

Demons Inside

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This one is for my family and they know why.

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CHAPTER ONE

The image was fuzzier than it used to be. The video player was no longer in prime condition and the title screen had practically fused to the monitor. His mother had recorded every episode when they were repeated on BBC2 a few years ago and they had been taped over something that had been taped over something that had been taped over something else.

‘Come on Dougie,’ Andy yelled, ‘let’s get out of here.’

The picture on the decrepit fifteen inch television was of little Andy Anderson, young hero of the cult classic “The Adventures of Andy Anderson”, running alongside a little person called Dougie over a poor representation of a river of lava. They jumped onto conveniently placed rocks dotted along the breadth of the river that (just as conveniently) the Island Cannibals were unable to traverse.

Josh Williams sat on the edge of his bed with his Welsh homework nearly finished on the floor in front of him. Only a few more sentences to practice but the best bit was coming next. This was the episode where Andy dreamed of travelling to a mysterious tropical island to find treasure with his friends including the secretly evil Captain Tommy (a reference to one of Andy’s friends in the “real world”) who betrays the hero and plans to leave him on the island.

The image moved on, flickering slightly in the same spot it always flickered, to a close up of Andy Anderson’s face. A cherubic child (he was supposed to be ten) dressed in tattered clothes and jumping over brown boxes battered to resemble rock. Since first becoming addicted to the show, Josh had grown to understand how dated the programme was but that never dampened his enjoyment of each twenty-five minutes episode.

‘We’ve got to find Captain Tommy and stop him getting away with the treasure,’ Andy was panting to Dougie as they reached the other

side of the river while the noise of a dozen angry cannibals echoed in the background.

‘Woogaaboogaawoogaaboogaaa,’ came chanting gruffly from off-camera.

Josh smiled; not the forced, deceitful smile he had fed his mother this morning. Though the reason for his happiness had changed in the years since he had first watched this show, it still inspired genuine joy. Forgetting about the smile on his face, he returned his focus to the exercise book in front of him.

Sunday evening was the final refuge of every schoolchild with homework to be finished. Weekends were supposed to be spent playing games, visiting relatives or enjoying the wonders of youth. For Josh, the weekend had been consumed by despair.

It’s getting worse, he thought to himself.

Everyday seemed worse than the last even when the last felt like the worst day of his life. Sunday’s were usually more tolerable, muted peace troubled by the prospect of the impending school week ahead.

Nevertheless, today had been worse than ever and he had stayed in his room most of the day. There was plenty of studying to do, final exams were approaching hastily and all his teachers wanted to hand him homework padded with career advice. At least today had been dominated by his beloved videos.

Josh Williams fitted the template for an ordinary fifteen-year-old though his poignant grey eyes and mousey hair were not quite enough to set him apart from his classmates. He possessed a kind face, a quiet voice and a lean six-foot frame. His final year at Dafydd’s Well Comprehensive School had started a few miserable weeks ago burdened with anticipation of the rest of his life waiting patiently at its end. There was a Science report due tomorrow in preparation for the Mock Exams that were due before Christmas. Though Josh had struggled over the weekend to put his mind on his studies, he had a paper in his bag that would earn him an ‘A’ by Friday.

‘It’s too late, Andy,’ Dougie squeaked in a ridiculously high-pitched voice (*maybe the actor’s putting it on; this was hardly the golden age of political correctness,* Josh thought). ‘Captain Tommy’s got the gold and your friends are going to help him escape. They don’t even know about his evil plans. What are we going to do?’

The child actor playing Andy held up a ridiculously large diamond the size of his hand (decent job by the Props boys) and smiled the charming smile that had made this show such a success.

‘We still have this. I have a plan to stop Captain Tommy but I need this diamond and your help. Quick, time is running out!’

The show was an American hit from the mid Seventies about a boy who could do anything using the power of his imagination. By day, he was an ordinary child with typical problems. All Andy Anderson had to do was fall asleep and let his imagination take him to any place he wanted to go. Every one of the forty-five episodes had an exotic location or a crazy adventure; it was science fiction without the science.

