

### Ode to the Smile Next to Me

You sit next to me in Mr. Cane's class  
English, room 131, third row, from 8:48 to 9:32 AM  
Never really saying a word, but I always know you're there  
Whether it's your usually blue pen clashing against your desk  
or your soft snores that now seem to be apart of of my everyday routine  
You're always there

I don't know much about you  
Not where you live, or who your mother and father are  
Or even if you have a pet or siblings  
But, I do know a few things

Your eyes crinkle when you laugh,  
and your smile seems to show all of your teeth  
Your hands cramp after writing for more than five minutes.  
You're overly generous with your school supplies  
You're always wearing long sleeve shirts,  
and blue, the color of your shirt, notebooks, book bag, pens, and shoes—is your favorite color.

You push your hair behind your ear when you're concentrating,  
But there's always that one piece,  
the one that's too short to stay behind your ear and so it dangles until you're driven to the point  
of insanity and throw your hair into a low bun.

I know you hate the sound a pencil makes when it touches the desk through your paper  
so you always stack two notebooks under it.  
I know your laces never seem to stay tied, so you tuck them in your shoe  
I know you always turn in your homework and have never missed a day of school.  
And I know you never stop smiling, never stop laughing.

But I didn't know your parents just died and you blame yourself.  
I didn't know your baby sister was lost in the foster care system and you saw her every night in  
your dreams.  
Or that your foster parents thought it was their right to do what they wanted to your body and  
you never told anyone because who would believe you?  
I never knew that when you left our class, you were attacked in the hallways and shunned in the  
cafeteria.  
I didn't know you avoided the bathroom because of the one time your tormentors found you in  
there, and no one heard you scream.  
And I didn't know that your long sleeve shirts served a purpose.  
I had no idea about the cutting that got so frequent that you had to switch to your legs from fear  
of someone noticing.

Is that why you stopped wearing shorts?

My deepest regret is that I didn't know the day you smiled directly at me and said bye as you walked out of our English class was the day you were going to go home, take the gun that you had been threatened with so many times, place it in your mouth and as a tear made its way down your cheeks...pull the trigger.

Your smiles were strategically placed masks, your laughs secret cries for help.  
For all the things that I knew, there was so much that I didn't.