

Cold and Blue

A Play

By Mike Weddell 1950-

Characters

Mark- a young boy

Dale- an older boy

Mrs. Parent- Dale's mother

Mrs. Webster- Mark's mother

Mr. Cochrane- the teacher

Valerie- a student in the class

Danny- the class despot

Eddie- Mark's old friend

Various other boys and girls

Assorted male figures, some in uniform, some not.

*A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy, a bird flew
Up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard of
Any world where promises were kept
Or one could weep because another wept.*

W. H. Auden

Scene 1

[This story takes place in the PMQ's or Permanent Married Quarters on an air force base adjacent to a small town in eastern Canada in the early 1960's. The houses are the war-time boxes put together hastily after the war to shelter the growing families of veterans and newly enlisted men. The lower ranks were assigned the smaller houses down in the bottoms, the junior officers had the medium-sized houses bordering the wooded park and the senior officers had the big, palatial houses on the hill overlooking the others. Mark and Dale lived across the street from each other. Mark's Dad was a Flying Officer and Dale's Dad was a Flight Sargent. Mark's Dad was sober most of the time and Dale's Dad was a drunk. Both fathers were seldom home. Their parents never spoke to each other but Dale and Mark were best friends at school. Mark had three brothers and a sister on the way. Dale had one older brother. Both mothers were dedicated to raising their families and providing for their husbands. Both played their roles reluctantly. Dale's mother was more compliant and resigned than was Mark's mother who fiercely resisted any attempts to control her]

Mark was a sensitive, caring and responsible individual who was being manipulated at school by a gang of older boys. His father beat him regularly for misbehavior. The teacher strapped him daily for insubordination and mischief. Mark was the second son in a growing family. His older brother had died as an infant, years earlier, from a heart ailment. Dale, on the other hand, showed little or no emotion and appeared to care less about the politics of the classroom. He was aloof and independent, played by himself rather than with others. It appeared he had chosen a path to success, following his older brother's footsteps. Both boys were quite bright, gifted in fact. Mark was an artist, although he didn't know it then. Dale was a scientist and he knew it. They both needed each other for different reasons.

This scene opens in the kitchen of Dale's house. An arborite table surrounded by four chairs dominates the room. There could be a box of cereal or a jar of instant coffee and mugs in the center of the table. It has the look of a busy, lived in place. Dale's mother is standing at the sink washing dishes. She stares out the window across the street to Mark's house. There is a stack of dirty dishes on one counter, a pile of clean ones in a draining rack on the other side of the sink. She moves dishes through the sink from one side to the other automatically. The fridge stands like an altar opposite the sink. When the door is opened a beam of light is cast on the person opening the door. The audience never sees the contents of the fridge only the door with Kelvinator in bold letters. Dale is the only character who, when he opens the fridge, is frozen in a blue light. Also visible to the audience is a dark opening from below, the stairs to the basement where Dale lives and has his chemistry lab. He may enter and exit from the blackness on occasion. Ideally a revolving stage or turntable would make the scene transitions smoother. However, this is costly and complicated. The scenes, a post-war PMQ kitchen, a typical classroom of the day and the doorway/vestibule/altar of a Protestant church could be simulated with creative furniture arrangement and lighting in the hands of a sensitive set designer. For scene three an asphalt surface with a brick wall and a wooded area with a path need to be simulated. Perhaps a raised dias off to one side could be used for the dream segments. The audience must be able to identify with the characters in the particular settings so they must be as realistic as possible.

Memories fade over time but these events did take place. The characters are based on real people, which can be dangerous. Not everyone welcomes reminders of tragic events in their past. Mining the memory can be hurtful for some, therapeutic for others. The version of events depicted in this play may differ from the recollections of those other participants who experienced the same time and place. The author has attempted to remain true to the real people about whom this play is written and maintain a spiritual connectedness. No disrespect or harm is intended. The story needs to be told. It is what it is, a play based on the memories of the playwright.

A narrator would be helpful in guiding the observer, to intensify the images, make them tangible and meaningful. It would be preferable if the narrator had some personal connection to these or similar events. The treatment of the material by the narrator is crucial to making a connection with the audience, setting the tone and the mood, which is not altogether dark.

The first scene opens with Mrs. Parent, Dale's mother, washing dishes at the sink. There is loamy blues (*Robert Johnson's- Come On In My Kitchen*) played by a backlit guitarist on the raised dias upon which the dream segments take place. She is wearing pedal pushers and a sleeveless blouse. Her hair, which is in rollers, is tied with a kerchief. She has a cigarette hanging from her lips which she places in an ashtray in the middle of the table as she answers a timid knock on the door. Mark is standing on the stoop dressed in the casual boys' clothes of the day, dungarees, T-shirt and sneakers. His clothes are worn but he is clean and well scrubbed. He is a tall, slim boy with an expressive, freckled face and curly, auburn hair. He likes to tell stories to anybody who will listen. He waits, with an ear cocked, as Dale's mother comes to the door, wiping her hands on her apron. He quickly stands to attention as she opens the door.

Mark [polite and well spoken]. Hello, Mrs. Parent. I was wondering if Dale was home from doing papers yet?

Mrs. Parent [sarcastic but gentle with the hint of a Quebecois accent] Well you can wonder all you want son, but my boy is still doing his paper route over town [smiling proudly] He's got over a hundred papers to deliver you know, the Toronto Telegram. The biggest route in town, that's my boy! [she snickers to herself]

Mark [carefully] He's a little bit late isn't he?

Mrs. Parent [in a defensive, protective tone]. Not really. It takes a long time to deliver all those heavy papers on a bicycle. He's got to go to all those businesses over town. He's a hard worker, my Dale. He's saving up for university, eh.

Mark [proudly puffing out his chest] I finished mine before supper. Sixty-four Toronto Stars with the weekly. They're really heavy. My little brothers help me on the weekends. Bobby Hull was on the cover today. Did you see those muscles? He kinda looks like Dale. I play hockey you know. I'm in Pee Wees. I play tomorrow. My team is the Chiefs. We have Dougie Larsen on our team. Coach says he's the best hockey player to come out of these parts since George Ferguson or John Garrett except he's a defenceman not a goalie. George Ferguson, he plays for the Toronto Maple Leafs. They're my favorite team. I love Johnny Bower, he's the best goalie in the whole NHL except for maybe Jaques Plante or Glen Hall. Did you know Glenn Hall throws up before every game?

