Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Rudie Dudie

written by

Michael Lawrence

published by

Orchard Books – an imprint of Hachette Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

CHAPTER ONE

Teachers should be banned. Some of them at least. The ones who shout all the time for no reason. The ones whose middle name is Detention. The ones who put a hex on you that makes you drop your pants and flash your bum in public places. Yes, I know the last of these is a bit unusual. In your life anyway. But you're not Jiggy McCue. Jiggyworld seems to be ruled by nutters like that.

The teacher who made me flash my basement cheeks was new at Ranting Lane. Her name was Ms Mooney. Our first sight of her was on day one of the new school year, when all the classes were was jammed into the main hall to be welcomed, warned about misbehaving and introduced to her from the stage. She was unlike any teacher we ever saw. She had this tragic fright-wig type hair (orange) and a nose that flipped up at the end, and she wore very jazzy clothes that didn't match anything in sight, and all these bangles that rattled, and a clunky

necklace that looked like bits of coloured rock. She was also shorter than every boy over twelve except Eejit Atkins, though we didn't realise it till our first lesson with her. This occurred the first Wednesday afternoon of term, in the gym. Her lessons were to take place there because we would need space for them, apparently. Ms Mooney was taking us for Drama. Drama. Like I needed more of it in my life.

We soon learnt when we met her nose to turned-up nose that this teacher wasn't one you could relax with. She had this quick, jerky way of moving, and she hardly ever smiled. But the most unrelaxing thing about her was her eyes. They were like twin black holes. There was something familiar about those eyes – and her expression when she stared – but if I'd seen her before I couldn't remember where.

The first thing Ms Mooney got us to do when she came into the gym for drama lesson one was tell her our names. Naturally, we tried the all-at-once routine, but she shouted us down and told us to start again, one at a time, alphabetical order. There was a bit of a hiccup here because Atkins is the second name in the register and he's not so hot at

the alphabet. After him the name-giving went OK until I said mine and Miss stopped Angie Mint, who's next, and asked me to say it again. I was tempted to say 'Vladimir Putin' this time, but I played it straight because she was new. When she didn't seem to catch my name the second time either, though, I said:

'Hey, Miss, if the old lugs are blocked I could bring in a bog plunger from home.'

This touch of good cheer was out half a split second before I noticed that she had bigger ears than normal. Her huge dangly earrings didn't do them any favours – in fact they drew your attention to them, but unfortunately they hadn't drawn mine soon enough. There were a few giggles and chuckles, but none from Ms Mooney.

'What sort of name's Jiggy?' she asked coldly.

I frowned. Ears or no ears, no one casts nasturtiums on my name, even teachers. 'What sort of name's Mooney?' I zapped back.

She narrowed her eyes, and a blast of cold air whistled through my bones. But I tried not to show that she made me nervous. Show nervousness to a new teacher and they immediately think they

have you where they want you instead of the other way round.

'You find my name amusing?' she said.

'Amusing?' I replied. 'No. Makes me think of mooning, that's all.'

'Mooning?'

'Dropping your nicks and dazzling strangers with your rear end.'

'I see.' She paused. Then she said: 'Jiggy, eh? I'll remember that.'

And she turned away, slowly and sort of deliberately, like she'd just made a threat. Our relationship had not got off to a perfect start.

When she'd got all our names, Ms Mooney told us what we were going to do in her lesson. A Shakespeare play. There were groans from at least half the class. One of the ones who didn't groan was Julia Frame.

'Brilliant!' she said, clapping her stupid hands. 'I love Shakespeare!'

But instead of turning a beam of teacherly delight on her, Miss flashed the black-hole orbs and said, in a voice straight out of the freezer: '*Do* you now?'

Julia didn't pick up on the ice, maybe because she was so thrilled about doing Willy-boy. 'Oo, yes, Miss. I know all his plays. Well, most of them. My dad's mad about them. He used to read them to me at bedtime!'

'Before they carted him off to the whack-house,' muttered Ryan.

'Quiet!' Ms M said. 'All of you!'

When most teachers say something like that it's about twenty minutes before we let silence take over, but there was something about this one that you didn't argue with. There was an instant hush.

'The play, in which *some* of you will perform –' (a glare at Julia) '– is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But we'll be under—'

'Oo, my favourite!' Julia said excitedly.

'—under some pressure thanks to the time of year. We have a lot to get through by the half-term break, before which we'll perform it in front of other pupils, parents and teachers.'

'Perform it?' someone squawked.

'In public?' squawked someone else.

'But half term's only weeks away!' squawked a third.

'Indeed. And as our lesson occupies a mere hour once a week those taking part will be working all the free hours their homework will permit.'

'Why have we got to do it in such a rush, Miss?' Angie asked.

'Because I have a very different play to organise with another class in the run-up to Christmas,' Miss explained. She didn't sound pleased about this.

'What play's that then?' Majid Aziz piped up, like he cared.

