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### Captain America Chopsticks

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Abstract: In her descriptive essay “Captain America Chopsticks,” Jenna San Diego uses her lifelong admiration of the confident, patriotic, heroic Captain America to explore her personal struggles with growing up Asian and American in a Midwest town.

### Captain America Chopsticks

Captain America was always my favorite. Since I was twelve years old, I have always had an infatuation with him. I’m in the year 2012, and I’m watching *The Avengers* (2012) for the first time. I’m lying on the hardwood floor of my childhood bedroom, and I’m mesmerized by what’s in front of me. I’m watching an extremely chiseled man jump around in a radiant spandex suit. He’s attractive and really seems to care about me even though we’ve never met. He cares about people and what’s good in the world. He tells nice jokes. He’s the whole package wrapped up in a skin-tight red, white, and blue suit. In my twelve-year-old brain we are the best of friends.

It never made sense to me why a man who is so patriotic could be my favorite superhero, let alone my imaginary best friend. I grew up Asian-American in the Midwest, and I lived among a sea of people who were anything but that. Everybody around me was white. I was the yellow spot of pee among the endless snow. Captain America was not meant to be my favorite. I didn’t think he was made for me. I was never patriotic because America always made fun of me. I never had any sense of country, as I was never allowed to have more than one. I didn’t even like red, white, and blue. That one is just personal. But how could a man plastered in American ideologies be my favorite superhero? I used to think that it was because he was played by Chris Evans. Or maybe I just had a twelve-year-old crush on a fictional character. Or maybe it was just the lack of female superheroes in film at the time. Or maybe it was just me

assimilating (I've always been a culprit of that). But even now, as a twenty-year-old, I still think he's awesome. He's still my favorite.

Now I'm back in the year 2008, and I'm eating lunch with my elementary school friends. All my friends are starting to finish their lunches, and I pull a mooncake out of my lunchbox. My family had just celebrated Lunar New Year, and I brought a leftover one as a nice treat. As I move the pastry of my dreams towards my mouth, my friend stops me and asks what I'm eating. I tell her it's a mooncake made of red bean paste, and that my family eats them to celebrate Lunar New Year. My friend tells me that New Year's Eve already happened in January. I explain to her that I know that and this is different. She doesn't listen, telling me again that New Year's has already happened. I then ask her if she wants to try my mooncake. She says sure. As the chunk of mooncake gets closer and closer to her mouth, I await in excitement for her reaction. I think to myself about how she's going to love it. How amazing it is that I can share something I love with one of my friends! How naive I was. As the mooncake moves across her taste buds, she gags and spits out the cake. She gags and gags until she finally says it tastes like dog food. The lunch table erupts with laughter. It felt like the room was shaking from all the noise. The table starts to make fun of me. They tell me my food is gross. They tell me to pick a New Year, as if only one of them is right. They tease me and I never, even once, mention mooncakes to any friend again.

Captain America is who I wanted to be when I grew up. Maybe that's where my love from him came from. Of course, I wanted to be him because he is a super cool, super-strong superhero. But deep down I just wanted to be liked like him. I wanted to be respected like him because as an Asian kid in the Midwest, I wasn't. At a very young age, I learned that patriotism

brought respect. Having clothes with the American flag on them meant that you belonged.

Liking the Fourth of July meant people liked you. Loving America meant people loved you.

America equaled being loved, liked, or even tolerated. That was the only way I knew how to be liked, and I wanted it so bad.

I'm now in the year 2014, and I'm a freshman in high school. I have glasses that make me look like an old man. I have a terrible haircut. My arms are still too long for the rest of my body, and I just want to be liked. I'm standing in P.E. class and we are playing dodge ball. I'm in the same class as one of my best friends and a new friend. We are having fun. I'm also in the same class as the foreign exchange student from Thailand. Her name is \*\*\*\*. She's very nice. She's also absent today. As we are playing dodge ball, somebody accidentally runs into me (this is fine). He turns around and apologizes (this is also fine). But as he apologizes, and the words fall out of his mouth, he does not call me by my name. He calls me \*\*\*\*, the name of the Thai foreign exchange student (this is not fine).

I guess I still do dream of being Captain America, but now I think I just want to be a good person. I've always wanted to be that, even before I met Cap. That's what everyone wants to be. But I want to not care while doing it, like Cap. Captain America had to readjust to a new world. He doesn't know how to approach his new world, and that world doesn't know how to approach him. His sense of country is different now. He has to adjust, and he adjusts just fine. I admired him for that. He did all that without giving a damn about what people thought of him. He just wanted to be a good person. I am like him. I just want to be a good person. I just want to not give a damn.

I'm now in the year 2018, and I'm seventeen going-on-eighteen and miserable. I haven't thought about Cap for at least a year and a half (maybe that's why I'm so miserable). But I'm in Chicago's Chinatown, and I'm being taken out of my misery for a short moment. As I'm browsing the bright aisles of tchotchkes and rice paddles, I find a pair of chopsticks. These aren't just any pair of chopsticks. They aren't the fun metal kind or the pretty patterned kind. They are a one of a kind pair of chopsticks. They may look plain at first, for they are made of that plastic that's made to look like wood. But if you look past that, further up, you will see a simple blue sticker wrapped around the tops of the sticks. And if you twist the sticks around to the front, someone will be looking at you. That someone is an extremely chiseled man in a radiant spandex suit. He's attractive and really seems to care about you even though you've never met. He cares about people and what's good in the world. He tells nice jokes. He's the whole package wrapped up in a skin-tight red, white, and blue suit. And he's on this pair of chopsticks.

I had never seen anything like these chopsticks in my entire life. They were super weird, super cheap, superhero pieces of cutlery. If I were to be buried with only one of my worldly possessions, there's a good chance I would choose these. I had never seen two things I love so much merged into one thing. Two things I hold so close to my heart: Captain America and chopsticks. Part Asian, part American. It was like looking in a mirror.

These pieces of plastic, with a cheap sticker of Captain America stuck to them, showed me why I truly love Captain America. Sure, Cap stands for what America should be. He believes that we all deserve to be here. He believes in independence. He believes in himself. He believes in good people. He is good people. I love him for all these reasons. But Captain America is also

proud of his country, no matter what that may be to him, and ashamed of it when he wants to be. He doesn't have to pick just one. He can have both if he wants to. He can wear his vibrant patriotic suit with love and pride, but he can also take it off and denounce all the bad things that come with it. He can fight for what's right in the name of America, but he can also fight America's flaws if he believes that is the right thing to do. He doesn't have to pick and choose. He doesn't have to prove himself. Captain America gets to have both.

But some of us aren't as lucky as Captain America. I've never been able to have what he has. I don't get to have both. I don't get to be Asian and American. I get to be Asian-American, but that is not the same thing. I have to pick which one I like better to be able to prove myself, but I don't want to prove myself. I don't want to pick just one. I want to be like Captain America. I want to have both. I want a swirl of Asian sides and American sides that are so blended that they can't be torn apart, but I also want to criticize one or both if I want to. I want to be extremely loud or extremely quiet about whichever I choose. I want to be plastered in what I love about my home and be able to rip it off if I want to. I want to celebrate New Year's Eve and Lunar New Year. I want to be unapologetically Asian without being mistaken for other Asians. I want to be Asian and American. I want to have Captain America and the chopsticks.