



## NIKKEIJIN / 日系人

Katie Cunningham

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When my grandfather Howard used to make hamburgers, he would save the grease from the patties and use it to fry the flat sides of the bun until they were crispy and golden. My mother gives a crooked smile every time she remembers the buttery give of bread, the tender sink of patty, the soft crinkle of lettuce as she bit down all those years ago. After listening to her, you'd think his way was the only true way to make hamburgers. He was Japanese, but his specialty was American food: hamburgers, hot dogs, corned beef hash.

I listen to my mother's stories carefully. Information about my Japanese grandparents on my mother's side is hard to come by. Both my grandmother and my grandfather died before I was born, and my mother's smile, the off-hand way she sometimes tells these stories, is one of the few things I have of them.

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When I first started college, my friends were all obsessed with going out for sushi. There was a hip sushi restaurant called Wasabi Bistro right down the street from our school, with hanging lights and square, modern plates and sushi rolls made with cream cheese. Birthdays, lazy Saturdays, finals—everything was an excuse to escape from campus and eat something delicious, something exciting, something cultured.

I loved going to Wasabi with my friends, but it didn't take me long to realize

the way they looked at me when we went out: like I was someone who could guide them through the complicated mess that is ordering sushi when you don't know the difference between sushi rolls and *nigirizushi*. "Do you think the eel is good?" "What's *ikura*?" "Tuna's usually cooked, right?" they'd ask me, looking up from their menus.

Most of them had fond memories of eating sushi with their parents. Maybe they did it with their dad on his Friday nights off, or maybe they had *makisu* mats at home and experimented with make-your-own sushi on school nights, but all of them had eaten sushi as a family activity. Ironically, by the time I started college, I had never eaten sushi with my parents. My mom, who is third-generation Japanese, hates sushi; my dad, who is fourth-generation Irish/English/German/Scottish, refuses to eat anything from the sea. Sure, I'd had the odd *inarizushi* or California roll here and there, but by and large, I was clueless.

That didn't matter to my friends. To them, I was the one who liked to eat, the one who could use chopsticks, the one who was—hey!—Asian, and they thought I would naturally know more than they did about sushi. Maybe, to some degree, they were right. I didn't know if they would like eel, but I knew that it was chewy and fatty and that I, personally, did. I'd never had *ikura*, but I know what it was. Lastly, I knew that tuna in a sushi restaurant was definitely served raw. I knew these things, but I could not, even now, pinpoint where I learned them. It seems as if I must have picked them up somehow, the same way that I know what a typewriter is or how to brush my teeth. If I try to find the source, all I can see in my mind are images on the edges of my memory, blurry: thin slices of rubbery gray meat, stacks of shining red eggs, deep red slices of fish on rice.

### 三

My grandfather Howard and my grandmother Kiyō met in Cleveland in the mid-1940s. Unlike many young Japanese Americans of their generation, they did not meet until after the war. They weren't even in the same incarceration camp: Kiyō was in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, and Howard was in Poston, Arizona. Both of them left camp as quickly as they could. During the war, incarcerated Japanese Americans were only allowed to leave camp if they were fighting in the military or if they were given a job somewhere in the interior of the country. My grandmother and grandfather were both sponsored by church groups in Ohio.

After the war ended, my grandparents decided not to return to their pre-relocation homes. My grandfather was from Riverside, California, and my grandmother was from Wapato, Washington, but Cleveland is where they chose to raise their family: specifically Garfield Heights, in a small, three-story home with a minimal front yard. They had three children there: Irland, 1948; Bill, 1951; and Karen, my mother, 1965.

My grandmother was a secretary, and my grandfather had many jobs, among them setting type. My grandmother died in 1984, at the age of 61; my grandfather died in 1989 at the age of 68. These are most of the facts that my mother, when pressed, can tell me about my grandparents. I wish there were more. I do not know how they met or what they liked about each other. I do not know why my grandfather could not keep a job. I do not know why they decided to leave camp or if they ever missed their families. This information is lost to time: their children never asked, they never offered the information, and now we will never know.

