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How to Catch the Rush

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How to Catch the Rush

Senior Project Submitted to
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of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024



HOW TO CATCH

THE RUSH

BY

JUSTINE FLORENCE

For Jacquie

Part One

Lay on your back. Wait for sleep. The room is small, but you are smaller. Hold on to the checkered blanket, kick the knitted sock off your right foot. Your mother has placed pillows on either side of you so you won't roll off the twin bed. Hold still. The kitchen radio is playing low on the other side of the bedroom door. Your mother is moving dishes in the sink. The faucet is running. Stare at the ceiling with two fingers in your mouth. It's too hot and your pajamas are sticking to your body, strands of hair to your wet forehead. There are small spots on the ceiling. Think they might be ants. See the small spots move, and know they are ants. The ants march down to the sound of the radio, forming patterns to the rhythm of a commercial, to the beat of a song. Watch the ants climb down the wall until they are just above the bed. Turn your head slightly as the ants climb over each other, making shapes. When the ants find stillness, make out letters. Read your initials against the bedroom wall.

Wake up to your mother sitting on the bed, her hand placed over your forehead. Drink the entire glass of water she's brought you and go back to sleep.

Hear the soft sounds your new sister makes from the crib. First, the crinkling sound of her body on the mattress, then a series of open vowels. Open your eyes. The room has changed. Morning has turned the walls blue; your flower sheets are crumpled by the end of the bed. Your mother comes into the room, picks up your sister and begins talking softly. See how she walks in and out of sunlight, how the room's one window creates a rectangle of light against her body. The dust in the air, once still, now dances around her every move.

Sit at the kitchen table with your knees against your chest. Eat cereal to the sound of the radio, to the sound of your parents talking. Eat cereal and listen to the sound of your own body chewing. Your father pours milk from the carton and fills your bowl without even looking. He returns the milk to the fridge while still talking to your mother, and their conversation continues even after he leaves the room and comes back in his jacket. After he leaves for work, notice how your mother leans against the counter, how she takes only a bite of toast before brushing her hands against her jeans and searching for her keys. She tells you it's time to get ready. See your sister, locked in her highchair, try again and again to pick up a cheerio.

Walk to school looking for fallen pine cones to step on. Pick up acorns and helicopter seeds, the ones that twirl down from trees. Do this until your pockets become bulky, until they start making rattling noises. The teacher always makes you empty your pockets before entering the building. Leave your nature piles by the front door, one day pebbles, another day leaves, one rainy morning a family of worms.

Notice your hair is the same color as sand. Lay under the jungle gym and try to bury as much of it in the sandpit as you can. Loose strands poke out like blond blades of grass. Push them under and once the whole sandpit becomes attached to your head, rest and feel its immensity. Feel the shapes of shovels, bandaids, action figures, long lost and buried. Feel the force of running footsteps. When you lift your head, the sand lets out a soft sound and falls back onto itself. Pat your hair and feel the sand there. That night, your mother makes you take a bath. She places one hand over your eyes and slowly pours the water over your head. Act surprised when

sand builds up underneath the water and collects in the drain. Offer no explanation. Go to bed with your fingers in your hair, playing with the few sandy strands that managed to hold on.

Lose your first tooth, by accident, while eating dinner. The second and third by consistent wriggling, by carelessly flipping the teeth around in the gums. Show teeth to friends at school. Show how your tongue pushes them over, how one tooth has split down the middle. Eat apples, chew gum, lay face down on your pillow. If a tooth is extremely loose in the morning, try not to lose it until you've arrived at school, where you'd be able to go to the nurse, receive a plastic tooth-shaped locket, and wear it the rest of the day on a string.

Scrunch your lips to form a small "O", leaving a small hole for air to pass through. Move your lips the way you've seen in the movies, the way you imagine people kiss each other. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth, as though saying the word *thing* or *thunder*. Actually, no, the moment right before. The moment you think about saying the word *thing* or *thunder*. Try to make noise. Think of your father. He walks to work every day, wearing his cracked leather coat and his ring of keys, whistling "La Marseillaise" in perfect pitch. People can hear him coming down the street. One time he took you to school, holding your wrist in his hand, and whistled the whole 12 blocks. You pretended to whistle too, by making a face and listening.

Go to church every Sunday with your mother and sister. Your father stays home, tells you over breakfast that he has work to do. Sit together at one end of a long pew. Stand when your mother stands. Hear the sound of the organ without knowing where they keep the organ. After this, you

will have to go to Sunday school in the church basement. You are going to have to sit in the dusty room and talk about God. The priest, who enjoys talking about God, starts giving a homily. Pull down the kneeler and sit on it. Turn your back to the altar. The church has printed pamphlets for the children with a maze and a word search on the back page. Return Joseph to his flock. Forget how to spell *Gospel*. Fiddle with the cuff of your mother's jeans as she stands again, as she writes something down in her datebook while reciting the Our Father.

Tell your mother you're running away. If she asks you where you're thinking of going, tell her France or a big city or your grandmother's house. Tell her you're going to get on a bus, and never come back. Show her your packed bag, and in it, the two pieces of toast, the Polly Pockets, the extra pair of underwear. Put on your good sweater and your jelly sandals. Fidget with the lock to open the front door and step onto the porch. Outside, the sun makes surfaces shiny. On the sidewalk, your shadow stays tucked close to your feet. Squint at your mother, who now stands on the porch, and take four steps. Look back at her. Take another four steps. In front of the neighbor's house, turn around and see how your mother shines in the sun. She shines the same way as the sidewalk, the mailbox, your own sparkly jellies. Sweat in your good sweater.

Play pretend with your sister. Tell her that you will be the mother, but she can be the dog. Hold a baby doll like a football. Pat your sister's head. When your sister tells you she is hungry, accept that she is a talking dog. Give her a saltine, but don't put any jelly on it. Dogs can't have anything grape, it makes them sick. When your sister lays with you on the bed, lay with her as though she is still a dog and you are still a mother. When your actual mother calls the two of

you out for dinner, walk out together as sisters. Eat dinner together as sisters. Watch television as sisters. Take baths and brush your teeth as sisters. Go to bed as sisters.

Lie with your knees up, eyes open. Your sister is already asleep. Her body lies sprawled open, her breathing has become loud and deep. Run your finger against the bedroom wall. Its surface is cool and sometimes the paint chips away. Discover layers of old paint underneath. Your father, late at night, plays his guitar in the living room. Occasionally, he will play a song for you and your sister before bed, but most of the time he plays when he believes no one in the house is listening. Hear the hum of the wire strings through the bedroom walls. Press your face against the wall and you might hear his voice, singing. Fall asleep to these whispers of music.

Emerge from your bedroom into the fluorescent light of the kitchen. Squint and rub your hands against your eyes. You can hear crickets through the screen door, the low chatting of the television. Your parents are on the couch, their faces lit by the changing colors of the tv. They are sitting differently than they normally do. Their faces look different, their voices are low. See how everything shifts once they catch you in the doorway. For a moment, they look at you surprised, then they call out your name. Get upset after realizing they're watching a movie, that they're eating ice cream without you.

Draw giant flowers on your driveway. Drag the chalk against the cement until the flowers have stems, until the flowers have petals. Show off your blue chalky hands to your sister as she shows off her green chalky knees. Sit on the stoop together and admire the colorful driveway. The girl

in 3rd grade crosses the street to take a look. She lets her bike fall against the sidewalk. She walks over wearing the kind of glittery flip flops your mother won't let you wear. She asks if she can show you something. Say yes because she is older. Watch her carefully put her hand on a flower, rubbing the concrete until its petals become soft, its colors blended. When she tells you her name is Mary, focus on the directness in her voice, her beautiful blue fingertips.

Collect twigs and leaves and rocks and bones. Lay them on the porch in perfect lines, so that you and your sister can stand back and enjoy the many colors, the way the rocks create shadows on the red wood. Trade with each other the way you trade action figures, toy cars, small mystery christmas chocolates. Trade three round pebbles for a stick, bark peeled. Trade ten helicopter seeds for one autumn turning leaf. Tape leaves to skin. Tape leaves to hair. Wear your mother's clothing; one full length khaki trench coat, one flare-sleeved green dress. Walk into the backyard, dragging trains of khaki and linen, carrying fabric along with tree branches, holding leaves in your teeth. Meet each other where the backyard meets the trees, draped in greenery.

Stand in your pajamas by the screen door. Your sister stares with her thumb in her mouth. Both of you press your faces against the screen. Your father sits on the deck with a cigarette, the low sun turning the smoke into shadows. Wait for the raccoon to show up. Your mom tells the two of you to step back, to sit at the table. Ask her what dad's gonna do when the raccoon comes out from under the deck. If she tells you the raccoon might be sick, ask her if he's taking it to the vet. Your dad waits patiently on the deck. Don't call out to him. Sit on the kitchen floor, until you're slumped against the leg of a chair, until your sister's head is in your lap. After a while, your

mother comes to take you both to bed. She carries your sister away as she fusses. Nothing happened, nothing happened, you say. Your dad won't come in. He stays outside on the deck smoking.

Keep two dice in your jacket pocket. One was a gift and the other was found in a sidewalk crack. One is wooden and the other, much smaller, is made of red plastic. Keep the dice just in case. Keep them in the small front pocket of your jacket that zippers closed and is meant for small things. In the pocket there is also a penny and a half-used tube of chapstick. Occasionally test that the small things are still there by feeling for their shapes. The cubed dice become rounded off and the penny completely faceless through the jacket. Keep the pocket zipped until you need to use one or all of the small things. Count every item by identifying its pocket shape, making sure no small thing was lost in the process. On long walks, count pocket shapes even though no small thing could have gone missing. Every now and then, find a new small thing and add it to the small front pocket, making sure to correct the total count of potential pocket shapes.

