

'My dear Miss O'Callaghan, do you really think that's what they'd be doing if they weren't here today? Let's be honest – if it wasn't me, they'd be protesting about something else. The latest war, the price of alcohol, giving women the vote, something like that.'

'Captain Hoseason, here in Ireland women already have the vote.'

'Do they indeed? What a very progressive nation you are.'

'So you have no message for all these people who want to see the freaks set free?'

'Actually, I have four words,' replied Captain Hoseason with a smile. 'Over my dead body. And I have a wonderful new specimen that I picked up in Toronto only last week. A very interesting little fellow. Disobeys the law of gravity.'

'Little boys can be terribly disobedient at times,' cried one mother from behind the railings, looking down at her own son, who stared back up at her with an angry expression on his face. 'They can be a curse.'

'They can indeed, madam,' replied Captain Hoseason. 'They can indeed. But fortunately this boy is kept in a cage so the public is perfectly safe. And for only one hundred of your devalued Irish euros you can view him for four nights in your capital city, Dublin, and three more in the town of Skibereen in the People's Republic of Cork. Check

press for details. Until then, ladies and gentlemen, I bid you all good day.'

And with that he made his way towards the front of a lorry as the last of the freaks' cages were loaded into the back – but before he could climb aboard an elderly man rushed forward to shake his hand, locking him in a fierce embrace, and it took three Gardaí to pull him away. A little shaken, Captain Hoseason brushed himself down and was driven off into the Dublin afternoon.

'It sounded like there were some people on our side back there,' said Francis as the lorry made its way through the city.

'They can't save us,' said Liam. 'No one can.'

'The man's a monster,' said Delilah.

'Tyrant despicable a,' added Felicia.

Thirty minutes later the lorry came to a halt and the back doors were thrown open. A team of men were waiting for them, each wearing bright red polo shirts and yellow chinos, and they carried the cages into a specially constructed Portakabin where they looked at each freak with interest – particularly Jeremy, the boy with flippers where his feet should have been.

'You must be a great swimmer yourself, are you?' asked one of them.

'Your remark is both insensitive and ignorant,' replied Jeremy.