

4 Billy's mum

Billy's mum often had what Billy thought were very crazy ideas. It was always a bit like this. She would get up early on a Saturday morning and suddenly announce: "Today I, or we, are going to....." whatever, whatever.

The trouble is that these ideas usually involved the whole family. Like the time that Mum decided to take up archery. First of all she took over the garden to practice. Then she had Billy and Amy running round picking up arrows just like they were some of Robin Hood's merry men. Or the time Mum announced that she was going to become a magician and forced Billy and Amy to sit through hour after hour of really bad magic tricks that usually went wrong.

One morning though Billy's mum got up and announced, "I'm going to learn to play the tuba!"

Before Billy or Amy could say a word she was half way to the music shop and then she was struggling home with an enormous tuba case. So suddenly, every day and every evening for months and months the whole house was filled with the most awful din as she practised and practised. Amy spent most of her time at her friend Michelle's and Billy retreated to the garden shed. Even from there he could still hear the dreadful din his Mum was making. It sounded to Billy rather like a bad tempered elephant, or a rhinoceros with a bad case of wind. For months the windows rattled to Mum's rendition of 'When the Saints go marching in' and the neighbours would give Billy rather sympathetic looks, whenever they passed him in the street.

Billy thought of hiding the tuba, but it was much too big. He thought of stealing it and maybe burying it in the garden during the night. He even thought of breaking it! Anything to stop this painful din going on night after night.

"Don't worry," said Amy to Billy one evening as they sat together at the top of the stairs waiting for the din to stop. "It can't go on for ever. It'll be just like all the other things she's tried. She'll soon lose interest in it and everything will get back to normal."

But Mum didn't lose interest. In fact, she got more and more enthusiastic. Straight away after tea each day she rushed through the washing up, headed straight for her tuba case and started her practise. Only on Tuesdays were things quiet for a while when Mum went for her lesson with Mr. Tubini, the owner of the Italian Ice Cream Stall in Driptown High Street. Mr. Tubini also happened to be the principal Tuba player in the Driptown Town Band. But when Mum got home there was double to pay for Billy and Amy and the neighbours as she puffed away at her new tunes till nearly midnight. Often Billy had to go downstairs and plead with his Mum to stop so that he could get some sleep.

But just when he thought things could not get any worse, they did! One afternoon Billy was walking home from school. As he turned the corner into Bridge Street, he heard the most dreadful noise. It sounded like thunder, but there were no black clouds overhead. "Maybe it's an earthquake!" he thought. But the ground wasn't shaking either. As he got nearer his house the noise got louder. As he opened the front door the noise got even louder, it was so deafening that Billy had to put his fingers in his ears to stop it hurting. But when he pushed the living room door open the noise stopped.

He could hardly believe his eyes. Sitting in his living room were eight people, all holding tubas. Three men and five ladies, and sitting in the middle of them with a beaming smile on her face was his Mum.

"Hello Billy," she said with the biggest smile Billy thought he had ever seen. "These are the tuba players from the Driptown Town Band. I've just become a member and we're practicing for a concert at the Town Hall tonight!"

For a second or two Billy's heart gave a little leap of joy as he thought: "Wow! A whole evening with no tuba in the house!" But it didn't last for long as Mum then said something that he didn't want to hear.

"We are leaving at half past six. So do your homework now."

Billy dragged himself up stairs.

"We," he said to himself, "All of us! Including me!"

He sat down on his bed and imagined the scene. Thirty or forty Mums and Dads and Grans and Granddads all with their tubas and trumpets and things, all making a terrible racket together. And the audience, if there was an audience, all laughing hysterically and pointing at him and saying, "That's his Mum making that dreadful noise!"

Billy's Mum and her friends started playing downstairs and everything in Billy's bedroom started to shake. Some of his models fell over, several things fell off his shelves and he was sure that his bed was starting to move across the room. He grabbed his homework and dashed out to the garden shed.

Half past six came. Mum was so excited that she didn't notice that Billy and Amy looked like they had each just eaten a lemon. Amy pretended to have a tummy ache and Billy pretended that his leg hurt. But neither of those excuses worked and they soon found themselves in Mr. Tubini's car, driving towards the town hall.

They went inside. Mum went backstage to get ready. Billy and Amy found their seats and tried to look as if they weren't really there.

"I hope nobody recognises us," he whispered to Amy.

But then, to their horror, in came their neighbours: Mr. and Mrs. Smith from next door, Mr. and Mrs. Green from across the road and Mrs. Brown from round the corner. When they saw Billy and Amy they waved and pointed at them and shouted across the hall, "Hello Billy! Hello Amy! We're really looking forward to seeing your Mum!"

Billy put his jacket over his head, he couldn't take it anymore.

"If only they knew," he kept saying to himself, "If only they knew what she sounds like.

"Everyone will laugh at us. We'll have no friends at all after this!"

By half past seven the hall was packed out, it seemed that every one in Driptown was there. As the band came on the stage Mum waved at Billy and Amy but they looked up at the ceiling and pretended they hadn't noticed. Mr Waverly, the conductor, raised his arm, and Billy stuffed his fingers in his ears. The music started and he waited for everyone to start laughing. But to his surprise they didn't. They didn't laugh at all. In fact, as he looked around, people actually looked as if they were enjoying themselves! Billy slowly took his fingers out of his ears, and he was amazed. It didn't sound awful. It actually sounded good! As he listened, he suddenly found that his little finger was bouncing up and down to the music. Then he started to smile. Then he found that his foot was tapping as well and before he knew it, he was actually enjoying himself.

He watched his Mum puffing and blowing away. Now and again he could hear a really low note that his Mum was playing. Then in one piece, every one else stopped playing and his Mum, yes his Mum, played three notes all on her own. All those people heard his Mum playing all on her own. Billy began to feel a bit strange inside. He'd never really felt like this before. He felt like he wanted to stand up in the middle of the crowd and shout: "That's my Mum, you know!!" But he didn't, of course.

At the end of the concert Billy and Amy rushed down to the front of the stage to see their Mum.

"Did you like it?" Mum asked.

Billy wanted to throw his arms around her and say, "That was brilliant Mum!"

But Billy, being Billy, he just said: "Oh yes Mum, it was alright."

But he stood right next to his Mum all the time and every time someone came up to her and said, "Well played, that was very good!" he felt a sort of tingly feeling in his tummy, and he said to himself:

"That's my Mum, you know! My Mum!"

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