

Mieko at Dance Camp

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1.

Today is the first day of Dance Camp. Mieko is really happy for a number of reasons.

Reason number one: They're going to dance a lot.

Reason number two: They're staying overnight.

Reason number three: Mieko and Sofia have planned to sleep next to each other, and Sofia has already found a great spot to sleep!

2.

- Welcome to Dance Camp! says dance teacher Tom.

- An extra warm welcome to Mariama and Magnus, who are new to the group.

Tom smiles broadly at a girl with thin, dark braids and a boy with freckles on his nose.

- And welcome to the grown-ups who are going to help me out here at the camp.

Dad waves eagerly from the group of other grown-ups. Mieko doesn't wave back, even though she's actually really happy that Dad is here. She doesn't much like to sleep away from home alone.

3.

In the room that they are to sleep in, Sofia shows Mieko where she has put her camping mat and sleeping bag.

- You can put yours here, she says, pointing.

Mieko rolls out her mat and is about to get out her sleeping bag when Sofia suddenly taps her arm and points to the door. Mariama, the new girl, is standing in the doorway.

- Maybe we should ask Mariama if she wants to sleep next to us? Sofia asks. No, thinks Mieko, but she can't say that out loud, can she?

Sofia doesn't wait for a reply anyway. She's already on her way over to the door.

4.

- Here! says Sofia, pointing to the other side of her sleeping pad. – You can sleep here beside us.

- Cool, says Mariama, smiling.

- We should go to the dance hall, says Mieko, and is ready to leave together with Sofia, while Mariama is unpacking her sleeping pad and sleeping bag. But Sofia is turned towards Mariama.

- I'll help you get your sleeping spot ready afterwards, she says. – Let's head to the dance hall together.

5.

Tom has prepared a brand new choreography for the dance camp. It looks easy when he goes through it, but both Mieko's arms and her mind get completely tangled up the first few times she tries it. It is difficult. But fun!

- Look! This is right, isn't it? shouts the new boy.

- Well done, Magnus! That's great! Tom says with a smile.

Mieko clenches her jaw. Ugh, she's not getting it right! And then the new boy just gets it immediately?

- Don't give up if you're not getting it right yet! says Tom, as if he has read Mieko's mind. - We're dancing to practice, after all!

6.

When they're done with the first session, Mieko is really tired.

- Food is served! Dad shouts from the kitchen area. – Hot dogs with bled!

Mieko stops. She hopes that no one else noticed how Dad pronounced bread.

But then someone says:

- Hot dogs with salad or hot dogs with bled!

And then all the kids start snickering. Everyone except Mieko.

Dad looks confused.

- Dad! Mieko whispers desperately. - It's not bled! It's BREAD! With an R!

- Aha, BREAD! I get it. Hot dogs with BREAD! says Dad and laughs.

- You see, I can't hear a difference between R and L, as I didn't learn English before I was grown up. But hey, come over here – hot dogs with bled or bread, let's eat!

7.

- So, what did he speak before he learned English?

It's Magnus, the new boy, who talks. – Did he speak ching-chong, or what?

Luckily, Magnus hasn't asked Mieko, and Mieko pretends like she didn't hear him. But then

Hedvig says: - He's Mieko's Dad, maybe she knows?

Mieko freezes.

Magnus shouts in her direction: - Are you from some kind of ching-chong land?

Everyone stops talking. Sofia grabs Mieko's hand and pulls her along towards the tables.

- That's not an OK thing to say, says Sofia. – Forget Magnus! Let's get hot dogs when there's not a line anymore. And later we get to play Base tag outside in the dark! It will be super exciting!

Sofia always makes Mieko feel better. And Mieko loves to play Base tag. Best of all, she likes to guard the base and do the seeking. She's really good at spotting those who are hiding, and quick as lightning at running back to the base before they can reach it.

8.

When they head outside after dinner, it has grown really dark, it's almost a little bit scary, but Mieko shakes off that feeling. She tries to shake off the queasy feeling she has inside her, too. She's at dance camp! She has been looking forwards to it for ages. No one gets to ruin it now!

Mieko's counting, and she'll catch them all!

- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... Mieko counts out loud with her eyes tightly shut.

- ... 28, 29, 30. They who haven't hidden yet, will – count – next!

9.

Mieko scans her surroundings. Wasn't it something moving over there, just around the corner of the house?

She quietly tiptoes towards the corner to see who it is, and just as she thinks that she doesn't dare to go further from the base, everything happens all at once.

From behind the corner, Hedvig peaks out, while Magnus comes running towards the base from behind a car in the parking lot. Mieko doesn't hesitate for a second, she dashes towards the base, gravel flinging from beneath her feet, and even though Magnis is quick, Mieko is quicker. She takes the last step in one huge leap and reaches the can that marks the base, shouting: Magnus at base! Hedvig at base!

