

PLAYING DEAD

It's 8.15 a.m. and I'm still in bed. I should have got up an hour ago.

But I didn't. You want to know why?

Because I'm dead.

Well, not really dead. I'm just pretending I'm dead so I don't have to go to school.

If I can convince Mum and Dad that I'm dead, not only will I have pulled off one of the greatest practical jokes of the century, but I'll get off going to school for the rest of the year. Maybe even for the rest of my life.

I got the idea from my dog. I've been taking Sooty to obedience classes each

↓
This is the start of the first story. We don't need any drawings here...
↓

← ...or here.



FRESHWATER
FISH of the
WORLD #22:
The
door handle.



Sunday morning. We've only been going for a few weeks, but already he's learned to sit, beg *and* roll over. Yesterday he learned how to play dead. I thought, if my dog is smart enough to do it, then why not me?

All I've got to do is lie here without breathing or blinking. Well, when I say without blinking, I mean blinking when nobody is looking.

And when I say without breathing, I don't mean not breathing at all – that would be stupid. I mean just taking a tiny little breath every so often – just enough to keep me alive.

The only thing that worries me is, I'm such an excellent practical joker, I might trick myself into thinking I'm really dead. And if that happened, I'd be as good as dead – or as bad as dead – because as far as I can see, there's nothing really good about being dead, except that you don't have to go to school.

Suddenly Mum bustles into the room.

'What? Still in bed? Come on, you'll be late!'



I hear the rattle of the curtains being opened.

The sudden light hurts my eyes, but I remember not to blink.

Any moment now Mum is going to see me. And scream.

She's standing right next to me.

'Pooh, what a stink! When's the last time you cleaned this room? It's an absolute pigsty! Dirty socks and undies everywhere. Why can't you put them in the washing basket like your sister does? If you're not showered, dressed and out of this house in ten minutes you're going to miss your bus, and I'm not going to drive you.'

She walks out of the room.

I stare at the ceiling. What else would a real corpse do? It's not as if it would make some brilliantly witty comeback, like, 'Lay off me, you old bag. I'm not going to school today because I'm dead. Just leave me alone so I can rot in peace.' Yeah – that would be a good line, but I can't say it because I'm supposed to be dead. So, I just lie here and stare at the ceiling some more.

YOU MIGHT
THINK I'M
A COWARD
BUT I WON'T
GET A FRIGHT.
★

Next time
your parents
take you
to a fancy
expensive
restaurant,
have an
eating
race with
your brother/
sister.

If the race
is close try
stuffing food
in your ears,
up your nose,
down your
shirt, in the
flower bowl or
in your
shoes.



I'm sorry...the
editor says that
pirahna should be
spelled PIRANHA.
Excuse me!!



Next thing I know, Dad is standing next to the bed.

‘Andy?’ he says.

I don’t answer.

‘Are you all right?’ says Dad in a slightly deeper voice.

I’m holding my breath. My body is tight.

He puts his hand on my shoulder and shakes me roughly.

‘Andy!’ he says. ‘Andy, I’m warning you . . . if this is another one of your practical jokes, it’s not funny! You hear me? Not funny!’

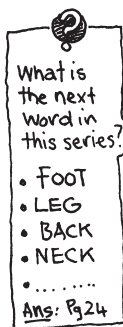
I tense as hard as I can while Dad shakes me. Then he stops and puts his thumb and forefingers around my wrist. He’s trying to find my pulse.

Damn! It’s the one thing I can’t fake. All the same, I try to concentrate on my heart and slow it down.

I read somewhere about these people who use the power of the mind to slow down their heartbeat, so I figure I might as well give it a bash.

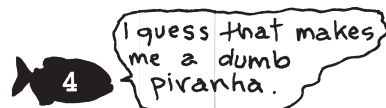
I imagine that my heart is as still as a rock.

A red rock.



APRIL 1ST
should be
WORLD
PRACTICAL
JOKING
DAY

Try filling
your parents'
good work
shoes/boots
with warm
custard.
When they
slip them on,
say:
"Happy World
Practical etc
Day" !
They'll love you
for it.



A paralysed red rock.

A frozen paralysed red rock.

A frozen paralysed red rock in a deep deep sleep.

It seems like forever, but eventually Dad puts my arm back down onto the bed. Gently.

