

Different World, Same Story, 11-12, p.1-7

The first day of classes brought me with a fresh feeling of anxiety, excitement and intimidation all at the same time. A feeling I haven't felt in quite some time. I'm not used to the noisy crowds, the crowded streets, and the over-whelmed feeling of suburbia around every corner. It's only natural to feel a bit nervous on your first week of classes at a top University like this. The student population of over fifty thousand was sure to keep a guy like me on his toes. "Big deal," some might say, "is it so bad being at a nice school like this?" No- but I'm from that middle of nowhere town in Tennessee that recently just got its first traffic light. Yes, one of those real fancy blinking red ones too. My family, born and raised there for generations knows nothing more than what we were taught in our town and what we saw.

I remember my grandmother, who spent a great amount of time raising me while my Mom worked two jobs to feed my lovely younger sister, Meg, and me. She always talked about regretting not getting out of town to see life outside the world we knew. To see what the cities were like and to see how different the people were. My grandmother always admired the beautiful people on the television and always said how well I would do out in the "real world."

When I started high school, my grandmother enrolled me at a rich-kid school thirty miles from our home so that I could get the experience of a good schooling that was offered in our small town. At this school I not only got an education, but also learned about what life is like for a kid my age that lives in a big city. See what they see, do what they do, and learn to have goals like they do.

I valued the opportunity my grandmother made for me to get an education at the city school and knew what she had in mind for me - to get an education and see the world outside of our small town. My grandmother was so wise for someone who came from our small town. She always told me, "Just because you gotta' small town, doesn't mean you gotta' have a small mind." - and she was right. I managed to do pretty well at this school and I knew what I was there for. To get the education I needed to make my grandmother's dream and my dream come true, and give me a life that didn't have to rely on farming or working at the local carryout.

So, here I am now, going off to college, over 600 miles away from my hometown in Tennessee. Graduated as valedictorian of my class, a 3.9 GPA, and got some nice scholarships to travel east to go to school – in pursuit of both my, and my grandmother's goal.

“Anders, hurry up, we’re going to be late!” I shouted. Anders was my sociopathic friend for a roommate.” Late?” he asked, “what time is it?”

“It’s time to leave, now hurry and put some clothes on,” I responded. I quickly buttoned up my shirt as Anders slicked back his jet-black hair with his pocket-sized comb he seemed to carry around everywhere with him. He was always checking himself out in the mirror and making sure his Elvis-like hair was greased back to perfection. I swear, Andres could compete in an Elvis Presley look alike contest (and maybe even win it too.)

We left our residence hall and were headed to the north side of campus where our English Composition 101 class was about a good twelve-minute walk. Anders walked slowly and nonchalantly gazed at the world around him and kept telling me to slow down. He grabbed my arm and glanced at my watch. “What do you mean we were going to be late? It’s 7:45, class starts at 8:00. What’s the big rush?” I asked him. “Well, I don’t want to be late, and you’ve been making me late for this class. My grandmother always told me being on time for things was important and showed a sign a respect,” I responded. “Man, you’ve gotta relax, it’s too early for this and you’re really starting to stress me out. Do you need a smoke or something?” Anders whipped out a pack of Camels from his back pocket and popped one in his mouth and held one in front of my mouth. “ A smoke?” I said, as I turned to keep walking back up to speed. “No I don’t need a smoke. Smoking is bad for your health man, everyone knows that.” “No it’s not, these are filtered and stop all that bad stuff from entering your body. You’ve got to think logically about this man – filter equals no bad stuff, hence the word filter!” I didn’t bother correcting his theory on how filtered cigarettes are still bad for you whether they are filtered or not.

We arrived at our English class five minutes before eight and sat down at two available seats toward the back of the class. A girl about our age stated walking down the aisle in front of Anders as her starred at her with a big smile on his face and nudged my shoulder. “Hey, man check out that fine girl over there, she’s about to sit in front of us.

