

<https://www.thebrightsessions.com/secret-notebook>

Transcriber note: I'm preserving all of the smol child misspellings because they're adorable. Apologies in advance to your screen readers.

Cover

[Picture of a green college-ruled spiral-bound notebook cover. "JOAN + MARK" is written in big block letters, and "top secret" is written in smaller block letters below. The notebook is decorated with animal stickers.]

Page 1

[Joan writes in light purple pencil. Her handwriting is neat for a nine-year-old. Mark is writing in blue. His handwriting is blocky and clumsy.]

Joan: Dear Mark: This is Joanie. I am your big sister and you are my little brother. I love you. [image of a heart]. From, Joan. PS: I hope you ~~right~~ write back.

Mark: [amid several scratch marks and scribbles] MARK AND JOANIE

Page 2

Joan: [in red pencil] Hello Mark. What is your favorite color?

Mark: [in blue pencil] BLUE [blue scribble]

Joan: [switching to blue] What is your favorite food?

Mark: ICE CREEAM SUMDAY [scribbles in light purple-red]

Page 3

Joan: [in a few different colored pencils; starting with darker purple] Dear Mark, Today I had a good day at school. We [green] learned about Greek Gods. My favorite is Atheena because she is [light purple] the goddess of wisdim, which means she is really smart. [blue] I hope you had a good day too. Love, Joanie.

Mark: [scribble that looks like a sun done in magenta and orange; written in light blue next to the sun, half-covered by the sun's rays] MARK

Page 4

[a row of neat daisies in purple]

Joan: [in teal pencil] Dear Mark: Can you draw flowers too? Love, Joanie

Mark: [a large, scribbly drawing of a daisy in purple with a yellow center, because even at four he's got more artistic style than his sister; squeezed in around the flower, in block letters] DEAR JOANIE, LOVE MARK

Page 5

Joan: [in teal pencil, surrounded by a few scribbles in blue and green that are probably Mark] Today we had a famus guest come to school. It was McGruff the crime dog! Remember him? He came to the potluck last forth of July. He taght us different ways to report a crime. Don't ever get in a car with a stranger. If a stranger ever tries to talk to you, tell me imedately! Love, Joanie

[drawing of a dark brown dog standing on its hind legs, probably Joan's]

Joan: [in light purple pencil] What sound does a dog make?

Mark: [in teal pencil] WOOF

Joan: What sound does a cat make?

Mark: MEWO

Page 6

Joan: [writing in blue felt-tip pen; her handwriting has matured a little] Dear Mark, Today was my first day of middle school. I have eight classes everyday! My favorite class was science because we are learning about the universe. My least favorite class was P.E. because we have to wear shorts. What did you do in school today? Love, Joanie

Mark: [writing in block letters in light purple pencil] TODAY I PUT A SEED IN A POT AND DRU A PIKTUR

Page 7

Joan: [writing in red felt-tip pen, with dots at the intersections of the letters] Dear Mark. Today I got detention during lunch. This stupid boy was copying my math homework so I pushed him. Don't ever be stupid. Love, Joanie

Mark: [writing in blue pencil] Dear Joan, today I had spugety for lunch. Love, Mark

[Joan has drawn an arrow pointing to "spugety" and written "~~spugetti~~ spagetti"]

Joan: [in purple felt-tip pen] That sounds yummy! I wish I had spagetti. I had a grilled cheese sandwich but I did not like it very much. It tasted like metal.

Page 8

[Mark has doodled designs in purple and light blue pencil along the left margin and top of the page]

Joan: [writing in careful cursive in light green pen; the words are mostly joined together with no breaks] Dear Mark, Today we learned how to write in cursive. I mean we got to write some of the alphabet but not really any full sentences. Cursive is supposed to let you write faster but it make me write a lot slower. I bet you can't read this message at all! Me neither! Love, Joanie

Mark: [writing in light purple pencil in a mix of lower case and capital letters] Dear Joanie, Today I red a book about a katapilr. The book had a hol in it. Love, Mark

Page 9

[drawing by Mark at the top of the page, showing two figures. Both have triangles for bodies. The taller one has long hair and is drawn in purple; the shorter one has short hair and is drawn in blue. They are standing on green scribbled grass. Mark has written "Joan + Mark = love" next to the drawing.]