#### 四

Among Japanese Americans, there is an immense amount of lost history. Sociologically, all ethnic groups that settle in the United States lose many of their cultural markers between the second and third generations, but in few communities is the loss as abrupt and complete as it is in the Japanese American community. After the incarceration camps, many *Nisei*, or second-generation Japanese Americans, wanted to move on and start a new life—a life that did not include stories about wartime or a rehashing of their old culture. *Nisei* like my grandparents never spoke Japanese at home or mentioned their incarceration to their children. Because of this, the Japanese American community has lost much of its surface culture: language, food, ways of dress. This erasure was not purposeful, exactly, but it was a result of all of the things the *Nisei* left unsaid. However, not everything can be lost so easily. Deep culture, or the culture that makes up who we are and how we relate to the world, is the hardest to eradicate. Traditions of respect, valuations of the family, and cultures of eating, for the most part, have been passed on. We have lost many of the specifics, but the echoes remain.

#### 五

My mother speaks Spanish, and her brother, my Uncle Bill, speaks German. I started learning Japanese in high school because I thought somebody in my family should speak it. My school was about 20% Asian, so Japanese was one of the more popular languages, especially for the Chinese kids who could already almost read Japanese fluently.

It was harder for the rest of us. My biggest problem was the *rs*. Japanese, like

many Asian languages, doesn't really have an *l* sound, so the *r* is the closest that it gets. It's a hard *r* sound, a mixture between an *r*, an *l*, and a *d*, and no matter how much I practiced, I could not make it. I had the worst *hakujin*, or white person, accent in the class. It was worse even than all of the white anime fans' accents, which was humiliating. I learned later, in a second language acquisition class in college, that the reason I can't make my *r* sounds is because I never heard them when I was younger. They aren't a part of the lexicon of sounds that my ear can easily hear and process. The sounds are foreign, not a part of my mother tongue.

Ironically, my mother, who speaks no Japanese at all, can make her *r* sounds perfectly if asked. Her mother used them all the time, and a part of that has stayed ingrained in her mind, even though she no longer feels a need to use them. She's third-generation and can make perfect American *rs* without an accent—why would she ever want to do otherwise?

#### 六

Neither of my grandparents went to college, but they saved the money to send all three of their children. It's cheesy, but it's true: if my grandparents hadn't worked hard and stayed in the United States, my family wouldn't be able to have the opportunities for education that we do.

My family has used those opportunities. While neither of my grandparents went to college, all three of their children and all five of their grandchildren will graduate with at least an undergraduate degree. For the most part, those degrees will be in STEM fields. My parents both met as math majors at Heidelberg University. My Uncle Irland received an engineering degree from Case Western Reserve, back when it was Case Western Institute of Technology. My cousin

David is a practicing medical doctor. My cousin Paul works in coding and technology development. My younger sister, who is still applying to colleges, is planning on double majoring in mathematics and computer science.

I, on the other hand, am an English major. Sometimes I feel guilty, like I am wasting a precious opportunity at education. Even though I tell my family that English majors are infinitely hireable, I can tell that they don't believe me. They are happy that I am happy, but they don't quite understand. When I talk about the history of the English language at Thanksgiving dinner, they listen politely but don't react correctly at any of the exciting parts. When I explain my stories for fiction writing class and my struggles with dialogue, they look perplexed. When I show my mother my first publication, a poem in a slim student journal, she reads the poem and shakes her head. "Of course I'm proud of you, Katie," she says, "but I really don't understand poetry at all."

When I learned that my grandfather worked for a while as a typesetter, I asked my mother a dozen questions. "Did he work there long?" "Did you ever see the press?" "Do you know what font they used?" My mother didn't know the answers to any of my questions: all she knew was that he used to work with type. But I was curious. I wondered if he liked to read all of the type he set. I wondered if he got excited by the feeling of all of those letters, all of those possibilities, beneath his fingers.

