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English Class

Assignment (Due December 8)

Here at Albert Einstein High School we have a very diverse student population. Over one hundred and seventy different nations, religions and ethnic groups are represented by our student body. In the space below, describe the manner in which your family celebrates the uniquely American holiday, Thanksgiving. Please utilize appropriate margins.

My Thanksgiving
by Mia Thermopolis

6:45 a.m.

*Roused by the sound of my mother vomiting. She is well into her third month of pregnancy now. According to her obstetrician, all the throwing up should stop in the next trimester. I can't wait. I have been marking the days off on my *NSYNC calendar. (I don't really like *NSYNC. At least, not that much. My best friend Lilly made me the calendar as a joke. Except that one guy really is pretty cute.)*

7:45 a.m.

Mr Gianini, my new stepfather, knocks on my door. Only now I am supposed to call him Frank. This is very difficult to remember due to the fact that at school, where he is my second period Algebra teacher, I am supposed to call him Mr Gianini. So I just don't call him anything (to his face).

It's time to get up, Mr Gianini says. We are having Thanksgiving at his parents' house on Long Island. We have to leave now if we are going to beat the traffic.

8:45 a.m.

There is no traffic this early on Thanksgiving Day. We arrive at Mr G's parents' house in Sagaponack three hours early.

Mrs Gianini (Mr Gianini's mother, not my mother. My mother is still Helen Thermopolis because she is fairly well-known as a painter under that name, and also because she does not believe in the cult of the patriarchy) is still in curlers. She looks very surprised. This might not only be because we arrived so early, but also because no sooner had my mother entered the house than she was forced to run for the bathroom with her hand pressed over her mouth, on account of the smell of the roasting turkey. I am hoping this means that my future half-brother or sister is a vegetarian, since the smell of meat cooking used to make my mother hungry, not nauseated.

My mother already informed me in the car on the way over from Manhattan that Mr Gianini's parents are very old-fashioned and are used to enjoying a conventional Thanksgiving meal. She does not think that they will appreciate hearing my traditional Thanksgiving speech about how the Pilgrims were guilty of committing mass genocide by giving their new Native American friends blankets filled with the smallpox virus, and that it is reprehensible that we, as a country, annually celebrate this rape and destruction of an entire culture.

Instead, my mother said, I should discuss more neutral topics, such as the weather.

I asked if it was all right if I discussed the astonishingly high rate of attendance at the Reykjavik opera house in Iceland (over ninety-eight per cent of the country's population has seen Tosca *at least once).*

My mother sighed and said, 'If you must,' which I take to be a sign that she is beginning to tire of hearing about Iceland.

Well, I am sorry, but I find Iceland extremely fascinating and I will not rest until I have visited the ice hotel.

9:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

I watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade with Mr Gianini Senior in what he calls the rec room.

They don't have rec rooms in Manhattan.

Just lobbies.

Remembering my mother's warning, I refrain from repeating another one of my traditional holiday rants – that the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade is a gross example of American capitalism run amok. I mean, using cute animal-shaped balloons to lure children into begging their parents to buy them products that they don't need and the manufacturing of which is contributing to the destruction of our planet?

I am sorry, but that is just sick.

Besides, at one point during the broadcast I caught sight of Lilly standing in the crowd outside Office Max on Broadway and Thirty-Seventh, her video camera clutched to her slightly squished-in face (so much like a pug) as a float carrying Miss America and William Shatner of Star Trek *fame passed by. So I know Lilly is going to take care of denouncing Macy's on the next episode of her public access television show,* Lilly Tells It Like It Is *(every Friday night at nine, Manhattan cable channel 67).*

12:00 p.m.

Mr Gianini Junior's sister arrives with her husband, their two kids and the pumpkin pies. The kids, who are my age, are twins – a boy, Nathan, and a girl, Claire. I know right away that Claire and I are not going to get along, because when we are introduced she looks me up and down the way the cheerleaders do in the hallway at school and goes, in a very snotty voice, 'You're *the one who's supposed to be a princess?'*

And while I am perfectly aware that at five foot nine inches tall, with no visible breasts, feet the size of snowshoes, and hair that sits in a tuft on my head like the end of a cotton bud, I am the biggest freak in the freshman class of Albert Einstein High School For Boys (made co-educational circa 1975), I do not appreciate being reminded of it by

girls who do not even bother finding out that beneath this mutant façade beats the heart of a person who is only striving, just like everybody else in this world, to find self-actualization.

Not that I even care what Mr Gianini's niece Claire thinks of me. I mean, she is wearing a pony-skin miniskirt. And it is not even imitation pony-skin. She must know that a horse had to die just so she could have that skirt, but she obviously doesn't care.