Josh *was* Andy Anderson, in his mind. When the character wanted to deal with a problem, all he had to do was close his eyes and retreat into his imagination. Andy could resolve any problem and escape into a fantasy adventure. The dozen or so tapes on his bedroom floor covered every problem that could afflict boys of their age.

The Andy Anderson on the television was running through a fake jungle with a funky Seventies beat following him. ‘If we cut through the caves where we found the treasure, we can beat them back to the boat before they set sail.’

‘Th-th-the caves?’ Dougie stammered.

‘It’s our only chance. Come on, follow me.’

‘Do you have to be so brave, Andy?’

Bravery was over-rated. Courage, honour, all that crap. Ancient principles used to sell movie tickets and recruit armies. Sometimes there was not enough bravery in the world to...

Don’t think about it, he scolded himself. *Watch Andy*.

This show helped. He knew that his mother did not think it was right for him to spend so much time watching what used to be a children’s television show but it did not matter. When everything around him was too much to cope with, he could rely on this show. So what if it was nearly thirty years old, dripping in cheesy melodrama and aimed at a juvenile audience despite its cult status?

He could lose himself in it, which was all that mattered.

Josh lived with his mother in one of the oldest houses in the village of Dafydd’s Well, right up in the eastern corner. The village was set at the foot of the hill called Cysgod Rhiw – Shady Hill in its crude English equivalent – ten miles from the city of Swansea. A small

population the majority of which were descended from the original founders of the village in 1890 when infamous Welsh businessman Rhodri Dafydd started mining operations in the surrounding hills. It became home for his employees, poor cheap housing close to poorly paid jobs for poor people fighting to survive. It never evolved even when mining operations increased in the area after the First World War

Nothing ever grew in the shadow of the hillside.

Things were tough everywhere. Josh's mother worked part-time in the Post Office on Robert Street. Most kids his age would watch DVDs and bash Playstation controllers before completing their homework on laptops. His mother could barely keep the house heated.

Sometimes, when she was feeling low, she would say that the only way they could survive was together. It was not fair that she had to rely on him like that; it was not fair on her.

'This is it.'

Andy and Dougie stood before a cardboard set that resembled the entrance to a cave. It even had tufts of plastic weeds around the floor.

'I'm not sure about this,' Dougie whimpered.

'We've got to try, Dougie.'

'I know...but I'm afraid.'

Andy smiled handsomely. 'You can't let fear control your destiny. Sometimes you have to stand up to the fear. Sometimes you've just got to stand up and be counted.'

Looking back, everyone knew the show was a pile of rubbish. Props were poor, sets obvious and dull, at times the stories turned dangerously towards sexist or even racist. If it were not for Greg Branston, nobody in the village would even remember it.

But it made Josh feel good; it almost helped him remember what happiness felt like. At times when he felt like every joyful part of him had bled away, at the end of the day when he felt hollow from all the worry, when he felt isolated and desperately vulnerable to everything this poor excuse of a life threw at him, that was when he turned on the video.

'Josh, teas ready,' his mother called from downstairs.

'In a minute.'

His mother was unaware of what was happening and Josh wanted it to stay that way as long as possible, if not forever. Sometimes the hardest days were the ones when he had to feign happiness for his

mother. She suffered for both of them and Josh did not want to add to her growing list.

He hit the pause button, catching Andy in a swashbuckling pose fighting with an older boy in black pirate attire. Andy Anderson had been the envy of Seventies children and the darling of Seventies adults with his bright, brown eyes and handsome features. Josh's eyes were grey and his hair mousey but Josh still saw some similarities. They both knew how to dream no matter what the waking world threw at them and they both had their share of problems to deal with.

Only Andy Anderson was already gone and forgotten.

Josh stepped over his Welsh homework and made his way downstairs as he wiped the redness from his eyes.