

November 10, 2025

Dear Sylvia Plath,

My worn and torn copy of *The Bell Jar* lives in the trunk of my Kia. Before that, it rode in my backpack long after I had finished it. The pages are sun tanned yellow, the spine is cracked, and I do not believe in bookmarks, so all the places I've stopped and started are creased with dog ears. What I'm trying to say is that this book haunts me the way old ghosts haunt creaky houses, and I would love to tell you why.

I've been reading literary 'classics' since the seventh grade. I say classics in quotes because, until yours, I didn't know exactly why. That was what I was trying to figure out when I picked up *Dracula* at age 13 and took three months to read it with no clue what I was reading half the time. I still hadn't figured it out when at 15 I asked my mom to buy me your book. When my English teacher asked me what I was reading, she threw up her eyebrows at my answer. When my friend asked me why I was reading instead of playing games on the school laptop like I usually did, she made a face at the synopsis I gave her. However, there was nothing they could do. Your writing had enraptured me in a way no book had, and between classes and assignments, I buried myself in your story.

Everyone talks about the metaphor about the fig tree, but now it's my turn. Before I started *The Bell Jar*, I had to take a personality test disguised as a career assessment. In the digital age I have always lived in, every career seemed plausible for me. Journalism, architecture, teaching, and biology have swirled around in my mind like the world's worst song to have stuck in your head since I was old enough to be asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and expected to give a real answer. To see this problem in writing, to know that there were other people with the same fear as me, was the best reassurance I have ever been given.

I believe the reason I loved your book so much was because it came to me right when I needed it. As I was entering the most delicate years of my life, when everything felt like a downpour and a drought at the same time, Ester Greenwood voiced herself in a way I could not. I also stared at the ceilings of bathtubs. I also swam out too far and then kept swimming. I also knew exactly what I wanted but nothing about what I really, truly wanted. I felt the jar closing down on me and I struggled like a beetle on its back while I made straight A's in school and my career assessment told me I would one day be a successful business owner.

*The Bell Jar*, at times, felt less like a story and more like a cold read of my internal monologue. While I have always loved writing and journaling, there are things I did not confess even to the spiral notebook under my bed. While things have never gotten as bad for me as they did for Ester, this book voices thoughts I have never been capable of articulating. It showed me a new perspective of things I would never think nor do, but also pointed a mirror at me.

When I finished this book, I was leaning over the edge of my bathtub, up to my ribs in warm water that grew colder with every second I neglected it. After the last page, I put it down on a towel and leaned back against the tub. The final words beat in my chest the way they did Ester's. "I am, I am, I am," I thought as I dunked myself under the water and felt the jar lift.

Your book changed me. It was the first classic I ever read that felt truly classic. This book will continue to live in the back of my car for many miles, as it stays on my mind for a million more.

With sincere thanks,

Abigail Bannister