

Hanna and Hamza

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There's Hanna.

Hanna has red hair and six million freckles.

Really? That many?

Yes, really. Hamza counted them once.

Who?

Hamza!

Hamza has black hair, and he can count to six million.

And he loves cake.

This is the block of flats where they live.

The supermarket is downstairs.

It's so handy if you need something.

Across the road, there's a park.

'Only cross at the traffic lights!

Or you won't be allowed to go outside for a year,' Hamza's dad always says.

So, they only cross at the traffic lights.

Do you see that balcony full of plants on the fourth floor?

That's where Hanna lives.

And if you look straight up from there, do you see that balcony with the coloured lights?

That's where Hamza lives.

When you enter the building, you go into the hallway with the letterboxes.

There are stairs and a lift.

Hanna lives on the fourth floor.

With her mum and her cat, Louis.

Hamza lives on the fifth floor.

With his mum and dad and his big brother.

Hanna is Hamza's downstairs neighbour.

And Hamza is Hanna's upstairs neighbour.

They're best friends, too.

At least, most of the time.

1

It's Sunday.

Hamza is standing at Hanna's front door.

He's panting a bit.

'I ran here,' he says.

'It's my dad's birthday,' says Hanna.

Hamza follows Hanna inside.

Hanna's dad has red hair, just like his daughter's.

He looks the same, too.

As if he's planning to rob a bank.

And then give away the money to poor people.

There's no way Hanna's dad will ever do that for real.

But what about Hanna?

Hamza looks at his neighbour.

No, with Hanna, you never know.

There's a candle next to the photo of her dad.

And there's a piece of cake.

'My mum baked it,' says Hanna.

'Oh,' says Hamza.

When Hanna talks about her dad, he never really knows what to say.

Because her dad's dead.

He's in a photo frame.

He isn't going to eat cake ever again.

But Hamza knows better than to say that.

Hanna can get pretty angry.

'Want to share it?' asks Hanna.

'What?'

'Duh! The cake.'

'But... it's for your dad, isn't it?'

Hanna takes the cake and divides it into two pieces.

Hamza gets the bigger bit.

'It's so good. I want more!' shouts Hanna.

'Let's go to Mr Bear's!' shouts Hamza.

'Have you got some money, then?'

Mr Bear doesn't like them hanging around without buying anything.

Hamza grins with his mouth full.

That's why he's here.

With a serious look on his face, he pulls something from his pocket.

'Two euros! Got it from my gran.'

She came to visit this morning.'

Hanna smiles.

'Mum, we're going to the park!' she shouts.
Hanna's mum comes out of the bedroom.
She looks awful.
Just like a scarecrow.
That always happens on this day of the year.
The scarecrow grabs Hanna and gives her a hug.
'Help! I can't breathe!' shouts Hanna.
'Be careful when you're crossing the road.'
'I always am.'
Hanna wriggles free. 'See you later!'
Hanna and Hamza head outside.
They nearly always take the stairs.
The lift is for old people.
Hamza chats away about his grandma.
She gave him two euros, just like that.
And she always brings tasty food with her.
But Hanna isn't listening.
She takes two steps at a time. She can think better like that.
When she gets to the bottom, she suddenly stops.
Hamza almost bumps into her.
'I've got it!' shouts Hanna.
'What?' asks Hamza.
'A plan! What my mum needs is a new husband.'
'Okay,' says Hamza.

2

Hanna and Hamza are standing at the traffic lights.
Cars, scooters and bikes pass by.
'If my mum has a new husband, she won't be so sad anymore,' says Hanna.
'And then you'll have a new dad,' says Hamza.
'Green!' shouts Hanna.
They quickly run across the road.
The park is small, but there's lots to look at.
A boy with a guitar.
Children playing football on the grass.
Old people sitting on a bench.
And the tables outside the café are full.

Hanna stops to pet a dog.
She'd love to have a dog herself.
'What's his name?' she asks.
'Teddy,' says his owner.
'Come on!' Hamza pulls her away.

There's a little shop under the big chestnut tree. It's Mr Bear's kiosk.
His name isn't really Mr Bear, but that's what Hanna and Hamza call him.

'Mr Bear!' shouts Hanna.

'He isn't here,' says Hamza.

'That's impossible,' says Hanna.

Mr Bear is always there, every day, seven days a week.

Sometimes he goes away for a few minutes, but he always closes the shutters then.

Hanna and Hamza look around.

They could just take a bag of sweets, or an ice lolly from the freezer.

'Mr Bear!' Hanna yells again.

'I'm not here!'

