

Billy's Bodacious Belly, by Paul Arinaga

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Billy's belly first started to hurt on Monday morning.

"Maybe you ate something funny, sweety," said his mom.

"You shouldn't have eaten that whole box of chocolate chip cookies," said his big brother.

Billy's mom gave him some pills and he felt better...

But by the afternoon, his tummy was hurting again. It was rumbling and felt kind of warm and queasy. Billy's mom picked him up early from school and took him to the doctor.

Dr. Bone poked Billy's belly, all the time muttering to himself and nodding his head as Billy's mom explained what had happened.

Finally, Dr. Bone said: "I think it's his appendix."

Billy went to the hospital with his mom. There they took some pictures of the inside of his belly. That was the first inkling that something wasn't normal. The man taking the x-ray photos raised his eyebrow and muttered to himself: "Hmmm...this is strange".

But there was no time to discuss the pictures. By now Billy's belly felt like it was going to explode! They quickly rushed him into the operating room for surgery.

A doctor with friendly eyes and a funny mask on looked down at Billy and gave him a wink. Another doctor gave Billy a shot and then Billy fell asleep.

The doctor with friendly eyes skillfully cut Billy's belly open with a small knife. Billy didn't feel anything because he was asleep.

Then the doctor and nurses in the operating room all gasped with surprise. Out of Billy's belly came...

A tuba! All bright and shiny.

Then the doctor and nurses jumped in surprise (and a bit of fright), because out of Billy's belly jumped...

A tiger! With bright orange stripes. It roared and jumped out of the window.

The doctor and nurses were pretty surprised, as you can imagine. But they were experienced professionals so they quickly calmed down and started to work on Billy again. The doctor gently put his hands in Billy's belly and felt around. He raised his bushy eyebrows as if to say: "What's this?"

He gingerly pulled something gold and shiny out of Billy's belly. It was...

A gold piece! And then another, and another, and another. There was as much gold in Billy's little belly as in a sunken Spanish galleon. Every time the doctor put his hand inside Billy's belly he found another one. Pretty soon there was a pile of gold coins on the floor of the operating room. And even though they'd come out of Billy's belly, they were all shiny and new.

When Billy finally woke up after the operation, he was in a quiet room looking out on a garden. The first thing he saw was a funny-looking little finger-like blob in a jar of water next to his bed.

"Darling, that's your appendix," said Billy's mom.

Then Billy almost jumped out of his bed.

Right there in his room were:

- A tuba.
- A (real) tiger (in a cage, naturally).
- A pile of old Spanish coins.
- A red bicycle.
- A family of ducks.
- A rabbit.
- A football, soccer ball, and basketball
- A model sailboat
- A little racing car
- And a small amulet

Billy picked up the amulet and rubbed it between his fingers. It made him feel warm in his tummy. But this time his tummy didn't feel like it was going to explode. It just felt nice and warm.

After that, the local papers ran a story about Billy and he became a little bit famous.

And later on, when he went back to school, all his friends crowded around him. They wanted to look at his belly.

When they saw his scar, they all said "Ooooh" with appreciation.

And when Billy's best friend put his ear next to Billy's belly, he *thought* he could hear another tiger.