Mark: [in light purple pencil] Dear Joanie, hape burhday. I dru a piktur for yor presint. Love Mark

[Joan has written corrections for "happy", "birthday", "drew", "picture", and "present" above the misspelled words]

Joan: [in red felt-tip pen] Dear Mark, Thank you so much for my birthday present. I love it! How come your wearing a dress? Love, Joan

Mark: [in light blue pencil] It's a KAPE!!!

[Joan has written "cape" under the misspelling]

Page 10

Joan: [writing in purple felt-tip pen] Dear Mark, I am very mad today. At school I was carrying my lunch tray in the cafeteria and this stupid girl that I hate in my homeroom purposely bumped into me and I dropped my lunch. So then I pushed her back and I got detention but she didn't! She is a very mean girl and really stupid. She always makes fun of me because of my clothes and my glasses. But all of the boys like her because they think she is pretty. But she is very ugly. Boys as stupid. Except for you of course. If you ever start to like girls, make sure they are smart and nice. Because then it doesn't matter what they look like. They will be beautiful no matter what. Love, Joanie.

[Mark has written his message in green pen upside down along the bottom of the page and wrapping around the left margin]

Mark: My sister is the priteest girl i no

[Joan has written corrections for "prettiest" and "know" in black ink]

Joan: Thanks Mark. My brother is the smartest boy I know.

Page 11

Joan: [writing in felt-tip pens and switching colors every sentence] Dear Mark, what did you do in school today? In my humanities class we are reading a book called The Giver. It is about a place where everybody is the same and no one feels pain. And everything is in black and white. But there is a special boy that is given a special job to remember what it was like before. Do you think if we were all the same it would be better or worse? Love, Joanie

Mark: [also writing in felt-tip pens and switching colors, but not as regularly, just kinda when the spirit moves him] Dear Joanie, It would be worse because it woud be boring. No one woud be speshal. In reel life everyone is speshal. Today in school I walked threw a door without opening it. Love Mark

Page 12

Joan: [in purple felt-tip pen] How did you walk through a door without opening it?

Mark: [continuing to switch colors as the spirit moves him] I don't know. I was in the bathroom and washed my hands and was thinking what it would be like to be Spiderman with stikky

hands. And I felt my hole body being squeezed reely tite. Then I looked up and I was back in the hall but the bathroom door was still closed.

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Joan: [in red felt-tip pen] Maybe somebody else opened it and walked through at the same time but you didn't notice.

Mark: [in green] I don't think so. I'm pretty sher I walked threw it.

Joan: [in maroon] Well that would make you even cooler than Spiderman.

Mark: [switching back and forth between red and blue] NO! Spiderman is the coolest. [drawing of a spider]

Joan: I like Catwoman.

Mark: That's becus your a girl. I want makarone and chees for dinner.

Joan: OK. I can make you some.

Mark: Wen? [Joan has corrected it to WHEN]

Page 14

Joan: After I finish my homework!

Mark: When will you be finished?

Joan: I don't know!!! Stop being a turkey. I'll come get you when dinner is ready.

Mark: Stop riting notes and do your homework!!!

Joan: POOP FACE [drawing of a stick figure with a piece of poop for a face]

Mark: BUTHED [drawing of a stick figure with a butt for a face; Joan has written "Gross!" with an arrow pointing to the drawing]

Joan: You are such a bad speller!

Mark: Your a no it all

[Joan has written corrections for “you’re” and “know”]

Page 15

Mark: Hello. When will you be home?

Hello. I'm so bored.

Today is Friday [“Friday” has rays coming off it and the Y has a long tail that underlines the sentence]

HELLO> Where are you?

Joan: [in blue] Hi Mark.

Sorry I was so late coming home today. I know I already told you that I got detention but I said I'd tell you why here. Well, first of all, I hate middle school. Everyone is just trying to be popular. I get made fun of all the time because of the way I dress and because I always know all of the answers in class. Today in math class we were taking a test and this stupid boy named Specer was copying off my test. At first I just tried to cover my test more but then he started kicking my chair. And I got so mad that I

[continued on next page]

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threw my pencil at him and it hit him in the eye and he started crying. So we both got detention after school. But guess what! When I first saw him trying to cheat off me, I wrote some of the answers wrong on my test on purpose! Then I fixed them after the teacher separated us! Ha ha ha! Love, Joanie

Mark: [in green] Dear Joanie, Sometimes I don't like school. I don't like math. But I really like music. Today we played on keyboards. I would never cheat on a test because I don't think it's fair. Love, Mark

Page 17

Mark: [in red, accented in blue where I've bolded the text] I love my **sister**. She is the **best** sister in the world. Have a good day.

