

FUCK NESS

ANDERSEN PRUNTY

Fuckness
A Novel

Andersen Prunty

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Introduction:

Fuckness and The Bad Time

My name is Wallace Black. Before I tell you anything about myself I should tell you about the Bad Time. And before I tell you about the Bad Time, I should tell you about my philosophy. Everyone, whether he knows it or not, lives his life by some type of philosophy. I'm not talking about the type of philosophy found in books, the shit nobody really understands. I'm talking about some innate code individuals are born with. The type of philosophy usually not thought about too much and often summed up in a few words. The kind of shit people wear on t-shirts and stick to their bumpers. And we see the proclamation of that philosophy on their t-shirt or bumper sticker and it, in turn, defines them.

There was this woman who lived down the street. She had a bumper sticker that read, "Life's a Bitch." I knew very little about this woman, but whenever I saw her emerge from her car—her dump truck frame crammed into a pair of stonewashed jeans, a pile of hair virtually scraping the sky—I knew the woman had it rough. Her life was, indeed, a bitch. As I watched her walk in that slouchingly comical way, knees seemingly before body, dragging heavy-assed into her house, I wondered how she could drive or walk at all. Life had undoubtedly beaten her down so much these tasks were something accomplished only through some masochistic necessity. And where did she drive, anyway? To a place filled with lots of other miserable people living out their grim, brief philosophies, too?

I called my philosophy the philosophy of fuckness. I first developed this philosophy when I realized I was the type of person who would go to just about any lengths necessary in order to avoid trouble and misery. That is, I just wanted to live life the way I wanted to live it without any interruptions or having to answer to anyone.

I quickly realized this was impossible.

No matter how actively I avoided just about every situation, trouble seemed to find me. This trouble is what I called fuckness.

All the world's absurdity quickly fell under the definition of fuckness. Loosely, the dictionary defines "absurd" as something so clearly untrue or unreasonable as to be laughable or ridiculous. When I was about twelve, when I first started thinking about this philosophy of fuckness, everything seemed ridiculous to me, only I wasn't laughing.

And I didn't even know the Bad Time was coming.

A man puts on a shirt and tie five or more mornings out of the week and no one finds this absurd. It is not the man putting on the shirt and tie I would define as fuckness, it is the fact no one else finds it ridiculous. And this man goes to work where he labors for someone else forty hours or more and at the end of the week he is given a paycheck. Does this man realize he is a rat? Does this man realize everything about him is ridiculous? If he realizes this then the situation surrounding him is not fuckness. "Carry on," I would tell him. However, if he is unaware of the heightened sense of absurdity surrounding him and the majority of his life, he is enveloped by fuckness. His whole situation reeks of fuckness. He might not have seen the Bad Time, but he's got plenty of fuckness.

There are, of course, various degrees of fuckness.

My troubles, my heavy fuckness, the Bad Time, happened about ten years back when I was sixteen and in my third year of eighth grade. That's when I really started thinking about divine punishment, redemption, my place in the world, and all that other coming of age bullshit.

I guess what it came down to was that I simply didn't fit in.

For starters, I was incredibly stupid. I mean, I didn't really consider *myself* stupid or anything. Actually, it was quite the opposite. I considered myself a genius. I considered myself to be one of the

only alive and aware human beings on the planet, but I still knew I was somehow *less* than everybody else. It was seeing all those blobs so unaware their lives were nothing but big jokes that really bothered me. That they were so oblivious to the giant clouds of fuckness gathered around all the blobby heads and threatening to piss down some acidic rain that could tear away the fabric of the realities at any moment.

I figured it was all a game when you got right down to it. The blobs picked their games and played them, depending on which games were the easiest.

Everybody else seemed to know how to play this game. It was like they had their games all chosen for them. Those fucks seemed to have some cheat sheet built right into their brains that had all the rules and tips and clues to these games spelled out on them. They had control of the game. Maybe *that* was where my philosophy of fuckness came from. Maybe I never had control of the game. Like maybe I just wasn't made for it. If that was the case, if I were somehow chosen to do something other than play their ridiculous game, then their control of the game must have blossomed from their complete ignorance of it. Like they didn't even know somebody somewhere was laughing at them.

Regardless, whether I was born to play the game or not, I refused.

I knew I didn't have those rules built in. I didn't have any fucking cheat sheets and I figured, if I played one of their stupid little games, I'd be the one to end up dead last. There was one thing I was almost sure of—if I were meant to go out there in the world of fuckness, I would have had so much of it on me so quickly I would have crumbled under the pressure before I could wipe the motherfucking placenta from my eyes.

The only way to even half-cope with all the fuckness of the world was to say, "Fuck it." If I had to sum up my philosophy of fuckness in a few words so I could cram it on a bumper sticker or t-shirt, those were the words I would have chosen: "Fuck it." So, for brevity's sake, *that* was pretty much my philosophy at the time. And it was a real beautiful philosophy, too. I liked that philosophy so much because it could have a couple of meanings. One, of course, was kind of sexual. But it was sort of a mean kind of sexual. Kind of like rape. This sexual meaning implied some kind of force. "Fuck it"—like I was forcefully attacking the world, raping the hell out of it, actively eliminating the fuckness that filled it.

There was also something kind of pacifist about "Fuck it." Like just trying to avoid the fuckness altogether. Like not even taking part in the world, just sitting back and letting it all flame by, watching all the blobs trying to win the game and knowing there weren't any winners.

"Fuck it." Beautiful.

Of course, the fuckness always had a way of finding me. The harder I tried to avoid it, the harder it hit me.

Maybe from hearing that, you'll already understand I wasn't as bright as your average individual. I mean, most people wanted to say "fuck it," but they rarely did. Most people never truly fucked anything.

Most people had something to lose.

So maybe I wasn't a genius. But at least I was aware of the game and it bothered the hell out of me. Anybody who knew how to play the game without letting it bother them was a blob. A stinking quivering blob.

So this isn't the story of a genius. It isn't even the story of a particularly intelligent person. But it is my story. My story of fuckness. Of how I let the fuckness bother me and how it found me, again and again.

Oh, and it's about the Bad Time. A swollen red image I'm trying to exorcise. Something I'll never forget because it sits on my bed when I go to sleep at night and sometimes I wake up with it sitting on my chest, breathing its hot stink in my face.

Maybe I could get rid of the fuckness, but I will never get rid of the Bad Time.

Chapter One

The Cloud Factory

Anyway, I was real dumb back then. Back then it felt like hate marrowed all my bones and the people around me were colorless, quivering masses, their shapeless mouths opening to coax my soul from my body. But I want you to know that I *knew* I was dumb. Or at least that I appeared dumb to most people. I wasn't so much head dumb as body dumb. I just wanted to be alone to twitch and wiggle and hum at the few things that made me happy, and it felt like everyone else wanted to stop me from doing those things. Like those things had any impact on how they lived their lives. The only thing I could figure out was most people were so fucking self-righteous they liked to destroy others' wills so they felt like their own petty lives had some sense of purpose.

