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Opening extract from

Moone Boy: the Blunder Years

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Chris O'Dowd
& Nick V. Murphy

MOONE BOY

The Blunder Years

Illustrated by
Walter Giampaglia/Cartoon Saloon

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Good afternoon, reader. Or good morning, listener. Or good evening, watcher, for those of you who are watching someone else read this novel and trying to guess the contents. Whoever you are, welcome to this book!

Before we begin, I need to carry out a quick survey.

Are you reading this book because:

A. You have a scientific interest in the moon.
B. You have a scientific interest in the misspelling of the word 'moon'.
C. You want to find out how quick and easy it is to obtain an imaginary friend that you'll cherish for life.
D. You'll read anything. You're just like that.

If your answer is A or B, then I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. There's very little moon action in this story, apart from the brief appearance of a wrestler's wrinkly bum.

If your answer is C, then you'll be equally disappointed. I suggest you pick up a copy of *Imaginary Friends – The Quick and Easy Guide to Forever Friendship* by a former colleague of mine, Customer Service Representative 263748. He wrote it while working at the Corporate League of Imaginary Friends Federation. It's a comprehensive and well-researched body of work that will send you to sleep within seconds of opening its cover.

If your answer is D, then good for you! You're my kind of reader. I'm glad we got rid of that other bunch of idiots who picked A, B and C. And may I say, you're in for a treat. If you like shenanigans, you've come to the right book. These pages are riddled with ridicule, peppered

with pranks and seasoned with spelling mistakes. So if you're looking for a tale that deals with the perils and hazards of imaginary friendship, you should find *Moone Boy: The Blunder Years* completely satisfactory.

So let's get on with it, my tea's getting cold. And stop picking your nose. You think I can't see you, but I can. And it's disgusting.

Anyway, enjoy the book. Just turn the page and proceed with Caution.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SCRUNCHIE INQUEST

Boyle, the third nipple of Ireland, on a wet Wednesday in the middle of the last month of the summer holidays.

Weather forecast: drizzle, with a chance of crizzle* in the afternoon.

It was the summer holidays, and it was raining. Again. Martin Moone might have been free from the shackles of the classroom, but now he was forced to do even more hard time at home, with the fierce females of his flippin' family. And he was fast finding out that women are a

***CRIZZLE** – cloudy drizzle.

MOONE DICTIONARY

tricky bunch. Sisters are even trickier. And *older* sisters have the ability to bewilder the finest magicians in the world with their tricksiness.

Martin Moone had three older sisters. And a very older mother, who was someone else's sister. This made the eleven-year-old simpleton feel like he was drowning in women. Or slowly submerging in female quicksand. Either way, not ideal.

If *only* his useless mother had given him a brother.

Just one.

Just a single tall, lanky companion to help him do battle with this legion of ladies.

But she hadn't. Probably just to spite him.

No, Martin Moone was alone in this fight. An army of one. And, on this wet Wednesday morning, as on every other morning, he found himself under siege.

'This was the best house in the world before you were born!' explained Sinead, jabbing a jammy finger at Martin's face. She then picked

up her buttery toast and wrapped her snack-happy jaws around her sixth slice of the morning.

'Now, let's not go mad,' reasoned Martin. 'Sure, how could it have been the best house if I wasn't even in it?'

'That's why it was the best house in the world, ya plonk!' repeated Sinead, spraying him with a mouthful of toast crumbs.

His other sisters, Fidelma and Trisha, murmured in agreement. They were eating breakfast while gawping at the television – clearly too busy to actually voice their dislike of their brother.

Martin had been accused of ruining his closest sister's scrunchie* by using it as a catapult. When I say 'closest', I mean in age. As siblings, they were as close to each other as a badger is to a trap.

In Martin's defence, it must be said that a

***SCRUNCHIE** – a simple rubber band, clothed in cotton, used by the long of hair to bunch their greasy, nit-infested manes into a manageable heap.

catapult is a device that requires a reasonable amount of upper-body strength. The amount of strength in Martin's upper body was very *unreasonable*. Pig-headed, even. Point being, there's no way this accusation could be true. His sisters' daily dead arms had surely made his insignificant little limbs far too weak to commit the crime. Pulling back the elasticated hairband and propelling a pebble skyward was clearly beyond his physical abilities. Case closed. An innocent man. Almost definitely.

But in the Moone kitchen, which this morning resembled a clan* court, Martin was being subjected to quite the grilling.

'Better than the Taj Mahal?' asked Martin. It had only taken him three full minutes to think of this smart-arse retort to Sinead's

***CLAN** – Gaelic** word for the fellow members of your personal human zoo, your family.
****GAELIC** – a lyrical and impossible language spoken in regions of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and, for some reason, France.

comment about their house.

'What are you talking about?' grunted Sinead, now horsing down a chocolate yogurt.

'You're saying that, before I was born, this . . . Irish igloo –' he pointed at various low points of the Moone kitchen to emphasize his point – 'this breezy bungalow, this mountain of mould, was better than say . . . the White House in America?'

He smirked, pleased with his joke and certain his quick wit would snip their sniping off at the knees.

'Are you being a clever-hole, Martin?' asked Trisha from the couch.

Martin glared at her. Trisha was the middle sister and so had been blessed with all the attributes saved for the average middle sister – a fear of being forgotten, which caused her to lash out, the ability to burn everything she cooked (even water) and, of course, a dislike or mistrust of all living things.

'He is and all,' hissed Sinead spitefully, as

she sliced herself a wedge of old cheese that she'd found in the fridge. 'He's being a smart-hole.'

Fidelma looked up from her bowl of soggy ReadyBix*. 'Martin, just apologize and give Sinead your pocket money to buy a new scrunchie. Then we won't have to murder you and throw your body in the lake.'

