

# BANG!

What it comes down to, Doc, is — Bang! — I lost my mind! Presto! Reducto! Had it. Lost it. Gone! *Alles kaput!* I don't really see what the big deal is. You know, whoever that asshole was who said a mind is a terrible thing to lose, Doc, had it all wrong. I mean look at me, for cryin' out loud. Three squares a day. Baskets of apples and stuff all over the place. Painting classes and crap. Not to mention the time I get to spend with a hottie like you. Can you believe it, Doc? No, sir, a mind most definitely is not a terrible thing to lose. I should know. I had one. Then bang! Oh, excuuuuuse me, Doc. Poor choice of words under the circumstances. What can I say? No pun intended, unless Freud was right ... there really are no accidents. In which case, "bang" certainly was intended, but only by my subconscious. But as far as my mind goes, what can I say? Easy come, easy go. *Quod cito acquiritur cito perit.* Or whatever. People lose things all the time, Doc. I mean ... their direction, their virginity, even their looks.

Think about that one, Doc. Kind of scary isn't it? I mean how is a hottie like you going to keep them down on the farm once *old tempus fugits. Kaput!* Botox can't redux.

Know what I think is interesting to lose? Your temper. Think about it, Doc. I mean, I have a temper. My brother's got a temper. You have a temper. All God's children got tempers. But, how do we know we got them? Only by losing them, that's how. Your temper's there, but nobody can see it, or touch it, or hear it. It's just there, perking away. Then bang! You lose it. And suddenly everybody knows you've got one. Only you don't. Why? Because you've lost it. Weird, isn't it? I love metaphysical shit like this, don't you, Doc? It's so freaky.

Now, my dad. He's so temperless. Most of time he has absolutely no temper. He can't ... it's impossible, the way he's losing it all the time. He's a real Temperless Joe, my dad. I mean he loses his temper all over the place. The one person who can really find it is my mom. I mean she can find my dad's temper like that ... especially before they split. Now, not so much. But he loses his temper in other places too. Once, even in Headmaster Tilley's office. That was something to see ... the way he was screaming, I thought he was going to bust a gut. That was the time I threw a desk out the window. I mean, who knew? I mean throwing a desk seemed perfectly reasonable at the time. Shit. I thought I'd get the freshman Latin prize, you know? But that dickhead Gorman got it. I mean I lost out because that asshole Mr. Turner didn't like me. So I threw the desk. It seemed like a reasonable alternative to smacking Asshole Turner in his fat face. I still don't know what the big deal was. Of course, I should have been more careful. How was I supposed to know that Mrs. Tilley had picked that very moment to show the gardener where she wanted some flowers? Boy! Did my dad ever lose his temper when Headmaster Tilley told him I was suspended. And when we got home, too. That's when he really lost it. It was amazing. He must have found his temper somewhere in the car after we left school because he sure had it by the time we got home. He sure did.

But he's a good guy, you know, my dad. He really is. We can't complain, my sister Emily and my brother Peter and me. Some dads, when there's a divorce, they're such dicks. But our

BANG!

dad, he's okay... you know? He gets us almost every weekend. I can tell his girlfriend doesn't like it, but he still gets us.

And after the shooting? He was the one who came. Have I told you that, Doc? I mean usually it's my mom who comes if there's something with Peter or me. But after the shooting, it was my dad. That's how I knew something had happened to Peter and that my mom had to be with him.

That dumb shit, Billingsley. Man. It was freaky, Doc. I got to tell you. Cops everywhere. And none of them had a clue. They were just letting their big fat cop guts spill over their belts like blubber awnings to keep their feet dry. See, they wanted to put us in the field house. After Columbine and all those other places, they knew they had to keep us together, so they wanted to put us in the field house, but it was being renovated. So they put us on the bleachers by the football field. And it started raining.

Man, it was weird ... parents running up and down the rows of bleachers looking for their kids. Kids crying. And I don't just mean little kids, either. The faculty ... man, they were freaky too. Some were saying Billingsley went into the faculty lounge and just shot the place up and a lot of them were dead. Nobody was saying how many kids had been shot. I kept looking for Peter, but they kept telling me to go back to the bleachers. Man, I didn't want to get suspended again, you know, Doc. I mean some colleges will overlook one suspension. But not two. So, I went back.

Everybody was surprised it was that asshole Billingsley. He was real quiet, you know. Not freaky. He was just real quiet. He never really hung out with anyone. He was freaky one way, though: his mother drove him to school every day. I mean, here he was a senior and his mother drove him to school. And, what gets me, is that he just lived a few blocks away. I mean that was weird, when you think about it.

People said it was because he didn't get accepted anywhere. And, man, that would do it to you. Twelve years at Pelham and not getting in anywhere. Man, that would do it. I mean, that's what Pelham's all about, isn't it? — getting in somewhere good. Did I tell you, my dad was third in his class? And my uncle Deke, he was somewhere the hell up there, too. Now I'm in this place, wondering if I'll be able to get into Hip Hop Community College. All because of that dumb shit Billingsley. Christ. Not to get in anywhere. Can you imagine that? Not anywhere? No wonder he shot himself. I would, too. Wouldn't you, Doc?

In a way, I was lucky. It started to rain, but I had my soccer uniform on so at least my mom wouldn't freak about me getting my good pants wet. I kept standing up and looking down the bleachers for Peter. I thought he'd spot me in my uniform. I thought it would be easier for him to notice me. Peter, he's such a little kid. And he does such weird stuff. He sleeps on the floor. Did I tell you that, Doc? It freaks my mother out ... he makes these nests on the floor with his blankets and sleeps there. I call him birdbrain and he's so little and dumb he doesn't even know I'm making fun of him. It's pathetic. So, I wasn't too worried because, like I said, Doc, he's does some weird things, he could have been anywhere. But still, I wanted to see him.

And then, Mrs. Tilley, she came and sat with me. She just came and sat with me and put a blanket over me. After what I almost did to her, I felt sort of bad about that, but I let her do it. And she held an umbrella over me. It was getting dark, and every time I could see headlights swinging into the drive, I thought to myself, "That's Mom." Because, see, I still thought it would be her that would come for us. But then, the way Mrs. Tilley was holding the umbrella, I couldn't see the headlights any more. I kind of pulled the blanket around my head and

BANG!

just waited for whatever would come. And when I looked out again the bleachers were empty just about. There were a few kids from the middle school. But in the whole upper school, I was the only one left. And then I knew why Mrs. Tilley was being so nice to me. And then I saw my dad coming down the path ... I could just barely make him out, but it was him. And he had Uncle Deke with him. I stood up so they could see me. I just stood there and waited, you know? And my dad, he took the bleachers two at a time. He could do that because his legs are real long, Doc, you know? I'll probably be real tall, too, someday. But sometimes I hope not.

Sometimes, I just want to be real small. Like when I was under Mrs. Tilley's blanket. I kept having this crazy thought ... that I could become real small if I didn't move or anything ... you know, Doc? Like if I could just be perfectly still, that my organs and all my cells would just begin to move toward the center of my body . . what do they call it? . . . the soma? ... like it was a black hole or something. And that sooner or later I'd be so small no one could see me. Like I was a piece of dust or something.

But I'd be dense, you know, Doc. Really, really dense. So that if someone stepped on me, they'd feel me and say, "What the hell was that?" And I'd think to myself, "You dumb shit, you're so dumb you can't even see what's right under your foot. And even if you did, you'd just think I'm a piece of dust or something. But I'm right here." And I'd just sit there, not moving or anything, getting denser and denser and I be watching every move they made.

Isn't that metaphysical or what, Doc? Don't you just love metaphysical crap like that?