

Bring Me the Head of Molly Ringwald
by Anna E. Purdy

At one time the math seemed really easy: school + college + career/personal = adult life. I'm a little hung up on the career factor, that being I don't really have one. I thought if I followed the math it would be easy enough to fall into. It's what everyone told you to look forward to in high school: the ever-elusive One Day that encompassed responsibly earned freedom. Freedom: a few dollars in savings, health insurance with a high deductible, and an iPod.

I grew up what I define as "light-blue collar": poor enough to hardly ever get new clothes, rich enough to eat boeuf bourguignonne on a Tuesday. (And lucky enough to realize that clothes may tear but knowing how to make a gourmet meal on the cheap is a priceless commodity.) Going without luxuries is not foreign to me. I don't fool myself into some anti-bourgeois revelry. I have reconciled that while I may crave the Kubrick boxed set I do not need it; I have what I need, which is knowing how to cook well with three ingredients. (It's a good thing I live hand-to-mouth so I can bite the hand that feeds me all I like. Sometimes I'm all the food I get.) But it isn't simply a lack of money: it's the lack of security money brings coupled with the feeling that a wrong turn was made and there's no off-ramp around.

I have watched my friends who went to tech schools make more money at 22 than I did from ages 22-25. We went to university at the beginning of the "blue swing," when those in tech schools arrived to their economic advantages as resplendent as a prodigal son. For years college was the place to be for any degree of success. Plumbers and mudloggers suffered to send their offspring to college...then watched them ten years later use their political science degree while unclogging a drain.

So here I am, here we are. I'm the youngest of Generation X and the oldest of Y (translation: I remember *The Brady Bunch* but I was using computers in the third grade) and I'm suffering. Mine is not a pitiable state: I'm very smart. I've traveled the world. I attended one of the best public universities in the nation. But I've got about \$90-odd left to my name and might have more if I can stomach fighting with dirty employers withholding my check. (I know it's illegal but I can't afford a lawyer.) I'm not trying to enact the qualities of a petulant and disaffected generation, but if I truly am petulant, can I be blamed? Where are the easier times, the health insurance? Why did everyone tell me college was the place to be? Why didn't I just go to cosmetology school? I probably wouldn't have listened, anyway. I was too smug about my intelligence to "stoop" to such a thing. Serves me right. I graduated and couldn't find work anywhere, even as a receptionist. Now I work as a bartender, or I would be if I could find another job doing that.

Maybe none of this leads up to my true point: I never should have listened to

John Hughes. I thought high school was the toughest time of every kid's life and when it was over, after all the hijinks and heartbreaks, you went to college and coasted through to marriage and the life your parents have. Whoops. John Hughes romanticized teenagerism for generations because he *could*. Romance is a luxury and those years can afford it. However, your 20s, with the connubial bliss-kids-college-career conundrums, cannot. It seems there is no humor, that ever move is wrong, and that every wrong move is expensive. We trade school bullies for collection agencies, tyrannical teachers for middle-management bosses, and bad grades for bad jobs. Our lovers are no longer kids in homeroom but people met in blustery, drunken bars. We trade weed for cocaine and whiskey.

We were lied to. Your 20s suck, and they are much, much tougher than covering up a "skip day" or pining for the school heartthrob, Jake. The educations we were supposed to strive for didn't yield money or ease because the market has been flooded with kids like us; we're as cheap, plentiful, and destructive as farmhouse meth labs. I'm lucky I grew up light-blue collar because it helps me cope with the gentle destitution (if not with the bitterness)

So what if I'd known how hard it would be? What if I'd known a BA wouldn't be worth the paper it's printed on and I'd gone to the Aveda Institute instead? I would still be writing, of course. I'd still be trying to hack it in this twisted-ankle-of-a-world, this perpetual and nagging pain of failed artistic strivings. I just wouldn't be dodging creditors because the last hair highlight I did would cover my expenses until I could crawl into my bed and write of all the things I'd rather be doing.