

BRILLIANT BOBBY

Episode Two

It was early morning and a quiet start for the Kaspies. Up on Bubble Balcony, Chinda was practising new judo moves. In the Bug, the Professor was still munching on breakfast pancakes. Mash was relaxing on The Favourite Sofa having finished off a kitchen bake of fruit pies. Voom had already wobbled off to recharge his batteries in the Control Cupboard.

The screens crackled into life.

“Good morning, my Kaspies!” LaJu looked radiant in a rose print gown, her faithful pets Floppa and Brux at her side. If she had something important to say she didn’t have a chance because in the Control Cupboard, Voom’s enormous eye was glowing ruby red. Which could only mean one thing: an important mission was brewing!

“Alert!” It jiggled a stubby foot and tottered into the Bug. “Prepare for an emergency, Professor! This one’s for you!”

Twitty raised an eyebrow and grunted.

“Then we shall meet later,” purred Queen LaJu. “I have no doubt you will do your best, my Kaspies. Professor, you can have the rest of your pancakes later.”

“Aye, aye!” grumbled Twitty, quickly gobbling down another mouthful. “Och, well here I go. Twitty to the rescue!” and disappeared in a flash.

“Professor, wait!” Voom had a funny feeling. “Something else is going on! I’m coming with you!” And It was gone.

Mash yawned and stretched out his paws, eyeing his basket by the fire. About to curl up for a nap, he was snatched up by Chinda who was ready for a brisk walk. Thus the Kaspies went about their day. And every day was different. But meanwhile not far away, something quite extraordinary was about to take place.

There wasn’t anything Bobby couldn’t do. He was brilliant, a prodigy in the making, a rare child who could turn his hand to almost anything, or that’s what he was told.

“How many stars do you think there are in the sky Bobby?” his friends would ask.

“Well, the stars are actually all suns and there are lots and lots, more than you could ever imagine,” Bobby would inform his pals matter-of-factly. “No-one really knows how many but thousands of spacemen are probably counting them day and night.”

“Bobby, do everybody’s dreams come true?”

“Depends if you want them to or not, not all dreams are nice ones.”

“My Bobby is just brilliant,” his mother would crow proudly to strangers, whilst smoothing down her son’s hair for the umpteenth time. “Such a clever boy. He can do simply anything!” Then she’d smile, take his hand and move on. Bobby could tell others didn’t really care what his mother thought just by looking at their faces and listening to the noises they made. He wasn’t embarrassed by his mother’s attention as his brilliance wasn’t important, just annoying because he didn’t really ever feel brilliant, like a famous scientist or an opera singer. He just knew things in his own special world. Mostly about nature ...and worms.

“Brilliant Bobby, come what may. He always knows what to do and say,” sang Bobby to himself one morning walking past the back of his house towards ZigZag Common. It was a windy Saturday in spring and he was looking for three more worms to add to his jam-jar collection. That would bring the total to ten.

“Just for twenty minutes and remember not to go any further than the edge of the grass,” his mother had warned. “Fooditch Woods are far too dangerous even for my brilliant son.”

Bobby liked the icy pink worms, especially the fat ones which were harder to find. Under his microscope in his bedroom he would watch them for hours, fascinated by the steady way in which they munched through leaves. Then he would release them in a safe place and start again.

“Hey, Bobby! Want to fly my new kite?”

Up ahead, Tufty, his next-door neighbour, was climbing over the stile leading to ZigZag Common.

“Oh yeah! I’d love that!” Bobby ran to catch up with Tufty. He had been saving up for a kite for ages, far too long actually. Apart from worms, owning a kite was the biggest thing that mattered to him right now, but Tufty had beaten him to it. Bobby was hoping he might get enough birthday money tomorrow from Grandpa to buy the red one from the toy shop. Every day he pressed his nose against the window, praying no-one else would buy it.

“Mum says I’ve only got twenty minutes though,” said Bobby.

“Come on then!” Tufty pointed a bare arm. He was never cold and always wore teeshirts and shorts. “Race you to that tree over there. Whoever wins flies my kite first! Go!”

