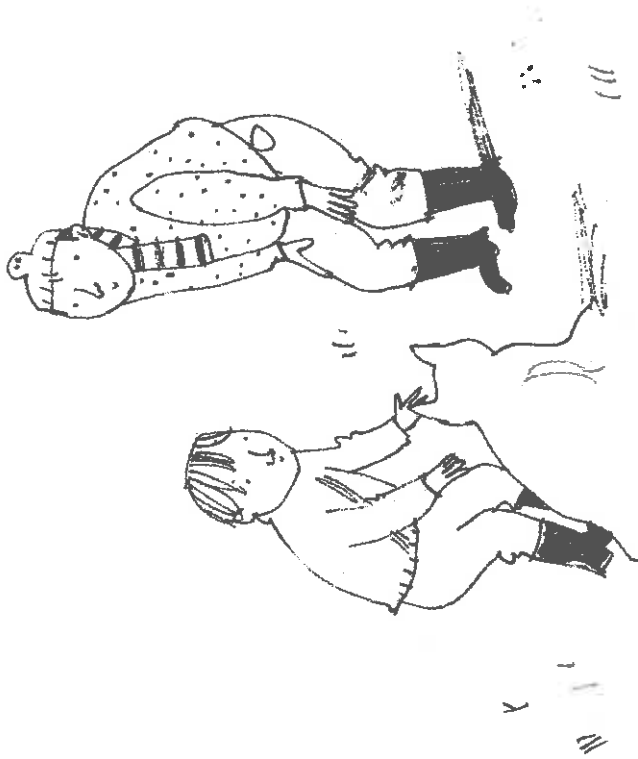
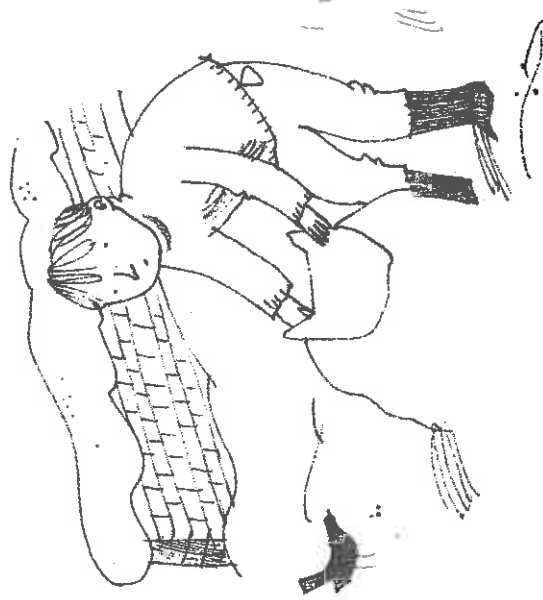




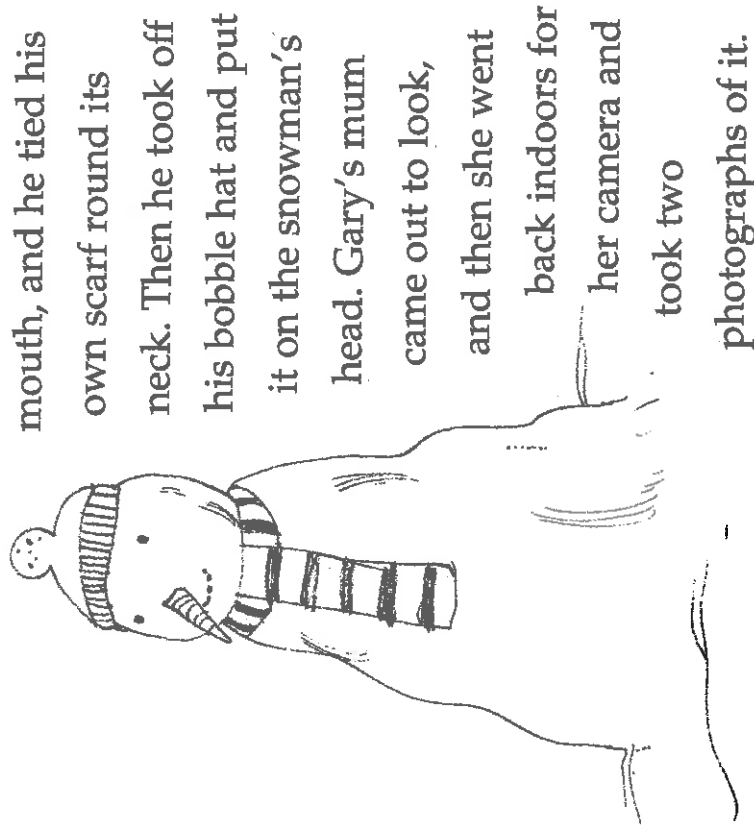
Gary's dad came closer to look. "Yes, I see what you mean," he said. "It's like the animals your dad makes. It's very good, Tom."

