

# Jonathan's Soccer Ball

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My name is Jon and I am a shiny, red-and-white soccer ball, flying high with happiness. Jonathan, the best owner in the world, named me Jon because he wanted to give me the first part of his name.

Perhaps you're wondering how a ball can tell a story? I'll tell you how. Jonathon has hugged me and played with me so much, he has given me *feelings* and *thoughts*. That makes me different from other balls. I'm very, very special to Jonathan. Not more important than his Mum and Dad of course. Perhaps he loves them just a *tiny* bit more than me, but he doesn't sleep with them, and he *always* sleeps with me.



That might seem odd because I'm not cuddly like Oscar, Jonathan's teddy bear. In fact, I'm a bit hard for a bed companion, but Jonathan can't stand leaving me on the floor. He needs me right there in bed with him. Oscar sleeps on the other side of the bed, and Jonathan makes sure he lies between us because Oscar and I don't see eye to eye.

Okay, so you're thinking soccer balls don't even have eyes, and teddy bears do. I'm trying to say that Oscar hurts my feelings terribly because he acts like Jonathan loves him more than me. He often nudges so close to Jonathan that he moves over to my side, and that pushes me right off the bed. And, what's more, Oscar just smiles about it!

Well, guess what? One day, finally, I managed to give smiley Oscar just what he deserved!



Then, one evening, something awful happened.

Oscar nudged himself over so *much* when Jonathan was asleep, and Jonathan didn't even *know* I had rolled onto the floor. I felt lonely and terribly uncomfortable all night long on that cold hard floor.



For a long time, it was tricky being in the same bed as Oscar.  
But in the end, we had to become *sort* of friends because Jonathan made Oscar kiss me and apologize.

*Ugh!* I only agreed to Oscar kissing me because I love Jonathan so much.



The first day Jonathan brought me to Evergreen School, the teacher, Mrs. Winterbottom, said Jonathan couldn't keep me on his desk because I would be too *distracting*. Jonathan cried and cried after that. He kept on crying until I thought the whole classroom would fill up with his tears.

Finally, Mrs. Winterbottom said: *"Okay, you can keep your ball next to you, but only if you don't look at it (me) during lessons."*

That got all the other kids upset because *they* wanted to bring something special to school too.

So now, all the kids have a special treasure next to them during class. There are only nine of us in the class, but luckily, the classroom is big, and there's enough room for everyone to have a favorite possession, right there beside them. Playtime in the fields is far more fun now.



Many of the boys, and some of the girls too, bring in different kinds of balls. I have to say, though, I'm by far the most handsome. I was made in a country beginning with P in the Far East, where they make very famous soccer balls. My leather has a special *gleam*. Jonathan tells me that, so I know it's true.

But one day, being such a handsome ball caused a problem. A boy named Arnold (he calls himself *Arnold the Great*), told Jonathan that *his* soccer ball was of a better *quality* than Jonathan's. Now neither Jonathan nor I knew what *quality* meant, but we didn't like the sound of the word, mostly because of Arnold's expression when he said it. His greenish eyes looked distinctly *mean*.

Not only that, Arnold has *enormous* feet – huge enough to kick a ball (including me) to the other end of the world!



Well, Jonathan is a wise boy and he knew that Arnold was just jealous, because *I'm* clearly more sleek and shiny than Arnold's ball. So, Jonathan shrugged and walked away.

But you know what? Arnold didn't like that one bit, precisely because he was the biggest kid, and wasn't used to being ignored. In fact, ignoring him was the *worst thing* anyone could do to him. He ran up to Jonathan, yanked me out of his hands, and kicked me far away with those great big feet of his.





**O**uch! I had never been kicked that hard in my life! I sailed over the green slopes and landed with a big splash in Mr. Pinnacle's pond. Down into a layer of sticky mud I went. It was an *extremely* uncomfortable landing. I was suffering fearfully, and it wasn't even for anything great, like a goal.

I had never been in water like this. Sometimes, Jonathan had kicked me into a puddle on the road, but that was a nice splashy sensation. This feeling, of being immersed in dark water, with my *bottom* touching slimy mud, was *horrible*.

I was all by myself and the silence was dreadful. It was far more awful than being pushed to the floor by Oscar. And, even worse, was wondering if Jonathan would ever find me again! I might still be here, shriveling away to nothing, for years! I began shivering, just at the thought of it!



Jonathan had told me never to hate anyone, but right then, every part of my ball-ness *hated* Arnold. I hoped Jonathan had given him a *huge* punch on the nose, and then stamped on his big feet. I hoped he had stamped so hard, his feet were much shorter now. Perhaps he would never again be able to kick me (or any other ball for that matter).

