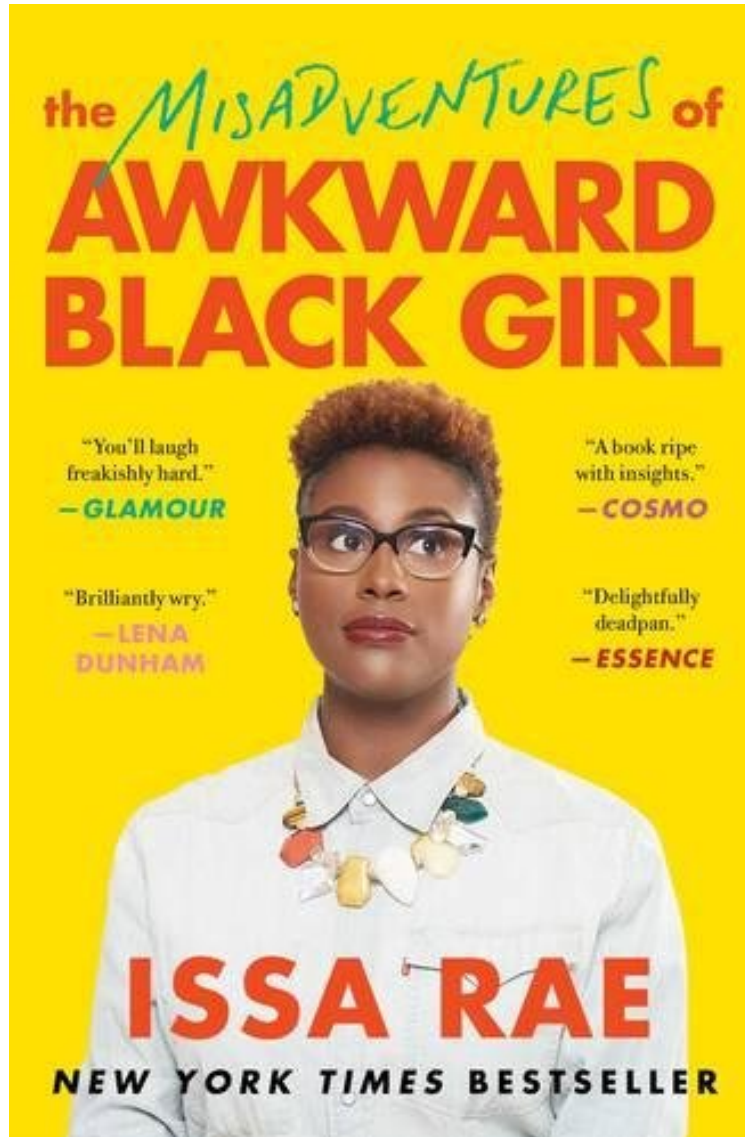


[Download pdf] The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl

The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl

Issa Rae

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Issa Rae : The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl:

83 of 88 people found the following review helpful. Nothing short of brilliant!By Tiffany Tyler"Being an introvert in a world that glorifies cool isn't easy."I remember sitting in an airport a few months ago while waiting to board a flight to Houston and I decided to start this book and I am so happy that I did. In the past I watched a few episodes of Issa's show on YouTube so I was quite interested in learning more about her as a woman. I will say without a doubt that she

is one of the few humans living on this planet that is completely honest with her self-esteem issues and it is all done with humor. "Food is my destination, my journey, my reward, my friend - if only my metabolism matched that of the skinny, crackhead-bodied girls of my high school. How lucky they were!" See, what she just did here??? We all love food, but we are brainwashed by the media that we shouldn't admit it. Issa has no problem admitting just how much she loved to eat but she infused some humor in there as well. This is pretty much the tone of the book. While most of the book has humorous undertones, there are sections that are quite serious. As a black woman, here is my favorite passage from the book: "I love being black; that's not a problem. The problem is that I don't want to always talk about it because honestly, talking about being "black" is extremely tiring. I don't know how Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson do it. I know why Cornel West and Tavis Smiley do it. They love the attention and the groupies. But the rest of these people who talk, think and breathe race every single day - how? Just how? Aren't they exhausted?" I swear it is like Issa knows some of my innermost thoughts! And, with her not being afraid to share her perspective on things such as food, lotion, hair, and black leaders it allows some of us to know we aren't alone in what goes through our brain. The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl is nothing short of brilliant. It will make you laugh out loud, it will make you think, and it will help make you feel more comfortable sharing your innermost thoughts because you now know you are not alone!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Kindred flameBy MP706I adore Issa! There were moments that made me laugh until I cried because I couldn't believe someone else had gone through some of the exact same things as me! I cried, laughed, and was mortified with her the whole way through. The only negative feedback I have isn't about the content or Issa at all. The book was missing a few pages in the middle. At first it looked like they were just skipped but on closer inspection, I saw that they were ripped out. I hate that it happened at that point because it was the climax of the chapter I'll have to snag a copy from a friend to find out what happens.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good BookBy NicoleI enjoyed Issa Rae's book. We were born around the same time and it was really cool reading about her internet days. That's how my fast *ss got my start. In the yahoo chat rooms. I completely died laughing. Reading about the different style of black people was very interesting too. I loved her honesty and I went to her website and watched a few of her videos. I didn't know that's how she got her start. Hope to see and hear more from this young woman.

