

October 2021

Excerpt of Cumberland: "From Someone Who Appreciates You, XOXO"

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Recommended Citation

Pavis, Jenna L. () "Excerpt of Cumberland: "From Someone Who Appreciates You, XOXO"; *The Mercury*: Year 2021, Article 38.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2021/iss1/38>

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Author Bio

Jenna Pavis grew up in the rural town of North Yarmouth, Maine, where she spent eighteen years gallivanting in the woods, picking blueberries in her backyard, and jamming out to jazz and 1960s hits. She's been a passionate saxophonist, tea hugger, competitive golfer, crossword enthusiast, and feline fanatic. Jenna has given musical performances worldwide, notably in New York City, Washington, D.C., Vienna, Berlin, and Prague. She maintains that writing informs her creativity for music and vice versa. Jenna prefers to write in the middle of the afternoon outside on a picnic blanket, with Simon and Garfunkel playing in the background.

Excerpt of Cumberland: “From Someone
Who Appreciates You, XOXO”

JENNA L. PAVIS

Once upon a childhood fantasy
on a parcel of land where I played with the dandelions
where I was taught but never learned
where I begged for attention but never said a word
where I cried under false pretenses
where I swallowed your suburban lies for thirteen years
all for a sense of popularity and acceptance.

Day by day
afternoon after afternoon
I stumbled down the path to greenery,
bound for my sanctuary, or so I thought
succeeding in what I knew
but lacking in my personhood.

A hole-in-one on eight was great
the photograph with my index finger to the sky
surrounded by friends who barely knew my name
was the only evidence needed to win the contest
for poster-child athlete who lives down the block.

Who was I fooling?
Unequivocal talent cannot erase broken dreams
or a lonely soul
or empty praises
or merciless taunting
or a lifelong pursuit for stimulating conversation.

All the accolades you bestowed upon me
will never come close to
the person I cruelly sacrificed as raw bait,
never to be seen or heard from again
until five years to the day.

No more am I the cookie-cutter suburban boy

that you raised like a calf for slaughter,
convincing me that small-town sports
are the be-all-end-all of childhood.
No longer does my face surface
in local newspapers,
your name printed proudly beneath in bold,
unveiling to maybe fifteen readers
the location of my private haven,
though I was never able to call you home.
No more do I win trivial awards for your glory,
which disintegrate in the dust cloud
of a seventy-year-old trophy case,
though you consider it your pride and joy.

No longer do your cronies invade my existence
by hissing “banana boy” at my yellow polo
or sneering “Mr. 3-on-his-AP-Bio-exam”
or trash-talking me at the rink
or forgetting to invite me to team dinners.
Our mothers may still get margaritas at Louie’s,
but you’re no more than an expired
Natty Light in my eyes.

You destroyed my chances for meaningful friendships
that didn’t involve dirty photographs in locker rooms
or annual plastic trophies on Turkey day
or belittling group texts that lit up my screen
as I succumbed to a restless sleep.

When graduation came upon me
and all hope was lost for celebration
or invitations to parties,
a single balloon
arrived on my doorstep down the block.

“From Someone Who Appreciates You, XOXO”
read the accompanying card in fancy cursive.
Too bad that sentiment wasn’t from you.
Don’t you recall?
Cursive wasn’t in the curriculum.