

Colonel Zadok Magruder High School

English 12 Honors Summer Reading 2015

Your assignment is to read the following packet of essays. Once you have read all six essays, choose THREE essays you found thought-provoking to write about. Below are the questions to answer. Each response should be 250-400 words in length (a hearty, healthy paragraph that clearly states your ideas and provides ample support).

Maya Angelou – “Momma, the Dentist, and Me”

Although Angelou narrates the events involved in a trip to two dentists, the account deals with more than just the pain of a toothache. Explain what Angelou comments on and why. Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

David Raymond – “On Being Seventeen, Bright, and Unable to Read”

Trace the passage of time in the essay. Explain why Raymond starts in his teenage years, goes back to his childhood, then progresses into his future. How does this technique relate to his overall purpose in writing the essay? Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

Anna Quindlen – “The War on Drinks”

Quindlen discusses many of the negative effects of alcohol addiction. According to her, what are the causes? Explain how the causes of alcohol addiction lead to the devastating effects. Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

Caroline Hwang – “The Good Daughter”

In what ways do Hwang’s parents try to have her become “fully assimilated” – and why? In what ways does she grow up “all American”? Explain how Hwang could be considered a paradox. (Please consult a dictionary if you are unsure of the meaning of *paradox*.) Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

Steve Brody – “How I Got Smart”

Consider the last five paragraphs of the essay, specifically the allusions and diction. Explain why Brody ends his essay the way he does. How does this relate to his overall purpose in writing the essay? Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

Gary Soto – “The Jacket”

Explain what the narrator means when he calls the jacket “that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder that day and ever since” in paragraph 12. How does this statement symbolize the evolution of his feelings toward the jacket? Be specific, and include textual support in your answer.

The responses must be complete by the 2nd day of school: Tuesday, 09/01/15.

- We will go to the computer lab the first week of school where you will turn this assignment in to your turnitin account (if you don’t have a turnitin account, you will create one then). You must have your document in WORD via e-mail, google docs, or flash drive in order to make your submission.

Your responses must:

- Be typed and double-spaced – Times New Roman and 12 pt. font
- Follow the conventions of Standard English
- Take a critical stance on each essay
- Include a topic sentence with the author’s name and essay title in it

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Dickey: Claire_H_Dickey@mcpsmd.org.

On Being Seventeen, Bright, and Unable to Read

David Raymond

One day a substitute teacher picked me to read aloud from the textbook. When I told her "No, thank you," she came unhinged. She thought I was acting smart and told me so. I kept calm, and that got her madder and madder. We must have spent 10 minutes trying to solve the problem, and finally she got so red in the face I thought she'd blow up: She told me she'd see me after class.

Maybe someone like me was a new thing for that teacher. But she wasn't new to me. I've been through scenes like that all my life. You see, even though I'm 17 and a junior in high school, I can't read because I have dyslexia. I'm told I read "at a fourth-grade level," but from where I sit, that's not reading. You can't know what that means unless you've been there. It's not easy to tell how it feels when you can't read your homework assignments or the newspaper or a menu in a restaurant or even notes from your own friends.

My family began to suspect I was having problems almost from the first day I started school. My father says my early years in school were the worst years of his life. They weren't so good for me, either. As I look back on it now, I can't find the words to express how bad it really was. I wanted to die. I'd come home from school screaming, "I'm dumb. I'm dumb—I wish I were dead!"

I guess I couldn't read anything at all then—not even my own name—and they tell me I didn't talk as good as other kids. But what I remember about those days is that I couldn't throw a ball where it was supposed to go, I couldn't learn to swim, and I wouldn't learn to ride a bike, because no matter what anyone told me, I knew I'd fail.

Sometimes my teachers would try to be encouraging. When I couldn't read the words on the board they'd say, "Come on, David, you know that word." Only I didn't. And it was embarrassing. I just felt dumb. And dumb was how the kids treated me. They'd make fun of me every chance they got, asking me to spell "cat" or something like that. Even if I knew how to spell it, I wouldn't; they'd only give me another word. Anyway, it was awful, because more than anything I wanted friends. On my birthday when I blew out the candles I didn't wish I could learn to read; what I wished for was that the kids would like me.

With the bad reports coming from school and with me moaning about wanting to die and how everybody hated me, my parents began looking for help. That's when the testing started. The school tested me, the child-guidance center tested me, private psychiatrists tested me. Everybody knew something was wrong—especially me.

It didn't help much when they stuck a fancy name onto it. I couldn't pronounce it then—I was only in second grade—and I was ashamed to talk about it. Now it rolls off my tongue, because I've been living with it for a lot of years—dyslexia.

All through elementary school it wasn't easy. I was always having to do things that were "different," things the other kids didn't have to do. I had to go to a child psychiatrist, for instance.

One summer my family forced me to go to a camp for children with reading problems. I hated the idea, but the camp turned out pretty good, and I had a good time. I met a lot of kids who couldn't read, and somehow that helped. The director of the camp said I had a higher I.Q. than 90 percent of the population. I didn't believe him.

