

Eddie, Sixth Grade

A Game of Dodge Ball

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The bell rings, and math class is over. It's now off to lunch for Eddie, Mark, and Braden. As they walk out into the hallway, Braden asks the guys, "are we gonna play Kill the Man with the Ball today?" Mark informs Braden, "of course, we are. What else is there to do?" Braden replies, "that's a good point. There ain't much else to do around here after lunch." Doing homework or studying are not exactly on Braden's list. Eddie informs Braden, "I'm trying out for the track team in the Spring. So, I want to get as much running in as I can." Arriving at his locker, Eddie tells Mark and Braden, "I'll catch you guys in the lunchroom." Mark and Braden head to their respective lockers to dump off their books and pick up their lunch.

Meeting in the lunchroom, Eddie, Mark, and Braden take a seat along the window only because it affords a better view of outside. Opening the paper sack containing his lunch, Eddie pulls out a chicken breast, a bag of mixed vegetables, some homemade bread, and an apple for dessert. Forgoing the standard school lunch, Mark and Braden have also brought something healthy to eat.

Over lunch, Mark comments, "there's that shithead again. He's headed this way." Looking clear across the lunchroom and seeing the problem, Eddie replies, "there's something seriously wrong with that guy. I think he's retarded or something." Taking a seat at a table in the next row over, Charles Black sits alone eating his burger and French fries. Occasionally staring in the direction of Eddie and his friends, Eddie suspects that Chuckie, a

nickname given to Charles Black by Mark earlier this year, will somehow find a way to be a pain in the ass once again today.

Hearing thunder in a distance, Mark mentions, "it's getting dark out there." Eddie optimistically replies, "well, it ain't raining yet. We can still get a game of Kill the Man with the Ball in." Just then, a flash of lightning brightens up the lunchroom accompanied with a simultaneous crack of thunder. Braden exclaims, "I don't know about that! That was real close!" Still hopeful that they will get to go outside after lunch, Eddie replies, "we still have time. Hopefully, the storm will blow over."

Eddie's optimism fades when a sudden downpour dampens any thought of playing Kill the Man with the Ball today. Mark mentions, "this really sucks. I guess we'll be staying inside for gym class too." Braden mentions, "it sure looks like there ain't gonna be any football in gym today." Eddie asks Braden, "why not? The pros play in the rain. Why can't we?" Braden replies, "I can see it now. We come in from gym class all soaking wet and full of mud." Eddie tells Braden, "that's why they make showers and washing machines."

Interrupting the conversation, Mark informs Eddie and Braden, "here comes trouble." Chuckie walks up, telling Eddie, "what's the matter with you? Why don't you get a burger and fries like the rest of us?" Eddie tells Chuckie, "shut up, asshole." Chuckie boldly tells Eddie, "what did you just call me?" Eddie firmly tells Chuckie, "an asshole, junior. What? Are you deaf or something? Is the fat growing inside your ears now?" Chuckie shoves Eddie in his back, then slaps Eddie in his head. Eddie stands up, prompting Chuckie to quickly walk away. Eddie takes his seat, hoping to finish his lunch in peace.

Chuckie is the class bully and class dunce all rolled into one. When in elementary school, Chuckie used to pick on those who are a few years younger than he is. Apparently, the seventh and eighth graders are too formidable an opponent for Chuckie. Since school started this year, Chuckie has been bullying Eddie and Mark on a daily basis.

Eddie and Mark have been ignoring Chuckie, which, for some reason, makes Chuckie even more antagonistic. Eddie and Mark have no idea how they became Chuckie's prime targets.

