

**Tweaked by Katherine Holubitsky**  
**A Booktalk by Rhonda Wills**

Gordie Jessup is a typical teenager who has grown up in a happy, loving home. His father is a college professor and his mother works as a secretary at an old folks' home. He plays in a rock band with his best friend Jack and they have entered *The Pogos*, as they call themselves, in a high school battle of the bands contest. Gordie has a part-time job at Barnes Hardware store and he is beginning to develop more than a friendship with his co-worker, Jade.

Gordie's family life is anything but typical, however. It has become a nightmare. His older brother, Chase, is addicted to crystal meth and, like a tornado, this has torn their life apart. Over a two-year period, Gordie has watched Chase descend into the life of a junkie, his parents not wanting to see what was happening, believing Chase's excuses for missing school, failing grades, losing weight and needing money. They were in denial until the night Chase was brought home by the police, dragged out of a meth house and charged with possession. He had been gone for three weeks. His parents had been frantic. The emaciated teen brought to their door looked like he had been living in a trench. "His face was all broken out in crank cankers, and he even had lice." (p. 20) They were hopeful when Chase completed a detox program but when he returned home, the lying, excuses and stealing continued. Gordie and his parents had to lock everything of value away so that Chase didn't steal it to pay for his next hit. When Chase forged documents for a credit card and managed to clear out his parents' bank accounts, the debt that they faced forced them to put their house up for sale. Worst of all, Chase attacked a meter man one night when he was "tweaking", looking for his next hit. The young father was left in critical condition, in a coma from a head injury. Running from the police, owing money to drug dealers and fearing they are going to kill him, Chase disappeared. When Gordie saw him again, he hardly recognized his brother.

It's around three o'clock when I hear the jingle of the bell attached to the door. I am moving boxes in the storeroom. Wiping my hands on my jeans, I walk through the doorway to the front of the store. At first, I think I am seeing things. A ghost is coming toward the counter. It's running toward me: a skeleton covered in jaundiced skin. Quick and spastic, it has started talking before I realize it's my brother. Still, I can't stop staring at this weird and jerky marionette. There are deep hollows where his cheeks used to be and his arms - dangling from the sleeves of his T-shirt - are freakishly thin. A ripe odor makes me take a step back when he comes up close. "Gordie, I need money. Five hundred." As he speaks, his eyes sweep the store in a paranoid way... "They're going to kill me if they don't get it." (p. 155-156)

Gordie has to make a decision fast. How can he support his brother but escape the wasted vortex that he has become?