

# PER H NON C'È NIENTE



By  
COLE WINNERS





MY FIRST MEMORY.

I'M IN ITALY.

At Via Cappelletti in Mariano Comense,  
on the outskirts of Milan's metropolitan  
sprawl.

I'm about 2 years old and it's my first  
time seeing snow. I'm not sure this is  
real, it's more like the memory of a  
memory. But I'm sure it did snow the  
winter of 2001 in northern Italy, the  
winter before we moved to the U.S.

This is my only memory before the move.

We move to Bloomington Indiana, a few hours from my dads hometown of Fort Wayne. My Parents split for good shortly after and my sister and I divide time between each of their houses.



IT'S MY DAD'S TURN TO PICK ME UP.



WHERE DID ALL THE KIDS GO? I MUST HAVE LOST TRACK OF TIME.



SCHOOL IS JUST ANOTHER SOURCE OF STRESS.



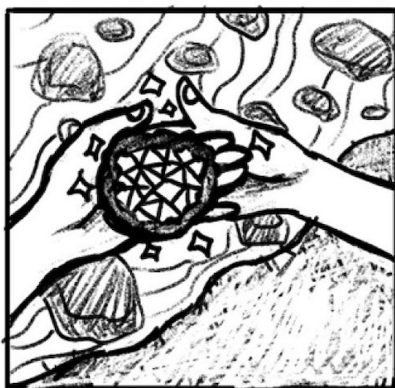
SHE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND.



I ALREADY KNOW THE ALPHABET. IN ITALIAN.

A come Armatura  
B come Bravura  
C come Canaglia che con me verrà questura  
D come Diamante  
E come Elefante  
F quel furfante che in galera se ne va  
G c'è tanta gente  
H non c'è niente  
Immediatamente alla L passerò  
L L'animale  
M Meno male  
N è Natale e tanti doni io avrò  
Per O c'è l'Orco  
Per P c'è Pinocchio  
Per Q quel ranocchio che stasera mangerò  
R come Roma  
S son le Strade  
T Tutte le strade che a Roma porteran  
U che bella storia  
V V'ho raccontato  
Z ho tanto sonno e a letto mene andrò  
Sotto le lenzuola tutte le parole fanno capriole  
e nuove storie inventero

