

FINAL BELL

by

DAMOND FUDGE

Mary Bauer entered her classroom and collapsed into the creaky chair behind her desk. She leaned back and rubbed her temples in a desperate attempt to calm the throbbing. Through the closed window she could hear some of the children, presumably the usual crowd whose parents weren't able to arrange a ride for them until later, having a fun time on the playground equipment. It was an almost soothing white noise, and she couldn't help but smile at the childhood memories swimming in her mind's eye.

This week's in-service meeting had been particularly interminable. Every other Wednesday, the school let the kids go home after half a day, just so the teachers could have meetings about how to better educate the children. This had never made sense to Mary, who constantly had to fight the urge to raise her hand and chime in, "Maybe we could stop sending them home early every other week and keep them in school. You know, *the place where they learn?!'*"

Granted, the other reason was to give the teachers extra planning time, for which she was eternally grateful. The fifty minutes a day when the students were at an extra-curricular wasn't enough, especially when ten of those minutes were taken up with the five to get them lined up and settled down, walking them to the other classroom, then five to reverse the process when bringing them back. If only the damn in-service meetings wouldn't drag on, like today.

Albert Potterdam, the school's principal, had decided to use today to completely outline the new standardized aptitude test the district was implementing next semester. Any logical person would've spread this out over the weeks, focusing on one section at a time. Not Potterdam. He not only went over each section in detail, but even worked through some of the sample questions. To make things worse, that stuffy little kiss-ass Jennifer Hanolan asked more questions than were humanly necessary.

Mary really needed to continue working on the lesson plan for the month-long unit on the presidents she was starting next week. Since her students were only fourth graders, she had a fine line to tread between accurately informing them and overwhelming them with facts. She knew they were bright enough, and old enough, to get more than the chopped-down-a-cherry-tree-had-wooden-teeth simplistic—if not misinformation—basics, but getting into the finer points of the Emancipation Proclamation or the New Deal would be a tad over their heads.

Her problem, like most in-service Wednesdays, was the meeting had sapped her ambition. All she wanted was to go home, slip into her fuzzy PJs and curl up on the couch with one of the three books she was currently reading. This felt like a gothic romance kind of night. She was well aware she wasn't alone in this sentiment, that several of the staff skipped out, usually hitting an early "happy hour" at Flannigan's. She would like to join them, but she always had too much work she needed to get done, mostly due to uninspiring days like this.

She closed her eyes just to rest them and, moments later, was waking up from an unexpected nap. She had one of those instances of panic, where she sat bolt upright and quickly checked her watch. This was just a reflex and didn't help much, since she had no idea what time it was before the nap.

Mary glanced around, taking in her surroundings to orient herself. Everything seemed to be where it should be, but something felt off to her. She wasn't sure what it was, but she had that sick feeling deep in her stomach, that nervous foreboding that usually told her a deal was too good to be true or to stop talking to a guy at the bar.

The sound of the door opening made her jump. Hannah Jeffries, one of her brighter pupils, entered, her face that joyful glow that only getting half a day off from school could produce in an elementary schooler. Her gait that lighter than air movement produced by the same feeling.

"Hi, Miss Bauer!"

"Hello, Hannah. Aren't you here later than normal?"

"Yeah. Daddy had to see a guy about one of his thingamajigs." Hannah's father was a stay-at-home who tinkered with inventing, something Mary knew had nearly broken up the marriage numerous times.

"Ah," Mary said, part listening to the girl, part concentrating on her own unease. She wasn't certain, but she thought it might be growing.

"I just came in to get my Troll pencil. I forgot it in my desk."

What the hell is wrong with me? Mary thought. "That's nice," she replied to Hannah.

The little girl retrieved her favorite pencil from the tray just inside the desk's opening. Hers was one of the cleanest and most organized desks in the room, unlike Jimmy Marshal's, with all that paper spilling out of it. It took him forever to find anything, and when he did it was usually all crumpled and messed up, which disgusted Hannah every time she watched it, and she had no choice since he sat right next to her. She gave Jimmy's desk a passing glance and shrugged, before skipping back up to the front of the room.

