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Recovering from a wardrobe malfunction

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Sarah Wagner

“Recovering From a Wardrobe Malfunction”

I am finishing up the final day of my *field experience* in an English class filled with junior and senior high school students. I have a lesson prepared, so I leave my house plenty early in order to setup. I close the door behind me, breathing in the crisp October air, ready to take on whatever lies ahead. I am dressed from head to toe in a darling “teacher outfit” that I have reserved for this very day. A red turtleneck sweater, a brand-new black skirt (zipper included), a new pair of thigh-high panty hose, and a pair of black heels, compliments of my roommate.

I take several confident steps forward, crunching the autumn-colored fallen leaves under my pointy-toed heels, which lead me in the right direction. I tiptoe across the rusty metal bridge that is covered in holes just the right size for one of my thin heels to get trapped in. It reminds me of the metal covered drains, weaved with holes, I refused to step over as a child. I once saw a panicked woman drop her keys down one. That led me to believe that I too could fall through the cracks and never return. My embarrassed mom would pick me up as I wailed. She would make a heroic attempt to prove that there was, “Nothing to be afraid of.” Today, fear was the last thing on my mind. Nothing could stop me from presenting my perfectly prepared lesson plan in my darling “teacher outfit”. With my head held high, I continued on my way towards the doors that greeted me as a teacher, not a student.

The classroom is waiting for me with the exact appearance it has had for the past month during my observation. The desks are arranged in a horseshoe, turned towards

the front of the classroom, which will soon be filled with students facing me. I look out at those empty seats and visualize the students with big smiles of enjoyment, creating the character maps I will shortly assign. I can only hope it goes as smoothly as I have imagined. I set aside the markers, paper, and examples I have brought with me and take a deep breath of the familiar musty school smell.

It takes only a few minutes to setup, gather my thoughts, and relax before the class begins. The clock ticks at me in the silence, reminding me that I have ten minutes left before show time. I decide to use this spare time to make a quick trip to the restroom and freshen up. I flush the toilet and down with the water goes my final moment of relief. Thank God a voice in my head told me to check myself out in the full-length bathroom mirror before heading to the front of the classroom. I turn side-ways and brush my palms down my thighs and suddenly, I feel bare skin - - - where I was relying on a protective zipper. I am now faced with the shocking reality that my zipper is perfectly closed at the top, but split open, exposing a large portion of my upper thigh and panties. The trouble is that I cannot unzip it in order to relock it over my flashing thigh. Honestly, what crime did I ever commit against zippers to deserve this?

My face turns as red as my turtleneck sweater. I wish I had the neck of a turtle, so I could hide my embarrassment inside a protective shell. I cannot hide. I know I must think quickly. Realizing I only have five minutes before presenting my exposed self in front of dozens of teenage eyes, I cover my wardrobe malfunction with my oversized teacher bag, high tail it down the hallway past groups of students that may have seen my accident already, and begin running one block to my house. At this point there is no casual way of getting from point A to point B, and back again in time. I jog passed

parents dressed in work clothes dropping off their children, exchanging hugs, and waving goodbye as their children waddle away in their oversized book bags.

I cross the see-through bridge that is several feet from my house. While doing so, I literally run out of my heels. They get stuck in the bridge that I had previously tiptoed over. I run back, grab them, and continue sprinting towards my house that has never seemed so unreachable. With a heel in each hand, I am well aware that my new panty hose are ripped and dirty. I do not care how ridiculous I appear; I am bound and determined to get this evil skirt off of me and replace it with something zipper-free and reliable. I throw open the door, stand face to face with my confused roommate that has just rolled out of bed, and yell, “I need you to drive me back to the school!” Maybe she thinks she is still in a deep sleep, dreaming, so I make sure to yell loud enough for her to know I am for real. This nightmare must be conquered. I grab a stretchy, zipper-free skirt that will have to do and try to squeeze my failure of a skirt off of my unshrinkable hips.

It is no use. The skirt won’t budge. It is locked around my hips and I can’t break the code. The zipper is smiling at me with its evil teeth. I grab a pair of scissors with no hesitation and ask my roommate to, “Please cut the damn skirt off of me!” She shoots back a look of bewilderment and asks, “Are you serious?” One would think that it would be a shame to waste a brand new skirt, but the skirt is cursed in my eyes. She releases me in one snip. The replacement skirt goes over my panties that never should have been exposed in a school setting. I leave the horrid, black skirt in a ball on the floor. It resembles the Wicked Witch, melted to nothing. It must have cackled, “I’ll get you my

pretty,” this morning, but I failed to hear the warning signs. It can’t possibly come back to life to further embarrass me.

