

Panic at Picnic Point (or vice versa)

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Ms. Geduld's eyes went from text she'd just sent to the principal down to her desk, where her phone laid to rest. There was no surprise in Andy's eyes: New school or no, after what he'd just said, Andy knew: apologize to Jolynn, or visit the principal's office again.

Under watchful spell, he made his choice. He rose from his seat. But he fell when his feet collided with Dak's in the aisle. A couple boys clapped. One girl flashed a smile. A couple more laughed. Dak asked "Awww, did you slip? Well, have a nice trip!"

Ms. Geduld said "Dakota you're next—feet back under your desk."

Meanwhile at the principal's office ...

"Hi Andy," said Alma, while a voice from the principal's door said "Thanks Alma, I got this." So Andy went in.

"I didn't say it," he lied (might as well try).

"What? This?" Andy eyed the words (from the text) on her phone. "Andy, you're new. That's true. And you may feel alone. It's hard to change schools," she said. "But that won't defend being cruel to Jolynn, what did she ever do to you? Our counselor's waiting, you can go in."

Ms. Oyente said "Hi Andy, back so soon?"

'How to begin,' thought Andy, "It's Dak. He's a bully. Gargoyle. Irksome baboon."

"If that's the best you can do," she said, "you could use a new tune. His name is Dakota. Now I can attest, at times he's a pest," said the counselor, placing a plate on her desk (with a donut). "But until you've walked in his shoes ... "

"They stink."

... "which you haven't" (the icing was pink). "And anyway that won't excuse what you said to Jolynn" (some sprinkles were blue and some red). "She didn't deserve it—you know how this ends ..."

"I'm sorry."

"I hope so, me too. But think of Jolynn for a moment. What else should you do?"

(Andy's eyes fixed on his feet) "No clue."

"*That* won't do. Is someone at home?"

"My folks are out looking for work."

"Anyway, I called your house," she said. Their eyes met and she saw that Andy's were filling with dread.

"Oh no worries," she said. "How would you like to go home for the day?"

"Mizz Oyente?"

"Yes Andy?"

"Are my parents okay?"

"Oh yes! Your mom's on her way. But there's something I want you to do."

"Whatever you say," said Andy.

"Good. Ms. Geduld says you write well. So write us a story."

"I could, I guess. What about?" Andy asked.

"A boy and a girl with some problem they have to work out."

Andy regretted agreeing before. "But ..."

"Not a word more! You can start in this room." She stood up and opened the door. "Don't look so gloomy, just have a seat. A boy, a girl, and an interesting plot. Alma will watch for your mom in the parking lot."

"Mizz Oyente?"

"Yes Andy?"

"Couldn't I just get a swat?"

She smiled, "Probbly not. But you *can* have that donut." She brought in the plate and a glass of water, said "Get a good start on your story, don't make your mom wait! Hurry up while I go fetch your stuff so you won't be too late."

"Fair 'nuff," Andy said. He felt crunched for time. He picked up the pen and a sheet of white paper, as blank as his mind, which was starting to fade. "Where to start..." Andy closed his eyes to concentrate (and what's more he was missing lunch, recess and art!)

But what he'd said to Jolynn wasn't smart.

“Or nice,” said a voice and he looked around once more than twice, but saw no one. *‘Probbly some ghost giving out free advice.’*

Then Alma knocked and walked in. “Andy hi, your mom’s waiting out in the parking lot. See you tomorrow!”

Andy said “thanks” and then “bye” and then “sweet” (to himself) as he followed his feet to the car.

“There you are,” said his unsurprised mom. “Any good news?”

“That’s what I was about to ask you,” Andy said.

“A job? No nothing yet. We’ll find something soon.”

Andy lowered his head. “That’s what you said in June when we left the last town, you know.”

“We’ve been down on our luck, I’m so sorry, kiddo. But there’s something else ... we have to move.”

“To move? Again? Already?” asked Andy, “Well when?”

“Today. You up for some camping, just for a week, maybe two?”

