

PART II

FINAL GIRL

2000

Not for Distribution

## **DRAFT 1**

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me. But I'm *not* supposed to write about when I was raped. And . . . I just did. Shoot.

## **DRAFT 2**

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me. I don't know what that's supposed to mean. My tutor Ms. McConnolly says not to worry too much, the prompt doesn't really matter.

How the heck do you write a good essay based on a question that doesn't matter?

It kind of reminds me how everyone says "How are you," but they don't really mean it. People ask me how I am all the time, but they don't actually want to know. Probably because they suspect

I'm probably not all that great, after my accident. Which . . . ha ha, I'm not supposed to write about, either.

### DRAFT 3

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me. My tutor Ms. McConnolly suggested I just start writing and see what comes out.

So: Ranch dressing and swiss cheese. Michael Stipe. Lampedoodle. Freak out. Hang ten. Power down. Whistle stop. Cry for help.

Game over. Try again.

### DRAFT 4

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me.

To help me think of a good topic, my mom bought me a book of sample college essays to read through. They were all freaking terrrrible.

In one of them, a guy who wants to be an engineer writes about the time he took the family microwave apart. In another one, this girl goes through the etymology of a bunch of interesting words that have been important in her life, because she found words so *interesting*

and wanted to be an English major. In the worst essay of them all, another girl talks about the time her mom took her on a very, very, very special shoe-shopping trip.

All of them made me feel like a monster.

#### **DRAFT 4.5**

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me. One such experience was the time I took the family microwave apart. The impact was that it exploded. The end.

#### **DRAFT 4.75**

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me.

I think the word "impact" is really *interesting*. I looked it up in the thesaurus because that's more *interesting* than starting an essay with a dictionary definition. The synonyms for impact are: 1) effect, influence, consequences, OR: 2) crash, smash, bump.

It's *interesting* to think about how that second one applies to my life.

So here's a short list of some crashes and bumps in my life. When I was eight years old, Gretchen Langeloth pushed me off the swing set. The impact was two bones in my elbow against the ground. My cast was hot pink. Everyone wanted to be my friend the next day. By the end of recess, there was no pink left on the cast, it was covered in Sharpie signatures. That was the last time in my life that I felt popular.

When I was ten years old, I was the only girl on the baseball team, and I made contact with the ball during a game one time. I hit a double. The impact was my heart exploded. (My feelings have been in a million pieces ever since.)

When I was twelve years old, I snuck out of my bunk at camp and swam across the lake. Because my friend Madeleine had chickened out, there were two boys waiting for me on the other side. So I had both my first and second kiss in the same night. The impact was the slap of our lips. The first boy, especially, kissed too hard.

When I was fourteen, they found a serial killer in the neighborhood next to mine. They found him out because his wife was in a dumpster, cut into fifteen pieces. I couldn't figure out where you would cut a body to make fifteen pieces. The husband told the police that a burglar had broken into the house and kidnapped her. Later they found out he had told the same story in a different state about a different cut-up wife. I tried to be a lesbian after that but couldn't do it. I kept chasing

boys, and then when I was sixteen, two boys took advantage of me in the back of a car after a party, and everyone at my school knew about it, and they were so mean to me about it, I basically wanted to die. A month later, I had an accident where I almost did die. I drank a lot of vodka both times, I was unconscious when they both happened. So I don't actually know the impact of either one.

If a tree falls in the forest and you're passed out, does it have an impact?

I guess the impact was these wads of wet toilet paper Tonya Simpson used to throw at me in the hallway back when I was still in school. They'd stick to the lockers above my head with a sound like *crash, smash, bump*, or more specifically, *schlop* (an accident, she said, when one of them hit me in the face). I guess the impact was my dad, breaking the window of the car where I was sitting in the driver's seat after I took too much Tylenol (an accident, he said, an accident).

#### **DRAFT 4.9999**

For this college application essay, I'm supposed to write about a "significant experience" that's "had an impact" on me.

But what does "significant" mean, anyway?

My thesaurus says: Of consequence. Uncommon. Momentous.

Momentous is a strange word. It should mean “full of moments,” since usually a word ending in “-ous” means a thing that is full of itself. Like: “Nervous” is full of nerves. Or how “sandwicheous” is full of sandwiches.

Aliceous is full of Alice. And what does it mean to be full of Alice?