"Got my pencil!"

It took a second for Mary to answer, the chipper, high-pitched voice working to cut through her fog of confusion. "Huh?" She looked up and saw the little girl with the bright smile holding up a purple pencil topped by one of those ugly-yet-cute creatures. This one had a red dress, a shock of blue hair and a smile that almost seemed to mimic Hannah's. "Oh, fine. That's good."

The child's smile faded, and she asked, "Are you all right Miss Bauer?"

"Hmm? Yes...yeah. I'm just..." Her gaze strayed to the window. *Is that it?* "I'm just kind of busy. Sorry."

"What are you working on?"

That must be it. "Um...our next project. The presidents."

Hannah perked up, again. "Oh boy! I like that topic!"

The realization finally struck home, and a chill ran through her bones: *The kids aren't playing anymore.* Her eyes began to widen as she thought, *In fact, there's no sound from outside,*

at all. Everything's silent. She slowly stood to get a better look at the playground, bracing herself on the top of her desk.

The piercing scream from across the hall almost gave Mary a heart attack. She spun her head around to look at the door. "Did that come from...*WHAT THE HELL?!?!?*"

The pain in her hand was excruciating. The first thing she saw when she looked down was Hannah's Troll pencil sticking straight up out of the back of her left hand, Mary's blood spattered on the critter's face.

The second thing she saw was that grin, so joyful a second ago, now full of evil. Hannah giggled, a sound at once childlike and demonic. Using the desk for leverage, the little girl leapt onto it.

Working on pure instinct, forgetting this was one of her students, Mary punched Hannah, knocking her backward. Her feet slipped on some of the papers Mary had been working on, and she fell, bouncing off a desk behind her and landing on the floor. Instantly, she was up on her feet and running out the door, that creepy tittering trailing away down the hall.

Mary turned her attention to her injury. Because her hand had been flat on the desk, the pencil hadn't gone all the way through, but the point was pushing on the skin of her palm causing a small lump. She quickly retrieved the first aid kit from her drawer. She couldn't remember if it was better to leave something like this in or remove it, but it was coming out, dammit. She wrapped her hand around the pencil, took a couple deep breaths and yanked.

There was less pain, this time, but much more blood. Mary dropped the pencil onto the desk and grabbed the loose end of the gauze roll, letting it unspool itself, and wrapped and wrapped and wrapped. When she felt she had enough, she cut the end with some scissors, pulled

it tight and secured it with tape. Blood had already begun to stain the gauze, but she felt the bandage was tight enough to hopefully staunch the bleeding until she could get it properly looked at. Just as a precaution, though, she wrapped a rubber band around her wrist as an extra tourniquet.

Now she had to find out who screamed, see if they needed help. It sounded like it came from Louise Gorson, the Art teacher's, room across the hall. Mary approached her own door cautiously, peaking out into the hall to make sure Hannah was nowhere to be seen. She looked to the left first, down the way toward the rest of the classrooms in this hall. No sign of the little girl in that direction. She looked to her right, next. Her classroom was the last one in the hall before the bathrooms, one on each side, and then the exit.

What she saw made her actually gasp: A long bike cable was wrapped around the doors' panic bars, held in place by a padlock. *What the hell is going on here?* Mary figured she could deal with that later, and zipped across to the Art Room.

Louise was sprawled on the floor in a pool of blood, clutching her left hand under her right arm, her eyes closed. She had obviously been using the paper cutter on the counter above her. The blade was completely down and gore was splashed across the counter top. Worst of all, four small Vienna sausage-looking nubs lay on a stack of construction paper that had soaked up what blood had landed on it.

She crouched next to Louise and checked for a pulse. It was there, but maybe felt faint. She couldn't be completely sure, not being a medical professional, but it didn't feel strong. At the feel of someone's touch, Louise's eyes fluttered partially open and she whispered, "Mary?"

“Don’t talk, Louise. Conserve your energy. Just shake or nod. Do you have a first aid kit?”

