

Richie nodded again. "It's because *you* know... that I'm going to win. I'm going to kick your little boyfriend's ass."

In that moment, any sense of restraint, any desire to leave him with a warning, to be the bigger man, to walk away, blah blah blah, was swept out of Carl's mind, leaving only a simple goal: to beat the shit and any thoughts of leading student government out of Richie Waisell.

He grabbed Richie's shoulders and <sup>pulled him off his chair and</sup> pushed him to the ground. Richie got up immediately, forming his body into a running back's crouch, and slammed into Carl's midsection. Carl was knocked slightly backward, but kept his balance, and lunged back at his enemy. They clutched at each other, lurching around in a clumsy dance, until finally managing to pull each other to the floor.

Carl was surprised by Richie's ferocity – the kid was small, but tough. He kicked, he kneed, he threw short punches; nothing that did any damage, but enough to keep Carl from gaining any advantage or going on offense. They rolled on the floor, banging into a chair here, a table there, locked in sweaty stalemate. Carl could hear some of the girls squealing with fear – or maybe excitement – and shouts from a few of the boys – "Give it to him," "Yeah, beat his ass."

And then, a pair of hands clamping under his armpits, pulling him to his feet. Mr. Perrino, the shop teacher, looking extremely pissed at having to interrupt his lunch.

"That's enough," he shouted, "both of you!"

Carl nodded, putting his hands up, and looked over at his opponent. For the first time, there was no hint of smartassery on Richie's face. On the contrary: Richie was staring at him with a look of hatred equal to his own.

\*make it clear  
Richie is kicking etc., not Carl -

good score!  
it was pretty  
maybe well  
it felt add  
smelly to Carl's  
midsection  
slamming  
Br...

good

Pain?  
loses  
breath?

\*

good

good pacing - M&H