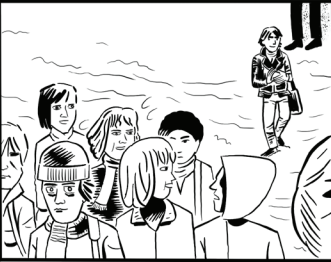


SNOW ANGEL

BY NICK GODDARD

ONE WINTER, AT THE END OF LUNCH, THE BELL RANG AND WE ALL FILED BACK TO CLASS LIKE GOOD LITTLE AUTOMATONS.



ON THIS OCCASION, I MADE THE MISTAKE OF TRAILING BEHIND THE REST OF THE GROUP.



THAT'S WHEN THE WOLF SNATCHED ME.



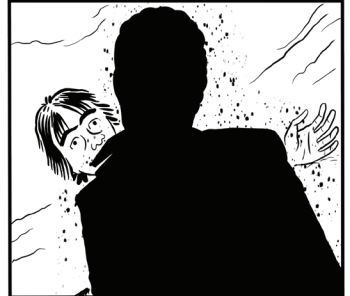
I WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD.



CLIVE WAS FIFTEEN, POSSIBLY EVEN SIXTEEN.



THIS WASN'T THE FIRST TIME THAT HE'D HAD HIS WAY WITH ME.



EIGHTEEN MONTHS EARLIER, A GROUP OF KIDS AND I WERE PLAYING IN THE GRASSY AREA BEHIND THE GARAGES NEAR TO WHERE WE BOTH LIVED.



AT SOME POINT, CLIVE AND I WERE LEFT ALONE AND THAT'S WHEN HE GOT ME.



HE FORCED ME INTO THE UN-CUT GRASS... SMOTHERED ME WITH HIS BODY...



PUSHED HIS HANDS DOWN THE BACK OF MY UNDERPANTS...



AND GROUND HIMSELF AGAINST ME.



EVENTUALLY, I WAS LEFT ALONE AMIDST THE SOFT BLADES.



I PICKED MYSELF UP AND WALKED HOME.

THE NEXT DAY—

THERE'S SOMEBODY AT THE DOOR FOR YOU, NICKY.



COMING OUT TO PLAY?



YOU'RE JOKING, I THOUGHT.

NO.



I WANTED TO TELL A GROWN-UP ABOUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO. SO I TOLD MY YOUNGER SISTER INSTEAD.



CLIVE HELD ME DOWN AND PRETENDED TO HAVE SEX ON TOP OF ME.



DO YOU THINK I SHOULD TELL MUM?



THE FOLLOWING DAY-

I TOLD MUM THAT CLIVE PRETENDED TO HAVE SEX WITH ME.



I WAS DEVASTATED. HE HAD GOT TO MY LITTLE SISTER TOO AND I HAD FAILED TO PROTECT HER.

WH-WHAT DID SHE SAY?



SHE SAID DON'T TELL DAD OR HE'LL BLOODY WELL KILL HIM.



NOW, HERE I WAS AGAIN, SUFFOCATING UNDERNEATH CLIVE...



BEING GROUND AGAINST... HIS HANDS GRABBING AT MY BARE BACKSIDE...



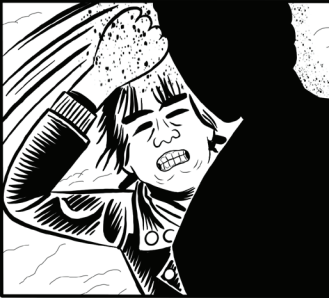
THIS MUST BE HOW WOMEN FEEL DURING SEX...



I DIDN'T JUST WANT HIM TO STOP I WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT HE NEVER DID THIS TO ME AGAIN.



