







For Warmth | ELLIE PIKE | Grade 12 | photograph



the  
BerkeleyCarroll  
School

# REFLECTIONS

Vol 47, Issue 1, 2018



## 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, Jake Lamazor's wire whale sitting alongside Audrey Wachter's "Isolated": "For the sea will not/surrender to the shattered glass/the weeping beluga forgot,/ and its voice will sound the brass." More than merely imagistic echoes, the sonic loops of Wachter's poem reflect the wire warpings of Lamazor's sculpture: repetition with a difference. In these warped, at times fractured and cracked, representations we seek to provide new perspectives on everyday encounters. We hope in these pairings of written and visual reflections that you catch glimpses both strange and familiar. As Ellie Pike writes in her story about a fractured portrait of herself, "maybe the crack told it right."

## 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 submissions. After the preliminary critiques, 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 600 copies of our beautiful magazine—through our library, at admissions events, and, most special of all, at 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, occasionally to fulfill class assignments, but always from the engines of their own creativity.



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### EDITOR'S STATEMENT

This year's *Reflections* would not have been possible without our faculty advisers, 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. And of course, *Reflections* would be blank without the thoughtful writing and intricate artwork that is shared with us each year. The sheer number of incredible submissions received this year is representative of Berkeley Carroll students' willingness and excitement to create and share art. I believe that the art and writing included in this magazine reflects that passionate attitude, and I hope you can feel this energy while perusing our Upper School students' work.

### Gemma Siegler

*Editor-in-Chief*

*Spring 2018*



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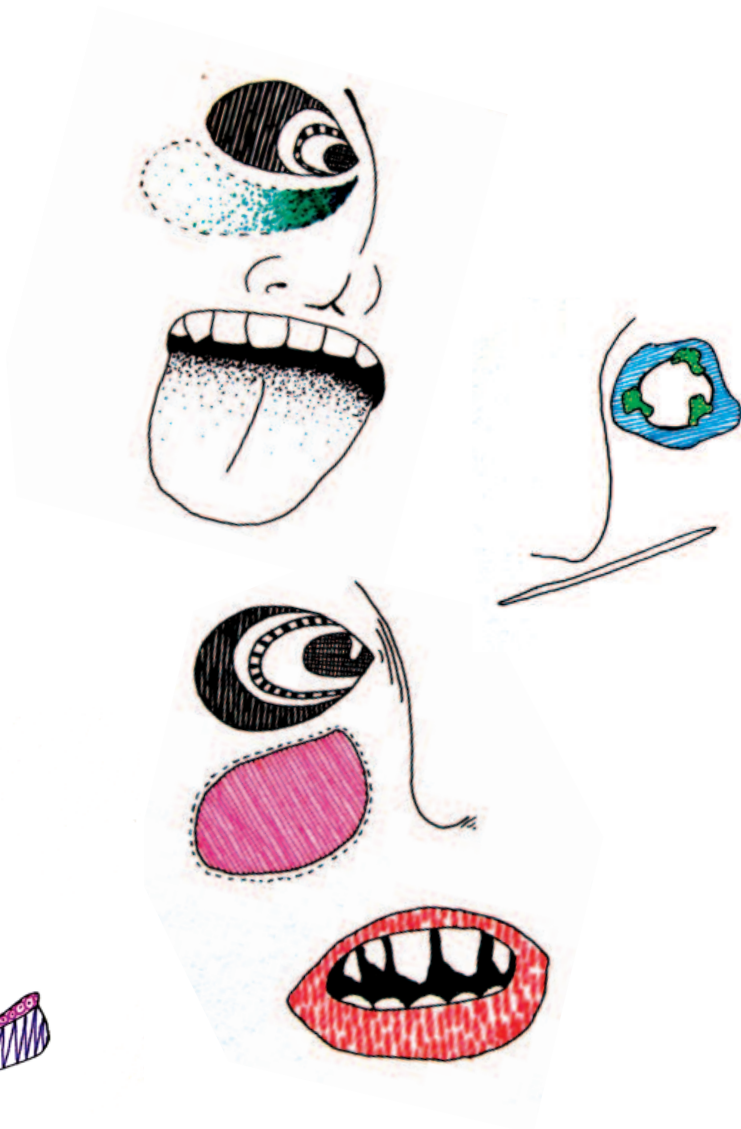
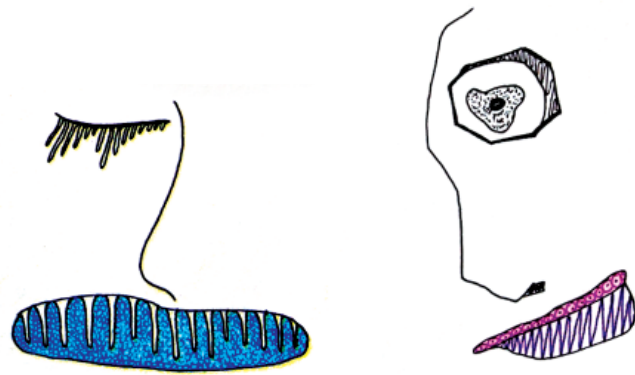
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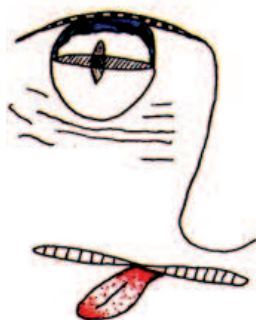
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TH STATION

EMERGENCY  
FOR EMERGENCY  
USE ONLY  
PORT AUTHORITY  
POLICE

CAUTION  
CUIDADO  
WET  
FLOOR  
PISO  
MOJADO



**MTA Status Update/Love Poem**

I shouldn't have gone to that party it was so lame—  
At Bleecker Street now.  
I'm at Spring Street and I have a secret  
which is that I skipped all of the songs and went to  
"Sea of Love."

Now I'm at Canal Street.  
I skipped to "Sea of Love" because I miss you.  
(I'm at Brooklyn Bridge)  
I was taking up a whole two seats curled up,

but I moved for some lady.  
Sending love from Fulton Street,  
Wall Street.  
I never told you my dream did I?

Bowling Green;  
in my dream  
I accidentally married a middle-aged bird sorcerer.  
Borough Hall m'dear.

By bird sorcerer I mean he could magically control birds.  
Nevins!  
Atlantic Barclays.  
The sorcerer was tall and thin and very beautiful.



I think he was addicted to drugs  
Bergen Street! I'm so close and tired.  
Anyway,  
I didn't love him.

I was with you in your room,  
and it was white and had three windows.  
Grand Army Plaza, finally.  
Suddenly a swarm of tiny grey birds flew into the window

and died one by one,  
because it was 5 o'clock and the sorcerer wanted me to  
make dinner.  
So he sent those birds  
and I woke up.

Basically I think it means I hate men  
and I miss you.  
I'm going to sleep now.  
Sending so much love.





## Warmth in Cold Places

I think I have an obsession with Suburbia. Not the actual suburbs—a conglomerate of beige houses on curved roads alongside poorly maintained McDonald's and Carvels that are lit up at night—or actually, that's exactly what I mean. Excuse me, I can't seem to describe this "conglomerate" without inserting my own fantasies of what I believe it to be, as I just did for you, ignorant of reality. So not the actual suburbs, which I only see through a biased, outsider type of way, but Suburbia—which to me means the suburban way of life that I have completely made up in my head. This is confusing even to me; I'm sorry if I've lost you.

It's possible that I'm just taken with how sad it can look. Really, I just imagine a Friendly's sitting in a glum parking lot, cheap, wood-chip decor surrounding ankle-high shrubs living under knotted but well-manicured and naked trees. And the yellow paint denoting the gaps where cars should be parked is chipping off a bit, and some kid dropped his strange leftovers all over the curb at some point so the yellow paint is a little stained in this one spot, and the door to the Friendly's has this dinky little bell that, when disturbed by an opening door, lets out this high-pitched,

hollow-plastic sound that reminds everyone that they are a little sad. And an 80-year-old woman is definitely having her Wednesday lunch date with her 82-year-old friend, and she definitely ordered the lobster roll and put three sugars in her coffee. She's named something like Irma or Odette. And the sky is grey and it's a little chilly—the sky is always grey and it's always a little chilly when I imagine Suburbia.

I can't pinpoint what about this image I'm fond of—all I can say is that it provides a specific feeling I crave. There's a certain warmth that radiates from the image of this Friendly's and grey sky, a warmth that I badly want to feel—but only from afar. It may be important to note that I in no way want to be a part of this image, or park my car between stained lines of yellow paint. This is simply my fantasy—I'm not interested in infiltrating the scene. I'm content with small doses of Suburbia. Small doses is what keeps this fascination living and breathing.

It's also possible that I'm in this for the supermarkets. I've actually been to supermarkets in Suburbia—and I mean good, proper, all-American supermarkets like Price Chopper or Harveys, ones that are connected to beige malls



and are warmly lit—that have transformed my fundamental sense of identity for the duration of the shopping haul. When I enter this wonderland of consumerism I transform into a child—where everything turns into bright colors and intriguing shapes and I just want to reach out and touch absolutely everything I see because damn that looks fun.

My mother will say, “Chloe, go get some jam.”

*Jam? You bet your donkey I can find jam. That is something I can 100% do for you.*

“Chloe, go pick out a cereal.”

*You mean I get to choose? An entire world of possibilities has just opened up for me—now I get to craft the future of what I am going to eat for breakfast for the next four days or so, so thank you.*

I’ll peruse the cereal aisle and think: *Look at that Cookie Crisp. That’s ridiculous, those are just mini cookies that they’re calling cereal.*

***And the yellow paint denoting the gaps where cars should be parked is chipping off a bit, and some kid dropped his strange leftovers all over the curb at some point so the yellow paint is a little stained in this one spot, and the door to the Friendly’s has this dinky little bell that, when disturbed by an opening door, lets out this high pitched hollow-plastic sound that reminds everyone that they are a little sad.***

*So silly. I love it. And look at those little marshmallows on that Lucky Charms box.*

*They created five new charms—I’ve never even seen star marshmallows that look like that. Mine.*

And the thrill I get from slipping something into the shopping cart—I know it’s ridiculous. I am a 17-year-old person. I know I can ask. But it’s so much better to see your mother’s face when she reaches for Goya beans and picks up rainbow mini-muffins. It’s the simple things, everyone.

But the warmth that seems to seep from Suburbia must be coming from something else. Not solely a Friendly’s or a Price Chopper, but from the routines one places around them. Of course, the following routine has been made up by me, but I imagine a typical day will go something like: your group of friends will start by hanging out in someone’s basement, helplessly bored, filling the one couch with so many teenage bodies







that some kids are sitting on armrests or the floor. Naturally, there will always be toil over who gets an actual seat on the couch, and the occasional injury from two bodies smacking together through the pursuit of the last spot. You will sit there until you decide to pack into the car of the only kid who actually has a car (they're always invited to hangouts, naturally) and you'll make your way to the mall with windows rolled halfway down—the car humming with Q104.3. And once at the mall, you'll crowd around a small round table in the food court, hunching around piles of fast food and styrofoam soda cups (despite all the junk food, everyone is still gangly because this is my stereotypical vision goshdarnit). And you're

sneaking into movies, doing tricks in the parking lot on skateboards, and some of you are smoking cigarettes on the hood of the car, just watching. Later, you'll be listening to the radio again, and kissing in cars.

I mean yes, this all sounds demonstrably boring. I'll still stick to my people watching on the F-line and walking-distance grocery stores any day, thanks. But there's something romantic about fighting off boredom when you're young. Maybe this is it—what's making me warm. The fact that in Suburbia, you create your own world within the one you already inhabit—a place within a place for yourself to exist. How beautiful.

## Understanding Your Millennial

*A dictionary written by parents,  
for parents*

### AF

Stands for “always family.” Refers to a Millennial’s love and devotion to their family, no matter what. Can be confusing because it can follow a negative statement about a family member, but is really meant as a compliment: e.g., “My Aunt Jane is weird AF” translates to “Despite all of my Aunt Jane’s oddities and quirks, she is still family and I have a great deal of love and respect for her.”

### Butterface

Referring to a young female who has done such an excellent job eating healthy, staying hydrated, and moisturizing her face, that her skin is as soft as butter. If your daughter is ever feeling self-conscious, make sure to refer to her as a “butterface.” This will without a doubt raise her self-esteem and make her burst into tears of joy.

### Cuffed

If you hear your Millennial talking about the rapidly approaching “cuffing season,” get excited! During the colder fall and winter months, take pride in knowing your Millennial is ready to head off to the mall, buy some nice

new clothing, and look for an internship. The term “cuffed” itself refers to “cufflinks,” originating from the desire many have to purchase new cufflinks in order to make themselves look more formal. Over time, however, the term “cuffed” has been used more broadly to refer to fancier clothing as a whole.

### Extra

If you hear your child using this term, congratulations! You have one studious Millennial! This term, which rose in popularity following its use in popular teenage television dramas such as *Cyberchase*, *Super Why*, and *Sid the Science Kid*, is most commonly used by the Millennial generation to describe someone who has enrolled in more classes than is required for their school’s core curriculum.

### FOMO

In a society where nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, some Millennials who take pride in having married parents express this through the use of this acronym, standing for “Father Only Married Once.”











### Highkey/Lowkey

Has your son or daughter expressed interest in joining the school choir? If you hear them talking about a high or low “key,” they are referring to being either sopranos or basses. Show your child how groovy and hip you are by singing them a little tune of your own!

### Instagram

The hottest form of social media out there! Constantly remind your kids you are thinking of them by “liking” their photos. Show you really care by going on their classmates’ Instagrams, scrolling all the way back four years to that cute class photo from second grade your little Suzie was in, and double tapping.

