

## A Season of Happiness Presents



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### Story Twelve – HAPPY BIRTHDAY PRONTO

By Dave Hawkins

It was Pronto's birthday and Wombat had decided to give his friend a nice surprise. He took Pronto down to the lake and there, sitting at the edge of the water was a boat. "I borrowed it from Water Rat," said Wombat, "And as a birthday treat I'm going to take you for a lovely long row on the lake,"

Well, Pronto was really surprised and thought how nice it would be to sit back, relax and do absolutely nothing but enjoy his birthday. Unfortunately, that wasn't quite what Wombat had in mind. "You'll have to row, I'm afraid," he informed his friend. "I'm too short and my legs are only little."

Now Pronto wasn't too sure; and he was even less sure when he climbed into the boat and found there was water in the bottom. "Oh, don't worry about it," Wombat reassured him. "It's probably just from the rain we had last night."

"I hope you're right," said Pronto as he settled down on the seat. The boat rocked around a bit as Wombat climbed in and sat at the back so that he could steer with the rudder. Noticing Pronto was frowning, Wombat tried to make his friend feel a little easier: "All looks pretty ship-shape to me," he said, "So let's cast off and get going."

As he started rowing, Pronto thought the boat seemed to be making a lot of creaking noises; but Wombat claimed all boats did that. Although not aware that Wombat knew anything about boats, he had no choice but to assume the creaking was nothing to be concerned about. It wasn't until they were right out in the middle of the lake that they realised something was wrong. The water in the bottom of the boat was rising and it was now up to Pronto's ankles. "I'm not much of an expert," he said to Wombat, "But I have a terrible feeling we're sinking. Better get out the life jackets."

Wombat was shocked. "Life jackets? Water rat didn't say anything about life jackets!"

"Alright," said Pronto, "What about distress flares that we can shoot into the air to attract attention?" The sheepish look on Wombat's face along with a shrug made it clear that there

were no flares, and no signal rockets either. In fact, there was no safety equipment of any description in Water Rat's boat. Following a huge sigh, Pronto declared: "I guess we'll just have to swim for it, then."

"Swim?" Wombat was horrified. "I can't swim – I never learned how!"

What a terrible mess the two friends were in. All they could do was sit in the sinking boat, waving and shouting: "Mayday, Mayday," which, according to Pronto, was the message ships sent out on their radio when they were in serious trouble. Needless to say, they didn't have a radio either, and they were so far from shore that passers-by couldn't hear them. Those who did actually see them waving assumed the two friends were just having a really good time, so they simply waved back and walked on.

Luckily for Pronto and Wombat, Pelican happened to be floating nearby, and when she saw what was happening, she flew off to find the Drumlins. Surely they would know what to do? The moment he learned of the crisis, Red went into action mode. "Right, Drumlins," he bellowed, "Shape up – Bristol fashion!"

"What's that mean?" Purple asked Yellow quietly so that Red didn't hear.

"I have no idea," Yellow replied. "Why don't we just form a line like we usually do? If Red yells at us, we can assume it's not that."

The Drumlins shuffled around until they were standing in a line and waited. That seemed okay with Red. "Over to you Green," he said, "We need you to think of a way to save Pronto and Wombat from drowning."

As soon as she heard the word 'drowning', Orange started to cry. "Um, er...", mumbled Blue, taking off his hat, then putting it back on again, "Don't er... cry, Orange. Green will er.. come up with er... an idea to er... save them."

"To be sure," said Green, "And I think I just have. I'd say we are in need of another boat."

"That's it!" said Purple, getting very excited, "A speed boat with a really fast, turbo-powered engine."

"No thank you," droned Yellow. "A nice, slow one will be fine; just as long as it floats."

They all looked around, but there was no sign of any kind of boat. "Maybe we could swim out to them," whispered Orange, "Although it does seem rather a long way."

"And they'll er... probably er... have sunk to the er... bottom by the er... time we get there," added Blue, stroking his tie.

It seemed there was nothing they could do to save the two friends; then Green said: "I know – I think there's a way we can *make* a boat." His idea was quite simple. He had Blue, Orange and Yellow lay close together on their backs in the water holding hands. He then asked Red, very politely of course, to stand at the front, while he and Purple climbed on board the Drumlin raft and sat at the back. When nothing seemed to be happening, Purple said: "This is all very nice, Green, but we aren't going anywhere."

“We will be soon,” Green declared confidently. “If you would please flatten yourself out, Red, you are going to be our sail.”

Purple looked around and frowned. “Brilliant idea, Green,” she said, sticking a finger in the air, “Except for the fact that there isn’t any wind.”

“Not at all, at all,” Green replied, “Not yet there isn’t; but there will be once you and I start blowing.”

A snigger came from the Drumlin raft. It was Yellow: “That won’t be hard for Purple. She’s always full of hot air.”

So, with Red making himself flat like a big sheet, and with Green and Purple puffing and blowing at Red to supply the wind, the funny-shaped, many-coloured sailing boat was soon skimming across the water to rescue Pronto and Wombat from the middle of the lake.

Sometime later, back on dry land again, Red had a very serious warning for the two friends: “Never go out in a boat unless you know what you are doing and there is proper safety equipment on board.”

“But it wasn’t our boat,” Wombat informed Red, “It was Water Rat’s – he’s the one to blame, not us.”

“The blame is yours, Wombat,” chided Yellow sternly. “You were the ones using it, so it was your responsibility to make sure it was safe.”

Pronto was nodding. “We understand,” he said, adding: “And thank you very much Drumlins for saving us. I don’t think we’ll be doing anything as silly as that again.”

“Too right,” said Wombat, “I’ve had it with boats.” Just then, as he looked up into the sky he saw a little aeroplane flying around. “Er, Pronto... A friend of mine’s got a plane. I don’t suppose you fancy a bit of a spin?”

Pronto scowled at his friend. “Thank you, no, Wombat. The only spin I fancy is watching my clothes hoist going round with the washing on it.”

“That’s not particularly exciting,” said Wombat dismally.

“And that’s just the reason I fancy it,” Pronto replied with a big grin.