“Some camping??” asked Andy, “*That’s* out of the blue! And anyway, what about school?”

“It’s not too far out and it’s on the bus route. It’ll be kinda cool! Dad’s packing up stuff as we speak.”

And as they pulled up Andy thought, *‘Could things look any more bleak?’*

“Hi Andy!” Said dad, happy face on while Andy looked caught between puzzled and sad. “I know it’s not good, this hasn’t turned out like we hoped it would. *Yet.*”

Andy looked down, his dad’s eyes looked wet. They left in the car, and ten minutes later they stopped, so his mom was right—it wasn’t too far. They parked, and his parents got out to look for a camping spot. They had neighbors, down at the end of the lot.

Andy got out and wandered about ‘til he spotted a trail. He thought *‘this move is already starting to fail. In trouble at school, camped out at a park, Ms. Oyente expecting a story that I’ve got to start. But where?? And these woods are dark. What if I meet a charging bear? Should I run? Throw a rock? Wave my arms in the air?’*

The trail wound up in a clearing, overlooking a shimmering lake. Then in the distance rose voices of girls that were nearing. He turned and heard “Sorry!” the shorter girl said, “I got nervous, and there was this table piled high with bags of day old bread!”

The taller replied “Itsall right” and then “Hi” as she caught sight of Andy. “I’m Jo, this is Brandy.” And “Hi!” Brandy said.

Andy waved and bade “Hi” to the girls, who seemed to be waiting for something. But what?? “Oh. My name is Andy,” he smiled. Meanwhile Jo took off, Brandy behind. A cow in the distance said ‘moo.’

“Nice to meet you!” Jo’s voice trailed off from a cloud of dust—“Last to the shoreline’s a *dunkoff!*”

“What’s that?” Andy yelled ahead, and started to run.

“It’s not good,” Jo yelled back, then added “C’mon!”

Down at the lake the sun was starting to bake (it was hot). The girls spied a sign, planted in mud with a stake.

“Hard to read. What’s it say?” Brandy asked.

“Swimmers welcome,” said Jo, “but someone can’t spell very well.” ([swimmers welkum](#))

“How can you tell?” asked Andy, “that’s weathered wood and the letters are fading and someone”

(Brandy): “or something” ...

... “chomped up one side pretty good.”

“Nevermind,” said Jo “look over there!”

Sure enough, rocking in waves at the shore was a boat. A rowboat. Why hadn’t they seen it before?? The first to board was Jo.

“Andy, you know how to row?”

“No. I can swim, though. You two?” he asked (to nods from the rest of the crew). “C’mon, let’s give it a go!” He sat in the middle, Jo in the bow. Brandy was last, but scurrying fast and she sat in the stern, which is when Andy noticed her pack. She laid it down gently, as if it were filled with crystal urns, evidently.

“What’s in the pack?”

“Don’t ask,” said Jo.

“Jelly donuts!” said Brandy, “baked fresh in the store only one day ago! We’re having a picnic!”

“Of donuts?” asked Andy.

“Why not?” answered Brandy, “two dozen!”

Meanwhile Captain Jo set a course for a rock, on the lake's other side. It stuck out from the shore, a pretty high point, but wide. Meanwhile Andy tried making sense of the oars.

Jo said "Brandy, shove off!"

Brandy complied, "That rocky point on the other shore's a good spot for our picnic! C'mon Andy, row away!"

"I've never done this before," Andy was heard to say (under his breath) ...

... "this boat's moving too slow!"

Andy, his back to the bow, took instructions from Jo. He had mastered the oars (well, sort of) and started to row to the point jutting out on the opposite shore. They zigzagged across the lake. Brandy was scanning for fish in the boat's wake. Some birds were swooping in low. One fish hawk dove below the surface but too late cuz the fish, having sensed the bird's shadow, had already scattered.

"You know what's the matter?" asked Brandy.

"I need to row faster?" guessed Andy.