So the Bad Time began on the playground of Milltown Middle School.

No, that's not really true. All of the troubles I'd *been having* coalesced there on the playground. That playground was where I would eventually set myself free. Not an external, everlasting kind of freedom, but a freedom of the mind—a discovery of how it would feel to be free. I had a number of troubles at Milltown Middle School, most on account of my being sixteen and in the eighth grade, but this fuckness I'm getting ready to tell you about was what led to my quest—except I think of it more as a stumbling than a quest. Milltown was like a fulcrum, there in the middle of a whole series of events that happened before and would happen after the Bad Time, an intricate web of fuckness that I felt like it was intended to wipe me out completely. It probably had something to do with biochemicals.

Some people just seemed born to fail.

But, right now, I'll stick to telling you my story about Bucky Swarth and his gang. I'm still kind of dumb, my mind wanders.

Milltown Middle School was where the poor kids in Milltown went to school. Milltown was a large industrialized city in southwestern Ohio, somewhere between Dayton and Cincinnati, that had several elementary and middle schools. It was one of the larger towns in the area with some 40,000 residents. Because all these schools were located in neighborhoods and the kids living in those neighborhoods went to the closest schools, they were more or less divided by financial status. A lot of the poor parents complained because they had real smart kids but, because the rest of the poor parents couldn't afford Ritalin, they thought their children weren't getting as good of an education as the rich, heavily medicated kids.

The kids knew this wasn't true. Most of the rich little shits just took their Ritalin down to the playground by Milltown Middle and sold it anyway. No, it was just part of the game. The poor were supposed to be stupid. The rich smart. But I didn't really care about any of that fuckness. I was dumb, poor, and completely unmedicated.

By the time these kids made it to high school, they were either all thrown together in Milltown High, which was in a little nicer, newer section of town, or they went to the Catholic high school, Saint Agnes. A lot of kids ended up going to St. Ag even if they weren't actually Catholic because it was in the absolute *niciest* section of town and was mostly white and more ordered and that kind of fuckness. Apparently the parents thought being lorded over by stiff-lipped sadistic nuns and boyflesh hungry priests would really do their kids some good. When the richer kids got to that high school, the public high school, was when *their* parents started griping. They said they were afraid that their wealthy chinned little fucks were going to get hurt in that school because it was so *combined*. “The *guns!* What about the *guns!*” they'd whine in the papers. Did anyone ever tell them they were the reason their kids took guns to school in the first place? *Combined?* What the hell did that mean, anyway? I always took

it to mean they didn't want their kids to go to school with the blacks and the poor kids.

Sometimes, if the parent of a poor kid could afford to send their child to St. Ag, they did. I guess they thought that once their kid was actually in that school, all decked out in that uniform, no one could actually tell how poor they were. Those poor kids' parents must have been really deluded blobs, thinking their kids weren't still going to smell poor and talk poor. You can never really hide poor. Like blood, it courses through the veins.

Anyway, like I was saying, Milltown Middle School was in a poor section of town. The only reason it had the honor of bearing Milltown's name, if that was in fact an honor, was because it was the first middle school built. It was back there with all the factories and fuckness. The factories were where all the poor people worked, if they actually had jobs. Apparently if the workers could keep their minds and bodies intact long enough, there was a good pension involved. After so many years and enough overtime, there was even the hope they could ingrain themselves firmly into the middle class.

Milltown Middle was small and dark and in a horrible state of disrepair. The outside of the school used to be red brick but had turned a dark brown from all the pollution. The playground was very small and dark, also. It was maybe about the size of one of the richer people's back yard. The school was up near the sidewalk, just off the road. There was a three-story parking garage to the right of the school, on the north side. The Korl Brothers factory butted up against the fence of the playground and sort of wrapped around the south side. It was a steel mill, so not only was there the distraction of those tweedling half-wits coming and going to work, there was also the clanging and clunking of giant sheets of metal being hurled around by even noisier machines. The main building of the factory had once been sort of a greenish-gray corrugated aluminum structure, the pride of Milltown's economy but was all soot-covered and rusted when I went to Milltown. All those structures smothered the playground, burying it, looming ominously over top of it. On that day, the day I'm trying to tell you about, huge smokestacks rose into the cold gray March sky, pumping out their smoke and fire.

When I was a real young kid and a lot dumber than I am now, dumber even than when I went to Milltown, I used to think that factory was where clouds were made. Whenever the parents would drive me by Korl or one of Milltown's numerous other factories, I'd say, "Look at the pretty clouds!"

I thought the black smoke and flashing orange-white fire brought the thunderstorms and the white steam made the cottage cheese-looking clouds you see on somewhat pleasant days. My father, Racecar, would snarl, "Those ain't clouds, ass, that's a Death Factory."

Him saying that changed my whole cloud perspective and I began to think the smoke was caused by burning bodies, which was closer to the truth, I guess. The father blamed the Korl Brothers for taking his legs and making him an angry gimp. A hunk of compressed metal had fallen off a forklift and crushed the father's legs so badly they had to be removed. The factory paid for the operation but avoided a settlement for years, saying it was the father's fault. I guess they just figured Racecar was in the wrong place at the wrong time. When they finally decided to pay him it amounted to about what he would have made for working two years, which was inconsequential, considering he'd never be able to work again.

There really wasn't anything to play on in the playground at Milltown Middle. There was an old rusted swing set we were forbidden to play on and an extremely dangerous-looking contraption called the witch's hat that hardly anyone would *dare* to even go around, ever since Lenny Lester got gored a few years back. Still, if someone dared, like some new kid who hadn't heard about the goring, it was forbidden. Those objects sat there, temptation for the bored, a punishment waiting to happen. If the teachers didn't get you, the contraption would, sooner or later.

The majority of the children were left to run around somewhat aimlessly on the playground unless they wanted to engage in games like Tag or Ring-Around-the-Rosy or another game called Red Rover. Red Rover involved two teams and each team was to send one of its members "over" to the other team.

when that member was called. All the kids had to know everybody else's name to play this because you had to say, "Red Rover, Red Rover, send *blah* over," or some fuckness. This game, on occasion would turn violent and have to be stopped. The kids at Milltown managed to make just about everything violent. Even Tag usually ended in bruises and tears as though a more apt title would have been "Beat" or "Strike" or "Punish." It was rare for these games to actually be stopped, however. There usually weren't any teachers around to stop anything and if they were actually outside on the playground they had a convenient habit of looking away at the slightest hint of a disturbance.

