

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MINUTE BILLY woke up, he knew it was a special day.

Now what can it be, he thought to himself, still too sleepy to remember what was so special about it.

It's not the first day of my holidays, because that's not till next month.

It's not Christmas, because that's not till Christmas time.

And I had a bath and a haircut yesterday, so it can't be that.

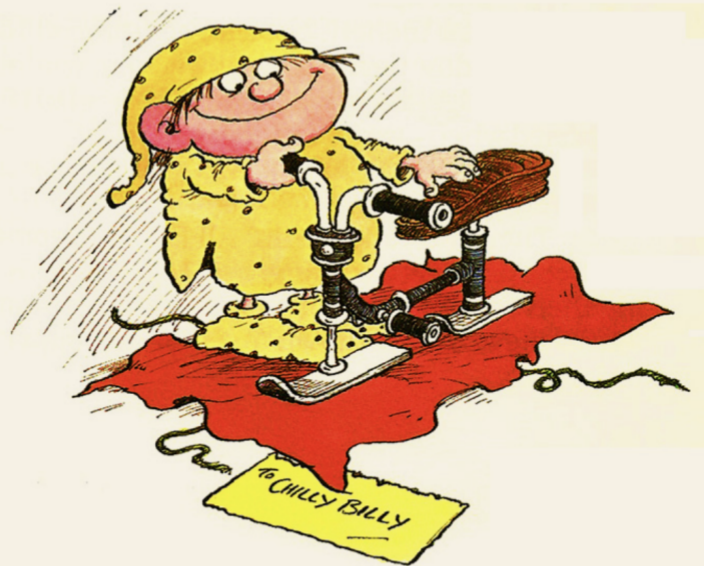
Still wondering and rubbing his eyes, he sat up. Then he saw, at the end of his bed, a large and oddly shaped package, beautifully wrapped in shiny red paper with a green ribbon tied round it.

Billy got out of bed and took a closer look at the package.

There was a card on top, with his name written on the envelope. He opened it.

And then he remembered; today was his birthday!

The card said: HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO BILLY AND DON'T FALL OFF SIGNED WITH LOVE YOUR FRIEND LILY XXX.



Wide awake now, and full of excitement, Billy poked at the package and squeezed it and walked round it twice and stood on his head and looked at it upside down, but he still couldn't guess what it was.

Then he heard a laugh behind him, and there was Lily standing in the doorway.

"Why don't you open it, you silly old thing?" she said. "Then you can have this special birthday breakfast I've made for you."

Billy untied the ribbon and took all the shiny red paper off, and then had to sit down rather quickly because he was so excited about what he saw.

It had a saddle, and handlebars, and pedals, just like a bicycle.

But instead of wheels, it had two little skis, one at each end. It was an lcycle, a shiny silver lcycle that Billy could ride all round the fridge.

"Lily, it's beautiful! Thank you very much. Now I understand why your card said don't fall off."

Billy was so thrilled with his lcycle that he had his birthday breakfast sitting in the saddle, and it was only with great difficulty that Lily persuaded him to get off and change out of his pyjamas.

Finally he got off, got dressed and went down to help Lily get everything ready for his not-so-surprise birthday party.

As Lily explained to him, “It’s easy to keep a present hidden, but it’s very difficult to hide a birthday party, specially when you’re living in a fridge. So you’ll have to *pretend* to be surprised when everybody arrives.”

And that was why it was going to be a not-so-surprise party.

There was a lot to do. All Billy’s friends and relations were coming, and Lily was turning the vegetable tray into a huge dining room where they could sit down together for supper.



And what a supper it would be. Lily had made coconut snow, pineapple milk, Stripy

Norman sandwiches, chocolate chip yogurt, fruit and nut salad and an Indescribably Delicious Birthday Cake.

While Lily was getting this all ready, Billy did helpful things on his Icycle, like riding it up to the very top of the fridge to see if anything needed doing up there, and then racing down again when he found that it didn’t.

At last it was all ready. Lily’s delicious food was laid out on a big round table, which was actually the lid from a peanut butter jar covered with a tablecloth.

All around the table were seats that Billy had made by chopping up a large carrot—one little cube for everyone except himself. He told Lily that he’d run out of carrot at the very last minute and would have to eat his supper sitting on his Icycle.

