



Thursday



Night



Lights



David James

Thursday Night Lights

Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine . . . Part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in.

Mark Twain, 1876, *Tom Sawyer*, Preface

The night before, Jakesy's dad had taken him, Butch his best friend who was a year ahead of the rest of them at Ignatius, together with Jakesy's classmates Joe Schultz and Johnny Lindsey, over to St. Pius. It was close to midnight. There, they found the school dark and deserted and got to work:

1. Butch, tall and wiry, the only one of the friends who could claim he looked good in a Tux, and Dr. Jakes, five feet six, overweight and a bit drunk—as in, “a bit pregnant”—inflated, with a helium tank snagged by Lindsey from his father's store, a large weather-size balloon with a “Go Knights” sign suspended beneath.
2. They secured it by a loop of rope under the lanyards of the flagpole, there to rise until the pulley mechanism at the top stopped the loop.
3. Johnny, strong and outdoorsy, shinnied up the flagpole, wrapped and tied the lanyard at the top, and greased the pole on the way down with blue- (for the holy Gold and Blue) dyed axle grease.
4. Schultz, (Schultzzy to his friends: “I see nu-thing, I know nu-thing!”), who's ambition that year at Ignatius was to make sergeant in the ROTC program, drew with salt the shape of the Shield and Lance on the south goal area of their stadium field, where the game was to be Friday night. He had sisters at Pius. He had sisters all over the place.
5. Jakesy, a slightly shorter portrait of his dad but with a starving wrestler's build, who could impersonate him on the phone to the hospitals, taped some signs with variations on the theme of “Go Ignatius! Beat Pi Hi!” and “Prepare to meet thy doom!” on the doors. Jakesy had composed them (he could spell *proctosigmoidoscopy* and *thrombophlebitis*), and his dad had copied them on his brand new (first of its kind) Xerox machine at the office that day.

You could tell by now that planning for this caper had been going on for a while.

Here's the story: In an all-boys Catholic military school, run by Jesuits, you didn't have cutegirl cheerleaders, short skirts and rah-rah—more's the pity. If such things were to be done

the boys had to do it themselves. So Lindsey, Schultz and Jakesy were self-appointed cheerleaders; goofy outfits, megaphones, the whole bit. They were wrestlers—nobody could call them pussies, and wrestling season hadn't started yet, so what the heck. As an additional motivation, in the South the tradition was for the cheerleaders of opposing teams to meet at midfield, come over at halftime and lead a cheer for the opponent's school, and *they were* cutegirls; so, reasoned the friends, this could start something. Meeting girls was a difficult hazardous undertaking for students at all-boys schools. Do the math.

There were only two Catholic high schools with football teams in town, so even before their first-ever meeting they were cast as archrivals. Jakesy had two sisters at St. Pius, Schultz three with more to come, and though half of Pius consisted of girls, the other half, well over a thousand, were boys. That meant their available population of homicidal bruisers was higher than Ignatius's, who, despite being in the division composed of the most populous schools, had only four hundred boys from which to draw a team. Not good. And the student body of Ignatius was compiled of a greater than average number of bookworms, journalists, sharpshooters, wiry wrestlers, and skinny track stars. What result? A school full of spirit but with much more of the attitude of the Light Brigade before the Charge. The word *fatalism* comes to mind; variations like *fatalities*, *casualties*, occur; the term "body count" could have been coined for what was in store, but wouldn't be in popular usage until later, in the Viet Nam War. With the first-ever game between the two coming up Friday, the boys had to do *something*. So midway through the summer Butch and Jakesy had hatched this plot, drawing Schultz, and Lindsey into it. Jakesy had purloined four ounces of blue oil-soluble dye from his summer work-like-a-dog-place, a miserable, stinking, toxic, fume-infested, life-shortening, chemical plant belonging to an "ole buddy" patient of his dad. Lindsey got a helium tank that his father's store used for Sale! Sale! and a big balloon. The salt thing? That goes to show that you actually can learn something important in Latin class. The Romans "plowed Carthage under with salt."¹ When asked, Father Snape replied that it killed the grass, and nothing could grow thereafter. Schultz got a bag of rock salt from his father's garage, laid up in preparation for the one crippling ice storm that always came around New Years. As you can see, the plot ripened as the school year started, and together with some signs and the impish cooperation of Dr. Jakes, they had brought it off.

