

## **Jammers – A New Novel by T. M. Taylor**

*From the author:*

*Jammers traces the footsteps and inner thoughts of a fourteen-year-old black girl during her freshman year of high school. Basketball, relationships, gangs, drugs, and prejudice are all very real elements in the main character's life as she struggles to understand life and adjust to high school. The most important element in her life, however, is the relationship she has with her grandmother, a retired foot soldier from the early days of the Civil Rights Movement. I hope you enjoy the following preview.*

On the last day of the month, Ms. Davis came into class with a shoebox and a bag of numbers.

She held the shoe box and numbers in front of her as she began to explain our next assignment. Ms. Davis felt that since our class was called a *creative* writing class, she should in turn be *creative* with the assignments and projects she gave us. At the first of the year, most of us thought this was pretty stupid. Like having us rank a list of topics and then write on our least favorite one. Or putting our hand into a bag without looking and then describing one of the objects we felt in it. But as the year went on, all of us had to admit that before each assignment was over, we usually ended up enjoying it and learning something new either about our writing or about ourselves. So we all sat in eager expectation of our next unusual assignment.

“Your next assignment is about luck,” she said. She paused for a moment and we all just sort of looked at one another.

“You know — Luck. Chance. Fate. Fortune. Do you believe that some things are meant to happen — and *will* happen regardless of what we may do. Do you believe that everything happens for a reason, for a purpose? Or is everything just random, just coincidence? Just... luck.”

She did another dramatic pause and looked around the room at each of us.

“Your next assignment is due two weeks from today, and it will be an informal essay of seven to ten pages on your personal beliefs about luck.”

She smiled. “Oh, and one more thing. This is to be a partner assignment. You’ll be working in pairs. Each pair is to submit one, joint-effort essay. What the two of you write, you’ll have to agree upon. So you have to spend an unusual amount of time working together and talking things out. And, since the assignment is about chance, I thought it would be appropriate if the twelve of you were paired up by.....chance.”

She then took the plastic bag with twelve numbered plastic chips and dumped them into the shoe box and shook it up.

“As soon as you see who your partner is, move your desks together and spend the rest of the period deciding how you’re going to do your essay outlines which are due day after tomorrow.”

Then Ms. Davis held the box above our heads so we could not see into it and walked around the circle letting each of us draw a number.

She started to my left with Arthur King. I’ll always remember that she started with him because when he reached

up to draw a number, his hand seemed to be shaking a little. I drew next and then Amanda next to me and so on all the way around the circle.

I had drawn the number “one.” Arthur and Amanda each had drawn the number “six.” That meant that they were going to be partners. I sighed slightly because I had really wanted to keep working with Amanda. She looked at me and rolled her eyes as if to say, “Boy, I bet this will be fun.” She got up and began pulling her desk over next to Arthur’s so they could start discussing their outline.

All around the room everyone was holding up numbers, finding their partners, and moving desks together to get started on the project.

Ms. Davis then said, “Get busy and don’t waste time. What you do today is important.”

These were not the last words she said that day in class. But they were the last words I remember. In fact, these were the last words I remember anyone else saying that day in class because right then I looked up across the room and saw Phillip smiling at me and holding up a number “one” just like mine.

A lot of times in the movies things happen in slow motion. They do that so we can see that whatever is happening in that scene is very emotional, very intense, or very important. I had always thought that it was silly for movies to have scenes in them like that because nothing in life really happened that way. That’s what I had thought.

But suddenly what was happening to me in that class that day was just like something in one of those slow motion scenes. Phillip was getting up and pulling his desk across the room next to mine. He was going to be sitting right beside me, talking to me, working with me everyday for two weeks.

Reality sank in and my senses were somewhat back to normal by the time he got across the room to where I was. He didn't put his desk in front of me facing me. He put it beside me on my left side. The tops of our desks were almost touching, and when he sat down, his right arm brushed slightly against my shoulder.

It was a good thing he had decided to be the one to come across the room because I couldn't have. I was paralyzed. Frozen. I could not move a muscle. I sat there like an idiot and stared straight down at the floor in front of me.

"Hi," he said, "how you doing."

I didn't answer. I just sat there staring straight ahead with my heart pounding.

"I really like the stuff you write," he started again. "I'm glad we're working together. I'm really looking forward to it."

I opened my mouth but no words came out. I tried again but it was no use.

Inside my head I was screaming at myself. "Say something!" my mind shouted. "Say anything. Don't just sit here. Here's the boy you've been thinking about, dreaming about, talking to Auntie about ever since school started. He's sitting right beside you and he has even given you a compliment! Say something!"

"I really like your writing, too." I finally said. And I turned and looked at his face.

He smiled. Only this time it was different. This time he was smiling at me. And he was looking at me with eyes that looked just like Michael's.

"So what do you think?" he said. "Do you believe that everything happens for a reason, or do you think stuff just happens?"

I took a deep breath to calm myself down a little more. Then I said, “I’ve always believed that everything has a purpose and a design behind it. I don’t believe that anything just happens.”

He smiled again. “That’s the same thing that I believe,” he said.

Before I knew it, I was in a conversation with him.

“My Mama says I think too much. She says that everything in life isn’t going to make sense and that I shouldn’t try to make it. But Auntie, that’s what we call my grandmother, Auntie says that the world makes sense for those who make sense out of it.”

“Your grandmother,” Phillip said, “She’s the one you wrote your paper on love about. Right?”

“Yes, You remembered that?” I said

“Oh yeah,” he said. “It was great.”

We talked for the rest of the period. When the bell rang, we were still talking. He pushed his desk back across the room and picked up his book bag. As he moved across the room, I looked at how tall he was and noticed his muscles in his neck and shoulders as he pulled on his letter jacket.

As he passed my desk walking out of the room he said, “I’ll see you tomorrow, Emmy. I’m really looking forward to doing this with you.” And he walked out the door.

I think I nearly floated out of that room. If my feet touched the floor going down the hall, I wasn’t aware of it.

I had just sat talking with him for nearly a whole class period. Not just thinking about him, but talking to him. And having him talk to me, and smile at me. And compliment me.

I walked right past my locker. I didn’t even remember to stop and pick up my books.

When I sat down on the bus Angela just stared at me. After a moment she said, “Emmy?!”

I turned and looked at her.

“Emmy, your face. It’s all...it’s all lit up.” She smiled, “What’s happened to you?”

I reached up and touched my face, smiled and laughed and told her I’d tell her about it later. Angela really wanted to know but she would have to wait because this was too special. Too special to share with anyone except Auntie.

Phillip had sat right next to me. Just like we had been in a car together. Or in the Hard Luck Café together. On a date. Side-by-side. And it was going to be like this every day. If it were possible for something like this to happen then maybe...just maybe.

I couldn’t wait to get off the bus to tell Auntie all about this incredible day!

Looking back at how happy I was at that moment, I wish I could have stayed on the bus for a long, long time. But then, how could I have known that disaster was waiting to meet me?