

# REBORN TO KILL

by

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## EPISODE 1 - TRAITOROUS DOGS

WORDCOUNT - 1838

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"We're walking right into a buzzsaw."

Bobby Maguire finally broke the tense silence in the back of the van, its rear space crowded with the Hennessey crew.

Bobby ran through the op in his head. The target: Connor Malloy. Once a Hennessey lieutenant, Connor broke ranks, poaching key Hennessey moneymakers in the process. This hit would take him out fast, stem that bleeding wound.

Still, Bobby's instincts screamed trouble. Intel said Connor was holed up on a decommissioned fishing trawler down in the Navy Yard. But it was too exposed - smelled like a trap.

But Liam Hennessey had given the order. Connor had to be taken off the board tonight. The Old Man was demanding it. Bobby glanced at Liam, arms crossed and stone-faced.

"You hear me, Liam? Connor's not stupid."

Liam looked up. "Just do the job."

Bobby bit his tongue. No point arguing - Liam was defacto Don now that his father was clinging to his last breath with stage four colon cancer, so Liam's word was law.

Across the van, Bobby spotted Finn tapping his foot anxiously, the kid looking greener than the Shamrock Shake he'd gulped back at the diner. This would be Finn's first scrape, his cherry popped tonight.

Brick, a six-foot slab of muscle and menace packed tight into denim and a cowboy hat, clapped a meaty paw on Finn's restless shoulder, unleashing his Texas drawl. "Whoa now, kid. Nothin' to get all worked up about. Know why?"

Brick tipped his chin at Bobby. "Cause you got him watchin' yer back."

The kid eyed Bobby. "What's so special about Bobby?"

At a glance, nothing about Bobby screamed ass-kicker. But he was rock solid, with Popeye arms and a nose that got busted up and re-healed crooked more than once.

"You ain't heard what they call him?" Finn shook his head.

"They call him the Butch-"

Bobby cut him off with a sharp look. "Brick. Not now."

Brick clenched his jaw. "Just sayin'. Kid should know who he's rollin' with."

Bobby thought the less they knew about each other, the better. If the kid caught bullets tonight, Bobby didn't need it slowing him down.

Bobby and Brick went way back, a bond forged in the blast furnace of Iraq and Afghanistan. When they first met, Brick was Cody Reed. But Bobby bestowed him the nickname "Brick" after Cody decked a hulking squadmate in a dispute over a pack of smokes, dropping the massive man like a sack of bricks. They'd been inseparable since that night, enduring the same brutal tours, insurgent bullets and I.E.D.s.

Now back stateside, they channeled that skillset into serving Old Man Hennessey's criminal empire. The Old Man had plucked them from the streets, seeing past the PTSD and the drinking, and had given them purpose. Now they were his elite enforcers. Whatever darkness needed to be handled, Bobby and Brick got it done.

Brick had worked with him long enough to know when not to press. This was one of those times.

"Alright, B. I'll leave it alone." Bobby gave a grateful nod.

The van slowed, approaching the docks. Bobby drew his three-fifty-seven snub and pulled his black ski mask down, the others following suit. Liam gave a signal, silent nod. It was time.

They spilled out of the van, weapons drawn, fading into the darkness between streetlights.

The Brooklyn night was damp and cold. Bobby's pulse thundered in his ears, the electric charge of looming violence amping his senses. He led his crew through the shadows under the bridge toward Connor's trawler.

But the fine hairs on Bobby's neck prickled. He put up a clenched fist. The crew instantly froze, weapons raised.

Bobby peered into the dead quiet dark. Then it hit him like a gut punch - ambush.

"Take cover!"

**SFX: MACHINE GUN FIRE**

The rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire ripped through the night, and Bobby's men returned fire in kind.

**SFX: CHAOTIC GUN BATTLE. BULLETS PING AND RICOCHET. GLASS BREAKS. SCREAMS RING OUT.**

Bobby dove behind a concrete pylon as bullets chewed into the blacktop all around him. Brick and Finn hunkered down nearby, unleashing round after round from their shotguns.

**SFX: SHOTGUN BLASTS**

It was a fucking deathtrap. Connor had the drop on them. Bobby's boys would be fish in a barrel if they stayed here.

Bobby's mind raced, thoughts cold and clear. He hadn't survived this long by allowing panic or stupidity to take over.

He locked eyes with Brick, motioning to the van. Brick gave a sharp nod in return. Bobby took a breath, then lept into action.

**SFX: BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!**

Muzzle flashes lit up the night. Bullets pinged off brick, whizzed past ears, and kicked up pavement.

Bobby's guttural yell cut through the thunderous gunfire. "Fall back!"

The crew scrambled for the van, heads low.

**SFX: TIRES SQUEALING**

Tires squealed as Bobby whipped the van around, bullets clanging off its flank.

As they fishtailed around corners, Brick punched the ceiling. "What the fuck is going on?"

Bobby gripped the wheel tighter. "They knew we were coming. Somebody dined us out."

He sped them to an abandoned box factory owned by the clan. Inside, heavy firepower awaited – The Old Man’s personal armory.

Once inside, Bobby pried up a floorboard, revealing wooden crates packed tight with guns and ammo.

“Tool up and make ‘em count.” Bobby racked a twelve-gauge. “We’re going back to finish this.”

### **SFX: BRAKES SCREECHING**

Just then, tires screeched outside - a Buick came crashing through the chained gate, guns blasting.

### **SFX: GUN FIRE**

Bobby clenched his jaw. The bastards had tracked them down. *How could they have known where we’d go?*

With an enraged roar, Bobby vaulted over his cover, charging right at the vehicle. He squeezed off blast after blast from the Benelli, peppering the windshield.

### **SFX: SHOTGUN BLASTS, WINDSHIELD SHATTERING**

The Buick skidded to a halt just feet from Bobby. The driver slumped sideways, a red ruin where his face used to be. Before the gangbangers in the back could exit, Bobby was on them. He smashed the driver’s window and unloaded point blank with the shotgun.

### **SFX: BLAM!**

Finn screamed a warning from the rear. More headlights approached outside. They were about to be pincered.

"To the tunnels!"

The labyrinth of maintenance tunnels under the factory would be their only way out now.

Bobby sprinted for the tunnels, holding the access door open for his crew as bullets ripped past them. Once his men were in, he dove through, slamming it closed behind him.

But as Bobby descended into the tunnels, he stopped short, eyes widening in shock. The path had been bricked over. Recently. Someone had known not only where they’d run, but even their backup escape route. This betrayal came from deep within the ranks. Bobby’s gut sank. Brick turned to him, fear in his eyes.

