

# EVERYTHING FLASHES

A tour of your life by  
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Working Draft

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# A NOTE :

This play or performance or THING can be presented, like memories, in many different ways. One way is as a series of monologues from one speaker on a fairly empty stage. Another is as a large, installation piece in a space with many rooms, all built out, allowing a tour guide to take small groups (or single individuals) from one place to another. Or you may have an ensemble build out and perform the memories in some capacity. Or you might put your audience in a small plain box with changing projections & a script. Or it might be interpretive dance.

The point is to remain simple, not too distracting, and allow for those empty spaces that the audience must fill in themselves. This way, the memories become their own.

# YOUR MEMORIES

## GUIDE

They say when you die your life flashes before your eyes. That's not entirely true. Your life couldn't flash. It's your life. What flashes are little things, little remembrances: the fireflies in bottles that blinked and shined and lit your eyes. They flash. Her hair on the pillow, his glasses on the table. Dogs and cats and house warmings. Hot chocolate on the first snowy day. Your mother. Her hands. Your father's shoes. Crying, until you can't breathe anymore. Umbrellas. Hot sand under your back. Cold water hitting your belly.

They flash and whirl and twirl and sparkle, like your eyes sparkle, shining there before you. Your life doesn't flash before your eyes when you die. Your life flashes before your eyes when you live. It flashes and flashes and flashes and flashes and then it stops flashing. And you die.

# THE WOODS

## GUIDE

Late fall. It hasn't snowed yet, but it will soon. Next week. Almost two feet. But it hasn't snowed yet. The water's lapping there, you might be able to hear it. It's close by. Water has a smell, a distinct smell. Lake water, ocean water, river water, stream water. Maybe you smell it. Or the pine needles might make that hard. But there's water over there. A cabin back that way. You left a few lights on, but not many.

It's late, maybe two, three o'clock. Everyone's asleep, all over. Maybe you can feel it. The trees breathe a little different? The wind shivering the leaves? You tried to look out at the stars, but didn't want a window in between you. So you're outside, bundled up against the cold, shivering with the trees. You look up and the stars, they flew. They flew and flew overhead and now you know everything goes away.

You look up at the stars, overhead. They really do fly. And everything does go away.

# STOCKINGS

## A LIVING ROOM.

The walls are painted a deep burgundy. There's a somewhat threadbare, but well loved couch. A fireplace, empty, unlit. Chairs. Your mother works on a cross-stitch pattern.

## GUIDE

The living room. You're nine and a half. Wall's just been painted three days ago, still a little tacky to the touch. Your father, he painted this wall. Years later they'd hire someone to paint them blue, and give the couch to The Marlowes. Family doesn't have a dog yet, so the floors are in better condition. The mantelpiece hasn't been chewed up. Still solid. It's early Spring, just starting to warm up. Your Mom's there, working on a cross-stitch pattern for Christmas stockings. Took her all year to make 'em for the whole family. They hung every year after that, until your mother died. Then you each took your own, hung 'em on your own mantels. One year in an especially small apartment, over your stove. Your sister keeps hers boxed up, she doesn't like to look at it anymore. You never really talk about it, much.

S'pose it's too hard for her. But, it's still early spring, your mother's just a quarter of the way into this second stocking. Christmas is a long way off yet. School bus just dropped you off down the street. You're home now. Okay.

## SAM

### THE QUAD.

A college boy, SAM, lays on the lawn with a book.

### GUIDE

The Quad. It's spring now. Finals are just starting, but it's beautiful and hard to be distracted by the doom and gloom of academia. Almost seems rude for anyone to test anything right now. Sam's laying on the grass here, reading something for Female Voices. He's been laughing a lot lately, more than usual, which you're happy about. You dated for a while last year, but it wasn't very serious. You worry sometimes he'll never be happy, even though he has so much going for him. But he's laughing now, and seems generally to be in a better mood. He's seeing someone new, it's going well. You talk about your first date, you ate messy falafel and both think it's very funny now. The sun's shining pretty hard, and your skin gets hot. You have class in an hour, and go to the library for a last minute cram between the books and sleeping students. Sam stays out, it's too nice for the library. You say goodbye and head in. You'll see him Thursday night at your friend Marie's. A few times over the summer, he and his girlfriend stay at your house. He kills himself next year. Doesn't leave a note. Comes as a big surprise for everyone. Maybe there were signs though. Tough to say. Some people don't make it. It shakes you up more than makes sense. Maybe if you'd stayed together, you tell yourself for a while, but eventually you forgive yourself. You never could fix Sam. He never wanted you to anyway. But, it's beautiful out right now, and Sam's happy, really happy, for the first time in a long time, and that's nice to remember.

## THE HILL

### THE TOPE OF A HILL.

It's warm, dry, smells like dead grass.

### GUIDE

The sun sets in about an hour. It's warm, but not hot. Early days of summer. You're ten years old, standing on top of the hill behind your house. The dry, dead, yellow grass and weeds poke you through your jeans. You always wear jeans on the hill, because your mother is terrified that you'll get ticks and get lyme disease. One day when you're eleven and you go hiking you do get a tick, behind your ear, and you have to go to the doctor's office where the doctor pulls it out with a pair of tweezers and it hurts a lot.

When you and Ben live in Seattle sometimes you'll take the dog out to the woods and you'll have to brush her especially carefully to check for ticks, and she'll get them from time to time, but you'll just pick them up off her fur and flick them off the porch. It's funny that you aren't really afraid of them anymore.

But right now, you're ten and you're standing at the top of the hill.

You've never been all the way up here before, it took you probably two or three hours to hike all this way up, just a long way up a hill with only the occasional oak tree to change the scenery. And you hiked and hiked and watched as your house got smaller and smaller, and the higher up you got you felt like you might just slip off the hill entirely, and fly down through the sky and land in front of your house, so you clung to the weeds to be sure you wouldn't fall off the earth.

When you get to the top you're sweaty and you brush your bangs out of your eyes, you hate having bangs. You look for a second over out at your house, and down your street, and wonder how far away your school is somewhere over to the left there. But then, you turn around to look out, to look out at the real reason you came up here, to see what's on the other side of the hill. Maybe it's a town, or a city. You close your eyes as you turn, and then open them.

When you look out, you see rolling, golden hills. You think it might be wheat. It might be weeds. You don't know. But all the hills are a golden yellow, almost a yellow white, dotted with oak trees, enormous trees with branches bigger than your dad, maybe bigger than your car. They must be two hundred years old. And you look out at the hills and you want to keep walking. You want to walk over the next one, and the next one, and the next one, and never stop walking, and go all the way to Montana and become a cowgirl, and get a horse, and ride him all the way to the Mississippi and never ever stop and just go forever. If all these hills are over the one behind your house, what must be over them?

Years later, once you get your driver's license, you'll sometimes see the tall electrical tower on the hill down Pacific and you'll wonder what it's like to drive all the way up there, and what you could see, but you never do it. It reminds you of walking up the hill, hours and hours, only to look over and see more hills. And now that you're older, you know you won't keep driving over them. It's 11:30 at night and you have to be home by 12, and even if you got to the top of the hill, there's probably just another hill past it, with no end in sight.

But for now, that's exciting and wonderful and not at all scary. There's a never ending adventure waiting just behind your house, just over the hill, where the whole world waits for you back there. And as the sun sets you climb back down to your house, slipping in the dead grass. You're ten years old and you still dream of adventure.

## HALF-DAY

### THE BATHROOM.

#### GUIDE

You're home early from school. There was a half-day. You'd completely forgotten about the holiday, so you're excited to get home early and spend some time with Lee. He's around nine. And you walk upstairs and he's in the upstairs bathroom and he's wearing Ben's dress shoes and a shirt with a tie in a knot around his neck. He looks like a Groucho Marx character. And when you ask Lee what he's doing he says he's going to work. And his too-big shoes click and clack out of the bathroom and down the carpeted stairs and he picks up an umbrella. "I won't be back for dinner," he yells up the stairs to you. Then he opens it and heads out the front door.

