

CORD
YEAR
88/89
89/90
bending over to get it. All I could think of at that moment was wishing one of his eyeballs would explode and a nice big cat would get at *his* neck, but I managed to get the book and sit straight up with this real annoyed look on my face.

Then he started that laughing again. Very quietly at first, and boy, did it burn me! And then I decided I was going to let out a little laugh, so I did. Then he laughed a little louder, and I laughed a little louder, and before I knew what was happening I couldn't stand it, so I really started laughing, and he started laughing, and we laughed so much the whole bus thought we were out of our minds.

CHAPTER 3

Like Lorraine told you, I really am very handsome and do have fabulous eyes. But that doesn't get me much, except perhaps with Miss King, this English teacher I'm going to tell you about. I think she really goes for me the way she always laughs a little when she talks to me and says I'm such a card. A card she calls me, which sounds ridiculous coming out of the mouth of an old-maid English teacher who's practically fifty years old. I really hate it when a teacher has to show that she isn't behind the times by using some expression which sounds so up-to-date you know for sure she's behind the times. Besides, card really isn't up-to-date anymore, which makes it even more annoying. In fact, the thing Lorraine and I liked best about the Pigman was that he didn't go around saying we were cards or jazzy or cool or hip. He said we were delightful, and if there's one way to show how much you're not trying to make believe you're not

behind the times, it's to go around saying people are delightful.

I had forgotten that stuff about paranoia in that magazine Lorraine gave me to read about seven months ago. She's always reading about eyes exploding and nutty people and beehives and things. The only part that impressed me out of the whole article was about the crazy lady in the sanitarium who hoarded food and sheets and towels and bathrobes—the one that used to wear all the bathrobes at one time. They said at one point she had hoarded 39 sheets, 42 towels, 93 English muffins—and she was wearing 8 bathrobes. Her big problem was she didn't feel secure. So they let her pick out as much as she wanted, and she ended up with 320 towels, 2,633 sheets, and 9,000 English muffins. Nine thousand English muffins!

But that's how it always is. Lorraine remembers the big words, and I remember the action. Which sort of makes sense when you stop to think that Lorraine is going to be a famous writer and I'm going to be a great actor. Lorraine thinks she could be an actress, but I keep telling her she'd have to be a character actress, which means playing wash-women on TV detective shows all the time. And I don't mean that as a distortion, like she always says I do. If anyone distorts, it's that mother of hers.

The way her old lady talks you'd think Lorraine needed internal plastic surgery and seventeen body braces, but if you ask me, all she needs is a little confidence. She's got very interesting green eyes that scan like nervous radar—that is they used to until the Pigman died. Ever since then her eyes have become absolutely still, except when we work on this memorial epic. Her eyes come to life the second we talk about it. Her wanting to be a writer is part of it, I guess, but I think we're both a little anxious to get all that happened in place and try to understand why we did the crazy things we did.

I suppose it all started when Lorraine and I and these two amoebae called Dennis Kobin and Norton Kelly were hot on these phone gags last September. We did the usual ones like dialing any number out of the book and asking "Is your refrigerator running?"

"Yes."

"Go catch it then."

And we called every drugstore.

"Do you have Prince Albert in a can?"

"Yes."

"Then let him out."

But then we made up a new game in which the object was to keep a stranger talking on the phone as long as possible. At least twice a week we'd meet

for a telephone marathon. Wednesday afternoons we'd have it at Dennis' house because his mother goes shopping at the supermarket and his father doesn't get home from work until after six P.M., even when he's sober. And on Sundays we'd do it at Norton's because his father plays golf and his mother is so retarded she doesn't know what's coming off anyway, but at least they didn't mind if their kids used the house. Mine and Lorraine's we can't even go to. We couldn't use the phone at Lorraine's anyway because her mother doesn't have unlimited service, and at my house my mother is a disinfectant fanatic. She would have gotten too nervous over all of us using her purified instrument. Another difficulty there is that my father, whom I warmly refer to as Bore, put a lock on our phone—one of those round locks you put in the first dialhole so you can't dial. He put it on because of a little exchange we had when he called from work.

"Do you realize I've been trying to get your mother for an hour and a half and the line's been busy?" Bore bellowed.

"Those things happen. I was talking to a friend."

"If you don't use the phone properly, I'm going to put a lock on it."

"Yeah? No kidding?"

20

Now it was just the way I said *yeah* that set him off, and that night when he got home, he just put the lock on the phone and didn't say a word. But I'm used to it. Bore and I have been having a lot of trouble communicating lately as it is, and sometimes I go a little crazy when I feel I'm being picked on or not being trusted. That's why I finally put airplane glue in the keyhole of the lock so nobody could use the telephone, key or no key.

Anyway, the idea of the telephone marathon was you had to close your eyes and stick your finger on a number in the directory and then call it up to see how long you could keep whoever answered talking on the phone. I wasn't too good at this because I used to burst out laughing. The only thing I could do that kept them talking awhile before they hung up was to tell them I was calling from *TV Quiz* and that they had won a prize. That was always good for three and a half minutes before they caught on.

The longest anyone ever lasted was Dennis, because he picked out this old woman who lived alone and was desperate to talk to anyone. Dennis is really not very bright. In fact, he talks so slowly some people think he has brain damage. But he told this woman he had called her number because he had heard she gave good advice and his problem

21

was that he was about to die from a hideous skin disease because a rat had bitten off his nose when he was a baby and the skin grafts didn't take. He kept her on the phone for two hours and twenty-six minutes. That was the record!

Now Lorraine can blame all the other things on me, but she was the one who picked out the Pigman's phone number. If you ask me, I think he would have died anyway. Maybe we speeded things up a little, but you really can't say we murdered him.

Not murdered him.

CHAPTER 4

John told you about Dennis and Norton, but I don't think he got across how really disturbed those two boys are. Norton has eyes like a mean mouse, and he's the type of kid who thinks everyone's trying to throw rusty beer cans at him. And he's pretty big, even bigger than John, and the two of them hate each other.

Actually, Norton is a social outcast. He's been a social outcast since his freshman year in high school when he got caught stealing a bag of marshmallows from the supermarket. He never recovered from that because they put his name in the newspaper and mentioned that the entire loot was a bag of marshmallows, and ever since then everybody calls him The Marshmallow Kid.

"How's The Marshmallow Kid today?"

Anyway, he's the one who started cheating in the telephone marathons we were having. After Dennis had rung up that staggering record about