

12

Great Rock and Roll Pauses

By Alison Blake

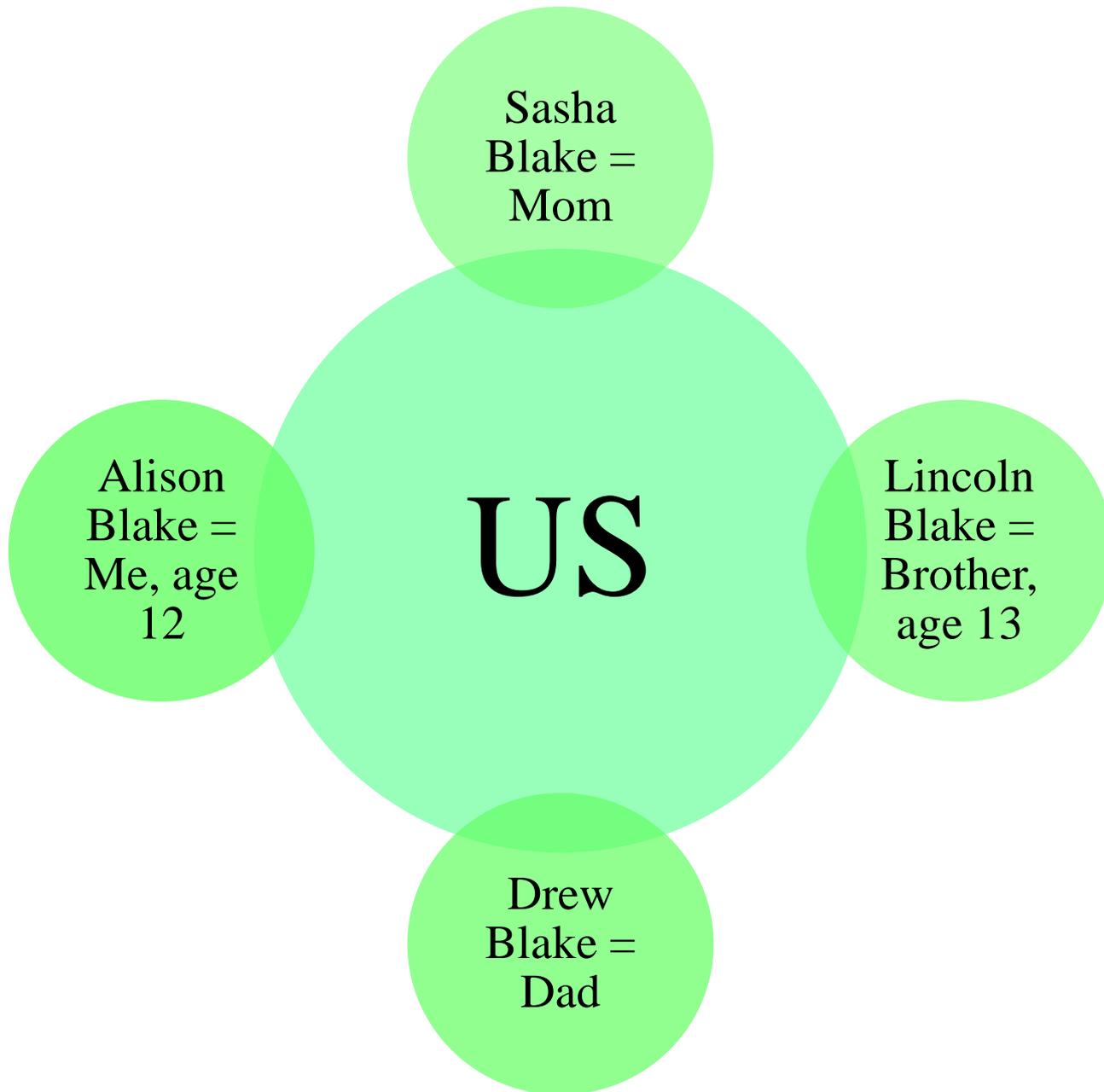
May 14th & 15th, 202-

1. After
Lincoln's Game

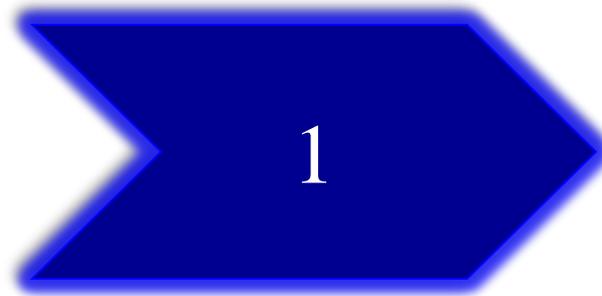
2. In My
Room

3. One
Night Later

4. The
Desert



After Lincoln's Game



Walking to the Car

- My arm around my brother's neck, skipping in the desert night.

- When kids say "Good game, Linc," I answer for him.

Cool air, but you feel heat coming up from the earth like from behind a person's skin.

I think I feel it through my shoes, but do I?

I was right: the ground is warm.

When I crouch to touch the parking lot, it glitters like coal in the streetlight.

- I stand up, slowly, rolling my eyes. "I know, Mom."

- "Alison, cars!" Mom yells, overreacting as usual (Annoying Habit #81).

Annoying Habit #48

*“Adios,
Sasha,”* says
Jason’s
Mom,
Christine.

*“Adios,
Christine,”*
Mom
answers.

*“See you
tomorrow,
Sash!”* says
Mark’s
Mom,
Gabby.

*“See you
tomorrow,
Gab!”* Mom
answers.

*“G’night,
Sasha,”* says
Dan.

*“G’night,
Dan,”*
Mom
answers.

In the Car

Me:

“Why do you have to repeat people’s *exact words* when you say good-bye to them?”

Mom:

“What are you talking about?”

I tell her precisely what I’m talking about.

Mom:

“Any chance of easing up on the scrutiny, Ally?”

Me:

“Not possible.”

Dad Is Working

Desert Landscape

When I was little,
there were lawns.

Now, you need a lot
of credits for a lawn
or else a turbine,
which is expensive.

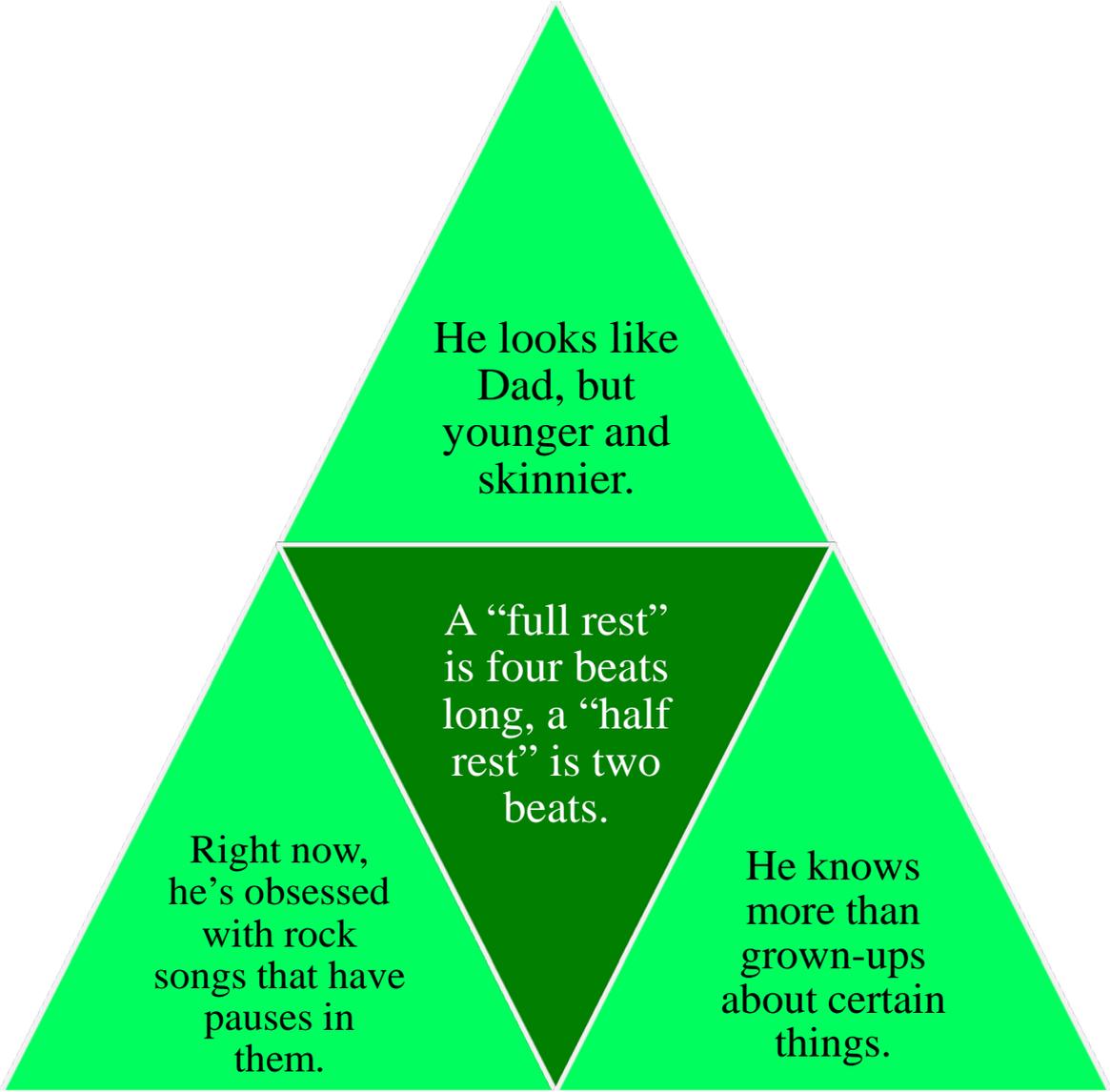
Our house is next to
the desert. Two
months ago, a lizard
laid eggs in the sand
by our deck.

Mom and Lincoln
and I sit at our
picnic table, looking
up at the stars.

Mom makes
sculptures in the
desert out of trash
and our old toys.

Eventually her
sculptures fall apart,
which is “part of the
process.”

Lincoln



He looks like
Dad, but
younger and
skinnier.

A “full rest”
is four beats
long, a “half
rest” is two
beats.

Right now,
he’s obsessed
with rock
songs that have
pauses in
them.

He knows
more than
grown-ups
about certain
things.

Songs with Lincoln's Comments

"Bernadette," by the Four Tops

- "This is an excellent early pause. The voice tapers off, and then you've still got 1.5 seconds of total silence, from 2:38 to 2:39.5, before the chorus kicks back in. You think, Hey, the song didn't end after all—but then, 26.5 seconds later, it does end."

"Foxy Lady," by Jimi Hendrix

- "Another great early pause: 2 seconds long, coming 2:23 seconds into a 3:19-minute-long song. But this one isn't total silence; we can hear Jimi breathing in the background."

"Young Americans," by David Bowie

- "This is a lost opportunity. Hell, it would've been so easy to draw out the pause after '...break down and cry...' to a full second, or 2, or even 3, but Bowie must've chickened out for some reason."

Dad vs. Mom

Dad Would Say
(if he were here):

“Wow, you’ve really analyzed those songs, Linc.”

“I admire you for digging into the minutiae.”

“You spend time with any other kids today?”

Mom Says:

“I like ‘Bernadette’ the best of those three.”

“I don’t think of Bowie as a chicken, so there must be some reason he opted not to pause there.”

