

(Based on a dream. It starts off normal, but then shows its true colors as a surreal nightmare (the twilight zone). The world is isolated and surreal from the boy's point of view. Not sure if should be first person or not, since it's hard for adult readers to empathize with a child's first person language? It's also hard to write as a child; would a child think using the words that an adult normally uses to describe things? Experiment with both.)

The story is about a 10 year old middle schooler (who is unnamed so the reader can see things from his point of view more) who has mild cerebral palsy, a stutter, wheezing, and is slightly overweight, so he has a hard time running. The school has almost no one in it; there is something surreal about it, as if there is something very wrong but no one bats an eye, or avoids doing so. The boy sits alone at the cafeteria. It is a sparsely populated school, and there are not many people in the cafeteria. He has hand written notes and texts from his parents- these seem like generic, lifeless texts, implying that his parents raise him but do not talk with him, as they are distant and busy with other things. It's implied they are often on 'business trips' and are not home, and a nanny takes care of him. One day, a man who seems to act friendly comes up and asks to take pictures of the boy. Weirder out, the boy moves away without looking at the man, but as he does, he hears the snap and sees flash of a camera. The man, without looking at the boy, walks away.

The next day, the man comes by the boy again in the cafeteria. He tries making conversation, to which the boy moves away from. But the man persists. He moves his arm in front of the boy, too uncomfortably close, almost blocking him. Eventually, while the man is distracted, the boy is able to get away.

When school ends, the boy is exiting to the parking lot where the buses are, but he has missed the bus. He sees the man go out the same exit. The boy is somewhat farther ahead. The boy tries calling an Uber, but his phone does not respond. He hopes the man is just on the same path he is taking. He starts walking as the man is too close too, and it proves too difficult for him to do. The boy can only try to take a different route now, and hopes the man does not follow him, as there is nothing important it leads to. He turns, and the man follows. The boy knows something is wrong now. As he tries his best to run, he realizes he cannot escape the man's fast paced walk. The man meets the boy, as if it's a surprise. He greets him and says that his name is Gerald. He says he hopes he can become friends with the boy, then walks away because he has 'other business' to do. The boy does not know what lies ahead in this alleyway, as he remembered there was nothing. Too scared to check it out, he sits and calls an uber, which arrives. The Uber driver doesn't want to pick up a kid at first, but then sees the boy has no other way home, so he lets him on. The boy tries talking to the Uber driver, but has trouble saying words, as he's gasping due to his disabilities. The Uber driver senses something is wrong, and says that if he ever needs help, he can call him, and he gives the boy his number. The boy feels more reassured.

At school the next day, the boy tries to go into a hallway, but sees a shadow that resembles the man. It is just eerily standing still for no reason. Perfectly still. The boy turns around and tries to take a different path, in a hallway he never took. For the first time, he sees around 8 people and children, sitting in a table working on arts and crafts. There is chatter and laughter, though it is not loud. The boy tries to speak, but cannot. The table ignores him. He can only tap on the shoulder of

one of the women at the table, an older black lady. She turns to him and warmly asks what's wrong. The boy cannot speak due to his disability mixed with his fear. He tries to write what he thinks, but his frantic, terrible handwriting makes the words illegible. The other women and a soft speaking man with a lisp try to help him and get him to calm down too. At each moment when he cannot communicate his words, it feels as if the shadow is moving closer. Finally, the boy is able to scrawl out a ragged looking word: it resembles the word STALKER. The adults are confused, and try to get the boy to describe the person, but he is overwhelmed. It is hard for him to draw the man, and his descriptions are too vague- it can be any hundreds of people. He has trouble spelling the word 'Gerald'. The older woman, feeling sympathetic, bends down to the boy's face level and asks if he needs help. The boy nods, and the woman offers to take the boy's hand and walk with him through the hallway. Yet when they do, nothing is there. The two are alone in the vast, sparsely populated school. The woman tries to reassure the boy that it's safe now, and he has to go to class as she has other business to attend to. The boy refuses to leave, so the woman asks her boss if she can take this boy along with her.

