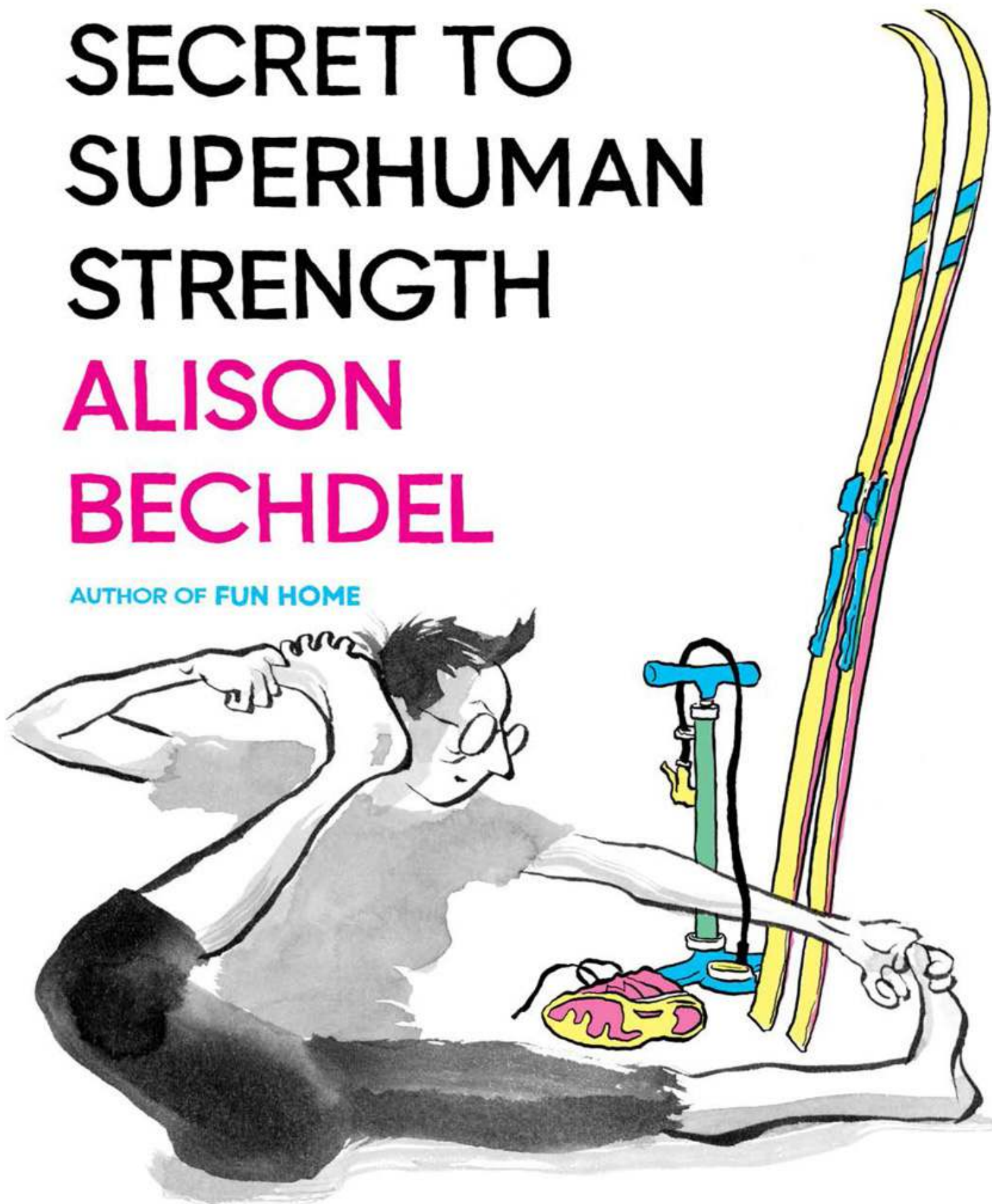


THE SECRET TO SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH

ALISON
BECHDEL

AUTHOR OF FUN HOME





THE
SECRET TO
SUPERHUMAN
STRENGTH

THE
ALSO BY ALISON BECHDEL
SECRET TO

FUN ROMEDY FAMILY TRAGICOMIC

THE ESSENTIAL DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR

ARE YOU MY MOTHER?: A COMIC DRAMA

ALISON
BECHDEL

WITH THE EXTREMELY EXTENSIVE COLORING COLLABORATION OF
HOLLY RAE TAYLOR

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT
BOSTON | NEW YORK
2021



*First there is a mountain, then there
is no mountain, then there is.*

—Dorothy

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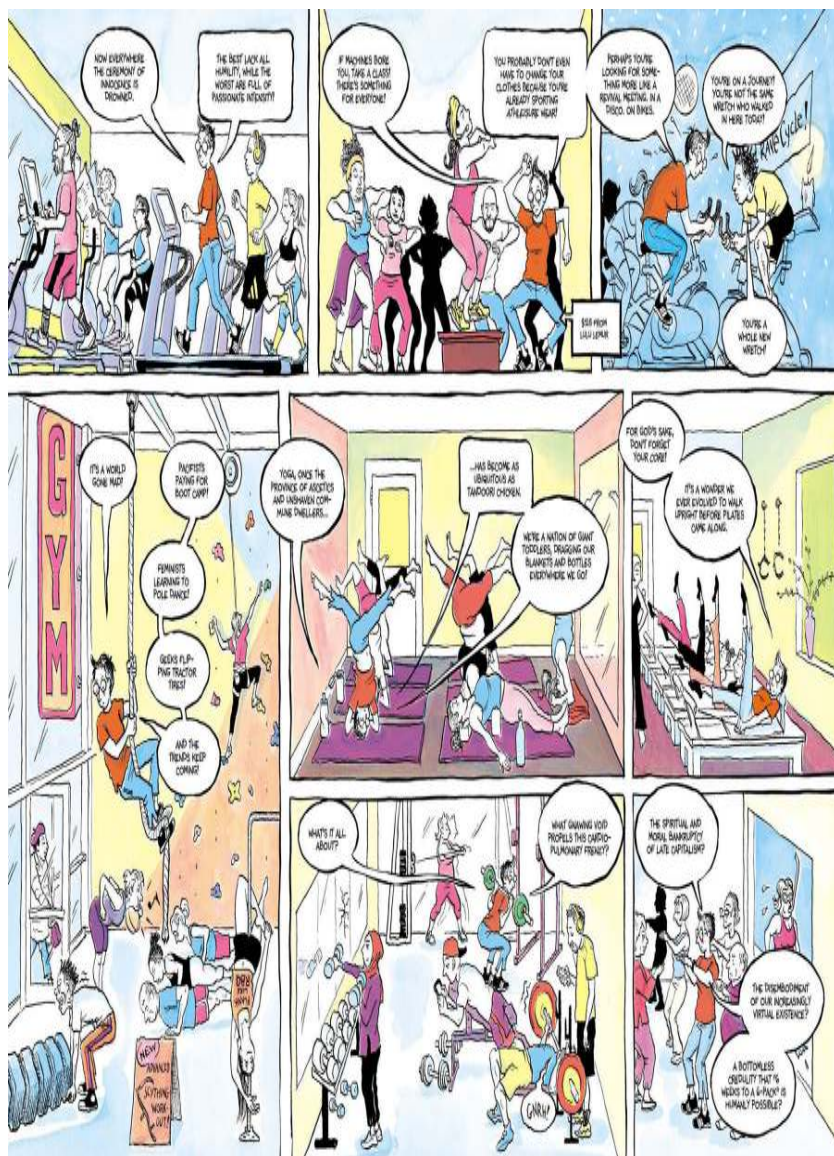
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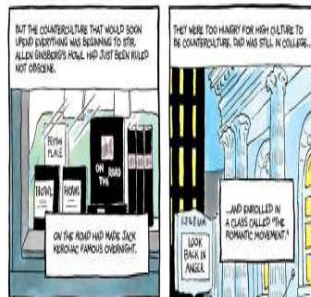
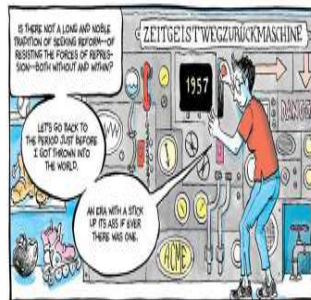
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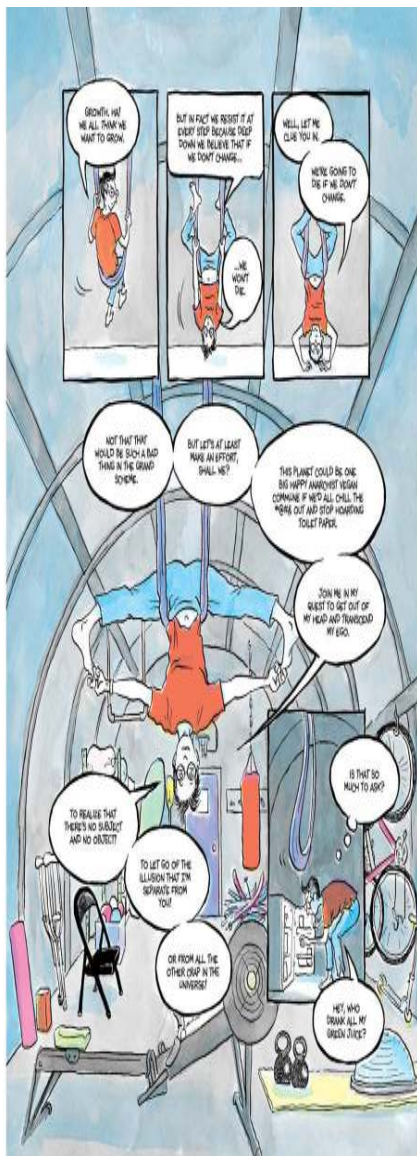
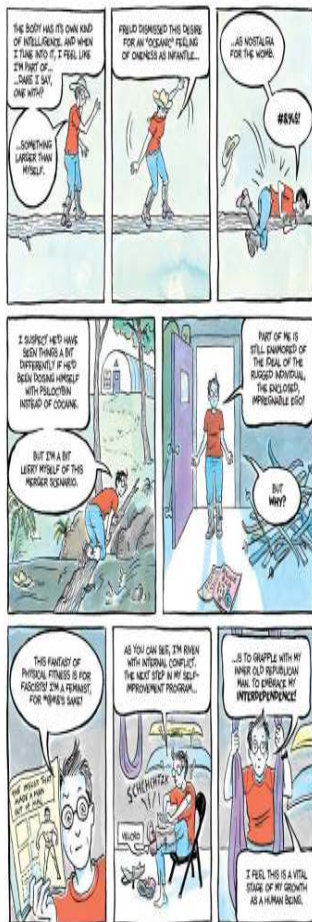




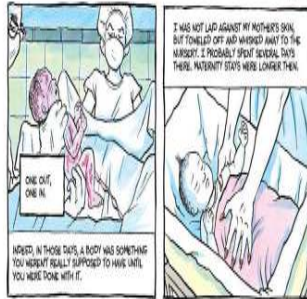






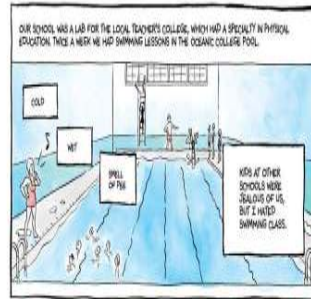
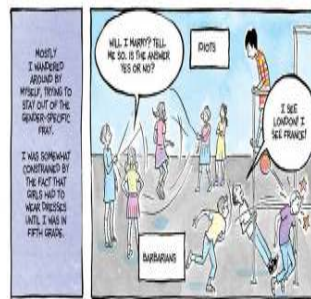


