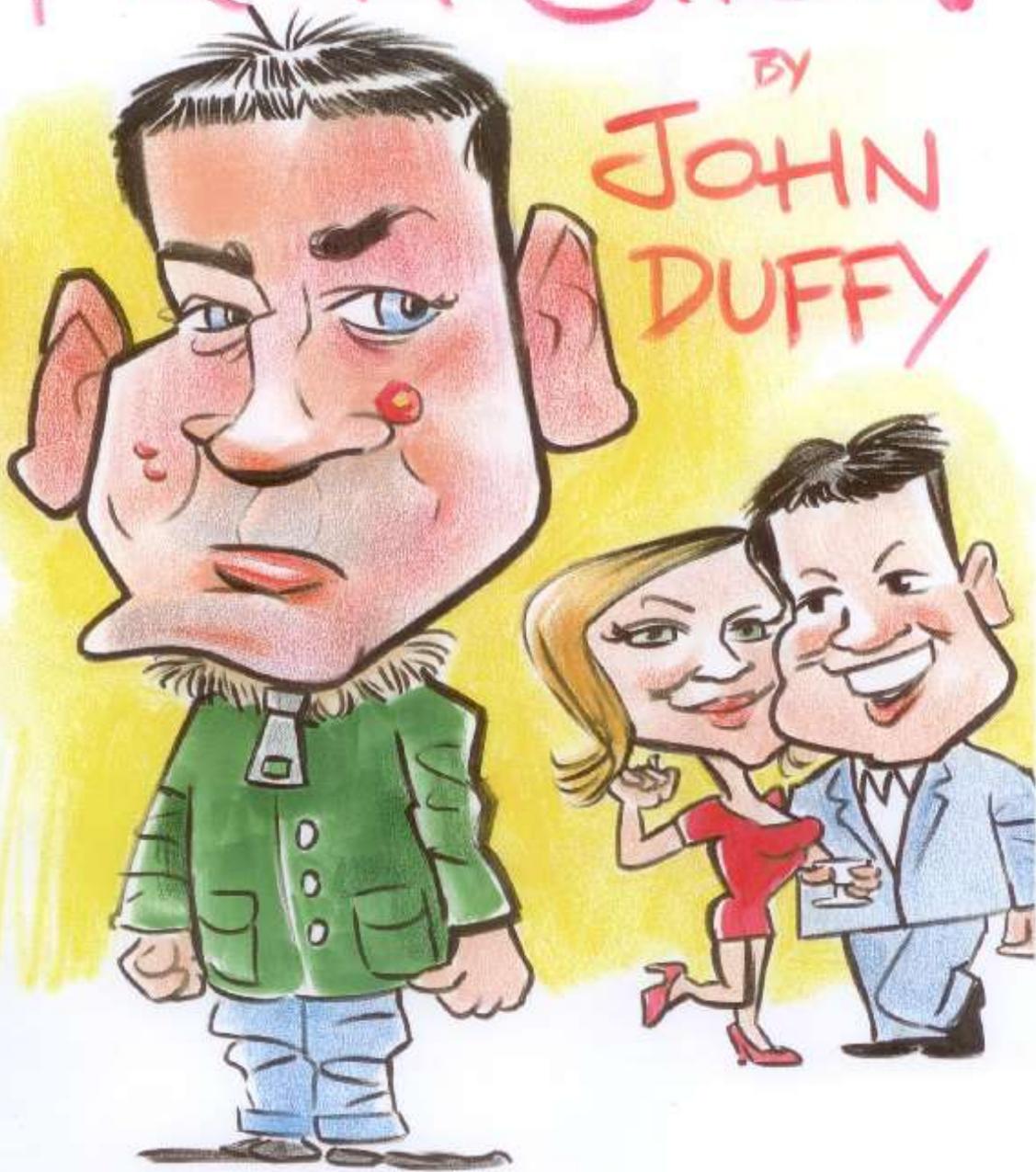


# FREAKSHOW

BY  
JOHN  
DUFFY



**FreakShow**

by

John Duffy

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest felt and heartiest gratitude to the following colourful and miscellaneous 'characters', living or dead, real and surreal, without whom this light-hearted little jig would not have been written. Your relentless and never-ending neuroses, foibles and musical and thespian deficiencies (and/or the opposite); your countless idiosyncratic nuances and leanings towards lunacy have quite literally been the inspiration behind every word. Please be assured however that no offence is or was ever intended. It's all made up you see. So the harsh views that may from time to time be perpetrated upon you by some or other of the protagonists within these pages ...well it's a work of fiction OK? So not true!

A raised glass to you all so I say! You're good sports so you are, to be sure, to be sure. But if you do find the time to read it (those of you that are still alive that is) and are insulted for whatever reason; well I've decided to 'cover' myself. Just, you know, in case of libel and all that. To be 'on the safe side' as they say!

So yeah. You know who you are. God bless you all!

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So the principal reason why I wrote 'FreakShow' relates simply enough to the passing of time. A case I suppose of 'if you don't do it now, you never will'. Why now though you might ask? At 46 and 45 when I began. Well it's to do with bereavement if you must know. Sudden bereavement. Two close friends, less than a year apart. Robert and Sharon; gone too soon and missed daily.

So who to thank next? My wonderful mother, father, siblings, nieces and nephews for starters. And my beautiful and supportive wife. And my miracle of a daughter. And Yia Yia. Yia Yia BA no less. And my dear friends. All of you for your patience and kindness. I hope you like it. Regardless of the seemingly endless barrage of expletives and profanities you'll encounter at every turn. Be strong I say. Blot it out. They're just noises after all generated by mere vocal chords. They could be anything. In Swahili they're probably compliments.

And encouragers and detractors alike of course. Both inspire in equal measure.

