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NOBODY

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For Jennifer, Zachary, Gretchen, and Jonathan

This may not be exactly like it really was... but it's the way I
seen it... the way I remember it... the way I damn well lived
it...

Monday

—Chapter One—

I GOTTA DO SOMETHING....

Spirit assembly they called it, for the football team, heading out to the state championships in a couple of weeks and for the girls' volleyball team, so far undefeated. We were all suppose to sit there and watch the jockstraps—both the dudes and the chicks—dance around like a bunch of horse's ass idiots. It wasn't bad enough that you had to sit there on them pain in the ass bleachers. You was also suppose to clap along and cheer while the jockstraps—that were the biggest assholes in school—slapped each other on the ass and grabbed each other's cookies. But that wasn't the half of it. The volleyball chicks strutted around and tried to act more like they was dudes than chicks. Couldn't figure that one out for the life of me.

Then there was the high school cheerleaders. I ain't gonna lie to you, them cheerleaders looked more like a freak show than a cheer squad, especially when the three hundred pound cheerleader did the freakin' splits—should of been a law against that nasty shit. *Who the hell wants to see that?* I use to think every time I seen her do it. Yet all around me, the other students hooted and hollered as they ate the bullshit all up.

Mr. Porterhouse, the head jockstrap keeper—what a bonehead—was at the center of it all. The whole freakin' time Porterhouse bullshitted on and on and on and on about how important that jockstrap bullshit was suppose to be to all of us. While Porterhouse bored us to tears, the jockstraps were dancing

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around behind him. They was giving each other Hi-5s and carrying on like freakin' animals in a circus—flexing their muscle, sucking in their beer guts, and every two seconds shouting “Yeah!” back and forth.

I wish one time they'd Hi-5 themselves and their cookies would explode.

To make it all even more worse, the high school mascot was a Trojan Warrior. So a couple of dudes threw a few rubber packets across the gym. Them packets flew through the air like silver ninja stars, fell to the floor, and slid near Porterhouse's feet. Everybody laughed like all hell broke loose, but it was the same old bullshit. During every football season, dumb-asses would toss around rubber packets, and some sick bastards would even tape up rubbers all over the school. Some dude last year cracked a egg in a couple of rubbers and taped them to the doors of the girls' locker room—I shit you not. That was freakin' sick and wrong, but the jockstraps got themselves a big kick out of it. I just couldn't see the joke, especially because they was throwing away good money to buy them rubbers. They costed a buck fifty in the gas station shithouse a few blocks away from my house. I'd of rather of used that money to get me something decent to eat.

Yeah, that entire assembly horseshit was sucking ass something fierce, yet it wasn't nearly as bad as homecoming week. I use to like homecoming—no horseshit—until it became all about the freakin' jockstraps. I don't know. Maybe it was always a big dumb animal fest, but it took me a couple of years to catch on. I was always a bit slow in the brain.

At any rate, I wasn't about to sit there no longer than I had to. A group of dudes that I called the Shit-rag Club—because they all wore a extra T-shirt with their heads only through the head hole like a necklace—was crowded in front of me. I waited until the Shit-rag Club popped up to cheer some bullshit Porterhouse said then made my break. Ducking behind the bleachers, I squeezed my scrawny ass between the gym wall and the metal frame of the bleachers. A couple of times, my hoody got snagged on a bolt or busted piece of metal. I even thought about ditching my books to make my escape more easier. Regardless of the crap holding me back, I was still able to cruise outta the gym real quick without nobody seeing me go, except the students sucking face and playing grab ass under them bleachers.

Like the school needs more chicks running around with swollen bellies, I thought as I passed by them couples.

Since all the jockstraps were in the gym, getting worshiped by all the students that they treated like shit throughout the year, I passed quietly through

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the locker room and down a empty hallway to one of the restrooms. I figured I'd hang out there till the horseshit in the gym got over. I hopped up onto the counter and sat in between a couple of sinks. Like every sink in the building, the taps on either side of me was dripping. *Wish I had me the money that they piss away on wasted water each year.*

In that depressing dim light, I sat dangling my legs over the side of the counter while hating life something fierce with nothing to do except stare at them shit stained walls. I could still hear the idiots cheering even though I was all the way across the freakin' school from the gym. *What a bunch of freakin' idiots. I just don't get it.*

Only good part about that assembly was that it took up the entire first hour class. First hour was English. I had me a copy of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in my back pocket, but I'd of rather of sat there staring blankly at the shit smears in the hoppers than crack open that book. I'd also rather of listened to them hoppers flush than listen to Mr. Marlowe blab and blab and blab about that freakin' book—especially since nobody except the ass kissers were reading the stupid thing.

