

FICTION

A short story by **Bridget O'Connor**

Here Comes John

I remember my first one. 1969. He was called John. A fine body of a man with his, Go on, punch me *right there*, the reddish ripple of muscle, that covering hair. It was all over his stomach and all over his back. It used to crawl over his collar and out of his cuffs. The man was a mat, but I suppose some women must like it. I must have liked it. Before my brain grew. And isn't it the way with them, the ones that slap at first, then punch, then give you a right good kicking (keep you straight), it's all mouth. Took him two seconds with drink in him, three without. If I timed it right I could set my tea down steaming and after, after I'd cleared up the mess a bit, it would be just right. Very nice with a fag. And of course he'd be exhausted, fairly whacked, bushed. And it would be, Can't you give me a moment love? (Oh, I thought that was one) or Jeezus! You a nymphomaniac or what?

And if you don't learn nothing from that, you don't learn nothing.

Cos nothing changes that much does it? The 70s, the 80s, the 90s. It all boils down to tit men (look at the conkers on that), or cunt men, or leg men. They still like to divide you up. And it don't make no difference if it's squash now stead of rugger, bacardi not lager, they've all got mental hair on their shoulders, red in the middle, wee white legs. They're still all John. Old John and New John. And even in the 90s, where it's all talk dirty, they still can't manage it, beckoning you over in a pub with their pinkie and off you trot, ever hopeful, and it's, If I could make you come with my finger, think what I could do with my *whole* body. Or they'd spend all evening, and a couple of quid, breathing in your ear even though your hearing's perfect cos they've read some comic that says you can do this and it's like foreplay and we won't expect nothing much later. Which brings me nicely round to John.

John was a fine body of a man all dressed up. My ear would be that wet sitting

next to him I'd have to keep swapping places for fear I'd get water on the brain. Now you're probably thinking I'm talking about some motor mechanic or builder as they're usually the ones with the tartan middles and luminous legs, cept you'd be wrong. I'm talking about The Johns. The millions of them. They're all stockbrokers, they're all Tories, they're all married (You put a scratch on me I'll lay you out), they're all Boring and so you're probably thinking, So why do you bother? and my answer to that is, Well, why do you think? Listen. This is how I met John.

1993. I was sitting in Rumours under a palm tree nursing a gin and thinking I could jack it all in soon and feeling this cold sore bubbling up on my lower lip, sort of humming, Wish I was pretty, Wish I was rich, when in walks this bloke. Oh, Oh, I thought, Here comes John. Oh, Oh, I thought a bit later, fourth gin (no t), John reads *The Independent*. Cos it's not all, What's a gorgeous bird/chick/bit/bint doing in an etcetera. It's all uni-this and multilateral-that and RUC and IRA and Opec so you've got to read up a bit for these yuppie Johns and you've got to know your way around shares and things cos they might be tit, cunt and leg men, but now they want *brain*. And *brain*, girls, is what I've got. See this necklace? John got me that. These earrings? John got me that. These shares in British Telecom, British Gas, British Steel, British Airways, British fucking everything, you name it, they sell it, I've got it, cos I bloody well earn it.

So anyways, to cut the eye contact and the, If I could make you come with my etcetera, there's John, finally sitting next to me, soaking my lug hole, boring me to sweet Jesus, and I'm doing my Wiggle On The Seat bit (they like you to wiggle, it reminds them of studs and fillies) and to look at me, you wouldn't think my brain had just atrophied cos I'm well into automatic and I look interesting. You've got to look interesting. It's all 90s'



clean, it's Anneka Rice. So what you need girls is glasses to take off and on, a lot of hair half pinned-up and something collarless and well-cut. And that's me down to a t - with a gin in it. And don't get drunk. Know your limit. He can get legless but you've got to hold your own cos You Need Your Wits About You.

Listen. Here we go. This is what Johns do. They

come straight out with it two seconds before last orders, giving it the old Nigel Havers eyebrow and it's, I feel this strong attraction to you... And I think you're an interesting woman but I... I better tell you I *am* married. Pause. And then it's the old spaniel 'isn't-life-cruel?' eye dodge and the quicky glance at you cos here's where everything hangs in the balance. This is *the* crucial



moment, so watch out girls, watch me girls and *learn* - get it off by heart.

I flinch ever so slightly to show I've got scruples and morals and I'm not *that* kind of a girl becos you see they don't like *that* kind of girl these yups, they don't really like any kind of a girl but they do like disguises. Everything nicely wrapped up. So here's where I go all foxy and silent and fight an inner

battle that is highly visible (they're thick - you've got to ham it up) and, My Aunty's Knickers, this one turns out to be one of those, Who-hurt-you? merchants and I almost blow the whole job. Gin goes down one lung and out my nose (I'm getting careless, I've had three too many) but still I *am* an artist so I splutter just in time and turn it into a sort of highly-charged sob like he'd hit the

nail right on the head. It works. Of course it works. Off he swaggers to the bar with his tight little arse grinning through his chinos and I take a breather.

What's it all about? you wonder. That's what I wonder too sometimes, cos what's a brain like me doing with pricks like him? but then I look at my bank balance and think, Come on girl, you're getting there.

What's it all about? you wonder. What d'you think? It's about sex, like it's always been, cept now it's better cos it's about Safe Sex. *I love safe sex.*

Now these Johns are so afraid of Aids they won't put it in you and God, what a blessing for the thinking girl. You don't have to take your clothes off. You don't even have to let him into the house, (I want you so much, John, we might get carried away). All you've got to do is put up with an earful of spit, a load of highly dodgy right-wing conversation and act like you're dying for it - and the last bit's how you get your pressies cos Johns feel guilty about denying it to you. Makes you laugh.

And this is an important bit. Johns *love* romance. They want you to romance them. They get off on all that dark corner bit and putting on a silly business voice when you ring them at home (ring them at home, they love it, ring them in the middle of the night, they thrive on guilt) and they can't get enough of slumming it off the stockbroker belt, del-boys and cafes, holding hands under tables. And you don't even have to kiss them - tell them you've got mouth ulcers. And what keeps the whole ball rolling is they can't resist telling their mates: 'I'm having an *Affaire*' - cos what's the use in being naughty if you've got no one to confess to? And John can pretend he does IT. John is not afraid of Aids.

Which brings me, horribly, back to John.

Here comes John now, my last John, my grand finale and it's swaying, it thinks it's got it made, it's sort of brimming and relaxed and it doesn't spill a drop, and here comes John now, thank Christ it's my last one, and it's lowering down and watch this smile play on my lower lip, I've got it down to an art it's sort of trembly and Yes, it says, I'm all heart, and here comes John now and it's totally pleased, it thinks it's totally safe and listen girls, I am going to take this John for *every* little thing it's got.