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Parade: Explorations in Cross-Narrative Creative Writing

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Parade

Explorations in Cross-Narrative Creative Writing

An Honors Thesis
presented by
Shannon Elizabeth Keating
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
May 2013

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A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

Advisers and Readers

Before graduating from high school, I had already called Professor Blanche Boyd to talk with her about the creative writing career I would soon be starting at Connecticut College. “What do you like to write?” she asked me then. “Everything,” I told her. “Fiction. Non-fiction. Everything.” She wanted to hear about some of my favorite writers, so I told her about reading Joan Didion, Dorothy Allison and Annie Dillard - she told me about meeting, interviewing and befriending them. Blanche’s work, and the critical attention she has paid to my own over the years, has enriched my relationship with feminist authorship, and, of course, my relationship with prose. The amount of thanks I owe her, and the amount of admiration I have for her, goes far beyond the scope of this paragraph.

Before my freshman year, I had not imagined that the ‘everything’ of my writing ambitions would come to include film - at least to the large, terrifying, wonderful extent that it has. Dr. Nina Martin’s Film 101 class got me hooked. I owe Dr. M for inspiring in me the overwhelming passion I have developed for films and the discipline of film studies, particularly feminist film scholarship. Her astounding intellect, enthusiasm and support have been invaluable.

I also must thank Professor Ross Morin, whose tireless commitment to his students is extraordinary. He has read and thoughtfully critiqued an absurd amount of script drafts for this thesis, pushing me to continually improve even when I was ready to take a short cut or two. Thanks, Professor Morin, for encouraging me to murder oh so very many of my darlings.

Dean Philip Ray, along with the self-designed interdisciplinary major committee, have generously allowed me to pursue my Narrative Studies major which concludes with its capstone: the exploration into cross-narrative writing throughout these following pages. Thank you; I can’t imagine, now, having done it any other way.

For my friends and my family

P A R A D E

scripts & stories

by
Shannon Keating

“I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.”
- Cassandra Mortmain, *I Capture the Castle*

Being Permanent

Lucy changed into high heels on the plane. She wore bright lipstick the color of persimmons and a little bit of gold around her eyes. “You don’t get to dress up like this whenever you want,” she insisted. “This is *Paris*.” My mother had sent me off with Keds for all the walking.

Lucy was the president of French club, which was finally making it to France. I had nothing to do with French club, but the adviser, Mr. Green was on the young side, and Lucy intimidated him. I got to come. We were in the left side row of a big-bellied passenger jet, our knees against the seats in front of us, laughing at our SkyMalls. Lucy repositioned, though, when a man sat down next to her. He had on a cream-colored suit, an inky purple Hermès scarf tucked into his shirt pocket. I made up his story: his heiress wife recently dead in a horse-drawn carriage accident, he came to the States to try and convince his former mistress, a line dancer from Baton Rouge, to return with him to Paris; but she’s married with twin boys, retired now, and she pitied him, which was worse than anything.

As soon as he settled in and Lucy heard him say something foreign to the stewardess, all her French began to dribble out onto his lap. He nodded, more polite than I had expected of a Parisian. Maybe I would be wrong about a lot of things.

Back in midwinter I told my mother that I’d be pulling my savings from selling fried dough on the boardwalk, and I had expected her consequent thrill. She was always encouraging me to ‘be sixteen,’ as if teenagedom was more a state of mind.

“Gay Paris. I was only there for one day, passing through from Berlin,” she said, smiling at the ceiling. Her feathery hair caught the light of the kitchen window. She always looked

youngest in the kitchen. When I got my first camera I liked to photograph her there, grainy and overexposed shots of her leaning over a host of failed culinary experiments, laughing. She was now mixing marinara on the stove with a wooden spoon, but she lost focus and the spoon dragged out of the pot an inch or two, dripping some red on her color-worn nurse shoes.

“What did you do there?” I asked her. “In Paris?”

“Oh, you know. Wandered,” she said.

On the plane, I watched Lucy pulling on suede pumps in the aisle just before we started descent, resting her hand on the seat of the French man for balance, smiling big. I thought she'd break her ankle. At Spring Fling she only wore heels for the pictures. She made me take dozens of them, her and Billy O'Callaghan holding onto each other sort of distantly in front of her stone-faced fireplace, while Billy's best friend Dennis Friedman slipped me a flask of his sister's Malibu. Then it was bare feet for the rest of the night, on the punch-sticky floor of the gym, and later on, trampling through briars in the woods around Lake May with the boys to watch the sunrise. I had been in comfy old flats the whole time, my mother's, vaguely Puritan, pointed-toe with a square buckle - but the next day I stuck my feet in the bath with Lucy's anyway, mine pillow soft, hers blistered and angry and red.

I had the window seat. Land within sight, Paris was cloudy and gray. We had left behind a hot and hazy New York.

///

I couldn't understand Mr. Green as he chattered excitedly with Lucy and the French kids on the train in from Charles de Gaulle. Mr. Green couldn't have been close to thirty but his hair was already thinning on the crown of his head, which was shaped like a hardboiled egg. He had lived in Bonne working on a farm for two years before moving back to Jersey to teach. It seemed

like quite a lifestyle downgrade to me, but maybe he had a nice girlfriend and a labradoodle and a decent-sized library back home in his duplex. What did I know.

The metro was cleaner and whiter than the ones in Manhattan. I read all the stops listed over the door and tried to fill my cheeks with the sounds of the words. *Châtelet. Étienne Marcel. Saint-Germain-des-Prés.* Fairy names.

I lumbered up toward the twilight behind the others with my overstuffed backpack into the streets of Montmartre, the artist district, crowded and colorful as it tilted precariously up the northern hills of Paris. The subway stop got us out close to Moulin Rouge. We navigated a stretch of garish neon signs and window displays of clear plastic models wearing costume lingerie and jutting out their breasts. The boys pointed. Mr. Green ushered us up into the emptier streets above, strung with red-lit bars whose tiny tables spilled in crowded tangles out onto the sidewalks, everyone talking loudly and leaning in close.

Our hotel sat on a sharp slant and smelled like laundry detergent. Cramped stairs climbed up to our rooms, Tommy and Jackson in one, the soccer girls in another, Mr. Green alone, us.

As soon as we got a feel for the skeleton key, Lucy clomped on unsteady feet across the carpet to hang her head out our one little window and shout to the people below on the street. *Paris, mon Paris, j'taime. C'est la vie.*

We slung our backpacks onto the bed. I ran my hands along a pewter washbasin that sat on the low, bulky dresser. I pretended to scrape a straight razor over my chin in the cloudy wrought-iron mirror, like the sad-eyed men in old movies.

“Did you *see* all those sex theaters?” Lucy said, by my side again, raising her eyebrows and poking me in the ribs. Her thick ponytail, slightly mussed from travel, swung around cheerfully as she bent into the vulgar poses of the women on the signs.

She was too skinny but had a good healthy flush to her cheeks. Sometimes in gym on the benches she would mush up against me and lay her bony browned legs next to mine, which are mashed potato white, round. “Mine’re half yours, Linds. I’m a toothpick.”

Lucy clambered up onto our lumpy queen mattress, heels still on, her ankles buckling as she posed, her breasts full and heavy in a low-cut blouse. I whistled. She tumbled onto the pillows, laughing.

“What would Billy think about this frivolity?” I asked her, flopping into bed with her.

“Billy,” she said, flinging her arm over her shoulder and tipping back her chin. “That peasant. Onto bigger and more French things.”

“By things do you mean boys?”

“I mean *hommes*. Men.” Lucy smiled lazily.

I waited, but she did not ask me about Dennis, who after Spring Fling carried me through the more precarious brush around the lake while Lucy and Billy made out in a sand hole some children had dug on the beach. We laughed in strangled bursts, Dennis and I, the thorns snagging my dress, his hand squeezing the back of my bare thigh where he held it. I waited then, too, but his kiss had not come. And later, into the first blessed week of summer, he didn’t call. But I guess I didn’t know what, exactly, to expect.

Lucy pulled off her heels.

///

The next day, early, we went to the Louvre, which I didn’t much care for. I liked imagining Napoleon haughtily riding his horse through the endless halls. I didn’t like the parades of gloomy-faced Christ or the crowds. Lucy and I kept getting left behind or lost, the soccer girls sprightly and impatient plowing on ahead with Mr. Green trailing, Jackson and Tommy stuck

looking at broken-faced statues for too long because they had smoked weed in the hotel bathroom before breakfast.

I pulled out my DSLR for the first time when everyone began to dance around the outdoor fountains, for pictures of them all throwing their hands up against the steely clouds. I got Lucy picking apart half of her baguette to feed to the pigeons, the soccer girls burying their faces in the fur of a passing St. Bernard. I gave the camera to Lucy before we left and I smiled in front of the glass pyramid. *Don't forget you, my mother had told me. I don't want any more pictures of strangers in my photo albums.*

We tried to walk through the gardens down to the Arc de Triomphe but it was farther than we thought, always standing grandly there in front of us but still far, a trick, so we stopped for a heavy lunch of salads and duck and Roquefort cheese. Lucy squealed at the escargot but I could have eaten them like popcorn. We spent too much money and sucked down two carafes of rosé, so daring to be sixteen and drinking at a restaurant by daylight. Mr. Green frowned a lot but didn't have the courage to impose the kinds of rules on us from which he must have been so recently freed himself. He could have been one of us students, baby-faced and fidgety, save for his sad hair and the skin bunching up between his eyebrows when we refilled our glasses.

We waded through the afternoon, which had thickened like soup, in and out of little cheese shops and cobbler's nooks. Lucy garbled her French to shop owners, who tried to sell her soaps and spices when all she wanted was conversation.

We made it to the Arc in the end, but I much preferred the enormous Louis Vuitton on the way off Champs-Élysées. I imagined the boys I knew back home in Jersey dressing in sleek trim suits and silk shirts in shades like blueberry and lavender. I imagined them trading in the

rugby polos and ill-fitting khakis with stains from exploded pens in the pockets. They would be different people entirely.

I got a bunch of macaroons from Laderée (too luxurious for my lumping saggy backpack, but I was still just buzzed enough not to be embarrassed). I pointed to all the different colors. I ate a salted caramel first and I was surprised, the way it collapsed over my tongue but was soft inside. Then pistachio, raspberry, cocoa. But I wished I had stuck with just rose, all rose, something I had never tasted before but still knew the taste, so fancy and divine but still familiar. I thought about gardening with my mother when I was a little kid, the smell of the flowers and the earth. Lucy and I considered an absurdly priced candle that smelled like tangerines until Mr. Green came in and told us everyone else was getting tired of poking around the street vendors and wanted to keep moving on.

Just before dusk, by the Bir-Hakeim metro stop, we saw the Eiffel Tower for the first time. Mr. Green was babbling on to the group in French, presumably about history or architecture or art. We stood on the stretch of marble that looked down over the lawn, which was sprayed with trash and sunbathing tourists trickling out with the day. I felt vaguely disappointed for the first time. I traced the empty champagne bottles littering the park by pushing my finger through the lightly humid air.

A boy standing next to me with a lime green Holga strapped around his neck elbowed me in the ribs in his hurry to capture a group of startled pigeons taking flight.

“Awfully sorry,” he said. British. Long, curly dark hair to his shoulders, but it worked. Lucy was at my side in an instant, melting.

“Don’t worry about it,” I told him. “Great Holga. Pinhole? How do you like it?” I envied him. Real film made me nervous.

“I love it. Helps to have nice subjects.” He waved the camera casually at Lucy. “Pose for me, darling?”

“I’m Lucy,” she said. She had a crooked smile when she was really, really smiling, the left corner hitched up a little too high. And then she was truly unstoppable.

“Thomas.” He raised the camera to his face and took a single shot of Lucy getting up on her tip toes and twirling around, her circle skirt billowing softly around her knobby knees. What came first, what caused the other – her knowing she was desirable or the desire toward her itself?

Mr. Green started calling to us. “Lucy, Lindsey. *Nous partons.*”

Lucy waved goodbye to Thomas with three of her fingers. “He’ll never forget me,” she whispered in my ear as we all trooped back toward the metro. “I’m permanent.”

I didn’t feel like correcting her. Holga pinholes allowed enormous depth of field – would the tower behind her be in focus? – but the slightest movements blur an image. She’d be an unrecognizable haze of wistful colors. A ghost.

///

The next morning, at the Musée d’Orsay, everyone mobbed together upstairs to see the Water Lilies, but I haunted the tiny little offshoot room for the post-impressionists: glowing pastel piles of smudges that created the worlds of dreams, spired empires in shocks of yellows and blues climbing out of clouds.

Back around the hotel for lunch, far enough from Moulin Rouge, towards the Sacré-Cœur, Montmartre came into its beauty. The cobblestoned streets hoisted themselves up their hills in twisting paths of boutiques and creperies. One shop exclusively sold jasmine and honey; we took our time, running our fingers over the bright jars, bought some as gifts for our mothers. My mother loved honey, but even more she would love the foreign words on the lilac-colored

label. I thought of her untying the ribbon from the lid and dipping her pinky in, offering me the first taste right off her finger.

Lucy, late in the afternoon, flirted in line for the Catacombs. Two backpacking Australian undergraduates. She was wearing a white dress and bubblegum pink lip gloss, so her skin seemed especially golden and her countenance particularly carefree. They offered to buy her a Coke if she saved them a space in line while they went.

“You speak French?” they said. “We could use you to help get around.”

“After I’ll come to Melbourne and you can return the favor,” she said.

We all shuffled down into the Catacombs: abandoned mining tunnels of Paris congested with the neatly stacked and artfully arranged bones of the old, forgotten poor. Lucy made disgusted noises as she poked fingers into eye sockets.

“Can you even wrap your head around six million people?” said Mr. Green, tottering around a little awestruck, forgetting to speak French.

Lucy’s Australians pretended to duel with two loose femurs. The soccer girls squealed as water from the stalactites fell into their hair. Tommy and Jackson hid behind corners and tried to catch them by surprise. Mr. Green wanted us to stop and read the signs but we rushed, rushed, the walls of bones having held us too close for many long dripping minutes in the half-dark.

When we emerged under the blinding sun, the Australians asked Lucy what she would be doing later, and she stuck her arm through mine, announcing that we already had plans.

Marching off together, still linked, I loved her for it.

I think her triumph was in knowing that she could if she wanted. She could bleed these boys dry, accept their drinks and compliments, steal a sloppy kiss in an Irish pub’s bathroom stall. Lucy had the confidence of knowing.

I didn't have the confidence even to wonder.

///

For dinner, we picked a near-empty café in our neighborhood, still eating too early for the Europeans and the swollen days, sunset far in the future when a disinterested waiter brought us bread.

“Not yet,” said Lucy. She tapped Tommy's wrist as it hung expectantly over the wicker basket. “The French eat it with their meals, not before.”

“What do you know about the French,” said Tommy, sour.

“I thought you'd have one lined up by now,” I said when Jackson started to distract everyone with a puppet made out of his napkin. “A Frenchman, I mean.”

“Maybe all I really need is this city,” Lucy said. “You've inspired me. You're taking enough of the place home with you.”

I did keep buying stuff, filling my arms with things. Mostly, I bought pictures. Sleepy Parisians on the streets sold old photographs in messy buckets, and I would leaf through them while everyone waited around impatiently. My favorites were, many times, of children: sitting on their mother's laps among the bookshelves in Shakespeare and Company, or feeding ducks along the Seine. And at the museum gift shops I got bookmarks for all the books I didn't read. I got teardrop earrings at the flea market, and an old silverware set, and a silk scarf embroidered with the silhouettes of elephants.

“What are you going to do with all this?” Lucy kept probing. I didn't know. I would keep it.

Now, as Lucy casually renounced French men, I thought of her American boy. She'd been seeing him for months before Spring Fling, her first goofy, bickering love. He clambered up

through her second floor bedroom window, as if the two of them were in a teen drama from the nineties. She adored him.

Her face glowed in the light of the heat lamps overhead, now, which had hummed on with the slow fall of the night. Tommy and Jackson snuck a couple bread rolls while she put on fresh lipstick blind. She smacked her lips softly.

She hadn't spoken to Billy since we arrived, far as I could tell, even when we all stopped off at an internet café to dash off assuring emails to our parents. As far as I knew the two of them hadn't spoken the whole week before we left. There had been much more time spent at my place, like before they'd been together. We were somehow unable to talk about him with any sort of frankness. So she just left me tantalizing little hints. *Billy would like this*, when we'd be out bra shopping, or when we tried on perfumes at the Galleries. And often I'd catch her daydreaming.

It reminded me of how my mother, the nurse, languorously alluded to an earlier life – how she would hold tight to any of the grander details, indulging in the protection, and the immortality, of her secrets.

They could have their secrets if they wanted them. All I really cared to know if, when Lucy talked to Billy, she talked to Billy about me, and if Billy talked about me to Dennis. Dennis, right now, training for cross country on the tracks at our high school at home in Jersey, caught six hours in the past and awash in American summer, sweat shining in drops on his too-long eyelashes, maybe thinking of me.

I got distracted by my food arriving, a nice hunk of honeyed beef. When I looked up I discovered that Lucy's lipstick, normally so meticulous, had clownishly ballooned her small mouth.

“How much wine have you had?” I asked.

