

Honorable Finalist, Level III

Makiyah Brown

Letter to author Matthew Quick concerning his novel *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*

Dear Matthew Quick:

It was hard for me to talk about my situation to anyone. I felt as though no one understood me. That was until I read your book *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*. This book created so many unwanted emotions, making me wage a battle against myself. It opened my eyes to issues that needed to be addressed about mental health, sexual abuse, and suicide.

Unfortunately, I have personally run across sexual abuse multiple times in my life. I held a lot of anger and pain toward the ones who took advantage of me. Your character Leonard and I share this rage. I never felt like I could relate to people after what I had gone through. I felt that I could never go back and be myself again, that I would never be happy again. Trying to escape my life, I pretended to be someone, anyone, other than myself. I thought that doing so was my only chance of happiness. I really connected with Leonard during that moment in the story when he cut his hair. I was in pain and wanted to escape from it so I shaved my head. It's people like Leonard and I who just want and need people to talk to who will listen and understand. We couldn't even talk to our own families. I tend to keep memories and emotions tinged with pain locked inside a box which I hoped would never be opened. I realized after reading your book that in order to free myself I needed to unlock it and dump everything out.

Your book also brought up topics that are uncomfortable to talk about, but need to be addressed. Your book talks about mental health, bullying, suicide, and rape. Male rape isn't talked about enough or is barely addressed. But it is an issue that people face and are silenced on. Males can be traumatized just as much as females, but society has decided to not address the issue of male rape as often as they do the rape of women. Your book opened my eyes on issues that we don't normally talk about. I admire that.

Around the time I was reading the end of your book, my best friend, Alex, committed suicide. I wondered if some of the same exact things Leonard was thinking about in that moment under the bridge were in Alex's mind before he took his own life. I then began to feel a pain for not helping him more. This pain I experience is unbearable. I wish I could have saved my friend. But we all can't be saved. Teen suicide occurs at a high rate, yet schools do not educate us very well on it. Coming from a person who has dealt with suicide at first and second hand, I can tell you that suicide is NOT the answer. It is very damaging not only to oneself (of course) but also to families and friends. I am one of those friends.

Sometimes when we can't express our emotions, it helps and influences us to see other people express their own (at least it helped me). I've been bullied for a long time starting at a young age. For years, I have stifled the cries of agony over what people have said and done to me because I believed that no one would understand. Reading your book made me feel like I was talking to Leonard, and that *he* understood. I finally found someone to relate to, and that's all I ever asked for. However, I do contradict the ending of your novel. It was confusing and I didn't understand why. Then I realized that sometimes in life, events happen and we don't understand

why. We don't have the answers for everything. Your novel also taught me that it is good to talk about something that is bothering you. Keeping everything bottled up inside isn't healthy. There is only so much that a bottle can hold, and when you try to overfill it, pressure builds up and it spills. I was very close to exploding, but I believe your novel did help me regulate myself.

Your book has changed my view on things and has changed me as a person. This was a very heartfelt, painful, but moving book to read. I thank you for helping me through the dark times I was in. My eyes were opened a lot.

Sincerely,
Makiyah Brown