About the worst thing I had to do in fifth and sixth grade was go to a special education class in another school in our town. A bus picked me up, and I didn't like that at all. The bus also picked up emotionally disturbed kids and retarded kids. It was like going to a school for the retarded. I always worried that someone I knew would see me on that bus. It was a relief to go to the regular junior high school.

Life began to change a little for me then, because I began to feel better about myself. I found the teachers cared; they had meetings about me, and I worked harder for them for a while. I began to work on the potter's wheel, making vases and pots that the teachers said were pretty good. Also, I got a letter for being on the track team. I could always run pretty fast.

At high school the teachers are good, and everyone is trying to help me. I've gotten honors some marking periods, and I've won a letter on the cross country team. Next quarter I think the school might hold a show of my pottery. I've got some friends. But there are still some embarrassing times. For instance, every time

there is writing in the class, I get up and go to the special education room. Kids ask me where I go all the time. Sometimes I say, "to Mars."

Homework is a real problem. During free periods in school I go into the special ed room, and staff members read assignments to me. When I get home my mother reads to me. Sometimes she reads an assignment into a tape recorder, and then I go into my room and listen to it. If we have a novel or something like that to read, she reads it out loud to me. Then I sit down with her and we do the assignment. She'll write, while I talk my answers to her. Lately I've taken to dictating into a tape recorder, and then someone—my father, a private tutor, or my mother—types up what I've dictated. Whatever homework I do takes someone else's time, too. That makes me feel bad.

We had a big meeting in school the other day—eight of us, four from the guidance department, my private tutor, my parents, and me. The subject was me. I said I wanted to go to college, and they told me about colleges that have facilities and staff to handle people like me. That's nice to hear.

As for what happens after college, I don't know, and I'm worried about that. How can I make a living if I can't read? Who will hire me? How will I fill out the application form? The only thing that gives me any courage is the fact that I've learned about well-known people who couldn't read or had other problems and still made it. Like Albert Einstein, who didn't talk until he was 4 and flunked math. Like Leonardo da Vinci, who everyone seems to think had dyslexia.

I've told this story because maybe some teacher will read it and go easy on a kid in the classroom who has what I've got. Or, maybe some parent will stop nagging his kid and stop calling him lazy. Maybe he's not lazy or dumb. Maybe he just can't read and doesn't know what's wrong. Maybe he's scared, like I was.

---Article from the *New York Times* 1976

Public & Private; The War on Drinks

By ANNA QUINDLEN

Published: November 06, 1991

When she was in fourth grade the girl wrote, "What do you think it does to somebody to live with a lot of pressure?" Starting at age 8 she had been cashing the public assistance check each month, buying money orders, paying the bills and doing the grocery shopping. One little brother she walked to school; the other she dressed and fed before leaving him at home.

Their mother drank.

"The pressure she was talking about wasn't even the pressure of running an entire household," said Virginia Connelly, who oversees substance abuse services in schools in New York City. "She didn't know there was anything strange about that. The pressure she was talking about was the pressure of leaving her younger brother at home."

Surgeon General Antonia Novello has opened fire on the alcohol industry, complaining that too much beer and wine advertising is aimed at young people. Her predecessor, C. Everett Koop, did the same in 1988, and you can see how radically things have changed: Spuds MacKenzie is out and the Swedish bikini team is in. There's a move afoot to have warning labels on ads for beer, wine and liquor, much like the ones on cigarettes. Dr. Novello didn't mention that; she said she would be taking a meeting with the big guys in the liquor industry. That's not enough.

There's no doubt that beer ads, with their cool beaches, cool women and cool parties, are designed to make you feel you're cool if you drink, milking a concern that peaks in most human beings somewhat shy of the legal drinking age. And those sneaky little wine coolers are designed to look like something

healthy and fruit-juicy; kids will tell you they're sort of like alcohol, but not really. This has joined "it's only beer" as a great kid drinking myth.

(I've got a press release here from an organization called the Beer Drinkers of America that notes that "many of the Founding Fathers were private brewers" and goes on to rail against "special interests" that would interfere with the right to a cold one. Isn't it amazing how much time people have on their hands?)

But Dr. Novello should take note of what many counselors discover: that the drinking problem that damages kids most is the one that belongs to their parents. The father who gets drunk and violent, the mother who drinks when she's depressed, the parents whose personality shifts with the movements of the sun and the bottle. The enormous family secret.

"An Elephant in the Living Room" is the title of one book for kids whose parents drink. "When I was about ten years old, I started to realize that my dad had a drinking problem," it begins. "Sometimes he drank too much. Then he would talk loudly and make jokes that weren't funny. He would say unkind things to my mom in front of the neighbors and my friends. I felt embarrassed."

That's the voice of an adult who has perspective on her past. This is the voice of a 12-year-old at a school in the kind of neighborhood where we talk, talk, talk about crack though the abuse of alcohol is much more widespread. She is talking about her father, who drinks: "I hate him. He should just stay in his room like a big dog." This would make a good commercial -- the moment when your own kid thinks of you as an animal.