"This is bad, Bobby. This is fucking bad."

Bobby knew he was right. They were cornered rats down here now. He reloaded, leaning his forehead against Brick's, brothers to the end.

The access door flew open and bullets rained down. Bobby's men returned fire, but they were lambs to the slaughter in the tight tunnel.

Bobby watched helplessly as his crew were gunned down around him. Finn, just a kid, fell back with a bullet between the eyes, just as Bobby feared.

**SFX: BULLETS HITTING BODIES. MEN SCREAMING.**

Screams echoed as more shots cracked out. Bobby's men - the only real family he'd ever known - were dying at his feet.

In the fray, Brick took a gut shot that folded him like a wet sack.

"Brick!"

Bobby dragged his loyal friend into his lap. Brick's belly was a bloody horrorshow, a real goulash. Bobby pressed down on the hole, blood bubbling up hot between his fingers.

"Stay with me, brother!"

Brick just grimaced, his face whiter than parish communion wine.

Then a bullet grazed Bobby's temple, opening a crimson gash. His vision blurred as he slumped back. Figures closed in through the haze as his revolver clicked empty.

So this was it. The end of the road. But Bobby stared defiantly up at the approaching killers. If this was his time to die, he'd face it like a warrior.

Bobby roared, raising his fists. "Come on you rat bastards, finish it!"

Out of the shadows stepped Connor Malloy, green eyes flashing with menace. As he braced for the inevitable, Bobby was suddenly seized by an eerie calm. In his final moments, he knew with absolute certainty: He would have his revenge. Somehow, someday, he'd make these traitorous dogs pay. He looked up at Connor, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Go to hel-"

**SFX: SHOTGUN BLAST**

A shotgun roared. Then, nothing but darkness.

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### **SFX: HEART MONITOR BEEPING, FLUORESCENT LIGHTS BUZZING**

A bright light stabbed into Bobby's eyes. His throat was raw as sandpaper, his skull pounding.

Where the hell was he? This wasn't the warehouse. No sounds of gunfire or screams. Just the incessant hum of fluorescent lights.

The last thing he remembered was the gunfight in the tunnels, taking bullets, collapsing with Brick in his arms as Connor Malloy closed in. He watched as Malloy leveled the shotgun at his face, its hot shot shredding into his brain.

Now, somehow, he was awake. And alive.

A shadow moved in his periphery. Bobby strained to lift his head toward it, but he was too weak. Then, a woman spoke:

"Bobby! Are you awake?"

A familiar voice - *Ma*? Bobby forced his eyes to focus, blinking against the harsh lights. Through blurred vision, he made out a woman's face hovering over him.

"He's awake! Frank, get him some water, quick!"

A straw was pressed to his mouth. Bobby gulped the cool water desperately, rivulets spilling down his chin. A man's hand cradled the back of his head, lifting it so he could drink.

### **SFX: GULPING WATER**

As his vision cleared, Bobby saw he was laid up in a hospital room, hooked to machines that beeped and whirred. *How the hell did he get here?*

Ma stroked his forehead, overcome with relief to see him awake. A man stood beside her now. *Pa?*

The man spoke. "Oh, Bobby...we thought we'd lost you..."

Bobby tried to respond, but his voice came out a croaking rasp. Ma shushed him, caressing his cheek. "Rest now. You're safe. We'll talk when you're healed up."

As the couple stood over him, gazing down with apparent paternal love, a chilling realization dawned on Bobby - these weren't his parents at all.

He studied their faces closely for the first time. There wasn't a hint of familiarity in them. He had never seen these people before in his life.

Bobby's pulse spiked. He strained toward the mirror across the room, and the horrors continued: The face staring back was not his own. The cold eyes, blunt nose, and hard set of his jaw - all gone. Instead, he inhabited the skin of a stranger. And not only a stranger - *a teenager*.

*What. The. Fuck.*

## **EPISODE 2 - WELCOME HOME**

### **WORDCOUNT - 1633**

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The light was too damned bright, like a nail hammering into Bobby's skull. He squinted through the haze, slowly taking in the hospital room. Bobby strained to lift his throbbing head.

His throat was parched and raw. "Water..."

The woman called out the door. "Doctor! He's awake!"

He turned toward the older couple standing beside the bed, worry and hope fighting for control of their faces. The man was tall and fit, with a salt-and-pepper crew cut. The woman had curly brown hair and a face lined with care.

Bobby blinked against the glare. The man lifted a cup to Bobby's cracked lips.

"Here you go, son. Small sips."

*Son?* Bobby gulped the cool liquid, confused. As his vision cleared he saw he was in a bright hospital room, not the dim warehouse where he'd fallen.

How was he alive? The last thing he remembered was the shotgun roaring, his world going dark. Now somehow he'd awakened in this alien place, surrounded by strangers calling him their son.

*What the hell was going on?*

Bobby's eyes scanned the unfamiliar hospital room. Machines hummed and beeped. Tubes snaked under his gown. An IV dripped fluid into his arm.

His mind raced, struggling to make sense of where he was and what had happened. How long had he been out? How the hell was he still breathing?

Bobby opened his mouth to speak again, but a doctor in blue scrubs approached the bed, flipping through a chart.

"Well, well, look who finally decided to wake up. We've all been very worried about you, Bobby. How are you feeling?"

"What...what happened?"

"You had a nasty fall and have been in a coma for a few weeks. But your brain activity looks remarkably stable now. I'd say you're going to be just fine."

Fall? Coma? None of this made any sense.

The woman spoke carefully. "Bobby...do you remember who I am?"

He didn't. Bobby studied her tired face, his brow furrowed. She was a total stranger.

She could see the lack of recognition in his eyes. It broke her heart. She looked to the doctor, but he could only offer cold comfort. "There's still a long way to go. He's just woken up. In cases like this, it can take days, weeks or even months for memories to return. Just try to have hope."

She nodded, clinging to the fact that at least he was awake. At least he was alive. The rest will come. Surely, it will come.

###

Two days had passed since Bobby had awakened, but he was no less baffled by his situation. After more tests, the doctor confirmed Bobby was ready to go home. *Home*, Bobby thought to himself. *What the hell does that even mean right now?*

On the drive home, Frank and Diane tried to fill in the blanks. It was the year twenty twenty-four, and he was Bobby Maguire, a senior at Port Jefferson High School.

*Twenty twenty-four?* Three whole years had somehow passed since the warehouse gunfight. *As if things could get any weirder...*

They continued, explaining how he was their only son, a quiet kid who kept to himself. Diane was a nurse at a local hospital. Frank had a small business repairing and importing vintage cars.