Mrs. Parent [smiling] Well, well, my little gentleman, are you going to come in and wait or are you going to stand on the porch all evening and tell stories, eh?

Mark [hesitantly] Well, thank you Mrs. Parent. I'll come in and wait for a while. I haven't seen Dale since school yesterday. He got the highest mark in the class on a Math test. I got the second highest and Brian got third. That's pretty well the way it is all the time. It used to be just me and Brian, we call him Brain [he laughs], until Dale came. He's really smart in Math but I'm good at reading and writing. Mr. Cochrane says he's never seen a kid as bright as Dale at Math and me at Writing, he says we have gifts. He's a good teacher Mr. Cochrane, I really like him. The other boys tease him and make fun of him, cause he's got a twisted face, but I really like Mr. Cochrane, he's good to me.

[Mark comes in and awkwardly sits at the kitchen table. The woman busies herself at the sink, rubber-gloved hands in soapy water. Mark looks furtively around the kitchen. This place is a mess compared to his Mum's spotless kitchen. He is obviously uncomfortable and has no place to put his hands so he places them primly in his lap. He fidgets

impatiently, crossing and uncrossing his legs, putting his hands underneath his seat waving the smoke away when she is not looking. He is somewhat disgusted]

Mrs. Parent [matter of factly, looking out the window] So your Mum's going to have another baby, eh? Your Dad was home on leave last fall wasn't he? [with a little sadness as she stares off through the window again]

Mark [embarrassed and confused about the man/woman stuff, clears his throat] Yes, ma'am. I'm hoping for a sister but I'd take another brother to go hiking and camping and play sports with. I don't think a sister would want to do that boy stuff. Boys and girls are different you know, they like different things.....

Mrs. Parent [laughing] lentement, mon petit cherie, slow down little one [her mood changes quickly, she seems disappointed, sad] Hope all you want son, you get what you get. I like boys. I've got two of the finest sons a mother could want[dream-like, staring off into the distance] Their father leaves a little to be desired, mais en! But he gave me two fine boys. Where is that Dale? He should be home by now [she stares out the window studying the light and then looks over her shoulder at the clock on the wall] Oh well,[she shrugs] he's probably playing pool with his friends over town. It seems I spend most of my life waiting for other people to decide what they're going to do [absent-mindedly to no one in particular]

Mark[surprised] You let him go to the pool hall?

Mrs. Parent [shrugs her shoulders, resigned] Mais oui. I can't stop him. He's almost a grown man. He pretty well does what he wants. Even his father can't stop him anymore. We've given up trying. He'll be OK. He's smart like his older brother. He'll make the right choices. I know he will.

Mark [dejectedly] My parents won't let me go to the pool hall. No way. They say it's a bad place for the criminal element.[mimicking his parents] . The Frenchie brothers, the Guichons, hang out there. They're bad. They raped a girl in the woods last year and...

Mrs. Parent [harshly] That's enough! There are bad Anglaise too! [her facial expression and mood changes suddenly]You talk too much [laughing] The criminal element, les animaux sauvages, oh come on, it's just boys having some fun. They have to have a place where they can behave like men, let off some steam, fart, belch, fight, tell dirty jokes about the girls, eh! [she playfully punches his arm]

Mark [red-faced, obviously uncomfortable, rubbing his shoulder where she punched him] My Dad says if he ever found me in a pool hall he'd make me never forget. [he rubs his behind and gulps, remembering the pain of the last spanking]

Mrs. Parent [watching Mark's reaction, softly] I don't see why people get so upset over a small town pool hall. There's more bad people sitting in their houses or walking the streets than in the pool hall. [she looks off out the window, does some more dishes, distracted, worried]

Mark [he is getting more impatient, tired of waiting and listening to Dale's Mum] I think I'll go home now. I have to do some reading before chores. I make dinner sometimes you know. I do dishes, I take care of my little brothers, I read them bed time stories and everything. I like reading. I read when I'm in bed. My parents got me a light for my bed side table in the cellar. I'm reading a John Buchan adventure right now and then I'm going to read about the arctic explorer, Fridjof Nansen. I like reading about the polar explorers. Those men were really brave. When I grow up I'm going to Antarctica. I've

got a sea named after my family in Antarctica, some Scottish explorer from long ago. My Dad says I'm probably related to him. So I guess I'm sort of famous.

Mrs. Parent[like she's seeing Mark for the first time] You are an odd little boy aren't you? You like reading? My boys never read books for enjoyment. They don't ever have to do homework either. They just seem to get it, even that chemistry stuff. I think they get that ability from their father. He's good at that sort of thing, not good for much else mind you. Mon Dieu!

Mark [hastily] Well I should go home now. Tell Dale I stopped by to see him.

Mrs. Parent[smiles wistfully] I'll tell him his little friend stopped by to visit.

A demain, mon petit chérie!

Mark[quickly closing the door behind him] Bye now!

[She stands at the window looking across the street and Mark stands on the step, looking down the street then he shrugs his shoulders and exits. As he is leaving Dale comes huffing and puffing to the side of the house and drops his bike (a Schwinn with a big metal basket on the front and two canvas bags criss-crossed over the back wheel) on the ground with the wheel spinning. Dale is a tall, muscular boy who lumbers awkwardly and stiffly from side to side. He has a solid, pronounced jaw. He is probably shaving and could easily pass for a young man but he's only fourteen. He leans over with his hands on his huge thighs and vomits. On wobbly legs he enters the house and closes the door. Mark comes running back and bounds up the steps poised to knock but stops when he hears yelling and screaming from inside]

Mrs. Parent[in a loud and angry voice with a stronger accent] You're late again! What have you been doing all this time? You had me worried sick! Where were you?

Dale[surlily] Playing pool with my friends, what of it?

Mrs. Parent [disappointed] You've been drinking too, haven't you? Just like your father and your brother. Here I thought you were different!

Dale [shrugs his shoulders and throws his hair to the side with a sweeping motion of his hand and his head simultaneously] Well I guess I'm not, eh? Am I? What's to eat in this house anyway?[He opens the door of the Kelvinator fridge and is frozen in the blue light, searching for something to eat. He takes out a milk bottle and drinks right from the bottle, milk dripping down his chin. He wipes the milk off with the back of his hand, puts the cap back on, belches and puts the milk back in the fridge.

