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Shoes

Kelly Bennett
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Author Bio

Kelly Bennett is a first-year student, majoring in English and Management with a minor in writing. She graduated from Red Lion Area Senior High school in 2005.

Shoes

I am not a morning person. I've always hated getting up before the sun. I am in my second year of high school but already I have mastered a concise morning routine, forty minutes then out the door, maximizing every second so I can spend more time beforehand in bed. I swear that I can make it at least thirty minutes in the morning without even opening my eyes, just going through the routine, in one room, out the other, remembering to step over the rim of the bathtub and into the shower instead of jamming my toe on the metal tracking that lines the edge, as I have a habit of doing. In fact if ever a stream of profanity makes its way out of my mouth before the clock strikes seven, it is more than likely because my poor big toe has taken yet another blow.

While I manage to save my metatarsal digits this morning, keeping on a strict time schedule is an entirely different story. God damn that stupid school bus. It is past seven, now the swearing may be directed towards my primary mode of transportation. I grab my bag, my swim stuff, and throw on a pair of flip flops. Why is it that only when you are in a hurry, and are tossing the only matching pair of shoes out of the shoe rack, that they never land left on the left side and right on the right side?

I can hear it coming as I clumsily run down the road, still trying to lock my toes around the straps of my shoes. The bus is making a low rumbling clamor, like a digestive gurgle, as the driver shifts from one gear to the other up the hill, spewing out a mechanical burp as it finally reaches the stop and opens the door. I go up one, two, three steps, then into the third seat from the front, falling down hard onto the greasy brown plastic. We are almost always late for homeroom. I don't know if it is the bus driver's fault, or all of the kids at the second to last stop who can never manage to run when they see this oversized yellow piece of tin coming. It is always the same kids. Only a few more months until I can drive, then I won't have to worry about the bus or the kids, or making it to homeroom before the late bell.

It is getting to that time of the year when it all just starts to blur together. I am already counting down the number of days that we have left in my assignment book. I cross out another number this morning while listening to the announcements.

The problem is that everything is the same; every day it's the same routine, waking up late for the bus, getting in late for homeroom and sitting there, just waiting for the next bell to ring. I am so tired of school, like most students, tired of the seemingly *déjà vu* moments that are part of the daily schedule. I wish the days were more exciting. It is funny how things turn around so quickly, next time I'll be more careful about what I wish for before I'm fully awake.

It definitely isn't the class bell shrieking to a robotic tempo from out in the hallway. It isn't normal to start the morning off with a code red lock down. Usually that is just the stupid drill that we do mid-afternoon, the drill that the students ignore and the teachers continue lecturing through. But because it is homeroom Ms. Smith at least goes to the trouble of locking the door, I'm surprised that she even feels compelled to do that much. I know she isn't going to go pull down the blinds on the windows that line the top half of the ceiling. That would require her exuding some effort, heaven forbid.

It is amazing how we all sit there so numb without any sort of concern over what the lock down is for. I guess it doesn't really help that last week we had to walk in the cold rain down to the junior high because of a bomb threat. Or the week before when they used the drill as an excuse to bring dogs into the school to look for drugs. I'm not worried, at least not yet, I don't even know if it is a drill or the real thing.

A half hour has gone by now. There haven't been any announcements, but I can see the shoes passing by outside our window. The simple Old Navy flip flops and Nikes and the top fashion of the moment, the Adidas tennis shoes. It doesn't make sense. Something must have happened. Why are there so many kids walking past our windows towards the back of the high school? We aren't trapped down on the bottom floor while the building is burning or a bomb is counting down, while the rest of our class is hauling their designer footwear to a safer place, are we? They didn't forget about A102 did they? I should be in first period by now. If I knew what was going on I would probably be more excited about the fact that I'm missing English right now. Instead, I'm starting to worry. I'm worrying because I've lost count of the number of feet that have gone by the window. Toes and ankles drift past. Attached to them, their calves and thighs, coated in various shades of blue, create a denim sky line. I can see a full body every now and then, all skinny. The girls are all in that stage where they have chests but no hips, and the boys are just lacking the leg and facial hair, and haven't had that second growth spurt yet. They are all young. It has to be the junior high kids. What are they doing? Pay back for our visit to their gym last week? At least it isn't raining on them. It has to be some sort of practice drill, like a fire drill to the extreme, or a tornado drill and they are pretending that the twister is chasing them out of the building and up the street. I don't know, but it is strange.