Be amazed by how Mary can bike standing up. She bikes without a helmet and sometimes without shoes. Be amazed by her cartwheels and the way she talks. She complains about her parents, creates made up fortunes, tells stories about her fourth grade class. The words Mary says fill you up like peanut butter and milk. Learn how to do a cartwheel with Mary's arms wrapped around your legs. Learn how to bike in the street.

Pick up a penny for good luck. When you get home, drop the penny in an old jam jar with other lucky pennies found on other lucky days. Luck can build this way, you think, through quantity. Leave other lucky pennies in pockets, socks, dresser drawers, couch cushions. Believe luck, spread evenly, will last longer. Mary joins you on your walk home from school. Walk each block together looking down at the sidewalk. Wonder if she's searching for pennies too. Pick up pennies in tough places (e.g. supermarket floors, sidewalk puddles) because it is unclear what happens to luck that is seen but not collected.

Keep an eye on the squares of light coming in through the bedroom window. The window frame is silhouetted boldly on the wooden floor. Sink into your pillow and wait. Wait for the moonlit squares to be interrupted by shadows, for the moonlit squares to disappear. Keep your eyes shut but see the image. The dark shadows move in from the window and slither up towards your bed. Lay still underneath the checkered blanket. Resist the urge to scratch your chin. The winter wind is roaring. The window starts to rattle. Hear the front door swing open, bringing in the wind, then footsteps into the kitchen. Tell yourself that they are here now. Hold your breath and close your eyes as their frightening forms stand over you. When you can't any longer, say that they are gone and you can sleep now. Open your eyes and see the moonlit squares. Play dead like this night after night so nothing will take you.

Put on your jacket, hat, gloves, backpack. Your sister is already standing on the iced over porch. Stand next to her and wait for your mother to come out the door. The cold is slipping through the neck of your coat, slipping through your sleeves. Your feet start to go numb. You can feel the ice

beneath them. Look down. The ice has bled your pink socks into a deep fuschia. Rush back into the house. How the hell did you forget to put on shoes, your mother says. She waits for you by the door.

See your mother's pocketbook sprawled open on the church pew. Your sister digs through it until she pulls out a sandwich bag full of felted figures. Watch her tiny fingers struggle to break the ziplock seal. She finally takes out a pink flamingo and slides it onto her pointer finger. She then grabs a fireman and fixes it onto her thumb. Reach for the bag of finger puppets, and together try on different people; the policeman, the doctor, the grandma, the teacher. Hear the communion bell ringing. Trade the grandma for the dog, try the chef and the mailman. People rise and start shuffling to the altar. Your sister lies in the now empty pew, holding the priest in her hand. As she wiggles her fingers, see the priest dance. Hear the organ and the priest's voice. Know that the priest is talking about God.

Lay in the pleather chair and look at the teeth on the walls, posters exposing cavities and explaining root canals. It is difficult to lie patiently. Shift your body to one side and then the other. Unstick the back of your shoes from the plastic protective wrap. There is a small television bolted to the corner of the ceiling meant to distract you. The stacy voice of a narrator plays over clips of monkeys. Watch the nature documentary until the dentist enters. Talk about simple things, lie about flossing. He examines your x-rays and points to your own teeth, bright and exposed against the light board. Open your mouth to drills and suction and gloves that smell like grapes, and close your eyes and think about other things. *Train rides, mechanic shops, large*

green apples. Push out the thought of swallowing each and every substance that is placed in your mouth. Try to block out how they taste. Lay with your mouth open, and hear the dentist drilling. Hear the dentist drilling and the screeching calls of the howler monkeys. Sit, your body flimsy in the chair, your mouth opening wider and wider.

Return home from school with snowballs in your pockets. Mary gave you them to throw against trees, to defend yourself against neighborhood boys. Drop the snowballs on the porch when your mother stops your first attempt to take them inside the house. Take off your mittens and throw them into a large plastic bin. Unzip your coat. Sit on the floor and pull off your boots. Chunks of snow have become matted to your hat. Lines of ice have formed within the folds of your scarf. Walk into the kitchen shedding pieces of ice. They all melt on the tile floor. Unbuckle the shoulder straps of your snow pants and swish-swish into the living room. Slither out of the snow pants. Pull off socks, turning them into small ruffled balls. Walk around the house in nothing but underwear, face still rosy, thighs still numb, leaving wet footprints through the hallway.

Dig snow tunnels out in the backyard. Create forts under bushes where the ground is still dry. Hide from your father as he tries to spot you from the deck. Watch how he packs snow together with his bare hands, how he wears his sunglasses in the winter. Ask him to throw you in the snow pile again. When he finally says enough, pull yourself out of the snow mold your body made, and start dragging your sister around on the plastic sled.

Go inside Mary's house for the first time. You are surprised by the differences in its interior, the dark living room walls, the oak table. Ask yourself if you should sit down on the couch, while Mary talks to her dad in the kitchen. Float above everything in the room. Your hand above the back of a chair, your feet inches above the shaggy carpet. Above the doorway there is a deer head, stuffed with its eyes glazed over. The horns are yellowed. The head seems to cave in every direction. Try to imagine the rest of the deer's body, now located elsewhere. Attach it back to its head. When Mary calls your name, walk through the doorway into the kitchen. Look up, as though expecting to see the deer's body suspended magically on the other side of the wall.

Step into Mary's room for the first time, which is small and at the end of a narrow hallway. Mary shows you where she keeps art supplies, where she hides strawberry candies. She tells you to come look at her books. The room is contained by floral wallpaper, the desk and bookshelf are covered in trinkets. Find marbles, paper cranes, small plastic figures from gumball machines. When the door is closed, all that is heard is the soft hum of the radiator. Decide that Mary's room belongs in the same category as rocks filled with crystal, as whatever is found inside of clam shells.

Ask your mother questions before going to bed. How long are people dead for? When will I be old? Why doesn't dad go to church? More than anything, ask her if you will wake up after you have fallen asleep. Once you are satisfied with her answers, say goodnight.

Make cardboard creatures and trace letters in notebooks. Scrape knees against sidewalks and run up the playground slide. Complete homework at the dining room table, tell your sister made up stories, learn happy birthday on the guitar. Come spring, race Mary home on bikes.

Lay in the grass as though it is your bed. The trees start moving towards you, the clouds in the sky move away. The wind moves through you. Stop flinching. Listen to the geese. The field is not grass, but clovers. Imagine bugs crawling under your clothes. Decide you need to be alone more often. Wonder what is colder: your body touching the air or your body touching the ground? Tell the clouds to come closer. Tell yourself you can dig a hole if you wanted to. It would take hours but then you could sit in it and pretend that you live there. There is an ant on your arm now. Direct him back to the ground. Believe the ant is gone until it appears again on your chest. Let the ant explore your body and love the ant for that. The ant falls off of you and hits a clover. Let the wind get caught in your open hand, feel it press against your back.

Remember that wind only sounds like the objects it touches.

Plant flowers out in the garden with your mother. She pops each small plant out of its plastic container and hands them, one at a time, to you and your sister. Rip away the bottom roots. Pat them into holes you dug with your bare hands.

Look into the new wire cage sitting against Mary's bedroom wall. In the cage there is rustling, pulling up pieces of bedding and hay. Dust from the cage has made Mary's purple rug sandy. See flickers of animal hair, hear the sounds that alive animals make. When Mary pulls out the rabbit,

first with one hand, and then catching it with the other, admire how the rabbit sits patiently in her grasp. When she gives you the rabbit, dislike how you can feel its bones shifting, its muscles tensing, underneath its soft fur.

Trade a tulip bulb for a river stone. Show your sister the abandoned wasp nest.

Meet Mary around the side of her house with a yellow plastic bucket. She is waiting for you, standing with one hand latched on the metal fence, swinging her leg. Show her your bucket.

Behind Mary's house there is forest, and in the forest there is a brook. Follow the path Mary has made, bending branches and tripping in your red rain boots. Hike downhill until you can hear the faint bubbling, until the trees clear away. Stand in the brook in your cotton shorts and red rain boots. Your feet feel numb in the cold rubber, but somehow stay dry. Hold the plastic bucket in your arms as Mary, barefooted, climbs over rocks and turns the interesting ones over. Stand waiting as she crouches over the brook, the ends of her shirt dragging in the water, and searches.

Eat oranges with Mary in the backyard. Poke a thumb into the peel, unbothered when pulp gets under the nail. Mary breaks the orange into ten contained segments and lays them in a line on the porch step. Hold one loosely in your palm. Rub it gently against your cheek and your lips. After eating the orange, the juice dries on your hands. Let dirt collect in streaks where the juice once ran.

Leave your clothes in piles and swim with Mary in the river. Try not to slip while walking on the smooth rock. Enter the deep water, holding onto each other or a fallen down log. When the water becomes cold and your lips turn blue, crawl your way out. Green specks of algae cover your skin. Sit naked on a sunny rock picking them off.

Spend the summer this way, swimming and biking. Spend it sucking icees and running barefoot on grass. Spend it rubbing in sunscreen, hiding out in the playground's blue tube slide, scratching mosquito bites until they bleed.

Pretend you are sitting in a movie theater when you look out the car windshield. The ride back from the supermarket is rainy and dark, and frogs keep jumping into the road. Watch them shine in the beam of the car's headlights. Your father nudges the wheel, careful to avoid them. There are stenciled tree shadows and a mile of corn husks, and tonight your father forgets to turn the radio on so you listen to the rain. It is loud enough. Begin to whisper a song without words. An Oh then an Ah and back to a lower Oh. Repeat the tune again and again. Oh ah Oh oh ah oh. Ooooh aah ooh ooohh. See other things appear in the road: pebbles, a branch, a killed racoon. Oh Ah ohh. The rain makes everything shimmer, makes everything move. Watch your father sit up straighter in his seat, hands tense on the wheel. When the car turns right onto a smaller road, go silent. The inside of the car is the same, humid and muffled and contained.

