

BILLY

KNOWS A SECRET

Billy Growing Up - Secrets

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James Minter

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Billy Knows A Secret

Billy Growing Up series:
Secrets

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www.billygrowingup.com

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DEDICATED To those who think they have secrets; in
reality, *they* have you!

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1 - Max's Birthday Surprise

On Saturday, Billy went to his best friend's house to play. He and Ant worked in the garden, building a maze for Cinders, Ant and Max's rabbit. At school, Billy and Ant had been learning about how you can teach a mouse to run through a maze and thought it would be fun to see if they could train the rabbit in the same way. The idea was to see if Cinders would find her way to the end of the maze using food as bait.

Billy and Ant had the task of making a challenging maze using anything they could find. Max, Ant's sister, had the

job of chopping up a carrot to lay it as a trail in the labyrinth of corridors, including a large enticing carrot chunk placed at the far end of the maze. Once the rabbit was set free, Max also needed to make sure Cinders didn't run away, and if she did, to fetch her back.

All three children soon realised that rabbits aren't good when it comes to learning. Instead of following the path, Cinders just hopped on top of the nearest brick, paint tin, or log to sniff the air before taking a shortcut to the carrot reward. Holding her prize between her teeth Cinders would run off to find a hiding place at the far side of the garden to eat it in safety.

After several goes, Billy and Ant went looking for extra-high obstacles to stop Cinders from running away while Max set off, yet again, to retrieve her.

Moving quietly around the garden, looking under all the bushes, Max spotted Cinders hidden amongst the thick cover of the garden hedge. The only way for her to reach the rabbit was to lay on her stomach like a soldier and drag herself along, using her elbows and knees. She did, until all that showed were the ends of her legs and feet. For anyone standing nearby, it looked like the hedge had eaten her leaving only her legs.

As the boys wandered about in search of more maze building materials, Billy noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye. It was Ant's mum stood at the back door, waving her arms and generally behaving oddly.

"What's wrong with your mum?" Billy asked Ant. "See." He pointed at her, and both boys stared. She appeared to

be looking for someone or something. Ant's mum was bent forward with her head pushed out like a tortoise. Moving from side-to-side, every now and then, she made a 'come hither' gesture.

Once she saw the boys staring, she waved frantically with one hand while putting a finger to her pursed lips with the other.

"Do you want me, Mum?" Ant called out.

"Shush," she hissed back. "Yes, both of you," she mouthed, as she scanned up and down the garden one more time.

Unsure of why they did it, but it seemed like the right thing to do, Ant and Billy looked about them before crouching and scurrying over to where Ant's mum stood.

"What is it?" Ant whispered.

"Where's Max?" his mum whispered back. "I don't want her to know." As she spoke, Ant's mum retreated into the kitchen, pulling the boys with her. She closed the back door behind them.

"What are you doing, Mum?" Ant looked first to her, and then to Billy. He shrugged.

"It's Max; she mustn't find out." Her voice came out as little more than a whisper.

"Find out what?"

"Her birthday ..."

Ant pulled back and screwed up his face. "Too late; she'll be nine in a couple of weeks, and she knows all about birthdays, Mum."

"No, Ant, of course she knows it's her birthday soon, but

what she doesn't know is what present she's getting."

To make sure that Max wasn't coming, her mum stood on tip-toe and took another look down the garden.

Ant reassured her. "Don't worry about her, Mum, Cinders is right under the hedge and won't come out until she's finished eating her carrot,"

"Good, because I need your help." She looked directly at Ant. "And yours, Billy."

"Our help?" the boys said together.

"Do you remember a few months back when Max painted her bike?"

"Mum, how could we forget. And the shed, and her head, and most of the bathroom." Ant laughed.

"Well, she ruined her bike, so Dad and I thought we'd get her a new one for her birthday."

"Cor, does that mean if I paint my old games controller, you'll buy me a new one?" Ant beamed up at his mum.

"If you paint your controller, you'll have no controller, no pocket money, and be grounded for a month." His mum returned a stern glare. "We're not rewarding bad behaviour; Max is getting a new bike because she's grown out of her old one. You look, the seat's already adjusted as high as it will go."

Ant's mum checked out the window again to see where Max had gotten to. She leant in and lowered her voice; the boys copied her. "I think we've all learned that she doesn't want a girly bike, but what we don't know is what she wants her new bike to look like. That's for you two to find out, but without letting on. Her birthday bike must be a

surprise. This is our secret, so you've got to promise me you won't tell her." Ant's mum creased her eyes and looked into each boy's face in turn, "Promise."

The boys nodded repeatedly.

"I want to hear you say it ..."

"I promise, Mum," came from Ant

"And you, Billy."

"I promise, Mrs Turner." Billy's tummy fluttered, and his cheeks turned pink; he wasn't sure why.

"If she finds out ..." Ant's mum wagged her finger and looked serious. "There'll be consequences."

"Ant ... Billy," Max shouted at the top of her voice while she ran up the garden, clasping Cinders. "Where are you?"

"Quick, boys!" Ant's mum opened the back door and, rather forcefully, helped them out. "Now, remember your promise," she warned.

"We're here." Ant ran toward his sister. "Who's a naughty rabbit?" He reached out to stroke Cinders laying in Max's arms.

"No, she's not. That's a stupid game. I won't let you do your maze thing anymore." Max opened the rabbit hutch door and lifted Cinders in. "And you'd better clear all that stuff away." She pointed to the collection of bricks, tins, wood, and other items. "Or else Dad'll get angry."

"Okay, bossy-boots." Ant wandered over to the maze. "Come on, Billy; you heard what she said." Ant looked around to see if Max was nearby. He put his hand to his mouth just to make sure she couldn't hear. "How will we

find out which bike she wants without letting on?"

"What about taking her to the shopping centre, you know, Boards and Bikes? I'll pretend I'm looking for a new skateboard, and you can take Max to look at bikes. What do you reckon?" Billy smiled at his idea.

"Boards and Bikes? No way. Max won't go anywhere near there after having to apologise for stealing those stickers. She thinks the owner will be nasty to her." Ant's brow furrowed as he thought some more. "I know, what about getting a copy of their catalogue instead. Haven't you got one?"

"Actually, their latest one came yesterday." Billy dropped the two bricks he held and headed toward his bike. "I'll zoom home and get it now, and we can pretend to go through it. Max is always miss-nosey-pants, and she'll want to join in. I'll be real quick," he called back over his shoulder.

Both boys sat on Ant's bedroom floor, huddled around the Boards and Bikes catalogue. They flicked through the pages, and every once in a while, they'd make exaggerated whoops or ahs or look at that, it's awesome type noises. They spoke loudly, with the bedroom door open, knowing it wouldn't take long for Max to come to stick her nose in.

Sure enough she arrived. "Let me see." Max squatted beside them and grabbed for the catalogue.

"Get off, Max; this is boys" stuff. Anyway, you don't like skateboarding." Ant snatched it back.

"I might do. I saw girls doing it when we watched Billy in

that competition." She pulled the magazine back toward her and turned over a page. "See there." She pointed, "I haven't got a skateboard, but I've got a bike." She bent forward for a closer look.

"I know," Billy said. "Let's pretend we've got a million pounds and can buy anything we like." His eyes sparkled at the idea. "What would you buy, Max?" Billy gave Ant a sneaky tap on his shoulder behind Max's back. Ant gave him a secret thumbs-up.

Max picked up a pencil from the floor. "I'll put an "M" next to all the things I want." She studied each page and wrote several Ms.

"It's your go, Ant." She pushed the catalogue toward him. "You write an "A" next to stuff you want."

Ant worked his way through the magazine page by page and noticed that Max had put Ms against two different bikes. "Sis, you can't have two bikes."

"Yes, I can. With a million pounds, I can have as many bikes as I like."

"I suppose so, but which is your favourite?" Ant gave her back the catalogue.

She drew a big circle around a Raleigh Mountain Bike.

"That's my bestest one," Max said.

"Nice," Both boys agreed, nodding their approval.

"It's my go now," Billy said. He picked up the catalogue and checked his watch. "Actually, I told Mum I wouldn't be late. I'd better get going."

Ant gave Billy a quizzical look.

"I'll show your Mum on my way out," Billy mouthed to

Ant.

He reacted with a wink. "See ya, mate."

Max saw nothing.



2 - Car Cleaning Goes Wrong

Days of heavy rain had turned many of the roads in the town where Billy lived into rivers. Outside his house proved no different. He watched from his bedroom window as the water brought endless dirt, stones, sticks, litter, and mud rushing past, around and under his dad's new estate car.

The car no longer looked new; the shine had gone. No gleaming paintwork, but instead, splashes, streaks, and

splatters of dirty brown mud decorated the outside. It got everywhere, on the wheels, in sweeping arcs over the doors, dappling the windows, and even smudged across the roof. Inside, the car looked no better; it smelt of damp dog, and appeared to be more like a council dustcart. It needed a good clean.