Mrs. Parent [studying Dale she seems to change her mind about something and when she continues it is in a much softer, gentler manner] I keep telling you not to drink from the bottle. Use a glass, please. There's some roast beef from last night. I'll make you a sandwich if you want. Your favourite.

Dale [smiling, jokingly, teasing his Mum] Wonder bread? [his Mum smiles] Mustard? Mayonnaise? Tomatoes? Seasoning salt and a little bit of pepper? Mum's special? I thought you were mad at me? [grinning]

Mrs. Parent [she tenderly almost sheepishly punches him on the shoulder] Oh, sit down at the table and let your Mum take care of her boy. [She starts to prepare a sandwich as he sits at the table studying a Chemistry 12 text book. She goes to the fridge to gather the ingredients but when she opens the door the light is a normal, white or yellow glow]

Dale [smiling] Could you get me some cheeze while you're in there Mum, pleeeze. [as she bends down to get the items from the fridge Dale sneaks up behind her] What happened to my Mum? [he pushes her from behind softly] Kelvin ate her! [he laughs]

Mrs. Parent[not crossly but she rebukes him] Ha! Ha! Don't push me boy!
[like she just remembered] Oh, that nice boy from across the street came to see you. He just left. What's his name? He's such a polite little fellow.

Dale [fondly] Yeah, Mark. He's a good guy. We're friends at school. He's funny and smart. He makes me laugh with all his stories. His parents are really strict. He's got it rough what with all those brothers and another one on the way. I'm pretty lucky compared to him.

Mrs. Parent[thoughtfully] Well, we all have problems in our lives we have to deal with. It makes us stronger in the end. Parents do what we have to do to keep you young people in line now don't we?[She pushes him playfully]

Dale [makes an exaggerated motion as his Mum pushes him] Yeah, sure Mum.
{grinning}

Mrs. Parent[seriously] I wish you wouldn't come home so late. I worry about you coming through those woods in the dark.

Dale[lovingly reassuring] Mum, I'm going so fast no one could catch me. Just like Superman, faster than a speeding bullet. [he mimics a news announcer and with a big grin splitting his face he flips his hair out of his eyes]

Mrs. Parent[tearfully, abandoning all control] Oh, my Dale I love you so. [She awkwardly hugs him standing up while he is sitting down.]

Dale [trying not to get choked up] Aw, come on Mum, don't get all mushy on me. I'll be OK.

[The light fades and Mark slinks away down the steps to the cellar]

Dream Sequence #1

A dark scene in a pool hall of the day. Meaner, urban blues (*Robert Johnson's-Crossroads*) played by the guitarist beside the jukebox. The only light is coming from a naked light bulb. A group of young men, with Dale in the center, holding a pool cue, gather around a big billiards table. Dale is bent over listening intently to Danny whispering in his ear. Dale looks worried and tense but mesmerized. The actors start to move and a brown bag with a bottle is passed around. When the bottle is passed to Dale he takes a big swig, like he was drinking milk earlier, passes it to Danny and bends over the table to take a shot, shaking his head and squinting. He is left-handed and leans awkwardly over the table like he doesn't belong here. The other boys watch intently as Danny works Dale.

Dannny [sneering, haughty] So you'll do it then, eh big guy? Help us out? It's just a little delivery. Just like you were delivering your papers. Nobody'll ever know. Just a paper boy, eh.

Dale [uncertain, tentative] I don't know. What's in the package?

Danny [puts his hand on Dale's shoulder] You don't need to know. If I told ya I'd have to kill ya. [the other boys look at each other sneering, knowing that Danny's not joking] It's better for you that you don't ask questions. Just do it this once and we'll treat you

good. Come on, do it for your friends. [he offers Dale the bottle and Dale drains it in one huge gulp] Way to go, big fella! Man, can you drink or what!

Dale [finishes his shot, carefully places his cue on the table and turns to face Danny drawing himself up to full height, towering over him] I'll do it. Just this one time. But you have to do something for me.

Danny [uncertainly, like he hadn't expected this] Yeah, sure man. You name it.

They leave the table and go out a back door leaving the others huddled together, whispering excitedly.

Scene 2

An early 60's classroom complete with one piece desks, chairs attached. Mr. Cochrane at the front sitting at a double pedestal desk. Danny, hanging with his boys at the back of the room. Val in the center, lounging languidly. Mark sits off to the right in front of the boys, close to the teacher's desk looking at Val. Danny surveys the room from an almost prone position, feet up on an empty desk in front of him. Everyone is supposed to be doing a Math test. There is an assertive knock and Mr Cochrane pushes himself out of his chair and lumbers in back pain to the door with his yardstick in hand like a cane.

Mr. Cochrane [in a firm baritone, not unkindly] Keep working class you have fifteen minutes left to finish.

[He opens the door and a conversation takes place outside. The students are listening to the conversation and talking amongst themselves. The test is forgotten for the moment. He steps back into the classroom with Dale in tow. Dale stands sheepishly, embarrassed at the attention, a full head taller than Mr. Cochrane even though he's slouching beside him, but with the same powerful torso]

Mr. Cochrane [sighing, resigned] Well class....this room is getting pretty full, please welcome our thirty-sixth Grade 8 student, Dale. He comes to us from Juneau, Alaska.

Danny [in a stage whisper] Holy shit, he's huge! [all the boys laugh but the girls are too busy staring at Dale]

Valerie [with a little grin on her face she leans over to Mark, casually exposing her breasts] Looks like we got a new friend eh, Markie [she places her hand on Mark's shoulder lovingly, compassionately] He's a looker, strong too... [she trails off staring at Dale with adoration, her hand lingering on Mark's shoulder]

Mark [stares at Val, looks down at her hand on his shoulder, wide-eyed and gulps and looks back at Dale and then Danny. Dale makes eye contact and smiles at him in a friendly, pleading manner] Yeah, I'll say...