Wake up in the middle of the night. Hear the buzzing of the radiator, see the shadows along the far wall. Sort through dream fragments. *Hidden bicycles, rose bushes, the stressful shade of blue.* Lay with both legs sticking out from the blanket. When it becomes clear that the room is too hot and too quiet, get up and open the window. On the other side of the window, there is a small field. Listen to the outside quiet, instead of the inside quiet. Return to the bed. Laying on your side, the cold air rests on places of exposed skin; the right side of your face, the length of your forearm, a strip of your waist. Believe you are being held here, until the air is no longer air but light, until the light is no longer light but something of your own volition. These must be the most alive parts of your body. Try to be still. Try to be quiet, not like inside quiet but like outside quiet. Do not find out what time it is. Do not notice the wild animal moving outside in the field.

Part Two

Press down on the bike's brakes. They release a high pitch noise. Fight against the bike's handlebars and feel the way the shock moves up your arms. Turn and see the pick up truck, the driver waving his hand around in the cab. Bike for several blocks and turn down Oakhill avenue, where the houses turn into small stores and the buildings are taller. At the end of the town's main strip, the street curves right. Ride out the curve until it opens, revealing a parking lot and in the distance, a baseball field.

Sit in the dug out with your feet up on the bench. Feel the sweat rolling down your lower back. In the dugout, the older girls stand with their fingers entangled in the braided metal fence. Look out onto the field the same way they do. Wait for something to happen. The fence cuts into their leaning bodies, forming small hexagons of puckered uniform and skin. The older girls bring their faces close to the metal, their eyes staring through the fence's holes, their lips pressed against the wire. Then they leave for the outfield, wiping sand dust from the corner of their mouths, their skin now patterned in red marks.

Follow Mary upstairs into her room. Look at the books on her shelves and pick up various knick knacks. Circle each item around in your hands. A small porcelain horse, a seashell, two green marbles, a nail polish bottle. Sometimes you are surprised by their weight, other times by their temperature. Place items back where they belong, while Mary darts around her room, rushes to put on new socks and grab her bag. Pick up the red rock, as she declares herself ready and heads out the open door. Put the red rock down gently. Notice that without her, each item hums beneath its stillness.

Paint your nails at the kitchen table. Alternating pink, black, pink. Carefully dip the brush in the bottle, then approach your nails, your hand shaking with precision. Lay down the polish. It settles on its own, thick as honey. When done, hold your hands out in front of you, spend time pulling excess paint from cuticles and peeling it off skin.

Join the softball team. You are the youngest member on the team. Mary convinced you, told you that you just had to, while biking back from school. Find it difficult to keep your eye on the ball. The sun is blinding. The older girls squint at each other, tip their water bottles upside down and throw them against the bench. See that they are sweating, sweating and shining in the sun. Walk up to the home plate. Kick up dust. Feel off balance. Hit the ball once and lose it in the air. The ball never went anywhere. It clinked against the bat and went straight up. Run.

Watch television on the couch while your mother sits with a stack of papers in her lap. Get distracted by how she whispers some of the writing aloud to herself, how she turns the whole stack of papers sideways to write notes in the margins. Your mother gets distracted too, staring up from her work to watch the tv, her pen still moving on the page. Notice how she'll read with your sister sitting in her lap, while brushing her hair. There are papers all over the coffee table, stacks behind the living room couch. Get used to your mother leaving the kitchen light on after you've gone to bed. Find her asleep on the couch night after night.

Wait in the outfield, where the ground is no longer dust, but clovers. Get lost looking into the grass or picking the leather of your mitt. When a girl hits a high ball, stare into the sky and walk

backwards, mitt open. There's an older girl coming, running with her arms stretched out. Hear the clap the ball makes when hitting her glove.

Invite Mary over after practice. The two of you pop a bag of popcorn in the microwave and lay your math homework out on the bedroom floor. Distract each other with stories and school drama. Mary tells you the answers to each algebra question while reaching for another fistful of popcorn. After a while, she gets up and moves around the room, adjusting one of your sister's stuffed animals, running her fingers over the strings of your father's guitar. Tell her that he doesn't play anymore, hasn't in years, so he let you take it. Play her the song you've been teaching yourself. When you start singing, Mary no longer watches the guitar but goes back to her place on the rug. We need to finish this, she says. Put the guitar down.

Find a new way to hold your pen. Change your handwriting. See how many days it takes until your normal "u" can comfortably be written as "U". Find a new way to use a fork, and a new way to put barrettes in your hair. Put on your jeans starting with the left leg instead of the right.

Notice that your father now spends all his time out in the garage. Sometimes he comes in through the screen door to wash his hands or grab his glasses from the living room. When you come home from practice and none of the house lights are on, look for your father. He'll be kneeling over the lawn mower, the thing turned on its side, the blade in his hand. Stand in the doorway, your bare feet on the cement, until he looks and says your name. Watch him fumble for what to say, his fingers digging through a plastic tub of metal things.

Notice that your father has the same expression as he moves around the kitchen. He approaches the stove with the same quiet focus. Watch him heat the leftover pasta, while you take down two blue ceramic bowls. He piles the pasta high. He coats his food in hot sauce. Eat leaning against the counter, your bodies facing the screen door. Hear the sound of chewing, the sound of the faucet when he fills a glass. Tell him they will be home after seven, that your sister is at ballet.

Sit in the dugout. Two other girls are chatting about the upcoming school dance. Tune out their conversation until one of them, Lola, gets up and shows you the bug in her eye. Look at how her glossy eye, held open, moves the bug around. The small gnat, stuck, rotates in a slow circle. Lola pulls her eyelid down further, revealing the roundness of the eye, a roundness that you've seen on anatomy posters but choose to ignore when making eye contact. Continue to look at each other. Mary, still breathing heavy from her time at bat, comes over to examine the girl's eye. She pours water over her hands, spreads one hand across Lola's head, and with the other, gently pulls out the gnat. Wish you didn't see the way her fingers grazed the soft eyeball, or afterwards, the way she wiped her fingers on her shorts.

Watch Mary climb around on the bleachers after practice. The metal echoes after each step. Hear it ring as she starts jumping down, making her way towards you and the park's exit. Mary unscrews her water bottle, looks in it, then tips it back. After each game, everyone's breathing slows. As the sun sets, walking and talking slows down too. Wait for Mary. Walk together, clothes covered in dust, sneakers turned tan. Find your bikes laying on their sides near the parking lot. Sit on your bike as Mary cleans her shoes with the sleeve of her sweatshirt and the

last of her water. The orange sky turns Mary's skin pink. Her eyes look closed when she turns to talk to you. Walking away from the field, notice your shadows momentarily overlap, touch, become one. Race each other home.

Throw your bike down by the mailbox and run into the house. Surprise your mother in the kitchen with your heavy breathing, with the blood running down your forehead into your eyes. She sits you down in a kitchen chair. Hear her call out to your father as she holds paper towels under the faucet, puts them against your face and tells you to hold them there. Your father enters the room. Keep your eyes closed as he takes away the wad of paper towels, holds your head in his hands, and places both thumbs on either side of your forehead. Hear him say, Stitches, it is.

Swim to where the water is deepest, where the river pools over and you cannot see the bottom. Tread water. Hold your breath and let yourself be taken downstream. You are water creatures that have long flippers and claws that allow you to grip onto branches and climb fallen logs. Form games this way, you and your sister, daring each other to jump from rocks of various heights. Walk out of the water together and look around at the other people who've gathered around the swimming hole. There is a group of highschoolers laying out in the sun, blasting music and clinking bottles against the rocks. Recognize some of the girls from softball. They lay with their heads back, retie their bathing suits, put their feet in the water. Wrap your towel around your shoulders and quickly carry your shoes to the exit. Wipe the dirt from your feet, while your sister shows you what she's collected on the way out. Five colorful beer bottle caps, two red, two green, one blue.

Lay on Mary's bed as she digs through her closet. Lay with your feet up against the wall, your head hanging over the side of the bed. Mary keeps tossing articles of clothing and the colorful piles build around her feet. Wonder where all these clothes came from, why you've never seen her wearing them. Mary turns around and throws a denim skirt on the bed. She tells you to put it on. Slide off the bed, and examine it. The skirt, folded over itself, lies limp on the bed. Bend over and undress quickly, then awkwardly step into it. Stand stiff in the now stiff skirt, while Mary, turned away from you, hoists a dress up her body. Stare at her back as she explains that she's only trying to help you.

Notice the older girls changing. They pick up speed running towards home. The muscles of their legs show as they lean against the fence. Notice how the older girls have started altering their team shirts by cutting the blue fabric at the sleeves or using magic markers on the printed letters. One girl, having cut the bottom of her shirt into slits, now plays softball with a small ring of bows around her waist.

Sit in Mary's room as she shows you magazine clippings. Hold a knee to your chest and watch her take each one out as though an archivist handling precious art. Lose track of Mary's words, lose track of the lyrics spilling out of her CD player. Instead, memorize each image. Mary lays out unnamed celebrities, unknown objects. She rolls her eyes after you ask her to tell you their names. Memorize the way each CD blurs, spinning in the CD player. Memorize the cut out of painted lips, the choppy cut of a woman's bare legs. Find yourself held by the consistent

drumming: the rapid beat of an 80s song and whatever is now spinning fast somewhere inside the chest.

Forget your sister is younger than you. She takes longer in the morning and will only talk about Looney Tunes on the way to the bus stop. Get frustrated when she doesn't want to practice batting in the backyard, or when she gets distracted, hitting the bat over and over again on the plate. But when your sister asks you to help arrange the toys in her room, so that they all become alive, lay on her floor dressing the stuffed dog in a toy rain jacket. She tells you to be careful when squeezing its arms through the jacket sleeves. Ask your sister again about the dog's occupation.

