

MiLLiCENT MiN, GiRL GENiUS

LISA YEE

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I have been accused of being anal retentive, an over-achiever, and a compulsive perfectionist, like those are bad things. My disposition probably has a lot to do with the fact that I am technically a genius. Unfortunately, this label seems to precede me wherever I go.

This afternoon I sped over to Maddie's house on my bike. I was anxious to escape the hysteria the last day of high school seems to inspire. Kids flinging their arms around each other. Teachers grinning with wild looks in their eyes. Yearbooks flying back and forth in an autographing frenzy.

As I emptied the contents of my locker into my briefcase earlier in the day, I had been optimistic that someone might ask me to sign their *Rocketeer*. In anticipation of this, I had drafted a truly original inscription — one that would showcase my sense of humor, something I have had little chance to share with my fellow students. I would start with *Quantum materiae materietur marmota monax si marmota monax materiam possit materiari*.² Which, translated

from Latin, means “How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” And then, here’s the really funny part, I’d close with *Vab! Denuone Latine loquebar? Me ineptum. Interdum modo elabatur*. In English, that’s “Oh! Was I speaking Latin again? Silly me. Sometimes it just sort of slips out.” I would then finish with a flourish, “Signed, Millicent L. Min.”

Eagerly, I waited for someone to stop long enough to hand me their *Rocketeer*. But the kids and their cliques just swarmed past without even slowing down. After a while it became clear I was not on the top (or even the bottom) of anyone’s autograph list. So I wrote my Latin inscription in my own yearbook and then bid John F. Kennedy High good-bye until the next school year.

As I rounded the corner on my bike, I relaxed at the familiar sight of Maddie’s house, a tidy white bungalow with green shutters and a bright red door. Despite the front-porch ceiling fan chugging away in a valiant effort to ward off the heat, my grandmother did not appear to be home. With nothing better to do, I camped out on the steps and reread my *Rocketeer*.

All the students look so much older than me. Yet that’s to be expected. It’s hard to believe I will be a senior next year. When I look back at my childhood, it doesn’t seem like so long ago. Maddie swears it’s because childhood is a state of mind. My mother insists that it’s because I am only eleven years old. *Whatever*.

By the time Maddie arrived in her beat-up Dodge Dart, I had

found twenty-three typos in the yearbook. Four of those were misspellings of my name.

“Have you been here since school got out?” Maddie asked as she leapt out of the car. She doesn’t act old, and no one has had the nerve to tell her she’s a senior citizen. Without waiting for my reply, Maddie wrestled with a dragon in the backseat. It was about half my size and carved out of wood. “I can’t believe you’re still here,” she said as she signaled for help. “School must have ended hours ago.”

“Of course I’m still here,” I told her as I held the car door open. I decided not to ask what the dragon was for. With Maddie, sometimes it’s better not to know. “Where else would I be?”

Maddie smiled when she saw my *Rocketeer*. “How many times are you in it this year, Millie?” she asked.

“Twelve,” I answered proudly.

“That’s great. Did a lot of kids sign your yearbook?”

I don’t really hang around with a lot of other students. I’m more of what you might call “an independent.” Still, I did manage to get one, and almost two, autographs at lunch today.

Tommy Loescher is the Chess Club President and had prided himself on never having lost a match, until I joined the club. “Sure, I’ll sign your yearbook, Millicent,” Tommy said as a grin crossed his face. “Just let me finish my sandwich first.”

His friends snickered as he chewed slowly. I wasn't sure what was so funny, but not wanting to appear rude, I laughed along with them. Then, wouldn't you know it, the bell rang before Tommy even had a chance to get out a pen.

"Oops," he said, popping what was left of his sandwich into his mouth, "gotta run! Sorry, Millicent. Maybe next year."

"But you're graduating . . ." I yelled as I watched him and his pals disappear into the crowd. Luckily, at that very moment Amy Drew crossed my path. Amy Drew is this year's valedictorian. I admire her immensely, and she has never failed to return my hellos in the hallway. Here is what she wrote:

*Millie, stay cool!
Love always,
Amy D.*

I spent my entire Honors English class analyzing her message. She could have been referring to the hot summer months Rancho Rosetta is famous for when she wrote "stay cool!" Or, and I like to think this is what she meant, Amy could have used the word "cool" as in "she's so cool." Thereby implying that I am one of the cool people, and that I should remain so.

Whatever her meaning, I am honored that Amy Drew signed my copy of the *Rocketeer*. I've already begun practicing my signa-

ture in anticipation of next year. Maybe when I'm valedictorian my autograph will be more sought after.

"Did you get any of the other students to sign your book?" Maddie pressed me again.

