

M & A Restoration

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DEDICATION

For the quiet presence that cannot be seen

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my grandmother whose affection softened.
And my grandfather whose constancy protected.

HOW TO BUILD A HOME

Dear Diary,

I decided to honor the first day of school with a new sunflower journal. My grandmother took me to Avalon Avenue and got me these cool dresses. This year I want to try to be as pretty as possible. I know I am not the level of Diana and Jahaira pretty, but I think when I get skinny I maybe could possibly be.

I still don't really know how to do hair but maybe just doing a straight part down the middle will look nice.

I have to say my prayers. And tonight I will dream about Aiden and what to say to him when I see him tomorrow.

Blue Gardenias,

Mallory

P.S. I don't know how I know but this year will be one with many adventures.

Dear Diary,

I finished my assignment and decided to write to you. I imagine there is a fortress around the perimeter of my desk. The other kids would first need to cross the moat to scale the walls of my desk to see me.

I remember sitting alone at lunch last year. Running my eyes along the cement between the bricks to pass the time. Some girl came up to me and asked me if I wanted to be her best friend. I followed her around the courtyard that day. She kept staring at these two girls that were mad at her. I don't remember seeing her the next day.

The teacher assigned us seats and I am not near Aiden. He has a nice haircut. He is still short but he makes everyone laugh when he talks. He reminds me of jumping into a cold pool and feeling glad you did after you get over the freezing part.

Okay I have to organize my new erasers and pens but tonight I will write to you, I promise!

Violent Violets,

Mallory

P.S. Diana and Jahaira have gotten even prettier if you can believe it.

Dear Diary,

During our snack break, I saw the teacher put Aiden's name in a big star on the bulletin board. The class crowded around him.

Aiden was like a cool breeze. He was like, "You just need to get a 90 or higher."

I felt like it would be a good chance to say something to him, but I lost feeling in my hands and concentrated on getting some sensation back.

Today I learned what Honors is and how I can get Aiden to like me.

If I focus like I do for Super Mario Brothers, Aiden will be my boyfriend by the end of the board.

I just have to find out how to get my name in that cutesy orange star that winks at you like they share your secret.

Didn't I tell you there was an adventure right around the bend!

Bright Aster,

Mallory

P.S. Remember you're a star, kid!

Dear Diary,

Today was really not a great day.

First this troll Mark, who is in the sixth grade and shouldn't have been playing with us little kids, tagged me in the courtyard. It felt like he had it out for me.

So I ran hard to tag him back. Then he starts yelling, "Come on fatso. Come on, come get me!" And everyone started laughing.

Then I was in class and the teacher sat us at the big table in the back. You can see the whole sky across the tops of the open windows. The sky was so blue I couldn't stop staring.

The teacher called on me and asked, "Mallory, what color is the bird in the story?"

I looked down at my book but there was only a caterpillar with glasses. The rest of the kids start shouting at me, "Look at the book!" I try to find the bird in their books, but it's just a sea of blurry books.

I guess, "Brown."

They start calling out, "I know! I know!"

They then started laughing at how red I turned.

Forget Me Forget-Me-Nots,

Mallory

P.S. I think I need to pray harder before bed. I am going to do 20 Our Fathers and 10 Hail Marys.

Dear Diary,

I had a vision last night. While I was saying my prayers, I saw myself escaping to the corner of the living room. Right now there are just piles of boxes and dusty toys.

Sometimes I sit in that corner on Sunday afternoons because the light coming through the window is so strong.

I sip apple juice out of my mom's wine glass thinking I'm a royal lady that can't be bothered.

Today my vision was of my poor self studying with a halo hovering just above my head.

I just have to clear out some of those boxes. Move this small desk there. Each night I'm going to study.

First I will write my times tables starting with 1x1, 1x2, 1x3, even though those are super easy.

I am going to say them with the focus that I say my prayers.

Daring Daffodils,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I did it. I studied.

I said each times table out loud over and over again, imagining the numbers being written on a chalkboard. My throat started hurting so I switched to writing them until my hand started hurting.

The more it hurts, the light of my halo shines brighter.

When I looked at the clock, two hours had passed and it was time to watch my favorite show My House.

Sometimes I put apple juice in a baby bottle and sneak sips from it. I place a pillow on the floor and grab this soft blanket that's the color blue of Mary's robes.

Dark Dahlias,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I studied hard for a week but then fell into a mood.

My dad keeps yelling at my mom and then he yells at us and then she steps in and yells at him.

Some of my siblings get into these yelling spells and the others get more quiet. My house feels like it has too many hallways and dead ends and not enough rooms.

There is a room on the top floor which everyone avoids probably because it is piled with the most dusty boxes of clothes and toys that no one wants.

Lately the mean mother has been visiting me. She is mad that I haven't been doing my chores or studying.

I'm afraid to even write about her. She sees everything I do.

I just need a few moments to imagine that I'm the princess waiting for Jack and his beanstalk to reach through the clouds. I am waiting like a bird on the stone wall. When he comes, he takes my hand, and leads me down the beanstalk. But I say, "Can I have my hand back because it's really hard to manage going down this monster vine with one hand?" And he laughs and says, "Princess, you're more than I bargained for." And I say, "That's what everyone says!"

After replaying that convo a few times, I will fold the clothes on my bed.

Better Beanstalks,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today the mean mother said she would punish me by giving me to the man. I was sitting on my long white bureau. The gray sky tip-toed through the curtains, making the pink walls a softer pink. None of my Princess day dreams were working. I tried the Jack in the Beanstalk. I tried Snow White feeding all the creatures. I tried the Cinderella total transformation that even my wretched step sisters don't recognize me.

I placed all my dolls in a row. I brushed their hair and straightened out their clothes.

The gray day still wanted to be known. I asked, "How much more can I know you?" It showed me perfectly placed items in a museum.

Then the mean mother appeared. At first she just watched me. I pretend to not notice because she prefers it that way. I pretend to be really dumb. Finally she speaks, "You ungrateful girl. You have not done any chores for a week. You have not studied. You will continue to be the girl that everyone laughs at."

I am relieved because I don't have to guess what she is thinking.

I tell her, "I will do as you say."

"It's too late," she says.

The man in a tan coat appears. He tells me that we are going to go lie down now. I am happy because there is an ending.

Terrible Tulips,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have to stay busy all day. And try to get more visions. Pray more. That's how the last vision came. I could feel it was right because of the heat that was surrounding my head.

I have to do all my chores and if I am done early I will do everyone else's chores. I want to suffer for my goodness.

I know my times tables no problem now so I have to find new things to learn. Maybe I can get my mom to buy me some books.

I will make a schedule and work all day feeling my halo's light grow with each completed task.

Some cool Nile River flower
(I'm sure there is one),

Mallory

Dear Diary,

As I was looking through the books in my house, I found a book about a mother.

The mother looked so sweet. The book is about guiding her little girl and boy in their daily chores from cleaning their faces when they wake up to making breakfast to feeding the birds. It ends with them doing their prayers at night. Tomorrow is Sunday and CCD is cancelled this week. I will follow this book like a guide. It will keep me busy the whole day.

Ghost Orchid,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

The sun was shining so bright right to my part of the bunk bed. I actually looked out the window for a while rather than staring at the ripped cardboard where my sister wrote the names of all her crushes.

I listened to the birds singing, imagining these were the birds that my imaginary mom and I were going to feed later. It's like my relationship with them was starting.

I had the book under my pillow. I turned to the first page. The mother had the sleepy-eyed boy and girl wake and get dressed. I could feel her presence near me, encouraging me. The blue shirt in my bottom drawer came to mind. It was like the light blue dress the little girl had.

Then they washed their faces in this large circular basin. I filled a cereal bowl with water and brought it to the kitchen table.

My sister looked at me weird. She asked, "Why don't you just use the bathroom sink?"

I just stayed quiet and waited until she left. I didn't want to lose my concentration.

I wet my face with a rag. The water felt cool. I dried it with a towel.

Outside the mother and children fed the birds in a sort of closed courtyard.

The mother's stillness was enough to command the children in their duties.

I took a piece of bread to the backyard.

I ripped it into pieces, but no birds were around.

The good mother was not near me.

I ruffled through the pages. There were only four or five pages left.

I stared at her as if to summon her out of the courtyard.

All of a sudden, birds swooped down, all around me.

I decided then that I would write out the pages that were not in the book.

This was a great start, but I had to imagine more. I had to always just imagine more. And I knew I could because that's what I'm pretty good at.

Weepy Willow,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Aiden got the star of the month again.

I came home and watched TV.

I quickly did my Math workbook. We didn't get a lot of homework today.

I wanted to do more. I wanted to feel like I felt when I was pushing all those times tables into my memory. Recognizing patterns in the stone walls to find my way out.

Instead I will play my Cinderella game where I clean everything dirty. I'll write about what I cleaned later.

Powerful Pines,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Tonight my evil stepmother made me clean until seven at night. First, I put away the leftovers from dinner—fish sticks on a paper plate with aluminum foil over it.

Then I did the dishes.

Finally I swept and mopped the kitchen floor.

When I was so tired and my hands had wrinkled, I went into the staircase. The only light was coming in from the top floor window. I'm not sure if it was moonlight or the glare from street lights.

One of the paintings in the hallway was a house in the distance and a field stretched out as long as the sky. I would always imagine I lived in that house.

But tonight that scene seemed like it would be more of the same.

My evil stepmother found me. She yelled at me that I hadn't scrubbed the bathroom.

Now as I write this from the light of the moon, on this old dusty staircase, I believe that this means we are getting prepared for something great.

I will continue to do the stepmother's chores but I believe something like a fairy godmother is coming my way.

Magical Pumpkins,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I am so excited I just got these red jellies that make me feel like Cinderella and at some moments, Dorothy. I have to start carrying myself like royalty.

When I play on the hill and go down the stone path, I am Dorothy.

I click my heels together and say, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home." But I don't really know what that means.

When I clean, I am just waiting for the moment that I sit near the chimney. I look out at all the buildings from the fire escape.

I chuckle because this Cinderella has a secret.

She is not only going to be the prettiest but the smartest at the Ball.

Fairy Lilies,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have a friend that lives across the street. Her name is Monica.

I go to her house after school. Her mom is not home, and we drink her mom's soda and walk around in her mom's heels.

The best part is that she has Super Mario Brothers and I don't have to wait forever to get a turn like I do when I play with my brothers.

Her cousin Roger lives above her. He's really cute with straight brown hair that's kind of long. He's a teenager. He has a nice smile, but he always has drops of sweat on his upper lip.

I usually leave before her mom gets back and then I do my homework.

Terrific Tiger Lilies,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I was at Monica's house today. I suggested we pretend we are Cinderella because her room is really messy, and I kept staring at the mess on the bureau as she was talking to me.

"Mallory! Are you listening?"

"Can I just get all the pens and put them in this cup?"

"Just leave it."

Instead we put on her mom's heels. I put on high red pumps. And she chose the school bus yellow pumps.

It was cool to clack back and forth across the black-and-white chessboard floor.

We sat on the couch, legs crossed and toes up to hold onto the heels.

She handed me some soda in her mom's wine glass and a handful of orange mints.

Monica asked, "Where is Carlos? He is late again."

And she tossed the pills into her mouth while pushing her head back.

I said, "Maybe his boss has him working late."

Monica said, "He better not be with Jessica."