It means you have boring, straight brown hair that only looks okay if you blow-dry it. It means you wear a ponytail most of the time, and wisps of hair fly out over both of your ears and make you look like you’re wearing a weird pilgrim’s hat.

It means you are pretty good at physics, but you really love writing. It means you want to be a journalist when you grow up.

It means your goal is to go to the University of Virginia. Your mom took you to visit and you saw people lying on blankets reading Joan Didion in the sun on the grass and they looked like they could be your friends.

It means you’ve been working so freaking hard this year, as hard as anyone has ever worked. You dropped out but then you went back and completed junior year with summer courses at the community college and even brought up your GPA. You’re working on your GED. You’re proving you are UVA-ready. You are ready for all of the acronyms.

*A.L.I.C.E.O.U.S.: Artistic Lovable Intelligent Creative Elegant  
Original Unique Smart*

It means your fifth-grade drama teacher cast you as Grizabella in *Cats*, but another girl came onstage to sing “Memory” instead of you because you can’t sing. It means wolves are your totem animal. It means you love horror movies.

Does that sound weird? It’s true, though. I really love horror movies. My favorite is *The Silence of the Lambs*, but I will watch any horror movie, and I won’t close my eyes. I’ve seen the scariest ones, like *Se7en*, and *The Shining*, and *The Blair Witch Project*, and even the really awful ones like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. The worst I ever saw was *The Last House on the Left*, which was just *awful*. You might think that one is a weird one for me to watch, because it’s a rape revenge film. But it was my friends on the Horror FanGrrls message board who convinced me to watch it, and they’re all survivors of sexual assault, too, so I figured . . .

Oh wait. Okay, new try.

**DRAFT 5**

For this college application essay, I’m supposed to write about a “significant experience” that’s “had an impact” on me. One significant

experience in my life was seeing *The Silence of the Lambs*. It was the first horror movie I ever saw. The impact on me is that now I love horror movies.

What I love about *The Silence of the Lambs* is that it's about a strong woman, not just one running away all the time—a lot of horror movies are just women running away (and getting hurt anyway).

I love that when you first see Jodie Foster, she's jogging through the woods alone. She's like any woman in any horror movie—running, running, running—but you can tell immediately that she's not running away from a murderer or anything. She's doing an obstacle course; she's training herself.

Later, you realize that the thing she's running from is inside herself.

Jodie Foster is not afraid of Buffalo Bill, the serial killer on the loose. *He's* afraid of *her*. She's *his* monster. (Actually, I feel bad for Buffalo Bill. The movie is pretty mean to him. The camera spies on him in his room. You get the sense he got teased badly in school.) Jodie Foster is also not afraid of Hannibal the Cannibal, who is stowed safely in jail. What she's afraid of is Dr. Lecter the psychiatrist. And it doesn't matter that he's behind glass and can't physically harm her. The scary thing is inside of Jodie Foster, and Dr. Lecter the brilliant psychoanalyst has the key to let it out just by talking to her.

I could keep going—I could spend this entire essay describing the plot of *The Silence of the Lambs* and what it means. For the past year, I've watched the movie at least once a week. I could probably reproduce the whole script from memory! But this is a college application essay, not a fan grrl message board. So what I'm going to tell you about is what it feels like to be Jodie Foster.

Like Jodie Foster, I've been working really hard for what I want. I didn't grow up on a ranch and was never traumatized by the spring slaughter of any farm animals. But I do want to get away from the place where I grew up. And I do have big ambitions: I want to be a journalist. And I'm willing to work hard for it. Like Jodie Foster, I'm driven, and like Jodie Foster, I'm not afraid of any serial murderer. What I'm afraid of is that I'm not good enough.

Not for Distribution

Alice Lovett  
9/30/2000  
505 words

Let's explore your POV  
on sexism a bit more.

**College Application Essay DRAFT 1**

One significant experience in my life was seeing *The Silence of the Lambs*. It was the first horror movie I ever saw. The impact on me is that now I love horror movies. We need a stronger opening. Maybe "in medias res"?

What do I love about *Silence of the Lambs*? There are a lot of things, but the big one is that it's about a woman who is strong and powerful. In most horror movies, women are just running away all of the time. *Silence of the Lambs* challenges that cliché from the beginning. When we first see Clarice Starling (played by Jodie Foster) on screen, she's running through the woods. But you can tell immediately that she's not running away from a murderer or anything. She's just doing an obstacle course, and she's a strong woman. Still, you can tell by the look on her face that she is running away from *something*. It's something that is inside herself.

