

Jaelynn Walls

Grade 12

*Bargaining: An Extremely Midwestern Tale*

Word Count: 485

Dear Pepper,

Do you remember the afternoon I took out your back tooth with my pliers? Our pliers. They were red and much too large to fit in your mouth. I think that is when we first loved wholly. Your spit dripping onto the linoleum, the blood pooled on my summer skirt. This is a real person who is really here, I must have said to myself. We were a system of absolute survival.

Dear Noon,

I think about your little hands wrapped around my pliers the way I think about that Stanford Prison documentary we watched together the night your sister got into a crash. Interesting, but mostly just a scary example of how dark people can get when you give them too much power.

Dear Pepper,

I resent the comparison. People in that experiment were hurt.

Dear Noon,

You cannot keep sewing your skin to the torn muscle of my broken body.

Dear Pepper,

I am my own person. I breathe as easy as July. I do not need your metaphors and tie ups to be happy.

Dear Noon,

Did you know that Jack Kerouac once suggested Ginsberg rename one of his books *Don't Knowbody Laff Behind My America Hunchback*? What would you rename our story? I would call it *Bargaining: An Extremely Midwestern Tale*. Do you see how that is funny? How funny that is?

Dear Pepper,

I would call us *Pepper Quinnes Takes A Trip to the Grocery Store and Never Returns Leaving Noon Pacney Feeling Like A Big Idiot with Too Much Berry Pie and Mourning to Eat for One Person*.

Dear Noon,

You make a primal desire for destruction arise within me. Every red apple between your teeth, every soap bubble against your simple skin, I see nuclear bombs exploding beneath us.

Dear Pepper,

At least no children would be lost in our Hiroshima.

Dear Noon,

You know as much about children as I know about settling.

Dear Pepper,

Do you want to know me? Do you want to put your hands inside my mouth? Not like before, the flowers, open jars, pliers. This time with our knees to the hard Earth. This time with our ears pressed against each others' listening to personal melodies.

Dear Noon,

You are consumed with yourself. If you could, you would listen to rolling tapes of your own voice as Sunday driving music.

Dear Pepper,

You've told me one thousand times over my voice is like penny candy and young liquor. I have told myself these are good things. Bold things. Things to be consumed with the entire heart.

Dear Noon,

You cannot read into my language so heavily. You cannot slump and fall into the warm body of my fickle words.

Dear Pepper,

I think the war has ended.

Dear Noon,

I am simply lulling my head out the window of your careening drive. White flags have always been your shoeless dance.