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Six Nations

by MaryPat Campbell

His mother said Johnny had too many bags to carry, and couldn't Dan his Father leave his beloved rugby just for once and give him a lift to the station? The Six Nations blared in the sitting room. The family knew their father was not to be disturbed during the rugby season.

Dan didn't approve of the namby-pamby attitude his wife took towards their eldest. He was big enough and ugly enough to manage things for himself now. In his third year at Uni, Johnny didn't need to be driven, he was all grown up, he didn't need his dad anymore.

Dan remembered his own father saying the same thing about him in that loud, bitter way he had that disguised what Dan thought were his father's hurt feelings. And here he was doing the same thing.

But Johnny had a way of whinging, Dan thought. A way of looking down on his father as if he was the last person in the world Johnny wanted to spend any time with. As Dan stared at the TV screen, he lost track momentarily of the score. He seethed inside at what he believed was his eldest son's contempt for him, the way he'd laugh and say 'dear old dad'.

They seemed to be greater strangers than before, so much so that Dan could hardly remember when he and Johnny had last kicked a ball around the garden, or gone to the cricket on a Saturday afternoon together. Even further back when together they lay on the sitting room floor building Lego and racing Johnny's Dinky cars up and down the hall. Dan loved singing his favourite songs to his baby boy when Johnny was strapped into his car seat, babbling and singing along happily with his doting father.

Who am I kidding? Dan thought. I can't bear him to know that I miss him when he goes, that I'm jealous and resentful because I didn't get the chances he gets.

Waiting in the kitchen with his mother, Johnny wondered if he ought to get himself to the station. His mother was keen that his Father should drive him, and not her. She'd packed a few packets of his favourite biscuits to stuff into his rucksack at the last minute.

Johnny checked his watch, thirty minutes to the bus station. No sign of his father budging from the TV. He can't wait for me to leave, Johnny thought. He's lost interest in me, doesn't approve of me anymore. He'd rather spend time with the younger kids & do stuff with them. He can't even summon the interest to see me off. I hate when Mum tries to get him to do things for me when it's clear he'd rather not.

Johnny let himself out of the house quietly, kissing his mother on the cheek as he went, telling her not to fret.