## COCKTAIL CRUISE

## A BOAT.

It's warm, tropical. There's a strong wind.

### GUIDE

Night time. About nine o'clock. There's a strong wind, you're on the water, but it's a tropical wind. Not cold no matter how hard it's blowing. That's a nice thing about tropical wind. You're on a cocktail cruise, for a wedding reception. Your sister's wedding. You're twenty six. She's twenty three. You're standing up on the gangway, looking down on most of the reception. Your sister and your cousins, laughing, posing for a photograph. Clara actually moves to China later that year, and you never really hear from her again. A band, playing something romantic. Your mother's parents dancing together. By the next family function your grandfather will be stuck in a wheelchair. Now though, they're smiling, and your grandma whispers something in his ear. He laughs, and you wish someone would make you laugh like that. You wish you didn't have to stand up outside the wedding. And your sister's there, smiling, talking with her mother-in-law. There's an airhorn that goes off, and someone screams. Then people laugh. You don't laugh, but you wish you could.

## BEN'S OFFICE

### BEN'S OFFICE.

A cute, cluttered, little study, which is also full of baby supplies: a crib, boxes of diapers and clothes.

### GUIDE

Ben's office. It's winter, grey outside and raining. It's a medium rain, the kind that looks and feels a little cozy when you're inside. You moved to Seattle for Ben's job about three and a half years ago. You know rain differently now. The grey light is mild and cool without being cold. Ben fought a lot of realtors and brokers for this extra room. You sometimes correct papers here when he does have to go in to work, but it always feels a little bit like you don't belong. Normally it's tidy and professional. Now it's a mess, halfway through the transformation to nursery.

Ben's brother gave you the crib. He has three children, but it's still in very good shape. You never like Ben's brother much, but when he shows up with the crib dismantled in his trunk, and builds it himself in the study, you cry.

Ben's clearing out his desk, there's a box of blueprints and models he's debating throwing away. On one of the bookshelves you find a stack of everything you've ever written to him, bound together with rubber bands. Birthday cards, anniversary cards, reminders to pick up medicine for the cat, a doodle on a napkin from your second date. Ben has it all here. He says he likes it close to him while he's working.

You look around at the mobiles and blankets and bottles and don't really believe they're all there for you. This is your house, with your husband, and your nursery. You and Ben sit on the floor, surrounded by baby things and read through your relationship together. Soon you have a son here as well, and one day he reads through these notes, curious. He reads the dirty ones too. He already knows about sex, but never thinks about his parents until now. He wonders if you still have sex. You do, sometimes. And it's very different than it was eleven years ago. But you still do.

You see a note that just reads “see you last night?” and you smile, and maybe you cry a little, but it’s the good kind of crying. It’s the good kind of rain. There’s a heaviness in your heart, but it’s the good kind of heaviness.

Rain falls, pattering lightly.

## FEELING ALONE AT MARIE’S

MARIE’S APARTMENT.

A red couch. People listening to music. Artistic, homey, cheap.

GUIDE

You sit on Marie’s red couch. You helped her move this couch up into her apartment. It was a nightmare, way too big, and when she eventually moves out, she just leaves it behind for the next tenants. Right now you’re sitting on it, it’s hot, you’re sweating, and drinking whiskey out of a jar with melted ice. You watch the condensation drip and sweat down onto the wooden table, leaving a ring. It’s covered in rings.

It’s late late late, early morning. The sun is rising. You’re sitting there as Marie digs through albums. She puts one on and sits down next to you.

Music plays.

GUIDE

You sit there in a room full of people, feeling all by yourself. Marie and all of her friends disappear and you close your eyes and listen to the record and you feel like nobody knows who you are. Nobody knows what this feels like, what this music, how lonely it is.

Marie doesn’t know and she’s right there and you can’t tell her because... Who could you tell? So you sit and listen to the music and eventually people are laughing and talking and Brian & Kim in the armchair next to you start making out and you just want to curl up and die instead of being alone, but instead you walk to Marie’s bedroom, close the door behind you, and lay on her floor to go to sleep. If you’re going to feel alone, you might as well be alone.

You rest your head against the sweaty whiskey glass until you knock it over and spill on the carpet. You don’t clean it up.

## LEE CRYING

A HOTEL ROOM.

Plush carpets. Lee cries on the bed. The bathroom over there.

## GUIDE

A hotel room. It's quiet, the way hotel rooms get quiet. Like the thick carpets eat up sound. Even though there's people just a few feet away from you, doing whatever they're doing. People in every direction.

It's New York City. Lee is on the bed. He's a sophomore in college here. You wish he'd stayed closer, but like to come visit. It's a good place for a young person to live. Ben sometimes sounds almost jealous. Lee sits, crying. His heart's breaking and so is yours and you don't know what to do. There's nothing to do when someone's heart is breaking, except break yours too.

He doesn't talk about his feelings very often, Ben doesn't either, so it's scary. It's scary to see your baby hurt and not be able to do anything. So you just let him cry. He cries and cries and you wonder if all the people hear it. All the people in every direction.

You tell him you remember, you remember how hard it is. It's hard. You just want to help him. But you can't.

He's unhappy for a while. A few years. Then he starts to get less unhappy. And you never really understand why. What happens. He changes though, maybe he just gets comfortable with himself. You see him less, but it's better when you do. He's relaxed now.

But today, right now, he's crying so hard he can barely breathe. And sometimes you'll dream about it, and be just as helpless in your dreams. Even years later. Lee crying on the bed, 20 years old, your son just out of reach, a few feet away from you. You wake up in a cold sweat, and turn to Ben, who holds you until you fall asleep. So there's your son, in agony. No need to linger here.

Maybe you do though. Or maybe you come back here. Maybe too often.

## WASHING MACHINE SEX

## THE LAUNDRY ROOM.

There's a bed on the floor, crammed between the wall and the washing/drying machines.

## GUIDE

The laundry room in the basement. You sit on the washing machine. Adam stands next to the dryer. It's late, the party's over, everyone else is asleep in the den, or the bathroom, or the living room. People are asleep everywhere. Everyone has paired off. The two of you are awake though, looking at each other.

Your bed is on the ground, jammed between the wall and the washing machines. It doesn't really fit, even though it's a twin. You're seventeen. He's sixteen. His hair is long, he hasn't cut it all year. Your hair is short, you cut most of it off last semester. The air is full of the smell of dryer sheets.

The washing machine runs. The sounds of water seeping into clothes, and pushing through metal tubes. The drum spinning and swishing. Adam tells you he loves you. You say you do too. You do. You both do.



You split up in college. Adam moves to your hometown eventually. You don't see each other much but will receive an e-mail every once in a while. It's nice, but still hurts a little to hear from him. Which is funny.

You sit on the washing machine and kiss him and he kisses you. You both fall asleep in the tiny bed. In the morning you wake up next to him, still a virgin. You have sex for the first time about a week later, and bake cookies and have sex and eat more cookies and have more sex.

It hurts a little but feels good a little too. It's beautiful and silly and weird. You think maybe someday you'll get married and have children together, but college is really hard for both of you and you break up a few times before it's official. You both hate yourselves afterwards, for a while. Then you both move on. Nobody ever again tells you they love you before having sex with you. That's special.

The washing machine runs and runs and beeps eventually.

## FIGHTING WITH YOUR SISTER

THE FRONT STEPS OF YOUR HOUSE.

It's sunny, spring outside. There are some trees nearby, ivy growing as well.

GUIDE

The steps up to your front door. It's sunny, spring weather. The front yard is mostly ivy now, the deer have eaten everything else. You're sitting on the stoop, angry and sad, and twelve years old. Your sister is down in the garage, crying. You yell at her. Her headless Ken doll sits on the other side of the garage, where she threw it.