Mr. Cochrane [taking a big breath, letting it out through his cheeks] I guess you'll need a desk then won't you son. [he walks to the back of the room grabs the desk in front of Danny in one hand and snatches it out from beneath Danny's feet. He carries it one-handed to a spot opposite Mark and drops it with an audible grunt]

Danny [for the benefit of his boys, mutters under his breath] Take it easy old man, sheesh [the boys at the back of the room snicker into their hands, they are afraid of Mr. Cochrane and Danny]

Mr. Cochrane [crankily] Sit there for now! [There is a buzz of whispered conversation in the room] Get back to work class!

Valerie [She seems pleased to see this new boy, this manchild] Wowser! Are things ever going to change around here, eh Markie?

Mark [awestruck] Yeah, you're not kidding.

Dale [sits down awkwardly trying to squeeze his frame into the desk] Sir? [timidly] I'm left-handed.

Mr. Cochrane [in an angry, exasperated voice] Well it'll have to do for now until the janitor can bring us a leftie desk. You've got a Math test to do boy. Here it is ...get started. [He slaps the test on Dale's desk, gives him a pencil, eraser and a couple of pieces of foolscap] You'll probably need a ruler too. Is there anyone who could lend Dale here a ruler so he can do this test?

Valerie [in a soft, low, sexy voice a la Marilyn Monroe] He can use my ruler, Mr. Cochrane.

Mr. Cochrane [smiling, pleased with his little girl. Valerie is obviously his favorite] Thanks, Val. That's nice of you. [in a kind and gentle voice]

Valerie [respectfully but loaded with innuendo] You're welcome, sir.

[Valerie unfolds herself from her desk. She is tall and gorgeous, with a full woman's figure, curly, ash blonde hair to her broad shoulders. She shakes her hair out, flings it back, picks up the ruler from her desk and puts it to her parted, red lips, tapping it lightly. All eyes follow her across the room, including Mr. Cochrane initially, but he looks away at Danny. She walks slowly towards Dale as he sits hunched over his desk, scribbling furiously. A loud wolf whistle emanates from one of Danny's boys and they all snicker and leer. Danny's thin grin is disappearing. Valerie smiles as she stops close to Dale's shoulder almost touching him with her hips. She places the ruler carefully on his desk and in a husky voice] Here you go, Dale. Take my ruler.

Dale [still with his head down busily doing the Math test] Thanks [he mumbles]

Valerie [in the same voice she usually reserved for Mr. Cochrane] You're welcome.

[she walks slowly back to her desk and exaggerates placing her bottom in the seat for the benefit of the boys at the back of the room as they all laugh and look at Danny]

Danny [uncoils from his semi-prone position and picks up his pencil] Fuckin' bitch!

Mr. Cochrane [angrily, defensive] That's enough of that, get back to work!

Mark [in an innocent but probing voice as he's looking at Dale and then at Danny] What do you do if you're finished the test, Mr. Cochrane?

Mr. Cochrane [harried and impatient] You know what to do, Mark. Check your work over and then quietly read another story from your reader.

Mark [pestering Mr. Cochrane and directing the attention to himself in a whiny, know it all voice] But I've finished all the stories in my reader, sir.

Mr. Cochrane [irritated] Then just sit there until the others are finished! Don't bother me again!

Dale [sitting proudly with his arms folded across his massive chest] Sir? I'm finished and I don't have a reader. What should I do?

Mr. Cochrane [dumbfounded, perplexed] You couldn't be finished yet! You only just started. Let me see, bring it up here! I'll just have to mark it right now. That wasn't an easy test, you know.

Dale [embarrassed] I found it pretty easy, sir.

Mr. Cochrane [angrier] You don't say! Get up here! We'll see about that!

Dale [as he extricates himself from the desk he bumps it with his knee and the pencil, eraser and Valerie's ruler fall to the floor] Yes, sir. [everyone laughs except Mark and Valerie]

Dale [holding the test in one hand he bends down and picks up the pencil and the eraser. He puts them on his desk then, almost reverently, he picks up the ruler. He walks over to Valerie, with everyone watching, and delicately places the ruler on her desk] Thanks for lending me your ruler.... [softly] Valerie.

Valerie [kindly, with compassion, moved that he was so polite and pleased he had used her full name] You're welcome, Dale. Any time.

[the boys in the back let out a chorus of calls, every eye on Danny who moves uncomfortably in his seat with hatred in his eyes]

Danny [drawling confidently] He's just a big dummy.

Mr. Cochrane [in an angry, gruff voice] Get up here now, Dale! Quit wasting my time. The rest of you have a test to finish...five more minutes!

Dale [holding the test in front of him with both hands like a shield] Yes, sir.

Danny [throws his voice from the back of the room in a high falsetto] Yessir.

Mr. Cochrane [losing control of the situation] Any more of that and my strap's gonna get a workout! [he opens his desk drawer, pulls out the strap and slaps it down on the surface of the desk with his right hand and then slams the drawer right in front of Dale who places the test in front of Mr. Cochrane and takes a step back, immediate silence as everyone busies themselves with the task at hand, including Danny.]

Dale [feeling awkward and conspicuous beside the teacher's desk] Should I go sit down while you mark it, sir?

Mr. Cochrane [busily making checks as he moves his head from side to side} No, I can see it won't take me long, son, just stand there and be quiet!

Dale [embarrassed] Yes, sir.

Mr. Cochrane [throws his red pen down on the desk, loosens his tie, pushes his captain's chair back, places his hands behind his head and leans back] Well, my boy, this is a first for me in thirty years of teaching. I have never had a student score perfect on one of my Math tests. This is incredible. What are your plans for the future?

Dale [clears his throat, flicks his hair out of his eyes with his left hand and puts his hands behind his back] I'm going to Royal Military College in Kingston or St. John's to study chemistry just like my brother. Then I'm going to serve my country for five years sir and become a high school chemistry teacher.

Mr. Cochrane [wide-eyed, blinking in disbelief, taken aback by Dale's honesty and candor, he puts his chair legs down, arms on his desk, sad, resigned] Well son, I wish you luck. We all have dreams in our lives, don't we? I wanted to be a poet and a singer and here I am teaching a bunch of misfits. [he looks up and gives the class a loving, crooked smile, some of the students smile back. Val has compassion in her smile and Danny has a wicked grin like he's planning something]

Dale [steps back, this is too much attention for him, awkwardly] May I return to my desk, sir?

