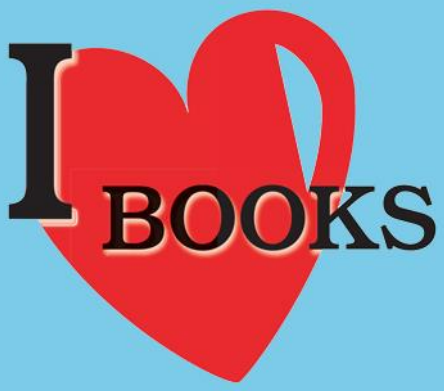


Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Misfits Club

Written by

Kieran Crowley

Illustrated by

Vince Reid

Published by

Macmillan Children's Books

Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



First published 2017 by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5098-0799-4

Text copyright © Kieran Crowley 2017
Illustrations copyright © Vince Reid 2017

The right of Kieran Crowley and Vince Reid to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

CHAPTER ONE



'You're dead.'

The thing nobody had ever told Brian about being chased was that it was fun. It was terrifying too, but that was part of the fun. Of course, the fact that he was on a bicycle, his trusty old Stringer White 5000, meant that he had an advantage over the two idiots who were after him; they were on foot. He flipped the pedals backwards, using the rear brakes to send the bike into a curving skid that spat up gravel chips from the churchyard.

It was almost one o'clock, eighteen days to the end of the school summer holidays and fifteen days to the end of the Misfits Club. A large grey-white cloud was beginning to hide the early afternoon sun as Brian straightened up the bike. On one side of him was the town of Newpark, on the other a road that bisected the town's largest housing estate. Beyond that lay the countryside and his escape.

'Did you hear me?' the bigger of his two pursuers shouted.

'I wasn't really listening. Was it something about being dead?'

His mother had said that he had a smart mouth, just like his dad – the only thing they had in common, Brian hoped – and that smart mouths got you into trouble. She was right about that; he was often in trouble.

Of course, he'd be in more trouble if these two hairy gorillas caught up with him. Gorilla number one was flabby and out of shape and not that much of a threat. Gorilla number two was a different prospect, though. He was younger and fitter and he wasn't issuing threats. In fact, he wasn't saying anything at all. That freaked Brian out a little bit. His father had always warned him that the quiet ones were the ones you had to watch out for.

The gap between them was about fifty metres. Unless one of them was an Olympic sprinter, there was no way he was going to be caught.

'You're so dead they'll have to bury you twice,' the heavier of the two men roared.

Brian faked a yawn, really exaggerated it too. 'Sorry, did you say something? You're so far away it's hard to hear you.'

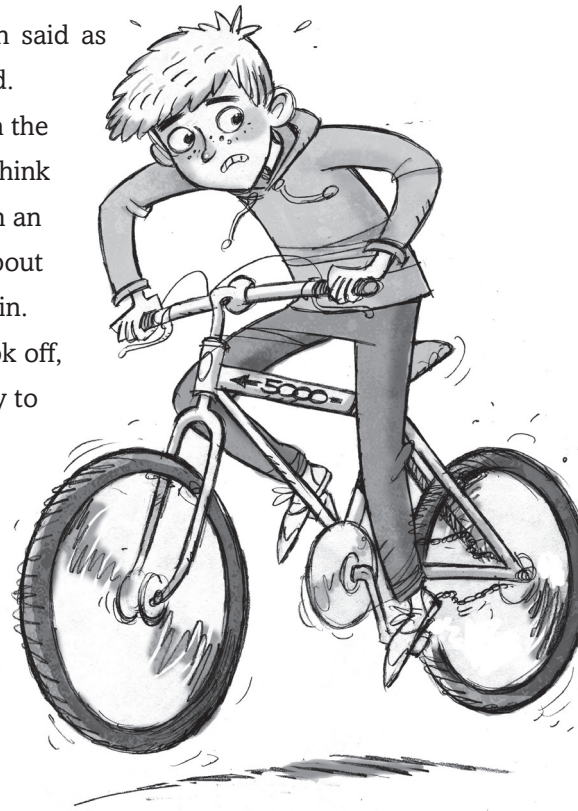
He thought gorilla number one was going to explode with rage. His cheeks puffed out and his face began to turn crimson, from the tip of his forehead to the bottom of his chin – dazzlingly red – like it was the world's worst superhero power. It made Brian smile until he realized that he'd lost sight of the second guy. There was no sign of him. Had he just given up?

