









The poem "One Thousand Nine Hundred and Sixty-eight Winters" by Jacqueline Earley appears here with the gracious permission of the author.

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This book is dedicated, with love, to my parents, Victor and Catherine Mills, who gave me wings to fly.

The author gratefully wishes to acknowledge the following people:

Margaret—for her insight, editing, and encouragement

Sandy—for her cheers and her ears

Fred—for his smiles and support

Dr. Kelly—for his psychological expertise

Jeff—for his athletic input

Janell—for her continued belief in me

Jeremy—who is still missed

Vicky—for her gentle spirit

Damon and Cory—my inspirations

Crystal—my Crystal Ballerina

Wendy—my baby girl

All my students who gave me guidance to make it real and finally

Larry—my strength.





A man shrieks in pain  
Crying to the universe.  
Panic is abrupt.



**Etcuj."Hktg."Rckp**

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Nov. 8—Robert Washington, age 17, captain of the Hazelwood Hi



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**Nqemgt/Tqq o "Eqpxgtuevkqp  
chvgt"vjg" I**



basketball. What you score tonight



**Qj"Pq#"Kv"Lwuv"Ec pøv"Dg#**

**Rjqpg"Emu**



—Rhonda, me again. I'm here at the hospital.... It's Robbie Washington. He's...He's...He's dead! Oh, Rhonda, he died in the accident. No, Andy, B.J., and Tyrone are okay. Tyrone and B.J. have already been sent home. Andy has been admitted, but he's not seriously hurt. Rhonda, what are we going to do? I've never known anybody who died before, except my grandmother, and she was old.

—Oh, Keisha, this is so scary. I don't know how to deal with it. Have you talked to Andy?

—No, they wouldn't let me in there. But I saw him through the door. He looked bad—not injured, but his eyes looked funny—I guess he was in shock. I've got to go now. My mom is taking me home. I'll call you tomorrow.



**O g o qtkgu"qh"Hktg**

**V{tqpgø"Uvcvg o gpv"vq"Rqkeg**

—Tyrone Mills? My name is Officer Casey, and I'd like to ask you a few questions. I understand you were in the car involved in the accident last night. I know you are upset, but it is necessary that we complete this report while the facts are still fresh in your mind. I'd like for you to tell me, in as much detail as possible, what happened last night.

—Well, the game was over 'bout nine-thirty and we was all in a good mood 'cause we won big—by something like forty points, so we was gonna celebrate. Me and B.J. and Andy and...and...Rob—we left after we all got changed. Gerald was gonna come with us...yeah, Gerald Nickelby, but he had to go home. His stepfather beats...uh, I mean, his old man is real strict. So it was just the four of us.... Naw, B.J. don't play on the team—he's too short, but the four of us hang together. We been tight since seventh grade.

So, we get in the car...yeah, Andy's car, and we start drivin' around, you know, just foolin' around, havin' a good time, yellin' out the window at old white ladies—it always freaks 'em out.... Yeah, we was drinkin'—all 'cept B.J.—he don't drink. We had put about four six-packs in the trunk of Andy's car before the game. Since the weather's been so cold, puttin' 'em in the trunk



and we couldn't get it open. All of us was screamin' by that time, 'cause we could see his feet stickin' through the windshield. His legs was cut and bleedin' really bad. All we could see was these brand-new Nikes stickin' out the window, with the rest of Rob screamin' and hollerin', stuck inside.

So then Andy and B.J. climb on top of the car and start to knock pieces of the windshield out of the way, so we can try to get Rob out that way. But then...then...we hear this heavy, thick sound, like an explosion in a closed room, and Andy and B.J. is knocked off the hood. Me and B.J. grab Andy then, and we have to hold him back, 'cause the whole car is in flames, and Rob is still stuck inside, and we can hear him screamin', "Andy! Andy! Help me—Help me—Oh God, please don't let me die like this! Andy!..."

He screamed what seemed like a long time. Then it was real quiet. All we could hear was the sound of the flames, and little pieces of the car sizzlin' and burnin', and then the sirens of the police cars. I think I passed out then. That's what I remember—and that's what I'll never be able to forget."



**õFgct"Nqt fö**

**D0L0øu"Rtc{gt**





**õ O {" O quv  
Htki jvgpkpi " O q o gpvö**







Robbie always had a cheerful grin and a positive attitude. He was a talented athlete, and an honor student as well. Hazelwood will miss you, Robbie.

## **Ecppgf"Hqqf Ftkxg"Dgikpu**

The annual canned food drive, which is sponsored by the Unity Cultural Association, will continue through the Christmas holidays. The period from the Thanksgiving holidays through the Christmas season is traditionally a time when we become aware of those who are less fortunate. Each student is asked to bring at least 5 canned goods. The class that brings in the most will be given a pizza party sponsored by the U.C.A. This is a time when all cultural groups of our school work together for the betterment of man.

## **Kpvgtpcvkqpcn I wgvuvu**

Last week, a group of students from French West Africa visited Hazelwood as part of the International Exchange Experience. They visited Madame Loisel's advanced French classes and amazed the students with their vast knowledge of not only French, but also English, Swahili, and several African dialects.

When asked what she thought about our school, Niafra Abundada, 16, replied, "Because your school is very large, very old, and very crowded, it frightened me at first. But even though I feel that the American students do not give enough honor to their teachers, I envy your freedom of expression, and I appreciate the friendship that you have shown me."

The exchange students will return to their country after a visit to New York City.

## **DWU"EJCPIGU**

Students who ride the yellow buses are reminded that fighting and other undignified behavior will result in a suspension from the bus and a possible suspension from school. Vice Principal Leo Davis has said that all incidents of disorderly conduct and unruly behavior must be eliminated in order to insure the safety of all concerned.

## **Gfkwqtkcn Eqoogpvu**

Last week, there were 400 people in the Senior Class. Today there are 399. One student became a statistic when he lost his life in an accident involving drinking and driving. Usually, statistics don't mean much, but this statistic had a name, a face, a basketball jersey, and friends. Every 18 minutes, every day of the year, someone is killed in a drunk-driving accident. Alcohol-related fatalities are the number one cause of death in teenagers. When will we learn?

## Qp" I kxp i Vj cpmu

As we approach the Thanksgiving season and start to collect canned goods for the poor (as if they are not hungry for the other eleven months of the year), we should all look around, and instead of complaining like we usually do, sit down, and truly give thanks for the blessings that we have been given. We are accustomed to whining about how small our allowances are, or how upset we are because we only have three pairs of athletic shoes, when there are so many around us who have *no* money, no homes, and no shoes at all. In addition, we have family and friends that care about us and we have the hope of a bright future. And, because we have learned that death is close by and can touch us, we must give thanks for the simplest and greatest blessing of all—life.

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**Cpf {øu"Hktuv" F c {"Dcem"vq"Uejqqn**

—Hey, Coach, what's doin'?

—How are you, Andy? How was your first day back to school?

—Not so good, coach. It was rough. I feel okay, I mean, I ain't really busted up that bad. I got a few bruises and burns left over on the outside of me, but the inside of me is hurtin'. You know what I mean?

