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## Angus: A Collection of Short Stories

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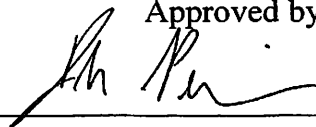
ANGUS: A COLLCECTION OF SHORT STORIES

by  
Sara Kate Hyde

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford  
May 2011

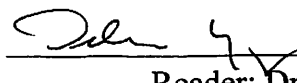
Approved by



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Reader: Professor Robert Rea



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## ABSTRACT

SARA KATE HYDE: *Angus: A Collection of Short Stories*

(Under the direction of Jack Pendarvis)

This thesis is a collection of short stories about the everyday life of the main character, Angus. Each story takes place on a different day of the week, making seven adventures in all. From attending church to getting a haircut, each day of the week offers an individual scene from ordinary life—something all readers can relate to. As the collection and the week progress, Angus' character grows more complex and he begins to feel like a friend, not a character.

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## Sundays

The first thing that began to ache was Angus' back. The pain always started like this. A dull ache in his lower back led to a not-so-dull pain which soon found its way into his legs, making the hard pew even more uncomfortable. Finally, the pain would go up into his head contributing to a headache caused partially by his back pain, the sunlight streaming in the windows, and the monotone voice of the preacher. Angus' legs, back, and head hurt if he even thought about church. Yet Angus was there every Sunday whether it was too cold, too hot, too crowded, if there was a guest speaker, or if he was still practically asleep. One Sunday he even went with a temperature. Today he went although pig season, one of Angus' favorite pastimes, had just begun.

"Good Morning," the preacher recited.

"Good Morning," the whole crowd answered with equal enthusiasm.

"Please stand for hymn #473, "Victory in Jesus". Angus groaned a little to himself. He no longer needed a hymnal; he could remember the look of each page in his mind's eye. This hymn took up a page and a half with three full verses and an extra-long chorus. On top of that, the regular pianist was sick today and the replacement was Dorothy, the pastor's daughter. Dorothy wasn't a terrible pianist but she lacked confidence and as a result played the hymns very slowly, to ensure she wouldn't miss any notes. This meant that what was normally a three minute and forty five second song would now be a full six minute commitment.

*"He made the lame to walk again and he caused the blind to see,"* Angus always had the urge to say "Peekaboo" at the end of this line. He had heard that at church camp once, when he was a boy, and it had always stuck. He restrained himself, as always, and continued singing with the rest of the congregation.

After a five minute and forty second rendition of "Victory in Jesus," a personal best for Dorothy, the pastor spoke again. The preacher was a younger man, only in his early forties.

The last preacher had been eighty-nine when he died. In fact, Brother Robert died in church. Angus had been tempted to skip that day on account of having had just bought his first computer. Although the act of dragging himself to Best Buy and navigating the cheery blue associates was an ordeal itself, he was mostly tired from playing solitaire on the desktop until 3am. The next morning, after dragging himself out of bed, feeding the Domino, carrying himself to his truck, and into the little country church, Angus found himself nodding off during the very first hymn. He had managed to keep his eyes open through the announcements and the second hymn by focusing on the back of Brother Robert's head on the front row—his bald spot. All of a sudden, Brother Robert fell over in his seat. There was some mayhem in the front row as no one was sure what had happened. The pianist was completely oblivious and continued to pound out "I'll Fly Away" (Hymn #554), adding to the confusion. Eventually Angus was told Brother Robert had had a stroke.

The young preacher made the first announcement. Apparently the church was in desperate need of volunteers. This announcement was weekly. Angus could've made it himself.

“Please prayerfully consider giving your time to the Lord this summer. There are so many needs in our church. If you could spare time to help with Vacation Bible School next month, it would be a blessing. We also have a real need for Sunday School teachers for our children’s classes. If you are interested in other ways you can serve the church, please feel free to speak to me or any of the deacons at any time.” The preacher had come from some big-city church and was not used to having to do so much of the church work himself. Every pastor and his family the church had ever had were required by necessity to do most of whatever needed done: preaching, visiting, Bible studies, Vacation Bible School, playing the piano, and teaching Sunday school.

Just as the preacher launched into his next announcement, an update about Mr. Bradford’s bout with flu, Angus became aware that his headache was being irritated by a new factor. There was a glint coming from the middle right of the pews, across the aisle. He turned his head just in time to see old Mrs. Brubaker tip up her flask and then put it back in its Bible case. He looked back up at the preacher, disappointed that the glare hadn’t come from something more entertaining. The widow brought her flask every Sunday, although she was usually able to make it through to the beginning of the sermon before her first swig. Mrs. Brubaker had claimed for years that she needed cough syrup close at hand. Since none of the congregation was foolish enough to believe a woman could need a syrup for no symptoms after so many years, everyone assumed that the widow’s joyful Christian spirit was not entirely spiritual.

Hymn #435, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”, was the next selection. Dorothy must have been practicing this one, because she shaved three seconds off the regular pianist’s time of one minute and forty one seconds. Angus felt as though he’d gotten an

extra three seconds of life back. It didn't really matter though. He would not get out of church any earlier and had nothing afterward to get to any quicker. In fact, he was in his late 60s now and couldn't remember why he went to church. When he was small he went because his parents made him. When he was in his early twenties he went hoping God would keep him from being drafted. When he was in his thirties, forties, and fifties, he went because it was one less fight with his wife. But now, now that he was in his sixties and his wife was gone, he had no idea why he went.

Angus got to his feet as he heard the cue from Dorothy. Hymn #282, "The Family of God," was always the third hymn, played right before the sermon. Everyone stayed in their spots through the chorus but after that the congregation moved around the small building greeting each other, dodging pews and people they didn't want to talk to. Angus had personally always viewed it as a final stretch of his legs before settling down for a long, convoluted sermon.

Angus looked two pews in front and slightly to his left for the short blonde who usually sat there. Angus had greeted Miss Eunavie almost every Sunday for the last thirty years. Due to her stature, he always looked for the top of her hair. This often proved difficult since her hair style often changed. When she first began attending services she had been much easier to spot with wild brown curls. Over the years her hair progressively got shorter and blonder making it a more challenging task to deliver his customary grunt.

Dorothy apparently forgot that some people needed more than twenty five seconds (the length of the song with repeating) to socialize and quit playing, leaving the congregation awkwardly scrambling to get back to their seats. Angus, having given his one greeting, was able to return to the still warm part of his pew without any embarrassment or



uncomfortable moments. The preacher however, was caught at the back of the aisle talking to Mr. Wilkinson who was a little deaf. When the preacher finally managed to extricate himself, he was forced to walk up the center aisle, under the eye of every already seated parishioner, to the pulpit. Noticeably flustered, he began,

“Open your Bibles to Matthew five.” Angus picked up his old Bible, worn from being carried to church, not necessarily being read. He believed that a person should always bring the book to church. One never knew when one might need it. Most Sundays there were usually enough things happening to interest him. That is, if he could just make it through the few opening minutes in which the preacher attempted to grab their interest with an ironic or thoughtfully humorous story. These were never very entertaining to Angus, so he spent this time counting the bricks in the wall behind the pulpit. He had counted them many times, but occasionally his numbers didn’t match the correct answer which he had decided was seven hundred and forty one. Angus tried to keep things interesting by counting them in vertical rows one week and horizontal rows the next. If he was feeling particularly adventurous, he would count them at a diagonal. That was usually reserved for days when the preacher discussed Revelation which Angus found to be too depressing and too disturbing to listen to.

Dorothy was leaning listlessly on the piano now. The preacher most often tried to give sermons on service (to drum up a few guilty felling church members to volunteer) or on salvation. To be fair, the sermons were occasionally interesting. Once, for instance, the preacher began his sermon with an anecdote concerning a recently married couple in the church whom he had, had dinner with. While telling the story, he remarked how kind it had been for Tom and Carrie to invite him to dinner. Unfortunately, Carrie was the name of

Tom's ex-wife, not his current wife. Although the preacher continued, oblivious to his blunder, everyone else caught it, including Tom and Casey who were in church that Sunday. There was nervous twittering around the whole room and hushed voices responded in indignant shock. Tom and Casey hadn't come regularly since the incident, and Miss Eunavie was convinced they were looking for another church.

Angus' Bible lay open in his lap and he glimpsed the exact passage that the preacher was saying out loud.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." The preacher had recently been doing a series on the Beatitudes. Today, he was discussing the importance of getting along with others. Just as he began to drone on about the subject, there was a commotion outside. Not everyone noticed it, but Angus did, since, due to the unseasonably warm weather, many of the small upper windows had been opened to catch the breeze. The preacher continued. Angus strained his ears to hear what was going on outside as the noise grew louder and louder. The preacher raised his voice to try to recapture his audience's attention, as many of them were beginning to look toward the windows in amusement.

Still unable to distinguish the sounds, Angus craned his neck to see through the windows on the opposite side of the church. Now he could tell there was something running on the gravel outside as well as some cursing. Now everyone was looking towards the window. Finally, Angus glimpsed a wild pig coming into the gravel parking outside from the woods. The pig was closely followed by an individual dressed in camouflaged coveralls, sporting what looked to be a high powered rifle. The preacher was now almost shouting in his attempt to regain the congregation's focus, but Angus barely heard him.

