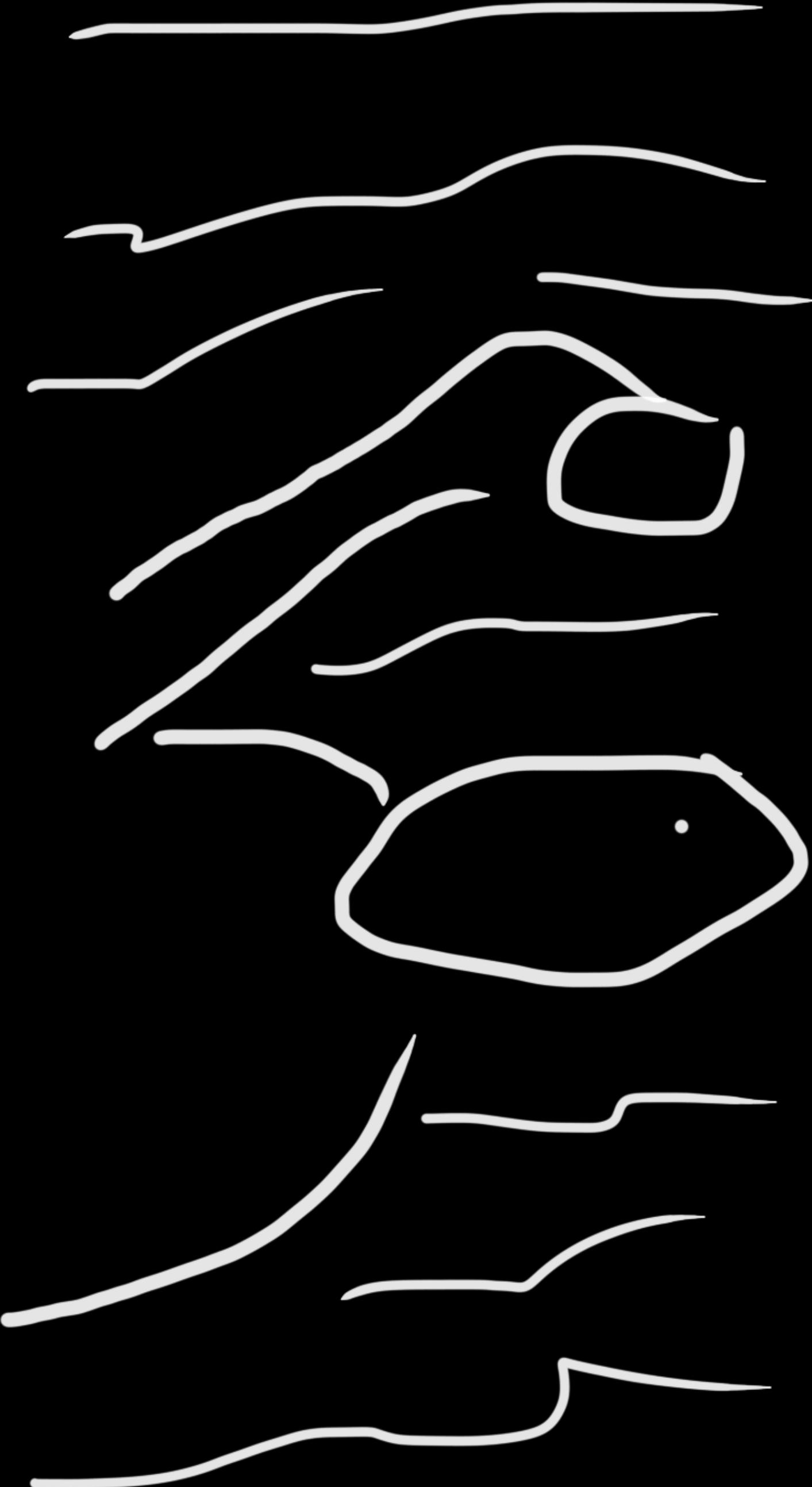


miniMAG

issue82
swimming solo





Solo at Midnight

Nancy Machlis Rechtman

There is a song I once used to sing
Long ago
It was a duet
Never meant for just one voice
To carry its tune.

