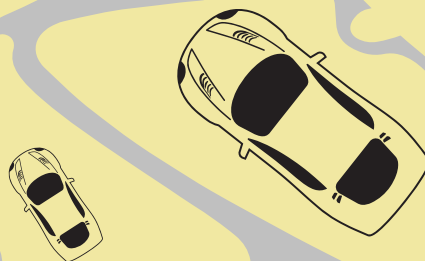
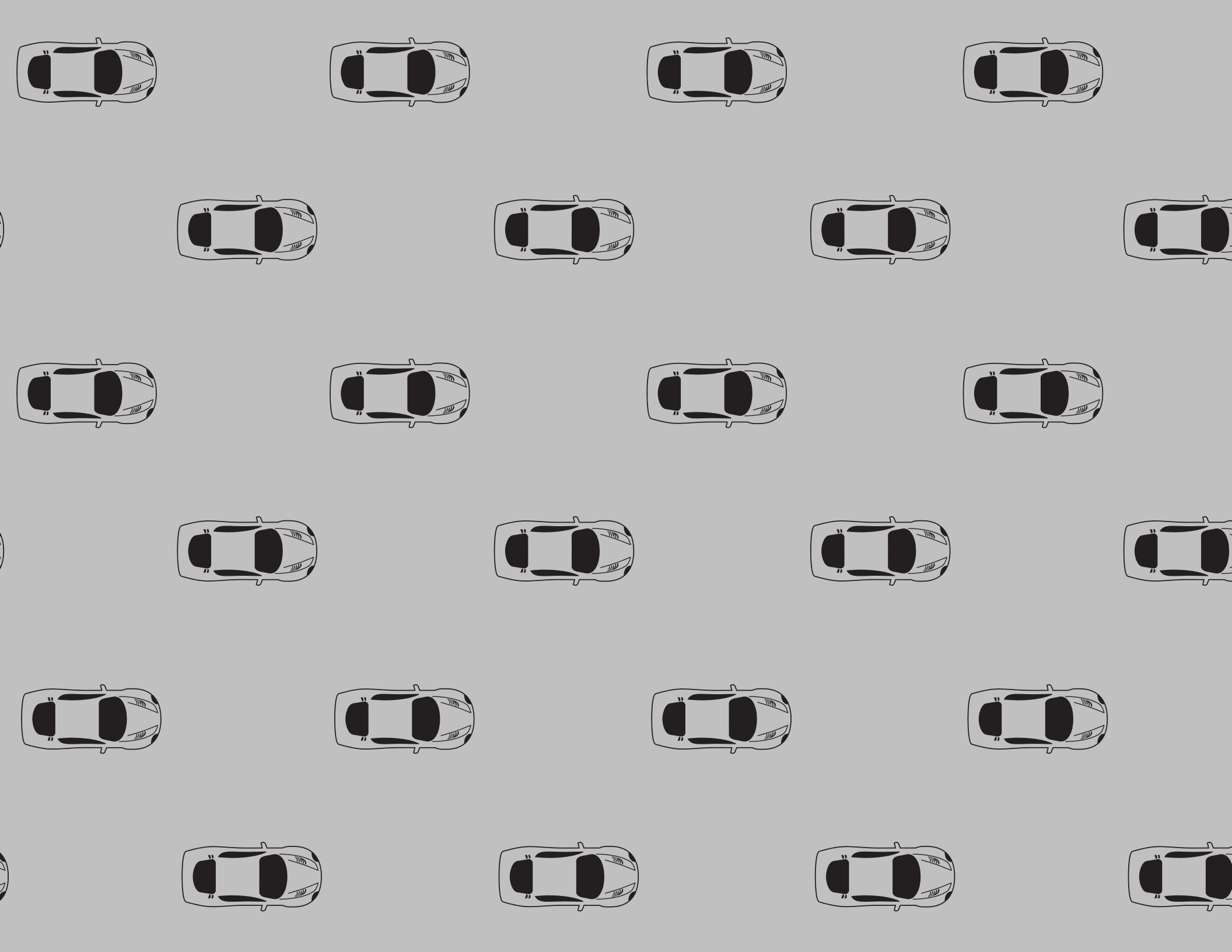
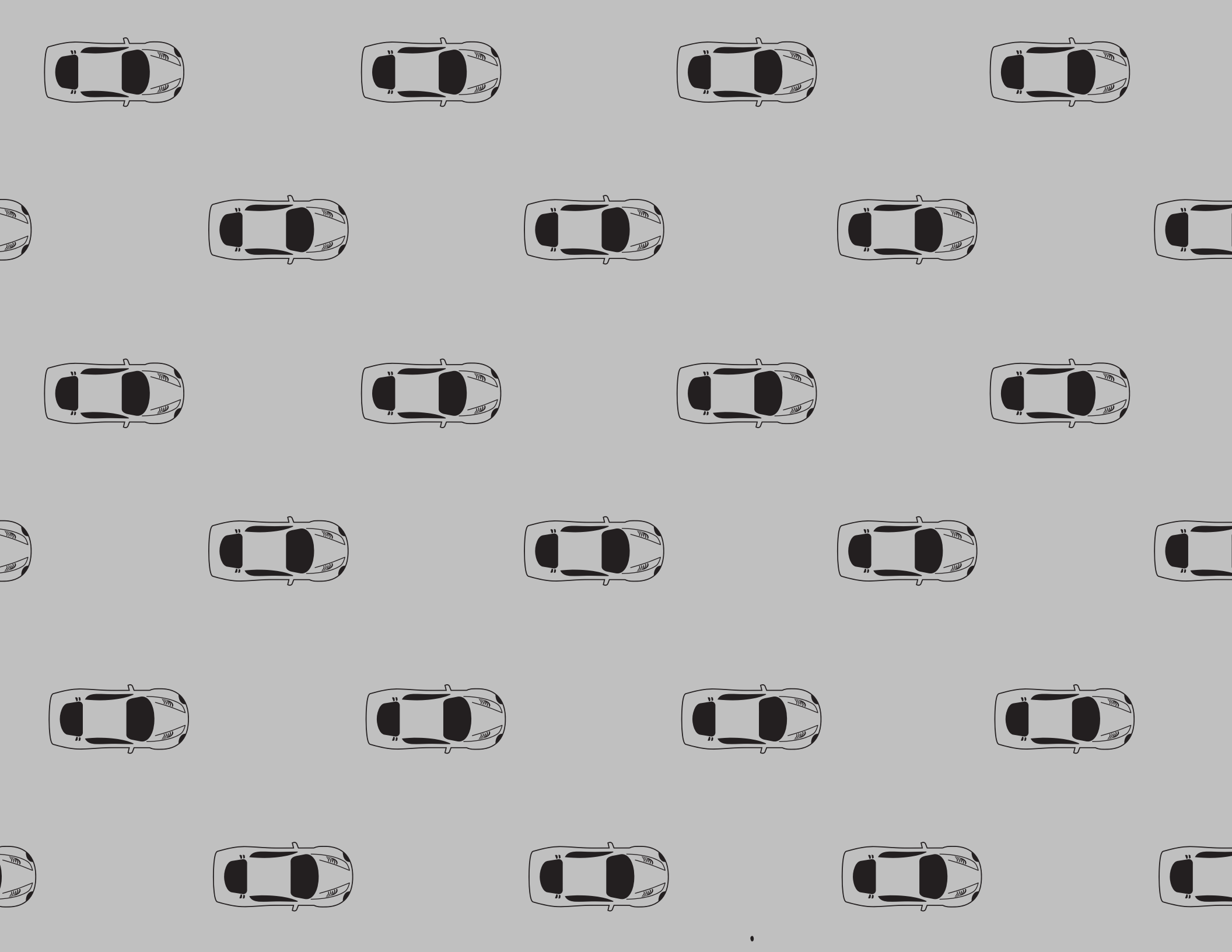