“Please don’t say ‘hell.’ ”

Now Just the Pauses...

Lincoln loops the pause in each song so it lasts for minutes.



If my friends are around, I ignore Lincoln's music.



When it's just us, the pauses are my favorite.



They sound like this:



Mom Says:

“There’s a smokiness to the ‘Bernadette’ pause, probably because it’s recorded on 8-track.”

“It’s a little eerie to hear Hendrix breathing continuously—I’m not sure that qualifies as a true pause.”

“God, it’s a beautiful night. I wish your Dad were here.”

Why Dad Isn't Here

Doctor

- Today he operated on the heart of a girl younger than me.
- Her parents are illegal.

“Good Man”

- That's what everyone says about Dad.
- Because of his clinic.

Boss

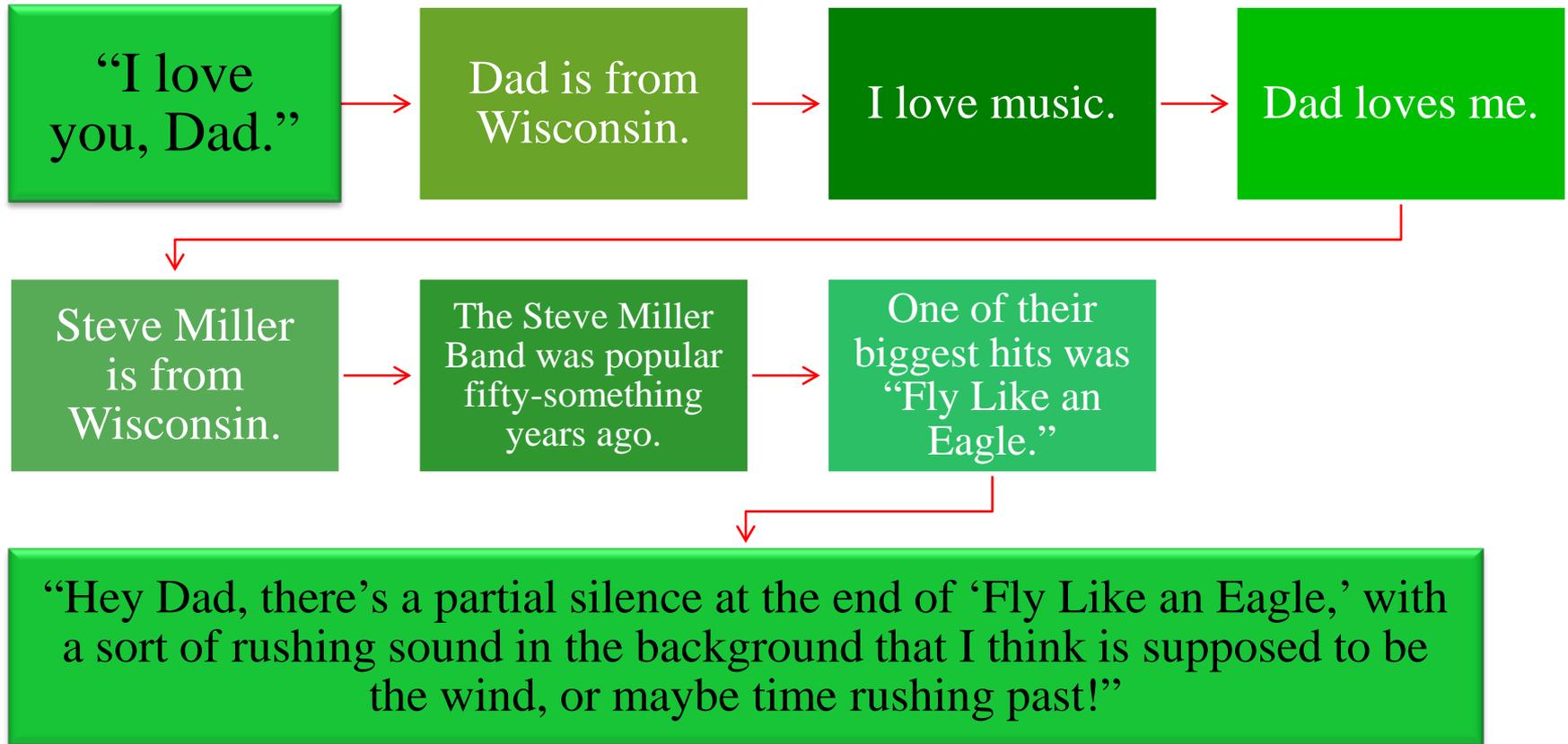
- At work, people follow Dad around with questions.
- In his office, he'll shut the door with a giant sigh and say, “Allycat, tell me what *you* did today.”

Weak Point

- He can't understand Lincoln.
- For example:



Lincoln Wants to Say/Ends Up Saying:



“Good to know, Linc,” Dad says.

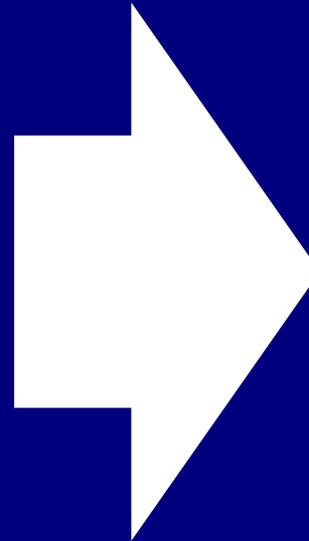
What I Notice During the Looped Pauses

A whisper of orange on the horizon.

A thousand black turbines.

Miles of solar panels like a black ocean I've never seen close up.

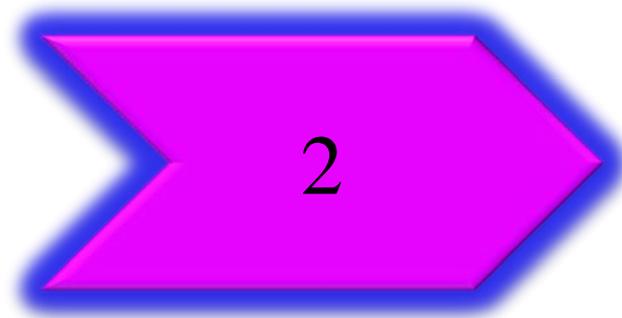
You can't get used to the stars, no matter how long you live here.



There was desert in Pakistan, but I don't remember it.

All I remember is this.

In My Room



Annoying Habit #92

Mom (seeing me making slides):

“Again?”

Me:

“So?”

Mom:

“Why not try *writing* for a change?”

Me:

“Excuse me, this is my slide journal.”

Mom:

“I mean writing a *paper*.”

Me:

“Ugh! Who even uses that word?”

Mom:

“I see a lot of white. Where does the writing come in?”

Slide Slogans from School That I Fire at Mom (just to annoy her)

“Give us the
issues, not
the tissues!”

“Please, Ally,
have mercy!”
Mom says.
But she’s
laughing.

“A word-wall is a
long haul!”

“Add a graphic
and increase your
traffic!”

“Charts should illuminate,
not complicate!”

Mom Spots the Toy Horse

I keep it on my windowsill. It's made of apricot shells.

She and Dad got it when they lived in Pakistan.

Mom told me once, "We thought our baby might play with that horse."

After Dad and Mom found each other again, she packed up her life in New York and met him overseas.

"I never looked back," she says.

I still play with the horse sometimes, alone in my room.

Even though I'm 12.

I like to make the prediction come true.

“Oh Ally, I love seeing that horse,” Mom says.

“What about this?” I Ask, and Open the Book.

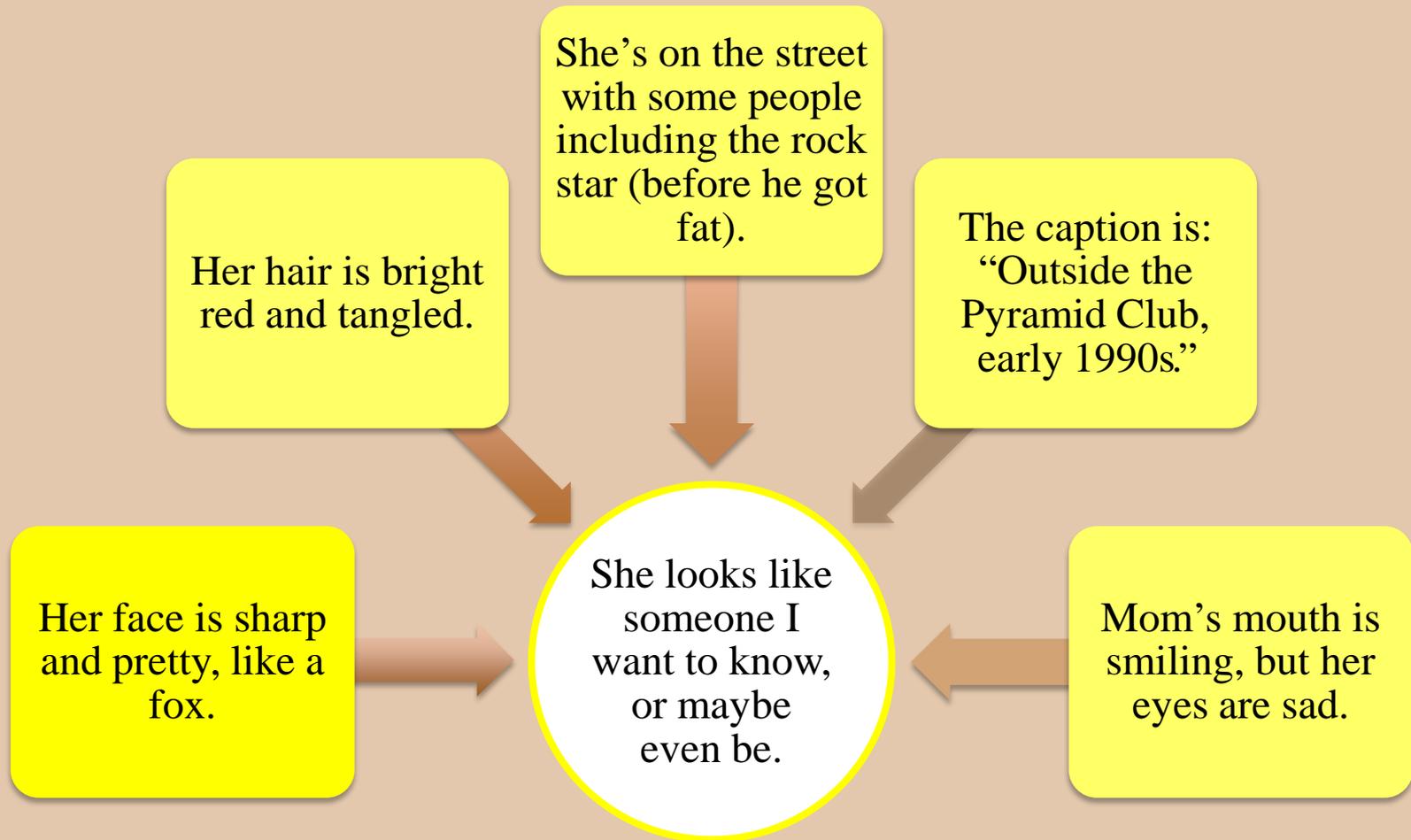
*Conduit: A Rock-
and-Roll Suicide*, by
Jules Jones

Mom bought the
book, but she never
mentions it.

