

## THE GRANTON STAR CAUSE

It hit Boab Coyle hard, right in the centre of his chest. He stood at the bar, open-mouthed, as his mate Kev Hyslop explained the position to him.

— Sorry, Boab, but we aw agree. We cannae guarantee ye a game. Wuv goat Tambo n wee Grant now. This team's gaun places.

— Gaun places!? Gaun places!? Churches League Division Three! It's a kick aboot, ya pretentious cunt. A fuckin kick aboot!

Kev did not like Boab's stropy response. Surely the Granton Star cause was bigger than any one individual's ego. After all, in an open vote, he had been the one entrusted with the captain's armband for the season. The Star were challenging for promotion to Division Two of the Edinburgh Churches League. Additionally, they were only three games away from a cup-final appearance at City Park — with nets — in the Tom Logan Memorial Trophy. The stakes were high, and Kev wanted to be the man who skippered the Star to cup glory in their own backyard. He knew, though, that part of his responsibilities involved making unpopular decisions. Friendships had to be put on the back burner.

— Yir bound tae be disappointed mate . . .

— Disappointed!? Too fuckin right ah'm disappointed. Which cunt washes the strips nearly every week? Eh? Boab pleaded, pointing to himself.

— C'moan Boab, huv another pint . . .

— Stick yir fuckin pint up yir ersel! Some mates yous, eh?

Well fuck yis! Boab stormed out of the pub as Kev turned to the rest of the boys and shrugged.

Before returning home, Boab went for a few unenjoyable pints of lager on his own in two other pubs. He brimmed with resentment when he thought of Tambo, who had had his eye on Boab's number 10 jersey ever since the posing cunt had got involved with the Star at the start of the season. Orange-juice drinking bastard. It had been a mistake to fill the side with wankers like that. It was, after all, just a kick about; a laugh with the mates. *Fresh orange n lemonade. Fresh orange n lemonade.* Tambo's nasal tones grated mercilessly in his head.

In the pubs Boab visited, he failed to recognise anybody. This was unusual. Additionally, auld drunkards who normally plagued him, looking for company, or to cadge a pint, avoided him like he was a leper.

Boab's mother was hovering when her son returned home. As soon as she heard him at the door, however, she switched the machine off. Doreen Coyle looked conspiratorially at her husband, Boab senior, who shifted his considerable bulk in his chair and cast the *Evening News* onto the coffee table.

— Ah want a wee word, son, Boab senior said.

— Eh? Boab was somewhat alarmed by the challenging and confrontational tone of his father's voice.

But before Boab senior could speak, Doreen started to rant nervously.

— S'no likesay wir tryin tae git rid ay ye, son. S'no likesay that at aw.

Boab stood there, a sense of foreboding cutting through his bemusement.

— That's enough, Doreen, Boab's father said, with a hint of irritation. — Thing is, son, it's time ye wir ootay this hoose. Yir twinty-three now, which is far too auld fir a laddie tae be steysin wi his ma n faither. A mean, ah wis away tae sea wi the Merchant Navy at seventeen. It's jist no natural, son, d'ye understand?

Boab said nothing. He couldn't think straight. His father continued.

— Dinnae want yir mates tae think thit yir some kindy queer felly, now dae ye? Anywey, yir ma n me's no gittin any younger. Wir ent'rin a funny phase in oor lives, son. Some might say . . . Boab Coyle looked at his wife, — . . . a dangerous phase. Yir ma n me son, we need time tae sort oot oor lives. Tae git it the gither, if ye ken whit ah mean. You've goat a lassie, wee Evelyn. You ken the score! Boab senior winked at his son, examining his face for a sign of understanding. Although none was apparent, he carried on. — Yir problem is, son, yir huvin yir cake n eatin it. N whae suffers? Ah'll tell ye whae. Muggins here, Boab senior pointed to himself. — Yir ma n me. Now ah ken it's no that easy tae find somewhair tae stey these days, especially whin yuv hud everybody else, like muggins here, runnin around efir ye. Bit we'll no say nowt aboot that. Thing is, me n yir ma, wir prepared tae gie ye two weeks' grace. Jist as long as ye make sure that yir ootay here within a fortnight.

