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Dead End School

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SIMPLE ENGLISH READERS

Vol. 102

Dead End School

With Introduction and Notes

by

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The Commercial Press

Beijing, 1979

内 容 简 介

本书是美国作者 Robert Coles 所著,略作简化。

本书描写美国六十年代某一大城市黑人聚居区一所小学的情况。这所小学校简陋不堪,教育质量低劣,校长和教员极端不负责任,名义上是一个教育机构,实际上是第二等国民的集中营,是青少年罪犯的温床和渊藪。政府官员和社会人士对此不闻不问,麻木不仁。在忍无可忍的情况下,少数家长和教师组织起来到学校静坐示威,但也并无真正解决问题的途径。本书从一个角度如实地反映了美国有关种族歧视、贫富悬殊和黑人青少年的教育处于穷途末路的境地等社会问题。

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死 胡 同 学 校

翦 才 注 释

商 务 印 书 馆 出 版

(北京王府井大街 36 号)

新华书店北京发行所发行

六〇三印刷厂印刷

787×1092 毫米 1/32 2 印张 47 千字

1979 年 6 月第 1 版 1979 年 6 月第 1 次印刷

印数: 1—103,000 册

统一书号: 9017·862 定价: 0.18 元

Introduction

This story, told in the words of a 12-year-old boy, gives us a glimpse of what life is like for millions of black Americans living in the slums of an American city. We see the terrible housing condition, the garbage-strewn streets, the over-crowded, dilapidated, ill-equipped schools. Life here for parents is a constant battle to bring their children up decently and to get them a good education. Some people, like Larry's mother, give up the struggle in despair and sink into the lumpen-proletariat. The dual nature of the lumpen-proletariat is well portrayed in the character of Larry. On the one hand he is acutely clan conscious—he sees the oppression his clan is subjected to, and hates and fears the cops — the agents of repression. On the other hand he admires the power of those very same cops — and of the newspaper reporters and TV men, too. This is shown well in Section VI during the demonstration outside the school. We can see that Larry could develop in either of two ways. He could become a militant revolutionary or he could easily become a fascist tool.

Jimmy is faced with a great dilemma. He wants to get a good education and equip himself for a good job and a worthwhile life. But he hates to desert his friends — to take advantage of the chance of a good education at a "white" school, while Larry and his other friends remain at the dead end school.

Other characters are sketched well: Jimmy's hard-working mother who brings her children up strictly — a hard job in such difficult condition; Jimmy's grandmother who escapes from the harshness of life to the "comforts" of religion; the white teacher at the dead end school who cannot cope with the enormous problems facing her, so drifts along waiting for the day when she can retire; the head teacher at the white school who rather patronizingly welcomes the poor black children, and so on.

All in all this book gives us some understanding of one aspect of the society in the USA today.

I

My name is James, same as my father's. My mother calls me Jimmy¹. My father was Jim and I can't forget how things were when he was alive. It was better² — he was there, big and always pushing at us to get up and start the day. And he called me Jim.

My father worked as a plumber's helper³ and, after work, he took care of buildings for extra money. It meant that he was almost never home, except to eat and sleep, and maybe late in the evenings and on Sundays, when we went to church. But my mother was always saying how lucky we were, to have the dollars coming in and good food and bikes and everything. She used to say that if things kept going the way they were, we could move out of the city and find a place of our own.⁴

But it never happened. Instead, one day last winter, a boiler Dad was working on exploded or something⁵. He was taken immediately to the hospital and that was the end. Now when my mother talks about him, it's usually when she wants us to do something for her or study.

"Your father took care of us, and what would he

1. Jimmy: 和下一句中 Jim 都是 James 的呢称。 2. it was better: (那时)情况好些。这里的无人称 it 指情况。 3. plumber's ['plʌmbəz] helper: 管子工人的助手。 4. find a place of our own: 自己买一幢房子(意思是说不再住城里的黑人贫民窟)。 5. exploded [iks'pləʊdɪd] or something: 不知是爆炸了,还是出了别的什么毛病。

think if he saw you loafing around,¹ doing nothing? If you're going to be lazy you'll never succeed in anything. Your father never wasted a minute. He finished school, and he learned a trade.² He read books and found out what was going on in the world. He spoke good English and his bosses told him he was one of the smartest men around.³ And he was dependable, which is not like some of his children."⁴

I can't answer her when she talks like that. There are seven of us, so we take our turns listening and she never keeps it up for long. I'm the next to oldest and I get it the worst.⁵ She ends by telling us⁶ that we do better than a lot of people, and we have to keep it that way.

That's my mother's biggest idea, to keep us moving ahead⁷. Even when we're not doing so well, she says, we can turn it into something good. When she had to go on welfare,⁸ she said the monthly money would give her time to help us read and study. The only trouble was that the money wasn't enough, and something had to happen, or⁹ we'd be thrown on the street for not paying the rent. So, that summer we decided to move.

