

Ashley’s Reads

“Sweetness,” Toni Morrison

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I like to think of books in terms of the seasons: some are appropriate for winter, some for fall, others for summer and spring. And I always associate Toni Morrison with fall. Her works, the short story “Sweetness” included, are unsettling and dreamlike, profound and life-changing. There’s a reason why she won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1987 novel “Beloved” and the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature. She was a brilliant, Howard and Cornell educated woman whose works are so, so good. “The Bluest Eye” (1970) and “Beloved” are two of my very favorite novels, but if I had to pick one, I would pick “Beloved.” It’s a compelling examination of generational trauma, heroism, family roles and the legacy of slavery in the United States. But never mind: this week’s column is focused on Morrison’s more recent short story, “Sweetness.”

Ned Talks: Stress, sleep and sustenance

“Hi Ned! I have a constant headache going on. What is wrong with me?”

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Hiya, friend! I did not get my doctorate in human medicine, but I did take a course on self care in my school days. There are many non-medical things causing your headache, but stress is as big as Right Whale. I understand that this time of year is stressful, but YOU CAN DO IT! Whenever you feel down about school, or just life in general, tell yourself that you are an amazing narwhal and that you can do this. Be sure to take time for yourself and make sure you are doing okay. You can do some meditative breathing exercises where you breathe in and out while focusing on your breathing. This helps clear your mind and just helps calm you down when feeling stressed or anxious. Or, do some gratitude journaling to remind yourself of what you accomplished that day and what you’re thankful for. Another way to help your stress is to exercise. When I feel stressed, I like to go out and swim a few laps in my back pond. It doesn’t need to be a super hard workout, the point is to get moving. Even just going for a little walk around your

First published in The New Yorker in 2015, “Sweetness” is a short story (just under 2,400 words) written from the perspective of a light-skinned Black mother who is ashamed of her daughter’s “blue-black” skin. Such is her shame that she won’t allow her daughter, Lula Ann, to call her “Mother” or “Mama,” but “Sweetness.” “Sweetness” is written as a letter of explanation from the narrator to Lula Ann, who now goes by “Bride.” Bride has written to her mother to inform her of her pregnancy, news that Sweetness receives with bittersweet trepidation. “Listen to me,” Sweetness warns Bride. “You are about to find out what it takes, how the world is, how it works, and how it changes when you are a parent.” The letter seems at once a stubborn explanation and a desperate plea for understanding. “If I sound irritable, ungrateful, part of it is because underneath is regret. All the little

things I didn’t do or did wrong,” she admits. Earlier, she attempts to convince herself of her maternal competence and of the necessity of her treating Lula Ann the way she did: “I wasn’t a bad mother, you have to know that, but I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to.” Sweetness views her maternal obligations as necessarily privileging protection over a more sentimental kind of love, which is understandable but difficult for the reader (or me, at least) to truly understand or appreciate. “Sweetness” is short, but it’s an absorbing work that will certainly make you think.

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campus or building will give you some time to breathe and relax. If it is in fact stress causing your constant headache, don’t be afraid to reach out to someone. Simply talking to your friends or calling your family can help you feel like you’re not alone. Go and talk to your professors if it’s something in their class, or just a problem in general. Your school has many resources available to help relieve your stress. Stress isn’t the only thing that could be causing your headache. Lack of sleep, hunger and increased screen time sometimes give me a headache. Be sure you’re taking the time to get enough sleep each night and eating all your meals. And eating all your meals means having a well balanced diet with protein, dairy, grains, vegetables and fruits. When I have to study on my computer for a long time, I give my eyes a break by just shutting them



Submitted photo/Ned the Narwhal

or looking away from the screen for about a minute before going back to work. Just a reminder that I am not a doctor in humans, and so talk to your human doctor for true medical assistance. I hope this helps remind you to take care of yourself and ask for help when you need it! Talk to you soon for more Ned Talks!

Information Schatz: Stuff you forgot from your tour of CSS

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To get things straight and make sure the title makes sense: Schatz is pronounced the exact same way as “shots.” In this episode of information, wow your relatives with CSS trivia when they come to visit before the holiday season. Many students, while in awe of the architecture, resources and other amazing parts of campus can easily forget the other cool parts of CSS if they don’t take the time to do the research tour guides do. The foyer of Tower Hall is a good place to start. When first walking in through the doors from the millions of steps outside, you’ll easily notice the four chairs placed there. The story goes that when St. Scholastica was an all-female institution (up until 1969), the only place men were allowed to come in and wait was in this foyer. So, young (and presumably anxious) suitors would swing their shoes back and forth on the chairs, causing them to wear down over time. Either way, it makes for a cute story. The story of St. Scholastica is one that can never be forgotten by any student at CSS. The painting in the foyer depicts the final meeting between Scholastica and her twin brother, St. Benedict.

Shrine, continued from Page 10

What can we as a Benedictine college community of scholars and learners do to demonstrate reverence and care for the Sacred Heart shrine? Sometimes it is as simple as reminding ourselves of God’s love for us and that we are called to be a people of love, care, courage, welcome and respect. In closing, Sister Lois lovingly shared her hope and her prayers (and surely that of the rest of the Sisters as well) that everyone will show respect for the sacredness of the Sacred Heart Shrine and find there in the outstretched arms of Jesus as an invitation to “Let God’s love for

Scholastica begged her brother to stay the night to spend more time with her, and her prayer was answered as a violent storm prevented Benedict from heading home that night. They spent the evening discussing life and joys of heaven, and as Benedict traveled home, Scholastica died three days after that evening. Moving on to general knowledge about Scholastica’s Duluth campus. Did you know there are over six staircases to get you where you need to go in Tower Hall? There’s also a secret staircase from the elevator by the Saints Shop that goes from the ground floor to the first floor. This staircase has the least number of steps between floors in the whole building (only 12 compared to an average of 22). Additionally, the professor offices on the third and fourth floors are still living history of what the dormitories looked like when Tower Hall was a living space as well. Closets and high windows facing the lake are some of the great features left from these spaces. If these facts aren’t impressive, stay tuned for the next edition of CSS facts and trivia! Stay tuned for the bathroom reviews, the best places on campus, and more to come. them be their comfort, their hope and their peace for God is with us always!” If you are interested in visiting the Sacred Heart Shrine here are some directions as to how to get there: Go up the cemetery road behind the soccer field. Follow the trees going south where you will find a mowed path. Follow the path into the Maryglade woods. There are markers along the way. Follow the trail and you will come to a path on the left in the woods where the shrine is.

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