Week 9: One-on-one physical fight scene, 1637 words

Kurt was hungry but they had to wait, always had to wait until their father got home. No matter how late.

His younger sister Staci was watching *Friends* on TV, so it was after 8:30, extra late. Kurt's stomach growled and he absentmindedly rubbed it, tried not to pay attention. But he was seventeen and growing and his body wanted food. Now.

Dad's new 1995 Chevy Silverado rolled into the driveway. Staci turned off the TV. Kurt hated the truck, hated the way his dad washed and polished that truck, loved it with his hands, when everything else his father touched ended up damaged.

They waited. His mom. Him. Staci. Waited to see which dad came through the door. They were pros. They could measure his blood-alcohol level based on the sound his keys made when he placed, dropped, slammed or slithered them onto the little table by the door. Slithered was better than slammed. Slithered meant he was too drunk to hurt anyone.

His dad came through the door. The keys slammed, shaking the little table.

"Let's all have some dinner," said his mother, trying to direct his father toward positive outcomes.

He glared at her. "What the fuck happened to 'nice to see you dear'?"

Nobody said anything. Nobody moved.

He was still locked on his wife. “Where the fuck’s my kiss? I work hard all day.” He threw off his cap. “I should get a fucking kiss when I get home.”

Kurt watched his mother prepare to approach the Beast. She took one step, then another. His father let her get close and gave her a crooked smile. Kurt couldn’t see if she smiled back. She stood on her toes, reached her head up and gently kissed her husband’s cheek, then slid her hand down his arm and took his hand. “I made meatloaf,” she said. “And gravy.”

He didn’t answer, just sort of half-shrugged, and mom lead him to the kitchen, with Kurt and Staci following. It was a bright yellow room with a square, scratched Formica table shoved towards the corner, with hardly any room for Kurt or Staci, especially for Kurt, now that he was growing.

His mother fixed a plate for his father and set it front of him.

“What the fuck is this?” He picked up the plate and threw it against the wall, just missing his wife’s head, only because experience had taught her to jump back. Gravy and bits of mashed potato splattered the wall, meatloaf and something green fell to the floor. The plate rattled on the linoleum and then fell silent.

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke. They waited.

His father turned his head to his mother, like a snake scouting prey. He held out his index finger and curled it in. She took a step toward him. He curled it again. She took another step. Kurt calculated. Their mother had put herself within striking distance.

The curl left the finger, the hand went flat and struck the side of his mother's face with a loud "Thwack," spun her head to the side. She brought her hand to her face and covered the hurt. The sting of the hit forced tears to her eyes. She kept her head turned and it looked like she was looking out the window, like maybe there was something worth seeing out there. Kurt knew when she finally dropped her hand, there would be a broad red handprint on her face.

Kurt stood up, as he had before. This is when he offered his body to his father in trade, as a punching bag. Trade her for me.

His father hadn't noticed, was still focused on his wife.

Kurt spoke. "Why don't you pick on somebody your own size?"

Now the beast swiveled his head, caught the fresh target, locked his angry eyes on his son, narrowed them, focused.

"Fuck off," said the father.

Kurt pressed his lips together. Breathed in. Prepared.

"No," said Kurt. "You fuck off."

Kurt was ready for a fist but what struck him was a foot that kicked his leg out from under him so fast he was on his back on the floor before he knew what happened. Kurt scrambled to get up. The floor was a place of vulnerability.

Kurt straightened himself, pulled his shoulders back, looked his father in the eye.

“Ooooh. Look who’s the big man now,” said the father.

Kurt said nothing. Kept his eyes locked on the enemy’s.

The father laughed. Looked down at his foot and chuckled. Then he brought his fist up fast and hit Kurt in the gut. Kurt doubled over and went down, clutching his belly, knowing the pain would spread outward and cover his whole body. His father never hit him or kicked him where the marks would show. Only the chest, the belly, the back, the butt.