You find it later when you go back inside, when it starts to get dark out. You sit there feeling angry and sad. You didn't want to rip Ken's head off, but you did. Your sister makes you so angry. She's such a twerp. She's so annoying. You can hear her crying in the garage and you just want to scream at her at the top of your lungs to be quiet, but you don't want Mom to hear. You know Mom will hear. But Mom never hears. Your sister never tells Mom, and you never apologize to your sister, and years later you'll wonder if she even remembers it, because you remember it, and you never talk about it.

One Christmas, when you're both in your late twenties, you walk past a toy store downtown and think about looking for that same doll, and buying it for her, but you think she probably doesn't even remember, and you probably won't see her in person anyway. You buy her a scarf. She just moved to Minnesota.

But you're sitting here now, angry and about to cry, and then there's a deer. And its baby deer. And they come up and start to eat the ivy and you yell at them to go away. They look up and you wave for them to shoo and scream at them and they don't move at first so you throw rocks at them and some hit the baby with little thuds. And you run at them and they scatter into the trees in the backyard of the creepy old man's house next door. The one you and your sister will sneak behind and smoke cigarettes in a few years. The deer run, and you can't hear your sister anymore. Maybe she ran away too.

And you sit back on the stoop and the sun sets through the trees across the street.

## LONELY AT SOPHIE'S

SOPHIE'S LIVING ROOM.

A group of people play Scattergories or something, loudly. They're seated on couches, and pillows, and cushions, and the floor. It's a birthday party.

GUIDE

It's Sophie's birthday. July. Hot, hot, miserable out, but she has air conditioning, central air, and you're all incredibly jealous for the first twenty minutes at her apartment. Then you get used to it, and it's like that's the temperature the air should be. That's the temperature of rooms with people in them, not the ungodly summer temperature of your bedroom, where you lay on top of a blanket with a wet washcloth on your neck, your hair soaking into the pillowcases.

Everywhere around you, people are playing a party game. They're shouting, they're screaming, they're laughing. You aren't. You're there. You know you have to be there for Sophie, you've been best friends since high school and you have to be there.

You sit there and your brain's five, ten years in the future. Also this afternoon. You got bad news today and all you want to do is go home and curl up in a ball and you're tired and heavy, but it's Sophie's birthday and if you don't go you will never, never hear the end of it. So you go. And you smile. And you never say anything to Sophie that isn't congratulatory and cheerful and coated with a smile. Because it's her birthday. You're here for her.

Everyone laughs at a joke and you feel a million miles away and lonely and tired and you get up to go. Sophie grabs you and asks what's wrong and you just tell her you're tired. She looks at you, and you look at her, and you wish she'd ask again, ask you to tell her what's happening, what happened, but she doesn't, and you're scared to say anyway, and you don't want to ruin her birthday, so you don't say anything, and you go home, and you turn on a movie and you fall asleep in the middle in bed and in the morning you go to work and Sophie never brings it up.

## GRANDMA'S FUNERAL & CHEESE

A FUNERAL HOME.

A casket lies surrounded by flowers and a picture of your Grandmother.

GUIDE

A funeral home. Sedate, respectful, a little bit antiseptic. Tired. You're seven. Your father's mother's body is in the casket. He doesn't cry. Your mother cries. He holds her hand. Your sister is only two, she doesn't understand anything, you think. Grandma's dead though. And that means she won't make you guacamole anymore. She made good guacamole because she didn't use tomatoes at all. You don't like tomatoes.

Sometimes you still make guacamole without tomatoes, and Ben laughs about it.

Your grandfather sits at the front of the room. He's sad. You've never seen him sad like this sad. He'll die later that year. Probably from a broken heart, you think. You wonder what a broken heart looks like. If his heart's two pieces like in pictures, with a squiggly line down the middle, or if it just doesn't work as well.

Your mother cries and cries, she liked Grandma a lot. They would drink tea together in the living room. She doesn't go in the living room very much after that, except to work on her cross-stitch.

Your cousin Cara is sitting on the other side of the room. She has a Game Boy. You play Game Boy together and everyone eats cheese and vegetables and talks about Grandma. Your dad takes home a lot of the cheese, and you eat cheese all week. There's one that smells a little bad, but you like it. It reminds you of Grandma.

People cry.

## BREAKING UP WITH ADAM

FIRST AVENUE SUBWAY STOP.

It's late, very late, or very early. The platform is nearly deserted. There are two or three people down at the other end.

GUIDE

The First Avenue subway stop. You are twenty-one. You are completely alone, shivering in a coat, and your blue sweater. There are a couple people down at the other end of the platform. You're crying, trying not to be too loud about it. It's 5, 5:15 in the morning. You have a present in your hand, wrapped. Red paper.

You and Adam just broke up. It took three or four hours. In his bedroom. You miss him more than you ever thought you could miss anything, and you just walked down here, just three blocks from his apartment. You'll never go back there you think. You do, a few weeks later, to drop some of his things off, shirts, or books, or... it's all just crammed into a Trader Joe's bag. And you don't know what to say.

A loudspeaker voice tells you the next train will arrive in seven minutes. You wish you could blow your nose. You don't have anything to blow your nose with. Your eyes are bright red. You're stuck with a birthday present from Adam that you didn't want to unwrap with him there. You didn't even want to take it.

Oh god, your birthday. You're going to have to have your birthday without him. You hate your birthday. It's a really sad birthday.

As you're waiting for the train, the one in the other direction comes and goes. As it rumbles off, sparks flying, you see a homeless couple walking along the platform together.

One of them yells at the other, then they start holding hands. You sit on the wooden bench, shaking, and wait for your train. It arrives in six minutes now. And eventually you take it home.

## WHEN YOU BOUGHT THE HOUSE

AN EMPTY HOUSE.

GUIDE

An empty house. No furniture at all. The walls are scuffed and yellowed and dingy. The counters and cabinets are tacky. The wood floor is scratched. The backyard's a mess. A broker stands in the doorway talking about which walls to do what with and how you can change this and that and you look over and see Ben petting the current owner's pitbull mix. "Oh buddy, it's alright. Don't worry buddy." It wags its tail. He looks up to see you staring at him. "Right?" You nod. He's right.

And two, four, eight years later, every once in a while, you'll stand in the living room with its three or four new coats of paint, couch number two, coffee table three, and you'll remember exactly where Ben stood, and exactly how the light filtered in through the dark red curtains, and how he smiled up at you and you felt not quite ready to grow up but ready to try with him. And you'll think about how right he was.

## YOUR SISTER'S DIVORCE

YOUR SISTER'S.

GUIDE

Chicago in winter. It's kind of pretty but biting cold outside. Your sister's apartment building. There's snow on the ground, piled up on the sidewalk. Maybe three feet high. There was a storm. Graham carries what looks like a heavy box up over the snowbank, sliding down. He slams it into the back of the truck. You don't really know what to say. Neither of you. "Sorry," you say. He heads back in and you follow him upstairs. You and your sister sit in the bedroom as he and his friend, you don't remember his name just his red coat, they move things downstairs and out. They must move him out for hours. You don't know if you should help or not. You don't even know who to help or how. So you just sit in the bedroom with your sister. She doesn't cry, but you wish she would. Or that she'd say something. That night, just the two of you, you sleep on the couch, listening to the wind howl outside and wonder where Graham's going. Are his parents alive anymore?

## THE LAKE

THE LAKE.

A rocky shore. Water laps softly. It's cold.

## GUIDE

The lake. It's cold here, always cold here. The wind comes in over the water and hits your bones in that way wind does. You're sitting on the shore, around five or six years old. There's a pile of rocks you built, and a fish gasping for breath, suffocating on air, flapping against your rocks. Your father hits it over the head with a metal pipe. The fish's eyes stop seeing, and you watch them go blank.

You watch your father cut the fish open and are curious. He cuts the stomach to show you the flies, whole flies, inside the fish's belly, and you start to feel sick. Your father throws the guts into the lake, and birds and fish start eating it. He wraps the meat in a newspaper and hands it to you.

