Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Opening extract from

Jiggy Mccue: Kid Swap

Written by

Michael Lawrence

Published by

Orchard Books

All text is copyright of the author

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Chapter One

Have you ever wished you lived under a different roof? I mean in a different house, flat, basement, with different people, wallpaper, toilets? Course you have. Who hasn't? But I bet you've never been traded for another kid, have you? Well, guess who has. Yes, the one and only Jiggy McCue. And by my own *parents* would you believe!

The first I heard about it was one Wednesday, towards the end of my mother's idea of an evening meal – the latest vegetable dish she'd failed to learn how to make from a celebrity chef with a stupid haircut.

'Jiggy,' said Mum.

'Mother,' I replied, pressing the pain in my chest.

'We have something to tell you,' she said.

'Text me,' I said. 'I'm going to my room to lie down.'

'You'll stay right there while I talk to you,' said she.



'I'll leave it to you, Peg,' said Dad, getting up.

'Oh no you won't,' said Mum. 'Sit down.'

Dad sank back in his chair. This was starting to sound serious.

'What's going on?' I asked, trying not to seem nervous.

Mum took a deep breath, which made me even more nervous. Deep breaths before speaking in my house mean Heavy Subjects are about to zoom Jigward. Had I been expelled from school while I was filing my nails? Was my pathetic chocolate ration going to be reduced to zero? Was Mum leaving Dad for a man?

But even though it was my mother's deep breath, it was my father who got in first with the news. The first bit of it anyway.

'Jig,' he said. 'We're going to swap you for another kid.'

I gawped at him. He was joking, of course.

'You're joking, of course.'

He smiled. 'Nope. Perfectly serious.'

'You're going to swap me for another kid?' I said.

'Another boy.' This was Mum. She was smiling too now.

'You're going to swap me for another *boy*?'

'It was your mother's idea,' Dad said, trying to shift the blame and failing.

I gawped some more, at both of them. What kind of parents would swap their own son?

'What kind of parents would swap their own son?' I asked.

'The kind that need the money,' said Mum. 'As you know, we had to cancel the week's touring holiday we were so looking forward to.'

'Whoa,' I said. 'Back a bit. You're swapping me for *money*?'

'Well, you don't think we'd just *give* you away, do you?' said Dad.

'Your dad's out of work,' Mum said.

'So what's new?' I said.

'So I can't pay the mortgage on my wages alone. And I'll be off work myself in a couple of months too, so no more overtime for a while. In other words, there's going to be a bit of a cash-flow problem.'

The Dad/work thing was true enough. He'd lost his job a few weeks earlier. He's always losing something, my dad. Keys, temper, hair. But his job. So selfish. Thanks to him we'd already had to cut back on essentials like my favourite biscuits, fizzy



drinks, the tasty little packet snacks that Mum keeps threatening to ban. There was even talk of 'looking at my pocket money', which you could already count on the fingers of half a hand.

'Dad could get another job,' I said.

'He *could*,' said Mum. 'But you're talking about someone who's proud to wear a T-shirt with "WORK-SHY" in big EasyJet letters across the chest.'

'All right, that's him. But why will you be off work?'

'Why? I'm expecting a baby. Your little sister. Had you forgotten?'

I glanced at her stomach, which was almost as big as the downstairs cloakroom. No chance of forgetting that. 'But you've got two months yet. And what's the big deal anyway? You go to the hospital one afternoon, have her and a cup of tea, back at work next morning. Dad and I can look after her.'

Mum sighed. 'Jiggy, you're being swapped, and that's that. You should look upon it as an experience. Most kids would jump at it.'

'You *think*?'

'I do. It's quite a privilege to be selected.

You wouldn't believe the number of applicants.'

'Applicants? You actually *applied* to swap me?'

'It's the way it works, Jig,' my treacherous father explained.

'I don't believe you can make money by swapping kids,' I said feebly. 'I just do *not* believe it.'

'Oh, but you can,' Mum said brightly. 'And by doing so we'll be able to pay the mortgage for six whole months.'

'*And* have enough over for a long weekend on a canal,' said Dad.

'But me!' I cried. 'Your number one son! Your only child so far!'

Mum looked at Dad. Dad looked at Mum.

'Maybe he should hear the details,' she said to him.

'I thought he was hearing them,' said he to her.