Louise shook her head. Mary looked around the classroom, saw a sweater hanging on the back of a chair, yellow with an embroidered cardinal sitting on a branch. She retrieved it and returned to the Art teacher’s side.

“This might hurt, but I need to move your arm.” Louise nodded. Mary carefully lifted the right arm and pulled the left out from under it. Blood flowed from each ragged stub at the end of her hand, making it slick and difficult to hold onto easily. Mary gave her injured colleague a concerned look and asked, “Ready?” Louise took a deep breath, gritted her teeth and nodded. Mary wadded up the sweater and pressed it against the wound. Louise hissed, tossing her head back and squeezing her eyes shut.

Mary took hold of the sleeves and pulled the sweater tight. She then folded the arm and tied the sleeves around both the fore and upper arm to keep the hand upright. “With any luck,” she told Louise, “this should keep the blood flow to a minimum.”

Through her haze, and with a raspy voice, Louise managed to say, “Sanchez.”

Mary was confused for a second. “What? Is...is that who did this? The Sanchez boy?” Louise nodded in answer to Mary’s question. She had never had him in her class, since he’d only moved to the school this year and was in fifth grade. She thought his name was Turk, but she wasn’t sure.

“A couple more questions. Is your purse in your desk?” A nod.

“OK. Is your cell phone in it?” Another nod.

Mary hurried over to the desk, opening both larger lower drawers at the same time. The purse was in the righthand one. Mary dug through it, but came up empty. “Shit,” she exclaimed. “It’s not here.” She thought for a moment before asking, “Will you be OK if I go get mine?” Louise nodded.

Mary could’ve been mistaken, but she thought Louise’s nods were getting weaker.

She cautiously checked the hall again, then sprinted across to her room. She kept her purse in the same drawer of her own desk. She also came up with the same result, and headed back to the Art Room empty-handed.

“Mine’s gone, too,” she told Louise. “We’re going to have to get to the office, use the phone there.”

“Why don’t we just leave?”

Mary hesitated, looking for the best way to say it, then decided the situation was way beyond being delicate, so she just said, “It’s locked. Bike cable.”

“What?”

“You’ll see. Do you think you can make it?” Her wounded colleague shrugged then, after a contemplative pause, nodded. Slowly, and with some pain, she held out her right arm, and Mary crouched under it to get the leverage she needed. It took quite a bit of effort, but they eventually were both up on their feet.

As they stood there catching their breaths for the journey ahead, Louise looked at Mary and whispered, “Why?”

Mary knew she was asking about the crazy situation they had suddenly found themselves in, and replied, “I don’t know.”

The clumsy duo made it to the door, and they peeked out into the hall. Mary heard a sharp gasp come from Louise, who had just seen the cable. The coast appeared clear, and they proceeded on their trek. It was slow going, the pair hobbling down the hall as if participants in a very sad three-legged race.

Mary glanced into the open doorway of the classroom next to Louise’s and saw Harriet Milliken, the 61-year-old music teacher, sprawled on her side. A pair of scissors protruded from her neck, the blood still slightly bubbling around the entry point. Her face was frozen with a look the mixture of abject terror and utter disbelief. Mary swallowed hard and tried to shake it off, focusing on their goal.

They had a long way to go. Their classrooms were at the back of the school, while the office was the first thing to a person’s right as they came in the front doors. It was a relatively small school, with only two classrooms per grade, and the building was split in half by the gymnasium. Mary was already thinking about which would be easier for them, to go around or through it? Also, which would be safer?

This is insane, she thought. How did we get to the point where I’m thinking which route will be safest for avoiding my own fucking students?

From somewhere up ahead, that high-pitched, maniacal titter echoed through the hall. It was quickly followed by a similar laugh, obviously from another child. Then another, and another. The pair stopped, their feet unable to move. As more giggles chimed in, creating a malevolent chorus, their skin crawled to the point it was practically recoiling.