You take it carefully, as carefully as if it were still alive and might flop out of your hands heading back to the water. But it's dead. And you set it in the icebox.

Your father cooks it over a fire with lemon and it's the best thing you've ever tasted. Fish taste good. You're sad it's dead, but happy it's good. It was worth it.

One year, you'll have to tie your father's fishing line. His arthritis is too bad for him to do it. He's embarrassed, but you try to act like it's your idea anyway. You never go fishing again after that. Right now you play with a stray scale, sitting on the ground. It feels cold and hard on your fingertips, a fading rainbow. You watch the birds eat, nothing is wasted.

The birds flap and fight amongst each other for the fish remains.

## GUIDE

The sun sets as you taste the fish and the oil and the lemon. When you imagine a sunset, it's this one.

The sun sets.

## FOURTH OF JULY

## YOUR APARTMENT.

Scratched wood floors, and a few boxes, but no furniture. Fans whirl loudly.

There's the occasional far-off explosion of light and sound: fireworks.

## GUIDE

Your first studio apartment. It's hot, July, every fan you have is sitting blowing muggy air onto your naked body. They whirl.

You sit, leaning back on your arm on the dirty wood floor. Ben lays nearby. You look at each other's bodies, occasionally touching, but mostly just looking. The last stray, illegal fireworks go off around you. You're both sweaty, tired, satisfied. Ben leans his head up against your body, and you play with his hair. He has perfect hair, it sticks to your legs. Ben tells you he loves you. You cry, but you aren't sad. You're so happy it hurts. Your heart is bursting out of your chest and Ben is there and you're on the wood floor, sweaty and well-sexed and there are fireworks and you'll never get pregnant.

You tell him what the doctor told you last July. You haven't told anyone. And Ben looks up at you, and takes your face in his hands and it fits perfectly and he looks at you through your tears and kisses you and you taste the salt, and the snot, and it's the softest kiss you've ever felt.

Later you have sex again, and a weight lifts off of you, so heavy and you never knew how heavy it was, and it lifts and lifts and you're floating and you start laughing and can't stop and you're happy. Happy for the first time. You didn't know it was possible to be happy like this. And Ben laughs too. And you fall asleep on the hardwood floors.

Ben sees a chiropractor next week because his neck still hurts. Every time you see a doctor, and you see a lot of doctors, some with good news, lots with bad, you tell Ben, and he takes your face in his hands and kisses you softly. It will never be that soft again.

A firework explodes nearby, lighting up the window with reds, whites, blues. It's beautiful and frightening.

## SAM'S APARTMENT WITHOUT SAM

SAM'S APARTMENT.

It's starting to feel empty.

GUIDE

It's late fall. More leaves on the ground than the trees. A kettle whistles on the stove. Sam's apartment. Without Sam. Marie's there and she's sitting at the table and she doesn't move when the kettle starts to boil, and it boils for a minute and you let it, and then when she doesn't move, you stand, make your way around his red table, and take it off the stove. You ask Marie if she wanted tea and when she doesn't answer pour her a cup anyway. Oolong.

The apartment's empty, except for the furniture and a couple stray dishes. The tea pot. Sam's family came by and picked all of his things up already. You don't know what to tell Marie. You don't think there's anything to tell her. The two of you sit and drink tea at Sam's bare table in his bare apartment, without Sam. Marie's frozen and you realize, and can't believe it's only just now, that Marie was in love with Sam. That she was always in love with Sam. And you wonder if she even realized.

Eventually, it gets dark, but neither one of you moves to turn the light on. Not for a long time. Instead, you hold her hand. A tree branch scratches at the window, trying to get in. You were always friendly, but after sharing this moment, you're friends. There will be plenty of good times, all because of this bad one. That's something.

# THANKSGIVING WITH FAMILY

## YOUR LIVING ROOM IN SEATTLE.

### GUIDE

Thanksgiving. You're just about through your second helping of food. Your living room in Seattle. The third year in a row that you've hosted. Ben's sitting with his brother Steven, and his kids, and Lee in the living room. You're at the table with your parents and Bill's mother and your sister and her husband and Marie.

Marie's been talking about surfing, and telling funny stories about an otter that always tries to steal surfers' boards from them, and you've been laughing so hard you have to hold your side. And you're so damned proud of Marie. For being a grown woman who's somehow after everything she's been through decided that she's going to start surfing, and she's going to really like it. And that's amazing.

And your sister's down the table and you get up to start bringing pie in from the kitchen. And as you pick up the pumpkin pie and look out into the living room, you see Ben tossle Lee's hair and he doesn't act like he hates it, or immediately yell at Ben and that's nice. And from behind you your sister says "You really got lucky, you know. With Ben." And you look at her and you smile and you say, "I know."

# DRIVING AT NIGHT

## THE BACKSEAT.

A station wagon, in the middle of the night.

### GUIDE

The back seat of a station wagon. The seats are a bit sticky with humidity, but you don't mind. It feels nice, the warm air flying into the car from the open windows in the front seat. You're in the back seat, on the passenger side. Your sister always has to sit on the driver's side. Sometimes you'd get in first and she'd whine and complain about it, and your mother would make you move over to the passenger side. But sometimes, your parents wouldn't have any patience for it, and you'd get to sit on the driver's side, your sister sulking alongside you, and you'd feel happy to get what you wanted. But you don't do that tonight. Tonight, you're tired, you just had a large dinner, and you climb up into the car in the parking lot, under the amber yellow lights, swarming with moths, and lean your head against the cool window. You're fourteen years old. You finished dinner, barely, and are so tired now. This is your favorite dinner of the year, that first meal at Roy's over the summer. Fresh fish, and perfect rice, and dessert. And you and your sister used to fall asleep before dessert even came, but now you're older and you make it all the way to the house without falling asleep. Your sister sleeps in the backseat, her head bobbing up and down, occasionally starting. You look and see she's still just a kid. You look up at the moon, and it follows your car. The moon follows you all the way home and you think you're racing against it, and sometimes it looks like you'll get ahead of it, but every time it looks like it, the road curves and it pulls ahead again.

You come here every summer, from the time you're five to the time graduate high school. Then your family has a terrible trip, lots of fighting. And you never come again. But right now, you don't know any of that. It's pretty perfect. You drive through a tunnel and hold your breath for good luck. When you pull out of it, it looks like you might just be ahead of the moon for a second. Then the road curves along the shoreline and the moon passes you once more.

You forget about racing the moon until one night when you're much older, and riding in a bus with Ben, and he points up to the moon and you say, "We're winning."

## MOM'S WATCH

A PLANE.

GUIDE

You wake up. Your neck is stiff. Your eyes dry and puffy. You're on a plane. It's the middle of the night. The red lights flash on the wing. You watch them flash over the lights below. Cars and houses and towns. You rest your forehead against the cold plexiglass. You can't cry anymore. You don't really want to. The plane is full. You remember when planes didn't used to always be full. You're flying back from Chicago to Seattle. You have class in the morning.

Your mother's in the ground. You're somewhere over maybe Nebraska or Wyoming. Two and a half hours left? You'll have enough time to go home and shower before going to school, but not enough to sleep more. You should sleep on the plane. But you can't sleep anymore.

You wish you had pretzels. Or a ginger ale. You only ever drink ginger ale on planes. The passenger next to you snores every once in a while, a woman in her pajamas. You just look out the window. The red lights flash, lights on the ground. There are fewer and fewer of them now. And you fly into the clouds. And you're just surrounded by dark dark grey grey. And red flashing lights.

You adjust your mother's watch on your wrist. It's gold and thin and felt right on her wrist, very thin. It's heavier than you'd realized. You aren't used to wearing a watch but you didn't want to bury it.

## UNION SQUARE

THE SUBWAY STATION.

GUIDE

Fourteenth street, Union Square. It's a little after 2PM on a weekday. It's Thursday. You are twenty four. You walk through the station, always busy but not currently crowded, and you head towards a man playing pop covers on his violin, selling CD's, who's assembled a crowd. You see five, ten, fifteen different people, all walking at different speeds to different trains and out of the clear blue sky, a thought pops into your head: we are the same. And it's overwhelming.