Jakesy's dad piled them all into the Healy, five in a two-seat convertible roadster (red, with gold and blue racing stripes—you could tell where *his* family loyalties were). "We'd better skedaddle," he said. They laughed their heads off. It was 1962. Jakesy was fifteen.

* * * *

There just wasn't anything like a security guard at a school in those days. The public schools—those Protestant dens of iniquity and tantalizing seats of vice—might have had security

¹ "Carthago delenda est! -- Carthage must be destroyed!" said Senator Cato the Elder, the classic "virtuous Roman," a prig, if you want to know the truth, over and over again, as described by Titus Livius (Livy), in his *History of Rome from Jump Street* or whatever the hell it was the boys translated in Latin. More later. Goes to show that stupidity and hubris are not exclusively attributes of contemporary politicians.

guards, but the Catholic kids would have thought probably not, they had no need. And St. Pius? Real vandalism or theft was unheard-of; you would probably be excommunicated. People turned out the lights and locked the doors after the school play or pep rally, and that was that. Later, all the way in 1968, there would be a whole sit-in at a the public school on the west side because a security guard, an off duty policeman, had been newly authorized to carry a gun just in case there was “trouble” at school over the King assassination. Oh, they got trouble all right, but over that gun: more sit-ins, arrests and jail, mile-long demonstrations winding to the courthouse for fiery speeches and singing, all started by one security guard—a cop for heaven’s sake—with a gun. How things changed after 1962! In 2007 the commandos might have been prosecuted as terrorists under the “Patriot Act.” In 1962 it was all about that big game: Packers and the Bears, Notre Dame and Alabama, Ignatius and Pi Hi. A few Xeroxed signs, a greased flagpole and a salted shield and lance were not vandalism, they thought, but good clean fun.

Thursday night, Butch Gallagher picked Jakeesy and Johnny up and drove to school. It was ten o’clock PM; they were going to be out late, again, on a school night.

* * * *

Jakesy made friends “for keeps.” His generation inherited this virtue from their parents who migrated South and put down roots there after the War, joining Lions International and Knights of Columbus. Catholics emptied their wallets, built churches, attended Mass, and sent their kids to the schools they built alongside. They had moved the hundred-year-old Ignatius from downtown to the suburb only a year ago.

Jakesy’s dad and Butch Gallagher’s were colleagues since their university hospital residency days. He was a damn good doctor, Jakesy’s dad, as Jakesy bragged when he got older. He had even consulted with the Vatican over the health of Pius XII. The following month the family were amazed to receive from the Vatican a hand-lettered and illustrated document, looking like nothing if not a page from the Book of Kells, granting the whole fam-damn-ily—as his father called it—a Plenary Indulgence at the hour of death if they but speak the name of Jesus.² He owned a successful (then) private practice as a liver disease and internal medicine specialist. But Dr. Jakes had had a drinking problem since the war. This translated into all sorts of bizarre behavior, some happy, some awful.

Happy was dad attending and son serving at 6:30AM daily Mass. Jakesy volunteered for this unsought-after duty so he could accompany his dad on predawn medical “rounds” to the university hospital. Jakesy always held his breath as his dad zoomed the Healy, top down in rain or shine, right at the semaphore barrier to the doctor’s parking lot, clearing underneath it by only an inch or two. They would laugh their heads off. Then they would go to Mass at St. Thomas More, where often nuns were the only other celebrants. His dad would join the nuns—Jakesy’s teachers in elementary school—at the communion rail and Jakesy, as an altar boy, would hold the paten under their chins lest they let the sacred Host drop. “Dómine, non sum dígnum, ut íntres

² That’s Catholic for “straight to Heaven, baby,” do not stop in Purgatory nor Hell, don’t even worry your little mind at all.

sub tectum meum: sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea,”³ he would say along with the priest. Even as a sixth-grader Jakesy knew all the prescribed Latin of the Mass. Only boys served Mass in those days. Added to the thrill of participating in the sacred ritual were the satisfactions of doing something well that his father didn’t know how to do, and administering smartly to the nuns—his old oppressors—who until Vatican II in the 60s, were forbidden to trespass the altar rail in public.

