

Jim Daniels

Idiot's Guide to Genius-Hood

—for George Bilgere

I don't want to talk shop here
or else I'll end up with the hollowed-
out, lead-filled billy club I made in shop class.

I'm not sure how many I made.
I briefly had a small business.
The hoods called it "The Jimbo"
and paid me good cash moolah
right there in shop class while Mr. Stooch
sat stupored in his office with his magic
bottomless cup of the unspoken, preparing
his hand basket for his trip to hell—
his own private wood-working project.

But three times I have been asked
to nominate or endorse people
for the genius awards. First thing
I thought of was "The Jimbo."

No, the first thing was "What about me,
motherfuckers?" But I duly nominated
and recommended like any dutiful middle-
aged mid-list *shlup*. If I was a genius,
I would know how to spell that, or at least
look it up to find out if it is indeed
a word. Or, just by using it, I'd find my usage
cited in the latest genius dictionaries.

I've never tasted sour grapes,
but I tasted sour wine and drank it
and everything else until I quit drinking
entirely. It didn't take a genius to know
I should've quit years earlier.
Sometimes sobriety itself
is a form of genius. Right, genius?

I nominated this young hot-shit
hot-shot whose debut prose rose

off the page as if carved
by one of those fancy saws
we had to get special permission
to use in Shop.

I liked Shop—stepping
outside for a smoke with the hoods
who occasionally and affectionately
punched me in the shoulder
and I affectionately tried not to wince.

Mr. Stooch was not his real name.
If he emerged from his windowed office
more often, I might've remembered it.
We affectionately called him
"The Old Drunk," or "OD" for short. Oh,
we were full of affection on that sawdust
and metal-shaving littered floor.

I swore that, despite his early success,
it would not, absolutely would not, go
to his head—he was so tall, how could it get
that high?

If you get that kind of early success
you might need a "The Jimbo" to gently
conk yourself in the head once in a while
to stunt its *inflatibility*—can you believe
that's not a word? It keeps wanting me
to change it to *infallibility*, and maybe
that's correct. I should have had
my mother-in-law bake him one of her famous
Humble Pies.

He starts carving his own name
instead of other genius-type words—he makes
one Capital I after another—it's all
he can make anymore,

and Mr. Smooch(?)
might've been the only one left who could've stood
him, and that'd only be because he'd be filling
Mr. Scooch(?)'s cup with the strong stuff

of his own ego, so he'd just pretend to listen while getting completely hammered.

I found myself rooting for him *not* to be a Genius. Though the Genius Foundation complimented me on the subtle middle-brow-ness of my nomination, Wiser Heads prevailed, as they sometimes do, but not often enough, and he didn't get one.

Yet the Wiser Heads

let Mr. Spooch continue on until retirement because he was *so close*—

and as I approach

Retirement and introduce myself to it, hollering out across the distance, Hey Mr. R, I'm a comin' yer way! Wait for me! (Don't kill me off when I can taste your sweet languor, or at least get a whiff of it. It smells like fresh sawdust that will enhance my soft-shoe toward death.)

Mr. Mooch was examined by the Prevailing Wiser Heads for allowing the proliferation of "The Jimbo" under his unwatchful eye because Parker, famous enough to go by one name, like all the Big Stars, was found in possession of a "The Jimbo" by the Local Authorities (who to be honest had very few Wiser Heads and nary a Genius) when they stopped him for crashing his Transportation Special through the locked gates of the Rec Center lot because damn it, he needed a place to Park. Parker, who survived two years in the Navy only to come back to finish high school because his mother was a mean sombitch who demanded it, Parker, good-natured about it, and not without affection, and blind drunk to boot, explained enthusiastically to the Officers where he got "The Jimbo" and "that kid's a fucking genius."

I was temporarily decommissioned by the Wiser Heads, though they did not make me join the Navy, where I would have sunk like a lead-filled billy club, so for that I am eternally and affectionately grateful. We had odd ways of showing our affection. I hope that no "Jimbos" were used in a display of one of those odd ways, but to be honest, to be honest, to be honest, I know otherwise.

The hot air balloon of affectation. It's all science. How could I have thought he'd be immune? When you're a celebrity in the parade, you should at least toss your own candy to the crowd, right? Not hire some *schloop* to do it for you?

None of us come out looking so good, I know, but I can't decide the greater shame in all this—which is worse? It's a story problem, the kind I always got wrong and thus got relegated to Shop 1 and Shop 2, where my true genius was revealed. Just ask any of the smiling smokers leaning against the school wall, squinting into spring sun, the whole notion of a "The Jimbo," just a pleasantry to be exchanged against those warm, humble bricks where some of us may have sprayed our secret names, for who among us could kick anybody else's ass in that Land of Pleasantry, stolen moments, without consequence, all of us geniuses when it came to that?