FOR- EIGN- ER



BY
ETAN
KIANG





PROLOGUE

Ken Kaplan drummed his fingers on his desk and lifted his glasses on and off his face. He put his head under his desk as images of him winning junior formula races swum across his mind. "And Ken Kaplan takes pole position again!" the commentator boomed. Ken could almost smell the burnt rubber as he celebrated his Formula Asia championship victory and feel the grin on his face as the stewards reprimanded him for doing donuts after a race--

No, that was a long time ago.

Before Mom left and shit.

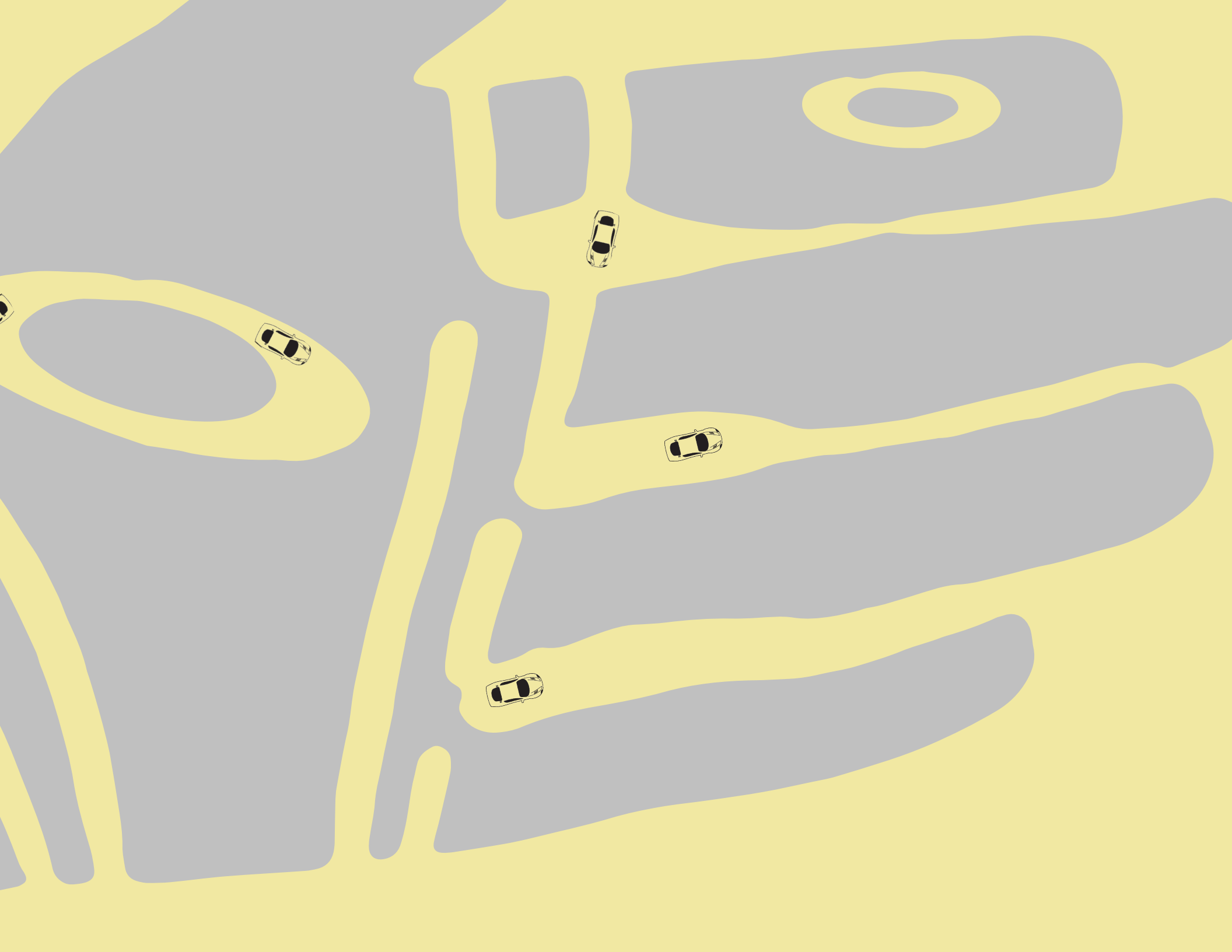
I gotta study now, Ken told himself. Stanford University, where his father had gone for college, had promised to send in the admission results by mid-March. He dearly hoped that his ceaseless diligence under his father's sharp eye would bear fruit. I even gave up my dreams of being a race car driver for this humdrum life, so they better take me, Ken thought.

For the past week, Ken's mind was welded to the issue, and his mind often wandered back to whether Stanford would accept him even when he was

doing his favorite thing: thinking about cars. The Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren was on every car magazine cover, and Michael Schumacher was dominating Formula One.

Ken's father's blood-red 996-generation Porsche 911 Carrera S sat in their garage everyday, collecting dust. Every time his father and he entered the garage to drive to school, Ken would stare at the beautiful Porsche with dreams to drive it one day.





His father also owned a Speed Yellow 1992 964-generation Porsche 911 Carrera 4, and he never drove it ever. Ken eventually took the car as his own and gave it extensive modifications, like fitting a whale-tail spoiler onto it, adding a rear diffuser for extra downforce, giving the car suspension tuning, stiffening the chassis, and upgrading the engine power from the stock 247 horsepower to 340 with a supercharger. The 911 also had various spare parts from other 911s, like the brakes and exhaust from an RS 3.8 and the steering wheel and gearbox from a Turbo S, a real Frankenstein of a car.