Mary, my older sister, said; "You watch. Ma will

1. loafing [loufɪŋ] around: 游手好闲, 游荡。 2. he learned a trade: 他学了一门手艺。 3. one of the smartest ['smɑ:tɪst] men around: 周围人中最聪明能干的一个。 4. he was dependable, which is not like some of his children: 他是靠得住的, 和他的一些孩子不一样。 5. I get it the worst: 我挨得最厉害(意思是挨骂挨得最多)。 6. she ends by telling us ...: 她每次唠叨到最后总要对我们说…。 7. That's my mother's biggest idea, to keep us moving ahead: 我妈主要的思想就是要我们上进。 8. to go on welfare: 吃失业救济金。 9. something had to happen, or ...: 总得想个办法, 要说的话…。

tell us to be glad, and that it's about time we moved.¹"

Well, Ma said it, in almost the same words. We hated to leave, but she kept on saying it would be the best thing in the world. We would be near Grandma, who could take care of us, while Ma got some work. We'd have more money, and eat better. And we'd be going to a new school, so that might be a real improvement.

"You wait and see," she said the day the movers² came. "You'll go over to that Saunders School and like it fine,³ a whole lot more⁴ than you've ever liked school before."

I asked why, and she said she just knew. My brother Billy said that we could be on a sinking ship with no one around to save us, and Ma would be telling us how lucky we were — we'd learn all about the ocean, and what it was like at the bottom and all that.⁵

Anyway, we moved.

"Are you kidding⁶?" I said to my mother when I saw the new place. It has four rooms. As you walk through, each room is smaller than the last until you get to the kitchen, where you're just able to breathe.

She exploded. "Am I kidding? You'll see whether I'm kidding if you don't shut your mouth and get down to work unpacking⁷. I'm tired of you and your lazy-rich ideas."

1. You watch. Ma will tell us ... we moved: 你瞧着吧! 妈准会说我们应该高兴, 我们早就该搬家了。(这里的 we moved 是虚拟语气, 不是过去式。) 2. mover: 从事帮忙搬运东西的工人。 3. like it fine = like it very much. 4. a whole lot more = much more. 5. and all that = and other things like that. 6. "Are you kidding?" = "You are not serious, are you?" "你是开玩笑吧?" 7. You'll see whether ... get down to work unpacking: 你要是不闭上咀, 马上把东西清出来, 你瞧我是不是开玩笑吧。

This place is our home from now on, and when I'm through it *will* be a home.¹ We'll make it one by sweat, not complaining.² Do you hear?"

I heard. She made so much noise it was hard *not* to hear. She had each one of us doing something, except my two little brothers and they're babies.

The rooms were a dirty mess. But Mary and I helped clean them. We got the curtains up, and some pictures my mother cut out of magazines a long time ago, one of some grass and a river, and one of a man with a dog going hunting somewhere. We moved the tables, chairs and beds all around, too, and finally decided where to put everything.

There were some holes in the wall, and my mother got some pieces of wood and made me nail them up.³ She wasn't going to let any rats come in.

It took three days to fix up that kitchen.⁴ My mother wouldn't even cook in it at first. The stove didn't work, and it was very dirty, and the lights were burned out.⁵ Grandma brought over food or we went across the street and ate in her house.

In a few days we were settled. I missed the old place, but we had the same beds and chairs and everything. The big trouble was that almost all of us had to sleep in one room, my three brothers and me, and my older sister Mary,

1. This place is our home ... it will be a home: 往后, 这就是我们的家。等我把一切收拾好了, 它就会真像个家了。这里 when I'm through = when I've finished putting everything in order. 2. We'll make it one by sweat, not complaining. 我们要用汗水把这个地方变为真正的家, 而不是靠发牢骚。 3. nail them up: 把墙洞用木板钉死。 4. It took three days to fix up that kitchen: 花了三天才把那间厨房收拾好。 5. the lights were burned out: 灯泡烧坏了。

too. She was really mad¹, having to sleep with us. My mother sleeps in the other bedroom with the two babies. Mary keeps saying she's going to move out and sleep in the kitchen, and we tell her to go ahead but she doesn't. I don't know why she's complaining. My three brothers are all younger than me, and we all have to sleep in one big bed. Mary has her own bed.

It was August and very hot. The new place was awful. It was cooler on the street, but I didn't feel at ease there. I tried making friends, but had no luck. All I found was little children. I asked one of them where everyone was.

"They're someplace talking, or playing games Or they hide out someplace²."

So I went to a store and the man told me to get out. I saw an empty store and could hear voices and they didn't sound grown-up. I was afraid but I put my hands in my pockets and tried to look cool³. The door was open, and I kicked it wider open and walked in. There were about ten boys there, mostly standing around, and a few sitting playing cards.

