



NEW BOY

by RODDY DOYLE

CHAPTER ONE HE IS VERY LATE

He sits.

He sits in the classroom. It is his first day.
He is late.

He is five years late.

And that is very late, he thinks.

He is nine. The other boys and girls have been like this, together, since they were four. But he is new.

—We have a new boy with us today, says the teacher-lady.

—So what? says a boy who is behind him.

Other boys and some girls laugh. He does not know exactly why. He does not like this.

—Now now, says the teacher-lady.

She told him her name when he was brought here by the man but he does not now remember it. He did not hear it properly.

—Hands in the air, she says.

All around him, children lift their hands. He does this too. There is then, quite quickly, silence.

—Good, says the teacher-lady. —Now.

She smiles at him. He does not smile. Boys and girls will laugh. He thinks that this will happen if he smiles.

The teacher-lady says his name.

—Stand up, she says.

Again, she says his name. Again, she smiles. He stands. He looks only at the teacher-lady.

—Everybody, this is Joseph. Say Hello.

—Hello!

—HELLO!

—HELL-OHH!

—Hands in the air!

The children lift their hands. He also lifts his hands. There is silence. It is a clever trick, he thinks.

—Sit down, Joseph.

He sits down. His hands are still in the air.

—Now. Hands down.

Right behind him, dropped hands smack the desk. It is the so-what boy.

—Now, says the teacher-lady.

She says this word many times. It is certainly her favorite word.

—Now, I'm sure you'll all make Joseph very welcome. Take out your *Maths Matters*.

—Where's he from, Miss?

It is a girl who speaks. She sits in front of Joseph, two desks far.

—We'll talk about that later, says the teacher-lady. —But maths first.

That is the first part of her name. Miss.

—Miss, Seth Quinn threw me book out the window.

—Didn't!

—Yeh did.

—Now!

Joseph holds his new book very tightly. It is not a custom he had expected, throwing books out windows. Are people walking past outside warned that this is about to happen? He does not know. He has much to learn.

—Seth Quinn, go down and get that book.

—I didn't throw it.

—Go on.

—It's not fair.

—Now.

Joseph looks at Seth Quinn. He is not the so-what boy. He is a different boy.

—Now. Page 37.

No one tries to take Joseph's book. No more books go out the window.

He opens his book at Page 37.

The teacher-lady talks at great speed. He understands the numbers she writes on the blackboard. He understands the words she writes. LONG DIVISION. But he does not understand what she says, especially when she faces the blackboard. He does not put his hand up. He watches the numbers on the blackboard. It is not so very difficult.

A finger pushes into his back. The so-what boy. Joseph does not turn.

—Hey. Live-Aid.

Joseph does not turn.

The so-what boy whispers.

—Live-Aid. Hey, Live-Aid. Do they know it's Christmas?

It is Monday, the tenth day of January. It is sixteen days after

Christmas. This is a very stupid boy.

But Joseph knows that this is not to do with Christmas or the correct date. He knows he must be careful.

The finger prods his back again, harder, very hard.

—Christian Kelly!

—What?

It is the so-what boy. His name is Christian Kelly.

—Are you annoying Joseph there?

—No.

—Is he, Joseph?

Joseph shakes his head. He must speak. He knows this.

—No.

—I'm sure he's not, she says.

This is strange, he thinks. Her response. Is it another trick?

—Sit up straight so I can see you, Christian Kelly.

—He was poking Joseph's back, Miss.

—Shut up.

—He was.

—Fuck off.

—Now!

Miss the teacher-lady stares at a place above Joseph's head. There is silence in the classroom. The hands-in-the-air trick is certainly not necessary.

—God give me strength, she says.

But why? Joseph wonders. What is she about to do? There is nothing very heavy in the classroom.

She stares again. For six seconds, exactly. Then she taps the blackboard with a piece of chalk.

—Take it down.

He waits. He watches the other children. They take copy books from their school bags. They open the copy books. They draw the margin. They stare at the blackboard. They write.

They stare again. They write. A girl in the desk beside him takes a pair of glasses from a small black box that clicks loudly when she opens it. She puts the glasses onto her face. She looks at him. Her eyes are big. She smiles.

—Specky fancies yeh.

It is Christian Kelly.

—You're dead.

CHAPTER TWO THE FINGER

—You're dead, says Christian Kelly.

This is the dangerous boy who sits behind Joseph. This boy has just told Joseph that he is dead. Joseph must understand this statement, very quickly.

