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I was on top of him. He was flat on his back with his arms pinned down underneath my knees, exhausted, and now totally defenceless. I grabbed a handful of sopping hair, peeled his head up off the ground by it, and then cocked my arm back to finish him off.

“Alright,” I heard myself ask, “who wants to see some more blood?”

In my whole life, I’d only ever thrown a punch twice. The first time, I took a swing at my sister during one of my childhood birthday parties – not exactly a benchmark moment in chivalry, I admit, but she was bigger than me at the time, and frankly, she deserved it. I guess I was getting a little too much attention for her liking and she’d spent the entire party covertly terrorizing me – trying to ruin my special day! Finally, I lost it and let one fly at her.

I missed.

She retaliated, and beat the living shit out of me.

As far as setbacks for a budding pugilist go, getting Billy Jean Kinged by your sister in front of all of your friends pretty much takes the cake. After that, I stuck to the path of the peaceful warrior and years went by before I ever dared rise up with fists again.

It was the spring I turned twelve and marbles season was just getting going – a time of year I looked forward to the way the other kids did Christmas or summer holidays. I may not have been the most imposing chest-beater in the banana patch, but over the years I’d managed to compensate for this shortcoming by honing my skills in other areas. For malice and sheer depravity, there were few who could match my slurs about your momma or your dick-size, and when it came to marbles, I was a full-on silverback. My flick was powerful, my touch around the pot, precise, yet supple, and I was cunning in my use of mind games against players whose talents rivalled my own. Every spring when the snow melted, I’d haul out my booty from the year before and go through it – categorizing my victories by size, type, and quality. I took my time with this – partly out of a childish delight in taxonomy, but also to let my little crystal balls work their magic on me. A telltale flaw in a Cat’s Eye might transport me back to where and when I won it, and for a moment, it was like triumph itself was encapsulated in this worthless glob of glass. Others sent me hurtling forward. I’d catch my reflection in the sheen of an Oily

Cobb, stare at it spellbound until my features distorted, and daydream about the coming days of conquest and plunder.

After my sort-through was complete, the next step was landscaping a marbles pit in the backyard. Usually this involved little more than digging a hole in the ground and packing the dirt down around it, but that year, I decided to take things to a whole new level. I would transform the swathe of grasslessness behind the deck into the Pine Valley of marbles: beautiful, treacherous – a pit sublime! – one to separate the pros from the schmoes.

When I was done, and saw that it was good, I spent a whole week practicing on it every evening after school until I was intimately familiar with every nook and cranny of it. By Friday night my lordship here seemed all but unassailable, and the following morning, I summoned the others to gaze upon my work – and despair!

Despite the unfair advantage of playing on my new home-pot, my game was off that morning and I ended up going on a costly losing streak. By the time we broke for lunch, my stash had dwindled substantially. As I sat aslouch the kitchen table, picking without appetite at my baloney and Wonderbread, a morningful of flubbed shots and strategic errors kept looping through my mind. This was bad enough, but flashing intermittently along this lowlight reel were the smug faces of my victorious foes – smirking, and snickering, and spewing derision at me like I was some kind of chump. Worst of all, I knew I'd have to set aside my thirst for vengeance when I got back at it that afternoon. It galled me, but however tempting a rematch with one of my equals might be, priority number one was recouping my losses, and for that I needed an easy mark. Better yet – a whale.

As luck would have it, when I returned from lunch, one was waiting potside for me like a chubby wad of manna.

My appeal to Mammon had been answered.

We called him Derf.

Derf had transferred to our school midway through the fourth grade. His real name was Derek Ferber, but on his first day, he showed up carrying a Smurfs lunchbox with his name spelled out on it. This was a mistake. Almost immediately, a wave of dyslexic free-association went swooshing through the collective, and when the swell subsided, Derek Ferber had been redubbed, “Derf.”

Surprise, surprise, Derek wasn't exactly thrilled with his new handle, but the louder he protested, the more it just egged us all on. Eventually his shame and frustration led to a weepy meltdown, but no one felt bad for him – he'd brought this upon himself. I mean, come on? – a Smurfs lunchbox? What was he thinking? The nickname stuck. Before long, his real name fell out of use entirely and was pretty much all but forgotten.

