

Children Don't Listen

a story by

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1. A Surprise

"They'll be so excited George, let's tell them now." Sarah was just as excited herself. "No, let's wait a bit," George said. "Make 'em sweat." "O, you rotter George, you're a big meany." George laughed, "Yep, I guess I am." Rachel came in and caught her parents looking very guilty. A frown caused her forehead to wrinkle, but she said nothing and walked straight past them to the fridge. "After a drink dear?" Sarah asked. "Yes mum, it's really hot out side." She took a can from the fridge and ran out of the kitchen. "Paul's been quiet today." George said, looking to Sarah for a response. She just shrugged and said, "Well, we have to be grateful for small mercies." George chuckled again. He knew just what she meant.

"Come on sis, give us a swig." Rachel was adamant, "shan't, go and get you own." Paul knew he was not going to win, and so left her to her coke, and went into the house to get his own. "Hi mum, hi dad, anything to drink?" "In the fridge," Sarah said pointing to make sure he got the message. Paul found a can and went back outside to annoy Rachel.

"Ok, we'll tell them now," George said. He followed Sarah out into the sunshine to find the kids. "Kids," she hollered, "come here, we've got a surprise." It's funny how the word surprise can bring kids running. They duly arrived and behaved just like excited kids. Sarah didn't wait for George, she just launched into the surprise. "Daddy has booked us a holiday in Cornwall..." "O goody," Rachel interrupted. "When are we going mum?" Paul asked, a little less enthusiastically. "Tomorrow dear... Early, so we want you in bed by nine." "O mum, do we have to?" Paul protested. George answered that one with a look. The kids ran off again leaving a bemused mum and dad standing on the front lawn. "Right," George said, "That's that done, better go and start packing." They walked back into the shade of the house holding hands.

Sarah made it to the bedroom and pulled the big case down from the top of the wardrobe. She turned to thank George for his help, but he wasn't there. "Typical," she thought to herself, "there must be some sport on the telly." Just then George walked into the bedroom carrying a bunch of flowers. Sarah melted. "Oh George, they're lovely..." "To get us off to a good start," he said, kissing her on the cheek. She didn't let him escape with a peck on the cheek. The case remained on the floor for the next hour.

For once, the kids went to bed early, well, after a token protest they did. George had been out for some time checking the car. It was a long drive to Cornwall, and they wanted to get an early start so George had been to fill up, and check

the oil and water. Their car wasn't new, but it was well up to a trip to Cornwall. "Ok?" Sarah asked on his return. "Yeah, no problems." George replied. "I blew the tires up too." They settled down for a cup of cocoa, and went to bed early.

2 Early Risers

The alarm screamed even louder than usual, and Sarah slammed her hand down on it with more than a little vengeance. "Not already," George groaned. "Fraid so," Sarah answered through a yawn. "Come on, up you get." George obeyed begrudgingly. Next door there was a clatter, followed by, "mum, Paul's tipped me out of bed!" "Paul, put your sister down this instant." George shouted back as best he could. Crash... "Don't ask." Sarah said before he could respond.

There was a rush for the bathroom, but neither George nor Sarah were involved in it. "Boy are they excited," George said, coming into the land of the living. Sarah just smiled, remembering how she used to feel at such times. Twenty minutes later, they were all down stairs having breakfast.

George packed the car whilst Sarah washed up the breakfast things. Paul helped his dad by dropping the cricket bat just as he was carrying the big case through the door. George managed a remarkable feat of balance as the bat got between his ankles. "Nice one dad," Paul said as his dad regained his composure without dropping the case or falling head over heels over it. Rachel was already fastened in the back seat ready to go. "Come on you lot." She said impatiently, "The day's half gone!" "It's 5.30 am sweetie," Sarah said climbing into the car. George slammed the boot shut and the whole car shook. "Now everyone knows we were going on holiday," Sarah said as he climbed in. George chuckled and started the engine.