He saw the covered man chase the pig around the corner of the church. Listening to the sounds from the open window, it seemed as though the man was chasing the pig around the building. The man's third time around the building, Angus recognized him as Mr. Bradford, apparently divinely healed from his flu. The members watched in shock as Mr. Bradford, finally having cornered the pig between a member's car and the church's wall, took careful aim. There was a loud crack as he pulled the trigger, but his aim had not been careful enough and the pig took the opportunity to run. Mr. Bradford's shot had not gone without a target, however, and one of the glass windows of the church shattered, spraying glass shards over the congregation. Startled, Dorothy fell hard against the piano and Angus jumped. More startled than Angus, however, was the preacher who hit the floor as soon as the shot was fired, and hadn't moved since. At the clatter of the piano, the congregation woke from their shock. As murmuring spread throughout the room, Mrs. Brubaker, her Bible case in hand, and a few others started down the aisle, toward the pulpit and the downed preacher with hopes of reviving him. As the sanctuary grew louder and louder, Angus looked at his wrist watch. Although it was only 10:37, Angus was satisfied that the service was probably over for the day. He picked up his Bible and headed for his truck.

## Mondays

11:43. Angus hurried out of his truck. He always like say hello to the greeter at the door and the greeters went to lunch at 11:45, the replacement not coming until noon. He hurried across the parking lot and into the sliding doors. Once he got through the first set of doors, Angus always paused before the second set. He would stand there, just out of the sight of the electric eye and then step forward, letting the doors slide open slowly. He always felt that here should be some kind of music that would play; something that would build slowly until the doors were completely open and you could see the rows of stuff, stacked from floor to ceiling. Finally, Angus stepped through the doors and towards the greeter.

“Hello Edna!” Angus said politely, squinting at her name card.

“Hello sir. Welcome to Sam’s club. May I see your Sam’s card?” Edna answered, glancing at her watch. Angus was ready for her, his card already out.

“Have a great day!” Angus said as he walked away after she nodded approval at his card.

Angus loved Mondays. Specifically, he loved the third Monday of the month because those Mondays were his shopping days. Every third Monday he would wake up early, milk Domino as usual, and then climb in his truck. Angus would then drive an hour and a half to Sam’s club in the next town over with his list of needed items that he had put together over the previous month. Today he had an especially long list as he had not been able to come

last month because of a special midnight showing of Star Wars Episode VI, his favorite movie.

He moved toward the few carts the associates put right inside the door. The cart process was always annoying. Since he would be shopping for a while, it was important to have a good cart. He pulled out his first cart and immediately pushed it to the side as one of the wheels was locked. The next cart was not any better as the wheel squeaked loudly. The third cart came toward him easily and quietly as he pulled, but Angus noticed a bright pink spot of wet gum on the handle. Out of options, Angus pushed it back and opted for the squeaky cart.

Angus glanced at his list. There were forty seven items on his list. Angus glanced at his watch and noted the time 12:46, writing his start time in the top right corner of the list. Every month he kept track of his time, as he had been trying to determine his average shopping time per item over the last six months. He still hadn't decided how he would handle this month in his computations since he had extra items to buy and had missed last month. He pushed the squeaky cart towards the aisles and checked his list.

Aisle One: White bread, Wheat bread.

Angus used to alphabetize his shopping lists, but he found this was slowing him down as he often had to retrace his steps for items further down on the list that he had missed on previous aisles. Once, he was so sore from all of the walking that afterwards, he sat on his front porch and didn't move until evening. The day after that, even though it was Wednesday, he drove back to Sam's Club and spent a couple hours with a notebook and pencil, writing down the general category of the items on each aisle. Angus went home and spent some more time figuring out Microsoft Office. He typed up the list aisle by aisle and

then put it in Lucida Handwriting 8 point font so it would look like he'd written it in pen himself.

Angus picked up the white bread and put it in the cart. He liked Sunbeam best because the packaging was yellow. Wheat bread, however, Angus didn't like, but felt like he should eat it because everyone else seemed so adamant that it was good for you. Whenever he made a sandwich, Angus would use one slice of white bread and one slice of wheat to make the two sides. When he actually ate it, then he put the wheat on top so that the white side, the good side, was what he actually tasted. Angus grabbed the most expensive wheat bread he could find (Nature's Own Stone Ground) because he figured that more money meant more nutrients.

Aisle Two: Potatoes, Baby Carrots, Celery, Tomatoes, Green Onions, Asparagus, Lettuce.

Angus liked buying vegetables a lot and looked forward to it. He would weigh each item so that he had exactly a pound of everything. It was a game to see if he could guess the quantity of vegetables it took to get the scale's red needle exactly at a pound. Angus was actually getting pretty good at it too. One bag of his favorite brand of baby carrots were right around a pound, but Angus knew that it took somewhere around forty five baby carrots to make a pound. It only took seven regular carrots to make a pound. The only exception to Angus' pound rule was potatoes. Not only were they very heavy, some of them weighing over a pound on their own, but they were one of Angus' favorite foods and he did not want to be limited in the number of them that he could buy. Today, he bought fifteen potatoes. Angus moved on to the next aisle.

Aisle Three: Pineapple, Apples, Oranges, Bananas.

The squeaking of the wheels of the cart was beginning to bother him.

Aisle Four: Ground chuck, Steak, Ham, Salami

The meat department was more a section, not an aisle, but Angus like his list looking neat and all the sentence to begin with the same word. This section always took him the longest when he figured his time. Not only did he want to look at every package of ground chuck before deciding which to buy, but the people behind the lunch meat counter always took forever to slice his ham and salami. He always, of course, asked for a pound. The meat people, afraid to over estimate the amount, always weighed after what seemed like each new slice, slice by slice, until they reached a pound. Although Angus appreciated their accuracy, it took forever. Then again, Angus had no where to be after this anyway.

Angus saw that there were six sample people in the meat section today, two more than usual. Glancing at his watch, Angus knew that today's time could kill his average. This was the other reason that the meat department slowed him down: the free sample people. Although not as aggressive as the free sample people in the frozen foods aisles, he still tried to spend an equal amount of time with each sample, so nobody felt left out. Suddenly, an idea came to Angus. He could put in his lunchmeat order and then visit all the free sample people, making his wait time more efficient.

"Hello Han!" Angus said, reading the woman's name card as he approached the lunchmeat counter.

The woman, raising her eyebrows, pushed her red and grey hair over her shoulder.

"Oh, sorry. Hannah, could I please have one pound of ham and one pound of salami?"

"Sure. Which ham?"

Angus pointed. "I'll be right back to pick it up."

"kay."

Angus walked toward the sample person furthest to the left. Like most sample people, she was wearing an orange visor and looked at least sixty.

"Hello Glenda! How are you today?"

The woman acted oblivious to the fact that he knew her name.

"Hello, would you like to try a free sample of Jimmy Dean breakfast sausage?"

"Of course! That looks delicious!" Angus took the toothpick from her and had a bite.

It was a bit spicy for his taste, but he swallowed it fast.

"You like it? You can buy it for only \$3.49 today. It's a great deal and so tasty!"

"No thanks, Glenda," Angus coughed and tried to smile. He pushed his cart to the next one. A toaster strudel, two kinds of bacon, and a frozen green bean later, Angus arrived at the last sample person.

"Hello Betty!"

"Well hello! Would you like to try a free sample of Swiss cheese?"

Angus wanted to like Swiss cheese. He always had because it was a nifty cheese with all those holes in it. He thought Betty seemed very nice and he didn't want to hurt her feeling by not taking the cheese after she'd cut it up into tiny pieces and put it on sticks.

"Sure."

She handed him the cheese and he pushed his cart towards the meat counter, sticking the cheese and the stick in the little corner of the cart when she wasn't looking. He wheeled back to the meat counter and Hannah nodded her head in the direction of Angus'



plastic bags of ham and salami. Putting them close to the toothpick cheese so no one else would notice that he didn't eat it, Angus continued to the next aisle.

Aisle Five: Milk (organic), Butter, Cookie dough, Yogurt, Eggs.

Angus wondered if the squeaking was getting louder.

Aisle Six: Pizza rolls, Pizza pockets, Sara lee rolls.

Six was the beginning of the frozen aisles. There were three frozen aisles altogether. It was for these aisles that Angus always brought his jacket inside with him, no matter how hot it was outside. It would always take him a few minutes to read the nutritional information and the description of the product on the back of an item, so he would have to stand there, freezer door open and something frozen in his hands. To make matters worse, kids would always run up and down the aisles and open and close the doors so that they could draw pictures on the door in the condensation. Needless to say, after a few doors, this made it very cold on the aisle.

Aisle Seven: Butter Pecan ice cream, Fudgecicles, Ice cream sandwiches.

