

My Life as a Myth
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Chapter One: Wouldn't It Be Nice

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My first day of high school. Boy, do I wish I could start over. I mean, I *need* to start over. I bet if you were me, you'd feel the exact same way.

What a day. It's bad enough that I'm already the casebook example of a loser. A social life? I don't have one. My few acquaintances don't really count. If I vanished out of their lives, they'd never even notice. My only real friend is Bruce Philemon. He says I just need to try harder. So to help me try harder, I'm starting this journal.

Okay, about today: There I was, in front of the elementary school, waiting for the bus for my first day at Chadham High. Three or four girls were standing on the sidewalk talking with four or five guys. The girls had clearly spent a lot of time deciding what to wear, and given the way the guys were looking at them, they were all smiles.

Now, these guys were all bigger than me. And while we might have gone to the same middle school, they were two or three years older and looked kind of dangerous. So I decided to keep a safe distance.

High school—the great unknown. All I knew was we're expected to be “adolescents,” which apparently means “emerging adults,” and act mature, *and* be interested in girls. And see, for me that's a problem. How am I going to get a girlfriend when they gross me out? I mean, guys talk about how girls make them feel, but just looking at the *Playboy* Bruce swiped from his dad kinda made me feel sick.

So anyway, I'd been standing there a couple of minutes when Andy Framingham showed up. Now I've known Andy since first grade and he's one of the most profoundly stupid people I've ever met. He had a can of Coke (his mother doesn't trust him with bottles), and he foolishly tried to chat up one of the girls (a bad idea). One of the guys was obviously her boyfriend.

I moved a little farther away from what I knew would soon become “the scene of the crime.” A couple of the guys—who were all cracking their knuckles—started talking to Andy. Now, I was too far away from the scene of the crime to hear the exact conversation, but I got the idea one of the big guys challenged Andy to put his soda can somewhere that would probably be real painful.

At that point, Andy actually got down on one knee like he was saying his prayers—which I thought was a pretty good idea. Then he held up the Coke can like he was trying out for the

Statue of Liberty and swung it down onto the sidewalk with the speed and force of a jackhammer.

It erupted like Mt. Vesuvius and sprayed the side of Andy's head. The fizz also hit two of the big guys all over their shirts and chins. And as the can spun around, it ruined the girls' first-day-back dressed-to-impress fashions.

Just as they all prepared to kill Andy and hide the corpse, Mr. Wiggins, the elementary school principal, came running from the building. He yanked Andy out of harm's way and announced he was reporting everyone to the high school principal. Then he pulled out his notepad and started taking names.

At first, I thought I'd been far enough away from the scene of the crime to avoid guilt by association, but no. Mr. Wiggins finished writing down the name of the last soda-splattered girl and marched over to me.

"Name," he said.

"Nick, uh, Nicholas—Nicholas Horton, sir."

"Horton? I remember you. Still making trouble, eh? Well, this time Mr. Fuddle will see you pay for it."

"No, sir. I'm *Nicholas* Horton. Not Raymond."

The whole six years I went to Chadham Elementary, Mr. Wiggins treated me like a punk because he kept confusing me with my older trouble-making brother. But I'd hoped to put all that behind me at Chadham High. My plan was simple: keep doing what I'd done in middle school and lay low for four years. It should have been easy. After all, Raymond had been long gone by the time Mr. Fuddle took over as principal. But now, identified as an accessory to the crime, I would be squarely on Fuddle's radar screen. *Not good!*

Mr. Wiggins warned everyone not to move and went inside to type up our death sentence. Then he came back out, slapping an envelope against his thigh. He stood there glaring at us until the bus came, gave the envelope to the driver, and watched to make sure we all got onboard.

Needless to say, the trip to Chadham High wasn't very festive.

When we turned into the parking lot, I caught sight of a tall bald man in a cheap suit. His white shirt looked dingy, and the skinny tie could have come straight from a game-show host's wardrobe. It was none other than Mr. Fuddle himself, arms crossed and scowling. Mr. Allen, the assistant principal, stood next to him. A couple of inches shorter than Mr. Fuddle but beefier, he was dressed just as square. He wasn't smiling either.