The “brilliantly wry” (Lena Dunham) and “lovably awkward” (Mindy Kaling) New York Times bestseller from the creator of HBO’s *Insecure*. In this universally accessible New York Times bestseller named for her wildly popular web series, Issa Rae—“a singular voice with the verve and vivacity of uncorked champagne” (Kirkus Reviews)—waxes humorously on what it’s like to be unabashedly awkward in a world that regards introverts as hapless misfits and black as cool. I’m awkward—and black. Someone once told me those were the two worst things anyone could be. That someone was right. Where do I start? Being an introvert (as well as “funny,” according to the Los Angeles Times) in a world that glorifies cool isn’t easy. But when Issa Rae, the creator of the Shorty Award-winning hit series *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*, is that introvert—whether she’s navigating love, the workplace, friendships, or “rapping”—it sure is entertaining. Now, in this New York Times bestselling debut collection written in her witty and self-deprecating voice, Rae covers everything from cybersexing in the early days of the Internet to deflecting unsolicited comments on weight gain, from navigating the perils of eating out alone and public displays of affection to learning to accept yourself—natural hair and all. *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* is a book no one—awkward or cool, black, white, or other—will want to miss.

"With MISADVENTURES OF AWKWARD BLACK GIRL, Issa shows us why she is the queen of media and why we need a multiplicity of voices in the media." (Los Angeles Times) "Issa Rae nailed it: Her book *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* is why the term must-read exists." (Marie Claire) "A book ripe with insights for the awkward among us." (Cosmo) "For fans of Mindy Kaling's *Is Everyone Hanging Out without Me?* . . .). Already a strong voice for diversity in the media, Rae is someone readers of all stripes will love getting to know, however awkwardly." (Booklist) "In Rae, her audience has landed on a singular voice with the verve and veracity of uncorked champagne. An authentic and fresh extension of the author's successful Web series." (Kirkus) "You'll laugh freakishly hard over the genius YouTube star's book about everything from PDA to coworkers who always suck up" (Glamour) "Delightfully deadpan...the real discovery here is that Rae has a natural flair for narrative, showing promise as an essayist with her unique perspective...a writer to watch." (Essence) "Cutting, laugh out loud observations." (Uptown Magazine) "I loved this book. Issa Rae is brilliant, funny and loveably awkward." (Mindy Kaling) "If you like Awkward and love Black. Or love Awkward and like Black. Or if you're like me and just can't get enough of Awkward and Black in equal doses, then you will love love love Issa Rae and her Awkward Black Girl tales of Awkward Black Girlishness. That wasn't too awkward was it?" (Larry Wilmore) "In her hilarious debut book, Issa Rae uses the brilliantly wry voice she's honed in her searing and necessary webseries to tell a story that is so personal yet so universal: awkward girl becomes awkward woman, and in doing so realizes that awkward is the best way to be." (Lena Dunham) "Far from awkward, Issa Rae wittily shows us how to navigate a society still obsessed with stereotypes. Her essays are a rallying cry for all those daring to be unique, international, and fully human. A must read for thinking