A come Armatura





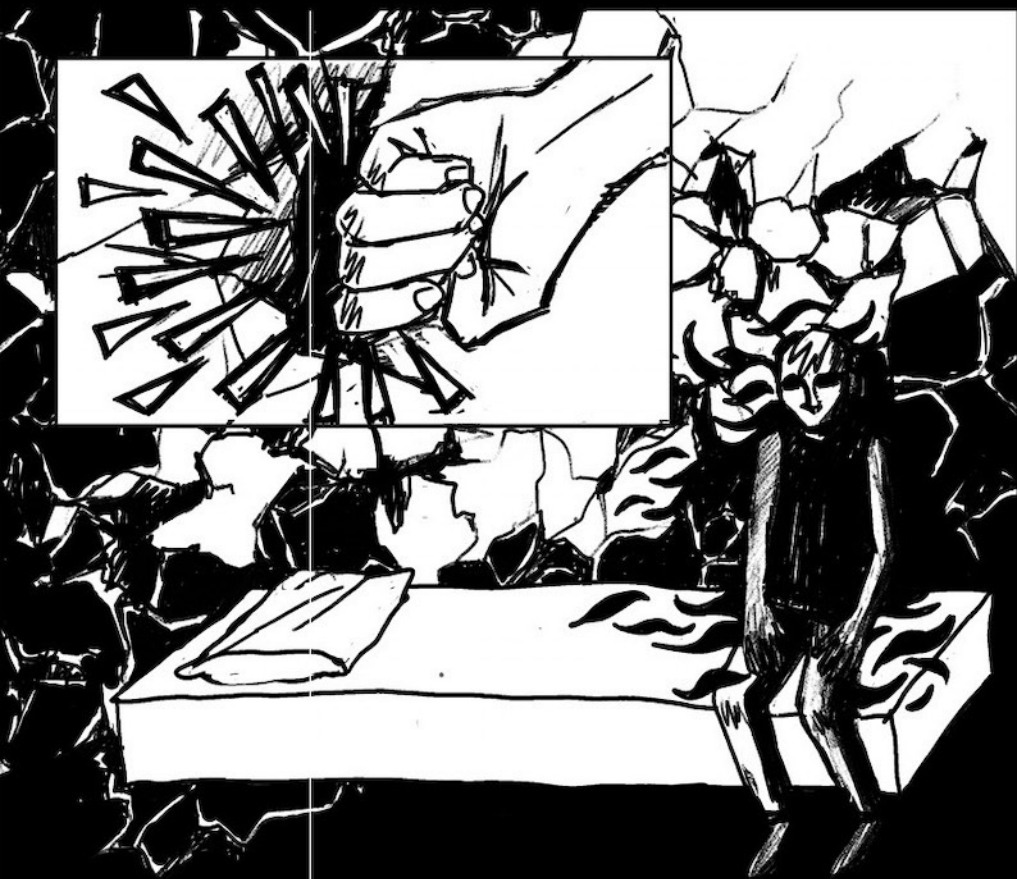
B come Bravura





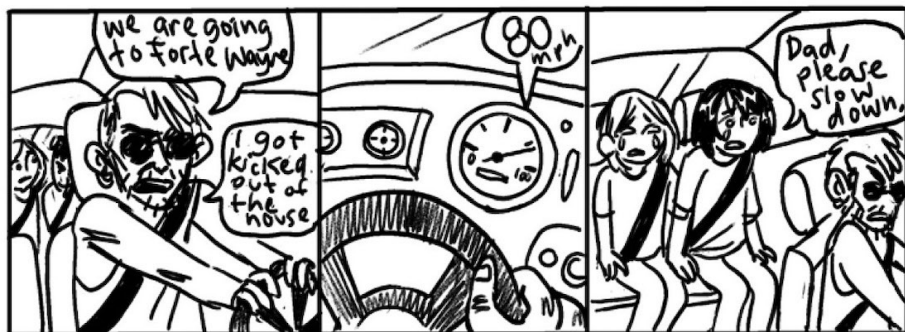






MY FATHER  
IS MADE  
OF SHADOWS.

C come Canaglia che  
con me verrà questura



Over time, he makes the drive less and less. He looks worse every time I see him.

The more time between the visits, the more I become afraid. Afraid of what will be waiting for me in the driver's seat.

D come Diamante





My parents met in high school, when my mom came to America as an exchange student. She was 18 and my dad was 17 when I was born. My mom left Italy to get away from family violence and the relentless culture of sexism.

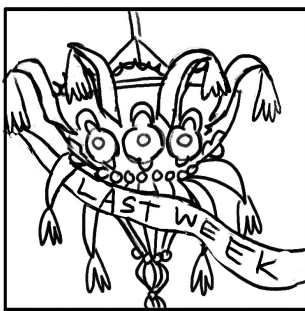
She gave us English names to make it easier for us to fit in.

She was obsessed with American grunge and punk music. She named my twin sister after a Hole song and me after Francis Bean Cobain.

Our American family says our names like a joke. They make fun of my mom's english in uncountable ways.

I wish I could laugh angrily at their jokes, but my laugh is filled with shame.

E come Elefante

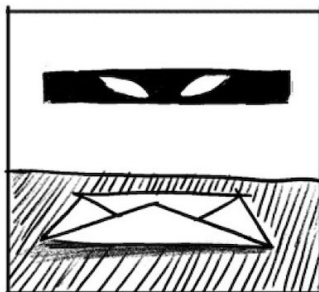
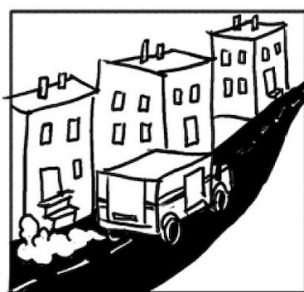


My Aunt and I talk in her dining room, affectionately renamed the Turkey room.

This is supposedly because of the Turkish chandelier, but by that logic it could be named the Jamaican room or the Indian room or the Chinese room or Indonesian room. It contains objects from all of these places.

She doesn't accept me because I'm not American, but she happily fills her home with proof of her travels. She is comfortable with owning but not with loving.

È quel furfante che  
in galera se ne va



We could never afford a lawyer before, but my mom got a large scholarship for graduate school and used the money on the custody case. Full custody meant my dad could no longer demand visitation time or threaten to appear at any time to take me away.

He still might have won partial custody, but he never showed up to court.

I slowly come to my body after the case is resolved, but a tiny voice whispers that he didn't show up because I wasn't worth fighting for.

G d'è tanta gente





Around the time my mom got citizenship, we took a trip to NYC. We had been in the United States for nearly 10 years, but finally the fear of deportation was no longer hanging over my Mother's head.

For years, my father had used that fear as a manipulation tactic, and finally she was free from it.

Citizenship also meant that we could stay in Italy for more than 3 months at a time, and in my freshman year of high school, we moved back for a year.

H non

cè niente

That morning my aunt calls me. I tell her I'm using this book to process my childhood.



"SO DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE READY TO SEE YOUR DAD AGAIN?"



"NO. THAT'S NOT WHY I'M MAKING IT. IT'S FOR ME.  
IT'S FOR ME TO HEAL."



I am so tired of running. I have been running all my life.



Now it's time to turn around and let these feelings catch me



I'm sorry I couldn't protect you.



Now I'm going to love you.

L L'animale









M Meno male

Years later, in a different country,  
another anxious spring day. I'm  
praying to get out of science  
class so I can feel the warm  
sun on my skin.