In a new chapter, the book shifts to the third person, centered around the older woman. Her name is Ms. Simmons. She's an elementary special education teacher. She asks the administrators what's wrong. They tell her that the school district assigns children to various sections, but it's clear that it's unorganized, and few people care. Not many teachers know who the students are. It's a mystery who the boy is, though they discover he belongs in class 3-B. Some teachers remark that he's too old to be here and has to be sent back, but Ms. Simmons objects and says that something is wrong. The teacher says she thinks there is someone after the boy, though it is hard for him to form descriptions. She asks why he is not put in special ed, and the other teachers don't have an answer, just blaming the administration. The teacher vows to look more into the issue.

The brief chapter ends and it shifts back to the boy's first person perspective. The day is ending, and it has been a safe day so far. The boy meets various special education teachers, such as Mrs. Jones with the big laugh and Mr. Williams, a soft spoken man with a lisp who tries to cheer the boy up. By himself, he picks up a picture book about a car, and something about it makes him remember it very well, though he hurriedly closes it before he finishes the ending. The boy almost forgets about the strange man. This whole time, however, the boy sees a cart push by him with toys and arts and crafts and puppets. All the other adults, and almost all children, are gone, and only the boy and Ms. Simmons remain in the playroom. It's the afternoon and the red sunset shines through the playroom's large windows. She asks how he gets home, and he says he uses a bus. She asks where his parents are, and he says they're traveling. Ms. Simmons wants to object, but stops herself, as if the next words she says must be careful, or she could get in a lot of trouble. She offers to drive him home, and he nods. Suddenly, she hears a child cry out in the distance, as if injured. Being the only teacher left, she tells the boy to come with her. The boy is too slow, and too heavy to carry. Left with a hard choice, Ms. Simmons has to run to the other child, telling the boy that it will only take a minute, and that he's safe here. The boy tries to call out to her, but does not want to cause any trouble.

The boy starts counting. Slowly, as to not count too fast and have his hopes dashed due to his mistakes. 1, 2, 3, 4. He gets all the way to 40, and she is still not back. He begins to worry. When

she leaves, the boy hears the squeak of the toy cart. He never looked up at it before, as he was too engrossed with reading, coloring (his hands are too unsteady for drawing) and other activities. He looks up, and someone is pushing the cart with a cap on. The cart stops, and the boy looks up at the sudden change in noise. The person with the cap looks up. It's Gerald. He makes conversation in his strange way of speaking. Gerald is not entirely like a child, but seems to want to act like a friendly adult yet there is something suspicious about the way he speaks and about his body language. The boy starts to scream. Gerald reassures him that it's all going to be okay. For a whole 10 seconds, as the boy counts, no one is there. Then Gerald starts to move closer to the boy. He tries to run, but trips and falls on the blocks on the carpet. He starts crying. It has been over a minute now. He starts throwing toys at Gerald, and just as Gerald is about to reach the boy, one toy hits him in the face. Gerald pauses with a blank expression. At the same time, Ms. Simmons rushes in, carrying the other child. She puts the other child down, gets in between the boy and the tall figure, and comes face to face with Gerald; she feels a slight tingle of fear. The boy is now clinging to her and screaming uncontrollably. Seeing that Gerald is frozen, she tries to get a hold of the boy and calm him down, but he's frantic and grabs the paper he drew on, with the word STALKER. Previously, Ms. Simmons told the boy to point to whoever is the STALKER if he sees him, and now the boy is hitting the paper while pointing at the man. Ms. Simmons is overwhelmed. Then, in an unexpected turn of events, Gerald goes into a mental breakdown, apologizing for everything and screaming.

In the next scene, the school administrators are called in. It's the adults' perspective again. The school administrators sigh and explain that the man is a slightly mentally handicapped, long time beloved employee of the school. Gerald has been with the school for a long time, and has never done any harm to the children. The school gives him menial jobs to do while he gives his positivity to the community. They show Ms. Simmons, a teacher who just transferred to the district, pictures of Gerald and drawings he's done with him and the children. The school is incredibly certain that all the children love Gerald. The adults say the boy was wrong in hurting Gerald with the toy, though Ms. Simmons insists he's just a child. Ms. Simmons is still slightly skeptical, but is willing to work with the school.

