

Chapter 23

Just then the door opened. A man in a scruffy brown suit stood at the doorway. Just stood there. Didn't move.

*****Hardy gave a loud groan in an attempt to hide the mouthful of food he was still trying to force down his throat. In almost the same movement, he arched his back up from the bed, groaned again, and slipped the box of food under the small of his back. As he slumped down again, the box was crushed underneath him, and he could feel the damp hamburger squash against his pyjamas. Mayonnaise oozed out onto the bed.

Clara waved the flowers she had been arranging around her head, to try to get rid of the smell of cooking that had filled the room.

Wil whistled, trying to look innocent. Freddy looked out of the window nonchalantly. On the TV in the corner the presenters chatted away about Chelsea's loss to Barcelona the previous evening.

They all look at the man in the doorway.

The man at the door just stared. He seemed to be breathing very very slowly, almost not at all, which gave him a sort of other-worldly appearance. He didn't blink. He could have been dead, if he wasn't standing up.

Then he raised his left eyebrow slightly, and a flicker of a smile played across his face. Just for a moment it looked like he might speak. Hardy adjusted himself into a less comfortable position to make sure he looked as ill as possible. He felt ketchup spurt across his back. He groaned again.

The man gradually entered the room. He looked around slowly, with a slightly confused look on his face, as if he had stumbled into the wrong part of the hospital. Then he fixed his gaze on the bed and its contents. Hardy froze as the man's deep brown eyes met his. Even if he had wanted to move, he probably couldn't have. A chip jabbed him in the side.

Although the man had the appearance and a kind of authority like a doctor, his brown striped suit, his unkempt hair, and his white trainers suggested more that he was some kind of foreign visitor or perhaps an eccentric but brilliant inventor who had come to check on one of his machines.

As Hardy was starting to get worried that this man might really be some kind of imposter, he leant over the bed and looked at one of the dials above Hardy's head.

'Fascinating', he murmured, almost to himself. *'Haven't seen one of those in years'*.

He withdrew again, and started fishing around in his pocket.

He pulled out a small device, similar to something Dr No had used. It was about the size of a large pen, silver in colour, fairly thick around the middle. At one end it had a circular bulb-

shaped object. He pointed it at the TV, as if to test it. The channel changed instantly.

Then he held it up to Hardy's face. Hardy recoiled slightly. The device started to glow. It buzzed quietly.

Just then, Dr No returned. As brisk as he had been before, he marched into the room without knocking and strode over to the far side of the bed.

The man in the brown suit put the silver pen device back in the pocket of his trenchcoat, stood straight up and stretched his out his right hand to greet the visitor. They shook hands across the bed. Hardy squirmed as a bun attached itself to his shoulder blade.

'Who', he said, quietly but confidently.

'No', replied Doctor No.

'No, Who', said the first man, firmly.

'I said, No!', Dr No repeated, tripling his vocabulary. He sounded angry.

'And I said Who',

'Who's who? I'm No, who are you?'

'Who', repeated man number one.

'Doh!', said a voice from the TV in the corner, to add to the surreal conversation going on in the room.

Man number one then seemed to lose interest in introducing himself, because he turned to Dr No and, waving his hand in the general direction of Hardy, said,

'Have you established the cause of the problems?'

'No', said Dr No, predictably.

What are the main symptoms?

'Don't know', said Dr No.

There was a loud beep which seemed to surprise the first Doctor. Dr No looked at the small bleeper attached to his white coat. He reached over to the phone in the corner of the small room and picked up the receiver.

'NO!' he yelled into the mouthpiece. He slammed down the phone and ran out of the room, shaking his head.

Doctor Brown Suit reached back into his pocket and started running his tests on Hardy again. At no point did he actually touch the patient, but he used the buzzing, glowing device to run down his throat, chest, arms, legs, feet. When the device was close to Hardy's back (and the soggy mess underneath), it started buzzing madly, at a much higher pitch. They were sure to be found out now.

'Fascinating, fascinating', muttered the Doctor several times as he took readings from the little device.

'Doh!' went the TV again. The Doctor zapped it and it went silent.

He slipped the device back into his pocket, and grabbed the lapels of his coat with his two hands, like a lawyer about to make a big speech. He moved over towards the window where Freddy was sitting. He stood still again for a few minutes, hardly breathing. They all looked at him with considerable trepidation.

'Hmmm...one of the most unusual cases I have come across in five hundred years of medical practice', he said eventually.

'Five hundred?', whispered Wil to Clara. They must have misheard him.

'Here is what we shall do. I shall recommend that we move you to another location, so that we can try alternative treatments. There are many possible causes for your problems, and we need time to decide how to heal them. Follow me, please. Rose will show you to your room.'

A blonde haired woman appeared at the door to the room. She didn't look like a nurse, and she wasn't dressed like a nurse, although she did look vaguely familiar.

Groaning extravagantly, and trailing fast food behind him, Hardy managed to struggle to the doorway, following the strange doctor and his assistant. They made their way along the deserted, cold corridor, the Doctor and his assistant in front, Hardy limping along behind, with Freddy, Wil, and Clara bringing up the rear.

'This way please', said the assistant, They turned the corner in the middle of the long main corridor. They entered a short cul de sac corridor, at the end of which was a large blue box.
