

# A SHOT THROUGH THE WINDOW

## 1. A NEW JOB.

Eddie rushed through the long hallway. If only the hall monitor wouldn't see him, he'd soon be outside. He dodged around the other students who were walking in small groups. Sliding into his locker, he hurriedly turned the lock to the exact number and opened the door. He threw his books inside, jerked his jacket off the hook and slammed the metal door shut. These slamming doors in the hallway made a deafening sound! He snapped the lock on his locker door and ran outside.

It surely was wonderful to be out of that stuffy school. Sometimes that huge, gray building looked just like a jail. Around him the yelling and commotion went on.

Four yellow school buses were waiting to bring the children home who lived farther away. Most of the children, including Eddie, didn't live too far away and walked to school every day.

He noticed it had started to rain. It was a drizzly, cold rain. It made everything look so bleak and dull. He walked away from the curb because the passing cars were splattering and splashing as they sped by.

He walked along with the crowd, past the high walls of the school with its rows of windows. The lower row of windows had iron bars over them. That was really necessary in this neighborhood since the school was broken into often. Eddie couldn't understand who would want to break into their school. There wasn't that much to steal!

There were two large buildings next to each other. The first building was the middle school and the second one was the high school. Between the two buildings was a high iron fence with a security gate. This gate was shut and locked after each school day was over.

Even with all the noise of the traffic, he could hear the students with all their talking and yelling. They were wound up after their day's work at school. Here and there someone would be shoved or jabbed, adding to all the commotion. At the corner of the street, the groups of students stopped. Those in the rear shoved those who were standing up front by the curb.

"Hurry up! Get moving!"

Of course, they could see the traffic light was red, but they still pushed. That was fun! A few of them even dared to run across the street. Angry drivers were honking, but after a mad dash, you also could hear the excited voices of the students who made it across the street.

Eddie looked and waited. It was good there were no policemen in the neighborhood right now. The traffic in New York was always extremely busy, especially at this time of day. No, he did not dare risk running against the light.

Of course, Chris, the school show-off, did; he was one who always tried to outdo the rest.

Eddie shrugged his shoulders. As the light turned green, he began walking again and crossed the street with the rest of the crowd. At every corner a few of the students broke away from the group. After he had walked two blocks, Eddie turned off to the right, also, with other children. They walked along between the high apartment buildings that were on either side of the street. The tall buildings made the street look very small and the sky much higher and farther away.

The door to his stairway was just ahead. The door had been broken for quite some time and was hanging open. Hopefully Greg, the maintenance man, would fix it sometime. With all the blowing, windy rain the whole stairway was wet. A long row of mailboxes hung behind the stairway. Eddie pulled one open to see if the mailman had been there, but the mailbox was empty.

“Hey, Ed.”

He looked around. There was Chris again, leaning against the doorpost with a cigarette hanging from his lips. He had his friend, Andrew, with him who was trying to imitate him. He also had a hand hooked in his pocket, legs crossed, and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. They were always hanging around with seemingly nothing to do after school. Their favorite hang-outs were in the stairways or at some corner outside. Why they liked this was a puzzle for Eddie.

“What do you want?” he said. Eddie really didn’t care to have much to do with Chris, and was on his guard. He quickly looked from one to the other.

“Say, Ed! You wanna do somethin’ for us?” Chris looked at him, his eyes nearly closed.

“You can earn some money,” said the other boy. He talked very slowly and didn’t look Eddie in the face. He stared thoughtfully at the curling puffs of smoke he blew into the air.

Eddie perked up his ears. Do something for these boys? That couldn’t be of much importance. He almost shook his head to say “no” and wanted to climb the stairs, but, wait a minute, these guys were seniors. It would probably be better to be friendly to them. And didn’t they say, “earn some money?”

He hesitated and glanced toward them again. Where did they get those leather jackets and those high boots with the nail studs? They certainly looked expensive, he thought. They must have lots of money.

Chris took something out of his pocket.

“I don’t want to get wet,” he grinned. “If you will bring this away for me, I’ll give you some money.”

Eddie looked outdoors. This Chris was sure a sissy. It wasn’t raining that hard at all! Of course, his leather jacket probably shouldn’t get wet. Eddie almost chuckled. No, he hadn’t expected that

of him. But, he could earn some money. He wondered how much Chris would give him. Even if it was only a dollar, he didn't have to do much for it. He wasn't afraid of a little rain!

Chris gave Eddie the envelope that he had taken out of his pocket.

“Do you see that car over there by the corner—that blue car that is cruising by so slowly? It will come past here in a few minutes; when it gets here, you walk as fast as you can to the curb and give this envelope to the man in that car. He needs it.”

He grinned, “Hurry, here he comes now. He'll pay you right away, so go quick!”

He gave Eddie a shove. Before Eddie knew it, he was standing on the curb next to the car. The window in the car was already rolled down and a hand was sticking out.

