



Damon

by Joshua Seigal



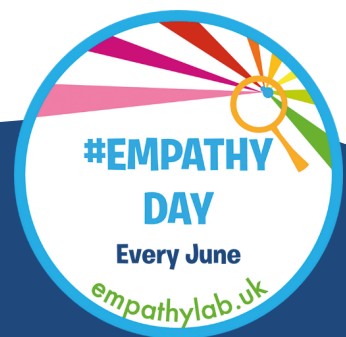
When I was younger, my friend Damon nearly died. The first thing I remember was that he collapsed at school during a football match. I remember that he wasn't at school the next day, or the day after that, and when I finally asked my teacher when Damon would be back, she said she didn't know. She said Damon was very ill, and was in hospital.

My mum knew Damon's mum, and after a while my mum was able to give me a little bit more information. She said that Damon had had something called a brain haemorrhage, and I remember thinking that those words sounded incredibly serious. I asked my mum if Damon was going to die. I'm not sure, but I think I remember her wiping something from her eye. I definitely remember that she reached down to take my hand.

The weeks went on, and still Damon wasn't back at school. We used to go exploring at lunch times, with our backpacks on, creeping through the abandoned huts that were entangled with weeds at the back of the playground. Damon had a theory that the huts were the site of a secret plot to destroy the school with dynamite. I don't think either of us really believed that, but we both pretended we did. Anyway, now that Damon wasn't there I mostly just kicked a football against the wall by myself. I wondered how Damon's brain was.

I remember that this went on for several weeks, until one day I got home from school and my mum asked if I wanted to visit Damon in the hospital. She said that Damon had been extremely sick, but that he was now doing a bit better. Just one thing, she told me - Damon can't talk anymore.

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The first thing I remember telling my mum was that I didn't want to go. How can I visit someone who can't speak? This was Damon we were talking about; the kid who called out rude jokes in class. What was I supposed to do with him in the hospital, just stare at him? My mum said that going to see him was the right thing to do. I remember that phrase well: 'the right thing to do'. How can it be the right thing to do, I thought, if I really, really didn't want to do it?

Damon was in a big bed, in the middle of a very white room. He didn't have any hair on his head, but I could see in his eyes that he was happy I had come. Gradually this made me feel happy too, although the whole thing definitely felt weird. He had a telly in his room, and there was a football match on. My mum stood by the door, and I let go of her hand and went to sit on a little seat next to Damon's bed. We watched the match together. I remember that bit well. West Ham against Man United. I remember how green the pitch looked, and the whiteness of the room. I remember the deep blue of Damon's eyes, and the ways his lips twitched into a small smile.

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