'I'm going to make something special for your mother,' my father said.

My mother was out shopping. My father was in the kitchen looking at the pots and the pans and the jars of this and that.

'What are you going to make?' I said.

'A pudding,' he said.

My father is a big man with wild black hair. When he laughs, the sun laughs in the window-panes. When he thinks, you can almost see his thoughts sitting on all the tables and chairs. When he is angry, me and my little brother Huey shiver to the bottom of our shoes.

'What kind of pudding will you make?' Huey said.

'A wonderful pudding,' my father said. 'It will taste like a whole raft of lemons. It will taste like a night on the sea.'

Then he took down a knife and sliced five lemons in half. He squeezed the first one. Juice squirted in my eye.

'Stand back!' he said, and squeezed again. The seeds flew out on the floor. 'Pick up those seeds, Huey!' he said.

Huey took the broom and swept them up.

My father cracked some eggs and put the yolks in a pan and the whites in a bowl. He rolled up his sleeves and pushed back his hair and beat up the yolks. 'Sugar, Julian!' he said, and I poured in the sugar.
He went on beating. Then he put in lemon juice and cream and set the pan on the stove. The pudding bubbled and he stirred it fast. Cream splashed on the stove.

‘Wipe that up, Huey!’ he said.

Huey did.

It was hot by the stove. My father loosened his collar and pushed at his sleeves. The stuff in the pan was getting thicker and thicker. He held the beater up high in the air. ‘Just right!’ he said, and sniffed in the smell of the pudding.

He whipped the egg whites and mixed them into the pudding. The pudding looked softer and lighter than air.

‘Done!’ he said. He washed all the pots, splashing water on the floor, and wiped the counter so fast his hair made circles around his head.

‘Perfect!’ he said. ‘Now I’m going to take a nap. If something important happens, bother me. If nothing important happens, don’t bother me. And — the pudding is for your mother. Leave the pudding alone!’

He went to the living room and was asleep in a minute, sitting straight up in his chair.

Huey and I guarded the pudding.

‘Oh, it’s a wonderful pudding,’ Huey said.

‘With waves on the top like the ocean,’ I said.

‘I wonder how it tastes,’ Huey said.

‘Leave the pudding alone,’ I said.

‘If I just put my finger in — there — I’ll know how it tastes,’ Huey said.

And he did it.

‘You did it!’ I said. ‘How does it taste?’

‘It tastes like a whole raft of lemons,’ he said. ‘It tastes like a night on the sea.’

‘You’ve made a hole in the pudding!’ I said. ‘But since you did it, I’ll have a taste.’ And it tasted like a whole night of lemons. It tasted like floating at sea.
‘It’s such a big pudding,’ Huey said. ‘It can’t hurt to have a little more.’

‘Since you took more, I’ll have more,’ I said.

‘That was a bigger lick than I took!’ Huey said. ‘I’m going to have more again.’

‘Whoops!’ I said.

‘You put in your whole hand!’ Huey said. ‘Look at the pudding you spilled on the floor!’

‘I am going to clean it up,’ I said. And I took the rag from the sink.

‘That’s not really clean,’ Huey said.

‘It’s the best I can do,’ I said.

‘Look at the pudding!’ Huey said.

It looked like craters on the moon. ‘We have to smooth this over,’ I said. ‘So it looks the way it did before! Let’s get spoons.’

And we evened the top of the pudding with spoons, and while we evened it, we ate some more.

‘There isn’t much left,’ I said.

‘We were supposed to leave the pudding alone,’ Huey said.

‘We’d better get away from here,’ I said. We ran into our bedroom and crawled under the bed. After a long time we heard my father’s voice.

‘Come into the kitchen, dear,’ he said. ‘I have something for you.’

‘Why, what is it?’ my mother said, out in the kitchen.

Under the bed, Huey and I pressed ourselves to the wall.

‘Look,’ said my father, out in the kitchen. ‘A wonderful pudding.’

‘Where is the pudding?’ my mother said.

‘Where are you boys?’ my father said. His voice went through every crack and corner of the house.

We felt like two leaves in a storm.

‘Where are you? I said!’ My father’s voice was booming. Huey whispered to me, ‘I’m scared.’

We heard my father walking slowly through the rooms.

‘Huey!’ he called. ‘Julian!’

We could see his feet. He was coming into our room.
He lifted the bedspread. There was his face, and his eyes like black lightning. He grabbed us by the legs and pulled.

‘Stand up!’ he said.

We stood.

‘What do you have to tell me?’ he said.

‘We went outside,’ Huey said, ‘and when we came back, the pudding was gone!’

‘Then why were you hiding under the bed?’ my father said. We didn’t say anything. We looked at the floor.

