

CHAPTER TWO

I PROMISED I'D tell you how it was that I first met Chilly Billy.

It was like this.

Very late one night, when everybody else was fast asleep, I woke up. My stomach was whispering to the rest of me about some chocolate ice cream that was down in the fridge.

Now I know that when this kind of thing happens it's no use trying to get back to sleep again. My stomach won't take no for an answer.

So, very sleepy, I got out of bed and went down to the kitchen. And because I was in my bare feet, I didn't make any noise at all. (You've never heard anything as quiet as me in my bare feet.)

The kitchen was really dark—that thick, black, middle-of-the-night kind of darkness. But I didn't switch the light on. I knew the light in the fridge would be enough for me to find the ice cream.

I opened the fridge door.

Blackness. Not a glimmer of light.

That's odd, I thought. I'm sure the light was working before I went to bed.

I was just going to switch on the kitchen light, when I heard a strange, small noise. It seemed to be coming from the freezer compartment.

I put my ear next to the ice cube tray, and listened very hard.

There it was again—a muffled, fluttery kind of puffing with a whiffle at the end.

Flutter, puff, whiffle. Flutter, puff, whiffle. That's exactly what it sounded like.

And then I suddenly realised what I was listening to. It was the smallest snore I'd ever heard.

Something was sleeping in my fridge.

This was serious. Maybe my ice cream had been raided by a mouse who mistook it for cold cheese in the dark.

Flutter, puff, whiffle went the noise again.

Keeping as quiet as I could, I crept away and got my torch.

I'll surprise whatever it is, I thought, and if it's been eating my ice cream, there'll be

trouble.

I aimed the torch into the freezer compartment and switched it on, moving the beam from side to side like one of those big searchlights.

No, there was nothing on the ice cubes. Nothing behind the orange juice. My chocolate ice cream, thank goodness, was safe.

Then I noticed that the snoring had stopped. Whatever-it-was had woken up.

I held my breath. Whatever-it-was held its breath. We both waited.

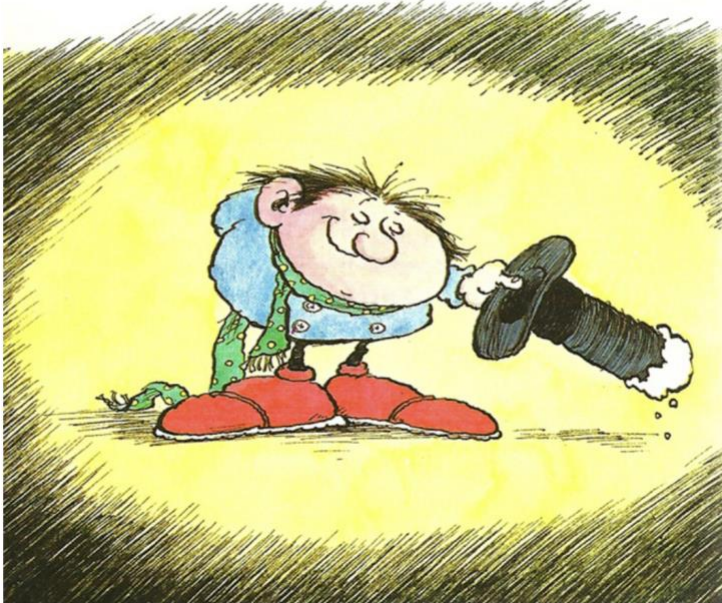
After what seemed like ages, whatever-it-was couldn't hold its breath any longer, and let out a little 'oof', like you do when you've been holding your breath.

The 'oof' definitely came from a package of frozen peas in the corner of the freezer.

Fast as I could, I aimed the torch right on the package.

And there he was.

Two sleepy little eyes peeked out over the top of the package. Then the rest of him (which wasn't very much) stood up and stretched and yawned.



"Oh dear," he said. "You're the first person who's ever caught me napping. What are you doing creeping around at this time of night?"

I was amazed. Not just amazed, but cross. After all, it was *my* fridge.

"Just a minute," I said. "Who *are* you?"

And what are you doing in *my* fridge, next to *my* chocolate ice cream, sleeping on *my* very comfortable frozen peas?"

He took his hat off, and did a little bow.

"Billy's the name," he said, "Chilly Billy. I take care of your fridge—cleaning, defrosting, that kind of thing. And I specialise in turning the light on and off."

"Well," I said, "you didn't specialise very well tonight."

As soon as I'd said that, I knew I'd made a mistake.

The little man was furious. I've never seen anybody get so angry. If he'd been any bigger, I'd have been scared stiff.

He slid down the frozen pea package like a champion skier, marched up to the very edge of the freezer compartment, stood up on the tips of his big boots and stuck his angry little face into mine.



"You've got a nerve," he said. "I've been working non-stop for eighteen hours.

"I repaired a leak in the yogurt carton.

"I tidied up the freezer compartment, which you left in a dreadful mess.

"I polished all the ice cubes.

"I put the top back on a milk bottle.

"I cleaned all the shelves.

"I'm worn out, and I deserve forty winks. Or fifty winks, come to that."

"Oh," I said, not being able to think of anything else.

"And another thing", said Billy, "what are you doing out of bed at this time of night? It's disgraceful."

I decided that I liked this fierce little man, even though he was angry with me.

"Well," I said, "I thought perhaps a lick or two of ice cream would be a comforting thing to have. Would you like some?"

He stood there for a moment, and thought about whether he was still cross with me or not.

"Well, all right," he said at last, "I forgive you. But don't say mean things to me again. It's not easy being small and chilly, and I work very hard in here. And a fellow doesn't like being woken up in the middle of the night and shouted at by someone who hasn't even got his shoes on."

I said how sorry I was, and then he gave me a wink and a little smile.

"Here," he said, and pushed the ice cream over to me. "Be my guest."



And so that night, while I was having a lick or two of ice cream, Chilly Billy sat on the side of the dish and told me about himself and some of his adventures.

And we became friends. And he said I could tell you about his adventures. And starting tomorrow, I will.