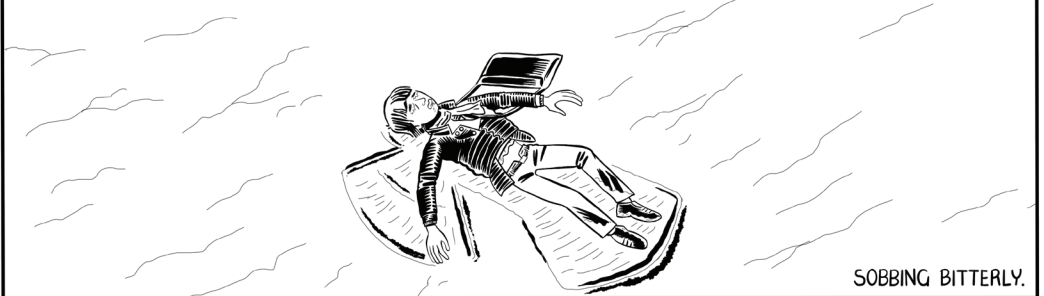
SO I WRITHED AROUND AND THREW PUNCHES AT HIS HEAD.



BUT IT WAS NO GOOD. HE WAS TOO BIG. TOO STRONG.

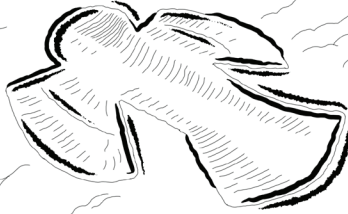


EVENTUALLY, I WAS LEFT ALONE IN THE SNOW.



SOBBING BITTERLY.

WHEN I STOOD UP I NOTICED THE ANGEL I LEFT BEHIND.



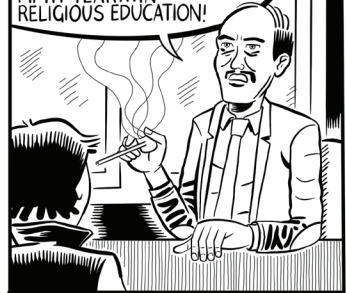
I PACED AROUND THE FIELD CRYING IN FRUSTRATION TRYING TO THINK OF AN ADULT I COULD TELL.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SEX, BOY? YOU'RE ONLY TWELVE YEARS OLD!



YOU DON'T STUDY SEXUAL REPRODUCTION UNTIL THE FIFTH YEAR... IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION!



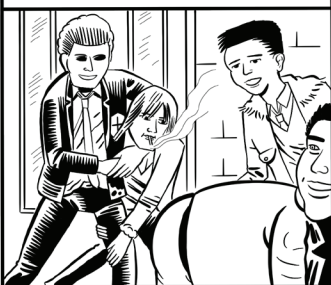
IN THE END, I PULLED MYSELF TOGETHER AS BEST I COULD, AND TURNED UP LATE FOR CLASS.

NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT MY LATE ARRIVAL, WHICH WAS ODD AS THIS SORT OF THING NEVER USUALLY WENT WITHOUT COMMENT.

IT MADE ME WONDER IF THE TEACHER HAD WITNESSED WHAT HAD HAPPENED FROM A WINDOW BUT DIDN'T WANT TO DEAL WITH IT IN CASE IT WORRIED MY MUM ABOUT WHAT MY DAD MAY DO.



SOMETIME LATER, A GROUP OF BOYS FROM MY YEAR WERE MUCKING ABOUT NEAR TO ME.

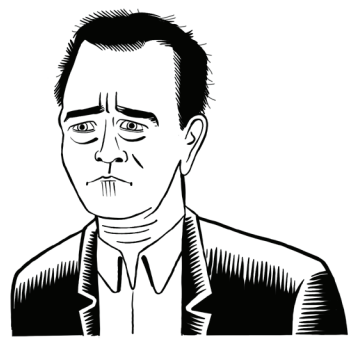


YOU'D BETTER STRAIGHTEN UP OR CLIVELL GET YOU!



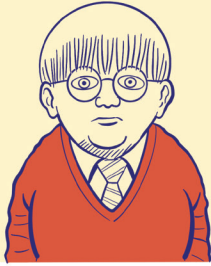


THAT WAS WHEN I REALISED THAT CLIVE WAS PROBABLY ONLY INTERESTED IN BOYS AND, FOR ALL I KNEW, ONLY INTERESTED IN ME. WE NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT AGAIN.