Now Claire has pulled out her mobile phone and gone out on to the deck where the reception is best (even though it is thirty degrees outside, she apparently doesn't mind. She has that pony-skin to keep her warm, after all). She keeps looking in at me through the sliding glass doors and laughing as she talks on her phone.

I don't care. At least I am not wearing the skin of a murdered equine.

Nathan – who is dressed in baggy jeans and has a pager, in addition to a lot of gold jewellery – asks his grandfather if he can change the channel. So instead of traditional Thanksgiving viewing options, such as football or the Lifetime channel's made-for-TV movie marathon, we are now forced to watch MTV 2. *Nathan knows all the songs and sings along with them. Most of them have dirty words that have been bleeped out, but Nathan sings them anyway.*

1:00 p.m.

The food is served. We begin eating.

1:15 p.m.

We finish eating.

1:20 p.m.

I help Mrs Gianini clean up. She says not to be ridiculous and that I should go and 'have a nice gossip' with Claire.

It is frightening, if you think about it, how clueless old people can be sometimes.

Instead of going to have a nice gossip with Claire, I stay where I am

and tell Mrs Gianini how much I am enjoying having her son live with us. Mr G is very good about helping around the house and has even taken over my old job of cleaning the toilets. Not to mention the thirty-six-inch TV, pinball machine and foozball table he brought with him when he moved in.

Mrs Gianini is immensely gratified to hear this, you can just tell. Old people like to hear nice stuff about their kids, even if their kid, like Mr Gianini, is thirty-nine-and-a-half years old.

3:00 p.m.

We have to leave if we are going to beat the traffic home. I say goodbye. Claire does not say goodbye back to me, but Nathan does. He advises me to keep it real. Mrs Gianini gives us a lot of leftover turkey. I thank her, even though I don't eat turkey, being a vegetarian and am virulently opposed to the mass slaughter of helpless fowls every time a holiday rolls around.

6:30 p.m.

We finally make it back into the city, after spending three and a half hours in bumper-to-bumper traffic along the Long Island Expressway. Though there is nothing very express about it, if you ask me.

I barely have time to change into my baby-blue, floor-length Armani sheath dress and matching ballet flats before the limo honks downstairs and Lars, my bodyguard, arrives to escort me to my second Thanksgiving dinner.

7:30 p.m.

Arrive at the Plaza Hotel. I am greeted by the concierge, who announces me to the masses assembled in the Palm Court:

'Presenting Her Royal Highness Princess Amelia Mignonette Grimaldi Thermopolis Renaldo.'

God forbid he should just say Mia.

My father, the Prince of Genovia, and his mother, the Dowager

Princess, have rented the Palm Court for the evening in order to throw a Thanksgiving banquet for all of their friends. Despite my strenuous objections, Dad and Grandmere refuse to leave New York City until I have learned everything there is to know about being a princess . . . or until my formal introduction to the Genovian people the day before Christmas, whichever comes first. I have assured them that it isn't as if I am going to show up at the castle and start hurling olives at the ladies-in-waiting and scratching myself under the arms. I mean, I am fourteen years old – I do have some idea how to act, for crying out loud.

But Grandmere, at least, does not seem to believe this and so she is still subjecting me to daily princess lessons. Lilly recently contacted the United Nations to see whether these lessons constitute a human rights violation. She believes it is unlawful to force a minor to sit for hours practising tipping her soup bowl away from her – 'Always, always, away from you, Amelia!' – in order to scrape up a few drops of lobster bisque.

The UN has so far been unsympathetic to my plight, but that, I believe, is only because they have never actually met Grandmere. Were they to witness for themselves the frightful visage – made all the scarier by the fact that years ago Grandmere had her eyeliner permanently tattooed on to her lids, not to mention the fact that she shaves off her eyebrows every day and then draws on new ones in black pencil – hovering over me during these torture sessions, they'd send over a hostage negotiator before you could say Kofi Annan.

It was Grandmere's idea to have what she calls an 'old-fashioned' Thanksgiving dinner featuring mussels in a white wine sauce, squab stuffed with fois gras, lobster tails, and Iranian caviar, which you could never get before because of the embargo. She has invited two hundred of her closest friends, plus the Emperor of Japan and his wife, since they were in town anyway for a world trade summit.

That's why I had to wear ballet flats. Grandmere says it's rude to be taller than an emperor.

8:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.

