

*“The Laundry Card”*  
*By Elliott Brown '21*  
*Short Story Honorable Mention*

The men smiled at one another. “I’ll meet you at Stewartstown Railroad. You know, the one in York County,” said Garrett. The two of them had been searching for Garrett’s laundry card, which pays for him to do his laundry, since earlier that morning. The funny thing is, before today, the two of them were complete strangers. Garrett didn’t even know his new friend’s name. “What did you have for breakfast?” Garrett asked.

“A breath of fresh air with a side of anxiety.” His friend responded. That is what most George School students typically had, after all. The two of them had come up with a plan to find the laundry card before dinnertime that evening. Each of them would retrace Garrett’s steps from the previous two days and then meet at Stewartstown Railroad, where Garrett goes to hang out after school every day. Garrett would retrace Monday, and his friend would retrace Tuesday.

His friend was wearing a peculiar assortment of clothing. He had on a black t-shirt and purple sweatpants, which were oddly accentuated with a pair of Nike shoes and Adidas crew length socks. From a distance, even a man with exceptional 20/20 vision wouldn’t be able to tell the two boys apart. They both stand at about 5 and-a-half feet tall, they both have golden blonde hair, and they both sport a pair of thick-framed eyeglasses that take up half of their face.

“That’s the bell,” Garrett said. “I’ll see you at the station.” The first place Garrett looked was in the dining hall. He was checking here just to be safe; he almost never went to eat the “food” they served in there. Not since the Curse of Meatloaf Monday, anyway. One day, during lunch period his freshman year, Garrett swore he could hear screaming coming from behind the kitchen. They’d been serving meatloaf that day, but there was something off about it. When he and his friends heard the screams, they quickly spun around towards the kitchen. When Garrett turned back, he was astounded to discover the meatloaf crawling right off his plate and onto the table! Shortly thereafter, all the meatloaf in the dining hall started to mobilize, and it didn’t take long for them to rebel against their oppressors. Many lives were lost during the Curse of Meatloaf Monday, and the school hasn’t been the same since.

Garrett checked for his laundry card by the salad bar, coffee station, storage closet, and panini press. He even looked behind the picture frames that decorated the dining room walls, but he had no luck. After examining the 'Wet Floor' sign next to the trash cans, he decided to leave the dining hall and shift his focus onto Orton Dormitory. Ironically, he slipped and fell on the way out. Mystery meat. Meanwhile, Garrett's friend had been searching for the laundry card outside on Red Square. He was supposed to be checking in Marshall Basement, but fumes of the undead kept him from stepping any closer than the door. After about a minute or so, he sat on a nearby bench to catch his breath. Mental exertion made him tired. His recovery was cut short when a pair of hungry squirrels fighting over an acorn thrust their way into his personal space. They ran a couple of circles around his feet, and eventually settled underneath the bench. When he bent down to observe them, he saw in the corner what seemed like a small piece of paper underneath some leaves. "A-ha!" He said. "That oughta do it." He snatched the laundry card from under the bench and made his way to Stewartstown Railroad.

Garrett was already there. He had carefully inspected Orton from nail to screw but was met with little success. As he waited for his friend to arrive, Garrett stepped inside the building. As he meandered through the station halls, he started to grow increasingly worried. He thought of the shame he'd feel if his friends knew he lost his laundry card. He thought of how embarrassing it would be to have to admit to the Dean's Office that he needed a new one. What would his parents think? The thoughts alone dejected him. Just as he was about to weep, he noticed something poking out from underneath a water fountain. Intrigued, he went to investigate. No sooner than two steps into his approach did he realize what it was. He raced the rest of the way, clicking his heels every few steps. He snatched up the laundry card with a smile the size of the Savannah on his face. Alas, his joy sank into sorrow as he read the name on the card: Jordan Banks. "That must be the new kid." Garrett thought. Once again feeling somber, he trudged towards the station exit. His friend arrived moments later, and the two exchanged greetings.

"I found one here, but it belongs to someone else," Garrett said.

"I found one too. Is it yours?"

Garrett looked at the card, but he quickly concluded that it wasn't his.

"Bummer," his friend remarked.

For a moment, Garrett didn't reply. After what seemed like an hour, he responded in despair. "My life is over! I'll never get past this, you know! It'd be impossible. This is worse than... than Meatloaf Monday. A lot worse! I honestly don't know if I'll ever be happy again."

Garrett looked at his friend and was surprised to see that he wasn't listening. He was staring directly at his waistline, below the mystery meat stain. "Did you check your pockets?" He asked. Garrett chuckled. "Of course," he replied. But then he thought for a moment. He'd been searching for hours, checking every single nook, cranny, and crevice that made itself known to him. He hadn't had time to check his pockets, because he was too busy searching in every other possible location. Then, it dawned on him. He was wearing the same pair of pants he'd been wearing Monday when he did his laundry. Garrett stuffed his hand in his right pocket. Sure enough, his laundry card was resting inside, along with some gum wrappers and his lucky spork. "Wow, I... I can't believe it! Thank you. Thank you so much!" Garrett cheered. His friend was gleaming proudly at him. "By the way... you never told me your name," Garrett remarked.

"Bacon," his friend responded. "Turkey Bacon."

Before Garrett could say anything further, a pencil tapped the top of his desk. "Young man, wake up. What did I tell you about sleeping in my class?" The sudden words indeed woke him up, and he rubbed his eyes. Slowly, Garrett heard the sharp ticking of the clock and the chatter in the room. "What?" He asked. Garrett had slept right through English class; he was up all night trying to finish his short story for a writing contest. Garrett had a crummy case of writer's block, and he couldn't get anything good written down no matter how hard he tried.

"What did I tell you about sleeping in my class?" The voice repeated. "What were you dreaming about anyway?"

"Sorry, Ms. Melaina. I was dreaming about... bacon," he replied.

"Of course you were. Garrett, do you have any ideas for your short story yet? The contest deadline is tomorrow."

Garrett opened his mouth to say no, but then he paused. Then, he quickly pulled out his notebook and began to write down everything he remembered from his dream.

"You know what, Ms. Melaina?" he said. "I think I do."