

Too Much Ketchup

Written by The Story Train

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A story about friendship and discovering new things

Scene 1 - Too Much Ketchup

Maggie Mitchell changed out of her soccer uniform and into her Saturday play clothes. It had been a great game ? she even scored the winning goal ? but right now, back home in her bedroom, she could only think of how tired and hungry she was feeling. She fell on her bed and lay there motionless, her stomach growling so loud she was sure her mother could hear it all the way out in the kitchen. Maggie whispered, "Oh please, someone ? someone meaning her mother ? let it be lunchtime soon, or I will surely starve to death."

Just then, and in the nick of time before she was certain she would have expired, she heard a voice call from the kitchen. Maggie slowly lifted her head off the pillow and moaned, "Is that my dear mother's voice?" She listened with all her strength. She heard it again.

"Maggie," her mother called, "come on down for lunch. I've made some fried chicken just for you."

All of a sudden Maggie wasn't tired anymore. She jumped out of bed and dashed to the kitchen. She stopped in front of the refrigerator, smiled, and looked over at her mother. "First things first," she said, and reached in for the ketchup. Maggie sat down at the table with her plate of homemade fried chicken. She opened the ketchup bottle and began to pour and pour and pour, until she couldn't see the chicken anymore. "Now," thought Maggie with a satisfied grin, "I am ready to eat."

Mrs. Mitchell looked down at the plate and shook her head. "Geez, Maggie, have some chicken with that ketchup, why don't you?" she teased. "I don't think you even like my chicken, because that" ? she pointed at Maggie's plate ? "is way too much ketchup."

"Mom, I really love your fried chicken, but now it's perfect!" said Maggie.

"But Maggie, won't you even try just one piece without ketchup?" Mom pleaded.

Maggie insisted, "No way, Mom. I want ketchup, I love ketchup, I NEED ketchup!"

She was so hungry she thought it was the most delicious food she'd ever eaten. "Thanks, Mom," said Maggie, pushing the plate away and running outside to play. She didn't give another thought to what her mother had said about trying food without ketchup. She didn't see anything wrong with using ketchup on all her food.

Scene 2 - Too Much Ketchup

The weekend came, and Maggie and her mom and dad always went out to eat at Luigi's Italian Restaurant. It was in the North End of Boston ? always busy and noisy. The tables were so close together that people barely had enough room to get up and move around, but Maggie liked it there. Everyone was always smiling and friendly, and the food was wonderful, too. Giuseppe, the waiter, always greeted them with a great smile and a warm Italian accent.

"Ah, Il Signor e la Signora Mitchell ? please follow me to your table," said Giuseppe, waving for them to follow him. Giuseppe had traveled all the way from Sicily just to live in the United States. Maggie loved his accent.

"Signora, may I take your order?" said Giuseppe, turning to Mrs. Mitchell.

"Yes, Giuseppe," said Mom, looking at the menu. "I'll have linguini with white clam sauce, please."

"And you, Signore?" said Giuseppe, turning to Dad.

"I'll have the eggplant parmesan," said Dad.

"Ottima scelta ? great choice," said Giuseppe. He turned to Maggie, rolled his eyes, and shook his head. He knew the routine. "And now you, Signorina," Giuseppe paused and took a deep breath. "If you tell me you don't want ketchup today, you would make me so very happy."

"Hmmm," answered Maggie thoughtfully. "I would like a cheeseburger and a side order of potato salad," she paused, "completely covered in ketchup, please." Maggie said this without blinking an eye.

"Mama Mia!" cried Giuseppe, swinging his hands wildly in the air. "Signorina, I will bring you what you ask, but I don't think you're going to like it. You no blame Giuseppe, OK?"

Maggie smiled innocently and nodded yes.

"Grazie, Signorina," said Giuseppe, turning away in disbelief.

"Oh, Giuseppe, one more thing," said Maggie, calling him back before he could leave. "I would like a hot fudge sundae for dessert, please." Maggie paused thoughtfully. "But you can just bring out the whole bottle of ketchup for that."

Quickly turning away from Maggie's table, Giuseppe muttered in Italian, "Americani. Io non capisco. Sono molto matti." Then Maggie could hear "Mama Mia, Mama Mia" echoing from the kitchen.

Scene 3 - Too Much Ketchup

The week began just like any other: get up and go to school, go to soccer practice, come home, do homework, go to bed, repeat. More than anything, Maggie looked forward to lunchtime with her friends at school, even though they could never understand how much she liked ketchup on her food. Maggie and her friends were in the third grade ? a status which gave them the privilege of sitting at any table they wanted in the whole cafeteria. They could even ask the first and second graders to move if they wanted to, but they never did. Still, it was nice to know they could.

Today was a day like any other. The girls in Mrs. Brooks' third grade class ? Maggie, Julie, Liz, Mary, and Catherine ? sat in the cafeteria eating their lunches. "Maggie," said Julie, glaring at Maggie's lunch, "why do you have to use ketchup on everything?!"

"You know why, Julie," said Maggie, trying to explain. "I just love ketchup on all my food. Here, why don't you try some with your lunch?" Maggie handed the bottle to Julie.

"No way," said Julie, horrified. "Ketchup is gross. Keep it away from me!"

Then Catherine asked, "Maggie, do you use ketchup on chicken soup?"

Liz asked, "On chicken sandwiches?"

Even Mary asked, "On cereal, bacon, cinnamon toast, and pork chops?"

Maggie's face turned red with embarrassment. "Yes," she said softly, looking down at her plate. "On everything. I love ketchup on all my food."