Joan: [switching colors as the spirit moves her] I have the BEST BROTHER in the WORLD and we will be together FOREVER and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and

ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever!!!

[all the “and ever”s wrap around each other upside down and make a spiral; it’s very cute]

Page 18

Mark: [in blue] I really like baseball. And I really like soccer. And I really like miniature golf. What is your favorite sport? Love, Mark

Joan: [in pink] Dear Mark, My favorite sport is gymnastics because I like it when they dance to music and do all the flips. I wish I could be a dancer but I don’t think I’d be very good unless I got a lot of practice. And it’s MINIATURE golf. [“miniature” is in green] Miniature means something that is a small version of something else. I really like miniature golf too. I especially like the part with the windmill. Love, Joanie [the sign-off is in cursive, noticeably better than the last time she wrote in cursive]

Page 19

Joan: [in block letters colored in yellow] HELLO! DID YOU TAKE MY CALCULATOR?
[in blue] Hello! I know you read this before practice!!!
[in purple] MARK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I’m SERIOUS! Where is my calculator??? I need it for school tomorrow morning!!!

Mark: [in green] Hi Joanie. I found your calculator in your shoe by the door. I put it on your backpack.

Joan: [in red] [unintelligible scribbled-out] You are such a BAD LIAR!

Mark: [in blue accented with red] You are the best sister in the world!

Joan: [in purple] I’m going to give you a noogy!

Page 20

[Joan’s section has doodles of a butterfly and concentric squares]

Joan: [in green] Dear Mark, There is a dance at school called Sadie Hawkins. It’s where the girls ask the boys to go instead of the other way around. In high school there are 4 dances every year. I’ve never been to one before but I thought it’d be fun to go. And there is a boy in my calculus class that I am thinking about asking. What do you think I should do? Love, Joanie

Mark: [in red] Dear Joanie, Is the boy smart? Love, Mark

Joan: [in blue] Dear Mark, Well, the boy is in all the advanced classes at school, like me. Do you think I'm smart? Love, Joanie

Mark: [in brown] Dear Joanie, You are way smarter than me. But you are older than me. So you supposed to be smarter. Love, Mark

Page 21

Joan: [in purple] Dear Mark, You are not helping. [drawing of an angry face] Love, Joanie

Mark: [in blue, accented with green] Dear Joanie, YES, you should ask him. Love, Mark
[in purple] What happened?

Joan: [in pink] He said that somebody else already asked him and that he already told her yes.

Mark: [in green] That is too bad. I hope you're not sad. Are you still going to go?

Joan: [in blue] I don't know.

Mark: [also in blue]: If you really want to go then I'll go with you.

Joan: Thanks Mark. I love you.

Mark: [in purple] I **love** you too!

Page 22

Mark: [in blue] Dear Joanie, Well, I guess I'll start this time. Middle school is awesome! Love, Mark

Joan: [in light purple] I hate you.

Mark: Such harsh words. How is high school?

Joan: Better than middle school.

Mark: Boy oh boy I can't wait!

Joan: Don't you have homework to do?

[in purple] Dear Mark, I heard you got detention! I want to ~~hear~~ read all about it right here [arrow pointing down the page] Love, Joanie

Mark: [in green] Dear Joanie, I remembered how much you got detention in middle school and decided I should try it. Have you ever played a game called The Ouija Board? One of my freinds brought it to school so we could play it during lunch. My freind's name is Jeremy and nobody really talks

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to him ecsept me. Other kids at school don't like him because he is kind of weird but I think he is interesting. Anyway, we were playing out in the field and this stupid 8th grader came over and started making fun of us. And then the stupid 8th grader grabbed the ouija board and threw it. So I pushed him. Except he flew really high in the air and landed on his back. I didn't think I pushed him that hard. But he had to see the nurse. He was crying. So I got detention. I had to talk to the principal too. I might get in trouble some more. Love, Mark

Joan: [in red] Dear Mark, You must have pushed him really hard so I'm not surprised you got detention. But I'm not mad because I know you were protection your friend and it sounds like this 8th grader is a real bully. But I hope you don't get suspended or something like that. I can't believe you're playing with a ouija board. Of course I know what that is! Do you believe in ghosts? Love, Joanie

Page 24

Mark: [in blue] Dear Joanie, I don't know if I believe in ghosts. Do you? Love, Mark

Joan: [in maroon] Dear Mark, YES. [every letter of YES is a different color] Love, Joanie

Mark: [in green] Now that you have a driver's lisenice when can you start giving me a ride to school? I HATE [ever letter is a different color] taking the bus.