Somewhat stunned, Boab could only say, — Aye . . . right . . .

— Dinnae think thit wir tryin tae git rid ay ye, son. It's jist thit yir faither n me think thit it wid be mutually advantageous, tae baith parties, likesay, if ye found yir ain place.

— That's it, Doe, Boab's faither sang triumphantly. — Mutually advantageous tae baith parties. Ah like that. Any brains you n oor Cathy've got, son, they definitely come fae yir ma thair, nivr mind muggins here.

Boab looked at his parents. They seemed somehow different. He had always regarded his auld man as a fat, wheezing, chronic asthmatic, and his auld girl as a blobby woman in a tracksuit. Physically they looked the same, but he could, for the first time, detect an unsettling edge of sexuality about them which he'd previously been oblivious to. He saw them for what they were: sleazy, lecherous bastards. He now realised that the look they gave him when he took Evelyn upstairs for sex, was not of embarrassment or resentment, but one of anticipation. Far from

concerning themselves with what he was doing, it gave them the chance to do their own thing.

Evelyn. Once he talked to her things would be better. Ev always understood. Ideas of formal engagement and marriage, so long pooh-pooched by Boab, now fluttered through his mind. He'd been daft not to see the possibilities in it before. Their own place. He could watch videos all evening. A ride every night. He'd get another club; fuck the Star! Evelyn could wash the strips. Suddenly buoyant again, he went out, down to the call-box at the shops. He already felt like an intruder in his parents' home.

Evelyn picked up the phone. Boab's spirits rose further at the prospect of company. The prospect of understanding. The prospect of sex.

— Ev? Boab. Awright?

— Aye.

— Fancy comin ower?

— . . .

— Eh? Ev? Fancy comin ower, likesay?

— Naw.

— How no? Something wasn't right. A shuddering anxiety shot through Boab.

— Jist dinnae.

— But how no? Ah've hud a bad day, Ev. Ah need tae talk tae ye.

— Aye. Well, talk tae yir mates well.

— Dinnae be like that, Ev! Ah sais ah've hud a hard day!

Whit is it? Whit's wrong?

— You n me. That's whit's wrong.

— Eh?

— Wir finished. Finito. Kaput. Endy story. Goodnight Vienna.

— Whit've ah done, Ev? Whit've ah done? Boab could not believe his ears.

— You ken.

— Ev . . .

- It's no whit yuv done, it's whit yuv no done!
- But Ev . . .
- Me n you Boab. Ah want a guy whae kin dae things fir ays. Somebody whae kin really make love tae a woman. No some fat bastard whae sits oan ehs erse talkin aboot fitba n drinkin pints ay lager wi his mates. A real man, Boab. A sexy man. Ah'm twinty Boab. Twinty years auld. Ah'm no gaun tae tie masel doon tae a slob!
- Whit's goat intae you? Eh? Evelyn? Yuv nivir complained before. You n me. Ye wir jist a daft wee lassie before ye met me. Nivir knew whit a ride wis, fir fuck sake . . .
- 'Aye! Well that's aw changed! Cos ah've met somebody, Boab Coyle! Mair ay a fuckin man thin you'll ivir be!
- . . . Eh? . . . Eh? . . . WHAE? . . . WHAE IS THE CUUUHHHNT!
- That's fir me tae ken n you tae find oot!
- Ev . . . how could ye dae this tae ays . . . you n me, Ev . . . it wis eywis you n me . . . engagement n that . . .
- Sorry, Boab. Bit ah've been wi you since ah wis sixteen. Ah might huv kent nowt aboot love then, bit ah sure as fuck ken a bit mair now!
- YA FAAHKIN SLAG! . . . YA HORRIBLE FUCKIN HING-OOT! . . .
- Evelyn slammed the receiver down.
- Ev . . . Ev . . . Ah love ye . . . Boab spoke those words for the first time, down a dead telephone line.
- SLAAHT! FAAHKIN SLAAHHT! He smashed the receiver around in the box. His segged brogues booted out two glass panels and he tried to wrench the phone from its mounting.
- Boab was unaware that a police squad-car had pulled up outside the phone-box.
- Down at the local police station, the arresting officer, PC Brian Cochrane, was typing up Boab's statement when Duty Sergeant Morrison appeared. Boab sat in depressed silence at the foot of the desk while Cochrane typed with two fingers.