Follow a pack of girls to the Sugar Shack, a fast food joint that's situated on the other side of the parking lot. Team members wave from a picnic table. They lean over the half-wall that separates them from the sea of parked cars. Inside, girls order pizza and fries and sodas. They play with the old arcade game. Others jump up onto the half-wall and sit with their legs dangling. Sit down at one of the picnic tables. Listen as Mary banters with other girls about the next game. She straddles the picnic bench, occasionally raising her voice and waving her slice around in the air. Later, once the adrenaline has drained and the sun has set, feel her finger press against your exposed arm. Feel how she drags her finger downwards, carving one clean line out of the sand-dust. Let her draw stars and mystery shapes as you push around the last of your fries.

Look the other way now when the other changes clothes. Try to continue conversation, looking at the floor, a book, random points in space. Momentarily, hide from each other. Find it polite. Avoid noticing her body, the way her arms fold against her sides, the way her spine becomes visible as she bends over. Avoid noticing differences in form, where lines turn to curves, where curves curve into each other. Her wired bra digs into her skin. Avoid seeing her. Avoid her gaze when she turns to look at you. But get stuck watching Mary dance, the way she turns in tight circles and shuts her eyes, the sight of armpit hair as she throws her arms out and above her head.

Bleed in Mary's bed. Wake up and see how the dark red splotches have stained her pastel sheets.

Notice that your parents don't go grocery shopping together. Your mother will work at the kitchen table when your father reads in the living room. They will both sit out on the deck, but not at the same time. Notice that your mother will stay out running errands before picking your sister up from a dance class. Your father will often miss dinner and come home once most of the house lights are out.

Go back to school and don't see Mary for many days. One Friday, bike tight circles in the street. Wait for Mary to get home so you can go see a movie. Eventually, you see her coming up the road, one hand waving, the other holding the textbooks only highschoolers get.

Bike across town together. Mary leads the way. She cues you to make a right on Oakland, to slow down at the intersection. Follow her bike in front of you, watching for when she puts on the

brakes, when she stands to pedal uphill. At every stop light, waddle your bike up to where she waits. She puts one foot on the sidewalk and ties her hair in a ponytail. Talk to her out of breath. Talk to her quickly, anticipating the green light. She keeps turning her head while you talk to her. Her eyes follow the passing cars. See the green light and fumble to get your feet on the pedals. Run your front wheel into the back of Mary's bike. Get it together, she says, aggravated and nudging your bike back. Take off pedaling in the direction she's taken.

Tell your sister that she can borrow your hair barrettes as long as she doesn't take the blue ones. She can have them as long as she doesn't lose them while running on the playground, as long as she doesn't give them to her friends. Show your sister the lip gloss Mary gave you last time you were at her house. Your sister goes to the mirror to put it on. Tell her it looks messy, tell her to wipe her mouth with a napkin, tell her to try again, this time not using so much.

Write your name onto a piece of paper until it is full and bled through. See how the words create abstract shapes, how they mimic wind, a bird's nest. See the letters as lines and curves. See them as the original task of tracing, given to you in kindergarten; an orange book with the cover *Guided Spelling*.

Realize that people at school are making comments. Realize that people at school eye each other looking for comments to make. Comments about hair, and height, and clothes, and breasts, and physical strength. Comments about who was seen with whom, who decided to do what, and who decided to do what with whom. Know that the easiest way to befriend someone is to first tell

them a secret. Know that the easiest way to test the state of a friendship is noticing whether their secrets are shared with you.

Go to the mall with your mother to buy new shoes. Try on a pair of sneakers and tell her they fit fine. She will tell you to test them out. Fake a jog while your sister sprints back and forth down the shoe aisle. Make sure no one is looking when your mother insists on leaning over and pressing her thumb into the toe of the shoe. When you walk out of the Payless, you see Mary near the fountain. She is eating ice cream with girls you don't recognize. Walk over and say hi. Talk about seeing a movie together. The other girls watch you silently. They turn to each other and slowly lick their spoons. Focus on Mary's familiar smile and the strawberry ice cream she's eating, yet become clumsy with your words. When the other girls get up to throw away their empty containers, Mary shifts in her seat. When they call her name, move back as she stands up and tells you she has to go.

Untie your shoes by the door, while your mother takes off her jacket. The conversation from the car has died off. Your mother makes one more comment, something about your father, and walks into the kitchen. Her voice trails off. Watch your sister leave for the bedroom. See her sit down at her desk through the half open door. Feel unraveled. Feel as though a thread has slipped.

Catch yourself in corners of the house. Find yourself standing in the middle of rooms, or spinning slowly around yourself, untethered to furniture. Find yourself caught in familiar spaces

the way a small animal finds itself caught in a net: limbs moving, body held, gaze fixed elsewhere.

Warm up with the team come spring. In the dugout afterwards, sit swinging your water bottle. You are engulfed in everyone's breathing. Every breath, multiplied by so many bodies, becomes something thick, something growing, a song. Breathe along with them, and become layered in body, in sound, and in force.

Find Mary after practice. She no longer brings her bike. Negotiate the weight of your own bike as she places her hands on your handles to talk to you. She asks you your plans for tomorrow night. Tell her you're not sure, ask her what she had in mind. After a few minutes, she leaves you and walks up to the boy who is now her boyfriend. Notice how he waits for her in his car, one hand on the wheel. Wait until she walks around the car, until she ducks inside, until the car door shuts as though vacuum sealed.

Hold thoughts in small jars. String thoughts together as though beads on yarn. Keep thoughts by pressing them into the body. Hold one finger tight between two others. Pinch your forearm, tap the side of your left thigh. Remember that you need to pick up a book at the library. Remember the name of a new album. Remember the feeling of assuredness, the feeling that comes at sunset. Leave marks this way, and rarely forget things.

Walk on the side of the road, pushing your bike by the seat. You can hear the approaching cars before you see them. Feel the wind that comes off each car as they pass. One car slows down and pulls over to where you're walking. Hear its tires on the gravel. Recognize the car. Mary's boyfriend rolls down the window, and calls your name. Respond to him as though run-ins like this were as common as anywhere else. Don't enjoy how he calls you kid, or how he talks slow while looking through the windshield. Your legs start getting cold leaning against your bike. Eventually, he cuts to the chase. He asks you when practice gets out on Fridays, asks you to do him the favor and not tell Mary he's surprising her. Laugh and tell him sure. He calls you kid again before driving off.

Cut off your hair. Do this not so that it is gone and off of your head, but so you can see most of it in front of you, on a table or held in a hand. Before cutting it off, you can braid your hair or fasten it together with string, with a rubber band. After the cut, see how thin and flat the braided object looks. See how strands of hair stick to your warm palm. The never alive object looks exhausted on the table. When the braid starts to untangle, see it, not as you, but as something you made. Slide it into a manila envelope.

Eat dinner all together as a family. Sit across from your sister, the two of you dividing your parents on either side of the table. Eat quietly. Listen to the sounds of eating, the sound of the buzzing kitchen light, the sound of your sister's foot hitting the chair. Your father cuts away at a piece of chicken. Your mother presses a hand against the side of her head, turns to your sister, and finally asks her to please quit swinging her legs. Make eye contact with your sister. Make faces at

your food. In the silence, the length of the table grows. Its small square shape stretches miles in both directions, your mother's side moving out through the living room, your father's side out the screen door. In the silence, lose sight of the end of the table, the end of the dinner, the end of a conversation that never happened. Instead, hold on tight to your plate, your glass, the silverware. As time stretches on, watch how your sister holds on too. Your father finally breaks the silence. He gestures to your head and asks your mother what happened to your hair.

See how Mary stands at the edge of the parking lot after practice, waiting for her boyfriend to pull up in whatever model car he owns. She rocks herself forward and back on her feet, looks at the ground only to look around again. Try to ignore the way her body finds stillness as the car pulls into the lot, how she picks her backpack off the sidewalk where it was originally laying on its side. Mind your business when she gets in the car smiling. Leave before she kisses him.

Believe adulthood is reached through a series of steps. Think adult and think of living alone and driving your own car. Think adult and think of the pills your mother takes in the morning, the pencil skirts some women wear to church. Think about the wine you drank last Christmas, the job you started at Cafe Java. Wonder if this has gotten you any closer. Later on, think about Mary with her boyfriend. Think about them driving through town, the windows down, the radio playing.

Perform certain tasks so frequently that your body can recite each motion as though poetry, as though the Hail Mary, as though your own name. Each of these motions will be with your body

until you die. Feel this way about the coffee maker, the way you pull the pot off the hot plate, the time it takes to fill one generic white cup. Remember this when shutting it off at the end of the day, after the last customer leaves and the main lights are turned off. Know the way your hand slides behind the machine to find the off switch, the way you scoop the used coffee filters out like injured birds.

Try not to laugh when Mary thanks you after handing her her coffee; the way her voice trails up and sings above the normal cafe chatter. Mary tells you it's been too long, that you should come over sometime. She asks you why you cut your hair. She then heads back to her table. Start working on another order, but glance over at Mary as she opens a textbook and pulls out her notes. It is difficult to focus with her reading in the cafe. Find yourself hiding the fact that you're friends. Find yourself pretending to be strangers. Continue making coffees and arranging desserts in the display case, yet call out Mary's name again from behind the counter. Look busy as she approaches you. Hand her the cookie she didn't order. Pretend to be strangers and tell her to come again.

Collect small pebbles and circle them in your hand. Bring them home. No longer place them in a line, but drop them in the sink. Their colors change under the water. Lay them out on a kitchen towel, and later collect them again, leaving behind their rock shaped water marks. Bring them into the bedroom, where you can leave one on your sister's desk, two on her bed, and one on her windowsill.

