

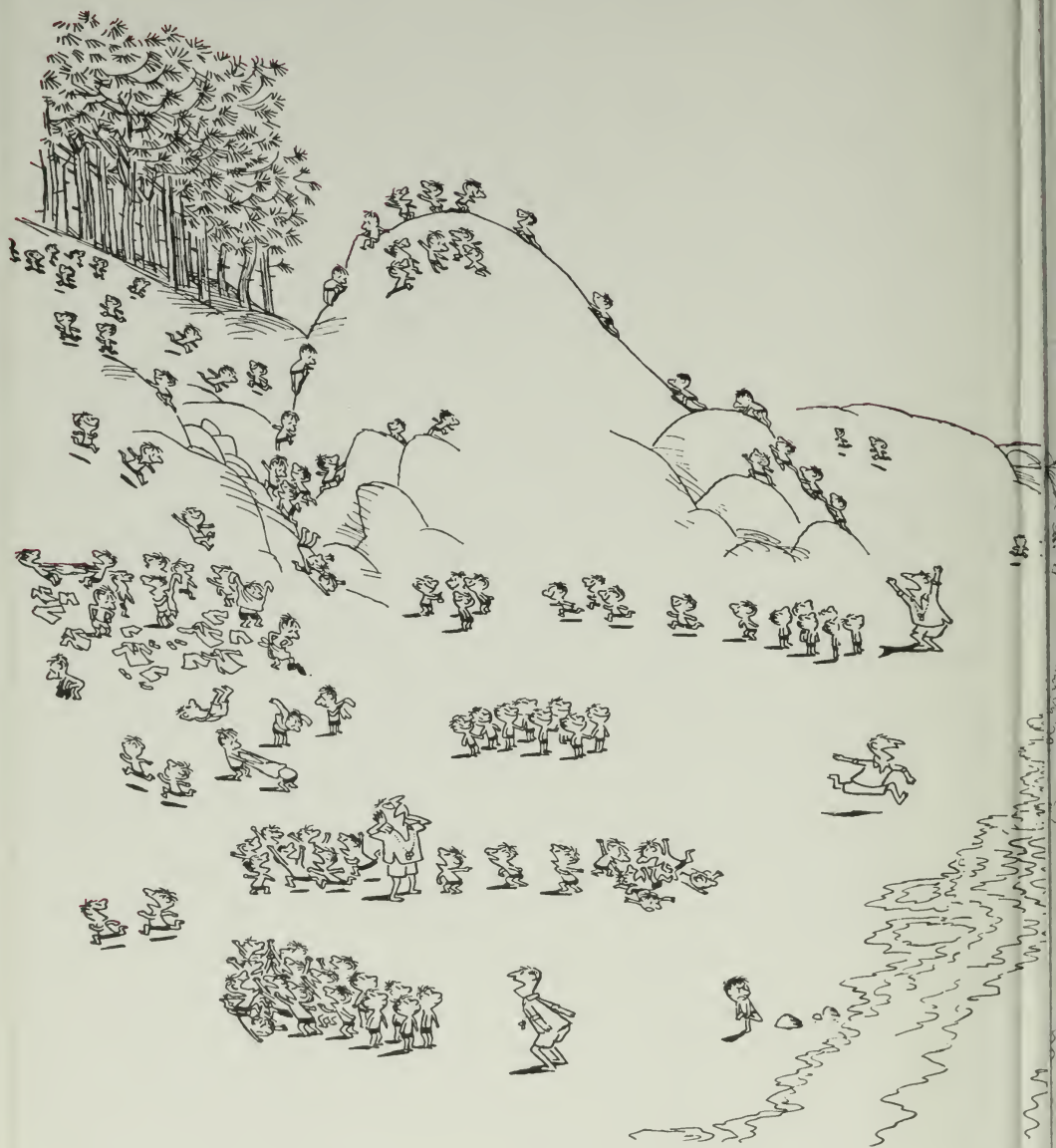


Nicholas  
on Vacation

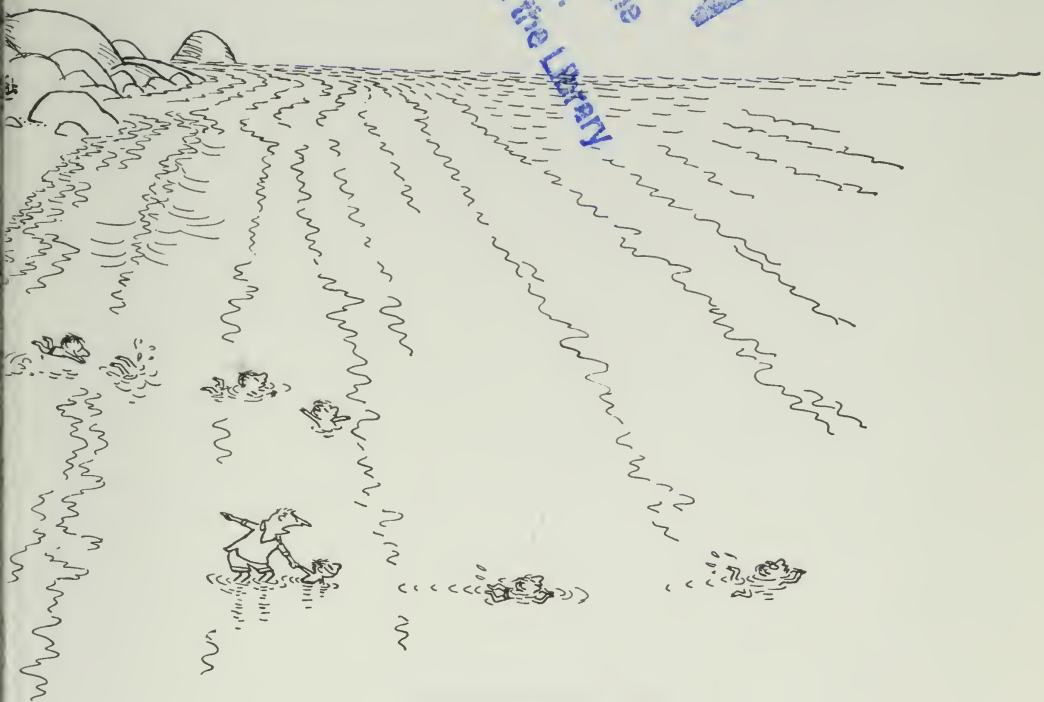
GOSCINNY & SEMPÉ

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# Nicholas on Vacation

RENÉ GOSCINNY & JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ

Translated by Anthea Bell



Phaidon Press Inc.  
180 Varick Street  
New York, NY 10014

[www.phaidon.com](http://www.phaidon.com)

This edition © 2006 Phaidon Press Limited  
First published in French as *Les vacances du petit Nicolas*  
by Éditions Denoël © 1962 Éditions Denoël  
New French edition © 2003 Éditions Denoël

ISBN-13: 978 0 7148 4678 1

ISBN-10: 0 7148 4678 3

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available  
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Designed by Phil Cleaver, Phil Evans,  
and James Cartledge of etal-design.

Printed in China

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*The school year with all its hard work is over. Nicholas won the Public Speaking Prize, for the quantity if not the quality of his contributions in class, and has said goodbye to his friends Alec, Rufus, Eddie, Geoffrey, Max, Jeremy, Matthew, and Cuthbert. Textbooks are closed, notebooks put away, it's time to think about the vacation. And in Nicholas's family there's no difficulty in choosing where to go, because ...*





## Dad Makes the Decisions

Every year, I mean last year and the year before, because before that is too long ago and I can't remember, Mom and Dad have a tremendous argument about where to go for our vacation, and then Mom starts to cry and she says she's going home to her mother, and I cry too because I do love Granny but there isn't any beach where she lives, and in the end we go where Mom wants and it isn't to Granny's.

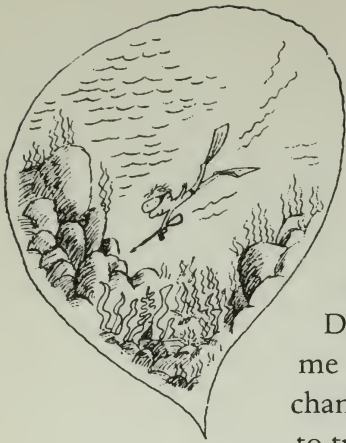
After dinner yesterday Dad looked at us in a stern sort of way and he said, "Now then, I don't want any argument this year! I'm making the decisions! We're going to a seaside resort on the Mediterranean, in the South of France. I have the address of a nice villa we can rent there. Three rooms, running water, electricity. And I don't want any nonsense about going to a hotel and eating terrible hotel food!"

"That sounds a very good idea, darling," said Mom. I said, "Great!" and I started running around the table again and again, because it isn't easy to keep still when you're so pleased.

Dad opened his eyes very wide, the way he does when he's surprised, and he said, "Well, that's fine then! Good!"

While Mom was clearing the table Dad went to look for his underwater fishing outfit in the closet.

"We'll go underwater fishing together, Nicholas!" Dad said.



"You'll like that!"

Actually I felt a bit scared because I can't swim very well yet – at least, if someone puts me on my back in the water I can float – but Dad told me not to worry, he was going to teach me to swim and he'd been the county free-style champion when he was younger, and if he had time to train he could still beat records now.



"Dad's going to teach me how to go underwater fishing!" I told Mom when she came back from the kitchen.

"Very nice, dear," said Mom, "though I don't think there are many fish left in the Mediterranean, and anyway the big trawlers must catch all of them."

"You're wrong!" said Dad, but Mom asked him please not to contradict her in front of little Nicholas and she knew what she was talking about because she'd read it in the paper, and then she went on with her knitting. She began that knitting ages ago.

"But Dad," I told Dad, "we're going to look real dimwits underwater fishing if there aren't any fish!"

Dad didn't say anything, he went to put his fishing outfit back in the closet. I was disappointed, but it's a fact that we never seem to bring anything home when I go fishing with Dad. Dad came back and picked up his paper.

"So where do people find fish for underwater fishing?" I asked.

"Ask your mother," said Dad. "She's the expert."

"In the Atlantic, dear," said Mom.

I asked if the Atlantic was very far from where we were going, but Dad told me if I worked harder at school I wouldn't ask that sort of question, which wasn't really fair because we didn't have underwater fishing lessons at school – but I didn't say anything, because I could see Dad wasn't in the mood for talking.

"We must make a list of things to take," said Mom.

"Oh no!" said Dad. "Oh no! We're not going away looking like a furniture van again this year! Bathing trunks, shorts, the minimum of clothes, some warm woolens ..."

"And saucepans, and the coffee machine, and the red rug, and a few cups and saucers and plates," said Mom.

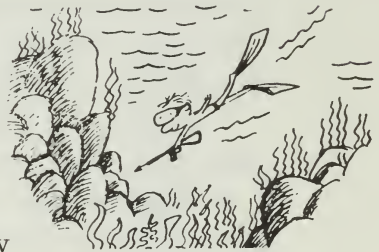
Dad jumped up looking very cross, and he opened his mouth but he didn't have to say anything because Mom said something first.

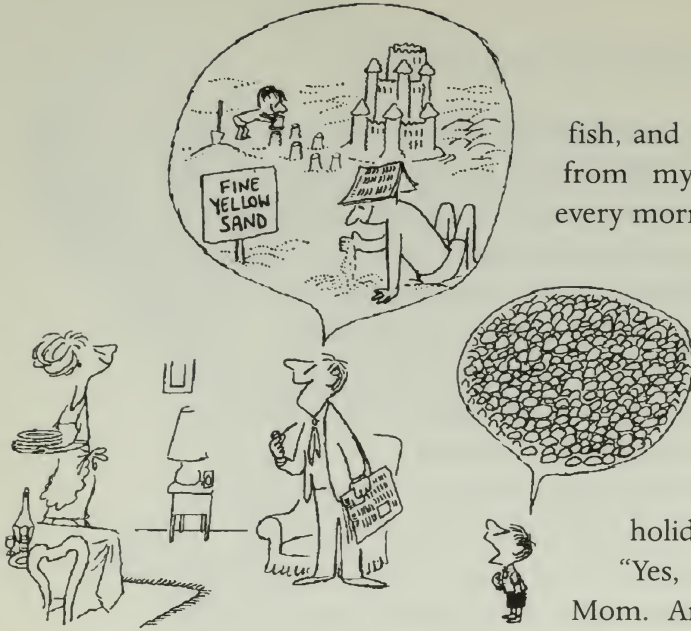
"You remember what Mr. and Mrs. Billings told us about the villa they rented last year?" said Mom. "There were only two small saucepans in the kitchen, and one of the saucepans had a hole in the bottom. They had to buy what they needed on the spot and they paid a fortune for it."

"Billings always was inefficient," said Dad, sitting down again.

"Maybe," said Mom, "but if you want me to cook your fish I can't do it in a pan with a hole in the bottom, always supposing you catch any fish."

So then I started to cry, because she was right, it's no fun going to the seaside where there aren't any fish, and there are lots and lots of them in the Atlantic. So Mom put down her knitting and she picked me up and she told me not to be sad about those naughty





fish, and I'd like seeing the sea from my bedroom window every morning.

"Well, the fact is," Dad explained, "we don't actually see the sea from our villa, but it's only a mile and a half away. It was the last holiday villa they had left."

"Yes, of course, dear," said Mom. And then she hugged me and I started playing marbles

on the floor with the two marbles I won off Eddie at school.

"And what about the beach? Shingle, I suppose?" said Mom.

"No, it is not!" shouted Dad, very pleased. "It's all sand, lovely yellow sand! Not a stone in sight!"

"Good," said Mom, "that means Nicholas won't be able to waste his time playing ducks and drakes with flat pebbles! He's been mad about that, ever since you went and taught him how."

And I started crying again, because she was right, it's fantastic playing ducks and drakes with flat stones; sometimes I can make them jump four times, and anyway it isn't fair, going to that old villa full of saucepans with holes in them miles away from the sea and there aren't any flat stones or any fish.

"I'm going to Granny's!" I yelled, and I kicked one of Eddie's marbles.

Mom picked me up again and she told me not to cry, and she said Dad was the one who needed a vacation most and

even if there was no fun where he wanted to go we must go there and act as if we liked it.

"But I ..." Dad said.

"I want to play ducks and drakes!" I yelled.

"Well, maybe you can do that next year," said Mom. "If Dad decides to take us to Bains-les-Mers."

"Where?" asked Dad, whose mouth was still open.

"Bains-les-Mers," said Mom, "a seaside resort in Brittany, with plenty of fish and a nice little hotel right beside the sea, and sand and shingle on the beach."

"I want to go to Bains-les-Mers!" I shouted. "I want to go to Bains-les-Mers!"

"Now, be a good boy, dear," said Mom. "Dad makes all the decisions!"

Dad mopped his forehead and said, "All right, I get the idea! What's this hotel of yours called?"

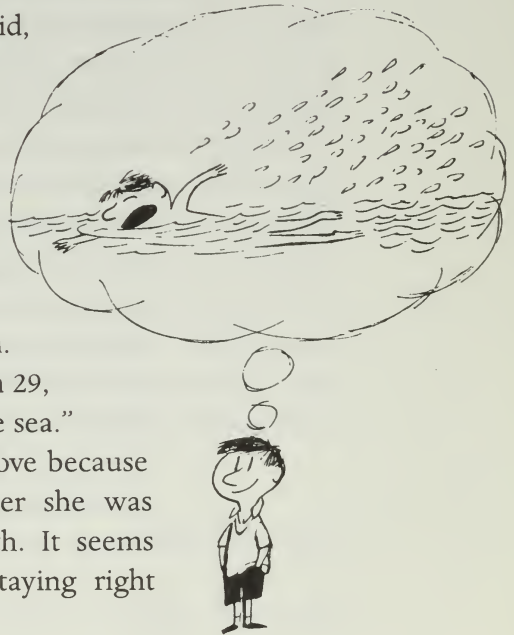
"White Strands Hotel, darling," said Mom.

Dad said all right, he'd write off and see if they had any rooms left.

"Don't bother, dear," said Mom.

"I've seen to all that. Ours is Room 29, with a bathroom and a view of the sea."

And Mom asked Dad not to move because she wanted to see if the sweater she was knitting him was the right length. It seems nights can be chilly if you're staying right beside the sea.





*Now that Nicholas's dad had made his mind up, there was nothing left to do but tidy up at home, put dustcovers over the furniture, take up the carpets, take down the drapes, and pack the suitcases, not forgetting some hard-boiled eggs and bananas to eat on the train. The train journey went smoothly, except that Nicholas's mom was cross with herself for putting the salt for the eggs in the big brown case that was in the baggage car. And now the family has arrived at White Strands Hotel in the seaside resort of Bain-les-Mers. The beach lies ahead, and the vacation can begin ...*



## The Beach

It's great on the beach! I soon made lots of friends. I made friends with Ben and Freddy and Monty (Monty is kind of silly!) and Ian and Justin and Christopher, and then there's David who isn't on vacation because he lives here all the time, and we play together and we have arguments and we never speak to each other anymore and it's really fantastic!

"Go and have a nice game with your little friends," Dad said this morning. "I'm going to sunbathe and relax." And he started covering himself all over with oil, and he was chuckling and saying, "Just think of them all, back there in the office!"

We started playing with Ian's ball. "Go and play further off," said Dad. He'd just finished putting his oil on when bam! the ball hit Dad on the head. Dad wasn't at all pleased, in fact he was very cross and he kicked the ball very hard and it landed in the water a long way off. It was a terrific shot! "Really, I ask you!" said Dad. Ian ran off and he came back with his own dad. Ian's dad was ever so tall and broad and he didn't look at all pleased either.

"That's him!" said Ian, pointing at Dad.

"Was it you kicked my lad's ball into the water?" Ian's dad asked my dad.

"Er ... yes," my dad said to Ian's dad. "You see, they'd just



hit me in the face with it ...”

“This beach is the place for kids to play, right?” said Ian’s dad. “If you don’t like it you should stay home. I suggest you fetch that ball back.”

“Take no notice!” Mom told Dad. But Dad did take notice.

“OK, OK,” he said. “I’ll get the wretched ball!”

“I would if I was you,” said Ian’s dad.

It took Dad some time to get the ball back, because the wind had blown it quite a way out to sea. Dad looked rather tired when he gave Ian back his

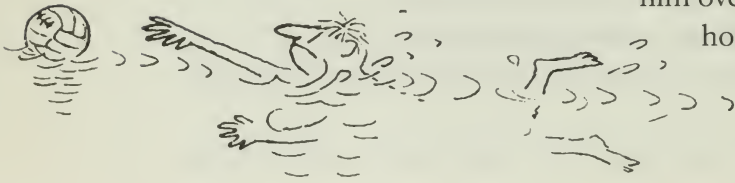
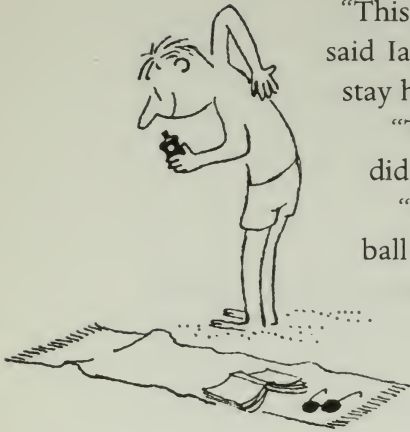
ball and he said, “Listen, boys, I need a rest. Why not leave the ball for now and play something else?”

“Play what else?” asked Monty. (Monty is kind of silly!)

“How should I know?” said Dad. “I tell you what, dig holes! It’s great fun digging holes in the sand.” We thought that was a terrific idea and we fetched our spades while Dad started trying to put more oil on himself, only he couldn’t because there wasn’t any left in the bottle. “I’ll go along to the shop at the end of the promenade and buy some,” said Dad, and Mom asked why he had to keep jumping up and down like that.

We started digging a hole. It was a fantastic hole, a great big deep hole! When Dad came back with his suntan oil I called him over to see it. “See our hole, Dad!” I said.

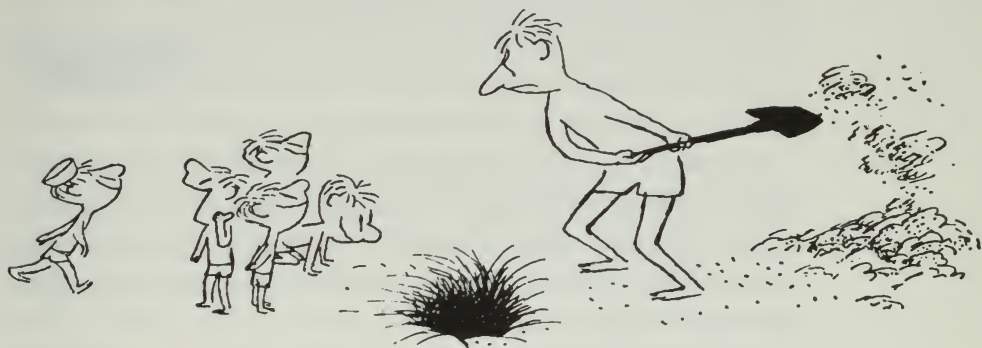
“Yes, dear, very nice,” said Dad, trying to take the





## THE BEACH

top off the bottle of oil with his teeth. And then a man in a white cap came along and asked who said we could dig such big holes on this beach. "He did!" said all my friends, pointing at Dad. I felt very proud, because I thought the man in the cap was going to congratulate Dad on our hole, but the man didn't look very pleased.



