

Stellar Stories

It Happened One Night

Round One

On Saturday, Billy and Rueben had lunch together. They went to their favorite spot, the Fish Shack, for fried fish. They were discussing their favorite subject – cars. Maria, Billy's girlfriend, showed up. She walked over and dumped a giant soda in Billy's lap.

"Hey, what was that for?" Billy shouted.

"That's for taking my best friend Allison to the movies last night," Maria replied.

"Uh oh," Billy thought, "How did she find out?"

Billy tried to cover by claiming it wasn't a date. Maria wasn't interested in listening. Rueben didn't look too pleased either, since Allison was his girlfriend. Finally, Billy came in and explained. He and Allison didn't really go to the movies. They were actually planning a surprise birthday party for Rueben. When Maria and Rueben heard the real story, they both apologized.

"Let's go to the movies tonight," suggested Billy.

"Cool. Then we'll go to Moe's and plan my surprise party together," added Rueben.

Maria joked, "I'll buy the soda."

Round Two

Later that day, Billy went home and asked if he could borrow his dad's car. At first his dad said no since Billy always returned the car on empty.

"But, Dad," Billy pleaded. Eventually Billy promised to return the car with a full tank. His dad handed him the keys.

Billy watched TV before heading over to Maria's house. He was late, and Maria was waiting outside. After passing Wild Willie's Toy Store, the car sputtered and rolled to a stop right in front of the Fish Shack. Billy looked at the gas gauge and he couldn't believe his eyes. He was out of gas.

Billy wasn't too happy and neither was Maria. The evening was starting off on the wrong foot.

Billy suggested, "We can walk to the gas station. It's only a few blocks away. We can still make it to the movies if we hurry, or we could have dinner at the Fish Shack instead."

At first Maria said she didn't want to walk. Her shoes were uncomfortable and her backpack was too heavy, but she realized that walking to the gas station was certainly better than sitting in the car alone so off they went.

Just before they reached the gas station, a blue muscle car with jacked-up wheels raced past them. It smashed into a green convertible and skidded into the front of the gas station. The blue muscle car was pretty banged up. The front window was shattered and the doors were jammed

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to Literacy

shut. The driver crawled through the window and started to run. Still shaky from the crash, he accidentally ran into Billy and Maria, knocking them both down. When Maria fell, she dropped her backpack. The driver grabbed it and kept running.

Round Three

Just as Billy pulled himself up, the blue muscle car burst into flames. People were running all over the place. Alarms were going off and the sounds of sirens filled the air. Luckily, Maria wasn't hurt, but she was upset that her backpack was gone.

"That has my life in it. My wallet, my license, my money, and my pager!" she cried.

Now Billy was really upset. His knee hurt, his lip was busted, and he didn't know what to do. But he had to get his girlfriend's backpack -- and fast! Just then, Billy's brother Michael drove up on his motorcycle.

"Dude, what happened?" Michael asked Billy.

Billy jumped on the back of the bike. He told Michael that Maria's backpack had been stolen.

"We have to get it back!" he shouted.

"Did you get a good look at the guy?" Michael asked.

Billy remembered that the guy was wearing a red T-shirt and a blue hat. Michael and Billy were speeding down 7th Street when Billy yelled, "Hey, turn left! Turn left! He's running down that alley!"

As they turned into the alley, they caught a glimpse of the thief getting into a black sedan. "That's him!" cried out Billy. "Follow that black car!"

Michael went full throttle on his motorcycle, and they roared after the car.

Round Four

The black sedan sped out of the alley, weaving in and out of traffic, but Michael and Billy were right behind it. They were determined to recover the backpack. Suddenly, the sedan made a quick U-turn into oncoming traffic. It was heading straight for a bus filled with innocent people. It would take a miracle to avoid disaster. Michael pulled hard on the brakes. He and Billy covered their eyes. They couldn't bear to watch. But the bus driver swerved and somehow missed the black sedan.

The car screeched and fishtailed into a fire hydrant. The hydrant blew and water went everywhere. In the middle of all the confusion, Billy headed for the black car. He ran through broken glass, puddles of water, and frightened pedestrians. When he got to the car he yanked the door open and grabbed Maria's backpack. The cops arrived moments later. They arrested the thief and then came over to make sure Michael and Billy were okay.

"Fine, now that I've got my girlfriend's backpack," replied Billy. "And if we hurry I think we can still make it to the late show!"

