

The neighbor's garden

by Natalie Klapacz

The sun was shining in my face and a light breeze blew my hair gently around my ears as I threw the ball to Thomas, who kicked it over to Sam. It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon and beads of sweat gathered on my forehead due to the hot weather. I looked over to the house next door where Mr. Dark lived and observed the old run-down house. The house was not visible at first sight because the tall branches and trees almost hid it. However, through the branches I could see the window where the curtain was slightly open. I looked more closely and suddenly the curtain quickly closed. A cool breeze now blew through my sweaty hair and from behind I heard Sam call out:

"Hey Lucas, watch out!"

As I turned around, the ball flew straight at my head and I had no time to dodge. The ball bounced off my head and flew in a high arc over into the neighbors' garden.

"Oh no, Lucas, are you all right?" Thomas asked me.

I lay on the ground and rubbed the throbbing spot on the front of my head. "Yeah, I'm fine. It's not that bad."

"C'mon Lucas, why didn't you catch the ball? Now it's lying in the bushes somewhere because of you. You should have been more careful and not dreaming" Sam grumbled at me.

"You didn't have to throw so hard either. That's your fault then, not mine." I responded annoyed.

"Come on, guys, stop fighting. One of you has to go get the ball, because I'm definitely not going to put my foot into this garden." Thomas said.

"No, I certainly won't either. I can't help it if Lucas is too stupid and can't catch."

"Oh be quiet Sam," I teased him back. I was also dreading entering this garden. I glanced over to the garden to see if I could see the ball from here. But no. The ball had landed deep in the bushes and I could only hope that we would find it at all.

"Okay no guys. We'll do 'Rock, Scissors, Paper' and the loser has to get the ball" Thomas suggested and we agreed. Thomas won the first round and in the second round I luckily defeated Sam and a big stone fell from my heart. I could see from Sam's face that he was getting nervous and red fear spots were forming on his face.

"Guys, this is stupid. I don't want to go in there" said Sam.

"Sam you threw the ball there and you just lost. That means you have no choice and you have to get the ball" said Thomas. Sam realized he couldn't get out of this, stroked his red tousled hair and then hesitantly walked towards the fence. He looked at us one last time before he climbed over the fence with a deft jump and Thomas and I were now alone. At

that moment I looked up at the window again and noticed that the curtain had moved again. Despite the hot summer weather, it sent a shiver down my spine. We sat in the grass and waited. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. Where was Sam? Had he finally found the ball? Or had the old man done something to him? At some point we got restless and I noticed how anxiously Thomas kept looking over to the neighbor's house.

Thomas eventually said: "Lucas, it's getting late and I have to go to dinner. You know my mum is very strict about that. Anyway, I think Sam is a scaredy-cat and has run home."

So Thomas went home and I approached the fence to see if I could see Sam from there. "Sam! Saaam! Where are you?" I shouted. But no answer came. At that moment I heard the door of the neighbor's house swing open and the old man stared at me with a grim face. Immediately, without a second's hesitation, I ran home as fast as I could and closed the door firmly behind me. My pulse was beating fast and I was in shock. Inside I just hoped that Sam had run home and that he didn't have to meet the old man.

On Monday morning Sam didn't come to the school and the next day a child's body was found in the river 50 meters from our house. A dead child with red tousled hair and a ball next to him.