Today was no different. Even as he had rounded the corner of Aisle Seven, Angus saw two doors on aisle bang shut and a kid blur run back around the corner. He felt the wave of cold air hit him, so, after gathering his items, he decided to take action. He put his cart to the side and began to open the freezer doors all the way down the aisle. As he opened each one, he wrote the word "Poison". After a while, he tried just drawing a monster with a jagged mouth and big eyes but it ended up looking like a rock. Satisfied that he had helped solve a problem, Angus went back to his cart and moved to the next aisle.

Aisle Eight: Pie crusts, Whipped cream.

It was around this time that the squeaky wheel really began to get on Angus' nerves. He was still too many aisles from the front for it to make sense for him to go switch carts.

Aisle Nine: Sugar, Flour, Vegetable oil.

He saw a seemingly abandoned cart ahead, right in front of the baking powder. There was only one package of chocolate chips and a grocery list lying inside. Instantly, Angus made his decision and pulled up beside the cart. As quickly as he could he moved all his items, including the toothpicked cheese, into the new cart and put the chocolate chips and list back in his old cart, in a position as close as he could get it to the way it was. He looked around; no one had seen him do it. He began to push the cart down the aisle and picked up his last few items on the way. This cart was perfect.

As he began to round the corner, he almost ran into a woman on her cell phone heading down the aisle. He paused and pretended to look at the display of bulk crackers on sale at the end of the aisle. Sure enough, the woman stopped at the cart and began to push it. Angus rounded the corner but could still hear the squeaking from there.

Aisle Ten: Baked beans, Lima beans, green beans, corn, asparagus.

Angus went down this aisle to avoid suspicion, but as soon as he had gathered his items he decided to get out of the aisles for a little while in case the woman on the cell phone figured out what had happened. He headed toward the middle of the store, towards books and games. He figured a woman here for chocolate chips wouldn't look in the books and games section.

Angus picked up a book and pretended to read it, glancing over it looking for the woman. He turned a few more of the children's cardboard book pages and then began to put the book to the shelf, but, just as he did, he heard the squeaking and looked towards the aisles just in

time to see her round the corner of Aisle Ten. He had made the right choice going to the middle. He picked up another book, about chicken soup, to hide his face. When he was finally sure that she was gone, he returned the book, pulled his cart behind him and tried to back further into the section. Soon, he was out of the books and into games. She seemed to be gone, but then, for a moment, he thought he heard the squeaking again. He picked up the game right in front of him and pretended to study the back of it. Sure that she was watching him from the corner of an aisle somewhere, Angus kept the game in front of his face. He was afraid to look.

After a moment, his eyes began to follow the print on the back of the game. This game had solitaire just like his computer at home as well as several other versions of it. Angus reread the back. This game worked on a computer. He put that game down and picked up another. This game was a “gem-swapping puzzler!” The next he picked up was “addictive fun test of your vocabulary and ability to spot patterns!” Angus picked up every single game and read the back. Finally, he picked up a game that would let him “help Lex spell words and vanquish villains in the hit spelling game”. Angus liked the sound of this one. He liked spelling. He looked at the price. Only \$9.82!

Suddenly, Angus heard the squeaking and it got louder by the minute. He froze. Then he saw her, coming down into the books and games section. She was talking loudly on her cellphone.

“A computer game? What game do you want?” She paused. “Well you have to tell me, Eric! Okay, fine, I’ll just pick something.”

Angus put his head down and started to replace the game so he could get away with his cart. As he searched for the spot the game came from, he realized that this was the last

copy. The cell phone woman approached, having moved on to a new subject. Angus hesitated. He hadn't had time to think about whether to buy this game yet, but he knew if he put it down she would take it. Abandoning his cart, Angus walked away quickly, game in hand. He strode away and reached the opposite set of aisles, the nonfood aisles.

Aisle Twenty Seven.

He found himself in small appliances. He saw a red Kenmore microwave and decided to hide the game there. Just as got close, however, an associate started down the aisle.

"Can I help you with a microwave, sir?"

"No thank you, Eddie. Just looking."

Aisle Twenty Eight.

Angus moved on to the next aisle (washers and dryers). There were already two associates on that aisle so he turned around and headed to the next aisle.

Aisle Twenty Nine.

Vacuums. And four other customers.

Aisle Thirty.

Screen doors and no hiding places.

Aisle Thirty One.

There was no one on the aisle as Angus began to walk down it. There were tub inserts lining the aisle on both sides. Angus thought tub inserts looked like a nice place to sit and he liked that the store had put lights over them so they looked very inviting. He decided that standing inside the insert would be like standing inside a domino with all the smooth white edges and he thought about sitting in one. Then, Angus saw it. There was a big, orange scissor lift at the end of the aisle. Angus had to use one once for a job he'd had and

he had always like being up in the air looking down at everything small. Angus looked for a place among the tub inserts where he could set the game until he could decide whether or not to buy it. Four giant shelves up, there was one space in between two tub inserts, high above him. He around and saw no associates or other customers walking by. Angus hurried down the aisle to the scissor lift and carefully climbed over the orange railing, onto the platform. Finding the controls, Angus slowly raised the scissor lift a few feet off the ground, not looking down. Gathering courage, he continued to raise the scissor lift until he was at least twenty feet off the ground. He then maneuvered the lift closer to the stacked tub inserts, searching for the space he had noticed between the inserts. Finding it, Angus put the game on its side in the space, right next to one of the insert boxes. Deciding it was positioned so that no one could find it, he lowered the scissor lift back to the ground. Angus climbed out just in time, before Eddie rounded the corner. Eddie gave him a strange look as he walked by but Angus pretended not to notice. He peeked around the corner of the aisle, looking at the book and game area. His cart was still in the middle of the aisle and he could see the cell phone woman squeaking towards the meat department. He knew she'd been tied up there for a while and that this would be the best time to escape.

Back at his cart, Angus inspected it all of his items were there and even the cheese and toothpick had not been moved. He headed toward the checkout line and picked what he thought was the shortest line. As he waited, he glanced over his shoulder once or twice, ensuring that the cell phone woman didn't change her mind about the meat. Or maybe she'd get caught by the samples people. He picked up his cheese on a stick and examined it. It looked the same, but Angus decided he'd give it one more try. He pulled the Swiss cheese off the stick and put it in his mouth.

## Tuesdays

6:57 am.

Angus sat silently at the table with another lady, Susan. He'd been preparing for today. He'd had to go to special meetings and training sessions. He'd even studied his big black binder of poll place rules every night.

6:58 am.

Susan began to tap the eraser of her pencil rapidly against the table.

6:59 am.

She tapped even faster. Angus considered taking the pencil away.

7:00 am.

Susan got up and unlocked the front door, letting in the one man who'd been waiting at the door for the last thirty minutes. He wore a giant orange ZISTER sticker on his T-shirt. Angus wasn't entirely sure he was allowed in here with any campaign material. He began to consult his binder.

"Hello, John Henry," Susan greeted him.

"Hello Susan! What's with opening an hour late?"

"We don't open 'til 7am every election day. You know that."

"Well, last week somebody told me it would 6am. I told everyone to be here at 6 am. I might as well not even vote now!" John Henry began to pace.

Angus found the rule (page 43) and stood up.

“Sir, will you please remove your sticker? It’s against the law to have campaign material within 100 feet of a polling place.”

John Henry stopped pacing.

“But how will people know who to vote for? I’m a freethinker! The big parties are working against me. They don’t want us little candidates to succeed!” John Henry began to raise his voice.

“Oh c’mon Angus,” Susan looked at him. “One sticker won’t hurt anything. Besides, no one else is here anyway. John Henry, I need your identification, please.”

Angus remembered John Henry from school, even though John Henry had been a lot older. Unfortunately, he had gone off the deep end while he was overseas and when he returned, he devoted his time to his forms of activism, living off a trust fund his father established for him when it became evident that John Henry couldn’t hold a job. It was now quite normal to see him in a wedding dress or camped out in a lawn chair, protesting something.

“Well, I guess I’ll vote now!” John Henry walked into a voting booth.

The Susan smiled encouragingly at John Henry as he walked away. Then she turned to Angus and whispered loudly,

“Angus! You know he means well! Just let him have his sticker.”

Angus said nothing and pretended to be engrossed in the government seal on the front of the black binder. John Henry came back out.

“I voted! Some of the crazies are definitely running this year though. Where’s my ‘I voted’ sticker?”

“Here you go, John Henry.” The Susan handed him the sticker.

Angus hated those ‘I voted’ stickers. They were a good idea but the government would never even buy stickers that were sticky enough on the back. He figured that they got what they deserved when the government had to pay the city workers to scrape all those stickers off the sidewalk a month later.

John Henry walked out the door. The Susan wouldn’t look at him.

8:35 am.

The next voter walked in the door.

“Hello Mrs. Stevens!” The Susan jumped up. “How have you been? I feel like I haven’t seen you in so long!”

“Well, it’s probably been since last election, Judy! How are those grandkids?”

“They are just too perfect! Want to see a picture?”

She did.

8:57am.

“Well, I guess I had better vote now,” Mrs. Stevens laughed. “Are these new curtains?”

