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Writer/s: [Derville Quigley](#)

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Declan's name used to be Nafees. The Hanratty family changed it after adopting him. Nafees seemed a little slow, slower than the rest of them. When asked where his mother came from he'd say, 'Over the hill'.

They'd laugh at him, fondly calling him Tullyamish's niglet. Declan wore the same jumper to school and to football. It was duck egg blue and had two red stripes at the bottom. He believed his mother had knitted that jumper but didn't dwell on that thought too often, as he couldn't be sure it was true.

One day Nafees was dropped off by Mrs. Hanratty at the local swimming pool. It was to be found on the grounds of the North Pine Mental Hospital. He had a towel under his arm and a pound for the lifeguard in the palm of his hand.

'Now try and do ten widths this time and you might get that weight off you, Declan. Do you hear me?'

But Nafees was far away. Clutching the frog towel, he stared into abstract reflections on the tiles in front of him.

'You're a tramp', she said to him. He turned around and looked blankly at the girl behind the desk who was handing him a ticket.

'Watch the ramp!' She repeated.

Nafees' lips felt hot so he cooled them on the walls of the men's changing room. He looked across the clothes hooks and noticed an elderly man was doing the same thing. The man, who was in his seventies had probably swum about a million and three lengths. His ribcage was propping him up.

'Hot lips?', enquired the old man.

'Yes', Nafees replied.

'Where are you from?', asked the man.

'Over the hill', said Nafees. The old man nodded.

Nafees prized two red, wire baskets apart and kept one for himself. Taking off his clothes he was mindful to fold them before placing them neatly inside. He made sure to keep an eye on the old man and noticed that he was wearing a red elastic armband on his left ankle.

'Have you ever seen a hare on that hill?...Now I'm not talking about a rabbit, I'm talking about a wild Irish hare?', asked the old man with a slightly aggressive tone to his voice.

'What do they look like?', asked Nafees.

'Strong and lean, less like rabbits more agile, fit with purpose.'

The girl at the hatch handed Nafees a green armband. Nafees put the armband around his ankle and the old man smiled at him then wiped his mouth as he was beginning to dribble.

'What does purpose mean?', asked Nafees.

'Purpose....their purpose is to run hard and fast and never look back.'

'But what about their families?', asked Nafees.

The old man didn't seem to be listening and continued talking quietly to the space in front of him.

'....Furry little creatures. Not scared of leppin' up and wallopin' a fella in the jaw. You watch out for them. Carrying eggs on their backs over the moon....every last

one of them.'

A loud alarm went off. Nafees recognised its high-pitched wail and left the old man. It sounded like an air raid siren but was merely to alert those with yellow armbands to leave the pool. The other children danced through the chlorine footbath and the siren continued until the pool was evacuated.

It was his turn. This time he held his nose and ran at the water, flicking his heels up behind him and landing on his knees.

A whistle blew and the lifeguard ran over to him.

'What did I say Declan? No running or jumping into the pool. There are other people trying to swim.'

Everyone else was swimming in lanes. The water was luke warm and he had goose pimples on his arms. Nafees took on to swim ten widths of the pool in the shallow end. No mean feat. He was better at kicking his legs than moving his arms. Splashing through the water, getting to the other side, then turning with gusto and splashing back across.

An old lady with a lemon yellow swimming cap steered clear of Nafees. But he knew he had an audience and why glide through the water gracefully? After all his eyes were stinging and he had only two widths left to go.

Just then Mrs Hanratty gave him a wave to let him know she was there, and he finished.

The alarm went off and the green light was flashing.

'Get out Declan, your time is up', shouted Mrs. Hanratty.

'Green armbands out of the pool', shouted the lifeguard.

Nafees ran through the chlorine footbath back into the men's changing rooms.

The old man was still sitting on the bench.

'They're from Asia...', he said. "...went to England...and then introduced to Ireland as game. To be shot or hunted with dogs...What's your name son?', asked the old man.

'Nafees. Just call me Declan.'

'Okay Nafees, I will', replied the old man.

'Would you do something for me? Bend down there and tie that lace for me, like a good lad.'

Nafees did that and tied the other one too without being asked. The old man stood up and walked over to a wheelchair. He sat down into it, released the break and began to manoeuvre around the benches. Nafees got up and held the wheelchair's two handles.

'Push on this side', said the old man pointing to the left side as he was propelling the right wheel with his good hand. Nafees pushed with all his might and the chair rolled up the ramp.

'Incidentally Declan...', said the old man. "...Young rabbits are called kittens.'

Nafees watched in the foyer as the old man struggled up the hospital hill in his wheelchair. The sight of his silhouette at the top, stayed with him for a long time. He was boxing, boxing the air with his limp arms and what was left of a fighting spirit.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Derville Quigley.*