

This is a collection of original short stories, including the very serious and the very unserious. The central characters range in age from two little boys to an elderly woman having memory problems.

Tale Spins: Stories for the High Minded

By Will Richan

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Tale Spins

Stories for the High Minded



Will Richan

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Adventures of a Private Eye

Jacko Hartz here. Me and my sidekick, April Flauers, used to run this detective agency. I say used to. More on that later. Anyway, I called her the sidekick because she'd once taught karate, and man, did she have a powerful sidekick? I took her on one time. You know, just a little playful shoving match, figuring woman and all. And whammo! Out of nowhere. I had a bruise the size of a pancake on my left thigh for days afterward. I hired April in the first place to get her out of this bar she worked at; I figured she could fetch coffee, keep the place clean, answer the phone, and stuff like that. Women are good at that sort of thing, you know. Out of kindness mainly, I made her a partner. Of course, I had to do the heavy lifting in the brain department, but I figured I'd make her feel like a partner; what the hell.

We get this call from my friend at police HQ, Sergeant Salten Pepper. A valuable diamond brooch was missing from a collection left to some wealthy broad by her late husband. They figure somebody stole the thing. So April and I dropped by Sergeant Pepper's office.

Once settled in his office, I tell April, "Take some notes, honey." She pulls out her phone and starts playing with it.

"No, sweetheart, no phoning now. Got to keep our eyes on the prize."

"Right," says April. "I'm taking notes with the phone," and she waves it in my face. Geez, I never could understand those gadgets.

So then the sergeant starts giving us the lowdown. "This woman, Lady Good: Beatrice Good. Friends call her Bea for short. She says she last remembered wearing the thing when she and a boyfriend were out fishing, down at the lake."

"Aha, I say, "Who was the guy? Probably stole the thing off her." Open and shut case, I figure.

"Can we talk with Lady Good?" says April.

"Oh, we already done that, miss."

"Do you have a transcript?" she asks.

As I say, April's a little fudgy in the attic. What the hell is she gonna do with a transcript?

"Yeah," says the sergeant. He calls out to his assistant, Gutan Morgan, sitting across the room. "Get me the transcript of the interview with that Lady Good."

Morgan hops up and heads for the outer office. So I repeat, "What's the name of the guy? The one fishing with the lady."

"Lemme see," says the sergeant, opening a folder on his desk and thumbing through several pages. "Okay, here it is. John Doe."

Aha, I knew it—an alias. The guy is as good as convicted.

"Is he on the same transcript?" asks April.

"Oh no, we interview 'em separately."

"Can we see that one?" Geez, what a pain. I can see the sergeant getting a little edgy. I hold up my hand to April and shake my head, but she's looking the other

way. So when Morgan returns with a big brown envelope, the sergeant sends him off again to get the file on John Doe. Gotta talk with April. When we're about to leave, April says, "In case we need to talk to Lady Good and Mr. Doe, can you set that up for us?" Sergeant Pepper nods. Now, is that dumb or what? I got the friggin' transcripts. What more are you gonna get from chatting with them?

Later, back at our office, April takes out the phone and works at her computer. When she finishes putting down notes, she says, "Okay, let's look at those transcripts."

Go to it, kid. Keep her out of mischief.

A few hours later, she says, "Okay, Think we got something. They were out in a rowboat on the lake."

"Fishing?" I ask.

"Right, fishing. Did you know that she and Mr. Doe had what we could call a stormy relationship?"

Hah, just as I suspected. Probably after her money.

"Simple," I say, "John Doe was after her money."

"Have to check that one out," she says.

A couple of days later, April says, "Uh uh."

"Uh uh, what?" I hate that Tonto stuff she pulls on me.

"John's got more money than Bea's got." It takes me a minute to figure out who she's talking about.

"Talked to Beatrice. She said they had a big argument in the boat."

Then it hit me. She threw the brooch at the guy and missed, and it landed in the water. I got to search the

lake bottom. Obvious when you think about it. I tell April.

“Uh uh.” Come on, Pocahontas. Now what?

“I think it was the stepdaughter who did it.”

“What stepdaughter?”

“Beatrice has a stepdaughter by the name of Polly Glotz. Our friend Bea is sweet and lovely in public but is the classic wicked stepmother underneath. You know, like the ones in the fairy tales.”

Of all the dumb theories! Hey, kiddo, we’re not dealing with fairy tales. This is for real. Oh well, women can go off the highway sometimes. But play along with her to keep her happy.

“And?” I say.

“And she lifted the brooch while Beatrice was out and pawned it for quick cash. She had a lot of gambling debts.”

Oh well, let her go chasing after the pawn shops. Keep her busy.

Later that week, I got a call from Sergeant Pepper. “I think you nailed it, Jacko,” he says.

“Nailed what?”

“We checked a few pawn shops. Sure enough, we found the brooch at Joe’s Easy Cash. Traced it to one Miss Polly Glotz.”

“Oh. Well, Sarge, we were working on that theory right along.”

“Had her in for questioning. She confessed everything. We must hold the brooch for evidence, but I called Miss Good and told her the news. She thanked me. I said, ‘Don’t thank me. Thank Hartz and Flauers.’”

"Right, Sarge, you bet."

Then I saw that April had left a bunch of dirty coffee cups on the table. Gotta get after that woman.

About a week later, we got a new case. The guy was found dead as a doornail up against the side rail in the middle of the 3rd Street Bridge. Shot at close range. In the mouth of all places. God, what a mess. All over that bridge railing. I have April clean up the blood. She says, "Why don't we get a blood sample? Might tell us something." That's a ridiculous idea, but I have my friend Ace O'Klubz take a sample to humor her. He starts to hand it to me, but April reaches out and grabs it. "I'll take that," she says. Since she's the one who suggested it, I let her keep it. What the hell, I figure, keep her out of trouble.

Well, it looks like an open-and-shut case, as they say. Francis Pope, age 35, was a big NRA booster. Some loony named Michael Finn had written a letter to the Daily Blade saying the world could do without people like Pope. We check him out and find he lives about five blocks from the bridge. Simple. He waits for Pope one night and then lets him have it. One important clue: the gun is nowhere to be found. Easy: Finn took it with him.

Is that ironic, or what? The guy joins the crazies who want to get rid of the Second Amendment, steals the gun, and uses it to knock off the owner, who is a big fan of gun rights—hoist by their something or other. Forget the exact words, but it means you bought it, you own it.

So we tell all this to the cops and say they should pick up Finn for questioning, which they do. He swears

he didn't do it, of course. You can't trust those gun control nuts. They'll say anything to get by or get their way.

