

Eli - Season 1, Episode 2

# The Touch of True Friendship

*Written and produced by Reactout Studios*

## Part 1: The Lunchtime Mix-Up

Eli dashed out for lunch with his mates. Eli, with his tousled brown hair flopping into his wide blue eyes, loved turning everyday moments into epic quests. His best buddy Jamie, with curly black hair bouncing like springs and round glasses that slid down his nose, was always ready for a laugh. They'd been friends forever, sharing silly jokes and wild ideas.

The bell just rang for lunch, and the playground exploded with shouts and laughter. Kids dashed everywhere—some swinging on monkey bars that creaked like old doors, others kicking balls that thumped against the ground. The air smelled of fresh-cut grass and peanut butter sandwiches from open lunch boxes. Eli and Jamie loved playing touch rugby, a fast ball running game to score tries and avoid getting tagged by the other team. "Hey, Jamie! Let's join the game," Eli called, his voice bubbling with excitement. Jamie grinned, pushing up his glasses. "Bet! You know I got that 1-2 step!"

They joined a group of boys from their class, Ben and Sam. The teams lined up on the grassy field. Under the blue summer sky, the sun was out in full heat. This was gonna get sweaty... Fast. Eli's team had the ball first. The game tapped off with a quick pass, and Eli caught it, looked up to see Ben, on the other team coming to tag him quick! He darted left, then right, dodging tags with speedy steps. "Eli!" Jamie yelled. He was open to run the ball. Eli spun the ball to Jame. "Go, Jamie, go!" he shouted.

Jamie caught it smoothly. He looked forward, searching for a path between the defenders to the tryline. He found a gap between Ben and Sam and stepped toward it. But oh no! Ben and Sam rushed him like a stampede of bulls. In a rush of panic, Jamie retreated backward but it wasn't enough. They were going to tag him! Hoping to keep the ball alive, Jamie flung the ball forward—straight back to Eli! But in touch rugby, you can't pass forward; it's against the rules! Eli knew it, and the kids on the other team started protesting - "Forward pass! Turnover!".

The other team grabbed the ball, and Eli's team groaned. "What was that, Jamie?" a kid grumbled. Jamie's cheeks turned red like ripe apples. He drooped his head, knowing he stuffed up. If he'd just held the ball and got tagged, his team would have to restart, but still have the ball on attack.

But now the game switched to defense. Eli's team spread out, arms ready like eagle wings. Sam had the ball and was zipping like a bee. Sam ran at Jamie then faked left, then zoomed

right—right past Jamie! "Try!" The other team cheered as they scored. Eli's team slumped. "Come on, Jamie, he was yours!!" teased Ben, laughing meanly. Sam joined in, "Yeah, you got smoked by me! The speedster!" The boys pointed and giggled, their words stinging like tiny bee stings. Jamie stood there, feeling pretty stink. He'd let his team down on attack, then again on defense.

## Part 2: Sparks and Stories

Eli could see his friend was hurt. He needed someone to stick up for him and fight off the bullying. But to stand up for Jamie meant to go against the bullies and make himself the target of their ridicule and banter.

Eli's tummy twisting like a pretzel. He wanted to say something—Jamie was his best friend, after all! But the words stuck in his throat like sticky gum. The teasing boys were louder, and Eli felt shy, like a turtle hiding in its shell. He just stood there, shuffling his feet in the grass, pretending to tie his shoe. Jamie glanced at Eli, hoping for backup, but Eli looked away. The bell rang, ending lunch, and everyone scattered like leaves in the wind. Jamie trudged back to class alone, his shoulders drooping, feeling deflated and like this friend didn't care. "How could Eli just watch?" he thought. When Jamie arrived to Mrs McClean's English class, he chose to sit in a different spot than usual. Away from Eli. The afternoon class dragged and the boys were uncharacteristically quiet and disconnected from the lesson.

Eli and Jamie walked home together after school, a light breeze kept them cool in the afternoon heat as they walked under the shadow of trees that followed the footpath. Eli tried to act normal, chatting about a funny doodle he'd made in class—a banana spaceship with wiggly alien arms. But Jamie couldn't hold it in anymore. He stopped under a shady oak tree, his face turning red like a stop sign. "Ben and Sam were teasing me like crazy, and you just stood there! You're supposed to be my best friend. Why didn't you stick up for me?"

Eli blinked, surprised, he stood stunned like a possum caught in headlights. Jamie was talking about the touch game at lunch. Eli's own cheeks flushed "What? I didn't know what to do! Those guys are always like that". Avoiding blame, Eli continued to deflect, "It's not a big deal. You messed up the pass first, anyway!" The words tumbled out before Eli could stop them. Jamie now felt like Eli, his best friend, was on Ben and Sam's side. Jamie's eyes widened with hurt behind his glasses. "Not a big deal? And now you're blaming me? Some friend you are, aye!"

