

Kalin Ringkvist

Middle Schoolers

The school bus door swung open and the seventh grader, Tommy Leiman, forced his way to the front and stumbled off, his book bag swinging wildly across his back. He ran home faster than he ever had before, not daring to look at the other kids, swarming out in every direction from the big yellow bus. He could hear them, talking about him, snickering behind his back. He could hear them laughing at him. He put his head down and stared at the ground under his feet as he sprinted the quarter mile to his house.

Tommy was a short kid--short and fat as many would describe him. Tommy, however, never thought of himself as being overweight. He wore thick lensed glasses over his heavily freckled face. His thick blond hair puffed out in every direction, in great curls, away from his head. He became quickly out of breath as his thick legs carried him home, but did not dare to stop, for fear of the other kids.

When he reached his home he stood outside the door for a long while, gasping for breath. Finally, he was breathing at a normal pace and he decided it was time to go inside. He checked himself all over, making sure everything was in its place. Lastly, he checked his eyes. He rubbed them with his fists, hoping to remove any trace of the tears he had been shedding not long before. He didn't dare let his parents know he had been crying. He feared greatly the endless questions they would ask him if he let on that anything was wrong. Finally, he took a deep breath, ran his fingers through his hair, opened the front door and went inside.

Charlie Mathis was laughing to himself as he leaped from the bus, and began his short walk home. He skipped along at a brisk pace, thinking back on the days events. The highlight, of course, had been the incident with Tommy. Charlie laughed even harder when he thought about that fat little freak.

"Hey Dude, what's so funny?"

Charlie hadn't noticed his friend Colin, walking beside him.

"Hey Colin," said Charlie. "What's goin' on?"

"Nothing much," Colin said. "So what are you laughing at anyway?"

"Oh, I was just thinking about that little fat-ass, Tommy Leiman. Did you hear about him?"

"Heard about him? I was there for the whole thing. I'll tell you, I've never laughed so hard in my life. People are going to remember that one for years. I just wonder how it happened."

"It was me," Charlie said. "I did it."

"It was you? No way! You've got to be kidding me. How--how did you do it?"

"It was pretty easy actually," said Charlie. "I just snuck up behind him after P.E. and grabbed his jeans. Then all's I had to do was run around with them and I had Mark shove him out the door after I ran out and hold it so he couldn't get back in."

"Wow. I'm impressed. Did you two plan the whole thing?"

"No, Dude. It just sort of happened."

Colin said, "Man, you are so wicked."
Charlie grinned at his friend.
"I know."

Tommy stared at the note, pinned to the bulletin board. It was from his mother, and said that she had gone to a movie and would not be home till late, and that his father was working late that night and would also not be home till late. Tommy breathed a sigh of relief. One less thing to deal with tonight, he thought.

He went to find himself something to eat. After a time, rummaging through cupboards and the refrigerator, he decided to microwave some leftover fried chicken. When he finished with this, he sat down in front of the television and tried his hardest to put the days events behind him.

"So Dude," Colin said, "you want to go skateboarding at the park tonight?"

"Sure," said Charlie. "What time?"

"My mom says I have to start eating dinner with them, so I'll call you at like six, okay?"

"Alright, sure."

"I'll see you tonight then. I've got to get home now. Bye." And Colin hurried off, leaving Charlie to continue on by himself.

Tommy sat on the edge of his bed, staring across the room at a blank wall. There was an open book on his lap that he was not even looking at. He had found he simply could not pay attention to it. His thoughts kept wandering back to what had happened earlier.

He could hear the laughing as if it was still going on. He could see the whole situation vividly, as if he was still standing there, in the middle of the hall with everybody staring at him. He felt, all over again, the intense fear he had when he turned around to go back into the boy's locker room and found that the door would not open. He could still see Charlie Mathis holding up his pants for all to see. He leaped for them, but Charlie was too quick. As Tommy was off balance from the jump, he felt a kick from behind which sent him careening into the wall. He slid down the wall and sat on the ground, his knees pulled up to his chin, his arms around his legs. He could feel the coldness of the brick wall against his bare back. He heard the penetrating sound of their laughter. He tried to shut it out of his mind, but it was simply too loud. He felt yet another kick, this one to his side, but the physical pain he felt was absolutely nothing in comparison to the tremendous humiliation he was enduring. And the most vivid sound he heard was the sound of Charlie Mathis shouting, through bits of laughter, "Look at that, he's crying! The little fagget's crying!"

Tommy leapt from his bed and threw his book against the far wall. It fluttered in the air and landed with a slam against the wall and fell the the floor. Tommy then entered a total screaming rage. His yelling and swearing was broken only by an occasional punch

or kick to a nearby wall. He cursed God for letting things like this happen to him, and he vowed that one day he would get revenge on Charlie Mathis.