The cops ask Finn for a minute-by-minute account of where he was on the night of the shooting. He says he was watching TV at the time. What was he watching? The Rosetta Stone Hour. Rosie was a cute broad and all but too hifalutin for my taste. Half the time, I couldn't understand half the words she used.

Well, they get a transcript of the program on the night of the murder. Ask him what Stone was talking about. He says he isn't exactly sure, but then, like a light bulb went on in his head, yes, she was talking about free speech. So the cops check out the transcript. That was at the beginning of her show. When Pope was shot, she was onto women's rights. C'mon, dames gotta earn their rights like the rest of us. So the cops ask Finn about that. He's unsure because he puts it on mute when the medical ads come on and may have missed it. Maybe they were talking about it when the sound was off.

Talk about suspicious. To top things off, he clams up until he can talk to his lawyer. As I say, I can't trust those gun control freaks.

"Why don't we check gun stores to see if Finn bought a gun at one of them?" says April. Dumb idea, but I say, "Go to it." Keep her out of my hair, what's left of it. She says, "Have to check to see the caliber of the bullet."

"Okay, sweetheart," I say. She must watch a lot of cop shows.

“What about Pope?” says the genius. “Must have a few guns around his place.” Now what’s his gun collection got to do with somebody else knocking him off? Oh well, let her have her fun.

“Go to it,” I say.

One morning, about a week later, April shows up at the office with “Well.”

“Well, what, sweetheart?”

“Very interesting.”

“Okay, we’ll get very interesting as soon as you clean those dirty dishes in the kitchen. And the place could use a little dusting.” I have to keep after her sometimes.

She shrugs and gets to work on the place. She does a nice job. I think it runs in their blood.

Finally, she comes and sits across the desk from me. “Well,” she says. Small vocabulary, that woman.

“I found out a few things,” says April.

“And...”

“Well, it seems our Mr. Finn did visit Andy’s Gun Shop a few days before the murder.”

“Hah, didn’t I tell you? That’s when he bought that pistol.”

“Not exactly. He was *outside* the gun shop, picketing against gun sales. Carrying a big sign saying ‘STOP THE KILLING. NO MORE GUNS!’

“Probably did it to throw off suspicion, then snuck back later and bought the thing.”

“Uh uh. Andy, the owner, had Finn and his pals removed from the premises. Cops said they’d get

arrested if any of them came near the place. And numero dos (I think that's 'number two' in French), that bullet they retrieved from Pope's skull was minimal caliber. It only fits a few pistols; foreign make mostly."

"So..." It's hard to follow the kid sometimes.

"Pope had an inventory of his gun collection."

"How do you know that?"

"I asked the police. They were holding it as part of the evidence." Come on, sister, if the cops knew anything, they'd have solved the mystery. Talk about stupid broads.

"And they let you see it?" Humor her a little bit.

"Not only that; I got them to run me a copy. About three pages in all," and she pulls this wad of folded paper from the bag she always carries and waves it in my face.

I'm still trying to figure out where the mastermind is taking us. "And...?" I ask.

"I checked Pope's apartment. Gun collection in a big room in back."

"And..."

"Checked the inventory. One CZ 2075, made in Czechoslovakia, was missing."

"And..."

"And, guess what: It uses the same kind of bullet they took out of the skull."

"My God, how did Finn sneak into Pope's apartment, steal the gun, and get out with nobody noticing? That guy is cleverer than we thought. Got to watch those gun control freaks."

“Or...” Come on, Sherlock. Geez, women can come up with the screwiest ideas.

“Oh, yes, I almost forgot.” she says, “They recovered the gun from the bottom of the river about half a mile downstream.”

“Oh, so Finn threw the gun off the bridge and made his getaway. Probably planning the caper for weeks.”

“No. I found one more piece of evidence. There was a note in Pope’s inside jacket pocket. It was tucked away in a compartment with a zipper. Easy to overlook, which I guess is what the police did for a while.”

“Okay, what did the note say?”

“Basically, a suicide note. He had bipolar disorder.”

“Bi what?”

“Polar. Means he had periods of depression.”

“How did you find that out?”

“Checked local mental health clinics and hospitals. Sure enough, Wilde Behavior Clinic had a long record on this guy. Not the first time he tried to commit suicide.”

“Ah, so Finn probably knew that and figured he’d make it look like a suicide.”

“Or...”

There’s that ‘or’ again. “Or what, sweetheart?”

“Or Pope leaned up against the bridge railing, shot himself, and dropped the gun in the river.”

The kid watches too many detective shows on TV.

“You said all this to the cops?”

“We said, boss. I did everything on behalf of Hartz and Flauers.”

Uh oh, I thought, they're gonna blame this looney stuff on me.

Just then, the phone rings. It's Sergeant Pepper down at headquarters.

"Congratulations, Jacko. Looks like you guys nailed it. That was a suicide. Pope shot himself in the mouth, then dropped the gun in the river before he keeled over."

"Well, thanks, Salten. As you know, we aim to please."

Chalk another one up for Hartz and Flauers.

But then, a couple of months later, came a huge case: the kidnapping of the Limburger baby. Limburger was known to be rolling in dough; after all, head cheese in a big bank. Whaddya expect? So April and I checked the thing out. I had April check it out. I got to keep the lady busy.

In a couple of days, she shows up with many news clippings. So, it turns out the baby was out in the backyard of the family estate in a playpen. The woman supposed to watch him was out having a smoke. It makes sense; after all, we don't want to expose a kid that young to second hand smoke. She returned a while later, and the baby was gone, along with his toys, pacifier, and everything.

So the big question is, Who snuck in and grabbed the kid?

April says, "Where's the ransom note?"

"The what?" I ask.

“The ransom note. Somebody kidnaps a baby from a rich family. They gotta ask for ransom, or curtains for the kid.”

Good point. I think the lady’s learning. Okay, so where’s the ransom note? Maybe the guy couldn’t write English. Sure enough, a hired man named Bruno Hupterman, who used to mow grass for the Limburgers, disappeared right after the kidnapping. As it was, he was what they call retarded, never learned to write. I pass that all along to Sergeant Pepper. They finally find the guy in a homeless shelter the next town over. He, of course, denies doing anything to the baby. He said he was on another job that day, other side of town.

Likely story. No, this time, we got an open and shut case.

“So where’s the kid?” asks April.

Good question. Old Bruno must of got nervous and knocked the kid off. I tell that to April.

“Maybe,” she says. Her with her maybes. Never satisfied, that woman. Then she says, “How come the toys and the pacifier were gone?”

“Easy,” I say. “Bruno did it to keep the kid quiet.”