Where Billy's dad had climbed in and out, his wellingtons had trailed mud that now clung to the carpets. In the car's boot, the floor looked even worse. It seemed as if a pack of wolves had stormed through, but in fact, it all came from the dirty footprints left by Jacko. In and around the seats lay old plastic drinking cups, wrappers, newspapers, empty water bottles, tickets from car parks, and flyers—adverts—offering pizza and other takeaways, which Billy's dad had recovered from under the windscreen wipers.

The rain still pelted down. The noise of water pounding on the windows made it difficult to concentrate on reading or doing school homework. Billy even found playing with his new computer games controller—the one he'd bought with money saved toward a mega skateboard—no fun by himself. All he could do was watch the weather. *I'm bored; I wish it would rain at night*, he thought. *When I'm asleep*.

In search of something to do, Billy wandered into the room where his grandad lived temporarily while he got better after his knee operation.

"Grandad, I'm bored; all it does is rain." Billy stood and looked over his grandad's shoulder. He sat doing a Sudoku in the newspaper. "Can I have a go, please, Grandad?"

"What's that, Billy? ... Bored? How can you feel bored? When I was your age, we didn't even have TV or

computers, and I never got bored.”

“Yeah, but you had dinosaurs to play with ...” Billy pointed at the newspaper, “There, it’s a nine. In that square there.” He put his finger on it.

Grandad studied the Sudoku. “You’re right, Billy lad; well done. Do you want to finish off this puzzle?” Grandad pushed the newspaper toward Billy.

“Not really, I’d rather go outside and play with Ant.” Billy left his grandad. He mooched about the house, ending up back in his bedroom, listening to the sound of rain beating off the window. There was nothing for it; he needed to make a wish.

He scrunched up his eyes really tight, so tight that if anyone had looked at him, his eyes had vanished. “I wish the rain would stop. I want to go out to play.” He chanted the words several times while still keeping his eyes tight shut. Billy hoped that holding them closed for a long time would give his wish more chance of working. He waited and listened.

The noise lessened; he listened harder in case he’d imagined it. The urge to open his eyes grew stronger. *What if it is stopping?* He waited and listened some more. *Surely, a peek won’t stop the magic.* He had talked himself into it, “Three ... two ... one.” He popped his eyes open wide and gawped out of the window.

The sky had changed. It no longer looked like a solid dark-grey blanket sitting on the roofs of the houses opposite, but had breaks—little streaks of white—pushing their way through. The dancing drops of water bouncing in the puddles had gone. The lashing rain had now become

only a keen wind determined to chase the wetness away. As it did, it revealed patches of blue sky. From somewhere behind Billy's house came a shaft of bright golden light. The late afternoon sun bounced off the windows of the houses across the road and reflected back into his bedroom.

"My wish has come true!" Billy grew so excited that he said the words out loud. Then he jumped up and down several times and encouraged Jacko, his dog, to join in. Jacko added several woofs for extra effect. "Muuuum," Billy shouted, as he and Jacko ran along the landing and down the stairs. "Have you seen it?"

"Seen what, Billy? Why all the shouting?" His mum looked up from the newspaper she was reading.

"Where's Dad? We should go out. ... It's stopped raining!" Billy bounced from foot to foot, "Come on, Mum."

"TV, football; don't disturb him. Apparently, it's some important league game, but you go out if you want." She dropped her head and continued reading.

"Oh, Mum ..." Billy disappeared for several minutes before running back into the kitchen. "I've sent Ant a text. He'll be over shortly." Billy headed for the back door.

"Wellies," his mum called after him.

Ant pulled up at Billy's garden gate. With no mudguards on his bike, and water all over the roads, Ant had a long, dirty wet streak running from his shoulders, down his back, and to his bum. He'd gotten soaked.

"Hi, mate." Billy came to see him. "Looks like you had

some fun getting here.” He spun Ant around to get a better look.

“It’s only water.” Ant didn’t seem too bothered. “You should see the pond at the bottom of your road. There’s loads of stuff floating around in it, even some ducks!”

As he stood there, Billy could clearly see how filthy his dad’s new car had become.

“Look at it.” Billy pointed to the caked-on mud. “Dad won’t be happy with his car looking like this.”

Ant leant his bike against the fence and walked around the vehicle.

“You know you’re saving up for a new skateboard? Why don’t you ask your dad if we can clean his car.”

“That’s brilliant.” Billy ran around the car before peering in the driver’s window. “It’s yucky inside too; I’ll ask him if we can do the whole thing.”

“How much do we charge?” Ant thought about the computer games controller he wanted.

Billy shrugged, “I dunno, a pound each?” He felt unsure.

“I thought you were the businessman, according to your grandad. Those blokes in the supermarket car park charge fifteen quid or more.”

“Yeah, but my dad won’t pay that much.” Billy lifted his head and looked up while he thought. “I know, how about we charge five pounds each.”

Ant nodded, and the boys exchanged a high-five.

“Go on, then, ask him.”

From his shed, Billy’s dad produced several plastic buckets

—some for soapy water and the others for clean water—two large sponges, bottles of car cleaning and polishing fluid, a large soft leather cloth for shining up the paintwork, and a black plastic sack for all the rubbish.

“Now, be careful, boys; that’s an expensive car, so no mucking about.” Billy’s dad held up two five-pound notes, “I’ve got your money here, but you’ll only get paid once you’re done. Okay?” His dad glanced at his watch, “It’s time for the second-half of the footie game.” He disappeared back into the house.

“Look, ‘cos I’m taller, I’ll clean the car on the road side. It’s safe, as there aren’t many vehicles up or down here. You work off the pavement; it’s higher, and you’ll be able to reach further.” Billy took his bucket of soapy water and sponge around to the opposite side of the car from Ant.

Soon white frothy foam covered the car. The wind still blew, and every now and then, a bubbly pillow floated off, heading over the houses to disappear forever. Both boys busied splashing and wiping, and rubbing and polishing away the gunge and grime.

Billy drenched his sponge and whacked it against the window. Water shot everywhere, including over Ant.

“You’ve asked for it now.” No sooner had Ant spoken than he’d filled his sponge and flung it at directly at Billy. It skidded over the car’s roof before slapping him right in the face.

Billy threw it back, and a water fight followed just as Billy’s dad looked out the front window.

His dad flung the window open wide, "Oi, boys, I told you, no mucking about."

The shout brought their fight to an end.

"We'd better get on with it." Billy bent to pick up a sponge from the road. He didn't see the small sharp stone caught up in the fibres, and with a single stroke, he both cleaned a streak of mud from the passenger door and created a deep scratch as long as his finger in the car's paintwork.

Billy froze, staring at what he'd done. "Ant, what do I tell Dad?"

Ant rushed to see what had happened. "Maybe he won't notice."

"Don't be crazy, of course he'll notice; look at it." Billy felt a thump in his ribs as if he had been kicked in the chest. "I'm in real trouble now."

"Just tell him the truth; it was an accident, and you didn't mean to do it," Ant said, helpfully.

Billy kept looking at the scratch, hoping it might go away, or somehow mend itself. It didn't. In fact, it seemed to get bigger the more he stared. He looked away from the car, and then back. The first and only thing he saw was the scratch. It seemed as if the car had gone invisible, and only the scratch remained.

"What can I do?" Billy's chest tightened, and he felt as if he couldn't breathe.

"Cover it up, somehow. Has your dad got any paint?" Ant watched his friend.

"Paint? That didn't work out too well when Max tried it. I

have a better idea." Billy set off and ran as fast as he could across his garden to disappear around the back of his house. Ant stood, unsure of what he had said. He looked up at Billy's bedroom window to see him waving a pen.

Billy came back around the house, crouched low and on tip-toe; he didn't want his dad to see him.

Using the felt-tip pen, and as carefully as he could, he coloured over the scratch. "I remembered I had one of those mega packs of pens with every colour." He stood back to admire his work. "See, you'd hardly notice it if you didn't know it was there." Billy felt relieved.

"Yeah, but it will wash off." Ant looked unconvinced.

"Okay, but for now it's our secret; you're not to tell anyone." Billy held out his hand and locked little fingers with Ant. "Say, I promise."



3 - Billy's New Games Controller

In class Billy, Ant, and Tom shared the same table.

"You should've seen us, Tom." Ant bounced in his chair as he spoke, "We got five quid each!" Ant saw Billy giving

him the death stare and shaking his head. Ant took no notice. "We cleaned Billy's dad's car; the muck was caked on."

The more Ant talked, the harder Billy stared. His face turned red, his eyes bulged, and a vein stuck out on his neck. Billy needed to shut Ant up.

"Oh, look, Miss is coming." Billy snatched up his book to pretend to read.

Ant's mouth snapped shut, and he fumbled for his book as well. Tom leant back in his seat, twisting his head to see where Miss was.