I waited for what seemed like a couple of days of my life getting pissed away for the horseshit in the gym to quiet down. *Wish I had me a smoke.*

Once the yelling stopped, I figured the jockstrap worship session was over, so I wandered towards my second hour class—Internet Tech with Ms. Hall. Rounding a corner, I slid to a stop and carefully backed away from Mrs. Wilson—the teacher I had for English my freshmen year. She was one of them people that you could tell right away wasn't right in the freakin' head. She basically had herself three different modes: off the wall cheerful, pissed off at the world, and isolation. As she stood alone by her classroom door, smiling away and clapping her hands, I could tell that she was in the off the wall cheerful mode, which was the worst of the three. When she turned to the side, I seen that she looked pregnant. That threw me for a loop.

Who the hell could of did the nasty with her? Couldn't imagine her thawing out enough for a dude to jump on and do the dirty deed. Damn! How could a dude even think about hitting that let alone digging in? Couldn't even imagine the horror of bumping my body parts with her nasty ass—especially a psycho bitch nasty ass at that, I wondered.

Backing the way I originally came, I was still ahead of the crowd that I heard moving through the halls towards me. Without warning, Marlowe and some woman stepped out of his classroom, cutting off my only escape route. I

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just froze in place. Didn't want to hang around there because the less time spent near Marlowe the better. But I couldn't go forward, and I definitely wasn't gonna go back and deal with that psycho Wilson.

Someone's mom was chewing Marlowe's ass up one side and down the other. If I wasn't so freaked out at the time, I would of laughed at him for standing there and taking that crap like a chump. The mom who was barely as tall as Marlowe's shoulders told him that he was nothing but a horseshit teacher that never once gave a rat's ass about the students in his class. She kept going on and on about how he didn't never teach nothing; all he did was pass out homework and expect the kids to know what to do with it. She also told him that he ran his classroom like he was king-shit Nazi or something like that. The whole time, Marlowe just stood there looking like a little kid getting a blasting from his mom.

Marlowe looked like he was getting beat up something fierce. He also seemed pissed as all hell as he said, "Pushing to get your son a label is not the solution to his academic issues... nor will any label be a green light for Sethro to act out in class without consequences."

"We'll just see what Mr. Chan and the school board have to say about it, Mr. Marlowe," she told him. Then she pushed past me and disappeared around the corner in the direction of the main office and the approaching crowd.

Marlowe looked stunned—like he didn't know what just hit him. A second later, he snapped out of it and turned on me with the old stink-eye.

"Why are you here, listening to personal business?" he yelled.

Turning to bolt away, I said, "Just on my way to class."

He grabbed my arm, but I ripped it away from him.

"Get off me," I shouted, backing away.

The hall was rapidly filling with students. Some slowed as they approached to get a view of the loser getting busted for something.

"Get to Mr. McCracken's office," Marlowe screeched at me.

"I didn't do nothing. You ain't got no right grabbing at me like that," I said, still backing away from him. He looked freakin' nuts, like he wanted to kick my ass or something—probably did for all I knew.

A few assholes in the crowd were doing the pointing and laughing thing as they stood around Marlowe's door.

"You ditched the assembly, and God knows what you've been doing," he said. He leaned forward and sniffed at me. "You've been smoking!"

"The assembly just let out," I claimed, but I knew I was busted—for

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ditching and probably for smoking a cigarette I never had.

Marlowe didn't have nothing more to say to me. He stepped into his classroom and buzzed the office.

"Office," said one of the crusty old women working up there, probably Mrs. 'stick-up-the-ass' Knight.

"I'm sending a delinquent to Mr. McCracken," Marlowe said into the intercom. "He ditched this morning's assembly, and I think he may've been smoking in the building."

Figuring I already had me more than enough trouble for one day, I kept my ass shut for once and headed straight for McCracken's office. On the way, I fought against the crowd of students, heading for their second hour classes. Just about every jockstrap I passed tried to book me—the assholes.

—Chapter Two—

EACH FOUNTAIN I PASSED, I TOOK ME A LONG DRINK TO TRY TO SETTLE MY grumbling gut. All along the way, I tried to figure out some story to tell McCracken. I soon gave up on the story though. Didn't make no difference what I told McCracken. Truth or bullshit, he'd figure I was lying to him anyway. Instead, I wondered who the mom was that was bitching out Marlowe. *Wish my mom gave a shit enough to head down here and let Marlowe and all the other teachers in this place have it. Like that'll ever happen.*

McCracken, arms swinging at his sides and making a couple of tight fists, was standing outside his office waiting for me. The bell rung by then, starting second hour.

When I entered the common area just across from the offices, McCracken yelled, "Figured it was you again... not a damn word." He turned his back on me and pointed to his office door. "You hear me? Not a damn word. Just get your sorry ass in my office."

I slumped past McCracken. He practically had his nose up my ass; he was that freakin' close to me as he walked in behind me. We entered the office, and then I took a seat in front of his desk. I couldn't help noticing how the desk looked like it was in a war—on the losing side—along with the rest of the crap in his office. What I hated the most was the poster-size photo of McCracken's high school football team. It was taken about a hundred years

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ago when McCracken was a kid about my age. And right in the middle was McCracken, sitting there like he was king of the freakin' jockstrap world. Every time I looked at that picture, I wanted to shred it to pieces, then set them pieces on fire.