"No, no," said Jo, "you're a natural" ... (then glancing at Brandy) "A picnic of donuts?"

"Very funny. This lake is great. It's warm and it's sunny. But there're no people," said Brandy. "Isn't that creepy?"

"Creepy?? Like scary? So what? That just means no sharing of donuts!"

"It just seems odd, dontcha think?"

"It's okay with me," offered Andy, "so long as this boat doesn't *sink*." (To himself he was thinking the car in the lot might belong to Dak's dad)

"Shhhh!" shushed Jo, "That word can bring bad luck!"

"What, *sink*?"

Brandy, frantic, cried "I think we're stuck!"

They all looked around. It's true, they weren't moving.

"We just ran aground in the muck," said Jo. "Andy, now you can stop to row."

Brandy gingerly lifted her pack, put it up on her head, like an African woman carrying large loaves of bread, waded ashore and said "Land ho! To Picnic Point . . . here we go!"

They found three friendly spots (to sit), below the rock, in the shade, just a bit. Brandy opened up her pack, revealing jelly donuts in a paper sack (two dozen, to be exact). She carefully placed one in each outstretched palm. Jo and Andy reaching, gladly (despite some earlier qualms). They talked and ate, ate and talked, and if Andy had problems hovering over his head, tapping his shoulder, tugging his shirttail, well, he'd forgot.

Brandy said "This jelly looks and tastes like liquid gold."

Jo said "Don't go overboard!"

"Nor you, Captain," Brandy replied with mock salute.

Andy smiled "Shoot, they're not too bad for one day old! But . . . shouldn't donuts have a hole?"

Brandy poked her finger through the jelly, licked it clean, spied Andy through the hole watching chipmunks, arriving on the scene. "We've got company," he said.

"Not getting *any*," Brandy said, "I'm pretty sure I read somewhere, jelly's not good for chipmunks." She pulled out three donuts, for the crew, one each, gently (chipmunks watching intently).

"By the way, what flavor is this?" asked Jo.

"Jelly? Lemon? Yellow? How should I know?" answered Brandy.

"I hate to say it, but after we finish these, we should probably go," said Jo, shadows growing longer on the other shore.

"Will we eat more donuts, or should we leave some for the critters?" Andy asked, eyeing Jo.

"No," replied Brandy, "they prefer apple fritters."

"Brandy, they're a day old and—no offense—slightly stale," said Jo.

"No," said Brandy, "yellow jelly could cause their little hearts to fail!"

"But watch them wag their little tails!" said Andy.

"No. No. No," said Brandy, "what if we get stranded? You never know."

"Okay fine," eye-rolled Jo, "let's go before the sun's too low." Brandy packed up the rest of the donuts—a dozen and a half—placed them back, carefully, in her pack, zipped it tight, and slipped it

right under her seat in the boat. Andy locked the oars. Jo set course. They took one last look at Picnic Point Rock before Jo said "Shove off!"

Cuz Andy was rowing, his back to the bow, he could watch Picnic Point and he blurted out "Wow. What a day. The sun. The sky. The clouds. The lake."

"The donuts."

The surface of the lake was calm, the wind slowed to a lazy breeze. But Andy, facing backwards, saw the fir trees swaying on the shore. What's more there seemed to be a second wake in the lake, though no other boat was in sight (not even a fish it might be). It was moving fast and heading toward the sailors three. "You see that wake—behind us, near the shore (his grip had tightened on the oars)?"

"That's strange," said Jo, "I didn't notice that before."

Brandy said "It's probbly just the shadows on the water, right?"

"Yes," Andy reassured, "it could be tricks of light. We should know pretty soon."

"Or swamp gas," offered Brandy, "or a weather balloon? Or a UFO?"

"Where's the swamp?" Asked Jo, then "Say, this lake isn't Loch Ness, by the way?"

"That's in Scotland," said Andy, "and UFOs come from the sky, not lakes. It's some kind of fish, pretty big I would say from the size of the wake. I would also say it's swimming this way."

