

Fives
by
Roger Beckett

FADE IN:

INT: HOSPITAL WARD RECREATION ROOM -DAY

EVERY SHOT IS FROM A BOY'S POV.

THE ONLY SOUND ON THE SOUNDTRACK IS ELEVATOR MUSIC, OR NURSERY RHYMES, PUNCTUATED BY THE BOY'S NARRATION.

There is a large, irregularly drawn shape with a number five in the center.

The background is black and has a fuzzy texture. The shape and the number inside are a patchy white color.

A brush with a powder blue handle, and loaded with a bright red paint, carefully fills in the shape. The number five is slowly covered over.

BOY (V.O.)
I paint fives.

The brush leaves the shape as the camera slowly pulls back to reveal more shapes adjacent. These shapes are still black, awaiting the appropriate colors.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
Some of the other guys paint other colors.

The brush returns, fresh with paint and begins another shape.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
And Mr. Joseph, he paints them all and finishes up for us.

The camera has pulled back, and now the overall picture is one of a patchwork Jesus, with blood red splotches the only color.

A hand holding the brush taps excess paint into a small plastic cup with an attached lid.

The last number five shape is colored in and the brush is set down on a napkin. Now that the whole brush can be seen, it is apparent that the brush has been snapped in half.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
I just paint fives.

The boy's hand pushes the picture away, as the camera slowly moves up to show an elderly gentleman studiously working on a picture of his own.

This is MR. JOSEPH (60s), and he's dressed in neatly pressed white pajamas with blue pinstripes.

He is thin, white haired and has a neatly trimmed white beard that gives him a kindly, professorial appearance.

Small bifocals are perched on his nose as he peers down at the picture in front of him.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
That's Mr. Joseph. He's nice. He's kinda
like a skinny Santa Claus.

Mr. Joseph looks up from his work, smiles and reaches for the painting the boy has just finished painting.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
'cept, without a red suit. Or presents.

Another man enters the scene, laying out a few fresh boxes of paintings on the table.

He's MARTIN (30s), the supervising orderly. A shifty looking man with a perpetual five o'clock shadow and coke sniffle.

A few words are exchanged between Martin and Mr. Joseph, then Martin takes a completed painting and goes away.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
We do our paintings everyday, and Mr.
Martin brings us more.

Mr. Joseph has opened the box and places the fresh black velvet in front of the boy.

He smiles and goes back to work on the Jesus painting, as the boy's hands reach into the box.

The boy gets the new brush out, and snaps it in half. The broken top half goes up into his sleeve.

Mr. Joseph is too busy painting to notice.

The boy opens a fresh pot of paint, of course, a bright red number five, and dips the brush.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
Five's my favorite color.

The brush carefully fills in the first shape.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
It's my favorite number, too. 'Cause
that's how old I am.

The brush takes on the next shape, as the camera zooms in until the screen is filled with red.

FADE TO:

INT: BOY'S HOUSE -BIRTHDAY

Filmed in a slightly blurred POV, suggesting flashback, the scene is one of happy festivity.

A kitchen table has party plates arrayed about a center piece containing a cartoon character cake with five candles flickering.

However, it becomes apparent that this is not a normal five year old's party.

There are no children present, just adults sitting around with drinks, smoking cigarettes. Three men and a woman.

Their clothing suggests a slightly shabby cocktail party, the woman in polyester and the men in ill fitting suits in brown or gray.

Mom and Dad are seated on either side of the cake, and the "Uncles" are holding presents in their laps.

They look up as the boy enters the room. His mother gives him a "better behave" look and the men sit up straighter and smile.

BOY (V.O.)
I know that's how old I am, 'cause that's
how many candles I had on my cake.

The adults start to sing "Happy Birthday", Mom and Dad looking tired and bored, the Uncles singing with more enthusiasm.

The camera moves in when they are done, and the candles get blown out.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
They don't have Birthday cakes in here.
It's 'cause I did a Bad Thing.

The boy's hand covers the Zippo next to the cake, and removes it unnoticed.

The Uncles applaud, as Mom cuts the cake and serves them.

Uncle number one holds up the present, and gives a questioning look to Dad.

Dad nods, and the Uncle gets up and holds out his hand to the boy.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
When Mommies and Daddies do Bad Things,
no one sends them away.

The Uncle enters a room that is empty, except for an overstuffed chair.

He sits in the chair, setting the present aside, and motions for the boy to sit in his lap.

As the boy hesitates, he gets a stern look on his face.

More hesitation, and the Uncle stands to remove his belt.

FADE TO:

INT: HOSPITAL WARD RECREATION ROOM -DAY

The time for painting is over, and Mr. Joseph is putting away the paints for the day.

He smiles at the boy as he cleans up, chatting happily though he gets no answer.

BOY (V.O.)
Painting time is over. Group time is now.

The table is pushed aside and chairs set in a circle.

One by one, patients slowly shuffle to fill the seats.

They range from the well dressed and lucid Mr. Joseph, to the extremely disheveled and agitated man with the nervous gestures and facial tics.

All of the seats are taken, except the one reserved for the psychologist, a much nicer padded chair, and the one immediately next to it.