With that, Julie, Catherine, Mary, and Liz burst out laughing. Maggie pretended to ignore them, busy eating her lunch: a tuna fish and ketchup sandwich. All of a sudden Julie shot Maggie a disgusted look and said, "That is a terrible thing to eat. Nobody I know eats like you. I'm moving."

Julie grabbed her lunch tray and moved to the next table. Then all the other girls moved too. Maggie sat alone, eating her lunch in silence. She told herself she was glad they moved, because now she could eat her lunch in peace.

Scene 4 - Too Much Ketchup

The next day in school, Mrs. Brooks started the day with her usual greeting. "Good morning, boys and girls." But then she said, "We have a new girl in class. Her name is Amanda Ranger. She's moved here from far away ? a state called California. Class, say good morning to Amanda."

At lunchtime Amanda sat in the back of the cafeteria by herself. Maggie sat alone too, because her friends were still ignoring her. She ate her lunch ? a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with ketchup ? and tried to keep from looking at Julie's table. Even though she kept her head down she could still hear her old friends giggling and whispering. She tried to ignore this too. Then Maggie accidentally looked up from her sandwich. She saw Amanda, the new girl, waving at her from across the cafeteria. Maggie waved a small wave back. There was silence at Julie's table as Amanda stood up, picked up her tray, and walked over to Maggie's table.

"Hi, I'm Amanda. Can I sit with you?" she asked.

Maggie looked up and grumbled, "Sure, no one else wants to."

She could hear the other girls whispering but she didn't care. Amanda sat down. Maggie looked at Amanda's lunch and asked, "What are you having?"

"Mmmm, my favorite ? peanut butter and jelly with ketchup. It's delicious," said Amanda, smiling.

"Me too," said Maggie, and she showed Amanda her sandwich. They both laughed.

The girls at Julie's table started whispering again. Then they all stood up to go out to the playground. As they passed by, Julie said, "Look at this, everyone. Maggie has a new friend and guess what ? she likes ketchup on her sandwiches too." The other girls looked down at Maggie and Amanda.

"Oh, leave us alone, Julie," said Maggie.

"Don't worry, Maggie," said Catherine. "We don't want to talk to people who eat such weird stuff anyway."

"Yeah," said Mary. "We have better things to do. Come on, let's go outside before we miss recess." The girls ran out to the playground.

Amanda was puzzled. "What's their problem?" she asked Maggie.

"Oh, they're just mad that you sat with me instead of them. I'm glad you sat with me. Come on ? let's go outside until the bell rings." Amanda and Maggie ran outside together. Maggie knew right then this was the start of a great friendship.

Scene 5 - Too Much Ketchup

A few weeks went by. Maggie and Amanda always sat together at lunchtime. They talked about school and about being friends. One day Maggie said, "Amanda, it would be fun to play sometime after school. Want to come over to my house? I asked my mother and she said Saturday would be a good day."

"Sure," said Amanda. "I'll ask my mother and tell you tomorrow."

The school day ended. "See you tomorrow, Amanda," said Maggie. "And make sure you ask your mother about Saturday."

"I will, Maggie," said Amanda. "See you tomorrow."

The next day Amanda told Maggie that her mother said yes. They exchanged phone numbers so their mothers could talk and make the arrangements. The school week seemed to drag by as Maggie and Amanda awaited their playdate on Saturday.

Finally, Saturday arrived. The doorbell rang at exactly 11:00 am. Maggie yelled, "She's here!" and ran to open the front door. Mrs. Mitchell followed behind. Maggie opened the door and there, in real life, was her new best friend Amanda Ranger ? and her mother.

"Hi Amanda!" said Maggie.

"Hello, Mrs. Ranger. This is Maggie, and I'm her mother, Lucy," said Mrs. Mitchell.

"It is very nice to meet you, Lucy ? please call me Joyce," said Mrs. Ranger. "And this is my daughter, Amanda."

With that, Maggie and Amanda ran off to Maggie's room. "Let's go check out my toys, Amanda," said Maggie.

"Sure, let's go," said Amanda.

"Would you like to come in, Joyce?" asked Mrs. Mitchell.

"Sure, but just for a few minutes. I have to pick up my oldest daughter from swimming practice," said Mrs. Ranger.

The time seemed to fly for Maggie and Amanda. They played with Barbies, colored, and read some books. Maggie looked at Amanda and asked, "Are you getting hungry yet?"

"You know, I think maybe I am," said Amanda.

"I think it must be about lunchtime," said Maggie, "because I'm getting really hungry."

Just then Mrs. Mitchell called from the kitchen. "Maggie and Amanda, it's lunchtime!"

Scene 6 - Too Much Ketchup

Mrs. Mitchell was already out of the kitchen and heading to her home office. Maggie and Amanda sat with their stomachs growling, staring at a meal with no ketchup in sight. The hunger was too much. Amanda picked up the first chip and ate it. Maggie watched, then did the same.

"Hmm, that wasn't so bad," said Amanda.

Then Maggie took a bite of her grilled cheese sandwich. Then so did Amanda. "Yummy," said Amanda.

"This is really good," said Maggie. "And I'm really hungry."

"Me too," said Amanda.

"I don't remember the last time I had lunch without ketchup on it," said Maggie.

"Me either," said Amanda.

"I guess it wasn't so bad," said Maggie thoughtfully. "Maybe we should try it again sometime."

"Yeah," said Amanda, "but I don't think I could have done it without you. I'm glad we're best friends."

"I am too," said Maggie. "Are you done? Want to go play some more?"

"Yes! Let's go," said Amanda.

Maggie and Amanda had so much fun that day. It was the first of many wonderful days they would share together as best friends. They learned that life is a lot easier when you have a best friend to share things with.

The End