My roommate becomes an instant lifesaver, rescuing me from this zipper horror film. She let out a few giggles when I was frantically running around the house in my underwear. Now I have to focus on getting back to the classroom. We slam the doors of her reliable car and before I know it we are back at the school where I am suppose to be demonstrating how to create a character map. I hustle up the steps of the entrance that seem to go on forever. I feel like a sweaty pig. How am I going to look arriving late, with shiny beads of panic running down my face?

I reach the quiet classroom and check my watch. I am three minutes late. I walk from the back of the room to the front, extremely aware of the silent eyes that follow my every sweaty move. All I want to do is break the ice by saying, “Sorry I’m late. I had a wardrobe malfunction that needed some taking care of.” Unfortunately, that could be seen as unprofessional, especially for someone inexperienced and only a few years older than the students awaiting my instruction. So instead, I immediately begin my lesson, ignoring the fact that I am late, out of breath, full of sweat, and have ripped panty hose (the least of my worries). I distract the students by placing the attention on the task at hand. By this point, teaching the lesson seems like the easiest part of my day. “It’s smooth sailing from here,” I think to myself as I passed out the papers for the assignment.

Before I know it, life appears to be back to normal. The students are opening up new packs of markers and snapping off the colorful lids. They draw connections between the main characters in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, the play we have been reading, and describe the role of each. As I observe them, I picture my ongoing

relationship with zippers. If I had to create a character map showing the shaky relationships I have experienced with the many zippers that have coincidentally busted open on me in an untimely fashion, it would not be pretty. Zippers obviously just have it out to get me and are avoiding a normal person/garment relationship.

Once I am sure that the students understand what to do and are hard at work, I sneak to the back of the classroom to apologize to the real teacher for being several minutes late. She looks up from the notes she is taking and smiles at me, ready to give some positive feedback. Before she speaks, I tell her, “I am so sorry I was late. I can’t believe it happened, but the zipper on my skirt broke and I had to run home and change.” I did not want to over exaggerate into the details. I make it short, sweet, and right to the point. She looks at me nonchalantly and replies, “Oh, no big deal.” Clearly, she has no idea what a big deal it really was. It was a complete nightmare. When a little kid wakes up from a nightmare, you do not simply reply, “Oh, no big deal.” I suppose it was only to make me feel better.

I slowly walk passed each student, glancing over their shoulder at their works-in-progress. With each step I take, my skirt that I have been wearing for all of five minutes gracefully moves with me. It is like a long lost friend, comfortable and broken in. I am so overwhelmed by the reality of the unbelievable morning I just experienced; I can’t help but let my mind wander away from the lesson I am teaching. I picture the lifeless skirt lying on the floor of my house wherever it happened to land after I threw it out of my sight. Thoughts of sweet revenge dance through my head. Destroying the final remains of my skirt will make me feel better.

I conclude the lesson by having the students display their character maps on their desks. Then, everyone walks around the room observing their peers' artistic talents and put a tally mark on the one they think looks most creative. The top three favorites are announced and applauded. I wrap things up and have everyone turn in their work. I receive praise from the teacher that still has no idea what I went through. I drape my trusty teacher bag over my shoulder and make my final exit out of the classroom. A sigh of relief blows out my previously fire-breathing nostrils.

* * *

I take my time walking back to my house. The clicks of my heels move much slower than my panic-stricken pace that I moved at only an hour ago. My final walk home from the school is calm, allowing me the opportunity to soak up the morning sunshine. I notice sleepy college students, much like myself, heading to class. For them, the day has just begun. They can start off fresh. I, on the other hand, feel like I have just completed a marathon. I take my time tiptoeing across the rusty bridge. I am happy to see that as I reach my front porch steps my heels are comfortably still in tact.

Before I make the slightest attempt to run to the rest of my roommates and tell them about my morning, I go straight to the culprit. The black ball of material seems to be crying out, "Forgive me! Sew me back up and let's forget all about this", but I have no sympathy. This pathetic excuse for a skirt is not worth my time. The minor sewing skills I possess will never be tested on this monstrous material. I lean over and pick it up, holding it as far away from me as possible. One would think that I was holding a ticking time bomb in my hand that could go off at any moment.

I walk towards the kitchen garbage that has seen more trash than Oscar the Grouch. Without a moment of hesitation I plop my recent purchase on top of a wet pile of soggy cereal. Now the zipper's shameful tears can be soaked up in the cereal, along with the spoiled milk. I look away from my victory at my other roommate who is sitting at the kitchen table inhaling her early lunch of macaroni and cheese.

She carelessly walks to the trashcan and dumps her leftover noodles, coated in gooey cheese, all over my once-adored skirt. She happens to look down as she scrapes the remaining elbow-shaped noodles out of the bowl. She does a double take as she looks at the garbage, up at me, and back at the garbage.

“Oh my gosh! Is this the skirt you bought with me the other day? What is it doing in here? I am so sorry. If I would have know it was in there, I never would have rudely dumped my food all over it,” she says with wide eyes of disbelief.

“Oh, no big deal,” I casually reply.