She pulled out her compact, normally unneeded, and started laughing. Everyone looked at her. I started laughing. I took a photo of her, with her strange lipstick flush, with her hands wrapped around her wine glass as she laughed. Then I took a photo of the soccer girls next to us laughing in their souvenir magenta berets. A street performer struck up his accordion somewhere down the block.

After, in bed, my head weighted with sugar and wine, I watched Lucy as she combed out her curls in our creaking foggy mirror. We had turned off the lamps on our bedside tables but the moon in our window hung pregnant and heavy with dull white light. Lucy wore a gauzy laced nightgown, like a vintage movie star.

I decided that I already knew about her and Billy. Just not where or when. So I made it up as I fell asleep.

I started with what had been real. Two weeks ago, a Sunday in the dry blue headache of very early morning, her cheek smashed against my shoulder in the backseat of Billy's car as, for a few fitful minutes, she slept. Billy and Dennis in the front talked quietly about football and work at the deli the next day. When we pulled up to Lucy's house, an egg yellow colonial, her mother in a bathrobe having coffee on the wraparound porch, Billy tugged her gently from the backseat and slung her over his shoulder. Waking, her dirty feet kicked out at the dry June air. She squealed and pounded weakly on his chest. He set her down and kissed her right on the mouth, right in front of her mother sitting there on the porch. "See you," I said to Dennis, because I didn't want to prolong our not-kissing any longer. I ran after Lucy, and Dennis called "See you," as I went, maybe surprised but maybe thinking *just as well*. I didn't turn around. I picked Lucy up by her waist and struggled to tug her inside while she blew kisses to Billy who stood waving on the lawn, his tie loose around his neck. And we went upstairs and stuck our feet

in the tub while her mother made blueberry pancakes for us, her little wild children. And then my mother picked me up and I went home. “Weren’t you a princess,” she said, smoothing my dress out on my thigh as we drove. She tugged on my earlobe and I told her to keep her eyes on the road.

Back up. To what I couldn’t know, when she was alone. This was it: Lucy slept away the rest of the day. Didn’t even wash off her makeup, she was so tired. Black wisps streaked her eyelet pillow sham when she woke to Billy in the doorway. *Your mom went to get the twins from soccer*, he explained. *Soccer, on a Sunday evening?* she asked. *Don’t be so hung up on the details*, he said.

Before they touched, I was dragged from shallow dream with the slight jostle of Lucy’s body as she slipped into bed beside mine. I lay awake for a long time.

///

We snuck out on the third night. We had listened to Mr. Green play a game or two of rummy with Jackson and Tommy, and then after the boys left it took awhile but finally his room had fallen quiet. Everyone was exhausted from a day poking around the heavy gilded halls of Versailles. They would sleep.

Lucy planned ahead. We drank from a Mine probably were too. By the time we got to the Tower we were clutching each other’s arms as if we couldn’t make it another step alone. On the hour it glittered like a Christmas tree. We were there by midnight. “*Comment magnifique, magnifique, magnifique*,” Lucy crooned. She tapped her heels against the marble. Then we stood there, hanging onto each other, until the lights were still.

Back to Montmartre, metro experts now. It was the summer solstice. Bars got flipped inside out. People climbed onto cars that tried to pass through the congested side streets. Loud

and demanding music swept the crowds into newly discovered corners. We were there. With our very own bottles of wine, now, I hoisted Lucy on top of a telephone booth, where she danced in a small bright skirt for the roiling crowds spilled out in front of her. I wished I had brought my camera. She was really something.

“Linds,” she said, falling to her knees and leaning over the side of the booth to reach down and grab my hand. I could barely hear her over the throb of the speakers slung between the lampposts. “Have you ever seen anything like this? Have you ever seen anything like this in your life?”

I squeezed her fingers. I saw her in her Spring Fling dress, the stiff organdy.

And then a smudge of lime green. Still holding onto Lucy, I turned to see the Holga bobbing above the crowds with its dull black eye.

What was this British boy’s story? Thomas. University dropout, to the disappointment of his parents: dentists, straight-laced. Dumped his savings into checking and is riding the world on a debit card and a few miles of 35mm film. But I couldn’t focus in. He was right there in front of me.

“Let me help,” he said.

I transferred Lucy’s hand into his and he lifted her down with grace. He was tall, almost as tall as the telephone booth. Lucy dipped her head back to look at him. He wore a simple plum colored windbreaker, shorts cuffed mid-thigh, loafers. He wasn’t as exotic as I had remembered.

“You,” said Lucy.

Then we were dancing. All three of us. Full-limbed, heads tossed, hands cupping the hazy stars. Crushed glass and party debris ribboned the cobblestones at our feet. All of Paris was on one street corner. I had never before danced. Not really.

We drifted downstream. Two blocks from the hotel, Lucy grabbed my arm with fluttery panicky fingers. “There are hands up my skirt,” she said. Her face wavered, like she was stuck underwater. I tried to lock eyes but hers were bouncing and sliding through the bright night.

There may never have been a time before in Lucy’s life when she got attention that was so thoroughly unwanted. Or maybe it was just the first time she’d told me about it. I grabbed both her hands.

We fought our way back against the current and swept up against the mob outside our hotel. From the doorway, we could see one of the soccer girls dancing with Tommy on a café table across the street, and Mr. Green distantly chaperoning outside the next door bar. My first instinct was to hide, but he saw us before I could lunge inside; he raised a beer in the air and mouthed “be careful.” Mr. Green was pretty all right.

I was following Lucy through the door when she glanced over her shoulder, touched my hand, and raised her eyebrows. When I turned, Thomas was still behind us. He held his hand out to me.

Lucy pressed her lips to my cheek and whispered in my ear. “Tomorrow you can tell me everything.”

I hesitated. She kissed two of her fingers and waved them at us, her final insistence, then she was gone.

I turned and took the hand offered to me. It was a large, square boy’s hand, thick-knuckled, wide-palmed. I liked this hand. We sidled slowly into the middle of the packed street and he turned to face me. We were crushed together without having to make the decision ourselves. The Holga pressed into my chest and I was surprised to still see it there. I looked up and Thomas was looking down at me. I had thought, before, when I first saw him standing

behind us, that he would follow Lucy inside - his darling, his ghost - to calm her down and comfort her. But maybe that would be too real and weighty an intimacy for strangers.

The people around us crashed into each other and pulled apart and crashed again. He said something but I couldn't hear him. I had to reach up and curl my hand around his neck to pull his face close enough to kiss. His mouth was warm. His hair was tangled and long between my fingers. What a weird thing for people to do, kiss. But I felt like I had done it plenty of times before.

Rain came. Thomas tucked the camera down his shirt and pulled me to him again, so we sheltered it. I spread my fingers as wide as they could go and planted them across his back, as if making handprints with finger paint like a little kid. Red, yellow, blue. Pale blank rivers for knuckles and lifelines.

He lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck. Through our bulky wet clothes, we touched.

I thought about Dennis (but just for a moment) lugging me through the Lake May brush, like I was package to tote from Point A to Point B, Dennis, far away in Jersey, probably still in bed now, asleep.

Thomas carried me all wrapped up around him. Slung me around onto his back and ran lightly through the crowds, who cheered as we passed, and danced on. I spread out my arms like wings, too wine-whipped, too happy, to feel awkward or afraid.

He shrugged me off on a tiny sliver of a side street and pulled out a skeleton key that caught the moonlight. I hadn't yet realized we were headed somewhere.

“My aunt and uncle’s flat,” he told me, pulling me through an arched doorway and up a narrow flight of stairs in the dark. “They let me stay in Montmartre with them for the summer. They’re on the Riviera for a fortnight.” I had been wrong about his story. (But of course.)

Upstairs, the apartment materialized in weak lamplight. It was small, sparse and warm. The rain pattered against a pair of latched shutters in the kitchen, where Thomas was making sure his camera had made it through okay. I stood in a cramped foyer lined with coats and boots, dripping. And cold, suddenly. I wrapped my arms around myself. Thomas set the Holga down on the kitchen table, where the lens winked tiredly. Too tall, he reached me in three assured strides.

I slipped under his long arms and went for the camera. “Pose for me, darling?” Bold, bold, bold. I could do anything.

He frowned, but the way his eyes crinkled, playful and curious, gave him away. I let the Holga fall taut against the neck strap and unpeeled him, clumsily, of his top layers, skinning an overripe fruit. His windbreaker and a plain cotton t-shirt sagged on the foyer tiles. Thomas’ exposed chest was a sleepy, spotty white, the skin humming with a touch of cold blue. When he hunched his shoulders forward a hollow dipped between his pectorals, fuzzed blonde. His dark curls were plastered wetly to his neck. He did not scare me, this puckered pale person. I took his photograph as he stood there in the foyer, frowning. “Film is expensive,” he said.

It was his camera, not mine. For me, there would be no evidence.

///

Continue to unpeel each other until we stand there, hairy mottled bodies. Had I been freshly bruised by flailing feet or fists in the crowds? Kiss strange things – elbows, ankles, the backs of knees. Take another photo, or two, naked and unknown and open. Start the process of knowing. Share feigned ignorance for shared youth. Wake tangled on the white couch to the day

fighting through the kitchen shutters. Try to make espresso with the outlandish machine on the stove. Dress in Aunt and Uncle's clothes, poorly fitting but dry and fresh. Stick the Holga out the window and photograph the street below without looking.

Kiss the boy in the concave dip of his chest, touch the corner of his mouth with one finger, and string the Holga back around his neck.

Bye, then.

I never even got your name.

Consider lying or staying silent. But then say it in the doorway while swinging around the corner, when almost out of sight.

I'm Lindsey.

Outside, alone. Run. The dirty cobblestones steam as they dry in the lamplight. Dawn is breaking like a cool orange egg yolk over the still-sleepy city.

Find Lucy.

She is curled, still dressed, in a very small ball underneath the covers. Her mascara, sticky and teary, has stained the ivory pillow sheet. Think of dreaming something similar to this, but so far away from this.

Learn: after dropping her off back at the hotel last night, she snuck out to meet up with the Australian backpackers, who filled her with beer in an crowded bar until she was no longer capable of finding the door. In the restroom, one easily held down her skinny and protesting arms while the other got under her skirt, where already that night so many strange hands had traveled uninvited.

Stroke her hair. Learn: she has never done much of anything with Billy, whom she loves in a nervous, open way, because she was and is still afraid, and he's been kind about it.

Feel sick and sad that it is now that she tells, now, while ignoring irritated knocks on the door and their accompanying complaints about missed breakfast, now, when she has scratches on her arms and snot spread across cheeks.

Was that British guy okay? A total stranger. I shouldn't have had you go with him. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Tell her: don't worry, don't be sorry. After dancing to a song or two he ran into an old friend, and so goodbyes were said, well wishes exchanged, the rest of the night passed watching from the sidelines, wandering alone while killing the wine.

Realize, while lying, that the truth could have been awful but it wasn't. Carefully tuck this knowledge away and consider when the time will come, the necessity, to re-examine it.

And while stroking Lucy's hair, remember, guiltily, his hands, big and square and warm, and the broad spread of his back, and the way he looked at daybreak – was it really just an hour ago? – his chapped lips parted, hair hanging in his closed, crusty eyes, his breath slightly acrid, his long blank body exposed there on the couch, his clothes littering the apartment like confetti.

For now, bury the truth of the thrill and the wonder. Get Lucy up and showered, get her to smile (if only for a moment), get her to remember lives patiently waiting to be resumed back home. For now there is breakfast with the overexcited, impatient French club, and an afternoon picnic in the Luxembourg Gardens, and the prospect of an early night in to play board games, and chat, and rest. Still three more days left in Paris.

Petunia or Jasmine

INT. HALLWAY/KITCHEN - DAY

TITLE: 1 day before

ROSALIE, 9, shy but energetic, with an unruly mop of hair, crouches in the hallway around the corner of her kitchen. Her legs are splayed underneath her tangled skirt, underwear exposed, as she spies on her sister, HELENA: 17, artsy and dreamy, full cherubic cheeks and a very pregnant belly.

Helena sits on the kitchen's island, crying silently, eating pickles which she first dips into a jar of peanut butter jammed between her thighs.

Will You Love Me Tomorrow, by the Shirelles, plays on the radio. When Helena isn't eating, she's mouthing the words.

Her eye makeup runs. There is pickle juice dribbled on the front of her dress.

Rosalie pokes her head around the corner.

Retreats.

Looks again-- uncomprehending, worried, fascinated.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER (O.S.)

Rosalie! How many times have I told
you not to sit like that?

Rosalie doesn't look away from her sister.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER, a harried, pretty young mom with her hair in a precarious beehive, scoops Rosalie up by the collar of her dress.

She gently yanks Rosalie a few steps down the hall-- Rosalie half-drags, half-walks, bare feet bumping along the carpet-- then plants her in a standing position and releases her.

Her mother runs to Helena's side, heels clacking.

Rosalie teeters hesitantly in the hallway.

She watches their mother gently tug a half-eaten pickle from Helena's hands and set it aside.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP of Rosalie's eyes, full of both concern and wonder.

The screen door attaching the kitchen to an outdoor porch BANGS open. A gaggle of young children, mostly little girls, comes flooding into the house. These are the LITTLE COUSINS.

They swirl around Helena and her mother like an eddy, then stampede into the hall where Rosalie still stands. They try to talk over each other as they tug on their big cousin's dress, vying for her attention.

The happy chaos of the squabbling children has shaken Helena to awareness of the outside world. She wipes her eyes with the backs of her peanut-buttery hands and spots Rosalie spying in the hall.

HELENA

Rosalie! Get out! Mother, get her to leave. Rosalie, go away!

Rosalie cocks her head, but doesn't move, looking a little hurt-- but more surprised that her sister has even noticed her there at all.

The children are confused and impatient.

LITTLE COUSINS

Rosalie?

ROSALIE'S MOTHER

Rosalie!

Rosalie jumps suddenly, throwing up her hands in claws and GROWLING.

The little cousins scatter like startled birds, SHRIEKING and LAUGHING.

Their mothers, the AUNTS, come into the hallway from the surrounding rooms to usher their children away from the scene.

AUNT

Let's give Rosalie's sister some privacy, darlings.

Rosalie, in mid-chase, turns to look back at Helena, who has fallen forward into her lap, her head in her hands, her mother's hand on her shoulder.

INT. DANIELS' FOYER - DAY

TITLE: 282 days before

WIDE SHOT on the Daniels' closed front door. Helena, unpregnant, shimmies over to answer the door bell, opening the door to a boy in a letter jacket, eager and handsome.

They talk briefly. All we can make out is--

LETTER JACKET BOY
Hey, Helena, I--

LETTER JACKET BOY
(continuing)
Oh, okay, well--

Helena shuts the door.

INT. DANIELS' FOYER - CONTINUOUS / VARIOUS TIMES

Helena's disembodied hand, manicured and bangled, closes the door on different boys, same eagerness: another prep / a superjock / a cute nerd, all looking expectant and disgruntled.

INT. DANIELS' FOYER - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

Same WIDE SHOT on the door.

THREE QUICK DOORBELL RINGS fill the foyer.

HELENA (O.S.)
Rosalie, I'm just getting out of
the shower. Get the door?

Rosalie obediently trots into frame and pulls the door open.

This time, it's an attractive teenage greaser moodily lighting his cigarette on the porch.

Rosalie cranes her neck to look up at him. Her mouth hangs open a little; she is overwhelmed by the amount of leather jacket and greased hair filling up the door frame.

Their father, in a reclining chair in the living room off the foyer with the evening paper, looks up.

ROSALIE'S DAD
A little late to be calling, isn't
it, son?

Back on Rosalie, still shell-shocked.

ROSALIE'S DAD(O.S.)
Lena, you can't go to the door like
that.

Helena pushes Rosalie aside. She's in her robe, makeupless, twisting her wet hair into a knot behind her neck.

Now it's the greaser's mouth hanging open.

HELENA

(brightly)

As you can probably tell, I'm in
for the night. I'll see you in
biology tomorrow-- if you decide to
show up.

The greaser fails to light his fumbling cigarette before
Helena SLAMS the door on him.

Helena sashays into the living room. Rosalie follows her,
sitting on the floor to resume building a LEGO cityscape,
but she's watching Helena.

Their mother comes in with a laundry basket, settling onto
the couch to fold.

Rosalie watches Helena twirl the dial on the radio, which
had been broadcasting the evening news.

Ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog plays.

ROSALIE'S DAD

Must we listen to this garbage?

Rosalie watches Helena kiss her father on the cheek.

HELENA

Someday it'll be my own garbage on
the radio. And I'll have done it
just to annoy you, Daddy-- become a
rock star.

She tweaks him on the nose, backs up into the middle of the
room, and buckles her knees in Elvis style.

Looking scandalized, their father glances to his wife for
support; she's focused on her laundry. Defeated, he snaps
his paper again and uses it to block his view.

Rosalie laughs from the floor.

She watches Helena urge their mother up from the couch, hold
her hands, and begin to dance-- uninhibitedly, wild.

After a beat of hesitation, their mother smiles and shakes
her hips modestly.

HELENA

Look, even Rosalie's feeling it.

Rosalie, on the floor, is moving without rhythm, her elbows
knocking together.

Helena locks her elbows in mocking imitation. Rosalie gets up to shove her, scattering her cityscape as she runs.