### Lit

An abbreviation of the word “literature.” If you overhear your Millennial asking their friends if they can “get lit tonight,” you can take comfort in knowing you are doing an excellent job parenting them, and that your beloved son or daughter is about to spend a fun night at the library with his or her friends

preparing for their upcoming English exam. Reward your Millennial for their behavior with a Barnes & Noble gift card. It will surely be put to good use.

### Netflix and Chill

The act of meeting up with a friend, watching a family-appropriate movie, and snacking on healthy freezer treats such as organic sorbet or frozen peas.

### Slide into DMs

An expression used by many Millennials to express their desire to enroll, or “slide,” into medical school following college or university to receive and become a doctor of medicine, as referenced by “DM.”

### Throwing Shade

The act of throwing or chucking sunglasses—or “shades” as the kids say—at another being. Parents should be mindful when they hear their Millennials speaking of this, as it can be a sign of aggressive behavior.

## This Ain't Pinocchio

I remember  
 The names they called me.  
 I remember  
 “Sissy!”  
 I remember  
 “Weakling!”  
 I remember  
 “Tomgirl!”  
 I remember  
 “Are you a boy or a girl?”  
 I remember  
 “Your daughter is so beautiful!  
 How old is she?”  
  
 I remember  
 My father’s embarrassed anger  
 I remember  
 Him yelling when we were alone  
 I remember  
 “Why do you talk like that?”  
 I remember  
 “Why do you walk like that?”  
 I remember  
 “Why do you eat like that?”  
 I remember  
 “Why do you breathe like that?”

I remember  
 “Why do you . . . you?”  
  
 I remember  
 Growing up a secret boy,  
 Different from a real boy,  
 Because no one has to ask a real boy  
 If he is a boy—  
 They just know it.  
  
 I remember  
 The first time I saw the movie *Pinocchio*.  
 I remember  
 Being so entranced by the fantasy of it all  
 Things I could only ever imagine  
 Talking puppets and  
 Noses that grew when you lied and  
 Fairies and  
 Magic and  
 Shooting stars and  
 Fathers who loved unconditionally.  
  
 I remember  
 Thinking it all was real  
 Or at least that it could be.  
 I remember











The scene where Pinocchio wishes to  
become a real boy.

I remember

*When you wish upon a star*

*Makes no difference who you are . . .*

*Your*

*Dreams*

*Come*

*True.*

I remember

The hope.

I remember

Before going to bed that night,

And every night after that for weeks

Looking hard for a star to wish upon

(There aren't many in a New York

City sky).

I remember

Finally finding one

And

I remember

Wishing that I, too, could become

A Real Boy

I remember

The disappointment that came when

My wish didn't come true.

I remember

Not being able to put it together

in my head,

Why the Blue Fairy had lied to me,

Until years later

I remember

The revelation

That of course my dream didn't

come true

The Blue Fairy hadn't lied

Everyone else did, see, because

This

Ain't

*Pinocchio*

## The Portrait

I remember that she was chastising me about something. Maybe I'd been snarky when she told me to brush my teeth, or I'd complained about what we'd had for dinner, I don't really remember. As she stood over me, hand on hip, I squirmed around, nearly bouncing off the bed. It was the kind of situation where what's happening in your mind in no way matches up with what's happening in real time. My thoughts ricocheted around my skull, and as I picked at the candy coating stuck in between my teeth, I thought of the winning video that night on *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Who knows if it was that, or an odd strategy to combat discomfort, but I laughed. More giggled. But audibly.

I could see in her eyes that she was furious. I was off the bed and being marched down the hall. I knew the routine, but this was different, and as I stepped onto the creaky wooden floor of my room, my heart leapt. My mother seemed a lot taller than she had before. Her eyebrows arched high and she spat her words: *ELEANOR REGAN PIKE!*

This was not going to be good.

I was always really good in school. Years later, maybe as some sort of consolation, my parents made that clear to me. I was quiet when the teacher talked, I played when it was time to play and worked when it was time to work, and I sat with Jaden that day he cried for all of free time because there weren't enough seats at the art table. But home was different. I was small, curly-haired, very sweaty, and constantly angry. Most of all, I threw fits. About everything: the fact that my sister had two windows and I had one, that my shirt had too many ruffles, that my toaster waffle didn't have enough butter.

Ages two to three were the Dark Ages in my family. My parents were sleep-deprived and coffee-addicted, frequently concerned that the thrashing two year old before them would turn into a bridezilla teenager. I was carefree: pulling out drawers, gnashing my teeth, and squealing in public places. My sister, already very put-together at the age of six, likes to describe the solitary mornings she spent in first grade, calmly reading Cam Jansen and eating Cheerios as my wails (followed by *Ellie, come on!*) and stomps came from upstairs.







I remember what it felt like: scratchy fabric, heat, my parents on their knees pleading with me to *just put on that sweater. It's cold outside Ellie, you might be a little itchy, but everything else is in the wash.* And then more frustrated, my mother's voice cracking, *please El. We don't have time for this.* But she didn't understand. I couldn't wear that. I didn't want to, so I couldn't.

One day, when I was about two and a half, I was sent to my room to "cool off" about one thing or another. I proceeded to tear the room apart: throwing the sheets off my bed, sliding furniture around, and leaving little bite marks on my dresser. After a few minutes my dad came up the stairs and opened the door to find me panting, parked in the middle of my room, my face beet-red and tear-streaked. He sat down on my bed, scooped me up, and put me on his lap. I fell asleep within a few minutes.

This hadn't happened in a long time. I was seven years old; I was supposed to be good now. Shouting and being sent to my room didn't happen anymore. I picked harder at the

candy coating with my tongue. She was done yelling now, but her chest was still puffed out, her eyebrows still arched. She turned quickly, slamming the door behind her, shaking the thin, white shelf that stretched across the wall. The portrait, surrounded by a pink, wooden frame, slid from its place on the shelf.

It had been cold out the day we bought that picture. I must have been around five, and I have a foggy memory of wearing a pink winter hat. It was the first time I convinced my parents to stop at one of the stands in Times Square where men draw a portrait of you in less than twenty minutes. I had to pose in a grimy, grey fold-out chair, the cushion of which was speckled with coffee stains and wads of gum.

As angry commuters rushed past, the sickeningly sweet smell of Nuts 4 Nuts wafting in their wake, I struggled to sit still. My face was raw from the cold, and I just wanted to see what he was drawing. But I waited. And when he was done I sprang out of the chair to take a look. The face was proportional, the shading and perspective effective. My hair was right, maybe



my nose, but in general, it looked like another five-year-old blonde girl staring back at me. A more timid five-year-old, maybe one who would grow up to play the flute.

I was fascinated by the portrait. It was a version of myself, not quite right, but close, and I couldn't stop staring. My eyes were deep and pale, much lighter than in real life.

As the frame hit the ground it made a hard, cracking noise. I leapt off the bed and kneeled down, turning it over and sucking in my breath. The glass was fractured diagonally from end to end. I began to sob, hard and loud, hiccuping and gasping, the bed frame creaking under my weight. My mom came up after a few minutes and lay next to me as I shook, stroking my hair. I didn't understand why I felt so much. I'd never truly *liked* the picture, but the long, diagonal crack that now fractured my pencil-gray face made my stomach sink.

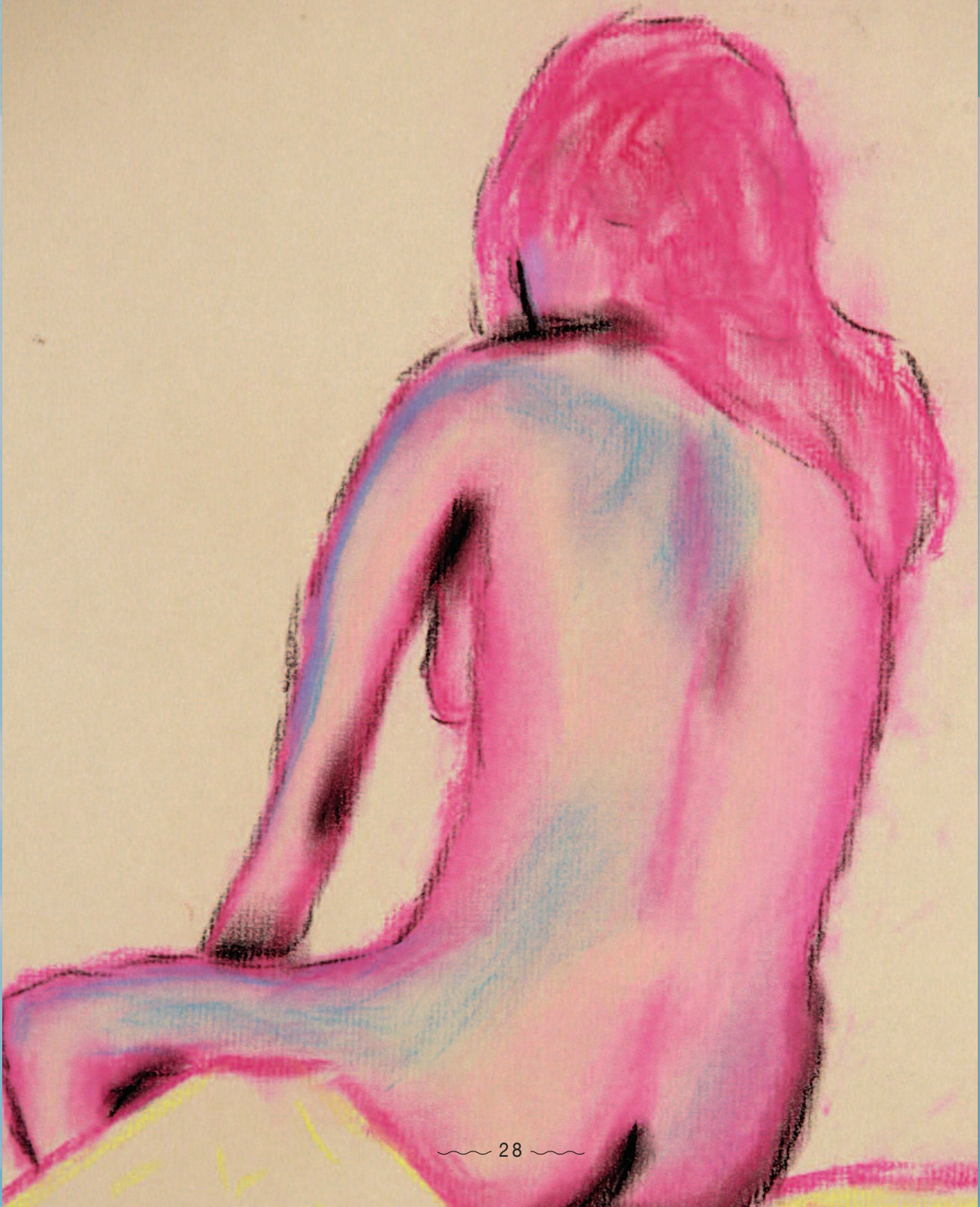
Decades later, I sat on a squishy, maroon couch across from bright-eyed, and even brighter-lip-sticked, Eva, whom my mom's co-worker had recommended when she'd told her I wanted to "talk to somebody." As I described my rebellious toddler years and she took notes, I played with the rubber flap on



*... it looked like another five-year-old blonde girl staring back at me. A more timid five-year-old, maybe one who would grow up to play the flute.*

*I was fascinated by the portrait. It was a version of myself, not quite right, but close, and I couldn't stop staring.*







my Birkenstock. *I don't know, some part of me is proud to have been so crazy and impulsive, it feels like . . . it feels like I was just doing whatever I wanted. I guess I really didn't care.* When I'd finished, she paused. *That's so interesting to me, I see a connection between some of the worries you're having now and that little,* she paused, choosing her words carefully, *hot-tempered three-year-old. Maybe it's odd for you to have that part of yourself that you need to, I don't know, reconcile with. Maybe you feel like you need to prove that that era's over.*

I don't know where the portrait is now. Part of me thinks that I got rid of it during one of my many massive room cleanses (a member of my family encouraging me,

*It really never looked like you anyway).* Or maybe it's somewhere in the back of my closet.

