

LEFT HOOK

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPRING AFTERNOON-SUBURBIA.

We open on a boy (13) walking beside a sidewalk, alone. A school bus pulls away in the background.

We cut in closer and see that he's been crying. We'll know him as IAN.

INT. HOME.

He walks through his front door to find MOM teaching a piano lesson. She quickly shifts her focus from her student's fingers to Ian's swollen eyes.

MOM
(mouthing, worried)
You okay?

Ian gives a unconvincing nod and walks toward the living room where we find DAD working, in the zone, sitting upright in a recliner. Brief cases are strewn about on the carpeted floor. Files tossed, unorganized. One of the folders reads, "MARK FORSYTH."

Ian sighs heavily, but dad's dialed in on his laptop.

Ian plops down on a nearby couch and sighs again, this time dramatically.

DAD
Hey. How's school?

IAN
Fine. You ever thought to
homeschool me?

DAD
(distracted)
No. Home schooled kids are odd.
With the rare exception, of course.

IAN
Right.

[beat]

IAN (CONT'D)
They don't get bullied, though.

DAD
 (distracted)
 That's true, I guess.

Ian goes quiet. The silence causes Dad to look up and really listen back to what Ian just said.

DAD (CONT'D)
 Something happen at school today?

Ian exhales and nods.

IAN
 They're calling me names and
 throwing pencils at me. On the bus.
 It sucks so bad.

DAD
 Shoot.
 What kind of names are we talking?

IAN
 (uncomfortably)
 I dunno—Dork.

DAD
 Hmm.

IAN
 What?

DAD
 Thought middle schoolers were more
 vicious these days.

IAN
 I dunno they say, dork, geek,
 doofus, dweeb—

DAD
 Those aren't, those are all just
 variants of each other.

IAN
 —and Ian FOREskin.

DAD
 (conceding)
 That sounds like our last name.

IAN
 (progressively louder)
 Foreskin. Foreskin.

DAD
Hey, shhhhh!!

IAN
FORESKIN! Chanting the entire bus
ride home.

DAD
(loud whisper)
Shhh...I'm sorry, okay? That's
terrible, but Mom's teaching right
now, so just keep "foreskin" at a
whisper.

IAN
(whisper)
Forrressskinnn.

DAD
That's worse. Look, it honestly
never matters what a bully actually
says. What matters is how you
respond.

A beat.

IAN
How do I respond to this?

Ian shows an open cut on his neck where a piece of lead is
lodged inside. This changes things.

DAD
(loudly)
Oh, shit.

MOM (O.S.)
I'm teaching!

DAD
SORRY.
(to Ian, back to whisper)
How many rows back are they from
you?

Dad springs into action, rummaging through one of his many
briefcases.

IAN
(confused)
8 rows?

DAD
Sharp aim.

IAN
Yeah and they're in the back of the bus.

Dad's still rummaging.

DAD
All bullies are back seaters.

IAN
How do I get them to stop?

DAD
One sec here.

Ah ha! Dad's found tweezers, but they're not the cleanest.

Ian shudders.

IAN
(disgusted)
Sick...

DAD
(newfound resolve)
War is sick. Lucky for you, I'm a field medic with these. Once pulled a gnarly tick from my groin. Successfully.

Dad starts tweezer-ing for the lead.

DAD (CONT'D)
This should be easier.

IAN
(wincing)
How do I get 'em to stop?

With one pincer move, Dad retrieves the lead.

DAD
There we go.
(off-handedly)
Just break their nose.

Dad walks over to the kitchen pantry.

DAD (CONT'D)
That'll stop them.

IAN
Dad, there're five.

DAD
Kindergartners did this?

IAN
There are five.

Dad silently assess.

DAD
Both tough scenarios—neither
impossible.

Dad returns with rubbing alcohol and pads to tend to the
wound.

DAD (CONT'D)
Just start with one. Who's the
leader?

IAN
Uh...Logan?

DAD
Logannn. You can take a 'Logan'.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK OF THE BUS - AFTERNOON - A MEMORY.

We see Logan (14) flanked by two middle school henchmen on
either side. His girlfriend, same age, twice his size, wears
a hoodie two sizes too small and sits on his lap so she can
stroke his greasy hair. It's disgusting, but Logan's power
over the bus is palpable.

IAN (VO)
(mulling it over)
He's my height. Very punchable
face. His girlfriend wears his
hoodies but she's like twice his
size, so they really don't fit her.
She's not fat, or anything, I just
learned recently that girls mature
faster than boys in science class.
And the science is real in this
case.

DAD (VO)
Wrong details.

IAN

Sorry. Logan is sandwiched between 4 idiots. Vinny. Danny. Timmy, and Wolfgang.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - REALITY

DAD

Big crew. They sound like the axis powers.

IAN

Yeah, it's not worth it.

DAD

They probably don't think you'd try it.

IAN

I probably won't.