And he says in a quiet voice: 'Andy – now listen to me. You're cold and you're not breathing. You're staring at the ceiling and I can't find a pulse. You may be dead for all I know. But then your past record leaves me no choice but to wonder if this isn't just another one of your so-called "jokes". If you are just playing a trick, then I'll give you to the count of three to get out of bed and we'll say no more about it. But, if you don't get out of bed, and I find out later that you're not really dead . . . well . . . you'll wish that you had been. Is that clear?'

He's trying to trick me. He wants me to nod. But I'm not going to fall for it. There's only room for one practical joker around here – and it's not Dad. He starts counting.

'One . . .'

I'm not sure I believe that I won't get



DARE YOU
TO STICK
YOUR
TONGUE
IN THE
END OF
AN
ESCALATOR.



so, why am I
here?



into trouble if I confess. He sounds pretty serious. I'll probably end up being grounded for a week. And I'll *definitely* end up having to go to school.

Next time
your
friend is
bragging,
bet him
he can't
remove
the cheese
from a
mouse trap
with his
nose.
(Show him
photos
(faked) of
you doing
it)



Keep
Hospital
number
close by.



'Two ...'

What have I got to lose? And, anyway, I've come too far to chicken out now.

'Three!'

I don't move a single muscle.

Dad calls Mum into the room.

'Is everything all right?' she asks.

'I'm afraid I've got some bad news,' says Dad. 'I don't know how, or why, but it appears that Andy is no longer living ... that is to say, he is ... er ... dead.'

'Oh no,' she says, and starts to cry. 'Oh no!'

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Dad move to put his arms around her.

While they're distracted, I quickly take a couple of good deep breaths.

'But he was such a good boy!' Mum wails. 'Such a *good* boy! He had his problems ... but deep down he didn't mean any harm.'

'No,' says Dad, 'I don't believe he did



I have to tell
you the page
number.

mean any harm – it's just he never knew when to stop.'

Dad's taking the whole thing better than I expected. I mean, he's usually pretty calm and all, but I would have thought, maybe, he might be a bit more upset. After all, I am his son.

'Oh well,' he says. 'No use standing around here all day. There's work to be done.'

'But surely you're not going to work now!' says Mum.

'Well,' says Dad, 'somebody's got to dig the hole.'

'What hole?'

'We can't just leave his body here.'

'I suppose not,' says Mum. 'Where are you going to dig it?'

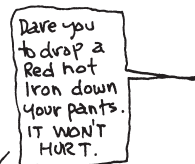
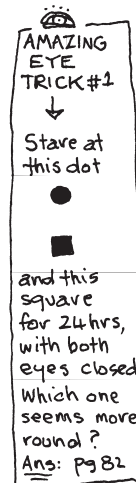
Dad hands her his handkerchief.

'I think underneath the lemon tree might be nice – and it'd be good for the lemons.'

'Yes,' says Mum, 'it's been struggling a bit lately.'

'I'll go get the spade and start digging. I'd like to have him in the ground before lunchtime. Before he starts to smell.'

'Okay,' says Mum, wiping her eyes. 'And



Boredom
MAXIMOSO.



THINGS
TO
DO:



Why not
try to
convince
your
brother
that
barbells
make
great
floaties.



FRESHWATER
FISH OF THE
WORLD #75:
Half of
something,
duhno
what!



while you're doing that, I'll put the kettle on. I think we could both use a good strong cup of tea.'

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Have my parents completely lost their senses? Are they seriously thinking of burying me in the backyard? Aren't there laws against that sort of thing?

Dad leaves the room.

Mum kneels down beside the bed and kisses me on the cheek. She passes her hand over my eyelids, just like they do in the movies. I'm so touched, I almost forget to close them – but I remember just in time.

'I don't care what anyone says,' she whispers. 'You were a good boy.'

Mum leaves the room.

I don't dare open my eyes again. I wouldn't want her to come back and catch me with them open. That would really freak her out. And I think she's been freaked out enough for one day.

Maybe I should confess.

But how do I confess without freaking her out even more? After all, if she thinks I'm



This is page 8.
Get the idea?

dead, and then I walk into the kitchen, what do I say? Somehow, I don't think 'Hi, Mum, I'm not really dead, I was just tricking!' would go down all that well.