They've all had the same heartaches, and breakups, and their grandfathers have died, and they wish they had better jobs, and their friends don't understand them always, and they fight with their mom over the phone, and have to find time for lunch some days, and all they want is to find their little place, to fit in somewhere and make things work out and sit in a cozy room someday with people they love and trust and just feel a part of something. And you're all here, rushing through the subway station, off to your own breakups, and makeups, and reunions, and you've all seen the stars, and you were all once nine and dreamed of something and now you're here.

And it's too much, and you can't, you just can't. It's, unless you'd felt it, you wouldn't be able to explain it. It's just that you're all, complicated. You're all equally complicated. And when someone bumps into you, it isn't some thing, getting in your way, upsetting the balance of your day, but a man distracted by something his wife said and you have to leave the subway, and you run up and out of the steps and you're in Union Square and everywhere everyone is everything and it's terrifying and you look up at the tops of the buildings and realize you built those too, all of you, and for a while you'll feel like this changes everything. And it does. For a while.

Eventually though, you'll still get annoyed by the boy at the coffee shop who's rude as he takes your order, or the woman taking up too much space on the park bench, or the car that cuts you off, and you start to understand that you can't really live your life considering everybody. There are too many of you, and you all want different things, even if they're the same things, and if you think about everybody all the time, you wouldn't even make it to a drop of the people, let alone yourself, and you let go of that. But you keep it somewhere in you, in your heart, and it helps. It helps something. Some loneliness, or, anger. It's big and scary but, it just, it helps.

## TIRED ON THE BUS

THE BUS.

### GUIDE

You're twenty years old. It's 12:46AM, and Adam's head rests on your shoulder as you look out at the UN and there's a warmth and comfort in being tired together as grown ups. You listen to the ding of someone requesting a stop and think about how when you were a child you could just fall asleep, and someone would take you home, and you miss that. But you can do it with Adam now. He trusts you. You won't get off the bus and leave him. You wish you could ride on that bus forever and have his head and hair on your shoulder and you'd feel safe because he felt safe and every couple blocks the bus would stop with a ding and the doors would open and his head would loll slightly and a few people would get off and a few more people would get on and pretty soon you'd be at your stop.

You wake him up and walk a few blocks to your apartment where he flosses his teeth while you wash your face and it's somehow so nice to just floss teeth and wash a face. It's never been so nice to wash your face, it's like having someone else in the room makes it a beautiful thing to share, when it's really just rubbing your face with water, and you finish first and watch him floss his teeth and smile at him. He asks "What?" and you tell him you're just looking. And the two of you walk back to your bedroom and have soft, sleepy sex.

You lie there afterwards with your head against his shoulder and wish that you were still on the bus. Or, wish that you could ride the bus together a lot more. But fall is coming soon and it gets too cold to wait for the bus. You break up not too long after that anyway, and then in the spring you move.

You never live near first avenue again, so you never really take it after that. Maybe a couple of times, when you're feeling nostalgic. He moves to Philadelphia eventually and you move to Seattle and sometimes you take the bus there but you miss the intermittent dings of the "stop requested" sign.

## YOUR ENGAGEMENT PARTY

YOUR BACKYARD.

GUIDE

Your backyard. It's the very beginning of Spring. Your engagement party. You're drunk. You're holding a bottle of wine. You step out from the kitchen through the sliding glass door to the backyard, where Sophie and Marie sit at the table together laughing about something. You can't remember Marie laughing, but there she is laughing with Sophie. Your new best friend, and your old best friend.

And they both look at you and pretend to scream in excitement and you laugh and all of a sudden you feel so much love for both of them for being with you for all the stupid things before this and all the great things and for liking each other because you like both of them, even when you don't. And you set the wine down and you don't drink any more that night because some nights who needs it? And the rest of the day passes.

## SOPHIE'S LIVING ROOM

SOPHIE'S LIVING ROOM.

It's sparsely decorated, but nice. Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel. The suburbs.

GUIDE

Early summer. Sophie's house with Mark. You haven't been here yet, even though they've lived here for two or three years now. You can't really remember. It looks like all the other houses on the street. Sophie sits on the couch, surrounded by her friends, some of whom you've met and some you haven't. Co-workers, neighbors, cousins, her sister-in-law. They're opening baby things. You stand by the counter, drinking a virgin margarita wishing it was the real thing.

You didn't come to her first baby shower, so when you come to this one, she's especially happy to see you, and shows you around the whole house, and Aiden's room, and the rec room that's becoming the new baby's room, and you nod along and smile and say how much you like things that you know Sophie picked. There's a wood giraffe, she loves giraffes.

Now you stand by the counter and try to remember the last time you saw Sophie, but you don't know when it was. And you try to remember the last time you talked to Sophie, not just on the phone, but talked. Really. And everyone on the couches shouts something about something and you stand there and smile and when they say "Aw" you say "aw," and it's not because you aren't happy for Sophie, because you are, but it's just hard sometimes. Especially baby stuff. Especially with Sophie. For whatever reason, you're totally different, and maybe if one of you just said, "Hey, we're totally different," that would be enough, but neither of you ever does.

Years later when Lee's still a toddler she'll come and bring her two kids and say that it would be great if they were all friends and you agree but know it'll never happen. And it never does.

## BEN ON THE BEACH

A ROCKY BEACH.

Ben sits with you on the porch.

GUIDE

Day three of your five day family vacation with Ben's family. It's a beach but a rocky beach. One of those East Coast places. You don't get it. Ben says honestly he doesn't really get it either.

The two of you are sitting out front, getting eaten alive by mosquitoes but not really daring to head inside and pretend to enjoy putting a puzzle together with Steven and his wife. They always put a puzzle together. Lee's sixteen. He drove the other kids into town. You're terrified but try to be understanding and let him act his age. At sixteen you were old enough to drive your friends places too, but now, now that you're old enough to have a sixteen year old, you realize that sixteen's a baby. At sixteen what do you know? Two tons of metal and steel piloted by someone who's barely taking the SAT's? Jesus.

Ben laughs and you realize it's at the look on your face. He sees your worry lines. He used to tease you about your worry lines, but now they're real, they're actual lines, for a few years now, grooving deeper, and he teases you about them less. Ben reaches over and smooths the wrinkles with pressure from his warm hand on your forehead. He smooths it over and over again.

"Bruce is fine," he says. Lee. Bruce Lee. It never really made sense. Ben runs his fingers through your hair. Someone in the house next door heads outside. They wave, and start prepping their grill. They seem confused. Ben offers to help and heads over there. You watch him start a fire for the other house, a bunch of young girls. He's a good teacher. He's a good father.

## YOUR CLOSET

YOUR CLOSET.

GUIDE

This is your closet. You sit in here, sometimes, in middle school. You're twelve now. It's 3:45PM. Bus just dropped you off down the street and you came straight in here.

Sarah Johnson looked in your locker today, over your shoulder and saw the name of a boy you like, Brad Bond. You'd written it Bradley, in a purple heart.

It was only for you to see, but Sarah Johnson was a sneak and looked in over your shoulder and saw it and tore the piece of paper from its tape and laughed at you. She showed everyone, and at first you grabbed for it back, but then she kept going and you felt frozen there, stuck, watching it like it was happening to someone else, but it was happening to you. And Brad wasn't in the hall then, but his friend Luke was, and he saw and you saw him see, and that was it.

So when the bus takes you home today, you're trying not to cry, and say hello to your mother as quickly as you can, so you won't have to talk to her. Sometimes she tries to talk to you, and it's like she just doesn't even know how and always makes it worse somehow, so you just go up to your room and open the closet, and turn on your flashlight, and just sit.

