

1 *Tell us about your relationship with one other person in your life.*

I find it very difficult to begin writing college essays. I have to augment my voice to such a degree that I'm attractive in sprawling ~500 word essays, and to such a degree that the person the reader admits or does not is, fundamentally, me. In this case, I'm going to allow myself an egregious "New York Times Baghdad coverage" opening, because this is what comes to my mind when I think about Allie:

A pale sky shifts rapidly through dusk to night over Greenhills High School, dull blues and greys reflected in the frizzy floor carpeting of the lunch room. Gathered, are the usual student event attendees: very new and perilously old teachers, parents of performing students, performing students, dutiful siblings. This evening, Allie Chatas and Gus Nordhielm are preparing to change improv forever. Gus has floated the idea that it would be novel, interesting, and funny if in their next scene, they were to leave the stage and make use of the unattended microphones and instruments left by the Jazz Club (who will take over when the improv set is finished). Allie has haltingly agreed. The moment of truth arrives. The performers are in their comfort zones, having assumed the mannerisms of the stock Brooklyn teen and AV club nerd characters. Gus jumps off the stage without any real motivation from the scene. Allie's eyes widen, she does not move. Gus is standing in front of a microphone, people are staring at him. Allie will not be stepping off the stage... Gus begins to sing in Spanish. This maneuver has proved unsuccessful.

It would be very easy to be angry at Allie. If *Napoleon Dynamite* has anything to offer about the ethical workings of friendship, it stands that she should have taken the plunge with me. And yet, two days later, our feelings toward one another had not changed, and I doubt our individual social standings changed much either. Allie is generally cautious and unassuming, and people like her. When I moved to Chicago, Allie was the only person I knew in town. She was a "coffee every couple weeks" kind of friend, and the only high school peer with whom I'd maintained any kind of intimacy. I absolutely treasure our friendship, distant and strenuous though it may sometimes be.

Marc Maron has this joke about "primary friends" and "backup friends". Whenever too much exposure or unbalanced enthusiasm threaten to damage an important friendly relationship, you can give that backup friend a call. I like my privacy and space; what is to me a "primary friendship" - because of the proportion of my thought and feeling it commands - is to Allie, the social one, more of a "backup friendship". We bridge the gap between the introverted extroverts and the extroverted introverts. It's a tense relationship when it hits bumps. I'm often bashful when asking anything of Allie: company, support, a ride to the airport. In part, it's because she asks so little of me. I've known her since the seventh grade, when we attempted to "go steady" for about two weeks - a very dry two weeks, conspicuously devoid of the laughter and chemistry that convinced us to give the thing a go in the first place. The two weeks after that were a sort of recovery. Lunch seatings were put back in place, feelings were re-evaluated. Neither of us, at thirteen, had many poignant conclusions to report.

Allie has been many things to me as I have been to her. For better or worse, time always passes, ambitions cool, coffee is always filled with chatter and laughter. The stuff of our relationship is totally without weight, it's natural and - flippant though it sounds - fun. It serves the same function as a trip to the zoo, or a theatre outing. It's a connection, however complicated circumstances can be, it remains a very simple thing. After all the work contorting and defining the thing, from both sides, I've come to recognize its reliable capriciousness as the most profound thing about it, and one of the most valuable things two people can stumble across.