

Sir Gavin and the Green Editor

(Okay, well, is there anywhere in particular that you want to sit? I really have no preference; I can write anywhere. Did I ever tell you about that time when I was at a Monster Truck show and this idea just—Oh, I thought I hadn't told you. Twelve times, huh? Well, anyway, how 'bout here by the coffee table? I hope you don't mind, I like to write on this legal pad—you can read it a page at a time, I suppose. Anyway, I'm going to put a CD on; I like a little mood music when I write. Let's see—for this story I think I need a real blast from the past. Here we go—Born in the USA. Okay, let me get my notes together and then I'll begin. Hope your people like this one!)

The Eraser

Nobody seemed to notice that there was an epidemic at South Bend Elementary School; an epidemic of disappearing appendages. Mr. Griffin, who lived in a small house next to the fenced-in kickball field and always wore light-blue shorts, a dirty white undershirt, a brown fishing hat with various hooks, and polished dress shoes with black socks hiked up to his wrinkly knees, would smile and maybe grunt a greeting to whole students while watering his twenty-one-foot-square front lawn in the morning, then do the same thing in the afternoon, when perhaps nine-tenths of those same students walked (or, in some cases, floated) home. Some of these—

(What? Oh, well, I suppose it's a pretty lengthy description, but I don't see what's so wrong with that. Joyce wrote page-long descriptive sentences and nobody gave him a ticket for it. I'm not comparing myself to anybody, I'm just stating a simple fact—only those computer grammar checkers will tell you that “long sentences tend to add confusion and disrupt the flow of the overall sense.” Okay, maybe I'll look it over later, but right now I just want to get a draft down, all right? Oh, and another thing, do you have to sit behind me like that? You remind me of Snoopy when he pretends to be a vulture. And I can see you holding that eraser like a six-shooter in my peripheral vision—it's beginning to freak me out. Well, okay, if that's the way you have to work...)

—poor souls were missing a finger or two, others an ear, perhaps, and sometimes

a student would lose an entire limb, though this usually took place over a period of time. The stumps from these wounds seemed professionally sutured, as if the part had never been there.

The students themselves were, of course, quite aware of this phenomenon, especially those of Mrs. Kurtz's fourth grade class. It was they, after all, who were the most pathetic examples of this strange plague. Justin Dubie, a shell-shocked young boy who had to put up with enough abuse on account of his rather unfortunate last name, was missing two-and-a-half inches from the middle of his right forearm, leaving his wrist and hand hanging in midair. Nicky Masset, the grinning, bulbous bully who sat behind him, had one nostril fewer than most, which made his labored breathing gurgle all the louder. Elaine Paige, who sat in the front row and always had her hands neatly folded on her desk, had legs, but no knees; she sometimes jumped rope by swinging it through the space where they used to be. And poor Charlie "Crabbie" Krinkle had to sit in a specially modified desk equipped with a baby booster; all that was left of him was his head, shoulders, and arms. He had been in this condition for so long that what was left of his body didn't even float anymore.

Mrs. Kurtz herself was the most feared fourth-grade teacher in the county. Horror stories about her would be passed down from survivors of her class every year, building up to a furor around mid-May when teacher assignments were posted for the following year. Those students unlucky enough to wind up on Mrs. Kurtz's list would walk home looking—and feeling—like inmates on death row. Mrs. Kurtz was built like a German baker, and her piercing voice passed on a wave of garlic and curdled milk through yellowed teeth that didn't seem to fit properly into her seething gums. She kept a rolling pin strapped to the side of her desk, and she sometimes slammed it against the metal chalkboard tray to keep students from dozing off. Her hair was a short, tousled silver-grey, and rested above an unusually large, slanted forehead boasting a blue, wormy vein. She was, in short, hell.

(Ummm, that's kind of the point, Mr. Greene. Making the teacher a stereotype of all mean teachers adds humor because people read it and say, "Yeah, I had a teacher like that once—man, what a witch!" I realize you probably don't understand about this because you, well, you're different from us, but still, try to bear with me, okay? And these aren't people I went to school with—I changed their names and modified them to

fit with the story. Anyway, who cares if they were? What are they going to do, sue me because I fictionally severed most of their bodies? Well, Charlie might sue me, but I'd sue him right back for all those times he beat me up by the bike rack. Anyway, can we continue? I'd like to finish this before The X-Files comes on.)

On this particular day, class began as usual. Mrs. Kurtz rose majestically from her desk, hands behind her back, strode stiffly to the center of the classroom, dictatorially clicked her heels together, and booming addressed the class.

“Good morning, class,” she said.

“Good Mooor-ning Miss-ezz Kurtz,” the class replied ruefully.

(Yeab, I know, I know. But in this case, I think it's okay to use a lot of adverbs. I mean, this is supposed to be a cartoonish fantasy, not something by, say, Raymond Carver. Come on, if I wanted editing advice like this I could just type this up and run that anal-retentive grammar checker on the computer. And quit caressing that damn eraser with your—whatever that is. It's really unnerving.)

“We have a new student, class,” Mrs. Kurtz continued CALMLY, “and his name is Gavin McQuinn. Can we all give him a big hello?”

“Good mooor-ning Gaaaa-vin,” the class said to the tall skinny boy dressed in black. He was almost as tall as Mrs. Kurtz, and his sharp eyes did not flit around when he looked at her, like everyone else's did. He looked right at her, and grinned. Mrs. Kurtz smiled, and stood up straighter than usual to make herself taller than Gavin.