Joan: [in purple] Even if I had time to drive you around everywhere, I don't have a car, silly!

Mark: [in red] Oh yeah. Duh.

Joan: [in red] DUH is right!

Joan: [in blue] DO NOT talk about this out loud at home. I don't want anyone hearing us. And when you write in this notebook, DO NOT leave it out anywhere! How did you know that Old Mr. Carson was having a heart attack???

Mark: [in green] I told you. I went inside his house and saw him fall onto the floor. And he was yelling and holding his chest.

Joan: But you were standing next to me the WHOLE time!

Mark: It was like there were 2 of me. I was walking next to you down the street and I got a bad headache. I thought it was a brainfreeze from the ice cream. So I stopped and closed my eyes real tight. Then when I opened them, I was standing outside of myself looking at you and the other me. But we were frozen or something. The 2nd me walked away and went into old Mr. Carson's house. I don't know why, I just did. And he was right there in the kitchen having a heart attack. So I ran back out to you or us or whatever and all of a sudden I was having the bad headache again and I opened my eyes and I was back to normal just

[continued on the next page]

one of me standing next to you. And that's when I told you about Mr. Carson.

Joan: But you were standing right next to me the whole time! I saw you get the brain freeze and you closed your eyes and grabbed your head. And a second later you opened your eyes and told me about him. You never left.

Mark: I don't know! I'm telling you what happened!

Joan: Did you have a feeling that something was wrong when we walked by his house?

Mark: NO! I told you I actually went inside his house. What do you think happened?

Joan: I don't know. But it's very very very weird. Maybe we should go to the doctor.

Mark: WHY?

Joan: Just in case. I don't know. What if something happened to your brain. Do you still have a headache?

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Mark: No. It went away as soon as I came back.

Joan: Well whatever happened it's a good thing we called 911 for poor Mr. Carson. I hope he's OK.

Mark: Do you think something is wrong with me?

Joan: No, nothing is wrong. It's just weird. We should go to the doctor anyway and we'll figure it out. If anything ever happens like this again, tell me right away. OK?

Mark: OK.

Joan: Promise?

Mark: I promise.

[bad drawing of an ice cream cone]

Joan: I tried to draw a picture of ice cream but it looks like the olympic torch 😞

Mark: Or poop in a basketball hoop. AKA hoop poop.

Page 28

Mark: Dear Joanie, I am writing this note to you in advance, even though I know you won't be home until next week. But I really need some serious advice and it's too hard to talk on the phone since you're so busy with college and your roommates are so noisy. Or nosy. Did you say noisy or nosy? I don't remember. Anyway. There is a girl at school that I will call Sara. That is not her real name, but I am using a code name just in case this notebook ever got in the wrong hands. So Sara is really really pretty. Like beautiful. But not in a gross model way. Like in a different way. I don't know how to describe it. And she is in all the honors and AP classes except for choir because there's no such thing as Honors Choir at school. That's where I met her. I'm taking choir because I thought it would be an easy elective, but it's actually kind of hard because we have to learn to read music. Anyway, it's still pretty fun. But Sara is an **AMAZING** singer. And she's in the drama club and in the honors society and she's the president of this new club called Gay Straight Alliance. And I know what your thinking! She is definitely straight because she had a boyfriend that she broke up with like a month ago, but she's in this club because her older brother is gay or something.

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Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that I think I might have a crush on her but in a seriously unhealthy way. Like I have dreams about her and sometimes I have these imaginary conversations with her. Then I realize I'm basically just talking to myself. And when I do talk to her I make really bad jokes. **REALLY BAD** and I can't help it. And I really really reeeeeeally want her to like me. I've never cared so much about what someone else thought of me. I seriously feel like I'm going crazy. I really want to ask her out but I'm pretty sure she'll say no because I think I weird her out and her last boyfriend was this senior who was like the star of all the school plays last year AND plays guitar in a punk band, so I'm probably not her type.

