

Spring Holidays – Day 4

N...N...Not OK!

Something hairy, crawling across his face...!

Wil screamed again, scrabbling madly with his hands at his face and neck. The thing, whatever it was, had gone, but it was pitch dark. He didn't know where it was in the darkness. He didn't really know where he was in the darkness.

There was the sound of frantic unzipping of sleeping bags.

Consternation of three half-asleep boys.

There was a low rumbling sound from the fourth sleeping bag.

'Are you OK? Is that someone laughing?' It was difficult to make out who was talking. But the low rumbling was definitely there.

'Is that Hardy laughing? Oh, not him again!'

'Ig woff joft a nickoo choke', said the sleeping bag indistinctly.

The torch came on. Hardy emerged from sleeping bag number four, clutching a piece of string, to which was tied a small piece of material.

'I said, it was just a little joke!' he said, more distinctly this time.

'No, no, NO!' said Freddy, who had not even been the butt of the joke, *'it is not funny, and you know Wil is scared of this place anyway. Come on lads, let's go!'*

Wil and Freddy started rolling up the sleeping bags in the half-light. The torch went off.

'Come on, that's one joke too far, put the light on, we're leaving'.

'Please don't go', said Hardy quietly, *'I didn't want to scare him, really. I want you guys to stay here with me. It's my favourite place in the whole world'.*

Freddy looked around him. Damp, dark, and probably dangerous? Wil, worried out of his wits? Shadows silhouetted against the shrouded sky? It really didn't seem a very nice place at that moment. But then again, four friends having fun in the fog? Midnight madness in the mighty oak? Hardy, happy and horrible at the same time? Maybe they should stay.

'OK, we'll stay, but definitely no more tricks, right?'

'Right', said Hardy.

The night passed quietly enough, despite the sounds of nature all around them.

In the morning, they compared notes.

Hardy was up first, packing his stuff into the rucksack, unaffected by the hard boards they had been sleeping on.

'OK, let's go and get some breakfast! I think the others are coming over as well'.

Wil stretched awkwardly as he got up, realising that he must have slept in an bad position.

'Did you hear that howling?' he said, as if it was quite a natural thing.

'Don't worry', said Hardy, wisely not trying any more winding up, *'it was probably a fox, but they couldn't possibly get up here, and anyway, they wouldn't be interested in humans'*.

'Well, I'm glad about that!' said Michael, *'but what's that noise now?'*

They listened for a few seconds. There was an unmistakeable howling sound coming from the garden. Wil again crept closer to Freddy.

'That, my friends, is Clara!' said Hardy, and sure enough, way down below they could see their star defender waving her arms, howling a little bit, and calling them in for breakfast. They packed up and got ready to leave.

'You can go the way we came if you like, just jump into the net, then climb down the branches. I'm going this way', and with that Hardy leapt over the low wall on the far side of the deck, grabbing at a stout rope which was hanging about a metre away. As they watched they could see the rope was knotted at various points, and Hardy was down on the ground in about thirty seconds.

'I'm going that way too', said Michael, who proved to be an expert tree-climber and descender. Freddy and Wil jumped into the net and took the longer route.

When they got into the house, Hardy's mother had been hard at work, preparing a cooked breakfast for them.

The only problem was that she had obviously forgotten what she was doing in the middle of cooking, and gone off somewhere. The food, when they got it to the table, left a lot to be desired. Freddy tried to remain polite.

'Erm, Hardy, what is this?' he said, pointing down to a mass of greyish, yellowish stuff on his plate. It looked like it was about to move at any moment.

'Scrambled egg, lovely!' said Hardy with a muffled grin, stuffing his face with the stuff.

'And THIS?' said Clara, holding up a small strip of black stuff between her fingers.

'Mmmmm, bacon!' replied Hardy with his mouth full, which didn't stop him breaking a piece of the black stuff off in his mouth.

'Hey! What's that? Look out!' said Michael, pointing at plumes of smoke emerging from one corner of the room.

'Oh great! Toast's ready!' replied Hardy, walking casually over to the toaster, wafting smoke out of his eyes as he struggled to identify where the toast actually was.

'I'll stick with bread and jam, thanks', said Michael, sticking his knife into the pot of strawberry jam, then trying vainly to get it out again.

But they did manage to eat something, and the night had not been so bad. And now they had time for some serious shoot-out card swapping.

'I've just completed Liverpool, AT LAST!' said Wil, *'and they were brilliant last week! If they play like that tomorrow, they'll go through, and we can see them in Athens!'*

'It's only the semi-final, they're not through yet, and we don't know we're going to Athens', said Jaz wearily.

'Well, I've completed the whole folder', said Michael proudly, reaching across the table for his own folder, *'All the five star shinies, all the teams, all the updates'*.

'Wow', said Wil in admiration, *'let's have a look, then'*.

There was a small pause, as Michael leafed through his folder. Gradually a look of complete horror came over his face. He spoke louder than they had ever heard him before.

'NO! ALL MY FIVE STAR SHINIES ARE MISSING!'