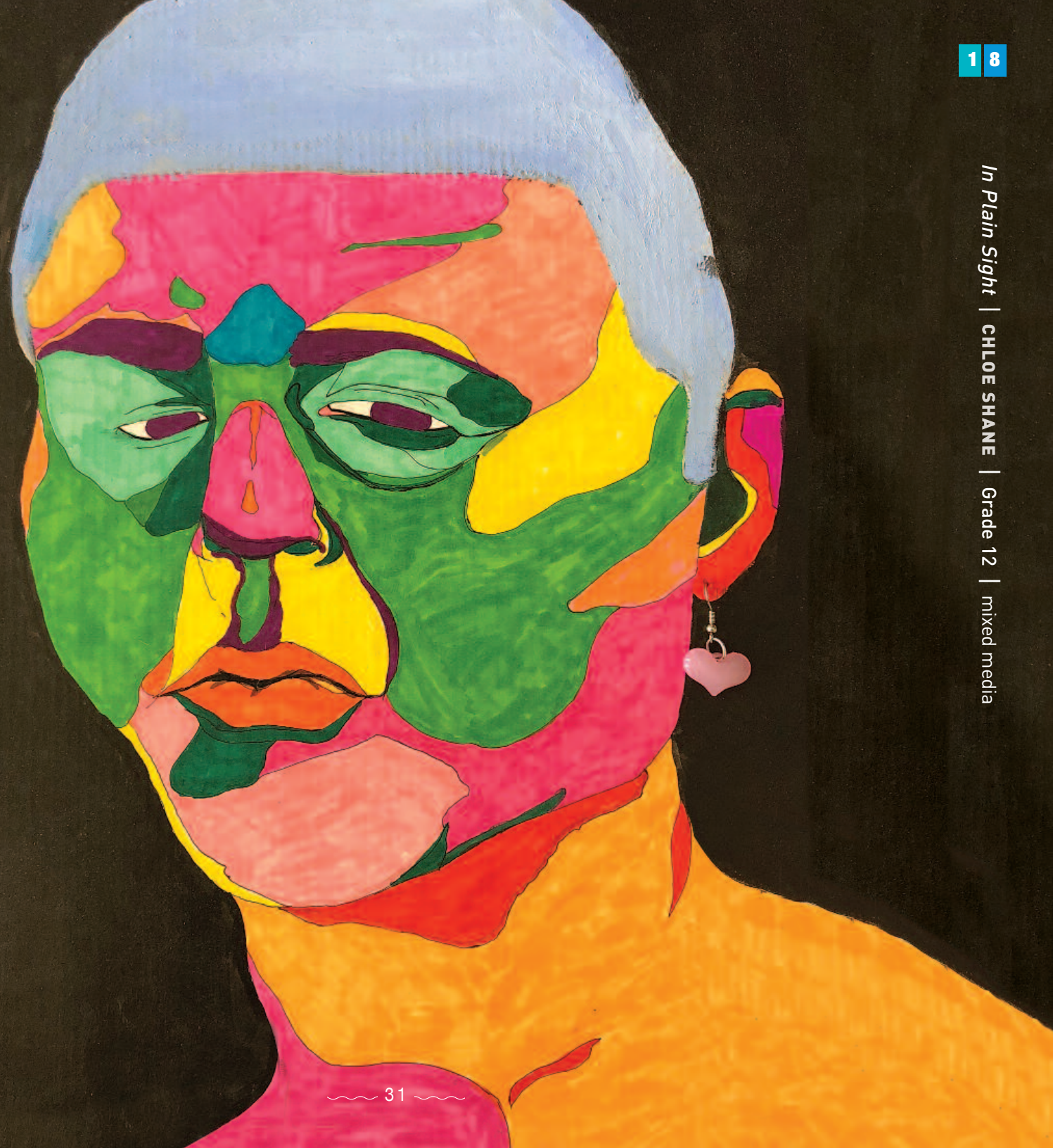
It wasn't *really* me, there was no feeling of recognition when I looked at the soft pencil lines marking the page. But it was a possibility, an alternative, maybe. A person who was downstairs sitting at the counter eating breakfast and reading, instead of upstairs making her parents want to scream. Years later she could go to dinner parties and not be greeted by old family friends with *you turned out so well!* She was quiet and peaceful as a baby, and her parents woke up without dark rings under their eyes.

But she was clean, safe, obedient. Her eyes were too forgiving, *too* placid. There was nothing there. Maybe the crack told it right.











### Pantoum: Isolated

The ghostly sea canaries  
do not worry  
when the arctic faeries  
ice over with eyes blurry.

Do not worry,  
for the sea will not  
ice over. With eyes blurry,  
the weeping beluga forgot.

For the sea will not  
surrender to the shattered glass  
the weeping beluga forgot,  
and its voice will sound the brass.

Surrender to the shattered glass  
when the cetacean globe is  
the gibbous moon  
and its voice will sound the brass.  
The cold stars will sing their tune

when the cetacean globe is  
the gibbous moon.

A single figure, shifting under  
the squid ink sky.

The cold stars will sing their tune,  
melting into crystals. Electrify

a single figure, shifting under  
the squid ink sky  
when the arctic faeries,  
melting into crystals, electrify  
the ghostly sea canaries.











## Moving and Spinning

I had this spinny chair when I was younger; it was from IKEA—the PS LÖMSK Swivel Chair. It had a red plastic shell with an orange cover that you could pull up and down to dramatically hide or reveal yourself to spectators. I tricked many friends’ parents by hiding my friends in it when their parents arrived to pick them up. I was sure they never knew. But then, it always went the same way: we would spin the chair around and open the shade to reveal my scrunched-up friend begging their parents to let them stay. Their parents never let them.

### E. Fourth Street

After living in my dad’s studio and then living in a cockroach-infested apartment in Stuyvesant Town, my parents and I moved into an apartment on E. Fourth Street between A and B when I was around three years old. This is the first apartment I remember. We had a huge living room with a brown velour couch, wall-to-wall carpeting (something I heard my parents complaining about a lot), and the tiniest little kitchen imaginable. (My parents rarely ever cook together in the kitchen anymore because of this; I can still see them flinch when they walk side-by-side in the kitchen at my current apartment.

Even seeing that is rare.) My room was way too big for a 3-year-old. I had all of my Polly Pockets, Calico Critters, and Friends To Be Made dolls strewn across my pink carpeted floor. My mom and I would spend hours arranging all the little bears and blonde-haired mini-people into “set-ups.” We would create scenes and stories for each miniature figure. Sitting in the corner of this room was my brand new chair. My dad would put me inside of it and spin me around. It was like my own amusement park at home.

I lived on E. Fourth Street until I was nine. Then we had to move. I put on a brave face. It was only a house. I found a sense of comfort in that my Calico Critters and spinning chair were coming with me. I remember asking why we were moving and not getting a straight answer. *Why wouldn’t they tell me?* I felt like crying. I didn’t want to make my parents feel bad so I didn’t.

### E. 32nd Street

My new house on E. 32nd Street was a two-floor brownstone. Besides my tiny closet of a bedroom, my most vivid memory of this place was the huge elk head, belonging to my landlord, that hung above the staircase when you

walked up. I named it Ella the Elk. I had a friend Ella at the time, but it was *not* named after her. My mom painted my walls blue, got me a loft bed, and arranged a little hang-out area underneath for my friends and me to play. My first few nights I almost vomited from sleeping up so high. My room had a blue theme, so my swivel chair stood out as it sat in the corner of my *pre-teen* hang-out area. It was in this house that my friends and I asked my dad for “one more second” before we had to leave and he responded “no, there are no secs involved” and we all burst out laughing. This was also where my band, Age of Kids, was formed and where we held many of our practices. We lived here for one year. I still don’t know why we left.

### W. 29th Street

I wasn’t as upset to leave my 32nd Street house. Maybe it was because of my small room, or because I was used to the feeling, but I wasn’t even close to tears. We packed everything up and moved to W. 29th Street, where the floors were peeling off, the wall was kind of slanted, and we had no shower. I got the bigger bedroom because my parents felt bad for sticking me in a closet for a year. My dad built a recording studio

in our house. We fixed the shower. We got a puppy. We got a credenza (my mom’s pride and joy). We got rid of our brown velour couch and got a new leopard one. Everything was different. Except my spinny chair. In this house, in that spinny chair, my friends told me that they had overheard this girl insulting me. I curled up in the chair and cried for so long while they comforted me and assured me that I didn’t need her, but I knew I did. There were bite marks on the sides from my new puppy, and the hinges were squeaky from so much turning. I didn’t get rid of it until high school. I was 13, and according to my family, it was time. I needed to *grow up*. We put it out on the street. The next day it was gone. I have no idea where it is now.

So I got a new closet, but I still have my pink poster that says “For Like Ever” that I’ve had since Third Street. I got a new desk, but I refused to get new bookshelves until last year. My parents are more comfortable with new things. They got us a new dining room table a few weeks ago and I have yet to adjust to it. I miss the burn marks from Hanukkah candles that fell out of the menorah, and the chipped wood from the family dinners where I was so angry I silently broke off pieces of the table.







**45.4408°N, 12.3155°E**

The canals of Venice have been Lorenzo Nascosto's second home for as long as he can remember. The jade water practically runs through his veins and the jovial music of gondoliers is his life's permanent soundtrack. The Nascosto name should be synonymous with the Line Four Vaporetto, as Lorenzo, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have manned the water bus for over a century. But despite the Nascosto family's dedication, Lorenzo goes unnoticed by hundreds of passengers each day. He dutifully ties, unties, and re-ties the rope attaching the Vaporetto to the boarding dock, knowing the ways of the rope so well that his gloved hands can complete their job on autopilot. Just like the rope, his uniform is frayed at the edges.

Lorenzo's job means waves of people constantly enter and exit his life, but he neither talks to nor makes eye contact with any of the passengers. Although the passengers pay him no mind, Lorenzo pays close attention to who comes and who goes and overhears countless stories. These stories are only fragments, however, so when Lorenzo comes across missing details, he simply fills in the blanks himself. The little old lady who always puts on a bit too much blush, never wears fewer than four cat-adorned accessories, and boards the Vaporetto at the crack of dawn each morning is actually a world-renowned assassin. Thanks to a

special serum she concocted herself, all of the pigeons in Venice are under her control and act as her personal henchmen. Important secrets are concealed within the bag of pigeon feed she carries with her. The young man who sports a masterfully sculpted handlebar mustache and is never without a funky-patterned suit is a fierce conspiracy theorist who travels all over Italy convincing people that a group of reptilian aliens have infiltrated the Vatican and corrupted the Pope. He rides the Vaporetto with an old box camera that he claims will one day capture an alien swimming through the canals and transform him into a superstar.

Lorenzo is so busy concocting stories in his head that, at first, he doesn't notice the mass of passengers whip around in unison to witness the spectacular sight of the elusive woman boarding the Vaporetto. Her leopard-print fur coat catches sunlight and attention and her knee-high, black boots stomp down on the deck. Although all of Italy has her to thank for their safety, no one is able to place her, for she is always in a disguise. At this point, Lorenzo's eyes are glued to her. Then, to his utter surprise, she strides forward and stops directly in front of him. His cheeks turn the same fire-engine-red shade of her lips. He abruptly turns away, but can feel her eyes searing into the back of his head and the soft breath of her words on the nape of his neck.



"I think you should take a look at this," she whispers in a deep, throaty voice. Lorenzo hesitantly turns her way as she hands him a card with the coordinates "45.4408°N, 12.3155°E" written in gold lettering.

"M-m-me?" he stammers.

"Yes, Lorenzo. It is your time. An entire world outside of Line Four is waiting for you. When the Vaporetto reaches the *Ponte Vecchio* stop, follow my lead," she responds.

"Who are you? Why should I trust you? Why have you chosen me?"

"You can call me Parvenza, but revealing my true identity would be putting the entire country in danger. The only thing I can disclose is that you have been specially selected by a committee of top-ranking officials at the agency who have decided that you are who our country needs. All you have to do is get off at the next stop and travel to the coordinates. A life of both great danger and great reward awaits you."

Lorenzo's eyes glitter with uncharted adventures. He can see it perfectly: he and Parvenza will quickly fall in love, and their days will be filled with private jets, the newest gadgets, narrow escapes, and steamy affairs. Lorenzo is practically salivating with giddiness when he is jerked away from his fantasy. He has just realized that leaving with the beautiful Parvenza would

mean leaving his job on the water bus. What would the passengers do without him?

"Don't worry, no one will even notice you're gone," Parvenza says, almost as if she has been reading Lorenzo's thoughts.

The buildings Lorenzo has known all of his life speeding by are as blurry as his mind. As *Ponte Vecchio* grows closer, he can't help but think about the disappointment and embarrassment his family would feel if he abandoned the Vaporetto business. He knows how important it is to them, and he knows that it is important to him, but that doesn't stop him from fantasizing about the adventures waiting for him away from the canals.

Before Lorenzo knows it, the Vaporetto skids to a stop. Will this be the last time he ties the rope? Parvenza slips off the waterbus and assimilates into the crowd of passengers. Lorenzo cranes his neck in her direction, attempting to see where she went. But it's as if she has disappeared into thin air. The Vaporetto departs with a dazed Lorenzo still onboard, leaving a foamy trail of missed opportunities in its path.

As Lorenzo finishes tying up the rope from the Vaporetto deck, he wonders what kind of adventure Line Four has in store for him for tomorrow. But first, he needs to patch up the rip in his cracked and faded leather gloves.





## My Mother

### Plant Lady

My mother stands in front of the ledge next to the balcony door. She has on her T-shirt with the two big, blue lobsters on it and her capri pants that fall just above her ankles, not quite made for a petite woman; her jet black hair is pulled into a loose ponytail. She stands with a spray bottle in her hand in front of her two houseplants that she bought from the man on Canal Street, contemplating whether they need water or if she should wait another day. “Come look how the plants are growing,” she shouts to me.

She continues probing me about the last time I watered the plants and if I took them out to the balcony for extra sun. My mother grew up on a farm in Southern China with longan and persimmon trees towering over a muddy rice field and the earthy smell of soil never far away. She always talks about the trees and vegetables she grew in China and how little could grow here, in our little Brooklyn apartment. In the past, she tried growing chrysanthemums on the balcony, for tea, but it was too cold and they quickly wilted; this is why our home is littered with exclusively Asian houseplants.

She ends her time in front of the plants like she did every day this past week, by slowly shaking the bottle of rice wine she has been fermenting. She finds her phone that has been sitting on the ledge of the window and walks away to the song of her slippers clicking and clacking behind her.

### Master Chef

The smell of burned garlic wafts around the room as the hot oil sizzles in the wok. The denim apron hangs loosely around her neck with her phone in the little kangaroo pouch—a pouch barely large enough to hold her iPhone 7 Plus that she insisted on getting because the screens on other phones were too small for her to see. Her face is calm and relaxed as she throws some cabbage into the wok, oil bouncing out at her like fireworks. She is on the phone with my grandma, asking her about her day and telling her about the latest family gossip. “Did you hear Matthew turned down MIT to go to that school in Long Island?” my mom asks nonchalantly, waiting for my grandma’s reply. Right behind her, steam from the rice cooker rises up to the

air, traveling up into the dusty old air vent. Her movements are mesmerizing, three quick flicks of the wrist to stir fry the veggies then three quick chops of scallion. She stirs half of the scallion into the cabbage, leaving the other half to be sprinkled on top as garnish. “Come get this!” she screams to me as she transfers the food, steam still rising from it, from the wok to the stainless steel serving plate.