and feeling people from 8 to 80." (Susan Fales-Hill) About the Author With her own unique flare and infectious sense of humor, Issa Rae's content has garnered more than twenty-five million views and more than 200,000 subscribers on YouTube. In addition to making the Forbes "30 Under 30" list twice and winning the 2012 Shorty Award for Best Web Show for her hit series *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*, Issa Rae has worked on web content for Pharrell Williams, Tracey Edmonds, and numerous others. She developed a TV series with Shonda Rhimes for ABC and is currently developing a half-hour comedy, *Insecure*, for HBO. Issa has received national attention with major media outlets including *The New York Times*, CNN, Elle, Seventeen, Rolling Stone, VIBE, Fast Company, MSNBC, Essence, and more. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl A/S/L At only eleven years of age, I was a cyber ho. Looking back, I'm embarrassed. For me. For my parents. But oddly enough, my cyber social debauchery is indirectly correlated with my current status as a so-called internet pioneer. It all started when I began catfishing—creating characters and transmitting them over the internet—though back then people just called it "lying." Had my father not signed my entire family up with America Online -accounts for the computer in our modest Potomac, Maryland, home I don't know that I'd have had the tools to exploit the early ages of the internet. Two years earlier, my oldest brother, Amadou, had gone away to college at Morehouse, freeing up the coveted computer, which was housed in the basement, for my use. Before he decamped for college, I would spend hours at a time watching him type the commands into MS-DOS that would transport us to the magical kingdom of Sierra's *King's Quest VI* on our IBM. I never had a strong desire to play the game myself—I always assumed I wasn't smart enough to play it on my own—until Amadou graduated from the house and I no longer had anyone to excitedly observe. I looked up to my oldest brother as the epitome of intelligence. He knew everything, though he was too humble to be ostentatious with his knowledge as I would have been had I been as smart. So I simply observed. At eighteen, he was an official adult, and he had a duty to selflessly spread his intelligence to the world, other people's younger sisters included. His absence left a void in my heart and in the basement, particularly where the use of the computer was concerned. I wasn't next in line for the computer, but my second-oldest brother, Malick, was too preoccupied with football, girls, and high school to care. He'd occasionally make use of it for term papers and Tetris, but otherwise, it was mine for the taking. Using the computer wasn't foreign to me, by any means. I had an old Apple computer in my very own room (a double source of jealousy for my younger brother), where I played *Number Munchers* and self-published my stories on perforated paper from an excruciatingly noisy printer. "Jo-Issa, are you wasting paper again?!" my mother would yell from her makeshift home office, tipped off by the mechanical snitch. When alone, and mom-approved, I actually loved to hear the robotic crunching and whirring that the printer made while laying to ink my very own written words. But the computer in my room paled in comparison to the one downstairs, in the basement. For one thing, the large floppy disks—I think they were actually called hard disks, what the f%4# 90s?—were becoming extinct, and rightfully so, since the data on those things could be lost with the smudge of a finger. And since my computer took only the "hard" disks, my game choices were limited to nerdy learning games and text-based adventure games with no visuals. BLECH. BORING. BOO. The other reason my computer wasn't a huge triumph for my preteen self-discovery was because it lacked a modem, which meant no dial-up internet for me. But AOL changed my life. Specifically, it changed my social life. To be more precise: AOL gave me a social life. It ignited my social development and expanded my concept of sexuality. Because of AOL, I had imaginary friends that weren't imaginary. I had elaborate conversations devoid of awkward silences. And, perhaps most valuable of all, I could actually talk to boys. At my command! Before my parents caught wind of frightening news reports of child predators, I spent my days and after-school evenings in chat rooms, learning to speed read, talking to kids my age who were also ahead of the curve. Or pedophiles, who were remarkably creative and persistent in their forbidden pursuit. Pedos actually had it made in the mid-nineties, before the media exposed them. Talk about the glory days. My friends at school, other fifth graders, didn't seem to relate when I mentioned "chat rooms" and "profiles" or when I sang along to the dial-up internet song I made up in my head. It seemed that, for a brief moment, only I was privy to this alternate American universe that lived online. By the time my family moved to Los Angeles to join my dad, a pediatrician, who had seized an opportunity to open his own family clinic there, my relationship with the computer had grown immensely, much to the dismay and irritation of my mother. "You're always on the computer! Go do your homework." "I already finished." "Well then, go outside and play!" She just didn't get it. Only recently, in my late twenties, did she come to realize that my excessive computer use is what led me to becoming the self-employed, almost-focused career woman I am today. By the summer of 1996, more of my friends from Maryland had adopted AOL. It helped us bridge the three thousand miles between us. By then, I was already over the handwritten letters of yesteryear. That was a form of communication of the third world, reserved for pen pals from Ghana and Spain. Besides, the "You've Got Mail" greeting was way more exciting than the dead silence of receiving a letter. Exclaiming, "I've got mail!" in the foyer to yourself isn't the same—trust me. It was through electronic mail that I'd tell my friends back home about my Hollywood adventures. Never mind the fact that I lived in Windsor Hills, thirty minutes away from Hollywood, and that I was struggling to make friends. Or that my sense of style was horrendous, and my middle school had done away with lockers so the authorities could better monitor drug use. ALL I EVER WANTED WAS A LOCKER! I felt robbed of the middle school experience I saw on *Boy Meets World* and *Doug*, but

