Read and listen.

*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

by Roddy Doyle

The News was boring but sometimes I watched it properly, all of it. I thought that the Americans were fighting gorillas in Vietnam; that was what it sounded like. But it didn’t make any other kind of sense.

The Israelis were always fighting the Arabs and the Americans were fighting the gorillas. It was nice that the gorillas had a country of their own, not like the zoo, and the Americans were killing them for it.

There were Americans getting killed as well. They were surrounded and the war was nearly over. They had helicopters. Mekong Delta. Demilitarised zone. Tet Offensive.

The gorillas in the zoo didn’t look like they’d be hard to beat in a war. They were nice and old-looking, brainy-looking and their hair was dirty. Their arms were brilliant; I’d have loved arms like that.

I was up for the gorillas even though two of my aunties and uncles lived in America. I’d never seen them. They sent us ten dollars, me and Sinbad, one Christmas. I couldn’t remember what I got with my five dollars.

– I should get seven cos I’m the oldest.
And I couldn’t remember the names of the uncles and aunties who’d sent it, which ones; Brendan and Rita or Sam and Boo.

I had seven cousins in America as well. Two of them were called the same as me. I didn’t care though; I was still up for the gorillas. Until I asked.

– Why are the yankees fighting the gorillas?
– What’s that?
– Why are the yankees fighting the gorillas?
– D’you hear this, Mary? Patrick wants to know why the yanks are fighting gorillas.

They didn’t laugh but it was funny, I could tell. I wanted to cry; I’d given something away. I was stupid. I hated being caught, more than anything. I hated it. That was what school was all about, not being caught and watching others getting caught instead. It was alright now though; it wasn’t school. He told me what a guerrilla was. It made sense now.

– Impossible to beat, he said.

I was still up for them, the guerrillas.