

The parking lot was empty when I arrived, its single light flickering in the inky darkness. Windshield fogging, I wipe it clean with the cuff of my hoodie, and kept driving to row 10. The instructions were explicit, and I followed them. Desperate, I ignored everyone's warnings and now, here I am, in the middle of a deserted parking lot in the dead of night, freezing while I wait. Headlights blind me as they drive up. Windows down, breath ballooning in front of us, we stare at each other.

"Five bucks?"

"You got the toaster?"

We make the silent exchange.



While perusing an email recently about publication opportunities, I stumbled across one that required the entries to begin with the sentence: *The parking lot was empty*. My mind raced with story possibilities. Then I remembered a meme with a guy clutching a toaster stood by his car frowning. Apparently, his wife sold their toaster for five bucks on Facebook Marketplace, and he had to stand around waiting for a stranger to come pick it up. It made me chuckle.

I can't say I've purchased anything in such a manner, but once years ago when we lived on The Island, someone reached out to me to ask if they could borrow some curriculum I owned, and because I understood the difficulty of obtaining the materials on The Island, I agreed. Since we'd be inland that weekend for a birthday party, I agreed to meet in the city park to make the exchange.

Our choice to head inland sounded good, but once we coastal peeps hit that inner area, we become quite grumpy with the excessive heat and humidity, and the lack of a good sea

breeze. Undeterred, we played mini golf, then camped in a shady spot at the park dreaming of a salty sea breeze. Somewhere between cutting cake and opening presents, a man walked up to us, and I handed him a canvas bag, whispered good luck, and turned my attention back to the small party, only to find everyone staring at me. Adults and children alike.

“Have I got something on my face?”

“No,” my husband said, “I’m just wondering why you gave away an entire bag of books to a complete stranger.”

Somehow, I’d remembered to bring the books, and failed to tell anyone we were lending them out for a while!

The Reluctant Author 