"It's okay; she's talking to Julie." Tom flopped forward and nudged Ant. "What are you going to do with your fiver?"

"A new games controller," Ant whispered.

"Not for five quid; my brother's cost over fifty pounds." Tom elbowed Billy, "You saw it."

"Yeah, it's awesome; that's why I bought mine." Billy put down his book. "The only trouble is it's so good that I can't find anyone to beat me." He smirked.

"You just wait 'til I get mine. All I need to do is clean ..." Ant thought for a minute, and counted on his fingers, "Nine more cars."

Billy cut Ant off, "I don't think I'll do any more car cleaning. You need buckets, sponges, soap, and loads of stuff like that." All the talk about car cleaning reminded Billy of the scratch on his dad's car. A shiver ran down his spine. He wanted to change the subject before Ant blurted out about the scratch. "Maybe we can do gardening for

people. Nobody likes weeding," Billy suggested.

Ant flinched; he heard Miss walking nearby. He jerked up the hand that held his book. It went so high that it covered his face. He nudged Billy, who then kicked Tom's foot under the table. By chance, all three turned a page at the same time. Miss noticed and came and stood behind them.

"Interesting, Anthony; do you find reading a book upside down helps you understand the story better?" She didn't expect an answer but took the book from him, turned it the right way up, and gave it back to him. "The playground is the place to talk about computer games controllers, not the classroom."

In the playground, Khalid joined in the conversation about games controllers. "My mum says I can't have one 'cos I've got a new tablet computer. She said my education is more important."

"Yeah, what do parents know?" Tom laughed.

"I think my mum would agree with Khalid's parents," Billy said.

"Of course she would; she's the deputy head teacher at Elliott's. You ask my brother Eddy. At assembly, she always goes on about doing homework, coming to school every day, not being late, and paying attention. She reckons that without school, you won't get a good job." Tom checked to see if the boys were listening to him. "But, Eddy told me working in a burger bar pays nearly five pounds an hour, and you get free burgers. You'd soon get a new controller if you got a job there, Ant, and none of that pulling up weeds in the wet and cold."

"Yeah, and you'd soon get fat." Billy rubbed Ant's tummy. "But what about you lot getting new games controllers. It's boring winning all the time." Billy did a pretend yawn. "Of course, Tom, you could ask Eddy if you could borrow his."

"You're joking me, Billy; my brother wouldn't lend me his controller in a million years. You ask my sister; she knows what he's like." Tom shoved his hands into his trouser pockets and walked around in a circle while he thought about what Billy had suggested.

"But I always see him in the park or at the shopping centre on a Saturday," Ant said. "You could borrow it, then zoom over to Billy's, play a few games, and get it back before he finds out." Ant looked smug at his idea. "What do you think?"

Tom rubbed his hand around the back of his neck. "I could, I suppose, but ..." He stopped talking while he checked the playground to see if his sister stood close by, "My mum said not to take things without asking. Anyway, if he finds out, he'll go totally nuts. You don't want to see him angry; his eyes look like ping-pong balls, and steam comes out of his ears."

Billy, Ant, and Khalid laughed at Tom's description. "If I do, no one can know ... ever." Tom shouted the 'ever'. All three flinched. "This has to stay our secret." Tom put his arms around Ant and Khalid's backs and pulled them, plus Billy, into a tight circle. "Put your right arm out with your palm facing down ... like this." Tom showed them. "Now, put your hand on top of one another's, like a stack, and say after me ... I swear to tell no one Tom borrowed Eddy's

game controller without asking him.”

The end-of-break-time bell sounded.

“You’ve made a promise, so don’t forget ...”

School finished, and Billy and Ant strolled toward the bike sheds.

“That got a bit scary with Tom.” Ant looked at Billy. “I know Eddy’s not nice, but you think he’d be okay with his own brother.”

Billy kicked at a stone as they walked. “We don’t want to mess with Eddy; my mum says he’s loads of trouble in school, and he still doesn’t like us after we got the police onto him.”

“No, we didn’t get him into trouble; he got himself into trouble by stealing your birthday money,” Ant said.

“I know, but still make sure you don’t tell Max. If she finds out, she’ll tell Katie, and then Eddy’s bound to find out.”

They rode home in silence, thinking about Eddy and what he might do.



4 - Tablet Computers Aren't Indestructible

"In this week's lesson—" Miss Tompkins wrote on the whiteboard while she spoke, "—we will use the data collected from the mice-maze experiment to create a table

of results and show them as a coloured bar chart.” She turned to see if the class were paying attention. “Is that clear?”

“Yes, Miss,” everyone said together.

“Now, those of you with your new tablet computers, please use them.”

“Miss, miss,” Khalid had his hand up.

“Khalid, what is it?”

“Please, Miss; I need you to load the chart app.”

Miss Tompkins waved at him to come to her.

Bursting with excitement, Khalid jumped up from his seat and set off across the classroom, weaving between the desks. “Coming, Miss.” He swung his arms as he dashed toward her. As he did he accidentally bashed the tablet against someone’s shoulder; he lost grip; the tablet took flight.

His shiny, new, and incredibly expensive hand-held computer headed toward the concrete floor, corner first. He dropped to his knees as he tried to grab it. The cracking sound of glass breaking into thousands of pieces told him, and the rest of the class, he got there too late.

Everyone went silent, except for Khalid—he burst into tears.

“What will I tell my mum?” He held up the tablet. It was no longer a rectangle in shape, but more of a diamond. “It’s totally bust.” He sniffed the loudest sniff ever, and in so doing, managed to stop the flow of slimy liquid oozing out of his nose from dripping onto the floor.

Miss Tompkins made it across the room at the speed of

an Olympic runner. "It was an accident." Her voice sounded soft, "Let's get this mess cleaned up, and we'll see what we can do." She passed him a tissue.

"I've got some sticky-tape, Miss," Tom said, helpfully.

Miss said nothing; she just looked at Tom over her glasses.

Billy, Ant, and Julie gathered around Khalid. "Your mum will be okay. Won't she?" Billy offered.

Billy's remark didn't help; Khalid felt as if a swarm of butterflies had taken off in his stomach. In his head, all he could hear was the sound of his mother's voice, *be careful with your computer; it cost a lot of money.*

"Sit quietly at your desk, Khalid, until you feel better." Miss guided him back to his seat.

"But, Miss." He blew his nose again. "I can't tell my parents. If they find out, I'll get in so much trouble."

"I'm sure they'll understand," Miss Tompkins said. "Accidents happen."

"No, Miss, really, they won't." The more Khalid thought about how his mum would react, the more his legs trembled and hands shook. "Can it be our secret?" Khalid looked around the class. "I can pretend it's okay, and I'm leaving it at school where it's locked away safely."

"But that's a lie. You are asking us all to lie." Miss wanted to sound stern but knew he felt too upset.

"No, Miss, I don't want anyone to lie. If my mum asks where it is, just say you don't know or say nothing. That's not really lying; it's more keeping a secret."

"Crikey, did you see how upset Khalid was?" Ant used his pen with all the different coloured inks to draw his bar graph. "They look great on a tablet." He looked over at Julie's work. "And you can make the bars loads of different colours." He hoped he'd get his tablet soon.

"What do you reckon Miss will do about Khalid?" Billy took out his plastic ruler to draw the bars for his chart. "His mum will find out, and then he'll get into loads of trouble."

Billy and Ant turned to look at Khalid. He sat staring into space.

"He looks terrified." Billy stood to walk over to see him.

"Have you finished, Billy?" Miss Tompkins called out. "Bring your work to me, please."

"Sorry, Miss; not quite, Miss." Billy sat down. "I think Miss has eight pairs of eyes; you can't do anything without her seeing." Billy spoke around the back of his hand.

"That's what teachers do. They're like Ninja's, always ready to swoop." Ant stood in a karate pose.

"Anthony, what are you doing now?" Miss had seen him. "If you must do that, wait until school's over."

Everyone looked at Ant.

"Well, at least Khalid's smiling." Billy pointed in his direction.

"Maybe Khalid can use karate on his tablet to get it back together."

"Tom, you say some crazy things." Ant jabbed him in the arm, "Everyone knows you use the ancient Japanese art of *amendoe* to put things back together." Ant giggled at his joke.

"No, grasshopper, you mean *oregano*." Billy laughed.

"What? Paper folding." Tom looked confused.

"Come on, class." Miss Tompkins raised her voice. "I'd like to see all of the finished graphs."

Just before the end-of-day bell rang, the door to their classroom opened, and in came the head teacher, Mrs Johnston.

"Please, be quiet, everyone," she commanded. "Miss Tompkins came to see me earlier and told me about Khalid's accident."

The noise in the room rose.

"Please, listen to what I have to say." Mrs Johnston looked serious. "It's not acceptable to tell lies or have secrets, but what happened here today is a lesson for all of us."

Miss Tompkins nodded as Mrs Johnston spoke.