## 七

When I was in high school, my uncle became very invested in solving what I call the "Missing-Tashima Mystery." The family narrative, passed reluctantly down from my grandfather to my uncles, was that the Tashima great-grandmother

had died giving birth to my grandfather, and that he—and his older sister—had been left in the care of a single father. Overwhelmed by the responsibility of two children in a new country, my great-grandfather packed up the home, left my infant grandfather in the custody of white neighbors, and moved back to Japan with the older sister. They were both never heard from again.

My uncle was sure we were missing parts of the story—why would the great-grandfather never reach out to his son again?—and he was determined to figure out what he could. If he was able to locate the lost branch of the Tashima family, he could potentially locate family as close as aunts, uncles, and first cousins. Unfortunately, his findings were inconclusive. Irland Erlander, the white man my grandfather lived with, had died. While his children confirmed that my grandfather lived with them, they knew very little about our family. It was impossible to find ship records for my great-grandfather and his daughter. Perhaps most frustratingly, census records from 1930 reported that my grandfather still lived with his father and sister when he was nine years old, though—as my uncle is quick to add—census records from the 1930s are not particularly reliable, especially if someone was trying to hide something. Still, even he had to admit that there was something off about his research. My grandfather's story shouldn't have been so difficult to corroborate.

The inconclusive findings were a blow to my uncle. He had been prepared to hit a dead end, but he had never before considered that his father might have lied. Eventually, he abandoned the search.

## 八

I started researching the Japanese Incarceration Camps when I was in the sixth grade. Something was comforting in the numbers, in the books and books full of history you could find. All you had to do was look. I researched the camps for every open-ended class assignment and for my own curiosity as well. Because I'm a writer, I wrote about the information in any way I could—in argumentative essays, in research paper competitions, in poetry, in fiction—to try and process it. I researched the camps so much that I inspired my mother to drive me from Seattle to southern Idaho so I could tour an incarceration camp for myself.

By the time I started college, no amount of reading or writing could make the research new. I had the numbers down pat: 120,000 incarcerates by some estimates, 110,000 by others; eleven camps if you count Poston I and Poston II as separate; 2/3 of those incarcerated were American citizens. Research projects became annoying, because of all the information I knew off the top of my head but had to cite from a scholarly source. I grew tired of having to say “but not a single Japanese American was convicted of sabotage,” or “the 442nd is the most decorated unit in the history of the American military.” I wanted new information, something real, not these same facts, again and again and again.

All of history is a story; it's the way we decide to tell our past to ourselves. Is it triumphant? Is it tragic? The Japanese American community today tells their story in certain, set ways, so that the injustices of the past will not be repeated. In many ways, our storytelling is a fight against erasure. We tell the story because the Issei and Nisei wouldn't. It's a solemn duty, and I believe in it. I know the story now, but here's the problem: it's not mine.

## 九

What I know about my Grandma Kiyō's and Grandpa Howard's deaths is limited.

I did not learn until I was in high school that my family—my perfect, wonderful family—was built on grief. We are built on grief in the way that Japanese families are built on grief, with histories that are silent and founded on erasure.

The trick with erasure is that, if no one brings attention to it, the absence becomes the truth.

Once I started looking, I found erasure everywhere. The empty downstairs of my uncle's home, complete with kitchen and extra bedroom where I used to play, was not a remnant of some earlier owner. It was specially finished by my uncle, for my grandfather to live in before he became too sick to stay. Our huge family gatherings for Christmas—my Uncle Irland and his kids, my family, and my Uncle Bill, many of us traveling thousands of miles to be together—was not just an expression of how much the Tashima siblings cared about each other. Our Christmas gatherings are an echo. They are a holdover of a time when my grandparents were around to host everyone, all of their children, for Christmas.