'I don't *want* the details!' I yelled, and ran out, slammed the door, pounded up to my room, slammed that door too, and punched Roger, my toy monkey.

They gave it thirty-two minutes before coming up to see if I'd got used to the idea yet. Those thirty-two minutes included twenty-five for Mum to watch *Home and Away*. *Home and Away*. Said it



all, didn't it? They were staying home and sending me away.

They knocked on my door. Well, one of them did. Dad, I guessed. My mother hardly ever knocks. She barges in, all hours, day or night, usually screeching at me to change my underwear, get a move on, or do stuff I've been trying not to think about, like homework. The knock meant that part two of Sell Your Son to the Nearest Bidder was about to occur.

'Jiggy, we have to explain,' Mum said, flinging the door back when the knock was answered with a leave-me-in-peace-forever-you-pathetic-excuse-for-parents silence. Dad shuffled in after her, looking a bit guilty. So he should.

'There's nothing *to* explain,' I snarled. 'You want to get rid of me, end of saga.'

'It's not that,' she said, plonking herself on the bed beside me and squeezing my shoulder. 'It's not that at *all*, darling.'

'Don't darling me,' I snapped, shrugging her off. 'You don't want me any more and that's that. Probably never did. It's because I can't keep still, isn't it?'

'Oh, Jiggy.'

'And don't "Oh, Jiggy" me either.'

'Calm down, Jig,' Dad said from the door. (He looked like he wanted to make a bolt for it.*) 'We have to talk this through.'

'Talk it through with me?' I said. 'Why? I'm just some unwanted kid who happens to be related to you by a freak of nature.'

He ignored this, probably because it was true. 'It'll be a real experience for you,' he said. 'Chance to see how the other half lives.'

'Other half?'

'The rich half.'

'They're rich?' I said.

'That's the impression we get.'

'Oh, so *they're* paying you. Have they got a son they don't like either then?'

'No, no, the money's not coming from them,' said Mum.

'Who then? The government? Is this some new government initiative to place kids with more loving families?'

'The television company's paying for it.'

'The what?'

'The TV company that's going to film it all.'

'Film what all?'

---

* Which would have been nice. I wasn't allowed a bolt on my door.



'If you'll just sit quiet a moment, we'll tell you,' Dad said.

So I sat quiet. Wasn't easy to keep still, though. My elbows flapped like they were battery-operated and my feet Riverdanced like maniacs. (They do this when I'm upset or agitated.)

If you want to hear about the cruel deal my parents had set up for me, drag your eyes to the next page. I wouldn't bother personally, but it's your time you're wasting, not mine.

Chapter Two

Did you ever see any of those TV programmes where people are swapped to see how they get on with different people or in different situations? Two families switch holidays or homes or wives for a while, and there are all these rows and lots of sulking and talking about one another behind their backs. Well, a new series was being made, and this was what my parents had signed us up for. It was going to be called Kid Swap. In Kid Swap, two families would exchange one child of about the same age, and cameras would go into each home and record everything.

When I heard that I was going to be in this thing like it or not, which I didn't, I shook my head in a neat combination of horror and amazement. 'Have you seen what *happens* on those shows?' I said.

'What do you mean?' This was Mum.

'People break down. Have tantrums. Throw things. They whisper to camera by torchlight and have to swear sixteen times in every sentence.'



'I can do that,' said Dad.

'That sort of thing happens in *other* shows,' Mum said. 'Carla, the nice girl from the television company, assured us that Kid Swap is going to be much classier.'

'And you believed her,' I said pityingly.

Dad smiled. 'She was quite a looker.'

I shook my head again, this time in sorrow. Parents. So easy to con. I should know, I con mine all the time. I explained, as gently as I could, to the feeble-minded old souls.

'Those TV types tell you what they think you want to hear to get you on board,' I said. 'It's only later, when you've invited your friends and relatives round to watch the result while nibbling cheese straws that you realise what a fool you've been made to look, and hear yourself say all the things they promised to leave on the cutting-room floor.'

Mum laughed. 'Jiggy, you're such a cynic. You're going to have a whale of a time. Trust me. But even if you don't, it'll all be over in a couple of weeks, then you're back home again.'

Yes, that was the one plus to all this. Two weeks of filming and that would be it. Could be a long two weeks, though.

