

Day at the Museum

by Lexie Bartell

I hate alphabetical order. My name, Alice Alborn, always puts me in the front. I have to be the first person to present projects and I easily mess up every time. When we take class pictures I'm always all the way to the side. Sometimes a teacher who thinks that they're clever will do reverse alphabetical order, leaving me all the way in the back. Worse than all that is when I'm put into groups. Norma Avarice, Darren Bauman, and Jay Beaker are the three people that I have had to deal with on every single class trip since middle school. Don't get me wrong, though. They aren't bad people, just different.

Norma Avarice is a practicing Anabaptist. In layman's terms, she's Amish. Norma lives on the outskirts of our school district in an Amish community. She grows potatoes and has a chicken coop in her backyard. Her parents drop her off at school everyday in a horse-drawn buggy. New people always ask her if she dressed up for Pilgrim Day.

Darren Bauman is huge. Not fat really, but he looks like he could be some famous person's bodyguard. He could also be a convict, depending on whether he shaved that day. When he was younger, Darren was just plain chubby, like that kid from Willie Wonka. Nowadays, he is more of a boulder. Like a humungous bowling ball, he plows down the hall at school, knocking kids down like toothpick-sized pins. It makes for a good skill when you are the star defensive lineman of the football team.

Jay Beaker is emo. The first thing people notice about him is his hair. It's purple and sticks out like some kind of weird tropical plant. Growing everywhere, it is his main facial feature. Not that you can see any other ones. He never talks, just sighs or a lazily grunts now and again. In my English class he sits in the back of the room, drawing pictures of zebras and listening to scremo music. He wears jeans that are so tight that his legs look like twigs. His dad is probably Jack Skeleton.

I'm just sort of normal. I have blonde hair (natural) and I'm on the Lincoln High Varsity Cheer Team. Go Ravens! I'm pretty smart; I get A's and the occasional B+. I really love to paint, which is why I was so excited about the trip to the art museum. That is, until I found out we were actually going to a field museum. You know, the kind with plastic dinosaurs and lots of little kids. The relaxing atmosphere I had been hoping for

had suddenly changed into a day of horror with the Fantastic Freaks from the planet Losermetia.

“Everyone!” Mrs. Ridgefield yelled as soon as we got to the museum, waving her hands, “Get with your group! Make sure you have your scavenger hunt list and camera!” We had to do a scavenger hunt and take a picture of each thing to prove we had seen it. There were only three things on the list. The teachers only wanted to make sure we saw each floor and visited its “wonders”. All four of us shuffled awkwardly together then walked into the museum.

“Oh, what is that?” Norma whispered to me. Her eyes were wide as she looked at the plesiosaurus skeleton that hung over the main entrance. The thing was ugly; I had to admit anyone could be weirded out by it.

“It’s a velociraptor, duh,” huffed Darren, rolling his eyes. What a braniac.

“Hmm mumff.” Jay muttered. It sounded disapproving.

“It’s a dinosaur skeleton and it’s also on the list. Only two more.” I answered her, ignoring Darren. I checked it off and took a picture. Click, check mark, done. The list was made up of riddles. The first one had been, “I see you come in. I used to love to swim.” Not a very hard riddle to figure out. “Okay, so the next riddle is ‘I have little wings. I rub them to sing.’” Darren sat down, rubbing his chin and raising an eyebrow like some crazy professor. I was obviously the only person taking this somewhat seriously. “I think it’s a cricket.” Jay’s eyes got big and he turned to look at me. Then he came over and pulled the riddle out of my hand.

“HM?” he stammered.

“What? What did I say?” I asked him.

“Excuse me?” asked Norma, leaning in to hear.

“Scared of bugs?” Darren laughed, slapping Jay on the back. Jay raised a withered hand and pushed him away.

“Stop it! I’m not.” Jay mumbled. We all gasped. You could have heard a pin drop from miles around. Never in the four years that we had known him had he ever said a coherent word. We looked at him, speechless.

“Wow! You spoke!” I finally said excitedly. Jay put his head down, hiding under his hair. “Hey, bugs are on the next floor, right?”

“Yup.” Darren said. So, we walked past the fake looking reptiles to the escalator. You could tell that Norma was in awe of everything. Her expressions changed with every new exhibit. Darren would just shake his head now and again, obviously bored and annoyed with Norma. Jay just crept along, his breakthrough forgotten. I tried to focus on the back of Darren’s head, to just keep moving, and to ignore the stares. We all looked so peculiar together; it was embarrassing, even more so when I could hear people whispering.

“Is that girl famous? That huge guy could be her bodyguard.”

“Ya, the pilgrim is probably in her new movie. Doesn’t she kind of look like Ashley Tisdale? Except, you know, younger.”

“Who is the guy with purple hair? He looks half dead! Is he her stalker?”

We got up to the next floor and made our way to the bugs. You had to go through the butterfly room to get to the other bugs, including the cricket that we needed a picture of. Jay’s face turned white.

“Butterflies are gentle,” I said to Jay as we walked into the room.

