



**THE  
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WHO COULD  
ENTER PAINTINGS**

**Herb Valen**

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## THE BOY WHO COULD ENTER PAINTINGS





One morning last winter Edward first noticed that he was getting really strong. He could hop all the way up one of the five rickety flights of stairs to his father's studio. Edward had discovered long ago





that hopping on one foot was the most interesting way of going places.

His father was an artist. They lived in a large loft on the very top floor of an old building in the city. There were no other children in the building. Edward spent a lot of time thinking and watching his father paint.

Sometimes in the winter the bitter wind forced its way in around the large windows of the studio. The room became



very, very cold. Edward wore a snowsuit, a scarf, and bright red mittens, but sometimes he still felt cold.

On one particularly windy day, Edward wrapped an extra scarf around his neck. Hopping around the studio on his right foot, he tried to think of something warm. He thought of a nice hot fire, but he was still cold. He thought of a glass of hot milk. On his way into the kitchen to ask for some, he passed in front of the rack where all the paintings were stacked in neat rows along the whitewashed walls. There, leaning against the rack, was a jungle painting his father had finished last week.



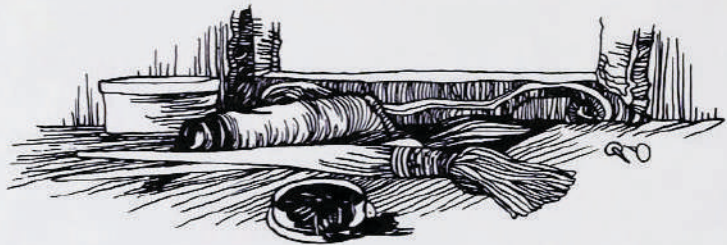




Edward liked the picture very much. There were palm trees and fruit trees, thick and green. Some serious-looking monkeys sat in their branches. Orange and yellow fruits hung on some of the trees. They looked delicious. But best of all, from the clear blue sky a very yellow sun was beating down on the bright green grass. One of the monkeys was looking straight at Edward. Edward hopped a step closer. As he did, he felt a sort of glow on his cheeks. The sun seemed to be shining through the paint and canvas to touch him.

He hopped a bit closer to the painting. Then he was sure of it. He could feel the





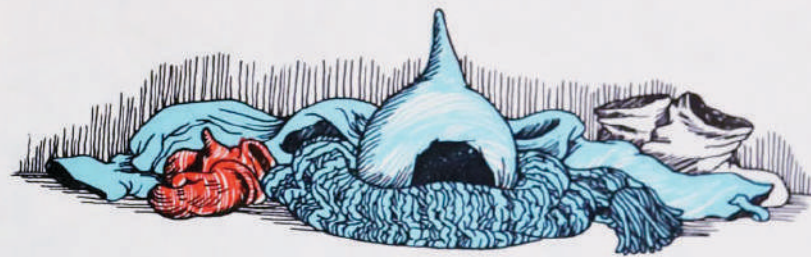
warmth of the sun on his face. He took another hop and he felt the warmth all over him. Then one hop more . . . and the strangest thing happened!

Edward was *in* the painting. He was right there in the middle of the jungle with fruit trees all around him. The hot, hot sun beat down on him. He could hear the monkeys chattering and sometimes quarreling over a piece of fruit. He could smell all the strange, bright-colored flowers.

He became so warm that he pulled off







his snowsuit and scarf and mittens and threw them down on the grass. He took off his shoes and hopped three great hops, and shouted, "Hooray!" The monkeys stopped eating and looked at him in surprise. Edward threw himself down on the warm grass and did a somersault. Then he lay on his back and watched the large bright birds dipping and gliding overhead. The monkeys became used to him and dropped him an orange. Edward peeled back part of the skin and sucked the delicious juice.





Finally he decided that there was such a thing as being too warm. So he hopped over to a spot where the trees became thick and the grass was shady. He was just thinking about exploring the jungle path when a voice called, “Edward, where are you?”

Edward looked over his shoulder. He could see his father coming into the studio. “Over here,” said Edward. But Edward’s father didn’t hear him.

His father called again, “Edward, wherever you’re hiding, come on out now.” His father looked into the closet and under the bed.