The folks who sell alcohol will say most people use it responsibly, but the fact remains that many people die in car accidents because of it, many wind up in the hospital because of it, and many families are destroyed because of it. Dr. Novello is right to excoriate the commercials; it is not just that they make drinking seem cool, but that they make it seem inevitable, as though parties would not take place, Christmas never come, success be elusive without a bottle. It's got to be confusing to see vodka as the stuff of which family gatherings are made and then watch your mother pass out in the living room.

This is the drug that has been handed down from generation to generation, that most kids learn to use and abuse at home. I'd love to see warning labels, about fetal alcohol syndrome and liver damage and addiction. But it's time for a change, not just in the ads, but in the atmosphere that assumes a substance is innocuous because it's not illegal. For most of our children, the most powerful advertisement for alcohol may be sitting at the kitchen table. Or sleeping it off in the bedroom.

The Jacket

By Gary Soto

My clothes have failed me. I remember the green coat that I wore in fifth and sixth grades when you either danced like a champ or pressed yourself against a greasy wall, bitter as a penny toward the happy couples.

When I needed a new jacket and my mother asked what kind I wanted, I described something like bikers wear: black leather and silver studs with enough belts to hold down a small town. We were in the kitchen, steam on the windows from her cooking. She listened so long while stirring dinner that I thought she understood for

sure the kind I wanted. The next day when I got home from school, I discovered draped on my bedpost a jacket the color of day-old guacamole. I threw my books on the bed and approached the jacket slowly, as if it were a stranger whose hand I had to shake. I touched the vinyl sleeve, the collar, and peeked at the mustard-colored lining.

From the kitchen mother yelled that my jacket was in the closet. I closed the door to her voice and pulled at the rack of clothes in the closet, hoping the jacket on the bedpost wasn't for me but my mean brother. No luck. I gave up. From my bed, I stared at the jacket. I wanted to cry because it was so ugly and so big that I knew I'd have to wear it a long time. I was a small kid, thin as a young tree, and it would be years before I'd have a new one. I stared at the jacket, like an enemy, thinking bad things before I took off my old jacket whose sleeves climbed halfway to my elbow.

I put the big jacket on. I zipped it up and down several times, and rolled the cuffs up so they didn't cover my hands. I put my hands in the pockets and flapped the jacket like a bird's wings. I stood in front of the mirror, full face, then profile, and then looked over my shoulder as if someone had called me. I sat on the bed, stood against the bed, and combed my hair to see what I would look like doing something natural. I looked ugly. I threw it on my brother's bed and looked at it for a long time before I slipped it on and went out to the backyard, smiling a "thank you" to my mom as I passed her in the kitchen. With my hands in my pockets I kicked a ball against the fence, and then climbed it to sit looking into the alley. I hurled orange peels at the mouth of an open garbage can and when the peels were gone I watched the white puffs of my breath thin to nothing.

I jumped down, hands in my pockets, and in the backyard on my knees I teased my dog, Brownie, by swooping my arms while making birdcalls. He jumped at me and missed. He jumped again and again, until a tooth stuck deep, ripping an L-shaped tear on my left sleeve. I pushed Brownie away to study the tear as I would a cut on my arm. There was no blood, only a few loose pieces of fuzz. Damn dog, I thought, and pushed him away hard when he tried to bite again. I got up from my knees and went to my bedroom to sit with my jacket on my lap, with the lights out.

That was the first afternoon with my new jacket. The next day I wore it to sixth grade and got a D on a math quiz. During the morning recess Frankie T., the playground terrorist, pushed me to the ground and told me to stay there until recess was over. My best friend, Steve Negrete, ate an apple while looking at me, and the girls turned away to whisper on the monkey bars. The teachers were no help: they looked my way and talked about how foolish I looked in my new jacket. I saw their heads bob with laughter, their hands half-covering their mouths.

Even though it was cold, I took off the jacket during lunch and played kickball in a thin shirt, my arms feeling like Braille from goose bumps. But when I returned to class I slipped the jacket on and shivered until I was warm. I sat on my hands, heating them up, while my teeth chattered like a cup of crooked dice. Finally warm, I slid out of the jacket but a few minutes later put it back on when the fire bell rang. We paraded out into the yard where we, the fifth graders, walked past all the other grades to stand against the back fence. Everybody saw me. Although they didn't say out loud, "Man, that's ugly," I heard the buzz-buzz of gossip and even laughter that I knew was meant for me.

And so I went, in my guacamole jacket. So embarrassed, so hurt, I wouldn't even do my homework. I received Cs on quizzes, and forgot the state capitols and the rivers of South America, our friendly neighbor. Even the girls who had been friendly blew away like loose flowers to follow the boys in neat jackets.