"Are you off your head?" asked the man. "Fancy giving little children ideas like that!" Dad was still trying hard to undo his bottle of oil and he said, "What about it?" So the man in the cap started shouting that it was amazing how thoughtless people could be, and someone might break a leg falling into that hole, and when the tide came in people who couldn't swim might get out of their depth and be drowned in that hole, and the sand might cave in and one of us might get buried in that hole, and all sorts of terrible things might happen in that hole, and it must be filled in at once!

"OK," said Dad. "Fill the hole in again, boys." But my gang didn't want to fill the hole in again.

"It's OK digging holes," said Christopher, "but it's no fun filling them in."



“Come on, let’s go swimming!” said Justin. And they all ran off. I stayed behind because I could see Dad didn’t look pleased.

“Boys! Boys!” Dad shouted, but the man in the cap said, “You just let those kids alone and fill in that hole, and get a move on!” And he went away.

Dad heaved a big sigh and he helped me fill in the hole. We had only one little spade so it took quite a time, and we’d only just finished when Mom said it was time to go back to the hotel for lunch, and we’d better hurry because the people at the hotel wouldn’t serve us if we were late. “Pick up your bathing things and your bucket and spade and come along, dear,” Mom told me. So I picked up my bathing things and my spade, but I couldn’t find my bucket. “Never mind, come on!” said Dad. But I started to cry some more. Because it was a fantastic bucket, it was red and yellow and it made terrific sand castles.

“Now let’s keep calm,” said Dad. “Where did you put your bucket?” I said I thought maybe it was at the bottom of the hole, the one we’d just filled in. Dad looked at me as if he was thinking of clipping me around the ear, so I started crying

## THE BEACH

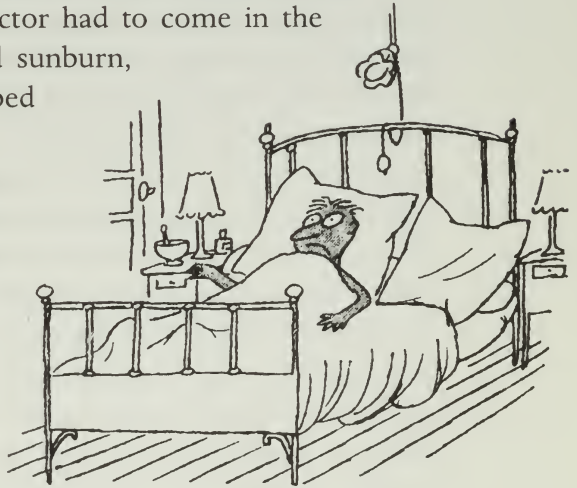
harder and Dad said oh, all right, he'd look for my bucket but would I kindly stop making that row? My dad is OK! We still only had the one little spade between us so I couldn't help Dad, and I was watching Dad digging when we heard a loud voice behind us saying, "Think yourself, funny, eh?" Dad jumped, and we turned round, and there was the man in the white cap. "I seem to remember telling you not to dig huge holes like that, don't I?" asked the man. Dad explained that he was looking for my bucket. So then the man said OK, but only if Dad filled the hole in again afterwards, and he stayed there to make sure Dad did.

"Listen, I'm going back to the hotel with Nicholas," Mom told Dad, "and you can follow us when you've found his bucket." And we went off. It was quite late when Dad came back to the hotel; he was tired and he wasn't at all hungry, and he went to bed. He didn't have my bucket, but that didn't matter, because I'd already found it where I must have left it in my room. The doctor had to come in the afternoon because Dad had sunburn, and he told Dad to stay in bed for two days.

"It's ridiculous exposing yourself to the sun like that without suntan oil on!" said the doctor.

"Just think of them all, back there in the office!" said Dad.

But he wasn't chuckling anymore.





*Unfortunately, if you go to  
Brittany on vacation the sun  
sometimes decides to take a trip  
to the South of France. So the  
owner of the hotel where Nicholas  
and his family are staying keeps  
an anxious eye on the barometer  
measuring the atmospheric  
pressure of his guests ...*



## The Life and Soul of the Party

We're on vacation in this seaside hotel, and there's the beach and the sea and it's really fantastic, except today because it's raining, and when you come to think of it that's no fun at all. The trouble is when it rains the grown-ups can't seem to stand us; we get on their nerves and there's a lot of fuss. I've made a whole crowd of friends in the hotel, there's Ben and Freddy and Monty (Monty is kind of silly!) and Ian who has this great big strong father, and Justin and Christopher.

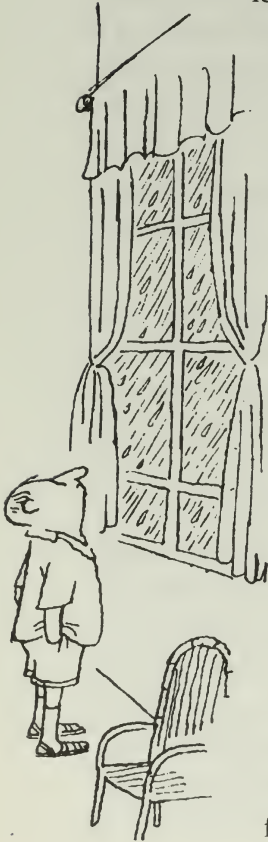
They're all great, but I suppose they don't always behave very well. Lunch was ravioli and cutlets, except for Christopher's mom and dad who always order from the expensive *à la carte* side of the menu so they had scampi, and during lunch I said I wanted to go to the beach. "Oh, for heaven's sake! Can't you see it's raining?" said Dad. "You'll stay in the hotel and play with your little friends." I said I didn't mind playing with my little friends, but I wanted to play with them on the beach, so Dad asked if I wanted him to spank me in front of everyone and as I didn't want him to I began to cry. Freddy had turned on the waterworks at his table too, and Ben's mom told Ben's dad it was a funny idea of his, going on vacation to a place where it rained all the time, and Ben's dad started shouting that it wasn't his idea in the first place, the last idea of his own he'd ever had was the idea of

getting married. Mom told Dad not to make little Nicholas cry, Dad shouted that this was really getting him down and Ian dropped his crème caramel on the floor and Ian's dad smacked him. There was ever so much noise in the dining room, and the hotel manager came along and said coffee would be served in the lounge, and he'd put some records on and the weather forecast on the radio said it would be very sunny tomorrow.

When we were all in the lounge Mr. Lambert said, "You just leave the kiddies to me!" Mr. Lambert is very nice,

he likes a good joke and he wants to be friends with everyone. He keeps slapping people on the back, and Dad doesn't like that very much, but that's because he was so sunburned the first time Mr. Lambert slapped him on the back. One evening when Mr. Lambert dressed up in a drape and a lampshade, the hotel manager told Dad Mr. Lambert was the life and soul of the party. "You could have fooled me," said Dad, and he went to bed. Mrs. Lambert, who is here on vacation with Mr. Lambert, never says anything. She looks a little tired.

Mr. Lambert stood up and raised his hand and he shouted, "Now then, kiddies! When I give the word, get into line behind me! Ready? Off we go to the dining room – forward march! One two, one two, one two!" And Mr. Lambert marched off to the dining room, but he came straight back again, not looking too pleased. "Well, why didn't you follow me?" he asked.





“Because we want to go and play on the beach,” said Monty. (Monty is kind of silly!)

“Now, now!” said Mr. Lambert. “You don’t want to go on the beach, you’d get wet through! You come with me and we’ll have much more fun. Why, you’ll be wishing it rained every day!” And Mr. Lambert laughed a lot.

“Coming?” I asked Ian.

“Might as well,” said Ian, and we went with the others.

Mr. Lambert had pushed back the tables and chairs in the dining room, and he said we were going to play blind man's bluff. "Who's going to be It?" Mr. Lambert asked, so we told him he could be It, and he said OK and told us to tie a hanky around his eyes, and when he saw our hankies he said he'd rather use his own. Then he stretched his arms out in front of him and shouted, "Here I come! Watch out, I'll catch you!" And he laughed an awful lot.

I'm great at checkers, so when Ben said he was checkers champion and he could beat anyone in the world, I really had to laugh. Ben didn't like me laughing, and he said we'd soon see who was the best, and we went into the lounge to ask the hotel manager for the checkers board, and the others came to see which of us won. But the hotel manager didn't lend us the checkers, he said it was for grown-ups only and we'd lose the pieces. We were all arguing when we heard a loud voice behind us saying, "You weren't supposed to leave the dining room!" It was Mr. Lambert coming to find us. He'd found us all right because he didn't have a hanky around his eyes anymore. He was all red and his voice was shaking a bit, like Dad's voice when he saw me blowing soap bubbles with his new pipe.

"Well," said Mr. Lambert, "since your parents have gone upstairs to have a nice rest we'll all stay here in the lounge and play a nice game. I know a splendid game! You all have a piece of paper and a pencil, and I say a letter, and you have to write down five countries, five animals and five towns beginning with the letter and the loser pays a forfeit!"

Mr. Lambert went to get paper and pencils, and we all went back to the dining room to play trains





with the chairs. When Mr. Lambert found us he seemed a bit annoyed. "Now then, everyone back to the lounge!" he said.

"Let's begin with the letter A," said Mr. Lambert, and he began to write ever so fast.

"My pencil point's broken! It isn't fair!" said Freddy, and Justin shouted, "Mr. Lambert, Christopher is copying!"

"Liar!" said Christopher, so Justin hit him. Christopher was a bit surprised, but then he started kicking Justin back, and then Freddy tried to pinch my pencil just as I was going to write down "Austria" and I punched his nose, so then Freddy closed his eyes and he thumped everyone in reach, and then Monty asked at the top of his voice, "Hey, everyone, is Avignon a country?" We were all making a fantastic noise and it was great, just like my gang at school, when all of a sudden, crash! an ashtray fell on the floor. And then the hotel manager came running in, and he started shouting and carrying on, and our moms and dads all came into the lounge and they argued with us and they argued with the hotel manager, and Mr. Lambert had gone somewhere else.

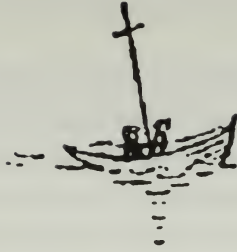
Mrs. Lambert found him at dinner time that evening. It turned out Mr. Lambert had spent the whole afternoon sitting on a bench in the rain, getting wet.

And Mr. Lambert really must be the life and soul of the party after all, because when Dad saw him coming back to the hotel he laughed so much he could hardly eat his dinner. It was roast chicken, too!





*There's a lovely view of the  
sea from White Strands Hotel  
if you stand on the edge of the  
bathtub, as long as you take care  
not to slip. On a clear day, and  
if you don't slip, you can easily  
see mysterious Spindrif Island,  
where they say the Man in the  
Iron Mask was nearly imprisoned.  
You can visit the cell he would  
have occupied and buy souvenirs  
in the refreshment room ...*



## Spindrift Island

We were going for a boat trip, it was a great idea! Mr. and Mrs. Lambert were coming too, and Dad wasn't very pleased about that because I don't think he likes Mr. Lambert too much. I can't think why not. Mr. Lambert is spending his vacation in the same hotel as us, and he's ever so funny, he's always trying to make other people laugh. Yesterday he came into the dining room wearing a false nose and a big mustache and he told the hotel manager the fish was off. I thought that was ever so funny. And when Mom told Mrs. Lambert we were going to Spindrift Island in a boat Mr. Lambert said, "What a good idea! We'll go too, and then you won't be bored!" Afterward Dad told Mom that was a pretty silly thing to do, and having the life and soul of the party with us would spoil the whole trip.

We left the hotel in the morning with a packed lunch. We had pâté and sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs and bananas and cider, it was great! Mr. Lambert came along wearing a white sailor's cap – I'd like a cap like that – and he said, "Well, how's the crew? Ahoy there! Forward march, one two, one two!" And Dad said things to Mom under his breath and Mom looked at him in a very surprised kind of way.

When I saw the boat down at the harbor I was a bit disappointed because it was so small. It was called *Jeanette* and

NICHOLAS ON VACATION

the captain had a big red face and he wore a cap. He didn't have a uniform covered with gold braid like I'd hoped, so I could tell the gang at school about it when I was back home, but never mind, I can tell them he did all the same, can't I?

"Well, Cap'n, all aboard!" said Mr. Lambert. "Everything right, tight, and shipshape, eh?"

"You'll be the tourists for Spindrift Island," said the captain, and we climbed into his boat. Mr. Lambert stayed standing up. "Anchors away!" he shouted. "Hoist all sail! Off we go in the good ship *Jeanette*!"

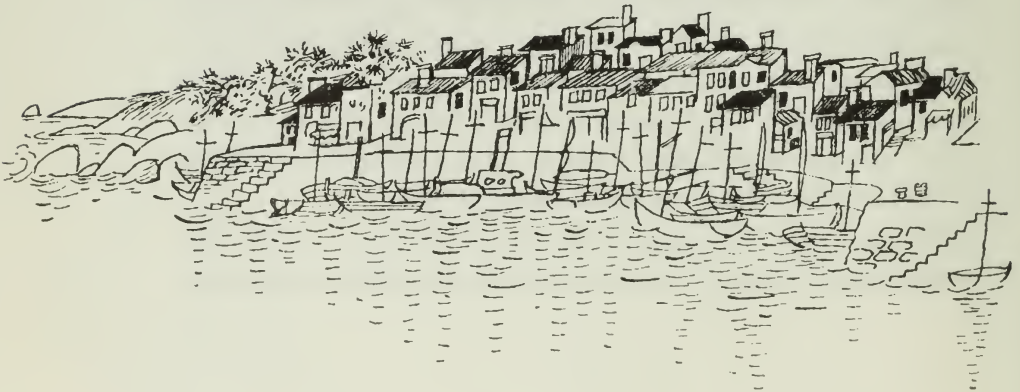
"Don't keep moving around!" said Dad. "You'll have us all in the water!"

"Oh, do be careful, Mr. Lambert!" said Mom, with a little laugh, and she held my hand very tight and told me not to be frightened, dear. But I'm never frightened, like I'm going to tell the gang at school when I go back home.

"Never fear, dear lady!" Mr. Lambert told her. "There's an old salt here on board with you!"

"You don't mean to say you were in the Navy?" asked Dad.

"No," said Mr. Lambert, "but I have a ship in a bottle on my mantel at home!" And he laughed ever so much and he slapped Dad on the back very hard.



SPINDRIFT ISLAND

The captain of the boat didn't hoist all sail the way Mr. Lambert told him because there wasn't any sail to hoist. The boat had an engine that went chug-chug-chug and it smelt like the bus that goes past our house at home. We left the harbor and there were some little waves and the boat went up and down, it was fantastic.

"Is the sea likely to be calm?" Dad asked the captain. "No squalls coming up?"

Mr. Lambert thought that was very funny. "Not afraid of being seasick, are you?" he asked Dad.

"Seasick?" said Dad. "You must be joking! I found my sea legs ages ago. I bet you'll be seasick before me, Lambert!"

"Done!" said Mr. Lambert, and he slapped Dad very hard on the back and Dad looked as if he wouldn't mind slapping Mr. Lambert on the face.

"What's seasick, Mom?" I asked.

"Let's talk about something else, dear," said Mom.

The waves grew bigger and it was really terrific now. You could see our hotel from the boat, it looked tiny, and I could tell the window of our bathroom because Mom had left her red bathing suit hanging out to dry. The captain said it took an hour to reach Spindrift Island. It was a great trip!

"Listen to this one," Mr. Lambert told Dad. "You'll like this! There were these two Italians, see, and they wanted a great big dish of spaghetti ..."

But unfortunately I never heard the end of the story, because Mr. Lambert whispered it into Dad's ear.

"Ha ha," said Dad. "Not bad. Ever hear the one



about the doctor who was called in for a nasty case of indigestion?' And as Mr. Lambert hadn't heard it, Dad whispered it into his ear. I thought that was a bit much! Mom wasn't listening, she was looking back at the hotel. Mrs. Lambert wasn't saying anything, same as usual, just looking a bit tired the way she always does.

We could see Spindrifft Island ahead, it was still a long way off and it looked very pretty with all the white foam the big breakers made. But Mr. Lambert wasn't looking at the island, he was looking at Dad, and for some reason he absolutely insisted on telling him what he had to eat in a restaurant before he left to go on vacation. And though Dad doesn't usually like talking to Mr. Lambert all that much, he wanted Mr. Lambert to know all about what they had to eat for his eighteenth birthday party. All these stories were making me very hungry, and I asked Mom for a hard-boiled egg, but she didn't hear me because she had her hands over her ears, because of the wind I expect.

"You look rather pale," Mr. Lambert told Dad. "I tell you what would do you good: a big bowl of nice lukewarm mutton fat!"

"Of course," said Dad. "With oysters and hot chocolate sauce."

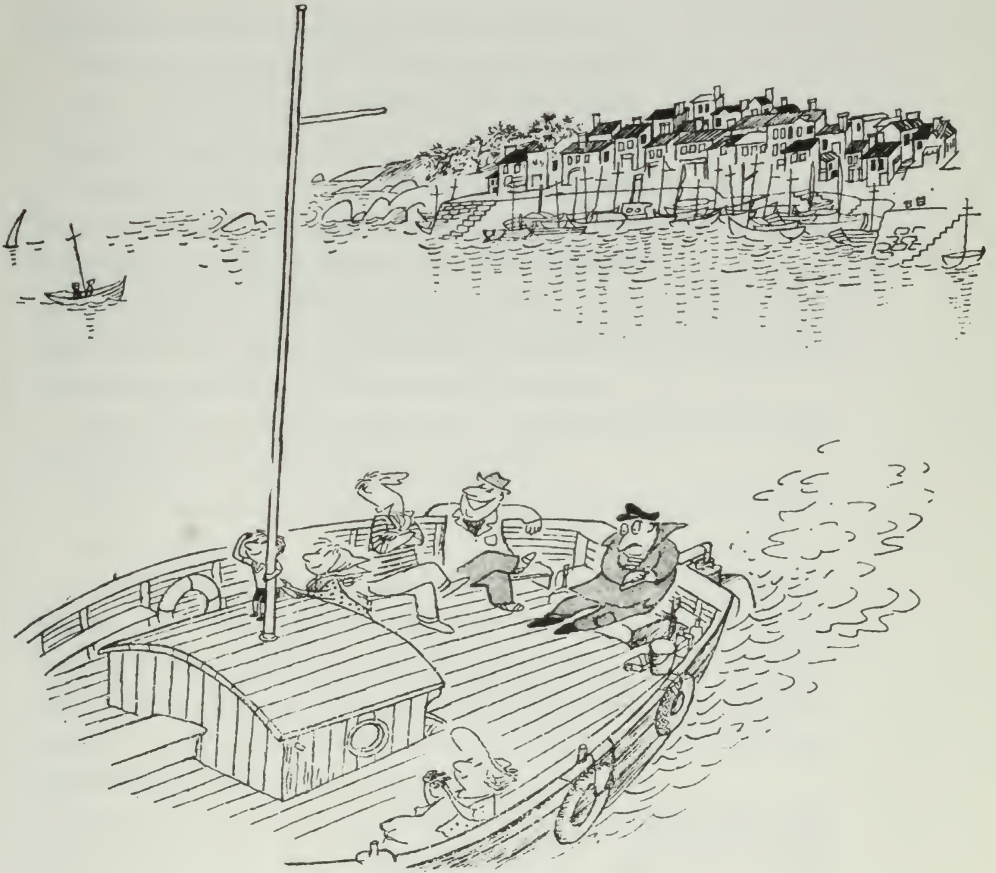
By now we were quite near Spindrifft Island.

"We'll soon be landing," Mr. Lambert said to Dad. "How about some pâté or a sandwich right now, before we go onshore?"

"Why not?" said Dad. "Sea air makes you really hungry!" And Dad took out the picnic basket and offered it to the captain of the boat. "Have a sandwich?" Dad asked.

## SPINDRIFT ISLAND

And we never did get to Spindrift Island, because when he saw that sandwich the captain of the boat was very sick and he had to get back to harbor as fast as he possibly could.





*A gymnastics coach turned up on the beach, and all the moms and dads rushed to enroll their children for his course. In their parental wisdom they thought that if their little ones were occupied for an hour every day it would do everyone a lot of good ...*





## Doing Gymnastics

Yesterday we had a new gymnastics coach.

"I'm Hector Higgins," he said. "How about you?"

