



Source: Michael Slackman, 'Molding the ideal Islamic citizen', *New York Times online*, 09/09/07.

Tags: [violence](#), [evidence](#)  
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James comes bouncing past me on a bright orange Space Hopper screaming like a fucking idiot. He collides with a box of other toys and falls to the floor laughing.

I try to look impressed.

He gets up and boots the toy across the hall, it hits two chairs and sends them flying.

I wonder why the hell I'm here.

James takes out his knife and thrusts it into the Hopper—he shrieks with delight at the sound this makes and the way the toy rapidly deflates. Danny laughs and pulls over a table then starts throwing building blocks at the notice board.

I stand in the doorway of the kitchen and smile. I'm thinking that someone is going to hear all this and the police are going to turn up any moment.

James looks at me, 'Ali catch!' He throws the head of a doll. It hits me in the shoulder and they both crack-up laughing. James holds up the rest of the doll by a leg then throws it too.

I dodge to one side, 'Come-on we should go,' I say.

'Ar-shut up, you're always moaning,' snaps Danny.

James just stares at me. He has a wild look in his eyes. His freckled face glistens. His thin lips form a sly smile. I feel excited too. I step forward. I've seen this look before: the time he went for his brother with a bread knife and the time he attacked a wasps nest on the edge of town—he had no fear at all. And there was the time he had a scrap with this kid called Butler outside the youth club. He was huge but James was never going to back down. Butler beat the hell out of James but he just kept getting up and going back for more. The cheering of the crowd had died and people began to walk away. It was embarrassing and sad to watch. In the end we had to drag him off, which was fine because James kept his pride intact. We had saved the day.

'This isn't right you know,' I shout, trying to show some authority. 'Debbie's mum works here—and your sister's kids,' I gestured towards Danny with a finger, 'They both come here.'

There is no response.

James drops the Telly-Tubby he's holding and walks towards me. He stops in front of me. My heart is thumping so hard I'm sure he can hear it. I look into his eyes. He is so close I can feel his breath on my cheeks. I think about kissing him.

James's eyes narrow. 'Come-on Danny, let's get out of here,' he says. He steps back. He turns and walks towards the toilets. Danny follows, kicking a couple of toys out of

the way as he goes. I can hear them as they climb out the same window we'd forced open to get in. I can hear them shouting abuse as they circle the building. The main entrance door is kicked and shoved a few times then their footsteps on the gravel drive fade as they disappear into the night.

I stand in silence. I go over what has happened in my mind.

I look around at all the mess and damage those two pricks have caused. I can't leave it like this. I begin tidying up and putting things back to how I remember them: toys back in their boxes at the far end of the hall, the chairs stacked up against the wall with the tables, the larger toys back in the cupboard. I go into the kitchen and pick up the bin and fill it with all the rubbish that Danny had emptied onto the floor. I have one last look around. It actually doesn't look as bad as I thought it would. I turn off the lights and head for the toilets. I think about tomorrow morning when Debbie's mum opens the nursery. They'll discover the broken window, they'll see the broken toys, and they'll know it was James and Danny. I climb through the window and lower myself down the other side. I stay close to the wall and head towards the front of the church hall. I can't believe that no one has heard all the noise. I make my way down the drive towards the road.

'Fuck.' I stop. 'Where was the Space Hopper?' I feel a rise of panic. I don't remember seeing it. Did they take it with them? No...No. Think. I've got to think. I didn't see them leave with it. I'll have to go back. I'll have to get it and hide it.

I turn 180 and head back to the hall. I reach the window. My mouth is dry. I climb up and lower myself inside again. It's dark but I can see the door leading into the hall. I take the handle and ease it open. I feel for the light switch to my right and turn it on.

I step back, I can't believe what I'm seeing—my eyes dart from left to right searching for whoever...whoever did this.

I slowly move forward. Someone has unfolded all the tables and piled them up like some bizarre pyramid in the centre of the hall. I walk around the structure in amazement. Above my head there is no ceiling: the building's rafters and beams are exposed and the structure rises high up into the roof space. I don't know what to think. It couldn't have been James and Danny. It would have taken several men hours and hours to have done this and I've no idea how they would have got the last few tables to the top. It's all so finely balanced, I'm frightened to go too close in case it falls. I stand there, just looking at the intricacies.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Gary O'Connor.*