

## Funny Men

His name was Brian. His name was not Brian, reason tells me now, unless paedophiles commonly give their real names to their victims. We didn't call them paedophiles then. We talked about 'funny men'.

It was summer and, latchkey child that I was, I decided to go for a walk on my own, for the first time. I was twelve. I wore jeans, polo shirt and a red, white and blue striped anorak. I looked like a boy. In photographs from that time, I'm forever squinting into the sun; pasty, freckled, unappealing.

Our road ran into a cul-de-sac, bounded by sturdy railings, on the other side of which was a wooded ravine. It sounds more dramatic than it was. There was a narrow path on the other side of the railings, then a drop, too steep to climb, to a burn. A road – more a metalled track – ran alongside. People walked their dogs there. The track led to a big house that huddled in constant shadow. Someone must have found this a desirable spot, once, and further shrouded the house in evergreens. Someone who didn't like neighbours, or sunlight. They built an icehouse down by the river. This was a source of fascination – it was round, it was ruined, and its mossy depths exhaled a witchy chill. All of these things felt magical.

But that day I didn't go down to the river. I didn't scurry about in the bushes, pretending to be a spy on the run. I was grown up. I cut along the top path to where it emerged from the trees and climbed Blackford Hill. It was sunny.

On a slope of grass whipped by winds, the man called out to me. What he said initially I can't recall; I don't know why I didn't ignore him; why it seemed, at first, to be okay.

I can see myself, standing some yards from him, surrounded by gorse bushes for protection. He said his name was Brian; probably asked my name in his strong accent. Probably I told him, my accent thickening in response. In my picture he has scrubby

ginger hair, a moustache, milk white skin. He reclines on the grass, patting the ground next to him, inviting me. I am twelve, but I'm not a complete idiot. I stand my ground.

'Would you frig wi' me?' he asks at some point, keen to move things along. I'm not entirely clear what the word means, but I'm pretty sure I won't. I'm thinking, This is one of the funny men we joke about; I should leave. He must be amazed I'm still here.

We've all heard gossip about a man in the woods who jumps out in front of women and opens his mac. A flasher. I've never seen this, nor has anyone I know. But we've heard. I fit the man into this box. My problem is, I don't know how to leave. I'm polite. Well brought-up. He is an adult; someone to be obeyed. I need a plan. Brian keeps exhorting me to come and sit by him in his gorsy dell with the sun, the breeze, on the grass. By now he is lying down. He is young.

I have a brainwave. 'What time is it?' I ask. No matter what time he says, I'll pretend to be shocked at how late it is. I'll be able to leave without being rude. Brian shrugs, uninterested, but looks at his watch. 'Half past two,' he says; something like that. And I'm thrown. He's lying. He has seen through my cunning plan. I falter... if it really is half past two, then I can't be late – can I? It *can't* be half past two, I keep thinking. While I'm thinking this, the opportunity passes.

At some point, he must give up on my coming any closer. 'It's rock hard,' he says, stroking his hand over his crotch. Now I know for absolute certain this is bad, but still I don't move. Why? Why am I stuck – embarrassed, scared, but still trying desperately to be polite? Then he unzips his fly and takes out his penis. He was telling the truth. In vivid detail I see bright red Y-fronts and the straight, white column between his caressing hands, pointing at the sky. For the next seven years I will not answer the doorbell, or eat a sausage. In a light, cheery voice I say, 'I have to go now', and run.

Bizarrely, there is a police substation on the hill, a few hundred yards from where this takes place. I know the police station is there, but first I see a man walking his dog.

We have a dog, so this man must be alright. I run up to him and struggle to get the words out: ‘There’s a funny man...’ I gesture in the general direction of Brian. He knows exactly what I mean. He walks me the few yards to the police station, presumably explains my situation to someone on duty, and I am taken to a small, untidy office.

The rest of my memory is vague apart from one thing. The policeman behind the desk asks questions and fills in a form. His accent, like Brian’s, is thicker than mine. At some point he leaves me alone and goes to arrange a squad car – we are about to drive pointlessly over the hill and tour nearby bus stops, trying to spot Brian making his escape. When he leaves, he closes the door of his office, and I look around. On the back of the door is a large girlie calendar. Not page-three girlie, much more graphic than that. I stare at the gaudy face, huge, shiny tits, shaved, splayed pubis. I have never seen this before (nor the inside of a police station, nor of a man’s pants). After a while, he comes back, and I go and get in his car.

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