View time as something exchangeable, as something that can be used tactfully and strategically. Save time by completing math homework in your history class. Save time by giving yourself twenty-five minutes to draft an essay; the time it takes to get home from school, including both the bus and the seven block walk. Save time by walking in straight lines, crossing streets before the crosswalk, forming long diagonals across town. View time as something that can be saved and opened later. When the time comes to open it, to open time and spend it, find yourself waiting in it. Find yourself wasting it.

Get your license. Start driving around in your mother's old minivan. Take the family car to school everyday, pick up your sister from her Wednesday ballet class. Your sister sits in the passenger seat and digs through the CDs. She reads off the names of your father's favorite albums, reads out the names of childhood songs. Waiting at the intersection, she pops in a CD. Adjust the volume and tell her to skip to a certain track. Drive home together to the songs you once sang from the back seats.

Forget to turn your brights off at passing cars. Get distracted by the way your headlights illuminate the trees, exposing their branches as though naked bodies. Know they are holding each other and whispering, how before you drove by they weren't afraid to dance nude.

Talk with your hands in the air. Talk with your head tilted, your foot moving back and forth. Talk waiting for the other person to interrupt you, to touch you, to look at you. Talk while your hands search for something, as though catching words in front of you, as though looking for a place to

rest. Talk without saying many words. Yes yes yes, see see see, store store store store, do do do do, sure sure sure, thanks thanks thanks. Repeat words, each one with a different emphasis, each one stuttering over the next. Talk and pause. Talk and pause. Wait for another word. Wait for another word, from the other person, then from yourself. The words come out like wet paint. The words come out slow and hot. The words merge until they are all one word and it all makes little sense. They become irrelevant, so irrelevant that you are focusing on the way hands flip over themselves, the way eyes look up, the way the body rests perfectly still, until something irrelevant sparks the body into some great act of movement.

Approach ordinary objects as though there is a chance they will be extremely hot to the touch. Touch objects as though your finger tips could turn their everyday material into something new, something elemental.

Flip the two grilled cheese sandwiches. Your sister, sitting on the counter, watches over your shoulder. The cheese bubbles as it melts onto the hot frying pan. The bread is slightly burnt. When your parents are both gone at work, do things differently. Pour glasses of chocolate milk, and lie on the living room floor. Help your sister write an essay by telling her what teachers really want, how starting an intro with a question will entice them. Leave the bedroom door open. Walk out onto the back deck. Scrape a knife against the grilled cheese until it no longer looks burnt. Eat while walking through the house. Your father enters the front door to the sight of the two of you watching television. Pause the show and poke your heads over the couch. Say yes when he asks if you finished your homework. Say yes when he asks if the two of you ate. Say

good if he asks you how school was, and hear his own short answer when you ask him about his day.

Remove your name by saying it over and over again. Repeat each syllable quickly, so the name is no longer divided words, but uninterrupted sound. The /E/ sound mimics the whines of a small animal. The /UH/ sound becomes a flat exhale. Continue until the name can no longer hold you, cannot take on a body or the weight of daily use. Continue until it is only a physical motion made by the mouth, your jaw moving slightly to support the repeated gesture. Say your name until you're no longer attached.

Avoid going home after school by walking through the park, by stopping at the cafe, by making one too many left turns. Walk around town by yourself, trying to find a place to hide out for an hour or so. It is difficult to settle anywhere. It is easier to move around than wait around. Stand still on street corners only to wait for the moment you can start moving again. Go to the mall, stop at the Sugar Shack, drive by the baseball field. Look for Mary. Feel the awkwardness that comes with staying in one place, the awkwardness of not knowing where to go.

Create new habits. Coffee on the way to school. Tights under skirts. Waking up a half an hour earlier. Start wearing bracelets on your left wrist and trimming your bangs. Start remembering to return your library books on time. Listen to music as though their lyrics could predict the near future. Listen to music as though the rhythm of each song could determine the outcome of each day.

Watch how Mary sits with one of her legs up, cracks open the lid of her shake and dips in a fry. She's telling you a story and you're completely lost. Get caught on each unknown place, the unrecognizable situations. She sounds as though she is far away, as though her voice is coming through a pair of cheap headphones or an old telephone. Hear the distance, until suddenly she says, I guess you could come with, It's Friday night. The boyfriend drops his slice on the table, swings his leg over the picnic bench while sucking soda through a straw. He grabs Mary at the waist, pulls her in close. See them, lit by evening sun and framed by open windows, pose together as though to be painted. A scene that only breaks once Mary tells him you're tagging along Friday. The boyfriend turns to you as though mulling it over, as though looking you over, and finally says sure.

Enter an apartment you've never been in before. Mary's boyfriend knows a guy, a guy that is five years older than you and enjoys turning his place over to the public. Don't be embarrassing, Mary says. She walks in and gets lost in the shadows of bodies. The apartment makes you dizzy; the flashes of faces, the moving conversations. Listen to strangers talk while picking the dirt from under your nails. Try to organize yourself close to a wall, try to organize yourself adjacent to people singing. Later sit perpendicular to partygoers submerged in the large corduroy couch. It is easy to get lost in the pretending, pretending you know people, pretending you're older, pretending you know what's in your cup. Notice how people's faces move in close when talking to you, notice how sweaty certain people get. Find it exciting to state your name in a way you never have before. Find it exciting when someone tilts their head towards you to hear it.

Imagine that the partygoers are not wearing clothing. Instead, see them wearing the leaves you collected as a child and placed in your *nature box*. They wear the leaves because the leaves are beautiful. Red and orange and green colors. When they move, see the leaves tear in the direction of important areas. See other leaves, on other parts of the body, become folded and wet.

Walk up the metal staircase which leads to the roof. Up there is all of town, then forest, then night sky. Partygoers smoke and look into their drinks. Notice their collective holding on, as though getting lost in conversation would send them upwards, into the low strung sky.

Recognize your mother in the photo she gives you. It's a photo of her, teenaged and on a family vacation, posed in front of the Grand Canyon. Recognize something in her long hair and smile. Recognize something in the checkered skirt she's wearing, the way her shoulders come forward, her arms crossed over her chest. Your mother examines the photo again. Before she places it back into your grandmother's photo album, recognize her expression. Recognize it as the face you've seen her make during disagreements. It's the same face you see when you've come home too late, having been out with Mary and her friends.

Get into places by asking to use the bathroom, by saying you're friends with the band, by forgetting something inside, by looking for your friend who is lost. Learn how to mosh. Go out talking to strangers. Go out pushing through crowded places, pressing yourself against the edges of bars. Go out asking dumb questions, running to the bathroom, staying quiet for too long. Go out trying to find people, to lose people, to find them later again.

Hear the boyfriend drop his elbows onto the bar. He leans forward, combing his fingers through his hair. Look at him the way you also look at street lights, at approaching buses. He gets the bartender's attention and orders drinks. When he hands one to you, don't know how to accept it. Don't want to accept it. Stare at him, suspicious of this sudden gesture. He laughs. A simple thank you would be nice, he says. He grabs a drink in both hands and tells you that the dress you're wearing looks good on you, that you look hot for once. Watch him walk over to where Mary is dancing.

Wade through conversations like you used to wade through shallow river beds. First by stepping slowly, then by questioning how far you could enter the river without its water flooding into your red rubber boots.

Dance until you are running. Dance until each move happens without you knowing, until it all starts happening to you. Run inside of yourself. Run far, run hard. Dance until you feel the blood moving through your body, until your face becomes hot. Move all of yourself, taking on every form your fading body will allow, and once that is over become still. Feel the buzzing. Start again.

Cool off outside, your back against the brick wall. Hear the noise from inside, unfiltered when someone enters the front door, then muffled again against the view of the empty street. Wait with your hands in your jacket pockets. Scrape your shoe against the concrete. The boyfriend steps out the front door. He lights a cigarette and momentarily walks into the street. He then makes his

way over to you. Ask him where Mary's at and when he doesn't respond, wait. He sinks his body into the brick wall. Finally he says, she's coming, kid. Scoff and go back to scraping your shoe on the pavement. Wait silently together. The waiting becomes heavy, heavy in your knees, heavy against the brick wall. Feel the weight of his open hand against your shoulder, how heavy his body is against yours.

Compare the feeling of a kiss to wet soil, compare the feeling of a kiss to small animals, to two worms. Compare the feeling of a kiss to being underwater, to being hit in the face by an oncoming wave, to not closing your eyes in time. Compare the feeling of a kiss to conversation, to the silence that takes place when a person pauses to look, to look at you.

See Mary walk out the front door and into the night air. She shines with sweat; her face rosy and hot, her body still light and dancing.

Stand inside yourself. Run inside yourself. Run far, run hard, until you feel the blood moving through your body, until your face becomes hot. Move inside yourself, taking on every form your body will allow, and once that is over become still.

Go home. Use the spare key to open the front door. Your mother is half asleep on the couch. Wake her up by placing your hand on her shoulder. She asks you what time it is. Join her on the couch as she says your name in a hushed voice, as she repeats the time over again. She wants to

know what you're even doing this late. Sit and face her, body curled and head pressed into the couch and tell her you're sorry.

Wish you could pull off layers, of skin, of self, as though they were clothing. Imagine taking off feelings as though a shirt, crossing your arms towards the waist and pulling upwards over the head.

Don't tell Mary that you quit the team. Don't tell her that it's because you're just no good. Or that it's because you've gotten bored, or injured. Don't tell her that it's because you just needed a change. Be surprised when she doesn't ask.

Pattern your life with the places you go. Home, school, library, home, school, work, home, park, work, library, home, school, work, home. There are also alternative patterns, even if less frequent. Take into account the occasional stops at gas stations, that time you swam at the rec center, your sister's ballet recital, dinners at the Sugar Shack. Break the patterns that pattern your life by sitting out in the backyard or walking through town square, spending enough time to notice the way dogs lay in sun spots, the way sun is laid over tree bark.

