

A Bad Week for Jimi – Day 3

The next day, there was more clomping down the stairs as they sat discussing the game. A faint chant of 'campeoni, campeoni....' emerged from the staircase. Hardy burst through the door. He was wearing a complete Manchester United kit, red boots, a red bobble hat, and was carrying a flag with the image of Cristiano Ronaldo on it, which he was now waving madly. 'You can't just change teams like that!' said Michael. 'Well I just did!' replied Hardy, sounding quite proud of himself, followed by, 'I like to support a winner!', as if that justified his having changed overnight. 'So if Chelsea had won, you would have stayed in blue?' 'Well, maybe...', said Hardy uncertainly. 'Look', said Michael in his quiet but assured voice, 'imagine that you are playing for Lancaster Road and that for once, you get beaten by Butterfield... you're not going to turn into a Butterfield supporter, or go and play for them, are you?' 'No, but that's different. It's like if I have my favourite water and pasta for dinner, that doesn't mean I don't like other things...' said Hardy. 'Eh?', said everyone else. 'That's not the point', said Michael, 'when you support a team, you've got to be loyal'. 'We'll support you... ever more!' sang Hardy. 'Yes, but you were singing that about Chelsea only yesterday!' said Clara. 'I know, I know, but does it really matter?' 'I think it does. I've been an Arsenal fan for all my life, and I'll never give up on them, however bad it gets. And sometimes it gets really bad', Michael explained patiently.*****

Freddy looked across to see Jimi, still sitting in the corner where they had left him prior to the game. He had set the guitar to one side, and was sitting crosslegged, his head in his hands. I've got to do something, thought Freddy. I think he's great. We all do. I don't want him to be unhappy. I'm going to talk to him. But I'd better be gentle with him. He doesn't look like he is in the mood for jokes. He looked across at their strange friend. Dressed in his long flappy jeans, and his flowery shirt, he looked like something from a bygone era. But past or present, there was no mistaking the look on his face. Wil looked across at his older brother, and then at Jimi. It was Wil who had been most inspired by Jimi's guitar-playing the previous summer holidays. He thought about what he could do to help. I know, I'll tell him a few jokes, that'll cheer him up! He strode up to where Jimi sat. 'Yo Jimi!' chirped Wil, 'how are things, have you heard the one about the...'. 'I'm not in the mood for jokes, man,' replied Jimi morosely. Freddy pulled his brother to one side. 'Leave this to me', he commanded, and Wil slunk off. 'What is it J?' said Freddy, concern radiating from his voice. 'I don't like being called 'J'', said J. 'Sorry J', said F, without thinking. 'Look F, I'm fed up with F, F and F, U C?' 'Hmmm.... not exactly', replied F. 'It's football, football, football, the whole time. I can't stand it any more. Ever since I came, it's been this game, that game, this training session, that training session... you know?' 'Time for training!' yelled Clara from the other side of the room. 'See?' said Jimi, from Freddy's side of the room. 'Well, why don't you come with us? That would be great!' said Freddy, looking down at the thin figure beside him. He was actually doubtful that Jimi could play... he looked vulnerable... weak even. Freddy realised that they all knew Jimi for his guitar and... that was about all. They didn't know anything more about him. Guitar in hand, Jimi was somebody they all wanted to know. Without the guitar, Jimi was... well... nobody.

'I'm hopeless, man', said Jimi, 'I've tried, it just doesn't work for me. Look, the last time I tried it, I got this injury. It was bad man, you want to take a look?' Before Freddy could speak, Jimi had hitched up the leg of his jeans to reveal a pasty white shin, and a very small bruise. 'Hmmm... that looks bad... can you walk on it?' said Freddy, trying to sound sympathetic, and trying to suppress the smile in his voice. 'I'll be OK', responded Jimi uncertainly. 'Look man', said Freddy, trying to speak Jimi-talk, 'we'd love you to play, and you're not rubbish. Just join in. And don't forget, no-one can play the guitar like you. We'd all love to do that!' Jimi smiled weakly and gazed down at his beloved guitar. There was a pause until he finally responded. His voice wavered uncertainly. 'Alright, man, if you say so, I'll give it just one more try. Let's go...*****