I wore that thing for three years until the sleeves grew short and my forearms stuck out like the necks of turtles. All during that time no love came to me- no little dark girl in a Sunday dress she wore on Monday. At lunchtime I stayed with the ugly boys who leaned against the chain link fence and looked around with propellers of grass spinning in our mouths. We saw the girls walk by alone, saw couples, hand in hand, their heads like bookends pressing air together. We saw them and spun our propellers so fast our faces were blurs.

I blame that jacket for those bad years. I blame my mother for her bad taste and her cheap ways. It was a sad time for the heart. With a friend I spent my sixth grade year in a tree in the ally, waiting for something good to happen to me in that jacket that became my ugly brother who tagged along wherever I went. And it was about that time I began to grow. My chest puffed up with muscle and, strangely, a few more ribs. Even my hands, those fleshy hammers, showed bravery through the cuffs, the fingers already hardening for the coming fights. But the L-shaped rip on the left sleeve got bigger, bits of stuffing coughed out from its wound after a hard day at play. I finally scotch-taped it close, but in rain or cold weather the tape peeled off like a scab and more

stuffing fell out until that sleeve shriveled into a palsied arm. That winter the elbows began to crack and whole chunks of green began to fall off. I showed the cracks to my mother, who always seemed to be at the stove with steamed up glasses, and she said there were children in Mexico who would love that jacket. I told her that this was America and yelled that Debbie, my sister, didn't have a jacket like mine. I ran outside, ready to cry, and climb the tree by the alley to think bad thought and breath puff white and disappear.

But whole pieces still casually flew off my jacket when I played hard, read quietly, or took vicious spelling test at school. When it became so spotted that my brother began to call me "camouflage," I flung it over the fence into the alley. Later. However, I swiped the jacket off the ground and went inside to drape it across my lap and mope.

I was called to dinner: steam shriveled my mother's glasses as she said grace; my brother and sister with their heads bowed made ugly faces at their glasses of powered milk. I gagged too, but eagerly ate rips of buttered tortilla that held scooped up beans. Finished, I went outside with my jacket across my arm. It was a cold sky. The faces of clouds were piled up, hurting. I climb the fence, jumping down with a grunt. I started up the alley and soon slipped into my jacket, that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder that day and ever since.

How I Got Smart

By Steve Brody

A common misconception among youngsters attending school is that their teachers were child prodigies. Who else but a bookworm, prowling the libraries and disdaining the normal youngster's propensity for play rather than study, would grow up to be a teacher anyway?

I tried desperately to explain to my students that the image they had of me as an ardent devotee of books and homework during my adolescence was a bit out of focus. Au contraire! I hated compulsory education with a passion. I could never quite accept the notion of having to go to school while the fish were biting.

Consequently, my grades were somewhat bearish. That's how my father, who dabbled in the stock market, described them. Presenting my report card for my father to sign was like serving him a subpoena. At midterm and other sensitive periods, my father kept a low profile. But in my sophomore year, something beautiful and exciting happened. Cupid aimed his arrow and struck me squarely in the heart. All at once, I enjoyed going to school, if only to gaze at the lovely face beneath the raven tresses in English II. My princes sat near the pencil sharpener, and that year I ground up enough pencils to fuel a campfire.

Alas, Debbie was far beyond my wildest dreams. We were separated not only by five rows of desks, but only by five rows of desks, but by about 50 IQ points. She was the top student in English II, the apple of Mrs. Larrivee's eye. I envisioned how eagerly Debbie's father awaited her report card.

Occasionally, Debbie would catch me staring at her, and she would flash a smile—an angelic smile that radiated enlightenment and quickened my heartbeat. It was a smile that signaled hope and made me temporarily forget the intellectual gulf that separated us.

I schemed desperately to bridge that gulf. And one day, as I was passing the supermarket, an idea came to me.

A sign in the window announced that the store was offering the first volume of a set of encyclopedias at the introductory price of 29 cents. The remaining volumes would cost \$2.49 each, but it was no time to be cynical.

I purchased Volume I—Aardvark to Asteroid—and began my venture into the world of knowledge. I would henceforth become a seeker of facts. I would become chief egghead in English II and sweep the princess off her feet with a surge of erudition. I had it all planned.

My first opportunity came one day in the cafeteria line. I looked behind me and there she was.

“Hi,” she said.

After a pause, I wet my lips and said, “Know where anchovies come from?”

She seemed surprised. “No, I don’t.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “The anchovy lives in salt water and is rarely found in fresh water.” I had to talk fast, so that I could get all the facts in before we reached the cash register. “Fishermen catch anchovies in the Mediterranean Sea and along the Atlantic coast near Spain and Portugal.”

“How fascinating,” said Debbie.

“The anchovy is closely related to the herring. It is thin and silvery in color. It has a long snout and a very large mouth.”

“Incredible.”

“Anchovies are good in salads, mixed with eggs, and are often used as appetizers before dinner, but they are salty and cannot be digested too rapidly.”

Debbie shook her head in disbelief. It was obvious that I had made quite an impression.

A few days later, during a fire drill, I sidled up to her and asked, “Ever been to the Aleutian Islands?”

“Never have,” she replied.