- Evening, sarge, PC Cochrane said.
- The sergeant mumbled something which may or may not have been 'Brian', not pausing to look around. He put a sausage roll into the microwave. When he opened the cupboard above the oven, Morrison was angered to note that there was no tomato sauce. He despised snacks without ketchup. Upset, he turned to PC Cochrane.
- Thir's nae fuckin ketchup, Brian. Whae's turn wis it tae git the provisions?
- Eh . . . sorry sarge . . . slipped up, the constable said, embarrassed. — Eh . . . busy night, sarge, likes.
- Morrison shook his head sadly and let out a long exhalation of breath.
- So what've we goat the night, Brian?
- Well, there's the rapist, the guy who stabbed the boy at the shopping centre and this comedian here, he pointed at Boab.
- Right . . . ah've already been doon n hud a word wi the rapist. Seems a nice enough young felly. Telt ays the daft wee hoor wis askin fir it. S'the wey ay the world, Brian. The guy who knifed the boy . . . well, silly bugger, but boys will be boys. What aboot this tube-stake?
- Caught him smashin up a phone-box.
- Sergeant Morrison clenched his teeth shut. Trying to contain a surge of anger which threatened to overwhelm him, he spoke slowly and deliberately: — Get this cowboy doon tae the cells. Ah want a wee word wi this cunt.
- Somebody else wanting a wee word. Boab was beginning to feel that these 'wee words' were never to his advantage.
- Sergeant Morrison was a British Telecom shareholder. If one thing made him more angry than snacks without tomato ketchup, it was seeing the capital assets of BT, which made up part of his investment, depreciated by wanton vandalism.
- Down in the cells, Morrison pummelled Boab's stomach, ribs and testicles. As Boab lay lying groaning on the cold, tiled floor, the sergeant smiled down at him.
- Ye ken, it jist goes tae show ye the effectiveness ay they

privatisation policies. Ah would nivir huv reacted like that if ye hud smashed up a phone-box when they were nationalised. Ah know it's jist the same really; vandalism meant increased taxes for me then, while now it means lower dividends. Thing is, ah feel like ah've goat mair ay a stake now, son. So ah don't want any lumpen-proletarian malcontents threatening ma investment.

Boab lay moaning miserably, ravaged by sickening aches and oppressed by mental torment and anguish.

Sergeant Morrison prided himself on being a fair man. Like the rest of the punters detained in the cells, Boab was given his cup of stewed tea and jam roll for breakfast. He couldn't touch it. They had put butter and jam on together. He couldn't touch the piece but was charged with breach of the peace, as well as criminal damage.

Although it was 6.15 a.m. when he was released, he felt too fragile to go home. Instead, he decided to go straight to his work after stopping off at a cafe for a scrambled-egg roll and a cup of coffee. He found a likely place and ordered up.

After his nourishment, Boab went to settle the bill.

— One pound, sixty-five pence. The cafe owner was a large, fat, greasy man, badly pock-marked.

— Eh? Bit steep, Boab counted out his money. He hadn't really thought about how much money he had, even though the police had taken it all from him, with his keys and shoelaces, and he'd had to sign for them in the morning.

He had one pound, thirty-eight pence. He counted out the money. The cafe proprietor looked at Boab's unshaven, bleary appearance. He was trying to run a respectable establishment, not a haven for dossers. He came from behind the counter and jostled Boab out of the door.

— Fuckin wise cunt . . . wide-o . . . ye kin see the prices . . . ah'll fuckin steep ye, ya cunt . . .