He does not turn, to look at Christian Kelly.

Miss, the teacher-lady, has wiped the figures from the blackboard. She writes new figures. Joseph sees: these are problems to be solved. There are ten problems. They are not difficult.

What did Christian Kelly mean? *You are dead*. Joseph thinks about these words and this too is not difficult. It is very clear that Joseph is not dead. So, Christian Kelly's words must refer to the future. *You will be dead*. All boys must grow and eventually die—Joseph knows this; he has seen dead men and boys. Christian Kelly's words are clearly intended as a threat, or promise. *I will kill you*. But Christian Kelly will not murder Joseph just because the girl with the magnified eyes smiled at him. *I will hurt you*. This is what Christian Kelly means.

Joseph has not yet seen this Christian Kelly.

It is very strange. Joseph must protect himself from a boy he has not seen. Perhaps not so very strange. He did not see the men who killed his father.

The girl with the magnified eyes smiles again at Joseph.

This time Christian Kelly does not speak. Joseph looks again at his copy book.

He completes the seventh problem. 751 divided by 15. He knows the answer many seconds before he writes it down. He already knows the answer to the ninth problem—761 divided by 15—but he starts to solve the eighth one first. He is quite satisfied with his progress. It is many months since Joseph sat in a classroom. It is warm here. January is certainly a cold month in this country.

Christian Kelly is going to hurt him. He has promised this. Joseph must be prepared.

—Finished?

It is the teacher-lady. The question is for everybody.

Joseph looks. Many of the boys and girls still lean over their copy books. Their faces almost touch the paper.

—Hurry up now. We haven't all day.

—Hey.

The voice comes from behind Joseph. It is not loud.

Joseph turns. He does this quickly. He sees this Christian Kelly.

—What's number 4?

Quickly, Joseph decides.

—17, he whispers.

He turns back, to face the blackboard and the teacher-lady.

—You're still dead. What's number 5?

—17.

—How can—

—Also 17.

—No talk.

Joseph looks at the blackboard.

—It better be.

—Christian Kelly.

It is the teacher-lady.

—What did I say? she asks.

—Don't know, says Christian Kelly.

—No talk.

—I wasn't—

—Just finish your sums. Finished, Joseph? Joseph nods.

—Good lad. Now. One more minute.

Joseph counts the boys and girls. There are twenty-three children in the room. This sum includes Joseph. There are five desks without occupants.

—That's plenty of time. Now. Pencils down. Down.

One boy sits very near the door. Unlike Joseph, he wears the school sweater. Like Joseph, he is black. A girl sits behind Joseph, beside a big map of this country. She, also, is black. She sits beside the map. And is she Irish?

—Now. Who's first?

Miss, the teacher-lady, smiles.

Children lift their hands.

—Miss, Miss, Miss.

Joseph does not lift his hand.

—We'll get to the shy ones later, says the teacher-lady.

—Hazel O'Hara.

Hands go down. Some children groan.

The girl with the magnified eyes removes her glasses. She put them into the box. It clicks. She stands up.

—Good girl.

She walks to the front of the room.

What do Irish children look like? Like this Hazel O'Hara?

Joseph is not sure. Hazel's hair is almost white. Her skin is very pink right now; she is very satisfied. She is standing beside the teacher-lady and she is holding a piece of white chalk.

—Now, Hazel. Are you going to show us all how to do number one?

Hazel O'Hara nods.

—Off you go.

Christian Kelly does not resemble Hazel O'Hara.

—Hey.

Joseph watches Hazel O'Hara's progress.

—Hey.

Hazel O'Hara's demonstration is both swift and accurate.

Joseph turns, to look at Christian Kelly.

—Yes? he whispers.

—D'you want that?

Christian Kelly is holding up a finger, very close to Joseph's face. There is something on the finger's tip. Joseph hears another voice.

—Kelly's got snot on his finger.

Joseph turns, to face the blackboard. He feels the finger on his shoulder. He hears laughter—he feels the finger press his shoulder. He grabs.

He pulls.

—What's going on there?

Christian Kelly is on the floor, beside Joseph. Joseph holds the finger. Christian Kelly makes much noise.

The teacher-lady now holds Joseph's wrist.

—Let go. Now. Hands in the air! Everybody!

Joseph releases Christian Kelly's finger. He looks at Hazel O'Hara's answer on the blackboard. It is correct.

CHAPTER THREE

YOU'RE DEFINITELY DEAD

Joseph looks at the blackboard. Miss Still holds his wrist. There is much noise in the room.

