

ALTAR BOYS

written by

Garrett Vander Leun

EXT. - WHISKEY FLATS - DELBERT BROS. GROCERIES - DAY

The exterior isn't much to look at, even with the cheap Halloween decor. Tiny store, tiny aisles, tiny kid out front-

HENRY THOMPSON (10). Slacks and dress shirt. Fidgety and undersized. He clutches two, folded cardboard boxes with nervous desperation and looks inside the store-

MAGAZINE AND GREETING CARD AISLE

Henry's brother, WILL THOMPSON (15). Slacks and dress shirt. His eyes are dark and volatile. A convict in the making.

He flips through a woman's lifestyle magazine-

"HOW TO PLEASE YOUR MAN **AND** YOURSELF"

Interesting. He glances up-

Watching him, like a hawk, is DILL DELBERT (49). A hairy, bowling ball-of-a-man with a distaste for kids in his store.

Will greets him with a shit-eating smile and walks away-

BREAD AND CEREAL AISLE

KEKE (15, African American) strolls down the aisle, old skateboard in hand. She carries herself like a blunt instrument, her clothing is drab and of no import.

She grabs a fresh baguette, SNIFFS it.

DALE DELBERT (49) watches her from the end of the aisle. He's just as hairy and grumpy as his twin brother. Maybe worse.

Keke doesn't address him, but she walks away, same as Will.

CLOSE ON TWO PAIRS OF TEENAGE FEET

Scuffed sneakers and dress shoes, facing opposite directions.

TOILETRIES AISLE

Keke looks at the shelves on one side, Will the other. They grab something, quickly, and check for the Delbert Brothers-

All clear.

They double-take on one another. And their in-hand items:

Tampons for Keke, zit cream for Will.

They stare at one another, neither one cracking. Until... Will LAUGHS, turning Keke's blank face into rage.

Dill and Dale appear down the aisle.

DILL AND DALE

Hey!

Keke shoves Will backwards, toppling an entire row of shelves!

Will swims to find his footing in the knot of upended items as the Delbert Brothers rush towards him.

EXT. DELBERT BROS GROCERIES - DAY

Henry almost jumps out of his bones as-

Keke flies out the front doors, then Will and-

In the rear and running like trash bags, The Delbert Bros!

Henry twitches with indecision before he runs after them.

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - MAIN STREET

Will trails Keke between the buildings-

Running past a dentistry, post office, pizza place, etc.-

The shops are quaint, a few of them closed for good.

Up ahead Keke suddenly twists into an alley and disappears. Will looks back- the Delbert Brothers stay on *him*.

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - RESIDENTIAL AREA

The Delbert Brothers are sweating through their clothes, their decision to pursue a mistake. Will is a dot in the distance, running through yards staked with "for sale" signs.

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - UNDEVELOPED LOT

Will jumps over a wooden fence into a pile of loose dirt.

HENRY (O.S.)

Will!

Henry waves from some distance away, relieved.

Behind the homes, the landscape drops into a steep ravine.

ON WILL AND HENRY AS

Will shoves the zit cream into his pocket and yanks the cardboard out from under Henry's arm. He lays them flat.

HENRY

Did you steal something?!

In the distance, the Delbert Brothers fall over the fence.

DILL AND DALE

Come back here!

WILL

Henry-

(off Henry's hesitation)

Sit down, Dummy!

Henry sits on the cardboard, tense and nervous. Will shoves him out of view, sits on his own cardboard and-

WIDE ON DEVIL'S GULCH

An authentic, Old West town rebuilt for tourism. Kind of.

An old water tower looms over a fading saloon, motel, blacksmith, church- the tourist attendance is thin at best.

In the background, the brothers trail dust as they descend the ravine on their cardboard sleds and bottom out in the basin.

EXT. DEVIL'S GULCH - CHURCH - REAR

Will and Henry skid to a stop in the dirt. As they stand, Will scans the top of the ridge.

The Delbert Brothers- rotund little dots- stare, defeated.

Will offers them his middle finger. Henry, eager to get away from the trouble, walks away from his brother.

ON THEIR FOOTSTEPS

Tracking through a nondescript pile of dirt, Will steps and-

A curl of long-buried **skeleton fingers** emerge in his wake.

HENRY (O.S.)
You shouldn't have done that.

EXT. DEVIL'S GULCH - CHURCH - REAR

Henry confronts his brother at the rear door.

HENRY
Mom and dad are going to be pissed-

WILL
That's the point, idiot.

The rear door opens and GERALD's head pops out (12, Asian).

Gerald's rail-thin, impeccably-dressed. He's got big glasses and even bigger eyes. He doesn't miss a thing.

HENRY
Stop being such a giant sugar booger.

Without warning, Will SLAPS Henry across the face.

WILL
Grow. Up.

He WHIMPERS, covering his face as Will goes inside. Henry takes a moment then shuffles past a blinking, awkward Gerald.

PRE-LAP: PUNK ROCK MUSIC

INT. CHURCH - ALTAR

As the music plays, the following scene stays with the beat:

FATHER PIKE (65), a sturdy man with a bonafide cowboy vibe and a tobacco-aged face, emerges from the sacristy door.