The doctor comes in, a bookish man in his 40s, dressed in a tweed sport coat with elbow patches.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
That's the doctor. He's nice too.

He's carrying a clipboard and has a pipe clenched in his teeth.

He motions to the boy to take the seat next to him as he lights his pipe and prepares his notes.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
He looks like one of my nice Uncles. One time, when I first got here, I tried to sit in his lap. He got mad and made me sit in the corner.

The camera moves to the chair, and takes the seat.

The doctor, finished with his pipe, sets his box of matches on the arm of the chair.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
It's hard to remember what each Uncle likes. I'm always getting in trouble.

The doctor looks at a note and asks one of the men to begin the session.

The man, thin and unshaven, appears to be reluctant to talk.

The man next to him, a larger and more ferocious looking person, yells at him, making him cringe.

The doctor admonishes the second man, and asks the first to begin again.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
The doctor tries to make everyone talk about what's bothering them.

Now, he is even more reluctant, and unwilling to speak.

The second man has had enough and stands, threatening the first man.

The doctor gets to his feet, to intervene, just as the second man pushes the first backwards in his chair.

As he hits the ground, all of the other patients leap to their feet, some excited, some afraid at this outburst.

As the doctor tries to calm the situation, the boy's hand reaches out and removes a single match from the box on the doctor's chair.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I don't ever say anything, like a Good Boy. That's Rule Number One. Good Boys never tell anyone. Mommy and Daddy made me promise.

The fight dies down with the help of a few more orderlies, and the patients who are calm enough return to their recreations.

Mr. Joseph peers at the boy and offers some kind words.

He gets no response, and looks a little sad, but resigned, as if this is a regular occurrence.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

Just smile and make your Uncle happy.

FADE TO:

INT: BOY'S HOUSE -BIRTHDAY

This flashback picks up where the last one left off.

The Uncle is wielding the belt in a vicious manner.

The exertion has caused him to perspire profusely and turn red-faced.

As he breathes heavily, looking down at the camera, the lurid red lighting and his crazed expression give him a maniacal appearance.

He starts to replace the belt, then thinks better of it and begins to unbutton his pants.

BOY (V.O.)

Some Uncles don't like it when you smile.

The Uncle moves closer to the camera.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

Some of them only like it when you cry.

The Uncle leers into the camera.

FADE TO:

INT: HOSPITAL WARD -EVENING

The ward is quiet now, many of the patients sleeping a chemically enhanced sleep.

Mr. Joseph lays on his back, his glasses held in hands that are clasped over his chest.

The camera pans to view the ward, seeing that the coast is clear.

The boy's hand removes the cap from the bed post and takes out a long lump of blue plastic.

He removes the new half of the brush from his sleeve, and sets it on the bed.

From the other sleeve comes the match he took earlier.

Looking around again, he strikes the match, and as it flares to life, he holds the snapped end on the brush handle to the flame.

It quickly melts, and he sticks it to the lump of previously melted handles.

BOY (V.O.)

They won't let us have good toys in here.

As the handle fuses with the mass, he plays the flame over the plastic to complete the addition.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I always wanted a giraffe for my birthday.

The match goes out, and he waves the plastic in the air to cool it.

The spent match goes down the bed post, as the boy looks at his handiwork.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I almost got the neck done, which is mostly what a giraffe is.

The lump gets turned and now that it's final form is revealed, there does appear to be a resemblance to a giraffe.

He carefully places it back in the bed post and replaces the cap as a light flickers on.

The camera turns quickly and reveals Martin leading a small group of men into the ward.

They tour the ward slowly, looking at each patient they pass.

Martin points out a patient here and there, but the men shake their heads and they move on.

They pass the boy and shake their heads, one of them gesturing to his face.

They continue on, looking at more patients.

At last they stop at the bed of a younger patient, who is blinking the sleep from his eyes.

The men nod, and Martin says something to them.

They turn and head back into the nurse's office.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
Mr. Martin has friends visit a lot.

Martin has spoken to the patient, and the patient shakes his head.

Martin becomes more forceful, and the patient looks frightened.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
They look like my Uncles.

Mr. Joseph has heard the commotion, and sits up.

He puts on his glasses, and sees the exchange between Martin and the patient.

Martin catches him looking and stares back.

Cowed, Mr. Joseph gives a quick, sad glance to the boy, and lays back down, turning his back to the whole thing.

Martin then lifts the patient to his feet and pushes him toward the nurse's station.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
One time, Mr. Martin's Uncles visited this other guy.

Martin has to use more and more force as the patient nears the door.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
And when he came back, he just cried.

The patient is grabbing the door jamb to prevent Martin from pushing him through.

A few pairs of hands appear in the doorway to help, and the patient is dragged through.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
He cried all night, and all day, too.

The door shuts, and shadows appear through the frosted glass of the station window.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
He kept crying so much, they finally took him away in a big white car.

Mr. Joseph has rolled over.

He has tears in his eyes, as he looks at the boy.

He clamps his hands over his ears, and rolls back over.

Mr. Joseph is curled in a fetal position, as the shadows in the office grow more animated.