(Look, I don't care if you know where this thing is going. Like I said, it's a comic fantasy, not something by Agatha Christie. And another thing, it's mine, so quit erasing my adverbs! Not only is it a presumptuous, automatic editing rule, it's disrupting my concentration. I can't write well with you leaning over me erasing things all the time. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Greene, I appreciate your time and effort, but try to respect my judgment just a little, will you?)

The first lesson of the day was Reading. Mrs. Kurtz placed Gavin in with the Fox Group—which was one person light ever since Bobbie-Lynn (pronounced “bobbalin”) Sutherland disappeared a few weeks ago—and called them up to the Reading Circle. The Squirrel, Rabbit, and Skunk groups began their board work—an exercise in their workbooks. Mrs. Kurtz gave Gavin a new book and a bookmark with a fox sticker on it.

“I think we'll start with the story about the meteor shower again. Who

wants to begin reading?" Mrs. Kurtz's grinning head swivelled around on her neck like , then settled on Gavin, who sat with his book unopened on his lap. "Gavin, how about you?"

"No," he said . Mrs. Kurtz blinked, .

(Okay, this is really starting to piss me off now. You're eliminating every shred of description from this as if it were the Final Solution or something. You're even erasing allusions to my favourite movie, for god's sake. Can't you just read the thing through after I'm done with it? Why not? Well, can't you—heaven forbid—change the way you work just for once? I'm telling you, even William frigginn' Faulkner would have an off-day if he had one of you lurking behind him with an eraser. You did? Well, doesn't that just make you the shit. Listen, I'm going to finish this story, goddammit, and I'm going to finish it the way I want. So you can take that eraser of yours and shove it up your ass!)

"What did you say to me?" she asked, the spittle squelching from behind her ill-fitting teeth, like a . Gavin stared right back at her, giving her a look much like Paul Newman's in .

"I said no, Mrs. Kurtz," he said, and the class gasped, . Mrs. Kurtz's smile widened. She stood up, taking Gavin by the sleeve of his "Bad Boy Club" T-shirt.

"Excuse me class, I think that Gavin and I have to go outside and clean up some of the erasers," she said, as the class whispered , like a . Mrs. Kurtz led Gavin out of the classroom, leaving the class in a state of shock.

(Ha! Now you really look stupid. Your eraser isn't picking everything up now that I'm avoiding it, so now I have these "like a" phrases that have no ending. Really brilliant. I oughtta show this thing to your boss and tell him that you made these retarded corrections. What do you think about that, huh? Hey, what's that supposed to be, an ultimatum? Why the hell would you do that, you're here to help me! Look I've read stories a lot more predictable than this one. Must've been ones that you edited, huh? Oww! Don't hit me, you asshole! Just let me finish. That's all I want to do. I don't care how predictable it is or how many unnecessary descriptions you think I'm using. I don't. Fucking. Care. And get that eraser out of my face, or so help me, you'll regret it.)

About twenty minutes later, the door opened again, and Gavin McQuinn walked inside just as complete as he was when he walked out. In his hand he held Mrs. Kurtz's eraser. Following behind him was Mrs. Kurtz, though her feet and ankles were all that was left of her. She to with ing

particular way that may remind people of something that knights did in Medieval times.

“There is One more!” he cried, and stormed off down the street, eraser held high in the air, not at all reminiscent of a torch held by athletes for some special event every four years. When he passed Mr. Griffin’s house, he waved it in the air at him. Mr. Griffin dropped his garden hose and ran inside. Gavin laughed the kind of laugh people make when they feel powerful and continued on down the street. He finally came to an apartment building that for no particular reason was covered in vines. The guard let him through as soon as he saw the eraser in Gavin’s hand.

(Excuse me, but I’m going to get a glass of water. All of this writing is making me thirsty. Want anything? Oh, that’s right, you have trouble with cups and glasses. Okay, I’ll be right back. What? Oh, I take my keys everywhere with me. It’s just one of my little quirks, you know, adding silly things like description in my stories, carrying my keys around, things like that. I’ll be back in a sec. [Clunk. Water running. Fumbling. Water stopping. Glass tinkling. Footsteps on linoleum.] There. That’s better. Almost done now. I’m going to write this last page over here—it’s sort of a surprise and I don’t want to give it away. Don’t worry, you’ll like it.)

Gavin approached room 238, eraser in hand. As expected, the door was ajar. He walked through the kitchen, noticing a dry glass and a spoon laying on the otherwise empty formica counter. His Reeboks pressed softly against the linoleum as he made his way toward the entrance to the living room. A skinny, rather flustered-looking young man dressed in black was sitting on the edge of a coffee table, furiously scribbling on a yellow legal pad that he held so close to his face it almost hit his nose. A horrid green insectile beast roughly the size of a monkey sat twitching on a couch behind the coffee table, wielding a well-worn eraser. A wooden sign with the word “EDITOR #1138” hung about its neck. Gavin inched along the far wall of the room without attracting the beast’s attention—it was holding a page from the writer’s legal pad in one of its claws and clicking its mandibles while reading it.

The writer tore off the final page from the pad and handed it to the creature, who eagerly grabbed it and continued reading. Soon the clicking mandibles stopped. The writer turned and winked at Gavin, who was now lurking in the beast’s periphery, eraser in hand. The beast’s eyes squelched down

in their sockets to read the bottom of the page, at which point it let out a horrid shriek and looked around the room. Gavin leapt forward and grabbed its segmented antennae. He jerked the Editor around to face him, held up the eraser and smiled quite lasciviously. And malevolently, too.

“I’m gonna erase you off,” he said magnanimously to the quivering Editor, and, clutching the eraser, was upon it. Viciously.