END

MY BEST FRIEND IN JUNIOR SCHOOL WAS ANTHONY IPSWITCH.



WE FOUND EACH OTHER BECAUSE ALL THE OTHER BOYS PLAYED FOOTBALL DURING PLAYTIMES. WE DIDN'T BECAUSE WE WERE TOO WORRIED WE MIGHT BREAK OUR GLASSES IF WE DID.

NATIONAL HEALTH GLASSES



POSH 'JOHN-BOY WALTON' GLASSES



INSTEAD WE INVENTED OUR OWN GAMES AND PLAYED THEM, LIKE AIRPORT.

PREPARING TO LAND!

RETURNING TO BASE!



ONE PLAYTIME, ANTHONY SUDDENLY POINTED AT A BUS DRIVING PAST THE SCHOOL...



THREE FOUR ONE!



...AND THEN HE DROPPED TO THE GROUND.



I FOUND IT HYSTERICAL!



THE NEXT DAY, WE WERE PLAYING HOPSCOTCH WITH SOME GIRLS...

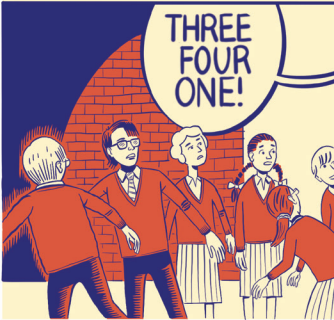


THREE FOUR ONE!





THE NEXT DAY, MORE OF US DID IT.



THE DAY AFTER THAT, EVEN MORE.



AND THE DAY AFTER THAT, YET MORE SO.



WITHIN A FORTNIGHT, ALL THE KIDS IN THE SCHOOL WERE DOING IT.



SOMEBODY WOULD POINT, SHOUT 'THREE FOUR ONE', THEN WE WOULD ALL DROP TO THE GROUND AND PRETEND TO BE DEAD.



WHO KNOWS WHAT THE PASSENGERS MUST HAVE THOUGHT!



ONE PLAYTIME, ANTHONY HAD SOME NEWS FOR ME—



MY MUM AND DAD ARE SENDING ME TO ANOTHER SCHOOL NEXT TERM.



SURE ENOUGH, WHEN I RETURNED TO SCHOOL AFTER THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS, HE WAS GONE.

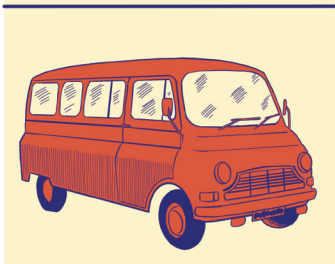




A YEAR LATER, A GROUP OF US WERE BUSED TO ALL-SAINTS, THE SECONDARY SCHOOL WE WOULD BE STARTING AT THE NEXT YEAR.

THE PURPOSE OF THE TRIP WAS TO INFORM US WHAT CLASSES WE WERE GOING IN AND WHERE TO REPORT TO ON OUR FIRST DAY.

IT INCLUDED ALL THE NAMES OF THOSE IN THE NEW FIRST YEAR BEING READ OUT...



I LOOKED AROUND THE HALL TO SEE IF I COULD SPOT HIM BUT 'WITHOUT SUCCESS.



HE DEFINITELY SAID 'ANTHONY IPSWITCH'. HOW MANY ANTHONY IPSWITCHES CAN THERE BE?



SUDDENLY, THE PROSPECT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL WASN'T NEARLY AS INTIMIDATING TO ME.