—I hear you, man. It's a rough scene to handle. How about your friends and your family? They're behind you, aren't they?

—Yeah, I guess. Me and B.J. and Tyrone'll never be the same, but we'll always be real tight because of this. And the other kids are tryin' real hard to be understandin'. My folks—well, you know how it is. My dad keeps tellin' me to be strong and put this all behind me. My mom won't really look at me. She cries a lot, but she hasn't said much about the accident after that first night.

—What about *you*, Andy? How do *you* feel about all this? This is quite a bit for you to handle.

—I'm okay.

—C'mon now. You just said you felt like you were hurting inside. What's going on?

—Well, if you really want to know, I wanted to die right after the accident. I wanted it to be me that was dead instead of Rob. He had so much goin' for himself. He woulda got that scholarship too, Coach. You know he woulda. He woulda made it big in the pro's too. He was 6 feet 5 inches and still growing. And he was my friend.

—You can't blame yourself forever, Andy. And if you had died instead of Rob, would you want *him* to be hurting like you are now?

—I don't know. I'm all mixed up.

—How long have you and Rob been friends?

—I remember the first time I saw him—tallest kid in the seventh grade. He and Tyrone were best friends from elementary school and they went around callin' each other "Tyronio" and "Roberto" like some kind of weirdos or something. Later on they started callin' me "Andini," but it was never as cool as their names because Andrew just didn't sound good endin' with an "o." You know what I mean?

—Yeah, I hear you.

—After I got to know them, and the three of us started hangin' together, I decided it didn't sound so bad. Anyway, the first day I saw him, he was pickin' his hair out with his red pick and diamond-lookin' things on it. I went over to him, and said, "Won't yo' mama get mad when she finds out you took her pick?" He slowly put the pick in his back pocket, slowly looked at me, and then proceeded to beat the snot out of me. We've been tight ever since.

—Nothin like a good fight to start out a solid friendship.

—Me and Rob and Tyrone had most of our classes together, and even went out for the junior

high basketball team together. B.J. tried out too, but he didn't make it. I guess you know, Coach, that B.J. has tried out for basketball every year for six years, including junior high, and never made it once. He keeps sayin' he's gonna be the next Spud Webb.

—Yeah, that B.J. is something else.

—He's got more guts than I'll ever have. It was B.J.'s idea to try to climb on the hood to rescue Rob. Like I said, he's the one with the guts.

—From what I hear, you have your share of guts and courage too. Without you, the other boys may have been injured much more than they were. Wasn't it you that helped get Tyrone and B.J. out of the car?

—Don't believe everything you hear. I think it was the other way around. Actually, I don't really remember.... but I couldn't get to Robbie. I couldn't get to Robbie.

—That's right. You *couldn't*. There are some things that are beyond our power to control.

—I coulda controlled the drinkin'. I knew better. We all did. We just never figured it would happen to us.

—I hear you.

—I never will know why I didn't get hurt worse—I shoulda been hurt so bad that at least I had to stay for a couple of months—but they let me go home in two days. My burns weren't too bad.

—Well, except for the miscellaneous Band-Aids, I'd say you look pretty good, considering. Have you recuperated from that court ordeal yet?

—After I got out of the hospital, and after all the police investigations, and I found out that I had to go to court, I was really scared. I really appreciate you comin' down there, Coach.

—No problem, kid. Just wanted to let you know we're all behind you.

—I was surprised so many kids from school was there—all the kids from S.A.D.D., several other teachers. Of course, Rob's parents, my parents, and Keisha was there. It was almost as bad as the funeral. When the judge talked to me, and I cried, in front of everybody, I was kinda embarrassed, but I guess that was okay—I guess they understood. A lot of them was cryin' too.

—I was too, Andy. There's no shame in tears.

—Coach, can you explain somethin' to me?

—Sure, Andy, if I can.

—I had been charged with DWI and vehicular homicide, but they dropped the vehicular homicide charge because of my age and good-driving record. I ended up gettin' my license revoked until I'm twenty-one, and a two-year suspended sentence. Even I thought it was a real easy sentence, maybe too easy. Do you think that was right? Shouldn't I been sent to jail or somethin'?

—The judge did what he thought was best in your case, Andy. You gotta stop punishing yourself.

—I think I would have felt better if I woulda had to suffer and complain a little.

—You *are* suffering, Andy. The judge knows that. We all do. And we'll help you all we can. You come see me whenever you need to talk, okay?

—Yeah, man. Thanks. When can I play ball again?

—What does your doctor say?

—I have nothin' broken—just some slight burns, a few cuts, and a couple of ugly bruises. When I was in the hospital, they ran all these tests, but everything came out okay. They told me I was lucky.... Yeah, right.

—Don't you have to go to the Health Clinic for your Alcohol Rehabilitation classes?

—Yeah, I go every Saturday from six in the morning till six at night.

—Wow, that's a long day.

—Yeah. They said they wanted my attention *first* thing in the morning. Well, they sure got it. That's even earlier than I leave for school. I went to the first one last week. It wasn't so bad. Actually, I learned a lot.

—Did you talk to the counselors there about returning to normal school activities, including basketball? Games start at eight, you know. Can you make it on Saturday?

—Yeah, no problem. They said they wanted me to have as normal a school life as possible. It's not like these programs that take away all your privileges completely. So I asked them about sports, and they said that as long as I didn't miss any sessions over there and was able to keep my grades somewhere above basement level, I could play basketball again. I'd like to try, Coach.

—It's been tough on all of us, Andy. We haven't had a practice, and we've forfeited two games since the...accident. But I feel that It's time to move on. I think Robbie would have wanted us to keep





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November 22

Dear Sandra,

Well, how is California treating you? Do you like it any better since your moved? My dad won't let me call you long-distance anymore since we talked all night last month. The bill came to over \$200.00 and he was ready to kill me. Even after that great Thanksgiving meal we had yesterday, he wouldn't give in. He just doesn't understand that when your best friend moves 2,000 miles away, you just have to do a lot of catching up. I've got so much to tell you—just wait until you hear what happened at school

Two weeks ago, right after a basketball game, Robbie Washington got killed in a car accident. It was awful. Andy Jackson was driving, and B.J. Carson and Tyrone Mills were also in the car. Those three got out okay, but Robbie, he got burned to death 'cause the car blew up or something. Everybody at school was crying and they had this special memorial service for Rob. Then these people from downtown called "grief counselors" came to talk to us. We were supposed to "share" our sorrow with them. Yeah, right. Mostly they sat around and looked concerned and smiled a lot. What seemed to help us the most was us talking in small groups with our friends and some of the teachers. It's going to be rough getting over this. Hardly any of us ever knew anybody who had died before. "shai `ral hji irknus eayg in dnyth øl



*P.S. Girl, that Tyrone can really kiss!!!!!!! Makes me want to stand up and shout Hallelujah!*



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—Okay, okay. Everybody here? Where's Jackson? Anybody seen Jackson?

