

### Champions League Challengers – Day 3

Hardy stood up, smiling, and took off the thick, slightly damp, jacket.

‘Right, Red Nose Day! What are you going as?’

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In the end, the school had banned all costumes due to an unfortunate occurrence the previous day, when a teacher had become the target of a pre-Red Nose Day custard pie, in a stunt that one of the Year Sixes had thought would be funny.

Unfortunately, the headteacher did not think it was funny, and she had forced the children to think of alternative non-fun ways of raising money.

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To get home, Wil and Freddy had to take a short cut through the woods near where Hardy lived, walk across the playing field (taking care not to take any of the mud from the field home with them...) and then head down from the top of Lancaster Road to their house at number 12.

It was a cold but bright day, with signs of Spring all around. New grass was growing close to the goalmouths, little buds were appearing on all the trees, birds were tweeting happily. A smallish white bird swooped low over the group of friends as they trudged home.

‘Hey look, isn’t that an albatross?’ said Wil, thinking back to the Observer’s Book of Birds that Auntie Annie had given him at Christmas. The bird, clearly no bigger than a seagull, gave an insulting squawk and flew off. Wil turned to his brother and Hardy,

‘I’m going on ahead to meet Michael. See you back home’.

They often bumped into each other on the way back. Although they went to different schools, Michael’s route home took him along the same path as the others, and as they got out of school at about the same time, it was inevitable that sometimes their paths would cross. And since the football team had started back in November, Michael had become Wil’s best mate.

They met up just where the woods emerged into the playing field, and you had to go through a small gate to pass through.

As usual, Michael held out his hand. Wil high-fived the outstretched hand, then put one finger in his ear. Michael put his own finger in his ear, then kicked Wil on the knee. After kicking Michael back on his own knee, Wil removed his finger from his ear and hooked his thumb round Michael’s and they pulled, trying to make a clicking sound with their thumbs.

‘We really must change that secret handshake...’ said Michael quietly, ‘How’re you doing? How was Red Nose thingy?’

Michael’s school had asked all pupils to dress in red for the day. Michael was wearing his Arsenal home shirt, his Liverpool home shorts, and a pair of tights which his mother had lent him. His hair was dyed bright red. He looked completely uncomfortable.

‘Red Nose Day? Oh, it was OK I suppose, although we just had to sit in silence all day whilst the teacher told us jokes. It was a sponsored ‘No Smiling’ day. Luckily none of the jokes were funny at all’.

‘Hey, I know’, continued Wil, ‘we can raise a bit more money on the way home. Grab that branch and block the gate!’

They could see the others, Freddy, Hardy, Clara and her sister, Alex and Jaz strolling slowly down the main path towards the gate. They worked quickly.

‘Right, that’s the gate blocked. All we have to do is lift this for them to get through’, said Michael, ‘but what do they have to do?’

‘Simple. They have to tell a joke. If it is funny, they have to pay a pound to charity’.

‘And if it isn’t funny?’

‘They have to pay two pounds!’

‘Right, here goes!’

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‘Joke please!’

‘Eh?’ said Hardy, who was the first to reach the gate.

‘It costs two pounds to get through, but only one if you can tell a funny joke’.

Hardy scratched his nose a couple of times, then stroked his chin, as if he had a beard.

‘Knock, knock’

‘Who’s there?’ replied Michael.

‘The interrupting cow’

‘The interrupt...

‘MOOOO!’, screamed Hardy, interrupting.

Wil and Michael looked at each other, trying not to laugh. But they did. It was really quite funny. Hardy handed over the pound and they lifted the barrier.

‘Joke please!’ said Wil as Clara and her sister approached. Clara looked at her sister and smiled. They obviously had a good one.

‘Doctor, Doctor’, said Clara, ‘I think I’ve swallowed a bone’.

‘Are you choking?’ said her sister.

‘No, I really did!’ said Clara.

‘Sorry, not funny enough’, replied Michael, ‘two pounds please!’

‘No way! That’s not fair! Here’s another one...Doctor Doctor, my son has swallowed my pen, what should I do?’

‘Use a pencil until I get there!’, replied Clara’s sister. Wil smiled a little at that one. Michael actually laughed.

‘OK, one pound then, pass through’.

Alex was next. As he reached the gate, he called out,

‘I’m not in the mood for jokes’, and grabbed hold of a large branch which was overhanging the path. Swinging himself upwards he jumped onto the top of the fence, vaulted over it, and was gone, jogging across the field towards his house. Wil looked at Michael and raised an eyebrow. Best not to bother him, he thought.

Finally, Freddy sidled slowly up to the gate, a pensive look on his face. I’m no good at jokes, he thought to himself miserably, desperately trying to come up with something funny.

‘Joke please!’

Freddy looked at the barrier and contemplated making a run for it, but instead came up with his own joke.

‘What did the Sheriff of Nottingham say when Robin Hood fired at him?’

Wil knew he could not laugh at this one, especially as he had heard it about five hundred times. He smiled at Michael. They had a winner here.

‘I don’t know’, said Michael, ‘what did the Sheriff of Nottingham say when Robin Hood fired at him?’

‘That was an arrow escape’, said Freddy, already fishing around in his bag for loose change.

‘Rubbish. Utter Rubbish. Two pounds please!’ Wil said, gleefully.

‘Oh well, it is for charity I suppose, you can have everything I’ve got here’, said Freddy, who in fact could only rustle up a 50p, three Mexican pesos, two Pakistani rupees, and a coin from Sweden with a hole in it.

‘Pathetic, but it will do!’ laughed Wil, ‘please pass’.

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‘And I’ve got another idea’, said Clara as they reached Lancaster Road, ‘y’know the match against Merryman tomorrow?’

Freddy thought he knew what was coming.

‘Let’s all wear our red noses for the match!’

Freddy was right. But there was no stopping Clara.