

SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING

Two in the morning Terri bolts out of her house screaming her new boyfriend's had it with her baby crying and is gonna kill it. She's got blood on her hands from where she wiped her nose, which looks fucking broken, and her right cheek's eggplant purple. She runs in bare feet down to the corner, where we're listening to Zeppelin in the rain, passing a fifth of JD Black on the stoop to Griffin's Deli. It's pouring, straight down, the kind of cold spring rain that cracks your back open when it hits you. She keeps shouting but nobody can hear her for sure until she's right on top of us, when she looks around all bug-eyed at Mikey and Jimmy and the rest of us and says, *Somebody do something*. She pulls Mikey from his nice dry spot under the awning, which has "Lottery Tickets" and "Cold Cuts" and "Fresh Soft Pretzels" handwritten on it, into a storm so bad you figure it can't last. Why she picks Mikey we're still trying to figure out. He was one-twenty soaking wet and couldn't fight his way out of a wet paper bag. Mikey was a lover, not a fighter, and he would have been first to say so. Now I'm scrawny as fuck so I can see why she looks past me, but I don't know why she doesn't grab Jimmy. That boy's a brick shithouse and looks like two Mikeys. I can even see her grabbing LT and that stomach, but she grabs Mikey by the middle of his T-shirt and says, *Do something, please*. Weird: He doesn't say, *Come on!* to the rest of us, like you think he would, or *Call the cops*, which would have been my line. Before we can do anything else, we're watching Mikey look at the ground for a second, take a deep breath like he's about to jump in a pool or something, then blow air hard through his mouth. Next thing, they're moving toward the house side by side, as if blown by the same fucking wind.

The rest of us stand there for maybe ten

seconds before we start running. Up ahead Terri runs into her house and Mikey goes in after her. I'm yelling at Mikey to get the fuck out, she's not worth it. Behind me it sounds like everybody's yelling. I'm the youngest and the fastest, so I know I'll get to the house first, and I know that when I do I'm supposed to run in and help Mikey. And I know I'm supposed to want to, and it's not that I don't, but the closer I get to the house, the slower I get, without even meaning to. Now I'll tell you that right there I want to trip on a crack in the sidewalk or have someone push me out of the way so they can go first. I want to see Mikey come running out of the house so we can forget this ever happened, but he's still in there when I get to the door. The boyfriend has his face a couple inches from the baby's and he's screaming at it, which makes the baby cry even harder. Mikey just stands there a second, and Terri picks up an ashtray and starts across the room, yelling, *Give me the fucking baby!* She raises the ashtray above her head like she's Ron Jaworski throwing a touchdown or something. But when the boyfriend takes a jab-step toward her, she jumps back and throws her arms up to cover her face, and it's my mother and father all over again. Something's burning—in the kitchen, the baby's bottle bounces around in an inch of boiling water. The boyfriend's holding the baby by its waist against the left side of his chest and now he's got a big ass knife in his right hand. He's laughing in the middle of all of this, and you start to get the feeling that he's not going to do anything to the baby, that he's doing this just to make people panic, to get everybody saying *Don't do it!* to him so he could ride some kind of power trip. Drama queens, we call people like that. This neighborhood is full of them. But then the boyfriend looks at Mikey and says, *Who the fuck are you?* Jimmy's saying, *Come on, Mikey, cut bait baby*, but he's not going in, either. Mikey says to the boyfriend, *Calm down, man, calm down*, his hands waist high,

palms out like on crime shows when they're trying to talk jumpers back from the edge. Now we're all telling Mikey to get the fuck out. *This isn't our fight, man*, Jimmy says. The boyfriend gets real calm all of a sudden, eases the baby to a chair, and Mikey's looking like a superhero for a minute. I bet he's feeling like one, too. I can just see him the next day while we played ball, all of us against the younger kids. *Quit now, young guns*, he might've said if the game got close, which it probably wouldn't have. *While you boys were jacking off last night, I was saving babies, sweethearts. Now who wants some?* Next he would've nailed a three or made a sweet backdoor pass, then blew a kiss at them heading up court.