It is understandable to want to erase tragedy. For a long time, I thought my life did not contain any. My parents were together. My friends were nice. My family loved me. No one drank or got thrown in jail or yelled at each other. Until I asked, I did not know that my grandmother died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-two, leaving my blind grandfather alone and seriously handicapped. I did not know that my grandfather's diabetes was so bad that he lost his sight and, eventually, one of his legs before dying at the Keiro Nursing Home in Seattle.

(My Uncle Bill was later married in the Japanese garden at Keiro; it wasn't until his wedding day that I learned why that spot, of all places in Seattle, held such significance for him.) I did not know that my mother, a perfect student, almost flunked out of college because she forewent studying to drive to her father's house every weekend and make him food, do his laundry, and keep him company. I did not know that my grandfather attended my parents' wedding, but was so tired from his medications that he had to leave before the father-daughter dance.

To find the answers, I need to ask questions, but here's the problem: if the past is hidden well, how do we know what questions to ask? And what if the answers are long gone, or never existed in the first place? When I was younger, I used to play a game. I'd rack my brain, wondering, *If they were alive now, would they approve of me? Would they like me?* I say *game* but it wasn't fun; somehow the answers felt so important, so foundational. *Yes*, my mother said, the one time I asked her, *yes, of course*, but the thing is, we don't really know. They are gone, and we can't have all of the answers anymore. All we can have is the blurriness of these stories and impressions and the living entity of our family, formed around the memory of something lost.

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When I was a senior in high school, I won a free trip to Japan. On a whim, I had applied for a program through the Japanese Consulate called the Invitation Program for Japanese American Students, and one phone call later, I was offered the opportunity to be a student ambassador between Japan and the United States. They would pay for me (and four other students) to visit Japan, tour Tokyo and Kyoto, and learn traditional Japanese art forms if we would, at the

end of our stay, give a brief presentation to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The trip was amazing, but I remember being perplexed by one thing: the food. We ate countless things I'd never tasted before: tofu made from fresh spring water, *okonomiyaki*, *shabu-shabu*, *korokke*, but—and this was the weird part—nothing tasted strange or new to me. It all tasted familiar, right, like the greatest kind of comfort food.

The best thing was eating Japanese breakfasts in the morning. I refuse to get up for breakfast in the United States—eggs, bacon, and pancakes really don't do it for me—but I would eagerly wake up at seven to eat warm rice, dried salmon, pickled cabbage, strips of *nori*, and drink cloudy miso soup. While the other students politely tried the Japanese breakfast at the hotel once, then opted for the American breakfast (boiled egg, ham, fluffy bread, jam, coffee), I savored each briny bite, delighting in the strong flavors.

"It's like Japanese food is written into my genetic code," I told my best friend, Kirsten, upon my return. "My body is hard-wired to respond to it, like it remembers my ancestors eating it for thousands of years."

Kirsten gave me a long, judgmental look, which I deserved.

"Or maybe you just like Japanese food," she said. "A lot of people do. It's flipping delicious."

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Like me, my grandfather liked to eat.

His eating habits are the only things my mother talks about spontaneously. To learn about his illness or his jobs, I have to push. But my mother and my

Uncle Bill will throw out comments about his eating habits easily. I used to think that they were hiding the other information about him, the *real* information, because they didn't want to think about it. Now I wonder if his eating habits, his every-day routines and joys, were the real information all along.

This is how it usually goes: I will try something new, express profound enjoyment in it, and then learn that it was one of my grandfather's favorites: pastrami sandwiches from Corky and Lenny's in Beachwood, OH (my mother: "Katie, you ordered the exact same sandwich my father always got"); root beer floats (my mother: "my dad could never resist root beer floats at the fair"); corned beef hash (my uncle: "your grandfather loved corned beef hash—he always used to order it when we went out"); chicken-fried steak (my uncle: "I knew you'd like it, it was one of my dad's favorites"). When I make a perfect root beer float or get corned beef hash for breakfast, I sometimes pretend that I am spending quality time with my grandfather. I imagine that he took me out, just the two of us, to some old greasy diner that he loves. He knows that I will love it, too, because we have the same taste buds, taste buds that transcend generations. My cousin may have gotten his face, but I have inherited one of the things that brought him the most joy in life: a love of good, hearty food.

