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Associated Colleges of the Midwest www.acm.edu/nickadams

Note: This story contains language which may be considered inappropriate for young or more sensitive readers.

Rolande Quits Her Job

Exactly two years and seven weeks after the story I'm about to tell you ends I get my ass into college.

I don't get to that part here because in order to go all the way to the day that Rutgers decides that I'm good enough to take and good enough to take for free I have to go through a whole lot of other crap like how I drank all the rum my dad got on his last trip back to visit his brothers in Haiti with my then-emphasis-on-the-then boyfriend Francis and how my dad came back when we were both trashed and said I could not see Francis again and I screamed and said, "No fucking way dad no fucking way," and it was the first and second time I dropped the F-bomb in front of my dad who is a guy who wears a suit and tie to work every day and reads French books in translation even though he could read them a lot easier in French. But actually I was happy because the reason I was drinking with Francis was to work up the guts to dump him anyway.

So that was a big deal and also at the time I thought I was pregnant and that would make a good story too, but I've had to read some long-ass crap for my AP English class and I know that once I get to the part where *and so Jan von Treksalot began his sojourn across the arid desert, at the crossroads of Longestparagraphever*, my mind is already wandering.

And I want you to pay attention.

But I also want to tell you about the day I got into college, which was yesterday.

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Here’s what happened: My dad comes home from the store he manages (I wasn’t drunk and wasn’t with Francis, whose ass I dumped a long time ago). He said, “Rolande, what did you learn at school today?” which is the first thing he says every day when he gets home, even when he has a shit day at work or is sick.

I had this whole thing planned out about how I was going to mess around with him and draw it out but instead I shouted, “Daddy I got my ass into college and Rutgers is sending me there for free!” and even though I dropped the A-bomb he took off his jacket and poured us each a glass of red wine which we drank together before even eating dinner.

Two years and seven weeks and one day ago it was a different story, I’ll tell you that, and I wasn’t in any AP English class, and although I could go on about why Francis is a serious loser and how scary it is to be seventeen and think you’re going to have a baby, I think I’ll stick to the day I quit my job at the Athlete’s Foot in South Orange, New Jersey.

I said I wasn’t in AP English, and I also wasn’t in school because the day I turned 16, which was a Monday, I walked into the Grade Administrator’s office and handed in the form that announced my withdrawal from Orange High School. When I walked out of the office Marie Francoise who I always celebrated my birthday with when we were little because hers was two days before mine, this year on Saturday, was walking in with her own withdrawal form, and we left OHS for what we damn well figured was for good and got Slurpees at the 7-11 and then took the bus to South Orange where Marie Francoise’s brother Jean worked at the Athlete’s Foot and within one hour of not being a high school student I was a working American.

Andrea the floor manager at the Athlete’s Foot turned away Marie Francoise because it turns out she’s not legal, and neither is Jean, so Andrea fired him that day too. Andrea asked if I

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had my green card and I said I was born here and she said okay but still made me watch the training video twice "Just so you understand everything because sometimes they talk really fast."

So while I had a job and didn't have to go to a bullshit school where they just wasted my time anyway—all of which I thought was a pretty sweet deal—it sucked for Marie and Jean a lot, because once Jean lost his job they couldn't pay rent and had to move in with their cousins in Newark, which is an even worse place to live than Orange. I hadn't known that their parents were still in Port-au-Prince and I think they still are, although I did see Marie Francoise and her daughter at the White Castle the other day and they seemed alright.

I had a job though, and one day of training was all I needed before I was fitting kids with spanking white Nike board shoes which are still cool now but were *really* cool then, but the funny part was they had been *really* cool back in Orange about a year before that. If my dad hadn't thrown me out of the house when he found out that I quit school, I am sure he would have made a comment about how the white teenage suburbanites surrounding Newark never paid any mind to the black kids from the inner-ring except to take their trends and make them passé. I know he would have said that because he had said it before and I was almost glad that I was living at my friend Beatrice's house so he wouldn't see me put on my Athlete's Foot polo shirt every morning and take the bus from Orange to South Orange and take boxes of Nike shoes off the shelves alongside the four other daytime workers—two from Haiti, one Dominican and one guy who said he was the nephew of the king of Nigeria—who were all too young to vote even if they were citizens, which they weren't.

