

UNTIL NEXT TIME, MARY LYNN

Taylor Necko

8-18-1985

Dearest Anthony,

I finally found a notebook that perfectly fits into my purse, so I can now easily jot letters to you while I'm at work. Not much is new with me—just missing when we worked here together. Still pouring the coffee, sweeping the floors, and such. Speaking of the diner, check out this news clipping from *Westwood Weekly* from today:

Not only did we win and get this great review, but last night, the renovations were completed too. We have all new pink menus on the wall and leather bar stools at the counter. These stools don't squeak like the old ones! They're teal with little sparkles, and I think you would like them. Today's customers sure did. The usual flock came in after the 8am church service down the street. They nearly clean out our freezer every weekend, but I don't mind because the tips are great. Mr. Martin especially tips well.

All he ordered for lunch was an egg and coffee for \$2.50, but he tipped \$1.50. Mrs. Define, the hairstylist, tips decently, especially when I show interest in the silly gossip she shares. Mr. Williamson is a bit stingier, but it makes me smile when he folds the napkins into little swans. Today, he mentioned how his daughter flew out west to Arizona for college. That's even farther away than you.

Before I forget, I wanted to remind you to stock up on cleaning wipes and medicine before the weather cools down. An awful flu is already spreading around here. During work, I've tried to count how many cars come and go in the next-door pharmacy's parking lot, but I lose count every time. Anyways, my break is almost done, and I hope to drop this off at the post office before the

WESTWOOD'S OWN VOTED #1 DINER

It is no surprise to us at *Westwood Weekly News* that our own Early Bird Diner got voted as the best diner in the county for the third year in a row. Locals know it is as everyone's favorite brunch stop. You can find house-roasted coffee, farm-fresh eggs, signature burgers, salty French fries, and more. The owner and staff want to thank their valued customers and those who voted for Early Bird Diner in the contest. They encourage everyone in town to stop by for celebratory discounted egg platters, available until 9/1/85.

dinner rush.

P.S. I miss your smile.

Much love,
Mary Lynn

8-28-85

My love,

It sounds like your classes are off to a good start, and don't feel sorry that you didn't have time to call me last week. It saves both of us money, which we need if we decide to get married within the next few years. Anyways, even if we don't call, I'd love to hear more about your classes. Is it weird just starting college at 25, or have you been able to join study groups and make friends? You always have been a social butterfly, so I bet you've had few problems adjusting. Honestly, I can't believe it's already been almost a month since you left. The house is too quiet without you laughing at Cheers and cooking full meals in the middle of the night. Once all the humidity dies down, I can assure you, I'll be wearing your old jean jacket and scarf.

Something else that I wanted to tell you was that, on Wednesday, Ben Lewis, the owner of the hardware store who always asks for an absurd amount of cream cheese on his bagel, came to the diner alone. You know how he always comes in with his wife before dropping her off at work, but I didn't get the chance to ask where she was that morning. What was weird was that she wasn't with him for the remainder of the week either. On the third day, when I asked where she was, he told me she was sick. Likely the flu. I told you it was spreading, hopefully not at Mizzou. It must be very serious for her to be quarantined all week. I've been chatting with him extra since he doesn't have her to banter with. He asked about you, specifically if you "finally quit this job and went off to school after all these years." I told him about your mathematics major and how I'm excited for you to come visit me for Thanksgiving. He wishes you luck. Anyways, that's all I have to say right now, but I'll write you again soon!

With all my heart,
Mary Lynn

Hello Honey,

I'm sorry to hear you've had so many late nights already. At least you know better for scheduling classes next semester. I hope you've been able to relax during the downtime. If I were there, I would take lots of walks around campus or see the Gateway arch in St. Louis if it's close by. I wonder if Michigan connects to the Mississippi River. If so, I could send letters in the form of paper boats. I'm joking, but that would be fun, don't you think? You asked what I've been up to besides work, but that's how I've spent most of my time. At least it's satisfying to come home after being on my feet all day. The new lunch special—a burger, fries, and milkshake combo—seems to be a big hit, although cleaning the milkshake equipment isn't very fun. The ice cream drips everywhere. I don't think my apron has ever been this sticky before. A family came in and needed 6 different 7 different shakes right at lunchtime, so that put mine and Heather's speed to the test. I think she started right after you left. She graduated from Westwood High last spring, so I would have been a senior while she was a freshman. Heather's very smart but is taking a gap year before she continues with her schooling. Apparently, she's neighbors with the Lewis's and says Mrs. Lewis's car hasn't left the driveway in a couple weeks now. I mentioned that I wanted to drop off a care package for her, but Heather says that they don't usually answer their front door. Something about them not liking visitors. She told me, "If I can hear them arguing from my bedroom next door, imagine the poor ears of anyone that goes inside," and we shared a laugh about it. Anyway, maybe I'll change my mind, but I imagine Mrs. Lewis is getting awfully lonely while Mr. Lewis goes to work every afternoon.