Also, the grass in the playground was always covered in this soot so when the kids went in from recess their hands and clothes were always black and grimy. They wore that soot like a coat of poverty. If they rubbed their faces with their hands, they would leave giant smudge marks that looked like some form of tribal marking.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that there wasn't a whole helluva lot to do out there on the Milltown Middle School playground and that's maybe sort of the reason why Bucky Swarth was exactly the way he was, which was real violent-like. There seemed to be a lot of that type at Milltown. They either all banded together to form a massive, brow-ridged juggernaut, or they separated into various camps, destined to do battle for the rest of the school year.

Even though I was sixteen and most of the other kids were twelve or thirteen, I almost fit in physically, anyway. That is, I think my proportions were about right. Even then, I was a little over six feet tall, but I'd been that tall since I was in the eighth grade for the first time. I was also rail thin and completely hairless, freckles all over my face.

If my proportions were about right for the eighth grade then my overall appearance wasn't right for any age. If I was going to be tall for my age and stick out like a sore thumb anyway, then the least I could have been blessed with was decent if not just plain looks. But this was not the case... I was ugly almost freakishly so. An ugly person, a regular ugly person who isn't cursed with being terribly ugly can go through life with virtually no problems at all. They may have issues with their self-esteem and all that fuckness, but there is absolutely no attention paid them and they're able to just muck around and pretty much do whatever the hell they want. The extremely good-looking can get through life fairly easily, but that's just because people will agree with what they say so they can fuck them or sometimes just be seen with them. And they're almost always attracting some sort of attention, but it's usually positive. The exceptionally ugly, like me, weren't going to be given any breaks in life. More than likely, we were the subjects of intense ridicule. Maybe some pity. What's worse is that also, through the sheer uniqueness of my appearance, always had attention hoisted upon me. That attention was always negative, of course.

Because I'd grown so fast, I no longer had the ability to walk with a normal gait, so I lusciously scuffled along, my feet rarely leaving the ground. It seemed like my eyeballs were made too big for their actual eyelids, creating the impression that my eyes were never fully opened but simply slit like some big doped up snake. My mouth suffered some of the same circumstances. It was too small, the teeth shoved in there with demented abstract abandon—what the mother called a "crowded mouth." My canines hung down way past all the other teeth and if I tried to actually shut my mouth where my lips met I looked like someone trying to form a horribly pompous face. Nevertheless, I kept my mouth fully closed most of the time and this may have generated more hostility toward me. My ears were like giant masts. If I slithered fast enough I could actually hear them slicing the wind.

Both years since I started failing, I had to go through a readjustment period and try not to let anyone in my class figure out that I was two or three years older than they were. It was hard enough to remain anonymous, being a hideous beast. And it never lasted very long. Inevitably, some other failure would point me out. "Well, *that* kid, he's failed *twice*."

After that happened, the stares and whispers would noticeably increase. I figured some of the

parents told the kids to stay away from me. I guess they were afraid my ample helping of stupid would rub off on their children.

I always hated recess because I've never really liked having what the other kids considered fun. Playing stupid games and running around aimlessly and that kind of fuckall. So mostly I just wandered around the big rusty fence separating the playground from the factory and thought my own thoughts, which mostly involved ways of getting out of Milltown without much of an education and by doing as little work as possible. Recess was always a bad time anyway because it was one of the only times when being completely alone seemed abnormal. When it finally got out that I was Wallace Black, the dumb boy who couldn't pass the eighth grade, recess was when the bullies started laying into me.

That year, the Year of Bucky Swarth's Reign, I'd been pretty okay. That is, I'd avoided being beaten severely by him. I'd never been the subject of more than a few names, threats, or pushes. I think initially, even though I wasn't particularly hard to notice, they were kind of intimidated by my age and I had to do something to really piss them off before they decided to let me have it. But on that chilly spring day, he finally came around and, looking back on it, it was probably my own damn stupid fault.

It was a Thursday morning, the year more than half gone, when he finally laid into me.

Chapter Two Drifter Ken and The Sucker of Doom

That morning, on my walk to school, Drifter Ken had given me a big green sucker. Drifter Ken was this magnificent old guy who hung around the park between my house and the school. He was really suspicious but nobody ever caught him doing anything so they couldn't do much about it, like having him locked up or some fuckness like that. Besides, he never panhandled and he was never in the park at night. I just thought Drifter Ken liked kids or that being nice to the kids that came through the park gave him something to do with his day. The mother always said to stay away from Drifter Ken because he *really* liked kids, but she wore a wig and I found her hard to trust.

If I ever got home late from school, she would accuse me of hanging out with that “trashy, *trashy* man,” her stroke-induced mumbling giving the words a lusty cant. The way she strumbled on about Drifter Ken made it sound like he was the type of man she'd like to bring home.

“You like what he does to you?” she asked me one time.

I had a pretty good idea of what she was talking about and knew Drifter Ken sure didn't do that. I mean, it wouldn't really surprise me if he had managed to nail a couple of the high school girls but it wasn't abnormal to see the high schoolers dating 35 to 40-year-old men. So what if Drifter Ken was closer to 60? In a town like Milltown, the general philosophy seemed to be that you had to snag the young, before pregnancy, drugs, alcoholism, and bad fashion used them up.

“You *like* the way that trashy, *trashy* man touches you?” It disgusted me, the throatiness of his voice.

“He's not like that.”

“Not yet.”

At that point, I grabbed a heavy glass and threw it across the room. The motion was strained and dramatic but I had trouble expressing myself vocally, so I had a tendency to throw and break things. Then I stormed into my room. It was pointless to argue with the mother.

It was the father's theory that Drifter Ken sold crack to the kids but, as I've already mentioned, the father was crippled and also untrustworthy. I'm guessing the father thought an adult would *have* to be high to get along with children.

Anyway, that morning I walked through the park as I always did. Some mornings Drifter Ken wasn't there. On the mornings he was in the park we always exchanged a few words, even if it was just say “Hi.” It was like we both understood each other. You can make contact with people all day but it only seems fulfilling when it's with someone you truly enjoy.

Drifter Ken was of near giant proportions. I was a little over six feet tall and had to look way up at Drifter Ken. His thick hands were the size of baseball mitts. He had flashy hair, all stiff and gray and piled up on top of his head in wild curls. That made him seem even taller. I thought about Racecarpathetically sitting in his wheelchair and growling and I thought dads should always be taller than their children, if only by an inch or two. Drifter Ken would have been the perfect father for me. He always sucked on these unfiltered Camels that drew attention to his magnificent teeth. I say his teeth were magnificent because they had *character*. Teeth can really make or break a person. Drifter Ken's teeth were powerful, like giant evenly spaced blocks, the area between them defining them even further, making them blockier and more magnificent. I complimented him on his teeth one time, mainly so I could tell him about Mrs. Pearlbottom's, and he said hers probably got that way from chewing kids' asses. I laughed. I laughed at a lot of what Drifter Ken said. Drifter Ken was a funny

man.