He sees boys and girls stand out of their seats. Other children lean across their neighbors' desks. They all want to see Christian Kelly.

Christian Kelly remains on the floor. He also makes much noise.

—Me finger! He broke me finger!

—Sit down!

It is Miss.

—Hands in the air!

She no longer holds Joseph's wrist. Joseph watches children sit down. He sees hands in the air. He looks at his hands. He raises them.

—Joseph?

He looks at Miss. She kneels beside Christian Kelly. She holds the finger. She presses the knuckle. Christian Kelly screams.

—There's nothing broken, Christian, she says. —You'll be grand.

—It's sore!

—I'm sure it is, she says.

She stands. She almost falls back as she does this. She puts one hand behind her. She holds her skirt with the other hand.

Joseph hears a voice behind him. It is a whisper. Perhaps it is Seth Quinn.

—I seen her knickers.

She is now standing. So is Christian Kelly.

—What color?

Miss shouts.

—Now!

Christian Kelly rubs his nose with his sleeve. He looks at Joseph. Joseph looks at him. There is silence in to classroom.

—That's better, says Miss. —Now. Hands down. Good. Joseph.

Joseph hears the whisper-voice.
 --Yellow.
 Joseph looks up at Miss. She is looking at someone behind him. She says those words again.
 --God give me strength.
 She speaks very quietly. She turns to Christian Kelly. She puts her hand on his shoulder.
 --Sit down, Christian.
 Christian Kelly goes to his desk, behind Joseph. Joseph does not look at him.
 --Now. Joseph. Stand up.
 Joseph does this. He stands up.
 --First. Christian is no angel. Are you, Christian?
 --I didn't do anything.
 She smiles at Christian. She looks at Joseph.
 --You have to apologize to Christian, she says.
 Joseph speaks.
 --Why?
 She looks surprised. She inhales, slowly.
 --Because you hurt him.
 This is fair, Joseph thinks.
 --I apologize, he says.
 A boy speaks.
 --He's supposed to look at him when he's saying it.
 Miss, the teacher-lady, laughs. This surprises Joseph.
 --He's right, she says.
 Joseph turns. He looks at Christian Kelly. Christian Kelly glances at Joseph. He then looks at his desk.
 --I apologize, says Joseph.
 --He didn't mean to hurt you, says Miss.
 Joseph speaks.
 --That is not correct, he says.

--Oh now, says Miss.
 Many voices whisper.
 --What did he say?
 --He's in for it now.
 --Look at her face.
 --Now!
 Joseph looks at Miss's face. It is extremely red. She speaks.
 --We'll have to see about this.
 Her meaning is not clear.
 --Get your bag.
 Joseph picks up his schoolbag. Into this bag he puts his new *Maths Matters* book and copy book and pencil.
 --Come on now.
 Is he being expelled from this room? He does not know. He hears excited voices.
 --She's throwing him out.
 --Is she throwing him out?
 He follows Miss to the front of the room.
 --Now, she says. --We'd better put some space between you and Christian.
 Joseph is very happy. He is to stay. And Christian Kelly will no longer sit behind him.
 But then there is Seth Quinn.
 A girl speaks. She is a very big girl.
 --He should sit beside Pamela.
 Many girls laugh.
 --No, says the black girl who sits beside the map.
 Joseph understands. This is Pamela.
 --Leave poor Pamela alone, says Miss. --There.
 Miss points.
 --Beside Hazel.

Joseph watches the girl called Hazel O'Hara. She moves her chair. She makes room for Joseph. She wears her glasses. Her eyes are very big. Her hair is very white. Her skin is very pink indeed.

—Look at Hazel, says the big girl. —She's blushing. Hazel speaks.

—Fuck off you.

—Now!

Joseph sits beside Hazel O'Hara.

—Hands in the air!

Joseph raises his hand. He hears a voice he knows.

—You're definitely dead.

Joseph looks at the clock. It is round and it is placed on the wall, over the door.

—Don't listen to that dirtbag, says Hazel O'Hara.

It is five minutes after ten o'clock. It is an hour since Joseph was brought to this room by the man. It certainly has been very eventful.

—Joseph?

It is Miss.

—Yes? says Joseph.

—I'm not finished with you yet, says Miss. —Stay here at little break.

What is this little break? Joseph does not know. The other boys in the hostel did not tell him about a little break.

—Now, says Miss. —At last. The sums on the board. Who did the last one?

