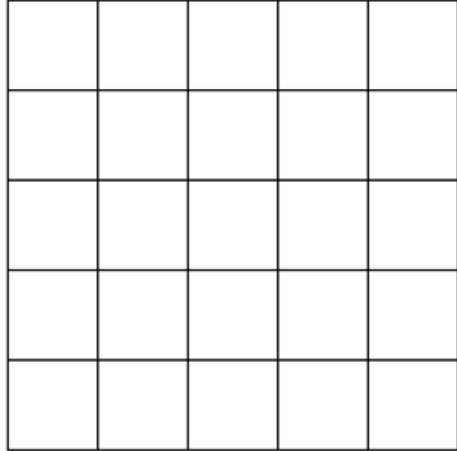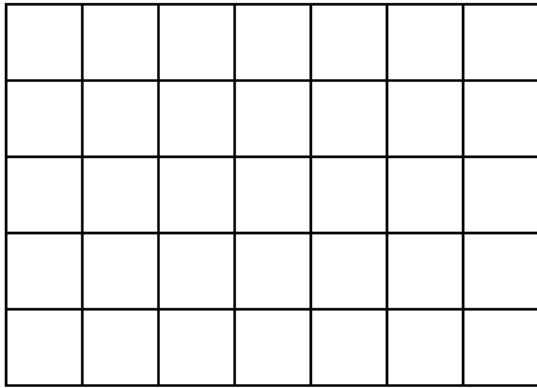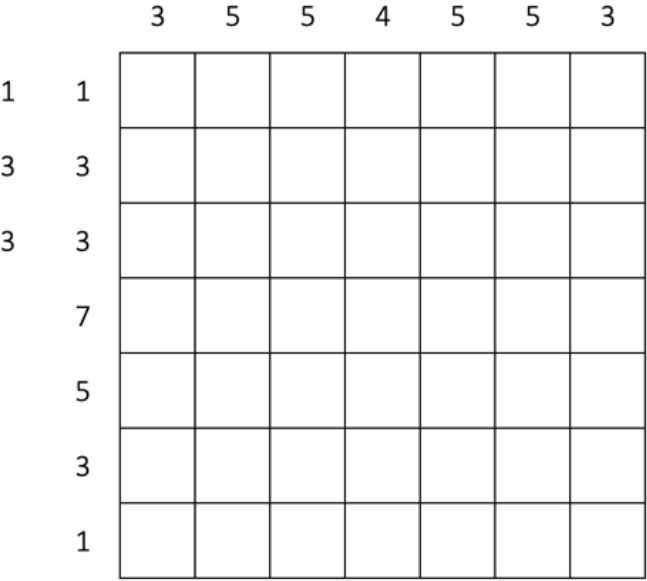2

|	3	2 1	1 2	3
3	*Meditations on an Eradication of Grey*	I was in love or I was going to die alone. I was my happiest or I had no reason to wake up. I was the most loved person on the face of the Earth, or else I was wholly unlovable.	*A classic case of black and white thinking,* my therapist said. An angel or the most hateful woman alive. Her goal was to help me think in the grey tones, to wash my thoughts in more livable hues; an achievable and worthwhile pursuit, except when it was impossible and a waste of my time.	*(nonogram grid — top clue: 1, left clue: 1)*
2 1	I was 23 then and mostly insufferable. My good friends knew not to contact me on Tuesdays unless it was a total emergency. Tuesday nights after therapy I cried my way out of the building, sobbed piteously on the subway home, wept and slept in turns in my bed until it was finally Wednesday again.	In the morning I rinsed my face with cold water until I looked human, then dragged my body to the cubicle which was my pained place of work, and where I changed completely. I was the boss's favorite, a consummate professional, or else I was an utter wreck who couldn't speak at least one day out of seven.	*(nonogram grid — top clues: 2 1 / 2 1 — 1 1 — 1 — 2 2 etc.; left clues: 2 2, 1 1, 1, 1 1, 2 2)*	At night on Tuesdays, searching for sleep, I played nonograms on my computer in the dark. A nonogram is a pixelated paint-by-number coded in logic. It starts as an empty grid with numbers along the left and top axes. The numbers instruct solvers which squares to shade, and which to leave empty.
1 2	A '2 1' row means two adjacent squares should be filled, followed by a break, followed by a single shaded square on its own.	*(nonogram grid — top clues: 1 1 2 1 1 1 / 1 2 1 1 1 1 1; left clues: 2 1, 2 1, 2 1, 2 1, 2 1)*	The trick of this puzzle, of course, is that one never knows where the two squares start, how long the break is, or where the one should fall. The only way to deduce the right shading is to cross-reference the row instructions with the column instructions. If the logic of a row and column agree, you fill the square in fully. If not, you leave it totally blank.	You can work backwards this way until the puzzle's conditions are satisfied. When solved, an image or pattern appears, or else (rarely) the boxes are shaded at random. All my friends back then were in love. Either they were abnormal, or else I was; either they loved me more than anyone else, or nobody really liked me at all.
3	*(nonogram grid — top clues: 3 5 5 4 5 5 3; left clues: 1 1, 3 3, 3 3, 7, 5, 3, 1)*	I began by solving smaller grids, 10x10s and 15x15s, then worked myself up to more advanced ones: 50x50s, puzzles that could take hours to solve, nonograms with multiple colors, 2 red 1 green 10 black 1 blue.	I found a website that had thousands of these puzzles and played them at random over and over again, sometimes realizing I'd already solved one when I reached its end and recognized the image.	The nonogram is not a game with any win-or-lose purpose; there are no time limits, no points, no rivals to defeat.
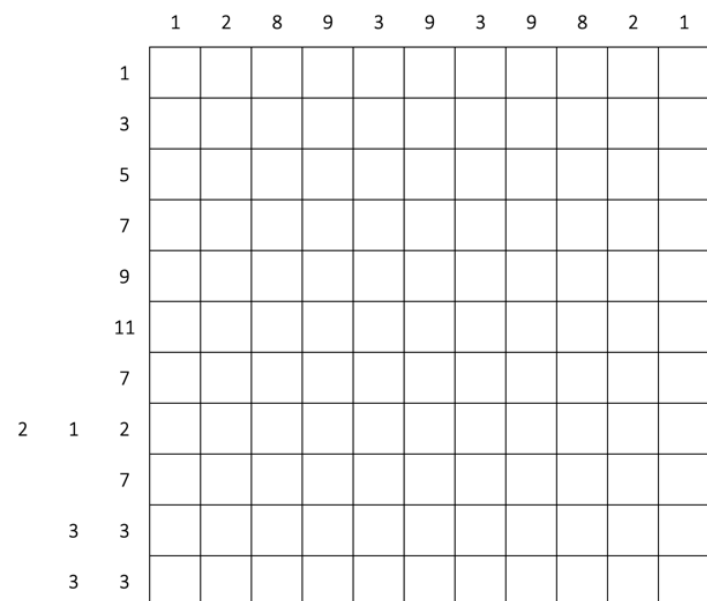
The satisfaction for me was in the work itself, the hard logic of shaded or empty— a mode of thinking that squared with my own rigidity.

