

## 31 Brave Billy

You may have realised by now that Billy is not the bravest boy in the world. Yet sometimes, in his dreams, he becomes a dashing hero. He trips up a bank robber as he is running away down the High Street. Or he dives into raging water to rescue someone who has fallen in. But of course, in the morning when he wakes up, the dreams just melt away like an ice cube on a hot summer day.

"I wish I was brave," he said to himself as he walked to school one day. He crossed the road to avoid going past Mr. Grimmer's house because Mr. Grimmer's dog, Trigger, sometimes jumped up at the fence and barked so loudly that Billy found himself running down the road, even though he didn't want to. "I wish I was as brave as Mick Muscle," he said to himself. "He's the bravest person in the world!"

(For those of you, who don't know yet, Mick Muscle is a champion wrestler. Billy and Grandpa go to see him whenever he comes to Driptown, and Billy is a member of his fan club).

Billy took his usual detour down Long Street, just to make absolutely sure he didn't meet Trevor Trippup or Pete Pushem, the school bullies. So he got to school his usual five minutes late. That day there was a visitor at school who came to talk to Billy's class. He had been an explorer in Egypt and he knew all about pyramids and mummies. Billy was fascinated. After he had talked to them Mr. Yellit said, "Now who wants to ask a question?" Billy was dying to ask a question, but every time he even thought about putting his hand up his heart started to go thump, thump, thump inside him and his arm seemed to go rigid. He was just too scared.

The next day was Saturday and Billy decided to go swimming. He always went as early as possible to avoid the crowds. So at 7 o'clock in the morning he was standing outside the pool waiting for it to open, when suddenly something amazing happened. A man came and stood beside him. At first he took no notice.

"What time does it open?" asked the man.

"Any minute," replied Billy. But then he thought, "Hang on a second, there's something familiar about that voice."

He took a sideways glance at the man and he could hardly believe it. It, it, it was Mick Muscle! Billy's jaw fell open and his eyes became as big as saucers.

"You're, you're ...."

"Shush," whispered Mick, "I don't want anyone to know who I am. I've got a big fight this afternoon against Hacker Harris and I always find that an early morning swim helps me think clearly."

"Hacker Harris!" sneered Billy; "you'll beat him easily. He doesn't stand a chance against you. You've never been beaten anyway!"

The doors opened and Billy and Mick went in. After his swim, Billy went up to the snack bar. He ordered a drink and a bag of chips and sat down. Then, to his surprise, in came Mick as well. He ordered a drink and a bag of chips and he came and sat down opposite Billy.

"Did you have a good swim Billy?" he asked.

"Yes!" squeaked Billy.

Mick was about to say something else, when he sniffed instead.

"Can you..." he started to say, when suddenly the lady who runs the snack bar came running out from behind the counter shouting, "Fire! Fire! Help!"

There was a thick cloud of black smoke billowing up the staircase and the room was quickly filling with smoke. It was getting very hard to breathe.

"We'll have to do something!" said Mick to Billy.

"We?!" squeaked Billy, "But..."

He wanted to say, "But I'm not brave like you Mick!" But he didn't get the chance.

Mick was thinking as fast as he could. He grabbed a coil of wire that was hanging on the wall. There was only one window in the room. But it was above their heads, right in the middle of the ceiling. Mick grabbed a table and stood on it but he wasn't tall enough to reach the window. "Billy quick!" he shouted.

Billy was terrified; his heart was thumping. He felt as if he was glued to the floor. He tried to move but every muscle in his body seemed to have frozen.

"Come on," said Mick, "trust me. I won't let you get hurt!"

Mick held out his massive hand toward Billy and Billy's terrified little face looked up at the great man.

But then Billy caught sight of Mick's eyes and something happened. He didn't really know what it was, but suddenly he found himself jumping onto the table beside Mick.

"Climb on my shoulders and push the window open!" said Mick.

Billy didn't even stop to think how scared he was. In fact, as he felt Mick's big strong hand grab hold of his arm, all of his fear suddenly disappeared in an instant. He climbed up on Mick's shoulders and gave the window a great push. He got it open.

"I'll give you a shove," shouted Mick. And before he had time to say, "Help,"

Billy found himself through the window and standing on the roof. Mick threw him the end of the wire.

"Tie it to something!" he shouted.

Billy looked around and there just a few feet away was the flagpole. It always looked so thin from the ground, but up here it looked thick and strong. He tied the wire tightly to the pole and in no time at all Mick came climbing up the wire, through the window, and onto the roof. Then Billy watched as Mick hauled the snack bar lady up as well. By now the thick black smoke was pouring out through the window.

"We were just in time!" said Mick.

In no time at all there was a great whirring sound and a helicopter was soon hovering overhead. A rope ladder was dangling down. Billy, then the snack bar lady and then Mick, each climbed carefully up and the helicopter whisked them away to the hospital. A doctor checked them over but they were all none the worse for their experience.

The headline in the paper that evening was a bit of a surprise to Billy's friends and his Mum. It said:

## **Brave Billy rescues Mick Muscle in Swimming Pool Fire Drama!**

There was an interview with Mick, and he said that Billy was the bravest boy he had ever known. Billy read it six times!

On Monday, when Billy walked to school, he was about to cross the road outside Mr Grimmer's house when he remembered what Mick had said. "The bravest boy," he said to himself as he walked straight past the house. When Trigger threw himself at the fence, barking and snarling, Billy didn't even flinch. He was about to turn down Long Street when again he remembered what Mick had said. "The bravest boy ever!" he said to himself. So he carried on and walked straight past Trevor Trippup and Pete Pushem, who just stopped and stared as he went by. That day in school Billy asked twenty questions, and everyone said, "Wow! Billy is a different person! He's BRAVE!"

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