

## Terror In The Classroom

Jason McGinty was a bad kid, but his teeth were worse. At this moment, they were leering wickedly at an unfortunate fourth class pupil who had the bad luck to catch Jason's eye as he came out into the playground at break-time.

'What you lookin' at?' Jason snarled, baring his horribly jagged, crooked teeth.

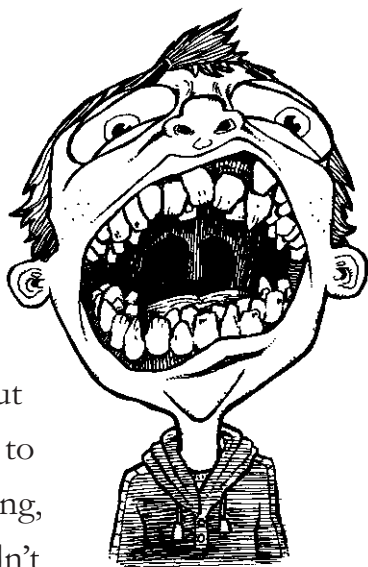
'Nothing!' the ten-year-old cowered. 'I wasn't looking at anything!'

'You're lookin' at me now. And you're talkin' to me. Did I say you could talk to me?' Jason persisted.

The younger kid's mouth shut with a stifled squeak.

‘Answer me!’  
Jason shouted.

His victim went pale as he struggled to work out which was more likely to get him beaten up – talking, or not talking. He couldn’t tell. Maybe both.



Jason gave the younger boy another close look at his teeth, and then shoved him backwards for good measure, sending him stumbling onto his backside.

‘Watch yourself in future,’ he snapped. ‘You’re on my list now, right?’

With that, he walked off to where his posse of mates were looking on in amusement.

‘You’re in a bit of a mood, Jayo,’ Vince said to him. ‘What’s got up your nose?’

‘Your bad breath, ye smelly git,’ Jason retorted, and they all cackled noisily.

That was his favourite sound, his mates laughing. And he made them laugh more than anyone else. He was The Man. Nobody messed with Jason McGinty. But Vince was right; Jason was in a bit of a mood. In fact, that morning, Jason was being extra-aggressive because he was scared – scared like a little kid being chased by a big dog. He was getting a half day today. Normally that would be a good thing – a great thing – but not today.

Because today he was going to see his orthodontist, a kind of dentist who straightened teeth.

This was his third orthodontist, to be exact. The first one had taken one look at Jason's teeth and had a nervous breakdown right there on the spot. The second one had nearly lost two fingers when Jason accidentally bit down during an examination. The man's sleeve had tickled his nose, making him sneeze, his fearsome array of teeth snapping closed like a bear-trap. Jason's mother had rushed the unfortunate man to the hospital, but he had made it clear he never wanted to see Jason or his teeth again.

This third fellow, though, was different. He got giddy when he first saw Jason's teeth. The X-rays that showed those impossibly contorted molars, the twisted canines, the zig-zag incisors, they brought an excited grin to the face of this orthodontist. And that worried Jason. Nobody else smiled when they looked at his teeth.

When the bell rang at the end of break, all the children filed reluctantly back to their classrooms. Jason found his favourite victim, Fintan, already sitting at his desk like the swot he was. Miss Taylor wasn't back from the staffroom yet, so Jason seized the opportunity to grab Fintan's pencil case, unzip it, and hurl its contents across the room. The large collection of pens, set squares and carefully sharpened pencils scattered everywhere. His posse laughed heartily as they took their seats, watching Fintan scamper around on the floor between the desks, trying to pick up his stuff. He was pushed and hustled as the other kids hurried to their desks. He kept his head down, trying not to show the hurt on



his face. This was just another bit of hassle in a whole life full of hassle.

‘Get your act together, Fintan,’ Vince called. ‘Honestly, you’re so clumsy.’

‘You’ll need this, Fintan,’ Jason waved the *Fire-flight* pencil case.

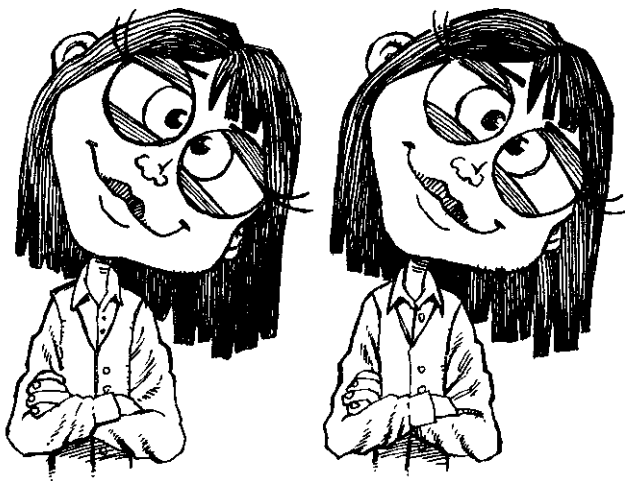
Fintan straightened up, and went to grab it, but he was too slow. Jason tossed it to Tony, on the other side of the room. Tony waited for Fintan to come after it, but Fintan knew better by now. He humbly took his seat, and laid the handful of pencils and pens out loose on his desk. His face was full and red, like it was going to burst, and he was careful not to look at anybody else. The posse knew he wouldn’t squeal on them. That was the beauty of it; he could seek the protection of the teacher, but the teacher couldn’t be there all the time, and once she was out of sight, the lads would make it twice as bad for getting them in trouble. They’d really get nasty then. And squealing would lose him whatever respect he had left in the yard. So Fintan just shut up and took

it, like the good boy he was. Some of the other kids were laughing, mainly the posse. The rest just ignored him.

‘You’re a funny man, Jason McGinty,’ Sonia Singh said.

‘Getting funnier every day,’ her twin sister, Anita, added.

Jason turned to look at them. They were smiling, but not with proper smiles. They had this look on their faces like they knew something he didn’t. They were always giving him that look. He never knew if



they were taking the mickey out of him or not, and that really annoyed him.

He shot an exaggerated frown at them, and they both crossed their eyes at him at exactly the same time. It was spooky how they could do that. He opened his mouth to make a smart remark, but Miss Taylor walked in just then, and he shut it again.

The class was boring. Boring maths and then history until lunch. Jason sat through both lessons with his jaws clenched shut, unable to stop thinking about what was coming. Normally, when the lunch bell rang, he was the first one out of his seat. This time it seemed to ring deep and slow, like a funeral bell. He started to slowly put his things into his bag.

The school secretary leaned in the door as the other children flooded out like a herd of miniature wildebeest.

‘Jason? Your mother’s here.’