

Vol 48, Issue 1, 2019
The Berkeley Carroll School

REFLECTIONS



Remember Not How I Died
SHAILEE SRAN
GRADE 11 / PHOTOGRAPH

Umi
IDRIYS ALI-CHOW
GRADE 12 / PAINTING



REFLECTIONS

Mission Statement

Reflections, the annual literary and arts magazine of The Berkeley Carroll Upper School, seeks to tap the vibrant, creative energy circulating in the classrooms and hallways of our school. Berkeley Carroll's mission is to foster an environment of critical, ethical, and global thinking; *Reflections* contributes by making space for artistic conversation and collaboration—in our meetings and in this volume.

Reflections

What's in a name? "Reflection" implies both a mirroring and a distortion: something recognizably strange and strangely recognizable. In selecting and arranging the visual and written work in this magazine, we seek to create this experience of broken mirrors: reflections that are just a bit off, refracted and bent to reveal uncanny resemblances. Take, for instance, Jordan Hickson's "Last Light" paired with Bernadette Frishberg's nostalgic yearning for the comforting patterns of her childhood home—now recognizably rearranged—in "aveeno revamp": "i want the living room in the dining room and the dining room in the living room/and me sitting there, unbothered." Hickson's photograph—capturing a moment of childhood bliss similar to those invoked in the poem—prompts us to recognize a swinging quality in Frishberg's language itself that reflects the themes of stasis and change, repetition and difference inherent in growing up. In such warped representations, making pattern out of paradox, stillness out of swinging, we seek to provide new perspectives on everyday encounters; indeed, Shailee Sran's "this is not an art gallery" mirrors the magazine itself: "math and light and movement and sound collapsing in/on each other to form a pattern."

We hope in these pairings of written and visual reflections that you catch glimpses both strange and familiar, new patterns from ordinary experiences.

Editorial Policy and Procedures

The *Reflections* staff is a small, dedicated group of students that meets weekly over homemade brownies and Oreos to discuss and develop a shared interest in art and literature. In the fall, *Reflections* members establish the magazine's high standards, solicit submissions, and refine their own works in progress. In February, the editors preside over small groups which read and critique anonymous student art and literature submissions. After the preliminary critiques—and with helpful suggestions from the art department—the editors carefully consider feedback from the entire *Reflections* team before choosing and editing the final selections and laying out the magazine. Editors then submit all materials to our fantastic printer, review the proofs, and distribute 550 copies of our beautiful magazine—through our library, at admissions events, and, most special of all, at our graduation in May.

Reflections is a student-run, -led, and -organized coterie; neither the editors nor the staff receive class credit for their work. We are proud members of the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. The striking artwork and writing in this magazine were all crafted by Berkeley Carroll Upper School students, sometimes to fulfill class assignments, but always from the engines of their own creativity.

STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jordan Hickson

ARTS EDITOR

Ella Novogratz

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Gaia Getzel Blessing

FACULTY ADVISORS

Erika Drezner

Jacob Hughes

STAFF

Noa Brown

Shailee Sran

Bernadette Frishberg

Mosab Hamid

Editor's Statement

This year's *Reflections* would not have been possible without our faculty advisors, Ms. Drezner and Dr. Hughes, whose support was crucial in producing this volume. The publication of this magazine would not be complete without the help of Linda Adams, Berkeley Carroll's director of strategic communications, and the design talents of Bob Lane at Studio Lane, Inc. We're also grateful for the guidance and support of Dr. Daniel, Ms. Nguyen and Mr. Smaller-Swift in the Art Department. And of course, *Reflections* would be blank without the thoughtful writing and intricate artwork that is shared with us each year.

This year we're particularly excited to have adopted a more humorous tone in the magazine with several satirical pieces from our new Voice & Style writing course. We've sought to balance this humor with the

many heartfelt reflections taken from a number of personal essay courses offered by our English Department. The humorous and the heartfelt are, of course, another one of our reflective pairs.

Every year we receive an abundance of high-quality work from students and this year was no exception. I believe the diversity of media and writing styles displayed in this year's magazine reflect the unique way Berkeley Carroll students engage with, observe, and challenge the communities around us. I hope you find the work inside these pages as enjoyable and enlightening as I have.

Jordan Hickson

Editor-in-Chief, Spring 2019

P OETRY

The Dreamer's Manifesto

Nichole Fernandez, Grade 10 9

Soaring Empty

Olivia Bennett, Grade 10 23

The Right Words: Two Lineations

Elliot Mintz, Grade 10 24

aveeno revamp

Bernadette Frishberg, Grade 11 37

the ag fair dream

Serena McGrane, Grade 10 40

You Threaten Me With Smothered Looks

Talin Schell, Grade 9 52

Dis(re)membered

Jordan Hickson, Grade 11 58

A Tour Guide for What He Calls "Heaven"

Nichole Fernandez, Grade 10 76

Girlhood

Noa Brown, Grade 9 85

Asylum

Abigail Lienhard, Grade 11 86

Ch!gg@

Emily Li, Grade 11 93

Watch This

Jordan Hickson, Grade 11 102

this is not an art gallery

Shailee Sran, Grade 11 108

F ICTION

Pedals

Mosab Hamid, Grade 12 11

Staten Island

Evelina Levy, Grade 11 26

H UMR

Got Milk? No, Thank You!

Irene Madrigal, Grade 11 19

Tree Sap, An Ancient Cult

Kai Ellis, Grade 10 49

Corporate Greetings

Luca Broder, Grade 11 55

Moe's Declassified White School Survival Guide™

Mosab Hamid, Grade 12 61

Drinks With the Girls

Sarah Cryan, Grade 11 99

The Human Condition

JORDAN HICKSON

GRADE 11 / DRAWING



P PERSONAL ESSAY

Some for Joy, Some for Mischief

Colette Drinkard, Grade 11 15

Mitch the Turtle Racer

Eve Blank, Grade 12 29

Liam

Sarah Cryan, Grade 11 45

Sap

Abigail Lienhard, Grade 11 73

Vivere a Colori

Gaia Getzel Blessing, Grade 12 79

“There’s a Lot You Don’t Know”

Julian Ansorge, Grade 11 82

Hebrew School Dropout

Colette Drinkard, Grade 11 89

My Friend Chotu

Sara Azcona-Miller, Grade 12 94

The Smell of Money: Barney’s on a Sunday

Aidan Silitch, Grade 11 105

A RT

Remember Not How I Died

Shailee Sran, Grade 11, *photograph* Cover

Umi

Idriys Ali-Chow, Grade 12, *painting* Inside Front Cover

The Human Condition

Jordan Hickson, Grade 11, *drawing* 4 - 7

Going Anywhere

Eugenie Haring, Grade 12, *painting* 8

Shadow

Ruby Salvatore-Palmer, Grade 10, *painting* 10

Considerations

Amber Pongrass, Grade 12, *drawing* 13

Snapshot

Ella Novogratz, Grade 12, *mixed media* 14

Liberty

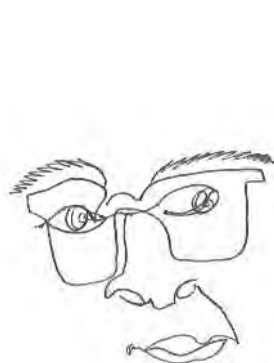
Ella Sran, Grade 9, *photograph* 17

Cup & Paper

Savannah Der, Grade 12, *drawing* 18

Pockets

Sophie Arens, Grade 12, *drawing* 21



Navigation

Eugenie Haring, Grade 12, *drawing* 22

His Eminence

Sita Pawar, Grade 10, *ceramic* 25

Sixth Avenue Express

Ella Sran, Grade 9, *photograph* 27

Onwards

Joan Marie Varous, Grade 10, *photograph* 28

Mobiles: Life; Truth & Lies

Nicole Neil, Grade 11, *mixed media* 30

Primary Lady

Mae Ryan, Grade 11, *ceramic* 33

Reckonings

Shailee Sran, Grade 11, *photograph* 35

Last Light

Jordan Hickson, Grade 11, *photograph* 36

Corner

Amber Pongrass, Grade 12, *drawing* 39

Here You Go

Noa Brown, Grade 9, *photograph* 41

Reclining Nude

Harry Justice, Grade 10, *painting* 42

Standing Nude

Harry Justice, Grade 10, *painting* 43

Charcoal Self-Portrait

Idriys Ali-Chow, Grade 12, *drawing* 44

Acrylic Self-Portrait

Idriys Ali-Chow, Grade 12, *painting* 47

Super Food

Cleo Lynn, Grade 11, *ceramic* 48

One by One

Kyra Maynard, Grade 11, *photograph* 51

Which Face Today?

Leah Khovov, Grade 11, *drawing* 53

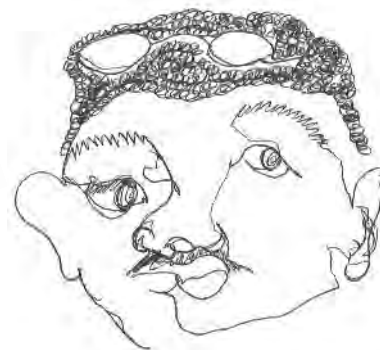
Missing Something

Tristan Lamson, Grade 12, *painting* 54

Watchers

Tess Gilmartin, Grade 9, *ceramic* 57

The Human Condition
JORDAN HICKSON
GRADE 11 / DRAWING



Form

Fynn Marsella, Grade 12, *painting* 59

Wishful Thinking

Damaris Gomez, Grade 11, *painting* 60

Stomp

Tristan Lamson, Grade 12, *painting* 63

Untitled

Camille Andrew, Grade 12, *mixed media*66 -67

Tuesday Afternoon

Tife Awoleye, Grade 10, *photograph* 71

Prospect Park

Zoe Pyne, Grade 9, *mixed media* 72

Reaching

Miguel Tejada, Grade 11, *drawing* 75

Chengdu

Shailee Sran, Grade 11, *photograph* 77

Climb

Amber Pongrass, Grade 12, *drawing* 78

Heart

Sophia Torren, Grade 9, *ceramic* 81

Rocking Out

Tess Fortenberry, Grade 12, *photograph* 84

Over My Shoulder

Maris Hayes, Grade 10, *painting* 87

Blue

Ella Novogratz, Grade 12, *painting* 88

Escapes

Ella Sran, Grade 9, *photograph* 91

Winged

Ella Novogratz, Grade 12, *mixed media* 92

Dinner

Noa Brown, Grade 9, *photograph* 95

Reflections

Maëlle Sannon, Grade 11, *painting* 98

White Tiger

Shailee Sran, Grade 11, *photograph* 101

Narcissus

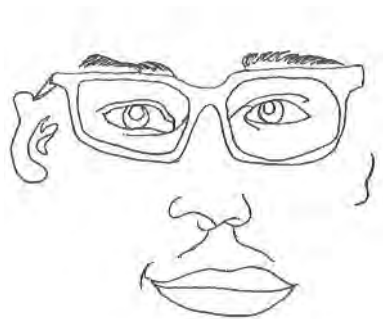
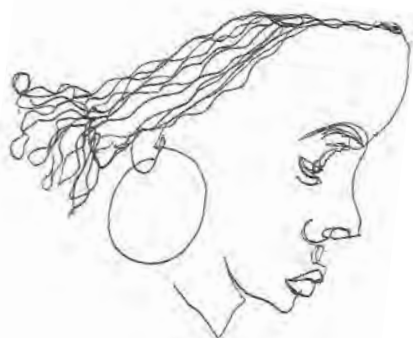
Miguel Tejada, Grade 11, *drawing* 103

Creeping Lilyturf

Anya Renzi, Grade 9, *painting* 107

Expecting

Rachael Hipkins, Grade 11, *painting*Inside Back Cover





The Dreamer's Manifesto

Deny not the miracle of conception!
Cradle all your gentlest dreams,
Comb your hands through the hair
Of every nightmare, and
Kiss all your bright ideas!

I am not just sleeping; I am conceiving.

The sunwalkers, worldeaters, eveningwringers,
And all else borne by sleep is real
And more than what your eyes, mouth, fingers
Could bury in the brain's soil.

I am not just sleeping; I am conceiving.

Plunge your hands into your favorite stranger's heart,
And emerge with a newborn planet. Two young
Gods bless the beginning of a new story.

I am not just sleeping;



Pedals

Tariq is a stupidhead. I don't care if that's a bad word. Stupidhead! Stupidhead! Stupidhead! He is so mean to me all the time. He didn't wanna teach me how to ride a bike today. And I asked him really nicely, too. All he wanted to do was play with Mudather, but Mudather is just a dumb baby, he gets everything. Tariq taught Mudather how to ride his bike, but Mudather's bike doesn't even have pedals! What kind of dumb baby bike doesn't have pedals? If I had my own bike, mine would have pedals. I just wanted to learn, too.

On Friday, Ms. Tomlin said brothers are suppose to be nice. Because I told her that I wanna learn how to ride a bike, and she told me that I gotta ask my brother, because brothers are always nice like that. So I leave school Friday, and I felt like I had jumping beans in my pants I was so excited. I was gonna learn how to ride a bike!

Momma and I are walking home from school. When we get up to the street next to the McDonald's, I know we gonna have to wait a long time because the walking man takes forever to let us walk. So I look up at Momma and pull on her sleeve.

Ai, habibti? Feish'nu? Momma asks me what's wrong.

I wanna learn how to ride a bike. All the other kids at school know how to ride and I wanna learn how to ride, too. Ms. Tomlin said that Tariq could help me learn, so can I? Can I?

Okay, okay. But not today, habibti. We have guests at home. There are always guests at my house on Fridays. They're Daddy's friends from the masjid. We get to the big 95 outside my building, that's how I know which one is ours. Momma reminds me that we are in 5D, *as in David*. I like the *as in David*, because it's funny. And it's suppose to help me remember which button to buzz when I start coming home from school by myself, which Momma says is pretty soon.

When we get to the door 5D as in David, my mom unlocks the door, and I run inside, take off my school clothes, brush my teeth, put on my blue Barney pajamas, and jump into bed.

What's wrong, Mosab, it's only five o'clock? Momma was worried.

Nothing's wrong! Everything's perfect! I'm gonna learn how to ride a bike! Momma smiles her Momma smile and turns to walk away. Wait! I shout after her.

Feish'nu habibti? She peeks back in through the door to my room.

Can you close the light, Momma? Thanks. Good

night-morning, Momma. Momma laughs a little bit as she flicks the lightswitch off and walks away. But I don't wait for her to leave, I just I throw my covers on over my whole body, even my head, and close my eyes so tight it hurts a little, so I try to just think of snow, which always helps me fall asleep faster. Because the faster I fall asleep, the faster tomorrow can come. I can't wait for tomorrow to come. I'm gonna learn how to ride a bike!

See? Tariq is *such* a stupidhead. You know what? It's whatever. I didn't really wanna learn anyway. Bikes are dumb. I don't wanna be riding a dumb baby bike like Mudather anyway. Dumb baby bike.
Doesn't even have pedals.





Some for Joy, Some for Mischief

"Some people come because the doctor just told them they're gonna die, some think they can find their soulmate, and some even come because God told them to." This is Geraldine talking. She is the guard who stands in front of Walgreens on the way out of the Empire State Building to tell you, "Have a wonderful day! Come back soon!" She looks like a policeman in an old movie, wearing a red, shiny-brimmed cap with a gray braid trim and a black coat with a double row of buttons. Until she started working here in 2007, she had never been to the Empire State Building, even though she moved to New York in 1967. "You don't have time when you live here," she tells me. "You think it's for tourists." Like Geraldine, I have lived in New York City for my whole life, but I'd never gone to the Empire State Building.