But if I don't confess, I'm going to be buried in a cold muddy hole in my own backyard.

I'll have worms gnawing at my eyeballs for the rest of eternity. That's a pretty high price to pay for a practical joke. Even one as brilliant as this.

The lemon tree is right outside my window. I can hear Dad digging. And whistling.

Whistling?

I die and he whistles? What is he – some kind of psycho? Normal people don't whistle when their son dies. Then again, normal people don't bury bodies in the backyard.

But as I listen to Dad's whistle, I begin to notice something strange. It's different from his normal one.

It's too loud.

Too cheerful.

And now it becomes clear.

My parents don't think I'm dead – they just want me to think that they *think* I'm

FRESHWATER
FISH of the
WORLD #75b:



The other
half.

To discover
the best
practical
joke ever,
turn to
Pg 130



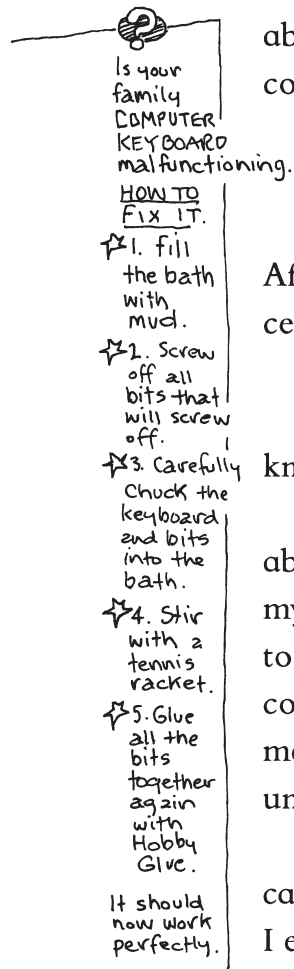
This is page 6
upside down.



dead. All this crap about being good for the lemons . . . that's not what it's about at all. They're just trying to teach me a lesson.

They want to scare me.

Well, I don't scare easily. And I'm not about to be beaten at my own game by a couple of amateurs.



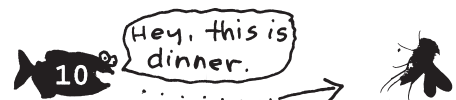
After a long morning of staring at the ceiling, I'm pretty bored.

At last I hear Dad stop digging.

Mum and Dad come into my room. I know what's coming next.

I suck my breath in and try to remain absolutely still. Dad grabs me underneath my arms. Mum lifts me up by the legs. I try to make my head flop around in a convincing corpse-like fashion. They carry me out to the backyard and lay me down underneath the lemon tree.

Dad gets down into the hole – which I can see through my slitted eyes is deeper than I expected – puts his hands back underneath



my arms and pulls me down towards him.

My legs follow with a thud.

The mud at the bottom of the hole is cold and wet and almost immediately my pyjamas are soaked through. I'm sure Dad is just dying for me to crack and open my eyes so he can say 'Just tricking!'

But I'm not going to give him the pleasure. Not now . . . not ever.

Dad climbs out of the hole. Mum begins reading from a small blue book, her voice low and serious.

' . . . Ashes to ashes . . . Dust to dust . . . '

Dad is standing to attention, shovel by his side.

I'm starting to wonder if this is such a good idea after all. Dad starts filling in the hole. I don't have to wonder any more – I know.

First I feel dirt hitting my toes. Then my legs. And then my stomach. A big clump lands on my chest and I feel dirt splatter onto my face and mouth.

Something's wrong. It's not possible that I'm such a brilliant actor that my parents really think I'm dead . . . is it?

A great thing to do in your holidays (especially if you're bored) is to cram yourself in the bowl of your washing machine, preset the cold cycle, & go to sleep.





No, that's stupid . . . they'll crack . . . any minute now.

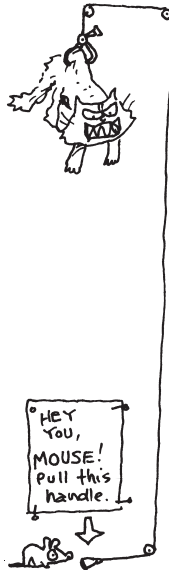
Another handful of dirt splashes across my face.