Jamie turned away and hid himself behind the oak tree. He slumped down and sat with his back to the tree: isolated, hurt and deflated.

Refusing to feel responsible, Eli shouted around the tree: "Well, if you're gonna be mad about it, fine! Maybe we don't need to hang out so much!". With that, Eli stormed off home walking the remainder of the journey, alone.

His tummy twisted with regret. But his stubborn mind whispered that Jamie was overreacting. Deep down, though, he missed his buddy's goofy grins and shared adventures. What if they never fixed this? The thought buzzed in his head like a pesky fly.

## Part 3: Questionable Dinner

As dinnertime arrived, Eli's dad noticed his son looking a bit unsettled at the table. "How'd school go today?" he asked, scooping another forkful of potato salad from his plate.

"Well..." Eli began hesitantly, "at touch today, Jamie got teased by some of the boys because he lost the ball and let a try through. Now he's mad at me! But I didn't make fun of him. It's not my fault—I wasn't the one who threw a forward pass or missed a touch."

"Sounds like Jamie's feelings were hurt," Dad observed gently.

Eli fell silent, letting a chunk of potato slip off his fork. His dad was right, but it was tough to see beyond his own frustration. After a pause, Dad added, "What would you want your best friend to do if you were in Jamie's shoes?"

Eli pondered that for a moment.

Finally, he looked up with a sigh. "I'd want him to stick up for me... I guess. Or at least say something to make me feel better." Dad nodded encouragingly, setting down his fork. "Did you stick up for Jamie? Make him feel better?" – the questions were like a splash of ice cold water to Eli's face. No – he hadn't stuck up for Jamie, or made him feel better. Eli began to understand why Jamie would be upset with him.

Before bed, Eli's Dad joined him in his bedroom for prayers. He read Eli a passage from the Bible. Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." As Eli thought about the scripture in his own life, he felt like God was saying to him that he should be strong and courageous for his friend. To not be afraid of bullies like Sam and Ben and know that he won't be alone when he does so because God is on his side.

## Part 4: Courage on the Field

Friday lunchtime arrived at school, the sports field bursting with energy under yet another hot sun soaked sky. Kids laughed and ran, the air filled with the thump of balls and the squeak of sneakers. Eli spotted Jamie sitting under the shade of a tree. He pulled together the courage to walk over. Eli's heart began to race as he approached.

Jamie looked up, his curly hair tousled by the breeze, but his face was still stormy. "What do you want?" Jamie asked, crossing his arms. Eli took a deep breath and the words began tumbling out like a waterfall. "I'm really sorry about the touch game—and our fight. I should have stuck up

for you when Ben and Sam were teasing. You're my best friend, and I let you down. I was scared, but that's no excuse. From now on, I promise to have your back, no matter what." Jamie's eyes softened a bit behind his glasses, but he hesitated. "You mean it?" Eli nodded firmly, holding out his fist for a bump. "Absolutely. Friends forever?" Jamie paused, then grinned a little and bumped back. "Bet." Eli beamed. "Come on! We've got a score to settle."

Eli and Jamie joined the touch game on the sports field. Sam called out "Look who's back—Ready to get stepped again aye?" he began to laugh mockingly. The words aimed to cut the confidence from Jamie. "Whatever Sam, my grandma could step better than you! And she's got one leg!" Eli laughed. That made Jamie smile. "Whatever egg" Sam replied with a smirk.

Ben tapped off and passed the ball out to Sam. Like last time, Sam ran at Jamie then faked left. Remembering the move from last game, Jamie anticipated the step right and tagged Sam on the step. "Touch!" Jamie yelled.

Sam, not expecting to be caught, became flustered and quickly passed the ball back to Ben. "Touch and pass!" Eli yelled victoriously. Passing the ball after being touched, isn't allowed and means the ball is handed over to the other team.

Without thinking twice, Eli tapped the ball and shot off towards Ben. Jamie ran in support. As Ben drew into Eli to tag him, Eli passed the ball out to Jamie and set him up to score an uncontested try.

Jamie and Eli had the biggest smiles on their faces as they high-fived on their teamwork. Just then the school bell rang. It was time to head back into class. "You can be on my team next Jamie" - Ben proclaimed as they packed up. It was quite the change in attitude from Ben. "I play on Eli's team" Jamie replied. Overhearing, Eli smiled. Picking up their school bags, the two friends walked together heading toward Mrs McClean's classroom for the final period of the day.

Eli was proud of himself. He'd shown courage to confront Jamie and apologies. He'd stood up for his friend amongst his peers and he'd helped his friend regain his confidence in touch. His dad's voice echoed in his head reading Joshua 1:9 from the bible "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." - Today, this verse had helped Eli make a world of difference for Jamie.