

### Chapter 3 - with Boggy, Wil and Freddy

*It was clear that the device that he was hanging on to was attached to the rope. Freddy stood below and waited for something to happen.*

*Then Boggy did something very unexpected...* With a sound that was a cross between a groan and a scream of triumph, Boggy knelt down and heaved the big stone away with a combination of his knees and his hands.

Wil and Freddy looked at each other briefly, then Wil looked down at the ground, as the stone he had been standing on disappeared beneath him. As he looked down at the ground it seemed to fall away. It was certainly too far down to drop with any level of comfort.

They looked at each other again.

‘We...we...we’re moving’, stammered Wil. Freddy just stared, open mouthed. No words came out.

With Boggy dancing maniacally beside Freddy, the slide began to gather pace and move down the rope towards the big hole.

‘Dead Man’s slide, dead man’s slide!’, sang Boggy, his shaggy hair shaking like a rag doll’s as he carried on a mad dance beneath the rope.

As Wil slid down the rope, gathering pace all the time, he was faced with a combined feeling of euphoria and fear, mixed with despair and dread and sheer terror. He could see the hole in front of him, completely dark, and he could see the sign that they had spotted before (the one they thought was the name of the owner). It was coming clearer now as he got closer, a grubby yellowing scrap of paper, about thirty centimetres square, with writing in black felt tip pen. As he got close to the mouth of the hole, with the breeze caused by the speed he were travelling now blowing his hair away from his face, the notice was becoming much clearer. As he sped towards the black hole, Wil yelled back to his best friend.

‘We’re going in, and look what it says on the sign, aaagghhhh!’

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Clara was still on the top floor of the house, lying more or less in the same place she had been during their discussions on New Year’s Day. The house was still silent, apart from a CD she had put on her new CD player earlier that morning. There was a function on the machine that let you play the same song again and again.

*‘You know where I’ve come from, you know my story...’* went the song for the twentieth time that day.

‘I wonder where the boys are’. Clara almost spoke the words to herself as she thought.

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The sign said ‘Abandon hope all ye who enter here...’

Although Wil didn't really know what this meant, his apprehension at the sign was tempered a bit by the fact that he still trusted Boggy (who he could still hear laughing uncontrollably back up the slope), and by the fact that it was clearly written by someone with a sense of humour, as each of the letters was represented by an animal figure, so the first A was rough picture of a giraffe, the 'b' was a baboon, and so on. Someone had actually spent a lot of time doing this.

He entered the hole at some speed, and as they got in he could see that there was indeed a fire burning in what seemed like the far distance. He was still travelling fast when he was suddenly wrenched upwards.

They slide had come to an abrupt ending and he was thrown upwards so that he had trouble hanging on to the handles. In fact, Wil was so shaken by the impact of the halt that he lost the grip of one hand and was left hanging precariously by the other.

'Free, I'm going to fall, I can't hold on any more'. He sounded a bit panicky as the words came out. Freddy had run down the long slope after him, with Boggy in hot pursuit.

As he swung there, Wil looked down to where his feet should be, and saw that they were actually not far from the ground. It looked a bit soggy, but Wil let his remaining hand go and fell to the floor.

Because he had been unbalanced on the slide with his one hand, he fell awkwardly and dropped onto his left foot which buckled as he came down. He cried out as the ankle turned over and fell to the floor. Freddy, who had arrived breathlessly in the cave, helped him up.

They just inside the mouth of the cave, with a wide opening behind them, a tree to their right (to which Boggy had attached the rope, which ran from a much larger tree some sixty metres back out of the hole), and the fire burning not far away from them. The cave had not changed much since when they had last used it, and it was not actually that big after all. They felt reassured as their eyes adjusted to the darkness and they could make out most of what was in it.

They sat down on the stump of an old tree which had clearly been dragged into the hole, as they could trace the tracks made by the heavy stump as it had been pulled in from the outside.

Boggy bounded into the cave, holding an old can, and a stick. He looked half menacing and half mad, as he had all afternoon.

'Didj'ou enjoy that, mate?' he smiled at Wil. Before Wil could answer, he moved over to the corner close to where the fire was burning.

In the half light they could see a complicated arrangement of sticks and old bottles and cans, mostly filled with clear liquid.

Boggy went over and poured a light brown liquid from his can into the top of the set-up.

'What's that?' asked Freddy inquisitively.

'That's what I drink, like some?' said Boggy pointing generally to the device. Then he added, 'actually, *that* is what I drink,' pointing towards the receptacle at the bottom of the

cascade, which was three-quarters filled with what looked like very clear clean water.

'Most beautiful, fresh, pure, filtered water, strained through the finest natural filter on earth.' This time he took a pace towards the device, unhooked two clear plastic tubes from it, and opened one of the containers in the middle. Inside was a thick dark brown sludge.

'Pete', he said, pausing, and staring at Wil.

'It's Wil, actually,' replied Wil.

'No, peat, the finest natural filter on earth. I get it myself from up North. Have you ever seen what is in normal water'.

Freddy thought back to the morning and his experiments with the microscope. He was anxious to try the filter.

'Can we take some', he ventured to Boggy.

'No way, this is my last lot, I need to go back up North for some more later this week'. He took a long drink from the bottom container and offered it to Freddy.

'Wow. Cool'. Freddy was lost for words.

'Meet me tomorrow and I'll show you how to make it', said Boggy, 'ten o'clock, just up there by the road'.

No options, no discussion, Boggy had spoken. He got up and walked out of the cave.

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'How're you', said Wil after a few seconds.

'Cool', replied Freddy, 'but let's get out of here. Clara's on her own back at the house, and we've got an early start tomorrow'.

They got up, Wil letting out a slight groan as the pain of his ankle hit him, and made their way up the path of where the tree stump had been dragged. It was getting dark as they got towards the mouth of the hole, so it was difficult to make out the shadows that were playing on the sides of the cave. They got to the entrance and looked around for Boggy, but he was not to be seen.

Then they heard a noise. A shuffling sound. Quite close to them. They stopped, as you do when you think you hear

something. Stood quite still. Freddy grabbed Wil's shoulder. They were shaking slightly. There it was again. A shuffle, then a snuffle, then silence.

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Clara moved over to the big window as she did every day, and looked out again. As dusk fell

there was not much to see, although she was aware of a light close to the road, about fifty metres from the front of the house. An odd light actually, not the normal glow from the street lights.

It was coming from the bus stop.

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Freddy and Wilis had stopped completely now, as the shuffling and snuffling was very close. In the shadows they could make out the shape of creature of some sort. It was silhouetted against the front of the hole, a grey shape against the pitch black entrance. It was about half a metre tall, a metre long, and hairy. It snuffled and snorted again. Wil whispered nervously.

‘What is it, it looks like some kind of pig?’.

‘Boar’, whispered Freddy.

‘Don’t be like that’, said Wil in reply.

‘Wild Boar’, Freddy added, ‘must have escaped from somewhere, I’ve seen them on TV. Hairy, big, nasty. Stay still.

The animal seemed oblivious to their presence, and carried on rooting around until, clearly finding nothing of interest. It disappeared into the undergrowth. The boys breathed more steadily, and staggered up the steep slope towards the road.

As they got there, they looked to the right before crossing, and then to the left. As they looked left, they noticed an odd light about a hundred metres down the road. Not a street light, it wasn’t that bright. And it was coloured. A sort of three or four coloured glow, moving, at one time the colours were in stripes, then they shifted, forming coloured hoops, then they swirled together and temporarily faded before reappearing brighter, just hanging there in the air.

The light was coming from the bus stop...