Monica's words started to direct mine and I felt as if I was entering a dark alleyway.

"Jessica?" I tried.

Then she said I should go lie down on her mother's bed and she would go lie down on her bed. And when our boyfriends came home, we would have sex with them.

I went into her mother's room. It felt weird to have the heels on in bed.

This game started to feel like the ending was in a worse place than the beginning was.

After a few minutes of staring at the ceiling, Monica came in and said, "Okay. I'm bored, want to play video games?"

I told her I had to finish my homework.

Sad Sunflowers,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today at school there was a new girl. She caught my eye because she was reading a book while we were standing in line. In the courtyard, it's like all this chaos swirled around her and she didn't notice or didn't care.

Then at lunch, I found where she was sitting. She already made friends with this really talkative girl Mary. She ate her lunch, chewing each bite slowly. She also didn't laugh or smile in a loud way.

I found out her name is Alex and she plays the clarinet. Maybe during band practice, I can ask her if she has an extra reed.

Plentiful Gerberas,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I was actually talking to my mom. I was asking her about what she wanted to be when she grew up. She said she wanted to be a concert pianist but her teacher said her hands were too small. I told her I wanted to be an actress.

She started singing, "Pipe dreams. Pipe dreams."

I don't really know what that means.

Then she looked at my jellies and said they were getting run-down because I wear them all the time.

I had a sudden vision of them right next to my bed before I go to sleep..

Melancholy Moonflower,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Sometimes I draw these faces in my notebook. I try to make them as ugly as possible so that I can challenge myself to see if I can make them look pretty again.

First I give it lopsided eyes and stringy hair and no lips. Then I draw over the course features or add to them to see if a really ugly face can be made beautiful.

Sometimes I think that about my life. What if I became really bad or my life got really bad—poor, ugly, fat, mean, and then I was able to change it all the way Cinderella did.

The thing is I kind of want to see how bad it can get just so that I can then amaze everyone with how much I turned it all around. Something in me feels that powerful. And I want others to know it too.

Roses hanging on the Gazebo,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Another month has passed. They announced the new Honor student. And someone beat Aiden FINALLY. It was the new girl Alex.

When they announced it, she didn't even look like she cared. She just kept doing her math problems.

I found some other cool things about her. She goes horseback riding on the weekends.

She just got a mushroom haircut and wears these really cute sunflower dresses with a denim jacket over it.

I think she's probably too smart to want to be friends with me. I mean there's probably some Honors Club where the smart kids make note of each other.

I need to focus. I am going to stop going over Monica's. I am going to go straight home and study and clean and say my prayers.

Now I have another reason to get Honors.

Horseshoe in a Field of Clover,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex talked to me today. I was carrying a model of the solar system in a blue plastic Mind bag— you know, the navy blue bag with the white pull string that makes you think you're a preppy girl going to play tennis.

Then Alex said to me, "I love The Mind, you shop there?"

I said, "Yeah sometimes."

I don't. I took it from my sister who saves all of her fancy mall bags, folded neatly under my bed.

Then Alex said, "You want to come over to my house one day? I live down the block."

I said, "Ok, sure."

Lavender in a Bicycle Basket,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex's house is amazing. She has these huge brown leather couches with pale pink blankets that feel like heaven. Oh and Alex calls them sofas, not couches. Her kitchen walls are painted this creamy orange color like a pinkish flower pot. These adorable ceramic figurines cover the wall. There's a prickly cactus, an emerald house, and bright red desert poppies. She said her mom is going for a New Mexico theme. I don't really know what that meant but I know I liked it.

Her refrigerator has this built-in ice maker. She just pushed her glass up to the fridge and out pops these perfectly formed cubes. And she uses real glass. I like the clinking sound the ice makes when it falls into the glass.

She invited me to stay for dinner, but it all was just cuteness overload and I wanted to run back and record it here so I wouldn't forget anything.

Terra Cotta Window Box,

Mallory

P.S. I didn't know there were flowers in the desert.

Dear Diary,

I have been staying over at Alex's house almost every day.

Today she suggested we join the Holiday Bake Sale committee to help with decorations.

She turned to me after the Bake Sale meeting with a frantic look.

“Let’s build a Winter Village with homes, churches, and a town square. And have it snowing everywhere and little clothespin dolls wearing mittens and scarves.”

“How?”

“With cardboard.”

“I don’t think I can. I can’t draw. My dad has been doing my art projects for me.”

“We just have to cut out cardboard squares and glue them together. I’ll cut it and you can glue it.”

With Alex, I just say what I’m thinking, and she laughs. But in a nice way.

Grapevines above the Fireplace,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today when I woke up, I couldn't find my jellies.

I went over to my mom and sister who were sitting at the kitchen table.

I asked, "Have you guys seen my jellies?"

They didn't answer me, but when my sister looked at me I saw a smile hung at the corner of her mouth.

Decaying House Plants,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have been avoiding Alex for a few days. She keeps wanting to get started on this Winter Village, but I feel like I also have to start thinking about my future. She's already getting great grades and I never got Honors.

She has an amazing mom who takes her horseback riding. When I once asked my mom to take me to dance, she said, "I took your sister to one dance lesson and she never wanted to go back."

And you know what, as much as I clean this house acting like stupid Cinderella, it still doesn't look as beautiful as her mom's New Mexico theme. She also goes shopping like every month. Her whole wardrobe is from The Mind and The Looks Place. I go shopping just at the beginning of the school year, and it's to the cheap stores on Avalon Avenue.

I thought I would take this time alone to study and try to get ahead but it turns out all I do is flip through this Allen Ethen catalog and day dream about the family I might one day have. My favorite living room looks like a summer cottage that is so sweet you can feel the breeze come through the french windows.

Coffee Table Potporri,

Mallory

P.S. I miss seeing Alex.

Dear Diary,

I've just been hiding out in the farthest corner of the house. Thinking about how I could make it beautiful. I started a checklist in my head: organize the holiday decorations in one box, the baby clothes in another box, label the boxes, and pile them by similar widths. Then the fun part, wipe away all the dust, crack open the window, vacuum around the boxes and watch as the light transforms the room so that the cozier elements can be seen like the embroidered rug with daisies and the light cream colored drapes and the strawberry shortcake plaque on the wall.

But just as I was about to get the courage to act, I heard the mean mother's voice.

She said, "How funny. She thinks she is a beautiful princess, Cinderella. You don't even know how to look neat and presentable. Nothing like that pretty girl Alex in your class."

I said, "Don't talk about my friend Alex. You don't know anything about her." She vanished.

And the room looked different.

There was a special light that revealed how ugly it really was. It felt like my brain was going to break.

I called her back.

She made me forget this project which she called a waste of time. She made me clean the entire house until seven at night so that everyone would notice. No one notices but the mean mother.

She said I can't hang out with Alex until I get Honors.

I felt pretty low but then I remembered Super Mario Brothers—when you lose your height and you have no gold coins or special powers, you can still play a turn.

Frayed Daisies,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Why is it the harder I try to be good— the worse I act? I am still avoiding Alex so I walk through the courtyard to 27th Street.

I saw Monica and she invited me to walk home with her. On our walk, she takes out a cigarette.

She said, “Chill, it’s not a big deal.”

I pull her into the park.

“Can you just finish it here?”

While she is smoking, Aiden and his new girlfriend Adriana walk by us.

Adriana is not to be messed with. She also has a mushroom cut. She wears a hunting jacket with the reversible orange inside. I freeze around her. It’s like she notices everything.

Adriana asks if she could take a puff from Monica’s cigarette. Aiden takes a puff. They pass it to me.

At that moment Alex comes by.

She said, “Mallory, where have you been? We’re supposed to be working on the Winter Village.”

Then Monica says, “Yeah Mallory, you have to work on the Winter Village!”

And Monica and Adriana start laughing.

But Aiden is curious and asks, “What’s the Winter Village? It sounds cool.”

Aiden hands me the cigarette again.

Alex is staring at me like I locked her in the courtyard after school hours.

And the little kids are spinning around on that spinning wheel really fast.

I say, “Alex, the Winter Village thing is lame.”

Then Monica adds, “Yeah lame and nerdy like horseback riding.”

Suddenly, the spinning wheel stops.

Playground Weeds,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have been avoiding everyone. I just want to study.

On my walk home, I passed by the Salvation Army. I went in to look around. I found a miniature snowman for a dollar. I saw this row of tiny pine trees dusted in fake snow. I'm going to collect a few more things.

There's three more weeks before the Holiday Bake Sale.

Cardboard Boxes,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today as I was sitting in the far and away room, I saw the sun shining brightly on a pile of old dusty books.

In the pile was a book titled, "Little Women" in romantic lettering. It had a forest green velvet cover and gold vines around the border.

I started reading it and I can't stop.

I imagine being one of the March sisters but especially Jo March. She is so outspoken and brave. Her main goal in life is to be a writer. I don't know if I really want to be a writer. I just want to be like her.

Placeholder,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Something crazy happened today. You really are not going to believe it. Today I got called down to talk to some guy in a suit. He was bubbly for an old guy in a suit.

He kept asking me to repeat long rows of numbers or asked what numbers came next. It was super easy because I had memorized all my times tables and I just saw the numbers on the chalkboard.

But here is the crazy part, when I came back, Aiden talked to me. He said I was just tested for the “Gifted and Talented” program and that we’re going to be taken out of class every week and go to a different class for smart kids.

Cottage Signposts,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I'm done for. How can you have the best day of your life and the next day be the worst day of your life?

Here is what happened from the beginning.

We got this really hard math worksheet for homework. I mean if you didn't memorize your time tables, it would take you two days to finish.

This morning, we went over it and I got 100. So then the teacher goes, "Ok clear your desk. Pop quiz!"

The quiz had the same exact problems as the homework.

As I pass my quiz up, the teacher walks down the aisle and she sees my homework in the middle of the aisle, right between me and Alex's desk.

She picks up the worksheet and says, "What's this Mallory?"

Then she says, "Alex, I thought I said to put this away."

Before we left for lunch, the teacher called Alex and me up to her desk. She made us re-test but I only got a 70 the second time. She said that was proof that I cheated.

Alex gave me the look from the waste land where the dead tree gives no shelter.

Crushed Violets,

Mallory

M & A Restoration

Dear Diary,

M & A Restoration drives by me when I'm walking to school.

The letters M & A are in large typewriter font. It's usually when I'm talking to God in my head.

Construction Vans,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex approached me in the hallway. We were both running late to gym class. She yells, "Hey."

I turn around and say, "Hi."

She asks, "Are you demented?"

I don't know why but I say, "Yes."

She says, "First you make fun of me, and then you get me accused of cheating. What is your problem?"

"I don't know."

"You seemed nice. But I just don't know anymore."

And she started to run ahead of me to the gym but I felt like this was my chance.

So I yell out, "Wait!"

She slows down.

And I say, "I don't go horseback riding or have an Allen Ethen living room."

"Whose Allen Ethen?"

It feels like I've said out loud one of my diary entries.

Then she says, "Mallory, my life is not that easy either. My mom wants me to be the best. And I just want to have fun and do crafts. Why did you cheat on the test?"

"I didn't! It fell out of my trapper keeper. I didn't even notice."

"You have to say that."

"I will."

"I started to find out the measurements of the houses and bell tower."

"I have a snowman and pine trees."

