

Learning To Love You More Harrell Fletcher & Miranda July

Learning To Love You More

Harrell

Fletcher &

Miranda

July

With essays by
Julia Bryan-Wilson, Laura Lark, and Jacinda Russell

PRESTEL
Munich Berlin London New York

© Prestel Verlag, Munich · Berlin · London · New York 2007
Text © by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher 2007
Images and texts by artists represented in the book,
© by the individual artists 2007

Prestel Verlag
Königinstrasse 9
80539 Munich
Tel. +49 (89) 38 17 09-0
Fax +49 (89) 38 17 09-35

Prestel Publishing Ltd.
4 Bloomsbury Place
London WC1A 2QA
Tel. +44 (0) 20 7323-5004
Fax +44 (0) 20 7636-8004

Prestel Publishing
900 Broadway, Suite 603
New York, NY 10003
Tel. +1 (212) 995-2720
Fax +1 (212) 995-2733

www.prestel.com

Prestel books are available worldwide. Please contact your nearest bookseller or one of the above addresses for information concerning your local distributor.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007929941

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data: a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library. The Deutsche Bibliothek holds a record of this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographical data can be found under: <http://dnb.ddb.de>

Editorial direction by Christopher Lyon
Copyedited by Ashley Benning
Design and layout by Brian Scott/Boon Design, San Francisco
Origination by Reproline Mediateam, Munich
Printed and bound by Aumüller Druck, Regensburg

Printed in Germany on acid-free paper

ISBN 978-3-7913-3733-3

Front cover:
Assignment 39: Take a picture of your parents kissing
Al & Mae
Judith Wigren-Slack, Roseville, California

Hello

Sometimes it is a relief to be told what to do. We are two artists who are trying to come up with new ideas every day. But our most joyful and even profound experiences often come when we are following other people's instructions. When we are making crepes from a recipe, attempting to do a handstand in yoga class, or singing someone else's song. Sometimes it seems like the moment we let go of trying to be original, we actually feel something new—which was the whole point of being artists in the first place. With this revelation in mind we founded the website *Learning To Love You More** in 2002. Visitors to the website are invited to accept an assignment, complete it by following the instructions, and send in the required report (photograph, text, video, etc.). The report is then posted online by our collaborator, Yuri Ono. (You can read all the assignments and instructions in the back of this book.) We tried to come up with assignments that we would want to do ourselves; often they came directly out of our personal lives or art practice. Five years later there are more than five thousand reports on the site.

Over the years we have watched the project's reach extend organically, region by region, as people email the link to their friends or post it on their blogs. For the most part we don't know who the participants are; sometimes we don't even know their real names, only that they come from St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, or Doha, Qatar, or New York City—and this is the sound that is keeping them awake (assignment 58), or this is how their parents look kissing (assignment 39), or they had this argument recently (assignment 37). This book contains only a tiny fraction of the work on the site, and new work is sent in every day (and new assignments are added throughout the year). But we hope it describes the complex world of *Learning To Love You More*, and the frequently wild, sometimes hilarious, and quietly stunning creative lives of a few people living on Earth right now.

Harrell Fletcher & Miranda July
May 2007

*This title was generously loaned by the artist Emma Hedditch, who is also the author of Assignment 35: Ask your family to describe what you do.



Assignment 63: Make an encouraging banner
Kaja Dutka, Wroclaw, Poland



Assignment 28: Edit a photo album page
Braden, age 4, bellyjumping in the living room in Vermont
Alison Wilder, Iowa City

Things I disliked at
first But, later learned
to love!

