Opening extract from

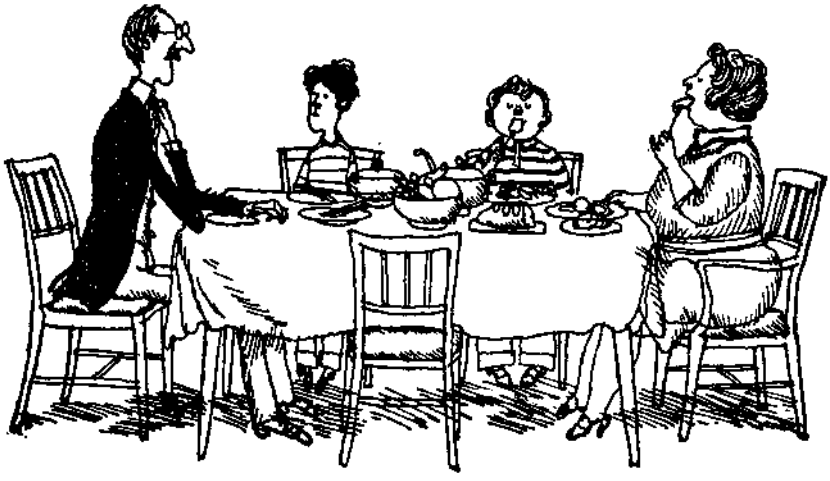
Fattypuffs and Thinifers

Written by

André Maurois

Published by

Jane Nissen Books



CHAPTER I

The Double Family

"How slowly you eat," said Mr Double, who for some moments had been tapping with his fingers on the tablecloth.

"Not me, Father," said Terry.

"No, not you, but your mother and your brother."

It would have been difficult anywhere to find a more united family than the Doubles. Mr and Mrs Double were devoted to each other, and they adored their children. Their two little boys, Edmund and Terry, often quarrelled—after all, boys of nine and ten are not saints—but they couldn't get on without one another. Edmund used to say, "Terry is always teasing me", but if Terry was away for two days Edmund was like a fish out of water; and

Terry used to say, "Edmund's too rough", but if Edmund happened to be ill Terry felt ill as well. You never heard them say, as other boys do, "I did this", or "I saw that": they always said, "We were at the Circus", or "We had to go without our pudding", or "We've had measles". In fact, although there were two of them, they lived just as though they were one person.

But at meal-times the father and mother and the two boys did not get on quite so well. The Double family was divided into two halves. Mrs Double and Edmund, the older boy, were very interested in food. When he came back from school Edmund always went straight to the kitchen to find out what was for dinner. It was even said that at the age of eight months, when he was sitting at the table in his high chair, he had grabbed at a plate which someone passed just in front of him and clutched a chop in his little hand. Mr Double and Terry, on the other hand, never paid the slightest attention to what they were given to eat. All they wanted was to gobble it up quickly so that Mr Double could go back to his work and Terry to his toys. Both were rather thin.

"Edmund," said Mr Double, "if you go on eating like that you'll turn into a real Fattypuff!"

Mrs Double looked anxiously at her son. She herself was very afraid of getting fat, and since she could never resist sweet things she went for long walks and ran about the house all day to keep herself beautiful.

"What!" she said. "Edmund isn't a bit like a Fattypuff!"

"Yes, he is," said Terry, who loved teasing. "Fattypuff! Fattypuff! Fattypuff!"

He said it so often that when they got down from the table

Edmund gave him a punch, and he started to cry. As you see, the brothers simply couldn't get on without one another.

It was a Sunday in the summer, and Mr Double had promised to take the boys for a walk in the forest. These walks with their father were their greatest treat. If the weather was fine, Mr Double, after walking a mile or two, would find a nice, shady spot amid the rocks and trees. He would sit down with his back against a moss-covered stone and pull a book out of his pocket.