Helena intercepts the shove, scooping Rosalie onto the couch. She then climbs on to join her, continuing to dance. Rosalie stands on her cushion, unsure of what to do.

in EXTREME CLOSE UP:

HELENA

(whispering to Rosalie)

And then, when my record goes
platinum and I get a movie deal
thrown in, it'll be James Dean
waiting for me on the porch. And
I'll break a thousand hearts.

Helena laughs and Rosalie smiles, star-struck, at her sister. Then the two of them dance together for the remainder of the song, knee knocks and head shakes.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

TITLE: 263 days before

Rosalie is perched toward the top of her favorite oak tree, wearing a dirtied play dress. It is a warm autumn day, a few leaves left on the branches.

In a WIDE SHOT, the tree still in frame, Rosalie's mother emerges on the wraparound porch, scouting for her daughter among the branches, a hand raised like a visor to her eyes.

Spotted.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER

Rosalie Daniels, what have I told
you about being up there in your
dress? You want the whole wide
world to see your underpants?

ROSALIE

Just let me come out in my shorts
then, why don't you?

Rosalie's mother tosses a pair of patterned leggings up into the tree, where they get caught in some of the lower branches.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER

Compromise.

Rosalie begrudgingly shimmies over to the leggings, finds a comfortable perch, and tugs them on.

When she looks down, she sees a balding young man beneath her making his way towards the front door. This is PAUL, Helena's soon-to-be fiance: stuffy and boring, but kind-hearted enough. (Rosalie doesn't know this yet.)

Having lost interest in the leggings, Rosalie abandons them around her ankles as she watches the man wait on the porch.

ROSALIE

Yeah, good luck, baldy.

Unpregnant Helena answers the door, but we can't see her expression.

She leads Paul inside. The two of them reappear behind the French windows in the kitchen, right in Rosalie's line of sight.

Rosalie watches as Helena and Paul embrace, take each other's hands, and kiss.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Rosalie's eyebrows shoot up.

She tries to scramble out of the tree and almost falls; she'd forgotten about the leggings.

She yanks them on.

Drops from branch to branch.

Races into the house, barreling through mud puddles en route.

INT. PORCH/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Into the screened-in porch, through to the kitchen, tracking mud.

Helena and Paul, caught, separate awkwardly.

HELENA

(looking Rosalie up and down)

You're a mess.

Rosalie, in retaliation, takes a few steps forward and looks Paul up and down.

And she sees:

Paul's hair, his balding not so apparent face-on.

His collared button-up where it meets his neck.

Clean sneakers where they meet the bottoms of his slacks.

His right ear, framed by a messy side-burn in need of trimming.

His mouth, smiling slightly, the lips chapped.

One of his hands, boldly taking Helena's.

Rosalie wrinkles her nose, unimpressed.

ROSALIE
(with suspicion)
Hello.

Paul smiles slightly.

PAUL
Hello.

ROSALIE
(aggressively)
Who're you?

HELENA
Rosalie--

PAUL
I'm Paul.

He holds out his hand. This throws Rosalie for a second. She takes it, releases it quickly.

PAUL
I work in your dad's office.

ROSALIE
Then what are you doing here?

HELENA
Rosalie!

ROSALIE
What? There's just never been a man
in the kitchen before. Just a
million billion on the porch.

HELENA
Mind your own business, little
girl.

Helena grabs Paul's arm and escorts him out of the kitchen.

Rosalie is left alone in her mud puddles.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER (O.S.)
Rosalie Daniels!

Rosalie slumps her shoulders, defeated.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY BATHROOM - MORNING

SUBTITLE: 209 days before

Helena has her head in the toilet as she throws up.

Rosalie is standing down the hall, watching her sister with confusion and concern, wearing a Lone Ranger night shirt.

Their mother rushes by with a damp washcloth, getting down on her knees on the tiles to mop Helena's sweaty face.

Rosalie won't get too close.

ROSALIE
Momma? Why's she so sick?

ROSALIE'S MOTHER
Go get a glass of water, Rosie,
please.

ROSALIE
Momma?

Helena leans back against her mother, looking green and exhausted.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER
Helena's got a little baby growing
inside her. Isn't that exciting?

Rosalie looks anything but excited.

EXT. ROSALIE'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

TITLE: 189 days before

We have CRANED over Rosalie's neighborhood, an idyllic, sunny suburb, Everytown USA. She jogs along underneath us, heading toward a baseball diamond and playground spotted with children in the near distance.

ROSALIE (V.O.)
 My sister Helena has a baby stuck
 inside her and it's making her real
 sick. I need some help.

START TALKING HEADS

Jane, 11, well-dressed and sweet.

JANE
 When my momma was sad before my
 baby brother was born, my daddy
 gave her chocolates and bacon til
 she felt better.

JEREMY AND JASON, 6-year-old twins.

JEREMY
 Is it an alien in there?

JASON
 (pointing his fingers like a
 gun)
 Pew pew pew!

ELIZABETH, 8, in overalls.

ELIZABETH
 You just gotta wait. My daddy says
 I have to be patient for 3 weeks
 til my chickens hatch. Only...

She counts on her fingers, holds them up triumphantly.

ELIZABETH
 Nine more days! Til then I can look
 at them with a flashlight to see
 inside their shells.

She holds two fingers in a circle around her eye, as if
 looking through a tube.

SCOTTY, 12, snapping bubble gum and slamming his fist in a
 baseball glove.

SCOTTY
 It's a fact of life. Turtles lay
 eggs. Girls make babies.

END TALKING HEADS

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - CONTINUOUS

As Scotty jogs onto the diamond, Rosalie sits on the sidelines of the gathering game, looking pensive and defeated.

The boys confer briefly on the pitcher's mound.

SCOTTY

Rose! Come on, Bryce is sick. You pitch this inning.

Rosalie sighs, then smiles. She stands.

OTHER BOYS

Hurry up!

ROSALIE

I'm comin', I'm comin'. Keep your mitts on.

INT. ROSALIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

TITLE: 162 days before

Rosalie is outfitted for school.

She slings on her backpack, checks the status of her toys-- everyone's fine-- and she's ready to run out the door.

We hear the SPLASH of Helena's vomit from down the hall. Rosalie turns to listen.

Her face sets with decision.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

We see Rosalie's little hands gliding along the kitchen counter.

She carefully assembles a plate of leftover bacon from the fridge, strip by strip, and a bowl of chocolates from a display bowl on the island.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Helena sits weakly on the floor of the bathroom, her arms wrapped around her knees.

Rosalie peeks at her around the corner of the stairwell.

She's caught. Helena leans forward to shut the door, glowering.

Rosalie steps up into the hall and stands, unsure.

She takes a deep breath and opens the bathroom door.

HELENA

Rosalie! Can't you just leave me
alone, for once?

Rosalie quickly takes a couple steps forward and sets down the plate, then backs up again.

Helena looks down at the plate, confused. Then she smiles slightly, first at the plate, then up at Rosalie.

Helena unwraps a chocolate and offers one to her sister.

ROSALIE'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Rosie! The bus will be here in a
minute.

Rosalie steps forward to take it. They each eat one together.

INT. OUTSIDE HELENA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

SUBTITLE: 93 days before

Rosalie is lying flat on her stomach, peeking through the stripe of yellow light underneath Helena's door.

Helena walks by in a pair of green stockings.

Billie Holiday's *My Man* is playing.

Her feet are back again, now bright pink. They sway and dance as she walks.

HELENA

(singing)

I'd just like to dream, of a
cottage by a stream, with my
man....

Rosalie grins.

Abruptly, Helena stops dancing.

The grin fades from Rosalie's face as the feet march towards the door. Rosalie scrambles up.

Helena opens the door, wearing pajama shorts over her stockings, curlers in her hair. She's round with the late second trimester of pregnancy.

Rosalie has been holding her breath. She lets it out and speaks at once.

ROSALIE

Whatever happened to James Dean?
Weren't you gonna hold out for him?

Helena is more exhausted in her irritation now.

HELENA

Rosalie.

ROSALIE

Isn't Paul such a bore? *Paul*. Who
wants to be with a Paul? Paul
Newman, maybe.

Helena grabs her arm and walks her down the hall to her room.

ROSALIE

(rushed)

Or at least somebody cool and
handsome who'll give you
compliments. Somebody who notices
what color stockings you've got on.
Paul wouldn't notice a pair of
stockings if they started walking
around by themselves and kicked him
in the knees.

Helena puts Rosalie back in her room.

She leans down to speak to her closely.

HELENA

You don't know anything.

Helena stands and SLAMS Rosalie's door.

We are left with alone with Rosalie, CLOSE on her eyes
glistening in the shadowy dark.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

SUBTITLE: 1 day before

Rosalie enters the crowded living room, leading a trail of little cousins through a party of mostly brightly-dressed young women.

Rosalie stops in front of Paul, who sits alone in her father's arm chair. She is separated from him by a room full of legs, and glares at him through the crowd.

He sees her, smiles very slightly, raises his drink in salute, and glares back. They have a brief stare-off.

Rosalie rolls her eyes and continues to lead the cousin parade.

She abruptly dislodges from the group, taking off, rounding the house.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She curls herself into a tiny ball and wedges herself in a hiding place between the wall and a grandfather clock.

The children LAUGH off screen, calling her name.

Rosalie leans out of her hiding place, grinning at her cleverness, but retreats when she hears the sound of heels on the hardwood floors.

Helena passes, a pile of freshly laundered napkins in her arms. She does not see her sister hiding.

Before she rounds the corner back to the kitchen, Helena pauses, wincing, a hand to her stomach. She drops some of the napkins.

She backs into the wall, tilting her chin up, closing her eyes, breathing deeply.

Rosalie pokes her head out a little, poised to spring up if her sister needs her.

Enter Paul from the kitchen, who scoops up the fallen napkins and offers his arm. Helena takes it, looking grateful, if a little uncertain.

Rosalie leans out further, watching Helena and Paul rejoin the party together through the kitchen, distrust on her face.

Two of Rosalie's cousins race down the hall and find her easily. They SHRIEK, jumping up and down.

LITTLE COUSIN

We found you!

Rosalie squeezes herself free.

ROSALIE

Yeah yeah, don't be so proud of yourselves.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Rosalie leads them back through the crowd, into the kitchen.

Helena is working the crowd, pressing hands, holding her belly, smiling hugely.

Rosalie hangs out by the snack table, eating a pile of chips out of her hand.

Helena enters the kitchen, her big smile gone, with two empty glasses in need of refilling.

She doesn't notice Rosalie at first. Then-

HELENA

(washing the dishes)

What are you doing in here?
Shouldn't you be running amok
outside?

(almost tenderly)

All our little cousins really love
you, huh?

Rosalie nods, her mouth still full of chips. She purses her lips, glances at the ceiling as if looking for support, then looks pointedly in a POV SHOT at the jars of pickles and peanut butter, still sitting where they were hastily stashed on the counter.

Helena follows her gaze, sees what she sees.

She groans and shoves Rosalie back out of the kitchen, half-annoyed, half-playful.

Rosalie stands outside the screen door. Helena glances over her shoulder as she walks back into the party; Rosalie sticks her tongue out at her and runs off.

Helena allows the slightest smile.

INT. ROSALIE'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Rosalie has escaped from the party into the retreat of her room. She pulls an old trunk out from under her bed.

She speaks to a congregation of toys sitting in the corner.

ROSALIE

This is my last chance. She just needs to get away from Momma and Paul and everybody, and then she'll remember about how she wanted to go to Hollywood and be a movie star and break a thousand hearts.

The dolls stare back, silent.

ROSALIE

Don't worry. We'll visit.

INT. HALLWAY - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Rosalie lugs the heavy trunk down the hall toward Helena's room.

This is periodically INTERCUT with 16MM HOME VIDEO:

Helena with a baby girl on her hip, smiling in front of the Hollywood sign,

wearing headphones in a recording booth, singing into a microphone,

dancing at a glitzy outdoor party, the most enigmatic person there,

with her toddler, walking hand-in-hand along the beach, glancing behind her to smile serenely at the camera.

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosalie opens the door, creeps inside, and leaves the trunk open at the foot of the bed.

The room is awash in sunlight.

Rosalie stares at the neatly made bed-- the covers are the same frilly pink as her own. She runs her hand down the length of the comforter.

Into Helena's closet, filled with beautiful pastel-colored dresses. Rosalie tugs down a few, which land on her in a heap. She struggles to get up, then drags them to the trunk and dumps them in, satisfied.

Next: a chest at the foot of Helena's bed. It is filled with knick-knacks and notebooks. Mostly, paper dolls from Helena's wartime childhood: babies and little girls with mix-and-match dresses, soldiers in their uniforms. Helena holds a baby in one hand, a soldier in the other, then delicately lays them to rest, her eyebrows knitted in confusion.

She is thrown. She packs nothing else.

She wanders over to Helena's extensive record collection. She sifts through the albums-- Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald. There's a record in the player and Rosalie sets down the needle. Dalida's *Ciao, Ciao Bambina* plays.

On Helena's dresser is a shrine: a framed photograph of Buddy Holly surrounded by dried roses, a lipsticked kiss pressed to the glass, and lipsticked dates: (1936-1959).

Rosalie speaks quietly to a teddy bear on the edge of the dresser.

ROSALIE

She cried for days when he died.
But you probably knew that already.

She lifts a little piece of paper to read, in Helena's handwriting, the lyrics: "I know it's wrong to keep crying, waiting / hoping you'll come back."

She then examines the walls around the bed, hung with pinups: Elvis, James Dean, Sal Mineo, Marlon Brando. Personal polaroids.

Rosalie gets closer.

Right above the bed, below all the rest: a small photo of Helena and Paul at the beach together. Helena wears a floppy hat that threatens to blow away in the wind. She reaches to hold it steady, laughing. Paul stands behind her, his hand around her waist, his fingers grazing her bared, flat stomach.

Rosalie clambers onto the bed to get a better look, and leans down to stare at it. Presses down a loose corner.

A final POV SHOT sweeps the room.

We're left with a WIDE SHOT of Rosalie, cross-legged, her head craned to see the wall behind her, looking small on the grand queen bed.

INT. ROSALIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUBTITLE: 12 hours before

Rosalie has used Christmas lights as an extension cord to bring her ballerina nightlight to her bed. We're underneath her covers with her, where she reads by flashlight.

Her eyes are sleepy, but they liven with laughter or surprise as she reads. Peter Pan is spread across her lap.

She pauses on an elaborate illustration of Peter and Tinker Bell.

She traces her finger along Peter's clothes, Tink's wings.

INT. ROSALIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosalie finally sleeps.

We PAN around her world: cluttered and incongruous. Here an abandoned baby doll beneath the nightstand, there a Tonka truck propped in the corner with two Barbies joyriding inside. A lamp draped with a Yankees cap in place of a shade.

The trunk, meant for Helena, lies empty on the floor.

Rosalie's desk is covered in tubs of play-doh. Dried out figurines of caterpillars and dragons stand protectively among the tubs. Behind them we see Rosalie fast asleep.

EXT. THE MOON - NIGHT

Rosalie stands with some of her cousins and her neighborhood friends in a crater on the moon. Rosalie wears stickered moon boots and her Lone Ranger night shirt.

The littlest kids color on her arms with black markers, children's drawings of houses and dogs and families. They place a paper-flower bouquet in her hands.

She looks down at it, confused, then peaks over the lip of the crater: an aisle fashioned out of her pink frilled comforter, weighed down with moon rocks, extends into the blackness.

ROSALIE

But Helena's the one getting
married, not me.

The children say nothing, backing up and looking expectantly
out over the lip of the crater.

Rosalie clammers out onto the surface. She turns back to the
kids.

ROSALIE

Who- what's down there?

They giggle and fidget. One of them raises his hands
palms-up - *who knows?*

Rosalie walks awkwardly down her aisle, looking down at her
boots as she walks.

Then she notices-- the backs of her hands. Her arms. The
children have filled in their drawings, inked over almost
entirely, just leaving dots and splotches of bare skin...
stars.

She drops her bouquet, which floats lazily away, and holds
up her arms against the sky.

She blends in perfectly with space.

A WIDE SHOT lets us know she is alone.

ROSALIE

Helena? Helena?

INT. ROSALIE'S BEDROOM - A FEW HOURS BEFORE DAWN

SUBTITLE: 5 hours before

Rosalie wakes.

She lies still for a couple beats.

She gets out of bed and stands.

She looks at her closed bedroom door.

She goes for it.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Down the hall in her pom-pom slippers.

She opens Helena's door.

INT. HELENA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Helena sits at the end of her bed, wearing her wedding dress. This is a spectacular, over-the-top dress, ivory, lace and a five-foot train.

Rosalie is disarmed. She rubs her sleepy eyes and glances out the blue-black window.

ROSALIE

Is it morning? Is it time?

Helena glances out the window herself.

HELENA

No. No, not yet.

She puts a gloved hand to her mouth, removes it.

HELENA

Were you in here today? In my things?

Rosalie shuffles her feet, embarrassed.

ROSALIE

Yes.

HELENA

That's *not* okay, Rosalie.

ROSALIE

I'm sorry. I--

HELENA

You can't just go wherever you want to go and do whatever you want to do. The whole world is not your playground.

ROSALIE

I wanted--

HELENA

I don't *care* what you wanted. I don't care. When you're nine years

(MORE)

HELENA (cont'd)
 old you get to think that what you
 care about matters more than
 anything or anybody else.

She wipes her eyes.