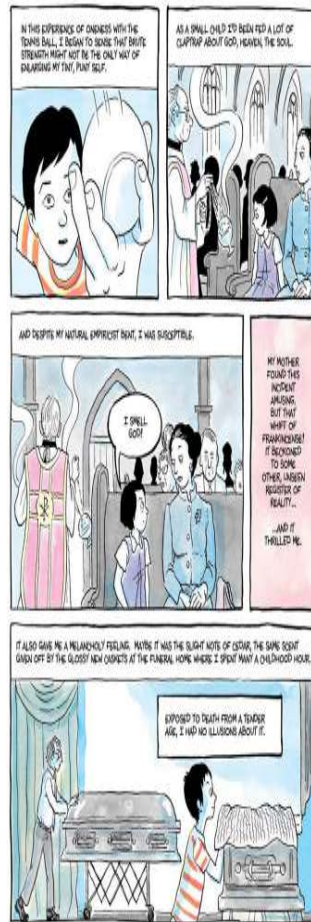




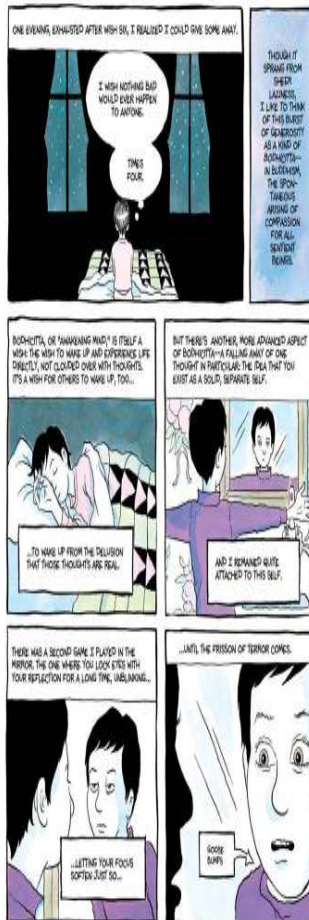


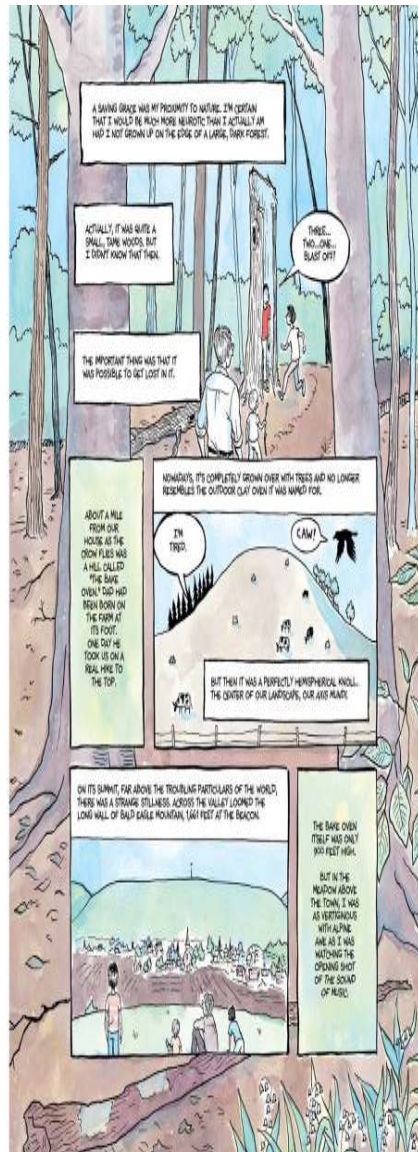


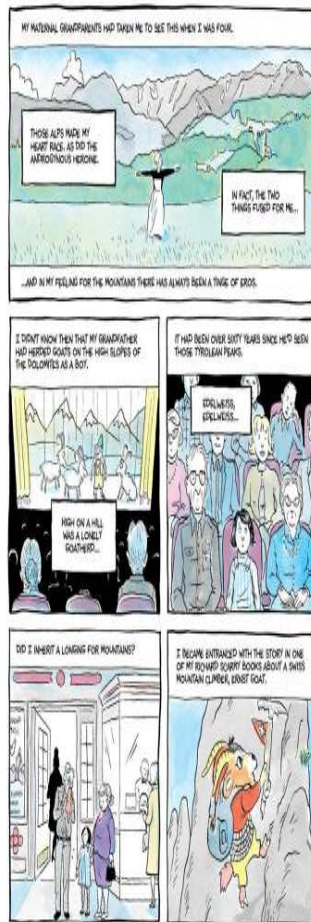




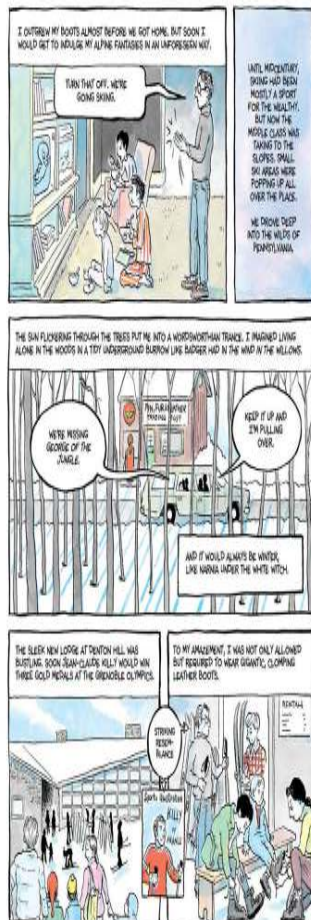


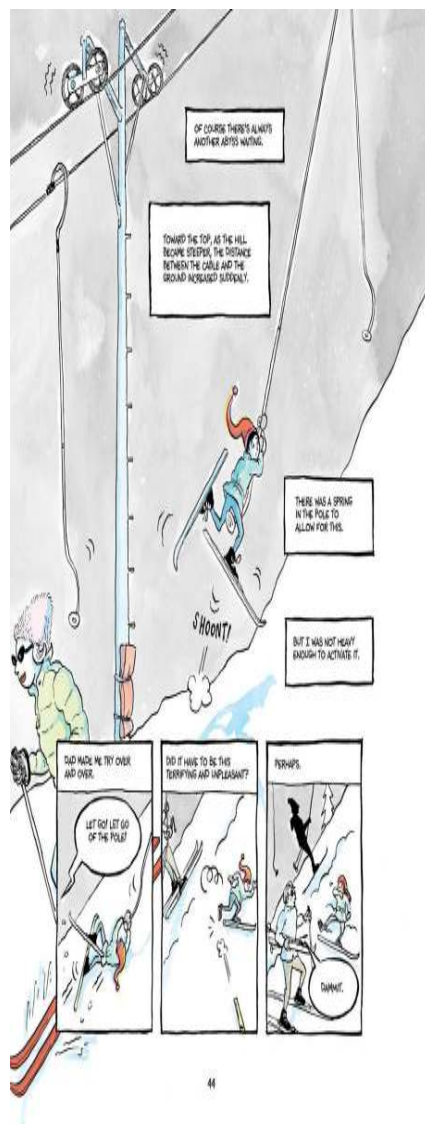


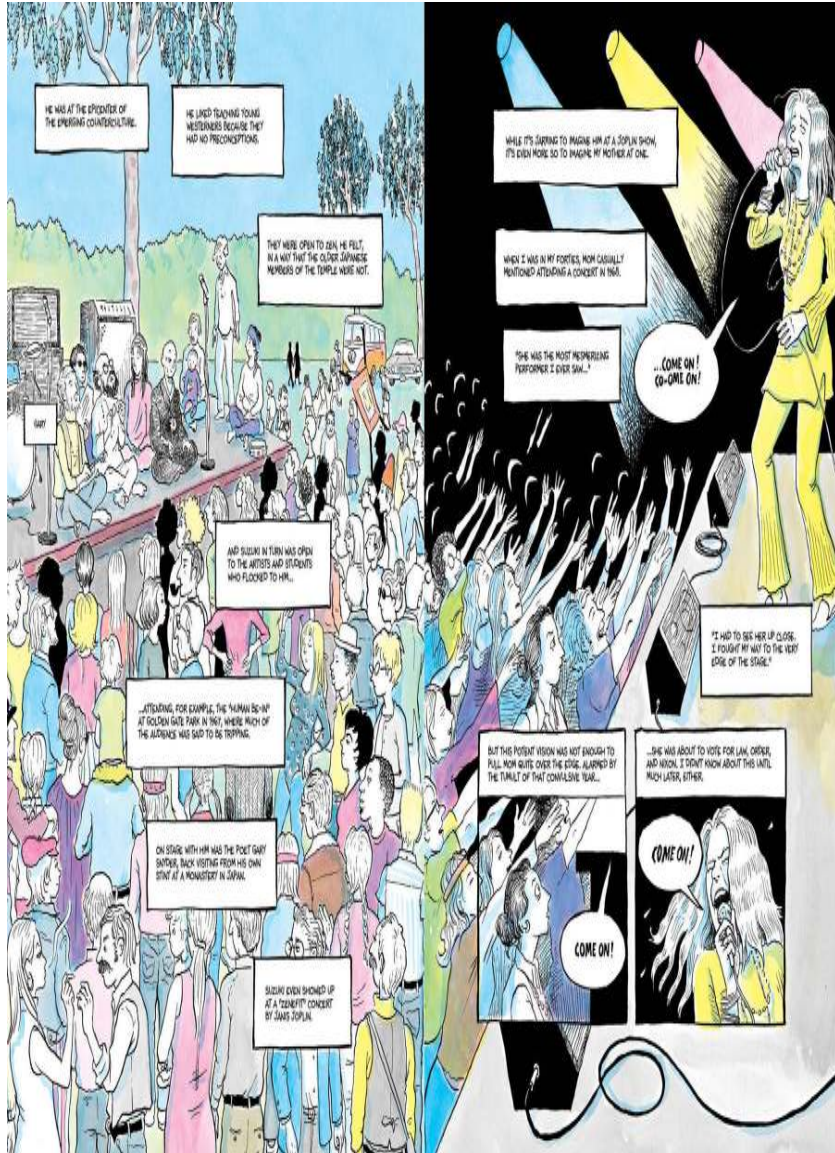


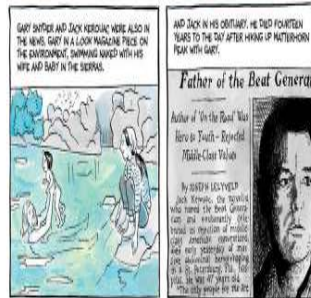
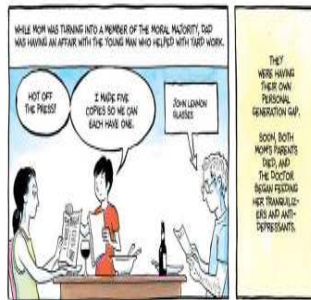












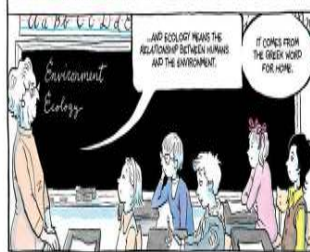


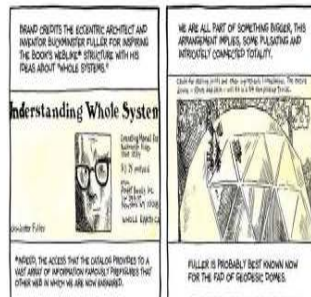
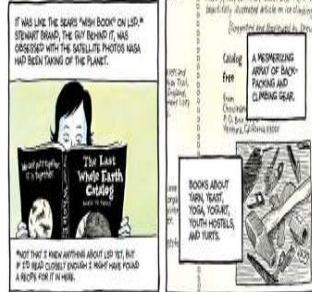


THE ONLY THING I LEARNED ABOUT THE NATIVE PEOPLE WHO HAD LIVED IN THE PLACE WHERE I GREW UP WAS THAT THE CONFLUENCE OF REDDY AND BALD EAGLE CREEKS HAD BEEN SOME SORT OF SACRED SITE.



AT LEAST IT HADN'T CAUGHT FIRE, LIKE THE CUYAHOWA RIVER IN CLEVELAND. A RECENT BLEND OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS HAD FORCED A RECKONING, AND IN APRIL OF 1975, THE FIRST EARTH DAY WAS HELD.





TRACKING THINGS BACK A BIT FURTHER, MARGARET FULLER WAS INSPIRED BY THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC POET AND US-APPE, SARAH TAYLOR COLERIDGE.



RABBIT ROSSER, NEARLY DOTT' DUCK JODICE, IF IT'S KNOWN THAT WHEN I WAS BLOODING THROUGH THE ARMS OF THE ANCHOR MANAGER IN COLLEGE, I MIGHT HAVE FELT A TRIPLE MOLE ENHANCED.



HE WAS A FICKER AT CAMBRIDGE AND DID A MAG-CAP STUNT IN THE ARMY TO ESCAPE HIS DEBTS.



HE WAS BOUNDLESSLY ENERGETIC, AN EARLY ADAPTOR OF THE WALKING TOURS THAT WERE ALL THE MORE AMONG THEORETICALLY PRAGMATIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE TIME.



HE WAS WITH "COMMON PEOPLE" WEARING WORKMAN'S CLOTHES

THIS BROUGHT MARGARET TO GET HIM DISMISSED AS "WOMANLY" BECAUSE SHE WOULD LATER BE DISCHARGED FROM THE WAY FOR "WOMANLY CHARACTER"

IN THE SAME REPUBLICAN SPIRIT, HE CAME TO EXPOSE THE IDEA OF SHARED PROPERTY, AND LOOKED UP A SCHEME WITH HIS FRIEND ROBERT SCOTT-ET TO EXCHANGE TO AMERICA AND -GET THIS- FOUND A LITIGIOUS COMPANION

AS COLERIDGE WOULD REVEAL IT LATER, IT WAS IN PLAIN AS HEMPSTRESS AS IT WAS EXTRANEAL, OF TRYING THE EXPERIMENT OF HUMAN PERFECTIBILITY ON THE BANKS OF THE SUSQUEHANNAH [sic]



THE SUSQUEHANNAH THE RIVER INTO WHICH MY OWN BROTHER CREEK FLOWS

HE WAS A BAD HUSBAND EVEN BY THE STANDARDS OF THE DAY, DISAPPEARING FOR LONG STRETCHES AND EVENTUALLY LEAVING SARAH ALTOGETHER.



THE SCHEME FELL THROUGH, BUT NOT BEFORE COLERIDGE AND SCOTT-ET HAD MARRIED A PAIR OF SISTERS ON THE STRENGTH OF IT. COLERIDGE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SARAH FULLER WOULD BE TURBULENT.

OFF ON A ONE-DAY SOLD FELL-WALKING TOUR

FOR A SHORT TIME, COLERIDGE PUT OUT A PERIODICAL JOURNAL, CALLED THE NATIONALIST, THEN CAME A THEORETIC TROOP OF PREACHING, LECTURING, JOURNALISM, POETRY...



HE BECAME FRIENDS WITH WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, WHOSE POETRY HE ADMIRER.



YOUR IDEAS-GETTING...

AS OCCASIONALLY "HIGH" AND YOUR POETRY CREATING, BUT WHAT MAINLY SENTIMENT? WHAT WERE COLERIDGE?

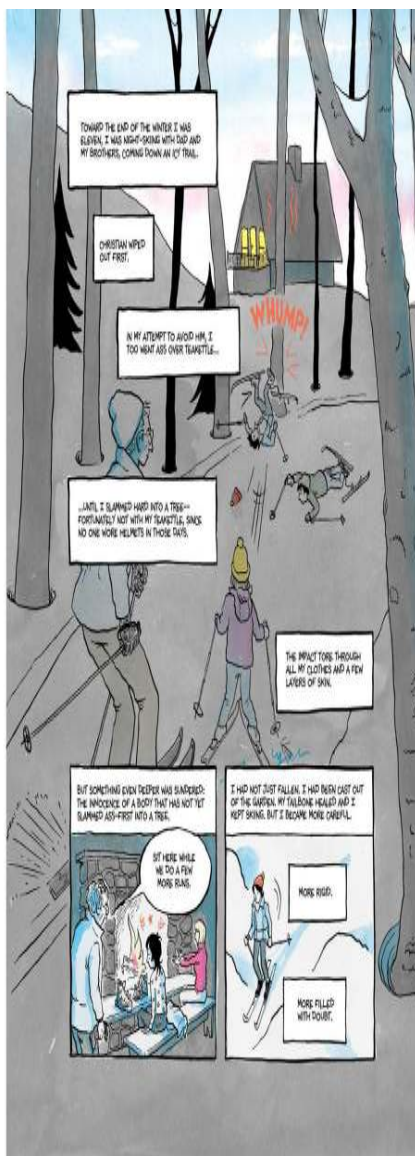
...INTERFERED WITH VARIOUS INJURIES AND ALLEGMENTS WHICH HE TREATED WITH LAZINESS.

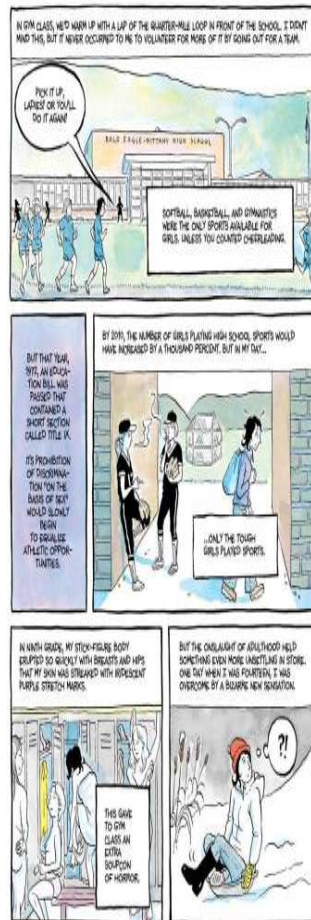
WILLIAM WANTED COLERIDGE TO VISIT HIM AND HIS SISTER, DOROTHY. ONE DAY THE WORDSWORTHS SAW A MAN VAULT THE GATE AND BOUND THROUGH A FIELD TO TAKE THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE TO THE HOUSE.

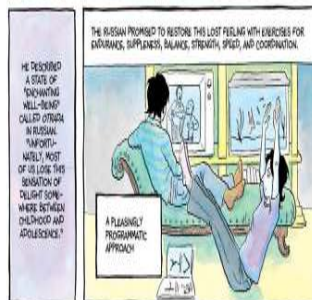


COLERIDGE'S LITERARY LEAP INTO THEIR LIVES IMPRESSED THEM BOTH INDUBITABLY.

FORTY YEARS LATER, SOME TIME AFTER HIS DEATH, THEY WERE STILL TALKING ABOUT IT.









ONE DAY
SOON AFTER
TEACH GRADE
BASIC
I DECIDED TO
TEST MYSELF
FURTHER.
I WOULD TRY
TO MAKE IT
ALL THE WAY
AROUND THE
BANK CHEN
LOOP, A LITTLE
OVER THREE
MILES.

USUALLY I DON'T CHANGE MY CLOTHES TO
JOG, BUT FOR THIS EFFORT I DONED MY SOLE
ITEM OF ATHLETIC APPAREL.*



MY PLAN WAS TO STOP AND
WALK IF I GOT TIRED, BUT
I DIDN'T GET TIRED. I KEPT
GOING ACROSS THE HIGHWAY...



...JUST THE BANK CHEN, PAST
THE FARM WHERE DAD WAS
BORN.



I MADE IT ALL THE WAY HOME
WITHOUT EVEN DIPPING INTO
THE ROOF.



IT FELT SO GOOD, I KEPT DOING IT, BUT PEOPLE
WEREN'T USED TO RUNNING IN THOSE DAYS, AND
I'M NOT QUITE SURE HOW I EVEN THOUGHT OF IT.



IT WAS JUST IN THE AIR, IT SEEMS LIKE TRANSFORMA-
TION DURING A GREAT ONE-DAYMENT 'STRESSOR'
WAS BEING INTO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.



I WAS A DEMOGRAPHIC WAITING TO HAPPEN. EXOTIC NEW BRANDS OF SHIMMERS HAD ENTERED THE MARKET
AND I ALREADY HAD A PAIR OF JORDAN SNEAKERS. BUT SOON, A PROFOUND NEW STONE OPENED.



