

Zach Toohey

Age 15

Mohawks of Kanehsatake

Ratiheñ:te High School

Kanehsatake, QC

Residential School Nightmares

Jackson Nelson sat up, drenched in cold sweat. He had just had a nightmare again, the same one he's had since he was 11. He glanced around the room, his eyes wide as dinner plates. He's gone to countless psychiatrists, even going as far as hypnosis. Nothing had worked though.

"What's wrong honey?" his wife asked.

"Oh nothing, I'm fine," he replied.

"Okay," and she rolled back over and drifted off to sleep again.

Jackson walked to the bathroom and rinsed his face in cold water, and went to lay down again.

Why did it happen to me, he thought as he went back to sleep.

He felt awake now, but his surroundings were vastly different. Instead of his white-and-beige room, he woke to a flickering light, and barely illuminated grey walls and carpet that looked older than him. He heard a sharp pounding on the door. "WAKE UP!" He didn't dare respond, but silently got dressed. He heard the deadbolt on his door click, and he saw Sister Chloe walk in. "Get out here, now." He hurried out, but she tripped him as he was walking out. "Now why'd you do that, dumbass? Come with me after roll call, I need you for something." *Oh no, what's she gonna do?* He looked up and heard "John Richardson.... JOHN RICHARDSON, GET OUT HERE!" He saw them open the door, but they didn't need to unlock it, because it had been broken that night. John (Jackson's best friend) had told him the day before that he was going to get out that night or die trying. So apparently John had escaped this hellhole. Surprisingly, they actually cared enough to call the headmaster, but they also went on with the roll call.

“Jackson Nelson!” He looked up at Sister Lisa with fear in his eyes, and she just laughed and walked away. Roll call finished soon after that, and he waited for Sister Chloe in the hallway.

Sister Chloe came and got him after about 5 minutes. “Come with me, I have a surprise for you!” Due to Jackson’s naivety, he actually got excited about what was coming, because he didn’t know the evil that was in this woman’s heart. They went down the stairs to the basement, and then they made a beeline to an unoccupied room. She slammed the door. “SIT DOWN!” He practically dove into the chair, scared out of his mind. He had the guts to ask her, “What kind of surprise do you have for me?” in a very quiet, shaking, almost mouse-like voice. “Oh a very good one, you’ll like it.” She opened the closet door and pulled something out. Jackson couldn’t tell what it was when she first got it out, but he could tell it wasn’t good. As she walked closer, he made out what it was. It was a whip! “Stand up,” she said. He stood up, shivering, feeling like he was about to faint. She wound up; his heart was about to burst out of his chest. The whip made contact, and obviously, a young boy’s skin and a whip are not a harmonious union. No matter what solution would come to him, nothing would work, the blows kept coming. Ribs, back, stomach, back again, *will it ever stop?* She kept whipping and whipping, eventually the pain became too much. His eyes became cloudy with tears, and he screamed, louder than he’d ever screamed before, a scream for absolution. Between all of the whippings, and the strength it took to utter that scream, he passed out, hitting the floor with a dull thud.

He awoke right back up though, as she was carrying/dragging him up the stairs. The fear shot right through him again, and he fainted again. When he finally regained consciousness, he was sitting on his bed, with Sister Chloe standing at the door. “If you tell a soul about this, so help me God I’ll whip you until I can see bone. Go to class.” He proceeded to go to his classes, and then went back to sleep that night, having a nightmare about the mornings events.

The next day, he woke up before the sun was up. He just sat up in his bed, shaking. About 3 hours later, he heard Sister Chloe outside of his door, unlocking it. “Wait for me again, I’ll come and get you.” They went through roll call again and he was called, but was scared, shaking like a leaf as he waited for Sister Chloe. This time was

different however because Sister Lisa was with her. “Come on, it’s okay Jackson.” Instead of going to the basement, they went upstairs, to Sister Chloe’s room. Sister Lisa locked the door behind them, and they both started beating him. He wanted to hit them back so badly, but he knew it would have to wait, because it would be futile with how strong he is now. *How would I, an 11-year-old, be able to fight off a fully-grown woman?* He stayed awake all night, thinking about what he would do. Finally he decided he would break out, like his best friend did. He wasn’t quite sure how he would do it, but figured that anything would be better than this. He went out to roll call, and Sister Chloe told him to wait again, and he did. She took him down to the basement, but he had thought this through now. She went to get the whip, and he said “No.”

“Excuse me?” said Chloe.

“I SAID NO!” Jackson said, and ran out of the room.

His heart was pounding as he raced to the doors.

Where do I go, where do I go?

The truth was there wasn’t really a place to go. Where would an 11-year-old Indian boy be able to find refuge in Quebec, while he’s running from the authorities of a residential school? The truth was, the only way he could get home is to find a reservation, because those are the only other people who truly know the hell that is a residential school. He was in the middle of the woods now, but it ached every step he took, from where he had been whipped. He knew however, if he went back, he would almost certainly be beaten. He wouldn’t let it happen again. He walked for what seemed like an eternity, until he saw lights. He turned towards them and started running. He saw a gas station and ran in. Now that he stopped, he couldn’t walk and collapsed. He woke up on a bed, and saw a native man tending to him. His strength was drained however; he just had the energy to say “...Red.... Lake...” before darkness took its hold. He could tell he was in a car, but couldn’t see sharp enough to see what he was doing. When he finally had slept enough to regain strength, he sat up and saw his mom and dad. His mom nearly had a heart attack; and his dad hugged him.

BUZZ! His alarm clock went off, he shot up with a start. Again he was reminded of his tragic youth, but he knew he would make it through. He has tried everything you

can try; it just doesn't work. The memories he has, they're like a stain or spill. The longer you leave them to settle, the harder it'll be to take them out.