

1/5/15 Monday — *White Christmas*

As was to be expected, Mom got arrested on Christmas Eve. But any resemblance to a normal holiday for the Anniston family ends there.

I was home keeping an eye on the turkey in the oven. Mom was more than an hour late, and I was starting to wonder if something wasn't going according to plan. Normally Reggie, Mom's old friend and her most frequent Christmas Eve arresting officer, would drive her home in the squad car on his way back to New Paltz after her brief arraignment in Poughkeepsie. We found out later that Reggie had inconsiderately decided to spend Christmas with his mom in Georgia.

At 7, the timer dinged for the turkey, and I got a text from Mom:

Bayard, can you meet me at the station w \$50? Long story. ATM card is inside Eyes on the Prize, vol 1. Thanks, buddy!

I glanced out the picture window onto our street. Eight inches of swirling new snow, on top of the two and a half feet I shoveled out last week. My hands were still practically stuck in shovel-grabbing pose. I sighed, to make my life more like a movie, and grabbed the ATM card from the book.

A few minutes later, with all my winter gear on, I felt like a cross between Iron Man and Ernest Shackleton. I heard the magic beans sound from my pocket. Probably Mom again. Dutiful Son de-gloved and took out his phone. But the text was from my Auntie Cheryl:

Hey, favorite nephew. The roads are a frozen mess. Grandpa Jordan and I are going to hit a hotel hopefully not literally. Not sure we'll be able to get through tomorrow. The struggle is real, Padawan [black fist emoji]

I cussed all the way to the ATM. Sometimes the Anniston holiday tradition is way too much work.

Keriemé says I can be passive aggressive sometimes. (What else are best friends for if not to remind you of your faults?) Well, the definition of passive aggressive might just be that once you've got three twenties for your Mom's fifty-dollar bail, you realize you're not 100% sure that jails give change. You decide it's probably safest to go back up the hill, break one of those twenties on an extra-hot mocha at the Bitter Dreg, and *then* go free your mother.

Inside the police station, I said hi to my second family: Alphonse, the big Italian guy who mostly does dispatch; and Sergeant Jeannine, the station chief, who was heading out. She wished me a Happy Kwan-hanukk-mas — her non-partisan holiday greeting — and disappeared.

“Hey, Bayard!” my Mom said, cheerily handcuffed to the red leather armchair where they always let her chill instead of throwing her in the cell downstairs. I smiled on the bottom of my face, and glared on the top. I was shivering from my walk through the life-size snow globe of our little village.

“I shouldn't really let you sign this!” Alphonse boomed, “you being sixteen and all!” Alphonse always booms; it's in his nature. He slid a clipboard across the counter, “But, hey, it's Christmas!” He grabbed a pen from over his ear and pointed to two places on the form with his gigantic finger. I signed, and handed over the money.

“Alright, let's go unlock Rosa Parks.” He walked over to Mom's chair in the detectives' area, and mom held up her wrist to make it easier for him. “Alright, Kendra, you're all set.”

“Thanks, Alphonse,” she said. “You're a prince.” Then she turned to me. “Bayard, honey? Why the long face?”

N-n-n-no r-r-r-reason.

Back at home, Mom said she was chilled through. She took a nice hot shower while I removed Cheryl and Grandpa Jordan's dishes and silverware from the table.

It was actually a really nice Christmas Eve dinner, just the two of us. And I got to hear the whole story of Mom's Fifth Annual Christmas Eve Crèche Protest and Brush with the Law.

1/6/15 Tuesday — *What Is This New 'Word Power'?*

You probably noticed a few things by now:

You have no idea how to pronounce my name.

You are reading my memoir.

You have a sense of increased Word Power you can't quite explain. You may even be a little frightened by it.

Well, my name is pronounced BY-erd. Not BAY-erd. Not BY-yard. BY-erd. Easy peasy. SAY IT!