McCracken kicked my feet when he walked past me and growled, "Next time, you wait until I invite you to take a seat."

I didn't know what the hell to do—stay in the chair or stand. But, then again, no matter what I did or didn't do, It'd of been wrong, so I just sat there like a chump.

"Mr. Marlowe caught you ditching the assembly and smoking in the building," he told me. And like always, he stared at my ass and waited for the confession or the series of lies.

"I wasn't smoking nothing in the building," I said in my defense. "Ain't got me no smokes."

McCracken ignored me. "That's at least a afternoon in ISS," he went on without bothering to look at me. When he finally looked me in the eyes, I instantly lowered mine to the floor. *I could never win.*

"You don't have no future or place in this world," McCracken said, starting up on me again; it was the same old bullshit he gave me since freshmen year. "You're going to end up dead in a ditch on a back road somewhere—your corpse gagging maggots—with a toe tag that reads: 'John Doe, number zero.' We'll just call you JDZ for short."

I knew what he meant by that zero part, but he was a idiot for saying it. *Like I'll give a shit what they'll think about me when I'm a worm feast—I don't give a shit what anyone thinks of me now.*

"Mrs. Giganti ain't here today, so just sit your sorry ass in my waiting room," McCracken told me. "Just keep your mouth shut, and get some homework done. What's that you got there?"

I glanced down at my books. Before I could say nothing, McCracken waved a hand in my face. "Just get something done, and don't give me no reasons."

I remember hearing Chan giving some announcements, echoing throughout the hollow halls, but after that, I couldn't tell you how long I sat there on that plastic chair in McCracken's waiting room. I stood up once to stretch, but a second later, McCracken screamed through the open door of his office at me to sit down. I also had to take me one mean ass piss, but I was too freakin' a scared to ask McCracken if I could go. *He'll just say no and then*

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think it's funny while he waits for me to pissed myself, I thought.

Most of the time, I sat there doodling on the cover of the *Cuckoo's Nest*. I tried to do some of my math homework, but I never could remember how to do that crap once I left the classroom. Really, I could do the stuff when I was in class—whenever Figglewitz had his wits—but whenever I tried to do the work on my own, I'd get stuck.

I was getting so bored of sitting there that I was even tempted to crack the cover of the *Cuckoo's Nest*. That was when McCracken stuck his head into the waiting area.

“Get to lunch. Go straight there and straight back here when lunch is over. If I catch you wandering the halls, you've had it,” McCracken growled. Then he headed in the direction of the teachers' lounge.

When I was halfway across the common area, the bell rung. Pushing and shoving, students filled the halls, going to lunch or to other bullshit classes. Avoiding a group of jockstraps and their chicks, I ducked into the restroom just as three members of the Shit-rag Club was leaving. *Freakin' weird asses.*

A freshman was already standing in front of one of the pissers.

I joined him there and said, “I got to piss so damn bad, this is gonna feel like I'm taking a mean shit.”

“Gross,” he mumbled and then washed his hands and walked out.

So much for making a friend.

After I took care of business, I thought about hanging out in the restroom instead of going to lunch. I ain't gonna lie, I wouldn't of gave a squirt of piss for none of my classes, but lunch was the worst of all. If I hung out in the hoppers, though, I feared McCracken might check on where I was during lunch.

Leaving the restroom, I spotted a group of *wanna-be* gang bangers, kicking around in the hall. The *wanna-bes* rarely or never gave me no crap. Think it was because I kind of looked like one of them. Yeah, I was a real dirt sack. But I never wanted to be no *wanna-be*. I never wanted to be nothing—except left alone. I also never had nothing the *wanna-bes* wanted to swipe since I was poorer than shit. No money meant no hassle, so messing with me wasn't worth their time. The jockstraps were a different story though. The jockstraps didn't only want to swipe your cash like the *wanna-bes* did. The jockstraps also wanted to swipe your self-respect. They messed with just about everyone—everyone they could smack around without getting smacked back themselves, that was.

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As I passed by them, the *wanna-bes* didn't even give me a second look. I didn't bother to even give the likes of them even a quick glance. In that school, just looking at someone was enough reason for them to bust a foot off in your ass.

Most everybody that had *C* lunch was in the lunchroom when I wandered in. Mr. Chan, the principal, was walking around and talking to students as if they gave a shit about what he had to say. He was cool and everything, but he could also be a ass pain. He was just one of them guys that was always walking around happy and smiling at you. I bet you could light that dude's grundies on fire, and he'd still smile that dumb-shit smile of his.

I took my spot at the table with all the rest of the losers. Dorks, geeks, burnouts, pansies, and all the other idiots had a table all to ourselves. All year, every year, we sat at the same table of losers. Every once in a while—but rarely—one of the losers would make a cool friend and join one of the cool tables. But mostly, we were all doomed to each other's company—like it or not.

But that wasn't the half of it. The losers were no big deal to sit with. It was the lunchroom that I really hated with a passion, even more than McCracken's office. Most days, I was starving my ass off and was forced to sit there day after day and watch everyone else feed their fat ass faces—or even more worse, watch people throw away good food that they couldn't force down.

