

### **Ben Short (3)**

Today was a wicked Wednesday... I think.

I had thought a lot about the things I had discussed with Mr Higgins last night while I was shoving myself full of pepperoni stuffed crust pizza. I guess just talking to him and all that thinking had tired me out so I went to bed when told without complaining. I heard Emma say 'Blimey' to mum and saw her pull a face as I went upstairs. She was always allowed to stay up later than me, so unfair. Which was what I usually said when it was bed time.

But I didn't sleep well. Not sure if it was the pizza or worry of meeting Pavlov. My stomach churned like a washing machine. Turning over and over, I felt sick. Every time I opened one eye to check on the time Scar was staring at me, not moving just blowing bubbles. I think he was worried too.

You see I had a problem. I had made a commitment to Mr Higgins that if I saw Pavlov I would say and do certain things, behave in a certain way. I was worried that I was going to let Mr Higgins down and not be able to do as we had agreed. Or worse, make a fool of myself or get in to another fight. The thought of all of these possibilities was unbearable. I was pretty sure that if I got in to a fight with Pavlov again it was gonna hurt...a lot. As I considered each possibility in turn my stomach churned and lurched.

This morning I didn't have time to think as I got up late and everything was a rush. During the night I had persuaded myself that everything was OK. Eventually I had fallen asleep with Scar watching over me. But as I ran to the car the doubts started to creep in again. My stomach started doing Olympic somersaults, my mouth filled with spit. I thought about pleading ill with mum but it was too late we were already in the car.

Emma just wouldn't shut up once we got in the car and I struggled to think clearly. I needed to get what Mr Higgins had said straight in my head before I got to school and saw Pavlov. I know that I hadn't seen Pavlov for some time but I just felt that today was going to be the day. My dad would say that it was Murphy's Law that it happened after seeing Mr Higgins last night.

My thoughts were swimming round so fast it was making me dizzy and I felt sick. I really did think I was going to throw up. I pinched Emma on the arm, she squealed her girly squeal and went quiet. Mission success. Mum was too busy on the car phone with dad to do anything. She just looked over her shoulder and pulled that face. My stomach lurched some more.

I got back to thinking. Mr Higgins had given me some things to do and some things to say if Pavlov started. I practised them in my head but the words kept tumbling over each other and got jumbled up.

At last we arrived at school but we were late so none of my friends were there. They would already be playing football behind the classrooms. I looked up and down the road and there were a few late arrivals like me but no sign of Pavlov. Good.

If I joined my mates to play football I would be OK. Emma walked towards a group of girls she knew as I strolled down the gap between the classrooms that led to the playground. It was clear but as I reached the end of the passage Pavlov stepped in to view. He had been waiting for me!

He smiled. It was the sort of smile you might see on a tiger's face as it is about to pounce on its defenceless prey. He had two other boys behind him blocking the way out of the passage. With a sinking feeling I realised that I had no choice but to face him and that it was gonna hurt.

I reached with my left hand and squeezed my little finger like Mr Higgins had taught me. I squeezed real hard.

'How is the lanky Gooner git today? You gonna tell us what the weather is like up there today?' As Pavlov laughed his face kinda twitched as if his mouth and face were having an argument. It made doing what Mr Higgins had told me to do a lot easier. I smiled to myself because when Pavlov laughed all I could see was a clown with a big red glowing nose and fluffy orange hair. The two boys behind him chuckled nervously. I reckoned they didn't really want to be there, Pavlov had probably bullied them in to it.

I raised myself up to my full height and straightened my shoulders. Dad said I needed to walk tall with my head held high. I might be skinny but I was tall and I could look down on Pavlov. 'Actually the weather is pretty good, bright and sunny. And as you are asking I am very well today thank you. How are you? I heard your hand was playing up.'

This was not my normal response and not the one they were expecting. The boys chuckled again and shuffled their feet. Pavlov just looked confused. His face screwed up like he had smelt something nasty. I realised he was struggling to think of the next thing to say. Not the brightest lad this Pavlov. All I could see was his big red glowing nose and wavy orange hair. I couldn't stop myself from smiling.

I was trying to remember all the things Mr Higgins had said to do.

We stood facing each other me looking down, him looking up with this silly twisted face as he wrestled to find the best possible words he could say. It seemed like an age as I stayed silent but finally he got there. He spat his words at me 'You really are an ugly beanpole aren't ya!' Ugh! I could smell his breath he was that close to me .

'Y'know Pavlov I think you are probably a nice guy. Most people don't think I am ugly. My mum thinks I am great but my sister, Emma, she would probably agree with you so maybe you are not completely wrong. Do you think Chelsea will beat the Potters at the weekend?' Pavlov was a keen Chelsea fan and this was one of the questions I remembered that Mr Higgins had suggested.

Pavlov just stared up at me. He was clearly confused and his face twisted and twitched. I looked at his hand, it was still swollen. I smiled to myself.

'Of course they will 5 nil I reckon'

'Oh I wouldn't be so sure Pavlov' Mr Higgins had told me to make sure I used his name and to stay calm. I was struggling to stay calm, the picture in my head of a clown really helped but I clenched my little finger again anyway. 'Stoke have a really good home record. Only lost twice at home this season. I have a friend who is going to the game, are you?'

Pavlov was clearly trying to think of a response as I watched his mouth wrestle with his face again. His whole face changed shape. I had never noticed him do this before. It was fascinating and funny at the same time.

'Nah. I'm gonna watch it on telly' he blurted out.

One of the lads Tim had drifted off. Ethan the other one looked bored. It was working!

'Who do you think will score first? Will they play Dwight their striker you reckon?' I asked.

By now I was leaning casually up against the wall and my stomach had stopped leaping around.

'Well they might rest Dwight as it's only Stoke. But they really need...' Pavlov was cut off by the bell going, it was just above his head and as usual it was way too loud. We had to get to our classrooms.

'Well nice talking to you Pavlov. See you at break.' As I stepped towards him he moved aside and we actually walked a few steps together as if we were mates. Not sure that was ever gonna happen.

As I joined my mates filing in to the classroom I was not sure how I felt. Relieved? Certainly. Exhausted? For sure. The confrontation had taken all my will power. But I think most of all I was pleased and excited that I had been brave enough to do exactly what had been agreed with Mr Higgins. I had stayed calm and I think the word he had used was resolute. Yeah I'm pretty sure I was resolute. And it worked.

I couldn't wait to finish school and see Scar to tell him how it had turned out.

It WAS a wicked wicked Wednesday.