They told Bobby he had fallen from the school's roof five stories up, only to land in a tree that had broken his fall. Still, the impact left Bobby comatose for weeks and afflicted with apparent amnesia upon waking.

Bobby played along, pretending their account jogged memories that weren't really there. Inside, he was struggling to answer a litany of questions, the list only growing with each passing day.

How was he still alive? How did he get into the body of this boy? Why did this kid have his same name? How had three years passed since the last thing he remembered?

Bobby only knew one thing for sure: whoever these people thought he was, he wasn't their son.

Frank and Diane brought Bobby to their modest home on the North Shore of Long Island, a small ranch house on the wrong side of the tracks, the side where they locked their doors at night and kept the shades drawn.

Not that Bobby minded. After the boiling streets of Brooklyn, the Maguire's little house felt practically palatial. And with Frank and Diane doting on him as if he were their long-lost son, it already felt more like home than any place Bobby had been in years.

Frank carried in Bobby's things and led him to a bedroom. "Remember this place? It's your room."

Bobby surveyed the cramped bedroom, its walls plastered with movie posters and shelves overflowing with comic books. Clothes and gaming controllers lay strewn across the floor. At the room's center loomed a beast of a gaming PC with three monitors.

Clearly, the teen he apparently used to be spent *a lot* of time in here. Bobby shook his head, something dawning on him: *He was a nerd.*

Frank patted him on the shoulder. "Well, take your time, get settled. I'm gonna pick up some food. How's pizza sound?"

Bobby nodded. It sounded amazing. He hadn't eaten anything but hospital food in what felt like years. And, apparently, it actually *had* been years. "Great. Pizza it is." Before leaving, Frank looked him over one more time, feeling grateful to have his boy back.

Alone, Bobby studied his new face in the mirror - oily skin and wide eyes that didn't belong to him. He stripped off his shirt, examining the scrawny body beneath. Even as a teen, Bobby was never this stick-thin and weak.

Bobby could hardly stand the sight, so he did the only thing he could think to do: He dropped to the floor and started pounding out push-ups. If he was going to be stuck in this body, he would mold it into something resembling the hardened man he used to be.

But just as he was starting to break a sweat -

**SFX: BUZZ. BUZZ.**

The tell-tale vibration of a cell phone sounded from within a desk drawer. Bobby pulled it open, and sure enough, there was an iPhone with several texts waiting to be read.

He grabbed the device, not sure what to expect, since this kid didn't seem to have any friends to speak of. But what he saw still managed to surprise him. The screen displayed a series of threatening messages from someone named Brad.

*Hey, shitbird. Heard you woke up from your nap. Good fucking thing because you owe me.*

*Needle-dick, did you forget how to pick up a phone? Are you retarded after your fall? Call me or I will cut your nuts off.*

Bobby chuckled as he scrolled through the pathetic attempts at intimidation. *So someone's shaking the kid down. Interesting.*

As entertaining as this was, Bobby didn't have the patience for it right now. He put down the phone and went back to his pushups.

###

An hour later, Bobby collapsed against the wall, soaked in sweat, his scrawny arms trembling from the exhaustive workout. But the aching muscles and gasping lungs were worth it. He had a long way to go if he were to hone himself into the lethal weapon he used to be.

Still, Bobby needed something to take the edge off. He scoured the room, rifling through drawers and shelves for anything he could find. A crumpled pack of cigarettes, a hidden bottle of booze, even a dimebag would do. But he found nothing, not so much as a porno mag. Bobby shook his head. What self-respecting teenage boy didn't have some kind of stash? This kid really was a loser.

On a whim he lifted the mattress, which revealed an old marble journal, creased from excessive use. Bobby had one just like it as a kid. Maybe there would be some common ground found within, he thought.

Bobby flipped through the tattered pages of the journal, skimming past mundane entries about classes and crushes. But as he read deeper, the tone shifted dramatically.

"What is this?"

The handwriting deteriorated into deranged scrawls. Dark passages spewed violently across the pages:

[I'll kill them. I'll kill everyone who bullied me.]

Bobby's eyes widened. "Someone was bullying him...I mean, me."

[They took my money again today. As usual, I didn't do anything. Just froze like a loser. Why am I so fucking weak? So afraid? I'm worthless. One day, I'm going to kill Brad. I swear it!]

Bobby's eyes instinctively darted to the phone.

"Brad..."

He kept reading, the diary revealing a psyche unraveling under relentless abuse, cataloging vicious beatings by his tormentors, and detailing violent revenge fantasies.

Then, a final entry added clarity to what happened to the old Bobby: "I wish I was dead."

Bobby closed the journal, shaken. "He didn't fall off the school roof. He jumped."

**SFX: BUZZ! BUZZ!**

Just then, the phone buzzed with an incoming call - Brad. Bobby's eyes narrowed. He answered the call.

Brad's quintessentially douchebag voice spewed out of the speaker. "You lost your damn mind or something, ignoring my calls? I need my money, you little bitch."

Bobby smiled, excited by the confrontation. "Hi, Brad. Nice to hear from you."

Brad paused, detecting something odd about Bobby's voice. "Huh, you really did hit your head, didn't you? Listen up, lamewad. Tomorrow, before school, bring me my money, or you're gonna take another swan dive, got it?"

Bobby set his jaw. "Yeah, I got it. See you then."

Bobby hung up. His jaw tightened as he set down the phone. He caught his reflection in the mirror hanging on the back of his door. He saw that cold, sociopathic stare - the icy gaze of the killer he used to be - and smiled.

### **EPISODE 3 - BACK TO SCHOOL**

#### **WORD COUNT - 1687**

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Bobby gazed at his reflection, barely recognizing the gangly teen staring back. Strands of greasy hair flopped across his forehead, framing an unfamiliar face.

"Time for a little off the top."

**SFX: BUZZZZZZZZZ**

The clippers he pilfered from his new father's cabinet buzzed to life. Tufts of hair cascaded down as he methodically shaved his mop into a severe military buzzcut.

He ran a hand over his shorn scalp. The buzzcut sharpened his features but couldn't hide the sunken cheeks and awkward frame of this new body. He straightened his back, squaring those bony shoulders as much as his weak spine would allow.

"Give it time, Bobby. Give it time."

Bobby rifled through the wardrobe, struggling to find anything other than graphic tee's for video games and comic characters that broadcast his dorkiness to the world. Finally, he settled on a pair of jeans and a plain black tee, clothes better suited to blending in.

"Time for school."

Bobby entered the kitchen, making a beeline toward the cereal cabinet. Diane looked up from her coffee, then did a double-take at his new look.

"Oh! Your hair..."

Recovering with a strained smile, she added: "It's very...utilitarian."