"So what did you do in school today, Charles?" Charlie's father asked as they were sitting down for dinner.

"Nothing much," said Charlie.

"What about P.E.? What are you doing in that class?"

Charlie chuckled to himself. "Nothing worth mentioning," he replied.

A short while into the meal, Charlie said to his mother and father, "Me and Colin are gonna go do some skateboarding at the school tonight, okay?"

"Did you do your homework yet?" his mother asked.

"I'll do it after we eat."

"Won't it be a little late after that?" she asked.

"No. I don't have that much to do. Besides, Colin isn't going to be ready until six anyway."

"Well, I guess it'll be alright if you go. Just be back before dark."

"I will," Charlie said.

Tommy stood in the middle of his parents bedroom, staring into the open drawer in the nightstand. There, amongst the clutter of pens, paper, wallets, keys and other such stuff, sat a small revolver. Tommy picked it up and held it in his hand. It was the first time he had ever touched it. He had always known it was there, though. His father had bought it in case a prowler broke into their house, but it had never been fired.

He felt a power from holding it. It was a power he had never felt before. He held the gun tightly in his hand, stroking it. He pointed it at the wall and pretended to shoot. He checked it to see if it was loaded. It was. He stared at it, sitting in his hand and thoughts of all he could do with it ran through his head.

He soon set it back in the drawer, checking to make sure the safety was still on, and left the room. He went to the kitchen and picked up the phone book and began flipping through to find the "M"s.

As he sat, figuring a math problem in his head, Charlie heard the phone ring downstairs. A few seconds later his mother called up to him, "Charlie, telephone!"

Charlie picked up the phone in his room. He heard a voice he did not recognize: "Meet me at six o'clock, at the old gravel pit. Come alone."

"What?" said Charlie. "Who is this?"

"Six o'clock. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure. I understand, but why?"

"Never mind why. Just be there. Six o'clock, at the gravel pit. Trust me." And the voice was gone.

Charlie hung up the phone. What was that about?, he wondered. Maybe somebody planning a surprise for me. Charlie's spirits suddenly picked up at the thought of that. He liked surprises.

He jumped up and began putting on his shoes and coat. He checked his watch. 5:37. If he left now he would be able to just barely make it by six.

Charlie ran down the stairs, and as he was heading out the front door, he said to his mother, "I'm going over to Colin's house," and he was gone before she had a chance to respond.

Tommy set down the receiver and stood staring at the telephone. He thought about what he was going to do. There was no turning back now. He wondered if Charlie had fallen for it.

Tommy slowly turned and went back up to his parents bedroom. He pulled the gun out of the nightstand drawer and, checking to make sure the safety was still on, he stuffed it into his coat pocket.

From his house, the gravel pit was only a short, ten minute bicycle ride. He left immediately. He wanted to be there early so as to get the jump on Charlie.

As Charlie Mathis peddled his bike as hard as he could up the long hill on the way to the gravel pit, he wondered what could be waiting for him there. As he topped the crest of the hill, panting heavily, he saw the quarry down below, stretching out before him. He searched the area for something that might give him a clue as to what he should expect to be waiting for him. He couldn't find anything. He then started the easy ride down the other side of the hill towards the meeting place.

Tommy hid his bike behind a large piece of machinery that was obviously meant for some sort of rock extraction. As he wandered around, searching for any sign that Charlie might already be there, his right hand repeatedly went for the the revolver tucked away in his inside jacket pocket. He felt the gun and tried to imagine what it would be like to actually fire it.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, Tommy saw a figure on a bicycle coming quite rapidly down the hill towards him. It was still too far away to make out a face but Tommy was certain it had to be Charlie, coming to meet him.

Tommy began searching the area for anyone that might be hanging around or watching guard but found no-one close enough to be a problem. The area was completely deserted. He smiled. His plan, so far was going smoothly.

The gravel pit was a huge quorey, littered with huge boulders and piles of sand and rock. There were a few scattered pieces of machinery here and there, such as bulldozers or dump trucks or things that looked like big armored tanks.

Once he finished looking around, Tommy sat down behind a large boulder, hiding himself from anything that might be coming around, and waited for Charlie to arrive.

Charlie got off his bike and let it fall to the ground. He walked towards the center of the gravel pit, searching everywhere for anyone that might be waiting for him. It was

dark now, and he was beginning to become frightened. He wondered what might be here. He thought that perhaps it was someone out to get him.

