



The Mercury
The Student Art &
Literary Magazine
of Gettysburg
College

Volume 2023

Article 9

May 2023

The Market

Kelly Smolik
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Smolik, Kelly () "The Market," *The Mercury*. Year 2023, Article 9.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2023/iss1/9>

This open access nonfiction is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

The Market

Author Bio

Kelly Smolik is a current Junior at Gettysburg College, where she's studying English with a Concentration in Writing and Psychology. On campus, she works at Musselman Library and plays the flute.

The Market

KELLY SMOLIK

It's Corn Day.

The sun is blazing in the mid-afternoon heat. The back of my shirt is already drenched in sweat. The kitchen's AC huffs away as we continue to open the glass door dividing the kitchen from the market. Simultaneously, the sliding doors around the market's perimeter trap heat inside like a coffin. On a day like this, we're lucky if the fridges stay at 40 degrees.

Corn Day, though. A great reminder that it can, in fact, always get worse.

...

Two pallets of corn are forklifted behind the market's shed. For the next two hours before closing, our ragtag team of three women – a high schooler, a college student, and the owner, a middle-aged mother of four – are gifted the task of shucking, stacking, and stuffing corn. *Stuffing corn* into any and all crevices of the already-full fridges (Corn Day also means you're bound to play fridge Jenga with boxes of produce and baked goods).

The three of us rotate between shucking, dragging the corn-stacked wagon to the fridges, and manning the cash register. Sherrie starts wailing – singing, some might say – along to the music more than usual and Grace continues her Corn Day collection of finding the baby corns amidst the normal-size ears. The voices of Trace Adkins, Luke Bryan, and the amalgamation of all other Y2K country music continues to roar back to us from the market. I always love to ask Sherrie if she thinks “Country Girl (Shake it for Me)” will encourage her customers to buy more local tomatoes or whoopie pies. She laughs with that eyebrow raise only mothers can perfect.

Amidst our heat-exhausted irrational jokes, though, there are Corn Talks. Sherrie asks about my boyfriend and the courses I'm taking next semester. She continues to lovingly heckle me to consider driving two hours home every weekend to work here during the school year. *Don't you want to see all the pumpkins and cider this fall?* Perhaps, but my car's gas tank might not want to.

Eventually, Sherrie gets swept away by customers to the register, and Grace drags the wagon of corn to the fridges. I'm left alone with the corn and things turn vicious. I'm ripping a leftover piece of husk from the ear when a string of husk slits the skin of my thumb mid-tear, like a searing paper cut. I wince, slightly from the pain but mostly from the embarrassment of the corn attacking me, as a tiny stream of blood surfaces. Thankfully, the blood only wells at my thumb and spares the piles of ears.

I abandon the corn and start rinsing my thumb under the kitchen sink's hot water. The blur of blood won't stop leaking from my thumb. The slit is only a tilted line on the outer edge of my thumb's pad. The skin flaps back and forth with a tiny throb of a sting.

"Oh, what happened?" Sherrie asks as she bustles through the kitchen's screen door from helping a customer.

"I was trying to get out of corn duty, obviously," I smile over my shoulder while waving my thumb in her direction.

Sherrie rolls her eyes with a grin on her face, as she ducks under the butcher block table to pull out the First-Aid kit.

"It kinda won't stop bleeding though."

Her head pops back up. "Well, yeah, what are you even doing over there?"

She critiques my lack of pressure on the area, as I try to defend that I was cleaning the area before applying pressure. Soap and water and all that. Apparently, my system is flawed.

"Well, you gotta stop the bleeding first," she says as she unwraps a Band-Aid. She's midair about to wrap it around my thumb when she stops.

"I probably should've asked you if you wanted my help with the Band-Aid, huh?"

We laugh.

"Please, finish the job."

She wraps the Band-Aid around my thumb.

...

For the rest of the day, I'm demoted to dishwashing duty to separate me from the feisty corn. In the sink, there are spatulas poised in blenders. Patterned mugs leaning against unwieldy baking sheets. Spoons floating in mason jars. This is where I used to always be stationed while the rest of the kitchen hustled with chaos back when I first started working here. Sherrie and the girls would flit around the room dodging each other in the cramped kitchen while balancing all the ingredients for a sandwich in one

hand and a mug of coffee in the other. I would only hear the echoing squeal of the espresso machine and the sizzle of a crepe being flipped, machines I didn't know how to use. Everything I did back then was "wrong" in some way, which was partially because my parents sequestered me away from the kitchen at home, leaving me clueless on basic tasks, and partially because Sherrie is a self-proclaimed micromanager. Meanwhile, though, my fingertips would crinkle at the sink and the water would soak the front of my shirt just like they are now. Back then, the only danger was the sting of hot water pouring over my fingers.

Now, though, my fingertips daily endure the prick of heat from shots of espresso and freshly made crepes. Last year, I sported a Tennessee-shaped splotch on my inner arm from a hot tray of chocolate cookies. Even now, the seemingly simple task of husking corn left me with a crescent of skin fluttering off. I know how to run the register, bake off cinnamon buns, and even grind espresso beans for customers, all in the ways that Sherrie likes. She taught me her ways but also taught me to believe in myself to do tasks. I learned the confidence of how to figure things out myself.

All day, though, I missed finishing off the corn. I missed gathering with the seemingly random group of us ladies that became a kind of family for me. I missed feeling the unifying exhaustion under the sweltering sun. I knew, however, that another Corn Day awaited.