

Light, in my experiences and in some Humanist, atheist, and agnostic philosophies, symbolizes hope for a brighter future. I look at light, and think, it will burn out tonight, and we may be overwhelmed by darkness, and tomorrow, I know we will be given another chance to make something just a little better. We can light another candle in the morning, and watch the sun return again.

When I came to campus, I didn't know I brought a light that really mattered. I didn't know if I belonged here, if I could make a difference amid all the darkness. What could my one small, flame add to the sea of candles? And that's sort of the trick, isn't it? Alone, I flicker and dance in the biting winds, and when I throw all my heart into what I believe in, I am just strong enough to spit fire, and lash out, and carve out the path for what I want for the world. This kind of anger and passion can get me far, but it tends not to create, not to mend the broken heart and generate a force for good. I desperately want to fix the wrongs I see, and often feel I need to do it today, but without friends, without allies, I only get so far until I forget where I am, and why I keep going. #dory #justkeepsfloating

I came to Tufts because I believe that hope feeds off of hope. My fuel is the flames of those around me, the heroes I read about in news and in books, the friends I've had from the first day at Tufts, and the strangers I've met yesterday. And I try to remember that I will have a tomorrow, complete with new companionship, bringing new potential.

I see sparks in human connection - in the romantic, yes, but especially in the friendships, as we open ourselves up to clash and be molded by the ones we love. This connection is the spark to our own flame, what spurs us to burn brighter and longer, and it's the light in the doorway when we are alone that says, come in, I welcome you. Come share in my light. I know I might burn you, I know my words might leave scars, and for that I am sorry. But I also know that the warmth of a flame can be the crucial essence of hope that keeps us moving each other further than we thought possible. I find courage in you, my Tufts community.

In that vein of human connection, of pain and fire and hope and perseverance, I'd like to share some text written by Clementine von Radics, and shared with me by a very special friend.

"When you are 13 years old,
the heat will be turned up too high
and the stars will not be in your favor.
You will hide behind a bookcase
with your family and everything left behind.
You will pour an ocean into a diary.
When they find you, you will be nothing
but a spark above a burning bush,
still, tell them
Despite everything, I really believe people are good at heart.

When you are 15, you will be punished
for learning too proudly. A man
will climb onto your school bus and insist
your sister's name is your enemy.
When you do not hide,
he will point his gun at your temple
and fire three times. Three years later,
in an ocean of words, with no apologies,
you will stand before the leaders of the world
and tell them your country is burning.

When you are 16 years old,
you will invent science fiction.
The story of a man named Frankenstein
and his creation. Soon after you will learn
that little girls with big ideas are more terrifying
than monsters, but don't worry.
You will be remembered long after
they have put down their torches.

You will turn 18 with a baby on your back

leading Lewis and Clark
across North America.

You will turn 18
and become queen of the Nile.

You will turn 18
and bring justice to journalism.

You are now 18, standing on the precipice,
trembling before your own greatness.

This is your call to leap.

There will always be those
who say you are too young and delicate
to make anything happen for yourself.
They don't see the part of you that smolders.
Don't let their doubting drown out the sound
of your own heartbeat.

You don't need to grow up to find greatness.
You are stronger than the world has ever believed you to be.
The world laid out before you to set on fire.
All you have to do
is burn."

Marina Rakhilin