Mr. Fuddle boarded the bus and gave each of us the stink eye before speaking. The driver handed him the envelope, and he read off the names of the condemned. Somehow, my name had gone

from last on Mr. Wiggin's list to first on Mr. Fuddle's. Andy Framingham's name concluded the roll call. With that, Mr. Fuddle told us to "stop by" his office during our lunch breaks, and emphasized we'd better see him before eating.

A few minutes later, I made for a big, open-air quadrangle where about seventy or so students were milling around. Somebody had a transistor radio on, and the sounds of "My Generation" boomed through the area. The hot morning air stank of cheap cologne, third-rate perfume, and sweat, all mixed together. You didn't have to know the freshmen to spot us; we all had that distant "is this really happening" look in our eyes.

I wandered around giving myself little pep talks.

Despite what happened, I can still make my high school life something different. They say all you gotta do is study, be friendly, and stay out of trouble. I can do it. I know I can.

I finally caught a glimpse of Bruce up ahead talking with Lionel Richtbacker, an acquaintance we'd barely spoken to in the last three years. When a path opened up between me and Bruce, I lunged forward at full speed, jumped in the air, and grabbed him from behind.

He turned on me with a look of horrified outrage.

"Hey, get the hell off of me, you fool! This isn't first grade; we're high school students now."

Then Mr. Allen appeared out of nowhere and put a firm grip on my shoulder. I just stood there dumbfounded while he wrote my name in his little black book. Yes, he really has one.

"Well, Mr. Horton, I guess you don't think you've caused enough trouble yet this morning. Let me see, eight-ten a.m., and you're already down two for the day. I'm warning you now—I'm watching you, kiddo!"

I found my homeroom and took a seat. At the front of the room, a middle-aged woman with graying hair and thick bifocals sat writing at a desk. I'd been there maybe two minutes when she looked around and spied me.

"And what is your name, please?"

"Uh, Nicholas Horton, ma'am."

She stood up. "Well, Nicholas, tell me, why are you sitting there?"

"Uh, why am I sitting here? Because...I was tired of standing?"

Several of the kids started sniggering.

She pounded the podium next to her desk. “I will not have sass! The instructions on the board clearly show the homeroom seating order.”

I strained my eyes at the blackboard. It read, “Welcome to Mrs. Walters’ homeroom!” in great flowing cursive. I looked to my classmates for help, but they were too amused to do more than grin and snicker.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. I don’t understand what—”

She brought her hand up very melodramatically to point. “The board!”

I turned around and for the first time noticed a blackboard on the same wall as the door I’d come in by. It featured a diagram of the room and identified the proper seat for each homeroom student. Red-faced, I picked up my book bag and went to my assigned seat.

After the first bell, Mrs. Walters took roll and made a few cursory announcements. She told us it would be in our best interest to study our student handbooks like the Law of Moses. Not doing so was the clear path to perdition. Finally, she gave out our class schedules, locker assignments, and maps of the school.

Teachers passed out books, taught the first lessons of the year, and assigned homework. Between classes, I scanned rows of lockers and looked for mine. By the end of third period, I came to the conclusion that my locker was not in this county. In desperation, I approached a teacher who was leaning against a wall watching the students go by like a cop ready to write speeding tickets. The teacher, a black man in a short-sleeved shirt, pointed out on the map where I could find my locker—the other side of the building.

The hall was totally empty and quiet when I got there. *Maybe it’s only used to bury dead students.* Finding my locker, I deposited everything but the essentials in it and then discovered we were expected to provide our own padlock. Throwing caution to the wind, I slammed the locker door and ran.

I rounded the corner to the hall where my fourth-period class was supposed to be. The door was closed and locked. A pretty girl walked up while I was standing there. She had on a yellow shirt with puffy sleeves and a beige miniskirt.

“Uh, excuse me. I have fourth-period class here, but it’s all locked up. Do you know if it’s meeting somewhere else?”

She gave me a Mrs. Walters-like look of disdain and sighed. “Have you checked which lunch you have? Miss Antallen usually has first lunch before fourth period.”

As she disappeared around the corner, I pulled out my schedule and saw a thirty-minute gap between third and fourth periods. Then I remembered I had to “stop by” the principal’s office and started running.

Incidentally, the one benefit of having a locker in Dead Student Row is quick access to the lunchroom and office complex. But I’d already wasted ten minutes running from there to my fourth-period classroom and now had to make it all the way back to see Mr. Fuddle.

