



**PROOF**

*The  
Fields*







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*Kevin  
Maher*



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Dedication (to come)







ONE





When Jack died I was real young, younger than I am now, and I said, in a temper, that I would never let it happen again. Jack was our cat. A dark brown Burmese fella, with nippy teeth, grabby scratchy claws and loud wheezy breaths that rattled through him in a strange sing-songy chorus as he tottered about on unsteady paws. He was also the first and only time that we tried, as a family, to have a pet. And when he arrived there was a big hulloaloo among the girls. They were all pulling and shoving each other, with a bit of scratching too, all desperate to have a go. Kissing and cuddling and yanking him under the covers, and chasing him round the couch until he hid in the corner and did a pee under the coffee table that drove Dad completely wild. That fecking cat! he said, gritting his teeth and pulling his fingers into a fist as if he was going to punch to death a six-week-old fluff bundle.

Jack's wheezing, from day one, got louder and louder, and by the end of the first week it had turned into full-on flu. The vet said that he possibly had it all along, that the breeder, an ancient fella from County Cavan, was probably a bit of a shark, and that Jack might actually die instead of getting better. This scared the girls no end. And that, combined with all the snotty green drippy

stuff pouring from his eyes and nose, and the way he'd suddenly sneeze and blast it outwards and right into your face, made them run like mad whenever he appeared in the room. And it made Dad want to kill him even more.

I was the youngest, and I was the one who kept nagging Mam for a pet in the first place, so it was my job to be the cat-nurse. Which meant chasing Jack up the stairs with some cotton buds, wiping all the mucus away, and then bringing him into the bathroom and holding him over a hot bath so that he could breathe in the steam that was supposed to clear away all the hardened snot in his lungs that was causing the trouble in the first place. He hated this bit. And no matter how many times we did it, and no matter how many times I finished it up with a cuddle in a towel and a treaty piece of squashed sardine from my fingertips, he always thought that I was doing it for the hell of it, or because I was mental vicious, and was going to chuck him into the boiling bathwater for a laugh. He'd go scrapey crazy on my hands, driving big gashy cuts into my wrists, often drawing enough blood to make a lone red drip that would plip into the bath while he was taking his last few steamy panicky breaths. But it didn't matter to me, because I was making him better again.

Jack recovered after two full weeks of the treatment. Everyone, even the vet himself, went all, Woo woo, do we have ourselves a budding Doctor Doolittle here, or wha? Even Dad said, Well done, son, before looking over at Mam and adding with a sigh, I still think he should've died. She told him with a jokey slap that he was an awful man, and he chuckled back that he was just the way she liked him, and that she was to get out of the garden, which was an expression that meant, ah, feck off with yourself ye little who-er, which was also an expression, and it really meant that you fancied the person on the receiving end of it.

Jack became super fit, and fast, and spent weeks and weeks lashing round the house, and causing all kinds of funny chaos,

like chasing after the shadow of the pogo stick down the full length of the slope, or fighting with his bendy brass reflection in the coal scuttle and covering the green sitting-room carpet in tiny black paw prints. He was killed on the road outside our door when he was just seven months old. No one saw it happen. The first we knew of it was Maura Connell from next door with a big sad look on her face, telling Mam that she should go down the slope and see what's on the road in front of our driveway. I was the only one of the kids at home, because I hadn't gone to big school yet, so when Mam brought Jack in, all squashed and red around the head, I had loads of time alone with him.

Mam said that we'd have a family funeral in the back garden for Jack when the girls got home, and she used one of her good kitchen towels to wipe away all the red and black gooey stuff that was pouring out of the side of Jack's head, mostly through his left ear hole and eye socket. She laid him out, next to the onion patch, real nice like, on a knitted blanket that Sarah had made in Home Ec, and then she ran up to the attic to find an old shoe box to use for a coffin.

I laid out beside him too, on the grass. And with no one around I stroked his still-warm coat, kissed the non-bloody side of his head and started crying like mad and telling him how much I loved him. I told him that he was such a good cat. I lied to him too. I pretended that I didn't remember all the scratches he'd given me, or the times that he'd put massive rips in Dad's armchair, or when he climbed all over the tray-bake pastry while Mam was on the phone. You're the best cat, I said, stroking and weeping. You're such a good cat. The best cat in all Ireland. All the others are jealous of you, Jack. Coz you're the fastest, and the cleverest, and the funniest, and the best there is and ever will be.