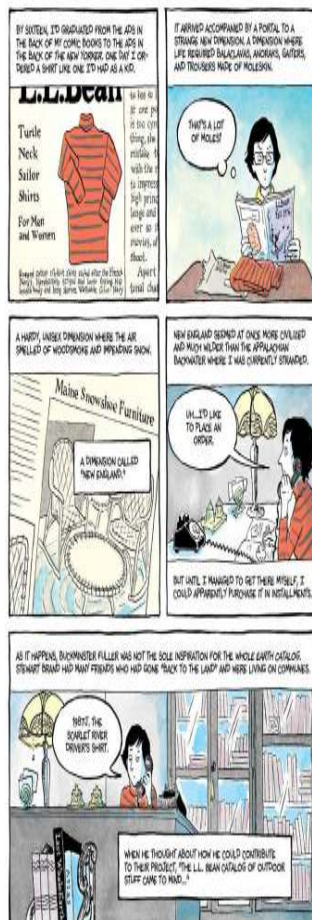
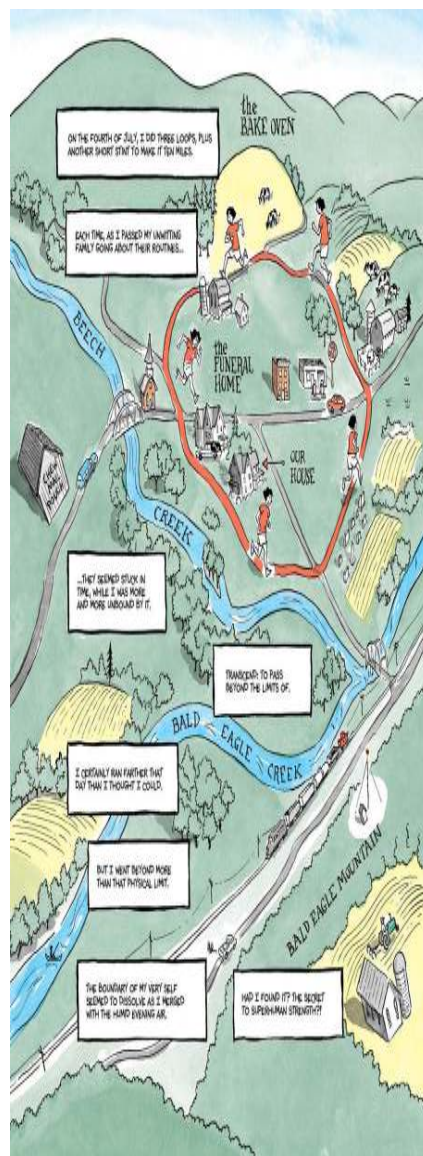
PERHAPS EVEN THE RUSSIAN GUY'S 'MYSTEROUS SOMETHING ELSE.'

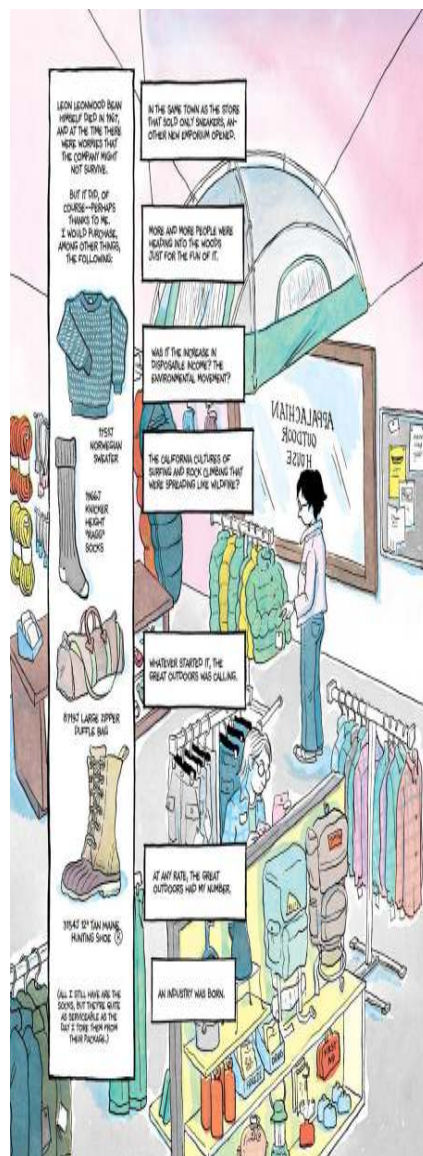


I COULD
NOT CONTROL
THE MYSTEROUS
METAMORPHOSIS
OF ADULGENCE.
BUT I COULD
CONTROL HOW
FAR I RAN,
AND RUNNING
PROMPTED ITS OWN
TRANSFORMATION.

I WAS
BECOMING
FOCUSSED.
DOUGH-AND!

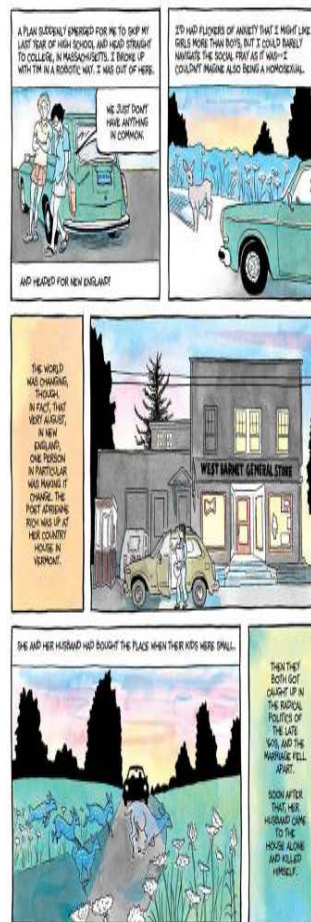












NOW, TEN YEARS LATER, RICH WAS WORKING ON WHAT WOULD BECOME HER ANTI-POETRY COLLECTION, THE TRIUMPH OF A COMMON LANGUAGE. IT WOULD BE HER FIRST BOOK SINCE COMING OUT AS A LESBIAN.

THE POEMS ARE IN A WAY ABOUT THAT SELF-TRANSFORMATION.

TRANSCENDENTAL ETUDE
(FOR MICHELLE CLARY)

THE FINAL TITLE POEM BEGINS IN THE ROMANTIC TRADITION OF A NATURE STORY.

This August evening I've been driving
over backroads fringed with queen anne's lace
my car startling young deer in meadows—one

WE MIGHT EXPECT THIS PASTORAL IMAGE TO LEAD TO WHAT WOODSWORTH CALLED AN "INTIMATION OF IMMORTALITY?"

IN COLLEGE, RICH STUDIED WITH THE SCHOLAR F. O. MATTHESSSEN, BEST KNOWN FOR HIS BOOK AMERICAN RENAISSANCE: ART AND EXPRESSION IN THE AGE OF EMERSON AND WHITMAN. MATTHESSSEN ADMIRERED HER. POLITICALLY, HE WAS A SEMIOLACOSTED GAY MAN AND A SOCIALIST.

THE POEM ALSO POINTS TO EMERSON'S TRANSCENDENTALISM.


(HER TITLE ALLUDES MORE DIRECTLY TO LUCY'S FAMOUSLY HYPOCRISIC PIANO STUDIES.)



IN HER SOPHOMORE YEAR, HE LEFT OUT A TWELFTH-FLOOR WINDOW TO HIS DEATH, BUT HE'D GIVEN HER A KIND OF LIFELINE.

A WAY OF BEING HERSELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS. THE MORE SHE CAME TO UNDERSTAND POWER AND PRIVILEGE, THE MORE SHE WOULD KEEP REMINDING HERSELF THROUGHOUT HER LIFE, LIKE A MANUSCRIPT.

HOW MANY FUTURE LOVERS WOULD SHARE THESE POEMS WITH HER?



ONLY THOUGH HE HAD ONLY THE VAGUEST IDEA WHAT SHE WAS TALKING ABOUT.

We once ever told us we had to study our lives,
make of our lives a study, as if learning natural history
or music, that we should begin
with the simple exercises first
the hard ones, practicing till strength
and accuracy became one with the starting
to leap into transcendence.



LATER IN THE POEM, RICH CONSIDERS TWO WOMEN, ONE TO EYE / REUSURING EACH OTHER'S SPIRIT, EACH OTHERS / UNLESS OTHERS / A WHOLE NEW POETRY BEGINNING-HERE.

NOT THE TWO WOMEN PART, BUT THE EMOTIONAL INTIMACY, THE MUTUALITY. LESBIAN ROMANCE WASN'T JUST SHAPING WOMEN FOR MEN. IT WAS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MODEL, MUTUAL, SUBJECTIVE.

SHALL I STOP TRYING TO TALK WITH YOU, THEN AND JUST COME TO YOUR LECTURES?

EYE TO EYE, IT'S THE END OF CONVICTION. MARGARET FULLER WAS ALWAYS TRYING TO HAVE WITH EMERSON.



WALDO TRIED, BUT AT HIS CORE HE PREFERRED HIS AUTONOMOUS SOLUTION. BELIEVE ME, I KNOW HOW HE FELT.

IT'S TRUE, SHE IS THERE.

BUT OF COURSE ALL THAT WAS STILL HEARD OF ME. FOR NOW, I WAS OFF TO COLLEGE IN THE BUNKERHILLS.

SHOULDNT YOU PACK A SHIRT?







BUT THAT WOULDN'T BE FOR A FEW MORE MONTHS. I WENT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS HAVING UNDERGONE A POWERFUL TRANSFORMATION THAT WAS APPARENTLY INVISIBLE ON THE SURFACE.



ONE DAY AT THE VERY END OF DECEMBER, DAD, MOM, AND I WENT BUSKING DOWN BY THE BRIDGE.

THERE'D BEEN A LOT OF RAIN, AND WE HAD HAD TO DEVISE WAYS OF CROSSING THE MANY LITTLE STREAMS FLOODING OUR PATH.



the hand ones, practicing till strength and accuracy became one with the feeling to leap into transcendence.

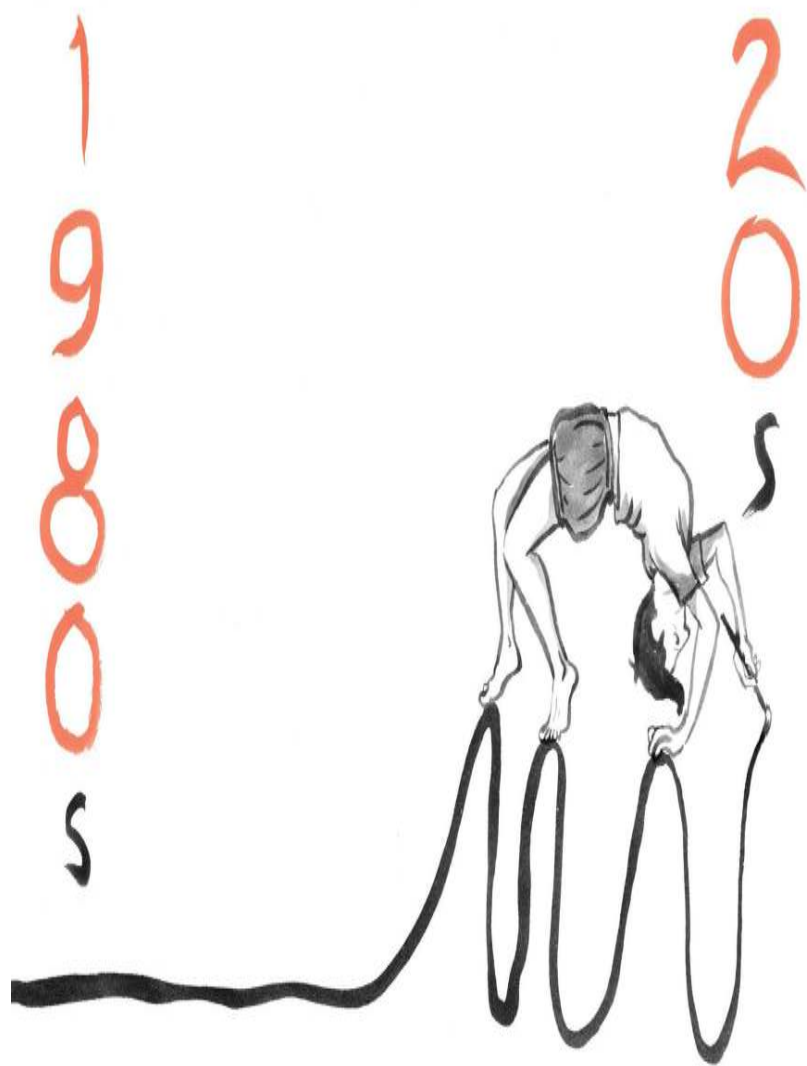
MY TRANSFORMATION THINGS IN FACT TO JOURNALING. IT WAS EASIER THAN MERE WORDS.

AND EASIER THAN MY FATHERS WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THEY HAD BEEN ABLE TO FACE IT.

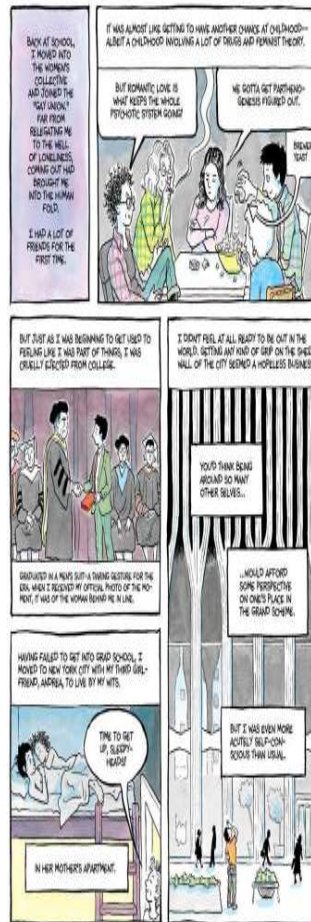
BUT DAD, TOO, HAD TAUGHT ME TO TRUST MYSELF ENOUGH TO TAKE SUCH A LEAP.

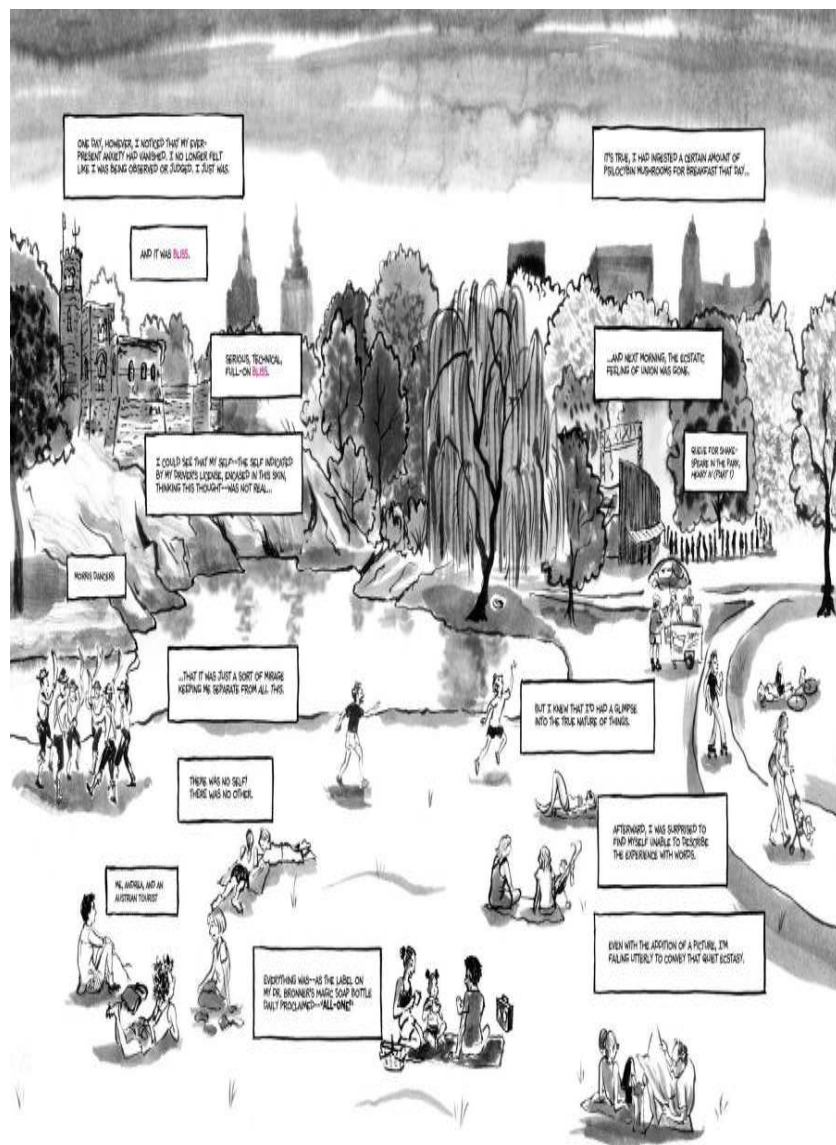
SOON HE WOULD LEAP INTO THE PATH OF A TRUCK, AND I WOULD GO ON TO LEAD A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF LIFE.



