

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/2

*Scott Taylor*  
**GET A JOB**

JAMES WAS TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD. He was living at home. He'd just gotten home from college, where he'd gotten remarkably bad grades. His parents wanted him to get a job, it being the next logical step in his development as a normal human being. James didn't want to get a job. He had repeatedly made his feelings quite clear on the matter, however stubbornly his parents were determined not to hear it.

"Jimmy dear, you have to get a job," his mother would say. James would stand there defiantly until she left the room. He was tired of repeating himself. A few minutes later, his father would appear to take her place.

"Son, you have to get a job," his father would say.

"No I don't," James would say.

"You will go out bright and early tomorrow morning and start looking again."

"No I will not."

"If you don't, your mother and I are going to throw you out of the house."

"If you do, I'll burn it down."

It went on like that, with both sides intractable, refusing to budge. The usual friction at the beginning of an induced life of torture. Nothing too out of the ordinary really.

He'd already gone for numerous interviews. One was for a job as a vacuum cleaner salesman, another was for a door-to-door gig selling steak knives. Any man who could stand a life of selling either vacuum cleaners or steak knives deserved to have his right to live revoked, or at least that was the way James saw it. He'd rather eat dirt on a daily basis, rather go play in traffic and wait for someone to finish him off. He'd been hired as a stockbroker-in-training once and had made it exactly one day before the stress of bullshitting people on the phone gave him such severe stomach cramps he'd had to call it off and not go back in for the second day. Life was looking bleak and grim. It did not appear to be worth living. He'd suspected as much ever since approximately halfway through junior year. It had to be some kind of sick joke, a prank the adults were playing on him, a gag they were carrying just a little too far. Any day now he was going to wake up and his Dad would say 'Surprise! We were all just kidding...' and everyone would have a good laugh over it. But thus far that day had not arrived.

So he caved, he went to look for a job. He found an ad in the paper and took down the number and the address, some sort of sales thing, like all the others had been. Everyone was selling something. The interview was down on Route 17, right at the intersection with Route 46. It was a group interview, with about ten or twenty other poor schlubs also desperately seeking gainful employment, all young kids like him. The interviewer was a fat man in a suit. He was large and in charge and liked to make a whole lot of noise.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/2

"EVERYONE IS TO SIT NO LESS THAN TWO FEET AWAY FROM THE TABLE," he shouted. "NO LESS THAN TWO FEET AWAY."

The sheep bleated their way forward and crammed themselves in around the big round table. James was moving too slow and found himself without a place to squeeze in, it was an awful lot like a game of musical chairs. The fat man focused his baleful glare upon him.

"I'LL TELL YOU WHAT, SON - YOU CAN LEAVE. NOW. GET OUT."

James looked round at the others as he went out. It was an exercise in dog-eat-dog, that much was clear. The idea was that they were supposed to look ready to slit each others' throats over the crumbs being tossed to them but all they looked was scared. James went outside with a deep feeling of relief. He'd just been spared another lifetime of hell on earth. Or at least another few months of it. He got in the car and drove back up the highway. The sun was out and it was going to be a nice day.

He went home. "Did you get the job?" his mother asked from the kitchen.

"Nope," James said, and went upstairs. His father cornered him again later that night.

"Your mother said you went out looking today," his father said. "She said you had an interview."

"Yes," James said.

"But you didn't get the job."

"No."

"Any idea why not?"

"I wasn't good at sitting at a table."

"Jimmy, you need to find something. You can't just sit around on your ass for the rest of your life."

"So I've been informed."

Secretly James wondered why this necessarily had to be true. I mean what was wrong with sitting around on your ass. When the alternative was getting yelled at by a fat man in a suit all day long, the prospect started to look more and more appealing.

The next day James didn't get out of bed. His mother and father came up in tandem, the old tag-team routine. He'd locked the door and so they were resorting to shouting through it to make themselves heard. His mother was the one speaking now, he could tell by the higher pitch.

"We're going to throw you out. I'm serious, we're really going to do it."

"And I told you what I'm going to do. This place is going up in smoke."

The threat didn't work, all they did was retreat for the time being. The grumbling faded as they temporarily receded into the background. So the clock was ticking. His father had given him a week and then that was it, he was destitute, he was indigent, he was officially a bum. He was eating

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/2

out of dumpsters and getting real cold at night. What a world. Submit to slavery or suffer in unimaginable ways, no other options to choose from. He had an excuse to do nothing for the next two days as it was the weekend, then on Monday he went back to looking through the paper. A whole bunch of garbage, he could be a barista, he could make doughnuts, he could clean gutters, he could fling concrete blocks around. It sounded horrifying, it sounded likely to induce madness. How had human civilization gotten this far without everyone going completely batshit and murdering each other in droves. His mother came by. "Any luck?" she asked. He growled.

Monday went by, Tuesday went by. He went out in the car and drove around. There were things to look at, parks and trees and things, pretty girls in the street, bridges crossing rivers. The job thing was a lost cause, he wasn't even bothering with that anymore. He was just waiting to call their bluff, to see if they'd actually go through with it. He suspected they might. This was supposed to concern him more than it did and yet he found himself not giving a shit in the slightest. It crossed his mind that he had in fact already gone insane. The people that knew they were insane probably weren't, and vice-versa, the same probably went in reverse - if you were completely sure of your own sanity then you were most likely in some fairly grave danger.

Wednesday, Thursday. He walked up and down the sidewalk, sipping coffee, looking in windows. Everyone else had jobs, he could see them in there. Some of them looked okay with it and some not so much. They sat at desks, they stood behind counters, they did all sorts of things. So many things to do. Where did one sleep when one was homeless? The park was one obvious place. James had heard that over in Hackensack the cops rounded the bums up in the morning and threw them all in jail. Maybe jail wasn't all that bad. I mean they had heat and running water and you got three square meals a day. How bad could it be.

Friday. The big day. James didn't want to go home, didn't feel prepared for some big showdown. The people in his family appeared to enjoy drama and conflict and things like that but for some reason he hadn't inherited the gene. It got dark out and he drove around some more, refusing to stay in one place. The crowds of idiots were coming out for their weekend revelries. Oh goodie. He went to the supermarket to get a snack of some kind, just for something to do. He had about fifteen bucks in his pocket but didn't want to spend any of it. Money was going to become more of an issue now, or so it appeared. The supermarket was packed with people, some carrying bags of chips, some carrying bottles of soda, some toting twelve-packs of beer or bottles of wine. There was a whole lot of commotion and an overabundance of distractions. James danced in slow circles for awhile and then took two bags of cheetos off the rack and stuck them inside his jacket. No one had noticed, at least not yet. He went around the corner to the refrigerated section and opened the door and took a can of coke out and stuck that in as well, wondering where the cameras were, not seeing any. He parted the waves of idiots with heart thumping along and knifed through the registers and returned a scowl or two and no one objected and no alarms were set off and a minute later he was standing outside the store, relieved and somewhat triumphant. There, you see, you didn't need money after all, you didn't need no goddamn job. It was eight o'clock, nothing but time to kill. He went over to the park and waited.