

our 16763 private messages (give or take for the miscounted ones and the ones you'll never see) our tens of thousands of messages in groupchats that i dont have the time or energy to calculate the two lunchtime walks to 7-11 where no one but you wanted to go with me the once-frequent afterschool walks to target and the two lipsticks i bought for you there the tiny bunch of red berries you chucked at me on one of those walks the countless games of chess i lost to you and the app you made me install to practice the begging you to try out for the girls badminton team the matching glasses frames but mine in gold and yours in silver the songs and music videos you sent me that i only sometimes watched the \$50 concert tickets you asked me to buy that were too expensive at the time the trip to sephora that never happened the christmas gift i couldn't give you and the rest of the anecdotes and emotions surrounding our 3-and-a-half-year friendship can't all be captured in a 24 page zine (including covers), but this is as close i can get to a genuine, fictional-but-realistic, representation of our too-brief friendship.

it has taken me exactly seven-and-a-half months to create this story, along with its illustrations. after multiple revisions and renditions of both the word choice and the drawings, i've completed what i think will be the second—and the last—art piece fully (and openly) dedicated to you, though i don't think i'll ever stop making art about you.

as genuine as this story is, i don't want to leave any impression on readers or myself that our friendship was limited to the extended metaphor described in 29 sentences (which is by pure coincidence your birthday), because in reality there was so much more laughing and smiling, not exhibited by these fictional representations of ourselves. in real life, not everything was so black and white, though it's taking me some time to come to terms with that.

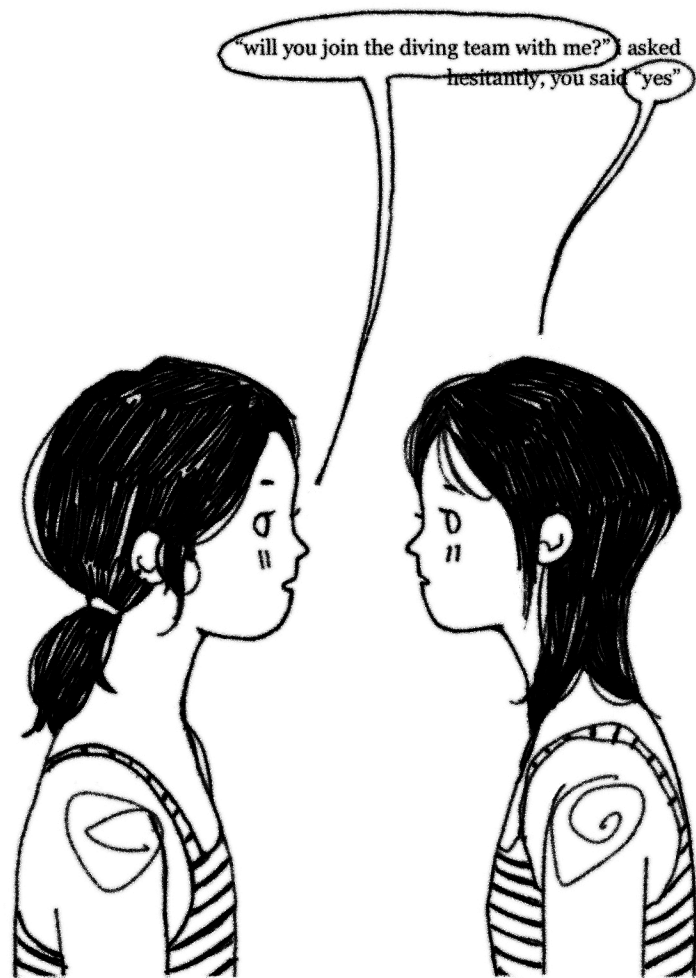
i'll always cherish the time we spent as acquaintances, friends, best friends, and not-as-best-friends, though remembering anything from those times still makes me sad.

thank you for a lovely 3-and-a-half years of friendship.