I wake up at 7 a.m. on a Sunday. Even though the Empire State Building is open every day of the year and is 1,250 feet tall, I imagine tourists filling up every inch of it. After all, this 1930 Art Deco skyscraper is filmed and Instagrammed *a lot*. It has its own zip code! It was the tallest building in the city until the World Trade Center's North Tower was built in 1970. And after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, it was the tallest once again until One World Trade Center was built in 2012. But when I go in, I see only a few tourists.

The first guard laughs at my All Access Express Pass. "Here's a tip," he says. "You can just buy the regular pass and upgrade once you get here."

"How many New Yorkers come here?" I ask him.

"They come when the relatives visit." He has a thick Brooklyn accent ("Greenpoint") so I tell him that I am a New Yorker too, from Brooklyn. As for him, he says he only goes up and sees the view if he hears there is some "weird weather."

On the elevator to the 80th floor, an animated movie plays on the ceiling. It simulates the building being built, the scaffolding rising higher and higher, planks flying around, *etc.* Nauseating. A voice in the background says, "Welcome to the Empire State Building!" Meanwhile, on the wall, you can see how far up you've gone. 1,000 feet, 1,015 feet . . .

The French tourists don't seem impressed.

On the 80th floor is a wraparound view. I see Brooklyn and New Jersey (I think?), a pool on a rooftop, an H&M ad on the side of a skyscraper, and one seagull. The most popular window is the one facing the new World Trade Center. A middle-aged man spends a few minutes trying to get the perfect photo, but his wallet iPhone case keeps getting in the way.

The view on floor 86, "The Observatory," as they call it, is almost identical to the one on floor 80, except outdoors. Big metal viewfinders line the walls and the guards wear thin hoods under their brim caps to keep their ears warm. It's windy. A Chinese woman points to One World Trade Center, asking, "What's that building?" The guard patiently explains. He also tells her about the 9/11 Memorial right beside it. I count the different

languages being spoken—five—and the selfies being taken—12—many with selfie sticks. A girl, who looks about seven, spends a long time choosing an Instagram filter for her picture. As I walk back to the exit, I hear a man say, “You really took me all the way up here just to tell me that?”

“How many New Yorkers come here?” I ask another guard as I wait for the elevator to floor 102.

“I don’t know,” she barks, grumpily.

Another guard hears and smiles at me. He says, “New Yorkers? Probably not a lot.”

“Can you tell who they are?” I ask.

“Sometimes by the way they talk.” As I walk into the elevator I tell him that I am a New Yorker too—from Brooklyn. “Didn’t guess,” he responds as the door closes, “But same! Williamsburg!”

The 102nd floor isn’t that cool. There’s too much to take in. Too many windows in too little space. As I circle the floor, I hear another guard, Renee, exclaiming about *Spongebob: The Musical*.

Back downstairs at the gift shop there’s just a bunch of tacky merchandise, a lot of King Kong. I ask a clerk my question: “How many New Yorkers come here?”

“Someone from the Bronx was here yesterday!” she says. “New Yorkers *always* feel like they need to tell me they are New Yorkers.”

To leave, you have to pass the place tourists take cheesy photos with the Empire State Building backdrop. After that, you’re in the hallway with Walgreens and Geraldine. Across from her is a long wall of framed photos of celebrities that have visited—Yoko Ono, Emma Watson, Mickey and Goofy, Wendy Williams, and many, many more. I wonder how many of them are native New Yorkers.

“Have a wonderful day,” says Geraldine. She is the last guard to hear my question.

“How many New Yorkers come here?”

“I’ve seen a lot of different people come through this building . . . It means different things to different people. Some come to propose or to celebrate their proposals, anniversaries, graduations, and what not. Or because they are sad. Or grieving. Once a woman came three days in a row for eight hours because God told her she would meet her soulmate! I’ve seen a lot of different people.”

“I’m a New Yorker,” I tell her. “From Brooklyn.”

She nods, “Some come for joy, some come for mischief.”

Leaving the epic building, I encounter the Williamsburg guard again; he is extra friendly and smiley. I guess it’s a New Yorker connection.

***“I’m a New Yorker,”
I tell her.
“From Brooklyn.”
She nods,
“Some come for joy,
some come
for mischief.”***





Got Milk? No, Thank You!

I've always been told that as a baby I loved my mother's milk. According to my mother, I couldn't get enough of it, so much that she couldn't keep up, and I was eventually switched to the store-bought product. *She still hasn't forgiven me for the unbearable pain I caused her breasts.* When I was a baby, my mother's milk was the greatest food in the world. Naturally, my parents assumed I'd transition to a love of cow's milk once my days of breastfeeding were done. They had no idea how wrong they were going to be.

Cow's milk smells disgusting!

I'm not talking about it in its spoiled and curdled form, but the fresh kind found at every grocery store. Sure, the milk we drink doesn't come DIRECTLY from a cow's udders—it's heated to insane temperatures to avoid a whole bunch of diseases and packaged in white containers with cute dancing cartoon cows and ridiculous, unrealistic sunny farm backgrounds that deceive people into thinking, *"I must have this."* But that doesn't change where it came from. That distinct, nauseating smell only milk has is a direct result of its mammary gland origins.

The taste is even worse!

The sour taste of milk for me is unmatched by any other food imaginable. It's bitter, rancid, foul, and

downright indigestible. I'd rather eat durian—hailed as one of the most disgusting fruits on the planet—than drink even ONE sip of milk. Hell, I'd stick a fried tarantula—and I scream over an ant coming near me—in my mouth before I'd pour myself a glass of milk.

You probably think I can't get any angrier. *Nope!* It's not the smell or taste of milk that infuriates me the most—that gets my blood boiling and heart pumping so fast I can barely breathe. It's the whole idea of cow's milk itself and how the world views it as an absolute necessity.

From what I've gathered, cow's milk is intended for calves! Apparently, though, nobody ever gets this and simply switches from breast milk to pink udder milk directly after infancy.

I want to give you all the English Oxford Living Dictionary definition of milk: "an opaque white fluid rich in fat and protein, secreted by female mammals for the nourishment of their young." Cow's milk is clearly made by adult cows to help their calves grow to full size. Do you know how fast milk makes these calves grow? In TWO years they go from, on average, 63.3 pounds to between 1,000 and 1,800 pounds!!!

It is essentially baby-calf-growth food! We are drinking a substance that causes these calves to turn

into enormous, fat, black-and-white beasts that spend more than half their daily lives—18 hours to be exact—eating grass, regurgitating that grass, re-digesting it over and over, and lying down. A drink that comes from an animal that is the epitome of laziness is supposed to make us grow strong and tall? That's the animal we're supposed to get our nutrition from?! *Please tell me this is some joke. That the majority of people don't ACTUALLY believe drinking milk is the quintessential answer to avoiding a society of frail weaklings.*

Sadly, that's not the case.

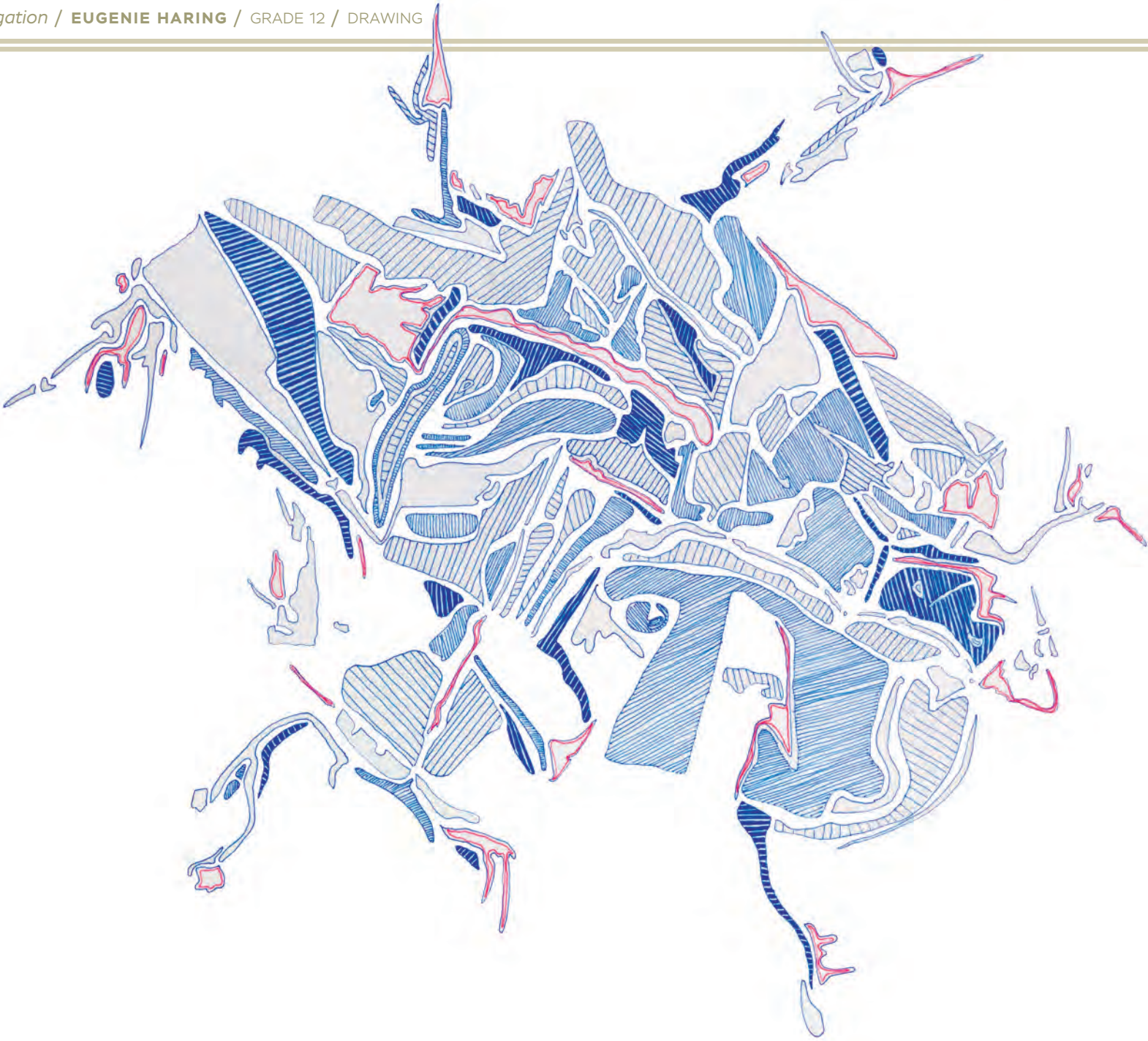
The majority of people I have met have the EXACT beliefs I stated above. To this day, whenever I complain about my average height, my parents love to jab, "If you'd drunk more milk as a child, maybe you'd have

grown taller." NO WAY! I will not stand to believe that my avoidance of the white, devilish liquid is why I'm smaller than most members of my family.

Thankfully, the internet and medical research are on my side. According to my extensive research—hitting the Google button a few times—I found out that an over-consumption of milk can lead to a higher risk for bone fractures, prostate and ovarian cancer, acne, antibiotic resistance, and get this—an *early death!*

I knew it! Milk is a deadly, silent killer that must be stopped. Don't worry if you've been chugging milk your whole life: it's not too late to change. There are only two things you must absolutely do if you want to save yourself: 1. Never listen to or follow the hullabaloo about consuming milk and 2. Never take another sip.





Soaring Empty

The sandy hair
Soars higher than
The abandoned rides.

A pair of
Hands handle
Summer's swings
Gripping rust plenty.

Up
Right
Left
Down

My swing grazes
The shimmering summer sun.
as I grow closer,

I see the crowded
Heavens. Everyone but
you is there.
Where did you go?

I guess you always
did soar empty.

The Right Words: Two Lineations

Run away with me to fair Venice
We can eat tarts with candied lemons
And watch as the boats glide

We'll see the opera together
Watch love bloom and wilt before our eyes
What a sweet afternoon

The sky the color of citrus rinds
I will hold your hand if you'll hold mine
We'll gather what we need

You draw a circle, I draw the blinds
We connect the candles with straight lines
We make a pentagram

When it is ready, we burn the herbs
Together we will read the right words
You would like that, wouldn't you?

I hope we get to see the devil
Of course we can and we'll be careful
What would you ask them, dear?

I'd ask them for immortality
So I could spend more nice days with you
What do you say, darling?

Shall we?

run away with me to fair
venice we can eat tarts with
candied lemons and watch
as the boats glide we'll see
the opera together watch
love bloom and wilt before
our eyes what a sweet
afternoon sky the color
of citrus rinds i will hold
your hand if you'll hold
mine we'll gather what we
need you draw a circle, i
draw the blinds we connect
the candles with straight
lines forming a pentagram
when it is ready, we burn
the herbs together we will
read the right words you
would like that, wouldn't
you? i hope we get to see
the devil of course we can
and we'll be careful what
would you ask them, dear?
i'd ask them for immortality
so i could spend more nice
days with you what do you
say, darling? shall we?



Staten Island

I would tell you if I remembered, but I don't. Nothing. Well, nothing after about nine. I was out of my mind, I'll tell you that. I don't do drugs, I swear. I don't even drink. My grandfather used to drink, and then his liver went all haywire. So that's why I don't drink. Okay, nine o'clock. I was emotional because Anthony left me. Anthony, that's my boyfriend. Ex. I wanted to get back at him, be with someone else for a night and make him know. You've been there, haven't you? Of course you have, you were a teenager once, right? So I went to this party on Staten Island. Staten Island! Well, you know, you were there. Okay, so I drank. Whatever. It was vanilla-flavored vodka and with every sip I pictured my liver turning into a wormy pile of dirt. There were Christmas decorations. It's October, and there were Christmas decorations. A Halloween party and Santa's riding Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer on the front porch. No skeletons or spiderwebs or witches. Not a single ghoul. Just jolly old Santas. Big Santas small Santas blow-up Santas cardboard Santas Black Santas Asian Santas Indigenous Santas. What I'm trying to say is, this party was weird. The Santas were the tip of the iceberg. And this was one honking iceberg. Titanic-sinking type of thing. You follow? Good. I mean, it was all fun and games at first, beer pong and loud music and lights whizzing, and I swear I had a conversation with one of the Santas. Not someone dressed as Santa. I had a conversation with Santa and I touched his arm flirtatiously because we

were getting along and he was plastic. Haha. And then the girl. I know that's what we're here to talk about. Poor girl. Young and innocent and so full of life. Did I know her? Maybe I followed her on Instagram. She was a bit of a whore, won't lie. Always on some boy's lap. Bet she had daddy issues. There was something else. And I know it makes me look guilty as hell. I'm telling you this because if I don't, someone else will. But she was kind of the the reason I came to this party. You see, I broke up with my boyfriend the day before. Anthony. Did I tell you that already? He broke up with me, technically, but it wasn't anything I did. It was that girl. The whore. I saw them together at a party and he should have been backing away saying no, no, no, I have a girlfriend. But he wasn't. Next thing I know, he's breaking up with me. Next thing I know, I'm on the Staten Island ferry, vanilla vodka in my hand. Next thing I know, I'm at a house with 100 light-up Santas and no ghouls. And she's on the bathroom floor. Maybe one of the Santas did it, who knows. Poor girl, so full of life.





Mitch the Turtle Racer

DISCLAIMER: This is a second-hand story.