I'd like to say things eventually got better for Derf, but they didn't. Not that he didn't try – Derf struggled earnestly to redeem himself, but the truth was, he just didn't have enough going for him to pull it off. He was good-natured, and eager to please, but he was wheezy, and nearsighted, and well, kind of stupid – you know, one of those kids whose flies are always down and who always get picked last for teams. And ironically, what should have been a natural advantage for him turned out to be his biggest detriment: his size. Derf was an absolute beast of a boy – huge – but weak, and flabby. He was surprisingly easy to dominate and his bulk always made doing so seem harmless and comical – *friendly* might be a bit of a stretch, but in the openly Darwinian atmosphere of our little habitat, this was about as genuinely amicable as things got. Derf's all-round lack of fitness, along with his protective padding, made him a perfect punching bag, and we soon devised a vast repertoire of tactics to harass and humiliate him.

The first one we came up with was called the “Derf Splat.” We'd all be hanging out on the playground together when the signal would be raised to initiate the assault. This could be done almost telepathically – a subtle glance, a raised eyebrow, or the slightest of nods. One of us would concoct some ruse to split Derf off from the pack and then suddenly jump up and wrestle him down into a front facelock. With Derf now in position, a co-tormentor, already hurtling full-tilt across the schoolyard, would plough into him with everything he had. Derf's flaccid body would go flying and then kind of splat against the ground – thus the name.

Another favourite was “Derf-Rider.” With a sudden charge, a burst of speed, and a hearty cry of “Derf-Rider!” one of us would leap onto Derf's back. The goal was to try and stay on as long as possible while Derf bucked and thrashed about trying to get you off of him. The ride would be timed by a group count, and we kept meticulous track of who was the current record-holder. The grand finale of this schoolyard rodeo came when one of the kids actually rode Derf until he collapsed with exhaustion then yanked his scarf off and hog-tied him with it. Obviously, such a performance could not be topped, and for a long time afterward this undisputed champion was referred to simply as “The Rider.”

As Derf dragged himself to his feet after one of these degrading ordeals, we'd all point at him and laugh. He'd swear his head off at us, but the idea that he might actually retaliate would've just made us laugh even harder. Let's face it, there was a line in the sandbox and even Derf seemed to understand that if he crossed it, he'd be viciously beaten within an inch of his life. It wasn't personal or anything, though – we liked Derf. He was one of us – the last and least among us, sure, but one of us all the same. And membership, even the non-premium kind like Derf's, still had its privileges. For example, if an outsider had been caught slapping him around like this, we would've leapt to his defence like a pack of junkyard bitches protecting one of their pups. Don't get me wrong, this was petty compensation for all the abuse the poor guy took. Derf's role was hardly an enviable one. But he was still an important and even valued member of the group.

He was our whipping boy.

“Hey, Butterball,” I called out to Derf as I approached from the house, “where the hell have you been all morning? Suckin’ on your fat momma’s tits?”

Actually, as it turned out, Derf had been at the Toys ‘R’ Us, loading up on new marbles, and now joined us with his pockets plump – and ripe for a picking. That was the thing about Derf: no matter how many times you beat him down, he always came back at you looking for more. Maybe he was simply a glutton for punishment but, honestly, I think he just never gave up believing that somehow, someday, next time would be his time – an admirable trait, I guess, but one that was also really, really easy to take advantage of, and that’s exactly what I did. It took a bit of finessing, but eventually I conned him into a ridiculously high-stakes game, and before we even started, I was already patting myself on the back for filling the void my earlier defeats had left in my bucket.

As I prepared to make my first toss at the pot, Derf, as was customary, began to wax abusive in an attempt to throw me off my game. His shit was feeble, and not worth mentioning, but it got the odd chuckle at my expense and thus demanded a response. I came back at him with a scathing barrage of hate-speech, focussing in particular on his man-gunt and remedial reading skills – okay, probably not the sort of retort Samuel Johnson would have come up with, but hey, I was twelve. Besides, it worked like a charm. The crowd was mine again, and Derf, put back in his place, now maintained a respectful, if begrudging silence as we completed our opening pitches.

No surprises there. One of mine landed closest to the pot, which gave me first shot.

Right from the get-go, I was on fire. Guaranteed victory lent a certain loosey-goosey swagger to my game and I quickly potted all but one of the marbles before Derf had even taken a turn. But as I approached the final shot, it occurred to me that I was running the risk of being undone by my own momentum and I decided I’d better cool my jets and refocus.

I paused for a moment, took a deep and calming breath, and then carefully scrutinized the position of the game-deciding lasty.

