

CHAPTER THREE

ONE QUIET AFTERNOON when there wasn't much else to do, Chilly Billy was doing his gardening down in the vegetable tray at the bottom of the fridge.

It was one of his favourite jobs. After a hard morning among the cans and packets and bottles, it was nice to get a little country air among the carrots and cabbages.



He'd just finished putting some fresh, fat asparagus in a neat stack, and sat down next to the lettuce to catch his breath.

All of a sudden, he got that funny feeling you get when you know someone's looking at you but you can't see anybody.

He got up and looked behind the peaches. No. Nobody there.

The carrots were deserted. There was nobody in the asparagus. Or the cabbage. Or the green peppers.

Then, just when Billy thought he'd been imagining things, the lettuce blinked at him.



Yes, a definite blink, coming from a pair of big brown eyes in the middle of the lettuce.

How extraordinary. Chilly Billy had seen hundreds and hundreds of lettuces before, but he'd never seen a lettuce with eyes.

"Good afternoon," said Chilly Billy. "You're a very rare kind of lettuce."

“N-N-N-N-Nonense,” said a shivery voice. “I’m a c-c-c-c-c-caterpillar, and I’m f-f-f-f-freezing.”

Sure enough, out from behind a big lettuce leaf came this remarkable long caterpillar with lovely green stripes and twenty-four feet and big brown eyes. And he was the coldest caterpillar you’ve ever seen.

Shivering and shaking, his caterpillar nose turning blue, and his twenty-four feet all scrunched up against the freezing floor; he didn’t look at all happy. (As you know, caterpillars usually live in the garden, which is much warmer than any fridge.)

Seeing how cold the caterpillar looked, Chilly Billy had a kind and thoughtful idea.

“Here—wrap this lettuce leaf round you while I nip upstairs and fetch my spare scarf,” he said.

With the help of his trusty sucker boots, Billy ran straight up the side wall, and all the way to his little corner cupboard next to the ice cubes, got out his longest and warmest scarf, and was back down again before you could say frozen orange juice.

“Aaaah, that’s better,” said the caterpillar as he wrapped himself up in the scarf. “Now I can

talk without my teeth chattering. Tell me something—Where am I?

“Before I tell you,” said Chilly Billy, “why don’t we go and sit on that peach? It’s got a nice furry skin, and it’s about the warmest place there is.”

So they sat on the peach, and the caterpillar listened carefully while Billy explained all about fridges and then, when he’d finished explaining, he said to the caterpillar, “How did you get in here? I’ve never seen you before, and I’m sure you haven’t been hiding because I would have heard you shivering.”

So the caterpillar, who was by now quite warm with Chilly Billy’s scarf round him, began to tell what had happened.

It had all started the day before, just after Stripy Norman (for that’s what the caterpillar was called) had eaten his usual light lunch: a double nibble of lettuce, with a daisy petal for pudding, and a small glass of dandelion juice.

As he usually did after lunch, Stripy Norman looked around for somewhere to take his afternoon nap.

It was hot out there in the garden, and when he saw a nice big cool green lettuce, he wriggled right into the very inside part of it,

curled up, pulled a leaf over his head to shade himself from the sun, and went fast asleep.

Now this is not something that's known by many people, but when caterpillars go to sleep, it's very difficult to wake them up

Specially if they've just had lunch. They sleep, and they sleep, and nothing wakes them until they're ready to wake.

That's what happened. Someone came out to the garden, picked the lettuce, brought it back into the house and put it in the fridge to keep fresh. And not once during all that time did Stripy Norman even stir in his sleep.

He stayed all curled up with a lettuce leaf over his head, dreaming caterpillar dreams until it was time to wake up. And then he woke up, and there he was in the vegetable tray of the fridge.



“Well, bless my boots,” said Chilly Billy after he'd heard the story. “What are we going to do with you now? You're welcome to my spare scarf, and I can lend you a hat, but I don't think you'd be very happy living here. It's too cold for caterpillars.

Stripy Norman thought about it. And the more he thought, the sadder he looked. And it wasn't long before he was crying long, thin caterpillar tears.

This made Chilly Billy sad, because he is a very kind-hearted little man despite those big boots.

“Don’t worry,” he said, putting his arm round Stripy Norman’s shoulder, “I’ll think of a way to get you back into the garden.”

Chilly Billy thought as hard as he could. When he thinks really hard, he likes to walk up onto the ceiling and hang there by the suckers on his boots. He says that thinking upside down, you often think of things you’d never think of standing right way up.

Back and forth, back and forth he paced across the ceiling. All of a sudden, with a slurp from his sucker pads, he jumped down from the ceiling with a big smile on his face.

“I’ve got it!” he said.

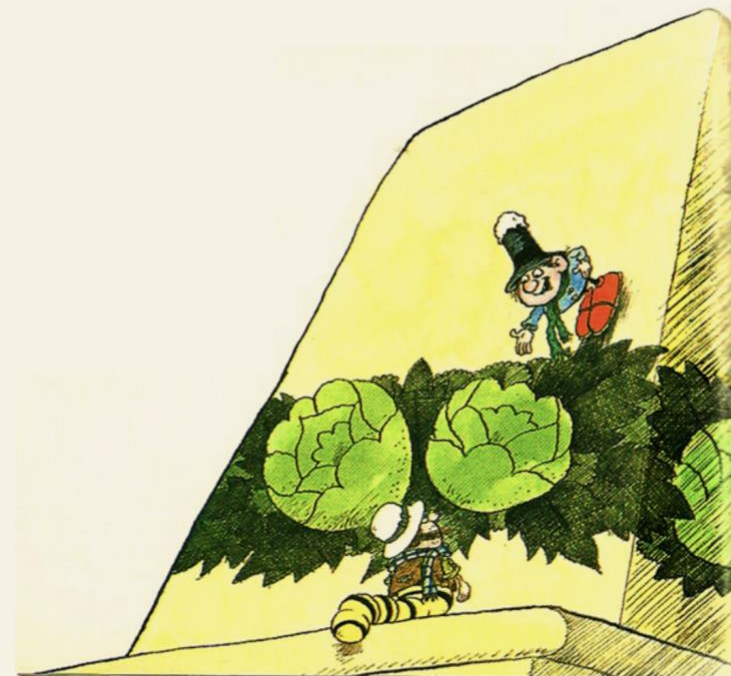
Stripy Norman cheered up at once, and stopped sniffing.

“What we’ll do,” said Chilly Billy, “is smuggle you out at dinnertime. Follow me.”

Chilly Billy led the way out of the vegetable tray, and up into the main part of the fridge, where all the dishes and bottles and packets were.

“There’s your disguise,” said Chilly Billy.

He pointed to an old china butter dish with a pattern of leaves round the edge.



“You hide in the leaves of the pattern, and nobody will ever spot you. See? The green on the dish is exactly the same green as your stripes.”

Chilly Billy was quite right.

Stripy Norman climbed up onto the butter dish, and vanished. He matched the colour of the pattern so well, it was impossible to see him.

“Once you reach the dining room” said Chilly Billy, “the rest is easy. Down the table leg, across the floor, sharp left and you’re back in the garden again.”

“Billy,” said Stripy Norman, “you’re a genius.”

“Yes,” said Chilly Billy, “I think you’re right. Quick! I can hear someone coming now. It must be dinnertime already.”

And it all worked out exactly as Chilly Billy said it would. Except that Stripy Norman went off in such a rush that he forgot to give Billy back his spare scarf.

So if you should ever see a caterpillar in your garden wearing a long woolly scarf, be specially nice to him. He’s a friend of Chilly Billy’s.