Then she's given an assignment to talk to Hannibal Lecter, and we realize that Clarice is going to have to face that thing.

Everyone knows Hannibal Lecter, whether or not you've seen the movie. Say "Hannibal the Cannibal" and basically anyone is funny! going to say, "Yeah, sure, that guy who chews faces and likes fava beans." But the thing a lot of people don't know about Hannibal Lecter is that he's the perfect monster for Clarice, specifically. He is *her* worst fear. She's not afraid of the serial killer Buffalo Bill (actually, *he's* afraid of *her*; she is *his* monster). She's not even afraid of Hannibal the Cannibal, who's in jail. What she's afraid of is Dr. Lecter, the psychiatrist. It doesn't matter that he's behind glass; the scary thing is inside of Clarice, and to let it out, all Dr. Lecter the brilliant psychoanalyst has to do is talk. *I'm surprised you love horror movies . . . I want to know*

*This is funny, BUT it doesn't tell me anything exciting about YOU.*

I could keep going—I could spend this entire essay describing WHY. *Can this essay go deeper?* what *The Silence of the Lambs* means. I could probably reproduce the whole script from memory. For the past year, I've watched the movie at least once a week. Instead, I'll stick to what's important, which is what it feels like to be Clarice Starling, because I identify closely with her.

Like Clarice, I've been working really hard, training myself, and working for a big goal. I want to go to the University of Virginia and begin my path to reaching my dream of being a journalist. Like Clarice, I'm driven. Like Clarice, I'm willing to work as hard as I have to. And like Clarice, I'm not afraid of any murderer. I'm afraid

of what's inside me.

But I think I might be ready to face it.

*EEP!*  
*Let's chat.* I almost feel like going to UVA will be like interviewing Hannibal Lecter. At UVA, I'm going to meet new friends and professors who—like Hannibal Lecter—will have the key to letting the monsters inside of me out. I believe that if I keep working hard, I can learn to wrangle those scary things and overcome them and keep reaching for my dreams.

*Alice: you're a v. strong writer. Your essay is going to be great. BUT we need to figure out WHAT you want to say. This first draft feels like you're just warming up. We'll brainstorm at our next meeting!*

*- Ms. MC*

## DRAFT 2 V1

People are often surprised to learn that I love horror movies. I'm a teenage girl with straight brown hair. I'm not goth or anything. I seem really normal at first. But I watch at least four horror movies every week. I've seen *Se7en* twice as many times as the title.

Why do I like them? It's kind of like the Apple Jacks commercials:  
*I JUST DO.*

I guess one reason is the adrenaline. I love the tight, excited feeling I get when the first image flashes up on the screen. I love the suspense. It's like being at the top hill of a roller coaster. And it's like a roller coaster when you're done, when you get off, you feel so alive!

Most people want to know what I mean when I say horror movies. Like, slasher films like *Halloween*? Or even like *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*? My answer is *all of them*. I even used to want to be a horror filmmaker; my middle school best friend and I used to make silly scary movies together on her dad's camcorder.

It's not because my life is like a horror movie. Although maybe

it is! Bad things happen to all of us. Even on a normal day you can turn on the television and see a man, who lives in the neighborhood next to mine, giving an interview because his wife's body was found mutilated in a dumpster. The world is scary. It's not hard to imagine Pennywise from *IT* hiding under my bathroom sink. It's not hard to imagine a *Poltergeist* in the walls of our house in these weird sterilized suburbs. It's not hard to imagine that this is *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; there are times where I definitely feel like everyone around me is in on a secret conspiracy, and I'm the weird outsider who didn't get the memo.

## **DRAFT 2 V2**

Sometimes I feel like I'm living in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. When I saw that movie in middle school, I thought—that's just like my school! I feel like the last person who hasn't been killed and replaced with an automaton of myself.

And I'm kind of afraid that writing this essay is making me fall asleep.

### DRAFT 2 V3

Shelley Duvall is walking through the kitchen, checking to make sure the Overlook Hotel is running, checking all the machines and everything. Note, *she's* doing her *husband's* job. Jack Nicholson is the star of *The Shining*, but it's actually his wife who's taking care of everything. Sexism!

What do I have to say about sexism?