Young Tufty had already taken off, a tatty rucksack thumping against his back. Mud flew as Bobby skidded to race his friend, two pairs of chubby legs tearing across the common into a playful wind that made their cheeks pink. In the distance stood an ancient oak tree with gnarly branches that twisted up and outwards like witches fingers.

“I win!” panted Bobby, throwing himself against the trunk.

“Only just!” Tufty flopped down beside him. “I’ll get you next time! Here,” he gasped in between breaths. “Seeing as I lost!” and reached into his bag to pull out the most beautiful red and green kite Bobby had ever seen. “My precious kite. Don’t let it out all the way though! She’s really fast!”

Bobby had already snatched it up and was running back into the open, the tail soaring out behind him.

“Be careful, Bobby! She’s much more powerful than she looks!” But Tufty’s advice was lost to the playful wind.

Voom and Twitty had landed in Fooditch Woods. Voom's navigation was bang on target but It hadn't quite prepared for such a dense approach. Wedged between the upper branches of a giant tree, it was well and truly stuck. Safely on the ground Twitty looked up and chuckled.

"What in the Kaspies are you still doing up there? From this angle, you look like a pantomime eagle!"

"Thank you, Professor," said Voom drily. "But I do seem to have hooked myself in." Its enormous eye boggled and blinked. "This new cloak really is quite stiff." Its tubular body was tipping this way and that. "Give me a hand would you? It's getting rather chilly up here."

The Professor crossed his arms and chuckled. "So let's get this straight. You want *me* to climb a tree to rescue *you*? Because the great Voom is feeling chilly? Do I have to?"

"That's an order, Professor. Now hurry up! A child needs us urgently!"

Putting his bagpipes to one side, Twitty nimbly skimmed the tree trunk and began tugging at Voom's cloak.

"Oh honestly! Not like that, Professor! You're making it worse!"

"Well, it would help if you kept still for a start," joked Twitty. "Twisting like a salsa dance isn't helping. Let's see now. I'm not sure I can... och, what a terrible tangle!"

"Professor, do stop fussing and unstick me!" countered Voom. "And be quick about it! There's an emergency about to happen and we can't be late!"

"Aye, aye boss!"

Finally released from his cloak, Voom bounced like a plump peanut through the branches and landed on the ground with a solid 'oof.' Alas, the pink cloak rested above, swinging like a hammock between the treetops. Mildly shaken, Voom brushed himself down and stood up.

"My, well that was certainly most exciting! Right, back to business and you can wipe that smile off your face, Professor. We've work to do."

Leaning against a tree Twitty smirked. The rather naked Voom was once again in control.

Bobby bounded across ZigZag Common marvelling at Tufty's kite. He whooped for joy as he watched it dip and dive, a stream of colour flapping in the breeze. Darting this way and that, the kite pulled and tugged at the leash, anxious to perform. With each burst of glee, Bobby allowed the rope to unravel just a little bit more. The worms could wait. There would always be worms. He patted the wooden collection box in his shorts pocket just to make sure it was still there. Flying this wonderful kite is what mattered now. Mindlessly, he skipped towards Fooditch Woods. The kite was laughing with him, teasing him. He loosened the string just an inch or two more, ecstatic to watch it sail higher and higher.

"Keep going! Let me out all the way!" the kite seemed to tease.

"Okay! I will!" cried Bobby feeling the cord trickle between his fingers.

The kite rose up and up and all at once the little blue plastic handle was bare. But the kite was behaving admirably! Silly Tufty was probably worrying about nothing. Of course the kite needed to be let out all the way. And in a spurt of abandoned joy, Bobby jumped just for the sake of it, a jump so full of jubilation that

he had no recollection of ever having being able to leap so high before and whilst he was wondering when his feet would touch the grass again, he realised with a confused sense of surprise that he was already two feet off the ground and rising.

Paddling his feet, he tried to pull down but that was only making him go higher!

“Tufty! Tufty! Help!” Dismayed, he chanced a glance down. Where was he? Where was the oak tree, where was Tufty? All he could see was darkness of woods. “Tuuuufffttty! I’m up here!!!” he called again in vain.

