

MACDOWALL. He's not your real brother, me mam says.
They don't even call him Casper for a start.

BILLY. Course he's me brother! We live in t' same house don't we?

MACDOWALL. He don't even look like you. He's twice as big for a start. You're nowt like brothers.

MACDOWALL *and* BILLY *fight. Firstly* MACDOWALL *pushes* BILLY *off with his foot, and as* BILLY *comes back he punches him hard which sends him flying.*

MACDOWALL. Get away, you little squirt, before I spit on you and drown yer.

They continue to fight. A crowd of PUPILS surrounds them until MR FARTHING *appears, blows his whistle and pushes his way through.*

MR FARTHING. What's going on?

BILLY (*tearful*). It was him, sir! He started it.

MACDOWALL. I didn't, sir! It was him.

MR FARTHING. Shut up, both of you. It's the same old tale. It's nobody's fault and nobody started it. You just happened to be fighting for no reason at all. Don't look so sorry for yourself, Casper, you're not dead yet.

MACDOWALL. He will be when I get hold of him.

MR FARTHING. You're a brave lad aren't you MacDowall? He's just about your size, Casper, isn't he? Well if you're so keen on fighting why don't you pick on someone your own size eh? Eh?

MR FARTHING *jabs* MACDOWALL *in the shoulder, and as* MACDOWALL *backs away, he walks after him, punctuating his speech with jabs.*

What would you say if I pinned you to the floor and smacked you across the face? You'd say I was a bully, wouldn't you lad? And you'd be right because I'm bigger and stronger and I know I could beat you to a pulp before we started. Just like you know MacDowall with every boy you pick on.

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MACDOWALL (*weakening*). I'll fetch me Dad.

MR FARTHING. Of course you will lad. And then do you know what I'll do, MacDowall? I'll fetch mine. And do you know, MacDowall that my Dad's the heavyweight champion of the world? So what's going to happen to your Dad then, eh? And what's going to happen to you?

He addresses the assembled PUPILS who have been enjoying the spectacle.

I'm giving you lot ten seconds to get out of my sight. If I see any face after that time, especially yours MacDowall, I'll give its owner the biggest belting they've ever received. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven . . .

They are gone. MR FARTHING and BILLY remain.

MR FARTHING. You always seem to cop it, don't you Casper? Why is that?

BILLY. 'Cos everybody picks on me, that's why.

MR FARTHING. Perhaps that's because you're bad?

BILLY. I'm no worse than stacks of kids, but they just seem to get away with it.

MR FARTHING. Have you been in trouble with the police lately?

BILLY. No, sir.

MR FARTHING. Because you've reformed? Or because you haven't been caught?

BILLY. I've reformed, sir. It's right, sir. I haven't done nowt for ages now. That's why MacDowall's always picking on me 'cos I don't knock about with their gang any more. But since I stopped going out with 'em I stopped getting into trouble.

MR FARTHING. What happened, did you have an argument or something?

BILLY. No, sir, it was when I got my hawk. I got that interested in it that it seemed to use all my time. It was summer, you see, and I used to take it down our field at

be top weight would it? I don't fancy t' other though. No form. Not even a jockey on it in here. It'll have some lad on it you can bet. No, I wouldn't bother with that one.

BILLY. You don't think they'll win then?

MAN. How've you got 'em – doubled?

BILLY. They're not mine, they're our Jud's.

MAN. He'll be all right if they do.

BILLY *moves to one side to consider a risk of his own.*

BILLY. Heads I place the bet. Tails I don't.

Tosses coin.

Heads. Shit. Best out of three.

BILLY *tosses the coin again.*

Tails.

BILLY *grins and walks round a little thinking what to do next.*

MAN. I can't see 'em winning myself though.

BILLY *smiles broadly and rushes out with the money.*

BILLY. Thanks, mister.

Scene 12

The field behind Billy's House, 2.30 pm

BILLY *is busy with the lure and Kes.*

MR FARTHING *(entering)*. Casper.

BILLY. Bloody-Hell-fire.

BILLY *winds up the lure. They both address the bird from a distance.*

MR FARTHING. You think a lot about that kestrel, don't you, Billy?

BILLY. 'Course I do. Wouldn't you if she was yours? Me and me Dad reared a young fox-cub one time. Then let it go. It

were a little blinder. And magpies, jackdaws. I had a young jay once; that was murder though, they're right hard to feed, and it nearly died. I wouldn't have one again, they're best left to their mothers.