“Might me a nice place to visit, but I certainly wouldn’t want to live there,” I said.

“Why not?” said Debbie, playing right into my hands.

“Well, the climate is forbidding. There are no trees on any of the 100 or more islands in the group. The ground is rocky and very little plant life can grow on it.”

“I don’t think I’d even care to visit,” she said.

The fire drill was over and we began to file into the building, so I had to step it up to get the natives in. “The Aleuts are short and sturdy and have dark skin and black hair. They subsist on fish, and they trap blue fox, seal, and otter for their valuable fur.”

Debbie’s hazel eyes widened in amazement. She was undoubtedly beginning to realize that she wasn’t dealing with an ordinary lunkhead. She was gaining new and valuable insights instead of engaging in the routine small talk one would expect from most sophomores.

Luck was on my side, too. One day I was browsing through the library during my study period. I spotted Debbie sitting at a table, absorbed in a crossword puzzle. She was frowning, apparently stumped on a word. I leaned over and asked if I could help.

“Four-letter word for Oriental female servant,” Debbie said.

“Try *amah*,” I said, quick as a flash.

Debbie filled in the blanks, then turned to stare at me in amazement. “I don’t believe it,” she said. “I just don’t believe it.”

And so it went, that glorious, amorous, joyous sophomore year. Debbie seemed to relish our little conversations and hung on my every word. Naturally, the more I read, the more my confidence grew. I expatiated freely on such topics as adenoids, air brakes, and arthritis.

In the classroom, too, I was gradually making my presence felt. Among my classmates, I was developing a reputation as a wheeler-dealer in data. One day, during a discussion of Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner," we came across the word *albatross*.

"Can anyone tell us what an albatross is?" asked Mrs. Larrivee.

My hand shot up. "The albatross is a large bird that lives mostly in the ocean regions below the equator, but may be found in the north Pacific as well. The albatross measures as long as four feet and has the greatest wingspread of any bird. It feeds on the surface of the ocean, where it catches shellfish. The albatross is a very voracious eater. When it is full it has trouble getting into the air again."

There was a long silence in the room. Mrs. Larrivee couldn't quite believe what she had just heard. I sneaked a peek at Debbie and gave her a big wink. She beamed proudly and winked back.

It was a great feeling, having Debbie and Mrs. Larrivee and my peers accord me respect and paying attention when I spoke.

My grades edged upward and my father no longer tried to avoid me when I brought home my report card. I continued reading the encyclopedia diligently, packing more and more into my head.

What I failed to perceive was that all this time Debbie was going steady with a junior from a neighboring school – a hockey player with a C+ average. The revelation hit me hard, and for a while I felt like disgorging and forgetting everything I had learned. I had saved enough money to buy Volume II –Asthma to Bullfinch – but was strongly tempted to invest in a hockey stick instead.

How could she lead me on like that—smiling and concurring and giving me the impression that I was important?

I felt not only hurt, but betrayed. Like Armageddon, but with less dire consequences, thank God.

In time I recovered from my wounds. The next year Debbie moved from the neighborhood and transferred to another school. Soon she became no more than a fleeting memory.

Although the original incentive was gone, I continued poring over the encyclopedias, as well as an increasing number of other books. Having savored the heady wine of knowledge, I could now alter my course. For:

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing:
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

So wrote Alexander Pope, Volume XIV, Paprika to Pterodactyl.

Momma, the Dentist, and Me
By Maya Angelou

The Angel of the candy counter had found me out at last, and was exacting excruciating penance for all the stolen Milky Ways, Mounds, Mr. Goodbars and Hersheys with Almonds. I had two cavities that were rotten to the gums. The pain was beyond the bailiwick of crushed aspirin or oil of cloves. Only one thing could help me, so I prayed earnestly that I'd be allowed to sit under the house and have the building collapse on my left jaw. Since there was no Negro dentist in Stamps, nor doctor either, for that matter, Momma had dealt with previous toothaches

by pulling them out (a string tied to the tooth with the other end looped over her fist), pain killers and prayer. In this particular instance the medicine had proved ineffective; there wasn't enough enamel left to hook a string on, and the prayers were being ignored because the Balancing Angel was blocking their passage.

I lived in blinding pain, not so much toying with as seriously considering the idea of jumping in the well, and Momma decided I had to be taken to a dentist. The nearest Negro dentist was in Texarkana, twenty-five miles away, and I was certain that I'd be dead long before we reached half the distance. Momma said we'd go to Dr. Lincoln, right in Stamps, and he'd take care of me. She said he owed her a favor.

I knew there were a number of white folks in town that owed her favors. Bailey and I had seen the books which showed how she had lent money to blacks and whites alike during the Depression, and most still owed her. But I couldn't aptly remember seeing Dr. Lincoln's name, nor had I ever heard of a Negro's going to him as a patient. However, Momma said we were going, and put water on the stove for our baths. I had never been to a doctor, so she told me that after the bath (which would make my mouth feel better) I had to put on freshly starched and ironed underclothes from inside out. The ache failed to respond to the bath, and I knew then that the pain was more serious than that which anyone had ever suffered.