“A butterfly is such a dumb thing to be afraid of. If anything,” Darren said, turning, “be afraid of me!” Then he sprayed out his wings. He had gotten a pair of dress up wings from the little kids area.

“I swear you’re dumb.” I said, walking past him.

“What?” he asked innocently, looking around, hands up.

“Come here! Come on!” Norma cooed as she chased a butterfly, her hand outstretched. I laughed as a blue one landed on my arm. Darren went and sat on a log, flicking them when they got too close.

“I guess this is okay, almost fun, actually,” I thought, watching the butterfly creep up my arm. We hadn’t broken anything in the whole museum, not a single fight had we started, nothing! Then I pulled my eyebrows together in confusion. Where was Jay?

“Hm!” I heard a pathetic sound come from behind me. Jay was standing as still as a statue and had tons of butterflies on top of his head. They must have been attracted to his purple hair. His face was pale, paler than usual. Little beads of sweat had formed on his upper lip and he was taking in big, labored breaths.

“Ohmygawd!” I said. I went over to try and brush them off, but more kept landing. Jay looked like he was about to throw up. If he threw up, I was going to throw up. I was pretty much hitting his head, trying to get the bugs out. Darren looked up from the log, sighed at my frantic effort, and then walked over.

“Wait, I got it, I got it,” Darren declared, pushing me aside. From out of his pocket he grabbed a mini can of Axe. He twirled it around like a gun, then sprayed it all over the top of Jay’s head. All of the bugs that were in his hair stopped moving. Darren ruffled the hair and they fell out, plop, plop, plop. Unfortunately, more kept landing and dieing.

“Here! Take this!” Norma said. She threw her bonnet to Jay, who put it on top of his head, then ran out of the room, spindly legs hurtling out behind him. I don’t think I ever saw him run before. It was kind of funny, like if a spider would get up and run. I turned to thank Norma for the use of her bonnet.

“Norma! Your hair is so pretty!” I said. Her hair hung in ringlets down her back. It was pretty color, too, a dark brown. I wistfully twisted my limp, straw hair. With her bonnet off she looked normal, sort of.

“Not really,” she answered, and then turned to find Jay. Darren was staring after her like he was in love.

“Darren and Normaa!” I sang at him.

“Shuddup,” he mumbled and drifted after her. I went into the next room by myself, took a picture of the cricket, and then went to meet them. Jay had clamed down and, thankfully, so had Darren.

“What’s the next riddle?” asked Norma.

“I wear a war bonnet. I live in a house with paintings on it,” I said.

“Native American exhibit,” Jay figured. Again, we were aghast at his voice.

“Well then. Next floor?” I offered. We scurried along to the escalator. A kid with a huge camera around his neck was staring at Norma. Who could blame him, really? She blushed and looked away, embarrassed. Darren looked at the kid and made a vein pop out from above his eye. The kid squeaked and turned around. Jay and I snickered.

We walked over by the Native American exhibit. They had a huge display of a fake powwow with human-sized people. Every couple of minutes the whole thing would

slowly spin and powwow noises would play. There were huge “Do Not Stand On” signs everywhere.

“Alice, can I take the picture this time?” asked Darren.

“Oh sure.” I said, “I don’t care.” I tossed him the camera.

“Yes, yes dahling. That’s fabulous!” he coaxed as he took pictures of the plastic people, telling them how fierce they were.

“You aren’t Tyra Banks!” I shouted at him.

“Who is she?” Norma wondered.

“Who says I’m not?” he asked. Then he paused for a second. “Oh man, I think I jammed the button,” he said. Then he pinched the button, like he was popping a pimple. A split second later it flew into the air down onto the powwow display, right in the middle.

“Wait, I’ll get it!” Norma said as she jumped up onto the display.

“Norma, Norma, wait!” whisper-shouted Jay. “Don’t move a muscle!” He whisper-yelled as she stooped over to get the button. I followed Jay’s gaze. A security guard was walking straight for us. Just then, the powwow music started. Jay turned to Darren and me. “Just act cool, okay?” he pleaded.

I looked down and pretended to be writing on the scavenger hunt list. Jay sat down to scribble zebras in a notebook and Darren was suddenly tying his shoe. The guard walked over to the display purposely and stared at it as it turned in a circle.

“Hey!” he said, “Did you guys ever notice that there was a pilgrim in the middle of the powwow? I don’t think I ever saw it before.”

“No, its always been there.” I assured him. “The boat they came on was the Mayflower, right?” I asked, turning him away from the exhibit.

“Yup! You kids sure are smart.” He smiled, and then walked away. As soon as he was gone the whole thing stopped moving and Norma fell over. Then we all started laughing with relief.

“Norma is a pilgrim!” I laughed. She laughed and bowed as we gave her applause.

At the end of the day, when we filed onto the bus, the same guard saw Norma and did a double take. She smiled and waved. Jay showed us the picture he was drawing

when the guard came. It was a picture of four zebras. One had purple hair and was listening to an ipod. One was wearing a cheerleading skirt and had pom poms. One was beefy and was wearing a letterman's jacket. One was wearing a bonnet and an apron.

I love alphabetical order.