"No, we're not Hector Higgins!" said Justin, which was so funny that we laughed a lot.

I was on the beach with all my new friends from the hotel, Ben and Freddy and Monty (Monty is kind of silly!) and Ian and Justin and Christopher. There was a whole bunch of other people doing the drill and things too, but they came from the Seafront Hotel and the Sandy Beach Hotel and we're from the White Strands Hotel and we don't like them.

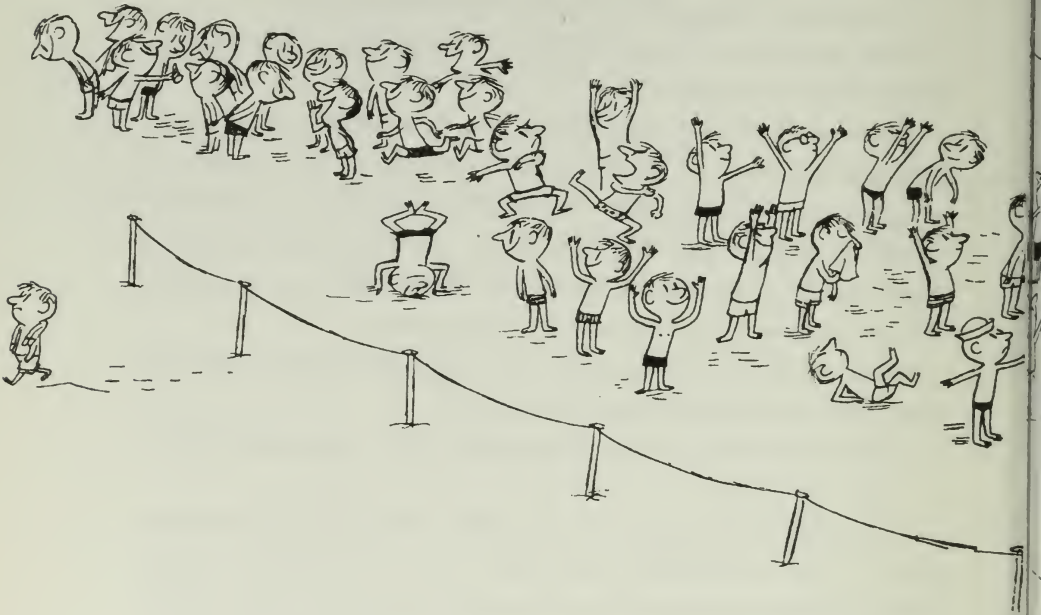
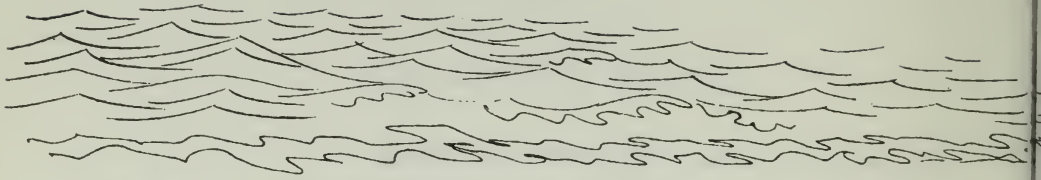
After we'd finished laughing the coach folded his arms and two great bunches of muscle stood out.

"How'd you like to have muscles like that?" asked the coach.

"OK," said Ian.

"I wouldn't, not much," said Freddy. "I don't like the look of them." But Christopher said why not, he wouldn't mind having all that muscle to show his gang at school. I get a bit fed up with Christopher, he's always showing off. "Well," said the coach, "if you're good and you do exercises you'll all have muscles like mine when you get back to school."

So then the coach told us to get into line and Christopher told me, "Bet you can't do somersaults like me!" and I had to laugh





because I'm really good at somersaults, and I showed him.

"I can turn somersaults too!" said Justin, but actually he couldn't. The person who wasn't bad at somersaults was Freddy – at least, he could turn them much better than Ben. We were turning somersaults all over the place when we heard someone blowing a whistle very hard.

"When you've quite finished!" shouted the gymnastics coach. "I told you to get into line – you have all the rest of the day to fool around!"

We all lined up, so as to keep the coach happy, and he told us he was going to show us how to get lots of muscles all over. He raised his arms and then he lowered them, he raised them and then he lowered them, he raised them and one of that crowd from the Seafront Hotel said ours was a lousy hotel.

"It's not!" shouted Ian. "It's great, your hotel is the rotten one!"

"We get chocolate ice cream for supper every day in ours!" said one of the crowd from the Sandy Beach Hotel.

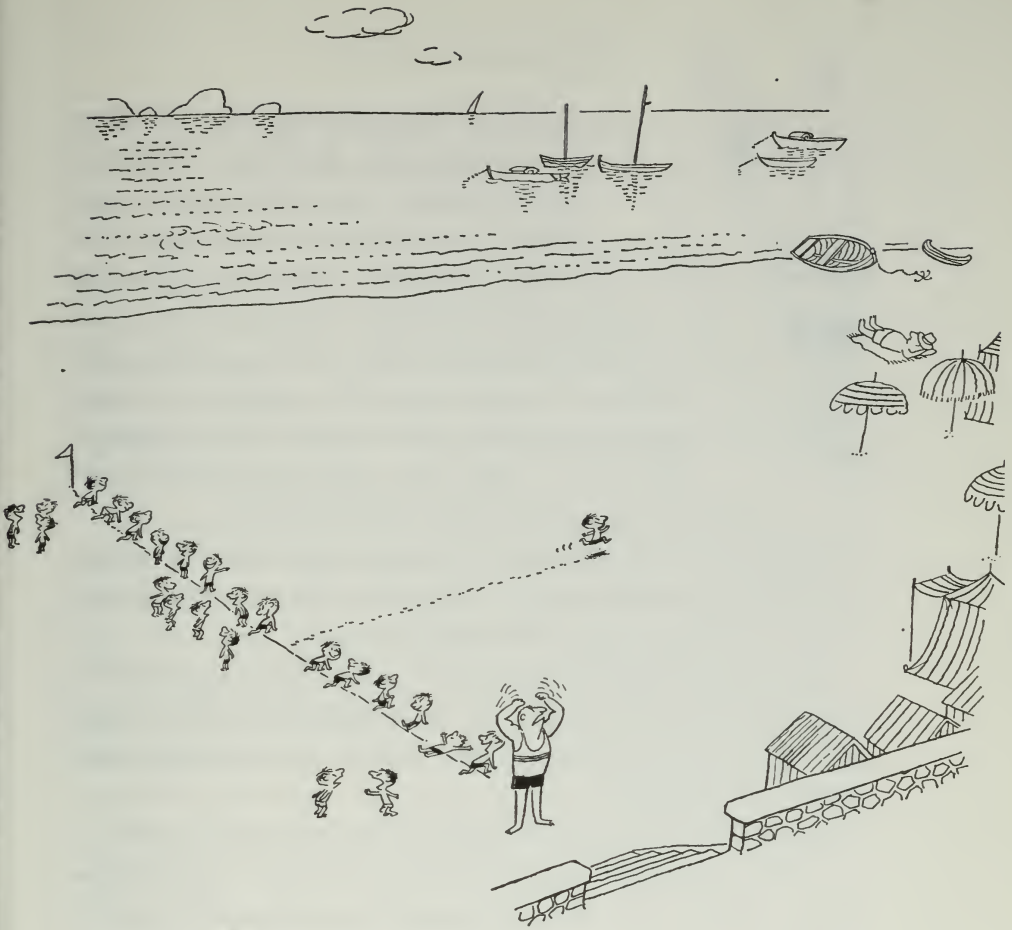
"Huh!" said one of the crowd from the Seafront Hotel. "We get chocolate ice cream at lunch too, and on Thursday there were crêpes Suzette!"

"My dad always orders *à la carte*," said Christopher, "and the hotel manager gives him anything he wants to eat."

"Liar!" said one of the crowd from the Sandy Beach Hotel.

"Just how much longer is this discussion going on?" shouted the gym coach. His arms weren't moving anymore because he'd crossed them. The bit of him that did seem to be

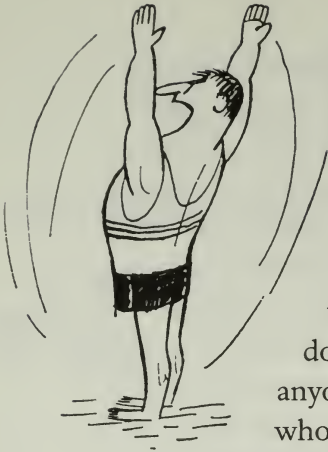




moving a lot was his nostrils, but I don't think exercising the nostrils gives you big muscles.

The coach mopped his forehead and then he said we'd do the arm-moving exercises later, and now we'd have some games. That coach was great!

"We'll run races," he said. "Stand in line over there. When I blow the whistle, you start, and the first to reach that umbrella is the winner. Ready?" And he blew his whistle. The only one



to start was Monty, because the rest of us were looking at the shell Justin had found on the beach, and Christopher was telling us he'd found a much bigger one the other day and he was going to give it to his dad for an ashtray. So the coach threw his whistle on the ground and he jumped up and down on it rather a lot. The last time I ever saw anyone so annoyed was at school, when Cuthbert, who is top of the class and teacher's pet, found he'd come second in the arithmetic test.

"Are you or are you not going to do as I say?" asked the coach.

"Well, of course we are," said Justin, "We were just getting ready to run your race. What's the hurry?"

The coach closed his eyes and clenched his fists and then he raised his face to the sky, and his nostrils were still moving. When he brought his face down again he started talking very slowly and quietly.

"Right," he said, "let's begin again. On your marks, get set ..."

"That's not fair!" shouted Monty. "I won! I reached the beach umbrella first! It's not fair and I'm going to tell my dad!" And he started crying and kicking the sand around and then he said OK, if that was how it was he was going away, and he went away, still crying, and personally I think he was right to go away, because the coach was looking at him the same way Dad looked at the chicken fricassee the hotel gave us for dinner yesterday evening.

"Boys," said the coach, "my dear, good little boys ... the next to disobey me is going to get the hiding of his life!"

"I'm not!" someone said.

## DOING GYMNASTICS

"Who said that?" asked the coach.

"Him," said Justin, pointing to one of the crowd from the Sandy Beach Hotel. He was very little.

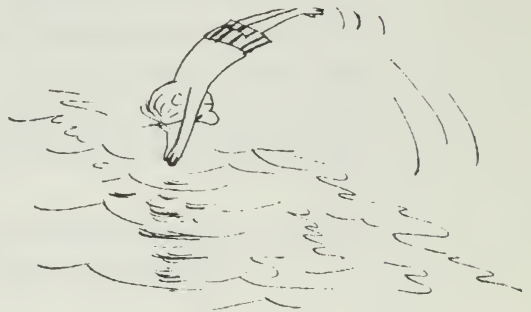
"That's not true! Dirty liar!" said the very little boy, and Justin kicked sand in his face, but the very little boy gave him a tremendous punch. I think that the very little boy must have done some gymnastic exercises before, or something. Justin was so surprised he forgot to cry. So then we all began fighting, but it was the crowd from the Seafront Hotel and the Sandy Beach Hotel that started it.

When we'd finished fighting the gym coach, who had been sitting down on the sand, stood up and he said, "Very well. We will now go on to the next game. Everyone face the sea. When I give the word you all run into the water! Ready? Go!"

We liked that, because the nicest thing about the beach apart from the sand is the sea! We ran in ever so fast and it was really great in the water. We splashed each other and we jumped up when the waves came in and Christopher shouted, "Look at me! Look at me! I can do the crawl!" and when we turned round again the coach wasn't there anymore.

And today we had a new gym coach.

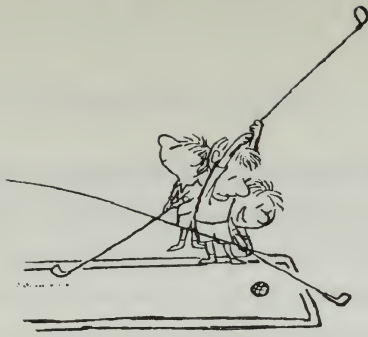
"I'm Jimmy Martin," he said. "How about you?"





*The holidays are going well,  
and Nicholas's dad has no  
complaints about the hotel,  
except perhaps when he found  
a seashell in his chicken fricassee.  
As the gym coach isn't around  
just at the moment, the children  
are looking for other ways of  
letting off steam ...*





## Miniature Golf

Today we thought we'd go and play miniature golf on the miniature golf course next to the souvenir shop. Miniature golf is really great! This is how you play it: there are eighteen holes and they give you balls and golf clubs and you have to get the balls into the holes with as few strokes as possible. And you have to go past little castles and little rivers and zigzag paths and tiny hills to get to the holes. It's fantastic. The only easy hole is the first one.

The trouble is, the miniature golf man won't let us play unless there's a grown-up with us. So me and Ben and Freddy and Monty (Monty is kind of silly!) and Ian and Justin and Christopher, who are all staying in our hotel, went to ask Dad to play miniature golf with us.

"No," said Dad. He was reading his paper on the beach.

"Oh, come on! Be a sport!" said Ben.

"Oh, come on! Oh, come on!" shouted the others, and I started to cry and I said if I couldn't play miniature golf I was going to get in one of those pedal boats they have on the boating lake and go a long, long way away and they'd never see me again.

"You can't," said Monty (Monty is kind of silly!), "you have to have a grown-up with you to hire a pedal boat."

NICHOLAS ON VACATION

"Huh!" said Christopher. Christopher gets on my nerves, because he's always showing off. "I don't need any pedal boat, I can go a long, long way just doing the crawl!"

We were all standing around Dad, arguing, and then Dad screwed up his paper and threw it on the sand and he said, "OK, OK, I'll take you to play miniature golf."

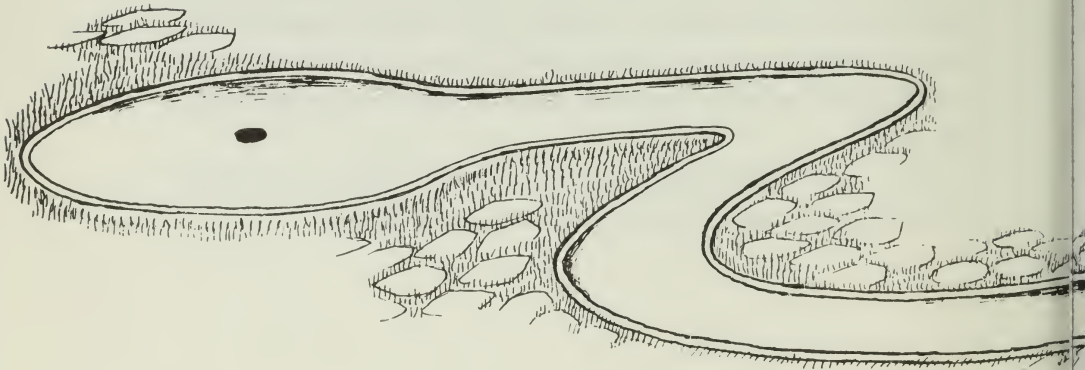
My dad is the best dad in the world, and I told him so and I hugged him.

When the miniature golf man saw us coming he didn't really want to let us play, but we started shouting, "Oh, come on! Oh, come on!" and then the miniature golf man said all right, but Dad was to keep a sharp eye on us.

We started at the first hole, which is dead easy, and Dad, who knows ever so many things, showed us the right way to hold a club.

"I know how already!" said Christopher, and he wanted to start playing, but Justin asked why should *he* go first.

"We ought to go in alphabetical order, like at school when the teacher asks questions," said Ben, but I didn't think that was right, because Nicholas is a long way down the alphabet and that's OK at school but it isn't fair in miniature golf. And then the miniature golf man told Dad we'd better start, because there were other people waiting to play miniature golf.



## MINIATURE GOLF

"Monty can start, because he's the best behaved," said Dad.

And Monty came up and hit the ball ever so hard with the club, and the ball went up in the air and it went over the fence and it went smash! right into a car that was out in the road. Monty started to cry and Dad went to look for the ball.

Dad was some time coming back because there was a man in the car in the road, and the man climbed out of the car and he started talking to Dad and waving his arms around in the air, and some people came along to watch and they were all laughing.

We wanted to go on playing, but Monty was sitting on the hole and crying, and saying he wouldn't get up till he had his ball back and he hated us all. Then Dad came back with the ball. He didn't look very pleased.

"Do try to be more careful," said Dad.

"Right!" said Monty. "Give us the ball!" But Dad didn't want to, and he told Monty he'd had his turn and he could play again another day. Monty didn't like that. He kicked the ground and he started shouting about how everyone always took advantage of him, and he was going to fetch his dad, so there! And he went off.

"My turn!" said Ian.

"Oh no, it's not," said Freddy, "it's mine!" So then Ian hit Freddy over the head with a golf club and Freddy punched Ian's nose and the miniature golf man came running up.



"Look," the miniature golf man said to Dad, "can't you get your kids out of here? There are other people waiting to play."

"Now, just a moment!" said Dad. "These children have paid to play, and play they will!"

"That's right," Justin told my dad, "you tell him!" And all our gang were cheering Dad on like anything, except for Freddy and Ian who were busy hitting each other over the head with golf clubs and punching each other's noses.

"Oh, so that's the line you're taking!" said the miniature golf man. "Suppose I call the police?"

"Go on, call them!" said Dad. "Then we'll see who has the law on his side!" So the miniature golf man shouted out to the policeman who was walking down the road.

"Joe!" called the miniature golf man, and the policeman came over.

"What's up, Ernie?" he asked the miniature golf man.

"It's this fellow," said the miniature golf man. "He won't let anyone else play."

"That's right," said a man. "We've been waiting to play the first hole for half an hour now!"

"At your age?" said Dad. "Don't you have anything better to do?"

"Better than what?" asked the miniature golf man. "Maybe you don't like miniature golf, but why go putting other people off miniature golf, eh?"

"As it happens," said the policeman, "we've just had a complaint in from a man who's had the bodywork of his car damaged by a miniature golf ball."

"Can we or can we not play the first hole?" asked the man who was waiting.

Then Monty came back with his dad.

## MINIATURE GOLF

"That's him!" Monty told his dad, pointing to my dad.

"Oh, it is, is it?" said Monty's dad. "I hear you won't let my son play with his little friends, right?" And then Dad started shouting and the miniature golf man started shouting and everyone started shouting and the policeman blew his whistle, and in the end Dad made us all go off the miniature golf course and Christopher was annoyed, because he said he'd done the hole in one while no one was looking, but I'm really sure he made that up.

We'd had such fun playing miniature golf we decided to go back tomorrow and play the second hole.

The only thing is, I don't know whether Dad will take us.





*Funnily enough, Nicholas's dad said he never wanted to play miniature golf again. In fact he's taken a great dislike to miniature golf. He says almost as many bad things about it as he says about the chicken fricassee on the hotel menu. Mom said Dad wasn't to make such an outrageous fuss about his food, and Dad said that considering what the hotel charged, serving up stuff like that chicken fricassee was the really outrageous thing. And it didn't help when rain started pouring down again ...*



## Playing at Shops

The trouble with girls is they can't play proper games, and they cry all the time and kick up a fuss. There are three of them in our hotel.

The three girls in our hotel are called Elizabeth, Lucy, and Emma. Emma is my friend Justin's sister and they fight all the time, and Justin told me it was a real pest having a girl for a sister, and if this went on he was going to leave home.

When it's fine and we're on the beach, the girls don't bother us. They play silly games, they make no end of sand castles, they tell stories, and they paint their nails red with crayons. Meanwhile our gang have a great time. We run races and turn somersaults and play football and swim and fight and it's absolutely fantastic.

But when it isn't fine, it's different, because we all have to be in the hotel together. And yesterday wasn't fine, it rained all day. After lunch, which was ravioli and a lot nicer than chicken fricassee, our moms and dads went up to have a rest. I was in the lounge with Ben and Freddy and Monty and Ian and Justin and Christopher, all our gang, and we were keeping perfectly quiet, playing cards. We weren't acting up at all, because when it rains our moms and dads don't seem to be having any fun, and our moms and dads seem not to be



having any fun quite a lot these holidays.

And then those three girls came into the lounge.

"We're going to play with you," said Emma.

"You push off or I'll thump you, Em!" said Justin. Emma didn't like that.

"You know what I'm going to do if we can't play with you, Justin?" asked Emma.

"I'm going to tell Mommy and Daddy and you'll be punished and your friends will be punished and you won't get any dessert at dinner tonight!"

"OK," said Monty (Monty is kind of silly!), "you can play with us."

"Nobody asked *you*," said Justin. So then Monty started to cry and he said he didn't want to be punished and it wasn't fair and if he didn't get any dessert he was going to kill himself. We were really fed up, because Monty would probably wake all our moms and dads with the noise he was making.

"I suppose we'll have to let them play," I told Ian.

"OK," said Ian, and we decided to let the girls play with us.