"Tablet computers are new in school, and we all have to learn how to look after them. Because they are light and easy to pick up, they are also easy to carry and drop. We, the school, have extra insurance to cover damage but ask you to treat your tablets like your most precious toy. We will also provide extra-strong cases to protect them." Mrs Johnston waved an envelope over her head. "This is for your parents, Khalid, and explains what I've said. Make sure you give it to your mother or father."



5 - Ant Can't Keep Secrets

While riding their bikes back from school, Billy and Ant passed the bottom of the road where the pond had formed after all the rain. Most of the water had gone, but loads of sticks, rubbish, stones, and mud lay around.

"Careful you don't get a puncture." Billy slowed to avoid

hitting anything. He lost his balance and tipped to one side. He put his foot down to stop himself from falling over.

"Yuk!" His shoe disappeared into a pothole full of dirty, muddy water. It filled his shoe and covered his sock.

"Do we have to clean you like we did your dad's car?" Ant made a goofy grin.

"What? No!" Billy shook his foot and splattered mud everywhere.

"Has he found out yet?" Ant asked.

"Found out what?" Billy's foot squelched as he walked.

"About the scratch, of course." Ant stopped his bike while Billy caught him up.

Billy spun around to make sure no one could overhear. "Of course not, or I'd be grounded at least, if not sent to the moon, or wherever dads send kids that have been really naughty."

"You're just making that up ... aren't you?" Ant didn't look too sure.

"If he finds out, I've no idea what he'll do. That's why I need you to keep my secret." He gave Ant a hard stare. "You haven't told anybody, have you? Does Max know, or Tom?" Billy pushed his face so close to Ant's that their noses almost touched.

"Hey." Ant pulled back. "I won't say anything. You're scaring me like Tom did with his stupid handshake thing. Why does everyone think I can't keep secrets? Max knows nothing about her bike, or Eddy about Tom borrowing his controller." Ant huffed; he pushed hard down on his pedal and sped away.

Max lay on her bedroom floor with Ant's Star Wars figures. She had Stormtroopers lined up on one side, with a mixture of other figures on the other. When Ant came up the stairs, he could hear a battle taking place. Max made the sounds of laser gunfire, lightsaber clashes, and Darth Vader shouting in such a strange voice that Ant found it impossible to understand what she was saying.

"Oi, sis, what are you doing with my Star Wars stuff? I never said you could borrow them." Ant bent and snatched up a handful of Stormtroopers. "These are for boys."

"Get off." Max grabbed his arm. "You've not played with them for ages."

"Yeah, but they're still mine." Ant struggled to pull his arm free.

"Well, I don't care. I'll ask Mum and Dad for some for my birthday." Max jumped onto her bed and rolled over, hiding her face in the covers. "You're horrible to me."

"Anyway, I know what you're getting for your birthday present. So there." Ant stuck out his tongue.

"No, you don't; it's a surprise. I like surprises."

"I do; honest."

"You're just saying that to be nasty." She stuck out her tongue in return.

"I told Mum what to get you." Ant folded his arms over his chest.

"Don't tell me." Max's voice sounded muffled as she spoke through the duvet.

"It's a—"

"Shut up, Ant. I don't want to know."

"A Raleigh Mountain Bike," he mouthed a whisper so that she wouldn't hear.

"Go away and take your stinky toys with you." Max rolled herself into her duvet. "And get out of my bedroom, or I'll tell Mum."

"Tell Mum what?"

"That you told me about my present."

"I didn't."

"You did. I heard you."

"So, what is it, then?" Ant leant in to hear.

"A dolly fountain mike. See, I told you I heard."

"You made that up. Anyway, what's a dolly fountain mike?"

"I dunno, but that's what you said."

"Come on, children; tea's ready," Ant and Max's mum called up the stairs.

They both appeared from their bedrooms. Max's bedroom, being closer to the stairs, meant that she got there first. Ant pushed her aside and rushed down before her.

"Mum, he's horrible to me." Max rubbed her arm where she'd banged into the wall.

"Ant, what have you done to your sister?" His mum stared into his face.

"She started it."

"Oh no I didn't." Max dropped her head and wiped away

a tear.

"Shush, Max; let's hear what Ant's got to say."

"She took my toys without asking." Ant gawped at Max.

"Did you?" Her mum put a finger under Max's chin to lift her head.

"Yeah, but they were old Star Wars figures he doesn't play with." Max rubbed at her arm.

"Has he hurt you?" Max's mum sounded concerned.

"And he told me what I was getting for my birthday."

"Anthony!" His mum's face turned bright red, her eyes widened like saucers, and her eyebrows shot up to her forehead. "What did I tell you? Now, come here." She pointed at the floor in front of her. "What have you got to say for yourself?" Her voice crackled in her chest.

"I didn't, really, Mum." Ant spoke so softly that his mum could hardly hear him.

"Well, Max just said you did." Her eyes darted between the two children. "Come here, Max, and whisper in my ear what he told you."

Max stood on tiptoe and brought her hands up to her mouth. "He said dolly fountain mike."

Ant strained to hear.

"Oh, okay." His mum looked relieved. "Go and have your tea, Max, ... and Ant, come with me. I need to talk to you."

"On Saturday afternoon, Katie's coming over to play." Max looked at her brother. "Please, Ant, can we lend your Star Wars people?" Max spoke between forkfuls.

"I suppose so." Ant forced his words out through a

mouthful of mashed potatoes. "And it's borrow, not lend."

"Ant, don't talk with your mouth full." His mum looked stern. "I'm not happy with you. You need to stay on your best behaviour."

He swallowed hard. "I'm out Saturday, around at Billy's. Tom's coming over with a new games controller. It should be awesome."

"Is this the controller you want? How come Tom's got one?" His mum sounded curious.

"It's not his, but his brother's." Ant spoke without thinking.

"What, stinky Eddy's? Is Tom allowed to use it?" Max took another forkful of food. "Katie says Eddy's a meanie and never lets anyone use his stuff. I'll ask her at school tomorrow."



6 - Eddy's Unhappy with Tom

Jacko, Billy's dog, liked mornings; fetching the newspaper seemed a great sport. As soon as he heard

the rattle of the letterbox, Jacko raced down the hall to claim his prize. He would grab the newspaper in his mouth and swing it from side-to-side until it lay in a wet, chewed, trampled and torn heap.

It was Billy's job to get to the letterbox before Jacko. But at the weekend, not being a school day, Billy's back would somehow stick to his mattress—he couldn't get out of bed, and Jacko would succeed.

This Saturday turned out different; Ant, Khalid, and Tom, with Eddy's games controller, would come around to play.

Billy got up and sat in the kitchen in his red-and-white striped dressing gown, eating his breakfast cereal, when he and Jacko heard the rattle of the letterbox. Together, they raced for the front door. Jacko won, as usual—four legs being quicker than two—and dragged the newspaper right through. Billy bent and, gently, held Jacko while he eased the paper from his vice-like jaw.

"Come on, boy; let me have it."

Jacko looked at Billy as if to say, *if you want it, you've got to take it.*

"This is not a game, Jacks." Billy shot his hand into his dressing gown pocket to find a dog biscuit. Billy knew Jacko liked to play, but he liked food better. Jacko seemed happy to exchange the paper for a biscuit. He let the newspaper go and chomped on his treat.

Ant arrived first at Billy's. He lived only two streets away. Next, Khalid's mum dropped off Khalid. All three boys

waited in the front room for Tom and the games controller.

"It's gone ten-thirty." Billy checked his watch for the hundredth time. "Come on, Tom." He knelt on the sofa so that he could stare out through the window.

"Maybe Eddy's found out," Khalid said.

"Or Tom's bike's got a puncture," Ant said.

Billy looked back at Ant and Khalid. "I know, I'll send him a text." Before he had time to get his phone, the unmistakable sound of Billy's front gate clunking shut stopped him dead. "Here he is."

All three boys dashed to the front door; Jacko joined in the chase.

"What happened?" Billy took the controller off Tom as he passed through the front door.

"Mum's going into town with Katie. She made Eddy wait before going out, so I couldn't leave until they did." Tom sat on the sofa in the prime gaming zone. "She needed to take some paint back to the shopping centre, one of those huge cans, and couldn't lift it into the car. Anyway, Eddy did it, and then went off on his bike. He's got to meet Mum in the car park to unload it."

"So, how long have we got?" Billy glanced at his watch.

"All day, I suppose. Eddy usually comes home at teatime." Tom picked up his controller. "Right, Billy Field. Prepare to lose."

Katie and her mum sat in their car, waiting for Eddy to arrive. From the back seat, Katie gazed out of the

window, hoping he'd come soon.

"Mum."

"Yes, Katie."

"Why is Eddy always grumpy?" She watched her mum in the rear-view mirror.

"Teenage boys. ... Oh, look; here he comes. Quick, Katie, get out of the car before he reaches us." Katie's mum opened the boot. "Thanks for doing this, Eddy."