That day, I was lucky enough to get stuck sitting next to Digger, all five hundred and two pounds of him. I called him Digger—but not to his face—because he was always digging in his pants. Believe me, that dude wasn't shy about it neither. Rain or shine in front of God and everybody, he'd dig into the front of his pants, scratching away like nobody's business.

So there I was sitting next to Digger while he ate his huge lunch with one hand and dug down his pants with the other. The rest of the losers sat and shoveled it in their faces along with Digger. The whole time no one said much to the dude or chick next to him. I had nothing to eat, as usual, so I sat and scribbled on the cover of the *Cuckoo's Nest*, trying to ignore the smells of the food and the slurping and chewing noises everyone was making.

About halfway into the lunch period, Digger offered me some of the chili-cheese fries and ham sub that he was shoveling into his face. Digger always had enough food on his tray for ten dudes, and he always offered some of it to anyone that sat by him. That was the story of my freakin' life. Digger had his

hands down his pants ever since kindergarten. I mean twenty-three outta twenty-four hours a day that guy was digging in his pants. The other hour he was using the same nasty-ass hands to eat with. I might of been a dirt sack myself—a desperately hungry dirt sack—but I couldn't bring myself to eat off of Digger's tray. I'd of rather of eaten outta the trash.

That far into the day, my gut was weaker than shit. I had to get outta the lunchroom before I freaked out from hunger. I looked around for Chan, to see if I could sign out and go to the library or something, anywhere just to get the hell outta there.

Chan was at the far end of the lunchroom. A group of cheerleaders—the standard freak show—was sucking up to Chan while they shook their shit in his face. You could tell that he was loving it from the look of him. I sneaked up to the small table at the front of the lunchroom and signed out that I was going to the library. Chan never seen me do it, so I left the lunchroom free of hassle. If McCracken tried to nail me for ditching lunch, I could tell his ass that I wasn't wandering because I signed out like I was suppose to.

—Chapter Three—

AFTER I DRANK ME ABOUT A GALLON OF WARM WATER—HALF THE FREAKIN' fountains in that place never did keep the water cold—I strolled into the library. No one was in there. It was so freakin' quiet that I thought I wasn't suppose to of been in there. I crept to the back of the library, feeling like I was there to rob the place, and hid in one of the study booths. I didn't have shit to do other than sit there and stare off into space or continue to destroy my copy of the *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Why the hell do people waste time and good money with this bullshit? I wondered as my eyes floated around the place from bookshelf to bookshelf. I couldn't imagine pissing away even one second of my useless life on none of them books.

Suddenly, Mr. Wood, the pansy librarian, appeared outta nowhere. He was talking to someone that I couldn't see clearly through the bookshelves at first.

“No matter how much we try to reach these little... blessings... two seconds with their apathetic—and more often than not pathetic—parents, they can care less what we have to say in our classrooms. We spend over a decade

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of the child's life, showing him and her the importance of an education, but all it takes is for a parent to mutter, 'I never needed me no schooling' or 'Reading them books never done me no good,' and all we've hoped to accomplish is lost," said Marlowe.

My weak gut tightened. Just the sound of Marlowe's voice was enough to make me look for a better place to hide.

Wood let out a long sigh then said, "Are we just to give up, then?"

"Only on the students and parents who time and time again have proven to us that they just don't care about education," Marlowe was quick to reply, pounding a fist on what sounded like a metal bookshelf. "Just this morning, I was berated by a parent who claims that school is important to her family. Then, she informed me that her little blessing, who is failing three classes, is going to miss three weeks of class while the family goes on a Caribbean cruise."

Wood just shrugged, and then Marlowe changed the subject. "Looks like you've gotten rid of the surplus books."

Wood bitched right back at Marlowe. "Surplus books! The school board has missed my point completely. I agree that we need more current novel releases, but not at the expense of the older books—the true literature. Most of the titles the board demands I sell or give away are out of print books and classics. If I dispose of these works, valuable literary art and knowledge will be lost forever. All our library will be left with are the bumpy cover books that read as empty as Hollywood movies are displayed."

"You can't have your cake and eat it too, Jonathan. If you want money for new books, you have to make room for them," said Marlowe.

"You support the board's decision, then?" Wood asked.

"The board won't give you money for new books unless you make room for them," Marlowe explained again. "You can't expect them to expand on the library. We'll have to knock down walls. You share a wall with the P.E. and athletic facilities, so don't count on it."

Looking around, I could see that many of the shelves were cleared off quite a bit. Some of the shelves were even empty.

Wood seemed pissed as all hell. "Last summer, the board built a \$75,000.00 equipment shed for the football and track teams, but—"

"They had to build the equipment shed because the new wrestling room took over the old equipment room," Marlowe told him.

Wood continued to hammer into Marlowe. "You're supposed to be an

advocate for literature.”