Out in the cold, blue morning street, the fat man punched Boab on the jaw. More through fatigue and disorientation than the power of the blow, Boab fell backwards, cracking his head off the pavement.

He lay there for a while, and began weeping, cursing God, Kev, Tambo, Evelyn, his parents, the police and the cafe owner.

Despite being physically and mentally shattered, Boab put in a lot of graft that morning, to try and forget his worries and make the day pass quickly. Normally, he did very little lifting, reasoning that as he was the driver, it wasn't really his job. Today, however, he had his sleeves rolled up. The first flit his crew worked on saw them take the possessions of some rich bastards from a big posh house in Cramond to a big posh house in the Grange. The other boys in the team, Benny, Drew and Zippo, were far less talkative than usual. Normally Boab would have been suspicious of the silence. Now, feeling dreadful, he welcomed the respite it offered.

They got back to the Canonmills depot at 12.30 for dinner. Boab was surprised to be summoned into the office of Mike Rafferty, the gaffer.

— Sit doon, Boab. I'll come straight to the point, mate, Rafferty said, doing anything but. — Standards, he said enigmatically, and pointed to the Hauliers and Removals Association plaque on the wall, bearing a logo which decorated each one of his fleet of lorries. — Counts for nothing now. It's all about price these days, Boab. And all these cowboys, who have fewer overheads and lower costs, they're trimming us, Boab.

— Whit ur ye tryin tae say?

— We've goat tae cut costs, Boab. Where can ah cut costs? This place? He looked out of the glass and wooden box of an office and across the floor of the warehouse. — We're tied doon tae a five-year lease here. No. It has to be capital and labour costs. It's aw doon tae market positioning, Boab. We have to find our niche in the market. That niche is as a quality firm specialising in local moves for the As, Bs and Cs.

— So ah'm sacked? Boab asked, with an air of resignation.

Rafferty looked Boab in the eye. He had recently been on a training course entitled: 'Positively Managing The Redundancy Scenario.'

— Your post is being made redundant, Boab. It's important

to remember that it's not the person we make redundant, it's the post. We've overstretched ourselves, Boab. Got geared up for continental removals. Tried, and I have to say failed, to compete with the big boys. Got a wee bit too carried away by 1992, the single market and all that. I'm going to have to let the big lorry go. We also need to lose a driver's job. This isnae easy, Boab, but it has ta be last one in, first one out. Now ah'll put it around in the trade that I know of a reliable driver who's looking for something, and obviously, ah'll give you an excellent reference.

— Obviously, said Boab, with sarcastic bitterness.

Boab left at lunchtime and went for a pint and a toastie down the local pub. He didn't bother to go back. As he sat and drank alone, a stranger approached him, sitting down next to him, even though plenty free seats were available. The man looked in his fifties, not particularly tall, yet with a definite presence. His white hair and white beard reminded Boab of a folk singer, the guy from the Corries, or maybe the boy in the Dubliners.

— Yuv fucked this one up, ya daft cunt, the man said to him, raising a pint of eighty shilling to his lips.

— Eh? What? Boab was suprised again.

— You. Boab Coyle. Nae hoose, nae joab, nae burd, nae mates, polis record, sair face, aw in the space ay a few ooirs. Nice one, he winked and toasted Boab with his pint. This angered, but intrigued Boab.

— How the fuck dae you ken? Whae the fuckin hell ur you? The man shook his head, — It's ma fuckin business taе ken. Ah'm God.

— Way taе fuck ya auld radge! Boab laughed loudly, throwing his head back.

— Fuckin hell. Another wise cunt, said the man tiredly. He then trudged out a spiel with the bored, urbane air of someone who had been through all this more times than they cared to remember.

