

Lindenwood University

Digital Commons@Lindenwood University

Theses

Theses & Dissertations

2008

Mouse of the Schoolyard

Kirk Stephen Lawless

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/theses>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

MOUSE OF THE SCHOOLYARD

Kirk Stephen Lawless, B.A.

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Fine Arts Degree in Writing

2008

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of two parts that show the diversity and flexibility of the student as a writer.

The original story was drafted, originally culled from a vast array of childhood memories, albeit alone it was too short to fulfill the requirements for a culminating project. The richness of the characters as well as the story itself called out for additional attention. An attempt to develop the story into a larger project proved an exercise in futility, as I felt it could not survive enough additions to increase the success of the project. An attempt to do so found the story mired in mindless bulk and boring dialogue. After developing and sketching the key characters, I decided to adapt the story into a movie screenplay.

Based predominantly on a series of non-fiction events from my childhood years spent in attendance at Corpus Christi Catholic Elementary School, the story concerns a young boy who suffers at the hands of a group of bullies who plague him for several years. Reaching a near breaking point and in the depths of despair, he is befriended by an old nun who teaches at the adjoining high school. Through a series of twists and turns, the young boy eventually meets his attackers head-on, growing up in the process and learning invaluable life-lessons from his new and unusual teacher along the way.

The adaptation to screenplay provided the opportunity to add some comedic relief to an otherwise dark piece of non-fiction while retaining the original storyline and its message of hope. It also allowed additional depth of the characters to shine through as well as allowed some of the characters to move to the forefront who had, in the story version, been vague and transparent.

The end result is the submitted screenplay based on the original short story. The inclusion of the story in the appendix will allow the comparison of the two, hopefully entertaining each in its own form.

MOUSE OF THE SCHOOLYARD

Kirk Stephen Lawless, B.A.

A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Fine Arts Degree in Writing

2008

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

Professor Michael Castro,
Chairperson and Advisor

Assistant Professor Peter Carlos

Table of Contents

I.	Introductory Essay.....	i
II.	Script: Mouse of the Schoolyard.....	1
III.	Appendix A: Mouse of the Schoolyard (short story).....	1
	Vitae Auctores.....	1

INTRODUCTION

Seanchai is the Irish word I would use to best describe myself. Being of Irish ancestry perhaps aided me in abilities as a storyteller. While in pursuit of my undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice I found the core clusters to be tedious and without challenge as I had been employed as a police officer since 1986.

The first communications class on the first Saturday of my collegiate journey overwhelmed me to the point I considered never setting foot on campus again. Feeling I was in way over my head, retreating, tail between legs seemed a viable option. I went home and mulled it over and decided to go to at least one class. As I sat in that classroom I felt the sting of inadequacy subsiding and decided that I could succeed.

A mere three clusters into my undergraduate studies, at the age of forty-two, I was laid low by a series of heart attacks that necessitated surgery. I was told that my survival was miraculous. Against the odds I did leave the hospital in my own car and not a hearse. My doctors told me there was a possibility I could be wheelchair bound and never able to work again. After a scant four months of recovery and rehabilitation to the amazement of medical and police personnel I returned to the job I love in November of 2002. Again I considered dropping from the program. I weighed the benefits of quitting and finding none, elected to push on.

The boredom of my core clusters was turned on its head when I enrolled in my first creative writing class with Professor Glen Irwin. That class was the catalyst that has brought me to pen this culminating project for my graduate degree.

I began to dabble in poetry as well as writing fiction and non-fiction pieces. Nearly every professor I came in contact with had been complimentary regarding my work and I modestly accepted their compliments while secretly telling myself that similar compliments were dished out to every student to keep them encouraged as well as enrolled in their respective programs.

While sitting in Professor Irwin's first class something inside me clicked as if someone had thrown a great switch that opened a whole new world to me; this new world lay before me. At the risk of sounding cliché, an indescribable feeling of joy filled me and I scrambled to learn as much as possible, as quickly as possible. From the moment that switch was thrown, my intent was to go straight through the undergraduate program and shedding the cloak of criminal justice, seek an MFA in writing.

I learned early that Walt Whitman is "The Big Daddy" of American literature and during the poetry cluster began referring to him as such throughout the graduate program. I prefer to think of him as the well from which all things literary flow. I learned that most writers worth their salt and whom I admired were greatly influenced by him.

The introduction to the writing of the beat generation sent me spinning. My only regret was that I had discovered some of the writings later in life. I devoured everything and anything I could get my hands on, gravitating particularly to the works of Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. My office soon was cluttered with video, compact discs, and books by them. I was enthralled by the spoken

voices of Burroughs and Kerouac. Dr. Michael Castro has been my favorite teacher and I am forever in his debt for guiding me through doors I might otherwise never opened much less walked through.

I chose the poet and painter Lawrence Ferlinghetti for a project and was drawn into his world of art and poetry. I felt as if I knew the man. I sent him a letter and a copy of a story I had written and he responded with a handwritten and signed kind postcard that is hanging on the wall in my curiosity-shop-like office. Given his age and busy schedule I thought that I would never hear from him.

As I continued through the program I saw myself evolving as a writer, poet, artist, and human being. I was being exposed to so much at a pace so rapid I feared that blinking would cause me to miss something.

I tried my hand at scriptwriting and found Professor Peter Carlos to be very supportive and complimentary regarding my work. Professor Eve Jones' class was among my favorites and I tried to soak up as much information as possible in the short thirteen weeks. I benefited further by learning in every class from the other students with whom I came in contact. I felt as if I had started a little late in life and felt that I needed to push myself in order to catch up. The final class with Professor Charles Warrts tied the entire package with a big red bow particularly during the marketing phase of the cluster.

Professor Shirley LeFlore really blew me away. I spoke with her on the telephone before the first class and from her voice I described her to my family. When I met her she was exactly as I pictured her; she is such a great lady. Shirley is a bit eccentric and I love that because I am also. I have always chosen the path less traveled and done my

own thing with not much care given to what people think about me. I think most artistic people see things in a different light, with the mind's eye.

I have on the wall in both my bedroom and basement office a list of Jack Kerouac's writing tips and now strive to write from the jewel center eye within the eye.

My literary influences in no particular order; "The Big Daddy" Walt Whitman, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Ernest Hemingway, Dashiell Hammett, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Edgar A. Poe, poets and writers of Ireland such as James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats and Emily Lawless. Of late I have become much enamored of the gritty writing styles of Burroughs and Hammett.

I have a particular fondness for Ernest Hemingway. Oddly enough I was born on July 21, about the same time Hemingway was blowing out the candles on his sixtieth birthday cake. I became a fan of his writings at an early age and learned that we shared the same birth date many years later. We shared other similarities as well: a great love of the outdoors and nature, good drinks, good guns, the sea, the thrill of the hunt, fishing, beautiful women, and beautiful words.

The rambling run on style of Kerouac is right up my alley going on and on without much for punctuation, just a continuous outpouring of thoughts in great descriptive words and sad little gray-fog phrases. I enjoy his writing style a bit somewhat like trance writing, but much more precise; he writes the way he talks and what a beautiful thing that is.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti painting with words and on brush sometimes combining both on one canvas has inspired me to take up the brushes once again after a long hiatus.

I pondered at length over the thought of laying down an autobiographical introductory essay for inclusion in my final project and honestly am unsure if I can satisfy those requirements in a mere ten pages, the parameters are a bit confining. It would probably be an easier task to write about what does not have an influence on my writing.

I am a native of Saint Louis born in 1959 and grew up in the shadow of the old Grand Water Tower. Blessed with a strong memory and a vivid imagination I recall events of my early childhood with ease, dating back to when I was two or three years old. I have been writing these things down as I remember them and one day will assemble them for publication. As luck would have it being born in Saint Louis, so rich in culture and history was and is a great place to live. Oh, the times I have spent on the banks of the great muddy Mississippi and the other Great American river, the Missouri, whose great banks wind past my house to the confluence of the two a mere couple miles from my current home.

Having dabbled in art since I was a wee boy, drawing and painting, carving wood and an eagerness to try any new medium given the chance, my hobbies have afforded me the keen eye and memory to remember the things I have seen. I was employed as a draftsman since graduating from high school as I was unable to afford college. Although I was talented as a draftsman and the money was adequate, the idea of spending a lifetime behind a desk drawing and inking lines did not suit me for very long and I had to get out of there quick.

I packed up everything I owned and headed west to Washington State near the borders of Idaho and Canada where I had the run of some ten thousand acres on

horseback and Jeep, lived briefly in a log cabin, hunted, fished, and played both cowboy and lumberjack. How I long for the day I again own a heaven--dog (horse) and ride until eternity! I was very young then, gullible and naïve, if not a little stupid. I lost nearly all of my personal possessions and limped home penniless, tail between legs, yet my spirit remained unbroken.

In 1984 I joined the police department and worked behind the radio as a dispatcher until being commissioned in 1986. I have been playing cops and robbers ever since and do not know what I want to be when I grow up. I have served in uniformed patrol, tactical operations for several years, as a detective for fourteen years, and spent several years working undercover in a multi-jurisdictional drug unit. I took advantage of the offer of a day job with weekends off that allowed me to finish my MFA, spending two years as the school resource officer in one of our local high schools.

In twenty-two plus years I have amassed a fortune of material for fiction and non-fiction pieces as well as fodder for movie scripts, some of which are in various stages of writing. My job is definitely a big influence when I write in the crime genre.

I have gathered additional material from investigations I have worked while assigned to the Greater Saint Louis Major Case Squad. Heinous murders tend to fascinate the public and are great material for fiction and non-fiction stories.

Music is another driving force that inspires me to write and triggers my creativity. I own way too many guitars and do not play well enough to justify the expense, but I like the way they look, smell, and feel. My varied musical interests help make me what I am and how I live. I am a Deadhead and have been one since around 1972 when the older brothers of one of my best friend introduced us to the music. Once "on the bus" I had no

desire to get off and just kept rolling down the road into the unknown. My musical interests vary from the obvious to Irish music, blues, and country.

A huge source of inspiration comes from my family, my beautiful supporting wife of twenty-four years, Lynda, who is a saint for putting up with me and all of my quirks, my daughters Dana, Nicole and Jennifer, and my sons Sean Patrick and Daniel. My job and academic pursuits have kept me from attending many family functions. There are so many stories yet unwritten that are jam-packed into every family member and every intersection of our lives. I blinked and now I have four granddaughters.

We live on a little parcel of two acres near the Missouri River. It is my little farm home where we have too many pets: Sweetie the Irish Wolfhound, Iko the Springer Spaniel, Molly the Yorkie. Living in the pole barn are Corrina and Lucky, the barn kitties. The cats inside are slinky black Dharma and my favorite Punkin the calico. In the chicken coop are the Barred Plymouth Rocks: Bertha, Sugaree, and Delilah. The ruler of the roost is the little red rooster Samson, a Rhode Island Red, who crows whenever he feels like it.

I sit on the back porch and watch the deer creep out of the wood to nibble corn at the feeder. A parliament of owls hoot to me almost nightly when the sun starts to go down and I call back to them. There are way too many raccoons about and moles that pester the lawn and are picked off one at a time by my barn pouncers. I had a pet cat when I was very young and did not have them again until now. As I read about some of my favorite writers I have learned that they too had a particular fondness for them. William Burroughs had a deep affection for his feline companions as did Hemingway, whose home in Key West is still inhabited by the ancestors of some of his polydactyl

cats. Kerouac also had at least one cat, although its name escapes me. I was little frightened when I saw photos of a cat belonging to Hemingway and another of Burroughs black and white cat. My inside cat Dharma is black and white and looks just like the cats belonging to two of my favorite writers!

The rippling creek is a constant reminder of the beauty of the place we call home. In the summer at night I sit and watch the bats in the dusk and listen to the near million crickets singing. In the spring it's the peepers who call out and announce the arrival of warmer weather. Sometimes the little frogs sing while stuck to the pillars on the front porch. Brown and blue tailed skinks sun themselves on the wall in front of the house and hummingbirds flit in front of me while I sit on the white Adirondack chair. How can these things not influence a writer and artist?

I spend a lot of time in the red pole barn sitting in front of the pot-belly stove sometimes thinking and writing, sometimes just thinking. There is something primeval and magical about a fire in a glowing woodstove.

Like Hemingway I love the outdoors whether stalking a hover of Rainbow Trout, sitting in a deer stand, or stalking Russian Boars. There is greater feeling for me than being afield with flyrod or gun in hand; just being out in the world. The taking of game is not all-important. Respect for nature is a big deal to me and I have passed that belief on to my children. I love the mountains, the forest, and the mightiness of the sea. I believe the mighty outdoors is a gift from God and should be treated with reverence. These are among the many things that inspire, move, and motivate me.

My office is decorated (someone say littered) with things I bring home that are too important to throw away: a grand bird nest, a bleached- white terrapin shell, animal

skulls, assorted feathers, cast iron buffalo and turtles, antique pipes, a perfect acorn, and a variety of perfect stones; not perfect in shape, but perfect in that they remind me of a particular trout fishing outing or walk in the woods toting a rifle. I come home with pockets of the stuff sometimes, but my wife knows how I am and leaves me to my idiosyncrasies. I often tell my friends that there are a lot of things going on in my head and I am certain they believe it. The more I learn, the more active my mind works. I keep notebooks everywhere in the house and at work and I am forever jotting down notes for future projects.

Religion is a huge bone of contention for some and for others it is a great source of comfort. I was raised an R.C. (Roman Catholic). I went to Corpus Christi Elementary School in Jennings and was taught by nuns. If my memory serves me correctly there were only two male teachers in the school. I was a small boy for my age and bespectacled. I was picked on almost daily which included acts of physical violence that left me crying and bloody. I was not prone to snitching and accepted the suffering as part of my everyday regimen. This began when I was in the third grade and continued until the fifth grade.

I chose the story *Mouse of the Schoolyard* as part of my culminating project. This story is, for the most part, factual. The names have not been changed to protect the innocent because the bad kids were not. The kids that bullied and assaulted me are the same types that drive kids today in similar circumstances to commit suicide or to commit violent acts that we see all too often on the evening news or read about in the newspapers across the country. I wrote this story for several reasons; to improve my recall of childhood events, to draw attention to the plight of kids targeted by bullies and do it in a

way that could be powerful with some lighter moments to relieve some of the darkness; at its core, my story rife with darkness and sadness.

The near suicide scene is the only part of the story that is not true. I added it to drive home the message of despair that some kids feel and their struggle to escape the pain. While my pain was mental and physical I did not consider suicide. True I wanted it to stop, but felt that I would be in trouble if I told. I know that does not make sense but I was just a kid.

When I showed the story to my father he was hurt. Apparently he did have a gun in the house; I just never found it. He thought that I had found it and tried to kill myself. I am not sure if I have convinced him otherwise. Had I found the gun, I could have been a pioneer in the ways of schoolyard shootings, but I did not. I did find the leather pouch with the bullets in it. I own it now as my father gave it to me years later when I was a grown man and I count it among my prize possessions.

My father built Phantom jets during the Vietnam War and we listened to baseball games on KMOX and he let me light his cigarettes sometimes with his silver Zippo lighter. Who could make all of that up?

We did have a priest who drank way too much. And the nun who taught me how to box, did she exist? She certainly did. Like I said, the only part that was not true was the suicide scene. I was an altar boy and I did get stuck getting up really early to serve mass. The politics of religion is a strange beast. There existed in my parish a hierarchy that dictated who got to serve masses for funerals and weddings, both of which equated to tips for the altar boys. Those were usually conducted by the boys whose families were in the inner circle, if you will within the parish, whose parents donated more heavily to the

church or drank with the Monsignor. My parents were worker bee types and therefore six o'clock mass was mine.

The nun who taught me to box was a large round lady, not unlike the Irish bear I portrayed her to be. She had a great accent and a kind heart and I loved her. I did play poker with her after school and learned plenty about life in her classroom. She tended her rose garden and taught me about coffee grounds and eggshells as fertilizer.

Sister did have glass cases of animals in jars and she let me pick from them. I did take the jars home and I can not lie; once I opened the piranha and got a good whiff of formaldehyde. I puked.

Tim Weber did get a bloody nose courtesy of my little fist and I thought I killed him he bled so much. He bled all over me, including into my mouth, and I must have looked like a little maniac standing there screaming and charging at the crowd. It is a wonder I was not carted off for psychiatric evaluation.

My descriptions of the boys were dead-on accurate including that of the deranged beaver with the long blond hair hanging in his face.

My parents were and are still God fearing Christian folks. My mother passed away ten years ago and if she knew what had been happening to me at the time, would have surely put the hurt on somebody. I never told though. My father worked the midnight shift building jets and I truly did not want to bother him. At the age of ten what I saw and heard about the war made me not want to interfere with the important job of building jets or put undo pressure on my father.

I enjoyed writing the story and have received many compliments on it from those who have read it. It was not long enough to submit for a culminating project so I thought

that I would submit it as a story in its original form and then adapt it into a movie script. I believe it to be an excellent example of diversity in transforming one into the other while allowing the original message shine through.

The adaptation of the story and turning into a movie script was something I mulled over for weeks before putting pen to paper. I thought my story was well written, a bit long for a short story and a little short for a novel, so a movie script transition was probably a good choice.

My target audience was fairly broad-based: those who were bullied in school and anyone with a religious schooling background, anyone who went snooping in their parent's room when they were not supposed to, and definitely anyone Catholic. I think that my use of religious symbols was not overkill for those in attendance who were not Catholic. Rather, I felt that it provided a backbone of good versus evil necessary to pull the viewer into the story. The bloody statuery was everywhere when I was in school and I now am very comfortable with it and have an old crucifix in my office as well as other statues that remind me of who I am and from whence I came.