I make polite conversation with the empress while we eat. Like me, she was just a normal person until one day she married the emperor and became royal. I, of course, was born royal. I just didn't know it until last October when my dad found out he couldn't have any more kids, due to his chemotherapy for testicular cancer having rendered him sterile. Then he had to admit he was actually a prince and all, and that though I am illegitimate, since my dad and my mom were never married, I am still the sole heir to the Genovian throne.

And even though Genovia is a very small country (population 50,000) crammed into a hillside along the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and France, it is still this very big deal to be princess of it.

Not a big enough deal for anyone to raise my allowance higher than ten dollars a week, apparently. But a big enough deal that I have to have a bodyguard follow me around everywhere I go just in case some Euro-trash terrorist with a ponytail and black leather trousers takes it into his head to kidnap me.

The empress knows all about this – what a bummer it is, I mean, being just a normal person one day and then having your face on the cover of People *magazine the next. She even gave me some advice: she told me I should always make sure my kimono is securely fastened before I raise my arm to wave to the populace.*

I thanked her, even though I don't actually own a kimono.

11:30 p.m.

I am so tired on account of having gotten up so early to go to Long Island, I have yawned in the empress's face twice. I have tried to hide these yawns the way Grandmere taught me to – by clenching my jaw and refusing to open my mouth. But this only makes my eyes water and the rest of my face stretch out like I am hurtling through a black hole. Grandmere gives me the evil eye over her salad with pears and walnuts, but it is no use. Even her malevolent stare cannot shake me from my state of extreme drowsiness.

Finally, my father notices and grants me a royal reprieve from dessert. Lars drives me back to the apartment. Grandmere is clearly upset because I am leaving before the cheese course. But it is either that or pass out in the fromage bleu. I know that in the end Grandmere will have retribution, undoubtedly in the form of forcing me to learn the names of every member of the Swedish royal family, or something equally heinous.

Grandmere always gets her way.

12:00 a.m.

After a long and exhausting day of giving thanks to the founders of our nation – those genocidal hypocrites known as the Pilgrims – I finally go to bed.

And that concludes Mia Thermopolis's Thanksgiving.

Over.

That is what my life is. O-V-E-R.

I know I have said that before, but this time I really mean it.

And why? Why THIS TIME? Surprisingly, it's not because:

Two months ago I found out that I'm the heir to the throne of a small European nation, and that at the end of this month I am going to have to go to said small European nation and be formally introduced for the first time to the people over whom I will one day reign, and who will undoubtedly hate me, because given that my favourite shoes are my combat boots and my favourite TV show is *Baywatch*, I am so not the royal princess type.

Or because:

My mother, who is expecting to give birth to my Algebra teacher's child in approximately six months, recently eloped with said Algebra teacher.

Or even because:

At school they've been loading us down with so much homework – and after school, Grandmere's been torturing me so endlessly with all the princess stuff I've got to learn by Christmas – that I haven't even been able to keep up with this journal, let alone anything else.

Oh, no. It's not because of any of that. Why is my life over?

Because I have a boyfriend.

And, yes, at fourteen years of age, I suppose it's about time. I mean, all my friends have boyfriends. All of them, even Lilly, who blames the male sex for most, if not all, of society's ills.

And, OK, Lilly's boyfriend is Boris Pelkowski, who may, at the age of fifteen, be one of the nation's leading violin virtuosos, but that doesn't mean he doesn't tuck his sweater into his trousers, or that more often than not he doesn't have food in his braces. Not what I would call ideal boyfriend material, but Lilly seems to like him which is all that matters.

I guess.

I have to admit, when Lilly – possibly the pickiest person on this planet (and I should know, having been best friends with her since the first grade) – got a boyfriend and I still didn't have one, I pretty much started to think there was something wrong with me. You know, besides my gigantism and what Lilly's parents, the Drs Moscovitz, who are psychiatrists, call my inability to verbalize my inner rage.

And then, one day, out of the blue, I got one. A boyfriend, I mean.

Well, OK, not out of the blue. Kenny, from my Bio. class, started sending me all these anonymous love letters. I didn't know it was him. I kind of thought (OK, hoped) someone else was sending them. But in the end, it turned out to be Kenny. And by then I was in too deep, really, to get out. So *voilà*. I had a boyfriend.

Problem solved, right?

Not. So not.

It isn't that I don't like Kenny. I do. I really do. We have a lot in common. For instance, we both appreciate the preciousness of not just human, but *all* life forms, and refuse to dissect foetal pigs and frogs in Bio. Instead, we are writing term papers on the life cycles of various grub and mealworms.