But the harmony eventually disappeared
Into the gathering clouds
And I became the plaintive whistle of a train
At midnight
Rattling down the rickety tracks
Through the deserted plains.

Cleats

L.A. Labuschagne

A day whose night is spent popping pain pills and smoking weed out of a tobacco pipe, shooting bubblegum liqueur and taking shots at each other until you feel things again.

If it was Lancelot it could've been Muffins or it could've been Werewolf but one bro took five at once and was out right after, collapsed under a tree and talking about how his chest tingled. Soccer ball kick him. Ask if it hurts.

Man runs into the house, teenage boy runs into the club villa, some one's reptile on junk having a mental break. Soccer ball kick him.

Meet your ladyboy at mugwump saloon for a pull of the slow-time sperm. Talk about how her brother died to a pill addiction. Feign sobriety until you take your first pull. "Hey, doll, is this shit stronger than usual or is it just me?"

Zoo

Johnny McIvor

So sad to see was the monkey
Big and dirty and fat
Grey eyes that were heavy lead
Orange fur that was matted with slime
Life was not fair to that monke

Cage turned from the sea
No smile, no banana any longer,
Looked down into the corner
Watching rust, eye floaters
A dream of maroon static

Considered buying him,
Considered twice actually
I was a boy at the time,
And he was sunny and fun
And made my day, kissing rain



Search

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Andy and his family stopped at a small restaurant on their way back from the beach. There was a sign on the counter that read “Coconut Ice Cream—Get it While it’s Fresh!”

“That’s what I want,” Andy declared. He was slurping at a cone when other customers entered and sat next to them.

He raised his eyes and was transfixed. Across from him sat a vision with intense brown eyes and a delicate oval face. She smiled and asked him something. He mumbled words that became lost.

Both families rose to leave and happened to walk in the same direction; Andy and the girl stayed behind. He impulsively grasped her hand. She said “They can see us,” and rushed to join her party.

The following day, the phone rang. Andy’s mother answered. When she hung up, her face was pale. “Father had another heart attack. We need to return home.”

On the drive back home, Andy’s mother kept urging her husband to go faster, and he complied. At a steep curve, the car went off the road and struck a tree.

Andy woke up hurting all over. His right hand was numb, so he

reached up with the left and found that his head was heavily bandaged. A nurse then entered the room.

“Where am I?” he asked, confused.

“In a hospital. You were in an accident and hit your head against the windshield, and fractured an arm, as well.”

“How’s everyone else?”

“Your mother has a broken collarbone, but will recover.”

“How about my grandfather?”

“He died a couple of days ago.”

Andy asked, fearing the answer, “And Dad?”

The nurse frowned. “He’s gone. He was already dead when you were picked up.”

Andy sunk back on the pillow and wept.

It took years for things to return to a semblance of normality, though life was never quite the same; the accident kept playing over in his mind, overshadowing almost all else.

He later discovered he had lost most memories of the day before the accident. He recalled eating coconut ice cream, meeting a girl, and exchanging words with her. He also had a vague impression of seeing her again that night, and felt that something important had occurred between them. But when he tried to bring those memories back, they had vanished.

He became obsessed with the problem. He resented the loss of his first romantic experience, a time when he might have known happiness.

Years passed. Biologists, digging into the workings of the human brain, found that new memories reside in the neurons in the dentate gyrus area of the hippocampus until they are transmitted to the cortex to become long-term memories. Loss of those transitory memories could occur due to events preventing their transmission out of the hippocampus. However, lost transitory memories could perhaps be found by energizing the neurons containing them.

A single neuron could be the repository of several memories, encased like matryoshka dolls. Memories could be extracted one by one, but the process might lead to the accidental loss of them or other memories.

Andy wished to volunteer for the memory retrieval experiments but was concerned about accidentally losing memories during retrieval.

“Is there a way to minimize that risk?” he asked the leader of the memory research team.

“The site of the probing is precisely controlled by a computer. We stimulate quiescent neurons, and if any of them evoke memories that correspond to the period of interest, you can decide whether to go further. Accidental loss of memories is improbable.”

Andy weighed the risks and benefits of letting his brain be probed. His desire to recover the missing memories won over.