Enough about the Lewis's—Kids have started coming to the diner right when school lets out. They're always very lively, which is nice, or irritating, depending on the day and the number of messes they leave behind on the tables (so excuse any ketchup stains on my letters). But any customer is a good customer because they keep me busy during the long days.

Until next time,
Mary Lynn

P.S. I miss you. I've been toughing it out. Someone needs to take care of the house and make sure no animals get through that broken window again (no, I will never let you live down the bird incident).

9-12-85

My Dear,

I'm glad to hear you've joined the math club. Is that how you met Christopher, Nicholas, and Vanessa? Maybe I should start saving my tips to plan a visit to Mizzou next semester so I can meet everyone. It's been a while since I've gotten together with friends for an evening. I've been cooking myself some of your favorite meals, like barbeque pulled pork. Have you been eating good? Any great restaurants near campus? Your kitchen looked nice. Thanks for sending those photos.

Even though you and Heather advised me not to, I put together a small care package for Mrs. Lewis. I found a polyester throw blanket on sale and a crossword book. She always did the games in the newspaper at the diner. You told me it would be pushy, but if I were in her shoes, I would appreciate someone reaching out to me. I was only intending to leave it on the porch with a note, to respect their distaste for visitors, but Mr. Lewis happened to be leaving at the same time that I arrived. He was surprised to see me, but he thanked me for the basket and insisted on getting our address to send me something. I must say that I'm excited to see what it will be! I wish you were here to open it too.

XOXO,
Mary Lynn

9-19-85

My Anthony,

Hi. I don't have much to write in this letter except that the weather is cooling down. Right now, I'm sitting in a booth by the window, facing the wide oak tree that teens carve their initials on. Its leaves are already fading to yellow. It made me think of the trip we took to Central Park last fall. Remember how the leaves were

were beautiful and overflowing with color? They reminded me of those Pointillist paintings we saw at the art museum. Not being able to take a trip again this fall is making me think of other things we'll miss out on. Movies with hot chocolate, carving pumpkins, haunted houses...

A few weeks ago, my mom offered that I come stay with her and my dad while you're gone. I declined. They live too far away from work and home. But I did agree to stay with them over this weekend. We'll probably play board games and go to a farmer's market. It's been something for me to look forward to, which is hard to find these days when I only have an empty house to return to.

That's all,
Mary Lynn

9-23-85

Anthony,

I try to wait for your letters before I send out a second in a row, but this simply couldn't wait: Someone tried to break in while I was away! I wanted to call you but must have misplaced your apartment's phone number. Please write it down for me again ASAP. There were scratches around the door handle like someone was trying to bust it off to get inside. On the porch, our fiddle-leaf fig was knocked over. The police think that once it fell, the suspect left immediately to not leave tracks in the dirt. While they do their investigations, whatever that may be, I was asking people at work if there's been any recent break-ins. Mr. Martin said his cousin in town claims to have gotten his cat stolen, but Mr. Martin claimed, "no one would steal that straggly old thing." And when I Oops, I don't remember where I was going with that. A big group of young teens came in and were extra messy to clean up after. I'm home now and an orchid bouquet from Mr. Lewis and his wife was just delivered. They're very fragrant and are such a bold magenta shade. I wish you could smell them. This has been the one good thing that's happened since I came home Sunday evening. Speaking of which, now that I have time, I need to call my parents about the attempted break-in (and you should call me too. Don't

forget to give me your number!).

Write me soon,
Mary Lynn

9-28-85

Hi love,

I'm still so happy that we got to call the other night! I was almost worried that you would be too busy to pick up my call. I wrote down your number and push-pinned it right above the phone so I won't lose it again. I'm taking the safety precautions you suggested. Although, it'll be a bit hard to avoid being outside at night due to my shifts and errands afterwards. My dad also advised that I get a dead-bolt lock installed and told me that the Lewis Hardware would be the best place to get one. It's sturdy and brass, so it even matches our doorknobs.

