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Opening extract from

Wow: 366

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Various

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FOOTBALL JOURNEY | DAN FREEDMAN

This is a true story.

I actually enjoyed going to school. Well, on Wednesdays, anyway.

On Wednesdays it was Jack's turn to give Adam and me a lift in to school.

Jack was my neighbour Adam's dad, and he had the best job in the world. He was a writer. He'd written lots of things that had been on TV and he'd even written films too.

That meant that he was brilliant at telling stories. With only his deep, rasping voice, he could make his stories as exciting as watching a film at the cinema.

"Tell us a story, Jack!" we'd say as we got into his car.

Sometimes he wasn't in the mood, but we always knew how to wear him down.

"Go on!" we'd beg. "Tell us a football story."

Jack smiled. He loved football as much as we did.

I'll always remember one of Jack's stories about a striker called Derek Dooley. Jack said Derek Dooley was the best striker he'd ever seen.

He was big, strong and quick – unstoppable. He scored 62 goals in his 61 games and the whole country knew about him. He was going to be a star.

Derek Dooley was just about to play for England when he got injured. He'd gone in for a tackle with a goalkeeper and broken his leg. His leg became infected with something called gangrene. In the

end, he had to have his leg cut off.

"What?!" Adam and I said. "He had his whole leg cut off? What happened to him?"

But it was too late. We'd already got to school. The journey had gone in a flash.

"I'll tell you another story next week," Jack promised. "Only seven days to wait."

I went into school and spent the rest of the day thinking about Derek Dooley and what he might have achieved if he hadn't broken his leg.

That was twenty years ago and I'm grown up now, but I can still remember those stories and those journeys to school.

I like to think that Jack would have been happy at what I did when I grew up.

I became a writer. I tell stories to children. Often about football…

If you enjoyed this story, why not try some of Dan's books:
The Kick Off and *Shoot to Win*

POLLY – PROBLEM PRINCESS | ALEX T. SMITH

Polly was a princess.

She had the crown and seventeen pink royal ponies to prove it.

Here is what she DID like about being a princess: the castle, the personal indoor lagoon, her pampered pooch Percy.

Here is what she DIDN'T like about being a princess: everything else!

The problem was that she was always being bossed about.

"Polly!" the queen would cry. "Stop climbing that tree immediately! Your dress will be filthy and the Evil Baron's coming for tea in a minute!"

"Polly!" shouted the king. "Stop welding saucepans to the Royal Yacht! You will scuff your shoes, and what on earth will my Knights of the Occasional Table think?"

The bossiest person of all had to be her fairy godmother, Miss Pinch. She was a miserable woman who looked like a toad wrapped in chiffon.

"Polly! Stop shampooing the Royal Elephant and come and kiss these frogs!" she would holler.

"Polly! Stop sharpening your crayons with that sword and see if you can feel the pea I've hidden under your mattress!" she would snap.

"Polly!" Miss Pinch would scream. "Stop waving my knickers out the window and come here NOW! I want you to prick your finger on this spinning wheel so I can see what happens!"

If Polly didn't arrive quickly enough, she and Percy would get

whacked on the head with Miss Pinch's wand.

"I've had enough of this, Percy," complained Polly after a particularly trying day. "I'm fed up of all this bossing! I wish we could be all by ourselves somewhere marvellous."

Polly pursed her lips and Percy pursed his too.

Then Polly had an idea…

"Miss Pinch!" cried Polly. "The magic mirror just said you weren't the cleverest lady in the land!"

Miss Pinch burst into Polly's bedroom, red-faced with panic. Whilst she bashed and shook the mirror, Polly swiped the magic wand!

"I wish we could be all by ourselves somewhere else," Polly whispered, and she shook the wand above herself and Percy.

They closed their eyes.

There was a flash.

Slowly Polly and Percy reopened their eyes. They were on their own desert island, miles away from everyone.

"Perfect!" laughed Polly and she splashed into the sea.

If you enjoyed this story, why not try some of Alex's books:
Eliot Jones, Midnight Superhero and *Home*

WALKING SYZYGY | KJARTAN POSKITT

"BEWARE – TREACHEROUS CURRENTS". I smiled up at the battered old sign. It was an early March morning and the freak low tide had left the end of the pier surrounded by dry sand. This spot would be twenty feet deep by lunch time, and it might be years before anybody could walk here again.

Something was swinging beneath the sign. It was an old dog collar and lead tied up among the manky seaweed clinging to the pier support. Being curious, I unknotted it, and saw the collar had a disc engraved with the word "Syzygy". I walked off along the water's edge, swinging the lead and wondering what such a strange name could mean.

Behind me the hazy sun was rising through the ruins of the abbey on the cliff top. For a moment my shadow stretched before me and then, just as it faded, a second smaller dark shape moved up beside it. I turned to see who had followed me, but there were just my own footprints leading back to the pier end.

Far away off towards the beach huts Mrs Thompson was walking her white terrier. As always, Dusty came scampering madly towards me. I bent to say hello, but then he stopped and growled in alarm. There was a clumsy splashing noise in the shallows behind me. Dusty turned and bolted. I looked round to see a few fading ripples, and then suddenly the old dog lead twitched in my hand. Something was tugging it out to sea. I snatched it back and it fell free. Enough! I swung it around my head and hurled it right away across the water and turned towards

the shore. Behind me I heard the distant splash, but then there were more splashes. Little waves or something, whatever. I'd had enough of the tricks this freak tide was playing on my imagination.

I walked directly back to the slipway. It wasn't until my feet were on solid paving stones that I turned and looked back. The tide was already lapping the pier as once again I wondered about Syzygy.

Then I heard a clink at my feet. The wet lead was lying across my shoes.

If you enjoyed this story, why not try some of Kjartan's books: *Pantsacadabra!* and *Pantology: A Brief History of Pants*