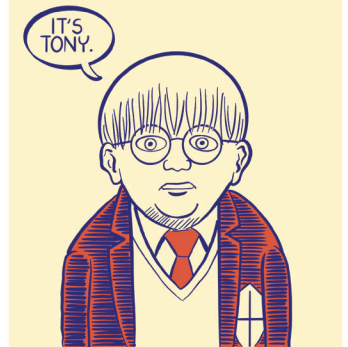
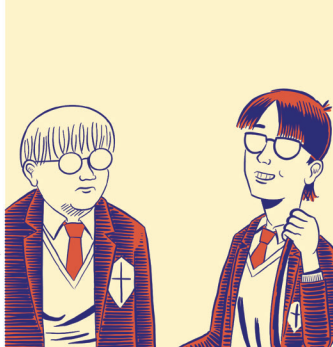
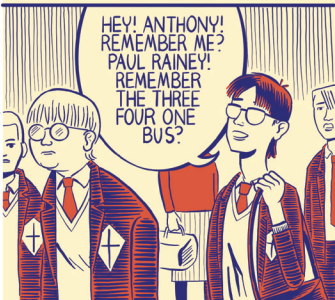
THAT LONG SUMMER PASSED BY A LOT MORE PLEASANTLY KNOWING THAT MY LOST FRIEND WAS GOING TO BE THERE AS WELL.



ON THE FIRST DAY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL I SAW HIM SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FORM-ROOM.



I APPROACHED HIM AT THE END OF REGISTRATION.



HIS COLDNESS STUNNED ME.



I WAS CERTAIN THAT WE WERE BEST PALS SEPARATED BY HIS ASPIRATIONAL PARENTS BUT IT TURNED OUT THAT I WAS MISTAKEN.



I DECIDED TO KEEP A RESPECTFUL DISTANCE IN FUTURE.



AROUND THEN, I WAS WAITING TO BOARD THE BUS HOME WHEN TWO FIFTH-FORM BOYS PUSHED IN.



NOT SATISFIED WITH HAVING JUMPED THE QUEUE, THEY THEN PROCEEDED TO ROUGH ME UP.



THEY WERE EACH MY AGE PLUS NEARLY HALF MY AGE AGAIN, TOGETHER, NEARLY THREE TIMES MY AGE.



I WAS USED TO BEING ASSAULTED AT MY OLD SCHOOL AND BY KIDS IN MY STREET, AND THIS FELT TO ME LIKE BUSINESS AS USUAL.



I HOPED THAT STARTING A NEW SCHOOL WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REINVENT MYSELF... TO PRESENT MYSELF AS SOMEONE PREFERABLE TO WHO I HAD BEEN.



BUT I LEARNED THAT DAY THAT THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE.



IT WAS AS IF THEY HAD TUNED INTO A SPECIAL FREQUENCY, A 'BULLY-FIELD', THAT TOLD THEM I WAS FAIR GAME.



IT'S OKAY TO HURT HIM.



IT'S FUN TO HURT HIM.

HE'S HERE FOR OUR PLEASURE.



OUR PLEASURE IS ALL THAT MATTERS.

IT DIDN'T MATTER WHERE I WENT OR WHO I PRETENDED TO BE. THE SADISTIC NEAR-ADULTS WOULD ALWAYS FIND ME.



ONCE ON BOARD THE BUS, THEY BOWLED STRAIGHT TO THE BACK SEAT.



I SAT AS NEAR TO THE FRONT AS I COULD FROM THEN ON.



A BOY WHO MOVED FROM MY OLD SCHOOL TO TRINITY WITH ME WAS DESMOND PING.



IN THE OLD DAYS, WHENEVER WE ENCOUNTERED EACH OTHER, WE SEEMED TO GET ON WELL.



HE WAS A GOOD LAUGH.



ONE WINTER'S DAY, THE PLAYGROUND WAS FROZEN OVER, AND WE ALL HAD FUN SLIDING ACROSS THE ICE.



LOOK AT ME!
I'M ICEMAN!



I'M THE
SILVER SURFER!



PING TOOK A BIG RUN UP TO THE ICE



AND DID AN IMPRESSIVELY LONG AND SPEEDY SLIDE...



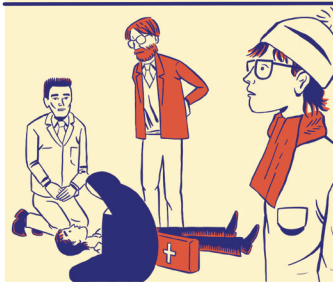
STRAIGHT INTO A WALL!



