

The Laugh That Says Stop



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

Ages 6-9



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Chapter 1: Two socks and a laugh

Meir finds one striped sock under the chair.

His younger brother, Dovy, finds the other one on the cushion.

"Mine has escaped farther," Meir says.

Dovy laughs. He holds his sock above his head like a flag.

The boys are putting their clean laundry into their own baskets. Mummy folds a sheet beside them. Her purple tichel covers all her hair.

Meir remembers a game from yesterday. He had tickled Dovy's side, and Dovy had laughed so loudly that Tatty came to see what was funny.

Now Meir reaches toward him again.

Dovy pulls his arm against his side.

"No tickling."

Meir thinks that means the funny part is beginning.

Chapter 2: A word inside the laugh

Meir tickles him.

Dovy laughs and twists away.

"Stop!"

Mummy puts down the sheet at once.



"Meir, hands away. He said stop."

Meir takes his hands away. Mummy moves beside Dovy and makes space between the boys.

Dovy catches his breath. He goes to sit on the other chair with his sock.

"But he was laughing," Meir says.

"I heard him say no before you began," Mummy says. "Then he said stop."

Meir looks at the empty space where Dovy was standing. The game has ended very differently from yesterday.

Chapter 3: What the laugh cannot say

"Yesterday he liked it," Meir says.

"Yesterday he wanted that game. Today he told you he didn't."

"Why did he laugh, then?"

"Tickling can make someone laugh even when they want it to stop. The laugh doesn't cancel their words."

Meir thinks about the laugh and the stop. He had heard both. He had kept the part that let him carry on.

Mummy stays beside the chairs.



"You don't need to work out how much he dislikes it. No tickling means no tickling."

Dovy keeps his feet on the chair rung. He doesn't have to say it again to make it count.

Chapter 4: Not another little try

Meir wants to show that he can be gentler.

He could tickle just once, very lightly. Perhaps Dovy would laugh the good kind of laugh. Then this would be a funny morning again.

Meir keeps his hands on his basket instead.

"I heard you say stop and I kept going," he tells Dovy. "I'm sorry. I won't tickle you now."

Dovy looks at him.

"I want to do my socks."

"All right."

Meir puts his striped pair together. He doesn't reach for Dovy's sock to help without asking. He doesn't ask for a hug to prove the apology has worked.

Mummy folds the sheet again while keeping the boys in view.

Chapter 5: A game with no hands

After the baskets are filled, Meir gets his animal guessing cards.



He asks Dovy whether he wants to play.

"Not yet."

Meir puts the cards beside his own basket. He wants to ask again straightaway, but not yet is already an answer.

He draws an animal with a ridiculously long nose on scrap paper instead.

Later, Dovy comes over.

"Is that an elephant?"

"It might be a sock with ears."

Dovy smiles.

"Can we do the cards?"

They sit across the little table. Nobody needs to touch anybody for this game.

Meir's first animal has a shell. Dovy guesses a turtle. The cards turn over one by one.

Chapter 6: Before a new game

On Sunday, Dovy wants to play their tapping game. They take turns tapping a rhythm on the tabletop for the other boy to copy.

Meir remembers that they sometimes ended it by tapping each other's shoulders.

"Table only?" he asks.



"Table only," Dovy says.

Meir makes three taps on the table. Dovy copies them and adds a fourth.

They make a pattern long enough to confuse both of them. Mummy asks for quieter taps while she reads nearby, so they use their fingertips.

When Dovy says he is finished, Meir lets the last pattern stay unfinished.

Chapter 7: More than one sound

Meir still likes hearing Dovy laugh.

He likes the elephant-sock drawing. He likes the wrong guesses on the animal cards.

But a laugh isn't the only sound he listens for now.

No counts. Stop counts. Moving away means he should stop too, not chase after another laugh.

If he isn't sure about a touching game, he can keep his hands to himself and ask Mummy for help.

The striped socks go into separate drawers. The cards stay on the table until both boys help put them away.