sea weed

waking up early

booty music

swimming in cold water



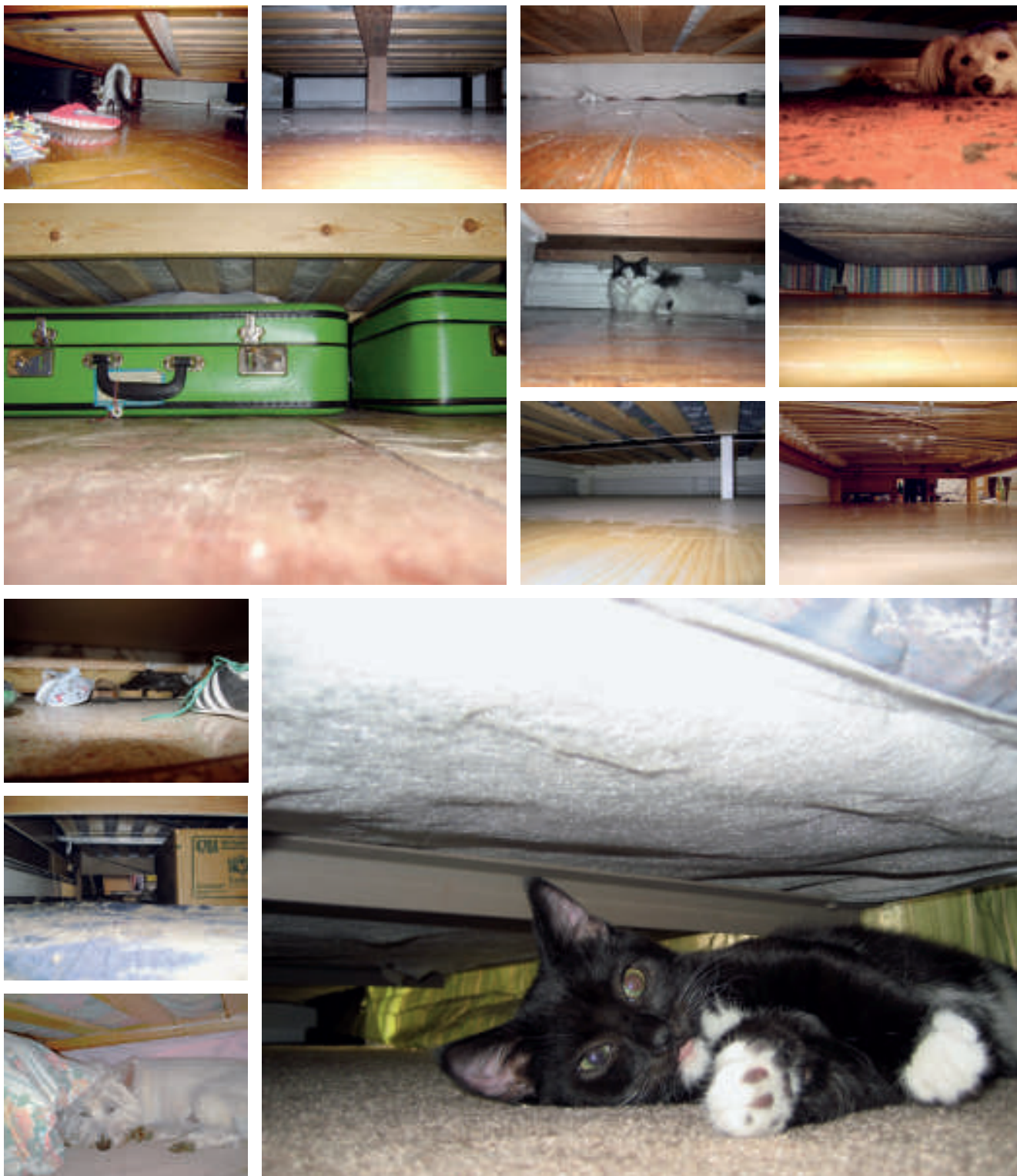
Assignment 33: Braid someone's hair
Eugenie McLachlan, San Francisco, California