DAD

That means you could.

IAN

No.

DAD

Nah, you could because all warfare is based on deception.

IAN

This is a school bus.

DAD

(monologuing)

All warfare, including bus bullies, is based on deception. HENCE...when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; When using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away. We must make him believe we are fear- Sun Tsu, The Art of War.

Dad lets the quote ruminate. Ian's lost.

DAD (CONT'D)
I feel like that was pretty clear.

IAN
I'll just ask Mom later.

Ian walks toward the kitchen table to work on homework, leaving his dad to sit with his quote.

DAD
Maybe you shouldn't react so much.

Ian gives Dad a sharp, teenager look.

IAN
React so much. You're quoting ancient Chinese guys for memory.

DAD
Dads just quote stuff. But I'm talking about you and Logan and his henchmen. Just ignore them...you ignore them and they cease to exist. They can't hurt you.

Ian shakes his head.

DAD (CONT'D)
Okay, if you can't take it anymore, punch 'em. But this could be solved by changing up your reaction.

Ian's eyes well up. Dad comes over to the kitchen to hug him for as long as Ian needs to catch his breath.

DAD (CONT'D)
(still hugging)
Sorry.

IAN
I don't know what to do. I'm telling them to stop.

DAD
It makes no sense but stop means go to these people.

IAN
I need help.

Ian softly screams into Dad's shoulder like a pillow.

DAD

I'm sorry, buddy. I really am, but I think we can fix this. This is going to sound weird, but humor me for a second here. What's a song you like that makes you the happiest? Maybe no one likes it, but you do.

This makes no sense to Ian, but he considers it anyway.

IAN

Number 41, by Dave Matthews Band.

DAD

Weird. I like it.

IAN

It makes me think about driving the Windstar up to Tahoe when we lived in California

DAD

(encouraging)
Okay.

IAN

I miss California. And it makes me miss it but in like a good way. Makes me think of Jonathan and Eric and Daniel.

A beat.

DAD

Use that song against them.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - AFTERNOON.

Ian walks onto the bus and he looks dead-straight at Logan and his henchman. They look back, Ian quivers.

DAD (VO)

You gotta walk onto the bus and put your headphones on. And play that Dave Matthews Song. Even though his voice pops in and out of falsetto, it should do the trick.

Ian can't put his earbuds in fast enough.

He struggles to find the right song and accidentally presses "And I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston. It starts off WAY too loud. Ian frantically scrolls in search of "#41"

DAD (CONT'D)
Set the tone. Quick.

He finds "#41." The track name glistens romantically on his MP3 player. He presses play. Music up. And then...

...zen. The song's power hushes the school bus chatter.

DAD (CONT'D)
This is the most important part.
The scariest, most critical part.
You've got to walk toward Logan-

But don't sit eight rows away like you usually do.

There should be three rows between you and his boys. Not one row. That's too close, too risky. Strategically, there needs to be enough space to embolden you and confuse them.

Ian carefully chooses his seat, three rows between him and the bullies.

Ian's still, but his shadowy background inches closer and closer to his neck until the bullies, who were three rows away, start to monstrously loom larger and larger.

We punch in tight on the bullies as they mouth "FORESKIN" "DORK" "BITCH" "FREAK" in slow motion.

DAD (VO) (CONT'D)
Now, turn it up. Let Dave do Dave.

"#41" grows until the chorus becomes the anthem of the moment.

DAD (CONT'D)
That yellow school bus is now a Ford Windstar on its way to Tahoe.

The song hits its climax and in a moment of meteorologic, sonic warfare, the song makes the bus freeze over. The windows ice. The leather seats crack. Condensation forms in the air. And the bullies shiver. Ian doesn't feel the cold. It's all warmth between him and Dave.

Logan's face quakes uncontrollably while his body holds still. His girlfriend's hand accidentally breaks off a handful of greasy hair like an icicle. Funnily enough, she doesn't feel cold at all because, well, she's got a hoodie on.

DAD (VO) (CONT'D)

They won't touch you, because Dave Matthews is mightier than the fist. Logan won't be able to comprehend Ian *Foreskin's* newfangled confidence. It might take a few days, but they'll eventually realize how small they are at the bottom of the Sierras.

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN

We hover over Ian sitting on top of snow, alone. He looks down from the peak to see five teenagers, Logan, Vinny, Danny, Timmy, and Wolfgang trudging through snow, running scared from a yellow school bus.

DAD (VO)

"We must make the enemy believe we are far away;...

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - REALITY

The bullies just stare at Ian, a bit confused as to what's happening. They're bodies are frozen. Not by ice. But by ice-hot Dave Matthews Band sounds.

DAD (VO)

When far away...we must make them believe we are near."

A beat. Ian's eyes are closed as he nods to the music, anticipating the worst from his bullies. But nothing happens. We linger on that moment until we see Ian crack an innocent, victorious smile.

CUT TO BLACK.