It was a long and kind of difficult shot, but one that looked a lot harder than it actually was. During my week of practice, I’d figured out the trick to it and had spent a whole afternoon draining marble after marble from pretty much this exact spot. Still, I thought, though low-risk, this wasn’t the most prudent move available. An even surer thing would be to reposition the marble just outside Derf’s range, knowing full-well that Derf (being Derf) would go for it, bungle it, and leave me with an easy tap in. Why chance it? – I reasoned – especially given the stakes.

I’d just crouched down to set Derf’s inevitable downfall in motion when a multi-headed shadow spread across the ground over my shot and started chirping at me from behind.

“Whoah, there’s no way you’ll make that shot, man.”

“No way. Totally no way.”

“What, did you forget you suck today or something, dude?”

“Ha. Ha.”

I scowled irritably, but just as I was about to turn around and lash back, I felt my features soften and my face splitting slowly into a devilish grin. Here was an opportunity to dumbfound the peanut gallery, restore my flagging prestige, and fleece Derf, all in one fell swoop. I actually had to restrain myself from cackling diabolically.

I collected myself and looked up over my shoulder.

“Alright then, dink-touchers,” I said, drawing attention undividedly me-wards. “Get ready to have your little peabrain blown!”

I released my flick.

As the marble left my fingers, a weird, tingling sensation coursed through my body – a kind of sentiment of certainty. I just *knew* my shot was right on the money. I looked on with an almost detached admiration as my marble alighted on the sweet spot of the embankment that encircled the pot and then began rolling down toward it.

I picked Derf out from among the crowd so I could watch his expression change as the wave of loserhood came crashing down on top of him.

“Game over, Fatboy.”

The marble dropped into the pot. Derf wilted. I smiled coolly and then turned to scan the faces of the onlookers. Time to bask in the wows.

“Awww... What a fluke!”

“Yeah, *totally* flukey.”

“You’re such a flukester, dude.”

My lip curled contemptuously. You gotta be kidding me! I thought. How dare these fuckers denigrate my triumph like this! I turned on them and snarled.

“That was no fluke, asswipes! I can hit that shot all day long!”

“Whatever, Flukester.”

“Yeah, Flukester. Don’t make me laugh.”

“Hey, Flukester. Flukester! I betcha anything you can’t make that shot again.”

My ears pricked up and I whirled upon this last naysayer.

It was Derf.

I rose to my feet and moseyed slowly toward him. “Oh really?” I challenged, glaring at him with all the menace I could muster.

“Yeah. *Really*,” he beaked back insolently. “I betcha can’t.”

“Alright then, Crisco,” I said with a laugh, still not taking him seriously. “How much you wanna bet?”

Derf seemed to consider this for a moment. Then he waddled over to the pot and emptied his still-bulging pockets into it.

“Everything.”

For a moment, I just stood there staring blankly at him. This was a ballsy and surprisingly dumb-ass move, even for Derf, and it took a second for the enormity of it to really sink in.

“Don’t even think about it, Flukester,” somebody heckled, snapping me out of my fog. “You’ll never make that shot again.”

“Yeah, Flukester. Don’t forget you suck balls.”

“Hey, check it out! Even Derf’s trying to sucker The Flukester!”

This was almost too good to be true. Bury this shot again and my marble-pit supremacy simply could not be denied. It would live on forever in the annals of the game – a great moment in marbles.

I made my way over to the pot, counted out what Derf had added to it, and made an equivalent contribution.

“Holy shit!”

“The Flukester’s actually going for it!”

“You’re totally crazy, Flukester!”

I returned my marble to where it was, took aim, and flicked.

The shot followed an identical trajectory to the first one, touched down on the embankment, and went rolling straight for the pot.

“Oh, yeah,” I smugly colour-commentated. “Enter the dragon, shit-eaters!”

I’d already hoisted a fist Black-Panther-style in the air, when the marble suddenly hit a slight divot in the earth, creating an unexpected retardando in its forward motion. It came to the lip of the pot, teetered there for a moment, and then stopped.

Fuck.

Derf threw his hands up in the air and squealed with glee, his face aglow at this unexpected triumph.

“Ha! Ha! I got you, Flukester! I got you! I can’t believe you went for it! You’re a total sucker!”