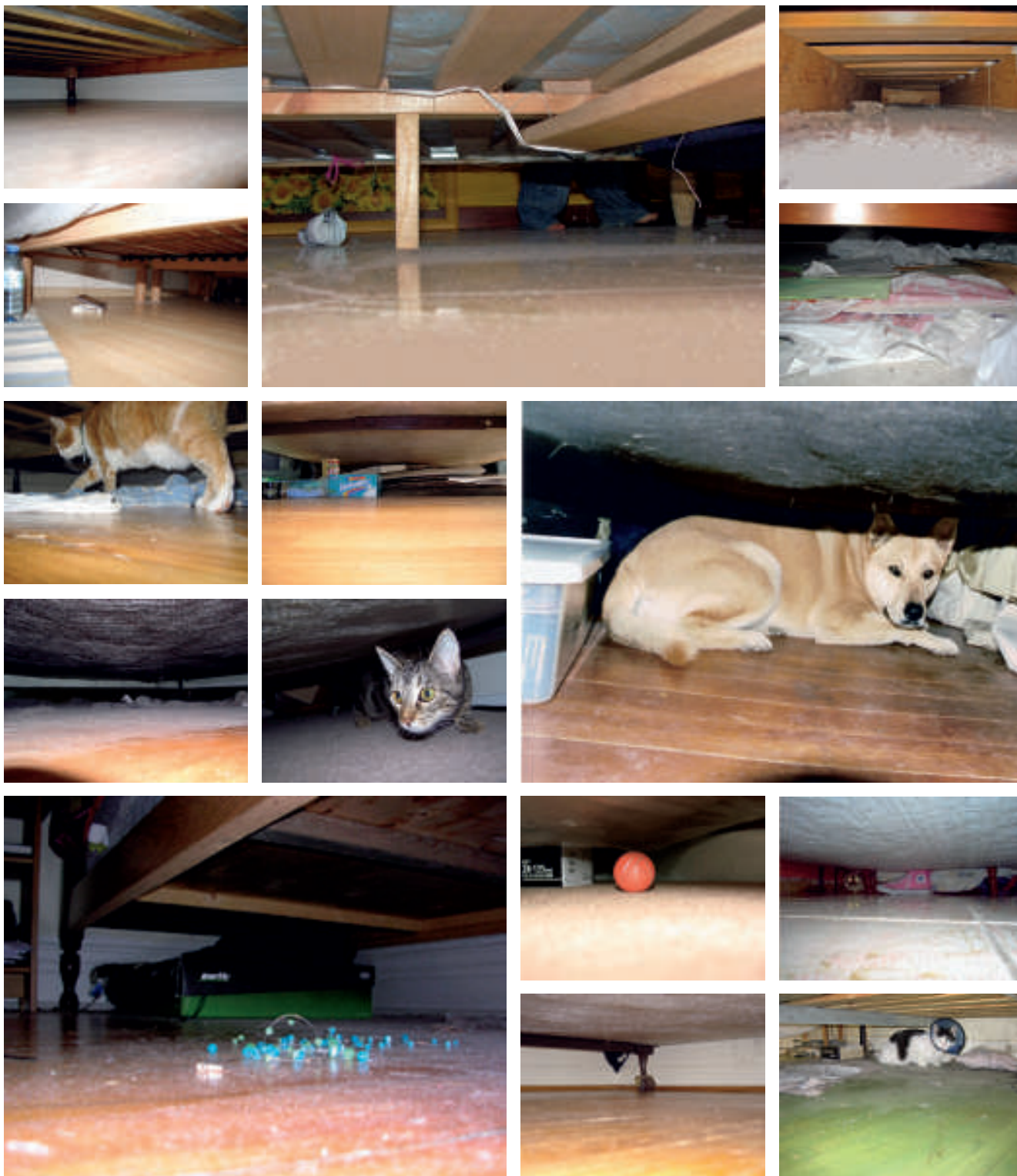
Assignment 9: Draw a constellation from someone's freckles
Jessica's Arm Constellation
Ashlee Campbell, Lynchburg, Virginia

Advice to Ryan, age 15

Don't be afraid to tell boys that you like them (or ask if they are gay). You can always have a good laugh if they reject you.

