

My Birthday

This scene developed out of an earlier deleted, deleted scene. I wanted a funny chapter, and I think I succeeded, but I cut it because I felt it slowed down the start of the main story.

After tea I rang Professor P and his answer machine replied.

“Good evening, Professor P Products,” it said in a rather self-important tone.

“Can I speak to Professor P please?” I asked.

“He’s extremely busy,” it said curtly. “If you’re selling double glazing or fitted kitchens...”

“I’m not. I was just...”

“Or mobile phones or holidays...”

“I want to ask Professor P if he can come to my birthday tea on Sunday,” I blurted out in frustration.

“Oh, in that case I’ll see if I can find him. I’m sure he’d like to come. I think he’s in the basement working on his...Oops...Please hold the line while I entertain you with a relaxing song.”

A very out of tune wailing noise began and a few moments later I heard Professor P’s voice, “Will you stop that racket, Answer Machine!”

“Just trying to do my job, Professor P,” it replied, rather hurt.

“Hi, Professor P, it’s Peter here,” I said cheerfully.

“Oh, hello, Peter. What can I do for you?”

“I was just wondering...It’s my birthday on Sunday. Would you like to come for tea?”

“I’d love to,” he said, obviously delighted. “What

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time?”

“About four o’clock.”

“Excellent! I’ll see you then, Peter.”

On Sunday I woke early full of excitement. It was my birthday at last! I waited restlessly in bed until seven o’clock and then finally tiptoed into my parent’s room to see if they were awake.

“Happy birthday, Peter,” my mother said sleepily as I opened the door.

My father was snoring. She nudged him and he woke with a start.

“Oh, Peter, hello, happy birthday,” he said rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Give us a moment, Peter,” my mother added, “and we’ll get your cards.”

I went back to my room. A few minutes later there was a knock on the door and my parents came in.

“Happy Birthday!” they chorused, giving me some cards and presents. “We’ll save your main present for later.”

“What is it?” I asked excitedly.

“It’s a secret,” my father answered mysteriously, “but I’m sure you’ll like it!”

We went downstairs into the kitchen. My mother made some pancakes and we had just finished eating when Tara knocked at the back door.

“Happy birthday, Peter,” she cried. “Not too early am I?”

“No, come in,” I replied. “Would you like a pancake?”

“Yes, please,” she said eagerly.

Tara gave me a birthday card. “I’ve got you a present too,” she said. “It’s not quite finished yet, I’ll bring it round later.”

“Thanks.”

PROFESSOR P DELETED SCENES

“Here you are, Tara,” my mother said giving her a pancake. “Come and sit down. Just help yourself to maple syrup and there’s fresh cream and strawberries too.”

After breakfast my mother, Tara and I got into the car to go to the water park.

“Isn’t dad coming too?” I asked.

“No,” my mother said and smiled knowingly “He’s got a special job to do for your birthday.”

The water park was fantastic. It had four outdoor slides and eight more indoors. Tara and I spent most of the time playing in the ‘spacebowl’ – an enormous bowl that we spun around in, before flying through the air and finally splashing into the water. After three or four fun filled hours we finally got out of the water we had a quick snack at the café before returning home.

“That was a great morning, thanks for inviting me, Peter,” Tara said as she went back to her house. “See you later, I’m just going to finish your present.”

While I was waiting for the party to begin I went up to my room and played on one of the new computer games my aunt had given me. At three o’clock exactly the doorbell rang. I ran downstairs and opened the door. Professor P was standing there, holding a large present wrapped up in silver paper with a gold bow. Sleepy ran up to the door, panting and shaking the hair out of her eyes. She was carrying two cloth rucksacks that were tied together and draped over her back like a saddle.

“Happy birthday, Peter,” Professor P said smiling.

“Thanks!” I cried excitedly, looking at the package. “You’re a bit early I’m afraid, my mum’s still making the scones.”

“Early?” he said puzzled, “I thought I was on time.”

“My fault Professor P,” his watch piped, “I told you the time was an hour later than it really was, because you’re always an hour late, so I thought you’d be on time, but you

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were on time, so you're an hour early."

"Watch," he said patiently. "I would be grateful if you would not do that again."

"Sorry, Professor P," it squeaked.

"Oh, that's all right, Watch," he sighed.

"Come in anyway," I said laughing.

Sleepy ran into the house like a whirlwind, her tail wagging madly. She met Sparky coming down the stairs and the two dogs dashed upstairs to explore.

Professor P and I went into the living room. My mother came in to introduce herself and offer Professor P a drink.