HELENA
 (continuing, quickly)
 But soon enough you'll have to-- to
 just shut up and grow up, little
 girl. Soon you'll have to realize
 that you can't have the luxury of
 selfishness. You'll have to--

ROSALIE
 I just WANTED--

Helena stops talking, surprised that Rosalie has raised her
 voice.

Beat.

ROSALIE
 (quietly)
 I just wanted to help you pack up
 and go away from here. Because you
 can't really want to get married,
 can you? You're so sad all the
 time.

Helena's face, tense with frustration, eases.

HELENA
 No. That's not true, Rose. I'm just
 not happy all the time.

ROSALIE
 But why not?

Beat.

Rosalie shifts in her slippers.

Helena tosses herself backward onto the bed and speaks to
 the ceiling.

HELENA
 Because when you grow up, you've
 gotta start thinking about other
 people's happiness, too.

ROSALIE

But you aren't a grown up, Helena.
You still watch the Lone Ranger
with me. And there are still all
those dolls in your bedroom.

Helena sits up, and finally really looks at her sister.

HELENA

Would you come with me somewhere?

ROSALIE

Come-- what? Now?

Helena extends a hand. Rosalie stares at it for a beat, then walks forward and takes it.

They slip silently through the hall, Helena in bare feet, Rosalie in her slippers. Helena has released Rosalie's hand and raises her dress from the floor as she walks.

They go faster, faster. Downstairs, Helena's train gliding down the steps like ethereal white water.

Out the front door, onto the porch.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Rosalie has been falling back, letting her sister take the lead.

Helena slips out the front door, leaving it wide open, and nearly runs onto the front lawn.

Rosalie steps onto the porch and watches.

Helena releases her dress and begins to spin, slowly, her arms stretched out, getting faster-- then collapsing gently to the ground.

ROSALIE

Helena?

Rosalie hurries to her side to see if she's all right.

Helena is lying flat on her back, looking completely at ease.

HELENA

In a few hours there will be white
chairs here, almost a hundred of
them, draped with blue ribbon.

As she speaks, she waves her hands through the air, indicating the ghosts of her chairs.

Rosalie hesitates, then lies down beside her.

Helena loops one arm underneath her belly, the other over her head in an elegant arc.

HELENA

What do you think of Petunia, or Jasmine?

ROSALIE

The flowers?

HELENA

(smiling)

The names.

Beat.

ROSALIE

Those are nice.

They lie silently, looking up at the stars. It's a clear night. Some branches from Rosalie's tree obscure part of their view.

Helena carefully rolls onto her side to face Rosalie.

HELENA

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Rosalie flips to face her, using her hands as a cushion against the ground.

ROSALIE

A firefighter, maybe. A pro ball player. Or an astronaut.

Helena's eyes are glassy with tears that have yet to fall.

HELENA

You don't want to be a mother?

Beat.

ROSALIE

A mother? I don't know. Maybe. I guess so.

Helena smiles.

HELENA
I guess so, too.

Beat.

ROSALIE
It was cool when I felt your baby
kick for the first time.

HELENA
She's kicking now.

ROSALIE
Really?

Helena guides Rosalie's hand to her stomach.

ROSALIE
Wow.

The teetering tears finally fall from Helena's eyes, just
one or two strays.

ROSALIE
So you *really* don't want to be a
movie star anymore? Or a singer or
a heartbreaker?

HELENA
All little girls start out wanting
to be famous heartbreakers,
Rosalie.

ROSALIE
Not me.

Helena laughs softly, wiping her eyes with her wrist.

HELENA
Yeah, I guess you're right. Not
you.

We leave them lying there, a couple feet apart, their heads
dipped toward one another's like flowers toward the sun.

Cowardice off the West Coast

They were docked at Viareggio. The family would be going into Florence that afternoon, but it was quiet by the time Luca returned to the yacht in the hazy light of a low-slung pink sun, two heaping bags of groceries in his arms. He was, as usual, disarmed by the sight of it, the glossy white luxury 110-footer, the resting giant. And he still got a little anxious (not so much anymore, just a little) about wobbling over the gangplank that stretched from dock to ship.

When he arrived on the front deck, Marcus was there folding laundry, which normally pissed off Rob, the First Mate. But maybe Rob had cut Marcus a break this morning. Everyone worked late last night, and it was a Saturday, and the family might sleep for hours still.

Marcus waved, a freshly bleached t-shirt in his fist (painfully bright against the chalky blue morning, snapping like a flag tossed in surrender) as Luca tottered onboard.

“A hand?” said Luca, squinting.

Marcus deserted the t-shirt and rose to gather one of the grocery bags.

“Thanks,” said Luca. “Careful, you’ve got the raw seafood.”

“Uck.” Marcus held the bag out in front of him as he marched it to the galley. He was wiry and weak-armed. His copper-colored curls were frizzed and matted to the left side of his head, and his left cheek was still faintly grooved with the crosshatches of his quilt - more things that would piss Rob off, Luca thought. But it was early.

Chef Benedikt was already waddling around the galley, a great comfortable cushiony presence among all the cold, veined marble. Benedict smiled at the boys, who were laden with the rich spoils of Italian seaside markets.

“Up already, Chef?” Luca asked him.

“I couldn’t wait to see what you picked up for our *misto di pesce*,” said Benedikt, tenderly pulling fish wrapped in heavy damp paper from Marcus’s bag, even as Marcus still cradled it. “And you got octopus, as well? And such handsome razor clams. Luca, my sweet beautiful child.” He hadn’t lived in Germany since he was a boy, but there was still a tang of exotic foreignness in Benedict’s warm, throaty voice that reminded Luca of his grandfather, even though Luca had only known his grandfather when he was very young.

“You and Marcus go sit and enjoy the morning awhile,” Benedikt said. “Take a coffee, I just made this one. No, take it. And you can be back in half an hour or so to help with the breakfast quiche. Go, go.”

Luca had been on board for two weeks.

Back on the deck, the two boys watched the port yawn and stretch to life as the sun rose. Marcus dug into the laundry and Luca took tiny sips of hearty Italian espresso. Luca thought of his creaking old Italian grandfather again, a gray-haired ghost in an apron, the image stuttering in his memory like battered VHS tape, the memory visceral, the coffee strong and dark on his tongue.

He thought, this port is too much like the ones at home, the yachts rubbing mighty shoulders while bobbing in the morning tide. It was too calm - too boring - for the loud, bright sprawl of fisherman’s wharf he had expected of this ancient and colorful country.

The deckhands, Elis and Anders, said gruff good-mornings and loped slowly fore and aft doing check-ups, trying to avoid the inevitability of scrubbing or polishing. They were strong, vaguely oafish Scandinavians, good humored sea urchins with plenty of war stories. “Deckhands are glorified janitors,” Marcus insisted.

Here was Rob, First Mate. He was dressed in his signature crisp sailor's whites. Sometimes he would add a pop of color with an exotic silk kerchief, or a preppy visor, but he was all white today, all frown.

"Boys, boys, boys," he said, coming up behind them and rubbing his palms together. "You know it's better not to do the folding out here, Marcus." Rob clapped his hands on Luca's shoulders. "Mr. and Mrs. were still drinking those gin and tonics, til, what, three in the morning, Luc? You've got a future in bartending, my friend, our guests were *lo*-ving them."

"They're not very hard," said Luca.

"I need to spend some time out of the laundry room or I feel like my head is going to explode," said Marcus.

"I know, buddy," said Rob, plopping himself down on a wicker chair and sucking air through his teeth. "But, you know, we've gotta keep the family happy, it's the one job we all share, *keep the family happy*, and Mrs. Rowan doesn't like seeing everyone's underwear flying out in the open, and it's better, cleaner, just to do it all nice and quick down below. Probably faster, too, eh? Then you can move on to other things, eh? Hey, Luc, doesn't Chef need you?" He stood up.

"He just wanted me to have a coffee first." Luca spun his finger around inside his empty European doll-sized coffee cup, which a week ago had been a novelty but was now like a trusty old friend.

Rob pointed a finger-gun down at him and made a clicking noise with his mouth. "Right. Right. Very true to the Italian lifestyle. I love it. Just don't take quite as long as the Italians do, huh? And remember to let Becky know when breakfast is ready." He teetered back and forth a

little, bare feet whining against the newly waxed deck. “Right. Big day, today. Everything’s gotta be tip-top.”

“What’s the hullabaloo?” said Marcus.

“Lenora’s birthday, she’s turning fifteen,” said Rob, his brow wrinkling. “The family’s taking her out for a big bash in Fi-ren-ze. You did get my invoices?”

“Oh yeah, yep,” said Marcus.

Rob left to talk with Elis and Anders while Marcus began wheezing into a pile of Mr. Rowan’s undershirts.

“Where’s your inhaler?” said Luca. Marcus seemed to deliberately forget his inhaler in their cabin, which meant he used it only when he was having an absolute fit and Luca had to run and get it for him. Now his breathing wasn’t awful, but his eyes were rolling back into his head.

“Jesus, Marcus, are you okay?” said Luca. He started heading for the cabin. Marcus waved him back into his seat. Luca sat down again.

“I never check those stupid fucking invoices,” said Marcus, swallowing the salty air. “I can’t believe I’ve forgotten her birthday. I am such a *fucking* idiot.”

“God, you weren’t going to do anything, were you?” said Luca.

“Let me think,” said Marcus, pressing his fingers into his cheeks. “Let me *think*.” Marcus thought he was in love with Lenora, their employer’s daughter.

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Luca heard about the yacht from his father, who was conducting an investigation into his ex-wife’s surgical habits.

“Is your mother injecting her lips with colander or whatever the hell it is?” Luca’s father asked. New York City crunched and crackled through the receiver.

“Collagen. I don’t know,” said Luca. He had just graduated from UC Santa Barbara and was spending his summer afternoon in his twin bed at home, drowning in a slush of young adult fantasy novels he’d checked out of the city library the day before. He was twenty-two and wanted to soak in some magic before his potential for wonder rotted out of him. He was halfway through *Prince Caspian* and thoroughly depressed.

“What do you mean, you don’t know,” said Luca’s father. “Is her face more fucked up than usual?”

“I don’t know,” said Luca. “Maybe.”

“I send your mother checks to feed and clothe you,” said his father. “Not to attract new lovers with needless, disgusting procedures. 73rd and Fifth.” The city quieted in his cab.

“I’ll tell her that,” said Luca. He tented *Prince Caspian* over his face and breathed in the musty centerfold.

His father seemed to remember that Luca had recently graduated. “Do you have a job?”

“I worked at a research lab for two weeks and quit,” said Luca. The book bobbed on his face when he spoke.

“It’s faster if you take the next left,” said his father.

“I’ll tell mom you called,” said Luca.

“Luca, Luca, wait, do you want a gig? A buddy’s buddy of mine at the firm is chartering a yacht to do Europe in a couple weeks. They’re bringing their personal chef but the guy needs an assistant. I said you might be interested, you’re probably not doing anything, and you’ve always wanted to see Italy. But I also said you’ve been terrified of the ocean ever since Antonio, so then again, maybe not.”

“How did you manage not to embarrass yourself anywhere in that conversation?” said Luca, almost embarrassed for him.

“You’re my kid. And who isn’t intrigued by a shark attack story? It’s my opener with clients. Here’s fine, here’s fine. What should I tell him, Luc?”

This story involved Luca, his best friend Antonio, and a great white off the coast of Surf Beach nearly five summers ago, a hot one.

Luca, like everyone in his glitzy neighborhood and elite k-12 private school, had surfed away his childhood. He was never great but he got pretty damn good. Antonio was great. He transferred into the elite k-12 school as a seventh grader on full scholarship – together, a potential death blow – but he was great at surfing and forging parent slips and Saturday Night Live impressions. He was beloved.

Luca and Antonio met in honors British Literature and started reading Austen together at the beach, not saying anything, just occasionally checking into each other’s chapter progress. Luca was a much faster reader, but only because Antonio had more patience and pleasure for words.

When they were seventeen, in very early autumn, it was just the two of them at Surf. Antonio, sleek in his orca wet suit, hugged his board lazily and dipped with the tired waves.

“I don’t feel like catching anything,” he said. “I’m exhausted. We should go down the beach and swim and watch the little kids goofing off.”

Luca knew Antonio was getting burnt out with seven hour surf days, and Antonio was the kind of person who could go weeks off his board and still qualify for regionals, still have plenty of things with which to occupy his surfless time in ways which fulfilled him. But Luca didn’t

want to leave high school without qualifying, and he needed to practice, and Antonio was the perfect motivator because surfing was so beautifully and infuriatingly effortless for him.

But Luca, too, could use a break. “Okay. Let me catch another in.”

Antonio smiled and turned his head with a slight shiver, someone walking over his grave, Luca thought. Then Antonio opened his mouth in surprise. Then he was being bucked and jerked like a sleek black buoy in stormy waters, his arms wagging, his mouth still in its surprised *o*, the fear not yet fully forming on his soft and handsome face.

Luca felt the broad, silky side of the shark graze against his knee. He pissed his wetsuit without ever looking down. The redness was oppressive, thick rivulets curling around him, food coloring in a large glass of tap water, oh, if only they had gone in a minute sooner, just a minute sooner.

Antonio was frothing and gurgling. He had managed to cling to his board even as it threatened to nose dive, to escape and leave him there to fend for himself. Luca thought, This is one of those times. One of those times when you’re supposed to demonstrate courage and character.

Luca was not brave. He still had to check behind the shower curtains when he got up to piss in the middle of the night. He now held his body tight and rigid in a perfect line down the length of his board, out of reach of the red, his suit beginning to steam in the sun.

“Luca,” said Antonio.

Almost blinded by his terror, his vision white and buzzing, Luca hoisted Antonio back onto his board. He wanted to tell Antonio to kick but somewhere in his mind he was aware that Antonio would not, could not kick. So Luca balled Antonio’s hands into one fist, grabbed the fist

with one hand, and Luca did the kicking for both of them. Each time his leg slapped against the surface of the water, he felt death curl up like a great black beast and rest heavier upon his heart.

Luca could not let go of the fist. It was getting cold, the fist, and slimy like the back of a sting ray. He was, suddenly, crouching on all fours on cooled, gummy gray sand, not letting go of the fist. Knees starting to ache, his body very present and alive, Luca began to appreciate that sometime between Antonio's *o* of surprise and now – here - they had made it back, safe. *We're safe, Antonio.* But when Luca twisted his head to look down, Antonio was lying there swarmed by buzzards of beachgoers who cried and screamed. His eyes were open but unseeing. His bottom lip was smeared with a cruelly comical beard of blood. *We're safe.* Antonio's waist was wrapped with a child's pink-and-purple beach towel soaked with a red so dark and unforgiving that it was nearly black.

Luca woke to his mother smoothing his hair on his forehead at St. Stephen's hospital. "*Amore mio, amore mio,*" she was saying, desperately, like she was begging. Her tears were causing small, widespread, disastrous craters in the makeup across the surgically smoothed planes of her face.

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After the yacht's breakfast spread, which included a particularly well-received quiche, the family relaxed on the deck before setting off for Florence. Mr. Rowan had a John Grisham novel and Mrs. Rowan had *Italian Vogue*. They lay next to each other in matching black swim suits, their oiled skin broiling with deep suntan.

The girls stuck to the other end of the deck. Ten-year-old Lydia, pasty and round, glossed with streaks of sunscreen, had plopped herself safely in the shade of the cabana and was reading a Japanese Manga book backwards. Luca brought her a glass of lemonade.

“Thanks, Luca,” she said. She was very much not pretty, while the rest of her family was almost strangely striking, and Luca hoped she maybe had another year or so not to notice.

Lydia’s older sister Lenora was stretched out on the built-in bench that ran the length of the front deck, her arms thrown over her head and one long leg cocked at the hip. Luca thought, she always aligns her body with drama, this girl. Her one-piece swim suit was carved out in spectacular diamonds that bared her sides, back and belly. She had a pinched pink rosebud mouth, like a doll’s, and full dark hair that hung to just below her smallish, firm breasts. She was beautiful in a way that made Luca uneasy, because she was still a child in her beauty, and he did not want to think about her the way that Marcus did.

Luca cycled in and out of the galley with drinks and prosciutto and calamari and cheesy toasted bits of bread. Becky, the hostess, was helping him, because it was Lenora’s birthday and therefore Becky’s Biggest and Most Important Day so Far.

“It’s all planned,” Becky said, shoveling three pieces of bruschetta onto a silver tray for every one she ate. Benedikt polished glasses and watched her, tucking in his lips.

“Paninis for lunch by Piazza della Signoria, nice and simple, I’m recommending the prosciutto, truffle oil and goat cheese,” said Becky, still chewing. “And every place they go all day, there will be girls I hired from the university dressed in *full-on* Renaissance clothes – not costumes, the *professional* stuff – and each one will say a riddle I wrote, and if Lenora answers correctly, the university girl will give her one of five little Tiffany boxes, each with a charm: the vespa, of course, and the ice skate, the convertible, the high heel and the cupcake. Either the cupcake or the purse, I can’t remember. So darling, right? So precious. Wish I got a Tiffany’s bracelet fully outfitted for a birthday of mine as a kid. Mrs. Rowan’s idea. But anyway, after lunch” - she started ticking the places off on her fingers - “it’s the Uffizi, the Salvatore

Ferragamo fashion museum – *thousands* of shoes – and then a little horse and carriage ride, to dinner at the Palagio. It will be magical. A magical fashion-and-Renaissance fifteenth birthday in Florence.”