I tried to visualize the flow of the script and read it over and over as it evolved into the final work. Upon its completion I felt that I had more than adequately transformed my story into a script worthy of watching. The story content is rife with visual opportunities to entertain the audience in a movie format.

Every character in the story is unique as they were in real life; however, in the script version, careful selection of cast members could ultimately enhance the viewing experience of the audience.

The janitor reeks of William S. Burroughs, hence his name Bill, and I could picture someone like him scooping out the pink sawdust while muttering under his breath. The line “I’m gettin’ outta’ here, me!” is a line I have heard Mr. Burroughs use in some of his audio recordings in my collection. The reference to “sheep killin’ dogs” is also a Burroughsism. A director could run wild with such a character and I hope one day it happens.

Sister Mary Brigid is another character with great movie traits. Careful selection in physical stature, accent, walk, laugh, and mannerisms could really make her believable to an audience. She is a bit quirky, as she was in real life. Cussing a little in the script version makes her more human and approachable. Nuns were a bit, and still are, a bit mysterious. Likewise, having her share a cigarette with Bill the janitor should make some laugh and others gasp out loud when the scene is played out. My goal here was to make her as human as possible and give the audience a chance to get to know her on a personal level. They are not all sour wooden-faced women in black and white habits.

The star of the movie Patrick Gallagher could be played by any good looking slender little boy with glasses and a wide-eyed innocence. Careful selection of this character is as important as the casting of Sister Mary Brigid as there needs to be chemistry between them that the audience believes in from the moment the two meet in the garden

The science room setting where a large portion of the script takes place is the perfect setting to captivate the audience and draw them into the scene. Cinematography would certainly polish the interior of the room filled with skulls and jars of floating

animals. I saw it in person and can still see it. I think that the script adequately painted an overall view of that setting.

I struggled with one scene in particular when adapting the story to the screen version and considered omitting it; the near suicide scene. I think this is a very powerful yet dark scene. Surely my intended audience would not include young children and I elected to leave it as written. As I mentioned previously, the near suicide scene did not happen, but I think it really drives the point home about bullying and the depression it causes. My intent was also to make it appear that young Mr. Gallagher was going to take the pistol to the playground to even the score, but he has second thoughts and contemplates suicide instead. I know the underlying topic is a dark one but it has a happy ending that I assume will hold the interest of the viewing audience.

Certain liberties were taken with the script version such as the rooster scene which did not happen, although Joe Brown's Meat Market was a real place where we shopped when I was a boy.

The playground for the movie could be found in just about every city in the United States. All you need is lots of hard Catholic asphalt! The old school I attended still stands today, as does the church. I have not been inside the building in some twenty-plus years. White marble Jesus still stands watch over the entrance, arms outstretched on the Switzer Avenue side of Corpus Christi School, and I remember like it was only yesterday, climbing up and thanking him for the wonderful gift of an old nun who took the time to teach a young boy about life.

MOUSE OF THE SCHOOLYARD
SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

WHITE STATUE OF JESUS STANDS ON A TALL PEDESTAL, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED. THE SUN IS SHINING BEHIND THE STATUE. CLOSE-UP OF PLACARD ATTACHED TO THE PEDESTAL READS "LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME."

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- AFTERNOON

A young boy, PATRICK STEPHEN GALLAGHER, eleven, bone-thin, dressed in clothing of the late 1960's, lies flat on his back on the asphalt, CRYING. His face is spattered with blood. His jacket is torn. Next to him on the ground is a pair of broken eyeglasses.

A SHADOW SWEEPS OVER THE BOY AS HE LIES ON THE GROUND

Sound of RUNNING FEET and FIENDISH LAUGHTER

Patrick staggers to his feet, wipes his eyes, then bends over to pick up his glasses. They are twisted horribly and one lens is shattered. Putting them on, he collects his books and papers from the playground, stuffs them into his little plaid gym bag and starts walking toward home, following the railroad tracks.

Sound of FREIGHT TRAIN and CROSSING GATE BELLS

Patrick walks slowly parallel to the slow-moving train alongside the schoolyard fence. He stops and SPITS blood onto the sidewalk and wipes the dirt from his face as he approaches the crosswalk, manned by an old white man, very wrinkled and hairy, in a crossing guard's hat. A cigarette dangles from the old man's lip and a small bottle of whiskey is in his back pocket. He is oblivious to the boy's injuries as he makes his way to the crosswalk. The crossing guard blows his WHISTLE, holds up his stop sign, and waves the boy across the street.

CROSSING GUARD

There ya go pal. Be careful. Watch those cars. We don't want no one gettin' hurt. See ya tomorrow.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

Patrick walks into the kitchen. His younger brother, SEAN (about six years old), is sitting at the kitchen table. The boy's Mom, Christine (pretty, mid-thirties, brunette) sees Patrick as he tries to walk past her and stops him.

MOM

Patrick! What happened to you? My God child, you're bleeding!

She checks his teeth, prying his mouth open gently and looks inside.

MOM (CONT'D)

Oh, your glasses! What happened?

PATRICK

I fell on the playground mom, my glasses broke!

MOM

You weren't fighting, were you?

PATRICK

No, I just fell.

MOM

You have to be more careful Paddy. You'll need new glasses, but it'll have to wait 'til payday. Can you manage?

PATRICK

I'll be okay, mom. I'll just use my left eye.

MOM

Let's get you cleaned up. Your Da will do his best to fix your glasses when he wakes up for work.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE BATHROOM -- EVENING

Mom cleans up Patrick and sets his glasses aside, then gives him a bear hug.

MOM

I love you Paddy-Stephen!

PATRICK

Love you too, Mom.

Patrick starts to cry, but holds it in. Sean peeks around the corner and waves to Patrick, motioning for him to come with him. Patrick peels himself from Mom's arms and follows Sean out of the room.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE BOY'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

SEAN

What happened? I saw blood.

PATRICK

I fell.

SEAN
I'm tellin' Da.

PATRICK
You can't! He's too busy building jets for the war. Sean, please don't tell. It'll be okay.

Sean just stares sadly at his older brother. Patrick is sad and he knows it.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE BOY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Patrick and Sean are dressed in pajamas and lying in bunk beds. Sean is on the top bunk looking down at Patrick.

FOOTSTEPS outside the door. The door opens and the boy's Dad, Malachy, (tall clean-cut mid-thirties handsome dark haired), walks in. Light from the hallway illuminates the room.

DAD
Good night my good boys.

PATRICK
Night, Da.

SEAN
Night, Da. Build jets, Da!

DAD
Yes, Sean, your Da will build jets. The best Phantom jets. Get some sleep.

Dad sets Patrick's glasses on the dresser next to the bed. They are taped and wired together.

DAD (CONT'D)
I did the best I could Paddy. I took the broken lens out so you won't cut your eye. We'll get a new pair on Friday when I get paid. Time for a new pair anyway. You okay?

PATRICK
Sure, Da.

DAD
Your Ma thought you were in a fight.

PATRICK
No, Da.

DAD

Okay, we'll teach you how to fight someday when you're ready. Too little to fight now. No need for it.

Dad kisses both boys on top of their heads and tucks them in.

DAD (CONT'D)

Your Da loves you. Get some sleep.

He closes the door and in the dark silence the sound of CRYING. Sean turns on a wall lamp and climbs down the ladder to check on Patrick who is sobbing into his pillow. Sean crawls in next to Patrick, puts his arm around him, hugging him, and closes his eyes and both boys drift off to sleep.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY -- DAY

Patrick buttons up his black robe quickly looking at the clock. It is nearly six A.M. he throws on his white vestment and heads into the dark church.

INT. CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick is making preparations for morning mass. Smoothing the altar covering and lighting candles. He looks up at the huge crucifix hanging high on the wall above and behind the altar. He sees the dripping blood and in the darkness he hears the DRIPPING and it startles him. As he peers into the darkness he sees someone walking toward him and closes his eyes from fear. MONSIGNOR BRENNAN late sixties wrinkled with grey wild hair enters the church and walks towards Patrick.

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN

Are you sleeping boy?

Patrick gasps, expecting to see Jesus and not the Monsignor

PATRICK

No, Monsignor Brennan, everything is ready.

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN

Not quite.

Looking over Patrick and walking around him slowly.

PATRICK

Not quite?

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN

Your robe. It is askew.

PATRICK

Askew?

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN

You buttoned it wrong! Fix it! I will not tolerate shoddy dress and neither will God!

Patrick looks down and realizes that he has missed a button when buttoning his robe and hurries to correct it. When he finishes he stand up so the Monsignor can see. The Monsignor nods his head in approval, swaying from side to side as if he were slightly drunk

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN (CONT'D)

Good boy.

Patting Patrick on the head. Patrick shakes his head and rolls his eyes when he smells the Monsignor's breath that reeks of alcohol.

INT. CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick suffers further from the Monsignor's breath throughout mass as he holds the giant red bible with gilt-edged pages aloft as the Monsignor prays and spits and sways and breathes on him. Patrick shakes under the weight of the giant book.

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN

Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve...

(whispering)

Steady Patrick

Monsignor Brennan steadies Patrick with a firm grip on his arm while taking the bible from him, closing it with one hand.

MONSIGNOR BRENNAN (CONT'D)

...the Lord. In the name of the father, son, and holy ghost. Amen.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick hangs up a robe and puts it in a closet and walks past the Monsignor who is asleep in a chair. Patrick opens the door and looks out to see if the coast is clear. He runs outside letting the door SLAM behind him, startling the Monsignor.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MORNING

Patrick runs across the playground through the other children gathered there before the first bell.

He looks from side to side and decides to avoid the main entrance hoping to enter school through a side entrance on the lower level. As he rounds the corner and after breathing a SIGH of relief, he is surrounded by a group of school bullies. The leader of the group MIKE MCCAFFERTY (big for his age, heavily freckled, with bad teeth and big ears) is with his younger brother GREG (a slightly smaller version of Mike), TIM GRUBER (overweight with unkempt hair and dirty clothes), and the brothers FRANK and STEVE MORELY (dark haired and wearing ill-fitting clothes). Mike grabs Patrick and shoves him hard to the ground. Patrick removes his glasses and puts them in his pants pocket.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Where do think you're goin'?

PATRICK
To class. I don't want to be late.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Get up then.

Patrick gets up and Mike shoves his brother Greg toward him.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY (CONT'D)
Get'im Greg.

The boys surround Patrick while Greg punches Patrick in the stomach twice knocking him to the ground. Tim Gruber kicks him in the ribs and Steve Morley steps on Patrick's fingers while he is on the ground trying to catch his breath. Frank Morely sees two nuns walking toward them and yells to the others.

STEVE MORELY
Nuns! Let's get outta here.

FRANK MORELY
Run!

SCHOOL BELL RINGING

The nuns (Both in their fifties and wrinkled) walk up to patrick who has just stood up and is wiping away tears and straightening his clothes. He thinks they are going to help him.

SISTER EDITH
Young man, you are late. Stop lolly gagging and get to class...and no more horseplay before school. That's how people get hurt. Look at your uniform. You look like a savage. Dreadful!

The other nun does not speak. She nods her head as the other nun speaks and then looks at Patrick with disapproval. The nuns walk away and Patrick walks slowly toward the door to school.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY--EARLY AFTERNOON

Boys and girls are lined up in the hall way waiting to go down the steps to the cafeteria. Patrick is in line next to another boy, TERRY SCHILLIGO (buck-toothed with dark rings under his eyes and unusually long hair that hangs into his eyes that he constantly sweeps up and out of the way to see). Most of the students are SNIFFING the air and making sour faces.

TERRY SCHILLIGO

My god! What's that smell?

PATRICK

I think it's spinach!

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY --MOMENTS LATER

As the line moves toward the door the smell gets stronger causing GROANS and GASPS from the other students. Mike McCafferty and his gang are in line also, nearby where Patrick is standing. Mike is sweating and looks ill. His brother looks at him.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

What's wrong Mike? You don't look so good.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Shut up will ya. I'm fine. I uh...

Mike begins to RETCH, doubling over holding his stomach. He begins to VOMIT hard all over the hallway near the doorway to the cafeteria. He starts CRYING. As the other children begin LAUGHING at him including Patrick. Mike and Greg see him laughing as do the others in his gang. Mike glares at Patrick as he is lead away by a nun who slips in the vomit, nearly falling. She adjusts her habit and walks away with Mike.

TERRY SCHILLIGO

Uh oh! Now you did it!

Terry moves away from Patrick leaving him by himself in the now widening gap in line. Greg McCafferty whispers to Patrick

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Real funny ain't it? We'll see how much you're laughing after school.

A janitor (late fifties overly hairy and wrinkled) appears through the crowd. He is pushing a large barrel on a two-wheeler. Stopping in front of the vomit on the floor. He begins scooping pink sawdust-like material out of the barrel and onto the vomit. Muttering under his breath as he works.

JANITOR

Fuckin' puke. Fuckin' kids.

At the end of the hallway a large statue of Jesus stands silently. Patrick stares at it closely as if looking for a heavenly sign then hangs his head in disappointment.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- AFTERNOON

SCHOOL BELL The kids charge out of the doors past the kids on punishment detail, covered with chalk dust, pounding erasers against the brick wall near the door. Patrick walks out cautiously and when the coast is clear runs toward the rear of the playground and is quickly surrounded by Greg McCafferty, Tim Gruber, the Morely brothers and Tom ROTH (skinny anemic boy with dirty ill-fitting clothes and a stocking cap that he always wears). Tom steps up to Patrick.

TOM ROTH

So what's so fuckin' funny now, Paddy?

He slaps Patrick in the face. Patrick doesn't say anything. Greg hits him in the stomach.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

That's for laughing at my brother.

The Morely brothers and Tim Gruber punch Patrick in the arms and stomach several times knocking him to the ground. Patrick see two nuns walking towards him and anticipates being saved. The nuns push past them.

SISTER EDITH

You boys break it up before someone gets hurt. Run along.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Yes, sister.

Patrick remains on the ground as the other boys run away
LAUGHING.

SISTER EDITH

Boy, are you deaf?

PATRICK

No, Ma'am.

SISTER EDITH

Then go. Go!

Sister Regina (mid-sixties thick glasses and deaf) walks over to help Sister Edith and turns her attention to another boy who is occupying himself by burning ants with a magnifying glass. She snatches him up and takes the glass from him and drags him off SCREAMING. Another boy runs up behind Sister Regina and SCREAMS while she makes a face at her behind her back. She does not hear anything, but instinctively and quickly turns around. The boy is quicker and is able to turn around and walk away WHISTLING before she sees what he did behind her back.

SISTER REGINA

Those ants are God's creatures, young man!

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick is alone on the playground now. Looking up he sees the white marble Jesus on the brick pedestal. He stands up slowly wiping away his tears and a trickle of blood from his nose and begins to climb up the bricks, past the "Let the little children come to me." Plaque, up the body of the statue and wrapping his legs around it to steady himself, cups the face of the statue in both hands, looking it straight in the eye.

PATRICK

Why won't you help me?

Looking at the statue nose to nose with it.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Why won't you help me? Help me!
Please help Me!

Patrick slides down the statue and stands at the feet of the statue. He touches the nail holes in the feet of the statue.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Get down from there! You'll get hurt!

Patrick jumps down and runs away.

EXT. STREET -- LATE AFTERNOON

Patrick runs toward home, the AFTERNOON TRAIN moving slower than Patrick. He runs past the convent's large flower garden with a solitary nun tending to the roses. He waits at the crosswalk for the Crossing Guard to stop traffic.

CROSSING GUARD

There you go pal. See ya Monday.

Patrick CRIES as he runs across the street.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

Patrick closes the door. His mom is putting something in her purse. He steps behind her and gets a drink from the refrigerator.

MOM

Paddy, I'm running to the store with your brother. You want to go? We could look at new glasses.

PATRICK

No. Do I have to go? I just want to stay home and watch TV. Can we get my glasses tomorrow?

MOM

Sure we'll get them tomorrow. We won't be gone long. Your Da's at work. Doing a double. Please stay out of our room and don't get into trouble.

PATRICK

Ok, mom. Bye, Sean.

SEAN

Bye, Paddy.

Patrick's mom and brother leave.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE PARENT'S BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

Patrick slides a chair from his parent's room and puts it in front of the closet door. He walks over to a large dresser and kneels down in front of it and opens the bottom drawer. Patrick removes a large brown jewelry box and sets it on the floor gently handling everything he touches: family photos, his father's air force wings, sergeant stripes, and his grandfather's gold pocket watch. He picks up a pack of cigarettes and smells them. Patrick picks up a Zippo lighter opens it and lights it blows it out smells it and puts it back. He plays with a bayonet that he finds in the drawer next.

Patrick picks up a small zippered pouch and sets it on the rug next to the dresser. He stands up and walks to the chair sliding it closer to the closet. He opens the door and shoves the chair closer and climbs up onto it.

Placing a fedora on his head he strains to reach something and comes out with a shoe box. Jumping down, he returns to the rug in front of the dresser. Patrick opens the lid to the box and removes a blue-steel revolver. He dumps the contents of the pouch onto the floor. Patrick loads the revolver with the bullets from the pouch, sets the gun on the floor and leaves the room.

Seconds later he returns with a small red plaid gym bag and places the gun into it. He gathers the remaining bullets and returns them to the pouch and sets them in the bag and zips it up. He is CRYING. Patrick picks up the gym bag and walks toward the door dragging the chair behind him. He stops in front of a large needlepoint of the Ten Commandments hanging on the wall.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not
kill. Thou shalt not kill! Patrick,
though shalt not kill.