"Have you lived here long, Professor P?" she asked as she brought in the tea.

"No," he replied, "since Christmas. I used to live in Cambridge."

"We went to Cambridge for the weekend," my mother said, "years ago, before Peter was born. It's such a beautiful city, with all those old buildings."

"Yes," he replied quietly. "There were some lovely old buildings at my college."

He cleared his throat awkwardly. My father suddenly came into the living room and broke the rather embarrassing silence. He introduced himself to Professor P and they shook hands.

"I've got something to show you, Peter," my father said. He took a box out of the plastic bag he was carrying and gave it to me. It was a video camera.

"I bought it specially for today," he said proudly, "best one in the shop, digital and everything."

"Brilliant!" I cried. "A digital video camera!"

My father opened the box and took out the camera. He picked up the manual and leafed through it.

"Perhaps you could look at it later, Jeff," my mother said. "Would you mind going out to the shop? I've just run out of butter."

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“OK,” he said and my parents left the room.

“I’ve always wanted one of these,” I said, picking up the video camera.

“It’s a good make,” Professor P said, coming over to examine it.

He took the batteries out of the carrier bag and fitted them in the camera. He gave it to me and I switched it on. I pressed the red record button.

“Lights, camera, action. You’re on Professor P!” I said, pointing the camera and moving towards him. He waved at me and I swept round in a wide circle before zooming in rapidly towards him.

Suddenly Professor P cried out, “Careful, Peter, the table!”

“Ow,” I yelled as I banged into the side of the coffee table.

I tumbled and fell to the floor. The camera flew out of my hand.

Crash! It hit the coffee table, rolled over and fell to the floor with a thud.

“Oh, no!” I cried in horror. “It’s broken.”

The back had come off the camera and the batteries were strewn over the floor.

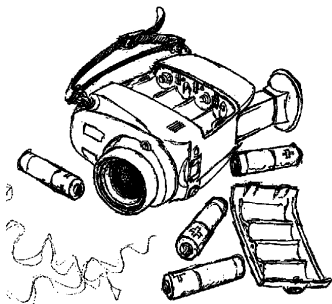
“I’m sure it will be all right.” Professor P said calmly.

We gathered the batteries and put them back into the camera. I switched it on.

“It’s not working!” I cried. “There are no lights, nothing!”

“No need to worry, Peter,” he reassured me.

“I’ve broken it,” I said, almost in tears. “My dad will be



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furious.”

“These cameras are pretty strong you know, Peter – they’re meant to take the occasional knock. It’s probably just a simple connection come loose. Should be easy to fix.”

“Can you fix it, Professor P?”

“I’ll take a look,” he said rolling up his sleeves. “Fortunately I never go anywhere without my tools. Would you mind finding Sleepy? She’s got them on her back.”

I ran upstairs looking for Sleepy but she was not there. After searching the whole house I finally found her playing in the garden with Sparky. But the tool bags were missing! I ran into the kitchen and asked my mother if she had seen them.

“Yes, they’re over there on the chair,” she said pointing. “I took them off her, poor thing, they looked so heavy.”

“Thanks, mum,” I said, feeling very relieved.

I picked up the bags and went back into the living room.

“Thank you, Peter,” he said as he took the bags.

He took a silver sphere out of his pocket and placed it on the table. Floppy popped into the air above the sphere. The little rabbit looked slightly unwell and had a few pink spots on his ears and tail.

“Hi, Floppy,” I said, slightly surprised by his appearance.

“Hello, Peter,” he sniffed.

Professor P opened the bags, took out his toolbox and found a small screwdriver. He put the camera in the centre of the table and carefully began removing the screws and placing them neatly in a saucer to one side.

“So important to be orderly and tidy when you’re working with electronics,” he said, removing one side from the camera.

“It’s very complicated!” I said as I peered inside, “How do they get so much into such a small space?”

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The doorbell rang and I went to answer it. It was Tara. She had changed into a red party dress and stood at the door, holding a box covered in white paper with painted yellow flowers on it.

“Hi, Peter,” she said smiling. “Happy birthday! Here’s your present.”

“Thanks,” I said excitedly, taking the box. It was quite heavy and I wondered what it could be.

“Hello, Tara,” my mother called out from the kitchen, “come and have a drink.”

“Professor P’s in the living room,” I whispered to Tara as we walked towards the kitchen. “Sorting out a little problem. I’ll tell you later.”

“Has one of his inventions exploded?”

“No!” I laughed. “Not yet!”

We went into the kitchen and my mother gave Tara an orange juice.