Steadily he rose, the air growing cooler, the kite’s string now as straight as an arrow. Panicking, Bobby held on with both hands, his feeble shouts useless. It was powerful and strong. His plump, merry face had paled and crumpled with fear. Surely his mother would come looking for him, her brilliant Bobby. Surely she would be worried by now. But would she search the sky for her son? What if he fell off into the dangerous woods where the Wiwos lived. He shivered and wiggled his toes and felt something cold brush past his feet. “Oh no! My new plimsolls” he burbled, not having recalled them falling off. Above he saw stars glow but how could it be night-time already?

Soon enough, Bobby lost track of how long he’d been flying. He felt his eyelids droop, his arms go slack and before he knew it, the string had slipped through his fingers and he was free-falling, falling, shooting down through a tunnel of freezing cold, his sweater blowing up under his chin. He could hear a high

pitched whistling close by, a gentle voice in his head reminding him he was 'brilliant Bobby' and screaming madly through it all, he could only remember waking.

He was lying on a pile of twigs and leaves in a deep, damp pit. Reaching around, a muddy mush crumbled to his touch. Suddenly, a rustling came from above and he exhaled thankfully. Of course Tufty had seen him and rushed to the rescue.

"Hey! Down here! I think I'm okay," he managed, his voice weak. "I must have fallen into a trap or something. Hurry up It's cold down here."

But Tufty didn't respond.

"Tufty? Come on. Stop being silly. My Mum will be getting worried."

A shadow crossed close to the edge. It was too gloomy to see clearly. That didn't look like Tufty. Bobby swallowed and kept very still. He heard a scraping noise and a snuffling and then it went quiet. Thinking it must be a curious lost dog he was about to shout out again when a pair of red eyes pushed through the darkness and glared at him. Only this was no dog. Bobby's fingernails dug deeper into the dirt. Terrified he stared back. So the rumours were true! The half-witch, half-wolves Wiwos did exist. As if it had understood, the Wiwo communicated a low snarl. Swiftly, it was joined by another, then another and before long, a full circle of

red eyes and snouts and rippling halos of fur had surrounded the trap. Baring its teeth, the leader lowered itself onto its haunches and growled again, the sound deepening as the pack followed its call.

“Please, leave me alone,” simpered Bobby. “Go away, please. I promise I won’t tell anyone you’re real.”

But the wolves had other ideas. Grunting, they turned around and began scraping at the ground, flicking chunks of loose earth into the pit with their hind legs. Covering his face with his hands, Bobby cried out.

“Stop! Stop it! Go away you horrible Wiwos!” He pushed himself as close to the wall as possible. “I’m Brilliant Bobby and I’m nine years old.” He choked as more mud flew. “And it’s my birthday tomorrow and I’m hoping to buy my own kite. Please... someone help me.”

Whatever made him think the wolves would care about his birthday Bobby never knew. But in the distance, another noise arose that sounded like bagpipes. The bleating was faint at first but now it was getting louder. Someone must be coming! All at once, to Bobby’s astonishment, the flying mud stopped. Daring to peek up, he couldn’t believe what he saw.

Save for the playful wind rippling their fur, the pack was static, stuck in position, like a comic-book strip, their noses turned to the sky as if checking for a scent. All of a sudden, the bagpipes ceased followed by a moment of intense quiet. You could have heard a pin drop from the moon to the ground.

But it was the blood-curdling howl next that Bobby would never forget. His skin ran cold as the creatures skulked into the shadows their tails tucked between their legs as unfamiliar voices cut through the dark.

“Well played, Twitty! Oh, look, there he is! In the pit as predicted. Hello Bobby, we’ve come to rescue you. My name is Voom. I’m an alien and this is Professor Twitty. The Kaspies at your service.”

Wide-eyed, Bobby found himself staring up into a gigantic glowing eye and a man with knobby knees reaching out helping hand.

“Sorry about my state of undress!” declared the eye. “Had a small run-in with a pesky treetop. Normally I’m smartly dressed in a pink cloak.”

“Och, the boy doesn’t want to hear about your sob story, Voom,” said the kilted figure. “About time we got you out of there, wouldn’t you say, lad?”