— Robert Anthony Coyle, born on Friday the 23rd of July, 1968, to Robert McNamara Coyle and Doreen Sharp. Younger brother of Cathleen Siobhain Shaw, who is married to James

Allan Shaw. They live at 21 Parkglen Crescent in Gilmerton and they have a child, also called James. You have a sickle-shaped birthmark on your inner thigh. You attended Granton Primary School and Ainslie Park Secondary, where you obtained two SCE O Grades, in Woodwork and Technical Drawing. Until recently, you worked in furniture removals, lived at hame, had a bird called Evelyn, whom you couldn't sexually satisfy, and played football for Granton Star, like you made love, employing little effort and even less skill.

Boab sat totally deflated. There seemed to be an almost translucent aura around this man. He spoke with certainty and conviction. Boab almost believed him. He didn't know what to believe anymore.

— If you're God, what ur ye daein wastin yir time oan me?

— Good question, Boab. Good question.

— Ah mean, thir's bairns starvin, likessay, oan telly n that. If ye wir that good, ye could sort aw that oot, instead ay sitting here bevvyin wi the likes ay me.

God looked Boab in the eye. He seemed upset.

— Jist hud oan a minute, pal. Lit's git one thing straight. Every fuckin time ah come doon here, some wide-o pills ays up about what ah should n shouldnae be fuckin daein. Either that or ah huv taе enter intae some philosophical fuckin discourse wi some wee undergraduate twat about the nature ay masel, the extent ay ma omnipotence n aw that shite. Ah'm gittin a wee bit fed up wi aw this self-justification; it's no for yous cunts taе criticise me. Ah made yous cunts in ma ain image. Yous git oan wi it; yous fuckin well sort it oot. That cunt Nietzsche wis wide ay the mark whin he sais ah wis deid. Ah'm no deid; ah jist dinnae gie a fuck. It's no fir me taе sort every cunt's problems oot. Nae other cunt gies a fuck so how should ah? Eh?

Boab found God's whingeing pathetic. — You fuckin toss. If ah hud your powers . . .

— If you hud ma powers ye'd dae what ye dae right now: sweet fuck all. You've goat the power taе cut doon oan the pints ay lager, aye?

about the murderers, the serial killers, dictators, torturers, politicians . . . the cunt's thit shut factories doon tae preserve thir profit levels . . . aw they greedy rich bastards . . . what about thaim? Eh?

— Might git round tae they cunts, might no. That's m fuckin business. You've hud it cunt! Yir a piece ay slime, Coy! An insect. That's it! An insect . . . God said, inspired. — . . . ah! gaunny make ye look like the dirty, lazy pest thit ye are!

God looked Boab in the eye again. A force of invisible ener seemed to leave his body and travel a few feet across the tab penetrating Boab through to his bones. The force pinned h back in his chair, but it was over in a second, and all Boab v left with was a racing heartbeat and a sweating brow, genitals ? armpits. The whole performance seemed to take it out of G. He stood up shakily in his chair and looked at Boab. — Al away tae ma fuckin kip, he wheezed, turning and leaving the pub.

Boab sat there, mind racing, feverishly trying to rationalise what had happened to him. Kevin came into the pub for a quick pint a few minutes after this. He noted Boab, but was reluctant to approach him, after Boab's outburst in the pub the day before.

When Kevin eventually did come over, Boab told him that he had just met God, who was going to turn him into an insect.

— You dinnae half talk some shite, Boab, he told his distraught friend, before leaving him.

That evening, Kevin was at home alone, eating a fish supper. His girlfriend was on a night out with some friends. A large bluebottle landed on the edge of his plate. It just sat there, looking at him. Something told him not to swat it.

The bluebottle then flew into a blob of tomato sauce on the edge of the plate, and soared up to the wall before Kev could react. To his astonishment, it began to trace out KEV against the white woodchip paper. It had to make a second journey to the sauce to finish what it had started. Kev shuddered. This was crazy, but there it was; his name, spelt by an insect . . .

— Aye, bit . . .

— Nae buts about it. You've goat the power tae git fit and make a mair positive contribution tae the Granton Star cause. You hud the power tae pey mair attention tae that wee burd ay yours. She wis tidy. Ye could've done a loat better there, Boab.

— Mibbe ah could, mibbe ah couldnae. Whit's it tae you?