—I called his house, Coach, to give him a ride, but his little brother said he already left. He said Andy was takin' the bus.

—The bus? Good grief, he may never get here! All right, let's go over the game plan. This is a big game for us, and I know it's our first home game since...since we lost Robbie, so it's going to be difficult for all of us—especially Andy. Let's see if we can give him as much support out there as we can—assuming he gets here. The bus! I could have picked him up if he had called me.

—He's been real moody lately, Coach. Sometimes he just likes to be alone. He don't talk to us like he used to.

—I know. I've been trying—

—Hey, Coach! Andy's here!

—Great. I was getting worried, Andy. Are you ready to play?

—Sure. No problem. Let's get it on!

—Okay, get suited up and meet me on the court for warm-ups in three minutes. We have a game to win!

—...and we now have only four minutes, thirty-three seconds remaining in the second half and Hazelwood trails by eight. This has been a very emotional game for all involved. The Tigers really want to win this one because this is their first home game since that devastating loss of their popular and capable center, Robbie Washington.

And it's a pass to Jackson, to Mills, back to Jackson and it's in for two.

That's fourteen points now for Jackson, Hazelwood's new center. It's hard to fill another man's shoes, but he's wearing them tonight.

Covedale's Stefanski is ready to move the ball downcourt—he tries one from the outside—it's good. The score is now 62-54. Hazelwood's Mills takes it down, under full-court pressure, and—no—he's fouled on the shot and will go to the line for two.

Mills has ten points in this game so far—make that eleven—Now let's see how he does on this next one—He takes his time, pulls the trigger—and he's got it! That gives him twelve, and brings Hazelwood within six. Covedale takes the ball out. Jackson steals and drives for the basket. It rolls on the rim—and it is good! He's dynamite tonight!

The score now stands at 62-58 and we've got about three minutes remaining in the game. Covedale takes it down. Barkley tries an eight-footer and it's no good. Hazelwood seems to be on fire and Covedale out of steam as Shuttlesworth drives it hard on the inside, fakes the jump shot, and finger rolls it in for an easy two points.



that's holding the team together. Without you, we'd all fall apart.

—I don't see how. I'm not even holdin' myself together very well. I just don't understand so much stuff. I just can't—

—Go ahead and cry, Andy. Don't be afraid of those tears. Sometimes they help to wash the soul clean.... Come on, I'll take you home.



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**v i g " D u f o i g n i b w**

—Andy, my name is Dr. Carrothers. I'm glad you were able to come today. Are you comfortable?

—Yeah, I guess. Hey, man. I ain't never seen no black shrink before.

—Well, here I am. I went to the University of Cincinnati for my undergraduate and master's degrees. And I got my Ph.D. from Yale.

—Man, I can't even pass chemistry. You make a buncha cash?

—Over ninezih]ch t0ep\$e\$ a a Oa°3a



some nights, but I feel a whole lot better than I did right after the accident.

—How did you feel then?

—Like a piece of crap.

—Why?

—'Cause it was my fault that

—Do you think your parents understand your problems?

—Heckee, no! Sometimes I think my parents ain't got no grip on reality. My mother lives in "la-la land." Do you know that she still says "Negro?" and refuses to call us black or African-American? At least she doesn't say "colored." She says that her skin is *not* black and never will be and that she doesn't know anyone from Africa; why should she change what has worked perfectly well all of her life? I've given up tryin' to convert her.

—What kinds of things is she interested in?

—She's active in her sorority activities, which to me seems kinda stupid. You got a bunch of black women (forgive me, Mother), who graduated from college twenty-five years ago, who meet once a month to talk about the good old days. That reminds me—she keeps the station on her car radio set to one of those oldies stations. If I hear the Supremes one more time, I think I'll scream!

—Does she ever listen to *your* music?

—~~Ohhh~~ for real! Anyway, they plan meaningless activities like cotillions for girls like Rhonda and Keisha. She once asked me if I would like to be an escort for one of the girls.

—What'd you say?

—~~It~~ almost died! Me? Put on a tuxedo and dance the waltz with some pimply faced girl whose major goal in life is to master the bass trombone? I don't think so. So me and my mom kinda stay out of each other's way. We don't dislike each other—we just don't think alike.

—What about your dad?

—My dad is another one who can't deal with the real world, although he doesn't think so. He's active in the Republican party—yes, I said "Republican." Isn't that ] deal in n?

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—Hi, Andy. You ready to go? If we don't hurry, we'll miss the bus.

—What I miss is my car.

—Look, you don't have practice, and you don't have a class or a se ; u



**Uejqqn"Dnwg**

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—Hey, Gerald, whatcha got next bell?

—American history. Killer Killian's givin' a test. And I don't know *nothin'* 'bout no Civil War, Andy.

—She givin' a test? Today?

—Yeah, Andy. I just remembered. You got your book?

—Naw, man. You outta luck. It's too late to study now anyway.

—I don't care. If I can get a D, that'll do. Hey, Tyrone, you catch Arsenio on TV last night?

—Sure did, Gerald, my man. It was just comin' on when I got in from my job at Burger King. The ladies in that singin' group he had on are so fine!

—For real!

—Didja read that story for English homework, Ty?

—Naw, man. Even if she gives a quiz, I'm cool. I sit next to Tiffany Brown, the smartest girl in the world.

—I hear you. I hope she has a class discussion. Then I can catch up on my sleep.

—No chance, today, Andy. I heard she's givin' out midterm notices in class today. I know she got one specially engraved for me.

—Oh no! So close to Christmas? Santa can just skate on by my house! I had my mama just about ready to buy me that leather coat.

—Kiss it good-bye, Andini! Now, if you did your homework every once in a while, like my man Marcus over there, you could wear leather down to your underwear!

—Yeah, man. What can I say? I can't be doin' all that. There's the bell. Let's raise up.

—Peace.







mail room of Proctor and Gamble. He didn't have to worry 'bout gettin' into college, because the chance wasn't there. And he didn't have to worry about scholarships or stupid school counselors or just plain feelin' useless.

—I bet he had his share of feeling useless. Have you ever talked to him about it?

—Naw, man. My dad don't *talk*. He lectures, he preaches, he yells. But we don't ever just *talk*.

—What about your counselors at school? Are they any help? If I remember, when I was in high school, the counselor was there to help kids out who had academic problems, or problems at home.

—You had counselors who would talk to black students and see their point of view and help them out?

—No, you're right. It was probably even worse when I was in school. I just happened to be fortunate enough to find a lady who recognized a spark in me and gave me some direction.

—I don't know what it was like back then, but all my counselor be doin' is makin' up schedules and callin' people out of class, as far as I can tell. We got one or two that maybe I could talk to, but they're assigned to another grade level. I'm stuck with the one I got.

—Have you ever talked to your counselor?