Today at the diner, I was finally taking care of the dust-coated frames on the wall when Mr. Lewis came in on his lunch break. I thanked him for the flowers and asked if his wife was doing any better, to which he said she's even worse than before. Poor Mrs. Lewis has pneumonia. However, after he paid and left, Mr. Williamson told me that it was strange for him to continue going out in public while his house is infected with illness. This prompted Mrs. Define to chime in, saying she had seen a perfectly healthy Mrs. Lewis at the hair salon the exact same day that Mr. Lewis claimed she started experiencing flu symptoms. She said something awful like, "I bet he's secretly happy she's sick so he doesn't have to hear her nagging all the time." Personally, I think they're both digging into something that isn't there. It's just unreliable hair salon gossip and people distracting themselves from their own lives by being nosy in the lives of others; You know how everyone around here likes to spin tales. Mr. Lewis already has a sick wife at home and he's the center of town gossip

CRASHED CAR RIGHT OUTSIDE OF WESTWOOD
WESTWOOD (MI)—Jefferson County Fire Department rescue retrieved a green 1981 Chevrolet station wagon that was found crashed in a ditch on Sunny Slope SW.
The crash was discovered by Otis Williamson, a Westwood local who commutes out of town for work, at 9:47pm on September 30th. Upon arrival at the scene, the vehicle was severely dented, missing plates and side view mirrors. Members of the fire department were summoned to search for the driver but were unable to locate a victim. Sheriff's deputies infer that any passengers would have faced moderate injuries. Sheriff Brown requests that any information in terms

while he's out of the house. He must be exhausted.

Sincerely,
Mary Lynn

Anthony,

Look what the paperboy delivered at lunchtime:

The rest is just contact information and road regulation stuff, but you better believe this news article caused an uproar at the diner. Even the cooks left their stations to lean over the counter and listen to all the guesses and rumors. What made this article so fascinating is that several customers recognized the station wagon as belonging to Mrs. Lewis. Mr. Lewis happened to be there and was sweating through his shirt. Not even touching his bagel. He was babbling about how the newspaper has nothing interesting to write about these days. According to him, Mrs. Lewis left that day to see her sister a few towns over, despite him telling her not to due to her illness. He told all of us that the sister picked her up from the crash site. His answer did not stop conspiracies and questions. In fact, it only made everybody more interested. Everyone's talking a mile a minute, then downing whole cups of coffee so they can speak twice as much! All the talking gave me a headache, so right now I'm taking my break in my car to escape the noise.

Before I go, I thought for a long time that she was indeed sick. Why would that be something to lie about? I was given no reason to doubt that. Their occasional squabbles were nothing out of the ordinary—No couple is perfect. But considering the suspicions with her absence and now that her car was found in an obscure country ditch... I might be jumping to conclusions, but what if Mr. Lewis was trying to hide the car to make it look like she simply went out of town? No real crime is committed when a car leaves its own driveway, but things get quite a bit more suspicious when said car is found and Mrs. Lewis is nowhere around.

Concerned,
Mary Lynn

P.S. It saddens me that I haven't heard from you since our phone call. Would you prefer weekly phone calls instead of letters? I miss you, always.

10-12-85

Anthony,

Hello, how are you doing? I wish we could have talked for longer when I called the other night, but I understand that midterms won't study for themselves. It was great to hear you talk about math club. So there's an upcoming trip to Washington D.C.? That sounds exciting. But, I wanted to remind you that you're already only going to be home for three weeks for winter break. I know I'll get to see you at Thanksgiving, but that's only a few days. So much of your life has been happening away from mine. I just wanted to tell you that I wish I just needed to say I hope you are doing well. If you call me after my shift sometime soon, we can discuss the trip a bit more, ok?

Oh, the car crash? No official update, but I did see something weird at work yesterday. I was wiping the windows when I saw Mr. Lewis and Mr. Williamson talking in the parking lot after lunchtime. Mr. Lewis was trying to get inside his car, but Mr. Williamson was blocking the door. He kept pointing and poking Mr. Lewis's chest. I thought I heard Mr. Williamson say something about how his sister works at the pharmacy and never saw Mr. or Mrs. Lewis pick up antibiotics. Their squabble stopped when I came outside, pretending to sweep the sidewalk. After Mr. Lewis drove away, I tried to approach Mr. Williamson, still red in the face, but he blew me off and mumbled something like, "Leave the questioning for the men." That's when I recalled Mr. Williamson was the one who found Mrs. Lewis's crashed car. Of course, the other customers questioned Mr. Lewis too, but it was more in the sense that they wanted to know what was going on. I will admit that sometimes I fall for the curiosity that gossip has to offer. But Mr. Williamson? He seemed more interrogative about it.