The teachers and administrators go into a room where the boy is held. He's alone, and shaking, cowering away from the other side of the room. Ms. Simmons wonders why, and then to her surprise and horror, she sees Gerald in the same room. The school principal puts his hand on Ms. Simmons's shoulder and reassures her that there is someone else in the room- a counselor in the corner, almost hidden in the shadows, who is supervising. He says the school has deemed it best that the boy and Gerald come to an understanding, so he can learn that Gerald means no harm. If they separated him, the boy would get the wrong idea. Ms. Simmons goes down to the boy and asks him what's wrong, and if he trusts Gerald now. The boy is still shaking; he stutters out 'b-b-but the p-pic-tures.' The principal sighs and says that Gerald has tried to show the boy his 'picture book'. It was all a big misunderstanding. Gerald likes to take pictures of his friends, both teachers and children, and put them in his book of memories. The counselor asks Gerald to bring out the book. For the first time, Ms. Simmons looks at Gerald, and sees his soft, child-like expression, and feels sorry for him. Gerald seems sorry too that he did something wrong. In the book, Ms. Simmons sees many pictures of smiling children and Gerald, and not one frown. Yet

she does not see a picture of the boy. Finally, Gerald says “I’m sorry.” The administrators believe that this is enough, and want the boy to respond to. He cannot. Ms. Simmons put her hand on the principal’s hand, just before he’s about to speak, and says, “That’s enough for today.” No one else says anything more, and only Gerald speaks, whispering, “I did a very bad thing I shouldn’t have. But I hope we can still be friends.”

The chapter shifts back to the boy. He feels guilty now. The adults told him he was overreacting. They towered over him, with their hands on their hips, annoyed at his bawling, reprimanding him for hitting Gerald. As he is walking to the ice cream parlor (note that this is a surreal place, mixed with some elements we’re familiar with), he notices some strange figure drawings on the glass window that weren’t there before. He does not move his head up, as he does not want to look at them, and goes in.

As he orders ice cream from the ice cream man, he begins to remember what he saw in that book. When Gerald was flipping through the pages, the adult in the corner did not react. She sat perfectly still, as if she was one with the shadows. The boy saw a horse. A car. A bucket of paint. And two bowls of soup, ‘one for you and me’. There was a signature at the bottom, and on the next page was a picture of Gerald and some older lady that the boy had never seen before. The boy gets his ice cream Sunday, puts coins in the jukebox, and an old time song starts playing. But then, the boy starts to remember the rest of the book. He could not see the adult in the corner anymore—something in his memory makes him just not remember her at this point. Gerald starts flipping to more pages. Again, a horse. A car. A bucket of paint. But there is no more soup. It’s a blank page. The boy does not remember Gerald’s face now. He does not want to think about what’s next, but the thoughts just come to him, even if he tries to push them away. The next page is turning, and the boy has no choice but to remember it. He shuts his eyes tight, and stops eating ice cream. There, back in the looming room, he sees a picture. It’s of Gerald and a little girl, as if from long ago. But the girl is not smiling. Gerald towers above her, with a grin. There is a chicken scratch signature at the bottom, scrawled in a very sharp red. The boy does not have time to look at what it says before the next page is revealed. It’s a toy car, covered in clay and paint. All over the car, as if it’s suffocating. The boy remembers the car— from a book, where it did not want to be stuck and covered by tar. It wanted to roam around and be free. The boy could now see Gerald’s face, and he was smiling. But not like a child now. It was a self-assured, adult smile. The boy opened his eyes to escape the sight. But now, it was night time, and he was still in the ice cream parlor. Still, the jukebox was faintly playing a tune. The boy turns to look for someone, but instead of the ice cream man serving ice cream at the counter, he sees Gerald.