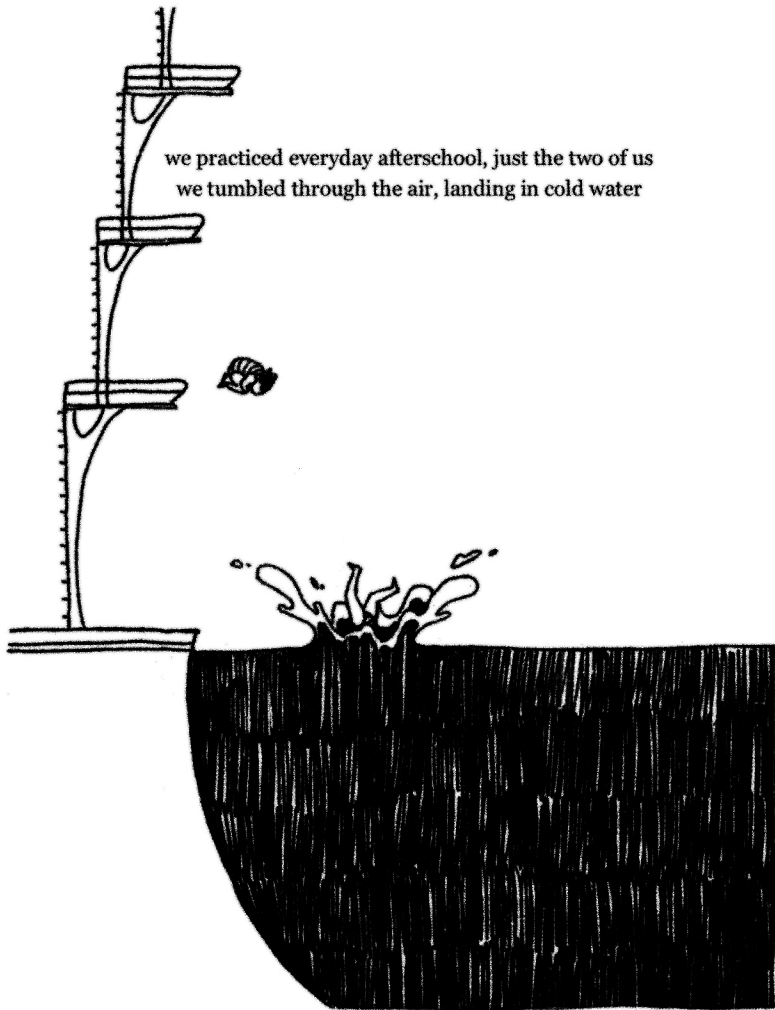
you and me



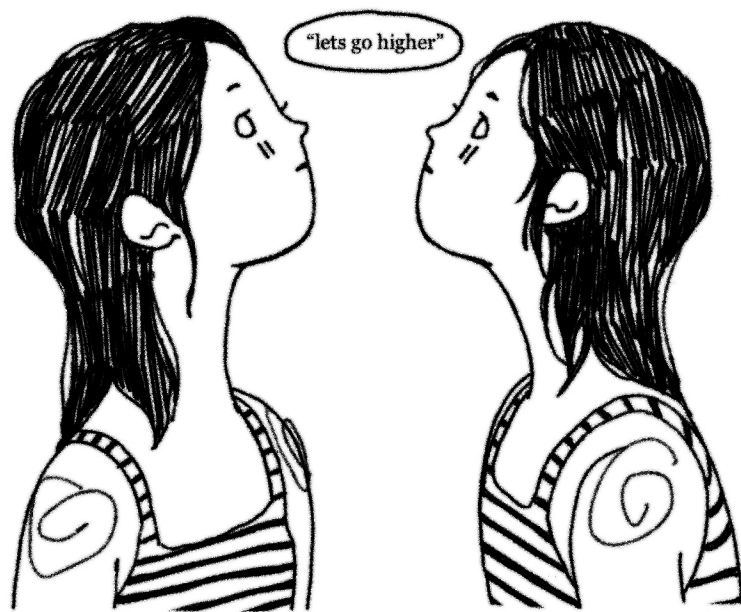
2



we practiced everyday afterschool, just the two of us
we tumbled through the air, landing in cold water



one day we were standing there on the lowest board,
and you saw me eyeing the ones above