I calmed down as I thought through the agreements, tapping my pointer nail to the computer's monitor as I counted out squares a few centimeters small. I was soothed by the sameness of the sound.

Every Tuesday afternoon, I prided myself in disarming my therapist with insistent logic, dissembling her advice with my syllogistic arguments for why I wasn't worthy of love or happiness.

*I wish you wanted to be happy more than you wanted to be right,* she'd say, sighing.
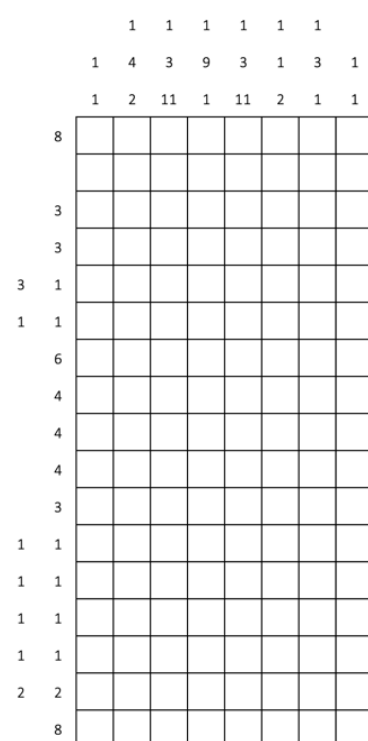
My arrogance in despair was either the most annoying trait ever or it did not exist. I could play nonograms from midnight until four in the morning without getting tired or tired of them.

In one month, I went on more first dates than most people go on in a year, and in one year, I spent so long squinting at the screen that my eyesight prescription rose 1.25 diopters in each eye. I got a new contact lens prescription and kept playing. I complained about therapy and continued to go.

The stubbornness of a mind unable to tolerate any gradations—squares of gray—is a mind trying its best to eradicate fear, trying to locate a refuge from the emotional flooding of uncertainty's paralysis. Pixelation builds safety out of clarity, and a mind makes its comfort through predictable patterns and rules.

Nonograms are often symmetrical, so the solving gets easier as one goes. Living, however, is unpredictable. Learning one's lesson does not always mean the same lesson will hold true for the next complication.
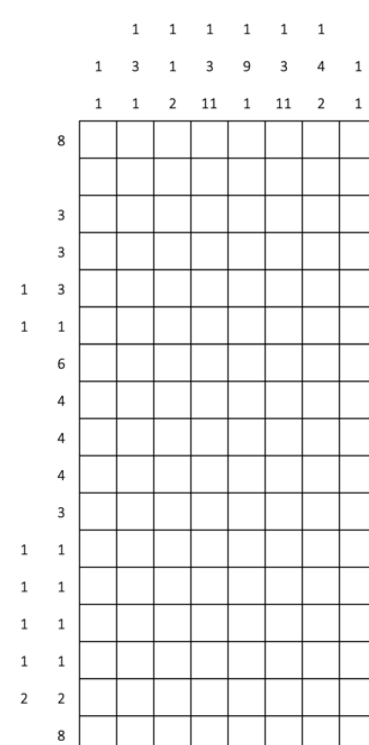
For my birthday that year, five years ago, my sister gifted me an art flipbook that zoomed out, on the flip, to show the big picture, the art book's painting, in full.

The first few pages of the art book were close-ups, splotchy paint squares of coral and orangey tones. Up close, these squares were empty of meaning. But when put into motion, they made up something visible—a starting place.

As more pages rushed past, their details blurred. A cubist face presented itself. It's hard, as the pages flip, to locate when they change, when the gridded color shifts into something with meaning. Nor can I recall when or how I worked my way out of that depression.

A grid is a delineation of structure, of openness; a series of pages are blank boxes, too. Blurring, alternately, is a product of distance, or a failure or consequence of one's own poor vision. In either case, it's the same end result: a detachment from hard breaks, a softening.