

Chapter 24

They moved down to the end of the short corridor. Rose reached up to the door handle, then turned around and smiled at them. 'You OK, guys?', she said pleasantly. 'Have we got a treat in store for you!'. She pulled at the door handle, still turning to look at them. It didn't budge. She pulled again. She looked at The Doctor quizzically, then pulled one more time. There was a huge cacophony of crashing and banging as the door opened, and Rose was submerged in brushes, dustpans, and cleaning fluid. 'Oops, wrong box!', she said, her cheeks turning a shade of deep red. The Doctor smiled. 'Not just the wrong box, the wrong corridor!. Let's go!'. In the confined space of the little passageway, it was difficult for them all to turn round at the same time. At the back of the queue, and therefore at the front when they turned, were Wil and Clara. They looked down at their feet as they turned, making sure they didn't step on anyone's toes. 'And WHERE do you think you're going?', boomed a huge, deep, female voice. Clara looked up. Standing at the end of the corridor was the most enormous lady she had ever seen. Not fat, just tall, wide, and apparently extremely annoyed. The light at the end of the passage was partly obscured by her bulk. On her head she wore a turquoise scarf over a set of plastic rollers. Her coat was also a light blue colour, sort of see-through. Through it you could see a t-shirt with the words 'born to ride' written on the front. 'Um, sorry....', started Clara uncertainly. 'SORRY, SORRY, YOU'LL BE SORRY...that cupboard is CONFIDENTIAL', the lady boomed, waving a broom aggressively at the group. She started advancing down the corridor, brandishing the broom like a jousting pole. Freddy, who was still in his Hardy Potter disguise, moved forward in an attempt to protect his sister. 'I'm sorry, madam, we made a mistake, we....we went the wrong way...' 'And you're just about to find out how wrong you were', replied the crazy cleaner, marching to within a metre of Freddy's face. (Actually it wasn't a metre, but it felt like that to

Freddy, because the glasses he had borrowed for the Hardy Potter disguise were not his, and they made everything look much closer than it actually was). In an attempt to make light of the situation, Freddy raised the piece of stick he still had with him and pointed it at the lady. 'There's no time for jokes', Clara whispered, 'do something'. 'Stupefy!', said Freddy, pointing the stick at the lady's ample chest. To his astonishment, the cleaning lady stopped dead in her tracks. Just stood there. Didn't say a word. Freddy looked at the stick, then looked at Clara. A buzzing sound, and a bright blue light behind them faded away. 'I'd had enough of that', said the Doctor behind them, returning his sonic screwdriver to his pocket. 'She should be good for five minutes or so'. They made their way out of the corridor, pushing their way past the fleshy immobile object in front of them. When they reached the main corridor, Rose went to the front, looked left and right, thought for a moment, then led them towards the left. They walked for some distance up the corridor. Rose pushed through some double doors. On the right hand side as they passed were a row of cheap plastic chairs of the kind you only find in hospitals. Several were in a state of disrepair, with legs missing or broken plastic. On one of the few good ones sat an elderly lady. Wrapped in a shawl on her lap was an elderly chicken. 'A chicken, in a hospital?', said Wil to no-one in particular. 'Shhh! Maybe it's ill', said Clara. 'Atishoo!', said the chicken, miserably. 'There, there', said the old lady, offering the chicken a tissue. The chicken blew its beak extravagantly, and settled back into the shawl. 'Must have a dose of the flu or something', Freddy commented, covering his nose with his hands as they passed. 'Oh no, I can't catch anything else,' groaned Hardy. He almost sprinted past, his handkerchief covering his mouth and nose. They passed several more empty seats until they got to the end of the row. Two men were sitting there, both dressed in white football shirts. From a distance it looked like they were hugging each other, but when the group got closer to them it was clear they were crying, and trying to console each other. The man nearest them had the

word 'Beckham' and a large number twenty-three on the back of his football shirt. 'Es terrible, es terrible', he sobbed uncontrollably.

'Los Galacticos...finitos', added his friend, in a similar state of distress. As they passed him, they saw the word 'Zidane' printed on his back. As they passed the inconsolable Spaniards, Rose ran to the front, turned to the group, and said, 'He we are friends!'. She waved her arm extravagantly towards the corridor which branched off to the left. It was indeed, almost the same as the previous one, an easy mistake to make. At the end was a similar blue box, although this one was rather taller, dark blue in colour, with a small blue light on the top. 'I'm not getting in there', moaned Hardy, 'I'm too ill. It's too small'. He had resumed limping, having forgotten to do so briefly in the main corridor. 'Come now, Hardy, my friend,' said The Doctor cheerfully, 'as I said to you before, time may help us to heal you. Please, step inside'. Rose, who had opened the door without incident, held it open for Hardy and the others to enter. As they peered through the door, they could see a kind of desk, full of dials and gadgets, with lots of ethereal-looking lights glowing in the semi-darkness. Hardy approached the door, accompanied by The Doctor. 'Are you sure?', Hardy said, half-turning to the others. 'Don't worry about a thing', said The Doctor cheerily. It was true that The Doctor spoke with such confidence that they didn't feel bad about entering. And on top of all the other strange things that had happened to them that day, being asked to enter a blue box by a fake Doctor was the least of their worries. It was amazing enough that there even was a blue box at the end of a hospital corridor, and amazing that no-one in the hospital had seen it or done anything about it. But the most amazing thing of all about the blue box was its size. *****