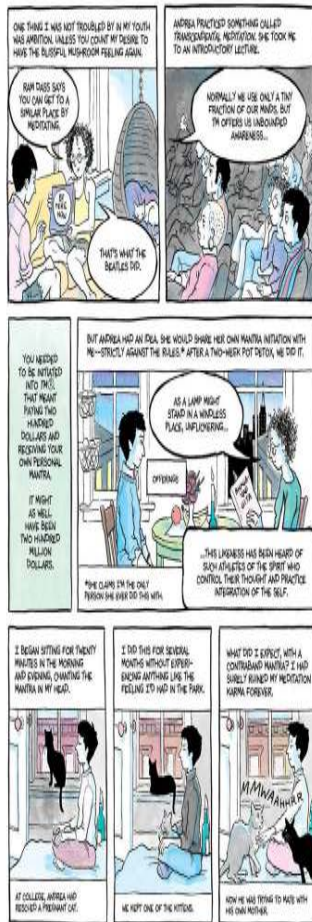


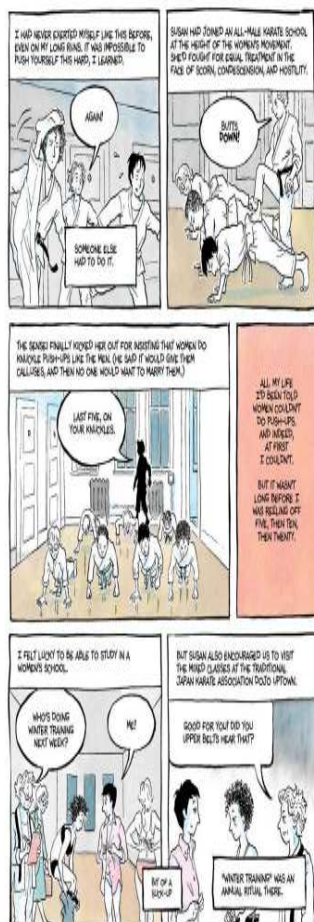




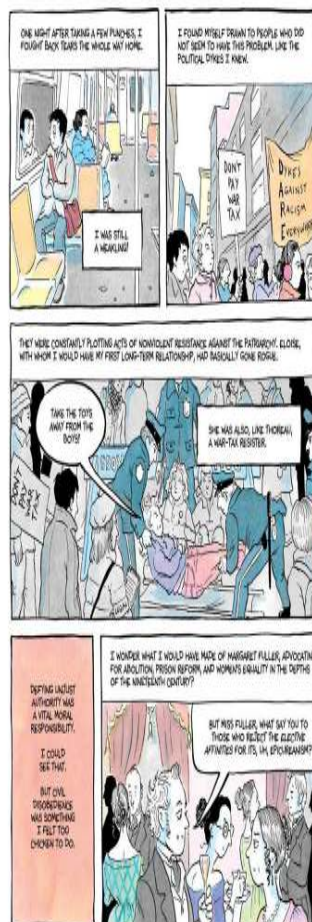
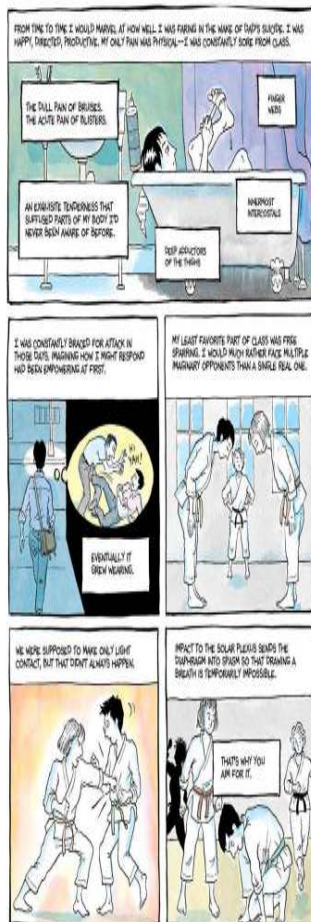












I SUSPECT I WOULD HAVE BEEN AS INTIMIDATED AS THE YOUNG MEN IN HER CIRCLE. ONE, A PRESENT COUSIN AT HARVARD, TENDED TO MATCH WITS WITH HER.

SHE WAS RECALIBRATED WHEN HE UNCOVERED HER UNRECALIBRATED ATTRACTONS BECOMING A PATRON. SHE TELL FOR SOME NORMAL, TOO, BUT THAT WAS AN EVEN LESS VISIBLE OPTION THAN BECOMING THE HELPERESS OF SOME MUTTONCHOPPED MANICURE.

I SAID IT IS A MORAL HONOR A WOMAN RELIGIOUS TAKEN TO PICTS

MYSTERY AND DISCUSSION OF THE VALIDITY OF THE MARRIAGE VOWS, AND SOCIETY? TRIMPLES TO ITS FOUNDATION?

SHE WAS ON HER OWN A FEW YEARS INTO HER COLE ON THE FARM, HER TWO TIED HER BRIGHTEST CHILDREN AND HER GREATEST DISRUPTION, NONE.

MARGARET WAS NOW THE BREAKDOWNER, SHE'D MANAGED TO PUBLISH A FEW ESSAYS WHILE TUTORING HER STUDENTS, BUT SHE COULDN'T RELY ON EARNING MONEY FROM HER WRITING-YET TEST.

PLUS, HE LEFT THE FAMILY BROKE.

THE WITCHES' MESSIAH

FOR NOW, SHE'D HAVE TO HIRE OUT AS A TEACHER. SHE SET ASIDE HER HOPES OF TRAVELING TO EUROPE, MOVED BACK TO THE CITY, AND ENTERED THE SCHOOLROOM.

SHE'D SET UP AT 4:30 AM TO PUT IN A COUPLE OF HOURS ON HER OWN PROJECTS FIRST. SHE HAD AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO UNDERTAKE A BIOGRAPHY OF GOETHE.

EARLY P.D.

MY TWENTIETH-CENTURY LIFE SEEMS ALMOST ABSTRACTLY SELF-CENTERED COMPARED WITH MARGARET'S FOCUS ON WORK AND FAMILY.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WERE IT.

BIG NIGHT DUFF?

YOU STARE?

THE CUBAN HOLE.

BUT I, TOO, WAS BEGINNING TO FEEL A CLIPPING SENSE OF PURPOSE...

A CONNECTION THAT BOTH MY DREAMS AND MY KARATE PRACTICES WERE PART OF SOME LARGER PICTURE.

THE STRANGE NEW WORDS COMING INTO MY VOCABULARY.

POWERS THAT WAS THE REAL APPEAL OF KARATE. THE EXPERIENCE OF MOVING AS HE MOVED AND BREATHING IN SYNC IN A COLLECTIVE TRANS.

HAIEH!

THIS WAS PROBABLY TRUE, TOO, OF THE AEROBICS CLASSES SORED ON ALL AROUND ME AT THAT TIME, AS IT WOULD BE OF SKATEBOARD, BARTHO, AND JUDOPOST IN THE FUTURE.

AGOSTINO

A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT KIND OF RELIGION WAS ALSO EMERGING IN THE 1970S. EVEN MY FIRM-RESISTANT MOTHER HAD BECOME A DEVOTEE.

I'LL LET YOU GO. I HAVE TO DO MY DIME POWER.

OHAY, I GOTTA GO ANTHONY, THE SOLOFLUX GUY IS ON.

ONE FORMERLY WANDERING BACK-HAD BEEN HARBOR ONE ON THE ADDICTION DISTILLER LEFT FOR MONTHS NOW.

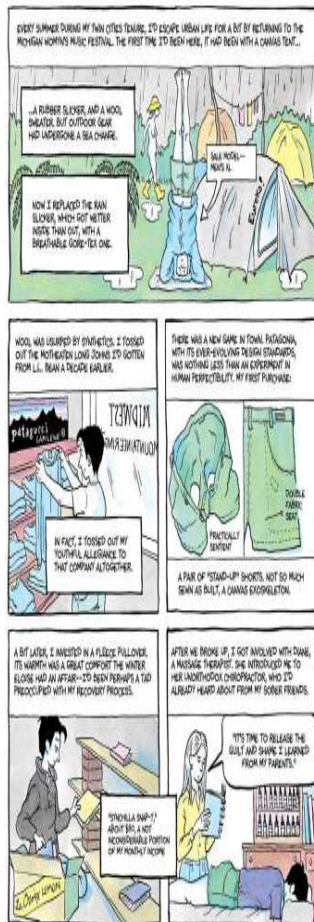
THE ROOM OF WORKOUT VIDEOS AND HOME EXERCISE EQUIPMENT OFFERED A COMPELLING MIX OF PRUDENT AND COMMUNAL EXPERIENCES THAT WOULD REACH ITS APOTHEOSIS TWO YEARS LATER, WITH PELOTON. THE STATIONARY BIKES THAT UNDERSTOOD CLASSES.