Bird in the Bell Tower,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex and I have been building the Winter Village every evening this week. I go straight to her house. I'm even having dinner with her family. Her parents ask us about our progress. I just smile.

She marks the measurements on the cardboard and I cut them out. Did you know that there are different types of roofs?

Some nights we are so focused that we can't stop and we both fall asleep on her basement sofa.

Even her basement is elegant, it supposedly has a Florentine theme like a Duchess's chambers with silver candle sticks and medieval tapestry prints on the sofa.

Her mom drives me home in the morning and I get ready for school.

Our moms talked to each other and they both agreed that it was okay.

Stained Glass Chapel,

Mallory

P.S. The wasteland is growing fruit and I'm not sure if I can eat it or if I'm just meant to admire it.

Dear Diary,

Today we had the meeting about cheating. My dad came in. Alex's mom came in. The guidance counselor was there.

The guidance counselor Ms. Smith said, "I don't understand why two smart girls would jeopardize their placement in the Gifted and Talented program. Help me understand."

The rain spattered hard on the windowsill. My dad was about to stand up for me and probably lose his temper.

But I felt like it was my responsibility to say something.

So I said, "Wait Dad. Let me."

As I stood up, a strong wind blew some of the papers off the long conference table.

And I started, "With all due respect, Ms. Smith, Alex and I take our work very seriously. It may be hard to believe, but my homework slipped out of my trapper keeper. I didn't know it was on the floor. Alex also didn't know."

And she was about to interrupt me, "But how do you explain..."

"Yes, my second score was lower than my first quiz score. Even though I did nothing wrong, I felt like I had. And I just couldn't stop thinking about how I messed up."

"But if you still don't believe me, then just punish me. It was my homework on the floor. Alex shouldn't suffer for my mistake."

I fell into my chair and turned completely red. But Alex had the biggest smile on her face.

Laurel Wreath,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

As I was about to walk in my door, Monica saw me from across the street. She called out to me.

I tried to just wave.

Then she called out again, "Mallory, come here for a second."

I felt bad. I knew Monica didn't have anyone home.

The acorns and pine cones were really piling up around the fence that contained a little concrete front yard. We played tag in this little courtyard late into the evening with all the neighborhood kids. The wall and fence acting as safe bases.

I said, "Hey Monica, what's up?"

"I want to show you something. Come to my backyard."

"I have a lot of homework actually."

"Come on, it will be quick."

I agree to go to her backyard and she brings me to this small kiddie pool that is filled with a watery brown sludge.

"See this, this is called witches' brew. It's hungry. Go around the yard and find as many rotten apples, dead insects, dried leaves, and any other gross thing and throw it in."

I rummaged through some overgrown grass under the broken down jungle gym. After picking up the bright green apples, a brown decaying mushy part was revealed underneath.

I threw them in.

Then Monica found a big stick, "We have to stir it all together now. Come grab the stick with me."

"Double double toil and trouble,

Fire burn and cauldron bubble,

Mallory likes Aiden,

Send this message to him as her confession."

"Monica, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, you like Aiden don't you? This is going to get him to break up with Adriana. And then he'll be yours."

"What?"

"Yeah, haven't you ever done spells before?"

"But Adriana is your friend isn't she?"

"I care more about you Mallory. We were friends first. That matters more."

"No."

“Stop being a loser Mallory.”

“I gotta go.”

I walk through her apartment and into the hallway. Suddenly the lights shut off.

Roger from the top of the stairs says, “Hey girls, let’s play a game.”

It’s so dark I can’t see the fingers I hold up in front of my face.

I yell, “Hey guys, turn on the light. I can’t see anything.”

Now Monica has come out, “Why are the lights off?”

Roger says, “Let’s play a game. Come up the stairs and see if you can guess the person you’re in front of, if it’s me or Jesus. If you guess correctly, I’ll turn on the lights.”

“This is such a stupid game, just turn on the lights.”

“You’ll have to come up the stairs first.”

I walked up the steps on the left side and Monica walked up the steps on the right side.

As I got close to the top, I felt like I should just run in the opposite direction. I should just try to open the front door, find the knob using my hand. But instead, I keep walking up the steps.

As I get to the top, I feel the breath of someone and this someone kisses me. The upper lip is sweaty and before I can even say anything I feel a hand between my legs.

And I say with all the courage I can summon, “Roger,” but it comes out like an engine’s final putter.

Then he says, “See you won. You can go home now.”

My body lay crumpled in a pile of bones at the top of the stairs, and as I walked down, the ghost of my body looked behind, seeing that I could walk fine without bones, I just left them behind.

I was able to quickly float across the street and into the far and away room.

The dark is uncomfortable but the light is too bright.

And the mean mother keeps calling to me.

I don’t know who Mallory is anymore. Now there is just the mean mother.

And I thank God for her.

Low Lily of the Valleys,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

The mean mother has me cleaning constantly. It's gotten to the point where my brother is yelling at me to stop cleaning his room. I'm just picking his clothes off the floor because I've scrubbed, polished, and organized every other room.

The vacuum wasn't picking up all the dog hairs so I started to pick them up by hand. The staircase is now like that ruby wine color glittering in the sun. But I gotta go because I shouldn't even be writing this.

Bejeweled Cup,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have to write this really quickly. I have a lot of chores right now. But at night, I've been reading Little Women and I say as many prayers as I can on the rosary beads.

Really Red Roses,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Even though the mean mother said, “It’s no big deal,” and “It took you long enough,” my name is in the BIG STAR. God, my name is in the big star.

Ivy-Covered Wall,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex yelled at me during lunch. I was sitting alone.

She said, "What's the big deal Dementor? Ignoring me again I see. The Holiday Bake Sale is a few days away and you have been MIA."

I started laughing because I don't know how to respond to things anymore. I am not Mallory or the Mallory she knew.

But when I laughed, she started to laugh too.

Then she said, "I knew you were crazy too."

I just walked away.

Rose Petals in the Doorway,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I'm bored and you know what I don't really care what the mean mother thinks of me.

I don't want to clean.

Cracked Stained Glass,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I want to set something on fire. It makes me not want to leave the house. I imagine that I have super human strength and I race cars on the highway. I will outrun every stupid car with a family of four going on vacation. Them with their stupid Allen Ethen perfect living rooms. I hate leather sofas. I hate pale pink throw blankets. They are not for me. They slow me down. I am out running everyone. And I don't need anyone. I never did. No one knows what I know. And that means I can probably do things they can't.

Junk Yard Fire,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

It's so weird. I couldn't find my diary and then I found it outside in my backyard near the chipped gray green wall.

As I was sitting back there, Alex appeared.

She said she didn't care that I was acting weird and that she wanted me to help her display the Winter Village tomorrow. She said I did actually help with a lot of the work.

I told her that I wanted to tell her the truth, but that I wasn't ready yet. She said she would be there when I was ready.

Loyal Laburnum,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today was the day of the Holiday Bake Sale.

The teachers strung these gentle white lights along the corridor.

We had to make a bunch of trips from Alex's mom's car to bring in all the little pieces of the Winter Village

Everyone was attracted to our Winter Village.

They were like, "You two did all this?"

"Well it was mostly Alex," I said and she nudged me to stop giving her all the credit.

We stood by our village square with a big Christmas tree at the center laughing with the little kids who came by to play with our snowman figurines.

There was only one weird thing about today.

When I came back from the bathroom, I saw Alex laughing with Monica. Alex was holding up my snowman figurine in the air like it was a joke.

As I walked toward them, Monica quickly disappeared.

I thought that was strange but, all in all, it was a lovely day.

I feel like I'm becoming more real.

A New Chapter,

Mallory

P.S. Did you ever realize that the birds also chirp right before the sun sets? I'm hearing them now as I sit in Alex's living room.

TYPES OF HOMES

Dear Diary,

I started walking home from school. I just can't be seen getting into my grandfather's car with all these kids. Everyone stares at what kind of car you go home in and who is in your car. There's about six of us, now that we've been driving Monica home.

I need to seem like a cool, pretty, mysterious girl. I keep imagining that I run into a hot guy from North Downfield High School on my walk home.

I have to get my diet of salads and fruits consistent. In the meantime, I need to scope out this territory for the chance that I pass by the love of my life.

Front Yard Sunflowers,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Every morning, I feel like I am shackled in the courtyard to our little friend circle. Alex is still my best friend and we got over a lot of problems we had in fourth grade. We talk on the phone every day but now it seems like our focus is always on what boys will be around when we go places.

I'm in 6th grade now and not much really happened in 5th grade.

Now I want to be different like Billie Cho in that one video where he's walking down a hotel corridor and picks the pay phone off the hook and drops it as he passes it. That's punk and I want to be that.

My style is more like a uniform of blue jeans, red Transverse sneakers, and an oversized Gavin Stein sweater. I take a lot of the sweaters from my sister's closet. When I get back home, I rush and take off her sweater, spray some perfume on it, and put it back in her closet.

The last update I will give you is one that is kind of hard for me to write about. I have started a habit of lying. I wanted to compete with Steven Stargate. He was winning this reading competition every month. You had to keep a reading log of how much you read each month. Everyone was just so amazed at how smart and hardworking he was. I decided that I would read for at least an hour a night, but I was reading the same line over and over again and couldn't get past the first page. So after fifteen minutes of trying, I filled out the log and put down an hour, sometimes two. I started winning.

Something took over and I needed to keep the lie going.

What worries me is that sometimes I lie to my friends to seem more interesting. And I don't pray anymore like I used to. My brother was telling me that God is not real and it's just a story that they tell people so they are not afraid when they die. After I thought about that for a while, I think I didn't feel so bad about lying.

Anyway, it's getting late and I have to watch this cool new show, *My So-Called Reality*. I want to be just like Roxeanne, this character who's always getting drunk.

Rose Tattoo,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I told my sister and her boyfriend that I don't care if I die. I didn't mean it like I wanted to kill myself. I just meant that I think I pretty much have experienced most of what life is and if I happened to die then I wouldn't mind it.

Even after my explanation, she looked at me like a dense hedgerow she couldn't see past.

I was glad when she and her boyfriend left the room. I could then begin focusing on my homework and TV shows.

I sit on my bed with the TV on in front of me. The noise comforts me and helps me focus. During this time, I'm also sneaking in prime fantasizing time. I take a peek at *Pretty* magazine. The latest spread that got my attention was how these young women lost 50-60 lbs. Natalie's *before picture* was her in an over-sized, dull sweater, hunched over and smiling. I know that fat girl smile well. It says, "I'm taking up too much space and am unattractive but at least I'm nice!"

My girl Natalie lost 60 lbs. and they put her cute new body in a mini skirt and knee-highs. She towered over her fat slouching self. Her real personality was shining through. She looked like she had fun and plans.

I'm basically the *before picture*. I mean, I have been told I have a pretty face but my teeth are crooked. My mom said insurance won't cover braces. So I have to focus on my body. I have a fat stomach and big thighs. My thighs rub together in the summer and it's torture to wear shorts.

So I take a peek of the new Natalie and I imagine it's me in the center. And I have a cute new outfit showing off my slim legs that don't touch.

But then I get bored of fantasizing and go make a bowl of vanilla ice cream and sprinkle M&Ms over it. I'll worry about the diet tomorrow. Besides, the real priority is making sure my teacher knows I'm one of the smart ones. But this year I want to blend in and not be such a teacher's pet. I'm going to play it cool and just let my test scores speak for themselves.