MR FARTHING (*addressing Kes*). How is she, Casper?

BILLY. Sometimes she's alright, but sometimes she goes mad, screaming and bating as though she'd never seen me before.

MR FARTHING. Bating? What's that?

BILLY. Trying to fly off, in a panic like.

MR FARTHING. I thought you said you'd trained her. Isn't she tame?

BILLY. Is she heck tame. She's manned that's all. She's fierce and she's wild, and she's not bothered about owt, not even about me. It's a kind of pride, a kind of independence. She looks you in t' eye and says 'Who the Hell are you, anyway?'

MR FARTHING *and BILLY exchange looks.*

Do you know, sir, I feel as though she's doing me a favour, just letting me be her friend.

MR FARTHING. That's you respecting her.

BILLY. The most exciting time was when I let her fly free for t' first time. I'd been flying Kes on t' creance for about a week, and she was coming to me owt up to thirty, forty yards, and it says in t' books that when it's coming this far, straight away, it's ready to fly loose. I daren't though, sir. I kept saying to myself, I'll just use t' creance today to make sure, then I'll fly her free tomorrow. But when tomorrow came I did the same thing again. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. I did this for about a week than I got right mad with myself 'cos I knew I'd have to do it some day. So on t' last night I didn't feed her up, just to make sure that she'd be sharp set next morning. I hardly went to sleep that night, I was thinking about it that much.

I wake up and I think right, if she flies off, she flies off, and it can't be helped. I go down to t' shed. She's dead keen an all, walking about on her shelf behind t' bars, and screaming out when she sees me coming. I take her out in t' field and

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try her on creance first time, and she comes first time, an' she comes like a rocket. I think, right this time.

I unclip creance, take swivel off an let her hop on to t' fence post. There is nowt stopping her now. She just stands there with her jesses on. She can take off and there is nowt I can do about it. I am terrified. I think, she's forced to go, she's forced to, she'll just fly off and that'll be it. But she doesn't. She just sits there looking around while I back off into t' field. I go right into t' middle, then hold my glove up and shout her.

Come on Kes! Come on then!

Nowt happened at first. Then, just as I go walk back to her, she comes. You ought to have seen her. Straight as a die, about a yard off t' floor. And t' speed! She comes twice as fast as when she had creance on, 'cos it used to drag in t' grass and slow her down. She comes like lightning, head dead still, and her wings never make a sound, then wham! Straight up onto my glove, claws out grabbing for t' meat. I am that pleased I don't know what to do with myself. Well, that's it. I've done it. I'd trained her. I trained her.

Pause.

MR FARTHING. Well done, Billy.

BILLY. It was a smashing feeling. You can't believe that you'll be able to do it

MR FARTHING. There's something weird about hawks when they fly, isn't there?

BILLY. You what, sir? Hawks are t' best flyers there is.

MR FARTHING. No, I mean . . . well, when they fly there's something about it makes you feel strange.

BILLY. You mean everything goes dead quiet?

MR FARTHING. That's it.

BILLY. Other folks have noticed that an' all. Me Dad used to say it's the same with owls. He said that he'd seen 'em catching mice in our yard at night, and when they swoop down you feel like poking your ears to make 'em pop.

MR FARTHING. How are things at home these days?

BILLY. All right, sir. Same as usual, I suppose.

MR FARTHING. Your Dad's not at home is he?

BILLY. No, sir.

MR FARTHING. Do you remember much about him?

BILLY. He left when I was six. All I remember is him pulling me up on his shoulder, and throwing me up in the air and catching me. Up high. And being caught. Over and over. Throw. Catch. Up. Down. Never falling.

MR FARTHING. Your Dad would have loved her, wouldn't he?

BILLY. You what, sir?

MR FARTHING. Kes. Don't you think he would have been proud of you?

BILLY. Don't know, sir. Haven't thought much about it.

MR FARTHING. I think he would have been very proud, Billy.

BILLY. My Dad?

MR FARTHING. Yes. Very very proud.

Pause.

Good lord! Look at the time. We'd better be off. I'll give you a lift back to school if you like. I'm in the car.

BILLY *shakes his head.*

What's the matter, wouldn't it do your reputation any good to be seen travelling with a teacher?

BILLY. It's not that, sir . . . I've one or two things to do first.

MR FARTHING. Please yourself then. But you're going to have to look sharp, or you'll be late.

BILLY. I know. I'll not be long.

MR FARTHING. Right. Thanks for our chat, Billy.

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