— Ye hud the power tae git oot fae under yir ma n dad's feet, so's they could huv a decent cowp in peace. Bit naw. No selfish cunt Coyle. Jist sits thair watchin *Coronation Street* n *Brookside* while they perr cunts ur gaun up the waws wi frustration.

— S' name ay your business.

— Everything's ma business. Ye hud the power tae fight back against the fat cunt fi the cafe. Ye jist lit the cunt panel ye, fir a few fuckin pence. That wis ootay order, bit ye lit the cunt git away wi it.

— Ah wis in a state ay shock . . .

— And that cunt Rafferty. Ye didnae even tell the cunt tae stick his fuckin joab up his erse.

— So what! So fuckin what!

— So ye hud they powers, ye jist couldnae be bothered usin thum. That's why ah m interested in ye Boab. You're jist like me. A lazy, apathetic, slovenly cunt. Now ah hate bein like this, n bein immortal, ah cannae punish masel. Ah kin punish you through, mate. That's whit ah intend tae dae.

— But ah could . . .

— Shut it cunt! Ah've fuckin hud it up tae ma eyebaws wi aw this repentence shite. Vengeance is mine, n ah intend tae take it, oan ma ain lazy n selfish nature, through the species ah created, through thir representative. That's you.

God stood up. Although he was almost shaking with anger, Boab saw that this was not easy for him. He could still be talked out of doing whatever he was going to do. — Ye look jist like ah always imagined . . . Boab said sycophantically.

— That's cause ye've nae imagination, ya daft cunt. Ye see ays n hear ays as ye imagine ays. Now you're fuckin claimed, radge.

— Bit ah'm no the worst . . . Boab pleaded. — . . . Whit

— Boab? Is that really you? Fuckin hell! Eh, buzz twice fir aye, once fir naw.

Two buzzes.

— Did eh, what's his name, did God dae this? Two buzzes.

— Whitt the fuck ur ye gaunny dae? Frantic buzzing.

— Sorry Boab . . . kin ah git ye anything? Scran, likesay? They shared the fish supper. Kev had the lion's share, Boab sat near the edge of the plate licking at a little bit of fish, grease and sauce.

Boab stayed with Kev Hyslop for a few days. He was encouraged to lie low, in case Julie, Kev's girlfriend, discovered him. Kev threw the fly-spray away. He bought a pot of ink and some notepaper. He'd pour some ink into a saucer, and let Boab trace out some laborious messages on the paper. One, particularly, was written in anxiety: **CUNT OF A SPIDER IN BATHROOM**. Kev flushed the spider down the toilet. Whenever he came in from work, Kev was concerned that something might have happened to Boab. He could not relax until he heard that familiar buzz.

From his location behind the bedroom curtains, Boab plotted revenge. He'd all but absolved Kev for dropping him from the Star, on account of his kindness. However, he was determined to get back at his parents, Evelyn, Rafferty, and the others.

It wasn't all bad being a bluebottle. The power of flight was something he'd have hated to have missed; there had been few greater pleasures than soaring around outside. He also gained a taste for excrement, its rich, sour moistness tantalising his long insect tongue. The other bluebottles who crowded onto the hot shite were not so bad. Boab was attracted to some of them. He learned to appreciate the beauty of the insect body; the sexy, huge, brown eyes, the glistening external skeleton, the appealing mosaic of blue and green, the rough, coarse hairs and the shimmering wings which refracted the sun's golden light.

One day, he flew over by Evelyn's, and caught sight of her

leaving the house. He followed her, to her new boyfriend's place. The guy was Tambo, who'd displaced Boab in the Granton Star line-up. He found himself buzzing involuntarily. After watching them fuck like rabbits in every conceivable position, he flew down into the cat's litter tray, checking first that the creature was asleep in its basket.

He munched at a skittery turd not properly buried in the gravel. He then flew into the kitchen, and puked the shite into a curry that Tambo had made. He made several journeys.

