

Stanley and the Football Sock

by

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Stanley and the Football Sock

“Stanley Thomas Ian Nigel Kevin Smith!” shouted Mum.

“Uh-oh!” thought Stanley. “I’m in trouble. A lot of trouble!”

Stanley could always tell how much trouble he was in from how many of his six names Mum used. Stanley on its own meant no trouble. Stanley Thomas meant a bit. Stanley Thomas Ian was getting more serious. Stanley Thomas Ian Nigel was something to start worrying about. Stanley Thomas Ian Nigel Kevin meant at the very least no pocket money for a week. But add the surname too and that spelt TROUBLE. (Actually, as you’ve probably noticed, it spells STINKS. Stanley was named after his uncles. Sadly his mum and dad didn’t think very carefully about the order they gave the names to Stanley in. No prizes for guessing Stanley’s nickname.)

Stanley sighed. He’d better go and find out what he’d done this time. He had a good idea though. He hadn’t meant to cut that hole in the carpet. It was just that he’d been cutting out shapes for his school project while lying on the floor watching television on Monday. He hadn’t realised he’d been snipping away at the carpet as well as a piece of cardboard. He’d covered the hole up with some books and hoped that Mum wouldn’t tidy them up just yet. Oh, and he hadn’t meant to break the Blu-Ray on Wednesday. He’d just wondered if you could get two DVDs into it at once. Or perhaps Mum had found where he’d been hiding his cheese sandwiches every day since the beginning of term. Mum gave him cheese sandwiches for his school dinner every day and every day Stanley didn’t eat them. He hated cheese sandwiches only he didn’t dare tell Mum that. So every day, when he got home, he stuffed the uneaten sandwiches under the loose floorboard in the spare room. It was getting a bit smelly in there, Stanley had noticed. Maybe Mum had noticed the same thing.

But to Stanley’s amazement Mum wasn’t cross about those things. Well, not today anyway – she’d be mad all right when she did find out. Mum was cross about something else.

“Where is your sock?” she demanded as Stanley slunk guiltily into the kitchen.

“On my foot,” announced Stanley. He checked quickly. Yes, he had two socks on.

“Not your school sock, silly boy. I mean your football sock. I only got one to wash last Saturday. It’s football practice again tomorrow so I need to wash the other one NOW! No sock, no football practice.” Mum turned back crossly to sorting out the washing.

Stanley slunk out again quickly. Crikey! He’d forgotten all about that football sock. Now, where could it be? Stanley frowned hard in concentration.

Suddenly his face cleared. After football practice last week he’d gone home with Thomas Tonks for the rest of the day. He remembered that he and Thomas had been playing in the garden. They’d kicked Thomas’s football into the next-door neighbour’s garden, as usual, but he wouldn’t let them have it back. So then they’d played with a tennis ball until Thomas kicked that into the next-door neighbour’s garden on the other side. She wouldn’t

let them have that back either. So then Stanley had taken off one of his football socks. He'd rolled it into a ball and they'd had a great game with that until teatime.

"It must still be in Thomas's garden!" smiled Stanley. He marched triumphantly to the kitchen.

"Mum, I left my sock at Thomas's last Saturday. Can I cycle round and get it?"

"Good boy!" Mum was pleased. "Yes, off you go, but watch out for traffic."

Grinning happily Stanley zoomed off to Thomas's on his bike. But Thomas wasn't in. Thomas's Mum said she hadn't come across a sock. She called Louise, Thomas's sister.

"Louise, have you seen Stanley's football sock anywhere?" she asked.

"No!" replied Louise immediately. Then she went a bit red and said, "Well, maybe, sort of."

"Sort of?" repeated her mum, frowning. "What do you mean, 'sort of'?"

Stanley wanted to know what she meant too. Louise took a deep breath.

"Well, Tommy and I went collecting conkers from the wood on Sunday. We saw your sock in the garden on our way, Stanley. We took it with us in case we saw you in the woods too. But we didn't so we, er, borrowed your sock to put all the conkers in to bring them home."

"Oh dear, Stanley, I'm so sorry," apologised Louise's Mum. "But where is the sock now, Louise?"

Louise squirmed. "We met Neil Nelson as we were coming back and he said he'd thump us if we didn't give him the sock full of conkers, so we did."

"What a horrid boy!" exclaimed Louise's Mum.

"I expect he's got your sock, Stanley," shrugged Louise.

Stanley groaned. Neil Nelson was the school bully. He was big and mean and stupid and nasty. Stanley didn't fancy trying to get his sock back off him. But then he remembered that Mum had threatened him with no football practice tomorrow if he didn't find his sock. There was nothing for it.