First, two points of context:

1. When I was in elementary school, there would be street/craft fair-type events in the yard behind P.S. 41 on Saturdays. They contained a plethora of activities: crafts (mostly coloring with some googly eyes thrown in), lots of food (which usually ended up on the ground), and, of course, turtle racing. The turtle racer arrived early and would set up a large, octagonal pen. Then he would line up his four turtles at one end and release them. They would eventually meander over to the other side of the enclosure and the first to make it would be declared the winner. Very exciting stuff. Sometimes there was betting involved. He had a whole assortment of turtle-related merchandise. I think I may have had one of his shirts.
2. When I was in seventh grade, we got a dog. There was much controversy over what to name him. My parents wanted to name him Sputnik, after the first satellite to be put into orbit (which was Russian). My siblings claimed that the word sounded like vomit. So that was off the table. But after that, my parents

didn't even consult us because we are siblings so one of us is bound to disagree with the other just to be contrary. While we were at school, they decided on Comet. Then my dad changed it to Komet with a K, to honor the Russians.¹ This isn't really important information for the story I'm about to tell, but if I hadn't told you, you'd be forever wondering why we named our dog Komet with a K, so be glad I did.

Three weeks ago: My mom, my dad, and my sister are walking our dog, Komet with a K, down Seventh Avenue. They stop at a triangular patch of trees and benches, so small that it barely qualifies as a park, but is called one anyway.² My sister gets thirsty so she leaves with my mom in search of a bottle of water. When they return, Komet with a K has bitten a large chunk of skin out of the top of a man's hand.

It all happened so quickly, my dad explains. *He just stuck his fist out and Komet attacked him.* The man takes it pretty well; he seems to know it is mostly his fault. But my mom brings him to the hospital³ anyways because he is fairly old and she needs to make sure everything is *really* okay. She spends three hours there.

¹ My dad loves anything Cold War related. Consequently, I have learned more about Nixon in my 17 years of existence than anyone ever needs to know in their lifetime. Fun fact: Nixon liked to eat cottage cheese with ketchup for breakfast.

² Known as McCarthy Square, formed by the intersection of Charles Street, Waverly Place, and Seventh Avenue, roughly .125 square blocks.

³ Lenox Health: A five-minute walk from the "park."



It becomes clear from that trip to the hospital that this man, named Mitch, is losing his memory and is acutely of it. He asks my mom to make sure he has all his IDs in place every time he has to remove one to provide the nurses with his information. He refuses to be given any sort of medication since he is afraid it will interfere with anything he is already taking. But he can't remember what he is taking. He keeps telling my mom to call Ryan, who would know what to do. Ryan, as was later established, is Mitch's nurse, whom I imagine as Ryan from *The Office* because I don't know what he looks like.⁴

So she does, she calls Ryan from *The Office* and it turns out that Mitch isn't on anything at all. It also turns out that he sees himself as a very friendly person and constantly walks up to dogs and sticks his fist in their faces. (Ryan from *The Office* isn't surprised.) Anyways, Mitch finally agrees to take the antibiotics, so the nurse wraps his hand and sends him off. My mom walks him home to his studio apartment on Charles Street.⁵ There is a large, octagonal pen full of turtles in the middle of the floor.

So at this point, my mom has an epiphany: Our dog, Komet with a K, has just attacked Mitch the Turtle Racer, whose shirt I may or may not have owned 10 years ago. But what is she supposed to do now? She can't just leave him, an old man with a wounded hand,

memory loss, and too many pet turtles. She agrees to come back tomorrow, solely to check on him. Mitch the Turtle Racer requests lettuce for the turtles, gives her the keys to his house (just in case), and asks for her phone number, but then realizes that he can't actually read it on his phone, so she writes her name, number, and address in a large, bold font, sticks it to the side of a cabinet, and takes her exit.

The next day, my mom arrives (with the lettuce⁶) to find that Mitch the Turtle Racer hasn't taken his antibiotics. Unless they are in the pill dispenser that Ryan from *The Office* fills for him, he won't take them because he can't remember why he has to do so. He has also taken off his bandage. So my mom takes him to the hospital, yet again. She spends six hours this time.

Because Mitch the Turtle Racer has missed his first dose, he now has to take his antibiotics intravenously, which requires a whole, long process of setting up machinery. And all this time my mom is stuck there with him, just trying to make sure he remembers to keep his bandage on.

This is a story about cycles. Cycles are like backstitching through time: seemingly linear from one perspective, but constantly circling back from another. They are a consequence of memory.

⁴ Actually, while I've never seen him myself, I have asked my mom to describe him for me. I have also decided not to tell you what he really looks like because it is funnier if you don't know. It wasn't so funny at the time. None of it was funny at the time.

⁵ Also not far: about five minutes back toward the "park".

⁶ Green leaf, I've been told, but other acceptable forms of nutrients for turtles include romaine lettuce, collard greens, mustard greens, carrot tops, endives, Swiss chard, kale, parsley, green beans, dandelion greens, turnip greens, and clover. Iceberg lettuce is not acceptable. (VCA Animal Hospitals)

I think the original incident occurred on a Thursday. That would make this second trip a Friday. My mom continues to visit Mitch for another week or so, bringing him lettuce each time (for his turtles, in case you've forgotten). Sometimes he remembers to keep the bandage on. Sometimes it is completely off. Sometimes he's forgotten he has to keep it dry, which is probably worse than taking it off altogether because he could die very quickly of infection.

But then she meets Julie and the situation gets much weirder. This is probably on the following Wednesday: My mom calls Mitch the Turtle Racer before she leaves to make sure he is home. He is. But when she gets there, the door has been left ajar and no one is in the apartment. So she waits a few minutes, and sure enough, Mitch the Turtle Racer shows up, apparently surprised that my mom is there, even though she has called him about 10 minutes prior. He is with a woman this time, who introduces herself as Julie, a freelance photographer who met Mitch the Turtle Racer in the AIDS memorial park.⁷ They have since become friends. The only thing I know about Julie is that she is middle-aged, but that is not much to go off of, so I imagine her as Julie, my brother's French ballet teacher, which doesn't quite make sense under the circumstances, but she's the only Julie I know.⁸ Anyway, Mitch the Turtle Racer seems to be doing fine this time. Great. My mom is more concerned about

Julie the French Ballet Teacher. She seems to have taken on the role of Mitch the Turtle Racer's caregiver, but is nowhere near qualified to do so. She also seems threatened by my mom's role as the Official Lettuce Bringer, and is consequently not pleasant to be around.

My mom then calls Ryan from *The Office* to make sure he knows that Julie the French Ballet Teacher is present. Ryan knows about Julie: Mitch the Turtle Racer tends to walk the streets of Greenwich Village and pick up people. Julie was the latest one, but he's had to throw out a homeless man before, so she isn't too bad by comparison.

The next time my mom encounters Julie the French Ballet Teacher is a few days later.⁹ This time Julie is drunk or high or something like that because she is stumbling around the room and speaking incoherently.¹⁰ This is when it becomes very clear that "freelance photographer" is really code for "unemployed." There is nothing that can really be done in this situation, though, so my mom attempts to talk to her like she isn't messed up.

But when my mom leaves, she realizes that there is a drunk woman in Mitch the Turtle Racer's apartment and my mom's name, phone number, and address are in bold letters on the side of Mitch the Turtle Racer's cabinet. So she again calls Ryan from *The Office* to update him on the escalating Julie situation and to tell him to get rid of her contact information the next time he's there.

⁷ Yet another miniscule park. This one contains a triangular white structure that I think looks like an alien's interpretation of a trellis, as well as a fountain/mini water park.

⁸ I like to imagine she speaks in a French accent, too.

⁹ Maybe Saturday.

¹⁰ And isn't it so much better to imagine that in a French accent?



That's the last time she sees Julie. Next is the pasta incident.

It's Tuesday: My mom calls Mitch the Turtle Racer and he says, *C'mon over*. When she arrives, his bandage is on (and dry) and his turtles are happy. All good things. But he is hung up on his pasta. *They tell me I can't cook pasta in my microwave! Is that true?* My mom explains that yes, one cannot cook pasta in a microwave. Microwaves are able to heat up water, but not to its boiling point. Also, you can't stir pasta if you are cooking it in a microwave. So no.

But I have this perfectly good tomato sauce here and it's already warm! It's like heaven on the tongue. I have to cook the pasta for the sauce! Mitch the Turtle Racer holds out the bowl of tomato sauce as if she can tell how good it tastes by looking at it. *Are you sure I can't cook pasta in a microwave?*

They go in circles for a while. He just can't seem to comprehend the fact that he cannot cook pasta in a microwave. Through this dialogue, it eventually becomes clear that Mitch the Turtle Racer has somehow obtained the perfect tomato sauce and some uncooked pasta from a grocery store he can't remember. He has put the tomato sauce in a bowl and then realized that he needs to be able to cook the pasta. So he goes (with the food!) to Gourmet Garage,¹¹ possibly the store he got the

sauce from (but probably not), for advice: Can he *really* not cook pasta in his microwave? No, the answer is still no.¹² The employees are slightly suspicious because it is not every day that an old man with a wounded hand, memory loss, and too many pet turtles walks into a grocery store with a bowl of "heaven on the tongue" tomato sauce that he has probably not bought there and asks them whether it is possible to cook pasta in a microwave. But they eventually realize that he isn't trying to pull anything on them, and so they do him the liberty of heating up his "heaven on the tongue" tomato sauce for him. So he goes home with his bowl of hot tomato sauce. But then it dawns on him that he still has no way to cook the pasta. This is the point at which my mom enters, at which he still hasn't wrapped his mind around the fact that one *really* cannot cook pasta in a microwave. He talks himself in circles, lapsing back into his original query time and time again.

My mom suggests that he go get a baguette¹³ to dip in his "heaven on the tongue," now getting cold, tomato sauce and he agrees that this *is* a possible solution. Though I still don't think he fully comprehends the many reasons why one cannot cook pasta in a microwave.

And that's the last time my mom saw Mitch the Turtle Racer. She left his keys with Ryan from *The Office* to make sure Julie the French Ballet Teacher couldn't get ahold of them.

¹¹ Closed as of November 27, but only five minutes south of McCarthy Square!

¹² This explains the they in *they told me I can't cook pasta in my microwave!*

¹³ She goes to Citarella this time: slightly farther, but better than returning to Gourmet Garage.





aveeno revamp

i want to take hot steamy bubble baths surrounded by duck toys and aveeno making me feel like miso soup under the heat lamp lights

i want to sleep in blankets with the lights on and wqxr humming from the bedside table
(to ward off ghosts),
but not before the way it feels to scratch the back of your neck with your nails freshly cut
next to the diaper table
not before you read picture books or spit out your toothpaste with the lights a little different
not before you watch a scratchy vhs of cinderella and recite the lyrics to the cleaning ladies

i want to go to bed and stay up skipping tracks on my dan zanes cd or fall asleep to a
freaky friday audiobook and i want to go to school to learn how to count and breathe in
crayonfresh air and play potions in the yard where river split his tongue

i want to play dog show and i want to play house and i want to play mermaid in the pool
before abby can call me a woman in third grade

i want to go into the plastic playhouse where i pinned up my spinnersplatter paint and i
want to keep stuffed animals in my plastic oven and i want to go visit hannah's room and
kill her playmobil and i want to throw a damn tea party with my damn stuffed dogs

i want american girl dolls to be novel and webkinz to be engaging and i want harry potter
to be a new concept to me

i want to play wii sports on the holidays and play wii fit until i can't feel my fingers
before body image can catch up to me

i want to wear my princess nightgown and sit on cinderella's lap and feel like magic or at the very least i'd like to take my lunchbox to school before it can get torn apart by squirrels

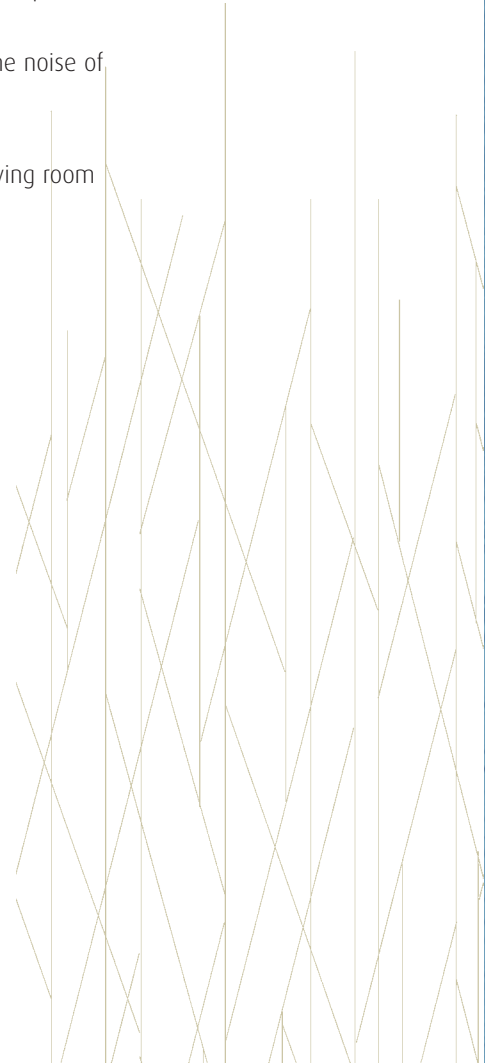
i want to sit under my canopy with hannah telling me stories and singing me pop songs and les mis

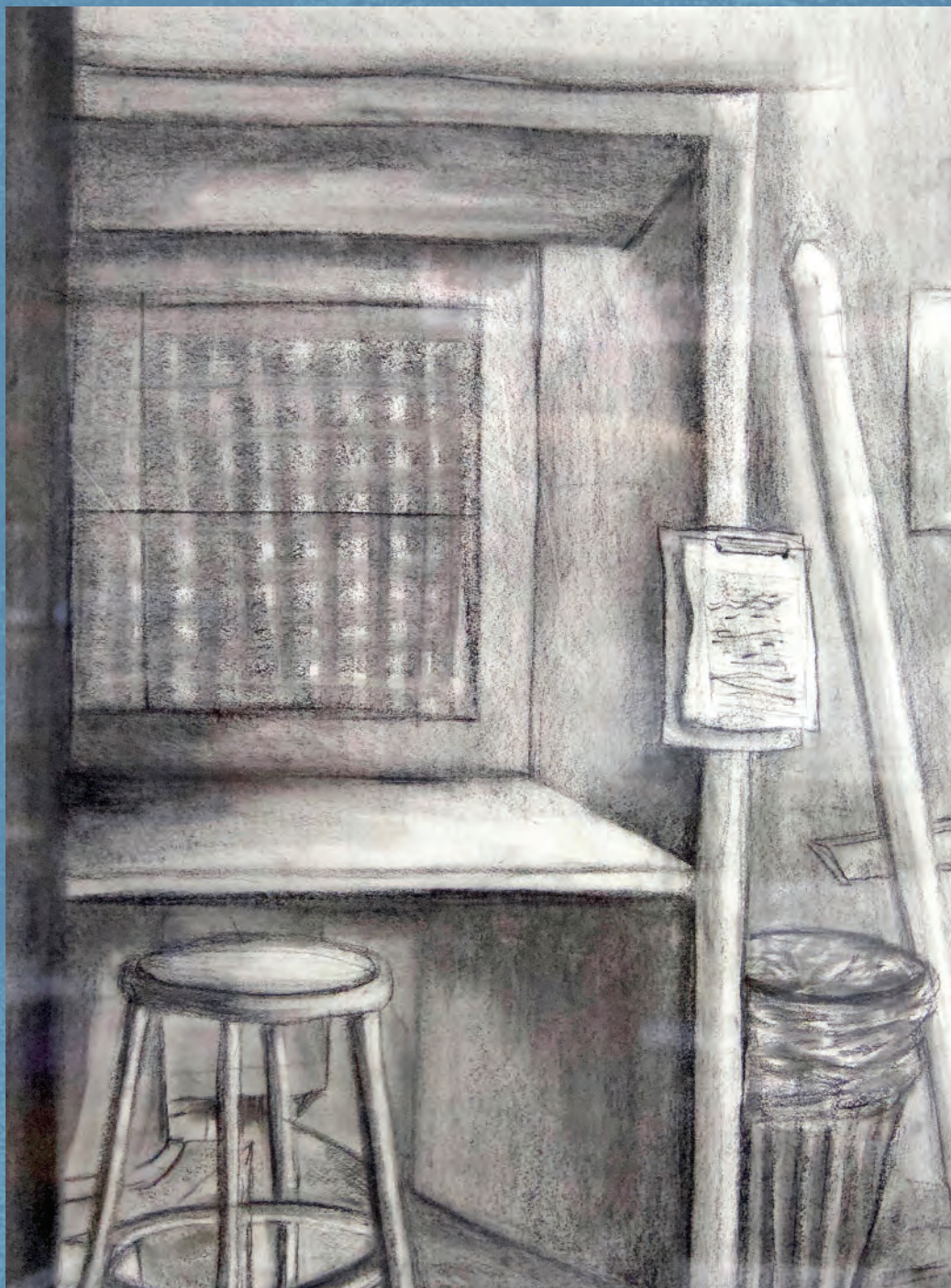
i want to be upstairs playing barbie storymaker on the gummy bear desktop

i want the scent of propane and the feel of scritchscratchy carpet and the noise of the pipes and playing doctor stibbons

i want the living room in the dining room and the dining room in the living room

and me sitting there, unbothered.