Another half hour and the shoes have stopped coming. I'm tired of waiting. I want to know what is going on. Why are we still sitting in homeroom? Sonia is starting to drive us all nuts, it is like she has ADD on crack and no sense of vocal volume control. "Turn on the TV! Turn on the TV!" She never shuts up. Although, I don't like to admit it, I agree with her. If something big has happened, maybe it is on the news already. It can't be just a drill anymore. Channel 8 is showing footage; Sonia was right, footage of our junior high. That's our front lawn. Those are our kids rushing up the hill, past the cameras, moving towards us and away from their building. Why are there ambulances? Why are there so many police cars? What has happened? I can't make anything out. All of the News 8 people just keep saying there

has been an incident. Well, no shit. I can easily tell that but what happened? Sonia is cackling. I don't know why, something in the text message she just got.

"Something happened to Dr. Segro." Ms. Smith yells at Sonia for sharing, telling her to put the phone away. Apparently we aren't allowed to know what is going on. Yet, the television is still on. I can't help but wonder what has happened to my favorite principal. Did one of the kids beat him up? Did he have to wrestle them to the ground? Oh, I wish that I could have seen that, Dr. Segro, all 200 some Italian pounds of him, pinning down some wily little seventh grader to the linoleum floor, just like the cowboys do with the pigs at the fair. What a way to start the morning. We are all sitting here while Dr. Segro is perched on top of some boy, waiting for the cops to come take him away. I bet his bald head is all red from the workout. We always used to joke about how he must wax it every morning because the lights reflect so brightly off of it, especially the stage lights when he gives the opening remarks before a music concert. I smile a little, thinking about one of my favorite concerts where he gave his best James Earl Jones impersonation in honor of our movie themed program. It makes me miss the Junior High.

Sonia starts up again; another message. I snap out of my mid-morning day dream and a wave of reality and panic wash over me. Austin, who is sitting up front on top of one of the ricketiest desks, is flipping through the stations now, trying to find out if Sonia is telling the truth. God, I hope not. We find out soon enough whether or not she is lying.

The principle is dead. A boy is dead. Ms. Smith's face goes white. I think all of ours do. This is Red Lion. This is my high school, my school district, MY home. People don't get shot here. This can't be real. That mass on top of the stretcher that the cameras are focusing on, that isn't him. It has to be a joke. Why isn't he popping out from under the sheet like they do in the movies? I can't keep my eyes off of the television. I can feel my chest tightening up like someone is trying to wrap a giant rubber band around my rib cage. This isn't real; I have to still be in bed. I just want to hear my alarm clock or the bus driving by, I don't care, I just don't want this to be the truth.

Dead? Dead. Gone. Shot. Murdered by a kid who then killed himself. How can he be dead? The only principal who ever bothered to learn my name. He always wore a suit to school. He was always out in the halls talking to the students, caring about everyone. He always stood in the cafeteria and watched over all of the kids before that first bell. He isn't standing there anymore. I think I'm going to be sick. I just, I just don't know what to do. I don't know what to think. I need to remember to breathe. I need to stop asking myself questions. I can't. Everything is a question. Today was supposed to be just another day. Why did it have to be different? This isn't what I meant when I wished for a little excitement. I thought this town was safe. Why did it have to happen here? Why did it have to happen to him? I'm still watching the TV. He always polished his black dress shoes. I can see them shining through the sheet.