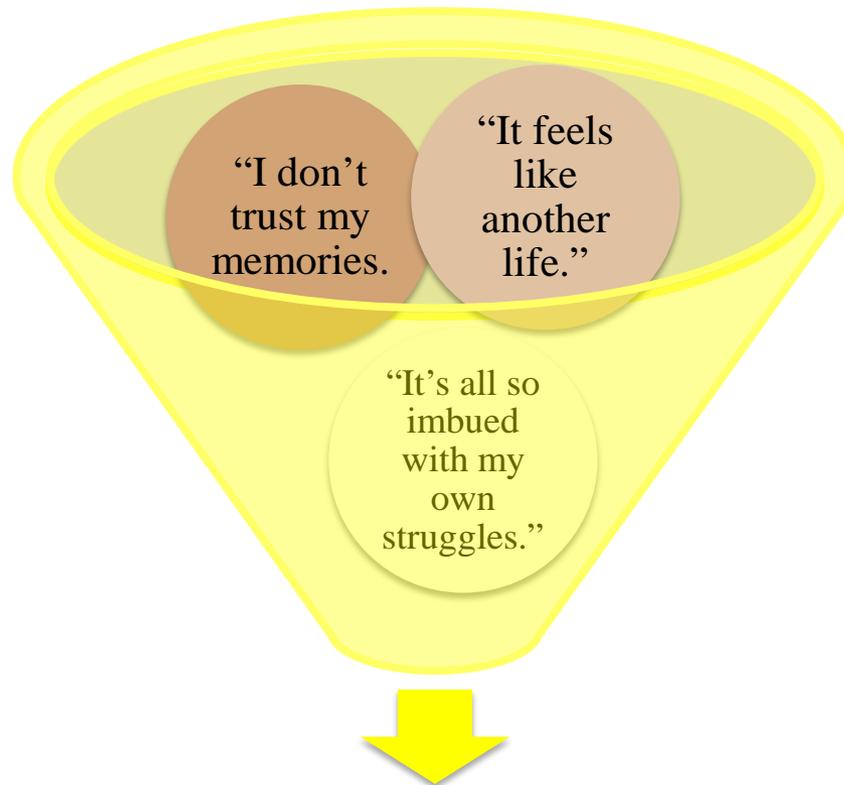
It's about a fat rock
star who wants to die
onstage, but ends up
recovering and owning
a dairy farm.

There's a
picture of
Mom on
page 128.

Sasha in the Picture



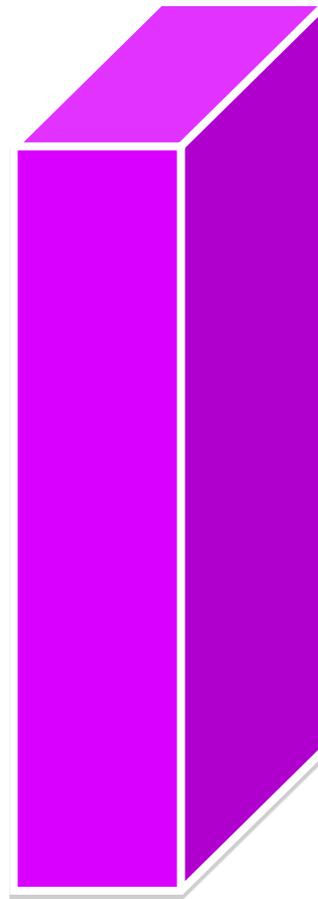
Mom's Reasons for Not Talking About That Time



"What struggles?" I asked her once.
"Nothing you need to think about," Mom said.

Lincoln's Bed Is on the Other Side of the Wall from My Bed

- 2 knocks from his side =
“Good night, Ally.”
- Mom will go to his room
next.
- Lincoln gets her longest.



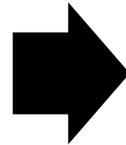
- 2 knocks from my side
= “Good night,
Linc.”
- I can hear them talking
through the wall.
- I get her first.

Mom Sits on the Edge of My Bed



What I Suddenly Understand

My job is
to make
people
uncomfort-
able.



I will
do it all
my life.

My mother,
Sasha
Blake, is my
first victim.

Lincoln Appears When I'm Half Asleep

He clamps his headset over my ears.

On the display it says, "Mighty Sword," by the Frames.

- Old music, I guess.

Music first, and then the pause...

I wait and wait and wait.

"Is that the end of the song?" I finally ask.

Lincoln starts to laugh, and I laugh, too.

He has a sweet, goofy giggle.

There are freckles on his cheeks.

"How long can one pause go?" I ask.

"A MINUTE AND FOURTEEN SECONDS!" Lincoln bellows.

“What is going on in here?”

Mom, in the doorway.

She’s holding a handful of the little papers she makes into collages after we’re asleep (Annoying Habit #22).

“Bedtime, kittens,” she says.

She collages in her Waiting Chair, in the living room.

I don’t know why she loves junk so much.

“Back to your room, Linc. It’s a school night.”

Usually when Dad’s not home yet.

“Not junk,” Mom will say.

“Tiny pieces of our lives.”

Mom's "Art"

Dinner prty
Langs—bring
wine!

Buy Sharpies
Blk

Kids—
call
Gma
Blake!!

Caring for
your
SmartFan

She uses
"found
objects."
"

They come from
our house and
our lives.

Ally
sleepover
@Suzette
9/19

Eye appt
3:30
Wed

Pick
up
shoes

She glues
them
onto
boards
and
shellacs
them.

Linc—therapy
2pm

Ada's
pie
crust—
use
lard!

She says
they're
precious
because
they're casual
and
meaningless.

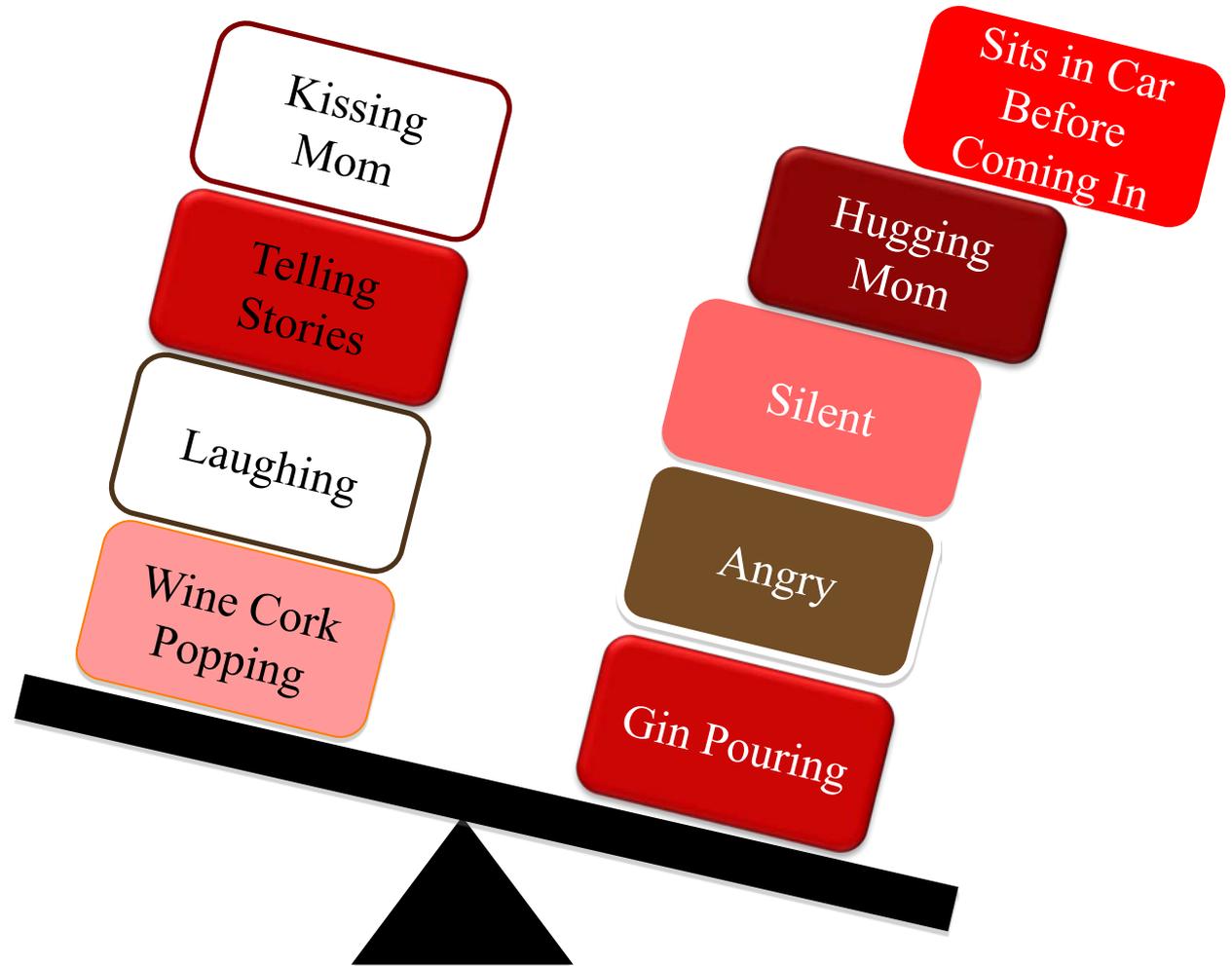
"But they
tell the
whole story
if you
really
look."

I look when she's
not there.

Mexico Flight
Conf:#:XJKD78
77

1/18
Grapes
Skim milk
Earl Grey tea
Drew shampoo
Krazy Glue
Peanut butter
Rolaids

Ways It Can Be When Dad Comes Back



Dad Comes Home Late

I hear the
brushing
door
through my
sleep.

I peek
through
my door
slit.

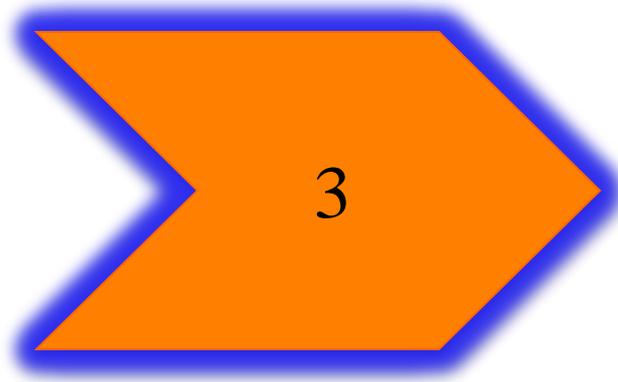
Mom has
her arms
around
Dad.

His face is
in her hair.

They don't
say
anything.

There's a blanket on
Mom's Waiting Chair
where she fell asleep.

One Night Later



Dad Barbecues Chicken on the Deck

We eat all together at the picnic table.

Dad asks us about school, and I tell him.

His dinners are better than Mom's, even when they cook the same thing.

Mom keeps her arm around Dad and kisses the side of his face (Annoying Habit #62).

I want to ask about the girl with the heart.

Facts About Dad

Right after he shaves, his skin will squeak if you push your finger across it.

His hair is thick and wavy, unlike a lot of dads.

He can still lift me onto his shoulders .

When he chews I hear his teeth smash together.

- They should be in pieces, but they're strong and white.

When he can't sleep, he walks into the desert.

It's a mystery why he loves Mom so much.

Dad's Laugh

It's hard to make
Dad laugh.

When he does, it's a
big sound like a bark
or a roar.

Maybe the bark or roar is his
surprise at laughing.

Mom says Dad used to laugh more.

“Everyone laughs more as a kid,” she says
(including college).

