



## **Wilfred's Heavely Journey**

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Wilfred, the churchyard rat, was feeling a bit miserable. He hadn't woken up miserable, but now he was definitely miserable. He had begun to be miserable when he'd found an old mirror that had been thrown over the churchyard wall and had a look at himself. He peered at his own image. He had a few bald patches in his rather mangy fur (courtesy of the vicar's cat), a somewhat bent ear (courtesy of the churchwarden's dog) and more than a few bent whiskers from running into the next door neighbour's patio door that she had cleaned so well he didn't now it was shut. "Hmm," he squeaked to himself. "I need a holiday." He suddenly smiled and stamped his paws, " yes, that's it I need a holiday right now!"

That night he scampered down to the travel agent to have a look in the shop window. He was really looking for a coach trip; they were wonderful with lots of people eating food on the journey and leaving bits for him and you got to go to new places and meet all sorts of churchyard rats. But, no matter how hard he studied the window display there were no coach trips leaving in the next few days. His eyes wandered around the window display and alighted on a picture of a huge white ship. 'Seventeen day cruise', it proclaimed, 'see Scandinavia and visit the land of the midnight sun.' It all sounded so romantic. As he read on he realised that the cruise left the following day from the nearby port. He rubbed his chin. "A cruise," he muttered to himself. "Well why not?" So he ran home, made himself a pile of cheese sandwiches and set out for the harbour.

The cruise liner was easy to find and looked just like the poster, a huge white ship that towered above all the others and looked scrumptiously luxurious. He waited for a quiet moment before scuttling up the mooring rope and making himself cosy in a little warm niche near the funnel. There he waited and, soon enough, the ship cast off and he was on his way.

There were lots of humans around so he waited until it was dark to have an explore. The ship was truly huge and there was lots to see from giant dining rooms to dark cinemas and gymnasiums to ballrooms. He ended up on the top deck and found the upper swimming pool that was closed to humans after midnight. He frowned and peered at the entrance for right near the floor, scrawled in the international rodent language of squeak-easi were the words 'all welcome.' Wilfred

crept forward and peered inside. To his amazement the pool area was full of rats having a cocktail party. He could see them drinking from odd shaped glasses, eating funny coloured stuff from tiny biscuits and mixing and mingling together. They all looked like they were having a great time, but Wilfred did not go in as the rats in the pool area were huge Russian black rats and he distinctly remembered his grandmother's words; 'You stay away from those black rats, they're called *Rattus Rattus* and they'll give you nasty diseases like the plague and, if you are a naughty boy, they will come and eat you all up.' Wilfred shivered and crept away to his little warm nook, ate a cheese sandwich and went to sleep.

The following day he took in the view, and was heartily disappointed, it was sea and nothing but sea. "Huh," he muttered to himself. "If I'd wanted to see the sea I could have gone down to the beach." Just to fill the time he popped into the cinema and found, to his utter dismay, that they did not sell popcorn, so he had nothing to snack on. That evening he crept back to the upper pool area. This time the rats were having a go at ballroom dancing. He watched them as they trod on each other's paws, got their tails tangled and had a wail of a time; but he did not go in. In the end he crept back to his nook and ate a cheese sandwich. His whiskers quivered, either it was his imagination or the sandwiches were becoming just a little stale and the cheese had that tangy aftertaste that indicated mould was starting to grow.

The following day was much the same, the view was sea, and nothing but sea, and the cinema empty of popcorn. He tried to make his way down to the kitchen, but there was a fearsome looking ship's cat and it seemed the chef's threw all the rubbish over the side and Wilfred was certainly not going to swim for his supper. When night fell he made his way back to the pool area and his nose twitched long before he got there as they were having a poolside barbeque. Wilfred took in the smell, took great deep sniffs of the glorious aroma and wished he could have just one little piece of whatever was cooking. Just as he was taking another deep lungful of barbeque fragrance a black rat appeared at his side and Wilfred shivered; was this it? Was this how it was going to end? Barbequed on the poolside?

"Hello," she said kindly. "Haven't seen you before. You coming to join us?"

Wilfred tried to hide his trembling as he felt sure she meant 'are you coming to join us as our meal!' "I d-d-don't know," he replied. "I'm a b-b-bit shy."

He swallowed back some fear.

"And if you d-d-don't mind me saying you're all b-b-black rats."