"I'll give you an hour," he said on this particular day to his sons. "You can climb the Twin Rocks and the Pointed Stone, only be careful! Keep within sound of my voice, and if I cry, 'Hoi! hoi! HOI!' answer at once."

"Hoi! hoi! HOI!" was the rallying cry of the Double family. They had a special way of making a long-drawn-out "HOI" at the end, so that if they were in a crowd, or if it was dark, they could always find one another.

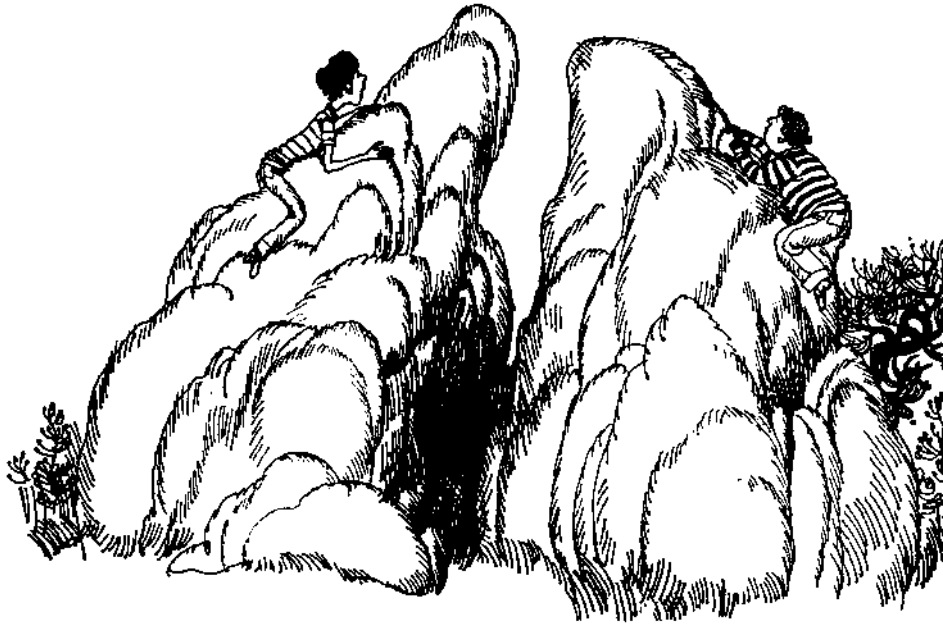
Edmund and Terry ran off. The Twin Rocks were two long flat stones leaning against one another, about eight or nine yards high.

"We'll each of us climb one side," said Terry with an annoying grin, "and I bet I get to the top before you do, old Fattypuff!"

"Terry," said Edmund, "if you keep on calling me Fattypuff I shall get cross, and then I'll hit you, and then you'll cry. You'd better start climbing the rock at once."

Each of them went to one side of the Twin Rocks, and started climbing. It was difficult. You had to find places for your feet on the smooth surface, and places to grip with your hands. You had to go slowly. Edmund had climbed up about three yards when he heard: "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" It was their father's voice.

Terry's voice replied, and from the direction of the sound Edmund guessed that Terry had already climbed higher than he. So he started to climb very fast, and he was just arriving at the



summit when once again he heard a "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" But this time it was a queer, stifled sound which seemed to come from amid the rocks. He had got so high that he could reach the top of the rock with his hand. He pulled himself up, and found himself with his head hanging over the narrow opening between the Twin Rocks. For the third time he heard the cry of "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" and then down below him, seemingly at the bottom of a sort of narrow chimney formed by the two rocks, he saw his brother.

"Terry!" he cried. "What are you doing there? Did you fall?"

"No," said Terry, who was too proud to admit it. "I climbed down. Come and see, Edmund. It's lovely!"

"But what a long way off you are! What can you see down there?"

"There's a huge cave, and it's all lit up with electric lights, just like a railway station."

