

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

EXPOSITION

“Jodie, what would you like for your birthday?” said Mum. She bent over and kissed me. We were sitting at the kitchen table after dinner. I was finishing off my homework.

“Gosh, I don’t know. I’ve got everything.”

Problem 1: What to have for birthday?

“Something special?” she added. “Grandma wants to pay this time. She was so pleased that you came and stayed with her when she was ill and Dad and I were away. Any ideas?”

Dialogue... the sound of characters in action

“I know you don’t approve, but I like McDonald’s...” I suggested. “But that’s probably not exciting enough. Or maybe a party with a real clown... Or perhaps some new clothes...” I was running out of ideas. “And anyway, I don’t mind staying with Gran. She’s lots of fun.”

I went to bed that night, imagining all sorts of lovely things. My birthday was a month away. The trouble was, it was right in the middle of the holidays. Everyone might be away.

Problem 2: No one to come to birthday

Sure enough, no one seemed to be able to come. I asked Amy. “Sorry, kiddo – I’m off at the beach. But I’ll send a card.” I asked Tran. “Oh Jodie, I wish I could – but it’s the day of my cousin’s wedding.” I asked Sarah. “It’s my Dad’s only time off – and we booked a house.”

Drama... the conflict within a character

Some birthday. The last day of term, I waved everyone goodbye. Then I went home. And I cried.

“Cheer up,” I said to myself on the big day. Mum had brought me breakfast in bed. And some presents, wrapped up in marvellous red paper. There was a DVD. And two Pony Club books. And a beautiful, huge Teddy Bear – to add to my collection.

Detail... the texture of real life

“Now get dressed, young lady,” she said. “We’re going shopping.”

We went to the local mall, and got me a new winter outfit – boots, and a fur lined jacket, and a fabulous cap. I admired myself in the shop windows as we headed for home.

“I know you’re disappointed, pet,” she said. She had noticed that I was silent again. “But you’ll see them again soon. And I’m sure they won’t forget your birthday.”

DEVELOPMENT

I just looked out the window at the rain.

“What about a hot chocolate?” she said. “Look, we’re passing McDonald’s. Will that do?”

I nodded. We turned in and parked.

“And a muffin?” I was suddenly starving.

**Problem 3:
To face
embarrass-
ment**

“Sure thing.”

We were lined up, when Mum said, “Oh look, Jodie. Someone’s having a party in the kids’ room. Want to have a look?”

“Oh Mum...”

“Check it out. I’ll bring the drinks...”

I pushed open the door to the kids’ room.

“SURPRISE!!!!!”

“OHMYGOSH!!!”

RESOLUTION

It was Amy, and Sarah, and Tran – and all my friends. They were laughing like crazy. Behind them was a clown with a ridiculous red nose and a yellow flower on his hat. He came forward and said,

“Happy birthday, Jodie!”

By Nina Byatt

