

## from **The Gift is to the Giver**

I let Damian do his project on serial killers in Iowa. This seemed like a bad idea, which was the point. It was early March, end of school year in sight, and Damian had been having bad ideas since August, when we wrote about imagining what we'd be doing a year from now. His answer was, "Selling oranges by the side of the road."

In classroom discussions, he liked to tell his friends, "You're stupid." He also liked to seize on incidental use of words such as "roll" or "ingest" as opportunities to intimate his recreational use of marijuana, by snickering.

The oranges scenario I kept to myself for personal worrying. Low self-esteem of that magnitude can't just be pep-talked away. What to do, though? Hmmm. I wanted to think of Damian as someone other than the unfunny class clown, the saddest clown of all. When I asked him after class about un-positive contributions to our learning environment, he would apologize with flagrant insincerity, looking like a big bad wolf who intended fully to blow down another house as soon as our little talk was over. He had the wolf's wet grin and overzealous gleam, as if he knew the brick house and boiling kettle awaited so he had better get his damage done now, yet also knew his story would be told in perpetuity and therefore he would always return to power.