

Cold, Wet, and Happy – Day 4

'What're you doing now?' said Hardy.

'Planning...' said Wil quietly.

Another cold Monday morning, and Freddy and Wil were looking back over the weekend.

'I can't believe it! We won again!' said Wil excitedly.

'Hmmm...that's four out of five', smiled Freddy, *'and you were brilliant, Bro!'*

It was rare for Freddy to give his younger brother this kind of compliment, but surely today was the day. Wil had played in midfield against the Wanderers on Saturday, had scored four out of the five Springhurst goals, and had even taken over from Michael in goal for the last five minutes and made an amazing save to keep the Springhurst clean sheet.

'That was a match-winning performance, lad,' Mr Andrews had said after the game, stating the obvious as usual, *'and I thought my tactics were brilliant, y'know Michael in goal, you in midfield, and...and...'*

'Yes, Mr Andrews, we did play well', interrupted Freddy, as Hardy aimed an icy snowball in Mr Andrews's direction.

It had been really cold for several days and the last few mornings had seen a biting frost covering everything. Even Hardy had been moved to comment as they had jumped up and down before the game (and not because the coach had told them to – it was just so cold they had to).

'Look at the frost on the trees, it's like Christmas all over again!', Hardy had said poetically, *'it makes me feel really lively inside!'*

Freddy and Wil had stared at their friend incredulously. Hardy was not normally driven to poetic inspiration. In fact he was normally driven to distraction by such things.

But Hardy had also played well. For the first time they had really played as a team, and Wil's goals were mostly a result of fluid passing and movement from everyone. And even JoJo had got on the scoresheet! Having come on as substitute for Freddy late in the second half, she had popped up unmarked in front of goal after a typically mesmerising run by Michael, and had elegantly stroked the ball home under the goalkeeper's outstretched right hand. She had run over to Wil to celebrate the achievement, wrapping her arms around him in a giant Gallic hug. He had responded with a brief British shrug.

But they had won again, and scored five to enhance their goal difference. Mr Andrews had said earlier on in the season that if they won by five clear goals or more that they could all squirt him with their water bottles. Unluckily for him, they had done so on the coldest day of the year so far, and the poor

man had whimpered miserably as the streams of icy water hit him.

Later, on Monday afternoon, realising that Hardy had not come round as he said he would, Wil and Freddy set off for his house. He lived in a large rambling house down a leafy lane up beyond the football pitch.

A woman let them in.

'He's in there, boys', she said, motioning them across the broad hallway to a room on the right.

Sitting in an armchair, apparently helpless, was their good friend Hardy, dabbing at a large bruise on his forehead, moaning slightly.

'How did that happen, looks nasty? Did you slip on the ice? Fall into a snowdrift? Get hit by a runaway toboggan?'

'Heelies...' said Hardy miserably.

'You fell off your heelies?', Freddy said, suppressing a laugh, and holding Wil back with his arm, to prevent him from either laughing or passing comment.

'They're dangerous. I was just coming round to your place when something flew over me, low, like this' (he ducked down dramatically), *'I looked up and back, rocked on my heels, and the wheels started turning...I couldn't stop.'*

'What did you hit?' Freddy said, this time smirking.

'It isn't funny!', said Hardy, turning his face away from them and sinking into the big armchair in which he was sitting.

'You went straight into a lamppost, didn't you?'

Whilst Freddy chatted with Hardy and tried to cheer him up, Wil pulled out the sheet of paper that he had produced at Jaz's house the week before. He unfurled it and spread it out in front of him on the table.

'What are you doing now?' said Hardy, in exactly the same unbelieving tone that he had used before.

'Give it a rest, I told you, I'm planning'

'Planning what?'

'Just planning', repeated Wil calmly.

He started drawing lines on the paper, and writing in dates at the top of the lines.

They finally left Hardy feeling sorry for himself, Freddy having got an assurance from him that he would recover in time for the big game on February 17th, against the mighty Butterfield Athletic.

'I'll probably just about make it,' said Hardy dramatically, wincing as he shifted his position in the chair, *'as long as I don't get bird flu or something'*, he added unnecessarily. Both his friends smiled, shrugged, and turned to leave.

As they meandered slowly back across the field from Hardy's house towards their street, Freddy noticed something unusual. Well, not unusual exactly, it was the kind of thing you quite often saw in fields, close to the countryside. It was just that this one was well, different. Not normal. Abnormal in fact. Strolling confidently towards them, showing no signs of fright and no signs of taking flight. A chicken.

'Look at that!', said Freddy, slowing his walk down and pulling Wil's shoulder, *'what is it?'*

'It's a chicken', said Wil.

'It's not normal', said Freddy

'Atishoo!' said the chicken.