I feel kind of like Jack right now. I'm sitting at my desk trying to write this essay. It's making me a dull grll.

### DRAFT 2 V4

What do I want you to know about me? I want you to know that I should go to UVA. But why should I go to UVA? I don't know the answer to that myself.

In a horror movie, when someone doesn't know the answer to something, it's usually time to go to the library.

### DRAFT 2 V5

Morgan Freeman walks into the New York Public Library. He banters with the night security guard, an old friend. The guard lets

him into the reading room, even though the library is closed. Morgan Freeman is Detective Somerset, and he's come to the library to read about the seven deadly sins, because the serial killer Kevin Spacey is using the sins as a script.

The movie is set in a city that is so dark, grim, and violent that most murders and assaults pass unnoticed. At the beginning of the movie, Somerset has given up. He doesn't want to try to help anyone anymore, and he's leaving the city. The movie is a running argument between him and his replacement, Brad Pitt, about whether it's better to keep trying or to give up.

The serial killer complicates their argument because he agrees with both of them, in a way. On one side, Kevin Spacey agrees with Morgan Freeman that the world is lost. He commits these truly violent, grotesque murders because he knows that the world is so bad nobody will pay attention otherwise. But on the other side, he's like Brad Pitt, in that he's committing the murders because he thinks he'll sledgehammer everyone out of their complacency, he thinks he will change things, he thinks change is possible.

I used to argue with my middle school best friend about this movie. We both watched it together for the first time, and Haley was on Brad Pitt's side. She believed that there's such a thing as right and wrong, and that those of us who know the difference have to fight

those who are evil—she believed it's possible to make the world a better place. She seemed so sure of things so I went along with her at the time. But now, I've gotten older, I've seen more . . . (plus Haley and I haven't really talked since ninth grade so she isn't around to convince me otherwise) . . . and anyway now I understand that Somerset didn't really disagree with Brad Pitt. It's just that he has given up on the fight.

Maybe that's why I'm having such trouble with this essay. Ms. McConnell says that it's good to talk about overcoming adversity. But I don't think you ever really overcome adversity. I think you just figure out how to carry it along with you and continue on your way.

By the end of *Se7en*, Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt switch places. Brad Pitt, who kills Kevin Spacey because he killed his wife, Gwyneth Paltrow (Wrath!), has lost all hope and realized that the world is a bad place. Morgan Freeman ends the movie by reclaiming his hope. He says that the world is a bad place, but worth fighting for. I agree with him. I think. Although on a lot of days I still don't know.

My favorite scene in the movie is in that library, though. It's a beautiful scene, quiet and soaring, even though Somerset is diving into the horrific research about hell and the seven deadly sins. This

scene, to me, is the answer to life: When everything seems like too much, go to the library. The best way to confront horror is through study.

Brad Pitt's character is the one who goes to Kevin Spacey's apartment and nearly catches him, he is the one who chases him down, he is the one who kills him in the end. He is the one who strives for justice. But Morgan Freeman is the one who figures out the code, understanding it through study at the library. His journey is to understand evil. Through understanding, he learns to live with it.

Is it lame if I say that's why I want to go to the University of Virginia?

There's one more thing I want to say, which is that I think horror movies can bring people together. Maybe this is what I really want to write about.

I'm part of a group of girls who all meet on a message board online. We all pick the same movies to watch on Saturday nights, and we chat about them the whole time. We're all survivors of sexual assault. It's not true that all survivors are horror fans; there are lots of other message boards on other topics. We just happen to be horror fans who have found each other.

I think talking about horror movies is an escape that lets us talk about our real feelings. There is only so much you can say about your own disgust and worry and guilt. I'd much rather talk about whether or not Morgan Freeman had a chance to stop Brad Pitt from killing the serial killer at the end of the movie or not.

Not for Distribution

Alice Lovett  
10/12/2000  
586 words

*Start with something  
about YOU!!*

### College Application Essay DRAFT 2

Morgan Freeman walks into the New York Public Library. He banters with the night security guard, an old friend. The guard lets him into the reading room, even though the library is closed, because Freeman is a police detective. He's come to the library on a mission. He needs to stop a serial killer who is using the seven deadly sins as a road map.

The film *Se7en* is filled with horrific scenes of gore and the aftermath of murder (one interesting fact is that there are few scenes of actual violence in the film!). But this moment, in the middle of the film, is pure beauty: a night in the library, reading and learning.

