

She's the one person you'd never expect. She's loud and outgoing, but keeps her true feelings hidden from fear of rejection. She wants to feel needed, but fears being left and abandoned. She's not gorgeous; she'd never take your breath away, but who she is makes her beautiful beyond any understanding. Her eyes reveal who she is, where she's been. Not even she knows where she's going. Her smile says it all. She's hiding behind it, waiting for something truly worth smiling for. You'd never guess it, but she has a different outlook on life; she knows that it should be more. She believes it should have a reason, a bigger purpose. She can't define life, but she knows that it shouldn't be like this. She finds the beauty in the small things, the things that go by unnoticed. Her definition of beauty is different than most. She's confusing. Although she hasn't had many, she believes in miracles, and is waiting for hers to come along. She's held down by her endless thoughts, but she has hope. She knows that one day she'll have what she craves. Happiness. She's always expecting the worst but always prepared for the best. She wants to be wanted. She desires acceptance but feels love is unachievable. It's hard for her to say how she feels, so she writes it, and even then she struggles to find the right words. She feels unexplainable. She looks simple minded, and she's easily judged, but she's quickly misunderstood. She's not simple, her past lingers over her head as a heavy burden. Her past has yet to remain in her past. But her future is a blank canvas. She's the one person you'd never expect.

The crowd rises at the first glimpse of the performer and applause emerges from the idle chattering like a wave falling from the sea. Keith Carlock walks onto the stage and prepares to take his throne, his rightful place, behind his pristine Yamaha drum kit. The room is filled with critiquing eyes and anticipating heartbeats as they look at this seasoned veteran of the craft. To someone who has never heard of Keith, they might look at him as an odd looking young adult somewhere in his twenties; someone you would not second-guess to be a musical professional. With his parted haircut, average looking face, his single ear piercing, and medium-sized frame, he could seem to be an odd individual. But visual first impressions hardly matter to the blind eye and the listening ear. As he picks up the wood sticks, there is an occasional outburst from a fearless, excited individual ready to envelope himself or herself in the solo that would ensue momentarily. Keith begins playing and from the first stick stroke he has stopped the rhythm of time and captured the audience into his own, ready to take the willing ear into a new breed of journey. He builds the solo, face growing grotesque with intensity and arms flying with a style all his own, ready to put his mark onto such a primitive instrument, ready to prove how much character can be portrayed through a pair of wood sticks. The first thing that strikes the visual of his playing is how physical of a player he is, with his fine tuned posture of the body and oddly positioned drum kit, with his toms parallel to the floor and the snare facing away from him. He towers over the set with a mastery that puts the shells into submission to get as much sound out as possible. His face and his emotions pour like

3

1

2

My frugal grandmother slowly hobbles through JC Penny's with her cane in her wrinkled, old hand, to use her ten-dollar bonus bucks. She does not understand that even though you are saving ten-dollars, you are also spending another fifty dollars on unnecessary items. That would explain her twenty sets of bed sheet with matching comforters and hand towels. Every sale or deal ~~frases~~ you can guarantee that my grandma will be there buying multiple of the things she "needs." She is so ignorant that she thinks the items will never go on sale again. In her cluttered pantry you will find at least ten cans of the same item, some having expiration dates that are five years past. Her unorganized cupboards are so full that she cannot tell what she has and what she needs so she will go out and buy more stuff. Her malodorous freezer is an absolute disaster; the ground beef looks like strawberries, and the green beans have an expiration date of December 2000. Not only does she just have this stuff at her house, she also uses it to make her food. No wonder her food always has a weird, indescribable after taste. Her grandchildren have to convince her that after three years of reusing the same candy canes, it is time to buy new ones so people can actually eat them without breaking their teeth. Her conservatism does not just deal with food; she also reuses her boxes and bags for presents. Every time she gives out a present, she puts money in a small jewelry box and then in a bag. All of her grandchildren, which consists of about twenty, put their name on the box and bag. Once we open the present we give I sit next to Leah on the piano bench, carefully going over the notes as she watches my fingers. Her dark brown, wavy hair falls over one shoulder, and her deep brown eyes study the pattern of the keys. She pushes her square checkered glasses up a little more on her face, straightens, and then carefully places her small olive hands on the keys, starting to play. Once she plays the whole page through successfully, she turns and flashes a bright, braces-filled grin at me, pleased to have gotten the notes right. For the next few minutes, I teach her the beginning pages of Taylor Swift's "Love Story" on the piano. When we finally get all the way through, she seems surprised that she can play it so well. Stuck in the insecurities that come with puberty and middle school, Leah does not believe that she is good at piano. I try to convince her otherwise, saying it is pretty amazing to be able to play two pages almost perfectly in only a week, but she has a hard time feeling good about herself. She also tells me that she is not good at math or science, even though she gets high A's on all her math tests and won first and second place at a science competition. The youngest of four children, Leah often feels overlooked and inadequate, unfairly comparing herself to her older siblings. She feels overshadowed by our accomplishments, and