Patrick leaves the room and closes the door behind him. He re-enters the room still CRYING and walks over to the rug and kneels on it. Patrick unzips the bag and removes the revolver. He looks up toward the ceiling.

PATRICK

Why won't you help me?

He puts the barrel of the revolver in his mouth, GAGGING on the barrel. He cocks the hammer and closes his eyes.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Thou shalt not kill! Though shalt
not kill!

Patrick sits with the barrel of the gun in his mouth but does not pull the trigger. Still CRYING he lowers the hammer, unloads the gun and returns everything to the places where he found them.

Sound of CAR DOOR SLAMMING

Startled, Patrick hurriedly surveys the room and walks out with his empty gym bag, closing the door behind him.

EXT. BACKYARD -- MORNING

Patrick and his dad are doing yard work and stop for a break. Dad pulls out a pack of cigarettes and hands Patrick a Zippo. Patrick lights the cigarette for his dad.

DAD

Thanks, Paddy.

Dad rubs the top of Patrick's head and reaches for his lighter. Patrick hands it to him and he slides it into his pocket. Dad offers Patrick a cigarette.

DAD (CONT'D)

Want one?

PATRICK

No, Da.

LAUGHING

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Aw, I'm too young to smoke.

DAD

I know, I know. You're a good boy. Don't ever smoke. Nasty habit. And never play with fire. Deal?

Hugging Patrick. Patrick watches his dad sweat as they pass a glass bottle of soda between them. A JET passes low overhead.

THE SHADOW OF THE JET PASSES OVER PATRICK AND HIS FATHER

PATRICK

Is that a Phantom, Da? Did you build that one?

DAD

Yeah, that's a Phantom. I built it, me and my friends.

PATRICK

Is it going to Vietnam?

DAD

Eventually.

PATRICK

Do you sweat that much when you build 'em?

DAD

Sure, it gets awful hot in the hangar in the summer. But it's not as bad as winter. I'd rather be hot.

PATRICK

Why don't I sweat like you?

DAD

Oh trust me you will, you will.

PATRICK
I'm gonna build jets like you!

DAD
Why not do something else? Be a
fireman or an astronaut.

PATRICK
Or a cop?

DAD
Whatever you want to be.

PATRICK
Dad, when can I learn to fight?

DAD
When you're a little older. Why, is
somebody picking on you at school?

PATRICK
Oh, no Da. I was just wondering.
Some of the guys were getting picked
on by some of the older kids is all.
I just wondered when kids learned
that kind of stuff.

DAD
If anyone bothers you, just tell me,
okay?

PATRICK
Want another soda?

DAD
Race ya!

Patrick races his dad to the back door of the house and they
go inside.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- DAY

Patrick is on the playground with Terry waiting for the bell
to ring.

PATRICK
Have you seen 'em yet.

TERRY SCHILLIGO
No, maybe they're sick?

PATRICK
All of 'em?

TERRY SCHILLIGO

I dunno?

PATRICK

Uh oh, there they are.

The gang of bullies is busy picking on some other kids on the other side of the playground.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Let's go inside before they see us!

TERRY SCHILLIGO

Let's go!

The two walk inside before the bullies see them.

EXT. SCHOOL BOY'S ROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON

Patrick is walking out of the boy's room as Terry is coming in. Terry stops him and keeps him from leaving.

PATRICK

What's wrong Terry?

Terry says nothing, but the McCafferty brothers walk in behind him.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Hi Paddy!

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Yeah, hi Paddy!

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Hit him Terry!

PATRICK

What...Terry? Wait, I thought you were my friend?

TERRY SCHILLIGO

Well, I was.

PATRICK

But...

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

But, nothin'. Smack 'em.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Do it!

Terry punches Patrick in the stomach several times and Patrick falls to the floor. All three leave LAUGHING.

SCHOOL BELL RINGS.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT -- AFTERNOON

The bullies catch Patrick as soon as he walks out of the main doors. They put their arms around him chum-like and walk him past several nuns who pay no attention to the boys who lead Patrick to the parking lot next to the building. The bullies punch and kick him until he fall to the ground. As usual, he does not defend himself or fight back. They leave him on the ground bleeding from the mouth and nose and CRYING. The bullies LAUGH as they run away

Patrick gets up and starts his long walk home.

EXT. NUN'S GARDEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick is wiping his face as he walks and stops occasionally to spit blood. He checks his front tooth to feel if it is loose. He is walking near the fence alongside the nun's garden behind the convent. He hears rustling among the rose bushes and trellises. He sees something big and black moving among the flowers but can't tell what it is, but he stops to see. He hears a sort of GROWLING coming from the bushes then a LOW HUMMING and GRUNTING. He has no idea what the sound is but steps closer. A large black shape explodes from the bushes and stands erect near the fence bear-like. Patrick jumps back and SCREAMS. SISTER MARY BRIGID, a large heavy-set nun, round-faced, blue-eyed, late-fifties, appears at the fence among gnarled rose bushes and SPITS. She has an Irish accent.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well, son of a bitch. I got ya, ya
bastard.

Clutching a large weed in her big hand. She is startled when she sees Patrick.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Sorry, my dear, I thought I was alone.
You didn't hear that did ya?

Patrick nods yes.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Sorry, dear...

Looking left and then right.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

It's a bad habit I picked up from my
brothers. I try to keep it in the
garden when I'm by myself.

Trimming flowers as she talks. She notices that Patrick is hurt.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Good Lord boy, you're hurt! What happened? Let me have a look at you.

Motioning him toward the garden gate and moving quickly on the opposite side of the fence to catch up to him to let him into the garden. Reaching the gate, she flings it open and reaches for Patrick with outstretched arms like the statue of Jesus. The sun is behind her. Patrick reaches for her and begins to CRY.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

It's bullies isn't it? I've seen that look before.

She hugs Patrick tightly and he SOBS into her breast as she smooths his hair.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

There, there. Take some time, take some time.

Patrick breaks away from Sister Mary Brigid. She cups his face in her hands, still dirty from the garden, and gets nose to nose with him.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

What is your name, child?

PATRICK

Patrick, Patrick Gallagher.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Sister Mary Brigid.

Sticks out her hand. Patrick shakes her hand.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Glad to meet you. We Irish have to stick together. You just come with me.

Sister Mary Brigid takes Patrick by the hand and leads him through the garden toward the adjoining girl's high school where she teaches.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM --MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid helps Patrick onto a large table in her science lab and scrambles to find her first-aid kit.

She checks his mouth for loose teeth and touches his nose gently.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well, your nose isn't broken and no teeth are loose, so that's good. How's your spirit Paddy? Not broken I hope? We'll have to see what we can do about all this.

PATRICK

You won't tell my parents?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Do you want me to?

PATRICK

No.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well, that settles that then.

PATRICK

I like your accent.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

It was a gift. For being born in Ireland. Raised on a farm with seven brothers and two sisters. Paddy, you don't mind if I call you Paddy, do you?

PATRICK

That's what my family calls me.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Do ya know how to fight? Can you defend yourself proper, one on one.

Sister Mary Brigid shadow boxes with the skill of a prize fighter, moving surprisingly fast for a woman her size and age

PATRICK

My Da says I'm too young yet.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Why not tell your Da?

PATRICK

He works nights and he's real busy building jets for the war. I don't want to bother him.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

You love your Da, Paddy? You're proud of him I can tell. Any brothers or sisters?

PATRICK

A little brother and two little sisters.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Okay, we'll have to handle this ourselves then. What saint are you named for?

PATRICK

Stephen.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Ah, the martyr. Just because you are named after him, doesn't mean you have to be like him, understand?

PATRICK

Yes, sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

How many of them are there?

PATRICK

Saints?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No child, bullies!
(Laughing)

PATRICK

Six, seven, sometimes more sometimes less.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Never one on one?

PATRICK

Nope.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Cowards, all! Like a pack of sheep killin' dogs. I know the type. You can't fight them all if you don't know how to fight one, so that's where we'll start!

Sister Mary Brigid finishes dressing Patrick's wounds and puts her first-aid kit aside.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Do you play poker Paddy?

PATRICK
My grandmother taught me.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Good, we'll play after school
tomorrow.

Sister Mary Brigid shows Patrick around her classroom. It is full of animal skeletons, skulls, and a tall glass case filled with row upon row of formaldehyde filled jars with animals floating inside them lines one wall. She points out poisonous snakes and spiders, sharks, and piranha. Some of them very small.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Do you know what these things have
in common Patrick?

PATRICK
They're all God's creatures?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Yes, true, true, but they are also
small and deadly, understand?

PATRICK
I think so.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
We'll teach you how to fight, but we
would prefer it to be a fair fight.
If it's not fair we'll throw in a
trick or two, the secret weapon if
necessary!

PATRICK
Secret weapon?

Sister Mary Brigid looks around the room to be sure no one else is within earshot and motions Patrick closer. She smiles a big smile and whispers.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
A swift kick in the balls!

LAUGHING

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
If they fight dirty so can we! I
learned a thing or two about fighting
from my brothers.

Sister Mary Brigid and Patrick laugh. Sister Mary Brigid points to the glass case.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Patrick, pick one of these creatures and take it home with you study it and remember, small and deadly, small and deadly.

PATRICK

Piranha, I'll take the Piranha sister.

Sister Mary Brigid takes out the jar, makes sure the lid is on tight and hands it to Patrick as she walks him toward the door. He stops and hugs her and she pats him on the back.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Hurry home dear. Be careful not to drop your piranha. And keep the lid on! Your mother would skin me if you open that in the house!

PATRICK

Thanks sister! See you tomorrow!

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Tomorrow Paddy!

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick is in his bed in near darkness. The jar with the floating piranha sits on the nightstand next to his bed. His little brother hangs over the edge of the top bunk.

SEAN

Night, Paddy!

PATRICK

Night, Sean!

SEAN

Neat fish, Paddy! I like his teeth!

PATRICK

See you in the morning.

Patrick reaches over and turns out the light and smiles as he closes his eyes.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY -- MORNING

Patrick hangs up his robe in the sacristy and tiptoes past the SNORING Monsignor. He steps toward the door smiling and shaking his head.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MORNING

Patrick runs through the crowded playground towards the main door to the schoolyard. He scans the playground for the bullies and smiles when he reaches the entrance without being beaten.

INT. CLASSROOM --AFTERNOON

Patrick watches the clock. He is worried. Mike McCafferty is watching him as he gets up to sharpen a pencil. Mike McCafferty stands close to Patrick and whispers in his ear.

MIKE MCCAFERTY

Missed ya this morning, Paddy.

Patrick says nothing and keeps sharpening his pencil.

MIKE MCCAFERTY (CONT'D)

See ya after school. Count on it.
Me and my brother will be waitin'
for ya.

Sister Mary Catherine is seated at her desk looking at the clock. At two-thirty she motions for Patrick to come to her desk.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE

Patrick, I need you to do something for me. Get your books together and take this note to the high school principal's office for me. It is very important. You may leave from there when the bell rings.

Patrick takes the note from Sister Mary Catherine, walks back to his desk, picks up his books and leaves the room puzzled. Mike McCafferty stares at him as he leaves and points to him, whispering.

MIKE MCCAFERTY

After school, don't forget.

EXT. FRONT STEPS HIGH SCHOOL -- AFTERNOON

Sister Mary Brigid is sitting on the steps waiting for Patrick.

PATRICK

Good afternoon sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Hi Paddy, ready for your first boxing lesson?

PATRICK

I have to deliver a note to the principal first.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'll take it.

Snatching it from his hand, laughing.

PATRICK

Sister Mary Catherine said it was important!

Sister Mary Brigid unfolds the note and shows Patrick it is blank on both sides. She refolds it and slips it into a pocket in her habit.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

They can't hurt you if they can't find you now, can they? You'll be doing quite a few errands towards the end of every school day until you're sufficiently trained.

PATRICK

I didn't know habits had pockets.

Sister Mary Brigid stands up holding out her hand to Patrick who helps to pull her to her feet and they walk up the steps into the high school.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid moves some tables out of the way SQUEALING along the floor to make room for training Patrick. She moves a box and dumps it onto a large table. There are two pair of boxing gloves, head gear, and a boxing book. Patrick reaches for a pair of gloves.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Not so fast. There's much training to do first before we put on the gloves. Go and lock the door.

Patrick runs to the door and locks it and then runs back to Sister Mary Brigid. She shows him the proper fighter's stance and proceeds to shadow box against the projector screen on the wall. She turns on the lamp of the movie projector and shows Patrick his shadow.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Get to work boy. We have to be serious. After this no one can say you're afraid of your own shadow.

She moves with him, showing him how to throw straight punches and several combinations.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

That's it. Good, good, now never stand flatfooted or they'll knock you down every time. Up on the balls of your feet, like this.

She shows him and he does as she does.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Yes, that's it. Oh we're going to make a fighter out of you, Paddy. They'll rue the day they picked on you.

Patrick throws punches while Sister Mary Brigid watches him, occasionally moving his arms and fists into better positions.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Protect that face. We don't want anything broken. A little blood doesn't hurt, especially if it's not yours.

Patrick, BREATHING heavy gets tired after a while.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Okay, let's take a break.

They sit down together and Sister Mary Brigid takes two bottles of Coke from a refrigerator opens them and hands one to Patrick. He drinks. She puts a towel around his neck.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

This is fun! Reminds me of when I used to help my brothers train back home in Ireland. We had a nice farm with chickens and a little red rooster.

PATRICK

Do you see them, your brothers and sisters?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh yes, all but two live here in the states.

(MORE)

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

I have a younger sister who is a nun. She lives in Wisconsin and an older brother Liam, who lives in Chicago. He's a priest. Two are policemen. They're scattered about. I get back home every couple of years. It's nice to have family and friends, yes? Do you have many friends Paddy?

PATRICK

My brother Sean, I guess he's my best friend, and my Da. And some of the boys from the neighborhood they just don't go to school here. I had some friends here, but not anymore.

Sister Mary Brigid turns off the projector light and pulls up the movie screen.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

How about some poker?

PATRICK

Sure!

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Not for money, but my dear friend, Sister Agnes, makes beautiful fudge. We'll play for that!

She pulls a deck of card from her habit pocket and shuffles them as they sit at her desk. She deals the cards.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Five card, nothing wild?

Patrick nods.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

You know this?

Nodding again smiling.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Cards?

PATRICK

Two please.

Sliding two cards to him.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'll take three.

She discards and deals herself three new cards.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Pair of threes.

Laying her cards on the table.

PATRICK
Flush, sister!

Fanning his cards and showing them to her. Sister Mary Brigid looks at the clock.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
It's getting late. Shouldn't you be getting home. Your mom might worry. We'll play again tomorrow. Cut the cards for the fudge. You go first!

PATRICK
High or low wins?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
High!

Patrick shuffles the deck and sets it on the desk. He cuts the cards and shows her.

PATRICK
Jack of diamonds.

Sister Mary Brigid cuts the cards and turns it to Patrick an animated sad look on her face.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Ten of clubs. You win.

She open her desk drawer and pulls out a square of vanilla fudge wrapped in wax paper and sets it in front of Patrick. Patrick unwraps it and smells it. He breaks it in half and hands it to Sister Mary Brigid. She smiles.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Thanks Paddy. See you tomorrow. The principal may be sending for you!

Sister Mary Brigid holds up the boxing book before putting it in Patrick's gym bag.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
This is your book to keep. It's pretty good. Start reading it.

PATRICK
Thanks, bye sister!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM STOREROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON

The school janitor is standing on a ladder hanging a large chain from the ceiling in the storeroom as Sister Mary Brigid steadies the ladder from below.

JANITOR
You know me sister. I don't say much. Just do my job, but what the hell...sorry sister, why am I hanging a chain from your ceiling?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
You ask a lot of questions Bill. I like that about you. Keep working. If you must know, it's for an experiment.

The janitor climbs down from the ladder.

JANITOR
Experiment?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Yes, my class is studying the effects of hanging from a chain without food or water for three days. What are you doing next week? I may need you again.

JANITOR
I'm gettin' outta here, me!

The janitor folds his ladder quickly and runs out the door with it, yelling over his shoulder as he goes.

JANITOR (CONT'D)
See ya later sister. Good luck with that experiment.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Sister Mary Brigid BREATHING HEAVY is carrying a large bundle over her shoulder the size and shape of a body as she walks towards the front steps of the high school. She hurries along looking from left to right, suspiciously. She fumbles with the door but cannot open it with the bundle on her shoulder. She drops it with a THUD, opens the door and backs inside the building DRAGGING the bundle inside. Bill the Janitor drives by just in time to see Sister Mary Brigid dragging the bundle inside a pair of shoes sticking out of the bag.

His jaw drops in amazement and he speeds off just as the door SLAMS shut behind Sister Mary Brigid.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE -- MORNING

Sister Mary Brigid is paying a visit to the principal of the grade school SISTER BERNADETTE, a mid-thirties slender, pretty nun and her secretary BETTY, a heavily made-up woman in her sixties with a bee-hive hairdo and pointy framed glasses

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Bernie, I need the key to the nurse's office. She's not here today?

SISTER BERNADETTE
She's sick.

Motioning with her hand as if she were taking a shot of whiskey.

SISTER BERNADETTE (CONT'D)
And please call me sister in front of Betty.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Yes, yes, of course...

Rolling her eyes and saying loudly in the direction of Betty.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Bernie!

Sister Bernadette opens her drawer and picks up a ring of keys and shaking her head in mock disgust, throws them to Sister Mary Brigid.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Thank you Sister Bernadette. I'll bring them back in a wee bit.