Following on from that so and as a direct result of it even; my own personal vanity. Leading to (for you) quite insufferable vainglory and aloofness. I'll probably erect an ivory tower to wallow in next whilst I deliberate moodily over that second 'difficult' novel.

Ahh well, 'whatever' as the kids say. To use the parlance of our times and all that (sic).

I wish to acknowledge once again my beautiful wife Amelia and wonderful daughter Annabel. Without their love and support I would never have been able to complete 'FreakShow' and for that I am deeply appreciative. Now that my mid-life crisis has come to an end however, I promise you both that I will wholeheartedly immerse myself into the 'rat race' once more, with extraordinarily unrivalled vim and vigour.

Finally this book is dedicated to my brother Bernard who died in the year 2000. We miss him no less with every passing year.

John Duffy

September 2014

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## Chapter 1 - Class Erection 1984

The year was 1984 and the future was bleak. Not bleak in an 'Orwellian, dystopian, relentlessly unrelenting' kind of way. More 'bleak for the next little while' kind of way. Short term bleakness. Thirty minutes tops.

So picture the scene: a teenage boy in a North Dublin secondary school. A sixth year, 17 years old, crammed into a desk barely large enough for a first year. John Lydon, a foot taller and three stone heavier than he probably should be. And almost definitely not a sex pistol. Isn't that the problem with famous people becoming famous after you've already made your own entrance into the world? That old baptismal nomenclature of choice coming back to haunt? For nine years give or take, JR had lived a relatively trouble-free existence (well ok, moniker wise anyway) until BANG 1976 awakened popular music from its six-year progressive/glam rock induced slumber and this flame-haired lunatic from another planet began ranting raucously about 'cants' and telling everybody to fuck off. But it *was* The Sex Pistols after all so not that troublesome for JR really. There was an audacious rebelliousness to the whole thing so instead of being embarrassed by it he was instead quite proud of the fact that he was in some small way 'connected' to them, however innocuous the link might be.

But moving on from that in a semi-related kind of way; is there really any excuse for parents to be such complete arses when it comes to choosing names for their offspring? Paul McCartney from Longford knew a thing or two about that. Paul was born in 1969. I mean seriously, where had his parents been living until then, under a fucking rock? So the school (and by the school I mean of course the kids) universally deemed John Lydon to be a little unfortunate on the name front but not unfavourably so in any meaningful way. The whole issue was beyond his control and besides, Johnny Rotten was the dog's bollocks so what was not to like? McCartney however quickly found himself on the receiving end of a pretty merciless plethora of wedgies, nurples, wet willies and/or any other such form of wanton playground torture conceived by random juveniles within his general vicinity. It became open season on the poor bastard before long and all as a result of the fact that his culturally challenged parents had burdened him criminally from the outset. Their staggeringly below par knowledge of popular late twentieth century music would lead to a lifetime sentence of derision and ridicule for McCartney. Yes of course they should have known who The Beatles were but didn't. Ergo, they were halfwits. Ergo, McCartney was a halfwit. Not fair I know but then again neither is the hair on a gorilla's arse. That's just the way it goes in the teenage stratosphere. It's not supposed to make sense. Fair enough so the whole thing was out of McCartney's control also, but he was such an annoying little bastard that general berating and castigation would doubtless have been the order of the day anyway, no matter what his parents had deigned to call him all those years ago. They called him Paul McCartney though. Not John Lydon. So there it was really. If you broke it all down into nicely compartmentalised snippets of the whys and wherefores and how everything eventually came to pass, the two boys' respective popularity was probably as simple as choosing which figure from popular culture you'd rather be if someone was to put you on the spot and actually ask you. So what about it then? Who would you rather be? Think about it. John Lydon or Paul McCartney? I think we all know the answer to that one. As questions go in fact it's as undeniably rhetorical as they come. Hardly worth even posing really when you sit back and weigh it all up.

But that's not the story. As a matter of fact it's completely unrelated to the story. Other than to explain to you how JR got his nickname.

So yeah. The story.

I've known JR a long time. We met as teary-eyed four-year-olds on our first day of primary school, both nonplussed in our infantile way as to who this loud, ghoulish and 'as far as you could possibly imagine from being maternal' tyrant was; stationed implacably and stone-faced at the head of the room. A crazed and maniacal harpy whose apparent speciality was to rant and gyrate about the room with as much fear-inducing menace as she could muster, terrorising confused and defenceless children with impunity as she went about her business. Why she was yelling and screaming like this was a complete and total mystery to us but we reasoned in later years that her total irrationality was probably brought on by an all-encompassing absence of any discernible competence in her chosen profession. We were eventually obliged to take our seats on this first day anyway, but poor JR was so large even then that he was ordered to sit to the side where the children usually took their lunch, a little bit off to the left of where the rest of us were situated, just next to where the lukewarm milk and processed corned beef sandwiches the Department of Education had provided were haphazardly scattered in see-through plastic wrapping on the floor. Perched like that above everyone else served merely to give the impression that he was even larger and taller than he actually was so psychologically not that great a start for him in fairness. If Adler was alive today he'd be spinning in his grave! He ended up sitting adjacent to me in the end anyway and from then until the day the following events unfolded we've been mostly inseparable. These 'following events' I refer to by the way take place in Double Maths in 1984, and JR as I mentioned before, had forced his oversized girth into an undersized desk. He was almost certainly in some kind of a precarious predicament also, which I could ascertain clearly from the look of misery that was etched across his youthful visage. The reasons for which as yet, were unknown to me.

"Psst," I whispered over. "JR! What's the problemo?"

He shushed my attentions away with a sharp and surreptitious swish of the hand. Indicating definitively that he was not desirous of any undue attention being brought upon him from the top of the class. You don't ever want any undue attention to be brought upon yourself from the top of any class but particularly so here. Put plainly, Brother Anthony was a raving lunatic which aligned him I suppose to a group that was constituted of well over 50% of the Christian Brothers 'working' in the educational 'system' at the time. More than half of these nutjobs were actual sociopaths, so when you add that to the considerable crew of lay teachers dotted around who were madmen also, it was pretty dear and definitive proof of the fact that evolution can indeed go in reverse. It made for a pretty torrid time as well if you were attempting to endure a relatively peaceful existence as a teenager in a North Dublin comprehensive secondary school in 1984.