Happy was dad and son’s mad overnight dash to Sebring for the twelve-hour race. Jakesy froze in the Healy all night. When he awoke Saturday morning he thought he was in heaven. They were in a country of orange groves to the horizon. It being March, they were in bloom, and the scent—never mind the sight—of the blossoms was a reverential experience. Later they watched Phil Hill, Sterling Moss and the Rodríguez brothers, Pedro and Ricardo, battle it out. Jakesy had never seen a Ferrari except in books, let alone five of them; and here also were Aston-Martins, Porsches, Jaguars, the whole gamut of exotic cars.

Happy were Saturday excursions, just the two of them, to little go-kart tracks out in the sticks, with the kart balanced on the back seat of the Healy, tied at the bumper, a lifeboat suspended from the rear of a yacht. Or was the Healy itself the lifeboat for a father and son?

Awful were his parents’ martini arguments, growing from his dad and mother slamming ‘em back after a hard day—sparking screaming hate-filled resentments whose causes he could only guess at. The fuel was six parts gin and one part dry Vermouth, “twist of lemon, over, not in;” or Gordon’s with martini stones {volcanic rock soaked in Vermouth}; stirred, not shaken—Martini drinkers saw themselves as members of a club with Churchill, Hemmingway, and Clark Gable. He remembered those fights from even when he was three. His only defense then was to shrink to the size of a mouse.

Awful were the battles over his grades. Jakesy just didn’t “get” trigonometry. The school had a typewritten, copied, experimental book from Harvard and Jakesy—not alone—was always about two weeks behind; the upshot being he failed most of the tests. But private tutors? No way; you go it alone. Awful were the arguments and insinuations about his sister Anne’s weight. These started when she was about six, and lasted long enough to drive the child into her own permanent mouse hole. Awful were the arguments about money as his father’s investments went sour.

As an older child, Jakesy would show up at school the next day unable to concentrate, the school day a fog around the hurtful names and tears of rage and frustration of the night before. He would fall asleep in Latin, and while the class snickered Father Snape would come up beside his desk and drop a Latin book on his head.⁴ He occasionally thought: do priests and parents

³ “Oh Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come unto me; just say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

⁴ “Oh Rome, eternal Rome,” Father Snape would rhapsodize, as if nobody knew half of ‘em died of syphilis and the other half were slaves. No wonder Jakesy fell asleep. He was much more attracted to the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and might have studied Persian if such a thing were feasible. He found it on his father’s bookshelf, a possible explanation of his father’s predilection for the divine gift of distilled spirits. From the FitzGerald translation:

“And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before

know what alcoholism does to little kids, how it tears up their trust and confidence in their parents? This was only an unformed, as yet unarticulated, question. The worst of it was, he thought all families were like that: filled with strife and irrational mental and physical violence. In those days there was no such thing as Al-Anon, or Alateen. All he had were Butch, Johnny, Schultz, and David Field. Over the last couple of years, as the boys began the painful and exhilarating process of growing up, these incidents were described to these friends, either overtly or as nonchalant participial addenda to boy conversation. They were not ashamed of it; everyone knew about everyone else anyway. The previous night and tonight though, the Thursday and Friday before the first-ever game between his school and his sisters' parochial high school, were shaping up to be good ones, happy days in the lifeboat.

* * * *

In 1962, in the South, football was the king of autumn. In 1962, everybody smoked; if you had a cough you switched to menthol cigarettes. Dope was something you used to varnish the skin of a balsa model plane. Cars were huge: Henry Ford had denounced small cars like the new Volkswagens as un-American. It was a more innocent time, if you were white, Catholic, and somehow shielded from the vicious side of southern political life; some say it was the last year of postwar euphoria.

Guys in Jakesy's school were excited about the New Frontier and proud of their new Catholic president—Jakesy's parents had even chaperoned a train-car of Ignatius and Pius kids to the Inauguration the previous January. Kennedy had just made the Russians "blink" over their missiles in Cuba. He was steering the South toward a more enlightened policy on civil rights. The priests and nuns had quietly integrated their two high schools without even a whisper of hate; after all there weren't very many black Catholic kids in town anyway and y'all pretty-much had to be Catholic or Jewish to go to these schools. Ignatius school spirit and that of its parochial rival was high as it could be; but this contest shared features with the Civil War, of which the Centennial remembrance was in high gear in those years. Jakesy's younger sister at Pi Hi dated his friend, a guard on the Ignatius team, Schultz had three sisters there, and this pattern was repeated in families, with friends and sweethearts all over the local parishes. Last night he and his dad, with Butch, Schultz, Lindsey, had taken a serious dump all over St. Pius. The boys thought: this could not go unanswered.