You are reading this memoir because I am taking Mr. Maung's class "Eyewitness: History through the Eyes of Those Who Lived It". 'Memoir' is a French word for a diary anyone else would ever find interesting. For extra Fancy-French points, pronounce it mem-WAH. Mr. Maung is making us write a 10,000-word memoir over the course of the second semester. That works out to 250 words a day, and the whole class complained when he said it. But he wasn't having it.

So, welcome to my memwah.

And finally, if you are **suffused** to your very core with the feeling that you belong in an episode of *Word Girl*, it's because of my new class "Super-Charge Your Word Power!!!". It should be called "Get Ready for More Standardized Tests!!!" but whatever. The point is, Ms Kitts is **insisting** that we turn in fifteen sentences a week that use the featured vocab words.

When I griped about the memwah and the vocab assignments for about the millionth time, Kerieme intervened with his usual straight-A genius: Combine the assignments by using the fancy **luxurious** vocab words to describe my plain old **mundane** life.

Two birds, one stone, and sincere apologies to the Audubon Society of Eastern New York.

1/7/15 Wednesday — *My Mom in Five Bumper-Stickers*

Kerieme, who is looking in the mirror over my dresser doing his best to look sexy practicing French verbs, reminds me that most people's mothers *don't* get arrested every Christmas Eve for five years running, so he thinks I ought to be less **reticent** and talk about *that* before I continue with the interesting part of the story — me.

Here's the bare-bones version of my mom:

She's been an activist since she was a little girl going to marches and protests with my grandparents. She kept at it in high school, then in college (at least until she had me), and then once I was walking. She's always trying to get things to change for the better, and as we have seen, she's never afraid to ruffle some feathers to call attention to political issues. She's kind of famous around here; like Dr. King, just in fewer Zip codes. In the last few years, she's done less though, because running the store takes a lot of time.

Mom drives a Subaru wagon (you kind of have to pack 4-wheel drive around here), but if my mom were a car herself, a) she would be a Prius, and b) she would look like this if you were behind her at a red light:

Out and Proud

Black Lives Matter

Supreme Court out of My Uterus

Smash the School to Prison Pipeline

The Patriarchy Isn't Going to Fuck Itself

Your basic normal mom, right?

Well, when you protest a lot, you can get arrested a lot. Mom's lost count by now. When she gets arrested, her stays in jail are usually **evanescent**, only an hour or two. Her needing bail is really rare, and it's never been my job before, so I shouldn't complain. I have pointed out to her on many an occasion that if she was an **ophthalmologist**, she'd probably always carry enough cash to post her own bail. But alas, you make a lot less money running a sex toy store than studying diseases of the eyeball.

1/8/15 Thursday — *White Devil*

Kerieme's really branching out. This afternoon, he is lying on my bed looking at guys on Tinder and swiping left at the speed of light. He just reminded me that the story of my life will make a lot more sense if I introduce the villain of our story: LaBianca Ferrari. I told him that just because he's from Sudan doesn't mean he knows everything. He said he knew I was going to say that. *Checkmate. Damn.* Still, it is nice to have a best friend who doesn't just point out my passive aggressive psychological problems, but also helps me write a **coherent** memoir instead of one that makes no sense.

LaBianca is who got Mom arrested on Christmas Eve. She's basically Mom's nemesis. They have hated each other since before I was born, when they were in college together. I'm not sure exactly why. In families, there are some things you just know not to ask about, and LaBianca is that thing in my family.

I wonder if LaBianca's daughter Mercury was raised with a **taboo** against asking about my mom, too. I don't think I've said half a dozen words to Mercury in the four and a half years we've been in the same schools. I never made a point of avoiding her, it's just she's a loud jockly type, and I'm a quiet reader of manga, so our paths will pretty much never cross in this life.

Her mom LaBianca owns the Mini-Cooper car dealership here. (With a name like Ferrari, you'd kind of have to sell cars.) She is also president of the Chamber of Commerce, and when Mom opened her sex toy store, LaBianca was not pleased. She said it sent the wrong message to families coming to New Paltz as tourists. I guess she's afraid the youth of our village will become sex-crazed **libertines**.

