

IT'S SUNDAY MORNING and mass is about to start. Jack's mother has tugged him toward the front of the church. He didn't want to sit at the front, but every other pew had someone sitting on its edge, making no move to shift further along.

Father Bane stands at the altar, waiting for everyone to stop shuffling about. When they seem to settle, he begins. 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Jack bends his head. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

He feels Father Bane looking at him. Father Bane is training him. *You're special to God*, he says. *He has called you here to serve at his altar. You have all been chosen*, he says. *Especially chosen by God*. Even though his head is bent, he feels the priest willing him to look up. He squeezes his eyes and sinks down, as if to the bottom of the sea, and now there's just a gurgle of sound and a swishing at his ears. He thinks in a vague sort of way that maybe he has died. His eyes are so tightly shut that his face hurts from contorting. His mother nudges him gently. 'Jack,' she whispers, 'do you have a pain somewhere?'

And when he opens his eyes, Isaac is looking at him from the pew across. He's cocking his head like a puppy and half-smiling in a hopeful way. Jack glowers and Isaac's face goes dark like a blown-out candle. His mother sees this and she looks at Jack. She leans into him and her breath is warm in his ear. 'Jack. Pay attention.'

