



Fireman Joe was the strongest and smartest of all the firemen. Everyone in the community looked up to Fireman Joe.

Sliding down the pole was Fireman Joe's favorite part of his job. It always made him feel very nice.



A small boy named Timmy lived across the street from the fire station. Every evening Timmy would wave to Fireman Joe, saying "Hello! Hello, Fireman Joe. I SEE you!"



"Children are SO foolish!" Fireman Joe would mutter to himself as he returned the wave.



After several months of watching Fireman Joe, Timmy decided to ask for his mother's advice. "I am in love with Fireman Joe," said Timmy. "What should I do?" "Go and tell him," his mother replied. "Fireman Joe will understand."

Timmy mustered up all of his nerve and ran to the station. He rushed up to Fireman Joe and bellowed, "I am in LOVE with you!"



Much to Timmy's surprise, Fireman Joe started laughing! "Ha ha ha! That's a GOOD one Timmy! Now go run along and play with your dolls!"



Timmy was stunned, upset, and frustrated so he began to cry. "Oh, Mother! I'm so ASHAMED!" Timmy bellowed. "Now, Timmy," his mother calmed him. "Don't feel bad. All little boys have romantic fantasies about firemen."

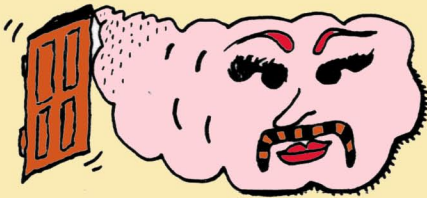


"They...they do?" Timmy stammered. "Of course," said his mother. "And that's why Fireman Joe laughed at you. All little boys tell him they love him. He hears it ALL the time."

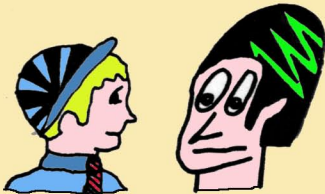


"Timmy, sit down," Fireman Joe said. "I'm much too busy to be detained by the confused antics of a very small boy with whom I have nothing in common. I never want to see or talk to you again. Okay?"

Timmy ran back home.



Then, all of a sudden, he heard a noise coming from inside his closet. He opened the door and out poured a cloud of smoke. A faint but easily identifiable image of Fireman Joe appeared in the smoke.

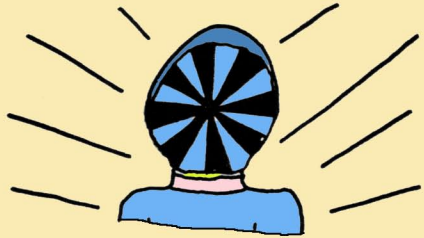


By schooltime the next morning, Timmy was back to normal. He ran into his best friend, Kevin. "I think I am in love with Fireman Joe," said Kevin.



That evening, Timmy went back to the fire station. He confronted Fireman Joe.

"So...there are OTHERS!" he declared.



Once inside his room, Timmy sat in the corner and stared at a blank wall for seven hours.



"You are small and nothing," said a faraway voice. "I am powerful and strong. In another 15 years you will have met another man and forgotten all about me."

"Do you really think so?" Timmy asked. "Yes, I am sure of it," Fireman Joe replied.



"Can it, Mary. Let's go play with our dolls," Timmy sneered. And with that, the boys skipped away and dreamt of the day when they themselves would be firemen.

*Stevie*