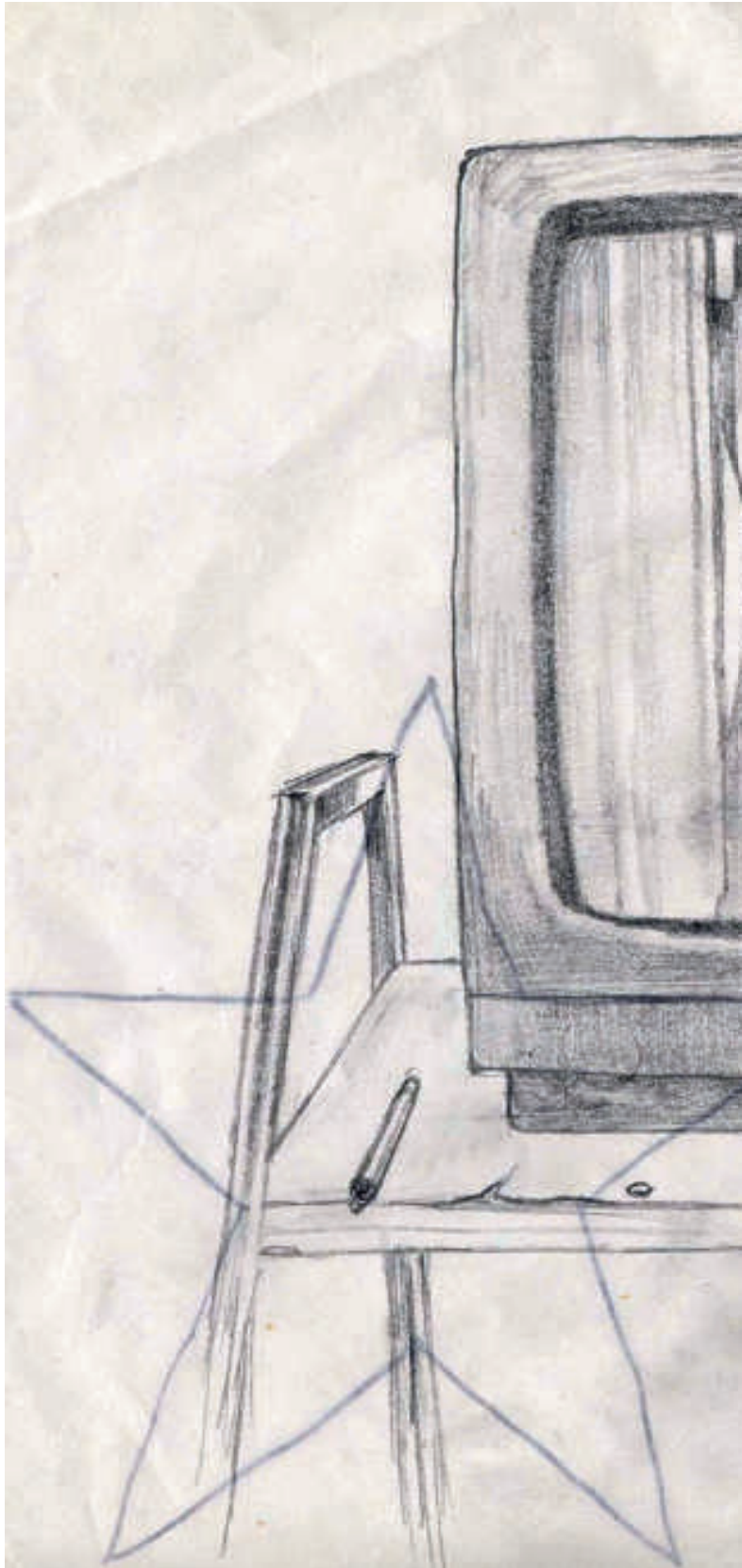


Assignment 50: Take a flash photo under your bed
 From left to right: Amanda, Brazil; Bellysays, Melbourne, Australia; Monica Church, Poughkeepsie, New York; Jules Souter, Sydney, Australia; Esther Kruk, Enschede, the Netherlands; Adee Good, Brooklyn, New York; Serafina Grace, Upper Marlboro, Maryland; Asha Schechter, Brooklyn, New York; R. Deerbrook, Munich, Germany; Sintia Karam, Beirut, Lebanon; Chung T. Nguyen, San Jose, California; Lara Emerling, Baltimore, Maryland; Katherine Powell, Cwmbran, Torfaen, Wales