Something About Sally

Round One

Sally got home from school late on Tuesday. She was having one of those days; you know the kind when nothing seems to go right. She got a C- on her history paper and a C on a math test. She forgot her lunch on the bus and to make matters even worse, today was the day she had to stay late to catch up on schoolwork. Needless to say, Sally wasn't in the best of moods.

So when she got home from school and saw an envelope with her name on it, she figured it was probably an overdue library book fine. But when she opened it up, a giant blue and gold elephant-shaped card fell out along with a bunch of temporary wild animal tattoos.

"Wow, this is cool. It's an invitation to a costume party this Saturday," Sally exclaimed.

According to the invitation, only those people in costume would be allowed in, and the theme was Wild and Exotic Animals. Plus there was going to be a costume contest, dancing, and music by the spotted Zebras, playing some very endangered sounds.

Sally was so excited she forgot how bad her day had been. She grabbed the phone from her little brother and immediately called her three best friends, Thea, Rufus, and Kris. Luckily, they all had been invited, too. Since the party was only a few days away, Sally and her friends decided to meet after school the next day to work on their costumes.

Round Two

Rufus, Thea, Kris, and Sally met at the Aardvark Café right after school. First they got some chili cheese fries to help them think. Then they decided to split up. Sally and Thea checked out the second hand clothing stores, Rufus scavenged the streets for discarded items, and Kris hit the zoo for inspiration.

When they finished they hooked up at Sally's house to show off their treasures. Kris had collected a bunch of pamphlets and brochures from the zoo. Rufus had found a stack of old wildlife magazines and a TV antenna. Sally and Thea came back with vintage clothes, wild hats, feathers, and lots of funny looking props. They dumped everything on the bed and started sorting through it.

"Now comes the fun part, figuring out what to be," said Sally.

"I was thinking I might go as a stinkbug," said Rufus.

"You are so weird," said Kris.

Sally said she was considering going as a zebra. "I will even dye my hair black and white!" she laughed.

"Not bad," commented Rufus. "What about you, Thea?" he continued.

"I can't decide between a squid and a moose," Thea said, while modeling antlers made from coat hangers and scarves.

They all looked at Kris. "I think these feathers would make a great quail!" she said.

Round Three

On Saturday afternoon, everyone met at Sally's house to put on their costumes. Sally had dyed her hair black and white so she could look like a zebra. Rufus had used the antenna from the TV to go as a stinkbug. Thea looked pretty good as a moose, and Kris looked funny as a quail. They decided the fastest way to get to the party would be to take the bus.

When they climbed aboard they were met by lots of really strange looks. It was pretty funny. Luckily, they were only on the bus for three stops. The party was in the public garden behind Bernie's Exotic Pet Shop. The dance stage glowed with strings of lights, and the picnic area was bright with tiki torches. The place was packed. Sally had never seen so many crazy costumes. She saw a guy dressed from head to toe like a leopard and a woman with a snake wrapped around her waist. There was also a fountain with colorful lights and fish in one corner of the garden. This was one of the coolest and strangest parties Sally had ever been to. The music was just starting up as they made their way through the crowd.

Round Four

"It's time for the Wild and Exotic Costume Contest," the street-level D.J. announced, "and the lucky winner gets an all-expense-paid trip for four to a wild animal park in San Diego."

The crowd went nuts. All Sally could think about was trying to get to the stage before the contest started. As she rushed past a leopard, she tripped and flew into the fountain. Water splashed over the quail who was laughing. The leopard toppled backwards into a herd of moose. The moose collapsed into a grumbling heap. There were antlers everywhere. By the time Sally struggled to her feet, it was too late. The contest was over. Rufus was on stage getting wild applause for his stinkbug outfit.

"Well, it looks like we have a winner," the D.J. said pointing to Rufus. "So, who are you taking with you to San Diego, Mr. Stinkbug?"

Rufus paused for a moment. "I don't know. I guess whoever bugs me the most."

The Tank of Dr. Wong

Round One

Going to the marine park was Diego's favorite thing to do since he was little. He had gone to the park often because his father worked there as a janitor. The summer that Diego turned 16, his father suggested that he apply for a job. Diego imagined that he would work with the animals. Instead he was hired to work the cash register in the gift shop.

On his first day, Diego stopped by the seal tank on his way to the gift shop. The seals were playing a basketball game with a giant red ball. One of the seals jumped up on a rock and started clapping her flippers.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Diego said.

Diego arrived at work two minutes late.

His boss yelled at him. "You're late, and it's only your first day. This better not happen again."