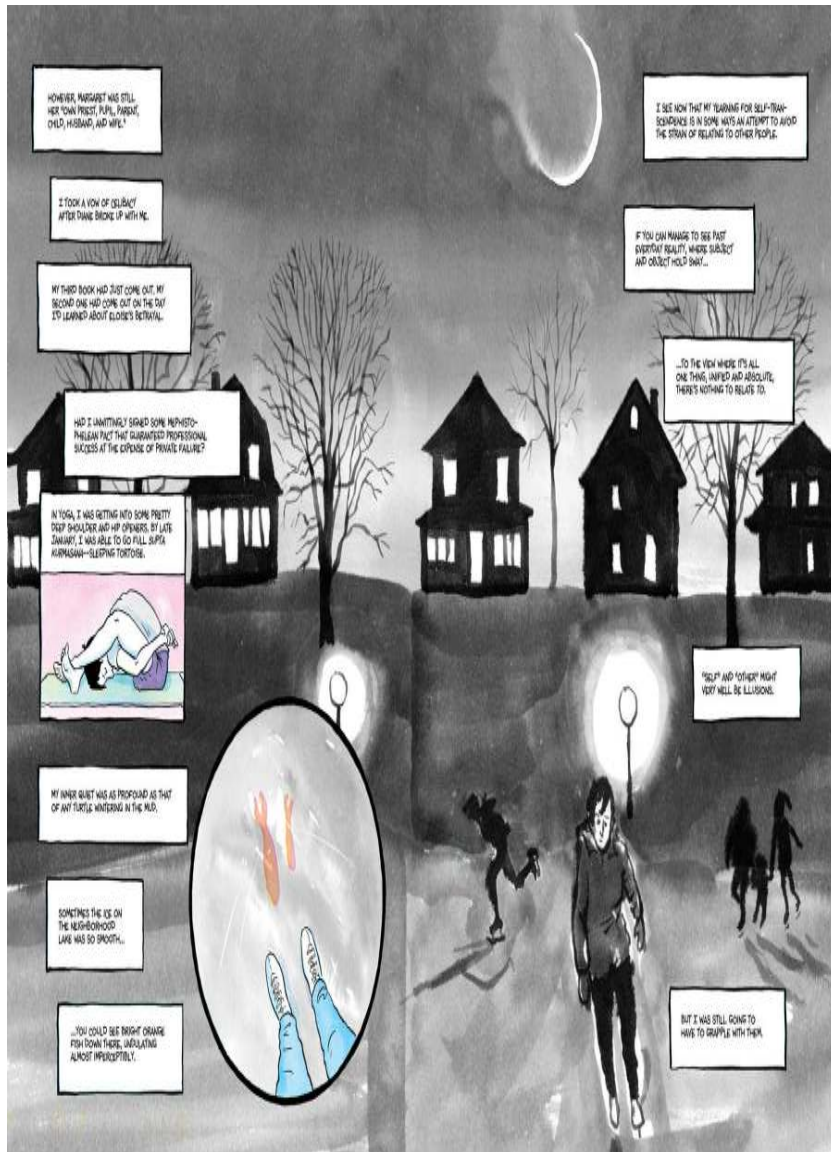


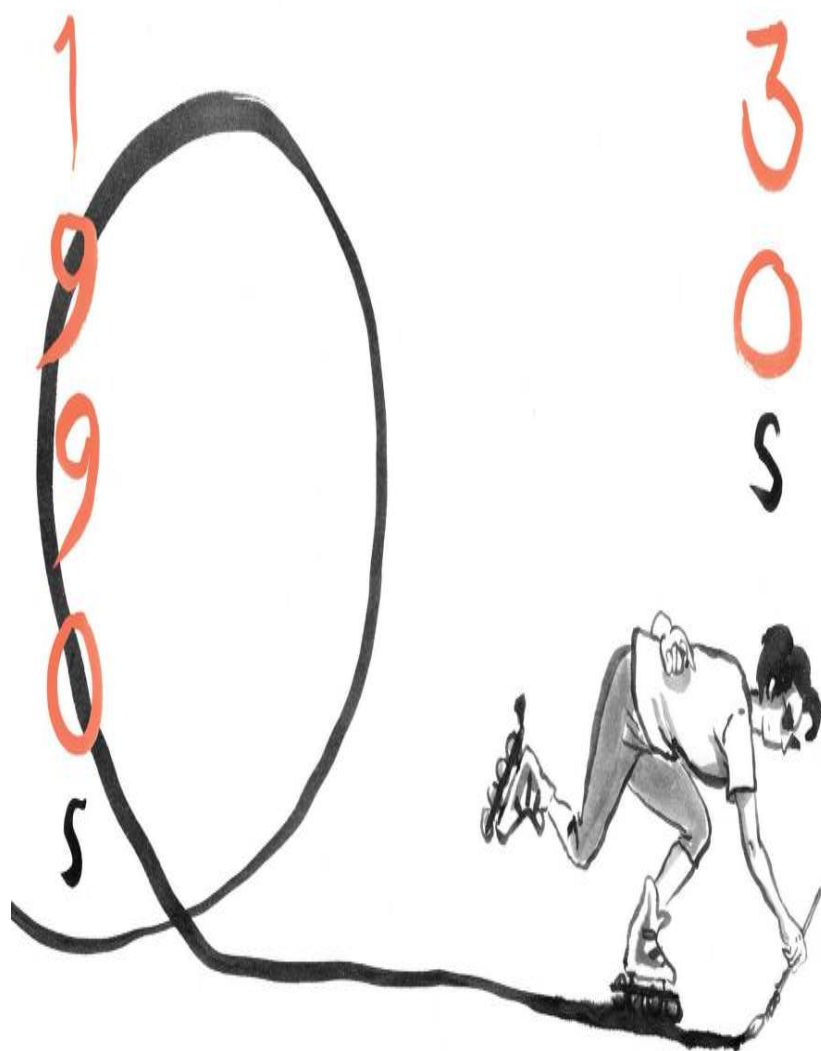


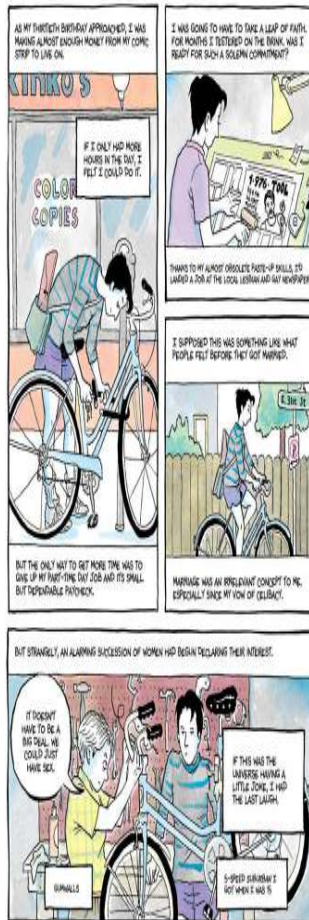




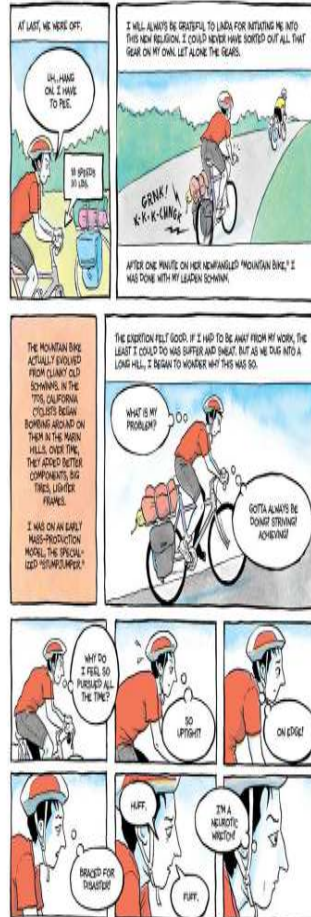
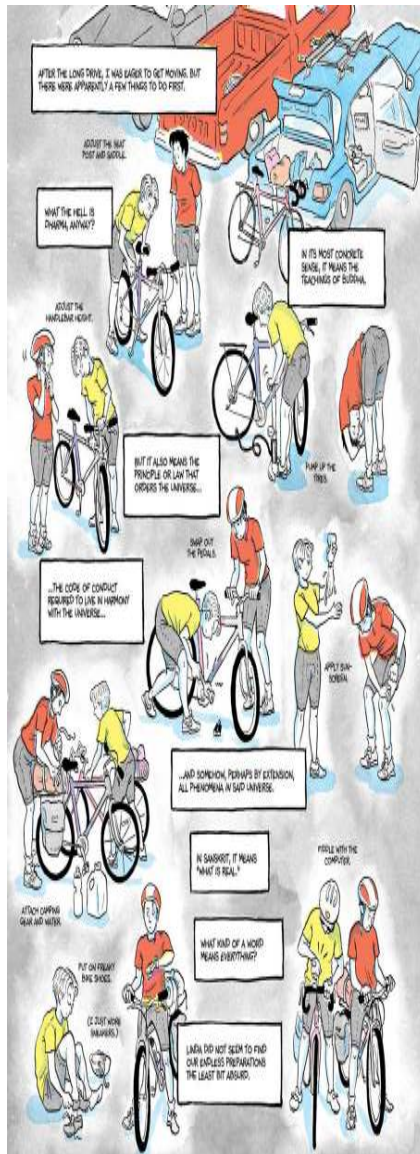






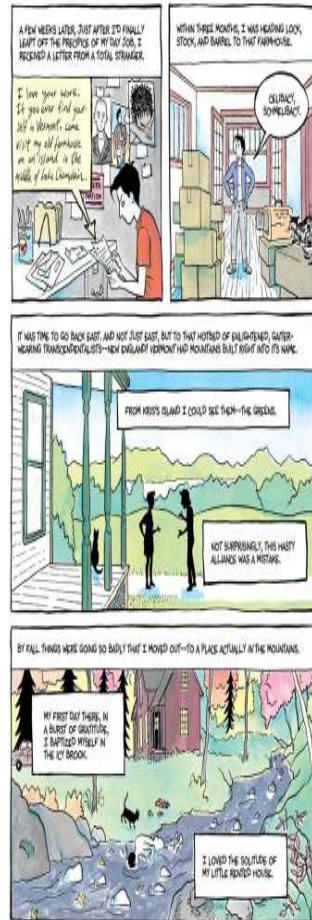
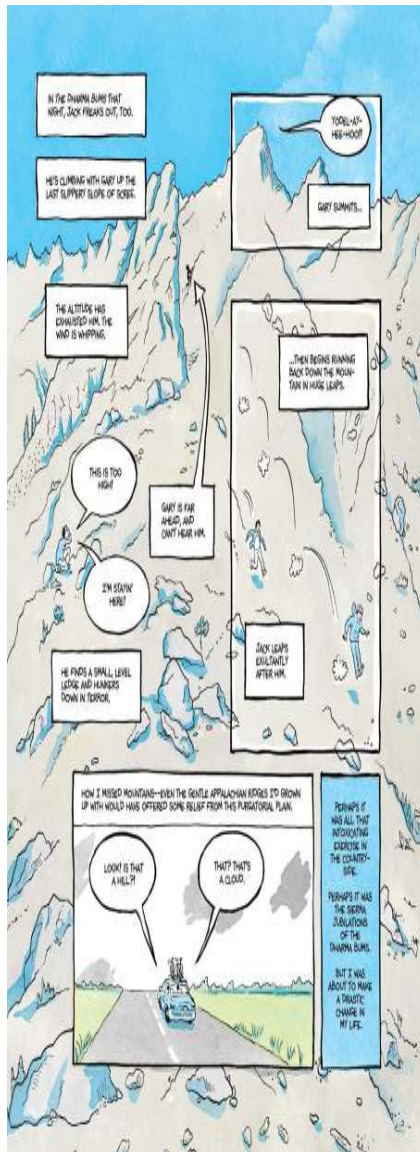


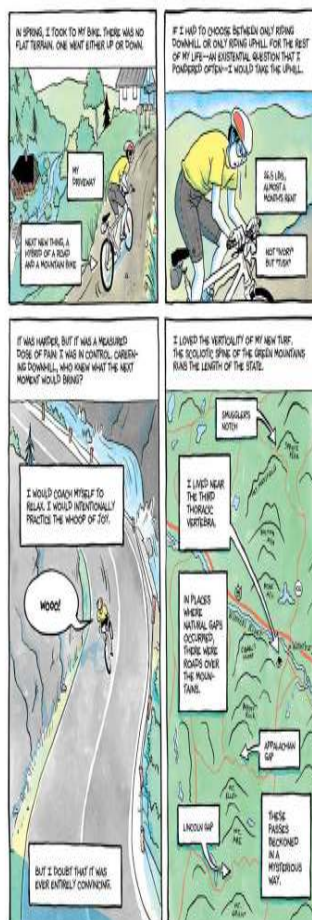


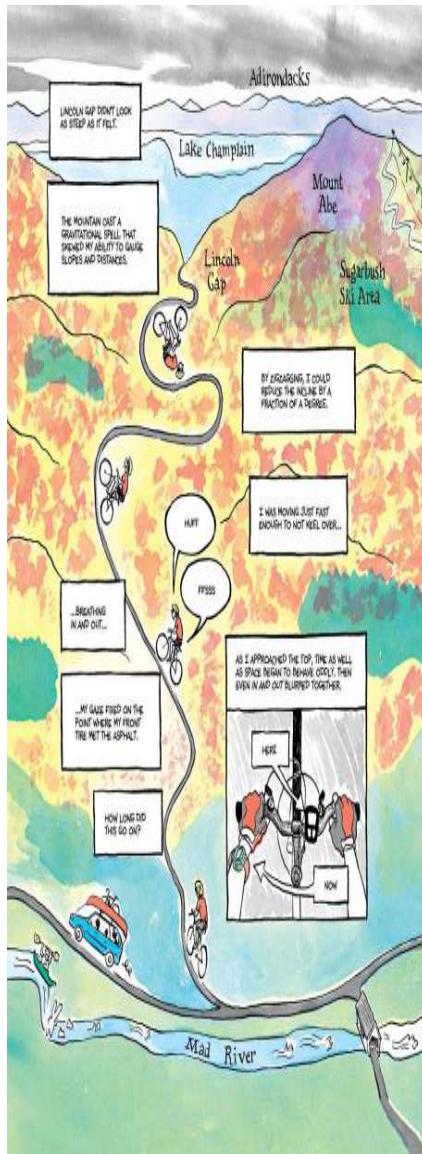


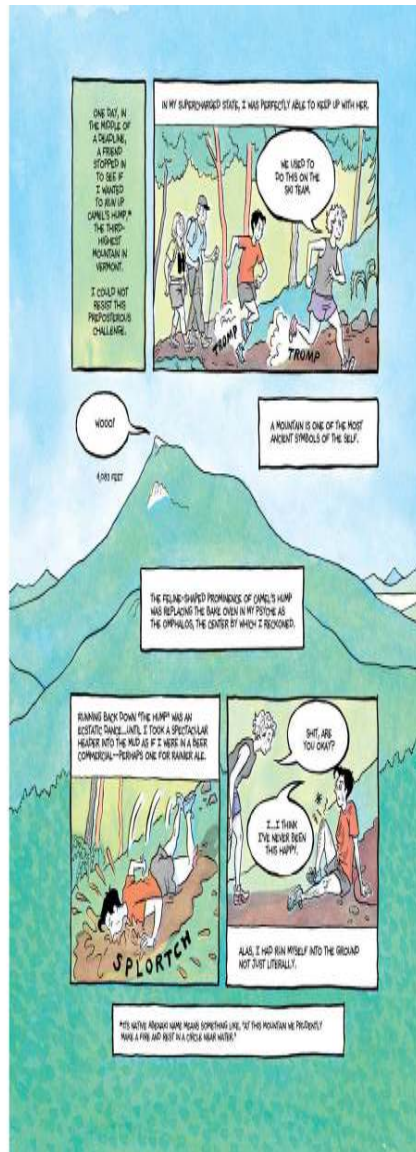


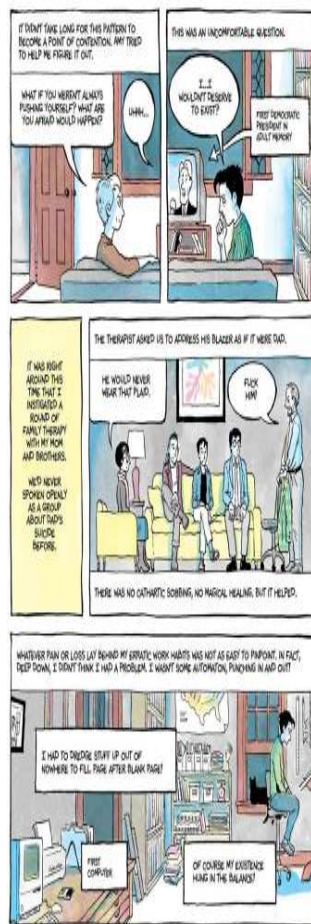














COLLEGE WAS DAMNUS OF THEIR ROAD, BUT HE WAS ALSO A PART OF IT. AS DOROTHY'S BIOGRAPHER FRANCES WILSON PUTS IT...

THESE WERE DEFINITELY MORE THAN THE CLOSING OF A CHAPTER GOING ON BETWEEN WILLIAM AND DOROTHY, WHO HAD BEEN SEPARATED FOR MUCH OF THEIR CHILDHOODS—THOUGH MOST SCHOLARS SEEM TO CONCLUDE THAT THEIR INTIMACY NEVER BECAME PHYSICAL.

"THERE'S A COUPLE, AND FROM THE BEGINNING DOROTHY AND WILLIAM PREFERRED TO BE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN A TRIANGLE."

IN 1960, COMPLETING THE SECOND EDITION OF LYRICAL BALLADS, WILLIAM REJECTED COLLEGE'S NEW POEM "CHRISTMAS." COLLEGE'S LATELIFE LIFE BEGAN TO CRACK UP.

HE TROTTED AWAY FROM POETRY AND TOWARD RETIREMENT.

WILLIAM BURROUGHS TRIED NOT TO BE COMFORTED WITH MENTAL MIST CURE, A FORERUNNER OF THE POWERSHED CARRIED ON LATEST GREATEST EXPRESSIONS.

THE LIVELY NATURE JOURNAL DOROTHY HAD KEPT WOULD COME TO AN END WHEN WILLIAM'S NEW WIFE MOVED IN WITH THE TWO OF THEM IN 1962.

IN MY SHIRAZ, SHALLOW MODERN WAY, I TOO, SUFFERED FROM THE VICISSITUDES OF CREATIVE FLOW. WHENEVER I FINISHED A PRODUCT, THE ARTIST TRAINED.

MY BRAIN FEELS DESICCATED.

WILLIAM'S WORK IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE RELATED WITH HIS MARRIAGE, AFTER WHICH IT BECAME A LONG SLIDE INTO MEDIOCRITY.

FORTEANALLY, OUTDOOR EXERCISE SEEMED TO HAVE THE EFFECT OF REINTEGRATING MY CEREBRAL CONTROL. MY FOURTH WINTER IN VERMONT, I EXPLORED A NEARBY SKI AREA.

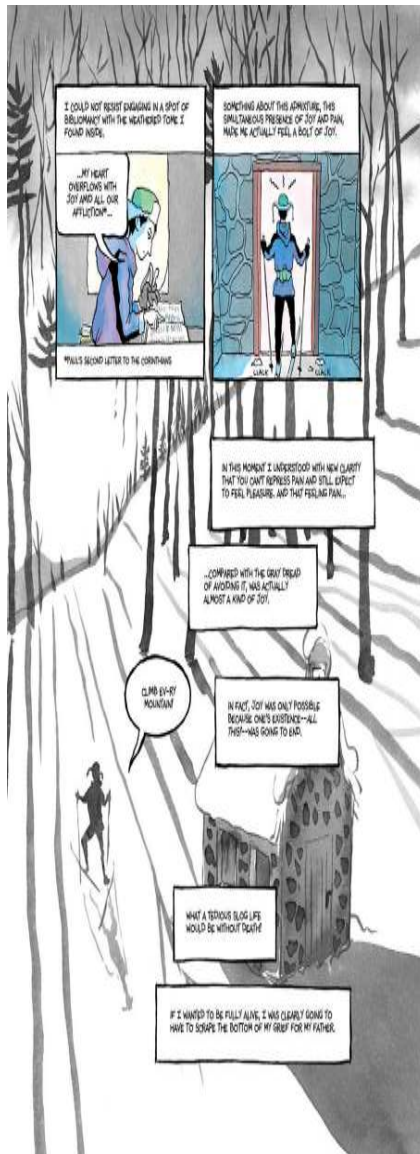
"THURPP AS IN VON THURPP AS IN THE SOUND OF WASSER. AFTER FLEETING THE WASSER AND TOWARD FOR A MALL AS SINGERS, THE FAMILY HAD TAKEN UP WANDERING HERE."

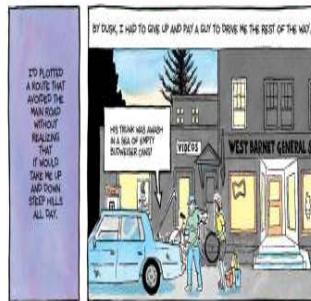
...WHERE THE LANDSCAPE REMINDS THEM OF AUSTRALIA, I HAD SOMEHOW STUMBLED INTO ANOTHER CHILDHOOD FANTASY. THE SONG JULIE ANDREWS SINGS IN THE OPENING SHOT OF THE MOVIE...

"THE HILLS ARE ALIVE!" IS BASED ON THE REAL-LIFE PARADES LONG OF THE OUTDOORS.

SHE HAD TRIED SOME "LEAFS CARLIER, BUT THERE WAS A TRAIL HUNDRED FOR HER.