True Story

When Dad was in college, he went swimming with a guy named Rob, and Rob drowned.

That was when Dad decided to become a doctor.

“Why not become a lifeguard?” I’ll sometimes ask.
“Or a swim instructor.”

“Good point,” Dad says.
“Think I still can?”

Before that, Dad wanted to be president.

“Who doesn’t, at 18?” he’ll say.

Dad will tell anyone this stuff.

“Keeping secrets can kill you” is one of his favorite sayings.

Rob Was Mom's Best Friend.

She keeps his picture in her wallet.

He's primordially cute, with reddish face stubble and nice eyes, like a mountain climber.

Still, Dad is more handsome.

If you look carefully, you can tell that Rob will die young.

"Did you love him?" I asked Mom.

"What was he like?"

"Why did he drown?"

"Why couldn't Dad rescue him?"

He has that look of someone who's only in old pictures.

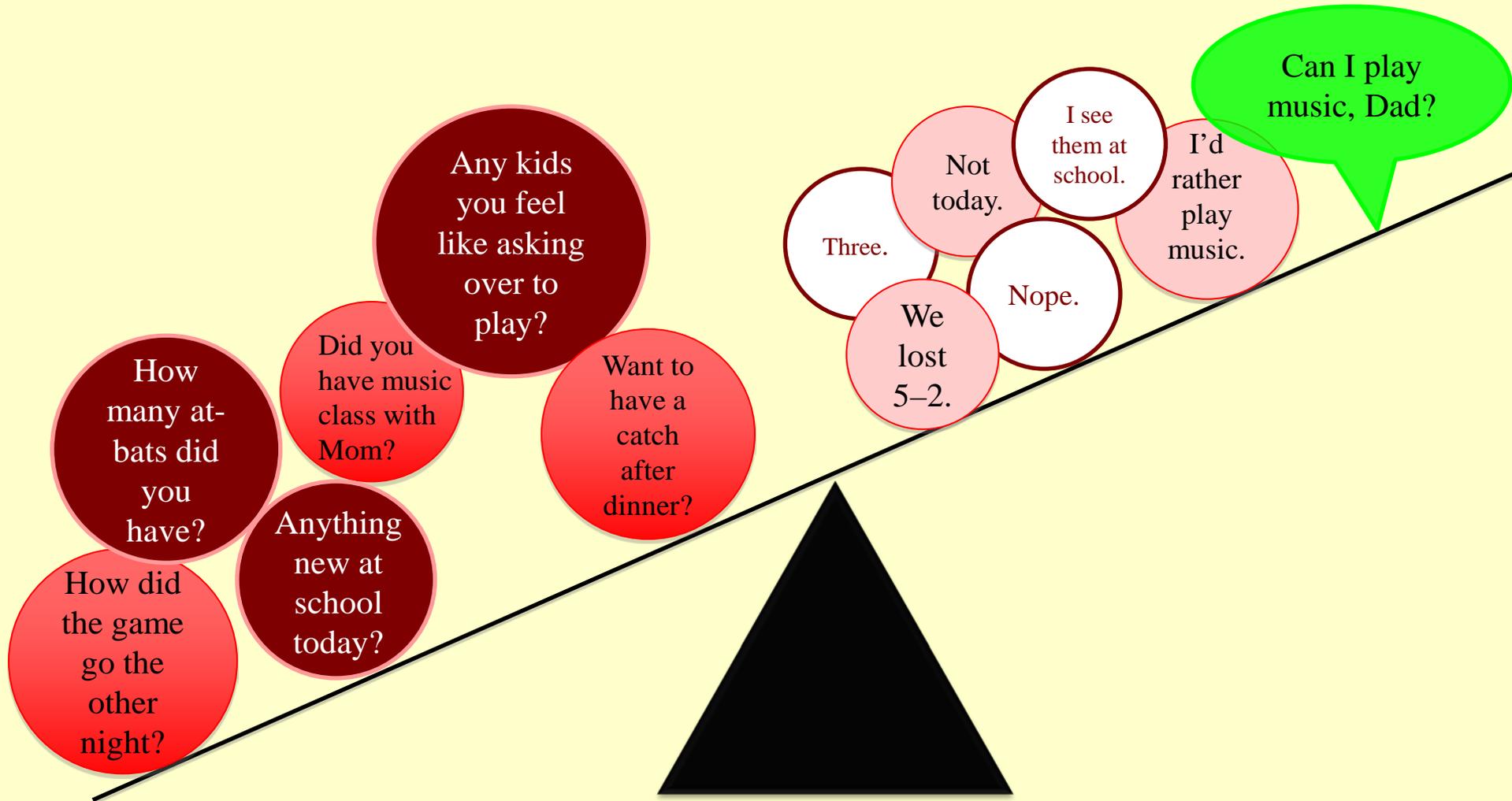
"Yes. As a friend."

"He was sweet and confused, like a lot of kids."

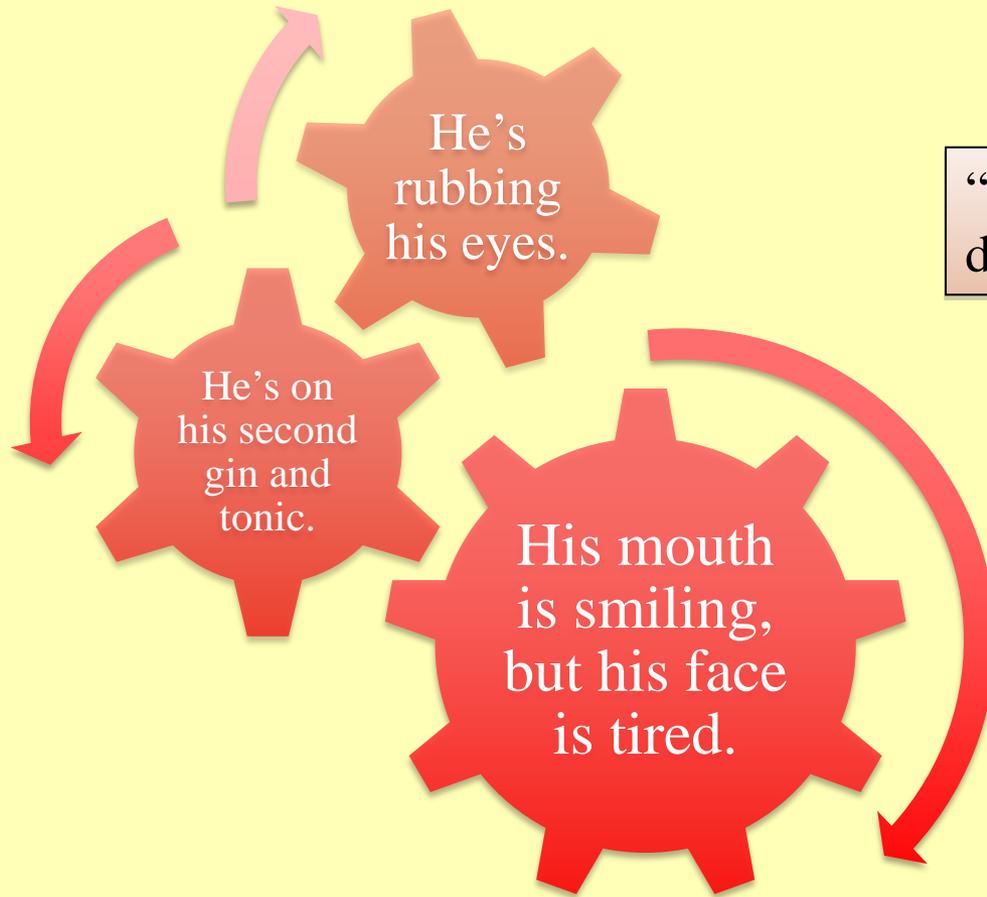
"He wasn't a strong swimmer, and he got caught in a current."

"He tried."

Dad's Questions/Lincoln's Answers



Signs That Dad Isn't Happy



“Sure, Linc,” he says, after dinner. “Let’s hear some music.”

Songs with Lincoln's Comments

"Long Train
Runnin'" by the
Doobie Brothers

- "The pause is only 2 seconds, from 2:43 to 2:45, but it's basically perfect: the refrain comes back in and then the song goes until 3:28—even after the pause, you've got almost another full minute of music."

"Supervixen" by
Garbage

- "This one is unique, because the pauses happen when there's *no rest in the music*. They're just second-long interruptions—from :14 to :15 and again from 3:08 to 3:09. It sounds like there's a gap in the recording, but it's intentional!"

Dad, to Mom, Whispering Under the Music (but I can hear him)

“Should we be encouraging this?”

“Of course we should.”

“How is this helping him connect to other kids?”

“It connects him to the world.”

“Why not try to divert him onto something else?”

“This is what he cares about right now.”

“But what *is* it, Sasha? What is ‘*this*’?”

“Drew,” Mom says, “it’s music.”

Dad/Lincoln

- “Lincoln, before you play another song, I—I’d love to know why the pauses matter so much to you.”

Dad

Lincoln

- “ ‘Roxanne’ has one, that old song by the Police? There’s a pause from 1:57 to 1:59—”

- “Okay, Linc, but I’m asking you—”

Dad

Lincoln

- “In ‘Rearrange Beds’ by an Horse, there’s a 2-second pause from 3:40 to 3:42, and unlike a lot of songs, where you basically know the song’s not over even though the pause makes you wonder if maybe it is, with ‘Rearrange Beds’ it really, truly sounds like—”

“Stop!” Dad shouts. “Stop. Please. Forget
I asked.”

Lincoln Starts to Cry

His crying makes sounds like scraping.



Hearing him cry makes me cry, too.



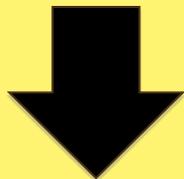
Dad tries to hug Lincoln, but he flinches away and hunches into a ball.



Mom's face is white and furious.