the ag fair dream

another new dream
all my grandparents were there
they were on the swings

ruby was next to me
it was the ag fair again
the mean kids played golf

i wanted to sit
but sophie did not let me
instead there were pictures

another small slip
a pogo stick hit a brick
everything collapsed

we all ran to her









Liam

If someone could be killed by intense staring, I would have just murdered my brother. He hadn't shooed me out yet. He wouldn't look at me. He crossed his arms and stuck his pointy elbow in my face. I stood there for another minute looking at Isaac, his best friend, and back at Liam, my brother. Liam turned his entire body away from me. His legs dangled from the chair and each time I shifted from one side to the other, he squeezed his eyes shut even tighter. I walked back to the kitchen and peeked back at them every few steps.

I made dust angels on the kitchen floor and listened to the garbage truck noises that came out of our computer when you turned it on. After the Lego Harry Potter background music, I heard Liam say, "Well now that she's gone, we can actually play."

Last year, Liam would storm into my room at random times in the evening because he was tired of homework or being alone in his room or for no reason. Sometimes he'd steal my phone. Other times he would stand outside my door and say, "Sir-ah" or "Soyrah" or "Srahrah" or any new version of my name. One time he knocked on my door and I said, "I'm busy!" He opened the door anyway and asked me why I'm always doing homework—that important thing for school. I rolled my eyes and continued reading *Things Fall Apart*. Liam took

off one of my socks, grabbed my book, and ran. I sat there for a moment thinking, *god, you're the absolute worst*. He came back to my room waving the book in my face and sprinted out of the room again. "Why, Liam? Why?" I shouted.

"So do the things really fall apart?"

"I can't wait until you graduate and go to college!"

I went into his room and took his copy of *Things Fall Apart* from when he was a freshman. He ran to the doorway and stood in it. I asked, "Can you move? I really need to do my homework."

"The problem is, I really don't want to."

"Are you serious?"

The couple of days before Liam had to go back to college, he set up his Xbox and an Aerobed in the living room, next to my, 2000-piece puzzle. As soon as I saw him spinning around in the office chair, I knew my rooftop garden scene was in danger. I protected it by working on it, while Liam played on his Xbox, 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.

I turned on the lamp and sat cross-legged on the ottoman. After an hour, the hundreds of identical pink flower pieces numbed my brain while the grunting *Call of Duty* soldiers and sniper rifle shots played in the background. The light from the TV highlighted Liam's oily

face. I stood up and shook his chair so someone could kill his player. He yelled, "Sarah, stop!"

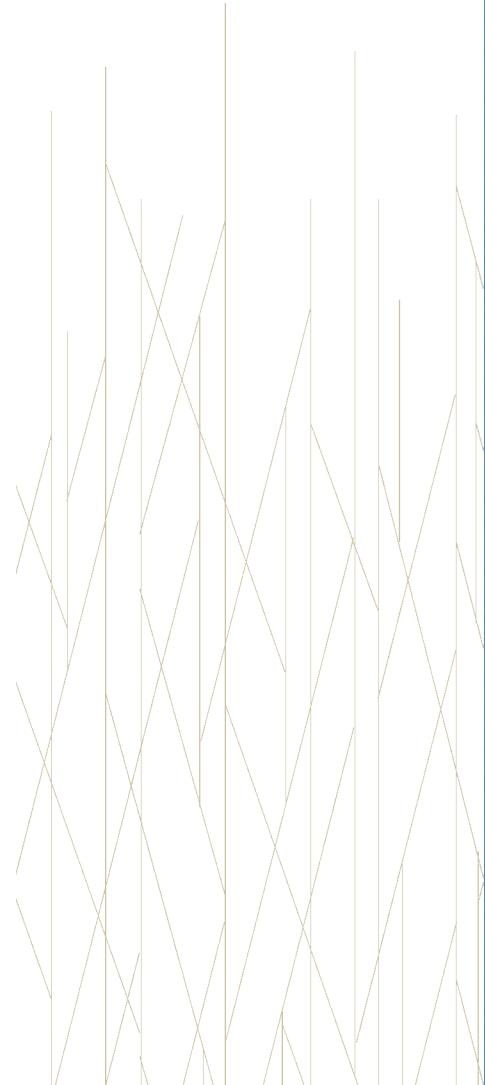
"Wanna do some of my puzzle with me?"

"I'm good. Puzzles are stupid. How about you play some *COD*?"

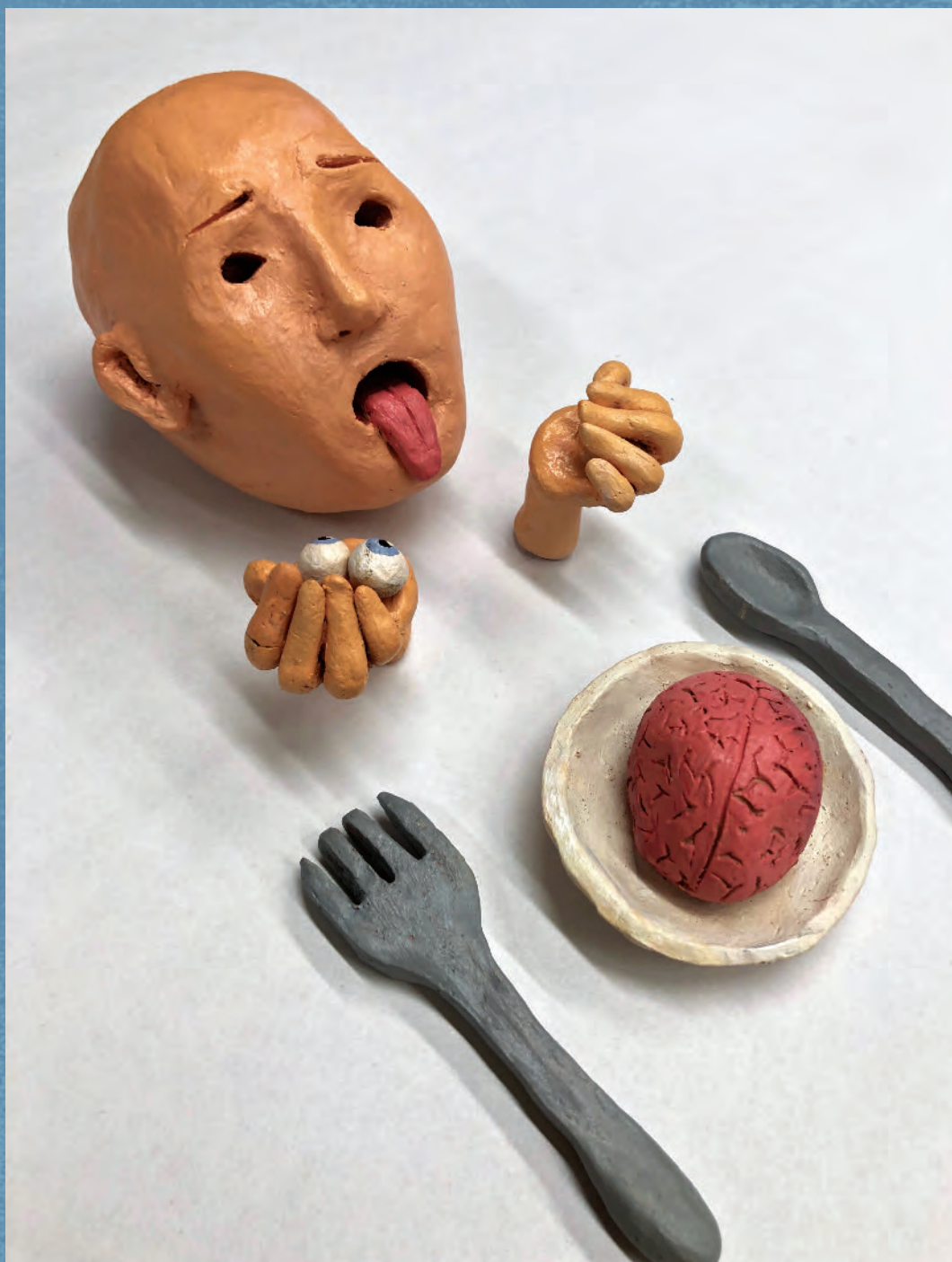
"You are so full of crap. The last time you asked me to play *Call of Duty* you just laughed at me the entire time."

I returned to my puzzle and Liam put a plate on my lap. I thought he'd eaten all the food and wanted me

to put it in the sink, like last year. But when I looked down, he'd sliced the Amy's pizza into two halves, but cut my half into four pieces, the way a pizza should be cut. I glanced at him. With one hand he was shoving his half of the pizza in his mouth, while using the other hand to slam the buttons on his remote. I apologized for getting him killed.







Tree Sap, An Ancient Cult

Waiter: And here you are—pancakes! Would you like to dampen them with some viscous fluid that we parasitically extracted from an unwilling donor during spring—that’s when it’s easiest to siphon out the fluid—then aged for a few weeks to marinate the flavor and boiled to purify the contents? Oh, and it’s *organic*. We like to take the time to harvest the blood ourselves.

Me: (*screams*)

According to Google, tree sap, a tree’s blood, seeps out due to “pruning, damage, pests and disease.” Okaaay . . . so you’re telling me that trees let blood to get rid of their sicknesses? And then humans come along and purify said blood and pour it over pancakes? Why would any stable person purposefully gulp down a quarter cup of tree guts? Then again, what TREE was like, “Yo guys, wouldn’t it be cool if we just let our blood seep out of our skin?! It’ll be groovy, my dudes!” Doesn’t that spread disease? I’m sorry Mr. Maple, but I regret to inform you that I DON’T WANT YOUR TUBERCULOSIS.

Let me tell you about one of my first encounters with tree sap, one that left me scarred for life.

Literally.

I was about eight or so visiting the Atlanta Zoo with my family, and on this fateful day I decided I would hug a tree. Now of course, the tree I hugged, a

welcoming elm, had decided that today it wasn’t good enough to merely have nutrients and sugar, but that it had to share them with the world. So that’s exactly what it did. My mom immediately pulled me away from the tree, but it was too late—I had already embraced the sticky syrup of death. As I was walking to the bathroom to wash myself off, I suddenly felt a buzzing presence in my hair.

Back in the day, I was Wild Kratt Martin, ready to save the day with my *creature powers*. I was determined to tame my buzzing creature friend, and in order to do that, I had to capture it—a mistake. IMPACT. I screeched with the screams of all of Satan’s past victims. The hornet was still stuck to my hand, my finger impaled with the stinger.

Splendid job, Martin.

Now terrified, I flung the beast into the first exhibit I could see. I mean, it’s an animal, right?

Another mistake.

It landed in the bird exhibit. I still have nightmares that when I get to heaven, my buddy, the hornet, will be waiting there for me:

Hornet: Why did you kill me, compatriot?

*“Oh, and it’s
organic.
We like to take
the time to
harvest the blood
ourselves.”*

Me: Kill you? I didn't kill you! Hahahaha: **IT WAS THE TREE SAP, IMPERTINENT INSECT.**

Hornet: Ah, so it was really the oligosaccharides. Well, then. All is forgiven, my dear boy.

Elm: Guys, I didn't do it.

Hornet: WHAT?

Me: The sap got you stuck—

Hornet: This insolent little ignoramus—

Me: —which is why I panicked—

Hornet: —is now LYING? I had DREAMS. I was going to be fruitful and pollinate, enjoy my life, settle down, maybe even start a hive as I grew old. But *noooo*. I had to meet my end in the repugnant jaws of a STUPID AVIAN.

Me: Nah man, I'm being framed.

Hornet: (*hyperventilating*)

Me: So . . . can I come into heaven now?

Hornet: **DENIED.**

Meanwhile, my parents looked back to see their son covered in sap, blood gushing out of his hand, tears streaming down his face, screaming in the direction of an emu.

You see, this is not even the full extent of tree sap's influence. Back in the 90s, tree sap infiltrated Hollywood. For those of you unfamiliar with the film *Jurassic Park*, let me give you a synopsis. Some rich old guy decides to create a theme park with live dinosaurs. What could go wrong? However, he revives the dinosaurs from DNA found inside amber, or fossilized sap.

So now sap is dinosaur Jesus. **MAGNIFICENT.**

Of course, the DNA is extracted by means of dinosaur blood trapped inside a mosquito corpse that is frozen inside tree blood, and the dinosaurs in question end up escaping and eating multiple clueless tourists, and the velociraptors hunt the survivors in a scene that makes the end of *Bambi* look like a light comedy, but we don't have to talk about that.

Sap is a universal herald for suffering, be it through the failure of amusement parks, the death of auspicious hornets, or the rejection of Wild Kratts from heaven. So please consider the consequences before you ask dinosaur Jesus to bless your bloodstained flapjacks.



You Threaten Me With Smothered Looks

We paint ourselves in masquerades of overwhelming pictures.
Whole lives are sought, emotions bought for overpriced mixtures.
I mirror myself in better lights from filters

blue and

mellow.

And still today, no better rights for

feathered red

eggshell white

negro black

and curling yellow?

The “battle royale” I view, of screaming clicks and likes for people
you could never hold.

Leaves a distance on the ladder for
the smarter and the bold.

Your popularity is a spectrum all depending on your hue.

But if you ask me what I favor I’ll say nothing over you.

You can shroud yourself in blush and liner, shadows and mascara.

But the you I want is perfect and there isn’t nothing fairer.





Corporate Greetings

Rite Aid

"Do you have epsom salts?" I asked. The employee paused his conversation with his coworker to raise his eyebrows in silent judgment.

"Uh. Aisle five?"