That morning, Drifter Ken had a surprise for me. I was passing through the park kind of quick because I was already running a little late and I just raised my hand in a wave and nodded to him when he came rushing over to me.

“Hey there, Wally, whaddya say?” Most of our encounters were horribly repetitive but there was a deep sense of comfort to this repetition.

“Oh, not much, Drifter Ken.” I used to call him “Mister,” but he insisted I call him “Ken.” It felt weird calling a grownup by his first name. And never mind that, at sixteen, I was almost a grownup myself. Since I was in the eighth grade, I still considered myself a child. And since I was well on my way to failing eighth grade again I considered myself even more of a child than the other eighth graders. I was downright feeble-minded. What the fuck did it matter what I called him, anyway? Names are ridiculous and the only thing more ridiculous than a name is a title.

“Hey Wally, I gotcha a little somethin.”

“Oh yeah? Thanks.” I didn’t have any idea what it would be. I sure hoped it wasn’t crack.

It wasn’t. It was a giant green sucker.

It wasn’t that I was ungrateful or anything. I guess I just expected something different. It seemed kind of hokey at first, like something you’d give to a baby. But a sucker was a sucker and I didn’t really think you ever got too old for candy.

“Now you hide that from the teachers at that school. Tell you what to do... you save it til you go to recess, then you find some place nice and quiet and you enjoy that there lollipop.”

I took the sucker and held it, feeling its heft. I nodded to Drifter Ken.

“Listen here now... you enjoy the *hell* out of that lollipop.”

“I sure will,” I said.

“Hey, say Wally, you got any good jokes for me?”

“I have to get to school.”

“Run on then. A good joke gets better with time.”

I usually tried to tell Drifter Ken all the jokes I’d heard. Sometimes they were horribly lame but they gave us something to talk about. I hated having to leave Drifter Ken’s company so I could go to the miserable fuckhouse of a school.

So, anyway, I got to school that Thursday only a few minutes late. All I could think about was the big, bulgy green sucker in the right front pocket of my pants and I couldn’t wait until recess. I didn’t think I’d be able to eat all of it and I’d have to save the wrapper so I could store the rest of it until after school. That way I could enjoy the hell out of it on my way home, too. Drifter Ken, if he was still in the park, which he almost always was after school, would be happy to see me enjoying the hell out of that sucker. And the thing kind of kept me behaved, too. A lot of times I’d have to skip recess and stay inside with the surly Miss Pearlbottom, who was one of the *biggest* blobs I’d ever seen.

There was this one time when I had a fantastic vision about fat old Pearlbottom. In the vision, she wore one of those hideous floral-patterned dresses. It hung flappingly from her giant buttocks. Her ass was so huge it looked like she had children stuck in there. For no reason whatsoever, there was this cow in the hall of the school. Pearlbottom, with a grace I’d never seen her obtain before was on top of the creature in a heartbeat, driving it to the ground with her girth. After wrestling it down to the floor, she began to rapidly devour it, poking her fingers into its flesh, moving pieces of it around with her pudgy little fingers in search of the choicest bites. The entire cow was gone in minutes. In my dream, she looked on, horrified, like it had been a brash act of cannibalism or something. Finishing her meal she looked up at me, wiping the blood from her mouth with the back of her hand and picking some of the cow’s coarse hide out of her teeth, looking as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Needless to say, I was shaken upon awakening.

Most days, I'd have to stay in from recess for doing something real stupid like sitting back in my little desk and flipping my head back and forth on my shoulders while singing some stupid shit like "Da doo doo doo," or some fuckall like that.

Pearlbottom reminded me of someone who should be working at a truck stop, not in a school. She tell me to stop acting out. Sometimes she would tell me that I was way off task, like I was supposed to know what the hell that meant.

It didn't matter. I'd keep flicking my head and making the sounds. Mainly, I kept doing this because of the real soft but sort of mean way she had of telling me to stop, like I needed to be reminded of what I was doing. I knew exactly what I was doing and figured it was disruptive as hell, but I just didn't care. I was more entertained by the way my hair would briefly raise up off my scalp. I snapped my head and I would try to snap it quicker and quicker every time. I tried to make the sounds loud and clear, yet distinctly my own, by adding occasional flourishes to it. Like sometimes I'd see what it sounded like with a lot of spit in my throat or with a bunch of paper in my mouth. And Miss Pearlbottom, she just kept shoveling on the fuckness.

My desk was in the back of the classroom, which had two doors—one in front and one in back. I knew I was intentionally sat by the back door so that when I started in with something like the head snapping and sounds, Pearlbottom could open up that back door and pull my desk out so I was sitting real lonely and all in the hallway. She was a very burly woman and she didn't have to extend a lot of effort to do this.

Simplified, the breakdown went something like this: I would be immersed in my own little world managing to have a decent time because I didn't *want* to be at school to begin with. She would yell me out into the hall for having a relatively good time when nobody else was. Then her brashness would make me cry. I'd felt like that for about the past three years, always on the verge of crying, always felt so sad and sorry for myself that it didn't take much to send me on a crying jag. Then, Miss Pearlbottom would take away my recess for crying. Having my recess taken away wasn't even that much of a punishment. But when that happened I had to stay in the lunchroom with one of the monitors while they stared at me. There I would sit, pitifully looking down at my half-eaten tray of food.

"You've really done it now," Pearlbottom would say, leaning down so close to me I could see the pores on her face, close to gaping, cheap and shiny make-up slathered over top of them. And this snide blob had the worst breath I'd ever smelled. She chewed cinnamon-flavored gum and drank coffee a day and this combination created an amazingly shit-like type of halitosis. Her teeth were all decayed so they looked like little Tic Tacs, the green kind, hanging from her gums. "Some people just never learn. You see if you're still in here at the end of the year, Wally."

Sometimes it seemed like all people did was threaten me and that smegma drenched cunthole was probably right. I wouldn't be there at the end of the year. At least, I didn't want to be there at the end of the year. And, even more, I didn't want to have to come back to the middle school the next year either.

That sucker of Drifter Ken's got me through the day. Or, at least, the first part of the day. When recess came, it was the sucker that finally got me into trouble. By the time recess did finally come, I was practically salivating over that damn thing. My hand rested on the bulge in my pants. With the sweaty tips of my twitching fingers, I could practically taste that sucker through the denim of my pants and its thin plastic wrapper. I had to be careful not to twitch too much though, so Miss Pearlbottom wouldn't think I was playing with myself, which is apparently a very serious offense at school. The last time it happened, I didn't even get the hallway. I was sent straight to the office where Mr. Rheingold, another blob, suspended me for the rest of the week.

I didn't see what the big fuss was. It wasn't like I had it out or anything. Wasn't school a place for

exploration? No one even noticed except Pearlbottom. If it hadn't been for Becky Trawlers' ass crack hanging out the back of her pants, it wouldn't have happened anyway. To me, it seemed more indecent to have your ass exposed than it did to have your hand discreetly shoved down the front of your pants. The kids called me "Whack Off Wally" for the rest of that year, the Year of Lottie Simpson's Reign.