Grouchy Trash Cans,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

My new teacher is constantly making jokes. The rest of the kids laugh but I have no idea what they are laughing about.

She says normal things like, “Okay Dokey Smokey Pokey,” in a drawn out, cartoony voice. It drives me crazy and I’m just trying my best to not show her how much I detest it.

I mean honestly it distracts me from my fantasizing time. I’m trying to imagine myself skinny and meeting a hot guy on my walk home and then I hear these cat-like shrieks and the forced laughter of the class.

I already decided I’m not going to be a teacher’s pet. I just want to show my intelligence with the real proof of my grades.

Hard Steel Beams,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I came home from school today and there was a bag of maxi pads on my bed. It had a nauseatingly pink color and it was huge. I was trying to hide it. I mean I was taking my mom and sister's supply from the bathroom closet. I just wanted to avoid any awkward conversation about it.

I come home and I see this bag on my bed. I don't know what would have been worse: if my mom had awkwardly cornered me by telling me some sentimental story about when she became a woman or this.

This way just makes me feel stupid.

Blood Diamonds,

Mallory

P.S. That's what Alex calls it.

Dear Diary,

I think I'm starting to understand what it means to be a woman. It sucks. Today I just stared at the inside of my closet. I have not stared so hard at a wall than I did this wall. And you know what the strange thing was, it was soothing to me.

I don't know if I morphed into another person overnight or if this is what the thing which shall not be named does. And does it stop at some point? And when?

Tic-Tic-Tic Ceiling Fan,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I'm feeling better. The new Eliza's catalog came in the mail. The girls are so cute and pretty and skinny. The clothes are sweet but edgy. I wish I could buy them all. Since I'm not at the skinny body I want to be at, I'm going to focus more on my tomboy style. I'm going to get these punk pin-striped Vickies overalls. They will look so cute with my red Transverse.

Some 8th graders were making fun of my Transverse during lunch. One girl was like, "Are those really Transverse?"

Another girl said, "Yeah, but those are from the 80's."

I didn't know they were from the 80's or outdated or whatever. I just thought they looked cool and punk. I hate my school. Everyone just cares about brand name clothing and being in style.

Anyway, I may not wear those shoes anymore, but I'm not sure yet.

Red Umbrella on a Gray Day,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Tonight I went and sat on my stoop around 2 am. I just wanted to know what I would feel out there. The street lights glazed over everything in a sad amber. As expected, nobody or nothing made its presence known.

For that reason, the parked cars and the neighbor's hedgerows suddenly seemed animated. It's not like they were moving, but it was like they were my guests. I now had to recognize them.

I seem to be veering back and forth between two identities. One identity wants to become this perfect teenage girl. I want to be skinny and beautiful and date a hot guy. Get perfect grades and into a perfect college. And then the other identity just wants to fold. I want to spend time alone looking at the mysteries in my mind. Like coming out here at 2 am. I was a little scared, but after I faced my fear, I realized it was only me that I was afraid of.

Maybe if you look long enough at something it becomes nothing.

Sentient Streetlights,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I didn't get much sleep last night after my little night time experiment. In class, I didn't do such a great job removing the scowl from my face. She just kept making these jokes and looking at me.

At awkward moments like this, I just build a home with my hand. I put my hand in different formations. When each finger stands on its point like they are legs, that's the gazebo. The gazebo is for summer outings. I am in the gazebo with friends and there is a light rain.

When I cup my hand like a cave or a mud hut, it's winter and you've been hibernating with a mate and you meander out of your slumber to see if the daffodils are peeking through yet.

Every time I looked up from my hand homes, my teacher was staring at me. I had to pretend I was still answering the questions even though I finished ages ago.

Simple Homes,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex usually walks me halfway home, but today Gael was with us. I think Gael likes Alex. His teeth are really messed up, kind of like mine. Cluttered like the rubble in the corner of an old Cathedral. He's cool though. He's funny. But anyway, he's neighbors with these two girls, Brittany and Catherine. He told us to go over to their house with him.

I don't really like these girls that much. Brittany has the body of a quarterback but the smile of an angel. Catherine wears a limp pony tail and a twisted smile like she's plotting something.

Alex convinced me to go.

When we first walked in, it smelled bad like the cat had peed. And not only that, they had this white end-to-end carpeting that was now stained gray. All around the house were these piles of clothes like tents set up in a camp.

When Catherine asked Gael to go to her room, Brittany gave me and Alex a weird look like that was supposed to mean something.

I was like, "Okay Alex let's go."

I walked home and I kept smelling their house like it had gotten on my clothes.

Pitiful Piles,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today our G&T teacher told us that we were going to be writing a book of poetry. She would teach us a new form every class and then we could write about whatever we wanted.

We have these morning worksheets that are like warm-ups. At the bottom of the paper, there's five different faces in a row. After circling the face that you are feeling, you have to complete this statement. "Today I feel _____." I usually write, "Ok," or "Fine." But then I circle the face with a flat line as the mouth.

And today, Ms. Star called me up to her desk. She said, "You're Joshua's sister right? He is so amazing. He was such a delight in class. He was so talkative and energetic!"

I just nodded. I'm used to hearing about how great my brother was.

"But Mallory, I wanted to ask you about this," and she pointed to the blank face I circled.

"Are you feeling ok?" she asked.

"Yeah totally, I'm fine." I said.

"Are you sure?" she asked with the pity face.

I smiled like I was brain dead.

I went back to my seat, but not even the sun, shining right at me, could thaw me out.

Trap Doors,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I've been reading over this journal and it is so depressing. I don't have any interesting things going on. On all my walks home, I never see any hot high school guys. Maybe I'm just going to start making up things in this diary. I mean I don't want to look back on my life and have nothing at all happen. When I'm famous, people are just going to feel sad for me. I need more action happening in these pages.

Ok Diary don't be surprised if cool things just randomly start to happen.

Vintage Stamps,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I know it's lame, but one of my favorite things to do is to go to my grandmother's room on Sunday morning. She leaves her apartment to spend the day with a friend.

Her room is so peaceful. It's on the first floor of our house. She has this elegant gray wooden furniture. She has these gauzy curtains over her windows even though the window looks out onto the neighbor's brick wall.

She set up all these framed photos of us. There is one of me with my chipmunk cheeks and a too wide smile.

I go there and no one is around.

There is this show. It's Grimm's fairytales animated.

During commercial breaks, I let myself imagine that there are gnomes scuttling under the trees in the backyard. And that the birds can hear my singing and want to be my friend. And that the gray green wall that's chipping, down by the pile of stones, hides a portal to another land. I just have to figure out the right words to say or befriend the right creature and through kindness receive all these secrets.

The whole day passes, watching the light from the sun fall lower and lower on the adjacent brick wall.

Grandma's Room Portal,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

So my older sister and I share the extension, it's called that because my father added it to the already existing house. It's like this huge room with lots of windows and has a sliding glass door that goes out into our backyard.

My sister has been coming home late and I don't want to stay down there by myself. The sliding door's lock is broken so my dad has us drop a piece of skinny wood against the back of the door to "lock" it.

But the moment I pick up the wood, I almost have a heart attack. I feel like moments before I'm able to drop the wood into place, a killer is going to slide open the door. I can see his eyes glaring at me as if to say, "Just a bit too late." So I've been sleeping in my brothers' room. Their room used to be the living room. Basically we ran out of rooms for all of us kids. There are two bunk beds that the twins sleep on top of. Then my older brother sleeps on a regular bed.

I thought I could just sleep under the twin's bunk beds until my sister comes home.

There was a lot of junk like magazines, pizza crusts, and candy wrappers below. That's fine, I could pick up all that stuff. The sheet had these little baubles that were rubbing up against my skin. That too was ok. But as I tried to get comfortable, I saw a row of little black ants walking alongside the wooden bed frame.

I spent the night watching the ants march in a straight line.

Pizza Crusts,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today was the Scholastic Book Fair in the auditorium. It was as it always is, marvelous. The old wooden stage awakens amidst tables upon tables of brightly colored paperbacks. I covertly run my fingertips along the glossy covers.

I thumb the \$20 bill in my pocket making sure it's still there. That could get me probably two paperbacks and a floral bookmark.

I must be discerning. I cannot just grab the prettiest cover of the dreamiest girl. No, I take time to read the back. I look at the author's name. I try to sense an affinity with the work. This is a moment of magic and you must be very quiet and centered for when it nudges you. A voice says, "This is it. This is the one that holds a secret."

I choose my two books. But I linger and take a walk once more around the tables. The energy is expectant and hopeful and I wonder why every day at school cannot feel this way.

Angelic Visitation,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Sometimes my house feels like a labyrinth with the Minotaur lurking around every bend.

Here's what I mean.

I was watching television in my grandmother's apartment. She makes the best breakfasts. She insists on making me a cheese omelet with bacon and sausage on the side. White toast with butter and jelly. And a large glass of OJ. Even if I say no, she insists. It's like she needs to do something for me. She sits beside me, taking a break. I am nestled into her arm chair, watching cartoons, and she says, "You know Mallory, you're book smart. But you got no common sense."

And then she says, "And you hear the boys go up and down the stairs fast-like. They go out. They do things. Fast, you know? But when you come down the stairs, I hear thud...thud...thud, like slow, you know?"

I ate my last bite and started to switch gears, not fast, slower than slow, stealth mode.

I go upstairs and on my sister's top bunk bed, I begin to write a list of what I want to accomplish this weekend.

I feel a little depressed because my grandmother's right. All my siblings seem to be running off to go somewhere or meet up with someone, but I'm always at home.

Then my dad pops his head into the room and just kind of looks at me.

And he says, "Is that all you have to do? I wish I could be so lazy."

Now lean close, I have something important to tell you. The list in this journal is no ordinary list. I will, with the focus I have been building, create the most perfect list that pushes me beyond my capabilities. And each task that's completed opens the portal a little wider.

Bread Crumbs,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Monica still lives across the street and we still hang out. Sometimes the older girls on the block chill on her stoop.

Today they called me over. We had to keep rewinding the Mary J. Blige tape. It was so good.

A lot of times the girls are talking about things that I don't really care about. They talk a lot about brand name clothing.

I get the most uncomfortable when they try to give me suggestions. They tell me how my hair could look cute or the parts of my body that they like and what I should wear to show it off.

At these times, I usually just go into my head and tell myself that they don't know what I know.

It seems too stressful to care about what they care about. Like one week everyone wants to wear Exclamation, and the next week, everyone wants MYNY. I just can't keep up.

So when they go into that advice giving mode, I just let them get tired of talking and I stay quiet. Eventually they go onto another topic.

I wait a few minutes so it's not obvious and make up an excuse for needing to go.

At times like this when I show no emotion even though they upset me, I feel like I won.

I feel like they don't know the game I'm playing, and as I walk away, I actually can feel their brains stop working. It's a great feeling.

Protect Your King,

Mallory

P.S. I don't know the "game" I'm playing, but I think that's why I win...every...time.

Dear Diary,

Today we went to Kevin's Basement Party. It's a couple of blocks from Alex's. Alex tells her mom she's going to my house. I don't tell my mom anything. I don't really know what I think about these parties. I mean I guess we go because we think there will be some cute guy there, but we know deep down it's just Kevin, Quinn, Gael, Tim, and Robbie. Robbie is attractive. He's actually hot, but he's so dumb that it takes away all of his hotness.