She laughed, "No we're not. If you look closely there's a little group of Canadian Brown rats by the drinks machine, some long-haired arctic rats by the sun-loungers, two Himalayan field rats under the sun-lamps, a yellow-tailed rat having a swim and we're expecting a party of desert rats on a world tour as soon as we dock." She waved a paw. "All us black rats are members of the Romanov family, we're just having a family reunion." She smiled at him again. "And don't worry we operate the heaven principle here on ship."

"The heaven principle," squeaked Wilfred.

"Yes, the heaven principle; all are welcome."

Wilfred peered through the doorway into the pool area.

"I don't know," he finally squeaked.

She nodded. "Suit yourself, but there's plenty for everyone and remember; all are welcome."

She wandered past him, scampered onto the diving board and then ran along before diving off. She managed a double somersault, a half-twist and a tail-tuck before cleanly entering the water; even the water rats applauded. Wilfred considered his options; his empty stomach and his mouldy cheeses sandwiches or the risk of an enjoyable barbeque. In the end the barbeque won and he started to creep towards the deliciously smelling food. He'd got within a tail's sweep when a ginormous black rat wearing a white apron spotted him.

"Howdee," he squeaked in a rich American accent. "Haven't seen you before; have a slug kebab."

He handed Wilfred a stick of succulent toasted slugs mixed with fried mango skin; to Wilfred it was pure heaven.

From then on Wilfred's holiday changed. Each night they had different events; he tried line-dancing, synchronised swimming, ball-room dancing, deck quoits and dragonfly hunting. He met dozens of rats from different countries, made some new friends and had a wonderful time. He even went ashore in Norway at Bergen and had a tour of the Viking sewers, they were just awesome. By the end of the cruise his coat was sleek and glossy, his stomach was full and he felt a new rat. Just after the ship docked back where they had started Wilfred said

goodbye to his new friends (they had made him an honorary Romanov) he scampered down the mooring rope to find three white rats at the bottom. They twitched their noses in the international sign of greeting.

"You just been on a cruse?"

Wilfred nodded. "It was grand."

One rat nudged the other, he coughed.

"You may have noticed that we're white rats and you know what that say about us; 'too posh, too domesticated, too stuck-up,' and George here isn't a white rat he's an albino. So do you think we'll still be welcome?"

Wilfred laughed.

"You sure will, the ship operates the heaven principle."

"Heaven principle?" They chorused.

"All welcome," said Wilfred, "Just like heaven, go ahead and enjoy yourselves."

Wilfred skipped away, it had been a grand holiday. "All welcome," he said to himself. "All welcome."

## From the same author on Feedbacks

### *Felburgh (2010)*

Felburgh is the story of a vicar (Peter) and his life in a new parish; one that he has not chosen and that has not chosen him. The parish is set in seemingly idyllic Suffolk seaside town of Felburgh somewhere between Felixstowe and Aldeburgh. The parish, like most parishes, is only normal on the surface and has underlying tensions and vast social differences. The church itself has a third of a million pounds in the bank, some of the congregation are downright antagonistic and quite a few have interesting pasts. The church has previously seen a rapid succession of vicars, who have been driven out, escaped or just disappeared, this has left a legacy of distrust and discontent. Finally, like the Parish, the vicarage itself also has an interesting history, one which soon impinges on Peter's life and not necessarily for the better. All in all it's a mixture most vicars would run from, but Peter has no choice but to stay as he has nowhere else to go, so can he make a success of it or will history repeat itself once again?

### *Barnabus Makes Someone Smile (2010)*

Barnabus notices a small child who does not seem to smile, ever. However, with a little lesson from a peculiar cat Barnabus learns how to make him smile.

### *Vignette (2010)*

Brian is a vicar on the edge, the edge of suicide that is. He has a number of rural parishes and they all contain farmers who are on the edge, or over the edge, of bankruptcy. It is all out of his control and try as he might he cannot deal with all the pain and angst and it has finally got to him. But he is not allowed to find relief in the comfort of a cold bullet via circumstances that are again out of control. However, as his life spirals downwards there is one chink of light, perhaps, just perhaps it will provide him with a way out.

### *Barnabus Prepares for Bonfire Night (2010)*

Fireworks can be pretty and bonfires can be warming, but to hedgehogs they can be deadly. Barnabus works out a plan to keep the hedgehogs safe, but it is not that simple.

*Barnabus and the Lost Spider (2010)*

Barnabus, the church mouse, believes that everything in his church is in exactly the right place. Then he opens the boiler room door and finds...

*Barnabus and Loadza Mice (2010)*

Barnabus is bored, in fact Barnabus is very bored. So he decides to invite a few friends over for a video party, unfortunately ...