The bell finally rang for recess and I was the first one out of the classroom, one of the conveniences of being in my hall-yanking position. Then I burst through those double doors, their long horizontal steel levers and the wire in the glass of the windows the only thing separating me from outside. I beat hell out to the playground and the fence. It was raining a little bit. Nothing more than a mist really but without a coat, I should have been freezing. It didn't really bother me though. My desire for the sucker kept me hot.

I pulled the green knob out of my pocket and unwrapped it with shaky, sugar-starved hands when I heard a soft voice behind me, freezing me.

"Whatcha got there?" At first I thought it might be Pearlbottom.

I turned around and saw that it was Mary Lou Dover, the hottest girl in my class. She was already fully developed and she had on a tight shirt that ended above her bellybutton, despite the cold. I guessed that was so everyone could see how flat and tan her stomach was. A soot smear sat, birthmarkishly, beside her navel. I knew she was as vacant as the rest of the blobs but her beauty or, perhaps at that moment, her militantly erect nipples, kept me from really noticing this blobbiness. It would come out later, as soon as the beauty faded. I guessed that would be like in her mid-twenties, when those legs and that stomach started bulging, after she'd been fucked and beat senseless by every huge-dicked football player that looked at her. Maybe she would take another route and marry a cockwinkle of a lawyer who would twist her words like soft metal until she was voiceless.

Mary Lou, the trophy wife.

Mary Lou, a big fuckable future blob.

What *did* I have there?

"Nothin." I answered her quickly, hiding the sucker behind my back. I thought she might tell on me. She was that type of person. Mary Lou was very mean. She had the two twins on either side of her head, Cathy and Denise Something-or-the-other, looking as though they'd had their spirits stolen by Mary Lou.

"I know you got somethin. I seen it. It's a sucker, ain't it?"

"No."

"Yer lyin. Wallace Black is a *liar*."

"No I'm not."

"And a... molester."

I don't know where she got that from. I'd never even kissed a girl, of any age. The only girls I'd even seen with their clothes off were on the television. I had a few fuzzy memories of seeing the mother naked as a small child but that seemed more appropriate for vomition rather than anything else, really.

"No I'm not."

"I bet you are."

"I bet I'm not."

"I want that sucker."

"You can't have it. It was a present."

"From who?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out."

"I want that sucker."

"No."

“I’ll let you kiss me if you give me that sucker.”

Then I lied. I suddenly realized what it was I might have. A bartering tool.

Everybody loves a lollipop.

“Aw, I kiss girls all the time. I’m sixteen. That’s almost an adult. Kissing’s what adults do.”

“Yer a big fat liar is what you are, Wally Black. I know you want to kiss me. Everybody does.”

It was true that I wanted to kiss her. I figured that would make me more like at least twenty-five other kids in the middle school. Hell, even the high school. Mary Lou was one of the girls that would hang out outside the middle school until the loser high schoolers drove by in their battered cars. Only I guess I was a bigger loser than they were. At least they were *in* high school. But I felt like I needed more than a kiss from Mary Lou. I wanted to up the ante at least a notch.

“Can I use my tongue?” I figured that might be worth it and it seemed like something she would plausibly go for. I knew she wouldn’t suck me or let me finger her like I’d heard she’d done with Johnny Listo.

“Only for a second? For the sucker?”

I nodded. I was starting to choke up. It felt like somebody had poured cement on the inside of my body and it was rapidly hardening. The only thing that wasn’t hardening was Mr. Lawrence. Maybe we hadn’t been on the playground. I had ogled Mary Lou all year. I had never even touched a girl and with the prospect of sticking my tongue in that mouth, I felt weak all over. I think hearing about Mary Lou’s exploits made me even more excited. Like I thought that anything she could do would be really good.

“You ain’t got AIDS or nothin, do ya? You look like somebody who’s got AIDS.”

“I don’t have AIDS. I promise.”

I guess that was good enough for her. She took a step toward me and closed her eyes. She was a little shorter than me so I had to bend way down. I shook uncontrollably. As soon as I was close enough to smell her skin under her perfume I kind of lost it, I guess. Once our lips touched, it couldn’t have been more than a few seconds before I tried to put my tongue in her mouth. I really wasn’t sure how that should be done. I mean, I’d seen people do it on the television but you never really got to see how the tongue got there. I just stuck it out like an insult. I wanted to slip it halfway down her blobby throat. At that point, I thought sex must be more about destroying each other. Just touching her made me want to like step inside of her body. To somehow stretch it to the point of bursting.

But she kept her teeth clenched. That felt like an embarrassing eternity, standing there as my tongue moved wetly against the plaque on her teeth. So I got this other idea. Real quickly, I put my clammy palm against her tan stomach and ran my hand straight down until it was in her pants.

For the slightest fraction of a second, I realized what this was all about. Mr. Lawrence picked up and stiffening against my briefs. I realized I didn’t give a fuck about Mary Lou. It was the senses I felt. Everything in that one breath. I tasted the inside of her mouth, smelled the oil on her skin, felt the texture of the cloth of her underwear on the back of my hand and that moist warmth on my palm. I wanted to do a little more. I wanted to rip her pants off. I didn’t care where the hell we were. She pulled away, jumping back, and I could tell by the way she was looking at me she was really mad.

Hell, I would’ve been mad too. How many times had Mary Lou felt that predatory stiffening? How many times had her essence completely ceased to exist leaving her to become nothing more than a body? How many more times would she feel it? And how did she feel being able to use that as her only tool, her only asset? Had she went down on Johnny Listo willingly or had his stiffness become so completely overpowering she didn’t have a choice?

She reached out and snatched the sucker out of my hand. I was too nervous and shaky and full of feeling to tell her that a deal was a deal and she didn’t let me use my tongue. If she’d just let me use my tongue then maybe it would’ve stopped there and I wouldn’t be standing on the playground feeling

so guilty.

~~She started yelling at me, bouncing that sucker toward me in the air, the way Pearlbottom sometimes did with the yardstick.~~

“You *are* a molester, Wally Black. Yer almost an adult, you said so yourself, and my momma says that older men ain’t supposed to be touching me. Especially *there*. Yer not just a molester, yer a big fat rapist. I never asked you to touch me, you stupid freak. I could have you locked up for this, just like Mom did Stephen. And I *asked* him to touch me.”

I got even more nervous and scared when she said that, but my guilt virtually vanished. “You got the sucker.”

“Damn right I got the sucker. That’s why I ain’t gonna tell Miss Pearlbottom bout this but cho better watch out cause I’m tellin Bucky *all* about it.”