—Yeah, once, but of ckkgoab. s I aaronc B gnlke and anoMim a her'orire w me Istudente

advanced math, and when the teacher gave back the papers, he said, “Irving got an A, as usual, and Ching Lee got an A, as usual, and, oh my goodness, even *Andy* got an A this week. I must be slipping—my tests are getting too easy if even Andy can get an A on them, or maybe he cheated.” Everybody chuckled, but I was boilin’ mad. How come I can’t ever get praised for good grades? How come me gettin’ an A on a test is somethin’ the class should laugh at?

—Do you find this frustration from teachers of both races?

—Even some of the black teachers treat us wrong. They be grinnin’ in the faces of those little white girls, sayin’ stuff like, “That’s wonderful, Mary Alice! You did a marvelous job on that project!” Then they say stuff to me like, “That’s good, Andy, but couldn’t you have improved this part or jlat



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about other things. We taking a shower to get rid of some of that perfume. (In the car, with the heat on, it was starting to make me feel sick.) We stopped by McDonald's and she never said anything else about Andy.

I wonder what Andy's getting me for Christmas. I wonder if Andy is even going to get me anything for Christmas. He's so out of it sometimes that I wonder if he even knows what day it is. All I know is, he better get me something nice, because I spent too much of my babysitting money on that sweater I got him.



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*It's dark where I am  
And I cannot find the light.  
There are shadows all around me  
And my heart is full of fright.*

*Everyone is cheerful  
They never even see  
That storm clouds are forming  
Upon the peaceful sea.*

*I cannot see the future  
And I cannot change the past  
But the present is so heavy  
I don't think I'm going to last.*

Class, pass your papers up. I know you're excited because this is the last day of school before Christmas vacation, but let's get this one last assignment in. At least you know what *I'll* be doing over the break—reading your poetry. I'm really rather looking forward to it.

—Yeah, just like an English teacher—poetry turns her on.

—Don't knock it till you've tried it, Gerald. Poetry is a wonderful way to express yourself. Sometimes a poem can say what we're able to feel, but unable to put into words ourselves. You like music, don't you?

—Yeah, ‘cause it has a live bass and I can turn it up loud and jam.

—Do the songs that you listen to have words?

—Yeah, specially rap songs.

—Well, believe it or not, the words to those songs are poetry. Someone has written a poem, and a musician has set that poem to music with a beat. That’s all poetry is. Poetry is a song without music. Can you deal with that?

—Yeah, but I still like what I hear on the radio better than what they put in this poetry book.

—That’s my point exactly. If you don’t like these, write your own! Now do I have all the papers? Andy, where’s yours?

—I didn’t do it.

—Oh, Andy, why not? This was the last big grade for this quarter. You’ve missed quite a bit of homework the past few weeks. I know you haven’t felt well, but this was an easy assignment.

—Yeah, well, I forgot. I’m sorry.

—I am too, Andy. I hope you have a great vacation. Come back in January and let’s start fresh, all right?

—I can live with that.

—Well, there’s the bell—I wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

—Hey, Andy, I thought you did that poetry assignment.

—I did. It’s in my book bag.

—So why didn’t you turn it in? That’s going to fry you when grades come out.

—I know. I don’t even care. I just didn’t feel like it, okay, Keisha?

—Okay, okay. Don’t get all bent out of shape. Are you still coming over tonight?

—Yeah, I’ll be there. That’s one thing that I *do* care about.

*Love is special,  
Love is fine,  
It sends warm shimmers  
Down my spine.*

*His touch is like  
caressing fire.  
His smile can make me  
feel desire.*

*His eyes are kind,  
His arms are strong,  
I've found the place  
where I belong.*

*What's your problem, little man?  
Can't you deal with the basic plan?  
Your mama don't know  
And your daddy don't know  
That you got a secret  
And it's going to blow.*

*What's your secret, little man?  
Can't you hide it under the sand?  
Your brother don't know  
And your buddy don't know  
That you got a problem  
And it won't let go.*

*What's your problem, little man?  
Can't you deal with the basic plan?  
Your mama don't know  
And your daddy don't know  
That you got a secret  
And it's going to blow.*

*I pray to the Lord  
Who lives up above  
To send me a lady—  
Someone to love.*

*She's got to be fine,*



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—I'm glad you came back, Andy. I'd like to finish our conversation.

—What conversation? I do all the talkin'. All you do is sit there and look out the window. You know, you really should trim those nose hairs.

—Thanks for the cosmetic advice. Now, what about you? We never really talked about Keisha, or Christmas, or the rest of the school year up to this point. Do you feel ready to get started?

—Yeah, I guess. Let me see...Christmas...Well, Christmas was kinda rough. Me and Rob used to hang out in the malls during the holidays, checkin' out stuff that cost too much and pretendin' to be interested in buyin' it. It was funny—we would walk into one of those stores with alarms and bells and electronic wires on the leather goods—you know the type I mean.

—Yes, I'm with you.

—The salespeople started to follow you around as soon as you hit the door, and they *never* take their eyes off you, like you gonna steal somethin' with the Bells of















**Dncem"Qp" Y jkvg**

**Cpf{"cpf"Mgkjc  
gn"e"Unay{"Eof**

- Hello, may I speak to Andy?...Hi, Andy, this is Keisha. Have you looked outside yet?
- Girl, I ain't even awake good yet. What's up?
- It snowed last night! Must be about six inches out there. And it's still coming down hard.
- Shucks. I hate snow. It gets all in my shoes and I walk 'round with cold, wet toes all day.
- So wear some boots.
- You sound like my mama.
- And you sound like a two-year-old. I just wanted to let you know about the snow. Get up and get going. Your dad'll probably have you shoveling.
- You got that right. You think they'll cancel school?
- Be for real! They *never* close the city schools. The lucky ones are the kids who live in places like Boone County—out in the country. They alwayn~

Put on my best black clothes

Walked out my black door

And, Lord have mercy: white snow!

—Hey, that's funny. You right, Ms. Blackwell—that one's not so bad. That's exactly how I felt this morning when I saw all that snow outside.

—Thanks, Andy. Coming from you, that's a real compliment. Gerald, what do you think?

—Hey, that's the way I feel *every* day. Sometimes I just feel like there's white everywhere I look, you know what I mean?

—Not exactly.

—It's like the snow today—like you go outside and there's white all around you—like swallowing you up.

—Go on.

—Like the lady said in the poem—you mindin' your own black business and all this white stuff jus' takes over your life. And I ain't jus' talkin' 'bout snow!

—What's wrong with white, Gerald?

—Nothin', Mary Alice. This ain't no personal thing 'bout you or any other white person. I'm just tryin' to explain a feelin' in the gode.

—That shows a real depth of understanding, Gerald—of the poem, and of some of the larger ideas that the poem touches on. I'm glad you liked the poem. What did *you* think, Mary Alice?

—I never really thought about it. But I guess Gerald is right. Sometimes it must be mind-boggling!

—Good. Any other comments? Keisha?

—I like the poem. All of us at one time or another feel like a cinder among the snowflakes. You stand out when you just want to blend in; you get noticed whether you want to or not. But it's not always racial. In one of my classes, I'm the only girl. That's just as bad.

—Good point, Keisha.

—Ms. Blackwell?

