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Opening extract from

The Fall

Written by

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THE FALL

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PART 1

DUFFY



Chapter 1
School

My mate, Neil Johnson, just called. He was at school with me but I hadn't heard from him in a long time. His number wasn't even in my mobile. I didn't know who it was till he said his name. Then he got straight down to it.

"Is that Mog?" he said. Nobody had called me Mog since I was at school. "Have you heard?"

"Heard what?" I said.

"Rush."

"Chris Rush?"

"Yeah," Neil said.

"What about him?" I remembered Chris. He was at school with us too.

"He's dead."

And that was it. It was like a time machine. Suddenly, I was back there, in the old school, years ago.

Corpus Christi High School, what a heap that was. The kids were mainly mental. Even the teachers were mental. Their first job was to scare you, and only when you were really scared would they try to teach you stuff. Maybe not all of them were like that, but sometimes it seemed that way.

And you didn't have to do that much to get on the wrong side of them. A teacher might not like the look on your face, or how you talked, or how you sat at your desk. Some would scream at you till your face was covered in hot breath and spit. Some would play mind games – they would show you up in front of your mates to make it look as if there was something weird about you, so everyone treated you like a freak.

The teachers always seemed to pick on the weaklings, not the nutters, or the big, meat-headed bullies, with fists like blocks of stone, and bodies bursting like the Incredible Hulk out of their school uniforms.

Mind you, you can't really blame them. They must have been scared of some of the Corpus kids. Who wouldn't be?

There was one called Gaz Manson. He had a sort of baby face, and he always looked as if he was smiling. But he had a streak of pure evil in him. He'd come out of nowhere in the play ground and dead leg you so you could hardly walk, never mind fight back. And then he'd loom over you and not even punch you, but slap your face, just because it was the most embarrassing thing he could do to you, as if you were a little kid or a girl.

He ruled the school until Terry Coleman turned up, fresh out of a Young Offenders Unit. The two of them stared each other out for a few days. They both had kids hanging on to them, like the fish that stick on the bottom of sharks. But you could see Gaz's gang leak away. It was like an old git losing his teeth.

You could understand why. It was because Coleman was such a monster. Just looking at him made you want to wet your pants. He had this great big head, and these massive jaws and teeth like a cannibal or something. And his fists. They were like a man's fists, not a kid's.

In the end, Gaz and Terry had their fight. They went at it on our all-weather sports pitch. Big laugh that, by the way, that the school called it an 'all weather' pitch. It was made out of some sort of red gravel, and it was only an all-weather pitch in so far as it was crap in all weathers. When it rained it was this claggy muck, and when it was dry, it was like sand-paper.

You could tell it was all over for baby-face Manson before the fight even started. He must have had some guts under all that blubber even to try to fight. If it had been me I'd have turned around and gone on running till I reached a wall I couldn't climb over or a sea I couldn't swim. But Gaz waited for his doom. It didn't take long. He put his fists up, like a proper fighter, but Coleman just bashed him a

few times, like he was hammering in a fence post.

Then, when Gaz was lying there, moaning and drooling, Coleman grabbed his hair and rubbed his face into the red gravel. It was like he was grating cheese. You could hear Gaz saying "please, please," but Coleman only stopped when he got bored with it.

There was a lass from Year 7 there, and she puked.

It was shocking, even to us lot. There was a big crowd watching, the way there always is for a fight. It's not like there was much else exciting going on. But we weren't shouting and yelling and laughing like you normally do when there's a set-to. We were just sort of standing there, kind of embarrassed.

Then that girl puked and it smelled rank. It made you want to be somewhere else.

And then it got even worse, even if this bit does sound sort of funny. Coleman somehow got a pork pie. I don't even know how. It was suddenly just in his hand. A pork pie, for God's sake. Maybe it was Gaz's lunch, and Coleman

took it out of his pocket or something. Anyway, Coleman got the pork pie and he mashed it into Gaz's face. The jelly and the pink, fatty meat. He rubbed it into Gaz's face which was already a mess from the red gravel. OK, it *was* kind of funny. And we did laugh. But it was a weird sort of laughing, and it wasn't that far away from crying.

After the fight we didn't know if we should be cheering or shaking. We'd all been scared of Gaz, but at least we knew what he was like. And he was fat – we could all outrun him. That's why he had to do that dead-legging thing, so you couldn't run.

Coleman was different. He was big but he wasn't fat. He was all muscle, tough and knotty. I know Gaz was evil but he was *our* bully. We didn't know Coleman. He was new. It was like they say – "better the devil you know".

In fact it turned out alright. Coleman wasn't really bothered with us. He didn't really notice us. It was like he was a lion and we were some little animals that weren't worth the effort of eating. Rabbits or

something. He was after bigger prey – Sixth-Formers, the rulers of other schools, local hard cases. Big meat.

And the *really* funny thing is that it even worked out OK for Gaz. Now he wasn't the big bully any more, he relaxed a bit, and it turned out he was good at art and stuff like pottery. Go figure.

So, that's the teachers and the kids. The school we all swilled around in was just right for us. From the outside, Corpus looked like some sort of a factory. Maybe where meat gets made into dog food. Something grim, anyway. Everything about it was grey. Grey concrete, grey asbestos. The only colour came from the graffiti. And even the graffiti was crap – nothing funny, nothing clever, just dirty pictures and football stuff.

All in all, there may have been worse schools in our town, but not many. The other schools hated playing us at football. They were scared of us. We were the place their kids got expelled to, and God help them when they got to us.