Mr. Williamson came back to the diner today and did not leave behind a paper swan. All he gave me was a wide-eyed look and brief nod, the type of nod you give someone when you're both in the know. What does he think I know? Across the room, I think Mr. Lewis saw the one-sided communication because he gave me an odd look too: a sour one. He was gone without leaving a tip. I don't understand it. I keep him company, ask about his wife's health, bring over a care package... It almost makes me wish my attention was more appreciated.

My noodles are boiling now so I must go. We'll talk soon?
Sincerely,
Mary Lynn

10-21-85

Anthony,

Me again. I got the envelope you sent me with the D.C. trip itinerary and receipt. You must have forgotten to slide a letter into the envelope too because I didn't get one. Again, I would be more than happy to start calling more often if the letters aren't working for you. Long distance calls may be expensive, but it would be worth it to hear your sweet voice. You just need to let me know. Speaking of calls, I called the Lewis household today. I had the day off, so I was watching Cheers and eating scrambled eggs for lunch alone. With Mr. Lewis working at the hardware store and Mrs. Lewis sicker than ever, I figured she probably would appreciate some company. I found their number in the phonebook. Unfortunately, no answer—she must still be at her sister's house. I hope she is doing all right and being taken care of. I would try calling you tonight, but I'm tired and you're probably busy with your studies or friends. It's just past 11:00pm right now, anyway. I was lying on the couch but got uncomfortable with the way the orchids seemed to stare at me like little eyes, so I tossed them in the garbage and went upstairs.

You know, I was thinking that next year or even next semester we should get an apartment together near your school. My parents are the closest people to me right now, and since they're an hour and a half away, I wouldn't really be leaving anyone behind here. There are always other diners to work at. Plus, I miss when my own life was more fascinating than getting invested in the lives of those I wait on. We could find an apartment by those beautiful walking trails you told me about, and we could even go on hikes there with your new friends. I miss eating meals with you, even if it was quick during our lunch breaks, and falling asleep on the couch together late at night to The Tonight Show and your snores. I miss how you always used to beg for us to adopt a dog and surprise me with my favorite Cherry Soda when I was having a bad

when I was having a bad day. Let me know what you think.

Sincerely,
Mary Lynn

10-25-85

To my dearest,

I am sorry. I really am. I am sorry for not writing sooner. For not calling. For not planning to visit sooner. I know you can't answer and I'm not even going to send this letter, but I don't know who else I can talk to about this right now. You always enjoyed the Westwood articles, so I thought you'd want to see yours:

By "forced entry," they really mean that someone busted the lock on our front door. They couldn't find any fingerprints because the criminal must have worn gloves. Darling, your neck was covered in awful bruises when they found you. But you want to know something Westwood.

some kind of small knife tool on the carpet near the door. Some sort of blade with a square tip. If the investigators saw it, they probably thought it had something to do with repairing our broken window right beside the door. I am certain we never bought that tool. It looks like a lock pick... I'm going to bring it to the investigators. I promise that whoever did this to you will be found. No one can hide forever in a town as small as Westwood.

Mary Lynn, what I really need to say is that I should have made more time for you. Mizzou may have been a great opportunity for me to finally become a math teacher, but I didn't realize how the distance would affect us. How it would affect you. Or how my tuition money took away funds towards the engagement that I kept pushing off. I figured it could wait, but I shouldn't have expected you to always wait on me. There is so much I want to talk to you about, but I pushed it off too long and now it's too late. I am so sorry.

LOCAL WOMAN FOUND DEAD

WESTWOOD (MI)— Jefferson County Police are investigating the death of a woman whose body was found Tuesday afternoon in her home, according to a news release. The victim was identified as local waitress, Mary Lynn Fanning (23).

The body was discovered on Tuesday, October 22nd by Heather Mitchell, friend and coworker to Fanning.

"Mary Lynn never misses her shifts, so I decided to check up on her during my break," said Mitchell. "As I was pulling in, my car headlights reflected off shards of glass in her yard. That was when I noticed the busted window and called the authorities pronto."

There were signs of forced entry, and the suspect is still at large.

Sheriff Brown asks that any information pertaining to Fanning's death be promptly passed on to his office.

I'm finally home, but not for reasons I would have wanted to come home. I want to give you a tight hug while you're breathing, not touch your cold hand one last time before they close your casket. I must pack up a lifetime that we never got to experience and sell this house. I can't spend a night there when I know you won't come home at the end of the day. I'll return to college, but I don't know what I will do next.

If only there could be a next time,
Anthony