

A Matter of Public Morality

by Matt Lewis

Matt Lewis has been involved in fictional productions in one form or another all of his adult life. He has written novels, plays, stories and articles on many different subjects. Readers of the old Coltsfoot books will remember his "Sammy and My Bishop", a delightful spoof of ecclesiastical purity, in Panthology Four. Recently he has become deeply interested in the cultural and religious roots of irrational taboos.

THE GOVERNMENT'S new Education Bill, one of whose more controversial clauses was the bringing back of the cat o' ninetails in primary schools, passed in the House of Commons with a comfortable majority despite what many considered to have been a rather hastily-drawn-up clause on proper instruction to pupils concerning Jumping Up and Down.

"Jumping Up and Down has to be recognised as a fact of life," said The Times in an editorial, "and it is clear that prior to the passing of this Bill it was taught in schools without any reference to the moral sanctity of family life. Nevertheless, we might question whether or not any state has the right to force teachers to commit an offence by not bringing Judeo-Christian values into teaching Jumping Up and Down at any certain point. Who can say that moral references will not become merely obligatory, as is the case with Religious Instruction today?"

The Daily Mail was more forthcoming, even demanding the reintroduction of capital punishment against any such erring teachers and in a passionate personal column next to the editorial, Sister Mary McQueen—a prominent spokesperson on traditional Catholic values—cried out at the wholesale rape of our children's little bodies and minds through the indiscriminate and largely Left-inspired ideological penetration into schools. "We, the parents and guardians of the rights of the young," he wrote, "must stand up and be counted. Millions of children are growing up into horrible youths and louts, dominating our streets with disgusting displays of violence, robbing, torturing and murdering old ladies, openly picking their acne spots, drinking and gambling and jumping up and down whenever the fancy takes them." In the name of preserving family life, Sister McQueen went on to advocate a massive programme of imprisonment by way of preventive detention for all people from the ages of fourteen upwards to eighteen in the hope that this would act as a "decisive deterrence" to future generations. "Jumping up and down," she said, "cannot be eliminated, but under true Christian guidance it can be decently incorporated into the sanctity and spirituality of the home, away from the baleful influence of the wet and weak-kneed liberals and their Marxist masters."

The Sun was more direct still, demanding that the schools actually become prisons, since one rarely found the kind of insubordination in maximum security jails that occurred so often in educational institutions. Though this was put in more direct terms. In a screaming black headline two inches tall, "FUCK YOUTH!" the Sun proclaimed its stand: "Youth? Who needs 'em? We may have all been young once, but at least we had the sense to grow out of it. If the kids of today can't grow out of it, then they must be treated like the cancer they are!" It asked its readers to "spit on a youth today" as a symbolic gesture of righteous contempt against the

whole of the younger human race. Another article in the same paper, "THE CURSE OF BEING YOUNG" purported to be the confessions of a boy of 12 and a girl of 13 about what it was like to be a kid, complete with lurid details about previous bedwetting, thumbsucking, and even some incipient jumping up and down on the school playground.

The Daily Mirror played down the whole story, contenting itself with an interview with a leading member of the National Union of Teachers who demanded that teachers be given extra pay for the additional new instruction on jumping up and down that was to take place.

The Daily Telegraph deplored, amongst other things, the inculcation of the idea that jumping up and down on the same spot was neither better nor worse than jumping backwards. "The heresy is becoming generally accepted," it went on, "that it is as morally healthy to jump backwards as it is to jump up and down on the same spot. It must be shown, though education, that although there will always be people—a small minority—who jump backwards this does not legitimise jumping backwards as a positive virtue in the eyes of our Creator." Just how people who jumped backwards were to be regarded or treated as a result of the general indoctrination that they were not legitimate, the Telegraph did not say.

In the nineteen-sixties, a wave of progressive legislation established the legal right of backwards-jumpers to jump with mutual consent behind locked doors in private after the age of twenty-two, except in Northern Ireland and in Her Majesty's Forces. This was hailed at the time as a major breakthrough and a triumph of British tolerance, although the police continued to carry out many arrests on the basis of spying through holes in the walls of public toilet cubicles to see who was jumping backwards inside them.

