Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Opening extract from

You Have Been Warned! A Collection of Cautionary Verse

Written by

Roger McGough

Published by

Oxford University Press

All text is copyright of the author

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Cautionary Tale

A little girl called Josephine
Was fair of face and reasonably clean
But at school she wore a dunce's cap
And her father, taking out a map

Said: 'She'll learn more if she comes with me
About the world and life at sea.
What she needs is a trip on my schooner
I'm surprised I didn't think of it sooner.

For I'm captain of the *Hesperus*
And I think I know what's best for us.'
And thereupon a most dreadful fate
Befell her, which I'll now relate.

It was winter when they left the port
(in retrospect they shouldn't ought)
Setting sail for the Spanish Main
Despite warnings of a hurricane.

Three days out there came the gale
Even the skipper he turned pale
And as for little Josephine
She turned seven shades of green.

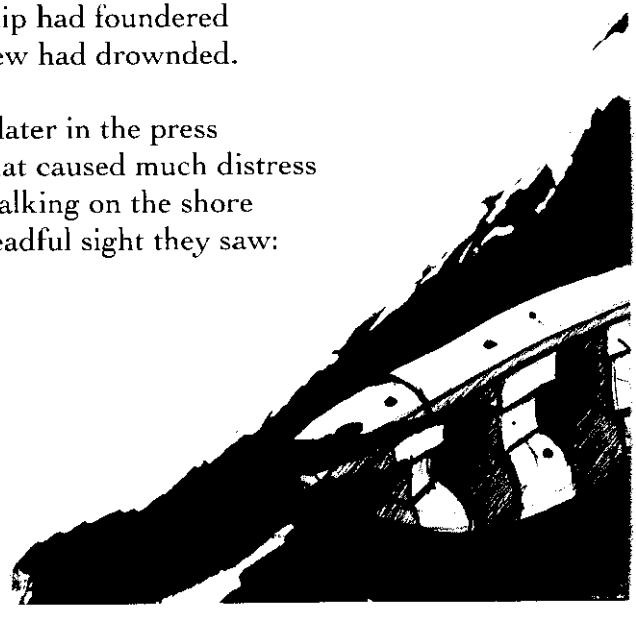
As the schooner rocked from port to starboard
Across the decks poor Josie scarpered
She ran from the fo'c'sle to the stern
(Some folks'll never learn)

Crying: 'Stop the boat, I want to go home,'
But unheeding, the angry foam
Swamped the decks. Her dad did curse
Knowing things would go from bad to worse.

He called his daughter to his side,
'Put on my seaman's coat,' he cried,
'You'll be safe till storm has passed,'
Then bound her tightly to the mast.

And pass it did, but sad to say
Not for a fortnight and a day.
By then the ship had foundered
And all the crew had drownded.

And reported later in the press
Was a story that caused much distress
Of a couple walking on the shore
And of the dreadful sight they saw:



Tied to a mast, a few bones picked clean
All that remained of poor Josephine.

MORAL

Stay on at school, get your GCSEs
Let others sail the seven seas.

Roger McGough



Little Billee

There were three sailors of Bristol city
Who took a boat and went to sea.
But first with beef and captain's biscuits
And pickled pork they loaded she.

There was gorging Jack and guzzling Jimmy,
And the youngest he was little Billee.
Now when they got as far as the Equator
They'd nothing left but one split pea.

Says gorging Jack to guzzling Jimmy,
'I am extremely hungaree.'
To gorging Jack says guzzling Jimmy,
'We've nothing left, us must eat we.'

Says gorging Jack to guzzling Jimmy,
'With one another we shouldn't agree!
There's little Bill, he's younger and tender,
We're old and tough, so let's eat he.

'Oh! Billy, we're going to kill and eat you,
So undo the button of your chemie.'
When Bill received this information
He used his pocket handkerchie.

'First let me say my catechism,
Which my poor mammy taught to me.'
'Make haste, make haste,' says guzzling Jimmy,
While Jack pulled out his snickersnee.

So Billy went up to the maintop gallant mast,
And down he fell on his bended knee.
He scarce had come to the twelfth commandment
When up he jumps. 'There's land I see:

'Jerusalem and Madagascar,
And North and South Amerikee:
There's the British flag a-riding at anchor,
With Admiral Napier, KCB.'

So when they got aboard of the Admiral's
He hanged fat Jack and flogged Jimmee;
But as for little Bill he made him
The Captain of a Seventy-three.

William Makepeace Thackeray

The Canoe-Builder

There was a young man from Crewe,
Who wanted to build a canoe;
He went to the river
And found with a shiver
He hadn't used waterproof glue.

Lorna Bain



Sun, Sand and Sea *or*
Do Have A Nice Day At The Beach

(a poem of advice for a younger brother or sister who's going for a day out by the sea when you're not)

Although I'm ill and stuck indoors,
I hope you have a good day out.
You mustn't let my day spoil yours
As you all gaily play about.

For it's your first time by the sea,
So do enjoy the sand and sun,
But first hear this advice from me
To keep you safe while having fun.

The sun, though safe enough inland,
Is treacherous when at the coast,
So keep your coat on, by the strand,
Or else end up like crispy toast.

The sand: walk on it if you dare,
In shoes that have the thickest treads,
Or broken glass that's hidden there
Will quickly rip your feet to shreds.