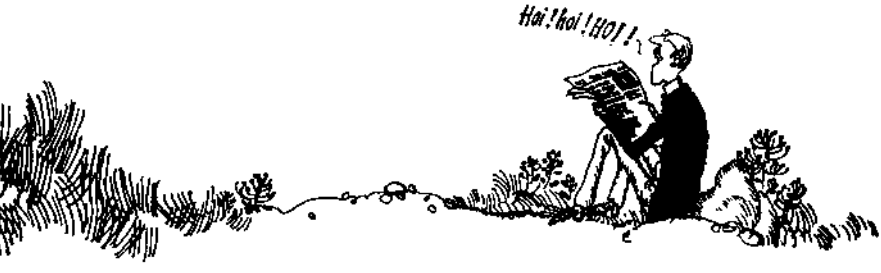
"Are there any trains?"

There was nothing in the world Edmund liked better than trains.

"No. But it's awfully interesting. Come on down."

"But how does one get down?"

"Oh, you just let yourself go. The ground's all covered with moss, and you can't hurt yourself."



Edmund was not quite sure that he believed this, but he didn't want to seem afraid. He swung himself over the edge of the rock, hung by his hands, shut his eyes and let go. And down he went, sliding with terrific speed between the two rocks. Just for a moment he was frightened, but then there was a quite springy sort of bump, and he found himself seated on the moss beside his brother.

"Look!" said Terry.

It was a most surprising sight. An enormous grotto extended directly in front of them, filled with a bluish light which came from round, luminous balls hanging from its ceiling. The ground was covered with earthenware tiles, half of which were coloured red and white, and the other half blue and red. At the end of this grotto there was a large tunnel sloping gently downwards, from which came a rumble of machines.

"Why," cried Edmund, "there must be *people* living under the earth!"

"Of course there are," said Terry. "And do you know what there is in the tunnel?"

"What did you see?" asked Edmund.

"A moving staircase," said Terry. "Just like in the Underground."

Edmund could resist no longer. He ran towards the tunnel. It was quite true! A moving staircase, so long that one could not see its end, was rumbling down into the centre of the earth. Beside it was another staircase going up, but there was no one on it.

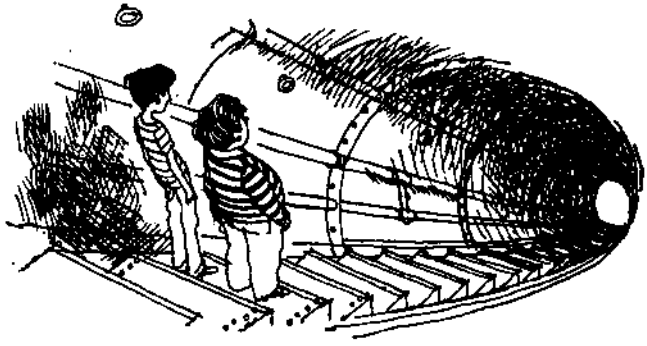
"Let's go down!" said Terry.

"We ought to tell Father," said Edmund.

"Never mind about that. We'll come straight back."

Terry always wanted things so much that he never thought of the consequences.

At this moment they heard a very distant cry of "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" They both replied "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" at the top of their voices, and stepped on to the staircase.



CHAPTER II

The Two Boats

Edmund and Terry would never have believed that a staircase could be so long. Down and down they went for more than an hour; down and down, through a half-darkness occasionally broken by red and green electric lights.

