

Chapter 1: The Move

Day 1

It seemed like an easy choice to make. I didn't really have another option if I wanted to retain my dignity and reputation, but then again, I don't really care about my reputation, and if you ask my dad, I don't even have dignity. But I don't care about what others think of me. I know what you're thinking. I'm your typical cliché 17 year old kid who has problems with authority. Is it my fault that society is crumbling beneath my feet? I'm merely a product of decent home with moderate affection that contain two semi-aware parents and a dog. A real piece of work created and fashioned in God's image to prove that God, too, makes mistakes. Does that make God human? To err is human. So if God made humans, and to err is human, and we are made in God's image, then to err is God.

"Mrs. Vincent is here to see you," spoke the overweight secretary as she peered through the door inside of the principals office. I really wish I had remembered her name. It was one of those really foreign European names that sounded dirty in normal English.

"Please let her in," Principal Schultz said in a manner that sounded too familiar. The ten seconds it took for my mother to walk in felt like an eternity. I'm used to it. My mother entered the room as if she too were in trouble. She's already fairly sheepish in her demeanor. Most women are. What can I say, it's 1963. The look of disappointment on her face gave her extra wrinkles. Dad often makes comments about that face she makes when

she's upset and told her to stop it otherwise she would age faster than him.

"Thank you for coming down, Mrs. Vincent," he said cleaning his glasses. "Please grab a seat."

"Mom, I didn't do nothing!" I proclaimed before anyone started to speak. Probably a bad idea. Definitely a bad idea. People who are not innocent proclaim their innocence. I guess so do people who are innocent.

"Anything," responded Principal Schultz.

"What?" Mom and I said it together.

"You didn't do anything," he said with an emphasis on the last word.

"So, we good to go then since I didn't do 'anything'?"

"I was correcting your grammar. Two negatives together cancel each other and make a positive." He waited for a response from either one of us, but I'm sure mom was just as confused as I was.

"Never mind," he exhaled as he sat down. He paused and looked at us as if waiting for someone to speak. I didn't want to say something else stupid. Mom crossed her pinkies together, as she usually does in these types of situations. I first noticed that when we were at my grandfather's funeral two years ago. Those two pinkies did not break apart the entire three hours. It's as if her pinkies were Atlas holding up her emotions and if they were pried apart, the world would collapse.

"William hit another kid," he began, "that's the third time this month." He was still cleaning his glasses.

"Is this true, Billy?" Mom gave me that same look she gives dad when he travels last minute for work.

"He started it," I defended. "He called John Papadapolis a fairy and knocked his milk from his hands--"

"And that was an excuse to give Michael a bloody nose?" Principal Schultz cut me off. Adults like to cut me off, usually followed by an accusation without causation.

"Again, Billy?" Mom uttered in slight shock. Slight.

"I didn't give him a bloody nose," I began the same explanation I gave Principal Schultz earlier. "After I saw Mike do what he did, I told him to knock it off and he came for me so I pushed him out of the way and he slipped on the milk on the floor and hit his face on the ground. I swear that's the truth."

"That's not how Michael told it," he interjected.

"And he's the one with the broken nose, not you. I'm sorry, William, but I have no choice but to suspend you."

"But--," I tried again to speak up.

"No buts. This is the third time this month and I can't even begin to count how many times you've sat on this chair since the year started." Principal Schultz adjusted his desk plaque with his name written on it. The slight relocation revealed a different shade of wood, possibly due to the dust collecting on his desk.

"But--," I repeated myself.

"But what, Mr. Vincent?"

"But earlier you said two negatives cancel each other out." I need to find those moments in life where silence is the optimal choice because the look he gave me was deafening.

"Please wait outside. I need to speak with your mother."

I walked out of his office to a waiting room where that same overweight secretary perched like a fat pigeon chick waiting for scraps. I sat across from her on a bench that could easily sit three of me, or one of her. She ate some strawberry yogurt with a silver spoon while she worked on her typewriter with one hand. Never had I seen a person type so fast with one hand, as if she trained for years to multitask with food. I scanned her desk for that funny name. I found her plaque: Mierzwa. I guess it's not as funny as I originally thought.

"How's the yogurt, Miss Mie-May-Miz--," I struggled to actually pronounce her name.

"Just call me Cathy," she responded with a mouthful of yogurt. "With a C, not a K."

"How do you pronounce Cathy with a K?" I questioned.

