

Arriving Late: Scenes from the Greatest Class I Never Saw

Edited by Bryan Fry

Washington State University

A 251 Production

Saturday Biscuits

By Renee Hall

Early that morning the weather brightened and the sun was shining between dusty blinds. Streaks of it shown through from the high window that faced our back yard. Loud footsteps pattered by in the next room, where my dad had just woken up. But I had woken up too.

I waited until he put them in the oven before I made my presence known. With an overdramatic yawn, one hand in a fist rubbing my sleepy eyes and the other stretched towards the ceiling, I began to descend the stairs putting my entire weight into each step until I was in front of the kitchen. "What are you making?" I asked.

With a smile on his face and mock groan, he washed his hands of the sticky combination of flour, sugar, butter and milk.

"I'm making breakfast" he said.

My tiny body trying to slyly peek around his large frame, I approached the kitchen drowning in one of his favorite shirts, the white custom made one with a picture of him and my mom's family at one of their reunions.

"What's for breakfast?" I asked.

"Hey! Whose shirt is that?" he asked.

You see, this was a sort of game my dad and I played. The type of game where we ask each other questions as if we don't already know the answer.

“It’s Saturday” I said. By now, I can smell their aroma wafting through the vents of the oven, melting in my mouth and coating my tongue in its buttery perfume.

He smiled at me with that big cheesy grin of his. It was a grin I can only describe as the *happy dad grin*. We both knew that I knew what was in that oven and we both knew whose shirt I was wearing and why. “It’s Saturday” he said.

I heard tiny *creaks*, multiple *be quiets* and *shushes* descending the staircase. Then two dramatic yawns peered into the kitchen.

“Go wake up your mom for breakfast you little spies” dad said.

“Are those biscuits?” my little sisters asked.

“It’s Saturday” I said.

My little sisters raced up the stairs, each tripping over the T-shirt they stole from dad’s closet.

As I helped my dad set the table I hear the annoyed groan of my mother and the joyful chant of two hungry toddlers. “It’s Saturday wake up! It’s Saturday! It’s Saturday!”

Quiet Before the Storm

By Will DeMarco

The high tree tops sway back and forth. The sound of rustling leaves fills the air. Jim quietly sits in his worn old rocking chair, watching the sky from his porch. Jim's one and only daughter, Elizabeth, sits beside him, slowly rocking back and forth. Scout, the family's black and white mutt runs around on the dirt yard in front of the porch, kicking up clouds of dust.

"Yeah, it's comin' alright," Jim says in a casual matter-of-fact tone.

"What is?" says Elizabeth.

"A storm," says Jim. "See those trees? They haven't held still for hours now, that's a sure sign. And Scout always runs around like this when one's comin'."

"Do you think it'll be bad?" Elizabeth asks.

"We'll be fine," says Jim. This happens every couple decades. I just hope the crops make it through. But if they don't, you should have a pretty easy harvest in the fall at least."

The rustling of the leaves grew louder. Elizabeth stopped rocking in her chair and let out a deep sigh.

"Dad... I know you're not gonna like this, but I don't think I'm gonna be here next fall," Elizabeth says timidly.

"What? Of course you're going to be here in the fall! You need to help your mom and I with the harvest," Jim says sounding exasperated.

"No... actually I got a scholarship today from the University of Texas and I think I'm going to accept it," Elizabeth says.

A strong gust of wind starts whistling through the trees, sending leaves flying through the air.

“Elizabeth, you... you can’t! You simply just can’t!” Jim says, his voice straining over the sound of the wind.

“I can, Dad, and I’m going to. You know I’ve always wanted to be a nurse and you know how hard I’ve been working in school. I don’t want to just be a farmer like everyone else in our family,” Elizabeth says.

The sound of the trees grows louder still. Scout stops playing and turns to the porch and begins barking, as if he’s trying to say something.