Angus had wondered how long it would be before someone commented on the curtains. All the times he had come to vote, there had been red, white, and blue striped fabric to serve as the entrance to each voting machine. Over the years, the curtain had been become pink, yellow, and blue striped as it faded. This year, however, there were new curtains that were red gingham with a big blue lace ruffle at the bottom. He thought they were stupid looking.



“Yes they are and I made them.”

“Oh! I thought I recognized your kitchen curtain material!”

“Well actually, they are my kitchen curtains! I took those old curtains, washed them really good, and they looked as good as new! And they really matched my kitchen so much better than these anyway. It really worked out.”

Mrs. Stevens voted and got her sticker. Angus watched it fall and stick to the welcome mat as she left. He’d probably have to scrape that one up.

9:45 am.

A six foot Doberman walked through the door in an orange ZISTER t shirt. There were fangs around the word ZISTER.

“John Henry?” The Susan spoke.

“Hey! I was just going to stand over here in this corner and remind people to vote for me for dog catcher. Like my costume?” John Henry turned in circle, shaking his stump-tail.

“Well, John Henry I guess that would be okay for a minute. Now where did you find that outfit?”

“I bought it online from a mascot store. I was going to get a basset hound costume but it was a hundred dollars more and I wanted to remind people that I’ll be a tough dogcatcher, not a sad one.

Angus finally remember to shut his mouth. He wondered if there was some sort of hotline to report this type of activity. He wished he had his computer to look it up. Or

to play solitaire. Or to stare at the background picture on his desktop of his cow, Domino, in a field. He was so bored.

Thankfully, after a few minutes John Henry got bored too and left to “trot along the streets and remind people to vote”. Angus was glad to see him go.

10:37 am.

“Do you want a magazine? I have *Redbook* and *Family Fun*. Either of those sound good to you?”

“I’m okay, thank you.”

“I really think you would enjoy the article on ornament making on page 24. Their ideas are so original! Here!”

Angus took the *Family Fun* and sat it on the table.

“Thanks.”

“No problem! I just found a really good soup recipe. I might have to go make that later.”

Not wanting to be rude, Angus opened the magazine to page 24. There were lots of pictures of women and children laughing and hanging ornaments on Christmas trees. He, unfortunately, had no desire to read about how to make ornaments out of noodles, gumdrops, yarn, clay, or old envelopes. He turned the page. Page 25 had a macaroni ad with more laughing people. Page 26 was an ad for shampoo. Page 27-31 was an article about the reality of elementary school bullies. Page 32, however, had a list of old toys making a comeback this year. Angus read through the list and mentally noted that Lincoln Logs were being sold again. He still had his original one on a shelf at home, but

was afraid he would break them if he played with them anymore. He definitely needed a new one. And according to the list, Amazon had them for \$29.96 which Angus thought was expensive.

11:57 am.

Angus had just discovered a how-to origami section on page 72. He had always wanted to make a swan. Susan spoke,

“I just finished reading a section on secrets to the perfect marriage. They have no idea what they are talking about is all I have to say!”

Angus nodded.

“That just gets me when people write things and they have no idea what they are talking about. I mean, I should get to tell people how to have a good marriage because I’ve had more than her!”

Angus nodded again.

12:35 pm.

A man with the head of Doberman walked in the door, wearing a sweaty white t-shirt and jeans covered in ZISTER stickers. There were even a few stickers on his shoes. Angus looked up from his origami article and tried to count them, but quit at twenty-two stickers.

“What happened to the rest of your costume?” Susan asked John Henry.

“It got really hot. But I kept the head on because I still want to advertise for dog catcher, you know?”

“I see. Do you want to sit down?”

Angus clenched his teeth and looked back down at his magazine.

“Sure. Do you want a sticker?”

“Not today, John Henry, but thank you!”

4:01 pm.

“I think I’m going to go try that soup recipe right now.” Susan waived a Wal Mart receipt with writing on the back.

“Right now?” Angus asked, doubtfully. He looked over at John Henry who had fallen asleep in chair, the Doberman head at his feet.

“Around now is always the slow time. Don’t worry. Rachel Ray says it’s a fifteen minute recipe. I’ll be back really soon!”

4:03 pm.

Somehow, Angus was even more bored now than two minutes ago. He again tried counting the stickers on John Henry across the room. Then he counted the panels on the wall behind John Henry. Then the ceiling tiles over John Henry. He sighed. He looked at his magazine again. Angus had read all articles and all the helpful tips in the corners of the pages. He’d even read all the fine print at the bottom of the ads. He flipped open the origami page again. He really wanted to try that swan.

Angus looked around for paper. He didn’t want to tear out any pages from his magazine because he might want to read them again. There were some posters on the wall, but they were made of cardboard. He didn’t want to use the voter list in case anyone else came in. Finally, he noticed the Susan’s *Redbook* magazine sitting on her

chair. Checking to make sure John Henry was still asleep, Angus picked it up and tried to quietly rip out a page. It wasn't exactly the right shape, but it was close.

He followed the instructions as closely as he could, but the slippery paper made it hard to keep folded. Angus made it to step five, but having to repeat step four without a picture proved too difficult. Angus was so tired and didn't have much patience so he began to fold the paper into something else. Eventually, he was constructing a paper airplane. He looked at the airplane and back at John Henry and then back at the airplane. Angus threw it at John Henry.

It missed but not by much. Angus tore another page out of Redbook and made another airplane, tweaking the wings slightly so it would go further. He threw paper plane number at John Henry. So close. A few more minor adjustments and paper plane number soared across the room and hit John Henry between the eyes. John Henry jumped up and looked around wildly.

"What? What?"

Angus stood up.

"Nothing. Why don't you go home and nap there for a while?"

John Henry considered this for a moment. "No, I don't think I want to."

"I really think you should think about it, John Henry." Angus pretended to look out the window over John Henry's shoulder. "I mean, you never know who is going to come in here and vote. I don't even think the sheriff has been in here yet."

"True." John Henry picked up his Doberman head and started toward the door.

"I really appreciate it. Thank you."

“Bye.” Angus sighed in relief. As soon as the door shut behind John Henry, Angus got his own information from the table and walked behind the ruffles into the voting booth. As the machine displayed his may options, Angus searched for one name. As soon as he located “Zister”, he looked for the opposing candidate’s name. Without even bothering to read that name, Angus selected it and finished the ballot. He walked out of the voting booth, sat back down at his table, peeled off an ‘I voted’ sticker from the roll, and stuck it to his shirt.

The door opened and Susan walked in.

“Soup definitely took longer than fifteen minutes. And I burnt it.”

## Wednesdays

He could feel the hair itching his neck. Angus constantly was pulling up the collar of his shirt so the hair would stop touching his neck. Yesterday, while milking Domino, the cow turned her head around, took some of his hair in her mouth, and pulled hard. Angus pushed her head away and she let go. Although annoyed, he decided not to worry about it too much. This morning, however, she had pulled his hair some more and actually tried to munch on it while he was pushing her away. Angus decided that it was time to get his haircut.

He had been going to the same barber since he was little. His father had let his mother take him to the beauty shop to cut it before then but that changed when he got to be seven years old. His father told him, "only girly men get their hair cut at salons." Angus' father repeated this phrase often, saying it every time the two went to get a haircut, every time his mother went to get a haircut, and every time his father heard of any man ever going anywhere other than a barber. The older he got, Angus' father became more insistent on the topic, saying that he, "would roll over in his grave before he'd get a girly haircut". Angus had always accepted this philosophy and had always gone to the same barbershop. Every time he went, it was the same un-girly glass storefront with the big blue sign that said, "BARBER" and the homemade blue open/close sign in the window.

Turning into the parking lot of the shopping center, Angus pulled his collar up to stop the hair from rubbing against his neck, and parked the car in the same place he nearly

always parked it—towards the front, third row. Angus got out, locked the car, and started toward the row of storefronts. As he got closer, he didn't see the big blue sign that had been there for the last fifty years that said "BARBER". Instead, there were a bunch of curly letters that spelled out Bladez. Finally reaching the sidewalk, Angus just stared at the front of the building. Now that he was closer, he could see that the curly letters were glittery and there were giant neon flowers painted on the window. Although he could barely see past the flowers, he noticed the inside was no longer a linoleum-floored room with fluorescent bulbs. Instead, Angus could see a purple tiled floor and several chandeliers hung throughout the room. On the door, however, was the same blue homemade open/close sign, the old lettering now outlined in sequins.

Angus decided to go in and ask if the barber shop had moved. He put his hand on the door, pulled it open and stepped inside. As soon as he did, Angus took a step back after being hit with a strong smell of chemicals and flowers that reminded him of the smell of fertilizing his wife's butterfly garden. Angus took a deep breath of outside air and tried to hold it as he approached the front counter.

"Welcome to Bladez! My name is Dee-Dee! Are you Steven?"

Angus let out the breath he'd been holding.

"No, I'm Angus. I just need to get my hair cut and..."

"Oh did you make an appointment?"

"Well, I was really looking for my barber." Angus watched Dee-Dee come around the corner towards him.