Sometimes I would see these bored-looking white and Asian kids who went to high school in South Orange and Livingston who were obviously cutting school and thinking they

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were really badass when really I had *quit* school making me the most badass of all of them and they would walk in and look around and never buy anything but sometimes make me take out forty fucking boxes of Pumas to try on which was one huge pain in the ass, no joke. Sometimes they would talk about the classes they were skipping and a lot of the time this guy Rene, who had quit OHS two years before me but was still working the floor would say, “Look at those dumbass cracker mama’s boys,” and I would say, “Yeah,” and then lace up the forty pairs of shoes that wouldn’t get bought.

So it all comes to the day that I quit my job which was what I wanted to talk about in the first place before I had to get into all of the shit with my dad and Marie and the commute to South Orange which was a bitch and how Beatrice was kind of a bitch too even though she was letting me live with her and her brother Francis, which is obviously another story that you’ll just have to wait for until Rutgers decides to pay me for telling goddamn stories.

Sometimes I saw my dad on the commute to South Orange because he works in West Orange which is like South Orange’s less-successful brother as opposed to plain old Orange who is the cousin on food stamps that no one talks about. He drives this huge Cadillac that he bought on the one-year anniversary of him and my mom coming to the U.S. which was also the two-year pre-anniversary of the day my mom died and even though he could afford another car that isn’t so ugly he doesn’t buy one. So it’s pretty easy to spot from the bus and the day I quit my job I was looking down at the cars and I saw my dad and he was wearing his suit and tie and he didn’t look like a man who had told his only child not three weeks before that she was throwing away everything he had done for her and everything she had ever done for herself. But he was. He kind of looked like a man who read the Bible and de Maupassant and Shakespeare every night which

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would have been more accurate. And then he looked up and he saw me and the light turned green and I saw him flip his turn signal and change lanes and I said to myself, holy shit he's going to follow me to work.

And he did.

Can I tell you how easy it is to stop feeling homesick and start feeling really fucking scared, because in the 15 minutes that my dad trailed the 64 bus to South Orange I forgot really fucking quickly about the books he read aloud to me and the birthday parties he threw and only could think of the summer when I was in sixth grade he made me copy the Old Testament into a marble notebook for two months because I went to the swimming pool without asking permission. But it was funny because I stopped being scared and started just getting pissed, pissed that I was sixteen years old and that according to the United States I was old enough to decide that I had received enough education but my dad still thought that just by saying that he was disappointed in me and that I was betraying everything my mother had done for me that it would change what I did. Hell no. Better luck threatening me with volunteer work, I thought.

I was an adult. I had a job and a paycheck and I was thinking of getting a fake ID from this guy someone knew in Passaic. I did what I wanted.

It turns out that the day I quit my job what I wanted to do when the bus reached my stop was to haul ass out the door, take a shortcut through the parking lot of the Blockbuster, and enter through the back entrance of the Athlete's Foot and pray that my dad couldn't figure out where I went. I messed around in the storage room for a couple of minutes, peeking out to the floor to see if an angry short man had walked into the store, but it didn't look like it, so I put my Athlete's

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Foot lanyard with my keys and name tag over my head and walked out into the store to do my job.

The first person who came up to me was a woman in a pantsuit and her son who was probably about my age although you couldn't really tell because he had his Dartmouth hat pulled down almost to his chin, which could have been to hide acne or maybe he was just pissed off to be shopping with his mom. Before she even opened her mouth I knew what she was going to say which is can David try on the white Nikes, size ten? I got the shoes out of the back room and when I kneeled down to lace them up I saw that it was acne but maybe also sulkiness now that I think about it, because pimples kind of piss on your day.

My boss Andrea always told us, the employees of the South Orange Athlete's Foot, to talk to the customers and make them feel like they were in a community and not a shoe store so because I was a good employee I asked the kid if he was having a good time out shopping with his mother which was really obviously not the case and I took the fact that he didn't answer to be a “fuck you” to his mom for giving him shitty skin in his genes. The woman looked pretty embarrassed and said they were having a great day since David didn't have school because of Yom Kippur which doesn't ever apply in Orange because nobody is Jewish, and then David said the shoes fit and the woman looked so happy that he talked that she said she would buy two pairs of the sneakers, so I went back to the shoe room to get another size ten.