So let's get to the nub of the problem then shall we? Straight to the point as they say. If you've ever been a 17-year-old boy you'll almost certainly be aware of the scenario I'm about to present but if not you almost certainly won't. But it should hopefully be a source of amusement to you all the same.

Let me begin so by verifying the undeniable truism that impromptu erections are pretty much, 100% of the time that is, unwelcome in all public places. And that bus and train journeys can and will exacerbate very badly your already dicey situation. It's the vibrations you see. The erections can be as random and untimely as to be absurd also, that is when there's an absolute abundance of punters in your immediate environs. They may strike at any moment and in any jurisdiction and are by no means also brought on by contemplations of a sexual nature. They often just arrive unannounced for no clear or obvious reason. A bumpy bus or train journey will almost always aggravate the problem further, as I've said already, with the uneven nature of your journey being of considerable nuisance value to you as you embroil yourself in the painstaking and 'much concentration required' process of retrieving images of the most asexual nature from your cerebral arsenal to combat your increasingly

worsening state of affairs. These images must be the grimmest musings imaginable and of a grotesque enough nature to counter the exponentially deteriorating situation. You know the kind of thing. Sucking warm diarrhoea from a pig farmer's sock. Or sticking pins in your eyes.

More often than not however everything imagined is futile. So if you're heading into the city centre on a 29A, you could quite conceivably be required to wait until everyone gets off on Marlborough Street before you can even think about alighting from the vehicle yourself. And if you're on a Dart you may end up in even choppier waters. I've heard of poor bastards looking to get off in Tara Street but travelling ten stations further on then to Dun Laoghaire before they felt even remotely confident about any kind of inconspicuous or vertical gait.

But it isn't all bad news my friends so don't worry. There are measures you can put into effect that can make things marginally more bearable. They don't always work of course but are definitely worth a shot if your situation becomes unendurable. First of all you must wait until everyone's looking the other way. Your next move then will involve a split-second contortion which could potentially raise an unsuspecting eyebrow here and there. Be prepared for this. If your move is executed in the correct fashion however, the vast majority will return to their newspapers or magazines or whatever, assuming hopefully that you just have a bit of an issue with random and uncontrollable spasms. The whole thing is all about delivery and timing to be honest; but then again isn't everything in life?

So the trick is this. With one swift move of your right hand you must reach down to the sock on your left foot and pull it very sharply further up your shin. This action must be carried out with clear and purposeful exactitude and your facial features must wear an expression that says that your life might possibly have ended if you hadn't been able to pull that sock up in that exact way at that precise moment in time. Your look must be pained. At the same time as your right hand is carrying out this part of the operation, your left hand, in an act of the most clandestine dexterity, must reach inwards towards your general crotch area and push the erectile offender into a completely upright position, ensuring that it now rests against the top inside part of your fly or belt area. You can complete your journey now in the peaceful knowledge that even though your knob stings like absolute fuck right now you will henceforth not be the laughing stock of the bus or train going proletariat today. Your militarily precise manoeuvre has saved the day and you can alight at your leisure now, whenever you choose to do so.

So back to JR's similarly damnable predicament. It had taken me a minute or two to grasp the situation but I could see now that this was the very problem he was at present confronting.

So we must now at this seemingly inopportune time consider the whole notion of being in love. 'Why now?' you ask and well you might. JR is in an emergency quandary of the stickiest nature and you're throwing this whole Mills and Boon shit at us? What gives dude? Well OK as untimely as it all may seem, it is of critical importance that you to consider the following. That most teenage boys between the ages of 12 and 17 develop crushes on practically every girl they encounter at all times of the day, 24/7, 365 days of the year. A simple statement of fact really, and no less true of JR than anyone else who had come or gone before. At this present juncture in time in fact, JR had a crush on at least six of the girls in the class, all of whom were present and accounted for on the infamous day.

"Fortune, ye little FECK! What the feck are you doing?"

Shit. I'd been rumbled. Bubble had ears like Lindsay fucking Wagner. Brother Anthony was known to us as 'Bubble' which as a nickname was an uncompromising reference to the generally

corpulent nature of his overall carriage. Put more colloquially though, I suppose I could just cut to the chase and call him a fat bastard.

“Nothing sir. I was just saying something to JR, sorry, John Lydon there sir,” I said, pointing fixedly at JR. Actually pointing at him. Rotating my outstretched forefinger around a few times also in the air in front of me for, you know, effect. I mean seriously. What a complete fucking jerk? Knowing what I knew about his bulging midriff.

And confounding that with:

“And it wasn’t me sir. He started it.” Which was a complete lie of course. Again, like I said; a complete fucking jerk.

What you need to take on board here now so, is that most teenagers by and large are totally spineless bastards. And that includes me of course at the very top of the list. I don’t know why this is to be honest, something Darwinian perhaps, but there was absolutely no way in hell that I was getting nabbed here. No matter what I had to do or say to get out of it. Bubble was as unstable as they come so whomever he chose to drag to the top of the class today would almost certainly be in for an unquestionably torrid time. And there he was. My best pal. Sitting directly across from me with a boner to beat all boners and no way on earth he can even think about standing up without the whole class seeing it for what it was. And there I was. Still not prepared to take the fall for him even though I was patently aware of his totally drastic situation. Like I said. Spineless. Another issue to consider also was the fact that Bubble absolutely detested JR, but for some unclear reason had a semi-begrudging fondness for me. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it but if I’m being totally truthful with you, I’d probably have to admit that it might perhaps have been related to a fervid desire on his part for the two of us to partake in mutually beneficial acts of a deviant nature ‘behind the bike sheds’ as they say. So following on from that it was probably 70/30 ‘for’ that JR was in line for a call up. But I wasn’t taking any chances on it just in case. Hence my lowbrow and underhanded tactics.