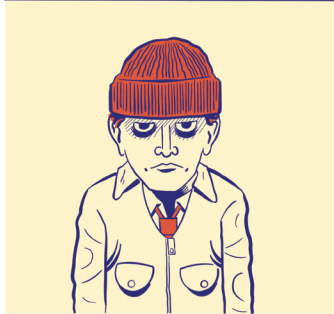
KNOCKING HIMSELF UNCONSCIOUS!



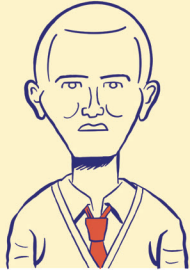
HE WAS NEVER THE SAME AFTER THAT.
HE BECAME SLOWER... THICKER... HIS
SENSE OF FUN TURNED NASTY.



HE BECAME EVIL, ALMOST.



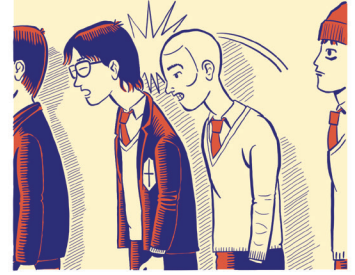
PING WAS FRIENDS WITH SEAN MCGOVERN, ANOTHER BOY FROM OUR OLD SCHOOL.



IF YOU WERE BEHIND MCGOVERN IN A QUEUE FOR CLASS, HE WOULD ELBOW YOU IN THE GUT.



IF YOU WERE IN FRONT OF HIM, HE WOULD BUTT YOU IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD.



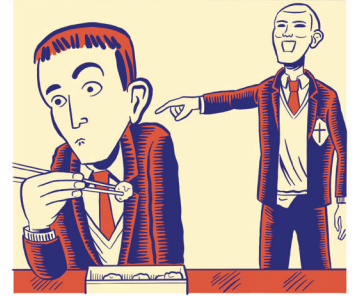
WHEN HE WASN'T ASSAULTING YOU, HE WAS INSULTING YOU ABOUT HOW HE PERCEIVED YOU AS BEING GAY...



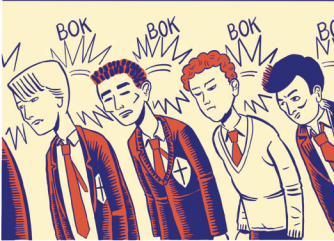
HOW HE PERCEIVED YOU AS DISABLED...



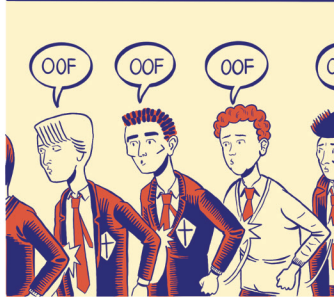
HOW HE PERCEIVED YOU AS NOT BEING WHITE ENOUGH.



MANY OF US STARTED TO ADOPT HIS ASSAULTS AS OUR OWN. WE BEGAN TO HEADBUTT THE BOY IN FRONT AND ELBOW THE BOY BEHIND US IN THE QUEUE.



TAKING CONTROL OF IT SEEMED TO DISPEL OUR FEELINGS OF ISOLATION.



THE GIRLS WHO HAD TO QUEUE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ENTRANCE, MUST HAVE BEEN GRATEFUL FOR THE SYSTEMIC SEXISM FOR ONCE.



ALTHOUGH I KNEW TO AVOID PING AND MCGOVERN, I NEVER TOOK THEM VERY SERIOUSLY AS MENACES.



PERHAPS THIS WAS BECAUSE I HAD KNOWN THEM BOTH SINCE WE WERE FIVE YEARS OLD.



WE WON THE WAR IN 1964!



WE WEREN'T STUDYING HISTORY THEN.

I SPENT MY FIRST YEAR AT SECONDARY SCHOOL FEELING ADRIFT.

CAN I HAVE A DOUGHNUT?



GO ON, THEN.



CHEERS.



THE CLOSEST TO A FRIEND I HAD WAS RICK O'CONNOR.