The shop opened at 8:00. Diego needed to organize all the T-shirts before the visitors came through. T-shirts sold more than anything else in the gift shop. That night, Diego felt disappointed. He wasn't learning anything about marine life. Instead, he saw a lot of walrus key chains and killer whale pens. The only dolphins he saw were stuffed animals, and although he learned how to make change, it wasn't much fun. And his boss was grumpy. His father told him it was better than cleaning, but Diego wasn't so sure. Diego set two alarm clocks so he wouldn't be late again.

Round Two

Diego was allowed an hour lunch break. On his second day, he went to sit in the bleachers to eat his sandwich. Maybe the dolphins would be rehearsing for the afternoon show, and he could get a sneak preview.

Suddenly, Diego heard someone behind him. "Hey!"

Diego turned around. He saw a girl who looked like she worked there.

"Are you new?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said.

"My name's Rani," she said.

She sat down to eat beside him. When they finished eating their sandwiches, she told him that she knew all the secret passages in the marine park.

"Do you want to go see the dolphin training tank?" she asked.

"Are you kidding? That's the reason I got a job here in the first place," Diego said.

He followed her up to a door marked "Restricted Access." The minute they went through the door, they were blasted with the smell of fish. At the dolphin training tank, it really smelled. They had to be careful not to fall because the floor was wet and slippery. At the edge of the tank was a big bucket of dead fish.

"Watch this," said Rani.

She threw a fish up in the air, and one of the dolphins jumped up out of the water. It caught the fish and came down, making a giant splash that sloshed all over the floor. Diego picked up a fish and stood at the edge of the tank. A dolphin put her head over the side. Diego nodded and held the fish out. The dolphin nodded back. Diego nodded again and threw the fish to the dolphin.

"That dolphin is named Frieda," said Rani.

Then, all of a sudden, they heard a voice ask, "What are you two kids doing?"

Round Three

Dr. Susan Wong was the park's marine biologist, and she turned out to be cool. When they told her that they were interested in learning about the ocean, she convinced them to visit the tide pool. It was a strange place full of animals that looked more like vegetables. Dr. Wong said that barnacles stand on their head and eat with their feet. The glue that barnacles use to stick to things is as strong as any glue you can buy in a store.

Diego picked up a green starfish and one of its arms fell off. Diego was scared he had hurt it, but Dr. Wong said that it happened all the time.

"Some starfish can grow up to nine or ten arms. Even if a starfish loses an arm, it can grow the arm back," said Dr. Wong.

Rani picked up a hermit crab.

"Don't move, and the crab will come out of its shell," said Dr. Wong.

The crab peeked out. Rani could hardly keep still, because the crab tickled as it explored her hand. Diego spotted a purple sea squirt. When Diego tried to take a closer look, it squirted water in his face.

Suddenly, Diego remembered the time.

"Oh no, what time is it?" he asked.

Rani looked at her watch and told him that lunch was almost over. Dr. Wong asked if they wanted to come after work and help her take care of the dolphins. They both agreed, and Diego ran back to the gift shop. He didn't want to get fired on his second day for being late again.

Round Four

"How would you like to get in the tank with the dolphins?" asked Dr. Wong.

Dr. Wong wanted them to scrub the sides of the dolphin tank. Diego and Rani put on wet suits. The wet suits were cold and uncomfortable. Diego felt funny walking around in his and wearing it was like having squishy wet noodles next to his skin.

Diego and Dr. Wong grabbed some brushes and jumped into the tank first. As soon as they were in the water, the dolphins swam around them making strange noises.

"The dolphins like to get comfortable with the people who take care of them," said Dr. Wong. "If they like you, they might invite you to swim with them."

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to Literacy

Diego touched a passing dolphin. It was Frieda. Diego thought that Frieda smiled at him but remembered that dolphins always smile. Frieda swam up beside him. She seemed to nod at him. Carefully, Diego grabbed Frieda's dorsal fin and held his breath. Suddenly, he was moving fast through water. Diego remembered to breathe out through his nose. Big air bubbles trailed out behind him, and his legs flew back. The water became like the wind. Frieda swam along the surface of the water and blew air out of her blowhole near Diego's face. For the first time that day, Diego stopped caring about time. Then suddenly it was over, and Frieda swam back to Dr. Wong.

Diego could see Rani anxiously waiting for her turn by the edge of the tank. Diego got out of the water shaking.

Rani said, "That looked pretty cool."

"Yeah," said Diego. "That's definitely the best part of the job."

Diego grabbed a fish from the bucket and nodded to Frieda. Frieda nodded back, and Diego threw the fish.