"Hey, you, what do you want?"

"I'm new here. We just moved in, and I'm trying to find something to do."

"Well, look somewhere else. Hear?"

"You mean ..."

"Yeah,⁴ we mean *get out* — and *fast*."

I must have waited a second, and a guy started moving toward me. The next thing I was in the street, running.

1. mad = angry. 2. someplace = somewhere. 3. to look cool = to look bold. 显出泰然自若的样子。 4. yeah = yes.

I tried a few other places, and there'd be a few guys of my age, but they let me know right away¹ that they didn't like strangers².

Things got so bad that I almost liked staying at home. I did a lot of odd jobs³ around the house because they were *something* to do. My mother and I, we did a lot of talking about my dad, and why we moved, and what it was going to be like later, when maybe we'd have more money, and I would be older, and in college, she said. And there was always my grandma around, talking about God and telling one story after another.

II

From the middle of August, when we moved, to when we started getting ready to go back to school was the longest, slowest time I've ever had.

When the first day of school finally came, I woke up glad to be going -- gladder than ever before, I'll tell you. I forgot about everything, the moving, and Dad, and how hot it was in our rooms. I kept on thinking there would be a lot of boys there at school, and it might be a real good place, like my mother said⁴, and I could make some friends. So I got into my clothes fast and sang at breakfast. Mary said I was a poor singer, but I didn't mind.

My mother made pancakes for me, the food I like best. Grandma came over, and helped mother cook. So we

1. right away = at once. 2. they didn't like strangers: 他们不喜欢陌生人。 3. odd jobs: 零活。 4. like my mother said = as my mother said. (这里 like 用作连词。)

had everything on time and none of us could complain. Grandmother said one of her long prayers¹, with her hands up in the air, like she does every year when we start school. My mother was making sure our clothes were clean and tidy, Mary and Billy and me, so we'd look good to the teachers, and my grandmother was saying a prayer for each of us. She walked over to Mary and told her she was going to be the best girl in school, and everyone was going to like her. Then she added, "Please God." And she told Billy and me she wanted us to be good like our dad was.

Meanwhile Ma kept saying "yes" to what Grandma told us, but she was more interested in seeing that we were all "new and shiny"² — that's what she said. I was afraid I was too new and shiny, with my new shirt and tie³, but I didn't say anything. I thought to myself I could always take the tie off and put it in my pocket.

It was then, after I said goodbye and was on my way to school, that I met Larry. I was thinking I'd soon be near the corner, and then I'd have to turn right. I turned the corner, and there he was.

"Hey, man⁴, where you going?" he said softly.

I wasn't sure he meant me, so I looked around, and nobody else was there.

"I mean you. You going to school?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Me too. My mother just threw me out and said if

1. prayer [preə]: 祷告。 2. "new and shiny": "新鲜漂亮"(这是 Jim 的母亲的话,反映她讲究体面)。 3. tie [tai] n.: 领带。 4. man: 老兄(黑人中的男人和男孩之间常用的称呼)。

I didn't show up at school, I'd better not come home."

"Did she mean it?"¹

"She never means what she says."

I didn't say anything. I just kept walking. And then he took me by the arm.

"You going to Saunders School?"

"Yes."

"But you're taking the long way there, man!"

"I thought this was the best way to get there."

"If you want to waste half your life getting there, it is."

"How do you go?"

"Well, I'll tell you. It's a big secret, but I'll let you in on it — if you can keep your mouth shut."²

He still held on to my arm and I was doing like he said. I kept quiet. He pointed to an alley between two buildings, and I had to follow him.

What a shortcut!³ When he let go of me I didn't know what to do — there was so much glass and garbage⁴ and other dirty things that it was difficult to make my way through. Besides, he gave me a look when he saw what I was doing, trying to step over things, or around them.⁵ He didn't say anything, and I didn't. It seemed as if making no noise was part of going through the alley.⁶

Every minute or so he stopped to look at something;

1. "Did she mean it?": "她说这话是当真的吗?" 2. I'll let you in on it — if you can keep your mouth shut: 要是你不乱说出去,我可以把这秘密告诉你。 3. What a shortcut! 这是什么样的近道啊!(指巷子里面堆满垃圾,又脏又臭。) 4. glass and garbage ['gɑ:bɪdʒ]: 玻璃和垃圾。 5. step over things, or around them: 跨过或绕过那些东西。 6. as if making no noise was...the alley: 似乎不出声也是穿过这条小巷的必要条件之一。

an old shoe, or a broken box, or some playing cards. One of them was an ace of diamonds,¹ and he showed it to me, and then put it in his pocket. He kicked a loose piece of wood in one fence.² Then he showed me how the bricks in a building were loose, so you could pull them out. I almost fell over a broken bottle, and just as I thought I was getting used to the place, I saw some rats eating garbage and they didn't even turn when we walked by.

