

The Hammer and the Belt

Brian queened Simon's pawn. Simon won the match two plays later and remained undefeated. He couldn't match Simon's brain power and would rather play video games, but Simon, his only friend, couldn't play them because he had a withered arm. His useless hand and fingers curled in like a dead bird's foot. Some of the boys at school called him the Claw Kid. Brian, an outcast, empathized with Simon because he had an undesirable nickname too.

After Brian helped Simon put the chess set away he headed home taking a short cut through the park. He circled around a group of boys tossing a football purposely avoiding them.

"Hey, Diaper Boy, wanna' play some football?" A sarcastic offer came from one of boys.

Brian ignored the additional heckling from the boys, avoided eye contact and kept walking. Thump! He felt the impact of a football on the small of his back. He turned around, and there stood Edward, AKA Tiny, Trenton, and the rest of his laughing lackeys.

Tiny trots over and picks up the football and gives it a spin. "Diaper Boy! Don't want to play football with us? Afraid you might piss your pants?" The rest of the guys threw out additional taunts.

Brian fired back for the first time, "Why are you guys laughing at me? The reason they call him Tiny is; he has a little pecker," weary of being the brunt of jokes.

"What did you say?" Bellowed the man-sized teenager, Tiny.

"Yeah, you have a teeny weenie."

Tiny charged. Brian held his ground but took a punishing tackle to the midsection. Tiny jumped to his feet and towered over Brian. Tiny kicked him in the ribs, “Say you're sorry.”

Still gasping for breath from the tackle, “No.”

Two kicks to the ribs, “Say you're sorry. Diaper Boy”

Brian could barely breathe, “I— ain't the— Diaper Boy— anymore.”

A couple guys ran over and grabbed Tiny, “Come on, he's had enough. You're gonna get in trouble if you hurt him too much. You're way bigger than him.”

Brian, struggled to catch his breath. He didn't cry, and he didn't say he was sorry because knew how to take a beating.

Seven Years Later

Detective Tipton looks down at the evidence photo, a larger-than-normal hammer with a piece of a skull stuck in the V-groove of the claw. At the apex of the V is a mixture of hair and dried blood. Further down the claw is gray matter, and at the tips of the claw is white matter. When through with his examination of the photo of the murder weapon, he looks up then through the one-way mirror into interview Room Number 2 at the suspect Brian Mulligan.

The suspect appears to be a young man in his early twenties. His left eye nearly swollen shut, and the color of his iris on his good eye is an unusual-looking brown, like an old copper penny. Brian has a pronounced brow and a square jaw, stubble beard, a been-working-outside tan, and short, well-groomed brown curly hair, except for the matted, dried blood patch on the

side of his head. His dirty, sweat-stained, spattered-with-blood sleeveless shirt reveals lean muscular arms with veins bulging near the surface. Even though he is sitting, Tipton guesses his height and weight at 5-11 and 165. Brian sits erect, his hands on the table, and head up looking at the one-way mirror. Most suspects sit slouched in the chair with their arms folded.

Tipton enters the interview room and offers his hand. “Brian Mulligan, I’m detective Phil Tipton.” Brian stands up and grabs Tipton’s hand. Tipton, known for his firm handshake around the police station, met his match. Brian increases his grip pressure until Tipton releases.

Tipton wiggles his hand. “That’s quite a grip you have what do you do for a living?”

“I’m a rough-in carpenter. I put the frame up on houses.”

Tipton focuses on the lump alongside Brian’s head. “Did the arresting officer offer you medical attention?”

Brian gently pats the swelling around his eye. “Ain’t no big deal. I’ve had worse beatings than this.”

“Okay Brian, have a seat. The arresting officer informed you of your Maranda rights. Did you understand them?” Tipton sits and places the photo of the hammer on the table.

“Yeah, I understand,” Brian’s good eye focuses on the photo of the hammer.

“Okay, is this your hammer?” Tipton taps the photo.

“Yeah,” Brian didn’t look up when he answered.