“Panini,” said Luca.

Becky hoisted the tray of bruschetta onto her shoulder. “What?”

“It’s panini,” said Luca. “You called them ‘paninis.’ The plural of panino, one sandwich, is panini. Multiple sandwiches.”

Becky stared at him.

Graduated a few years ago from a state school in Florida, degree in hotel management, Marcus had told Luca about fiery-haired Becky with the craggy reddish skin and chunky ankles. She dreamed of owning her own luxury hotel in the Tuscan countryside. *Better get a handle on your Italian, then, Rebecca.*

“Go on outside now, my dumplings,” said Benedikt, lightly touching them on the smalls of their backs and pushing with the tips of his fat fingers.

“Landon, they’re going to spoil their appetites,” Mrs. Rowan was saying to her husband, tapping him on the crook of the elbow with her magazine.

Lydia had relocated to Lenora’s feet, now wearing a foam visor from Disneyland over her lank yellow hair, a napkin full of cheesy croutons on her lap. Lenora hadn’t moved. She accepted a small plate of bruschetta from Becky, who hesitated with Mrs. Rowan’s complaint, but Lenora reached up with great, sighing effort and took the plate from her hands.

“It’s Lenora’s birthday, for Christ’s sake,” said Mr. Rowan. “Lydia, though, you’ve had enough.”

Lydia’s face crumpled.

“Don’t listen to him, LydsByds,” said Lenora, lying down again. She had placed the plate of bruschetta on the spot of bench just above her head, and would reach up one long tanned arm to grab one and guide it to her mouth, right side up, so it would not spill.

“Remember what we talked about, Lydia,” called Mrs. Rowan. “About making good choices.” A crouton was stuck, hovering nervously, in Lydia’s fingers, caught in the space between her lap and her mouth. Becky stood by, shifting her bare feet in guilt for having supplied the contentious snacks.

Luca stayed put under the cabana, watching. Behind him, the screen door to the dining room slid open and Marcus came out, tablecloth linens draped across his shoulders like scarves. Luca winced at him.

“Rob’s talking to the Captain,” he said, waving his hand dismissively and staring at Lenora’s legs.

Marcus, according to Marcus, had arrived in Naples the previous fall, fresh from three expedited years at an elite New England liberal arts college, on a prestigious Fulbright scholarship to study Art History. He had, consequently, studied great art. “I would sit on the steps of the cathedrals and just watch everything, all the people. But then I got a little too involved in the coke scene there. So.”

The bodily memory of cocaine still pulsed in Marcus’s twitchy hands when he remained idle for too long, which was often. And maybe it was what made him whimper, sometimes, at night. Luca wondered what had gotten Marcus kicked out of his program - if it was the drugs themselves or their byproduct, in some act of desperation, perhaps, or reckless happiness.

“Since it is my birthday,” Lenora was saying to the clouds, balancing another piece of bruschetta above her slender nose, “I suggest you leave me and Lydia alone.”

Mrs. Rowan was already wrapping her bony shoulders in a beach shawl. “Let’s get dressed, Lan, Becky’s Uffizi reservation is for 2:30 and it’s already nearly noon.” She touched her husband on the head with her rolled-up *Vogue*. He swatted at it and lumbered up after her into their quarters. Becky went after them, a hot stripe of pink stretched across her wan cheeks.

Luca turned to Marcus but he was back inside the dining room, setting the table like he was supposed to. When Luca looked back at the girls Lenora was propped on her elbows, staring at him. Her lips were taut and her eyes were blank with withering indifference. Luca gave her a little fuck-you wave.

Her face broke into an alarmingly sudden smile. She had a small gap between her top front teeth. Laying her palm flat in front of her face, she crooked her finger at him in invitation.

He thought, no, this is not good.

Luca walked the length of the deck that separated them. It was obscenely large, this yacht.

“Go get your book, Lyds, you’re burning already,” Lenora said, touching her sister on the billowy fold of her shoulder. Lydia nodded at her and smiled with her orange-powdered lips.

“Luca,” said Lenora when they were alone.

Luca could feel Marcus pressed like a suckered sea creature to the sliding glass doors behind them.

Lenora stood up on her tip toes, arching her back and stretching. Her armpits were fuzzed with coarse black hair.

“Come for a swim with me,” she demanded, sashaying toward the ladder, shaking hips that were not yet child-bearing hips. Her bathing suit was riding up in the back. Luca tried to stare at the patch of dock to the left of her slightly pointed, heavily-pierced ear.

“I’m working,” he said.

“And I’m the boss,” she said, wheeling on her bare heel to face him again, dipping forward in a strange half-bow. “And the birthday girl. And I say so.”

Luca shook his head. *Have to help in the kitchen. Have to bullshit around for Rob. Have to be appropriate with girls who are newly fifteen.*

What he said was, “I’m afraid of the water.”

She raised both eyebrows. Forgoing the ladder she stepped onto the wraparound bench, then onto the rail, and pirouetted into the glassy green wake.

Out of a feeling of duty, in case she had hit her head, or something, Luca leaned over the bench to watch her surface.

“I don’t believe you,” she called. She looked even younger now, with slicked wet hair and green eyes glowing greener there in the green, green ocean.

Luca looked behind him. The deck was still empty. Anders and Elis and Becky, and maybe even Rob and the Captain, were probably grabbing sandwiches down in the galley. Marcus, going hungry, was half-hidden in the curtains, watching them. Luca waved at Marcus to go away and sat down on the railing.

“It’s true,” Luca said to the ungraceful figure flopping around below him. “When I was still in high school, my best friend got attacked by a shark right next to me, in Santa Barbara.”

Lenora spat some water out. “Isn’t that, like. Insanely rare?”

“Yes,” said Luca.

Lenora took a deep breath and dived. When she came up for air, spitting up salt water, she said, “Pretty stupid to come out on a month-long ocean yacht charter, then.”

“Yes,” said Luca.

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Antonio lived. Luca wasn't allowed to see him for a long time. Part of that came from the hospital, and surgeries, and the press. Most of it came from Luca's mother.

Luca lay in bed through the first week of his senior year, eating a lot of pasta and watching *Freaks and Geeks*. He had been at St. Stephen's for a single day, vomiting up sea water and suffering spasms in sedated states of half-dream. But the next morning he woke up feeling nothing, and went home.

His mother told their maid to take a vacation and she tended house herself that week. Luca turned his television on full volume, but he could still hear his mother's heels clacking on the hardwood floors around the Hope Ranch imitation-villa in which he had grown up.

"You have *post-traumatic stress*," his mother told him, bringing him snack-size chip bags and Easy Mac in her good china. "Seeing Antonio would *trigger* you."

Luca looked up at her from his blanket cocoon. There was a velvet scrunchie in her hair and she was wearing yoga pants and a gold lamé zip-up hoodie. He felt a prickle in his spine, a feeling like he had never seen her before.

"Did Papa respond?" he asked.

"*Cucciolo*," she said, "Your father does not run a charity."

Luca knew that Antonio's family would not accept any money, but Luca didn't know whether offering or not offering would make him feel worse.

When his mother was in the gym with her trainer, Luca snuck out and drove to the hospital. The media frenzy around the attack had already calmed, and no one recognized him. He walked right into the ICU.

Antonio was asleep, and so was his mother, Rosalia, in her chair. Luca touched her lightly on the arm and she woke frightened, her untended bangs wild in her eyes. She wrapped Luca up in her large warm arms and held him.

“Thank you,” she said. Luca nodded formally, like a politician.

Antonio woke when his mother left the room to get his sisters from elementary school. Luca sat in the chair she had vacated.

“You made it,” Antonio said.

He looked so happy to see him. His face was still gray but hints of color grooved the hollows of his cheeks. Luca wanted to run.

“You’re okay,” Luca said.

“Alive and kicking,” said Antonio. The parts of him underneath his blankets rustled. Luca tried not to look so surprised.

“The left just above the knee,” Antonio explained, “The right just below.”

“Oh,” said Luca.

Antonio readjusted in his bed, sitting up more comfortably. Luca began to notice things in the small, yellow-lit room: a short fat vase of peonies, hand drawn cards from Antonio’s little sisters, a stack of Die Hard DVDS, mountains of fun-sized Halloween candy. Someone had tacked up photographs along the windowsill where Antonio could easily see them. In one, Antonio was lifting Luca up by the waist and Luca’s fist, raised in the air, got swallowed by the glaring light of the sun. It was from two years ago, when the two of them won a local soccer tournament. It wasn’t for varsity or for school. They hadn’t been given any prizes or anything.

“Do you remember,” Antonio said, folding his hands in his lap and smiling toward the window, “Do you remember those fried zucchini flowers we used to make with your mom, with

the southern pesto dip? That your grandfather had taught her to make? One summer we made them nearly every day. And we got such a kick out of mixing beer batter, it felt so dangerous. And your mom said we could only ever use Italian beer. We haven't made those in way too long. That's the first thing I want to do when I get out of here. I'm eating all this hospital food so everyone has been bringing me, like, chocolates and chips. But all I can think of are those fried zucchini flowers. Do you think your mom would buy us the beer if we asked?"

Luca pulled his legs up to his chest and began to cry into his knees. He felt awful and guilty for crying. He felt guilt more than he had ever felt anything before in his life.

"I don't have the right," he said, tried to say, but he couldn't get it out. "I don't have the right."

"Bullshit you don't," said Antonio.

Antonio told him that his family was moving out to Wisconsin, just outside of Madison, where his aunt and uncle ran a large and modestly successful farm. He had a whole mess of cousins out there he had never met, who would show him and his sisters the ropes at their new schools.

"Go Badgers," he said.

"Have they ever seen shark bites in Madison, Wisconsin?" Luca asked, wiping some snot from his face with the back of his sleeve.

"We're thinking it'll be helpful," Antonio said, "to surround ourselves with fresh perspectives."

Luca hugged him. He realized that perhaps he never had before.

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Benedikt gave Luca the afternoon off.

They were in the galley, cleaning up and packaging leftovers while the family ran late for their shuttle into Florence and Becky buzzed around upstairs with them, on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

“Chef, I’ve barely done anything all day,” said Luca, scrubbing the galley’s marble countertops.

“The Rowans are out for both lunch and dinner,” said Benedikt. He was packaging leftovers. “Do you think I am going to be doing anything tonight? I’ll be in my cabin playing solitaire and skyping my wife.”

Luca tried to free Marcus. He found him down in the cramped laundry room, lying on the floor underneath Lenora’s red satin bed sheets. Luca kicked him awake.

“Fucking Rob won’t let me go,” Marcus said, eyes groggy, tugging the sheets around his face. “He wants me *to help Anders and Elis* get this whole stupid boat spick-and-span by the time the family gets home for birthday champagne. In, like, nine hours. It is not humanly possible to clean for that long. And I need to make my *own* preparations.”

“Marcus, you can’t,” said Luca. He had already found a small stash of Lenora’s extra small lacy thongs under Marcus’s pillow. (“She has, I’m not kidding you, literally *hundreds* of pairs,” Marcus had said in defense, completely unashamed. “Seriously. She won’t miss them.”)

Marcus stood up, pulling the sheets around his shoulders as if in need of warmth, even though sweat was pooling at his temples. “What did she say to you, when she was swimming? Why was she even talking to you? Did she mention me?”

“She’s a kid, Marcus,” said Luca.

“Did you know,” said Marcus, pulling Luca into the room and shutting the door behind him, “That she does origami? Yeah. And I don’t think her parents have ever noticed. Not like

they notice anything. Cranes and flowers. Even an elephant once. She leaves them in weird places, like on the bookshelf in the sitting room? Or on the lower shelves of the bar behind the cabana? I had no idea where they were coming from, but then last night I couldn't sleep and I came out onto the deck and saw her sitting there, making something. It must have been three or four in the morning. I should have said something then but I didn't. But, I'm thinking." He was whispering conspiratorially now.

"It is so disgustingly hot in here," said Luca.

"I'm thinking I can teach myself how to make one of them, and I can write her a note inside, and leave it somewhere only she would find it. And she would find it and know." There was an uncharacteristic gleefulness in the way he raised his eyebrows.

Luca didn't try to talk him out of it. He was too tired. He went with Becky in her car service into Florence. Their FIAT followed the Rowan's FIAT into the city. Becky talked about reservations and jewelry. Luca looked out the window and thought about his grandfather.

He was all there, somehow, more seeable than he had ever been. Luca could quite easily picture the old man now, squinting to hold up his glasses on his wrinkled, bulbous nose, wandering very slowly around these loping hillside Italian villages.

"Northerners don't know how to cook," he had once said to Luca in Italian, when Luca was little and still understood it with ease, before the language started to crumble in his mind and get replaced by other things. This memory of his grandfather was available to him now, as if he had passed some sort of a test. It was the only time they had met, some visit to Hope Ranch that his grandfather refused to ever make again, because he was old and feared dying far from home.

"The northern men, at least," his grandfather had continued. They were in the kitchen. Little Luca plucked basil leaves. "They go right from their mothers to their wives. They can

barely boil pasta. But we, in the south, in particular we who had to spend time away from our families and send money home, we learned the ways of the kitchen and we are proud of it. I used to catch fish for cooking as a boy, with just my stick and line.”

After his visit, Luca dreamed often of Italy. Luca’s mother, though, refused to entertain ideas of vacations or summer homes, even when Luca’s father was still there with them in California. She had left her small hometown on the bay of Naples when she was nineteen and sometime after she left, her mother died there, and then her father too. Luca suspected that she did not want to go back because she thought the whole country was haunted.

Luca had not dreamed of anything but sharks and shipwrecks in a long time.

When they were dropped off just outside the city center, he let Becky and the family get a head start (meet back here at 9, said Becky, sternly, motherly), and then he got himself lost. Florence was like a toy city, a toy Renaissance city, not like the cosmopolitan metropolis of New York or the green-and-white glam of Santa Barbara. Florence, all over, was in the color palette of the Tuscan earth, dusty reds and creams. The streets were narrow and cobblestoned. The buildings were very short and very old. Luca walked through the Piazza del Duomo, where tourists crowded in the long stretches of luxurious shade cast by the imposing cathedral. He walked through the Piazza della Signoria, past the replica of Michelangelo’s David. He almost stopped at a number of old famous cafes for a coffee and cannoli - they looked so inviting, decked out in lush golds, spraying cooling mists over the dozens of crowded round tables - but, dangerously, thoughtlessly, he hadn’t brought any money with him. He passed the Uffizi Gallery; outside were actors dressed like da Vincis and Dantes, the street artists with their beautiful watercolors.

Luca made it to the river. It was hot out, and still, an almost white sun tucked into the bottom of the overturned bowl of the Tuscan sky. Just being by the water made him feel cooler and calmer. He hadn't fully realized his sweat or his building unease. He stared into the murk of the Arno, a shiny black stripe that divided the two sides of Florence. It was not yet his grandfather's sea, but it was the closest he had yet come.

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Luca never surfed again, but he was stuck loving the ocean. It almost made him sick. Sometimes he got scared in occasional all-body bursts, even years later, standing twenty feet away from the shoreline on his childhood beaches. But he still loved the smells and sounds. Just standing there in the sand, in the sun. He decided to major in marine biology, hoping that one day all the fear would have slipped right out of him and only the love would be left.

He went to a university that, in some ways, was very much like his high school. Almost everyone was from California and almost everyone surfed or swam. At least that's what it felt like to him. He got by. He could still hang out at beach bonfires and things. But he could never go back in, not even up to his ankles. His friends made fun of him for sticking to the coast. He wondered if he was a masochist. He wondered if he should have followed Antonio and his family into the cold and sealess heartland. Mostly he got very angry at himself for only feeling comfortable in what has always been familiar even though he was starting to hate the familiar.

He saw the movie *Soul Surfer* because everyone who knew about the attack told him about *Soul Surfer*, and he hated sweet brave Bethany Hamilton for getting back on her board shark-maimed and one-armed, for not being weak enough to have experienced true emotional trauma, for still being whole and happy in the eyes of Jesus. He hated her for having Jesus and therefore he hated his parents for never having given him something like that, anything, to feel so

blithely sure of. He tried girls but they only made things worse. He tried not to seem like a wreck when he wrote to Antonio. He still woke at night, in his dorm room, his knees aching, a phantom shark pressed against his leg.

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Luca bought Marcus a box of chocolates shaped like the Duomo cathedral. He had found a 10-euro note by the old palazzo and didn't know what else to get after a cup of coffee in the Piazza della Repubblica, where he sat for a long time, watching children on the merry-go-round. After his car ride return to the dock with an overjoyed Becky ("the best birthday party in the history of Europe, Luca, those Renaissance girls-"), he found Marcus lying on the stretch of wraparound bench where Lenora had lain that morning. He was talking to Rob, who was leaning over him and bouncing slightly on the balls of his feet.

"The family's back now, hey hey, Marcus," said Rob. "Off to your cabin now, yeah?"

"I brought you these," said Luca, handing Marcus the Duomo.

"Hey Luc, you're home," said Rob. "Off to your cabin now, eh boys?"

Marcus ate the chocolates as the two of them walked to bed. "You didn't see anything I could have given her? As a gift?"

"I don't know what a fifteen-year-old girl wants," said Luca. "And I don't think you do, either."

As they headed below they could hear the Rowans behind them on the front deck. Mr. Rowan sounded smoothly drunk and pleasant. "Best pumpkin ravioli I've ever had. Beautiful day for my beautiful girl."