The place Mom and LaBianca really go head-to-head is over the Chamber of Commerce's Christmas Crèche. It's hard to be offended by it, if you ask me. Over the years various figures in it have had to be replaced, and you can't always get a perfect match. By this point, the sheep is larger than the cow, one of the Wise Men should get drafted by the NBA, and let's just say a Baby Jesus that big could not possibly have entered this world through the vagina of the adjacent Virgin. No wonder the Mary figure looks so hella depressed.

Mom complains every year that all the figures except one wise man are white, even though everyone knows Jesus and Co. came from Semitic stock with darker skin and hair "like lamb's wool" according to the Oracle at My Grampa Jordan. Six years ago Mom wrote a letter to the paper complaining about it, and the Chamber promised to make the crèche more representative of the world's Christians. They never followed through. In case you haven't figured this out already, not following through is a bad strategy with Kendra Anniston.

On the one hand it is hard to know why Mom would give a damn about a Christian holiday display; I mean, we celebrate Christmas, but you wouldn't call her devout. Maybe she started the

whole thing simply to spite LaBianca, but I'd like to think my mom is bigger than that. On the other hand, it is beyond me why anyone would break a promise to the most famous Black lesbian activist in barely upstate New York. So LaBianca loses a point there.

Result being that for 5 years running Mom has snuck into the crèche the night before Christmas Eve and put a little Black baby doll in the manger. She hides the original Baby J in more or less clever places. The driver's seat of LaBianca's Mini Cooper is my all-time favorite. (Hardly anybody locks their cars here, and a lot of people leave their keys in the ignition. New Paltz would be the easiest place in America to escape from after robbing a bank.) Then on Christmas Eve, Mom handcuffs herself to the manger in protest. Reggie arrests her because the Chamber wants her off their property, mom gets let out on her own recognizance, and the Anniston family's Christmas Eve is as normal as can be. No walking in a winter wonderland to the ATM required.

Just not this year. The Mini-Messiah is as Caucasian as ever, but Mom has upped her game. In the middle of the Chamber of Commerce's Christmas Eve Carol Sing, she claps on the handcuffs. But instead of substituting a Black doll for the White one, Mom's packing some special low-temperature quick-drying spray paint. She corrects the little guy's melanin in like five minutes. She's just finishing the third coat when the lovely, **mellifluous** sound of sirens can be heard. (I'm not saying LaBianca called the cops, but there was a photo of the whole thing in the local paper — Mom always invites the press to her actions — and in the picture LaBianca is *actually on her cell phone* standing in front of the crèche. And it would have been a weird time to order a pizza.)

With Reggie off selfishly enjoying time with his mother in Georgia, a substitute cop is sent to the scene, who has no idea of the way things normally go. It's obvious that Mom's

‘vandalism’ is on private property, and New Cop realizes she can make everyone happy (especially Mom) by hauling her off to the police station for booking. Hence my Christmas Eve re-enactment of *The Snowy Day*.

I wrote a haiku about it in Ms Gbolade’s Japanese Culture class today:

Darkness in the town

Our hero brings paint and brush

Jesus gets a tan

1/9/15 Friday — *No Restroom for the Weary*

Mom let me take the afternoon off from school so I could go to court with her and her lawyer. She knows almost everyone involved in the proceedings on a first-name basis, because probably half of their work over the years has been generated by Mom’s political actions. They’re super-friendly, always **exclaiming** how much I’ve grown. I think they admire Mom for taking strong stands; but they must also feel she’s a real pain.

If there’s no real threat to public safety, the police won’t even bother to file the paperwork to charge her, and she doesn’t have to enter a plea. The judge dismisses the case, everybody’s done in time for lunch, and the District Attorney can move on to doing more useful things (we hope). That’s how it usually goes, and how we expected today to go as well, especially when we noticed that the arresting officer wasn’t even there.