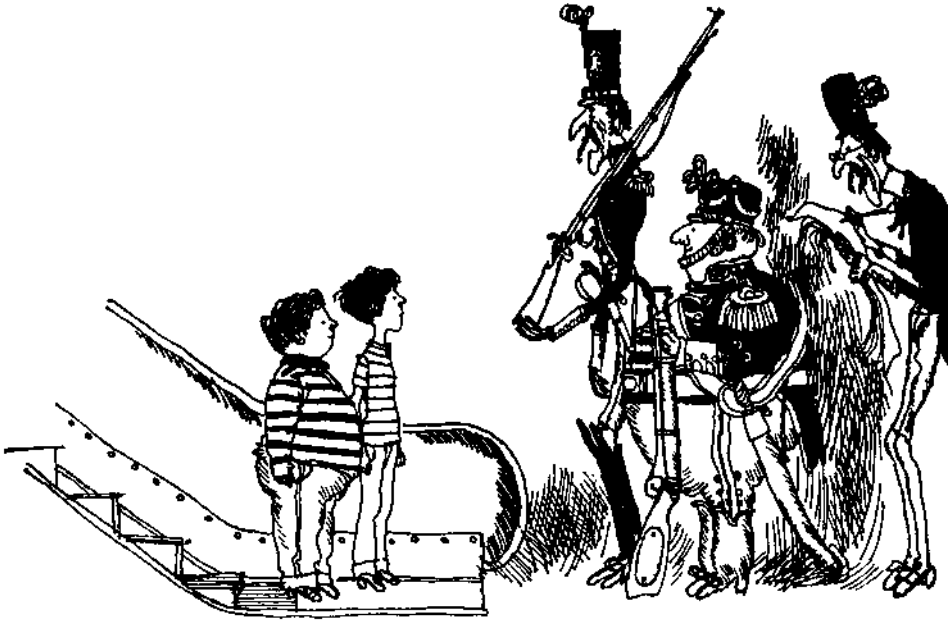
"It's just like the signals in the Underground," said Edmund. "But what a long way we've come!"

"Are you frightened, Fattypuff?" jeered Terry.

Edmund said nothing, and there was no sound except the rumble of the staircase—drum-bum—drum-bum—drum-bum—echoing in a vast stillness.

At length they saw, a long way below them, a semicircle of light such as one sees at the end of a tunnel. The semicircle grew larger; the light from outside shone on the walls of the tunnel, the lamps grew pale, and five minutes later the staircase deposited Edmund and Terry in a vast hall. At the foot of the stairs there were two soldiers with rifles. They looked funny, because one of them was short and very fat, and the other tall and very thin. The thin one said:

"Two Surface-dwellers. Two!"



The fat one answered:

"One Fatty and one Thinny. Two!"

Behind him a very thin clerk made two marks on a green sheet of cardboard. A fat man dressed like a railway porter came up to Edmund.

"What, no luggage?" he said, looking very astonished.

"No," said Edmund. "We're going straight back home."

The fat man went away. A great many travellers were crossing the hall, and as they were all going in the same direction Edmund and Terry followed them. On the walls were large signs which said: "To the Boats."

The two boys were immediately caught up in the crowd. They passed through a doorway, and as they did so a fresh, cool breeze blew on their faces. They found themselves out in the open air and overlooking the sea, but although the light was very bright they could see at once that it was not sunshine. When they had had another look they discovered that the whole countryside was lit up by huge luminous balloons floating in the sky. These balloons were filled with a very bright blue gas, such as one sometimes sees in tubes outside shops. They gave a soft and pleasant light. A little town of bungalows and houses was clustered on the slopes leading down to the sea, and directly in front of the two boys was a harbour with a lighthouse and a jetty. Two gangways made of brightly shining metal connected two steamers with the quay. On one of the gangways there was a notice which read: "Fattyport Line". This gangway led to a big wooden paddle-steamer which was very broad and round. The other steamer, on the contrary, was made of steel, and was very thin and sharp. The

notice on its gangway read: "Line to Thiniport".

"Shall we go for a sail?" said Terry.

"What will Father say?" said Edmund.

