

# Hunting Season

by Melanie Gardner

Today is Thursday and I'm on the hunt again. I'm eager and hopeful that today I will find exactly the thing I want and need. Stay positive, I tell myself. You will find it. Happy thoughts. With my focus at knee level and with my eyes shifting from side to side, I look for that one thing that gets me through: that portal to perfection, my electrical connection to both inner and outer worlds. I need my fix today, and I'll need it again tomorrow. Some days I feel like a junkie, and perhaps I am.

Usually I get what I need, but sometimes I don't. On the days that I can't find one and fail to secure a cozy spot to pursue my activities, I feel slighted by fate. Hopes are dashed. Prospects ruined. Its 11:00a.m., and I can already tell that today will be a day where there are plenty available, yet unsuitably placed and inconvenient to use. As I walk down the hallways, each of these exposed plastic portals mocks me in turn like the Cheshire cat from *Alice in Wonderland*.

I round the corner and there, right there, is the perfect locale — a beautiful oasis in a barren land. Yes! But is it right? Is there one available? I can't see. There is a girl in the way. "Excuse me," I say, practically vibrating with excited energy. Cool blue eyes and blonde hair look over at me quizzically. As I scan the area I can see that she doesn't have what I need. "Is there a... oh, never mind. Sorry to bother you." Disheartened, I excuse myself again and keep walking, nose to the ground. I decide that this building isn't going to be much help today so I head to the next one, where the accommodations are friendlier for solitude.

I take the skywalk to French hall and start my search all over. I survey the study areas. Nope. I scour the walls on all sides, peeping surreptitiously under unoccupied tables and behind chairs, trying not to be obvious. Nothing. The ones that do exist are already accounted for. It is an absolute fact that nobody likes to share them; they are such a precious commodity. Even though there are usually

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two, using one in such close proximity to someone I am not already friendly with can be unnerving, so I don't bother stopping to ask anyone. I walk up and down each hallway, the third floor then the second. One end of the building to the other, and I find nothing. Not even one. What is going on today?

Far off down the hallway, another student is on the same quest; I watch as he scans the lower portions of the walls. Hopefulness brightens his face as his eyes lock onto that which he has been seeking. I observe the change in his countenance as he realizes that this one will not suit him; his face droops, and his lips become a thin line. I feel what he feels, and I wish I could help him. Kindred spirits are we; members of the same tribe, on the same mission. I have a thought that almost makes me laugh out loud: we could form a support group for the aperturially challenged. It occurs to me that I don't *really* need one in the strictest sense, its just that I won't last long without one. Maybe he actually needs it. So, I sacrifice the remainder of French hall to this unstated comrade and make my way to the street.

Outside in the fresh cool air, I feel less disappointed and more expansive. Who needs to be chained to one of those anyway? Not I. *This* is bliss. Here, I have the unique denizens of Flint, crunchy leaves, and plump squirrels to contemplate. Here, I am not a peculiar mixture of computer parts, organic brain and hapless flesh; I am not plugged in, turned on, or electrified. I just am. And now, I'm getting cold. Back to the hunt.

I cross the street at Harrison and wonder just how many other UMF students have the same issue that I do. Hundreds? I've seen them in scores — intellectual troops of barely-adults, conjugating with the unseen frequencies of electricity and broadband waves, headphones blocking out the sounds of the world in preference to Facebook and the Auto-tuned voice of Kanye West. In an intensely hypocritical way, I regard these willing cyborgs with contempt. Doesn't anybody read actual books anymore?

Advancing on my next target, the University pavilion, I formulate my strategy. I check my watch: 11:45 a.m. now. It will be busy for

lunch. Not very good odds, but I am an eternal optimist. I smooth my hair down and take a fortifying breath. Walk the perimeter, I tell myself. Keep your eyes peeled. If an opportunity presents itself — jump on it. It is getting to be late in the game, and I know that I must act quickly. I make my way through the crush of students, past the bookstore and the food vendors, and toward the arcade niche along the east wall. The table in the back corner of this niche is my favorite place on campus. I know I will be uninterrupted here. It is relatively secluded, but I can still watch people as they pass by. I approach this electrified laptop sanctuary with a combination of grateful hope and anxious anticipation, and I see that two university employees have already snatched it for their own purposes - lunch. With selfish dismay, I pivot on my heels and head back the way I came.

There is one last place I can check, and then I will give up. Oh, how I pray no one has taken this last spot! Just past the Financial Aid office there is a large room that is open and airy, with long tables and a blessedly infinite number of electrical outlets along the walls; this is the place I intend to pounce next. I take the escalator to the second floor and turn in that direction. From fifty yards away, I can see that there are no other students around. Its completely empty! Suddenly I have a sincere desire to do cartwheels all the way to that formica-covered table and its adjacent outlet and kiss them both fervently. Facebook and Kanye, here I come!

