Cautionary Tales by Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953)

Jim, Who ran away from his nurse, and was eaten by a Lion

There was a Boy whose name was Jim;  
His friends were very good to him.  
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,  
And slices of delicious Ham,  
And Chocolate with pink inside,  
And little Tricycles to ride.  
And read him stories through and through,  
And even took him to the zoo—  
But there it was the dreadful Fate  
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know— at least you ought to know,  
For I have often told you so—  
That Children never are allowed  
To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;  
Now this was Jim’s especial Foible,  
He ran away when he was able,  
And on this inauspicious day  
He slipped his hand and ran away!  
He hadn’t gone a yard when— Bang!  
With open jaws a Lion sprang,  
And hungrily began to eat  
The Boy: beginning at his feet.

Now just imagine how it feels  
When first your toes and then your heels,  
And then by gradual degrees,  
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,  
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.  
No wonder Jim detested it!  
No wonder that he shouted Hi!  
The honest keeper heard his cry,  
Though very fat he almost ran  
To help the little gentleman.  
“Ponto!” he ordered as he came  
(For Ponto was the Lion’s name),  
“Ponto!” he cried, with angry Frown.  
“Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!”

The Lion made a sudden Stop,  
He let the Dainty Morsel drop,  
And slunk reluctant to his cage,  
Snarling with Disappointed Rage.  
But when he bent him over Jim  
The Honest Keeper’s Eyes were dim.  
The Lion having reached his head,  
The Miserable Boy was dead.
When Nurse informed his parents, they
Were more Concerned than I can say:
His Mother, as she dried her eyes,
Said, “Well— it gives me no surprise,
He would not do as he was told!”
His Father, who was self-controlled,
Bade all the children round attend
To James’ miserable end,
And always keep a hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.

Matilda… Who Told Lies and was Burned to Death

Matilda told such dreadful lies,
It made one Gasp and Stretch one’s Eyes;
Her Aunt, who, from her Earliest Youth,
Had kept a Strict Regard for Truth,
Attempted to Believe Matilda:
The effort very nearly killed her,
And would have done so, had not She
Discovered this Infirmity.
For once, towards the Close of Day,
Matilda, growing tired of play,
And finding she was left alone,
Went tiptoe to the Telephone,
And summoned the Immediate Aid
Of London’s Noble Fire Brigade.
Within an hour the Gallant Band
Were pouring in on every hand,
From Putney, Hackney Down and Bow
With Courage high and Hearts a-glow
They Galloped, roaring through the Town,
“Matilda’s House is Burning Down!”
Inspired by British Cheers and Loud
Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd,
They ran their ladders through a score
Of windows on the Ball-Room Floor;
And took Particular Pains to Souse
The Pictures up and down the House,
Until Matilda’s Aunt succeeded
In showing them they were not needed.
And even then she had to pay
To get the men to go away!
It happened that a few weeks later
Her Aunt was off to the Theatre
To see that Interesting Play
‘The Second Mrs Tanqueray’.
She had refused to take her niece
To hear this Entertaining Piece:
A Deprivation Just and Wise
To Punish her for Telling Lies.
That night a fire did break out—
You shout have heard Matilda Shout!
You should have heard her Scream and Bawl,
And throw the windows up and call
To People passing on the Street—
(The rapidly increasing Heat
Encouraging her to obtain
Their Confidence) — but all in vain!
For every time she shouted “Fire!”
They only answered “Little Liar!”
And therefore when her Aunt returned,
Matilda, and the House were burned.

Rebecca

Who slammed doors for fun and perished miserably
A trick that everyone abhors
In little girls is slamming Doors.
A Wealthy Baker’s Little Daughter
Who lived in Palace Green, Bayswater
(By name Rebecca Offendort),
Was given to this Furious Sport.

She would deliberately go
And Slam the door like Billy-Ho!
To make her Uncle Jacob start.
She was nor really bad at heart,
But only rather rude and wild:
She was an aggravating child.

It happened that a Marble Bust
Of Abraham was standing just
Above the Door this little Lamb
Had carefully prepared to Slam,
And Down it came! It knocked her flat!
It laid her out! She looked like that.

Her funeral Sermon (which was long
And followed by a Sacred Song)
Mentioned her Virtues, it is true,
But dwelt upon her Vices too,
And showed the Dreadful End of One
Who goes and slams the door for fun.

The children who were brought to hear
The awful tale from far and near
Were much impressed, and inly swore
They never more would slam the Door.
— As often they had done before.
RULES FOR PUPILS

I. Prepare your lessons carefully.

II. Come regularly and punctually to School.

III. Be as tidy as possible in your dress.

IV. If you do not understand what is taught, ask your Teacher to explain it.

V. Be respectful and attentive to your Teachers, and remember how kind it is of them to take so much trouble with you.

VI. Speak the truth at all costs.

VII. Be respectful and obedient to your Parents, Guardians, Teachers, and all set over you.

VIII. Study to be polite and courteous to all, avoiding coarseness and rudeness.

IX. Fight against selfishness, anger, and all evil.

X. Be kind and obliging to everyone.
Vocal Gymnastics

1. Thirty three thousand thrushes thrive
2. Thrust thread through thick cloth
3. Thrust thick thorns through the three thieves’ throats
4. Thwart thoughtless thieves

1. Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran
2. Row brothers, row against the roaring river
3. Rats ran right across the rusty rails
4. Roll, roller, roll across the rugged road.

1. Light came next night through the mists
2. The wasps’ nests were difficult to catch
3. Went out into the harvest field
4. What are the lengths of the masts?

1. A shapely sash should not show shabby stitches.

Spellings

1. A-N-G-E-L spells ANGEL
2. C-H-U-R-C-H spells CHURCH
4. C-R-U-E-L spells CRUEL
7. E-L-B-O-W spells ELBOW
8. A-M-B-E-R spells AMBER
9. S-C-A-R-F spells SCARF
10. S-H-O-E-S spells SHOES