Selections from
Please Don't Kill the Freshman
FROM FUTURE TENSE PRESS

List of Characters

Linux Shoe — fourteen years old. freshman. best friend. homosexual. beautiful. has made me cry many, many times. disgustingly insightful. plays cello. reads philosophy. asked me why Tosca had to die.

Plum Sweater — eighteen years old. senior. of the literary persuasion. very dry laugh. very soft (muddy brown) hair.

Wonka Boi — fifteen years old. freshman. very fifteen. listens to angry music. thinks his parents are out to make his life a living hell. whines. needs someone. a teenager. has completely random moments of blue-eyed beauty.

Case Boy — fifteen years old. freshman. quiet in his own repressed way. listens to angry music. speaks of random things. we could kill each other with our words but we choose not to. likes anime. guinea pigs, and the Metallica t-shirt I gave him for his birthday. also prone to expressing his violence through video games.

Techno Boy — seventeen years old. junior. has a red car. works at a restaurant. it hurts when he smiles. very, very beautiful. dandruff. likes computers. electronic music. seeking a girl that won't eat his heart with a steak knife.
**Fishsticks** — English teacher with pedophilic tendencies. Also known as the blond Beck wannabe. Listens to Radiohead, likes *The Odyssey* too much.

**Cherry Bitch** — Most beautiful girl ever. Sixteen years old, sophomore. Wears juicy red lipstick, smokes cigarettes like she wants to use them with her bright red mouth, makes art with her hands, makes sounds with her hands, makes beauty with her hands.

**Jar Guard** — English teacher who is far too nice. Too young to be burnt out yet. Listens to U2, enjoys the occasional back rub. Has a wife. Lets anyone write anything on the dry erase board in his classroom.

**Curry** — Fifteen years old. Freshman. Mother is literally insane. Very conservative family. He likes dressing up in woman's clothing (watched *Rocky Horror* too many times). Also enjoys listening to bad punk rock music.

### trois.dix-huit

Mocking me for my strength. They have none. Only a lack of dignity which allows them to make fools of themselves publicly. Too much to ask for them to play OUR music as they filed into the gym. Too much to ask that they stop talking for FIVE seconds while we try to. Microphones are useless. School assemblies, even when I'm a part of them, are nauseating. They are vegetables; they should throw themselves at us. We tried. It was a multimedia presentation of guilt tactics. "Recycle or die" would have been a better slogan. I am such a loser geek. I'd burn this earth club t-shirt but I'm too lazy. And the toxins from the smoke would pollute the air. I try to remember to breathe .... Words are scarce, dreams are many. Blond curls in blue VW bug flipping over and over, unable to drive. Can't handle control. I pray not to die. This was only Saturday.

### trois.vingt-quatre

My biology teacher is trying to give a review lecture for the test on Friday. I could get a zero on the test and still have an A in the class. It's kind of depressing. I think my time is spent much more productively by writing, glaring at her, sipping orange juice, and nibbling on cheerios. I am not an elitist. I am just a cheerio junkie. I wish I had my Mother Jones. It's easier to read and drown out her voice. Rejected by the Plum Sweater and muddied brown hair. Loved and then rejected. Charmed and then stoked. STOP ABUSING ME!!! Oh, but I want more. Please don't stop. Fishsticks (blond Beck wannabe) on videotape, Aerie Poetry Slam 2000. He reads his sexy poem in his sexy voice. "You know he's talking about his ten-year-old niece, don't you?" People laugh, then ashamed silence. Unable to laugh out loud at the truth. The man is a pedophile. No! No more di-hybrid crosses or punnet squares or sex-linked double allele chromatic heterozygous codominant genotypic ratios! I'm going to start drooling like the rest of my classmates. And then, after that, she'll break out the safety crayons and we can have art time. Orange juice and honey nut cheerios are a delicacy. I had to argue with my science teacher last year to get into this class and now I sit here with these morons who don't give a. Arggh. I will not be an angry twenty-something. I will not grow into an angry twenty-something. I will not .... meet my fate.