His father bought the 911 when Ken was 12, when he and his family first moved to Japan. It was the first car his father ever bought in Japan, but only two of the seats were big enough for adults. Not sure why he did that, Ken thought to himself. As soon as the 996 Porsche 911 came out, Ken's father dumped the 964 for that. Ken had free reign over the Porsche 964, and his father simply sighed and shrugged whenever Ken was tuning it. Ken remembered that his mother would have to walk for 2 years before he got a Mercedes S-class. By then, Ken's mother was done with the family. After a fiery divorce, Ken's mother went back to her childhood home in Gunma Prefecture, and his father said that Ken could only visit her again if he "proved himself worthy", which meant getting into one of the "H.Y.P.S." colleges.

Ken yanked at his hair. He wanted to see his mother and experience her infectious laughter and her warm smile again.

He inhaled and jammed the tip of his pencil into his binder.

Suddenly, his father called. "The mailman's here!"

Ken bolted down the stairs. He loved to see mail. The suspense at the sight of the package and the joy or disappointment when he ripped it open, hoping to see the latest issue of Car and Driver was Ken's daily dose of excitement in his life. However, today's mail was especially suspenseful for a different reason.

His father showed Ken the large crimson envelope with the Stanford logo emblazoned on it. Ken rubbed his palms. His father told him that large envelopes always meant good news. Ken snatched the envelope from his father and ripped it open. A letter fell out.

Ken squinted at the letter in disbelief. I got in? he questioned in disbelief. "Wait—I got in?" he asked his father.

His father took the letter and skimmed it. "You got in!" he yelled.

Ken's jaw dropped. "Yes! I did it! I can visit Mom now!"

Suddenly, the smile on his father's face faded. Ken furrowed his eyebrows and stared at him. "What's wrong?"

His father shook his head. "Nothing. I'm just thinking of something."

Ken backed away and said pathetically, "Yay. I'm in now."

His father replied, "Good! You got in!"

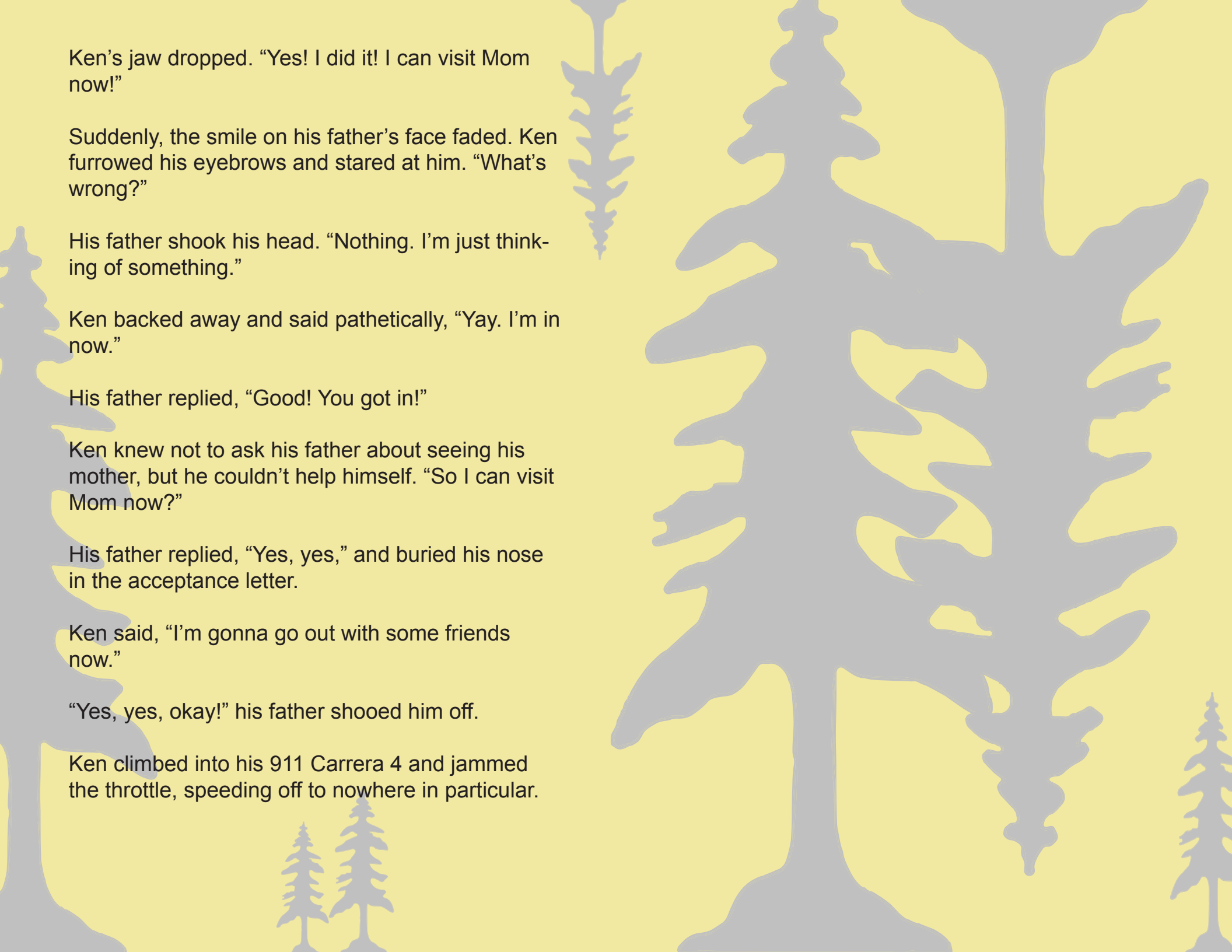
Ken knew not to ask his father about seeing his mother, but he couldn't help himself. "So I can visit Mom now?"

His father replied, "Yes, yes," and buried his nose in the acceptance letter.

Ken said, "I'm gonna go out with some friends now."

"Yes, yes, okay!" his father shooed him off.

Ken climbed into his 911 Carrera 4 and jammed the throttle, speeding off to nowhere in particular.



1: UN- WOR- THY

Ken pulled over at a small track. He drove into the booth, and an old man greeted him. "Good afternoon, Mr. Nakajima," Ken greeted him. He always went to this track whenever he had the chance.

"Good afternoon, Ken," Mr. Nakajima replied. He and his wife had owned the track for over 30 years, and Ken had visited the track several times when he raced karts and Formula Asia. Mr. Nakajima had always been especially friendly to Ken, and eventually he just let Ken use the track for free when Ken told him about how his father stopped him from racing.

Ken sped down a small track. It was a humble one, one he had visited many times while racing in Formula Ford. It was big enough for the Porsche 911 Carrera 4. Still, the old couple that owned the track let him rip his tires on the track.

He flew through a corner as he struggled to maintain grip. Is Dad after me? Ken thought. Ken had just left. He was so gutted. His dreams were over. Yes, he could see his mother, but what would that mean? His racing career was over. His independence was over. His life was over.

Ken floored the throttle and shifted the G50 transmission as he flew into a long straight. He braked and swung through a series of esses, his 911's tail swinging out. He mashed the gas through the next straight, the all-wheel-drive system putting all 340 horsepower to the ground as the car flew through the track.