Mary tried to urge Louise with the hand on her back. “We need to keep moving.” A quick flash whipped across the hall as a child ran from one classroom to another. “Maybe not,” Mary said in response.

She looked to her right and saw Dale Kennedy’s sixth grade classroom. “Over here.” She guided Louise into the room, their progress chased by more of that laughter, the acoustics of the cold tile on the walls and the metal lockers producing a chilling resonance.

They lucked out: The room was empty, both of children and dead bodies. Mary helped Louise over to the teacher’s desk chair. The injured woman slumped over so far, Mary was afraid she’d slide right to the floor. She pushed the chair closer to the desk to help keep the woman upright. “Is that OK for you?” she asked. Louise weakly nodded, then she reached out her good arm and placed it on the desk, bracing herself. Mary noted this action was even weaker than the nod.

She surveyed the room, turning in almost a complete circle. *I need something for defense.* She quickly went through the few cabinets, drawers and the small closet (Dale’s coat was missing, so he was probably among the ones who skipped out early), but the only thing she found that might work was a yardstick. She moved Louise back enough to open the desk’s center drawer and found a long pair of scissors. Her baser instinct of survival was telling her this would be perfect, but her teacherly instinct made her question the idea of stabbing a student.

As she tested the weight of the sharp implement, her gaze fell to the front row of desks. *The legs*, she thought. The desks were made to be universal, so a school could buy them in bulk and just adjust their heights accordingly through the legs. Mary tipped one onto its side, spilling books and papers and comics and toys all over the floor.

Using the scissors, she worked at removing the screw on one leg, but it wouldn't budge. She went to work on the opposite leg and its screw gave no resistance. She hefted the metal tube and gave it a few test swings. It felt satisfying, and she figured it would be easy to use one-handed with Louise hanging from her other side.

"OK, this should do," she said as she moved back to assist her colleague. "We really need to get a move on." Louise was slumped onto the desk. As Mary tried to move her into a better position to help her back to her feet, she heard Louise say something. "What did you say?"

Louise took a deep breath and managed a small shake of her head. "Leave me."

Mary was shocked. "What? I'm not about..."

"Please."

Louise lifted her head like it weighed a hundred pounds, giving Mary a sad, pleading look. Mary hadn't noticed, but the sweater wrapped around her injury was mostly a dark red, now. It had even begun dripping.

Tears welled up in Mary's eyes. "I can't...I..."

"Yes. Sve yrslf." Louise was so weak she was starting to slur.

Mary was on the verge of full-blown weeping, so she gave her friend a big hug to try to hide it. The gesture helped her regain some of her composure. When she broke the hug, she said, "I'm going to get help, I promise. We'll be OK."

"If I don't..." She swallowed the words. "Tell my husband and son I loved them."

"You'll see them again."

Louise tried for a smile and almost succeeded.

Mary took the scissors and put them in Louise's good hand. "Just in case."

As she left, Mary took one last look back at Louise. The woman was barely holding herself up using the desk, her head hanging limply.

The hallway was empty, yet this was less comforting to her than it should've been. She still had to make it past a few more classrooms, around the gym and past more rooms to get to the office. She used to love how far away her own classroom was from most of the noise and bustle. Not today. *Definitely* not today.

Mary got closer to the gym than she thought she would, passing most of the rooms in this wing. The scream that pierced the silence startled her, causing a small yelp to escape her mouth. She quickly slapped her hand over her lips, looking around and listening to see if she had given away her position. The scream had been male, which narrowed down the possibilities. It was also bloodcurdling. She had always heard that word, but never had first-hand experience to what it truly meant. It was not something she ever wanted to feel again.

It took a great amount of mental energy to get her feet to resume their movement. She was coming up on the fork where the hallway split around the gym. She decided that going around, rather than through, was her best bet, and angled toward the right. On a normal day, the only light on either side of the gym came from the fluorescents, since all that was in those halls were bathrooms and lockers. As she got closer, she saw the lights were out and began to second guess her decision. She tried to look down the other route from where she was and, from what she could tell, it was just as dark.