Ms Mooney glared at the ground rather than him. 'A script has yet to be written, but I'm informed that it's to be a multicultural nonpartisan drama that takes care not to offend any minority religious faction or politically correct sensibilities. In other words, a Christmas play that has nothing *whatsoever* to do with Christmas!'

'Can we get started on ours, Miss?' Julia asked eagerly. The half of the class that had groaned when they first heard about it turned to her and hissed. She shrank back. 'Well, we haven't got much time to work on it,' she said. 'And *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s quite long.'

'I've cut it to about forty minutes,' Ms Mooney said.

Julia gasped. 'Forty minutes? You can't cut *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to forty minutes!'

'Well, I *have*!' Miss snapped. 'Now be quiet while I tell the rest of the class what the play's about.'

'Some of us know already,' Kelly Ironmonger said. 'I saw the film with Kevin Kline.'

'Bet you had to bribe him,' said Wapshott.

'In *essence*,' Miss went on frostily, '*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a light-hearted entertainment about the nature of love.' (Forehead slaps from all the boys except Martin Skinner.) 'In the original, the main events take place in the forest home of the fairies, where—'

'Fairies!' several boys cried in horror.

'—where the lives of four sweethearts fall apart due to mix-ups and the intervention of Oberon, the fairy king.'

'I'm not playing no king fairy,' one of us muttered.

'Being a Shakespeare comedy there is, naturally, a fair amount of mischief, much of which is provided by an impish fairy called Puck –' (muffled chortles) '– who at Oberon's behest brews a magic love juice to put on the eyelids of his queen, Titania – ' (more chortles) ' – as a punishment for disobeying him.

Oberon's idea is that the love juice will make Titania fall hopelessly for the first lowly creature she sees when she wakes. Unfortunately, the first creature she claps eyes on is Nick Bottom the weaver.'

Howls of laughter at this. Miss turned on one of the howlers like he was the only one doubled up with hysterics.

'I imagine that it's the name *Bottom* that so entertains my new friend Jiggy McKee?'

I killed the hysteria. 'McCue, Miss. McCue. OK? And I wasn't the only one laughing.'

'Yours were louder than the others.'

'Yeah, well, I have this tonsil condition.'

'There's much more to the plot, of course,' Ms M said, turning away, 'but we'll come to it as we come to it. As I've had to cut the play to a serviceable length I've adapted the story to fit the forest scenes. That way we don't have to change the scenery. And instead of a forest, I thought, to make things easier still, we would set it in a modern classroom.'

This wasn't well received. We see enough classrooms every day without setting a play in one.

'You'd rather the action took place in a forest?' Miss asked.

'Yeah, one far, far away,' said Ryan.

'If we set it in a forest, we'll have to make substantial scenery and a number of props, to say nothing of costumes. That would mean a lot of work for some of you. Are you sure you want to do all that when we could simply use a few desks and the actors could wear their existing school uniforms?'

While most of us went suddenly dumb (as in silent) a few nutters said 'Yay' and the yays must have done it for Ms Mooney, because suddenly it was a sealed deal. There would be a forest, props and costumes, all made by us, like we had nothing better to do with our lives.

'What we have to do now,' Miss said next, 'is choose our actors. Some of you will be keen to be in the play, I know, and some won't, so let's start by finding out which is which. Those of you who would really like to be in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* go and stand on that side of the room.'

About a third of the class (all girls except Skinner) immediately headed that way, smiling happily, like they'd just achieved a lifetime's ambition.

'You want to be in it?' I said in amazement as Angie passed me.

'Yeah, why not? Chance to show my star quality. Hope I get queen of the fairies.'

'Titty,' said Pete.

'Titania!' said Julia Frame sharply. No surprise that she was with the mob that wanted to be in the thing.

'Now just to be certain that we know who wants to do it and who doesn't,' Ms Mooney said, 'all of you who wouldn't touch a Shakespeare play with a bargepole please go and stand on the other side.'

Almost all of the rest of us, including some girls and Marlene Bronson, veered sharply to the right wearing relieved smirks. We'd got out of it! And so easily!

The only one left standing in the middle was Eejit Atkins.

'Ralph?' Ms M said to him. 'Which group are you with?'

'I dunno,' he answered. 'I din't unnerstan' the queschun.'

She left him where he was and told those of us who didn't want to be in the play to call our names out. She wrote them in a little notebook, then said (to us, not the other lot): 'I don't know if we can

find parts for all of you – might have to have more fairies than the script demands – but we'll see how it goes.'

Everyone in our group looked at everyone else in our group, puzzled. We were still doing this when Miss came over to us.

'Now who shall play who, I wonder…'

Time to speak up. 'No, Miss, you've got it wrong,' I said. 'We're the ones who wouldn't touch this thing with a midsummer bargepole. The ones you want are over there. Skinner would make a great fairy king.'

She turned her black eyes on me. 'No, you've got it wrong… *Jiggy*. My purpose here is to involve those who think they would *not* like to be in a play. It's from *your* group that my actors will be chosen!'

Any lingering smirks of relief hit the floor with the most dramatic kerplunk in drama history.