Bobby grunted in reply, pouring milk over a bowl of cereal.

Diane frowned, troubled by this latest development but not wanting to upset him. "Well, I'm sure the lower maintenance will be nice for you."

Bobby just nodded, shoveling cereal into his mouth without looking up. Diane sighed. Her son was slipping away, this brooding stranger taking his place.

Hoping to build a bridge between them, she extended a handful of cash. "Here's some spending money, sweetie. Go have some fun after school. Stop and get a burger or something."

Bobby eyed the cash, then met Diane's gaze. Her eyes radiated maternal warmth, filled with love for a son she barely knew. It made no sense to him.

Diane couldn't understand the coldness in his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He grabbed the cash and headed for the door.

Diane instinctively called after him. "Okay, just be careful and don't stay out too-"

**SFX: DOOR SLAMMING.**

With that, Bobby was gone, leaving Diane alone at the breakfast table.

###

Bobby hoofed it down the rolling hills toward Port Jefferson High School, following the GPS on Old Bobby's iPhone. Along the way, he thought about how foreign it felt having a mother who worried. Bobby was unaccustomed to such feelings.

He craved a cigarette to steady his nerves. After being house bound and bedridden for so long, the urge overwhelmed him.

At the bodega, Bobby bought his first pack of Marlboros in this new life. The college-aged clerk hesitated, asking for ID. Bobby stared him down coldly until the smokes were surrendered.

**SFX: CIGARETTE LIGHTING**

Outside, Bobby lit up, the first drag stinging his lungs so bad he coughed excessively, his eyes tearing up. He couldn't forget that this body was not *his* body. Not really. He had to acclimate to it. That was going to take some time.

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Bobby stepped through the front doors of Port Jefferson High, the cigarette between his lips trailing a wisp of smoke. All eyes turned to him, the other students staring, whispering to each other.

They remembered Bobby Maguire as the scrawny, awkward kid who fell off the school roof like a fucking idiot. But this Bobby carried himself with an easy confidence, meeting their gawking stares with amusement.

As Bobby strode down the hall, he spotted a group of Letterman jacket jocks eyeing him warily, muttering to each other.

"Yo, check out Maguire. Dude get a makeover?"

"What's with that haircut? Looks like Jason Bourne or some shit."

"Is he smoking in here?"

Bobby smirked to himself and kept walking.

At his locker, he noticed a cute blonde girl staring in his direction. He remembered the Old Bobby mentioning a girl in his journal - Chloe Parker - "*The most beautiful girl in school*," he wrote. This must be her, as no one else in these halls fit that description.

According to Old Bobby, she used to completely ignore his existence. But now her eyes were fixed on him with fascination. Bobby met her gaze and winked. Chloe quickly looked away, blushing. *Bet the Old Bobby never even managed to look her in the eye.*

Bobby was feeling good about this first impression. This was a whole new world for him. One he aimed to conquer.

Just then, a contemptuous voice yelled out. "Bobby! You outta your mind?" Bobby recognized it from their brief phone call: Brad.

Brad sauntered up, looking Bobby up and down with a sneer. Brad was a hulking brute, over six feet tall with shoulders like a linebacker. A smug grin was plastered across his meaty face.

"Well, if it isn't little Bobby Maguire. I thought I told you to meet me out front, shithead. I guess you're hard of hearing now, too? Gonna cost you extra for making me come find you."

Bobby met Brad's glare with a cold smile. "Is that right?"

Brad couldn't believe the stones on this kid. "Yeah, that's right. Now cough up what you owe me, unless you want me to cave in that ugly mug of yours."

**SFX: BANG AGAINST LOCKER!**

Brad shoved Bobby hard against the lockers. Students in the hall froze, watching the confrontation unfold.

"I got your money right here, Brad."

Before Brad could react, Bobby slammed his forehead into Brad's face with lightning speed.

**SFX: BONE CRUNCHING!**

Brad's nose splintered under the force of the headbutt, blood erupting down his chin.

He stumbled backward, clutching his face as crimson leaked through his fingers. "You broke my fucking nose!"

Bobby stood defiantly before him. "Consider us square. I won't be paying you shit anymore. You got a problem with that, I'd be happy to revisit this conversation."

Brad wavered on his feet, eyes wide with shock and pain. The other students watched in stunned silence as Bobby Maguire, former bullying victim, had suddenly become the most dangerous kid in school.

Brad looked over Bobby's shoulder at the rest of his football goon friends. "What are you idiots waiting for? Kick his ass!"

The jocks closed in, cracking their knuckles. Bobby stood in the center, surrounded. He couldn't help but smile. These muscle-bound apes had no idea who they were dealing with.

Bobby rolled his neck and bounced lightly on the balls of his feet, adrenaline pumping. This scrawny teenage body was not like his old one. He couldn't rely on brute strength here. But what he did have was speed and precision, honed from years of special forces training.

The first goon lunged with a wild haymaker. Bobby slipped it easily and delivered a vicious palm strike to the jock's throat.

**SFX: PUNCH AND CHOKING!**

As the brute choked and staggered, Bobby spun and swept his legs out from under him, sending the oversized teen crashing to the floor.

**SFX: THUD!**

Another brute tried to grab Bobby in a bear hug from behind. But Bobby was too quick, ducking and twisting like a greased eel.

**SFX: PUNCH PUNCH PUNCH!**

Bobby targeted pressure points on the arms wrapped around him. The brute howled in pain, his grip broken.

Bobby moved fluidly, using his diminutive size to dart between the lumbering football players. He attacked joints and soft tissue, inflicting maximum pain. The beasts flailed but couldn't land a single blow on the elusive Bobby. With ruthless efficiency, he took them apart, piece by piece, until Brad's crew lay twisted and moaning on the ground.

**SFX: PAINFUL MOANS AND GASPS FROM THE CROWD.**

The gathered crowd of students looked on in shocked silence. Scrawny little Bobby Maguire had just demolished nearly the entire football team single-handedly.

It seemed the fight was over. But, suddenly, Brad let out a guttural roar and charged at Bobby from behind.

Bobby reacted instantly, grabbing Brad's arm and twisting it into an excruciating arm bar. Brad shrieked in pain as Bobby bent his elbow to the breaking point.

But an authoritative voice intervened: "That's enough!"

The gym teacher, Mr. Jonas, strode onto the scene, his imposing frame looming over Bobby.

Bobby released Brad, who collapsed, clutching his arm.

"This punk attacked us for no reason!" Brad whimpered. "You saw it. He's psycho!"

Mr. Jonas eyed Bobby sternly. "Is that true? You want to explain yourself?"