“All right,” said Edward, “but I’m not hiding. I’m right here.” And he waved his arms to get his father’s attention.





But his father did not see or hear him. Edward picked up his snowsuit, scarf, mittens and shoes. Balancing on his toes and leaning forward, he took an enormous hop—right out of the painting, back into the studio. Right away he felt cold again and started to shiver.

Edward's father looked up from under the bed. "Edward, where have you been? And what are you doing without your snowsuit and shoes on?"

"I've just been in your jungle painting, keeping warm."

Edward's father looked amused. "Oh, I see," he said, smiling. "Well, get into those clothes, now that you're back."







One day Edward's father said, "Would you like to come with me to the museum this afternoon? I'm going to start a copy of a painting there. It is to practice and study for my own painting."

Edward loved to go with his father to the big museum. He liked to wander about, looking at the paintings. He walked sometimes by himself, while his father painted. Sometimes his father went with him. Then his father would tell him stories about some of the paintings and about the artists who painted them.



Today Edward hopped partway up the great, wide staircase to the second floor. He and his father walked slowly through several galleries full of large Greek vases painted in a reddish brown and black. They would be wonderful places to hide. Then they came to a room where Edward's father stopped and put down his things. There was a large painting of a man and a woman in a boat.





“This is the picture I’m going to copy,” his father said. “It’s by Manet. Do you like it?”

“Yes,” said Edward. “I would like to get right into that boat with them.”

Edward’s father nodded. “I know just how you feel.” He set up his easel and small canvas chair, and put out his paints. “Why don’t you walk around and look at some of the pictures. Would you like to take the chair with you? Then you can rest if you get tired. Be very quiet and don’t disturb anyone.”



Edward hopped off on his left foot, holding the canvas chair under one arm. He hopped over to a painting of some people sitting on a terrace. A man was playing a musical instrument. A boy was pulling a toy pony. There was a real dog at his side. Edward thought he would like to meet the boy and get a closer look at the toy pony. That reminded him of another boy he had always liked in a painting called "Don Manuel." Edward decided to find him. He hopped from one gallery to another. Just as he was about to ask the guard if he had seen Don Manuel, Edward found him all by himself.





It was hard not to see Don Manuel. He was dressed in a bright red suit with a lace collar and a wide, white satin sash. He had white satin slippers and his long hair was like a girl's. But Edward's father had explained that little boys dressed this way nearly two hundred years ago. What Edward loved about the painting were the animals. There were cats and some birds in cages. One large black and white bird was on the end of a string which Don Manuel held in his hand.

Don Manuel had a nice look on his face, and the animals looked very real. Edward thought what fun it would be to play with them. He had no sooner





thought the thought than he smiled a little secret smile. He waited for a few minutes.

Two ladies who were looking at the painting finally walked away. Then Edward looked sideways, out of the corners of his eyes. He watched the museum guard walk slowly out of the gallery and around the corner. Edward put down his canvas chair and walked into the middle of the room.

He looked very hard at Don Manuel. He closed his eyes and thought as hard as he could. Then he started hopping. He hopped once, he hopped twice. (He heard a clear "Meow.") He hopped



three times, and a gentle voice said, "¿Quién eres tu?"

He was standing right beside Don Manuel, who was shorter than Edward.



“¿Quién eres tu?” Don Manuel asked again, looking at him curiously. Edward knew he was speaking another language, and he was rather disappointed. He finally decided Don Manuel was asking him to introduce himself.

“My name is Edward,” he said. “I know who you are, Don Manuel.” Don Manuel looked very pleased when Edward spoke his name. Edward looked around and saw three cats. He had only noticed two when he was in the gallery.