Tom didn't want anyone looking at his snow cat until it was finished. And anyway, he didn't know if Gary's dad *really* liked it, or if he was just trying to

be kind, because he thought Tom hadn't been able to make a proper snowman. The snow cat wasn't anything like as good as Dad's carved animals; but Tom didn't want to think about those. He ignored Gary's dad and carried on working. He scooped up more snow and modelled its ears, the dip at the back of its neck, and then added a long sweep for its tail. It crouched there, waiting.

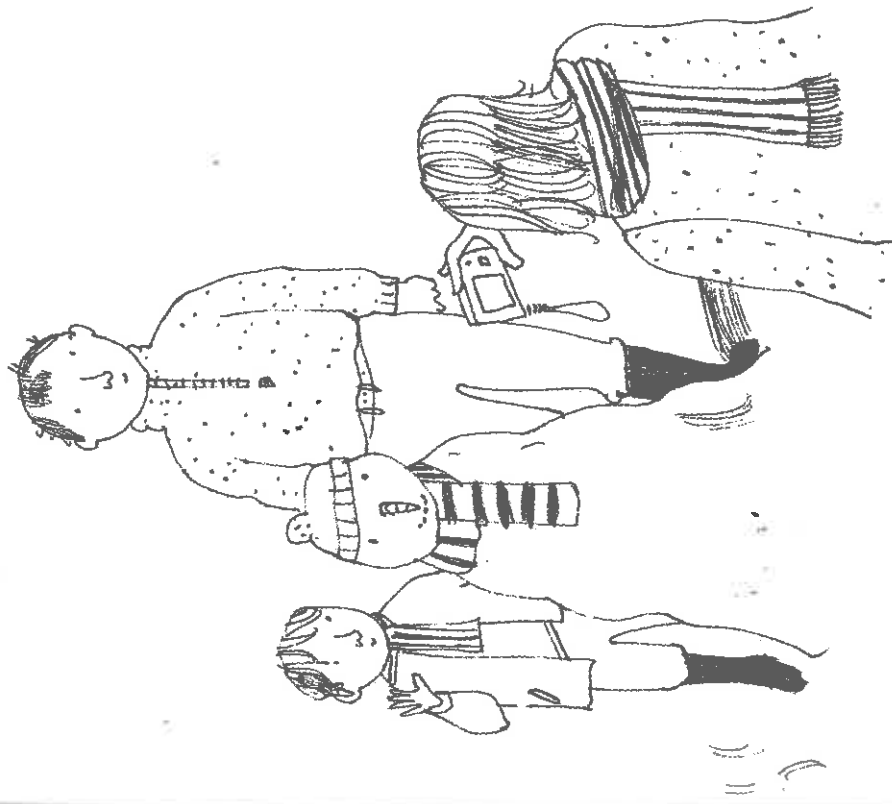


Gary's dad went in and fetched two black buttons for the snowman's eyes, a carrot for the nose, and another sideways carrot to make a wide smiling



mouth, and he tied his own scarf round its neck. Then he took off his bobble hat and put it on the snowman's head. Gary's mum came out to look, and then she went back indoors for her camera and took two photographs of it.

She had to use the flash, because it was already starting to get dark.



"Take one of Tom's as well," Gary's dad said, pointing. "He's made a cat, look."

"No," Tom said quickly. "It's not finished yet."

The snow cat, he could tell, didn't want to be photographed. It wasn't like the smiling Christmas-card snowman.

