

A TWINKL ORIGINAL

**That's
So
Gay!**





“Pass! Jules! Over here!”

“Woah! Foul! That has to be a penalty!”

Tension hung in the air as Jules stepped up to the penalty spot. The children in Year Five looked on in anticipation; any minute now, the bell would signal the end of break. Jules felt all eyes on him as he geared himself up to take what could be the winning shot of this oh-so-important match. They played football every breaktime and in reality, it didn't matter what

the final score was, but you had to get your head in the game and tell yourself that you were taking a penalty in the World Cup final.

Jules ran a sweaty palm through his floppy, blonde hair, focused intently on the area between the two muddy school jumpers on the ground, and tried to decide which way Zara was likely to dive. She was quite small for her age but was a fantastic goalie. Jules took a few steps back, then accelerated towards the ball – but just before meeting it with the end of his shoe, he felt his foot tugged back by his own shoelace, caught under his back foot. He grazed the edge of the ball and it trickled weakly towards the centre of the goal as Jules plummeted to the ground.

"Idiot!" he hissed to himself as he buried his head in his hands. To have a well-placed penalty shot saved by a great goalie like Zara would have been fair enough, but to mess it up like that was just embarrassing.

Zara jogged over. "Wow, you really tested my skills with that one, Jules! I wasn't sure that I could save a shot like that!" she teased him.

Jules forced himself to smile. "Yeah. It was one of the finest moments of my footballing career to date – just

a shame that it wasn't caught on camera," he replied.

"What was that supposed to be, mate?" came a friendly voice from behind him. Jules turned to see the lanky frame of his best friend Waseem heading towards him. "That was so gay! Do you want me to tie your shoes for you next time?" he joked, putting a bony arm around his friend.

Jules began to relax. He smiled and bent down to tuck his laces back into the sides of his trainer, wondering idly whether he should start to tie them properly from now on. Just then, the bell rang to signal the end of breaktime and everyone headed towards their classrooms.

There was an excited buzz as the children discussed the match. Four goals had been scored – pretty good for a fifteen-minute game – and there was much debate about who would be on which team when they played again at lunchtime.

"Who gets Jules on their team, later, though?" asked Waseem, giving his best mate a friendly nudge. "He's the star player!" Jules faked a smile.

"OK, guys, find your seats and let's get started," called

Mr Tucker.

Mr Tucker was their teacher and was a real favourite with the class. He was one of those people who always looked smart without even trying, and he never appeared flustered or frazzled. As the class had come in from break, he had been finishing an amazing display about superheroes that used pictures of the children. He stood back to admire his work, then turned to the children.

“We are carrying on with our Shakespeare work. Yes, you will need a pencil – 2B or not 2B,” he chuckled.

Mr Tucker told some of the funniest jokes that Jules had ever heard and he could even do the odd magic trick. He had been on great form that morning and had made up a hilarious poem, off the top of his head, about some of the children in the class. Everyone was in awe of how he could think of such funny things so quickly, and they were all keen to get themselves a mention in the poem. Mr Tucker had promised that he would create some more verses, mentioning more children, later that day.

“Right, you lot, who can tell me what we have read so far?”

Before Mr Tucker had even finished asking the question, about a dozen arms had already flung themselves into the air. One of those arms belonged to Zara, who looked as though she would burst if Mr Tucker didn't pick her soon.

"Hmm, let me see... Zara – before you pop – could you please summarise the text that we have read so far?"

Zara giggled before she began. "In the last lesson, we learned about the two feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets..."

Jules watched as Zara reeled off fact after fact about the play so far. He was always impressed by how well she could recall information, and by how eloquently she was able to explain it to everybody else. Sometimes, Mr Tucker would say that Zara could explain things even better than he could!

"...so Romeo and his friends decided that they would attend the party."

"Thank you, Zara. You summarised that brilliantly!"

The lesson seemed to fly by. After reading the next part of the play, Mr Tucker split the class into pairs

and asked them to hot-seat as Romeo and Juliet. Next, they wrote short diary entries as the characters and Jules even got to read his out at the end of the lesson. Mr Tucker was so impressed by the class' hard work that he awarded them five whole team points each!

"Great work this morning, guys. When you come in after lunch, you will need to grab your aprons and sit in your art places."

A 'yessssss' hissed around the room at the mention of artwork.

The lunchtime bell rang and Year Five flooded out onto the playground, ready for their next football match to kick off.