Vigdís Jónsdóttir, Reykjavik, Iceland; Silvia Monteverdi, Milan, Italy; Eva Pel, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Alexandre Dulaunoy, Les Bulles, Belgium; Calvin Stephens, South San Francisco, California; Chelsey Johnson, Portland, Oregon; Julie Jean, Northhampton, Massachusetts; Megan Pitsios, Los Angeles, California; Graham Kolbeins, Davis, California; Anthony Tortorici, Rahway, New Jersey; Anya, Chicago, Illinois; Jonelle B., Brooklyn, New York; Susana Meza, Venezuela; Emilio Paesano, Toronto, Canada; Anne Porter, Los Angeles, California

Assignment 32: Draw a scene from a movie that made you cry
Giant
Colter Jacobsen, San Francisco, California





I was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and am the second son of my parents; the first one died the day he was born. My family stayed at a place in Chittagong called Mehdibagh. My mother's eldest sister, Mam, also lived in Chittagong. She had three sons who were like my own brothers. My younger brother was also born in Chittagong. Mam took good care of my younger brother although she was a teacher and already had enough work to keep her extremely busy.

Then we moved to the capital city Dhaka, I am not sure in which year, and stayed at my grandmother's place. I was admitted to a nearby Bengali medium school, but my mother wanted to get me admitted to an English medium school although my grandparents and my father were opposed to that idea. She didn't give up and got me admitted to Maple Leaf International School, a pretty well-known English medium school. My new school was quite far from Dadi's house (I call my grandmother Dadi) and going to school every morning was quite a hassle.

We moved out of her place to a flat that we shared with my uncle (my mom's brother) and my grandparents (my mom's parents). At school, I started to make friends and get good results. But still my mother and I thought I could and I should do better. At home there were frequent rows between the household members, which irritated and also scared me. Although as I grew up I became more indifferent to these family problems, I hated it the most when my parents quarreled with each other. But that doesn't mean we didn't love each other. We were one big and loving family. My aunts and my only uncle (mom's sisters and brother) and my cousins were like my own family. When Mam used to come from Chittagong with her sons, we all had a great time together. And on my vacations I would remain eager to go to Chittagong to Mam's place. My cousins from my mother's side were like my own brothers and sisters.

We moved back to Dadi's place again and I don't know why. At school I became a boy scout and also performed in functions. I won a medal for my acting at a school function.

My Dadi and all her children, except my father, are rich. Dad's career has never been that successful. He had a plastic business in Chittagong, which for some reason had to be shut down. He had unsteady jobs and his earnings were not too big. But I didn't like staying at my Dadi's place; I wanted to have a home of our own. Although Dadi's home was a nice place, the environment was gloomy. I had a dream of becoming rich someday and believed that Dad would soon earn a lot of money.

Taking my brother and me to school from my Dadi's place was quite a difficult task for my mother. She had to wait for us in our school until our school was over whether she liked it or not; going back home and coming back again to pick us up would cost a lot of money. She worked hard and took good care of us.

When I saw my father playing the mouth organ, I developed an interest in music. I started trying to play a toy saxophone, which my youngest aunt had brought me from America. My brother and I soon learned to play songs on the saxophone and the keyboard without receiving any formal training.

A really nice gentleman rented the top floor of my Dadi's house. He lived with his wife and three daughters. My brother and I became good friends with his daughters and used to call them Apu, which means sister. We used to play with them and had a really nice time. It was like a relief in that boring environment in my Dadi's place. Dad and his eldest brother Uncle K started a business together, which ended up as a total fiasco, making their relationship bitter. I learned a lesson: never do business with your family.

Now my grandparents and some uncles and aunts started blaming my father for everything. Severe quarrels at home between

my father and his parents and Uncle K always kept me nervous. Everyone seemed to have turned against us. I have always been scared of chaos at home, and that's what I had too much of.

It is report card day at school. I go to school with my mother to collect my report card, and my brother is sick at home with Dad. Uncle K is supposed to come to talk to Dad about their failed business. I dread another conflict. I stand first in my class, but an apprehension of what might be happening at home overshadows my joy. When I get back home, my brother says that anything as far as laying hands on each other could have happened, the environment was so heated. Money can cause relations to break.