Bobby met the teacher's gaze unflinchingly. "These assholes have been tormenting me for years. I'm over it, so I defended myself."

Mr. Jonas considered this. He knew Brad and his buddies were a bunch of bullying shitheads, and he was glad to see them finally get what's coming to them. Still, violence on school grounds couldn't be tolerated. He tried to negotiate between the two factions.

"Is this true, Brad?" Brad looked away, signaling his guilt. Mr. Jonas nodded. "Listen, I don't think any of us want to get parents involved in this. So why don't we shake hands and walk away."

Reluctantly, Brad stood and approached Bobby, extending his hand. "Sure, let's be pals." The sarcasm was clear. Bobby met it with a smile, shaking his hand.

### **SFX: CLASS BELL RINGING**

The bell rang. Brad and his cronies hobbled off, glancing back over their shoulders at Bobby and Mr. Jonas.

"They deserved every punch. And they would have done far worse to me given the chance."

Mr. Jonas placed a firm hand on Bobby's shoulder. "I know. Sometimes there are no good choices." Bobby could definitely agree with that.

"Where'd you learn to fight like that, anyway?" Bobby considered his answer.

"YouTube."

Mr. Jonas grinned. *Sure you did.*

"Well, gotta get to class." Bobby turned and walked off. In truth, he had no idea what class he had or where to go, but he didn't feel like subjecting himself to twenty questions from Mr. Jonas. He pushed out a side door, deciding this was enough excitement for one day and his first day of classes could wait until tomorrow.

Mr. Jonas nodded, eyeing the departing Bobby with a curious look. There was something about this kid. Something...familiar.

## **EPISODE 4 - LASAGNA NIGHT**

### **WORDCOUNT - 1641**

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The savory aroma of Diane's homemade lasagna wafted through the cozy dining room as Bobby sat down to dinner with his new parents. It had been ages since he'd enjoyed a proper family meal.

Growing up poor, his real mother barely managed canned soup and limp sandwiches, when she bothered to feed him at all. Most nights his drunk father just passed out in front of the TV.

But here he was, at a beautifully set table with a caring mother who had cooked from scratch. Diane smiled warmly as she served Bobby a generous portion. Bobby dug in, swallowing a bite of the best lasagna he'd ever tasted. Just when he started thinking he could get used to this whole loving family thing, Frank spoke.

"So, how was your first day back?" His eyes probed him for information.

Shit. Was he gonna have to make small talk now? How could he possibly connect with their comfortable suburban lives when all he knew was death and pain? Their worlds were unfathomably far apart.

Bobby's mind raced for a response. He figured they didn't need to know he had gotten into a fight as soon as he stepped onto school grounds, then played hooky the rest of the day. After wracking his brain, he came up with this chestnut:

"Umm, it was fine, I guess."

Silence followed that brilliant response. Frank and Diane locked eyes. This was like pulling teeth. Diane chimed in, taking a gentle approach.

"We heard there was some kind of fight at school today. You want to tell us about that?"

Great, they already knew. This was all he needed. Diane could see the worry on Bobby's face.

"You're not in trouble, Bobby. It's just - I saw a post about it on the parents Facebook group. People are mad, and, we just want to make sure you're OK."

Bobby set down his fork, his appetite suddenly gone. "Do either of you have any idea what I was going through before my 'accident'?"

He looked between Frank and Diane's kind but oblivious faces. They exchanged confused glances, clearly having no clue about the torment Bobby had endured.

Bobby shook his head, anger simmering beneath his calm facade. He stood abruptly and left the table, Frank and Diane's worried stares following him out of the room.

"Bobby, wait..."

"Son, what's going on?"

They had no concept of the bullying, the extortion, or the daily despair that had pushed their son to attempt suicide. But it was time for Bobby to make them understand.

He returned a moment later with the journal in his hand. He handed it to Diane, who exchanged a worried look with Frank as she accepted it.

She opened the journal, gasping in shock at the scrawlings within. The detailed accounts of Bobby's torment leapt out from the pages, along with disturbing revenge fantasies and, most shockingly, his longing for death as the only escape.

"...Oh my god..."

Diane's eyes welled with tears as the painful revelations washed over her. She had no idea Bobby had been suffering so deeply.

Now his brooding behavior and emotional distance since the accident made sense - he was still recovering from the trauma of that bullying. Of course, that wasn't the reason at all, but Bobby was glad to offer some kind of logical explanation as a cover for his behavior.

Even Frank found his eyes glistening at this new understanding of his son's life.

"Bobby...we had no idea. If I had-" He choked back a guttural sob. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"What should I have said? These guys have been humiliating me for years and I'm too much of a pussy to do anything about it? Well, I did something about it today. They're lucky they're still breathing."

"Bobby!" Diane had no stomach for violence and hated hearing these words come from her boy. Frank tried to calm things down. He put his hand on Bobby's. It took all Bobby's will power not to snatch it away, but he had to remember this man thought he was his father, and this was a normal, fatherly thing to do.

"I understand why you did what you did. It sounds like these kids really had it coming. But violence like this...it's a slippery slope. You could throw your whole life away thinking like that."

Bobby had to admit, this was something he hadn't considered. In his old life, taking out an enemy was as routine as breathing. He subscribed to the idea that, if you were going to put an enemy down, you should put them down for good, or else you'll be looking over your shoulder the rest of your life.

But now, living in this strange body, it wasn't so simple. He was in someone else's shoes - someone who, for all he knew, might wake up back in this body one day and be stuck dealing with the consequences of Bobby's violent solutions.

Or maybe that would never happen. Bobby now had the chance to live a whole second life as Frank and Diane's son. Perhaps this was an opportunity to walk a different path - one without violence. But, *fat chance*, is what Bobby thought about that.

Still, for the sake of these two caring people, Bobby thought he should try.

"Ok, I get it. I'll be more careful next time."

Diane smiled, hoping this was all behind them. But, deep down, she knew it wasn't. Though that didn't stop her from putting on a brave face.

"Who wants ice cream?"

###

### **SFX: PHONE RINGING**

As the dishes went in the washer Frank's phone rang. He glanced at the caller ID with a puzzled look before answering cautiously.

"Hello?"

Diane looked on worriedly as a barrage of rapid, angry Pashto poured through the speaker. Frank could only stutter in response, completely lost.

Bobby listened curiously, hearing the words spilling out of the tiny phone speaker. Bobby had another surprise in store for Frank and Diane: He could understand the words of the caller on the other end. He wasn't exactly fluent, but he could get by well enough.

It was something having to do with Frank's import business. Frank was at a loss to communicate with the caller, so Bobby held out his hand. "Give me the phone."