Court appearances involve a lot of waiting (except on Christmas Eve, of course, when Mom’s usually the only one in line). Because it’s an arraignment, Mom is there to say exactly two words (*not guilty*, in case you were wondering), but unfortunately, they don’t have an express line, so we chill on the benches watching other people blab to the judge about whatever.

It was only a matter of time before I was both bored out of my mind and in need of the men's room. Between arraignments, I headed for the door at the back of the courtroom. As I was reaching out for the handle, the door flew open, nearly scaring the bladder out of me, and LaBianca marched in. She didn't say excuse me or anything; I'm not 100% sure she even saw me, because I was mashed behind the door when she stormed in. My heart started beating a mile a minute, half from surprise and half because I was so close to the reason for all Mom's troubles. My face got that disgusted look, and I hit the hall. I hated LaBianca in that moment.

With my recently acquired knowledge of the danger lurking in every door, you'd think I'd be on high alert, but I just barged into the bathroom. I was planning what I'd say if I ever got the chance to school LaBianca on her stupid racist crèche and the trouble it causes me and Mom.

I opened the door to the first stall. My eyebrows shot up and my jaw dropped. I may or may not have let out a little squeal of **astonishment**. Sitting there on the toilet was LaBianca's daughter Mercury, all freckles and frizzed-out hair, and pants down around her shoes. I must have walked into the women's room by mistake. Oddly enough, my first actual thought wasn't *Run, Bayard, run! You're in the Ladies!*, It was, *Seriously? Girls don't lock their stall doors?*

Your brain processes information so fast sometimes. Before Mercury could say a word, my eyes swept over her legs, which were up on tiptoe. She had the nicest muscles I've ever seen.

"Bye now," she said, as sweet as can be. She gave a little wave, and pushed the door shut. There was a hole in the door where the latch thing should have been.

The slamming noise kind of snapped me to attention. I got the hell out. I needed to spend a couple minutes letting my heart rate get back to normal, so I headed across the hall to the other restroom. It was another Ladies. Maybe they did Ladies on one floor, and men's on the next? I

was halfway to the stairwell when the bathroom door opened behind me, and I heard two voices laughing helplessly.

I just had to look. It was Mercury and Zelda, another girl from the ice hockey team, walking away from me toward the courtroom. The hall was echoey like old buildings are, but I could still make out Zelda's words when she said, "It serves us right! I can't *believe* we just did that!"

They disappeared through the Dangerous Door into the courtroom, and I retraced my steps back to the bathroom. I hadn't been spacing out at all. Mercury and Zelda had been using the Men's room.

I went upstairs to use the restroom anyway. The Girls' Men's Room just felt too risky.

When I got back, Mom and Drayton, her lawyer, were waiting for me in the hall. The judge, realizing she was running out of time, had postponed the arraignments of all non-violent offenders until Monday.

I don't think I said a word all the way home.

1/10/15 SATURDAY — *Poultry in Motion*

I don't have to write on Saturdays, but I wanted to add a couple things to yesterday.

From the courthouse, Mom drove to her sex shop. Open All Night closes at 9pm on Fridays, and it's always busy enough that she and her helper Kayla are both on duty.

Mom kissed me goodbye and went inside. I was pretty rattled; it had all been so strange. Thank god the Bitter Dreg is right on my way home from town. I went in and got a Frisbee-sized chocolate chip cookie and a latte and plopped onto the comfy couch that is so close to the wood stove you can feel your skin getting frightened. I Snapped Kerieme and he replied right away.

K: Hey, man. How was court?

B: Unreal.

K: Everything go alright?

B: Mom's case got postponed. But some next-level weirdness went down as well.

You got a minute?

K: Yeah, just gotta make dinner for Fatima in ten minutes...

Fatima is K's 6-year-old sister.

After I'd texted him the Saga of Stall One (I left out the muscles), he said:

K: I can honestly say I didn't see that coming.

B: IKR

K: Alright gotta get some ramen going. Out.

That was it for Friday. This morning, though, I got this text:

K: Ostrich Girl requests a meeting with you. Wednesday at 3 at the Dreg?