I kind of wound myself up after a while. And the tears turned into big bonkers screams. Mam had to come rushing out and pin me into her arms. I told her that it was wrong, and that Jack



should still be alive, and that God had made a stupid mistake. Mam, who went to Mass every day at ten in the morning without fail, and did praying the way most people did breathing, flinched a little at this. Feeling angry, I continued. And so, if God wanted Jack dead, I said, still crying, then I wanted God dead. Mam pushed me away from her chest and gave me a right shake, and told me that I was out of my mind, and saying terrible, terrible things. But that just made me worse, more angry, more bold, and made me say that I'd swap Jack for God any day of the week.

Mam told me to go to my room, and that I wasn't to come down until the funeral. I turned away from her, marched back into the house and shouted as I did, loud enough for her to hear, the words, Fecking God!

And I wasn't messing either. I lay on my bed, mad head dug into the pillow, still crying, still angry, and I said to God that I'd had it with Him, and that killing Jack was the last straw. He was in trouble now. Big trouble.

Eventually, drowsy with tear-heat, wet-eyed and weak, I fell asleep arguing with Him in my head, and thinking of the joke that Auntie Una once told about the little Italian fella who's praying to God for a brilliant birthday present and, just to be sure, chucks a statue of the Virgin Mary in his drawer, locks it tight, and then says to God that if He ever wants to see His Mother again He'd better make sure that he gets a bike for his birthday. It's a gas joke, because the little fella is supposed to be acting like a Mafia man that you see on telly, but actually the really funny part of the joke is that you say it with your voice gone all Italian, like the Cornetto man, all eef-a you-a want-a see-a your-a mother-a again-a you-a better-a get-a me-a bike-a. Auntie Una told it one Christmas Eve and it became the joke of the season, and the whole family, all eight of us, any time we wanted a laugh, kept on sticking 'a' at the end of our words and pretending-a we-a were-a Italian-a. Even after New Year's.





I told God that He could do what He liked to me, but really, that was the last time he was to pull that killing trick while I was around. I didn't have a statue of the Virgin Mary to hide, but I told him anyway that as soon as my mam allowed me, I was going to stop going to Mass, and confession too.

I slept right through to the next day. Missed the funeral and everything. Mam said it was just as well. Would've been too upsetting. I think of him now, though, Jack. Right at this moment. Here in this kitchen. And I wonder if it could've been different.







## 1

## Summer Loving

Helen Macdowell gets hit in the face with a hockey ball. That's how it starts. Yes. The beginning of the end. All downhill from there. Helen's beautiful. She's got this light brown wavy flowy hair that curls back from her forehead. Her face is round, and her nose is soft and slightly ski-sloped. Her lips are brownish pink, but shiny with lipgloss. And her eyes, Jesus, her eyes are crystal blue, really clear blue, no dirty bits in the blue. She's beautiful and she's going to be a nurse, or an air hostess, or a private investigator. At least that's what my sister Fiona says, and she should know. Fiona and Helen used to knock around together before Helen became too beautiful to have friends. They were best buddies once upon a time, and used to cut their fingers and stick the bloody bits together and pretend that they were witches and all the rest. Then Helen got boobs, nice hair and beautiful skin, and stopped knocking round with anyone except herself.

So, she's standing there, the best-looking girl on the black gravel pitch, wearing make-up and everything. Bully one, bully two, bully three's all done, and the sun's streaking down, battering the hockey girls good and hard. They're sweating in their short slate-grey gym skirts and their tight light-blue airtex tops, and we're cheering from the sidelines.





Go on now, ye ride, get them off ye, ye sexy little who-ers!  
The nuns are looking round, scowling, pointing fingers, and we're loving it.

School's out, summer lovin, havin a blast.

And Helen's just standing there. Centre of the pitch. Staring.

I don't notice it at first, but the lads do.

They say, all giddy, Ooooooh, Finnegan, she's looking at you!

Looking at me?! Bollocks!

Yeah, looking at your bollocks all right!

But it's obvious, yes, she's looking straight at me. I turn my face away and go puce. I count to five while looking at the side-line grass and thinking about my whole family getting squished through a giant mincer like in the song on telly. But the funny thing is, when I turn back I notice that she's not really looking *looking* at me. Not giving me the eye or anything. She's just kind of staring into space, but at me.