Mr. Cochrane [like he's coming out of a dream, absent-mindedly] Of course, son, I'm sorry, go sit down and take a break, you sure earned it.

[as he ambles back to his desk, with the same sailor's gait that Mr. Cochrane exhibited, Danny uncoils from his desk to pick up a pencil from the floor, he stretches and coughs into his hand]

Danny [coughing] Brown-noser ahem, suckhole....

[Dale snaps around in his seat and glowers at the same time Mr. Cochrane suddenly pushes his chair back, grabs his yard stick and slaps it down on Mark's desk, Mark jumps as he'd been watching Danny like all the others in the room]

Mr. Cochrane That's enough of that! There's nothing wrong with being a conscientious student concerned about academic achievement and the future! Some of you need to put more of your energy into school work and less of it into ridiculing others for good behaviour. Dale and Mark here are two of the best students I've ever had the pleasure of teaching and that's more than I can say for you Mr. O'Connor.[looking directly at Danny]

Danny [smiling, brimming with confidence and malevolence as he had successfully turned the light on himself and away from the new boy] Whaddya mean, sir [whining, pouting] I was just coughing. I have something caught in my throat [he rasps dramatically, coughs forcefully, horks into his throat, gulps and swallows] There that feels better [some of the boys are giggling, the girls are disgusted and Val looks angry] I guess I'm just not as con-sci -enshus or ac[like a cough] a- dumbic as the new kid. I'm sorry, sir [in a whiny, sniveling voice]

Mr. Cochrane [impatient, tired of this behaviour, losing control of the class] That's enough out of you O'Connor! Sit down and shut up!

Danny [like a whipped puppy in a high-pitched whine] Yes sir, Mr. Cochrane , anything you say.

Mr. Cochrane Just sit down and get back to work. All of you! [he swings his yard stick around and almost hits Mark who had stood up to get a better view, everyone laughs as Mark ducks] Now![as he passes by Mark's desk on the way back to the front of the room he mumbles an apology] Sorry there, little fella!

[everyone busies themselves with the Math test, which has almost been forgotten, tidying their desks or reading. Mark is pretending to be reading but watching and waiting for a signal from Danny, he knows it isn't over yet. Val sits with her long legs stuck out and her arms crossed over her chest, an angry, petulant look on her face. Dale is watching the others waiting for instructions from Mr. Cochrane as he has no books yet. Mr. Cochrane busies himself at his desk preparing to mark the Math tests and record the marks in his book. The class is silent.

Danny [coughs to get Mark's attention and Mark's head slowly turns to face Danny as he nods to Mark, this is their signal and has been all year. Everyone's eyes turn to Mark, getting ready to be entertained. There is now a nervous energy in the room that Mr. Cochrane hasn't noticed yet]

Mr. Cochrane [without looking up from his desk and his papers]

That's enough time, class! You have to be finished by now. Mark, please collect the papers and bring them to me. The rest of you read the next story in your basal reader, I think it's called The Parsley Garden, by the American writer, William Saroyan. Read quietly while I mark your tests. Dale, there are some extra readers behind Mr. O'Connor on the shelf. Go get one, please, and read the story, it starts on page eight. Class, I want you to be prepared to discuss the reasons for the boy's hatred of the store detective in this story and some of the hardships faced by the itinerant workers in southern California.

This is a story about anger and humiliation. Mark, the papers, please. [Dale gets out of his desk and lumbers to the back of the room. Mark starts collecting the tests. Everyone is watching Dale and Danny, the clash of the titans. As Dale approaches Danny's desk he is hunched over whispering to one of his gang beside him.... Dale stands there]

Dale Excuse me, please.

Danny [looks up like it's the first time he has seen Dale] Why, what'd you do big fella, fart?[everyone laughs except Dale, Mark and Val]

Mr. Cochrane[annoyed but civil] O'Connor, just let him get a reader would you, please!

Danny [well articulated, deferentially] Why of course, Mr Cochrane, anything for you, sir! [he makes a big deal of moving his desk but not enough for Dale to reach through unless he gets down on his knees, which he does] Well, that's better big fella, now you're more my size. [their faces are very close and Danny leans forward to make them even closer] Whatsa matter, big guy, need more room? [Dale stares at him, silently, eye level, then he bounces up on powerful legs, suddenly, and Danny jerks back, ready for an attack. Dale just smiles, kind of smirks, looks beside him at one of Danny's little buddies grinning at Danny. He reaches over, grabs the boy's desk, lifts the boy and his desk off the floor and places him in front of Danny, the boy is sputtering, embarrassed, looking at Danny waiting for him to say or do something]

Dale [reaches through the space he has just created and grabs a reader, not taking his eyes off Danny] No thanks, I got it [in a light, carefree voice as he walks back to his desk. Someone laughs and Dale and everyone else in the room is smiling, including Val and Mr. Cochrane. The only ones not smiling are Danny, Mark and the boy who had just been moved, he just sits there with his mouth open]

Mr. Cochrane Mark bring those papers up here! What are you waiting for Spring Break? [he chuckles]

Mark [fear has crept into his voice] No sir, er yessir. [looking at Danny who nods imperceptibly, a look of hatred on his red face, he has just been humiliated in front of the class. Mark continues collecting the papers and when he stops in front of Val's desk it seems he makes up his mind what to do. He stumbles and spills the papers all over the floor. As he crawls on the floor collecting them he looks up Val's skirt at the white triangle and leers lasciviously. Everyone giggles and Val looks up from her reading, sees Mark, smiles and slowly crosses her legs]

Val [smiling, kindly, somewhat haughty, with a hint of promise] In your dreams, Markie! In your dreams. [Everyone howls, some of Danny's boys are rolling on the floor]

Mr. Cochrane [slams the strap down on his desk] Get up here, Webster! [the boys who were on the floor quickly return to their desks to get a good seat. They are like a crowd at a public flogging. The only ones not looking forward to this spectacle are Mark, Mr. Cochrane and, strangely, Val, who has a pitiful look on her face. She turns away so she can't see Mark trudge up to teacher's desk]

Mr. Cochrane [sadly resigned] Webster, I have strapped you more times than any other student in my whole career. When are you ever going to learn? You know the drill. Roll up your sleeves, one hand behind your back, other hand out, palm curled down, I know the cupping trick. [the teacher takes off his sport jacket revealing hairy, thick forearms and a barrel chest] Lets get this over with! It's not something I enjoy doing. [Mark stares at Danny the whole time, he flinches with every blow but no tears come. Mr. Cochrane is huffing and puffing, sweat flying off his body, the smell of fear and excitement in the

room. Val is hiding her head whimpering, Danny is smiling with satisfaction and Dale is wincing every time the strap comes down. Mr. Cochrane tires and gives up. Everyone knows that if you cry he stops. Mark does not cry, just stares at Danny] Now sit down and behave yourself while I mark these damn tests, Jesus H. Christ!