Anyway. Have you learned anything in that psychology class you've been raving about that might explain what's wrong with me? I really need some serious help.

Love, Mark

Joan: [in pink pen] Dear Mark,

I can't tell you how excited I was to come home to a nice, long letter from you. I was wondering why our notebook was on top of my pillow as if in desperate need of my attention — and now I understand. First of all, if you ever need to talk on the phone

[continued on the next page]

about something private or important, just tell me. I can always use my cell phone and go outside! I just need to plan ahead to make sure I have enough minutes. Secondly, I can't say that I've learned anything specifically from my psych class about what you're going through. But I have lived through my fair share of unhealthy crushes. And honestly, it just sounds like you're really into this girl (aka Sara). And you're probably obsessing so much and making yourself all weird because you're not taking the right action to potentially move the relationship forward. I mean, you should just ask her out. Worst case scenario, she says "no". But even then, I'll bet you'll feel 100 times better than you feel now, just because at least you'll have done your part and the rest is out of your control. And if she says "yes", then you'll go on a date, start to get to know her better, then really be able to determine whether or not you're attracted to her. It sounds like maybe you have a bit of a celebrity crush on her — meaning you are attracted to your IDEA of her based on what you see and assume —

[continued on next page]

but that you don't really know her yet. So try to get to know her and go from there. Plus, you don't want to regret not trying.

In physics we've been reading about this Many Worlds Theory that says that measuring a quantum object causes a split in the universe. The universe is duplicated to accommodate each possible outcome from the measurement. So, in theory, if you ask Sara out on a date, you'll cause a split in the universe. In this universe she may say "yes", but in a parallel universe she may say "no". And both outcomes exist simultaneously. But in your current human form, you can only experience the outcome in this universe. But you can trust that both outcomes will exist.

Anyway, I have to admit that I'm a bit amused by this seeing as you've never had any problems talking to girls in the past. I remember when a new girl was calling the house every week! Are you sure you're my brother — MARK BRYANT? I must be in a parallel universe where you're not the popular kid that can charm any girl he desires without lifting a finger.

[continued on next page]

Which must mean that I'm the Joan that has a ton of friends, enjoys crowds, and is a professional dancer in Argentina.

Love, Joanie

Mark: [in blue] Dear parallel-universe-flamenco-dancer Joan,

What the hell are you talking about? This is the last time I ever ask you for girl advice. And please don't ever write about anything physics or science related again in this notebook. But I think you're right. I just need to approach her and get it out of my system. Argh! I can't believe winter break is two weeks though! I'll have to wait all that time to talk to her. Will you help me figure out what to say?

Love, Mark

Joan: Dear Mark, OK. Let's meet at twenty-hundred hours in the ballroom with the candlestick and we'll brainstorm some classy one-liners. Love, Joanie

Mark: WHAT?

Joan: I'll be back at 8:00 tonight. We'll talk then. [smiley face]

Mark [in blue]: Dear Joanie,

For my elective this quarter, I'm taking a beginning photography class and it is SO _____ **COOL!** I put the blank (____) in there so you could insert your own expletive, but it needs to be a really good one to do justice to how I feel about this class. Right now we're working on night photography and we have to take black and white photos at night. Then we develop them ourselves in the darkroom at school. The assignment is due on Friday, before spring break, and we have to turn in a portfolio of our ten best night photos. I wish it were due after our break so I could take pictures of you while you're home. But I guess I could take pictures of you anyway. I think the syllabus says we have to do action shots next, so maybe you could run and jump around while I take photos and I could get a head start on that assignment. I can't wait to see you!

Love, Mark

PS: What is your favorite class right now?

[in the margins, there are doodles of cameras: one fairly simple doodle, labeled "lame", and a more elaborate one, labeled "better". Mark has also written his name in a few fancy fonts.]

Joan: [in red] Dear Mark,

I've never known you to get a "head start" on anything related to school, so I am very pleased to hear it, even if it's just regarding one of your electives. I'm glad you're enjoying the class so much. You know I hate getting my picture

[continued on next page]

taken! And I also quite dislike running and jumping. So I'm not sure you'll be able to afford my help on this one. I'm thinking ice cream AND a movie — so I hope you've got some savings put aside!