Before we left the Store she ordered me to brush my teeth and then wash my mouth with Listerine. The idea of even opening my clamped jaws increased the pain, but upon her explanation that when you go to a doctor you have to clean yourself all over, but more especially the part that's to be examined, I screwed up my courage and unlocked my teeth. The cool air in my mouth and the jarring of my molars dislodged what little remained of my reason. I had frozen to the pain, my family nearly had to lie me down to take the toothbrush away. It was no small effort to get me started on the road to the dentist. Momma spoke to all the passers-by, but didn't stop to chat. She explained over her shoulder that we were going to the doctor and she'd 'pass the time of day' on our way home.

Until we reached the pond the pain was my world, an aura had haloed me for three feet around. Crossing the bridge into whitefolks' country pieces of sanity pushed themselves forward. I had to stop moaning and start walking straight. The white towel, which was drawn under my chin and tied over my head, had to be arranged. If one was dying, it had to be done in style.... if the dying took place in whitefolks' part of town.

On the other side of the bridge the ache seemed to lessen as if a whitebreeze blew off the whitefolks and cushioned everything in their neighborhood - including my jaw. The gravel road was smoother, the stones smaller and tree branches hung down around the path and nearly covered us. If the pain didn't diminish then, the familiar yet strange sights hypnotized me into believing that it had.

But my head continued to throb with the measured insistence of a bass drum, and how could a toothache pass the calaboose, hear the songs of the prisoners, their blues and laughter, and not be changed? How could one or two or even a mouthful of angry tooth roots meet a wagonload of powhitetrash children, endure their idiotic snobbery and not feel less important? Behind the building which housed the dentist's office ran a small path used by servants and those tradespeople who catered to the butcher and Stamps' one restaurant. Momma and I followed that lane to the backstairs of Dentist Lincoln's office. The sun was bright and gave the day a hard reality as we climbed up the steps to the second floor.

Momma knocked on the back door and a young white girl opened it to show surprise at

seeing us there. Momma said she wanted to see Dentist Lincoln and to tell him Annie was there. The girl closed the door firmly. Now the humiliation of hearing Momma describe herself as if she had no last name to the young white girl was equal to the physical pain. It seemed terribly unfair to have a toothache and a headache and have to bear at the same time the heavy burden of Blackness.

It was always possible that the teeth would quiet down and maybe drop out of their own accord. Momma said we would wait. We leaned in the harsh sunlight on the shaky railings of the dentist's back porch for over an hour.

He opened the door and looked at Momma. 'Well, Annie, what can I do for you?' He didn't see the towel around my jaw or notice my swollen face.

Momma said, 'Dentist Lincoln. It's my grandbaby here. She got two rotten teeth that's giving her a fit.'

She waited for him to acknowledge the truth of her statement. He made no comment, orally or facially.

'She had this toothache purt' near four days now, and today I said, "Young lady, you going to the Dentist."

'Annie?'

'Yes, sir, Dentist Lincoln.'

He was choosing words the way people hunt for shells.

'Annie, you know I don't treat nigra, colored people.'

'I know, Dentist Lincoln. But this here is just my little grandbaby, and she ain't gone be no trouble to you ...'

'Annie, everybody has a policy. In this world you have to have a policy. Now, my policy is I don't treat colored people.'

The sun had baked the oil out of Momma's skin and melted the Vaseline in her hair. She shone greasily as she leaned out of the dentist's shadow.

'Seem like to me, Dentist Lincoln, you might look after her, she ain't nothing but a little mite. And seems like maybe you owe me a favor or two.'

He reddened slightly. 'Favor or no favor, the money has all been repaid to you and that's the end of it. Sorry, Annie.' He had his hand on the doorknob. 'Sorry.' His voice was a bit kinder on the second 'Sorry,' as if he really was.

Momma said, 'I wouldn't press on you like this for myself but I can't take No. Not for my grandbaby. When you come to borrow my money you didn't have to beg. You asked me, and I lent it. Now, it wasn't my policy. I ain't no moneylender, but you stood to lose this building and I tried to help you out.'

'It's been paid, and raising your voice won't make me change my mind. My policy ...' He

let go of the door and stopped nearer Momma. The three of us were crowded on the small landing. 'Annie, my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's.'

He had never once looked at me. He turned his back and went through the door into the cool beyond. Momma backed up inside herself for a few minutes. I forgot everything except her face which was almost a new one to me. She leaned over and took the doorknob, and in her everyday soft voice she said, 'Sister, go on downstairs. Wait for me. I'll be there directly.' Under the most common of circumstances I knew it "did no good to argue with Momma. So I walked down the steep stairs, afraid to look back and afraid not to do so. I turned as the door slammed, and she was gone.

Momma walked in that room as if she owned it. She shoved that silly nurse aside with one hand and strode into the dentist's office. He was sitting in his chair, sharpening his mean instruments and putting extra sting into his medicines. Her eyes were blazing like live coals and her arms had doubled themselves in length. He looked up at her just before she caught him by the collar of his white jacket.