That made me even more nervous and scared. My Swarth-free year was about ready to come to an end. Before trotting over to Swarth, Mary Lou leaned toward me and said, “If you’da played yer cards right, Wally Black, I woulda showed you my tits for this here sucker.”

Now, whether the sucker was watermelon or lime or sour apple, I would never know. The only thing I’d got out of the deal was a cheap feel of a crotch that I’m certain was diseased, if only by a low grade form of crabs. And, even worse, it was a feel I’d felt guilty about.

Chapter Three

The Year of Swarth

Mary Lou stalked up to Bucky Swarth. I stayed over by the fence, bracing myself. I could have run but the playground was very small, so there really wasn't any place to go, and I probably would have fallen down anyway. I had never really run away from the bullies. At first, I'd tried to fight back. Then I learned to just accept the beatings. Usually, if a teacher happened to come along while I was taking a good beating and not even fighting back, the bully would get in worse trouble than I would.

Bucky stood in the middle of the playground, his gang of five surrounding him. They stood there like they belonged, puffing away at their cigarettes. Some of them hadn't grown to their full height yet, but I was certain that they all weighed over 200 pounds. Bucky was the biggest, naturally—the leader. It looked like he wore a new pair of pants every day, they were so stiff and blue-looking. He always had the bottoms of them cuffed-up and I knew he probably shopped in the husky section, his mother telling him that he was just big for his age. But he was a fatass. Weren't *fat* people supposed to be made fun of? The bottom of his stomach stuck out of his striped shirt. I could tell he already shaved. Wiry, black hair covered his vast white stomach. He wore a big black leather jacket with loads of shiny silver buckles on it. The arms were too short and I questioned the physics required to zip over his gut. He kept his black hair in a very retro crew cut.

I stood there, quivering with fear, watching Mary Lou talk to him, rubbing those breasts all over his arm. She was rather coy about it, throwing her arms into some sort of gesticulation, moving in to even so slightly *swipe* Swarth with her chest. For treatment like that, I would have beat the hell out of me if I were Bucky Swarth. He tried to push her away, but she just kept rubbing herself all over him. I'm sure his leather-clad arm was numb to those stabbing, excited nipples. Boy, she was really mad. I heard her caterwauling from over where I was.

Apparently, she finally said something to catch his attention and shove his bloodlust into action. I was guessing she probably promised him anal sex without a condom or some fuckness like that. He leaned over to her and kissed her for a few seconds, massaging one of her breasts with a meaty hand. They broke up and he kind of pointed at me, mumbling something. Confirming her accusations, I guess. And then he was on his way over, throwing down his cigarette and aiming that big blobby head right at me. His gang followed him, their chests all pumped up. They all looked like they had tits and if they weren't capable of inflicting such physical harm, I would have found the situation too absurd to take seriously. I imagined Pearlbottom sending a note home stating that I'd been whapped to death by the bosoms.

There I was, standing frozen by the fence, shaking even more violently by that point. Bucky came over and just stood there, staring at me. Hate boiled in those eyes, but it was real *unspecific* hate. Like he looked at everyone like that and I was no one special. That look was what made me most afraid. It was a zombieified look that said there must be some form of altercation, some end, and there wasn't going to be a shred of mercy in that conclusion.

"You wanna start some shit?" he said and spit onto the ground.

I was going to tell him about the deal and how the fucking blob bag had copped out on everything and then figured, why bother? Fuck it.

"No," I said instead.

"My girl over there says you raped her good."

"That's not true."

I knew there was no way I could talk myself out of it. I had trouble talking anyway and, being nervous and all, I could just forget it. My throat felt constricted. If I started talking, I'd just end up

twittering like a girl hopped up on diet pills.

“You callin er a liar?”

“No.”

“Then you must be callin *me* a liar. You think I’m a liar, you fuckin molester piece of trash shit?”

Whenever he said “liar” it sounded more like “lar.”

I knew the beating was coming and I could tell it was going to be real good and humiliating so I did something I didn’t expect. I spit in the fat blobfuck’s face. I did. I hawked a real thick one that felt like it sucked everything out of my brain and I aimed right in the middle of his sizable head, rolling my tongue around the mucous like a fleshy gun barrel. The glob hit him with surprising accuracy and hung there on the end of his puggy, piggish nose.

His gang collectively winced, “Oooh.”

Bucky tried to wipe the glob off real cool, but it hung there on the end of his fingers. He tried to flick it off with his thumb but the goober steadfastly latched onto that. He wildly flapped his arm but it just swung up and stuck onto the back of his hand. He bent down and wiped it on the damp grass, exposing an expansive backside the color of Swiss cheese. I was certain that he had a forest of hair.

“You’re dead.”

He stood up and shoved me back into the rusty fence.

I sprang forward and took a wild swing, completely missing him and throwing me off balance. One of his gang members stuck out his foot and tripped me up while Bucky pushed me forward onto the wet grass. I hit the ground and went skidding a couple of feet. Two gang members got each of my arms and lifted me up. My eyes were watering but I could see Bucky slip a set of brass knuckles onto his hand. He was out to do serious damage. He tried to hide his newly metallic right hand behind his left, so I wouldn’t know what was coming. He took a huge, overhanded swing and his iron-covered fist smashed into my face. I felt my nose break. It made a loud pop inside my head and I felt the blood coming out of it in a warm rapid trickle like I had a runny nose all of a sudden. I tasted it on the back of my tongue. The gang members kept me upright. This time Bucky took a huge underhanded swing and rammed my jaws together. I felt my teeth click and grind. My lower jaw felt like it was broken. There was more blood. I think I swallowed a couple of my teeth. This time I blacked out for a couple of seconds. Bucky took some quick shots at my ribs and body and fuckall and the gang members lifted me fall to my knees. They actually kind of shoved me to my knees. Bucky got in front of me and bent over, sticking that big blob of an ass right in my face.

I could smell the newness of those pants. One of the gang members steadied my head there close to Bucky’s ass.

I heard the fart before I smelled it.

Suddenly it was there, surrounding my head with a brown heat. The smell was the worst thing I’ve ever smelled. Maybe even worse than the beating itself. Not only was it humiliating, it smelled worse than rotting fruit. It was worse than all the locked-up-in-a-hot-room shits I’d ever had in my life. It was like Bucky had at one time devoured an entire human and those were the gases released from that exploit, sickening decay of flesh. I visualized that smell, a wet fume rolling out of that damp black forest. I felt my gorge rise and I vomited, the heaving action exuding an excruciating pain. My vomit smelled better than Swarth’s flatulence. Bucky stood upright again and overhanded the back of my skull with those brass knucks, driving my face into the cool wet ground. This time I went out for I don’t know how long. As I was going out, sort of a sickeningly uncontrolled spiral down into blackness, I heard his gang’s laughter fading and somewhere beyond that, I heard the bell, felt the warmth of my bile on the side of my face.