Marlowe let out a humorless chuckle, “Advocate! I no longer waste my time with most of these kids. The students in this community don’t read much anyway. It’s all texting, hyperspace, video games, movies, and TV for them. Trying to get them to read is like potty training a dog. Hell, they won’t even listen to a book on CD. I have this one student in—”

I heard another teacher interrupt Marlowe. “Wood, I need to book library time for Tuesday through Friday next week—all day, each day.”

I didn’t need to see her to know that the squeaky childlike voice came from Mrs. Wilson. Her voice entered my ears like the top of a busted pop bottle.

Wood let out a puff of air. “I will see if that time is—”

Wilson was quick to cut off Wood. “I need the time regardless of what you have available... though I don’t know why I bother. Most of the little geniuses in my classes don’t have a clue when it comes to researching material for an essay. Unfortunately, the few who do have a clue must suffer in the company of the morons.”

“The best I can offer is to check my bookings,” Wood said calmly, but you could tell he had to be getting pissed off at Wilson for being a class A psycho bitch.

“Tuesday through Friday, I’ll be bringing down my classes,” she said as simple as that, her voice trailing off towards the library exit.

“The woman’s a bloody elitist,” Wood said as I heard the library doors close. I figured that was some high class British dude’s word for a American psycho bitch.

“We need more teachers like her,” Marlowe told Wood. “If public education is going to survive, we need to get rid of the riffraff, so we can focus on the kids who belong here.”

“Good God, man,” Wood said, finally getting his shorts in a knot, “will you just listen to yourself?”

After the door of Wood’s office closed, I couldn’t hear them above a mumble, so I sneaked outta the library. I drank me another gallon of water before I headed back to McCracken’s office. The bell rung just seconds after I sat back down in the little waiting area.

McCracken stormed up to me—his finger nearly touching my nose—and bitched, “Where were you? Before you lie, I know you weren’t in the lunchroom.”

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“I signed out and went to the library to read,” I explained, not looking up at him, but holding up my copy of the *Cuckoo’s Nest*.

He towered over me as I sat there like a helpless idiot. “Library? What was wrong with reading in the lunchroom?”

“It was too loud in the lunchroom for me to get any reading done,” I told him. I cracked open the book somewhere in the middle and acted like I was going to start reading.

McCracken nodded, but I knew he didn’t buy it. “Whatever,” he grumbled, then went back into his office.

—Chapter Four—

A NUMBER OF BELLS LATER, MCCRACKEN POKED HIS HEAD INTO THE WAITING room and said, “Get out of here... now!”

At first, I was gonna head back to my locker—my usual once or twice a term visit—to dump off my books. *Like I’m gonna waste my time at home doing homework*. If I understood the horseshit, I might of given it a try, but screw it. If the teachers that think they’re so damn smarter than everyone else didn’t take the time to explain the crap, then I wasn’t gonna take the time to try to do the crap. Even if I was able to do the crap, I still couldn’t see no point in it. Since I had no future in life where my brain was concerned, all I was doing was wasting my time when it came to doing school work.

Anyway, I didn’t get very far down the hall when I seen a herd of jockstraps hanging out. They was farting around, trying to shove some poor little bastard into a locker. A few weeks ago, one of them jockstraps seen a movie where the hard ass jocks went around high school cramming dorks into lockers. Since they first talked about that movie in the locker room about a week ago, they kept trying to find the smallest dudes in the school to see if they could get one to fit into a locker. I knew they wouldn’t try to cram me into a locker. Don’t get me wrong, in the eyes of a jockstrap, I was more than dorky enough to get crammed into a locker, but skinny as my ass was, I was too tall to fit. That wouldn’t stop them from slapping me around if they seen me, seeing how I was one of their favorite targets—thanks to that ass crack of a P.E. teacher St. Martin. He hated my ass. Just because I wasn’t knock-kneed, pigeon toed, and lumbered around like a freakin’ sasquatch, I didn’t fit in among his herd of jockstraps.

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Doug Maley was by far one of the biggest and dumbest animals in the jockstrap herd. His lips were fat and greasy like giant, swollen worms, circling his mouth. His skin was as pale and yellowish like the shithouse walls, which made them nasty ass lips look even bigger. With the herd of jockstraps cheering for him, Maley nearly had the locker door shut on the poor dude. I seen the little dude around. He was a sophomore, but he was probably the smallest dude in the school. The German teacher, Mr. Johnson, must of been bothered by the noise and jumped out into the hall. Most of the students and a few of the jockstraps that were watching the show scattered like the cowards they was when Johnson came outta his classroom.

“Maley, what’re you trying to do?” Johnson yelled. He sounded pissed, but he was a lover-of-jockstraps just like most of the teachers. Shit! A jockstrap or popular dude could set the freakin’ school on fire, and the teachers wouldn’t care. A lowlife like me would get busted for spitting in the trash.

“Just putting my stuff away before I go to practice. Everybody knows we got the state championships coming up,” Maley said, laughing a bit.

The remaining jockstraps that hadn’t run off grabbed each other’s cookies and asses as they laughed. I could see the poor bastard crying like a pansy through the crack in the locker door.

