

Shaping up

(A children's story aimed at reluctant writers)

'I'll go up and have a word. See what I can do.'

'That would be great Dad. Weekends are becoming a bit of a nightmare.'

Henry climbed the stairs to his grandson's room, stopping midway to get his breath: it was a long way to the top of the house. And on reaching the landing, he had to smile – 'Andy's Room' it said; the Toy Story obsession had gone into orbit, skipped a generation, and returned to Earth here, on his grandson, Freddie's, door. He knocked twice.

'Go AWAY!...who is it?'

'It's me. Grandad. Can I come in?'

Silence, then the pad of feet and a sharp cry as Freddie negotiated the slew of Lego between bed and door - it opened a crack.

'Are you alone?' Freddie's eyes scanned the landing. 'I don't want to talk to *them*.'

Henry looked around. 'The coast is clear. We're safe to rendezvous!'

'Come in.'

The two sat on the bed together, Freddie looking glum.

'Go on,' the old man said, 'you start. What's got into you?'

Freddie pulled his knees up to his chin, burying his mouth in his pyjama bottoms. He started to speak.

'If I'm going to hear you, you're going to have to extricate your mouth ...'

'Extric...?'

'Speak more clearly!' The old man ruffled his grandson's hair. 'So, let's start again.'

Freddie sighed deeply and Teddy joined the pair. 'It's school. I've got to write a story *-again!* – and I can never think of what to do. No imagination.'

'Nonsense! Right, put your outdoor clothes on. We're going outside...'

'Outside? But it's night, and-'

'It's a Friday, and I say you can. Clothes on!'

The playground was a ten-minute walk, high trees shielding them from the lights of the estate. A sea of stars twinkled overhead. The pair sat on the swings, Grandad with his arm around the boy, keeping him warm.

'Right, close your eyes, let them get used to the dark.' Freddie did as he was told. 'Now, look where I'm pointing. What do you see?'

'Stars?'

'Very good. A hundred stars. A thousand?'

'Zillions.'

'*Exactly*, whatever that might be. And can you see those seven bright stars?' Grandad pointed at The Plough. 'What does that shape look like?'

Freddie considered before answering. 'A big spoon, maybe?'

'Good! And what would a big spoon be doing in the sky?'

Freddie scratched his head. 'Maybe they use it to feed the moon...'

'Carry on.'

'...because every month the moon loses weight. It gets thinner and thinner until it disappears, but then it comes back, so something must be making it fat again.'

'Brilliant! And who is 'they' that feed the moon?'

'I dunno. Space people. Maybe some gods who live up there.'

'Great, we're getting somewhere!'

Thirty minutes, and lots of ideas later, they were back in the house.

'How's your imagination now, Fred?' Grandad asked as he tucked him into bed.

'Shh, I'm thinking!' Freddie grinned, rolled over, and went straight to sleep.