AND IN THE WOODS, AN ENCHANTED-FEELING CHURCH, A NOCT TO THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE SHE HAD LEFT FOR A MORE ACTIVE ONE.



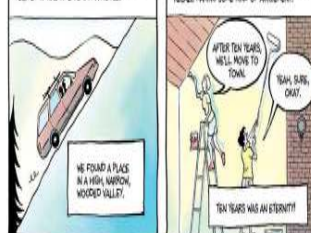




I COULD CALM DOWN INSTANTLY WITH A DRINK. ALL THAT QUESTING AFTER ENLIGHTENMENT WAS A REAL TIME WASTE.



AND BEHOLD, ANOTHER DEADLINE WAS HUNG UPON ME. IN THE FINAL WEEK OF THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT, I DREW FOR A HUNDRED HORSES.



BUT DESPITE THE PRECIOUS ABOUT WHAT I NOW THOUGHT OF AS MY MACHINERY, ANY AND I DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO PUT A HORSE.

SHE HAD A BAKING FEELING, IT WOULD LAST. LEAVING THE FIRST TIME WE HUNG THE HORSE. I ONLY RECALL MAKING SOME KIND OF ARGUMENT.

AFTER TEN YEARS WE'LL MOVE TO TOWN.

TEAM, BURN, OKAY.

TEN YEARS WAS AN ETERNITY.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SERIOUS.

BUT NOW IF HURT TO RUN.

MY KNEE DIDN'T HEAL, AS ALWAYS ALWAYS HAD. I HAD BEGAN RUNNING AGAIN IN VERMONT, WHEN I COULDN'T BARE OR SKI.

JUST ENOUGH SHAME, HOWEVER, TO MAKE ME RECONSIDER THE EVENING BEER OR WINE THAT WAS NOW BECOMING ROUTINE.

I LOVED RAMPING AROUND IN THE WOODS. THERE WERE BOUNCERS, LOGS, AND BEAVER DAMS. A NEW BROOK TO EXPLORE. FROM A CLIFF ABOVE THE HOUSE I COULD SEE CAMP'S HAMP.

WHAT TO GO FOR A WALK?

NO.

ONE THAT MY FIRST SPRING AT THE NEW HOUSE, I RETURNED FROM A WORK TRIP TO CHICAGO. AFTER HAVING A WEEK, I HAD FOR A WALK DOWN TO THE BROOK TO UNCLIMB.

IT'S VERY POSSIBLE THAT I WOULD HAVE SLIPPED ON THE WET ROCKS AND BROKEN MY KNEE EVEN IF I HADN'T BEEN A LITTLE BOUNCER.

BUT THE INTENSE PAIN WAS COMPOUNDED BY SHAME.

MY KNEE DIDN'T HEAL, AS ALWAYS ALWAYS HAD. I HAD BEGAN RUNNING AGAIN IN VERMONT, WHEN I COULDN'T BARE OR SKI.

JUST ENOUGH SHAME, HOWEVER, TO MAKE ME RECONSIDER THE EVENING BEER OR WINE THAT WAS NOW BECOMING ROUTINE.



ANY HAD NEVER SHARED MY INTEREST IN THE OUTDOORS. BUT I WAS SURE SHE WOULD GROW TO LOVE OUR WILD SURROUNDINGS.



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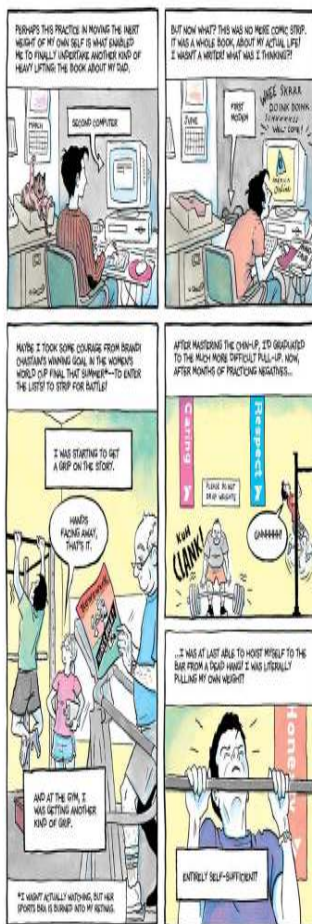
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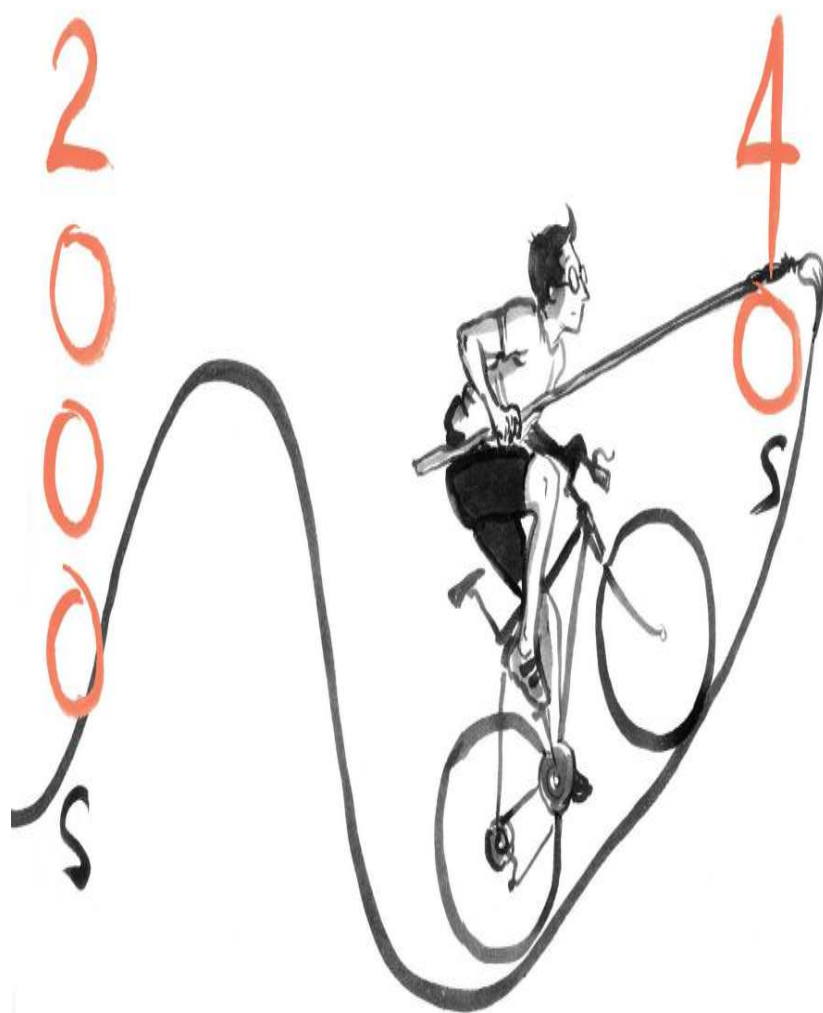
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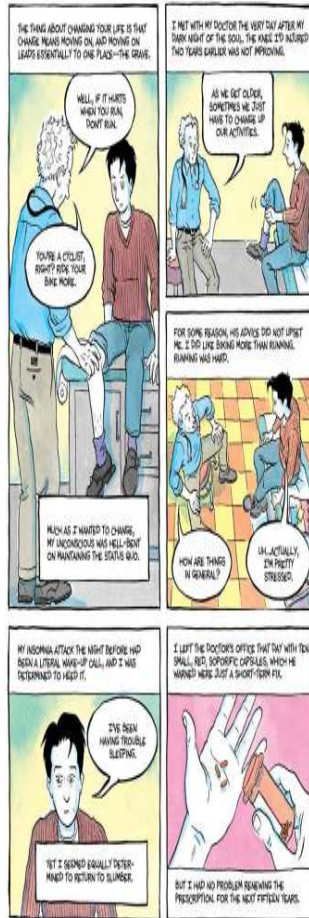


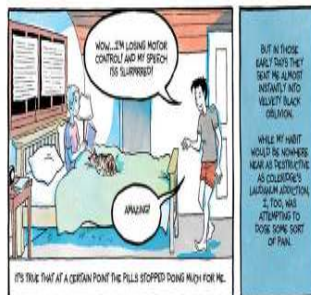


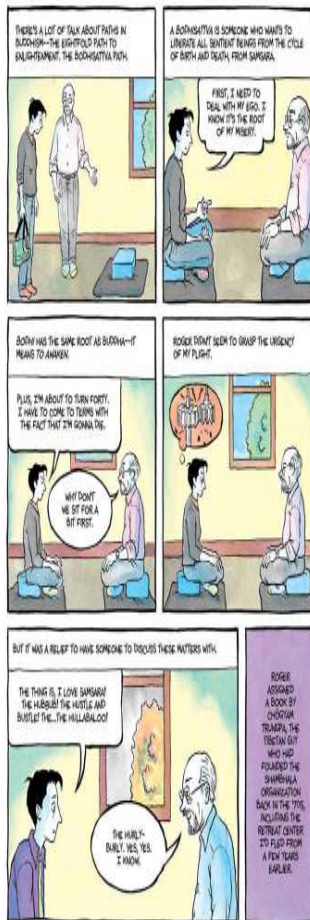


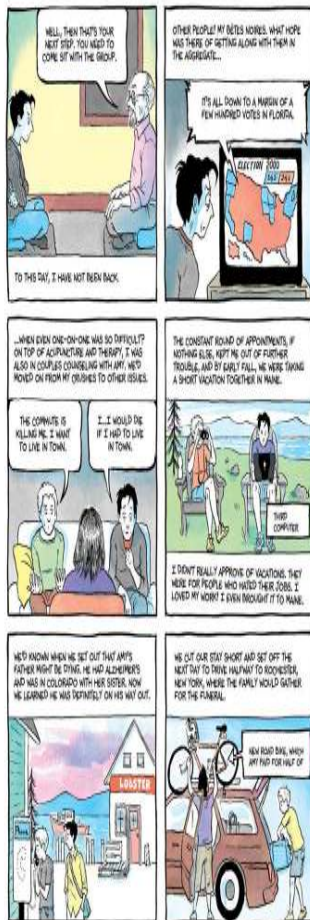
Two

7













THIS WAS OF THE ESSENCE. I GOT A HEART-RATE MONITOR, MAKING SURE TO HIT MY MAXIMUM BEATS PER MINUTE FOR AT LEAST A FEW SECONDS.

TOWARD THE END, TO BE PUSHING SO HARD THAT I COULDN'T GET MY BREATH BACK IN THE RECOVERY INTERVALS, AND FELT LIKE I WAS SUFFOCATING.



SOMETIMES I'D HAVE ONE OF MY TECHNOLOGICAL SPONSORS WHILE WATCHING THE MONITOR. I WOULD WATCH PARANOID AND FEAR, AS IT BEGAN FLASHING A NUMBER WELL INTO THE 200S.



I WAS FRUSTRATED THAT I COULDN'T ALSO INCREASE MY TRAINING SPEED BY sheer FORCE OF WILL. MY PROGRESS HAD BECOME PROBABLY SLIGHTLY MORE LABORIOUS OVER THE YEARS...



...AND NOW INVOLVED MANY LAYERS OF PREPARATORY SKETCHES. IT WAS THE OPPOSITE OF THE DRAWING I'D DONE AS A CHILD, WHEN MY LINE UNFOLDED PRETTY FROM MY DECIDE.



I'D WORK AS LONG AS I COULD, THEN HAVE A NIGHTCAP AS A WAY OF SLAPPING ON THE BRAVES.



I DIDN'T WANT TO WIND DOWN. I WANTED TO SHUT OFF, TO FEEL NOTHING. THIS WAS NOT UNCOMMON. I SEE NOW, TO MY WATERS AFFECTIONS.



THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED TO GET ON THE RIGHT-FOOT PATH--THAT DIFFICULT PATH...



...LIKE A SHAPED-EDGE OF A BLADE--WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY REVEAL TO YOU THAT THE SELF IS EMPTY.

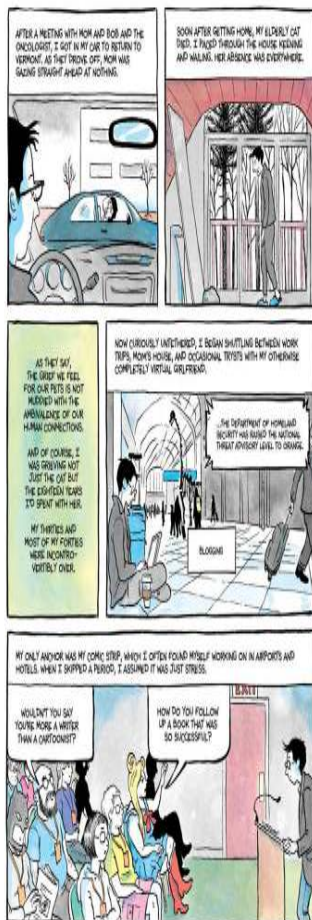

















WHEN THE REVOLUTION FAILED, PARAGUAY Sailed with her partner and baby to AMERICA, JUST MISSING A LETTER FROM VALDO ASKING HER NOT TO COME.

LIKE OTHER FRENCH, HE WORKED THAT DO GIVEN A HARD TIME BACK AMONG THE FRENCH.

PARAGUAY'S SHIP RUN AROUND IN A STORM THREE HUNDRED DAYS OFF FIRE ISLAND. SHE DROWNED WITH HER SMALL FAMILY AT AGE FORTY.

IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT SHE'D GONE AS FAR AS IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR A WOMAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO GO.



AFTER HOLLY MOVED IN WITH ME, GARY STARTED COMING OVER TO HANG OUT. IT WAS HARD NOT TO LIKE HER.

SHE WAS FUNNY, DISCOURAGED, AND WHIP-SMART. SHE'D PASSED THE BAR WITHOUT GOING TO LAW SCHOOL. NOW SHE WAS AN ATTORNEY FOR LEGAL SERVICES.

HOLLY WOULD EVENTUALLY FORGIVE POLYNORM, BUT GARY WOULD REMAIN AN ARDENT PRISONER. IN THE RADICAL TRUTH POLYNORM ENTAILED, SHE FOUND AN EXISTENTIAL FREEDOM.

IT'S BASICALLY FLYING.

HAH.




IN FACT, SHE WAS ALSO A PASSIONATE PARAGLIDER AND LOVED LAUNCHING HER BODY OFF HILLTOPS TO GLIDE ON THERMAL UPDRAFTS.

ISN'T IT DANGEROUS?

YOU ALWAYS HEAR A RESERVE CRATE.

WHILE I WAS COMING TO UNDERSTAND EXPEDITIONARIES, AND BELIEVED WHOLEHEARTEDLY IN THE NECESSITY OF TAKING LEAPS, AN ACTUAL LEAP HELD ABSOLUTELY NO APPEAL FOR ME AT ALL.



POLYNORM CONTINUED TO BE HARD WORK, BUT IN A WAY, THAT'S WHAT I LIVED ABOUT IT. IT WAS AN EMOTIONAL BUSINESS RESUME.

I SAID YOU COULD CALL ME.

I WAITED YOU TO CALL ME?

WHAT DO YOU REALLY NEED?

...



ONCE, DURING A FIGHT ABOUT GARY, HOLLY AND I WENT FOR A WALK. IN THE SUMMER NIGHT, SOMETHING SHIFTER, MY BALANCE? PROCEEDED AWAY.

BUT IT WAS HARD TO SUSTAIN THIS PERSPECTIVE BACK IN EVERYDAY LIFE. FOR ONE THING, AN INTRACTABLE LIMIT WAS HUNG UPON ME.

THERE WAS ONLY SO MUCH TIME.

I COULD STOP, BE FREE?

I KNOW!