SISTER BERNADETTE
Wait. What do you need in the nurse's office anyway?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Bless! I've never seen a more inquisitive bunch. I'm checking to see if she needs more first aid supplies, quite boring actually.

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid is seated at the nurse's desk looking for something and not finding it stands up and walks over to a row of filing cabinets and pulling at a drawer to open it,

finds it locked. Sister looks around for the key and is distracted by a pile of uniforms. She picks up several white shirts, inspects each and puts one aside. She does the same with several pair of pants. She continues to look in other drawers and does not find the key to the cabinets.

She reaches under her habit and removes a bobby pin from her hair, places it in her mouth while rearranging her habit. Sister Mary Brigid picks the lock on two drawers with the bobby pin and starts going through files. She pulls a stack of files from each drawer and stuffs them into her sleeve, rolls up the shirt and pants that she had previously set aside, locks the drawer, and backs out of the room smiling.

EXT. FRONT STEPS HIGH SCHOOL -- AFTERNOON

Sister Mary Brigid is sitting on the steps as Patrick comes running up to where she is sitting waving a piece of paper.

PATRICK

Special delivery Sister!

Handing her the note.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Thank you Paddy. Help me up child.
We have work to do!

She holds out her hand and Patrick helps her up. She holds her lower back and walks with a limp up the steps as Patrick holds the door open for her.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick and Sister Mary Brigid are sitting at sister's desk on which are laid a stack of manila folders.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Paddy, did you bring the class photo?

Rifling through his gym bag, Patrick pulls out a class photograph and hands it to Sister Mary Brigid.

PATRICK

Here it is Sister.

Handing her the photograph.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Hand me those cheaters child.

Pointing to a pair a glasses across the desk. He hands them to her and she puts them on. Sister Mary Brigid holds the photo at arms length bringing them into focus. She put the picture on the desk and pulls Patrick onto her lap.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Now, which ones are our problems
Paddy?

Patrick begins to point the bullies out, calling them by name as Sister Mary Brigid pulls a magnifying glass from her desk drawer to give each bully a closer look.

PATRICK

Mike, Mike McCafferty. He's the
boss!

Sister pulls the magnifying glass over the small picture and gets a good look at Mike.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Bless, child! The boy looks like an
ape! Tsk, tsk! I'm certain he's
missing a chromosome.

PATRICK

Yeah, just like an ape. His brother
Greg looks like an ape too.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Can he actually speak? Have you
ever seen him use a tool of any type?
His ears stick out like the doors on
a Buick...with a bad paint job, no
less.

PATRICK

Yep, he can talk all right. Lot's
of bad words. Even the one that
starts with "F".

Sister Mary Brigid mutters to herself.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Little bastard.

Patrick laughs.

Sister Mary Brigid points to the stack of folders.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Pull his file and set it over to the
side. Who's next?

PATRICK

Frank Morely. His brother Steve is
one grade down. They're both fat.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Pull Frank's file and his brother's file. Grab Greg McCafferty's as well.

Patrick flips through the folders and pulls the appropriates and puts them on the table next to Mike McCafferty's file.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Next.

PATRICK

Tim Gruber. The fattest one of the bunch. I think he got held back before...twice.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Bless! No wonder theses boys are so mean. They are a mess! Mmmm, I can almost smell him in this picture.

Patrick is already pulling the file as he yells out the next name.

PATRICK

Tom Roth! He's small and deadly just like that snake up there, the little green one.

Pointing to the jars on the shelves on the opposite side of the room and then the picture.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

He looks small and sickly. Puny! Anyone else?

PATRICK

Just Terry. Terry Schilligo. He used to be my friend too, until he beat me up in the bathroom last week.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Some friend. Okay keep those files over there and put the rest in the box. I'll need the picture for a day or two.

PATRICK

You can keep it. The only person I care about on that picture is my teacher.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

And?

Sister Mary Brigid points to Patrick in the photograph.

PATRICK

Me? Oh yeah, I care about me too.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

That's who I care about too. Now let's go into the storeroom.

Sister Mary Brigid walks into the storeroom and motions for Patrick to follow.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM STOREROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick stands in the doorway of the storeroom as Sister Mary Brigid climbs a chair and unhooks the chain suspended from the ceiling letting it fall closer to the floor. She climbs down from the chair and walks toward the storage shelves. Patrick sees two legs sticking out from between the shelves and GASPS as Sister steps over them and begins DRAGGING them out towards her. Patrick thinks it is a body.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Don't just stand there boy, help me.

Patrick is frozen with fear. Sister comes from between the shelves dragging a heavy boxing bag along the floor. There are pants legs sewn to the bottom of the bag complete with socks and shoes attached. Patrick SIGHS with relief.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Well?

PATRICK

Yes Ma'am. I thought you killed one of them.

Sister Mary Brigid (LAUGHING)

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No, Paddy. I didn't kill anyone. I just want it to be a little more realistic. Now help me hang this thing.

Sister picks up the heavy bag and holds it up near the dangling chain.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Hook the hook through the big ring. There, that's it.

PATRICK

That's pretty neat Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I should say! Stand next to it so we can see how tall it should be.

Patrick stands next to the bag and Sister eyes it up.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

How tall is the big fat one...Tim is it?

Patrick points from the top of his own head and then towards the heavy bag upward, estimating the height of the tallest bully. Sister brings the bag up and adjusts the hook, making it as tall as Patrick indicated.

PATRICK

That looks about right.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Good! Whew, that's a heavy thing. I like the way the legs look.

Sister picks up a pair of boxing gloves and hold them up so Patrick can put his hands into them.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Here ya go, Paddy. Time to go to work.

Sister slides on a pair as well and the two square off against the heavy bag.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Okay, now watch me and do as I do. Watch my feet. Remember the shadow boxing? Don't stand flat-footed.

Patrick watches and tries to mimic Sister as she moves around the bag slowly, but he keeps standing flat footed.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Here child. Stand right here.

Pointing to a spot on the floor.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Now stand on the balls of your feet and put your hands up like this to block the bag. There now stand there.

Sister pulls the bag back towards herself and sets it swing at Patrick it hits him but he stands up still as it bounces off him.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Good! Now stand flat-footed on the same spot.

Sister swings the bag at Patrick and the bag knocks him down CRASHING into a table full of jars and cans that fall to the floor. Patrick stands up slowly and walks toward the still swinging bag.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Ol' fat Tim knocked you down not me. Be mad at him. Careful, he's not going to just stand there, he'll be moving trying to hit you, trying to knock you down.

Patrick begins to punch the bag, slowly at first then faster and faster until he starts CRYING. Sister stops him and he stands there tears running down his face BREATHING HARD.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

You okay Paddy?

PATRICK

Yes, Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Are you hurt boy?

PATRICK

No Sister.

Sister rubs the top of Patrick's head, puts her hand on her hips.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

How did that feel? Good?

Patrick nods yes.

PATRICK

Pretty good.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Pretty good, I should say. You looked pretty good too. Now for some pointers. Try not to get too emotional. You've been hurt before and you are anticipating that you're going to be hurt. Remember the snake and the piranha...small and...deadly.

Patrick nods yes as he wipes his eyes and smiles at sister.

PATRICK

Small and deadly. I got it.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

You have the ability to make someone else hurt too. Remember that.

PATRICK

I will.

Sister takes her gloves off and then takes Patrick's off and walks him to a table in the storeroom next to the refrigerator. She opens it and takes out two bottles of Coke, opens them and hands him one. She picks up a towel and throws it at him. He takes it and wipes his face.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

You see Patrick. I understand that you don't want to hurt anyone. But you must understand you can't be expected to stand there and let someone hurt you.

PATRICK

But, what about turning the other cheek?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well...the way I look at it is that turning the other cheek stuff is for big people. You're too young to go through such nonsense. Besides, we're not talking about one boy hitting another, this is a gang of cowardly bullies attacking one small boy.

PATRICK

And deadly, don't forget about deadly.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Ah, yes, deadly. Anyway when you're older is when turning the other cheek becomes more important. You're named for two great saints. Neither Patrick nor Stephen would want you to put up with this kind of abuse.

PATRICK

So Stephen should have thrown rocks back when they were stoning him?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Stephen was a grown man.

(MORE)

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

You are still a boy. We all want
you to defend yourself. It's okay.
Do you understand?

PATRICK

Yes, Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Good. Now let's go out and pick out
another something small and deadly
to take home and study.

PATRICK

Neat!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister has her hand on Patrick's shoulder as she walks him
to the glass cabinets. She holds up several jars for him
one at a time and lets him inspect the creature inside.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Rattlesnake?

PATRICK

Pretty cool!

Shrugging his shoulders.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Tarantula?

PATRICK

Wow, hairy! Does it have teeth?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Fangs.

PATRICK

Lordy!

Shrugging his shoulders.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Baby shark?

PATRICK

There's no water on that playground
Sister.

Sister Mary Brigid puts the shark back on the shelf and then
stretches to reach another jar on the next higher shelf.
She holds it up for Patrick to see and he smiles and starts
nodding to yes to her.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh, I see we like this wee snake do ye? It's a baby King Cobra.

PATRICK

I know that's small and deadly! I saw one at the zoo. It was as big as me!

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Okay Paddy you can take this home and put it next to the piranha. If your parents ask about it they can call me at the convent later.

Sister hands the jar to Patrick and he holds it close and very careful.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Be very careful. That one's still alive in there!

Patrick GASPS and looks at the jar, looking for signs of life then looks up at Sister Mary Brigid and smiles at her.

PATRICK

You got me that time! I'll be careful.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

And?

PATRICK

And I promise I won't open the lid.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Good boy. See you tomorrow.

Patrick takes the jar containing the snake and runs out the door headed for home.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- EARLY AFTERNOON

Viewed through binoculars it is lunchtime on the playground. From a distance Patrick is on the playground by himself sitting against the wall of the gym reading a book about boxing. Sister Edith, the gym teacher, walks up to Patrick and starts talking to him. He looks sad and Sister Edith looks angry.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (O.S.)

Okay, you old Bitch.

INT. CONVENT ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid is in her room watching Sister Edith and Patrick through a pair of binoculars from an open window. She does not know what is being said but she knows she doesn't like it. She slams her binoculars on the nightstand.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Not today Sister, not today.

Sister Mary Brigid walks quickly toward the door and slams it on the way out.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid walks across the playground quickly to overhear the tail-end of the conversation between Sister Edith and Patrick. Sister Edith is holding the boxing book in one hand and shaking a yardstick at Patrick alternately pointing at the book.

SISTER EDITH
Well young man, I'm waiting...

Patrick says nothing, but is relieved to see Sister Mary Brigid.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Waiting for what Sister Edith?

SISTER EDITH
For this Irish Boy to answer me!

Sister Mary Brigid squats down and looks at Patrick and motions for him to answer.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Well, boy, cat got your tongue.
What did the good Sister ask you?
Don't be shy, tell me what she said.

PATRICK
Well, Sister. She wanted to know why I wasn't getting my exercise instead of reading that stupid book. When she saw the book was about boxing she offered to give me a boxing lesson.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
How kind! Are you a boxer, sister?

SISTER EDITH
I can hold my own.
(MORE)

SISTER EDITH (CONT'D)

The point is that this ruffian is planning on being a fighter. He's reading about it anyway. He's always rough-housing on this very playground and I keep telling him he's going to get someone hurt and...

Sister Mary Brigid interrupts, throwing a hand up as she cuts off Sister Edith.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

So you're going to teach an eleven year old boy about fighting?

SISTER EDITH

Why not? The lesson will do him good.

Waiving her yard stick in the air as she speaks.

SISTER EDITH (CONT'D)

Maybe cure his mean spirit. He'll never amount to anything anyway, probably end up in prison.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Mean spirit? Prison? What a great idea. Sister, may I have a word with you in private?

Motioning for Sister Edith to walk around the corner of the gymnasium with her. Sisters Mary Brigid and Edith walk around the back of the gym away from the students on the playground. Sister Mary Brigid motions behind her back with her hand for Patrick to remain where he is.

EXT. REAR OF GYMNASIUM -- MOMENTS LATER

The two nuns walk slowly at the rear of the gym.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

You going too easy on him or put a good ol' fashioned Catholic beating on him? Ya know, the double T's.

SISTER EDITH

Ah yes, teaching and torture. This little fella is always in the middle of it. He needs to be taught a lesson.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Plan on hurtin' him, then?

SISTER EDITH

It's for his own good, you know.

Wagging her yardstick in the air as she talks.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh, he needs taught a lesson all
right, true, true.

Sister Mary Brigid grabs the yardstick as Sister Edith swings
it in the air.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Give me that!

Sister Mary Brigid wrestles the yardstick from Sister Edith's
hand and snaps it over her knee and tosses it to the ground.

SISTER EDITH

Sister, what's gotten into you?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

If I hear of you ever laying a hand
on that boy, you'll answer to me,
Sister Edith! Do you understand?

SISTER EDITH

Mind your business and go back to
the high school. These children are
under my supervision and I'll do as
I see fit! That boy needs a lesson
and apparently you do too!

Sister Edith slaps at Sister Mary Brigid who blocks it and
punches Sister Edith in the stomach. When Sister Edith comes
at her again, Sister Mary Brigid punches her in the eye,
knocking here to the ground.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Bother that boy again and there'll
be more of the same. He's picked on
near daily under your watchful eye.
He doesn't need punished, he needs
to learn to defend himself!

Sister Edith MOANS holding her eye.

SISTER EDITH

But Sister...

SISTER MARY BRIGID

But Sister nothing. You, Sister are
a disgrace to the habit!

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MOMENTS LATER

Lunchtime is over and Sister Mary Brigid walks Patrick toward the school. She hands Patrick his boxing book.

INT. CLASSROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid stands in the doorway of Sister Mary Catherine's classroom with Patrick lightly pushing him inside toward his desk.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Sister I have one of your sheep.
Sister Edith and I were giving him a
special lesson. Please forgive him
for being late.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE

Patrick, you are just in time. We
were about to read about Saint
Stephen. I know he's your namesake.
Page eighty-eight we'll wait until
you're ready.

Patrick walks quickly to his desk, climbs in and reaches for his religion book from beneath his desk and flips through the pages as Sister Mary Brigid leaves.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Thank you sister.

Winking at Sister Mary Catherine.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE

No, thank you sister.

INT. GYMNASIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Bill the Janitor walks behind the gym and finds Sister Edith sitting on the ground holding her eye. The broken yardstick is on the ground next to her.

JANITOR

Sister! Here, let me help you. My
God! What happened to your face?

She pulls away, as he tries to help her up.

SISTER EDITH

Sister Mary Brigid gave me a boxing
lesson! Don't you have some vomit
to clean up somewhere? Leave me be
man!

Bill throws his broom across his shoulder and walks away smiling and talking to himself.

JANITOR

Geez, what a bitch! Never cared much for her anyway.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Sister Mary Brigid is sitting at her desk with file folders and papers before her. The door opens and Patrick walks in.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Hello Patrick.

PATRICK

Hi Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Learn anything today?

PATRICK

Plenty!

She smiles at him and speaks quietly to herself as Patrick walks closer to her desk.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I never liked that bitch!

PATRICK

What sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh nothing, just talking to myself.

PATRICK

What are you doing?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

A little homework,

PATRICK

Homework? What kind of homework?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Fight homework. Here, pull up a chair and look.

Patrick slides over next to Sister Mary Brigid and she starts piling piles in front of her.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Have you learned about Achilles yet?

PATRICK

Yes sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well I've found some.

PATRICK

Achilles' tendon?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well we know where his was. Now we know where some of theirs are. See I lifted some of the boys medical files to see if they had any problems.

PATRICK

Whoa! How'd you do that?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I told you I have two brothers who are policemen?

PATRICK

No.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I learned some things from them too.

LAUGHING.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Here, look. Seems like some of our little friends are not in the best of health. Three asthmatics, the Morely brothers and Tom Roth. Stomach punches should bring on some respiratory distress so we'll concentrate on that little gem for them.

PATRICK

Okay, what else?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Your former friend Terry has a hearing problem. He should probably be wearing hearing aids. You could probably sneak up on him if we have to...

PATRICK

What about the apes?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
The McCaffertys? Well, they're
healthy as horses...or apes if you
like.

Smiling at Patrick.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Their weak spot is their brains.
Dumb as a box of hair combined.
Probably why they're so angry.
Behavioral problems for several years
now, but their family donates a great
deal to the parish which is why they
get away with it. Their daddy drinks
with the Monsignor. They shouldn't
be too hard to outsmart. Just don't
try to fight them yet. They could
kill you.

Sister pulls out the last file and sets it in front of
Patrick.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Which is why I think we should
concentrate on Mr. Gruber.

PATRICK
Tim?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Yes, Tim. Why, what's wrong?

PATRICK
It's just that...that...he's the
biggest one. And the oldest.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Right, he's been held back twice so
we know he's not very bright. He is
big, but he's fat. He's mean, but
he's slow. But that's not why we're
concentrating on him. Look.

She lays his medical file in front of Patrick.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
How many times has he been to the
nurse's office, this year alone?

Patrick starts counting on his fingers.

PATRICK

One, two,
three...seven...eleven...fourteen.
He's been to the nurses office
fourteen times, so?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Why did he go so many times?

He continues reading.

PATRICK

Bloody nose?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Bloody nose, that's right! See,
he's prone to nose bleeds. I spoke
to his homeroom teacher and she told
me that once she yelled at him because
he wouldn't settle down in class and
his nose started bleeding. Nobody
ever touched him.

PATRICK

So I just yell at him?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No, Paddy, but you will have to target
his nose just like the guts on the
other three. That's his Achilles
tendon.