OK. Through, then, Mary thought. She cautiously opened the door to the gymnasium, peeking inside. It was even darker, completely pitch black.

Hell. No.

Closing the door, she turned back to her first choice of direction. She walked slowly, trying to help her eyes to better adjust to the darkness. She neared the section where the curve of the gym's outer wall caused the hall to angled back toward the front wing, and she thought she could see the shadow of something large. The closer she got, the bigger the object became, until she could tell that it stretched all the way across, blocking her path.

While her eyes adjusted, she took in what she could. It was obviously a pile of something, or things. It had solid mass, coming up to about chest height, yet thinner parts branched off in several directions. It was those jutting pieces that made her doubt she could get over the blockade. By this time, her eyes had adjusted more, and what she saw horrified her to her core.

The pile consisted mostly of desks and chairs, intertwined in an intricate, impassable web. Filling any gaps in the structure were the bodies of four of her fellow teachers. They were broken, bloody, twisted, even partially impaled on desk and chair legs to keep them in place. Once again, she had to find the strength to move, backing up a few steps before turning and running to the other hall, where she was greeted by a similar version of the first wall of horror.

Mary lost it and yelled, "Fuck!"

From somewhere in the surrounding darkness, Hannah's sing-songy voice chided, "Language," followed by that haunting giggle. *Goddamn that laugh!*

She conceded and approached the door to the gym, once again, opening it wide. She heard a click from the opener at the top, indicating it would stay open for her. The light that spilled in to the room was weak, but enough to calm her nerves about making the crossing. Mary walked fast as she entered, keeping her attention on both the opposite door and, of course, on anything potentially coming at her from the remaining shadows.

She was maybe a third of the way into her journey when behind her she heard the click of the door closer. She looked down at the floor and watched her precious illumination slowly disappear. Another click, this time from the door's latch, and she was submersed in darkness.

She wasted no time, running for her destination, swinging the desk leg wildly back and forth. Knowing her navigation would be off without any reference points, Mary held her free arm straight out in front of her. She was surprised how quickly she found the wall, her palm smacking it, jarring her wrist and aggravating the pencil wound.

Continuing to slash at the air with the desk leg, she felt her way along the wall. At one point, the leg connected with something: She heard a dry-yet-wet slap and a grunt of pain, then someone falling to the floor. At the same moment she hit whoever, hot pain seared her upper arm, just below the shoulder. She felt the spot. Unable to judge distances in the darkness, she accidentally plunged her finger into the fresh wound, causing her to cry out in pain.

Mary resumed her path along the wall, hoping she chose the right direction and wasn't going to end up at the door she used to enter. In mere seconds, she found a door, and was relieved to find it to be the exit she wanted. She rushed through, pushing the door shut as quickly as the closer would allow. She leaned back against the closed door and took the time she needed to calm her pounding heart.

The hall of the front wing stretched out ahead of her. She could just barely make out, at this distance, something wrapped around the panic bars of the front doors. Probably another bike lock. She turned her focus to the front office and started to run. She got about ten feet from the gym door when a chair shot across the floor and into her legs, knocking them out from under her. She went sprawling across the floor, slamming into the end of a set of lockers. The desk leg clattered away, rolling far beyond her reach.

Mary heard footsteps. She was facing the front wing, so she saw the three children coming from that direction first. Two girls and a boy. She recognized them, but they were from lower grades, so she wasn't certain of their names. The boy had a bowling pin, one girl had a baseball bat—they had apparently raided the sports equipment locker—and the other girl was swinging a bike chain.

Mary turned her head while she lifted herself up onto all fours. From the direction of the gym she saw the boy who must've pushed the chair. He also had a bat in his hands. The door to the gym opened and the Sanchez boy stepped out, carrying what had to be the blade arm from Louise's paper cutter. He had a welt beginning on the right side of his face, an ignored trickle of blood already staining his shirt collar. The maniacal giggle came from the other branch of the hall. Out of the girls bathroom came Hannah, brandishing a long pair of scissors, a pair Mary instantly recognized. She had also pulled her hair up into a loose 'do, held in place by her Troll pencil. She was followed by another boy, Jeremy Barnes. He held what looked like half of the wooden flagpole from Jennifer Hanolan's room, the ugly brass eagle, wings spread for flight, betraying its origin.