Eddy stomped across the car park, carrying the can of paint with Katie running alongside. Their mum had trouble keeping up.

"Eddy," Katie said.

"What?" he grunted back at her.

"If I told you a secret, would you be nice to me?" Katie looked up at him.

"Maybe." Eddy kept walking, "Depends on the secret."

"You know your new games controller?"

"What about it?" Eddy turned and stared at her. "Go on, tell me, or else ..." He held up his fist.

"You said you'd be nice to me." Katie pulled a face at him. "You have to promise, or I won't tell."

"Just tell me, shrimp." Eddy leant down and brought his face level with hers.

He smelt of cigarettes and chewing gum. "Poo, you stink."

"What about my controller?" Eddy wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

"Tom's got it, and has gone to play games around Billy

Field's."

Eddy dropped the paint outside the decorating shop and ran from the shopping centre.

Their mum arrived, panting, "What's got into him?" she asked.

Cinders could find her way out of any garden, and Max and her dad felt determined to stop her. Busy at the bottom of the garden, struggling with a roll of wire fencing, they didn't see Eddy arriving at their front gate.

The four boys sat lost in their computer games were having too much fun to bother with the repeated ring of the doorbell.

Billy's mum put down her cup of coffee and wandered through from the kitchen. She opened the front door.

"Oh! It's you. What do you want? Can't it wait 'til we're back at school on Monday?"

"Is my brother here?" Eddy looked past her and into the hall, trying to spot Tom.

"Yes, I think so." She hesitated. "He's with Billy, playing computer games."

"That's the problem, see. Tom's got my games controller." Eddy pulled himself to his full height; he towered over her, "And he didn't ask me."

"Sorry, Eddy. I know nothing about that." Billy's mum didn't want to upset him. At school, she had more control, but in her home, she didn't know what he might do.

"Well, I want it back." Eddy took a step forward before

he shouted, "Now!"

It made Billy's mum wince and step back into the hall.

The noise brought Billy, Tom, Ant, and Khalid out of the front room. Tom saw his brother and knew exactly what he wanted. They exchanged glances before Tom disappeared, only to reappear holding the controller.

With the controller at arm's length, Tom approached his brother. Eddy snatched it and spun around to leave. The trailing connecting cable whipped across Tom's cheek, leaving a bright-red strip. Tom clasped his hands to his face.

"Eddy! Look what you've done to your brother. Say sorry," Billy's mum shouted after him.

Eddy didn't look back, and just ran up the garden path to the front gate.

Seated astride his bike, Eddy stuffed the controller into his jacket and zipped it up. He glanced at Tom, who stood with his mates plus Billy's mum in the doorway, and then snarled. He swung his bike off the pavement to go around Billy's dad's car before setting off down the hill. Fumbling, he lost his footing and dropped the bike in the road, on the far side of the car. Bent low, Eddy went out of sight for a few seconds before he reappeared and jumped back on his bike. Without a glance, he raced off down the hill.



7 - Take it to the Car Wash

"After the Eddy boy incident, I think it would be nice if we all had some fun," Billy's dad looked at the four boys. "How about we go to the cinema?"

"Thanks, Mr Field, but I need to get back home." Tom walked off; his shoulders slumped while his feet dragged.

"See ya, mate," Billy called after him. He turned to Ant and Khalid. "I wouldn't like to be in his shoes." They watched Tom until he was out of sight.

"I think the cinema's a great idea." Billy's mum smiled. "Eddy has me to deal with on Monday; he's got some explaining to do."

"Right, kids; come on, then." Billy's dad pulled the front door closed. Together, they set off up the path.

"Look at my car, Billy." His dad pointed. "It's only been a week since you cleaned it and now it's muckier than ever."

Billy, his mum and dad, Khalid, and Ant packed into the estate car.

"I'll tell you what; we've got time to go to the carwash on the way to the cinema." Billy's dad drove off. At the mention of carwash, Billy felt a jolt in the stomach. He felt sure his dad would find the scratch.

"Do we have to? Ant and I can clean it later." Billy turned to Ant. "We can't let him find the scratch," he whispered.

"No, it's fine, boys; these modern carwashes do everything."

He drove in between the guide rails of the automatic carwash, and the car came to a halt. The red stop sign showed. "Are you staying in or getting out?"

Billy and Ant looked at each other and mouthed *out*. They wanted to see what would happen to Billy's colouring in of the scratch. "Come on, Khalid." Billy led the way.

"Here we go." Billy's dad dropped the last token into the

machine and pressed the *start* button.

The two large vertical brushes swung into motion, and a third lowered itself onto the bonnet while streams of high-pressure water and soap covered the car in a frothy white layer.

Within a few minutes, and with a lot less effort than that used by Billy and Ant, the estate car gleamed as a nearly new car should. The machine stopped, and the *safe to go* arrow lit up. Billy's dad drove to a parking bay, and the boys trotted after. Billy led Ant and Khalid to the passenger door and stood there. He wanted to look for the scratch but didn't want to be seen looking.

They didn't have to look hard. Fairy lights might as well have surrounded the scratch. Or it could have had one of those great big foam-rubber fingers pointing at it, or have been filmed and displayed on a fifty-meter-wide TV screen. Billy's worst nightmare had come true. He grabbed Ant's arm.

"What can we do?" Billy's mind went into overdrive while his dad worked his way around the car. He would be with them in three ... two ... one more step. *Would he notice?* Billy feared the worst.

"What's that?" His dad bent to take a closer look. There was no mistaking what *that* was. He took out his mobile phone, not to take a happy smiley selfie, but instead, to take a picture of the five-centimetre long, deep all-the-way-to-the-metal scratch.

"Patti!" Billy's dad called for his wife. "Come and take a look at this." He stood back and rubbed his forehead,

scrunched up his eyes, leant in, pulled back, and turned around several times in a desperate attempt to make sense of what he could see.

"Oh, Walter. What happened?" Billy's mum looked at her husband first, and then at Billy, Ant, and Khalid. Too frightened to speak, neither Billy nor Ant said anything, and Khalid knew nothing.

"It must have been the carwash machine." She took hold of her husband's arm. "Go and see the manager."

Billy's dad shook his head in disbelief. "I've used hundreds of carwashes and never had anything like this happen before." He set off to find the manager.

"Stop, wait," Billy's mum called after him.

His dad pivoted on one foot and wandered back.

"This morning with Eddy ... you saw him, Billy." She looked to Billy for support.

"What, Mum?" Billy said.

"You know, when Eddy stormed off. He'd just gone around Dad's car when he wobbled and fell off his bike. Remember? He disappeared behind the car, about here." She pointed to the passenger door. "It could easily have been him. Maybe his handlebars hit it, or maybe he did it deliberately." She looked to Billy then her husband. "He might have wanted revenge for us getting him sent to that juvenile centre after stealing Billy's birthday money."

Billy let go of Ant's arm. Neither said anything but let out a sigh and made a knowing smile. Once Billy's mum and dad had climbed back into the car, the boys look relieved.

"Sorry, Dad, that's so bad of Eddy. Tom and Katie don't

like him, and I certainly don't."

Billy's dad looked into the rear-view mirror. "Let's wait until Monday when Mum sees him at school." The car pulled away; everyone sat in silence. Billy thought hard about Eddy and what had happened.

Tom arrived home and stored his bike in the garden shed. He noticed Eddy's bike wasn't there. He ran straight upstairs to peek into Eddy's bedroom. The controller lay on the bed. *He's been back*, he thought, *I wonder how he knew I'd taken it?* Tom rubbed his cheek where the cord had hit him. It still stung.

From along the corridor, he heard crying. Tom stood at his bedroom door and listened. "Is that you, Katie?" He walked toward his sister's bedroom. The noise stopped when he reached her door and looked in.

"Go away." Katie did a long sniff.

"What is it?" Tom sat next to her on her bed.

"Leave me alone." She blew her nose.

"Has Mum told you off?"

"No, why would she?"

"I dunno. What's happened then?"

She threw herself sideways, burying her face in a pillow, "Eddy."

"Yeah, well, I know about him. He came around to Billy's and kicked-off about his games controller. It beats me how he knew."

Tom sat in silence; Katie made occasional sniffs before turning her head toward him.

"It was me." She spoke ever so quietly, but Tom still heard.

"You? How did you know? Why did you tell him?" Tom jumped up, "I thought we were friends."

"Max told me."

"I should have guessed. Ant just can't keep a secret. But why tell Eddy?"

"'Cos he was being horribly to me, and I thought if I told him a secret, he'd be nice." Tears formed little rivers down Katie's cheeks before dripping from her chin and onto her jumper.

"Was he?" Tom crossed his arms.

"Was he what?" Katie said.

"Nice to you." Tom squinted at Katie, his eyes all small and menacing.

She didn't answer but burst into tears again.