Even so, the lads are going wild, saying that she wants to ride me, and touch me mickey, and all that stuff, only I'm feeling a bit sick from her stare. Her lips are curled downish, and her crystal-blue eyes are fizzing fire at me. She looks sad too, like she's feeling sorry for me, like she wants to shake her head and say, 'You poor poor prat.' I feel dizzy. I need to stand up, shake my head and turn away again. I want to go home to my mam.

But before I can do anything, it happens.

THWACKRUNCH!

Holy fuckster! one of the lads yells, as everyone goes spare. Helen Macdowell has just got a hockey ball in the mouth. There's teeth-bits everywhere, red teeth-bits. She opens up her mouth in agony and you can see that her lips are all puffed and slit and stabbed with bits of red teeth. Her face swells up in front of us. Blood pours out of her mouth. Like she's getting sick, and instead of puke there's blood coming out. The girl who hit her, Mary Davit, a big bruiser of a thing, is sitting in a heap on the





ground, crying. Helen isn't crying yet. She's pawing her face, trying to feel the outline of her lumps and bumps. She's surrounded by the nuns, like a flock of nervous magpies, who keep the girls away. The others are still sweating in their skirts and shirts, but they're mostly whispering to each other and comforting Mary Davit. Someone whispers, Stupid bitch, that'll teach her!

After tapping and tipping her face for a few seconds, Helen lets her head drop to her chest and just screams the whole hockey pitch to pieces. Really screams. Like when you're being chased down a dark alley by a fella with a big carving knife in a Halloween horror flick. That loud! And to prove it, she lashes out at the nuns and starts to run for her life. Seriously. She runs straight off the hockey pitch, through the long grass, and out the main school gates on to the Goatstown Road. Screaming all the time, that carving-knife-horror-flick scream. And running, not stopping.

Maura Connell saw her running full pelt past Quinnsworth's on the Dundrum Road at two o'clock that afternoon. Helen Macdowell, the most beautiful girl on the hockey team, with her brown wavy hair flowing away from her, her crystal eyes on fire, and her battered minced-meat face shiny with blood. Blood pouring down her neck from her slash-hole mouth, all over her airtex gym shirt.

The rumour going round The Rise says that Helen was eventually wrestled to the ground by two shopping centre security guards inside Murray's chemist shop. She was in deep shock, and trying her damndest to buy a jumbo refill of lipgloss.

We'd never seen anything like that around our place before. Not right in front of our eyes. You always heard about it, though. Through friends of friends. Or when The Mothers got together for coffee mornings. They'd sit around in a steamy kitchen circle



like four mad witches, and dip ginger-snaps into Maxwell House until they went wobbly warm, and take turns at saying, Jahear about so-and-so, Lord rest his soul, only thirty years old, poor creature!?

They were brilliant at it. Scaring the shite out of each other, grinning inside, but on the outside all sad, just breaking up the day between ironing, washing and making sausage, spuds and parsnip dinners for the dads on their way home from work with their newspapers and their tired faces.

Of course, they'd go all hushed if they saw one of us coming in from the telly room. They'd lean in together and start talking with their mouths closed, or speaking in code. But most of the time, sitting in silence on the floor with the telly on low and the door half open, we got the gist.

For instance, there was Kent Foster, died of skin cancer aged twenty, God rest his soul. Kent was mad into the sunbathing. Every summer, down there on the black tarmac behind the five-a-side pitch, in his brown speedos, lathered in sunflower oil, like a Malteser covered in spit.

English blood! The Mothers would say.

With that name!

Right you are, Maisie.

Then one summer Kent just disappeared. No one knew where. No one except The Mothers.

Jahear about Kent Foster? No? Well, poor soul's down in the gym, he spots a little black freckle on his thigh, and two months later he's stone dead. Cancer! Riddled with the stuff! Only twenty years old, God rest his soul!

Cancer, death, only twenty! It's music to their ears, like the sound of a starter gun.

And so, stories at the ready, champing at the bit, they're off.

Gary's mam is thinking, I can beat that one hands down!

Mozzo's mam is wracking her brains, scratching her fag

packet and trying to remember that recent tragedy she heard about from her brother-in-law in Finglas.