"Well . . . guess what?" I exclaimed. "I'll bet I am the only one lucky enough to get every teacher's signature!" My favorite was from Coach Frank. Despite his severe crew cut, he has a wild sense of humor. Coach had written:

**Millicent,
You are the pride of our Math Bowl team.
Can't wait to have you back next year when
we sweep at Nationals!**

**Coach Frank
P.S. Why is 6 scared of 7? Because 7 — 8 — 9!!!**

Maddie laughed when I read her Coach's joke. Then she put her arm around me. "C'mon Millie, it's time to get this dragon into the house and get some cold lemonade into us!"

As Maddie handed me my drink, I pulled out "Millicent's List of Splendid Summer Activities" from my briefcase. I've planned a lot of exciting adventures for Maddie and me. Since Grandpa died earlier this year, my grandmother's been de-

pressed. So, to cheer her up I make sure I'm always around. She looked the list over, saying, "Hmm," as she read each entry, sometimes changing her response to "Ahhh" and "Uh-huh." I made sure to include projects I thought Maddie might enjoy, such as plotting the downtown traffic patterns or building a subterranean ant village.

Finally, Maddie placed her reading glasses on the top of her head. She already had two other pairs of glasses there, her driving glasses and her sunglasses.

"You know, Millie . . ." she said slowly. The ice clinked as she took a sip of lemonade. "I was thinking of maybe doing some things on my own this summer, like taking yoga. Maybe you should do some things on your own too. A young girl like you needs to branch out, find new friends her own age."

I considered how yoga involves emptying your mind, the complete opposite of what I strive to do. Noticing my frown, Maddie quickly added, "Of course, that doesn't mean we won't spend time together. Anyway, I thought that Monday was going to be the start of your new life. Isn't that what you've been telling me?" Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

Ah yes, Monday. That's when I will be attending my very first college class. It was Maddie who convinced my parents to let me go, though at first they insisted they needed to think about it.

“What’s there to think about?” Maddie had asked. “The tea leaves say it’s what she needs.”

My grandmother often consults the tea leaves, and if they don’t tell her what she wants, she simply moves them around until they do.

Mom and Dad pursed their lips as if they had just eaten some lemons. “Come on, Millie,” Maddie sighed, taking my shoulders and facing me toward the door. “When their faces start scrunching up like that, it’s our invitation to leave so they can talk about us.”

“You didn’t even begin to convince them,” I complained as she marched me into the living room. “What am I supposed to do for the rest of my life? Hang around the house?”

“I planted the seed,” she said. “Then I backed down when they were expecting a fight. They’ll come around on their own. You’ll see.”

Sure enough, that night a Min Family Meeting had been called. At Min Family Meetings, problems/challenges/grievances are aired, discussed, and voted on. It is not as democratic as it may seem. My parents always have a secret Pre-Min Family Meeting first. They’ve read lots of parenting books that instruct them to prepare a unified front. What they don’t know is that I’ve read the same books, so I know what to expect from them.

“Millie,” my mother began solemnly. “College is a big step,

especially for someone who's only eleven." I held my breath and braced myself for the bad news. "Now, listen carefully," she said. "Here's the deal. . . ."

I could not believe it. . . . My parents actually agreed to let me take one college course! The caveat being that it had to be something "fun" and not have anything to do with numbers. Just because I once stayed awake for fifty-three hours straight to work out a complicated equation, Mom and Dad think I have an unhealthy obsession with math.

After much consideration, I have selected Professor Skylanski's Classic and Contemporary Poetry class. I'm looking forward to studying the great poets, interacting with my intellectual peers, and putting high school behind me — at least for the summer.

"Well, perhaps you'll make more friends in school next year," Maddie mused as she tried placing her dragon in various spots in the kitchen. "Then I'm sure your yearbook will be filled with autographs. Or maybe," she said nonchalantly, "you could befriend that nice boy, Stanford Wong. I hear he's having some problems in school."

I quickly changed the subject. Just thinking about stupid Stanford Wong is enough to creep me out. "I have plenty of friends," I assured Maddie. "Like Mrs. Martinez from the library. And what about Coach Frank? He's my friend."

Maddie just smiled. "You know," she said, "in China dragons

are considered good luck. You ought to have a dragon for your journey. One never knows where life might lead.”

“We’re not in China, we’re in America,” I pointed out. “Besides, I know exactly where I’m headed.” It’s true. I’ve mapped out my goals for the next fourteen years.

“Try veering off the road now and then,” Maddie suggested as she lugged her dragon around the room. “Take a few side trips, see where you end up. You might be pleasantly surprised.”

I stifled a laugh as I sipped my lemonade. Everyone knows that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Why would I want to take any other route?