“Maybe,” says April. She says she’s going to do some more checking. Go ahead, kiddo, give her something to do, as I say.

About a week later, April sits across the desk from me and says, “About that Limburger case.”

“Yeah, what about it?” Her and her theories.

“In the first place, they’ve cleared Bruno. When the child disappeared, he was working on somebody else’s

lawn on the other side of town, just as he said. They checked to see if he had any associates. Turns out, he's a complete loner. By the way, did you know our Mr. Limburger was in trouble on child abuse charges?"

Why does she go after the guy right when he's suffering a tragic loss?

"County child welfare was after him for beating up on a couple of his kids. They took custody of them. They're in foster homes now."

"And..." It's hard following the kid sometimes.

"And the wife left him a year ago because he beat up on her, too."

"So?"

"So we should go talk with the guy."

"Hasn't he been through enough without us bugging him?" I ask.

"All the more reason to try to find out what happened to his kid."

"O.K., April, you talk with him. Leave me out of it."

"No, Jacko, I need somebody there in case he changes his story afterward."

Now, is that dumb or what? Oh well, got to humor 'em sometimes. So, the next day, we dropped in to see Limburger. Nice guy. Invites us to have coffee and everything. He looks at me like I'm supposed to do the questioning. I nod in April's direction. The conversation goes something like this:

April: "We're sorry to bother you, Mr. Limburger. I know you're going through a lot right now – with this kidnapping and all."

Limburger: "Yeah. I had to miss an important meeting in Detroit because of this. So anyway, what can I do for you?"

April: "You've never gotten a ransom note?"

Limburger: "Nope. The kid disappears like that."

April: "I think the police said other relatives were in the area. Have they been any help?"

Limburger: "Them? Only one in the general area is my wife's sister. Oops, former wife's sister, Jane Airhead."

April: "Oh, where does Ms. Airhead live? We might want to talk with her." I can see us traveling all over creation on some wild goose chase. Oh well.

Limburger: "Over in Claire County. I'll have to get you the address," and he gets up.

April: "No, that's okay. We'll get it before we leave."

So the thing goes on for a good half hour. I'm starting to doze off, but she nudges me and says, "That's it." Limburger gets the Airhead Dame's address and stuff, and we're out the door.

"So, guess we should drop in and see Ms. Airhead," she says.

"Go to it," I say, "I don't need to tag along."

A week later, April plunks down across the desk from me.

"We found the kid," she says.

"What kid?"

"The Limburger baby," she says.

"Where was he?" I ask.

“Safe and sound in the home of one Ms. Jane Airhead.”

“You sure it’s the right kid?”

“Absolutely,” she says. “Jane was worried about leaving the child with that brute, Limburger, after how he treated everybody else. She came around, hid in the house, waited ‘til the hired hand was off with her cigarette, ran out, grabbed the kid, and took off.

“At first, Claire County was going to throw the book at her, but child welfare stepped in. Jane and her husband Jim wanted to adopt the kid. Given the father’s record of abuse, child welfare threatened to go after him unless he went along with the plan for the Airheads to adopt the child. They arranged the whole thing on the QT through the Little Wonder Adoption Agency. When they told Limburger what they were doing, he said, ‘Good riddance.’ But he said he wanted to keep the thing secret and still pretend it was a kidnapping. He likes to see himself on TV and in the papers.”

“You mean the police and Hartz and Flauers were spending their valuable time on a phony kidnapping?”

“Listen,” says April, “the cops like headlines, and it doesn’t hurt our business either.”

So the missing child case would still keep us and Sergeant Pepper busy. And the reporters would keep after us for news. I even got to get interviewed on TV once or twice.

Then comes the bombshell. When I got to the office one morning, April had already come and gone. Then I saw this envelope on the desk addressed to me. I open

it, and there's a note inside. It says, "Sorry, but I'm leaving the agency. I will be working as an undercover agent for the police department. They require that I not have any dealings with outside detective firms. So good luck, and I hope you can find a new associate. April."

Unbelievable. And after all I done for her. Oh well, women. Never could depend on 'em.

Gifts

Call it burn-out or midlife crisis, but whatever the term, I was smack in the middle of it. I had reached the point in my career when I was frankly fed up with teaching high school students the fundamentals of chemistry and physics. The prospect of returning one more time to face roomfuls of equally bored adolescents was dismal. But with Kevin still in college and bills to pay, we had no choice.

When Leon was reassigned to the legal department at the insurance company's home office, it meant a new state and school district. Who knew? Maybe teaching could be exciting again. The only problem: It was the end of August when we finally got moved. But I submitted my application to the Morgan Regional School District anyway.

By then, of course, the high school slots were all filled. They did have one opening at Sherman Middle School, teaching science basics to 7th and 8th graders. That was not what I had in mind. But, OK, put in a year at Sherman, then high school the following year. It would be the middle of September before I could step in. Ms. Belknap, in guidance, would take over those classes in the interim.

At my first meeting with Dr. Gamble, the principal, I learned that I would be teaching four classes: science, Honors and Basic sections, in both 7th and 8th grades. Yes, Sherman was wedded to tracking from sixth grade on.

Did I have any questions? Yes, a few.

"I noticed there was no science lab set up when we were making the rounds."

"No, they deal with that at the high school level."

"You mentioned the tracking system, Honors and Basic. I was wondering how that works."

"Very well. It separates the top students from the rest."

I bet it does. "No, how do students get assigned to Basic or Honors?"

"Oh, we start by limiting Honors to students with 3.0 or better overall GPA. Then guidance weighs in."

"And the Basics?"

"Below a 3.0 average on those subjects."

"Automatically?"

"Yes, automatically." There's nothing like labeling kids right from the start.

No more questions. I thanked Dr. Gamble and left, wondering how long I'd last at this place. If anything, it looked like Morgan was worse than Denby had been.

As for those science textbooks, they were organized like the manuals I used to use in GED classes: science basics, then life sciences, then physics, then chemistry, then earth and space science. Save the most complex and speculative for last. So happened, a space flight had just run into problems but ended successfully, with the astronauts splashing down off the Florida Keys. Big news at the time. So I decided to upend the order of things and start with earth and space science.

And so it was that I began my first day at Sherman Middle School. I got through the homeroom meet and greet OK; the kids seemed nice enough—a real mix in terms of race.

The first period was 8th grade Basic: thirty-five students, maybe a third of them African American or Hispanic. Fortunately, Ms. Belknap had prepared charts with the assigned seating for all four classes so I could connect names with faces.