It was a very good thing they were ready, because just then the birthday guests began to arrive.

They came in two’s and three’s, all dressed in their best and wishing Billy many happy returns as they came through the door.

Stripy Norman was there, still proudly wearing Billy’s spare scarf and with smart new shoes on each of his twenty-four feet.

Billy's favourite Uncle Ernie came, with his long white beard reaching almost down to his sucker boots.

Lily's three cousins, Little Lily, Ted from next door, and Where's Albert arrived next. (In case you're wondering, Where's Albert is called that because he's always getting lost, so people are always having to say, "Where's Albert?" Anyway, today, thank goodness, he didn't get lost.)

Then a whole crowd of Billy's sporting friends arrived, including, much to everyone's surprise, the Mad Jumper.

Lily had invited him because she thought he'd be lonely sitting at home in the fridge factory in Birmingham while the others were having fun. So there he was on his best behaviour, with a present for Billy tucked under his arm.

Finally, the last guest, a snail called Desmond who was a friend of Stripy Norman's, came very slowly through the door and the party began.

The Mad Jumper banged on the table so that the others would stop talking.

"Billy," said the Jumper, "before you open your presents, I'd like to wish you a very happy

birthday from all of us."

Everybody clapped and cheered and whistled and stamped their sucker boots. The Jumper waited for the noise to die down, and then went on.

"Where I come from," he said, "a birthday isn't a birthday without Birthday Bumps. So I suggest we proceed with the Bumps at once."

And before he knew it, Billy found himself in the middle of a large lettuce leaf with his friends holding on to the edges.

"One ... Two ... Three ... UP!" called out the Mad Jumper.

And with a great pull on the edges of the lettuce leaf, Billy's friends sent him sailing up in the air, caught him again as he came down, and bumped his bottom, not too hard, on the floor.

There was a toss and a bump for every year of Billy's age, which was seven, and an extra one just in case, which made eight, and then one for luck.

A little dizzy from his Bumps, Billy climbed out of the lettuce and started opening all his presents.

Old Uncle Ernie gave him a red and white spotted bow tie, for Sunday best, with a pair of very grand red and white spotted braces to keep his trousers up.

A long-lost Aunt sent a beautiful book called FAMOUS POLAR BEARS THROUGH THE AGES, because she knew how much Billy liked bears. The book had pictures of all the best bears in the world, and important information like what they eat for breakfast and how old they are when they learn to swim.

Even Lily's smallest cousin had brought Billy a present—a pair of luminous bootlaces that glowed in the dark so that Billy could see where his boots were at night.

From Stripy Norman, Billy received a genuine caterpillar scarf, in different stripes of green. It looked exactly like Stripy Norman but without the legs.

And the Mad Jumper, who was turning out to be quite a pleasant fellow after all, gave Billy two Secret Springs.

"Put those on the bottom of your boots," he said, "and you'll be able to do giant hops like me."

And so they sat down to supper, Billy hopping up on his springs whenever he could

find an excuse, and jumping clean over the table three times just to fetch the pineapple milk.

Lily finally had to ask him to sit down, because she said it was like having supper with a helicopter, and all his flying around was making her dizzy.

So they ate and they ate until they thought they could eat no more.

And just when they were almost absolutely full to bursting, Lily brought in Billy's birthday cake, which was a layer of chocolate cake covered with a layer of vanilla ice cream covered with hot chocolate sauce.

It was so delicious that they all suddenly found a little extra room that they thought they didn't have and before long there wasn't a crumb left.

Old Uncle Ernie and Lily's three cousins, who weren't used to being up so late or eating so much, had fallen asleep in a bed of lettuce, and even Billy was beginning to feel tired after all the excitement.

It was time to go to bed.

Slowly, feeling very full and very sleepy, the guests left, wishing Billy one last Happy

Birthday as they said goodbye.

Now the fridge was quiet.

"I've had so much fun, Lily," said Billy as he had one last sit on his bicycle, "thank you for my party and everything."

But Lily didn't answer. She had fallen asleep too, curled up on the top of a baby tomato.

And that's where we'll leave them, until the next time.