My favorite class right now is Abnormal Psychology. Because I took all honors classes in high school, I don't have to take any general ed courses this year, fortunately. So I get to just focus on my major. Abnormal psych focuses on unusual, rare, or extreme cases of psychological disorders. Right now we're studying cult leaders. I've been learning a lot about Charles Manson and the Manson Family. I have a paper about him due after the break, but I have to focus on Manson's behavior leading up to his big break w/ fame as a mass murderer. Basically, his early

life. He is very interesting. And as a result, I've been listening to The White Album a lot. It's good to be home.

Love, J

Mark: WHAT? I've been listening to The White Album! On vinyl!!! Like all week! What? Were like telepathic or something! [drawing of two heads with rays coming off them, and squiggly thought lines flying between them]

Joan: [in black, written vertically up the left margin] I'd call that a coincidence, not telepathy. And don't play the vinyl too much! You'll destroy it!!!

Page 35

Mark: [in block printed letters from a label maker] These are prints I made but didn't use from a nature shoot in class. PS: I'm stealing your label maker.

[Two photographs. The first is a swan against an all-black background, curled up with its beak half-buried in its feathers as if it were about to go to sleep. The second is bare branches of a tree with a body of water in the background, reflecting foliage. There is also an "M" and "B" in the lower right-hand corner that look as if they've been cut out from a magazine.]

Page 36

Joan: **WHAT?! NO PRE-WRITTEN LETTER TO COME HOME TO???**

Mark: Sorry. School is kicking my butt.

Joan: **ME TOO.**

Mark: **Dear Joanie,**

Please forgive my tardiness in penning this letter. I have found myself quite overwhelmed as of late, due to an unfortunate situation at my institute of education. In my English class, we are reading a novel entitled, "Pride and Prejudice". And it is quite LOOOOOONGGGG. [the O's are filled in with yellow] It does not tickle my fancy. But I have been informed that I am teetering on the edge of a passing grade in this class, so I'm trying to "step up my game", as people often say. I much preferred "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest". The story and characters were of much more interest to me. And I could just watch the movie.

Love, Mark

Joan: [in pink] I'm pretty sure there is a movie of "Pride and Prejudice" too. [doodles of stars around her entry]

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Mark: **REALLY?** Well, you know what we're renting this weekend!

Joan: I DON'T KNOW IF THEY'LL HAVE IT. I THINK IT'S FROM THE 40s WITH LAURENCE OLIVIER. ANYWAY WE CAN JUST GO TO THE BOOKSTORE AND GET THE CLIFF NOTES.

Mark: **WHAT?** Is this my dear sister Joan, suggesting I cheat in school, or an alien imposter?

Joan: IT'S NOT CHEATING. IT'S JUST EXTRA HELP. LIKE A TUTOR. BESIDES, I DON'T COME HOME BETWEEN SEMESTERS TO WATCH MY LITTLE BROTHER READ.

Mark: Okay, okay. You know what's next to the bookstore? **ICE CREAM!!!!!!** ["ice cream" is in multicolored block letters]

Page 38

Joan: [in red] Art school?

Mark: [in blue] Yes and... [the rest of the line is filled in with dots]

Joan: [following a line of dots like Mark's] Nothing. Just wanted to say it (write it) out loud (on paper). What are you going to study?

Mark: Um... ART! Look... I'm good at it!

[stick figures of Joan and Mark. Joan has an angry face and is thinking "art school?" Mark has a neutral face and is thinking "yes, and..."]

Joan: Ha. Ha.

Mark: [in purple] Grad school????

Joan: [in green] Yessirree!

Mark: Why? Aren't you tired of school yef?

Joan: I want to get my PhD. I need to get my masters first.

Mark: WHY?

Joan: So I can be a doctor, Dummy!

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Mark: Why?

Joan: So I can help people!!!

Mark: oooohhhh. I seeeeeeee [the E's just sorta trail off into a scribble]

Joan: You will be my first patient. But I already know your condition is untreatable.

Mark: What condition is that?

Joan: **SMART-ASSERY** (yes, that's the medical term)

[drawing of a donkey wearing glasses; the drawing is good enough that it's probably Mark]

Joan: [in maroon next to the donkey] Why is being smart always associated with wearing glasses? Does this mean choosing to wear contacts makes me less smart? What about people who wear glasses but don't need them, like an accessory? Should they be considered smart?