my friends didn't have to know that. I led them to believe I was on the brink of stardom, just by breathing in the recycled smog of other celebrities around me. Plus, I lived down the street from Ray Charles's old house. I was famous by association. Our move back to Los Angeles also fulfilled a dream I'd held on to for five whole years: we were finally reunited with my father. He'd visit us in Maryland once every two to three months for an extended period of time, but for the most part, I spent my elementary school years without him and, in his absence, had constructed a superheroic, Arnold Schwarzenegger-esque Father of the Year image of him in my mind. My dad was the man, and whenever I'd tell my teachers my father was a doctor who was too busy to come to Back to School night, their surprised and delighted "Oh!" always gave me a sense of pride. I didn't speculate then that they were making an assumption about my family's income and placing my blackness into a Huxtable category. To me, their reaction implied that a doctor was an important profession, which meant my dad was important. And I wanted to be just like my dad. I so longed to live with him and see my family complete, I neglected to figure out that the reunion meant double supervision. The only computer in the house was in my dad's home office, and now internet activity was being monitored without my knowing it. Going through puberty during the dawn of the internet could have left me unscathed if my dad weren't so annoyingly tech savvy. If only he, a native African, were like the tribal stereotypes I read about in my middle school history books, I would have gotten away with so much more. Instead, I found myself sneaking to look up "sex" in the encyclopedia and then cross-referencing my findings with the Yahoo.com search results. Also, unbeknownst to me, my dad had added a kid-safe image blocker, so I was always limited to boring text-only definitions. I was wrought with hormones and obsessed with finding a boyfriend. All I knew was that boys cared about sex and I didn't know enough about it. I was too embarrassed to ask my peers. They were already über-judgmental about my naïveté to all things black after I accidentally exposed myself when Tupac died. "Two-pack died? What did he sing?" Normally, I would have been spared from middle school humiliation by asking my two older brothers directly. They would have happily explained who Tupac was and I would have happily plagiarized their responses and relayed their feelings about him as my own. But my second-oldest brother had by then also graduated from the house to go to college and I was left as the oldest in the house. If I had trouble attracting the boys at my school before, my ignorance about Tupac destroyed any remote chance I might have had. All I knew was that I had all these developing feelings for boys and that I wanted desperately for them to notice me. They did, but for reasons that didn't help my quest: my nap-tural hair; my underdeveloped, seemingly concave breasts; my white-girl accent, and my tomboyish appearance. The prototype of lust for the boys my age was a light-skinned girl with long hair, and I just didn't fit that profile. But I didn't want to believe that. So I would imagine instead that I held the interest of all the boys and often convinced myself of that. All the while, I remained the continued object of disdain from my peers. I often found myself emboldened whenever a guy would show me any attention at all, i.e. "Ay, you did the homework? Let me copy," or "You got ten cents for the vending machine?" I blame any misread social cues on *Saved by the Bell*. Zack and Kelly's romance was something I wanted so badly to emulate. My first-ever junior high school dance was approaching and, with the help of a Saturday morning marathon of *Saved*, I built up the courage that Monday morning to talk to Remington, an eighth-grade-looking sixth-grader who I'm pretty sure had been held back (though nobody talked about it). He had thick facial hair and muscular, athletic arms. He loved women, and frequently expressed his sexual desires in a way that hinted at experience. In my eyes, he was the answer. And I had so many questions. One of them, I worked up the courage to ask in front of his friends. I approached him right after our Environmental Studies class was dismissed, casually, waiting for him to pick up his only school supply, a single folder. "Hey, Remington," I started, shyly. "Are you going to the dance?" He didn't miss a beat: "Not with you!" His friends didn't even try to hide their laughter. Not a single one. I smiled and tried to play it off. "Oh. No—I didn't mean that. You thought I was asking for me?" But it was too late; they had already pushed past to leave me in the classroom alone, my Environmental Studies teacher avoiding eye contact with me. Ever optimistic, I went to the dance by myself, with the hope that maybe a boy there would ask me to dance. Maybe it would be Quentin, the skinny, half-albino/half-effeminate boy to whom I'd been sending "secret admirer" letters. It was the least he could do, after excitedly exposing to the class that I had been writing him love notes for weeks. Despite my humiliation, I couldn't really blame him. It happened naturally enough. The homeroom teacher brought up "secret admirers" in her announcement about Valentine's Day grams. "Does anyone know what a 'secret admirer' is?" she asked. "I do! I do, Ms. Nash!" My heart plummeted to my stomach as I noticed him anxiously looking in my direction. "What do you know about secret admirers, Quentin?" asked Ms. Nash. "That girl right there was writing me 'secret admirer' notes." He smiled at me, as if his public acknowledgment didn't violate the very purpose of the "secret" in "secret admirer." Surely, he would save me from walking around the junior high dance all alone, in the jean jumper and white turtleneck I had packed in my backpack just for this after-school occasion. (I never wore dresses.) Somebody had to take notice and ask me to dance, based on that alone. Unfortunately, no one ever asked. I was rapidly coming to the conclusion that boys didn't find me attractive. That was heartbreaking. My self-esteem was in danger and had it not been for the saving grace of the Instant Message feature on AOL, I probably would have suffered death by trying too hard. I don't remember the first time I typed to a stranger. It wasn't monumental for me. But it did speak to a desire to escape myself. For one thing, I could be anyone I wanted to be online. With each swift keystroke, a new, fearless identity emerged. I could be