I felt something brush my ankles. I looked down. Stallone, our cat, had crept upstairs and joined us. But he wasn't brushing my ankles out of affection. Stallone doesn't do affection. He was doing it because he'd just been outside rolling in something disgusting and wanted to pass it on. He looked up at me and snarled, the way he does.

'Here's a thought,' I said to my unfaithful parents. 'Tell the company you've change your minds about Kid Swap and'll wait for Pet Swap. Then we can exchange Stallone and see how we adapt to a terrapin or something.'

'No can do,' Dad said. 'The contract's been signed. And you want to count yourself lucky it's not Gender Swap (though they'd probably call it Sex Swap to get more viewers). If it was Gender Swap or Sex Swap, you'd have to become a girl.'

I'd already been there and done that, but that's between me and you.* 'What I want to know,' I said, 'is why I'm the last to hear about this, seeing as I'm the victim.'

'We thought we should keep quiet about it till we knew we'd been selected,' Mum said. 'Wanted it to be a surprise.'

I glared at her. 'Oh, it's that all right.'

---

* See the third Jiggy book, *The Toilet of Doom*.



'I didn't know about it either till she told me we had to go and meet the producers,' my father added, polishing his e-Bay halo.

I swivelled the glare his way. 'Went along with it then though, didn't you?'

He shrugged. 'Be a crime to turn down the loot they're offering.'

'Anyway, it was all kind of rushed,' Mum said. 'Four of the six episodes have already been filmed apparently, and the fifth is underway. I applied months ago and didn't hear a thing, but one of the families who'd agreed to do the sixth episode pulled out at the last minute, so they had to find a replacement family.'

'And there we were,' I said, 'just waiting for them like three sitting ducks. What's my share?'

'Your share?'

'What do I get out of this lousy deal?'

'You continue to have a roof over your head when you're back in the family fold,' said Dad.

'Oh joy. How come the producers didn't want to meet me too?'

'They did,' said Mum. 'We told them you weren't well.'

'Showed them some video I took one of the many

times you were in a stinking mood and not talking to anyone,' Dad said.

'Thought you'd show them my best side, did you?'

'You know how these shows work, Jig. It's not good telly if everyone's all sunny and cuddly. Thought we stood more of a chance of getting picked if our son came across as a surly little git.'

'Did the trick too,' said Mum brightly.

'And there's going to be a party at the end of shooting,' said Dad.

'I hate parties,' I muttered.

'A fancy dress party,' said Mum.

'Those most of all.'

Then they told me what they knew about the family they were farming me out to. It wasn't much. But guess what they were called, this family. Next. Yes, fans, I was being handed over to the Next Family! Mr Next's first name was Solomon, Mrs Next's was Roo (what kind of name is *that*?), and their two kids were Toby and Jess. Toby was the 13-year-old boy who was going to take my place on the McCue toilet, and Jess was the 15-year-old girl I would have to put up with as a temp sister. I asked where these people lived. Not that I cared.



'Just the other side of town,' said Mum.

'The fat cat side,' Dad smirked.

'Fat cat' must have offended Stallone, because he stalked out of the room with his tail in the air. It wasn't a view I needed right now.

'The telly people said they try to get families who live quite near one another so the crew can get from one to the other with ease,' Mum said.

'Have you met them?'

'We'll meet for the first time on Saturday. Then you'll go with them and Toby will come home with us.'

'Saturday? This Saturday?'

'Yes.'

'But that's the first day of the summer hols! I won't have any time to unwind from this long miserable term at school!'

This was all happening too fast, but it looked like it was going ahead whatever I said or wanted. I tried to find a bright side.

'How rich is this family?'

'Well, Carla said they have horses and a swimming pool,' Mum said.

'Indoor pool,' said Dad. 'Heated.'

'I've never ridden a horse, and I'm not huge on swimming.'

'I shouldn't think they're obligatory activities.' Mum again. 'Unless they insist.'

'Insist? You mean they can make me?'

'Well, you might not *have* to do things their way, but if you don't...'

'If I don't?'

Dad stepped in. 'If you don't, the sneery voice-over merchant could make you look like a sulky brat. These shows love a grouch.'

'I thought you said Kid Swap wouldn't be like the others,' I said.

He leered. 'That was your mother.'