She couldn't tell what disturbed her more: The fact that every weapon the kids were holding had blood on them, or that there was enough blood that it was dripping from every item. In fact, most of Hannah's forearm was coated in gore.

The children said nothing, simply advanced toward her very slowly. Mary weighed her options. Still on all fours, she was in a bad position to try to make a run for the office. At least one of them could be upon her while she was trying to get her footing. She needed to act somehow, though, because they were already almost too close.

At that moment, she felt someone grab a handful of her blouse from behind and pull. A decidedly adult male voice said, "Get in here!" Mary pushed backward and ended up falling into Barbara Fillmore's third grade classroom. The children had run at her, and she even felt the breeze from one of the bats as it missed her nose by inches. The person who helped her slammed the door shut and triggered the lock. He turned around and Mary saw it was the principal, Albert Potterdam.

The kids gave the door a few angry pounds before stopping. They all began to laugh, and the sound faded as if they were backing away from the door.

Albert suddenly fell back against the wall and slid down it. He was covered in cuts and very nasty bruises. His nose was broken and his horn-rimmed glasses were missing. "Are you OK?" he inquired.

Mary nodded, then asked, "What about you?"

"I'm not going to lie to you," he said, shaking his head. He gulped after every sentence. "I'm not doing well. Plenty of internal...damage. I can feel it. I would've saved you sooner. Took forever to...get to the door. Then stand. Sorry."

"No, you were just in time." She looked around the room. There was a small pool of blood in one corner, with streaks leading to the door and Albert. "Have you been here the whole time?"

"Not the whole time."

"What happened? Why are they doing this?"

He shook his head. "No idea. I let the office staff...go home early. Nothing to do today. I...I went for a snack. Heard a scream. Got bli...blindsided. Three of them. Bats. Chain. Took what I could, then...played dead. Crawled in here when...when...they left." The principal broke down and started crying. "I'm such a coward."

Mary slid over to his side, put a hand on his shoulder. "No, you're not."

"I could've...helped the others. So much...so many..." He dropped his head into his hands and continued sobbing.

"Hey. Hey, now." She tried to sound as comforting as she could manage, given the situation. "If you had tried to help, you probably would've ended up just like them. Those kids took out...how many adults? The point is: You're still alive. And, without you, I wouldn't be alive, now. So, you did save someone, right?" It looked like he may have nodded, but it was hard for her to tell, the way his body was shaking. "Right. So, we need to try to focus on staying alive and getting out of here, away from them, and getting help. We'll have plenty of time to mourn our friends, later. And we will. We'll honor all their memories. OK?"

Albert only shrugged.

“No. Promise me that. We’ll survive this, for no other reason than to be the ones who will always remember those who died here, today. Promise me, dammit.” She added the curse in hopes it would be the slap he’d need, letting it hang in the air between them.

It took longer than she thought it would, but he eventually lifted his head, looking at her with wet, red-rimmed eyes. His expression changed from exhaustion to determination, and he said, “I promise.”

“Good. Now, we need to get to the phones in the office and call the police. As long as those...those...little fucking monsters haven’t gotten to them.”

Albert shook his head. “I locked the door. Phones are probably fine.”

“OK, then. Do you need a moment, or do you feel like you can make it?”

He thought about it, even lightly felt at his ribcage, which caused him to wince. “I’ll need a moment. Not long. Need to gather strength.”

“Just let me know.”

Mary stood and cased the room for a weapon. Best she came up with was a nice metal pen from a pen and pencil set in the teacher’s desk. *The irony would be nice if I get to stab that little cunt Hannah with a writing utensil*, she thought, a vicious smile spreading across her face.

Albert saw this and asked, “What?”