—Yes, Andy?

—Why is that is at zh.

—Ruby red lips!

—How about white heat?

—Or white as death?

—I know a real weird one. Chocolate is dark, right?

—Right! Brown and luscious!

—Ever eat white chocolate? It's even better!

—Dag! Everything good that's dark, they take it and make it white!

—How about black magic! Is that better than white magic?

—It's more powerful!

—Well then, what about black gold? Oil! I'd be rich!

—Excellent, class. As you have shown, color is used all the time to create images in our mind.

It's society that implants positives or negatives onto certain ideas. You have the option to accept, reject, or change the stereotypes that currently exist.

—How do you mean?

—Okay, let me give you an example. In Puritan England, about 300 years ago, it was against the law to wear the color red. Anyone caught wearing red would be arrested and probably killed.

—Why? That's stupid.

—It wasn't stupid to them. They associated red with the devil and works of evil; therefore, anyone who wore that color must be guilty of evildoing.

—Hey, Keisha! You better get rid of that red sweater you're wearin'! I heard a police car go by. I'd be glad to hold it for you.

—Shut up, Gerald. You are just used to running from police cars!

—Okay, now, calm down. Let me give you another example of how color bias can be changed—and this one *is* racial in nature. About twenty to twenty-five years ago, social activists started a campaign to get rid of unfair, negative racial stereotypes. That's when we first started hearing the phrases, "Black is beautiful" and "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud!" Before that, black people in American had been called all sorts of terrible names. And all those thousands of years of the Black Knight and black cats and the blackness of death that people associated with negative ideas were associated with a group of people whose skin happened to be darker than the skin of the folks who seemed to be in charge here. Even Africa was called "the Dark Continent."

—I see what you mean. My mother told me about all that stuff. She said when she was little, all she could buy were white dolls. Every little black girl had a beautiful white baby doll with long blonde curls to love and to hug.

—You're right, Rhonda. I had one like that myself.

—You did? Now *that's* funny!

—Well, times have changed. Stereotypes of color, race, and gender are slowly disappearing. It's up to you people to make a world that is better. Well, there's the bell. Good discussion, class. No homework tonight. Enjoy the snow.

—Are you feet cold, Andy?

—Not really. Yeah, maybe a little. Hey, Keisha, can I ask you somethin'?

—Sure.

—Do you think Robbie is cold?

Do you think Robbie is cold?

—What?

—It's so cold today. And there's so much snow. Do you think he's cold?

—What makes you think of stuff like that?

—I was just thinkin' about how cold my feet are and how uncomfortable it makes me feel. And I was just wonderin' if Robbie is feeling like this all over.

—Andy, I don't think you should be talking like this.

—So cold. So cold. I can't stand it! I can't stop thinkin' 'bout Robbie out there frozen and cold in the cemetery. It's drivin' me crazy!

—Andy, stop it! You're driving *me* crazy. Robbie can't feel anything, Andy. Robbie is warm and at peace.

—Are you sure?

—As sure as I can be.

—Warm?

—Warm.

—At peace?

—At peace. Like I wish *you* could be. Now let's get out of here. If we miss the bus and have to walk in all this snow, then we'll *really* know what cold is.

—Okay, okay. Here I come.... Cold.... Cold.... So cold....





**Ceegrvkpi "Hgct ô  
Guecrkpi "Rckp**





—That's good. Do you feel a little better now that we've verbalized some things that you were unsure of or unwilling to talk about?

—Yeah, I do.

—Do you think if you wrote a letter to Rob, or to his parents, it would help eliminate some of the pain?

—I don't know. I never thought about it.

—Why don't you try to write one of those letters and bring it next time that you come, okay?

—Dag! Now I got homework from my shrink! I can't win.

—Yes, you can, Andy. You're a winner all the way.

—You really think so?

—I know so. You remember now—you promise to call me if you need me—any time of the day or night, okay?

—Yeah, okay.

—Peace, man.

—Later.



**Pki jv"cpf"F tgc o u**

**Cpf {"cpf"O qpv{  
I wvv"dehate"De fyke a**







—Why?

—'Cause you don't make fun of me when I start talkin' off-the-wall stuff. And you listen to whatever foolishness I got to say.

—That's 'cause I like you, Andy. And I care 'bout you 'C

—No! No! No! Get outta here! Leave me alone!

—Andy? You okay?

—Wha—? What? Whatsa matter, Monty? Why you in here?

—You were screamin'. Did you have a bad dream after all?

—A bad dream? Yeah, I guess so. I'm okay now.

—You want my Teenage Warrior Space Soldier? I got two. Rocketman is the most powerful, but Astroman has the most weapons.

—Hey, just to make you happy, I'm gonna take Rocketman, okay? Now go back to bed. I'm sorry I woke you up.

—G' nite, Andy.

—G' nite, Monty. And thanks.





LCPWCT["3:

*Dear Mr. and Mrs. Wash*

*...of two extra large boxes of frozen pizzas with case during those small after-school "snacks."*

*—Riding in the backseat of your station wagon, all dressed up and nervous, the night me and Rob double-dated for the Freshman Dance, and you had to drive us because we didn't have our licenses yet.*

*—Sitting in your backyard in the summer, eating Bar-B-Q, and listening to stories from Rob's granpa about "down home."*

*—Going to King's Island with you on family discount day and riding The Beast 47 times in a row.*

*—Driving backward through the drive-through at McDonalds, and getting in trouble and having to call you, not for driving backward, but because we were so busy being silly, we forgot we didn't have enough money to pay for the hamburgers.*

*—Getting chicken pox, both of us, in the eighth grade, and staying at your house for a week, because we couldn't go to school.*

*—Eating spaghetti at your house on Saturday night and having "worm-slurping" contests to see who could suck the longest piece of spaghetti.*

*—Seeing you in the stands during all our basketball games, knowing that you'd always be there, and feeling good about that, even if we lost.*

*—Wishing that I could be a part of your family because you seemed to have something that my family didn't.*

*These are some of the things I remember about you, your family, and Rob. I will always treasure those days, and I will never forgive myself for destroying something very special. I hope that someday you will be able to forgive me, but if not, I hope you will be able to remember without so much pain.*

*Yours,  
Andy.*



**õQwv."Qwv#"Dtkgh"Ec p fng#ö**

**õO cedgyj ö"Nguuqp**

**br"Cri du i"Enouu**



—All right, class. We've almost finished our study of Macbeth. We've watched Macbeth change from a noble, trusted, dedicated soldier, willing to sacrifice his life for king and country, to a wretched, depraved, corrupt murderer who no longer has feelings of guilt or morality. It's a fascinating study of the degeneration of the human spirit.

—Ms. Blackwell, does he die at the end?

—Well, Marcus, he's just about dead inside already. He's got one little spark left—his refusal to surrender to Macduff and the forces of good—but don't you think his death is inevitable, Marcus?

—Yeah, he deserves to die—he killed his best friend, he killed women and children, he killed the king. Yeah, I'd say my man deserves to die.

—Okay, what about his wife? Does she deserve to die too? Mary Alice?