"Thanks Louise," he muttered, and cycled nervously off to confront Neil Nelson.

He didn't have far to go. He met Neil Nelson walking along the road looking big and mean and stupid and nasty, as usual.

Stanley wobbled to a stop.

"Er, hi Neil," he squeaked. His voice always went squeaky when he was frightened. He wished it wouldn't.

"Whatcha want, squirt?" snarled Neil.

“Um, do you remember Thomas Tonks giving you a sock full of conkers on Sunday?” asked Stanley squeakily.

“Yeah. So?”

“I wonder, do you know where the sock is now? You see, it’s my sock and I need it for football practice tomorrow and my mum’s really mad about it.”

This was a long sentence for Neil’s brain to cope with. So it was a good thirty seconds before Stanley got a response.

“Yeah, mums always get mad about stuff don’t they,” observed Neil bitterly. Stanley was surprised at such a sympathetic response. He’d expected to be thumped.

Stanley waited. Neil was still thinking.

“Oh yeah, that sock. It was green and white wasn’t it?”

Stanley nodded eagerly.

“That was the day Valley Rovers won the league, wasn’t it? Their colours are green and white too so I tied your sock onto the aerial of Dad’s car. I think it’s really cool when people do stuff like that, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes, really cool,” agreed Stanley, but he was actually thinking that it wasn’t at all cool when it was his sock that was being used. “Er, so is it still on your dad’s car then?”

“Nah, it came off when Dad went to work on Monday,” Neil informed him.

“Um, where exactly?” Stanley knew he was pushing his luck asking so many questions. Either Neil would get mad with him or his brain would burn up at being used so much.

“Just down the road. I couldn’t tie a proper knot in your stupid sock,” growled Neil.

No, you’re too stupid to tie a proper knot, thought Stanley.

“It went into someone’s garden.” Neil was being amazingly helpful. “The Head Master’s I think.” Neil gave a nasty smile. He loved getting other people into trouble.

“Are ... are you sure?” stammered Stanley.

“Yeah, now shut up, squirt, you’re giving me a headache.” And with that, Neil tramped off down the road to pick on someone much smaller than he was.

Oh heck, thought Stanley. I’ve got to go and see the Head Master now. I do that often enough at school. I shouldn’t have to do it at weekends as well!

He pedalled a bit further down the lane until he came to Mr Duggan’s house. Mrs Duggan was busy in the garden. She caught sight of Stanley hovering outside the garden gate.

“Hello dear!” she called cheerily. She was a very jolly person. “Can I help you? If you’re after my husband, he’s gone to his flower arranging class.”

What? Mr Duggan flower arranging? Stanley was stunned. Stanley could imagine the big, cross Head Master eating flowers or stomping on them, but not arranging them prettily in a vase. Well, well, that was news for his friends on Monday! For now, though, he was extremely grateful that Mr Duggan was safely out of the way.

“I think my sock blew into your garden on Monday,” Stanley explained.

Mrs Duggan looked puzzled.

“You see, I used it as a football on Saturday, and then my friend put conkers in it on Sunday, and then my worst enemy tied it to his dad’s car’s aerial and it came off that on Monday.”

“Goodness, I never knew socks had such exciting lives!” exclaimed Mrs Duggan. “Yes, we did find a sock, but not till Tuesday. My granddaughter found it, actually. She came here after playschool. It was very dirty so she washed it in the dog’s bowl. I was cross when I saw what she was up to. Anyway, I put it on the line to dry. But you know how windy it was on Tuesday. I’m afraid it blew off into that field there.” She pointed to a meadow full of cows behind the house. “I was upstairs and I looked out of the window and I saw your sock stuck on the horns of one of the cows. Oh it did look funny!” Mrs Duggan began to chuckle.

Stanley didn’t feel remotely like chuckling. He looked at Mrs Duggan bleakly.

“Cheer up, dear,” said Mrs Duggan. “I was worried that the poor cow might get scared or something, so I phoned Farmer Murphy to tell him what had happened and he said he’d get the sock off right away. He asked if I wanted it back and I said no, so you’d better go and ask him what happened to it. Now I must get back to my pruning. Bye dear!”

Stanley’s ears felt battered by all that talking! He got back on his bike and cycled towards Farmer Murphy’s farmhouse. He came across Farmer Murphy inspecting one of his tractors in the yard.

“Hello,” said Stanley, climbing of his bike.

Farmer Murphy stopped staring at his tractor and stared at Stanley instead.

“How do,” he responded at last.

“I’m very well, thank you,” gabbled Stanley, trying to be polite. “Um, I think you’ve got my sock.”

