

36 The journey

You may remember that Billy is a great fan of Mick Muscle, the champion wrestler. In fact, he is a member of the Mick Muscle Fan Club. He's got a signed photo of Mick and, whenever Mick comes to Driptown, Billy goes with his Grandpa to see him at Driptown Town Hall.

One Saturday afternoon, after Billy had been to see Mick, he was sitting at home reading the programme he had bought. On the back there was an advert for the Mick Muscle Fan Club. At the bottom of the page was a note that caught Billy's eye. It said:

Now open
The Mick Muscle Fan Club Museum
Visit the house where Mick grew up
See his first rattle and his first set of weights
Find out everything that you've ever wanted to know about
Mick and his Muscles!

"Cor..." said Billy, "I've got to go there. I've just GOT to go!" Billy looked up the address. It said, 'The Mick Muscle Museum, Champions Avenue, Liverpuddle.' He phoned up his Grandpa. "Can we go to the Mick Muscle Museum?" he asked, "in Liverpuddle?" To Billy's surprise Grandpa said: "Well, young Billy, I think that's a grand idea. We'll go next Saturday. I'll pick you up at 9 o'clock."

Billy got more and more excited all week. By the time Saturday arrived he was very excited. Mum packed him some sandwiches and at 9 o'clock exactly Grandpa drew up outside in his rather battered old car. "Come on young Billy!" he called. "Get your skates on!" Mum waved goodbye. Billy scrambled into the car and off they set.

Now, Liverpuddle is about fifty miles from Driptown. "We'll take a short cut," said Grandpa. He turned off down a long winding country lane. As they drove along Billy couldn't stop talking about Mick Muscle and all the things he was going to see. He was very excited indeed.

They drove for about five miles. There was nothing around them, no houses or other cars, just open fields with lots of sheep and cows. "This is grand!" said Grandpa. But just at that moment the car began to make a strange sort of noise. The noise got louder and louder and suddenly the car shuddered to a stop.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Grandpa, as he peered into the engine. "It looks serious to me. It's no good. We'll have to walk."

"Walk!" exclaimed Billy, "walk to Liverpudle? But it's forty-five miles from here!"

"No, young Billy," said Grandpa, "We'll walk to the nearest house and get some help."

Billy looked along the road. There was a steep bend, then a very steep hill and on the top of the hill was a house.

"Come on!" he called to Grandpa as he rushed off. "Its not far!"

Half way up the hill Billy's legs were beginning to ache. He wanted to sit down but he was determined to reach the top as quickly as possible. Poor Grandpa struggled behind. But when they reached the house they found a large sign outside saying 'For Sale!' There were no curtains at the windows and the house looked very empty.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Grandpa. "We'll have to keep walking Billy."

Billy was tired and his legs ached. He was about to start to moan when he remembered the Museum and all the interesting things he was going to see. He felt a new burst of energy inside.

"Come on, Grandpa," he called. "There must be another house soon!"

They started walking. Everything was very quiet. Apart from the odd mooing cow and baaing sheep, there was not a sound.

"We could be walking for ever!" thought Billy. "We'll be lost for ever and no one will ever find us!"

They walked on in silence, when suddenly there was a noise from behind.

Grandpa waved his arms as a large and very muddy tractor approached them.

The driver stopped and Grandpa explained what had happened.

"You'll have to ride on the trailer," said the tractor driver.

Billy and Grandpa scrambled onto the trailer. It was very muddy and slippery.

They had to hang on tight to avoid slipping off on the corners. Billy's trousers and shoes got very dirty. He began to wonder whether this journey had been a good idea after all.

The tractor driver dropped them by a little cottage about two miles up the road and then turned off into a field. Grandpa knocked on the cottage door and a very old lady answered.

"We've broken down," said Grandpa. "Could we please use your phone?"

"Sorry, dear," said the old lady, "I haven't got a phone. But my son is about to take his van up the road. I'm sure he'll give you a lift."

"You'll 'ave to go in the back," said the lady's son.

Billy was horrified when the man opened the back of the van and there were about fifty chickens in it. Grandpa and Billy scrambled in and the van bumped off down the road. It was so bumpy that the chickens jumped about all over the place, and all over Billy and his Grandpa. When the van stopped they were not only covered in mud from the trailer, but covered in chicken feathers and worse as well! Billy was beginning to want to go home.