The next day Tambo and Evelyn were violently ill with food-poisoning. Observing them feverish and sick gave Boab a sense of power. This encouraged him to fly over to his old workplace. When he got there, he lifted some smaller granules of blue rat-poison from a matchbox on the floor, and inserted them into Rafferty's cheese salad sandwich.

Rafferty was very sick the next day, having to go to casualty and get his stomach pumped. The doctor reckoned he'd been given rat-poison. In addition to feeling terrible physically, Rafferty was also devastated with paranoia. Like most bosses, who are regarded with at best contempt and at worst hated by all their subordinates, except the most cringing sycophants, he imagined himself to be popular and respected. He wondered: Who could have done this to me?

Boab's next journey was to his parents' home. This was one journey he wished he hadn't made. He took up a position high on the wall, and tears condensed in his massive brown eyes as he surveyed the scene below him.

His father was clad in a black nylon body-stocking with a hole at the crotch. His arms were outstretched with his hands on the mantelpiece and his legs spread. Boab senior's flab rippled in his clinging costume. Boab's mother was naked, apart from a belt which was fastened so tightly around her body it cut sharply into her wobbling flesh, making her look like a pillow tied in the middle with a piece of string. Attached to the belt was a massive latex dildo, most of which was in Boab senior's anus. Most, but still not enough for Boab senior.

— Keep pushin Doe . . . keep pushin . . . ah kin take mair . . . ah need mair . . .

— Wir nearly at the hilt already . . . yir an awfay man, Boab Coyle . . . Doreen grunted and sweated, pushing further, smearing more KY jelly around Boab senior's flabby arse and onto the still-visible part of the shaft.

— The questionin, Doe . . . gies the questionin . . .

— Tell ays whae it is! Tell ays ya fuckin philandering bastard! Doreen screeched, as Boab the bluebottle shuddered on the wall.

— Ah'll nivir talk . . . Boab senior's wheezing tones concerned Doreen.

— Ye awright, Boab? Mind yir asthma n that . . .

— Aye . . . aye . . . keep up the questionin, Doreen . . . the crocodile clips, GIT THE CROC CLIPS DOE! Boab senior filled his cheeks with air.

Doreen took the first clip from the mantelpiece and attached it to one of Boab senior's nipples. She did the same with the other one. The third clip was a larger one, and she snapped it harshly onto his wizened scrotum. Turned on by his screams, she pushed the dildo in further.

— Tell ays, Boab! WHAE HUV YE BEEN SEEIN?

— AAAGGHHH . . . Boab senior screamed, then whispered, — . . . Dolly Parton.

— Whae? Ah cannae hear ye, Doreen said, menacingly.

— DOLLY PARTON!

— That fuckin slut . . . ah knew it . . . whae else?!

— Anna Ford . . . n that Madonna . . . bit jist the once . . .

— SCUMBAG! BASTARD! YA DIRTY FUCKIN PRJCK! . . . Ye ken whit this means!

— No the shite, Doe . . . ah cannae eat yir shite . . .

— Ah'm gaunny shite in your mooth, Boab Coyle! It's whit wi baith want! Dinnae deny it!

— Naw! Don't shite in ma mooth . . . don't . . . shite in ma mooth . . . shite in ma mooth . . . SHITE IN MA MOOTH!

Boab saw it all now. While he was mechanically relieving

himself upstairs by skilllessly poking Evelyn in the missionary position, his parents were trying to cram the three-piece suite up each other's arses. The very thought of them have a sexuality had repulsed him; now it shamed him in a different way. There was one aspect, however, where it was like father, like son. He knew he could not trust himself to see his mother's shite. It would be too arousing, that succulent, hot sour faeces, all going into his father's mouth. Boab felt his first conscious twinges of an Oedipus complex, at twenty-three years old, and in a metamorphosised state.

Boab sprang from the wall and swarmed around them, flying in and out of their ears.

