

Wisplurkers

Episode 010. "I'm not scared, it's just that..."

Matt, Kylie and Lloyd joined the other pupils of Sir Basil's into the school ground. Then they stopped. Toby was still standing on the pavement and his friends pushed their way back out through the one-way stream.

"Come on," encouraged Matt. "The bell'll be going any second. You can't afford to be late again this week." Toby had other ideas.

"I'm bunking off."

"You can't," said Lloyd.

"Why?" asked Kylie. "Don't tell me. You've not done your homework."

Toby glared at her. He had something better to do than spend a day doing lessons.

"I'm going to investigate the mystery. I've decided I'm going to be a private detective when I leave school so I need to practice."

"That's new," said Lloyd sarcastically. "Last week you were going to be a test pilot."

Toby ignored him.

"Just think," his eyes shone at the very idea. "The Grimleys might have been *murdered* and their bodies dumped in the old telephone place before the fire."

Kylie giggled. "Well that's a good start. The fire came first. Remember?"

"Yeah — well, Miss Know-It-All," Toby pointedly turned his back on her. He said to the others. "Why don't we all go to the house in Wood Street and have a look? It's only Lyon's class first period. We'll not be missing anything."

"Nah, can't," said Lloyd, as the sudden shrill whistle pieced the air. "If Dad found out I'd bunked off I'd be in big trouble."

"Go on Matt. You'll come with me. It'll be a laugh," Toby urged his friend. Kylie had other ideas.

"You can't. You have *got* to go to school, Matthew."

Matt considered it for about five seconds. He wasn't sure he wanted to go to the house. There wouldn't be anything to see if the police had it cordoned off. Anyway, he quite liked Mr Lyon's history lessons.

Kylie was tapping her foot and demanding her brother took notice. If he dawdled anymore they'd be late for registration.

"Mum says we both have to go straight to school and then straight back home after school, and no stopping off on the way. I'll tell her if you do what Toby Dodd says," she gazed after Lloyd, who was already walking away towards the main entrance. She was eager to run after him and catch him up.

Toby was fed up with his friend's sister. She always had to follow them everywhere.

"Go on, Matt," he glared at the girl, now standing defiantly with her hands on her hips, and ignored the determined look on her face. "Let's do something different for once. I dare you."

Oh no, not another dare. Matt shook his head. Kylie was right, their mother trusted him and his sister. He'd never taken a day off school, unless he'd been sick. If she found out he'd been playing truant, and Kylie would be sure to tell on him, his Mum might never trust him again. History was his favourite subject and it was games later. He was good at football. He couldn't miss that. The games teacher had hinted to Lloyd that he might be chosen for next term's team. Neither were about to pass up such an opportunity, for one of Toby Dodd's daft ideas.

"We could go after school," said Matt.

"No I'm going right now. 'Course if you're scared --?" mocked Toby, "I'll go on my own. I don't care."

"I'm not scared, it's just that..."

"I know. *You have to go straight to school, and straight back home after school and no stopping off on the way,*" Toby quoted almost word for word. "Well, I'm going. If old man Lyon asks where I am, you can tell him I've got a cold or something."

"But Toby --."

Toby wasn't listening. He slung his bag over his shoulder and marched off down the road, leaving his friend undecided what to do next.

"Toby," Matt yelled "TOBY". He ignored him and Matt chewed his lip, unsure, until Kylie pulled at his arm. Reluctantly, he followed his twin sister in through the school's gates.

Toby was muttering to himself, as he walked in the early morning sunshine.

"I don't need Matt Jameson or Lloyd Wong. No way, flappin' I can go and investigate without their help. Why has Matt always got to do what Kylie says?" he asked no one in particular. Making his voice as girly as he could, he again mimicked his friend's sister.

"*Mummy says we must go to school, Matthew. Mummy says we must go straight home, Matthew.*"

He added scathingly, and a little unkindly, "What a wimp!" Then he turned the corner into Wood Street.

It was just an ordinary street with ordinary houses. It was long and quite narrow, shaded on both sides by the trees growing on the grass verges and in some of the front gardens. In the sunshine the birds sang cheerfully amongst the branches. At this time of the day it was almost empty of cars, except for a white van parked half on the pavement and half on the road, outside a house. The only sign of life was a cat that ran out in front of him, crossed the road and disappeared amongst bushes in a garden opposite.

Toby was very disappointed. He'd expected to see police cars, TV vans, reporters, anything. There was nothing.

He shivered suddenly. It was odd. What had been a very warm morning seemed to be a lot colder as soon as he turned the corner of the street. He dropped his bag on the ground and, from its deep innards, he pulled out his crumpled blazer. He struggled with a sleeve turned inside out, but eventually got the blazer on and buttoned up. Toby then picked up the bag and walked along the pavement, searching for the Grimleys' house.

He stopped at number 35, a house on the left side of the street, about half way down. He didn't know why he'd chosen this particular house, except it was obviously old and scruffy. Somehow, the state of the house seemed to match the miserable old man who'd shouted at them all those months before.

He peered up at the house, his eyes narrowing against the glare of the sun. The paint was flaking from its window frames and front door. A piece of the guttering, that had come loose during the last storm, was caught in the sudden breeze and banged against the wall. The sound was eerie in the quiet of the street. Toby stood just inside the overgrown garden looking up at the front of the house. The place did seem to have a strange presence, as if it knew the terrible fate that had overtaken the inhabitants. It was beginning to give him the creeps.

His unease grew as he walked down the weed covered path, towards the front door. Was it his imagination? Or was someone watching him. He thought he saw a movement in one of the windows behind the net curtains. Maybe the Grimleys had come back? He was probably mistaken. What he'd thought he'd seen was only his imagination. That didn't stop the short, fair hairs standing up on the back of his neck.

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Wisplurkers. By Maggie C.

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