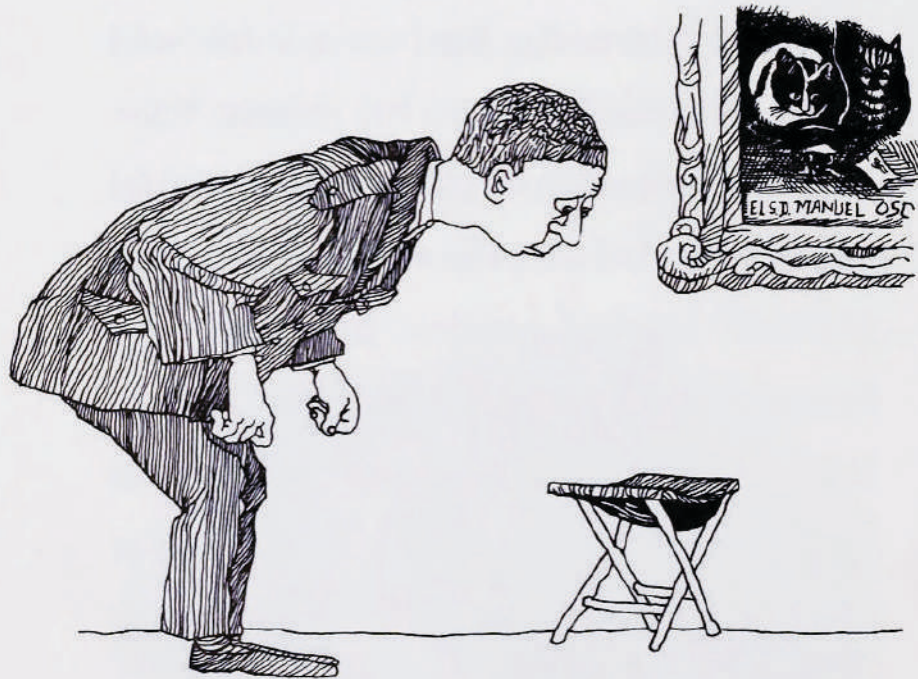
The black one sat in back of the other two. All three were staring very hard at the large black and white bird. The bird had a card in its beak. Edward's father had told him the writing on it was the artist's name—Goya.

Edward said, “Don Manuel, would you let me hold the string for a while?” He had never had a bird on a leash, and he reached out for it. To his delight, Don Manuel seemed to understand him and eagerly handed him the string. Then Don Manuel reached under his sash. He brought out a little flat package. Opening it, he took out a few seeds and sprinkled them through the iron bars



of the bird cage. The tiny birds fluttered about making excited sounds.

Just as Edward was stooping over to pet the cats, he caught sight of the gallery guard walking toward him. The guard came over to the empty canvas chair and looked puzzled. Folding up the chair, he walked away with it.



Edward called, “Guard! Guard! That’s *my* chair!” But the guard paid no attention. Edward turned to Don Manuel. “Here, you’d better take the bird. I have to go get my chair.” He handed Don Manuel the string and said, “Goodbye, Don Manuel. Maybe I can come and see you again.” And he waved farewell.

Don Manuel waved back and said, “Adiós.”