INT: HOSPITAL WARD RECREATION ROOM -MORNING

The paints are set up and Mr. Joseph is busy finishing up a rural scene.

The boy is carefully filling in fives, as Martin comes over.

He picks up a finished painting, and has a few words with Mr. Joseph.

Martin drops a twenty dollar bill in front of him, and says something in a furtive manner, looking around as he does so.

Mr. Joseph gets an angry look on his face, and hands the money back.

Martin gets even angrier, and points toward the boy.

Mr. Joseph looks at the boy and shakes his head, holding his hands up in a pleading manner.

Martin pockets the twenty, and says something else to Mr. Joseph as he stomps away.

Mr. Joseph's hands are shaking as he tries to clean his glasses.

He gives up and looks at the boy, nearly in tears.

He begins to talk, looking around to see if anyone is listening.

BOY (V.O.)

Mr. Joseph is sad all the time.

Mr. Joseph is becoming more adamant, his gestures gaining in intensity.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I try to smile and be quiet, like I was told.

Mr. Joseph stops talking, his tears brimming over at the futility of the situation.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

But, it never makes him happy.

Martin returns with a guest and brings him over to the painting table.

Mr. Joseph stands up and starts to put himself between Martin and the boy.

Martin pushes him back into his chair, and points a finger in his face as he threatens him.

Mr. Joseph looks at the boy sadly and then goes to lay down in his bed.

Martin and his guest turn their attention to the boy.

Martin begins talking to the man, who is smiling at the boy.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

It's hard to be good sometimes, even when I know I'm s'posed to.

The man smiles at Martin and shakes his hand.

Martin pockets the wad of bills that the man has left in his handshake, and they turn to leave.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)
But that's why I came here. So I could be
good and not make Mommy and Daddy go
away.

FADE TO:

INT: BOY'S HOUSE -BIRTHDAY NIGHT

The party has wound down. Mommy and Daddy are passed out on the couch with the first Uncle snoring in a chair.

The second Uncle staggers drunkenly into the bathroom, zipping up his pants.

He sits down blearily on the toilet, and weaves a bit as he settles back to clear his head.

The boy leaves the room, passing a mirror on his way to the kitchen.

In the mirror, his torn and bloody pajamas barely cover his small, broken form.

He passes the bathroom, and sees the second Uncle vomiting into the sink.

He carefully sneaks past the adults in the living room, and moves to the door.

The boy's hand reaches for the dead bolt.

Instead of opening it, he slowly slides it in place.

Walking quietly back into the living room, he pauses at the mess left there.

A fifth bottle of Vodka lays half empty on it's side, it contents staining the rug in a wide circle near the couch.

The boy holds out the Zippo he has carried for the evening, and opens the lid.

A few sparks, and the lighter flares up.

The lighter slowly drops to the floor, as the room starts to go up in flames.

FADE TO:

INT: HOSPITAL WARD -EVENING

Mr. Joseph has curled into his fetal position, his blanket shutting out the world.

The boy has taken the giraffe from the bed post.

It sits on the bed as he replaces the cap.

BOY (V.O.)

I thought if I was good, I would get a giraffe for my birthday.

He takes the plastic, and starts to rub it against the cinder block wall.

The wall is slowly getting colored a powder blue, as the plastic is worn away.

A light flickers on behind the boy, and he hides the giraffe in his sleeve.

The camera turns to face the room, as the boy sits on the bed, waiting.

Martin and the visitor from that morning approach.

Martin looks at Mr. Joseph's sleeping form and Mr. Joseph clutches the blanket tighter.

The visitor smiles at the boy and holds out his hand to him.

The boy's hand grasps the man's, and Martin looks surprised, but pleased.

The visitor beams at Martin and then leads the boy away.

INT: HOSPITAL WARD -MORNING

The morning sun seems especially bright and cheerful on this day, as the patients rise from their slumbers.

Mr. Joseph looks over to the boy's empty bed with haunted eyes.

He appears to have cried all night, and aged a few decades doing so.

There is a commotion as the morning supervisor arrives.

She is screaming, and pointing to the nurse's station.

Mr. Joseph puts on his glasses and belts his robe, to go see what the matter is.

When the orderlies rush to the room, they fling open the door to find a grisly scene.

The boy is sitting on the floor between the bodies of Martin and his visitor.

It is now revealed that the "boy" is actually a young man in his mid twenties.

He is dressed in bloody pajamas, and has a burn scar on part of his face.

As everyone takes in the scene in absolute shock, the boy is happily dipping the sharp end of the giraffe in the spilled viscera of his attackers.

Carefully painting in blood, he has filled in many of the shapes that form an abstract pattern in the floor tiles.

BOY (V.O.)

I try to be good. But, it's hard when
Uncles want to hurt you.

Mr. Joseph pushes past the shocked nurse, and takes in the scene.

He smiles tearfully at the boy, who beams happily back.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I just want to paint.

The camera pulls back to reveal a picture that slightly resembles the face of Mr. Joseph, drawn on the bloody tiles.

BOY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I paint fives.

FADE TO BLACK.