The boy panics and stumbles out of the parlor. He does not dare look back, and tries to run, but he can barely move. He’s already out of breath. At night, everything is dark, and streets are longer. And the lights are too dim. There is no one outside. It is a small district; there usually isn’t anyone on the streets in the day, let alone at night. The boy had never been out at night by himself before. As he stumbles, he cannot breathe any longer, and can only hope he is far away. In fear, but knowing that he has to, he turns around, and does not see Gerald. He takes out his inhaler and puffs on it.

He does not know where he is. But he remembers that Ms. Simmons gave him her number. He brings up his phone and finds the contact. It's still there. And he presses call. As the phone hums, the boy nervously looks all around him. The shadows are very still. Everything is. But as the seconds pass, and the phone still hums, and there is no voice, the boy trembles. At last, in his greatest fear, no one answers. He waits for the voice mail, but it does not come. The phone did reach a number, so the boy knows it's a real phone number.

He remembers the Uber driver gave him his number. The boy tries to call him. The phone hums, and the boy nervously looks all around him again. The shadows remain still. But now, a light has flickered. As the boy expects, there is no voice at the other end of the phone. His hand shakes as he takes the phone away from his ear, now certain that there is no one else he can call, that no one will answer.

The boy stares into the distance. He cannot stay still. He has to get back inside somewhere- at home, or at school. Home is too far away. He wants to go to school, to hope that Ms. Simmons is there, but he knows that Gerald may be there too. He may live there. Then, at last, a car pulls up. Mrs. Jones calls out to the boy, and worries that he's out alone. The boy does not say a word, and gets in the car. He tries to tell her that he saw Gerald, but Mrs. Jones finds it hard to believe, although she tries to play along. The boy feels that she does not believe him. After giving her his address, he is too exhausted. He falls asleep in the car.

The next day, the boy goes to school. As usual, its halls are nearly empty, except for one or two children who walk past it every once in a few minutes. The boy wants to take the arts and crafts hallway again, to see Ms. Simmons and the others. He goes into it, and sees the table. Arts and crafts litter it, but there is no one there. The boy is afraid for a second, but hopes they will come back. He waits at the table.

It is raining outside. Though it is daytime, it is pitch black outside, and only the silent, fluorescent lights inside dim the school. The hallways have green carpet, tan walls with cyan rubber outlines at the top and bottom, and crafts with colorful bold letters decorate the bulletin boards. As the minutes pass, no one appears. The boy worries now. Exiting from the table, he starts to walk towards the special education playroom, much farther down the hall. There are twists and turns, and at each turn, he wonders if he'll see Gerald. Each time he has to turn, he does not see a shadow, so he knows it is safe. But then, he hears footsteps. They are light and sharp, as if on high heels. The boy does not know who it is.

Standing still, he wants to hide, but there is nowhere in the hallway for him to crawl in. He clutches his backpack and freezes, and from the corner comes the counselor who was sitting in the corner. He looks up to her and tries to speak, but no words come out. And she does not look at him either. She walks past him, and the boy watches until she disappears into the other side of the hallway.

Something was wrong. The boy walks even slower now, even more careful now towards the playroom. Finally, he gets there, and can almost anticipate the relief that will come when he goes

inside. Peering through the window, he sees another child, though she is playing with a toy on the floor and does not see him. For the first time today, the boy smiles.

He goes inside, and sees teachers in the distance. There are a few children on the floor. But he cannot find Mrs. Jones, or Mr. Williams, or Ms. Simmons. He does not recognize a single teacher at all. He tries to talk to the children playing with toys on the floor, but they do not respond to him. He walks up to the teachers. At last, one of them, holding a mug of coffee, takes notice of him and asks him what he's looking for.

"M-Ms. Simmons," he stutters. The two teachers look at each other in confusion. The coffee holding teacher responds, "There's no Ms. Simmons around here."

The boy is in disbelief; he stutters again. The teachers say the same thing. And then, they ignore him. They go back to talking with themselves, as one of them sips their coffee every once in a while and laughs. The boy is left alone.