"I don't know. Just know that's not the correct way." She let out an artery clogging cackle that was kind of cute. That was the moment that I realized I really needed to stop asking stupid questions because they reveal the intelligence of others, or lack thereof, despite how cute their laugh may be. She continued on with her yogurt and typing. I continued with my inner thoughts. At 17 most of what is happening inside of here are girls and how to not pop one in class. The rest of my mind is consumed by thoughts of not wanting to be here. Not wanting to be in this chair. Not wanting to be in this school. This city. This world. The door opened and my mother walked out of the principals office.

"Thank you Mr. Schultz," She said as the door was closing. I could see Mr. Schultz sitting behind his desk

looking straight at me. I winked. I don't know why I winked, but I did it anyway. I felt a hand on my shoulder pushing me toward the exit.

"Good bye," my mother said to Cathy responding with a series of garbled words muffled by her yogurt.

"Later, Cathy with a C," I waved as we exited. Mom kept her hand on my shoulder through our entire walk back to her car. She did not say a word. We walked by Mr. Glassman's English class. He liked to keep the door open during class hours in the Summertime. John Papadapolis sat at the front attentively starring at the chalkboard. I got in trouble for defending this kid. Sure, he was a fairy, but he didn't deserve to get his milk knocked from his hands. He turned to face me as I started to leave his view and for a split second I saw a smile, but mom continued to push me, still not saying a word. We got to her car and I waited for her to find the keys in her purse. It took her a minute to locate them, as usual, which gave me time to look at the cloud formation in the sky. I used to like clouds. Majestic beasts that appeared and disappeared as they please. They have the power to protect and to destroy. Like floating gods in the sky, except to cloud isn't to err.

"Get inside, now," her voice went from sheepish to stern. "What the hell are you thinking? Hitting another kid!"

"I did not hit him! I told you he slipped on the milk and hit his nose. Mike is the bully in this situation, not me." I can't seem to explain my good deeds to adults. They tend to get lumped in with the misdeeds of others.

“I find it so hard to believe you nowadays,” she started. “I don’t know what I’ll even do with you, William.”

She never calls me William. Never.

“What do you want from me?” I raised my voice.

“To stop acting like this!” Her voice is now louder than me. Raspier too. “To stop being this menace. I don’t know how much energy I have to come to your school and speak with your principal.”

“Why not? It’s not like you have a job like dad does.” This is another one of those times I spoke and shouldn’t have. That was the last thing that was said in the car. She started it and drove us both home. When mom didn’t speak, I knew well enough that dad would. Shit.

When we arrived home, dad’s car was already in the driveway, which was weird because we normally don’t expect him until night time. I jumped off the car and ran inside. I like my relationship with him, even though he’s kind of an asshole. In fact, he’s a big asshole to everyone who lives in this house. He cares enough to make sure I have things I need but not enough to care about anything else. He criticizes me for being a teenager and I’m sure he’ll criticize me for being an adult. He works all the time and after spending the past 17 years with my mom, I don’t really blame him.

“Dad!” I shouted. He quickly shushed me when I entered his line of sight. I saw him on the phone with a notepad and pencil. Our dog, Sammy, came running toward me like a clumsy pile of clothes. He’s overweight, has no coordination, and could drown Abraham trying to cross the Red Sea with the amount of saliva this beast

produces. Not that I don't like him, I do, but this dog demands so much attention. Thankfully when my mother is around he gravitates toward her. He likes her, then me, then his tennis ball, then my dad. That's the Vincent family dog hierarchy. And he smells.

"Yeah. No, I got it. 19220 Old North Rd, Cockeysville." Dad is wrote something down on a piece of paper by the counter. He fidgeted with several small spools of thread and one needle in a small golden plate.

"How far is that from Baltimore? Oh that's not too bad. Two weeks? Yeah I can do that. Thank you, Mr. Knight."

Mom entered just as dad was hanging up the phone. She put her purse down on the ottoman near the front entrance and most of the contents of her bag fell to the ground, startling Sammy in the process who runs underneath the kitchen table near dad.

"Who was that, honey? She asked while trying to pick up empty lipstick tubes and spools of thread.

"That was Mr. Knight," dad responded. "I have some exciting news to tell."

"We've got some news of our own, don't we Billy?" Mom turned to look at me motioning for me to tell dad what happened earlier today.

"I think dad has some great news that I am dying to hear. You go first, dad."

"Alright then," dad said. He cleared his throat. He always clears his throat when he speaks to mom about work stuff. "I got promoted to run the new office they are about to open."