## 十二

Every year, two or three days after Christmas, we leave my Uncle Irland's house in Sylvania, OH, and drive a few hours to Cleveland. This is where my mother's parents are buried, not far from the home in which they raised their three children.

The gravestone is on a hill, right under a tree. Each year, we stomp out of the

car—me, my sister, my mother, my father—walk up to the tree, and look down. My mother washes off the stone with a little bit of water. We leave a bunch of fresh flowers, a mochi snowman. Sometimes I leave a half pastrami sandwich from Corky and Lenny's. Then, the formalities over, the grave clean, the gifts given, we stand in silence at the grave and look.

These visits are short. Five minutes, tops. I do not know what the others think. Maybe my mom remembers. I don't have anything to remember. Only this, the same ritual every year.

Invariably, at the end of about a minute or so of silence, my mom clears her throat. "We can go." Silently, we trudge back to the car, stepping carelessly over other graves, loved probably as much as ours. We do not talk about grief. We do not search for meaning. We visit a cemetery.

## 十三

When Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, ordering the removal of Japanese Americans from the west coast, very few Japanese Americans protested. The vast majority of them cooperated with the government, and the incarceration camps were designed with partial developmental help from leaders in the Japanese American community. The prevailing attitude was a popular Japanese platitude, *shikatagonai*, or "it can't be helped."

This always made me angry. I hated the idea of giving in, of letting your government strip away your rights. It seemed like cowardice. But as I've gotten older, I've started to recognize *shikatagonai* in the ways that I react to everyday situations. I see it in my job as at an ice cream shop, where I ignore customers who insult me or my scooping abilities. I see it when people make incorrect

assumptions about me, based on how I look, and I brush their ignorance aside. I see it when I am talked down to by a peer and I remember my mother comforting me when I was younger: “You will always have to deal with terrible people, Katie; you can be the bigger person.” Increasingly, *shikatagonai* is beginning to look a bit like wisdom.

#### 十四

Searching for identity is like living in a room made of two-way mirrors. To see yourself you look at your reflection, which is imperfect. It is separate from you, distant and foreign somehow, but you still try to consolidate this stranger with how you feel inside. At the same time, you know that strangers are watching you and making their own judgments. What do they see? Do you have an obligation to act differently—to clean up after yourself, to eradicate your less attractive habits—because you afraid of what they might think?

I got that question—“What are you?”—a lot when I was younger. It was because I looked unusual, exciting. People wanted to know what made me so different, so I told them I was Japanese. But what did it mean to be Japanese? Did it mean traveling to the Midwest for Christmas, eating pasta and meatballs for dinner every night, and buying five-pound bags of rice? Did it mean having a white name and a white father and going to a white church? Was I Japanese, or was there something missing? And if there was something missing—could it be regained?

#### 十五

In the summer after my freshman year of high school, my Uncle Bill, cousin Paul, and I drove from Seattle to Yakima, WA, for a reunion coordinated by the Yakima Valley Museum. The reunion was for Japanese American families who have roots in the Yakima Valley, so that we could see the places where our parents and grandparents farmed, pore through old pictures of church gatherings, and maybe—maybe—reconnect with the elusive history that time and grief threaten to erase.

My grandmother grew up in the Yakima Valley, and my uncle, cousin, and I searched for her family’s old land armed only with imprecise street names and an old photograph of a bent tree. We walked up and down Lateral A, searching for a place that felt right, evaluating each tree we saw, none of us stating the obvious: that in seventy years, anything could happen. Trees could be cut down or entirely regrown, roads could be renamed, land could be redivided and resewn. We were searching for the truth, but there was no way to know, for certain, if we found it. There was only our blurry guesses, our interpretations of the echoes left on the dry, dusty land.