—Well, it *was* originally her idea. If it hadn't been for her, Macbeth never would have killed the king in the first place. Women have that power over men, you know. Right, Keisha?

—Right on, girl. Now you're talking!

—Ooh—You wish! You livin' in "la-la land," ladies!

—Okay, Gerald, that will be enough. Keisha and Mary Alice have a right to their opinions too, you know. But Lady Macbeth, who seemed so strong at the beginning of the play, had a rather rapid mental deterioration—remember she was walking and talking in her sleep and washing her hands uncontrollably? She finally cannot stand the pressure of the guilt, and she kills herself.

—Kills herself? What a wimp! I'm disappointed. I thought she was pretty cool for a while there.

—Sorry, Keisha. She takes the coward's way out by committing suicide and leaves Macbeth to face the end alone. But you must remember that she *was* a murderer. I don't think Shakespeare meant for her to be a hero. That's where we'll start today—where Macbeth learns of his wife's death. Open to page 224—Act 5, Scene 5, line 16. Anthony, would you read, please?

The Queen, my Lord, is dead.

She should have died hereaft eheadeees d

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
and then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

—Now let's see what Shakespeare is talking about here. What is he saying about life? B.J.?

—He says, "Life is short, and then you die. And on top of that, life don't really mean nothin' anyway." But I think the only reason that he was so depressed was because he had been the cause of so much death that he couldn't find nothin' else good about livin'.

—That's a wonderful observation, B.J. See, Shakespeare isn't so bad. You're doing a great job of figuring out what's going on. Andy, what do *you* think about these lines?...Andy...where are you going? What's wrong? Someone go check on him, please. He seemed pretty upset. Keisha? Tyrone? Go out in the hall and make sure he's all right.

—Okay, class. Let's go on.



**Dcnqpg{"Ucpf yke jgu"cpf  
Dcf"Dtgcvj**

Nwpej."cpf"c"Xkukv  
vq"vjg"Eqwpugnqt

HGDTWCT["6

—Hey, B.J. Whatsup? Whatcha got for lunch?

—Nothin' much, Tyronio. Probably baloney again. I *hate* baloney sandwiches.

—Don't you make your own lunch? My mama told me a long time ago, "Tyrone, if you want lunch, you better make it yourself, 'cause I got more important things to do!"

—Naw, man. My mama *loves* me—she takes the time each mornin' to make me a nutritious, delicious luncheon!

—Yeah, baloney sandwiches!!...Hey, Andy. Put your tray right here. You have to sit downwind of B.J. He's got baloney and mustard again. Where's Keisha?

—She went to the library to get a book for a report she's got to do. She'll be down in a minute. Tyrone, where's Rhonda?

—She's got a chemistry lab to finish. I do admire intelligent women. Say, Andy, remember when Rob was tryin' to go with that exchange student from Hong Kong because she was so good in math? Remember how she—

—Hey! Leave Rob out of this. He's dead, okay? I get sick and tired of you two always talkin' about Rob! Like you're tryin' to bring his head back by sayin' "What do you tryin' to do—make his head don't forget that I'm alive and he's dead? Okay, you've made your point—he's dead! He's dead! He's dead! He's *still* dead! Do you hear me? I'm outta here.

—Man, I don't know how to deal with this. It seems like he ought to be gettin' better, but he's gettin' worse. I still have bad dreams 'bout that night, but I'm learnin' to live with it. Andy keeps freakin' out.

—Yeah, B.J., I know where you comin' from. Maybe we should talk to his parents or somethin'.

—Naw, man. That's like talkin' to this baloney sandwich. Wait a minute, I got an idea. Isn't old lady ~~Florne~~ always sayin' stuff like we should come and talk to her in the counselor's office if we ever have a problem?

—Yeah, but I can't v,Òta y td

—Well, Mrs. Thorne, Andy seems depressed all the time and gets mad at us for no reason. Sometimes he starts cryin'. A couple of weeks ago, he ran out of English class because we were readin' a play about some dead white guy.

—It was *Macbeth*, stupid. Anyway, Andy only seems happy when he's with Keisha or when he's actin' weird. And we didn't know who else to talk to.

—Now it's perfectly understandable that Andrew is having a difficult time adjusting to Robert's death. That was a very traumatic experience—for all of you, I might add. His behavior is really not out of the ordinary—anger, depression, even tears—are all positive signs that he is in the process of working it out. If he *didn't* show any of these signs, then we'd be concerned.

—But...but...it seems like...

—...like he needs help or somethin'.

—Well, I probably shouldn't tell you boys this, but he *is* getting some outside counseling. I tell  
zsel



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**Cpf{øu"Hkpcn"Xkukv**  
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**Vjg"K o rqtvcpeg  
qh"Htkgp fu jkr**



*most important thing in the world. Know that and I tried to get it*



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**Rjqpg"Ecm"htq o"Cpf{øu"Vgcejgt**

HGD TWCT [



attention. Is he getting enough sleep at night?

—From what I observe, kids that age forget to comb their hair half the time anyway. And with all the new hair styles that the kids are coming up with, there's no telling what he's planning to do with his hair next week. And, as far as I know, he's getting plenty of sleep. He doesn't have an after-school job because of basketball. He's in his room most nights by eleven o'clock, and from what you say, he's not using a lot of his time to do homework, so that doesn't seem to be a problem. Besides, he never was a "morning person." He doesn't really get moving until noon.

—Well, I just wanted to let you know that I'm concerned. A couple of weeks ago, he ran out of the room in tears in the middle of a discussion about the suicide of Lady Macbeth. Let me ask you this—and please don't misunderstand my intentions or think that I'm trying to intrude into the personal life of your family—but wasn't Andy seeing a counselor about possible problems that may have been caused by his involvement in that accident?

—Yes he was, initially. But the counselor has told me that he feels that Andy is adjusting quite well to the situation, and we will be discontinuing those sessions on a regular basis. I appreciate your efforts, but I feel that you might be overly concerned about a situation that is under control.

—I see. Well, thank you for your time. I hope Andy is able to get himself together and pass English this quarter. I'd hate to see him fail.

—I'll talk to him. You'll see an improvement. That's a promise.



**Nkqpu."Vki gtu."cpf**  
**Fkpqucwtu**



—Why? Were you bad?

—Yes, Monty, I was bad. I was really, really bad.... Now go wash your hands and get ready for dinner.



**Jk fgp"Qrvkqpu**

**Eqpxgtucvkqp"dgy y ggp"Vgcejgtu**









*tonight—it's so cold tonight" or "If I died, would you miss me?"*

*I'd like to ease up on our relationship a little, but I don't know how without hurting him. Well, he needs me, and he has been through a lot. I'm sure n, h, s c*

*hosrods bæ*

*I'd lne t ured e ni*

*I dIane n, hni*

*It d*

*I .*



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**õK" F qö**

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OCTEJ"37

*Dear Rhonda,*  
*YES.*

*Tyrone*



**Rwdnke"Rngcuwtg.  
Rtkxcvg"Rckp**

**Vcngpv"Ujqy"cv"Uejqqn**

**OCTEJ"52**





**Rtkxcvg"Rckp**

**Cpf{"cpf" Jku**

**Qgg"ev" Jggg**





beach together every day.

