



## CHAPTER ONE 'Comes to class unprepared'

**'Mister O'Carroll-Kelly,** will you pay attention please.' That's what Lambkin says. He goes, 'Entertaining the troops as usual,' but I'm not, roysh, I'm actually about to spew my ring all over the desk, and we're talking totally here. If I'd known we were going to be looking at an actual fucking cow's eye this morning, roysh, I think it's pretty safe to say I wouldn't have been out on the batter last night. And Oisinn's not helping. He was more hammered than I was, but he's got a stomach like a fucking goat. He's got it in his hand, roysh, and he's, like, squelching it and you can hear all the, I don't know, guts inside. The goy actually wants to see me spitting chunks.

The teacher's going, 'How do we see? Well, the eye processes the light through photoreceptors located in the eye, which send signals to the brain and tell us what we are seeing. There are two types of photoreceptor and these are called rods and cones,' and then he walks around handing us each a scalpel, and I'm thinking he couldn't seriously be suggesting we ... He goes, 'These photoreceptors are sensitive to light. Rods are the most sensitive to light and therefore provide grey vision at night. Now there are a number of differences between the human eye and the cow's eye, which I will discuss as we proceed with the dissection.'

I'm just, like, staring straight ahead, trying not to think about what we're about to do, when all of a sudden Oisinn taps me on the shoulder and – HOLY FOCK! – he's somehow managed to stick the fucking eyeball onto his forehead, roysh, and he goes, 'Look at me, Ross, I'm from Newtownmountkennedy,' and I laugh and heave at the same time and old fucking Lamb Chop throws me a filthy, basically telling me that I'm pushing my luck here.

He's going, 'Cones are, in the main, active in bright light and enable you to see colour. There are one hundred million rods located in your retina compared to just three million cones.'

I just need to get through this class, then I'll hit the canteen and get a Yop or something to settle my stomach. But Oisinn knows how close I am to hurling here and it's become, like, a challenge now. He turns around to Fionn and goes, 'Gimme your glasses,' and Fionn's like, 'Why?' and Oisinn just grabs them off him. Then – this is fucking horrific – he puts the eye basically onto his own eye and then he puts on Fionn's glasses, which sort of, like, hold it in place. Then he turns around to the rest of the class and goes, 'ESMERELDA!' and the whole class cracks up, roysh, and Lamb Chop, who's been writing some shite or other on the blackboard, turns around and goes, 'O'CARROLL-KELLY!' and he looks at me in a way that basically says Last Chance Saloon, and of course I can't tell him that I'm doing fock-all, roysh, because I can taste the vom at the top of my throat and if I open my mouth it's coming out. Oisinn throws Fionn back his goggles and Fionn's, like, majorly pissed off, trying to clean them on his shirt, but of course they're covered in, like, blood and shite and all sorts, but I'm trying not to, like, think about it.

'If you walk inside from the sun,' – this is Lambkin again – 'you can't

initially see anything. This is due to the activity of the cones and the lack of activity of the rods. Similarly, when you leave a cinema during the day, it's the rods that are mainly activated and the cones have to adjust to the sunlight.'

I'm thinking, I better actually listen to some of this shit because it might, like, come up in the Leaving. Then I hear Oisinn going, 'Ross! Ross! I know you can hear me!' and I'm trying my best to, like, ignore him. Rods and cones, I get it now. He just, like, grabs me by the back of the neck, roysh, and spins me around so that I'm, like, facing him and then – Oh! My! FOCKING! God! – he pops the eyeball into his mouth like it's a fucking Bon Bon and then – get this – he actually bites into the fucking thing and all this, like, blood and yellow goo and everything just, like, squirts out of the side of his mouth and, like, dribbles down his face and I just go, *Weeeuuuggghbb!* and basically explode.

There's vom everywhere, all over my Dubes, the desk, my biology book, the floor. I'm like a fucking volcano. It just keeps coming and coming. Goes on for about ten minutes and everyone's just, like, staring at me, and when I've finished I've got, like, my face on the desk and the table feels nice and cold against my cheek, and I'm slowly getting my breath back and Lamb Chop's basically speechless and I'm thinking, I don't even remember having a kebab.

