

Isidore and the Castaway

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Isidore, a bored nine-year-old, sends out a message in a bottle for a castaway who must be bored as well. An unexpected answer arrives, which is the beginning of the correspondence between Isidore and the Castaway, a most mysterious adventure: who is the Castaway, and where is his desert island?

Author's bio

I was born in Athens forty long years ago. When I am not writing, I love to travel, dance with my daughter and eat chocolate ice cream. When I was in primary school, I used to have bad dreams. A doctor advised my mother to buy me some books, and – hey, presto! - the nightmares went away. Thanks to books my life became interesting and adventurous. Then I decided to write books myself: novels for grownups and stories for children. Perhaps one day the children who read my stories will also get to read my novels, which can only mean they will have grown up – and I will have grown older!

A.M.

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Dedication:

To the memory of my father, the Great Castaway.

My best friend

My name is Isidore and you'll have probably seen me around. It's just that nobody pays much attention to a nine-year-old boy in glasses. I live in that building over there, fourth floor, the door to the right, and my best friend is a castaway. He hasn't sent me a picture, but I can imagine what he looks like: he's got a beard and his hands are rough from working hard on his island. He doesn't write often either, only when he's got the time.

It all began one day I was bored. When I'm bored, I usually count the kitchen tiles. Yellow fish, three tiles, red fish, seven tiles, yellow fish again. If the yellow fish and the red fish shared the same tile, would they be bored, I wonder?

Fish live in water. There must be a castaway somewhere around there too. And he is all alone. I know because I've read a few books about castaways fishing. I have seen movies, too, of castaways in beards building rafts or striking two flints together to light fires. Then they roast the fish in the fire and eat them with their hands, since nobody can see them. Who would be there to see them on their desert island?

I often think about the castaway and his life on the desert island, and that day I decided to write him a letter and throw it in the water. When you are always on your own, you must be eager for some good news, for something to make you happy. So I tore a page from my language workbook and I wrote, in big clear letters:

Dear Castaway,

My name is Isidore. Sometimes I am bored, but you must be even more bored staying in the same place all the time. So I thought I'd write to you about what I do when I am bored, just to give you a few ideas:

I gaze at passing clouds.

I count the steps from the front door to my room.

I open the spice cupboard and read the labels on the spices.

I rearrange my books by size or by my favourite stories.

I have a drink of water.

I make bubbles with a straw.

I read the names on the buzzers of our building and I imaginethat all the residents take a piece of paper and write their names on each buzzer: A. Moustache, V. Sleepy, F. Chubby, R. Grumpy.

I pretend I am lost in the woods and I light a fire to keep the wolves away.

I blow up a balloon and then let all the air come out, and then watch how it dances in the air.

I play hopscotch on the black and white tiles of the bathroom.

I pick up a strand of a lighter shade of wood on the parquet floor and pretend it's a rope and I'm a ropewalker.

I write my name in many different ways (capital, bold, italics, wobbly, long etc.)

I pretend my pinkie is a caterpillar crawling up the ivy leaves on the carpet pattern.

I take all my stuff out of my desk drawer and try to remember who gave me what or where I got each item, and then put it all back.

I am thinking of words beginning with bo – as in bored: boat, bow, Bo Peep.

I search the depths of my schoolbag for chewing gum, staples, or bits of rubber (they smell quite nice).

I look under the bed to see if there is a hole with a tunnel leading into mysterious places.

If I am with other people, I ask them what they do when they are bored. "I make jewellery", "I listen to music", "I read a book".

Obviously you can't do this last one since there is nobody around, but you can gaze at the clouds or count your steps. Can't you?

Also, you could reply to my letter (if you ever get it).

Goodnight or good day (I'm not sure what it will be when you find the bottle).

Isidore

I rolled up the letter, tied it with a rubber band and squeezed it into an empty bottle of orangeade. Then I handed it to Dad and asked him to throw it into the water. He works in an office near the seafront, so he passes by the sea everyday. But he is not very glad to see it, as he is used to it.

"Ok, I'll see what I can do," Dad said, smiling in a sad way. He is always busy and Mum says not to disturb him without good reason, but I thought the castaway was good enough reason. On my birthday in the summer, Dad got me a book, *Robinson Crusoe*, and told me that when he was a kid he dreamed of being just like him. Sometimes when I am bored I imagine what it would be like if Dad was Robinson and I was his man Friday.

Many days passed and I was a bit disappointed. But one day Dad came back with the bottle of orangeade. There was a letter inside!

"A reply from your castaway."

"Have you read it?"

"Do you think I would read somebody else's mail?"

We hugged and patted each other on the back, like we always do when we are happy. I got my bottle into my own room; I shut the door and read the reply.

Dear Isidore,

I know exactly what you mean. Sometimes life seems to stand still while clouds pass overhead. I like to gaze at them as well, when I'm rolling some rope or washing my hands with sea-water on my desert island. I am on my own here, you were right in this, but I've got a million things to do. Or it seems that way, at least. I make some improvements to my hut - I am currently making a large storage room -, I carry reeds, I calculate my provisions, and thus the