‘I can tell you one thing,’ he said. ‘There is going to be some beating here now! There is going to be some whipping!’

The curtains at the window were shaking. Huey was holding my hand.

‘Go into the kitchen!’ my father said. ‘Right now!’

We went into the kitchen.

‘Come here, Huey!’ my father said.

Huey walked towards him, his hands behind his back.

‘See these eggs?’ my father said. He cracked them and put the yolks in a pan and set the pan on the counter. He stood a chair by the counter. ‘Stand up here,’ he said to Huey.

Huey stood on the chair by the counter.

‘Now it’s time for your beating!’ my father said.

Huey started to cry. His tears fell in with the egg yolks.

‘Take this!’ my father said. My father handed him the egg beater. ‘Now beat those eggs,’ he said. ‘I want this to be a good beating!’

‘Oh!’ Huey said. He stopped crying. And he beat the egg yolks.

‘Now you, Julian, stand here!’ my father said.

I stood on a chair by the table.

‘I hope you’re ready for your whipping!’

I didn’t answer. I was afraid to say yes or no.

‘Here!’ he said, and he set the egg whites in front of me. ‘I want these whipped and whipped well!’

‘Yes, sir!’ I said, and started whipping.
My father watched us. My mother came into the kitchen and watched us.

After a while Huey said, ‘This is hard work.’
‘That’s too bad,’ my father said. ‘Your beating’s not done!’ And he added sugar and cream and lemon juice to Huey’s pan and put the pan on the stove. And Huey went on beating.
‘My arm hurts from whipping,’ I said.
‘That’s too bad,’ my father said. ‘Your whipping’s not done.’
So I whipped and whipped, and Huey beat and beat.
‘Hold that beater in the air, Huey!’ my father said.
Huey held it in the air.
‘See!’ my father said. ‘A good pudding stays on the beater. It’s thick enough now. Your beating’s done.’ Then he turned to me.
‘Let’s see those egg whites, Julian!’ he said. They were puffed up and fluffy. ‘Congratulations, Julian!’ he said. ‘Your whipping’s done.’

He mixed the egg whites into the pudding himself. Then he passed the pudding to my mother.
‘A wonderful pudding,’ she said. ‘Would you like some, boys?’
‘No thank you,’ we said.
She picked up a spoon. ‘Why, this tastes like a whole raft of lemons,’ she said. ‘This tastes like a night on the sea.’
Boys Will Be Boys

WENDY EDMOND

Mum puts down her knife and fork.

‘They’re at it again,’ she says.

The cars on the road are a distant whoosh, whoosh. It’s the beginning of a hot Sunday afternoon. Mum and us kids are eating lunch. Dad is out working somewhere.

‘Quick, close the windows. I don’t know, I slave away in this house every day. Not that anyone seems to notice. It’s all work and no pay, that’s what. Just get the place clean and then those townies come out here and raise a dust-storm. Why can’t the council seal the road? Your father’s been on at them for years. Close the windows before the dust gets in.’

We run from room to room closing all the windows. From the front of the house we can see the townies’ cars passing our gate. Dust rolls towards us as each car passes. Whoosh, whoosh.

Back in the kitchen it’s hot now the windows are closed. We hurry through the meal, longing to get outside.

‘If you kids think you’re going to rush off and play, you’ve got another think coming. Your father hasn’t had his meal yet. You three can go and help him finish his work. And you,’ she turns to me, ‘it’s your turn to do the dishes. I’ve got work to do.’

The others go off to find Dad. Will I never get outside? ‘Aw gee, Mum, Chris is coming soon. We’re going to play in the trees.’

‘Not before the dishes are done. Chris can help too.’

Chris doesn’t turn up in time to help. I do them and wander outside. What a relief! It’s so hot in there.
'Gidday, Nicky.' Chris comes cycling up the drive.

'Hi. Let's get going before the others have finished helping Dad.'

We leave the bike against the house and head for the trees. Quickly we climb to our platform looking over the dusty gravel road. These macrocarpa trees fell down in a storm last year. They kept on growing and now their great leafy branches provide us with forts, hiding-places, stages, slides, and platforms.

This one is the best. Chris and I come here every Sunday afternoon. Immediately below us the townies are driving their cars. One after another they head towards the beach. Whoosh, whoosh. The dust from the road rises in choking clouds with each car. We'll get our own back.

'We'll have to hurry, Chris. Come over here. I found some branches loaded with nuts yesterday. I dumped them over here.'

We rip the nuts from the macrocarpa branches, piling them on the platform where we can grab them easily.

'How's your throwing arm, Nicky? Reckon we'll get more than last week?'

'Too right we will. I reckon we get more every week, don't we? And they'll all have their windows open today. It's so hot.'