He started singing. "*Be my, be my, be my pretty baby...*"

"Landon, you'll wake the whole boat," Mrs. Rowan complained.

Marcus lingered at the top of the staff stairs, waiting to hear Lenora's voice.

"Come on, Marcus," said Luca.

"I just hope she had a good day," he said on the way to their cabin, through the chocolates in his mouth. "Her parents don't understand her. I just hope her day was good."

The two of them could have held hands in their beds if they wanted to, they were so close.

"Remember Venice?" said Marcus, sleepily, under his quilt.

Luca was turned towards him in the dark. He remembered Venice. It was the first of Italy he'd seen after flying over from New York, he and his new boss Benedikt in coach, where he wondered about his father's buddy's buddy somewhere up in first class, but more so he worried about shipwrecks. His second day on board, he left to spend a free afternoon in the city. It was cloudy and humid and clogged with crowds, but the deeper into Venice the emptier and quieter the canals became. Luca remembered sitting cross-legged on a tiny bridge over a still waterway, sandwiched between two sea-shell colored houses, alone, almost happy.

"The glass figurines?" Marcus was saying. "The masks? All the colors." His words got garbled in one large, indulgent snore and then he was asleep. Soon, too, was Luca.

But Luca woke abruptly, jerked from a nasty dream. For a difficult minute he was convinced that he was in his bedroom at Hope Ranch, and he got alarmed when his sight adjusted and the lump of Marcus was there in front of him. Calming from the riot of his dream, he re-remembered his life as he lived it now.

There were no windows in their cabins, no clocks. They were woken every day by Rob's insistent knocking on their door. Luca could only know now that morning had not yet come.

He got up, planning to go to the bathroom, but he wound up climbing the staff stairs up to the fringes of the front deck, the only place besides the galley and the cabin where he was permitted to go. Luca had to hear the soft rush of the waves, blackened by the still, full night, to understand that they were on the move, heading off along the coast toward Livorno. His heart lurched feebly and he put his hand to his neck, breathing in the coolly whisking salt air as he tried tricking himself into believing he was safe.

A distraction presented itself in the form of a limp paper crane huddled on the second shelf of the bar behind the pilot-lit cabana. He opened it messily at the throat. There was Marcus's neurotically hunched, erratic scrawl. "*My Lenora--*"

Luca breathed deeply again, once, and crushed the crane in his fist.

Out of the glittering sunlight of heavy Italian summer, this small spread of the grand yacht looked decidedly less grand. As Luca stood at the edge of the deck, there was only a smattering of wicker lounge chairs and tiny round tables separating him from the calmly heaving ocean beyond the bow. Once, on this deck, Luca had thought of decadence. He took a few steps forward and dipped his head back to look toward the tiered upper levels of the boat, layered like a wedding cake, where he had never been. There were the private quarters and sitting rooms, Jacuzzis and sun decks, billiards, a library, buried treasure – corners and caves of nautical majesty that were probably beyond his imagination. Because he had grown up, comfortably and irritably, in what he had thought was unmatched splendor, this was comforting to him.

He was no longer so aware of his heartbeat. He took a couple more steps and stuck out his arms and spun slowly in the middle of the deck, which was grayed by the unhurried light of a few tired stars. The night was balmy and smelled faintly of the sea. Luca realized he hadn't noticed the smell until he had come back, an indeterminate number of hours ago, from his second

Italian city. Recalling the café in Florence - still spinning - he thought, I am becoming reliant upon the coffee here. He was already looking forward to his cup in the morning, before chopping fat tomatoes still fresh from his trip to the market the day before, when he had stumbled through Italian words that were once as simple and sustaining to him as the foods he had struggled to name.

He would see Rome, *la citta antica*, the streets of white marble. Soon after, his contract winding onward, the yacht would come to nest in the bay of Naples, and he would steal some free afternoon to see where his mother and his grandfather came from, and the grandmother he had never known. Maybe he could at last let himself drift beyond the unmarked borders of their tiny finishing village, to let himself tip off the hot rocky coastline. More than getting back on his surf board, he wanted to be able to get back under the surface, to the blue-gray world that could hold him in sweetly thoughtless oblivion, in quiet sun-dappled rapture. He wanted to push his body through waters both familiar and unfamiliar, to toss and turn and fly and kick, and to be thrilled by it, like when he was a kid waking with the promise of an empty summer Saturday.

Luca was just quite feeling lucky when he noticed a pile of blankets stir in one of the wicker lounge chairs. He stood very still.

Lenora's thick dark hair spilled out into the night as she sat up, wrapping the blankets more tightly around herself. She was looking away from him and he was caught behind her, exposed in the openness of the deck's mouth, in the feeble orange of the cabana pilot lights.

He thought about being sixteen or seventeen, home in Santa Barbara, sometime very soon after he'd started having sex and there was a new, exciting undertone to all the mundane motions of his life, something to look forward to on dry land. He thought of his second girlfriend, Clare Thompson, a pretty blond who bit her nails in bed and took him to the drive-through downtown

on the weekends because she liked the idea of a more vintage sort of romance. They had been holed up in his room, and the sound of his mother's heels on the stairs failed to break through their strangled murmurs until it was nearly too late. Luca flung himself from bed as his mother called out to him and prepared to charge through his door, and he stood there, naked, caught between Clare hiding in the bed sheets and his mother on the verge of her grisly discovery.

Antonio must have gotten in with his own key, probably planning to camp out in the playroom til Luca and Clare decided to emerge from their cave. "Ms. Rodriguez!" he called out from the depths of the house. He'd thought of something to draw her away from the reversed primal scene, the small catastrophe. Clare Thompson collapsed in giggles at Luca's panic when the danger was no longer imminent. His mother safely hidden away in the house with Antonio's charms, he still felt caught, ugly and awkward at the foot of his bed. He didn't remember what had happened to Clare but he could guess, now, that a relationship sutured by the fragile bonds of young, overenthusiastic, profoundly bad sex could not have withstood the memory of that kind of humiliation for long.

Here he was now, years later, caught again.

Lenora stood, her blankets unpeeling like a bulky second skin, completely unaware of him just there behind her. She was wearing a sheer nightgown. Even in the dark Luca could see straight through to her pearly white lingerie, a delicate scalloped garter and lace stockings. Her stilettos were too big for her; probably her mother's. She took delicate, stork-like steps toward the bow.

Luca then noticed the tiny silver jewels stretching between them like a trail of bread crumbs. A little purse, a vespa. A heart. They were the Tiffany's charms Lenora had been handed throughout her birthday, by Becky's university girls in their Renaissance costumes in Florence.

When he looked up from where they glinted cheerily on the deck, Lenora's heels were already deserted on her wraparound bench, and she was stepping off the ship's railing, no spring or pirouette, just a step.

How could she have wanted to be discovered that way? He went after her, scrambling like a fat insect over the railing with a will for his hands not to seize. How could she have wanted to be discovered washed up ashore like a slimed whale carcass, her little body bleached and bloated with seawater, bulging out over the popped garter, swelling in the stockings, her blood drained and condemning her with an alien, vessel-popped blue-burst whiteness, plump horrible lips, breasts flopping and obscene. He might have gone after her out of pure, clean indignation. *What are you doing? Don't do that. Of course you don't want to do that.*

He let go of the railing and plopped painlessly into the waiting wake. He had braced himself for an awful iciness but even after sundown the water was pleasant and warm. Eyes squeezed shut, he held himself under for a moment, fists pressed to his ears, the roar of the yacht drowning out the sound of his racketing heart.

He opened his eyes with a delirious certainty that his life was ending. He had chucked himself into the pits of this great black yawning cavity. But then he saw, somehow, a flicker of a white-stockinged foot, tightly curled in resolution or in agony, and he reached for it, he almost cried out at the glorious physicality, the assured *realness* of it. His hand wrapped around the toes and he became instantly reaware of his own struggling body, as if he were waking from a dream that had been exceedingly reluctant to release him.

Lenora's foot lashed out, connecting with Luca's nose. He felt his bones break with sharp, acute, delicious pain. Pressure gushed forth from his numbing face in a flood of red he

could not see. His untrained lungs were beginning to tighten in wary protest. The noise of the ship roared on. They could be killed if they stayed here.

Luca heaved himself through the water, thrashing in his pajama bottoms and his terrible, heavy nightshirt, blindly yanking Lenora away with him. His head broke the surface for only a rough, spluttering moment, because Lenora was fighting his hands on her elbow and her hip. She was strong and she was determined; he had to give her credit, didn't he?

But they were both getting tired.

He was preparing to let her go. He was so tired. But he had jumped and if he came back without her they'd probably think he'd killed her. He put his hand to his mangled nose under the water, his lungs like two tight fists in his chest.

He opened his complaining eyes again, just in cautious slits. Lenora was fragmented wisps of white, coiling and recoiling, moving like a disturbed wraith through the densely pitch-green water, beautiful in a way that was haunting and dreadful, and she was still alive. Luca made one last lunge through the space which separated them, reaching his arms around her waist as if in loving embrace. She went limp in his arms.

They surfaced. The air sliced through the exposed mess of flesh on Luca's face and he screamed at the shock of the pain. The receding yacht bounced, enormous, in his flickering vision, and he kept screaming, for the Captain or Rob or Marcus or Becky or Anders or Elis or Benedikt or the Rowans, the Rowans who were ballooning with Tuscan wine and safely asleep in their bed.

Luca flipped Lenora to face him. Her head lolled like a rag doll's, her neck in his cupped hands twitching and pulsing; she took a strangled breath. Luca wanted to kiss her. He wanted to

cry. They had already been through so much together. Those were the logical next steps, that made sense, didn't it?

Used to the dark at last, he could see her clearly, the coils of curls pasted to her neck, her eyes. She was scared. She reminded Luca of his own predictable fear, which settled intimately into the pit of his stomach as if it had never left him.

The yacht continued to lumber grandly on, its sights set on Livorno, oblivious to the two pieces of living cargo it had misplaced. Luca continued to call after it, feeling his hot blood dribble over his lips and into the churning black water over which he was still breathing.

He couldn't have watched her drop into the ocean like a coin into a wishing well and gone simply, in good conscience, back to bed, and woken up to hopeful Marcus, whose love letter would be missing and its intended recipient along with it. Luca would have had to look for her, in the rooms of the yacht that were once forbidden to him, he and the crew and the family searching in increasingly absurd, unlikely places, hoping to find a human body where a human body could not possibly be, first under piles of bedspreads but then behind bookshelves, in cabinets under sinks. He would have been alone for hours with the sour, rotting truth, until someone pragmatic and sensible looked to the open water where she was, in reality, now dying, and he along with her.

He had let go of Lenora without realizing and found her to be keeping afloat on her own beside him, bobbing on her back. He wiggled out of his pajama bottoms and hated himself for it as he imagined them snaking to the ocean floor, alerting whatever was down there to the flash of bare legs above, ripe for the picking.

Luca thought about his classes at university, when his professors told him the ocean was the last great frontier, and he was excited to be a part of discovering the strange and wonderful

things that lived in the depths and the darkness, but for all these years he couldn't get past the shoreline shell debris.

Off the yacht's port shoulder, a half-dozen lights were strewn across the stretch of land a few miles away. In his prime perhaps he could have swum it.

Where were the nighttime fishing boats, coming in with their haul to fill the markets?

When Luca was a small child he would imagine the hulking figure of a shark looming beneath him even in his unexciting swimming pool.

"Look," said Lenora, only one eye poking out over the surface, water bubbling from her mouth as she spoke. "Look."

Luca looked. At first he thought it was a trick of the light, which was steadily and assuredly strengthening as the faded stars faded further still, but no, she was right, the great yacht hundreds of feet in front of them was turning, turning, as if to tell Luca that it was not quite so oblivious as he had been led to believe.

Maybe it was Lydia, wandering in search of her sister across the deck, and one of the Tiffany charms tore into her flabby bare foot. Maybe it was Marcus, sneaking out to check the status of his crane, finding only the shell of blankets and a pair of high heeled shoes. Whoever it was had set out to save them, had roused the boat, had pointed out the small wriggling figures in need of saving far away in the dark.

We're safe, Antonio.

Luca hoped, desperately, that the trip would not be cut short after their rescue. He hoped that they would still head south.

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They were tossed floatation devices and bobbed for awhile, until Elis and Anders reached them on the dinghy. The deck was a mutiny of sound. Luca and Lenora stayed silent. He felt her hand bump into his, but she pulled away too quickly for him to know if she had meant it to be there.

“Christ Almighty,” said Elis, shining a flashlight into Luca’s face.

Mercifully, they were wrapped in huge down comforters as soon as they flopped into the dinghy, so no one but the Scandinavians saw Lenora’s lingerie or Luca’s bare legs. On the short ride back to the yacht, Anders kept elbowing Luca in the ribs, but Luca kept to himself. He liked the dinghy’s jerky glide. He stuck his hand out over the water and let the pads of his fingers trail across the surface. He took deep breaths. Then they clambered aboard.

“What the fuck happened,” said Mr. Rowan, pacing around the deck in a terrycloth bath robe, light and thin for summer. “Someone please tell me what the fuck is going on.”

Mrs. Rowan clung, crying, to Lenora, who was completely obscured within the cocoon of her comforter. Marcus stood by Lenora’s bench spot, holding her heels and looking at Luca. Becky crouched by the cabana, her arms wrapped around Lydia’s shoulders. Lydia wore bunny slippers.

Mr. Rowan yanked Lenora from her mother’s arms and tried to unwrap her. She let out her head and arms but kept the comforter clamped under her armpits.

“Are you hurt?” said Mr. Rowan. He was shaking her.

“Lan,” Mrs. Rowan screamed. “Landon, stop. Lan.”

Mr. Rowan turned to Luca, who had sat down on the deck.

Lenora began to speak. “I got up for a drink of water. And I saw Luca outside through the dining room’s sliding glass doors.” She was talking directly to Luca, her voice raw but

authoritative. “He was out on the front deck, walking around. He headed toward the railing by the bow. I went out there and called out to him, to ask him what he was doing out there. But he didn’t hear me and I figured he was sleepwalking.”

Luca matched her gaze. He made it into a game for himself, trying to make his face as expressionless and commanding as hers was.

“It was all so fast. I figured he was sleepwalking and I thought he could be in danger so I ran out there to wake him up. But I must have startled him. He was dreaming, it wasn’t his fault. He felt me grabbing him and totally freaked. He must have been scared, in his dream. He grabbed me back, my wrist, to try and get me off him, and we both just tumbled in.”

No one said anything. Rob, Elis and Anders, standing over the dinghy as if intending to pack it up, but not moving. Becky and Lydia by the cabana. Marcus, still at the bench, but the heels set down at his feet now, and he was looking at Lenora. The Captain, hidden up in the control room above all of them and righting their course. Mrs. Rowan standing alone and hugging herself. Mr. Rowan pacing again, his robe hanging open as he scratched his stubbly chin.

“Well,” said Mr. Rowan finally. “Girl’s a hero.”

Benedikt arrived on the scene in flannel pajamas with a cup of double espresso.

“*Salute*, Luca,” Benedikt said, passing the espresso down to Luca on the deck with his large and steady hands. “To your health.”

“*Salute*, Benedikt.”

There was arguing.

“We can’t lock the boys into their rooms. It’s a health risk.”

“It’s a health risk for my daughter to have to save this clown again. Lock their door at night.”

“Benedikt, could you make me a grilled cheese?”

“Of course, my dumpling. Here, come.”

“Lydia, you’re not supposed to eat after dinnertime. Remember?”

“It’s more like before breakfast time by now.”

“I’ll get breakfast started for everyone, Mrs. Rowan.”

“Let me draw you a nice hot bath, Mrs. Rowan.”

“We can see about installing a safety gate in the staff hall.”

“I don’t want anyone having to save this clown again.”

“Let’s check out our options.”

At daybreak, a humid pink dawn, it was just Luca and Lenora and Marcus left on the front deck.

Lenora hiked up her comforter around her face. She crossed the deck and sat down next to Luca, who was considering lying down right there on the floorboards and falling asleep.

Marcus walked over to Lenora and crouched down in front of her. Luca was barely awake and therefore powerless. He allowed the exchange to go forth.

Marcus reached into the pocket of his robe and held out his hand. Lenora wriggled an arm out of her comforter and extended her open palm, into which Marcus dropped all her Tiffany charms, one by one.

Lenora looked at them, up at Marcus, back to the charms, back up at Marcus.

“Thank you,” she said.

Marcus smiled. He stood up, patted Luca once on the arm, and headed for the staff stairs. Luca wondered what questions he'd be facing when he got back to their cabin. He was almost looking forward to them.

He sipped his coffee.

"Your friend really got bitten by that shark in California?" said Lenora. She shifted so that she was sitting directly in front of him.

"Yes," said Luca. He was so tightly tucked into his comforter that he couldn't reach the floorboards to set down his cup, so he just let it go and watched it roll down his mountainous lumps of down and dart across the deck. The heat of the day was settling in, but he was too cozy to strip the comforter quite yet.

"I'm so sorry," said Lenora. Two fat tears rolled down her little nose. "I'm so sorry. What an awful way to die."

"Don't be sorry," said Luca. "He's alive. He lived."

Parade

INT. BOSTON BALLET STUDIO - DAY

OVERHEAD SHOT: a studio full of teenage girls who dance in stunning lines of grand jetés diagonally across the clean white space.

