

from captivity, in ten years or maybe fifteen—whenever a committee of janitors determined that the locker was abandoned. The padlock would be forced open, the locker's secret brought to the director. A mild excitement would flutter the art world. Somebody would judge the painting authentic; somebody else would declare it an anonymous donation; the curious manner of its donation would be remarked. It would be hung on the wall of a numbered room. But first it would be displayed in an exhibition of recent acquisitions. Hé'd mai, her an invitation and a round-trip plane ticket.

Following the girl up one stairway and the next, stopping for breath on each skimpy landing, he acknowledged to himself that Louanne might by then have vanished into a dark corner of Moscow, he into the blinding fluorescence of a nursing home. "Ars longa," he muttered.

She turned her head. "Just a few more steps," she assured him.

JAN TERM

February 5

Dear Ms. Jenkins,

Josephine Salter has informed me that Caldicott Academy will not grant an extension for her Jan Term paper until you receive a request from me. Consider this that request. Of course Josephine could not meet the deadline; there was an upheaval in her family due to her stepmother's unexpected return on January 31 after a two-month absence. You probably know, too, as does most of the town, that her father greeted his wife's homecoming by throwing crockery at the wall and pouring Scotch into the family's aged computer. Josie and young Oliver, whom the family calls Tollie, were more welcoming.

Let me say, for whatever it's worth, that Josie was an asset to Forget Me Not during January—the customers miss her respectful presence and I miss her height. Standing on only a telephone book she could reach bibelots from my highest shelf. She seems to have learned something about antiques, too. Nevertheless, I continue to think that Jan Term is Caldicott Academy's devious method of giving teachers an extra month's paid vacation and in the process driving parents frantic with worry. The fifteen-year-old girls who volunteer at shelters, veterinary establishments, ethnic restaurants, and Central American villages are at risk for TB, psittacosis, salmonella, seduction, kidnapping, and deep boredom. Josie, working at my store, at least avoided the first five.

How are you, Eleanor? I've got an Edwardian inkwell you might want to take a look at.

Reinic

February 15

Dear Ms. Jenkins:

Thank you for granting me an extension for my Jan Term paper. I didn't need as much time as I first thought. Per your suggestion, I had kept daily notes on three-by-five cards, and as you predicted, it was not onerous to, after reading over the cards several times and arranging and rearranging them as if playing FreeCell and thinking about them deeply, make an outline. (The preceding sentence demonstrates why you should not split an infinitive, so I left it in rather than correct it in case you need a reality example for the tenth-grade grammar unit.) My outline followed the helpful schema you provided: Why I Chose, What I Did, Some Things I Learned. After constructing the outline, writing the essay was pretty straightforward. I made the required three drafts on three successive days, starting on the morning my father gave me a typewriter (our computer had met with an accident). I found footnotes useful and deployed them according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, numbering sequentially.*

And so here is my paper, which I dedicate to my late mother. As you may know, though it was before your time, she too attended Caldicott Academy. She often shared with me her school-day memories, though she called them flashbacks. LOL.

* Similar to Solitaire

Josie

FORGET ME NOT
JANUARY TERM PAPER
JOSEPHINE DOROTHY SALTER

My original plan for a Jan Term project was to read to the blind. I'm told that I have a pleasing voice. Before she died of a tumor¹ my mother lost her vision, and so I read to her every afternoon just as she had read to me when I was little, mostly Grimm's Fairy Tales, our favorite book. But readers to the blind are sent all over the Boston area, hither and yon, and I needed a workplace close to my stepbrother Tollie's day care center, since his own mother was not at home at the time and therefore I was in charge of him and also of our household, which numbered three. So I applied to Forget Me Not, a nearby antique shop, because you can learn a lot of history from the artifacts of the past. Ms. Renata McLintock, owner and proprietor, warned me that what I would learn mostly was cleaning and a steady hand in pouring liquids, and she hoped that my progressive, prolapsed² school had taught me how to compute the 5 percent Massachusetts sales tax and that I would remember to do so.³