“Right,” said Bubble. “It’s Lydon again, haw? Up here now Lydon ye little feckin’ feck!”

‘Little’ was not the operative word here really, which Bubble realised as soon as he’d said it, which in turn made him even madder. It didn’t take much for this guy to lose it to be honest but that’s chastity for you right? The brothers and the nuns all lived in the same house behind the school near the Raheny Road, and I’d always maintained that if just one of them had the foresight to buy a litre of Black Bush in the offy on the way home and you know, let things take their natural course, that the whole situation might have ended up a whole lot funkier chez maison clergé. A loosening of a collar here and a removal of a wimple there and before you knew it there’d be a fresh and breezy air of bon vivant about the place. Common sense would waft through the house like a Sirocco on a humid day and all as a result of one or two liberally poured Shirley Bassey’s at the end of a long and tiring shift at the seat of learning. In no time at all the brothers and the sisters would be hopping about the corridors of the old alma mater, sprightly young gazelles one and all, high fiving unsuspecting students for no apparent reason and singing ‘Celebration’ by Kool and the Gang <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GwjfUFyY6M> It’s been said before but I’ll say it again. Relatively regular sexual encounters almost always represent remarkably positive fillips for the soul. Anything else is unnatural. And sure wasn’t Jesus riding Mary Magdalene as well? OK well maybe not. But it’s fun to say it all the same just to watch the pious faces contort with horror.

But I digress. The problem looming for JR was unenviable. It was twofold as I saw it and a fairly complicated conundrum to unravel for even the best of minds. The first element of it was this: if he was to be called up by Bubble (which as you know was already the case) how was he supposed to

get to the top of the class without anyone seeing the trouser tent? The second part of the dilemma was how he would take the shit that was sure to be doled out by Bubble in whatever form that might take, and then make it back to his seat without any of the ruses he might have employed to avert the imminent catastrophe being uncovered by all or any of the populace in attendance – including the six or more objects of his desire that were dotted here and there throughout the classroom.

So Act 1, Scene 1. Getting his lumbering torso out of the desk. If we refer to the solution outlined before, i.e., the bus/train scenario, you can readily conclude that even though things looked fairly ominous, he did have a vaguely outside chance of getting away with it if he applied himself correctly. One must always be prepared to see things from a different perspective you know, adapt and survive and all that, and JR was a smart and resourceful guy at the best of times. So all was not, as yet, lost. In true McGyver fashion so he had a quick look around his general person to assess what tools he had at his disposal. A quick itinerary revealed a black ballpoint pen, an A4 foolscap pad, a similarly sized Maths text book, a protractor and a compass. Meagre enough fare really, but provisions of a kind at least. And something is always better than nothing right?

What to do though, what to do? Protractor, useless. Writing pad, semi-useless. Textbook, semi-useless. Pen and compass his best options almost definitely, but how? He was up against it and time was not on his side. I reckoned he could stall Bubble for twenty, maybe thirty seconds tops, before the lunatic lost it big time and started throwing dusters. Oh yeah and one other thing. When I talk about compasses here I'm not referring to those circular, magnetic gizmos that seafaring and orienteering types can't do without. A mathematical compass is a technical drawing device that's used for drawing arcs and circles and the like. So of absolutely zero use to you if you happen to be at the top of a mountain and a dense fog is forming around your feet. As a matter of fact if you'd offered one to Magellan before he set out on his trail-blazing journey to the Pacific, there's a fairly good chance he'd have poked you in the eye with it for being such a fucking halfwit. Which would have been decidedly unfortunate for you as it goes, as the mathematical compass has two needle-sharp points at the end of both of its' arms. So a poke in the eye with one of these won't be the nicest thing that's ever happened to you. This particular compass gizmo has a cylindrical slot attached to one of its arms also, through which you're supposed to slot a pencil for drawing curves onto paper. All of which is mostly irrelevant by the way, especially when we reconsider JR's enduringly dodgy predicament. A point not irrelevant however was the sharp one I've referred to already at the end of JR's compass. An excellent design feature indeed, the potential merits of which were becoming increasingly more noticeable to JR the more he perused and weighed up his options. He wasn't entirely sure how the compass would assist but knew that he had about fifteen seconds or so at best to figure it out. He was growing in confidence though from what I could see, and a plan was definitely formulating in his mind. In order to get himself out of the chair he was essentially wearing, without the whole class observing his acute dilemma, he concluded that the only way he could ensure that this present debacle might have any chance of arriving at an ultimately successful conclusion would be to deploy some kind of a decoy. Without further delay so, and with a level of execution not seen before on any glorious battlefield of yesteryear, he put his elaborate plan into action.

Timing was critical. Timing was everything. With great mental fortitude he grasped the compass in his left hand and stabbed Paul McCartney in the back. McCartney squealed in pain as JR dropped his compass back onto his desk, before grabbing his maths text book with the same hand. He squeezed his considerable frame out of his seat then, and with his free right hand made a furtive adjustment to his erect penis with his fingers and his thumb. Now standing, JR shielded his crotch with the text book and strode confidently in the direction of the psychotic cleric.

The whole procedure went like clockwork. So much so in fact that even McCartney hadn't realised that the sharp pain in his back had actually been caused by JR's compass. Besides McCartney's protests to Bubble so, about something he could neither explain nor blame on anybody else, the whole thing went off rather swimmingly.

But this was only half the battle with foreboding and general apprehension still present in considerable spades. JR still had a fuming Christian Brother to contend with and McCartney's shrieks weren't lightening the mood either.