—Vaguely. Yes, now that you mention it. I remember you playing with an older boy quite a bit.

—Well, on the night before we were to leave for home, he and I sneaked out to see if we could catch crabs on the beach in the moonlight. You and Dad were asleep.

—Keep going.

—Well, we couldn't find any crabs, so we decided to go wadin' in this little pool of water that had collected near some rocks on the beach.

—A tide pool?

—Yeah, I guess that's what it was. Anyway, it was a lot deeper than we thought it was, so we were goin' to go back before our parents noticed that we were gone, when I slipped.

—Oh my goodness! Then what happened?

—It was dark, so I couldn't see, and I was under the water, so I couldn't breathe. I tried to scream, but water got into my mouth and my throat and my chest. I was cryin' out for help, but my cries only made things worse. That's how I feel tonight, Mom. That's *exactly* how I feel tonight.

—So how did you get out of there? Why didn't you tell us?

—That kid pulled me out, dried me off, and hit me on the back until I stopped coughin' and started breathin' normally again. Then he made me pro ki



**õ I ktñ."Ngv" Og"Vgm" [qw#ö**

**Tjqpfçø"Ugeqpf"Ngvgt"vq"Ucwpftc**

*April 1*

*Dear Sandra,*

*Guess what! Andy and Keisha broke up the other night! Ooh, girl, you should have been there! It was at the Talent Show. Andy was Master of Ceremonies, and he was dealing! It was really live! The music was loud and the teachers were all lined up in the back of the auditorium, frowning, so you know it was good.*

*He seemed like he was having a good time. He's been really depressed lately—I guess because of the accident—but last night he was acting really silly. He had us cracking up! He did this striptease, where he took off his coat, and his shirt, and was about to unzip his pants. Mrs. Jawes was halfway down the aisle, but the song stopped. We was dying laughing.*

*Then, for some reason that I'm not really sure of, Andy and Keisha started fighting backstage. She was supposed to sing that new song by Whitney Houston—I forget the name—and dedicate it to ,laugt,s*

turning him through his temper tantrums and crying spells. She said she was glad it was over finally. She didn't have the nerve to break up with him before this. I don't know what Andy is going to do now. She told him they could still be friends, but Andy needs more than that. I feel sorry for him, but I side with Keisha—she ain't no shrink. That dude needs help.

Me and Tyrone are still cool. I wish you could see the dress I got for the Prom. He will just die! when he sees me. Ooowee! That boy turns me on! Gotta run. I'll write again when I can.

Love,  
Rhonda



**Un**



—Hey, Andy. I haven't seen you since basketball season ended. How've you been?

—Oh, just great, Coach Ripley. My grades are up. Me and Keisha are really tight. I got my act together; I'm even lookin' at colleges for next year.

—That's good to hear, Andy. I'm so glad you got over that bout of depression you had a couple of months back. That was a rough time for you. It will *always* be difficult to deal with, Andy, but taking;



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—Hi, Dad, you're home early. What's to eat?

—How can you say you want to go to college? What college is going to take you with grades like this?

—I never said I wanted to go to college. *You* were the one who said I wanted to go to college.

—What do you mean? We've been talking about college since you were a little boy! Getting a degree—maybe even in the field of business administration.

—That's your dream, Dad, not mine.

—Well, what about basketball? Didn't you want to go to college to play ball so you could get a chance at professional basketball? You've really improved your game this year.

—How would you know? You didn't ever come to even one of my games this year! Not one!

—Well, you know how hectic my schedule is. Besides, I've seen you in the yard when you shoot hoops with your friends. I know you're good.

—Yeah, right.

—But back to the subject at hand—this absolutely reprehensible report card!

—Why you gotta always use such big words? I know my report card stinks. Why can't you just say that?

—If you had a better vocabulary, perhaps you wouldn't be failing English!

—Why don't you just get off my case?

—I'm not going to argue with you, Andrew. But I expect to see some major improvements in these last couple of months of school. Or I shall have to take some severe punitive measures.

—There you go with them big words again. What else can you do to punish me? Take away my car? It's in pieces at Joe's Auto Graveyard. Take away my driver's license? Sorry, the cops beat you to that. Stop me from seein' my best friend? He's in pieces at Spring Grove People Graveyard. I took care of that myself—I killed him—remember? So, you can't hurt me. I deal with big-time hurt every day.

—Andrew, I know you can't do it. You've been through a traumatic incident. But you have to get beyond it and move on. You have to be strong and show that you are bigger than the problem.

—Yeah, I know. You've told me that before. Be a man. Be strong. Put this "unfortunate incident" behind you. Well, maybe I can't do that.

—Quit interrupting. I'm trying to explain where I'm coming from. You see, I wanted to be—

—White?

—No, not white, but accepted by them. And it was almost impossible to be taken seriously in the business world with a name like "Ezekiel." I'd be sitting in a meeting with a group of five or six of them, all of us in blue suits and serious ties. The meeting would go something like this:

"Bob, what do you think the strategy should be?"

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—You think they care that you busted your butt to be acceptable to them?

—It's that desire to excel that I see lacking in you. Sometimes I think you just don't care.

—Sometimes you're right.

—How can you *not* care about your life, Andr...Andy?

—You seem to be doin' a fine job of dreamin' my dreams and plannin' my future. Maybe I don't wanna be acceptable to white folks.

—But you *must*! That's the only way to make it in this world—to assimilate into the society in which we live. *That's* why you must pull up your grades and improve your attitude. That is the key to success.

—What if I can't?

—I'm not taking "no" for an answer. You *will* show substantial improvement. I will not accept anything less than maximum effort. *No son of mine is going to be a failure!* Do you hear me?

—Okay, Dad. Whatever you say.

—There's your mother's car in the driveway. Help her bring in the groceries.

—I hope she didn't get much. I'm not very hungry anymore.





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- Grimes?  
—Here.  
—Hawkins?  
—Yeah.  
—Henderson?  
—Here.  
—Immerman  
—Over here.  
—Jackson?...Jackson?...Is Andy absent again?  
—Yeah, Mr. Whitfield. He's got "senioritis," a terrible disease.  
—I'd say that he might have a fatal disease. Students who catch "senioritis" have been known to develop serious complications and never graduate.  
—He'll be here tomorrow. He has to. He owes me two dollars.  
—Good luck. Okay, let's finish with attendance.  
—Johnson?  
—Here...
- Keisha, have you seen Andy?  
—No, and I hope I never do again.  
—Come on, girl, you know it hurts.  
—Yeah, Rhonda. It hurts. I really liked him, you know, but it just got too complicated. He's better off without me. He's got to get himself together before he can get seriously involved with someone else. How's Tyrone?  
—Oh, just great. We're goin' to the movies tomorrow. Do you want to come?  
—No. I'll probably just catch a movie on cable. It's kinda nice just to relax for a change and not worry about how I look or what I'll wear or where we're going. I'm just going to chill and enjoy my freedom.  
—Okay, but call me if you change your mind. Say, I'm going to drop off Andy's chemistry homework to his house after school. Mr. Whitfield said he'd fail unless he got this assignment in. You wouldn't want to go with me, would you?  
—No way, girl. Actually, if I saw him, I might break down and do something stupid like cry, or

make up with him. I'm out of his life—at least for now.