Don't go to Mary's house.

Lay in your bed and feel caught in some greater motion, as though being taken many miles by train or car. Imagine the rushing landscapes, the way houses blur into trees and trees into great

deals of mountainous rock. Lay in your bed, and despite your stillness, feel the distance, feel its impact on the body.

Don't think about them driving downtown, the windows down, the radio playing.

When Mary finally comes into the cafe again, try to laugh when handing her her coffee. Force it out in the form of small breaths, of awkward pauses. Mary talks to you from the other side of the counter. She asks what you've been up to, how your classes are going, while the boyfriend stands by and avoids making eye contact. Try to focus on answering her, yet lose your words to the milk frother, to the coffee grinder. Return to the counter and lose the question entirely. Mary tells you that she's been busy getting ready for graduation, that she's going to college in New York next fall. We'll have to catch up soon, she says. Know that she doesn't mean it. Watch the boyfriend, still avoiding your gaze, play quietly with the sugar packets. Tell them you have to go, that the coffee pot needs to be refilled, that you need to stay on top of the rush. Go back to making coffees and plating food, yet find it difficult to ignore the way they eat together, the way he drops the sugar packets to reach for her hand.

Spend the summer swimming in the river and playing the guitar. Spend it helping your mother out in the garden, taking on more shifts at work. Spend it driving around in the old minivan with the windows rolled down, your sister sitting in the passenger seat. Return home long after the sun has set.

Don't look for Mary in familiar places. Don't hear from her the entire summer.

Hear that Mary broke up with her boyfriend. Lola tells you a few days into the new school year after hearing it from her friend Isabelle, who was told by Mary while visiting her for the weekend. It happened right before she left for school, Lola says, honestly I didn't like him much anyway.

Apply to music school the fall of your senior year. Have your heart set on it. Your mother finds the letter in the mailbox months later and leaves it for you on the kitchen counter. Carry the letter to your room before opening it. Inside is a piece of paper folded over in thirds. Read up until the word *Unfortunately*.

Show up late to classes. Forget to turn in assignments. Decide that after you graduate you're going to leave home no matter what. You can test your luck and move to a city, any city, and bring your guitar with you. In the spring, Lola tells you that Mary, of all people, is looking for a roommate. Mull it over. Wait many days before calling. When Mary picks up the phone, you can hear the surprise in her voice. After the small talk dies, she asks you what this is about. Ask her if she's still looking for someone to move into the other bedroom. For a moment there is silence. Hear the faint buzzing noise coming through the receiver. Yes, Mary says, You're interested? Let me send you the details.

Roll dice to determine the order of events. Roll dice to decide when you will leave, what you will tell your parents. Roll dice to determine what's the beginning, what's the end. Roll dice until you see every option. Roll dice until you start picking favorites, start making important decisions.

Roll dice already knowing the answer. Roll dice to choose colors, flowers, haircuts. Roll dice and see the odds. Roll dice and do quick math. Roll dice to play monopoly, yahtzee, made up games.

Roll dice and see if you're still lucky.

Part Three

Make your sister sit on your suitcases so you can get them to zip closed. She won't say much but will crawl on top and watch you fiddle with the zippers. After standing the suitcases up, wait quietly together in the kitchen. She'll ask you if she can wear your denim jacket since you're leaving it. Tell her it's all hers. The suitcases are stacked in the car, along with some packed sandwiches and your father's old guitar. Wait for your mother to get in the passenger seat. Drive to the nearest bus station, as your mother talks about her own visits to New York. There was the time during college, then later for a friend's wedding, then that family vacation you all went on when you were eight and your sister five. Your mother talks all the way to the station to avoid any chance of silence, but as you pull the suitcases out of the trunk, notice how thick the silence has become, how your mother can't help but let it sit heavy between each of her goodbyes.

Drag both suitcases out from under the bus and line them up against the concrete wall. Don't know where you are. Don't recognize the dark tunnel you're in, the fluorescent lights, the line of parked buses. Try to look for any sign of the city, any sign of the image you imagined, and find nothing, nothing besides trapped heat and the smell of gasoline. Don't know if you are under the city, above it, or just hidden from it. Follow a mother and her two children through the automated door, leading to a long series of gray tiled passage ways, stairs leading to more stairs. Follow the trail of people until suddenly the space opens and there is no trail, just bodies moving quickly in all directions. Look for a way out, out onto the street.

Drag your suitcase, one step at a time, down the subway stairs. Feel the rushing bodies squeeze by you, sense the crowd of people behind you growing in size, growing in impatience. Only once

you have hit the bottom, do you feel the total flood of pedestrians. They flow by, their heads blank above the surface. Fight against the current to walk back up the stairs and find your other suitcase. When you are finally ready, take out the metrocard your mother gave you. Swipe it through the turnstile. It doesn't work. Flip the card over, then back again, swiping it faster. Nothing works. Drag all of your stuff over to the booth, and through the plexiglass, hear the woman in the green vest tell you that this card expired years ago.

Examine the apartment building. Walk past it twice while counting up the street numbers; ring the buzzer and stand there waiting. After a while, Mary appears and opens the front door. She's wearing a sundress, she's cut her hair. Together roll your suitcases through the dull hallways. Admire the little things that make the apartment lively: the Van Gogh poster taped above the couch, the books holding up the DIY coffee table, the plants lining the kitchen windowsill. Don't know what to say. Watch Mary and be reminded of how good of a pitcher she used to be. She has gotten older. Notice it through the way she talks about her new job, her decision to apply to medical school post-grad. Notice it through her familiar smile, how it has faded underneath a new stern focus. She asks you how your family's doing, if you're here for college. See the way she frowns slightly when you answer no.

Learn new rules from Mary. No shoes in the apartment. No leaving the front door open. No pets, no parties. No loud music. There are other rules too. No eye contact on the subway. No open toed shoes. No asking for directions. No feeding pigeons, no maps. No wasting time.

Abide by Mary's rules and take your music elsewhere. Think where a musician would go and head to Washington Square. Get off the N train a stop too soon, and feel your heart start to race as you exit the station. Find yourself spinning, looking up at street signs, observing passing people. The park makes you dizzy, all those moving pieces, the flashes of faces, the cacophony of voices. Lean against the fountain and rest your guitar case between your legs. Press both palms against the cool stone. Think it must be you spinning, spinning around the fountain again and again. Even though you are standing still, convince yourself you can feel some centrifugal force pulling you out into the surrounding blur.

Leave your guitar laying out in the sun to go looking for a water fountain. Feel as though you are interrupting one private moment after the next, a woman reading the paper, a young guy falling off his skateboard, a mother retying her child's shoes. Finally, drink the warm water dribbling out the water fountain's copper tap. Return, still thirsty, to a tall man looking at your guitar, running his thumb across the strings. He looks surprised when you say hello, when you say it's yours. After that, he doesn't look at you again. He tells you that's one hell of a guitar, and tries to get your name, but as soon as you give it, he walks away.

Look for a place to set up. The whole park makes you feel overexposed. Finally settle on a bench in the northeast corner. It is difficult to take the guitar out of its case, to know where to stand, where to face. Try to look casual. Leave before you play a single song.

Try to feel at home in the apartment. Catch yourself standing in the middle of rooms when Mary is away at work or in class. Put away the dishes, water the plants, clean the bathroom mirror. Remind yourself that you really live here. It's hard to fall asleep in the new bed.

Get hired part time at a cafe on Bleeker. The cafe can only seat around ten people, yet it is always loud and there's a line until noon. People come in wearing ridiculous outfits. Many of them order drinks you've never heard of before.

See him for the first time on the other side of the fountain. Examine his set up; the electric guitar, the red battery powered amp, the guitar case flung open a few meters away. Notice the cardboard that lines the inside of the case, the messy sharpie handwriting, the crumpled cash. Notice all of this after trying to figure out where the loud noise was coming from, how one person's voice could carry across the whole south side of the park. Realize it's the microphone. Stand listening to him with your arms crossed. When you return back to your bench, pick each guitar string softly and repeat the chorus.

Start seeing him everywhere, his heavy denim jacket, his long, messy hair. Pop open your guitar case and hear his voice again, singing the same lyrics from a couple days before. His voice is rough and falls off pitch, yet something about it carries both in song and through conversation. Hear him laughing by the fountain. See him smoking first thing in the morning. Once you spot him on the street, pushing a small dolly, all of his gear held together by bungee cords.

Play in the park for a few hours, then walk along Broadway. Catch your reflection in store front windows, in the sleek metallic of office building exteriors. Surprise yourself with your sudden visibility.

Hear him calling after you. Turn around and watch him walk over. His jeans are frayed from where they drag against the concrete. He's wearing boots even though it's summer. He asks if Bryan's been bothering you too, and seeing your confused look, explains that Bryan's the tall guy who plays the electric bass. Tell him no. Stand there as he shifts his body around, curses and says it must be because you're never plugged in. Don't know what to say when he starts talking about all these new guys trying to claim the whole east side even though they've only been at it a couple months. Keep nodding your head when he says he's gonna lose it if Bryan tries moving in on his space.