The only new information we found the whole weekend was in an old church directory that listed the names and occupations of all the church’s members. Under my great-grandfather, Shohei Tsuyuki, we found what we expected—farmer on eighty acres—but something new besides: Shohei Tsuyuki was “one of the leading *senryu* poets of Yakima.” I couldn’t believe it. My family is full of accountants, computer scientists, and doctors, and never for a moment did I consider that, so close in time, there was a writer.

My uncle read the directory, then smiled and turned to me. “My grandfather



was a poet," he said in awe, and then: "That is where you get it from," and for a moment I felt connected in a legacy, an important part of a story that is still unfolding.

## 十六

In Japanese, there is a phrase: *okage sama de*, or "in your honored shadow." The phrase is meant to show respect for your ancestors, and is roughly translated to mean "I am what I am because of you."

This is what I have of my mother's parents: memories, blurs, decontextualized facts, dreams, questions. I have so many things I want to say to them, so many things I want to ask, but in the end, this is all I have: *okage sama de*.

*Okage sama de, Ojiisan. Okage sama de, Obaasan.*

Everything I am, I am because of you.



"I COME AT YOU NOT WITH STICKS"  
.....

Hannah Cobb

Down by the river  
I found five smooth words  
Rolled around by the stream,  
their surfaces worn and etched  
almost soft.

I liked the weight of them  
as I hefted each one carefully in my hand.  
I walked away with five words in my pocket.

Later, on the battlefield, I looked away.  
I did not want to see your face  
as I flung the first one at you.

## EN ARRIERE

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Anneliese Immel

Her mother was dying. Mara didn't need a doctor to tell her that. She could see it in the cataract-ridden eyes, feel it in the claw-like hands that fumbled her wrist each time she said goodbye. Months, they had given mom. Mara didn't know if she could last another month like this one. She bit her lip at the thought and glanced around guiltily.

The bus was crowded today. Mara shifted in her seat, scooting closer to the window as some teenagers and an elderly gentleman crowded into the aisle. A girl with a blond pixie cut and pink sweater fell giggling into the seat beside Mara, while her friends crowded into the aisle beyond, creating a vibrant wall of sweatshirts, laughter, and obscenities. The older man stood a few rows ahead, one hand grasping an overhead rung and the other cradling a bulky paper sack. Mara wanted to offer him her seat, but didn't think he would hear her over the commotion. He looked back once, briefly, and Mara stood halfway, trying to catch his attention, only to duck back down as blondie's arm gestured wildly close to her head. He hadn't seen her.

The gentleman got off at Stanton and 10th. Mara rubbed at her temples. The kids were all crowded around Blondie's phone now, exclaiming over something using slang she didn't understand, and didn't want to. Her own phone vibrated against her thigh. She couldn't hear the accompanying text tone. She took a few moments to dig it out of her pocket. Her jeans were fitting just a little tighter these days, and blondie left her no room to maneuver.

The message was from her sister *How's mom?* Dammit. She sure knew how to time it. Mara blinked rapidly and swiped the message out of sight, opened a new one to her husband, Peter. *I'll be home late. Order pizza, whatever u want.* She looped her purse over her shoulder and slipped her phone into the front pouch, then zipped her windbreaker up to her chin. One block later, she pulled the cord above the window. The bus slowed to a halt.

She had to tap blondie twice and murmur "Excuse me" before the girl shifted her legs to let Mara slide past. She wove her way through headphones, backpacks, and too-strong cologne until she reached the door and hurried out onto the sidewalk.