So that's why the four of them, together with David Field—a soft speaking, kind, but much less foolhardy boy—had gone out, Jakesy with his father's blessing (if challenged, he couldn't remember *what* his mother thought, or whether his sisters even knew) to "guard" the school—really, "to keep them from doing to us what we did to them." Butch Gallagher had talked his father out of the family's Buick, and had picked up Lindsey and Jakesy; at sixteen you had full driving privileges then. The others had biked out; they lived a lot closer to school. The

The Tavern shouted - "Open then the Door!
You know how little time we have to stay,
And once departed, may return no more."

school consisted of a rectory at one end, three buildings of three stories each, new last year, and a chapel at the end, just built. The last of the three, facing where they were going to build the athletic field, was open on the first storey, a good place to hide and watch the campus. The priests' rectory was all the way at the other end and, until the last, they never knew the boys were there. They built a little fire out in the field, hung out and played folksongs on the guitar. The following year Field, Schultz and Jakesy would team up in a "folk group." They were already doing things like "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," and Kingston Trio songs. Johnny Lindsey had some Gallo rosé. They gradually got a little sloshed. Oh but he was a wise one for being so young; the four of them shared one quart of wine, that was all he purloined from his parents, and he had some Double Mint gum for all afterward. An old campaigner was Johnny Lindsey.

Jakesy led off on Field's guitar:

Em
Go bum again.

Em D Em D Em D Em D
Clickety clack, clickety clack. The wheels are saying to the railroad track.
Em G Bm Em
Well, if you go, you can't come back.
Em D Em D Em D Em Bm
If you go, you can't come back. If you go, you can't come back.

"Play that 'Scotch and Soda'," Jakesy said to David Field.

"I just got the record, I don't remember all the words yet." He played and sang:

Fmaj7 Bb9
"Scotch and soda, mud in your eye.

C A7 D7 G7
Baby do I feel high, oh me, oh my,
E7
Do I feel high.

Fmaj7 Bb9
Dry martini, jigger of gin,
C Am7 D7 G7
Oh what a shape you've got me in, oh my,
F G7 C G7 C
Give me lovin' baby I feel high."

Jakesy: "Wow! That's the part that gets me. 'Give me lovin'. More like give me fightin', I say. But the chords are hard. How'd you figure them out?"

“My brother takes guitar at Georgia. He taught ‘em to me last week. Look, just do an “F” with four fingers instead of a bar. Then you smash the first three strings and the “A” string on the first fret, and leave the “D” open. Those are the only weird ones.” Anybody could do the three-chord patterns, but songs like “Scotch and Soda” were impressive when somebody could do ‘em at fifteen. David Field was the only one Jakesy knew who got advanced help on the guitar. Everyone else picked up what they could when they had the opportunity. Classes for popular and folk guitar were ‘way in the future.

Jakesy tried to steer the topic back. To Lindsey: “Johnny, do your parents drink?”

“How do you think I got out tonight? My dad’s in North Carolina buying carpet for the store. Mom was in the bag by about six o’clock. I just walked out with this wine when you guys showed up. There’s tons of it in the basement. She’ll never miss it. If they find anything missing I’ll just say she drank it herself. she’ll never remember.” He took a swig out of the wine bottle and passed it around. Jakesy didn’t know about Lindsey’s parents though he and Lindsey frequently went back and forth to each other’s house. Peavine Creek ran underground for two blocks between their houses in a four-foot high, brick-lined, arched tunnel, which caught and added rain run-off to the creek. In dry weather when the creek was low you could duck in right next to Jakesy’s, and if you were brave or had a flashlight, navigate the two blocks underground—always an adventure—past one branch-off to Springdale Road where Lindsey lived. Among the school chums the Gallagher’s were the only family he and his parents socialized with, both being physician-friends. Jakesy with Lindsey, Schultz, Field? Outside, on the bikes, playing outlaws, B-B guns, and hold-the-fort, parents were a million miles away. You greeted them politely as Mister, Misses, or Doctor whomever, and hoped they didn’t notice you for the rest of the day.

Jakesy took a drink. Too sweet, he thought, and it wasn’t even carbonated. “Do they fight?”