“Here,” Eddie was going to say, but a hand grabbed the envelope from him, not a word was said, and another envelope was handed back to him. The car sped away. Eddie watched it disappear around the corner. That man was in a hurry! He walked back to the boys who were waiting in the stairway.

“Good job, Ed,” exclaimed Chris as he grinned.

“You are our best runner,” chimed Andrew, as he blew a cloud of smoke in Eddie's face.

Eddie started to cough.

“Stop that,” said Chris gruffly. “See how easy that was, Ed? I've got another one here. There comes another car, that maroon one, see it? Quick, give this to him!”

Eddie walked back and forth a few more times. Each time he brought an envelope back to Chris, but sometimes he got cash. Eddie thought, these people surely give a lot of money. They seemed to know where Chris was, even though he stayed hiding in the stairway.

“You sure are a big help,” exclaimed Chris who appeared very satisfied. “Are you coming to help us again tomorrow?” he asked.

Eddie looked at him. Something inside him told him he shouldn't have anything to do with Chris. He seemed very friendly, but... Eddie felt a little afraid when he looked at him. No, though he sounded friendly, his eyes were not so at all! But it probably wouldn't hurt to work for him again. Besides, if he didn't do it, Chris and his friend would be angry with him, he could be sure of that, and then they would probably tease him.

He felt something being shoved into his hand.

“This is for you; we'll see you tomorrow. We don't always stand here, but even if we're in another stairway, you can help us again. We'll let you know.” Eddie watched them as they

walked away. They walked like all the big boys did: swaying a little with their pants sagging low at their knees. When he got older, he would act like that, too, he thought. It looked really cool!

He looked at the money that he had in his hand. His eyes got big! A \$20 dollar bill! He stood in shock by the stairs. This must be a mistake! After thinking for a moment, he thought maybe not. Chris had received a pile of money from all those people, and there was lots of money in the envelopes that Chris had received from them, too. So, he reasoned, he could also have a little of that money. Hadn't they even made him walk through the rain to get it?

Whistling, he began to climb the stairs to his own apartment and took the key out of his pocket.

"I won't say anything," he thought. "I won't tell Mom anything when she comes home either. Later, when I have saved a lot, and then, after she comes home, tired, and we're sitting at the table, and she's writing checks for all her bills and sighing, I'll quickly shove this money under her nose. She sure will be surprised!"

"Eddie," she'll say, "what a surprise! How did you ever earn this much?" Then I'll tell her: "Oh, I only helped a couple of boys. They were too cool to get a little wet."

Then she would give him a punch on his shoulder and say, "Eddie, you've really helped me; now I can work a little less, maybe we can go somewhere on Saturday. I'll let you choose where to go."

In the meantime Eddie had climbed the five sets of stairs to their little apartment. He did not like to use the elevator, which always smelled so bad. He turned the key in the lock and quickly opened the door. Once inside he turned on a light for it was beginning to get dark.

He stood in the middle of the room and looked around. Should he hide the money somewhere? No, he'd keep it in his pocket and wrap it in a piece of paper. What would he choose to do if mother wanted to go away for a day with him? To the zoo in the Bronx or take a boat trip around the city? He'd have to think more about it later.

Maybe they could eat out somewhere, too. Not in a high-class restaurant of course; that would be too expensive. There were many other places, though, they would still be able to afford. He'd order a large hamburger with lots of ketchup and relish and a large coke to go with it.

Eddie wandered into the bathroom and glanced in the mirror. He chuckled at the boy in front of him. He stood there dreaming and making plans, while his mother knew nothing about it. He wondered if the boys would want him to help them again. Maybe they'd ask someone else tomorrow.

There was a couch in the corner of the living room where he always slept. Behind this room was a small bedroom where his mother's bed was. He looked at the clock and saw that she wouldn't be home yet for over an hour.

He wandered into the kitchen. Usually his mother left a note there if she wanted him to do something before she came home. The note didn't have many instructions other than she had wanted him to water her plants and turn the oven on to heat their supper.

He went to get the watering can. The front living room had four small, square windows, just the same as the buildings on the other side of the street. Behind that building were others, with the same square windows. He wondered how many windows there were altogether. There must be hundreds. Eddie knew their windows were different though, and he was proud of that. His mother always set her plants in front of their windows. He never saw that in any other place but that made their little apartment special. When he looked up at all those squares from the street, it was not difficult to find their own windows. He just looked for his mother's plants.

After watering the plants, he set the dial on the oven and then picked up his library book.

He laid on the couch, close to the window. The constant noise coming from New York City penetrated everything; he didn't even hear it anymore. He began reading his book and soon was deeply absorbed. The book was about two boys who brought a slave from the South to Canada so he could be free. This was a long time ago when there were many slaves in America. There were also many black people who lived in those large buildings in his neighborhood. He wondered if they were all descendents of these slaves.

Eddie lay there thinking when he heard the key in the lock.

Mother was home!