Mara looked at the street sign above her. She was on First Street. Mara bounced up and down on her toes, rubbing her palms rapidly against her sleeves. She was in a residential area, no coffee shops or diners in sight. There was a small park midway down the block, but it looked unappealing at the moment as wind whipped through the thin bushes and grey clouds crowded together overhead. Mara glanced the other direction. Stevens street was the next intersection. That road she knew. Her dance studio was along it, not far from here.

Mara set off at a brisk trot and turned Eastward on Stevens, heartening when her surroundings began to look familiar. Twenty minutes later, she reached the studio. It had been closed for 2 months now, and she wondered when her unplanned sabbatical would end. She flipped through her keys and threw the door open, slapping a switch to her left upward as she entered. The lights flickered to life, their dull yellow glow illuminating an expansive but dilapidated wooden floor. There was no heat to the room, but that wouldn't matter for long. She set her purse down and removed her jacket, tossing it to the side. Her shoes

and socks followed soon after.

Goosebumps rose along her bare arms as she paced to the center of the room. She stood, gazing at her image in the mirrors that lined the walls. She turned her feet out, slid them into first position. Her arms fell to her sides at rest. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply in, and then out again, making each movement of air audible. She could almost feel the room expanding with the susurrations of her breathing, which grew louder and louder. The familiar tempo drove all other thoughts away from Mara. She began to move.

It was slow at first, elementary. Mara took inventory of each piece of body, reminding muscles of how they used to move. She isolated her torso, working it side to side and front to back, expanding outward, caving inward. Her foot stretched forward tentatively, pointed through to the largest toe, and was drawn inward again, brushing the wood grain in rhythmical *tendues*. Front, side, back. Front, side, back. Each time a little stronger, each time a little farther. Now her feet traced half circle *ronds de jambe* and unfolded into *développés*. Arms worked in concert with them, flowing from one position to the next.

And then step, prep, *pirouette*. Again.

She deepened her breathing. Tautening her legs, she pushed off of the floor into a tuck jump, landed, shifted her weight to her right foot, and spun into a series of traveling turns that took her to the periphery of the room. She sprung briefly into *arabesque*, one foot planted, the other leg raised behind her, left palm reaching for the rafters. Then she was off, taking two running strides before leaping through the air, landing on the ball of her right foot, dragging her left in a circle around that fixed point until inertia slowed her spiraling and she sank into a jazz splits. One arm pressed into the ground, lowering the weight of her

torso onto the floor. Mara rolled onto her side and arched her back, extending fully from the tips of her fingers to her toes. She crumpled inward, drawing her knees into her chest, becoming small and empty again. She moved to her back. Legs pedaled frantically in the space above her, cycling over her head, past her head, pulling her spine into a reverse somersault that landed her on her knees. She rocked into a stranding position, threw herself into another combination that spanned the length of the room. She crossed and re-crossed the space in arcs of flesh and fabric, hair rising and falling about her ears. Mara approached the center again and whirled into a *fouetté pirouette*, spinning faster and faster and faster in place, fixing her gaze on a single point as the rest of the room blurred into incomprehension.

The burning in her calves, her thighs, registered, and she dropped into a trembling fifth position, raised shaking arms above her head. The rhythm to her breath was gone. She gave ragged, choking gasps as she approached the barre and leaned most of her weight against it, stretching out her tightened muscles. Sweat dripped from her forehead as she leaned down, and Mara grimaced, recalling the beads of sweat she had toweled off of her mother's brow. Perhaps she should be in a church right now, praying. That's what a good daughter would do.

"God..." Mara exhaled forcefully, shaking her head. She shoved away from the barre and shuffled back to her pile of belongings. It took her fumbling fingers several minutes to tie the simple knots of her shoes and thread the teeth of her jacket into its zipper. She checked her phone. One unread message from Peter: *Pizza's here. You coming?*

Mara typed *Be there in half an hour*. She turned off the lights. Before she left, she reached to crank the thermostat on. Cold air wasn't good for tight muscles.