

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

2006 MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL THREE — HONORABLE MENTION

Hi, Markus,

I'm not nineteen. I don't drive a cab. I'm definitely not male. And playing cards bores me. But Ed Kennedy in *I Am the Messenger* still struck me as uncannily similar to myself. So similar, in fact, that at first he bored me. Truth be told, it wasn't until Ed tried the first task on the first ace that I first thought, "Wow, this is going to be a really great book." And it wasn't until I savored the last word on the last page that I finally thought, "Whoa, wait, did that book just *inspire* me?"

It's funny that I've always loved to read but scoffed at the idea of being inspired by any of the books that I treasured so much. Even funnier is that I didn't realize this story's potential to be inspirational until all of the pages had slipped by and I had flipped shut the back cover. And then I wondered how I could have missed it. Maybe I was too busy envying your knack for twisting and molding language into beautiful new forms; maybe I was distracted by the smoothly subtle love story or the wry, wonderfully sarcastic humor; maybe I was just enjoying myself too much. But when I was finally able to wrench myself out of the world of Ed Kennedy and back to the slightly more mundane one that is mine, the realization trickled into my mind that something had changed since I met Ed.

I called my world mundane. Maybe a lot of teenagers would call it that. No doubt Ed, at the beginning of his story, would have no arguments with the description. The wonderful thing about the story is watching his world quickly change from dull to glittering. That transformation was thrilling; who doesn't love stunning changes for the better? What makes it inspirational, though, is the glimmer of reality that hangs around everything Ed does. Sure, it's bizarre that he receives cryptic playing cards in the mail detailing people he needed to do good deeds for. But really, he doesn't accomplish any spectacular feats in carrying out those deeds. Ed doesn't do anything that I couldn't do. Is it difficult to buy Christmas lights for a poor family, or to convince a crowd to show up at a church where an excellent priest preaches? Of course not. Sometimes the hardest part is figuring out what you need to do.

Not too long ago, I sat at a lunch table in the school cafeteria with a good friend of mine, Amanda, and watched members of a certain club shuffle around selling carnations. Amanda sighed, "Nobody's ever given me a flower," and I nodded. I knew how that felt. We would have left it at that, but when a girl came around with her bright selection, inspiration struck me hard. I pointed to Amanda's favorite color as I pulled out my wallet. This wide-eyed beam spread across her face as I handed her that simple present, and I thought to myself, "Well, what do you know? I'm like Ed!"

See, I may not live in Australia, or have a dog, or drink coffee, but Ed and I do agree on the most important things, like love and friendship and saving the world. His story opened my eyes to other stories that could be. Maybe anybody can be a hero; maybe I can. Maybe to somebody, I already am. If so, I've got you (and Ed) to thank for it.

With deep respect and fingers crossed for a sequel,

Molly Cavanaugh

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