That sixties legislation had been based on the pioneering Wolfingdown Survey which demonstrated conclusively that there was a great deal more jumping backwards—and even sideways—in the population at large than had traditionally been assumed. What happened subsequently—in the so-called 'permissive' sixties—is history. Many backwards jumpers 'came out of the closet' and some intrepid souls even went so far as to jump backwards in public places and rock festivals.

But what about jumping sideways? Sideways jumping has always been a taboo subject in our Christian culture, although veiled references to it occur for example in Victorian novels about public school, stunning to us today for the sheer naivete which we all know was a limitation of these Victorian writers. Jumping sideways did not gain any significant headway in the otherwise liberated sixties, for it seemed to too many people to be, quite simply, too perverse.

And here I must come out into the open—in the hope that it may help others to come to terms with themselves—and say that jumping sideways has always been a latent tendency of mine. When I was a youngster, growing up in a small Midlands town, jumping sideways was something one took for granted, and I knew of no kid, no contemporary of mine, who didn't indulge in it a bit, in furtive games of hop-scotch played behind old sheds and warehouses. I was taught to jump sideways by an older friend, and later fell in with an old tramp with whom I did it regularly. But as I grew older I felt I had matured into jumping up and down on the same spot, like everyone else, and with that felt able to marry and have children of my own. It wasn't until many years later that in the bathroom once I nearly slipped and fell getting out of the bath;

putting my right foot out instinctively to the side to keep from falling I once again experienced the heady pleasure of the sideways manoeuvre. In a sudden orgy of release, I jumped sideways all around the bathroom until my wife rattled the doorknob, asking me what I thought I was doing.

From then on, the old habit reasserted itself. The business was complicated by the fact that I was a schoolteacher and therefore in a very sensitive social position. I taught in a single-sex establishment and had always got on well with my boys, playing football and rugger, organising chess tournaments, holding mutual masturbation and cock-sucking classes.

It was through the latter activity that one of our best cock-suckers went on to win the regional junior championship, in a particularly good year. He triumphed in the Extreme Pleasure-giving category. I felt proud that it was I who had originally shown him how to do it. Unfortunately he came down with a very bad sore throat afterwards, but managed to see himself being handed the award on local television, while in bed convalescing.

My downfall began towards the end of an ordinary school day, after I had been ministering to young Jerry across my desk at the head of the classroom. With his school tie askew over his unbuttoned shirtfront, and his young, smooth legs spread apart, above the tangle of his school shorts knotted about his feet, blond little Jerry was the very picture of boyish virile contentment, as he lay in a half-dreamy daze while I made pitching circles with my mouth. Class had long since been dismissed and the headmaster had paid a visit, noting with approval Jerry's keen and promising passivity. We lay for a time together after we had finished, warm and supine. "I have to go now, sir," Jerry then murmured. "Mum's expecting me home for a bit of a fondle."

"That's all right," I replied, climbing down off him and the desk. "We've made good progress today, one way and another. I don't see why you shouldn't be tops in the Prepubescent Section by the end of the year."

Jerry brightened at this. "You really mean it, sir?"

"I do indeed," I chuckled indulgently. "By this time next year you could have the makings of United Kingdom Junior Sexpot! But," I warned, "don't let it go to your head."

"You mean I should be taking the passive position all the way through the heats?" he asked.

"No, it's just an expression. I mean, don't start getting too high an opinion of yourself just because of the size and duration of your erection."

Jerry assured me he wouldn't, and with a sudden burst of youthful elation he swung his delightful legs over and down to the floor, giving a little jump as he landed and stood. My heart skipped a beat on that jump, but I wasn't prepared for what happened then. Still exuberant, still with his pants and trousers around his ankles, Jerry took a little sideways jump, his feet tight together.

A sensitive boy (we always went in for cultivating extreme sensitivity in our boys at my tradition-bound school), Jerry must have noticed at once my colouring and the beads of sweat that

suddenly appeared across my brow. "What's the matter, sir?" he asked, his hand placed lightly on my arm with all the delicate tenderness of his school training. "It's all right," I muttered, mopping my face with my semen-stiff hanky. "Where did you learn to do that?" "Do what, sir?" Jerry asked innocently.