The car pulled off the drive and headed for the motorway about five miles away. It was still dark and cold, even though it was mid August. The headlights lit up the road before them. Two miles later, Paul and Rachel were asleep. The motorway slip road appeared and both George and Sarah silently prayed that it would be empty. They were in luck, the motorway was almost deserted. George hit the gas and the car slipped along nicely at 70. George never drove above the speed limit when the kids were in the car, a very different driver to the one who tore up and down the roads when working. Ten miles later, Sarah was asleep.

George drove on heroically through those awful hours of dawn and just beyond when the light is really dreary. The traffic was starting to build up, but they had made good time so far, and everything was moving. The one thing George couldn't stand was traffic jams. He was Ok as long as things were moving. It didn't matter how slowly they were moving, as long as they were moving. As it happened, he was currently doing a steady 60, so all was well.

Sarah slipped back into the land of the living, and looked over at George smiling. "Good morning dear," he said softly. She looked lovingly at him and then sat up and stretched. It was 10 am and they'd been on the road for over four hours.

Turning, she saw the kids still asleep in the back. All was peaceful... For now. "I need to stop," George said. Which made Sarah turn back to him. A sign said, services one mile. "Ok," she agreed, realising that she needed the loo. George pulled into the service area and parked. "Are we nearly there yet?" They were awake.

3. There at Last

Refreshed and much more awake, the Taylor family set off on the last leg of their journey to Cornwall. George drove on. Sarah was not much for driving, and didn't like motorways at all. Paul and Rachel passed the time with a never ending game of eye spy, Paul infuriating everyone with things like G for germ!

Several hours later they pulled into the caravan park at Prar Sands. Sarah leapt out at the office to get directions to their caravan. A few minutes later they all piled out of the car and began to unpack their things into the caravan's nooks and crannies. George flopped onto a seat and lay back. He was tired. Sarah took the hint and put the kettle on. Tea was not far away.

The first day at the park was used to explore the facilities. This being mainly toilet and shower as far as Sarah was concerned. There was a shop and games centre too, so the kids were happy. George bought a local guide in order to plan the following days outing. As always, a pack of cards was purchased for the snap tournament along with supplies for breakfast and snacks. Fish and chips from the local kiosk sufficed for tea, and at nine o'clock with no protest from the kids, the Taylor family hit the sack.

Next day, they were up at the crack of noon, and then only because of the need for the loo. Brunch followed with excited kids asking every two minutes, "where are we going dad?" Eventually, George gave in and said, "it's a surprise." This cut no ice at all with Paul, who frowned one of his deep frowns, causing Sarah to laugh and Rachel to tut disapprovingly. George remained tight lipid.

A picnic was packed and loaded, along with the kids, into the car. George drove, as usual, and they set off on George's surprise trip. "I thought we'd go somewhere close today." He said to Sarah. "We got up so late! We'll go further afield tomorrow." Sarah nodded and turned to look at the scenery that was passing by. In the back, the kids were quite happy amusing themselves. Paul had brought the pack of cards and was trying to get Rachel to pick out the Queen of diamonds. She soon lost interest however and so they played snap instead. The volume rose steadily, as it does with snap, until George could hardly concentrate on his driving. Sarah came to his rescue with another game of eye spy.

The seal sanctuary was enthralling. The kids loved it, especially Rachel who fell in love with one little guy who had been rescued having been hit by a ship's propeller. Paul was less involved emotionally, but non the less, he really enjoyed the day out. The weather forecast was for hours of hot sun shine the following day, so a trip to the beach at Senen was agreed upon.

On arrival back at the caravan, the girls duly sort out their costumes in readiness for the anticipated sun bathing. Paul and George were not sun worshippers and so planned a cliff path walk. This was normal for them, and both Rachel and Sarah were quite used to it. To be honest, they both rather liked it when the boys left them alone on the beach, it gave them time for some serious 'girl' talk. The boys were hoping to see a snake on their travels. Paul hadn't yet had the privilege of seeing a snake in the wild, and so was particularly anxious to remedy that on this trip.

The evening passed pleasantly. Sarah's egg and beans supper was a real hit. A very excited family slept well that night in anticipation of the next days activities.