"Look," said Jo, "there's a fin! It's dark, coming out of the water, it looks like a ..."

"SHARK!!!!" they yelled all at once.

"There's no sharks in fresh water," mused Jo, "maybe a giant otter? Still. Andy, as Captain, I give you full permission to ROW!!!"

The mystery fish was gaining! Brandy had an idea. Unzipping her precious pack, she carefully removed the paper sack, unrolled the top, reached in, grabbed a jelly donut, and lobbed it into the lake, in front of the fast-gaining fin with its wake.

The donut went 'plop' as it hit the lake's surface. Then the wake stopped, the fin submerged, the donut lazily floating on top. Andy stopped rowing. All became quiet, the sailors relieved, the problem solved (or so it seemed).

"Maybe it was just a jelly donut dream?" hoped Brandy.

But as her voice trailed off a snout broke the surface (and silence), its mouth open wide, encircled by teeth with a donut trapped inside. And then WHOOOSH! . . . The shark splashlanded and turned toward their boat, and the boat-rocking wave that splash made? They were lucky to still be afloat!

“So much for a perfect day!” said Andy, soaked from the splash but furiously rowing (which couldn’t explain just how fast the boat seemed to be going) ([fish starting to pull the boat](#)). Brandy grabbed a jelly donut (inventory: 16) and heaved it to the far side of the wake, in hopes the shark would take the yellow bait. It did! And it slowed, as Andy rowed, assisted by . . . *who knows??* ([now birds are helping tow the boat, but the kids don’t seem to notice](#))

Brandy wound up and hurled the third donut (15), her arm was strong, the donut’s arc was long. The shark heard it splash on the lake. It crossed the boat’s wake for the tasty bait *but wait!* A fish hawk was watching the scene, and bypassed a school of minnows—relieved, if you know what I mean—swooped in and snatched the sugary snack from the shark’s snapping jaws! But it quickly lost interest, loosened its claws, the donut dropped, the shark heard the *plop* and turned to re-snatch it.

But it must’ve changed its mind—midcourse—left it behind, and as the donut sank chose instead to race straight ahead to the source (the boat and those flapping oars)!

Brandy was ready, she tossed numbers four (14), five (13) and six (12), to the left, the center and right. The shark couldn’t resist! From the stern she could see that it spun and snatched up each one. Andy rowed with a fury, flapping the oars like airplane propellers, in panicked hurry to cross the lake, too frantic to ask how one boy could produce such a wake ([the scaly and feathery helpers multiply](#)). Then seven (11), eight (10) nine (9), Brandy picked her spots. The donuts plopped, she even tossed one—number ten (8)—behind, but the shark’s patience was wearing more thin than a . . . dime!

The shore in sight, the ‘swimmers welkum’ sign to the right (missing chunk and spelling errors solved), Jo called out “Ten degrees starboard!” Andy adjusted the oars, Brandy launching five (7, 6, 5, 4, 3) jelly donuts (aft not fore) as the boat approached the shore.

“It’s gaining!” cried Andy, “How’s the donut supply, Brandy? What’s the news?”

“I’m down to my last two!” Brandy slung number seventeen (2), into a patch of green algae. The lake getting shallow, the shark getting close—it looked almost as big as the boat! Brandy launched the very last donut off to the right. The shark tracked its flight, and with a slight detour, swallowed it whole. It circled around, one shark eye found the boat, it was catching up fast (Andy suddenly wished he was back in class)!

“C’mon Andy, you can do it!” the crew was urging him on. “When we reach the shore, you’ll feel a bump, and when you do, don’t even think, just jump!” shouted Jo. But the shark was upon them! The rowboat was grounded. They threw themselves over the sides, the shark lunged in the air, horrible jaws open wide, ready to pounce on whatever was there beneath!

But . . . where were its teeth? Except for a few that looked rotten, the shark's teeth were gone! The shark belly-flopped on the boat, splinters and planks and nails went flying, you would have thought with the noise that a dragon was dying!