We descend with a TRACKING SHOT through the rows of dancers, among their flying legs and arms. This is a grueling pre-professional class, and the girls are assembly lines of near-mechanical precision.

We DOLLY IN on our protagonist, RUPA: she is South Asian, 16, a remarkable dancer, muscular and curvy, determined and masterful. She stands out starkly in a room otherwise filled with fair ballerinas decked out in pink.

CLOSE SHOTS on Rupa's face reveal her dedication and exertion: small beads of sweat above her ear; pressed lips; intense dark eyes that are closed more often than they are open.

DION, 15, another sore thumb, dances beside her: African-American, very thin, less technically exact, but fierce.

NATALIA, the severe ballet mistress, shouts instructions and criticisms from the front of the room.

Despite her obvious talent, Rupa gets caught in the crossfire. Natalia's voice carries all the way across the studio--

NATALIA
(Russian accent)
Everyone watch out for the
elephant's stomps shaking the
floor. Light landings, Rupa, light
feet, smooth, *ballon*--

She places her hands on her own hips and gyrates.

NATALIA
Extra light feet to hide the extra
thick hips, hmm?

Rupa lands an otherwise magnificent grand jeté heavily, furiously.

INT. STUDIO HALLWAY - EVENING

Rupa is staring at the gold mine of food encased in the hallway vending machine.

Dion sits messily on the floor beside SAM: 15, a physically quintessential ballerina, temperamental, grungy, and obsessive.

Sam's legs are at 180 degrees, one propped on a chair, the other on the floor with an ice pack on the ankle. She is on her stomach, propped elbows, head in her hands.

Dion changes into leggings, a sweatshirt.

DION
Natalia's just bitter.

SAM
Natalia's just a bitch.

Rupa lets her forehead fall against the glass of the vending machine.

RUPA
The audition's in three days--

DION
(to Sam)
To go from a soloist in San Francisco to an instructor at a nobody studio in Boston--

RUPA
--but I'm so hungry.

SAM
She's *jealous*. Who gives a shit about having been a soloist in San Francisco-- she knows Rupa's gonna be

(British accent)
a principal dancer at the Royal.

DION
I would probably give a shit about being a soloist in San Francisco. I would probably give a lot of shits.

RUPA
I'd eat my leg if I didn't have to dance on it.

Dion gets up, gently pushes Rupa aside, and buys two energy bars.

DION

Those gorgeous hips of yours need energy.

Dion gently touches Rupa's waist, bites off half her bar in one go, hands the other half to Rupa.

SAM

Why don't you ever say I have gorgeous hips?

Sam tucks her legs underneath her and stretches back to grab her ankles, baring her bony hipbones. Dion takes advantage, poking her in the exposed stomach. Sam's body buckles like a roly-polly's.

They bicker and laugh as they pack.

Rupa stares at the energy bar, unconvinced. She sighs, takes a bite, and closes her eyes, momentarily in heaven.

INT. RUPA'S ROOM - DAWN

Rupa wakes. She lies in bed for a few beats.

Morning exercises:

She rubs her knees to warm them.

She sticks her legs out of bed, extends, contracts.

Presses on a ball contraption with her toes to work on her arch.

In pajama shorts and a sports bra, she stands before her full length mirror. Sleepily does a few prances.

She uses a makeshift barre built into her dresser. In first, plié and relevé, then both in second. It's instinctual.

Grand battements to the front, the side, the back, with near-flawless extension.

She is breathtakingly graceful; we can see she is made of muscle.

She begins soutes. Her room has barely anything besides a bed and dresser for this reason. One jump, another--

RUPA'S MOTHER (sarcastic, hardworking, sweet) opens her door.

RUPA'S MOTHER
(British accent)
Do you ever sleep?

Rupa allows herself to fall backward onto her bed, defeated.

RUPA
You aren't supposed to be able to
hear me. I'm supposed to have
ballon--
(Russian accent)
--smoothness, Rupa, lightness.

She puts a pillow over her face-- serious ballerina has a typical teenage moment.

RUPA
(continuing, into pillow)
I'm a big noisy elephant.

Rupa's mother sits down on Rupa's bed and gently tugs the pillow from her face.

RUPA'S MOTHER
I am sure the other girls are
comparatively much more elephantine
and you will rise like a beautiful
balloon above the whole parade.

RUPA
Not balloon, Ma. *Ballon*.

Rupa stands, throws a shirt on.

RUPA
...parade?

RUPA'S MOTHER
It's the term for a group of
elephants. I'm quite pleased,
balloons above the parade, turned
into a clever metaphor, didn't it?

RUPA
Happy for you.

INT. RUPA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Rupa's making coffee. Her mother is at the kitchen table, wearing doctor's scrubs, sewing a fabulous tutu.

Rupa drapes her arms over her mother's shoulders from behind, hugs her.

RUPA
It's beautiful.

RUPA'S MOTHER
Maybe not worth two thousand dollars like the ones at the dance stores. Two thousa--do they sew precious gems onto the tulle? Doesn't that weigh the girls down?

RUPA
You're hilarious.

Rupa kisses her mother on the cheek before pulling away.

RUPA
It's better than the ones at the stores. It's priceless.

RUPA'S MOTHER
Now you're being hilarious.

RUPA
I love it. Thank you, Ma. I mean it.

Rupa backs up her backpack (books, pens) and her ballet bag (ribbon, duct tape, thread, extra clothes). Her two worlds.

RUPA'S MOTHER
You ate?

RUPA
Yes, Ma.

RUPA'S MOTHER
(carefully)
The audition's on Saturday?

Rupa slings on her bags, ready to go.

RUPA
Just like it's always been.

Rupa's mother puts down her needle and thread.

RUPA'S MOTHER

I tease you too much, my darling.
You know I really do think you're
the balloon above the parade.

RUPA

(smiling)

You're biased.

Rupa's mother looks at her watch.

RUPA'S MOTHER

You're late.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Dion and Sam are by the wall of a Boston public school gym, practicing their extensions. The school is more diverse than their studio, but still, the girls stand out. Other teenagers are playing basketball. It is a loud mess of LAUGHS, JEERS and SLAMMING FEET.

Rupa argues with the gym teacher.

COACH

(Southie accent)

I can't make exceptions for you
girls. I make exceptions for you I
gotta make exceptions for
everybody.

RUPA

Coach, I told you. We can't risk
injury. We're all in a lot of pain.
My tendinitis. Sam's ankle's messed
up. We're auditioning on Saturday
for a summer program in New York
that will *launch our careers*.

COACH

(dubious)

Careers? You're sixteen.

A tall, bratty jock, CALEB, inserts himself from afar.

CALEB

Listen to 'em, coach! If they get a
ball to their pretty little faces
the ballerinas are worthless.

SAM
Hey, Caleb!

Caleb turns to Sam on the sidelines.

SAM
I guess we'd all be in the same
boat, then, because if you got a
ball to *your* puny little balls,
you'd be worthless too-- oh, wait,
you're second string on the
lacrosse team, so you're already
worthless.

REVERSE SHOT of disgruntled Caleb, preparing a snotty
retort. He hesitates, though, when Sam begins to head his
way.

Rupa watches as Sam marches the few yards which had
separated her from Caleb, then plants herself in front of
him.

He takes a step back.

The other kids are watching now.

Sam sticks her leg up in the air, as high as it can go, so
it almost reaches Caleb's face. She points her toes at his
nose accusingly.

SAM
Do you realize how much fucking
stronger than you we are, Caleb?
(moving her foot from side to
side to punctuate the words)
We could *kill* you.

REACTION SHOT of the coach looking affronted, Rupa next to
him with her hand visored to her forehead like *Really,
Sam?*-- but there's a smile threatening to spread across her
face.

INT. OUTSIDE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - END OF SCHOOL DAY

Rupa and Dion wait outside the principal's office.

They get up when Sam comes out, wearing a ratty denim
t-shirt, a beanie and a do-not-say-a-word scowl.

They head for home.

INT. RUPA'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Rupa and Dion are dyeing "flesh-tone" pink leotards brown in Rupa's sink.

Sam lies on the tiles, her legs in the air to drain the lactic acid from her muscles. They're all in post-ballet clothes.

SAM

Pisses me off when we aren't treated with respect. When we're treated like girls.

DION

We are girls, Sammy.

RUPA

She means like we're fragile. Porcelain dolls.

Rupa dunks her leotard, de-pinking it entirely.

SAM

Exactly. When in reality there's nothing more fucking hardcore than ballet. We're bleeding and breaking but we go out there and make it look easy. Hell, we make it look fucking lovely. Doesn't anyone get that--

She fumbles around and pulls a ballet school application from her side. A picture of MATTEO BELLAGNINI, a handsome and intimidating head recruiter for the American School of Ballet, is emblazoned across the page.

SAM

(snooty high-class voice)
--according to head recruiter Matteo Bellagnini, summer program applicants to the American School of Ballet in New York City must enjoy excellent health and have an anatomical structure suited to the demands of classical dance: legs that easily adopt the turned-out position, a high instep, and a well-proportioned, flexible, coordinated body.

RUPA
'Anatomical structure'. It's like
we're machines.

Rupa shakes out a leotard with annoyance.

SAM
If only. Then I could just go to
the robot ballet shop and buy a
higher instep.

DION
Why do we do this, again?

Rupa hangs up her leotard to dry, getting dreamy.

RUPA
Because ballet's more beautiful
than anything else in the world.

SAM
Oh my God, you are so full of shit.

Rupa throws a wet wash cloth at her.

SAM
(peeling the washcloth off her
chest)
I'd tackle you right now but my
ankle will blow up if I stand on
it, probably.

RUPA
If I'm full of shit, Sammy, all of
us are.

INT. HALLWAY TO POOL IN DION'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dion and Rupa walk together toward the empty pool.

RUPA
What if eventually someone
discovers I don't actually live
here?

DION
Just insist you're with me, a
live-in ballet trainer. Show them a
jump or two. No one will blink.

Beat.

DION
 (continuing)
 So, two weeks til the studio show.
 Your big debut.

Rupa turns to her.

RUPA
 You should've gotten the lead,
 Didi.

DION
 A black White Swan? I'll believe it
 when I see it.

She smiles, a little sadly.

DION
 You deserved it. Swan Lake's famous
 32 fouettés. I can't wait. You're
 gonna kill it.

At the end of the hallway, Dion holds a card to a keypad
 beside the pool door; the door clicks open.

Rupa heads in.

RUPA
 Thank you, Di.

Dion blows her a kiss from the hall and waves her away.

INT. POOL - NIGHT

Rupa stands at the edge of the empty pool in a one-piece
 bathing suit reminiscent of a leotard.

The nighttime cityscape sparkles in the glass windows.

Rupa is totally alone.

She takes a breath and dives.

She lets herself float. Her bunioned, calloused, beaten-up
 feet bob at the surface, free of gravity, momentarily
 painless.

She stretches out her sore limbs and lets herself be
 supported.

She does a few laps, then submerges herself underwater,
 where she twists and turns in undisciplined, soft, wild
 motions, completely imprecise but striking, ethereal.

INT. POOL - A LITTLE LATER

Out of the pool, dripping, Rupa prepares to dive again, to give herself that release.

But as she takes a few steps, her body begins to naturally fall into positions. Her feet step into fifth. She pliés deeply.

She reaches for her ballet bag, always on hand, and pulls on a battered old pair of pointe shoes.

She's dancing at the pool edge, and she begins to hear Swan Lake's music swelling, filling the pool room, echoing, grand.

RUPA
(whispering)
Thirty-two.

She begins the undertaking: the thirty-two famous consecutive fouettés she will perform as a solo in Swan Lake.

Without anyone to watch or critique her, she melts into the role with fluidity and fire.

But there is someone watching: we BREAK from Rupa's POV. Dion is standing on the landing, looking down and watching Rupa dance. We no longer hear the music in Rupa's head.

Dion smiles.

Back with Rupa, and she is almost there. There's a huge smile on her face; she knows she's nailing it.

Then--

Dion grabs her by the waist and they tumble into the pool.

They surface.

RUPA
You ruined my shoes, fucking jerk.

DION
You ruined them already, dancing poolside, you nut. I'll buy you new ones.

They engage in splash wars.

DION
I should have let you finish your
fouettés.

RUPA
I've got them.

DION
I know.

They paddle to the sides, hoist themselves up with groans
onto the side of the pool, back to the gravity of real life.

RUPA
The studio production's taking
backseat to the SAB auditions
anyway.

DION
Backseat? Really? Like you've ever
skimped on anything in your life.

Dion pushes her in the pool again.

When Rupa splutters to the surface, Dion has packed up all
their stuff and is heading for the door.

DION
Come on, we need our beauty rest.

Rupa paddles for the edge, then remembers--

She dives, searches, and grabs the pointe shoes sitting at
the bottom of the pool.

INT. RUPA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Rupa wakes to a bunch of multi-colored balloons tied to the
posts at the bottom of her bed.

She smiles.

INT. BOSTON BALLET SCHOOL LOBBY - MORNING

The school is humming, a sea of leotards and tutus. Girls
and boys of all ages are stretching, exercising, icing their
sore limbs, contorted into every position, running every
which way.

Sign-up tables, banners and directions everywhere indicate
that today, the national auditions for the School of
American Ballet have come to Boston.

Rupa snips off the ends of a brand new pair of pointe shoes, holds them lovingly. She hits them against the floor to break them in.

Dion is sort of stretching, mostly on her phone.

DION
(whispering to Rupa)
Look! It's Bellagnini. SAB's most
infamous instructor since
Balanchine.

Rupa catches sight of Bellagnini heading into a studio, barely getting a good look. Dion's trying to take a picture of him.

DION
(in awe)
Imagine. He danced Don Quixote in
St. Petersburg.

Sam groans, interrupting. Rupa and Dion turn to her.

She looks green. She can barely do a set of push ups.

RUPA
Your ankle?

SAM
My everything.

Dion begins to rub arnica gel on Sam's shaking legs, exchanging worried looks with Rupa.

We watch as the girls' battered feet are slipped into tights, then new shoes secured with new ribbon.

Their grimaces of pain are reset with expressions of peace and poise as they apply heavy stage makeup in their compacts.

Rupa looks up for Sam, but she's gone.

RUPA
Where'd Sammy go?

INT. BOSTON BALLET SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rupa and Dion scour the hallways for their friend, then--

INT. BOSTON BALLET SCHOOL BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

--BANG into the bathroom.

RUPA

Sam?

No answer. They're about to leave when Rupa spies a crumpled heap of girl slumped on the floor of a stall.

Rupa gently opens the door.

The toilet seat is down, and Sam has placed her head on the seat as she hugs the bowl. She has been crying. She wipes her mouth before she looks up at them.

SAM

I fucked it all up.

Rupa sits down heavily in front of her. Dion urges Sam off the toilet and lets her rest against her chest.

DION

Do we need to take you to the hospital? Sam?

SAM

No, it's fine. I'm fine. I'll live.
But I can't--

She's trying so hard to battle emotion, but she can't help a few angry tears.

Dion strokes her hair and clumps of blond comes off in her hands.

RUPA

Sammy.

DION

You're sure?

Sam nods.

SAM

I don't have the strength. If I try now something will break and then I'll be done for good.

She closes her eyes.

Girls are cycling awkwardly in and out of the bathroom. Dion and Rupa don't care.

SAM

Come on, you need to head out. Go on without me. I've bit the dust. I'm toast.

RUPA

Easy.

DION

There's always next year.

Sam smiles and reaches for Dion's hand.

SAM

Little miss sunshine.

(beat)

Go. I'm gonna rest here a little while.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY

Rupa and Dion try to keep warming up, but they're visibly shaken.

It's a co-ed class. These are the best dancers in Boston and the surrounding area. Rupa and Dion get some stares. Everyone is reduced to the numbers on their chests, and they are all sizing each other up, spreading ill-will.

Matteo, still handsome past his ballet prime, stands in front of the class. A few other judges hover silently in the wings.

BELLAGNINI

(Italian accent)

Auditions will be a technique class, *molto semplice*. Everyone warmed up? Good. We begin.

Rupa starts off shakily, then sets her face in determination as if pushing Sam out of her mind. She makes herself smile.

As the class speeds up it's a disorienting kaleidoscope of masterful bodies, but Rupa stays confident, bending and jumping and pirouetting. She is both soft and strong, making everything look effortless.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY

Class has paused. Bellagnini CLAPS his hands.

BELLAGNINI

A quick break for water. We resume
in *due minuti*.

He holds up two fingers.

The dancers flock to their bags. Rupa is following Dion, smiling slightly to herself, like she's got this. Bellagnini intercepts her, away from the others.

BELLAGNINI

You are quite the little spectacle.
Your expression. Explosive, but
very precise... mesmerizing.

Rupa doesn't know what to do with this.

RUPA

Thank you, signore.

Some other students are glowering with jealousy.

Bellagnini leans in closely.

BELLAGNINI

Ma, che peccato, what a pity, that
you are so bulky. Movement can
indeed generate the... *illusion* of
a perfect line,
 (pinching his fingers
 together, running them along
 an invisible string)
it is true, but ballet is its most
extraordinary, its most beautiful,
when it is not lying to the
audience. And after all, you could
no longer lie if the boys were to
try to lift you, *vero*? You are
welcome to stay the rest of the
class, *tessoro*, but it is my
recommendation you return next year
with less of you.

At these last words he touches her, crudely, invasive, two fingers to her waist.