—Okay. I'll call you later.





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*DATE: April 3*

*TIME: 1820*

*INVESTIGATING OFFICER: Casey*

*SUBJECT: Andrew Jackson—male—black, age 17*

*ADDRESS: 2929 Ridgemont Lane*

*FINDING: Suicide*

*DISPOSITION: Deceased*

***SUMMARY REPORT:***

*On the morning of April 3, the above-named student left for school, but a neighbor reported seeing him return home about one hour later. He never reported to school. His friends had expressed concern because of Andrew's recent extreme fits of depression. A friend, Rhonda Jeffries, arrived at the house at 4:05 to bring Andrew some missed schoolwork. Andrew's mother, who was just getting home from picking up her younger son from school, had not been aware that her son had not gone to school. The younger child, Monty, age six, noticed blood on the ceiling. Mrs. Jackson went to her son's bedroom where Andrew's body was found with a fatal gunshot wound to the head. Police and life squad were summoned at 4:11. Andrew was pronounced dead at the scene.*



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—Good morning, class. my name is Mrs. Sweet and I'm a member of the suicide prevention/grief counseling team that has been brought in to help you through this crisis. We want you to feel free to express your emotions—so cry if you want to, or ask us questions—whatever you need to do to get through this.

—If you work for the suicide prevention team, you didn't do a very good job, did you?

—You sound bitter, young man. Your name is?...

—Tyrone. Andy was my friend. Where was you last month when me and B.J. was lookin' for somebody to help him? You got posters and emergency phone numbers for suicide prevention hot lines posted all over the building today. Where was you last week? What good does it do now?

—You have a point, Tyrone. Your counselors here at school know these numbers and should have had them available for you.

—When we went to see the counselor, all we got was bad breath and bad advice.

—There is no way that your counselor could have seen the future. I'm sure she would have suggested our number had she known the severity of Andy's problems.

—Yeah, sure. Tell me anythin'.

—Is there anyone else who would like to express their feelings? Anger is a perfectly normal emotion.

—Yes? Your name?

—B.J.



who do, let's see if it helps.



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*Dear Andy,*

*Well, this stupid counselor woman said to write this dumb letter to you. I don't see what for. It's supposed to make us feel better. But how can we feel better if we still don't understand why? Hey, man, life ain't perfect, but it's life! Remember right after the accident when we realized we wasn't going to die? In spite of all that noise and fire and death, we looked at each other, and real quicklike, we smiled. You know why? Cause we were alive. And we were glad. Of course we felt horrible because Rob was dead. I will never, never forget him, or that terrible night. And we felt guilty too—guilty that it was our stupid behavior that caused it, and guilty that we had lived and he had died. I been able to deal with the guilt—day by day it gets easier to handle. But you—you never got out from under the blame you put on yourself.*

*We didn't die in that accident for a reason. B.J. says it's because the Lord needed Robbie up there and he needed us down here. (I guess you know B.J.'s gotten real religious lately.) I don't know about all that—all I know is that if there was some special reason why we didn't die in that crash, then you just blew it.*

*Robbie's death was an accident. Somehow I can deal with that, but what you did—it just don't make no sense to me. You're making everything so rough for the rest of us. Rhonda and Keisha—they cry every time you look at them; and me and B.J. try to hang together, but nothing is fun anymore. I probably never will figure all this out. I know my life will never be the same. But I also know that dying don't fix nothing. It just makes things worse. I don't know what I'm here for but*

*I'm here to stay, and I got the guts to keep on living and find out why.*

*I'll miss you, Andy, and I'll never forget you, but when me and Rhonda is married and got six kids, you won't be there. And when B.J. is preaching to a church with 5,000 people, you won't be there. And when Keisha is a famous fashion designer with a Ph.D. in chemistry, with all kinds of fine-looking dudes around her, you still won't be there.*

*So later, brother. Say hello to Romeo and Juliet for me. Tell them I think they were stupid too. They didn't get to go to the Senior Prom either.*

*Your main man,  
Tyrone*

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the job boards through the ceiling of the living room. That's how they first discovered what you had done. Monty asked your mom why there was blood on the ceiling.

I'm not through with you. Your mom found you, or what was left of you. Did you think about her? Could you feel her pain as she walked into your room, and saw your body draped across your bed, a gun still clutched in your hand, and shattered segments of your head spread across a room which looked as if it had been painted with blood? Do you know what blood smells like, Andy? Your mom does. She'll never forget it. Part of her died that day too.

And so did I. I was there. I had come to bring your chemistry homework because you weren't at school. When she screamed, I ran upstairs. From that point, it's like a terrible videotape that keeps rewinding, that won't erase. The blood, the screams, the tears, the frantic call to 911, the ambulance, the police, the body bag. Then the numbness, more tears, the disbelief, and the questions. Then more tears, the wake, the funeral, and the pain—the pain that will not go away.

So, tell me, What were you thinking?

Rhonda

**Dear Andy,**

**You can't be dead. But I went to your funeral. I felt your coffin. It was warm and woody, but you couldn't have been in it. I wanted to open it, to knock and call out your name, but I didn't dare. I went tou**

*place where there is no pain, and I guess that's good. But the pain left  
by your absence is like a wound in our hearts that will not heal.  
Nobody understands why you decided to end your life when you had  
so much to live for. S*





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*—Dear Lord, there's a dude named Andy who's on his way up there, at least I hope he's headed in Your direction. He's not a bad kid—just young and very, very stupid. Will stupidity keep him out of heaven?*

*He suffered a lot down here. He never could talk to his folks and he stayed tied up in knots. He felt so very guilty for Robbie's death. I think it's because he never learned to pray. He never learned the power and hope that comes from Your forgiveness. I know that's what kept me sane.*

*He never willingly hurt anybody or anything. I remember once when we were in the eighth grade, Andy had a puppy who got hit by a car. He had only had the dog for a couple of weeks, so he couldn't have been that attached to it, but when it died, Andy almost fell apart. He stayed depressed for weeks.*

*I think Andy was scared of death in general. Two years ago, when old Mr. Mancilli, one of our gym teachers, died of a heart attack, a lot of the kids from school went to the funeral. But not Andy. He got all nervous and irritable whenever anybody even mentioned Mr. Mancilli. He just couldn't cope. The whole idea of death terrified him.*

*So I know Andy was afraid. His soul is probably still out there somewhere—floating in the darkness, looking for hope, hoping for forgiveness, and terribly, terribly frightened.*

*I know You already know all of this, but I just wanted to ask if You'd look out for my partner, and help him find peace.*



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