### trois.vingt-sept

Plum Sweater on my voice mail. Heart palpitations induced. What a punk rock goddess. I'm going to faint. My fingers are shaking. I can't decide whether to squeal excitedly with a friend or call her back. I decide to call her. We laugh. Our voices are fake. She sounds so young. Painting pottery tomorrow? Great. Okay, I'll call you when I get home. I can't get over it. Is it a date? Is she interested in me? I'm so in love. I am SOOO ... fourteen. I can't stop shaking. She said she finds me “interesting.” My heart is pounding. I can't believe this. It's Plum Sweater.

### trois.vingt-huit

Plum Sweater. What a bitch. She has company, church, cleaning, *The West Wing*. After more than twenty-four hours of a
girl-scout-knotted stomach and shaking hands, I am told I have to wait until Saturday. I'm going to wring her neck after I hold her forever. My fingers click idly. I find this boy I know. I ask him to come over. I tell him I can't be alone. My shiny black Linux Shoe agrees and scurries. We eat toasted cheese sandwiches and I rub my nose into his 100% cotton trousers. Such a marvelous frag. He tells me about making love on fresh-cut grass. I want to cry. I'm supposed to be hugging a Plum Sweater. These gray trousers will have to do.

trois.trente-et-un

I take a shower and sigh. I am not looking forward to Plum Sweater, amazingly. We chase each other through the phone lines. Eventually, 2:45, I get as little work done on my eight-minute speech as possible. We lazily paint pottery. She tells me about choosing a school, her best friend's competitiveness, birth control, her mother walking in on her when she was having sex. I feel so small. I realize I have no chance. I return home to my friends and they console me. I attempt to write my eight-minute speech. I hate my biology teacher. My brother packs to go back to college. I flip through the pictures he brought home. I smile at the picture of his friend, Rob. I want to steal one but I am too nice. I shouldn't pine after college boys, anyway. I have no chance. After useless hours spent typing and clicking, I curl into my empty double bed and the TV comforts me. The noise becomes softer and I fade into the darkness.

quatres.quatre

I promise myself I'm going to laugh about this someday. My dreams are obscure and frightening but I refuse to leave them. Linux Shoe greets me in the hallway. We pace to the choir room and gnaw on our cuticles. I shuffle to the classroom of France and Midwestern Tackiness. I ask her if I can turn something in and she tells me not to be rude. I promise myself I'm going to laugh about this someday... Elijah Wood can't act. His portrayal of Huck Finn makes me want to vomit. My Linux Shoe sits by me at lunch in his classic black jacket. I squeeze his blue-jean-covered knee and hate the Case Boy for trying to tell me that Linux Shoe will not find anyone. To quote Wonka Boi: "LYING BITCH." He is right. So right. I can't wait to program a computer and get yelled at by a boring ex-hippie (a substitute, obviously) ... Linux Shoe follows me home and into my bed. We waste time, drinking too much, holding each other. We finally give up and walk around the neighborhood, softly revealing secrets to each other in the clean quiet of the evening. Fresh-cut grass is everywhere. We laugh. We sip cold water and continue to giggle. I try, so hard, not to cry when he leaves.

quatres.onze

Linux Shoe whines loudly about his inability to write, lack of a boyfriend, overinterest in the straight boys. I sigh and hit his cheek with the back of my hand. He honestly believes that if he does not have a boyfriend before he turns fifteen, his entire life will be over. No reason to live. No will to go on. Because, so far, this is his entire life. And he's gone his entire life without a boyfriend. I laugh and shake my head. When he sits still, he wears a cloak of longing that presses down on his shoulders, pushing him into the ground, weighing down the corners of his mouth. I keep my mouth closed, because if I opened it, tears would come out. Some beautiful man is going to steal him away from me someday. Too soon. Far, far too soon.