When I'd finished hating Arnold, I looked around me. I had rolled between two big pieces of wood, so I couldn't float away. Worse still, I was invisible from Jonathan's side of the pond because of those ugly fat logs hiding me.

I *had* to have a plan of rescue, or else, how would Jonathan, or Mrs. Winterbottom, or any of the kids, know where to look? I must give them a sign. But how?



Not too much was living in Mr. Pinnacle's pond because who, on earth, would want to live in such yucky mud?

I looked into the clearer water around my top half. There were some bubbles floating about, but they couldn't help much. Or *could* they? Perhaps if *I* moved a little, I could make bubbles, then Jonathan would know where I was. I'd practiced moving on the floor when Oscar pushed me off. But that was easier because the floor was smooth, not all sticky like this mud. I strained and strained, but I was wedged, and I couldn't make a *single* bubble.

Suddenly, a grey thing, with round eyes and a mouth like an 'O', swam close to me, O...ing and O...ing its big mouth.

"*What the heck are you doing in here?*" it asked. "*This is my corner of the pond! Did you come to steal my insects?*"



When it spoke, lots of bubbles were coming out of its mouth.

*“Please, will you keep doing that?”* I pleaded.

*“Doing what?”* it asked, mouthing more bubbles.

*“Keep making bubbles!”*

*“Why?”* It was swimming around me, swishing its tail.

*“Yes! And keep doing that!”*

*“What?”*

*“Swishing your tail, silly!”*

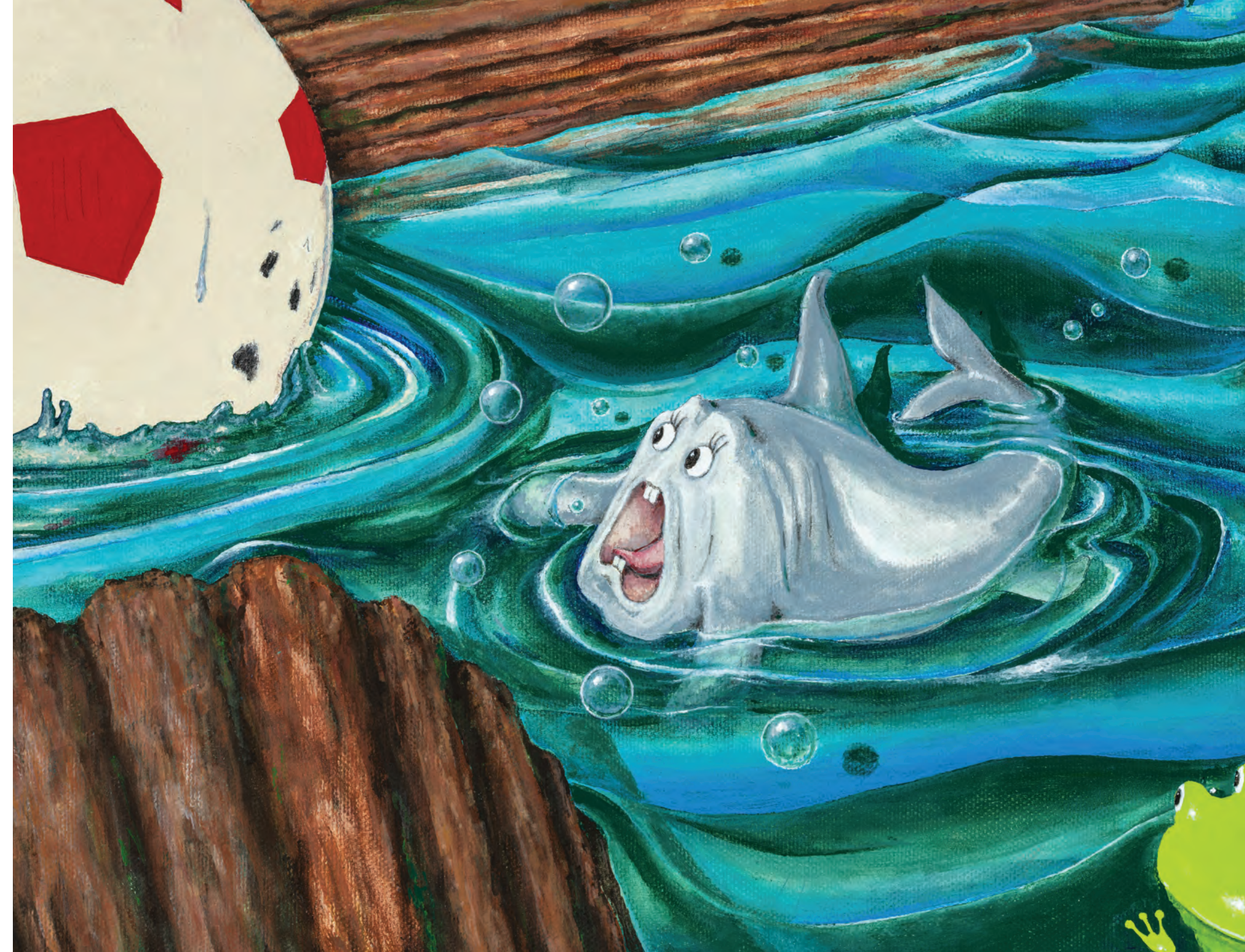
It swung around and glared at me with eyes as round as my whole body:

*“Don’t you “silly” me, you ...whatever you are! I’m Plop, the fish. and I’m never silly.”*

It glared over at a bright green frog at the side of the pond.

*“Not as silly as Bog, anyway. See him? Goggling at us?”*

Plop flipped his tail impatiently at the frog.



*G*'m sorry, Mr. Plop! I'm desperate, and that makes me impolite! Let me introduce myself: I'm Jon, the ball. By the way, can that silly... what's his name – Mr. Bog – make bubbles too?"

"Nah," Mr. Plop snorted, "he just góggles. Now tell me, Jon-ball, don't you love my pond? What could be better – water, mud, a few tasty insects?"

Plop swished around in the direction of the frog.

"Too bad Bog sometimes catches them before me, using that nasty, sticky tongue of his." He flicked his tail at him again.

"I understand how much you love your pond, Mr. Plop," I panted.

"But I'm a ball, and water wrinkles my leather. Besides, I'm lost without my Jonathon."

"Lost? Lost? What does that mean?" Mr. Plop's mouth had opened even wider in surprise.



*Being lost feels terrible, but I'll stop feeling it when I find Jonathan.*

*"Aaah!" Plop bubbled excitedly. "Well, that's easy enough, you sad, lost ball! What side of the logs would you like me to bubble so Jonathon, or whatever he's called, can see us?"*

*"Over there! Oh, thank you, Mr. Plop! How can I repay you for your kindness?"*

*"Just ask that Jonathan of yours to put a few more insects in the pond—the kind I like and Froggie Bog doesn't." He gave a smirk.*

Mr. Plop swam away, thrashing his tail so much that bubbles began nudging me, lifting me up from sticky mud and those uncomfortable logs! My face was almost all out of the water now! I waited. An eternity passed. Oh, where was Jonathan? Balls don't usually cry, but I was close to tears. Then I heard a shout. It was Jonathan's voice! *"I bet that fish is telling us something! That must be where Jon is!"*



And then I heard Mrs. Winterbottom's voice: "You can't go in there, Jonathan; it's muddy. And the water's too deep."

"Yes, but I can, Miss, 'cos I'm taller."

Surely not. Was that Arnold's voice?

There was a loud, squelchy noise. Someone was coming towards me, but I couldn't see who, because the fat logs were in the way.

Then I saw some enormous feet. Oh no! Was the hateful Arnold going to save me?

I watched and waited as the feet, the legs, the waist, came closer.

"I've found it! Here's your ball, Jonathan!"

Arnold's big hands were clutching me. But I felt differently about him now. He was being gentle!

Arnold kept holding on to me and panting as he waded back, through the mud, towards the bank.



And there was my Jonathan, waving, and jumping up and down at the edge of the pond! Even serious Mrs. Winterbottom had a big smile, and Jonathan's friends were yelling:

*"Good job, Arnold! You found it! You found it!"*

Arnold climbed out of the pond and handed me over to Jonathan.

Once again, I was back in the world's most beautiful arms!

*"Thank you for finding Jon, Arnold,"* Jonathan said.

*"I'm sorry I kicked your ball in the pond, Jonathan."*





Arnold's mouth wasn't sneering anymore, and his eyes weren't mean; they even looked a little bit soft.

*"It was wrong of you, Arnold," Mrs. Winterbottom said. "You gave Jonathan quite a fright. Being bigger than the other kids doesn't mean you can be a bully."*

Arnold was looking so ashamed, I thought he might cry.

*"I was angry, Miss, because Jonathan's ball is nicer than mine. But when I saw how scared he was about losing Jon, I wanted to help him."*

*"It's okay, Arnold," Jonathan said.*



Still hugging me, Jonathan walked over to Arnold.

And do you know what that bullyboy did? He held out his arms and pulled me and Jonathan towards him, so I was squashed in a wet, muddy hug between two boys' chests.

It felt weird, but I'm telling you, in that moment, I heard their two hearts, singing away with love and joy.