You rest your head on the long dress your aunt bought you. You never wear it, but the material feels good against the back of your head. Sometimes you come in here and write in your journal, or the journal your friends shared. You think about writing in there today, to tell Sarah Johnson how mean she is, that everyone thinks she's mean, but then you hear your mother. Humming. You can't really tell what she's humming, but she's humming something, and you hear the clatter of a pan being pulled out of the cupboard, and the refrigerator opening, and bowls being placed on the countertop, and your mother humming and humming and you just sit and listen.

Your mother says something to your sister about her homework, and goes back to work. She hums and you try to imagine what she's doing in the kitchen, what she's making. It's probably her gross macaroni thing, and as you imagine, in the dark, your flashlight burns out. It's dark. Normally this might scare you a little bit, but you're twelve now, and your mother's humming just through the wall, and it feels like it might all be okay.

It's dark. You hear the humming. The clatter of pans. The click of a stove burner igniting.

#### GUIDE

And when you wake up a few hours later, you slide the door open to find a plate of soft tacos sitting on the floor of your room, right in front of the closet. Right where you can't miss it. You pick one up, it's still warm, and take a bite. Your mom made your favorite dinner.

## PARKING LOT SEX

#### A SCHOOL PARKING LOT.

#### GUIDE

The day before Thanksgiving. You're nineteen. Home from college, and brought Adam with you for your first family holiday together. You drive through your hometown, a place you don't miss at all. But with Adam, you do almost miss it. It feels nice to drive by the house Sophie grew up in, and show Adam where you used to live, next to the golf course, and you pull into your old grade school and get out and tell him this is where you used to go to school. And you laugh because maybe that's stupid and he doesn't care. But he does care.

He cares, and wants to know, and tells you he likes thinking about what you used to be like. You tell him you hate thinking about it.

And you stand there and it's cold, and you see the breath comes out of your mouth, and the air smells like home. You smelled it as soon as the airport doors opened and you stepped out in front of the airport. Maybe it's wetter? Colder? There's a different smell, not water, but maybe like water. The smell of home. And you smell it here, and Adam's here with you, and he holds you against the car door because you're shivering and he kisses your neck and your lips are cold and you kiss in the parking lot of your grade school.

The same parking lot where Ben Johnson once threw up right as he was getting out of his parents' car in the third grade.

And now you're an adult, and you're kissing in the parking lot with your boyfriend, who's here for the holidays with your family, and you almost miss it all this is so nice. And you whisper in Adam's ear "Get in the backseat," and he laughs and the two of you have sex in the parking lot where your mom would drop you off still in her pajamas and you'd be so embarrassed. And you both laugh and laugh and it's one of your favorite memories of your school.

Years later it'll be one of those stories you'll tell if your friends have been drinking and start swapping funny boyfriend stories. But right now, you're still nineteen, the air is cold, the windows are rolled down, and you and Adam are resting, naked, on the backseat of your first car, in the parking lot of your first school, and it smells like home. After a little while it gets cold, and you'll roll up the windows.

## LEE'S SHOES

### A PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE.

Fluorescent lights and paper cutouts of trains and turtles across the walls. An examination table, with colorful plastic stairs leading up to it.

### GUIDE

Your pediatrician's office. Lee is six and three quarters. His doctor, Dr. Fred, sits in the rolling stool that Lee wishes he could play with every time you come in here. You never let him. He gives Lee a shot, and, for the first time, Lee doesn't cry. He just sits and watches the needle go in, and you see that it hurts him, he makes a face, but he doesn't cry.

He asks Dr. Fred if he can have a green band aid, green is his favorite color, and earlier that year Ben painted his entire room green. He sleeps in green pajamas in a green bed in a green room and you think of it as his little mossy cave. But Dr. Fred doesn't have any green band aids, and Lee says "That's alright." And you realize, Lee will grow up. It's stupid really, because you've been watching it all this time, but, now you know. He will be a teenager soon, too soon, and then a grown man, and you will be old and he will look at you the way you look at your parents, maybe with a little more love in his heart, you hope. But right now he wants to play with the doctor's scale in the office, and to weigh his shoes, they never take his weight with his shoes, and he wants to know what they weigh, and the doctor tells you to come back if he develops a bump, or rash on his arm, but otherwise you're all set.

He leaves you alone in the office with Lee, who can't really figure out how much his shoes weigh, and is still small enough for you to pick up, barely, so you do. He holds his shoes, and you hold him, and he says he doesn't think they're very heavy, and you agree with him. They probably aren't.

## TRANSCENDENTAL WEIRDNESS

YOUR COUCH.

Late at night on a cheapo futon.

GUIDE

Your couch. It's a little after midnight. You're twenty years old. You're curled up with Adam there, legs intertwined in a way that neither of you believes is actually comfortable, but it is. And at first you're both surprised by it, then eventually you take it for granted, then, the next person you date, and the next, and the next, you'll realize how remarkable that was to find.

But right now, you don't know any of that yet, and you're laying there with Adam, tracing his arm, and as you run your fingers up and down his wrist, the pale inside of his wrist, over his veins and the small light blond hairs, you think about the fact that you're touching him. Really think about it though. And the fact that, what's underneath his skin is muscle and blood and bone and ligament and that that's all really made up of molecules made of atoms made of just spinning electrons and protons and that neither of you is really touching anything at all, even though it feels like it, and if all the electrons lined up properly for just a moment, you'd pass right through his arm. But they don't. They never do. They spin and spin and the two of you are made up of maybe billions? Trillions? You don't even know. And you don't even find out. But it's unbelievable. And all of those pieces, put together over all of those years, and spinning all those miles and miles somehow, someway, ended up with Adam, here, with this arm, under your fingers, on your green couch, and it's so comfortable, and you try to explain to Adam, but he just says "I know."

And you think he can't really know. Nobody can really know. You don't even know, because if you did, you couldn't ever move again probably. And then you laugh, because you aren't even high, but realize you're having exactly the kind of transcendental weirdness that happens when you are. And Adam shifts slightly, and all of his electrons keep spinning, and it makes your head spin a little, and you put your head on his chest and it steadies you. And you lay there until you fall asleep.

In the morning you wake up in bed, and you never know if he carried you or woke you up in the middle of the night.

## MARIE'S FOR GRADUATION

MARIE'S APARTMENT.

GUIDE

Marie's apartment. It's a little after 5PM. You're both twenty one. Your parents are sitting on the couch talking with hers. It's early May and beautiful outside. It's beautiful inside too.

Marie was always a homebody.

She has framed pictures of all your friends, of all the time you've been at college, and even before, her high school, her childhood friends, family parties. You think about the envelopes you have in a drawer somewhere, somewhere dark where all your pictures live. You think maybe this week you'll put them up somewhere. Do something with them. You don't.

Your parents are here, and they're drinking wine, and eating appetizers the two of you made, and you graduate tomorrow, and it's funny how different everything is, and how you met each other when you were eighteen years old, and how young that was. How young that is, so young, and you're still young, but you were babies, and didn't even know it, and now you have apartments and jobs and assuming everything goes well tomorrow, college degrees, and for everything the two of you have shared, and the tears and the boys and the beers, your parents don't even know each other's first names.

The doorbell rings, and more people from your class arrive, more of your friends, and you get the door and let them in and it's a nice party, you're glad Marie had you all over. Darren gets too drunk and falls through the table.

## YOUR FIRST DATE

OUTSIDE A DINER.

Downtown San Francisco. Cold weather. Music off somewhere.

GUIDE

The air's brisk. It's early November, three days before your birthday. You'll turn twenty eight. It'll be a good year. The last few haven't been very good. You're standing outside the diner after they just asked you to leave, waiting on the sidewalk for Ben to walk out. You'd be cold if you weren't bundled up in a scarf already. You'll look back on the years you lived in San Francisco as your scarf years. You'd wear a scarf almost any season of the year.