quatres.dix-huit

Camped out in front of my locker like a homeless person. Waiting for a security guard to yell at me. They pass by numerous times and do not even look at me. I should be in class. Instead, I open Bukowski's Tales of an Ordinary Madness and read with a look of confusion on my face. I find this beautiful. No, one, notices...
Cherry Bitch lets me wear her cat-eyed glasses. I feel silly and vain and I like it. I walk home and eventually kiss the Wonka Boi (supposed to be gay). He shoves his tongue in my mouth anxiously, awkwardly. Too much like a child ripping open a shiny Christmas present only to be disappointed. I don't understand my need to mess with unattractive people. Curry wore a candy necklace today and I tried to bite off some candy and ended up making his neck bleed. What a tragedy. My hands are cold. My feet hurt. Career week only gets worse, I think. Tomorrow we have to write notes to the presenters we saw today (like the woman from State Farm who tried to convince us that selling insurance was a fun, interesting career field . . . LYING WHORE). That could take at least two hours . . . Vivarin. I believe this calls for Vivarin.

**Quatre.vingt-trois**

The weekend finally ends. Before the memories melt together like globs of chicken fat, I would like to press my hands into the sticky wet cement for a few moments:

- Sleeping on the floor of Cherry Bitch’s beach house right next to the giant window. Throwing my arm over her side and holding her against me. Her fingers hold my hand until they become limp one by one and I know she’s fallen asleep.
- Wearing my brand-new Powell’s sweatshirt for three days in a row. It had taffy, bodily fluids, food, sand, and dirt on it by Sunday evening.
- Eating ice cream cones and squeaky cheese at the Tillamook Factory.
- Plum Sweater being cold and then forgiving. I nearly died.
- Holding Linux Shoe as I fall asleep, saddened when he’s forced to go back to the boys’ side of the house.
- Eating, SO MUCH FOOD. Teenagers are cows.
- Laughing at Cherry Bitch: *tha po-liec*.
  Wandering up and down the beach at night in the dark listening to the waves.

**Quatre.vingt-quatre**

Seven weeks left of this building. I am frightened. Very frightened. Sometimes the entire world scares the crap out of me. I still feel vague and cryptic. Season finales for all my favorite TV shows. The never-ending purr of lawn mowers in my neighborhood. Sky continually a beautiful shade of light blue. More reasons for fear. Some of my friends are driving, smoking pot, piercing their lips. I vaguely remember finger-painting with tempera paints when I was seven years old. Sometimes the cycle of life makes my fingers twitch and wrists ache. A wad of dictionary pages grows larger in my stomach. I fear driving. I fear senior prom. I fear graduation. I fear college. I fear relationships. I fear life. I curl up in the fetal position on my bedroom floor, the one in the first house I lived in, the one with the elephant painted on the wall.

**Quatre.vingt-cinq**

Enough of my philosophical rambling. Okay, that’s a lie. Sometimes I’m sick of loving everyone. I’m sick of being the one people...
depend on. I'm sick of depending on people. I care so much the skin under my fingernails bleeds and turns black, but I am rarely held, recognized, encouraged. Sometimes loneliness makes me more vague and cryptic. Aerie people suggest I have my own book. I laugh and tell them yes. I narrow my submissions down to four. It is difficult, like losing children. I am aborting my words.