As he trepidatiously steps back into the playroom carpet, almost all of the children are motionless, engaged in playing with their own toys, not noticing the other children. From the corner of the eye, he sees something familiar. The girl he saw earlier was reading a book that he knew, but it was a terrible feeling, one filled with dread and one that he did not want to face. But his mind would fill in the details for him. Tar, railroad tracks, and a car with big, clown-like lips. The boy knew it was the book with the car- the same one that Gerald had in his picture book. The boy did not want to look, but he could almost see that the car had sad eyes, and was frowning. He closes his eyes; he did not want to look any further, as he knew what came next in the book, and did not want to think about it any further. He turns his head and just as he's about to open his eyes again, hoping he wouldn't see the book, a boy's voice calls out to him: "Hey, don't look that way."

The boy does not open his eyes. The voice has a strange accent, sounding like the delinquent boys who speak in the movie *Pinocchio*. He hears it again: "This way. Look *this* way." The boy turns towards the voice, and he opens his eyes. A few feet away, is a tall boy with dirty blonde hair and gray overalls who, unlike all the other children staring at the ground, is staring at the clock on the wall. He does not look at the boy, but keeps on staring at the clock. As the playroom is silent, aside from the turning of pages and stacking of blocks, the ticks of the clock are heard with a strange clarity. The boy stutters to the dirty blonde-haired boy, "W-who are you?"

The dirty blonde-haired boy turns to face the boy. He reaches a hand out, and whispers, "The name's Smokestack. And you gotta be smart if you want to get around these parts."

The boy is at a loss. He asks Smokestack what he means. Smokestack continues, "There's someone coming. See that clock? Everytime it hits an hour, a cuckoo comes out and someone comes around and takes one of us kids away. So we can either wait..." Smokestack reaches into his pocket, and pulls out a crumbled map. He flattens it out and shoves it in the boy's face. "Or get outta here."

The boy looks up at the clock. It's very close to the hour. Unsure of what to do, the boy whispers, "Wwhat d-do you think we s-should do?"

"Well... it's going to cost ya. Got any candy?"

The boy reaches into his pockets. Inside are the 3 pieces of candy he took from the ice cream parlor's jar. He takes a piece and puts it in Smokestack's hand. Smokestack unwraps it and starts chewing on it. "All right. Now look at this map. We're in the play room right now, and we gotta get here, to the buses. Trust me on this- when we're on those buses, we'll be safe. Got it?" The boy nods. Smokestack continues, "But we gotta make it in time. And we gotta sneak past the adults by going into through the-"

A bell rings in the distance, and suddenly, a very loud cuckoo noise bursts into the room. Its echoes reverberate throughout the entire playroom, but no one except the boy flinches. Smokestack harshly whispers, "Come on! Time to go!" He leads the boy through one of the doors, hidden in a narrow corridor of the playroom, and going through the door, and down the empty school hallways, they go through another door and find themselves in a nurse's office. Smokestack slams the door behind them and they catch their breaths.

"All right," he says to the boy, "Time to pay up."

"A-again? I j-just did!"

"You were too slow. That puts me in danger, too. So I gotta have something out of it. If you don't, I'll just leave you in this room alone."

With no other choice, the boy gives Smokestack his second piece of candy. Smokestack smirks. Suddenly, he has an idea. "Say, you see that wheelchair over there? Whaddya say I push you on it? Gets us both around faster."

Seeing that it's a good idea, the boy agrees. Then Smokestack tells him the next part of the plan. "The doors to outside are locked. We gotta get the key, but it's inside of a janitor's closet, where they keep the toys."

The boy's eyes widen in fear, "B-but we can't go there! I-it's where G-gerald might be!"

Smokestack is confused. "Who's Gerald? Anyways it's not like you got any other choice. Didn't I tell you to trust me?"

The boy starts fidgeting. But with no other choice, he tries to get himself to believe in Smokestack. The two exit the room, and Smokestack starts briskly walking while pushing the boy along, getting faster and faster. The boy is heavy, and Smokestack is straining. They don't have any time to lose.

