

By MARILYN BATES  
There may be more depressing experiences than spending a rainy day at the beach crammed in a small cottage with two boys approaching puberty: a wet, smelly dog, and no television, but offhand I can't think of any.  
"What can we do?" they whined.  
"Well, for openers," I suggested, "why don't you go to the refrigerator, open the door and examine its contents at great length. Maybe some wonderful delicacy has evolved during the last 10 minutes."  
"Aw, Ma," one of them complained. He went to the refrigerator and examined its contents. "There isn't any more pop. How come we never have any pop?"  
"Because you drink it faster than I can buy it. Anyhow there's half a bottle of Frosty Bear Cola right in front of your nose."  
He recoiled in disgust. "No way. Tommy was drinking from that bottle before and he drooled in it. I saw him. What a creep."  
"That's a nice way to talk about your friend you wanted to invite here so badly."  
His voice was scornful. "I'm sorry we brought him. He steals the covers, and this morning he sneaked out of bed early and ate all the Crunchie Munchies. He spits crumbs in his pop, too." He contorted his face hideously at the subject of his contempt.  
A well directed clog with a sofa pillow hurled from across the room muffled anything further he might have said. He sailed the pillow back, overturning a lamp.  
"Now, boys," I pleaded, "no roughhousing. I know, why don't you brush the puppy? He's covered with burrs from the field."  
"No way. I'm not going near that dog. He's all wet and he stinks."  
"Smells," I corrected automatically.  
"He doesn't just smell. He stinks." He held his fingers to his nose and made a loud, vulgar sounding noise with his mouth. Then he went to the refrigerator and inspected its contents. "I'm hungry. Why isn't there ever anything good to eat around here?"  
"I have some chicken surprise we had left from dinner last night," I suggested. Had I offered him snakes and snails and puppy dog tails, his look of revulsion could not have been more pronounced.  
"Fuck, no way, that was really crummy. All those green plants mushed around in it."  
"THAT WAS broccoli," I sighed wearily. "Why don't you play Monopoly?"  
He looked gloomy. "No way, the houses are all stuck together from the other night when the marshmallows melted in our experiment, and anyhow the puppy ate most of the \$500 bills."  
"I know what we can do," he became enthusiastic. "We can walk down to that little store on the road and buy some pop and potato chips and baseball cards, and on the way back we can look to see if anything ate all those spiders we trapped yesterday."  
"Oh, no you can't, you'll get soaking wet. Why don't you go swimming instead?"  
He stared at me, an expression of shock and more than a little delight on his face. "Hey, Tommy, he called, 'get Ma. She's flipped'."

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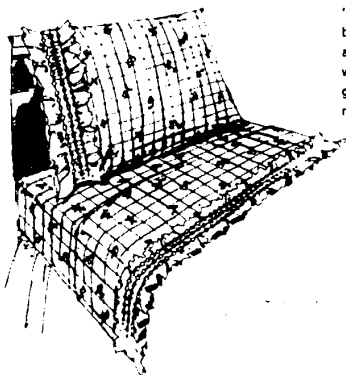
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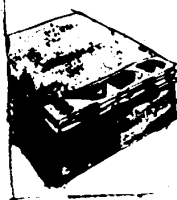


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