"Mmmhmmm..." Dee-Dee nodded as she lifted up pieces of Angus' hair. He had to bend his knees in order for her to reach it.



“Do you know if he moved? His shop used to be here. His name was Owen.”

Dee-Dee stopped playing with his hair and looked up. She had tears in her eyes.

“Owen was my grandpa. He died a few months ago.”

“I—I’m sorry. I guess it’s been a while since I’ve been here.”

“Yeah, he tripped on a rock and fell in the pool and drowned. It was so sad. I’m trying to run his business now, though.” Dee-Dee went back to her hair inspection. “I’m so glad to see you actually—it’s been such a slow day. I’ve been so bored.”

“Well, thank you ma’am,” Angus tried to straighten up but she wouldn’t let go.

“Ma’am?”

“Yes?” Dee-Dee answered brightly. Angus sighed and looked at his shoes, then back at her face.

“Alright,” He said slowly. “Do you have time for a haircut?”

“A haircut? Well if you aren’t Steven then I have a spot open right now. Oh my gosh this worked out so perfect!”

Angus imagined what his father would say.

She took his arm and led him to a chair, “So what were you thinking today? Just a trim? Do you want it all off?”

“No, thank you. Just a trim will be fine.”

“Well, if you change your mind, just let me know. I’ll tell you what—why don’t you look at these books over here? They’re just for men. I’ll do any of the cuts in the book and still only charge you the price for the trim!”

Angus took the book and opened it while Dee-Dee went in the back room. All of the men looked angry. One man’s hair all stuck straight up like he’d just been electrocuted.

Another man's hair was green and pointy like grass. That one definitely wouldn't help the problem with Domino. Finally, Angus found one that looked the closest to what Owen had been able to do for him. It looked a little like he was going into the Marines, but Angus had never minded the military. Dee-Dee reappeared with a piece of zebra fabric.

"This one," he pointed to the Marine.

"Fabulous! So this is my new cape. Isn't it darling?" She swished it around him then choked him by snapping it in place. "So the first thing we're gonna do is wash your hair. If you'll just lean back here and I'll get you fixed up."

"I just took a shower this morning ma'am. You can just cut it if you want," Angus said as she lowered his chair back.

"No, its better to cut this way and I can condition it."

Angus squirmed. His neck didn't fit in the neck sized spot in the sink at all. Between the cape and the sink, he began to worry about breathing. Dee-Dee began chattered about something having to do with her mother's cat, but Angus only heard about every third word because she kept spraying water in his ears. Angus wondered if he could get swimmers ear without swimming. He wished he had his computer to Google it as she bumped her arm on something and sprayed water in his nose.

Snorting, he sat up as she turned off the water and wrapped a towel around his head. She was now on to talking about TV shows. When she turned her back to him to pick something up, he used the corner of the towel to dry off his ears. Now he could hear everything she said. She was talking about some TV show in which they cut hair.

"...In fact, I get a lot of ideas from the show. I mean those girls are so good! They do some crazy stuff that they didn't even teach us in school. So when I cut somebody's hair I

like to try out those styles. I just try to remember how they did it on TV and that works most of the time..."

Angus regretted getting the water out of his ears. Dee-Dee began to rub the towel vigorously over his head. He felt a little dizzy and his scalp began to burn. He imagined smoke rising from underneath the towel. Dee-Dee's voice seemed to go with the rhythm of her motion as her voice got higher at the end of every couple of syllables. He could almost smell the smoke now.

Finally, she threw the towel on the chair beside him and Angus saw himself in the mirror. His hair stood straight up and he thought he looked like one of the guys he saw in the hair book. When Dee-Dee looked away, he tried to make his face angry like the men in the hair book to match his spiked hair.

"Okay! Are you ready for a cut?"

Angus nodded. Some of the spikes wilted.

"Alright! Just sit still—well tilt your head slightly to the right. Perfect! So anyway I had this cousin who was a swim coach and she had this thing about Niagara Falls..."

Angus tried to think of a way to block her out. He tried to make a grocery list picking something from every letter of the alphabet. He stopped because he got stuck at J. All Angus could think of was Jello and he disqualified that answer since it was a brand name. Her voice seemed to get faster every second.

Next, he tried to replay a song in his head. He started by trying to hear a piano play Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata". Midway through the song however, the melody somehow drifted into "Für Elise" so he gave up. After that he tried "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Jesus loves Me". Neither was strong enough to overcome her voice. Finally, he

imagined the introduction to "M\*A\*S\*H." He closed his eyes, trying to see the opening credits and hear the theme song. Although this worked, after a minute, he realized he was actually humming it quietly and immediately opened his eyes.

Dee-Dee hadn't even noticed and was pulling out zebra covered scissors. She was still talking. Angus watched her clip the first spike and the hair fell onto his cape. She zebraed all the hair until soon, the spikes were all in his lap and only their stumps remained. Angus hoped it wouldn't dry this way.

"Okay so I saw this show where they do makeovers and at the end they turn the person around and do the finishing touches so they're surprised at the end. Let's do that right now!" Dee-Dee spun Angus around in the chair. He felt his stomach lurch a little. He closed his eyes, trying to will the nausea away.

"Is it okay?" Dee-Dee asked.

Angus had no idea what she had just said but from the concerned look on her face he decided she had asked if he was feeling alright.

"Yes."

"Yay! Great." Dee-Dee went back to her chattering. Angus did not, in fact, feel better so he closed his eyes again. She began to rub something sticky through his hair. She told him to let it set for a minute. She put something else in his hair that crackled. She sprayed something in his face.

"Alright. You are finished!" Angus opened his eyes. There was a bad taste in his mouth and his nose burned. She spun the chair back towards the mirror. Angus just stared at the mirror.

His hair was a different color. Although it was almost entirely gray, Dee-Dee had restored his hair to its original brown. Not only that, but all of his newly brown hair was pushed towards the middle of his head, like a tiny mohawk.

“So do you love it?” Dee-Dee clapped her hands.

Angus said nothing.

“I think it’s amazing! Oh my gosh, you look, like, twenty years younger! Yay! I’m so glad we did this.”

“It’s brown.”

“It’s so cute!”

“It’s brown.”

She took his arm and pulled him up from the chair. Angus’ knees felt weak. Her arm in his, they walked to the front counter.

“So, normally your total would \$65 for the wash, the color, and the cut, but, since you’re a new customer, how about \$30?”

Angus nodded.

“But of course, your hair won’t do that style everyday by itself, so you’re definitely going to need this mousse which is \$9.95 and probably this hairspray which is \$11.50. Wait, do you already have hairspray?”

Angus shook his head.

“Okay! So your total comes to \$56.08.”

Angus reached for his wallet. His usual haircut only cost \$10 and that was all the cash he had. He handed her his credit card. She, still chattering, ran his card through, gave

him the slip to sign, and put his hair products in a bag. Angus took the pink bag with the zebra lettering.

“Thank you, ma’am.” Angus turned to the door.

“It’s been so amazing to meet you. I’m so glad you came to Bladez today! Do you want to go ahead and make an appointment for your next visit? That way you could just have it already marked on your calendar.”

“Well, I usually go to a barber ma’am and...”

“Did you not like your haircut?” Dee-Dee asked, sadly.

Angus looked at his feet. He sighed. He imagined his father rolling over in his grave.

“Alright.”

## Thursdays

“And don’t feed him any calamari! He’s allergic.” The front door slammed and Angus was left alone with him. The brown haired five year old boy looked up.

“My name is Logan. Have you seen my dog?”

He had been told to be there at 7:40 sharp. This was incredibly early to Angus.

Many times, after rising early to milk Domino, he would go back to bed. He would walk back into the house, put the bucket of milk in the refrigerator, and then walk on through to the front porch. Once on the porch he would sit in the swing and drift off for a few more hours. Angus would never admit that he actually did this though. He didn’t want people to think he was old. Just to throw them off, in fact, he always brought a magazine or book out with him and put it on his lap, hoping that anyone driving by would think he was just very interested in his reading. There would be no extra sleep today, though. Judge Wright had been very clear: Violate probation and go to jail. Angus didn’t feel as though he knew a lot about the law, but he was beginning to wonder what kind of lawyer he had had.

“I’m Angus.” He said gruffly. He supposed he should tell the kid to call him mister or something, but Angus had practically forgotten what that second name was.

“Do you know how to play Medal of Honor?” Angus was impressed that the kid was so interested in history. He didn’t really feel like playing pretend so early in the morning though especially if might involve dress-up with an army hat or something.

“No, not really.”

“Why did you go to jail?”

“I didn’t go to jail.” Angus answered taken a back.

“Mommy said you did!”

“I didn’t go to jail. I got a ticket”

“Mommy said you did go jail!”

“I didn’t go to jail! I got a curfew ticket!” Angus was getting annoyed.

“What’s curfew?”

“A law that says you can’t be out of your house past midnight on weekdays.” Angus answered through his teeth and then added under his breathe, “A stupid law.”

“So you stayed up too late and went to jail?”

Angus considered this and gave up the argument.