"McCartney, if you don't shut the feck up, I won't be held responsible..." Bubble glowered.

"But sir, I have a pain in..." moaned McCartney, before being shot down decisively and definitively.

"McCartney! If you don't shut it I'll leather you 'til your mother thinks you spent the day at Dollymount without your Ambre Solaire!"

Silence reigned in the classroom eventually as McCartney realised he was getting nowhere fast. Bubble refocused his attention on to JR who was standing in front of him now with the Maths text book still placed strategically across his front.

"Right then Lydon, ye feekin' scut," he hissed. "I'm not going to waste your time and you're not going to waste mine. I will ask you one question and by Jesus you'd better get it right. Otherwise there'll be hell to pay, so help me God!"

"Yes sir," said JR. Not a great retort admittedly but under these fairly extenuating circumstances, pretty impressive I think that he could speak at all.

"OK then," Bubble continued, regaining some composure. "Tell me now Lydon, if you add A2 + B2, what do you get?" He spoke slowly and with purpose. But something dark was a-brewing. You could tell.

"What sir?" said JR, not really listening to him now as things were. Which was mainly as a result of his attempts to will his erect penis into a state of flaccidness by imagining Bubble taking a shit. Which was a risky enough strategy for sure. Bubble was a loose cannon as I've said already, but JR had to try something, anything really, to turn the tide. The ongoing issue in his pants was still very much extant. He needed to channel his mental efforts on to just one thing alone so made a conscious effort to focus in the short term on this attempted deflation of his continually burgeoning lunch box. An answer would have to wait.

"You answer me now Lydon or I'll leather you, so help me God," continued Bubble, who was shifting excitedly now from foot to foot as he spoke. Not a good sign. Not a good sign at all. Ominous. He was gearing up for something.

So if you ask any mother anywhere in the world across the centuries and down through the annals of time, they'll all tell you the same thing: that a growing teenage lad really is quite something to behold. This is based primarily on the amount of clothes they go through over a ridiculously short period of time and Mrs Lydon was certainly no exception to this rule. Quite the opposite in fact. These were recessionary times and mothers would usually push it to the nth degree if they could get away with it. Families were large in the 80s so we're not talking about one or two kids here. It usually hovered around the five or six mark at least and was very often a lot more. The point being

anyway, that on the day in question JR was modelling garb that was fully two sizes too small for him. His trouser legs were three inches higher than they should have been and the waist area – notwithstanding his current predicament – was barely held together by the most meagre of clasps and makeshift zips imaginable. It wasn't anyone's fault per se, but that was the situation as it was. So not ideal. Particularly when JR's primary goal at present was to seem as inconspicuous as possible to anyone looking on. His vision of an imaginary turd leaving Bubble's arse wasn't improving his situation either, so he knew now that at this stage in the proceedings that he'd probably have to have a stab at some kind of an answer. And while he stood there considering that, having barely understood or even heard the question in the first place, he became convinced of one thing and one thing alone: that if he got this question wrong Bubble would be coming down on him hard. The brother was at least a foot smaller than him but that didn't matter. He packed one hell of a punch when his back was up. JR was usually pretty fearless but in his current disadvantaged position, he could ill afford to be taking any chances dodging this crazed man of the doth around the room. Particularly when at any moment his whole ensemble might fall asunder leaving him standing there in all his glory with nothing to cover his decency but a tattered old Maths text book. So he chose his words carefully.

"A2 sir," he ventured slowly, "and B2 sir," he ventured further still, "Is AB2 sir."

He was quietly confident. It made sense. What else could it be? In his head he was victorious and the panic was over. He'd snatched victory from the jaws of defeat and gone from zero to hero in less than a couple of minutes.

Although oblivious to it, for JR truly believed that he had indeed dodged a bullet, an air of further menace settled over the room. Everyone else could sense it except him. Imagine ominous cellos and a movie about a big fish and you won't be too far off the mark. Bubble's pallor experienced a grand and wondrous metamorphosis of colour change. First sickly yellow, then cerise pink, followed by a rose-coloured reddish hue before culminating in a deep crimson, with tinges of yellow and green across the wrinkles of his forehead. He stepped towards JR uttering just two syllables under his breath, barely audible but almost certainly borne out of a primal and deep-rooted malevolence. He began to circle JR, denching and undenching the fist of his right hand and all the while muttering just two syllables over and over again.

And then he basically lost it.

"C2, C2, C2, C2, C2!" he blared, matching each utterance with the most voracious, open-handed slaps of an arse you're ever likely to witness. With every blow JR was thrown this way and that, first left, then right, with his general posterior flitting hither and thither around the top of the classroom. The text book flew out of his hand and slid across the floor in the general direction of the door. JR found himself gyrating like a salsa dancer, making intermittent and largely fruitless attempts to avoid Bubble's manic palm. All very amusing of course, and well worth a fully paid up ringside seat under ordinary circumstances. But these weren't ordinary circumstances. After slap three or perhaps four, the cage was finally opened and the beast unleashed. A collective scream went up around the room, some tinged with horror and others with unbridled glee, with some a mixture of both. A sense of amazement prevailed throughout, as the audience took on board what had been very unexpectedly presented before them. Even Bubble stopped his frenzied onslaught when he finally caught sight of it. A fully erect penis that wouldn't look out of place hanging from a Clydesdale was protruding out of JR's fly and for the briefest of moments time stood still. Everyone present wondered initially at the enormity of the appendage and secondly, after a brief interlude interspersed by nervous girly giggles and boyish whoops and wehays, completely re-evaluated their overall feelings towards JR and saw him in an entirely new light.