"You know, er, um—jump like that?" Even at my age I found it difficult to get the word out.

"That's dirty, sir, what you said." It was Jerry's turn to be shocked.

I shrugged, hoping my sudden frankness in spelling it out wouldn't get reported by one who didn't even know what the word meant. "It's just a word, after all."

"You're not allowed to say it, though," said Jerry, pulling his trousers back on. They pulled up rather higher and more revealingly than most boys' because Jerry would soon be out of shorts altogether and his parents weren't spending money on any more new pairs. The fullness of his thighs was openly admired and remarked upon by all the staff.

"But didn't you know that was what you were doing?" I asked.

"What, this?" And Jerry took another little sideways jump. Entirely by himself, unencouraged and unaided, he jumped a full six inches to his immediate right. My palms began to moisten, and, what was worse, my own feet began to tingle intolerably. "Is that jumping?" he asked.

"It's worse than that," I said, shaken. "It's jumping sideways! How long have you been doing it?"

Jerry hung his head, and over his face appeared shame for the first time. "Sebastian showed me last year," he murmured. "We did it behind the bike shed." He looked up at me, tears beginning to form on his little round, white face. "I didn't know it was—jumping, sir! He never told me! Anyhow," he sniffed, "I like doing it."

I kneeled down and stroked his genitals, trying to comfort him. "Listen to me, Jerry," I pleaded. "Jumping is the most natural thing in the world. Everybody jumps."

Jerry took a big swallow, his eyes growing larger. "What, everybody? Even the headmaster?"

"Even the headmaster."

"Even my mum and dad?"

"Even your mum and dad."

"Gee," said Jerry.

"Everybody jumps—well, not people in wheelchairs of course, but they're in the minority. One day when you're older you'll experience jumping as the most natural thing in the world, jumping with someone—a girl, preferably—whom you will love and cherish."

Jerry made a face. "Love a girl? No thank you, sir!"

I smiled, giving him an affectionate tickling of the balls. "One day you will."

"Can't I just go on fucking my brother?" he asked. Jerry's little brother Malcolm, who went to the same school, was just out of the Infant's.

"You can do what you like with him," I said, "but it won't satisfy you forever. My God, I hope you don't jump sideways with him!"

Jerry was indignant. "I've only ever done it myself—except that time with Sebastian."

"That's all right, then," I said. "Because if I thought you were introducing little Malcolm to bad habits I'm afraid I'd have to have a word with your parents."

"But you just said it was natural."

"Yes, of course it's natural."

"Then why is it a bad habit if it's natural?" he persisted. "It's not natural for little boys—or indeed boys of any age—to jump," I said.

"But if it isn't natural for boys to jump why do boys do it?"

I sat us both down at two desks in the front row. This was going to need some explaining. Jerry was turning out to be unexpectedly trenchant. "You see, Jerry," I said, "jumping isn't something you just do, for the fun of it. It is fun, of course, but that's not the whole picture. As you grow older you'll learn that it has to be done with meaning, with feeling and love, and that's something you can't understand until you are mature enough and your feet are at least size nines." "But my feet are only size five-and-a-halves; it'll take years!" said Jerry in dismay.

"All in good time. It will seem long now but before long you'll be old enough."

"I still don't see why I should wait," said Jerry, "if I like jumping now. It isn't hurting anybody, is it?"

"It could be hurting you now. If you jump too much, especially on hard surfaces, it can cause serious pounding of the joints."

"I didn't know that," murmured Jerry.

With my own feet alive and twitching, my calves flexing, I knew I was deliberately lying to the boy, telling him the old superstitions I'd been taught by my own so-called 'elders and betters'. I'd jumped—on the same spot or sideways—all my boyhood and it hadn't done my growing joints any harm whatever. I'd never known of any cases of shattered joints through repeated jumping. And still I was repeating the old lies and fears. Jerry seemed to notice my uncertainty then. He looked at me out of the corner of his eyes.

"Do you jump, sir?" he asked.

It was an absurd shock, but a quiver of fearful excitement ran through me all the same. "Sometimes," I said with as much dignity as I could muster.

"Do you ever jump sideways?" he asked, a little bolder. And like a fool I admitted something to him that I had never told anyone else. Yes, I had, I said, but it was a long time ago.