1: WOR- THY

Ken threw down his backpack. His friends had been prickly at best. They were jealous of him for going to Stanford, his father had said, but Ken did not care as long as he could meet his mother. He was not going to see any of them ever again anyway.

His father yelled from downstairs. "Ken, I gotta talk to you for a sec."

Ken ran down the stairs. "Yes, Dad?" he panted.

"Alright. You're going to drive to Mom's house near

Mount Akagi by yourself," Ken's father announced.

Ken lowered his glasses. "Wait, what?"

His father affirmed. "Yes, you are. You said you wanted to visit, so you'll have to go by yourself. You know I can't come with you. I got an international sushi chain to run."

"Seriously?" Ken put his head in his hands and fell to his knees. All these years Ken had thought he and his father would travel to his mother's house together, and maybe he would even get them to make up. "But can't you come with me somehow?"

His father said, "I have to support us. I can't be gone for so long."

Now it was Ken's turn to laugh. "You daily-drive a Mercedes S-Class and own a new Porsche and you say you have to support us?"

Ken's father ignored him. "Well, do you want to hear the plans or not?"

“Sure,” Ken replied, still on the ground.

“Get up, son,” his father ordered, “Kaplans don’t disrespect their elders.”

“Sorry,” Ken mumbled as he rose from the floor.

His father stared at him intensely. “So, you’re going to drive to Mount Akagi. It’s only 2 hours to there. When you get there, besides Mom, you’re also going to meet your cousins Ryosuke and Keisuke Takahashi. They’re barbarians. Avoid them. They’re going to get you into street racing, and then you’ll be an outlaw for life. Do you want that?”

“N-n-no,” Ken stuttered. He knew he had cousins, but he imagined them as kind and funny, not as uncivilized ruffians.

His father continued. “Also, don’t think about taking the 996. It’s gotta be in pristine condition so I can sell it for 32 million yen in 20 years, ‘kay? You’re going to take your 964. Also, I don’t want to see you drift in that car, okay? Tires cost a lot to replace. Just enjoy the car, have some fun, and don’t race anybody. Got it?”

“Yes, Dad,” Ken replied. Darn, Ken thought. He fantasized day and night since the day he was accepted into Stanford about how he would race his cousins and destroy them all with his father’s Porsche.

“When does this happen?” Ken asked his father.

“Whenever you’re ready,” he replied, “but just return before July 10th to celebrate my birthday. I’ll call Mom to make space for you when you get there.”

“Alright. Thanks.” Ken gabbled, and he ran up the stairs. He really had to go there alone?

2: A LONG DRIVE TO FA- MILY

Ken's father turned away from Ken and his mother. "Look! You're attracting so much attention! Come with me at once!" Ken's mother ordered.

The memory hit Ken like a tsunami. He wasn't in Japan. Ken did his best to make out the words "LOS ANGELES INT'L AIRPORT --> TOKYO HANEDA AIRPORT" through his peripheral vision, even though he could not actually move himself. *Somebody get me out of this nightmare!* Ken yelled in his head.

He suddenly began to bawl. Ken tried to calm himself, but to no avail. *I don't wanna be here! I wanna wake up and go to Mom's house!* He willed himself to exit the nightmare, but still to no avail.

His mother's palm whooshed towards Ken's bottom...

Ken clutched a copy of *Car and Driver*. "Why do we have to move to Japan?" Ken asked, "I want to stay here."

But I'm already in Japan! Ken thought.

"Dad wants to earn more money with his sushi business," his mother explained. Ken could feel her patience draining away. *I thought Mom left us! Why is she still here?* Ken asked himself.

"But it's better here!" Ken protested automatically. *I said that?* He was confused. His lips were moving of their own free will. People began to stare at them as Ken whined.

"It's not that bad," his mother seethed.

"I don't wanna go!" Ken cried. Tears flooded his eyes. *What on earth is happening? I can't control myself!* He thought.

Ken woke up teary-eyed. His bottom stung like anything, and he had been sleeping sideways with his legs propped up on the wall. Ken lifted his feet from the wall and slammed them on the radiator at the foot of his bed.

“Ah!” Ken shouted in pain. He rolled off the bed, blanket and all, and stood up with much difficulty. He waddled to the bathroom and ran into the door. Ken yelled in frustration and kicked the door open.

Ken lifted his suitcase into the trunk of his car. His father ran to him and warned, “Whatever you do, please, please, please don’t get into street racing. You’re the heir to a huge ramen chain and you gotta go to Stanford. You can’t get in trouble with the law now.”

“I promise not to,” Ken answered disappointedly.

“You better not,” his father commanded. “You have your reputation to watch over.”

“Okay. I love you, Dad! See you at the end of break!” Ken shouted as he struggled into the 911.

Ken watched his father wave silently as he pulled away from the driveway, then realized that he forgot his Walkman. Well, he thought, I guess I’ll just listen to that flat-six engine.

Ken relished in the roar of the engine as he floored the throttle and sped along the E17, the sun rising behind him. Now I’m finally free from Dad’s domination, and maybe I can race again, Ken thought. He rolled down the windows and let the wind blow through them.

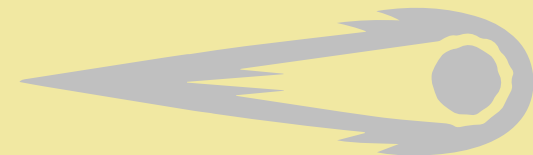
Whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh.

Ken laid back as best as he could in his racing seat. Driving for 30 minutes on the backroads was fun, but two hours on a straight, monotonous highway was taking a toll on him. Ken pulled over for gas.

As Ken stood there, filling his tank up, a young man approached him.

“Nice car, man,” he commented.

Ken blushed. “Thanks. What’s your name?”



"I'm Akihito. You can call me Aki," Akihito replied, "and my car's over there, if you wanna check it out."

Ken glanced over at an orange and black Mitsubishi Starion with a carbon-black rear spoiler and side skirts sitting at the pump across from him. "Nice. I'm fine here, though, if you don't mind."

Akihito nodded and turned to leave. "That's alright. See you around." Then, he suddenly whirled around as if he had been startled.

"Also, where are you coming from?"

Ken raised an eyebrow. "Why are you asking?"

"Just curious. I'm from Gunma. They got a lot of street racers there. Be careful. Especially that beast Ryosuke. They call him the White Comet of Akagi.

He pwned me proper in a race once. He and his white RX-7 just went zoom. I had no chance," Akihito said.

Ken furrowed his eyebrows. Surely he couldn't be that Ryosuke, or could he be? Ken shoved the thought aside. "Ah," Ken bobbed his head, "I'm a city boy. From Tokyo. I'm going to Gunma to see family."

"Family? You should be glad you have family. My punks disowned me when I got into racing," Akihito spat.