“Oh, what lovely wrapping paper,” she said when she saw Tara’s present.

“I painted it myself,” Tara said proudly. “Do you want to open it now, Peter?”

I carefully took off the wrapping paper. Inside was a pot filled with soil and wrapped tightly in a plastic bag.

“Thanks,” I said feeling rather puzzled.

“It’s a home-made sunflower growing kit,” she explained. “There’s a pot, some sunflower seeds and a little bag of gravel. If you put the gravel on the top it helps to keep the slugs away.”

“Thanks, Tara.”

“What other presents have you got?” she asked.

I told her about the presents that my family had given me and added, “Professor P brought one too but I haven’t opened it yet. Let’s go and see him, shall we?”

I opened the living room door and gasped in horror.

I could not believe what I saw.

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The video camera was in pieces. The table and floor were covered in tools, circuit boards, wires and springs. Professor P was kneeling at the coffee table, holding a soldering iron and singing loudly.

“Professor P...” I stammered. “What on earth have you done!”

“We all live in a yellow time machine, a yellow time machine,” he sang, completely unaware of our presence.

“Professor P!” I said raising my voice.

“Nearly there, Peter,” he said without looking up. “I’ll just take this out.” He removed a small component from the circuit board and promptly tossed it into the wastepaper basket.

Tara looked at me. “What’s going on?” she whispered.

I stared at her completely lost for words.

“Ah ha! Don’t need this little chip either,” Professor P mumbled and he threw another component into the wastepaper basket.

“Stop!” I burst out. “Professor P, please! What are you doing?”

“New circuit,” he said. “Work twice as well. Don’t need the old stuff. It’s all got to go. Trust me.”

“But...” I spluttered. “My dad! He’ll...”

Floppy appeared from behind the sofa. He was now covered in pink spots and did not look at all well.

“I can’t bear to look,” he said, covering his head with his ears. He disappeared behind the sofa again.

Tara was speechless. I stood motionless, frozen in shock. What would my father say when he saw the state of the camera? He would be furious! He would have been upset to find out I had dropped it. But now it was a disaster! The camera was spread out in small pieces on the floor. The guarantee would be worthless – we’d never be able to take it back to the shop and get it fixed properly.

Professor P continued to dismantle the camera, leaving

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an almost empty shell and an assortment of circuit boards and wires scattered about the wastepaper basket. He paused and leant back against the sofa.

“Can you believe it?” he grumbled. “Who designs these things? Such a waste of space!”

“But, Professor P,” I began, “I thought you were going to fix it.”

“Fix it? It would be a crime to merely fix it. I had to make some improvements.”

“What?” I asked, confused. “But my dad, he’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“Oh, it won’t take long,” he said, picking up the soldering iron. “All I’ve got to do is put in a new processing chip. Take about five minutes I expect.”

“Five hours more like,” Floppy added.

I heard the front door open and my mother call out, “Is that you, Jeff?”

Too late – my father was home!

“My dad! He’s back!” I cried in horror. “Hurry Professor P, please hurry.”

“Oh, black holes!” he exclaimed. “Put the chip in the wrong way round. Now, that’s what happens when you rush things.”

I watched impatiently as Professor P took the chip out again, turned it round and carefully soldered it back into the circuit board.

“Nearly there,” he said as he began to fit the new circuit board into the camera.

I heard the kitchen door open.

“My father’s coming!” I yelled in panic. “What are we going to do?”

“Calm down, Peter,” Professor P said. “I just need a few minutes to finish and another couple of minutes to tidy up.”

I glanced at my watch.

“I think we can keep your father busy until then,” Tara

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said. "Come on, Peter, I've got an idea."

She hurried into the hallway. I ran after her and shut the living room door firmly behind me.

"Hello, Mr Davidson," Tara said cheerfully.

"Hello, Tara. How are you?"

"Fine, thanks."

"Has Peter shown you our new video camera yet?" he asked moving towards the living room.

"Not yet," she said smiling sweetly. Then she put her hand on his arm and gently steered him towards the kitchen.

"Mr Jenkins," she continued, "I was wondering if I could ask your advice about something. I heard you're an expert gardener."

"Oh, no, not really," he replied modestly.

"Well, it's just that I gave Peter a present for his birthday," she continued.

"Yes, come and have a look, dad," I added quickly, following her lead.

"Oh," he said distractedly, glancing back at the living room door.

"It's a sunflower kit," Tara said proudly as we entered the kitchen.

She picked it up and without stopping led my father directly into the garden.

