**Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha** by Roddy Doyle

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| We were coming down our road. Kevin stopped at a gate and bashed it with his stick. It was Missis Quigley’s gate; she was always looking out the window but she never did anything.–Quigley!–Quigley!–Quigley Quigley Quigley!Liam and Aidan turned down their culdesac. We said nothing; they said nothing. Liam and Aidan had a dead mother. Missis O’Connell was her name.–It’d be brilliant, wouldn’t it? I said.–Yeah, said Kevin.—Cool.We were talking about having a dead ma. Sinbad, my little brother, started crying. Liam was in my class in school. He dirtied his trousers one day—the smell of it rushed at us like the blast of heat when an oven door was opened—and the master did nothing. He didn’t shout or slam his desk with his leather or anything. He told us to fold our arms and go asleep and when we did he carried Liam out of the class. He didn’t come back for ages and Liam didn’t come back at all.James O’Keefe whispered,—If I did a gick in me pants he’d kill me!–Yeah.–It’s not fair, said James O’Keefe.—So it’s not.The master, Mister Hennessey, hated JamesO’Keefe. He’d be writing something on the board with his back to us and he’d say,—O’Keefe, I know you’re up to something down there. Don’t let me catch you. He said it one morning and James O’Keefe wasn’t even in. He was at home with the mumps.Henno brought Liam to the teachers’ toilet andcleaned him up and then he brought him to the headmaster’s office and the headmaster brought him to his auntie’s in his car because there was no one at home in his own house. Liam’s auntie’s house was in Raheny.–He used up two rolls of toilet paper, Liam toldus.—And he gave me a shilling.–He did not; show us it.–There.–That’s only threepence.–I spent the rest, said Liam.He got the remains of a packet of Toffo out of his pocket and showed it to us.–There, he said.–Give us one. | –There’s only four left, said Liam; he was putting the packet back in his pocket.–Ah, said Kevin.He pushed Liam.Liam went home.Today, we were coming home from the building site. We’d got a load of six-inch nails and a few bits of plank for making boats, and we’d been pushing bricks into a trench full of wet cement when Aidan started running away. We could hear his asthma, and we all ran as well. We were being chased. I had to wait for Sinbad. I looked back and there was no one after us but I didn’t say anything. I grabbed Sinbad’s hand and ran and caught up with the rest of them. We stopped when we got out of the fields onto the end of the road. We laughed. We roared through the gap in the hedge. We got into the gap and looked to see if there was anyone coming to get us. Sinbad’s sleeve was caught in the thorns.–The man’s coming! said Kevin, and he slid through the gap.We left Sinbad stuck in the hedge and pretended we’d run away. We heard him snivelling. We crouched behind the gate pillars of the last house before the road stopped at the hedge, O’Driscoll’s.–Patrick, Sinbad whinged.–Sinbahhhd, said Kevin.Aidan had his knuckles in his mouth. Liam threw a stone at the hedge.–I’m telling Mammy, said Sinbad.I gave up. I got Sinbad out of the hedge and made him wipe his nose on my sleeve. We weregoing home for our dinner: shepherd’s pie on aTuesday.Liam and Aidan’s da howled at the moon. Late at night, in his back garden; not every night, only sometimes. I’d never heard him but Kevin said he had. My ma said that he did it because he missed his wife.–Missis O’Connell?–That’s right.My da agreed with her.–He’s grieving, said my mother.—The poor man.Kevin’s father said that Mister O’Connell howled because he was drunk. He never called himMister O’Connell; he called him the Tinker. |