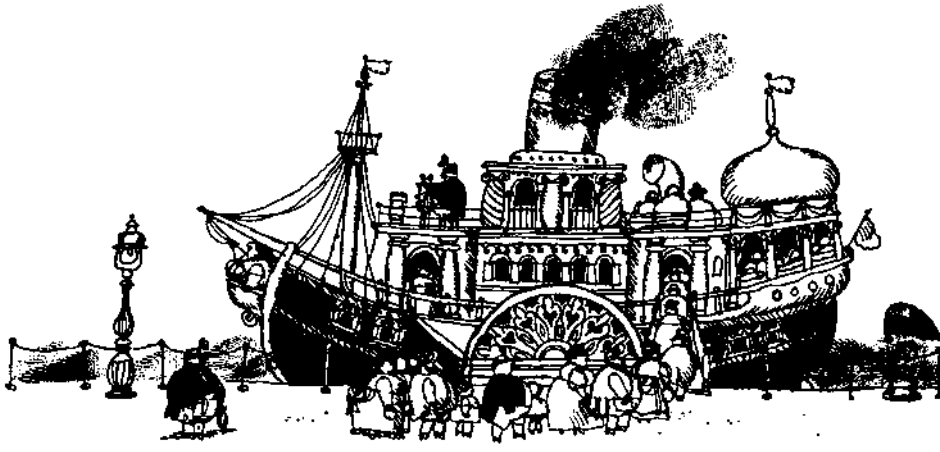
"We won't go far," said Terry. "It's quite a tiny little sea."

Indeed it was more like a lake than a sea. By the light of the balloons one could see quite clearly an opposite shore, on which were tall houses.

"But we haven't any money," said Edmund.

"Yes, we have," said Terry. "I've got two shillings left out of my pocket-money. Anyway, we didn't have to pay for the stairs."

Edmund sighed and followed. He always ended by doing what his brother wanted. They walked side by side to the gangway which bore the notice "Fattyport". One of the ship's officers, a



fat, red-faced man with a very big smile, pushed Edmund gently on board, saying:

"Hullo! A little Surface-dweller! It's a long time since we saw one of you."

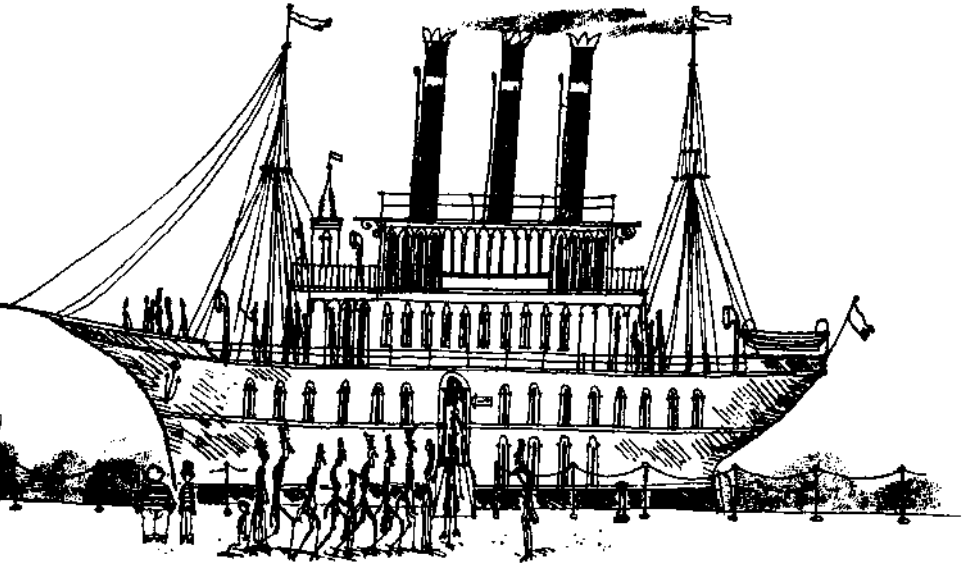
But when Terry wanted to follow, the officer said:

"Oh, no! You must go on the other boat."

"But *we* always go together," said Terry.

"On the Surface, perhaps," said the officer. "But you can't do that here. He's a Fattypuff and you're a Thinifer. There's no doubt about it. If you don't believe me you can weigh yourselves. There's a scale just over there. But hurry up if you want to take the other boat. It's just getting ready to start."