RICK'S MUM WORKED IN A BAKERY AND OFTEN PACKED HIM OFF TO SCHOOL IN THE MORNING WITH A BAG OF CAKES.



CAN I HAVE A DOUGHNUT?

YOU'VE ALREADY HAD ONE!



WHEN HE DIDN'T HAVE DOUGHNUTS, HIS MUM GAVE HIM MONEY FOR THE TUCK-SHOP.

WE INVENTED A GAME CALLED SUGAR RUSH. RICK WOULD THROW A FIZZ-BOMB HIGH INTO THE AIR AND WHOEVER CAUGHT IT GOT TO EAT IT.



RICK AND I NEVER SEEMED TO QUITE CONNECT.

I'VE GOT THE NEW SPIDER-MAN...



FOR EXAMPLE, ALTHOUGH HE ALSO LIKED COMICS, HIS APPRECIATION WAS BAFFLINGLY DIFFERENT TO MINE.

OH MY GOD! LOOK AT THE STATE OF IT!

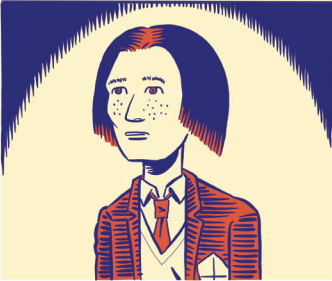


BUT MAINLY HE WAS UNRELIABLE DUE TO OFTEN GOING HOME FOR LUNCH OR BEING ABSENT ALTOGETHER.

IS THAT DOUGHNUT GREASE?



I SPENT SOME TIME HANGING OUT WITH A KID CALLED THOMAS OLDMAN.



BUT THEN...

I'M CHANGING FORMS.

WHAT? WHAT INTO?



MY MUM COMPLAINED TO THE SCHOOL ABOUT ME BEING BULLIED.

BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU BEING BULLIED!



A FEW DAYS LATER, HE CONFRONTED ME...

HEY!



WHY DID YOU TELL SEAN MCGOVERN ABOUT MY MUM SEEING THE HEADMASTER?



THE REASON WHY WAS THIS...

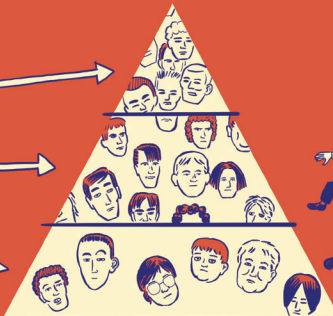


I SAW THE KIDS IN MY YEAR AS EXISTING IN A SOCIAL HIERARCHY.

AT THE TOP WERE THE HARD LADS.

IN BETWEEN WERE THE MIDLERS.

AND AT THE BOTTOM WERE THE SOFT BOYS.



I SAW MY POSITION AS FLIPPING IN AND OUT OF THE SOFT BOYS.

WHERE I WANTED TO BE WAS IN THE TOP HALF OF THE MIDLERS.

THERE I REASONED, I WOULD BE SPARED THE ATTENTIONS OF THOSE AT THE TOP.

I THOUGHT TELLING MCGOVERN MIGHT MOVE ME UP THROUGH THE SCALE.



BUT I WAS ALSO ANNOYED THAT TOM HAD A PARENT WHO CARED ENOUGH TO COMPLAIN TO THE SCHOOL IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I THOUGHT IT WOULD STOP ME BEING BULLIED.



HE NEVER HAD MUCH TO DO WITH ME AFTER THAT AND I COULD NEVER BLAME HIM.



ANOTHER BOY I TRIED TO BEFRIEND WAS JACOB HAIR. ACCORDING TO THE HIERARCHY, HE WAS A SOFT BOY BUT HE WAS ALSO INTO COMICS.



I WAS PUTTING MY SOCIAL RANKING AT RISK BY ASSOCIATING WITH HIM BUT I THOUGHT THAT HE MIGHT BE WORTH IT.



AT THE VERY LEAST, I THOUGHT HIS GRATITUDE MIGHT BE WORTH MY KINDNESS.