And another.

And now I don't know what to think . . . because I'm almost completely buried and I'm having trouble breathing.

I open my mouth to shout, 'Okay, you win! I was just tricking!'

But a big clump of earth lands in my mouth and I can't get the words out.



It's dark.

It's quiet.

It's cold.

It's boring.

How long have I been here?

Am I dead?

If I am dead, then how come I'm still thinking?

I know one thing for sure. If I ever get out of this – and it's beginning to look like there's



not much hope of that – I'm never going to play another practical joke for as long as I live.

Hang on, I can feel something on my stomach. Urgent jabbing and scratching. The weight of the dirt on my belly is lifting. When the scratching starts on my chest, I realise what it is.

Sooty has come to save me! He's the only one who realises I'm not dead! He must be able to smell me, to sense my warmth.

And, as the weight of the dirt lifts, I decide I don't care about playing dead any more. Anything would be better than this. Even school.

I sit up and scream: 'I confess! You win! I was just tricking!'

I wipe the mud out of my eyes and see my parents staring down at me.

They are shocked.

The sight of me rising from the dead has them goggling at me in horror, their mouths frozen open.

Mum starts screaming. Dad is trying to ward me off with his spade, holding it crucifix-style in front of him, as if I'm some



Before
Breakfast
Mechanical
YODA
Exercise.

★ Take your
little
brother's
walkman or
game boy.

★ Pull it
apart with
screwdrivers,
hammers &
forklift trucks.

★ Put all the
bits in a
crisp, new
paper bag.

★ Say: "Here,
I fixed this
for you."

★ RUN!!



sort of vampire.



'Dad, it's okay!' I reassure him. 'I was playing a dumb joke and I'm sorry!'

But I might just as well be speaking another language.

My words don't seem to be having any impact on him whatsoever. He's still brandishing the spade as he and Mum back slowly away from the hole.

This joke is completely out of control. The only one who's glad to see me is Sooty. He's standing at the top of the hole trying to lick my face. I push him away but he keeps coming back for more, like it's a game. At least somebody round here is acting normal.



Then, all of a sudden, Dad drops the spade and clutches at his chest with his right hand. He drops to his knees, his mouth still wide open, then falls forward onto his face.

I leap out of the hole and rush to his side. I roll him over and check to see if he's breathing.

Nothing.

I place my hands on his chest and push with all my weight, just like they showed us

in first aid. I push three more times. Then I pinch his nose and pull his head back. I'm about to start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when Mum screams.

'Get away from him, you . . . you . . . zombie!'

'I'm not a zombie!' I tell her. 'I'm not dead – I was just tricking!'

'Don't touch him, you bloodsucking freak!'

'Mum, I haven't got time to argue! I've got to do this. It's Dad's only hope.'

I take a deep breath. Mum starts laughing. Poor Mum. The stress has affected her brain. And it's all my fault. But I can't help her until I've saved Dad. First things first.

I take another breath and am about to put my mouth over Dad's when he starts spluttering. First a sputter. Then a wheeze. And then a deep rocking laugh.

Dad opens his eyes. They are wet with tears.

'Would you mind sharing the joke with me?' I ask.

'Sure,' says my father, pulling himself together with great effort. 'We were *just* *tricking!*'

BEAUTY TIP.

MIX IN SOME GLOW IN THE DARK PAINT WITH YOUR SISTER/BROTHER'S ACNE COVER-UP BEFORE THEIR BIG NIGHT OUT.

(In the disco their zits will glow like stars).



And then they really start to laugh. And laugh. And laugh.

They're bent over double like a couple of maniacs. Even Sooty is rolling around on his back, wheezing and carrying on.

It takes a few moments for the shock to sink in, but then I realise that my parents have won.

I've been sucked in.

Sucked in, chewed up and spat out.

But then, maybe things aren't as bad as they seem.

Never mind that I'm wet and cold.

Never mind that I'm covered in mud.

Never mind that I'm the victim of a heartless practical joke that had me thinking I had killed my father and driven my mother insane.

No, never mind all this.

At least I got the day off school.



TRICK
YOUR DAD!
Tease his
nose hairs
& wax them
while he
is asleep.
He'll be so
grateful.

↓
Possible
shapes/
styles