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After a lunchtime game that seemed to take forever, and a rather unimpressive nil-nil result, it was time for Year Five's Friday afternoon art lesson. The majority of the class looked sweaty and exhausted as they trooped in from the yard, but the thought of Friday afternoon artwork kept them energised. Mr Tucker was a pretty good artist and the children loved his demonstrations. His enthusiasm and positivity were infectious, and he

would also play music while they sketched or painted, which meant that art was most people's favourite part of the week.

Jules loved art and spent a lot of time sketching at home. Waseem, on the other hand, rarely picked up a pencil or pen outside of the classroom and wasn't quite so keen or confident when it came to making marks on the paper. The objective of the lesson was to show an emotion through their drawing and Jules had started on a brilliant crouched figure with their head in their hands, looking truly sorrowful, all in charcoal. Waseem had chosen to use coloured chalk and he was covered in it. On his paper, he had created what looked like a terrifying, screaming clown's face, although it was supposed to be a picture of himself laughing.

"Waseem, you do realise that the chalk pastels are meant to go on the paper and not on your face, don't you?" Zara joked as she walked back to her seat with a pack of watercolour pencils.

"Ha, ha, very funny! I wish that I hadn't chosen to use pastels – they're impossible. This picture looks stupid. It's no use; I can't draw to save my life," Waseem moaned.

“I think that it’s pretty good,” said Jules, in an attempt to emulate Mr Tucker’s positive attitude. “Just work on the hair a bit. Try to add more detail so that it looks more like you.”

“It looks like some kind of zombie at the moment,” laughed Lucy, Zara’s best friend, as she peered at Waseem’s drawing. “Mind you, mine’s no better!”

Everyone else on the table laughed as they looked at their own and each other’s attempts; they all agreed that Jules’ drawing was amazing. Jules beamed with pride. Besides football, art was his favourite pastime, and he had to admit that he did seem to be pretty good at it. The headteacher had even chosen his design as the official poster to advertise the summer fair.

“That is so sick, Jules! How do you get it to look so good?” asked Jessica, looking over from the other side of the table.

“It’s so cool how you’ve done that shadow bit on the ground,” added Zara. “The next time that I come to yours, can we make our own comic strip, or something? You can give me some drawing tips. I’d love to be able to draw like you!”

“We’d all love to be able to draw like that, Zara,” laughed Jessica. “Mine is so gay, it looks like a three-year-old has drawn it!”

Everybody continued to laugh and appraise each others’ drawings, but Jules noticed Zara’s face fall. He watched with curiosity as she turned back to her work and slumped in her chair. As the chatter and laughing continued, she picked up her pencils and paper and walked over to Mr Tucker. Jules heard her ask if she could move tables and sit in the spare seat next to Omar. Mr Tucker agreed and Zara sat down, lowering her head over her work. Jules thought that she looked almost angry... or was she embarrassed, or upset? He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but something wasn’t right with his friend all of a sudden.

“What’s up with Zara?” he asked Waseem. His best mate shrugged and continued to work on his picture, adding hair to his scary clown, just as Jules had advised. Jules glanced over at Zara again. Omar was chatting away to Zara, but she was staring intently at her work as though he wasn’t there. It was so unlike her to suddenly become grumpy. Maybe it was her hormones – they had been learning all about those recently, in science and PSHE.



The rest of the afternoon passed uneventfully. When the classroom was looking back to its usual state (paintless, chalkless and oops-I-dropped-my-water-pot-less), Mr Tucker was letting the class know about the plans for the summer fair that coming weekend.

“If you are running a stall, please make sure that you are here nice and early so that you can get set up – especially you, Zara,” added Mr Tucker. “I need you and your mums to heat up that barbecue and make sure that you have a delicious burger ready for me when I get here!”

Year Five laughed and Zara raised a weak smile. Mr Tucker smiled at her kindly. Jules wondered if *he* knew why she was acting strangely.

“So, don’t forget: at 10 a.m. sharp, the school fair will be open for business. There will be food, games, shopping and – I can imagine this may be your favourite – a penalty shootout!”

An excited chatter hummed around the classroom.

“I guess that I can get some extra practice in!” laughed Jules.

“Yeah, you should,” giggled Waseem. “That penalty kick earlier was so gay! You should probably –”

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Mr Tucker interrupted sharply. The class fell silent.

Waseem jumped in his chair. His face filled with colour and he stuttered, “Jules’ penalty kick. It was a bit rubbish.”

“It’s OK, Mr Tucker, I don’t mind,” Jules offered. “It *was* rubbish.” He managed a giggle, but his smile faded at the expression on Mr Tucker’s face.

