

## Grass Monster

Frisbees, soccer balls, stray basketballs, and the occasional shoe went missing around Hurston Middle School's playing fields at an abnormally high rate. Nobody thought much about how it happened, as the pace of regular school life focused on bigger priorities, but missing objects from the fields were a fact of daily life around Hurston. People simply got used to it and tended to ignore it.

Mona kicked a near-goal in a soccer game before school one day and lost sight of the ball - her personal soccer ball that she had brought to school. She trotted down the field to get the black-and-white ball, jogging and looking around here and there on the field, but she saw no sign of it. Before long, the first bell had rung, and it was time to head into class. Mona stood for a few seconds on the field, however, as everyone else ran inside... surely she hadn't kicked the ball that hard, so hard it left the field altogether... surely she would have at least seen the black-and-white ball on the green field if it were anywhere nearby. Mona wondered what had happened as she slowly turned around to go inside, glancing back for one more quizzical look as she walked away.

As Mona sat down in first period math class next to her best friend Eric, she still had a puzzled look on her face. "What's up, Mona?" asked Eric. "Forget your homework?" But Ms. Marks was signaling the beginning of class - they would have to talk later.

By the end of class, they had both forgotten about Mona's look and Eric's question, but at lunchtime, as they lingered at the table after eating, Eric remembered and asked again. "Hey, you sure came into math class looking funny. Everything OK?"

"Oh, yeah," Mona said, suddenly remembering the morning, "It's just that this morning something strange happened."

"Ooooooh, what's that?" asked Eric. "Bus driver's eyes start glowing neon pink when you got on?" and he giggled to himself.

"No, nothing like that," sighed Mona. "I took a shot in soccer, right? The ball soared over the goalpost, but when I went to look for it, it was like it had disappeared."

"Oh, that happens all the time. You must have kicked it harder than you thought. You've got a whale of a kick there, you know. It's just a ball, anyway; sometimes you lose one, and sometimes you find one. I'm sure someone else has a ball we can use after school."

"Yeah, it just didn't feel right, you know?" said Mona. "Like, where could it have really gone? It was nowhere to be seen... nowhere..."

They both shrugged, though, and forgot about the mystery for the rest of the day. After school, Eric liked to go out to play Frisbee with some of his friends. Alex

usually brought the Frisbee because he had a good one. Eric saw Alex on the way out of school and asked him how long he could play today.

"Oh, didn't you hear?" said Alex. "No game today; my Frisbee's gone. I threw a long toss this morning, and it must have sailed away with the wind. We didn't have time to find it before school... come to think of it, though, it really wasn't windy at all this morning... I don't know."

"Oh, yeah?" said Eric. He paused to consider something. "Hey, where were you playing, by the way?"

"On the school field. Where else?" said Alex. "Well, got to go! See you tomorrow, and let us know if you find another Frisbee to play with - nobody else has one yet."

"Sure thing... bye..." Eric mumbled in reply as he slowly continued to walk outside. He was standing on the front steps of Hurston School when Mona walked up behind him.

"What's the hold up, mister?" she joked as she patted Eric on the back.

"Just thinking," said Eric, looking pensive. "You know, Alex lost his Frisbee on the field today. What do you say we go look around for it, and for your ball, of course?"

"Oh, NOW you're interested," Mona grinned. "Yeah, I've got some time before I have to be home. Let's go."

Eric and Mona walked the full length and full width of the Hurston field, looking at every square inch of the green grassy ground. They walked the entire perimeter of the field, looking into the trees and bushes on the west side, out over the parking lot on the south side, out over the quiet neighborhood street on the north side, and even along the school wall and into the classroom windows on the east side. There were no signs of Alex's Frisbee, Mona's ball, or any other Frisbees, balls, playthings, or anything, really, anywhere near the field.

They walked back to where they had set their bags down and started to say their goodbyes, giving up for the day with no other solutions to think of when suddenly Mona cried, "Hey, where's my water bottle? I left it right here by my bag."

"Huh? Oh, your purple bottle? You definitely had it before... I have no idea!" said Eric. He looked at Mona. Mona looked at Eric - they both knew that something funny was going on, and they decided to figure it out, once and for all.

Both Eric and Mona made plans to stay late after school the next day. Mona brought an extra backpack with a small rubber ball, two old stuffed animals - a rabbit and a pig - and a small package of tissues: all things that she knew nobody from her home would miss. Eric brought a blanket, some snacks, and an extra bottle of water for Mona.

After school, they set up camp at the edge of the field, laying out the blanket and opening up their snacks, getting comfortable and ready to stay for a while. Mona threw

the small rubber ball out into the field, and they lay down to watch - they watched for a few minutes, a few minutes more, and a few minutes more when Mona turned over to stare at the sky, wondering, "How long do you think we'll have to wait?"

"I don't know," said Eric, sitting up and turning to grab a juice out of his bag. "It could be minutes, it could be hours or days, and maybe we're waiting for nothing, who knows?" But when they turned back around, the ball was gone.

"Whoa!" Mona cried. "The ball is gone!"

"Quick!" Eric cried. "The rabbit!"

Mona threw the stuffed rabbit out into the field, lobbing it way out onto the far side where it landed in a patch of really tall grass. They both stared, motionless, for another minute or two - though it seemed like an eternity - before they saw a great mound move up under the grass, and roll right over to the rabbit, collapsing over it like a wave of water. The long grass near the stuffed rabbit swayed slightly, and then it seemed to move in a wave back the way it had come. When they ran out to the field, they couldn't see anything wrong with the dirt, and the grass was left perfectly in place, but the rabbit was completely gone.

Eric looked at Mona, Mona looked at Eric - they could hardly breathe; they were so shocked and scared. "Maybe we should go home," Eric said. "This may not be the best idea we've ever had. In fact, I'm not even sure we're safe here. Do you have your cell phone?"

