

A Boy and his Nemesis

Stuart Sakarellos

In ancient Greece, Nemesis was the name given to the spirit of divine retribution. She was implacable justice, who punished the arrogant and those undeserving of good fortune . . . but in present day and far from the deities of old, fortune is fickle, the unjust roam free and it is the weak who are made to suffer.

The bell for lunch rang at 11am. Greek school only went for four hours, so we were only given one thirty-minute break. I walked down the stairs slowly. A group of boys ran past me lead by a big, fat, bushy-haired boy named Marcos. To his right was a weedy little kid named Aris. Kay, tall and gripping a ball in his arms, was on the other side. There was little to do at lunchtime. Greek school was held on a Saturday in a local high school so there was nothing but vacated courtyards and buildings. Playing soccer at lunch became a tradition amongst the kids.

I walked out into the courtyard and took a seat on a nearby bench. I could see that Marcos and the boys were already hard at it. I picked up my lunch bag; a vegemite sandwich and an apple. I hated vegemite, I'd told mum a hundred times but I don't think she ever really listened to me. I threw it in the bin next to me and grabbed the apple instead. Another group of boys was sitting across the yard. The high school was massive so we shared it with the Saturday morning Vietnamese school but no-one ever talked to the 'Kinezi'. The Kinezi were kicking around a football. They weren't very good. The yellow ball hit my leg. Shaking his head, one of the boys took a few steps towards me.

'Kick it, kick it,' he shouted at me in a high pitched voice. I eyed the ball, before picking it up and kicking it back to him. It was a straight kick that

landed right in the arms of one of the kids. The little Asian boy mouthed WOW, and then ran over to me.

'Show me, Grick boy, show me,' he was saying as he dragged me over to his friends. I took the ball and tried showing them how to hold and kick it properly. This did not go unnoticed by my compatriots. I hadn't noticed the boys had stopped playing soccer and were moving closer and by the time I did see them coming, it was too late to get away.

'What are you doing with them?' asked Marcos, shoving me backwards.

'Nothing.' I felt queasy as the other boys quickly gathered around Marcos. The Asian boys just stood silently. Kay pushed the little high-pitched boy in the back and he landed sprawled out on the ground, the ball flying from his hands.

'Hey, leave him alone!' I shouted, and went to help the boy up. Aris moved quickly to grab the ball and laughed. His voice was an even higher pitch than the Asian boy; he sounded like a weasel. The rest of the boys chimed in and Marcos stepped forward.

'What did you say?' he confronted me, but his fist connected with my jaw before I could respond. I tumbled backwards, blood spurting from my mouth. I looked up at the Asian boys who had picked up their friend and were backing away. The cowards. The Headmaster began ringing his bell, signalling for everyone to come in and Marcos and the rest walked off laughing. I was left outside, flat on my back, alone. I would get used to this.

One day I came in wearing an orange hoodie. One of the boys yelled out that I looked like Kenny from *South Park*, who in each episode, would die in some gruesome, yet comic, way. This was the beginning of a new tradition for the boys of my class: I would play Kenny and they would try to kill me.

The 'game' started out tamely; just things thrown at the back of my head in class. I would always be sent out of the class if I cried out so, naturally, I learned to stay silent.

I was in the toilet during lunch one time. Three of them came from behind me and pushed me into the urinal. I got piss all over my pants, then they hit me in the kidneys and left me on the wet ground. I could hear their snickering ringing in my head. The stone walls seemed to close in around me. I could hear breathing. It was deep and heavy. Was it my own?

It was winter and cold outside. I waited for everyone to go out for lunch

as usual before deciding to explore. Upstairs. I'd never been beyond Level Four. The stair rail was dusty. My footsteps echoed on the marble floor. A long corridor of lockers divided rows of classrooms, a narrow ray of light exposed the only one unlocked. I slid my hand over the door and drew it open. All but one of the chairs were neatly lined up. I thought I heard a soft cough behind me. I spun around but didn't see anyone.

Making my way back to the stairwell, I nervously knocked out a tune on the lockers as I went. A locker sprang open suddenly against my knuckle. A few scraps of paper, a calculator, a few books on Ancient Mythology and to my surprise, a ten-dollar note and some coins. I thought it best to leave things where they were.

'Shut up!' Kay's voice screaming out from the stairwell startled me. I turned and ran toward the stairs at the opposite end of the corridor when suddenly a shadowed arm sprang out and clothes-lined me in the throat. I fell backward onto my backpack. My metal lunchbox slid out. I scrambled to my feet. I heard the boys' howling and squealing. Marcos loomed over me. He grabbed my collar and raised a fist, my hands clawed out for something to defend myself with. I hooked my fingers into the corner of my lunchbox tin and slammed it into the side of his head. The others pounced and in a sweeping motion, pinned me against the lockers. The force of the shock knocked open the locker.