Hanna and Hamza look up.

Sitting on the bottom branch of the old chestnut tree, they see Mr Bear.

'Why are you up the tree?' asks Hanna.

'Was there a scary dog?' asks Hamza.

'Or a robber?'

'No, I just felt like sitting in the tree. There's a very nice view from up here.'

Mr Bear looks around.

He pretends that he's enjoying the view.

'My gran gave us two euros!' shouts Hamza.

'Yes, yes, okay. I'm coming,' says Mr Bear.

But nothing happens.

He stays where he is.

'Could you two check that it's gone?'

'What?' asks Hanna.

'The waps,' says Mr Bear quietly. 'There was a waps.'

Hanna and Hamza walk around the outside of the kiosk.

They take a look inside, too.

'There's no waps here!' shouts Hamza.

'It's a *wasp*,' says Hanna. 'Not a *waps*.'

'Is there a waps? Or not?' asks Mr Bear.

'Not!' shouts Hanna.

With a thud, Mr Bear lands on the ground.

He brushes a few leaves off his trousers.

'My mum's scared of wapses, too,' says Hamza.

'But there's no need.

Wapses don't usually hurt you.

And they're very good for the flowers and they eat mosquitoes.'

'I can't help it,' says Mr Bear.

'I'm allergic to wapses.

If I get stung, then I swell up.'

Mr Bear takes a deep breath and pretends to swell up.

'And then, after a while, I explode.'

So whenever I see a waps, I run away.’
‘WASP!’ shouts Hanna.
‘Where?!’
Mr Bear looks around, scared. He’s about to climb the tree again.
‘Nowhere,’ says Hanna. ‘But you’re supposed to say wassssssp.’
‘Wapsssss,’ Hamza and Mr Bear repeat after her.

Hanna giggles.
That big Mr Bear, scared of such a little creature!
Mr Bear coughs.
‘So, do you want to buy something or not?’ he asks.
Hanna and Hamza both choose an ice lolly.
Mr Bear takes the ice lollies out of the freezer.
They hold out their hands, but he doesn’t give them their lollies yet.
‘And you won’t tell anyone, will you?’ says Mr Bear.
‘Of course not,’ promises Hamza.
‘We didn’t see a thing,’ says Hanna.
Then she takes another good look at Mr Bear.
He’s big, he’s strong and...
He owns a shop that sells sweets and ice creams!
The only little problem with him is that wasps make him swell up.

But if that’s the only thing...
‘Mr Bear?’ says Hanna.
‘Yes?’
‘Would you like to marry my mum?’

3

There’s another little problem with Mr Bear.
He laughs way too loud.
Everyone is looking at them.
‘Ooh, that feels so good,’ says Mr Bear.
‘Is your mum as funny as you?’
Hanna thinks about her mum.
Messy hair, puffy eyes.
But that’s mainly on her dad’s birthday.
Most of the time she’s okay.
‘Yes,’ she says.
Mr Bear stares into the distance, thinking.
Hanna and Hamza look at each other.
Is this going to work?
‘Look,’ says Mr Bear, ‘I can’t just marry someone I don’t know.’

‘Then why don’t you come to our place and get to know her?’ says Hanna.
‘My mum’s baked a cake.’
Mr Bear licks his lips.

'I have lots of goodies in my shop, but I don't have any cake.'

'What did you say?' Hanna's mum asks a little later.

'You have to brush your hair and put on some make-up,' says Hanna.

'Because... *who* is coming to visit?'

'Mr Bear, from the kiosk.'

'Hanna, what have you gone and done now?'

'Oh, you know, I just thought it would be fun,' says Hanna.

'Because you're always so sad on this date.'

She thinks it's a good idea not to start talking about getting married right away.

Mum will soon find out for herself what a good match Mr Bear is.

With a sigh, Mum drops down onto the sofa.

'Hanna, I'm sad today, and that's normal.

We should have gone out to buy a cake.

And then gone for a meal together.

And you'd have done a nice drawing for your dad.

But that's not how things are.'

She wipes away a tear.

Then the doorbell rings.

It's Mr Bear!

'Tell him it was all a misunderstanding.'

'He closed his shop, just for us,' says Hanna.

'He does that all the time.

You don't think he sleeps there, do you?'

The bell rings again.

'Mum!' shouts Hanna. 'Just do it!

It's not nice to send Mr Bear away now.'

Hanna's mum looks at the photo.

'What do you say, Jelle?'

But of course, Jelle doesn't say anything.

Then she wipes her cheeks dry.

'Go on, then. Open the door.'