He heard something--a scuffle, rocks tumbling. He turned. He saw a figure coming slowly towards him through the darkness. It was a short, non-threatening figure. Charlie didn't recognize whoever it was coming towards him.

"Are you the one who called me?" Charlie asked.

The figure said nothing, simply continued walking slowly towards him. There was something about the way the person walked that made Charlie want to break out into laughter. There was something familiar.

Then he saw the face.

"You?" exclaimed Charlie. "What are you doing here?"

"Who do you think called you?" Tommy stood, stiff and rigid with an odd sort of glare on his face. He looked, in Charlie's opinion, rather foolish.

Charlie started laughing, partly from the remembrance of the events earlier in the day, partly from the way Tommy looked at that moment, trying to act threatening, and partly from the surprise of seeing him here. His laughing continued and grew louder and louder.

Tommy put one hand on the gun in his pocket. He listened to Charlie's laughter and couldn't help but think back to the way he was laughed at earlier today. He began to grow more and more angry. His heart started thumping. He could hear it even over the sound of Charlie.

"Shut up," Tommy said.

Charlie's laughter slowed a little but still continued. "Shut up!" Tommy shouted, starting to draw the revolver from his coat. "Shut up or I'll make you pay." Charlie's laughter slowly drew to a halt. The two boys stood in silence, in the middle of an open area in the gravel pit, staring at each other.

After several, incredibly long seconds, Charlie broke the silence. "You are such a fuckin' pansy, you know that?" He took a threatening step forward, and then another. "Did you know that?"

Tommy's rage was finally too much for him to contain.

He couldn't hold himself back.

He pulled the gun from his pocket and pointed it at Charlie.

Charlie stopped. That was something he hadn't been expecting. He stared in shock at the little revolver in Tommy's hand. At first he couldn't believe it. How would a dork like this have access to such a weapon? But then he realized what it must be.

He laughed. "Ooh," he said mockingly, "big man has a toy gun." He took another step towards Tommy. "Do you actually think I'm going to fall for that? Goddamn, how stupid could you be?"

"Stay back!" Tommy shouted.

His hands began to shake as he watched Charlie come closer and closer, seemingly fearless of the weapon in Tommy's hands. The pounding of his heart grew louder. He took a cautious step back.

"Get away or I'll shoot!" Tommy shouted at the top of his lungs.

Charlie simply laughed at him as he drew closer and closer. "Do you actually think you can scare me away with that. I know damn well that's not real."

"It's real," Tommy said, just above a whisper.

"Do you know what I'm going to do now? I'm gonna take that little toy gun of yours and I'm gonna shove it up your ass. You've wasted my whole night, you little prick."

The two boys were now too close for Tommy to have any other choice but to pull the trigger.

At first it wouldn't fire. Tommy began to panic until he remembered the safety. He clicked it off just as Charlie lunged at him. They tumbled to the ground as the gun fell off to the side.

Tommy could immediately feel Charlie's fists connecting with his face. He fought back hard but to no avail. The other boy was simply too heavy and too powerful for Tommy to shake him.

Soon there was blood. It soaked into the two boys' clothing. Tommy's face stung more than it ever had in his life.

Finally Charlie got off him and stood up. "I'm leaving now," he said, and began walking away.

Barely able to see from the swollen eyes, fighting back tears, Tommy crawled to where the revolver had fallen. He aimed at Charlie, whose back was turned, and fired.

It felt more like a push at first. In fact that's what Charlie thought it was. He believed Tommy had gotten up and simply shoved him from behind.

He staggered, caught his balance, and tried to turn around, but instead simply collapsed to the ground. He lied there, the rocks digging into his back, for several seconds before he realized what must have happened. Soon there came a stabbing pain from his left shoulder blade.

He forced himself to turn and look in Tommy's direction. He saw the boy starting to stand. The gun was still in his hand.

Tommy staggered over to where Charlie lay. For the first time, Charlie had a real fear of this boy. He tried to move, push, crawl away from Tommy but found his entire body immobile, cursed with a strange sort of paralysis he had never before experienced.

Tommy now stood, towering over his wounded victim. Charlie tried to speak, to say something that would get him away, but was unable to say anything.

He began to shiver, trembling violently, from the cold, the fear and the pain.

Tommy suddenly felt a sort of pity for the young man lying in the dirt. He had come here to kill him, but now found it completely impossible to pull the trigger the second time. His hands started trembling once again. His face stung from the cuts and bruises. His entire body ached. A whole mass of emotions seemed to hit him at once, clouding his mind with everything conceivable.

And with nothing left to do but flee, he threw the weapon as far as he possibly could, turned and ran back to where he had hidden his bicycle, leaving Charlie alone in the dark, cold, and frightened.