"I thought you'd know how much water to give them," she continued, "and the best place to grow them."

"Well, it's a bit late in the season to be growing sunflowers," my father said. Then seeing Tara's disappointment he continued, "But I'm sure it will be all right if we water them every day. We can put them over here by the fence where they will get the most sun."

Tara did a great job of keeping my father talking but finally he turned back towards the house. I looked nervously at my watch. Only three minutes had passed!

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“Dad, can I have a little section of the garden to put the sunflowers in, and maybe some other plants too?” I asked.

“Of course, Peter!” he answered in surprise. “I didn’t realise you were so interested in gardening.”

He eyed me suspiciously. I looked away.

“I got Peter interested,” Tara said quickly. “I love gardening. That’s why I made the sunflower kit.”

“Well, it’s been most interesting talking to you both,” he said, “But we’ll have to continue this conversation another time. Let’s go inside now and try out the new camera so it’s ready for Peter’s birthday tea.”

He marched inside and I trailed unhappily behind him.

“Nice try,” I whispered to Tara.

I smiled at her but inside I felt utter panic. All I could think about was the terrible state of the living room and the uproar that would follow when my father saw it. He opened the living room door and went inside. I hung back, waiting for the outcry, but to my complete surprise there was none.

I peered round the living room door.

Professor P was sitting on the sofa, quietly reading a magazine, and the camera was resting neatly on its box on the coffee table. There was no mess or any sign of mess. I looked at Tara, my mouth wide open in astonishment, unable to believe my eyes.

“Oh, I’m so sorry to leave you all by yourself, Professor P,” my father apologised.

“No problem. Just been reading your banking magazine, very interesting article on overdrafts.”

As my father went to pick up the video camera Professor P winked knowingly at Tara and me.

“It’s surprisingly light,” my father said balancing it in his hand. “Amazing modern technology, isn’t it?”

“I wonder how it works?” he mused.

He put it down and picked up the manual.

“You need a degree in rocket science to understand this

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thing,” he sighed. “A dozen different languages too - everything except plain English!”

He picked up the camera again and looked at all the buttons. I looked on anxiously as his finger reached out for the small red button on the side. What would happen when he switched it on? Had Professor P actually managed to fix it?

He pressed the button.

“Hello, Mr Davidson,” the camera said in a friendly voice. “How are you today?”

My father almost dropped the camera and looked at us dumbfounded. He scratched his head and turned to Professor P.

“Err,” he stammered, “did you say something, Professor P?”

“No,” a little voice squeaked, “it was me, your camera.”

My father looked at the camera, then at Professor P and then at me. He looked at the camera again then burst out laughing.

“Fantastic!” he cried. “Absolutely amazing! How do they do it? It even knows my name!”

He opened the door and called out, “Molly, come here, you have got to see this.”

My mother arrived a few minutes later and he proudly showed her the camera.

“You try it, Molly,” he said. “Just point the camera and tell it what to do.

“Tell it?” she said uncertainly.

“That’s right, just talk to it.”

She took the camera and looked through the viewfinder.

“Hello, Mrs Davidson,” the camera piped up.

“Oh,” she stammered in surprise. “Err, hello, Camera. Record please.”

“Now recording,” it said.

“Isn’t it incredible!” my father cried. “I don’t remember

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the one in the shop being nearly as good as this.”

My parents were delighted with the camera and it worked perfectly. While they were playing with it I went over to Professor P.

“Thanks,” I whispered. “It’s brilliant!”

“My pleasure,” he said smiling. “Our secret eh?”

The doorbell rang and I went to answer it.

“Happy birthday, Peter,” Mary said as I opened the door.

She gave me a present and we went into the living room. I introduced Mary to my parents and Professor P. My father once again proudly showed off his new video camera, much to Mary’s amusement, and then we all went into the dining room.

“Wow, it’s fantastic!” I cried in delight when I saw the room.

Balloons and party streamers were hanging from the ceiling. The table was laden with food - bowls of crisps, nuts, cheese dips and in the middle was an enormous home-made pizza smelling deliciously of melted cheese and sweet-corn.

“Do just help yourselves,” my mother invited us.

I piled my plate high with pizza and crisps and sat down next to Tara. Mary sat next to Professor P.

“So you’re an inventor then, Professor P?” Mary said.

I noticed that he went rather quiet and blushed slightly when she spoke to him.

“Er, yes,” he stammered.

“What sort of things do you invent?”

“Er,” he said scratching his head as if he had forgotten and he blushed again.

“Professor P has invented a self heating can,” Tara giggled.