**XXX**

Castlerock boarders are Total Knackers it says in, like, black marker on the bus shelter opposite Stillorgan Shopping Centre, roysh, put there by some tool who doesn't realise that (a) writing graffiti actually makes *him* a knacker and (b) so does getting the fucking bus. Nothing against public transport myself, but the old pair are basically rolling in it enough for me and the old 46A to lead parallel lives. The old dear,

who's a total fucking weapon, pulls up in her Micra – total shamer – and I hop in, and she's all smug and delighted with herself because she's just been to the printers to collect the posters for this anti-halting site group she's involved in, Foxrock Against Total Skangers or whatever the fuck they're called, and she says that Lucy and Angela are going to be SO pleased with how they turned out, basically not giving a fuck how long she left me sitting around waiting.

I go, 'I am SO late,' but she makes a big deal of ignoring me, roysh, humming some stupid Celine Dion song to herself, and I pretty much know what this is all about. Last week, roysh, the old man found out I've been, like, skipping my grinds. It's already January, roysh, and I basically haven't gone to one. The old Crimbo report comes and I ended up failing, like, six of my seven exams, and of course the old man's going, 'Don't be too down in the mouth, Kicker. I'll phone that Institute tomorrow and see if I can't get to the bottom of it.' I'm like, 'What are you banging on about, you dickhead?' and he goes, 'Well, you're not stupid, we know that. My brains and your mother's, that's a formidable combination, with a capital F. No, they're obviously not teaching you the right things. No, wait a second, maybe it is the school after all. Yes. Clearly they've either miscalculated your marks, given you the wrong report, or simply didn't understand what it was you were trying to say.' The tosser actually thinks I'm the next Stephen what's-his-face with the fucking voicebox. *My eyesight is very important to me.*

So thinking of the old man, roysh, trying to help him not make a *complete* tit of himself, I end up telling him that I haven't been doing the grinds. He has an oppo, of course, reminding me how much they cost him – we're talking two thousand bills, the scabby fucker – and then he asks me, roysh, what I've been doing every Friday night and Saturday

morning, and I tell him I've been, like, hanging around town and shit, not mentioning, of course, the fact that I've been going on the batter with the goys. So the old pair have a major freak out, and we're talking major here – they basically don't understand the pressure of being on the S. All this results in the Mister Freeze treatment, which suits me because I hate having to talk to them. Anyway, the schools cup starts in two weeks and they'll be all fucking over me then, you mork my words. Still can't believe I failed six of my seven exams. Actually, it was news to me that I even took English.

The goys are already sitting in Eddie Rockets when I arrive. Oisinn's wearing the old beige Dockers chinos, brown dubs, light blue Ralph and a red, white and blue sailing jacket by Henri Lloyd. He high-fives me, then he hugs me – nearly breaks my back, the fat bastard – and he goes, 'YOU THE MAN, ROSS,' seven or eight times in my ear. JP high-fives me and tells me he's glad I took the idea of having a nosebag offline. JP's also wearing beige Dockers chinos, brown dubs, light blue Ralph and a red, white and blue sailing jacket by Henri Lloyd. Aoife leans across the table and, like, air-kisses me on both cheeks, totally flirting her orse off with me, while Sorcha gives me daggers and goes, 'We've already ordered,' and I look her in the eye and I know she basically still wants me.

Oisinn goes, 'Question for you, Ross. If anyone can answer this, you can,' and I'm there, 'Shoot, my man.' He goes, 'Is it proper to wear Dubs with, like, formalwear?' and of course I'm there, 'How formal is formal?' and he goes, 'We're talking black trousers, we're talking white shirt, we're talking black blazer.' I rub my chin and think about it. The food arrives. JP is having the Classic without dill pickle, bacon and cheese fries and a large Coke. Oisinn is having the Moby Dick,

southern chicken tenders, chilli fries, a side order of nachos with guacamole, cheese sauce, salsa and hot jalapenos and a chocolate malt, the fucking Michelin man that he is. Sorcha is having a Caesar salad with extra croutons and Romanie lettuce. Aoife is having a bag of popcorn which she has hidden inside her baby-blue sleeveless bubble jacket. She's looking over her shoulder every few seconds, roysh, going, 'I have to be careful. Me, Sophie, Amy and clarinet Deirdre got fucked out of the one in Donnybrook last week for ordering, like, a Diet Coke between us.' and Sorcha says that is, like, *SO Dubbb!* And Aoife's there, 'Totally. It's like, OH my God! HELLO?' and Sorcha goes, 'No, it's more like, OH MY GOD!' and Aoife's there, 'Oh my God! *Totally.*'

