

Albert Bender
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Our Daily Bread

Already the hunger began to gnaw at X. Big breakfasts for Xavier Michael Sloan, X for short, were part of his daily routine, but today was different. Chores, his now that his brother Tommy was sick, took away the time but not the memory of what would have been. Deliver the newspapers(there go the pancakes), walk Sampson(ditto the eggs), get the recycling ready for pickup(scratch the sausage). Even Tommy's illness, chicken pox, sent X's thoughts in strange directions.

For now, however, he'd have to take his mind off food. Gradually, he settled into his seat, and professor Quail began the ninety-minute endurance course called Western Civilization. His focus, the professor said, would be Asia Minor, and he repeated the word Turkey again and again until it pounded like a drumstick into X's head. Interesting lectures usually held his attention, but X could hear the grumbling mutiny in his stomach louder than Dr. Quail's voice. Just one cookie, a couple of grapes--anything.

Knowing he had to do something to survive, X glanced around the lecture hall. Lee, Brad, Paula, Ryan, and everyone else were taking notes as they paid close attention to every word. Midterm exams would be in two weeks and, as X knew, Dr. Quail's relied heavily on his lectures. No time to be missing out, but X was too hungry to care about the Ottoman Empire; Turkish taffy, on the other hand, was a delicious alternative.

Only when Dr. Quail, after millions of "Are there any questions," "That's a good point--let me respond to that," and "Who'd care to comment at this juncture" gave the assignment for Thursday, did X know he ^{was} close to dismissal; first, of course, the good professor gave a detailed outline

of the exam format, a guide sheet and bibliography for their research papers, which weren't due until December, two months away, and when someone with black, horn-rimmed glasses asked about midterm grades, Dr. Quail offered to mail the results to those who brought in self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Putting everything into his bookbag, X made it to the hallway before he saw his friend Robbie approach.

"Que pasa, dude? said X.

Robbie looked at his watch. "Sorry for the short notice, buddy. They need us right now at work. Unloading all kinds of stuff that came in. Vic says we'll be able to get in at least four hours."

"Well, can't we--"

"X, we're needed there right now. You know, we're the ones in charge of the inventory. Zucchini, carrots, tomatoes, broc- hey, why're you looking at me like that?"