Page 40

Mark: [in blue] Dear Joanie,

I can't stop thinking about what happened when I visited you at school. I think I'm getting anxiety or panic attacks or something. Every time I notice or feel something weird or unnatural about me — my body, my thoughts, even my feelings — I assume it's happening again and then I'm very suspicious of all the people even remotely near me. Do you think I should see someone? Can you help me?

Love, Mark

Joan: [in black] Dear Mark,

From now on let's not write about this kind of stuff here. Just to be safe. I know I sound paranoid, but I think it would be better if we only spoke in person. Especially since we used to just leave this notebook wherever. You can call me anytime. I mean it. Call my cell phone. I got a new plan where I don't have to buy minutes anymore. I am hesitant to suggest that you see

someone. I am a huge advocate for therapy, but I think your situation is extremely unique and I worry the average therapist or psychiatrist will drug you up or send you to in-patient. Don't do anything dumb. See you when I get home. Love, Joanie

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[row of dancing monkey stickers along the top of the page]

Joan: [in multicolored block letters] CONGRATULATIONS
HAPPY GRADUATION!

To my amazing, wonderful, intelligent, funny, kind, magical little brother:

I am so proud of you. And I am happy that you are going to college, even if it is art school :) I will always be proud of you no matter what you do. Well, within reason.

Love always, Joan

PS: I was cleaning out my old closet and found a bunch of old stickers from 10 years ago at least! I had forgotten how serious my sticker collecting habit was.

Mark: [in block letters] HEY! THANK YOU!!! [in normal letters] What are we going to do w/ this notebook now that we're both away from home?

Joan: I guess I can take it and then just bring it back w/ me everytime we come back or see each other?

Mark: Okay!

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Joan: [in black] Dear Mark,

I am and will always be proud of you and love you unconditionally no matter what. I am sorry that I hurt your feelings earlier. I only expressed concern because sometimes when people take time off between high school and college, it's much harder for them to go back to school later. Being in school is a very specific way of day-to-day life that is easily lost when out of practice. But you should follow your heart and do what you believe is right. Traveling is an invaluable experience that may, in fact, teach you more about life than school ever will. Perhaps I am just jealous because lately I have been feeling very trapped and sometimes I doubt that the field I'm in really helps anyone. It's just that sometimes the system really gets in the way of the work and it can be quite discouraging. But it looks like I'll be given an incredible opportunity soon. An internship of sorts in a really unique psychological field. I can't talk about it yet — I don't even

know all the details myself — but I'm told there's a lot of opportunity for growth. Anyway, I hope you will forgive me.

Love, Joanie

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Mark: [in green] Dear Joanie,

Of course I forgive you. I know that you are always just looking out for me. And I wasn't really mad or anything. I just didn't want to discuss it because I've already made the decision. You writing out a pros and cons list wasn't going to change my mind. Plus, two of the art schools I got accepted into said they'll defer my admittance as long as I send them a letter outlining what I'll be doing during my gap year. And one school said most likely, but they don't give me an answer until after I send the letter. I'll have to re-apply for financial aid but I can do that online from anywhere.

Anyway... enough of this boring talk, I'm craving PIZZA. I'm making an executive decision and ordering some NOW.

Love, Mark

Joan: [in purple] Dear Mark,

I cannot believe you ordered four large pizzas AND buffalo wings for two people Also I thought Hawaiian pizza came w/ ham — not SPAM! You must have ordered from one of those trendy "outside-the-box" pizza places again. Hey! Don't walk away while I'm writing at you!!!

Love, Joanie ["Joanie" trails off into a scribble]

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Joan: [in blue] Dear Mark,

I can't believe it's been so long since we've written in here. Time really does fly. And more so as I get older. My job has been draining. I'm learning and experiencing things that I never thought possible five years ago. And I'm so grateful for that. But sometimes I question our motives and whether or not we're really helping anyone. I don't know what I'm trying to say. But I have met some amazing human beings that I'd love for you to meet someday. If ever possible.

It feels odd being the one waiting for you to come back now. I worry this letter will not suffice the way yours always did. And now I'm just blabbing.

I'm excited you're staying with me for the holidays this year. My apartment could use a man's touch. Okay that came out wrong. Nevermind. I can't wait to see you! Only two more days.