Lay your ninety-nine cent slice down on the ledge. Stand with your elbow propped. Read the glowing signs hung up near the ceiling, *olive, vegetable, mushroom \$1.75, peperoni \$2.50*. Add up all the old two dollar bills taped behind the register. Drag out each bite of pizza, and feel half dead underneath the fluorescent lights. You spot him outside the glass before he walks in. Watch as he orders two slices, starts a conversation with the cashier, and folds out the creases of a crumpled five. Don't know whether you should say something. Look away when he turns from the counter and spots you. By the time he drops his plate down next to yours, he is already talking. He asks you questions and you give him answers. *A month and a half, Bushwick, took a bus down from Massachusetts*. He splits his gaze between you, the window, the pizza. He smiles,

laughs, when you tell him how you ended up at the park. He talks about the area, asking if you stop at Tompkins or have gone to Zoe's on 2nd. Keep saying no over and over again. Watch him fold his slices in on each other and take another bite. *Leo, 23, grew up in Queens.*

Get used to stopping every couple of minutes when walking through the park with Leo. Get used to how he'd tell you to wait up so he can talk to people. It will only be a few minutes, he says. People shout out his name, wave him over from nearby benches. Listen to how he talks to them, talks about the park and the people in it as though it was his job to keep track. Stand next to him and pick up small things, that Bill moved back to the West Coast, that the jazz trio started playing shows in Brooklyn, that Evelyn, the older woman who always sat near the north entrance, passed away in her apartment last week. Introduce yourself to his friends again and again. It's the cue to say your name when the conversation dies down and they all turn to look at you. Notice that the looking doesn't stop, even after you say it.

Figure out that you make more money playing together. People seem to take you more seriously when you sing into a microphone, when you hit a simple two part harmony. Learn which parks require a permit for amplification, and how long you can get away with playing without one. You make the most money if you are downtown in the mornings and at Central Park in the afternoon. Realize that no one makes money in WSP once it's crowded, that the rich people living in the area are long gone by then, and it's just college students and people from other neighborhoods with nowhere to go. Stay in the park even when you don't feel like busking anymore, when you

just want to sit and play and meet people that way. Return there late at night, when you get off from work in hopes of catching Leo before heading home.

Count up the day's money with Leo. Watch how he uncrumples each bill before creating two even piles. Celebrate by going to the diner for dinner. The waitress brings pancakes with chocolate chips, sides of bacon, french toast. Leo dumps syrup over everything. The diner is bright and all you can see is your reflections in the window next to you. Your knees keep hitting his under the table. Listen to the music playing, 60s folk songs against background clatter of forks hitting plates and soft conversation. At the end of it all, watch Leo pile the leftovers in a to-go container, and celebrate his feast for the week.

Lay in a bed that is not yours. Now that it is over, hear his breathing become heavy and know he is asleep. The entire room smells like him, like smoke and coffee and fresh earth. It's so hot the bed sheets stick to your legs. Try to inhale when he exhales. Exhale as he inhales. Fall into the hold he has made for you. Don't get up to use the bathroom. The room is silent. Silent except for the drumming inside your chest.

Get used to walking together. Match your step to his step. Walk down the street at the same pace. Get used to other things as well, the weight of a hand, sleeping positions, favorite street corners. Get used to all of it, quickly and without realizing it. Other people will get used to it too. Regulars in the park ask Leo about you. Men will refer to you as his girl. Notice how some of

them start talking to you and others finally start leaving you alone, and how the whole park just starts calling you girl, whether they know your name or not.

Stay in the park until it closes and the cops force everyone out. Stand around waiting for it to happen, the music having died out besides one persistent guitar player. Talk loudly and kick an empty bottle around. When the cops come, act dumb; squint when they shine their flashlights over you. Place instruments back in cases, look under benches for forgotten bags, wait for someone to tie one of their shoes and then the other. Everyone leaves the park together. This is known as the 20 minute break. Everyone gets a slice of pizza or a 7/11 coffee, then heads back to the park after the cops have cleared. Now it all starts over again. If someone starts playing, dance without the fear of being interrupted.

Make the standard announcement that the cafe is closing in fifteen minutes. The remaining customers slowly make their way to the door, some of them leaving small piles of trash where they once sat. Wipe down tables after everyone has left. Turn off the machines, flip chairs, stash food in your bag before trashing the rest. Leo is sitting on a stoop across the street. Join him. Without talking, he hands you the flattened penny he's found, a cigarette. He puts his hand on the back of your neck. Open your bag and together dig through the pocketed pastries.

Don't be shy with each other. Don't look the other way when the other changes clothes. Don't try to continue conversation by looking at the floor, a book, random points in space. Sit in silence

together. Wait on street corners for each other. Share the same tricks, know the same cheap spots. On good nights, share the same bed.

Wake up in your bed together. Put on clothes, grab the guitars. Drag the dolly down the subway steps, hop turnstyles, lean out over the platform's edge. Get on the train, never needing to look at the map. Spend the morning walking the East Village, busking in the park, sharing a single cup of coffee from a stationed cart. At two in the afternoon, count up your change and buy three dollar falafels, run into Rick and the new girl he's seeing, nap together in the grass. Aimlessly walk the neighborhood together until the sun starts to set. Head uptown, holding on to each other when the light is red.

Leave shows, leave bars, leave groups of people when you've decided you're tired of everything but each other. Go running through Times Square, walking by the river, sitting in courtyards you've never been in before. Close your eyes on the train ride home.

Search under benches for lost guitar picks. Once night hits, everything changes. The generated energy of the day becomes suppressed in the cooling concrete and conversations become tense. Walk over to Leo with your hands in your pockets, your bare shoulders hunched. Listen to Jack talk to him about showing up at someone's place of work, giving them hell. Jack is known for getting heated like this. Leo nods and laughs. Watch him continue to nod as he pulls his jacket off the dolly and hands it to you, turns to look at you after you've put it on. Never catch who this

someone is, just that Jack swears he's serious, that next time he sees the guy, he swears he's gonna jump him. Alright, Leo says, I got the point.

Leave the park, momentarily, and head towards the deli. Walk around just to waste time, to get lost, to circle yourself for a little while. Fidget with the loose change and cigarettes in Leo's jacket. It doesn't take long for the city to feel utterly unknown again. As soon as you fall off your radius, the buildings start to look taller, start to tilt in on you. Each block grows emptier than the last, streets start to veer off the grid. Recognize a restaurant awning before all hope is lost.

Return to the park and see that everyone has dispersed except for Leo. He looks up and watches as you walk over, kicking his foot against the fountain, putting his cigarette out against the stone. He asks you where the hell you were, what took so long. The tone of his voice surprises you, so does the look on his face. Tell him to relax, that everything's fine. He doesn't believe you when you say you got lost.

Don't bother to turn on the lights when you get back to the apartment. Throw your shoes by the door and drink from the kitchen tap. Mary left a note on the counter. *Not cleaning after you! Do your dishes.* Look in the sink and see the forgotten bowls from breakfast. Close your bedroom door. Undress silently. Hide yourself within the folds of your bed. Fall asleep to the sounds of distant street talk. Fall asleep to the whispers of music coming through the apartment walls.

Forget about the other night. Lay on Leo's couch with your feet in his lap. His roommates are lining the living room, smoking and talking out their plan for the night. The living room is

windowless, cluttered, and someone left the television on. Recognize the cartoon playing. Weekdays 5pm, you and your sister would watch it while waiting for your parents to come home. Leo isn't paying much attention. Watch him roll, run his tongue against the paper, and reach for a lighter. A person you've never seen before walks through the apartment and goes into Leo's room. Leo explains casually that he's subletting the room now. On nights he's not with you, he just enters the apartment late and sleeps behind the couch.

Call your mother for the first time in a couple weeks. Tell her everything's working out, your roommates are nice, you have a job at a new cafe. She wants to know the details. Tell her that you're working six days a week even though you're only working three, tell her you are paying rent just fine. Don't mention all the time spent in parks, what you're up to at night. Don't mention that you've spent most of the money you had saved, that you wash underwear in the sink to avoid doing laundry. She will ask clarifying questions about your new life: what you've been eating, if she should mail you the rest of your clothes, whether or not you'd want to come home for a weekend. Maybe you should come home, she says. Promise her that everything is fine.

Look in your bathroom mirror. Look at your face. It never looks the way you think it will. Notice where the light hits your face, and what is then hidden in shadow. As though examining a painting or a mountain range, see the landscape for what it is. Nothing is symmetrical, rarely anything is. Notice how your eyes don't rest on a linear plane, how one cheek is fuller than the other. See the scar on your forehead; a reminder of a bike accident when you were eight. See where there is

color, where there is tension, and where lines have formed. When you are ready, look into your eyes as though making eye contact with a stranger for the first time.

Try to identify who's who under the soft light of the lamp posts. Approach the park slowly. Know that something is going down by the way everyone's shadows move. A man you don't know walks back and forth, others are sitting still or moving elsewhere. The man is shouting. Hear Leo's voice, hear his laugh, hear him trying to shut the whole thing down. Get closer. The shouting and the pointing and the pacing continues. It continues until Leo is yelling too and their bodies become electrified in the dark. See them move in on each other, move quickly over the concrete. See the man reach, see his arms swing high in the air, and before Leo puts his hands on him, hear the crash, the crunch of wood, the warped hum of wired strings. Hear the park go silent. Rick sits up from where he lies smoking, That was the girl's, you idiot! He spits on the pavement. See them all turn to you, the shouters, the smokers, the onlookers. See Leo staring down at the ground, at what was once your father's guitar.

Expect Leo to be sorry, but he isn't. He just tells you your voice is what's important anyway. Explain that your father has had that guitar since before you were born, that you don't have the cash for a new one. Tell him you're going to have to start working at the cafe full time instead of busking with him. Leo is trying to walk ahead of you now. He doesn't say anything, but stares down at the sidewalk and picks up the pace. Keep up with him. Insist on knowing who that guy was last night. Grab him by the arm. Ask him why he always has to get involved in this shit. That look on his face again, the rude way he tells you to relax, to quit being on his case. Stand

there and wait for him to say something more, but all he says is that he's going to fix it, that he found a show for the two of you to play Friday night. Don't agree to anything.