cinq.huit

My Linux Shoe is melancholy and I do not know how to help it. I get annoyed, push him away, give up. I tell him he is margarine, that he is my only joy and other contradictory things. Aerie's poetry slam in thirteen days, woohoo. Even though I'm sure it will mostly be trembling teenagers reciting poorly written love poems in crackly voices, I think it will be marvelous. I'm going to read one of Linux Shoe's poems and a few other writings. I have this feeling that I am running around and accomplishing nothing. This is springtime. I must resist the urge to place daisies in gun barrels. Last night my dad was driving me home from band practice and we passed by a fast food joint. EIGHT COP CARS WERE THERE TO BUST TWO GUYS! TWO! I counted. Pigs. Goddam pigs. I felt like screaming but I couldn't. My dad is the only one who would say, "Hey, wanna go back and look at what happened?" My mother would never do such a thing. She usually comes home, lights a cigarette, drinks liquor diluted in cheap soda, and reads crime novels. She is not a bad person. I worry that she is too unhappy. Case Boy has decided to make a political statement by wearing the same outfit every day until school ends. I admire his philosophy, though fear it is misguided. A girl named Louisa wore the same green dress every day in the fall. These girls in my biology class were talking about her. "Isn't that strange? I want to ask her about it, blah blah blah." I calmly interrupted, "Why does it matter? Why do you care?" And the girl with flat brown hair and boring lips, "Oh, I don't care. I just want to know why she'd do that. It's weird." These people drive me crazy.

cinq.onze

I worry about very, very tedious things. My friends are very, very horny. And sometimes, if I listen closely enough, I can't hear anything at all. I can hear black. Linux Shoe nods and tells me I think too much and say too little. I never thought of myself as such a person but he is right. Sometimes I don't say what I think. That makes me human. He comes over and we sit in my nineteen-seventy-something rug and listen to the radio. The seats aren't even cracked. We ride public transportation and eat Mexican food and look at books and boys. He is not perfect. But he's the closest thing I've found.

cinq.vingt-et-un

I do not spend time in class today . . . I spend time in the lecture room, arranging black lights, feathers hanging from the ceiling, scribbling art with chalk. The room is art nouveau. Wonderful, as Cherry Bitch would say. Later that evening, she adorns a pair of wings and white clothing which electrifies under the black light (scotch tape does too). It is a slam. A slamming sort of slam. I read first, pieces I pretend are my own. Lips I pretend are my own. A voice I pretend is my own. The band drifts between my words (the beat of a drum and the hum of a strum of a guitar . . .) Absolutely fabulous, as Cherry Bitch would say. Later, I win a prize for best reading voice. Curry wins a prize for best overall piece. Plecks of spit hit the microphone as he recites his acceptance speech: "Holy crap." I laugh. Linux Shoe wears a wine-colored shirt (I swoon) and the evening is absolutely wonderful. The room is humid and quite moist, but the atmosphere is perfect . . . I'd die in that room, if I had a choice.

cinq.vingt-trois

There is an English teacher named Jar Guard. He doesn't teach my English class, but I certainly enjoy him more than Fishsticks. His
wife has him on a diet. Every day at lunch, he eats two pieces of fruit, fat-free yogurt, or some other tasteless dish. He screws up his face in disgust. I tell him that I would never put him on a diet. I want to marry a man like him. Soft but not fat. Intelligent but not arrogant. Owns a sticker that says "Tough Guys Write Poetry." Black hair and funky glasses. Wears pin-stripe pants, shiny black shoes, and casual-dress shirts. He's only been teaching for three years, so he isn't burnt out yet. One of the few teachers who still seems alive. If I were a teacher, I would lose all hope very quickly. I lost all hope as a student quite a while ago. He continues to smile and walks with his shoulders back, hips moving. And maybe because he remembers those random things that mean everything, "You're a very beautiful woman," he tells me. I smile too, for the first time in months.

cinq.vingt-quatre

Techno Boy, the one who took me to McDonald's so long ago, gives me a ride home in his air-conditioned car. Reluctantly, I agree to go home with him. He does not want to be alone but he does not say so. His parents collect porcelain figures with rosy cheeks. Cats, women, bears, pigs. All made of pale ceramic. He claims they are worth upwards of three hundred dollars. I've never trusted people who so greatly value material possessions. Value them enough to choke their homes with them. He shows me the basement: twenty thousand heaving worn brown boxes filled to the brim with Christmas decorations, more porcelain figurines arranged on shelves, and two separate bullet-making contraptions. I feel overwhelmed. I think his house would make a wonderful bonfire. I simply nod. His hands shake very, very badly all the time. He tried to move out of his parents' house because they are verbally abusive. He tried to smile at me when he showed me his bedroom. Sharr's menu lying on the floor. (I have to memorize it for work, he tells me. I open it up and ask, How much is a Denver omelette? He smiles painfully. 6.49? I tell him he is right, even though he is forty cents off.)