And we both like science fiction. Kenny knows a lot more about it than I do, but he has been very impressed so far

by the extent of my familiarity with the works of Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, both of whom we were forced to read in school (though he doesn't seem to remember this).

I haven't told Kenny that I actually find most science fiction boring, since there seems to be very few girls in it.

There are a lot of girl characters in Japanese anime, which Kenny also really likes, and which he has decided to devote his life to promoting (when he is not busy finding a cure for cancer). Unfortunately, I have noticed that most of the girls in Japanese anime seem to have misplaced their bras.

Plus I really think it might be detrimental to a fighter pilot to have a lot of long hair floating around in the cockpit while she is gunning down the forces of evil.

But like I said, I haven't mentioned any of this to Kenny. And mostly, we get along great. We have a fun time together. And in some ways, it's very nice to have a boyfriend, you know? Like, I don't have to worry now about not being asked to the Albert Einstein High School Non-Denominational Winter Dance (so-called because its former title, the Albert Einstein High School Christmas Dance, offended many of our non-Christmas-celebrating students).

And why is it that I do not have to worry about not being asked to the biggest dance of the school year, with the exception of prom?

Because I'm going with Kenny.

Well, OK, he hasn't exactly asked me yet, but he will. Because he is my boyfriend.

Isn't that great? Sometimes I think I must be the luckiest girl in the whole world. I mean, really. Think about it: I may not be pretty, but I am not grossly disfigured; I live in New

York City, the coolest place on the planet; I'm a princess; I have a boyfriend. What more could a girl ask for?

Oh, God.

WHO AM I KIDDING?????

This boyfriend of mine? Yeah, here's the scoop on him:

I DON'T EVEN LIKE HIM.

Well, OK, it's not that I don't like him. But this boyfriend thing, I just don't know. Kenny's a nice enough guy and all – don't get me wrong. I mean, he is funny and not boring to be with, certainly. And he's pretty cute, you know, in a tall, skinny sort of way.

It's just that when I see Kenny walking down the hall, my heart so totally doesn't start beating faster, the way girls' hearts start beating faster in those teen romances my friend Tina Hakim Baba is always reading.

And when Kenny takes my hand, at the movies or whatever, it's not like my hand gets all tingly in his, the way girls' hands do in those books.

And when he kisses me? Yeah, you know those fireworks people always talk about? OK, forget it about. No fireworks. Nil. *Nada.*

It's funny, because before I got a boyfriend I used to spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to get one and, once I got him, how I'd get him to kiss me.

But now that I actually have a boyfriend, mostly all I do is try to figure out how to get out of kissing him.

One way that I have found works quite effectively is the head turn. See, if you notice his lips coming towards you, you just turn your head at the last minute so all he gets is your cheek and maybe some hair.

I guess the worst thing is that when Kenny gazes deeply into my eyes – which he does a lot – and asks me what I am

thinking about, I am usually thinking about this one certain person.

And that person isn't Kenny. It isn't Kenny at all. It is Lilly's older brother, Michael Moscovitz, whom I have loved for – oh, I don't know, MY ENTIRE LIFE.

Not that he even knows I am alive, except as his little sister's best friend, but whatever.

Which is why I have decided I have to tell him. Kenny, I mean. About how I really feel.

That's why my life is over. Because *how* do you say to somebody who wants to hold your hand in the movies that you don't like him in that way? Especially when he's already asked you out a bunch of times and you've gone. And you knew full well the whole time that he wasn't asking you as a friend – he was asking you as a potential life mate.

Or a royal consort, as Grandmere would say.

Wait, though. It gets worse.

Because now it's like everybody considers us this big item. You know? Now we're Kenny-and-Mia. Now, instead of Lilly and me hanging out together Saturday nights, it's Lilly-and-Boris and Kenny-and-Mia. Sometimes my friend Tina Hakim Baba, and her boyfriend, Dave Farouq El-Abar, and my other friend Shameeka Taylor, and her boyfriend, Daryl Gardner, join us, making it Lilly-and-Boris and Kenny-and-Mia and Tina-and-Dave and Shameeka-and-Daryl.

So if Kenny and I break up, not only will it be this very big deal, but who am I going to hang around with on Saturday nights? I mean, seriously. Lilly-and-Boris and Tina-and-Dave and Shameeka-and-Daryl won't want just plain Mia along. I'll be like this seventh wheel.

Not to mention, if Kenny and I break up, who will I go to the Non-Denominational Winter Dance with?

Oh, God, I have to go now. Lilly-and-Boris and Tina-and-Dave and Kenny and I are supposed to go ice-skating at the Rockefeller Center.

All I can say is, be careful what you wish for. It just might come true.