***Going Up* by Robert Swindells**

**Part 1**

It was going to be the most exciting day of my life when Barfax Town played Lincoln City away in the last game of the season. If we won, Barfax would be promoted to the First Division for the first time since my dad was a kid. The whole town buzzed with it for a fortnight. You could feel the tension, just walking through the streets.

We had our tickets and seats on the coach. Dad and me, I mean. We never went to away matches but we were off to this one, no danger. Part-time supporters Dale always calls us, but it’s not that. Dad works Saturday mornings so it’s impossible for him to get away in time. He’d got special permission this time though, like a lot of other guys in Barfax.

Dale’s my brother. He’s a red-hot Town supporter. Goes to every match, but not with Dad and me. He’s sixteen and part of the Ointment. The Ointment are the Barfax headbangers, feared by every club in the land according to him. Dad reckons they’re a bunch of tossers and Dale should kick ‘em into touch but he won’t. Dead loyal to Lud, see? Lud Hudson, leader of the Ointment and cock of the Barfax Kop.

Was, I should say. Was loyal, till all that stuff went down at Lincoln. A right mess, that was. Total bummer. If you’re not doing anything special, I’ll tell you all about it.

First thing was, Dad lost his half day off. Big job came in at work and that was that. ‘Sorry, ‘Tel,’ he goes. ‘Can’t be helped.’

My name’s Terry but everybody calls me Tel. And yes, I know I should’ve said, ‘Ah well, it’s only a game,’ but I didn’t. I went ballistic instead. Well, this was Thursday, right? Two flipping days before the match and I’d been building up to it for a fortnight.  
‘S’not fair,’ I screeched. ‘Everyone else is off, why not me? Our Dale’s going.’

And that’s when I got this brilliant idea. I could go with Dale, couldn’t I? I eyeballed Dad through my tears. ‘Why can’t *Dale* take me- he’s my brother, isn’t he?’ You could see he wasn’t keen. Dad, I mean. He sighed, pulled a face.

‘Our Dale…he’s not reliable, Tel. It’s those headbangers he knocks around with I wouldn’t feel easy in my mind…’

*Easy in your mind?* Wow, did I let rip. What about my mind? What about I’ve been looking forward to this match for two weeks? Why should I stay home while all my mates’re there, shouting for the Town? They’ll show off, Monday. Laugh at me. I won’t dare show my face at school.

And he gave in. Against his better judgement, he said, but I didn’t care. I was over the moon.

Our Dale wasn’t. He went ape shape. ‘Tel?’ he yelps when Dad mentions it. ‘Drag our *Tel* along? You’re joking. My mates. Lud…I’ll be a laughingstock, Dad. They’ll *crucify* me.’

Poor old Dad. Not only was he missing the match himself he was getting all this grief from the two of us as well. Don’t think I’ll have any kids when I grow up. Anyway, he lays into our Dale, tells him at sixteen it’s time he started talking a bit of responsibility and all that, and in the end the big plonker agrees to take me. No choice really.

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**Part 2**

So. The big day rolled round at last, and at half eleven there I was in my Town scarf and cap, trotting at my brother’s heels towards the coach park. He was going fast on purpose, but I wasn’t bothered. I’d have stuck with him somehow if he’d been Lynford flipping *Christie*. The road was crammed with folk in scarves and caps, all heading the same way. I bet most of ‘em had never been to a match before in their lives.

You should’ve seen the coach park. Talk about seething. There must’ve been at least twelve coaches, and that’s not counting all the people who were going by train or car. Dale heads straight for the Ointment coach. They don’t have their own, I don’t mean that, but they must’ve planned in advance to take one over because they were in a mob by the door, shouting and laughing, stopping other folk from getting near. I don’t suppose many people fancied travelling with them anyway.

‘Hey up, Dale- started a day nursery, have you?’ A great husky guy in black, studded leather looks from Dale to me and back to Dale.

My brother grins sheepishly. ‘Naw, just minding our Tel for the day. You know how it is.’  
‘You mean…Tel here’s travelling with *us*?’  
‘Well, yeah, just this once. My old man…’  
‘Sod your old man. What if…?’  
‘Hey, mind your language, Lud. I’ll just have to…you know…stay out of it if it happens, that’s all.’  
‘Stay *out* of it?’ He scowled at my brother. Others were chuckling, nudging one another. I wished Dad was with us.  
‘Now listen here, my son. You stay out today, you’re *out,* geddit? Ointmentdon’t *choose* when to rumble. Ointment’s there for its mates, for the *Town*, see? Town pride is what it’s all about. You think about that all the way down., son, ‘cause there ain’t no *nannies* in the Ointment.’

He was great, that Lud. I mean, I know he was a thug, but you should’ve seen how he controlled those headbangers. They worshipped him. Nobody else could’ve done it.

It was terrific, that coach ride. See- to really enjoy a match there’s got to be atmosphere, and those guys really knew how to build atmosphere. It was the jokes and the songs, especially the songs. What they did was, they started yelling for the kids in various parts of the bus to give them a song. You know- *back seat back seat sing us a song, back seat- sing us a song.* The kids on the back seat would sing a song, then it’d be, front end front end sing us a song- and so on. Just after Doncaster we ran over a dog, and like a flash they crowded up to the back window going, *dead dog dead dog sing us a song*- horrible I know, but magic too. I’ve never felt so fired up in my life.