The sea, although it seems quite calm,
Can swiftly sweep you far from shore.
The dolt who doubts its deadly harm,
And swims, will soon be seen no more.

Beware the lurking Jellyfish,
Its tentacles and lethal sting.
If slow and painful death's your wish,
The Jellyfish is just the thing.

And mind the Shallow-Paddler-Shark,
Which, searching round for things to eat
And finding you an easy mark,
Will neatly bite off both your feet.

Be wary of the Hairy Grampus
As it lumbers from the spray,
Attracted by the picnic hampers,
Crushing all things in its way.

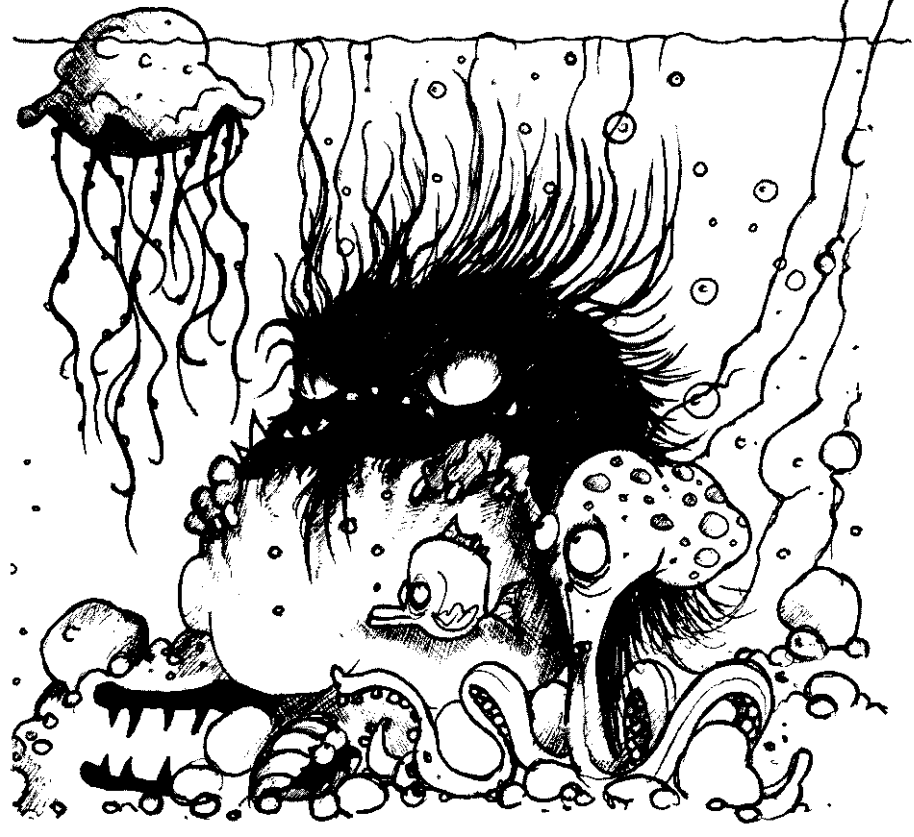
And don't forget to watch the skies
In case the Red-Beaked Carrion Gull
Should swoop down and peck out your eyes
And rip your face right off your skull.

For many, many are the fools
Who've been on seaside holidays,
And failing to observe these rules,
All died in ghastly, grisly ways.



But though I'm stuck at home in bed,
I'm glad that you can go and play.
Just follow all these things I've said,
And have a happy, carefree day.

David Bateman



Government Health Warning

The boy stood on the burning desk,
Whence all but he had fled,
He tried to quench the flames with ink
(Which happened to be red);

The fire brigade came rushing round,
With ladders, hose and men:
They tried to reach the stricken lad
But flames roared up again.

'Oh help me, please. Oh help me!'
He cried in grief and pain;
'Just get me out; I promise you
I'll never smoke again!'

The firemen they came running
And grabbed the little fool:
And soon he stood there safe and sound
Outside the blazing school.

His friends all gathered round and said:
'Thank God you're in one piece!
We thought they'd never get you out!
Will wonders never cease?'

But then a look of horror ran
Across the young lad's brow;
'I've left a pack of Marlboros there
I don't half need one now!'

Before the watchers scarce could move
Or even cry in fright;
He dashed into the flames again,
And vanished from their sight.

The flames leapt up, and caught the roof,
And down in dust it fell:
And never did they see again
The boy whose tale I tell.

So heed my words, and listen well
If you would live in wealth:
For smoking isn't just a joke.
It *damages* your health!

Christopher Mann

Risk Assessment—Class Outing to Woods

(Based on actual risk assessment forms!)

(Children really must beware—
Of all the dangerous things out there)
Underfoot, there may be stones:
Risk of tripping; broken bones.
Climbing over low stone wall:
Foot could slip and cause a fall.
If weather turns from dry to drippy:
Mud might make the going slippy.
Patch of nettles:
Minor harm may be caused to leg or arm.
Meadow, long with grass and clover:
No running! Risk of falling over.
Enter wood, uneven ground:
Issue warning—path unsound.
Near to our perambulation:
Barbed wire—risk of laceration.
Touching leaf-mould, earth and worms:
Advise against and warn of germs.

So much injury to fear:
Perhaps we'd better stay right here.
Risk assessment: too many 'shoulds'
For a simple walk in the local woods.

Polly Peters