Just when they're about to head down a corner, the boy notices something dark on the wall. It's a shadow. As Smokestack rushes ahead, the boy trembles in fear- he knows it's Gerald. "STOP!" the boy screams. The sudden surprise makes Smokestack trip. Annoyed, he seethes, "What's the matter with ya?"

"It's G-gerald!" the boy whispers. "W-we can't go a-any further. He'll g-get us."

"Well thanks to you, I just bruised myself! If you wanna go another way, it's gonna cost ya!"

The boy looks back at the wall. The shadow is gone. Hurriedly, he tries to reach into his pockets for the third piece, but it's gone. Oh no, he thinks to himself- he must have dropped it somewhere before. His upper lip is shaking now.

Smokestack narrows his eyes, seeing the boy's expression, and says, "So you don't got any more. Well, it was nice knowing ya."

"W-wait!" the boy pleads, but it's no use. Smokestack runs away. Alone with the wheelchair, the boy sits there, not knowing what to do. He grips the handles next to him, and starts wheezing deep breathes. He takes out his inhaler and puffs into it. He reaches for his phone, but it's gone. It was his fault that he lost the phone, and the candy, and Smokestack.

Alone in his wheelchair, he doesn't know what to do.

In the distance, he hears footsteps. But unlike before, these are heavy, and cumbersome. The boy panics and tries to push himself off the chair, but he stumbles and injures himself. He can only crawl now. On the floor, he hears the footsteps even louder. He tries to crawl away from them, but he feels like he's too slow. Everything around him fades away into nothingness as he becomes focused on getting away. Gnawing his teeth in desperation, he musters all his strength to get away, grabbing the floor as fast as he can to pull himself forward- and then, he stops. There is a shoe in front of him.

The boy screams. Gerald acts as if he ran into the boy by accident. The boy crawls backwards, but Gerald moves forwards, not stopping despite the boy telling him to. Gerald says "Can I take a picture? Aw no. But it'd just be one quick picture. Not gonna harm anybody." In a last stand, the boy throws his inhaler at the palm, which bruises it. Gerald stops, and starts panicking.

The sounds alert several teachers nearby and they head towards the scene. They reprimand the boy, and lock him in a room until he decides to apologize to Gerald. A moment passes, and the boy feels like he can stand now. At last, the boy gives in. The teachers decide to put him and Gerald in a room together so he can learn from mistakes.

Everything is quiet. The boy stares at Gerald, thinking that he was overreacting. There is nothing truly dangerous. But then, Gerald takes out his camera again, and starts taking pictures. The boy stares at the camera, as it's the only thing he can do. The pictures come out, and the boy sees



Gerald take out his picture book. Now the boy starts to breathe heavier. As Gerald flips through the pages, the boy sees the images again. It gets to the blank page. The boy closes his eyes, and with his eyes still closed, tries to reach for the door. But it's locked. When he opens them again, there is no door, and the book is front of him. The page is turned, and the suffocating, suffering car is seen again. Gerald now has a self-assured, confident look again. He does not look like an innocent child. The boy backs away, grabs books from the shelf behind him, and tries to throw them at Gerald while shaking. Gerald does not whimper or budge, and still smiles, walking towards the boy. The boy screams for help, but there is no response from anyone. Suddenly, he reaches to find a switch on the self. Pushing the book out, the shelf flips him into another room- back into a hallway- and he makes a run for it.