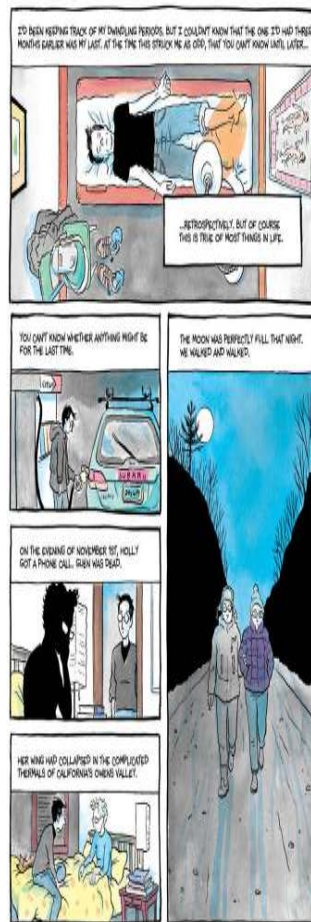
I COULDN'T KEEP UP WITH MY COME STOP, AND WRITE A BOOK, AND ALSO DO THE NEW THINGS I WAS GETTING NERVOUS TO DO.

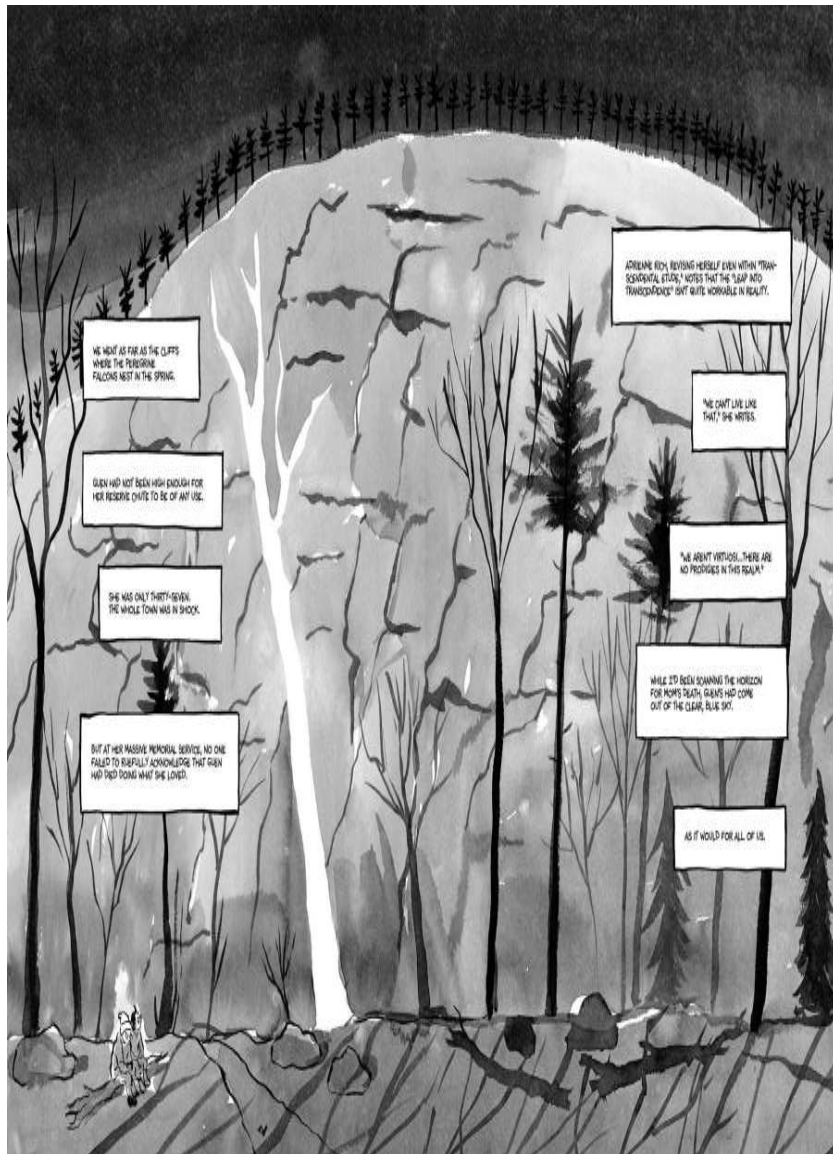
FOR THAT INSTANT, IT WAS ALL ONE!

THE SHIMMERING BLUES OF NODDUALITY?

AS THE POLITICAL TIDE TURNED, IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD TIME TO QUIT THE STOP.







WE WENT AS FAR AS THE CLIFFS
WHERE THE PERDORNE
FALCONS NEST IN THE SPRING.

ELLEN HAD NOT BEEN HIGH ENOUGH FOR
HER RESERVE CHAIR TO BE OF ANY USE.

SHE WAS ONLY THIRTY-SEVEN.
THE WHOLE TOWN WAS IN SHOCK.

BUT AT HER MASSIVE MEMORIAL SERVICE, NO ONE
FAILED TO RAPIDLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT GLEN
HAD DONE WHAT SHE LOVED.

ADRIANNE RICH REVISITS HERSELF EVEN WITHIN "TRAN-
SGRESSORIAL STORIES," NOTES THAT THE "SLAP INTO
TRANSCENDENCY" WAS "GREAT, HORRIBLE IN REALITY."

"WE CAN'T LIVE LIKE
THAT," SHE WRITES.

"WE AREN'T VIOLENT... THERE ARE
NO PRODIGES IN THIS TALENT."

WHILE IT'S BEEN SKIPPING THE HORIZON
FOR SOME TIME, GLEN HAS COME
OUT OF THE CLEAR, BLUE SKY.

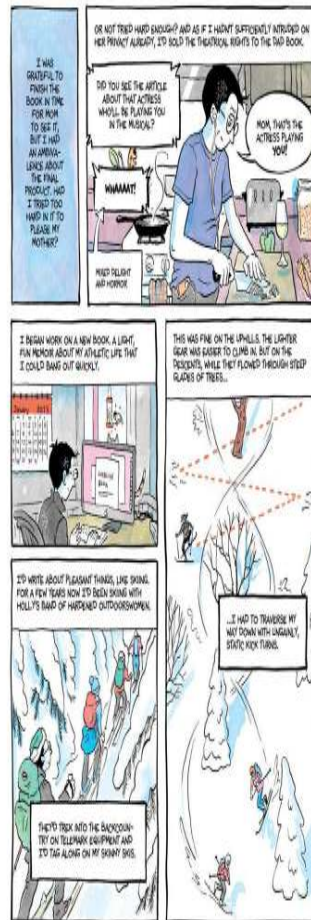
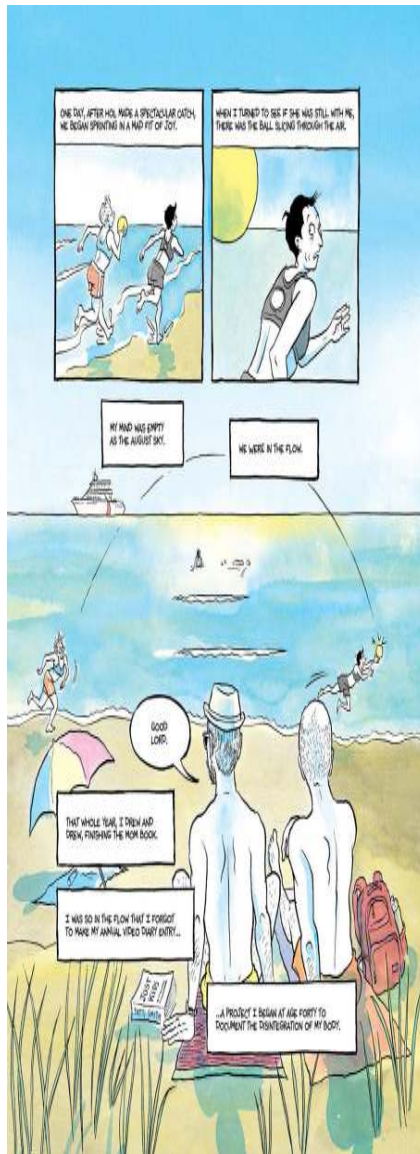
AS IT WOULD FOR ALL OF US.

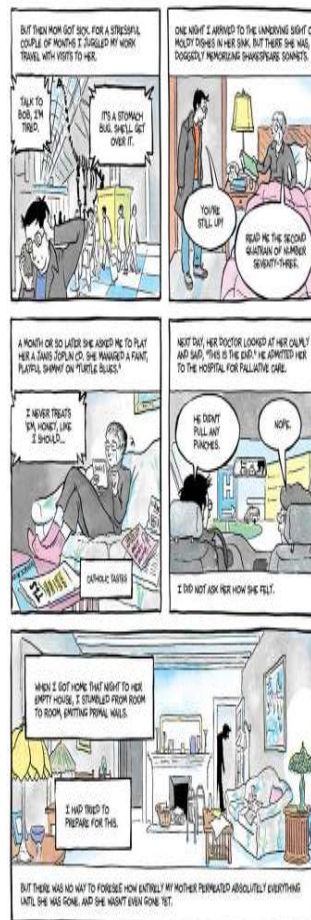


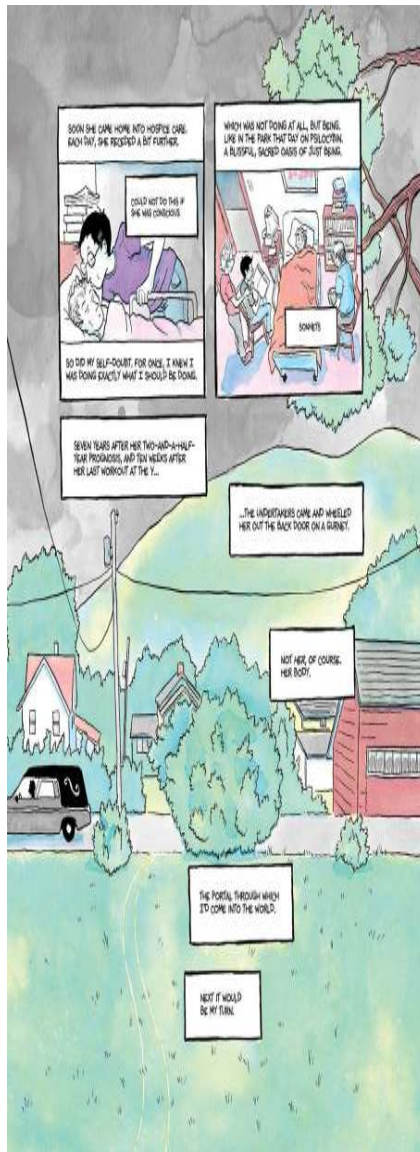








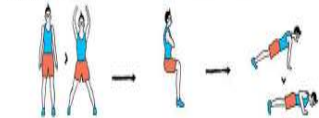




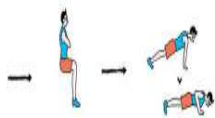
THE SEMI-SADISTIC 7-MINUTE WORKOUT

12 exercises, and you're done for.

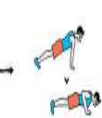
AS MY LIFE ITSELF BECAME A KIND OF HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING, THIS WORKOUT WOULD BE MY SALVATION. I WOULD DO IT ON THREE CONTINENTS, AND MORE OFTEN THAN I CAN COUNT, FIRST THING IN THE MORNING BEFORE I COULD THINK BETTER OF IT. IT RESTORED CLARITY TO MY BODY, CLARITY TO MY MIND, AND DIGNITY TO MY SOUL—THOUGH I WAS STILL ASKING WHAT A SOUL WAS.



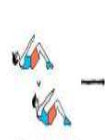
1. Rent a dumpster and, in a great suburban dance, fill it with the contents of your dead mother's house.



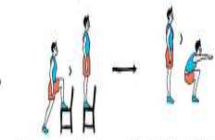
2. Rush to your dear mother's partner's apartment when he, also grief-stricken, decides to stop treatment for his multiple lives.



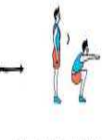
3. Rush off again in order to attend OR Broadway musical based on your family memoir.



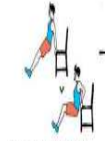
4. Round up wayward family members in logically and emotionally complex operation for evitable of game.



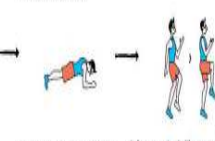
5. On grueling round of speaking engagements, realize you are performing some kind of version of yourself. Wonder if this is what it's like to be a sex worker.



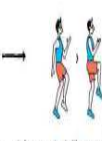
6. Fly to tennis festival in France, give talk in English about your lesbian comic strip and gay sleep-bowdlerized immigrant high school students.



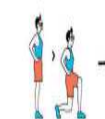
7. Travel to interplay for a month of public appearances, make incremental but honorable gift of lifeboat with each one.



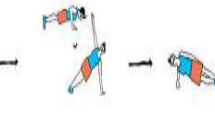
8. While struggling to feel that you deserve to be at an artist's residency in Italy, learn that you have won a Blackberry 'genius' grant, and that the musical is moving to Broadway.



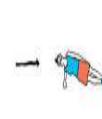
9. Become mixed with a sense of profound fraudulence, make more by knowledge that this is actually quite narcissistic and self-indulgent.



10. Participate in said publicity merchandise to promote Broadway musical. Master at last that you have finally become sick of talking about yourself.



11. Accept a string of awards and honors that it would be charitable to turn down, each one making you feel more depleted and foolish than the last.



12. Wonder if your life might be all downhill from here.

FOR DECIDED, TO SPEND LONG STRUCTURES WORKING QUIETLY AT HOME, WITH OCCASIONAL FORAYS INTO THE PUBLIC THAT CAME AS A WELCOME CHANGE OF PACE.



MY WELL WAS NOT JUST EMPTY BUT BOWLED-OVER, YET I HAD TO GET STARTED ON THE FITNESS BOOK. I DECIDED THE LEAST I COULD DO WAS LEARN WHAT THESE FIRST THINGS WERE ABOUT.



AS TENS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED, KEEPING TRACK OF HOW MANY STEPS ONE TAKES PER DAY IS REVEALATORY.



I CONSIDERED MYSELF QUITE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE, BUT IN FACT, LIKE MOST OF OUR OWNERS, I RARELY WALKED ANYWHERE ANYMORE.



I BEGAN WALKING MORE, DOING ERRANDS ON FOOT AS MUCH AS I COULD, ON DAYS I DIDN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE. I'D GET ON THE TREADMILL IN ORDER TO HIT TEN THOUSAND STEPS.



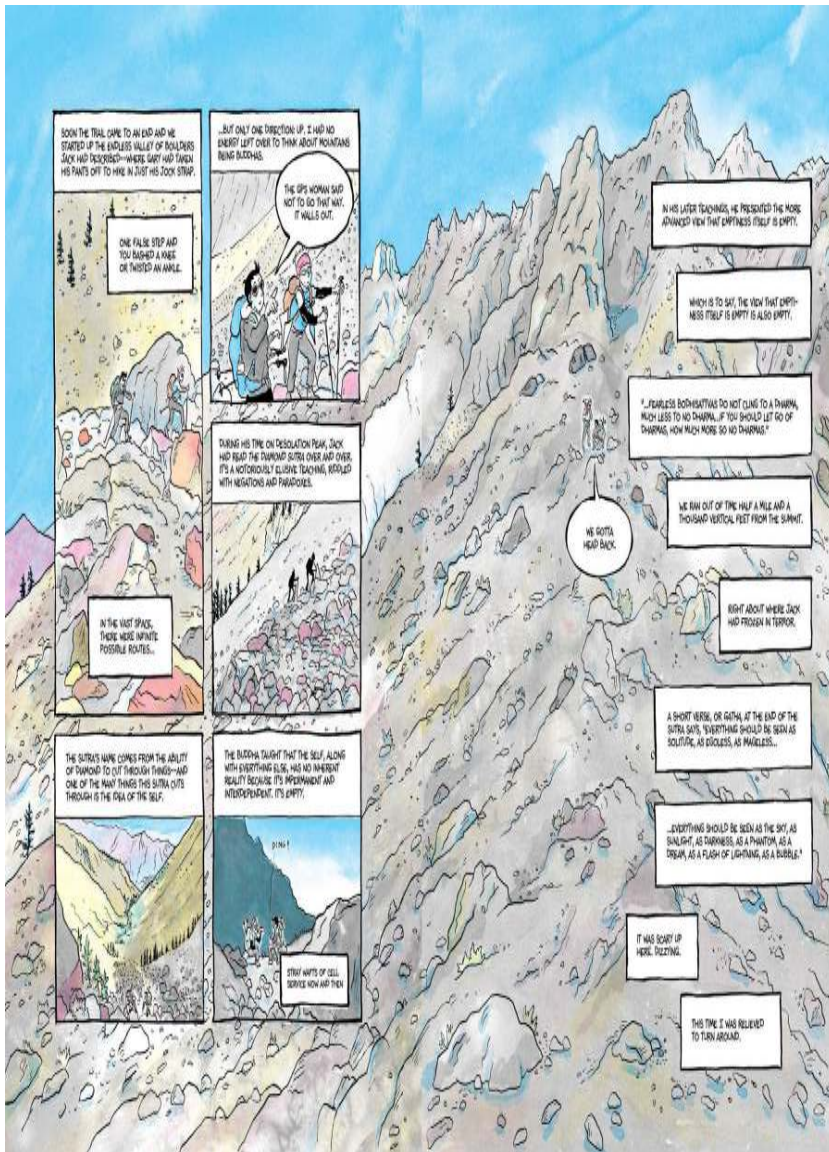
ONE DAY, PRECISELY FOR THIS, I DROGGED INSTEAD OF WALKED FOR THREE MILES. IT HAD BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE I'D BEEN TO FORGETTEN THE MARVELOUS EFFECT IT HAD ON MY MOOD.











