

5 Billy learns to juggle

Billy is the sort of boy who, once he has made up his mind to do something, never gives up. He will practice and practice, and try and try, until he manages to get as good as possible at whatever it is that he has decided to do. The trouble is though that people don't always believe Billy when he tells them what he can do.

"I can balance two full glasses of water on my head and walk six times round the garden," he said to his Mum one evening.

"Oh yes Billy, I'm sure you can," said Mum, not even looking up from her magazine, and not believing a word of it.

But Billy could you know, he'd been practicing all day!

"I can draw with my foot," he told his art teacher one-day.

"Oh yes I'm sure you can," said his art teacher, not believing a word of it. "Now get on with your work Billy."

But Billy could draw really well with his foot; he'd been practicing.

The trouble is, you see, that people were used to Billy being, well Billy. Sort of clumsy, and a bit silly, and not really very good at very much at all.

One Saturday Billy got up and said:

"I'm going to learn to juggle!"

"Oh yes Billy, very good," said his Mum, with her head stuck in the paper.

He went to the Library and got out a book called "Learn to Juggle." He came home and found six old tennis balls in the shed, and set to work. It was hard work, but he tried and tried. He started with one ball, and then two. Soon he could juggle with three, and then four, and six months later, after hundreds and hundreds of hours of practice, he could juggle with six balls. Billy was very pleased with himself and he kept practicing every day.

One day at school Miss Roberts, Billy's teacher, announced:

"Next Friday afternoon we've got a special treat for you all. Jacko the Juggler is coming into school to amaze us all with his juggling skills."

"Wow!" said Billy. "Jacko the Juggler! My hero!"

Jacko had lived in Driptown when he was a boy. He had even gone to Driptown Primary school for a while. Billy often daydreamed about what it must have been like to be at school with Jacko.

"He probably juggled with everything," he thought, "pens, pencils, rulers, maths books, plates of semolina!"

There was nothing that Billy wanted more than to be a brilliant juggler, just like Jacko!

Billy was really excited all week. When it came to Friday he was up early and was the first in the playground. There was a poster on the school door with a colourful picture of Jacko on it with his juggling skittles high in the air. He studied it carefully to see if he could learn anything about Jacko's juggling.

After lunch everyone in the school was getting very excited. Even Mrs. Downer, the head teacher, was looking quite excited as she watched for Jacko to arrive. Eventually he did, and he brought his bags of juggling things into the school hall. There were balls and skittles and plates and even teapots, all of which Jacko carefully got ready for his sensational juggling act.

"Would you like a cup of coffee before you start Mr. Jacko?" asked Mrs. Downer.

"Oh yes that'll be very nice," replied Jacko.

Billy was lurking at the hall door and Mrs. Downer caught sight of him.

"Billy!" she called. He was about to run away.... "Billy! Come here and mind Mr. Jacko's juggling things while he has a cup of coffee in the staffroom."

Billy could hardly believe it. He watched Mrs. Downer and Jacko disappear and then he stared at all of Jacko's juggling things. But he knew the first golden rule of juggling: 'Never, never, never touch another juggler's juggling things.' So he just looked.

A few minutes later Billy heard a strange sound from along the corridor. A sort of "OW!" and a bit of a crash, and then again, "OW! OW!" Suddenly Mrs. Downer and Jacko came into the hall. Jacko was holding on to Mrs. Downer, he was holding his right arm and going: "OW! OW!"

"Oh dear, Oh dear," fussed Mrs. Downer. "The children will be so disappointed."

"I'm sorry," said Jacko, "but I can't juggle like this, it hurts too much!"

Jacko had tripped on the steps and fallen on his elbow. It was very painful and bruised. Billy's heart sank when he heard what had happened, but then he remembered something.

"Err, hum, excuse me Miss," he said.

"Oh not now Billy, I'm busy," snapped Mrs. Downer.

"But Miss, I" he said.

"Not now Billy," said Mrs. Downer again. "I need to get Mr. Jacko to hospital to have his arm X-rayed, and he's very upset at letting everyone down like this."

"But Miss," he said, "I can..."

"Billy will you be quiet," snapped Mrs. Downer again.

"But Miss," he persisted, "I can juggle if you like."

"You! Juggle!" Mrs. Downer almost laughed. "Billy you must think I was born yesterday. If you can juggle, then I'm a brain surgeon!"

Mrs. Downer glared at him, and Billy knew it was time to be quiet.

"Now stay here with Mr. Jacko while I go and find my car keys," she spluttered in a very flustered voice, as she strutted out of the hall.

For a second Billy and Jacko looked at one another.

"Can you?" asked Jacko as he looked deep into Billy's eyes. "Can you juggle?"

"Oh, yes," he said.

"Go on then," said Jacko.

"What me," said Billy, "me, touch your juggling things? But..."

"Now I know," said Jacko, "Now I know you really are a juggler. You know the juggler's golden rule. But just this once, because it's an emergency, you can juggle with my things. Go on lad have a go."

Billy carefully picked up Jacko's juggling balls and started to juggle. One ball, two balls, three, four, five, six.

"Higher! Higher!" shouted Jacko.

So Billy threw the balls higher and higher. He was having great fun, when Mrs. Downer came back.

"Billy what are you doing!" she shouted.

But before Billy could answer, Jacko said:

"Oh I thought headmistresses were clever! Can't you see that he's juggling!"

Mrs. Downer just stood and stared with her mouth wide open as she watched Billy throwing the juggling balls right up to the hall ceiling.

Soon the whole school was waiting excitedly in the Hall. Mrs. Downer made an announcement:

"I'm sorry to tell you children that Mr. Jacko has injured his arm, so he can't juggle today. But never fear, the show will go on!"

With that all the lights went out. In the dark Billy started juggling, but no one could see him. Then suddenly a spotlight was switched on pointing straight at him. For a second everyone was so shocked to see Billy juggling that they didn't know what to do. Then Mickey started to clap and cheer, and so did Lisa, and then so did the whole school, including Mrs. Downer.

Billy juggled with balls and skittles and plates and teapots. He and Jacko juggled together, Jacko using his one good arm. At the end Billy was juggling his six balls when Jacko threw a seventh one in, and then an eighth. Everyone cheered and then there was complete silence as Jacko got out a ninth ball. Everyone held their breath, Jacko threw it up into the air, and to everyone's amazement, including his own, Billy was juggling with nine Balls. The whole school went wild. Even Mrs. Downer stood on her chair and cheered.

That afternoon, When Billy got home, his Mum asked, "Did you have a good day Billy?"

"A great day!" he replied. "I juggled!"

"That's nice dear," said Mum as she turned over the page of her magazine. "What would you like for tea?"

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