

DUCK FEET

Ma da's got bad feet. He says it's cause when he wis wee his mother made him wear shoes that didnae fit him. She made him squash his feet intae shoes that used tae be his brother's cause she couldnae afford tae buy new wans fur the baith ae them. He's got curly toes noo because ae it: thir aw twistet aroon on top ae each other lik the plaits ma ma pits in ma hair. Yi can see aw the big blue veins in his feet lik sumdy's drew them on wi a felt tip pen; he cannae bend his toes right an he has tae wear steel toe caps tae work, in case anywan stauns on them.

Oor school's gaunnae be startin swimmin lessons soon an ah cannae wait. Ah cannae swim yet so ah asked ma da if he'd take me tae the baths tae let me practice. He said naw. Ah said, How no. He said, Because ah cannae bliddy swim that's how no. Ah said, Aye but yi don't need tae be able tae swim tae go in the pool. He didnae say anythin aboot it after that, he jist pointet at his toes an said, If you wur me wid you want tae show aff feet lik that?

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The swimmin baths wis pish. They pit me doon at the shalla end wi this pure midden ae a boy cawd Colin fae wan E that looks lik he's never had a bath in his life, an this lassie cawd Harpreet that wears a mad swimmin cap cause it's against her religion tae get her hair wet. Ah got made tae wear these big stupit yella airm bands an aw the boys in the class laughed at me; aw ma pals wur up at the seven foot mark daein lengths an divin fur rubber hoola hoops.

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Ah said tae ma da, How dae yi no go tae see a shiropidist. A shiropidist, he said, Whit wid ah want wi a shiropidist. Ah says, Mibby he could help fix yir feet an then yi'd be able tae take me swimmin. Ma da jist laughed at me though, an then he said, A shiropidist wid take wan look at these feet an chop the bliddy things aff.

Ah only says it tae him cause see ma wee sister, she had bad feet when she was a wean an she managed tae get her feet fixed. This guy in the Start Right shoe shop, he fittet her wi the wrang size ae shoe an she endet up wi her toes aw up an doon lik Gourock. It wis aw cause she had wee skinny ankles an big broad feet an he packed her toes intae wee narra shoes.

Ma ma knew somethin wisnae right aboot they shoes, cause fur a whole week after she bought them, ma sister wouldnae stop girnin an she kept pullin the shoes aff an flingin them ootae the pram. We wur comin back fae the Sunday school wan mornin an this guy chased after us cause he'd fun wan shoe at the top ae Ard Road an the other wan half way doon Vennacher. When ma ma took the shoes aff ma sister that night, her feet wur red raw an covert in blisters, an her wee toes wur aw twistin thegither lik a corkscrew. Ma da took the shoes back tae the shop the next day an ah've never seen him that angry, ah thought he wis gaunnae punch the guys lights oot.

Ma sister wis lucky that her bones hadnae set properly an the shiropidist managed tae gie her these wee things fur in between her toes: they wur lik braces made ae plasticine stuff an they looked a wee bit lik the jelly false teeth yi used tae get aff the ice cream van. The shiropidist wis dead nice an he made me a bouncy ball ootae plasticine stuff fur me tae play wi when ah wis sittin in the waitin room.

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Thir wis deep sea divers in the baths the day. Ah swam half a breadth an then ah stopped at the edge ae the pool tae watch them: they had snorkles an oxygen tanks an everythin. Wan ae them had a pair ae green flippers an she wis pittin them on when sumdy fae up the deep end shoutet, Heh duck feet, an then evrubdy else startet laughin. Then Chris Rice fae ma Regi class shoutet at me, Heh how'd yi no get a perra duck feet tae go wi yir wings.

That wis whit gave me the idea.

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Aye but how no, ah said. Ma da said, Naw. Ah said, But how no. Ma da said, Naw an that's it finished. Ah said, But ah asked about it an everythin an the guy said it wis awright. Ma da said, The answer's naw ah'm tellin yi an that's it endy story.