Mary snapped out of the fantasy and replied, “Oh. Nothing.”

She sat back down across from Albert. A couple minutes later, he let out a puff of breath and said, “Ready.”

She had to help him to his feet. “Do you need to lean on me?”

Leaning back against the wall, he shook his head. “Just give me another second.” He took a few breaths, pushed away from the wall while keeping one hand on it for balance.

Mary put her hand on the doorknob.

Albert removed the keys from his pocket, hooking his finger tightly through the ring.

They looked at each other, nodded and shot out of the room as fast as they could.

Albert was moving slower than Mary thought he might, a limp dragging down his speed. The hall was empty, but not for long. The sounds of the children running came from behind. Mary didn’t have to look, she could tell by the sound they were gaining quickly. “Faster!” she yelled.

Albert tried to speed up, and he succeeded. He got within a foot of Mary, his arms pumping, adrenalin and fear keeping his limp at bay.

They were only twenty feet from the office door when Albert’s body betrayed him. The leg with the limp suddenly cramped up, wrapping around the other. He fell so hard that Mary heard the audible crack when his skull struck the tile.

She spun around and called out his name.

The feral beasts were upon him in a second.

Before they could stop him, he threw the keys as hard as he could toward Mary, yelling one word: “Green!”

She scooped them up and sprinted to the office door. The keys had different colored rubber indicators around each one. She found the green, and was through the door just as Albert began to scream in extreme pain. She slammed the door and locked it. She refused to even glance back into the hall.

She scrambled around the main desk, grabbing the first phone she found. She pushed button for Line 1 and dialed 911. She put the phone to her ear and the world dropped out from under her.

All that came through the receiver was silence.

She pushed the button for every line. Same results each time. She ran to another phone, but no luck. *They must've gotten to the breakers.* She turned around to see the blood splattered children standing in a line outside the office, just staring at her. All of them had a look in their eyes that could only be described as pure evil. Except for Hannah.

She was smiling, and it was somehow more frightening than the stares.

Mary couldn't help herself, she just started yelling, "Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck every last one of you, you little fucking shits!"

The children didn't move a muscle. So, Mary continued hollering curses at them until her voice was hoarse, then her screaming changed to weeping. She fell to her knees and cried until her eyes were dry.

She pulled herself over to the front desk, sitting with her back to it. She looked around and realized the room was getting darker. The sun was going down. She checked her watch and saw how late it was getting. *Oh my God, she thought, they're going to wait me out, aren't they?*

Directly across from her was the door labeled “Principal.” She thought about poor Albert. Then she thought about Louise, then the others, giving each former friend and colleague their own individual time and thoughts. *I promised to mourn you all.*

Then Albert’s voice entered her mind: *I locked the door.*

Her gaze returned to his office. *Locked the door!*

So the kids couldn’t see her, she crawled across the room. She reached up, turning the knob as slowly and silently as she could. She opened the door slowly, only cracking it wide enough for her body. She scooted into the principal’s office and shut the door just as quietly.

She knew it wouldn’t be on him because it was a school rule, and if there was anyone who stuck to the rules it was Albert Potterdam. Albert’s coat was hanging on the coatrack next to the door. She fished through the pockets, but came up empty. She moved to his desk, hitting the jackpot in its center drawer. She powered the cell phone, thanking God that Albert was just enough of a luddite to not have a lock screen.

Mary had never dialed a number as fast as she dialed 911. She didn’t even wait for a reply: The instant she heard the click at the other end she began talking, also faster than she’d ever done.

“Hello? I need help. I’m at the elementary school. A group of kids have gone crazy and attacked us. People are dead.”

She paused for a breath, her pulse going a mile a minute. That’s when she noticed the operator hadn’t yet spoken.

“Hello?” More silence.

“Anyone there?”

Still more silence, then the slowly building sound of another damned giggle. Every hair stood on end. Heat flushed her face. Her heart dropped into her stomach.

“I’m sorry, Miss Bauer,” the child on the other end of the line finally replied, “the police aren’t here...anymore.”

The End