

40 The Jumper

Like all boys and girls and, I suppose, all grown ups for that matter, Billy likes to wear comfortable clothes. He loves his old jeans, even though they have holes in the pockets and patches on the knees. He loves his old orange shirt, even though the collar is frayed and one of the cuffs is starting to come adrift. But most of all Billy loves his old blue jumper. It's like an old friend. It's warm and comfortable and always seems to do just what Billy wants it to do!

But Billy's jumper is a bit worn out. Its got several holes in it and there are a few threads of wool that hang out of it here and there. It also has a few nasty looking stains which, despite Mum's best efforts, just won't come out.

One Saturday in October, Gran had popped round for a cup of tea and, as usual, Billy was wearing his favourite old clothes. Gran looked at Billy's jumper.

"Oh dearie, dearie me," she said, "that jumper is looking a fright Billy. Haven't you got another one you could wear?"

Billy was a bit stunned.

"Err... no Gran," he said. "I haven't."

"Oh dearie, dearie me," said Gran again. "Well, in that case, Billy I think I better get to work and knit you one. You could have it for your Christmas present!"

Billy froze as a sense of panic swept over him. For a moment he couldn't move or speak. He had seen Gran's jumpers. Grandpa usually had to wear one, and they were just too awful to describe. They were usually the worst colours you could imagine and they were such a funny shape that they made Grandpa look like he was going to a fancy dress party dressed as a dish cloth!

"Err, err, oh Gran, err, that's really nice of you," he said. "But you really don't have to go to all that trouble for me you know."

"Oh, that's alright Billy," replied Gran. "It'll be no trouble. In fact I'll enjoy doing it, and I'll really enjoy seeing you wear it afterwards!"

Billy's heart sank. In fact, he thought for a moment that it had almost stopped as he imagined himself having to wear one of Gran's creations with bright yellow, blue and purple stripes. Before he had time to say anything else Mum came into the room.

"Billy has asked me to knit him a new jumper for Christmas," Gran said.

"Oh, that'll be lovely," said Mum. "I'll look forward to seeing you wearing it Billy."

Billy looked at Mum and Gran. "Err," he said.

Of course you know what he wanted to say don't you, "NO!" But Billy, being the polite boy that he always is, said, "Err, thanks Gran, that'll be, err, lovely."

That night Billy had a dreadful nightmare. He dreamed that it was Christmas Day and he opened Gran's present to find that it was worse than he could ever have imagined. Then, suddenly, in his dream he was walking down Bridge Street with Gran and Grandpa and Mum. They were all wearing matching jumpers and all of his friends from school were standing by the roadside pointing and laughing at them. Billy woke up with that feeling you get when you know something disastrous is going to happen but when you also know that there is nothing that you can do about it!

The next time Gran came round she brought her tape measure. She measured Billy's arms and waist. Then she said something that made Billy groan in despair.

"I'll make it on the big side to give you plenty of room to grow Billy. Then it will last you for a good few years!"

Billy imagined the jumper reaching down to his knees and having great long flappy arms.

"This is terrible," he thought, "a real nightmare!"

Gran worked really hard, and a few days before Christmas a large brightly wrapped parcel appeared under the Christmas tree in Billy's house with a label on it saying: "To Billy, Happy Christmas, Love Gran." Billy felt it and, yes, just as he had feared, it was a jumper.

On Christmas Day Billy found it quite hard to enjoy the present opening. All the time he was dreading the moment when he was handed the parcel from Gran. But eventually the moment came and he slowly tore off the paper. He was about to sneak the jumper into the corner with the rest of his presents, when Mum said: "Hold it up then Billy. Let's see the masterpiece."

So Billy held up the jumper and, as he did, all of his worst nightmares suddenly came true. It was the biggest, lumpiest, brightest jumper you have ever, ever seen.

"Oh, that's lovely," said Mum, "lovely. What do you say to Gran, Billy?"

"Err, thank you Gran," he said with all the enthusiasm he could muster.