In slo-mo now, the three altar boys enter to flank the priest. It would be badass if they weren't such an odd trio-

Will, cross in hand, steel-jawed and defiant-

Gerald, chains of incense in hand, chin raised in devotion-

And Henry, carrying the bible, with watery eyes and the telltale pink outline of a fresh slap on his face.

ALTAR BOYS

The music and slo-mo ends.

INT. CHURCH - LECTERN - LATER

Father Pike addresses his parishioners-

FATHER PIKE
...“Trick or treat.”

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Smell my feet!

Father Pike holds off on anger as LAUGHTER rises and fades.

FATHER PIKE
Classic. Thank you.
(moving on)
The real trick is believing that we
even need a treat in the first place.
Switching a song on the radio before
it's through. Ordering out while
we've got leftovers in the fridge...
When we spend so much time reaching
for something better, it's impossible
to realize we already have the best.

He looks down at the Bible and a camera flash goes off.

Father Pike takes a deep BREATH, looks for the offender-

WIDE ON THE PARISHIONERS

TOURISTS in shorts sit beside LOCALS dressed in contemporary
Church attire and local ACTORS in authentic Old West attire.

BEHIND THE PARISHIONERS

Moving between their heads as Father Pike tries to press on.

FATHER PIKE
I know we've got a number of first-
timers here in Devil's Gulch. Taking
a little va-cay.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Yee-haw!

Father Pike points at nothing in particular, likely his rage.

FATHER PIKE
Thank you.
(forced smile)
Not really looking for a call-and-
response, comedy club thing here.
(MORE)

FATHER PIKE (cont'd)
 (warmer smile)
 We're a church. I'm the priest.
 Preaching. You're the parishioners-

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Parishioning!

The movement stops on a clear gap in the pews, framing up-
 Will and Henry sharing a bench with Gerald.

ON THE ALTAR BOYS

HENRY
 (sags with disappointment)
 Mom and dad aren't even here.

WILL
 Good.

Henry's going to cry. Will shoots him a look. *Don't you dare.*

FATHER PIKE (O.S.)
 It's fear that prevents us from
 taking a new challenge head on. Fear
 that makes us mask our pain instead
 of defeat it. It's fear that makes us
 think we have to do it alone, too. If
 we remember, psalm twenty-seven says-

Will turns his attention to Gerald-

Gerald's lips move in exact synchronization with Father Pike.

FATHER PIKE (O.S.)
 "When the wicked advance to devour
 me, it is my enemies and foes who
 will stumble and fall."

WILL
 (to Gerald)
 The hell are you doing, Gerald?

Gerald stares at Will, still lip-syncing Pike's words-

FATHER PIKE (O.S.)
 "Though an army besiege me, my heart
 will not fear."

ON FATHER PIKE

FATHER PIKE

You see what I'm getting at here?
With the many treats God has afforded
us? With our friends and loved ones?
We, the meek, become the mighty.

Will tosses something and it bounces off Gerald's head.

Father Pike, double-takes and loses his focus- *forget it.*

FATHER PIKE (cont'd)

Body and blood, anyone?

PRE-LAP: RINGING CHURCH BELLS

EXT. CHURCH - FRONT DOORS

The bells RING while Father Pike shakes a few hands and exchanges pleasantries with exiting tourists and parishioners.

Will, back in his under-dressings, tries to rush past-

FATHER PIKE

(grabbing him)
Hey! What's the rush?

WILL

Nothing.

Henry hustles up beside them, also dressed for home.

FATHER PIKE

You already clean the pews?

WILL

Yes.

FATHER PIKE

(to Henry)
I'm asking *him*. Sacristy's clean?

Henry doesn't budge.

WILL

Tell him 'yes,' Hen.

FATHER PIKE

(not worth it)
Just get out of here.

As they leave, Gerald, still in robes, sidles up beside him.

GERALD
Sinful little devils, aren't they?

Father Pike sizes Gerald up. *The kid is incredibly odd.*

EXT. DEVIL'S GULCH - CROSSROADS

Henry trails Will through the middle of the dirt-lined street. An authentic Old West BLACKSMITH (40s, Asian) looks up from his work as they pass. Henry makes a gun with his hand and-

From inside the nearby saloon, the clear sound of GUNFIRE.

Henry puts his hand to his face, feigning a silent scream as-
TOURISTS scream and move away from the swinging doors before-

A clean-cut SHERIFF staggers and falls out to the street, clutching a shirt clogged with bright, red costume blood.

Henry stops to watch, smiling.

HENRY
Blake The Rattlesnake..!

And from the swinging doors, out steps Blake "The Rattlesnake" Cagney. Or at least the ACTOR playing him.

He's overweight, balding and barely convincing. His spurs RATTLE an almost comical amount as he walks. Hence the name.

ACTOR
(hammy and big)
Agree to disagree, Sheriff?

He cups his ear, waiting for answer. Grinning, now-

ACTOR (cont'd)
I guess ol' sleepy britches settled
on a dirt-nap instead!

