

BILLY AND THE BROKEN PROMISE

Dear Best Friend Rabbit Billy,
You are invited to my birthday party on the first day of the first week of spring.
Love,
Hedgehog Alex

Billy was eating breakfast when his mother read the invitation to him.

"That's right, it's Alex's birthday soon. What fun we'll have! I'm sure Alex will be given some neat toys for his birthday!"

"Well, dear," said Mother Rabbit, "if you want to attend, you'll need to RSVP. It is only five days away."

"R-S-... what?" asked Billy.

"*Répondez, s'il vous plaît.* It's French, dear. It means 'to please respond to this invitation,'" explained Mother.

"Oh," said Billy with a smile. "I'll let Alex know when I see him today at school." And with a wave to his dad and mom, he was out the door and into the morning sunshine.

The path that led to Greenshire School was particularly lovely in the early morning light. Billy would do his best to be out the door as soon as he could so he could relish his walk to school.

"Billy, Billy!" came an excited voice to his left. It was Badger Smogl.

"Guess what!" commanded Smogl.

Billy laughed at Smogl's earnest expression. "What's up, Smogl?"

"Father just bought me a new fly-chute for pine surfing."

Billy gasped in appropriate awe. "Can I have a try, please?"

"Of course," agreed Smogl smugly. "Next week, Thursday!" called Smogl over his shoulder as he headed back toward the Badger estate.

That's the day of Alex's birthday party, thought Billy. But he decided not to think about it. *These things always work out,* he told himself.

Billy smiled all the way to school. Later that day he sat with Hedgehog Alex as they ate their lunch. Billy was so excited about trying Smogl's fly-chute that he had forgotten all about the invitation to Alex's birthday party he had received that morning.

"Billy," said Alex in a worried tone, "did you get my invitation for my birthday party?"

"Oh" said Billy smacking his forehead. "Yes, I did. I just forgot to say, but of course I'll be there." *There should be enough time for me to do some fly-chuting first,* thought Billy.

"Good," sighed Alex. "Crowds make me nervous, even if it is a birthday party for me. I'm glad I can count on you to be there as my best friend."



Days passed quickly, and the appointed day of Alex's birthday celebration had arrived. Billy was on the shaded path that led to Alex's home when Smogl came crashing down the path. "Your mother said you'd be on your way to Alex's, so I knew just where to find you." Smogl was in the fly-chute, and it indeed was a grand contraption. Perhaps the grandest contraption Billy had ever seen in all his rabbit years. "Get in," said Smogl.

Billy looked at the sun in the sky. It was early yet, enough time to go for some pine surfing. Besides Alex would understand if he was just a little late ... he knew how much Billy LOVED fly-chuting.

It was quite late in the afternoon when Billy finally arrived at Alex's birthday party. In fact, it seemed nearly all the guests had come and gone. Alex was sitting alone at the foot of Old Grangle the Oak, party streamers hung from the low branches, and a pile of presents sat at the foot of the tree, with one especially shiny and large present in the back. As Billy neared he gasped in appreciation. Alex had gotten a fly-chute as well! And if it was possible, it was even grander than Smogl's.

"Did I miss all the fun?" asked Billy innocently. He earnestly wanted Alex to invite him to ride in his new fly-chute.

Alex looked up from where he had been sitting. His eyes looked sad, and a little watery. "You said you'd be here," said Alex in a small voice.



"Oh," said Billy, suddenly feeling quite ashamed. "Well, Smogl came along, and I couldn't say no, ... but I'm here now. There's still some light left, perhaps we can play."

"No, it's okay," said Alex in a stiff voice. "I think I'd rather be alone right now."

"Well, tomorrow, then?" asked Billy.

But Alex had already begun to walk away, and Billy didn't know if Alex had heard him or not.

The next few days it seemed to Billy that Alex was avoiding him. He didn't sit at his usual place during lunch hours, and at class times he would sit at the very front of the class, right in front of Teacher Reamus, which Billy was sure Alex had never done before.

Billy missed his friend. He remembered how Alex had said he was counting on Billy to be at his party, and he knew he had hurt his friend by not keeping his word. He wished he knew how he could make things right.



It was the day of the school festival. All the students were helping to raise funds for a school field trip to Aquadare Waterfalls. Some students were selling lemonade; others were offering baked goodies from booths piled with great heaps of delightful-looking treats.

Alex was sitting alone in a booth with a sign that said "Handcrafted Quills." Usually he and Billy would attend the school festival and operate a booth together, but he had overheard someone say that Billy was helping out at the fly-chute booth, selling tickets for rides in Smogl's fly-chute. He missed Billy, but he was still hurt that Billy hadn't kept his word about his birthday party. Alex sighed, and rested his head on the booth table.

"Hello, Alex," said a voice that sounded like Billy's. Alex opened his eyes to find that it was indeed Billy.

"I ... uh..."—Billy's cheeks were a dull pink—"I wanted to ask if I could help you with your booth." Billy paused, and when Alex didn't say anything, Billy nervously continued. "And I want to apologize for the other day when I didn't keep my word to you. I realize that it hurt our friendship, and caused you to not trust me. But I miss you and want to be your friend again." "It's okay," said Alex, who was very happy to have his friend back. And happier still to not have to sit through the school festival alone.

They sold many quills that day, and agreed to see each other again on the morrow for a full day of fly-chuting.

"I'll be there," promised Billy. It had been a difficult thing to learn, but Billy was now glad he understood the importance of keeping his word.

The End