Mona gulped. She took a deep breath and looked down at the remaining stuffed animal they had brought with them. "Hang on," she said. "We have to get to the bottom of this." Hardly daring to move, Mona threw the stuffed pig onto the grass about ten feet in front of where they were standing. "Stay right here," she told Eric, "and don't take your eyes off that pig."

When the friends saw the long grass begin to move toward them again like a wave on the ocean, they both got pale. Eric looked like he might get sick at any moment, and Mona didn't look much better. The tension was almost more than either of them could handle. As the wave of long grass moved in their direction, they both felt as though their hearts were about to burst right out of their chests. Right before they turned to flee, though, Mona saw something that made her gasp.

"Eric, look!" she shouted. "It's not a monster at all!" She began to laugh until tears ran down her cheeks.

Eric couldn't believe his eyes. He groaned and hit his head with his hand. "Mona," he said, "if you ever tell anyone else that I was almost frightened to death by a poodle, I'll deny every word!"

- 1. What did Eric notice about Mona when she came into their math class?**
  - A. She arrived later that day than usual.
  - B. She had a puzzled look on her face.
  - C. She didn't have her soccer ball with her.
  
- 2. What item disappeared first when Mona and Eric set up camp on the playing field after school?**
  - A. A small rubber ball.
  - B. A stuffed rabbit.
  - C. A blue water bottle.
  
- 3. Why did Mona stop looking for her soccer ball when she first lost it?**
  - A. She got tired of looking for it.
  - B. She wanted to get to class on time.
  - C. She thought it wasn't worth the trouble.
  
- 4. What was Eric's attitude when he learned that Mona's ball was lost?**
  - A. He thought that probably someone had stolen the soccer ball.
  - B. He thought Mona shouldn't kick the soccer ball so hard the next time.
  - C. He thought losing a soccer ball was one of those things that just happens.
  
- 5. What was the plan that Mona and Eric came up with to solve the mystery of things disappearing?**
  - A. They would throw other things into the field to see what would happen.
  - B. They would hide in the tall grass during recess and try to catch the thief.
  - C. They would set out another volleyball and Frisbee and lay in wait.
  
- 6. What happened right after Mona threw the small rubber ball into the field?**
  - A. Eric spread out a blanket and got some juice out of his bag.
  - B. Mona lay down for a few minutes to rest and look at the sky.
  - C. The ball lay in the field for a few minutes and then disappeared.

**7. What was Mona like?**

- A. She was curious but didn't know how to solve problems.
- B. She was courageous and wanted answers to her questions.
- C. She thought most things weren't worth the trouble to figure out.

**8. Why did most students at Hurston Middle School have little concern about things disappearing from the playing field?**

- A. They were used to things disappearing.
- B. They were too busy with school to think about it.
- C. Only a few things had actually disappeared.

**9. What was Eric like after he saw the mound of grass move?**

- A. He was afraid but wanted to keep trying to figure what was going on.
- B. He was afraid and wanted to go home before they got hurt somehow.
- C. He was undecided whether he was afraid enough to give up the search.

**10. What best describes how Mona and Eric felt at the end of their first day of searching for missing items?**

- A. They felt like they were in a very dangerous place and wanted to leave.
- B. They were afraid and thought that something very bad was going on.
- C. They had no idea about what was going on and felt uneasy about it.

**11. How did Eric act when Mona first told him that something strange had happened to her?**

- A. He asked Mona to tell him exactly what happened.
- B. He was concerned that Mona had a problem.
- C. He made a joke about it and laughed out loud.

**12. What encouraged Eric to want to help Mona look for her soccer ball after school?**

- A. He felt sorry for Mona because he knew how much she liked that ball.
- B. He wanted to look for the Frisbee his friend Alex had lost that morning.
- C. He was bored because there wasn't anything else going on after school.



- 13. Which statement below best tells what this story is about?**
- A. Things aren't always what they seem to be.
  - B. Mysteries can be solved by children.
  - C. It is good to have friends who will help you.
- 14. What was Mona thinking when she was trying to figure out what happened to her soccer ball?**
- A. The playing field was too small to lose a soccer ball in.
  - B. Someone must have picked up the ball from the field.
  - C. She hadn't kicked the ball hard enough to lose sight of it.
- 15. What probably was the main thought going through the minds of Mona and Eric when the mound of grass started to move in their direction?**
- A. Some strange creature was about to attack them from the grass.
  - B. It was time to think up some new plan to get their things back.
  - C. Getting Mona's soccer ball back wasn't worth facing the unknown.
- 16. What was the relationship between Eric and Mona like?**
- A. Eric did most of the work, and Mona did most of the thinking.
  - B. Eric was willing to help Mona if he got something out of it too.
  - C. Eric was willing to let Mona take the lead and then support her.
- 17. What kind of things did Mona bring from home to throw into the field?**
- A. Things that a thief would probably want to take.
  - B. Things that no one at home would care about losing.
  - C. Things that other children would be interested in.
- 18. What probably concerned Mona and Eric the most when they were at the field after school the first time?**
- A. Mona's water bottle had also disappeared from the field.
  - B. They couldn't find any of the items that had disappeared.
  - C. There were having trouble figuring out what to do next.

**19. How did the story end?**

- A. Mona and Eric solved the mystery and began to laugh so hard they cried.
- B. Mona solved the mystery of why things left on the field had disappeared.
- C. Eric was concerned others would find out that he was scared by a dog.

**20. What was Mona like after she saw the mound move under the grass?**

- A. She was afraid and thought it might be wise to give up and go home.
- B. She was afraid but wanted to keep trying to figure out what was going on.
- C. She was undecided whether she was afraid enough to give up the search.