I think they all like Alex because her boobs are really big. Right now I'm not even wearing a real bra. I'm just wearing one of those crop top undershirt bras. But honestly, I'm not even jealous because these are not like guys, they are like boys. They are constantly laughing and joking about the stupidest things. I just tune them out when they get started.

When they direct some question toward me, I like to say the most outrageous thing and just watch as their brains freeze.

That's the only real allure of these parties.

Also, I think Alex and I feel like we're being bad because our moms don't really know where we are.

Nothing bad happens. It's just a bunch of these boys amusing themselves and Alex and I rolling our eyes.

Boring Boys,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I was bored. I was looking at these dolls I have lying around. I had a couple of blonde Jennie dolls. One had this cutesy face with pale pink lips and sweet eyes. I don't know why but she just started to bother me.

So I got this urge, and I thought what's so wrong with this act?

I got these magic markers and a pair of scissors. I brought the dolls to the bathroom. The first client said she was tired. She didn't want to just be pretty anymore. So we agreed that we should get rid of her hair. I asked her if she was sure. She said, "Hell yeah!" So I cut off each blonde bundle of plastic hairs. One by one at the root. The plastic strands scattered over the cold ceramic tiles. Then I said, "Ok, ready to really try something new?"

I took a pink magic marker and colored the small blonde stubs. Then I grabbed blue. Then I grabbed purple. Then none of it made sense and I was just coloring in whatever spots I could with whatever marker was nearest. After it was done I felt relieved but also a little sick. My mom peered into the bathroom. I just smiled and said, "What?"

Punk Parade,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

There is this friend who lives at the corner. She's in high school, but she acts really fun like a kid. She is super skinny and tall. She smiles and jokes a lot. I really wish I could be her sometimes, especially because she has her own room that overlooks her backyard. She has this grand mysterious willow tree right before her window. If I had her room, I would spend hours making up stories with that tree.

Her name is Christiane.

Usually when I go to her house, we play Super Mario Brothers or Zelda, but on the new system that's out.

Lately she has been acting a little strange. In the TV room where we play video games, her parents have this cabinet with bottles of alcohol. Today she brought in a large cup of orange juice and then she knelt in front of the cabinet. She invited me over. I knelt down with her.

She took out this tall glass bottle with clear liquid. She poured it in the orange juice.

"Here like this, this is how you mix it."

She drank first.

And then she handed me the cup.

I had never had such an invitation.

Sharing a Cup,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I went over to Christiane's house again. It was weird. Something just doesn't match up. Her room is so neat and organized. Her light gray carpet is clean with no dog or cat hairs. She even has a sofa in her room with dozens of Rare Bears and Pumpkin Patch dolls lined up.

She showed me her gerbil and how he hides these brown pellets in his cheek. She kept feeding him these brown pellets and his cute little hands grabbed them and placed them in the inside of his cheek.

Then she told me to stand against the wall. She said this was a cool game. She said, "Take a deep breath, and bend over when I say." So I stood up against the wall and took a deep breath. "Bend over now and come up fast," she instructed. Then Christiane put her palms facing out, against my neck. After a count of ten, she let go. I felt this rush of energy to my head and started shaking as I fell over.

She told me to do it to her, but I just couldn't push hard enough against her throat so she never fell over. But she kept doing it to me. And sometimes I didn't fall over but I started laughing uncontrollably.

What was weird was that I liked the feeling. I liked having a completely different sensation in my brain. It felt like it was emptied out for a few seconds.

Gray Days,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I sat on the wall of our school courtyard. It's a wall layered with black rocks, gray stones, and cement. I feel really connected to this wall. The school is one of those old gray early-1900s buildings where they had separate entrances marked for the girls and for the boys. There is a somber stillness but also an excited pride in its stately finishings. The best part is you can sit on these walls and no one kicks you off. We eat our breakfast sometimes there. The school is at the top of a steep hill so sitting on the wall you feel a little bit of greatness as in "all the King's horses and all the King's men," watched Frumpy Mallory make a new plan.

And here is the new plan. I'm going to change my image. I'm really into this show, *My So-Called Reality*, and I relate to the character Angelica more than I relate to myself. Myself as I currently am is a confused jumble of mistaken starts.

So when Alex came by to join me on the wall, I asked her, "Can you start calling me Angelica?"

"No, why?"

"I just really like that name."

"No, don't be ridiculous."

"Ok, how about Roxanne?"

"Mallory, stop being weird."

I thought she would have been more supportive. I am going to dye my hair red. At least I can look as close to Angelica as possible.

Stone Entrances,

Mallory—Angelica

Dear Diary,

I'm at Alex's house. We planned a sleepover this weekend. It's Friday evening, and I have some very alarming news.

I dyed my hair red and took my sister's comfy Gavin Stein black sweater, ready to morph into Angelica. There's one scene where she sticks her head into her sweater and observes the Yearbook meeting through its mesh tears. I was not so bold to act that out. I just slouched extra low on my chair and grimaced the entire day.

Well guess where that got me? The teacher called me up to her desk and handed me a letter. She wrote, "Ms. Rodriguez" on the front in black script. At Alex's, I confided in her, "Alex, Ms. Wall gave me a letter to give my mom." "What? Let me see."

I took out the letter and immediately Alex went to work.

"Okay two staples but light adhesive, we can remove the staples and steam the rest."

"What like open it ourselves?"

"Duh, why are you getting a letter? You're like an Honors student."

"Okay."

Alex brought the letter under the living room standing lamp. She pulled each staple open with tweezers. Then we boiled water on the stove and slowly pulled the flap open.

We read the letter. Here is what it said:

Dear Ms. Rodriguez,

I am concerned about Mallory. She never smiles or laughs at my jokes in class. I think she should talk to the school counselor.

Alex first looked at me with pity and then outrage.

"What is this lady talking about? She's crazy."

I don't know what I'm going to do but I know I can't give my mom this letter.

Wrought Iron,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I felt sick the entire night. I cut short Alex's sleepover and came home today. I gave my mom the letter and walked away.

I actually totally forgot about it until she cornered me in my grandma's apartment. I was just about to watch my Grimm's Fairytales, preparing a nice cheese and baloney sandwich.

My mom walked in.

"Mallory?"

"Yeah."

"I read the letter."

"Okay."

She started to smirk which kind of creeped me out. "Are you depressed?"

"No."

"Do you need to talk to a counselor?" She was still smiling.

"No."

"That's what your teacher says."

"Yeah I don't know what that's all about."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah mom," and then I sighed in a really exasperated way.

It felt like I was the main character in her favorite soap opera and a new season with all new episodes was starting. I needed to make sure it never happened again. I broke the code again and to ensure my survival I would have to truly be invisible.

Bricked up Windows,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Monica and I went down to the mini-mall today. There's a McDougal's, a teen clothing store called Shorties, some other random stores, and a craft store. We usually look at the clothing but go to the craft store to buy stickers.

We got these cute neon stars that we put on our cheeks. I have two skinny braids framing my face because it's what Roxanne does in the show.

Then I felt this surge of excitement to make something happen. "Let's look over the ledge," I said.

The mini-mall is on this elevated platform and if you go to the edge, you can see the cars passing below.

Just walking over to that ledge made me feel more alive.

That's when I decided to summon Roxanne's energy.

I saw the stickers falling like snow on the Winter Village.

"Let's rip these up and drop them over the edge like confetti."

Monica thought that was the stupidest idea.

"But Monica, it would be something different to do. Aren't you so bored of this?"

She finally agreed. And we one by one, tore up the sheets of stickers, and on the count of three, "One, Two, Three, Drop!" The artificial snow floated down and I could feel myself go down with it for a few seconds until Monica said, "Wow, we just wasted five dollars."

We walked back and I knew I needed time to plan how I was going to manage this nuisance of a teacher. That would be the last time I let someone read me.

Paper Snow,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

In the movie *Big*, a boy is transformed into an adult by a fortune-telling machine and lives life in the big city as an important ad executive until the final scene when he returns to being a boy. The woman who fell in love with him takes him back to his home. The block is supposedly in Cliffside, New Jersey but it looks like it's some magical Somewhere, USA in which the streets are perfectly paved and wide. The oak trees have a strong presence as if they have been keeping watch. As the boy stands in the middle of that street, he has tears in his eyes for the adult life he has to say goodbye to, but also because he's just a boy and just wanted to be home.

I think that's why I keep exploring my town. I keep thinking I'm going to run into the block that looks like the one from the movie *Big* and I'm going to finally know that feeling.

Home Explorer,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I have a new fantasy. I imagine that I'm a girl disguised as a boy at an all boy's school. I wake up at dawn and row on the pristine lake just off school grounds. Then I rush a memorization of latin conjugations for the daily quiz given by Mr. Victus. I know each day that I'm competing with the best of the best. The other boys' early advantages are nothing in comparison to my innate intelligence and drive. But I hide it because I know that a poor boy who challenges their superiority is not something their ego can take.

Other times, I don't even want to be a girl disguised as a boy. I'm ready to give up the whole girl thing entirely. I mean, what a burden to try to hide my female form and I'm sure I would fold and lack the natural assertiveness of the other boys. In this version, I begin as a boy. That's when the real competition begins. A boy among boys fighting for the elusive alpha placement. Playing the game of deception just long enough, to go undetected for as long as necessary, until I have my chance to fully demonstrate my prowess.

Oak and Ivy Crest,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today was my first day back at school since I got the letter from Ms. Wall. But I had a plan now. I was going to smile and laugh. I was going to smile and laugh at everything she did.

I didn't anticipate it but my cheeks started to hurt.

Ms. Wall looked a little put off.

I felt a wave of relief when we were released for lunch.

Now is it possible to keep this up all year? I have no choice.

Cedar Chest,

Mallory

P.S. But something surprised me. As I was fake laughing, I noticed a sweetness I hadn't before. When she stopped seeming sweet, I could still make her feel good by smiling at her. I forgot about my own sadness in the process.

Dear Diary,

I have decided to try the fake laughing and smiling with my friends. I just laugh at most of the things they say if they were said in somewhat of a funny way. My cheeks are really hurting now because I don't take a break during lunch, but I go even harder.

Alex said to me, "What are you on? Why are you laughing so much?"

I don't know why I feel like I really need to do this now. It's like I can't stop. Because somewhere in the fake laughing, a real laugh sneaks through. And somewhere in the fake smiling, a real smile settles. But the thing is when it wants to depart, I don't let it. I kinda keep it stuck on my face. And that's when it begins to hurt.

Cracked Formica,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Lately I have had the urge to go up the hill in my backyard. The neighbor's houses are far enough away.

With my walkman, I sing and run around in circles on the hill.

When I am out of breath, I sit in the center of the hill and look at the sky. My body starts to float above the horizon line and I quickly glimpse the hollow caverns deep under me to keep myself from fully floating away.

Then I feel like I'm being crazy by being up on this hill with the eyes of neighbors peering at me.

But I keep going back because it feels so good.

Skylight,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I came home from school and all I could think about was smoking a cigarette in my driveway. It was too risky. This early in the day there is so much activity around the house. I waited until just before sunset.

The black broken pavement of the driveway and the gray concrete of the house's foundation brought me comfort. They were like friends who shared my secret.

The car shielded me.