#### Cashier

It’s another hot summer day and my mom has on a loose shirt, flip flops, and her iconic coral capris; the unofficial uniform of all the women at her workplace. Even with the air conditioning, there are always beads of sweat rolling down her face. She fans herself with a pocket fan, sold in the store for \$1.50, and talks to Gigi, her Cantonese coworker with the big, curly black hair and a deep love for mangoes.

The shop is filled from top to bottom with random necessities: nail clippers, pencils, squeeze stress balls, shaving cream, chopsticks, bedazzled NYC caps. While she waits behind the counter for customers, she chats with the grannies who frequent the store, offering to buy them a cup of milk tea or honey lemon, and calls to check up on my brother and me.

She starts in Cantonese, “Hey! Have you eaten? Where are you right now?”

“I just got home, but—”

“\$19.50 total,” she declares in accented English midway through my sentence. This happens often, but even when I think I am used to it, I find myself pursing my lips and furrowing my brows. Especially the way she says it, with such strength, makes me wonder if she was ever listening to me, but it is Chinatown and everybody haggles; my mother is a compromiser.







## Tuesday

1. you ask your senior friend how they are doing. they do not reply. they look at you with dead eyes and take their muffins and go to engineering, trailing the scent of decay in their wake
2. "it's so weird that they're dating people," says your friend. "they're babies." you look at the boys, who are all your age. before your very eyes, they regress into infants, suddenly sitting in the puddles of their adidas shorts, stussy shirts, and knicks snapbacks. you are somehow unsurprised. they continue to get more girls than you do, even in infant form
3. you get to the cafeteria at 10:10 exactly. you are the only one there. you are the only one in the school that day. the chocolate chip muffins are already gone
4. there are clusters of screaming fifth graders at roma's. they have merged into one body, their many heads and arms taking selfies and crafting beautiful snapchat stories while chewing bites of greasy two-dollar pizza
5. you go to the knowledge bar to fix your ipad. you go to the knowledge bar to fix your ipad case. you go to the knowledge bar to fix your ipad keyboard. you go to the knowledge bar to fix the projector in your classroom. you go to the knowledge bar to fix your broken heart
6. you inquire with a teacher on where a certain student went. they solemnly inform you they have gone to a semester school. you nod with respect, knowing that they have had a valiant death
7. the lights are flickering. every light in the building flickers in perfect synchronization. the school flickers in and out of existence, and you with it
8. you ask your friend if they have a pencil. they open their pencil case to check. as they empty out their case, out falls a ballpoint pen, two gelly rolls, an eraser, several elk antlers, a gull feather, and an amount of viscera, but no pencils. i guess i lost all of them, they say. you know how people are with pencils, they say
9. you buy a cupcake from the bake sale. it tastes like coffee and tears. the junior behind the counter looks up at you with dead eyes and you realize this is all he is now
10. the lights in the hallway go out during spanish class. everyone sighs in resigned acceptance, knowing that they're all getting taken to hell again



11. a teacher offers an extra point on the upcoming test to whomever murders another student the fastest. the entire class pulls knives out of their backpacks
12. someone goes to adjust the microphone during morning meeting. it begins to extend, growing to the height of the ceiling in sterling place and breaking through. somewhere, you hear mr. kent sigh
13. you wake up to find a construction site inside of your locker. centipedes, each wearing a supreme shirt, presumably summoned by the week-old cupcake that girl in your latin class gave you, are showing off by doing pullups on the scaffolding
14. you submit writing to reflections. you submit your application to the diversity leadership conference. you submit photos to the yearbook. you submit your earthly form to satan to appease him, in hopes that it'll get your french grade up
15. you have a planner. you have a phone. you have an ipad. you have a chromebook. you have a laptop. you quietly take notes on a 40 inch lcd tv. your mother sees this and recommends with tight lips that you see a chiropractor



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16. you go into nurse nancy's office claiming demonic possession. she gives you advil and a band-aid and asks how your mom's doing
17. a berkeley carroll t-shirt appears in your drawer one day. you have no idea how it got there
18. "did you participate in that girl's science research project?" asks your friend. "i sure did," you reply, taking out a small, plastic bag of your own teeth. "what candy do you think is the prize?"



## Before the House

Before remembering  
 Before laughing  
 Before coloring the world:  
 A house.

One meager box overlooking the gray-  
 sectioned strip designating us as the  
 civilized, where we walk with hardened  
 soles tapping on concrete, the same  
 hardened soles we pull to the side when  
 we glimpse calloused bare feet and  
 weathered yellow nails sometimes  
 concealed with a half-torn shoe or sock  
 dragging along the speckled floor of a  
 subway car and we stare at the feet so we  
 don't have to look at the hands shivering  
 so much that the penny or two in the  
 paper cup makes a slight knocking sound  
 like a Hudson River wave lapping at the  
 shore over  
 and over  
 and over  
 and over  
 and over  
 and over  
 and

Before the house:  
 A street.  
 Content in being destitute of foliage,  
 instead bristling with a wind from  
 the West,  
 stirred up by cars rushing down  
 the West Side Highway,  
 past the Adopt-A-Highway sign boasting  
 DONALD J. TRUMP on its white face.  
 And the cars speed by,  
 sending dirt and dust  
 up through the baseball fields and  
 sledding hills,  
 carried on an authoritative breeze.

Sometimes I close my eyes.  
 Sometimes, when it's cold,  
 I walk backward,  
 watching the avenues disappear  
 over the crest of 101st Street.





## The Oxford Comma

So let me tell you why leaving out an Oxford comma is such an affront to grammatical taste and decency.

Yeah, yeah, you think to yourself—trapped in a bubble of ignorance, along with everyone who contributed to the AP Style Guide—it’s just a stylistic writing choice, haha, that means I can leave it out!

Well, newsflash: *no*.

You really, really can’t leave it out. It’s an offense on par with leaving out Pluto from the Solar System, but that’s a subject for another rant and coincidentally the subject of several strongly-worded emails I’ve directed to NASA’s communications office.

Now, the Oxford comma. What is it, you ask? Simply put, it’s the comma that’s placed right before the conjunction at the end of a list (for this reason, it’s also called a serial comma). That conjunction is usually “and,” though it can vary. Pretend you’re shopping, for example. You want to buy four cats, a strong black coffee, and a gothic coffin. Notice the comma after “coffee.” It’s right where it needs to be. And it contributes so much to making

lists more readable and understandable—makes their meaning so much clearer—that it’s a crime to leave an Oxford comma out where one is necessary.

To put this in perspective, say you’re writing an editorial to be published in *The Blotter* on graduation day. Your parents will be reading it, so you want to go for something sappy, right? You want to warm the hearts of all of your readers. And what better way to do that, you think, than to thank your parents, and the other two most influential figures in your life—Emma Watson and God (grammar nerds, you know where this is going). Obviously, there is no better way. Somewhere out there, both Emma Watson AND God are reading, you know it, and so are your parents, as well as the entire school.

Now, the night before, you’re frantically typing up your article, and you decide to thank all of these people together in one sentence at the end! Great. You’re satisfied with your work and you go to sleep.

As soon as you arrive at school the next



day, you realize something is off.

It seems that *The Blotter* has published your article already! A printed copy is shoved at you by a middle schooler seemingly dying of laughter. You skim it and pause at the last sentence:

“I would like to thank my parents, Emma Watson and God.”

You wonder if you have done something wrong. And yes, you have! Look at you! You’ve gone and made a fool of yourself. You’ve implied that God and Emma Watson are your parental figures, and now everyone’s snickering and pointing at you in the halls, and your parents feel sad and ignored, because Emma Watson is clearly not your parent and neither is God.

But you know what? You deserve it! Why? You could have avoided all this shame, all this embarrassment, by *adding a serial comma right after “Emma Watson.”* The power was in your hands, and what did you do? You rejected it!

Like so many other readers, I am sick of coming across lists without that final comma, lists I have to struggle to decipher for five minutes straight because the author had better things to

do than add an Oxford comma. The comma makes lists look *neat*. It’s *easier on the eyes*. It conveys *the intended meaning of your sentence*. With *accuracy*.

Moving on. So maybe that was a bit of a clichéd example. But that doesn’t make it any less true, because one way or another, you will end up looking like a dolt if you continue to ignore the existence of the Oxford comma. If you aren’t fully convinced yet, though, here’s a more original example: I could say “I formed a rock band with President Obama, a 300-year-old tortoise and a used car salesman,” but that would be completely wrong (unless I am actually trying to imply that Mr. Obama is both a tortoise and a used car salesman). This sentence can easily be remedied by Adding! That! Comma! Like so: “I formed a rock band with President Obama, a 300-year old-tortoise, and a used car salesman.” Now, the meaning is clear. You have three fellow band members—a tortoise, the former U.S. President, and a salesman. All you need is a cool band name.











## What Was Lost

As her fingers ran along the stalks of the flowers she could feel each imperfection. From far away the bright yellow petals seemed full of life but, from where she was sitting, all she could see was the cracking plaster.

The window to the room was swung open and the subtle spring breeze battled with the odor that hung in the air: a reminder of all the different colors they had splashed onto these walls.

First they'd laid out newspaper on the floor and slathered the walls with "Carolina Blue." Each stroke was filled with enthusiasm and each layer was followed by laughter.

The next time, they painted quietly. With the color of peonies streaked on her jeans and determination glinting in her eyes she covered the blue walls.

But when it came time to paint again, just standing in the room

made her pulse throb and her stomach contort until it was so unbearably tight she couldn't breathe.

Her husband called the friend of a friend who—with pity—drew tall sunflowers that slowly extended toward the ceiling.







But each time the room remained empty.

The first time she'd turned the key, the carefree manner the door had swung open, the way the afternoon light had bent around the corner, the small notches up the wall in the kitchen—all had breathed

possibility. It had been a time when she'd been content to spend her days basking on their deck or digging her hands through the dirt in their garden, but now things were different.

Daily life reverberated through her vacant body—high-pitched shrills of children playing outside, chuckles of conversing parents, the barking of labradors and retrievers, and an ever-present smell of charred

steak. Every house was the same; the same green lawns, the same white panels and brown roofs, and the same stay-at-home moms in their sweatpants, each of them on the latest diet.



All of a sudden she felt a need to fill their home with artwork, mismatched bookshelves, and odd bits and pieces she found in yard sales. She arranged and rearranged tables and chairs, trying to fill every

crevice with something, anything. She even filled in and painted a thick layer of white over the notches in the kitchen wall. But despite all of her efforts, she kept coming back to that one empty room in their house.

There she sat on the bare floor with her fingers pressed against the wall—a reminder of everything that was lost.







## Flora

Flora's my poodle. She's got black, curly hair and an inability to sit up on smooth surfaces. If you anthropomorphize real hard, she smiles a lot. She's a good dog, and doesn't do much beyond running around and walking really fast. She knows all the standard tricks, but the only fun trick she knows is shaking hands, and she's got that one down. She's gotten so good at knowing when to shake hands that she has made the logical connection that if any part of your forearm is within two feet of the floor, it must be for a handshake. She knows other tricks as well, like sitting and coming to you and that she can basically get whatever she appears to be in need of by gazing at you soulfully and sorrowfully. This technique, which we have dubbed "cow eyes," is properly performed by sitting at an angle of approximately 90 degrees to the target, tilting the head all the way back and cocking it slightly so

that the target has no choice but to see her deep longing for a walk. The final step is to open the eyes as wide as possible, so that the target is slightly disturbed, but enamored, with the obvious look of crazed craving for the opportunity to walk outside, sniff the neighbor's trash, and go back inside again.

Whenever Flora encounters another dog on a walk, she plays it cool. She'll walk past at a dignified pace, maybe smell the dog to get a whiff of their character. If she is feeling particularly nonchalant, she'll twist her leash up with the alien dog, so that the humans do that funny dance. No craziness.

The only sign that anything might be up is the vigorous tail wagging that begins from the moment she turns the corner. Once the strange dog is a safe distance away, she begins jumping and rejoicing at the feat of stealth and nerve that she has

*She's got black, curly hair and an inability to sit up on smooth surfaces. If you anthropomorphize real hard, she smiles a lot.*



just performed for the third time in 15 minutes. Her main victim of this rejoicing is our other dog, Kitty, who is a few years older and doesn't have the energy to stop Flora from her paw barrage.

It is quite possible that Flora's favorite person in the world is, curiously, Mac, my mother's 20-something-year-old cousin. If it were possible to do such a thing, it is probable that Flora would die of happiness at his mere mention. Flora is about two years old at this point, but until recently, Cousin Mac would need to avoid any physical interaction with Flora so as not to cause an unpleasant mess. Even now, Cousin Mac can only pet her with

caution. As previously mentioned, she has extreme trouble sitting on smooth surfaces, such as hardwood floors. This is because neither her paws nor her claws can get a grip on the floor. As this relates to Cousin Mac, she has an exceedingly difficult time leaping to her feet and flying with breakneck speed into his lower leg, as she is obviously required to do. Instead of fulfilling her dream of breaking the sound barrier in her sudden acceleration, she more often leaps to her feet, then scrabbles helplessly at the floor while staying in one place, then suddenly finds traction and disappears in a puff of smoke like Wile E. Coyote.









## Second

*After Ryan Van Meter*

It is the second day of kindergarten and I see Ari reading alone in our classroom. She sits in the reading nook, all by herself, very focused on some book that is mostly full of pictures. She is not an outgoing kid. I am. This means I must initiate. For some reason I am drawn to her. Maybe it's because opposites attract. I sit down next to her and begin to try and read what she will be so intent on reading for our whole conversation. She doesn't say anything to me even though I am craning my neck to read over her shoulder. She is five and I am four and a half, so I am struggling with the words more than she is. She flips the pages before I have even read the first sentence. I'm impressed. I am her first friend in our class but she is my second. I already did the same thing to the other shy girl in our class. But I will know after this day that my second friend is the best one, the one that will last. Years from now I won't remember the book she is reading. It might be *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. It could be a book about dogs (her favorite animal). That doesn't really matter. All

that matters to me in this moment is making a new friendship. A best friendship.

