

1 The dining room carpet

Billy was expecting a letter. Every day he would rush home from school hoping to find that it had arrived. For several days he had come crashing through the door shouting, "Has it come yet, Mum!"

Only to be met with the reply, "No, not yet, Billy."

He waited all week, and on Friday came rushing home as usual.

"Has it come yet Mum!" he shouted as he threw his school bag down in the hall. But there was no reply. Suddenly, he remembered that on Fridays no one was home till 5 o'clock. And then he saw it, lying on the dining table, a large brown envelope addressed to: Billy, 16 Bridge Street, Driptown.

"Yes, Yes, Yes!" he shouted, as he tore open the envelope.

It was just what he had been waiting for, his Mick Muscle fan club pack.

(For those of you who don't know, Mick Muscle is the champion wrestler who Billy had seen with his Grandpa at Driptown Town Hall a few weeks before)

Billy flicked through the pack. There was a signed photo of Mick, showing all his muscles. There were all the details about how tall and heavy Mick was and how many fights he had won. There was also Billy's very own Mick Muscle Fan club membership card with his name printed on it, and a dotted line that said, 'Sign here.'

"This is very important," he thought, "So I'll have to use Mum's best fountain pen."

He got the pen out of the drawer in the living room and sat down at the table to write. But he wrote one letter and then nothing. The pen would not write another thing.

"Oh drat!" he said; "It's run out!"

Billy went back to the drawer and found the bottle of Ink that his Mum always kept there. He read the label: "Permanent Black Ink - does not wash out."

He sat at the table and carefully took off the top. He filled up the pen, and finished signing his name. Then he waved the membership card in the air to dry the ink. He was getting quite excited now, so he jumped up and down a few times as well. Then he gave the card one extra big wave, just to make sure the ink was dry. But in his excitement he had forgotten to put the top back on the ink bottle. The card hit it, and Billy watched in horror as the bottle slid off the table and landed with a very messy splat, upside down in the centre of the dining room carpet.

For a few moments he froze. This was just too terrible to be true. Surely he would wake up in a minute and it would all be just a dream. He closed his eyes and opened them again, but the ink was still there. Suddenly he sprang into action. He tore into the kitchen and came rushing back with a sponge and a bowl of soapy water. He set to work scrubbing the carpet, but the more he scrubbed the bigger the ink stain seemed to get. Eventually it was about twelve inches across, and very black indeed.

Billy could feel a strange sort of gurgling feeling in his tummy. He wanted to run. He wanted to run away as far as he could and never come back. All he could hear was his Mum in his head saying over and over again, "Use a pencil Billy, not my best pen. You'll only make a mess!" And oh boy what a mess!!

"Mum's going to go mad!" he thought. "She's going to ground me for ever!"

He just didn't know what to do. So he did what he usually did at times like this. He shot out of the back door and ran down the garden where he dived into the garden shed and curled up in his favourite corner.

Billy's Mum had been out shopping with Gran, and Gran had come back for tea. They dropped their bags in the kitchen.

"Hello Billy!" shouted Mum, "Gran's here." But there was no reply. "Hello Billy!" shouted Mum again, but there was still no reply. "I wonder where he is," said Mum as she walked into the dining room. Suddenly she stopped. She stared at the ink stain. She blinked a few times, just to see if it was really there.

"Billy! Billy! What have you done. Come here at once!" she shouted.

Gran came in to the dining room to see what all the fuss was about.

"That's a nasty stain dear," she said. "How did it get there?"

"Don't ask," said Mum, "I'll give him a really good telling off when I find him! Billy! Billy! Come here!"

"Er.... I'll pour out the tea," said Gran, who always knows how to cope in a crisis. Billy's Mum slumped in an armchair and stared at the stain. But the more she looked the blacker it seemed to get.

When Gran came in with the tea, all Billy's Mum could say was:

"Ruined, its all ruined, just wait till I find him!"

"I don't know dear," said Gran, "Maybe its not that bad, I mean, its only a carpet."

"Only a carpet!!" shouted Mum, "Only a carpet!! I'll... I'll....I'll..... !"

"Do you remember the new sofa we bought when you were a little girl?" asked Gran.

"Oh no, don't remind me now," said Mum. "Of course I remember."

"Well then," said Gran, "You'll remember how angry I was when you cut out that dress pattern on it the day after we got it, and how you managed to cut great chunks out of the cushion covers."

"Of course I remember," said Mum, "I'm hardly likely to forget something as stupid as that, am I?"

"Well," said Gran, "How did you feel when I shouted at you afterwards?"

"Terrible," replied Mum. "After all, I didn't do it on purpose. I just wasn't thinking. All I wanted to do was to make a dress."

"Exactly," said Gran, "And I have a feeling that all young Billy was trying to do was his very best signature on his Mick Muscle Fan Club membership card."

"Well I suppose you're right," said Mum, "But what about my carpet?"

"Do you remember what we did with the Cushion covers you ruined?" asked Gran. "We used the material to decorate the dress, and then got the cushions re-covered. It worked out alright in the end."

Mum didn't say a word. She got up and walked down the garden and went into the shed.

"Hello Billy," she said, "I see you've had a bit of an accident!"

The next day Billy and his Mum went to town and bought a very colourful round rug. Billy put a bit of his pocket money towards it. When they came home they placed it over the ink stain.

"That's lovely," said Mum. "It's just what this room needed to brighten it up a bit."

A few weeks later Billy's big sister Amy managed to tear his signed photo of Mick Muscle. Billy was furious.

"I'll... I'll.... I'll...." he said as he clenched his fist and went very red in the face. Then something caught his eye. It was the colourful round rug in the middle of the dining room. He paused, "ErrI'll.... fetch the Sellotape and help you mend it." said Billy.

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