I assumed he was playing, so I texted back,

B: Sorry, meeting with Obama from 2:30 to 5.

K: For real, Bye. Turns out she likes you. Wednesday at 3?

B: For real real?

K: No shizzle. Can she count on you?

B: You're scaring me, K. What if she's ugly? How will I know what to say?

K: She is +not+ ugly, I promise you on a stack of Qur'ans. And I'll be there to keep your ass from looking too damn stupid.

...

B: Alright, I'm in. You won't bag on me?

K: And miss watching you act the ladies' man? Hell, no.

B: Who is she?

...

B: Just so I can stop stressing.

...

B: K, I'm begging you.

...

B: 2 things you're a good friend for agreeing to be there with me but you have
asshole capability

...

I tossed my phone onto the bed and opened the laptop. Some things **necessitate** a big screen. I opened my favorite video, clicked on the giant triangle, and watched Kerieme's titles scroll onto the screen:

New Paltz High School Festival of Drama and Dance 2014

"La Fille Autruche"

Video by Kerieme Abu-Bakr, Sophomore

The video was from December 10th, a month ago today, and a week and a half before holiday vacation. The entire freshman and sophomore classes packed the auditorium for the performance. There were fifteen dance routines interspersed with four short scenes from different plays. Some were meh, some good, a few jaw-dropping, which is to say **sublime**.

Now, most dancing rocks a certain amount of sexy, if you ask me. But the last dance was extra-hot, except not in any normal way. Written in by hand at the end of the program, it was called 'La Fille Autruche', which Google translate says means 'The Ostrich Girl'. The performer

was listed as Big Bird, which Kerieme and I agreed must be an alias, since the real Big Bird coming to New Paltz High School was too much to hope for.

A solo dancer took the stage. She was dressed in a long-sleeve black leotard. The skirt she wore was covered in fake ostrich feathers — the big fluffy grey kind you see on Three-Musketeers-style hats. More feathers sprouted off the left side of her waist to make an ostrich-booty. Her right arm was the giant bird's neck, painted pink from her fingertips to a little past the elbow. Her hand was the head, with orange eyes painted on the sides. Greyish-yellow tights completed her costume.

She was looked either really dark-skinned, or maybe she had painted the rest of her skin black: neck, face, feet, and her left wrist and hand, so they were pretty much invisible. Her hair must have been crammed under a cap, because you couldn't even notice it. All you saw was the bird shape. I wasn't the only one who laughed in embarrassment for her during the silence that preceded her act, during which time she stood perfectly motionless.

Despite the ostrich angle, I was responding very sexually to her shapely legs and body, and something about her bare feet on the stage was really working for me. God knows why. Or probably Kerieme knows why, since he is from Sudan and knows everything.

When the laughter died down, it left that kind of silence you swear you can hear. After a minute, the girl's bird hand began sliding up and down, turning this way and that as if it were looking around, like a real ostrich, but also sort of like a cobra. It was creepy, and I got shivers.

She ostrich-strutted to the far left of the stage, where a dozen teachers and staff were sitting on folding chairs, probably wondering if they were supposed to stop this unauthorized addition to the program. Ostrich Girl stepped along, the ostrich-head examining one teacher after another. She stopped at Mr. Carle, who teaches Algebra.

Mr. Carle despises the students. He always calls on kids who don't know the answers, and **deprecates** them when they say the wrong thing. It's so subtle that if you read a typed-out version of what he said you would have no idea how humiliating it is if you are his target.

Ostrich Girl — back in our seats, we were all looking around furiously to rule out different girls — stood in front of Mr. Carle's seat, and the ostrich-head looked him dead in the eye from maybe three inches away. For like sixty seconds! Tilting its head left — then right — in that weird way birds have. Eventually, Mr. Carle had to say something, just to break the tension of the moment.

The millisecond he opened his mouth, the ostrich screeched, and snapped **ferociously** at the bill of the stupid ball cap he always wears to seem cool. It was so sudden that almost everyone jumped — I know I did — and many people gasped in surprise. We were no match for Mr. Carle, though, who let out a huge terrified squeak. Think parakeet trounced by honey badger.

