

Poor James was still slaving away at the chopping-block. The heat was terrible. He was sweating all over. His arm was aching. The chopper was a large blunt thing far too heavy for a small boy to use. And as he worked, James began thinking about all the other children in the world and what they might be doing at this moment.

Some would be riding tricycles in their gardens. Some would be walking in cool woods and picking bunches of wild flowers. And all the little friends whom he used to know would be down by the seaside, playing in the wet sand and splashing around in the water. . .

Great tears began oozing out of James's eyes and rolling down his cheeks. He stopped working and leaned against the chopping-block, overwhelmed by his own unhappiness.

"What's the matter with you?" Aunt Spiker screeched, glaring at him over the top of her steel spectacles. James began to cry.

"Stop that immediately and get on with your work, you nasty little beast!" Aunt Sponge ordered.

"Oh, Auntie Sponge!" James cried out. "And Auntie Spiker! Couldn't we all -- please -- just for once -- go down to the seaside on the bus? It isn't very far -- and I feel so hot and awful and lonely. . ."

"Why, you lazy good-for-nothing brute!" Aunt Spiker shouted.

"Beat him!" cried Aunt Sponge. "I certainly will!" Aunt Spiker snapped. She glared at James, and James looked back at her with large frightened eyes.

"I shall beat you later on in the day when I don't feel so hot," she said. "And now get out of my sight, you disgusting little worm, and give me some peace!"

James turned and ran. He ran off as fast as he could to the far end of the garden and hid himself behind that clump of dirty old laurel bushes that we mentioned earlier on. Then he covered his face with his hands and began to cry and cry.