As I settled in, I noticed that several of them were fiddling with their cell phones, despite posters all through the building announcing that the use of cell phones in class was verboten. OK, teacher testing time, huh? That was my cue to do the unexpected. Instead of telling them to put away their cell phones, I asked Tonia, front row middle, for hers. She reluctantly handed it over. Holding it up, I said, “Can you get on the internet with this thing?” She nodded.

“OK,” I said, returning it to her, “everybody turn on your cell phones. If you don’t have one handy, join your neighbor who does.” So, then and there, we had a session on using their cell phones or laptops to tap into Google or Yahoo to find answers to questions about the solar system and outer space. I would do the same with each of the science classes after that. Maybe I’d get reported to Dr. Gamble. Perhaps I’d get fired; no end of possibilities with that one.

Next class, 8th grade Honors. Twenty students. As they filed in, I noticed only two Black students were in this class. My mind immediately flicked back to that tracking issue. Oh well, let’s see where this goes. I

checked Ms. Belknap's chart. Arlene and Kiana, the two Black students, sat next to each other in the very last row.

Cream of the crop, these kids? OK, let's see if they're really on their toes. So, without saying a word, I went to the board and wrote, "Climate change is a hoax." Turning around to face the class, I was appalled to see the students dutifully writing down this pearl of wisdom. And these were on the top of the heap at Sherman, headed for college, presumably? All these students were engaged in this benighted exercise except one of the Black students, who sat doing nothing. Let's see. Yes, Kiana.

"Your fellow students are writing this down," I told her. "Why aren't you writing?"

"That thing about climate change bein' a hoax is a pile of crap," said Kiana.

I turned to the rest of the class. "Anybody else here thinks it's a pile of crap?"

From the shocked expressions, it was clear that teachers at Sherman Middle School didn't use the term "pile of crap," at least not in the classroom.

After a pause, Carl raised a tentative hand. In a few seconds, Jeanette raised hers. Then, one or two others, until about a quarter of the class joined. "Then why were you all writing it down?"

"Because you're the teacher." Melvin, it turned out, was the class clown. Big laugh.

"So, if a teacher says it, it must be so. Is that what you're saying, Melvin?"

He nodded.

“Not in this class. In this class, the teacher says to think like scientists. Scientists are born skeptics, right?” Lots of nods. “Take nothing for granted, right?” More nods. “Presume the null, right?” Few nods, mostly blank expressions.

“Null as in nullify, or the statement that the hypothesis ain’t so.” Then I turned to Kiana. “OK, Kiana, how would you go about proving that the statement about climate change being a hoax is crap?”

“I don’t know how.” The tiniest sign of discomfort.

“Fair enough. I’d like you to take on a special assignment. Not to be graded, you understand, but give it a try anyway. I would like you to write me a paper where you say how you would prove that climate change is not a hoax. Oh, and I don’t want the rest of you to miss the opportunity. You’re all invited to take either side of the argument, hoax yes or hoax no, and write up a strategy for testing.”

Then came the questions: When is it due? (Let’s say Friday.) How long’s it supposed to be? (As long as it takes to make your point.) Is climate change in the textbook? (Check the index to find out. But don’t stop there. There’s Google and the school library. Oh, by the way, I look for plenty of documentation.) Docu what? (Documentation. Source material. Where did you get your information? Cite sources; otherwise, Ford Foundation will never fund your project.) Are we supposed to do a project? (Not at this point. Just say what you would need to do to show that climate change is or is not a hoax.)

A few were taking notes. The rest sat and waited to discover what this strange creature would do next. I paused while things settled down, then said, "OK, so now we're into testing assertions that something is so or that something causes something else." That led us to how one tests a hypothesis to show that it's A that causes B and not C or D. From time to time, a student would ask a question. But by the nods, it was pretty clear these students were getting it. How well they understood would be clearer when I did some quizzing. But by and large, I felt they were tuned in. All but Kiana, who seemed beyond her depth. Whenever I tossed a question in her direction, her standard response was a shrug or a "Beats me." She was scribbling things on a pad most of the time, apparently oblivious to the discussion.

We then went through the cell phone bit, using things like how big the earth was. Then, "All right, scientists. So how do you test a hypothesis about the weather or those planets?"

Henry: "You can't. I mean, you just explained how you control one factor to show another one is the cause. But you can't control anything out there in space."

"Oh, so climatology, a science critically important to aviation, is all based on untested assumptions? I'll remember that the next time I board an airplane."

Big laugh. Thank you, class. "All right. One thing we're going to be doing this term is looking at how you test hypotheses where you can't control everything, as in earth and space science. There has to be a way. You can start by looking at whether climate change is a hoax."

Things were moving nicely until the bell rang, signaling the time to go to the next class. As Kiana passed my desk on the way out, I heard her mutter, "Neat." OK, we would see what came of 'neat,' but I wasn't too hopeful.

When I checked my mailbox Thursday, an envelope with "Miss Sampson" was scrawled across it. Inside was a typed document of some kind. It wasn't until I got home that I could look at it. It read as follows:

I have to define hoax to see if climate change is not a hoax. After that, I must see if climate change fits a hoax. A hoax is intended to trick or dupe (Webster New Collegiate Dictionary). OK, so what about climate change Global or regional climate patterns that last for periods not just change in the weather that can happen overnight (Wikipedia), so a cold day or lots of snow in winter mean the climate is getting colder 95% of scientists say humans cause global warming so of course they think climate change is real (Sceptical Science) so 95% of scientists would have to be taken in by somebody out to deceive them. Still you said scientists are born sceptics, so it's hard to believe that scientists would fall for a hoax. Therefore climate change does not fit a hoax that proves the statement is wrong.

Kiana Jefferson

She left out any reference to testing hypotheses or much about scientific research. But on top of that, the spelling

and grammar were a disaster. How did this kid make it into Honors science?

That night I showed the paper to Leon.

He studied it, then “Looks like somebody’s in special ed.”

“Which they don’t do at Sherman. Guess I’m stuck with her.”

Leon was rereading the paper. “What was the assignment?”

“To map out a strategy for determining if climate change is a hoax.”

“And use the strategy to test the validity of the statement?”

“No, just map out the strategy.”

“But it looks like she not only mapped out a strategy but used it to answer the question.”

“But that paper is a mess.”

“Put aside the spelling and grammar for a moment. She made her case,” says the lawyer.

“What do you mean?”

“Is climate change a hoax? Which is a little like, is John Doe, a murderer? First, the prosecutor explains to the jury what constitutes murder. Then he, yeah usually he, shows how what John did fits into that general definition. This is exactly what your student did. Defined the general concept, hoax, then saw if it applied to climate change.”