“That’s bigger than a normal hammer.”

“It’s a 22-ounce straight claw ripping hammer. See there how the claws are straight instead of curved like a little 12 ounce hammer you might have. And it has a longer handle and a bigger head. I use it for hammerin’ nails in lumber. Ya know, I can sink a 16-penny nail in two whacks after I start it.” Brian pretends like he’s holding a hammer and swings twice at an imaginary nail. “That straight claw certainly did a number on him. Drove the claws into his head right up to the handle.”

Tipton’s pleased he has a confession in less than five minutes. “So, you’re admitting that you killed him?”

“Yeah.” Brian maintains good posture and looks Tipton in the eyes.

“I’m going to have another detective join us.”

Brian shrugs, “I don’t care.”

Tipton leaves the room and makes certain the audio video camera is recording then asks his partner, Frank Bates, to join him for the rest of the interview. “It’s an easy one, Frank. He confessed. Witnesses stated there was an argument at the Rumpus Room Lounge. The victim assaulted him. The suspect went out to his truck and got a hammer came back in and buried it in the victim’s head.”

Tipton and Bates enter the interview room. “Brian, this is Detective Bates. He’s going to join us for the rest of this interview.” The detectives sit, Bates doesn’t offer his hand. “Okay tell us what happened.”

“After work today, ‘bout a quarter to five, I decided to stop by the Rumpus Room Lounge and drink a couple beers. It was hot today. I was sittin’ at the bar mindin’ my own business but

heard some loud drunk guys playing pool, so I spun around on the stool to have a look. I recognized Tiny Trenton from school. I didn't know the other two guys. Tiny looked at me but didn't recognize me at first. I spun back around on my stool because I didn't want any trouble.

A couple of minutes later, I heard Tiny yell, 'Hey, Diaper Boy is that you?' I pretended I didn't hear him so he yelled louder, 'Diaper Boy!' Everyone heard him, so I spun around on my stool. Then he yelled, 'That is you. The Diaper Boy.'

I said, 'fuck you, asshole,' and then I spun back around on my stool. A couple of seconds later, I felt a thump on the side of my head and saw the butt end of a broken pool stick fall in front of me. I was a little stunned, but I turned around and stood up. Then Tiny sucker punched me in the left eye and knocked me down. He grabbed me by the back of my shirt and my belt and drug me to the door and said, 'Get the fuck outta' here before I piss on ya.'

I went to my truck and got my hammer from my tool belt. When I went back in, I could hear Tiny talking to his friends about the Diaper Boy. They were all laughing at his story. He had his back to me. I said, 'hey' to get his attention 'cause I wanted him to see me. When he turned around, I swung the hammer and planted the claws into the top of his head. It went in all the way to the handle. He pissed his pants as he collapsed. I scuffled with his friends, and soon the cops were there. Now I'm here. That's it."

Tipton looks down at the notes he took when Brian talked. "So, Edward Trenton, the guy you killed, is the guy you called Tiny?"

"Yeah. Tiny is his nickname. Even in grade school, he was a couple of inches taller and twenty pounds heavier than the other kids. Even more so compared to my skinny ass. When I saw him this afternoon, he must have been 6-5 and 300 lbs."

Tipton crosses his arms, rests them on the table then leans in, “What’s this about Diaper Boy?”

Brian folds his arms. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Well, it seems it is the source of the argument.”

The veins pop out of Brian’s neck. He yells. “Look. I’m confessing to killing Tiny. That’s all you need to know. I fucking did it. Besides, I haven’t been the Diaper Boy since I was eleven.”

“Ok, Brian, you need to relax, or we’ll restrain you.” Tipton went back to reading his notes. “Why did you go back into the bar with the intent to kill Tiny? It would have been better for you if you didn’t. The barmaid called the cops, and they were on the way. They would have arrested him. Now, here you sit, looking at the possibility of Murder One.”