“Do you –” Mr Tucker was cut short by the sound of the hometime bell. He had an unusual look on his face. Jules couldn’t make out if it was anger or something else.

His teacher glanced at the clock and visibly shook himself. “We had better not be late out, today. See you tomorrow morning, guys.”

Normally, at hometime, Mr Tucker would walk out to the yard with the class and would try to speak to everyone before they went home. He would often ask if they were doing anything fun that evening, or he would ask if they had enjoyed the day, but today, he did something that seemed totally out of character: he silently turned away from the class and headed over to his marking pile.

Waseem had noticed, too. He sneaked a glance at Jules, frowned and pointed at Mr Tucker as if to say, ‘What’s up with him?’

Jules shrugged. Mr Tucker was behaving a lot like Zara had, earlier in the day, and unlike her, his reaction certainly was not because of hormones! Just like Zara, he had been fine one moment, then quiet and sullen the next. What was up with everyone?

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Later that night, Jules sat at the kitchen table, thinking about Zara and how upset she had looked during their art lesson. He had tried to catch her to say goodbye at the end of the day, but she really hadn't been her usual, bubbly self. The picture that she had made in class was really lovely, and as far as he could remember, no one had said anything mean about it. He pushed fish fingers and peas around his plate, playing the art lesson over in his mind while Mum rattled on about the summer fair. She was on the parent committee and had been organising the event for months.

"...so I said, 'If you can't provide the bouncy castle that we asked for, then you'll just have to supply us with a different one, but make sure it's just as good as – if not better than – the one that we ordered'. I hope that they don't let us down."

Mum stopped talking as her eyes fell on Jules and she realised that he wasn't listening to a word that she was saying.

"What's up, love?" she asked. "It's lovely outside. You're usually out of the door and in the garden with a football about five minutes after you've started eating."

“Nothing. I was just thinking about today. Zara was a bit weird in art and it just wasn’t like her. Then, Mr Tucker was acting weird at the end of the day...”

“What kind of weird?” asked Mum.

“I’m not sure, just kind of... quiet. I don’t know. I didn’t like seeing them like that. Zara’s always laughing and joking around, but today, in art, she went quiet and she seemed upset. She was fine at first, but then suddenly asked Mr Tucker if she could move, and she went and sat next to Omar. She doesn’t even really like Omar that much. After art, I asked her about coming round to ours for tea soon, but she hardly spoke to me. She had said earlier that she wanted to make a comic strip with me.”

“I’m sure that she does, love. Did someone say something about her artwork that might have upset her, perhaps?”

Jules shook his head. “Then, there was Mr Tucker. He didn’t say goodbye the way that he normally does at the end of the day. I hope that they’re OK and that I haven’t done anything to upset them. Maybe I made Mr Tucker cross because I tried to explain what Waseem meant...”

“Different people can be upset by different things – even adults – and sometimes, we can offend people when we really don’t mean to,” suggested Mum. “Maybe something happened that was no big deal to anyone else on the table, but was a big deal to Zara. As for Mr Tucker, everyone has bad days and I’m sure he’ll let you know if there’s something that you can do to help.”

Mum paused to take a sip of her drink, and then looked hard at Jules. She must have seen worry lingering in his expression because she smiled at him and said, “It’s really nice that you care about your friend so much, but there’s nothing that you can do right now. Why don’t you wait and see how she is tomorrow at the fair, and maybe ask her if she wants to chat about anything. Offer to have her over for tea again. Just be a good friend and let her know that you’re there if she needs you.”

Jules thought that it seemed like pretty good advice. He turned back to his plate and finished his dinner, before heading out into the back garden.

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The next morning, Jules approached Zara as soon as

they arrived at the fair to help set up. She was helping her mums to set out all of the sauces and napkins at the barbecue stall and seemed to be back to her usual self. They chatted for a bit about the fair before Jules found a way to ask her about how she was feeling.

“Zara, you know yesterday? What was up with you in art? Why did you go and sit with Omar?”

“Oh, it was just something that someone said,” replied Zara.

“Was it me? Was it something that I said?” asked Jules, concerned.

“No, it wasn’t you. It’s nothing. It doesn’t matter. Anyway, are you going to help me set up here, or what?” Zara threw a pack of burger buns at Jules and smiled. Jules smiled back and was reassured that Zara seemed to be back to her old self.

A little later, an excited group of Year Five children gathered by the coconut shy, which was the stall that Jules, Zara, Waseem and Lucy had offered to help on. The sun was shining, the air was warm and the tantalising smell of burgers was wafting across the school field, luring people in the direction of

the barbecue.