Frank handed it over hesitantly. "Do you speak Pashto now too?"

In response, Bobby put the phone to his ear and spoke in the foreign tongue. "Please repeat yourself slowly, sir."

Bobby listened intently as the caller explained there was an issue with the pricing and quantity of the vintage car shipment they were importing. Diane and Frank exchanged shocked looks, without the foggiest idea of how their son acquired this skill.

After a moment Bobby responded, telling the caller to hold. He turned to Frank.

"He's saying the shipment paperwork doesn't match what's being declared to customs. I think he's trying to get more money from you."

Frank nodded, familiar with this tactic, still bamboozled at how Bobby is doing this. "Tell him we'll go over the paperwork and sort it out properly with customs."

Bobby raised the phone again, unleashing a long, assertive stream in Pashto before lowering the phone once more.

"He's claiming it will cost him a lot more if the cars sit there past today. It's bogus. He's just squeezing you."

Frank considered his response. "Tell him I will take full financial responsibility for any storage fees or losses caused by delays from incorrect paperwork. Make it clear though - nothing gets paid until we sort this out properly."

Bobby nodded and raised the phone again, relaying Frank's message with a firm tone that shifted to threatening by the time he was done. After a long pause, the foreign voice responded agreeably and hung up.

Frank and Diane looked at Bobby, dumbfounded. "Well?" Bobby smirked.

"I called his bluff. Told him we can have some of our...associates...in Kabul meet him at customs to review the documents. Wouldn't you know it, the paperwork was miraculously found."

A strange tension filled the room as the reality of what just happened sunk in. Diane looked to Bobby, utterly perplexed.

Bobby lied unconvincingly. "I've, uh, been playing Call of Duty with some guys over there. They've been teaching me."

Frank looked doubtful, but had no clear evidence to challenge this explanation.

Bobby stood up from the table. "Well, I'm pretty tired. G'night." He quickly made his exit before more questions could come, leaving his impressed yet puzzled parents sitting in silence.

###

### **SFX: FOOTBALL GAME ON TV**

Brad paced angrily in front of his crew, who were sprawled out the leather couches, focused on the big game playing on the flat screen.

"Guys, are you even listening?" Brad snapped, grabbing the remote and switching off the TV.

### **SFX: TV SHUTTING OFF, GROANS OF PROTEST**

"We can't let that little shit Bobby Maguire make fools of us like this."

Brad strode over to a storage cabinet in the garage and threw open the doors with a dramatic flair. Inside lay an arsenal of aluminum bats, steel pipes, and crowbars.

The guys murmured with concern as Brad began passing out the makeshift weapons. One voiced his hesitation. "I dunno man, maybe we should just let this go..."

But Brad was having none of it. "Fuck that! We're ending this tomorrow."

The others hefted their weapons uncertainly. Another kid piped up. "What about you though? You don't have one."

Brad smiled coldly, walking over to a small lockbox on a shelf. He pulled a key from his pocket and unlocked it with a click.

He slowly opened the box, revealing a nine-millimeter pistol nestled inside. The garage was silent.

Brad picked it up, feeling the weight in his hand.

"Bobby Maguire is going to wish he died in that fall."

The fight from yesterday never made it to the authorities or the school's radar, but word had clearly traveled well beyond the parent Facebook group. Even the teachers stammered and stumbled when addressing Bobby, proving the grapevine had done its work.

Though amused by the fear he evoked in all those around him, Bobby found his new high school classes excruciatingly dull. After homeroom with Mr. Andrews, whose stale coffee breath and pungent body odor assaulted Bobby's senses, he suffered through four agonizing hours of incomprehensible lectures and tasks.

In math, Bobby struggled to grasp equations and formulas that seemed useless for anyone living in the real world. It wasn't that Bobby was stupid - this material was just disconnected from anything he knew from his past life. As an enforcer and soldier, he had never needed to solve quadratic equations or memorize the Krebs cycle. *Isn't this what we have calculators for?*

English wasn't much better, the plight of Jay Gatsby's unrequited love feeling ever so trivial in the face of what Bobby has seen. Though the part about his bootlegging operation, that Bobby could get behind.

The one bright spot in Bobby's scholastic slog was History class. The lecture covered the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece. This was a world that Bobby knew. Clashing empires, endlessly jockeying for power, carving out territory by force. He couldn't help but lean forward in his chair as the teacher droned on. He was almost disappointed when the bell rang.

As he headed into fifth period, the atmosphere remained tense. The loud chatter of gossiping students instantly faded to silence as soon as he entered the classroom. Students scrambled to their seats, stealing furtive glances at the notorious Bobby Maguire while carefully avoiding direct eye contact.

Surveying the small class, Bobby had no idea which desk was his. With no choice, he called out to a boy sitting in the back. "Hey, where's my seat?"

The kid looked around, stunned. *Was Bobby Maguire talking to him?* Bobby wondered if the kid shit his pants. "Oh, uh, right over there." He pointed to the second row.

Bobby took his assigned seat, noting its precarious position. He checked all the exits, disliking having his back exposed. Middle of the front row - the perfect place to get attacked from all angles. Not ideal.

The energy in the room suddenly shifted. Bobby turned just as Brad swaggered in, a bandage over his busted nose, unable to mask his unease at seeing Bobby. Despite the bruises and cuts from their prior altercation, Brad's defiant posture signaled the fight wasn't over. He took a seat in the back corner, his eyes fixed on Bobby.

Bobby wasn't surprised. *That's what happens when you let your enemies live to fight another day.* Brad's gaze was alert, like a predator watching for the right moment to strike back and reclaim lost pride.

Bobby wondered if he might even try something reckless right here in class. He tensed reflexively before catching himself. *No, he's just a kid. Get a grip.*

"Pssst, Bobby!"

Bobby turned. *Here we go.*

"Meet me up on the roof at lunch." Brad's demand was undercut by his inability to fully conceal his nerves. "Bring any backups you want, let's settle this once and for all."

Despite his battered appearance, Brad was clearly clinging to some pretense of intimidation. Bobby found his posturing almost laughable in its futility, but dangerous in its potential.

*So that's his game. Jump me on the roof. Sounds fun.*

Bobby wasn't even sure what class he was in, his mind racing with different scenarios, preparing for his inevitable confrontation with Brad. He watched the clock for fifty-two straight minutes until the lunch bell finally rang.

As chairs screeched back, Brad made a show of dramatically standing up and stomping out the back door, keeping up appearances.