“OK,” said I, “I admit the science teacher was thinking experimental design, which would have required access to lots of data on climate trends, among other things. Hence, I was just asking them to devise a

strategy, not try to make the case. Yeah, the way she did it, she bypassed that problem. Hmm, have to look at that one a little more.”

Leon said, “Wonder if there’s a lawyer in the family. Maybe our student got a little help along the way.”

“I have no idea,” I said, adding, “No lawyer in his or her right mind would write like that.”

“OK, dad or mom gets the kid headed in the right direction, then leaves writing the thing up to her.”

I went back and reread the essay. Not bad the way she took on the argument. Wholly different from where I was taking the class. To top it all off, she not only made up a strategy but then used it to come up with a conclusion. I made a copy of the paper on the spot (underlines, marginal notes, and all). I figured it might come in handy as a teaching tool.

On Friday, in 8th grade Honors science class, Kiana sat there when I arrived—staring out the window with occasional quick darts of the eyes in my direction.

“Hi, Kiana. Could I see you after class for a few minutes?”

She nodded. Later, when the bell rang at the end of class, the rest of the kids were up and on their way out the door. Kiana sat and stared out the window. I came over and sat next to her.

“Hiya.”

A wave of the hand. “Hi,” still staring out the window.

“That paper you did...”

“Yeah?” Turning to face me.

“Thanks for getting it in early.”

“So, how’d I do?” coming forward a hair.

“As is, not great.”

“Yeah, that’s what they all say,” slumping down a little.

“Big problem was with the mechanics.”

“Mechanics? What they got to do with...?”

I chuckled, “Not the kind who work on cars. It means things like grammar and spelling. But those are things we can work on.”

“What you mean? I gotta do more work on it?”

“You’re going to have to decide that. By the way, you got a lawyer in the family?”

“Lawyer in my family? You kiddin’? When my grandma needs a lawyer, she goes to Legal Aid. It’s just me, my grandma, and Julie, who I drop off at daycare every morning. It’s ‘cause of my grandma’s work schedule. Oh, and Bob. He’s in and out. Mostly out. Comes around when he needs money mostly. He’s had a public defender a couple times.”

“So how did you know how to take on the issues that way?”

“Dunno, just made sense. Language arts teachers always say start by defining your terms, so that’s what I did.”

“Wow. Look, Kiana, I’m willing to work on this with you. Not just the writing but also the research. Oh, and I won’t be rewriting that paper; you will.”

Kiana glanced at her watch. “Uh oh, gonna be late for Mr. Pratt’s class.”

“That’s OK. Tell him I held you up.” And she was gone.

The next day, I checked by the principal’s office and asked about Kiana.

“Chronically late.” Hannah, the principal’s secretary, shrugged. “Also, a lot of unexcused absences. Of course, that sometimes happens ‘cause a kid gets there after attendance is taken in homeroom.”

“Do you know anything else about her or her family?”

“No comment. You might try the guidance counselor. Ms. Belknap. She’s in 313.”

After straightening things up at the end of the day, I dropped by Room 313. Older woman getting ready to fly the coop.

“Ms. Belknap?”

“That’s me. What’s up?” It looked like she was in a hurry.

“I’m Ms. Sampson. I wanted to check with you about a student in one of my science classes. By the way, thanks for taking charge of those classes until I got settled. Those seating charts are great. If you need to run, I can come by tomorrow.”

“No, that’s OK.” It wasn’t, but what the heck? “Anyway, welcome to the snake pit. Sorry, that’s what it seems like since they cut a lot of staff. So, what’s up?” Ms. Belknap was sitting back down as she spoke.

“I wanted to check with you about one of my eighth-grade students, Kiana Jefferson.” Belknap nodded.

“Question number one: How come she’s in my Honors science class?”

“Yeah, that surprised me when I wrote up those seat assignments. Somebody goofed on that one. Yeah, we know Kiana. Have you got a couple of hours? Let’s take a look,” as she got up, went to a filing cabinet, opened the second drawer, and fished out a thick folder. Settling back in her chair and opening the folder, “OK, yeah, she lives with her grandmother. Black, as you know.” From the nod and the sour expression, I gathered there was something about African Americans she and I were supposed to know.

“Let’s see,” scanning the record, “Yes, it should be Basic in everything—some screw up in the science class. Let’s see, she rarely gets to school on time. Plus, nobody from the family shows up for report card conferences. Not a big surprise there. Oh, and she was suspended for a week last year. Behavior. Sassing the teacher.”

Where to start? “What if parents don’t show up for report card conferences?”

“Homeroom teacher deals with that. Mr. Pratt. Room 225. Language arts.”

“Have you worked with Kiana on any of this?”

“No. As long as there are no complaints, I leave it alone. Got too much on the plate since they cut back the funding last year.”

“Do they do anything to involve parents here at Sherman?”

“Used to and had a nonpro from the community for each grade until they cut those positions out. Oh, PTA,

of course. But that kind never comes to meetings. You know how that goes.”

“I’m beginning to.” If she got the message behind my response, she didn’t show it. “Well, thanks for your time, Ms. Belknap.” Meeting over.

Mr. Pratt was busy writing something on the computer in front of him. He was a serious looking guy, maybe in his twenties. “Oh yeah, always lots of catch up around here, but in between, I find time to work on my other project. Working on a book: the great American novel, ha ha,” and he nodded toward the computer.

Shift of mood. “You wanted to talk about Kiana, I believe. She’s in Basic for everything. Writing is a big problem, but it is for many of them—that and math.

“Them?”

“You know, colored kids. Kiana is a mix. Does better than some on the multiple-choice questions.”

“How did Kiana get into my Honors science class?”

“Really? That looks like a snafu somewhere along the way; in the office, maybe. We can get that changed if you like.”

“No, not yet, anyway. We’ll see where it goes from here.”

On Friday, several other students in Honors science turned in papers on the climate change question. I was eager to see what they did with the task. There was not much from Kiana during the whole session. As they were filing out, I grabbed her sleeve. “So, is it yes or no?”

“You mean to do more work on the paper?”

“Right,” hoping for a yes.

“OK,” and she was gone.

When I checked the other students’ work, the writing tended to be OK, unlike Kiana’s. Most of them proposed some version of hypothesis testing using massive amounts of weather pattern data to demonstrate that climate change was real. Some did decent jobs. Arlene and a few others got sidetracked onto whether human activity or fossil fuels were to blame. A few sided with the hoax faction and tried to say how they would support that thesis. But Kiana was the only one who had not only spelled out a strategy but then gone ahead and used it to make her case.