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**Part 3**

We got to Lincoln just after one. The police were waiting to escort the Town fans, but Lud knew an alleyway and the Ointment slipped into it. Dale had ignored me on the coach, and he ignored me now. I had to run to keep up as they negotiated the alley and headed for a pub they knew was opposite the ground. I’d never been to a pub. I didn’t know kids could. I plucked at Dale’s sleeve. ‘I can’t go in there. I don’t want to’.  
‘Shut it, kid. You’re with me, you go where I go. Come on.’

The place was packed. Smoky. They barged in, shouting, and swearing, intimidating customers into making room for them. Nobody took any notice of me; it was like I wasn’t there. All these bodies jostling, shoving me around. I couldn’t see over them. It was taking me all my time to keep from falling. I was sweating like a pig and the smell of the place made me feel sick.

After a bit they found some seats- I think people left to get away from us- and Dale put me on a bench between two of the guys. He’d got me a Coke and some crisps. I thought, this is better. It’s going to be all right now. They were talking about the match. Next season in the first division. Cheering and laughing, slurping pints. Dale had given over telling them to mind their language. I sat there and tried to be part of the Ointment.

It might have been ok if a crowd of Lincoln fans hadn’t showed up. Twenty past two and in they came in their colours, roaring. They knew we were there, and the Ointment had been expecting them. They leapt up, overturning chairs, knocking glasses and beermats on the floor, surging towards their challenges. In a second, I went from being crammed in to having the whole bench to myself. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do. You’re with me you go where I go. Was I meant to join the fight?

It was a fight, over there by the door. A terrible fight. Crashing and yelling and the sound of things breaking. The customers had fled out the back. There was just the fight, and the guy behind the bar on the phone, and me. I couldn’t move. I sat there wishing I’d stayed home. I didn’t care about the match anymore, I just wanted to be somewhere familiar. Somewhere safe.

There was a noise, over the noise of fighting. Sirens. The Ointment and the Lincoln lads crammed the doorway, struggling to get out of the pub while continuing to knock hell out of one another. I looked for Dale but couldn’t see him. He’d forgotten me. I was alone in a city I didn’t know. A city full of enemies.

Suddenly the pub was empty. A guy charged over a sea of broken glass, aimed a kick at a youth in the doorway and the pair of them swayed snarling out of sight. I slipped off the bench and ran to the door, yelling for my brother. Two police cars stood at the kerb, blue lights flashing. The fight was a few metres away down the street. A woman somewhere screamed.

Dogs came out of a white van. Police dogs on leads, pulling their handles towards the battle. The fighters broke and ran, all except one who stood bent over, blood pouring from between the fingers he’d clamped to his face. It wasn’t Dale. I started in the direction the fight had gone because I didn’t know what else to do. I had my ticket, but I couldn’t remember where the coaches were picking us up after. How could I watch a soccer match, knowing I was lost a hundred miles from home?

It was then I heard my name. ‘Terry? What’re you doing here? Where’s your dad?’ I turned, weak with relief. It was Popo, Dad’s mate, with Danny his son, same age as me.

I shook my head. ‘Dad couldn’t come. Work. I’m with Dale, but he’s…’ I gestured towards the dog handlers. ‘He’s somewhere, fighting.’  
‘Oh, I see. Oh dear. Well, you’d better come with us, I think. Never know when Dale might…got a ticket, have you?’  
‘Yes.’ I got it out, showed him. I’d never been so pleased to see anyone in my life.  
He nodded and smiled. ‘Come on then. We’ll see Dale inside, I expect.’

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**Part 4**

We didn’t though. Popo sat me and Danny on a rail so we could see over people’s heads, and all through the match I kept looking round for my brother, except the last ten minutes when it was too nail-biting and I forgot. They were torture, those last ten minutes. We seemed to be heading for a goalless draw- missing out on promotion by two rotten points- when a Lincoln player fouled Billy Watson and the ref awarded Town a free kick just outside the box. Watson took it himself and it was a beauty, swerving round the end of their wall and ricocheting off the underside of the bar into the top right-hand corner of the net. Half a centimetre higher and it’d have bounced out. You should’ve heard us roar. You probably did- it’s only a hundred miles after all. Anyway, there were ten minutes left and they chucked everything at us. I’m not kidding- even their goalie had a shot. Well, they’d nothing to lose and everything to gain, but it was no use. Our lads hung on and that’s how we went up.

Popo drove me home. Danny and I clamped our scarves in the windows, so they flapped in the slipstream all the way up the A1.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that Dale didn’t make it home that night, and poor Luke didn’t make it at all. Somebody stabbed him and he died in hospital without ever knowing the result of the match. None of the Ointment saw the game. By the time Watson swerved into Division One they were all down the police station being charged. It was Sunday lunch time when our Dale turned up. He’d come by train, and he was breathing funny owing to bruised ribs. Dad had intended giving him hell for leaving me, but he looked so rough he let him stagger off to bed.

Monday teatime we’re all in the front room watching telly. Town on an open bus getting a civic reception, but when the chairman comes on our Dale gets up and leaves the room because he knows what he’s going to say. Naturally, he starts by regretting Luds’ tragic death, but then he says, ‘Those youths who brawled on the streets of Lincoln last Saturday are not our supporters. They have no share in our triumph and are not welcome on our terraces. We are a First Division club with First Division fans. There is no place in our ranks for scum.’

Anyway, all this was last season. This season he’s a different guy. He goes to every match same as before, only he doesn’t stand with the Ointment. He doesn’t’ stand with me and Dad either, but that’s alright. He’s grow q121n, see? Just like Barfax Town.