

# ONE PUNCH AWAY

BY JOHN GREENYA



Our thanks to Mr. Russell Eiffer and the students of Plainfield High School, Plainfield, New Jersey, who played the characters in this story.

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Photographs by Jeremiah Bean

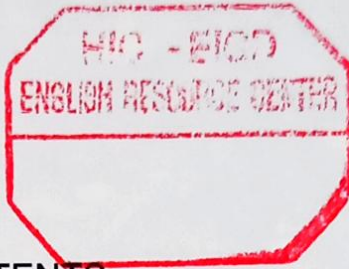
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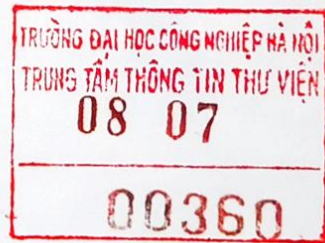
*For Suzanne,  
who loves boxing...*





## CONTENTS

Chapter 1	_____	9
Chapter 2	_____	17
Chapter 3	_____	26
Chapter 4	_____	33
Chapter 5	_____	43
Chapter 6	_____	51
Chapter 7	_____	60
Chapter 8	_____	67
Chapter 9	_____	80



It all started the night of the City Championship game at Central High School. Lee and Stuff were in their last year at Central and knew most of the boys on the team.

Late in the fourth quarter, Central fell behind Washington High. Washington held the ball for the rest of the game. That was how Central lost the game — by three points.

Almost as soon as the game ended, a fight started. And in the next minute, everyone seemed to be fighting. Lee did not mean to get into the fight. He was still on probation for car theft. But when some cat hit Stuff in the face, Lee jumped him. He punched the boy and sent him flying out of the stands down to the floor.

“Let’s make it!” Stuff cried.

“Wait a minute,” Lee said. “Look over there!”

Something bad was going on below one of the baskets. One big boy had a pretty girl up against the wall. Another was beating her across the face.



“Come on!” Lee said, jumping down from the stands. “We can take those guys!”

“Forget it!” Stuff called after him. “The cops are coming!”

Lee didn't hear him. He was on the floor and had downed the boy who was beating the girl. The other boy let go of the girl and ran. Lee caught him, and was hitting him with lefts and rights until two policemen pulled Lee away.

“Cool off, boy!” one policeman said. “You're going for a little ride.”

When Lee was pushed into the crowd being lined up to go to the station, he looked around for Stuff. He didn't see him. Lee hoped he had got away.

The police station walls were a sick green, just as Lee remembered them. They did not look any better now. A year before Lee had been in the same station. He had been picked up for car theft. Because it was his first arrest, the judge gave him a break. He was put on probation. Right now, all he could think of was that he was still on probation.

About twenty other kids were crowded into the small room. Behind a big desk sat a mean-looking, tired policeman. He did not

seem to care that his station was filled with high school kids. He just kept looking down at some papers and shaking his head.

At last he looked up. "All right, Pavletch," he said. "Book them all."

He waved a paper at the kids. "If you want to find out your rights, you can read this. IF you can read," he went on, not smiling. "All of you were picked up for disturbing the peace. But if you make any trouble here, I can change it to rioting. If not, you can wait in the booking room until your mother or father comes for you."

He waved his arm, and the policemen at the far end of the room came over. They began to lead the kids away.

"By the way," the tired policeman called after them. "You can call your lawyers if you want to."

The kids did not think he was funny. But all the policemen laughed.

Lee knew that the policemen were just trying to scare them. And Lee was scared. He wondered what would happen when they found out he was on probation. "They aren't booking any of us yet," he thought. "Maybe they are just going to let us all go."