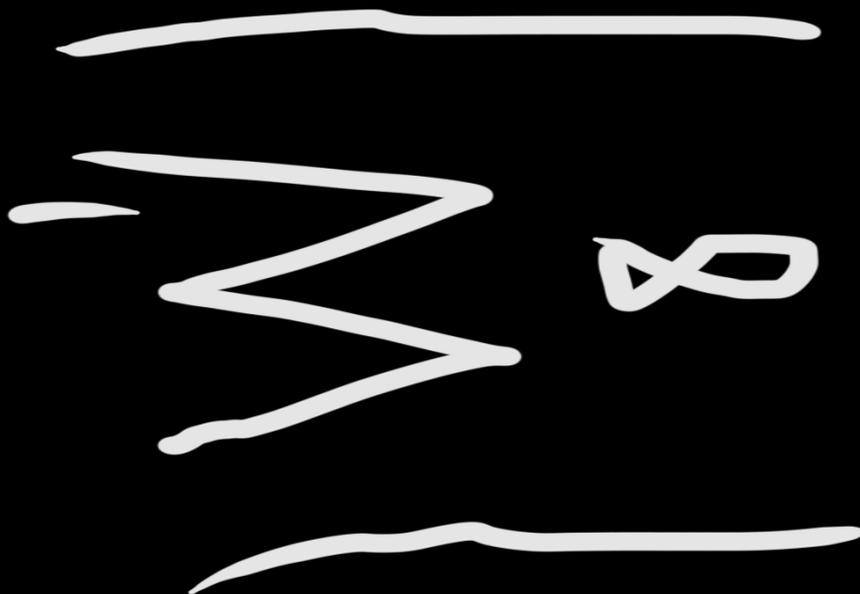
“I’m ready” Andy advised one morning. “Please include me in your protocol.”

* * *

Andy lay, immobilized but conscious, on the operating table. Sources above his head generated tiny electric fields. The fields’ minute movements caused neurons to fire individually.

Suddenly, one firing neuron flashed before his mind the taste of coconut ice cream which, as a fishing rod, reeled in the sight of himself walking with a girl.

Other images showed him standing inside a gazebo. He heard footsteps crunching shells on the path to his location. The girl appeared,



came to Andy and pecked his cheek. She said: “I came because you were waiting for me... but I can’t stay. My parents saw us and forbade me to talk to you again.”

“Wait!” he pleaded.

Another neuron evoked the girl’s receding steps and his own steps in pursuit. He caught up to her. “Let me go!” she demanded.

He tried to kiss her. There was a struggle and both fell.

The images then cut off.

“Wait... where is the rest?!!” Andy asked himself, and repeated the question to the technician who was readying to move the fields forward a tiny distance. The man stopped: “Should I continue?”

Andy then realized he was at the edge of a cliff. Maybe he should stop before it was too late. On the other hand, could he live with never knowing what happened?

He swallowed hard and replied: “Let’s go ahead.”

The firing of the next neuron showed him getting up with difficulty from the path to the gazebo. The girl was nowhere to be seen.

There was still a gap, some memories that his brain stubbornly refused to resurrect. What was it hiding?

The technician looked at him quizzically. “Should we try again?”

“Yes, again. In for a dime, in for a dollar.”

The firing of another neuron showed him trying to kiss the girl, and then she was slapping his face and pushing him off. She had gotten up and gone away, leaving him beaten and humiliated.

Andy sighed. His mind had been seeking, all along, to protect him from reopening those early wounds of shame and disappointment.

“Let’s quit now,” he instructed. “The brain knows its business better than we give it credit. Losing good memories may sometimes be better than finding bad ones.”



Waiting For The Sun

Kit Terrel

I hate the glare in my eye but the fear swells when it goes away
I satiate myself with pulsing rushes of cooling toxins
I poison myself with the smile I get when I think I'm making sense
I fear the swell when it goes away

I hate the cold and I hate the sweat I drip when it's hot
I satiate myself with medicine to balance the two
I poison myself with my impatience and my want of elation
I fear the night when the sun goes away

I drink in the radiation
I satiate my mental illness
I poison my body to balance the past
I fear the light upon my face

an elit dolor sit amet, LO
scipiscing est. Aicua
ma dapibus feugiat. Cras
us adipiscing, condimentum
ec, dignissim feils. ora

War

LOREM IPSUM

Adipiscing lorem ipsum

An elit dolor
cipiscin

war
she wore his heart
on her sleeve



Linda L Ludwig [L3]

The Tibetan Numerologists of Appalachia

Toni Kochensparger

Arthur took a drink of his slushie. When she was in a good mood, his grandmother let him pick something sweet from the gas station, while she spoke to the cashier.