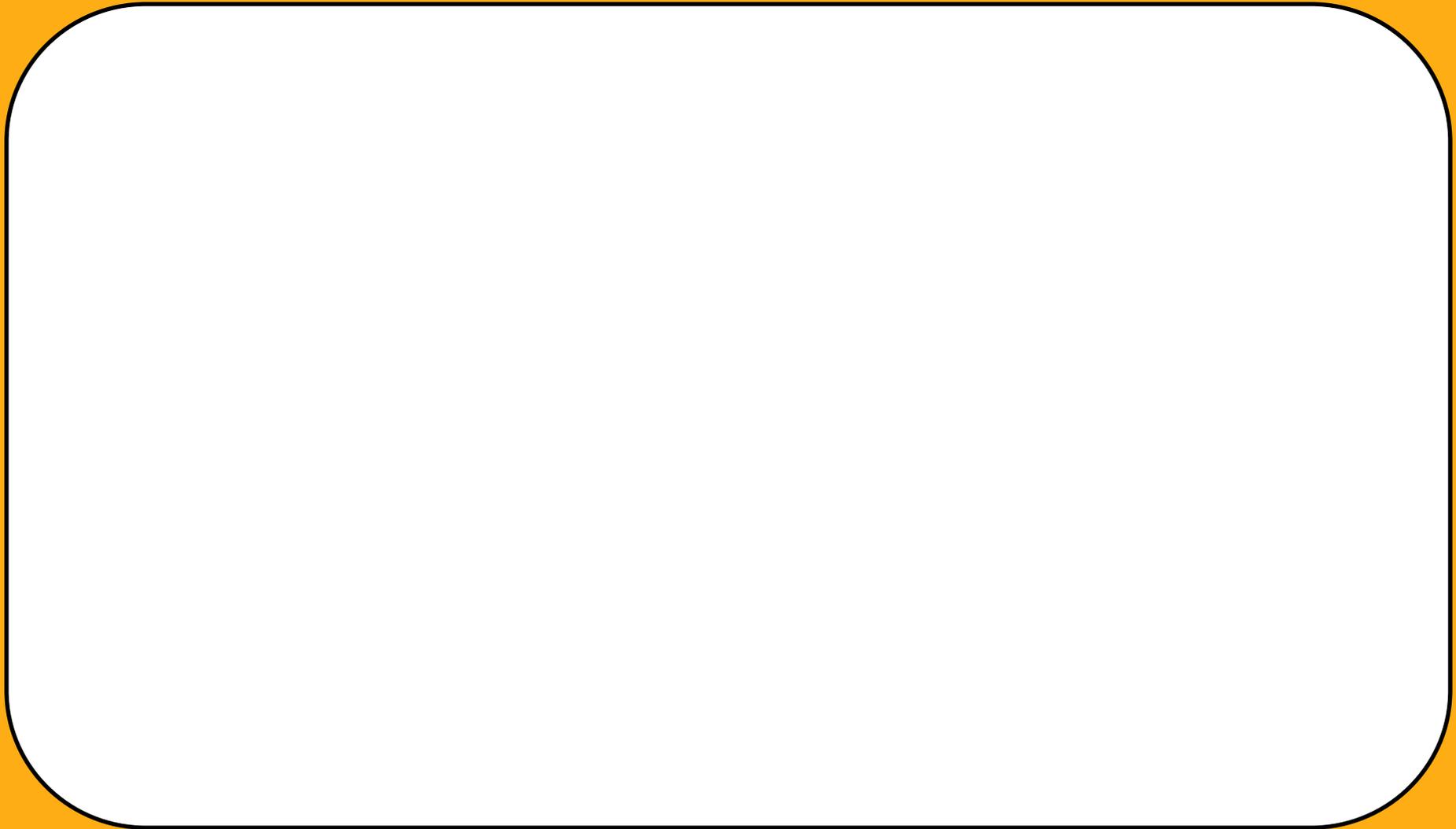


She leans close to Dad, and says very softly:



“The pause makes you think the song will end. And then the song isn’t really over, so you’re relieved. But then the song *does* actually end, because every song ends, obviously, and **THAT. TIME. THE. END. IS. FOR. REAL.**”

A Pause While We Stand on the Deck



Then Dad Gathers Lincoln into His Arms

Lincoln fights him, but Dad is stronger.
“Okay,” Dad says softly.
“Okay, Linc. I’m sorry.”

Even when Lincoln stops struggling, he keeps sobbing. His shoulder blades jab through his shirt.

They look so much alike, it’s like watching Dad hug his skinny, long-ago self.

Lincoln Runs Inside and Slams His Bedroom Door

Mom follows him.

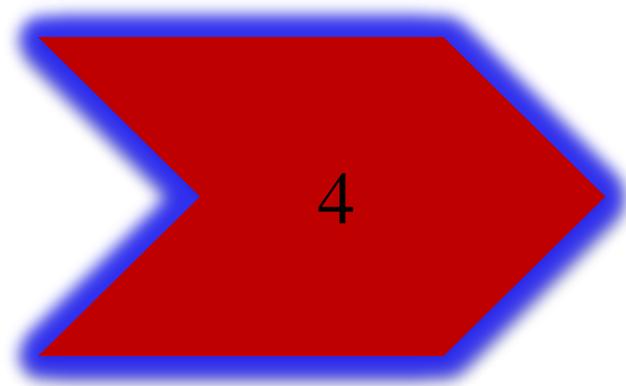
I stay on the porch with Dad.

The sunset is a bonfire over our heads.

Dad drains his gin and tonic and shakes the bare ice.

“Feel like a walk, Ally?” he asks.

The Desert



It Starts Where Our Lawn Used to Be

Three steps down from
our deck, the desert
surrounds us:

Mountains
like cutout
paper shapes.

Big-top sky
full of stars.

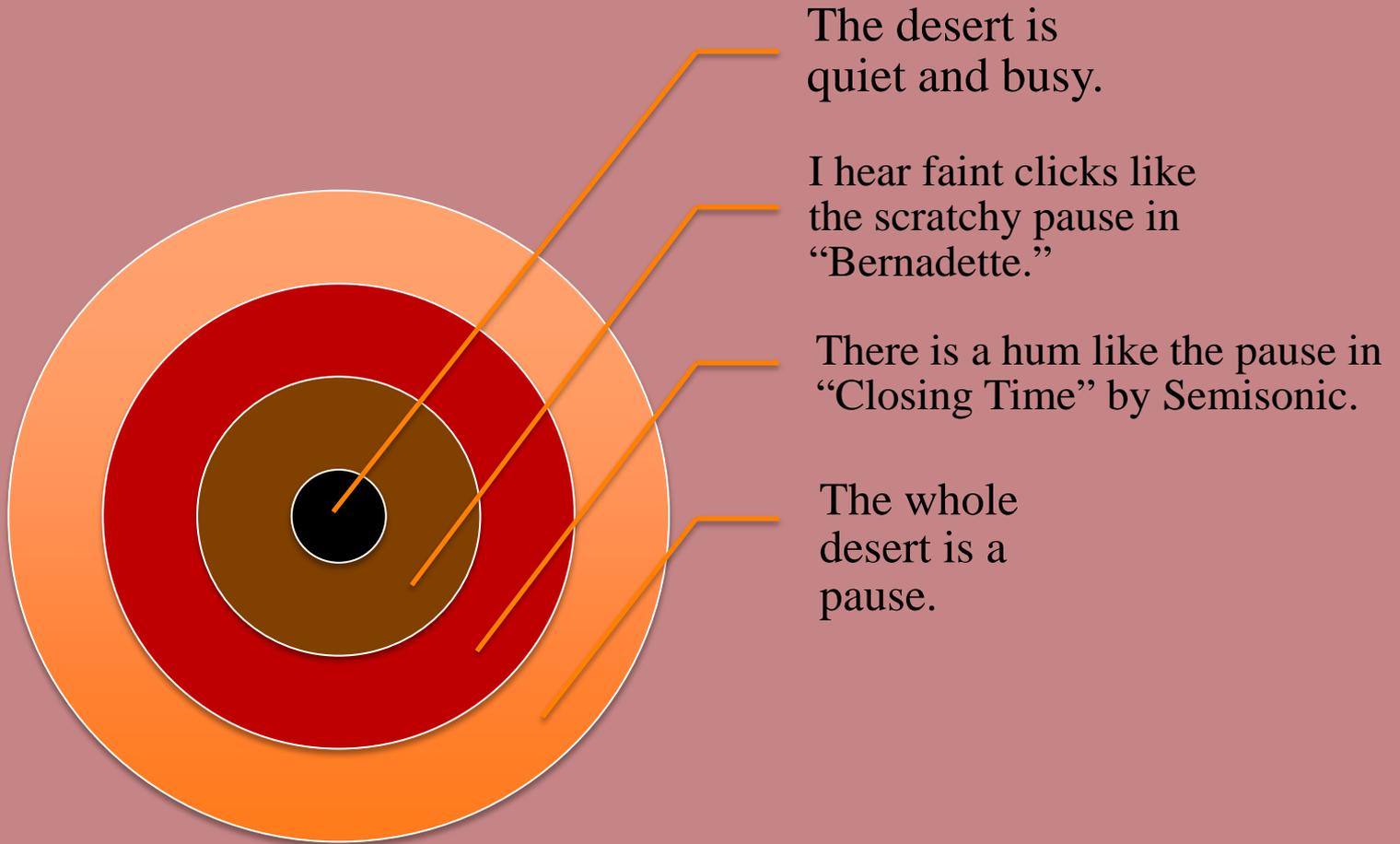
Mom's sculptures made of
train tracks and doll heads
fading into the dust.

"Careful of snakes," Dad
says.

"It's too cold,"
I say. "They're
sleeping."

"Let's keep it
that way," Dad
says.

Sounds



“I’ve got to do better with Lincoln,” Dad Says.

Me:

“He needs help graphing
the pauses.”

“But will you really?”

“He’s been asking me, but
I’m terrible at graphing.”

Dad:

“I could do that.”

“If I say I will, I will.”

“I might have to brush up a
little...”

The Old Golf Course

There are lots of grayish swells and dips, like the moon.

The clubhouse is still there, roped off and collapsing.

Dad stands in a shallow hole and grins at me.

“I remember this trap,” he says.

“You used to play here, right?” I ask.

“Sure. All doctors play golf.”

Dad doesn't have time for friends.

“You're the only friends I need,” he'll say. Meaning us.

I remember riding the cart between purple flower beds.

Dad doesn't like most doctors. “They're arrogant,” he says.

A Long, Empty Stretch of Walking

“Is Mom mad?” I ask.

- “I believe she is.”

“Will she forgive you?”

- “Of course.”

“How do you know?”

- “Your mother is the forgiving type. Thank God.”

“Did she forgive you when Rob drowned?”

- Dad stops walking and turns to me. The moon has just come up. “What made you think of him?”

“Sometimes I just do.”

- “Me too,” Dad says.

After a Long Time, We Reach the Solar Panels

I've never
walked this far.

The panels go
on for miles.

It's like
finding a city
or another
planet.

They look evil.

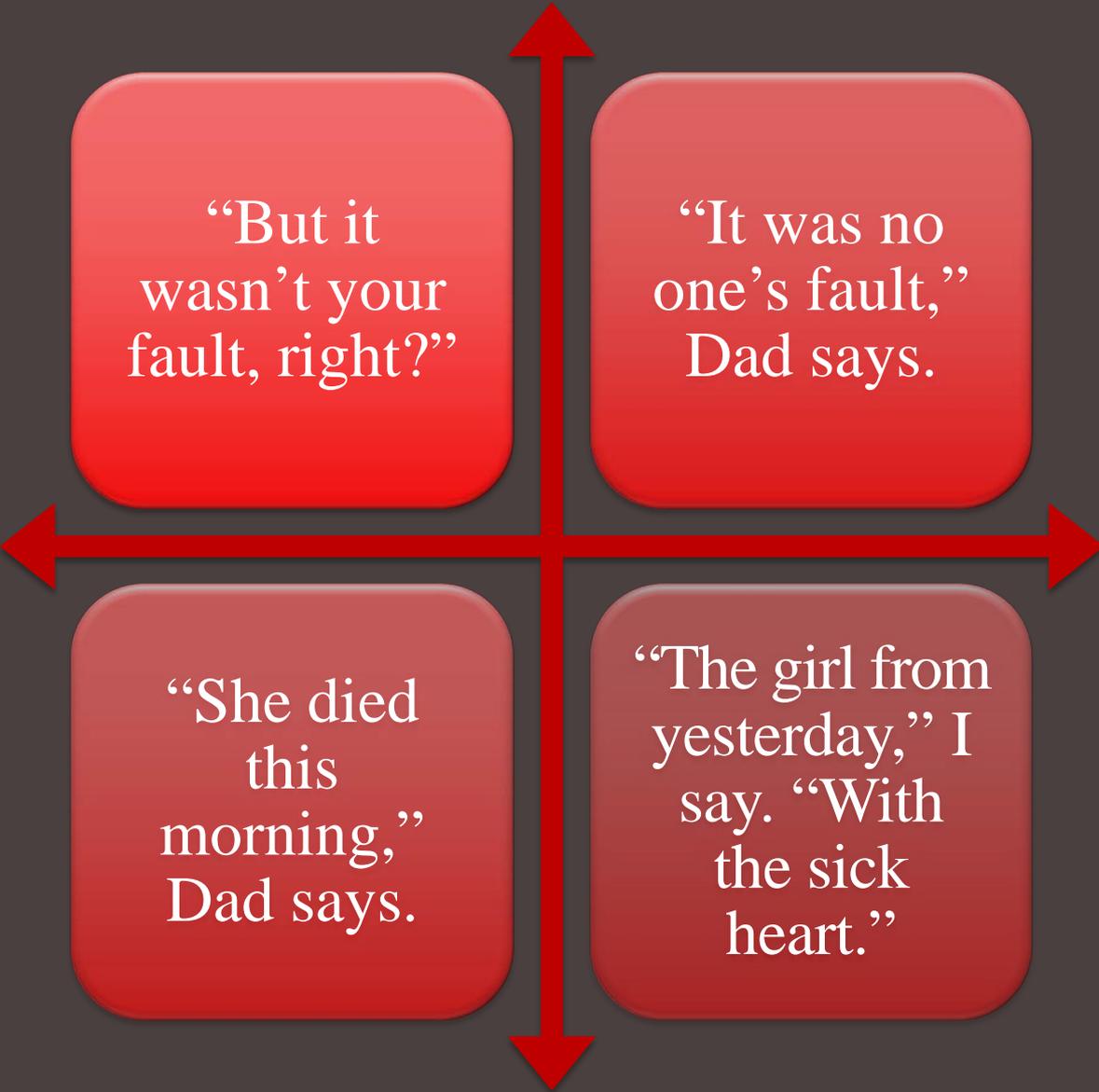
Like angled
oily black
things.