In this paper I will refer to Ms. McLintock as "Rennie," since she asked me to call her that. She doesn't know where her mother dug up Renata.⁴ Rennie was right about what I would mainly do. I vacuumed the floor and the furniture (I did that at home in January, too) and I scrubbed the little bathroom in back and then dumped

1 Glioblastoma

2 Sic

3 I think she was joking but maybe not—some people have forgotten elementary arithmetic. Tina, my stepmother, cannot even balance a checkbook, though she is an excellent guitarist and knows all about hemidemisiquavers and can follow directions as to rhythm and speed and can also ignore them when interpretation demands. I can compute 5 percent of anything in my head and I can also do elementary calculus. So can Tollie, who is four.

4 My mother got Josephine from Little Women and Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz.

the contents of the pail into the window boxes, for which I was responsible.⁵ I climbed a ladder and polished the brass chandelier which dates from 1775 or thereabouts. It has been wired and fitted with 60-watt bulbs.

Those were my computational and cleaning duties. Some were daily and some were weekly. Also I assisted Rennie at hosting tasks. Forget Me Not is like the village well of colonial times, a period we studied last year. At the village well, news and gossip and advice were exchanged. Women went away from it with water and also with strength and self-esteem, though some did find pleasure in making others feel wrong or stupid. But of this unpleasant type there were only a few at Forget Me Not. I will mention a particular person later. Also we have many customers who come in just to chat and don't buy anything. Some want a smattering of comfort, like the one whose daughter had gotten rolled over by Princeton,⁶ and others want a lot of solace, like the woman whose son had just died.⁷ I became able to tell the difference between the two and to make tea for the first type and for the second type to pour sherry without spilling any.

This takes me to the main part of my paper: What I Learned at Forget Me Not in addition to techniques of polishing metal and how to wheedle the credit card machine into working. I learned the distinguishing features of various jewelry styles: Victorian, art nouveau, art deco, and post-World War II until about 1950 (Rennie doesn't carry anything later than 1950). Victorian is delicate and elaborate. Art nouveau is inspired by natural and mythological themes like dragonflies or enchanted women, set in sinuous designs. Art deco is geometric and employs motifs like ziggurats and lozenges. World War II introduced synthetic materials, and Rennie has some Bakelite slave bracelets that look like butterscotch silk. All

5 I learned this gardening technique from Tina, a conservationist. Scummy water is good for houseplants and outdoor plants alike, though Mrs. Bluestein, Caldicott's science teacher as you know, says she's from Missouri, a remark which apparently indicates disbelief.

6 Not admitted in the first batch

7 AIDS

this jewelry and estate silver and Chinese ceramics are the store's bread and butter. Rennie's particular specialties are pottery made by the Saturday Evening Girls and Victorian mourning jewelry.

The Saturday Evening Girls grew out of the arts and crafts movement in England of the 1870s, based on the reformist ideals of John Ruskin and William Morris. Those two important men advocated a return to hand craftsmanship, not just for aesthetic quality but also for the purpose of furthering social and educational goals.⁸ At the turn of the nineteenth century, in Boston's crowded North End, just a few miles from Forget Me Not, a group of young Italian and Jewish immigrant women gathered on Saturday nights to make ceramics, guided by an altruistic socialite.⁹ She wanted the Girls to earn money and also work in a healthy and uplifting environment. But people didn't buy the pottery, because its prices were higher than mass-produced wares. Now the dishes are prized and collectors pay a lot of money for them, often to Rennie. The pottery is simple and colorful and sometimes decorated with barnyard motifs; if you didn't know it was urban, you might call it rustic. Either way it is pretty—Rennie and I both think so.

Victorian mourning jewelry is a horse from a different glue factory.¹⁰ Rennie and I don't much care for it but it is all the rage today, and a few Goth girls of my acquaintance (not Caldicott students) wear gutta-percha hair ornaments decorated with death's heads. Mourning jewelry was meant to be a souvenir to remember a loved one and also a reminder of the inevitability of death. Mourning rings reached the height of popularity in England after the death

8 I would note that this is in keeping with Caldicott Academy's own high ideals.

9 The North End is still mostly Italian. Tina is of Italian descent and has acquaintances there. She stayed with a particular friend all the time she wasn't with us, experiencing her own Jan Term as she said to me. She came every weekday to visit Tollie at his day care center. I am putting this down because I know there is a rumor that she is an indifferent mother. She is a very good mother. Some people confuse mothering with housekeeping.

