

Outsider

W2

English

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Freshman

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What does it mean to be an outsider? It means I don't belong.

It means I have to explain the complicated story of my name every single time I introduce myself.

It means I shiver under four layers of clothing when everyone else is wearing short-sleeve T-shirts. It means I realize how heavy my accent is in the middle of a conversation and try to mitigate that situation.

It means I don't get that joke or that Martha Stewart reference. When everyone is dancing to the latest One Direction song, whatever that is, I am quiet because I have no clue what's going on.

It means multiplying each price tag by 66.89.

Sometimes, a meaningful sentence turns into a jumble of foreign sounds without my even realizing it. And other times, I have to stop in the middle of a sentence and struggle for a word that's about to tip over my tongue. I reach out to grab it only to watch it fall down the escarpment. It means I speak fluently but simultaneously struggle to categorize my words and translate in my head. It also means hiding that struggle.

It means despite the burning desire to touch someone's feet, I decide not to do it because I know it will make them uncomfortable. It means breaking tradition because there is no other option.

It means eating food that does not have a taste and I know the itch of craving food that cannot be obtained. It means when I send an anonymous note to someone, they know it is from me because I am the only one they know who spells the word "honour" with a "u."

It means having to justify my passion for mythology as an atheist.

It means people turn to me whenever something in connection with my culture comes up. It means people measure their cultural awareness by measuring their exposure to my experiences.

It means my friends feel safe sitting with me at lunch because they know that their annoying floor-mate is too racist to share her lunch table with me. It means never knowing exactly why they want to sit with me.

It means I have to cleave my identity from my poetry until I cannot even recognize it just so others can understand it.

It means, because I am different, I do belong.

That is what it means to be an outsider.