I take a puff and laugh at what a ridiculous facade I put on at school. No one really knows me.

I am different from them. All of them.

I wonder if anyone will ever understand me.

I think the moon might. One evening, I will stay out until she appears.

Concrete Slab,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I was eating lunch with some new girls. Margaret Figueroa got left back twice. She pastes her baby hairs to her face but it makes her look like she could kill you. I don't know what it is about her because she's always smiling and laughing so I think she is actually nice deep down.

But yeah, me and Alex decided to sit with them. They sit on this stoop up from the school. I got my ham and cheese on a roll with our 25 cent drink at Roses, the deli at the corner. I love the crisp white paper they wrap the sandwich in.

They started talking about how much they weigh.

Margaret was like, "I'm at 110 lbs right now which is good for me."

Another girl was like, "110 that's a good weight, I was 110, but now I'm more like around 115."

Then they asked Alex how much she weighed. She said, "I'm not sure, but the last time I got weighed it was around 115."

Then they asked me. I was like, "Last time I got weighed by the nurse, I think I was 140."

Suddenly everyone got quiet.

"Some girls are just big boned," Margaret said.

Margaret then saw her enemy walk by in another clique, and said if she gets another dirty look from that girl, she's gonna jump her.

"You better check yo'self before you wreck yo'self!" she said.

Another moment of silence ensued, and I kept repeating the phrase in my head, excited by its edges that were somehow familiar even though I didn't really know what it meant.

Wrecking Ball,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today Margaret Figueroa asked the teacher if she could sit behind me. She passed me a note asking if I could come over to help with her homework. She was being really nice to me.

I asked Alex if she wanted to come, and she just gave me a weird look.

Margaret Figueroa is considered popular. She looks like a Puerto Rican Snow White with lips outlined in maroon and black curly hair. She dresses in faded bootcut jeans, a Gavin Stein baby tee, and Doc Martians. She shows her midriff because she can. She has these really high, razor thin eyebrows that could slice you. She's tough and I think she wants to be my friend. Maybe I can learn something from her.

I think Alex is jealous that Margaret and I are gonna be cool.

Reinforced Doc Martians,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I had a strange dream last night.

I dreamt that I woke up in the morning and something was calling me to grab my bike and ride to the park.

Then it was as if I was riding through a fairy tale. Streets that have no trees were now covered in ancient oaks arching over the pavement. The only sun was the dappled light that made it through the canopy of leaves. Fairy dust sparkled every time my eyes darted to a new corner.

I rode without trying to maneuver. I just rode.

When I arrived at the park, I felt the energy of a celebration, but no one was there. It was as if I was meant to be there. As if I knew I would be here all along.

As I made my way further into the park, I started to see that people were waiting around for a football game. Then the food stands and the smoke from the hot grills made me lose my way and I forgot why I was here. I didn't know how to leave this place and I didn't know what it was meant to teach me. I wanted so desperately to get back to the ancient forest I had just been in but the fear started to arise that I was going to be stuck here at this football game and all the people vacantly staring, waiting for something to happen.

Today I'm going to Margaret Figueroa's house to help her with her homework. I am feeling nervous and I'm not sure why. But I think ultimately it will be good to help someone who needs it.

Threshold Arches,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I wonder what the birds are singing about all day. What if it's just to stay warm or to clear their throats?

When I walk somewhere, during the walk, I actually end up somewhere else in my mind. Maybe that's how bird song is. They find the song in the singing.

Right now I'm waiting in the park for Margaret Figueroa. She's going to meet me here and then we are going to walk to her house.

I kind of wish I had just gone home. I don't really like doing new things.

Bird House,

Mallory

P.S. I can't just go home now. I already formed an image of me in Margaret Figueroa's house, sitting on the floor of her bedroom with our notebooks open. Once I form images, I am pulled to live them out.

Dear Diary,

I just got back from Margaret Figueroa's house.

When I showed up, we went straight to her room. There was no bed or any furniture. There was a dresser piled with hair products.

We sat on the floor and we took out our books.

She pointed out a half-deflated heart balloon, and said, "My boyfriend got this for me." There was also a pink stuffed bear with a heart embroidered on its chest.

"How old did you turn?" I asked.

"I'm sixteen, and Marcus is 26. But you know, age ain't nothing but a number," and she started to laugh.

"Okay shall we get started? I usually like to label my homework at the top like this."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No, I don't have a boyfriend right now."

A baby started crying.

Then some guy came by to look in the room.

Margaret yelled at him to leave.

"That's my uncle. I'm staying at his house right now."

My eyes darted back to the hair products on the dresser.

I asked Margaret, "Okay, what do you think the gerund is in this sentence? Do you remember what a gerund is?"

"Mallory, you're like a good girl, huh?"

I started to laugh and I said, "I don't know, not really. I just think it's important to go to college, you know?"

"You're so cute Mallory," she said.

Her razor thin eyebrows arched at ninety degrees started to make me uncomfortable. And the baby kept crying. And the uncle kept peering in. She started getting messages on her beeper and became consumed with them.

I said I had to leave like three times. Each time she begged me not to go. But she was also ignoring me while I was there.

"Margaret, I really have to get this done."

"Okay Mallory. Go be a good girl."

"I'm sorry Margaret, I want to help you though."

"Sure Mallory, no problem. You can come over again though, right? I just don't feel well right now. I can't focus."

“Yeah, okay I can come over again. We’ll try another time.”

When I left her house, the sun had already set and the streets home seemed unfamiliar in the dark.

Empty Rooms,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today during class, just as the teacher asked us to take out our homework, Margaret tapped me on the shoulder. When I turned around, I glanced at her notebook and the page was blank.

“Yo, Mallory, let me get your homework.”

We were supposed to leave our homework on our desk as the teacher came around to check it.

Margaret wanted to copy a whole page.

Every second I stalled, the teacher walked closer.

Margaret kept demanding, “Come on Mallory, don’t be like that.”

I dropped my notebook on her desk.

She speedily wrote down what the gerunds were without writing the whole sentence. Then when I turned around to check her progress, I saw her hand it to Lisa. The teacher was two rows away.

And then Lisa handed it to Ahmed.

Finally when the teacher was at the front of my row, Margaret poked the metal spirals of the notebook into my back. I grabbed it without turning around.

And as the teacher passed me, I felt as if I had just sprinted around the school.

“Thanks girl,” Margaret said.

When I looked down at my notebook, I saw there was a thumbprint that wasn’t my own.

Brown smudge,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Margaret asked for my homework again. I gave it to her and she proceeded to pass it to Lisa and Ahmed.

Then during class transitions, as I walked to Math, the three of them walked past me. Margaret said something under her breath, and Lisa and Ahmed started laughing as they stared at me.

I have no idea what they said about me, but I started imagining everything that could be wrong with me.

Violent Violets,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I told my mom I was sick.

I stayed home and watched TV.

I know that I'm really avoiding Margaret Figueroa and the other two. It's not so bad. The worst is right before we go over our homework and then when I pass them in the hallways.

I feel pretty free at lunch.

They never actually said anything bad about me to my face. Maybe I'm just imagining that they were laughing at me. I mean, I'm giving Margaret my homework every day so why would she then go ahead and make fun of me? Wouldn't she be afraid that I would stop giving her my homework?

I just don't get what I did wrong.

I think when I see them in the hallway and they look at me with disgust, I'm just going to smile and say hi to them. Maybe it's all just a misunderstanding.

Glass Bridges,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

So we have been making these poetry books in G&T. Every time we write a poem in a new form, we share it with the class.

For some reason, my classmates have really been liking my poems. Maybe they just like how I read it very forcefully and with emotion.

I was thinking about including some of them here.

If I could have any job
Or be anything
It would be to catalog gray skies.
I want to stare at them intently
And know each shade intimately
So when someone needs a name
I can tell them—
Slate, Charcoal, Dusty, Muted
A touch deeper than white—
A smudge a little more lasting—
A tired, longing reach—
Or perfectly content
With nothing happening.

Gray Sky Cataloger,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex confided in me that she likes Gael.

I find it weird. I mean we always talk about how Gael has really messed up teeth. But I mean, he does really make us laugh. He has been walking home with us.

She said that she wants to invite him over before her mom gets home.

I don't like any of the boys in my school.

At night I have a craving to imagine a boy holding me. But no one is available to feed my imagination. I have a crush on the cartoon Aladdin. So I've been imagining that I am Princess Jasmine and Aladdin and I have adventures in some far off city like Cairo.

And he kisses me at night and wraps his arms around me.

Then I get these weird sensations, and I feel so terrible. I start praying so hard to God to take away all of these thoughts from me.

I think Alex has the right idea to find someone in our class to have a crush on, but again, I just don't relate to anyone. I hate to say it, but I think I'm smarter than any boy I ever met.

I'm so confused. I'm smarter, but I imagine being with a cartoon. Really smart, huh?

Slate Hearth,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I was wearing my sister's over-sized Gavin Stein sweater. It was black but had this gray marbling quality. My jeans were too big in some places and too tight in others.

I made two skinny braids down the front of my face. I applied my red lipstick that I can't leave home without.

I felt like the day had so much possibility even though it was just me and Monica at the mini-mall down our block.

We had just gotten these neon star stickers from the craft store. I put one on my cheek. We were eating at McDougle's.

Then this kid Frank in Monica's grade approaches us.

He was like, "Yo, let me get a dollar."

We both tried to ignore him. Monica was immediately like, "Sorry I don't got any money."

I stayed quiet. Sometimes my responses really lag.

So he started pestering me, "Yo, let me get a dollar?"

I gave it to him so he would go away.

Then he came back and said, "Hey, what's your name? My friend Jason said he likes you."

I look over to the front of the McDougle's and there is this small gang of hip-hop skater boys. They had that pretty boy look but wore baggy jeans and over-sized polo shirts.

Something just came over me. I think I was annoyed at being a girl. This kid just got a dollar from me and now there's some guy Jason who likes me?

I decided to put on a little performance.

I say to Monica, "Let's go."

I dart up. I throw my fries away with one smooth flex, but they fall off the tray and in front of the trash.

I quickly re-calibrate. As they are parked there by the door, I slowly pull up and with a granite pause, I say to them, "If Jason likes me, he can tell me himself."

As we walk down the mini-mall sidewalk, I have no idea where I'm leading Monica. I just know that last move is hard to live up to.

The gaggle of goons is following us.

I take us back into the craft store. Soon the door pops open like a fizzy can of coke, and they walk in.

Now this guy Will has taken the lead. He saunters over to me and looks me in the eyes, he says, "My friend Jason really likes you. Do you have a boyfriend?" Will has straight long blonde hair and a little blonde peach fuzz above his plump lips. He won't stop staring at me.

"I already told you, let Jason speak for himself."

"My friend is a little shy."

Will is watching every gesture of mine. I felt like I was under the microscope, but it just emboldened me more. Each one of my gestures became more fluid, more spontaneous, more free.

"I'm sorry Will, Monica and I have got to go."

So I led Monica out of the store and again, I had no idea where I was going, we were getting toward the ledge and there weren't any other stores to pop into.

When they approached us this time, Will sprinted up to me and asked, "Hey, do you guys smoke?"

I said, "Sometimes."

He walked to the corner of the ledge and said, "Come on, let's have a smoke." He disappeared down some concrete steps.

I followed him down.

There's a Buck-E-Bees in the bottom level. Will took out cigarettes. He handed one to me and Monica.