Mark Yessir.

Danny [in a stage whisper] Atta boy, Markie! You show em.

Mr. Cochrane [tired, still puffing] O'Connor, haven't you had enough for one day?

Danny [proudly, likes he's accomplished something] Why, yessir, I think I have. I think I have. [smirking]

Dream Sequence #2

The hallway of a house similar to but not the same as Dale's. Mark stands watching his mother take off her hat while she looks in the mirror as if it were a crystal ball. She has an intelligent countenance and striking features. He seems worried, troubled as he stares at his Mum. The audience can see through to the kitchen which is immaculate and pristine. There are brightly colored curtains in the window and a tablecloth on the big table with flowers in a vase and a fine china tea setting. The house has a light, airy feel. It is a happy, pleasant place. As Mark's mother removes the pins from her hair, she pauses with her arms above her head and another pin in her mouth. She removes the pin from her mouth and places it in a dish on the hall table beneath the mirror. She then places her hat on the table and shakes her hair out and fluffs it in the mirror, much like Val. She turns to Mark who stands obediently waiting for her to speak. Her brow is furrowed like she is puzzled, concerned.

Mrs. Webster [sternly] You know I don't like going to these parent/teacher interviews, Mark. Oh, I wish your father was home. He's always away when I need him. Mr. Cochrane thinks I'm just another stupid, harried housewife. Well I'm not! I have my senior matriculation. I graduated from Grade 13 with honors and here I am trapped in this god-forsaken place taking care of three children on my own most of the time.

Mark [sadly, trying to comfort his Mum] It's OK Mum. Don't worry. Mr. Cochrane's nice. He likes you.

Mrs. Webster [embarrassed, realizing she has shared too many of her inner feelings] Markie, I'm sorry. I just get all upset about these interviews. I feel the teachers think I'm a bad Mum. I really do try my best.[she stares into the mirror]

Mark [in a sing song voice trying to cheer her up] Don't worry Mum! Everything will be OK. I took care of the kids. I fed them and did the dishes. Then I played a game with them and got them all tired before bed. I read them Winnie the Pooh and tucked them in. I didn't even scare Benji with any of my monster stories. I did my homework and waited for you to get home. Do you want some tea? I'll make it for you!

Mrs. Webster [gently laughing] Oh, Mark, you are such a good boy. I don't know what I would do without you. [she bends down and hugs him tightly] Thanks for being such a big help.

Mark [as he hugs her back tightly, it looks like he is going to say something but he just mutters] You're welcome, Mum. That's what sons are for, helping their Mums.

Mrs. Webster [takes Mark by the shoulders and looks into his eyes, searching] Is there anything you want to tell me, son?

Mark [apologetically, surprised, he lies] No, Mum.

Mrs. Webster [sadly, unsure of herself] Are you sure? I don't want to have to tell your father when he gets home tomorrow. You know what that means.

Mark [looking down, nearing tears] I know, Mum. I know.

Mrs. Webster [studying Mark's face like a map in the dark, trying to read it] Well, I'm convinced there's something going on there, but Mr. Cochrane won't tell me what it is. He says everything is OK. That you're a good boy that talks too much sometimes.

Mark [like a huge weight has been lifted from his shoulders, beaming] See, I told you Mum, everything is alright! Now, how about that tea? [as he bounces toward the kitchen]

Scene 3

The school yard asphalt in front of the brick wall of the gymnasium. The set is bare except for Dale. You can hear children playing in the background. There is a tackle football game going on off the set. Dale is playing a game with an Indian rubber ball, bouncing it against the brick wall, all by himself. Mark comes on to the scene, dejected. He doesn't want to play football anymore. He watches Dale from the edge of the asphalt. His mood seems to change. His whole world has changed since Dale arrived. He is fascinated by the new boys casual indifference. He follows Dale with his eyes as the ball kathunks off the wall and ricochets off the asphalt in a blur. Dale is up on his toes catching the ball with his left hand then his right. Like a dancer, shuffling, sliding side to side. Dale seems oblivious to his lone spectator. Sweat drips off his forehead and he uses the awkward slashing motion to flick his hair out of his eyes. His breaths come fast, jagged, explosive. Between gasps he talks to Mark as the audience hears the taunts of the boys playing football in the lower field.

[Sissy boy, Sissy boy doesn't wanna play football, too rough for him]

Dale [panting, still playing the game] Whaddya want little fella?

Mark [resigned, sadly, expecting rejection] Can I play?

Dale [throws the ball harder and faster against the wall] Sure, but be careful! [as he grabs the ball out of the air with his left hand just before it smashes into Mark's face, he smiles a lop-sided grin] I've never played with two before, can you catch?

Mark [proudly] I play Little League. I pitched the Indians, that's my team, to the championship. My best friend, Eddie Harris, he caught. Coach said we were a good team, us two. We won 12-6 and.....

Dale [laughing] Whoah! Hold on there little guy. I didn't ask for your life story. This ain't the same as baseball [he chuckles] The ball's comin' at you a lot faster and you don't have a glove to protect you.

Mark [hopefully] I think I can do it!

Dale [smiling] Well, OK...but I think we should start slow, maybe play with our right hands until you get used to it. You gotta get into the rhythm too. Listen to the ball. Follow the sounds. I'll throw first, you catch it and then throw it back off the wall.

Mark [shows Dale he can do it] Like this?

Dale [scrunches his face, trying not to be disapproving] Yeah, sort of. Let's just try it.