To his amazement though no one said, "Try it on Billy." They were all too interested in their own presents. Later in the morning, Billy managed to sneak his jumper up stairs and he folded it away in the bottom of one of his drawers. In fact, he managed to avoid wearing the jumper for quite a long time. But one day, the inevitable happened.

It was the middle of April, Gran and Grandpa were at Billy's when Grandpa's friend Ronny came rushing round sounding very excited.

"There's a pair of blue collared tail waggors nesting up at Clearview Point," he spluttered. "I'm off to see them now. Do you want to come Joe?"

Grandpa jumped out of his seat. "You bet I do," he said. "Do you want to come, Billy?"

Billy was a bit bored, so he said: "Yes, alright!" and rushed off upstairs to find his old blue jumper. But despite looking everywhere he couldn't find it. It was just nowhere.

"Where's me jumper?" shouted Billy.

"In the wash," replied Mum, and then she said the one thing that Billy had been dreading for the past 3 months, "You can wear the new one Gran made you for Christmas!"

Billy pulled the jumper out from the bottom of his drawer and slowly eased it over his head. It was enormous, and so bright that Billy felt that he needed to wear his sunglasses as he looked at himself in his mirror.

"Come on, if you're coming Billy!" called Grandpa. So he slowly sauntered downstairs and dived into the back of Ronny's car. He lay on the seat hoping that no one had seen him.

Billy had never seen his Grandpa so excited as they reached the car park at Clearview Point.

"If we climb right up to the top we'll get the best view," said Ronny. So off they set, climbing higher and higher. Grandpa stopped and looked through his binoculars. "Just a bit further," said Ronny. "Then we can look right down into the nest!"

Grandpa scrambled a few paces more but, in his excitement, he didn't look where he was going properly. He stepped on some very loose stones and started to slip. He grabbed hold of Billy to steady himself but, oh no! It was too late! Grandpa tipped over the edge of the cliff and went sliding down on his tummy dragging Billy with him.

"Ahhh!" shouted Billy as they both landed with a great thud on a ledge about thirty feet further down.

Ronny looked over the edge. "Don't move," he shouted, "I'll go and get help!" Billy and Grandpa lay very still and quiet for a few moments.

"Are you alright Grandpa?" asked Billy.

"Oh, oh," groaned Grandpa, "I think I've broken my leg! It's very painful."

Everything was very quiet. There was just the sound of the wind whistling in the trees below. It seemed like they were waiting for hours and hours, and slowly it started to get darker and darker. Billy was just imagining what it would be like to be out on the cliff all night, when there was a distant whirring sound. It was a helicopter.

In the cockpit the pilot was radioing his base. "Rescue One to base, Rescue One to base, do you read me? I'm flying over Clearview Point now but I can't see anything. I'll go round again, then I'll have to give up. It's getting very dark."

The helicopter circled round a few times. The pilot was just about to give up his search and head off for base when Billy managed to struggle to his feet; he waved his arms frantically in the air.

Suddenly, the pilot radioed again. "Rescue One to base! Rescue One to base! I can see something. Yes I can see something. It's, it's, it's someone wearing an incredibly bright jumper! Gosh, it's amazing. I could probably see that from five miles away. It must be them, so I'm going in now."

The helicopter hovered overhead and a man was winched down to Billy and Grandpa. Then one after the other they were winched up and the helicopter took them to Liverpool Hospital.

Billy was none the worse for his experience, apart from a few scratches here and there. Grandpa though had broken his leg and had to have it in plaster for nearly 3 months. Billy drew several pictures on his cast!

The whole incident was of course reported in great detail in the local paper. The headline read:

Dazzling Jumper Saves boy and his Grandpa In Daring Rescue!

The report told all about how Billy's amazing jumper had saved his Grandpa. After this all of Billy's friends wanted to see the famous jumper. So the next day he wore it, and the day after, and the day after that. In fact he has worn it ever since, and his old blue jumper has stayed right down at the bottom of his drawer.

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