I like to watch Disney shows, and what I love about them is that every character has a friend. A best friend. A best friend that they are always with—that they spend all of their time with. I have learned from watching *Good Luck Charlie*, *Shake It Up*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place* that best friends have to always

“

*She is five and I am  
four and a half, so I am  
struggling with the words  
more than she is. She flips  
the pages before I have  
even read the first  
sentence. I'm impressed.*

”



be together. They go over to each other's houses every day and basically become a part of the other's family. They hardly ever leave each other's side. I want to experience this for myself. I swear this will be how it is with Ari and me from this day on. We will have weekly playdates and spend all of our time together in the yard—just like Teddy Duncan and Ivy Wentz, Cece Jones and Rocky Blue, and Alex Russo and Harper Finkle. We will have our own secret language and special songs that no one else will understand.

So there Ari and I sit in silence—Ari reading, me watching her read and thinking about our new friendship that I have created

in my head. The friendship that she hasn't experienced, but I have. In a moment of courage I ask her:

“Do you want to be friends?”

She looks at me and responds with the smallest little voice,

“Yes.”

I revel in the silence after this moment. She is my best friend. I did it.

I notice her focus on the book. I want to stay like this forever.

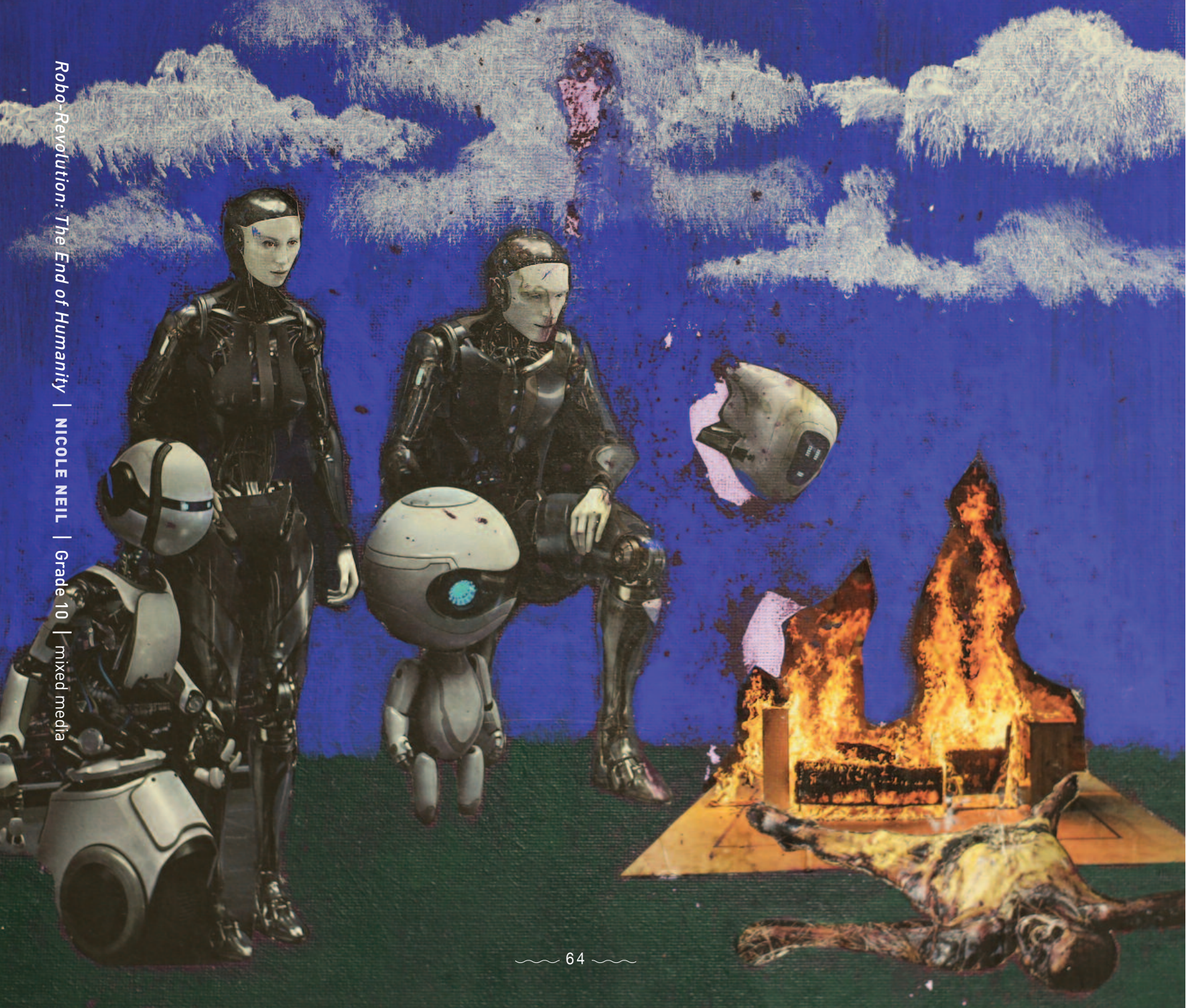
“*Best* friends?” I ask her, only to confirm what I already know.

She nods back to me, and I smile before the teacher separates us to our different assigned seats.











### Key Food Dream

What would it be like to be  
trapped in Key Food  
overnight? For some reason,  
when you have the store to yourself,

the power is also out.  
Perhaps there was an apocalypse  
beforehand. This, of course, means

that you will have to eat  
much of the ice cream before it melts, so  
as not to waste valuable nutrients.

Then, you suppose you will attempt  
to eat your way  
from the aisle on the far

left, the cheeses & desserts, all  
the way to the aisle on the right,  
the vegetables. A year, however, is

much more of a commitment.  
If you are trapped for a year,  
you will have to find a place to sleep

which means you will end up making  
a cushion out of paper towel rolls and  
sleeping behind the deli meat counter.

You will eventually need someone  
to talk to so you might become friends  
with the honey or the uncooked

pasta since those tend to last. Maybe  
you will spend your time memorizing  
nutrition facts. Maybe you can

put together stories with the labels.



## Joy

### Prelude

I spot Joy from across the crowded airport and inadvertently squeal. I feel myself running, suitcase dragging at my ankles. Joy runs too, wiggling through mobs of families with matching luggage and businessmen holding briefcases. Finally we reach each other and hug like squids. She smells so much like herself, and the familiarity makes me tear up. Joy has the strongest smell—it's as if she is her own species of flower. When I enter her house, the smell hits me like a wave. When I borrow her clothes, the smell lingers. It doesn't matter if I wash the hat or scarf, the smell sticks, sweet and comforting. It only takes one sniff to bring back a wave of memories.

### Resemblance

Joy sits on my window ledge, checking her phone. The sun streams in from behind her, creating a silhouette and making her short blonde hair shimmer like gold floss. "You HAVE to listen to this song," she exclaims excitedly, "it's SO nice." She connects her phone to my mini-speaker and a soft rap song

reverberates through my small room. "This is SO nice," I echo. "Who's it by?" In her drawling British accent, Joy explains that it's a cool new rapper she discovered called Loyle Carner. "NO way—I love it," I say in a slight accent, mimicking hers, "Do you want to go on the roof?" (To this day whenever I talk to Joy, I pick up on her accent just as I pick up on her gestures or catchphrases. "I don't even think you get it" is our most notable one. It is almost as if we build off each other, taking a characteristic of the other and making it our own.) Joy and I duck through my open window and onto the roof. It's a hot day—for London, that is—and the metal of my roof scalds our bare feet.

### The Room and the Girl

Joy sits cross-legged on a blow-up mattress, surrounded by the piles of clothes and other crap that coat her bedroom floor. Her hair is pulled back into a messy bun, with a strand hanging casually but deliberately at each side. In typical Joy fashion, she wears two







shirts, a plain, long-sleeved white shirt under a Beatles shirt she stole from her dad. Her jeans are the insanely wide-legged type you would expect to see on a '90s R&B singer. Her bedroom walls are plastered with childhood photos and magazine cutouts, the photos arranged with a purpose and organization that clashes with the apocalyptic state of her bedroom floor. Kate Moss's Calvin Klein ad, a close-up of young Bob Dylan smoking a cigarette, a collage of separate lips and eyes that together resemble a distorted face—all mingle with disposables of friends and youthful pictures of her mum. A close-up of baby-Joy's face smiles at me from above her bed and today-Joy smiles from atop it. She still has the same round face, strong cheekbones, and light blue eyes.

### **A Day Out in Camden**

During the week we spend together in London, Joy and I get in two fights. Actually, fight is not the right word. We don't seem to fight, we only have slight annoyances. First, Joy is annoyed at me: I have lost her favorite

black velvet clutch with a J for Joy. She had a couple of pounds in there and an Oyster Card she had borrowed from her sister. Her sister is going to kill her. For the rest of the trip we slip into the Underground together, wary of the Transport guards in orange reflective vests. Like we are one person instead of two.

The next day I get annoyed at Joy. We're walking through Camden Town, the crazy-busy, semi-sketchy, totally eccentric part of London where you always need to grip your wallet with both hands. "Do you ladies want some weed?" a hoarse voice comes from a pair of men. I shake my head and carry on, careful to avoid eye contact.

But Joy has stopped in her tracks; what does she think she is doing? The man continues, "Smell this, it's the best quality you can find. We can give you girls the best price. You seem like cool girls. Twenty pounds for an eighth, that's the best anyone'll give."

I widen my eyes at Joy, speaking without speaking, *Joy let's get out of here, I'm scared.* Joy shrugs, *I don't know what to do, I'm stuck.* The men go on, "We'll take 15 pounds,



you won't find a better price anywhere."

Joy's so sweet, she never wants to be rude. "Yeah, sure, we'll take it. Ev, do you have 15 pounds?"

I death-glare at Joy, pull three crumpled five pound notes from the pocket of my overalls, hand them to the men, grab the paper towel ball filled with weed that the man holds up to us, mumble a "thanks . . ." and scurry away.

Once Joy catches up to me, I sound off, "What the hell, Joy?? You expected me to pay for that??? That was so so scary OHMYGOD? And it's not like we can use that stuff, it's so dodgy, what if there's other stuff in there, like GLASS."

Joy looks defeated and sheepish, vulnerable in a way I have never seen her. "Ev, I am so so sorry, that was so crummy of me. I didn't know what to do, I panicked." Our offenses have canceled each other's out, we decide. So all is good. It's no fun to hold a grudge.

### Bad Influence

Teachers think Joy is trouble. Once, in art class, I was helping her with a painting she was making. It was a massive painting, and a good section of it had to be robin's egg blue, maybe it was the sky or water. So Joy and I took our giant paintbrushes and swished the paint along the canvas. We were sharing earphones, probably listening to some retro Beyoncé or Rihanna, singing along, the cuffs of our white uniform blouses covered in blue splatters. All of a sudden Joy lunged at me, paint-covered brush in tow, leaving a massive blue blotch on my crinkled nose. We both burst into laughter. The teacher was less amused. Mrs. Matthews was the quintessential British lady, prim and proper, with a stiff upper lip and no-BS personality. Joy became the first girl in our grade to get detention. Ever. Later that week, I got detention for chewing gum. We went together to our jail room, passing notes and eating prawn crisps from our bags.



## The Escapist

The papers, or what was left of them, lay before her. Shredded pieces scattered. As she looked numbly into the rough edges, she recalled the taste of ink and poison. Her mouth salivated. Of course it would. Always wanting to escape.

She was a psychotic artist on amphetamines of fiction, a dreamer in a world in which reality and fiction blended together. A writer, you could call her, but a writer with stories that she sometimes lived in. A more adequate term would be *recluse*. The recluse took her home in the black font pressed on paper. In her sheets she built universes, first building with truths from her own life, then twisting them in a way that could only be, could only *exist*, in paper.

She was a dreamer, first. Then a seductress, a murderer, a heroine, a monster. A pilot, a shapeshifter, a scout. A lover, a friend. A pathfinder.

As she kept indulging in her fantasies, her sense of reality became distorted, the borders that seemed so clear once now blurred. In those blurs, those indulgences, she sought refuge in fantasy. It's safe to say that she was a lunatic. A psycho, a maniac, a mentally-ill child

whose imagination was more than what her hands could form. Her mind was consumed with fiction.

But her logic and reasoning still had a faint presence. She still had enough sense to realize that some of her universe was counterfeit. With that notion her misery grew. The medics came for her soon enough. They prescribed all sorts of treatments; however, none was the one she wanted. That particular cure was impossible, because fiction is fantasy, and can never be reality.

This was the terrible truth that consumed her. The sheets ripped themselves apart in front of her eyes and cut her skin, which bled dark. Almost like ink.