8 - Not Eddy Again

At Elliott's Secondary school, where Billy's mum worked as deputy head teacher, Monday mornings started early. The

staffroom got used for meetings to share information about school events, staff absences, or pupil issues. Billy's mum always attended.

"And, finally, and this is a big *and finally*, we need to talk about Eddy Jost." Billy's mum waited for the room to fall quite. "I take it I've no need to tell you who this boy is, but over the weekend he came to my house." The noise level in the room heightened. "My son Billy, who is in year five at Grove Road Primary School, was playing computer games on Saturday morning with Tom Jost, Eddy's younger brother. Tom is in the same class as Billy. It appears that Tom borrowed Eddy's games controller without his brother's permission. Eddy found out and came storming around to my house to recover it." She looked out at the other teachers' faces to see their reactions. They seemed confused.

"Okay, this may not be a school issue, but I'm sure you recall that my son Billy had his birthday money, a twenty-pound note, stolen by Eddy's bullying tactics last October. And, at that time, we had to get the police involved. Well, after Eddy left our house on Saturday, my husband discovered a long, deep scratch on his new car." The room exploded with, *what will he do next? That boy needs stopping, and is nowhere safe?* comments.

"Right, let's not jump to conclusions. We know the Jost family have had problems, especially Eddy, since his father left, but I can remember Eddy when he first came to this school. He was such a nice boy.

"Now, over the next few days, I would like you all to listen out, especially year nine teachers, for anything that

gets said. These kids like to boast about what they've done. In the meantime, I will interview Eddy. Also, I'll talk to the police. This could be a serious case involving criminal damages."

"Eddy, I've asked you to my office to give you the chance to explain yourself." Billy's mum glowered at him as he stood in front of her desk. He kept his face still without any expressions and just looked, not at her, but over her head at the view of the school sports field beyond. He said nothing.

"What took place on Saturday is between you and Tom, and is none of my business. However, what happened at my house is my business."

Eddy's face remained still. He didn't look scared. In fact, he didn't look bothered at all.

Billy's mum continued, "As you left, I saw you fall from your bike near my husband's car, and shortly afterward, he found a deep scratch in the door's paintwork. What can you tell me about that?"

She noticed Eddy recoil but still he said nothing.

"Not speaking up won't help you. If you don't tell me what you know, I'll have no choice but to get the police involved."

"I did nothing, Miss." Eddy didn't shift his gaze from the window. "I always get blamed for everything."

"The more you deny any wrongdoing, the greater the trouble you'll get into." She stood up from her desk to break his line of sight. "If you tell me now, we can sort this

out between you, me, and my husband, without telling the police.” She looked for a flicker in his eyes but saw nothing. He only continued staring. “Okay, if that’s the way you want it, please leave my office and return to your class.”

Billy stood by the kitchen sink, on vegetable peeling duty. His mum stood busy mixing spices, and the room smelt of curry.

“How was school today?”

“Yeah, okay.” Billy kept peeling.

“And Tom?” His mum asked.

“A bit quiet.”

“Did he and Eddy have a falling out?”

“Not really, just Eddy keeps making Tom do stuff for him.”

“Stuff?”

“Getting him food—crisps or drinks. And Eddy won’t let Tom watch his favourite TV programs.” Billy didn’t look up from the sink. “What happened with Eddy at your school today?”

“I’m sorry, Billy; I can’t say anything to you about Eddy except that I’ve had a chat with him and the police. If he made the scratch on purpose, it could be criminal damages.”

I made the scratch. Will I be a criminal? shot through Billy’s mind. His throat went dry, his heart thumped, and his palms grew sweaty. Still worse, his leg shook so much that it banged off the kitchen cupboard.

"You okay, Billy?"

"Yeah, fine. I just need the toilet." Billy dropped his peeler and ran from the kitchen.

Mum just told me she's going to the police about Eddy. Billy hit the *send* key on his mobile phone. The text message zinged on its way.

What? Why? Ant replied straight away.

Criminal ... somethings Billy sent his reply.

Ugh.

"Billy, I need you," his mum called for him.

Got to go. I'm in the toilet. Speak 2moz at school.

"Morning, class," Miss Tompkins sounded her usual cheery self.

Billy, Ant, and Tom sat at their table in silence.

"This lesson, I want you to complete the worksheet for the mice-maze experiment." Miss directed them before she took up one of the many books on her desk and read.

"What did you mean in your text last night?" Ant spoke without lifting his head from staring at the worksheet.

"I don't know any more than that. Mum just said she can't talk about Eddy except that she is talking to the police about him being a criminal or something." Tom overheard Billy's whisper.

"My brother went bananas after school yesterday. He stomped and banged around the house," Tom said. "He didn't speak to me; he just shouted horrible things about your mum. Something about her accusing him of

scratching your dad's car, and that she's going to the police."

At the mention of police, Billy slumped back in his seat and clasped his hands to his head. "Crikey, Ant. What should we do?"

"You've got to tell your dad." Ant said, "There's nothing else you can do."

Tom looked at Ant, "What do you mean, *tell your dad*? Do you two know something about this scratch?" Tom shifted his gaze between Ant and Billy, waiting for an answer. "Come on, spit it out, or my brother gets into real trouble for something he says he didn't do."

"We cleaned Billy's dad's car last Saturday ..."

"No, Ant, you can't tell him!" The tremble in Billy's leg came back.

"But if we don't, your mum will get the police onto Eddy," Ant said.

"Yeah, but if I own up, what will my dad do to me?" Billy's face went pale, his breathing grew difficult, and he felt sick.

"I can't keep it a secret forever; I'm no good with secrets. Tell your mum now before it's too late for Eddy," Ant suggested.

"What? It was you who scratched the car! Of course you've got to own up. My brother's nasty sometimes, but he can't get blamed for things he hasn't done."

Seated at the tea table, Billy fiddled with his food. He didn't speak.

"You're quiet, Billy." His dad helped himself to more vegetables. "You had a bad day at school?"

"Sort of." Billy didn't look up.

"Hey, come on, son; anyone would think you'd lost a million pounds." His dad wanted to cheer him up. "Have you heard the one about the boy who went to a pet shop to buy a spider?"

"No," Billy mumbled.

"They cost seventy pounds. No way, he thought, I can get one cheaper off the web." His dad smiled, but Billy said nothing and only stared at his plate.

"What's wrong with him?" his dad mouthed to Billy's mum.

She shrugged. "No idea," she mouthed back.

"Dad ..." Billy hesitated, and his words stuck in his throat.

"Have you something to say?" His dad put down his knife and fork.

"What would you say if you knew I've been keeping a secret?" Billy half-turned his head to look at his dad, "And I can't keep it any longer."

Billy's mum and dad exchanged glances.

"It depends on what the *secret* was. Why?" His dad leant forward, bringing his face closer to Billy's. "What have you done?"

"It was me." Billy sniffed, and tears ran down his cheeks.

"What was you, Billy?" His dad stopped smiling. "What aren't you telling me?" His voice had gone hard and much louder.

"Come on, Billy." His mum rested her hand on his

shoulder, "We need to know."

"The scratch, it wasn't Eddy, it was me." Billy pushed his chair back and sprinted for the stairs on the way to his bedroom.

"Billy ... here ... now!" his dad shouted after him.

Lindy, Ant's mum, and Ant sat on one side of the kitchen table. Billy sat near Ant and next to his mum. Walter, Billy's dad, preferred to stand, and leant against the sink, while Billy's grandad hovered in the doorway.

"I had no idea." Lindy stared at Ant. "I knew he'd helped Billy clean Walter's car, but Ant's acted oddly since he got into trouble for sharing a secret." She looked to Billy's mum and dad. "Max is getting a new bike for her birthday, and I asked Ant, and Billy, actually, to help me choose one for her. They did, but I swore them to secrecy not to tell Max. I wanted it to be a surprise."

"I didn't mean to tell her. She was playing with my toys without asking. It just sort of came out." Ant shifted in his seat and sat on his hands.

"So you knew the secret, too, Billy?" His mum turned to him.

"Yeah, but I never said anything."

"Well done, son," Billy's dad said. "But what about the scratch on my car?"

"We didn't do it on purpose, Mr Field." Ant fidgeted in his seat. "It happened when we had a sponge fight."

"Billy, what have you got to say?" His mum placed her hand on his shoulder.

"We chucked the sponges, and one landed on the road. A stone or something must have stuck in it 'cos when I came to use it, I made the scratch." Billy's heart pounded, and sweat ran through his hair.

"What I don't understand is why it took me a week to find it?" Billy's dad tried to remain calm, but his voice had an edge.

"'Cos I got a felt-tip pen and coloured it in."

"So, you deliberately tried to cover up what you had done. Did you know about this, Ant?" Billy's dad moved his glare between each boy. "This is getting worse by the minute."

"Really, it happened by accident, and you should have owned up there and then." Billy's mum eyed Billy. "Because of your secret, I've involved the school and the police. And, of course, Eddy has come under suspicion."