light-skinned with long hair, or blue-eyed with blond hair. Or experienced, witty, and seductive—things nobody saw me as in real life. I could be anyone's type and was able to do so because during the early stages of AOL, pictures were pretty rare, though around the time that IMs came along, home scanners were growing more popular. Thankfully, however, pictures took forever to upload and weren't in high demand, so people were content with self-descriptions. As people tended to be quite generous in their descriptions of themselves, I figured I could be, too. What did it matter? "A/S/L," the pop-up conversation would start. Age/Sex/Location? (This blatant acronym had to have been tooled by pedophiles. The genius!) There was something flattering about being selected out of a pool of thirty to sixty people in a chat room for a private talk. I'd imagine it was like being chosen at a party to dance, though I wouldn't know anything about that. But for my chameleon-esque purposes, responding to this conversation opener was the hardest part. I couldn't become a type if I didn't know what I was working with. If I were in the mood to talk to someone my age, I'd be honest. "11/F/Cali, u?" "13/f/az. hi." Trick, I don't want no friends right now! On to the next. Sometimes I'd be the pursuer. I'd visit the RB, Rap, or Games chat rooms and scout screen names that would give me hints at my preferred types: soccrplaya83, muscleman39, blkboy17. All I had were snippets of open chats to go by. What were they contributing to the larger public conversation? I couldn't choose someone who was too active in the chat room; his chances of committing to a one-on-one were slim. Besides, someone who revels in being the center of attention is not my type. I don't like to compete. Instead, I went for those who would contribute a few meaningful phrases here and there: "games are cool" or "yah i love r. kelly." Subtle hints like those were enough to provoke me to reach out. I'd begin: SuGaLuv112: "hi. a/s/l?" muscleman39: "18/m/de. u??" SuGaLuv112: "17/f/cali." muscleman39: "cool, what's up?" SuGaLuv112: "nothin. chillin. bored." muscleman39: "are you horny?" What? Like rhinos? My knowledge of internet slang was coming up empty. But I tried. SuGaLuv112: "what do u you mean?" Then came the door-slam sound effect from my computer speakers. muscleman39 has signed off. After a couple of weeks, and some more of these incidents, I decided to finally look up the definition of "horny." What was being asked of me? My Encarta CD-ROM produced no answers, but Yahoo was full of them. hor-ny (hôr ne): desiring of sexual activity. Oh my freaking God. Of course. YES! That's exactly what I was. The answer to what I was looking for in so many ways was being dangled before me, and all I had to do was respond with a simple "yes." I couldn't wait for the next opportunity to showcase my new personality trait. I sought it, thirstily. This time ready for the exchange and wealth of knowledge that would follow. I was so appropriately excited and ready. My first online relationship started off innocently enough. Every day after school, around three thirty, I would log on. It was the perfect time. My mom, who was too tired to worry about her remaining three kids, after dealing with one hundred plus of her French students, would go take a nap. During that time, nobody could go in and disturb her. Unless there was a fire, or an intruder—Jehovah's Witnesses didn't count—we had all learned by swift-slap punishment that we were to respect her nap time. It was the one time slot of the day—thirty minutes or sometimes a whole hour—that our adult supervision was lenient. Occasionally, I would play bossy and order my siblings around on behalf of my mother, but for the most part, I left them alone to focus on my own debauchery and thus began my first real online relationship. He was nineteen; I had turned twelve. My parents were seven years apart, so . . . I guess it was cool? He described himself as white, athletically built, bald, with a red beard. When I first saw American History X years later, in high school, I had a flash memory of him, as if I'd met him in a previous life. He was "pretty average looking" by his description, but by my imagination, he was beautiful. He was sensitive. He asked me—Jennifer was my white-girl name (same number of syllables as Jo-Issa)—about my day, about how I was doing. He expressed his feelings for me. Told me he felt stupid for thinking about me all the time when we'd never met. To him, I was blond-haired, blue-eyed, and petite. Technically, I was petite for an adult person, but definitely oversized for a sixth-grader. Our conversations started out pretty casually at first, but they escalated quickly. And then he made the first move. redbear19: what are you wearing? SuGaLuv112: a tank top and shorts By then, I knew how to play the game. I had been asked the question via IM multiple times enough to know that a T-shirt, baggy jeans, and sneakers wasn't sexy enough. With redbear19, I was slightly seasoned, and he only helped me to get better. He taught me so much about what ideal sex was supposed to be, what I could expect from future relationships. This was the prelude to sexting. The crazy part is, nothing about this turned me on. It was a learning experience for me. I would type what guys wanted to hear, while reading Spider-Man comic books or as Tiny Toon Adventures played in the background, satisfied that, while most of my peers were still virgins, at age twelve, I was mastering the art of cybersex. After that first time, I started to feel a sense of guilt. In the classroom, I was anxious, worried that eyes were on me. I started to wonder if what I did was wrong. What would my teachers think if they knew? My parents? Could people tell? Did I look different? One day in the spring, I sat in Ms. Frank's English class, unusually quiet. The teacher's pet, I owned this class. She reminded the class of that often, which only escalated their hatred of me. But that day, sick and in pain, I just didn't feel well. It was as if the butterflies inside my stomach had turned into dark moths, with razor-sharp antennas that were poking my sides and my midsection. I felt nauseous and dizzy. What was happening to me? I hadn't even had real sex! Ms. Frank excused me to the nurse's office and I clutched my stomach and my throbbing head, worried about my pending diagnosis. I stopped at the restroom first to see if maybe I was experiencing a case of lunch food poisoning. And in that bathroom stall I discovered that, just like "Sally" in the Sex-Ed section of the Health textbook we had studied that winter, my