You look up through the fog and see the moon just poking through behind the Bank of America building. Somewhere down the street you can hear a man playing jazz standards on his saxophone. He's not very good, but it's magical. You look in through the windows at Ben, as he finishes paying at the counter, and you notice his jacket collar is crooked. It's cute. As he walks out he smiles at you looking at him and you turn down the street. He's out on the sidewalk with you and you adjust his collar. He thanks you, and kisses you. And it's your first kiss. And you start shaking. And he thinks you're cold and pulls you closer.

A few years later he'll surprise you, taking you back to this diner, and you'll walk up the street and right as you realize where you're going, you'll both see that it's out of business. The saxophone player is gone too, and you wonder what happened. Ben puts his arm around you and you tell him that you weren't cold, you were scared. And he kisses you, and it isn't scary anymore. But for now, he's kissing you, and you're kissing him, and there's a saxophone playing somewhere and it's terrifying. Maybe because you knew what it meant, even then? You don't really know.

There are paper Thanksgiving decorations on the windows. The manager turns the lights off. The diner's closed.

## YOUR FATHER'S FUNERAL

THE FUNERAL HOME.

Cheese plate. Family members. Stuff.

GUIDE

Another funeral home. This one's just a few blocks from the old one. It's actually closer to your parents' house. You're sitting on an old couch, a spring somewhere poking into your flesh. The couch is a dark, deep, red color, with swirls of gold lace and blue and dark forest green. Maybe it's supposed to look like an autumn forest?

You feel the fabric under your hands and wonder how many people have sat here. How many people have felt this. Everyone, you guess. At some point. It's strange because it doesn't really feel like anything yet. You're sitting on a couch with your mother, your sister's standing nearby, and your father is lying in a coffin at the front of the room.

People come up and tell you they're sorry, and you know a lot of them, most of them, but there are a good group of people you don't know, or recognize. One man with little tiny glasses, a woman with blue shoes. They come over and talk with your mother and talk with you and you ask your mother who they are and she says they're old friends of your father's. They used to live down the street. And you wish you could have known your father. Actually known him. Not as your father, but as a person. And you realize you never will.

Afterwards, at your house, someone brings a large tray of cheese and you laugh, and laugh, and you look around for your cousin but remember you haven't seen her in probably twenty years. So you leave the living room and walk over the scuffed and scratched hardwood, up the carpeted stairs, down the hall, and into your old bedroom. You shut the door behind you, and open the closet and you barely fit in there anymore, but you do, and you slide the door shut and feel the cold hard wall behind your head and when you wake up, it's dark in your room. Mom's asleep.

And you sit in the living room on the couch and eventually fall asleep too.

## HIGH SCHOOL CRUSH

THE CITY POOL.

Summer. Kids splash, it's a little noisy.



## GUIDE

You're seventeen. It's June, school's been out for something like five weeks, you aren't really sure. You're tan, as tan as you'll ever be, and you're sitting out in the sun, high up in a lifeguard's chair. You've been lifeguarding at the pool since last summer. You and Sophie both do it. She's on a break right now, standing over by Evan's chair, leaning against it.

They both look over at you and laugh about something. Are they laughing at you? You look down at your orange one piece. It's bright, unflattering. Somehow Sophie looks alright in it. Evan looks good in orange trunks, but your coloring, orange just used to make you look so pale.

You've put a lot of effort into getting this dark this summer, and when you look at the bathing suit, you feel a little bit better. Maybe they aren't laughing at you. You hope they aren't. Evan's a year older than both of you, and goes to the public school, and every day you want to talk with him, but don't. Every day Sophie tries to get you to, making a point out of when you're on break at the same time, calling him over. It's embarrassing. You wish Sophie wasn't so... Sophie. But she is. And she's had a boyfriend for two years now and you haven't even kissed a boy yet and that's just embarrassing and you wish you would and you wish it would be Evan, but it isn't.

In fact, after this summer, you never see Evan again. Instead of going to college he moves to China, or Japan, and you guess he never comes back. Not that you'd know. Every once in a while, when you go to a pool, and you see the lifeguards, you remember that summer, those three summers you worked there, with Sophie, and you think about the fact that at sixteen you were supposed to be able to save someone's life, and you're still a good swimmer, but now you don't even remember CPR.

## YOUR FAVORITE DINNER

SOME ITALIAN RESTAURANT.

## GUIDE

It's dark out. You're sitting inside at a vinyl booth, looking out the window as the occasional car's lights pass by. A plate of spaghetti with meatballs on the table in front of you. Lee sleeps with his head on the table next to you. Ben returns from the counter with garlic bread. The two of you eat, fast, hungry. You're starving. You were all at the beach all day and you're tired and your skin has that radiant heat thing going on that comes from being in the sun all day and when the old waitress comes over to ask how it is you say it's the best spaghetti you've ever had. She smiles at you and at sleeping Lee and refills your water. It's funny how dinner can be so good and so important every once in a while. Most of the time it's just food. And you think what it would be like if you lived here and weren't just here for the day and driving back to the city tonight and if you came to John's Pizza once a week and you and Ben would split orders of two different things and a house salad and Lee grew up on the coast with his beach friends and how different everything could have been. Could be still, you guess. But it's nice to only get things like this every once in a while. When you can have something every night it loses a little magic. Plus, you know it's not very good. It's not very fancy. But it's great when you're really hungry and it's the last day of vacation and you're driving home soon. It's great.

## MISSING SWEATER

### ADAM'S APARTMENT.

#### GUIDE

Adam's apartment, on 13th & C. The squishy yellow couch that eventually starts losing feathers, so there are always feathers on the ground, wisping along when you open the door. It's a little after 5, late fall. The weather's just finally starting to get cold, and the sun's been setting before you're even out of classes. It's dark in here, and you're sitting on the couch with Adam behind you, your head propped up on his shoulder.

Adam's sick with a cold and you both have strong cups of hot apple cider vinegar, which he hates, but drinks when you tell him to. Wrapped in sweaters together, on the couch, it's Friday night and you can still smell the Indian food you had delivered, from the place around the corner that closes next year when there's a kitchen fire. You and Adam love this place, and order from them at least once a week. You've been together every day for two weeks now, and, you don't hate each other yet.

You sit in the flashing blue lights of the little computer monitor across the room. Fred Astaire signs to Doris Day about shining stars, and Adam's asleep behind you. You tuck your arms into your soft, warm sleeves, your favorite sweater. When you put it on again next week, it smells like Adam's cologne and you call to tell him.

When you're twenty six, and unpacking your winter clothes in your new apartment, you can't find it. And you look through everything, every drawer and suitcase and compartment and it's just gone. And it never comes back. You want to call someone and tell them what it means, how it feels, but who would you call? It's two-thirty in the morning, and it's just a sweater. You don't even remember where you bought it. But every fall you miss that sweater, and you think of Adam, and the smell of indian food in his tiny little apartment on C.

## THE AWARDS CEREMONY

### A BANQUET HALL.

#### GUIDE

A large banquet hall at a hotel. The tables are all covered in fresh pressed white linens. People are in suits and ties and dresses and it's very elegant. This is maybe the fourth time you've been at the North Pacific Architectural and Design Awards and Ben's over at another table shaking hands and laughing with someone from another company. You recognize him but don't know him. And Ben's laughing, which is nice. Because last time he was nervous. This must be the sixth or seventh time at the NPADA, because this is his second nomination. He designed a local community center that's up for a Green Initiatives Commendation and that's two years in a row for Ben and you drink some wine and think about how silly it is to be at an awards ceremony and wonder if this is what it feels like to be at the Emmy's or something. You almost feel like you belong now, but it's still a little bit strange. It always is a little bit strange. Ben's hair is grey now. You're older than some of the people here now. You used to be the youngest people in the room. The first year you each had maybe six glasses of wine because it was free with admission. This year, you'll have maybe one.

When Ben doesn't win, Richard Harris wins for his Sutter Ave bikepath, he goes to the bar and has a bourbon. You watch Ben at the bar with his drink. You walk up to Ben. You run your hand through his hair. He got a haircut this morning. You sip his drink. You just take this minute to yourselves, you don't have to say anything.