Clunk! Just then, the fuel nozzle popped out of Ken's car. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Aki. Good luck and Godspeed. I gotta go."

Akihito laughed. "Good luck and Godspeed? I thought only mission control guys in movies said that!"

Ken said, "Well, I said it. So, yeah, it's been a pleasure talking with you. See ya, man."

Akihito shook Ken's hand. "See ya."

Ken slipped a 10000-yen paper bill into the slot in the gas pump, which promptly spit out change. Ken counted it meticulously. He never trusted gas stations.



Screech!

Ken popped his head up. Akihito's wheels spun as he sped out of the station. That guy must be in a hurry, Ken assumed. Ken glanced over his change one last time, stuffed it in his pocket, and climbed into his car.

3: ENTER THE TAKA- HASHIS

Ken replied, "Of course it is!"

Ken's mother exclaimed, "Yes! You're here! We've been expecting you. Come on in and make yourself comfortable. You have much catching up to do."

She glanced out the window and saw Ken's Porsche. She patted his cheeks. "I guess my lovely boy Ken still loves racing!"

Ken smiled wanly and stepped in. He saw who was presumably Keisuke lying sideways on the couch. As Ken glanced at him, Keisuke promptly sprang up to greet Ken.

"Hi, Ken! I'm Ryosuke! I've heard a lot about you from Aunt Aiko, or your mom," Ryosuke muttered, his voice the tone of an answering machine. "Sorry about me lying on the couch earlier. I haven't been feeling well lately. Keisuke probably told you."

Ken rubbed his sweaty palms on his pants. "Good afternoon, Ryosuke," Ken said.

"Good afternoon," Ryosuke replied.

"Good afternoon," Ken replied back.

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon."

At this point, Ken decided to quit the "Good afternoon" loop. "By the way, Ryosuke, have you ever raced a kid named Akihito or Aki?" he asked, remembering the boy he had met at the gas station. "Yeah," Ryosuke responded, "and I absolutely destroyed him! He had no chance. He barely knew how to drift. I don't think that he knew that he was on a mountain road. He probably thought he was on vacation!"

His mother stepped in. "Guys, Ken needs to unpack. Maybe later?"

Ryosuke and Keisuke stared at her. “There is no later. We’re racing tomorrow and the day after.”

“Whatever.” Ken’s mother sighed. “Come on, Ken. I’ll show you your room.”

Ken twiddled his fingers at the dining table. “So, what brought you here?” Eiko, Ryosuke and Keisuke’s mother, asked. She had just returned from work.

“Nothing much. Just wanted to see my mom and her side of my family,” Ken replied.

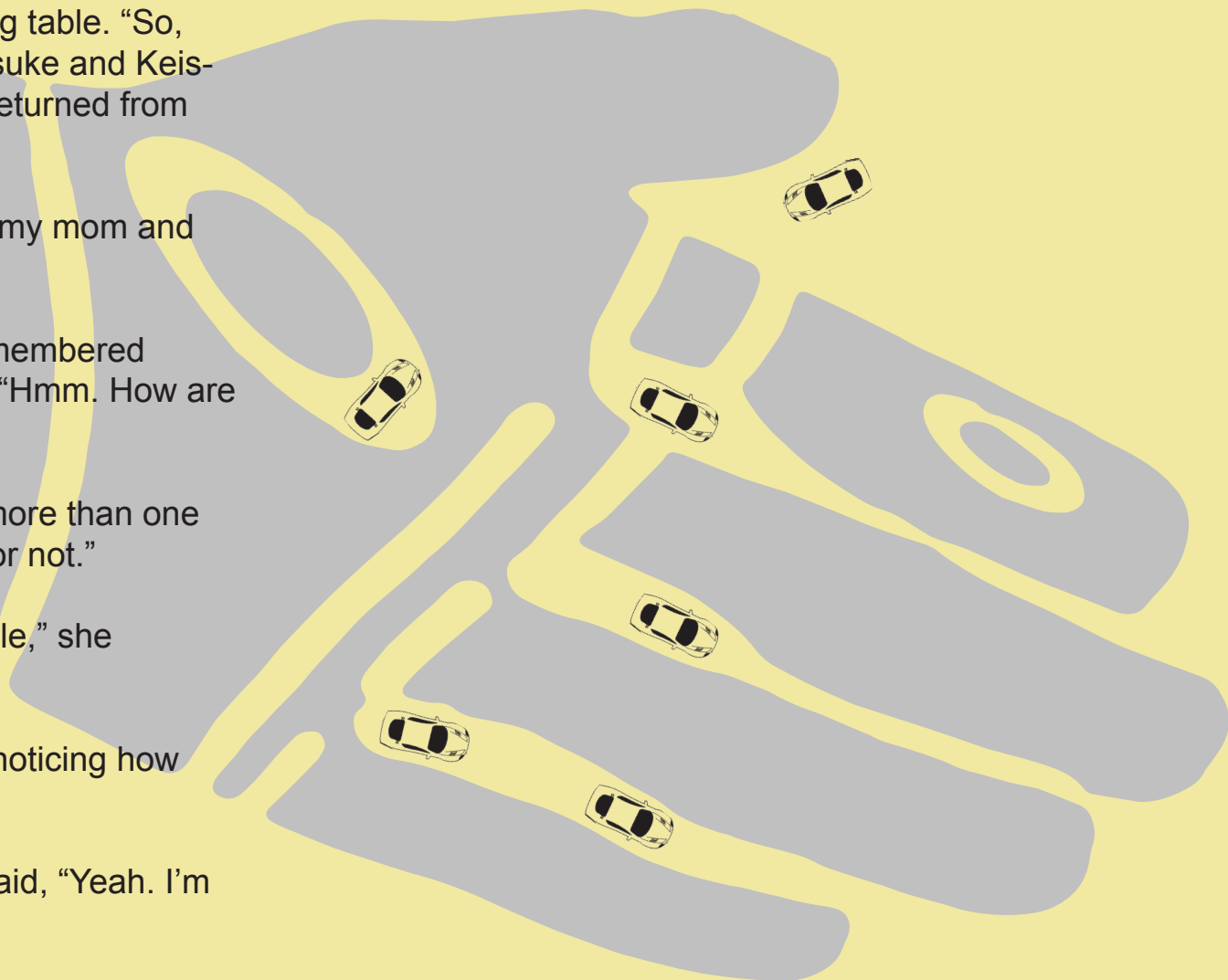
Eiko seethed for a second, then remembered where she was and put on a smile. “Hmm. How are you liking it so far?”

Ken answered, “It’s alright. I need more than one day to decide if something is good or not.”

Eiko inhaled deeply. “Understandable,” she remarked.

“Are you alright?” Ken asked Eiko, noticing how she seemed angry.

Eiko reapplied her fake smile and said, “Yeah. I’m okay.”



Ken scraped the last bits of food into his mouth and put his dishes away. "Thank you so much," he said, then he hurried upstairs.