"That's wonderful news, Charles!" She clasped her hands even though they were holding half of the junk in her purse.

"Only thing is that it's in Baltimore and we move in two weeks," he responded as he began to gather his things and started to head to their room.

"Two weeks?" Mom exclaimed. "That's not enough time to get things in order, get movers, sell the house." Mom also does this thing when she gets overwhelmed her breath becomes shorter. She grew up in a town that was hit pretty hard by the Dust Bowl and claims it gave her asthma, or so she says. I'm sure it's an excuse to cover her lack of brain capacity she has to process unpleasant situations.

"Don't worry, honey," dad tried to reassure and calm her down. "The company is taking care of all of our arrangements. They'll even get someone to help us sell the house. What do you think about moving, champ?"

I wasn't sure if he was talking to me or Sammy, but I spoke up for both of us. How dare he make this decision for all of us? Take me away from the place I've called home for the past 17 years! My friends, my neighbors, my room! This is the worst thing you as a father could ever do to your son.

"I don't care," I said lackadaisically as I began walking upstairs to room.

"Hang on there, mister," she stopped me with her tone. "William was sent to the principal's office again today."

Dad's excitement melted away. Even Sammy could feel it because he ran to hide behind my mother. Dad isn't

one to punish, but he knows how to make you feel like a worthless human being from time to time. Sometimes you don't even have to get in trouble to be showered with such affection. These are the times I don't like my relationship with dad. He walked over to me in an eerily calm manner.

"Sit down," he said to me. His teeth didn't part when he spoke. I hesitated but he didn't budge, so I obliged. I looked over to mom to let her know that she caused what I was about to happen. I couldn't tell who was more scared: me, my mother, or Sammy.

"We are moving to a new state. A new city. You will make new friends, go to a different school, experience a different life," dad said this in a tone I was not familiar with. "When we arrive to Cockeysville, you will become a different person. You will become a kid who respects his father and respects his mother. A kid who respects his teachers and his elders. The very second I hear otherwise, I will make sure you regret every bad decision you have ever made and will ever make."

I starred at him. He starred at me. Sammy starred at mom. The grandfather clock got louder. There were so many words I wanted to say to that man. My fists were clenched under my legs so tight I began to lose circulation to my fingers. I got up and began to head upstairs.

"Don't forget to start packing," dad said as I stormed upstairs. I began to slam my door but something took over inches from the hinge and I quietly closed it instead.

Charles walked over to grab his briefcase and collect the papers he had scattered on the dining room table. Joan walked over and stands next to her husband.

“Are we doing the right thing with him?” She asked.

“That boy needs discipline,” Charles responded. “He runs around like he owns this house and you allow him to do so.”

Joan put her hands on Charles’ shoulders, but he shrugged her off and continued to collect the papers on the table. Joan looked visibly upset, but Charles paid little attention to her. She grabbed the little note that Charles was writing on.

“Cockeysville,” she reads the note. “I thought I heard you say we were moving to Baltimore.”

“It’s close to it,” he responded. “About 30 minutes from Baltimore by car.”

“Do you know if there’s a fabric store nearby?” Joan asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe, why?” Charles collected all of his things and locked the briefcase.

“You know why,” Joan feebly responded. Her pinkies crossed again.

“Oh, that. We can find out once we get there.” Charles didn’t seem as worried as Joan did. He left the room leaving Joan alone with Sammy.

“19220 Old North Road,” Joan continued reading the note. She folded it and sat it back on the counter. Her eyes caught the small plate on the counter top with the spools of thread. She noticed that they were organized with the light colored spools to the right and the dark colored spools to the left. She mixed them back together.

Day 13

I'm not entirely against this. The part of me that is against this is the part that is against what my dad is for. The part of me that is for this is the part that is for what my mother is against. Does that make me a psychopath? Does that even make sense? When I was in the third grade I found a frog injured in the playground. Part of its hind leg was ripped off and you could tell that the clump of guts hanging out of its mouth maybe was a sign that it was a feral cat away from dying anyway so I put it out of its misery, or that was my original intend. I couldn't find a way to actually kill it. I tried stepping on it but the fucking frog would just flatten like a pancake so I got my pocket knife out and severed its head. A frog with no head means no brain, which means dead, but no. That frog continued to jump around headless. Even the head looked like it was still breathing. So I began to chop it up. Two parts may be able to live independent of each other, but 20 parts couldn't. At least that was the conclusion 8 year old Billy came to. Sally, the class snitch, caught me trying to bury the body parts in our schools garden and caused such a storm you would've thought it was her I was cutting up and burying among the sunflowers. I spent the next six months with a therapist trying to diagnose me with some sort of serial killer disorder. Adults think they can slap a half-assed, not thought out consensus of a problem because they studied two fucked up people and diagnose their patients as if they were clones of these two still fucked up people. Thus I became the subject of their questioning to find out if I, too, was a clone of those two