And Maisie O'Mally, the crinkly septuagenarian from number 43, is faking it, saying, Did you hear about what's his name, who fell into the river?

Luckily, Gary's mam, the old reliable, cuts her dead. Not as bad as Neil Cody! she says.

Neil Cody is this boy from Mount Merrion, only fifteen. He's a bit of a swat, and likes to read his daddy's newspaper every day. So one Sunday morning, still in his pyjamas, he grabs the paper, the *Indo*, hot off the kitchen table and, dead excited, brings it up to his bedroom for a good ole read. Half an hour goes by. No sound from above. An hour. Nothing.

Imagine it! says Gary's mam, Silence from upstairs, what do you think? He's fallen asleep with the papers, the little dote, yes?

Well, no one's heard a peep out of Neil in three hours, so his mam runs up the stairs, knocks on his door, goes into his room, and there he is, dead as a dodo, flat out on the bed, a stream of blood coming out of his nostrils and down on to the funnies. He's had a brain haemorrhage and died. Just like that!

The Mothers all bless themselves and mutter things about St Anthony and Jesus and the apostles. Gary's mam is feeling happy with herself, and everyone thinks that she's won the competition hands down when Mozzo's mam lights up a John Player and says, dramatically, And of course, you've all heard about poor June Shilaweh?

Gary's mam freezes and, furious, aware that she's going to be trumped, shakes her head.

Mozzo's mam nods gravely to herself, as if she's not sure whether she should continue.

My mam tells her to hurry up and put them out of their misery.

The Shilawehs, Mozzo's mam says, are an African family, black as night, who've moved to the Villas.

The Villas! everyone goes in unison, groaning at the thought of that long line of little boxy terraced houses down the back of the estate. To hell or to the Villas! They couldn't've picked a worse spot if they tried, the eejits. Worse than the bloody jungles they've come from.

The Mothers all laugh at this, though they hold their hands over their mouths as they do.

So, the Shilawehs are trying to settle in to life in the Villas. They say, Hello, good morning, to all their neighbours, even the ones who say Fuck off nigger to their faces. They send their only daughter, June, to the local Catholic school, Grove Hill, the one that Helen Macdowell went to before she lost her face. And Mr Shilaweh gets a job stacking envelopes at Ryan's post office. The one thing that's missing is a bike. Little June Shilaweh has never had a bike, and now that she's in the free world and out of the jungle she wants one.

Indeed, interrupts Maisie, What would you want a bicycle for in the jungle? It'd only get whipped by the monkeys!

The Mothers do their hand-covering-mouth laugh again.

Anyway, little June Shilaweh gets a bike from her dad, who's saved up all his post-office money to pay for it. She hasn't even had it a week when she cycles up Taney Road, gets overtaken by a juggernaut, swivels and turns, falls off the bike and goes right under the rear wheels. Crushed to death on the spot.

The Mothers all sigh in silence and avoid looking each other in the eye.

And you know the worse bit? says Mozzo's mam, teasing and toying. Johnno Mac who works in Mangan's Hairdressers on Taney Road said he had to clean up after the truck was gone. Said that little June had no head left, swear to God, it was popped like a pimple under the weight of the truck. Ambulance



just dragged a headless corpse inside, and the poor Shilawehs had to identify their daughter by the handlebars that were still stuck into her innards when they arrived.

Mozzo's mam has gone too far. My mam shoots up, leans against the sink, and says that she's doing sprouts tonight and you know how long them feckers take to peel. Gary's mam says that she'll walk Maisie home, even though it's only four houses down. Mozzo's mam, quickly getting the message, stands up to leave.

She sticks her head into the telly room and tells me that Mozzo's coming back today and he'll be dying to see me.

Mam, Gary's mam and Maisie mess about with coats until Mozzo's mam is out the door, and then they agree that she's a lovely girl, but a bit crude.

The fella left her, of course, says Gary's mam, Left her with that little animal!

Meaning Mozzo.



## 2

## The Turnip Incident

I have known Mozzo for only two months and already we are best friends. His hair is long, jet black and deliberately messy, he has a tiny hint of a greasy moustache on his pale upper lip, and he's the first person I tell about Helen Macdowell. He sits on my bed with his legs crossed and his shiny thirty-two-hole docs tucked neatly under each thigh. He rocks back'n'forth, picks at his faded red Iron Maiden T-shirt and says Fuckin Jaysus! out loud when I describe the moment of impact. He's so impressed that I tell him again, straight away, only this time I add a little extra gore, just to see his eyes pop even more. I tell him the sound the ball made when it hit her mouth.