“You what?” grunted the farmer. He looked thoughtful for a moment and wriggled his toes inside his wellie boots. “No, no, these are definitely my socks. I recognise all the holes in them.”

“No, no,” Stanley explained patiently. “I don’t mean you’re wearing my socks. But one of my socks got stuck on your cow’s horns the other day. Mrs Duggan phoned you up about it.”

“Oh ah, that sock. Oh ah, I remember. That was Tuesday wasn’t it. Now, whose horns did it get stuck on? It was either Belinda the Tenth or Bella the Nineteenth, I think. Or was it Buttercup the Fourteenth? Now let me see.”

Farmer Murphy furrowed his brow in thought and rubbed his bristly chin. Oh golly, thought Stanley to himself, we’ll be here all day. But then the farmer’s face brightened. “Silly me, it was Belinda the Tenth, of course. How could I forget that?”

He smiled proudly. Stanley waited. Farmer Murphy continued to beam jovially at him.

“So where is it now?” prompted Stanley anxiously, after a long pause.

“It? It?” thundered the farmer, suddenly angry. Stanley jumped back in alarm. “Don’t you call one of my cows an ‘it’. They’re all ladies, so just you be polite, young man! And she’s in the cowshed. Fancy calling a cow an ‘it’.” Farmer Murphy grumbled angrily to himself.

Stanley gulped. “When I said ‘it’, I didn’t mean Belinda the ... the ... Ninety-Second, or whatever her number is, sir. I meant, ‘where is *my sock* now’. *It* was the ‘it’.”

“Huh? Was it? Well, you should have said so, shouldn’t you,” the farmer huffed and puffed. “Now, what did I do with that sock? Let’s see. I got it off Belinda the Tenth’s horns. She was a bit upset, you know. She’s highly strung, same as her mother Belinda the Ninth and her Grandma, Belinda the Eighth. You should be more careful with your socks, my lad.”

Don’t I know it, thought Stanley.

“Now, I got that sock, and then what happened? Oh, I remember, my young nephew came over to show me his pet rat. Young people today, I don’t know. I mean, fancy keeping a rat as a pet. ‘It was very expensive, Uncle,’ says my nephew. ‘Oh, was it,’ says I. ‘Then you’ve got more money than sense, haven’t you. I could have let you have a dozen rats for free. There’s plenty creeping around in the cowshed,’ I says. Humph, not the right sort of rat, apparently.”

Stanley wasn’t sure how much more of this he could take.

“But what about my sock?” he cried in desperation.

“I’m just getting there, aren’t I? ‘Uncle’ he says to me, my nephew that is. ‘Can I have that sock you’ve got there if you don’t want it? I need something to make a nest for Petunia. She’s about to have babies.’ Petunia indeed!” Farmer Murphy spat in disgust. “Fancy giving an animal like that a name like Petunia!”

Stanley felt like saying fancy giving an animal like a cow a name like Bella the Nineteenth – but luckily he bit his tongue.

“So I gave him the sock. I dare say he’s still got it. It’ll be full of horrid little baby rats now, most like. Ought to feed them to the cat in my opinion. Humph.” And with that Farmer Murphy turned back to his tractor.

Stanley turned back to his bike. He knew Farmer Murphy’s nephew. That was Matthew Murphy. Matthew was much older than Stanley. He was at secondary school. Stanley

sighed. Matthew lived about two miles away, and it was all uphill. But there was no alternative. Stanley *had* to get that sock back, even if a rat had had babies in it, or Mum would kill him and then not let him go to football practice. Not that he'd be able to if he was dead, of course.

Stanley was panting hard when he got to Matthew's. Matthew was in the garden, looking into a big cage.

"Hi Matthew!" panted Stanley.

Matthew looked up. "Oh, hello. You're Stinky Smith, aren't you? Do you want to see my rats?"

Stanley really wanted to see his sock but it would be rude to say that, so he nodded. He went into the garden and peered reluctantly into the cage. To be honest, he shared Farmer Murphy's opinion of rats. There was a big black and white rat with red eyes and a pink tail washing itself in a pile of fluff and chewed-up blue wool in a corner. It was surrounded by tiny, bald, grey and pink wiggling blobs. Those were the baby rats.

But there was no sign of Stanley's sock! Stanley didn't know whether to be thankful or not.

"Um, did your Uncle give you a sock for your rats?" Stanley enquired.

"Golly, how did you know about that?" gasped Matthew surprised.

"Well, it's my sock, you see."

"Ah. Yes, he did, but when I got home with it, Morris, my little brother, said he wanted it for a bandanna because it was in Valley Rover's colours. He supports Valley Rovers. So I gave it to him and he gave me an odd blue sock instead for Petunia. It was amazing. Petunia shredded that sock in seconds!"