—Hazel.

—That's right. Who's next?

Hands are raised. Some of the children lift themselves off their seats.

—Miss!

—Miss!

—Seth Quinn, says Miss.

—Didn't have my hand up.

—Come on, Seth.

Joseph hears a chair being pushed. He does not turn.

CHAPTER FOUR
MILK

The boy called Seth Quinn walks to the front of the room. He is a small, angry boy. His head is shaved. His nose is red. He stands at the blackboard but he does not stand still.

—So, Seth, says Miss, the teacher-lady.

—What?

—Do number three for us.

She holds out a piece of chalk. Seth Quinn takes it but he does not move closer to the blackboard.

Beside Joseph, Hazel O'Hara whispers. —Bet he gets it wrong.

Joseph does not respond. He looks at Seth Quinn.

—Well, Seth? says Miss.

Joseph knows the answer. He would very much like to whisper it to Seth Quinn.

Miss holds out her hand. She takes back the chalk.

—Sit down now, Seth, she says.

—Told you, says Hazel O'Hara.

Joseph watches Seth Quinn. He walks past Joseph. He looks at the floor. He does not look at Joseph.

—Maybe we'll have less guff out of Seth for a while, says Miss.

Joseph decides to whisper.

—What is guff?

—It's a culchie word, Hazel O'Hara whispers back. —It means talking, if you don't like talking. She says it all the time.

—Thank you, says Joseph, very quietly.

—Jaysis, says Hazel O'Hara. —You're welcome.

—Now, says Miss. —Little break. Some of the children stand up.

—Sit down, says Miss.

This, Joseph thinks, is very predictable. Miss waits until all the children sit again.

—Now, she says. —We didn't get much work done yet today. So you'll want to pull up your socks when we get back. Now, stand.

Pull up your socks. This must mean *work harder*. Again, Joseph feels that he is learning. He does not stand up.

—Dead.

It is Christian Kelly, as he passes Joseph.

The room is soon empty. Joseph and Miss are alone. It is very quiet.

—Well, Joseph, she says. —What have you do say for yourself?

Joseph does not speak. She smiles.

—God, she says. —I wish they were all as quiet as you. How are you finding it?

Joseph thinks he knows what this means.

—I like school very much, he answers.

—Good, she says. —You'll get used to the accents.

—Please, says Joseph. —There is no difficulty.

—Good, she says. —Now.

She steps back from Joseph's desk. Does this mean that he is permitted to go? He does not stand.

She speaks.

—Look, Joseph. I know a little bit about why you're here. Why you left, your country.

She looks at Joseph.

—And if you don't want to talk about it, that's grand. Joseph nods.

—I hope you have a great time here. I do. She is, Joseph thinks, quite a nice lady. But why did she embarrass Seth Quinn?

—But, she says.

Still, she smiles.

—I can't have that behavior, with Christian, in the classroom. Or anywhere else.

—I apologize.

She laughs.

—I'm not laughing at you, she says. —It's lovely. You're so polite, Joseph.

She says nothing for some seconds. Joseph does not look at her.

—But no more fighting, she says. —Or pulling fingers, or whatever it was you did to Christian.

Joseph does not answer.

—You've a few minutes left, says Miss. —Off you go.

—Thank you, says Joseph.

He stands, although he would prefer to stay in the classroom. He walks out, to the corridor.

He remembers the way to the schoolyard. It is not complicated. He goes down a very bright staircase. He passes a man. The man smiles at Joseph. Joseph reaches the bottom step. The door is in front of him. He sees children outside, through the window. The schoolyard is very crowded.

He is not afraid of Christian Kelly.

He reaches the door.

But he does not wish to be the center of attention.

He cannot see Christian Kelly in the schoolyard. He pushes the door. He is outside. It is quite cold.

Something bright flies past him. He feels it scrape his face

as it passes. He hears a smack behind him, close to his ear. And his neck is suddenly wet, and his hair. And his sleeve.

He looks.

It is milk, a carton. There is milk on the glass and on the ground but there is also milk on Joseph. He is quite wet, and he is also the center of attention. He is surrounded.

—Kellier did it.

—Christian Kelly.

Even in the space between Joseph and the door, there are children. Joseph does not see Christian Kelly. He removes his sweatshirt, over his head, and feels the milk on his face. He must wash the sweatshirt before the milk starts to smell. He touches his shoulder. His shirt is also very wet. It too must be washed.

He is very cold.