"Ugh, red Cowboys? Those are so harsh," I said.

"What do you do for fun?" Frank asked.

"I like to read and write."

"Ah you're a good girl, is this your first time smoking?"

"No, I smoke sometimes."

That's when Frank started laughing and said something under his breath and the whole crew started laughing. I realized then that they wanted to play chess. I'll wait for the right moment to lower my good girl mask ever so slightly and keep them guessing.

"Hey, come with us to the roof," Will said.

"The roof?"

"Well, it's not really a roof, it's the train tracks behind the mall."

"Is that safe?"

Will started laughing, and he looked directly in my eyes, "It's totally safe."

We walked up this grassy hill, and at the summit, were train tracks. The roof is this dusty patch of earth, with a few boulders and sparsely planted trees.

They take out a joint.

Everyone walked further on leaving Will and I alone, staring awkwardly at each other.

I finally said, "Jason is pretty far for someone who likes me."

Will started laughing.

Then he said, "Come here."

I said, "I'm happy here, thanks."

"I want to tell you something"

"I can hear you fine over here."

He looked down and a little nervous.

I walked over to him. Now we stood right in front of each other.

"So you do like Jason?"

"No"

"Why not?"

"I like someone else."

Now diary, I was not high. I felt no different than I usually feel. But I was so nervous and I didn't know what to say so I started to act high.

"I think I'm really high," I said.

"Yeah?" and he smiled.

"Yeah, like are those Rare Bears in the sky?"

"Huh?"

"I mean I think it's because I'm high."

I felt like a phoney.

Then Will grabbed my hands. He was now staring at me, holding my hands, and I was trying to look away every chance I got, but his eyes were pulling at mine.

And then he kissed me, twice. Really gentle and soft.

"Is that okay?" he asked.

"I think so."

He started laughing.

It felt like an eternity but we were only there for a few minutes, and then the rest of the group came back.

Monica came back in a very aggressive mood. She started making fun of me, calling me a little girl who puts stickers on my face.

The rest of the guys said they needed to go buy cigarettes. Monica said she had to go home. Will wanted me to hang out more. But I couldn't let Monica leave by herself.

Will called out, "Wait, are you sure you can't stay?"

"I will see you in school tomorrow."

I can't stop replaying every sensation my body has had today. From how his sweaty hands held mine to his soft wet kiss. No one has ever liked me this much! And I felt like I was totally being me. I wasn't trying to be a cute girl or anything. I did kind of get a little weird with acting high, but hopefully, he forgets that part.

I think I have a new crush. Will Anthony Wall.

Heart Hearth,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

What if this is going to be my new life? Is that why girls are always going out?

To meet cute guys?

It feels so exciting. At the same time, I feel like I was slutty.

I mean, I just went with four boys I didn't know to this hidden place behind the mini-mall.

I think I just couldn't help myself and I would follow this guy Will anywhere.

Cottage Signposts,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I didn't see Will at school today. I didn't see his friends either so maybe our paths just didn't cross.

I'm definitely caring about my appearance more. I blow dry my hair and don't leave any wavy spots in the back like I normally would.

I also want to buy some perfume. Maybe it's time I learn how to do makeup? Ugh, I hate that I want to be such a girl now.

What would Jo March or Anne of Green Gables say about this? They would say, "Don't get sucked in by stupid boys!"

But I feel like I like being a girl, and liking a boy, and feeling a little crazy.

Maybe Alex and I can go to the real mall, the big one. That place makes me nauseous, but it would be for a good cause.

Fresh Floral Notes,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex jumped at the idea of going to the mall. So did her mom. They love to shop. We went to Galatea State Plaza.

Alex's mom went to the plus-size stores with her friend Ella. We went to all the cute dressy stores like The Mind, The Looks Place, MYNY, and Exclamation. Alex was like, "Mallory, you can't buy something from every store."

Every time I saw a cute skirt or dress, I had a daydream about Will and me. If I were wearing this, my dreams would come true with him. I would be so cute that he couldn't resist. I mean when I tried these outfits on, I didn't want to take them off. I wanted to leave the store with them on.

I considered stealing because I just don't have enough money to get everything I NEED.

I dread taking off my clothes in front of those dressing room mirrors, my skin always looks green and I look like a fat ogre with no waist and no legs. But once I get the knee highs on with a baby doll dress, I see my potential. I just can feel that I'm going to have a boyfriend soon!

Notebook Hearts,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Tonight I spent like five hours in front of my mirror. I tried on every new outfit. I also practiced a sweet smile, a sexy smile, and a mysterious smile. As I felt different emotions, I looked to see what the smile looked like.

Sometimes I really look hideous because I have these crooked teeth that jut out under my lip and I don't want to close my lips too tightly because it crinkles my chin, but I also want my lip to hide the crookedness a little. So I was practicing the level of closed mouthness that was acceptable.

I asked my parents for braces before but they said it's cosmetic and insurance wouldn't cover it. So in the meantime, I just push my teeth against the bed frame when I'm lying in bed watching TV. Maybe the consistent pressure over time will push them in and make them straight.

Then I spend like an hour thinking about Will before I fall asleep. I think about his sweet kisses and how it felt to have my hand held.

Gold Mirror Kisses,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today it happened.

I saw Will. It's been about a week and Monica said he hasn't been in school. But today he was walking down the hill from Roses. He was in his little derelict group and Frank looked right at me, but Will was looking straight ahead. I guess he didn't see me. Frank didn't acknowledge me either.

I saw Monica after school and told her.

She was just like, "Mallory, boys are jerks. What did you guys just kiss? It doesn't mean anything."

"I mean he could at least say hi."

"Well then he probably just didn't see you. But I would try not to think about it."

All I can think about was how perfectly his baggy jeans hung loose on his pelvis. I couldn't smell him but I imagined it was that romantic musky cologne he wore on the roof. I think it's the Gavin Stein *Eight* cologne. I can smell it now. And his blonde hair is perfect for his skin complexion. He's like a true Spring or whatever, he's a true whatever, and I wish he was my whatever. William Anthony Wall, I love you. I'm going to believe that you just didn't see me.

You did look kind of mad. I wonder what you were mad about.

High and Dry,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

So Will is a total jerk. He walked by me again with his gang of goons and smirked! He smirked. He made eye contact for a second and smirked. And didn't say a word to me!

It makes me feel like nothing. Am I nothing? Surely, I'm something. I mean, nothing wouldn't be able to write. Nothing wouldn't be able to get mad!

Nothing couldn't set something on fire!

No, I'm not going to burn anything down. But Monica did point out where he lives when we walked home today.

Maybe I can just show up at his house and demand he say something to me.

No, that seems desperate. Maybe Monica is right. It didn't mean anything.

But no one ever made me feel so much before. And he would get nervous around me too at times. So how could it mean nothing? It has to mean something. But I feel like the solution is way beyond my grasp.

So now I'm going to ignore him.

Skeleton Keys,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Today I successfully ignored Will. I walked right by him like he walked by me. I could feel him looking toward me but I just kept my eyes straight ahead. I also gave a fake laugh at what Alex was saying to show that I am totally in control.

I did have a chance to glance at him later when we were in the courtyard. He had his hands in his pockets and was wearing an oversized plaid shirt. I wonder if he's changing his style. He looked bored.

I was ravenous for those few seconds. The whole cacophony of screams and laughs faded and I floated a little off the ground.

I'm done for. I imagine him every night holding me. I'm totally going to lose this game.

Why won't he just talk to me? It can't be so hard to just acknowledge someone. He just would have to look at me and smile. Or look at me and wave. Surely that's not impossible.

Unless he is sad. Maybe he is sad and doesn't have the energy to say hi. I have a feeling he is sad. I don't know why. I just got this impression he thinks he's better than the people he surrounds himself with.

I'm going to smoke a cigarette in my driveway. I'm going to imagine the day I met him when so much was possible.

Lonely Bike Loops,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

You are not going to believe this.

I saw Will with Christiane together.

I was walking to school, and Will was coming out of Christiane's driveway. Did he sleep over her house? Are they sleeping together?

I am so stupid. I am fat. I am ugly. I can bear being fat. I can bear being ugly.

But I cannot bear being stupid. He was so into me. How could this be happening?

He didn't see me. He was just going really fast and jumped on his bike and rode away.

Please God take this feeling from me. But of course, Christiane is so cool.

She's skinny and pretty. She is able to dress with crop tops that show her midriff. Midriffs. They are always going to win. What do I have over midriffs but an eternal sadness?

Bitter Sea,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I started hiding during lunch. Instead of going up the street to Roses with Alex and Brittany, I ask them to buy me a sandwich, and I wait on the steps of the school.

It's strange. I'm totally alone for the first twenty minutes of lunch. Everyone is either at Sal's pizza or Roses or the Chinese spot. And I keep watch like a hawk, ready to run into the school if I see Will approaching.

I can see Christiane's driveway from my mom's bedroom window. When she's not around, I take glances out of my mom's window. I haven't seen them together since that morning.

I thought about bringing my cigarettes to school to have something to do before Alex comes back, but I don't want to mess with my reputation as an Honors student.

Tonight Alex suggested we go to Kevin's house. He's having a Basement Party. I probably need some distraction so I'll do that tonight.

Hiding out,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I am the master of my fate.

I just listened to some Blue Day and I'm going to channel Billie Cho. I'm not some sad teenage girl. I am punk and smarter than any boy I ever met. No one understands me because one day I'm going to be a creative genius that people crane their necks to get a glance of.

When I see a boy now, I'm not going to see a face, I'm going to see a cardboard mask. And when I gaze into their eyes, I will know I'm just gazing into eyes of coal.

Fire Pit,

Mallory

P.S. I'm already exhausted. Please God save me from my thoughts.

Dear Diary,

Well tonight was entertaining. I went to Kevin's Basement Party.

His basement is kind of unfinished. There are some tan cracked linoleum tiles over the concrete floor. There's a frumpy couch that looks like it had a couple of beatings.

It's dark as expected for a basement. His black lights make our clothes glowy and bright.

Someone suggested we play five minutes in heaven. I mean, Alex has a crush on Gael and Gael likes Alex, so it made sense for them.

Brittany and I were the only other girls and we didn't like any of these boys. And I was like, I guess I could kiss for practice.

The first guy I had to go into the closet with was Kevin. It was kind of funny because he was too nervous to do anything. We just sat against opposite ends of the closet trying to create space between each other where there was none. Kevin mentioned that he had some of his father's Peach Snapps in the back room, so I jumped at the idea. I don't really have a craving for alcohol but I thought it's what Roxanne would have done. She would have gotten drunk and crazy. This party needed some of that.

He handed me a capful of Peach Snapps, and it tasted delicious but burned as it went down.

Well you know, I kept convincing Kevin to give me another capful.

I didn't feel any differently. I was still bored so I decided to act drunk. I started talking loudly and saying the most ridiculous things I could think of.

I was like, "Woah, the room is spinning. I need to lie down."

Then I would pretend to be passed out on the couch.

"Is Mallory okay?"

"Yeah she only had a few sips."

"But look, she's passed out."

Alex looked at me like she was annoyed, like she knew I was faking. Whatever, she's going to have a boyfriend and I should be able to have some fun.

Home Entertainment System,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I found myself in the far and away room.

I hadn't been there for months.

I was curious if it was still as I remembered it.