“You’re staying right here, and that’s final!” Jim says, clenching his fists. He’s yelling now, something Elizabeth has only seen him do once before. “This farm has been in the family for 150 years, Elizabeth!”

“I can’t live in our family’s shadow for the rest of my life! This is my dream and I’m not going to give up on it now!” Elizabeth quickly stands up, knocking her chair back in the process. Jim’s eyes grow big as he quickly glances from the chair back to Elizabeth. “I’m going to college whether you like it or not!”

Wind whips through the trees, small branches are torn off and fly through the air. Scout runs up on the porch and barks at Jim.

“We need to go. Get inside,” Jim says calmly.

Jim stands up and holds open the front door. Scout runs through and Elizabeth follows. Jim calmly walks inside and locks the door behind them. Elizabeth begins crying as the wind shakes the home.

Something Always Goes Wrong

By Taylor Noce

It was a boring day, a simple day. I'd just reached hour six of my Netflix binge, and I wasn't planning on moving until at least hour ten. I'd already denied going to the gym, obviously, and now I was in the process of making up an illness to get out of lunch with one of my friends. My fake migraine was just killing me.

My phone started buzzing just as a girl was shooting her friend for sleeping with that one guy, and I was not happy. Does no one understand that I cannot be bothered today? I ignored it the first time. And then the second. By the third round of incessant vibrating, I figured someone was obsessed with me. I looked at my phone and it was an unknown number, meaning I was probably going to get murdered. I've seen the movies. The killer was probably waiting outside my bedroom, ready to strike once I picked up my phone and got confused and distracted. I answered it anyways – I was bored. Maybe I needed a little excitement, like running away from a serial killer in my underwear.

“What?” I answered.

“Claire?”

“Yeah. Who's asking?”

“It's Mary.” My eyebrows furrowed, and I sat up in bed.

“Mary? Whose phone are you on?” Why didn't she have her own?

“I'm at the hospital. With Jace.”

Jace. My boyfriend who was currently not speaking to me. Apparently wanting a little space was a crime in my relationship.

“Space? You want space?” he’d yelled. “Well fucking fine, Claire. I’ll give you all the space you need.” And then he stormed out of the Starbucks. It was just awesome.

But Jace was at the hospital twice a month for physical therapy for his shoulder injury from baseball. He was on the team at our university and threw it out when he was pitching. This wasn’t any news to me.

“What’s up with his shoulder? Is he not doing his exercises at home? I tell him all the time to do them, but no, no one listens to me,” I said.

“His shoulder is fine, Claire.” She paused. “It’s not his shoulder,” she whispered. Her voice sounded tight, her nose stuffed up.

The way she spoke stopped my heart. I jumped up from my bed in my room and started pacing on the worn brown carpet, dodging the piles of clothes and books littering the floor. Something was wrong, I just knew it.

“Tell me, Mary.”

“He, well he crashed his car this morning, Claire. Oh god, he’s-” Her voice breaks, and it’s directly correlated to the crack in my heart. I know she’s crying, and hearing a mom cry is the worst sound in the world. Mothers are so strong, so resilient, especially Mary. She doesn’t cry, ever. She took breath. “He’s not waking up. They don’t know what’s wrong and he’s not waking up and-”

“I’m on my way.” I hang up the phone and toss it in my bag, grabbing my keys and jacket as I head out the door, slamming it behind me.

I halt in my tracks, and look down. “Pants, Claire. Pants.”

Cold Coffee

By Madison Jackson

That morning she woke up earlier than usual. The house was still quiet; the TV hadn't been turned on yet. She was used to her brothers fighting and screaming all day. The house seemed new, foreign and unrecognizable in its silence.

Eventually she made it to the kitchen. Her feet felt heavy; she leaned against the white wall, eyes closed. When she opened them, her mother had her back turned to her. The girl could smell the coffee before she could hear it pour into the brick yellow "Best Mother Ever" mug that her mother wouldn't let anyone else drink from.