“I can’t wait to have one of my mum’s veggie burgers later,” said Zara, scraping her long, dark hair into a ponytail. “She’s cooking halloumi cheese to go on them and putting them in a brioche bun. They sold out last year.”

“Do both of your mums cook?” asked Lucy, getting out her bright yellow purse and counting her money.

“No. One of my mums is a chef, but the other one works in a bank and she’s hopeless at cooking!” replied Zara.

“Well, I don’t think I’ll be buying a burger – I’ve spent most of my money at the sweet stall,” mumbled Waseem through a mouthful of marshmallows. “I’ve got enough left to have a go at winning a coconut, though,” he added.

“Oh, look,” said Jules, pointing across the busy field. “Mr Tucker’s coming over. Let’s get him to have a go. He’s really into sport. I bet he’s got great aim.”

Mr Tucker looked quite different in his weekend T-shirt, jeans and trainers – the exact trainers that Jules was hoping to get for his birthday next month.



“Hello, guys, how are you all doing over here? Has your stall been busy so far?” Mr Tucker seemed much more like himself than he had the previous day. He beamed at the children and they beamed back.

“Sure has,” replied Jules from beneath his baseball cap. “I reckon that we’ll make loads of money. You’re going to have a go, aren’t you, Mr Tucker?”

“Well, I don’t like coconuts, but I’m happy to show you all how it’s done,” Mr Tucker joked, limbering up with exaggerated arm stretches and twists.

“I’ll have the coconut, if you win one. Here, I’ll pay

for five goes,” said another man who had walked over with their teacher. Jules had been so relieved to see his teacher back to his usual, cheery self that he had not even noticed the man beside him. He was about the same age as Mr Tucker and wore a hat to shade his face from the sun. Smiling, he handed over a five-pound note to Lucy. “Not that he’ll need many turns – I should warn you, he’s a pretty good shot. You should see him play darts!” added the man.

“OK, Mr Tucker, here are five balls,” said Lucy. “Good luck.”

Mr Tucker picked up the first ball and took aim, before launching it at the coconuts. He was incredibly close to one of them with his first shot, but it sailed slightly too far to the right and landed on the ground with a thud.

“So close!” Waseem called through a mouthful of jelly beans. “Try again, Mr Tucker!”

Eyes narrow with determination, the teacher picked up a second ball and took his time to line up an underarm throw. Everyone’s eyes followed the arc of the ball as it soared up through the air and then down towards one of the targets. Again, it flew so close that it must have

brushed the coconut's wiry, brown hairs.

"Woah! You are good. You're definitely going to get it this time," said Jules, looking on with excitement. Not many people had managed a direct hit yet. In fact, some people had been completely useless, including the headteacher, Mr Edwards.

"Come on, James, third time lucky," encouraged the man who had paid for Mr Tucker's shots.

Powered by his supporters, Mr Tucker propelled the third ball directly at the biggest coconut and, with a *clunk*, knocked it clean off its post. The small crowd cheered as Lucy dashed over to collect the prize coconut.

"Woah! That was amazing!" cried Waseem.

"Not like Mr Edwards, earlier," laughed Jules. "His throws were all so gay – he was way off every time! But you are really good, Mr Tucker."

Jules watched as Mr Tucker winced and his shoulders stiffened. There was an uncomfortable silence where his teacher's response should have been, and the man next to him gently placed a hand on Mr Tucker's arm. Jules' stomach lurched as he realised that something that he

had done had upset his teacher, and his mind raced to piece together all of the fragments of information that it was receiving.

He didn't have to wonder for very long. "Thank you, Jules," said Mr Tucker, after a short pause. "I appreciate the compliment. However, I'd like to ask you all something."

Mr Tucker looked around the group, from one bemused expression to the next.

"Could you do something for me?" he continued. "I'd really like you all to stop using the word 'gay' like this."

The group of children looked around at one another, confused. The only person not making eye contact with anyone was Zara; she was fiddling with her hair and staring at her shoes. Butterflies flitted around in Jules' stomach as his gaze slid from Zara to his teacher, and then to the man standing by his side.

"I don't just mean Jules," said Mr Tucker. "I have heard 'gay' used like this a few times now, around school. It can be very upsetting for some people to hear the word 'gay' used to mean 'rubbish', 'bad' or 'stupid'."

The teacher paused, then straightened his back and took a breath. "Look, guys, I'd like you to meet someone." Mr Tucker gestured towards the man at his side. "This is my husband, Will."

The other man stepped forwards slightly and smiled. "Hello, everyone. It's really great to meet you. James – Mr Tucker – talks about you lot all the time at home. I even had the pleasure of reading some of your Viking stories the other week. I thought that they were great!"