The girl twirled away and started running in huge circles around and around the stage. She really looked like an ostrich, moving her arm, her legs, her pelvis in the most authentic way, **ineffably** bird-like.

Even on the video, the sound of a hundred kids' phones getting whipped out can be heard, as everyone realizes this is something worth posting. I noticed Kerieme had been recording 'La Fille Autruche' on his iPad from the beginning, which I found almost suspiciously lucky.

I turned my head to Kerieme but didn't take my eyes off the girl running on the stage.

"If you send me that video, I'll give you a million dollars," I said.

"Two million."

"Deal."

Then the projector flashed words on the rear curtain:

“The ostrich can run at speeds OVER 35 MPH.”

Ostrich Girl stopped, breathing hard, and stood there, stock-still, until the slide changed.

“Females can weigh as much as 320 POUNDS.”

Now she began to strut around the stage, slowly this time, fluidly, like a slinky: bending, sliding, and flowing around the floor.

The words cast by the projector changed again:

“It is one of the few non-mammal species that has a CLITORIS.”

This caused a few expressions of disapproval from boys who had to make sure everyone knew their opinion of all parts of female anatomy besides breasts the size and shape of Jupiter.

But the performer was unflappable. (See what I did there?) She started doing cartwheels all the way across the stage. Since one of her arms and her human head were blacked out, it looked like the giant bird was tumbling from its ostrich head to its legs to its head to its legs. She disappeared backstage.

Total silence reigned for five seconds before we all burst into wild rock-concert applause, whistling and shouting so loud you couldn't hear the Principal on the mic trying to calm us down. It took the teachers fifteen minutes to shepherd us back to our classrooms, and the buzz continued all day as we tried our best to identify Ostrich Girl.

I've watched that video a hundred times, and it still moves me. The shivers, the sexy feelings, and I jump at the ball-cap snatch every time.

Why would Ostrich Girl want to meet me? I'm not tall, or very strong, or that outgoing, and I'm about the farthest thing from a ladies' man you can imagine. Maybe I have something going for me that I'm not aware of? Or Kerieme is setting me up for some stupid prank.

1/12/15 Monday — Mom Courts Disaster

Mom went to Poughkeepsie with her lawyer today to enter a plea. But her expectation that there wouldn't even be charges filed turned out to be dead wrong, but not because of the cops.

Instead, LaBianca showed up for mom's arraignment, and made a huge scene. Because defacing a privately-owned baby Savior is a property crime, the owner of the property gets to decide whether to press charges. And LaBianca was pressing charges.

In New York state, if you do up to \$500 in damage to someone's property, it's a misdemeanor, sort of like a mini-crime. Normally, the owner of the property just wants their shit replaced, so the evil-doer agrees to pay for what they damaged and it's all good.

But LaBianca had done her homework, and discovered that more than \$500 in damages can be charged as a felony — the legal word for “ten times worse” if you are not familiar with the lingo. LaBianca actually brought the judge a receipt for \$511 for the brand-new Baby Jesus the Chamber of Commerce bought for this year's crèche. The **magistrate** was clearly **dubious**, and asked how a doll could possibly cost \$511. Turns out it's one-of-a-kind, outfitted by some guy on eBay with custom robotics to make it move like a newborn — even cry.

Mom had spray-painted the crèche equivalent of the Robo-Mona Lisa.

Here's what's super jacked up: New York has a new law called the Repeat Offender Control Act, which says that if you've been convicted of two felonies, anywhere in the US, and find yourself charged with a third, you can't get bail. If you wind up getting *convicted*, it's even worse: ROCA means you get a mandatory sentence of 15 years to life in prison.

And guess who has two prior felony convictions? My mother.