But they're
actually
mending the
Earth.

There were
protests when
they were built,
years ago.

Their shade
made a lot of
desert
creatures
homeless.

But at least they
can live where
all the lawns and
golf courses
used to be.



“But it
wasn’t your
fault, right?”

“It was no
one’s fault,”
Dad says.

“She died
this
morning,”
Dad says.

“The girl from
yesterday,” I
say. “With
the sick
heart.”

Suddenly, There's a Whirring Noise Around Us

Thousands of solar panels lift and tilt at the same time, in the same way.

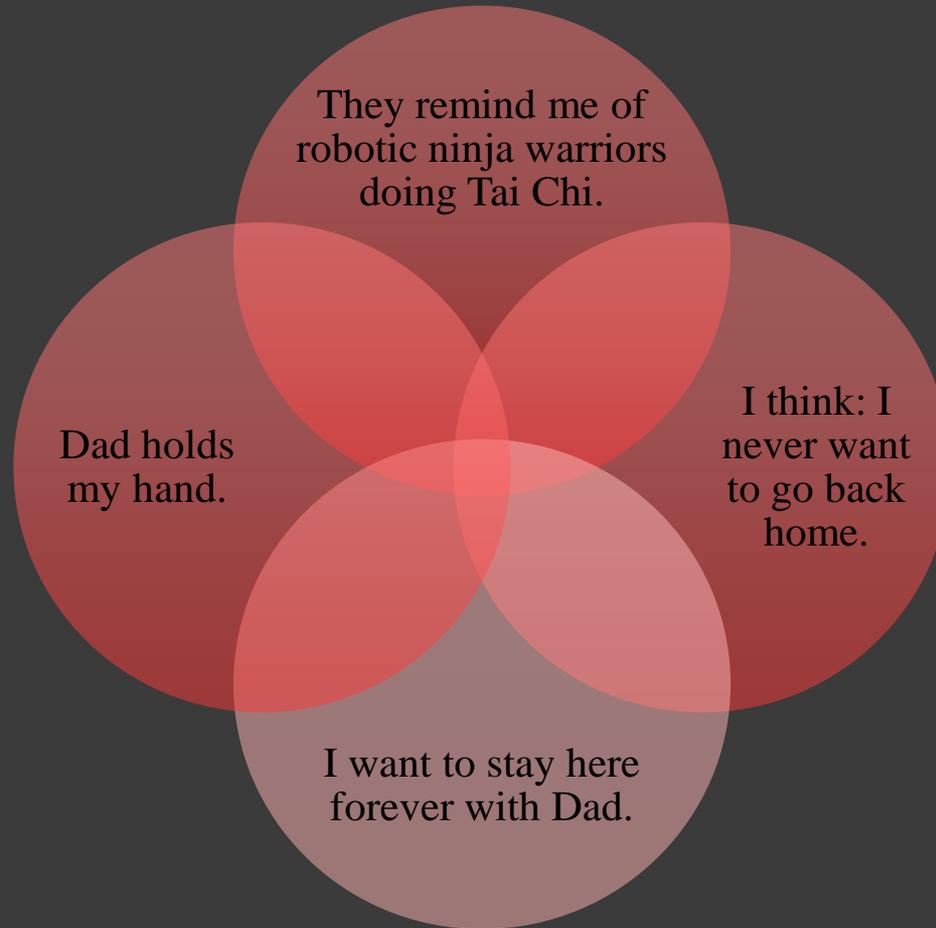
I clutch at Dad's arm: "Why are they doing that?"

"They're collecting moonlight," Dad says, and I remember: it's weaker, but we use it.

The panels shift and move.

"Is this where you come when you walk in the night?"
I ask.

We Stand a Long Time, Watching the Solar Panels Move



Me/Dad

“Have you heard of a group called the Frames?”

- “I think your Mom used to listen to them.”



“They have a song called ‘Mighty Sword’ that has a pause of more than a minute.”

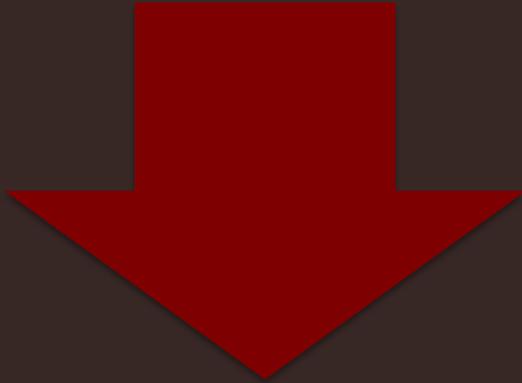
- Dad stares at me. “Come on, Ally. Not you, too.”



“You have to admit, that’s a long time for a song to pause.”

- Suddenly Dad laughs in his big churning way. “You’re right! That is a very long pause.”

After a While, I Feel Like Curling Up on the Ground and Closing My Eyes



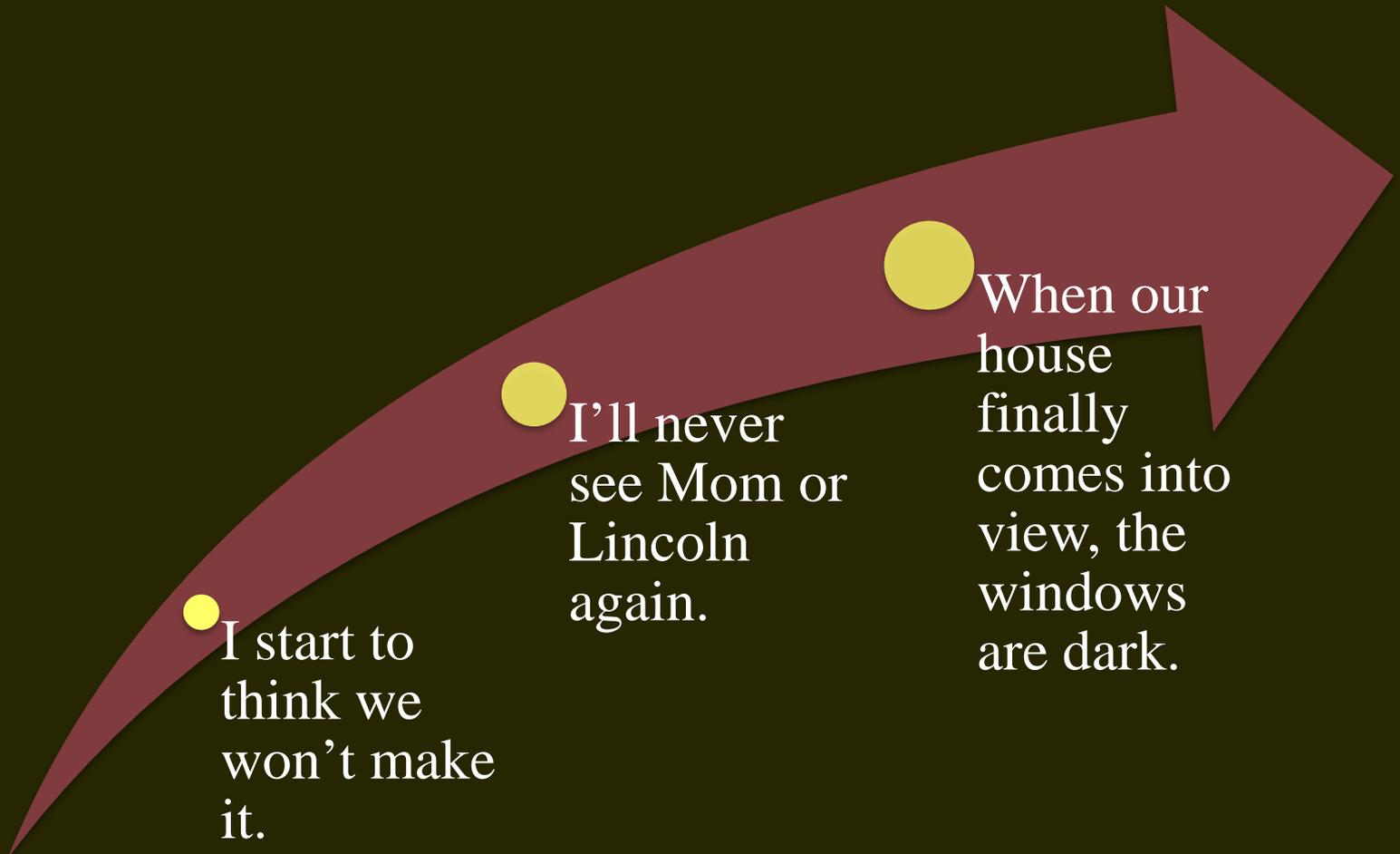
“I wish I were
already in bed,”
I say.



“Brace
yourself,” Dad
says. “It’s a
long way back.”



We Walk for Several Years



I start to think we won't make it.

I'll never see Mom or Lincoln again.

When our house finally comes into view, the windows are dark.

Dad Points to a Snake on one of Mom's Sculptures

It's coiled like
a silver rope on
my old puppet
theater.

Dad lifts me onto
his shoulders.

"Do you think
they're inside?"
I ask.

He's the
strongest man
in the world.

He carries me
toward our
house.

Dad doesn't
answer.

It looks
abandoned, like
the clubhouse
at the golf
course.

Suddenly I'm
scared.

What I'm Afraid Of

That the solar panels were a time machine.

That I'm a grown-up woman coming back to this place after many years.

That my parents are gone, and our house isn't ours anymore.

It's a broken-down ruin with no one in it.

Living here all together was so sweet.

Even when we fought.

It felt like it would never end.

I'll always miss it.

Dad Sets Me Down on Our Porch

I run to the sliding glass door and yank it open.



Inside there's a light.



Familiar things fall back over me like the softest, oldest blanket.