Johnson pushed past the assholes and opened the locker. “Get out of there, Louis,” he yelled at the little dude.

Everyone standing there could see that the poor bastard done pissed himself because he was so damn a scared. Johnson yanked the dude out from the locker and gave him a shove against the closed lockers. I thought Louis was gonna drop dead on the spot as he spazzed out.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Louis?” Johnson yelled. “Standing there crying like a little girl? No wonder people are shoving you into lockers. Have a little respect for yourself. Now get home.” Then Johnson turned on Maley, who was choking back a bellyful of laughter. “That your locker, Maley?”

“No, I don’t know whose locker it is,” Maley explained.

“If it isn’t your locker, you have no business playing around with it—not to mention that the locker *is* school property,” Johnson told him.

“Sorry, we were just joking around. We’re just all geared up for the state championships,” Maley said, flexing his biceps as he put his hands on his hips.

Johnson checked out the inside of the locker, shut the door, and then spun the combo dial. “Just consider yourself lucky that you didn’t damage the

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locker, or that Louis didn't... dampen any of the textbooks."

After that, Johnson went back into his classroom. Maley and the other jockstraps grabbed each other's asses again as they laughed their cookies off.

"We'll try it again before the end of the week. We got to get the door closed all the way, or it don't count," Maley explained to the herd.

Then Maley got sight of me and smiled like he just won himself the lottery. I was froze in place the whole time, foolishly standing there alone in the hall with a freakin' herd of jockstraps ready to run me down.

Darla Phelps, a cheerleader I always called Bow-legs because she walked like a bowlegged ranch hand, hollered for Maley. I couldn't stand Bow-legs, but she just saved my sorry ass. She was standing at the far end of the hall and waving her arms for Maley and the others. Maley and the rest of the jockstrap herd didn't give me a second thought and raced over to Bow-legs—who had the reputation of entertaining the entire football team in a single night.

Since danger was just down the hall from me, I decided to forget about putting my books in my locker. I just wanted to get the hell outta that freakin' building real quick.

Along a section of the hall, some prep chicks and a group of dudes that acted more like chicks than dudes were decorating the halls for the state championships. They was making and hanging posters and banners that glorified the jockstraps of the high school football team and dissed the members of all the other teams going to state.

Stuff won't last long, I thought, wishing I had the money them idiots spent on all them bullshit posters and banners. Before the end of the next school day, I knew that most of the stuff would be tore down. The only stuff that'd be left hanging by the end of the week would have raunchy crap drawn on it, or a bit of fancy cussing written on it. Sad part about it all, though, the jockstraps were usually the one's that messed up all the shit like that.

A couple of the prep chicks gave me dirty looks as I tried to step over a banner. The heel of one of my grubby shoes landed on the edge, just above a jockstrap's cartoon head. *Shouldn't block the hall then*.

Also blocking the hall was a mountain of shoes that were piled up against a cart that had a dozen long colored rolls of paper hanging from it. Why was it that chicks couldn't do nothing without taking off their shoes first? All of them was moving around the hall like they was part of a construction crew. The whole time, they was working in socks or bare feet.

I was pissed off that the hallway was blocked. Going back the way I'd

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come, I didn't even bother trying to step over the posters again. That time, I stepped right on the jockstraps' cartoon heads, leaving shit smears from my shoes.

"Hey! Jerk," a couple of the preps whined at me, but I never said a word or even looked back.

After being forced to take the long way around the building only to end up where I freakin' started, I neared the front doors of the school. When I was just steps from the main entrance and freedom for the rest of the day, St. Martin hollered at my ass.

"Hey, smoker, get in here and get your gym clothes," he told me. "It's about time you bring them disgusting things of yours home to get washed... or burned."

I was too a scared to even look at the asshole. I kept walking and said, "I'll get them tomorrow. I got to catch the bus home."

I never did plan on taking the bus home, but I needed a excuse not to go into the locker room after school. That would of been like a dude throwing himself into the middle of the entire jockstrap herd. *Screw that!*

St. Martin started walking after me. "Get your ass in here before I drag you in here."

McCracken must of heard St. Martin hassling me, so he stepped outta his office to join in on the fun. Without saying nothing, McCracken started walking towards me, pushing me back with his eyes towards St. Martin. Figuring that Maley and the other more deadly jockstraps were down the hall with Bow-legs, I decided to avoid McCracken and duck into the locker room. After all, I figured I could race in, grab my gym clothes, and race out before anyone could even notice me. *Five seconds. That's all I need.*

—Chapter Five—

WITH MY HEAD SHOVED UP MY ASS, I FOUND MYSELF DRUDGING DOWN THE SIDE of the road on my way home from school. The last fifteen minutes in that freakin' building still spun in my melon like a tornado. Another day of high school bullshit. *I gotta do something....*

A rush of blood burned my cheek every few seconds. In the mirror of a parked car, I seen the bruise already purpling and lumping up. Though I never got smoked in the chin, I could also feel the skin on my chin tighten up. My

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jaw was also getting stiff too. *Damn them, anyway!* I slapped the car mirror and then stomped off on my way home. I was so freakin' pissed that I couldn't freakin' see straight.