“Really,” said Mary in surprise.

“A lot of his inventions are made from recycled things,”

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I added.

“How interesting!” she continued. “I think recycling is so important, don’t you, Professor P?”

“Absolutely,” he said nodding vigorously. “The things people throw away. The waste is terrible.”

“I’m always careful to recycle as much as I can,” she said.

“I just wish everyone did,” he added. His nervousness was gone and he enthusiastically explained his views on the importance of recycling. Mary nodded in agreement and they were soon chatting happily and easily like old friends.

After we had finished the pizza my mother brought in some jelly, ice cream and fruit.

“You haven’t opened all your presents yet, Peter,” my father reminded me as we finished the dessert.

“Oh, yes,” I said and fetched them from the hall. Mary had brought an expertly wrapped present in bright silver holographic paper.

“Oh, thanks,” I cried when I had managed to remove the sellotape.

Mary had given me the wonderful book on fossils that she had shown us in her shop. My mother came over to look at it and I showed her the page with the ichthyosaurus.

“Look, mum,” I said excitedly. “Mary’s got one of these in her shop!”

“Not a live one I hope?” my mother said jokingly and everyone laughed.

“Thank you, Mary, it’s brilliant,” I smiled.

“I thought you’d like it,” she said pleased.

The present from Professor P was about the size of a shoebox and wrapped in recycled paper. It had the words *congratulations on your wedding* printed on it. The wrapping paper came away easily and I quickly tore it off.

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Inside, was a shoebox!

I opened it.

“Er, thanks, Professor P,” I said. “It’s... it’s great.”

Tara looked inside the box and then whispered to, “What on earth is it?” I shrugged as I stared at the collection of electronic components and coloured wires. I felt rather embarrassed at not knowing what it was and wondered if it would be impolite to ask.

“It’s very,” I hesitated, trying to find a suitable word.

Tara giggled.

“Oh, how silly of me, I forgot to put the label on,” Professor P apologised. “It’s a metal detector,” he added enthusiastically. “Well, actually it’s a metal detector kit. I was going to build it for you but I thought you might have more fun building it yourself.”

“Brilliant!” I cried enthusiastically. I took out some of the components and looked at them closely. It would be great fun building the metal detector.

Tara looked at me and mouthed a word. I was puzzled. What was she trying to say? She did it again and getting no

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reaction from me, came over and whispered in my ear, “Gold!”

I nodded excitedly. Of course! We could use the metal detector to find gold on the beach.

“Thanks, Professor P! It’s just what I wanted!”

“And now, Peter,” said my father, “we’d like to give you your main present. Shut your eyes and I’ll get it.”

I closed my eyes tightly wondering what it could be. Moments later my father returned.

“Do you like it, Peter?” my mother asked.

I opened my eyes and there was a silver and black mountain bike with red stripes.



“It’s fantastic!” I cried and rushed over to it.

“It has twenty one gears,” my father said, “and I’ve fitted it with a little bicycle computer that tells you how fast you’re going.”

“Oh thank you,” I beamed. “I really, really wanted a bike. Can I try it out now?”

We went outside and I got onto the bike. It felt perfect. I set off along the road with Sparky and Sleepy running after me. When the road curved downwards I changed into top gear and sped down the hill with the wind rushing past my face. I glanced down at the bike computer. I was going at 20mph! At the bottom of the hill I stopped and the two dogs caught up with me, barking with excitement. I turned round and sped back up the hill, skidding to a halt outside the house.

“That was great!” I panted.

“How were the gears, Peter?” my father asked.

“Brilliant!” I replied.

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We went back into the dining room and my mother cleared away the plates. Then she returned from the kitchen with an enormous chocolate cake with the words “Happy Birthday Peter” written in red icing and around the outside twelve candles shone brightly.

Everyone sang *Happy Birthday* – much to my embarrassment and I blushed as Tara’s voice rang out clear and tunefully while my father managed almost, but not quite, to avoid hitting a single right note. My mother put the cake on the table and I leant over to blow out the candles.



“Don’t forget to make a wish!” Tara said.

I hesitated. What could I wish for, I wondered? It felt as though all my dreams had already come true. I was living by the sea in a new house with a great friend next door. I had made friends with a brilliant inventor. I had a dog – a wonderful puppy! And today on my birthday I had been given a fantastic mountain bike. I just could not think of anything more I wanted in life.

“Come on, Peter,” Tara urged, “the candles are melting!”

“OK,” I said, and then, in that moment I knew what to wish for. I blew out the candles.