Call me weird but just at that excruciatingly humiliating moment in time I had a vaguely surreal notion that Bubble was on the verge of extolling the merits of Pythagoras' theorem by using JR's phallus as a kind of hypnagogic teaching aid. It was after all protruding upwards at an angle of almost ninety degrees and as everyone knows the square on the side of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares... well you get the picture. But this was all in my head of course. Too much cheese the previous night maybe, I don't know. Bubble was definitely staring at it with a considerable degree of interest though, I wasn't imagining that. One thing I was certain of also was that JR seemed to be getting a lot of positive attention from the female fraternity present. More, perhaps than he could have ever hoped for I would imagine in a situation such as this. There were noticeable hot flushes to be observed throughout the room and he could definitely sense himself I think that the overall mood had changed considerably towards him. He made a decision therefore to do something quite outrageous and out of character for him at the time; a real case of 'What the fuck, carpe diem' and all that. Feigning a bodybuilder's pose so he crouched forward, Lou Ferrigno like, and let out a loud and raucous, primate-like roar. After which he gingerly pulled up his fly, pushed Bubble to one side and sauntered out of the classroom.

Afterwards we all agreed, whilst deliberating over it for perhaps the fiftieth time, that as exits go, this really was something quite special.

## Chapter 2 - Timonfaya Of The face

So what a day that was. As momentous as they come. JR's rapid rise in popularity was affirmed and what a complete and total revelation it was too. It would seem the fact that he was a gargantuan oaf with nothing of any specific note to say was an apparent irrelevance. In this instance, size *did* matter. The real beauty of the situation however was not the fact that he was finally getting some himself but that we, his lesser endowed cohorts, were in line potentially for a bit of 'nook and cranny' ourselves. Result! Well maybe. It wasn't guaranteed. Although our chances had definitely improved significantly as a result of his recent exploits. We did all hang around the same places at the same times you see, so if a fly of a female variety was happy to hover around a particularly appetising looking piece of excrement then there was a better than reasonable chance other flies might also now be more than content to hover around inferior specimen of excrement that were loitering about also. But as positive as all that sounds there was still no escaping the fact that we all instinctively knew that the present 'set up' was probably more akin to a lion's paw toying despondently with a random piece of innards whilst a more dominant member of the pride mere yards away was sinking its fangs into the arse of a recently appropriated wildebeest. A case of 'I'll make do with you for the time being sunshine, but as soon as the prime cut becomes available you'll be tossed aside unceremoniously, like an unmerciful sow discards a runt piglet from out the sty'. The present 'arrangement' however, for want of a better word, was inordinately better than anything that had been in place before; so we'd nothing to complain about really. Any manner of flotsam and jetsam might theoretically wash up along the side now, and all we had to do to be successful was cast our respective nets out and reel 'em in as required. So 'win-win'. As long as we kept our cool that is and didn't fuck around with the 'formula'. The 'formula' being as idiot-proof as you like. Namely to encourage JR to give all of the girls in his clutches equal amounts of attention from the outset, ergo driving them into such frenzies of amour that they might hypothetically opt for any one of us no matter how desperate or pathetic we seemed. Which of course on both counts, we did. We were aware however that this perfect situation couldn't last forever; I mean, they weren't total halfwits right?

So there you have it. Following on from JR's initially horrific but ultimately successful debacle in the classroom, the subsequent weeks and months that followed yielded an unprecedented

'girlfriend by osmosis, manna from heaven' type situation for everybody. Ok well nearly everybody. As is almost always the case, it was a good deal more fulfilling for some than others. If for example say, there were four girls buzzing around JR but just two of them in with any sort of realistic chance, the other two 'on the periphery' would be generally viewed by the rest of us as 'up for grabs'. Which could very soon become three also, if one of the front runners came back to the field. If therefore there were four of us 'secondary' players loitering about (which was usually the case) the above deal meant that just one of us would lose out at worst and perhaps two if we were unlucky. Which aren't bad odds really when all is said and done. Some of us as I said were considerably less successful than others though, and I'm sad to report that I found myself backing up the field quite badly on a fairly regular basis. I wasn't entirely sure what the main reason for this was, but social mores almost definitely played a part. That is to say that there was an anthropological explanation as to why yours truly ended up as a habitual persona non gratis on practically every other occasion; perennially subjected to the receiving end of defiantly brandished red cards from the fairer sex considerably more often than not. The opportunities presented to us were bountiful enough also, so my dire lack of success in the event was particularly hard to stomach. Out of the four of us that remained after JR, I really was quite seriously a total and utter fucking eunuch.

So let's look at some of the main protagonists then shall we? In a bid to ascertain why some of us prevailed where others failed. There were five of us in our little group and every one a dastardly miscreant beyond compare. First up the big man. JR. But you know about him already of course. Too much perhaps! Next was Marcus Quinn, oozing smarm and arrogance and our resident Don Juan of the territory. With a swagger and style that made Sting in Quadrophenia <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bi5lsOqL0i8> look like John Mills in Ryan's Daughter <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-bkquX1Bg8>. Marcus was a pretty natty dresser for the time, but this was 1984 don't forget so he wasn't up against much. Male grooming and dapper dress codes weren't exactly de rigueur with the youth of the day back then. Marcus was suavity personified however and rarely looked anything other than resplendent compared to the rest of us. In those days the majority of male teenagers took considerably less care over their general grooming than they do today. Washing for example was an entirely optional enterprise for most and a typical fashion statement was probably some random jumper you picked up in Guiney's of North Earl Street the previous week. The kind of garment that more often than not was an absurdly flimsy and threadbare object of attire with no palpable use at all least of all as quality apparel to keep you warm on a winter's evening. Marcus however was always one step ahead of the posse and if you were lucky enough on a rare occasion to acquire a crisp new cotton shirt for an auspicious occasion, his would almost certainly be brushed cotton and double cuffed. If you had new shoes his would be Barkers. He was clean shaven and rugged jawed and bore a not unreasonable resemblance to a young Timothy Dalton <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWzrQ-xn3Wc>. His main problem however was a supercilious air of arrogance, which resulted ultimately in a surprisingly low level of success with the womenfolk. Arrogance as you know is not an attractive trait, so good looks and sophistication or not, he wasn't the roaring success he might have been if he'd been less of a buffoon when it came to his overall discourse with the ladies. He wasn't entirely bereft of luck though, don't get me wrong; but if he'd condescended just that little bit less, he'd almost certainly have experienced a significantly greater degree of éclat than he did. He had dubious leanings towards that Trinity College, literary boffin type fraternity also, so whenever he launched into a monologue of a bookish nature (which was often enough I'm sorry to say) this was usually a cue for a pretty immediate dispersal of numbers in his general vicinity. It's all very well prattling on about the relative merits and/or downsides of Raskalnikov's detestable actions in 'Crime and Punishment', but you really do need to evaluate your audience before you start waxing lyrical on the subject. And if you think it's OK to start throwing 'Steppenwolf' out there also, well you're pretty much asking for trouble in my view. What self-respecting young girl in 1984 is going to go for that? Self-obsessed sociopaths from the tomes of yesteryear have their time and place of course, that's indisputable. But