There is movement, pushing. Children move aside. Christian Kelly stands in front of Joseph. And behind Christian Kelly, Joseph sees Seth Quinn.

CHAPTER FIVE THE BELL

Christian Kelly stands in front of Joseph. Seth Quinn stands behind Christian Kelly.

All the children in the school, it seems, are watching. They stand behind Joseph, pressing. They are also beside him, left and right, and in front, behind Christian Kelly. Joseph knows: something must happen, even if the bell rings and announces the conclusion of this thing called little break. The bell will not bring rescue.

Joseph remembers another bell.

For one second there is silence.

Then Joseph hears a voice.

—Do him.

Joseph does not see who has spoken. It was not Christian Kelly and it was not Seth Quinn.

He hears other voices.

—Go on, Kellier.

—Go on.

—Chicken.

Then Joseph hears Christian Kelly. He sees his lips.

—I told you.

Joseph remembers the soldier.

The soldier walked out of the schoolhouse. He held the bell up high in the air. It was the bell that called them all to school, every morning. It was louder than any other sound in Joseph's village, louder than engines and cattle. Joseph loved its peal, its beautiful ding. He never had to be called to school. He was there every morning, there to watch the bell lifted and dropped, lifted to the teacher's shoulder, and dropped. Joseph's father was the teacher.

—I told you, says Christian Kelly.

Joseph does not respond. He knows: anything he says will be a provocation. He will not do this.

There is a surge of children, behind Christian Kelly. He is being pushed. Christian Kelly must do something. He must hit Joseph. Joseph understands this. Someone pulls at Joseph's sweatshirt. He has been holding the sweatshirt at his side. He does not look; he does not take his eyes off Christian Kelly, or Seth Quinn. Someone pulls again, but not too hard. He or she is offering to hold it. Joseph lets go of the sweatshirt. His hands are free. He is very cold. He looks at Christian Kelly. He knows. This is not what Christian Kelly wants. Christian Kelly is frightened.

The soldier held the bell up high. He let it drop; he lifted it. The bell rang out clearly. There were no car or truck engines

in the air that morning. Just gunfire and, sometimes, the far sound of someone screaming or crying. The bell rang out but no children came running. Joseph hid behind the school wall. The soldier was grinning. More soldiers came out of the schoolhouse. They fired their guns into the air. The soldier dropped the bell. Another soldier aimed at it and fired.

Christian Kelly takes the step and pushes Joseph. Joseph feels the hand on his chest. He steps back. He stands on a foot, behind him. Christian Kelly's hand follows Joseph. Joseph grabs the hand, and one of the fingers.

This is a very stupid boy indeed.

Joseph watches Christian Kelly. He sees the sudden terror. Christian Kelly realizes that he has made an important mistake. Once again, he has delivered his finger to Joseph.

It is now Joseph's turn. He must do something.

The soldiers had gone. Joseph waited. He wanted to enter the schoolhouse; he wanted to find his father. But he was frightened. The bullet noise was still alive in his ears, and the laughing soldiers, his father's bell—Joseph was too frightened. He was ashamed, but he could not move. He wanted to call out to his father but his throat was blocked and too dry. He had dirtied himself, but he could not move.

Children shout but Joseph does not look or listen. He looks straight at Christian Kelly. He knows: he cannot release the finger. It will be weakness. Seth Quinn stands behind Christian Kelly. He stares at Joseph.

The school bell rings. It is a harsh electric bell.

No one moves.

The bell continues to ring. Joseph continues to look at Christian Kelly.

The bell stops.

He found his father behind the schoolhouse. He knew it was

his father, although he did not see the face. He did not go closer. He recognized his father's trousers. He recognized his father's shirt and shoes. He ran.

Christian Kelly tries to pull back his finger. Joseph tightens his hold. He hears children.

—This is stupid.

—Are yis going to fight, or what?

There are fewer children surrounding them. The children stand in lines, in the schoolyard. They wait for the teachers to bring them back into the school. Joseph and Christian Kelly are alone now, with Seth Quinn.

—Let him go.

It is Seth Quinn. He has spoken to Joseph.

—Seth Quinn!

It is Miss, the teacher-lady. She is behind Joseph. Christian Kelly tries to rescue his finger.

—And Christian Kelly.

Miss sees Christian Kelly's finger in Joseph's fist.

—Again?

Joseph knows what she will say.

—God give me strength.

He is learning very quickly.

