

ENGLISH 12 SUMMER READING

Your assignment is to read the following packet of essays. Once you have read all four essays, choose TWO 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.

The responses will be due on the third day of school (August 27, 2014).

Your responses must:

- Be typed and double-spaced
- Follow the conventions of Standard English (spelling, punctuation, indentation, etc.)
- Make and support an argument in each paragraph
- Include a topic sentence with the author’s name and essay title in it

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.

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 filmily 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 donne 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.