Both boys dropped their shoulders and pulled their heads into their necks.

"You've gotten yourselves into a whole lot more trouble," she added.

"But, I didn't make the scratch," Ant protested.

"That makes no difference, Ant; keeping the secret means you are equally to blame," Lindy said.

Grandad nodded. "Guilty by implication." Grandad's gaze shifted between the two boys.

"This can't go unpunished, boys." Billy's dad looked at the two mums. They nodded. "You know you're saving for a new skateboard, Billy ..." His dad looked stern. "Well, that money can pay for the repair."

"Oh, Dad!" Billy's eyes filled with tears, his face went bright red, and his jaw wobbled.

"I tell you what—"Ant picked up a stone, '—I never want to know another secret ever again." He tossed the stone onto the pile made by the council clearing up after all the rain. "Secrets get you into too much trouble."

Billy nodded, "Yeah, but at least you didn't have to pay any money; all my savings; over a hundred pounds!" Billy shook his head.

"Here, this will cheer you up." Ant's face filled with a smile.

"What? Not one of your stupid jokes." Billy wandered on.

"Have you heard about the schoolboy who asked his teacher if she'd punish him for something he hadn't done?" Ant looked to Billy for an answer.

"Go on, then."

"Of course not, she said. That's good, said the boy, 'cos I've not done my homework." Ant patted Billy on the back. "You can laugh now."

"Ha, ha."

The End

What you can learn from 'Billy Knows A Secret.'

A secret is something that is kept unknown or unseen from others. Secrets can be harmless; but sometimes they can really hurt people. It is important to know the difference between keeping a secret for the benefit of another, versus keeping a secret that might be harmful or even dangerous to another.

Keeping a secret of a surprise such as a party or a present will make another person happy and the secret will no longer be a secret once the event has happened. But secrets that can't be repeated for negative, harmful or even dangerous reasons are far more serious.

If a child is exposed to secret keeping (especially from people they trust) they can very quickly begin to believe this is normal behaviour, which can lead to them being easily manipulated and convinced to keep secrets themselves. Especially within families, secrets can be hurtful and harmful and have been known to be passed down through generations, finally hurting a family member when it is exposed.

Children will often keep secrets amongst themselves. This is a part of learning how to become independent and how choices have consequences, but they should be taught not to keep secrets about bullying, aggression, illegal or dangerous activities and especially inappropriate touching.

We have to bring into this learning, the subject of child sexual abuse which is based on secrecy. 'This is our little secret' becomes a way to manipulate and control children

whose aim is to please adults and avoid doing things they think will get them into trouble.

Some secrets are acceptable, especially in the business world. For example, Coca Cola keep their recipe such a secret that it is under lock and key and only two people in the world are aware of what it is. And magicians agree to keep their tricks a secret as to share these with the public would take away the joy of the illusion of their work. Passwords must be kept secret, or you may have a secret hiding place for personal things of value. These secrets do not involve others being harmed and are completely acceptable.

Adults can help children learn how to make positive choices and decisions, to believe and trust in themselves, and to be able to trust in responsible adults when they need help. A rule of thumb is that if a secret can't hurt anyone, you can keep it; if a secret can hurt someone, tell a responsible adult; if you're not sure, always speak to an adult.

An adult should not encourage a child to keep any secret. For some children, even a fun secret can feel like a burden. Some children may find it difficult to keep silent; others may feel extreme anxiety and feel troubled at having to keep a secret, leaving them with negative feelings of guilt or shame.

In the story keeping the secret from Max about her birthday present was a fun secret, but what starts off as an innocent agreement, ends up being nasty when Ant uses it to 'get his own back'. Ant told Max about her birthday surprise when he became angry, so spoiling it for

everyone.

When Billy scratched his dad's car, the pact he made with Ant about keeping it a secret put a burden on both of them and nearly got someone else into a lot of trouble. Secrets by their very nature need to be protected by those who know them and it can become very hard work to keep them safe, especially if you know someone else might be harmed.

We can think we have secrets; but in reality, *they* have us!

There are no secrets that time does not reveal.

Jean Racine

There are no secrets better kept than the secrets everybody guesses.

George Bernard Shaw

If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees.

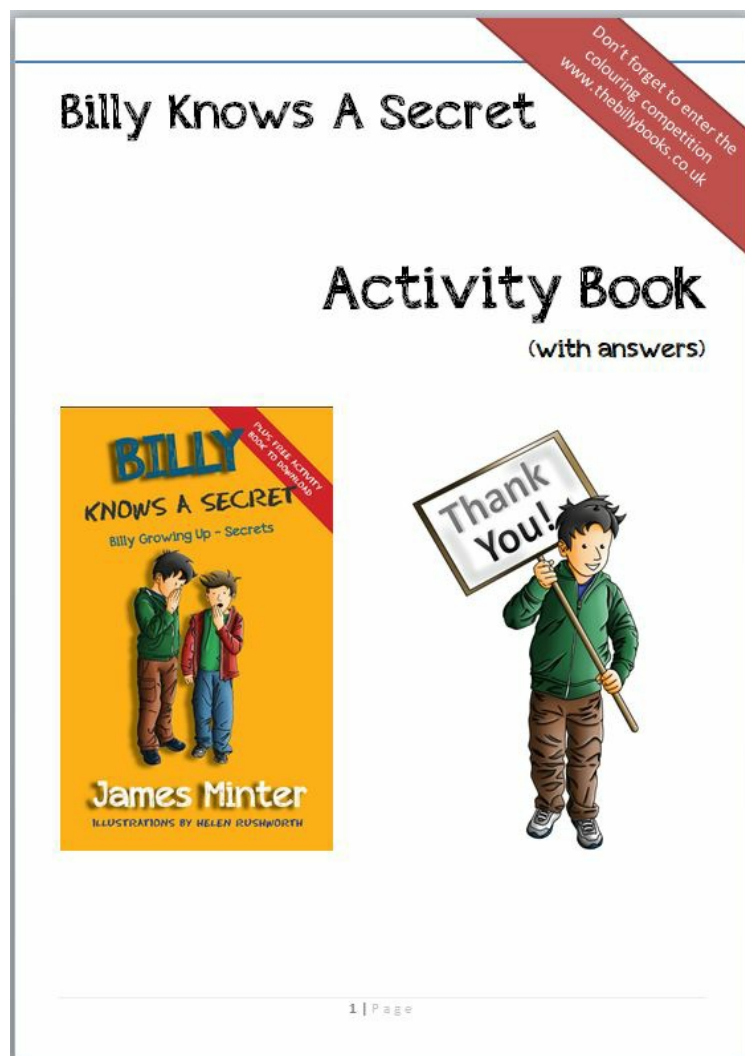
Khalil Gibran

I am not very good at keeping secrets at all! If you want your secret kept do not tell me!

Miley Cyrus

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Book Review

Hi, it's me again, Billy Field. I and my friends would be very grateful if you would leave a review of how much you enjoyed this story on Amazon or Goodreads.**com** or other book related websites.

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Read On For A Taster

Of

Billy Gets Bullied

*Billy Growing Up Series:
Bullying*

James Minter

Helen Rushworth – Illustrator

www.billygrowingup.com



1 - TEN, TEN, TEN

"Do you know what, Jacko? I'm going to be ten years old, on the tenth day of the tenth month. That's got to be

magical.” Billy clapped his hands in excitement. Jacko, Billy’s loving golden retriever dog, lay on the floor beside his bed and licked his paw.

“Ten, ten, ten, Jacko!” Billy repeated.

Billy often spoke to his dog about his feelings and thoughts.

“And it’s only seven days until my birthday!”

Jacko didn’t seem to share Billy’s excitement and continued to lick his paw.

“To turn ten is special; it will never happen again ... ever.” Billy ruffled the dog’s fur. “Are you listening?”

Jacko looked up at Billy and licked his hand as if to say, I hear every word.

“Do you know what, Jacko? I can count to over a thousand and spell marmalade.”

The golden retriever didn’t look impressed.

“I’ve learned so much, and can do all sorts of things, and I’m only nine. What’s it going to be like when I get to ten?”

That reminded Billy of his best friend, Ant.

“Hey, Jacko, you know Ant?”

Upon hearing Ant’s name, Jacko wagged his tail.

“He can’t spell London. I can. Everyone but everyone knows that London has two ‘ons’ and no ‘nos’. Even Ant’s little sister Max knows that, and she’s only eight!”

Billy rubbed Jacko’s ears. “I hope Max can make it to my party. Mum said she won’t count her as one of my six friends, which I’m really pleased about. It feels hard choosing who to invite to your party; somebody always gets left out.”

Thoughts of his party got Billy wondering about birthday presents.

"I hope that Mum and Dad buy me a big bike so I can ride even faster than I already do. The trouble is that when other people buy you things, they often don't get it right. Not because they don't try or care, but more because I'm not exactly sure what I want. To see something on TV or the Internet and actually hold it in your hands, are completely different things."