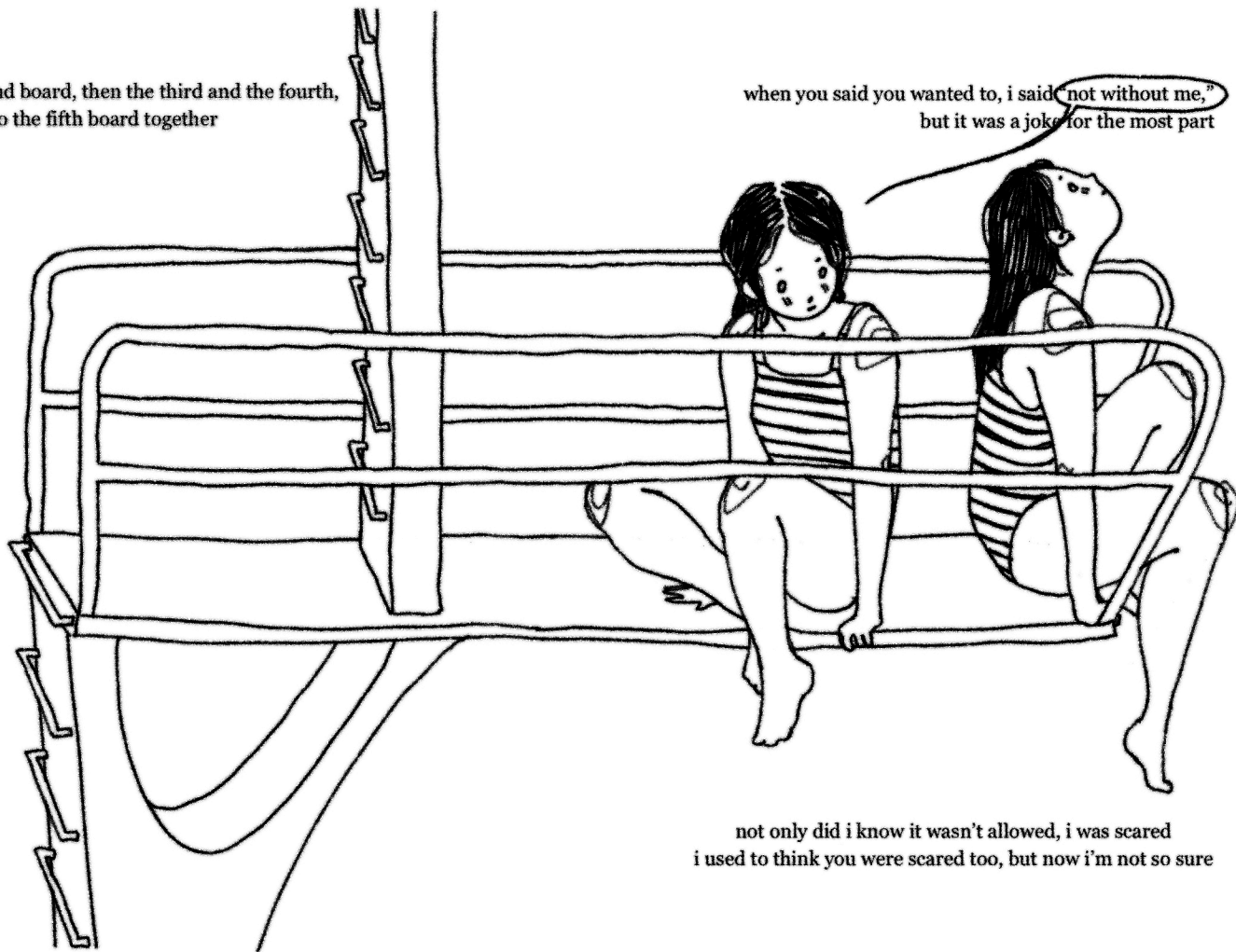


the deeper we went, the darker and colder the water got

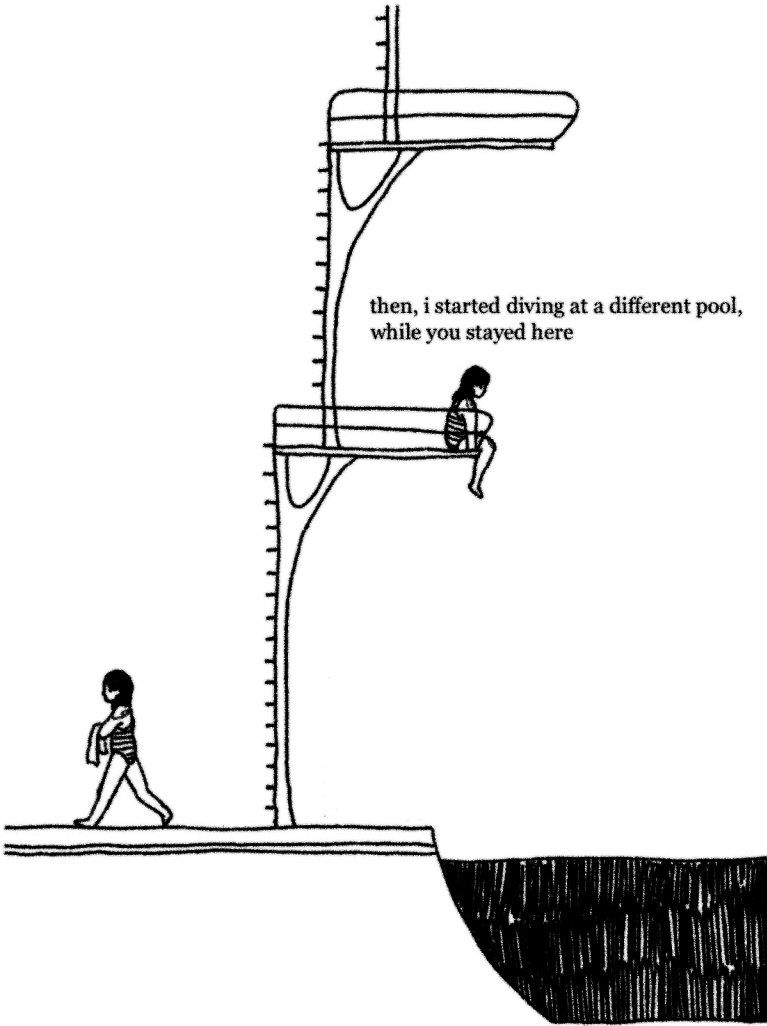


we dove from the second board, then the third and the fourth,
but we never went up to the fifth board together

