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Twenty Years and Let It Fly

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"What's his name?" I asked the assembled gang.

"Dinklehoff!" replied Sniffer (so named because of his continually running nose).

"Dinklehoff! Boy with a name like that, will he get lumped. What's his old man do?"

"He bought out Fink's corset place in the market."

At this point, Russian spoke up, "Hey, I like that. I'd work for nothing. Hell, I'd pay him."

"What would you know about it, Russian? You're too young anyhow."

"I keep telling you, Lippy, I ain't Russian, I'm Polish."

"Oh yeah, that stuff you babble with your old lady sounds like Russian."

"How would you know? Your English ain't the greatest and besides I'm only a year younger than you, but I'm in the same grade as you in school, and about women, I wouldn't be too proud of being Cock-Eyed Jenny's boyfriend if I was you."

This was a long speech for Russian and the boys were laughing at me. I had to change the subject in a hurry or I was through. They wouldn't take orders from anybody they could laugh at.

"O.K., Sniffer, go collect the kid, Dinklehoff. The rest of you guys go find some garbage; we're gonna play 'Twenty years and let it fly'."

Chuck, the fattest boy in the bunch, and Ben Blue, who was always blowing his nose, nodded their heads in approval. Even from Russian came, "Good idea, Lippy, we ain't had an initiation in months."

I felt great, I was still boss.

The boys with the garbage came back first.

"Hey, couldn't you get anything besides tin cans?"

"Naw," Ben Blue complained. "The first chance in a week to have
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some fun and the lousy Department of Sanitation has to do their duty for a change."

"I got a cat," announced Russian.

"A live one?"

"Nah, it's deader n'hell. You think I wanna get all scratched up? It smells pretty bad too," he added, holding it up by the tail for our inspection.

"OK, let's get over to old lady Rubin's stoop and hide this stuff. Here comes Sniffer with the kid."

We had everything set by the time Sniffer came up and we could see that Dinklehoff didn't look too happy about the whole deal.

"What's all this stuff about an initiation?"

"We always have an initiation when a new kid moves around," I replied.

At this he looked even more uneasy. "What do I have to do?"

"Not a thing. We're just gonna have a trial. You'll be the judge. Sniffer will be the prosecutor, and Ben Blue is the defendant. The rest of us is the jury."

"Then what happens?"

"Ya see, we holds a trial and when we find the defendant guilty, I'll ask you for the sentence and you say: 'Twenty years and let it fly'."

Dinklehoff seemed puzzled, but eager to be accepted. He agreed to this and sat down on the stoop we were using.

"Prosecutor," I snapped.

Sniffer stepped forward. "I charge the defendant Ben Blue with stealing fruit from Garfinkle's and breaking the bakery window with his BB gun."

"Defendant, what have you got to say?" I asked.
"Nothing," Ben Blue responded.

"Jury, what's the verdict?"

"Guilty," they screamed.

"Judge, please pronounce sentence."

Dinklehoff got up and spoke his piece: "Twenty years and let it fly!"

We picked up the stuff we had hidden and started heaving it at him.

There was a loud crash. We stopped, frightened, (but not too frightened to admire our handiwork). One of the cans had broken a window in the house behind Dinklehoff. The cat was draped around his neck like a fur collar, but the laughter died quickly when we saw that one of the cans had torn open his forehead above the left eyebrow. We stood there, entranced by the steady flow of blood down his cheek. He stared back at us out of one eye, the cat still slung around his neck. Then the door behind him opened and Mrs. Rubin came out. Dinklehoff and Mrs. Rubin looked at each other. He started crying, she started screaming, and I started running.

I became separated from the gang and it was many hours before I went home that evening. Apparently my parents hadn't heard of the bloody eye and when I went right into bed without any supper, my mother tried to take my temperature to see if I was sick.

I avoided the gang for the next couple of days until I finally decided that nothing was going to happen. Then I walked around the corner and right smack into Dinklehoff. He was a sight. He had so many stitches it seemed as if he had two left eyebrows, one directly above the other. No use running, might just as well find out what he was planning on doing.

"Hi, Dink. How're ya doing?"

"Oh, pretty good."

He started talking - wildly, eagerly. It dawned on me, "This kid is sick in the head." All he wanted from me was to know when we were going to initiate someone else. It seems he had, not one, but two dead cats stashed away for the occasion.