I think I woke up because I was drowning. I’m not sure if it was because of the rain that was no

beating down in steadily heavy sheets or all the blood that was congealing in my nose and running down the back of my throat. Nevertheless, I woke up because I couldn't breathe. I stood up as fast as I could. An intense feeling of vertigo surged up from inside, tilting me crazily back down to my knees. I stayed like that for a moment. At least until the initial pain and nausea passed. The only reason I tried to get up at all was because I knew Pearlbottom would have some sort of punishment waiting for me that would be more severe the later I was. Fuck it. What did it matter now? I'd already lost the sucker. That's what really started this whole thing anyway, wasn't it? Maybe now Bucky could shove the stick up his urethra and let Mary Lou lick the shiny green knob.

When I stood up the dizziness was still there but it wasn't nearly so overwhelming. My head whummed with pain. I tried to focus on the school but it kept darting out of my field of vision. It showed up in the far corner of my left eye and then came back in the far corner of my right. I took a few more moments to gather my bearings and then skipped back to the school because skipping makes me happy and I thought it might make the whumming go away. The skipping didn't make me any happier though. The only thing I could muster was a heavy-headed, broken kind of skip. I got to the classroom and accidentally went into the door at the front of the class because I still didn't quite know where the back door was. The whumming made it impossible to think. If I had went into the back door I maybe would have had a chance to sit down unnoticed. Or, if not completely unnoticed, then at least *less* noticed. Instead I nearly ran Pearlbottom over.

She turned to face me, real shocked-looking, like I was going to attack her or something. Her lips worked dryly against those Tic Tac teeth.

"It looks like *somebody* got into some trouble."

And I was going to tell her all about it, even if I had to stand up there and yammer like a little girl, but before I could, she reached out and plucked a blade of grass from just under my nose. She pulled a Kleenex from the floral box on her desk and wiped her finger distastefully. She reached out again, turning me around by the shoulders, touching me with only the very tips of her fingers.

"Why don't you just go on home before you can interrupt my class any more for the day." She gave me a gentle push toward the door.

My shoulders slumped. They slumped anyway, but this time it felt like my whole damn spine hit the floor. I walked in the direction I was nudged. The whumming sound was huge.

"Oh, and Mr. Wallace?"

I turned back around to look at her and tried to say, "Yes, Miss Pearlbottom," but I couldn't move my mouth.

"Why don't you shower up when you get home? You smell like death." The class burst into laughter, peppered with random words like "molester," "freak," and "AIDS."

I was sure I smelled. It was at that point that I was fairly certain I'd defecated in my pants.

I went home the same way as always, passing by the park. I didn't have the energy to skip or whoop and I didn't even really feel like it at the moment. The blobs had won today, I thought. The blobs kicked the hell out of me.

Drifter Ken was in the park, lying down on one of those thickly green painted wooden benches, sound asleep. He lay there on his back with his gray raincoat pulled up over his head. I was kind of glad he was asleep. I was really embarrassed about how bad the blobs had got ahold of me. I didn't want him to see me like that. I also didn't want to tell him about the sucker and my moment of weakness that had caused me to lose it. Drifter Ken was definitely not a blob. He was one of the only adults I had met that wasn't. He said he'd never graduated school. I was pretty sure he didn't even have a job. From talking to Drifter Ken, I got the impression a job turns a lot of adults into blobs just like school does a lot of kids. He said a job would take a man's will to live more completely than anything else. I believed him. I believed just about everything Drifter Ken said, mainly because I

wasn't a blob. I had made it a point to never believe anything a blob told me. I dreamed of a place that had absolutely no blobs in it. If I could have convinced myself a place like that existed, I could have had a little happier day.

Chapter Four

Racecar and The Wig

The parents had to be a couple of the biggest blobs I'd ever known. They weren't always that bad, mean, I didn't always see them that way. Maybe I'm the reason they were the way they were. Maybe they were the reason I was who I was. Who knows? Fuck it.

To start with, there was the mother. Her name was Sadie. There's a song called "Sexy Sadie," I think it's by the Beatles, that couldn't come further from describing the mother. In fact, if you were to hear that song in your head while watching the mother in action, it would seem cruelly humorous. I'm sure most sons wouldn't consider their mother sexy even if she truly was but the mother, man. She was a stout woman—very large and broad-shouldered. Quite mannish, now that I think about it. Never leaving the house removed any impulse she may have had for ever getting out of her nightgown. She wore the same gown for days on end. It collected all kinds of stains and worked up an odor that could be called rank even by the gentlest of standards. Even though she never left the house or changed her gown she went through the trouble of putting on her wig every morning, a sloppy brown thing she never managed to put on straight.

She had a stroke a few years back. This was mostly because of me, she said. She said her stroke came the first time I failed. "It was God's way of striking me down. Of waking me up and telling me that I had to stop sparing the rod." I tried to tell her I had been failing since birth. This stroke that I thought God or whoever gave her made her slur her words. She smoked constantly, her cigarette dangling out of her mouth. The cigarette coupled with the slur made it nearly impossible to understand a thing she said.

After my first time failing, she also became a devoted follower of vodka and gin, which probably didn't help the slurring either. She only drank the bottom-shelf stuff, the kind that comes in plastic bottles. Invariably, these bottles could be found below the kitchen sink and, wherever the mother was, a snifter was always at arm's length. Her boozing usually knocked her out shortly after I got home after her stories had gone off on the television.

She lived for those stories! Sometimes I think the people on the television had become more real to her than me and Racecar. I couldn't really blame her, though. I was a dumb boring shit, fun to laugh at but never *with*. Nothing but trouble. Virtually retarded. And the father, the father was something different altogether.

He was, as I said before, an angry gimp. He'd lost both of his legs in a work-related incident of a dubious cause. I never talked to him much, anyway—especially about that. He had this old motorized wheelchair he zoomed around the house in and he was always knocking things over—ashtrays and glasses off the coffee table, the *TV Guide* off the mother's end table. All the lower cabinets in the kitchen had this horizontal strip of raw wood down close to the floor from him slamming into them with the unused metal footrests on that damn gimpy wheelchair. That's all he did with his days zooming around the house like he was in some fucking marathon for cripples. The carpet, which wasn't in too good of shape anyway, was all worn bare from his continuous buzzing. He was trying to wean himself off the motor, though. He saw the motor, undoubtedly a modern convenience to most, as some sign of weakness. A classic case of overcompensation, he wanted to make his arms and torso huge to make up for not having any legs. He didn't talk much and when he did it was with his teeth clenched around this old yellowed-plastic cigarette filter. He had stopped smoking after he lost his legs. He said if he ever had to go on some sort of lung gadget, it would make the wheelchair too heavy to whirl around the house like that. When he did talk it was usually a fervidly passionate and obsessive rant about getting the basement all cleared out so he would have a decent place to ride his chair.

around. I wasn't even sure the basement needed "all cleared out." Nobody had ever gone down there. It could have been used as a body farm for all we knew.