10 Rennie's phrase

of Prince Albert, in December 1869.¹¹ In England, rings were often inscribed with the name, age, and date of death of the lost person. Early rings were made of black enamel. Later ones were jet.

Since this is a research and observation paper, I have mostly kept anecdotes and speculations and digressions out of it or tucked them into footnotes that a reader can skip. Anyway, I am taking Journal Writing next semester. I did observe the operational details of a small retail business, so I will report on that. Rennie let me look at her ledger, which is of the pen-and-ink variety. Her accountant urged her to get a computer but finally said "Oh hell."¹² In Rennie's handwriting, each letter and number slants at a 60-degree angle to the line. It's more legible than many fonts.¹³ Rennie also took me with her on a few house calls. I saw how shrewd you have to be at sizing up the worth of individual items and also entire roomfuls of stuff. In one huge mansion the owner had just died¹⁴ and there was wonderful silver, as you would expect. But in a couple of awful apartments, Rennie found some unusual objets d'art. She always paid what they were worth, though of course not as much as she hoped to sell them for.

I also observed and attempted to emulate her various ways of dealing with customers beyond serving tea and/or sherry to the obviously unhappy ones. She shows patience to people who can't make up their minds and also to those who need to think it over, which really means ask their husbands. She is firm with dealers who want a deep discount. She allows returns always. She puts up with a lot but doesn't put up with everything. For instance, that unlikable woman referred to earlier came in frequently just to gab. The woman usually didn't pay attention to me, but one day when Rennie was finishing up with somebody else she asked me to show her a jet mourning ring. I did, and told her that the finest jet was

11 Typhoid fever

12 Sic

13 Rennie's penmanship is called Copperplate. It was developed in England in the eighteenth century. Early American copybooks continued the use of this plain script. Caldicott is considering returning to cursive instruction in the early grades, an excellent idea but too late for me.

14 Myocardial infarction

mined in Whitby, England. Whitby got used too much, and today it is illegal to mine there because the only jet left is in seams in the cliffs over the town. To remove it from the cliffs would cause them to tumble down. In this case, overmining led to undermining. In the middle of my mini-lecture, which I had practiced on other customers with good results (i.e., sales), she said, too sincerely, You have a beautiful voice. Then she said, Who are you? and I told her my name, first, middle, last. She said Salter I know your family your mother was a saint your stepmother is a slattern your father is a tyrant. Like that, with no punctuation. I'm surprised she didn't say your brother is on the spectrum. Rennie hustled her out in thirty seconds, maybe less, mentioning untruthfully that we were going on a house call, and she actually turned on the alarm and locked the door with the three of us outside it for verisimilitude. We watched the woman go away.¹⁵ Then we went next door to the deli and had lunch, which Rennie paid for (usually I bring a Tupperware container of last night's meat loaf, or macaroni with a little lettuce from the night before that, or creamed chipped beef from even earlier if it hasn't gone bad). Over lunch Rennie gave me a recipe for All-Week-Long minestrone, a vegetable soup that lasts from Sunday through Saturday. I would have made it on the weekend but Tina came home and we went back to takeout, which Tollie prefers anyway. It was that lunchtime that I told Rennie that Tollie's breakfast

15 This is perhaps the place to correct the woman's mistakes. My mother was not a saint. She didn't do anything to end wars or cool the globe or rescue the homeless. When a pie crust crumbled she told it to fuck itself [sic]. She was very nearsighted and didn't sew, and even wearing her eyeglasses, she blinked a lot, which because she was so tall made her look like a confused giraffe, but not a saint. Tina is not a slattern, just disorganized. She's twenty-three. She was eighteen when she met my father and got pregnant with Tollie. While she was staying in the North End with her Friend, she thought about her life here and came to the conclusion that it's pluses outweighed its minuses. My father is not a tyrant. He's absentminded and preoccupied with biostatistical research and sometimes gets quite irritable, but he's turning over a new leaf. My brother is on the spectrum. I love him very much even when he stares silently into his thoughts, maybe especially then.

every day is a scoop of vanilla ice cream and half a cup of coffee. He won't eat anything else. Very few people would have refrained from comment, but Rennie just nodded. Very few people have the discreetness to run a village well. I hope I can attain that quality, as I am thinking of the antique business as a career.