'Who's goin' to the lake? I'll go to the lake if people are goin' to the lake.'

The children turned to find their father, Liam, standing in the kitchen doorway with a big happy head on him.

'I haven't been to the lake for ages,' he declared cheerfully.

Sinead and Martin began shouting again, each putting across their own case for their dad's judgement.

'Martin used my scrunchie as a catapult,'

***READYBIX** – a puddle of sawdust, oats and tears pretending to be breakfast cereal.

Sinead snorted, holding up the red sagging scrunchie like a murder weapon, 'and now it's too baggy!'

'What?! As if I could even use a catapult after all the dead arms you've given me!' Martin retorted. 'It's a miracle I can even feed myself!'

'Whoa, whoa, whoa!' groaned their clueless father. 'All right, calm down, speak one at a time or nobody's goin' to the lake.'

'Nobody *is* going to the lake, Dad!' they both blurted back at him.

'Well, not now they're not,' Liam insisted, putting his silly old foot down.

Fidelma and Trisha rolled their eyes and turned back to the flickering television screen.

'He's always using my stuff, Dad,' Sinead persevered. 'Last week he used my tights to catch worms.'

'They were attracted to your scent!' Martin explained.

'He broke a leg off my Sindy doll—'

'My Action Man prefers his damsels

to be *really* distressed.'

'And he's always hogging my Fashion Wheel*.'

They all looked to Martin for an explanation. Martin cleared his throat as he searched for a reason why he had been using this oh-so-feminine crafting device. But all that came to him was:

'That's just an excellent toy.'

'Martin, did you use your sister's scrunchie as a catapult?'

'It hurts me that you even have to ask, Dad,' replied the mini-Moone.

Just then, Liam's inquisition of Martin was interrupted by the arrival of Mammy Moone.

'Has anyone seen my leather belt?' she asked, as she rushed through the kitchen

***FASHION WHEEL** – a common Christmas present in 1987. A plastic contraption for drawing and colouring lovely patterned dresses. Popular with girls, and their brothers when no one was looking.

looking like a turbaned Margaret Thatcher*, her recently washed hair wrapped high in a towel. Debra Moone had a habit of rushing into and out of rooms, as mothers often do, which made Martin suspect that she had a secret identity far beyond the simple, lazy life she led as their mother.

'The green one?' asked Fidelma, the most likely belt-borrower in Boyle.

'No, no, my new one, the black leather one. Flippin' heck, can't keep a hold of anything in this house,' Debra complained as she exited the kitchen at speed, off to her war-room meeting or whatever.

'Dad, it's just not fair,' Sinead whined, still on the hunt for scrunchie retribution.

'Life isn't fair, love,' mused Liam, trying to be poetic.

'Wise words, old man, I think we can all

***MARGARET THATCHER** – the eldest and wartiest of the witches from Roald Dahl's wonderful book.

learn from that,' nodded Martin, tapping his father on the elbow appreciatively.

Sinead rolled her eyes as their mam rushed back in, her damp, limp hair now straddling her shoulders like the legs of a sick horse.

'What are they fighting about this time?' she asked her husband, patting her wet hair dry with an even wetter towel.

Liam, still pretending to focus on the conflict, whispered back, 'Who cares? I just use "life isn't fair" as my position on everything now.'

The slightest hint of an impressed smile from her mam was all that Sinead needed to go back on the attack.

'Martin used my scrunchie as a catapult and now it's ruined,' she squawked.

'I swear on my grave that's not true,' Martin offered, hand on heart.

'You don't have a grave, pal,' said Liam, sipping his tea.

‘Then I swear on your grave, Dad.’

‘We’re all alive, Martin,’ his mother reminded him.

‘For now we are . . .’ whispered Sinead, staring daggers at Martin. ‘I’m gonna end you, ya flute*.’

‘But I’ve only just begun!’ Martin protested.

‘Martin, did you or did you not use Sinead’s scrunchie as a catapult?’ Debra asked calmly and ominously.

‘Absolutely not. And I’m growing tired of all these baseless accusations.’

‘Did you use it for anything else?’ added Mammy Moone, with a knowing look.

The room fell silent as all eyes turned to Martin.

‘Well . . .’

‘Did I see you practising karate in the garden this morning, Martin?’ probed his mother,

***FLUTE** – a melodic woodwind instrument. Also used as a personal insult, probably because it’s such a pain in the bum to learn.

clearly ahead of the game.

'I may have been honing some of my moves, yes,' the boy offered sheepishly*.

'And were you pretending to be the Karate Kid by wearing Sinead's scrunchie as a headband, by any chance?' Debra quizzed, promptly wrapping up the case.

As Sinead and the girls gawped, Martin cleared his throat to make his final plea.

'It's the headband that makes it macho, Mam.'

As his sisters lobbed abuse at him, Martin's punishment came quickly.

'Buy Sinead a new scrunchie and stop stealing our flippin' stuff,' Debra ordered as she rushed off to meet some astronauts or whatever.

'Wait,' piped up Trisha, sensing blood.

***SHEEPISHLY** – a long word for shy. Comes from the sheep world's lack of good public speakers.

‘Wasn’t the Karate Kid a *black belt*?’

Martin’s head drooped as Debra spun on her heels and looked from her sagging belt loops to her flagging fruit loop of a son. She waited for an explanation. And waited.

Martin simply shrugged. ‘A basic grasp of self-defence is very important in this house.’

A vicious dead arm from Sinead provided a fitting full stop to his point.

Martin was sick and tired of being terrorized by these turbulent teens. I can't fly this boy jet alone any more, he thought to himself. I need a co-pilot.