

26 Little Billy

Billy is not very tall. In fact, he's small even for his age. There are one or two boys in his class the same height and Timothy Thomas is actually smaller. You may be able to guess what nicknames he gets called. But the majority of boys in Billy's class are taller. Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper, for example, are all at least a head taller than Billy. They have much longer legs than Billy, so when they walk he feels like he has to run to keep up with them. And because they're taller, of course, whenever they jump for a header at football Billy doesn't stand a chance.

Not being very tall is sometimes a problem for Billy. If Mr. Yellit does a demonstration in a science lesson, for example, it is always the tall people who crowd around and he is left at the back trying to peer around people to see what's going on. In class Billy hardly ever gets noticed when he puts his hand up but all the bigger boys and girls get to ask and answer all the questions. It's always been the same. Even on his first day at school the teacher didn't notice when he put his hand up to ask to go to the toilet and poor Billy had to walk home in very squelchy shoes.

In shops or at the burger stall, Billy always has to wait for ages and ages before he gets served. It seems that everyone pushes in in front of him and the shop assistants just don't notice poor little Billy at the back of the crowd.

Sometimes being small seems to have its advantages. But, then again, these are usually quickly outweighed by the disadvantages. Like the time that Billy and Mickey were at the park on the climbing frame. Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper were playing football. Billy watched as Darren tried to do a shot from twenty-five yards. But he miss-hit the ball and it went flying over the garden fence of one of the houses that back onto the park. Mickey and Billy chuckled to each other and watched as the other boys tried to peer over the fence. But the fence was far too high, even for them.

Billy and Mickey continued to chuckle as Malcolm tried to squeeze through a small hole where a panel was broken in the bottom of the fence. But, of course, he was far too big to even get his head through.

"I've got to go for my tea," said Mickey, and he headed off across the park leaving Billy still watching the other boys in the distance.

Suddenly there was a great shout that echoed across the park.

"Eh! Billy, come over 'ere!"

Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper were all looking straight at Billy.

Billy hesitated, but they shouted all the louder, "Billy! Billy, come over here! We need your help! You're the only one who can help us! Come on Billy Boy!"

Billy was curious, so he headed off across the park toward them.

"Here Billy," said Richard, "just squeeze through this hole and get our ball for us will you."

With that they grabbed Billy and pushed him through the hole in the fence. He went flying into the garden and landed in the middle of a very muddy vegetable patch. He picked up the ball.

"Chuck it over!" the others shouted, so he did, but then, as he bent down to get back through the hole, the other boys just ran off across the park, kicking the ball and laughing to themselves.

"Ungrateful little" he said under his breath. But then something terrible happened. He tried to push back through the hole but found that he couldn't. He tried and tried, but it was no good. It had been alright with the others pushing him through but now he couldn't do it on his own.

"Help!" he called, "Help!" But the other boys were too busy laughing and joking among themselves to notice.

"Help! Help!" he shouted as loudly as he could. But they took no notice and disappeared off through the park gates and down the road.

Billy was just wondering what he was going to do when all of a sudden there was a great shout from behind him.

"What are you doing in my garden you little blighter!"

Billy turned round to see a very gruff looking man behind him.

"Err, err," began Billy. But instead of speaking, he found himself running, running as fast as he could through the man's garden, around the outside of the house and out into the road. He ran and ran and ran until he couldn't run another yard. Then he flopped exhausted on a bench and vowed he would get his own back some day.

The next Monday at school the boys didn't even look in Billy's direction, let alone talk to him, or thank him, or even remember that he had got their ball back for them. Poor Billy, he felt as if he was about six inches tall compared to ten-foot giants. He was not happy, not happy at all.

A few weeks later there was great excitement in Driptown. It was announced that Mick Boots, the Driptown United striker, had been chosen to play for England in their vital world cup qualifier against Germany.

"Mick'll show 'em," said Billy to Mickey as they walked to school together. "I think he'll score at least 3 goals."

The next Wednesday evening everyone in Driptown was at home watching the game on TV. There was no one out on the streets. Slowly the noise of cheering got louder and louder from each house as Mick hammered home his first goal, then his second, and then incredibly his third, until England had thrashed Germany 4 - 1.

At school the next day no one was talking about anything else. In assembly Mrs Downer made a special announcement: "Children, the mayor phoned me last night and asked me to tell you that on Saturday morning there will be a special parade through Driptown when our hero, Mr. Mick Boots, returns home. It will start at half past ten, and the Mayor is sure that you will all want to be there."

The Mayor was right. By half past nine everyone in Driptown was out lining the streets and waiting to cheer Mick on the parade.

Billy found himself a good spot on a corner. But just before half past ten a group of boys came pushing through the crowd. It was Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper. They all pushed in right in front of him and poor Billy couldn't see a thing. In fact, the boys were nearly crushing Billy against the wall behind him. Before he could say anything a great cheer went up from along the road. The Driptown Town Band struck up, playing 'When the saints go marching in,' and the parade started.

Mick was standing on the top of the Council's open top bus and waving frantically to everyone. As the bus rounded the corner where Billy was straining to try and see, there was suddenly a great surge in the crowd. Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper were all getting so excited and jumping up and down so much that Billy was beginning to be completely squashed against the wall behind him.

Billy tried to shout, but he couldn't. He started to wave his arms in the air, but no one noticed. He had gone a very bright red as he struggled to breathe and he was about to slip on the floor where he knew he would get trodden on. With one last effort, he managed to shout, "HELP!!" just as the bus drew level with Billy and the others.

Without warning there was a great shout from the bus, "STOP!!"

Suddenly the band stopped playing and the crowd fell silent. It was Mick. As quick as a flash, he went leaping down the stairs on the Bus and out onto the road. He pushed through the crowd until he reached Billy.

"Are you alright? Are you alright?" asked Mick in quite a fluster. "I could see from up there that you were getting squashed by the crowd!" He looked at the other boys, who just stared at the floor.

Then Mick said: "I think you'd better come with me." He led Billy through the crowd, on to the bus, and up the stairs, where Billy sat beside Mick for the whole of the parade. Billy could hardly believe it as he looked across at his hero.

"Come on Billy, wave!" said Mick, and so Billy did.

That evening the local paper had a big double spread picture of the parade. There were the crowds and the band and the bus. And right in the middle of the photo Mick and Billy sitting together waving and smiling to everyone. And, if you looked very very carefully, right down in the corner you could just see Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper looking very glum and very guilty and very small!

Mick gave Billy a special signed photo on which he wrote:
"To my friend Billy, England 4, Germany 1, Signed, Mick Boots."
Billy took it into school to show in class. Everyone, including Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper, sat in silence and stared at little Billy.

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