After searching through aisle five and encountering numerous tampons and pads, I came to the realization that I was in the feminine hygiene section. Marching back to the counter, I asked another employee. "Epsom salts?"

"Back of aisle number one." I found them in a minute. *Jesus, that was a lot of work.* I walked, head high, up to the counter for the third time. Now, I was greeted by a 15-person line. One by one, each customer handed their items to the cashier, who struggled, again and again, to locate and scan the barcode. Finally, it was my turn.

"Following guest?"

Following WHAT?! GUEST? Does the corporate idiot that forced such stupid language on Rite Aid employees even know the meaning of that word? I mean, Merriam-Webster defines a guest as "a person to whom hospitality is extended." And let me tell you, what I experienced was far from hospitality. Remind me not to celebrate Thanksgiving at that guy's house. Imagine if I asked where the bathroom was; he would probably ignore me for a minute, continuing his conversation,

and then tell me it was somewhere down the hall. *Which hall? Which door?* It would be like the Wild West.

McDonald's

Thank you for choosing McDonald's. May I take your order? There is so much wrong with the seemingly innocuous phrase. First, what kind of people are going to McDonald's? I'll tell you who, people in a time crunch. People who got somewhere to be. Then why would they ever want to be slowed down with small talk? Second, in my entire life, I have never "*chosen* McDonald's." I am either in a rush or I'm stranded in the middle of nowhere, forced to decide between McDonald's and a gas station. There's nothing like hearing teenagers in brown aprons spit out an overlapping chorus of corporate speak to make you feel like a meaningless part of a billion-dollar machine.

Designer Shoe Warehouse

Next Shoe Lover! This smarmy phrase is the brainchild of the geniuses at DSW. They should realize their customers are not "Shoe Lovers," but people who really just need a pair of dress flats for their son's bar mitzvah or whatever. I feel so bad for DSW employees. Imagine that you're working a crappy job, with crappy rights and a crappy wage, and the cherry on top is that you have to repeat

the same humiliating sentence over and over and over and over again.

Regal Cinema

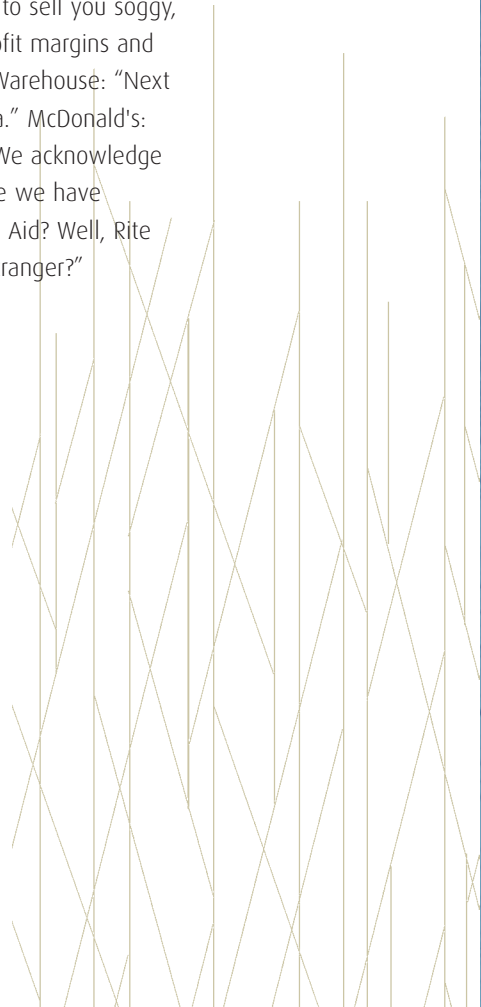
Let me set the scene. I have just forked over \$15 in order to see *Fast and Furious 45*. I then volunteer to stand in a 10-minute concession line, where I will hopefully be given the opportunity to part with another \$7 in order to get a medium popcorn. My movie is starting soon and I really want to get to my seat. Finally, I get to the front of the line, and you know what I hear?

"Thanks for coming to Regal Cinemas. What item would you like to purchase? We are now offering pretzel bites with American cheese." What. The. Actual. Why would I ever want pretzel bites with American cheese? Hell, what sane person wants any type of cheese from a movie theater? The only thing I want less than movie theater cheese is someone using mandated sales tactics

to *upsell me* some movie theater cheese.

You might be thinking, *You are being so incredibly petty. Why do you even care so much?* Well . . . I care because their cute little greetings are misleading. I just want these companies to acknowledge their gross food, crappy customer service, and trashy shoes through completely honest corporate dialogue. I am proposing one alternative for each company.

Regal Cinemas: "We appreciate that you purchased tickets to our movie, but now we have to sell you soggy, disease-ridden pretzels to boost our profit margins and prey on your laziness." Designer Shoe Warehouse: "Next desperate but underfinanced fashionista." McDonald's: "Thank you for coming to McDonald's. We acknowledge the only reason you are here is because we have snuffed out all local business." And Rite Aid? Well, Rite Aid employees should just say, "Next stranger?"





Dis(re)membered

An unnatural darkness wraps an always lit
city. Slinking across the soft wool, I rest
my head against the glass, leaving fingerprints

against cool panes. Remembrance tiptoes around
corners, waiting to be caught, silently
hoping, allowed to pass by the

fractured moonlight revealing
water gently lapping against the side of
broken brick. Cars bobbing, metal

monsters swept as easily off of their
feet as the sanguine bodies of apples in a basin. Eyes
skimming for something intact, some little piece left

alone. Just like those children drench their
faces and snap to sink their incisors
into the round flesh. Teeth grazing,

eyes shut tight. They
press into the sides of my
cheeks, the bridge of my nose, the arch of my

forehead. I surface, tongue tingling, left with
a longing to savor something I can't
hold onto. The frigid venture proving

barren. My breath slipping, heartbeat
elevated by each *crack* of teeth on
teeth.





Moe's Declassified White School Survival Guide™

Hello! I'm Moe. You probably can't tell through the page, but I am—what are the kids calling it nowadays? Oh yeah—*Black*. Are you also *Black*? Perfect! And are you going to a predominantly White high school? Oh, well lucky you! You've come to the right place!

Now, I've been in your shoes before: they're squeaky clean because it's your freshman orientation! You're starting high school and you're nervous, you're scared—you're practically gonna crap your pants you're so terrified. Well, let me be the first to tell you, you shouldn't be! High school is *sooooo* much fun. You get, like, no homework, you sleep eight-plus hours every night, and your parents are, like, *totally* understanding and helpful. As for colleges? Pffft, they might as well apply to *you*. High school is *awesome*! Now, add some White people to the mix, and high school is looking like a *breeze* for you!¹

But, in case you need some extra help, I'm here so you won't have to face it alone! Follow the tips in my Declassified White School Survival Guide™, and you're sure to have the best four years of your life!

PRE-TIP: Getting Into a PWS is as Easy as ABC

This guide is for Black students who are going to a PWS (Predominantly White School). If you're not in one yet, don't fret! Getting into a PWS is going to be the *easiest* thing. They'll call you in for an "interview" and make

you fill out an "application," but those are just formalities. Once they see that photo you send in of yourself, you're pretty much set. They'll accept you into their school with open arms. Pasty, White open arms.

TIP #1: The White Switch

You know how everyone tells you when you start a new school to just *be yourself*? They were totally right! But you always wanna put your *best* self forward. Which one is that, you ask? Well, the one the White people like, silly! Stay true to *that* version of yourself. You gotta be Black, but not *too* Black.

Think of it like this: You wanna be Black enough that they can point you out when a school tour is walking by (this is a good sign, it means they like you), but not so Black that you make the White folk on the tour clutch their bags and shield their children's eyes. (This is *not* a good sign, it means you should probably transfer, see Pre-Tip for further instruction.)

In order to activate this best version of yourself, you're going to need to locate your White switch. What's the White switch? Oh, you don't know? Well, I don't blame you for your ignorance, they actually don't tell this story in the Bible. Let me: So, while God was making Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he was also experimenting with new, energy-saving darker versions of the human that he called Andre and Ebony,

¹ Results may vary.

who lived in the inner-garden community of Edensville. And on Andre and Ebony, God carefully placed a failsafe switch, just in case their darkness proved unnecessary after all. Long story short, God decided to keep the darkness in his new humans. But, to this day, the White switch has survived centuries of evolution. Talk about luck, huh?

So before we continue, go ahead and locate your White switch now. Everyone's is in a unique spot on their body. It'll be a little hard to see through all that Blackness. Found it? Great!

Now, before you jump right in, here are some ground rules of the White switch:

1. Leave it on the entire school day. You don't want to accidentally let any Black slip when you're at school. The White people wouldn't like that.
2. Flip it off at the end of every school day. You don't want to accidentally let any White slip when you're at home. Your family wouldn't like that.

There's one more thing you should know before you flip that switch: Once you stop going Black, there's no going back. The more you flip the switch, the more addicted you become to the privileges it brings, and the less you turn it back off. Over time, you forget where your switch is, your Blackness blurs, and eventually the switch just falls off. This is the peculiar blessing of your dark skin. Enjoy it!

TIP #2: Ebonics? We Don't Know Her.

When you speak, there are three things that you use to distinguish the different sounds that come together to make different words that come together to make sentences.

They are: the lips, the teeth, and the tip of the tongue. Use them! Don't be a dick—have *dic-tion*! Leave the slang back in the ghetto where it belongs!

Proper enunciation is the key to the heart of *any* White person. Nothing will make them love you more than the stimulation they'll get from hearing the style of speech they claim leaving the lips of a mouth they used to own.

Well, not *them*, per say, but more their grandparents. Slavery was a *looong* time ago.

TIP #3: Show Us That Pearly White Personali—I Mean, Smile.

Never stop smiling. Like ever. No exceptions.

It's considered disrespectful in White culture for a Black person to show any emotions. So *tone it down*. Cut it out with the chicken neck and hand claps. We're more civilized in private school.

Let me put it this way: It's like that Australian animal researcher guy who everyone used to love on PBS. Remember how when *one* stingray messed around and killed the guy, everyone hated *all* stingrays? That's what it'll be like if you mess this up for us. Everyone's watching you, so don't let them catch you slipping. Don't be a stingray.



Be more like a strange pet, like Clifford the Big Red Dog! But Black. Everyone loves Clifford the Big Black Dog.

TIP #4: What's In a Name, Anyway?

Okay, Clifford. Just like any pet—your name? Gotta keep it simple. *Something* about you will curl the consonants in your name as they roll off the tongues of your White peers and teachers. Javon will become John. Taj will become Tom. Sandra will become Sambo—you get the point.

Not to mention, you're probably not the only Black person in your grade. There are like, two more? If you're lucky, maybe five! But you have to be patient with the White people, they don't know better. Javon, you'll most definitely be confused with Taj. But don't take everything so personal, it's not *their* fault you have a weird name. You just gotta make it easier for them.

Come up with something catchy: like JJ or Ty or Sandy or Moe.

TIP #5: Hands are the Hottest New Haircessory

The biggest compliment in White culture is *touching*. The White people will touch you. But don't worry, it's all out of love and amazement. They're bound to be most enamored with your hair. I mean, if you met Clifford the Big Black Dog, wouldn't you wanna pet him? When they touch you, enjoy the sensation! This is what acceptance feels like!

Oh, they're also gonna ask questions. Their curiosity is so flattering.

"What do you use?" It's offensive in White culture to answer these sorts of questions with references they will not understand. So, instead of Cantu or Shea Moisture, go with Pantene or Garnier Fructis.

Whenever you detangle or wear your hair natural, be prepared for more questions! These are my personal favorites:

"Did you get a haircut?"

"How did you do that?"

"Where'd the rest of it go?" White culture frowns upon laughing at them when they ask obvious questions, so don't be rude! Smile, answer them, show them your shrinkage, and watch them bask in the glory of the magic act you have atop your head.

TIP #6: Don't Make Friends With . . . The Others

This rule is pretty self-explanatory. Don't make friends with the other Black kids. You're all Black and you don't *have* to necessarily be friends with each other because of that, so don't.

It's mean; you'll just make the White kids feel bad.

And anyway, why bother with them when you have an entire student body of wonderful *White* friends to be sidekick to?

This isn't public school anymore, you have options now! Take advantage.

TIP #7: Meet the Parents

After you make some great White friends, you're eventually gonna be invited to their great White home, in their great White neighborhood, where you'll

no doubt meet their great White parents. It is crucial that you respect their culture!!! Use what I've already taught you: smile, speak eloquently, let them touch you, and introduce yourself using your pet name—I mean nickname.

Because they're *so* kind and considerate, while you're over, they'll remember the kids they saw on an infomercial about Ugandan refugees and realize that you, too, probably don't have food to eat at home. They'll ask you to stay for dinner. Accept the offer: this is a once in a lifetime opportunity! But keep these Special Case Tips in mind:

Special Case Tip A: Seating

You'll walk down from your friend's room and into the dining room. You'll see five seats, and six people. Looks like someone forgot to bring the extra up from storage in the basement. You know what, it's fine, the stools in the kitchen are more comfortable anyway. Besides, they don't have arms that squeeze at your thighs and pinch your skin. Look, don't take it personally, they just didn't want your Black to stain the furniture. I mean, would *you* let your dog eat at the dinner table with you?

Special Case Tip B: Ask for Help

Not with the eating, silly, with the utensils! There'll be like 12 different utensils to choose from. Ask for guidance on which to use for each part of the meal. There's nothing that'll float their gravy boat more

than coming to your rescue with the right fork for your mashed potatoes.

Special Case Tip C: The Food

White culture prohibits the seasoning of food. They'll have salt and pepper shakers that look like matryoshka dolls on the table—they're empty. See, the mother, let's call her Karen, has a best friend from book club, let's call her Lily, who was selling them on her Etsy page. Lily was going through a really nasty divorce earlier this year, with her ex-husband, Doug, and Karen was just trying to be supportive. Either way, enjoy this cultural cuisine! Who are you kidding? Screw hot sauce, the only condiment you *really* need is water! Bon appetit!

Special Case Tip D: Banter

It'll be hard to have a conversation with the family when they'll be sitting all the way in the dining room while you're in the kitchen.

First, don't speak until you're spoken to. But, when you are, make sure you answer promptly, with no food in your mouth.

They'll ask about you. This is their home—tell them what they want to hear. That your dad left when you were young. That your mother has seven

***“After you make
some great
White friends, you’re
eventually gonna be
invited to their
great White home,
in their great
White neighborhood,
where you’ll no doubt
meet their great
White parents.”***

When I was a medical intern at St Vincent's hospital many years ago, I was on call (essentially on duty 24 hours for all emergencies)I was paged to assist an elderly white woman who was having trouble breathing. She took one look at me and screamed at the top of her lungs, "don't touch me you Black Bitch." I didn't break a sweat... Just told her its Dr. Black Bitch. I have your back. Don't swear it and don't let it tear you down. We love and honor you. Keep stepping

From Birthgiver (👁️,💚) on April 28, 2016



And Then There Were None

Rekia Boyd, 22. Shot in the back of the head
by an off-duty police officer Michelle Cusseaux.

50. Killed a stranger by a police officer
called to a health facility.

Renisha, 19. Her car crashed, she
knocked over a car for help and

shot in the head. 27. Shot in the
neck and an off-duty deputy

after a shoplifting. 47. Shot in the
head by a police officer.