4. The Big Day

Morning came all too quickly for George, but the kids were already up and about. For once they were being quiet. Something George and Sarah were grateful for. The hope of a lie in was dashed however when two little people came gingerly into their bedroom carrying an approximation of breakfast. The somewhat startled big people sat up and forced themselves to be awake. "Why how kind." Sarah muttered, her voice not yet fully functional. George only managed a grunt, but that was all that the kids expected from him and so was acceptable. It wouldn't have been so bad, but the kids sat on the already cramped bed and insisted on watching them eat it. George and Sarah dutifully went through the ritual, making what they thought were the right noises from time to time. Duty done, the kids were dispatched along with the dirty dishes. George slumped back down into bed, but Sarah decided that that was not a smart move and so pushed him out. In retaliation, George pulled her out after him. The caravan shook violently with all the commotion, and the kids could be heard giggling at the other end of it.

Showers, toilet and dressing took up the next hour, but once achieved, the car was loaded and the trip to the beach was set in motion. For once, Sarah drove. She had taken pity on poor George after the previous days excursion. George was sitting in the back with Paul for a change, much to Rachel's delight. It wasn't often that she got to sit in the front, and especially not with mum driving. The two girls chatted away as only girls can, whilst the two lads in the back sat in silence looking out of the window.

The traffic was quite bad, even at this early hour. Sarah was silently praying under her breath that there wouldn't be too many people on the beach. She knew that Senen was a popular place, so she didn't really believe what she was praying. Senen is a big beach though so she knew they would be able to find somewhere to set down. It was parking the car that was worrying her. As it turned out, there was plenty of space to park the car, and they were soon out of it and carrying all their kit on the golden sand. There were plenty of people already staked out, but a few minutes walk further on brought them to a nice little patch of clear sand that was all theirs. Towels were laid down, and the

cool box planted. They were set.

The ritual was, that they would all flop on the towels for about ten minutes, when the kids would get bored and run off to play some game or other. Sarah got the sun lotion out and doused everyone with it, and then settled down with a book. She would remain like that until lunch time. George had a plan. If he wasn't asleep within half an hour, he would go and find the kids and spoil their game. This is exactly what happened. Sarah sank into her book, and George left her to it and wandered off after the kids.

George and Sarah were very strict about bathing in the sea. The kids were forbidden to go into the water without one or other of them present. All the Taylor family were good swimmers, but a lot of those who drown are, or rather were, good swimmers. The day wasn't quite that warm yet, though it was threatening to be in a little while. So, bathing hadn't come into the kids thinking. It would, but it hadn't yet. George found them looking into a rock pool and joined them. They were looking for crabs, well, Paul was. Rachel didn't much care for crabs, a girl thing...

Time passed and the kids decided to go for a walk. Paul had spotted a cliff path way over the other side of the beach, and Rachel seemed game, so off they went. George gave them strict instructions to keep to the path, and not do anything foolish. A wagging finger in Paul's face seemed to get the message home. "And be back by lunch time." He hollered after them. George watched them for several minutes as they took a higgaldy piggaldy path across the beach, and then went back to the silent Sarah. "Will they be all right?" She asked without looking up from her book. "Of course they will." George answered her. "I gave them strict instructions."

5. The Snake

Eventually, Paul and Rachel reached the start of the cliff path. They looked back across the beach. Mum and Dad were just tiny bits of colour on the sand. Rachel waved, but got no response. "Come on Rache', lets go." Paul said impatiently, and set off up the slope. Rachel turned and followed him like a faithful dog.

The path was steep, and in no time they were up high above the beach and heading out along the coastal path. The sound of the sea had diminished greatly as they had climbed, and there were less seagulls up here. The day was getting warmer, and Rachel was thinking they should have brought a drink with them, but it was too late to go back now. They walked on.

The path became less steep, and the gorse bushes got thicker each side of it. Paul was hoping above hope to see a snake, so he began to walk as quietly as he could. He even tried to breath quietly. "What's up?" Rachel said in an over loud voice. "Sh," Paul said softly. "I'm looking for a snake." "What do you want a snake for?" She whispered back. Paul hadn't thought of that and so couldn't answer.

