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Fans

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1

Off to the match

Jerry was on his way to pick up Stevie, his son. They were going to watch a football game.

Stevie was waiting with his mother, Jean, on the steps of the museum. This was the place they always met on the days when Jerry could see his son.

Sometimes they looked around the museum, because Stevie loved the dinosaur skeletons. Sometimes they went to the beach.

But today they would be watching the football. An important game was on. Liverpool were playing their oldest rivals, Everton.

The sun was shining brightly and seagulls were flying overhead. Stevie was eating an ice cream. It was chocolate ice cream, which was his favourite.

Jerry said hello to his ex-wife and hugged his son, who had brown ice cream all round his mouth. Jerry took a tissue out of his pocket and wiped it off.

‘Make sure you bring him back here by six o’clock,’ said Jean.

This was fine with Jerry. It was an early kick-off so they had plenty of time.

‘I will,’ Jerry said.

‘And look after him,’ Jean said. ‘Make sure he’s safe. There can be trouble at these games. There was trouble at the last match.’

‘Of course I’ll keep him safe,’ Jerry said. ‘He’s my son too.’

‘I know he is,’ said Jean, and bent down to kiss the top of Stevie’s head.

‘Have a good time and look after your dad,’ she said, and Stevie nodded. ‘I hope Liverpool win,’ Jean said.

‘We will,’ Stevie said.

Jerry said goodbye to Jean and took Stevie’s hand. He led Stevie over the road to the bus stop. Jean watched them go. At the bus stop they turned and waved to her. She waved back and walked away.

Stevie’s hand was sticky from the ice cream so Jerry had to use a tissue again.

‘I wish you and mum were still friends,’ Stevie said as his dad was wiping his hand.

‘We are still friends,’ said Jerry.

‘Well, I wish you still lived with each other,’ said Stevie.

‘So do I, sometimes,’ Jerry said. ‘But sometimes people fall out of love with each other. They don’t start to hate each other, it’s just that they think they would be happier not living together. Do you understand?’

Stevie nodded, but Jerry knew that he didn’t really understand. He was too young.

Talking about this always made Stevie sad. Jerry bent down to look into his face and said, ‘But your mum and I will always be glad that we met each other, and do you know why? Because of you. If we had never met each other then we would not have had you.’

‘But if you still lived with Mum, I could see you every day,’ Stevie said.

‘I know,’ Jerry said. ‘And I would like to see you every day. But then your mum and I would see each other every day as well, which means that we would argue more.’

‘But why?’ Stevie asked.

‘We just would,’ Jerry said. ‘You will understand when you get older. But just remember this. Your mum and I both think you’re the best little boy in the world.’

This seemed to cheer Stevie up.

The bus came, but before they got on it Jerry looked through the windows to see if it was full of Everton supporters. There was no way that he would get on a bus full of rival fans.

There were no Everton supporters on the bus, so he and Stevie got on. They paid their fare and set off for the ground.

What do you think?

- Why did Jerry check to see whether or not the bus was full of Everton supporters before he and Stevie got on it?
- What reason does Jerry give to Stevie for why he and his mother don't live together any more? Do you think it's a good explanation?
- If you need to talk to a young child about something difficult, what might you need to think about?

2

Liverpool v. Everton

The city of Liverpool is home to two football clubs, Liverpool and Everton. Matches between them are always sold out. Today's match was being played at Anfield, Liverpool's stadium.

Jerry and Stevie got off the bus at the stadium. There were thousands of people going to the match.

On the streets around the stadium people were selling scarves and souvenirs for both teams.

There was a smell of burgers and onions. There were also lots of police. Some were on foot and some were on horses.

One horse backed away from a group of noisy young men, towards Stevie, who grabbed hold of Jerry's leg.

'It's OK,' Jerry said to Stevie. 'Stay close to me. The horse doesn't want to hurt you. It was just a bit frightened, that's all.'

The last time they had come to one of these games, Stevie had been small enough to be carried on Jerry's shoulders. He had felt safe like that, when he was higher than the other people, and at the same level as the policemen on the horses.

But now he was too big to be carried on his dad's shoulders. It was frightening for him with all the legs moving around him.

All he could see were the legs of people and the legs of the horses. It felt a bit like being lost in a forest.

Most of the fans were walking down the middle of the road. Jerry took his son on to the pavement, closer to the houses. There weren't so many people there.

Jerry and Stevie could see into some of the houses. In one house, there was a bunch of flowers in the window and in another house there was a ginger cat. Jerry pointed out the cat to Stevie and Stevie smiled because he liked cats. He had a cat at home, called Shankly. Shankly was also ginger.

At another house, the window was open and an old man was leaning out with his arms on the windowsill. He was wearing an LFC hat and when he saw Stevie he winked.

'Good luck,' the old man said. 'Hope we win.'

‘We will,’ Stevie said.

The old man laughed and so did Jerry.

It would be fine today, Jerry thought. The sun was out and the crowd seemed happy. Stevie seemed happy too. It was a good day to watch a football game.

Today was going to be a good day, Jerry thought again. And then he heard a noise.

What do you think?

- Have you ever been in a big crowd? How did you feel?
- Do you support a football team (or another sports team)? What made you support that team?
- What do you think it would be like to live in a city that is home to two rival football teams? What issues might arise?

3

The crowd turns

The noise Jerry heard wasn't a good one. It wasn't a happy cheer, like when a goal is scored. It wasn't like a lot of people laughing. It was more like a big roar, like a lot of people roaring and shouting at the same time. And it was getting louder.

'What's that noise?' Stevie asked.

'I don't know,' said Jerry. 'But let's just wait here for a moment.'

But today they would be watching the football. An important game was on. Liverpool were playing their oldest rivals, Everton.

The sun was shining brightly and seagulls were flying overhead. Stevie was eating an ice cream. It was chocolate ice cream, which was his favourite.

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