"What will we play?" asked Lucy. She's a fat girl and she reminds me of my school friend Alec who is eating all the time.

"We'll play at shops," said Elizabeth.

"Are you nuts?" asked Justin.

"Right, Justin!" said Emma. "I'm going to wake Daddy up, and you know what Daddy's like when someone wakes him up!" So then Monty started to cry and he said he wanted to play at shops. Ben said well, he didn't, he'd rather go and wake



up Justin's dad himself! But Freddy said he thought it was chocolate ice cream for dessert this evening, so we said OK.

Emma sat at one of the tables in the lounge, and she put the cards and the ashtrays on the table and she said she'd be

the shopkeeper and the table was the counter and the things on the table would be the things she was selling, and we had to come and buy them from her.

"Yes," said Lucy, "and I'm going to be a very rich, beautiful lady and I will have a car and lots of fur coats."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "and I'm going to be an even richer, more beautiful lady and I will have a car with red upholstery like Uncle Jonathan's and high-heeled shoes."

"Yes," said Emma, "and Christopher is going to be Lucy's husband."

"No, I'm not," said Christopher.

"Why not?" asked Lucy.

"Because he thinks you're too fat, that's why," said Elizabeth. "He'd rather be my husband."

"Liar!" said Lucy, and she smacked Christopher's face and Monty started crying, and to shut Monty up Christopher said OK, OK, he didn't mind whose husband he was.

"Right!" said Emma. "Let's start playing! Nicholas, you're going to be my first customer, but you're very poor so you don't have any money to buy things to eat,





and I'm going to be very kind and give you things for nothing."

"I'm not playing," said Lucy, "not after what Elizabeth said! I'm never going to speak to anyone again!"

"Aren't you, though?" said Elizabeth. "You think I don't know what you said to Emma about me when I wasn't there?"

"Liar!" shouted Lucy. "After all you told me about Emma, too!"

"What did you tell Lucy about me, Elizabeth?" asked Emma.

"I didn't tell Lucy anything about you, so there!" said Elizabeth.

"You have a nerve!" shouted Lucy. "You told me outside the shop window where they had the black bathing suit with little pink flowers on it, the one that would look good on me, remember?"

"It's not true!" shouted Elizabeth. "But Emma told me what you said about me down on the beach."

"Look, you girls," said Justin, "are we playing at shops or aren't we?" So then Lucy told Justin to mind his own business, and she scratched him.

"You leave my brother alone!" said Emma, and she pulled Lucy's hair and Lucy started shouting and she smacked Emma's face and Justin thought that was dead

funny, but Monty started crying and the girls were making an awful row and lots of moms and dads came down into the lounge, and they asked what on earth was going on.

"It's those boys, they won't let us be nice

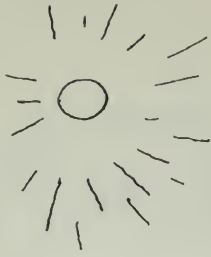


PLAYING AT SHOPS

and quiet and play at shops," said Elizabeth, and our moms and dads told us all we couldn't have any dessert.

Freddy was right, too, it was chocolate ice cream that evening!





*The last day of the vacation was lovely and fine, with the sun blazing down. All the guests at the hotel had to say goodbye to their new friends, pack their suitcases, and catch the train home. The owner of the White Strands Hotel offered to give Nicholas's dad some chicken fricassee in a plastic box for the journey, but Dad politely declined. That was a mistake, because this time it was the hard-boiled eggs that were packed in the big brown case that was in the baggage car.*



## Home Again

I was very glad to be home again, but the gang I met on vacation weren't there and my gang from school were still on vacation and I was all alone, and it wasn't fair, and I started to cry.

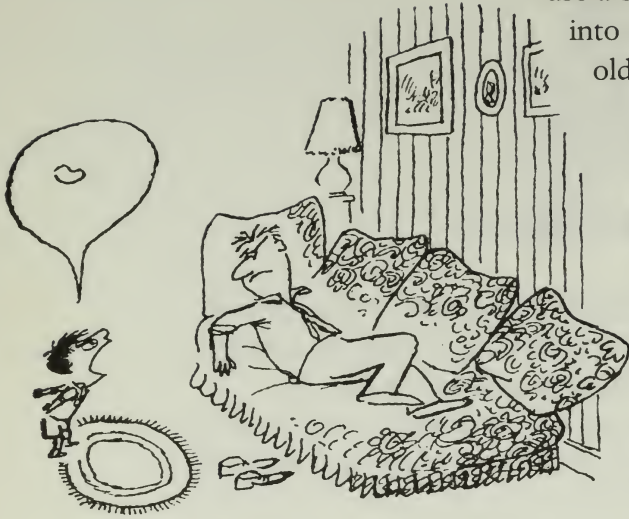
"Oh, for goodness' sake!" said Dad. "I'm going back to work tomorrow, and I could do with a bit of rest today without having you bother me!"

"Now, now!" Mom told Dad. "Don't be so impatient with him! You know what children are like when they're just back from vacation." And then Mom hugged me and she wiped her face and she wiped my nose and she told me to run along and amuse myself. So I told Mom I would if I could, but I didn't know what to do.

"Why not start a bean sprouting?" Mom asked. And she said that was a lovely thing to do. You took a kidney bean and put it on a damp piece of old flannel, and first you saw the stem coming up and then the leaves, and then you had a beautiful bean plant and it was great fun, and Daddy would show me. Then Mom went upstairs to tidy my room.

Dad had gone to lie down on the living room couch, and he sighed and then he told me to go and find some old flannel. I went into the bathroom and I didn't upset very many things, and it's quite easy to wipe talcum powder off the floor if you

## NICHOLAS ON VACATION



use a bit of water, and I went back into the living room. "Here's a old washcloth," I told Dad.

"We say *an* old washcloth, Nicholas," said Dad, who knows a whole lot of things because when he was my age he was top of the class and an example to all his friends.

"Right," said Dad, "now go into the kitchen and find a dried kidney bean."

But I couldn't find any kidney beans in the kitchen. I couldn't find any cake either, because Mom had cleared everything out before we went away, except for that bit of cheese she left in the cupboard by mistake, which was why we had to open the kitchen window as wide as it would go when we arrived back from vacation.

When I went back to the sitting room and told Dad I couldn't find any kidney beans he said, "Too bad," and went back to reading his paper, but I cried and I shouted, "I want to start a bean sprouting! I want to start a bean sprouting! I want to start a bean sprouting!"

"Nicholas," said Dad, "I will smack you if you go on like that."

Grown-ups! I ask you! They want me to start a bean sprouting, and then they want to smack me just because there aren't any beans! I began crying really hard now, and Mom came downstairs and when I told her all about it she said, "Why not go to the corner shop and ask them to give you a bean?"

"You do that," said Dad, "and take your time over it!"

So I went to Mr. Compani's shop on the corner, and Mr. Compani is great because when I go there he sometimes gives me a cookie. But he didn't give me anything today because his shop was closed, and there was a notice up saying it was because of the vacation.

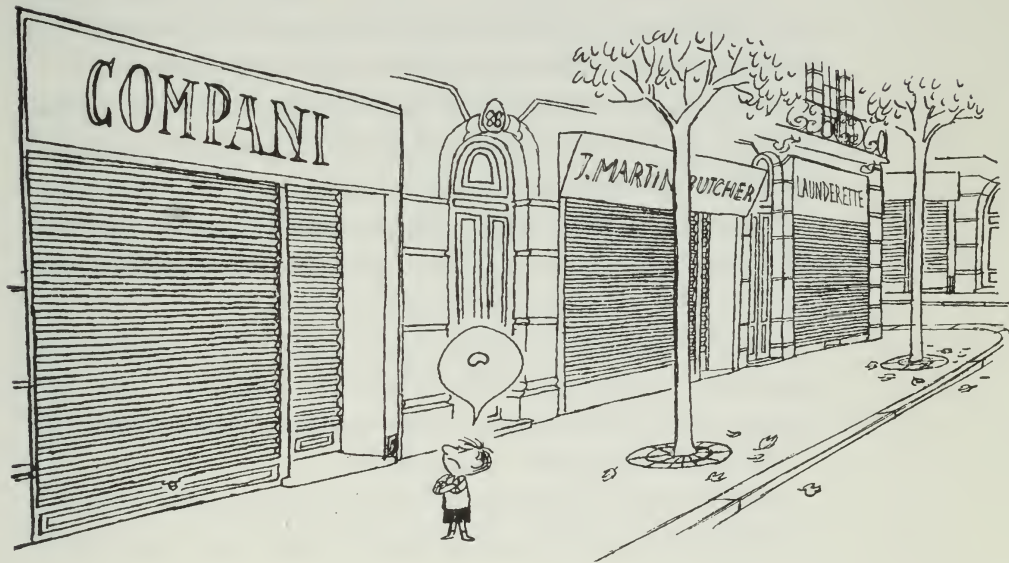
I ran home, and I found Dad still on the couch, but he wasn't reading the paper anymore, he'd put it over his face.

"Mr. Compani is closed!" I shouted. "So I still don't have a bean!"

Dad sat up, all of a sudden.

"Eh? What? What's up?" he asked, so I had to explain all over again. Dad leaned his head on his hand and sighed, and he said well, he didn't see what he could do about it.

"Then what can I make sprout on an washcloth?" I asked.



NICHOLAS ON VACATION

"We say *a* washcloth, not *an* washcloth," said Dad.

"But you told me it was *an* old washcloth," I said.

"That will do, Nicholas!" shouted Dad. "Go and play in your room!"

So I went up to my room still crying, and I found Mom tidying up.

"Oh, don't come in here, Nicholas," said Mom. "Go downstairs and play in the living room. Why not make a bean sprout, like I suggested?"

Back in the living room, I told Dad, before he could start shouting, how Mom told me to come downstairs and she'd be cross if she heard me crying.

"OK, but be good," said Dad.

"So where am I going to find an kidney bean to make it sprout?" I asked.

"We don't say '*an kidney*,' we say ..." Dad started, and then he looked at me and he scratched his head and he said, "Go and find some lentils in the kitchen. They'll do instead!"

There were lentils in the kitchen all right, and I was ever so pleased. And Dad showed me how to dampen the bit of flannel and put the lentils on it.

"Now you put the whole thing on a saucer on the window sill," said Dad. "Soon you'll see the stems and leaves coming out." And he went back to lie on the couch.

I did just what Dad said, and then I waited. But I couldn't see any stems coming out of the lentils, so I wondered what was wrong, and as I didn't know what was wrong I went to ask Dad.

"What is it this time?" shouted Dad.

"There aren't any stems coming out of the lentils," I said.

"Do you want me to smack you?" asked Dad, and I said I



was going to leave home and I was very unhappy and they'd never see me again and then they'd be sorry, and it was a load of rubbish what they said about lentils sprouting, and Mom came running into the living room.

"Can't you be a little more patient with the child?" asked Mom. "You know quite well I've got to tidy the place up, I don't have time to play with Nicholas, and I really do think ..."

"I really do think a man might have a bit of peace in his own home!" said Dad.

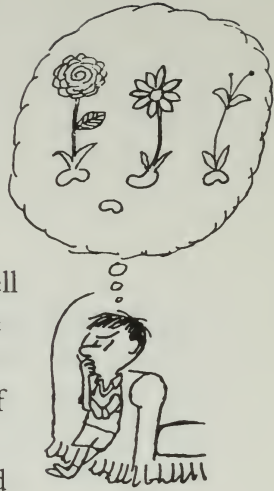
"My poor mother was right all along!" said Mom.

"Leave your mother out of this," said Dad, "and anyway, she isn't in the least poor!"

"That's right!" said Mom. "Start insulting my mother!"

"Me, insult your mother?" shouted Dad. And Mom started crying, and Dad walked up and down the living room shouting, and I said if they didn't make my lentils sprout right away I was going to kill myself. And then Mom shouted at me!

Parents are really impossible when they get back from vacation!





*Another school year, as devoted to study as its predecessor, is nearly over. Nicholas and his gang from school, Alec, Rufus, Eddie, Geoffrey, Max, Jeremy, Matthew, and Cuthbert, are about to say goodbye to each other after Prizegiving Day, with just a touch of sadness in their hearts. But the holidays lie ahead and cheerfulness soon breaks in.*

*However, Nicholas is rather worried. No one at home has mentioned the vacation yet ...*



## Being Sensible

What surprises me is, no one's said a word yet about where we're going on vacation this year! Other years Dad says he wants to go somewhere and Mom says she wants to go somewhere else and there's no end of a fuss. Mom and Dad both say very well, in that case they'd just as soon stay at home, and I cry, and then we go where Mom wants to go, like when we went to Brittany last summer. But none of that has happened this year.

And all the gang from school are getting ready to go away. Geoffrey, whose dad is very rich, is going to spend the holidays at his dad's big house by the seaside. Geoffrey told us it has a beach all to itself and no one else is allowed to go and make sand castles there. But that could be just a load of rubbish, because Geoffrey is an awful liar.

Cuthbert, who is top of the class and teacher's pet, is going to England to spend the vacation in a school where they'll teach him to talk English. Cuthbert is nuts!

Alec is going to the Périgord to eat truffles, because his dad is a friend of a man who has a delicatessen there. And so on. Everyone else is going to the beach or the mountains, or to stay with their grannies in the country. I'm the only one who doesn't know where I'm going yet, which is very annoying,

because one of the best things about the vacation is talking to the gang about it before and after we go away.

So today I asked Mom. I asked her where we were going for the holidays. Mom looked very odd and she kissed the top of my head, and said we'd discuss it when Daddy gets home, darling, and she told me to run along and play in the yard.



So I went into the yard and I waited for Dad, and when he arrived home from the office I ran to meet him, and he picked me right off the ground shouting "Oopsadaisy!" and I asked where we were going for our vacation. And then Dad stopped smiling, and he put me down again and said we'd discuss it indoors, and when we went in we found Mom sitting in the living room.

"I think the moment has come," said Dad.

"Yes," said Mom, "he was asking about it just now."

"We must tell him, then," said Dad.

"OK, tell him!" said Mom.

"Why me?" asked Dad. "You only have to tell him, that's all! Go ahead!"

"Me? It's your job to tell him!" said Mom. "It was your idea!"

"Now, just wait a minute!" said Dad. "You agreed with me, in fact you went so far as to say you thought it would do us all a power of good. You have just as much reason to tell him as me!"

"Listen," I asked them, "are we going to talk about the vacation or aren't we? I mean, all the gang are going away and

I'm going to look a real dimwit if I can't tell them where we're going and what we're going to do!"

So Dad sat down in the armchair and held my hands and pulled me toward him.

"My little Nicholas is a sensible, big boy now, isn't he?" asked Dad.

"Oh yes!" said Mom. "He's a real grown-up man!"

I don't like it too much when people tell me I'm a big boy now, because usually when they say that they're going to make me do things I don't want to do.

"And I'm sure my big boy would love to go to the seaside!" said Dad.

"Yes! Yes!" I said.

"Go to the seaside, and swim and fish, and play on the beach and go for walks in the woods?" asked Dad.

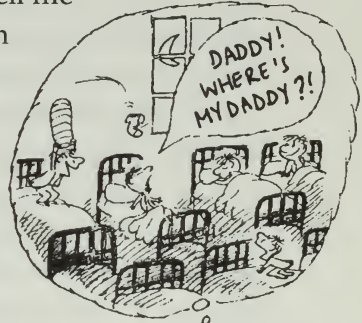
"You mean there's woods where we're going?" I asked. "So it isn't the same place we went last year?"

"Wait a minute!" Mom said to Dad. "I can't do it! I'm not sure it was such a good idea after all. I think we'll scrap the whole business. Maybe next year ..."

"No!" said Dad. "We've made our decision! Come on, buck up! Nicholas is going to be very sensible, aren't you Nicholas?"

I said yes, I was going to be sensible as anything! I felt really thrilled about the seaside and the beach; I like it by the sea. Going for walks in the woods isn't such fun, except you can play hide-and-seek and that's great.

"Are we going to a hotel?" I asked.



"Not exactly," said Dad. "I ... I think you'll be sleeping in a tent. That's great fun, you know ..."

I was ever so pleased!

"Sleep in a tent, like the Indians in the book Auntie Dorothy gave me?" I asked.

"That's right," said Dad.

"Oh, great!" I shouted. "Can I help you put the tent up? And light a fire to cook our food? And will you teach me underwater fishing so I can bring Mom some big fish to cook? Super! Great! Fantastic!"

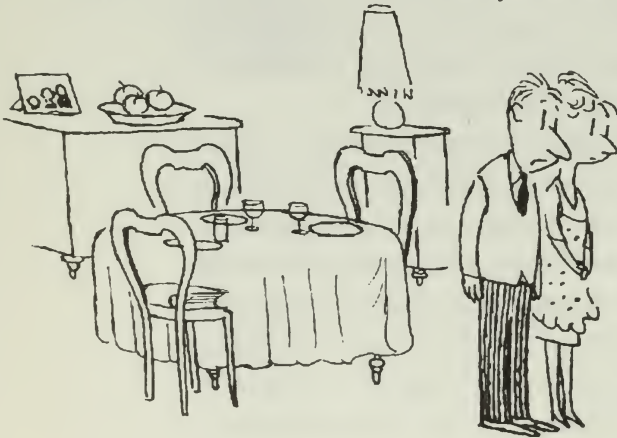
Dad wiped his face with his hanky as if he were feeling very warm, and then he said, "Nicholas, we must discuss this man to man! I want you to be very sensible!"

"And if you're very good and show us what a big boy you are," said Mom, "there'll be fruit tart for dessert this evening."

"And you know how you've been wanting me to mend your bike?" said Dad. "I'll mend it if you're sensible. There's something I have to explain ..."

"I must just pop into the kitchen," said Mom.

"You stay here!" said Dad. "We decided we'd break it to him together, didn't we?" Then he cleared his throat, and he put his hands on my shoulders, and he said, "Nicholas, dear, we're not



BEING SENSIBLE

going on vacation with you. You're going on your own, just like a grown-up."

"What, all alone?" I asked. "Aren't you coming?"

"Now, please be sensible, Nicholas!" said Dad. "Mommy and I are going away for a little trip. We didn't think it would be any fun for you, so we decided you could go to a kind of special summer camp for children. It will do you a lot of good, you'll be with boys your own age, and you'll have a lovely time ..."

"We know it's the first time you've been parted from us, Nicholas, but it's for your own good," said Mom.

"Well ... what does my big boy say?" asked Dad.

"Oh, great!" I shouted, and I started dancing around the living room. Because I've heard of these summer camps before, and everyone says they're terrific. You go and stay with a whole crowd of other kids and make loads of friends, and you go hiking and playing games, and you have singsongs around a big bonfire, and I was so pleased I hugged Mom and Dad hard!

The fruit tart was very nice, and I had several helpings because Mom and Dad didn't want any. The funny thing was the way they kept on staring at me. They even looked a bit cross.

Well, I don't know! I think I was sensible like they wanted, don't you?





*All the preparations are now  
made, although they were  
interrupted by seventeen phone  
calls from Nicholas's granny. It  
was funny: something kept getting  
into Nicholas's mom's eyes. Even  
blowing her nose did no good ...*





## Going Away

I'm going off to my summer camp today and I'm ever so pleased. The only thing is, Mom and Dad look rather sad. It must be because they're not used to being on their own in the holidays.

Mom helped me pack my case with my T-shirts, my shorts and my sandals, and my little cars and my bathing trunks, my towels, the engine of my electric train set, some hard-boiled eggs and bananas and ham sandwiches and cheese sandwiches, my shrimping net, my long-sleeved sweater, my socks, and my marbles. We had to make several parcels too, of course, because the case wasn't big enough, but that will be all right.

I was scared I'd miss the train, and after breakfast I asked Dad if we oughtn't to leave for the train station straight away. But Dad said it was still rather early, the train didn't go till one o'clock, and I seemed to be in a great hurry to leave them. And Mom went into the kitchen with her hanky, saying there was something in her eye.

I don't know what's the matter with Mom and Dad, but they seem rather annoyed about something. So annoyed I daren't tell them I feel a kind of lump in my throat when I think of not seeing them for nearly a month. Because if I did tell them I'm sure they'd laugh at me and tell me off.

I didn't know what to do while I waited for it to be time to start, and Mom wasn't too pleased when I unpacked my case to get at my marbles that were at the bottom.

"He just can't keep still!" Mom said to Dad. "Perhaps it really would be a good idea to leave now."

"But it's an hour and a half before the train goes!" said Dad.

"Never mind," said Mom. "If we get there early we'll find the platform empty and we'll avoid all the crush."

"If you say so," said Dad.

We climbed into the car and we left. Twice, because the first time we forgot my case.