I start to cry.

What I Hear as I'm Falling Asleep

Hey
Linc.

Yeah.

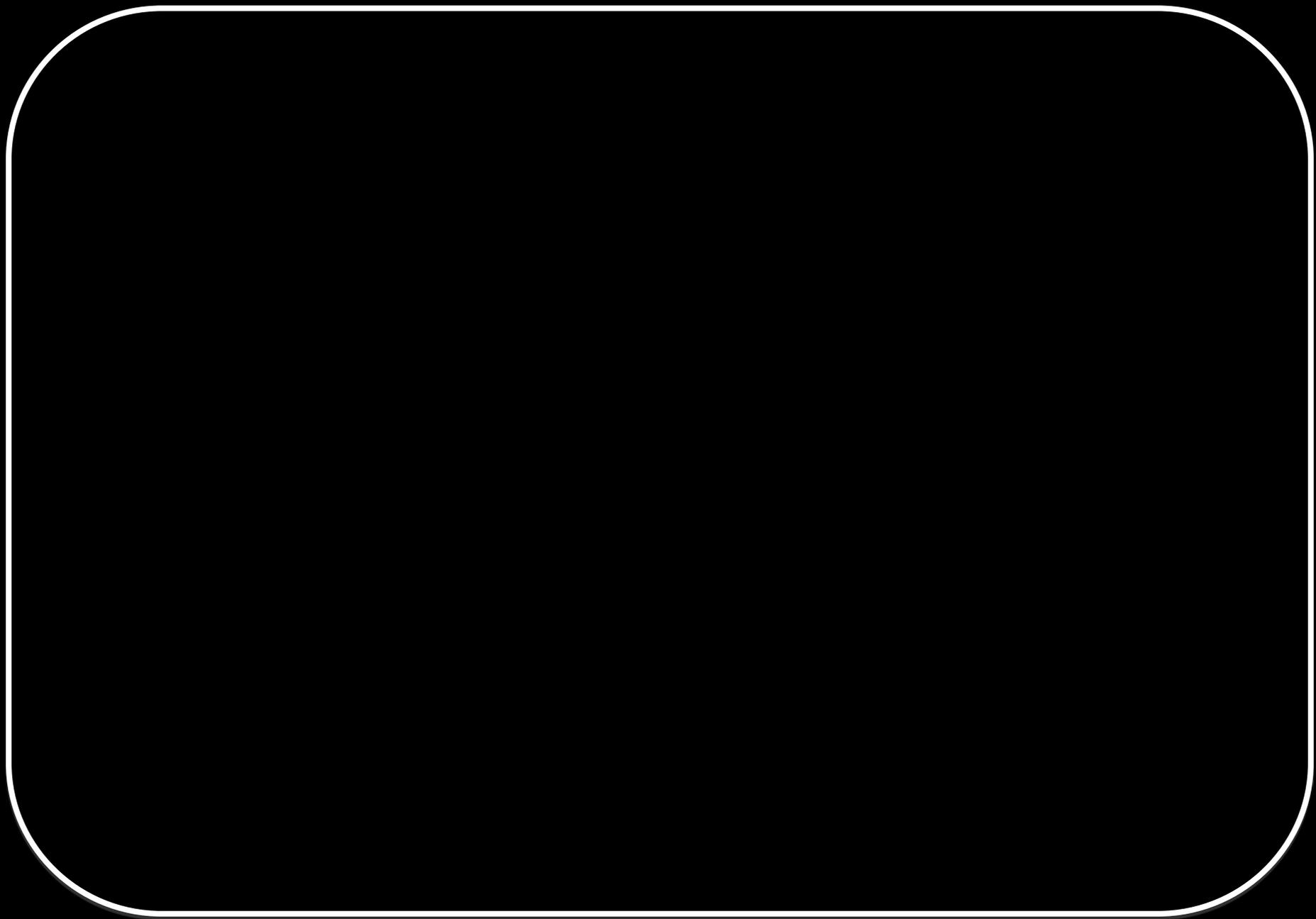
You
hear that
sound?

No.

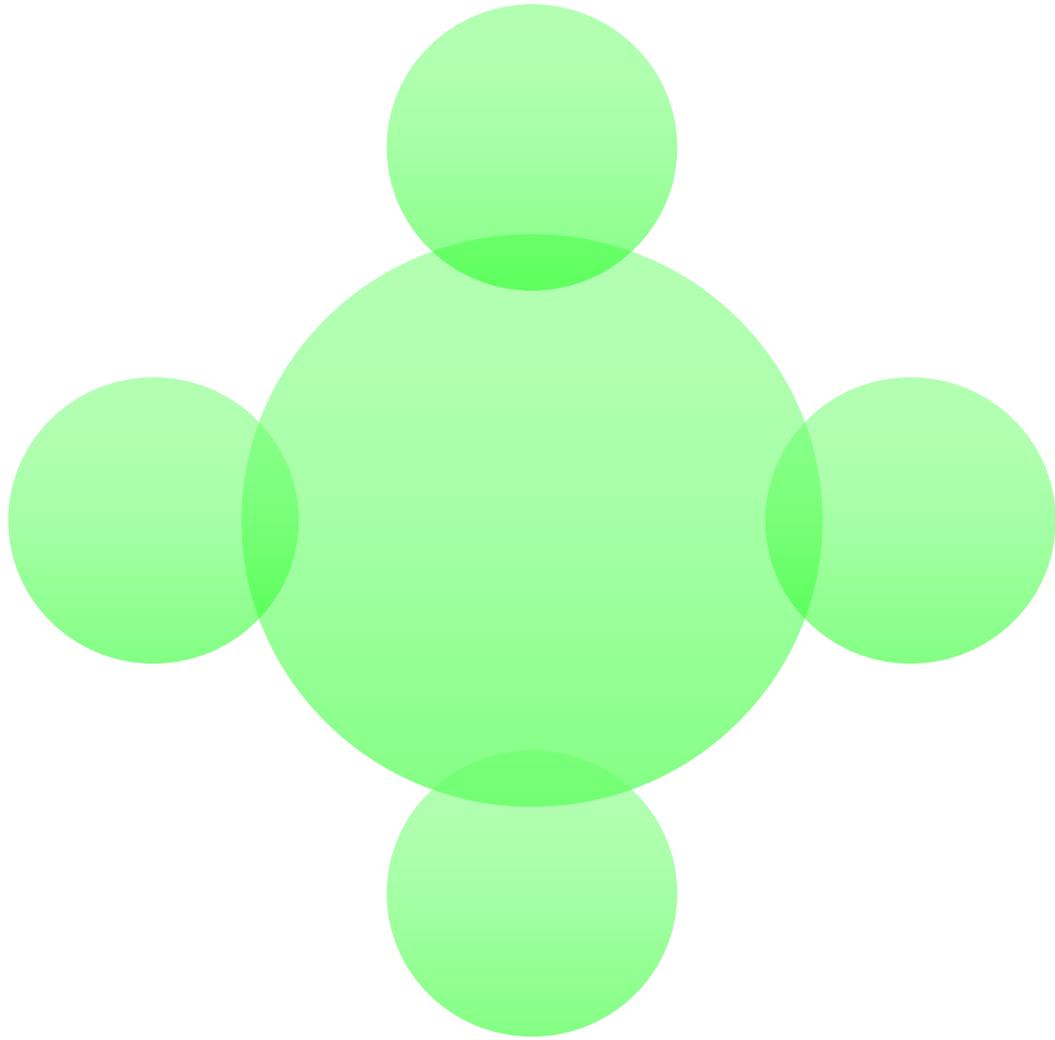
That.

No, Pop.

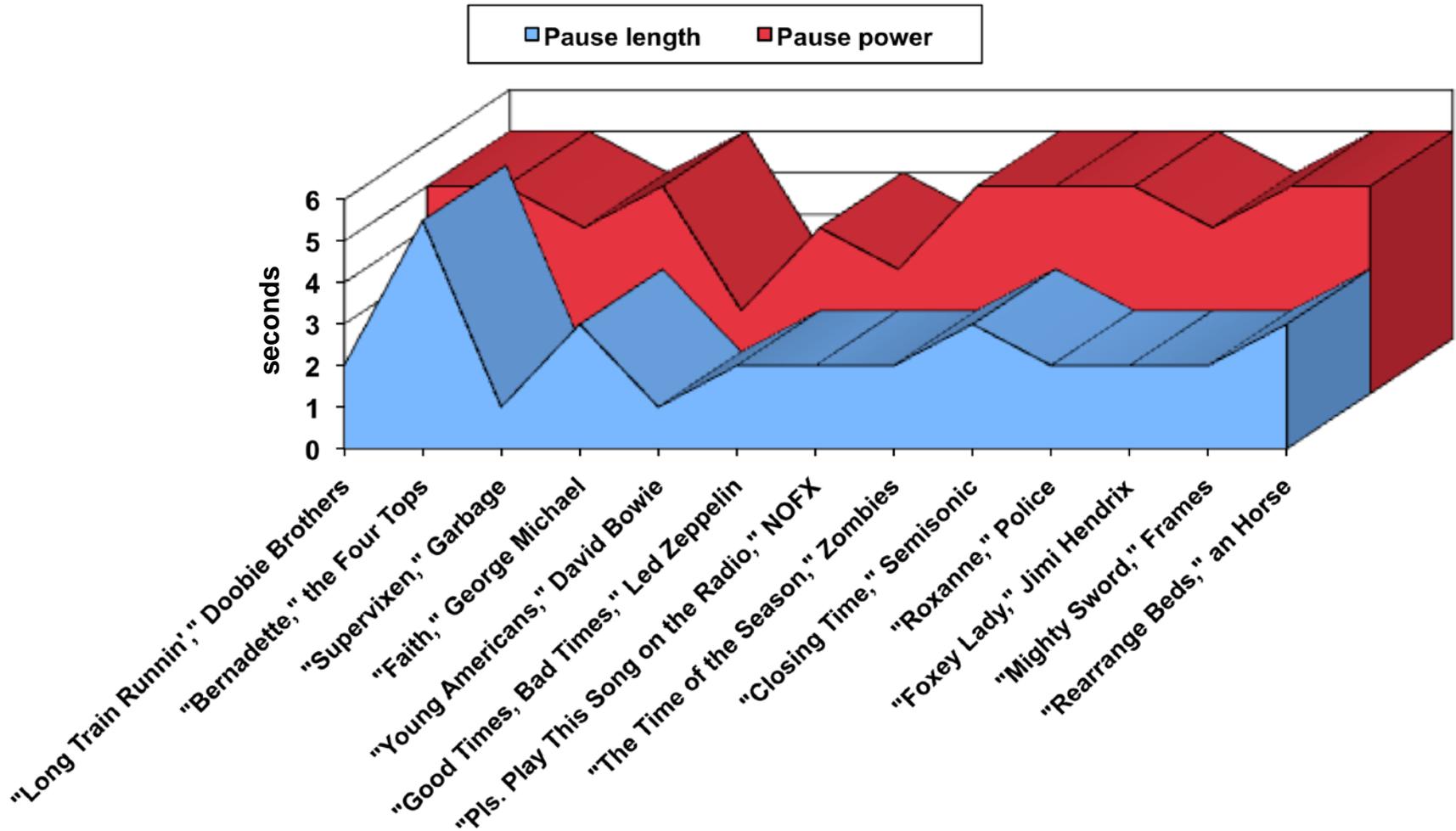
Here, let's stand by the
window. Listen with me.
What does that sound like
to you?