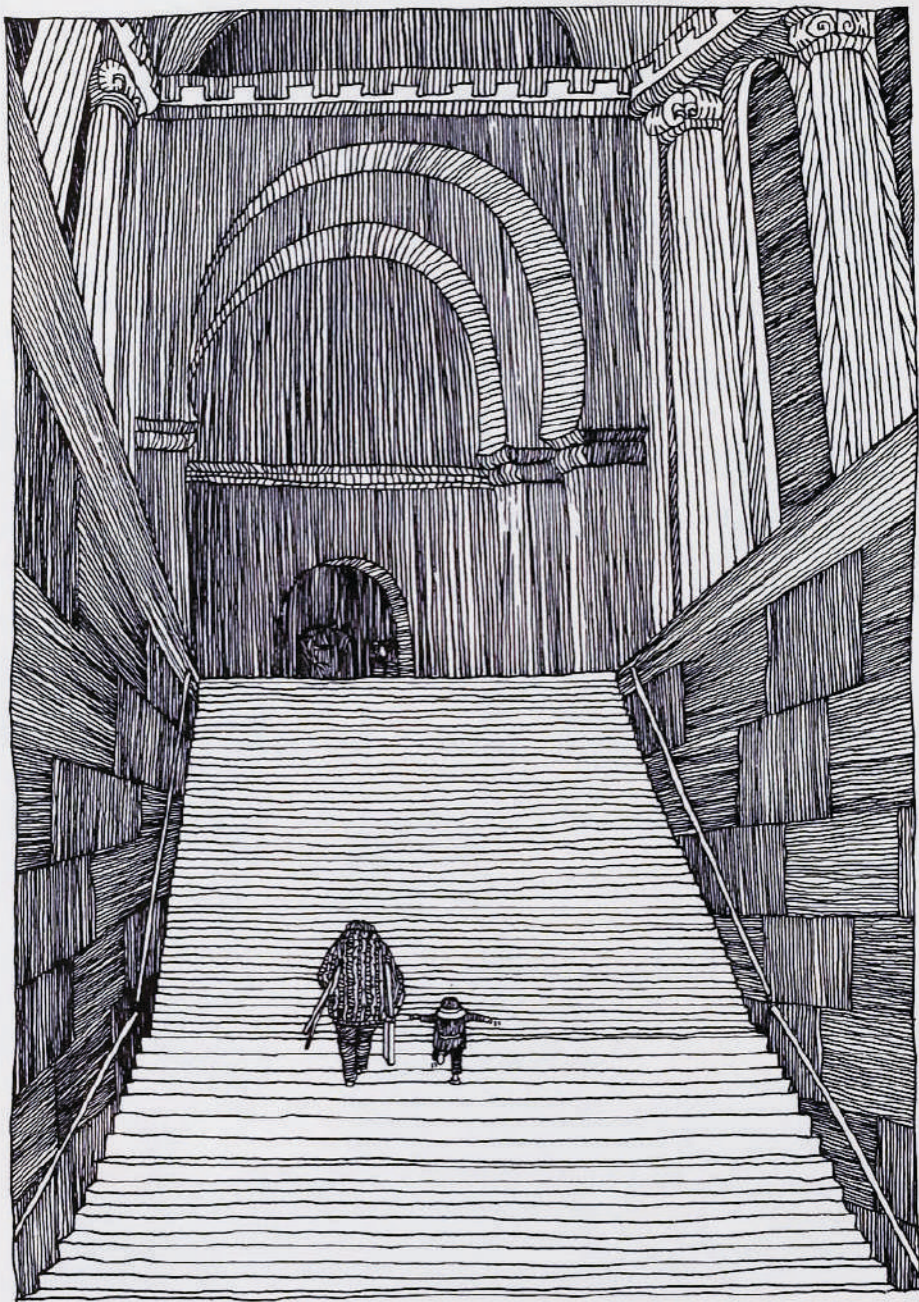


It was quite a steep hop. Edward landed with a thud on the floor of the gallery. The guard heard the noise and came hurrying just as Edward was picking himself up. "I was wondering where you were," the guard said. "I took your chair to your father. You'd better get back there."

Edward looked up at the guard. "I was right here all the time," he said. The guard still looked puzzled as Edward hopped away on his right foot.







It was several weeks before Edward's father took him to the museum again. By that time Edward was able to hop more than halfway up the great staircase.

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They went to the painting of the lady and gentleman in the boat. His father set up the canvas and easel and laid out the paints. Edward took a small rubber ball out of his pocket. He was about to bounce it when his father said, "My word, Edward, you mustn't play with a ball in here. It's not allowed. Put it back in your pocket. Just walk around and look at the pictures. Come back when you hear the closing bell."





Edward put the ball back in his pocket and hopped into the next gallery. He knew many of the paintings. It was just like visiting with friends. To his right was a very gay painting of a great many people sitting and playing on the bank of a river.



It was called "La Grande Jatte." His father had said that was an island in the middle of the Seine River near Paris. The painter's name was Seurat. He had painted the whole picture by putting together tiny little dots of color with the point of his brush until they formed just the effect he wanted.