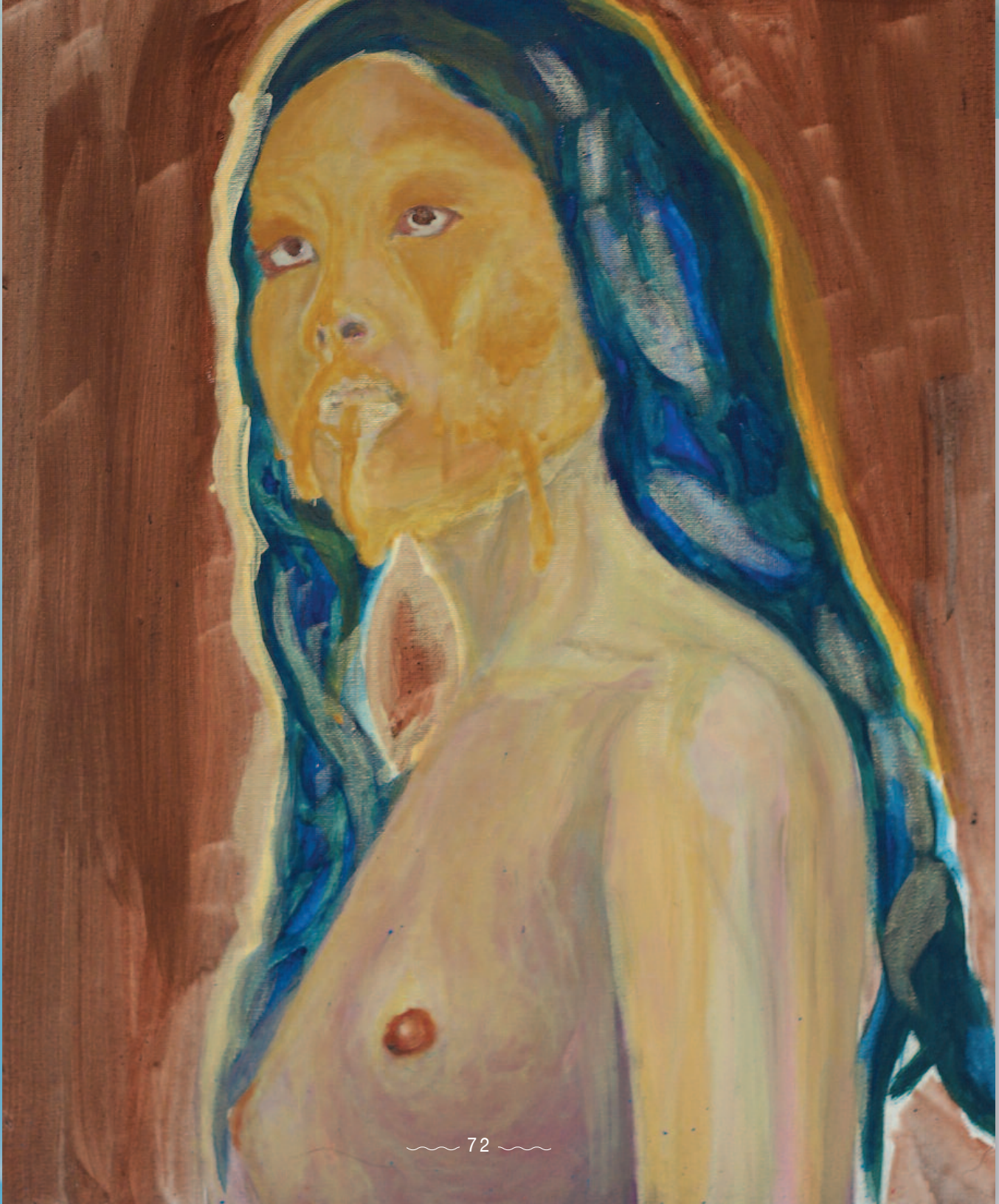
One day she tried an escape to pure figment. At the summit, at the brink of letting reality slip from her fingers, she reached into the sky for deliverance. None came.

She fell, fell deep, fell dark, as the paper tore through her skin, her lungs, her eyes, her mind. When she came to consciousness she saw white. White, tiny shards of fantasy. She learned that a part can never create a whole. Left with pieces, without hope, without fiction, she saw no worth.











She knows now that paper cuts deep. That it hurts others, too. That it is capable of destruction. She's seen the wasteland it leaves.

She is trying to glue herself back together. But the fibers cannot turn back the clock and fully heal. She is scarred. You can see it for yourself, on her wrists, on her thighs. People have seen them, and been afraid of what it means. She has never told them the truth. That she is not just a dreamer. She is not just delusional. She is not just a liar. She is not just a refugee.

She is an escapist.

And these rough edges between bits of paper have shown her what escapes can do.

You know where to find her. You'll find

her when you try to escape yourself. You'll look through the edges of reality and into the depths and dimensions of fantasy and see her in her castle built of paper. She'll be calling out to you, laughing, saying over and over, "Come escape! Come escape! Come escape, my friend, join me!"

You shouldn't be deceived, though. You've seen her rough edges, you know falsity when you see it. So shake your head, smile apologetically, and say that you're not an escapist. That you're a realist. That you have compared your world of flesh and blood to her world of paper and ink, and you've decided to stay here.

You might just make her come back.







## Hands

After Brian Doyle

Consider your hands. Each hand has 27 bones. The smallest of them, the carpals, sit on top of the wrist. They shift against each other. They allow for movement over the wrist, back and forth and back again, like a fake pendulum. The metacarpals stand with their feet resting on the carpals, lifting up the proximal, intermediate, and distal phalanges. And so the fingers move, walking over the keys of an ancient upright piano, or down the back to make a shiver.

Most of the movement of the hand is in the forearm. Squeeze your fist; you will see the *extensi carpi ulnaris* harden, right below your elbow crease. The hand is in some ways a puppet. There are no muscles in the fingers: if your hands wanted to up and walk away from your arms, they would have no means. There are at least 123 ligaments in the hand. These are the strings that the forearm pulls. But then again, the forearms, the arms themselves: you pull on strings to make them work. You are the master of your own body. The hands do the bidding of the forearms as they open a window of a room so devoid of oxygen that the two of

you fell asleep in the middle of the day.

On the left-fourth finger of many people, you can find a ring. Most likely it is a gold band, perhaps not. The ring wraps around a little tube called the *venna amoris*. The *venna amoris* holds blood. More than that, it transports it. Toward the heart. It is a vein. Veins bring blood toward the heart, arteries bring blood away from it. If you wrap this vein in a gold wedding band, the gold might seep into the bloodstream, and tiny specks of gold will make their way to the heart, lost in the great sea of bialy-shaped red blood cells, and they will cover the heart in a fine golden dust, and it will feel new. This is not true. However, the band protects the *venna amoris*, from, perhaps, a splinter, which could pierce it, were the ring finger naked. Although splinters do not travel with the current of blood, it was once thought they did. They thought that the splinters could speed along the veins, all the way to the heart, piercing it from the inside. An old wives' tale. The *venna amoris* is a direct line to the heart. The band embraces it.



The nails are made of a protein called *keratin*. This is a noble protein, a protective protein. This protein guards the sensitive tips of the fingers. Wars have been won with this protein. Two whitetail deer bucks will grow antlers from this protein. Before they are ready to fight, the antlers will be covered in velvet. Velvet skin. The bucks will shed their velvet as they grow old enough to love. When the bucks find their doe, and two bucks have found the same doe, they will fight. With *keratin*. Hard as nails. You will file your nails to stop from scratching the person you need. You do not want to be a buck *sans* doe, but you will file your *keratin* because people are not deer, and do not need *keratin* to find does.

The hands are not the most beautiful part of the human body. They are not the most ugly,

***The hands are the machinery that you will guide through life, like a tractor, or a flashlight, or a hammer.***

***They will reach to the back seat of an old Jeep to hold a different hand.***

***A smaller hand. . . . They will pull a fitted sheet over a bed. They will untie the strings around old cleats, and they will check for swollen lymph nodes.***

either. The most ugly are unequivocally the feet. The hands are the working part. The hands are the machinery that you will guide through life, like a tractor, or a flashlight, or a hammer. They will reach to the back seat of an old Jeep to hold a different hand. A smaller hand. They will run themselves over the nape of the newly shaven neck—if necks have napes. They will pull a fitted sheet over a bed. They will untie the strings around old cleats, and they will check for swollen lymph nodes. They will run themselves over a chest, whispering past the

nipple, to search for distortions. A self-exam. They will dog-ear a favorite page from a book about fishing for trout, to read aloud later. In the hands you hold yourself. They are the working part of you. They are the most beautiful part of you.







## A Glossary for the Asian-American Girl

After Marc Philippe Eskenazi

### SCHOOL

#### Math

Might as well start off with the basics. You will be expected to be good in this subject at school. It's okay if you aren't; just know that people will be surprised. Most will try to be subtle about their shock, try to stifle their confusion at your lack of finesse in geometry or algebra. But others will hit you with *You're Asian, how could you not be good at math?!* It won't matter that you always loved English class more, because you're Asian so *of course math is the only subject for you*. But don't worry, it's not your fault that your middle school never taught you how to isolate X and that you're still not great at long division, because somehow you will end up in the advanced math class anyway and satisfy everyone's expectations.

#### Good Grades

Another thing you will be expected to achieve. Might as well adhere to this too; they're good for adhering to a stereotype and applying to college. Two birds with one stone.

#### Bullying

Something that will probably happen to you up until ninth grade when everyone learns to be "PC." It won't ever be that severe. It won't even be bad enough to tell a teacher or parent. But kids will use your Asian-ness as a weapon. You will never understand the names or the teasing, because you haven't yet learned that this part of you is an easy target. *Fat Asian* if you're a little chubby, even though you didn't think your extra baby fat had anything to do with your race. *Hot Asian*, which will sound like a compliment, but will just alienate you as *other* (see *Hot Asian*). Probably something about *slanty eyes* will come up.

### FOOD

#### Chopsticks

Something everyone will expect you to use when you're out to dinner at a sushi restaurant. Even if you're 6 years old and have the hand-eye coordination of a blind monkey scavenging for food. You haven't quite gotten the hang of regular utensils just yet (your frozen peas always



roll off your spoon at dinner), yet people assume you're dextrous enough to pick up tiny grains of rice with two wooden sticks.

### Rice and Nori

Something you will bring to school for lunch a few times, but stop after the other kids give you strange looks over their PB&J sandwiches with the crusts cut off.

*Hey, what's that green stuff? Yuck.*

*Yeah, that looks weird. Really weird.*

*It's all flaky, ew!*

When you're six years old and being scrutinized by all the other little kids in your class, it's easier to just start bringing the lunches they bring. It's easier to not stand out. You will always love this snack, even after you grow older, and you will be confused and a little annoyed when Seaweed Snax suddenly become an extremely popular lunchtime choice in middle school. Where was this trend when the other first graders were making fun of your nori?

### Dumplings

A food you will learn to cook with your grandma. She will show you how to stand away from the stove when the oil pops, spitting hot

drops onto the stovetop. How to listen for the crackling to die down, because that's when they're ready to take out. How to use chopsticks to lift each little purse of dough and meat onto a plate, delicately so as not to pierce the outer layer. She'll press her hand to your cheek, skin soft from years of methodical hand cream application, and say *Good girl, very good* when you fry your first batch alone. Every little burn from rogue oil, every burst dumpling, every failure is worth it when you bite into one with a satisfying *crunch*. She will even teach you how to make veggie ones when you stop eating meat, an earthy mix of mushrooms and carrots that tastes fresh and crisp and makes you feel at home. You will think of her when you make the Annie's dumplings from the freezer section at the Food Co-op, always frying them the way she taught you, not the way it says on the box.

### Chap Chae

A staple at Thanksgiving. Turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, stuffing, and a huge punch bowl filled with chap chae. Your grandmother will always make too much, so a tupperware full of it is always included when you leave. You will think it's strange when you are







the only one with Korean glass noodles in your Thanksgiving leftovers lunch at school.

## BEAUTY

### Eyes

You will always want them to be bigger. You will draw on them with black eyeliner, winged to give the appearance of wide doe-eyes, like Zooey Deschanel. You will wish and wish for blue eyes, because those are the color of the sea and yours are the color of dog poo. The small obsession with the change in eye color will start around age five, and it won't ever *really* go away. You will even consider buying colored contacts. Your first boyfriend will look at you and say, *Your eyes are so beautiful, my favorite part of you.* But his eyes are the prettiest green-blue, like sea glass, so you laugh. You will never believe people when they tell you your eyes are beautiful.

### Exotic

*Synonym: Ethnic*

Something you will be called in comparison to your white friends. It doesn't matter if you're 100% Asian, or just half, or even just a quarter (the latter will make you a "fake" Asian: see % *Asian*). This word will most likely be used

when trying to compliment you, e.g., *Betty, your blonde hair is so pretty! Lily, you're so . . . exotic. Like, different. Unique!* Cool, you think. Like a Venus flytrap or rare jungle cat. You'll get so used to this strange form of compliment, specific and slightly backhanded, that you will be surprised when someone calls you pretty for the first time.

### Hot Asian

Something you will undoubtedly be called at some point in your life. Boys will see you as an exception, like *Usually Asian girls aren't hot, but you are.* This will make you feel somehow lucky to receive their praise, but believe me, you are not. For some reason you can't put your finger on, most of the "compliments" you receive will always come back to your Asian-ness.

### Brown

A color you will be self-conscious about. When you are changing and all the other skinny little girls in the locker room are pink and milky and you are brown and olive. You will be shocked the first time you see one of your white friends naked in your bunk at sleepaway camp. They will point out the places where your skin is like milk



chocolate and theirs is like the underbelly of a kitten, giggling and poking and making you feel more naked than you already were. You will start changing a little faster when you get back to the bunk.

## **FAMILY**

### **Halmoni**

*Synonym: Grandma*

For most of your childhood, you will think that this is your grandmother's real name. This is because everyone calls her that, not just her grandchildren. She is always the chef: she makes you dumplings (you will eat hundreds of these over the course of your lifetime, and they will never get old: see *Dumplings*) and rice and nori and Korean burgers and Korean barbecue and chap chae (noodles added to a Thanksgiving meal, a Korean twist on arguably the most American holiday: see *Chap Chae*) and scallion pancakes because *I'm full* is not in her vocabulary. Whenever you enter the kitchen, she has something waiting for you. *You need to eat. You're growing!* She says this even after your growth spurts have long passed and you haven't changed height in four years.

### **Dad**

Someone you will always be jealous of because he tans so easily and looks Hawaiian, not Asian. His eyes are creased more from smiling than from race. His long, black hair makes him seem like a surfer, or a snowboarder, maybe. All your friends think he's *so cool*. You agree, but you can't help but envy that he is the coveted half-Asian, and you are only a quarter (see % Asian).