PATRICK

And the apes?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Stay away from them until you're
bigger, I think that if we can get
Tim Gruber to fight you, one on one,
in front of the others, and you can
get that nose bleedin' you'll take
the fight right out of him.

PATRICK

Why would that make him quit fighting?
They made my nose bleed before.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

How long did it bleed?

PATRICK

Couple minutes, I guess?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

His doesn't just go for a minute.
Every time it bleeds he has to go to
the doctor to get it to stop. Look
at his records. His mom has to sign
him out after every trip to the
nurse's office. Get it?

PATRICK

Yes Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

If you can get to him first and make
him bleed real good, I don't think
any of the others will want to mess
with you. He's the biggest, he's
the slowest and the fattest. I have
confidence in you Paddy, I believe
it will work.

PATRICK

When?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Not just yet. We'll know when it's
the right time.

INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE KITCHEN --EVENING

The Gallagher family is eating dinner at the kitchen table.

DAD

Pass the pork chops, please.

MOM

Here you are dear.

She passes him a platter of meat from across the table. She
glances down at the jar of formaldehyde with the baby King
Cobra floating in it.

MOM (CONT'D)

Paddy! Get that snake off the table.
You know I'm scared to death of
snakes.

DAD

Is that really a King Cobra, Paddy?
Let me see it.

Patrick slides it across the table to his dad. Who picks it
up and walks toward Mom holding it at eye level.

DAD (CONT'D)

Sssssssssssssss! Sssssssssssssss!

Mom SCREAMS and starts to run out of the room.

MOM

Malachy Joseph Gallagher! You'll pay for that. It's not funny.

SEAN

I'll take it Da. Give it to me.
I'll put it in our room next to the piranha, Paddy.

Dad hands the jar to Sean and he starts to walk out of the room with it.

SEAN (CONT'D)

Hey mom, look!

MOM

Don't you dare Sean Frances. Off with ya!

Sean LAUGHS as he runs out of the room. Patrick LAUGHS at his mom as she tries to compose herself.

DAD

Is that a real King Cobra, Paddy?

PATRICK

Yes Da.

DAD

You don't open the lid do you?

MOM

He better never!

PATRICK

I won't mom, I promise!

DAD

So Sister...

PATRICK

Mary Brigid.

DAD

Sister Mary Brigid is helping you with your science? That's nice. I don't know her, which one is she?

PATRICK

She teaches science at the high school. She takes care of the garden.

MOM

I've met her. She seems very nice.

PATRICK

She used to live on a farm with her brothers and sisters. She had a pet rooster and everything!

DAD

Well I hope you are paying attention. She sounds pretty interesting. I'll have to meet her sometime, maybe one of these weekends.

MOM

You could invite her to dinner one night Paddy, if you'd like.

PATRICK

Thanks mom.

Sean walks back into the room.

SEAN

I'm finished mom.

Picking his plate up from the table and handing it to her.

DAD

Okay boys you go get cleaned up and get ready for bed. Paddy we're getting you new glasses tomorrow.

PATRICK

Let's go Sean. You heard Da.

SEAN

Aw, stop pushin' me already.

The boys walk out of the room.

DAD

Sounds like that boy really likes that nun. That's nice. I hope he learns something from her.

MOM

I'm sure he will.

INT. OPTOMETRIST'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Patrick is sitting in a chair waiting as doctor is with another patient. His parents and brother are looking around. Patrick is trying to read a magazine, squinting hard.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (O.S.)
Which is better, a or b, a or b?

PATIENT (O.S.)
B.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (O.S.)
Now which is better a or b?

PATIENT (O.S.)
A.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (O.S.)
Good! Miss Hardcastle will finish
up your paperwork and your glasses
should be here in a few days.

Doctor Breeman walks out of the exam room and sees Patrick and the rest of the family. Doctor Breeman is a man in his sixties with white hair and very thick eyeglasses.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
Ah, Patrick. Hello Gallagher family.

Waving.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
Ready to try out those new glasses?

Patrick waits patiently while Doctor Breeman sorts through packages of glasses holding each close to his face so he can read the labels. He picks up a large magnifying glass and uses it to read the labels.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
No, no, not this one. No that's not
it.

Patrick picks up a lone package from the desk and looks at the label. He taps Doctor Breeman on the back.

PATRICK
Is this mine, Doctor Breeman?

Doctor Breeman turns around and examines the package with his magnifying glass.

DOCTOR BREEMAN
Ah, yes, here we go! Sit, Paddy,
Sit.

Doctor Breeman tears the package open, takes a pair of glasses out of a box and wipes the lenses with a cloth as he sits on a chair opposite Patrick and slips them onto Patrick's head.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
How do they feel?

Patrick adjusts them and looks in the mirror.

PATRICK
Good.

DOCTOR BREEMAN
Well boy, can you see?

Patrick looks around and starts smiling. He stands and walks to the window.

PATRICK
Mom, I can see even better than I could with my old ones!

MOM
Really?

DOCTOR BREEMAN
His prescription changed a little. He's pretty near-sighted, but not as bad as me.

Doctor Breeman taps on the lenses of his glasses with an ink pen.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
Patrick, grab your brother and come over here by my desk. I found something you need to see.

Doctor Breeman walks to his desk and slides open a big drawer as the boys follow him.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
I found these while cleaning the basement last week.

SEAN
Whoa! What are those?

PATRICK
Eyeballs?

DOCTOR BREEMAN
Glass eyes! That's right!

Doctor Breeman sorts through a tray of glass eyes moving them around CLINKING.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
 Yes, here's a nice dark brown one
 for you Patrick.

Handing a glass eye to Patrick.

Doctor Breeman bends over and gets close to Sean's face,
 squinting.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
 And for you, young Sean, blue!

Looks some more and picks up a glass eye and looks closely
 at it.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
 A beautiful blue eye! Not as blue as
 yours, but blue none the less. Here
 you go.

Sean takes the eye, smiling.

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)
 Mom, if it's okay?

MOM
 Well, I guess? Yucky! Are they
 clean?

DOCTOR BREEMAN
 Never been in a socket, I assure you
 madame. I don't really need them
 and besides,... Boys like this kind
 of stuff.

Boys smiling, Patrick stuffs his glass eye into his pocket
 and Sean puts his against his own eye and frowns to hold it
 in place and shows his mom.

SEAN
 Look, Ma!

MOM
 Oh good Lord, Malachy make him stop!
 Put it away Sean!

DAD
 Malachy! Do like your mother says.

Sean puts his eyeball in his pocket as the family walks to
 the front door with Doctor Breeman.

DOCTOR BREEMAN
 Goodbye Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher.
 (MORE)

DOCTOR BREEMAN (CONT'D)

If he has any problem with the glasses bring him back. Boys no more scaring mom.

The boys wave goodbye to Doctor Breeman as they leave the store.

EXT. STREET MARKET -- CONTINUOUS

The Gallagher family is standing in front of the optometrist looking at the fit and style of Patrick's new glasses. Patrick looks at his reflection in the window. His dad hands him a hard eyeglass case.

DAD

Here Paddy. For when you feel like rough-housing with your friends or your brother. Put your specs in here and maybe they won't get broken.

PATRICK

Thanks Da!

Turning to his mother.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Mom, can we go into Joe Brown's Meat Market?

MOM

Sure, let's go. Malachy, we won't be long. I'll just grab some things. Why don't you take Sean to the Red Goose shoe store.

DAD

Meet you back at the car.

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick and Mom are at the rear of the family car. Mom closes the trunk and they climb into the car. Dad and Sean are already in the car.

INT. GALLAGHER FAMILY CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

The family is driving home. Dad and Mom are LAUGHING. The cars pulls to the curb along the fence of the nun's garden next to the school and Dad climbs out.

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick is walking toward the garden gate. His family is pulling away from the curb in the family car.

Dad calls out to Patrick.

DAD
Not too long now.

PATRICK
Okay, Da!

Patrick is carrying a large box as he opens the gate and closes it behind him.

EXT. NUN'S GARDEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick see Sister Mary Brigid and walks toward her.

PATRICK
Hey, Sister!

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Paddy, what brings you here on the weekend?

Sister Mary Brigid's hands and face are covered with dirt. Patrick holds up the box.

PATRICK
I brought you a present for your garden.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
A present, child you shouldn't have! Let's see. What do you suppose is in here?

Sound of ROOSTER CROWING

Sister Mary Brigid's eyes light up and well with tears. She unties the string holding the box lid and reaches in and gently pulls out a live red rooster.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Oh, Paddy he's beautiful! How did you know?

PATRICK
Remember? You told me about your farm when you were little...

Sister Mary Brigid drops to her knees and gets nose to nose with Patrick, getting dirt on his face. She kisses him on the forehead while cradling the rooster and cupping his face with one hand.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh Paddy, God love ya, you're a grand,
good boy.

She hands him the rooster.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Set him down, set him down. Let him
get used to the garden. Oh, I do
believe he'll be at home here. Plenty
of bugs. We'll have to have Bill
make him a little coop so he'll have
a place to sleep.

Patrick chases the rooster into the flower bed and returns
to Sister's side.

PATRICK

I'd better be getting home Sister.
I'll see you later!

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Right after school. It's almost
time, boy.

Patrick runs toward the garden gate. ROOSTER CROWING.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY -- MORNING

Patrick closes the closet door in the sacristy and shadow
boxes against the adjoining wall while the Monsignor SNORING
sleeps in his chair. Patrick walks past him then turns
quickly facing the sleeping Monsignor and shadowboxes him as
he sleeps. The Monsignor stirs, scaring Patrick who runs
out the door.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick runs down the back steps of the church and rounding
the corner runs into the midst of the bullies. ROOSTER
CROWING.

INT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid walks into the office where Mother Superior
(elderly woman with a mean sour face) is seated behind her
desk. On the opposite side of the desk sits Mr. and Mrs.
Gallagher and Sister Edith who has a large black eye. Sisters
Mary Brigid and Edith exchange hateful glances.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Ah, Sister Mary Brigid, come in,
come in. This is Mr. and Mrs.
Gallagher, Patrick's parents.

Sister Mary Brigid walks in, nods, and sits.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Good morning. It's very nice to meet you both. Patrick is a lovely boy. He's told me so much about you both.

DAD

Pleased to meet you, Sister.

MOM

Sister.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Sister, it has been brought to my attention by Sister Edith, that young Patrick might be receiving some unauthorized training in addition to your gracious offer to help him with his science studies.

MOM

Sister Mary Brigid, we don't condone fighting. Paddy's too little. He could get hurt.

DAD

Sister I know you mean well, but like my wife said, we don't want him getting hurt.

MOM

Paddy thinks the world of you, Sister. We just wanted to be sure that you understood how we felt about fighting.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Oh, I believe we all understand now. Don't we sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher, I assure you we were just having a little fun, nothing more. It won't be a problem. I understand completely.

DAD

Thanks Sister.

MOM

Thank you for your time sister.

The Gallaghers walk out along with Sister Edith. Sister Mary Brigid gets up to leave.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
A word in private, sister?

Sister Mary Brigid closes the door.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Certainly.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Sister, the report I received from Sister Edith was most disturbing. I can assure you, as I have the Gallaghers, that fighting will not be tolerated and that includes any training you may have in store for their boy.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
But Mother...

MOTHER SUPERIOR
But, nothing. You will cease such nonsense immediately or there will be consequences.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Such as?

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Certainly there are other parishes in dire need of such an energetic and entertaining educator as yourself. Some of our rougher parishes perhaps. This is a peaceful parish, let's keep it that way Sister. Do we understand each other?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Sister.

Sister Mary Brigid nods her head and walks out of the room closing the door behind her.

EXT. NUN'S GARDEN -- MORNING

Sister Mary Brigid is working in her garden and sees Patrick and the other boys. She watches from a distance but does not intervene, talking to herself.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Those little bastards! C'mon boys, how's about a fair fight? Watch yourself Patrick.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- CONTINUOUS

The bullies walk around Patrick in a large circle. He turns in a small circle waiting for the attack.

MIKE MCCAFERTY

Where ya been Paddy? We missed Ya.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Yeah, we missed ya.

STEVE MORELY

Been lookin' for ya.

TERRY SCHILLIGO

I told you he was servin' mass

FRANK MORELY

Gonna run away?

PATRICK

No, I ain't runnin' away.

Patrick quickly takes his glasses off and puts them in the case and slides it into his pocket. He puts his hands up and waits for the fight to start.

TOM ROTH

If you were smart, you'd already be runnin'

TIM GRUBER

Yeah, it's your funeral.

Tim Gruber grabs Patrick from behind, holding his arms. The McCaffertys punch him in the face and stomach. The other boys do the same.

EXT. NUN'S GARDEN -- CONTINUOUS

Sister Mary Brigid winces as Patrick is hit again and again. She throws punches in the air trying to direct Patrick. Sadly she watches to see how he will handle himself.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- CONTINUOUS

Patrick stomps on Tim Gruber's foot and he loses his grip on Patrick. In a blind rage and CRYING Patrick lashes out. He takes a boxers stance and punches Tom Roth in the stomach. He punches both Morley boys in the stomach. Steve Morely goes down and has trouble breathing. Tom Roth starts wheezing. Frank Morley helps his brother up and they run away following the McCaffertys. Terry Schilligo is watching the others run away and doesn't hear Patrick run up behind him.

Terry turns around just as Patrick swings hard with a right cross and hits Terry in the eye knocking him down.

PATRICK

That's for you, old friend!

EXT. NUN'S GARDEN -- CONTINUOUS

Sister Mary Brigid is jumping up and down wringing her hands as Terry goes down hard, holding his eye. She then cringes still talking to herself.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Patrick! Behind you!

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- CONTINUOUS

Tim Gruber grabs Patrick around the throat from behind and starts choking him. Patrick goes down unable to breathe. Tim Gruber sits on Patrick straddling him and still choking him. His eyes are rolling back in his head. Suddenly a big boot kicks Tim Gruber in the seat of his pants.

JANITOR

Get off him, boy! Now get! Fat little son of a bitch. Chokin' ain't fightin'.

TIM GRUBER

This ain't over Paddy!

Tim Gruber runs away with Terry Schilligo in tow. Bill, the janitor, kneels beside Patrick.

JANITOR

Paddy, can you hear me?

Shaking Patrick and helping him stand up. As Sister Mary Brigid runs up to where Patrick is getting up.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Did ya see him sister? He's gettin' better. How do ya figure that happened?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Yes, I saw! Oh Jesus Paddy! Look at your eye. Oh dear, I think we should tell your ma. Maybe this isn't such a good idea after all.

PATRICK

No Sister. I'm okay.
(MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)

I got some licks in that time. It's just there's too many of them to fight. Do you think one of them will ever go for a fair fight?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'm not sure boy. Do you want to try that?

PATRICK

Before you tell my mom and dad? Yes, Ma'am!

SISTER MARY BRIGID

C'mon then.

Holding out her hand to Patrick.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Let's get something on that eye.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Sister Mary Brigid is talking to Sister Bernadette.

SISTER BERNADETTE

You want him excused from classes today? Why is he sick?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No...just a little banged up is all. I just need to work on some things with him.

SISTER BERNADETTE

What if his parents ask?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Direct them to me. I'm only asking for this one day dear. Please?

SISTER BERNADETTE

I hope you know what you're doing?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh I do!

SISTER BERNADETTE

Go, then!

Muttering to herself as she walks out of the office.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Lord, I hope I do.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM STOREROOM

Sister Mary Brigid watches Patrick work on the heavy bag, the sewn on pants legs and attached shoes make SWISHING sounds as they drag the floor.

JANITOR

Kinda creepy, sister.

Bill the janitor is sweeping the floor outside the storeroom and stops to listen to the THUDS on the other side of the door and the SWISHING. He pushes the door open slowly and sees Sister Mary Brigid and Patrick punching the bag. Bill starts to light a cigarette and sister looks at him.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Sorry, sister.

Bill starts to put the unlit cigarette back in the pack.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Go ahead Bill. I won't tell.

Reaching for his cigarettes.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

May I?

JANITOR

Sure...I didn't know nuns smoked?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I pride myself in not being typical.
Keeps me young.

Sister Mary Brigid lights the cigarette and puffs it heavily as she walks toward Patrick and the heavy bag.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Patrick, you did well today. But, I don't think you're ready yet.

PATRICK

Okay. Whatever you say, sister.

JANITOR

Ya know Sister, I used to box...Golden Gloves.

Bill walks around the bag sizing it up as he lights his cigarette. He shoves it with one hand. Bill punches the bag several times slowly. He then attacks the bag with a flurry of combinations that send the bag swinging, the chain it is hanging from CLINKING while the cigarette dangles from his lip.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Hey kid, what say I take you and the good sister here down to my old gym tomorrow and introduce you to some of the guys.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Bill, maybe you could teach him some...

JANITOR

Sure, sure, but he's such a little fella. I want him to meet some featherweights and see what they can do. The kinda damage they can do being little and all.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

That would be great Bill, Paddy?

PATRICK

Yes, can we?

JANITOR

Ya know, part of this boxing thing is psychological. Just 'cause your big don't mean you're tough, you'll see.

Patrick nodding as Bill speaks.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

How's about one o'clock?

Bill looks at sister who shrugs her shoulders and nods okay.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'll get you out before lunch and we can be back before anyone knows we're gone.

JANITOR

I'll tell Mother Superior I have to go downtown for supplies.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

We can't tell. It could be the end of me here.

JANITOR

Sister, you know me. I don't say much. Not about to start now. Anyways got no use for bullies or mean-assed nuns.

(MORE)

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Sorry sister, no offense. Meet you at the side door of the high school at one, then?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Perfect!