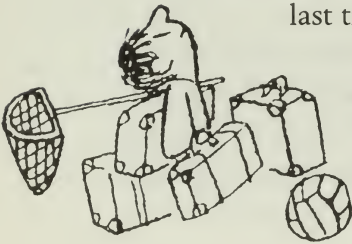
When we reached the station everyone had arrived early. There were people all over the place, shouting and making no end of noise. It was difficult finding a parking place, but at last we found one a long way from the station, and we waited for Dad who had to go back to the car to get my case because he thought Mom had it with her. Inside the station Dad told us to stick together so as not to get lost. Then he saw a man in uniform. The man looked funny because his face was very red and his cap was on sideways.

"Excuse me!" said Dad. "Would you mind telling me where Platform Number 11 is?"

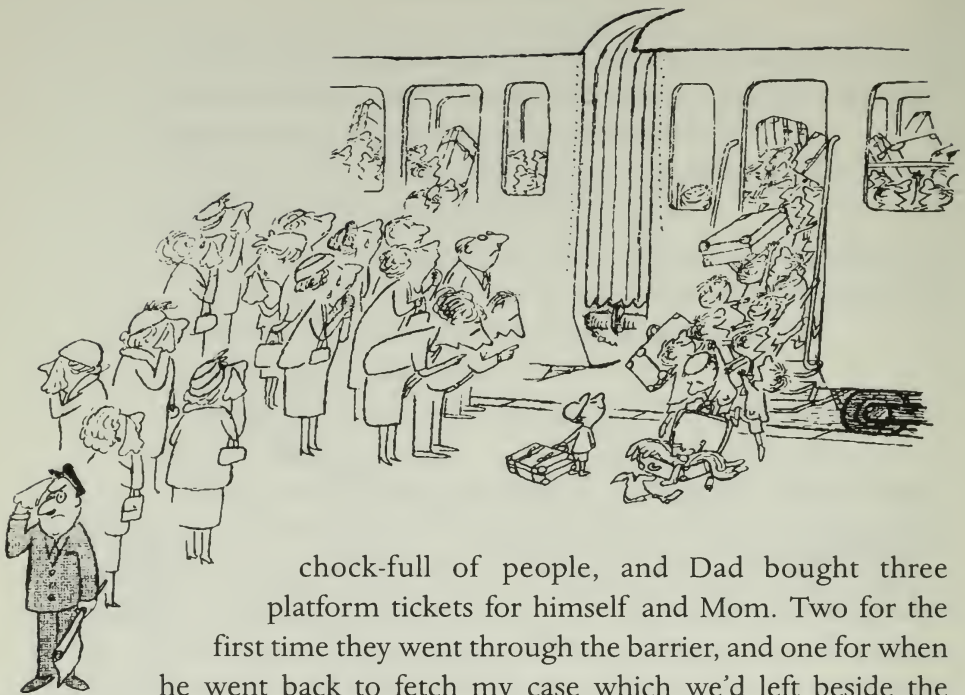
"In between Platform Number 10 and Platform Number 12," said the man. "At least, it was still there last time I saw it."

"Now just a minute!" said Dad, but Mom said it wasn't worth arguing about and getting all worked up, we could find the platform quite well ourselves.

We found the platform, which was







chock-full of people, and Dad bought three platform tickets for himself and Mom. Two for the first time they went through the barrier, and one for when he went back to fetch my case which we'd left beside the platform ticket machine.

"Right," said Dad. "Now, everyone keep calm! We have to find Coach Y."

The coach nearest the barrier was Coach A, so we had to walk a long way, and it wasn't easy because of all the people and the super little carts full of cases and baskets, and the fat man's umbrella that was caught in my shrimping net, and the fat man and Dad had an argument, but Mom pulled at Dad's sleeve so he dropped the fat man's umbrella, which was still tangled up in my shrimping net. But that was OK, because there was so much noise in the station we couldn't hear the things the man was shouting.

There were lots of people my own age outside Coach Y,

along with their moms and dads and a man holding a big sign saying "Sands-by-the-Sea Camp," which was the name of the camp where I was going. Everyone was shouting. The man with the notice was holding a lot of papers too. Dad told him my name, the man looked at his papers and he shouted, "Latimer! Here's another one for you!"

And we saw a big boy who must have been at least seventeen, like my friend Eddie's brother who is teaching him how to box.

"Hi, Nicholas!" said the big boy. "I'm Gerald Latimer and I'm your team leader. That means I look after the team you're in. You're all in teams, and ours is called the Lynxes."

And he shook hands with me. Terrific!

"Well, we'll leave him to you!" said Dad, laughing.

"Don't worry," said the team leader. "You won't know him again when he gets back!"

And Mom had something in her eye again and had to look for her hanky.

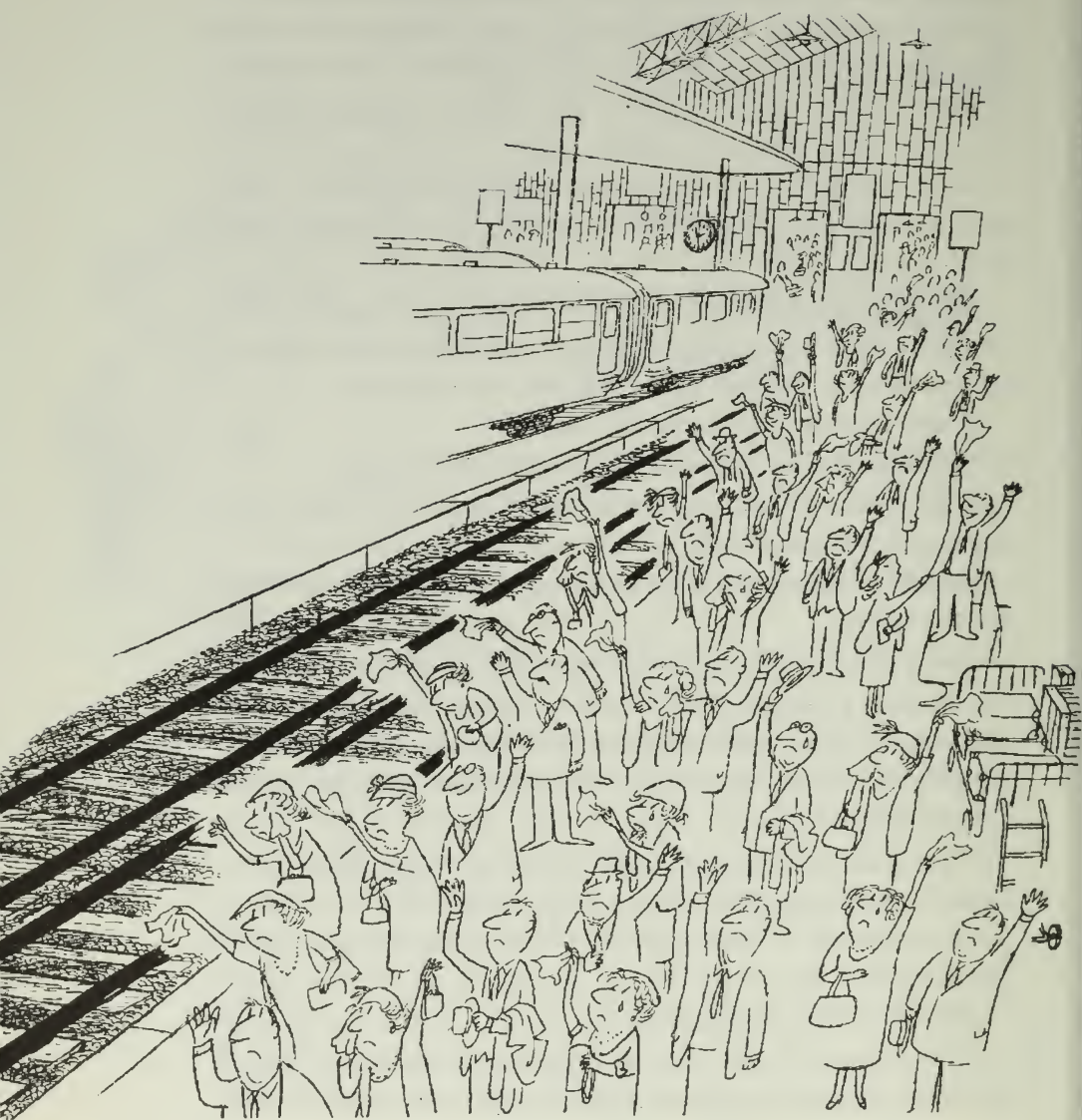
Then a lady came up to my team leader; she was holding hands with a little boy who looked rather like Cuthbert, he had glasses like Cuthbert too, and she asked my team leader, "Aren't you rather young for the responsibility of looking after these children?"

"No, that's all right, Ma'am!" said my team leader. "I've done all the training, you don't need to worry!"

"Yes, but still ..." said the lady. "Well - how do you cook at the camp?"

"What?" asked my team leader.

"Do you use oil or butter or cooking fat for frying?" asked the lady. "Because I ought to tell you right away, my little boy



can't digest cooking fat. If you want him to be sick, just give him food fried in cooking fat!"

"But ..." said my team leader.

"And mind you make him take his medicine before every meal," said the lady, "but the important thing is to remember he can't eat cooking fat! I mean, what's the good of giving children medicine if they're going to be made sick afterward? And mind he doesn't fall when you go climbing."

"Go climbing?" asked my team leader. "Climbing where?"

"In the mountains, of course!" said the lady.

"Mountains?" said my team leader. "But there aren't any mountains at Sands-by-the-Sea, where we're going!"

"Sands-by-the-Sea?" cried the lady. "But they told me the children were going to Pines-in-the-Mountains! What shocking organization! Well, really! I knew you were too young to ..."

"The train for Pines-in-the-Mountains is waiting at Platform Number 4, Madam," said a man in uniform, passing by. "You'll have to hurry; it leaves in three minutes' time."

"Oh, my goodness!" said the lady. "I won't even have time to tell them how to look after him!"

And she set off at a run, with the boy who looked like Cuthbert.

Then we heard a whistle blow, very loud, and everyone climbed into the coaches shouting like anything, and the man in uniform came up to the man with the notice and asked him to stop that little fool who was playing with a whistle from getting everyone mixed up. So some people climbed out of the coaches, which wasn't easy because of the people who were still trying to get in. Our moms and dads were shouting things



and telling us not to forget to write, and to wrap up well, and not do anything silly. Some of us were crying and some of us were getting told off for playing football on the platform, it was fantastic! We didn't even hear the man in uniform blow the whistle. His face was bright red, as if he was just back from vacation himself. Everyone hugged everyone else and the train left to take us to the seaside.

I looked out the window and saw my mom and dad and all the other moms and dads waving goodbye. I felt quite sad. It wasn't really fair: we were the ones going away and they looked ever so much more tired than us! I felt a bit like crying, but I didn't, because you go on vacation to have fun, after all, and it's going to be great!

And I'm sure Mom and Dad will manage to send my case on by another train.







*Nicholas has gone away to summer camp all by himself like a big boy. And even if he did feel a little lost for a moment, when he saw his parents getting smaller and smaller at the far end of the station platform, he'll soon be as cheerful as usual, thanks to his team's rallying cry ...*



## Courage

The train journey was terrific. Our team leader, who is called Gerald Latimer and he's fantastic, was in the coach with us, and he told us how there were twelve of us in our team, called the Lynxes, and our rallying cry was "Courage!" There was a little boy who kept on crying and saying he wanted to go home to his mommy and his daddy, and another one who laughed and said he was a girlie, so the one who was crying thumped him, and then they both started crying, specially when the team leader said he'd make them travel standing up in the corridor if they went on that way. Then we had our packed lunches, and then people started going to the bathroom and one person didn't come back, and our team leader went to find him, and the reason he hadn't come back was because the door was jammed and they had to call the guard to open the door, and everyone was worked up, what with the person inside there crying and saying he was frightened, and what was he going to do if we arrived at a station, because there was a notice up there saying it was forbidden to be in there while the train was standing at a station.

And then, when he came out and told us what fun it was being stuck in there, the team leader told us to go back into our coaches, and we had a great time trying to find the right



coaches, because when everyone came out of their coaches no one could remember which was which, and we were all running around opening doors. And a gentleman stuck his big red face out of one coach and he said if we didn't stop making that row he was going to complain to the railway company; he had a friend who was very high up in the company.

When we reached Sands-by-the-Sea there were buses waiting to take us to the camp. In our bus we were all shouting, and our team leader said it would be a better idea to sing, so he had us singing all sorts of good songs, about ten green bottles hanging on the wall, and one man who went to

mow, went to mow a meadow. After that the team leader said he thought he'd really rather we went back to shouting, and then we reached the camp.

I was a bit disappointed about the camp. It was very nice, of course, and there were trees and flowers, but no tents. We were going to sleep in wooden huts, which was a pity, because I thought we'd be in tents like in the Wild West, and that would have been more fun. We were taken to the middle of the camp, where there were two gentlemen waiting for us, one with no hair and the other with glasses, but they both wore shorts.

The one with no hair told us, "Boys, I'm pleased to welcome you to Sands-by-the-Sea Camp. I'm sure you'll have a good vacation here, living together in a spirit of straightforward, healthy comradeship. I'm Mr. Ratcliff, in charge of this camp, and this is our camp bursar Mr. Kneebone, who looks after us and will be asking you to help him with his work now and then. I know you'll all obey your big brothers here, the team leaders. Now they're going to show you your quarters, and in ten minutes' time we assemble to go down to the beach for your first swim."

Then someone shouted, "Three cheers for Sands-by-the-Sea Camp! Hip hip ..." and lots of people shouted, "hooray!" They did that three times. Fantastic!

Our team leader took us twelve Lynxes to our hut, and he told us to choose our beds, unpack and get our bathing trunks on, and he'd be back in eight minutes' time.

"Right!" said a big boy. "I'll have the bed by the door."

"Why you?" someone else asked.



"Because I saw it first and I'm the strongest, that's why," said the big boy.

"Oh no, you're not!" someone else said. "Oh no, you're not! I'm having the bed by the door. I'm on it, anyway!"

"I'm on it too!" shouted two other people.

There were eight of us on the bed and we were just about to start a fight when our team leader came in with his bathing trunks on and lots of muscle all over.

"Hey!" he said. "What's all this? Haven't you changed yet? You're making more noise than all the other huts put together! Hurry up!"

"It's about my bed ..." the big boy started to explain.

"We'll see about the beds later on," said our team leader. "Now, get your trunks on! They're all waiting for us."

"I don't want to get undressed in front of everyone! I want to go home to my mommy and daddy, I do!" someone said, and he started crying.

"There, there!" said our team leader. "Come along, Paul, remember our team's rallying cry! Courage! Remember, you're a man now, not a little boy anymore."

"Oh yes, I am a little boy! I am a little boy! I am a little boy!" said Paul, and he rolled around on the floor crying.

"Gerald, I can't put my trunks on," I said, "because my mom and dad forgot to give me my case at the train station."

Our team leader rubbed his cheeks with both hands and then said he was sure there was someone who'd lend me a pair of trunks.

"Oh no, there isn't," one boy said. "My mom said I wasn't to lend any of my things."

"You're just mean," I said, "and I don't want your rotten old

## COURAGE

trunks." And I punched his nose.

"Who's going to undo my shoelaces?" asked someone else.

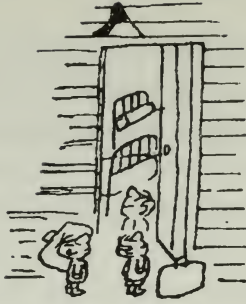
"Gerald!" someone shouted. "All my jam's spilt in my case. What will I do?"

And then we saw our team leader wasn't in the hut with us anymore.

When we left the hut we were all in bathing trunks. Someone called Bernie had lent me a pair; Bernie is OK. We were the last to arrive, and it looked ever so funny, everyone in bathing trunks!

The only person not in bathing trunks was our team leader. He was wearing a suit and tie and carrying a case. Mr. Ratcliff was talking to him, and Mr. Ratcliff was saying, "Do change your mind, my boy; I'm sure you'll find you can control them. Courage!"





*Life at the summer camp is settling down to make men of Nicholas and his friends. Even their team leader Gerald Latimer has changed since the day they all arrived, and although his frank, honest face sometimes looks a little weary he's learned to keep panic at bay ...*





## Going Swimming

In this camp where I'm spending my vacation we do an awful lot of things.

We get up at eight in the morning. We have to get dressed very quickly, and then we go to Assembly where we do drill, one two, one two, and after that we go off to wash up and we have a great time splashing lots of water at each other. After that people on duty fetch breakfast; breakfast is great, with lots of toast! When we've had breakfast we go to our huts to make our beds, but not the same way Mom makes the beds at home: we fold the sheets and blankets in four and pile them on the mattress. After that we have duties, like sweeping the paths and running errands for Mr. Kneebone, the bursar, and then there's Assembly – we have to run to get there – and we go down to the beach to swim. After that it's Assembly again, and we go back to camp for lunch, and lunch is great because we're always hungry. After lunch we have a singsong, we sing "John Brown's Body" and "What shall we do with a Drunken Sailor?" And then we have to have our rest. That's not such fun, but it's compulsory, even if we can think of perfectly good excuses not to have it. While we have our rest our team leader is with us and he tells us stories. And then there's another Assembly and we go back down to the beach and swim, and

## NICHOLAS ON VACATION

then there's another Assembly and we go back to the camp for supper. After supper we do more singing, sometimes around a big bonfire, and sometimes there's a treasure hunt or something after dark, but if there isn't anything like that we go to bed and we have to put out the light very soon and go to sleep. All the rest of the time we can do whatever we like.

What I like best is swimming. We all go with our team leaders, and we have the whole beach to ourselves. It isn't that other people aren't allowed to be there too, but when they turn up they go away again. Perhaps that's because we make quite a lot of noise and play all sorts of games in the sand.

They line us up in teams for swimming. My team is called the Lynxes and there are twelve of us; we've a team leader who's really great and our rallying cry is "Courage!" The first time, our team leader gathered us all around him and then he said, "Right! Now I don't want anyone doing anything silly. You're all to keep together and don't go too far in. When you hear the whistle, come back to the beach. I want to be able to see you all! No swimming underwater, and anyone who disobeys won't be allowed in the sea at all, understand? Right, no fooling around, everyone in the water!" And our team leader blew his whistle very loud and we all ran into the water with him. It was cold and there were big waves and it was really fantastic!



## GOING SWIMMING

And then we saw that the whole team wasn't in the water. There was one of us left on the beach, crying. It was Paul, who was always crying and saying he wanted to go home to his mommy and his daddy.

"Come on, Paul! It's lovely in!" shouted our team leader.

"No!" yelled Paul. "I'm scared! I want to go home to my mommy and my daddy!" And he rolled about on the sand saying he was very unhappy.

"OK!" said the team leader. "The rest of you stay together and don't move while I go back for your little friend."

And the team leader strode out of the water and went to talk to Paul.

"Come on, now!" said our team leader. "There's nothing to be scared of!"

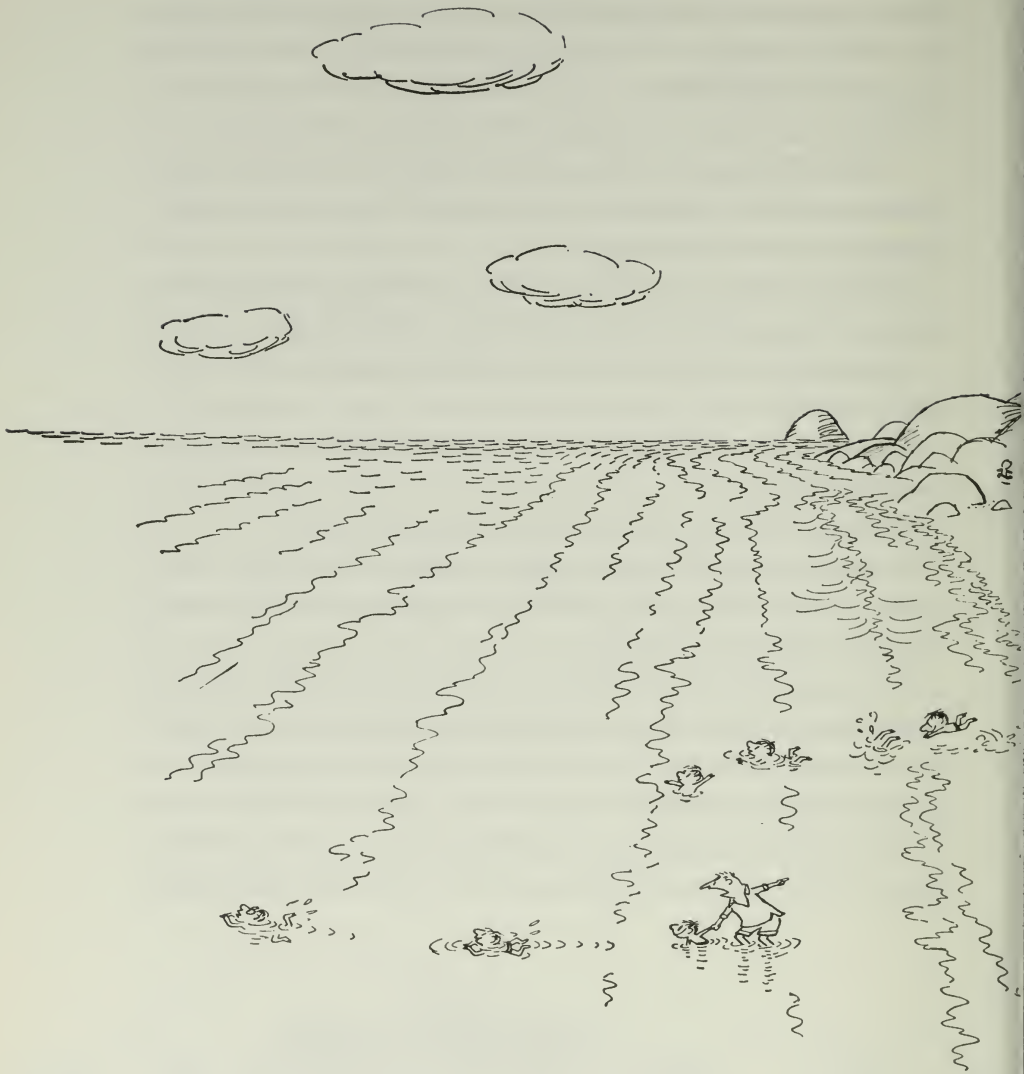
"Oh yes, there is!" shouted Paul. "Oh yes, there is!"

