



KICK

by Ewa Jozefkiewicz



Maxim and his mum are due to arrive on a rainy Saturday morning. I stare out at the blurred world and a spark of excitement fires up in my stomach. It fizzles through to the tips of my fingers and into my toes.

Dad has gone to pick them up from the train station, but the time since he left is stretching out into infinity. He's still not back. Archie does a figure eight around my legs and then when I don't react, he jumps up suddenly onto the windowsill and pokes his wet nose under my left hand.

"Where are you?" I ask aloud.

And finally I can hear the faint whirr of an engine and dad's car pulls up in our drive. There's a woman with dark hair and a nervous expression sitting next to him. I run outside in my socks and don't even notice the cold damp seeping into my feet, because I'm desperate to meet him.

But the boy who emerges from the back seat is not at all what I expected. He's thin and tall - almost a head taller than me. He seems to unfold himself when he stands, but not fully, because his shoulders still curve inwards. He has thick, dark curly hair that goes into his eyes a little. It makes it very hard to read his facial expression.

"Hello," I say, putting out my hand, "I'm Freddie. Welcome."

My hand hangs in the air between us for half an eternity, and his mum begins to say something, but then eventually, Maxim shakes it. He looks at me, but there's no smile on his face, so I instantly feel silly for beaming at him, especially when I remember that he's escaped a war.

"Hello," says his mum and nods in my direction. "I am Viola." I help her with her suitcase, and Dad takes Maxim's rucksack.

We go inside and Mum greets them both. "It's just through here," she says and guides them both into Grandma's room, which is not really Grandma's room anymore, because it's been completely transformed.

Mum's taken down the old floral curtains, and replaced them with sunshine yellow ones. She's moved the big bed up against the wall to make space for another, smaller bed on the other side of the room and she's put up a strange painting of a beach scene. Maybe she thought that it would brighten up the room and cheer Maxim and his mum up.

"Would you like to have lunch now, or a little later?" she asks. She looks almost as nervous as Viola who says, "Thank you. We don't mind."

"Okay, give me ten minutes and I'll be ready for you in the kitchen."

Maxim sits down on the bed and looks at the floor, his head in his hands. I want to sit down next to him, put my arm around his shoulders and say that he doesn't have to worry. I'm here for him. But I'm not sure he wants anyone that close. Maybe it would freak him out.

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"What do you like to do?" I ask, quietly. He looks up at me and I can tell he doesn't understand English. For a moment I panic, but then an idea sparks in my head. I run to the garden and pick up my old red football.

I show it to him. "Want to have a kickaround?"

His eyes light up just for a second, and he gives me a thumbs up.

"Brilliant," I say. "Let's go."



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