'Stand up when you see a lady, you contemptuous scoundrel.' Her tongue had thinned and the words rolled off well enunciated. Enunciated and sharp like little claps of thunder. The dentist had no choice but to stand at R.O.T.C. attention. His head dropped after a minute and his voice was humble. 'Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Henderson.'

'You knave, do you think you acted like a gentleman, speaking to me like that in front of my granddaughter?' She didn't shake him, although she had the power. She simply held him upright.
'No, ma'am, Mrs. Henderson.'

'No, ma'am, Mrs. Henderson, what?' Then she did give him the tiniest of shakes, but because of her strength the action set his head and arms to shaking loose on the ends of his body. He stuttered much worse than Uncle Willie. 'No, ma'am, Mrs. Henderson, I'm sorry.'

With just an edge of her disgust showing, Momma slung him back in his dentist's chair. 'Sorry is as sorry does, and you're about the sorriest dentist I ever laid my eyes on.' (She could afford to slip into the vernacular because she had such eloquent command of English.)

'I didn't ask you to apologize in front of Marguerite, because I don't want her to know my power, but I order you, now and herewith. Leave Stamps by sundown.'

'Mrs. Henderson, I can't get my equipment...' He was shaking terribly now.

'Now, that brings me to my second order. You will never again practice dentistry. Never!

When you get settled in your next place, you will be a vegetarian caring for dogs with the mange, cats with the cholera and cows with the epizootic. Is that clear?'

The saliva ran down his chin and his eyes filled with tears. 'Yes ma'am. Thank you for not killing me. Thank you, Mrs. Henderson.'

Momma pulled herself back from being ten feet tall with eight-foot arms and said, 'You're welcome for nothing, you varlet, I wouldn't waste a killing on the likes of you.'

On her way out she waved her handkerchief at the nurse and turned her into a crocus

sack of chicken feed.

Momma looked tired when she came down the stairs, but who wouldn't be tired if they had gone through what she had. She came close to me and adjusted the towel under my jaw (I had forgotten the toothache; I only knew that she made her hands gentle in order not to awaken the pain). She took my hand. Her voice never changed. 'Come on, Sister.'

I reckoned we were going home where she would concoct a brew to eliminate the pain and maybe give me new teeth too. New teeth that would grow overnight out of my gums. She led me toward the drugstore, which was in the opposite direction from the Store. 'I'm taking you to Dentist Baker in Texarkana.'

I was glad after all that that I had bathed and put on Mum and Cashmere Bouquet talcum powder. It was a wonderful surprise. My toothache had quieted to solemn pain, Momma had obliterated the evil white man, and we were going on a trip to Texarkana, just the two of us. On the Greyhound she took an inside seat in the back, and I sat beside her. I was so proud of being her granddaughter and sure that some of her magic must have come down to me. She asked if I was scared. I only shook my head and leaned over on her cool brown upper arm. There was no chance that a dentist, especially a Negro dentist, would dare hurt me then. Not with Momma there. The trip was uneventful, except that she put her arm around me, which was very unusual for Momma to do.

The dentist showed me the medicine and the needle before he deadened my gums, but if he hadn't I wouldn't have worried. Momma stood right behind him. Her arms were folded, and she checked on everything he did. The teeth were extracted and she bought me an ice cream cone from the side window or a drug counter. The trip back to Stamps was quiet, except that I had to spit into a very small empty snuff can which she had gotten for me and it was difficult with the bus humping and jerking on the country roads.

At home, I was given a warm salt solution, and when I washed out my mouth I showed Bailey the empty holes, where the clotted blood sat like filling in a pie crust. He said I was quite brave, and that was my cue to reveal our confrontation with the peckerwood dentist and Momma's incredible powers.

I had to admit that I didn't hear the conversation, but what else could she have said than what I said she said? What else done? He agreed with my analysis in a lukewarm way, and I happily (after all, I'd been sick) flounced into the Store. Momma was preparing our evening meal and Uncle Willie leaned on the door sill. She gave her version.

'Dentist Lincoln got right uppity. Said he'd rather put his hand in a dog's mouth. And when I reminded him of the favor, he brushed it off like a piece of lint. Well, I sent Sister downstairs and went inside. I hadn't never been in his office before, but I found the door to where he takes out teeth, and him and the nurse was in there thick as thieves. I just stood there till he caught sight of me.' Crash bang the pots on the stove. 'He jumped just like he was sitting on a pin. He said, "Annie, I don'te tole you, I ain't gonna mess around in no niggah's mouth." I said, "Somebody's got to do it then," and he said, "Take her to Texarkana to the colored dentist" and that's when I said, "If you paid me my money I could afford to take her." He said, "It's all been paid." I tole him everything but the interest been paid. He said "T" wasn't no interest." I said "Tis now, I'll take ten dollars as payment in full." You know, Willie, it wasn't no right thing to do, 'cause I lent that money without thinking about it.