The office complex includes the principal and assistant principal’s offices. It also has rooms for a couple of school counselors and space for the secretarial staff. A secretary directed me to a seat, and I looked around. *The torture chambers must be somewhere in the back.*

A good five minutes later, Mr. Fuddle came out of an adjoining room, wiping his mouth with a paper napkin. He caught sight of me, asked my name, and motioned for me to follow him. Leading me into his office, he pointed me to a chair, and then sat behind his desk and rifled through a stack of papers. The tension in the room rose to a fever pitch. I was ready to confess to spreading the medieval plague, starting World War I, and causing cavities—anything, if he’d just get it over with.

“Well, Mr. Horton? What have you got to say for your actions this morning?”

“My actions, sir?”

“I have the letter from Mr. Wiggins right here.”

He shoved the letter in my direction.

I picked it up.

Dear Mr. Fuddle,

The below named student started trouble that threatened to escalate into a riot outside my school this morning. Everyone on this list was involved with the exception of the one innocent bystander.

As you know, I refuse to allow such behavior in front of the elementary students. I do not want to have to petition the school board to move the high school student pickup location away from impressionable children. Trusting that you will discipline the responsible party, I leave the matter in your capable hands.

Sincerely,

Beaumont R. Wiggins, Principal

The list of names followed, and somehow, mine was at the top of it.

“Sir, Mr. Wiggins got the list mixed up. *I* was the innocent bystander. See, Andy Framingham had a—”

“You listen to me, Horton. Mr. Allen’s already told me about the fight you tried to start before first bell and your insolence with Mrs. Walters in homeroom. I won’t stand for it. Your troublemaking days are over. You get me? Over. Any further trouble and the consequences will be severe. Now get out of my sight. Go to your next class, and remember what I told you.”

Well, there it is. I’ve been labeled a troublemaker.

I’d kill Andy Framingham, but I’m already in too much trouble as it is.

When the last bell finally rang, I made my way to the parking area, exhausted and dreading the bus into town, convinced that I’d be blamed if it got a flat tire. Bruce came up to me smiling and almost dancing after what must have been a great day for him. We don’t have a single class together, so this was the first time I’d seen him since before homeroom.

“You know, Nick, today wasn’t so bad after all. I think this place will be all right.”

“I’m glad somebody had a good day. Mine was a disaster from the moment my mom dropped me off at the elementary school.”

Suddenly, an upperclassman appeared before us. He had to be six foot four, with a crew cut and shoulders almost as big as he was. The giant snorted at me like a bull preparing to charge, and I took a step back like a matador ready to run for it. Bruce also took a step back, looking for the best path to escape. I would have retreated farther, but the giant now had a fistful of my shirt in his hand.

“Deloris told me about you stalking her in the hall during fourth period.” He fingered me in the chest. “You better keep your goddamned hands off my girl, or I’ll beat you so bad your dog won’t know you.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Curley?” I’ve never learned when to keep my mouth shut; I either freeze up and say nothing, or I say the wrong thing at the wrong time. This was definitely the wrong time. The giant didn’t like answering questions.

“You faggot! I’m gonna teach you a lesson so you remember to stay away from her.”

Bruce ran for his bus, and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the giant pulling back to punch me. The girl I had asked about my fourth-period classroom started laughing as the back of my head hit the sidewalk. The giant ended the lesson with a kick to my side.

As people walked around me or stepped over me, I looked up just in time to see my bus pull out of the parking lot.

Friday, September 5, 1969

Second period is undoubtedly the class I dread the most—Physical Education. I’m not very coordinated, and I’ve never been good at sports, not even jacks. But PE is different. It’s not like playing a game with other kids; you actually get graded on it. And that’s not the worst of it.

PE students first gather in the locker room to change into workout clothes. For me, this is awkward. See, in my family, nudity just doesn’t exist. I’m pretty sure my parents were both born fully clothed and still shower that way.

If a guy thinks you’re looking at him too long, or in the wrong place, he’ll go out of his way to humiliate you. If you blush easily, it’s open season, and if your...uh...body reacts the wrong way, God help you.

The trouble is, sometimes when a guy makes me nervous, that’s exactly my problem. I tend to be nervous enough as it is, but we have thirty-three guys in our class. The way some of them show off makes me *very* nervous. Talk about embarrassing. You’d think “faggot” was my middle name. All I can do is try to keep my head down, change, and get out of there fast.

