

# Tumbling Out of School

**I**n the Limerick of my childhood I remember how on hot June days we'd watch the clock hands crawl towards three. When finally the bell tolled, like caged lions just set free, we'd tumble out of school and race to Willie's. Clutching scarce pennies we'd crowd the cool tiled shop, to ogle garish gobstoppers, twists of glistening liquorice, golden barley sugar, Peggy's legs, acid drops, and tins of creamy toffees.

Waiting our turn we'd peruse the shelves: Omo, Rinso and striped Rickitts Blue, pipe cleaners, plug tobacco, Woodbines and Afton, and big balls of twine. On tiptoe we'd peep at glass-cased exotica: star studded midnight blue bottles of 'Evening in Paris' perfume, Art Nouveau gold and turquoise scrolls on 4711 Cologne, slim bottles of Brilliantine, fat jars of Brylcream, soft sachets of Silverkreen shampoo. My pragmatic mother had a preference for Lifebouy soap, so our hair never revelled in shampoo. I longed for hair like the Veronica Lake lookalike on the Palmolive sachet. I saved my pennies and bought my sachet. I lathered up to be transformed, but my brown lank locks hung limp as ever. It was a first bruising encounter with the euphemistic language of the advertising world.

It was a joy to watch silver haired Willie in tawny twill coat weigh pounds of sparkling sugar, then line up the serried ranks of indigo bags (greatly coveted for transforming shoelaces into Christmas cribs). We lusted after Lucky Bags and spinning tops, glass marbles and their terracotta poor relations we called 'dobbers', bumper editions of The Beano and The Dandy, costly treats lusted after but deferred for more affluent times when we should earn or acquire half-a-crown and feel like King Farouk.

But mostly we plumped for a cone-shaped concoction of shards of sweets compressed in sugar called Willie Manifold's Dust. Eventually we'd trail off home blissfully licking our sticky penny's worth, a motley crew with ties askew. Sated, we'd fiddle with worthy dinners while mother droned on about 'wilful wastemaking, woeful want.'

Until at last cotton-frocked, we'd gain the great outdoors, to skip or play 'pickie', our version of hopscotch. Sometimes we'd assemble stones, collect bits of broken glass and china to play shop, intoning in a loud cacophony: 'Buy away, sell away, new shop open, ham, jam, anything you want Mam'.

When spent from clamorous play we'd flop on any patch of grass or stone around Rosses Avenue or Garryowen to tell tall tales by the fading light until the jaded sun sought respite in the night.

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