

TRUCK STOP

One time my coworker found heroin under the lid of the toilet water chamber in the men's bathroom. Or was it the women's? I don't remember that detail, but I do remember the heroin.

"Uh Ashley, there's a little baggie in the back of the toilet."

And thus, the police were called. That wasn't the only time we called them when I was on the clock. Nor was it the last drug related incident we—or me—had to deal with either.

There was also the time in my summer of solo mid-shifts when the cop circled our parking lot four or five times before coming inside when the store was empty and asking me if I had "seen this woman." He flashed the phone at my face and in a panic I said no.

He left.

I pondered.

Then I remembered she'd looked a lot like the lady who came behind the counter with me to look at the rolling papers we sold up close. I had let her back there because she seemed nice, but she also paid a hundred dollars cash and got in her fancy car despite looking like she rolled out of bed in the east side of Des Moines.

Maybe they were the same person.

Did I let a criminal escape!?

I didn't get paid enough to really care.

She was a paying customer. She was kind to me, the mere cashier at the small town truck stop—who usually got berated by middle aged individuals—and thus, she gets to run free. I free you criminal lady just don't come back and rob me.

Just this last summer, I was behind the counter at Casey's alone for eight hours minimum a day for six days a week. The regulars asked me if I ever went home. The answer was "No, I sleep on the mat back here."

I know their Casey's Rewards numbers. I have their cigarettes memorized. I know which customers want a receipt and who want bags.

My favorite customer tells me she is trying to quit smoking while buying her 'last' pack. Her husband comes back in the next day to buy more for her. He tells me she's sorry she let me down.

I'm just touched she remembers me enough to have him tell me this.

The main thing about my job is that I bitch a lot about it. I am there more than I am home. I see the regulars more than I see my family. My feet ache and my already permanently injured back screams with relief when I finally sit in the front seat of my car after my eight and a half hours of straight standing. (Iowa does not have mandated breaks.) And although I bitch and complain about my job, I do it with pride.

That sounds stupid I know. I have fell victim to the evil entity of capitalism. They are overworking me, underpaying me, and giving me no help or even a singular coworker to let me go change the trashes at the pumps without having to run because what if a customer shows up while I'm changing trash number eight out of thirteen, but I care about how my store looks when I leave.

Key word: my. That Casey's last summer was mine. The counters were clean because of me. Customers got in and out in a timely manner because of me. The bathroom was free of pee puddles and the literal poo on the toilets seats and walls because of me. I did it all. The Casey's ran from two or three p.m. to eleven p.m. because of me.

It was clean, efficient, and open because I took it seriously.

With the pride in my store and the trust of my manager I took a lot of manners regarding asshole customers into my own hands. For example, our diesel pumps had shoddy card readers and one particular woman with a stick firmly up her butt came storming into the store. She had black long curly hair like a lot of Iowan Karens do and wore her bootcut jeans like they didn't go out of style a decade ago.

"Tell me why your pumps won't read my card!" She demanded not responding to my hello I greeted every customer with.

"They have issues sometimes. You can prepay inside and anything you don't use will go back on your card, or I can come outside and see if it's just being tricky," I respond quickly because I was the top-dog efficient problem solver.

"I expect you outside in less than 60 seconds," she stated before storming back outside.

Thankfully for her, the store was empty. I would never leave my register unattended to help a rude person. Being rude automatically puts customers lower on the priority list. We met up at her pickup with horses whinnying in the back and I tried to reset the keypad and get her card to read.

Spoiler alert: it didn't.

Then she turned to me and said, "If I knew you were retarded I wouldn't have asked for your help."

First of all, the r-word. Really? Grow up.

Secondly, I said, "You are banned from this Casey's."

Thirdly, I turned my back to retreat to the store and she called out, "You can't do that. I'll speak with your manager."

“I am the manager,” I lied with all of the *umpr* I could muster. “And you are banned from this Casey’s.”

Her foul language followed me into the store where I began helping more customers. The grind never stopped.

I prayed for the rest of the summer that she would try sauntering back into *my* Casey’s and have a problem with *my* pumps because if there’s one thing I learned from my dad it is to hold a grudge.

Her face was burned into my memory and if she had the balls to come back in I was ready.

It would have been so awesome.