"When you were my age?" asked the clever little darling. He had me there. I didn't have a leg to stand on. I was a fraud. In his excitement Jerry was already pulling at himself through his open flies—a common enough sight in any park or playground—but at this moment it took on an ominous character, for he knew he was scoring all the points, and he knew I knew. I made one last attempt to divert his attention from the subject by cupping my hand over his little pounding one and helping him along. At this moment the classroom door opened and Pearson, the physics master, came in, wrapped up and ready to depart for home. "You ready to leave yet?" he asked me.

"I've got a bit of a problem on hand at the moment," I said. "Thanks anyway for the lift."

Pearson looked over my shoulder at Jerry, who was too oblivious and whose eyes were too tight shut to have noticed anyone come in. "That young Hawkins? Still keeping in training, I see!" But Jerry, breathing and heaving heavily, still hadn't seen him, so Pearson turned back to me. "I'd have thought you would be into more advanced techniques by now, old chap?"

"Just a bit of revision," I said. Person departed with a Cheerio and closed the door. I regretted he had done this, for it made things private again, and when I saw Jerry come out of his self-induced ecstasy I knew he was going to revert to the Subject. "You do it, sir!" He was smiling at me, goading me in a precocious manner. During his masturbation he had sprawled across his chair with his maturing legs open, dishevelled, and he remained in this position. "Go on, sir! Show me how you jump sideways!"

My legs were positively shaking by now, and I knew the pressure was too great to withstand. Slowly I stood up, placed my feet together, and—tentatively—took a little sideways jump (to the left) in front of him.

Jerry clapped his hands and jumped up from the desk. "Let's do it together, sir! Let's jump and jump and make our jumps longer and longer and longer!"

"Wait, wait, wait!" I tried to stop his bounding excitement, in an effort to quell my own. "What about your mum?"

"Oh, she doesn't matter. She'll have Malcolm to play with on the kitchen table till I get back. Come on, Sir!"

And—ashamed as it still makes me to say it—we jumped, hand-in-hand, sideways up the row,

down the row, all around the classroom. I became alarmed when the windows started rattling at our vibrations, and stopped us suddenly. "It doesn't matter, sir," said Jerry breathlessly in the silence. "They'll have all gone home by now."

And so it went on, till at least six o'clock. He, oblivious to his mum (and no doubt his dad would be home soon and wanted him too), I, oblivious to wife and children. Up and down, up and down, side to side to side—an obscene orgy of jumping sideways. Had I not become so absorbed I might have asked myself what the hell anyone in the room below us might have been thinking we were doing.

Afterwards I walked Jerry home at least as far as the common, where a man offered Jerry a quickie under the shelter of some bushes close to the road. Jerry said he didn't mind so long as it was a stand-up job because he didn't have much time. I knew the boy was in safe hands so I continued on my way alone, fighting back the guilt from what we had experienced together.

And, of course, what started off as fun ended up as a compulsion, for us both. Every night we jumped about the classroom, and I'm sure people were beginning to talk about our association. We were taking terrible risks. More often than not I was late home for dinner, which naturally displeased my spouse. And later, when I seemed too tired for our jumping up and down on the bed together, it was clear she was beginning to suspect that I was getting my leaps elsewhere.

Through schoolboy gossip Jerry got wind of a disreputable place where men and boys congregated together, in a seedy part of the town. I fought going there as long as I could, knowing the risks involved, but Jerry persuaded me to take him there, one rainy Saturday afternoon after a school sperm-shooting competition.

It was a terraced house in the midst of a row of crumbling terraced houses, and the front door was opened by a fat harridan of a woman with a cigarette dangling out the side of her mouth. I tried to say something, but I couldn't get the words out. So Jerry took charge by whispering to her the name of a school friend who was a frequent visitor; she shrugged and let us in, holding our her hand to me as we passed through the entrance. I wondered why she wanted to shake hands, it seemed an odd civility in her character.

"It's five pounds, sir," whispered Jerry in loud sotto voice.

"Oh! Sorry!" I felt a ninny as I searched round for a note in my wallet. She grasped it with practised expertise and led us down a dark and dank corridor, her slippers shuffling in a suitably sordid manner. Before a certain door she stopped, and flung it open, gesturing to us to go in.