Ken's mother crept into his room. "Hi, Ken."

"Hey, Mom," Ken replied. "How'd you know I was coming?"

Ken sat on his sleeping bag next to Ryosuke and Keisuke's childhood bunk bed and grinded on F1 2001. Ken loved playing as Rubens Barrichello, his favorite racing driver. He looked up from his computer as Keisuke walked in. So much for avoiding the Takahashi brothers, Ken thought, since we have to share a room.

"Yo, Keisuke," Ken greeted him.

"Hi," Keisuke replied without looking. Why did everything suddenly seem so strange? The Takahashi family was acting fine when Ken first came in, but now they all seemed to be trying to ignore him whenever possible.



4: HISTO- RY

He opened his eyes to see his mother standing over him. The right side of Ken's jaw pulsed with pain. He looked to the side and saw that he was in a hospital. A cracked tooth lay in the tray beside him.

Ken felt around his mouth and realized that a tooth was missing! "Keisuke punched my tooth out?" Ken asked.

A doctor standing next to him nodded. "He sure did. You're lucky your jaw isn't broken."

"Yeah," Ken muttered, "Thanks." He got up and walked out of the room with his mother.

As soon as they left the hospital, Ken could feel tears of anger well up in his eyes. "Where the hell is Keisuke?" he yelled.

"Calm down. He said he's really sorry." his mother assured him.

"Sorry? I'll make that lousy bastard feel sorry he was born!" Ken seethed.

"Don't swear about your own cousin!" his mother reprimanded him.

Ken took a deep breath. "Sorry about that."

"See? Everybody makes mistakes. It's not good to get revenge. Forgive and forget," his mother reasoned.

"How can I forget this? What he did is just atrocious!" Ken protested.

"Well at least he didn't deal any mental damage. Unlike your father, who was very passive-aggressive. He was too scared to actually walk out but he didn't love me." his mother explained.

Ken furrowed his eyebrows. "What? He barely even talks to me if I'm not getting into a good college or being the valedictorian or some other accomplishment. I wouldn't call that damage."

"That's damage beyond your wildest dreams," his mother refuted, "and it doesn't hurt, but it warps you. It makes you cold, and conflicted, and heartbroken. After being with your father for 14 years, I couldn't stay with him anymore. I felt like my mental health was slowly dying."

"And I thought he was in the right and stayed with him instead," Ken huffed. He knew this part of the story.

They stepped into his mother's maroon 1970 Nissan Fairlady Z432. "You used to race?" Ken asked when he glimpsed the car's racing seats and special steering wheel and shifter knob.

"Yeah," his mother confirmed, "and back then I had a fire. I was a real girl racer, not that stupid Impact Blue or whatever nonsense Ryosuke's been telling your aunt about. They called me the Maroon Mistress. Your aunt got married off to a rich man and I was left to fend for myself. My parents abandoned us when we were in our early teens, so we knew how to stand up for ourselves. And stand up I did. I almost conquered the entire racing scene in the Gunma Prefecture."

"Almost?" Ken asked as they pulled onto the road.

"Almost," his mother continued, "but one day, in the later part of my racing career, word began to spread about a new challenger from Akina by the name of Bunta. By then, your father had just started doing business here in Japan, and we met when I came to his first shop in

Tokyo. We immediately fell in love, but I should've known that when it comes too quickly, it's usually too good to be true." She sighed and shook her head wistfully.

"Anyway, on my last race before I was to be married to him, I raced Bunta, and even though he was driving a Subaru Impreza STI, literally a Corolla, and I was driving a Fairlady, he smoked me. I still don't know how to this day. He was just gone. I couldn't keep up."

"Wow." Ken was lost for words. He could never imagine his mother as some fierce street racer.

"Do you mind if you give me tips on how to race on these mountain roads?" Ken asked his mother.

"I'm fine with teaching, but you better not race other people. It's a toxic world out there," his mother warned. They pulled into their driveway, and Ken immediately hopped out and asked, "May I go out for a drive?"

His mother told him, "Your cousins are leaving today, so you might wanna say goodbye to them."

"I'm good," Ken replied.



“Keisuke, do you do touge racing?” Ken asked, trying to start a conversation.

“Yes. Why?” Keisuke answered him hesitantly.

“Just curious,” Ken said.

Keisuke put down a photo of him with his arms around a brown-haired girl before staring at Ken. “Is it something your dad told you about?”

Ken furrowed his eyebrows. “Why are you asking me this?”

Keisuke sat down next to Ken and said, “Look. That little snob doesn’t understand a thing about touge racing. It’s a culture. It’s a life. People find happiness in touge racing, not making shitty sushi like your dad does.”

Ken stood up. “That’s a little far, Keisuke.”

Keisuke looked through Ken’s eyes. “Everyone in this house except you knows how much of an asshole your dad is—”

Ken eyed Keisuke. “I know too, dumbass.”

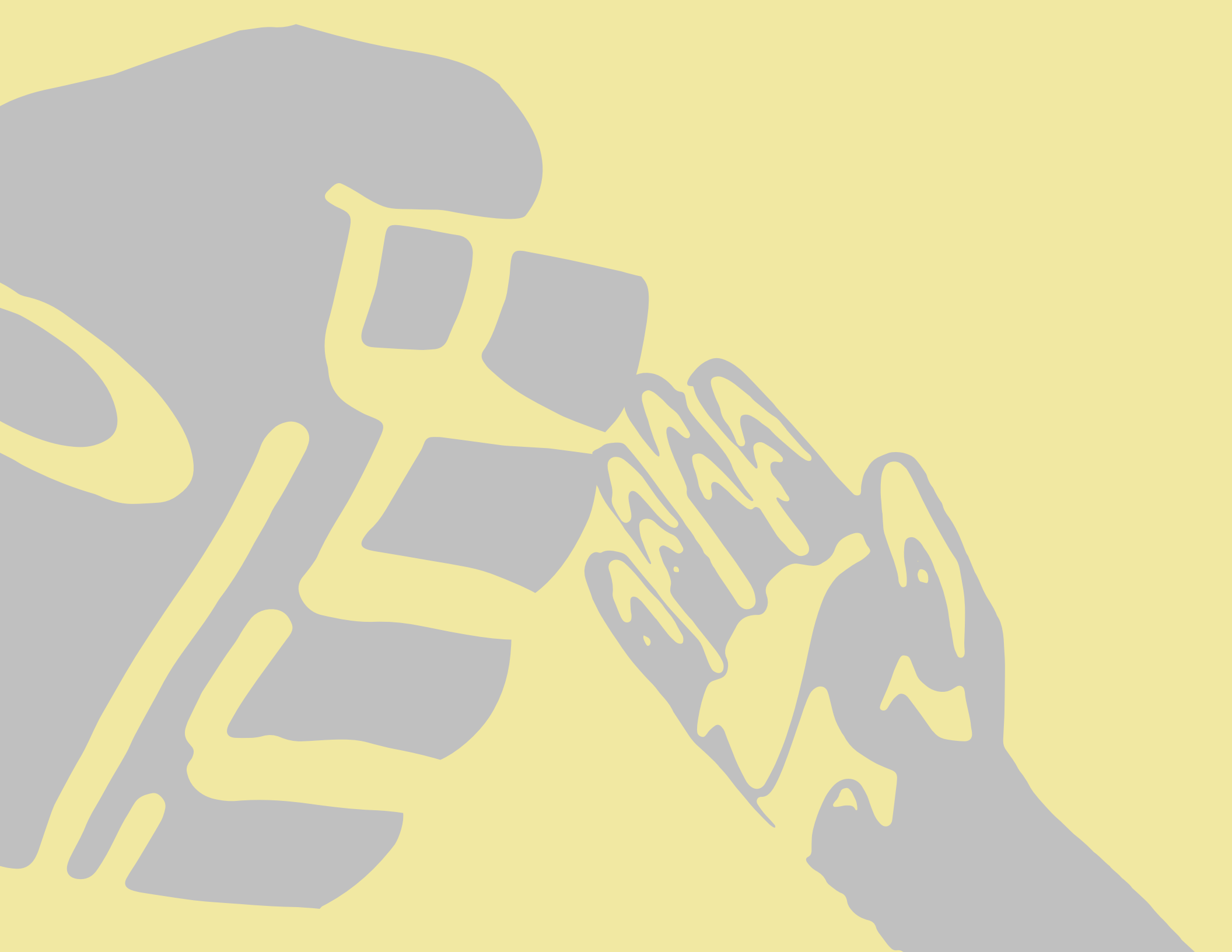
“Then why haven’t you done anything about it?” Keisuke sneered, “You’re a coward!”