“Give me thirty-two, three of the...twenty-fours, the Bingos,” his grandmother said, eyes scanning the rows of scratch-offs for any glowing aura she could sense. Arthur stood behind her in line, looking out, in a daze, at the exploded kaleidoscope of colors, lining the gas station’s shelves. Snacks of many kinds, motor oil.

“And five of the threes,” his grandmother said, beckoning Arthur to place his slushie on the counter, already halfway-consumed.

“So, who was the boy you were talking to?” Arthur’s grandmother asked, as they pulled out of the station.

“He’s new,” Arthur said. “His family just moved here.”

“Well, okay. Well, what’s his name?”

Arthur’s mother asked the same questions when they got home, after his grandmother filled her in. It had been years since the boy had had a friend, a fact that made the pair of them excited, if cautious.

“Well, what’s his family like?” Arthur’s mother asked, ruining tomatoes.

“I haven’t met his family,” Arthur said. “I just met him. And I think he biked to the pool.”

“So he lives in the neighborhood,” his mother said. “Well, that’s good. Maybe the two of you could study together.”

“The boy doesn’t need someone to study with,” Arthur’s grandmother said. “He already does too much studying, as it is.”

“He needs a little help with his math,” Arthur’s mother said. Arthur winced.

“He needs a little help making friends, is what he needs,” his grandmother replied. Arthur’s cheeks turned red and he looked in his lap.

“Well, we’ll see what kind of friend Peter turns out to be,” Arthur’s mother said, ash seeping into tomato juice.

Arthur felt a stone form in his stomach. “There’s plenty of people in the world. You have to be careful who you spend your time with,” said his mother.

The last time Arthur had anyone over to the house, he was nine years-old. That was when he was still friends with Brandon, who had to be picked up by his dad late-at-night, after Arthur’s mother called when the two boys were arguing.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” Arthur had told her, through tears, after Brandon left.

“It’s not your fault, Baby,” his mother had said. “He shouldn’t have picked on you like that.”

“He made fun of my Reba shirt,” Arthur had said.

“Well, I love your Reba shirt,” Arthur’s mother had said, fingers running through his thick, brown hair. “I think it looks nice on you.”

The following Monday, everyone made fun of Arthur’s Reba shirt. Brandon had told anyone who would listen that Arthur had cried.

Since then, all Arthur’s birthdays had been just the three of them. It made Arthur think of what his mom said, the first night they spent without his father—that it was us against the world.

The next afternoon, the phone rang.

“Arthur!” his mother called, from downstairs. Arthur made his way to the top of the steps, expecting a lecture of some kind.

Arthur’s mother stood at the bottom of the stairs, holding the cordless phone she had bought for the kitchen.

“It’s for you,” she said, her hand gently covering the receiver.



“What are you doing right now?” a voice said, on the other end. Arthur didn’t recognize it, for a second, before realizing the voice belonged to Peter.

“How did you get my phone number?” Arthur asked.

“I asked around,” Peter said. “I got it from a kid named Brandon.”

“Oh,” Arthur said.

“He’s kind-of a jerk. I mean: I just met him, but I can tell,” Peter said. Arthur let out a small smile. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter: what are you doing right now?”

“I’m supposed to be working on math,” Arthur said, glancing back at his bedroom. His action figures were scattered on the ground, next to his unopened book bag.

“Okay, well: do you know where Fjord is?”

“Fjord?”

“The street. It’s off of Lakengren.”

“Oh—oh, yeah. Yeah, I know where that is.”

“Oh, great,” Peter said. “I need you to meet me there.” “Now?”

“Right now, yeah. As soon as you can.” “What for?” Arthur asked.

“We need one more,” Peter said.

“One more what?”

It took a ten-minute negotiation to convince Arthur’s mother this was a good idea, before Arthur was on his way. He had changed out of his Shania Twain tank top into something neutral.