is it really what the masses are crying out for? Is it the light entertainment option that'll have them fawning over you at the end of an evening? It most certainly is not. Yield to banality I say and dumb it all down. Keep it simple, talk about Simon Le Bon or John Taylor. Tell her she looks a bit like Debbie Harry. Anything really to achieve your ultimate goal, that teenage holy grail; the proverbial 'getting of the leg over'. Marcus didn't see it that way though and trusted in the notion that one day, some day, by a law of averages, he would stumble across a kindred spirit of the opposite sex, with the intellect to see beyond his windswept and rakish carriage. A girl that would admire him for the brilliance of his mind and not just his handsomely chiselled jaw. (See 'arrogance' above). Unfortunately for him though he was ignored for the most part and considered to be as most of the girls opined at the time 'a bit of a fucking weirdo.' This was seen initially by the rest of us as a grand enlightenment; a seemingly emphatic verification of the notion that sometimes, just sometimes, the fairer sex actually *do* see beyond the pretty boy face. In the end though, that ended up as an entirely utopian assumption on our part, with shallowness and superficiality triumphant in the end.

So let's move on to Stretch. Real name Paul Herron which was a joke that was never lost on any of us when we considered his near ornithological frame. Standing fully six foot four in his bare feet, it took very little communal deliberation for us to bestow upon him his elasticated sobriquet. Stretch's principal characteristic however was RANK. Not tall. Rank. And not that disgusting under-arm BO smell you sometimes get with the more lethargic teenagers that dwell among us either; more a rancid odour of fetid underwear and unwashed bollocks, neither of which has been exposed to anything remotely resembling H<sub>2</sub>O for actual weeks. We're talking a musty, malodorous atrocity here that no doubt concealed under its pestilent surface several biological anomalies heretofore unknown to science. Every now and again though, he'd take a rudimentary shower, which was probably forced upon him by his despairing and long-suffering mother; which meant that for a day or two perhaps his gruesome stench would be kept at bay. It would return however as always, in all of its former glory and by day three by Christ did he fucking reek? In truth it's hard to know why we hung around with him at the start. He was indifferent then to almost everything that was going on in his immediate vicinity, and had zero interest also in anything that the rest of us in the gang were into at the time. If it wasn't for the pungent stench that followed him around in fact, you'd quite possibly have never even known that he was there. On that first day he rolled up next to us in the schoolyard and just never went away. And that was it basically. He'd moved over from the south of the city a month or two previously, so not knowing anyone else in the school he just kind of latched on to our group by chance. It might just as easily have been any other of the pockets of boys that were dotted around the school yard at the time, so his ending up in ours was down to nothing more than random serendipity. He looked lonely enough as well, so we didn't have the heart to tell him to fuck off. That was how it started so and that was how it stayed. He said nothing for the first few weeks and just sidled up to us every day and hung around. There he'd be stood next to us, with his hands stuffed sullenly into his pockets with a gormless countenance to match. We came to know over time of course that he was a really good guy to be around, but in those early days you'd have been hard pressed to know that this was the actual case. His overall tastes also, as I've said before, were radically different to what the rest of us in the group were into at the time. In deference to his individuality though I can tell you now that he never succumbed to our efforts to encourage him to pass over to the 'dark side' as he himself termed it at the time. That is, that he had a pretty good degree of backbone and the courage of his convictions. Even if those convictions were very often related to musical atrocities such as any of the offerings from Soft Cell <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEh5pWjcWCg> , China Crisis <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldQpRMegYc0> and many other such similarly grim proponents of vile transgressions upon the ear. So he stuck out like a bit of a sore thumb whenever we were loitering about as a group, with his water and sugar mix spiked up Ian McCullough hair decision a contradictory extreme to our greasy and unkempt shoulder-length tresses. We didn't care much about this though, as he was one of the boys now as far as we were concerned; whatever about his

ridiculous appearance. Or was it our appearance that was ridiculous? I suppose its objective. And amazingly enough also Stretch actually did love this 'music'. And would fight his corner on the subject to the death. And we're talking Fiction Factory here folks!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GUMBlxkdvU> And Go West!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9s9vmrJkV8>. Inexcusable. He was a 'new romantic' you see and we were 'rockers', which as two musical genres standing side by side, were so far apart ideologically that it's hard to see how we didn't go for each other's throats whenever discussions related to contemporary music came to the fore. We'd spar with pretty vitriolic invective of course, but I can unequivocally verify that we never came to blows whenever heated arguments on the subject got going. We were buddies after all so wouldn't let anything as inconsequential as differing musical tastes get in the way of our friendship.

But all that aside anyway we were as honest as the day was long and not shy either about imparting several other home truths to Stretch. Truths related mainly to what we regarded as subjects of a less provocative substance. Which along with one or two other things were usually to do with the ongoing and grotesque nature of his foul bouquet. Not that it made a blind bit of difference in the end though, as his pungent odour reigned supreme throughout the five or so years we remained in close proximity as a group.