"Hello, sweetheart," her mother said when she turned around. "What are you doing up so early?"

Her mother had this soft gentle way of speaking that instantly comforted you, made you want to sleep, but the girl needed to stay awake. "I just wanted to talk with you," the girl said. It was all she could think of saying. It felt too light—airy and artificial.

Her mother cocked her head to the left listening, intrigued. She didn't say anything, but her eyes were these pearlescent green orbs that made the girl look away, ashamed.

Silence settled between them. The girl stared at her hand, her fingertips, her nails and started picking at the paint on the wall, aiming for larger and larger chips of the fragile textured peeling.

"You spend more time with the boys than you ever do with me—why don't you want me anymore?" the girl said.

Seconds later she felt her mother's arms wrap around her shoulders, letting her continue to pick at the paint. "They just take more time than you, sweetheart. They're more high maintenance than you." Her mother started swaying her body back and forth back and forth, swinging like a breeze that could coax emotion away.

"Do you want some coffee?" her mother asked. A small nod was all the response the girl could give. After a kiss on the back of her head the girl felt her mother walk away, moving toward the cabinet for a mug. The girl walked toward the island, sat at the bar with her hands clasped, waiting. They drank their coffee together in silence, sipping the now cold coffee.

A crash, a boom, a slammed door and both women looked up at the ceiling. "You know what that means."

And so the day began.

Mahogany

By Ruby Duggan

Christmas in my household was never an enjoyable time of year. While other families were singing carols and visiting Santa, my family and I went on with our days as if they were any other. For as long as I can remember, the season would only start for us when we came home from school one day late December to discover a tree in the living room. The feeble thing would be decorated scarcely with cheap, tacky ornaments one could find in the local supermarket, and it stood wallowing lopsided in one corner of the room.

Every year, after dropping our backpacks at the front door and grimacing at the sight of our new tree, we would stare at the back of our mother's head, lying on the couch in her infamous position, waiting for an explanation that would never come. One of the particularly worst Christmases we had during my childhood was the year I decided to challenge her on the holiday nightmare.

"What is this?" I asked, gesturing to the scrawny thing.

"The tree," she replied without looking at us.

Sean, my elder brother, shaking his head 'no' was doing nothing to deter me at this point and I, losing confidence, blurted out without thought "trees are supposed to be green."

Turning to us, finally, her eyes locked with mine and I felt my body stiffen. It had been a while since I had been that close to her. Her hair, once the colour of our mahogany kitchen table was now all but silver. Her skin, which used to glow a warm golden colour, was now tinted grey and had lost its tautness from years of aggravated facial expressions. She wasn't very old, which

was evident in her still piercingly blue, sharp eyes, but her body, aged ungracefully by the stresses of her life, did little to reveal this.

“Oh yeah?” she said, “Well children are supposed to be grateful for all the work their mothers do while you run around all day doing god-knows-what with your life. It’s a tree.”

I felt Sean take a step backward behind me. My confidence was waning.

“I was only saying that maybe we could, eh, water it or maybe, em...”

I began to frantically scan the room for a subject with which to exit this conversation. Initially, I thought about complimenting the decorations, before realizing again that there were none. My body was coated with a thick layer of sweat by the time she had gotten off her throne and bent down to my eye level.

“Why don’t you paint the fucking tree if you want it to be green?” She said, all too slowly.

The calmness of her voice scared me more than if she had been shouting. Before she could do or say anything else, I ripped my eyes away from her cold stare and bolted up the stairs. I was followed closely after by Sean, wishing also to get away from the nightmare unfolding downstairs.

Sitting with me on my bed, Sean recited stories of Christmases past. He told me of happier years with Santa’s villages and candy canes and reruns of old Christmas movies on the tv, all before I was even a seed. He made funny faces and transformed into the tickle monster, and as the sky outside got darker and my eyelids heavier, he attempted to make me laugh one last time by nicknaming, in a Scottish accent, the brownish-red tree downstairs the “bleedin’ tree”, and for the rest of our Christmases, that’s what we called them.