The mother described the father as a "bundle of nerves."

"Why don't you just *stop* for a minute," she would strumble. "Stop turning this place into the goddamned Grand Prix."

Even with the television turned to top volume, the mother still had to strain to hear her stories over the buzzing and clunking of the father. Sometimes he growled around that filter. This really drove the mother nuts. When he started with the growling she usually had to go into the bedroom and lie down. That's something else she was doing more of lately, just going into the bedroom and falling asleep. I was ever too sick to go to school, she usually stayed in bed all day. Like a whole day with me was just too much for her. Needless to say, she was bedridden most of the weekend. She would make me move the television stand over to her doorway so she could still watch it. She never let me push it all the way into the room. She said it cluttered up her room to push it all the way in. Since she made me her personal servant when I was there all day, bringing her this and that, I had to go through the tedious process of moving the television out of the doorway to get to her bed.

So that's what the parents were like. That's not really fair. That's what the parents had *become*. I really hated them. I hadn't always hated them but, lately, I hated them an awful lot. I didn't really blame them for anything, like my failing and all that fuckness. Before I started failing, back when I actually tried to fit in, I blamed them for a lot because, even at an earlier age, I knew they had somehow created me. I never saw myself as something that came from God. I wasn't familiar with the eggs and the sperm and all that fuckness but I could tell I was like two puzzles that had the pieces all mixed up, making a third puzzle that didn't really look like anything. So when I was younger, I blamed them a lot because I didn't have my own personality so I was just a combination of them and they sure were terrifically blobby wastes. But I grew out of that and I just started wondering why I had to be born to *them*. That's really when I started hating them. I knew I still wouldn't have fit in, but at least I could have maybe had new clothes and good food and all that fuckness.

I was sure there were a lot of other people out there who would have made better parents. Maybe I'd been born to one of those other countless parents I could have had some sort of plan or goal and not that fuckness like that. Mostly I just sat around wondering how I could have been born to such slothful and ridiculous blobs like the parents.

When Miss Pearlbottom sent me home that day, I knew I had it coming. Miss Pearlbottom liked to call the parents from school whenever she thought she didn't have an opportunity to punish me enough for one day. Like I could tell that some days she wanted to haul off and smack me, I could see it in her eyes. Those were the days she would call home so that the mother and father could properly lay into me. I hated them all. The mother, the father, and Pearlbottom combined formed some kind of fuckness triumvirate. A web of fuckness. Those three lead the fuck-Wallace-Black-in-the-ass parade.

That day, walking home through the rain, I hated them—especially the parents—with an even greater passion than usual. The only thing I could think about was getting the fuck out of Milltown and never looking at any of those blobby faces with their seeping rectum mouths ever again. I walked down the sidewalk and remembered that old saying, "Step on a crack, break your mother's back," and I made sure to step on every fucking crack along my way. I briefly hoped the parents would be too tired to really punish me or maybe they would have a stroke of understanding or compassion but I guess, deep down, I knew that wouldn't happen. They always had their ways.

Sometimes, when they didn't jump my ass the second I walked through the door, they punished me in different ways. Like sometimes the mother wouldn't make dinner because demons didn't deserve dinner. That thing I said about wishing I hadn't been born to them, well, I knew they had the same feelings. Like they wished that *I* had never been born to *them*. The mother really did think I was

demon. I would catch her saying pitiful little prayers over my bed when I was asleep, trying to get the demon to fly out. Sometimes she would make me say prayers, too. They were stupid things I tried to forget right after saying them. They all sounded like something you'd find on a napkin or book of matches. I bet the father prayed he would've had a son like Bucky Swarth. A stout little shit who was smart enough to get away with everything he did. Making me skip dinner was actually one of the better punishments they had in store for me. That is, I didn't really mind it too much. The best punishment was when they flat out gave me a beating and sent me to my room. That was the best punishment because it was over so quickly. Any beating was better than thinking you're not going to get punished and then getting punished when you least expected it.

One time I got in trouble for some stupid fuckness or the other and they didn't say anything when I walked into the house. This was one of the first alternative punishments I can think of. So this one time there was no yelling or hitting and I didn't bring up anything that happened at school and a couple hours went by with me at home and nothing happening. I stood by the kitchen sink, drinking a glass of ice water, thinking everything was just fine, like I'd got away with something, when the father barreled out of the living room on that wheelchair and rammed it straight into me. The hard steel hit me at the same level it usually did the cabinets and I thought that leg he hit, the left one, was broken. But I couldn't say anything like, "What the fuck're you doing?" because I knew that was part of my punishment. There was something inside of me that said I deserved the punishments. That it was just something I had to put up with. And the crazy fuck kept doing that for the rest of the night. I'd have my back turned and right when I heard that whirring and growling I'd try to move but it got me anyway. And it hurt like hell every time. You'd think I would have wised up after the second or third time, but that's where my stupidity comes in. Was it stupidity or optimism? After every hit I told myself *that* had to be the last one. How could he think I could possibly take more than that?

There was this other time I got all the way to bed thinking I wasn't going to get punished and woke up the next morning with an incredibly bad haircut. It was that morning more than any other that I awoke wishing I wasn't such a sound sleeper. We lived right behind some train tracks and that loud sound kind of dulled me to noises and fuckall, I think. So, because I slept so fucking heavy, I woke up and had these wild tufts of hair sticking up all over my head. I looked like a crazed chemotherapy patient. I wasn't attracting anyone anyway, but that fucking ridiculous haircut made it even worse. Like I could give up all hope of *ever* attracting anyone, or even going unnoticed which, at that point, was the best thing I could really do. It worked too, the punishment that is. The kids at school taunted me for the next month, making all kinds of stupid remarks and jokes and fuckness. Like, "Hey, Wall had a fight with a lawnmower and the lawnmower won." I must have heard that a hundred times by the end of the month and I wanted to smash all those blobby people's teeth out. If you ever see someone who's had a really bad haircut, you should never start all that shit about the lawnmower because they've probably heard the same thing three times that day. Some of them just called me "Leukemia Boy," like leukemia's a disease you get from jerking off or something. I'd never hated those blobs more than that fucking school more than that month I had the really bad haircut. Did they think I didn't know my hair was ridiculous?

I eventually found the clippers and evened it out myself. I got hit for that. The mother busted her drinking glass against my face and strumbled, "I didn't tell you you could do that yet." She acted like I was some kid who was put on the couch for quiet time and got up before my fifteen minutes were served. She was a really vacant mean sick piece of blobshit.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that I never really knew how things were going to be when I walked in the door of my house. I braced myself that day I got thumped by Swarth. It felt like I had already been through so much. I didn't really know how much more I'd be able to take.

I imagined that fatass Swarth going home to his family.

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