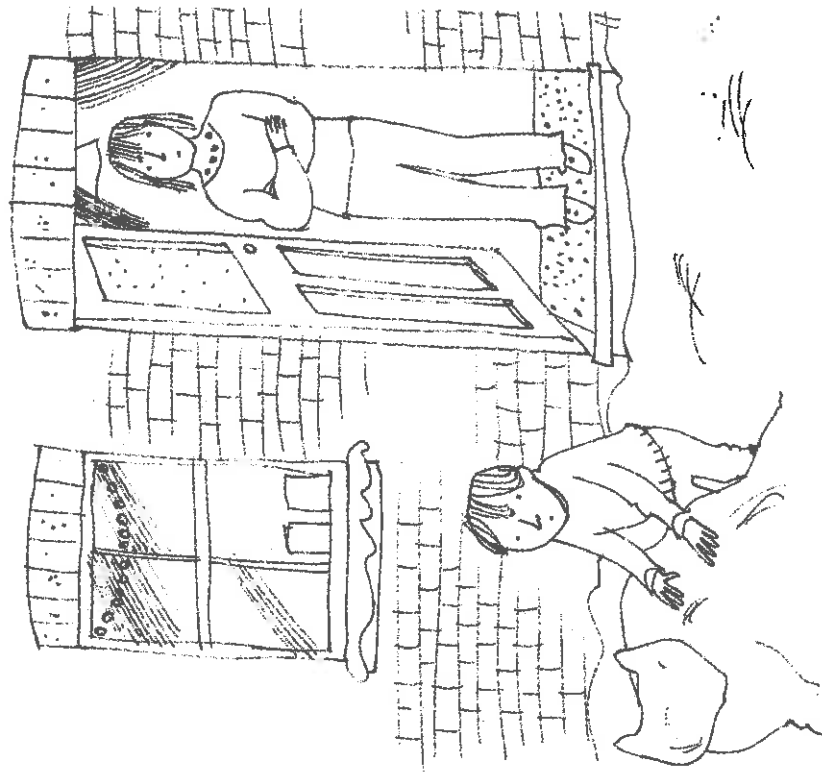
Gary and his mum and dad went indoors, and Tom completed his work on the snow cat, modelling the face and the ears, tracing in a nose, eyes, curved mouth and whiskers.

Suddenly it didn't feel right to be touching it any more. The eyes were only scratches in the snow face, but they seemed to be looking at him.

"Tom, come on! Aren't you getting frozen out there?"

Mum was at the door, shivering. The lights were on in the house, making the snow look blue and icy. Tom noticed for the first time how very cold it was.

"That's a funny snowman," Mum said, peering from the doorstep. "For a minute I thought it was some wild animal crouching there."



"It's a snow cat," Tom said. "I didn't mean it to be. It just sort of turned into one."

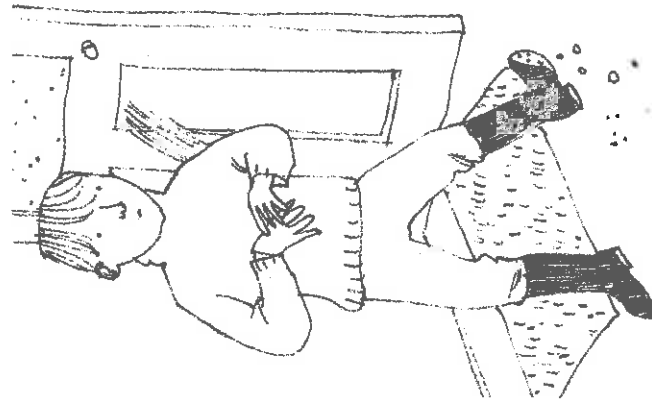
It was a relief to go indoors, to stamp the snow off his boots, to take off his

fleece and his soaking gloves.

The TV was on but there was no sign of Dad.

"He's still not well enough to come down," Mum said, guessing what Tom was thinking as he looked at

Dad's empty chair. "Why don't you go up and tell him about your snowman -



I mean snow cat? That'll cheer him up. And ask if he wants anything taken up." It wouldn't cheer Tom up, but he went anyway, walking upstairs as slowly as he could. Dad was sitting up in bed, reading. He looked thin and tired, but he smiled at Tom and said, "Did you have fun? Mum said you were making a snowman with Gary. I bet it's a good one."

