

I used to think that  
Mental health issues  
Caused by standardized testing  
were mostly make believe.

Like sugar plum fairies that  
Dance around the crowns of little children while they sleep  
Waiting for Santa Claus  
Except Santa Claus broke in to their homes and stole their hopes and dreams after leaving a  
number on their foreheads  
Labelling them as  
Not Ready.

Like magical money hidden under a child's pillow  
By the twinkling Tooth Fairy  
But the Tooth Fairy shattered their squealing piggy banks against the cold night floor and  
replaced their allowances with  
Debt,  
Because they couldn't pass a certain percentile.

Standardized Testing  
Where all students answer the  
Same questions, require the  
Same responses, and are viewed on the  
Same scale  
Consistently.

Everyone has a fair opportunity, right?

When a sixteen year old, introverted, nothing, shy girl just wants to write rhymes and see the  
grass on the other side for a change  
She has to spend three years, *three years*, in test preparatory classes  
Treating her life like a videogame leaderboard:

High scores  
or death.  
Put in a few more tokens if you didn't achieve first place  
But it costs sixty dollars.  
Pay for play.  
For a limited time only,  
But wait, there's always more.

Sixty dollars is nothing.  
Sixty hours is nothing compared to those hours of training.  
Training,  
Training for something you've never aspired to do well at.

Or maybe I just don't know what I'd want to do well at.

Sure.

I'm labelled as 'Proficient' at Command of Evidence  
But how does that help when I want to write lines of code for the next Assassin's Creed remake  
Or kick the winning goal in the World Cup

I bet Steve Jobs was a master at Circle Theorems  
How else was his net worth \$10.2 billion?  
I guess I just need to try harder.

And thank you, Khan Academy.  
For your mission to provide world class education to all who can  
Afford wifi access and a computer screen  
Such a noble cause.  
And for your loving relationship with College Board,  
The prosecutor, I mean, provider of the SAT, ACT,  
And all of the other 'booklets' and sheets they distribute while raking in the dough of our needs  
to classify ourselves as better than others.  
How big of a half do you split on profits after each score report?  
Or did you sign a prenup?

You milk impoverished school communities for their money and statistics  
So maybe their kids can leave for a few years to tell Mom and Pop how life in The Big City really  
is, but that it's just not for them  
But if this is how you qualify us for life after high school,  
Why is the US ranked fourteenth in education?

What help are you?

But here I sit.  
Filling notebook after notebook with practice problems, score calculations, and test strategies.  
Strategies?  
'Strategies' makes it sound as if I'm headed to fight a war.  
But maybe I am.

Maybe this is how it will be in life.  
Constant preparation for something massive, looming.  
Perpetual denial of anything remotely fun, “No, I’m sorry I can’t hang out this weekend. I just need fifty more points.” to ready for the next big assessment.  
Continuous resentment of all the things I just can’t seem to do.  
A war with myself.

It’s hard work,  
But that’s life.  
Life is hard work when you haven’t found something to live for,  
Much less something to work for.

Therefore, I work for a high score  
Because I am worried that I’ll never find a love  
A passion  
For something that will make me stand out.

Hard work means nothing if your score is low.  
But if your score is too high, then what do you  
really do?  
Nothing?  
You still aren’t ready.

Well no, maybe I’m not ready.  
I wasn’t ready to study for three years for a test  
that lasted only six hours.  
I wasn’t ready for my teachers to beg me to show up  
Or else they’d lose their jobs.  
I wasn’t ready to cry in my mother’s arms three times before test day because I felt that  
I would never be good enough.

And maybe I will never be good enough.

I used to think that  
Mental health issues  
Caused by standardized testing  
were mostly make believe.

But now I’ve seen the crushing reality that they only provide two services:  
Turning our school systems into warehouses and factories  
And processing our students into numbers that determine  
What they think the world sees as their worth.