*Barnabus Trusts a Cat (2010)*

Barnabus, the church mouse, doesn't like cats very much and certainly wouldn't normally trust one with his life, but one Christmas...

*Barnabus and the Inheritance (2010)*

A Barnabus Church Mouse Story.

Barnabus gets a surprise letter telling him he's got an inheritance. What can it be? His mind runs wild, is it money? A Mansion? Perhaps it's a ...

*Barnabus and the New Year (2010)*

It's New Year's Eve and Barnabus is all alone in his church basement home. Have all his friends gone out and left him? he feels really miserable, and then...

*Barnabus and the Winter Supply (2010)*

Barnabus has been a diligent Church Mouse, he has stored enough food to feed all the mice in his church for the whole of the winter, but then it starts to rain up North and other mice are in trouble, what should he do?

*Alien Gel (2010)*

Henry is a perfectly normal person in a perfectly normal world, then he is forced by circumstances to buy a weird hair gel. From then on his life begins to change as the hair gel starts to interfere in its own peculiar way. The question is: can Henry keep it under control?

*Barnabus Meets Ratatouee (2010)*

It's Christmas Eve and all is well in Barbabus' church, that is until there is a scratch on the door and the appearance of a very hungry Romanian rat. Should they say there is no room, or let him and his companions in?

*Spike and Mother's Day (2010)*

Spike the hedgehog has a problem, a real problem. It's two days before Mother's day and he hasn't got her a present, and even worse has no idea what to get. Can his friends help him or not?

*Spike Learns to say Sorry (2010)*

Spike the hedgehog absolutely loves cycling, but his father has given him two basic rules to obey and one day Spike forgets them, it leads him into all sorts of trouble.

*Spike Plays Hedgehog Rugby (2010)*

Spike the hedgehog has been made captain of the local hedgehog rugby team, but will his first decision at his first match be a big mistake?

*Barnabus needs an Albatross (2010)*

The church needs money to repair the church tower and Barnabus and his friends hatch a plan that they hope will give the church the money it needs. Trouble is it all depends on finding a rare and special bird.

*Boris the Dancing Beaver (2010)*

Boris is a beaver like no other. Forget swimming, forget chopping down trees; Boris loves to dance. But, just what future is there for a dancing beaver? His brothers think he's a nuisance, but Boris is sure dancing, somehow, is his future.

*Barnabus and Hank the Armadillo (2010)*

Barnabus, the church mouse, is looking after his church as normal and has an American guest, Hank the armadillo. However, they do not get on very well until the church boiler begins to throw a fit.

*Barnabus and Risk Management (2010)*

Barnabus, the church mouse, has to entertain his friend's Aunt. She is a bit of a snob and loves to find fault with the state of Barnabus' church. She discovers a box of soft toys in the wrong place and has a good moan, but Barnabus has an unusual answer; one involving sky-diving!

Sarah has a problem (2010)

Sarah the skunk has a couple of problems; one being her temper. She just can't keep it and when she gets angry those around her get squirted with her special smell liquid. It's not a recipe for keeping friends, so she hasn't any. Then one day...

Arboreal Love (2010)

Can trees feel for human beings as human beings feel for trees? Not everybody thinks so, but one old lady holds a secret: a secret of a love and passion for a tree that knew no bounds. But could this love be infectious?

The Last Assignment (2010)

They are highly trained operatives. They have been specially prepared for any mission. They are kept under tight reign. But there is this special assignment, could it be their last?

Cold (2010)

Jim Tarrent is an ex-army sergeant turned private investigator following his untimely departure from the army. On solving his first case he gains a partner and together they look like they will make a go of his business. However, Jim has a traumatic past that he cannot seem to leave behind and his partner is probably no better off. Then two cases hit them that could change their lives, and their detective agency, for ever.

The Rectory (2010)

Stephen Holmes is the type of person for whom every silver cloud has a black lining. Up to now he has led a fairly uneventful life. Uneventful that is if you forget that everything he touches has a knack of turning to dust or biting back. So much so that after nearly a decade as a bank clerk he has not progressed more than one tiny step up the promotion ladder; so much so that he's really given up on living and thinks of himself as just existing; so much

so that you'd hardly call him a good catch or for that matter any sort of catch. However, a surprise letter offers him the chance to change all that and to begin a new life, nay a new wealthy life. But he knows that every time someone fills up his glass with beer it has a habit of leaking out through unnoticed cracks, so can it all be true, and are there really new horizons ahead?