“Okay, we need you to hike me the ball,” Peter said, when he got to Fjord. A handful of other boys populated the yard, about half of them from school. Arthur shied from any contact with their eyes.

“Whose house is this?” he asked Peter.

“It’s mine,” Peter said. “Do you know where to go?” “I’ve never been in your house,” Arthur said.

“That’s not what I mean,” Peter said. “I mean: do you know where you’re supposed to go to hike the ball?” This was the first time Arthur became cognizant of the fact that he was being asked to play a sport.

“Um,” Arthur said.

“It’s easy,” Peter said. “I’m going to stand in the middle and you kneel in front of me while I call out the numbers. Then, when I say the word hike, you pass the ball through your legs, behind you, to me.”

“What do all the numbers mean?” Arthur asked.

“They’re supposed to stand for different moves we’re gonna do,” Peter said, “but, really, they’re all just made-up. They don’t mean anything.”

“I’m Marcus,” one of the boys said to Arthur, after the game. “This is my brother, Cal.”

Arthur felt like he’d performed some kind of magic trick. Because all he had to do was hike the ball, no one noticed that he didn’t really contribute to the actual game, he just kind-of ran around. He even got tackled by one of the boys on the other team and kept going. It didn’t hurt or, if it did, he didn’t notice because, by that point, in the game, he was having real fun.

“Do you wanna hang out in my room?” Peter asked Arthur, after Marcus and Cal and all the rest of the boys went home. “My dad doesn’t get home till eight. So it’s cool.”

Peter’s room was upstairs. He led Arthur up and then ran down to the kitchen to get them both snacks.

Arthur looked around. There were posters on the wall of different football and baseball guys. There was a desk, beneath a window, where Peter’s things were all arranged at the same right angle, and his bed was perfectly-made, like a bed in one of Arthur’s mom’s catalogues. The room didn’t have a TV or a radio, and it didn’t have any toys. Besides the sports posters, there was no sign of Peter.

“Here,” Peter said, returning with two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and two glasses of milk. “My dad doesn’t let me have pop,” Peter said, sitting down on the floor.

“Where are all your things?” Arthur asked, taking a seat.

“What do you mean?” Peter asked.

“Like. Like don’t you have any...I don’t know: stuff?”

“My dad doesn’t really buy me stuff,” Peter said. “Sometimes he buys me books, but really only ones he picks out.”

“Is that what you get for your birthday? The books?”

“Sometimes,” Peter said, after swallowing a bite of his sandwich.

“Mostly he just gets me clothes.”

“I’m sorry,” Arthur said.

“Don’t be,” said Peter. “I like the clothes. And I usually end up liking

the books. Like even if they're boring, at first."

Arthur looked at the wall above Peter's bed. "At least he lets you have posters," he said, halfway through a bite.

"He got me those, too," Peter said. "I think they're cool, though. I really like those guys."

"Do you go to the games?"

"Not really. We went to one. Once, when we were on vacation. It was the coolest thing we did, the whole time. The rest was museums."

"So how do you know that you like them?"

"Well, they're my dad's favorite players, so there's that. Like he talks about John Elway a lot."

"But I mean, like, if you don't watch the games on TV?"

"We listen to them on the AM radio," Peter said. "In Dad's car."

"Oh," Arthur said. "Yeah, that sounds pretty cool."

"It's fun imagining what they're doing," Peter said. "Pretending they're tackling each other."

Arthur studied the picture of John Elway. He took a bite of his sandwich. He turned back to Peter.

"I've never really seen him so excited," Arthur's mother said to someone, on the phone. Arthur could hear her conversation, downstairs. "It seems like those kids were really nice to him."

Arthur was picking up the action figures in his room. One-by-one, he held them up to his face for inspection, then placed each of them, carefully, into a cardboard box.

"He said that they played football," his mother said. "I mean: he hates sports."

Arthur looked at his bed. He'd tried to make it like one of the catalogues, but he wasn't that good.

And, besides that, something was just basically wrong. "I have no idea," his mother said.

Arthur stared at the bed, confused. Then he walked over and flipped the blanket to the other side, the one without the Animaniacs.

Then the bed was perfect.



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