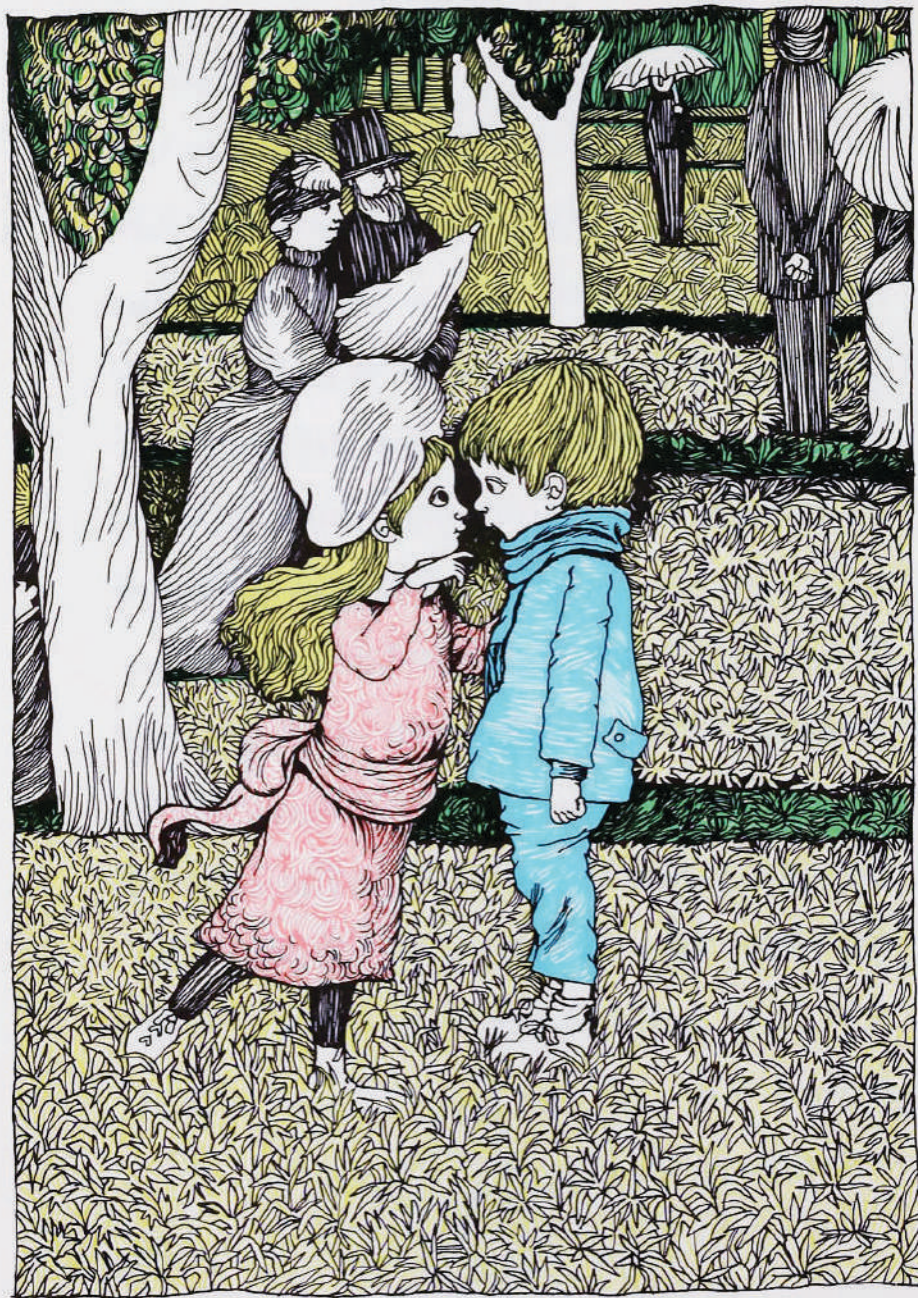
The picture was very peaceful, and yet so much was happening. Some men were rowing a boat. Others were sailing. A small girl was running towards him. It would be fun to run with her on the lovely clipped lawn. Why not!



Edward looked around carefully. No one was in sight. He walked into the middle of the room and stared at the girl. He closed his eyes and concentrated very hard. Then he started hopping. One hop, two hops. (Nothing happened yet.) Three hops. (He thought he heard some sounds.) Four hops. (It was getting harder.) Five hops, and suddenly there he was! Right in the park at the edge of the river. Several dogs leaped about him.

A lady with an umbrella leaned over, patted one of her dogs, and asked, "Aimes-tu les chiens?"





Edward smiled at her, but he thought, "Oh, dear, I must go into some pictures where people speak English." And he ran down the warm, cropped grass to where the girl was running. She was very pretty with long blond hair, and she wore a rose-colored dress. When she saw Edward she stopped running and smiled at him.

"Je m'appelle Suzanne," she said. "Qu'est-ce que tu t'appelles?"