fucked up people all because I tried to save a frog from pain and instinctively cut it up into pieces! In the end, they couldn't diagnose me with anything and my dad was out of pocket several thousands of dollars. It was a win-win for me.

Tomorrow will be the big day. We finally get to move to whatever new shithole Dad wanted to take us to. Not that I hate living in Chicago. The city is fine. I hate everyone here, but the city is fine. Our house sold a few days ago. Dad's company worked fast in working this deal. It's almost as if they were trying to get us out of Illinois as fast as possible. Mom and Dad on the other hand have been arguing since the day he announced we were moving. Mom isn't very good at arguing since she gets quiet when you say something she considers an insult. She got mad at Sammy once for barking at her while trying to take him out for a walk. He got the infamous silent treatment for two days. The thing about her is that she grew up on a farm in Nebraska in the 20s right before the Depression hit. People don't understand what being poor is like until you are considered poor even among the other poor. That's what Joan Anne Vincent says to me when I ask for anything. She can't get rid of that mentality, even though dad's an executive and she drives a '63 Buick Riviera and I'm still stuck riding a bike, but at least it's red and it's got a horn on it. Speaking of horns, Principal Schultz rescinded my suspension after dad called and spoke with him. There was only a week and half left of school. I'm so glad dad thought of me and sent me back to school to finish up that precious week we had left. Thanks dad.

I had a dream last night. A weird one. I dreamt I was stuck inside of a bathroom. White tiles, pedestal sink, clawfoot bathtub, pretty typical, and yet there was something off about the bathroom. Everything was white except for this small void in the corner. I call it a void because it wasn't a color, but instead the lack of colors. As if a blackhole somehow made itself inside the bathroom. The void would pulse like a heartbeat. It was alive. Breathing. Growing. I noticed something strange going on inside and surrounding the void. Hair-like shadows began to escape the void, anchoring themselves around the white tile, causing the tile to turn shades darker, and the ceramic glaze to peel away like burnt skin. It started to smell like it too; an awful odor. The void began to pulse faster, and grow thicker, now covering not just a corner of the bathroom, but that entire wall in darkness. By now the white has turned charcoal and the odor smelled like piles of rotting bodies being burned just outside. I started to hear a hum. Not like a human humming, but a much deeper reverberation. I couldn't just hear it, but feel it too. The louder it got, the more my bones reacted. It sounded like nothing I had heard of before, then all of the sudden, nothing. No hum. No sounds. Just the drumming of my heart. A thick, dense shadow talon poked out from the void, toward me across from the deformity I was watching. Even though I could make out this eerily obvious shape, I could still see through it. I wanted to scream, but no sound would come out. I wanted to run, but my body was transfixed in horror, or fascination. I wanted to shut my eyes, but my lids were glued open. The shadow talon would contort itself toward me, splitting

from one to several intertwining shadows, twisting and turning as it reached inches from my face. I open my mouth to scream, but I was suppressed by the shadow, muffling any possible notion of a sound, as I inhaled it through my now gaping esophagus and it entered me. I was being consumed by the shadow. I couldn't breath. I couldn't close my mouth. I couldn't shut my eyes. All I could do was to allow this to happen; allow to be devoured, then a distant knocking echoed inside the bathroom and a faint voice of a woman is heard, not enough to make out what she was saying, but enough to know it was a woman. The knocking got louder, as did the woman's voice. The bathroom door opened, which startled the shadow into escaping my body, back into its lair, shrinking the void into the size of a freckle on the wall. My blurred vision could make out a shadow of a woman wearing white approaching me.

"Hello," the mystery woman spoke. "Wake up." She shook me and then I woke up to my mom standing over me.

"It's late and you haven't even packed up your stuff yet," mom shouted as she left my room.

That was the strangest dream. I can still feel the horror I sensed in that bathroom. I can still feel a shadow inside of me. I have to put my mind into something else, like packing, or that magazine under my bed. I'll pack later.