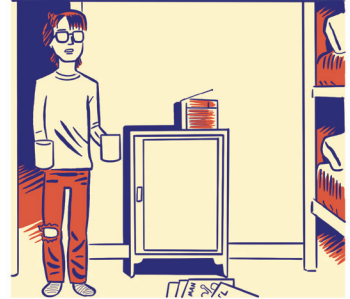
I MET HIM IN TOWN AS PROMISED AND TOOK HIM HOME.



AFTER SHOWING OFF MY COMICS TO HIM...



BUT WHEN I RETURNED TO MY ROOM, HE WAS GONE.



ON MONDAY AT SCHOOL...

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU ON SATURDAY?



OH... SATURDAY... YES... I SUDDENLY REMEMBERED AN URGENT ERRAND I NEEDED TO RUN FOR MY MOTHER.



HOWEVER, A FEW DAYS LATER, I NOTICED THAT TWO KEY COMICS WERE NOW MISSING FROM MY COLLECTION.



WHY DID YOU STEAL THE FIRST ISSUES OF RAMPAGE AND THE COMPLETE FANTASTIC FOUR FROM ME?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.



LOOK IF YOU ADMIT IT AND RETURN THEM TO ME TOMORROW, WE'LL SAY NO MORE ABOUT IT.



I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THOSE COMICS ARE NOT IN MY POSSESSION.



A FEW WEEKS LATER, HE SEEMED TO FORGET HIMSELF FOR A MOMENT...

LOOK AT THESE! PAPERBACK COLLECTIONS OF THE FIRST SPIDER-MAN AND HULK COMICS!



ON THE INSIDE COVERS HE HAD WRITTEN 'PROPERTY OF JACOB HAIR', WHICH, TO ME, WAS LIKE AN ADMISSION OF GUILT.

CAN I BORROW THEM?

WELL... THAT IS...



OF COURSE, I NEVER RETURNED THEM.

THANKS.



JUST THEN, MR. RAYSTON DIRECTED A QUESTION AT HIM...



NORMALLY, HE COULD BE RELIED UPON TO ANSWER CORRECTLY BUT ON THIS OCCASION, HE WAS WRONG.



JACOB HAIR...

HAIR TODAY, GOON TOMORROW.



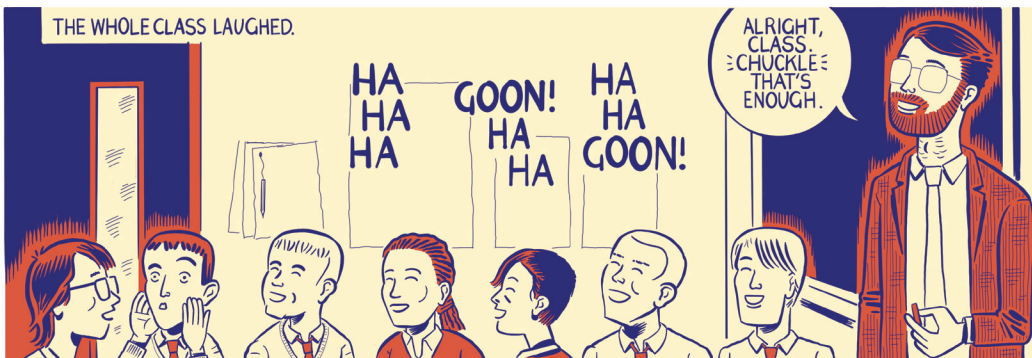
THE WHOLE CLASS LAUGHED.

HA HA HA

GOON! HA HA

HA HA GOON!

ALRIGHT, CLASS CHUCKLE THAT'S ENOUGH.



THE NICKNAME STUCK. EVERYONE STARTED TO CALL HIM IT.

GOON!



WHEN WE RETURNED TO SCHOOL AFTER THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS FOR OUR SECOND YEAR, HE WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN.

HEY! WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT KID GOON?



I FELT AS IF I HAD DISCOVERED A SUPERPOWER WITH UNFORESEEABLE OUTCOMES.

HIS PARENTS HAVE SENT HIM TO ANOTHER SCHOOL.