Because of this problem between my dad and his brother, everyone else in the family started treating us badly. I heard that my uncles and aunts from abroad were coming to Dhaka to settle this problem. I felt like they are the jury, my dad, the defendant, and Uncle K, the prosecutor. They started arriving one by one with their children. I met my cousins whom I have not had the chance to know closely before. We became good friends and had a great time together. But a constant disquiet was always within me that my uncles and aunts might think that my father is guilty and shun us all. Nothing like that happened but we were insulted by Uncle K and his family on many occasions.

There is a family get-together at Dadi's place. My mother is in the kitchen preparing meals. Uncle K's wife comes in and tells a cook that if my mother cooks she won't eat. Hurt and insulted, my mother leaves the kitchen. Every time we greeted Uncle K's family they didn't reply. Their children didn't even say hello or give Salaam to my parents. They misbehaved with us and no one said anything to them. Only we were made to feel as if we are the guilty ones.

One day Dad asked what happened to my face and why had the left side of my face swollen. I looked in the mirror and realized that my left side is actually looking swollen and my face is looking a bit lopsided.

As I grew older the left side of my jaw grew bigger than the right side, and the deformity became more and more noticeable during my teen years.

After reading up to Class 5 in Maple Leaf International School I took admission in Siddiquis Tutorial in Class 7 skipping Class 6. Some of my old friends also came with me to Siddiquis. I met new people in the new school and started liking it. But I noticed some gradual changes in my old friends: they started calling girls, smoking, telling dirty jokes and avoiding me. They called me a guilty man and avoided me because they thought I might inform their parents about the things they did. It hurt me a lot, so I tried to change myself to be a part of the gang again. I shared dirty jokes with them and tried to make them laugh. Although they stopped calling me guilty man, I still felt we were not as close as we used to be.

As my family was no longer tolerable to my Dadi we moved out of her place to one of my aunt's place. She was my mother's youngest sister and loved us very much. Dad started a new business in her home. My mother and sometimes my brother and I had to work all night. We then rented a flat for ourselves, and moved out of my aunt's place.

In 1998, a few days before the Oscars, I had a dream that I won two Oscars. From then on I have been craving to make this dream come true.

When my O level examination was getting closer, I left school and started going to private tutors. I made new friends there and realized that I had been a fool trying to change myself for my old friends.

One day, I had a picture of mine taken at a photo studio, as it was required with my O level exam form. When I saw my picture

I was very much displeased with it as I was looking so ugly and the deformity of my face was awful. I kept complaining about the picture when my mother asked me if I really meant to say that I was not beautiful. At that time I realized that I was ugly.

After my O level exam I took admission to another school for my A level examination. At school I tried to avoid looking face to face at people so that they would not notice the deformity in my face. I was having difficulty coming to terms with the problem in my face, so I went to a doctor. He said that it could be corrected with surgery, but not totally, and that the surgery would cost a lot. Instead of having the surgery, I had to learn to accept myself as I am. It doesn't bother me much anymore.

It is my brother's birthday. My parents and I present a Spanish guitar to him. But the guitar is for right-handed people and my brother is left-handed. So I start learning to play it on my own. Within a year I learn the basic chords and can play many songs. Playing the guitar helps take my mind off problems and refreshes me.

After my A level exam I decided to go abroad for higher studies. I started preparing for the SAT I and II and TOEFL, but was only able to take the SAT I because of financial constraints. I decided not to apply to the UK or Australia, as the cost of studying there was too high for me. When I applied to universities in the US without taking the TOEFL, they put my application at a disadvantage and eventually rejected me. Once, one of my uncles who lived abroad came to Bangladesh and gave me the money I needed to take the TOEFL. I scored high in the TOEFL and applied to two Canadian universities. Both the universities accepted me, one even offering me a scholarship. I asked my uncle if he would sponsor my education. Although he agreed at first, he didn't send me the documents I needed to apply for a student visa. I could not go to Canada, as it was not possible for my family to bear my cost of education in Canada alone. I decided to apply to US universities and took the SAT I again. In the meantime I started tutoring students. My first student was an O level candidate whom I taught Chemistry. At the same time I was also tutoring two girls of Classes II and III, and a financially disadvantaged boy for his O level English Language test. I applied to local private universities but found out they were too expensive for me. Then I applied to Dhaka University and flunked the admission test, as I was not that good in Bangla.