Mark [scared, apprehensive] OK

[They start playing the game, tentatively at first. Dale is gentle and encouraging. Once Mark gets into the rhythm and starts having fun he gains confidence. He knows Dale is taking it easy on him but that's what friends are for. They are so engrossed in the game neither of them notices the small knot of spectators gathering at the edge of the asphalt. Mark lunges for the ball thrown hard to his right and collides with Eddie, his friend, who catches the ball nonchalantly and studies it.]

Eddie [sneering] This ball ain't that special! [he spits on it and casually throws it over his head into the field] I guess you'll have to go get it now.

One of the boys [triumphantly] Let's go get it! [they charge off set after the ball yelping with glee]

Eddie [drawling, menacingly] So the two sissy boys are playing a sissy game. They don't wanna play football anymore, it's too rough for 'em.

Dale [his face clouds over and he clenches his fists as he takes a step towards Eddie as the boys return with the ball] That's enough!

Eddie [in a high falsetto] That's enough! Whadryou... a teacher? [one of the boys gives the ball to Eddie and he holds it aloft] So I guess if the two sissy boys wanna play their sissy game they're gonna need this here ball, eh?

Mark [tired of the drama] Come on Eddie, give it back, will ya. I'll come and play football if you give it back.

Eddie [leering, taunting, bouncing the ball on the asphalt] Yeah, I'll give it back if you fight me for it!

Mark [he's fought Eddie before] Jeez, Eddie. I don't wanna fight you again.

Eddie [coolly] Well, I guess you don't get the ball back. What's your big friend gonna think of you then, eh? Too chicken to fight for his ball! What kind of a friend are you anyway?

Mark [like he was considering the logic] Oh alright, but no punching, only wrestling.

Eddie [victorious, grinning] Yeah, sure, Markie, let's go. [the boys make a circle and Eddie gives the ball to the boy who retrieved it]

Eddie [stretches] Here keep this for me, I just gotta take care of this sissy boy and I'll need it back.

Dale [standing off to the side] You don't have to do this little buddy. It's not worth it.

Mark [seriously] Yes, it is.[like a little soldier]

{Eddie charges without warning and Mark is knocked to the ground. They wriggle and squirm, evenly matched, and then Eddie gets the dreaded chokehold underneath Mark's chin and starts twisting}

Dale [steps through the cheering crowd purposefully and stands over the two combatants like a referee, he has a concerned look as he watches Marks face] That's enough! Let him go. [calmly, matter of fact]

Eddie [grunting from the effort] Not until he gives!

Dale [excitedly, urgently] Let him go, now!

Eddie [ignoring Dale, through pursed lips] No!

[Dale suddenly stoops and punches Eddie in the head.(Whack!) He doesn't let go.]

Dale [calmly with dread] Now...(Whack!) [he punches Eddie, in the head, harder this time and he lets go]

Mark is lying limp on the ground as Dale glares at the rest of the boys, ready to take them all on, they step back. He goes to Mark and picks him up gently helping him get his legs under him. Mark is coughing and sputtering, gasping for air as Dale helps him towards the school. The rest of the boys are gathered around Eddie who is rubbing his head and groaning in pain.

Eddie [fear and loathing in his voice] You didn't have to hit me, you big goof. I never woulda choked him out. I'm never gonna be your friend, ever again, Mark Webster! You little baby!

Dale [softly, endearing in Mark's ear] Well, I guess it's just you and me little buddy.

Mark [sobbing, in a raspy voice] Why do people hurt their friends? Eddie's been my best friend for years and he chokes me out...jeez, what was that all about?

Dale [tenderly puts his arm around Mark] I don't know, little buddy, it's not you, you're a good friend. It's probably got more to do with me than you.

Mark [harrumphing] Yeah, right! It wasn't you getting' choked by your best friend!

Dale [laughing, apologetically acknowledging the truth in what Mark said] No, you're right, but Eddie's probably jealous and pissed off.

Mark [defensively, trying to smile] Whaddya mean jealous? You're not my girlfriend.

Dale [seriously] No, no I'm not, but it's kinda the same thing. How long have you guys been best friends?

Mark [quizzically] Since Grade 1, we been like blood brothers. Why?

Dale [explaining] Then I come along, right across the street, walk to school with you every day, hang out on weekends....

Mark [brow furrowed] Yeah?

Dale [nods his head and throws his hair back in that peculiar gesture] So, when was the last time you went over to Eddie's and hung out?

Mark [thinking back] I don't know, last fall I guess.

Dale [confidently] Right, you see, just before I arrived in the neighbourhood. You don't hang out with him anymore, do you?

Mark [like he just figured it out] No, you're right, but I like being with you, you get me, you listen to my stories, we have fun together, doing chemistry experiments in your lab, remember that time we made gunpowder and set it on fire in your driveway and the fire department came [his eyes light up] That was so much fun!

Dale [stares off, remembering] Yeah, that was fun, eh? [he chuckles] Confucius say from ancient Chinese recipe [he mimics a Chinese accent]

Mark [bursts out laughing and then grabs his throat] Oh, that hurts! You and I have some good times ,eh? I sure hope we don't have to move away. My Dad says your Dad might get transferred back to Alaska for NORAD cuz of the communists in Russia. [he gets sad] I don't want you to move away. I don't wanna hang out with anyone else. I like being with you.

Dale [looks off into the distance in a detached, dream-like voice] Yeah, well I may not always be here my friend.... [like he just remembered] Now you see why Eddie might be pissed off?

Mark [resigned] Yeah, I guess. [apologetically] I don't mean to hurt his feelings. It's just not as much fun as it used to be. He makes fun of me and teases me all the time, calls me Ann of Green Gables. I can't help I've got red hair and freckles. He always has first pick choosing teams...leaves me with all the losers, like Noodles and the guys who don't know how to play. Everyone wants to play on his team cuz they always win.

Dale [shrugs nonchalantly] Well, I think team sports are dumb anyway.

Mark [excitedly] But you could be so good. Play on my team next time. Give us little guys a chance, eh! [he smiles and looks up at Dale]

Dale [chuckling, shakes his head, flicks his hair out of his eyes and stares at Mark] My Mum says you're a strange one. I've never known anyone that cares so much about others. You gotta learn to take care of yourself, buddy. Here, stop! [he grabs Mark by the shoulders and turns to face him] Next time someone tries to get you in a headlock tuck your chin, right away, like this [he shows him] Then drive both hands up, palms open, like this [he demonstrates again] Grab his wrist and his elbow, hard, drive it up and pull back on the wrist then push him away hard, step back and be ready. If he comes at you again kick him in the nuts or, even better, punch him right in the nose, but be careful, not as hard as you can or you could kill him, just enough to make his nose bleed, like this [he shows him a short, piston like jab] Nobody wants to fight anymore when their nose is bleeding, but always be ready to hit him again cuz the blood just makes some guys angrier.

