

# Tales from the Great Unwashed

I remember him as Goosey. Goosey Watt. His first name was Alan, but that doesn't matter when you're wee. He used to cry a lot when we were first in the primary, and no-one ever knew why. His hair was long, long and curly, and it was all over the place. His nose was all squashed to the one side, like he was looking at you through a wee window, and it had a funny-looking bit, like a strip of pink skin down his lip from his nose to his mouth, and when he closed his mouth it didn't shut right, like a bit was away and you could see white tooth where there should have been lip.

Goosey always sat at the desk right in front of the teacher, right from year one. He was always there, on his own. Didn't matter what teacher it was, if it was Budgie or Wally or Timpo or Barno, he was always there, and even in different rooms, with different furniture and different light coming in the room, there was Goosey, always at the front on his tod.

So, he was daft. That was it. He was daft and he didn't know anything about sums or writing or singing or anything else. Didn't matter what we were supposed to be doing, Goosey couldn't do it right, so he'd get bored and start laughing at something he was thinking about, or else starting doing mad drawings on his books and that. His wee brother was in the next year down, and he was a right handful, so Goosey was always getting called out by Headie to come and see whatever it was that Vinny had done and try to calm him down and all that.

But Goosey was alright. Like, when I say alright, I mean he never ever did anyone wrong that I saw anyway. He was always getting in fights and that right enough, but it was usually the other guys from his bit that would do him, and he always, I mean always got a doing. He never ever won a fight, not even one. Not even against me.

I never knew all Goosey's mob, them from the scheme beside the school. They were a bad lot, that's what the old dear said, you watch them boys from the scheme, that's what she always said, almost every day. But Goosey was alright. He liked fish. Tropical fish. He said his Granda had a tank of fish and knew loads about them and had a stack of books and that, and if you ever got him during a wet-playtime, Goosey would use the crayons and that to draw some of these fish that he knew, and you could even check them with the book at the back that had like pictures of actual fish and that, so his drawings were pretty good I think, he knew what they were. Least, that's what I think, cos they were never the same as the pictures in the book, and if he was at it you would've known cos they would be the same shape and colours and all that.

Anyway, we got to the end of the primary, that's maybe when we were twelve or something, or most of us were twelve anyway, and it was all this stuff about how we were getting sent up to the big school and we would have to be ready and all that. Our teacher was old Barno. Mrs Barnes. We didn't know what she was on about, but we already had all the horror stories anyway. We knew about the gauntlet and the grog-pit and all the other stuff. Just about everyone had a big brother or sister already in the place, so we already knew all the names, all the danger.

So it came to the last day of primary seven. We could take games in cos there was no classes, we

just had to go in the morning and it would be a prizegiving and then we could play games and that, games that we brought in, and it was no uniforms either, you could wear your best gear and that.

Primary seven had like a greenhouse, or that's what we called it anyway. It wasn't a real greenhouse such as you would call it, but a bit of the shelf at the window that had like big polythene sheets down about it so we could put plants in there for biology stuff, watching the plants grow and that. There was a big tomato plant there and it was tiny when it started, but we all had shots of putting water on it every morning, just before we got the milk, and it shot up right enough. It was good getting your turn to give it the water cos everyone would watch when you did it, and it was like a test to see if you could pour the water right and not give it too much cos Barno would shout when you did it too fast. You had to do the other things in there as well at the same time, but I can't remember what they were, all wee cactuses and geraniums and that.

So that was the last day of primary, like the very last day of primary seven, then off to the big school and all that, and the prizegiving happened, and that was your normal like countdown from one all the way down, and Hammy was first, the best of all, as normal, so he went up to get like a big giant book, like this big encyclopaedia type of thing, and then it was Marty and he got this wee set of history books in a box, and that looked a lot better than the first prize anyway, then there was Jules and she got a token for the book-shop in town for a fiver, and we all clapped and that, but we just really wanted to get out the games. I had the Junior Scrabble with me, and it was split new as well, but there was other folk had like Mouse Trap and Buckaroo and stuff, so I wasn't that bothered about playing Scrabble, but we all wanted the games anyway, so it was good when Barno said she was off to meet the other teachers and she would be back in a wee while.

All of a sudden, she was back again. Maybe it was getting late, I can't remember. Everybody had kind of split into bunches playing the best games, but there was no bother, we all just moved about the class, sitting places we'd never been before, getting into whatever games were going. There was even some of the guys were sitting with the lassies. There was games I never even knew before, like Autocross and Hyperlink, but when Barno came in we all ran back to our normal seats without having to be told.

Barno was smiling. She hardly ever smiled. She looked different. Her eyes were different. She looked the way my Dad looked when he came home late on Fridays. The same smile, the same look. She said she would miss us all and she hoped we would do well in the big school and not get in any trouble and be a credit to the school and always remember where we came from and all that. Then she said she had to present the special prize, and we were all kind of looking at each other cos the prizegiving was already done and that, but she told Hammy to take his pick of the tomatoes off the big plant on the shelf, and Hammy went up a bit funny, not really knowing what to do, and she told him again to pick the best tomato cos he was the top of the class and all that, so we all watched him and he pulled away this big

fat scarlet tomato near the top of the bush. Then it was Marty, and he did the same, and he picked like exactly the same tomato that anybody else would have picked, like it was pure obvious to anyone what the first and second best would be, then it was Jules and, well, I think she missed the next best one, but she was dead fast and grabbed this thing and off she went, then it was Pauline and Garbo and somebody else and then eventually it was me, and the one I got was this pure sad effort that was more green than red, and I knew I couldn't even eat the thing or do anything else with it, and I was glad to get back to my seat.

By the time Goosey got up to the plant there was nothing left but wee green pellets. Some of the guys were having a laugh about it, but I think most of us were sort of looking at each other, then at Barno. It was pretty dodgy. I didn't feel right at all.

Goosey didn't even seem that bothered. He took his time. He was just looking at this dozen or something berries that was left. You couldn't pick a best out of that lot at all. He was facing away from all of us. You could hear Barno breathing, and she wasn't smiling any more. Then he did this wee mad dance, like shaking his bum dead fast for a wee minute and waving his fingers like he was going to do a magic trick, then he grabbed one wee green ball and yanked it off the plant and ran back to his seat and we all clapped cos it was all over.

Barno went away again then, and we went back to playing the games, then the bell went and we got our stuff and left the place for the last time.

We were walking away from the school, by the fence across from where our class was, and someone looked back, and there was Barno standing at the window of our room, staring out at us. Hammy and Marty and Gerso and Hingy, they were all there, and so was Goosey. He was at the back, as usual. Someone said, should we wave? should we wave cheerio? and we all stopped and looked at her looking at us through the window. She was dead still, dead sad looking, like she really didn't want us to go. Then you could see her shape change dead fast at something, and we all looked round and there was Goosey firing his pellet of a tomato at her. The wee hard thing did hit the window, and Barno jerked back and down. The noise of the thing hitting the window was dead loud, and you could even see the glass wobble a bit but there was no smash.

Goosey ran like the clappers. We all shouted after him, but he never stopped.

See ye's after the Summer. That's what he shouted. But we never did.