

ONE

It was an ordinary January afternoon, a Thursday, when they came for Matt Donaghy.

They came for him during fifth period, which was Matt's study period, in room 220 of Rocky River High School, Westchester County.

Matt and three friends – Russ, Stacey, Skeet – had formed a circle with their desks at the rear of the room and were conferring, in lowered voices, about Matt's adaptation of a short story by Edgar Allan Poe into a one-act play; after school, in Drama Club, the four of them were scheduled to read *William Wilson: A Case of Mistaken Identity* for the club members and their advisor, Mr Weinberg. It was a coincidence that Mr Weinberg, who taught English and drama at Rocky River High, was in charge of fifth-period study hall, and when a knock came at the door of the room, Mr Weinberg went to open it in his good-natured, sauntering manner.

"Yes, gentlemen? What can I do for you?"

Only a few students, sitting near the front of the room, took much notice. They might have registered a note of surprise in Mr Weinberg's tone. But Mr Weinberg, with his greying sandy hair worn longer than most of his male colleagues' at Rocky River, and a bristling beard that invited teasing, had a flair for dramatising ordinary remarks, giving a light touch where he could. Calling strangers "gentlemen" was exactly in keeping with Mr Weinberg's humour.

At the rear of the room, Matt and his friends were absorbed in the play, for which Matt was doing hurried revisions, typing away furiously on his laptop. Anxiously he'd asked his friends, "But does this *work*? Is it scary, is it funny, does it *move*?" Matt Donaghy had something of a reputation at Rocky River for being both brainy and a comic character, but secretly he was a perfectionist, too. He'd been working on his one-act play *William Wilson: A Case of Mistaken Identity* longer than his friends knew, and he had hopes it would be selected to be performed at the school's Spring Arts Festival.

Typing in revisions, Matt hadn't been paying any attention to Mr Weinberg at the front of the room talking with two men. Until he heard his name spoken – "Matthew Donaghy?"

Matt looked up. What was this? He saw Mr Weinberg pointing in his direction, looking worried. Matt swallowed hard, beginning to be frightened. What did these men, strangers, want with *him*? They wore dark suits, white shirts, plain neckties; and they were definitely not smiling. As Matt stared, they approached him, moving not together but along two separate aisles, as if to block off his route if he tried to escape.

Afterwards Matt would realise how swift and purposeful – and practised – they were. *If I'd made a break to get my backpack... If I'd reached into my pocket...*

The taller of the two men, who wore dark-rimmed glasses with green-tinted lenses, said, "You're Matthew Donaghy?"

Matt was so surprised, he heard himself stammer, "Y-Yes. I'm – Matt."

The classroom had gone deathly silent. Everyone was staring at Matt and the two strangers. It was like a moment on TV, but there were no cameras. The men in their dark suits exuded an authority that made rumbled, familiar Mr Weinberg in his corduroy jacket and slacks look ineffectual.

"Is something w-wrong? What do you want with – me?"

Matt's mind flooded: something had happened at home to his mother, or his brother, Alex... his father was away on business; had something happened to him? A plane crash...

The men were standing on either side of his desk, looming over him. Unnaturally close for strangers. The man with the glasses and a small fixed smile introduced himself and his companion to Matt as detectives with the Rocky River Police Department and asked Matt to step outside into the corridor. "We'll only need a few minutes."

In his confusion Matt looked to Mr Weinberg for permission – as if the high school teacher's authority could exceed the authority of the police.

Mr Weinberg nodded brusquely, excusing Matt. He too appeared confused, unnerved.

Matt untangled his legs from beneath his desk. He was a tall, lanky, whipper-lean boy who blushed easily. With so