Bobby lumbered through the crowded halls, students hurrying to clear a path as he passed. Up ahead, Bobby spotted a familiar flash of blonde curls. Chloe Parker leaned casually against her locker, chatting with a friend. But her alert gaze was trained on Bobby as he approached. She said something hurriedly to her companion before breaking away, moving to intercept him.

"We need to talk." Chloe fell into step beside Bobby. "It's about Brad."

Bobby didn't slow down or make eye contact. "Got nothing to say about that prick."

"I know you're meeting him up on the roof. It's a set-up, Bobby. I used to date the sleazebag, I know how he operates. He's not gonna fight fair."

He stopped abruptly, turning to face the petite blonde. Chloe held his gaze unflinchingly, her pretty features set with determination.

"Yeah, no shit. What's it to you?"

Chloe shrugged. "Just figured you should know what you're walking into."

"I'm not the one who doesn't know what they're walking into." The idea of an ambush didn't frighten Bobby - if anything, it excited him. He was itching to unleash his pent-up rage from being trapped in this juvenile limbo.

He shoved past her toward the stairwell. After a few steps, he glanced back over his shoulder. Chloe still stood in the busy hallway, watching him intently.

"You just gonna stand there and stare?" Bobby called out impatiently.

Chloe tilted her chin up defiantly and fell into step behind him. Bobby's confidence excited her. He didn't carry himself like the other boys at school. How had she never noticed him before? Whatever the reason, she was glad she had now.

Together they ascended the stairs toward the roof. Chloe mustered up the courage to break the silence.

"So, like, what happened to you. After your...fall. You seem so different."

Bobby shrugged. "I don't know, but I'm not the same kid who fell that day." It was the truth, even if it wasn't how she thought he meant it.

"Everyone's saying you got brain damage and you're, like, a superhero or something now."

Bobby laughed. Their teenage theories were closer to the truth than they realized. In a way, he was a kind of superhero now - a weak kid transformed by a freak accident into something more powerful than they ever thought possible. He understood how they could only process what they had seen by relating it to comic books and movies.

What they didn't know, was that, to Bobby, this body was a prison, only capable of a fraction of what he was used to. Still, the alternative was death, and it was important to remember that.

As they reached the top, Bobby held out an arm, stopping Chloe from approaching the rusty rooftop door.

"You stay back until I know what's what."

Chloe started to protest, but Bobby silenced her with a glare. Waiting until she reluctantly nodded, Bobby approached the door slowly. He could hear muffled male voices on the other side, laughing and boasting loudly. His hands curled into fists reflexively.

In one swift motion, Bobby shoved the door open and stepped out into the afternoon sun, senses on high alert. Just as Chloe predicted, nearly a dozen of Brad's thuggish crew were

lounging about, passing a flask and smoking. More alarming was the motley collection of weapons piled nearby - aluminum bats, hammers, tire irons.

At Bobby's sudden entrance, the boys leapt to their feet, grabbing makeshift weapons. Brad sauntered to the front, his smug expression faltering only slightly upon seeing Bobby's fearless posture.

"Well, well, look who showed up. Thought maybe you'd chicken out."

His sycophants jeered in support. Bobby remained silent, slowly scanning the hostile scene.

Brad strutted forward. "I don't know what's gotten into you lately, Bobby Boy. But it ends here." He slapped a baseball bat against his palm menacingly. "We're gonna finish what we started, once and for all."

Bobby arched an eyebrow. "Yeah? And what exactly did you start?"

The bullies exchanged uneasy glances at this. Finally Brad spoke up. "Don't play dumb. You know we shoved your pathetic ass off this roof that day."

Bobby's jaw tightened, but he showed no other reaction. *So the Old Bobby didn't jump. He only thought about it. It was Brad who provided the final push.* Brad mistook Bobby's restraint for fear.

"Not so tough now, are ya?" Brad laughed cruelly. "Well this time, we're making damn sure you don't crawl back up."

With vicious glee, Brad recounted how they'd found Bobby standing on the ledge that fateful day. How they cornered him, his panicked pleading only egging them on. How the wet thud of his body hitting the pavement below filled them with shocked exhilaration.

"Anyway, enough nostalgia. Time for round two."

Bobby wanted nothing more than to end Brad with unequivocal permanence. But he couldn't help but remember his promise to Frank and Diane to stay out of trouble.

"Listen, Brad. I'm going to give you one more chance to walk away from this. It's not too late yet.

Brad laughed, still shocked by Bobby's newfound, brazen confidence.

"Look around, Bobby. The odds aren't exactly in your favor."

Brad's goons readied themselves. Bobby remained silent. Brad shrugged.

"I appreciate the offer, but I'll pass."

Bobby nodded. "Well, I tried."

## **EPISODE 6 - ROOFTOP RUMBLE - PART TWO**

### **WORDCOUNT - 1524**

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Bobby nodded. "Well, I tried."

This whole new leaf thing was going to be harder than Bobby thought. He sent out a silent prayer to Frank and Diane. I'm sorry guys, they aren't giving me a lot of options here.

He pulled out a cigarette, lit it and dragged on it slowly. His display of casual confidence clearly unnerving Brad and his thugs.

Brad stammered. "Are you serious right now?"

"Hey, I'm ready whenever you are."

If he was going to be forced to fight, the least he could do was refrain from throwing the first punch. This small restraint, Bobby thought, satisfied his commitment to the promise he made. At least, that's how Bobby was rationalizing not simply walking away, which he easily could have.

Brad shook his head, turning to his friends. They were just as puzzled as he was.

Brad psyched himself up. "Alright, fuck it."

With that, Brad rushed at Bobby, bat raised high. But Bobby swiftly side-stepped the wild swing, seizing Brad's overextended arm and snapping it at the elbow with brutal precision.

### **SFX: BONES SNAPPING, BRAD SCREAMING**

Brad shrieked and dropped to his knees, cradling the mangled limb.

The others stood motionless as Brad moaned in pain. Bobby took another casual drag on his cigarette, blowing the smoke in smooth, effortless rings. He raised his eyebrows at perplexed crew. Any more takers?

They were clearly having second thoughts, but Bobby had a taste for blood now. He picked up Brad's bat, testing its weight in his hands.

"Ok, I'll start this time."

### **SFX: BAT SWINGING, THUDDING AGAINST BODIES, SCREAMS AND YELPS OF PAIN**

Bobby was a blur of merciless motion. The bat crashed into elbows, shoulders, kidneys - whatever targets presented themselves to his lightning-fast blows. Despite their superior numbers, the bullies were reduced to cowering and whimpering wrecks within seconds, battered into submission under this unrelenting assault.

Soon only one remained. The largest boy of the bunch, face twisted in rage, hefted a thick wooden plank with cruel metal spikes driven through it. Bobby faced him fearlessly, the blood-slick bat ready in his hands.