I guess it was understandable that Derf would want to savour this rare delicacy, and a certain amount of celebratory exuberance would have been permissible, even appropriate. But this was not enough for Derf. He went too far. He forgot himself. He forgot *he* was the bottom-feeder in the food chain and began to dance around, gloating, and swearing, and wagging a chubby finger at me.

And then he started humping the air in my direction.

“Suck it, sucker! Suck it!” he shrieked as he thrust himself at me, his little nuts bouncing against the fabric of his navy blue jogging pants.

Derf’s enthusiasm was contagious. Soon the others began to mimic him, laughing, and mocking, and humping at me along with him.

“Yeah, suck it, sucker!”

“Suck it! Suck it!”

Needless to say, this was an intolerable humiliation. With each jab of crotch, my place in the playground hierarchy was undermined further and further until it felt like there was nowhere lower I could go. A powder keg of lizard-brain hate began to smoulder inside me, and as Derf gyrated toward me, lost in the fervour of his endzone dance, it suddenly hit the flashpoint, sucked up every kilowatt of latent power my organism possessed, and then detonated as a vicious left hook into Derf’s blindly beaming face.

Derf crumpled to the ground like his skeleton had just evaporated.

The laughter stopped.

What finally broke the silence was Derf’s horrible, horrible, sobbing. It started low, a sort of whimpering moan, but swelled steadily into a deep and mournful roar. He started slapping, and clawing, and pounding his fists at the ground until the dust he kicked up muddied the tears streaming down his face. He gazed up at us, at me, his dirt-smeared eyes smouldering with impotent rage, and I laughed at him. It was a black and ugly moment. Everything dimmed a bit, like a light had gone out or something. Nobody said or did a thing. We all just stood there, looking down at Derf without pity or remorse as he cried his heart out, and when he finally hauled himself up off the ground and staggered his way homeward, we went back to our game as though nothing had happened.

Later that day, after everyone had left, I started feeling kind of guilty about what I’d done and decided to try and make it up to Derf. I went by his house, told him I was sorry about the whole thing, and gave him a small but fairly choice selection of my marbles as compensation.

At the time, he seemed satisfied by this peace offering, but as it turned out, he really wasn't. Before long, Derf started taking advantage of any opportunity that arose to antagonize me, and eventually, my patience with him wore off.

Everything came to a head one evening while we were playing football. Throughout the game, whenever his team made a successful play, Derf would run up to me, stick his thumbs in his ears, and wriggle his fingers while he yelled, "Doink! Doink! Doink!" in my face. This was tiresome to begin with, but after he had done it five or six times, it really started to piss me off. And when the other members of his team joined in and started doing it to me, too, I decided I'd had enough. I would not be doinked at any longer, and the next time Derf bounded up to me, I stepped into him and shoved him. Hard. I figured this would put an end to it, but after stumbling back a few feet, Derf regained his footing and went into this ridiculous boxing stance.

"You gotta be kidding me, Fat-ass," I sneered. "What? You wanna go?"

He answered by skipping around a bit, shadow-boxing, lobbing pathetic jabs and crosses into the gap between us. I was totally flabbergasted. I couldn't believe that Derf was actually willing to take it this far. The crowd began to swirl, shouting words of encouragement, and pretty soon everyone was swept into the vortex. Derf continued to bounce about for a bit while I stood there, astonished and kind of embarrassed for him, really. I laughed and glanced about, assuming that no one would actually expect me to take this idiotic display seriously. But the circle of our taunting peers had already wound itself around us and was now closing in, tighter and tighter. There was no way out. I felt like a reluctant gladiator melting in the light of a Roman noon, but as the cries for violence grew louder and louder, I realized I had no choice:

I had to kick Derf's ass.

It wasn't long before Derf inadvertently danced within my reach. I lunged at him and grabbed ahold of the collar of his T-shirt. I swung him around to knock him off balance, feigned a punch at him, and he turtled. I did this again and again, trying to get him to give up by demonstrating how easy it would be for me to destroy him. After about ten of these feint and turtle sequences, I shouted to the others, "For Christ's sake, someone tell Fat-ass here to give before I *actually* kill him!" I'm not sure why I even bothered suggesting a non-violent solution. It was obvious from the identically crazed looks in the eyeballs orbiting around us that things had already reached that frothy, boiling-over point where leniency or mercy was simply out of the question. My appeal was echoed back at me, its meaning reversed.

"Yeah, kill that fat-ass!"