Jules didn't know what to say. The group of children glanced at one another, each hoping that someone else would speak first.

Mr Tucker sighed. "Will and I are gay. We both grew up hearing kids use the word 'gay' to mean 'rubbish' – just like I've heard some of you do – and it felt quite uncomfortable. It made it more difficult to talk to anyone about who I was or how I felt. Will and I have shared our experiences with each other about growing up, and we both agree that we would have found it much easier to be ourselves if we hadn't always felt like being gay meant that we were rubbish. It still upsets me when I hear you all talking about something being 'gay'."

Jules recalled Mr Tucker acting strangely after Waseem had talked about his rubbish penalty shot. His face felt hot and he stared at the ground as he thought about how upsetting it must have been for Mr Tucker to hear the word 'gay' being used in that way.

Mr Tucker smiled. "Now, I know that you're all wonderful kids, so I know that none of you mean anything by it – but I'm probably not the only one who gets upset when they hear this word. Can you think of anyone else who might not like it when you use it this way?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "I don't use that word because I know that Zara's mums are... well... you know..."

"Gay," said Zara. She had looked up and Jules could see that her face was flushed and her brow was creased. "They're gay. There's nothing *wrong* with it."

"Of course there isn't, Zara," said Mr Tucker calmly. "It's not a rude word, Lucy, and you don't have to be afraid of it, as long as you're using it thoughtfully."

Jules shook himself and looked hard at Zara. He had never seen her look angry before, and it didn't suit her. It had never occurred to him that Zara's mums were

gay, and that the word 'gay' referred to them, too – he and Zara knew each other well, but Zara's mums were just her mums, and there was nothing strange or rubbish about them. He wondered why anyone ever *did* use the word 'gay' to mean 'rubbish' – now that he thought about it, it seemed like a really strange choice of word.

"But we never meant that it's bad or rubbish to *be* gay," Waseem tried to explain to Zara. Then, with a glance towards Mr Tucker, he added, "I guess we should have thought about how it might *feel* to hear it. Sorry."

"Me too," added Jules, forcing himself to look Zara straight in the eye so that she knew that he meant it. He couldn't quite remember who had said the word 'gay' when Zara had become upset the day before, but he knew that they were all responsible in their own way. "Loads of kids use it around school," he said, "so I think that we need to try to make everyone stop. Maybe we could make some posters to put up about it?"

"Yeah," agreed Zara, smiling feebly. "We could do an assembly or something about the words that we use and how they might upset others."

“Good idea,” said Mr Tucker.

Lucy looked thoughtful. “Actually, I get fed up with people saying that people are doing things ‘like a girl’. It’s stupid – I mean, what’s wrong with being a girl? Of *course* I run like a girl – I *am* a girl!”

Mr Tucker’s husband shook his head. “It’s always been the same – children just love to put each other down all the time. Why aren’t you telling your friends how great they are, instead of calling them names?”

“Yeah,” Waseem agreed, “you guys are wicked! Zara, your goalkeeping skills are incredible; Jules, you are so amazing at art; and Mr Tucker, you are one of the funniest people that I have ever met!”

“Why, thank you, Waseem,” smiled Mr Tucker. “Don’t beat yourselves up about this, guys,” he added. “It’s OK to get things wrong sometimes. We all make mistakes and we can sometimes hurt people without meaning to. The most important thing to do is learn from the experience. Your words have power, and only you get to decide which words you use.” Then, turning to his husband, he said, “See, I told you that they were a great class.”



“You were right,” replied Will. “Fancy one of those veggie burgers? They smell delicious.”

“Definitely,” said Mr Tucker. “Keep up the good work here, guys. I hope that you make lots of money on the stall. We’ll head back over later to see how you’re getting on.” Then, the Year Five teacher and his husband headed off towards the barbecue.

“Well, I’m going to have a go at winning a coconut, now,” said Zara, smiling. “Pass me two balls, Waseem,” she said, dropping her two pound coins into the pot of money on the table. Jules was so pleased to see

her back to her old self. He was ashamed, and a little embarrassed, that he might have been upsetting her all this time without realising. However, as Mr Tucker had said, the important thing to do was learn from the experience. Jules felt good that he could make sure that it never happened again.

For a talented goalkeeper, Zara was surprisingly bad at accuracy when it came to knocking a coconut off its stand with a small ball. Both of her shots were way off-target and everyone laughed, including Zara.

“Not bad,” Jules chuckled. “You can always try again next year!”