Maybe I should keep her company?" Anders whispered to me, I simply shrugged my shoulders. She looked like those tall, skinny, longhaired girls I would see in the commercials for perfume and cologne commercials. She was wearing a red skirt with leggings underneath, with a white button up shirt and a flower in her hair to top it off. She had a beautiful shade of auburn-red hair, that Anders was clearly fond of as he stared her up and down as she approached us, sitting down directly in front of us as Anders predicted. Not only did I simply enjoy admiring the back of her beautiful hair, while comfortably being suffocated by her over-powering perfume; it wasn't everyday that I saw girls like these back at my old school. I got a kick out of this, but I'm not sure how much she enjoyed sitting in front of us on their first day of class.

"Hey, Jessie, some cute redhead we got in front of us, huh?" Anders purposely said loud enough for the girl to hear him. "Is that real? Is that real red hair you got on your head there? Or is it—" She quickly turned her head and starred at Anders in disgust, rolling her eyes. Anders simply laughed. "Hey, Anders, chill out man, I don't think she is too keen on being hit on by you," I told him. He gave a loud puff and crossed his arms as he put his feet on the back of her chair to continue antagonizing her. She sat there with his feet on her chair until he started tapping her chair with his foot. "Would you *please* get your feet off the back of my chair?" she asked him politely. I could tell she was getting very annoyed and I felt bad for her. "Anders, come on stop harassing her," I pleaded. As Anders removed his feet from her chair she looked at me and smiled and mouthed the words 'thank-you' to me and even threw me a smile. She began to relax. Anders saw our exchange of communication and gave me a viciously sneered at me. I could tell he didn't like that I was on her side and made him look foolish. As the professor walked up to the podium to begin his lecture Anders thought this would be his last chance to make an impression on this girl and leaned over toward her and began to hover his head right above her shoulder as he put his arm around her and said, "How exactly would *I* be able to find out whether this is *real* red hair, or not? The same hair that matches your...uh, eyebrows?" She stormed off in anger and sat at the very front row of the lecture hall and Anders laughed and laughed, as he was successful in harassing this poor girl.

I sat next to Anders the rest of that class in complete embarrassment. I've met a lot of jerks in my day, but this guy had to be one of the worst. I couldn't pay attention that

whole class after this episode between these two. I kept my eye on that girl the whole hour. Class ended and I said nothing to Anders and made my way down to the front of the room to talk to this girl. "Hey, wait up!" I said to her, she turned at me in wonder, noticed who I was and let out a big grin.

"Hey, sorry about Anders back there, that guy can be a total jerk. I tried to get him to stop." "Oh, that's alright, thanks for trying to get him to stop, that was really sweet of you, my name is Sarah by the way, what's yours?" she asked. "Oh yeah I know," I answered, "I met you on the first day of class when you didn't have any pens I gave you one of mine. My name is Jessie." We walked together out of the classroom and continued talking.

"So, what's a nice boy like you doing hanging out with that guy? You two sure seem to be complete opposites in personality." "Well, Anders is my roommate and I'm from Tennessee so I didn't know anyone at school before coming here. And it doesn't seem like Anders has many friends either, so we have had that in common," I explained. Sarah asked if I would continue walking with her and grab a bite to eat with her.

We walked to the campus coffee shop and sat together as I told her all about my life in Tennessee; how I ended up here and all about my grandmother. She was from a college town in Ohio and told me about her life back there too. This girl was so easy to talk to; she kept the conversations going and had that type of personality I could trust.

"Oh no!" I said, "I think I lost my wallet, I don't have any money on me now." She paid for my meal without any hesitation and offered to help me look for my wallet. We backtracked our steps and made our way back to the lecture hall where she found it below the seat of where I was sitting. "You know, you're a pretty nice guy," she admitted to me, "I've got to be off to my next class now but here is my number. Call me tomorrow, maybe we can get some ice cream in the evening?" I was more than willing to call this girl tomorrow and made my way back to my dorm.