47. Shot in the head by a police officer.
and a police officer.

back of the head. 28. Shot in the
back of the head.

park after taking her final exams. Sandra Bland, 28.
Arrested for allegedly assaulting a police officer and

four days later. 28. Shot in the head.
and a police officer.

and a police officer. 28. Shot in the head.
and a police officer.

7. Shot in the head. 28. Shot in the head.
and a police officer.

Sharon, NY. 28. Shot in the head.
and a police officer.

her 5 year old son with an elbow injury and
a police officer.

in a classroom. 28. Shot in the head.
and a police officer.

there are many other stories. They matter.
They matter.

Rekia, Michelle, Renisha . . .

children by five men. That the commute from Brownsville is tough, but it's worth it.

Now, crack a couple jokes. White people love laughing with Black people. Or is it at us? Either way, we're just so funny. So keep the jokes coming. Nothing like a minstrel show to complement your minestrone soup. Yum!

Oh, and last thing: Don't speak to the help. They'll be sitting with you in the kitchen, but you are *not* like them, no matter what sweet nothings their skin whispers into your ears as they brush past you. If you engage, you risk losing the respect of the family.

Special Case Tip E: Saying Goodbye

As you get ready to leave, make sure you tell Karen how delicious the food was. Shake the hand of your friend's father. Don't make eye contact with the help. Hug your friend after you grab your coat and put on your shoes. Check to make sure you haven't forgotten anything, White folk sleep early; they won't be up much longer after you leave. Tell Karen how great the food was one more time before you leave, and throw out one more "thanks for everything," before your friend closes the door . . . Then take a sigh of sweet exhaustion. Congrats! You just got your first *taste* of privilege! Pun intended.

Now get your Black ass home quick before your mother beats it.

TIP #6: Slayed by the Bell

Now of course, this is a high school survival guide, so it's only fitting that I give you some tips on surviving the best part of school: class. Woo-hoo! Use these Pencil Tips (see what I did there?) to help you make it through the day!

Pencil Tip #1: The S-Word

Slavery! Ah, don't you just *love* the *entirety of Black history*? I know I sure do!

If and when slavery comes up in class (and it *will* come up in class), your White peers will look to you, and you *need* to be ready . . .

Don't go ghost when it comes up, instead, serve the children some *Phantom of the Opera*! Don't start class on a sour note, let's have *A Chorus Line*! Don't leave your classmates bewildered, give 'em *Into the Woods*! Don't let the kinks in your hair speak for themselves, give us *Kinky Boots*!

I hope you're getting the point here. This is your moment to shine! Give us a production: share all that expertise on your ancestors! Recite a monologue selection from Frederick Douglass' autobiography on what it was like to work in the fields! Bring in some cotton to share with the class! Maybe sing some negro spirituals? My personal fave is "Wade in the Water," but hey! "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" works, too!

The point is, there's no better way to an easy A than to share about what you know, so share about slavery!

Pencil Tip #2: Respect the Safe Space

If you're going to a PWS, chances are your school has been dubbed a "safe space" by the administration, faculty, and shiny rainbow stickers on classroom windows. Part of being a considerate classmate is making sure that you're respectful of your White peers. It's not easy being a majority. So here are some mini pencil tips so you know how to make going to school with you easier for them.

mini pencil tip #1: we get it, you're smart

They get it, dude. You're smart. You're probably in a program for other Black kids like you, who are also smart. But you don't have to rub it in, okay? School isn't easy for everybody. Especially your White peers. How were they supposed to know that you can't just pay for good grades?

Look, you don't want to make them feel bad, right? Right. So maybe chill out with the big words and the answering questions and the raising your hand and the talking and the taking up space. Share the air time, all right? You don't have to show off that you're smart.

What are you trying to prove, anyway?

mini pencil tip #2: aggressive

Can you not be so . . . aggressive? You're always on the attack mode. You're not in the hood anymore. You don't need to fight your way through everything. I guess someone woke up on

the wrong side of the tracks this morning. You can talk without the attitude. Would you just let him finish? There's a way to respectfully disagree. Remember our community norms. Remember that this is a safe space, right? Just take a deep breath and calm down. You'll be okay. Lower your voice, please. There's no need to create a hostile environment, we're all learners here. Do you need to take a walk, get a sip of water?

Okay.

Oh, and just shut the door behind you, please? Thanks.

mini pencil tip #3: sing along if you know this one!

*This space is your space, this space is
Whites' space . . .*

*From the all-gender bathroom to the library,
And you can't compare it to segregation,
But "Safe Space" was made for Whites Only.*

Things are always easier to remember when you set them to a catchy tune!

But for real though, especially in our current political climate, White people are under attack. #StayWoke. As such, it's important for *them* to have safe spaces. So, if you feel a little unsafe, that's why. We just have to give all the safety to the White folk right now. And forever. But it's, like, not like segregation, like, at all. That's so 1950s.

And I'm sure you don't mind giving up
some of your safety to help out White people,
right?

Your ancestors never did.

**Pencil Tip #3: Always Carry an Extra N-Word
Pass On You**

Black culture is so much fun, right! Watermelon,
hip-hop music, Kool-Aid, grape flavoring, hereditary
PTSD, R&B music, fried chicken, gospel music, heart
disease! What's not to love? But, for White people,
the best part of Black culture is undoubtedly the
claim over the ever-illusive n-word. They had their
turn with it first, but they're not very good at
sharing (just ask the Native Americans), and now
they want it to be their turn again. So don't be so
stingy, carry an extra n-word pass on you and share
the fun with your buds. Otherwise, they'll just feel
left out.

Besides, who died and said Black people are
the only ones who can reclaim things?

Oh, yeah. But, like, who *else*?

Pencil Tip #4: Teachers

Teachers. Gotta love 'em. But they don't gotta love
you. So you need to be extra careful around them.
Whatever you do around White students, do triple
that for teachers! They work so hard to teach you
everything they do and they go through so much
trouble to help you, you don't want to place the
extra burden of your Blackness on them. Remember:
these are the people who control your grades. You
wanna succeed? Then you have to, above all, have
integrity as a student, which means that you're
always doing the White thing, even when no one's
looking.

But especially when they are.

Well, that's it! That's all I got for ya. I know, I
know, I'm amazing and this was really helpful and
you would've totally, like, died without me, *yada
yada yada, blah blah blah*. Don't worry, you're
welcome. But don't leave here today and put my
great advice to shame!

I wish you good luck in high school, young
one! But you're *totally* not gonna need it.





Sap

There are three trees in the playground at my school. Three small and knotted pines, oozing sap in the corner, littering the ground with shiny green needles. I never see any adults in that corner, or most of the older kids. I don't think the adults really know about them—at least not the way we do—and the fourth graders say they are too cool. But I'm a third grader, so it's still okay for my hands to be yellowish and sticky after recess.

Today, we are playing over there. Sap's fun, if you know how to use it. It's great for trapping ants, making believe you're a honey bee farmer, and making the queen's gold coins. Viv and I come up with a million ways to use it each time; the sap is our secret—all best friends have secrets—for no one else unless we want it to be.

Viv is the only red-haired friend I have, and it's not really red hair anyway. She has dark brown eyes, and freckles, but you can't always tell because her cheeks are so red. She smells strange, but I don't care, because she's loud, funny, and always wears pretty shirts. I try to dress like her, but I can't figure out how. She's not afraid to talk to boys, or to not pay attention during math. We yell a lot, and sing, too. At my house, we pretend we're sisters, and play with my dress-ups. She has a lot of stuff at her house, but it's all "special," so you can't play with it. I know she's my best friend because she always laughs at my jokes, and when she

smiles at me, I feel important and cool.

Mr. Soto calls. We line up: fourth grade and third grade. A fourth grader bumps into me. Viv says she saw the menu, says there are rice noodles for lunch. I want to go eat, but everyone in my line is talking, so Mr. Soto won't let us in. He thinks it's funny, but I don't.

The line goes on forever when we get inside. I'm really hungry now. In third grade, I'm always hungry. Viv's talking to Kate. To distract myself, I reach for Viv's hair. It feels scratchy and rough and sticks to the sap on my hands, but I want to try braiding it, like she does to mine. She turns around and rolls her eyes.

"Abby, this conversation doesn't involve you," she says.

"Oh."

Kate giggles, then asks Viv what's for lunch.

The line moves up. My cheeks feel hot, and I blink really hard because all of a sudden my eyes are stinging.

Doesn't involve you.

I don't get it. We play dress up. I play with toys no one else can. We share everything: puzzles, Barbies, chocolate-frosted birthday cupcakes, gummy worms, books, Trident gum, cheeseburgers, toothpaste, makeshift rubber band hair-ties.

I want to cry. I want to yell. I want to go home. I want to wash this icky sap off my hands. I want to

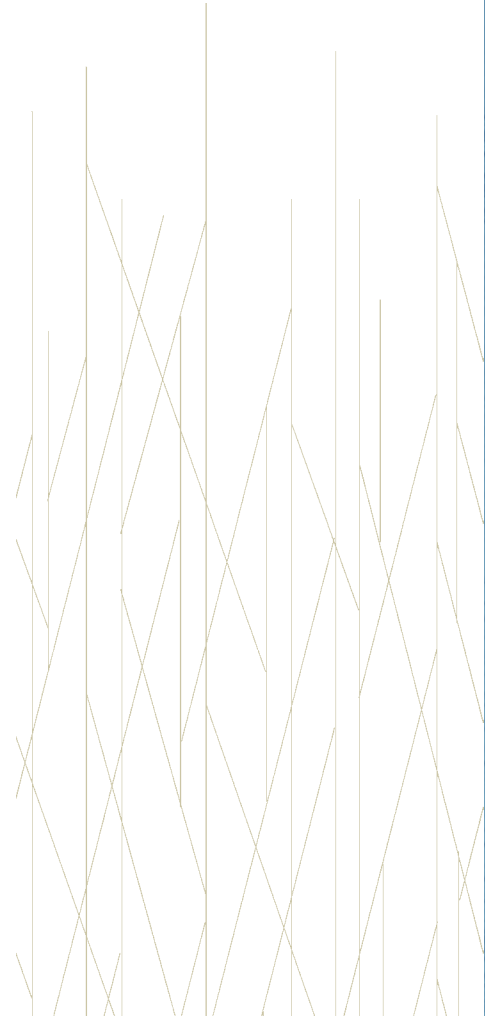
apologize to her for being so stupid. I want to make her laugh. I want her to yell, "Just kidding!"

But she doesn't. She just giggles and turns away.

This won't be the last time Viv hurts my feelings. I don't know it now, but in fourth grade I will cry a lot. In fifth grade, she'll tell Lizzy I'm annoying. Sixth grade I won't invite her to my birthday party. Seventh grade

we'll stop texting each other, and she'll start dating.

Eighth grade is the year of hallway nods and class partners and occasional group lunches. Right now, in third grade, the hallway lights feel brighter and harsher and all of a sudden I don't want to sit with her anymore and I'm not very hungry.





A Tour Guide for What He Calls “Heaven”

In Heaven, fields of grass are engulfed in planetariums.
You turn to me and ask, “Where did all of the people go?”
Did you have to phrase it like that? I can’t speak for people, but
Angels are great stalks of cloud and trails of happy-tears;
The flowers must drown in what they can’t drink.

When you arrived, God built a telepathic network
Between your brain and all the others!
There are still roads you’re not allowed to cross,
but you are not unsatisfied.
You are here because you learned to be satisfied.

Flowers still grow from where you died,
And your children still water them.
Did you know your deathplace could be more than just such?
Did you know you were anything more than temporary?
Did you ever make the mistake of believing you could be forgotten?

Or do you miss your pulse?





Vivere a Colori

"It seems like a language with which I have to have a relationship [. . .] I would be unsatisfied, incomplete if I didn't learn it [. . .] I feel a connection and at the same time a detachment [. . .] It stirs an absurd longing. An exquisite tension."

—Jhumpa Lahiri, *In Other Words*

My determination to learn Italian first began when I was a child. I was enchanted by my dad's raspy renditions of Neapolitan ballads and loved watching his hands roll fresh *tagliolini*. I saw the way that thinking about home brought him to tears and I dreamed that someday I would be able to call Italy home as well.

The last time my family went to Italy was to spread the ashes of my grandfather, Nonno. He spoke very little English, so when I grieved his death I was not only grieving the person I unconditionally loved, but also the fact that I was never truly able to get to know him. Not speaking Italian was what filled the ocean between us: it was what fueled the separation. I clung to my Nonna and promised myself that I would never let the same happen with her.

After years of anticipation, I arrived at my grandmother's apartment building in the Monteverde neighborhood of Rome, only a bus ride away from St. Stephen's, my school for the semester. When my taxi pulled up to the pebbly courtyard on *Via Carini*, I spotted

Nonna on her radiant, rose-covered balcony. She looked as she always has: small and round, sporting delicately-puffed white hair and her classic ensemble of pearls. Soon enough, we were suspended in what we now call "*l'abbraccia della rana*" ("the frog hug") because of the way I have to squat in order to embrace her tiny frame.

I was exactly where I wanted to be, but I felt the "exquisite tension" that Lahiri describes, being planted in a place far from home yet somehow familiar. Each night I confidently set out to retrieve the ingredients for dinner, but my excitement promptly faded when store owners insisted on speaking to me in English. Before I said a word, they could tell I was American. I responded tentatively with my meager Italian vocabulary, discouraged by my performance gone wrong.

But after a few months, I grew to be as comfortable navigating Rome as I am Manhattan. I started to feel at home at St. Stephen's, and the nearby shopkeepers began suppressing their instincts to speak to me in English.

