

Read “Day 1” and answer the questions that follow.

## Day 1

from *The Library Card*

by Jerry Spinelli

1 “Five minutes!”

2 Brenda froze.

3 Once, she had watched a TV show about zebras. The narrator said that sometimes a lion gets real close to a zebra and stares at it, and the zebra is so terrified it doesn’t try to run. It just stands there waiting to be devoured.

4 How dumb, thought Brenda at the time. She did not understand the zebra. Now she did. Now an even meaner beast came stalking, ready to pounce, ready to swipe away her very life. And she was paralyzed with fear.

5 “Four minutes!”

6 Four minutes. Two hundred and forty seconds.

7 She squeezed her pillow to her chest. She tried to concentrate on her TV, on the figures speaking and moving, but she could not. The screen was like a half-remembered dream.

8 When first she heard about it, she had scoffed. Impossible, she said. It would never happen. A date had been set, and a time, but it was so long off it did not seem real. It could not be seen coming down the street. It could not be heard. In her room things were as they had always been. Her beanbag chair. The bed. *Ace Monahan*, *Weird Kid*, as always on the tube at 6:30 Sunday. She simply could not believe that anything horrible was on the way.

9 “Three minutes!”

10 At times like this in the movies, some people would try to look on the bright side. They would say something like, “Well, it’s been a good life.”

11 How stupid!

12 The convict on death row—in the final minutes of a movie or before the commercial—that’s who she related to. Sweaty palms clutching cell bars—the raw, terrified stare—the footsteps of priest and warden—the faint buzz that means they’re testing the electric chair—the seconds ticking louder, louder—yes, that

13 “Two minutes!”

she understood. In one movie a man being strapped to the chair cried out, “Just give me one more minute!” How silly, she had thought then.

14 Her hands and feet were spongy. She was tortured by thoughts that she might have done something to stop this. Had she tried everything? Had she cried? Yes. Pouted? Refused to speak? Refused to eat? Refused to move? Yes, yes, but nothing stopped it. It was a ten-ton steamroller squashing every protest in its way, crunching.

15 “One minute!”

16 So fast. She had never known time was so fast. It did not help to remind herself that she was not alone, that it was happening all over town. She had heard once that the greatest fear was fear of the unknown.

17 “Thirty seconds.”

18 She could hear footsteps now, on the stairs, rising, in the hallway now, closer, on the other side of the bedroom door now . . . the warden, the priest . . . A lock! She should have gotten a lock!

19 “Ten seconds.”

20 Had it been a good life?

21 The doorknob turned. She opened her eyes as wide as she could, swallowing, gorging herself on the glowing screen, the beautiful screen.

22 “Three . . . two . . . one . . .”

23 The door swung open. Her father walked in. He looked at her. She clutched at the bedspread, she wailed, “One more minute! Pleeeeeeese!”

24 The warden smiled a weak, regretful smile. “Sorry, kiddo,” he said and pushed the power button: *plink*. The picture shrank to a point and vanished. Flushed. Gone. Herself with it.

25 Was it her imagination, or could she really hear ten thousand *plinks* all over town?

26 The Great TV Turn-Off had begun.

27 It was 7:00 P.M. Sunday. Brenda had already done the arithmetic. She would have to go without TV for one hundred and sixty-eight hours. Or ten thousand and eighty minutes. Or six hundred and four thousand, eight hundred seconds.

28 One week.

29 At the moment the numbers meant nothing to Brenda. Nothing meant anything. She was numb. Dead.

30 And so was her beloved TV. The voices, the laughter, the bright leaping colors—gone with the flick of a father’s finger. Where moments before *Ace Monahan* was filling the screen, now there was only a flat gray nineteen-inch square. A shroud.\* A tombstone.

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\* *shroud* — a sheet used to cover a body for burial

- 31 Brenda knew she was in shock. She knew this from hospital and emergency room dramas she watched. Even zebras facing lions went into shock. It was nature's way of shielding its creatures from the extremest moments of agony.
- 32 But shock was not a healthy state either—let it go on too long and you might never come out of it. That's why doctors always said of someone in shock: "Keep him warm. Raise his legs." Brenda got under the covers and put the pillow under her feet.
- 33 The red numbers of her digital clock said 7:01. Ten thousand and seventy-nine minutes to go. She groaned aloud.