Keisuke ran up and tackled Ken. Ken slammed his fists on top of Keisuke’s head and pushed him into the rails of his bunk bed.

“Who’s the asshole now?” Ken taunted him.

Keisuke yelled and kicked Ken in the crotch.

Ken cried out in pain, and then a fist connected with his jaw and his vision blacked out.



His mother sighed. "Alright, whatever."

"Bye, Mom! Bye, Aunt Aiko!" the Takahashi brothers yelled. Aiko, Ken's mother, and his sister Eiko, who was the Takahashi brothers' mother, waved silently. Ken, however, wasn't there.

Screech!

Ken braked as he approached a sharp hairpin bend. Ken tried to kick the rear tires out, and the Porsche 911 snapped its rear out. Ken thought to himself, I can't drift properly. I can only snap or spin. If it wasn't for Dad, I'd be racing in Formula 3000 by now, Ken fumed, not getting beat up by some thugs I have to call my cousins and spinning in circles.

"No more racing," Ken could suddenly hear his father say. "It's useless. I'd rather you earn big money than race yourself to death in those coffins."

"Will, he likes it. If he wants to die in an overpriced coffin then let him do it," Ken heard his mother plead.

Ken's hands suddenly jerked. His car fishtailed and Ken barely kept it away from the guardrails.

The angrier Ken got, the more aggressive his driving became. He floored the throttle on the straights and slammed on the brakes into the corners.

Why am I still going so slowly? Ken pondered. Drifting's the dumbest thing since the Ferrari Mondial. But then as he began to slip back into his mental rant about his father, he remembered his first time sneaking out at midnight to practice racing by himself.

He momentarily felt the shock when a red kart appeared behind him in his first karting win.

Ken felt the panic as he realized the driver was trying to bump him, and Ken felt the excitement as he tried to shake the red kart's driver off.



What if I use circuit racing techniques like I did in my racing days? Ken wondered, *It sounds good, but I've never done this on a mountain pass before!*

Whatever, let's wing it, he decided, and he eased the pedal forward. *Brake, turn, accelerate.*

Every move that Ken made with his car began to turn from spasms to an elegant dance as he swung through each curve with ease. The smooth motion of his Esprit soothed Ken as he concentrated on the road.

The car bobbed smoothly up and down. *Much better,* Ken said to himself, *I don't know why Dad hasn't realized already that this is way better than taking boring cooking classes or doing calculus. Well, fuck him, and fuck his little dreams. This is my life!*

Ken mashed the gas and skillfully snaked through the mountain pass when a orange and black Mitsubishi Starion with a noticeable rear wing seemed to appear in front of him. He squinted at the car. Was it the car he saw at the gas station the previous day? Ken gunned the throttle and pulled up next to the Starion to have a look.



The man in the Starion looked at him, then rolled down his windows and shouted, "Hey! Aren't you the dude I met at the gas station yesterday?"

Ken gave him a thumbs-up and saluted him. He rolled down his windows too and said, "Sup, Aki! What are you doing here?"

Akihito pointed at his steering wheel and gestured that he couldn't talk; they were driving down a mountain pass. Ken gave him another thumbs-up and sped in front of Akihito. Akihito narrowed his eyes and tried to find an opening to pass Ken, but Ken wouldn't let him.

Akihito tried every trick in the book, but Ken stayed in front of him, moving his car elegantly and maintaining grip. *Oh my god,* Akihito said to himself, *That kid's really fast. Almost as fast as Ryosuke! And I thought he was one of those rich kids!*

Ken saw the end of the pass through the foliage. He followed the imaginary racing line closely as he pivoted through the last series of hairpin bends. His Esprit barreled through the turns as Ken tried to manage the car. Finally, Ken could see street lights. He set the steering wheel straight and flew through the finish line, Akihito's Mitsubishi several car lengths away.

Ken carefully parked his car on the side of the road. Akihito parked behind him and stepped out.

“How’d you get the Starion? Weren’t you disowned or something?” Ken remarked.

Akihito laughed softly. “I was, but my former family’s pretty darn rich. They didn’t like how I was doing ‘illegal’ stuff, though, so out I went. And guess what happened the following day after I got disowned?”

Ken furrowed his eyebrows. “I don’t know.”

A grin crept across Akihito’s face. “I turned 18. So I was like, ‘Fuck y’all,’ and I left ‘em. Haven’t seen ‘em since. And that was all 7 years ago. I heard from some of my old homies that they still want my car back, though.”

“Hmm,” Ken nodded, and then he realized that he hadn’t told Akihito his name. “I’m Ken, by the way. Wanna trade phone numbers?”

After they were done, Ken and Akihito shook hands and got back into their cars. As Ken started up his 964’s engine, he thought to himself, Wow. Aki’s surprisingly nice for a street racer, but how does he not care at all about his family? That’s weird. Ken turned his car back down the mountain road and headed home.



5: RE- LIVE

Ken was playing F1 2001 again when his mother called to him. "Wanna go for a ride?"

Ken said, "At night?"

Ken's mother responded, "Just get down here."