At that moment the other boat blew several sharp blasts on its



whistle. Terry never took long about making up his mind. He rushed to the second gangway, which was just being pulled in, and in two jumps was aboard the second boat. Her engines had already started; the screws were churning up the water, and the sailors were casting off the mooring-lines. Amid all this noise Terry heard a voice crying, "Hoi! hoi! HOI!" He ran towards the stern of the steamer and saw the other steamer making off in the opposite direction as fast as its big paddle-wheels could drive it. And there was Edmund, standing on a sofa and waving a handkerchief, with tears in his eyes.

Terry fumbled in his pocket, but could find nothing but a small and very crumpled bag of liquorice which he had bought the day before on his way home from school. So he waved the bag of liquorice. The other passengers looked at him in surprise, but he didn't mind that. He was very unhappy at being separated from his brother. What would become of him, now that he was all alone and surrounded by strangers?

CHAPTER III

The Thiniport Line

When Edmund was no more than a tiny speck in the distance Terry sighed lightly and looked about him. He had often crossed the sea before: he had been across the Channel, and he had even been to Marseilles and Algiers; but he had never been on a boat like this one. All the other boats he had been on had plunged up and down from bow to stern (his father had told him that this was called "pitching") as well as from side to side (which was called "rolling"). It was the rolling which had made Terry seasick. But this boat didn't do any rolling: it was so long and thin that it only pitched. Terry felt quite comfortable, and he was very hungry.

All sorts of things were happening on deck. Everybody seemed to be walking or running or giving orders. Numerous hawkers were going about carrying little trays loaded with newspapers, books, magnifying-glasses, watches and tape-measures. Terry hoped that one of them might also be selling chocolates or bananas, but not one of them sold anything to eat.

Through the windows of the saloon he could see a lot of men doing gymnastics. Some were lifting heavy weights; others were throwing a ball to one another; and others, seated in mechanical boats, were pulling away as though they were rowing. It all made Terry think of the windows of the big shops at Christmas-time, when they are full of mechanical figures which never stop moving.

But soon he was struck by something even more surprising. Although there were such a large number of people aboard, there

wasn't a single one who was fat, or even moderately plump. All of them—men, women and children—were dreadfully, dreadfully thin. One could see the bones through their cheeks. There was no flesh on their hands, and their clothes hung loosely about them.

In spite of this they did not seem in the least ill. On the contrary, they appeared to be in the best of health, and extremely active and vigorous. But it was plain that this was a most peculiar race of people, and almost unbelievably thin.

"Where am I?" Terry wondered. He thought of all the people he had seen on his travels, but he couldn't think of a country where all the people were thin. And anyway, he had never heard of a country that you reached by going down a moving staircase.

He walked up and down the deck, thinking this over; and presently, as he passed a door on which were the words "WRITING ROOM", he noticed a large map in a frame. He examined it with growing surprise, because it was not in the least like any map he

had ever seen, and it did not contain a single name he knew.

He examined it for a long time. Although he had been third out of thirty-seven in Geography he could not remember anything at all about this strange country. And while he was racking his brains, an elderly, white-haired, very thin gentleman stopped beside him and gazed at him sternly.

"Aha!" he said. "From the Surface?"

"Who, me?" said Terry.

"Yes, you! You came down the stairs, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Terry, "*we* did."

"Precisely," said the elderly gentleman. "Exactly what I said, from the Surface. Down here we don't understand your Surface countries, where you mix fat and thin people without making any difference between them. Under the earth the races are properly separated. There are Fattypuffs and there are Thinifers."

"And I suppose the Fattypuffs are all fat, and the Thinifers are all thin," said Terry.

"Intelligent child!" said the old gentleman teasingly. "He has grasped it all by himself! Ten marks out of ten."