KNOCKING at the door. A female student enters the store room.

FEMALE STUDENT

Excuse me sister. I have a note from the grade school nurse.

Sister Mary Brigid holds the burning cigarette behind her back and takes the note from the girl, who leaves.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Thank you, dear.

Who leaves. Sister Mary Brigid sweeps the door closed with her hip starts smoking again as she unfolds the note reading.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Aha! This is good news!

Bill and Patrick stand next to her as she continues reading.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Tim Gruber went to the nurses office today for a horrible nosebleed! The nurse said he was crying for his mommy and she came and took him away to the doctor. He'll be back at school tomorrow.

She walks over to the heavy bag, cigarette dangling from her lip. She picks up a red marker and draws an X on the face already on the heavy bag and points.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

...hmmm, a real gusher this time too'. That settles it. This is your target Patrick. Tim Gruber's nose. Hit it, Paddy!

Paddy swings at the bag again and again hitting his mark. The bag spins toward sister, who also punches the bag, still smoking her cigarette.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Paddy, and if anyone else steps in...the secret weapon.

Sister Mary Brigid kicks the heavy bag and lands a kick with a THUD between the legs attached to the bag. Bill the janitor grabs his crotch and GROANS.

JANITOR

Geez, sister! That just ain't natural, but it'll work. Probably bring down an old bull moose if he connects like that.

She motions for Patrick to kick the bag as she holds it still. Patrick kicks it several times LAUGHING.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Just stay away from him as best you can. Move in close, fast, attack the nose, then get away. He can't fight. We know he's a choker.

Pointing back at the nose on the bag. Patrick stops kicking and starts punching again until he is BREATHING HARD and stops. Sister takes another cigarette from Bill and lights it.

PATRICK

When do I challenge him, Sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

In a week maybe? But, definitely in the cafeteria. He won't be able to back down. He'd look like a chicken in front of the others if he said no.

JANITOR

Sounds good to me, makes sense. I'll be there for that one.

PATRICK

Right, sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'll make certain that Sister Regina is working the cafeteria. She's deaf as a post! When the time is right you'll tell old Tim you'll meet him after school on the playground...and insist on a fair fight.

JANITOR

I'd better start locking up, Sister.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Oh yes, Bill, one more thing. I just remembered. I'll be needing you to build a nice little coop for my rooster.

JANITOR

Sure, Sister. I'll get right on it.

Bill walks out, muttering to himself.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Fuckin' rooster!

Sister grounds out her cigarette, wipes Patrick's face with a towel, and walks him out to the classroom.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL -- AFTERNOON

Bill the janitor is waiting in his car by the side door of the high school. The passenger door is open. Sister Mary Brigid steps out and looks around to see if anyone is watching. She steps out slowly and walks toward the car turning around and when the coast is clear hurriedly motions for Patrick to run. They both jump into Bill's car and the car speeds away.

INT. BILL'S CAR -- AFTERNOON

Bill is driving with Patrick sitting between him and Sister Mary Brigid.

PATRICK

Think anyone saw us?

JANITOR

Ah, boy ya worry too much, you're fine. How's it goin' Sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Swell, just swell.

JANITOR

Plenty to learn, huh Paddy?

PATRICK

I'm ready.

EXT. OUTSIDE BOXING GYM -- AFTERNOON

The three are climbing out of Bill's car and walking toward the open door of the gym. The gym is a run down building in al older section of town. Boxers are coming and going.

BOXER WITH GYM BAG

Hey, Bill.

JANITOR

Johnny, The Hook! What's happenin',
buddy? Knock out this Friday?

Bill throws punches in the air in the direction of the boxer.

BOXER WITH GYM BAG

You know it, you know it!

Yelling over his shoulder as he passes the trio in the street.

PATRICK

Whoa, he's big!

JANITOR

Not so much. He's a middleweight.
There's bigger inside kid, gorilla
big. Most of 'em are probably at
home in bed. These big guys 'round
here tend to train more at night.
Too hot for 'em during the day.

PATRICK

Oh.

Sister nods her head as though she understands then shrugs
her shoulders as if she has no clue. As they walk closer to
the entrance. SPEED BAGS and HEAVY BAGS get louder as they
walk closer. Patrick wrinkles his nose.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Whew! Smells like my dad after he
gets done working in the yard.

Bill LAUGHS.

The three walk through an assortment of boxers training,
SKIPPING ROPE, working out with MEDICINE BALLS, and SPARRING.

GRUNTING HEAVY BREATHING.

Bill points them in the direction of the ring where some
lightweights are sparring. The boxers are between rounds.
One of the boxers sees Bill and waves to him from inside the
ring. Bill waves back.

JANITOR

See that guy, Paddy?

Pointing to a small boxer in the ring.

PATRICK

Yep.

JANITOR

That's Johnny Bottle Rocket Rodriguez.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

He's so tiny.

JANITOR

Just watch.

PATRICK

Why do they call him Bottle Rocket?

JANITOR

Well because he has a short wick, I guess. He just sort of explodes and he's very, very, fast.

BELL rings.

The two fighters come out swinging and Bill watches Patrick duck and move and cringe at the sound of the PUNCHES. Bottle Rocket knocks his sparring partner down twice before the end of the round.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

He's very fast, isn't he?

JANITOR

He sure is Sister, and he hits like a ton of bricks too. You want to spar with him or do ya just wanna stick to Sister Edith?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No, no, I'm just fine, thank you.

JANITOR

How 'bout you Paddy?

PATRICK

Lord, no!

JANITOR

Come on up in the ring and meet him.

Bill helps Patrick up the stairs and into the ring. He slides through the ropes and walks over to where Johnny is standing holding onto the ropes talking to one of his trainers. The trainer points to Bill behind him.

JOHNNY

Howdy, Bill. This your friend Paddy?

JANITOR
Sure is. Paddy, this is Johnny.

JOHNNY
Pleased to meet you Paddy. You can call me Bottle Rocket if you'd like. That's what my friends call me.

PATRICK
Hi, Bottle Rocket.

JOHNNY
Hi, Sister.

Johnny waves to Sister Mary Brigid who is sitting in a chair ringside. She waves back.

JANITOR
That's Sister Mary Brigid.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Pleased to meet you, Johnny.

Johnny gets down on one knee so he is at eye level with Patrick. Bill moves away so the two can talk.

JOHNNY
Bill tells me you're havin' some trouble at school? Bullies, huh?

PATRICK
Yep.

JOHNNY
I went to Catholic school too and ya know what?

PATRICK
What?

JOHNNY
I was smaller than you are. How old are you ten, eleven?

PATRICK
Eleven.

JOHNNY
Yep, I was smaller than you when I was eleven. I used to get beat up all the time too.

Patrick smiles knowing that someone like Johnny has been in his shoes before.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I hear that the good sister has been showing you some stuff. That's good. Watch ol' Bill too. Great boxer. If ya got him, ya don't need me, but if you're a friend of Bill's you're a friend of mine, okay?

PATRICK

Okay?

Johnny yells to one of his trainers.

JOHNNY

Hey, Mikey, got a minute? Put some gloves on this kid for me will ya?

Mikey enters the ring puts some gloves on Patrick and laces them up.

MIKEY

There ya go, buddy.

JOHNNY

Okay, first let's see your stance.

Patrick shows him his stance and Johnny looks him over.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Not bad, not bad. I see someone's been paying attention. Who taught you that?

PATRICK

Sister.

JOHNNY

Well, you can listen to her too then.

Johnny swings at Patrick's face slowly and Patrick blocks it.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What are you protecting?

PATRICK

My face?

JOHNNY

Perfect! Always try to protect your face.

Johnny gets on both knees and puts his gloves up to protect his own face.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Now, hit me Paddy.

PATRICK
Where?

JOHNNY
In the face.

Patrick tries but cannot hit him Johnny the face.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Well? I'm waiting.

PATRICK
I can't.

JOHNNY
How 'bout somewhere else then.

Patrick starts hitting Johnny in the body over and over. Johnny shoves Patrick on top of his head pushing him backwards as they trade punches. Patrick gets mad and starts swinging wildly at Johnny hitting him again and again in the body.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Sorry about the bump on the head,
Paddy. That pissed you off a little
huh?

Patrick, BREATHING HEAVY.

PATRICK
A little.

JOHNNY
That's good. Short fuse. Just...
when somebody gives you one of those
bumps try to concentrate on whatever
target they show you. Understand?

PATRICK
Yes,

JOHNNY
Take the head if they give it to
you, if not. Go after the body. We
like to say kill the body and the
head will die.

PATRICK
What if there's more than one?

JOHNNY
Are you a fast runner?

PATRICK

Pretty fast.

JOHNNY

Then run as fast as you can. That's what I used to do. And guess what? I don't have to run anymore. Got it?

PATRICK

Got it.

JOHNNY

Great! How's about let me show you around the gym a little?

Johnny shows Patrick around the gym. He lets Patrick use a speed bag and shows him a little about jumping rope. He gives a rope to Patrick to take home.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Here, Paddy. Take this home and work on it. It's great for endurance and breathing. Not too much. Don't wanna lose too much weight. Guys like you and me can't afford it.

PATRICK

Thanks, Johnny.

JOHNNY

You need gloves?

PATRICK

Na, Sister already gave me a pair.

JOHNNY

You look thirsty. The water fountain's over in the corner.

Pointing to the water fountain. Patrick runs to get a drink.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hey Bill, hey sister.

Johnny waves them over and talks to them while Patrick gets a drink.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Honestly, the kid's little, but ya know he actually hits pretty hard. You two got the mechanics down and he knows to protect his face.

Bill and Sister look at each other a little surprised.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Bill tells me the little guy's been takin' a whippin' pretty regular. I think he's about had enough. When someone rings his bell, he'll go off. The fuse is already lit. I know.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'm just not sure...

JOHNNY

Sister, if he gets in a one on one fight and loses, at least he's tried. I don't know the kid, but if he's like me, I'm thinkin' he's about at that stage of the game. He doesn't really need my help.

JANITOR

Johnny's right, Sister. He can try and if it's not a happy ending...we'll just have to train some more.

JOHNNY

Just help him get a fair fight. Good luck. If it doesn't work out bring him back to me.

Patrick come back with a towel draped around his neck.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Ready to go?

PATRICK

Yep. Thanks Bottle Rocket.

JOHNNY

You're welcome, Paddy. Come back and see me anytime. Bill, keep in touch.

Johnny and Bill shake hands and the three leave the gym.

INT. BILL'S CAR--MOMENTS LATER

Patrick wipes the sweat from his face and head while sandwiched between Bill and Sister Mary Brigid.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

So, what did you think of Mr. Rocket?

PATRICK

He's a good boxer. He told me that Bill's a good boxer too!

SISTER MARY BRIGID
I'm sure Bill is, at that.

JANITOR
He gave you some good advice?

PATRICK
He told me that he was a fast runner
when he was my age!

LAUGHING.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
He told me I'd know when I was ready,
whenever somebody pushed my button.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
And you understood that?

PATRICK
Yep.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
I hope no one's been looking for us!

JANITOR
You worry too much.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- AFTERNOON

They walk hand in hand to the glass cabinet full of jars.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
What will you pick today, Paddy?

Patrick stands looking at the various creatures floating in formaldehyde. Sister Mary Brigid picks up jar after jar holding it up for Patrick to see.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)
Brown Recluse?

PATRICK
Naw.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Black Widow?

PATRICK
Naw!

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Alligator? Lord, look at all those
teeth.

PATRICK
No good. What else?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Asp? Like the one that killed
Cleopatra?

PATRICK
I don't think so. What's that one?

Patrick reaches back into the cabinet standing on his tiptoes and pulls out a jar, smaller than the others with a dark object floating in it.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Well, it's certainly small, but
deadly? Hardly. It's just a mouse,
Paddy. They don't fight or attack.

PATRICK
He must be deadly if he has to be.
Look at his big teeth.

Patrick looks closely at the mouse floating in the formaldehyde.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Will a mouse defend itself?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
I suppose they will. I suppose they
will.

PATRICK
Just like me then? He's the one.
I'll take him home.

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Well, I see you have learned something
in this classroom...and you're not
even in high school yet.

Patrick sits down at a desk looking at the mouse in the jar.

PATRICK
Sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Yes, Paddy?

PATRICK
I've been thinkin'

SISTER MARY BRIGID
About?

PATRICK

Well, after talkin' to Bottle Rocket,
I think I'm gonna ask for a fair
fight tomorrow at lunch.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I can't make that decision for you,
boy. Nobody can. Do you think you're
ready.

PATRICK

I don't know if I'll win, but I'm
ready to try.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Well you know I'm on your side, so's
Bill. If you change your mind, that's
okay too. You're call.

PATRICK

Tomorrow at lunch, then.

Sister tightens the lid on the jar and Patrick holds it close to his chest as they walk toward the door. They stop and Sister Mary Brigid puts a finger tip under Patrick's chin so he can see her face.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Paddy, you're a good boy. You get
some sleep tomorrow's a big day.
I'll be watching you. Remember
protect your face and aim for that
nose, and don't worry about the blood.
It's him that'll be worryin' about
the blood.

PATRICK

I'll just be glad to have this over
with.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Me too. Me too.

PATRICK

C'mon Stephen, let's go home.

Talking to the mouse as they walk out the door. Sister sits down at her desk, opens the drawer and takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights one while rubbing the large crucifix she wears around her neck.

INT. PATRICK'S PARENT'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Patrick's parent are lying in bed

MOM

All I'm saying is I think he's been fighting.

DAD

He's just a boy. They fall down a lot.

MOM

Maybe he's being bullied. Maybe the nun knows more than we do? Maybe it's time you teach him...Oh, I don't know. You're his Da...do what Da's do.

DAD

I'll talk to him again. These things have a way of working themselves out without moms and dads getting involved. If I step in at the wrong time things could get worse.

MOM

I know...it's just that he's so little and...

Interrupting.

DAD

And he's your baby, and you're worried. That's what moms do. Let's get some sleep and I'll talk to him tomorrow.

Malachy kisses Christine good night, pulls up the covers and rolls over to turn out the light on the nightstand.

DAD (CONT'D)

Good night, love. It'll be okay.

MOM

I hope so. Good night, sweetie.

INT. CAFETERIA -- NEXT AFTERNOON

Patrick walks up to the table where all the bullies are sitting eating lunch. Sister Regina is walking around the cafeteria hearing nothing.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Oh, look guys it's Paddy.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

As soon as lunch is over we're going to beat the crap out of you.

Patrick stands there nodding as they talk.

STEVE MORELY

I owe you for that punch, remember?

FRANK MORELY

Yeah, me too. I had a asthma attack.
My ma said I could've died.

TOM ROTH

Yeah, me too.

TIM GRUBER

Shut up Roth! Hey Paddy, how'd ya
like goin' to sleep?

Holding his hands up as if he were choking someone. They
all LAUGH.

PATRICK

I have a great idea, Mike.

The cafeteria gets quiet.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

What?

PATRICK

You guys beat me up everyday,
sometimes twice a day, right. How
good are you at a fair fight?

WHISPERS throughout the cafeteria. Sister Regina is working
the cafeteria and is distracted by Sister Mary Brigid who
sneaks in to watch the challenge. Sister Mary Brigid keeps
Sister Regina's back to the commotion.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Sister Regina, do you have the time?

SISTER REGINA

Hello Sister Mary Brigid. What do I
have a dime? What do you need a
dime for?

Reaching into her habit for her coin purse.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

No, no Sister, nevermind.

Sister Mary Brigid walks Sister Regina to the cafeteria line
to get her a cup of hot tea while the boys continue to talk.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Whatya mean, fair fight?

PATRICK
I mean me against one of you, just
one. You know, fair?

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Well I...

PATRICK
Or are you guys chicken?

LOUDER BACKGROUND CHATTER

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
I'll show you who's chicken.

PATRICK
Okay, then. I'll pick one of you
and we'll fight. If I win you leave
me alone. If I lose..well I guess
everything stays the same.

The cafeteria gets quiet again and everyone is waiting for
the answer from Mike McCafferty.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Well, I ain't no chicken. Pick one.
Why not pick me?

GREG MCCAFFERTY
He'll probably pick Roth. He's the
smallest.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Shut up, Greg.

Tom Roth pulls his stocking cap down lower so he doesn't get
picked. Terry Schilligo, still sporting a black eye eats
nervously at his tray of food.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY (CONT'D)
Pick one, or I'll pick for you.

PATRICK
I'll pick Tim Gruber. See you after
school on the playground, Tim.

GREG MCCAFFERTY
You're kidding?

MIKE MCCAFFERTY
Tim 'll kill him.

STEVE MORELY
Lucky thing he didn't pick me!

FRANK MORELY

Yeah, or me. I'd brain him!

Terry Schilligo and Tom Roth look at each other and SIGH with relief.

Everyone looks at Patrick in amazement as he walks over to a corner table and sits down to eat lunch by himself.

EXT. PLAYGROUND -- AFTERNOON

Patrick walks out to the playground carrying his little plaid gym bag. He is followed by a large group of students who come from all directions to watch the fight. Patrick opens his gym bag and looks at Stephen, his little mouse, floating in the jar. Tim Gruber and the rest of the bullies walk over to where Patrick is standing.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

Okay, Tim. Let's get this over with and send this little crybaby home.

TIM GRUBER

You ready to go to sleep, Paddy?

Patrick stands his ground and in the distance sees Sister Mary Brigid and Bill the janitor watching from the garden. Sister rolls up her sleeve and points to her watch and nods to Patrick, who whispers quietly.

PATRICK

It's time.

TIM GRUBER

What?

PATRICK

I said it's time.