“Naw,” said Johnny Lindsey. “For me it’s like being in no-man’s-land between the trenches. One lobs a shell over every now-and-then, but it’s mostly cold war. I’ll tell you though, what scares the pea-Jesus out of me is when she goes blank and starts wandering around. He’ll be gone on a trip. She’ll wake up and go outside in her bathrobe, thinking it’s morning and she wants the paper. I’ll wake up to her crying and go out the front door and find her standing there wringing her hands and wondering where the paper is. I have to lead her back into their room and stay to make sure she’s in bed. Oh, I don’t like that at all.” Lindsey looked like he was ready to cry.

“My parents have horrible fights,” Jakesy said. “I had to go to Hageman Monday and give him an excuse why I didn’t get my report card signed.” The others shivered. Hageman was Father Charles, “Whistle-Happy” Hageman, the Prefect of Discipline and a feared presence anywhere at school. On top of his cassock he wore a long cape, like Count Dracula the boys said. His piercing whistle froze action in mid stride or swing. Immediate silence. Legends of birds dropping out of the sky. “I told him my father was screaming all week. He lost a lot of money on that stupid drug store. He lets any ‘ole buddy of mine’ talk him out of his money. He was blaming it on my mother—gee-zow, he drinks ‘way more than her—but they were pushing and shoving, and he ended up sleeping in my room. I show up with a “D” in trigonometry? No way;

I'd be pounded! Hageman was actually kind!" The others looked at him in wonder. A first, surely. "He said any time I needed counseling . . . what do you suppose he means by that? It's my parents who are drinking."

"Uh, bring it up in Confession," said Schultz. "That's probably what he meant; ask the priest for advice. Or a psychiatrist—that's it; you know a psychiatrist. Your sister goes to one." Schultz was the handsome one of the friends, growing up in that happy house full of sisters. They knew all the Pi Hi gossip.

"Oh yeah, that's really gonna work. My mother takes Anne out to the crazy farm for Anne's weekly lesson in Why I Shouldn't Be A Nun, and I'm supposed to tag along and ask another ole buddy of my father about my dad's drinking. Uh-uh; not gonna work. Besides, I seen mother getting dressed for the last time out, and she put on red bikini panties. *My mother is forty-eight.*"

"Eew!" said Field. "Forbidden lust at forty-eight!"

"You shut up Fieldy," Jakesy said good-naturedly.

"I don't get it," said Schultz, taking a sip from the rosé. "My parents don't drink. What is there about this stuff that makes you craaa-zee?" he said.

"Just keep going like that," Lindsey said. "You'll find out. Know about that kid over at Briarcliff who piled up his parents' Biscayne? His girlfriend's head hit the dash board, and she's in a coma."

"What happened to him?"

"They were both drinking. He had a half-pint of Old Crow in the car; a half pint; a lousy eight ounces of booze. My mother said he hit a parked car doing forty, bounced around a lot but didn't get hurt bad. I'd feel terrible if I did that to some girl," said Lindsey.

Field in his soft ironic drawl: "Biscayne's a tin can any-wazy. Can't you hear him bouncing around in that thing? Clang, off the roof, clang off the dashboard, clang, off the floor."

"Not funny Fieldy," Jakesy said, holding his hand over his mouth to keep from chucking wine all over everybody.

"Made you laugh, though," he said.

"Yeah, but if you heard my dad and my uncle Lee screaming at each other about Nixon . . . He came from Philadelphia two weeks ago for a visit and they got clobbered one night when Father Vincent came over. 'I am Faaa-ther Vincent. My CU-P is empty.'" He did an imitation of Father Vincent, holding out the wine bottle with two fingers in the air. "Everything was ok until he left. Good thing he was a priest; I don't know how he drove home. Anyway, he left, and the two of them started in on Nixon. Uncle Lee loved him; my dad hates him. I hate Nixon too, but so what? Then Uncle Lee has to go back home to Philadelphia and shoot himself, 'in an alcoholic stupor,' says my dad. *He* should talk. Something about having no kids; but I know what it was. He drank gin all the time, even at work they say, an' he had *so* much money; he practically *owned* Borden's in Philadelphia. When we used to go up there he had a whole freezer full of ice cream. Help yourself."