The sailors barely escaped. The shark, having splintered the boat, seemed to accept its fate. It ran out of water to swim away, or even to float!

"Its teeth. They're all gone! 'Twas the jelly donuts—I knew it all along!" said Brandy.

"Come on! Eighteen donuts can't rot a shark's teeth!" offered Jo.

"I don't know," said Andy, "maybe it had a sweet tooth or two, but saving those donuts, Brandy, that was a real *coup*! It sure slowed it down. And Jo, if you hadn't charted that course, we all might have drowned."

"And you hadn't mastered those oars!"

Safe and sound, they turned their gaze to the shark. Its expression seemed sad, it was stuck in the muck, still as an overturned truck, teeth dangling bad.

"Poor shark." said Brandy.

"Poor shark??" cried Jo. "It was trying to eat us!"

"Maybe that's true," said Brandy, "but for the brave crew."

"It is a shark, after all. It has to eat, too," added Andy.

"We have to do something." said Brandy. "We can't just leave it like this, poor fish, what will it eat without teeth? If it weren't for our donuts . . ."

"We might have been shark treats!" said Jo. It was true the shark now looked harmless. Its eyes seemed to be saying '*Please?*'

Brandy, finally at ease, had an idea. "Say, what if we found a harness . . ."

. . . "And now you know," said Andy and Jo, surrounded by grandkids from stern to bow, "so that's how sharks came to live in the ocean, with good dental hygiene and no tempting sugary sweets. That shark needed something soft to eat, after it lost all its teeth. In the sea it made a switch, to a diet rich in jellyfish."

"And that one jelly donut that sank to the floor of the lake? The one the shark didn't take? Well no one knows exactly what happened, but—for the first time—shortly after, jellyfish were spotted in fresh water!"

Andy reached into the lake to show the kids a jellyfish, which opened up its bell to speak. It said *"Hey Andy, you're asleep!"*

That's when Andy woke, still groggy, arm wet, glass on its side. The donut, pen and one sheet of paper all survived the soggy mess. It was then he recalled Ms. Oyente's request—write a story about a boy and a girl (or two) with a problem to solve. He smiled, started to write, and the story flowed from his pen like Niagara Falls. He finished and left the sheet on her desk (she was gone to lunch), along with the donut, for the next guest (whose name you might guess ...).

Andy passed through Alma's empty office. The door was closed. He reached for the handle just as the door swung open and flattened his nose. It was Dak. He grinned "Ouch! Your nose got in the way. You okay?"

"Listen Dak!" Andy paused a moment, then replied (in sniffelly voice). "Ms. Oyente's not inside, she went to lunch in case you're next. She did leave you a donut, on her desk."

Caught off guard, Dak stared at him, hard. "Is this some kind of test?"

"Test? Nope. But donut? Yes," he said. "There's no jelly, but icing, it's pink with some blue and red sprinkles."

Dak, confused but still interest-ed, shook his head. "This dudn't make us friends," he said. But Andy could sense that the bullying would end. Then from behind he heard Dak call "Hey Andy! *Andy!* ANDY!" (walking briskly away down the hall)

... "Andy! Wake up! She's coming this way!" said Jolynn, but the teacher veered off at the very last second when Dak raised his hand with a question (*'How'd he get back so fast?'* Andy asked to himself).

"That was close! Sorry Jolynn, I was napping again," said Andy, touching his nose, and strangely feeling no pain. He couldn't explain. "This may sound odd, but was I just at the principal's office?"

"You've been here all morning," said Jolynn, "though most with your head on the desk. Then Ms. Geduld gave us this group science test. Did you have a bad dream?"

"A dream, yes. It seemed pretty real. Well sorry I slept, Jolynn, but thanks for concealing that fact. Now how can I pay you back?" asked Andy.

"No worries! I finished the test, more or less," said Jolynn, "except for the extra credit question, which has me vexed: Would you happen to know if exists such a thing as a freshwater jellyfish?" (*Andy smiling, his eyes lighting up*)