'What's this?' said Marcos. His greedy eyes scanned the locker and fixed on the money. His fat fingers snatched up the note first then tore out all the contents from the locker. I felt sick that he'd managed not only to discover me but also the locker upstairs.

'You're scum!' I spat. Marcos grabbed my collar again and dragged me along the floor, like a mop, to the stairs.

'What did you say?' he threatened me.

'Scum!' I screamed more in terror than defiance, and with that he pushed me down the stairs. I heard them all laughing as I fell down a flight, where they collected me and dragged me down to the ground floor and pushed me through the double doors into the courtyard. I resisted, to no avail, as they carried me over to a large dumpster and heaved me in head first.

I could hear their derisive laughter fade as they walked away. I sat defeated in the dark; my knees curled into my chest, face turned down. I'm not sure how much time had passed before I felt a little tap on my head, then another. Looking up, I saw a little girl staring down at me with

grapes in her hand.

'Hello, Ugly Duckling,' she said. Her name was Misseen.

We'd never really talked much, but I came to like spending time with Misseen. She would help me with my Greek and we would spend lunchtimes reading about myths and legends and heroes like Achilles. Misseen was very clever; she knew a lot about history and her Greek was perfect, but she always seemed off-centre to me. I didn't mind; I'd made a friend. Her white lunch pack always carried the same turkey sandwich cut into triangles that she'd trade for my vegemite sandwiches. Mostly we sat and ate quietly.

'I have to go,' she suddenly announced one day. I didn't bother to ask where or why. That was Misseen: curious; unpredictable.

'Okay.'

'Where's your creepy girlfriend Kenny?' I heard Marcos's snickering voice from above me as he slapped my book out of my hands. I didn't take the usual care to stay in supervised areas when I was with Misseen, and suddenly; I realised that I was alone in a distant corner of the courtyard.

I stood up, keen to get away but the boys behind me pushed me back down onto the bench. Marcos rummaged through my bag until the sound of a faint cough from behind startled him. I saw it was Misseen. How had I not noticed her?

'What do you want?' asked Marcos dismissively as he continued his search.

'Leave her alone,' I whispered under my breath. Marcos stood up and glared at me before landing a heavy smack across my face. Although a diminutive girl, Misseen didn't flinch.

'Hubris is a dangerous quality . . . usually possessed by those who perish from it.' Her voice was quiet and composed, normal.

'What the hell does that mean?' bellowed Marcos, bursting with laughter and looking to the others to follow his lead.

'In stories, bad people always get a chance to do the right thing; the ones that get punished choose to be un—' Marcos spat a dirty glob of phlegm at Misseen. The thick liquid splattered all over her face; the biggest landed on her open mouth. The laughter stopped and we silently watched Misseen lean over and let the spit dribble out of her mouth, then wipe her face with her sleeve.

'Let's go,' Marcos motioned awkwardly to the others.

'I hope he goes to Hell! He's scum,' I said, holding my hot, throbbing cheek.

'They all are,' she answered. I took Misseen's hand and walked her to the toilets to wash her face. She must have been very upset, though she didn't show much emotion. The Headmaster rang the bell.

Suddenly it was the end of the day. The sound of the bell jerked me out of my sleep. I must have dozed off in class. How could the teacher have left me alone in the classroom? I clumsily collected my things. In the quiet of the empty stairwell, I heard whimpering from the vacant floor above.

Thinking of Misseen, I hurried up the stairs and I searched the corridor for the source of the sound. I followed the whimpering into the same open classroom I'd visited before. I was relieved to see her as I turned to enter the room.

'You all right?' As I approached her, I saw someone was slumped over a desk. Marcos. Face down. Hands bound. 'What's going on?'

Misseen stepped between Marcos and me, and, holding my gaze, she pressed my fingers around a pair of scissors.

'He is a mean boy. You know it! It wasn't fair what he did to us. He has to learn it is wrong. We have to show him.' She looked at me imploringly.

'Missy—you can't just tie someone up because they've been mean to you! His mum is probably looking for him downstairs—' I released my hand from Misseen's grip and turned to cut Marcos loose.

'He's not going to do anything again,' Misseen's voice followed me. 'None of them will.'

Marcos was motionless. I saw dark pools on the floor. I was confused. My nudge against Marcos revealed his jaggedly-slit throat. His eyes were fixed. Still clenching the scissors, I convulsed with waves of sickness.

'Misseen! Oh God! What did you do? Argh! Oh God! What are we going to do?' Turning desperately to find the answers, I searched the empty corners of the room. I was alone. I heard heavy breathing from the corridor behind me, then, the door was shut. CLACK.