VRRRROOOM.

Uh-oh, Brian thought. That's not the sound of someone giving up. It was actually the sound of a car, a cobalt-blue 2004 Subaru Impreza, to be completely accurate. A souped-up car if the roaring, guttural engine sounds that sent great rumbling tremors across the ground were anything to go by. It emerged from the hidden parking space on the side of Colbert Street like a predator emerging from the undergrowth.

‘Oh, crud,’ Brian said as his stomach lurched.

He was quick on the bike, but he didn’t think he was quicker than an Impreza. He was about to find out for certain. The car revved, took off, then stopped briefly to let the bigger guy climb in as Brian spun the bike round by the handlebars, stood up and began pedalling faster than he ever had before.



There was a left turn thirty metres ahead that led into a cul-de-sac. If he could get to the end of the cul-de-sac, he could make it over the Hennigans’ back wall and disappear into the maze of alleys behind their house. They’d never find him there.

The left turn was only ten metres away now. Another plan was beginning to form in Brian’s brain.

Form faster, form faster, he thought.

The car closed the distance between them quickly and the nose of the Impreza was just behind him as he turned into the cul-de-sac at speed, leaning low, his shoulder almost grazing

the ground as the bike struggled to stay on two wheels.

Brian was almost parallel to the tarmac, but he was in the flow – completely focused, nothing existing outside of him and this moment. Time slowed. He could see everything all at once, hear the noise of children playing, smell the fumes from the car's giant exhaust, then the whine as the car struggled to follow him into the turn.

The back end of the car swung wide, dragging the rest of the vehicle with it, followed by the look of sheer panic on the bigger man's face as he briefly thought they were going to smack into a garden wall. The younger man corrected the spin with two sharp movements of the steering wheel. The car righted itself with a judder.

Brian launched himself on to the small green, and circled round, digging a tyre furrow in the soft grass, before heading back in the goons' direction. He knew he wouldn't make it to the Hennigans' house before they caught him. It was time for Plan B.

As they watched open-mouthed, he briefly considered making a rude gesture, but instead he just waved. It was hard to tell because he was travelling at speed, but they appeared to be getting even angrier.

He didn't want to head back towards town – they'd catch him too easily – so there was only a single possibility left. It was one he didn't want to take as whether it would work or not depended upon how lazy a neighbour had been over the last few days, but he decided that he had no other choice. The other possibilities, ones that involved him begging for mercy or

shouting for someone to call the gardaí, never occurred to him.

The turn-off was on the opposite side of the road, past the housing estate. He was nearly there when he heard the car's tyres squeal as it joined him on the main road.

He veered the bike right again, down a narrow path with grass growing in the middle. The last of the housing estate was on one side, nothing but fields on the other. Brian hoped that the farmer who owned the fields hadn't got around to fixing the broken fence yet. It sagged down next to the iron gate at the end of the path, leaving an opening of about a metre, enough of a gap for Brian and the bike to make it through if he was careful, but not enough space for a car to follow. Brian pedalled furiously. The adrenalin that had kept him going was running out now – his lungs were on fire and his legs felt like concrete, but he kept pedalling. He was only metres away when the car loomed up behind him.

He was going to make it.

As he slipped between the tumbledown barbed-wire fence and the concrete post of the iron gate, he saw that it was padlocked. He heard the screech of brakes as the car tried to avoid slamming into the gate. He'd done it. Even if they tried to break the lock, he'd be miles away from them by the time they managed it. The only way they could chase him now was by running after him and he knew they wouldn't do that. They'd never catch him on foot.

