

# **Warrant Glen**

An excerpt from the 1978 novel

by William Wallis

## **Chapter 16 (Part 3), pp. 194-96**

The Friday before Thanksgiving was overcast. The sun had no chance of piercing the autumn clouds or the dingy windows of Warrant Glen Public High School. The remnants of the heavy frost still fringed the stiff, brown grass of the schoolyard lawn outside. Will made out these few facts through the clouded window of Mrs. Erdes' warm classroom. Ice crystals slowly formed tiny rivulets on the outside of the panes themselves, within the clouded mist forming there. Like tiny vines, delicate crystalline veins crept from the edges of the window toward the center of the bottom pane where he concentrated on the world outside. His breath, he saw, contributed to the growth of the crystalline veins of his vision.

More than half of the eighty-seven seniors filled the classroom between one and two p.m. Will had lost track of time as Mrs. Erdes had retreated, as she sometimes did, into clipping pictures for the annual; the class she left to its own devices, and a subdued roar of jokes and

gossip sustained itself out of restless boredom. In the back near the window, Will slumped in his seat, haunted by his behavior last night on the bus. He glanced at Lisa, whose head rested on folded arms; as if aware of his gaze, her head turned toward him, and her brown eyes opened and found his. An illicit chill ran through him, painful and delicious. She was not angry, but there was sadness in her eyes. Will wished he could fall into the earth and disappear forever.

Nearby, Will saw Don move his hand in such a way that the pencil loosely grasped between his thumb and forefinger appeared elastic. Mrs. Erdes had given the second half of the class to "review" verb forms while she clipped away and glued—her Winter-long chore. Today she was making a rough montage of the senior baby pictures for the "See How They've Changed" section of the annual. She grinned as she studied a picture of a boy she knew well. The crusted makeup on her gaunt, heavily rouged cheeks cracked slightly. Her discolored, claw-like hands darted over the desk as she searched for something, maybe the heavy glue with which to assemble fragments in the eight and one-half by eleven from in which she shaped every page. Will wanted to hate her, but there was no fire for it left in him. He glanced out the window, now heavily veined with thick scales of crystal that denied him escape from the classroom.

Will again glanced at Don, who now leaned back hands linked behind his head, firmly grasping the same pencil between his upper lip and the bottom of his nose, studying the ceiling. Across the room, Sue was reading a novel, the collar of her thick leather and fur jacket turned up against the noise. Tommy rested his head on his forearms, his fingers working in slow patterns meant for the keyboard. Mandy looked up from her Spanish homework and winked at Will. Dewey's head had fallen on an open book; he was fast asleep; his spittal stained the declension of irregular verbs.

The classroom door opened, and Mrs. Remarque appeared, her face drained of color. The immaculate surface of her carefully coiffed hair was married by a single strand that drifted like a cirrus over her right eye. Something about the way she looked caused the room to hush. Mrs. Erdes raised her shears and arched her eyebrows at her colleague.

*President Kennedy's been shot in Dallas,* Mrs. Remarque said weakly.

Little had prepared Will for what followed.

A short moment of, it seemed to Will, absolute silence and a kind of emptiness followed Mrs. Remarque's words.

Then Sue Bradford gasped softly.

The classroom exploded in noisy celebration. Most students sprang up, let out rebel yells, and embraced or threw whatever their hands found into the air like confetti. Mrs. Erdes, her narrow lips parted in a wide, dark line rose up from her desk, a scissors clinched victoriously above her head.

Outside himself, Will stared at her from a great distance. He saw himself slowly close his book, he wondered if the bell had rung.

Don was sitting up straight, his pile of books held firmly on the top of his head like an African water carrier. Mandy's chest heaved and she cried out the same monosyllabic question to each person near her, in a kind of terrible chant—no one listened. Will saw Sue's face turned to him, her mouth open as in a whisper, her eyes blank.

Mrs. Remarque disappeared as she had appeared, like a ghost.

Mrs. Erdes wagged her hands above her head to restore order, and the celebrants slowly cooled to an excited murmur.

*Shhhhh, she hissed. Shhhhh!*

The class gradually grew to a murmuring thing, and her voice crackled about them like electricity. *If I'd've known they were going to do it, I'd've bought 'em the*

*bullets.* She smiled slyly from ear to ear, rolling her eyes upward.

The class exploded again with laughter and applause. Rebel yells rang out loudly. Will's head was splitting open. He couldn't wait for the bell. He got up, fought his way to the door, lurched outside, fell on his knees in the hallway, and heaved up whatever was in his guts.

As he raised his head and slumped against the cool surface of the lockers, gasping for breath, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up into the face of Lisa, whose round mask was streaked with tears. Her lips could not settle in her face. The corners of her mouth danced up and down, her slight pug nose ran unashamed in the center of her nodding countenance, and her hand gripped his shoulder hard as her intense brown eyes glowed down on him with bright anguish.

Will was overwhelmed with regret and shameful need. He rose to his knees and threw his arms around her in passionate apology. His hands clung to her, full of pain.