"Kill him, man!"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

Taking advantage of my advocacy on his behalf, Derf suddenly whirled loose from my grasp and hurled a wild roundhouse uppercut at me.

My nose exploded in my face and I staggered backward, stunned.

He pounced on me, knocked me face down on the ground, and threw himself on top of me. Now that he had actually hit me, he knew he was a dead man if I managed to get back on my feet, so he used all his weight and strength to hold me down. We must have struggled like this for a couple of minutes or so while the accompanying howls for more carnage rose in a frenzied crescendo around us. Finally, I wriggled free of his grasp and managed to struggle to my feet with him still draped over me, pounding furiously but feebly on my back. He wrapped his arms around my torso and tried to lift me in the air to throw me down on the ground again, but he tripped and I landed on top of him. He grabbed and flailed at me for a moment or two before I pinned his arms down under my knees. He was flat on his back – exhausted, and now totally defenceless.

“Kill him!”

“Kill him!”

“Kick his fat-ass, man! Kill him!”

Suddenly, someone came up behind me and hissed into my ear, “Look what the fat-ass did to your face, dude. Kick his fat head in, man! Kill him!”

I snaked my tongue up along the crusty red moustache that now clung to my upper lip. The raw, metallic taste of it suddenly swept through me, thrilling the meat of me with a hot flush of shame and rage. I grabbed a handful of sopping hair, peeled his head up off the ground by it then cocked my arm back to finish him off.

“Alright,” I heard myself ask, “who wants to see some more blood?”

The crowd roared its approval. I looked down into my victim’s face to take aim.

But what I saw there startled me. There was no anger in it, no “I’ll-get-you-next-time” sneer of hatred and defiance, just helplessness, and fear, and this mute plea for mercy like you’d see in the eyes of a gunned-down doe. He wasn’t even struggling anymore, and every time I moved, Derf would wince and Bambi up at me again in anticipation of the beating he was about to receive.

I hesitated.

The yelping and shrieking were almost deafening now. The only other thing I could hear was the swish and slurp of my own heartbeat seething through my head. Everybody had crammed in so close, I felt the thick, oppressive heat of their flesh weighing down on me like a big, wet, beach towel. I could practically smell the bloodlust in the b.o. wafting about me – an acrid tang of pheromones signalling me to snuff Derf out so the others could scavenge the carcass. I felt myself dissipating, my own will becoming nothing more than an extension of theirs. The burden of it was so overwhelming, so much bigger than I was, and I knew I couldn’t hold on any longer.

I was going to drown.

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My cocked arm began to tremble.

And then suddenly, something occurred to me – not so much a thought as a kind of imperative, an order, flashing through what remained of my mind.

No.

My fist unclenched itself and my arm slumped to my side.

I couldn't do it. I don't know why, but I just didn't have it in me to ruthlessly pummel this already defeated friend of mine. Maybe it was compassion, maybe it was just some sort of weakness, a lack of killer instinct or something, but whatever was or wasn't there deep down at the bottom of me made it impossible to deliver the coup de gras.

I drew back again like I was going to throw the punch. Derf winced and closed his eyes, and I leaned over and whispered in his ear.

“I give, Derek.”

Then I rolled off of him, sat down on the ground beside him, and started crying.

“Fucking gaylord,” someone muttered.

This'll probably sound kind of twisted, but for a while I often regretted not just pounding Derf into oblivion. It really ate at me sometimes. At first, this was aggravated by Derf constantly bragging that he'd kicked *my* ass. To me, this was totally ridiculous but, according to the kids' version of the Marquis of Queensbury rules, he was technically correct. He'd landed a punch. He'd drawn blood. I'd done neither and, in the end, I gave up. I surrendered. In Derf's mind and, more importantly, in the minds of those who'd watched, and cheered, and stood in judgment afterwards, the decision went to him – unanimously.

And things were never really the same afterwards. Maybe it was all in my head, but I was convinced I was being treated differently all of a sudden – like I couldn't be trusted anymore or something. Conversations seemed to end abruptly when I approached, and the vibe I picked up on when I was around had a new coolness to it that wasn't there before. I started getting the the feeling I wasn't all that welcome at their reindeer games, and eventually, I took the hint. Don't get me wrong, it's not like one day they all banded together and pelted me with rocks until I fled into the surrounding countryside. I was never overtly driven away. Then again, no one sought me out when I started to drift off on my own. This stung a bit, but over time, I learned to mask the pain of my self-imposed exile with self-righteousness and by heaping scorn on the ways of others. In other words, I became a typical teenager: the type that lies on their bed staring up at the ceiling, blasting Joy Division, thinking about how the world and everyone in it is completely and irredeemably fucked. I got to admit, these were often dark and lonely days, but

solitude had a bright side to it that proved, well, illuminating, I guess. Basically, it gave me time. Time to read, and write bad poetry, and ponder the meaning of life, or lack thereof. Probably too much time but, if I've found anything from my years of fumbling in the dark it's that the only findings are in the seeking, which takes a while – sometimes a lifetime. Sometimes even longer.