"So, is that your girlfriend now?" Anders asked me as soon as I entered the room. I examined Anders' flushed red face and could tell he had been drinking. Beer cans were scattered on his desk. He was wasted. "No, we just got coffee together" I said. "I was apologizing for you acting like a fool!" He made his way over to me and stared me deep in the eyes without a single facial expression. All of a sudden he busted out with a loud laugh and put his arm around my head to give me a hard, passive-aggressive noogie. "That was

suppose to be my girl, you stole her from me, man,” he said as he messed up my hair. His beer breath breached my face and I pushed him off me. “Sorry. I didn’t think you’d be mad about that...” “Mad?” he asked. “Ha-ha, mad? I’m not mad, I’m proud of you man, you deserve her.” I sat down cautiously on my bed as he tossed me a beer.

We sat together silently for a quick moment, he cracked open another beer as I let out a big sigh, “You knew I’ve been trying to get with her all semester long, and you just come out of no where and woo her with your southern accent that all the girls fall for. You made me look like a fool in front of her. I thought you were my wingman. I thought you were my bro?” I could tell that he was starting to get angry about what happened. Now I could see that the alcohol was really starting to get to him. “I think you’ve had enough to drink man–” he cut me off. What did you two talk about, me? Did you talk about how much of a jerk I am, huh?” I explained to him our entire day together and how we talked about our lives back at our hometowns. He stood up, chugged the last of his beer and threw it on the ground at my feet. “I heard you’ve been talking shit about me for awhile now man, and to be honest, I’m tempted to beat your ass right now. You don’t take my girl away from me get off that easily!” he said as he stumbled toward me. “Sarah is not and was not ever your girl, Anders. I knew you were flirting with her a bunch before but I didn’t know she meant that much to you, I’m sorry. Let’s talk about this tomorrow when you’re sober,” I tried to explain. He stood right in front of my face; I did not know how to react. I didn’t want to have to fight my roommate but if he threw the first punch, I wouldn’t hesitate. Then all of a sudden Anders hurled forward and vomited all over my shoes. He ran down the hallway to the bathroom and stayed the night in there. Finally, some peace and quiet.

*Dear Grandmother,*

*I know I haven’t written back in awhile, I’ve been busy with classes and people. How are things here, you ask? Oh gee, where to begin. I have had such a crazy day and have learned a lot. Not only am I learning a lot in my classes, I’m also learning about people being here in the big city.*

*You know how I was telling you about my roommate, Anders? That guy really has some anger issues and is very rowdy. This guy is tough, I’ll tell ya’. He is 19-years old and is well on his way to becoming an alcoholic, seeing that he gets hammered every night. And might I add that he is a very angry alcoholic. Anders sure does remind me of Uncle Eddie, with*

his "I don't care" attitude and tough guy look. The both of them are always drinking, starting stuff with people, and don't know how to treat a woman right. Today during class he kept harassing this girl, Sarah and wouldn't leave the poor girl alone.

Oh and speaking of, Sarah, gosh is she gorgeous. I took her out on a date after Anders harassed her. She is one of the sweetest girls I have ever met. She's got a real nice personality, you know? She reminds me of my sister, Meg. She is beautiful, respectful, courteous, and knows how to have a good time. Sarah is so nice; she even helped me look for my wallet all around campus!

I know you've always wanted to get out and see the outside world, but to be honest; it's not all it's made out to be. The traffic is everywhere- whether you're in a car or not and the crowds of people never rest. I'd choose the countryside over suburbia any day. And the people here? Well, they're not much different from the ones we have back at home. Both of our worlds have people like Sarah and Meg, people who are respectful, courteous, kind-hearted and lovely to be around. Then we have people like Anders (or in your case) Uncle Eddie. Drunk, sour, careless people that only think about their selves.

So, what I'm trying to say is that the grass is not always greener. Bigger is not better and whether you travel 6 miles down the road, or 600 miles, people are not so different. You've always wanted to experience a life outside of our little old town, but trust me; it's not as great as it looks on our television. If I were you, I'd be content with that world you got right there in your backyard.

Write back soon

Love,

-Jessie