body had begun to succumb to its transition to womanhood. Or as I thought at the time, Ew gross, my vag is bleeding. I told the nurse I'd just gotten my period and she was super sympathetic, asking me if I wanted to go home. I did. I called my mother, who was transitioning into her new role as a stay-at-home mom and whispered my news into the phone. "Mom, I got my pe . . ." "What? Are you at school?" "I don't feel good." "What's wrong with you?" "I got my period." "Aww. My schubalubbalubba. I'm coming." During the car ride home, as my mom snuck peeks at me and patted my leg for comfort, I wondered if I were being punished for my "fast" behavior. In Health class, we learned that a girl's period typically came around the time she was a teenager. I had just turned twelve. I was in a rush to grow up, but I didn't know if I wanted to be "grown" yet. I didn't want to be a woman, because that meant more responsibilities and expectations, and I was way too lazy for responsibilities and expectations. But then, my mom assuaged my worries with a simple declaration that changed everything for me. "Guess you're a teenager now." To hell with being a woman, I was a teenager. Teenagers like the kids on *90210* and *Saved by the Bell*. Finally! That was the missing link of my identity, and this bloody punctuation served as a head start to my new identity. I was a horny teenager. My relationship with redbear19 progressed as scanners became more readily available and he sent me a picture. He was nervous to do so, but he felt like I should see him. I was so excited. But also nervous. By then, I'd had several online flings here and there, but he was the only one with whom I had something "real." Also up until then, his face was an open canvas. It could change depending on what he said, or my mood. He wasn't a fully real person to me, with real feelings and real desires. He could have been lying to me in the same way that I was lying to him. We both could have had *Tiny Toons* on our television screens, scrambling to come up with novel sex words to stimulate each other. But the picture he sent demonstrated to me two things: 1) he was pretty damn -honest—he appeared just as he said he would, and 2) he was actually kind of cute. Something about our relationship wasn't the same after that. I felt like a fraud, and I was kind of turned off by how vulnerable he'd made himself. I stopped becoming available to him at the same time every day. I'd block him whenever I felt like prowling for new people to talk to, then unblock him when I was bored. He grew hurt and needy, and I grew disgusted and cold. redbear19: what are you wearing today, baby? SuGaLuv112: clothes. redbear19: take them off. [5 minutes later] redbear19: u still there? SuGaLuv112: sorry, was on the phone. redbear19: you don't have time for me anymore SuGaLuv112 has signed off. After that, I kept him blocked. By now, I was becoming a pro. Some kids had after-school sports, some had piano lessons, but "cybering" was now my after-school activity of choice. And for the most part, it felt safe. I wasn't "doing it" for real, so I was still pure. My actions were justified because I could still wear white for my future wedding (which, as with Zack and Kelly, would probably happen in college). Now, pictures became a priority for me. If you didn't have a picture, I wasn't interested. As the most beautiful and sexy girl on the internet, I had a right to be picky. Not too much later, I met the guy of my dreams online. He sent me his picture after we got into a casual conversation about music. He was twenty-two, Italian, and