“Yes.”

The boy was silent for a moment.

“Can you reach the remote on top of the TV stand?”

“Yes.” Angus didn’t even care why the remote was apparently being kept out of the small boy’s reach. The time before Logan’s mother returned, 9 hours and 24 minutes, seemed longer by the second. Angus followed him into the next room and got the remote down from where it was hidden. Logan flipped on the TV and began watching some strange action show and Angus stepped back, surveying the room. It was a little messy. He pushed a few papers and magazines into a stack and stiffly sat down on the leather couch. As he allowed himself to relax, Angus found himself nodding off quickly and, almost out of habit, he reached for a magazine. He looked down and found a copy of *Vogue* in his lap which he immediately slid back. He continued to catch himself beginning to doze until Logan turned



the volume up on the TV. A new show had come on now. This show caught his attention because characters said things like “Jeepers!, a word he had heard people use in everyday language at one point in his life.

Logan got up and stood in front of Angus.

“Can I have a snack?” They both headed to the kitchen and Logan opened the pantry doors.

“Can I have cake?”

Angus instantly straightened up. He was ready for this type of situation. As skeptical as he was, Angus tried to prepare as best he could. He read the American Girl book, *The Babysitter’s Handbook*. He had to order it from Amazon because the local library didn’t have it available. He also used Google to research as well and was shocked to find that the word “babysitting” found about 63 million results in .16 seconds. Angus decided to narrow it down and typed in “How to Babysit” which came up with the much more manageable number of about 470 thousand results in .15 seconds. In all of his research, if he had learned anything, he had learned not to give the babysittees sugar unless it was within one hour of the parent’s return. Since he currently had 7 hours and 19 minutes left, Angus opted for goldfish crackers instead.

“My other babysitters let me have cake.” Logan whined.

“I am not one of your other babysitters.” Logan was prepared for this too. He knew to be tough and consistent.

“I know that. You’re a boy and you’re old.”

Angus said nothing, but strongly considered not allowing Logan any snack. Finally, Angus simply replied,

“You can have goldfish crackers.”

Logan complained a little bit more, but ate the crackers and Angus decided it was safe enough to leave the room momentarily to go to the washroom. He was only gone minutes, the finding of the washroom taking up most of the absence. When he returned, he found Logan in the living room, climbing onto the couch, throwing a cracker onto the floor, and then jumping off trying to crush the goldfish.

“What are you doing?” Angus stared at Logan. Logan shrugged.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, we have to clean this up. Do you have a sweeper?”

“Yes!” Logan’s face lit up. “One second!” He ran off into the other room and returned moments later with a mop already dripping from being dipped in what Angus could only assume had been the toilet since he’d heard no running water. Angus stared down at the floor where the shattered goldfish were now swimming. Without speaking, he began to walk through the house opening every closet until he had found the sweeper. He dragged it back, plugged it in and pushed it towards Logan.

“Here. You made the mess.” Logan jumped up. Although the sweeper was bigger than him, he pushed it slowly back and forth in front of the couch. Angus felt proud of himself. He felt as though he was doing something every parent would appreciate since he was making a child clean up and therefore learn not to do it again.

“Don’t forget to go under the couch a little bit. Get all of the crackers.” Logan obeyed and bent down, lifting the front of the sweeper up on accident, trying to get as far underneath as he could. Although he was no longer sucking anything up off the floor, Angus said nothing and let Logan keep sweeping since he was learning an important life lesson.

The next thing Angus knew there was a high pitched howling that could be heard over the sweeper. He reached down and cut the sweeper off, but the howling persisted. He and Logan both got on their hands and knees and looked under the couch. Angus couldn't see anything but the noise was louder.

"Grandma!" Logan reached his hand under the couch and scooped the dog out. A possum sized ball of fur continued crying so loudly that Angus wanted to cover his ears.

"What happened?"

Angus already had a guess. As Logan cradled the screaming Grandma in his arms, Angus inspected the dog. He finally noticed that the outside of Grandma's left ear had begun to bleed.

"Is she hurt?" Logan yelled over the howling.

"I think her ear is hurt from the sweeper."

Logan looked stricken

"I vacuumed her ear?"

"She's going to be completely fine. It's just her ear." Grandma's howls had turned into whimpering now and Logan carried her into the other room and laid her down carefully on a throw pillow. As Logan left to get a blanket or something for her, Angus knelt down to examine the ear a little better and decided it wasn't anything to be too worried about. Logan returned with a fluffy white monogrammed towel and began to dab at Grandma's ear with it. He pulled a band aid out of his pocket and handed it to Angus. As Logan continued to pat the ear, Angus debated on whether or not to use the band aid and finally decided that it couldn't hurt anything. He unwrapped the packaging and to his surprise found that

same dog from the cartoon on the green band aid. Angus gently put the band aid over the cut, wondering how long the adhesive would stick to fur.

Grandma remained lethargic through the next several hours. She simply laid still and slept. Logan became wrapped up in his cartoons again and stopped worrying about her. After about the five hundredth episode of some Japanese cartoon, Angus checked his watch hoping more time would have passed and found only 3 hours and 11 minutes remaining.

If he were getting paid for this babysitting job the day would be more exciting. Angus could've at least been figuring out how much he was making for every awful cartoon he had to sit through. Or for every second he sat there. For instance, if he was making minimum wage, around \$7.50, he was making about \$.0021 for every second he sat on the big leather couch. More importantly, Angus was making a whole \$3.75 per cartoon episode. He also could dream of getting a raise and making maybe \$10 an hour. That was quite a jump to \$.0028 for every second and \$5 for every cartoon. Yet, sadly, he was only doing community service.

Around 4:30, with only half an hour to go, Angus went over to check Grandma who still hadn't moved. She was thankfully not dead but still not moving much and he began to wonder how he would explain this. Showing Grandma to Mrs. Wright would probably not be the best way to end his first 10 hours of service. Angus glanced around and picked up Grandma and the monogram towel very carefully so she wouldn't whimper. He carried her into the bathroom to get a better look at the dog's ear. He could see that the cartoon dog band aid was a dark shade of greenish red now. Angus stood holding the dog, debating on whether or not to change the band aid or not. After he had finally decided to leave the old

one on, he heard a crash in the next room. Angus set the dog down on the toilet seat and hurried into the kitchen.

There, sitting on the floor in front of the refrigerator was Logan. Angus started to ask why he wasn't watching TV, but then stopped. Logan was covered in tentacles. They were in his hair, on the floor, and in his lap. Most important, however, was the tentacle hanging out of the corner of Logan's mouth, a few suction cups still visible.

"I just wanted a snack." Logan said defensively in reaction to the look on Angus' face.

"Is that squid?" Angus asked.

"I don't know. It was just in that box on that top shelf." Logan pointed upward, spilling the rest of the Chinese takeout box beside him.

Angus knelt beside him and examined the box. He noticed on the side, in black marker, someone had written "Calamari". Angus looked back over at Logan who, in turn, began to itch his arm. Angus wished he had researched "first aid" instead of "how to babysit". Logan itched his neck. Then he itched his other arm. Angus could see the bright red patches beginning to pop up on Logan's face now too. Angus ran to the bathroom and got a cold wash rag, upsetting Grandma on the toilet as he ran out. Grandma began to howl again. When he got back to the kitchen, Logan was beginning to cry a little too. Angus tried to dab at the red spots but it seemed to only upset Logan more.

He heard a car door close outside. Leaving Logan with the wash rag, Angus hurried into the living room to get his things, shutting the bathroom door to mute Grandma's cries. Seeing that Logan's mom was almost to the front door, Angus walked out onto the porch and met her there.

“See you Mrs. Wright.”

“See you! Hope all went well!” Angus nodded and kept walking. A second car had just pulled in the drive and the driver’s side window rolled down.

“Going to make it back before curfew this time I hope!” the middle aged man chuckled.

“I’ll try. Good evening Judge Wright.” Angus tried to walk faster to his car.

“Angus!” Judge Wright called.

Angus turned quickly, still walking backwards.

“Did you ever find the dog?”

“What dog?” Angus replied as he opened his truck door.

## Fridays

“Hello! Welcome to Applebee’s! How many?”

“Two.” Angus was standing next to a woman in a leopard print dress. He couldn’t remember how he had gotten there. Leopard Print held up two glittery fingers and nodded.

“Alright! Booth or table?”

“Oh, I don’t care. Anything is fine with me,” Leopard Print practically sang.

“Booth.” Angus stated decisively. He liked booths best by far. He didn’t understand why people preferred to sit on uncomfortable hard chairs as opposed to a cushioned booth that had a little give so you didn’t get bored sitting there.

“Okay great. Follow me!”

Angus and Leopard Print followed the waitress to their booth.

The best booths were the ones on which the cushions on both sides of the seat were somehow connected. This meant that when you sat down, the person at the other booth behind you would bounce a little. Angus never worried about getting bounced himself because he figured he was too heavy. Unfortunately, there was no one in the booths on either side of their table to bounce so Angus let Leopard Print pick whichever side she wanted.