In Monday’s 8th grade Honors science class, I read Kiana’s paper to the class, pointing out how she devised a different strategy and used it to make her case. I said nothing about her writing problems, bypassing the errors as I went. I also applied her model to various issues, including John Doe and the alleged murder and whether Abraham Lincoln was a great president. Some students responded by saying this sounded more like social studies than science. That allowed me to point out that proof was proof, regardless of context.

Kiana got involved this time. She had read a lot more than whether climate change was a hoax. Did I sense a little shift in attitudes toward this class member? Maybe it was only my imagination.

On the spur of the moment, I decided to spend some time after school with Kiana. But when I suggested getting together at the end of the school day, she said she had to pick Julie up at daycare.

“You mean you never stay after school, like for extra work or behavior?” remembering the extra time I used to spend after school with students at Denby.

“Oh, they let me off ‘cause of Julie, I guess.” How to show interest in a promising student. I had to figure out some way to work with this kid.

“Got a question. How did you do that paper?”

“You mean the hoax one?”

“Yes, you got a computer at home?”

“No.”

“Well, did one of the teachers let you use theirs?”

“No,” chuckling, “I used one at the branch library over on Oak Street.”

“How’d you manage that, with Julie and all?”

“Oh, sometimes when I pick her up after school, we head to the library. They got a play room for kids, story time and stuff; so, while I work on my stuff, she’s in there. They got a lady runs that.”

Unbelievable. Then a thought occurred to me. “Can I join you over there some time at the library?”

“Guess so. You have to keep it sort of quiet or the librarian gets after you.”

I knew that teachers were allowed to leave at the close of school one day a week. So then and there a new plan was hatched. On Wednesday afternoons, we would meet at the branch library. I’d be available the other days for after-school meetings, work with students, etc. I explained to Dr. Gamble that I was committed to something every Wednesday after school. He went along with it. Fortunately, he didn’t ask for an explanation.

When I walked into the library Wednesday afternoon, Kiana was sitting at one of their computers. I had come prepared: a spiral notebook with a copy of her paper tucked inside and a couple of ballpoint pens. Fortunately, there weren't many other patrons at that hour, just a couple of folks with their laptops sitting off in a corner and a woman talking to the aide at the desk. I sat down next to Kiana.

I decided to focus on the writing first, then making one's case. So, we would begin by reviewing what she had written and, labored line by line, starting with "dafine."

"Here," I said, plunking the notebook and a ballpoint pen beside her. "A gift from me to you." That brought a little smile.

Pulling out the paper, "Turn to the last page in the notebook. When you come to a word I've double underlined, that is a misspell. Look it up and print it out on that page in the notebook. Make sure the spelling is correct."

"But you said I don't know how to spell it."

"So, what are you going to do about that?"

She quickly brought up Google and soon had the insertion point blinking to her to go on. She typed in 'dafine' and pressed the return key.

"There's just a bunch of ads," she said.

"Not what you were wanting to say, was it?"

She shook her head.

"OK, that's a tough one. DEE-FINE," sounding it out slowly.

"Oh, d-e-f..."

“Right.”

“Yeah, well, it meant what a word means.”

“Are we into defining ‘define’ maybe?”

Back to Google and, “Oh yeah, that’s it.” Then, the excited expression began to sour. “There’s so many ways they use the word.”

“Keep going until...no, don’t go wandering; stay right there. Look for something you meant when you used the word.”

After a little more searching, “OK ‘Define. Show the nature or meaning of a word.’”

“Good, now list the word ‘define’ in your notebook. Yes, top of the last page.”

But once she had done as instructed, I put a line through what she had just written. “Lower case. Print it lower case, not all caps.” She didn’t like seeing her painstaking work crossed out but redid the word.

“Good. Why did I have you do it in lowercase?”

She thought, then, “Cause that’s how I’ll see it in print, like in a story or something?”

“Yes. Do you know something? You are a very bright young woman.” That brought a bigger smile.

Kiana started going through the rest of her paper, stopping at each double underlined word, doing the Google search, and then printing the word out. Occasionally, she’d check me out, and I’d nod and wave as if to say, “Go on. You’re doing fine.”

“Oh, am I supposed to write out what the word means, like ‘define’?”

“No, just the word. No explanation, and I’ll tell you why. The next time you run across the word, try to

figure out what it means without looking it up. You can often tell by how it's used in a sentence or by similar words. Make a guess. Then look it up. If you guessed right, you'll remember that little victory. And if you guessed wrong, you're still more likely to remember."

"Who says? Can you prove your case?" Broad grin.

"I can. I can refer you to some learned articles on the subject."

She threw up her hand and grimaced in mock horror.

"No thank you!"

I checked my watch. It would be best if we didn't overdo it the first time. We'd get to the proof part later. "You can do that with any word you come across. You can bring up Google on your cell phone."

"I don't have one."

"Then when you come to the library, use one of their computers, just as we did today."

"But aren't we gonna do the rest of my paper now?" Genuine disappointment.

"No, enough for now. But I have another question: Why are you late a lot? To school, I mean."

"Yeah, well, I have to take Julie to her daycare. Grannie has to get to her job at Giant. The school used to get after me about that. Now nobody seems to care."

"I care." Which brought another smile.

We were still in the early stages of earth and space science when I decided to do my little handwaving stunt, something I'd used with GED prep groups. So, the next time 8th grade Honors science met, I slowly waved

my hand back and forth. "OK, class, how fast is my hand moving, in miles per hour?"

"Two," said Jerry.

"No, one," said Carl—lots of nods that seemed to settle it. But then Kiana's eyebrows went up. She began working away at something with her calculator. I'd picked up a bunch at the dollar store and given them to any of my students who didn't own one. Then, after a while, Kiana gave a nod.

"Yes, Kiana? Do you agree with the rest of the group?"

"I'm guessin' 'bout a thousand miles an hour."

That set off a lot of guffawing and head shaking. "Where'd you get that number, genius?" asked Melvin. More guffaws.

"Tell him where you got it, Kiana," I said.

"Well, you told us it's about 25,000 miles around the earth. There are 24 hours in the day. The earth turns once a day, so I just divided 25,000 by 24. Let's see," peering at the calculator, "A thousand forty one point six sixty seven."

And this kid was getting a C in math? Unbelievable.

After a pause, Charles piped up, "OK, that's at the equator, so it would be slower where we're sitting."

"Turns out both of you are right in a way. Kiana thought we must be moving at a pretty fast clip to get around in 24 hours. And Charles, you are dead on. We're moving at maybe half the speed Kiana said. The whole solar system is moving, so it's more than that. But then I have another question: Why doesn't it feel like we're going hundreds of miles an hour? And if I toss a

ball straight up, why doesn't it land lots of yards behind me?"