Stanley sighed with relief that Petunia hadn't managed to get her rodent little teeth into *his* sock. Then he sighed with misery as he realised the quest for the sock wasn't ended yet.

"Has Morris still got my sock?"

"No idea," shrugged Matthew. "You'll have to ask him yourself. Oh no, you can't, he left for Cubs about ten minutes ago."

"I've got to catch him!" cried Stanley, leaping up. He startled Petunia, who leapt up too, scattering baby rats in all directions. He was vaguely aware of Matthew shouting at him angrily as he zoomed off on his bike towards the Scout Hut in the village. But he didn't care. He had to get his sock.

He gathered speed on his downhill run. Soon he spotted a small figure in a Cub uniform walking along in front of him. As he got closer, he could see it was Morris. Morris was carrying something quite large. It looked like a model dinosaur, maybe a Brachiosaurus. As Stanley drew up beside Morris, he could see that it was in fact a Stanleysockasaurus! Its

head and neck were very obviously made from a green and white football sock that had been badly stuffed with newspaper.

“Hi Morris. Hey, that’s a good dinosaur,” remarked Stanley casually.

“Yes, it is, isn’t it? I’ve been making it since Wednesday. I’ve spent ages and ages on it.” Morris looked very pleased with himself. Stanley, who had been planning to grab the dinosaur and pedal off at top speed, realised he couldn’t do that to Morris. “It’s for a competition we’re having at Cubs tonight,” went on Morris eagerly. “The winner of the competition is going to get a medal and a *huge* bar of chocolate. And the model will go on display in the museum in the city.”

Stanley’s heart sank. If Morris won, he’d *never* get his sock back!

“Do you think you’ll win?” he asked.

Morris’s face clouded a little. “I’d like to, but I’ve heard that Wally Williams has made a dead good pterodactyl.”

“But your dinosaur is dead good too!” protested Stanley, not entirely honestly.

“Well, the head and neck aren’t the right colour,” admitted Morris. “They should be brown but I couldn’t get a brown sock. Green and white was the nearest I could get to dinosaur colours. I should have painted it really but I ran out of time.”

Thank goodness you didn’t paint my sock, thought Stanley.

Then he had an idea. It was the brainwave of the century.

“Er, Morris, I could help you make your model better,” he offered.

“Thanks, but it’s a bit late now,” replied Morris. He paused. “Isn’t it?”

“It’s never too late!” grinned Stanley. He jumped off his bike and hitched up his trouser leg. “Look, I’ve got brown socks on. I’ll swap you my brown sock for your green and white one.”

“Would you? Wow!” Morris looked delighted. Then he looked suspicious. “Why?”

“Because that’s *my* sock you’ve got there and my mum’s mad and I won’t go to football practice without it and everybody KNOWS that dinosaurs didn’t have green and white stripy necks!” Stanley fumed.

Morris glared at Stanley for a moment, then he shrugged.

“Yeah, you’re right. Give me your brown one then.”

Morris pulled the head off his dinosaur and emptied the newspaper out of it. Stanley tore off his sock and gave it to Morris.

“Phew, it stinks!” protested Morris.

“Well, that will make your dinosaur more authentic won’t it,” pointed out Stanley. “I bet they stank too.”

“You reckon?” asked Morris, uncertain.

“Of course they did!” Stanley promised him gleefully as Morris gave him the long-lost football sock back. Morris stuffed the paper into Stanley’s smelly sock and stuck it back onto the dinosaur’s body, reusing the not-very-sticky-any-more bits of sellotape that were hanging from it.

“You know, it does look better. Thanks Stanley!” Morris was delighted.

“You’re welcome!” shouted Stanley, cycling off and clutching his football sock to his chest as if it was the most precious thing on earth.

Which, come to think of it, it was!

A note from the author

I hope you enjoyed this story and it made you smile!

I've always loved writing. I wrote my first stories when I was about 7, all about Apple and Carrot! English was my favourite subject at school and I went on to study it at Oxford University. I did a postgrad degree in Publishing Studies and Stirling University and then began working as a desk editor. I took a few years out to be an accountant, but when we moved to Ireland from England in 1992, I set myself up as a freelance editor and indexer, and I've been doing that ever since. I'm married to Chris, have three children - Benjamin, Caitlin and Ruadhri - and since 2006 we've all lived in France on a 75 acre farm. We run a gite and carp and farm llamas, and also [edit ebooks](#).

My first books were published in 1996. I have around 30 to my name now and I'm moving into adult fiction and non-fiction, as well as carrying on writing for children and young adults.

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