

CHAPTER FIVE, BACK HOME

Tristan didn't run home, but walked. He was tired out from all his adventures. It had been a great day! He grinned. And he had a new friend. Sebastian was a bit strange, but fun anyway. Should he do what Sebastian did, and get some clothes just for the cave? Looking at himself he decided that that was a good idea. How was he going to hide this mess from his mum? He thought for a moment and then he had an idea!

There was his garden and his house. And though his mum wasn't a spy in his story anymore, he really did need to hide from her this time. This time it was for real! So for the second time that day, he hid behind a bush. Where was she? He didn't see her. Silently he moved to the next bush again. And the next. He still didn't see her. She must be inside. He darted to the back door and had a quick peep inside. He didn't see her so he slipped in quietly. But then he heard her in the kitchen. Oh no, he could hear her walking to the kitchen door and if she opened it, she would see him! As quickly as he could he dashed to the bathroom, opened the door and shut it behind him.

But he hadn't been quiet enough. His mum opened the kitchen door and called out, "Tristan, is that you?"

He tried to steady his breathing. "Yes mum, I'm home. I'm just going to take a bath."

"A bath? That's unusual for you. Mind you don't run it too hot!"

"OK, mum," and he turned on the taps.

He took off his soaking wet trainers. What was he going to do about them? Next he peeled off his very muddy clothes and dumped them on a pile on the floor. Then he sank into the nice warm bath and relaxed. Running around with Sebastian had warmed him up quite a bit, but

his feet were still very cold. He must use his wellies tomorrow, just like Sebastian. Hopefully that would keep his feet warm and dry. He smiled to himself as he warmed up.

After his bath he picked up his muddy clothes and threw them all in the bath water. Immediately the water turned brown, even though he hadn't even started to clean them yet. He swirled his T-shirt around, trying to wash the mud off, till he could see that they were black again. Instead of muddy brown. He did the same with his tracksuit bottoms and then threw his trainers in as well. He let the water run out of the bath and rinsed all under the tap. The water was still quite muddy, but his clothes were better than they had been. He tried to squeeze the water out of them, but found that really hard. How did his mum always do that so easily? They were still dripping wet, and he couldn't get them any drier. He sighed. It would have to do. How was he going to get them dry so he could use them again tomorrow?

He bundled his clothes together the way Sebastian had done, wrapped the towel around his naked body and listened at the door. Could he hear his mum? No. He opened the door a little crack and listened again. She was still in the kitchen! He dashed down the hallway and up the stairs and into his room. Phew.

He dumped his bundle of dripping wet clothes in front of the radiator and put clean ones on. He sat on his bed, feeling the warm sun on his face through his window. How was he going to get his clothes dry? The radiator was off of course as it was summer time, so he couldn't hang them up there. And anyway, his mum would see them when she came in. The sun on his face was still quite warm, despite it getting late now. Supper must be nearly ready, he thought. So what was he going to do with those clothes? He couldn't hang them up on the washing line, like his mum did. So he had to hide them AND dry them. How?

“Tristan. Supper's ready!”

Startled, he jumped up. Oh no, not already. Frantically he looked around his room. Where could he put his wet gear? Not knowing what else to do, he picked up the bundle and shoved them underneath his bed. They weren't going to dry there, but at least they were out of sight. With a sigh, he went downstairs.

Throughout supper, Tristan kept thinking about his problem. Then, as he helped his mum bring the dishes to the sink, he had a sudden idea.

"I'll help you with the dishes, mum," he said.

His mum looked at him. "What are you up to?" she asked. "First you take a bath without me having to tell you to, and now you want to help me with the dishes."

"Nothing," answered Tristan in a hurry. "I just... I just... I've been outside all day, and I got a bit muddy playing in the forest, so I took a bath."

That was true enough, he thought to himself. He imagined that was just the thing that Sebastian would say. Not the whole truth, but part of the truth. So how could he explain the dishes?

"I've had fun all day, mum. I suppose I could help you a bit, that's all."

His mum shrugged and handed him a tea towel. "Well, while it lasts, I won't say no to some help. I'll wash the dishes and you can dry them."

So Tristan dried the dishes. It was not his favourite job, but then he knew his mum wasn't fond of it either. So fair was fair. And today he had a plan.

When he had nearly dried all the dishes, his opportunity came. His mum turned away from the washing up bowl to put the plates away. Now is my chance, he thought! And he dropped his tea towel in the bowl, still full of water. He fished it out again and tried to wring it

out, like he had done with his clothes in the bath. His mum came back and said, surprised “What are you doing? Why is the towel soaking wet?”

“Oops. Sorry mum,” he said, trying to sound regretful. “I dropped the tea towel in the bowl by mistake,” and he continued to try to squeeze the water out of it.

His mum took one look at him and laughed. “No, not like that, Tris. Here, let me show you how to do it,” and she showed him how to twist the towel and do the wringing motion. She gave it to him to try, and to his amazement it worked. Not as good as his mum did it, but better than he had done earlier on anyway.

“Thanks, mum. It’s still very wet though, and it’s too late to hang it up on the washing line now.”

“That’s alright. I can put it in the boiler cupboard,” and she walked to the hallway, opened the door and spread the towel over the top of the boiler.

Yes! Now he knew exactly what to do!

So when he went to bed, he set the alarm on his mobile phone at midnight. He was soon fast asleep, as the day had been so exciting and tiring. The ringtone on his alarm woke him up. He was still so tired that for a moment he simply turned over and went back to sleep. But 5 minutes later it went off again, and this time he remembered. Sleepily he got up, pulled the wet clothes bundle from under his bed and opened his bedroom door. He stood still, listening, as he had already done twice that day. No, yesterday, he told himself, it was the next day now. He couldn’t hear his mum, so he had to assume that she was asleep. He hoped so, anyway.

Silently he crept down to the bathroom and had another go at wringing out his clothes. Yes, that was much better. Nowhere near dry, but a lot drier anyway. Satisfied, he walked quietly to the boiler cupboard, and arranged his clothes on it as best as he could. He yawned. He was so tired, he just wanted to go back to sleep. He stumbled up the stairs again, hoping he had not

woken his mum up. He was just about to throw himself on his bed and go back to sleep, that he remembered something. He had nearly forgotten! He would have to take the clothes out of the cupboard, before his mum woke up. He groaned. This meant that he himself had to get up before her. What time did she normally wake up? He didn't actually know. His mum was always up before him. Whenever he woke up, she was there. During school time, he got up at a quarter past seven, but now, during the holidays, he often got up much later. Would his mum get up later too then? He didn't know, and didn't want to risk it. He decided to retrieve his clothes at 6; hopefully she'd still be fast asleep by then.