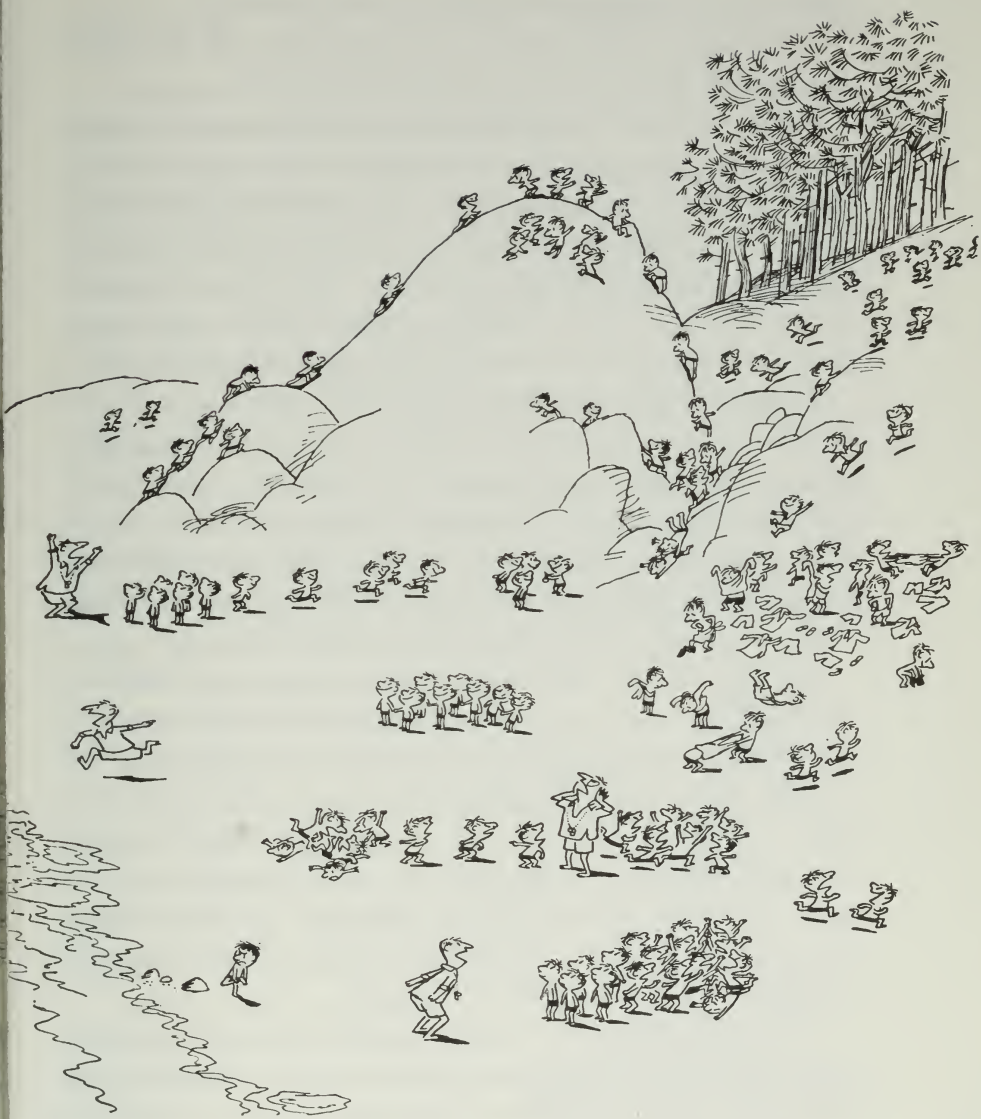
"Honestly there's not the slightest danger," said our team leader. "Come on, hold my hand. We'll go into the water together and I won't let go!"

Paul took his hand, still crying, and our team leader led him to the edge of the water, and as soon as Paul's feet were wet he started to screech, "Ooo! Ouch! It's cold! I'm scared! I'm going to die! Ooooooh!"

"But I tell you, there's not the slightest d—" our team leader began, and then he opened his eyes very wide and he shouted,







"Who's that swimming over there, near the buoy?"

"It's Crispin," said someone else in our team. "He can swim ever so well, he bet us he could reach the buoy!"

Our team leader let go Paul's hand and he started running into the water and then swimming, and he was shouting, "Crispin! Come back this minute!" He was blowing his whistle too, and the whistle made a kind of bubbling noise because of the water. And Paul started shouting, "Don't leave me alone! I'll be drowned! Help! Mommy! Daddy! Help!" And it was funny watching him, because he only had his feet in the water.

Our team leader came back with Crispin, who was very cross because our team leader had told him to come out of the water and stay right there on the beach. And then our team leader started counting us, and it wasn't easy because while he wasn't there we'd all gone off on our own a bit, and the team leader had lost his whistle chasing after Crispin so he had to start shouting, "Lynxes assemble! Lynxes assemble! Courage! Courage!"

And one of the other team leaders came over and said, "Hey, Gerald, can't you shout a bit quieter? My lot can't hear my whistle." I must say, the team leaders were making no end of noise, whistling and calling and shouting. Then our team leader counted us; he saw we were all there and he made George join Crispin on the beach, because George was in the water up to his chin and he was shouting, "I've fallen into a hole. Help! I've fallen into a hole." But actually he was only crouching down. George is dead funny!

And then the team leaders decided we'd had enough swimming for one morning and they started whistling and shouting, "Teams assemble on the beach!" So we all lined up and our team leader counted us. "Eleven!" he said. "There's

## GOING SWIMMING

one missing!" It was Paul. Paul was sitting in the water and he didn't want to come out.

"I want to stay in the water!" he shouted. "I'll catch cold if I come out! I want to stay in the water!"

Our team leader looked as if something was getting on his nerves, and he took Paul's arms and pulled him out, and Paul shouted that he wanted to go home to his mommy and daddy and stay in the water. And when the team leader counted us again there was still one missing.

"It's Crispin," someone said.

Our team leader went quite pale. "He didn't go back into the water, did he?"

But the team leader next to him asked, "I have one too many ... would he be yours, by any chance?" It was Crispin, who'd gone to have a word with a boy who had a chocolate bar.

When the team leader came back with Crispin he counted again, and there were thirteen of us.

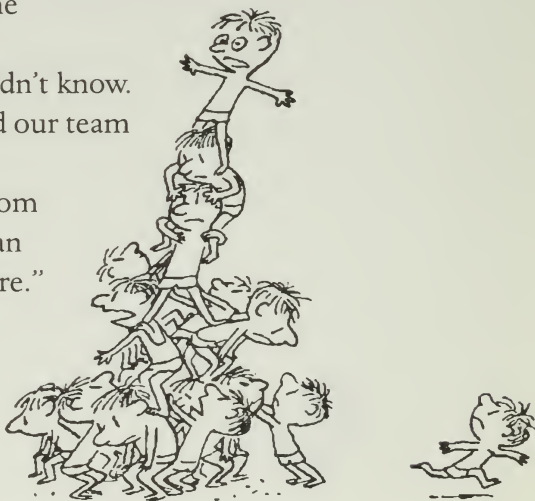
"Who here doesn't belong to the Lynxes?" asked our team leader.

"Me, Sir," said a little boy we didn't know.

"And which is your team?" asked our team leader. "Eagles? Jaguars?"

"No," said the little boy, "I'm from Bay View Hotel. My dad is the man asleep on the breakwater over there."

And the little boy shouted, "Daddy!" and the man who was asleep on the breakwater raised his head and walked toward us quite slowly.



NICHOLAS ON VACATION

"Now what, Bobby?" he asked.

"Your boy came over to play with our kids," our team leader told him. "Looks as though he likes the idea of a summer camp!"

"I dare say," said the man, "but I've no intention of sending him. No offense meant, but it strikes me that without their parents there's no one to supervise these children properly."







*If there's one thing that  
Mr. Ratcliff who runs the  
summer camp likes – besides  
children, of course – it's hiking  
in the woods. That's why Mr.  
Ratcliff could hardly wait for  
the end of supper to tell  
everyone his brilliant idea ...*



## Stormy Point

After supper yesterday, Mr. Ratcliff, who is in charge of the camp where my mom and dad sent me for a vacation (that was a great idea of theirs!), called us all together and he said, "We're all going on an excursion to Stormy Point tomorrow. Hiking through the woods with rucksacks, just like men! You'll find it a delightful expedition – a most exhilarating experience!"

And Mr. Ratcliff said we'd leave very early in the morning, and Mr. Kneebone the bursar would give us packed lunches to take. Then we all shouted "Hip hip hooray!" three times, and we went to bed feeling very excited.

Our team leader came into our hut to wake us up at six next morning. It wasn't easy.

"Put your walking shoes on and take sweaters," he told us. "And don't forget rucksacks to hold your packed lunches. And take the volleyball too."

"Can I take my camera, Gerald?" asked Bernie.

"Yes, by all means, Bernie," said our team leader. "Then you can take pictures of us all when we reach Stormy Point. It will make a nice memento!"

"Listen, everyone!" shouted Bernie proudly. "Hear that? I'm going to take photographs!"

NICHOLAS ON VACATION

"You're just a show-off. You and your camera!" said Crispin. "Who cares about your silly old camera? Anyway, I'm not letting you take any photo of me, I'm going to move!"

"You're only saying that about my camera because you're jealous," said Bernie. "Just because you don't have a camera!"

"Me, not have a camera?" said Crispin. "Don't make me laugh! I have a camera at home ever so much better than your camera, so there!"

"Silly twit! Dirty liar!" said Bernie, and they started to fight, but they stopped because the team leader said if they went on fooling around they wouldn't go to Stormy Point at all. Then he told us to hurry up or we'd be late for Assembly.

We had a big breakfast, and then we all lined up outside the kitchen and Mr. Kneebone gave each of us a packed lunch and an orange. It took a long time, and Mr. Kneebone looked as if he was beginning to get fed up, specially when Paul looked at the meat inside his sandwiches and said, "Please, there's fat on it."



## STORMY POINT

"Well, that won't hurt you. Just eat it all up!" said Mr. Kneebone.

"My mommy doesn't like me eating fat at home," said Paul. "And anyway I don't like fat."

"Well, leave it, then," said Mr. Kneebone.

"But you just told me to eat it all up!" said Paul. "It's not fair! I want to go home to my mommy and my daddy!" And he started crying.

But everything was OK, because George had already eaten the meat out of his sandwiches, so he swapped them for Paul's.

We left the camp with Mr. Ratcliff at our head and all the rest of us in teams behind him, with our team leaders. It was a real procession; the team leaders had us singing all kinds of things and we sang very loud because we felt so proud of ourselves. The only trouble was, it was too early in the morning for anyone to see us, specially when we went past the hotels where there were other people on vacation. But one



man did open his window and shout, "What do you think you're doing, making a row at this time of day?"

And then another window opened and another man shouted, "Was that you yelling like that, Paterson? As if it wasn't bad enough for us having to put up with your brats all day long!"

"No need to put on airs just because you order from the *à la carte* side of the menu, Langley!" shouted the first man. Then another window opened and a third man started shouting things, but we didn't know what, because we were some way off by then and we were singing so loud we couldn't hear him very well.

Then we left the road and crossed a field, and quite a lot of people didn't want to go through the field because there were three cows in it, but they told us we were men now and we mustn't be frightened, and they made us cross the field. We didn't sing going through the field, except for Mr. Ratcliff and the team leaders, but we joined in the choruses again when we were safe in the woods the other side.

The woods were terrific! Lots and lots of trees, you never saw anything like it! There were so many leaves you couldn't see the sky and it was quite dark and there wasn't even any path. We had to stop because Paul was rolling around on the ground, saying he was frightened of getting lost and being eaten by wild animals.



"Oh, really, this is the end!" said our team leader. "Look at the others, Paul! They're not frightened, are they?"

Then someone else started crying and saying yes, he was frightened

too, and three or four more people started crying as well, but I think some of them were doing it for fun.

Then Mr. Ratcliff came up and he gathered us all around him, which wasn't too easy because of the trees. He said we had to act like men, and he told us how many ways there were you could get your bearings again if you were lost: there was a compass, and then there was the sun, and then there were the stars, and then there was the moss on the trees, and anyway he'd been there before, last year, so he knew the way, and that was quite enough of that. Forward march!

Actually we couldn't forward march at once, because he had to find the people who'd gone off into the woods. Two of them were playing hide-and-seek; we found one at once, but the other wouldn't come out from behind his tree till we shouted, "Pax!" And someone else was looking for mushrooms and three were playing volleyball and George was having difficulty getting down from the tree he'd climbed to see if there were any cherries on it. And when everyone was there and we were about to start walking again, Bernie yelled, "Wait a minute, Gerald! We'll have to go back to camp! I forgot to bring my camera!"

And Crispin started to laugh, so they began fighting, but they stopped when our team leader shouted, "Stop that or you'll be punished!" We were all very surprised; it's the first time we ever heard our team leader shout like that!

We walked through the woods, for a long, long time. We were beginning to get tired,



and then we stopped. Mr. Ratcliff scratched his head and then he gathered all the team leaders around him. They were all waving their arms around, pointing in different directions, and I heard Mr. Ratcliff saying, "Funny thing, they must have felled some trees since last year, I can't seem to find my bearings." And then finally he put a finger in his mouth, raised it in the air and started walking again. We followed him. It was funny, that wasn't one of the ways he'd told us to find your bearings if you were lost.

Then, after walking a long, long time, we came out of the woods at last and we crossed the field again. But the cows had gone, I expect because it had started to rain. So we ran back to the road and we went into a garage there and ate our packed lunches, and we sang and we had a fantastic time! When it stopped raining it was very late, so we went back to camp. But Mr. Ratcliff said he wasn't beaten yet: tomorrow or the day after tomorrow we'd be going to Stormy Point.

By bus ...







*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*I'm being ever so good, I'm eating everything, I'm having a great time, and I'd like you to write me an excuse note for Mr. Ratcliff to say I don't have to have an afternoon rest, like the excuse note I took our teacher that time when Dad and I couldn't do my arithmetic homework ...*

*(Extract from Nicholas's letter home to his parents)*



## The Afternoon Rest

What I don't like about the summer camp is the afternoon rest we're supposed to have every day after lunch. They make us rest even if we think up good excuses not to. And it's just not fair, because after getting up in the morning, doing drill, having a wash, making our beds, having breakfast, going to the beach, going swimming, and playing in the sand, there's really no reason for us to feel tired and go to lie down on our beds.

The only good thing about the afternoon rest is that our team leader comes to our hut to supervise us, and he tells us stories to keep us quiet. It's great!

"Right," said our team leader, "on your beds, everyone, and don't let me hear a squeak out of you."

We all did as he said, except for Bernie, who crawled underneath his bed.

"Bernie!" shouted our team leader. "Always the same boy fooling around! I'm not surprised. You're hopeless! You're the worst of the whole bunch!"

"I'm only looking for my beach shoes, Gerald," said Bernie.

Bernie is my friend and it's true about him being hopeless, we have a great time together.

When Bernie was on his bed like everyone else, the team leader told us to go to sleep and keep quiet so as not to disturb



the people in the other huts.

"We want a story, Gerald!" we all shouted. "We want a story!"

Our team leader sighed heavily, and then he said OK, but we must be quiet.

"Once upon a time," he said, "in a country very far away, there was a good Caliph who had a very wicked Vizier ..."

Here Gerald stopped and asked, "Can anyone tell us what a Vizier is?"

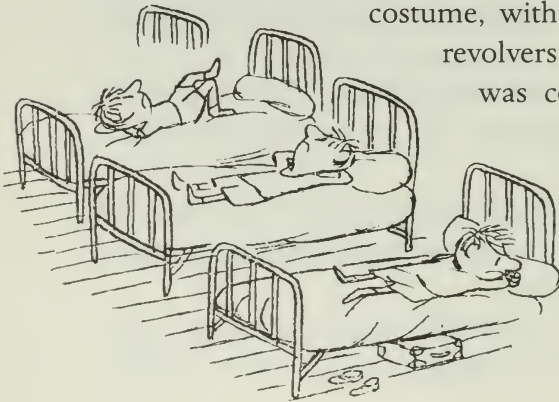
Bernie put his hand up.

"Yes, Bernie?" asked our team leader.

"Can I leave the room?" asked Bernie.

Our team leader narrowed his eyes and looked at him. He had taken a big mouthful of air, and then he let it out and said, "OK, off you go," and Bernie left the room.

So then our team leader went on walking up and down between the beds, telling his story. I have to say I like stories about cowboys better. Or stories about airmen. Our team leader went on talking, no one made any noise, my eyes were closing, and then I was on horseback in cowboy



costume, with these really terrific silver

revolvers stuck in my belt, and I

was commanding lots and lots

of other cowboys because

I was the sheriff, and we

were all going to be

attacked and someone

was shouting, "Hey,

everyone, look at this!

I found an egg!"

## THE AFTERNOON REST

I sat up on my bed all of a sudden, and I saw it was Bernie who had come into the hut carrying an egg.

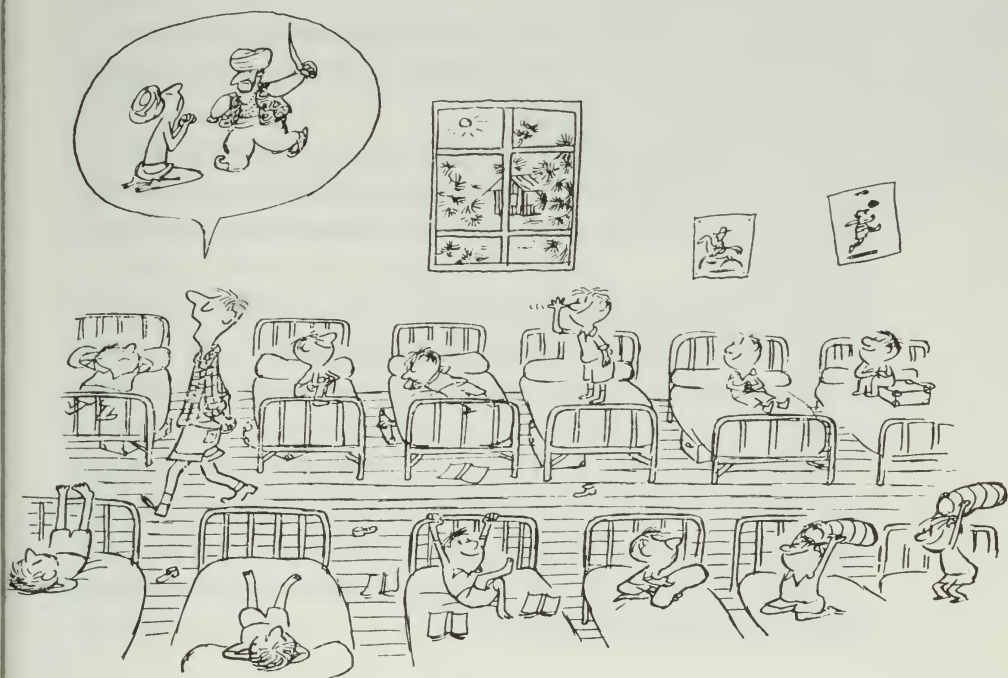
We all stood up to take a look.

“Go back to bed! Go back to bed, all of you!” shouted our team leader. He didn’t look a bit pleased.

“What sort of egg do you think it is, Gerald?” asked Bernie.

But Gerald said it was none of his business, he’d better go and put the egg back where he found it and then get back to bed. So Bernie went off again with his egg.