cinq.vingt-six

Curry wears his Old Navy and drinks his 24 oz. lattes from Starbucks while hateful-condemning all of society. Why? Because THEY are so snide and ignorant. Like listening to Bad Religion makes you some sort of pseudo anarchist god. Okay, so maybe I exaggerate a little. He isn't that bad. But some people are. A stoner girl in a few of my classes hates the popular people who wear Converse shoes. Like when you go to buy Converse shoes, she thinks you should have to show your anarchy-punk ID card. Another girl in our class wears Converse shoes and Gap jeans, an ultimate sin to the punk stoner girl. All I wanna know, all I really wanna know is: When the is this shit going to matter? Jesus Christ, people, let it go. Let it be.

cinq.trente

I watch a movie called Edge of Seventeen. I feel like I'm going to be sick and that's okay. Instead of eating too much, I'm thinking too much and I need to throw up some of these thoughts before something vile happens. I am thinking that I don't need to prove myself to the people who don't matter. I am thinking that I love Linux Shoe and he could be taken away from me at any moment. I am thinking of longing. I am thinking that I would like to be six years old or nineteen years old. I am thinking I am indecisive. Mostly I am longing. I am convincing myself of many, many things, but my longing is a constant. My longing is riding my bike with pink streamers on the handles to 7-eleven and buying a Slurpee. My longing is a soft boy to hold me. My longing is to be rid of my empathy. Out of all the things I am thinking and convincing myself of, the only thing I know for sure is that it's okay. It's okay to convince and to long and to think. And perhaps most importantly, I know what matters. Linux Shoe matters. My words matter. The people I love matter. Not that building, not those letters on that piece of paper, not the teachers who yell, not the teachers who tape pictures of pretty blond girls to their podiums, not the crackly
voice on the PA, not the scores from the "state," not the stupid girls or the angry boys. As simple as this may be, I sit and cry because no one else will know this for a very, very long time ... I do I really know? Nothing. I'm fourteen. I am a girl in a pretty little neighborhood. What do I know?

six.m.e.u.f.

Stepping in horseshit is never as glamorous as it seems. Stepping in horseshit when you're behind a float that leaks water is even less glamorous, if you can imagine. I have no appetite when it is over. I just want to go home and sit. I want to pretend that I am not such a band geek and that I do not spend my Saturdays wearing a shako and playing a brass instrument. But sometimes life is like that. I don't get much choice. I come home, try to clean myself of the stench (band geek or horseshit ... Sometimes I can't tell which is worse, so I scrub extra hard). I have to leave soon, anyway, to go burn dead animal flesh with the literary department from school. We listen to Bob Dylan and talk about what is important and play basketball and I touch my Linux shoe until my hands bleed rose petals. He is leaving for Singapore on Wednesday. He matters to me like my shoelaces. Always there, always wrapped between the holes. Everything falls apart when he's gone. I can't walk, I trip and fall and lick the ground. After the BBQ, I continue to be a teenager. We go to a double feature at a cheesy theater in the ghetto part of the suburbs. I remember being little and thinking that the teenagers who sat in the back row were obnoxious and stupid and I never wanted to be like them. I am, now. We laugh and rest our feet on the back of the seats. We throw candy and poke each other. I wonder how long I can do this before I am the adult sitting in front of myself, rolling my eyes and just wanting to watch the movie. The second movie is so bad we leave during the middle and wander around the empty streets. I'm not too scared because one boy has a knife. We act like teenagers. We do stupid things. One girl steals
Audio:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_iOSOjhR_ZyMTRBV0prNIIVMjg/view?usp=sharing