Blank stares. "OK, we'll get the answers to those questions in the coming weeks, along with many other interesting earth and space science facts. And Melvin, I think Kiana and Charles deserve a round of applause, don't you?" In response, Melvin flapped his hands together in slow motion.

Over dinner that night, I recounted the incident as one more piece of evidence about Kiana the Magnificent. Leon listened patiently, then, "Are you getting a little carried away with that kid? Every Wednesday, meeting her in the library? Aren't there other students who could use your help after school?"

"I'm not shortchanging anybody. I'm there for after-school four days a week."

But I knew he was right in a way. I was becoming obsessed with bringing out the best in one gifted teenager shunted into Basic, where expectations were automatically lowered and the possibility of achieving real success more remote with each passing year. The task was daunting, but I wasn't about to quit. I just hoped Kiana would stay equally determined.

Meanwhile, I was taking the 8th-grade science classes on two tracks: one dealing with the subject matter in the book and the other on thinking like a scientist. For that, I decided to have them come up with a question and say how they would use science to answer it. The choice as to subject matter was up to them.

As usual, Kiana did the unexpected: “Do white people get more education than black people, and if so, why?” Uh oh, put us squarely in Joan Antrim’s territory. She taught social studies. My first impulse was to steer Kiana into something about the physical world. But then I thought, why not let her try her wings on it? My note at the bottom of the page she had submitted suggested she check with Ms. Antrim on the topic.

It didn’t take long for Antrim to get back to me.

The note in my mailbox said, “Ms. Sampson, could I see you after school?” So, at the end of the school day, I dropped by Roon 214. Antrim was cleaning the blackboard.

“Hi, Joan. You wanted to see me.”

“Yes, thanks for coming by,” sitting down and nodding to another chair. “It’s about one of your 8th grade students, Kiana Jefferson. You have her doing an assignment that sounds like social studies.”

“She chose the question to pursue. Her assignment was to figure out how to use science in answering the question. I even suggested she check with you for suggestions.”

“Yes, well, this is a little awkward. I think each of us has enough to do without moving into somebody else’s territory. I assume she’s in Basic science.”

“No, she landed in my Honors section.”

“Really? And how is she managing there?”

“Very well. She has some language problems, as I’m sure she does in social studies.”

“Yes, very much so. She is a keen observer in class discussions, but when she tries translating them into the

written word, she seems to be at a total loss. But more to the point, I wonder if it may confuse her when we cross over the boundaries of our respective fields.” The language was nice, but the message was clear: Stay off my turf.

I was treading on tender ground. Then, a thought occurred to me. “About our respective domains, I have an idea. I’ve been stressing with them the fact that proof is proof, no matter the context. Kiana is ahead of some of her classmates on that one. What if we let her go ahead with her project? I once did an article on the differences between research in the physical realm and areas like social class and culture. The article dealt with the special challenge of reconstructing the past in plumbing the depths of history, the different levels of complexity, dilemmas in withholding a promising intervention from a control group, and, more generally, the role of values, including those of the researcher. I’d love it if we could work together on this. Maybe let Kiana teach the two of us some things in the process.”

“I don’t know. Let me give it some thought. By the way, could you give me a reference for that article you wrote? Sounds interesting.”

“I’ll have to check. It’s been a while since I wrote it. Maybe I can find a copy.”

We shook hands, and I left.

That night, I checked my files at home. Sure enough, tucked away in a folder marked “Research” were two copies of the article. The next day, I left one of them in Joan’s mailbox. Soon afterward, there was a note in mine. “Let’s give it a try. J. Antrim.”

One afternoon in the middle of a class session, Hannah, the principal's secretary, beckoned me to the door. "Dr. Gamble would like to see you."

"But I...." nodding toward the students.

"That's OK. I'll take over the class while you're gone."

It had to be serious business. Now what?

I walked in to find Dr. Gamble locked in a tense conversation with a woman of color, maybe fifty or sixty years old. Hard to tell. Looked like she'd been through the wars and back."

"Oh, hello, Ms. Sampson."

"Sampson. That's the one." It looked as if the woman was about to lunge in my direction.

"This is Ms. Tyler. She's Kiana Jefferson's grandmother."

"Oh, hello. I'm so glad to..." My hand hung there, waiting for the handshake that wasn't about to come.

"You been messin' with Kiana's head."

"I beg your pardon."

At this point, Dr. Gamble stepped in. "Now, ladies, I'm sure that we can settle this thing."

Good. Then maybe I'd find out what 'this thing' was. I decided to listen. Not to worry, I would have had a hard time getting word one in edgewise.

"Ms. Tyler is concerned about your meetings with Kiana at the public library after school."

"Besides, I had to take off work today to come here. Bad enough havin' to take over after their mom got herself killed. Yeah, that kid's spendin' some Saturday mornin's at the library. That's the one day I can go

shoppin' and do laundry. I need her around to look after Julie and help with the housework and stuff."

"Oh, have you been meeting Kiana in the library on Saturdays as well, Ms. Sampson?"

"No. Nor did I suggest that she go there. Trips to the library were Kiana's idea from the beginning."

"You been puttin' ideas in her head."

"You have a very gifted granddaughter, Ms. Tyler." Meanwhile, I was grappling with what that family had gone through.

Dr. Gamble put up a hand. "I'm sure whatever Ms. Sampson has been doing has been for Kiana's best interest. She is a dedicated and experienced teacher; I'm sure her intentions have been the best. But under the circumstances...."

"Dr. Gamble. Before we go any further, could I say something?" I tried to keep the tone even. No need to inflame things any more than they were, but I could see disaster looming.

"Go ahead, Ms. Sampson."

"In the first place, Ms. Tyler, I had no idea what you and the children have been through. All I can say is you've done an amazing job with Kiana. And to take off work to come here this afternoon. Just wish half of the parents made that big an investment in their kids."

"Ya gotta do what ya gotta do," she said with a little nod.

I went on, "And it's paid off. Kiana is not just smart. She's very smart by anybody's standards. For reasons I won't go into here, she was stuck in Basic for everything, basically tagged as a C student. I got her in

Honors science by accident. I soon realized she could keep up with the other students and be ahead of them in some ways. She's getting a B plus in science; Honors science. We're still working on the writing. If you want to check with Mr. Pratt, you'll find she has had a total turn around in language arts. Ms. Tyler, you should be proud of Kiana. She had to get a lot of that from you, incidentally."

