

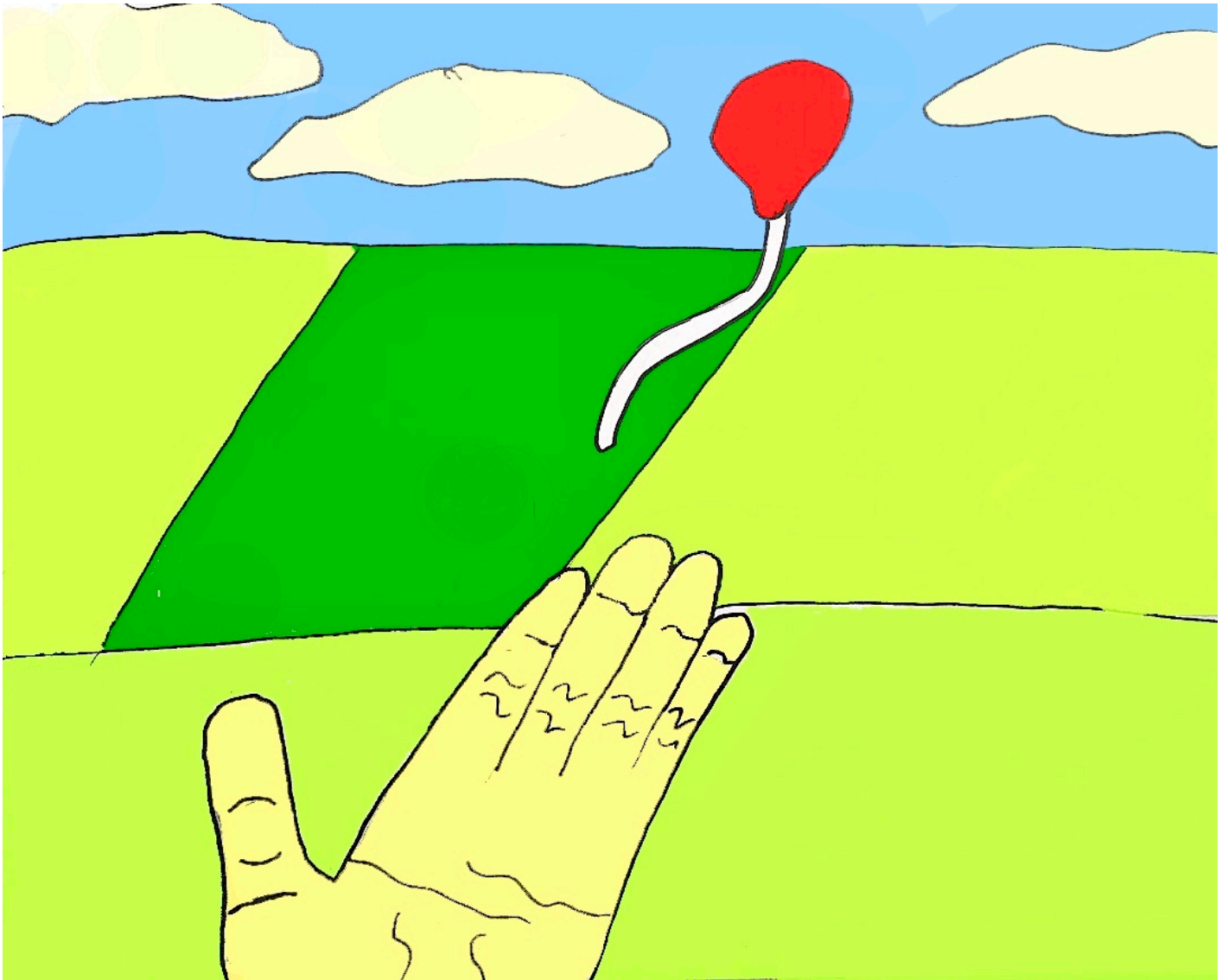
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Feature by Kate Raphael

An Open Letter from April 2020



Dear Roommates,

When I walked out of my room completely spent after a multi-hour class Zoom call—following my third grueling week of working from home amid coronavirus—to find you sitting at our kitchen table, drinking Lawson’s Sip of Sunshine from the can and using your hands to scoop shredded Mexican three-cheese blend from the bag into your mouth, I knew I

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was Home.

During this limbo period, when I am home all the time., I can't express to you how grateful I am that with you, in our too-small apartment, I feel *Home* all the time. Actually, I can. Here it is.

Right now, I'm looking at our fridge, which is covered in artwork we made at our kitchen table two weekends ago. It was a sunny Saturday, one of the first ones when we were cooped up inside, and we got out all these watercolors, colored pencils, markers, and pens and just made art for the whole day. This is the kind of thing I've always wanted to do my whole life. I've always been "arts and crafty," but it has felt like too much of a luxury to take the time to do it—there are classes to take and books to read and runs to run and friends to see and *damn I'm out of groceries and need to go to the store before the week starts*.

That weekend, we had so little else to do, though, and we just created in each other's quiet company for the whole day. I felt so accepted and supported. We talked sometimes—about food and relationships and grief and running and what we would buy once we had mortgages (piano, stand mixer, and food processor at the top of the list)—but I also didn't need to talk; I could just be. I had nowhere else to be (there was nowhere I *could* be), but there was nowhere else I wanted to be. This indefinite time, this slowdown of life, has made me reevaluate what is important. The art, yes, but the company more.

I was one of those people who thought for a while that all my best friends were guys. It was some weird point of pride that I didn't have super-close female friends, the same way I was proud of the fact that I've given myself tattoos and have an undercut. But that idea is stupid and sexist and different from giving myself tattoos and an undercut, because female friends are awesome. They make me a better feminist and a better human, and I would be ridiculous to miss out on you. You tell me about your days, and I care and I know that you care about mine. You know who my work enemies are, and you are my allies against them. You know when I have a race coming up, and you wish me luck.

Don't get me wrong. I am still completely annoyed by the crusted cheese you have left on the burner, the hair in the drain, the lid to your travel mug you dropped three days ago beneath the kitchen table (I know, I should I have picked it up, but I was curious if you'd notice where it had gone. You did not, and I finally washed it and put it in the dish drainer). Your microwave antics drive me bonkers (the last three seconds always left on the LED screen—*why?*), and there is cleanliness left to be desired.

But there are always desires, and you fill the vast majority of mine.

When we make an Ina Garten cake that has been tailored to all the dietary restrictions of the house (gluten-free *and* vegan—the butter replaced with vegan butter; the eggs converted to flax; the all-purpose flour shifted to almond, coconut, rice, or some combination thereof), I have no doubt I'm in the right home. This I know when I wax on about my feelings for a guy or a girl and you listen attentively. When I cry for no reason, and every reason, amid this bloody, bloodless pandemic. When you come with me on runs, when we do an '80s core routine during lunch in the living room. When you tolerate all my shit that I'm not even aware of and that you haven't written an open letter to me about because you are too discrete to call me on it. I know I am home—and I know I am Home.

Thank you for keeping me company and for being my company.

Kate

Art Information

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://talkingwriting.com>)



Kate Raphael is a writer social distancing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her three roommates. In her abundant spare time, she runs to stay sane. Most recently, she and her roommates baked (and then inhaled) gluten-free pumpkin chocolate-chip cookies.

Find Kate on Instagram [@KateRaphael1](https://www.instagram.com/KateRaphael1) [4].

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