St. Martin, that crack of a horse's ass, just sat there in his office and watched the whole thing like it was no different than watching TV. As soon as I seen the jockstraps standing around the locker room—most of them half dressed in football gear—I bolted the hell outta there. The jockstraps nailed the shit outta me with their football shoes and pads. Running like my ass was on fire, I thought I was home free when I reached the locker room door, but when I yanked it opened, I ran right into that freakishly large animal, Maley.

Maley pretended like I ran into him on purpose because I wanted to pick a fight. First he gave me the usual “You don't want none of this” as he pounded his chest like a freakin' dumb-ass ape. Then Maley gave me a fist to the face before I could say boo. He tried to drag me back into the locker room, but I was able to just barely slip outta his reach. Kind of made me grateful that he smacked me as hard as he did. If he would of just bitch slapped me, he wouldn't of knocked me so far out into the hallway and outta his reach.

The whole time, St. Martin sat in his office and watched as Maley and the other jockstraps handed me my ass—once again. Didn't even know where or when I dropped my freakin' school books and stuff, including my freakin' gym clothes. *Like I give a shit, anyway.*

Fantasies of kicking jockstrap ass swelled in my head as I passed through the road construction site. There, I hunted around for the ass ends of cigarettes. For the last few weeks, that spot was a gold mine. Pocketing a few decent butts, I got to thinking about one jockstrap in particular—Buck Baxter. Didn't even know if his real name was actually Buck. Sounded more like a nickname, but you couldn't never tell with jockstrap families. They always gave each new generation of jockstraps some bullshit name that was horse's ass stupid as all hell—Hunter, RJ, Buzz, Biff, Doug, and the like.

If you can believe it, Baxter and me use to be friends when we was in the third grade—that's friends for about thirty seconds. Baxter was the new kid in town. I remember his dad's funeral and how his mom's boyfriend took a bunch of us out for pizza afterward. It was a hell of a cool night of laughing and eating till I felt like a stuffed sausage. Next day, Baxter signed up for little league baseball. After he hooked up with the jockstraps, I instantly became just another dork to push around. Screw having friends anyway, but I sure could of went for some of that pizza as I drudged home, nursing a weak gut, busted

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cheek, and bruised pride.

The bus was a more quicker way home, but the bus was full of assholes. So I use to walk home most days when it wasn't raining or when there wasn't ten feet of snow on the ground. Back in them days, I wasn't no more eager to get home in a hurry than I was to get to freakin' school. So I spent a good part of my time just wandering around town and trying not to think about nothing. Didn't matter what it was. You name it, and I tried hard as hell not to think about it.

At least walking home, I could smoke if I found a decent butt or two. The other week, a worker left his lunchbox at the site. A can of beer, lighter, and sandwich was left inside. *Talk about striking gold*, I thought at the time. I traded the lunchbox to my neighbor down the street for three smokes and two of the hot dogs he was grilling. Today, I found nothing more than a few ass ends. Mostly menthol, so I'd have to smoke them without the filter. That menthol shit'll kill you.

I passed by the *Checkerboard*, the local burger joint. Sometimes, if I talked to this one old lady that worked there, she'd give me fries or some shit like that. Looking in the window, I seen the one woman, the nicer one, wasn't there. The old sea hag that was bitchier than all hell was there, so I didn't bother going in. Nothing but a waste of time if I did.

The mean old hag caught my eye as I went by, and she jerked back a thumb to tell me to get the hell away from the place. *Why do people got to be like that*, I wondered as I turned away and headed for home.

As I moped along on the sidewalk in front of my house, a neighbor drove by and said, "Hey, hillbilly, you gonna cut your grass and rake your leaves before it snows?"

"Mower's busted, and I ain't got no rake... ain't got no gas neither," I said without even looking at her. She was pretty hot for a old lady, but she hassled me constantly about how shitty our house and yard was. Never hassled my mom or my sister, just me. *What the hell can I do about it? Give me a mower that works and some gas in it, and I'll cut the freakin' grass from here to the freakin' moon. Hell, I like cutting the grass.*

"What do you need the mower for? I thought hillbillies kept goats for that," she said, then drove off in her new SUV. She was kind enough to leave her window down, so I could hear her laughing at me as she rolled on by.

"Screw you," I said when she was more than halfway down the street.

Stepping inside the house, just by the front door, you got to know where

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to step, or you'll break a ankle as your foot crashes into the crawl. With the crawl in mind, I wondered if anything was down there that was worth anything. When I was a grade school kid, we use to have Christmas stuff at Christmas time. *I guess it doesn't matter what's down there; I can't eat it so to hell with it.*

The sewer smell in the house was always more worse after a walk home in the cool open air. Most times, worst of all in the summer, the stink was so freakin' bad that you could taste the tang on the tip of your tongue, making everything you drank or ate taste like piss or the inside of your own ass. That's when you ever got something to eat or drink in that house. Piss or shit didn't matter much to me anyhow. I was always so damn hungry I could eat the nuts out from my own shit and love every bite of it.

