

## Let the Games Begin – Day 5

They walked over to the edge of the pitch, where the noise was coming from. When they got there, they couldn't believe what they saw.

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And when they thought about it, they couldn't believe that they had actually won. In a shallow ditch, half submerged in water, whistle stuffed into his mouth... referee from the first half.

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On Wednesday, Hardy and Clara were out shopping for kit with Hardy's Mum.

*'Oh for goodness sake, Hardy, why can't you ever make up your tiny mind, darling?'*

It took Clara a split second to react to what Hardy's mother had said.

*'Tiny mind! Ha, ha, haaagh!'. She held her stomach as if it was about to fall out onto the floor of the shopping centre. 'Wait til I tell the others, Hardy, oh wow...!'*

Hardy looked down at the floor in embarrassment, for once unable to think of anything to say.

They continued on through the mall, stopping here and there but getting nowhere with their shopping. The shopping centre was full of the hustle and bustle of Christmas traffic, the usual array of teenage layabouts, litter, excited children, and tired-looking Dads. Hardy was almost never in a shopping sort of mood, and least of all today.

His mother, who was going to be going away for Christmas, had insisted that she should buy him some warm clothes for the winter. They had gone from shop to shop, picking up things here and there. Just when Hardy thought they had finished, his mother had said,

*'We mustn't forget your scarf and bobble hat, dear!'*

Hardy had forgotten about a scarf and bobble hat when he was about four years old.

Him, Hardy, wearing a scarf! No! And a bobble hat? Oh my word!

He traipsed sadly along after his mother, with Clara teasing him all the way, as they searched for a bobble hat shop. The reason he needed the hat and scarf was that tonight was the night of the carol concert. In fact, the whole day was turning out bad.

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Hardy had got into trouble at the Nativity play earlier in the day by first shouting 'He's behind you!' when one of the shepherds emerged into the light of the stable, and 'Oh no you haven't!' when one of the Kings said that he had brought frankincense. A teacher had pulled him out of the audience, and made him write out 'The infants play is not a pantomime' one hundred times. And that was before the evening concert had even started.

The carol concert was an annual nightmare for Hardy. His mother had forced him to join the school choir, and they had been preparing for the concert for weeks. Everyone was very nice to him, the teachers always encouraged him to participate, his mother always cooed appreciatively, but he couldn't sing. He knew it. He just wished that someone would tell him to do something else. Like put up the scenery, or serve drinks to the audience, or run the affle. But singing? It just wasn't his thing.

Wil, who was good at almost everything, had a beautiful singing voice. He and Freddy were standing either side of Hardy as the concert began.

It went off well enough to start with, the sound of Hardy's droning drowned out by the more tuneful performances of Wil, Freddy, and the rest of the choir. No problems with the first few carols.

They moved on to Jingle Bells. Hardy made a few changes to the words here and there to keep himself amused. It still didn't make him sing them any better.

Finally, his patience and concentration seemed to snap and he started changing everything. Once in Royal David's City became Once the Royals beat Man City, and Hark the Herald Angels Sing became 'Hark Wayne Rooney on the Wing'.

The choir around him started to smirk. They started to snigger. Some of them started to laugh. One of them fell off the bench they were perching on. Eventually, a teacher pulled Hardy out and made him write 'Shepherds watched their flocks, not washed their socks' two hundred times.

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After the concert, Wil and Freddy made their way home, down the steep street to their house. Further down the road, outside number twenty-three, they could see about fifteen people. All in black. Clothes flapping in the cold wind. Dancing around a big fire in the garden.

Chanting wickedly.