Braden asks Eddie, "aren't you gonna kick his ass?" Eddie replies, "no. Not right now." Braden suggests, "you ought to drag his fat ass behind the school, and rough him up a little. Somebody needs to show that asshole who's boss." Eddie replies, "someday I will. Not right now, though." Braden reminds Eddie, "that guy is getting away with too much shit. Don't you remember during the first week of school, when he pulled the chair out from under you?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I told him I was going to kick his ass someday. And, I will. Just not right now." Braden asks, "why not?" Eddie replies, "I don't want to get suspended. I'll kick his ass when he's off school grounds." Agreeing with both Eddie and Braden, Mark mentions, "yeah. Kick his ass off school grounds. That makes a lot more sense."

Eddie, Mark, and Braden sit back and relax, watching as the storm dumps an entire inch of rain in one hour. It is now obvious that there will be no game of Kill the Man with the Ball today. And, there will be no football game outside in gym class today. With not much else to do, the three guys talk among themselves, and watch as others in the lunchroom do their homework, talk with their friends, or, as in the case of a few guys at the other end of the lunchroom, have an arm wrestling contest.

The bell rings, and it's off to gym class for Eddie, Mark, and Braden. As they are walking down the hall, Eddie stops at his locker, and tells Mark and Braden, "I'll catch you guys in the gym." Pressing the issue, Braden reminds Eddie, "I still think you should have kicked that guy's ass." Braden and Mark continue down the hall, discussing between themselves what an ass Charles Black is.

In the gym, the class is seated on the bleachers waiting for the physical education instructor, Mr. Harris, to walk in. While they are waiting, Eddie asks Daniel Gaspari, "who won the arm wrestling contest at lunch?" Gaspari replies,

“some guy named Gerald Beck. He’s on the football team. He also throws the shot-put for the track team. And, his older brother, John, is on the high school football team.” Daniel Gaspari is also on the football team, and plans to try out for the wrestling team in the Winter. Like Eddie, Mark, and Braden, Daniel Gaspari is one of the better athletes in the sixth grade.

Mr. Harris walks in and blows his whistle, gaining the immediate attention of the class. Mr. Harris, stating the obvious, announces, “today, since it is raining outside, we are going to be staying indoors. First, we will have a quick game of dodge ball. Then, we will break up and have two games of basketball. There are 24 of you in this class. The first twelve to be eliminated will be in one basketball game. The last twelve will be in the other basketball game.” Mr. Harris is trying to keep the competition fair by having the less skilled students play in one game, and the more athletic students play in another game. The game of dodge ball is how he will differentiate between the two groups. Mr. Harris announces, “Edward Bogenskaya and Mark Svoboda, you are the team captains.”

Eddie and Mark walk onto the gym floor. Using rock - paper - scissors to see who chooses first, Eddie puts out a rock, and Mark puts out scissors. Eddie announces, “I pick Braden.” Mark announces, “I’ll take Gaspari.” Selections continue for a minute or two, until one person is left. That lone person is Charles Black, who will be on Mark’s team. Eddie whispers to Mark, “if it looks like I’m the last man standing, save the Chuckie for me, and don’t let him get hit.” Mark asks, “why?” Eddie replies, “I’m taking him out.” Mark smiles, gives Eddie a fist bump, and tells him, “you got it.”

Returning to his team, Eddie then whispers to Braden, “Mark is going to make sure Chuckie doesn’t go down early.” Braden asks, “why?” Eddie replies, “because I’m going to take him out in this game. And, we’ll take him out on the basketball court next.” Braden grins, and replies, “I like that idea!” Eddie then tells his team, “whatever you do, don’t go after Chuckie.” Eddie’s team agrees, having no idea what Eddie has up his sleeve.

The dodge ball game begins. As in any middle school dodge ball game, a few of the less athletic types are quickly eliminated. Once the requisite twelve have fallen, Mr. Harris assigns two team captains, and the B team begins their basketball game on the other side of the gym. As the dodge ball game continues among the A team, the more athletic students are eliminated slowly compared with the first group. Chuckie cannot figure out why he has not yet been eliminated.