*Not sure  
about this  
transition . . .*

That's what I hope to find at the University of Virginia.

It might seem strange to you that I talk about my dreams for college in the same breath as I talk about a horror movie. People are often surprised that I love horror movies at all. I'm a good student, a normal girl with straight brown hair, I smile politely. But I watch

*ha.  
yes.*

like four horror movies every week. I've seen *Se7en* twice as many times as the title. !

One reason I love horror movies is the adrenaline. I love the tight, excited feeling I get when the black screen first flashes up an image. I love not knowing what's coming. It's like being at the top of a roller coaster. And I love when the movie is over, I feel like I faced the monster myself and <sup>a</sup>came out victorious. You really feel alive at the end of a horror movie.

But the biggest reason I love horror movies is that I'm part of a group of girls who all meet on a message board online to talk about the movies we love. I love to share movies with my friends. We all pick the same two movies to watch on Saturday nights, and we chat about them with each other online as we watch.

Those friends on the message board are the first friends I've had where we found each other because of our intellectual interests. Before, all my friends were just people at my school, we were forced together. Most of those friends didn't last when things got tough. My horror friends are my friends because we share a passion.

Their friendship is the first taste of what I want the rest of my life to be. I dream of being a journalist and a writer, and I want to work and spend my time with other people who share my passions. Most of the people at my old school reminded me of the aliens in *Invasion*

Funny . . . BUT it's a little immature. This essay needs to be about what makes YOU unique!

of the Body Snatchers. They seemed like they were just doing what everyone else wanted to do.

That's why I started this essay by talking about Morgan Freeman in the library. Like him, I know that the world is full of evil. Like him, I feel pretty sad sometimes when I think about all that evil, but I still want to fight. I want to be a journalist, to learn and explore and study, and work for what's right. I know that I can't do it alone. I want to go to the University of Virginia to meet other passionate, hardworking people.

I want to have deep conversations. I want to study hard. I want to find new ways of looking at horror movies, and politics, and everything. I'm thirsty for knowledge. I can't wait to find it at UVA.

A little muddled at the end . . . I know you can do better than this! Let's try again 😊

Not for Distribution

### **DRAFT 3 V1**

Last night, I was awake until three o'clock in the morning, chatting with my friends on a message board about whether or not I should write this essay. These friends are my closest friends in the world, although none of us have ever met. We have two things in common. The first is that we are all fans of horror movies, and we watch them together while chatting online every Saturday night. The second thing we have in common is that we are all survivors of sexual assault. Through their friendship and support, I've learned to be grateful and maintain a positive attitude even on the hardest days, and I've learned to focus on building a positive future for myself. I see that positive future at the University of Virginia.

My friends have always given me great advice. But when I asked them whether or not I should write this essay on this topic, they were of two minds.

Some of them believed that I should steer clear of the topic entirely. Friends like AlaskaWitch and Blink1982 reminded me that

their guidance counselors and parents told them to write their essays about constructive experiences and not traumatic ones. Like learning a new skill, or being proud even to be on a losing sports team, or the lessons taught to us by a parental figure. Talking about your rape is too easy to turn into a pity party, Blink1982 told me, which she said a guidance counselor told her.

Others of my friends, like JillyBean16, believed that I could write about it, but only as long as I was careful. They argued that it was a serious and weighty experience and also that I did need to explain the dip in my grades in the spring of my junior year, and the nontraditional academic path I've taken since.

But they agreed with the others on one point—everyone says that if I do write about this, I should focus not on the trauma itself, but on my recovery, and the way it has changed my outlook and my character, rather than on how bad things were for me last year.

So: I've been working hard and taking good care of myself this summer and fall. After dropping out, I went back over the summer for community college classes to catch up, and I'm on my way to a GED. I'm sad that I won't be walking up at graduation with everyone else. But as my real friend RedHotChiliSarah put it, Why would I want to walk with those people anyway?

What I learned from the experience is to find constructive ways

of dealing with my emotions. Like I have learned to be optimistic, and handle my emotions in healthy ways. And . . . I can't think of anything else actually.

### **DRAFT 3 V2**

Last night, I was awake until two o'clock in the morning, chatting with my friends on a message board about whether or not I should write this essay. These are my closest friends in the world, although we've never met. Like me, they are all survivors of sexual assault, and their friendship has helped me get through a very dark time in my life. Most of them say that I should not write this essay. Their guidance counselors and parents have told them to write about constructive and character-building experiences instead of trauma.