He spins his revolver with a clumsy flourish and barely gets it back inside his holster. Rushing to move past his blunder-

ACTOR (cont'd)
(to the crowd)
Well, quit your gawking and come
inside- drinks is on me!
(drops his act)
Sodas only, though. No refills-

A WOMAN tries to snap a photo of him-

ACTOR (cont'd)
 (stopping her)
 Sorry, Ma'am. Twenty bucks for photos
 with The Rattlesnake.
 (acting again)
 Got a whole gang of bandits to feed!

Henry beams and turns to share the moment with Will... Will is halfway up the only road in and out of Devil's Gulch.

HENRY
 (running to catch up)
 Will..!

The sheriff stands, dusts himself off. Looks for recognition- Henry, still running, spins and WHISTLES his sharp approval. The sheriff bows, deeply and with great flair.

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - MAIN STREET

Will stomps up the sidewalk, Henry trailing.

HENRY
 I think The Rattlesnake is savage.

Will doesn't respond.

HENRY (cont'd)
 Right, Will? The Rattlesnake is-

WILL
 Shut up, Hen.

HENRY
 I kind of want spurs now, is that weird of me? Could be cool, right?

WILL
 You know he's just some guy from TV, right? That old show with the friends all living in an apartment?

HENRY
 Friends?

WILL
 That's what I just said!

HENRY
 No, I meant it's called 'Friends!'

WILL
Oh, like I'm sure you know it so well. You were fucking sperm, Hen.

HENRY
So were you.

WILL
I was born *before* Netflix, dumbass!

HENRY
We were all sperm. *Dad* was sperm.

WILL
Fuck dad.

Will spots something in the distance. Something upsetting.

HENRY
I'll tell him you said that.

WILL
Good! Tell him! I'll tell him about the dumbass spurs you want to wear-
(to off-screen concern)
HEY!

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - PARK

Keke kicks her skateboard into her hands as-

Will marches up to her, finger aimed at Keke's face.

WILL
Hey, Asshole! You think you can just shove me for no reason?

Henry spots something approaching the distance. *Uh-oh...*

WILL (cont'd)
Apologize.

Henry tugs on Will's shirt and points-

WILL (cont'd)
Henry, I swear to-

Five GNARLY SKATEBOARDERS skid to a stop behind Keke.

WILL (cont'd)
Hi.
(grins)
Sausage party?

HENRY
 (to Will)
 Apologize..!

WILL
 Sure. Yeah.
 (suicidal grin)
 Sorry you're bleeding out your eyes
 and your *whatever*.

Henry's mouth drops in shock. As Keke's gang closes in-

Keke raises a hand to stop them. *She's got this one. She rears her skateboard back like a baseball bat.*

Will closes his eyes and a WET SQUISH SOUND cuts to-

CLOSE ON WILL'S FACE - MOVING

The same image from before, eyes closed, except one is purple and swollen completely shut. Keke-style.

EXT. WHISKEY FLATS - THOMPSON HOME - DAY

Henry leads the way, opening the front door for Will.

INT. THOMPSON HOME

Two-story, modestly decorated. Mom-style crafting meets dad-style sports and leisure. Henry and Will stop, stare-

THROUGH THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR AT THE REAR

Their mother, BONNIE (50s), stands opposite their father, JACK (50s). Bonnie's in dark sunglasses, hiding tears.

Henry looks up at Will for guidance, gets nothing.

Bonnie spots her boys through the window, mouths, *Oh my God!*

INT. THOMPSON HOME - LIVING ROOM

Will, blank-of-face, and Henry, eyes lit with concern, sit opposite their parents. Bonnie is still wearing her glasses.

JACK
 I'm just stuck on the girl thing.

WILL
How interesting.

JACK
Excuse me?

HENRY
You weren't at church.

JACK
We were busy.

WILL
With a girl thing?

JACK
Take it easy...

BONNIE
(to Jack)
You don't think a girl is capable of
kicking a boy's ass?

WILL
She didn't kick my ass.

JACK
Look at your face, Knucklehead.

HENRY
Why are you wearing glasses, Mom?

JACK
Listen, Boys. Your mom and I are
going to take off tomorrow-

HENRY
But it's Halloween tomorrow!

JACK
You can talk in a minute-

HENRY
But-

JACK
In a minute! When I'm done. Listen.

BONNIE
We'll be back the next day.

HENRY
But who's going to sing at the
saloon? And get me sarsaparilla?

WILL
Jesus Christ, Hen!

JACK
Hey!

WILL
Who cares about fucking sarsaparilla?

BONNIE
Language!

HENRY
I love sarsaparilla..!

JACK
Hey- guys- you can talk in minute-

WILL
Mom got fired, Henry. There's no more
saloon show. No more pretend cowboy
shit. Right, Dad?
(pressing harder)
Right?!

JACK
You can talk in a minute!

Henry collapses against the couch, ready to cry his life away.

JACK (cont'd)
Sit up. Sit- hey! Listen. We're going
to find a new house, okay?

BONNIE
Apartment.

JACK
Well-
(not his choice)
We'll see.

BONNIE
We're getting apartments.

HENRY
(he can't handle anymore)
More than one?!

CLOSE ON WILL'S FACE

His family's conversation turns to a nagging, ELECTRONIC HUM.