Mark [the whole time Dale was showing him his technique Mark was standing with his mouth open and his eyes wide, agape] Jeez, Dale I could never kick anyone in the nuts [he covers his crotch] or punch them and make their nose bleed [he rubs his nose] especially Eddie, he's my friend, sheesh, I've never hit anybody in my life.

Dale [matter of factly] Sometimes you have to Mark, sometimes you have to, whether you want to or not. It's you or him. That's just the way it is.

Mark [his face twists into a grin] I don't know. I'm more of a wrestler like Whipper Billy Watson [he sticks his chest out] or [he lowers his voice] Man Mountain Mike.

Dale [laughing so hard he's bent over double slapping his thighs, tears streaming down his cheeks] God, you're funny! You're gonna get killed out there, buddy! Here, do this. [he makes a fist]

Mark [uncertainly, awkwardly, like he's looking at a lethal weapon] Like this? [he shows him]

Dale [impatiently] No, Jesus, you'll break your thumb if you punch like that! Put your thumb like this. [he shows him] Now hit me as hard as you can, right here! [he punches his solid shoulder]

Mark [hesitantly] No, I don't wanna hit you, Dale.

Dale [emphatically] Come on! Do it! Now! Hard as you can. Don't worry I can take what you got. [he smiles]

Mark [uncertainly] Oh, OK, ready.

Dale [in a gravelly voice] I was born ready, come on, do it!

Mark You sure?

Dale {angrily} For Christ's sake, hit me as hard as you can before I hit you, you little twerp.

Mark [hits Dale on the shoulder] There.

Dale [meanly, taunting] What was that, a little love tap? Hit me, like you mean it, pretend I'm Eddie... come on!

[Mark punches Dale as hard as he can and steps back, eyes wide] Not bad, [he shakes his arm and flexes his fingers and in a low voice, eye arched like an evil villain] Now, it's my turn [he snickers, rubbing his fist]

Mark [scared] Aw, come on. You never said you were gonna hit me! No! It's gonna hurt!

Dale [agreeing, but not being deterred] Yep, you're right. Quit being a baby. You gotta get tough or you're never gonna survive.

Mark [offering his arm] OK, but take it easy.

Dale Hey, nice try, little buddy, take off your jacket.

Mark [whining] Jeez, this is gonna hurt!

Dale Yep. Probably....they's the breaks. Ready?

Mark Yeah, I guess

Dale [crosses himself] Holy Mary, Mother of God forgive me for what I am about to do! [intonating like a priest]

Mark [laughing, just about to say something and Dale pivots, like a fighter, and hits Mark hard (not as hard as he hit Eddy earlier) but hard, he's done this before... Mark howls] Jesus Christ, that really hurt! I think you broke my arm! My fingers are tingling! I can't move them! Why'd you hit me so hard? I didn't hurt you! [sobbing]

Dale [tenderly puts his arm around Mark, carefully places his coat on his shoulder. Mark leans into him, crying] Come on, little buddy. Let's get you home, you've had a bad day. Sorry I hit you so hard.

Mark [sniffing] It's OK, you're still my best friend, forever.

Dale [looking off in the distance] Yeah, huh, forever.

Dream Sequence #3

The cellar door opening coming into Dale's kitchen is in the center of the stage. It's not Dale's kitchen though. It looks like the entrance/vestibule of a Protestant church. A pale blue light is coming from where the fridge was and is cast on the opening. The kitchen is full of spectators, the whole cast, watching the opening expectantly. Mark is standing in the center, his head down, alone, waiting. Dale's mother is standing off to the side, separate from the crowd, big, dark, male silhouettes behind her. She is dressed in black, with a veil so you can't see her face. The crowd is singing Swing Low, Sweet Chariot. From the opening comes a casket carried by Mr. Cochrane, Danny, Eddie, Dale's brother, Mark's Dad and another big man in an air force uniform. They have to squeeze through the narrow opening struggling with the casket. They stand in the center of the stage holding their burden. The cold, blue light is directed to the casket, with Mark on one side and Dale's mother, Mrs. Parent, on the other. She is staring at Mark. Mark is sobbing and shaking.

Mrs. Parent [wailing and crying, throws herself on the casket] O, Dale my sweet child, mon enfant magnifique! Pourquoi, mon dieu, pourquoi? Mother of Jesus... Why? Mark stops sobbing and watches Mrs. Parent with everyone else in the crowd.

Mrs. Parent [sobbing, crying, wailing, beating the casket with her fists] Why? Why? [the dark males pry her from the casket and hold her up as the pall bearers carry the casket back down the stairs, into the blackness, she reaches into space] Non! Non! Non!

Mark [stands with his mouth agape, tries to comfort Mrs. Parent] Don't worry, he'll be OK [weakly, sad, consoling] He was a good friend to me.

Mrs. Parent [locks onto Mark and stops crying like she's thinking about what he just said, she suddenly lunges at him and starts pounding on him the way she had been beating on the casket earlier, weakly, desperately] Why? Why? Why couldn't it have been you, why is my boy so cold and blue?

Some men, including Mr. Cochrane and Mr. Parent, pry her away from Mark and take her off stage, wailing. The dark, uniformed figures holding the casket carry it down the stairs to the basement. The crowd begins dispersing, leaving Mark all alone, center stage, facing the audience in the cold, blue light. He sings *Lou Reed's-Pale Blue Eyes* or the playwright's *Hurts So Bad* as the cold, blue light fades away. The play ends.

Devil On My Shoulder

*What if the demon that haunted you all these years,
Turned to you, smiled and wiped away your tears.
What if that smiling boy who left you in his prime
Told you he still loved you even after all this time.
What if that crazy mother who hated you so much
Cried out that she forgave you, took away the crutch.
Live your life in sorrow, or live your life in pain,
One thing is certain, we don't pass this way again.*

M. R. Weddell