I had the shock of my life. A large room with a high ceiling, this was evidently an extension at the back to the original house. As a room, it was fairly bare and neutral. The light was artificial, for the windows were all shuttered. But it was what stood in the middle of the room that took my breath away. I had never actually seen one before in my life, though I had obviously read and heard about them. And now, there it was, in all its glory.

A trampoline.

"Come on, sir!" shouted Jerry, his voice echoing round the room. In a twinkling we had our shoes off, desperate to get to the springy thing itself. And before long we were sharing the delirious ecstasy of endless jumping and bouncing. It was almost more than I thought I could take.

Soon it became established as a regular Saturday occurrence. Sheer bliss. Sometimes other men and boys were there, we swapped partners, we did just about everything anyone can do on a trampoline.

Of course it was all to end, as I knew it would. Jerry and I were spotted coming out of the place one Saturday and the matter was duly reported to the police and the school. I was arrested and taken into custody; Jerry was later taken into care. I was remanded on bail but of course the homelife was so terrible and the neighbourhood so shunning that I would almost have preferred remaining in custody, terrible as the loss of liberty would have been. At my trial my lawyer stressed the usual mitigating factors, that I had been overworking and under pressure, that I had always been an upstanding member of society, that boys who would never have known anything of masturbation or fellatio or sodomy were now skilled practitioners because of me. Because it was a first offence and I had been straightforward in pleading guilty, I was given probation on condition that I seek psychiatric help.

The psychiatrist, a specialist in psycho-jumping illnesses, sat behind his desk, tapping his fingers together a lot. He was a cool but not unfriendly man, who got through my case-history with caring precision.

"Now, then," he said, "what are we going to do about you?"

"I don't know," I said. "I realise now that I have always wanted to jump sideways, and even after all I have been through I think it is the most natural thing in the world. After all, men have been doing it for a long time—since the dawn of history at least."

He nodded. "Indeed, indeed—even before that. It is the most natural thing in the world. But it is not legal in this country, is it?"

I had to admit that it was not.

"So that if you are caught doing it again you will go to prison."

"But it seems so wrong," I protested. "In other countries..."

"Other countries are other countries," he interrupted, holding up his hand. "This is Britain, and here there is a long tradition of deep prejudice against variations on jumping that are reflected in the statute-books."

"But isn't that prejudice—irrational?"

"Oh, terribly irrational," said the psychiatrist, "I couldn't agree more. But we mustn't go to jail

because of other
90 peoples' irrational prejudices, must we?"

"But then," I said, "surely it is up to all of us to try to alter and change these prejudices, if the behaviour itself can't be wiped out?"

"It's true that the behaviour is irradicable. I would be lying to you if I said I thought you would ever be any different. There is no hope that you will ever be different from what you are."

"So what am I to do?"

"Good!" said the psychiatrist, at last clasping his hands tightly together. "Good, we've got you thinking positively as to the way out of your particular problem. I'm here to help you, totally in confidence, of course. Naturally if you came to me and told me you'd jumped sideways with a boy again I'd have to report it to the police, but that's the only exception to our confidentiality. Now: do you want to stop doing this?"

"I'm not sure. In one way, obviously, I'd like to; but in another way—well it's me, isn't it? In another way I don't want to stop being me."

The psychiatrist shook his head, slowly and sadly. "If you persist on that tack I don't see any way that I can help you. And you know what that means, don't you?"

"No, what?"

"I'd have to go back to court to recommend that you were not fulfilling the terms of your probation by seeking help from me. And that would mean—prison. And you know what happens to men like yourself inside a prison once the other inmates get to know why you are there? Many a sideways-jumper has had his brains dashed out in prison by his fellow convicts. You wouldn't want your brains all over some prison floor, would you? I thought not."

I shuddered. I couldn't feel guilty for my little sins thinking about these horrors carried out under the benevolent gaze of the prison authorities.

"I must admit," I said, "that right now I feel angrier about what happens to men like me than guilt for what I did."

"Oh," said the psychiatrist, "I don't want you to feel guilty! That would only bring on the pressure to commit the act again!"