There's No Place Like Home

By Payton Renner

It was a rather warm day in November but I was dreaming of something much colder. Snow fell before my eyes, chilling the air around me. Through the trees I could see a figure who waved at me in the distance. The figure began to walk toward me, their footsteps crunching softly through the snow.

“Sir are you okay?” I heard a woman’s voice say, her shadow blocking the sun.

“What?” I croaked, sitting up in my soggy, putrid sleeping bag. I looked around and realized I was right in the middle of a busy sidewalk. Oh, yeah, that’s right. This is how I woke up every single morning.

“Sir, I’m sorry but you can’t be here.” the woman continued, “you’re right outside our shop, and you’re concerning our customers.”

I rubbed my eyes, scraping the crust from my eyelids. I looked up at the woman, bearing the harsh light of day, and noticed that her face looks quite frightening. I shut my eyes, and buried my face in my hands.

“Please just leave me be. I’m tired, I need rest.” I said. The woman put her hands on her hips and scoffed.

“Well, you’re gonna have to go somewhere else to rest.” she said. My vision blurred as I looked around and noticed people passing in and out of a thrift shop I was right in front of.

“Where am I?” I ask, my head spinning.

“You’re outside of my damn shop, and you need to move. Now.” she replied angrily. I looked at her once again, as her face was morphing into bewildering shapes. I couldn’t remember what happened the day before, but that was usually the case. It appeared that whatever I did had put me into a bit of a psychosis.

“Yeah, yeah okay,” I said standing to my feet. Everything began to spin around me, causing me to stumble forward.

“Jesus, Bill look at this drunk bastard.” I overheard a woman say to her husband as they passed by. I stood tall and glared at them, clenching my fists. I wanted so badly to yell at that bitch, but my mouth couldn’t seem to find the words.

“Sir, please go. Now.” The woman said, still standing with her hands on her hips.

“I am.” I grunted, picking up my sleeping bag; a demeaning representation of a home. I tossed the sleeping bag over my shoulder and began to walk down the street, my head pounding with what seemed to be the world’s worst hang over.

“Sir don’t forget your trash.” the woman said kicking a small paper sack toward me. She scoffed and walked back into her precious shop with the upmost alacrity. I snatched up the paper bag and rolled my eyes as I began walking away. Not remembering what the bag contained, I unrolled the crinkled top, and reached inside. My hands met with a small, plastic bag, which I quickly pulled out. Inside were three crack rocks. I looked at them in awe, as my eyes followed the beautiful white ripples that cascaded down each rock like trails of snow. I smiled with squinted eyes from the sun’s brightness, as I observed my amazing discovery. As the sun grew uncomfortably hot, I realized I didn’t care. For in this wonderful moment, there was snow falling all around me.

Chicken Breast

By Chelsea Harkins

He walks through the door and he makes his way to the hostess table where Meghan is working tonight. She greets him the way she greets all the old pricks who dine here, politely and without judgment; she remains professional, though they never make eye contact and choose to stare at her very large breasts on her very petite frame. I watch and groan under my breath as she leads him to his table, which, of course, happens to ^{be} me in my section.

I slowly grab my note pad and pen out of my back pocket, never once taking my gaze off of the man. He's old, maybe about sixty-five years old, with ^{what} which looks like a freshly laid brunette toupee on his head. He's got money I think to myself. He has to. I take a deep breath and step towards his table.

"Good afternoon sir, my name is Kaitlyn and I'll be your server today. Can I start you off with a drink or an appetizer? Maybe a water?"

He looks up from the menu and I stand there motionless as I watch him eye me up and down, starting from my scuffed up converse, to my slightly too short jean-skirt then resting several seconds on my breasts, until resting on my face. He smiles at me, revealing some cracked and yellowing teeth.