But the boyfriend looks up all crazy then, and you just know it's gonna get bad. *You fucking her?* he says, and Mikey says he isn't, which has to be true. If he's doing anything with anybody, you get every detail. He might have said he was with girls he wasn't, but it was never the other way around. Terri says it, too. She's got the baby now. She's bouncing it up and down, but it won't stop crying. *Nobody's fucking anybody, Brian*, Terri says. *For Christ's sake.* Then the boyfriend says to Mikey, *You fucking her, you motherfucker?* Terri's over by the steps when the boyfriend runs over to lock the front door. Here's something that keeps me up some nights: Instead of pushing the door open and running in right then and there, instead of just tackling the guy and each taking a turn on him, every fucking one of us jumps back like a pussy. By the time the boyfriend clicks the deadbolt, we're off the stoop and standing on the sidewalk. We can hear him yelling at Terri: *You trying to make an asshole out of me?* We can hear her thumping upstairs saying she's calling the cops, but she never calls. *It all happened so fast*, she says at the viewing. Before Mikey can get the fuck out of there, the boyfriend chops his neck with the

knife. Mikey raises his hands halfway to his shoulders like he's being robbed and falls against his side of the door.

We're banging on the door and Mikey's holding his neck together with his hands. I'll admit it: I'm crying like a son of a bitch. I'm crying, and I feel like this whole thing is one huge wave down the shore. I'm watching it swell up and there's nothing I can do about it. The boyfriend runs to rinse the knife in the kitchen, where the burner is bright red under the empty saucepan, and he's wrapping the knife up in a hand towel that he shoves into his pants. The lip of the pan is burning into the baby's bottle, and the room is getting thick with the smell of melting plastic. When he sees Terri, the boyfriend yells, *See what the fuck you made me do?* He stands near the sink with his hands on his forehead, pulling back his hair over and over again with his eyes closed, screaming all kinds of curses. When Terri runs over and unlocks the door, I take one look at Mikey and just know he's gone. He's the only person I've ever seen die—let alone die like this—and he's looking at me, saying, *Don't let me die.* Terri keeps saying *I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, Mikey.* Blood's pulsing out to the rhythm of Mikey's heart, and I'm not going to tell you what that looks like. When we get Mikey to the sidewalk, Jimmy takes off his shirt and holds it to Mikey's neck. I put Mikey's head in my lap so he can hold it straight. Old Lady Lewis comes out of her house real calm and holds an umbrella over me and Mikey. She says she called the cops. She starts praying.

By now the whole neighborhood is out there, or coming out. Terri yells, *He's in the alley*, and a bunch of the older guys like PJ and Chickenhead and Vic Turner take off around



back. Vic looks like he has a nightstick or something and PJ definitely has a bat. Chickenhead reaches into his back pocket for a Chinese star. Ten minutes ago we're as far as you can get from fighting—we're laughing and talking shit and smoking a joint fat as Mikey's index finger. We're sitting on the stoop with our legs spread, or we're standing with our shoulders back, smiles like snarls on our faces. Then Terri shows up, and for the rest of that night and a bunch after we act like we would actually kill the fucking boyfriend if we catch him. The line at the viewing goes out the front door of Garzone's Funeral Home and around the block. People you haven't seen in years show up—schoolteachers, our old CYO basketball coach, a bunch of guys who moved away. Terri's there in a black dress down to her knees. She's wearing big gold hoop earrings and a pearl necklace and a ton of make-up. You'd think people would say something to her, one way or the other, but mostly they just leave her alone. Vic Turner's there in a shirt and tie, and so is PJ and Big Bob and One-Eyed Timmy. Buddy has a suit on, like Mikey, who looks like somebody else all dressed up, lips stitched together, hands and face all powdery. Mikey's got his hands kind of folded with Rosary beads in them, which is funny in a way, because Mikey never once went to church as long as I knew him. I put my hand on his hands and feel how cold and stiff and swollen he is. Next thing I know, I'm telling Mikey I'm sorry I let him die. I'm sorry I didn't come into the house, but I just couldn't. I'm like Terri saying, *I'm sorry, Mikey,*

I'm sorry, over and over until his sister puts an arm around my shoulder. Mikey's white shirt collar is tan from where they tried to hide where the knife hit him. Outside we get together and smoke, still talking about what we're going to do to the boyfriend when we catch him.

Nobody catches him, though, even after we ride around for a good week looking for him. We check the railroad, the woods behind the high school, every burned-out abandoned house you can think of. Mr. Griffin tapes the newspaper picture to his store's window, a black-and-white picture of where Mikey and me were. You can see Jimmy's shirt in a dark puddle by the steps, the broken window, the brick front of the house, the house number, 1814. You can see the open front door and that it stopped raining. You can see some feet, some people with their arms crossed or around each other. You can see they're crying or just finished crying. If you know the whole story, you can hear me telling Mikey to hold on. You can hear me screaming for a fucking ambulance, crying hard and saying, *Hold on Mikey Hold on Mikey,* and you can see that Mikey's got no expression on his face whatsoever. And you can see me cradling Mikey tight to my chest like he's my baby or my girlfriend, or like I'm trying, but I'm not strong enough, to lift him out of deep water.