

## Dear Mrs. Porter. Or Ms. Porter, Probably

This letter is to you because you are the scariest part of me, the scariest thing I can think of. Wanna be my pen pal? I want to get to know you. Seventh grade was a hard time. And then again in tenth grade, was it?

Anyway, you must be wondering why I am contacting you after all these years. What made me think of you? I was in the shower, filling my travel bottle of shampoo as I prepare to go work on a farm with my lover this weekend, and I remembered to squeeze the air out, like you told us to do before plane trips because air expands at higher altitudes, and I've always done it and nothing has ever exploded in my luggage. Thanks. And I started thinking that so many things about the every day that I do come from you. Like tossing salt in boiling water to lower the boiling point. Or not mixing medications in containers because they can chemically react with each other. Or how it's bad if oven cleaner smells good because the gases really are noxious and it's good if they smell that way. I mean, countless things. And in my head, when I think, or not think, but heed these lessons, I kind of think, but not think, about you. I kind of don't think about you because I am ashamed. I got excited about science. You noticed. You recognized me because you loved science, too. But I was scared, terrified, still am, about what else you may have recognized.

You. Huge breasts, kinky hair, angry, so bitter. Smart and so disliked; right, but so embattled. Always on the righteous, losing side. Those crazy clothes from when?—the sixties, seventies? Or did no one but you ever wear those clothes? And the way your spit rattled in your mouth as you talked. Thick and white, it flew between your teeth, lips—sometimes staying attached, venturing out but with enough surface tension to return to your mouth—or other times, flinging itself in great globs on a students' desk. That stuff really travelled.

God, and the time you were saying something to me in class, what, congratulating me for a correct answer, and you spit on me, on my desk, but also in my eye, and all I could do was look at you, not looking at the spit on my desk or wiping my eye. And all the other kids saw, but like somehow I needed to be an ally to you. And that's what was scary. Maybe this is all a projection. And maybe someday you'll tell me it's all true. But I knew what it was like to be you.

I'd been monstrous before. Grotesque. Was. Is. Out. On the outs. The outside. And later, out. It's so scary. Were you scared a lot? And did you see that in me, too? Did you recognize it? How scary to be your friend. How scary to defend you, to kids, parents.

And you recommended me for the recombinant DNA and cloning seminar at UOP. A summer camp for nerds. The only people on campus were the summer dummies (incoming freshpeople

who got in on condition of passing summer school) and us, the tenth-grade nerds, who were more adept at school and earning better grades than these “dummies” could ever hope to. You know, so it was really great, and kind of emphasized the weird freak thing.

Scared to be the monster. Whatever society deems monstrous at the minute. Gay. Jewish. Hairy. Big. I mean, why isn't blonde considered weak, inferior, less substantial, recessive? I'm really just scared to be the monster of the minute. Because even though the minute is fleeting, the effects last a lifetime and you never forget, do you? And even if they don't remember to make you one, you do it yourself. You've learned and you remember. You carry the freak in your purse, in your heart, and to every new person you meet, you say, “Hello, I am a freak. Nice to meet you.” And you hope it will be different this time, but it's already too late.

Too late. Too late for us. How are you? Too late for the sad boys from Littleton. I know. I know. I know. Sssh, come here. And, I'm sorry. I want to tell the boys, I hope you're really cool in heaven because you must have gone through hell down here. I don't even believe in heaven or hell, but I remember high school.

Take care.