The cops have to file felony charges to detain anybody, and LaBianca wanted Mom held in the court until the forms were filled out. But the arresting officer was missing today, too. The

judge, who obviously on Mom's side, told LaBianca there was no way the paperwork would be ready until after lunch, which gave him the excuse to keep Mom's bail at the \$50 already paid, and let her go until the felony charges were filed. When LaBianca raised the concern that Mom might flee to avoid prosecution (like Mom has ever tried to *avoid* prosecution), the judge, with some eye-rolling, ordered Mom not to leave the State of New York. So at least the two of us are together for now.

It would be funny if it wasn't so serious. Mom is technically looking at life in prison — for painting a *doll*. It's hard to believe LaBianca will go through with it. How can her hatred be this strong after so much time?

1/13/15 Wednesday — *Like Likes Likes*

I'm killing it with this journal thing. I'm practically halfway to Mr. Maung's assigned word count, and we're only a week into the term. I've never done anything *early* for school before. Is this what it feels like to be Kerieme?

I squirmed through the entire day thinking about meeting the beautiful Ostrich Girl, and by fourth period I was so worked up my central nervous system decided to reward me with an erection that refused to **subside**. Which I wouldn't mention, except Ondréa, who has been acting flirty recently, was my lab partner. I think she noticed my boner-plight, and thought I was responding to her in-Bayard's-personal-space, unnecessary-hand-on-arm presence. Don't get me wrong: Ondréa's gorgeous; it's just, she's in *eleventh* grade — practically a grown-up. In any case, the reality is that when you are blessed with a Renegade Hard-On, the more you try and think it away, the harder it gets. I thought the end of the day would never come.

After the dismissal bell, Kerieme was nowhere to be found. I figured he was off renting a clown to **harass** me at the Bitter Dreg. I just wanted to get it over with, so I walked into town by myself. At the Dreg, while I waited for my bagel and Ms Freezy at the counter, I looked around the main room. No Kerieme, but no clown either. I grabbed my food and peered around the corner into the smaller part of the cafe. Kerieme was sitting at a table with a girl. Her back was to me, but I knew who it was at once, and even though my face was still cold from being out in the freezing day, I instantly felt sweat evaporating from the entire surface of my skin. I was frozen in terror.

It was Mercury, and her crazy unruly head of corkscrews was bouncing around while she talked. It pissed me off how much K was laughing at whatever she was saying. I watched her get up to act out some part of the story, which involved doing jazz hands and twirling around. When she saw me, she stopped, and put her hands in her pockets, like she couldn't trust them not to start twirling again. Mercury's dad is black, but complexion is super light, and I saw her cheeks were rosy, from the cold, or the twirling, or from something else I couldn't say. She just stood there gazing at me and smiling, all freckles and hips in tight jeans.

As I had apparently been shot with some kind of stun-ray, Kerieme got up to grab my shirt and pull me toward a seat at the table. He sat down on my left, Mercury on my right. A real man takes charge of the situation, I decided, so I took an enormous bite out of my bagel, and sat there chewing, looking around at the paintings of robots French kissing that was the current art exhibit. Every few seconds I snuck a glance at Mercury, who was destroying a huge sandwich and playing with her hair while she chewed the enormous bites.

During one of these stealthy glances, I was surprised to see her staring at me. I locked onto her eyes, green and gorgeous, like sexy drills boring into me. And 'surprised' does not begin to

express how I felt when she said to me, “I like you. I know I’m not supposed to, but I’m the kind of girl who does what feels right. Thoughts?”

I sat there while my ribs tried to collapse, speechless for what had to be a year.

“You weren’t kidding,” Mercury finally said to Kerieme, “he *is* like a deer in headlights.”

“This is where *you* say something,” Kerieme teased me. “Almost anything, in fact.”

“I don’t know what to say.” I was terrified.

They alternated suggestions to ‘help’ me:

“How about ‘thank you’?”

“Or ‘I have a crush on you, too’?”

“Or, ‘Sorry, I’m gay’?” This cracked Kerieme up.

“Or, ‘Would you like to go to a movie with me and my best friend Kerieme’?”

