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On this extremely cold night, I have packed my bag to bulging, extra woollies, thermos of hot tea, chocolate biscuits (two packets, enough for all), paper, pens, regalia.

This is a big game, a resurgent Geelong, a splendid Collingwood. The black hulk of the MCG is seething with boisterous folk in stripy jumpers, their huge murmur rolling over the football ground. Vivid green grass is spotted with seagulls, all sparkling in the brilliant white beams of the light-towers, in the crisp cold and the clean night.

My friends and I find seats right at the top of the southern stand, some wag will always make a joke about loss of oxygen at altitude. Haha. Yes. Shut up you fag. Who's going back down for food?

I am involved in the *Record*-shuffling-bag-shoving-banter of settling-in, when I feel a small hand fold the edge of my jacket onto my lap as the empty seat clicks down beside me. It is Tianna, arriving with her Grandmother to see her first ever game of football. With her small dark head and serious eyes she has the look of a nighttime marsupial pulled into the light. A curious stillness surrounds her. She wears a pink duffle coat over her tiny Collingwood jersey.

Tianna leans forward and peers down at the ground: 'Can you see?' she asks me. 'Ah, yes,' I say, 'pretty much. Can you?' 'Not really', she says. 'Is that Collingwood?' pointing to the men doing warm ups, hopping and jumping together across the ground. 'No', I say, 'that's Geelong. Geelong have stripes that go across, Collingwood have stripes that go up and down'. 'Where's Collingwood?' she asks. 'Collingwood haven't come on yet', I say. 'Where will they come on from?' 'I'm not sure', I say, 'maybe over there.'

Once the game starts Tianna becomes interested in who is winning, which leads to an interest in scoring. I point out the numbers hung on the fence way down on the ground opposite us. Confusingly, these numbers are different from both those on the television screen hung above our heads, and those on the big video screen at the end of the ground. I do my best to explain how a goal is equal to six points and then how a behind is equal to one point, and that when you add all of these up you get the score, but then, that there are different ways of writing down the score. I don't do all that well in the explanation. Next I attempt to elucidate how if the ball goes between the two big posts in the middle it's a goal but if it goes between the middle one and the smaller one at the end it's a point. She frowns. 'What middle?' she asks. I cannot answer. 'When everybody screams you get a point', she observes. 'Well, yes' I agree, 'that's another way you might look at it'. 'Where's Nathan Buckley?' she asks. 'Um', I peer: 'over there'. 'Where?' 'He's walking, now he's running across the grass, way over there'. 'Where?' 'It's

hard because he's moving around. He's running back towards us now, but further in...near the middle...' 'Why do they let birds in?' she asks. 'Well, they just come in through the sky', I say distracted, still trying to keep track of Bucks. Like pointing at stars.

I show her the football *Record* and how I mark in it who kicks the goals. 'You give them a tick when they get a goal?' she confirms, licking chocolate biscuit crumbs off her fingers. 'Yes', I say. 'A tick?' she screws up her face as I mark in a snap by Leon Davis. 'Well, it's a mark', I say, munching on another biscuit myself. 'That says 11', she says. 'Well no, um, hang on', I say, chewing and swallowing, 'it's not 11, it's two. It looks like 11 but every time they kick a goal I do a little mark like that, to show that they kicked one, and then I do another one, and then another one. It's called making a tally'. I demonstrate in the margin: mark mark mark. She frowns.

'Who got that point?' she asks, when everybody screams again. 'Leon got another goal!' I cry, my pen poised. 'Let me find Leon on the list!' Tianna runs her finger down the page. She is not a very good reader, but she can pick out the capital letters of each name, and then slowly sound out the rest. The time this takes however is at odds with the speed at which scoring shots are being made. Feeling the pressure she starts to guess at the names. All players with a prominent D mysteriously become Dylan and some excellent variations of team favourites are coined, including: Aladdin Didak, Blake Cinderella, Blondie Holland and Paul (Lucy) Licuria. My friends and I think this is hilarious. These names will stick.

Tianna and I discover we have the same starsign, Aries. We chat and laugh together right throughout the long game. After the final siren my friends and I stand up to sing the club song but Tianna and her Grandmother turn to leave, picking their way along the row of emptying seats. At the aisle she turns back. We look at each other until her Grandmother tugs on her hand, but neither of us waves or smiles. It is too sad. Then they descend, melting into that mad crowd.

On this cold night at the MCG Tianna threw out tendrils that will forever fix her to the currents of the football ground. She curled about them as they roared and whipped through her: space scale stripes points marks screams screens teams birds coats hats bags ticks tallies speed lists names tales jokes tastes laughs loss song stars and the dear distant certainty of the captain's body.

Idiots will never understand this but without her: night, star, bird, little girl, without Tianna, there would be no football game at all.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Margaret Trail.