Leopard Print (he couldn’t remember her name), seemed a little dressed up for Applebee’s. She had a crazy dress, red heels, and very curly hair. It was everywhere. She was from another city, one much bigger than this town and she was visiting her sister. Her sister,

Jane, someone he knew from church, had begged him to take Leopard Print and show her around. Angus didn't want to do it, but felt bad for Jane because she seemed so insistent that he assumed she was desperate.

Hello! My name is Lanie and I'll be your server tonight. Can I get you started with some drinks?" A young tattooed blonde girl stood at their table.

"Hmm..." Leopard Print cooed, "You first!"

"Water." Angus answered.

"Oh." Leopard Print seemed disappointed. "I'll have a water too I guess. Actually though honey," She caught the waitress by her apron. "Could I have some lemons with that? And limes? And a lot of them? Maybe just put them in a little bowl? Thank you."

Angus said nothing. He didn't understand putting things in water. If you want flavored liquid, you should just buy a flavored drink. He was just thankful that she ordered a cheap drink and not some \$1.99 soft drink that cost the restaurant \$.06. That was robbery. He wondered if the lemons and limes would be an extra charge.

"So, what do you do, Angus?" She asked.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You sit and stare at the wall all day?"

"No, I mean I'm retired."

"Oh, what do you do though? Like during the day?" She pressed. Angus was caught off guard.

"Well, I milk my cow and I sit on the porch most days."



“Ooh how exciting darling!” She examined her nails. There was an awkward silence. “I’m between jobs right now actually myself! One day, I just decided I didn’t want to do my old job anymore and so I quit and –ta da!- here I am.”

Angus was already beginning to get tired just listening to her talk.

“Here are your drinks.” The waitress set them both on the table. “I’ll be right back.” She left and returned a moment later with a large bowl of lemons and limes. “Can I get ya’ll an appetizer?”

Angus shook his head no, but Leopard Print said,

“Yes. Cheese sticks please!”

“Okay. I’ll get that order right in for you.”

As soon as the waitress left the table, Leopard Print began to squeeze lemons into her water.

“So are you enjoying your visit with Jane?” Angus tried to make polite conversation.

“Yes I am! She has the sweetest little house.”

“How long are you planning to stay?”

Leopard Print stopped wringing the lemons. “Well, here’s the thing. I just left my job and just haven’t decided what I want to do yet. You know, I have a couple of ideas, so we’ll just have to see what happens.” She finished the lemons, sipped the drink, and made a face.

“My! That’s rather strong!” Leopard Print emptied some sugar packets into the drink. She stirred it and then tasted it again. “Tastes like lemonade!” She seemed surprised. She started in on squeezing all the limes into the drink.

“So do you have any other siblings, other than Jane?” Angus tried again.

“Well yes! We have a brother named Georgie. Well, his real name is George of course but we call him Georgie. Well, actually, it’s mostly just me that calls him Georgie.”

“Oh? Where does he live?”

“Well darling, I lived with him before I came here! Did I not tell you that? I’m so sorry. I’m just so rude!”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it.”

When she had squeezed all but two limes in, Leopard Print tasted the drink again. “Uh! It definitely needs those last two limes!” She squeezed them in. She tasted it and squealed, “Angus! You have to try this!”

“No, thank you.”

“No baby, really! It tastes like sprite! I made a sprite!”

“You could’ve ordered sprite.” Angus said.

“No, I’m just excited because I made it myself!”

“Oh.”

Just then the waitress came with the cheesesticks.

“Here ya’ll are! Enjoy!”

Leopard Print most certainly did. Angus watched in amazement as she stuffed a whole cheese sticks into her mouth at once.

“Do you want one?” Leopard Print asked.

“No thank you. I’m alright.”

Leopard Print finished all the cheese sticks on her own and even tipped the bowl back for the last of the marinara sauce and ate it too.

“That was so good!” She sighed. Angus began to glance around again, looking for their waitress to take their food order. She was now helping another table. Leopard Print was talking again; he wasn’t sure what about though. He tried to concentrate on what she was saying, but just couldn’t focus.

“Can I take your order?”

The waitress must have gotten his telepathic message to her.

Leopard Print went first. She ordered a steak (medium well) and some mashed potatoes to go along with it. Angus ordered chicken salad. Lanie refilled their drinks. Left alone at the table again, Leopard Print stared into her Sprite-water and stirred the straw around.

“So, uh, do you have any, uh, hobbies?”

“Not really. I like shopping, but that’s about it.”

“Do you like cows?” Angus ventured.

“Um, I don’t really know any. We don’t really have any cows where I lived. You know, except in grocery stores.

Angus swallowed.

“Well, I just wondered since I have a cow.”

“No way! Tell me about her! It is a ‘her’, right?”

Angus didn’t bother to tell her that he’d already mentioned he had a cow.

“Well, her name is Domino, and I’ve had her for several years. She’s a good cow.”

Leopard Print had quit listening.

“Look!” She’d leaned two sugar packets together to form an upside down ‘v’. Her head snapped up. “I bet I could make a house of cards!” she said excitedly.

Angus didn't doubt it.

"Go ahead and try it."

"Okay!"

Angus tried to think of new topic to discuss with her. Her second set of leaning sugar packets was not doing as well as the first.

"So, what brought you here? Why'd you leave the city and Georgie?"

Leopard Print stopped and looked up. She looked down at the table and said,

"Because I got a divorce."

Angus didn't know what to say.

"La la la," she laughed and went back to her sugar.

"Maybe you should put a napkin on the bottom, so that your sugar packets aren't sliding all over this table," Angus suggested. Leopard Print looked at Angus in awe.

"That is such a great idea!" She unfolded her napkin and laid it on the table. The two no longer talked. She redid the first pair of packets together on the napkin. Then second went next to it. Then the third. Then she began to build up, putting pairs of packets on top of the other pairs. Angus watched her, completely engrossed in what she was doing.

After a while, Angus' stomach began to growl and he looked around. There were people that had come in after he and Leopard Print and by this time, they'd gotten their food already. One such couple was actually leaving now. Angus looked around for their waitress and finally caught her eye.

"Just wait a few minutes - we almost have it ready."

Angus knew it was the steak that was taking so long. How hard was chicken salad anyway? They waited in silence a few more minutes, Leopard Print building the sugar

packets higher and higher until she finally ran out of sugar packets and had to keep building with Sweet and Low.

Finally, after what seemed like eternity, the waitress brought the food.

“Thank you!” Leopard Print said brightly. Angus said nothing to the waitress.

“Is your steak good?” Angus asked.

“Ooh yes! It is very good. You know, it’s funny. When Jane told me you wanted to go out tonight, I didn’t want to go. She made me, you know. But now, now that I’m here with you – I’m so glad I listened to her. You seem like a super sweet guy.”

Angus almost choked on his salad.

“Well, I’m glad you’re having a good time.”

Neither one talked again for a while as they ate, but Angus thought the noise of the lettuce he was chewing was deafening. He wondered if Leopard Print could hear it.

“Angus?”

“Mmmhhh?” He knew she was going to ask him to be quieter with the lettuce.

“Will you cut up my steak? It’s really hard to do.” She pushed her plate towards him. He was surprised, but took the plate anyway. Angus picked up the knife and fork and began to cut the steak into strips.

“This good?”

“Well,” Leopard Print hesitated, “Could they be, maybe like, marble sized? I just like smaller pieces.”

Angus said nothing, but continued to cut, the strips turning into square, marble-sized pieces of meat.

“Thank you so much!” Leopard Print clapped her hands.

Their waitress walked up with a digital camera.

“Could I take a picture of your sugar packet house?”

“Why, of course!”

The waitress held up the camera and just before she snapped the picture, Leopard Print leaned in and smiled.

“Thanks.”

“Are you going to put it on the wall?” Leopard Print called out after the waitress who apparently didn’t hear.

Angus finished his meal. He checked his watch and saw that he still had time to get home and watch the reruns they played after the news.

“Are you ready for dessert?”

“I’m not really that hungry after all that chicken salad.” Angus hoped she’d get the hint.

“Is it the money? I know desserts can be so expensive sometimes.”

“No, I just am full.”

“I know how to get a free dessert. We can split it!”

Before Angus could say anything, Leopard Print waived the waitress over. She pulled her close and whispered in her ear. The waitress smiled at Angus and walked back to the kitchen.

“We’re getting an ice cream brownie!” Leopard Print began to stack her plate, full of unfinished food, on top of the appetizer plate and Angus’ empty salad bowl. Angus sighed as she scooped up the croutons he’d set aside for Domino.

He heard singing across the restaurant and turned to see what was happening. There were four waiters singing some form of the song "Happy Birthday" and walking towards their table. When the waiters stopped in front of Angus and Leopard Print's table and began to sing to him, Angus felt his face getting hot. He looked desperately across the table, but Leopard Print just began singing along. By the time they were finished, Angus was sure his face looked like a tomato. The restaurant began clapping. Their waitress was right behind the singers, holding a large plate of ice-cream brownie. She set it down and all the waiters patted him on the back and said "Happy Birthday" before they walked away.