THWACKRUNCH!

I describe little splatlets of blood flying off into the air from her burst lips. I describe her head shooting back on her neck like a boxer's punchball. And I describe the blood. Buckets of it. Everywhere.

Mozzo's impressed. He rocks back'n'forth at the top of the bed, right under the poster of a parked Porsche, doors open.

Fuckin hell, Finno! he says, over and over again. Fuckin hell, Finno, that's mad!

My Toshiba boombox plays Survivor at full volume. I am pleased.

Mozzo's normally the one telling the stories. He's good at it too. His dad was a fisherman who worked out of Dublin port and used to fish at night, and take drugs during the day. He beat Mozzo's mam, Janet, at least once a week and then left her to raise Mozzo alone. But before he left he did loads of things that Mozzo turned into great stories. Like the time he came in pissed from work and held a knife to Janet's throat. How does it feel, wagon? he said. How does it feel?

Or the time he made Janet eat a whole cooked chicken in front of everyone because there was no gravy and it was too dry. Disgusting. Or the time he threw a gas cylinder through the neighbour's front window because they complained about the smell coming off his fish van.

I'll give ye fish, ye stuck-up bastards! he said, and then he threw a big black plastic bag of fish guts through the hole where the window used to be. Mozzo said it was mad. The police came and everything, and they had to move houses in the end.

Mozzo's real name is Declan Morrissey, but even his mam calls him Mozzo. Fellas like him are always called something-o. There's loads of them down in the Villas. And they all know each other. Micko, Macko, Johnno, Backo, Stapo, Ryano, Freyno, Gavvo, Devo, Rocko, Knocko, Dicko, Mallo, Heno, Feno, Hylo and so on. The first thing that Mozzo said when he met me was, Howsigoin, Finno? It was a good start.

When Mozzo moved into The Rise my mam said that I should be friendly to him because he hadn't had all the luck that I had.

What luck? I asked her.

He has no feckin father! she answered.

I shrugged, and agreed that she was right. My father has a big thick brown moustache, laughs a lot, and is always called A



Right Charmer by everyone who meets him. He makes money selling office equipment and he's genius at his job.

He could sell sand to the Arabs.

That's what everyone says about him. In fact, when the Shilawehs moved into the Villas, Maura Connell winked at him and told him that this was his chance to sell sand to the Arabs. He winked back at her, told her not to be so stupid, that they weren't Arabs, they were coloureds.

I have five sisters, all older than me. And no brothers. My father jokes that he wouldn't stop trying till he got a boy. And usually, depending on who's around, he'll then say, But I settled for Jim instead!

Then everyone laughs and says to my face that my dad's a wild card. Mam then grabs me, rubs my hair and says, Leave the poor creature alone!

Mozzo's still reeling from the excitement of the Helen MacDowell story. He's still rocking back'n'forth, but now he's nodding his head too. He looks up at my boombox, tells me that Survivor's fuckin shite and that I should listen to some real fuckin music! He points to his T-shirt when he says this. Then he continues nodding, like he's thinking about something interesting inside. Eventually, he spits it out.

Let's do it, Finno, he says. Let's do a fuckin Helen Macker on it!

I'm confused.

I've seen it in a flick once, he says. We'll get a big fuckin melon, stick it on a fuckin pole and take fuckin potshots at it with the fuckin hockey gear. First shot to hit, splat goes the melon! Be fuckin mad!

Mozzo says fuckin the whole time, more than any friend I've ever had. More than Gary anyway.

\*





Until Mozzo arrived on The Rise, Gary Connell was my number one buddy. His dad's a pilot for Aer Lingus and is always bringing him the latest electronic gadgets from America. Gary is an only child and a Protestant to boot, and, so my mam says, his parents have loads of money to spend on him because they don't have to be dividing it up among six hungry children. Nearly every day that Gary walks down The Rise he has a new gadget. Pocket space invaders cum leather wallet. Baseball-cap radio with joke drinking straw. Joke windscreen-wiper sunglasses. Sweat-band with built-in digital watch. Transistor-radio tankard.