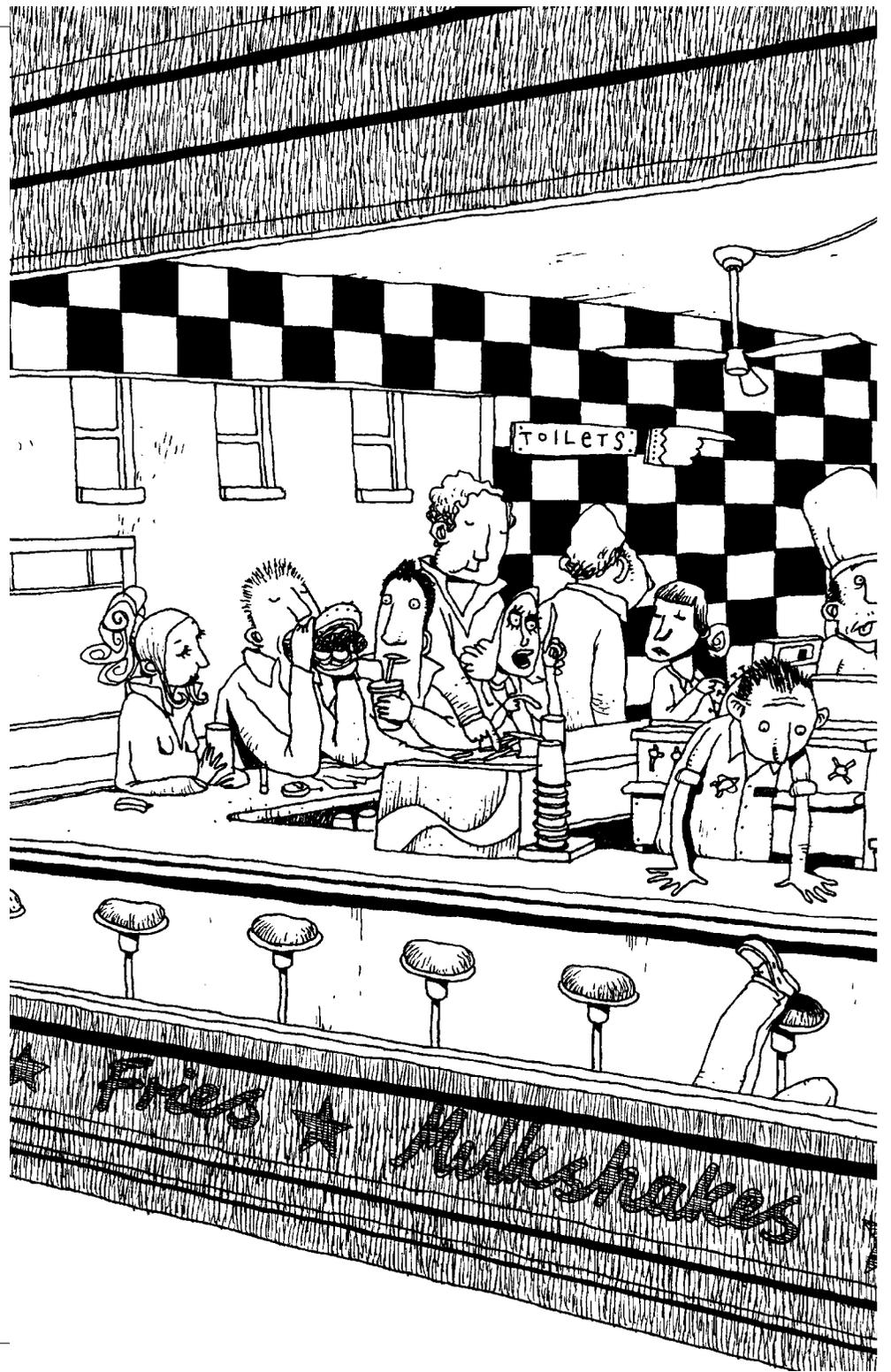
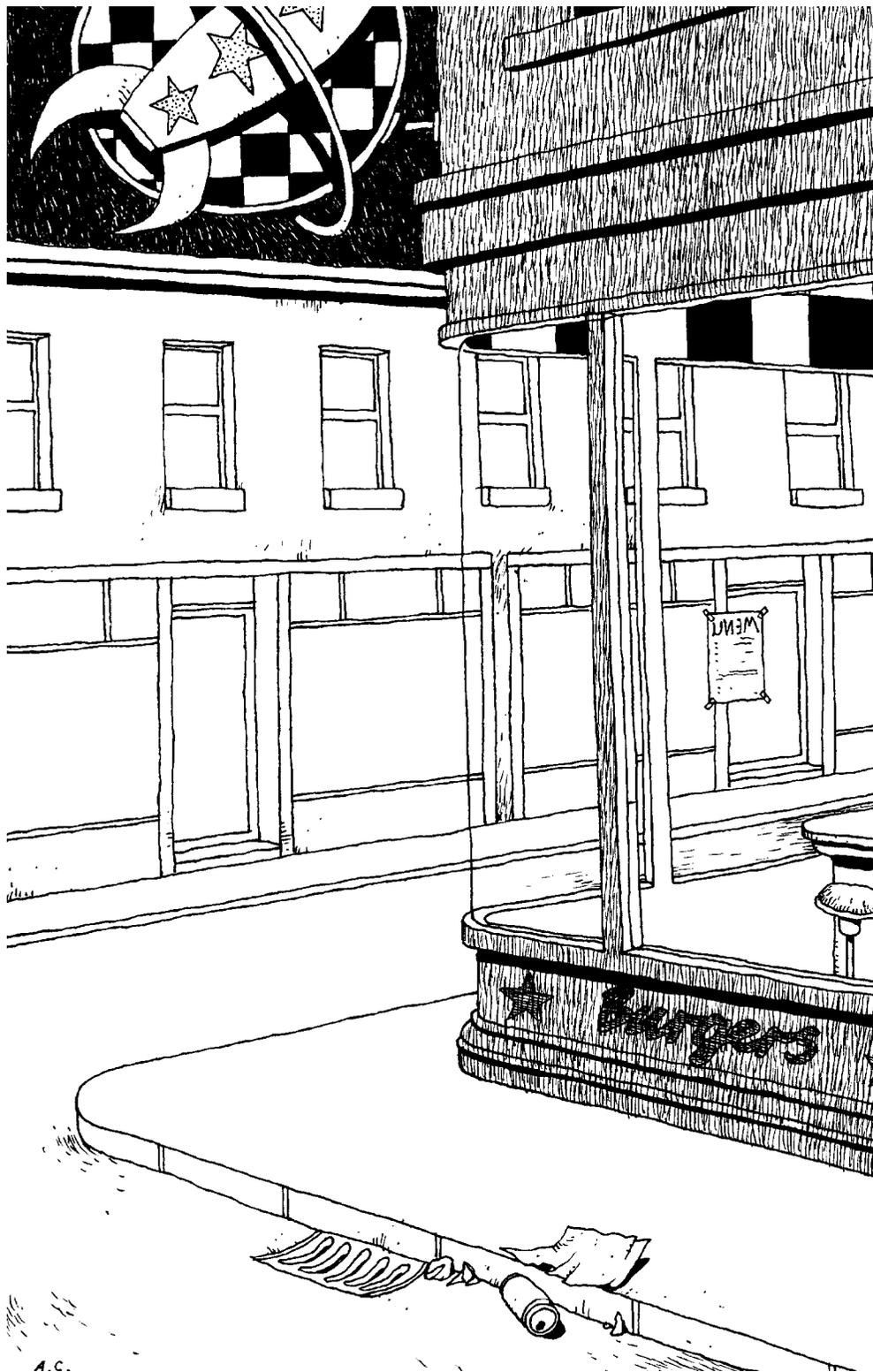
The waitress, roysh, is a total babe, we're talking Kelly out of 90210's identical twin here, and when she drops the last of the food over she turns around to me and she goes, 'Do you want to order something?' and I go, 'Well, what I want and what I get are probably two different things,' and I'm hoping it didn't sound too sleazy, roysh, but she just goes red and out of the corner of my eye I can see Sorcha giving me filthies, and we're talking *total* filthies. I go – cue sexy voice, roysh – I'm like, 'Could I get a, em, dolphin-friendly tuna melt, maybe a chilli cheese dog and a portion of, like, buffalo wings,' and she writes it down and then, like, smiles at me and when she fucks off Sorcha goes, 'That girl is SUCH a knob.' I'm there, 'You don't even know her,' and she goes, 'HELLO? Her name HAPPENS to be Sian Kennedy and she's doing, like, morkeshing in ATIM.' Aoife goes, 'She is like, *Aaagggbb!*' and Sorcha goes, 'Totally.'