The right teacher could put a stop to this kind of thing. But there are only two kinds of PE teachers in the world. The first kind is like Jack LaLanne, super fit, and a firm believer that everyone should eat enough fiber to orgasm every time they shit.

The second kind is descended from the Marquis de Sade. These guys get off pushing the athletic types to the limits of their abilities while humiliating the rest of us lesser beings.

Our PE teacher, Mr. Starkman, is the second kind.

I’ve already suffered through a week and a half of his taunts and put-downs. But I can’t help it. I just can’t throw, catch, kick, hit, or keep up with the rest of the guys.

And the more I fail, the more he pushes, and the worse I get.

And today was the perfect example. I was attempting to shoot a hoop for the fifth time, and Mr. Starkman yelled at me. So of course I missed the hoop and backboard completely. But then, the ball bounced off the wall, hit Jason Sullivan in the back of the head, and his glasses flew off and broke when they hit the floor.

Mr. Starkman banished me to the weight room.

Solitary.

Just what I need, more “evidence” for everyone that I’m a troublemaker.

What I wouldn’t give to be popular like a jock or one of the straight A students. The popular kids get all the breaks. Everybody loves them, and they get to do whatever they want. Everything *I* do backfires, so I spend most of my time just trying to avoid embarrassing myself.

Oh, on a positive note, my black eye is looking better.

Monday, September 15, 1969

Bruce Philemon and I don’t even have the same lunch break. Until now, we’ve always had at least two classes together. It’s a real bummer, but I guess it’s just as well. The one time we did get to talk, I complained about how things have been going, and Bruce just said the same thing he always says: it’s all in my head, I’m too shy, and I need to try harder.

It’s not like I’ve been hiding from people. I really want to make new friends. It’s just that my reputation since that ill-fated first day kills any hope of that happening. It’s depressing. Mr. Fuddle’s convinced I’m a troublemaker, and Mr. Allen always seems to be around. I’m under constant surveillance.

Today, for example, I dropped off a couple of books in my locker right after study hall, and since none of my classes are anywhere close to Dead Student Row, I had to hustle to get to sixth-period English before the bell rang. So I rounded a corner and ran head on into a girl.

Now, I didn’t fall from the impact, but she sure did. She bounced off me like I was a trampoline and fell flat on her ass. Books and paper flew in all directions. And before I could even apologize or try to help her up, the omnipresent Mr. Allen grabbed my shoulder.

“Horton, you take the cake. I thought not even you would stoop to bullying a girl.” He marched me off, leaving the poor girl to gather her things by herself.

“You big jerk!” she yelled.

It's hard to imagine the humiliation of being marched to the office with the assistant principal holding you by the shoulder like you're a crappy diaper unless it's happened to you. Head after head turned to look at me with frowns of contempt. I just knew it; this time, Mr. Allen was taking me straight to the torture chambers, and the kids passing us would be the last to see me alive.

The door to the office seemed to open for us by itself, like in one of those old horror movies. Mr. Allen marched me into his office and pushed me into a chair. He left the door open, and I sat there terrified and totally embarrassed. I was in plain sight of the counter, and a couple of students were standing there staring at me.

"Horton, give me one good reason I shouldn't expel you right now."

"Because it was an accident," I pleaded. "I was just trying to get to class. We just bumped into each other, that's all. It was an accident."

His eyes narrowed. But after a few minutes, when I still hadn't confessed to knocking the girl down on purpose, he leaned forward and told me to see him after last bell, and to get the hell out of his office.

Detention at Chadham High always involves two things: First, there's the lecture from Mr. Allen. Then, there's the detention itself—some kind of task, like emptying trash cans, moving desks around, or continuing Mr. Fuddle's ongoing project to have a student one day break through the Earth's crust with a garden trowel.

I arrived at the office and sat there a solid half hour waiting for Mr. Allen while the secretaries came and went. When he finally came in, he almost went into his office before he noticed me.

"Horton, you're off the hook. Get out of here."

It took a second for it to sink in. I didn't have detention after all. A good thing, right?

But once I thought about it, I had decidedly mixed feelings. After spending a half hour sitting in the office, it didn't feel like much of a victory. I walked out to the Commons and looked through the window at the now bus-less parking lot.