If an alien scouting party landed in The Rise and saw Gary Connell marching down the street, with all his electronic blinking, tweeting, and bleeting gadgets attached, I'm sure they'd scarper straight back to space, convinced they had met a super-advanced cyborg civilisation.

Mozzo likes hanging out with Gary, mostly because of Gary's gadgets. Gary's mam, Maura, hates Mozzo, mostly because Mozzo made Gary stick his mickey in between two pillows and hump away on it like it was a woman. Gary's mam is very glamorous and always wears miniskirts, see-through blouses and lipstick indoors. Mozzo calls her a Fuckin Ride, even in front of Gary. Mozzo knows much more about girls than me and Gary. He's always talking about fannies and arses and blowjobs and lickjobs and bumming and wanking.

Just had a great pull of me dick, I spunked everywhere! he'll say as he walks into the room. He'll grab his crotch and say, Fuckin lovely!

Me and Gary joke about our mickeys and our balls too. But mostly when Mozzo's around. We go, Oh yeah, I'd definitely ride her! every time a girl walks by. And then we look at Mozzo to see if he agrees. Mostly though, he tells us that we haven't got a hope in hell of getting any fanny until we stop looking and acting like two little benders.



So one day Mozzo and Gary are up in Gary's room playing with his remote-control R2-D2 alarm clock and Mozzo says that he had the most amazing wank ever last night. He says that he put his mickey in between two pillows and banged away for hours, and it was just like the real thing, and he'd know about the real thing because he'd done it twice with his cousin at their Stephen's Day party.

I'm tellin ya, he says to Gary, Two pillows jammed together, fuckin hell, exactly like riding a real fuckin fanny! And then he says, You should fuckin try it!

Now Gary's a little blond fella with lots of freckles and he doesn't want to embarrass himself in front of Mozzo, so he says yeah, but insists that Mozzo leave the room while he's riding the pillows.

Mozzo stands outside the door and has a good ole laugh to himself listening to Gary humping and bumping away on the pillows. But then Gary's mam, Maura, comes up the stairs with a big pile of clothes for the hot press. She sees Mozzo standing outside the door and goes charging inside to find her little Gary, trousers down, having sexual intercourse with the bed linen. Gary's mam is disgusted and kicks Mozzo out of the house. She then sits Gary down on the bed and tries to talk to him about what he was doing and how it could ruin him and ruin his experiences with girls in the future. Gary said to me that the whole thing was a big laugh, but his mam told my mam that Gary burst out crying and said that it was all Mozzo's fault and that he never wanted any other girl but his own mam. Gary's mam hugged him close to her blouse and told him that everything would be all right and that he was supposed to be feeling confused at his age and that he'd make some woman very happy someday as long as he stayed away from Mozzo.

\*



My mam doesn't hate Mozzo as much as Gary's mam. She says that's because Maura's a Protestant and she's a Catholic, and Protestants don't have much time for people like Mozzo or Mozzo's mam Janet. But my mam's a Catholic and our Lord was a Catholic and he was always looking after those who were less fortunate than himself, so that's why Mozzo needs our help. Mam then told me that if she ever caught me riding my pillows like Gary Connell she'd call the Parish Priest.

If there's any trouble at home at all, Mam threatens to call the Parish Priest. It's one of her rules.

Mozzo, Gary and me are out in the back garden, and we've Sellotaped a turnip to the Swingball post because we couldn't find a watermelon in Mam's veg basket. The turnip has been covered in a big red lipstick mouth to remind us of Helen Macdowell. My mam will later go spare when she finds her favourite lippy worn down to the base. Mozzo kisses the turnip for ages and calls it Helen Macker the Little Ride, and me and Gary laugh.

Gary has been told the Helen MacDowell story too so he's all excited about the game Mozzo has in store for us, and is wearing his joke drinking-straw baseball cap especially for the occasion. Mozzo's holding my sister Sarah's hockey stick in his hand and he's marching around the garden like he owns the place.