He leaves to confer with the other instructors.

Dion has been sneaking closer throughout Matteo's speech. But she can't bring herself to approach Rupa to comfort her; she stands safely on the sidelines.

MATTEO
Iniziamo, ragazze.

He CLAPS again.

Rupa stands still while the class bustles into position around her.

She takes a breath and heads for the door.

Changes her mind.

In a flash of fury, she grand jetés her way to Bellagnini at the front of the studio, cutting through the class of very startled dancers.

She lands, soft and light as anything, in front of him, and continues to sweep herself into dizzying, fantastic, rage-fueled dance.

She catapults herself into her thirty-two fouettés.

The class, Bellagnini, and the other instructors stand and watch her; they are wide-eyed and open-mouthed, looking both confused and fascinated.

As she goes, packaged within her own self-contained world of movement, Rupa sees flashes of Dion, who is standing a few meters away, taking the position of the Prince in Swan Lake as he prepares to catch the Black Swan. She gestures at Rupa with wild fingers: *come on, you've got me.*

Rupa finishes the fouettés and dances into Dion's lift.

The class backs away, expecting a tumble, but skinny little powerful Dion supports Rupa above her head, and Rupa holds her position. They've done it.

RUPA
(down to Dion, in a whisper)
Skipped a few bits, didn't you?

DION
(whispering back)
Excuse me for not knowing all of
Swan Lake's dude bits.

When Dion sets Rupa down, Rupa spins into a ridiculous and over-exaggerated bow, and slips onto her back.

Rupa begins to laugh.

One of the women instructors steps tentatively forward, as if to break up the scene.

Dion pulls Rupa to her feet, and they make their escape, pausing just to grab their ballet bags, laughing as they leave the astonished class in their wake.

INT. BOSTON BALLET SCHOOL LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

When they get out into the lobby, Rupa's laughter turns, steadily, to crying. She tries smiling through the tears.

Dion puts an arm over her shoulder and they're off to search for Sam--

--who is resting on a lobby bench, flirting with a tall, handsome Colombian dancer.

SAM
(seeing the girls)
Uh-oh.

She stands, wincing.

SAM
Are we all fuck ups now?

RUPA
Can we go home, and stop for ice cream on the way? Even though it's 32 degrees out?

SAM
Fuck the rules of seasonal eating!
Fuck all rules, for that matter. We can do anything we want to, Rupe. Well, almost.

They head for the door.

Sam looks over her shoulder at the Colombian boy, putting her hand in the shape of a phone to her ear.

SAM
Llamame?

DION
Is now really the time, Sam?

SAM

What?

Dion cranes over her to look at Rupa.

DION

There's still Swan Lake, Rupa. And then the summer. Without SAB maybe we can spend it doing what normal teenagers do.

SAM

Like go to a real-life beach? With real-life sun and sand?!

RUPA

I don't want to be normal. I want to be extraordinary.

DION

I'd wager that disrupting auditions for the best ballet school in the country with a reckless, unrehearsed lift means that we are decidedly and incurably not-normal.

RUPA

(grinning)

Thus, by the transitive property--

DION

--extraordinary.

SAM

I'm pretty sure that's not how the transitive property works, braniacs.

(beat)

Wait, what the hell did you guys do back there?

DION

Ruined some of our brightest career prospects.

RUPA

Pissed people off, probably. Very, very important people.

DION

Proved remarkable upper body strength, if I do say so myself.

RUPA

Got some intriguing new
choreography ideas. You in for more
lifting, Didi?

SAM

So you're choreographing now?

RUPA

I'm doing anything I want to,
remember? Starting with some lemon
sorbet. I'm pretty sure there's a
shop right up here on the corner.

Like the interlaced dancers in Swan Lake's Pas de chat, the girls link arms as they walk. Dion and Rupa lift Sam slightly off her feet so she doesn't put weight on her ankle, and they carry her, laughingly, between them.

Discoveries

Comparing the Short Story and the Short Script:
Implications of Authorship, Subjectivity and Voice

I embarked upon the thesis portion of my portfolio with many far-reaching intentions. Thanks to my classes in the Film Studies, Literatures in English, and Government departments, I became determined in my creative work to engage with some the issues I have been studying critically for the past three years, primarily regarding the concerns of intersectional feminism. Whenever I sat down to write a story or a script, I was thinking about things like character, plot, story, diction and syntax, just as I was considering community, race, looking relationships, point of view, female subjectivity, identification, and the spectrums of feminine and masculine constructs. Collectively, my intentions to challenge literature and filmic oppressions through a gendered paradigm all add up to quite a handful of lofty social and scholarly goals. I wanted to challenge heteropatriarchy, the devaluing of the traditionally feminine, the glorification of (femme, virginal) whiteness, and the fetishized female form across both literature and cinema. I wanted to explore the private spaces of girls and women, validate caring and friendship, and empower my female characters through their experiences of sex, love, ambition, and art.

And yet, as my fellow classmates in Dr. M's senior seminar on Authorship: Women Directors very well know, sometimes the best authorial intentions do not translate well to the text, especially once it is consumed by unprimed spectators who are not able to be assured by a writer or filmmaker: *no, really, this is what I was trying to do*. Throughout the writing process, and the much longer editing process, I worried that I would befall a fate similar to that of feminist filmmaker Diablo Cody, or lesbian filmmaker Lisa Cholodenko, who both set out on

creative journeys with progressive intentions, but were met with disappointment, anger, and general vitriol from the blog circuit all the way up to critical journals for their respective films *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *The Kids Are All Right* (2010); according to certain interpretative audiences, these films purportedly failed in one way or another to enrich the feminist canon, while even potentially reifying problematic representations of women and queer characters in popular cinema. While my thesis will (most likely) not be consumed by thousands, my intentions to set forth positive and/or subversive representations of marginalized groups are still crucial to my process as a creator of meaning, and to my identity as an author and writer. And of course I also need to be practicing, because hopefully one day an audience beyond the students, staff and faculty at Connecticut College will be able to experience my stories.

Due to the respective demands of prose and script, my intentions - specifically regarding female subjectivity - manifested themselves differently across these very different mediums. The first piece I worked on was my short story *Being Permanent*; since I finished most of its early drafts before even starting either of my scripts, I almost took for granted the power of prose to demand a specific point of view by the very nature of its totality as a 'universe'. The entire diegetic world of this story, from a New Jersey suburb to the streets of Paris, only exists because the protagonist, Lindsey, is offering it to us from her first person voice. Conceivably, the only way *Being Permanent* could be read as anything but Lindsey's own story is if it belongs to her best friend, Lucy, which would still accomplish my goal of privileging female subjectivity and experience, especially in relation to friendship.

Scripts do not have this same power to demand a point of view, let alone a female one, by the very nature of their incompleteness. In contrast to the imagery-rich, figurative and flowery world of prose (particularly my own, since I tend to over-indulge in poetics), scripts are bare

bones. They are outlines for films, which will later be fleshed out by a director. The aesthetics, stylistic flourishes, and most importantly, the point of view, can only truly be established once the script realizes its completion in filmic form. Setting aside for now consequent implications for my own authorship (which I will later argue is fragmented by scripts' inherent incompleteness), reaching this conclusion about screenwriting early on meant that I had to rethink my intentions, and my ability, to depict full female subjectivity through scripts alone. While there is certainly some power in a protagonist, and the agency simply having a female protagonist implies, I could not realize my larger efforts to engage a subversive gaze in my two technically-unfinished films. I cheated a little, writing in a few camera directions throughout both scripts which would otherwise be reserved only for a shooting script, but theoretically they could be rejected by a theoretical director, who has final say on camera work.

The camera establishes the gaze in cinema, and thus carries enormous power for the establishment of point of view. When writing my script *Petunia or Jasmine*, I envisioned a film with complex looking relationships between the protagonist, Rosalie, and her older sister, Helena. If I were to direct this film (which a screenwriter should not envision while writing, if she ever wants to sell her work), I would oftentimes align the camera's gaze with Rosalie's, particularly when looking at Helena. Throughout the script, Helena is trying to deny Rosalie the power to look at her pregnant body, and eventually Helena allows lets her sister into her world and into her own subjectivity, visually and emotionally. I wanted to deny the fetishizing, objectifying male gaze of popular cinema by giving that gaze to a little girl, who could look at Helena, a seventeen-year-old woman, with admiration and love. However, all I could do to further this goal was to write "Rosalie watches" in the script over and over again, hoping that my

theoretical director would align the camera's gaze with Rosalie's, but unable to fully adopt that control myself.

Being similarly unable to control or predict a hypothetical camera's gaze for my second script, *Parade*, is perhaps even more worrying to my concerns over female point of view. Since the film is explicitly dealing with female bodies being put on display, specifically for the male-dominated world of ballet, it would be too easy for this film to be made with a sexualizing, fetishizing male gaze. The script is filled with teenage girls in leotards, most of their heavily-makeuped skin bare. In my Women Directors senior seminar, we discuss the repercussions of cinematographically depicting misogyny in an attempt to critique it, which can oftentimes backfire. *Parade*, which deals with sexism and sizeism in the highly feminized dance world, could reify, rather than condemn, the male gaze upon the female body depending on framing, mise-en-scène, and editing – all elements which officially occur far beyond pre-production, the only kind of work contained in this thesis. If spectators of the potentially finished film are looking *at* the protagonist, Rupa, more often than they are looking *with* her, I would have failed to tell a film with a female voice concerned primarily with the privileging of her subjectivity. Further, since ballet is a cutthroat world which turns women against each other in order to succeed - everyone vying for that prized single spot as prima ballerina - I intended to suggest a feminine concept of care and community among my main characters even as they maintain their artistic ambitions, to counter the masculine individualism to which they are forced, through traditional constructs, to aspire. This could all be undone, or at the very least not conveyed, depending on the theoretical camera's gaze.

To return, again, to the prose of *Being Permanent*: Lindsey looking is as simple, and as complex, as the text informing the reader it is so. With a sentence like “I watched Lucy pulling

on suede pumps,” the reader is positioned with Lindsey’s point of view, watching Lucy with her character and through her narrative. When Lindsey photographs Lucy and, later, Thomas, there can be no question that the camera – intra- as opposed to extra-textually – is aligned with Lindsey’s point of view. By the time Lindsey is with Thomas in the foyer of his aunt and uncle’s apartment, the reader is looking at Thomas through a sexualized female gaze informed entirely by the text: Lindsey is describing, in first person, what she sees there in front of her, a half-naked and soaking-wet stranger. The totality of the world of prose lends her agency in a way that the incomplete worlds of scripts cannot.

Lindsey’s agency is also informed by textual depictions of interiority: thoughts, dreams, memories. The reader is sutured into her unique point of view particularly through her fantasies, whether she is daydreaming about Dennis sweating back home on the track field, or idealizing her flippant mother in their sun-washed kitchen. Lindsey’s subjectivity, and her ability to drive the story forward, is perhaps strongest when she imagining what Lucy’s first sexual experience might have been like, constructing her own version, patching together what could be truths and what could be the projections of her own desires, the maker of her own meaning.

I tried to create a similar interiority in my second short story, *Cowardice on the West Coast*, my only piece with a male narrator, and the only one told in the third person. It is a close third, since we are always with Luca, the protagonist, but I decided to see what would happen if I wrote his story slightly separate from him. Luca’s struggle with the masculinity of heroism and bravery carries with it the implications of his male and class privilege (though those dynamics are also complicatedly framed within the construct of his marginalization as a Hispanic worker on a ship for white clients far richer than he is). Luca does not feel like he has deserved much of anything in his very pampered life, and the concept of his responsibility for saving a life does not

jibe well with his aggressively self-deprecating ego. His interiority is less asserted than it is self-reflexively questioned: is he *really* a coward, and what does that mean for his masculine identity? Is he *really* that much better than Marcus – can he keep himself from sexualizing this teenage girl who flirts with him and has trauma hidden beneath her tranquil surface?

While interiority was not quite so straightforward in my scripts, I believe I was more successful in textually controlling its depiction therein than I was with point of view, since interiority is less explicitly reliant upon the apparatus of cinema. In *Petunia or Jasmine*, a dream sequence lets the spectator into Rosalie's mind, where they can experience her fears. Simply moments when we are alone with Rosalie, up the tree in her yard or rooting around for feel-better foods in the kitchen, lends itself well to filmic suggestions of interiority: the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds during production and post, for example, will belong to either her moods or her perceptions.

Across both scripts, I was very interested in the presentation of the woman's private space; bedrooms, for me, served as points of interiority projected in visual metaphor. Rosalie - whose own room is bedecked with the spoils of a happy and diverse childhood which involves athletics, creativity, imagination – spends much of the film trying to get into Helena's room so that she can free her, but at a base level, to understand her. The scene where Rosalie finally makes it into Helena's room is drawn out and close to the climax because this is a big moment in Rosalie's life, seeing that her sister still has dolls in her trunk and is about to have a child of her own. Rosalie's investigations into Helena's personal space is also an investigation of womanhood, sex, and love. We explore Helena's world with Rosalie's eyes. When Rosalie climbs up onto her sister's bed, she looks around the room to see it through her sister's point of view, creating what I hoped was a dovetailing of subjectivities and interiorities. My intentions

were less complex in *Parade*, but I still spent time with Rupa in her sparse, clean dancer's bedroom which allows her the peace and the space to move. Additionally, when she wakes to the balloons her mother has tied to the end of her bed post is for me one of the most important scenes in the film: we are alone with her at the beginning of this very important day of her life, and she sees this message of encouragement and support from her mother, who in choosing a bunch of different balloons as opposed to one is wishing all of Rupa's friends luck. This scene is about the personal and interior, just as it is about friendship and family. Yet, demonstratively, my goals regarding interiority are similar to my goals for the gaze because they also cannot be fully realized without the camera; in-text plot and props, however, give me some agency over interiority here as a writer alone.

Does the writer have agency at all, and when, and why? When I set out at the beginning of this year to explore the difference between screenwriting and prose writing, I was not expecting questions and concerns regarding my authorship to necessarily float to the forefront of this study. Undoubtedly this focus has been in part spurred by Women Directors, a class which empowers its students to question the 'death of the author' and to consider what a film directed by a woman means, both inside and outside of the text, when women-directed works are still so depressingly few and far between. As I studied Bigelow and Coppola and Campion, I began to more strongly than ever think about what their films, careers, public personas and criticisms mean to me personally and professionally as an aspiring female author across both prose and film. Though of course, I feel like every writer regardless of gender is trying to navigate his or her own sense of agency.

My thesis adviser and creative writing professor, Blanche Boyd, will often ask her students, including me, questions about our characters. *Where did she go to college? Are her*

parents still alive? Is this her first sexual experience or her two-hundred-thirty-second? If anyone dares to answer “I don’t know,” Blanche will say, “But you *have* to know. You’re God.”

When I – when anyone – writes prose, we are pulling all the strings. The power is all ours. Something else Blanche likes to say: “it’s just you, 26 letters and a space bar.” Prose is a room, and a world, of my own, which (with the exceptions of a mentor or an editor’s suggestions), belongs entirely to me. Even if next to no one reads it, a finished story is still a total universe, and as writer, I am its Goddess. My authorship cannot be denied - though of course my intentions and executions can still be critiqued. I open myself up to the possibility of critique, because I am also alone in the ability to accept praise, should it ever come.

Scripts, as much as they are a joy to write, cannot afford an author such Godliness. I referred earlier to their inherent incompleteness - their positions as a recipe to which someone else will add the flourishes and flavors. A film’s authorship belongs to the director, and with it, the executive control over the work. And a script that never makes it off the page is arguably not a film at all.

A director’s executive control, however supported and unchallenged, is still unlike a writer’s executive control over her prose. Even assuming for a moment that I actually am able to direct my own scripts, thus earning myself the right of authorship, the real indication of supreme control in cinema is the right of final cut; power and prestige matters. The heavy hitters across Hollywood and the (decreasingly disparate) independent film world, from Martin Scorsese to Paul Thomas Anderson, still have to fight the financiers, studios, and distributors for the realization of their complete artistic vision. Down at the bottom of the heap with all the brand new filmmakers, smaller budgets mean cutting corners: sacrificing a scene or five, inexperienced no-name actors, few locations, a starter camera, a small crew, barely any money left over for

post. Environmental factors are all a part of the hustle and bustle of moviemaking, its thrills and its headaches; this is a different world entirely from that of a prose writer sitting quietly alone in her room, staring at her computer screen. While storytellers can prefer one world over the other for any number of reasons, the prose writer is alone in the comfort of total authorial control over her piece, secure in the knowledge that she has made her best possible attempts to succeed in her textual goals once she has taken her fingers off the keys.

My goals - to present and align the reader with a collection of diverse, believable, sympathetic characters who have been historically marginalized in cinema and literature - exist within a larger goal, one which Blanche has instilled in me during my time at Connecticut College: "write something good that matters." Now as this thesis draws to its close, I can only hope that through my work this year, I have reconciled my intentions with the text of my portfolio in these preceding pages. I also hope to someday direct and produce my two scripts, so I can further explore my studies of authorship and subjectivity, as well as to realize the extent of my filmic intentions to the best of my abilities. The medium of the screenplay offers an avenue for privileging elements like female authorship, subjectivity and voice, but demonstratively I do not believe it does quite enough. The finished short story as a potential agent of institutional resistance and change is complemented not with a finished script, but with a finished film.