"There's a petrol station and shop just up the road," said the van driver, when he dropped Billy and Grandpa off. He pointed up the road and they started to walk. Billy was not happy.

When they got to the petrol station and shop though there was no one around. All they could find was a sign that said: 'Closed for holidays.'

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Grandpa.

Billy was not happy. "I, I, I..." Billy nearly said, "I want to go home!" but then he suddenly thought of Mick Muscle, and the Museum, and all the things that he would see!

"I don't mind," he said, "We'll get there somehow."

They started walking again. Billy's legs were aching, and his tummy was rumbling. He was very hungry, but then he remembered that he had left his sandwiches in the car. Suddenly, there was another sound from behind them. Grandpa waved his arms and a large horse box drew up beside them. Grandpa explained what had happened.

"I'll take you to the next village," said the driver, "But you'll have to ride in the back."

Billy was relieved that there were no horses in the back. However, the man had only just dropped some horses off and the van was very messy indeed. As they bumped along the road Billy and Grandpa got covered in very smelly horse muck. Billy was more than fed up.

"I want, I want, I want..." He nearly said, "I want to go home!" But then he remembered Mick and the Museum and all the exciting things he was going to see. "I want to go to Liverpudle!" he said.

"And so do I, young Billy," said Grandpa, in his usual reassuring way.

At the village Billy and Grandpa were surprised to see that everyone was dressed up in very posh clothes. They were all heading towards the church. Grandpa and Billy felt very silly. They were covered in mud and chicken feathers and horse muck.

"What's going on?" said Grandpa to a lady.

"Mr. Sparks' daughter is getting married today," said the lady. "Everyone is going to the wedding."

As Billy and Grandpa walked through the village they came to the garage, there was a large sign saying: 'Sparks Garage, Closed all day Saturday.'

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Grandpa.

Billy's heart sank. He was really fed up now.

"I want, I want, I want." He nearly said, "I want to go home!" But then he remembered Mick, and the Museum and all the exciting things he was going to see.

"I want to carry on!" he said defiantly. So Billy and Grandpa carried on walking.

They were soon in the middle of nowhere again, surrounded by fields and sheep and cows. They were covered in mud and chicken feathers and horse muck. And then, on top of all of this, it started to rain! Not just a little bit of rain, but lots of rain. Grandpa and Billy began to run along the road looking for a tree to shelter under. Suddenly, there was a brilliant flash of lightening and a loud clap of thunder. When they eventually stopped under a tree Billy was more than fed up. He had had enough. He was dirty and wet and smelly. His legs ached and his tummy was very empty. And now he was wet through as well. He was just about to say, "I want to go home!" when, suddenly, there was a noise from behind them. Grandpa waved his arms and a very posh car drew up beside them. The driver wound down the window, looked at Billy, and said: "Billy! What are you doing here?"

Suddenly, Billy's eyes opened wide and his jaw nearly hit the floor. The driver of the car was none other, yes none other than the greatest, strongest, most brilliant wrestler there has ever been. It was none other than Mick Muscle himself!

Grandpa could hardly believe it either; he explained what had happened.

Mick said: "I'm off to the Museum myself right now. I'll give you a lift. Then I've got to go back to Driptown, so I'll give you a lift home as well."

Billy could hardly believe it as he climbed into the back of Mick Muscle's own car. When they got to Liverpuddle, Mick gave Billy a personal guided tour of the whole museum. He even showed Billy things that no one else had ever seen.

As they were about to leave, Mick opened a drawer and took out a little medal.

"You're one of my best fans," he said. "Because you saved me when there was that fire at the swimming pool, I'd like you to keep this medal that I won twenty years ago at the Driptown under-tens wrestling competition."

"Wow! Thank you!" said Billy, and he held the medal as if it was the most precious thing in the whole wide world. "Thank you, Mick."

On the way home, as he sat in the back of Mick's car, Billy pinched himself a few times to make sure he wasn't dreaming. When they got home Mum was a bit shocked to see what a mess Billy and Grandpa were in.

"Have you had a good day?" she asked.

"Brilliant!" said Billy, "Brilliant! The best day ever."

Grandpa stayed for tea.

"I'm glad we didn't give up," said Billy.

"So am I," said Grandpa.

They both stared at the medal that Billy had put on the table.

"Just think of what we would have missed," said Grandpa. "Just think of what we would have missed."

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