They looked at Butch Gallagher, waiting. "My dad's not interested in quitting the hospital." His dad was the chief anesthesiologist. "He explained the trade-off to me one night about a year ago, why Ellen and Gary's wedding wasn't at the country club. 'We buy Buicks.'"

“Yeah, but that convertible is a *very* cool car,” interrupted Jakesy.

Butch waved him quiet: “The Jakes’s buy Cadillacs. We live on Garden Lane. They live in Druid Hills. We live a ripe old age. They pop off at 45 or 55 from drink and heart attacks.’ Me, I want a Cadillac, but look: Dr. Hauck had a heart attack last month. Is he as old as your dad, Jakesy?”

“Well, he lived at Andrews Circle, didn’t he? That makes him as old as your dad or mine.” Andrews Circle, just east of the university, was where the young physician vets crowd lived after the War; the Jakes’s, the Gallagher’s, Houck’s, Spaulding’s, all married doctors with kids, doing residency, double shifts at the university hospital and living hand to mouth in hastily thrown-up little box houses. Medical residents then made next to nothing. Wives didn’t work; they stayed at home having and looking after the kids who all played in the circle. Butch and Jakesy had haircuts together, him four, Jakesy three. He was “Butchie” then, the oldest boy in his family, nicknamed by his doting father. Jakesy was still over there all the time, and could only remember one occasion when Dr. Gallagher got mad. That was very scary for Jakesy, though *his* dad seemed mad all the time.

“They say you can’t help it. My dad says ‘One drink and she’s gone.’ Here I am,” Lindsey took a swig and brandished the bottle, “I’m not dying to chug the whole bottle. I’d get sick.”

“You lose control,” said Schultz, “like deGolian’s girl. She got pregnant. They were drinking brandy in the parking lot at . . .”

“Could she shimmy! Wow! That dance after the Claremont game . . .” interrupted Lindsey. “That must have been where . . .”

“Shimmy, brandy, pregnant—there you have it!”

“Not funny Fieldy.”

“But you’ve got something there, David,” said Butch Gallagher. “Dagneau’s religion class, he’s talking about self-control, how Catholics need will power to overcome temptations. You know, free will.”

“How about dope addicts? Addicted . . . you know, craving,” said Schultz.

“Like I crave deGolian’s girl doing the shimmy,” said Fieldy.

“My sisters are always practice-dancing with each other,” Schultz said, “like it’s the most serious thing in the world, being able to dance. But I never seen anything like that girl; almost like dancing was s’posed to be enticing, or something,” he said quizzically.⁵

“Yeah, but now that the news is out she’ll be gone from Pi Hi next week. No more shimmy from her, or you either Fieldy. It’s off to ‘boarding school,’” Gallagher used his hands to make quote signs, “until next year, or deGolian’ll drop out of school and get a job. You-all should-a heard Hurst at formation Friday. He used to go out with the girl. Went up to deGolian and slapped him on the back. ‘Hey, big daddy-O! What’s shakin’?’ DeGolian, who would-a pounded him, turned away. Didn’t say a thing.”

⁵ Were they clueless or what? Schultz should-a known better, with all those sisters, but he didn’t. Butch’s sister was gone and married, Lindsey was an only child, Jakesy’s older sister was on the road to The Convent, his younger sister off in her own world. David Field wasn’t saying. Bet *he* knew!

Jakesy said, "I just don't know what to do about my dad . . . We're supposed to get a cabin in North Carolina, or a cottage at Sea Island, meet there with our children that we're s'posed to have after we all get married. Anne's sure not going to have kids; she'll be a mess all her life. Judy, maybe. But he'll be dead. Drunk dead."

* * * *

"Hey you guys, it's twelve thirty. Do you really think anyone's coming this late?" said Butch Gallagher. "I have to think about getting home. We gotta get up at six-thirty, and I gotta take you guys home."

Jakesy said, "Yeah, it's right on the way, but you're right, they're not coming out. They're chicken. Somebody tipped 'em off there'd be a necktie party waiting."

"Us a necktie party?" said Lindsey.

Fieldy: "Well, you, Jakesy and Butch are all wrestlers. I bet you'd be good in a fight."

"Ha-ha! 'We aim to maim.' How about you Fieldy?" said Jakesy dropping to a crouch.

"Feets don't fail me now!" he replied, pantomiming. They laughed their heads off. Jakesy felt better.