I felt bad in my stomach.³ I thought I was going to throw up the whole breakfast I had just eaten. I tried not to show him how I felt. I remember I kept walking. And from the corner of my eye I could see the rats, fat, brown, bigger than cats.

I was glad when we left the alley to walk through the hall⁴ of a building. I felt much better being inside again.

"It's only a couple of minutes after the next yard.⁵ We go thorough a back street and it leads us almost right to the school. It's much faster this way, and there's no one bothering you."

"Do you go this way every day?"

"Mostly. I know another shortcut, but it's longer. I like to go any way that gets me away from the traffic lights.⁶ They're stupid. No cars are coming, but the light is green and you're supposed to wait.⁷ Then a lot of cars show up, and it's red, so they have to stop and wait,

1. an ace [eis] of diamonds ['diəməndz]: 纸牌中的红方块A。 2. a loose piece of wood in one fence: 板墙上一块松脱的木板。 3. I felt bad in my stomach. 我感到噁心要吐。 4. hall: 室内的走廊、过道。 5. It's only a couple of minutes after the next yard: 穿过一块空地以后,再走几分钟就到了。 6. traffic lights: 交通红绿灯。 7. you're supposed to wait: 你就得等。(be supposed to 用以表示有责任、义务做某件事。)

even if there's no one around who wants to walk across. Stupid. A lot of things are stupid, and all they do in school is give you more stupid rules."

And then we were on the street. Just to the right of us was the school, like I saw it a week before with my mother. Only now there were people all around, and I was glad I had a friend. I must have smiled at him or something, because he smiled at me.

"I'm Larry. What's your name?"

"Jim."

"O. K., Jim. You want to try the alley again going home?"

"Sure."

"What grade are you in?"

"Sixth."

"Think you'll ever finish it?"

"I hope so."

"I'm starting sixth, too, and it's going to be a waste of time, the biggest waste anyone ever dreamed up.¹ Just wait."

Like before, I didn't know what to say back, but we were inside the building, so I just said something about having to go to the office to find out what to do.

"You'll be there all day, man. But who knows, we may meet in the cafeteria². If you want to stand right outside the door we came in, I'll pick you up when school's over."

1. dreamed up: 异想天开想出来的。 2. cafeteria [ˌkæfɪ'tɪəriə]: 由顾客自取饭菜的食堂。

The next thing I knew he was gone.¹ I thought to myself that he might even know a shortcut to his room.

I moved in the direction Larry showed me, but I didn't seem to be getting anywhere. The school was much bigger than I remembered. When Ma and I had walked over to look at it I told her it looked just like the old one, the same broken windows and writing all over the walls and everything else. Even the fence around it was coming down. But my mother said no, it's what's inside that's important. "That will be different." Well, it was. The halls were longer, and there were even more children than before, so many I couldn't see how there was enough air for everyone to breathe.

The halls went on, and turned corners, and I had to ask someone about the principal's office.² I saw a teacher and asked her.

"End of the hall, last door to the left. And hurry up. It's late."

So I did what she said and there was the door with the sign: OFFICE. WALK IN.³ I pushed the door just as the bells all rang: The halls were suddenly empty. I waited for a second before pushing the door open. Then I was afraid someone might come down the hall and see me standing there with my hand on the door, so I went inside.

1. The next thing I knew he was gone: 一转眼他已经走了。 2. the principal's office: 校长办公室。 3. Walk In = Don't bother to knock, just open the door and come in.

III

It was the biggest office I had ever seen. almost like a hall or something, and there were three women in it. They didn't even look up¹ when I came in, and I stood there, not knowing what to say or do. I thought to myself I could be a robber and they wouldn't know it,² or I could steal some pencils and paper and a lamp on the desk near the door and just walk out, and it wouldn't make any difference to them.³

I was thinking of doing something to make them look up and see me. But then one woman dropped a pencil and couldn't reach it from her chair, so she got up to look for it, and that's how she noticed me.

"The principal is a very busy man," the secretary told me before I could say anything.

I told her my name and that I was transferring from the Lawrence Simpson School.

"You'll have to wait your turn," she said, and went back to look for that pencil.

It was O.K. at first, just sitting there on the stool and hearing her talk on the phone. Once she turned to me and told me there were twice as many children in the building as there ought to be. I didn't say anything. I didn't know if I was supposed to or not.⁴

1. They didn't even look up: 她们连头也不抬一下。 2. I could be a robber and they wouldn't know it: 我即使是一个强盗,她们也不会发现。
3. and it wouldn't make any difference to them: 对她们说来,也无所谓。
4. I didn't know if I was supposed to or not: 我不知道我该不该说。