One day a close acquaintance of mine, who was a teacher at a school called Mastermind, called me in the morning and asked me to be her temporary replacement in that school as she was going to take a leave for three months. I took the offer because it was better to earn money than to sit around. I was supposed to teach History and Poetry to Class IV students. Later that month she also gave me another job, where I had to work as a translator for a man who worked at an NGO. And I was also tutoring a student at the same time; my very first student, who had completed his O level exam and was now preparing for his A levels. So March to May of 2003 had been a busy three months for me, but it was wonderful and of course lucrative as well!!

When introduced to the Class IV students of Mastermind for the first time, I felt I was not welcome there. The students didn't want their previous teacher to go and besides I looked so young that they had difficulty accepting me as their teacher. They looked so naughty that I was quite intimidated. I was wondering how I would control them. Boys of Class VI, who looked bigger than me, shot satirical looks at me. I wondered whether my decision to work there was right. My colleagues, the administrative staff and the Vice Principal were extremely friendly and helpful, and I began to adjust quite soon. The students were naughty but cute. One day there was a teachers-parents meeting when I had to stay at school

till 7 p.m. from the morning and talk to the parents about their children. At first I was not sure whether I would be able to handle this job properly, but it went pretty well. I was beginning to feel that I could cope with the workload. I was beginning to enjoy it.

One day I was asked to conduct a literature class in Class VI, section Pink as their literature teacher was absent. I would have to read and explain Macbeth to them, which I, myself, had never read before. On my way to the class, I met the Vice Principal. When she heard that I was going to Class VI, she gave me a smile and said, They'll eat up your head. I was a bit scared but didn't lose hope. I said a prayer and entered the class. When the students saw me, they started asking my name, and which class I read in, as if I was not their teacher but only a senior student. I told them I was going to write my bio data on the board, and that if I had been a school student I wouldn't have been teaching there. They then warned me in a friendly manner that they were the naughtiest class. And I am the naughtiest sir, I replied. They seemed to be amused. I asked them to quickly and briefly explain to me up to the part they had already read as I had not read Macbeth before. They turned out to be helpful. After a brief summary of what they had done till then I started reading and explaining the rest. They liked it because I made them laugh. After the class was over they thanked me for coming and said they had enjoyed it. They asked me to be their literature teacher, which gave me a great feeling of success. From that day whenever they saw me they asked me to come back to their class. When I said I was teaching in the school only temporarily and that I would leave soon, they pleaded with me to stay. I realized I would miss the school severely.

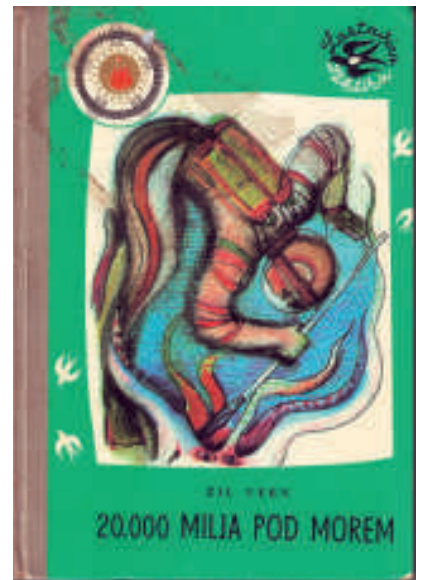
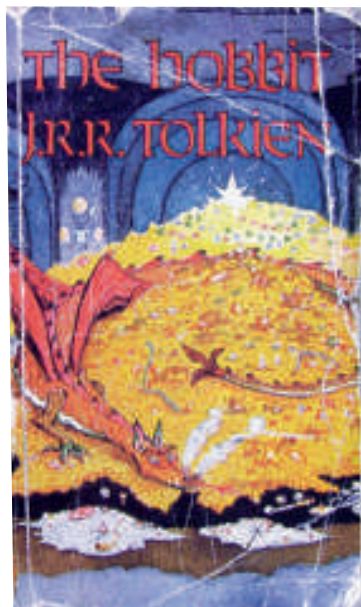
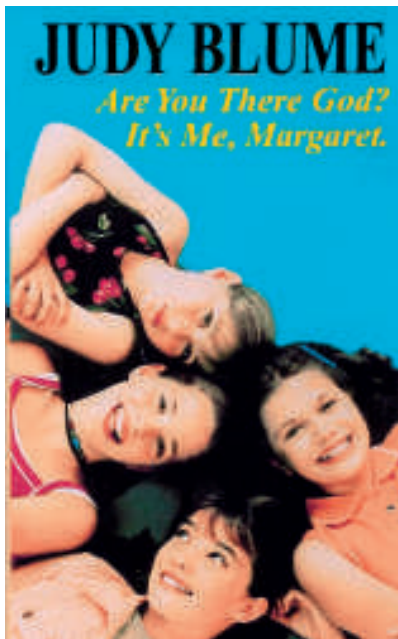
As my days in Mastermind came towards the end, my students requested me not to leave more and more. They asked for my autograph. When I told them that I felt like I was a star, they said, You are our star. It is really a great feeling to think that they liked me so much.