"See? Free brownie."

"But it's not my birthday," Angus said slowly, hoping his face was a normal color again.

"They don't know. They don't even ask for your ID or anything. I mean, honestly, as long as you always get a different waitress, you could come and do this every night!"

Angus said nothing but stared at the dessert.

"I'll be right back. I have to go to the bathroom."

Angus continued to stare at the dessert. A family on their way to the door, all touched Angus' shoulder and wished him a happy birthday.

"Thank you." Angus did not even look up. He nudged the dessert plate with the spoon in front of him, then took a small scoop of ice-cream. He really wasn't hungry so he turned the spoon around and imagined flinging it at the empty booth in front of him. He wondered if it could hit the ceiling if he aimed up. Angus turned quickly and looked over his shoulder. Leopard Print was still nowhere in sight. He pulled the spoon of ice-cream back and flung it at her sugar packet house.

## Saturdays

Angus poured the first cup of coffee, rubbing his eyes. When he was a boy, he had marveled at his father's energy in the morning while Angus got ready for school. At the time, after much consideration, he assumed that being an adult meant you started the morning feeling more awake. When he got to be his father's age, however, and still struggled to wake up every morning, Angus figured that he just needed to be a little older. Now, he was the age he remembered his grandfather being when Angus was forced to help with chores at five in the morning during the summer and, even now, it was no easier.

Grabbing his coat, Angus headed towards the front door. He hated morning chores. If he had not inherited this farm from his father who had inherited it from his father, Angus would have lived in a city or maybe just a town.

He did not really have that many chores anymore. In fact there was only one chore that really had to be done every day. What got him up every morning was Domino. He'd had Domino for years and although he briefly wished death on her during the cold winter months' walk to the barn, he faithfully milked her every morning.

As he rounded the corner of the barn, Angus looked for the black and white head always looking over the fence waiting on him. After greeting Domino with his customary grunt, he settled down to milk her. As Angus did this, he thought about his grandfather teaching him to milk a cow for the first time. Angus had been so excited to visit his grandfather as a child, especially the day Angus found out his grandfather had a new cow.



Upon arrival, Angus rushed to find him in the barn along with the recently acquired cow. His grandfather introduced him to the cow as if it were a person, told him he had named the cow Gus-Gus, Angus' childhood nickname, and showed him how to milk her. Knowing how much Angus liked Gus-Gus, his grandfather began to send Angus little updates about Gus-Gus in monthly letters to the family and even including the occasional snap shot if he found the time. The next time Angus visited, he looked forward to seeing his black and white namesake. As they sat down at dinner, Angus' grandfather inquired as to whether Angus had received his last letter containing a doodle of Gus-Gus. Angus nodded.

"How does he taste?" Angus' grandfather asked. Angus went a little pale at this, "Yep, ole Gus-Gus is on the table right now." At that, Angus suddenly felt ill and ate no more of his Gus-Gus burger.

Angus finished milking Domino, stood up with the pail of milk, and walked out the door. As he stepped outside, he tipped the container over so that all but half a gallon of milk poured out onto the ground. Angus was only one person and that milk would not keep forever so he felt no need to lug the extra weight back to the house. He checked his watch and saw that it was almost nine now. Angus hurried back to the house to put the bucket in his icebox and grab his car keys.

For the last few decades, Angus had spent many Saturday mornings at either Jonah's house or Hardees. He liked Hardees because, for much of his life, his wife did not allow him to eat fast food; without her though, he often had to go out of necessity. Even now, he felt a little guilty. He never had to eat alone, though. There were always many people that he knew there and Angus had gone to high school with most of them. They had all graduated,

worked a job, and now had nothing better to do than to sneak off from wives or empty houses to drink coffee and talk. Today, however, he was going to Jonah's.

Angus pulled out of his driveway and onto County Road 372 that led to town. He could have driven this route blindfolded and sometimes Angus felt as though he was on auto pilot. One second he'd be pulling out of his gravel driveway and the next he was passing the gas station at the edge of town, unsure of where the seven minutes and twenty eight seconds had gone. Even worse, there were the rare days with traffic. Often times on these days, Angus would notice a car in the rear-view mirror and then a few minutes later he would realize that exact car was now a good mile ahead of him, yet he had no recollection of being passed.

Three minutes and twenty two seconds into his trip, as he passed the intersection with County Road 311, a red car pulled out onto the road behind him. Determined to be observant this time, Angus decided to concentrate on the car until it passed him. It inevitably would pass him since he drove forty five miles per hour exactly, which apparently was too slow for the rest of the county road traffic. Angus reached to adjust his rear-view mirror so that he could better view the car.

After a few minutes, Angus rechecked the rear-view mirror and he realized that he'd not seen the red car pass him today either. He watched it disappear ahead of him as he braked to turn right down County Road 1498, now headed to Jonah's.

Jonah was someone who Angus had known his whole life. They had never been friends and in fact, Jonah had bullied Angus through school. Whereas Angus had escaped the draft, Jonah had gone overseas and come back a totally different person. He was still not nice, just a different kind of mean and remained that way for decades. Then quite

suddenly, a few years ago, Jonah was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and had no family to take care of him. When Jonah no longer left the house, Angus, mostly out of curiosity, went to visit him and discovered, now that his mind was gone, Jonah had turned into a much nicer person.

Angus knocked on the door quickly, but then simply opened it and walked in since Jonah wouldn't be answering it. He walked through the living room and into Jonah's room. Jonah was sitting upright in his bed, a checkers game prepared on the breakfast tray in front of him.

"Good Morning!" Jonah greeted Angus.

"Good Morning! How do you feel today?" asked Angus

"Well, a little tired, to be honest."

"Why's that?"

"Well, really it's the people in the trees again. They come by every morning and climb up there."

Angus nodded, "Why does that make you tired?"

"Well they're turning all those trees yellow and red and making the leaves fall off. It bothers me so much I can't sleep sometimes."

"I'll see if I can't shake some of these guys out of there for you today before I go,"

Angus promised.

"Thanks. How 'bout a game?"

"Sure. Should I get you a Coke out of the icebox?" All Jonah ever wanted to do now was play checkers and drink Coke while in bed. He never left bed, in fact. Jonah simply

relied on the church members who brought him food daily to play checkers with him and bring him Cokes from the other room.

Angus opened the icebox door to shelves full of the 6-pack glass bottles of Coke. There was nothing else in the icebox except Coke. The 6-packs that wouldn't fit on the shelves had been removed from their cardboard box, and lined up on the inside shelf on the door and stacked in the drawers under the icebox shelves. There was even a Coke where the piece of plastic slid up to keep a dish of butter.

He took two Cokes from the door and walked back into the other room.

"Good morning!" Jonah greeted him.

"Good morning."

"Thanks for the Coke. I was just wanting one of these. Want to play some checkers?"

Angus pulled the chair over from the corner and sat down opposite Jonah.

"Okay, I'm red and that means I go first." Jonah always went first, no matter what color he was. He pushed his piece diagonally towards Angus. Angus pushed one of his back.

"So how is Domino doing?"

Angus was always surprised whenever Jonah brought up Domino. He'd only mentioned the cow in passing once and ever since, every visit, Jonah asked how she was doing.

"She's doing pretty well."

"Have you told her about me?"

Angus studied the board, looking for his next move, "Yep. She likes your name."

Jonah's face lit up.

“Did you show her my picture?”

“I don’t have a picture of you, Jonah.”

Jonah looked sad as he pushed his checker piece forward.

“Maybe you could bring her next time you come. I was actually just out in my castle the other day and thought I could give Domino a room in there.”

“Maybe. It’s your turn again. Do you want another Coke yet?”

“Yes.”

Angus went back into the kitchen and took the Coke from the butter dish niche.

“Good morning!”

“Hey, Jonah.” Angus handed him the fresh Coke.

“Thanks. My turn!”

Angus settled back in his chair as Jonah contemplated his move. He thought about ways to bring Domino to visit Jonah. He supposed she wouldn’t fit in the front seat. He didn’t want to put her in the truck bed though because he was afraid she would fall out. Walking her here was definitely out of the question since it was several miles between the houses.

“Your turn.”

“What did you have to eat today, Jonah?”

“Spaghetti.” Jonah made a face. “It was awful. There were chunks of tomato and leaves in it. It was definitely not sauce.”

“Doesn’t sound like it.” Angus pushed his checker piece forward.

“You can have it if you want.”

“Thanks.”

Angus finally left Jonah's house after it was dark. He was physically tired after thirty games of checkers and yet mentally awake from an almost equal number of Cokes. As he climbed into the cab of his truck, he consoled himself that he would be in his bed sleeping soon. He drove down County road 1498, turned back onto his own county road 372 and then eventually his driveway. Angus slowly climbed out of his truck and started toward the barn, each step seeming longer. Sure that the barn was further away than usual, Angus even considered counting his steps. Upon finally reaching the barn, he walked in and saw the cow lying on the hay. She lifted her head.

"Just wanted to say good night Domino. I'll see you in the morning."

Domino blinked.