He glanced behind and saw both of them standing by the car. The bigger guy was shaking his fist and shouting something at him. Something rude, no doubt, but Brian couldn't hear it.

They'd given up. He was free. Or at least he would have been if he'd been paying attention.

The grassy field wasn't the smoothest of surfaces and as he bounced along the rutted path he hit something, a rock maybe, nothing he could clearly see. It jolted the bike and sent him flying over the handlebars. He hit the ground hard, scudded along the surface for a couple of seconds before he came to a stop, twisted on his side.

'Ow,' he said.

Ow was a little bit of an understatement. It hurt a lot more than an *ow*'s worth. He heard one of the men laugh, a hollow mocking laugh that really annoyed him, nearly as much as the severe pain he was in annoyed him.

Brian clambered to his feet. The men had taken a few steps into the field. He was in no shape to outrun them. He wasn't even sure he could reach his bike in time.

'We've got him now,' one of them said.

6pm - Everything is sort of normal. If you think a screaming baby and a house being in a complete mess is normal. It's been like that for the last six weeks since Susanna, Her Royal Highness, first arrived. Six weeks old and my new baby sister is already the centre of the universe and now it's like I don't exist at all. Twelve years of being an only child and suddenly they've forgotten about me. It's not fair. It really isn't. I get that she's small and, when her face isn't all red and scrunched up cos she's crying (which is never), she is kind of cute, but why does she have to get all the attention?

7.15pm - Everything is HORRIBLE. More horrible than being forgotten. I hate my dad and I hate my stepmother. During dinner they tricked me into thinking everything was OK by acting all nice to me and stuff. They said having a new baby around was tough on me, but it was also tough on everybody else. They said they were glad I was helping out (I wasn't doing that much) and then they gave me a clothes voucher as a present. For one complete second I was actually happy. Then after dessert they sat down and put on sad voices and I'm-sorry faces and said there was something we needed to talk about. Except that there wasn't anything to talk about because they'd already decided everything. All because of a little joke!

And now here I am, writing in this stupid journal with its stupid flowers on the stupid cover for the first time in four years. I don't even like writing, but I have to do

something right now or else I'll just EXPLODE! I can't even talk to any of my friends because my dad took away my phone and tablet for the night when I got cross and woke the baby up. I still can't believe what's happening. They're making me move out of my own home! Where I've lived all my life while my stepmother gets to stay here even though she's only lived here for three years. HOW IS THAT FAIR? I don't want to move. I like my friends. I like my room. I like my life, or I did until Susanna arrived. They say it's only for the holidays until things calm down with Her Royal Highness, but how can I trust them? My dad is kicking his <u>own daughter</u> out of her <u>own home</u>!

When Vivienne and my dad got married she was nice to me. Always taking me to fun places. On Saturday nights, we'd get a takeaway and she'd make hot chocolate and we'd sit on the couch watching The X Factor.

'I'm not just your stepmother – I'm your friend.' she used to say. But what she's doing now isn't very friendly, is it?

I have to live with my GRANDMOTHER! I don't want to live with my grandmother. Don't get me wrong, Gran's nice to me, but she's not exactly what you'd call normal – unless you think things like shouting at crows or singing so loudly the neighbours can hear are normal. <u>I don't</u>. She lives over thirty miles away and I won't see my friends <u>all summer</u>. I've never been left on my own with Gran before, so that's going to be completely strange, and my bedroom in her farmhouse smells old and musty. Gran likes reading all these books I've never heard of and she doesn't even own a computer. What if she

makes me milk a cow or something? I don't like cows. They stare at you the whole time, like they're plotting something sinister. And the town she lives near is nothing like my home town. It's a really odd place. I'm not a snob, but the people there are different, kind of weird and some of them smell. Everything's going to be AWFUL.