Edward smiled. He understood that she had said her name. "I'm Edward," he said. "Would you like to play ball?" He fished in his pocket for his little rubber ball.

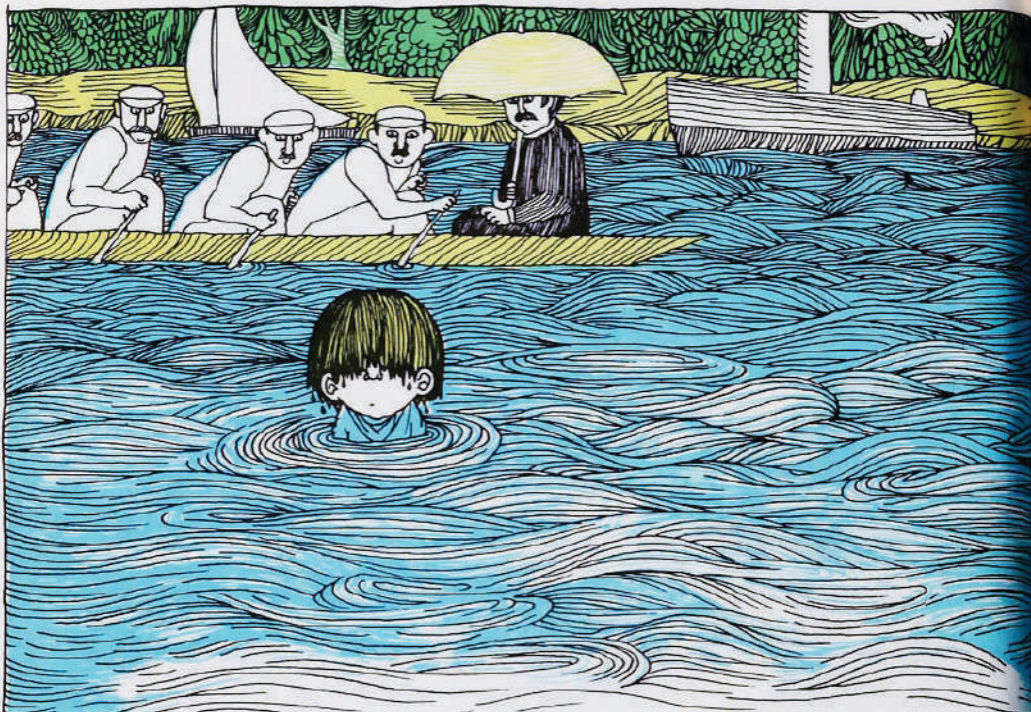




The girl was pleased. She examined the ball closely as though she had not seen one quite like it before. Then Edward jumped up and threw the ball high in the air, ran under it, and caught it. Then he threw it again and Suzanne ran under it and caught it. He threw it high and they both ran and Edward got there first. Suzanne threw it, but instead of going straight up, it went up and out. Edward ran backward to get to where the ball would come down. Before he knew it, he had lost his balance and was up to his neck in muddy water.



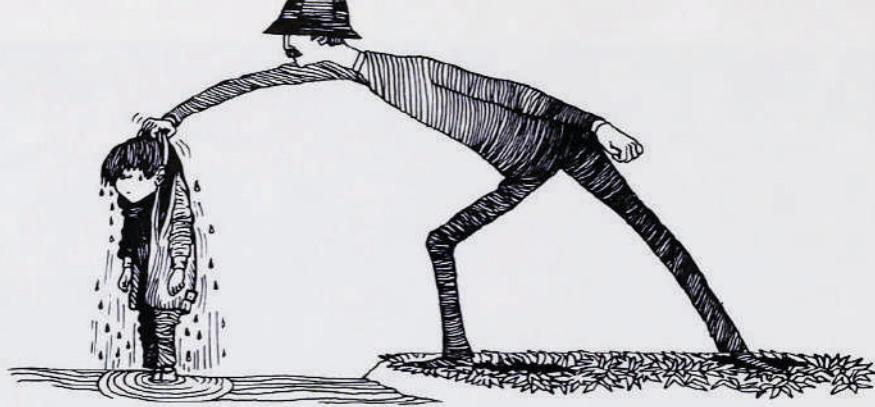




The men in the boat passed close by. They saw he was all right and shouted and laughed. Suzanne stood laughing on the shore with her hand over her mouth. It seemed everyone on the shore was laughing at him.