Field grabbed the guitar. Lindsey threw the empty rosé bottle into the woods, handed out gum for their wine breath; they kicked the little fire out and trudged toward the parking lot, Butch Gallagher's car, Schultz and Fieldy's bikes. Suddenly they were all tired, all the adrenalin gone.

A car was coming around the curve. "Der death rattle auf der Volkswagen," said Schultz. "Sieg Heil!" He mocked the Nazi salute. "Maybe it's O'Brien; he just bought a '57 . . . Holy shit!" The second swear word by anyone this night escaped without thinking as the rattling car hurled over the embankment by the school driveway, and nailed a tree, hard, coming to rest as a loud whump! heralded a gas tank explosion.

"The tank's under the hood," cried Jakesy. "Come on!" He started running, Lindsey after him.

"No, wait!" cried Butch Gallagher. "No, no! Somebody's got to get the priests and the fire department. Somebody's sure to be hurt. You guys see what you can do, Schultz and I will go pound on the rectory." He grabbed Schultz by the arm and started running for the rectory building.

Jakesy and Johnny Lindsey tore up the long driveway full tilt, arriving to find the front of the Volkswagen wrapped around a medium-sized tree, a blaze flaring up under the front windshield. The worst of it was a man in a white shirt half out of the shattered glass, lying within reach of the flames licking up around the distorted hood.

"Oh, man, Jakesy, we're gonna have to drag him out. Get ready to grab him on three. One. Two. Three." They both reached into the flame and grabbed what they could, Lindsey a shirt collar and Jakesy an armpit. "AHhhhh . . . this hurts!" cried Johnny, but he kept on tugging. Between the two of them they pulled the man free and in their panic didn't stop dragging until they were about ten feet from the car. They let go, Lindsey dancing around flapping his hand, Jakesy pounding and tearing at the smoldering white shirt, the man face down. "Mister? Are you awake?"

“Don’t move him! Don’t move him! Don’t move him!” from Lindsey in rapid succession. “He may have a broken neck or something. You’d kill him.”

“What’ll we do? What’ll we do!” said Jakesy in a panic. “His face is in the dirt. He’ll choke!”

“Yeah, we better turn his head a little.” Jakesy sat down in front of the man, put two hands on his head and gingerly turned his head. It moved easily, too easily, he thought.

Butch Gallagher and Joe Schultz came trotting up, behind them ill-tempered Father McGuckin, the old math instructor, remonstrating at top speed. “Just you wait until tomorrow, you boys . . . It’s a wonder if you all . . .” He spotted the man lying face down. “Oh, dear. Let’s have a look.”

He knelt down. “You, give me a hand; you other two put your hands under his waist and legs. We’re going to turn him over. Together now, one, two, three.” They gently turned him over. Butch ran around and caught him as he flopped over the rest of the way. He was a young-looking man, in a white shirt and tie, face covered in dirt and glass from where the two friends had dragged him free. He wasn’t moving.

“You, uh, Lindsey. Go back and make sure Father DeLaMater called the hospital. Then run some cold water on that hand. The rest of you, kneel down and pray; maybe it’s a good thing you were here; you’re good boys, most of the time. Now pray. Hard.”

Butch, David, Jakesy, and Schultz knelt in a circle at the man’s feet. They did something they never would have done, and that they were not embarrassed to admit afterwards. Overwhelmed with emotion, they held hands, crying. Gallagher started Hail Marys. They began coming fast and furious.

They heard Father McGuckin speaking in the man’s ear, as he rubbed something from a small locket on the forehead. “Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, just say the word and my soul shall be healed oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, just say the word and my soul shall be healed oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, just say the word and my soul shall be healed through this holy unction and His own most tender mercy may the Lord pardon thee whatever sins or faults thou hast committed by sight, by hearing, smell, taste,” touching his eyes, ears, nose and mouth in rapid succession. The boys, praying, stared glassy-eyed into the future.

Epilogue

St. Pius trounced the Ignatius Knights, 42-12. They were a much bigger team, and they were mad. They won for two more years before the Knights finally eked out a lucky victory.