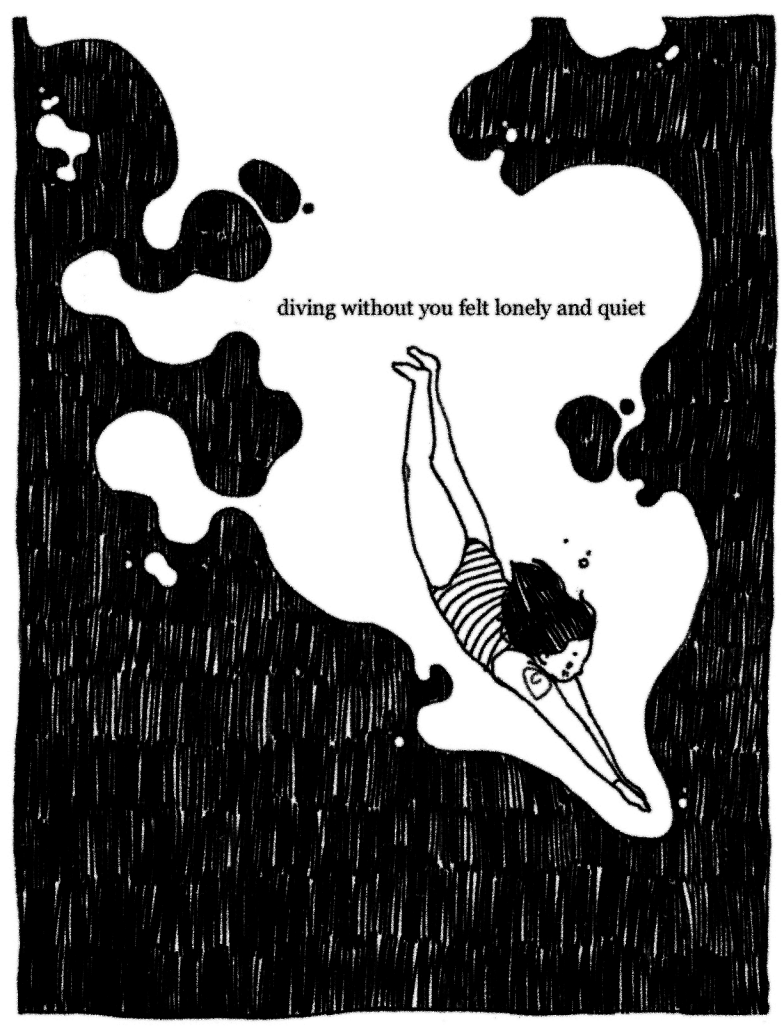
when you said you wanted to, i said "not without me,"
but it was a joke for the most part



not only did i know it wasn't allowed, i was scared
i used to think you were scared too, but now i'm not so sure

A line drawing of a diving board structure. A person is sitting on the edge of the board, looking down. Another person is walking on the pool deck to the left. The pool is represented by a dark, textured area at the bottom.

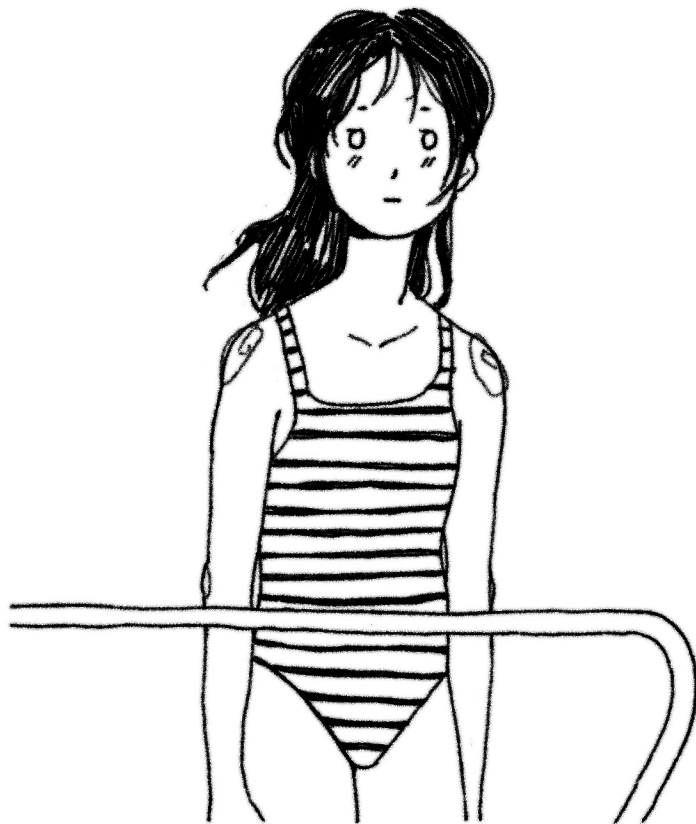
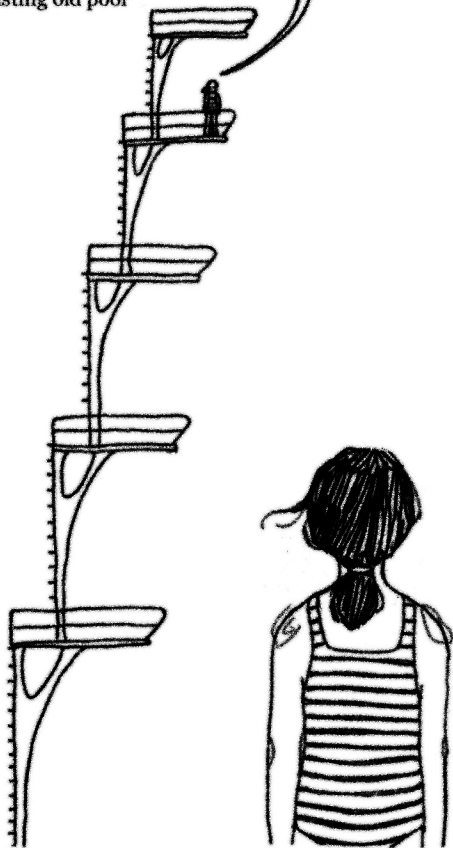
then, i started diving at a different pool,
while you stayed here