## **RACE and ETHNICITY**

### **% Asian**

A metric that will measure how white you are. If you are only a quarter Korean, you will hide it from your Asian friends who mock anyone who is under 50%. But you will also be 25% too "ethnic" for your white friends. You will probably question your identity for most of your life: when, for instance, you go to school and you're the only Asian kid in the middle school, so by default you are the most Asian one there, but then when you transfer somewhere new you're suddenly not Asian enough for the other kids in the Asian-American Alliance club.

### **White**

What some of your Asian friends/acquaintances think you are. *You're Asian? I couldn't even tell.*



It doesn't matter how many times you hear this (it will be many), it will always shake you. You never thought you could be so offended by someone who shares something so important with you. You thought they would be the accepting ones.

### Asian

*Synonym: Chinese*

People will always be shocked when you are not Chinese. Your straight, black hair and your almond eyes = Chinese, according to white people. They always seem to forget the other 47 countries on the continent. Maybe keep a map saved on your phone in case someone you meet says *You're Korean? I thought you were Asian!* Again.

### Person of Color

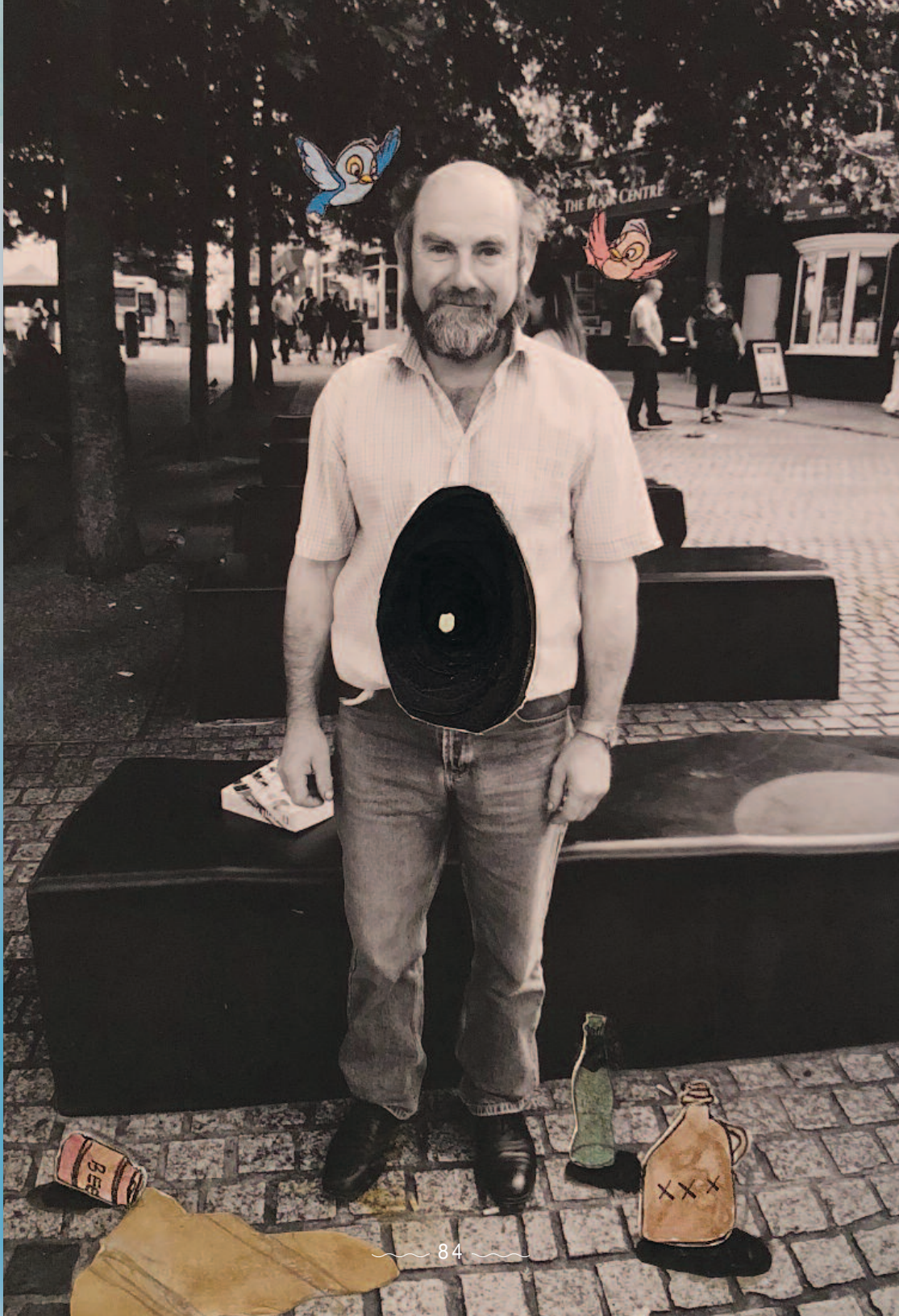
A category you will never be sure you are a part of (especially the 25% Asians). On college applications you check the little box marked *Asian*. You know you are a part of that group, but others seem to want to tell you that you're not, exclude you for no reason. When you're put in the mixed-race group during a workshop at

school, you'll feel embarrassed, like a fraud. A counterfeit. Your insides will churn and your cheeks will turn pink, and the room will feel too small, like everyone is looking at you. Just know that *you do belong there*. Even if it feels like you don't. You must remind yourself that you don't need categories to define you. You are different and that is okay.

### "The Good Korea"

*Are you from the good Korea or the bad Korea?*  
Oh, God. Maybe a map really is a good idea.





## Steps to Responsibility

1. Beg.
2. *Mature people, they say, don't need to beg to be trusted.*
3. Don't beg anymore. You weren't mature enough then, but now you are enlightened: now you are wise.
4. Part of being the mature new you means that you must be agreeable. Go with your parents on errands, and do your best to be helpful.
5. Offer to carry the grocery basket.
6. The grocery store is also conveniently located on Broadway. Notice the store when you leave, but don't say anything. Do not screw this up.
7. On your birthday, receive toys.
8. Enjoy these toys. These are the toys you would have asked for had you still been a child.
9. Remind them that you are no longer a child. You may look like one, but you are a mature, responsible adult.
10. Ask them: Have they noticed just how mature, responsible, and adult-like you have been? You have been very mature, responsible, and adult-like if you do say so yourself.
11. Ask them: Do you know what I would *really* like for my birthday?
12. Ask them: Please can I get one?
13. Jump when they say yes. You were not expecting this at all. They had been saying no for quite some time, and you weren't planning on receiving a yes for at least another six months. This is fantastic news.
14. Ask them: When can we go?
15. When the time comes, slide your MetroCard through the metal slot quickly. You are so excited!
16. "Swipe card again at this turnstile."
17. Swipe card again at the turnstile.
18. When the subway arrives, get on.
19. Instead of sitting, stand and hold on to the pole, because you are a mature, responsible adult and the movements of the train will not knock you over.
20. Stumble when the train comes to its first stop.
21. Sit down in the ugly orange seat. Mature, responsible adults sit on the subway, too.



22. Arrive at your stop. Get off of the train.  
Sprint all the way to the store.
23. Locate the fish.
24. Examine the fish.
25. Tap on the plastic cups; see which ones  
have the prettiest fins.
26. Study each cup carefully.
27. Finally, make a decision. He's a blue betta,  
and in the light, you swear he sparkles.
28. Pick out rocks, a tank, good, a plant to  
keep him company. You like the plant, so  
he will too.
29. They pay, you thank them, you never  
stop smiling.

30. You get in a taxi and clutch him to your  
chest. His name is Bluehead and he is yours  
and you are his.
31. At home, assemble his tank and put him in.
32. Every day, feed him.
33. Every day, talk to him about your friends  
and your family and your school.
34. Every day, ask him how his day has been.  
You think he says it's been good, but  
you're not quite sure. You're still learning  
his language.
35. When he dies after only one month, cry.





## Ant Rapture

I have wondered,  
before, what  
it must feel like to be an ant.

You might've spent  
hours climbing  
up a wooden cabinet

because maybe  
you smelled some  
crumbs that you could carry home

to offer your  
family.  
And it might've been too late

when you real-  
-ized one of  
your six legs was vibrating.

Maybe no one  
ever told  
you how stretched out it will feel—

the duration  
of an in-  
dex finger collapsing on your

exoskeleton.  
Maybe your  
abdomen will rupture first

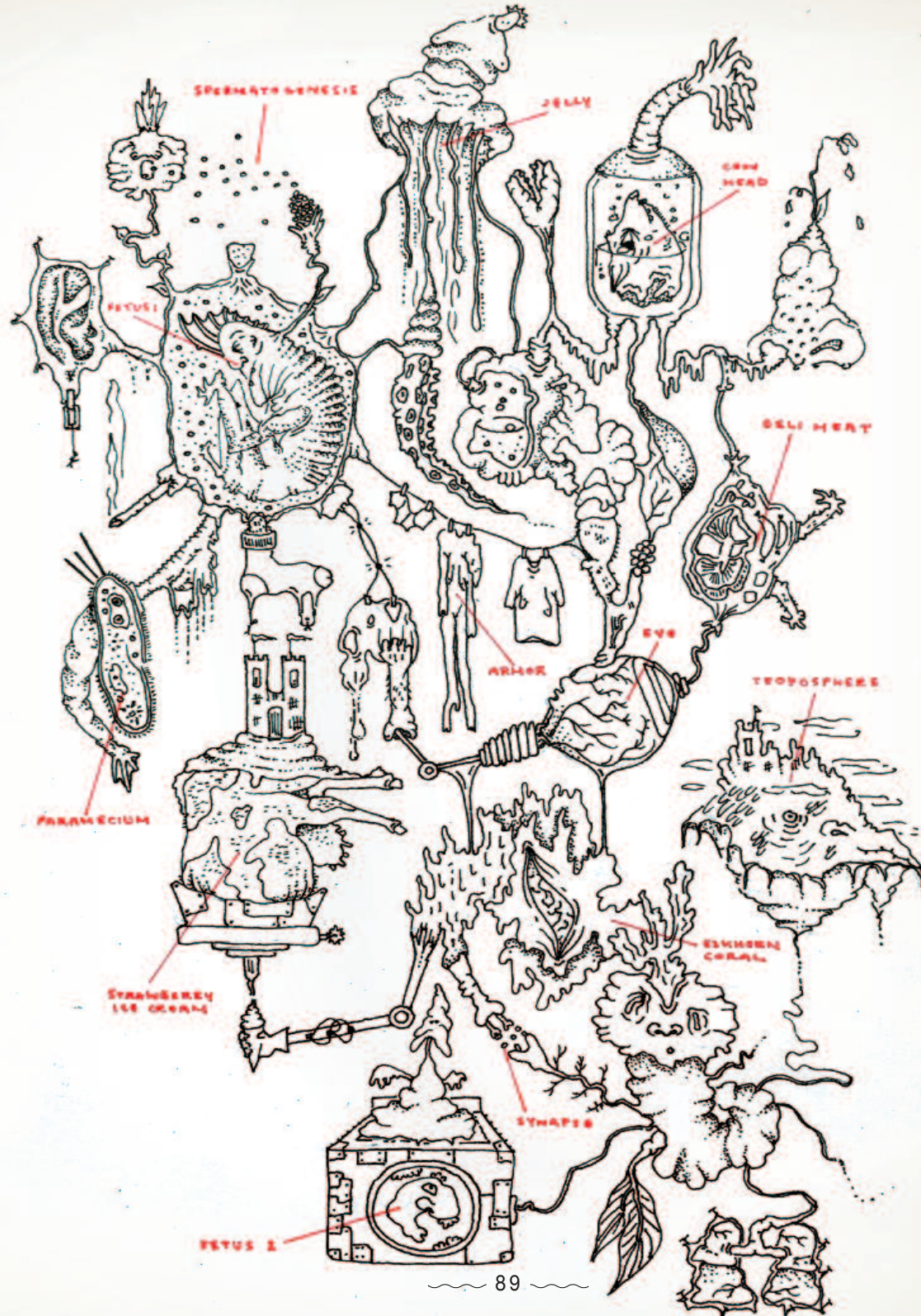
Maybe as you  
deflate, your  
nerves will pour from a tear in

your side like a  
tipped-over  
pot of cold noodles. Maybe

your heart will be  
squashed like a  
grape and you will feel your leg

and aorta  
float up to  
heaven in pieces. Maybe

your world, a ka-  
leidoscope  
of grey tones, will start to fade.









## Pining: Ukrainian Ballet and How Little I Understand Myself

Sergei Polunin was born November 20th, 1989 to parents Vladimir and Galina Polunin. Growing up in Kherson, Ukraine, Sergei was enrolled in gymnastics classes<sup>1</sup> at a young age, due to his remarkable flexibility. In his gymnast period, Sergei was top of his class, and won numerous awards.<sup>2</sup>

However, upon reaching the age of nine, Sergei was faced with a choice: more gymnastics, or ballet. His parents decided that he could be more successful as a ballet dancer, and the family

moved to Kiev to pursue this goal.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, the family could not afford this move, or Sergei's classes, and so Vladimir traveled to Greece to work as a construction worker, while Sergei's grandmother became the caretaker of an elderly woman in Portugal. This caused immense strain on Sergei, who feared that his family would not be able to stay together, and that it would be his fault. He worried that, with his minimal education, the only way he could provide for them was as a professional dancer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a point you will claim you have in common with him. You want, desperately, to have things in common. He is beautiful and brave, and you want to be, too. You want to be someone he would meet and be amazed at, be so impressed with that he would propose on the spot.

You are too old to keep believing you will find a way to make him love you, but you do anyway.

<sup>2</sup> You actually have no common ground here. You took gymnastics for a year. You couldn't seem to do a handstand, and your friends all advanced while you remained in the basic training group with middle schoolers.