— Shite . . . that fuckin fly . . . Doreen said. Just then, the phone went. — Ah'll huv tae git it! Boab. Stey thair. It'll be oor Cathy. She'll jist pester us aw night if ah dinnae answer now. Don't go away. She undid the belt, leaving the dildo in Boab's senior's arse. He was at peace, his muscles stretched, but holding the latex rod comfortably and securely. He felt filled, complete, and alive.

Boab junior was exhausted after his efforts and retreated back to the wall. Doreen grabbed the telephone receiver.

— Hiya Cathy. How are you doin, love? . . . Good . . . Dad's fine. How's the wee felly? . . . Aw, the wee lamb! N Jimmy . . . Good. Listen love, wir jist sitting doon tae oor tea. Ah'll phone ye back in about half an hour, n will huv a proper blether . . . Right love . . . Bye the now.

Doreen's reactions were quicker than the weary Boab's. She picked up the *Evening News* as she put down the phone and sprang over to the wall. Boab didn't see the threat until the rolled newspaper was hurtling towards him. He took off, but the paper caught him and knocked him back against the wall at great speed. He felt excruciating pain as parts of his external skeletal structure cracked open.

— Got ye, ya swine, Doreen hissed.

Boab tried to regain the power of flight, but it was useless. He dropped onto the carpet, falling down the gap between the wall

and the sideboard. His mother crouched down onto her knees, but she couldn't see Boab in the shadows.

— Tae hell wi it, the Hoover'll git it later. That fly wis a bigger pest thin young Boab, she smiled, clipping on the belt and pushing the dildo further into Boab senior's arse.

That night, the Coyles were awakened by the sound of groaning. They went tentatively down the stairs and found their son lying battered and bloodied, under the sideboard in the front room, suffering from terrible injuries.

An ambulance was called for, but Boab junior had slipped away. The cause of death was due to massive internal injuries, similar to the type someone would sustain in a bad car crash. All his ribs were broken, as were both his legs and his right arm. His skull had fractured. There was no trail of blood and it was inconceivable that Boab could have crawled home from an accident or a severe kicking in that condition. Everyone was perplexed.

Everyone except Kev, who began drinking heavily. Due to this problem, Kev became estranged from Julie, his girlfriend. He has fallen behind on the mortgage payments on his flat. There are to be further redundancies at the north Edinburgh electronics factory where he works. Worst of all for Kev, he is going through a lean spell in front of goal. He tries to console himself by remembering that all strikers have such barren periods, but he knows that he has lost a yard in pace. His position as captain, and even his place in the Star line-up, can no longer be considered unassailable. Star are not going to be promoted this year due to a bad slump in form and Muirhouse Albion almost contemptuously dismissed them at the quarter-final stage of the Tom Logan Memorial Trophy.

## SNOWMAN BUILDING PARTS FOR RICO THE SQUIRREL

The silver squirrel undulated across the yard and scuttled up the bark of the large Californian Redwood tree which overhung the rickety wooden fence. A tearful little boy in sneakers, t-shirt, jeans and baseball-cap watched, helpless in torment as the animal moved away from him.

— We love you Rico! the boy shouted. — Don't go Rico! he screamed in anguish.

The squirrel scrambled deftly up the tree. At the sound of the boy's despairing voice he stopped and looked back. His sad brown eyes glistened as he said, — Sorry Babby, I have to go. Some day you'll understand.

The small creature turned and launched itself along a branch, catching onto another, disappearing into the dense foliage of the woods behind the border of the flimsy fence.

— Mommy! young Bobby Cartwright shouted back towards the house. — It's Rico! He's going, Mommy! Tell him to stay!

Sarah Cartwright appeared on the porch and felt her chest tighten at the sight of her disconsolate son. Tears welled up in her eyes as she strode forward and held the boy to her. In a breathless, sugary voice she said wistfully, — But Rico has to go, honey. Rico's a very special little squirrel. We knew that when he came to us. We knew that Rico would have to go, for it's Rico's mission to spread love all over the world.

— But that means Rico doesn't love us, Mom! If he loved us he'd stay! Bobby screamed, inconsolable.

— Listen Babby, there are other people that need Rico too.