And somehow this day, my prayers  
are miraculously answered. ○ ○

The answer comes in the form  
of an earthquake. ○ ○ ○ ○

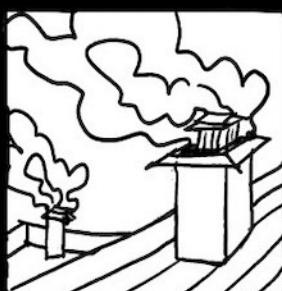




N è Natale e tanti  
doni io avrò

In Italy, citrus season is in the winter. We always had baskets of fangerines around the house in December. My great grandmother would save the peels to put on the radiator so the whole house smelled warm and sweet. I would help make the Nativity scene, the presepe, and use plants and rocks and wood from outside to build a manger and miniature mountains. When I tried to set things up the same way in America, but we only had paper scraps and old boxes to build with. The floor was painted gray and rotting from the inside, instead of the terracotta Earth I remembered.

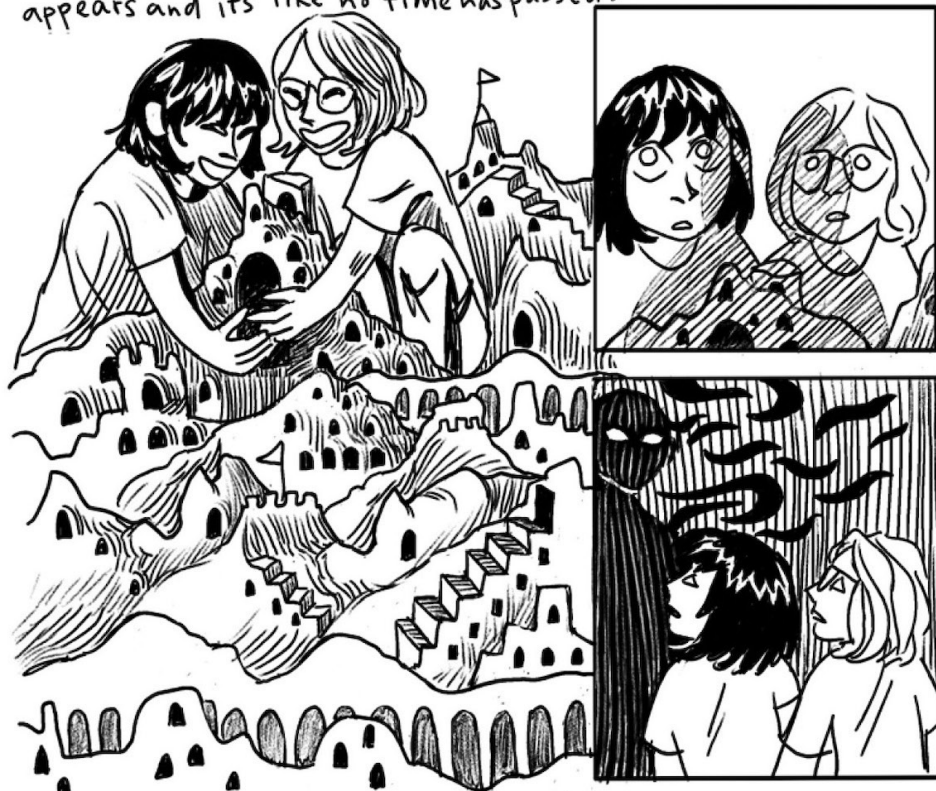
It looked as if baby Jesus had landed on the surface of the moon.



Per o c'è l'orco



It's been five years since I saw my father. Then suddenly he appears and it's like no time has passed.





That was  
the last time  
I ever saw him.

per p cè pinocchio

until their deaths when I was 8,  
I go visit my great grandparents  
every summer in Italy. My  
great-grandfather survived two  
World wars, famine, and inescapable  
life long depression.

But he lost the will to live  
when he became confined to  
a nursing home. The only  
times he seemed peaceful was  
when my grandmother and I  
took him on walks.

My clearest memories are of  
staring worldlessly into his  
unknowable cloudy blue eyes.

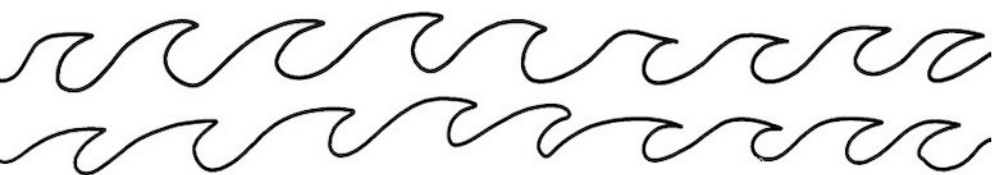




My great grandparents suffered so much, but despite their struggles, they created a safe space for my mom growing up.

Because we lived in America, she couldn't be with them when they died or attend their funerals.

No words will ever be big enough for this pain.



per Q quel ranocchio  
che stasera mangerò





R come Roma  
S son le Strade  
T Tutte le Strade  
che a Roma porteran





I'm swimming along the reef  
when suddenly my feet touch  
smooth stone. I think I have  
discovered something magical,  
something precious.

I run to tell my uncle and  
he explains that it's a  
Roman road, that the water  
has risen over the centuries  
and submerged it.

We follow the road until  
it's lost in the sand, and  
then we just keep walking.



U che bella storia  
V'ho raccontato  
Z ho tanto sonno e a letto mene andrò  
sotto le lenzuola tutte le parole fanno capriole  
e nuove Storie inventerò



FIN

