

Jon Faustman

## Changing Your Life

Everything seemed to be standing still one second, and moving at warp speed the next. The sirens screamed through the midday air, getting closer with every passing moment. Brian knew he should have never started hanging out with Jesse and Andy. He didn't need to look back at the raging fire to know that. He should have known they were trouble – you know a kid is trouble when his real name is Jesse James. But Jesse and Andy were the only other boys in the neighborhood.

Andy and Jesse were two years older than Brian, but they accepted him as a friend anyway. They seemed to click together, and they treated Brian like a little brother. They were best friends, a close group nobody could come between. The rest of the neighborhood just saw them as a small group of miscreants. It always seemed like they were in some sort of trouble, but nothing had ever got this out of hand.

“Hey Brian. Come out and play. We have something to show you.” Andy and Jesse knew better than to come to the front door. Brian's mom wanted nothing to do with either of them. They had to resort to yelling at Brian's window from the alley behind his house. After all, it was public property they could stand there and yell whenever they felt like it.

Brian tried to ignore the two of them yelling, but he couldn't ignore the rocks flying at his window. “Come on guys, stop. I'm already in trouble; please don't make my mom come back here. She's super-pissed about yesterday.”

“She'll get over. Come on, we have something to show you. I don't know if it's going to be there for long, so you have to come NOW.” Jesse didn't care if Brian's mom didn't like him, nobody's mom liked him. He was the bad kid, from the bad family; he was used to that sort of thing.

“Yeah Brian, it’s pretty cool. You have to come check it out,” Andy yelled in Brian’s general direction. Andy was a shy kid, but once he was with Jesse he was invincible. Before becoming friends with Jesse, he used to get beat up at school; now he was the one beating up other kids.

“Jeez. All right, let me go ask my mom if it’s ok.”

“Screw that, just come. Your mom’s a bitch man.”

“Jesse, how many times do I have to tell you not to call my mom a bitch? Just give me a second and I’ll go ask her. She’ll let me, she is just a little mad. I’ll make it up by doing the dishes or something.” Brian’s head disappeared from the window, and Andy and Jesse could hear the faint yell of his mom.

A few minutes later Brian ran out of the house with a smile on his face. “Dude, what did your mom say? She sound pissed,” Andy asked.

“I just promised to help her with the housework for a month and walk Peanuts everyday. She was still pissed about yesterday, but she got over it. Now what is so cool?”

“It’s in the junkyard, and don’t give me any of that pussy ‘my mom won’t let me go there’ talk. What she won’t know won’t hurt her.” Jesse’s smug smile should have tipped off Brian, but Jesse was always up to something.

“All right I’ll go, but the dog better not be there today. He almost got me yesterday.”

“Don’t worry Brian, he hasn’t been back since yesterday. I think the animal shelter had to take him for real,” Jesse said. “That was funny when he almost bit you.”

“Yeah, it was so funny I forgot to laugh.”

Andy and Jesse looked at each other and laughed. “Brian, we’ve told you before you have to stop with those lame grade school comebacks,” Andy said mockingly. The three of them squeeze through a hole in the junkyard fence, barely big enough for their 10 and 12-year-old bodies. “This is awesome! Jesse showed me earlier and I knew you would like it.”

Now Brian was excited to see what the two of them were raving about. Andy may follow Jesse around like a lost puppy, but he rarely gets this excited about anything. They've been to the same junkyard many times. They were there yesterday and had a little run in with the junkyard's bulldog. The dog was just doing its job, but when three sobbing young boys say they were attacked people are going to listen.

The three of them come to a junked out car, a pure skeleton of what it used to be. It wasn't an uncommon sight for where they were, but once they looked inside Brian saw what the big deal was.

"Holy shit, I've never seen that many grasshoppers in my life. Where do you guys think they all came from?" Brian asked with the curiosity of a two-year-old.

"Who cares where they came from, we have to get rid of them. Haven't you ever read the Bible? Grasshoppers are a plague," Jesse said.

"It's plague, not plaque. I thought that was locusts anyway Jesse?"

"Shut up Andy. Grasshoppers, locusts, what's the difference? They're all bugs aren't they?" Jesse retorted. Jesse pulled his prized Zippo lighter from the back pocket of the rags he calls jeans. His parents might not give him much – food, good clothes, love – but the one thing his dad did give him was a Zippo.

Before Brian or Andy could react, Jesse through a bottle into the car. A few grasshoppers jumped out of the way to avoid being crushed. "Is that gas? Jesse, what are you doing?"

"Brian, I told you we have to kill them. They are a plague to humanity. You want that kind of thing to be resting on your shoulders?" Brian's reasons always seemed to make sense.

"It's humanity you retard," Andy said with a smile on his face. "Do it man, light them on fire."

Before Brian could protest Jesse lit a piece of paper on fire and threw it into the gas-filled car. He must have underestimated the amount of gas he used, the fire jumped close to their young faces. Flaming grasshoppers jumped out of the car and onto the dry grass. It was only a matter of seconds before the entire area was on fire.

“Oh shit. Run!” Jesse knew he made a mistake, but he sure wasn’t going to get into trouble for it. As Brian ran away from the fire he just helped to create, he knew he had to stop hanging out with them. He wanted to be a police officer someday, and this was not a good way to start his life.

It was a good thing Brian decided to stop hanging out with them. The next day both Andy and Jesse were picked up at a local convenience store for suspected arson. They would have got away with their crime had they not been recognized by the junkyard’s owner. He was still angry he had to kill his dog because three kids decided to wander onto his property.

The police knew there was a third person involved, but neither Jesse nor Andy would tell them who it was. They were a tight group, they would never rat on each other. Brian’s only other involvement with either of them was watching as Child Protective Services took Andy and Jesse away. He would never see them again.