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NOTE: This is just the first draft. The story involves chases, but it's not entirely about chases. Gerald would position himself to try to talk to the boy, and each time, he's able to get closer and closer because the adults slowly start to not believe in the boy. Alter the above story so that this gradual decline in trust in the boy is shown. It's like the boy who cried wolf. 3 strikes. The only ones to consistently believe in the boy are Mrs. Jones, Mr. Williams, the taxi driver and Ms. Simmons, but they somehow mysteriously disappear by the end (and the boy has no idea why, since he's just a child and the world is surreal to him). After the adults mysteriously disappear, the adults comment that they were too afraid to stand up with them, and the lack of power in numbers caused the others to disappear. One of the 'lies' is Smokestack, and the boy claims the harm and plannings were done by Smokestack, not the boy. The adults do not believe him. The more higher-up adults also do not believe Gerald is capable of such things. Their employees notice something is wrong, but there is some evil they dare not name and fear, so they play along with their bosses. They want to deny the surreal aspects, when in actuality they actually occur (such as Smokestack doing something impossible; Ms. Simmons questions how a boy can even do that, but the other teachers just say that children have their ways and she's just fooled by a child), and the adults are either too oblivious to them or scared; only a few, such as the boy, Ms. Simmons and a few other children, admit that they're living in some twisted, hellish world. Ms. Simmons desperately pleads with the other teachers to stand up for her, but they don't, and in the next scene, she disappears.

The car story foreshadows what happens to the boy. The boy points out that the car story is evidence, but the adults dismiss it as his imagination, since it's not concrete proof. At first, most of the teachers support the boy, but they slowly start to turn away as the bosses clamp down on them. Ms. Simmons has noticed the other 3 adults have disappeared, and at Mr. Williams's house, she finds the car book. When Ms. Simmons finally reads the story that the boy tells her to (this story is not shown to the reader so it's left to the reader's imagination; only a few details are given), she's agape, because now she understands why Gerald's picture in his book about the car is so disturbing. The other teachers try to get her to stay silent, but she refuses. Instead, they turn on her and when the bosses want their subordinates to confirm that they're right about her being 'hysterical', they all say yes. They tell the nurse to label her medical file as hysterical, and Ms. Simmons panics. She tries to turn to the teachers who have been here longer to try to find out what

will happen to her, but they don't respond. The scene with her ends with her flipping open the last page of the car book to find answers that no one would give her (which she didn't do before as she already connected the dots using the previous page and was too disturbed to continue), and her hand goes over her face.

First, show from the boy's perspective that Ms. Simmons and everyone else just suddenly disappears one day (after a false alarm in which he found the again), and he has no idea why. He runs from Gerald, then has false hope that he found Ms. Simmons, and he asks where she's been this whole time. Then cut to a chapter that shows how they disappeared. Finally, cut back to the boy, who realizes it's not Ms. Simmons, but something else resembling her that's not explained to the reader. Gerald says, "Ms. Simmons? Who's that?" After screaming, the boy gets taken away by Gerald.

The more Gerald is rejected, the angrier, more offended, and persistent he becomes. Gerald also goes out of his way to lie that the boy did something bad. Gerald persists in knowing more about the boy no matter what, trying to trick him into giving up details. He discovers the boy is eating ice cream and deduces the boy likes ice cream. He tries to use various 'techniques' that he believes all children love, and when the boy doesn't like them, he takes it personally and thinks the boy is saying he's defective.

The superintendent is an old lady who has some personal connection to Gerald, though it's not said explicitly what this is. She defends him no matter what.

Smokestack appears when all the other adults are too preoccupied or sick or at a meeting. He leads the boy down the wrong path, and takes the form of him 'lashing out' (though Smokestack is REAL in this story). He's the desperate last stand for the boy to escape, but due to being a child, the boy doesn't know the right thing to do and ends up causing trouble, such as damaging school property with fire. He is not protective of the boy, and runs away every time Gerald gets too close.

In the end, the boy is dragged away by Gerald somewhere. Later, a newly hired teacher is going through documents, and sees a strange picture book. Reading through it, she sees the boy's picture as a drawing, and worries that he looks fearful and similar to a boy she saw before, but the other teachers nervously deny the boy's existence then dismiss it as Gerald's made up character that he uses to entertain the children, so the new teacher, under pressure, does nothing. As she heads into another room, she sees Gerald being friendly with a smiling young girl. Gerald looks at the teacher and smiles. She nervously smiles back, reassures herself that she's overreacting, and closes the door.