Kurt struggled to get to his knees, managed to push himself to his feet, caught his breath with his hands on his knees, straightened. Wobbly.

“You still wanna fight?” He could hear his father clearly but knew depending on how long the beating lasted, eventually his ears would hear nothing, his eyes would see only black, with flashes of pain lightening.

In all the years the father had beaten the son, the son had never hit back, never kicked back. And once a strike had landed, the son never spoke. Kurt had decided he would not reduce himself to his father’s level. Instead, when the beatings happened, he pictured his father as slimy worm and himself as an eagle, flying high in the sky where his father couldn’t touch him.

Kurt looked at his mother, the red mark of the square hand plain on her face. He didn't see Staci, maybe she had fled. He hoped so. Even though his father never hit her, it was better not to watch.

Kurt studied the mark. He could see where the pinky finger was separated from the rest of the palm and that small little finger awoke something inside him. "You shouldn't hit Mom," the son said to the father.

His father rubbed his punching fist with his free hand. Maybe that hit to the gut had hurt him, too.

"It's my house," said the father. To prove it, he spat on the floor. "I'll hit anybody I want."

The father looked at the son and the slow smile that spread across the father's face frightened the son more than the fists and the kicks. The son saw it come, saw the fingers tight, knuckles white, skin stretched, curled hairs on the back of the knuckles. The aim was for his nose and he instinctively turned his head, too late. The punch flattened Kurt, landed him on his back, head ringing, hurting. He could taste blood in his mouth. Pain lighting flashed.

The father bent his knees, got close to Kurt's face. Maybe he liked the smell of blood. The ringing in Kurt's ears dropped, a little. It was overtaken by a flow through his body, electric, angry. Rage. He tried to sit up, but the Beast punched him in the chest and sent him back to the floor, saying something that Kurt couldn't hear. The red flow got louder, louder than whatever his father was saying, was doing.

The Beast lifted his leg for another kick. As it came, Kurt grabbed the ankle and pulled. His father went down hard on his back and Kurt smiled with a realization—he had felled his father. Kurt was bigger than he had ever been and he had taken his father down. The rage shifted, felt less red, felt more like light, like indignation and justice and it filled Kurt. He felt powerful. Righteous.

The father rolled over, pulled himself on top of Kurt, and wrenched his hands around Kurt's neck, squeezing hard. Kurt gasped for breath. His father had never choked him before. Kurt tried to push his father off but couldn't. He could see his father's teeth, so angry that they were biting into his tongue, drawing blood, blood seeping up into the grooves between the teeth. Kurt made his hands into fists and beat them on his father's back, over and over and over. He hit hard, hit with everything he had, hit until his arms grew tired, hit until the hands around his neck loosed and he could gasp a breath, hit until he could roll his father off him.

Kurt got up and ran. He had never hit his father, didn't know what was coming next. He ran out the front door, ran down the street to his girlfriend's house and pounded on the door. But BonnieJo's father was the one who opened it. He took one look at Kurt, bloody, his shirt ripped and what looked like a broken nose, and he told Kurt he couldn't see BonnieJo. He closed the door.

There was a fort back in the woods that Kurt and his friends had built when they were in eighth grade. Kurt went there. It was empty now but it had a plywood floor that was better than sleeping on the ground. Kurt laid down. He tried not to think because thinking hurt, and he tried not to feel because that hurt too. He slept a little, then waited until the dawn sun was high enough in the sky, high enough for his father to have gone to work.

When Kurt got home the screen door was locked. It was never locked. He rang the doorbell. He could hear someone coming and hoped it was Staci. He just wanted to take a shower and go to bed. The door opened. It was his mother. He could see through the mesh to the bruise on her cheekbone. She did not unlock the screen door. She said, “Sons don’t hit their fathers.” Kurt looked at her, looked for words to say but nothing came. She said, “You can’t stay here anymore,” and she closed the door.