4

not wanted to be her own uniform person. But she is minimal popular, with lots of friends, she gets

5

By her lip piercing and four tattoos, you would think she would be menacing in some way. But she insists that those things are just for flair and self-expression. And, when a person really thinks about the actual tattoos of an owl, ^{an} octopus, a chameleon, and a constellation of four stars, ~~he~~ she tends to believe this same thing. When she is constantly doing new things with hair and makeup, one gets the impression that she is indecisive. But she says that she simply likes experimenting with new things. When someone finds that she is in cosmetics school, he/she understands this as well. And, when she receives a comment on her odd fashion sense, she explains that her hobby is cutting up clothes to make them more interesting, and all questioning looks finally relax into contented expressions. But, this is only the person seen by the public at first glance. Inside, there is always doubt and negativity. She doesn't truly believe in herself. She just doesn't want to be judged, because how others view her is all that matters. She must have friends; she must be needed. But, this attitude ~~the thing that~~ always drives those who get close enough to see it away. Once people see this, they also see the cloud that is always over her head, the attitude that is lurking just beneath the surface. They try to help, try to cheer her up. But this only sets her off. They always tell her she should try. She hates that word. Try to get a better job. Try to work harder in school. Try to find better friends. She tells them she has tried. But, this is one lie people don't push up at.

Pushing his heavily framed glasses farther up his triangular nose, the Geek grins widely up at our calculus teacher. "Y'el I feel as if I've been waiting for tapereoidal integration of functions for my entire life!" The entire class laughs, though not unkindly, at Geek, who obviously takes great delight in all the attention. He leans back in the desk, arms crossed and long legs stretched out, enveloped in baggy, washed-out blue jeans and a faded red t-shirt. His hair isn't just the fizzy do of a stereotypical nerd - it's a plethora of fuzzy, tightly curled black springs squiggling outward into space, encircling a pale face, an angular jaw, and energetic blue eyes. Although we met in elementary school, I have never known Geek well; fortunately, however, his garrulousness and quirky personality are entertaining now, rather than irritating as I had remembered them nine years ago.

"I think we may need tasers to keep you from going overboard on the talking," chuckles the teacher good-naturedly.

"Ooh! Can they be pink ones?" exclaims Geek excitedly, his too-loud voice rocking through words faster than the speed of light. "That would be so cool!" Even in such a silly subject as pink taser guns, his entire being seems to radiate more zeal for learning each and every day than I will probably ever feel in a lifetime.

6

7

The ~~Amway~~ Amway guy always has a fantastic opportunity "for you," even if it conflicts with the non-refutable idea from last week. For example, putting a rocket on a kitten and lighting it. For just \$50 you can get all anger out with one feline, thus you have a healthier marriage. The only catch is that the stunt can't be tried at home, yet for \$25.00 more, Amway guy will personally escort you to his fancy open field, complete with a mini-bar along the treeline, compliments with mugs from mom's kitchen. Although his plan is ultimately foiled with the guard dogs of the real property owners chasing you, Amway man is positive he can get a special deal for bandages somewhere in Mexico. Amway guy secretly makes his living by tricking naive home-school graduates, and utilizes the nights he can't sleep to write out what it would be like to be Rosie O'Donnell. Poor Amway guy never realizes he was adopted and believes that his "mother" saying he's special is a good thing.

Ironically, one of his biggest hits is selling motivational tapes to beer-bellied truck drivers who keep litter boxes in their trucks and wonder why they feel socially unaccepted. Regardless of the fact that Amway guy is relatively aspergers, he often recognizes a person's vulnerability, therefore most of the attendants of the Amway conventions are middle-aged men going through their midlife crisis, desperate women, and elderly citizens with dementia... or Alzheimer's. Or both. Despite his surroundings, Amway guy is constantly superficially optimistic and waves at every passing driver, hoping that they'll see his giant website plastered along the rusty minivan. Around women, Amway guy plays it up like he

Every day, at 10 AM sharp, you will see her leave the house to get her daily groceries. Even if it's pouring rain, you will see her barreling up the road, clutching her umbrella in one hand, and dragging her little wheezy bag in the other. Even though my eighty-nine-year-old grandmother appears to be aged and weathered, she has the health and agility of a woman half her age. Friday is fish day. Every Friday you will see my grandmother, a creature of routine hopping on a double decker bus on her weekly errand out to the fishing harbor to pick up some fresh fish. The boats are filled to the brim with the week's catch, with the squawking seagulls circling overhead, waiting to scoop up a tasty lunch. Almost an hour can go by as she progresses to her usual fish stand, chatting with anyone and everyone she encounters before catching the bus back to her house. Her entire day is scripted from the moment she wakes up to her 10:00 PM bed time. At 10:05 she's out cold, snoring loudly, with her hearing aid sitting on the nightstand and her false teeth sleeping in her sterilizing glass. Even when the violent winds trigger her burglar alarm, waking the entire neighborhood, she remains in her routine slumber, unaffected by blaring noise. Her next door neighbor wearily puts on some shoes and grabs his spare key to her

8