Wonderful speech. Like Martin Luther King doing his 'I Have a Dream' thing at the Lincoln Memorial that time. The trouble was, we weren't in dreamland. Ms. Tyler, still grumbling, was ushered out by Dr. Gamble. I could hear them talking outside, but not so I could tell what they were saying. At the end of what seemed like hours, he returned alone.

After he settled back in his chair, he said, "I'm sure everything you say is true. But under the circumstances, you shouldn't do any more of these after school sessions with Kiana. Ms. Tyler wanted her out of your science class, but I explained that you taught both sections of eighth grade science. She finally accepted that, but she was not happy about it."

Speaking of not being happy, he was reading a very unhappy expression. "Look, Ms. Sampson, we have to face reality. Ms. Tyler has gotten some of her church buddies riled up about this. She came to see me at the suggestion of her pastor. The last thing Sherman needs is a problem with the Black community."

I was just devastated. The last thing the Black community in this town needed was to have its best and

brightest continually shunted into deadend futures. I had half a mind to quit on the spot.

I was still thinking that way when I spilled everything to Leon over dinner. Good old Leon. There must be a special place in heaven for folks who must put up with their teacher spouses' grouching.

"So, what do you plan to do about it?"

"I'm thinking seriously of quitting. It's not just this thing with Kiana. That whole tracking system that pushes kids who don't fit the proper stereotype into Basic; emphasis on the last syllable: sick, sick, sick. It's also the teaching to the test syndrome so the Dr. Gambles of the world can look good on their resumes. And then what happens to teachers who get caught up in that stupid system and adopt a survival mindset."

"Oh, OK. One less dissident they'll have to deal with. The system won't care. It'll keep chugging along as usual, turning out the elect, whose parents are figuring out which college to get them into, and the unelect who'll keep the Big Macs coming; if they're lucky enough to get a job, that is."

I hate you, Leon. Damn! He knew and I knew I'd knuckle under, play the game, and do what I could around the edges. Most of all, I couldn't abandon Kiana just when her plane began taking off. I made sure she had a copy of a manual I once used for GED science prep classes. I needed a bookmark for the section we were covering, so I used my card (the one with my phone number and email address in plain sight and circled in red). Oh, how careless of me. Go ahead, fire me, guys.

But I was continually nagged by the thought that I remained deeply embedded in a school system that epitomized the worst features of this unjust, racially insensitive society. Maybe I should have walked away from Sherman Middle School, or not even have gotten involved in it in the first place. If I'd bothered to do a little research, I might have found a school that nurtured all its students more positively. On top of everything else, I couldn't get that image of Ms. Tyler and what she and the grandkids had been through out of my mind. I checked to find out what had happened to Kiana's mother, and it turned out an old boyfriend had shot her dead and was now in the state prison for life. Not the children's father. Who knew about him; or them? God, that family had had to deal with stuff a lot more terrible than anything I would ever know.

*

After my retirement, I was on a panel of former teachers at an education conference in upstate New York. We were asked to tell a roomful of people how we handled discipline problems in our day and how we thought we would deal with students in an age of cyberbullying. I only vaguely remember what I said when it came to my turn to speak.

When we broke for lunch, a young teacher of color approached me. She looked familiar, but I couldn't immediately place her.

She shook my hand. "Remember me?"

Hearing that voice, I knew immediately who it was. "Kiana Jefferson?"

“Right, Kiana Jefferson; well, actually Kiana Jefferson-Clark.”

“Kiana! You’re a teacher?” I gave her a big hug.

“You bet.”

“That’s fantastic. Say, how about we do lunch?”

“Great. Give us a chance to catch up.”

Once we got through the food line, I asked, “Could we take our trays out on the terrace? I can hear better out there. Noisy cafeterias are the enemy of people with hearing aids.” Kiana nodded.

We were soon settled at one of the tables away from the center of things and beginning to eat. “By the way, how’s your grandmom? Amazing lady, that one.”

“Oh, Grannie died a few years ago.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that. You were one lucky lady.” Then, after a pause, “And how about Julie?”

“Julie’s hoping to get into City College. Says she wants to be a teacher, too.”

“That’s wonderful,” I said. “Got one great role model.”

“So did I,” said Kiana. It was obvious to whom she was referring.

“Ditto,” I said, nodding back in her direction.”

Another pause, “So what are you teaching, science?”

“Not science. Social studies.”

“Fantastic. And where are you teaching?”

“South Bronx. Not exactly Sherman Middle School. You could say I’m a person who likes challenges. Doug, my husband, is in the shipping department at Sears. No

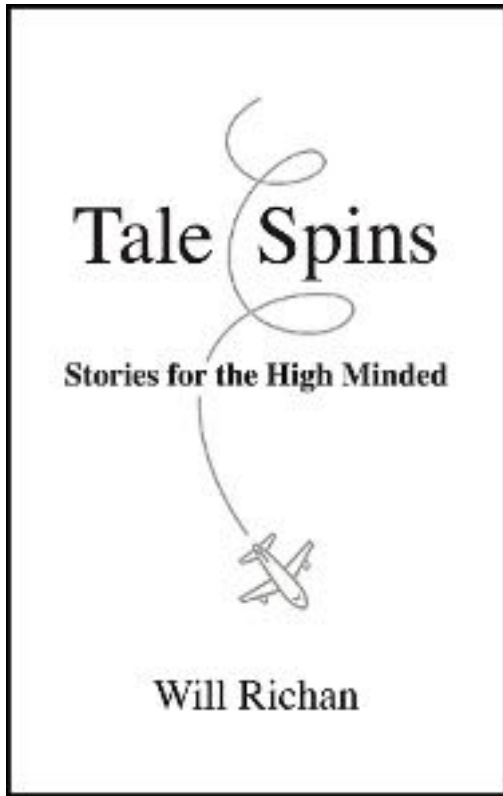
kids yet, but we're working on it." Then, "You know, Ms. Sampson..."

"It's Beverly."

"I know. Anyway, Beverly, there's something I've wanted to tell you and never had the opportunity to. I've had some good teachers through the years, including professors with long lists of publications after their names. But you were the one who made a difference in my life. You kept me from sinking to the bottom of the pond just when I needed it most."

"That's good, hon, because that's how I would describe what you did for me."

And, in truth, that young woman came into my world at just the right time; she helped me turn my life around. Leon commented on it more than once. Oh yes, there was the article Joan Antrim and I did for the *American Journal of Sociology*, with a special note of thanks to Kiana. And she will make a difference in people's lives long after I have made my final exit.



This is a collection of original short stories, including the very serious and the very unserious. The central characters range in age from two little boys to an elderly woman having memory problems.

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