A few more paces and he stopped dead in his tracks. Rachel bumped into him. He motioned her to be quiet and pointed. There on the path in front of them was a snake. Not a very big one, but a snake non the less. It had zig zag stripes and was green. They could hear it hissing softly, and its tongue flicked out as it did so. Paul's heart was beating heavily. At last he had found his snake. Then, without any warning, he leapt at it and picked it up. Rachel was horrified and screamed at him to put it down. Paul was having non of it. He turned towards her and dangled it close to her face. Rachel recoiled at the nearness of the beast, and as she did so she heard Paul cry out in pain. "It bit me," He said dropping the snake, "It bit my hand." He held his hand up for her to see, and there were two tiny puncture marks on the back of his hand. Paul was getting more and more distressed, and suddenly he turned and ran away crying. "PAUL, COME BACK." She screamed after him, but he seemed not to hear her and ran wildly away from her.

Then he vanished. He just vanished, and she couldn't see him any more. Rachel ran off in the direction he had taken calling him as she ran. She only just managed to stop herself in time. The cliff edge was hidden by the long grass. "PAUL." She screamed as loud as she could, but she got no answer. Rachel began to cry, but she had presence of mind to mark the spot with some stones before running to get her dad.

It was a long way back to Mum and Dad, but Rachel ran all the way. Running on the sand was the worst, it slowed her down and made her very tired. She was still really crying too, which was causing a stir among the other folk on the beach.

George had not been able to drop off, and saw the commotion in the distance. It didn't register at first that it was Rachel, but it had caught his eye, and so it didn't take long for the penny to drop. "Something's up." He said jumping to his feet and starting to run towards Rachel. Sarah was up and after him in a flash. They met the distraught girl and tried to get her to tell them what had happened. Poor Rachel was so out of breath that she couldn't speak. She just grabbed her Dad's hand and pulled him in the direction of the cliff.

Several other adults could see that something was wrong and joined them as they ran back across the beach towards the cliffs. George eventually picked Rachel up and ran with her on his back. At last she was able to tell him what had happened. George called it out to the other men who were trotting alongside and they ran on ahead to begin the search.

When George and Sarah got to the marker stones, the other men were already there and looking over the edge for the missing boy. As yet, no one had seen him. "Any one got a mobile?" George asked. "It's already done mate." Came a Scouse voice holding up his phone. George nodded in thanks and gave Rachel to Sarah. Having done so, he went to the edge to look over. "Give us a hand will you?" He said to the Scouser. "Yeah, sure mate." With the extra support, George

could lean much further over than before. He peered down. "I can see him," he said excitedly, "he's not too far down." Another quick look around, and George vanished over the edge. "GEORGE." Sarah shouted. "It's all right, I think I can get to him." George replied. He was gone. A minute or so later, George called up. "It's Ok, I've got hold of him. He's out for the count so I won't try to move him. Keep an eye out for the coast guard will you, and tell them we need an ambulance." "Or right whack." Came the familiar voice, and George relaxed a little.

Paul had ended up on a ledge about twenty feet down the cliff face. A tree had saved him from falling further having somehow wrapped itself around Paul's midriff. George gave a silent prayer of thanks. Had it not been for the tree, Paul would have fallen the rest of the way onto the rocks below.

Though it seemed a lot longer, the helicopter was there within half an hour. The rescue was effected without too much difficulty, and George was able to wave to the group stood on the cliff top watching. The medic in the chopper had been informed of the snake bite and had the anti toxin with him. A quick injection was all that was needed to counter the Viper venom. There was nowhere to land on the cliff top, so the chopper took them to the waiting ambulance near the car park. Paul was coming to and in no real danger, so they waited for Sarah and Rachel to reach the ambulance before setting off for the hospital.

George made a point of thanking them all as Sarah climbed in. Paul was awake now and looking around. The ambulance sped off with its blue light flashing. They were silent as the medic checked Paul again. "He's all right." The he said and moved aside. George and Sarah looked at each other, and then at Paul. "I did tell him not to do anything stupid." George said. "Ah, that's the trouble." The medic replied. "Children don't listen."

From: Colin's shorts.
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