The last time Mozzo was here it was my sister Fiona's seventeenth birthday barbecue party. It was brilliant fun, thanks to Mozzo. When it started getting dark, he rounded up all the kids into three groups, called one of them The British, the other The Argentinians and the other The IRA. So the IRA and The Argentinians got together under Mozzo's orders, and chased The British all around the apple trees shouting, Get out of the Falklands, Brits! Some of the parents thought this was very



funny, especially Saidhbh Donohue's father, who always likes to sing songs and cry late at night about the times when our potatoes were rotten and the British were killing us all. After a few rounds of the apple trees, The IRA and The Argentinians cornered The British in the onion beds and started thumping them. My dad ran up the garden with a temper on him because loads of his onions were broken at the stalks and would therefore be tiny little malformed things when they were born instead of huge great tear-makers.

After rooting around in Sarah's sports bag, joking about finding her knickers and wanking all over them, Mozzo produces a badly scuffed hockey ball. It's a big heavy thing, like a perfectly round lump of concrete. He places the ball on the grass, ten feet in front of the Swingball post, facing up the garden, away from the house and towards the two apple trees. He turns to us and says that the first person to hit the turnip with a single shot wins the Mary Davit award for being a vicious bastard. Mozzo then strolls up to the ball, stands beside it, steadies himself, swings, shoots hard and clatters the turnip on the very first shot. Of course, nothing happens to the turnip. It doesn't explode like Mozzo said he saw in the flick, but even so me and Gary cheer out loud. We can't believe it. First shot and he gets it, one in a million. We look at each other and then over at Mozzo, who's lapping the garden in triumph, his hair blown off his face, his loose red Iron Maiden T-shirt flowing behind him, and we think together that he's brilliant.

It takes me and Gary ages to hit the turnip. I manage it after nearly twenty or so goes. Mozzo's sitting on the grass at this stage, making comments about the state of our shots.

Swing, ye big fuckin' girlies! he's saying. Fuckin' bufties, hit the fucker!

He says things like that right out loud after every shot, and

he's starting to make Gary nervous. Gary still hasn't hit the turnip, and in fact is getting worse instead of better with each swing. He's even missing the ball altogether, taking big chunks of mucky-green earth out of Dad's very carefully cut grass. Dad never wanted us to have Swingball in the first place, said it wears down the grass something rotten, but Mam made him put it up after they had a big fight one night about how Dad was becoming a real killjoy in his old age. It started out as a jokey one around the table, with a few chuckles and proddings from Mam, but it continued onwards, on through the night, up the stairs, and eventually behind closed bedroom doors, with voices raised, with tears, with everything. A real barnstormer.

Suddenly Mozzo says, Bollocks to this! He stands up with a big grin on his face, and says that he has a better plan, and that he's raising the stakes goodo. He grabs the ball and stick from Gary, who's nearly crying at this stage, and he walks round to the other side of the Swingball post, the side facing my mam's kitchen window. He looks up and down the garden, then he places the ball on the ground, again about ten feet away from the post, and he twists the post around so that the turnip's on this side. He hands the hockey stick to Gary and says, Try it now, ye big fuckin girl!

Gary refuses the stick. He says no way, because if he misses he's going to smash my mam's window. He even says fuckin this time.

No fuckin way!

But Mozzo's having none of it. He's teasing Gary, saying that he couldn't hit the bog with his own piss, or his own shit for that matter. And that Gary's bathroom floor must be covered in pools of piss and lumps of shit from all the times he's missed the loo. I know I shouldn't, but I'm laughing my head off picturing Gary slipping off the loo and pissing and shitting everywhere.

I can see Gary's really upset now, and his chin is clenching up



all tight like your arse when you're holding in a fart. Mozzo can see it too, so he goes all soft and puts his arm around Gary's shoulder. He speaks to Gary like a dad, and says that there's method to his madness and that the risk of smashing my mam's kitchen window is called motivation. He says that Gary knows deep down inside that he'll be in trouble if he hits my mam's window, so there's no way he'll miss the turnip. Instead he'll focus on it, swing back and hit it in one. Just like that. Gary looks like he's feeling better after hearing this, and his chin relaxes a bit. Then Mozzo says, out of the blue, right into his face, Now go on and hit it, ye little pillow-fucker!

I burst out laughing at this, and so does Mozzo. We think it's so funny that Gary must find it funny too. But he doesn't. He just goes all red-faced and hits the hockey ball straight through my mam's kitchen window. Everyone goes Fuckin Hell! out loud and Gary bursts out crying and runs off home, holding his drinking-straw baseball cap in his hand.