PATRICK'S SHADOW SWEEPS ACROSS TIM GRUBER

He takes a proper boxers stance and waits for Tim's reaction. Tim doesn't move. Patrick moves in cautiously and starts jabbing at Tim.

TIM GRUBER

Hey look everybody. We got a real fighter here.

Patrick steps into him and punches Tim in the eye before he can react.

TIM GRUBER (CONT'D)

Why, you little...

Patrick steps in and hits Tim with a combination, ending with a quick jab at Tim's nose, stunning Tim.

The crowd of students ROARS in approval.

Sister, at the fence is swinging punches in the air as Patrick fights while Bill smokes a cigarette nervously. Tim grabs for Patrick when he moves in again clumsily. Patrick avoids him and punches him in the nose, stopping him. Tim checks his nose for blood but doesn't find any.

Sister Edith and two other nuns run over to break up the fight. Sister Mary Brigid WOLF WHISTLES LOUD and the nuns stop and turn. Sister Mary Brigid throws several punches in their direction and directs them away from the fight. Sister Edith touches her still-black eye and sends the other nuns back where they came from. Sister Mary Brigid nods her approval in the direction of Sister Edith accenting her approval with a closed fist. Sister Edith walks away from the fight quickly.

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

C'mon Tim he's beating you. Don't be a pussy.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

Is Tim crying?

STEVE MORELY

Pussy!

FRANK MORELY

Yeah, pussy!

TOM ROTH

I wish he woulda picked me!

TERRY SCHILLIGO

Yeah, or me!

Tim rushes into grab Patrick by the throat. Patrick sidesteps him and lands a solid punch to Tim's nose and it starts bleeding. Tim sees the blood and touches his nose and starts CRYING.

Sister Mary Brigid starts clapping and cheering, stepping through the gate to get a better look. She grabs Bill by the collar and makes him follow her.

Tim tackles Patrick and they both fall to the pavement. He starts choking Patrick who continues to punch Tim in the nose with both fists. Tim Chokes Patrick harder and Patrick begins to punch as hard as he can upward into the face of Tim Weber who is bleeding heavily.

The blood is flying all over Patrick's fists and arms as he keeps swinging at Tim who is starting to lose his grip. Both boys' white shirts are covered in blood and Tim's blood dips all over the face of Patrick who is still fighting while on his back. Tim's blood drips into Patrick's mouth.

TIM GRUBER

I'm bleedin'. I'm dyin'. Somebody
get my mom.

The crowd GASPS at the sight of the bloody boys.

Sister runs toward them to stop the fight but Bill holds her back.

JANITOR

He's not finished yet, Sister. Let
him go.

Patrick pushes the crying Tim off and stands up. As Tim starts to get up, Patrick punches him three more times knocking Tim to the ground. He then turns on the Morleys who are trying to help Tim. He punches them in the face several times while spitting Tim's blood from his mouth.

PATRICK

Who's next? Who's next? You?

Pointing to the McCaffertys. Both Mccaffertys are looking over their shoulder walking away fast.

GREG MCCAFFERTY

He's crazy! I think he killed Tim!

MIKE MCCAFFERTY

C'mon let's get outta here!

The crowd turns on The bullies.

CROWD

Get outta here! We're not afraid of
you anymore either! Go home.

The crowd grows eerily silent as Patrick stands, covered in blood, BREATHING Hard and SPITTING, still in a boxer's stance.

PATRICK

C'mon! Where ya goin'?

Sister steps into the crowd with Bill right behind her, directing kids out of the way. Sister is clapping her hands to hurry the crowd along.

JANITOR

Okay, kids that's enough! Go home.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Go home children, shoo! Run along.

She makes her way to Patrick and stands before him with her hand on her hips, smiling.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

Well, Patrick. You did good. I'm so proud of you. That took some doin'.

JANITOR

Boy, you're a mess! Look at ya! Bottle Rocket would be proud of you.

Patrick looks down at his bloody shirt and the blood on his fists and arms.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

You can put your fists down now boy, they're gone.

Sister kneels down in front of Patrick and opens his mouth prying at his upper teeth and looking curiously inside.

PATRICK

I don't think any of the blood's mine, Sister. My teeth are okay.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'm sure they're fine. I just wanted to see the size of the teeth on my small and deadly mouse.

Winking at Patrick and extending her hand so he can help her up. Bill hands Patrick the gym bag and the jar containing his mouse.

JANITOR

Don't forget Stephen. I believe he saw the whole thing.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Take my hand boy, let's get you cleaned up.

They walk toward the high school beneath the white statue of Jesus with arms outstretched.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick is sitting on a big desk in the science room, hair wet wearing a t-shirt with blood stains on it. Sister Mary Brigid is wiping blood from his face and hands.

PATRICK

What am I gonna tell my mom and my
Da about the bloody clothes?

Sister steps into the store room and returns with a neatly pressed white shirt and uniform trousers and sets them on the table next to Patrick.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Sister, how did you know?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I'm old! That's what old people do.
I guessed on the size and I iron
pretty well, I think. I knew we'd
be needing them sooner or later! So
now you may tell your mom and Da
whatever you wish. Now go in the
store room and change. Throw the
bloodied ones in the trash.

Patrick goes into the storeroom.

PATRICK (O.S.)

Hey, Sister?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Yes, Paddy?

PATRICK (O.S.)

I never even needed the secret weapon.

SISTER MARY BRIGID

I know child, but you may use it
someday.

Patrick comes out buttoning his shirt.

PATRICK

How do I look?

SISTER MARY BRIGID

Like a new man.

Sister Mary Brigid pulls a comb from her habit pocket and combs Patrick's hair, smoothing it with her hand.

SISTER MARY BRIGID (CONT'D)

It's about time to get home now,
boy?

PATRICK

See you tomorrow?

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Training or poker?

PATRICK
Poker!

SISTER MARY BRIGID
Poker it is! I'll have Sister Agnes
make some fudge for us. See you
tomorrow Paddy.

Patrick walks along with his plaid gym bag and jar with his mouse in it. When he gates to the statue he sets the bag and jar down and begins climbing the pedestal

CLOSEUP OF PATRICK'S HANDS CLIMBING THE BRICK PAST THE PLACKARD BEARING THE WORDS "LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME" HIS HANDS UPON THE WHITE ROCK OF THE STATUE, HIS FEET AND LEGS WRAPPING AROUND THE STATUE.

CLOSEUP OF PATRICK, FACE TO FACE WITH THE FACE OF THE JESUS STATUE. HE CUPS THE FACE WITH BOTH HANDS AND LOOKS JESUS STRAIGHT IN THE EYE.

PATRICK
Thank you. Thank you. I knew you'd
help me. Thanks for sending Sister
to me.

CLOSEUP OF PATRICK KISSING THE FOREHEAD OF JESUS THEN SLIDING DOWN THE BODY OF THE STATUE AND STANDING ON THE BRICK PEDESTAL.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Get down from there boy! You'll get
hurt!

Patrick jumps down to the ground. Grabs his bag and jar and run for home, yelling

PATRICK
Not anymore! Not anymore!

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

Key Legend over scene: Twenty years later

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

A thirty-something police officer, good looking, dark-haired, wearing glasses, climbs out of his patrol car red lights are on and POLICE RADIO SQUAWKING and walks up to a beat up Buick with a bad paint job.

Two men are seated in the front seat of the car. The driver sandy haired, freckled with large ears, yells out the window at the officer.

DRIVER

What'd you pull me over for? I wasn't doin' nothin'?

POLICE OFFICER

License and registration, sir.

The driver turns to the passenger and LAUGHS.

DRIVER

Apparently you don't know who you're messin' with.

The passenger slaps at the driver LAUGHING.

POLICE OFFICER

Well, let's see. You were speeding...and your plates are expired.

DRIVER

So?

The driver reluctantly hands his license to the police officer who walks back to his car. Police officer is talking into his radio microphone POLICE RADIO SQUAWKING.

DISPATCHER

Active warrants on your driver Michael McCafferty, white male thirty-two, for domestic violence and traffic violations. Negative on your second subject.

POLICE OFFICER

Send another car my way if you have one close.

DISPATCHER

Ten-four. Forty-one oh-six.

RADIO

Forty-one oh-six.

DISPATCHER

Proceed to back up Forty-one oh-two. He's out with a wanted subject. Vehicle occupied two times.

RADIO

Clear, I'm en route.

The police officer climbs out of the patrol car and walks back to the driver's side of the Buick.

POLICE OFFICER

Sir, I need you to step out of the car.

DRIVER

For what?

POLICE OFFICER

There is an active warrant for your arrest.

The police officer removes his glasses and puts them in a hard case SNAPPING it shut and slides it into his jacket pocket, smiling.

The police officer reaches for the door of the Buick and opens it. The driver starts to climb out of the car, grabbing for the officer. The officer grabs the driver by the arm and spins him around SLAMMING him up against the car.

The passenger jumps out of the passenger side door and runs to the aid of the driver. The police officer shoves the driver onto the ground and squares off with the passenger who is running at him just as the driver gets up and jumps the officer from behind.

The police officer KICKS the passenger in the balls and the passenger FALLS to the pavement holding his crotch GROANING and GASPING for air. The police officer turns to the driver HEAD-BUTTS him, knocking him to the pavement then handcuffs him. He is handcuffing the passenger when a second and third police car SIREN blaring drives up TIRES SCREECHING and the backup officers climb out.

SECOND POLICE OFFICER

Paddy, you okay? We got here quick as we could.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm good!

SECOND POLICE OFFICER

Ow, they don't look so good!

Wincing.

The police officer takes his glasses out of the case after removing it from his jacket pocket and wipes them off as the driver and passenger lay on the asphalt behind their Buick. He slips the case back into his jacket pocket and we see his name tag, GALLAGHER.

In the background, the other officers help the two men get to their feet and lead them to their patrol cars as other officers arrive to help.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END.

MOUSE OF THE SCHOOLYARD

Mouse of the Schoolyard

White marble Jesus stood on his pedestal, arms outstretched, five blessed wounds exposed. He said nothing. I gazed up at him as I lay on the cruel Catholic asphalt, my head swimming. The asphalt of this playground had to be, I imagined, the hardest substance known to man.

The blood ran hot in my mouth, tasting of iron. Dazed, I rolled over and waited for Jesus to climb down and take me home, but he didn't come. I heard the sound of running feet and sinister laughter that soon faded away, followed by the sound of a lumbering freight train heading east upon the silver tracks that ran alongside the school property. The black and white arms of the crossing gate were on their way down, the red lights flashing, keeping time with the warning bells, all meant I was late getting home.

I staggered to my feet, spitting blood. My red plaid CPO (jacket) was torn and stained with the dirt of the playground and my tears. Bending over, I fumbled for my glasses; the right lens was shattered in the thick tortoise shell frame. I followed the red caboose as it swayed from side to side toward my house, walked up Jennings road to where the crossing guard stood waiting, looking at his watch. His blue watchman's hat was perched high on his head and too much coarse black hair grew from his nose and ears. Wisps of black smoke and hot orange flames licked at the passing cars from a line of smudge pots left on the street by maintenance workers as I approached the corner. The crossing guard clutched his

stop sign in his wrinkled mitt and blew his shrill whistle, stopping traffic so I could cross with a cigarette primed whisper,

“There ya go pal.”

And soon I was safe at home.

When I got inside I told my mom I fell on the playground and broke my glasses, bloodying my mouth in the process. She checked my teeth and found none broken then attended to my various scrapes and abrasions,

“You’re going to have to be more careful. You’ll need new glasses, but it will have to wait until payday.”

“I’ll be okay, mom. I’ll just use my left eye.”

I hated my glasses and imagined that wearing them made me an easy target for the bullies who routinely hit me at Corpus Christi School. I had to manage, as I was too nearsighted to see without them. I couldn’t tell my mom that I had been fighting. She wouldn’t approve, even if it was one-sided and I was just being used as a punching bag. I figured even being the recipient of a beating would equate to a fight and I would be in trouble with the nuns if they found out. I couldn’t bring myself to snitch. I couldn’t tell my dad. He was working the night shift at McDonnell Aircraft building jets for the Vietnam War. I didn’t see him much except for weekends and I didn’t want to bother him with my problems with the school bullies. I knew his job was important. I could see him in my mind turning silver wrenches with his big freckled hands, sweating as he worked. I was proud of him and during the day on the playground I knew he did good work

whenever I saw a low-flying brown and green camouflaged F4 Phantom splitting the blue sky overhead. Building jets was more important than my problems.

I was a good boy. Slight for my age and shorter than anyone else in my class, the other boys had no problem picking on me from the safety of their little wolf pack. In the quiet of my room I felt like St. Stephen, my Catholic namesake. As I gazed at the painting of him hanging on the wall, I think I knew what he felt like except that he was a strong and good-looking grown man. Eyes looking to heaven, hands folded tightly in prayer, back against the wall while towering shadows of men holding great stones and boulders high overhead, prepared to make him the first martyr. Drifting off to sleep that night I cried the hard tears, the kind that break off and burn, so hot they felt as if they would set my pillow on fire.

Just weeks before it seemed as though everything was right with the world, I sat upon my white-haired grandmother's tiny lap in the shade of the gnarled plum tree by the railroad tracks in our backyard. Her velvet soft hand smelled of the cherry and almond scent of Jergens hand lotion as she stroked my face while cooing,

“Smooth as a peach. Smooth as a peach,”

as we rocked endlessly under the canopy of orange and yellow leaves while sitting on the old green clam shaped chair on a peaceful summer day far away from the schoolyard. I remember closing my eyes and listening to a far off freight train and feeling the rumble of the earth as it rolled closer and closer, and smelling the exhaust as it wafted over us. Knowing that the black locomotive was not

twenty yards away from us with a long line of yellow and red boxcars following blindly behind was no cause for alarm. Eyes closed, I was safe and drifted off to sleep.

When I woke up I was no longer on my grandmother's lap. It was time for school and six o'clock mass duty. I felt safe when I entered the church although that early in the morning it was black as pitch. It was quiet as cricket singing stone in daylight as I buttoned up my black robe and threw on my white smock and went out to light the altar candles before the priest arrived. In the candlelight I saw crucified marble Jesus hanging high on his cross half naked. He looked right at me but didn't say a word. His crown of thorns was certainly bloody and he had an awful gash on his side oozing blood. The blood from nails in his hands and feet looked really painful and I wished that I could climb up and help him down. In the near darkness I thought I heard his blood dripping to the hard floor below. The ceiling of the church reminded me of the inside of a whale and I felt a bit like Jonah, swallowed up in the belly of the great heaven beast after being thrown overboard for something he didn't do. I wanted to stay there forever in the darkness surrounded by the blood red carpet and smelling the sweet beeswax.

I held the giant holy book aloft for a hung-over Monsignor, who never spoke much except for what he read during mass and a bourbon-tainted,

“You buttoned your robe up wrong, fix it.”

before we got started. I held the big red bible with gold-edged pages as best as I could. It seemed to weigh nearly as much as my little brother and the Monsignor

would steady me from time to time so he could get a better read from the Holy Scripture. The combination of his swaying back and forth while saying mass and his breath in my face made me dizzy as if I were rocking on a boat on the sea.

When mass was over I snuffed out the candles, hung up my robe and smock, cleaned up and slipped out the back door and prayed to all things holy I could get into the school building before the bullies saw me. My heart sank in my little chest when I saw them just outside the main doors of the school like a pack of sheep killing dogs. As they approached, my heart began banging and I felt sick to my stomach, not unlike the sick feeling when the tornado sirens go off on the first Monday of the month and then you realize that "This is only a test." The problem was that the punches and kicks did not come on just the first Monday of the month. I could have lived with that and this was not just a test.

I ran past the front of the school and the chalk dust coated walls where the erasers had been pounded clean and headed towards the gym, rounding the corner under the windows of the bowling alley beneath it, hoping to get into the school through the back door by the cafeteria, but I had been seen.

The group of bullies who preyed upon me looked as though they had been punched out of bad dough with a cookie cutter held by the devil himself. Most had ape-like features. Brothers Frank and Steve were both fat kids with orange freckles, dirty hair that was poorly-cut and yellow teeth. The meanest set of brothers, Mike and Greg, looked like chimpanzees. Their faces were explosions of freckles that made them look like they had a disease. Both had big ears that stuck out like the open doors of a big Buick with a bad paint job. Their teeth

seemed too small for their mouths and were greenish and pointed. Tim was the fattest kid in the group who always wore a dirty shirt spattered with cheese and mustard and whatever was for lunch the past several days and too-tight pants with a rip in the seat that had been repaired too many times. Jerry had long blond hair parted on the side that necessitated him sweeping it to the side constantly, smoothing it over so he could see, to the point he looked like he had a nervous tic. As a bonus he had protruding buck teeth that made him look like a deranged blonde beaver. Dennis was an anemic looking kid who bruised easily. His skin was so white you could see his veins that pumped blood all the way to his little black heart. He always had dark circles under his eyes and his breath smelled like dead fish.

We all wore the same uniform: blue trousers, white button-up shirts, and black shoes. These boys seemed to revel in their own filth, ripped and patched trousers, dirty and stained shirts and perpetually-scuffed shoes. I took a brief beating that morning and was punched in the stomach by each several times that left me breathless and crying before school even started.

When I finally could breathe again and made my way toward the school I was cautioned by an old bewhiskered nun with thick bifocals, who clapping her hands at me,

“You’re going to be late young man, hurry.”