'He tole that little snippity nurse of his'n to give me ten dollars and make me sign a 'paid

in full' receipt. She gave it to me and I signed the papers. Even though by rights he was paid up before, I figger, he gonna be that kind of nasty, he gonna have to pay for it.'

Momma and her son laughed and laughed over the white man's evilness and her retributive sin.

I preferred, much preferred, my version.

The Good Daughter

By Caroline Huang

The moment I walked into the dry-cleaning store, I knew the woman behind the counter was from Korea, like my parents. To show her that we shared a heritage, and possibly get a fellow countryman's discount, I tilted my head forward, in shy imitation of a traditional bow.

"Name?" she asked, not noticing my attempted obeisance.

"Hwang," I answered.

"Hwang? Are you Chinese?"

Her question caught me off-guard. I was used to hearing such queries from non-Asians who think all Asians look alike, but never from one of my own people. Of course, the only Koreans I knew were my parents and their friends, people who've never asked me where I came from, since they know better than I.

I ransacked my mind for the Korean words that would tell her who I was. It's always struck me as funny that I can more readily say "I am Korean" in Spanish, German, and even Latin than I can in the language of my ancestry. In the end, I told her in English.

The dry-cleaning woman squinted as though trying to see past the glare of my strangeness, repeating my surname under her breath. "Oh, Fxuang," she said, doubling over with laughter. "You don't know how to speak your name."

I flinched. Perhaps I was particularly sensitive at the time, having just dropped out of graduate school. I had torn up my map for the future, the one that said not only where I was going but who I was. My sense of identity was already disintegrating.

When I got home, I called my parents to ask why they had never bothered to correct me. "Big deal," my mother said, sounding more flippant than I knew she intended. "So what if you can't pronounce your name? You are American," she said.

Though I didn't challenge her explanation, it left me unsatisfied. The fact is, my cultural identity is hardly that clear-cut.

My parents immigrated to this country 30 years ago, two years before I was born. They told me often, while I was growing up, that if I wanted to I could be president someday, that here my grasp would be as long as my reach.

To ensure that I reaped all the advantages of this country, my parents saw to it that I became fully assimilated. So, like any American of my generation, I whirled away my youth strolling malls and talking on the phone, rhapsodizing over Andrew McCarthy's blue eyes or analyzing the meaning of a certain upperclassman's offer of a ride to the Homecoming football game.

To my parents, I am all American, and the sacrifices they made in leaving Korea – including my mispronounced name – pale in comparison to the opportunities those sacrifices gave me. They do not see that I straddled two cultures, nor that I feel displaced in the only country I know. I identify with Americans, but Americans do not identify with me. I've never known what it's like to belong to a community – neither one at large, nor of an extended family. I know more about

Europe than the continent my ancestors unmistakably come from. I sometimes wonder, as I did that day in the dry cleaner's, if I would be a happier person had my parents stayed in Korea.

I first began to consider this around the time I decided to go to graduate school. It had been a compromise: my parents wanted me to go to law school; I wanted to skip the starched-collar track and be a writer – the hungrier the better. But after 20-some years of following their wishes and meeting all their expectations, I couldn't bring myself to disobey or disappoint. A writing career is riskier than law, I remember thinking. If I'm a failure and my life is a wash-out, then what does that make my parents' lives?

I know that many of my friends had to choose between pleasing their parents and being true to themselves. But for the children of immigrants, the choice seems more complicated, a happy outcome impossible. By making the biggest move of their lives for me, my parents indentured me to the largest debt imaginable – I owe them the fulfillment of their hopes for me.

It tore me up inside to suppress my dream, but I went to school for a Ph.D in English literature, thinking I had found the perfect compromise, I would be able to write at least about books while pursuing graduate degree. Predictably, it didn't work out. How could I labor for 5 years in a program I had no passion for? When I finally left school, my parents were disappointed, but since it wasn't what they wanted me to do anyway, they weren't devastated. I, on the other hand, felt I was staring at the bottom of the abyss. I had seen the flaw in my life of halfway-ness, in my planned life of compromise.

I hadn't thought about my love life, but I had a vague plan to make concessions there, too. Though they raised me as an American, my parents expect me to marry someone Korean and give them grandchildren who look like them. This didn't seem like such a huge request when I was 14, but now I don't know what I'm going to do. I've never been in love with someone I dated, or dated someone I loved. (Since I can't bring myself even to entertain the thought of marrying the non-Korean men I'm attracted to, I've been dating only those I know I can stay clearheaded about.) And as I near that age when the question of marriage stalks every relationship, I can't help but wonder if my parents' expectations are responsible for the lack of passion in my life.

My parents didn't want their daughter to be Korean, but they don't want her fully American, either. Children of immigrants are living paradoxes. We are the first generation and the last. We are in this country for its opportunities, yet filial duties bind us. When my parents boarded the plane, they knew they were embarking on a rough trip. I don't think they imagined the rocks in the path of their daughter who can't even pronounce her own name.