CHAPTER SIX
ROBBING A BANK

Miss the teacher-lady follows the other boys and girls into the classroom. She stops at the door and turns to Joseph, Christian Kelly, and Seth Quinn.

—Not a squeak out of you, she says. —Just stand there.

She is looking at Joseph. Does she think that he will run away?

She walks into the room. Joseph remains in the corridor.

—Now!

Joseph hears the noise of children sitting down, retrieving books from schoolbags. He hears Miss.

—Open up page 47 of *Totally Graeige*. Questions one to seven. I'll be right outside and listening out for any messing.

Joseph does not look at Christian Kelly or Seth Quinn. They do not speak. They face the classroom door but cannot see inside.

Miss has returned.

—Now, she says.

She stands in front of them.

—I didn't do anything, says Christian Kelly.

—Shut up, Christian, for God's sake.

Joseph looks at Miss. She does not look very angry.

—We have to sort this out, boys, she says.

—I didn't—

—Christian!

It is, perhaps, a time when she will say *God give me strength*. But she doesn't. She looks at Seth Quinn.

—Seth, she says. —What happened?

—Nothing.

Christian Kelly is looking at the floor. Seth Quinn is looking at Miss.

—It was a funny sort of nothing I saw, says Miss. —Well, Joseph. Your turn. What happened?

—Nothing happened, says Joseph.

Miss says nothing, for three seconds. These seconds, Joseph thinks, are important. Because, in that time, the three boys become united. This is what Joseph thinks. They are united in their silence. They do not like one another but this does not matter. They stand there together, against Miss.

She looks at the three boys.

—You're great lads, she says.

Joseph does not think that she is sincere.

—What'll I do with you? she says.

Again, the boys say nothing.

—Seth?

Seth Quinn shrugs.

—Joseph?

Joseph looks at her. He does not speak. He will not speak. He will be punished but he is not frightened or very concerned. He is, at this moment, quite happy.

—Nothing to say for yourself? says Miss.

Joseph shakes his head. He looks at the floor. There are many loud noises coming from the classroom. Joseph hopes that these will distract Miss. She does not speak. He hears her breathe. He looks at her feet. They do not move.

She speaks.

—Right, so. If that's the way you want it—

—Miss?

Joseph looks. It is Hazel O'Hara, the girl with the magnified eyes. She is at the door.

—Yes, Hazel? says Miss.

—I seen it.

—Now, Hazel—

—But I seen it. Christian Kelly pushed—

—Back inside, Hazel.

—But he—

—Hazel!

Hazel lifts her very big eyes and makes a clicking sound with her mouth. She turns and walks back into the classroom. They hear her.

—She's a bitch, that one. I was only telling her.

Miss follows Hazel. She rushes into the classroom.

—Hands in the air!
Seth Quinn speaks.

—She thinks she's robbing a fuckin' bank.
Christian Kelly laughs quietly. Seth Quinn laughs quietly.
Joseph smiles.

They listen to Miss. They cannot see.

—Hazel O'Hara!
—What?

Joseph laughs. It is like listening to a radio program.

—I heard you what you said, Hazel O'Hara!
—It was a private conversation.

He laughs because the other boys are also laughing. He hears them snort. He also snorts.

—Don't you *dare* talk to me like that!
—Like what?

Joseph looks at Christian Kelly. He looks at Seth Quinn. They laugh, with him. Their shoulders shake.

—Stand up! says Miss.
—I *am* standing.
—Hands in the air!
—She's an eejit, whispers Christian Kelly.
The three boys laugh together.
It is quiet in the classroom.
Seth Quinn whispers, —Now.
And—
—Now, says Miss, inside the room.
This is, perhaps, the funniest thing that Joseph has ever heard. He laughs so much, he cannot see. He wipes his eyes. The other boys also wipe their eyes. He tries to stop. He knows that Miss will soon reappear.
He stops.
Then he says it.

—Now.
He thinks suddenly of his father; a great weight drops through his chest. He cries now as he laughs. He feels the weight, the sadness, fall right through him. He wipes his eyes. He continues to laugh. Many times, Joseph made his father laugh. He remembers the sound of his father's laughter; he sees his father's face.

He laughs. He wipes his eyes. He looks at the other boys. They are looking at the classroom door.

Miss stands in front of Joseph.
He stops laughing. He waits.
He is surprised. She does not seem angry. She looks at Joseph for some long time.

—The three musketeers, she says. —In you go.
She stands aside.
Christian Kelly enters the room. Joseph follows Christian Kelly. Seth Quinn follows Joseph.