They hopped into his mother's Fairlady Z432. "You sure you haven't been involved in any monkey business recently?" his mother asked.

Ken stared at his shoes. "Yeah."

They pulled out of the garage. Ken's jaw dropped as his mother sped down the road.

“Whoa!” he exclaimed.

As the road melted into the mountain pass, Ken’s mother picked up speed. “How fast is this thing?” Ken asked.

Ken’s mother did not reply. She executed a butter-smooth powerslide around a hairpin and slid around the next corner.

“Er, Mom?” Ken said.

“Sorry, I was just trying to relive some old moments,” his mother replied. “I used to be the fastest here, but then Bunta Fujiwara and his Impreza STI came along and blew me out of the water. At any rate, it’s good to be racing again.”

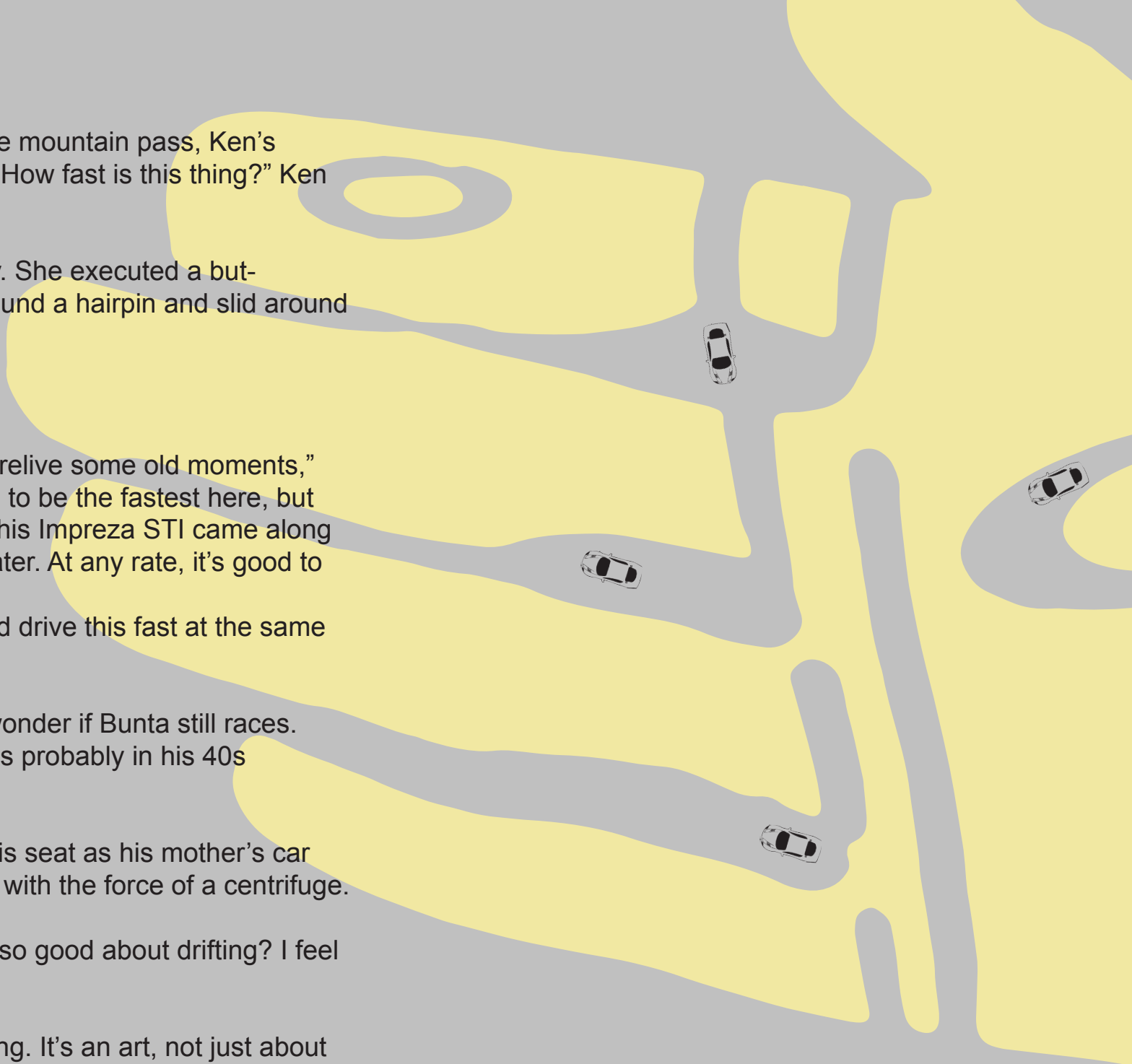
How is she able to talk and drive this fast at the same time? Ken wondered.

His mother continued. “I wonder if Bunta still races. Probably not, because he’s probably in his 40s already.”

Ken grabbed the side of his seat as his mother’s car spun around every corner with the force of a centrifuge.

Ken asked, “Mom, what’s so good about drifting? I feel like I wanna puke!”

His mother replied, “Nothing. It’s an art, not just about who can go the fastest. Watch and learn.”



Suddenly, Ken heard a roar from behind them. A white Impreza STI approached them from behind. "Is this the car you're talking about?" Ken asked.

His mother glanced behind her. "Oh my, it is!" she cried.

Ken's eyes widened. The Impreza STI tailed his mother's 1970 Fairlady as they sped through corner after corner. The Impreza STI pulled up beside Ken and his mother as they entered a twin drift.

His mother whooped as they swung around the curve. Ken stared at his mother. This was way out of character.

The Impreza STI crawled past them as they crossed the end of the pass. As they pulled over, his mother told Ken, "Put your head down."

His mother climbed out of the car. "Hey Bunta, long time--"

A young man slightly older than Ken stepped out. "Oh, that's my father. My name is Takumi. You must be Aiko Matsuyama, the legendary Maroon Mistress of Akagi. My father told me great stories about you."

Ken's mother laughed nervously. "Thank you. You can call me Aiko. It was nice racing you. By the way, how's your dad?"

Takumi answered, "Pretty well. People have been flocking to his tofu shop ever since I started racing. It's weird."

Ken's mother looked at her feet for a second, confused, then said, "Cool. It's no surprise considering how good you are at racing."

"Thanks," Takumi replied. "Anyway, I gotta head home. See you around!"

Takumi stepped briskly into his Impreza STI and sped off.

Ken's mother ignited the engine. "Didn't know Bunta runs a tofu shop now. I guess it matches his personality."

Ken's eyes bulged. "How'd you do that?"

His mother replied, "You don't wanna know," and spun the tires as she floored the pedal, speeding home.

"I wanna know," Ken persisted.

"You know I've always wanted you to do what you're interested in, unlike your father," Ken's mother told him, "but I won't allow street racing. It's a bad life."

Ken protested, "I gotta settle my differences with my cousins!"

"Not like that, you won't," his mother said.