Seeing that no one was asleep anymore, our team leader went on with his story. It wasn’t bad, specially the bit where the good Caliph goes out in disguise to find out what his people think of him, and the Grand Vizier, who is terribly



wicked, seizes his chance to take the Caliph's place. And then our team leader stopped, and he said, "Where on earth is that wretched Bernie?"

"I'll go and look for him if you like," said Crispin.

"OK," said Gerald, "but don't be long."

Crispin left the room too, and next moment he was back at a run.

"Gerald! Gerald!" Crispin shouted. "Bernie's up a tree and he can't get down!"

Our team leader left the room, also at a run, and we all followed him, even though we had to wake up George, who was asleep by now and hadn't heard anything.

Bernie was sitting on a branch right at the top of a tree, and he didn't look happy.

"There he is! There he is!" we all shouted, pointing.

"Quiet!" called our team leader. "Bernie, what are you doing up there?"

"Well, I went to put the egg back where I found it, like you told me to," said Bernie, "and I found it here in a nest. But when I was climbing up again a branch broke, and now I can't get down."

And Bernie started crying. He has a very loud voice, Bernie has, when he cries you can hear him miles away. And then the leader of another team came out of the hut near the tree, looking very cross.

"Are you and your team making all this noise?" he asked our team leader. "You've gone and woken up all my bunch, and I'd only just made them go to sleep."

"Stop whining, can't you?" said our team leader. "One of mine is up a tree! Over there!"

THE AFTERNOON REST

The other team leader looked, and he started laughing, but not for long, because everyone came out of the huts to see what was going on. There was a whole crowd of us around the tree now.

“Go and lie down again!” shouted the other team leader. “Now see what you’ve done!” he told ours. “You want to control your lot better. You don’t take a job as team leader in a summer camp for kids if you can’t get little boys to obey you!”

“I’d like to see you do it,” said our team leader, “and anyway your lot are making just as much noise as my lot!”

“Maybe,” said the other team leader, “but it was your lot that woke my lot!”

“I want to get down, Gerald!” shouted Bernie.

So then the team leaders stopped arguing and went to look for a ladder.

“Fancy being silly enough to get stuck up a tree like that!” said one of the other team.

“What’s that to do with you?” I asked.

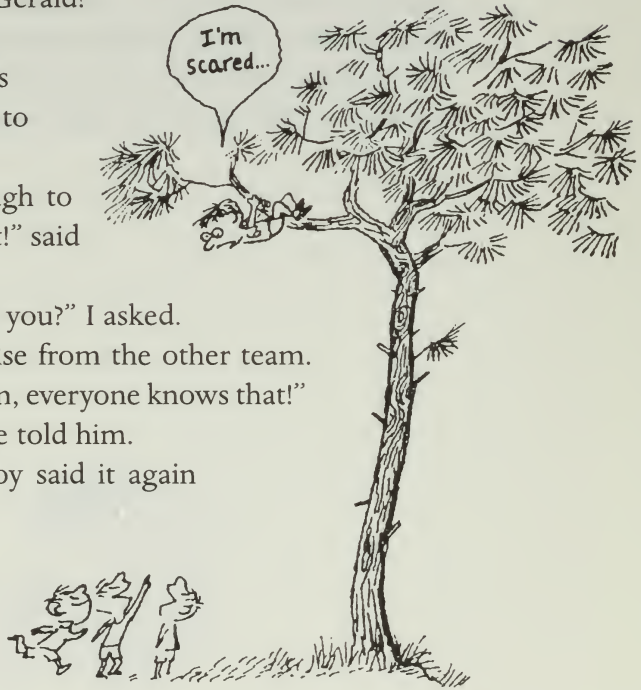
“Yeah!” said someone else from the other team.

“You’re all silly in your team, everyone knows that!”

“Say that again!” George told him.

And when the other boy said it again we started fighting.

“Hey, everyone! Hey! Wait for me to get down!” shouted Bernie. “Wait for me, everyone!”



## NICHOLAS ON VACATION

And then the team leaders came hurrying back with a ladder and Mr. Ratcliff, who's in charge of the camp and wanted to know what was going on. Everyone was shouting, it was terrific, and the team leaders looked very annoyed – perhaps because Bernie was in such a hurry to come and join in the fun, he hadn't waited for them to arrive before climbing down the tree.

“Get back to your huts, all of you!” shouted Mr. Ratcliff, and he sounded just like Old Spuds who is one of the teachers at my school.

So we went back to go on with our rest.

But not for long, because then it was time for Assembly, and our team leader made us all get up and go out. He looked pleased. I don't think he likes us having an afternoon rest either.

And then there was more trouble, because Bernie had gone to sleep on his bed and he didn't want to get up.







*Darling Nicholas*

*We hope you're being a good boy, eating everything they give you, and having a nice time. Mr. Ratcliff is quite right about the afternoon rest: you need a little nap after lunch as well as a good night's sleep after supper. We know you, my poppet: left to yourself, you'd want to play even at night. Luckily there are people there to keep an eye on you, and you must always do as they say. About that arithmetic homework, Dad says he knew the answer all the time, but he wanted you to work it out for yourself ...*

*(Extract from a letter to Nicholas from Nicholas's parents)*



## Treasure Hunt

At supper yesterday evening, Mr. Ratcliff, who is in charge of this whole camp, was talking to our team leaders, and they were saying all sorts of things in low voices, looking at us now and then. And after dessert – the dessert was OK, it was raspberry yoghurt – they told us to go to bed early.

Our team leader came into our hut, and he asked if we were feeling fit, and then he told us to go to sleep quickly because we were going to need all our strength.

“What for?” asked Conrad.

“You’ll soon see,” said our team leader, and then he said goodnight and put out the light.

I could feel this wasn’t a night like any other night and I knew I wouldn’t be able to sleep. I can never sleep when I’m excited before I go to bed.

I woke all of a sudden when I heard people shouting and blowing whistles.

“Treasure hunt! Treasure hunt! Everyone assemble for a treasure hunt in the dark!” they were shouting.

We were all sitting up in bed except for George, who hadn’t heard a thing, and Paul who was scared and who was crying under the bedclothes and we couldn’t see him, but we could hear him going “Hmmm hmmm hmmm,” and as we know



him pretty well by now we knew he was saying he wanted to go home to his mommy and daddy, same as usual.

And then the door of our hut opened and our team leader came in. He put the light on and told us to get dressed fast and go to Assembly ready for the treasure hunt, and to wrap up well in our thick sweaters. So then Paul put his head out from under the blankets and he said he was frightened to go out at night, and anyway his mommy and daddy never let him go out at night, and he wasn't going to go out at night so there!

"OK," said our team leader, "you stay here, then."

So then Paul climbed out of bed and he was the first one ready, because he said he was scared to stay in the hut alone and he was going to complain to his mommy and his daddy.

We had Assembly in the middle of the camp; there were lights on because it was very late and quite dark, but all the same we couldn't see much.

Mr. Ratcliff was waiting for us.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Ratcliff, "we're going to have a night-time treasure hunt. Our kind bursar Mr. Kneebone has gone

off with a flag – that’s the treasure. You have to find Mr. Kneebone and bring his flag back to camp. You work in teams, and the team that brings the flag back gets an extra chocolate ration. Mr. Kneebone has left some clues to help you find him more easily. Now, listen carefully: ‘First I set off for China. Then beside three white rocks ...’ Do you mind not making such a noise while I’m talking?”

Bernie put his whistle in his pocket and Mr. Ratcliff went on, “And beside three big white rocks I changed my mind and went into the woods. So as not to get lost, I did the same as Hop-o’-my-Thumb ...’ For the last time, will you kindly stop fooling around with that whistle?”

“Oh, sorry, Mr. Ratcliff,” said one of the team leaders. “I thought you’d finished.”

Mr. Ratcliff sighed heavily, and he said, “Right. Those are the clues to help you find Mr. Kneebone and his flag. You must show your powers of ingenuity, observation, and initiative. Stick together in your teams, and may the best team win! Off you go!”

And the team leaders blew their whistles like crazy, and everyone started running around all over the place, but not outside the camp yet because no one knew where to go.

We were ever so pleased. It’s great, having a treasure hunt at night!

“I’m going to get my torch,” shouted Conrad.

But our team leader called him back. “Keep together,” he told us. “Now, you want to plan how to start the hunt. And you’d better hurry up, or another team will get ahead of you and find Mr. Kneebone first.”

But I don’t think he needed to worry too much because

though we were all shouting and running around, no one had left the camp yet.

"Well, let's think," said our team leader. "Mr. Kneebone said he set off for China. Which way does the oriental country of China lie?"

"I have an atlas with China in it," Crispin told us. "Auntie Rose gave it to me for my birthday, but I'd rather have had a bike."

"I have a super bike at home," said Bernie.

"A racing bike?" I asked.

"Take no notice," said Crispin. "He's making it up."

"So what about the thumping I'm going to give you?" asked Bernie. "Am I making that up too?"

"China's in the east!" shouted our team leader.

"Where's the east?" someone asked.

"Hey, Gerald!" shouted Conrad. "He isn't one of us! He's a spy!"

"I'm not a spy!" shouted the other person. "I'm in the Eagles and it's the best team in the camp."

"Well, run off back to the Eagles," said our team leader.

"The thing is, I don't know where they are," said this boy, and he started crying.

He was kind of silly, because his team couldn't be far off, since no one had left the camp yet!

"Where does the sun rise?" asked our team leader.

"Near George's bed, which is the one by the window even if he does complain the sun wakes him up," said Jonah.

"Hey, Gerald!" Crispin shouted. "George isn't here."

"That's right," said Bernie, "he never woke up. He sleeps like a log, George does. I'll go and get him."

"Well, hurry up!" shouted our team leader.

## TREASURE HUNT

Bernie went off at a gallop and then he came back saying George was sleepy and he didn't want to come.

"Too bad!" said our team leader. "We've lost enough time as it is."

But seeing no one had left the camp yet, it wasn't too serious. And then Mr. Ratcliff, who was still standing in the middle of the camp, started shouting, "Silence, please! Team leaders, assemble your teams and we'll start the hunt!"

Assembling the teams was quite a job, because we'd become rather mixed up in the dark. We found we had one Eagle and two Lions in among us Lynxes. We soon found Paul: he was over with the Tigers, but we recognized him by the way he cries. Conrad had gone off to spy on the Jaguars, who were looking for their team leader. We were having a fantastic time, and then it started to rain really hard.

"Treasure hunt postponed!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Everyone go back to the huts!"

And we could do that quite quickly because luckily no one had left the camp yet.

We saw Mr. Kneebone and his flag come back next morning by car, the car belonging to the farmer who owns that field of apple trees. Later someone told us Mr. Kneebone had gone to hide in the pine wood. Then, when it started raining, he grew



## NICHOLAS ON VACATION

tired of waiting for us and tried to go back to camp. But he became lost in the woods and fell into a ditch of water, and when he was in that ditch he started shouting and that made the farmer's dog bark. So the farmer found Mr. Kneebone and took him back to his farmhouse to get him dry, and let him spend the night there.

But no one ever told us if the farmer had the extra chocolate ration for finding the treasure. After all, he'd earned it.







*“Angling undeniably has a soothing effect ...” Gerald Latimer, team leader of the Lynxes, read that in a magazine somewhere, and he was very impressed. He spent a wonderful night dreaming of a dozen little boys sitting in silence without moving a muscle, carefully watching a dozen floats bobbing up and down on the tranquil waters ...*



## Fish Soup

Someone said our team leader Gerald had read a piece in a magazine about the soothing effect of angling. I don't know about that, but this morning he came into the hut and said, "Well, boys, how would you like to go fishing for a change, instead of going swimming with the others?"

"Ooh, yes!" we all said. Or almost all; Paul didn't say anything, he's scared of everything and he wants to go home to his mommy and daddy. George didn't say anything either. He was still asleep.

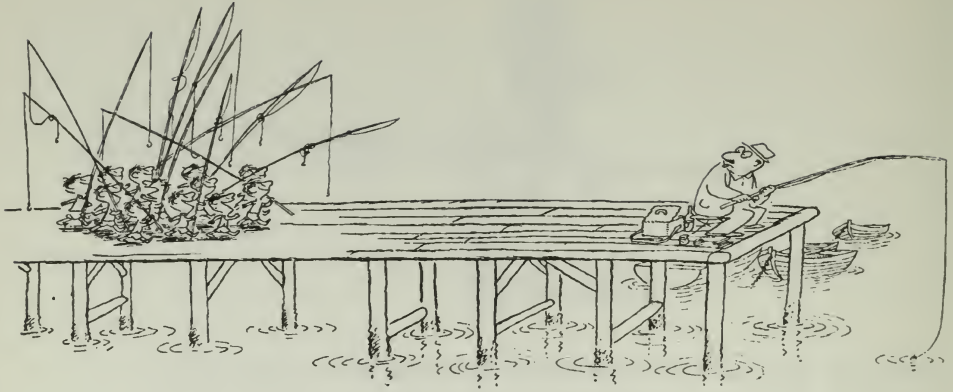
"Right," said our team leader. "I've already told the cook we'll be bringing him back some fish for lunch. There'll be fish soup for the whole camp, provided by our team. That'll show the others the Lynxes are the greatest! Three cheers for the Lynxes ... hip hip ..."

"Hooray!" we all shouted, except George.

"And what's our rallying cry?" asked our team leader.

"Courage!" we all shouted, including George who had just woken up.

After Assembly, while the others went off to the beach, Mr. Ratcliff, who is in charge of the whole camp, gave us fishing rods and an old tin full of worms. "Don't be too late back. I'll need time to make the fish soup," shouted the cook, laughing.



The cook is always laughing; we like him a lot. When we go into the kitchen he starts yelling, "Get away, you wicked little beggars, or I'll be after you with my big ladle!" And then he gives us cookies.

We went off with our fishing rods and our worms; we went right to the end of the pier. There wasn't anyone there except for a fat man in a little white hat, fishing, and he didn't look pleased to see us.

"The main thing to remember when you're fishing is to keep quiet, so as not to scare the fish off," said our team leader. "And don't fool around! I don't want anyone falling in the water! Stick together! No going down on the rocks! And mind you don't do yourselves an injury with those hooks!"

"When you've quite finished ..." said the fat man.

"What?" said our team leader, surprised.

"I was wondering if you'd nearly done bawling like that!" said the fat man. "The noise you're making would frighten off a whale!"

"Ooh, are there whales?" asked Bernie.

"I'm not staying here if there are whales!" shouted Paul, and

he started crying and saying he was frightened and he wanted to go home to his mommy and daddy. But he didn't go, it was the fat man who went, which was a good thing, because that way it was just us and there wasn't anyone to disturb us.

"Have any of you been fishing before?" asked our team leader.

"Me!" said Alastair. "Last summer I caught a fish that big!" And he spread his arms as far as they'd go. We all laughed because Alastair is a terrible liar; I think he's the biggest liar of us all.

"You're a liar!" Bernie told him.

"You're just jealous!" Alastair told him. "Stupid, too! I did so catch a fish that big!" And since Alastair had his arms spread right out Bernie seized his chance and punched Alastair's nose.

"Stop that, you two, or I shan't let you fish, understand?" shouted our team leader. Alastair and Bernie stopped it, but Alastair was still saying we'd soon see the sort of fish he caught, you bet we would, and Bernie was saying he was dead sure *his* fish would be the biggest.

Our team leader showed us how to put the worm on the end of the hook. "And do be careful not to hurt yourselves with those hooks!" he said. We all tried to copy our team leader, but it wasn't easy, and he helped us – specially Paul who was frightened of worms and asked if they bit. As soon as he had a worm on his hook, Paul threw the line into the water, so as to get as far away from the worm as he could. We all had our lines in the water, except for Alastair and Bernie, whose lines were tangled up, and George and Conrad, who were busy organizing a worm race on the pier. "Keep watching your floats!" said our team leader.

So we did keep watching our floats, but not much seemed to be happening, and then Paul let out a yell and he lifted his rod and there was a fish on the end of the line. "A fish! Mommy!" shouted Paul. And he let go of his fishing rod and it fell on the rocks below. Our team leader mopped his forehead and he looked at Paul, who was crying, and then he said, "OK, wait for me here, I'll go and fetch the rod that little ... I mean, that clumsy child dropped!" Our team leader went down on the rocks, which is a dangerous thing to do because they're very slippery, but everything was OK except there was a lot of fuss when Crispin went down too, to help, and he slipped into the water, but our team leader managed to catch hold of him, and our team leader shouted so loud that we saw people on the beach, quite a long way off, standing up to see what had happened. When our team leader gave Paul back his rod the fish wasn't on the end of the line anymore, and Paul was really pleased to see the worm wasn't there either. Paul said he didn't mind fishing so long as he didn't have to have any more worms on his hook.

George caught the first fish. This was really George's day; his worm had won the worm race, and now he'd caught a fish! We all went to look at it. It wasn't a very big fish, but all the same George was proud of it, and the team leader congratulated him. After that George said he'd had enough of fishing, now he'd caught a fish, and he lay down on the pier and went to sleep. You'll never guess who caught the second fish! It was me! I caught a fantastic, super fish! It was just a little bit smaller than George's fish, but it was a very good one. The only trouble was, our team leader hurt his finger when he was taking it off the hook (it's a funny thing, I knew he was

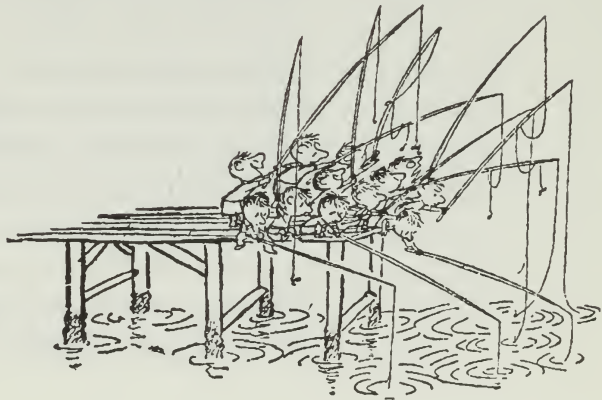
## FISH SOUP

going to do that). That may be why our team leader said it was time to go back. Alastair and Bernie protested, because they still hadn't untangled their lines.

We felt a bit silly giving the cook our fish; we thought perhaps two fishes weren't an awful lot to make fish soup for the whole camp. But the cook laughed and he said they were just right, exactly what he needed. And he gave us cookies as a reward.

Our cook is OK! The fish soup was very nice, and Mr. Ratcliff announced, "Three cheers for the Lynxes ... hip hip ..." And everyone shouted "hooray!" We shouted too because we felt so proud.

Afterward I asked the cook how the fish in the fish soup became so big, and how there could be so many of them. The cook started laughing and he explained that fish swell when you cook them. He's really great, he gave me a piece of bread and jam too.



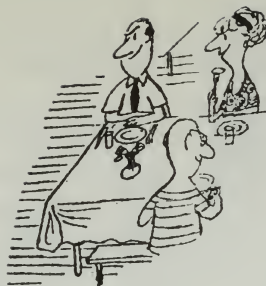


*Dear Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone*

*Crispin is in good health, and I am happy to tell you that we are very pleased with him. Your son has fitted in here perfectly, and gets on well with his little friends. Perhaps he is sometimes inclined to act the "tough guy," if you will pardon the expression, but he wants his friends to regard him as a leader. A dynamic boy with a strong sense of initiative, Crispin was quick to gain influence over his young comrades, who instinctively admire his well-balanced character. I shall be delighted to see you when you are passing through this area ...*

*(Extract from a letter to Crispin's parents from Mr. Ratcliff)*





## Crispin's Visitors

The summer camp where I'm staying is fine. I've found a whole new gang of friends here and we have a great time. The only thing is, our moms and dads aren't here. Of course, we all write lots of letters, us and our moms and dads. We tell them all the things we've been doing and we say we're being good and eating well and having fun and we send our love, and they write back telling us to be good and eat everything we're given and be careful, and they send hugs and kisses, but it isn't quite the same as when our moms and dads are there.

So Crispin was really in luck. We were just sitting down to lunch when Mr. Ratcliff, who's in charge of the camp, came in with a big smile on his face and he said, "I have a nice surprise for you, Crispin. Your mother and father have come to visit you!"

And we all went out to watch. Crispin hugged his mom and then his dad, and they told him how he'd grown and how sunburned he was. Crispin asked if they brought his electric train and they all looked very pleased to see each other. Then Crispin told his mom and dad, "This is our gang. That one's Bernie and this is Nicholas, and there's George and Paul and Alastair and all the others, and that's our team leader, and our hut is over there, and yesterday I caught tons of shrimp!"



“Will you stay for lunch?” asked Mr. Ratcliff.

“Oh, we don’t want to put you out,” said Crispin’s dad. “We just thought that, as we were passing, we’d drop in.”

“But it *would* be interesting to see what the little dears have to eat,” said Crispin’s mom.

“Of course!” said Mr. Ratcliff. “I’ll just tell the cook to serve two extra portions.” And we all went back into the refectory.

