

Cold, Wet, and Happy – Day 6

She stretched an elegant finger over to the date Wil had marked.

14th February.

Valentines Day!

Ooo-er!

'STOP PRESS! ABANDON ALL PLANNING! PUT VALENTINE'S DAY ON HOLD!'

The radio crackled a little as it struggled to cope with the intense cold.

'LATEST NEWS crackle crackle, IS THAT ALL beep beep SPRINGHURST SCHOOLS ARE NOW CLOSED...I REPEAT, buzz buzz beep ALL SPRINGHURST SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED!'

And then, in slightly less urgent language,

'All citizens are warned to stay indoors. The weather is closing in. More snow is forecast. The emergency services are unable to cope. And now over to police control HQ',

Another voice came over the airwaves,

'This is Commander Bill Hardnut of Springhurst police. I speak to you as an officer of the law, and as a fellow citizen. Please do not leave your houses. Stay warm. Drink hot drinks. Check on your neighbours. And children, stay inside and do your homework! Thank you'.

'Who does he think he is kidding?', said Wil, laughing, pulling on his jeans over his pyjamas.

'Well, maybe we'd better be careful...', Freddy replied.

There was a loud knock at the door, and shouting.

'Come ON, lads...'. It was Hardy's voice, muffled slightly by the snow all around him.

On opening the door, a scene of complete chaos met their eyes. Cars abandoned on the steep street. Even 4x4s, belching out their smoke and fumes, struggling. Old ladies vainly shovelling snow off their driveways as more snow fell. And all around, defying Commander Hardnut's instructions, were children. Throwing stuff, mixing stuff, building things, dodging things, running, sliding, laughing.

'School's out for winter!' cried Hardy excitedly. Freddy gave up trying to be a sensible and good citizen and joined them outside. His feet squeaked as they hit the thick white carpet underneath them.

This was the real thing. This was not the few centimetres of wet stuff that had fallen the previous week. This was thick, crunchy stuff, the purest white colour, fluffy and smooth. Covering everything – houses, cars, walls, street lamps. Even people.

Up the street, one person in particular was being covered. Mr Andrews, wearing a flat cap with a bobble hat perched on top of it, and wrapped in a huge greatcoat several sizes too big for him, was just standing at his front gate, apparently surveying the scene in front of him. He appeared not to be moving, so the three boys walked up to check he was alright.

'Good morning Mr Andrews, are you OK?' enquired Freddy politely.

No reply. No movement.

Hardy went over and waved his hand in front of the coach's face dramatically. Mr Andrews gave a little jolt, and a mini-avalanche tumbled off the peak of his cap, down his nose, and into the neck of his jacket.

'Ah, Hardy lad,' Mr Andrews said with a start, *'how the devil are you? Just taking the air this morning, isn't it beautiful?'*

'Beautiful day for a snowball fight!', Hardy said predictably.

'No, I mean smell the air. Clean, fresh, like new'.

Hardy sniffed briefly, taking in some of the cold clear air.

'Anyway, lads, never too cold for a training session! Let's go!'

And with that, picking up Jaz, Michael and Clara on the way, they headed unsteadily up the road to play football.

Or rather snow-ball.

Or more like slide-ball.

'Alright my friends, the rules are like this', started Mr Andrews, *'no slipping, no sloshing, no slopping about in the snow, and certainly, no slide tackles. No pushing, no pulling, no fouling, no free kicks, no biting, no bashing...'*

No ball!', yelled Hardy as the white Adidas World Cup Super ball disappeared into a snowdrift.

'Ah, we need this, lads'. Mr Andrews reached into his kit bag and pulled out a dark brown round thing, approximately the size of a football, covered in leather, and with bootlaces pulling it together on one side.

This is what we used to play with, back in the days when men were men, and girls were...y'know...girls, he looked nervously over at Clara, *'finest leather football two shillings could buy in those days!'*

They played with the heavy leather ball for ten minutes or so, until it absorbed so much water that even Hardy would not risk his toes by kicking it. The game had ended in a free-for-all.

'*Pass, pass*', yelled Hardy to Michael, who tried a nifty flick up with a snowball, which only succeeded in flicking snow into his own face.

Freddy tried next, attempting a volley on a larger snowball, which exploded into his face with a mighty *thump*.

Michael gave up with the ball altogether, and just set off on a mazy run through the snow-covered field. His legs were hardly visible as he tried to dodge imaginary snowmen defenders, but even he had met his match when he tried an imaginary shot, caught his foot in a non-imaginary pile of thick snow, and was flung forwards, eventually sliding to a halt in front of the others. He was laughing as he spat snow and grass from his mouth.

Finally, Wil, seeing a large ball of snow flying past him, tried a fantastic Rooney-scissor-kick, missed the snowball completely and ended up, head-first in a gigantic snowdrift, legs still sticking high in the air. The others had to dig him out.

In the end, cold, wet and happy, they had trudged back down the street to Number 19, where Mrs Azalea had stuffed them full of bacon sandwiches and hot chocolate.

Wil had abandoned his planning. Towards the end of the day, he just had time to write in a few brief ideas for half-term week, including:

Go to football training- which covered most of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday,

Go to Aunt Annie's – which covered Thursday and Friday, and,

Play Butterfield match – which was scheduled for Saturday 17th.

He was just about to pack everything away for the night, when he saw someone had added something to his chart. In spidery handwriting, just after the third football training day, someone had scrawled in pencil,

Valentine's Day – send card to JoJo!

Wil's stomach gave a leap, and then a lurch, and then a lump came to his throat. He looked around, and then put the chart away – *very quickly*.