Speechless in the presence of his saviours, Bobby allowed himself to be heaved out by the bagpipe man as the alien eye twirled around on three legs, boosting them on.

“There we go! I’ve got you. And don’t worry. I scared off the Wiwos good and proper. With my pipes!” The Professor beamed proudly giving his bagpipes a pat.

It was all too much. Finally Bobby found his voice. “But I don’t understand. How did you find me?”

“We are superheroes, Bobby. We always hear a child’s cry for help.” Voom bowed respectfully. “We knew you were in trouble so here we are!”

Non-plussed, Bobby didn’t know what else to say.

“Now then,” the eye continued. “Just adjust your eyes to closing position...”

“But... I...!”

A strange sensation of blankness passed momentarily, almost as if a small piece of Bobby’s life had never existed. The next thing he knew he was walking in his socks back across the Common. The sun was shining, the wind ruffled his hair. Gone was the dark night, the spooky forest and any sign of the Kaspies. Patting his

back pocket he felt reassured by the worm tin still there. Up ahead, leaning against the oak tree he saw Tufty, a can of juice in hand, the tip of his red and green kite poking out of his backpack, zipped up and ready to go.

“Hi,” said Tufty lightly. “Found my kite over there.” Casually, he tipped the can towards the woods. “And your plimsolls too. I told you my kite was powerful but I wasn’t worried as she always comes back to me.”

Bobby turned a full circle. Everything looked absolutely normal. His flying and falling felt dreamlike and hazy. Cautiously he approached Tufty.

“Thought the Wiwos had got you,” teased Tufty handing him his shoes. “Even though everyone knows they don’t exist! So what happened?”

“Well, I...” began Bobby then stopped. Tufty would never believe he’d fallen into a trap surrounded by the Wiwos and survived! And he certainly wouldn’t believe he’d been saved by the Kaspies! Quickly, he changed the subject. “What time is it? I was supposed to be home hours ago!”

Tufty frowned and checked his watch. “Don’t be silly! You were only gone a few minutes. I thought you’d be ages! If you like we can fly her again tomorrow.” He gave his buddy a friendly punch on the shoulder. “Come on! Race you back!”

The aroma of freshly baked cakes filled Bobby's nostrils as he opened the back door. Pleased to be home, he walked into the kitchen and gave his mother a warm hug.

"My! You're home early, darling. Is that Tufty outside? Isn't he coming in?"

"He said he had to go home." Bobby clambered up onto the bay window snug to wave goodbye to his friend as his mother placed a steaming bowl of scrambled eggs on the table.

"Well, this should keep you going after your worm-hunting morning. Goodness me, Bobby! You're so muddy. Be sure to wash before Grandpa gets here and you can tell him all about your adventures."

Bobby climbed down to sit at table, thoughtfully chomping on a mouthful of eggs. "I think I'd like to be a Kaspie, Mum. They're so cool! And did you know they save kids? You'll never believe what happened to me just now. I hope I can meet them again."

His mother smiled fondly and patted his head. "I don't know what a Kaspie is but I do know you can be whatever you choose to be," she said. "Like a star in the

sky or a worm in the ground or even a Kaspie, you'll always be brilliant Bobby to me. Which reminds me." She rose and moved towards the oven where she took out a tray of fluffy cakes. "Seeing as it's your birthday tomorrow I thought we could all have an early treat."

Bobby could hardly wait. Angel cakes were his favourite! Just then a flash of light caught the corner of his eye. Convinced he heard the faint bleat of pipes, he scanned the front garden hoping to see the Kaspies again. But it was his Grandfather pushing open the gate, his hair silvery and soft in the morning sun. He was carrying a large wrapped parcel tucked under one arm.

"When you want something badly enough it usually arrives!" shone his mother by his side. "And sometimes when you least expect it!"

"Yay!" cried Bobby excitedly jumping up to greet Grandpops.

It didn't matter that his mum thought he was brilliant because Bobby knew that he was as special as any other kid. Today was already brilliant all by itself and tomorrow was going to be even better! Thanks Kaspies! You're the best!