10.

As Magnus heads over to the others who have been caught, he lifts his hands, pulling at the corners of his eyes while sticking his tongue out. Mieko is the only one who sees it, but she doesn't have time to care. By now, she has caught almost everyone. She's quick as lightning. She sees everything! Even at night. But she has still not found Sofia.

There! Mieko's sure she saw something move by the shed. She stares into the dark. Everything has grown still again, nothing is moving.

Mieko scouts the area. She just needs to have a slightly better look, then she can catch Sofia at base.

11.

Blonde hair and a pale face peeking around the corner. Yes!

In a flash, Mieke turns to run back to base, but in that moment someone darts past her and heads towards the base at full speed. Mariama is racing from the opposite corner of the shed! She has a head start!

Mieke races after her, but THERE Mariama kicks the can with a loud clang.

12.

- Base freed! She shouts at the top of her lungs.

Everyone cheers! And there comes Sofia, running right past Mieke and over to Mariama. She grabs Mariama's hands, and they jump around, laughing.

They must've planned it! They must've stood behind the shed and planned how Sofia would draw Mieke away from the base, so that Mariama could run from the other side. And it worked. Mieke didn't notice Mariama at the far side of the shed at all.

13.

- It's cheating! Mieke says loudly.

She flings out her words to stop herself from crying. She's not going to cry now, no way.

It's not fair, she should have won. Mieke sees everything! But it was impossible to see Mariama!

- Mariama is so dark that it is impossible to see her in the dark!

14.

Then, Mieke hears someone behind her.

- Mieke! That's not ok to say! Dad uses his stern voice.

- But it's true! says Mieke, and now she starts crying after all.

It's so unfair. Stupid Dad! Who hasn't even learned the difference between bleed and bread!

Mieke runs off, away from dance camp, away from Dad, away from Sofia, away from everyone.

15.

Mieko sits hugging her legs by the side of the road. She's so busy being angry and sad that she doesn't hear that someone is approaching from behind.

- Hi, says Mariama.

What is Mariama doing here? Has she come to tell Mieko that she's mean for saying that Mariama cheated? Mieko does understand that looking a certain way isn't cheating, after all.

But Mariama is just standing there, looking at Mieko.

16.

- I'm sorry! Mieko says after a little while. But she doesn't know what more to say.

Mariama shrugs her shoulders. – It's ok, she says. – It's not like I haven't heard it before.

- But it's not ok, though, says Mieko. – It's not ok at all!

And now she feels that she really, really means it. – I'm so sorry. I'll never say something so stupid again.

Mariama scratches her nose and says: - Maybe it *is* a little bit harder to see me in the dark, but it feels really bad when someone says it like it's my fault.

Mieko nods. She gets it.

17.

- And it's definitely not my fault that you can't beat people to base, says Mariama and smiles.

She continues: - Don't blame me for not catching me. I'm probably just faster than you.

- What, says Mieko. – Are you joking, I'm quick as lightning!

- Oh yeah? If you are quick as lightning, I'm twice as quick as lightning, because I'm quicker than you.

- Oh yeah? We'll see about that, says Mieko, and shouts: - Race you to the sleeping quarters!

18.

- There you are, says Sofia when Mieko and Mariama come running in. Sofia looks at them while they gasp for breath.

- So, are you friends again? she asks.

- We're friends, right? Mariama looks at Mieko, and Mieko nods shyly.

- Come on, let's practice the dance! says Sofia and pulls Mieko and Mariama over to a group who is already practicing dance moves.

19.

- And 5 – 6 – 7 – 8! Magnus says out loud.

He's making big gestures, but a little off-beat, and throws his arms into the next posture without looking. Just as he's making a big, windmill-y gesture, he hits Mariama on the nose so that she lets out a small scream.

- Magnus hit her! shouts Hedvig.

- There, there, says Tom, comforting Mariama.

Everyone gathers around Mariama. Everyone except Magnus.

Mieko looks at him. Is he crying, too?

20.

- I saw that it wasn't on purpose, says Mieko.

Magnus looks at his feet.

- Should I ask Dad to comfort you? He's really good at comforting. Even if he mixes R and L sometimes, she says, smiling carefully.

Magnus shuffles his feet.

- Did it make you sad earlier? When I said ching-chong? And when I made pretend-narrow eyes?

Mieko nods, because it did make her really sad. – I'm ok now, though. And soon Mariama will be ok, too. Look, she's practicing again! Mieko points to the others. – Maybe you can show us the arm gestures at slow speed, because you're really good at them?

Magnus nods, and they join the rest of the group.