I will conclude with a discussion of old spectacles. Rennie acquired a small collection of them from a gentleman who was selling some clocks she really wanted. She asked me to make the glasses my project, so I numbered them and arranged them in large boxes which I lined with velvet, and I did some research and wrote its results on a placard in an elegant font (we still had a computer) as follows:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPECTACLES

The ancients used reading stones—single pieces of glass which magnified what was before them. The Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (1220–1292) determined that a convex (converging) lens could assist people with weak or aged eyes (presbyopia). In Florence, nineteenth-century glassmakers produced concave (diverging) lenses for nearsighted (myopic) persons. But all these aids were single lenses only. The earliest pictorial record of eyeglasses is *Saint Jerome in His Study*, by Ghirlandajo. This shows that eyeglasses were made not necessarily during the time of Saint Jerome (347–420) but definitely during the time of Ghirlandajo (1449–1494). They have been in use ever since, with frames of gold, copper, leather, bone, baleen, and tortoiseshell. Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals.

In this display you see nineteenth-century spectacles showing Victorian tendencies—filigreed gold, ivory ornaments, and, in one pair (#4), a setting for jewels on the temple pieces. The jewels themselves have been lost. Very few of these spectacles have any refraction (prescription) in their lenses, which indicates that they were used mainly for adornment, but the pair without temple pieces (#2, pince-nez) does magnify greatly, and the steel-framed eyeglasses (#7) were made for a very nearsighted person.

I sold three spectacles, each for \$50, making a net profit of \$150—Rennie pointed out that the spectacles had cost her nothing.

ing because they were baksheesh¹⁶ from the gentleman unloading clocks. She showed me that the entry in the ledger mentioned only the clocks. She wanted me to take the \$150, but I reminded her that Jan Term is supposed to be a volunteer activity. Then take a pair of glasses, she said, sort of snappishly. So I chose a pair with no refraction, because my eyes are twenty-two, like my father's. My glasses have plain silver frames in an oblong shape. I wore them one night while I was making dinner and my father and TOLLIE were playing their preprandial chess game. While I was sautéing tofu, I felt my father looking at me, and finally he said, You have restored your mother to our household. This shows how wearing spectacles can alter a person's appearance and even influence the vision of a bystander! Then TOLLIE said "Checkmate," for the first time ever, which shows how even an adept adult can be bested by a child if he (the adult) is not paying full attention. I include these instances to demonstrate that during Jan Term I acquired unexpected information. The most important off-label thing I learned was that non-inquisitiveness like Renata McLintock's, along with just plain Being There, beats all the good intentions of friends and neighbors, even the ones who left casseroles on the back porch.

Establishments like Forget Me Not help preserve things of the past, and this adds to our general knowledge of history. Antique stores have been criticized for pandering to what's low in human nature—acquisitiveness and narcissism. But the acquisition of items gives aesthetic pleasure to those who acquire them as well as to those who will view them in their eventual resting places, museums. As for narcissism, I do believe it is here to stay. The art of personal adornment has been practiced ever since Eve found out she was naked. Also, people like to buy other people beautiful things to show their love. My father bought Tina a welcome-home present of demantoid garnet earrings dating from late in the Belle Époque.¹⁷ He gave her one earring and left the other in Rennie's safe, to be reclaimed in the future, a kind of good-behavior reward. That's his way, and Tina says she can live with it now.

16 *Baksheesh* means free but for the purpose of sweetening the deal.

17 1871–1914