The end of the dodge ball game draws near. On one side, Eddie and Braden remain. On the other side, Mark and Chuckie are still standing. Eddie hurls the ball at Mark, who evades getting hit. Braden, who wants a front row seat when Eddie takes out Chuckie, whispers to Eddie, "I'm gonna go out, and let you take his ass down." Mark throws the ball at Braden, who pretends to evade the ball, but gets hit. With Braden eliminated, Eddie takes the ball, bounces it a few times, and hurls it straight at Mark. Mark attempts to catch the ball, but intentionally drops it. With Mark now eliminated, it is Eddie versus Chuckie.

Chuckie procures the ball, and throws it across court to Eddie as hard as he can. The ball takes a few lame bounces before reaching Eddie, indicative of Chuckie's total lack of athletic ability. Eddie scoops up the ball and bounces it a few times, examining his target. Eddie takes aim and, with all his strength, hurls the ball straight on at Chuckie. Seeing the ball about to hit him, Chuckie evades the ball by dropping to his knees and ducking. Great fear comes over Chuckie as he sees the ball about to strike his face. Chuckie turns his head to the left and puts his hands over his eyes. The ball smashes into Chuckie's head, which, in turn, slams Chuckie's head against the concrete wall. Chuckie goes down, and goes down hard. Seeing Chuckie laying motionless on the ground, Eddie announces, "we won!"

Mr. Harris rushes over to aid Chuckie, finding that he is unconscious. Eddie walks over to Mark and Braden, who exchange a high-five among themselves. As Mr. Harris is trying to arouse Chuckie, Braden whispers to Eddie, "he ain't moving. It looks to me like his ass is dead." Eddie

replies, "that's his problem. He shouldn't have ducked." Mark replies, "yeah. That was stupid of him." As expected from sixth graders, many students are wondering if Chuckie is still alive. Others are wondering whether an ambulance should be called.

Mr. Harris announces, "I'll be right back," and rushes to the locker room. Returning with a cup of cold water, Mr. Harris splashes the water onto Chuckie's face. Chuckie slowly regains consciousness, at a loss to figure out what just happened. In a stupor, Chuckie attempts to stand up, and is barely able to stay vertical. Suspecting that Chuckie has suffered a concussion, Mr. Harris instructs two students to escort Chuckie to the nurse's office.

Once Chuckie is gone, Braden tells Eddie, "I thought that was the end of the road for Chuckie! I can't believe his ass just blacked out like that." Eddie replies, "he's weak. It doesn't take much." Mark points out, "now we know how to get that asshole back without getting suspended." Eddie replies, "yeah. We'll just keep taking him out in gym class." Also being bullied by Chuckie for the last two months, Mark tells Eddie and Braden, "next time, he's mine." Eddie replies, "you got it."

Later that evening, Chuckie's mother, Kathryn Black, calls Eddie's mother, Nina, on the phone. Giving Nina a piece of her mind, Mrs. Black, over and over again, boldly informs Nina what a bully Eddie is. Eddie listens to the conversation from the living room as he does his homework, hearing Mrs. Black yelling and screaming at the other end of the phone. From Eddie's perspective, Mrs. Black seems to be upset that Eddie threw a ball at her son, and knocked him out. Nina holds the phone in the air, letting Mrs. Black scream at the wind.

Having enough of the one-sided conversation, Nina finally tells Mrs. Black, "why don't you jump in a lake, Kathryn? Wait. No. On second thought, you'd better not do that. It might cause a tsunami." Not liking Nina's comment in the least, Mrs. Black continues to rant and carry on. Nina hangs up the phone, not wanting to deal with Mrs. Black's temper tantrum any longer.

Eddie continues to do his homework, waiting for his mother to say something to him. Fifteen minutes go by, and Eddie hears not a word. Eddie walks into the kitchen to get something to eat, asking his mother, "who was that yelling on the phone?" Eddie's mother replies, "that was the Kathryn Black. She was upset that her son lost the dodge ball game in class." Eddie replies, "yeah. His team lost." Eddie gets back to doing his homework, clearly knowing that he is not in any trouble.