Blow the afternoon walking around neighborhoods you're not usually in. Decide to go to the museum. Inside, there are Jurassic skeletons and windowless hallways. Inside, your boots become heavy on the marble. Enter the bird hall and see backlit windows framing forest and desert scenes. Feel shy as you stand in the darkness and look into every one of them. Stop in front of one window and recognize the landscape. The paint strokes of pine trees, the dusted plastic placed over blue paint to form a river. See the Barred Owl suspended with a large rodent in its talons and feel sorry for it. Its eyes seem misplaced, its feathers overworked. Try to figure out what is more realistic, the feathers or the fur. Guess what they might use for the fake blood. It is rare to see an owl in real life. As a child, you would hear them out in the backyard as though calling you to the window. Remember the time your mother took you to a museum, how she told you and your sister that they only stuffed the animals if they found them already dead.

Forgive Leo. Crawl the entire city at night, following him to one music show after the other. He says that he is scoping out the scene, that it's all part of the process. Learn the names of new neighborhoods, new bars, new people. Find it difficult to weave through crowded spaces the way Leo can. Find yourself holding on to tables and thin conversations. The whole ordeal has become tiresome, yet as the night gets later, it gets easier. The people around you become blurry, their faces become slow and exaggerated. Grab on to Leo at the end of a show. His body vibrates against your touch. Try to convince him it's time to go. Try to figure out what the hell he's on.

Call your mother the next day. She tells you your sister wants to come down to visit. She asks about the last time you've spoken to your father, if he's been calling you at all.

Look for Leo for a few days. Search the park, walk his neighborhood, call and leave messages. When you tell Mary about it, she looks at you like you're stupid. She rolls her eyes, asks you where he even goes when you're not together. Don't tell her that you don't know. Think the worst. Then one day after work, walk out the cafe and see him sitting across the street waiting for you. He acts as if everything is normal. When he gives you a guitar case, hesitate to open it. Inside is a new acoustic Ibanez guitar. Know he does not have the money to buy this. Ask him where he got it. Don't worry about it, he says.

Play the show with him Friday night. When it's over, snap the buckles on your guitar case and leave Leo to get drinks. Wait by the bar, the adrenaline now subsiding, your body still damp with sweat. The man next to you is wearing a heavy jacket and he's quick to start conversation. He asks you how long you've been playing, then how long you've been in New York. Answer his questions, staying even after your drinks are put down on the bar. Ask him what this is about only after he wants to know if you'd play solo. He gives you a speech, hands you his card, and tells you to think about it. Walk back and hand Leo his drink. His eyes keep darting up at you as he wraps up a cable. He'll ask what that guy wanted and you'll tell him he just liked the music. Sit on the edge of the stage as he finishes packing everything up. Afterwards, go to the diner. Eat without speaking to each other. Let 80s pop music fill the silence.

Try to dissuade your little sister from visiting. After weeks of her pleading, give in and propose vague dates. Know it's unstoppable when she calls and tells you she's decided to take the bus down that weekend. Spend the whole day cleaning the apartment. Hide the ashtray Leo leaves on your windowsill, hide both the broken guitar and the new one under the bed. Throw his clothes in the hamper, brush weed crumbs off the desk into the palm of your hand. Pick your sister up at Port Authority and walk her through Times Square. Explain the subway system and buy her a metrocard. Take her to Central park. With your sister, the city suddenly becomes friendlier, cozier, something known. Show her all the spots you've discovered over the past few months as though you are a local. Make sure she has a good time. Make sure, when she heads back home, she'll tell your parents she had a good time. On the last night, introduce your sister to Leo and others in the park. It's unnerving to see her, sitting politely in her floral dress, amongst all of your new friends. Tell off Rick when he tries putting his arm around her. Catch your sister watching as Leo finds a loose cigarette on the sidewalk, shows you his luck and lights it. Your sister will hide her expression, but imagine the words she'll accidentally tell your mother when she gets back home.

Get used to Leo disappearing for a week or two at a time. When you eventually find him on a park bench, don't hold back the questioning. He tells you he's been busy, roommates causing him trouble, cops approaching him in the park. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, he knocks on your apartment door. Argue with him in a hushed voice to not wake Mary. Find it difficult to whisper with the heat building in your body. Spit consonants at each other. Sometimes he'll come in apologizing, other nights you'll fight in the hallway. On nights that end with him lying in your

bed, stare up at the ceiling and hold back; a feeling, a doubt, a timid hope. Hold it all back as though if released they would cause flooding.

Dream that you are wading through riverbeds. In the dream, it is just you and your sister or maybe it is Mary. Dream that you are standing barefoot in the water, holding the yellow buckets from your childhood. The river is rushing fast and the two of you are placing your buckets in the water, trying to catch the rush.

Walk out into the livingroom and find Mary waiting for you on the couch. You're behind on your share of rent, she says and follows you into the kitchen. Convince Mary it won't happen again, and when she finally tells you that she's just looking out for you, notice how her voice dips at the end. Notice how she doesn't look at you. Maybe Leo shouldn't be over as often, she says. She stares at the kitchen wall as though her words were written there.

Remember, as a child, the way your mother used to say your name. Full and sharp after you hit your sister, or with an extra syllable tacked on the end during times of affection. Replace your name with the words she meant in those moments.

Walk through the park, bundled up against the cold wind. Everything dies in the winter. The plants, the crowds of people, the momentum that took you from summer into fall. See how empty it has become now that it is too cold to play, too cold to stay out at night. Look for Leo.

Find yourself alone. Alone at the cafe, the library, the pizza place on 7th. Find yourself alone in the bed, not reading the book you checked out that day but looking out the window. Notice how the window frame lines up with the edges of neighboring buildings, how the draft coming in moves the curtain ever so slightly.

For your birthday, your family sends you a package in the mail. When it arrives, one side of the box is crushed and it's wet with snow. Open it on the kitchen table. Inside, there is a new notebook, saltwater taffy, a pair of earrings your sister made out of bright pink beads. Your mother wrote a note on the card and signed everyone's names. Your sister added in the envelope three autumn changed leaves.

Track Leo down in central park. It is cold enough that snow sticks to the grass. Keep your fists clenched in your coat pockets. After a while, Leo insists you take his gloves. Sit on a park bench, your bodies hunched and pressed against each other. Speak softly. Speak so softly about things that the urgency behind the words gets muffled in your scarf, his jacket, the snow. Take off a glove to wipe your nose, and see the red stripes on your knuckles. Tell him you bled in his winter glove.

Cry for the last time in front of him. Let your gaze become fixed on your shoes, his nose, a smudge on the pavement. He sits on the bench staring out. He never says the words you'd just wish he'd say. Instead, he keeps repeating the same thing. *I don't know what you want me to do.*

Lean against the stone edge of the fountain. In the morning, this part of the city is more forgiving, more familiar. The sounds of traffic hide within the sounds of birds, within the sounds of someone's heels hitting the concrete. The only people in the park at this time of day are here to walk their dogs or drink their coffee before work. Even in the winter, the morning sun looks the same. It comes down in thin sheets, and slows down everything in its path. Count the loose change in your pockets, take each coin out and flip it a few times between your fingers.

Stand at the corner of Barrow St and Bleeker. Stand with your hands in your pockets, with a foot off the curb. Look down. There is a cigarette sticking out of the snow residue, now gray and frozen solid. Listen to each passing car. When it is quiet, look up and see them waiting for you. Three cars pulled to a stop, steam visible from their exhausts. Cross the street and go. Work off of momentum. Believe it helps to count city blocks. Walking alone, you hear your boots on the pavement. Turn your body right, then left, then three blocks later, right again. Form the linear pattern in your mind. Repeat it, until you hit 8th avenue, walking in large strides with your heart rate up. Look ahead of you and see colorful storefronts and a fogged up restaurant. Look down and see sidewalk cracks and old gum spots. See shoes, small birds, trash, lost gloves. Pass the public library and a man in a plaid trench coat. Try to make the street light by running up to the corner.

Practice whistling by moving your tongue back and forth, from the back of your teeth to further into your mouth. Create wind tunnels to the sound of the radio, to the sound of rain. Whistle as though you're making noise, and be surprised when you briefly hold a pitch. Walking home from

work, keep your hands in your pockets and whistle silently, knowing not much is heard over the sound of traffic anyways.

Spot Leo at a distance once or twice eating a slice of pizza through fogged glass or dragging the dolly through city slush. Run into him in a deli one rainy night. Notice how he talks about the rain, how he talks to you about it as though you could've been anyone else. As soon as the rain lightens, make a run for the bus.

Find it difficult to see out the bus window. Instead, see the raindrops racing down the outside of the glass, see reflections of the bus' interior. Listen to the rain, the city traffic, the conversation between a mother and her young son. Remember the melody to a song. Oh ah oh Oh ah oh. It is a song from your childhood, and while the words never come, the melody sits in your chest the same way your own name does. Quietly repeat the tune again and again. Oh ah oh oh ah oh.

People board the bus. A woman sits down and opens a book. Oh Ah ohh. The rain makes everything shimmer, makes everything move. When the bus suddenly stops, jerk forward and go silent. The inside of the bus is the same; humid, muffled and contained.

Enter the apartment with rain dripping down your face. Drop your boots near the doorway, their soles soaked through. The edges of the kitchen are sketched in city light. No one is home. Take steps carefully. Pull off wet socks. Throw your scarf, hat, gloves on the kitchen table. Walk into the living room and turn on a lamp. The apartment is the inside of an animal's den. Every item seems to hum beneath its stillness. Take a bath to warm up.

Become embarrassed, suddenly, in the luke-warm tub. Notice how your body is a different color under the water. Hold up body parts and try to identify movement residue: creases and places of muscle. Avoid remembering how your mother bathed you as a child, how she would place one hand over your eyes and slowly pour the water over your head. Avoid remembering how she spoke to you softly, her fingers combing through your wet hair. Get out of the tub and drain the bath water. Reach for a towel and open the bathroom door. Walk around the apartment until you return to your proper age.

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