Thursday, September 25, 1969

I can't believe it! Today something good actually happened!

Third period, World History—a class guaranteed to make even the world’s worst insomniac drowsy. Mrs. Boone has droned on for days about Hammurabi and the Mesopotamians, and today, she surprised us with a pop test essay assignment.

I slumped in my desk and tried to organize my thoughts.

Who cares about the damn Mesopotamians and their ziggurats, or whatever the hell it was they smoked?

A few minutes later, Mrs. Boone said she’d be right back and that she expected us to work quietly in her absence. We all listened as the tapping of her shoes faded away down the hall. People sat back in their chairs and started chatting.

It was then I heard a voice to my left.

“It must be hell fitting classes in when there’s so much havoc to spread.”

I was so sure the speaker was making a crack at me that I started to blush before I even turned my head.

The guy wore a denim jacket over a T-shirt, very old dungarees, and sneakers. With his long sandy-brown hair parted in the middle, he looked so much like John Lennon, except for the glasses, that I wouldn’t have been surprised to see Yoko on his lap. Still, although he wasn’t smiling, he looked friendly.

“What do you mean? What are you talking about?”

“You,” he said. “The troublemaker who leaves a path of chaos and destruction wherever he goes.”

“Oh yeah. Didn’t you know? I’m Napalm Nick. ‘Leave nothing but burned earth in your wake,’ that’s my policy.”

“I’m Jesse. Jesse Gaston.”

“I’m Nick Horton.”

“I know. Tell me, how did you get on Fuddle’s shit list so fast? I heard it usually takes even the most violent criminal at least a month to get on it, but you made the grade within the first week.”

“Try the first day.”

He raised his eyebrows and blinked in a kind of *I’m impressed* sort of way.

“Want to get together with me and a few friends during lunch?”

“You’re a brave man. But keep in mind, I’m like Socrates—a corrupter of youth.”

“I’m willing to take a chance. It might be fun to rub shoulders with a famous criminal.”

“Okay, let’s see then. I think I might be able to squeeze you in somewhere between plotting to overthrow the government and signing fan club photos. Lunch it is.”

I’d just finished my essay when the bell rang. I turned to tell Jesse I’d join him after I dropped my books off in my locker, but he’d already gone. As I wound my way to Dead Student Row, I began to worry he might be playing some kind of prank, like get my hopes up, disappear, and leave me wandering around the lunchroom looking for him.

But when I got to my locker, Jesse was waiting for me. It was so odd to see anyone there, and it suddenly struck me that in almost a month, I’d never encountered one single person, let alone another student, dead or alive, in the Row.

“How’d you get here so fast?”

“I study traffic flow. Everybody heads for the Commons after third period, and they all take the front hall. So instead, I cut right, away from the traffic. You just go down near the Science Department, and it’s a free ride the rest of the way. Come on.”

I walked beside him with no clue as to where we were going except that it was farther down the Row than I’d ever ventured. But Jesse apparently knew this part of the building very well. As we went along, I noticed the classrooms, some of which had open doors, hadn’t been used in quite a while. It was quiet and everything smelled musty.

We did pass through one intersection where I heard the sound of a hammer pounding on something.

“Hmm,” I said, “I guess we’re near the torture chambers.”

“No, I-C-E,” he said.

“I-C-E?”

“Yeah, Internal Combustion Engine. You know, auto shop class. Mr. Dorsey teaches it—black guy, sideburns, always wears a short-sleeved shirt. You must have seen him.”

We turned the corner and walked up a final short hallway. It ended at a set of double doors whose windows gleamed with sunlight. One push of the bar later and we stood outside blinking.

“Come on,” Jesse said, leading me to the end of the building and around the corner.

Two guys stood there chatting. One was tall and lanky with black hair falling onto his collar. The other stood half a head shorter than me. He had wavy brown hair about the same length as mine—long enough to irritate a father but not enough to look cool.

A third guy had his back to us, squatting near the wall like he was examining the bricks. All I could see of him was the back of his head. He looked very lean and had the blondest hair I'd ever seen.

“Hey, Jess,” the tall guy said.

“Say, Matt,” Jesse replied. “Meet Nick.”

“Hi,” I said to the raven-headed boy.

Matt took over the introductions. “Nick, this is Gary. Gary, Nick.”

Gary looked me over skeptically, saying nothing.