"Move, loser," Jill, my sister, said as she pushed by me and ran outta the house. I only ever seen her once every month or so, and she was always running outta the house in a hurry when I did. As usual, she was dressed for the street corner, and she carried a big ass duffle bag over her shoulder.

Trevor, her pelican penis of a boyfriend, was in his car at the curb, waiting for her. He thought he was the bomb because he had that car of his—a '68 Mustang. Thing was a beater of a stoner mobile. He was one of them jerks that thought everything he had was the best. All he ever really had was worthless shit, but it was more than I ever had—the asshole.

Now I know that being named Trevor don't make you a piece of shit the instant you drop out from your mom's scabby ass, but I ain't never met me a dude named Trevor that wasn't a lowlife piece of hillbilly horseshit. Jill's Trevor was right up there with the best of the worst of them called Trevor. Yeah, he was a real class act as he sat in his duck taped driver's seat, a cigarette between two fingers and another finger up his nose.

Jill seen me watching her get into the car. I noticed that she had a few more bags of hers in the car already as she tossed in the duffle bag. Figured she was planning to be gone longer than usual. Jill flipped me the bird, and fat head, hill-trash Trevor revved the engine of his burn-out bucket, and then they raced away.

Screw them, I thought, Wish I can just be some asshole's bitch and get me something to eat tonight. Couldn't say for how long that I stared down the empty street after them.

As I rubbed my bruised cheek, I thought, *Nothing much to do. Getting dark soon.*

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Only about three lights worked in the whole freakin' house while I wandered around from room to room. I opened and closed the fridge and pantry about a hundred times as if food would magically appear if I opened one of the doors just right. All that running around did though was make my gut bitch louder. It would of been cool to have cable or a TV that gets more than snow for a picture or just anything to do to take my mind off of my grumbling gut.

When I thought about it, I would of done some homework just to take my mind off of my gut, but I ditched most of my books in the gym locker room or in the hall on my rush to save my ass from the jockstraps. I usually had the most homework in math lately because Figglewitz was in one of his moods. The *Cuckoo's Nest* should of been about halfway done or more. If I had the novel with me, I might of even read some. *But whatever.*

Suddenly, I had to piss like a Russian race horse—drank way too much water. I drank me a shitload of water most days. Sometimes, it helped settle my gut, but only sometimes. Most of the time my empty gut wasn't fooled by just plain water.

The hopper took a shit on us last spring, but my mom never worried much about getting it fixed—or nothing else in the house fixed for that matter. “Go at school or down the road at the gas station or *Checkerboard,*” she'd tell me and my sister. Didn't matter to my mom or my sister because they didn't never spend much time at home. Only in between their boyfriends-of-the-month or to pick up some clothes and shit.

At night, I just pissed out the back door, but I usually dropped ass at school. I tried to go first thing in the morning or hold it till after school because they only gave you five freakin' minutes to get to class. *Hell! How's that enough time to let loose?* Stopping in the restroom, I was late to class a couple of times. That ass crack of a math teacher, Surgess, gave me a detention for running in the hallway. One time, I had to drop ass right before gym, and I wasn't gonna do it in the locker room, leaving me open for a jockstrap attack. So I let loose in a hopper down the hall, but I had to book it, or I'd of been late to gym. Not that a detention was a big deal to me. I could sit at home and do nothing or sit in detention and do nothing all the same. Least people were around when you got a detention. The real bitch of it was that I didn't even have Surgess for a teacher that year. Bitch always thought of herself as the high school hall cop. *One of these times, I should just shit myself and then hang out in Surgess's classroom. That'd fix that tight-ass bitch of a math*

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teacher. Screw her anyway.

At any rate, if you was one for exciting adventures with nasty smells, then out my back door was the place to be. Not only did I use the back yard as a hopper, Travis often tossed his cookies in the middle of the night out the back door. I use to call him “Captain Cookies” because he tossed them nearly every damn time him and my mom drank themselves stupid—which was most times I seen them. Summer, with the heat and the flies chomping on the shit, was the worst. Rain usually washed away most of the stank, but that summer we didn’t hardly get no rain. The change in seasons cooling things off kind of took some of the edge off of the stank, but it was still pretty freakin’ sharp.

At any rate, while I was standing out back and drilling mansions for worms into the dirt with a mean ass piss, Robbie McDougal—a horse’s ass that been ruining my life for years—smoked my ass with a egg. Freakin’ egg stung the hell outta my ear but didn’t break till it bounced off of me and hit the back door window. The window was already busted, but the pieces of glass were still in the frame. The egg knocked out them busted pieces, leaving goopy egg and busted glass on the floor inside the house.

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At the time of this publication, Allan A. Zarbock, his wife, and their three children reside in a small town fifty miles south of Chicago, Illinois.