But, UVA, I keep going back to your question. You asked me to "evaluate a significant experience" and its "impact" on me. Nothing in my life has had as much impact on me as this, and I feel like I have to tell you about it. Plus, I do have to explain the dip in my grades last year, and why I'm taking courses at the community college.

In the middle of my junior year, I passed out in the back of a car after a party, and two boys took advantage of me. The thing you might not expect is that the worst part of the experience was the

months afterwards, when rumors flowed all around my school about me, and I was bullied viciously. At the time, I didn't know how to handle my emotions. That was part of the reason I went to the party when I wasn't supposed to, part of the reason I got so drunk, why I was so vulnerable. It was the reason I couldn't handle the teasing and ostracizing afterwards. It got so bad, I even tried to kill myself. My grades fell so far that spring because of all that.

I was on a bad path for a long time. But it turned around when I found my friends online. If it weren't for the internet, I don't know if I would be here to write to you today. At first, they helped me just by understanding what I was going through. It was so nice to settle in and talk to them about what I was feeling. And they knew exactly what to say because they felt it too.

The other thing that helped is that we are all horror fans. We all pick the same movies to watch on Saturday nights, and we talk about them the whole time. It's a kind of escape for us. There is only so much you can say about your own disgust and worry and guilt. It's fun to switch over and debate, instead, about whether Morgan Freeman should have stopped Brad Pitt from killing Kevin Spacey at the end of *Se7en* or not. (I hope I didn't just spoil the movie for you.)

But through these conversations, these friends have helped me

find a way to talk about what happened to me to people who haven't had the experience. I feel them now, standing beside me as I try to write this essay and explain.

The part that is hardest about it is that I don't really know what happened. So how can I explain? I was unconscious for it. I'm almost jealous of my friend JillyBean16, who says she told her story so many times, to family and police and eventually in court, that she feels like the thing didn't even really happen to her. It's turned into just this story she tells; whenever she wants to not think about it, she just has to tell herself the story, and the memories settle back down into this kind of blank feeling. I've told her I'm jealous of that, because I don't even have a story to tell. I start out with that blank feeling, and sink lower from there.

So I don't know what else to tell you. I guess, to conclude, I'll just say that I've already been through an incredibly hard experience, but I survived. And I've gotten better. I've been working hard at my classes. I feel strong. I feel ready for UVA.

Alice Lovett  
10/27/2000  
588 words

GREAT opening!  
I'm hooked!

**College Application Essay DRAFT 3**

Last night, I was up until two o'clock talking to my friends on a message board about whether or not I should write this essay. Most of them said I should not.

These friends are my closest in the world, although we've never met in person. But we have two things in common. The first is, we are all fans of horror movies. Every Saturday night, we all pick two movies that we watch together, pressing Play at the same time and then chatting as we go. It's not only fun, but I learn so much.

For example, one thing I learned from my friend JillyBean16 is that in the book *The Shining*, the family drives a red punch buggy. In the movie *The Shining*, when Hallorann is driving up to save them, he passes a red punch buggy crashed on the side of the road, impaled by an 18-wheeler. It's a foreshadowing about Hallorann (who's about to get smashed himself), but also, because Hallorann doesn't die in the book, it's also Stanley Kubrick's way of saying to Stephen King,

this is *my* movie, I'm smashing *your* book.

I include that story because I want to tell you something similar:  
this college essay is not going to go the way you expect. *Wow. Yes! You have my attention. 😊*

Because the second thing my friends on the horror message board and I have in common is that we are all survivors of sexual assault. I was assaulted last winter. Afterwards, I was bullied so badly, I had to go on medical leave from school and had to work hard to repair my grades and get to the point where I am today. I was only able to do it because of the support of my friends online.

Most of them say that I should not write this essay. Their guidance counselors and parents have told them to write about constructive experiences instead of their trauma. But this isn't the first time I've disagreed with them.

We have another running argument, about a famous Stephen King quote, which they all love. King wrote, "Monsters are real. Ghosts are, too. They live inside us—and sometimes they win." My friends all agree that the worst monsters are our own internal demons, like jealousy and anger, and that those demons torture us much longer than it would be humanly possible for any real person to do.