The dog gave a low woof.

"I upset Mum last year when I suggested Grandad could give me money. She says I should be grateful for whatever I get. Mum is right, but Grandad never knows what to buy me. I reckon being nearly ten is old enough to ask for money, don't you?"

Jacko lifted his head and grasped Billy's pyjama bottoms with his teeth, and then pulled.

Billy looked down at him. "You're easy to buy for—a big bone and you're happy for hours. And, you know, asking for money doesn't seem so bad. Come to think of it; Grandad will be pleased. He doesn't like toy shops or department stores much."

Busy tugging on Billy's pyjamas, Jacko didn't listen. He wanted to go outside.

"We'll walk later, Jacko," Billy said, tugging back until Jacko let go. The dog slumped down and rested his head between his paws. He looked sad.

Billy felt bad and jumped out of bed, "Come on, then, Jacko; let's go for a walk now!"

I hope you enjoyed this free chapter. Please continue reading ['Billy Gets Bullied'](#) to find out what happens next...

For Parents, Teachers, and Guardians: about the 'Billy Growing Up' series

Billy and his friends are children entering young adulthood, trying to make sense of the world around them. Like all children, they are confronted by a complex, diverse, fast-changing, exciting world full of opportunities, contradictions, and dangers through which they must navigate on their way to becoming responsible adults.

What underlies their journey are the values they gain through their experiences. In early childhood, children acquire their values by watching the behaviour of their parents. From around eight years old onwards, children are driven by exploration, and seeking independence; they are more outward looking. It is at this age they begin to think for themselves, and are capable of putting their own meaning to feelings, and the events and experiences they live through. They are developing their own identity.

The Billy Books series supports an initiative championing Values-based Education, (VbE) founded by Dr Neil Hawkes*. The VbE objective is to influence a child's capacity to succeed in life by encouraging them to adopt positive values that will serve them during their early lives, and sustain them throughout their adulthood. Building on the VbE objective, each Billy book uses the power of traditional storytelling to contrast negative behaviours with positive outcomes to illustrate, guide, and shape a child's understanding of the importance of values.

This series of books help parents, guardians and teachers to deal with the issues that challenge children who are coming of age. Dealt with in a gentle way through storytelling, children begin to understand the challenges they face, and the importance of introducing positive values into their everyday lives. Setting the issues in a meaningful context helps a child to see things from a different perspective. These books act as icebreakers, allowing easier communication between parents, or other

significant adults, and children when it comes to discussing difficult subjects. They are suitable for KS2, PSHE classes.

There are eight books in the series. Suggestions for other topics to be dealt with in this way are always welcome. To this end, contact the author by email: james@jamesminter.com

*Values-Based Education, (VbE) is a programme that is being adopted in schools to inspire adults and pupils to embrace and live positive human values. In English schools, there is now a Government requirement to teach British values. More information can be found at: www.valuesbasededucation.com

Billy Gets Bullied

Bullies appear confident and strong. That is why they are scary and intimidating. Billy loses his birthday present, a twenty-pound note, to the school bully. With the help of a grown-up, he manages to get it back and the bully gets what he deserves.

Billy And Ant Fall Out

False pride can make you feel so important that you would rather do something wrong than admit you have made a mistake. In this story, Billy says something nasty to Ant and they row. Ant goes away and makes a new friend, leaving Billy feeling angry and abandoned. His pride will not let him apologise to his best friend until things get out of hand.

Billy Is Nasty To Ant

Jealousy only really hurts the person who feels it. It is useful to help children accept other people's successes without them feeling vulnerable. When Ant wins a school prize, Billy can't stop himself saying horrible things. Rather than being pleased for Ant, he is envious and wishes he had won instead.

Billy And Ant Lie

Lying is very common. It's wrong, but it's common. Lies are told for a number of different reasons, but one of the most frequent is to avoid trouble. While cycling to school, Billy and Ant mess around and lie about getting a flat tyre to cover up their lateness. The arrival of the police at school regarding a serious crime committed earlier that day means their lie puts them in a very difficult position.

Billy Helps Max

Stealing is taking something without permission or payment. Children may steal for a dare, or because they want something and have no money, or as a way of getting attention. Stealing shows a lack of self-control. Max sees some go-faster stripes for her bike. She has to have them, but her birthday is ages away. She eventually gives in to temptation.

Billy Saves The Day

Children need belief in themselves and their abilities, but having an inflated ego can be detrimental. Lack of self-belief holds them back, but overpraising leads to unrealistic expectations. Billy fails to audition for the lead role in the school play, as he is convinced he is not good enough.

Billy Wants It All

The value of money is one of the most important subjects for children to learn and carry with them into adulthood, yet it is one of the least-taught subjects. Billy and Ant want skateboards, but soon realise a reasonable one will cost a significant amount of money. How will they get the amount they need?

Billy Knows A Secret

If something has to be kept a secret, there must be a reason. It is usually to protect yourself or someone else. This story explores the issues of secret-keeping by Billy and Ant, and the consequences that arise. For children, the

importance of finding a responsible adult with whom they can confide in and share their concerns is a significant life lesson.

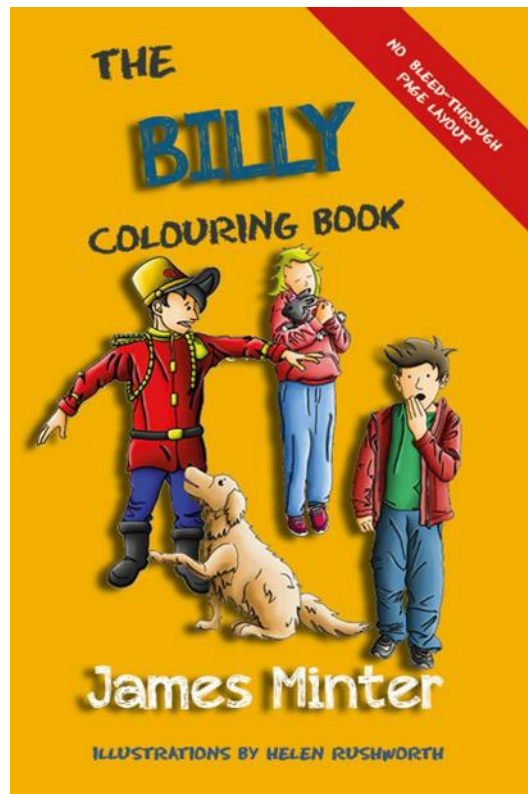
Multiple Formats

Each of the Billy books is available as a **paperback**, as a **hardback** including coloured pictures, as **eBooks** and in **audio**-book format.



The Billy Colouring Book

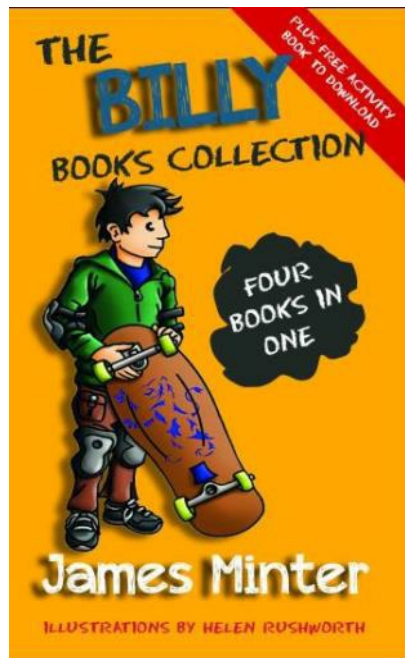
The Billy Colouring book is perfect for any budding artist to express themselves with fun and inspiring designs. Based on the Billy Series, it is filled with fan-favourite characters and has something for every Billy, Ant, Max and Jacko fan.



The Billy Books Collections Volumes 1 and 2

For those readers who cannot wait for the next book in the series, books 1, 2, 3, and 4 are combined into a single work —The Billy Collection, Volume 1, whilst books 5, 6, 7, and 8 make up Volume 2.

The collections are still eligible for the free activity books. Find them all at www.thebillybooks.co.uk or www.billygrowingup.com



About The Author

I am a dad of two grown children and a stepfather to three more. I started writing five years ago with books designed to appeal to the inner child in adults - very English humour. My daughter Louise, reminded me of the bedtime stories I told her and suggested I write them down for others to enjoy. I haven't yet, but instead, I wrote this eight-book series for 7 to 9-year-old boys and girls. They are traditional stories dealing with negative behaviours with positive outcomes.

Although the main characters, Billy and his friends, are made up, Billy's dog, Jacko, is based on our much-loved family pet, which, with our second dog Malibu, caused havoc and mayhem to the delight of my children and consternation of me.

Prior to writing, I was a college lecturer and later worked in the computer industry, at a time before smartphones and tablets, when computers were powered by steam and stood as high as a bus.

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IBEX ILLUSTRATIONS