Lumen in *Let Your Little Light Shine (2010)*

Lumen is a glow worm with attitude. Currently he's fed up with being a glow worm and lured his lights off. But there is a problem, if his light doesn't shine, just where does his energy go?

Book Woman (2010)

Mary is the Manager of a private lending library in the sleepy Suffolk coastal town of Eastburgh. She originally wanted to be a journalist, but following a dreadful accident that she was forced to realign her career aspirations. Mary has a reputation of being rather short with people and fending off chances of friendship, not that she has much chance of friendships as she works full time and cares for her elderly mother.

However, Mary's nicely ordered world of books and home is slowly turned round thanks to an unexpected discovery, a young girl and Mary's changing inner needs.

The Soulmate Agency (2010)

The Soulmate Agency is a dating agency with a difference. Instead of pairing people up they invite groups of people away for a week and run them through a series of exercises to help them get to know one another. However, that is not to say the owner doesn't have a hidden plan of possible matings. But one assorted group, as soon as it arrives, starts to defy the odds...

Trembine Halt (2010)

Trembine Halt is a tiny Cambridgeshire village. Like most small villages the dozen inhabitants have their various foibles, but they have learnt to live together and support one another when necessary, even coping with the odd transitory interloper. However, lurking underneath are emotional hang-ups, hidden relationships, suicides and selfishness. All would remain as it was, except on one snowy day a freight train gets stuck in the village and the addition

of the extra person starts off a train of events that will have long term repercussions.

#### Nocturnus (2010)

John Smith and Jane Doe (yes that's their real names) are ordinary people living separate lives. He as a peripatetic lecturer and she as a night-time cleaning manager. In the normal course of events their paths would probably never cross. However, some events are far from normal and the two get thrown together to dispose of a corpse.

The question is can they get away with it? Especially as it's not just the police after them.

But the story is more than just a simple tale of misdeed and misdemeanor. Jane leads her nocturnal life for very good reasons (well good to her) and John prefers to travel rather than stay at home for equally valid reasons (well valid to him.) So as their lives are forcibly intertwined are their reasons still valid or are they redundant?

#### The Face (2010)

Brian is the type of guy who likes to have everything cut and dried and his life on a well-ordered track. He's been in the same teaching job since leaving university and spends every summer holiday house-sitting for his cousin George. However, this summer, after seeing a woman's face in a supermarket, his life starts to change in ways he would never have contemplated. However, there is more to come and his well ordered life starts to spiral way out of control, the problem is that he rather begins to like it that way.

#### Botanago (2010)

Botanago refers to a mathematical formula, which is invented within a robotics company by an eccentric and irascible middle aged research engineer called Albert, who is not all he seems.

All would be well if they left him alone to think his mathematical thoughts, but in Jeddle Robotics lie people with ambition and downright managerial ruthlessness that Albert detests.

So while he strives to perfect his cherished formula, he must also deal with the rest of his life, and that is nowhere near as easy.

Ruth (2010)

Ruth is a runner with a unique sexual chemistry that combines in almost near perfection with the story-teller; but she says little and wants nothing else. However, as far as he is concerned this is enough, then the unexpected happens and life gets turned on it's head...

Bitter (2010)

Jim Tarrent and Jenn Tarrent are settling down to a new routine in their detective agency following their marriage.

They have the usual mix of cases, but also pick up a case for military intelligence involving two dead service personnel discovered in unusual circumstances while Jim (who still dreams of his army past) plugs away at solving a child hit and run mystery no matter what it costs.

However, both cases lead them into murky territory where simple objectives have morphed into potential scandals that no-one on high wants revealed.

Jims unusual evidence gathering skills and Jenn's organisation lead them further on than anyone else, but perhaps the outcome is not worth the trouble involved.

(Bitter is a sequel to 'Cold')

Sydney takes a stand (2011)

Sydney the frog only has a small muddy puddle as a home and now the council want to take it away - there comes a time when every frog has to make a stand. Unfortunately this time the stand is against a giant digger; can he survive?

Barnabus can Fly! (2011)

Barnabus the church mouse has got himself into a pickle again! He's been teaching the mouslets all about bats, but now he can't find one and his class are beginning to disbelieve him - can there be a solution?

Barnabus and the 'Swerve' (2011)

Barnabus has a lot on his mind; the church want to sell off their ancient pipe organ and he needs to find a way to beat the Red

Rodents at Mouse Volley ball. The answer could lie in something very different...



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