Crispin’s mom and dad were sitting at Mr. Ratcliff’s table, with the bursar, Mr. Kneebone. Crispin stayed put with us. He was ever so proud, and he asked if we’d seen his dad’s car. Mr. Ratcliff told Crispin’s mom and dad that everyone was very pleased with Crispin, and he had no end of initiative and dynamism and things. And then we started eating.

“Why, this is very good!” said Crispin’s dad.

“Simple fare, but healthy and nourishing,” said Mr. Ratcliff.

“Mind you take the skin off your salami, my poppet! Mind you chew it up well!” Crispin’s mom called across to Crispin.

Crispin didn’t seem to like his mom saying that. Maybe because he’d already eaten his salami, skin and all. You have to admit, Crispin’s dynamism is something tremendous when it comes to eating. The main course was fish.

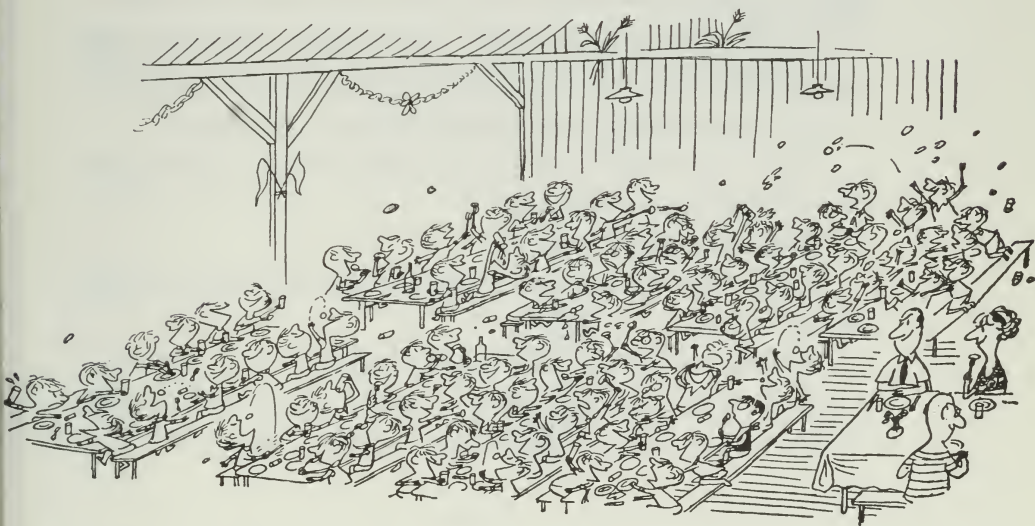
## CRISPIN'S VISITORS

"This is a good deal better than the fish we had where we were staying on the Costa Brava," said Crispin's dad. "The oil they used in that hotel was ..."

"The bones! Do mind the fishbones, my poppet!" called out Crispin's mom. "Remember how you cried that time you swallowed one at home?"

"I didn't cry!" said Crispin, and he went quite red. He looked even more sunburned than before.

Then we had dessert, which was a lovely fruit custard, and afterward Mr. Ratcliff said, "We usually have a bit of a singsong now." He stood up and told us, "Silence, everyone!" He waved his arms in the air, and we sang the song about the ten green bottles, and then the one about riding on a donkey, hey ho and away we go, donkey riding, donkey riding, and Crispin's dad, who seemed to be having a good time, joined in. He was great at the hey ho bits. When we'd finished Crispin's mom told him, "Now sing them 'Hushabye Baby', my poppet!"





And then she told Mr. Ratcliff how Crispin loved to sing “Hushabye Baby” when he was little, before his father insisted on having his hair cut – such a shame, because his curls looked so sweet. Crispin didn’t want to sing, he said he couldn’t remember the song any more, but his mom started to help him. “Hushabye Baby, on the tree top ...” Even then Crispin didn’t want to sing, and he didn’t look at all pleased when Bernie started laughing. Then Mr. Ratcliff said it was time to leave the table.

We went out of the refectory, and Crispin’s dad asked what the boys usually did at this time of day.

“They go and lie down,” said Mr. Ratcliff. “It’s a rule. They need some rest and relaxation.”

“Very sensible!” said Crispin’s dad.

“I don’t want a rest!” said Crispin. “I want to stay with my mom and dad.”

“And so you will, my poppet,” said Crispin’s mom. “I’m sure Mr. Ratcliff will make an exception for you, just for today!”

“If he isn’t having a rest I’m not either!” said Bernie.

“I don’t care whether you have a rest or not,” said Crispin. “I’m not having one anyway!”

“Why not?” asked Alastair.

“Yeah!” said Conrad. “If Crispin isn’t having a rest, no one’s having a rest!”

“Want me to punch you?” asked Crispin.

Mr. Ratcliff suddenly seemed rather cross, and he said, “Silence! Everyone will have a rest, and that’s that!”

## CRISPIN'S VISITORS

So then Crispin started shouting and crying and waving his hands around and kicking, and we were surprised, because that kind of thing is more like Paul. Paul's always crying and saying he wants to go home to his mommy and daddy, but just now he wasn't saying anything, he was so surprised to see someone else crying instead.

Crispin's dad was looking rather hot and bothered.

"Well, anyway," he said, "we really ought to leave straight away if we're to get as far as we planned tonight ..."

Crispin's mom said yes, he was right, that was the best thing to do. She kissed Crispin and gave him lots of good advice and promised him no end of toys, and then she said goodbye to Mr. Ratcliff.

"It's very nice here," she said, "but I do think children tend to become rather highly strung, away from their parents. It would be a good idea if parents came to visit regularly! That would be a soothing influence; they'd feel all the better for being back in the bosom of the family!"

And we went to have our rest. Crispin had stopped crying, and if Bernie hadn't said, "Sing us 'Hushabye Baby', my poppet," I don't think we'd all have had such a big fight.





The holidays were over and it was time to leave the camp. A sad moment, of course, but the children cheered themselves up by thinking how pleased their parents would be to have them home again. First, however, there was a big goodbye party at the camp. Each team showed what it could do. Nicholas and the Lynxes brought the party to an end with a human pyramid. One of the young athletes waved the Lynxes' team flag from the top of the pyramid, and everyone shouted the team's rallying cry, "Courage!" And they were all very brave when the moment came to say goodbye, except for Paul, who was crying and saying he wanted to stay at the camp.



## Vacation Memories

I'm back from my vacation now. I went to a summer camp, and it was great. When our train arrived, all our moms and dads were waiting for us. It was great; everyone was shouting, and some people were crying because they hadn't found their moms and dads yet, others were laughing because they *had* found them, and the team leaders, who were with us, were whistling to make us keep in line, and the railwaymen on the station were whistling to stop the team leaders whistling, because they were afraid that would make the trains leave, and then I saw my own mom and dad. That was really great! I hugged my mom and then my dad, and we all kissed each other a lot, and they said how I'd grown and how brown I was, and Mom's eyes were wet and Dad was chuckling to himself. He put his hand on my head and I started to tell them about my vacation, and we left the station, and Dad lost my case.

I was pleased to be home. Our house smelt so good, and then there was my bedroom with all the toys, and Mom went to make lunch, which was great, because the food was OK at the camp, but Mom is the best cook in the world, and even if her cakes do sometimes sink they're nicer than anything you ever ate in your life. Dad sat in an armchair to read his paper and I asked him, "What am I going to do now?"

"How should I know?" said Dad. "You must be tired after your journey. Go and have a rest in your room!"

"No, I'm not tired," I said.

"Well, go and play, then," Dad told me.

"Who with?" I asked.

"Who with? What a question!" said Dad. "On your own, I suppose."

"I don't know how to play on my own," I said, "it isn't fair. There was a whole gang of us at the camp and we always had things to do!"

So then Dad put his paper down on his lap, he looked at me very hard and he said, "You're not at camp now, and you will kindly oblige me by going to play on your own!" So I started to cry, and Mom came running out of the kitchen. "Well, this is a fine start!" she said, and she comforted me and told me to go and play in the yard until lunch was ready, and maybe I could invite Mary Jane over, because Mary Jane was just back from vacation. So I went off while Mom was talking to Dad. I think they were talking about me, they were so pleased I was back.

Mary Jane is Mr. and Mrs. Curtis's daughter, and they live next door. Mr. Curtis is head of the shoe department of the Save-It chain stores, on the third floor, and he often has arguments with Dad. But Mary Jane is great, even if she is a girl! And I was in luck, because when I went out into our yard

I saw Mary Jane playing in hers.



"Hi, Mary Jane!" I said. "Coming over to play in our yard?"

"Right," said Mary Jane, and she came through the hole in the fence which Dad and Mr. Curtis don't want to mend because they both say the hole belongs



to the other one's yard. Since I saw Mary Jane last time, before the vacation, she'd gone very brown, which looked nice with her blue eyes and her fair hair. Honestly, Mary Jane is great, even if she is a girl!

"Have nice holidays?" Mary Jane asked me.

"Fantastic!" I told her. "I went to a summer camp, and there were teams, and mine was the best, it was called the Lynxes, and I was in charge of it."

"I thought there were grown-ups called team leaders in charge at those camps," said Mary Jane.

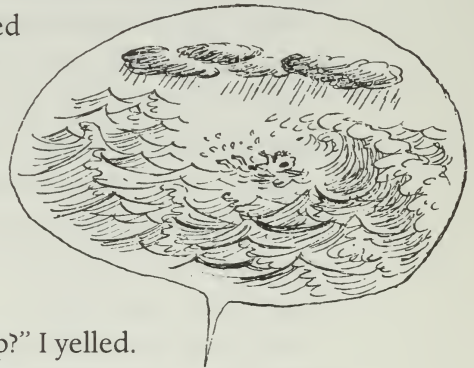
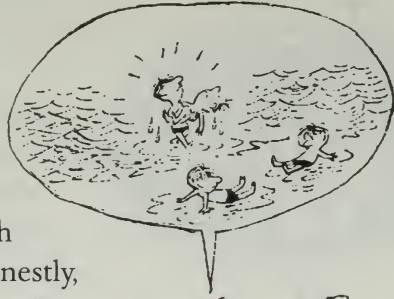
"Yes," I said, "but I was the team leader's second-in-command and he never did anything without asking me, so I was really the one in charge."

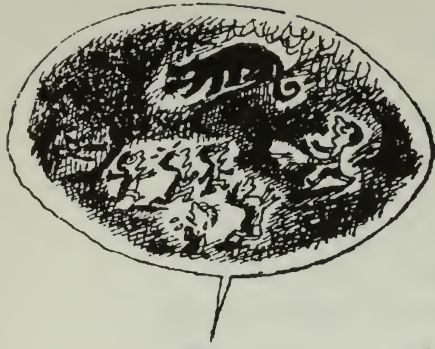
"Were there any girls there?" asked Mary Jane.

"No fear!" I said "It was too dangerous for girls. We did some fantastic things, and I had to save two people from drowning."

"You're making that up," said Mary Jane.

"What do you mean, making it up?" I yelled. "It wasn't two people either, it was three, I forgot one of them. And then I won the fishing competition, I caught a fish that big!" And I spread my arms as far as they'd go, and Mary Jane started laughing as if





she didn't believe me. And I wasn't too pleased; it's perfectly true about girls being silly. So I told her about the time I helped the police catch a burglar who had been hiding in the camp, and the time I swam to the lighthouse and back, and everyone was dreadfully worried, but when I returned to the beach they all congratulated me and said what a fine swimmer I was, and then I told her about the time all the rest of the gang were lost in the forest and it was

full of wild animals and I found them.

"Well, I went on the beach with Mommy and Daddy," said Mary Jane, "and I made friends with a boy called Johnny who could turn fantastic great somersaults ..."

"Mary Jane!" called Mrs. Curtis, who had come out of her house. "Come along in, lunch is ready!"

"But I'll tell you all about it later," said Mary Jane, and she scrambled back through the hole in the fence.

When I went indoors again Dad looked at me and he said, "Well, Nicholas, found your little girlfriend? In a better mood now, are you?" I didn't say anything, I went up to my room and I kicked the closet door.

Well, I ask you! Why does Mary Jane want to go telling me a load of rubbish about what she did on vacation? It's all lies, and anyway I'm not interested.

And that silly twit Johnny has a face like a monkey!



## René Goscinny

*René Goscinny is the world-famous writer and creator, along with Albert Uderzo, of the adventures of Asterix the Gaul. Born in Paris in 1926, Goscinny lived in Buenos Aires and New York. He returned to France in the 1950s where he met Jean-Jacques Sempé and they collaborated on picture strips and then stories about Nicholas, the popular French schoolboy. An internationally successful children's author, who also won awards for his animated cartoons, Goscinny died in 1977.*



## Jean-Jacques Sempé

*Jean-Jacques Sempé is one of the most famous cartoonists and illustrators in the world and his work is featured in countless magazines and newspapers. Born in Bordeaux, France in 1932, Sempé was expelled from school for bad behavior. He enjoyed a variety of jobs, from traveling toothpaste salesman to soldier, before winning an art prize in 1952. Although Sempé was never trained formally as an artist, more than twenty volumes of his drawings have been published, in thirty countries. He lives in Paris.*



## Anthea Bell

*Anthea Bell was awarded the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and the Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize (USA) in 2002 for her translation of W.G. Sebald's Austerlitz. Her many works of translation from French and German (for which she has received several other awards) include the Nicholas books and, with Derek Hockridge, the entire Asterix the Gaul saga by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo.*



*Have you read ...*



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*Look out for ...*



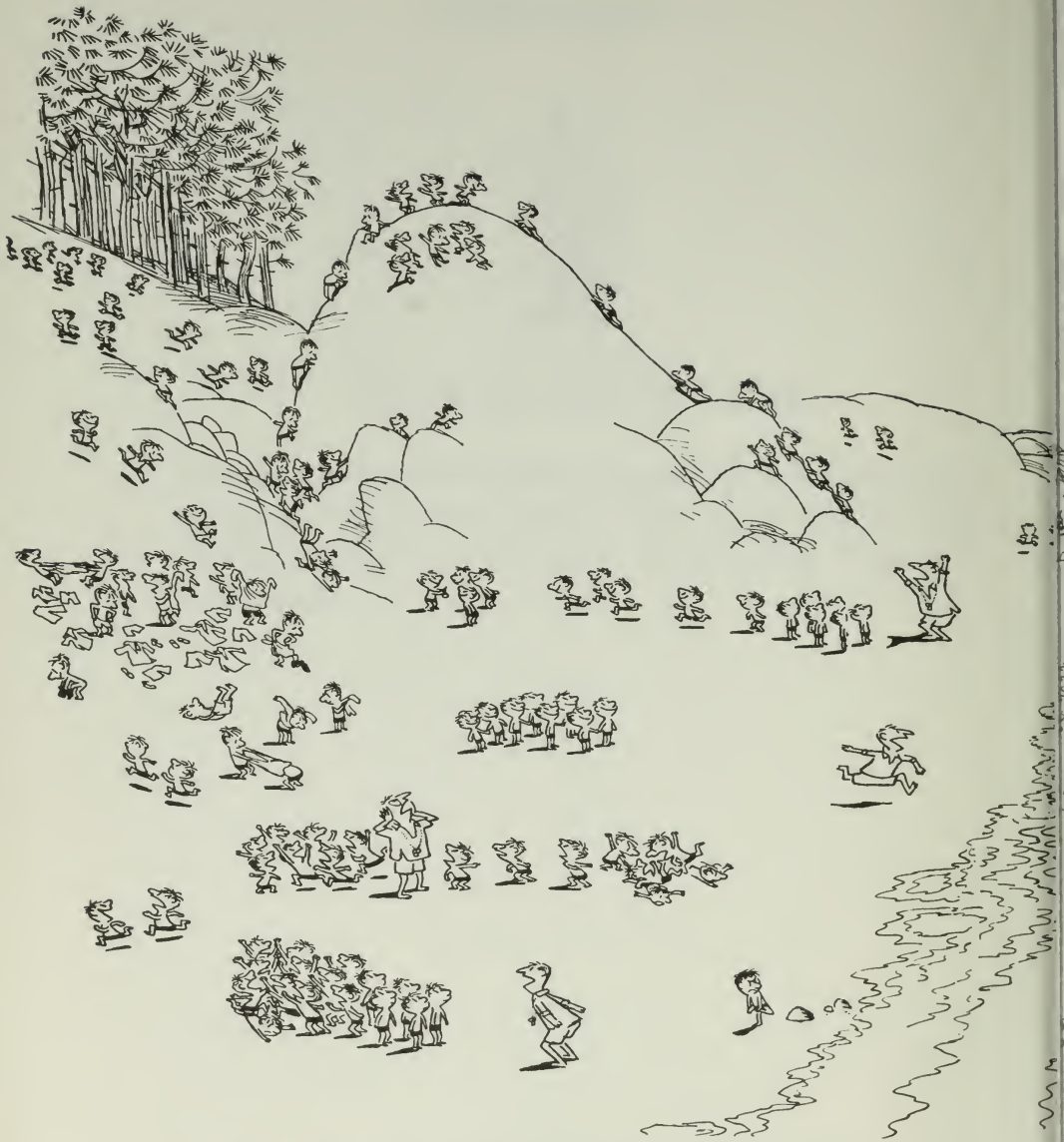
## Nicholas and the Gang

Nicholas and his friends always find exciting new things to do: Max does magic tricks, Jeremy wants to go camping, and Geoffrey invents a secret code that only the gang will understand.

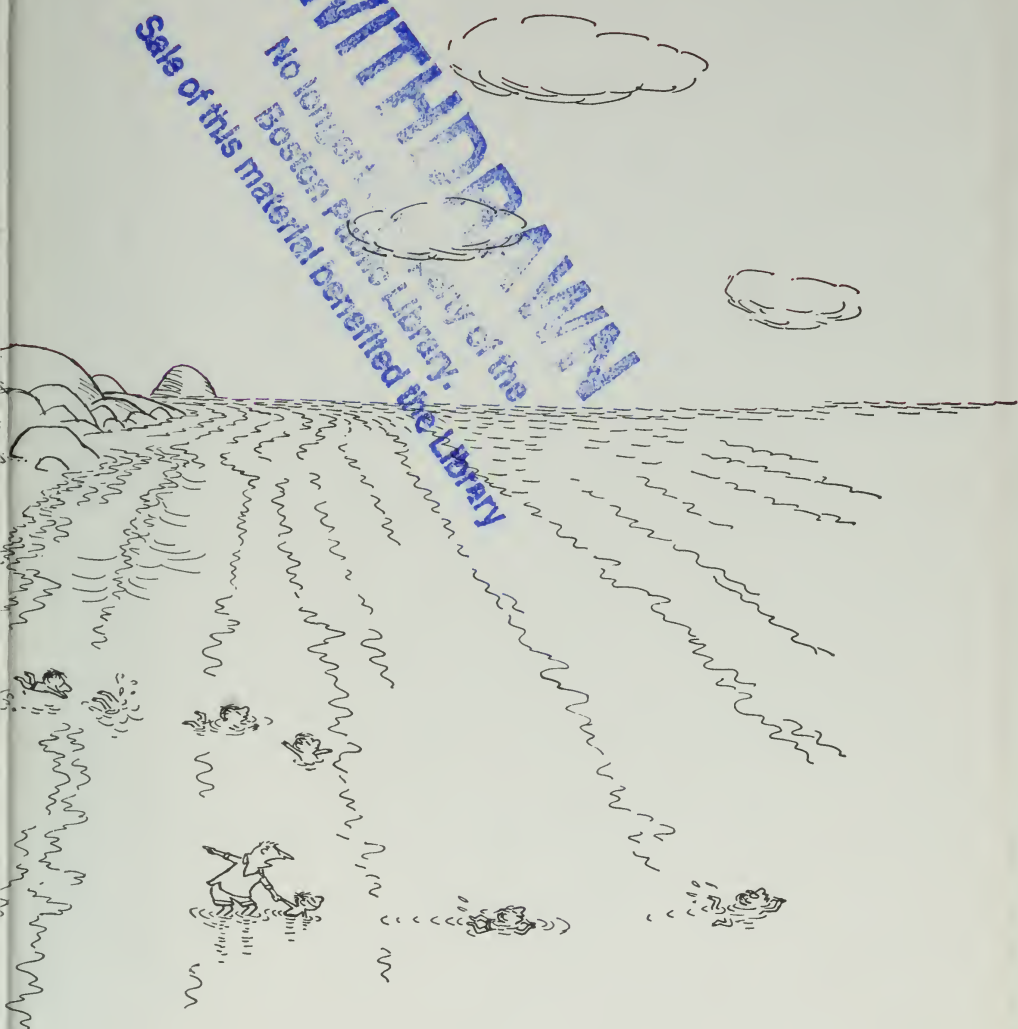
To find out more about Nicholas and his friends, visit [www.phaidon.com/Nicholas](http://www.phaidon.com/Nicholas)







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ISBN 0-7148-4678-3

£ 12.95

ISBN 978-0-7148-4678-1

\$ 19.95



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