"But why," I protested, "why is it such a terrible act? Why is it always condemned and punished?"

"Because it falls outside the norm in our Judeo-Christian society," said the psychiatrist. "It offends society. You can't go on offending society indefinitely. We live right now in a reactionary backlash to all the sixties' permissiveness. People don't want that any more. They want the laws to be even tougher than they are already."

"But why should I be punished because there happens to be a temporary moral backlash?" I asked, becoming more and more frightened by this encounter.

"I didn't say any of this was right," he said. "In many ways it's terrible, it flies in the face of scientific fact. Oh yes, if you must indulge in sideways-jumping, go to some country—Africa or Sri Lanka perhaps—where sideways-jumping has always been an accepted part of tradition. But don't do it here."

"But I can't go to any other country—I've lost my job, I haven't any money." That wasn't, thank heavens, quite true, but I wanted him to think it was, for a plan was forming in my mind.

"So, there you are. You have a clear choice. Which is it to be? Prison? Or...?"

"Or what?"

"There is a treatment we can carry out that will rid you—not of the desire to jump sideways—but of the ability to do so. It's a little bit painful at first, but you would get used to the condition in time."

"What is it?"

"Well, we first of all prepare you for the operation..." "Operation-?"

"Yes, the rather extensive operation on your legs. First, in order to get you used to the idea of not jumping any more..." "Not jumping at all? Even jumping up and down on the same spot?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, but medical science isn't as yet advanced enough to find a way of discriminating between the one sort of jumping and the other. I'm afraid you would have to lose the capacity for jumping altogether."

"So I haven't the chance to try even to be a normal jumper?"

"Fraid not. But I still think prison for ten or fifteen years could be even worse, don't you?"

"So I'm to have no jumping life whatever?"

"The choice is yours."

"But the choice isn't mine! My choice is to go on as I am!" "Not one of the options, I regret to say. Now: are you going to let me explain what we do to keep you out of jail?" I sank back in my chair, suddenly exhausted. "All right," I said.

"Good! First you wear, for a period of about six weeks, a pair of exceptionally weighted leaden boots. You may find getting around a little cumbersome at first, but later you will be mobile. Then, when you are more prepared for the sedentary life, we perform the operation. This is to tie up your hamstrings so that you lose the use of your legs generally. As I said, it's painful at

first but you soon become accustomed to it. There will be a motorised wheelchair if your annual income isn't sufficiently high to bear the cost, and what's more you will come in for a disablement pension that should substantially increase the amount of benefit you presently receive through being unemployed. Now, what do you say to that?"

"What can I say?"

"Good! You know, I feel I've failed if any of my cases end up back inside. In fact I know I have failed, because they tell me so. We're not going to have any failure or backsliding with you, are we?"

"I don't see how I can, in a wheelchair," I said.

IT IS SUMMER HERE, but the sun comes up at exactly six a.m. and plunges into the Indian Ocean at exactly six p.m., just as it does in winter. The sound of the sea, the sound of the monsoon wind in the palmetto thickets is peaceful, but, despite the fact that I keep in touch with the airmail editions of all the newspapers, I'm homesick for the long June evenings of England, the greenness that comes once a year, then fades through yellow to the autumn brilliance. I miss the boys, too, for in these lands, unfortunately, sex is taboo; no one would even talk about masturbation, although I suspect many of the younger chaps practice it secretly in the bush.

But then there is jumping: up and down jumping, backward jumping, sideways jumping, any kind of jumping you like, and in public! It's often done to music, and they call it dance. You see it on the streets, in the clubs, on the beaches. Mr. Hatterjee, my new guru, jumps, even though he is almost eighty. He encountered me in the Long Bar, a dirty, drunken drifter down to my last rupee, and at once began to draw me out of my depression. I keep house for him, now, and read Agatha Christie novels out loud to him endlessly in the evenings.

Except Poya night, the night of the full moon, and then we are both out there with the village boys, doing it at the edge of the silver-tipped broken waves, running up and down the beach, drunk, dancing, jumping; jumping, dancing.

I think that's the way I will die: wifeless, boyless, jumping until my heart cracks in some orgy of buoyancy in the tropical night.