Day 14

“Goddamnit, aren’t you done packing yet?” Shouted my sweet, old father. I know it was mom who told him I wasn’t done and I know it was Sammy that led her up to my room to rat me out. Never in my life have I wanted to yell so many expletives to him more than I do now. That’s a lie. I’m always down to give that man my middle finger, but I learned at an early age to use a solid barrier between my phalange and his face, like a pillow, a door, or Sammy.

“We are literally leaving in one hour,” he continued his shouting. “If you are not done you will be walking all the way to Cockeysville.”

Cockeysville, ugh. It sounds like a dump, but I am ready to sleep in a bed again. The movers came yesterday to pick up the furniture and I was forced to sleep in a sleeping bag.

“I’m almost ready!” I shouted back at the same intensity to match his. I wasn’t almost ready, but I wasn’t ready to find out if his threat was empty, like my suitcase. Ha! That would’ve set him off. Screw this. I grabbed a few duffle bags from closet and just started to shove items inside of them. I’ll fold my shirts when I get to our new house. I have a pile of dirty clothes in one corner, and an obvious pile of clean clothes in the other corner, or were the clean clothes in that corner, and the dirty clothes in that other corner? I can’t spend too much time trying to separate the clean from the unclean, Catholicism already has that covered. Deep underneath another pile I found an old box I forgot I had. I tend to keep things that belong in the trash. My door opened without a knock. Rude.

“Honey, do you need any help?” Mom peaked her head in to offer her assistance, but I have too many things I don’t want her to see, so I had to politely decline.

“No,” I responded. Simple, cold, and emotionless.

“Well, at least can I help you take out what you are throwing away?”

“Yeah,” I said without looking up. “That’s fine.”

She began gathering the trash I had laying around the room and putting it in a black trash bag.

“What’s that?” She asked when she saw the box I was holding.

“Trash.” I responded as I handed the box to her.

“Oh, that’s heavy,” she seemed surprised. “What’s in here?”

“Just junk I don’t want anymore.” She took the box and the black trash bag downstairs to the garbage bin. Sammy walked in and sniffed around my room and then left.

I’m ready to move to Shitteysville.

William (Billy) Vincent Interview

When were you born?

I was born in 1946 right after the War. My dad didn't fight in any war though. He claimed to have bone spurs. His best friend's dad was also a doctor. You do the math.

Where did you grow up?

We grew up right outside of Chicago. It was technically a suburb but we were so close to the city I was basically a city kid. Was it a shit town? Not really. Did I enjoy living there? Not really.

What are your hobbies?

I loved music when I was younger. I would put on a record and listen to all of the good stuff, but I don't do that stuff anymore. I put all of that shit in the trash.

What is your opinion on Religion?

Religion is dumb. We go to church some Sundays and I listen in, but I never found any truth to a man being sent to get reborn on earth from an alleged virgin just to die again because his ghost father said so. That just doesn't make any logical sense if you really think about it.

What is your opinion of Civil rights?

Not many of my "friends" agree with me, but I believe everyone should have equal opportunity. I'm no civil rights advocate or anything like that, but I wouldn't kick out a negro from sitting on the lunch counter or anything like that. I just don't like confrontation.

Do you have a best friend?

No

Did you do well in school?

I don't want to talk about that.

Do you work? If so, what is your profession?

I'm 17. Getting up in the morning is plenty work already.

Do you watch TV?

We have a TV but there isn't much on that I like. I do like the Twilight Zone and Mr. Ed sometimes. Mom watches a lot of Mr. Ed, though.

Do you think ghosts exist?

I don't know man, I've heard some stories when I was younger, but I haven't experienced anything myself. Well...never mind.

Tell me something interesting about you.

Like what?

Anything

I sometimes go by Billy.

Is that the most interesting thing about you?

I have a scar on my left shoulder the length of a railroad spike.

Do you have any enemies?

You can't have enemies when you don't have any friends.

What was your childhood like?

Normal, I guess. I don't like moving but here we are about to move across the country. I guess there's nothing I'm leaving behind. That's the beauty of having nothing to begin with.

Do you get along with your family?

Eh, they're alright. I don't spend too much time with my dad since he's always working. I spend too much time with my mom since she doesn't really work.

Have you ever witness a murder?

No. What kind of question is this?

If you were alone in an island, what three items would you take with you?

A blanket so I don't stay cold, a book to read maybe, and I don't know what else to take. Shoes, I guess.

What do you think of your neighbors?

I guess we'll find out.