He was a sarcastic and unpleasant old person, but Terry wanted to find out where he was, so he continued the conversation. He learned that his companion was called Mr Dulcifer, and that he was Professor of History at the Thinifer National Academy. It would, in any case, have been easy to guess that he was a professor, because he was always asking questions.

"Name the capital of Thinifer," he said suddenly.

"Who—me?" said Terry.

"Of course, you. There's no one else, is there?"

"We—" said Terry, "we've learnt Italy—capital, Rome; Poland —capital, Warsaw; Hungary—capital, Budapest. But no one ever taught us about Thinifer."

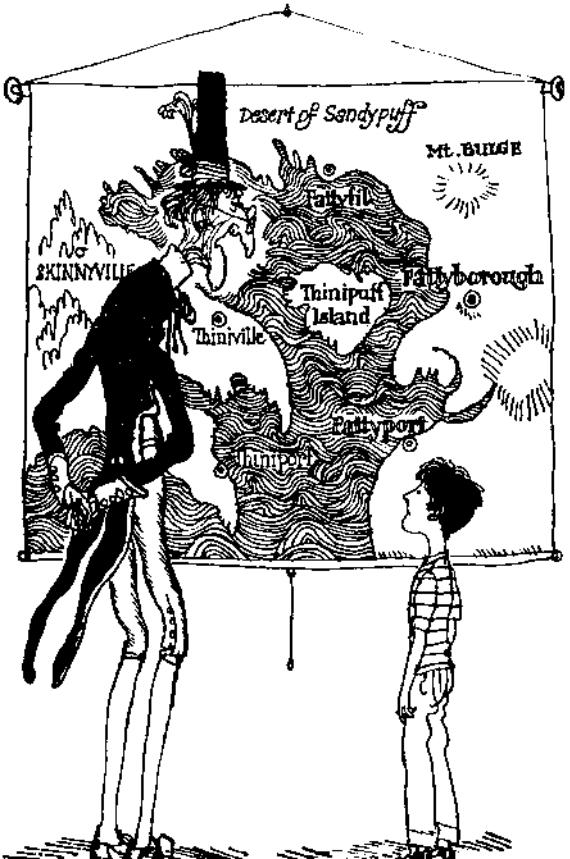
"Nought," said Mr Dulcifer. "Repeat after me: the capital of Thinifer is Thiniville."

Terry repeated this.

"Now then—the capital of Fattypuff?" said Mr Dulcifer.

"I'm not sure," said Terry. "Is it Fattyville?"

"Five out of ten," said Mr Dulcifer. "Repeat after me: the capital of Fattypuff is Fattyborough."



"Well, that's easy to remember!" said Terry. "I only wish the capital of Sweden was Swedeville, and the capital of Greece, Greekborough."

"Silence!" said Mr Dulcifer. Drawing Terry in front of the map, he continued: "The staircase by which you arrived, which links the two races in the centre of the earth with the people on the Surface, is known as the Stairway to the Surface. Its upper entrance is concealed between two rocks in a forest."

"I know that," said Terry, rubbing his back.

"The harbour at the foot of the staircase is known as Surface-by-the-Sea. It is highly important, because it is the terminus both of the Fattypuff Line to Fattyport——"

"—and of the Thinifer Line to Thiniport," said Terry.

"Ten out of ten," said Mr Dulcifer. "Now if you look at the map you will see that the Kingdom of the Fattypuffs is separated from the Republic of the Thinifers, first by a land frontier, across the Desert of Sandypuff, and then by a gulf which we call the Yellow Sea, because of the gold-coloured rocks on the bottom, which give it a quite unusual appearance. The Yellow Sea is almost closed in the south by two capes—Cape Pat-a-Cake and Cape Nailhead."

"I see," said Terry. "And in the middle there's an island called the Island of Thinipuff."

"Exactly," said Mr Dulcifer. "And I wish that island were at the bottom of the sea, because it is the cause of all our troubles."

But before going on with Mr Dulcifer's history and geography lesson, we really ought to see what was happening to Edmund . . .