

30 A shot in the dark

One Friday afternoon in the winter, Billy came home from school. Billy doesn't like the winter, mainly because it gets dark so early. Almost before he is home from school at a quarter past four it seems like it is the middle of the night. In the winter there is no rushing off to the park to play football after school, or climbing the trees in his friend Mickey's garden, or dashing off with his grandpa for a bit of bird watching. No, in the winter after school there isn't much else to do but to stay home.

On Friday's you may remember Billy has to spend some time at home on his own. Mum is always out, and his big sister, Amy, goes to her judo class. So Billy is left at home on his own till nearly 5.30pm. As usual, on this particular Friday, Billy dropped his school bag in the hall, threw off his shoes and jumped onto the sofa with the TV remote control in his hand. He flicked through the channels and was just getting into one of his favourite programmes when something very unexpected happened. All of a sudden everything stopped. One second the room was full of light and the TV was blaring away, and the next there was nothing. Everything was completely silent and completely dark as well.

Billy pressed the buttons on the remote control almost as if he expected them to make the lights come back on again. But of course nothing happened. He swallowed very hard. He didn't like the dark. In fact, he was really quite scared of the dark and now, now it was completely dark and he was all on his own.

Billy slid off the sofa and stood up. He couldn't see a thing. He headed off in what he thought was the direction of the window so he could look out and see if all the street lamps had gone off as well. But instead of finding the window like he thought, his knee crashed into the fireplace and his nose smashed into the mirror that hung above it.

"Ouch, ouch, ouch!" he groaned, as he took a step back and knocked over one of Mum's little tables. There was a great crash, as a plant and its china pot, fell to the ground. Then there was a horrible sort of crunching noise as he managed to stand in the soil that had spilled on the carpet.

"Oh no," he said stepping back and knocking his elbow against a pile of DVDs, sending them crashing to the floor and, on the way, knocking the bowl of potpourri down the back of the television!

"I must stand still!" he said to himself, and he stood where he was in the dark, trying to work out which way he was facing.

Billy reached out carefully with one hand to see what he could feel. As he moved his hand round it came into contact with something round and cold. In a second, there was a terrible splashing and sloshing sound as the gold fish bowl teetered and rocked and eventually rolled off of the sideboard and onto the floor.

"Bubble and Squeak!" he shouted in a panicky voice.

Those are the names of the two gold fish, which live in the bowl, by the way. His sister's is Bubble and Billy's is Squeak. But now they were no longer in the bowl at all.

Billy started to panic, especially when he imagined what his sister would do to him when she got home from her judo class! He knelt down on the floor in a squelchy puddle of water and slowly and gently began to feel around. The bowl still had a little water in it and in no time at all he found one of the fish. He popped it back in the bowl. He felt all over the wet patch but he couldn't find the other fish anywhere. It seemed as if he, or she, had just disappeared. He felt all over the carpet but it was like the fish had grown legs and walked off.

He stopped, and was about to give up when he heard a little, a very little, splashing sound. He reached out to where it had come from and there was the other fish splashing its tail in the puddle of water. He quickly popped it into the bowl and hoped for the best.

But now he was soaking wet. He needed to get changed. He carefully felt his way around the room, managing to knock over 5 ornaments and 2 more plants as he went. Then he knocked Mum's knitting off of the chair and the needles fell out; wool began to unravel all over the place!

Eventually, Billy found himself in the hallway. On his hands and knees, he slowly crawled up the stairs. His clothes were wet and cold and sticking to him. It was very uncomfortable, so he felt his way into his bedroom and quickly took off his jumper, shirt and trousers.

Billy was getting much better at feeling his way around now. He found his wardrobe and opened the doors. He felt inside but, to his horror, there was hardly anything in there.

"Oh drat," he said to himself. "All my clothes must be in the washing."

Now all the clean washing in Billy's house is kept in a large pile in the spare bedroom until Mum does the ironing and put's the clothes back in Billy and Amy's rooms. So Billy set off again in the pitch dark. He felt his way out of his room, along the landing, and into the spare bedroom. He rummaged through the pile of clean washing and found a shirt and a pair of trousers. He quickly pulled them on, although it was difficult to do up his shirt buttons in the dark. He was just beginning to wonder what he was going to do about the mess downstairs when there was a knock on the door and a shout from outside. "Billy! It's Mum. Let me in. I can't find my key."

"Phew!" thought Billy, "at last,"

He carefully felt his way down the stairs and along the hall and reached out to open the door. He turned the latch. The door swung open, but right at that moment there was a sudden flashing of lights all around as the electricity came back on.

Mum's mouth fell open as she looked at Billy, and Billy nearly fainted when he looked down at himself. He was wearing his sister's new pair of bright yellow trousers and his Mum's new pink shirt! Before Mum could say anything, he turned round and raced up the stairs as quickly as he could. He dashed into the spare room and scrabbled around until he found his own trousers and tee-shirt. He dashed into his room to get changed. His heart was beating like mad. He knew exactly what was going to happen and, yes it did! There was an ear splitting scream from down stairs. Mum had gone into the living room!

"What have you been doing, Billy?" asked Mum.

"The, the, the, the lights went out," Billy replied. "It was dark. I couldn't see!"

Mum looked around the living room. It looked like a bomb had just gone off. Billy decided that it was a good time to go to his room and do his homework.

Fortunately, I can tell you that Bubble and Squeak were none the worse for their experience.

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