A line drawing of a person diving into a pool. The person is in a diving position, with arms extended forward and legs straight. The water is represented by a large, dark, textured area with white bubbles around the diver.

diving without you felt lonely and quiet

i passed our pool one day, and i saw you standing on the fourth board
you shouted at me from up there

"don't you miss diving with me? don't you want to see how much better I got?"
and i joined you in that rusting old pool



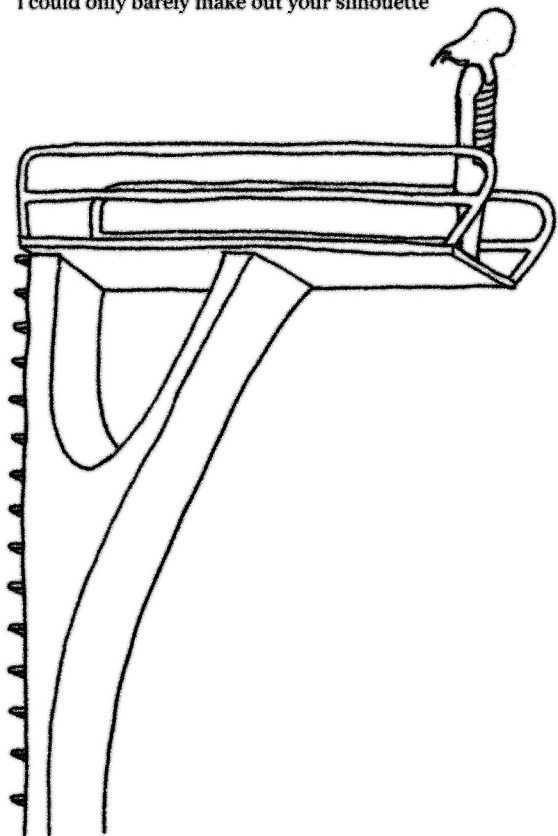
but the water was a lot colder than i remembered
shivering, i left before you came back up



i still regret that part



the last time i saw you, you were standing so far up,
i could only barely make out your silhouette



i didn't see exactly what happened,
but I saw the splash and you were gone



i climbed up to follow you, because I still needed my diving partner

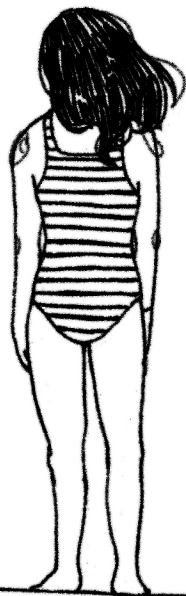


but then the lifeguard called me down

no lifeguard had called you down, but she did for me
i wish she'd called you; i wish i'd called you



i haven't gone diving since then
but i know that if i ever do go back,



you'll be in the water, waiting to greet me