And will you believe it but when I walked to the register carrying two pairs of cool Nike sneakers, who is standing in line behind the woman and her pimply son but my dad.

And I just about flipped my shit right there but I rang up the woman who paid in cash and before I could even say something like “What the fuck Dad!” or probably more like “What are

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you doing here?” or maybe just “Hi,” he said “I would like to look at these shoes” (and he was pointing at the white Nikes) “in a size twelve.”

Now I hadn’t lived with my dad for sixteen years without knowing that he was a size eight, no bigger, but I turned right around to the back room and got him out a pair.

I brought out the shoes that were going to be too big for my dad and the other people working the floor at the Athlete’s Foot were giving my dad a weird look maybe because not a lot of black men in suits came into the store in the morning or maybe because we kind of looked alike (I don’t actually think that, by the way, but that’s what sometimes people tell me and even though I think that’s full of shit I thought I’d throw it out there).

So I laced up the shoes and handed them to my dad and he said, “Hmm, these seem to be a big roomy around the heel,” but still walked around the store five times and by this time almost everyone in the store was pretty much staring at him and I pretty much wanted to die right then and there and when he finished his long-ass stroll he sat down at the try-on bench and said, “Perhaps I should try an eleven and a half.”

I couldn’t fucking believe it. Still I got him the shoes and they were too big for him but he still shuffled around the store in the white Nikes and by this time it was 9:30 and he seriously must have been late for work but he obviously didn’t care and asked for a size eleven (same deal) and then a size ten and a half. By the time I got to ten I slammed the box on the ground in front of him (I still hadn’t said anything by the way) and I felt a finger tapping my shoulder and it was my boss Angela.

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“Can I talk to you Rolande?” she asked and I was about to tell her that she didn’t understand, it was my dad seriously fucking with me but I realized that if I said something I was probably going to start crying so I just nodded.

“You are being very rude to this customer,” she said.

“Whatever,” I said, which was all I could get out.

“Whatever?” she said sounding pretty offended and behind her my dad who had finished walking around the store five times called out, “Perhaps a nine and a half, miss?”

I ignored him.

“Rolande, your customer is requesting your assistance.”

I looked over at the Jason Kidd display by the door.

“Miss?”

“Rolande, your customer—,”

“I *know*,” I said and I was starting to get pissed off now at Angela more than my dad because if he hadn’t been my dad this would have been really embarrassing, to be yelled at in front of a customer.

“Maybe you didn’t pay attention to Part II of the training video where they emphasized courtesy and speed.”

“My shoes? A nine and a half?”

“I paid attention,” I said, but Andrea was already telling my dad to hold on and had grabbed onto my arm which I found really annoying and was dragging me towards the back room and when we got back there she took out the training video and said, “Let me just fast forward to that part so you can remind yourself.”

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I don't think I actually said, "I'm not a fucking moron, Andrea" but I might have because she got this really pissed off look on her face and said that maybe Athlete's Foot wasn't the right place for me to be working.

"Well, good, because I quit," I said (See? That's where I quit my job at the Athlete's Foot, but I'll keep going a little longer so you get the full picture.) I yanked off my nametag and grabbed my coat and ran out the door and I guess my dad had left the store because he was sitting outside of the Panera next door with a lemonade and a chocolate chip cookie.

"Are you done early today with your job?" he asked.

"I quit," I said, and I didn't think I would cry at this point but I still thought I shouldn't talk too much.

"It's never a good idea to quit things, Rolande," he said.

"Yeah," I said.

"But maybe once or twice is okay. Perhaps that will get it out of your system."

I nodded.

"The quitting disease."

"Yeah."

"I don't think I'm going to want the rest of this lemonade. Would you like it?"

"Yeah," I said, and sat down next to him and he gave me the cookie too.

"Would you like a ride home?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"I will probably drop you off at the high school."

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“I figured,” I said, and he did, and that’s how my dad dragged my sorry ass out of South Orange and back to high school after I quit my job at the Athlete’s Foot.

But, look, he didn’t take my SATs or fill out my application to college or wake my ass up at 6:15 every morning to go to school, and he didn’t get me into college. I did that myself. If anyone ever asks, all he gave me was a lemonade and a cookie and a ride.