I was offered a place at Mastermind as a teacher for the next session as well. They said they'd put me in Class V for English Literature. Well, at least they thought I was competent. But unwillingly I had to reject the offer as my dad was planning to get me admitted to a university. The university was quite cheap and affordable for my family, but I was not sure about the standard of education there.

On the last day of school, I receive a deluge of gifts, self-made cards and requests to stay. The students seek my autograph and turn absolutely wild and treat me like a star. A few lines from the cards they have given me are quoted below without any correction for grammatical mistakes.

One, two, three
Garden has trees
Four, five, six
Mountain has peaks
Seven, eight, nine
The pride of Mastermind
It's you
Please don't leave us.
You were one of the path shower of our life.
You are best teacher in this world.
I will miss you so much.

And I'll miss them too.

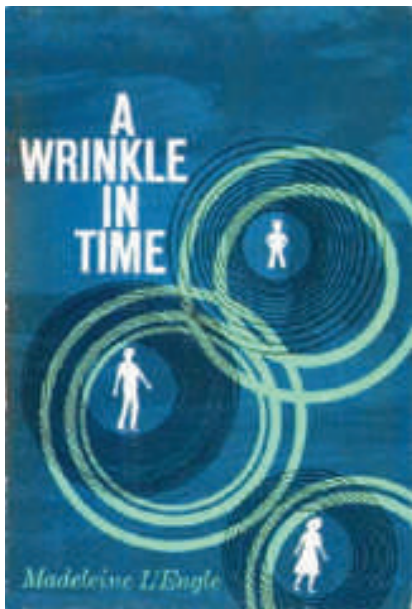


Assignment 45:

Reread your favorite book from fifth grade
Mylissa Fitzsimmons, Atwater Village, California

Paula Spurr, Three Hills, Alberta, Canada

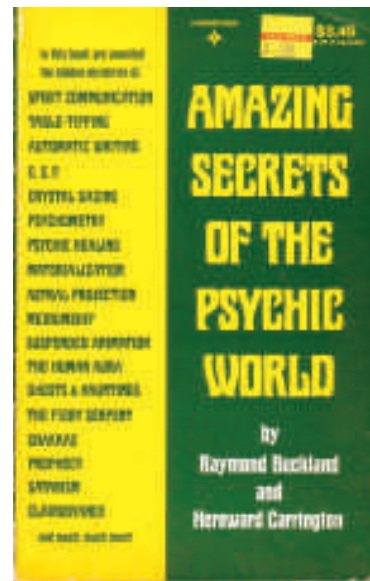
Ivana Nikolic, Belgrade, Serbia



Kate, Wisconsin



Stacy Clayton, Memphis, Tennessee



Jason Burns, Massachusetts



Assignment 27: Take a picture of the sun
Laura Palmieri, Manchester, Tennessee