I think that's a very mature way of thinking about the world, and it's a good way to help yourself recover. But I disagree. I think

that there are real monsters. They cheat, and lie, and cause injustice. And I believe ~~it's~~ we have to stand up to them.

That's why I decided to write this essay. Terrible things are possible. I don't want to have to smile and write a sweet essay pretending that I've overcome some kind of adversity and reached a happy ending. I'm doing better, but I still have a long way to go.

I want to be a journalist. And as a journalist, you have to tell the truth. You tell the world about the monsters, so that everyone knows to watch out.

And that's why I want to go to UVA. I know I can't reach this goal alone. I've learned that I need the support of other passionate people. I know that with the new friends I will make in Charlottesville, and with my own hard work, I'll be ready to reach my goals and stand up to all of the monsters, inside and out.

Alice: Let's talk.  
- Ms. MC

### **DRAFT ONE MILLION**

Stephen King once wrote, “Monsters are real. Ghosts are, too. They live inside us.” I’m a member of a message board of other horror fans who all debate this quote a lot. We are also all young women, and we all have seen examples of sexism in the world.

We talk to each other about how we’re going to overcome sexism. That’s the biggest adversity young women face today.

### **DRAFT ONE MILLION AND ONE**

One time my mother took me on a very special shoe-shopping trip. We bought shoes, and I can’t wait to wear them at UVA.

See? Everything has been fine in my life. The end.

### **DRAFT FORGET THIS STUPID THING**

Stephen King once wrote, “Monsters are real. Ghosts are, too.

They live inside of us—and sometimes they win.” My mother and I debated this quote once on a very, very, *very* special shoe-shopping trip.

Not for Distribution

Alice Lovett  
11/21/2000  
535 words

#### College Application Essay DRAFT 4

My mother stands in the doorway, still wearing her work outfit and the white tennis shoes she wears to commute. “I’m taking you to the mall,” she says.

I clean up my physics homework, shuffling papers and textbooks into a pile, and wonder why we’re going to the mall. We’ve always been close. But my mother works long hours at her job, and I’ve been studying nearly nonstop this year, catching up and finishing my high school diploma after an illness took me out of school in the spring of my junior year. We don’t have a lot of time for mother-daughter shopping trips.

But in the car, I knew that this day was special. She turned down the radio and told me a story about the importance of shoes. *Could be a good opening line?*

After college, my mother moved to Philadelphia and got a job at the city’s planning department. When she had interviewed, she didn’t have anything to wear except for a pair of sensible, flat brown

Can you show this?  
Maybe with a quote?

loafers that were hand-me-downs. The interview didn't go well. The boss was brusque and cruel. This was in the seventies, when women still had to fight for respect in the office. The boss even put a hand on her lower back as he walked her to the door. He insulted her and gave her the job in the same sentence: "Our top candidate took a better-paying job already." *Wow. Great (& terrible!) line.*

What my mother hadn't realized was that she wouldn't get her paycheck until she had worked two weeks. She ate nothing but peanut butter that whole time, stretching out the last of her graduation money.

And when she finally got that paycheck? She felt so good. She was the first woman in her family to go to college, and most of her aunts and female cousins had never even worked. Delirious with the pleasure of having earned her own money, she spent the entire paycheck on a pair of new shoes for herself.

We looked for the same pair of shoes at the store, but of course they don't make that style anymore. Instead, we bought a pair of black Mary Janes.

Like my mother's shoes, I know this pair is going to help me stand tall. Because my mom said that her shoes were like magic. Even though the heels were only an inch high, she was amazed on Monday morning when she found herself in the elevator, standing

next to her intimidating boss, and discovered that they were eye level. All along, he'd only been an inch taller than her. But that tiny difference was invisible until she'd overcome it.

This story inspired me. I won't have to face the same kind of sexism when I get a job, but as an aspiring journalist, I know that there are still hurdles I'll have to face. I know UVA will prepare me for them. *Let's get specific.*

And I know that my mother prepared me for them. I'm saving the shoes she bought me that day, a pair of nice black Mary Janes, for my first month at UVA. I want to wear them at convocation. That extra inch of height will remind me that I'll go far, because I'm standing on my mother's shoulders.

*Alice: I'm so proud of you. This is a GREAT essay! One more draft to iron it out and make it sing—plus a proofread!—and we'll be there! You're going to do big things—I can tell. 😊  
— Ms. MC*