“Or, ‘Would you like to go to a movie *without* my best friend Kerieme’?” Mercury said.

“Oh, *snap!* Hand over the aloe!” Kerieme shouted, and the two of them did daps and made sizzling noises, as I sat there pathetically.

Honesty about feelings is a cool idea. But I feel like everyone knows more about romance than I do. Which is strange because my mother runs a bliss-based sex-toy boutique. I learned to read looking at *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives*. From growing up around the store, I probably know more than any kid in New Paltz about reproduction, lube, healthy limits, & light bondage.

But it’s all from books. I’ve never had to set a limit — *ever*. And I don’t have any experiences (me-time doesn’t count). So when anyone talks about romance, or sex, I feel like a theoretical physicist who can calculate the size of the galaxy but can’t catch a baseball.

But my admirer turned out to be not just honest, but merciful as well. After a few seconds Mercury drummed on the table and said to me, “Did you like my dance?”

“You were beautiful,” I said to a crumb on the table. Although my crotch was melting, I forced myself to lift my gaze.

“*There* you go, Bayard!” Kerieme said. “That was almost like flirting.”

“Ignore him,” Mercury and I said to each other at the same time. We both started laughing, and it turns out laughing with a beautiful girl makes everything 100% okay.

I couldn’t believe how normal Mercury was. Or, not *normal* exactly, but *bright*, and...*fresh*, or something. Like that day at the end of winter — usually sometime between March 10th and June 1st —when you walk outside and it smells like spring for the first time.

“*Thoughts?*”

I can’t even remember if I answered her or not. This is going to sound moronic, but I had never really thought about whether I *liked* a girl or not. Whether she was sexy, sure. But knowing Mercury liked *me* made me interested in her. I was meeting her for the first time, even though we’ve gone to school together since junior high, and have been hearing trash about each other’s mamsa since the maternity ward.

Eventually, I noticed the three of us were drinking our hot chocolates and mochas and laughing like friends. For an hour and a half, we talked about hockey, and movies, and how fucked-up the American education system is, and how it doesn’t prepare you for real life, which is absolutely true. I asked if she had any more dance performances and she said that she dropped dance because hockey was taking all her time. That is really too bad for me.

We didn’t talk about our moms, of course, or what it would be like sitting on opposite sides of the courtroom in a few weeks. The sweet feeling I got around her blotted out any thought of Mom’s beef with LaBianca. When I had to head home to cook dinner, I left Kerieme and

Mercury talking as easy as could be. When I glanced back Mercury reached out and touched Kerieme's hand snorting like he had said the funniest thing in the world. Thank god he's gay.

I DIDN'T SEND THE REST OF THIS ENTRY TO MR MAUNG.

BECAUSE WHO IS THAT STUPID?

I wanted to text Mercury all evening, but I wasn't sure if you do that right away, or if girls need some time. I guess it would have been okay, because she called right after dinner. We talked about summer jobs and school, and once again *not* about our moms, and we were cracking each other up. All of a sudden we had been on the phone for two hours, and we both had tons of homework, so we hung up. Hearing her voice for so long had revved me up. I had a gigantic smile on my face and I was so incredibly horny I couldn't concentrate. Is it normal for your brain to get all scrambled when you like a girl?

I lay on my bed right where I was talking on the phone and masturbated. In my mind she was lying on top of me, and we were kissing, and — isn't masturbating so *nice* sometimes? I mean, it pretty much is nice *all* the time, but every once in a while, you bring your A-game, and it's perfect. And you know it was the right thing because you are now able to concentrate on the War of 1812, which had previously been impossible.

Now I'm tripping on how little Civilization would have accomplished over the last 30,000 years if people couldn't masturbate. They would have wandered around, unable to plant crops, spear mammoths, or invent fire because they were so turned on it was impossible to think straight. Don't even get me started on opposable thumbs.

I'm heading to bed now. Thinking about what happened today, I feel a little like a traitor. But I feel *a lot* like a badass who's doing something forbidden.

I love this feeling.