

Albert Bender
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Valedictorian

I hope you will understand what I am about to do. No, I'm not going to burn my diploma or snap off my bra and wave it just for the shock effect. I am going to vanish. "Impossible," you're probably thinking, but that is what everyone here at Valley Regional thought when I got 1600 on the SAT's and full scholarship offers from everywhere.

So don't think it's impossible. I am going to vanish, probably within the next few hours. Where I come from it is called the journey, something assigned to me even before the day John and Helen Roberts adopted and named me Mary Kathryn. I've been their little girl these eighteen years, but now my journey is to take me far away.

If you are wondering what I look like, stop letting your imagination deceive you. I'm not a green, three-legged creature with tentacles for arms and antennae protruding from a triangular head. I have blue eyes (two), shoulder-length brown hair, a nice smile, and, I think you'd agree, an even nicer body. You aren't the only beings who look the way you do. In fact, that is why we make visitation to this planet. And if you ~~could~~ could come with me when I leave, you'd see a world not much different from your own.

When we are born, those of us chosen to be mentors are given one special gift to help us learn the ways of the beings we visit. So it could be a scholar, poet, or athlete who dwells among you for a time. Then, when we are called, we return home to spend our lives teaching others about our experience. But before you think of us as selfish, we give a gift to our unwitting hosts each time one of us leaves. The man who walks away from his car mangled in a crash, the woman who

defies all medical opinions and gives birth, the low-income family who wins millions from a two-dollar ticket are some examples.

The most successful mentors are the ones who learn one thing particularly well, and, thus can be masters in their teaching. I want to be such a mentor. My area of expertise will be love. The love that my parents gave me these eighteen years will sustain me the rest of my life. Yes, I know how much grief they will suffer when I depart. I can only hope the gifts they receive over the years will help ease their pain; they have already received one. When I was four, my mother, despite the odds, conceived my brother David Michael. He is now the one who will have to help carry on.

So that's why I thought I'd tell you what I'm going to do. I think someone ought to know. Sure, I'll give my speech as valedictorian. I'll talk of our accomplishments, hopes, and fears. I'll thank everyone from the bottom of my heart (and I do have one). Then, I'll hug and kiss my family, my friends, and go off by myself. I've completed only part of my journey; the rest lies ahead.