Butch Gallagher developed a strong attraction to money. He went on to be a successful dentist with a mortgage and a Jaguar. He married Jakesy’s senior year high school sweetheart, a honey of a Southern Baptist girl. That affair was a cause of some very hard feelings and eventual estrangement between the long-time friends. As a college sophomore, Jakesy had asked Butch to help him patch things up with Jeannie following some long-distance misunderstandings. Instead, he prevaricated with Jakesy, and snagged his girl. Butch’s father, though big and fat when they were boys, lived to be 92.

Joe Schultz took the military program at Ignatius seriously. He went on to become a major in the counter-insurgency unit of the army. He was killed in Viet Nam. His funeral was immense: all those sisters and their families. His father, a veteran of Korea, was heartbroken by his favorite son's death and died himself, four years later, a hopeless alcoholic. He had never a drink before his son died.

David Field over the years introduced the friends to the powerful music of the civil rights era and the youth rebellion. He was the first with the Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Richard Fariña records, the first to question the Viet Nam War. He went to Harvard. He volunteered as a medic in Viet Nam, survived the war to become a high executive of the International Red Cross. His father, an equally gentle man, finally retired as a college professor in his eighties.

Johnny Lindsey rode out the Viet Nam War loading bombers in Cambodia. He has three grown up kids, and works for the *International Herald Tribune* in the Paris office. Lindsey speaking French; who'd-a thunk it! His mother went missing two years after the events told here, and, after an extensive fruitless search by many, Johnny, on his way to Jakesy's by their "secret" way, found her three weeks later face down in the storm tunnel along Peavine Creek near their home. He and his dad moved after his graduation to the North Carolina mill country. His father is 96 years old.

All the friends growing up watched the burning busses of the Freedom Riders on the T.V. news; watched the rioting at Old Miss as James Meredith integrated that university; talked about it at school. These sights especially affected Jakesy and David Field. In the summer of '63 Jakesy and Butch would follow the Birmingham struggles with Police Chief Bull Connor and Governor George Wallace, the sit-ins, the March on Washington. They would walk their dogs—the excuse they would give if anyone asked—and meet at a park halfway between their two houses and talk about what they had seen.

Jakesy met that public school girl in 1963, the daughter of a Georgia State patrolman. In 1964, against all odds, he almost had her converted to Catholicism. That, instead of doing what he *really* wanted to do—what Butch Gallagher did later—tells a lot about Jakesy. He would pick her up "for breakfast" Sunday morning and they would go to the Cathedral, where Mass was showy and golden, and often the priest who had returned from the Selma, Alabama Freedom Summer preached especially fiery sermons. Jakesy and his girl were moved by his power and candor. Midway in the summer of '64 the auxiliary bishop abruptly announced that the priest was transferred. Although these events were only spoken of obliquely by the parishioners (except between Jakesy and his perceptive girlfriend), everyone knew it was because the priest made the wealthy Cathedral patrons uncomfortable. Jakesy stopped going to Mass in protest, endangering his immortal soul, he thought—but finally, along with Huck Finn, he didn't care. He would not go to Mass again until his sophomore year at Notre Dame, when his college classmates mourned their brothers and friends who died in Viet Nam. Jakesy became a draft resister, organizing an effective anti-draft counseling organization with the help of the American Friends Service Committee, for the final four years of the war. His father died ten years after this tale at the age of 59 from cirrhosis and after many battles with fate, Jakesy ended up in Mendocino, California, running a primitive music camp in the redwood forests. At least that's where he wanted to be.

* * * *

On February 3, 1959, “The Day the Music Died,” a chartered Beechcraft Bonanza aircraft—the one with the distinctive V-shaped tail—crashed in a field near Clear Lake, Iowa, killing Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, J. P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson and their pilot. Friday March 13, 1959, a rented Twin Beech airplane, carrying the Kingston Trio on the mid-west leg of their national tour, crash-landed on a turkey farm in South Bend, Indiana. All survived.

In November of 1962, the Kingston Trio, who released “Scotch and Soda,” and “Fast Freight” in the ‘50s, released their seventh album, *New Frontier*. All the friends bought copies. Here are some excerpts from the lyrics to the title song:

[Ch] “Some to the rivers and some to the sea.
Some to the soil that our fathers made free.
Then on to the stars in the heav'ns for to see.
This is the new frontier. This is the new frontier.
The day will come. It's got to be.
The day that we may never see.
When man for man and town for town
must bring the peace that shall resound.

This is the new frontier. This is the new frontier.”

South Bend, Indiana
December, 2007 – November, 2011