I said nothing and ran into the building to avoid being punished by the teacher as well. I wondered to myself how the old nun or any of the nuns who frequented the playground could not see the obvious. Were they too busy questioning the

vows they took, or so miserable that they just didn't care that someone else was suffering? The same ones who could sense that boys were gambling by flipping baseball cards or burning ants with magnifying glasses, who would sternly admonish,

“Those ants are God's children too and deserve to live without being interfered with,”

while pocketing their ill-gotten gain or weapons of solar destruction, and who never seemed to notice me when I was flat on my back or on my knees after getting the wind knocked out of me, or bleeding, or crying, or any combination thereof.

I needed some help. I would sometimes, after making my way home, return to the schoolyard alone and climb the red brick pedestal where white marble Jesus stood. Just below the statue, inset within the brick, was a white marble plaque that was inscribed “Let the little children come to me.” And that is what I did. I touched the nail holes in his perfect feet as I clambered up the rough brick. I reached out, holding onto his slick white sleeve, straining to touch each shiny white hand and put my tiny fingers in each nail hole. I put my hand into the wound in his side where the spear had been, and throwing my hands around his neck, shimmied up his body until I was face to face with him. I looked him right in the eyes and cried out loud,

“Help me! Why won't you help me?”

Still, he said nothing and I, still crying, slid down his body, jumped from his pedestal and ran home and held it inside until my mother went to the store taking my brother and little sisters with her.

“You sure you don’t want to go with us to the grocery store?”

“No, I have homework to do, Mom.”

“We won’t be gone long. Lock the door behind us.”

The minute they left the driveway I went right to my mom and dad’s room and knelt in front of my dad’s mahogany dresser.

I had been told never to go into my dad’s dresser, but I had gone in there without his knowledge before. He had shown me his jewelry box and keepsakes that he kept in there. Grabbing the bright brass drawer pulls, I slid the drawer partly open, smooth as glass. I studied the contents for a few moments before sliding it open completely. I removed his leather jewelry box that contained his heavy Air Force wings and blue and grey sergeant stripes from when he was in the Air Force during the Korean War. My grandfather’s gold pocket watch in its case made my eyes light up every time I saw it. I wished that I had known him. The angels took him away when I was only two. I thumbed through a stack of old black and white photographs briefly pausing at pictures of my mom and dad, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. I had to dig deep to find what I was after, past the “Greetings from the Alamo” key chain and pressed white cotton handkerchiefs.

There in the bottom of the drawer that smelled of Zippo lighter fluid and Kool cigarettes, next to a shiny silver German bayonet with black wood handles was a small zippered pouch that had belonged to my grandfather, my dad's dad.

I unzipped the crinkled leather. It had a brass zipper and I suppose my grandfather used it as a coin purse before he died. I unzipped the pouch and imagined that it still smelled like him.

Twenty-seven .22 caliber bullets tumbled to the small multicolored hooked rug in front of the dresser. I knew how many were in the pouch because I had counted them before, but this time it was different. I grabbed a chair from the kitchen and carried it to the closet and climbed up looking intently for the dull blue cloth that my dad kept way up in the corner under his black and gray Stetson Fedoras. I put the gray one, my favorite, on my head. It was too big for me, but I felt secretly grown whenever I put it on. I slipped the owner's tag from the inner band. It read "Like Hell it's yours" and had my dad's name written in pencil on the owner's line. In bold black letters was "Levine's Hat Company, Washington Street, Saint Louis, Missouri."

I clawed at the blue cloth, stretching to reach it, catching the heavy burden within, as it slipped from the shelf and into my arms. It was heavy, heavier than any time I had taken it down before. I ran to my room and grabbed my gym bag and returned to my mom and dad's room with the blue bundle under my arm. I knelt down and unwrapped the bundle. There before me on that tiny rug lay a possible answer to my problems. My mind raced so that I was literally dizzy. My dad would kill me if he knew I had touched his gun, but I was on a mission. A

shiny blue steel Smith and Wesson revolver was a nice gun. It was .22 caliber with a long slender barrel and pretty wood grips. I knew how to load it and carefully swung out the cylinder and held it safely like I had been taught. This looked just the kind of gun that the detectives on television and gangsters carried. I grabbed a small handful of cartridges and filled the cylinder with six, snapped it shut and put the rest of the tiny brass and lead shells in the old leather pouch. I unzipped my red plaid gym bag and put the gun in it. It fit without a problem. I tossed the pouch in next to it. There would be no more beatings on that playground.

My Catholic conscience got the better of me as I returned everything to the exact place where I found it fully intent on being a pioneer in the ways of school shootings. But, I happened to glance at the framed needlepoint piece of the Ten Commandments hanging on the flowered wall next to my parent's bed. *Thou Shalt Not Kill* seemed to scream at me from the red thread, over and over and over. Hell, Purgatory, would I go? How bad could it be? Could I kill those other kids? I wanted them dead. I had learned to hate them with a perfect hate and felt that my soul was already doomed. Why hadn't Saint Stephen thrown a rock back and at least been the first Martyr for God as well as the one who went down swinging. Who was I to question a saint and the one I was named after, at that? I didn't know how to fight, much less defend myself.

I took the gun and pouch of bullets from my gym bag, shook it from the rag, and sat on the floor. I held the gun in my hand and thought about being beat up on the hellish playground. I knew that I didn't want to go back there. I put the

barrel of the gun in mouth and started to cry. I was so sad. The metal was cold and I could taste the gun oil on it. The front sight scraped the roof of my mouth. I thumbed the hammer back. I was committing a mortal sin and was surely doomed. *Thou Shalt Not Kill*. Did that mean me too? I hadn't learned anything about that one yet. I thought about my parents, my white-haired grandmother who loved me and white marble Jesus and crucified Jesus hanging in the church. If I did this would he help me or be ashamed? The needlepoint screamed at me and I took the gun out of my mouth. I was still shaking when I lowered the hammer and unloaded the gun. I carefully wiped it off, wrapped it back up, and returned it to the closet shelf. I tossed the hats back on top of it just right, so no one would ever know I had touched it. I put the bullets back in the pouch, counting them to make sure, and zipped it up. I put it and everything else back where they belonged and left my parents room and went to bed, crying myself to sleep.

I hung out with my dad that weekend and we listened to the Cardinals on the radio. After my dad cut the grass I sat next to him and watched him sweat. He put a cigarette in his mouth and he let me light it for him. He handed me his silver Zippo and I flicked it open and thumbed it hard. The flint sparked and the flame danced while my dad steadied my tiny hand as I held it up for him. He put his hand on top of my head, smoothing my hair briefly then opened two cold bottles of Pepsi with a church key and handed one to me and we sat there in the driveway and drank them together. I watched his strong hands as he drank and smoke. Those jet building hands made me feel safe. I wanted so to be like him,

but knew it would be a long time coming. I started to tell him about the bullies, but I couldn't. He looked at me laughing, not knowing I was in trouble,

“You can keep my lighter in your pocket until I need it again. You want a smoke?” Extending his cigarette in my direction.

I shook my head no.

“I'm just kidding. You're a good boy. Don't ever smoke. Or, play with fire, Okay?”

“I won't.”

We played catch and I almost forgot about the schoolyard until Monday morning.

At the end of the day I was surrounded on the lower level by the soccer field and punched around. I was if anything, a pretty fast runner. This time I was not punched in the stomach and was able to break away and run for home. They chased me for a while but gave up soon thereafter. A slower kid probably got beaten by them after I escaped.

As I walked along the chain link fence, strung tight as harp strings, near the adjoining all- girl's high school, I smelled the sweet end of summer roses and tall tomato plants in the garden taken care by the nuns, whose convent was between the high school and grade school. I saw a large black figure among the flowers that I couldn't make out. As I got closer and had a better view I saw that it was a nun. She was as wide as a city bus and I thought that she could be mistaken for a black bear when she stood up and stretched, holding her aching back amid the tall rose trellises. She walked toward the fence in my direction and waved me over seeing that I was having a bad day.

“Dear, are you alright? What happened to your face child? What’s your name child?”

“Kirk Lawless.”

“Come round here to the gate and come in with me.”

She pointed to the gate at the end of the fence. She walked as though she had a bad hip. She told me her name was Sister Mary Agnes. She taught Biology at the girls’ high school. She got down on her knees and hugged me, wiping away my tears. I told her what had happened.

“There, there. No more, no more. Let us see what we can do about this.”

“You won’t tell my parents?”

“Do you want me to?”

“No.”

“Then we’ll see what we can do. We Irish need to stick together.”

She took me to her classroom on the third floor and washed her hands of the dirt from the garden, and then wiped the sweat from her brow, straightening her habit. She wiped my face and got close to me, eye to eye, as close as I had been to white marble Jesus. Her eyes were piercing blue and she had light peach fuzz on her cheeks and chin. She had a lilting Irish accent. When I asked her about it she told me it was the place of her birth. She had been raised on a farm with seven brothers and two sisters before joining the convent.

“Kirk, do you know how to defend yourself, you know, fight?” as she shadow boxed in her classroom among the black slate topped tables decked with Bunsen burners and test tubes.

“Not really.”

“What saint are you named after?”

“Stephen”

“Ah, the martyr. Just because you’re named after him, doesn’t mean you have to be like him, understand me, child?”

“Yes, sister.”

“How many of them are there?”

“Saints?”

“No child, bullies!” laughing, her eyes sparkled when she did and it made me feel better.

“Six, seven, sometimes less.”

“Never one on one.”

“Never.”

“Then that is what we’ll work on.”

“Do you play poker Kirk?”

“I’ve played with my grandmother a little on weekends.”

“We’ll play tomorrow right after school.”

I believed at that moment white marble Jesus or hanging on the cross Jesus had sent this nun to help me and I was happier than I had been in a long, long time. Sister Mary Agnes showed me around her classroom stopping in front of a long glass wall lined with shelves that was filled with jars that contained just about every animal imaginable in glass jars filled with formaldehyde: silvery Sharks, black and brown hairy tarantulas, rubbery purple squids, pink octopi, rainbow-

hued piranhas, green vipers, and yellow hooded cobras, most of them were small, many of them

babies. Sister Mary pointed out some of the smallest snakes and a piranha handing them to me, instructing me to set them on one of the slate topped table.

“Do you know what these animals have in common, Kirk?”

“They’re all God’s creatures?”

“Yes, true, true, but what they are also is small and deadly, understand?”

“I think so.”

“We will teach you to fight, but we want to make it a fair fight. If it’s not a fair fight we will throw in a trick or two, the secret weapon if necessary.”

“Secret weapon?”

Sister Mary Agnes looked around as if to make sure no one could hear her except for me and leaned in close. Her breath smelled of flowers, good strong coffee, Ireland and religion. Her eyes twinkled,

“A swift kick in the balls!”

Her voice got louder and she began laughing,

“If they fight dirty, then so can we.”

I laughed so hard that a nun would say such a thing, but was fascinated by her.

“I learned a thing or two about fighting having seven brothers around!”

She told me I could take home one of the jars, but I had to promise just to look at the animal inside and not open the lid. I agreed and chose the piranha. She made sure the lid was on tight.

“See you tomorrow after school,” hugging me then patting me on the head.

I ran home as fast as I could with the jar in my hand, being careful not to drop it. So excited, I couldn't eat dinner and actually couldn't wait to get to sleep. I studied that piranha as it floated in the clear formaldehyde its iridescent scales danced in the glow of my little desk lamp. Its eyes were a little cloudy, but I could see the death in its eyes, the death in its small teeth.

The next day I managed to serve mass and sneak into school without the apes catching me. As we stood in the cafeteria line in the long hall waiting to go downstairs, they would whisper to each other and talk about who was going to hit me first when school was out. Colored marble Jesus stood at the end of this long dark hall with his flaming heart exposed watching us as we waited silently. His wounds were deep bloody red and I remembered how my own blood tasted. I wondered if colored marble Jesus ever got mad, he was human after all, at least for a while.

The cafeteria had some horrible smells that wafted up from it filling the halls with boiled spinach and stewed tomato smell. It seemed that somebody vomited at least once a day in the school, usually in the cafeteria line, and always when it was hot in the school which was nearly every day. When it happened, the janitor, the old wrinkled one who never spoke, would appear mysteriously in his light gray uniform with his bucket of pink sawdust and spoon it onto the vomit pile, which always seemed to make it smell even worse. He wouldn't say a word,

just cover the pile and later, after the sawdust worked its magic, returned and scooped it up.

Mike couldn't stand the smell of the boiled spinach and lost control. He started making a funny noise in line and then started retching. Everyone stood back as he cut loose. Projectile vomiting is never funny, except when you look like an ape and your huge ears turn red and you start crying for your mommy in front of everybody. The silent janitor stood by shaking his head in amazement as the boy-ape purged himself of what appeared to be everything he had eaten in the last week. His wrinkled hand clutched the smallish bucket as he watched the chunky brown and orange puke splash on the dark marble floor. He set his bucket down, disappeared only to return several minutes later with a small dolly on which was a large cardboard drum of the pink stuff that he quickly shoveled onto the pile. Everyone had a good laugh including me, but I felt a little sick as Mike's eyes met mine as he was lead away by one of the nuns and he saw me laughing. The whispers began among the others about me getting mine for laughing at Mike for puking all over himself.

Even colored marble Jesus at the end of the hall couldn't help me now.

At the end of the day Sister Mary Agnes came into my classroom and whispered in Sister Mary Catherine's ear. She gave me a wink as she left the room. Sister Mary Catherine called me up to the front of the room,

"Kirk would you take this note to the principal of the high school for me?"

"Yes sister."

I was a little confused, but did as I was told. When I got to the high school sister Mary Agnes was sitting on the front steps waiting. She reached for the note and put it into a pocket in her habit, her big black and silver crucifix swinging as she tucked it away. I was surprised because I didn't know they had pockets in their habits and even more so that she hadn't bothered to read the note.

Sister Mary read my mind,

“There's nothing on the note child. They can't hurt you if they can't find you.”

We went upstairs and moved some of the tables out of the way and she proceeded to teach me how to box and not just how to defend myself. She had a mean right cross for a nun and she showed me how to use it. She showed me how to box left handed, saying it would really throw them off, but doubted any of them could fight very well by themselves,

“That's the way their kind operates.”

She showed me how to protect my face and followed up everyday with a simulation of the secret weapon which always caused her to break out in the most wonderful laughter and I loved her for it. After Sister Mary Agnes was sufficiently sweaty and out of breath we would sit down for a cold bottle of coke in little green bottles and move the old black Emerson fan with the shiny brass blades close to us and turn it on high. We would play poker and gin rummy and eat homemade vanilla fudge one of the other nuns made for her,

“We take a vow to give up some things child, good fudge is not one of them, neither is poker.”

My training sessions went on for almost two weeks, during which time I went home late after learning about small deadly animals, roses, tomato plants, fertilizer, Ireland, poker, and boxing. I also learned that nuns were nice and Sister Mary Agnes was my friend. I also learned not to be afraid of the ape-boys. When the coast was clear I would shimmy up the pedestal and talk to white marble Jesus and touch the holes in his hands, feet, and side. I would pull myself up and kiss his cheek and thank him for Sister Mary Agnes.

On the playground some days later, Mike told me that I was going to get a beating for laughing about him vomiting. From the corner of my eye I saw a familiar silhouette in black and white, leaning on the garden fence. It was Sister Mary Agnes and she was nodding and motioning with her hands as if to say "Get on with it." As I was surrounded by the usual group, I told them to wait a minute,

"Why don't I fight just one of you? You know a fair fight? You'll probably beat me anyway."

Mike looked around and nobody stepped up to the plate. They seemed shocked. This was something new to them. Fat Tim in the ketchup-stained white shirt, after a little prodding, piped up,

"I'll take him, no problem, Mike."

"Get him, Tim."

The other boys circled us and were joined by other spectators who wanted to see if these boys could handle themselves in a fair fight. Tim squared off with me and after listening to Sister, I believed that he wasn't going to be a very good fighter, although he was quite a bit bigger than me. As we circled each other I

saw two of the other nuns coming over to see what the fuss was all about. Sister Mary Agnes whistled at them loudly and came over to them quickly and engaged them in a huddle and all three stopped to watch from a distance. Tim looked as though he wished they had stopped it before it started. The fight didn't last long. He punched me in the eye and I punched him in the eye. I switched to a left-handed stance and hit him in the other eye. Tim was enraged and began swinging wildly. I hit him in the body and it only hurt my wrists.

He tackled me and I went down on the asphalt with him straddling me. Tim started to choke me and I couldn't breathe. In the dizzying near blackness, it dawned on me that if both his hands were around my throat, he couldn't protect his face. I punched him as hard as I could several times and his nose erupted in a geyser of blood. It dripped onto me, covering my white shirt. I was scared. I tasted the blood when it splashed into my mouth and I spit it back at him. It tasted like iron, just like mine, but it wasn't mine. He released his grip and started crying. I thought I had killed him. I had never seen so much blood, not even my own. I kept punching him until he was crying out loud and begging me to stop. Mike tried to pull me off of Tim and I pulled out the secret weapon. I landed a solid kick to his nuts and he dropped too.

I stood there, the little mouse of the playground, ripped shirt, covered with blood, offering a challenge to everyone in the little wolf pack that had plagued me for the past several years and no one wanted to play with me. They huddled around fat Tim and walked him home.

I walked past the three sisters who stood with their backs to the crowd smiling secretly. As I passed, they clapped ever so quietly and Sister Mary Agnes took my hand and walked me to the high school to clean me up,

“I saw everything child. You did good. My brothers would have enjoyed that one. How about some poker?”

Later that night I walked by white marble Jesus and climbed up to say hello. As I slid down and stood on the pedestal next to him preparing to jump down, one of the men from the neighborhood yelled from across the street,

“Better get down from there, you’ll get hurt.”

“Not anymore. Not anymore.”