Love, Joanie

Mark: [in brown] Dear Joanie,
PLEASE don't ever say or write the words "A man's touch" in my presence ever again. Or in anyone's presence for that matter. Your apartment is nice and the couch is not as lumpy as you implied. You could use

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some, oh, I don't know — **ART** — on your walls. It's very white in here. Perhaps I'll dig through some of my photos and souvenirs from over the years and see if I can find anything you might like. Or maybe some stuff I made in school that nobody would bother framing and hanging up unless they really needed to — which **you do**. Speaking of school, I'll know my graduation ceremony date like a year in advance so there will be no reason you can't make it.

It makes sense that you're questioning your job and stuff. And it proves that you're an intelligent, open-minded, good person. People who are stuck in their own ways and won't even consider second opinions are the cause of so much conflict in this world.

It would be fun to meet all your scientist + doctor friends someday. And you could meet all of my artist and musician friends. And maybe our two groups of friends could play capture the flag. I've always wanted to start a Capture The Flag Club.

Love, Mark

Joan: [in blue] Dear Mark,
I don't care for Capture the Flag. There's too much running + I get stressed I'll be stuck in prison the whole time. Of course I haven't played in 15 years or so but I clearly remember disliking it. ♥,
Joan

[In the margin, Mark has drawn a little blue flag and written "SMARTS vs. ARTS". "Smarts" has glasses on it, and the T in "arts" is tilted to the side. Joan has written "I thought that said 'arx' but now I get it"]

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Mark: [in green] Dear Joanie,
Your neighborhood is pretty sweet. Today I walked through the university campus to — I guess it's the downtown area? Or that few blocks with all the cafes and used bookstores and record shops. I found a used copy of an early hardcover edition of Vonnegut's "Welcome to the Monkey House". It was a little pricey but I had to get it. I remember that one time I was in middle school and I was really sick so you skipped school to take care of me and I asked you to read me a

story as a joke, but then you started reading that book to me and I was like “What is this? This is amazing!” After the bookstore, I got a free private yoga class. I stopped to get a coffee at some artsy cafe and the girl in line in front of me forgot her wallet, so I paid for her coffee and in exchange she gave me a private session at the yoga studio she owns next door. I **LOVE** your neighborhood. Can I live with you when I’m done with school?

Love, Mark

[Mark has doodled a monkey’s head in the margin]

Joan: [in red] Dear Mark,

Unfortunately my lease here will be up in a little over 3 months and I’ll be moving. This area is really being gentrified so all the rich college kids that can afford to live off-

[continued on next page]

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campus want to move into this area. So once my lease is up, the rent is increasing \$200/month! Plus, my commute to work is almost an hour right now. I spend more time there than on campus these days so I’m going to find a place closer to work. But you can certainly live with me wherever I am, if it’s cool enough for you.

Love, Joanie

PS: Please don’t ever write about the “private yoga sessions” you have w/ girls you meet in cafes in this book ever again.

Mark: [in blue] It was literally a private yoga session.

Joanie: STOP writing it! Seriously.

Mark: YOU seriously!

Joan: What???

Mark: PRIVATE YOGA SESSION

Joan: A MAN’S TOUCH.

[Stickers that look like cut-out letters in different fonts spell out “HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY GRADUATION”]

Joan: [in yellow block letters] I LOVE YOU

Mark: Thank you so much! I’m so happy you’re here!!! [happy face with a little arrow pointing to it and “me” written next to it]

Joan: I wouldn’t have missed it for anything!

Mark: Where did you get all those stickers?

Joan: Someone at work gave me a scrapbooking kit for my bday.

Mark: HA! You hate people who scrapbook!

Joan: I know. The irony.

Joan: [in black] Dear Mark,

I know I won’t see you for a couple of months, but I just felt like writing. It’s the middle of the night and I can’t sleep. I’m sorry it took me so long to return your phone call. To be honest I haven’t done anything except work the past month. And I’ve had a hard time sleeping lately. I bought a DVD box set of Carl Sagan’s “Cosmos” and watched the entire series in 3 nights. So that basically sums up my state of mind right now. But that’s no excuse, I know. I tried you again yesterday but your voicemail was full. You probably don’t have time to check your email very often either, but I sent you a message there too, just in case you lost your phone or something. I hope you are enjoying yourself frolicking around the country. Someday, I’d like to join you on one of your adventures. Until then,
Love, Joan

[Joan has doodled stars all over the upper half of the left margin, and written in the margin, “And you are made of a hundred million cells. We are, each of us, a multitude.” - Carl Sagan]