A tall man reached over and pulled him out. Edward stood on the bank, dripping wet and shivering. Suzanne took out a little lace handkerchief and offered it to him. It was kind of her, but it didn't help much. The warm sun dried him quickly enough. He watched sadly as the little rubber ball floated out into the middle of the Seine.

"Let's play hide and seek." He showed Suzanne what he meant.



She knew the game and went to a tree. Covering her eyes, she started to count, "Un, deux, trois, quatre . . ."

Edward ran to the place where he had first come onto the Grande Jatte. The lady with the parasol was still there. He crouched on the grass behind her. Somewhere a bell clanged. At first he thought it might be from one of the boats in the river. But when it rang again it didn't sound like a ship's bell.





From his hiding place he could see into the museum gallery. The guard walked by the door in a hurry. "Oh," Edward thought, "that must be the closing bell. I must have been here a long time. I'd better go." Leaning forward, he rolled off the grass onto the floor of the gallery.

He stood up and looked at the picture. Suzanne was running as before. "I should have said goodbye," he thought. "She'll be looking for me and looking for me. It wasn't fair."

Edward's father came into the gallery. "I've been looking for you and looking for you," he said. "It's time to go."





As they were about to leave the gallery, Edward pulled at his father's coat sleeve. "What is that out in the water?" He pointed to some of the bright specks of paint in the picture.

"Mmmm," said his father, looking at the painting. "I'd say it might be the play of light on the ripples of the water. What do you think?"

"I was wondering," said Edward, "if it could be a ball . . . say, a rubber ball. One of the children might have been playing with it and lost it in the water."

Edward's father looked more closely at the picture. "The things in this picture are not supposed to be clear and sharp. It's possible you might see a ball out there. Yes, it could be."

"That's what I thought," said Edward. Then he carefully slipped his hand into his pocket. The ball wasn't there. "Yes," he said, "that's what I'm pretty sure it is."





In the next few weeks a great many things happened. They were all important. In the first place another family moved into the loft building. They had a boy named John. He was just Edward's age. It was the first time that Edward had ever had a regular playmate. Any time he wanted to, he could go out in the hall and down two flights of stairs, and there was his friend. They spent a good deal of time together, hopping on the stairs. That was the next important thing that happened. Edward could hop up three whole flights without getting tired. He was getting bigger and stronger all the time.





And then another thing happened. Edward's father said, "In a few weeks, Edward, school will be starting."

Edward was quite busy and had a great deal to think about. He played with John most of the time, instead of going to the museum with his father.



Then one day his father came home from the museum with the picture of the lady and man in the boat. He put it up against the rack and stood back to look at it. It was exactly like the one in the museum, except just a bit smaller.







When Edward's father had gone into the kitchen to have some tea, Edward looked closely at the painting. How pleasant and inviting the picture was. Again he thought how much he would like to go for a short ride in the boat with the lady and gentleman. He felt he knew them quite well.



Edward walked into the middle of the studio and turned around and looked right at the gentleman in the boat. He closed his eyes and concentrated as hard as he could. Then he started hopping. One hop, two hops, three hops. (Nothing seemed to be happening.) Four hops, five hops. (It was getting harder.) Six hops. (He thought he heard John calling him.) Seven hops, eight hops. And before he knew quite what happened, there was a dreadful, tearing sound and he was through the canvas and sprawled out on the studio floor.





His father came running. "What was it?" he called. "What was that?" and he saw the canvas. "Edward!" For a moment, his father couldn't seem to find the right words. He just sputtered.

Finally he said in a choked voice, "Edward, would you mind telling me how this could possibly happen?"

"I was hopping with my eyes closed," said Edward truthfully. "I was hopping, and then I guess I fell right through the painting."





“Edward,” said his father, “this is too bad, but not as bad as it might have been. This painting is just a copy that I did for practice. But you *must not* hop around paintings. Do you understand? This must never, never happen again!”

“I understand,” said Edward sadly. “I know that. I don’t think it *can* ever happen again.”

And he ran downstairs to play with John, without even hopping once.