"Hello there sweet heart," he says, "I would love a tall glass of you if that could be arranged." He winks at me before flashing me his haggard toothed smile once more. I blink slowly refusing my urge to gag.

"I'm sorry sir," I say, "but that is not on the menu this evening. Perhaps you would be interested in one of our specials instead?"

I watch him as he looks over the menu once more. I take a deep breath in reminding myself that I'm off in twenty minutes; after that he's ^{somebody's} somebody else's problem.

"Hmm-hmm-hmm, I'm ready to order now sweet heart," he says to my breasts.

"Okay, Great," I say, "what will it be?"

He tears his gaze off my breasts briefly and says, "I'll take the Smokey chicken breast with mash potatoes, but do me a favor and hold the chicken."

I write it down, keeping my eyes on the pen and paper. "Coming right up sir," I say flashing him my best smile. I turn around and pretend that I don't hear his hoots and hollers about my ass as I walk away and head straight for the kitchen.

"Hey Moe!" I yell, "Make sure this guy gets an extra side of a loogie would-ya?"

Moe smiles, "Coming right up!"

The Gray Man

By Savannah Jarrett

Up to her waist in a sea of white tablecloths and gleaming silver cutlery, walled in by dark wood and dark suits, Chloe fidgeted in her seat. The chandeliers hung low and the clinking of glasses assaulted her ears. The waiter, with black hair slicked like crows' feathers, arrived at their table and efficiently poured rich, deep red wine into two glasses before moving on to the next table.

"So," Chloe began, forming a tee-pee with her hands and resting her chin atop her fingertips, "what do you *do*, exactly?"

"What do I do?" her date asked, his voice deep.

Chloe giggled nervously and set down her glass, only to start fiddling with the once crisp, now wrinkled napkin. "Haha I know right? *What do I do?* That could mean anything really." She laughed again and said "I mean, what do you do for a job?"

"Yes, I understand," replied the man sitting across from her at the table. "Well, it's hard to define, but it is freelance work."

"Ooooh," Chloe said. "Like a writer?"

"Ah, no, not quiet."

Her date's online profile didn't have much, only two pictures and the name 'The Gray Man'. Initially, that worried Chloe, but this man was damn fine. He was tall and beautiful with close-cropped hair and a pleasing accent. Aside from his eerie stillness and canine smile, his face and figure were of near model-like quality. Even his nose, which looked like it had been broken a few times, was far above average.

“Are you, like... a photographer? I can’t think of many freelance jobs off the top of my head.” Another giggle, then a subsequent hair flip and considerable sip of wine. Chloe felt somewhat confident now, with this artsy photographer and more Cabernet Sauvignon in her body. Sure, he was kind of scary—Chloe couldn’t imagine the Gray Man over for dinner at her parent’s house, stiff in his seat like a statue, all dark shadows and wide shoulders, asking her mother to please pass the mashed potatoes. But if he was just a creative, artistic soul, *that’s* what she was looking for—a good, kind, extremely attractive man.

“No, not like a photographer,” he said. “My job is not the most typical.”

He paused briefly, eyebrows drawn together in concentration. “You know how, when your computer catches a virus, you bring it to the manufacturer to be fixed? A tech intern will take the computer and weave through the hard-drive, killing the bugs one by one?”

“Yes...,” Chloe said, drawing out the word and praying her date wasn’t some computer nerd.

“Well, I am like that tech intern.”

Internally, Chloe cursed.

“Except with people.”

Chloe’s face was dominated by a frown, annoyed by yet another computer geek. It took several moments for the Gray Man’s words to catch up to her. “Wait—what?”

“I am a freelance assassin, essentially,” the gorgeous man across the table replied, lifting his knife. “I’m hired by various prestigious employers, globally, to weave through life and kill people, one by one by one.”

The Gray Man flashed his white, wolf-like smile before slicing into his rare steak with surgical precision, and Chloe, speechless, watched the bright red blood pooling across the plate.