Brian pounds the heel of his fist on the table. The note tablet and ink pen fly up in the air from the concussion. “For once, I didn’t take the beating without fightin’ back. I’m never taking a beatin’ again.”

Tipton and Bates quickly get on their feet in case they have to restrain Brian but he calms down as fast as he flared up. “Do you want to call somebody? Your mom, dad or relative?”

“Not them assholes. They signed the papers for me to drop out of school, and I left home when I was seventeen. Haven’t talked to them since then. I was always the outcast and they treated my brother like the only child. Maybe I’ll call my girlfriend. She’ll probably leave me, though. What about my truck and tools? My cat, Red Spot?”

“Well, you should have thought about the consequences of your actions before planting your hammer in Edward Trenton’s head. You don’t get a second chance, a Mulligan, after you do something like this. Looks like we’re done here.” Tipton and Bates stand. We’re going to cuff you and take you to the county jail. You’ll have an arraignment hearing in the next day or two. They’ll offer to provide you with a lawyer. Take advantage of it. Maybe your lawyer will get plea bargain down Man 1. If you decide to plead guilty, act remorseful and apologize.”

“I’m not sayin’, I’m sorry. I’m glad I killed that big piece of shit.”

Eight-year-old Brian wept while he followed his dad up the basement stairs. The big man stopped at the top of the stairs leading to the kitchen and barked. “Boy! Don’t leave your bicycle by the road again. And quit your crying— like a baby. Maybe I should make you wear a diaper anyway.”

“I’m sorry, Dad.” Brian wiped the tears from his cheek with the back of his hand.

Brian’s mom looked down at the kitchen table. His older brother, Alan, smiled when he heard the word diaper. Alan, Dad’s favorite, who rarely had a trip to the basement, anointed his brother with the nickname Diaper Boy. Within days, the nickname spread around the neighborhood. By the next week, the Diaper Boy nickname spread through the school like the flu. The gossip included the real reason to call Brian the Diaper Boy.

Only a few kids heckled and teased Brian. Soon, though, his friends abandoned him. They did not want to be associated with the Diaper Boy. No one would sit next to him on the bus

except for Simon, the kid with the withered arm. The leader of the heckling was the bigger-than-the-rest-of-his-class-mates, Edward Trenton.

A couple of weeks later, the Mulligan family sat around the kitchen table, finishing dinner. “Dad, I’ll be playing shortstop and bat cleanup on the team this summer,” Alan announced.

“Son, that’s not a surprise. You are the fastest and strongest kid on the team.” Dad responded with pride.

The exhausted-sounding Mom requested, “Brian, after dinner, get your sheets out of the dryer and make your bed. Remember to put the plastic on the mattress. You forgot last night.

Dad’s face turned red. He glared at Brian. “Boy, get down to the basement.”

“Aw, Gil, it’s no big deal.” Mom pleaded.

Pardon denied.

After waiting ten minutes by the tool bench, Brian heard the punisher come down the basement stairs. The treads creaked and groaned from his weight. He whispered to himself, “I’m not gonna cry. I’m not gonna say I’m sorry.”

This time, though, he did not know the pent-up fury of the punisher. “Drop your pants, boy.” Brian could hear the 42-inch leather belt unbuckle and slide through the loops of the big man’s pants.

“Turn around and grab your ankles.” A couple of seconds later. Whack! The sound of the belt as it slapped against the tiny buttocks with only thin cotton underwear for protection.

“Your mom has to wash your sheets every damn day.” Whack!

“You pissed on the new mattress we just bought for you.” Whack! Whack!

“We can’t go anywhere and stay overnight because you’ll piss the bed.” Whack! Whack!

Whack!

“I’m ashamed of you and wish you weren’t my son.” The man stepped into it with all his fury and rage. Whack! The force of the blow knocked Brian down. Lines of blood seeped through the small, torn, untidy-whities. The punisher destroyed a pair of Fruit of the Looms and the fruit of his loins. The boy curled up on the cold, damp, musty-smelling basement floor and quivered but did not cry and did not say he was sorry.