black. He was one of the finest guys I had ever seen in my life, much less online. And he had multiple pictures of himself, so I knew it was real. Or was it? Thinking back, he sent me some very polished -pictures—very modelesque. But whatever—he was real to me. I know he was real because he said he was Italian and black. And when we spoke on the phone, for the first time, he sounded like he was Italian and black; a Luigi-and-Tyrone hybrid, if you will. His voice was so freaking sexy, though. I can't recall what we would have talked about, what kind of engaging conversation -starters came out of my twelve-year-old mouth. I just remember wondering why such a hottie like him was looking for people to talk to online. He seemed like the kind of guy who people would go out of their way to talk to. Just when I began to convince myself that this hot guy was courting me for me, he started pressing me for a picture. Shit. I had insisted that I didn't have a scanner in the past, but in an effort to keep him around, so he wouldn't get bored with me, I told him I planned to get one, just for him. So began the search. I'd have to do my best to find a picture that matched the description I gave him. He already thought I was eighteen. He thought I was African-American and light-skinned with long hair. So, thankfully, those nonspecifics gave me lots of options. I don't remember where or how I found the picture—but she was gorgeous. She was who I wished I looked like. She looked like she could have been mixed race. My middle school peers would be all over her. In fact, I'm pretty sure I printed her picture out and told all the guys she was my cousin. "That's your cousin?! What side of the family? Where does she live?" I sent him the picture, holding my breath. Would he believe me? Boy, did he! He was awestruck and excited, as if he'd hit the online jackpot. His interest in me grew: What did I do? Did I model? Was I dating? It felt amazing to be so beautiful. I envied the life of the real girl whose picture I stole. Did she know how lucky she had it? How easy her life was because she was so beautiful? And then the Blatian wanted more. Maybe he was suspicious. Maybe he, too, felt like it was too good to be true. "Send me another picture," he demanded one day. My heart started racing. How was I going to find another picture to send him? Since I was now supposedly the proud owner of a scanner, I had no excuse. So I went on another online scavenger hunt, this time to try to find a girl who resembled the fake me. I found one; she was light-skinned with curly hair and posed in the shower, half-naked. She looked like she could have been partially Asian. But the initial picture I sent him was black-and-white and the new picture of the girl in the shower was in black-and-white, so I figured that he wouldn't know the difference. I was wrong. He confronted me on the phone. Partly amused, partly miffed. "That's not your real picture, is it." "Yes, it is." "You look like two completely different people." "People always tell me that when I curl my hair." "I don't think either of these pictures

are you.” “Yes, they are.” Not willing to argue with me about my fake identity, he pleasantly let me go. Ultimately, he stopped talking to me altogether. Lesson learned. Eventually, the online conversations and fake adult sex no longer filled the void that my socially inactive middle school life had left wide open. My friends were being asked out. People were coupling up, and I was left with my lies and my fake personas. I needed someone to like me for me. Or at least who I pretended to be in person.