There were displays once a month, in front of crowds of parents and friends. You watched the other girls flip and spin and kick, looking so beautiful. You watched the videos of your own routine afterward your limbs flailing and uncoordinated.

You were too embarrassed to keep trying after that.

<sup>3</sup> You remember, here, when your family moved to Qatar to support your father. You wonder if Galina also felt lost and afraid and filled with resentment. You wonder if your father felt a whole family's weight on his shoulders like Sergei did. You wonder if maybe he would be happier now if he had stayed. Try very hard, here, not to blame yourself. Blame yourself anyway.

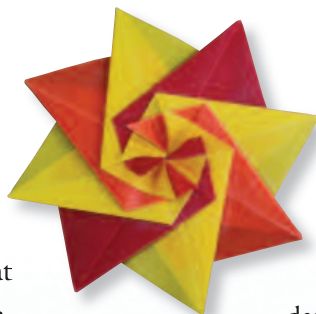
<sup>4</sup> Think, here, of the day when you came home from class with your report card, all As and one B. Remember how proud you were.

Remember, now, how your mother pointed at the B and asked, "What happened here?" Think of how every grade that isn't an A now feels like a failure. You will not continue your father's Dartmouth legacy.



It is for this reason that, at 13,<sup>5</sup> Sergei applied to the British Royal Ballet. He was already showing great promise, and was accepted, the only caveat being that he would have to move to London without his mother,<sup>6</sup> and with no knowledge of the English language.

Despite the challenges it would pose, Sergei moved to London, and quickly excelled in his new home. He was moved three years ahead of his age group and was an exemplary student, though he struggled socially. The age and language barrier proved quite difficult to overcome, and so Sergei found himself with little



more to do than throw himself into his work.<sup>7</sup>

His dedication paid off, and quickly. At 17, Sergei Polunin became the youngest-ever principal dancer for the British Royal Ballet.<sup>8</sup>

Although Sergei had achieved everything he had hoped, his family was still spread throughout Europe. They had never seen him dance before because of it. That same year, Sergei's parents filed for divorce.



<sup>5</sup> Remember 13. Remember gawky limbs and the boy whom you thought was beautiful and who thought you were strange. Remember how talking to people made you sweat so much that others could smell it, and how you complained that boys stank because you couldn't admit to yourself that it was you.

<sup>6</sup> You left your mother for a week when you were eight, a summer camp in the Québécois woods. You hated the girls. Your French was sloppy, and you couldn't convince the counselors to let you go home after three days. You wrote so many letters to your mother that you ran out of stamps. When you came home, you carried a little stack of the folded

papers you couldn't send for her to read, but they all said the same thing.

*I miss you. I'm scared. I want to come home.*

*I love you.*

<sup>7</sup> Remember ninth grade. Nothing was good. Your vocal chords were stiff from how little you let yourself speak.

<sup>8</sup> At 17, you have done nothing. You are almost an adult. Most people your age have done nothing, but you still feel ashamed. You should try harder, do more, have friends and play sports and make stories worth telling, but you are so, so tired. You are trying so, so hard just to exist.

The divorce sparked a change in Sergei. He had done everything he could and still was unable to keep his family intact.<sup>9</sup> He began staying out at night, arriving at rehearsals hungover, late, or not at all. His body began to accumulate an array of tattoos, entirely against the rules in ballet. Years later, he would admit that he was horribly depressed<sup>10,11</sup> and had developed a cocaine addiction. He even admitted to dancing on the drug regularly.



At 21, his years of erratic behavior finally came to a head: he quit the Royal Ballet.<sup>12</sup> He

<sup>9</sup> You were so good. You got straight As and did theater and hung out with the “good kids” and only ever cried by yourself at night because you were the sibling who was fine and happy and doing well, and your brother was the one who wasn’t. Your parents didn’t need more to worry about. They weren’t supposed to find out that you were drowning, too.

They still found out. They still blame themselves for not knowing what you couldn’t tell them yet.

<sup>10</sup> They don’t talk about this in the magazines as much. This is what you cling to hardest. He understands you,

“

*... at 13, Sergei applied to the British Royal Ballet. He was already showing great promise, and was accepted, the only caveat being that he would have to move to London without his mother, and with no knowledge of the English language.*

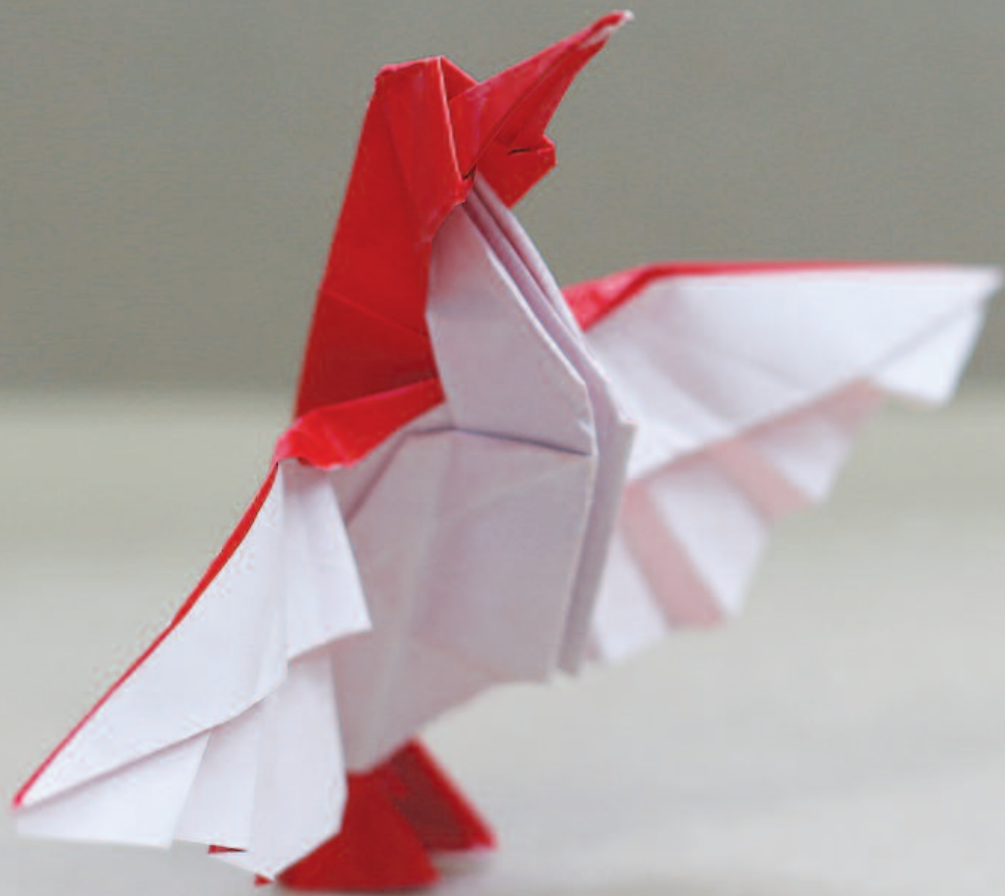
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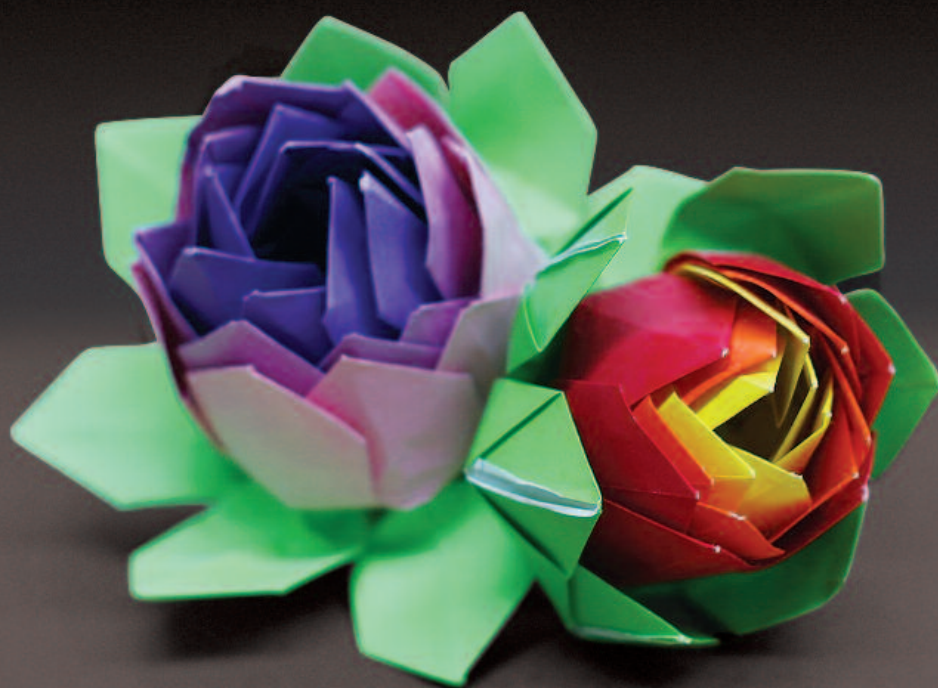
because he, too, did everything right, and he, too, found out it wasn’t enough. You think this means you have a bond. You think this means you know each other.

<sup>11</sup> You don’t know him. You know what he wants people to know, through photoshoots and interviews and newspaper articles. It is so hard to remember that sometimes, when you want so badly have a friend, to know and be known.

<sup>12</sup> You wonder what would happen if you quit. You don’t think it would go well. The prospect is tempting just the same.





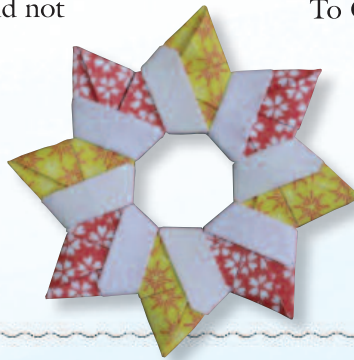






claimed he no longer wished to be controlled.

His intentions may have been positive, but the results of his choice were catastrophic. Sergei found that most choreographers would not work with him after his fairly public meltdown, and he was forced to find work in a televised Russian dance competition. It wasn't all bad, though; Sergei won, and got the attention of Igor



Zelensky, the director of the Stanislavsky Theatre. For a few years, he worked with the Stanislavsky, but his passion<sup>13</sup> was gone.

In 2015, Polunin asked a friend of his to direct his last dance, set to Hozier's "Take Me To Church," and filmed by David LaChapelle in Hawaii.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout filming, he struggled to come to terms with the end of his career. When the video was released, his inner turmoil only grew—the video

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<sup>13</sup> This is a word you aren't sure if you understand. You used to feel too much, and now you barely feel anything. The sadness is gone, mostly, but everything else is, too. You don't know if Sertraline is meant to work like this, or if your dosage is wrong, or if you need to switch medications. Things were never perfect on medications: first you couldn't sleep, then you couldn't stay awake, then you muffled your sobbing with a mascara-stained pillow, then you felt like your brain couldn't catch up with your eyes, then you couldn't breathe, and now you're blank. Nothing has worked. Maybe nothing will work. Your psychiatrist said that this might just be how you are.

You don't believe in God, but you pray to whoever's listening that it isn't.

<sup>14</sup> This was the dance that made you fall in love with him. It made everyone else fall in love, too, but you thought you were special. You thought it would work out, because you felt it. You had a bond.

Remember, now, that you don't feel anything anymore.

<sup>15</sup> This was where you met him. Your hands were trembling, and you couldn't breathe properly, and when you looked him in the eye you had to look away. It was like looking into the sun.

You thanked him, because he gave you hope, even if it was all made up. He smiled, and listened to your stuttering, and asked if you wanted a picture. When he put his arm around you, you wondered if he could feel your heartbeat.

went viral within a matter of days, and his career underwent a sort of rebirth.

With the sudden success of his video, Sergei decided to continue his career in the public eye, but not only as a dancer. At the premiere of his BBC documentary,<sup>15</sup> *Dancer*,<sup>16</sup> he announced a new creation: The Polunin Project, a foundation to help struggling performers attain professional representation in both legal



and dance fields, so that young artists would never experience the lack of control he did.

Now, Polunin continues to dance, and is currently on tour promoting the Polunin Project through performances. He has also extended his talents to acting, and stars in the films<sup>17</sup> *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Red Sparrow*.

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<sup>16</sup> This was also when you knew you were foolish. You don't know him. He is a man and you are a child. You have no idea how the world works.

<sup>17</sup> You are working on reminding yourself how little you understand. You have stopped spending hours reading his Wikipedia page, scrolling through his Instagram and Facebook feeds. You deleted your bookmarked tabs about him. When people ask, you can no longer tell them exactly where he is in the world, what show he is working on. He doesn't come up in your conversations anymore, and that is for the best.

You were not okay, then. You still aren't, but you're learning to be. Being alive is not as hard as it once seemed.

While reading this, you are laughing, because you sound like you're going through a breakup. If this was a movie, you would be crying on the train platform as your small town boyfriend lets you leave him behind and follow your dream to New York City. It isn't so far from the truth; even if you didn't know him, you loved the idea of him, and now you are letting it go.

Sergei Polunin will not save you, and you have stopped pretending he will. He is a stranger. You know that, but you will still go see those movies. Your breath will still hitch when he walks on screen.











### Cheshire Cat

it was stained violet,  
as it sat in the tall tree  
and waited.

it did not know why  
or who it waited  
for. but if it didn't

listen to the pages of  
the sky that gripped every  
translucent exhalation,

it knew that the ability  
to lounge within the  
erinaceous forest and the

lackadaisical larkspurs  
would surely evaporate  
until the girl could

never return to her  
home that rested above  
the raining sun. and so

it sat, invisible and elusive,  
grinning like a madman  
until the rain became cold.





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