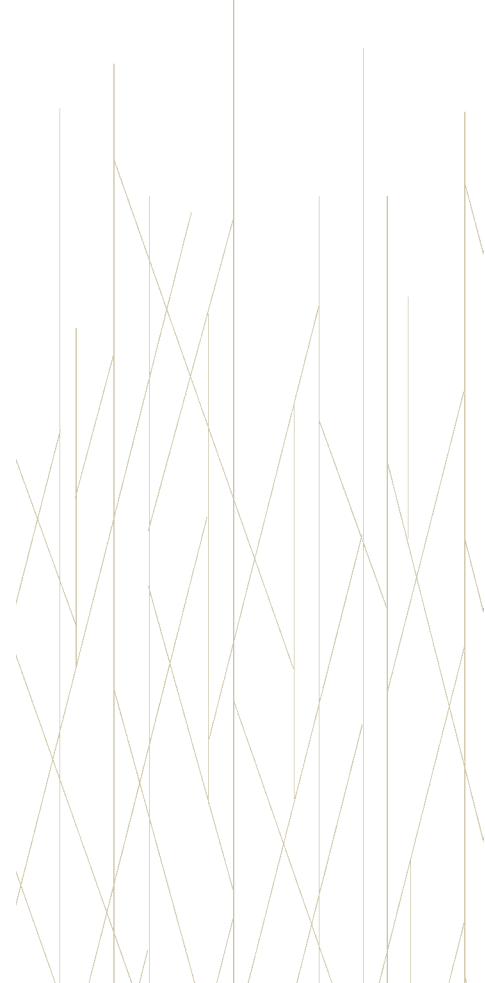
On my last night in Monteverde, my extended family came over to have dinner at our house. When we finished our *primi piatti*, someone commented that I was awfully quiet. They wanted to hear my Italian. But before I had time to respond, my Nonna chimed in to say, "*Gaia parla Italiano perfetto*," and for the remainder of the evening, I spoke proudly in my disjointed,

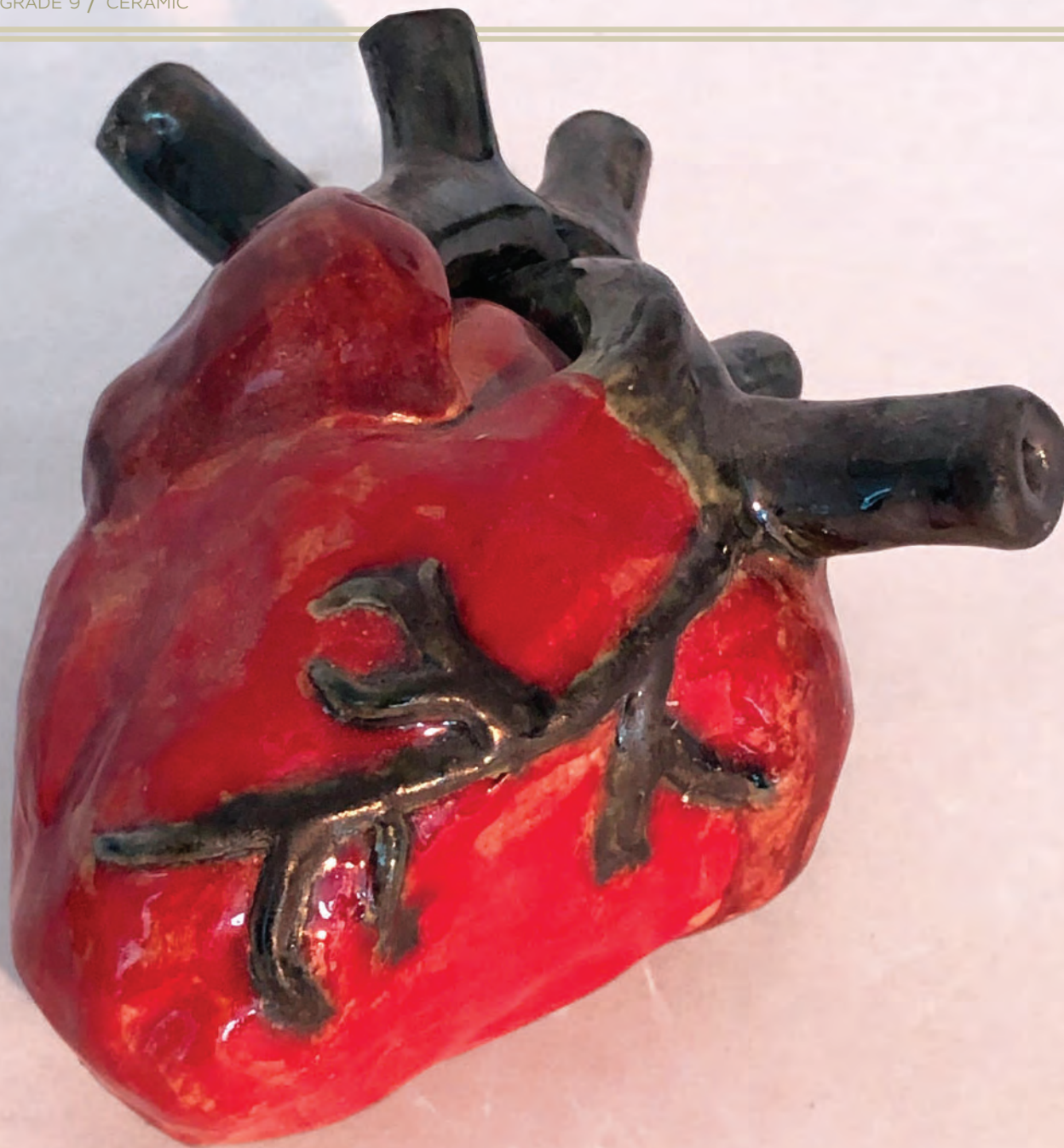
juvenile, *straniero* Italian. “A work in progress,” I thought.

Before our final *buona notte* hug, we watched a performance of one of my favorite songs, “*Vivere a Colori*” (“Live in Color”). The lyrics painted a montage of memories in my mind: my walk to the bus each morning, reading in the park, Nonna’s stories at dinner each night, solo expeditions to greet the paintings I studied in art history, trekking to each public library in Rome, spontaneous strolls around Baroque churches,

through unknown alleys, nooks, and corners of the city. Each of these hidden gems was as satisfying to me as learning new words. Each one like a breadcrumb more of the language I love, and an inch more of the most beautiful city in the world.

I thought back to when *mia carina nonnina* gave me the first hug of the year. In that one unsurpassable squeeze, I knew that Rome was welcoming me, ready to absorb me, teach me, and love me, almost as much as my nonna would.





“There’s a Lot You Don’t Know”

“Freddy Goldstein was our best fighter,” my grandfather recalls, chuckling. Growing up on 99th Street and West End Avenue in the 1940s, his group of friends clashed with the neighboring teenagers on the other end of Broadway. “Freddy got a pretty good punch in the face and that was the end of it.”

These days, Harry O. Ansonrg can be found in his Upper East Side apartment, or at nearby restaurants, where the owners all know him. His favorite is Tang’s Garden, a Chinese restaurant where he doesn’t need the menu; he couldn’t read it, but that doesn’t matter because he orders chicken with black bean sauce every time.

My interactions with my grandfather have been limited to large family gatherings, when he sits in his blue recliner, unable to follow the conversation, but happily watching over the mingling. Because of his poor hearing, and our lack of one-on-one interactions, I’ve never sat down and had a long conversation with him. We give each other a hug, and only get to talk about how tall I’ve grown before he is back in his chair. I’ve heard bits and pieces of his life from my dad, but Grandpa Harry has always just been my grandfather who sits in the blue recliner. This has begun to bother me as I watch him get older. So on a quiet Sunday afternoon, I call him on the phone and ask if I can interview him for a school project. “Absolutely,” he says. I find myself nervous to talk to my own grandfather.

When I arrive at his apartment, he is sitting at the kitchen table in a blue dress shirt, with old photo albums and newspaper articles spread out before him. It seems he has been anticipating this day for a while. It’s no surprise that he is dressed up—he *always* dresses up, even for his grandson on a Sunday afternoon.

“The slums were on the other side of Broadway, and the kids there were poor. We were very afraid of them and we called them the ‘toughies.’” He looks back and laughs at these stories, but they belie an important truth: the widespread ethnic and racial divisions in New York City when he was growing up. The “toughies” were the kids in the predominantly Irish neighborhoods. He talks about how the schools he went to were never integrated.

My grandfather became a lawyer, but on the side he founded an organization to integrate the public schools of New York.

“Why was this cause so meaningful to you?” I ask.

“It was important to me because I knew about the issues that black people faced in America. The black schools were deprived, and were not good. The best teachers wouldn’t teach there. And I knew it wasn’t fair for black children to be educated in a third-rate school.” He goes quiet, and looks down at the table. *He’s trying to remember something.*

I stare at the wall behind him, and Abraham Lincoln stares back. The walls of his apartment are

littered with artwork purchased from thrift shops, and the same few always catch my attention. There's a massive, colorful geometric 70s painting, a goopy painting from Denmark, and a small, curious portrait of a Russian monarch. The monarch, who looks particularly stern, hangs over a small dresser in the living room. *Who was he?* My dad says it's just a random painting, and that he isn't real. I like to think that he is.

The only windows in the apartment are small and look out at a brick wall. The white marble floors and windowless rooms make me lose track of time. *Where will I live when I'm 90?* My grandfather looks up at me, and I think he has remembered.

His eyes sink as he recalls an instance of police brutality in the 60s. "A black kid was playing on one of the blocks that was largely white, and he threw a garbage can cover into the street, and they called the cops. And the cop shot him dead. The cop was never prosecuted. In those days, they got away with it like they usually do today." He talks about how he tried to get the incident covered in the press, but failed. It is difficult to hear him reflect on how little progress has been made. I want him to have hope. I want to have hope.

I want to know more about his adolescence, so I ask:

"When you were a teen, what did you and your

friends used to do?"

He smirks, "We played pool, we bowled, and we threw dice against the wall of apartment buildings." I try and picture Grandpa Harry throwing dice. I can't help but ask:

"Did you ever get into any kind of trouble in high school?"

"No. I was always a good boy. You should be appreciative because you're asking a guy who's in his 90th year about memories from the 1940s. And I do remember, I still have most of my marbles. What that may mean is that you will have all of your marbles in your 90th year." He begins to give me advice on how to live longer; I listen eagerly. First, he tells me to never drink or smoke. He recalls his first time trying alcohol, "I thought, who needs this? I'll stick with Pepsi Cola." I glance over, checking to make sure my phone is recording. The time reads an hour and 45 minutes; I lean back in my chair and meet the brown eyes behind his circular frames.

He begins to tell me about how his sister was a communist.

"Did you know that?"

"No."

"There's a lot you don't know."



Girlhood

I play dress-up, and pretend.
Not a care in the world,
I hear noise—loud and not embarrassed:
girls, games, fun.
We know exactly who we want to be when
we grow up.
We belly laugh
and juice comes out our noses.

But look! Careful people doing
careful things. Pastels and quiet
voices:
 women, work, sisterhood.
We remind ourselves:
obligated and free
obligated and free
bound and free.
Here we softly giggle.

Asylum

The wild girl with wild eyes
Filled up the world with wild cries.
She raved and ranted rabid hate
And no one near her could sedate.

The little men, she said 'tween screams
They have me tearing at the seams
They're in my mind, they'll have my head
Oh how I wish that I were dead.

One day they came the men in white
They came and snatched her in the night
With open arms they let them in
She was betrayed by her own kin.

She tried to shout that they were wrong
But they were simply just too strong
They gagged her up before she could
And did it all "for her own good."

The men in white, they took her in
And bound her tight to free her sin.
The pain was in her head they said,
They'd beat it out till it was dead.

So inner demons in new forms
Embraced her soul with rag doll arms.
The beasts and devils from the deep
All kept her up and stole her sleep.

And so the days and nights wore on
And so the lion ate the fawn
And poisoned things went round her head
And round her body, round her bed.

If ever there was girl inside
Beneath the skin, the beastly hide
Now there was not
And time's forgot
The empty girl with empty eyes





Hebrew School Dropout

Every Sunday, I come home from class complaining to my Mom about Hebrew School. It's so boring. What's the point of learning the Hebrew letters? The place reeks of grape juice and cleaning fluid. I hate sitting on the blue rug and saying my "rose and thorn of the day." That afternoon my "thorn" is the news that I will have to start going twice a week now that I am in the third grade. I hate it.

"So quit," says my mom.

"Really?"

"I don't know. Do you really want to quit?" My older sister is studying for her bat mitzvah. "Don't you want to have a bat mitzvah too?"

I think about the round, multi-colored highlighter with which my sister is marking up her Torah portion. I want that highlighter so much. But the thought of singing Hebrew in front of a room full of people is terrifying. I say, "No."

"Okay," says my mom and walks away. Is she angry? I can't tell.

"She never let *me* quit," says my sister.

"Can I use your highlighter?" I ask.

"No."

At my sister's bat mitzvah ceremony, my mother tells me that every person in the world having a bat mitzvah that day and at that time is reading the same exact part of the Torah. Watching my sister, I imagine all

the other people and wonder if she feels connected to them. Afterward, we all pelt her with gummy candy, dance around her, and lift her up in a chair. Seeing the look on my face, my mother says, "It's not too late to have a bat mitzvah!"

For the first time, I start paying attention to the way Judaism works in my family. We celebrate holidays, but rarely, if ever, go to temple. On Rosh Hashanah, I hear my mother muttering about how she feels weird that I'm not in Hebrew school, especially this year, the year my sister was bat mitzvahed. We are in Prospect Park, throwing bits of stale Saltines into the lake. The crackers represent our sins.

"Think about what you wish you hadn't done," says my mother. "Then throw."

First, I drew all over the bottom of our kitchen table (no one has noticed yet). Second, I hated on my best friend for buying the exact same red, Gap boots as me. And lastly, I dropped out of Hebrew school.

As we walk home eating Saltines, I think about my father. He is the one who encouraged us to go to Hebrew school, but he is not even Jewish. Until now, I never even wondered about this. "It's more important to your mother than she realizes," he says.

On Yom Kippur, we are back in the park. "Think about how you can be a better person," says my mother.

"Are you mad that I quit Hebrew school?" I ask.
"I'm just confused," she says. She tries to explain how she hates the way religions separate people. She doesn't believe in God, at least the way Jews do. She hated Hebrew school too and used to argue with her own mother about the mindlessness of all the prayers and rituals, how no one ever seemed to examine anything they were doing, even though her teachers said that questioning was one of the most important things Jews do. After one fight, my grandma actually canceled my mother's bat mitzvah. "She said I didn't deserve the honor. The thing is, I was kind of relieved." But her mother, my grandma, has recently died and now she feels more lost than ever. The rituals of the funeral and shiva were a real comfort, but they didn't make her feel any more spiritual. She wonders, "What do I owe my mother?"

***"What do I want?
To never go back to
Hebrew School?
A round, colorful
highlighter?
To keep throwing my
sins away?"***

What do I owe *my* mother? What does she want? She doesn't even know. What do I want? To never go back to Hebrew school? A round, colorful highlighter? To keep throwing my sins away?

It's my cousin's bar mitzvah, I'm 15, and I'm waiting for my mother to ask me if I wish I'd had a bat mitzvah. She doesn't ask. I wonder how much my cousin has thought about anything he is doing or saying. I think about all people all over the world having their bar and bat mitzvahs today trying to make sense of the same words. During his party, he walks around joking (?) that now that he's "done," he doesn't have to be Jewish anymore. I ask myself: Did I need to drop out of Hebrew school to become Jewish?





Ch!gg@

"Hey,
do you know who Rich Brian is?"

"Yes" and a chuckle.

"What do you think about his old name . . .
Is it okay to use the word . . .
'ch!gg@'?"

You drop your
spoon of baked oatmeal in one hand and breakfast burrito in the other.
Double fisting.

You remember your undeniably Asian eyes, your jet black hair, and
your tan skin.

Another chuckle. Rehearsed Answer:

"No, because it is just a variation of the n-word which is not okay to say
so
you shouldn't say *that* either."

He looks at you very seriously, nodding his head.
He thinks you know all the answers and, perhaps, this time you gave
the right one.
Your breakfast-burrito-eating ABC self.

My Friend Chotu

It's our second-to-last night together and the six of us are sitting in a circle on top of the roof, overlooking the expansive swath of peanut fields. The vibrant green of the peanut leaves has dimmed, softened by the warm, orange glow of the sun that is slowly submerging itself into the field. Down below in the front yard, Banu, the four-month-old calf, is nibbling on the datura flowers in Lord Shiva's shrine. The grandmothers half-heartedly attempt to shoo Banu away, but we all know that Banu will be back to his trespassing ways tomorrow, once the shrine is replenished with fresh flowers.

As the sky gets darker, Dixa, my host sister, beckons us closer. "Tonight I am going to tell you about all the times my family members saw the devil in agriculture land," she whispers, and launches into her story. When Dixa starts talking about their grandfather, whose soul roams the peanut fields, Rashmitha, Dixa's older sister, shuts her big chocolate eyes in fear.

"No more! No more!" she exclaims, a curious grin on her face nonetheless.