With a guttural cry, the bully charged, lunging with the savage plank. But Bobby deftly side-stepped the attack and brought the bat down in a vicious arc onto the back of his head. The bully dropped hard, out cold before he even hit the ground.

Breathing heavily amidst the moaning bodies, Bobby tossed aside the bat in disgust. It was finished.

Or so he thought.

"You're dead!" Brad's enraged cry made Bobby whirl around. Despite his mangled arm, Brad had managed to struggle over to the discarded weapons, retrieving his father's handgun.

"Any last words, Maguire?" Brad hissed through the pain, index finger resting on the trigger.

But Brad didn't scare Bobby. Bobby knew killers. Bobby was a killer. Brad was not. Brad was just a dumb kid who had never been told "no" in his life, and was having a hard time adjusting to hearing it from someone he considered so much lower than him on life's totem pole.

Instead of fleeing or negotiating, Bobby simply walked right up to Brad, took hold of the trembling hand clutching the gun, and pressed the barrel firmly against his own forehead.

Bobby spoke evenly, cool as a cucumber. "Go ahead, Brad. Do it. You know I want to die. Pull the trigger and do me the favor."

Brad's eyes went wide with shock. Bobby could see beads of nervous sweat already forming on his temple. His hand shook uncontrollably. His breath came in panicked gasps. In that moment, Bobby knew Brad was asking himself - could he really pull that trigger?

Bobby watched the projections play out in Brad's mind. If he fired, there was no way he'd get away with it. Even if his cronies backed up whatever fictional story of self-defense Brad

concocted, Chloe had witnessed it all. To cover his tracks, would Brad have to kill her too? And where would it end once he'd crossed that irrevocable line?

These ceaseless thoughts were precisely why Bobby knew Brad didn't have what it took to go through with it. There was too much at stake for a pampered kid like Brad to truly take a life in cold blood. But for Bobby? Not so much.

Bobby pressed the gun barrel harder against his own forehead, his stare unrelenting. "Do it, motherfucker. Pull the goddamn trigger."

Brad looked like he might vomit, his expensive polo shirt drenched in anxious sweat.

As Brad hesitated, Bobby struck. In the space of a single heartbeat, Bobby seized Brad's arm, twisting his wrist viciously and ripping the gun from his grasp. Before Brad could even register what happened, Bobby had the cold barrel rammed in Brad's mouth, knocking out some teeth in the process.

"Who's dead now, motherfucker?" Bobby growled, icy calm. His finger tightened on the trigger, ready to paint the rooftop with the contents of Brad's skull.

Brad whimpered pathetically, eyes wide with primal terror. Bobby watched the growing dark stain spread across the front of his jeans with detached satisfaction.

"Bobby, stop!"

The new voice brought Bobby's execution to a jarring halt. He glanced up to see the gym teacher from yesterday, Mr. Jonas, striding forward, hand extended demanding.

Bobby warned him to stay back. "Walk away, old timer. This don't concern you."

But Mr. Jonas stood firm. "Hand me the firearm. Now."

Bobby considered defying him. But killing Brad now would cause too many complications. With an annoyed sigh, he surrendered the gun to Mr. Jonas.

Brad immediately scurried away on all fours like a whipped dog. Bobby started after him, but Mr. Jonas stepped into his path.

"That's enough. You've made your point."

Bobby's temper flared. He violently shoved the officious teacher. "Get outta my way, grandpa."

To his surprise, Mr. Jonas smoothly blocked the shove and came back with a sharp elbow of his own, catching Bobby across the jaw.

### **SFX: POW!**

The hit caught Bobby off guard, jolting him backwards. He rubbed his throbbing jaw, sizing Mr. Jonas up. Where did that come from?

Bobby laughed. "Ok, this is gonna be fun."

### **SFX: SWIFT SWINGS AND BLOCKS.**

Bobby threw the first punch, a testing jab aimed at Mr. Jonas' chin. The teacher slipped it smoothly, responding with a sharp chop Bobby barely blocked in time. They broke apart, circling each other on the sunny rooftop, two predators taking measure.

Bobby stepped in, unleashing a flurry of body blows. Mr. Jonas anticipated each strike, deflecting them with expert precision honed from countless hours of training. He countered with a palm heel strike that caught Bobby's sternum, driving the air from his lungs.

Staggering back, Bobby cataloged his opponent with new respect. This was no bookish schoolteacher. Mr. Jonas moved with a fluid economy of motion that only came from experience. Who is this guy?

They exchanged probing strikes, neither committing fully yet, still gathering intel. Mr. Jonas flowed between boxing, Muay Thai kicks, and the occasional sneaky elbow - a mixed style mirroring Bobby's own eclectic training.

Bobby picked up the pace, throwing combinations meant to overwhelm. But Mr. Jonas responded in kind, meeting every punch, bare-knuckling Bobby's ribs before he could regain guard. They broke apart again, both breathing harder.

### **SFX: PANTING**

Bobby rolled his right shoulder, catching his breath. "Not bad for an old-timer."

Mr. Jonas shot back with a bloody grin. "Back at ya, kid."

### **SFX: SWIFT BLOWS AND GASPS.**

Then they were at it again, neither bothering to block now, trading savage blows designed to incapacitate. The rooftop filled with the sounds of flesh striking flesh. They moved in a blur, two whirlwinds of focused violence seeking an exposed weakness.

Mr. Jonas landed a vicious uppercut to Bobby's gut, folding him over. But Bobby came back with a sweeping leg kick that dropped Mr. Jonas to a knee. Bobby moved in for the finish, only to catch a hook punch square on the jaw that rattled his skull and sent him reeling.

The battle raged on, passing in a red haze of pain. But despite the bloodshed, Bobby felt a strange exhilaration to testing his limits against an equal.

Finally they collided in one last clash of raw power and will. They grappled ferociously before breaking apart, chests heaving, bodies bruised and bleeding. Neither had gained an advantage. They stood toe-to-toe in grudging respect, two alley cats who'd fought to a draw.

There was a glint of familiarity in his steely eyes that gave Bobby pause. Bobby had only known one other person in his life who could match him like that. From the look on Mr. Jonas' face, he was thinking something similar.

After a tense pause, the winded teacher spoke. "You know, I used to have a friend named Bobby Maguire..."

Bobby narrowed his eyes. What he was thinking simply wasn't possible. But, there were a lot of impossible things going on lately, and no other apparent explanation.

Bobby tilted his head, daring to give voice to his bizarre intuition:

"Brick?"

Mr. Jonas only smiled, his own suspicions finally confirmed.

"Butcher!"