Oisinn's there, 'Ross, you never answered my question, dude,' and I'm there, 'I don't know why you have to rely on me for this stuff,' secretly delighted of course, and then I'm like, 'Dubes are traditionally a

casual shoe.' I look at Sorcha, who stirs Oisinn's chocolate malt and then takes a sip from it. I go, 'But to be passed off along with formalwear, the Dubes must – and I repeat *must* – be black.' Oisinn whistles. JP goes, 'They can't be brown?' in a real, like, suspicious voice. I go, 'Too casual for black trousers. Beige definitely. Black's a complete no-no.'

Sorcha's mobile rings, roysh, and it's, like, Jayne with a y, who used to be her best friend until she caught me wearing the face off her in Fionn's kitchen on New Year's Eve, which was basically one of the reasons Sorcha, like, finished with me. Anyway, roysh, they're obviously back talking again and they're blabbing on about some, like, dinner party they're organising, but then all of a sudden Sorcha turns around to her and goes, 'Is Fionn there with you?' and of course immediately the old antennae pop up, and I'm wondering what that four-eyed fucker's doing sniffing around – looks like Anna Friel this bird, I'm telling you – and JP must cop the look on my face because he goes, 'Message to the stockmarket – friendly merger going down between Fionn and Jayne with a y.' I'm there, 'And for those of us who don't speak morkeshing?' and he goes, 'They're going out together, Ross,' which is news to me, roysh, because I've been seeing her on the old QT for the past three or four weeks and she asked me to, like, keep it quiet, the complete bitch.

Sorcha must cop my reaction, roysh, because she's suddenly going, 'Ross, I'm talking to Jayne with a y. Fionn's sitting beside her. Do you want a word with him?' and I go, 'Tell him I'll pick him up for rugby training in the morning,' playing it Kool Plus Support Band. I run my hand through my hair, which needs a serious cut. Might get a blade one all over this time instead of, like, just the sides, seeing as the Cup's about



to stort and everything.

Sorcha hangs up and of course she can't let it go. She goes, 'Oh my God, they make SUCH a cute couple, don't they?' and Aoife's there, 'Yeah, it's like, Rachel and Ross cute,' and Sorcha goes, 'No, it's more like, Joey and Dawson cute,' then she turns to me and she's like, 'You've gone very quiet, Ross. Not jealous, are you?' Where's my fock-ing food? I'm there, 'Not at all. Been there, done that ... worn the best friend,' and she's bulling, and we're talking bigtime.

The waitress comes over and I decide to up the old ante. She's putting my food on the table, roysh, and I'm giving it, 'You're Sian Kennedy, aren't you?' and she goes, 'Yeah,' and I'm there, 'First year morkeshing in ATIM?' and she goes, 'Yeah, I know your face. You go to Annabel's, don't you?' and I'm seriously giving it, 'Sure do. Maybe I'll see you there tomorrow night?' and she goes totally red, roysh, and she's there, 'Em ... yeah,' and I go, 'Cool,' and she's like, 'Bye,' and I'm giving it, 'Later.'

Oisinn and JP both high-five me and Aoife goes, 'Oh my *God*, you don't ACTUALLY fancy her, do you?' and I go, 'She looks like Kelly off 90210,' and Aoife goes, 'But she's a sap, Ross. A total sap,' and out of the corner of my eye I can see Sorcha's face is all red, the way it gets when she's pissed off. I'm on match-point now. She turns around to Aoife and she goes, 'So, do you think I should go?' and Aoife's there, 'What?' and Sorcha's like, 'Do you think I should go?' Aoife's there, 'Oh my God, you SO should. I'm telling you, you SO should go,' obviously wanting me to ask, roysh, but I'm in the game too long to fall for that one. But JP – the loser – he goes, 'Go where?' and Aoife's like, 'She's been invited to the Gonzaga pre-debs,' and JP's there, 'By who?' and Sorcha goes, 'Jamie O'Connell-Keavney,' all delighted with herself

and she's looking at me for a reaction, roysh, because she knows damn well we have Gonzaga in the first round of the Cup.

