

# Carter's Surprise

Carter enjoyed riding the school bus home. The ride home gave him some time to relax after a hectic day of fifth grade. He usually sat alone, and he enjoyed that too. With four siblings he didn't get much alone time.

Sometimes he sat with his younger brother, Jackson, but Jackson was sick at home today. Carter leaned against the window and stretched his legs across the dirty bus floor. He glanced down at his ankles. His pants were getting short again. He liked that. It meant he was getting taller. His dad was over six foot tall and Carter hoped to be even taller than him. So far, though, that didn't seem likely. Most of the boys in his class were taller than him. Some of the girls, too; which wasn't a great thing for any fifth grade boy.

The bus stopped and the tallest boy in his class, Dexter Fisher, stepped off followed by his younger brother, Billy. Their house was the last stop before Carter's house. As the bus pulled away, Carter looked back over his shoulder to watch the boys. Dexter was yelling and waving his hands at his little brother. Billy said something Carter could not hear. Dexter yelled something and gave his younger brother a hard shove and knocked him to the ground.

Carter leaned toward the window to get a better view. Billy was still on the ground and Dexter was walking away. Carter watched as Billy wiped at his eyes. The poor kid was crying.

Carter turned in his seat. He felt nauseous. He hated seeing little kids get picked on. It just wasn't right. The sight of Billy on the ground crying was burned into his memory. He tried to think of something else.

He thought of the model car he was working on at home, a 1967 Corvette. He started building it over a week ago and just finished putting it together last night. Tonight, as soon as he finished his homework, he could start painting the car. That was his favorite part. He already had the perfect color of blue picked out.

He hurried off the bus, ran through his yard, and breezed through the kitchen with a quick hello to his mom. She was making spaghetti. His favorite. It smelled delicious.

He ran up the stairs two at a time and rushed into his room.

"Surprise!" his brother Jackson said, throwing his arms into the air.

"What are you doing in my room? I thought you were sick!"

"I feel better!"

"What's on your face? Are you bleeding?"

"No! I'm not bleeding." Billy wiped at his face. "It's probably just paint. Look! Look what I did!" He pointed at the desk in the corner of Carter's room.

Carter looked down at his desk in horror. His Corvette! Jackson had painted it red. An awful dull shade of red that didn't look good on a car at all. Like the color of Dad's tractor! "Why would you do that?" Carter

shouted.

“I wanted to surprise you!”

Carter felt his heart start to beat faster. His breath was coming faster too. He felt his hands curl into fists. Jackson was saying something to him, but Carter was so angry he couldn't even hear. “What?” he snapped.

“Do you like it? I tried so hard. I barely got any paint on the windows at all. Look! Do you like it?”

Carter looked at his brother. An enormous smile stretched across Jackson's face. Red paint was smeared across his cheek and his forehead. He even had some in his hair. He was still dressed in his pajamas from this morning. Carter imagined Jackson spending the day painting the car. It must have taken him a long time to paint the car. He was horrible at painting. Paint was all over the chrome and the windows. The car was a disaster. After all that time Carter had spent carefully putting it together. Carter took a deep breath and then exhaled. He relaxed his fingers and they unfolded out of a fist.

He remembered Billy Fisher sitting on the ground wiping at his eyes as his big brother Dexter walked away. Carter stepped toward the table where the car was still drying.

“Do you like it?” Jackson asked again.

Carter wasn't sure what to say. He didn't want to lie, but he didn't want to hurt his brother's feelings either. Jackson was only trying to surprise him. He could see that now.

“Do you? Do you like it?” Jackson insisted.

“Every time I look at this car, I'm going to think of you,” Carter said with a smile. And that was the truth.

“Now, we better get that paint off your face before dinner.”

**Questions**

1. Does Carter enjoy his bus ride home?
2. Are some of the girls in Carter's class taller than him?
3. How many siblings does Carter have?
4. What changes Carter's mood from furious to forgiving?