SOON THE TRAIL CAME TO AN END AND WE
STARTED UP THE KNOLLY VALLEY OF ROALDERS
JACK HAD DECIDED—WHERE SART HAD TAKEN
HIS PANTS OFF TO HIDE IN JUST HIS TUCK STRAP.

ONE FALSE STEP AND
YOU RANDED A KAKE
OR TWISTED AN ANGLE.

IN THE VAST SPACES,
THERE WERE INFINITE
POSSIBLE ROUTES.

THE SUBTLE NUANCE COMES FROM THE ABILITY
OF THOUGHT TO CUT THROUGH THINGS—AND
ONE OF THE MANY THINGS THIS SUBTLE CUTS
THROUGH IS THE IDEA OF THE SELF.

...BUT ONLY ONE PREDICTION UP, I HAD NO
ENERGY LEFT OVER TO THINK ABOUT MOUNTAINS
BEING BLOODIES.

THE OPS WOMAN SAID
NOT TO GO THAT WAY.
IT WOULD OUI.

DURING HIS TIME ON DESSOLUTION PEAK, JACK
HAD READ THE THUNDERBOLT OVER AND OVER.
IT WAS A NOTION OF ELEGANT TEACHING, BOTTLED
WITH NEGATIONS AND PARADOXES.

THE BLOODSAUGHT THAT THE SELF, ALONG
WITH EVERYTHING ELSE, WAS NO INHERENT
REALITY BECAUSE IT'S IMPERMANENT AND
INTERDEPENDENT. IT'S EMPTY.

STAY AWAY OF CELL
SERVICES NOW AND THEN.

IN HIS LATER TEACHINGS, HE PRESENTED THE MORE
ADVANCED VIEW THAT EMPTINESS ITSELF IS EMPTY.

WHICH IS TO SAY, THE VIEW THAT EMPTI-
NESS ITSELF IS EMPTY IS ALSO EMPTY.

"A FEARLESS BODHISATVA DOES NOT CLING TO A THING,
MUCH LESS TO NO THING. IF YOU SHOULD LET GO OF
THINGS, HOW MUCH MORE SO NO THINGS?"

WE RAN OUT OF TIME HALF A MILE AND A
THOUSAND FEET FROM THE SUMMIT.

RIGHT ABOUT WHERE JACK
HAD FROZEN IN TERROR.

A SHORT BREEZE, OR GUST, AT THE END OF THE
SUTRA SAID, "EVERYTHING SHOULD BE SEEN AS
SCULPTURE, AS ENDLESS, AS PAINLESS."

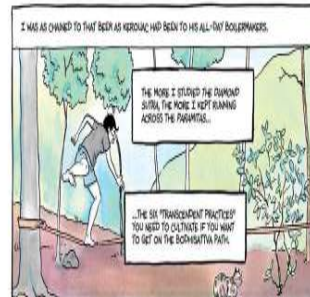
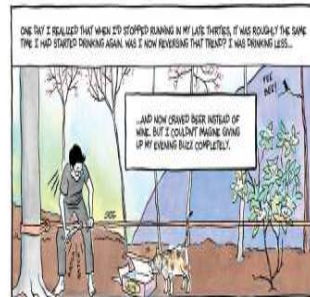
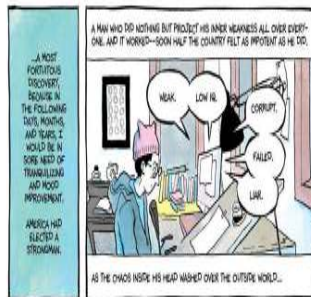
...EVERYTHING SHOULD BE SEEN AS THE SKY, AS
DUALITY, AS DARKNESS, AS A PHANTOM, AS A
DREAM, AS A FLASH OF LIGHTNING, AS A BUBBLE."

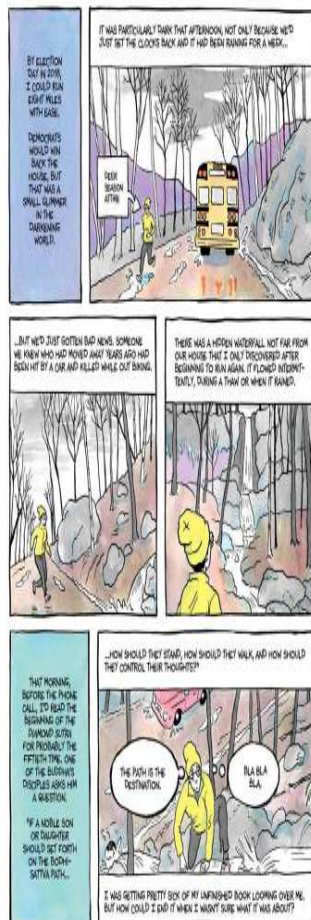
IT WAS SCARY UP
HERE, FREEZING.

THIS TIME I WAS RELUCTANT
TO TURN AROUND.

WE GOTTA
HEAD BACK.









AT THE BASE OF UPPER TOSWENT FALLS, SUGAR ALIGNED HIS COMPANIONS BY SUDANLY APPEARING ATOP A LARGE BOULDER.

IN MY FAVORITE PART OF DEN WIND, BEGINNERS' MINDS A SECTION TITLED AROUND THE WATERFALL, HE TALKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE OF THE FALLS.

BEFORE WE'RE BOON, HE SAYS, WE'RE LIKE THE RIVER UP ABOVE.

THEN WE'RE SEPARATED FROM THAT ONENESS INTO DISCRETE. HE FORGETS THAT WE'RE PART OF THE RIVER, AND WE FEEL FEAR.

BUT SOON ENOUGH, WE JOIN THE RIVER AGAIN.

Whether it is separated into drops or not, water is water. Our life and death are the same thing.

I WISH TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT BY THE FOLLOWING ELECTION DAY, I WAS STILL NOT FINISHED WITH MY BOOK. THERE ARE APPARENTLY NO SHORTCUTS ON THE PATH.



THEY TALKING ABOUT HOW I GOT A PLAN WAS IN ONE OF THEM.

ON MY RUN THAT AFTERNOON, I SPREAD MY ANKLE BUILT. I HIT THE GROUND SO HARD MY EYES REMAINED CLOSED FOR SOME TIME.



IT WAS A FOREBODING OF THE BODY BELOW I WOULD RECEIVE THE NEXT DAY, WHEN OUR BELOVED GOT THEM SUDDENLY, IN THE UNREMARKABLE VOICE, HOLLY AND I BEGAN GETTING UP JUST BEFORE DAWN TO MEDITATE.



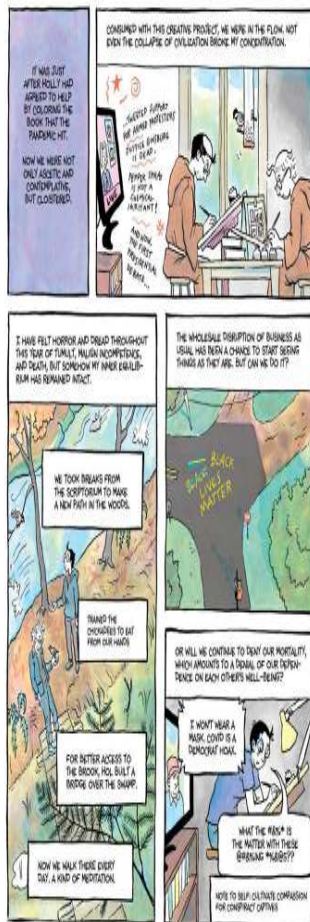
NOT LONG AFTER THAT, HOLLY DECIDED TO TAKE A BREAK FROM DRINKING AND EATING MEAT. I OBVIOUSLY AGREED TO JOIN HER.

I DIDN'T REALLY THINK I COULD STOP MY DAILY DRINKING, BUT I DID. THE REP WAS BROKEN. I WAS AWAKENED FROM MY ENCHANTMENT.



I WAS AT LAST ENGAGED WITH THE PROCESS OF DRAWING THE FITNESS BOOK, WHOSE DEADLINE WAS PRESSURING WITH ALARMING RAPIDITY.







BUT HE'S A PART
OF EVERYTHING.

ALSO THIS IS IT.

THE ONLY THING TO TRAVEL
IS THE IDEA THAT THERE'S
SOMETHING TO TRAVEL.

NOBODY IS SAYING. I
FINALLY GOT THE MESSAGE.

ONWARD TO THE NEXT!

THOUGH I SUSPECT THERE WILL BE A
FEW MORE LEVELS TO UNLOCK FIRST.

I GOTTA STAY IN
SHADE.

JUST IN CASE SOMEONE GO
FURTHER SOUTH AND I HAVE
TO RUN MESSAGES FOR
THE RESISTANCE.

NOBODY WILL
SUSPECT A LITTLE
OLD LADY.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



I'M GRATEFUL TO VAL ROHY FOR READING THIS BOOK AS IT EVOLVED, AND FOR HER RESEARCH ASSISTANCE--WITHOUT HER I WOULD NEVER HAVE DISCOVERED THE EDIFYING BOOK *TRANSATLANTIC TRANSCENDENTALISM: COLERIDGE, EMERSON, AND NATURE* BY SAMANTHA C. HARVEY. VAL WAS A GREAT HELP WITH COSTUME DESIGN, TOO, ALONG WITH HER COLLEAGUE ANNAMARIA FORMICHELLA.

THANK YOU TO JANE SHARP FOR TURNING ME ON TO DOROTHY WORDSWORTH'S JOURNALS, NOT TO MENTION THE LAKE DISTRICT ITSELF. I'M ALSO GRATEFUL TO DIANE GAYER FOR PRESSING ON ME HER COPY OF *POETS ON THE PEAKS* BY JOHN SUITER.

MEGAN MARSHALL'S REMARKABLE BIOGRAPHY, *MARGARET FULLER, A NEW AMERICAN LIFE*, SERVED AS A NAVIGATIONAL GUIDE FOR ME, A SORT OF ROPE BRIDGE OVER THE SWAMP OF ALL THE MATERIAL I TRIED TO FIT INTO THIS BOOK. I'M GRATEFUL TO MEGAN AS WELL FOR GIVING ME A ACTUAL GUIDED TOUR OF CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS.

MY GRATITUDE TO SOPHIE YANOW FOR HER STAGGERINGLY COMPETENT PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE IN PUTTING THIS BOOK TOGETHER IS REALLY BEYOND MY ABILITY TO EXPRESS IN WORDS. HER PRODIGIOUS CALM IN THE FACE OF MY VARIOUS PANICS WAS ALSO QUITE AWE-INSPIRING. JAN STURM AND MICHELLE OLLIE OF THE CENTER FOR CARTOON STUDIES EACH VERY GENEROUSLY SHARED IDEAS AND ADVICE EARLY IN MY PROCESS ABOUT HOW TO COLOR THIS THING. I'M PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL TO BETH BURLEIGH FULLER AND DAN JANECK FOR THEIR PEERLESS, MAY-BREATHAKING COPY-EDITING. I WOULD BE HOPELESSLY LOST IN THE FOG WITHOUT MY SUPERHUMANLY PATIENT AND INSIGHTFUL EDITOR, DEANNE URMY. I'M DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR HER STEADY COMPANIONSHIP ON MY CREATIVE THANKS TO THE TEACHERS WHO HAVE DEMONSTRATED TO ME THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MIND AND THE APPROPRIATE, MY KARATE SENSEI IN THE MID '80S; WILLIAM PROTTENGER, MY YOGA INSTRUCTOR IN THE LATE '80S; AND MY SAGACIOUS, AS WELL AS VERY POSSIBLY ACTUALLY ENLIGHTENED ACUPUNCTURIST AND QI GONG INSTRUCTOR, ARTHUR MAKARIS.

THANKS TO THE MACARTHUR FOUNDATION, WHOSE SUPPORT MEANT I COULD ALLOW THIS BOOK TO TAKE AS LONG AS IT NEEDED TO. AND TO THE GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION--MY PROJECT TURNED OUT RATHER DIFFERENTLY THAN THE ONE I DESCRIBED TO THEM. I'M GRATEFUL TO THE CIVITELLA RANIERI FOUNDATION FOR AN IMMENSELY RESTORATIVE RESIDENCY. I FELT GUILTY ALL THE TIME I SPENT RUNNING AND BIKING IN THE UMBRIAN HILLS, BUT IN THE END I THINK CAN COUNT IT AS WORK. THANK YOU ALSO TO HEDGEBROOK FOR A BRIEF STAY DURING WHICH I ACCOMPLISHED LITTLE MORE THAN STARING DAZEDLY AT MOUNT RAINIER IN THE DISTANCE. THAT TOO NOW STRIKES ME AS A CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF MY TIME.

THANKS TO SALLY FELLOWS, CATHY HUNTER, AND ALL THE TOWANDANS FOR THE BACKCOUNTRY ADVENTURING. YOU ARE MY INSPIRATION.

EVEN THOUGH I DEDICATED THE WHOLE BOOK TO HOLLY RAE TAYLOR, I MUST THANK HER EXPLICITLY FOR THE HUNDREDS OF HOURS SHE SPENT WORKING ON IT, AND FOR EVERYTHING ELSE SHE DID TO KEEP OUR LIVES AFLOAT WHILE I WAS COMPLETELY ABSORBED. BUT I'M PERHAPS MOST GRATEFUL TO HER FOR THE DRAWING EXERCISES SHE CLEVERLY DEvised TO JUMP-START MY SLUGGISH CREATIVE ENERGIES. HOL, I LOVE COLLABORATING WITH YOU.





PRAISE FOR

ALISON BECHDEL



FUN HOME

"FUN HOME MUST BE THE MOST INGENUOUSLY COMPACT,
HYPER-VERBOSE EXAMPLE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO HAVE
BEEN PRODUCED . . . PIONEERING."

ARE YOU MY MOTHER?

-NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

"MAGNIFICENT . . . BECHDEL'S TRIUMPH IS NOT JUST THAT
SHE'S EMERGED FROM HER TUNNEL, WITH WEARY BUT CLEAR
EYES, BUT THAT SHE'S BROUGHT HER MOTHER WITH HER."

THE ESSENTIAL DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR

-ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"A BOOK THAT STILL FEELS AT THE CUSP OF SOMETHING NEW:
A WAY OF FOLDING THE WORLD INTO FICTION, OF EXAMINING
HOW THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL INTERSECT IN
INTIMATE LIFE . . . THESE CHARACTERS ARE LOVED – AND YOU
FALL RIGHT IN LOVE WITH THEM TOO."

-NEW YORK TIMES

