

Around the World
WC 1451

Billy stood on the corner of Maple and Durham in the small town waiting for his sister Rosie's school bus. She rode a different bus than he did. It was about half the size of his bus, and it only held eight kids. They were the slowest kids in the school, so they had their own wing, color-coded green so they wouldn't step into the wrong classroom. But that always confused Billy, because they only had one classroom. Why did they need a whole hallway? Probably because they were special. At least that's what his Dad said. That's why Mom left, too. Rosie was too special for her to look at. She got stars in her eyes and walked around the house with sunglasses on for a long time. Then she left.

Billy wasn't special. He had six classrooms. He had gotten all A's that quarter, so today, which was Allowance Day, was extra special. Allowance Day always fell on a Friday. He had eight whole dollars to spend! That was a dollar for every year. His money itched in his pants while he waited for Rosie. Did her bus have to be slow, too? She would have two dollars to spend. She was only six, and everything she liked was usually only a dollar anyway. Like the Duncan Butterfly yo-yo she'd been talking about for weeks - how the red in it was like her favorite red bouncing ball, but more grown up. Plus Dad said the Butterfly had a wide string gap that would make it easier for Rosie to land the yo-yo back on the string.

Finally, her bus came and slowed to a stop. Rosie was at the back, her huge head a tumble of black curls. Ever since Mom left, Rosie hated to brush her hair and it was left on its own to grow into the garden it was. The other kids had parents waiting at the bus stop for them. Billy felt older, responsible for picking up Rosie. He also felt a little

embarrassed when his friends would see him and taunt him. His response was to brag that their parents wouldn't hand over that responsibility to them. He always hoped they wouldn't mention what other choice did Dad have, without Mom around.

Rosie was finally out of the bus. She jumped out into a puddle, spraying water all over. She loved making a splash.

“Bi-Wee!” She came and hugged him. The smile never left her face. “Yo-yo today, Bi-wee, wight?”

“Yep. Yo-Yo today.” He took her hand and they walked the long block down to the D Lovely Dollar & Discount Store, ready to spend their earnings.

In the store, Rosie stepped right up to the counter, ready to make her well-thought-out purchase.

“Hang on, Rosie, I want to look around a bit, ok?”

“OK.”

Rosie kept her eye on the yo-yo while her brother browsed. Her prize was behind the counter on the wall. That made it important, special. And she had just enough money to pay for it – two whole dollars. It was fantastic, with chunks of red colored plastic, tinsel, and glitter. She had never seen anything so beautiful. It reminded her of the Christmas tree her family used to decorate each year, tossing tinsel on top of it until the branches drooped. Even if she couldn't do tricks like Rock the Cradle or Eiffel Tower, she could look through the yo-yo like a kaleidoscope and turn back time to the days of Christmas trees and tinsel.

What was taking him so long? She looked at the other things on the counter and saw a sucker swirled with pinwheel colors of red, orange and yellow, all the primary colors that Rosie was learning in kindergarten. She only had two dollars, though, just enough to buy the yo-yo. But the sucker hypnotized her with its spirals; she felt the room spin.

The bell above the glass door tinkled. A man that looked as old as her dad walked in. He headed straight for the counter. “What are you looking at, young lady?”

She turned to look at him and saw the Butterfly yo-yo again as she did. Rosie had been taught to never talk to strangers. But she was so excited about it, she had to burst out, “yo-yo.” Rosie pointed to the Butterfly.

“Ah, you have very good taste, I see. A very nice yo-yo. For a reproduction, that is.”

“Product?” Rosie asked, squinting her eyes like she did when the sun hit them too hard.

“RE-production. It means, a fake, a phony.” The man talked in quick, short punches.

The woman behind the counter interrupted him. “Now, these yo-yos came straight from the old Duncan warehouse, mister. They have the seal and everything.” She bent down to look at Rosie. “They ain’t fake, honey.” She put her hand on Rosie’s.

“Well, why have a plastic reproduction when you can have the original wooden?” The man smiled crookedly at the clerk.

“Mister, those are over forty years old, and I haven’t seen one except on Antiques Roadshow.” She sniffed.

“I happen to own one. A red one, too. I have it in the original polybag.” He leaned down and whispered to Rosie, “To be a true collector, you need to have the original specimen. I’m a collector of all sorts.” The man stood up and rubbed his chin.

Rosie looked at him, her eyes wide as spaceships. She knew from his tone that fake was a bad thing. She didn’t want fake.

“The original Duncan Butterfly is perfect for going around the world and reaching the moon.” The man smiled.

Billy walked up to the counter. “Ready, Rosie?” His hands were full of bottle rockets, Pez candy and Willy Wonka chocolate bars. His money was ready in his hand and looked as stiff as the pants his mother used to iron for his father.

“Yeah.” Rosie slowly reached for the spiral sucker that she knew was real. She took it, the packaging making a popping noise as it came off the wire shelf. As she brought it down, she looked to her left and found her eyes locked with those of the man. She tried to figure out the color of them; they looked different in the slants of sunlight that came through the window. Rosie was mesmerized by those eyes and thought they must be original, too.

“Come on, Rosie!” Billy interrupted her thoughts. “Why are you getting that thing? I thought you wanted the yo-yo. It’s a better deal.” He shook his head.

Rosie put her two dollars on the counter. Her bills, unlike Billy’s, were worked over, wrinkled from the nights she had folded them over and over in her hands, thinking of the yo-yo.

They walked past the man, out of the store and into the ending day.

“Help me open?” Rosie handed Billy her lollipop.

“We gotta get home. Wait to open that later, OK?” He pushed it back into her hands.

“OK.” Rosie sighed

“Hey, Billy, what’d you get?” Chuck and Rick, his neighborhood friends, ran over to them.

“Oh boy, my bag is so heavy, you guys gotta take a look at all my stuff! Eight dollars worth!” Billy grinned. He showed them his goods, leaving Rosie alone.

The man tapped Rosie on the shoulder. His hand stayed a pulse too long.

“Would you like me to open that sucker for you?”

“Lollipop!”

“Ah, that’s correct. Lollipop.” He took the candy from her and unwrapped the cellophane, each crinkle creating a wrinkle in the air. “Here you go.” His fingers drooped just enough for the candy to fall to the pavement. “Aw, shucks. I’m sorry, kid.”

She looked for Billy. He was a block ahead, walking with his face in his candy bag, showing off to his friends.

“Let me make it up to you. How about I give you that wooden Butterfly yo-yo? How does that sound?”

Rosie’s eyes shone like broken glass. She looked again up the street. Billy was far away now. She took the man’s outstretched hand.

When Billy’s bag was nearly empty and his friends gone, he reached back to take Rosie’s hand. It was almost dark. “Hey Rosie, let’s...”

She wasn’t there.

Billy retraced his steps and stopped when he came to the spot in the street where the lollipop lay like a forgotten toy. A blown cottonweed was stuck to the edge.

He looked up into the early night sky and saw the egg of the moon slowly being born. As his mind shattered, the wind carried a phrase on its back.

The Butterfly is perfect for going around the world and reaching the moon.