Still dusty boxes. I remembered I spent a lot of time in this room as a kid.

Now it just seemed dirty and cluttered.

I found this cute collection of country mice dolls. One mouse looks like he's a professor or doctor. He has spectacles and a gray cardigan. One mouse is a mama mouse with an apron and a strawberry printed dress. There are also country mouse children.

I think he's more like a doctor than a professor. I imagine he has a cute little cubby hole in the underground home where he has his desk and piles of medical reference books.

The mama mouse is always trying to get him to come out and do some gardening. But he's just attached to his books. So she brings him a cup of vanilla ice cream. His favorite.

She brings the children out with her to the garden. They like to dig with her gardening tools.

She's so proud of her country mouse husband. It was always his dream to learn about medicine because he needs to feel useful. She just wishes he would remember that his presence provides enough help.

Fork and Trowel,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Alex hasn't called me in about a week. Her and Gael are going out now. He goes over to her house after school before her mom gets home.

So I think I'm just going to make up stories with these country mouse dolls. Or maybe I should make up stories about Will and me. Like what I thought was going to happen.

Either story is better than thinking about how nothing happens in my life and how everyone gets a boyfriend but me.

I mean, what's wrong with me? Is it because I want it so badly? I feel again like I am eternally behind. The things that come to others are so elusive to me.

Medical Reference Books,

Mallory

P.S. Maybe I have to go alone where I am going.

Dear Diary,

As I was looking for more country mouse dolls, I found a different kind of mouse.

This real mouse has been chewing up this cardboard box and the papers within it. I was totally grossed out, but I had to investigate what the mouse got into.

It turns out it was all of these songs. Hundreds of pages of sheet music with my mom's handwriting.

Songs about the Spring. Songs about Christmas. Songs about books. I can't read music like that so I don't know what they sound like.

I never knew my mom had written so many of her own songs. It made me wonder why she never shared these songs with us.

My mom has only ever been tired. She wears the same clothes every day. Her hair is always in the same limp ponytail.

I saved the songs and put them in a plastic bin. But I did not clean them.

Forgotten Songs,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I didn't find any other country mouse dolls. But the ones I found, I have moved to a shoe box with a delicate sunflower design. I'm going to make a comfier home for them.

I decided not to make up stories about Will. Call me a baby but I'm going back to the dolls.

I don't want to take part in this world anymore.

Each day I will place the country mouse dolls in a new scene. Whether seated under this big boulder in my back yard or a moss-covered enclave where they can sit and talk to each other.

I'm going to start the country mouse story series. Each day I'm going to imagine what life would be like and the challenges that they face.

Rocking Chair,

Mallory

Chapter One

Mama Mouse was sitting near the open window waiting for Harmony and Melody to come back from school.

She did enjoy this time alone—the light breeze coming in from the window, the new fragrance of the blooming lilacs near the dooryard, but at the same time, she anticipated the energy Harmony and Melody would bring once they came through the door.

As she waited, the sun hovered just above the horizon.

She placed her hand on her chest and tried to feel her intuition. They were ok. They had just taken a longer way home.

All of a sudden, they burst through the door.

“Mama! We befriended a turtle. A turtle that talks!”

Mama sighed and smiled.

“Come in, come in, I was so worried about you. Tell me about it after you wash up.”

Chapter Two

The mother was washing their hair in the bath.

“So what did the turtle tell you?”

Melody said, “He said, ‘Don’t forget who you are.’”

Then Harmony added, “Yeah he also said, ‘Or why you came here.’”

“How mysterious,” the mother chuckled, disbelieving the children.

After she tucked the children into bed and instructed them to say their prayers, she lied in bed. Her country mouse husband was snoring near her.

And she stared at the darkened sky and felt haunted by the words. How could the children have made up such a thing?

What if the turtle was real? If it was, no doubt there was some demonic energy at play.

Tomorrow when the children were in school she would go into the forest herself and see if she could find the talking turtle.

Chapter Three

The next morning, Mama Mouse convinced herself that it was so silly to think a turtle could talk. She really let her imagination run wild. She would just listen to her children's fantasies with amusement.

They woke up so excited talking about how they were going to look for Mr. Turtle in the forest.

She said, "Okay, but do not go too far into the forest. I expect you home before the sun begins to fall from the sky."

When the children returned, they were full of joy and excitement.

"Mama, mama, you won't believe what the turtle gave us!"

Harmony opened his hand to reveal these sparkling gem stones.

Mama Mouse's heart dropped. She tried to tell herself, they just discovered them under some rock. Some pirate's treasure.

So she seriously sat them down. "Now children, this game is going on too long. Where did you really find these gems?"

Melody took on her mother's seriousness, "Mama, it was the turtle. He said we were meant for a big adventure and there would be more, there is so much more out there in the big world!"

"Melody and Harmony! Stop it right now! You are not to go into that forest ever again! You are to come right home after school. Do you understand?"

After putting the children to bed, again Mama Mouse lies in bed haunted by the words...more...so much more.

Chapter Four

That morning after the children left for school, Mama Mouse was determined to find the turtle in the forest.

She didn't know how long she would have to walk so she made sure to wear her comfortable slippers and to carry a small snack and water.

She had not come to this forest since she was a child.

She heard the birds chirping and remembered how effortless their song was, which is why she named her children, Harmony and Melody.

Then she heard the brook babbling and it called her to sit and dip her feet in the cool waters.

Finally the rustling of the leaves, started to put her into a trance.

And she saw the turtle.

She walked slowly to the turtle, "Are you able to talk?"

The turtle just stared at her.

"Have you been instructing my children to go on an adventure?"

The turtle continued to just stare.

"Talk to me!"

The turtle merely blinked its eyes.

"Ok then, you have made your decision."

She grabbed the turtle and threw him in her knapsack. She started to trek, far beyond the familiar periphery. All of the forest looked the same but the deeper she went, the more she felt unsafe. She was not sure she would know how to return.

When she could walk no more, she let the turtle down, and she said, "Now you leave my children alone!"

She returned home and was just in time for her children's arrival.

They looked downcast but emboldened, she had enough energy to make all of their favorite treats.

Chapter Five

Each day the children came home now they were too tired to play. Mama Mouse tried everything. She sang their favorite songs. She made their favorite foods. She played their favorite games. But the children said they just preferred to nap.

Why did she now have so much energy but her children were getting weaker and weaker each day?

Now she truly felt lonely. Papa Mouse was too busy in his study trying to find cures for the terribly ill. All of her own powers had no effect to make her children happy.

She decided she would just work harder to make her voice more cheerful, her energy more exuberant, and her treats more delicious.

Chapter Six

Years and years passed and the children continued to weaken. Their bodies did not grow. And now they were expected to go out and work but they said they didn't know what they liked to do.

Now the mother grew weary.

The children were eternal children, but they did not have the excitement and innocence of children.

One night, she had a dream and it was the turtle. He came to her in a dream and said, "Remember who you are and what you came here for."

And she wept. Her body folded into the forest floor.

And when she awoke and opened the kitchen window to let the breeze in, there it was, a sparkling gem.

When her children awoke and stared into their coffee, the mother sat at the table.

Without speaking, she laid the gem on the table.

The children looked at her with wild eyes.

She said to them, "Remember who you are and what you came here for."

Harmony said, "It is too late for us mother."

Melody said, "I have forgotten."

Mama Mouse said, "Go into the forest and do not come back until you remember."

The children got ready with light comfortable slippers, a snack and some water, and set out into the forest.

The sun fell lower and lower in the sky and Mama Mouse watched as the shade grew upon her kitchen wall until she was enveloped in darkness.

And then she knew that sleep would become a distant friend until her heart gave her messages from Harmony and Melody.

Dear Diary,

That just took me to a crazy place I didn't expect to go.

Anyway, is it weird that I want to bring these country mouse dolls to school with me? I mean, obviously I'm not going to play with them in class.

I think I'll just glance at them in my bookbag,

Turtle Power,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

Something unexpected happened today.

Margaret Figueroa asked me for my homework as she normally does.

So when she started to plead with me, “Come on Mallory. I thought we were friends.”

I said, “Why don’t you do your own homework?”

I felt the reverberations travel to the back of the room. There was this nervousness now transferred to everyone that would have normally been copying my homework.

And me, I felt like a bird. I actually felt like a bird. I could fly around that whole room in circles.

Bird Power,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I'm writing this on some scrap paper, not my actual diary. Here's why.

My life is officially ruined and I can never return to my school.

How do I begin to recount the series of events that led to my demise?

I was walking to Roses with Alex and Brittany. I was going to get my ham, cheese, and mayo on a roll. I felt so strong. I felt like I didn't care if I saw Will. I felt like I cared more about being respected than loved.

And as I'm leaving Roses, I hear someone say, "Mallory, your bookbag is open."

And before I know it, this guy Frank has grabbed one of my mouse dolls out of my bag and he must have also taken my diary because Margaret Figueroa started reading my diary out loud.

In an instant, I flew at her and knocked my diary out of her hands, but we both stumbled to the ground.

We start to fight and she's pulling my hair and I'm pulling her hair. Then I feel someone pulling me off the ground.

Will has me in his arms. And Frank is holding Margaret back.

She starts taunting me, "Tell us how it ends Mallory! Does the country mouse finally get a boyfriend?"

And it's as much as I could take. I grab my book bag but I can't find my diary as I scan every inch of the ground.

Alex calls out, "Wait for me Mallory!"

But I just have to jet home and now I'm smoking a cigarette in my driveway. I feel like I can't breathe.

Iron Grate,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I had such a weird dream last night.

I dreamt that I never stood up to Margaret Figueroa. That I kept giving her my English homework and managed her this way for the rest of the school year. And so she never fought me. And no one discovered my diary or dolls. And then in the dream, I became 30 years old, and there was a woman at work that looked like an ogre. And she bullied me in the small office I worked in. I was so unhappy. And every day I lied to myself that I could be happy there. I ignored the woman's bullying every day. And the whole office was the same color gray.

Then one day, I was so angry that I set the office on fire.

Gray Office Walls,

Mallory

Dear Diary,

I got you back!

Today I was sitting on the wall surrounding the courtyard. Alex was getting my sandwich from Roses. I just wanted some time to myself.

As I'm sitting there writing in a new notebook, guess who walks by me. Will.

He walks up to me with his head bowed.

He placed my diary on the wall.

I was so happy. I couldn't stop smiling.

I said, "Thanks."

Then he said, "Wait, something else."

He bought me a stuffed turtle. He placed it near the diary.

"Sorry, I just read the mouse story. I really liked it."

"You swear that's all you read?"

"Yeah," and he continued to look down.

"Thanks for saving my diary."

"Maybe this could be the beginning."

"It could be, but first something has to end."

A New Chapter,

Mallory

HOME RESTORATION

IF YOU ENJOYED **M & A RESTORATION**, YOU CAN READ THE FINAL PART BY BUYING THE BOOK ON AMAZON.

OR EMAIL WHITMANLILAC@GMAIL.COM AND I'LL GIVE YOU THE FINAL PART.

THANKS FOR READING!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Jimenez was born in Hudson County, New Jersey. She lives in Brooklyn where she goes on walks with Toby, her 19 lbs. Chihuahua mix who neighbors lovingly call “The Sheriff.” She often notices the sunflowers printed on fabric and that grow in her neighbors’ front gardens in New York City.