Ma da's never paddult in the sea or walked along the beach an felt the sand atween his toes; he's never took his shoes aff on a hot day an run bare foot across a scorchin hot pavement; he disnae know how it feels tae huv athlete's foot or a verucca, an he disnae understaun the pleasure ae watchin dead skin peel away fae the backs ae yir heels.

Ah jist thought if he wore a pair ae flippers in the baths then he widnae huv tae worry about folk seein his bad feet an then he'd be able tae come in an watch me swim. It wisnae lik ah wis bein funny, ah wis bein totally serious about it although ah did have some job convincin the life guard at first.

Ah tried tae get ma ma on side but she jist laughed at me. Away yi go, she said, An don't talk stupid. Ah said, But whit if aw ae us wore them on wur feet then da widnae feel sa stupid. An who's AW AE US, she said. Me, you, ma sister... Aye that will be shinin, she said, Yir no gettin me in a bliddy swimmin cozzie. Ah said, But how no. She said, Because if ah jump in, aw the water'll jump oot that's how no.

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The teacher wantet me tae try daein it withoot the airm bands. Ah said, Ah cannae. She said, Yi can. Ah said, Ah cannae dae it an that's it. She said if ah managed a breadth wi oot the airm bands then ah'd be allowed up the deep end the next time. Aff went the stupid rubber airm bands.

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They gied oot aw the medals fur swimmin the day. Aw ma pals got wans fur twenty, thirty, fifty an a hunner lengths. After we come oot the water, the teacher lined us aw up beside the

pool an she shoutet the names oot wan by wan. Ah jist stood there lookin at the spectator's bit where ma best pal Charlene's ma wis sittin up beside the mirrors an the hair drier.

Charlene wis the best swimmer in oor class, a right water baby, she'd been takin lessons since she wis three yir auld an her ma dis aw that underwater callanetics or whatever yi caw it.

It wis bliddy freezin an ah couldnae wait tae get dried an ah didnae see the point in me staunin there anyway when ah wisnae even gettin a medal. Ah wis aboot tae walk away when ah heard the teacher shoutin oot Colin's name. How did he get wan, ah thought, he couldnae even kick his legs in a straight line never mind swim a length. Then they shoutet Harpreet. Ah've got quite pally wi her an ah've fun out quite a bit aboot Sikhism which is oor next topic in R.E. Ah thought it wis good she got a medal, cause when she first startet she wis feart tae pit her face in the water an noo she can float wi oot the rubber airm bands wi me haudin ontae her hauns an pullin her alang.

Ah wis that busy sayin well done tae Harpreet that ah didnae hear ma ain name gettin shoutet. Then Harpreet said, It's your turn Kirsty, an ah walked doon tae the front ae the line no really knowin whit tae expect cause aw ah'd done wis swim a breadth, an there wis ma best pal Charlene had done a hunner bliddy lengths. Up in the spectator bit sumdy wis cheerin an wolf-whistlin so ah missed whit the teacher actually said. She held oot this big bronze medal wi a yella ribbon that said on it,

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Ah didnae really know whit that meant but ah shook her haun an smiled an then she pit the ribbon ower ma neck.

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Ma da wis staunin talkin tae the teacher when ah come oot the changin rooms. Ah said, Whit you daein here, an he said, Well done, an he pointet at the medal. Ah said, Da whit yi daein here. He looked at the teacher an she looked at me an then she said, Yir dad's thinkin about takin swimmin lessons. Ah couldnae believe it so ah said, Yir bliddy kiddin.

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Ma da starts his swimmin lessons soon. He cannae wait. But he's a bit feart. He came an sat in the spectator's bit at the weekend an watched me an Harpreet.

While we wur daein wur hair ah said tae him, If yi come in wi us next time ah can teach yi the breast stroke cause that's the easiest wan. He said, Aye mibby. Ah said, Harpreet's dead good at it noo an she disnae even need the water wings. Ma da said, Listen tae you two ya pair a show affs, an me an Harpreet startet tae giggle.

Aye well wan things fur sure, ma da said an he pointet doon at the wans wi the flippers an the snorkles that wur in daein thir deep sea divin, Yi'll no catch me in a pair ae they duck feet.