OK so let's talk about FuckFuck. And yes, I can hear you now. 'Fuck me' you're probably saying, 'How in Jaysus did that poor bastard get his name?' Well the oddest thing about Jason Michie was that even though he was an absolute nutjob whenever his cursed affliction came to the fore, he was (well for the most part anyway) a bit of a pussy cat in reality. And of a fundamentally nervous disposition. Bloody hell though, when he did let rip, what a sight and a sound to behold? The worst of it all also was that it was all completely involuntary for the poor bastard, that is, that there was absolutely nothing he could do about it once he got started. He had no say in when it might occur or how bad the episode might be, and as an affliction it was completely and utterly beyond his personal control.

FuckFuck suffered from a rare nervous condition called Coprolalia which can at best be described I suppose as a very extreme form of Tourette's. It's accompanied by tics sometimes (but thankfully not in his case) with the main difference between it and 'normal' Tourette's being that for no known reason the sufferer is prone to extreme outbursts of the most profane and irreverent language imaginable. With excessive sexual content being the general order of the day. This sometimes happens with Tourette's also but with Coprolalia it's all about the expletives. It's all these fuckers know. Outbursts are usually perpetrated in public also which as you can well imagine brings the overall merriment and fun levels to unprecedented levels of delight. Watching FuckFuck in full flow, if you haven't seen it before, is as joyous an experience as you can possibly contemplate and beyond comparison for free gratis hilarity. Not of course if you're FuckFuck though. Or anyone else I suppose of a censorious nature. But fuck them I say. Who gave them the last word on profanity? I've always maintained myself that there's no such thing as bad language, just sanctimonious zealots who feign offence. If you don't like it you can always leave the room. You won't be missed. I'm absolutely and totally convinced also that behind closed doors these fuckers fuck and blind like the rest of us; probably more so in fact. And wear women's underwear. The blokes, that is. Women who wear women's underwear are totally acceptable in my book.

So that's the guys and a motley crew of characters they unquestionably were. I should probably introduce myself now shouldn't I? Johnny Fortune. That's me. Johnny Freak Show to my nearest and dearest. And talking of introductions let me bring forth this whole Gladys episode now also, which soon after it came to pass became a legendary tale in local urban folklore, forever to be remembered as the calamity and mockery to end all calamities and mockeries. These unseemly and

deplorable events, the gory details of which I will impart to you now, took place at Manor House secondary school for girls in Raheny. A hideous edifice whose repugnant doors we should never in glorious hindsight, have ever consented to darken.

So here's the background anyway before I elaborate any further. As you know I'd had absolutely zero success with the ladies to date; regardless of the nailed on certainties that JR's recent change in fortunes had teed up for one and all. What you probably know also, but may not entirely understand unless you've actually been there yourself, is that the experience of being a teenager can very often bring with it horrendous and unspeakable conditions of the most gruesome nature. With I might add little or no sagacity from previous experience to help you along your way. Inappropriate ill-timed erections and involuntary expletives are all very well but a face that resembles a lunar landscape is no joke my friends. Johnny Freak Show. The less than complimentary (but admittedly pertinent) sobriquet assigned to me by my so called friends. So this in a nutshell was my main problem. And it was a problem that was not to be considered lightly. From toe to neck I was a perfectly reasonable specimen but once you ventured further north the similarities to John Merrick became ever more apparent <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF19L00KbAI>. OK so perhaps that's a bit of an exaggeration but the old phizog was certainly not the prettiest sight you've ever cast your eye over. All manner of boil, pustule and furuncle populated its surface for the duration of my teenage years, and no amount of cream or lotion applied ever made the blindest bit of difference. The other guys sported perfunctory teenage pimples every now and again but nothing that was even close to my league.

Do you remember something I mentioned earlier on? When I talked about a vague notion that the fairer sex might sometimes conceivably view situations with more erudition than we possibly give them credit for? Well that's horseshit folks. Total balderdash. When it came to the attention that they might have considered lavishing upon me as a result of my, you know, stellar wit and rip-roaring personality, I regret to tell you that they pulled up short on every occasion. Not that there's anything wrong with that of course, I mean I've been known to have a bit of a semi-superficial side myself. So I can definitely see where they're coming from, no doubt about it. But a young man has his needs you know, so something had to give. And give quickly. That's where JR came in.

One thing you can always say about JR and many have done so before; it's that cerebrally – and I'll try to put this as graciously as I can - he's a tiny bit on the challenged side. One thing you can never say about him however is that he doesn't have a big heart. So in the weeks and months after his watershed moment in the classroom, he made sterling and robust efforts to do everything in his power to ensure that we all experienced at least some level of fleeting romance however insignificant that level of fleeting romance might be. He made it his business to put in a good word for any one of us if he saw that we had our eye on someone, and wouldn't let up until a deal was done, dusted and 'signed on the line which is dotted'(sic) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elrnAl6ygeM>. Regarding my own situation however, there was precious little he could do to turn the tide. He persevered though in fairness to him, and came to me one day with what seemed at the time to be a perfectly reasonable proposition. That I didn't see the catastrophe looming is due in no small part to the quite Napoleonic hubris that seemed to emanate from him now, which was a trait borne undoubtedly out of his not being, in the recent past anyway, on the receiving end of the unequivocal rejections that most of us had been summarily subjected to ourselves. His more recent successes had consigned all of his previous failures, of which there were many, to a place in the depths of his psyche where he simply couldn't relate to them anymore. His confidence was infectious though, so I decided to go along with it. I mean why not? What did I have to lose? To us JR was a virtual talisman now, an apparently invincible behemoth of a pied piper of teenage dreams. There was just no way so that his suggested sojourn could culminate in failure. Could it?

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