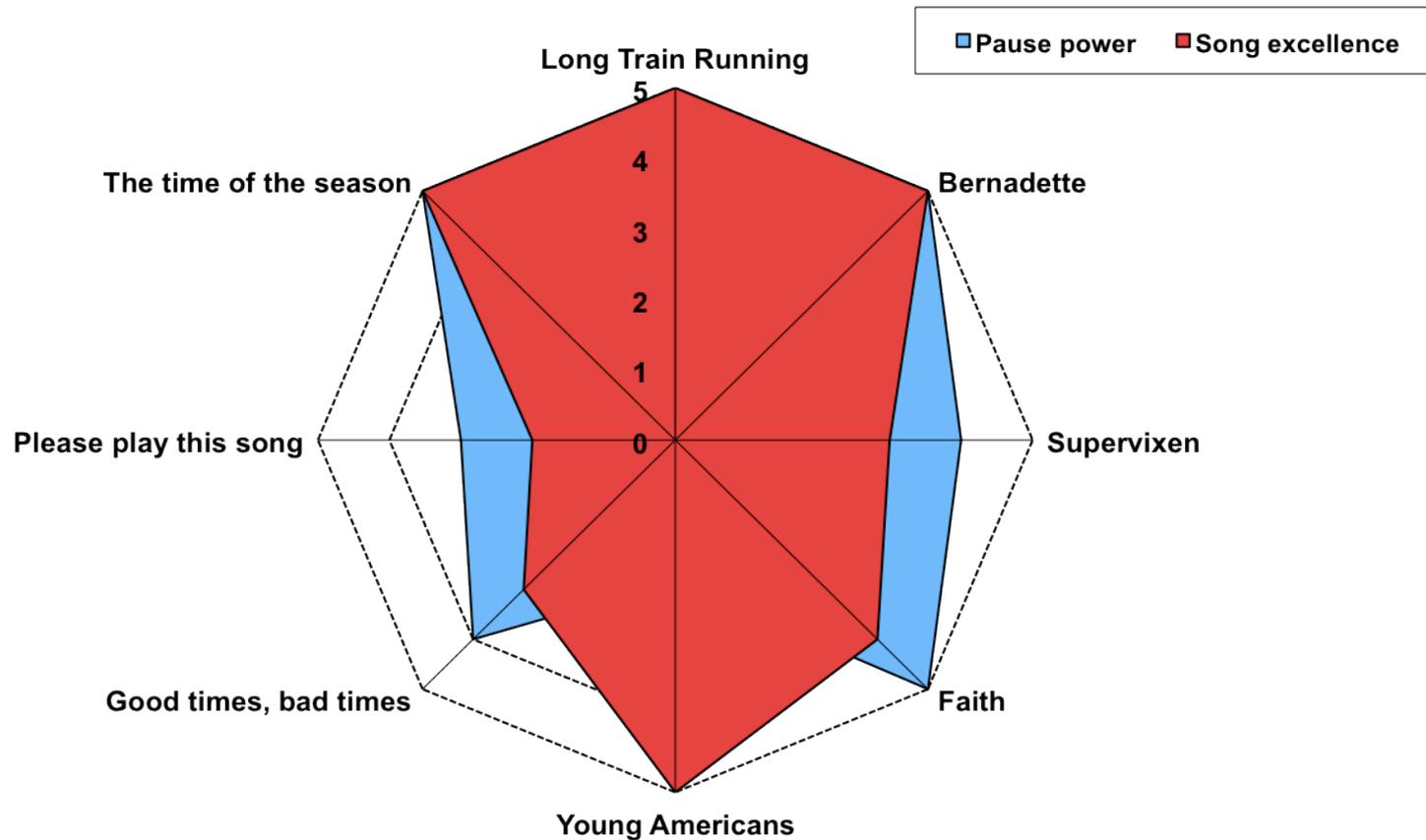
“Okay. I know.”



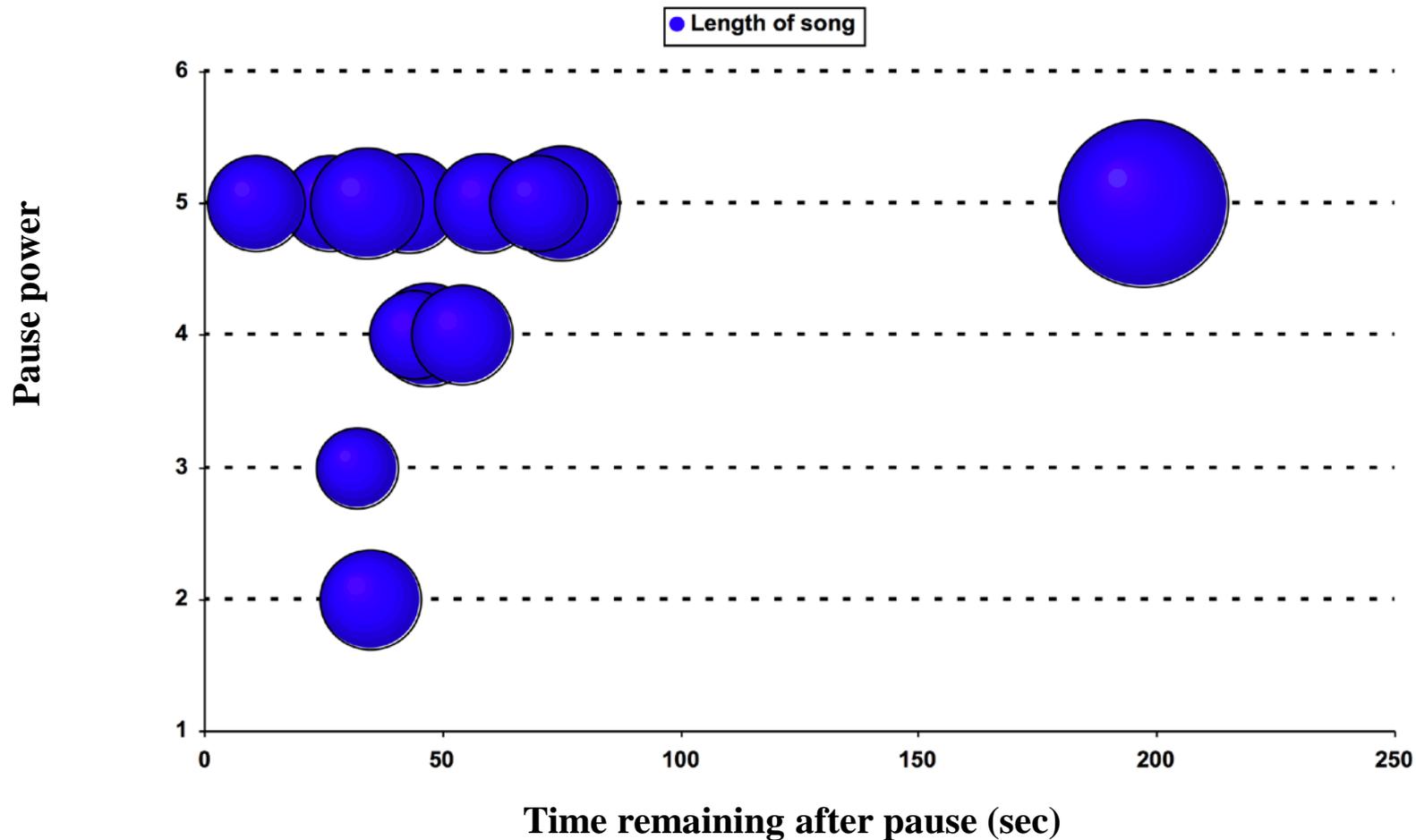
Relationship of Pause-Length to Haunting Power



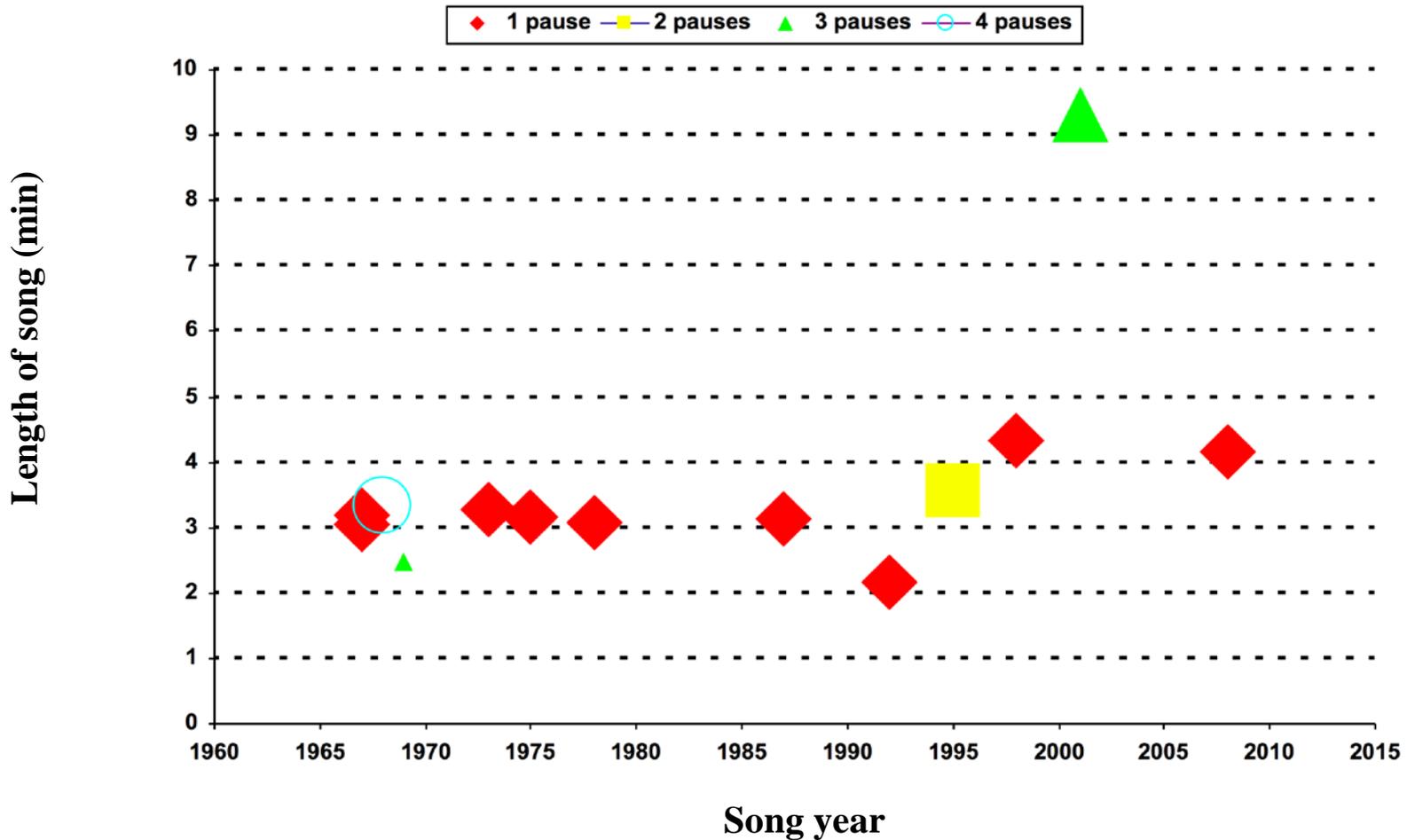
Proof of the Necessity of Pauses



Discoveries About Pause Timing (in Bubble Form)



The Persistence of Pauses over Time



The End