

THE BEST OF SCHOOL

The blinds are drawn because of the sun,
 And the boys and the room in a colourless gloom
 Of underwater float: bright ripples run
 Across the walls as the blinds are blown
 To let the sunlight in; and I, 5
 As I sit on the shores of the class, alone,
 Watch the boys in their summer blouses
 As they write, their round heads busily bowed:
 And one after another rouses
 His face to look at me, 10
 To ponder very quietly,
 As seeing, he does not see.

And then he turns again, with a little, glad
 Thrill of his work he turns again from me,
 Having found what he wanted, having got what was to be had. 15

And very sweet it is, while the sunlight waves
 In the ripening morning, to sit alone with the class
 And feel the stream of awakening ripple and pass
 From me to the boys, whose brightening souls it laves
 For this little hour.

This morning, sweet it is 20
 To feel the lads' looks light on me,
 Then back in a swift, bright flutter to work;
 Each one darting away with his
 Discovery, like birds that steal and flee.

25 Touch after touch I feel on me
 As their eyes glance at me for the grain
 Of rigour they taste delightedly.

As tendrils reach out yearningly,
 Slowly rotate till they touch the tree
 That they cleave unto, and up which they climb
 Up to their lives—so they to me.

I feel them cling and cleave to me
 As vines going eagerly up; they twine
 My life with other leaves, my time
 Is hidden in theirs, their thrills are mine.

D. H. Lawrence, « The Best of School »

Anyone who has been properly beaten will tell you that the real pain does not come until about eight or ten seconds after the stroke. The stroke itself is merely a loud crack and a sort of blunt thud against your backside, numbing you completely (I'm told a bullet wound does the same). But later on, oh my heavens it feels as if someone is laying a red hot poker right across your naked buttocks and it is absolutely impossible to prevent yourself from reaching back and clutching it with your fingers.

Foxley knew all about this time lag, and the slow walk back over a distance that must altogether have been fifteen yards gave each stroke plenty of time to reach the peak of its pain before the next one was delivered. On the fourth stroke I would invariably straighten up. I couldn't help it. It was an automatic defence reaction from a body that had had as much as it could stand.

'You flinched,' Foxley would say. That one doesn't count. Go on - down you get.'

The next time I would remember to grip my ankles.

Afterwards he would watch me as I walked over - very stiff now and holding my backside - to put on my dressing-gown, but I would always try to keep turned away from him so he couldn't see my face. And when I went out, it would be, 'Hey, you! Come back !'

I was in the passage then, and I would stop and turn and stand in the doorway, waiting.

'Come here. Come on, come back here. Now - haven't you forgotten something?'

All I could think of at that moment was the excruciating burning pain in my behind.

'You strike me as being an impudent and ill-mannered boy,' he would say, imitating my father's voice. 'Don't they teach you better manners than that at this school?'

'Thank . . . you,' I would stammer. 'Thank you ... for the beating.'

Roald Dahl, « Galloping Foxley », *Someone Like You* (1953)

– You should be ashamed of yourself, said Father Arnall sternly. You, the leader of the class!

Then he asked the next boy and the next and the next. Nobody knew. Father Arnall became very quiet, more and more quiet as each boy tried to answer and could not. But his face was blacklooking and his eyes were staring though his voice was so quiet. Then he asked Fleming and Fleming said that that word had no plural. Father Arnall suddenly shut the book and shouted at him:

– Kneel out there in the middle of the class. You are one of the idlest boys I ever met. Copy out your themes again the rest of you.

Fleming moved heavily out of his place and knelt between the two last benches. The other boys bent over their themebooks and began to write. A silence filled the classroom and Stephen, glancing timidly at Father Arnall's dark face, saw that it was a little red from the wax he was in.

Was that a sin for Father Arnall to be in a wax or was he allowed to get into a wax when the boys were idle because that made them study better or was he only letting on to be in a wax? It was because he was allowed because a priest would know what a sin was and would not do it. But if he did it one time by mistake what would he do to go to confession? Perhaps he would go to confession to the minister. And if the minister did it he would go to the rector: and the rector to the provincial: and the provincial to the general of the jesuits. That was called the order: and he had heard his father say that they were all clever men. They could all have become highup people in the world if they had not become jesuits. And he wondered what Father Arnall and Paddy Barrett would have become and what Mr McGlade and Mr Gleeson would have become if they had not become jesuits. It was hard to think what because you would have to think of them in a different way with different coloured coats and trousers and with beards and moustaches and different kinds of hats.

The door opened quietly and closed. A quick whisper ran through the class: the prefect of studies. There was an instant of dead silence and then the loud crack of a pandybat on the last desk. Stephen's heart leapt up in fear.

– Any boys want flogging here, Father Arnall? cried the prefect of studies. Any lazy idle loafers that want flogging in this class?

He came to the middle of the class and saw Fleming on his knees.

– Hoho! he cried. Who is this boy? Why is he on his knees? What is your name, boy?

– Fleming, sir.

– Hoho, Fleming! An idler of course. I can see it in your eye. Why is he on his knees, Father Arnall?

– He wrote a bad Latin theme, Father Arnall said, and he missed all the questions in grammar.

– Of course he did! cried the prefect of studies. Of course he did! A born idler! I can see it in the corner of his eye.

He banged his pandybat down on the desk and cried:

– Up, Fleming! Up, my boy!

Fleming stood up slowly.

– Hold out! cried the prefect of studies.

Fleming held out his hand. The pandybat came down on it with a loud smacking sound: one, two, three, four, five, six.

– Other hand!

The pandybat came down again in six loud quick smacks.

– Kneel down! cried the prefect of studies.

Fleming knelt down squeezing his hands under his armpits, his face contorted with pain, but Stephen knew how hard his hands were because Fleming was always rubbing rosin into them. But perhaps he was in great pain for the noise of the pandies was terrible. Stephen's heart was beating and fluttering.

– At your work, all of you! shouted the prefect of studies. We want no lazy idle loafers here, lazy little schemers. At your work, I tell you. Father Dolan will be in to see you every day. Father Dolan will be in tomorrow.

He poked one of the boys in the side of the pandybat, saying:

– You, boy! When will Father Dolan be in again?

– Tomorrow, sir, said Tom Furlong's voice.

– Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, said the prefect of studies. Make up your minds for that. Every day Father Dolan. Write away. You, boy, who are you?

Stephen's heart jumped suddenly.

– Dedalus, sir.

– Why are you not writing like the others?

– I . . . my . . .

He could not speak with fright.