We look down at the cars. Sure enough, all the drivers have their windows open. Their elbows jut out from the cars as they drive along with one hand on the wheel. Each car contains a family. Mum and Dad are in the front, kids in the back. Everyone has their swimming-togs on, ready for the beach.

'Gee, I wish we were going to the beach, too.'

'I don't know. We can have just as much fun up here I reckon.'

We settle down to throwing nuts at the cars. The idea is to get a nut into a driver's lap. The one who gets the most nuts through the car window and onto the lap wins. We never get all that many through. The cars go too fast. But it's fun.

'You remember that guy last week? He didn't know what had happened to him. I bet those townies don't know a macrocarpa nut when they see one. And they never think to look up here.'
We’re throwing away all the time but we don’t seem too good at it today. The cars are going faster than usual. The dust gets heavier and heavier in the air. We throw harder and harder.

‘If we don’t get one soon, I’m going off to find some nests. It’s getting boring.’

‘Aw, come off it, Chris. We just have to warm up, that’s all.’

‘I’m warm enough. Don’t tell me you aren’t getting sick of it. I mean if we could get just one I’d be happy. Just one.’

‘Well, you’re not going to get one if you stop throwing. Come on, try a few more. If it doesn’t work then we’ll go and do something else.’

‘Okay.’

There’s a car beneath us going a bit slower than the others. All its windows are open. With all our might we both hurl our nuts.

‘Missed again. Come on, Nicky. Let’s go and find something else to do. I want to get at those nests we saw last week.’

Just then we hear a man shouting. The car has stopped. The townie has got out. He’s coming down the road, shouting.

‘We hit him!’

‘Ssshhh . . . lie still.’ We both freeze.

‘I’ll get you. You wait till I find you. I’ll thrash the living daylights out of you.’

‘We’d better move. He’ll see us up here.’

‘Okay, but don’t make a sound. You go that way and I’ll go down here. Don’t break any branches, he’ll hear us.’

We skedaddle, plunging down through the mess of branches and trunks, trying to get to the ground where we can hide in safety. I hit the ground first, right next door to a rotting dead sheep. Chris lands on top of me.

‘Pooh! What a smell! Let’s get out of here.’

‘Ssshhh. He’s just through there.’

‘All right, I know you’re in there. Come on out you little devils. If you don’t come out before I’ve counted ten I’m coming in to get you. Then you’ll be sorry. I know you’re in there. One,
two, three . . .’

We crouch down and start running silently up the length of the trees. If we can get up the end, over the gate, through the hedge, and up the drive, we’ll be safe. Ssshhhh. We run.

‘. . . eight, nine, ten. I’m coming in. And when I get you boys I’ll tan your hides.’

We reach the gate. It’s hidden from the man’s view. I get to the top and fall off into the ditch, tearing my jersey and cutting my elbow. I push my sleeves up so Mum won’t notice the hole at tea-time.

‘Come on, Nicky. Don’t be so clumsy.’

‘All right, you brats. Don’t think I won’t find you. And when I do . . . Your father’s going to hear about this.’

Through the hedge we creep and out onto the drive. I want to go back to the house. Chris wants to have a look at the man. ‘It’s all right. He won’t guess it was us. He thinks we’re still in the trees, hiding.’

‘Okay, but you’re responsible. I don’t want to get a hiding.’

We walk down the drive, straightening our clothes and hair. Just as we get to the gate, the man comes up. He’s very red in the face. His wife and kids are starting to shout, too.

‘Come on, Dad. We want to get to the beach. Forget about it.’

He stops. We wait. I wish we were back at the house.

‘You kids live here, do you? Seen any boys around? They’ve been throwing things at my car. They’re down in those trees somewhere.’

‘Boys? There were some staying on the farm next door. Could have been them. They sometimes play in those trees.’

‘Well, next time you see them, you tell them from me that they’d better cut it out. I’m not going to stand for it. For two pins I’d go and see their father.’

‘Come on, Dad. We want to get to the beach. It’s late.’

‘They’re only visitors. Their father isn’t there.’

‘Well, you tell them to cut it out. And if it happens again . . .’
The townie strides over to his car and gets in. He slams the door and drives away. The dust rises behind him. Chris and I look at each other and burst out laughing.

‘What are you two doing? It’s time to get the tea ready. Who was that man?’ Mum comes down the drive, wiping her hands on her apron.

‘I don’t know, you’re never around when I need you. Get inside and make some tea. Dad’ll be needing it soon.’

‘We’ve only been playing in the trees.’

‘Playing in the trees. What you girls find to do down there all afternoon beats me. And no doubt you’ve torn your clothes as usual, Nicky. You’d earn your keep more if you did what I told you. Now go and make the tea. And keep the windows closed. I’m not going to dust that house again.’