Not long before graduation, I was sitting outside the guidance counseller's office, waiting to talk to her about college. In front of me was a long bank of windows that separated the administration offices from the hallway, where I noticed Derf and a few of his cronies from the football team loitering about. Accessorizing this otherwise spartan ensemble of track pants and letterman's jackets were a few of the indistinguishable doll-like creatures that seemed to arrive fully assembled from the Mattel factory sophomore year, snatching the lives and names of girls who suddenly were no longer with us. As I sat there, observing their behaviour, I found myself reminiscing about the years that separated the Derf I saw before me from the whipping boy I used to know. High school had been good to Derf. To say he had blossomed since we were twelve wouldn't be quite correct – the guy had ballooned. Size-wise, Derf had been formidable to begin with but, as he grew older, he continued expanding and expanding into something truly colossal. Rather than let himself turn into a giant blob, though, he'd started working out in middle school and by the time he was a senior, he was quite literally, the big man on campus – a Konglike, 6'9", 350 pound monster. He was also an All-State Offensive Lineman and had gotten himself a full ride to a pretty decent university, despite his, shall we say, less than stellar academic achievements. The Derf I watched stomping and bellowing in the hall before me was nobody's whipping boy. And no one called him Derf anymore either.

He was now known as "The Wall."

While I watched, a small, frail-looking freshman approached and tried to make his way through this bottleneck of agitated teen flesh. As the boy gently tried to squeeze his way past, The Wall whirled on him and within seconds had done a complete Bannister-to-Hulk-type transformation. His eyeballs jutted out from his sloping forehead with a look of barely, and I mean barely, contained rage seething in them as he fee-fi-fo-fummed down at the much smaller boy from on high.

"What the fuck you think yer doin', freshman? Can't you see wurr standin' here? Show some respect for yer elders."

"Oh come on, Wally, let him get by," one of the dolls insisted.

This appeal to common courtesy was quickly kiboshed when the others began chanting what had, in recent years, become our school's unofficial motto:

"No one gets past The Wall!"

"No one gets past The Wall!"

"No one gets past The Wall!"

The Wall seemed to agree. He shoved the kid backwards, launching him a couple of feet through the air into the lockers behind him. He didn't even have to take a step forward to grab him a second time. He just brought forth one of his thick, wookie-like appendages and caught him by the T-shirt as he bounced back toward him. For a moment, he appeared at a loss as to what to do next. One of his teammates offered a suggestion:

“Hey, Wally. Make the little faggot salute if he wants by.”

“Yeah, make him salute, man. Make him salute.”

The Wall appeared confused for a moment. Then the unexpected jolt of comprehension made his one continuous eyebrow twitch. He turned to the freshman.

“Doan juss stann there,” he ordered. “Salute me! Salute me, you fuckin’ faggot! Salute!”

The freshman was obviously too stunned and frightened to do anything, even if his life depended on it, which it did. This made The Wall angry. He started ragdolling the kid, dribbling him against the lockers, screaming, “Salute! Salute, you fuckin’ faggot!” each time he rebounded back into his hairy-knuckled hand.

It got so ugly, I actually considered intervening. But while I was still deciding whether my convictions were worth dying for, the door opened behind me and the guidance counsellor asked me to come inside. I thought about ratting The Wall out to her and glanced back over my shoulder just as the freshman finally regained his bearings and saluted. He tried to continue on his way, but The Wall still wouldn't let him pass.

“Din't you hear them, faggot? No one gets pass The Wall!”

Everyone laughed. The kid turned and made his humiliating retreat back down the hall. All the while, The Wall growled and grunted threats at him until he disappeared around the corner, and as I looked away in disgust and stepped into the office to plan my escape from this hellhole, I remember thinking,

Shit... Maybe I *should*'ve just kicked that guy's ass.

END