"It's not an evil spirit, it's a friendly one," Dixa reassures Rashmi, but Rashmi squeezes my hand tightly with fear. Rashmi wants to be a doctor and has plans to head off to university in Mumbai next year. She is quiet and kind and generously doles out "super!"s, paired with "okay" hand gestures. Dixa dreams of being a fashion designer. She dashes through Heranjalu on her scooter with her long braid whipping the air behind her. The two sisters live in a house with four other women. With the

father and uncles working in Mumbai, the women are the ones who keep the family up and running. The aunts head out to the peanut fields early in the morning wrapped in scarves to protect from the dust (the pile of peanut plants in the front yard has grown so high that it brushes up against tree leaves), the peanuts are shelled whenever anyone has a spare moment (dust under fingernails, pop one every so often in your mouth), the cows get milked (Dixa zips to and from the dairy daily on her scooter), the grandmothers somehow always manage to have some idlis and a fresh cup of chai on hand (milky brown liquid, small silver metal cup, spicy-sweet warmth that spreads to every crevice in your body), and Rashmi is always welcoming a student from school into her house to help with their studying.

By now, the sun is completely gone, but instead of being draped with sleepy darkness, our faces are swimming in the breathtakingly bright moonlight. The intricate shadows formed by palm leaves and the light of the full moon dance across the roof. Dixa has finished her story, and she and Rashmi are now asking Chloe, Tess, Kat, and me about our lives: *What is it like to fly in an airplane? What stores do we shop at? Why did we come to India? What is marriage like?* They tell us that in India, especially in small villages like Heranjalu, there are arranged marriages rather than love marriages. Because of tradition and the caste system, the permission of parents is a prerequisite to marriage. Dixa, Rashmi, and their family are Pujari, so not only can they



not marry outside their caste, but they can't do things like enter the homes of Brahmins (because they are vegetarian) and if some teachers touch them at school, the teacher will take a shower. I know that this treatment is part of their normal, but when I try to imagine what it would be like to have centuries of tradition separating me from my neighbors and teachers, to have ancient rules that mark me as dirty, an uneasy feeling rises up in my stomach. I wonder what invisible lines have been dividing all of the people I have come to know over the past two weeks, the lines that I have been oblivious to. The lines that have been etched into daily life and that I will never truly understand the implications of. We stay huddled in the circle on the far-left corner of the white stucco roof for hours. Our words glide into the night and seep into the rich, brown earth of the peanut fields, commingling with the stories that came before until we finally retire downstairs to sleep.

I'm shaken awake early the next morning, because the night before, the six of us agreed to watch the sunrise together. Half asleep, we climb back up onto the roof, where the soft, saffron sun is waiting for us. It bathes us in light, its warmth fusing this moment together with our shared memories. Dixa suggests that we dress up in saris, so after breakfast, she hands me a fitted blouse and a long silky piece of fabric to go on top of the blouse. Both are a rich orange-red with gold embroidery. She then dabs lipstick on my lips, a perfect color match to the sari, fastens a small watch to my wrist, and drapes a delicate beaded chain around my waist. The jewelry Dixa fetched came from a medium-

sized box on top of the dresser in her room. I'm pretty sure it's the jewelry she is planning to use for her future wedding. This realization adds a sense of weight to this act. Part of me feels like an outsider who's overstepping into something more intimate than I deserve. But another part of me is filled to the brim with the joyous energy radiating off of Dixa's eager smile. This part of me is simply spellbound.

I came to India for a brief school trip, but somehow, my life in Heranjalur seems so permanent. Although I've spent less than two weeks with the Poojaris, the routine we've gotten into—the front yard badminton games, the singing while walking down the dusty red roads, and the heaping plates of salty-sour pickled mango and sticky-sweet *jalebis* included—feel like all that ever will be. We've found a comfortable rhythm with each other and I've finally figured out how to communicate in *Kannada* at the most basic levels (I can ask for a shower, ask for more food, explain when I am full, say thank you, and count to 10). "*Nimma manielli iralu awakashakottidaké dhanyavada galú,*" read the looping letters in my notebook: "Thank you for hosting us." I learned this sentence yesterday because tomorrow I will be leaving and Rasmitha and Dixa will be staying. After the overnight train to Mumbai, the red dirt and Holi powder stains permanently pressed into my clothing will be the only things physically connecting me to this community.

As Dixa puts the finishing touches on my outfit, my mind jumps back to the night before: how conversation flowed so naturally, how when I closed my

eyes it felt like any other late-night sleepover chat I would have with my friends back in Brooklyn. I remember the way Dixie peered up at the sky and pointed out Chotu. "That's my friend, Chotu," she said. "Chotu means small, and my star is the small one.

Sometimes it disappears. But then I have my phone!" This cracks all of us up. I wonder if I'll be able to locate Chotu in New York. I know it's bound to be there. But I think to find it might be pretty hard.



Drinks With the Girls

Linda and Karen¹ swirled their Chardonnay while cackling about “the new admin—you know, Janette—totally effing up Mark’s meeting.” I shuffled my stool a couple inches away. Linda had swung her left arm out when one of Karen’s jokes was “just too much,” nearly tenderizing my face with her blinged-out hand. Every time one of them said “STOP! YOU’RE SO BAD!” I would clench my jaw and stare harder at Gabriel García Márquez’ face on the back of my book.

Everyone at Fausto, the new Italian restaurant, was sitting with someone else: Linda with Karen, the two parents behind me with their very unhappy baby, and me with Mr. Márquez. Although I wanted to read his complex story of Macondo, I couldn’t ignore two women trash-talking their coworkers. In Fausto, nobody knew who I was and no one cared about what I did, as long as I wasn’t bothering anyone. Janette the ditzy admin, who should really work on her klutzy tendencies, let me forget about the homework I could’ve been doing instead of going out for dinner. She let me forget about myself entirely.

I tucked *100 Years of Solitude* under my leg and told my server, Frank, what I wanted. “So the carrots, the garganelli, and the chicken?” he asked.

“Uh, yeah,” I muttered, quickly whipping my book back out and opening to page 196, because the person who had it before me must’ve thought the sentence

they underlined, “it’s only rabbits,” needed to be accessible at all times, hence the dog-ear. Every few seconds I would turn the page, while continuing to eavesdrop.

“So get this, Al kicks the photocopier and it starts making this noise,” Karen says, “We unplug it, everything is fine, but then Lauren asks me in front of the whole office, ‘didn’t you do something weird with the copier yesterday?’ Like yeah, I did, but the noise isn’t *my* fault.” I turn the page. *Jeez, that Lauren. What. A. Rhymes-with-itch.*

Frank handed me a plate of the roasted carrots. Once I finished them, I kept shuffling the goat cheese and mystery vegetables that came along around my plate. I tried to tune back into the work gossip, but Karen was on her phone and Linda had gone to the bathroom. I considered opening up my book, but a man tapped me on the shoulder and handed me a plate of green penne pasta with meat sauce before I could pull my book out. The al dente pasta and rabbit meat sauce cut out any stories being told around me. It was the first time I had had rabbit and the only course worth its obscene price.

***“Everyone at Fausto,
a new Italian
restaurant,
was sitting with
someone else:
Linda with Karen,
the two parents
behind me with
their very unhappy
baby, and me
with Mr. Márquez.”***

¹ I don’t know their actual names. They seemed like a Linda and a Karen.

Frank took my plate and I slouched in my stool with my hands on my lap. I read each of the liquor labels across from me and watched the bartenders light drinks on fire while waiting for my chicken. After reading “Blue Gin” and “Industry Standard Vodka” for the third time, I searched for other distractions. *Why do the bartenders have a bowl of citrus fruits? Never mind, the Blue Moon commercial² told me why. What made my pasta green? Why were those crappy vegetables so expensive? Why are they playing ‘80s hits?*

The chicken broth tasted like Xtreme Cheddar Goldfish and some of it splashed onto my book (it had started to bother my leg so I’d put it next to my plate). The millennial-vlogger-looking lady to my left wouldn’t stop staring at the little broth puddle on the cover. *What’s your problem, lady?* I wiped the puddle off of my

book and moved it to the other side of the plate.

Dessert cheeses are stupid. All I wanted was some ice cream. I gave Frank the dessert menu back and asked for the check. I pulled out my decaying wallet, an oyster card holder,³ and paid for my meal. *I should buy a new wallet, and not something like this. I need a real wallet. Maybe I can buy one this weekend, if I don’t have too much homework.* Everything I had kicked out of my brain that night suddenly flooded back in. Even though Frank was yacking with Linda and Karen about the dog park and “the boys having a playdate” this weekend, I didn’t care. “9177224050,” Frank told the women. Part of me wanted to be a part of the “dedicated doggy lovers” group chat, but my meal was over and I needed a wallet.

² In this commercial, a man explains that Blue Moon is special because their beer is paired with *oranges* instead of *lemons*.

³ A train pass holder for the Tube (the subway of London).



Watch This

Watch this
Our midnight roamer
Watch this
Cutting moonlight on slippery surfaces
Watch this
Gently rolling, dipping, rising

Watch this
Eyes blinded, rendered ineffective
Watch this
Set ablaze by a breaking light
Watch this
Shards of grass misshapen, softly folded

Watch this
The rich taste of flicking tongues, ringing throats
Watch this
Tempered spirits reappear without respite
Watching always
Always watched

Watch this he told us
Eyes blind, our midnight roamer
Gently slips away

Moonlight cutting through
Our flicking tongues, ringing throats
Blazed by twinkling shards

Always watching us
Tempered spirits reappear
Watching us always





OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY
MOURNS THE LOSS
AND CELEBRATES THE LIFE OF

AIDAN CAMERON SILITCH

March 10, 2002 – March 21, 2019

Whose kind heart, effervescent smile,
and entertaining, moving words will be missed by all.
Aidan wrote the following piece in the spring of 2018
for his Voice & Style class
as part of an assignment to experience something
new and reflect upon it.



The Smell of Money: Barney's on a Sunday

I take time to admire a pair of loose brown pajama pants, then turn the price tag over: \$410!! I pull my hand away, for fear that I have damaged them and will have to pay, and walk away flabbergasted; I didn't know you could feel culture shock from a boutique. At first, I am surprised, but then I remember: THIS IS BARNEY'S FREAKING DEPARTMENT STORE. This is where Kardashians go to get dressed up for galas, and where Rockefellers wipe their butts with Prada handbags. Now, I feel like the salesmen might take one look and throw my raggedy self out of here. My worn-down Patagonia jacket and tattered La Sportiva shoes just don't seem to cut it when compared to the rows of Italian fur jackets and shiny stilettos. This feeling of inadequacy only intensifies as I walk past a plain, white T-shirt that costs more than my computer.

While looking at the facade of Barney's, one can't help but feel a little afraid. It's a black marble building that looks to be ten stories tall, with a gold-lined revolving door. The interior is brightly lit and smells like money. Honestly, I only came here because I felt that observing crazy people would be an interesting use of a rainy day.

If you do decide to venture to Barney's, I recommend going to the ninth floor—it's bizarre. That's where I see a nine-year-old boy dressed head to toe in

red Ralph Lauren merchandise. I hear him ask, "Mom, can I get these Yeezy's?"¹ She responds, "*Oui, bien sur!*" which in French means, "Yes, of course!"

After hearing this, I start to notice that Barney's attracts different types of clientele—the oldies who are here to buy frilly hats and relive the pastel paradise of the 60s, and the youngsters, here to waste their parents' money on acid-washed denim and expensive shoes (e.g., The Yeezys). One thing they have in common: they're all pretty weird.

I make my way past the sea of fancy neck ties and Ralph Lauren jumpsuits and sit myself near the display case of Gucci handbags. I see a man, dressed all in black, point to a pair of sandals and remark to his girlfriend, "These wouldn't be for walking." Suddenly, my eye catches a jacket very much like my own. Curious, I walk over to try it on. It's blue, has magnetic buttons, and leaves a weird film on my fingers when I touch it. I look at the price tag. It's \$1,700, nearly 10 times the price of my current puffy. As I walk over to a mirror, I knock over the display of handbags; I can hear the nine-year-old French boy snicker. (No, I am not exaggerating. That little piece of garbage had the temerity to laugh at me.) I walk it off, thinking they might discuss this with their butler when they get home.

¹ Shoes with an average retail price of \$2,395

It's easy to crap all over the people who shop there. But that becomes more and more difficult when I start to notice a third type of person around the store. I stand next to a young man, no older than 22, trying on suits and ties. He is tall, with short hair and a slender frame. I follow him around, hoping he'll further validate my hatred of the department store. But he is not the typical rich kid who comes here only to piss on his new clothes when he gets home. He looks around the suit department carefully, and thoroughly examines the material of each piece. As I follow him around, the nervous look in his eye becomes more and more visible. I hear him mention to a salesman that he is preparing for a presentation. Obviously, he is petrified at the thought of talking in front of his superiors. I start to see why he is at Barney's; he came here to find self-confidence.

I start to imagine who else might come looking for themselves here. There might be someone here who was bullied as a child and searches for self-assurance in fancy clothes. I soon realize that someone out there might actually want to buy those \$410 pants to make a lasting impression on a first date. Someone might

actually bring home that \$1,700 jacket to call their own, maybe because they *really* need to feel like they belong. Don't get me wrong—a majority of the people here are nuts, but while it's absurdly expensive, it provides people with the self-confidence they lack.

I sit down in my secluded Gucci lair and find myself empathizing (I'm as shocked as you are) with the third type of people who shop at Barney's. They come here for a sense of importance, which is something every human being strives for. (Barney's, if you're reading this, I just wrote your new tagline. You're welcome.)

I walk out of Barney's and immediately want to go back, feeling like I've just left my five-year-old kid home alone for the first time. My mind is put at ease when I remember the 22-year-old man. "He'll watch over them; I have to believe that," I think to myself. In the 30 minutes I've been here, I've started to like the nutjobs. Not in the way you like your friends or acquaintances, but in the way you like your uncle at Thanksgiving who gives a 30-minute speech after his fifth glass of scotch. They may be very annoying and may irk you after a while, but they're also really hilarious.



this is not an art gallery

an ode to Ouchhh's Parallel Universe exhibit

this is not an art gallery, it is a laboratory.
this is not an art gallery, it is a cathedral.
this is not an art gallery, it is a lesson,
in which we press against the boundaries of our imagination, press harder,
press a little harder until the walls crumple.
this is not an art gallery, it is a laboratory —
in which we type code and measure distances and calculate angles,
in which we arrange lights and build projectors and string wires,
in which we tilt our heads to the side and say *i think we're on to something*
in which there is little difference between a laboratory and a cathedral and an art gallery except
our methods.
listen: we have captured light in our hands and painted with it. we have
unwoven dna strands and sketched out sound—we have found a pattern
that locks together our genes and our galaxies and the flowers in our windows.
 today i went to an art exhibit and saw a black hole, or maybe hieroglyphics, or maybe a
 galaxy, or maybe a jellyfish,
or maybe a star or maybe a brain or maybe an algorithm or maybe a deity.
 and this is the closest to truth i think one could come—math and light and movement and
 sound collapsing in
on each other to form a pattern. we have made a painting out of everything except what a
painting should be made of and constrained it with our imagination alone, black and white light
painting a dream.
so we mark this experiment as a success, and open a new page.



Expecting
RACHAEL HIPKINS
GRADE 11 / PAINTING

the
BerkeleyCarroll
School

181 Lincoln Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217
www.berkeleycarroll.org

P: (718) 789-6060

F: (718) 398-3640

Enrollment: 318

Faculty: 62

Reflections@berkeleycarroll.org

Typeface: Stem, Dax

Paper Stock: Endurance cover / Endurance text

Computer Equipment: iMac i5

Software: Quark XPress, Adobe Photoshop

Number of Copies: 550

Design: Studio Lane, Inc.

Printer: William Charles Printing