

Ellen Niit Uncle Nightingale *Onu Ööbik*

Translated by Susan Wilson

HOW UNCLE NIGHTINGALE GOES TO THE BEACH

Uncle Nightingale can't really swim yet, but he absolutely loves the sea and being in the water. When it's a warm, sunny day, Uncle Nightingale goes to the beach.

At the bus-stop, Uncle Nightingale meets his friend Markus Stampfoot, who can't really swim yet either, but is less of a beginner than Uncle Nightingale.

At the bus-stop Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot hold their bus tickets ready in their hands and begin waiting for the Sandyshore bus. The bus that usually goes to Sandyshore is beautiful and red, and the trip costs exactly one Estonian crown. Uncle Nightingale and his friend Markus almost never catch the blue buses. They let them go by.

Once or twice Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot haven't made it to the seaside until lunchtime because it's been mainly a blue-bus day. Uncle Nightingale and Markus once walked all the way out to Sandyshore because not a single red bus went past all morning.

"Men fear nothing" said Uncle Nightingale. "We can just as easily get to the beach on foot!"

"People have walked there before us," said Markus Stampfoot. "And back as well," Uncle Nightingale added. And so off they set.

The way out was lovely. Going from one bus-stop to the next, and from there onto a third. And no-one asked for their tickets. It was just that walking took a terribly long time. In the meantime six blue buses went past them. There was one red one too, but with all the walking Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot hadn't noticed it.

When Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot finally reached Sandyshore, it was already evening. There was no time for even a quick dip. They had to set off quickly for home so that Uncle Nightingale wouldn't be late for his night-shift.

"How about," said Uncle Nightingale to Markus Stampfoot, "we allow ourselves to catch a blue bus back if there is one."

"How about," said Markus, "we allow ourselves to catch a blue bus or a red bus."

"Agreed," said Uncle Nightingale.

But at that very moment round the corner a yellow bus came into view instead. Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot looked very serious and Markus almost burst into tears. But Uncle Nightingale realised and quickly said, "And of course any yellow bus would be particularly welcome."

"Oh, I'd completely forgotten that," said Markus Stampfoot. "How come forgotten!" said Uncle Nightingale in surprise. "My father always used to say that the bonds between men are all made by men themselves."

The yellow bus had already stopped next to them. Uncle Nightingale jumped on first and his friend Markus jumped on next and both said at the same time, "I'm having the window seat!"

Fortunately there were several window seats. So Uncle Nightingale and his friend Markus sat one behind the other and held out their tickets for clipping to the lovely kind lady who was sitting just by the ticket-clipping machine.

The yellow bus travelled back to the town. Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot waved and waved to all the people walking and sang all the way back, their voices echoing round the half-empty bus:

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It's a lovely ride on this bus,
This yellow bus,
this yellow bus!
Its wheels race round and our feet rest quietly,
trees whistle by and our faces are smiley!

All the other people on the bus grinned to themselves. Including the kind little lady who'd clipped their tickets. They no doubt all agreed with Uncle Nightingale and Markus Stampfoot.