The goys look at me for a reaction too, roysh, but there's no way I'm, like, taking the bait. JP goes, 'That is SO not cool, Sorcha. That is SUCH an uncool thing to do,' and Sorcha's like, 'Why?' and JP goes, 'Because Gonzaga are our TOTAL enemies,' and Oisinn nods and goes, 'Tossers.' Sorcha goes, 'Jamie's not like that. He's SUCH a cool goy,' and Aoife's there, 'What do *you* think she should do, Ross?' As subtle as a kick in the old town halls. I pop the last piece of tuna into my mouth and I go, 'If she wants to go, that's cool. I think she should do what makes her happy,' and JP's going, 'Yeah, but not with someone from Gonzaga ... Oh my God, we are SO going to kick their orses now,' and him and Oisinn high-five each other.

Aoife gets up to go to the toilet and Oisinn goes, 'That's three times she's been in there since we arrived. What kind of load could she possibly be dropping off? It's not as if she ever eats anything.' Then he says he can definitely taste dill pickle on his Classic and he takes the top off the bun to investigate. Sorcha takes off her scrunchy and slips it onto her wrist, shakes her head, smooths her hair back into a low ponytail, puts it back in the scrunchy and then pulls five or six strands of hair loose. It looks exactly the same as it did before she did it.

Aoife comes back, wiping her mouth, calls one of the other waitresses over and asks can she have a glass of, like, water. The waitress asks us if we want dessert and Oisinn and JP both order the Kit Kat Dream and Sorcha orders the New York toffee cheesecake with ice cream and cream. Aoife goes, 'OH MY GOD! Do you KNOW how many points are in that? Have you, like, TOTALLY lost your mind?' and Sorcha goes, 'I'm not counting my points anymore,' but before it arrives

the guilt gets to her, roysh, and she takes one mouthful, then pushes the rest across the table to me. I just pick at it, roysh, then I get up to go. JP goes, 'You heading home?' and I'm there, 'Yeah. Big training session tomorrow. Got to, like, keep my focus.'

I walk up to the counter, cool as a fish's fart, tell Sian what I had and she tots it up. I hand her twenty bills and tell her to, like, keep the change. Then I tell her I might see her tomorrow night, which is, like, Saturday, and she says that would be cool. Behind me I can hear Oisinn saying he's sure he can taste dill pickle on his burger and he is SO not paying for it. Aoife goes, 'See you tomorrow night, Ross. Annabel's,' but I totally blank her and go outside. I stand in the cor pork and try to ring the old dear, but the phone's engaged and so's her mobile. Her and that focking campaign of hers. I try Dick Features, but then I remember he's out at the K Club tonight with Hennessy, his orsehole solicitor.

I stand out on the road for ten minutes looking for a taxi, roysh, but there's fock-all about. I don't focking believe this, but there's nothing else for it, I'm going to have to get the focking bus. Mortification City, Wisconsin. I cross over to the bus stop. There's two birds there. Skobies. One is telling the other that Sharon – no, Shadden – is a dorty-lookin' dort-bord. The bus comes and I let them get on first. I hand the driver two pound coins, roysh, and he tells me to put the money in the slot, which I do. I pull the ticket and wait for my change but the tosspot storts driving off. I go, 'What do you think that is, a tip or something?' and he goes, 'Sorry, bud, we don't give out change. You have to take your receipt into O'Connell Street to get yisser change.' I go, 'Are you trying to be funny?' and he's there, 'Sorry, bud?' I'm like, 'O'Connell Street?' and he goes, 'Yeah, you know where Dublin Bus is?' and I'm there, 'No. I don't *do* the northside,' and I sit down. He

probably had one of his mates lined up to focking mug me.

I sit downstairs. There's a funny smell off buses. Actually it's probably the people. I take out my mobile and, like, listen to my messages. Some bird called Alison phoned and said OH MY GOD! she hoped I remembered her from last Saturday night and she couldn't remember whether I was supposed to phone her or she was supposed to phone me, but she decided to call me anyway and if it's after midnight when I get this message I should phone her tomorrow, but not in the morning because OH MY GOD! she's just remembered she's at the orthodontist and she gives me the number again.

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