

Chapter 19

Setting Free the Freaks

At Dun Laoghaire harbour in Dublin, two long barriers had been erected on either side of the road. To the left a crowd of about two hundred people, freakophiles all, were waiting to see the extraordinary creatures who had made their way across the ocean. Opposite them stood a much smaller crowd, a quarter of the size, made up mostly of students who waved placards in the air.

LET THE FREAKS GO FREE! said one.

IRELAND SAYS NO TO THE ACTIVITIES OF FREAKS! said a second.

STOP CALLING THEM FREAKS, THEY'RE JUST PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME, ALBERT WITH SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND IN ONE CASE A MOST UNUSUAL MANNER OF SPEAKING, said a third, held by a boy who didn't appear to understand how to make the most of his protest.

Both groups fell silent when a door was flung open on deck and Captain Hoseason appeared,

looking resplendent in his freshly pressed ringmaster's outfit, a funeral black hat on his head, his whip locked carefully into the pouch at his side.

As he set foot on dry land, he indicated that the Gardaí might allow the television reporter and cameraman through for a short interview.

'Captain Hoseason,' said a smartly dressed woman, thrusting a microphone between them. 'Miriam O'Callaghan, RTE News. There's a large crowd gathered here today in protest at what they see as the forced imprisonment of freaks. How do you respond to this accusation?'

'With a sarcastic reply, of course,' said Captain Hoseason, smiling at her. 'And a patronizing aside to remark on your extraordinary beauty. Although this is hardly a large crowd, dear lady. The large crowd will be the one that gathers to see our wonderful performances over the next week. That crowd will put this crowd to shame.'

'A lot of people feel that this form of forced servitude is genuinely unacceptable,' continued Miriam. 'Do you have anything to say to your critics?'

'I make a point of never listening to my critics,' said Captain Hoseason, spreading his arms wide once again in a magnanimous gesture. 'I find that they give me indigestion.'

'But all these students who've taken time off from their studies—'