The blond guy stood up. He was a full head shorter than me, with the leanest, fittest body I'd ever seen. I couldn't help but stare at him. He's got a face you can't help but notice, handsome but childlike. And he may be small, but he looks like he could easily take the giant who sucker-punched me that first day. He had a cigarette in his hand, which he passed to Jesse.

“I'm Bobby. Bobby Warren.” He locked eyes with me.

“Hey, Bobby.” I tried unsuccessfully to avoid blushing but felt my cheeks burning.

Jesse lit the cigarette Bobby had given him and took a relaxed puff.

“Guys—” he exhaled a cloud of blue smoke in my face “—you are standing in the presence of royalty. Nick here is *the* Nick, Nicholas Horton, Napalm Nick.”

“Cool.” Matt accepted the cigarette from Jesse and took a long, slow drag.

Gary took it next and followed suit. As he passed it to Bobby, he cocked his head and blew the smoke out one side of his mouth, which sent it in my direction. I breathed in the spicy cloud that drifted through the open air and watched Bobby take his drag. Gary looked me over again and seemed to regard me with a little more approval.

“So how did you guys hook up?”

“We have History, English, and study hall together,” Jesse explained. It embarrassed me to think I hadn't noticed him in any of my classes, or at all for that matter, before he introduced himself earlier.

“Don’t smoke,” I said when Bobby offered me the cigarette. He paused for a beat and smiled at me before handing it back to Jesse. His smile was open and made me feel good.

As the minutes passed, I loosened up and got to know my new friends. Jesse is definitely the leader of this little group. He doesn’t just take part in the conversation; he steers it in the direction he wants it to go. He sort of made it clear to the others that from now on I was a permanent member of their group, although there didn’t seem to be any objections.

Matt is kind of hard to pin down. I think he’s Jesse’s best friend. He’s tall and pale, and his stringy black hair makes him come off as kind of goofy. His baggy slacks and long-sleeved shirt, with the cuffs hanging loose and unbuttoned, make him look even thinner than he really is. He’s very laid back and friendly, and he goes along with any topic of conversation, which makes me think he’s smart. But he also likes to make off-the-wall comments and ask really dumb questions that give Jesse an opening for a funny comeback.

Gary doesn’t talk much, just a word or two every now and then. He seems to be content to just listen in. With his dungarees and plain T-shirt, he could blend in with any high school scene in the country.

The one who really made an impression on me is Bobby. He’s laid back, and he’s real nice and showed the most interest in getting to know me. There’s something about him that makes me think he could be the leader if he wanted to be. I must have embarrassed him at one point, ’cause when I noticed him looking at me, he blushed, which triggered that embarrassing nervousness I sometimes get. But the way he smiled at me kinda made it all right. Like I said, he’s real nice.

“Napalm—” Matt bowed deeply “—I’m one of your greatest admirers. Fuddle’s so determined to get you, the rest of us are getting away with murder. Our praise and our thanks.”

The thought of being admired for things I have no control over struck me as so absurd that I laughed out loud.

“Oh, you’re so welcome. It’s nothing, believe me.”

Jesse choked through a fit of giggling that had us all laughing. He tried to pass the cigarette to Matt, but he just laughed and shook his head until Gary took it.

It went on like that for the rest of the lunch break. We chatted and giggled like five-year-olds, and Matt had me tell them how I’d gotten on Fuddle’s bad side that first day. When Jesse heard the real story, he laughed so hard he had to sit down.

“So the great Napalm Horton is really a great fraud,” he said, spluttering through uncontrollable chuckles.

“Afraid so,” I said grinning.

Bobby winked at me and tried to maintain a straight face. “Are you kidding? Gentlemen, we are in the presence of genius. Without even trying, Nick managed to begin his high school career with a ready-made reputation that sets him apart. Most guys spend the whole time they’re in school trying to reach the top of the mountain, but Nick flew straight there before he even set foot on campus. It’s genius—I’m telling you, true genius.”

I started to bow before him, but he must have intended to bow to my genius at the same time because the next thing I knew our heads collided. We both stumbled, rubbed our nearly fractured skulls, and held each other up. The touch of his hand around my waist made my cheeks burn, but it felt good. He squeezed me a little before letting go, and my skin tingled.

“Bless their pointy little heads,” Matt said and we fell about laughing again.