Then you finish eating with the rest of Ben's team: Jessica and Bradford and Tonya, the new drafter, and they seem disappointed but Ben laughs and says we can't win every year. We have to leave some for the kids. Tonya says something like "We are kids. Speak for yourself." And Ben is so much more relaxed now that it's over. This is the last year he's nominated.

## MARIE AND ROBBIE AND LEE

MARIE'S HOUSE.

GUIDE

Early Spring. Rained 28 days out of the last month. You're sitting in Marie's living room, staring through the sliding glass doors to her backyard. Robbie, her son, is 9 now, Lee is 6.

Marie says something about Ben's commute when you see outside, Lee and Robbie, covered in mud, walking through the grass towards the house. And they are covered, head to toe. Looks like they went swimming in it, which later you find out they were trying to do. And you're immediately angry, because now you'll have to drive an hour and half with Lee muddy in the car, and Marie laughs, and she hoses the boys off on the gravel walkway to the house before you force them to take baths.

And when Robbie's out of the bath, he cries, and cries, because he doesn't have the right pajamas, and you can't imagine how Marie does it and always seems so positive. Lee's younger and already much easier. And he pretty much always will be.

Robbie dies in his early twenties. A congenital condition common in people with Down Syndrome. And you feel so sorry for Marie. Can't even imagine what it would be like, if Lee were to... and Marie has had enough tragedy in her life, and it isn't fair, and there's nothing you can do for her. But right now, this very moment, she's spraying Robbie and Lee with a hose and everyone's laughing, and soaking wet, and just covered in mud, and you can't help but laugh too.

## GRADUATION DAY

AN AUDITORIUM.

GUIDE

Graduation day. It isn't your first class of students, but it's your first really good class of students. Where you knew what you were doing, and they respected you. That song plays, the graduation march song, and they march up to the stage in their little robes, ready to head to high school, and you watch as Skip Daniels takes his diploma and shakes the principal's hand.

He'll graduate high school and get a job with his father's gas station. Angie Evans, her family moves to Los Angeles. Lauren Fairbanks, she's killed at camp that summer. A horse gets skittish and kicks her in the head and a few girls from your class see it. Sam Gardener, you hear he's doing commercials, and you look them up years later. You can barely recognize the little troublemaker, but he has the same exact dimple, just one, that you remember. Aviva Greenberg, works at the school as a PE teacher for a few years after college. A little timid to handle children. Charlie Johnson, Emmanuel Kerry, Charlie Kramer, Matt Lawson, Aaron Lee, Nikki Lee, Wesley Murray, Langston Nicchols, Julian Pierce, Vinay Noschese, David Parri, Donati Tomar, Bernard Queen, Nate Yeslin, Harry Zhi. There were others too. A big class.

Your biggest for a few years, but you liked this group a lot, they all liked each other. The first year you feel like you did it right. And now they're heading to high school, where they'll probably make a lot of mistakes. And they don't know anything. You taught them, math and spelling, but they really don't know anything, nothing that matters. Sometimes you'll wish you could teach them what matters, but when you think about it, you don't even know. Love. Friends. That things disappear. How to like yourself. They'll learn those things, hopefully.

## MOM'S APARTMENT

MOM'S APARTMENT.

Cramped, a little tired.

GUIDE

Your mother's apartment. It's the dead of winter. Slush on the ground, dirty from the cars. Your sister is in the small kitchen, washing dishes. It's a miracle she even agreed to come. Your mother's birthday cake, what's left of it, sits on the coffee table. Your mother sits in an old armchair. The one your father used to sit in and read the paper. You say something and she laughs and there's a light in her eyes you haven't seen since your father died. He has heart trouble for a few years. Same as your grandmother. Then his heart gives out. And you wonder about your mother's heart, if it'll break like your grandfather. You know there isn't a squiggly line. She lives though, one year, two years, five. She's still here, and for the first time, there's a light in her eyes. A twinkle, a flash.

And she rocks back in the chair and looks at you over her glasses and you see your mother as she was thirty years ago, and see why your father loved her so badly that he moved to be with her after one week. Your sister yells something about the dishwasher from the kitchen, and the light leaves your mother's eyes. She yells back. You love your sister, but don't see each other very often. She's an attorney and doesn't get along with the family. She feels bad whenever she's there, and can't handle trips over a day or two. It's a shame. You wish you could be closer, especially after dad passes. You are for a little while, but it doesn't last.

Your mother sits back in her chair, rocking a little, and asks you about Lee. He's in high school, and just finished working on Twelfth Night. The radiator starts hissing, and night seems to be closing in. You turn a light on.

You do.

# HOT COCOA

## THE KITCHEN.

### GUIDE

Late fall. Just before Halloween probably. Lee's upstairs in his bedroom doing homework. You're stirring a pot of milk on the stove, to make hot chocolate on the first very cold day of the year. The sun's just behind the hill, the sky's a dark clear blue.

Ben's arms wrap around your waist. He's home early. He turns you around and kisses you and the stove clicks, trying to light because you're pressed against the knob. Ben fingers you in the kitchen and you lean against the counter with your head against the cabinet with the mugs and neither of you makes a sound and the milk boils. You haven't felt sexy in years and now Ben has you coming in the kitchen.

After, Ben takes a cup up to Lee. He comes back down with it, Lee's too old for cocoa. You sit on the couch and drink it. It's warm and rich and good.

# PACKING

## YOUR BEDROOM.

It's quiet, dark, soft yellow light pools from the bedside table. It's cozy and warm.

### GUIDE

Your bedroom in Seattle. The last time you're here. You have a suitcase on the bed, packing. You're packing to visit Lee and his boyfriend, they just moved in together. Ben will meet you the next day, he has a presentation for a city contract today he couldn't reschedule. You hope he gets it, if only so he can relax about it.

You reach for a box of shoes on the top shelf of the closet, and feel a sharp stab in your chest. It's like pulling a muscle, only a hundred muscles. You call your doctor.

An ambulance comes to find you passed out on the floor of the bedroom. Ben cancels his presentation and spends the day with you in the hospital. He takes your face in his hands and kisses you softly. Just like always. You close your eyes. You don't know what happens after that.

Lights fade. You're surrounded by blackness.

There's a soft beeping, like a hospital room heart monitor. The heart monitor flatlines.

### GUIDE

Your heart stops beating. They try to revive you.

There's a flash of light.

GUIDE

Flashes of light, electricity, pulsing through your body. There are so many things you remember. Lee's first word. Your first kiss. A bandaid on a scraped knee. Ben, sick, in bed, a fever. Your father's grave.

There's another flash of light.

GUIDE

They keep trying. Salad on the roof. Champagne under a bridge. Hot bread.

There's another flash of light.

GUIDE

Leaving the adoption office.

FLASH.

GUIDE

Moving your mother into her apartment.

FLASH.

GUIDE

Lee's smile.

FLASH.

GUIDE

Ben's kiss.

FLASH. In the darkness.

GUIDE

You can't really explain the flashes, but you understand them. You understand them all, even the ones you can't tell what they are. And you realize that you're just a flash too.

As the Guide speaks, overhead, quick bright flashes appear and disappear. Shooting stars light up, hot and bright, then fade away.

GUIDE

That you, and Sophie, and your mother and sister and Ben and even sweet Lee, you'll all just flash and sparkle. Like stars you'll burn up fast and bright in the universe then disappear forever.

Remember when you first saw them? Standing out in the cold, the shooting stars. They flash in the night and then they burn up, disappear. But when they flash, they're so beautiful.

You don't want anything to get in the way, anything between you and those beautiful flashes. You'll flash and it's scary and wonderful and then you'll be gone forever.

Complete darkness. Still, quiet.

An EXPLOSION. A firework illuminates the entire room. Twinkling, burning lights fall all around you, disappearing into the dark. It's something to marvel at. Once it burns up, you're in the dark again. Dark and dark and dark.

You are alone.

THE END.