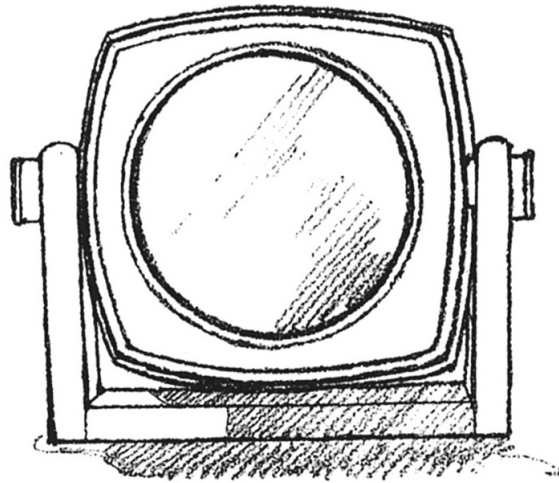


Anastasia's Chosen Career



Lois Lowry

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
Boston New York

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Summary: Thirteen-year-old Anastasia acquires poise and self-confidence, a new friend, and advice on becoming a bookstore owner when she commutes to Boston to take a modeling course.

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This book and all of the books in this series are fictional. I made them up. I made up the people. I made up their names. Honest.

With that in mind, I would like to dedicate this one to several strangers:

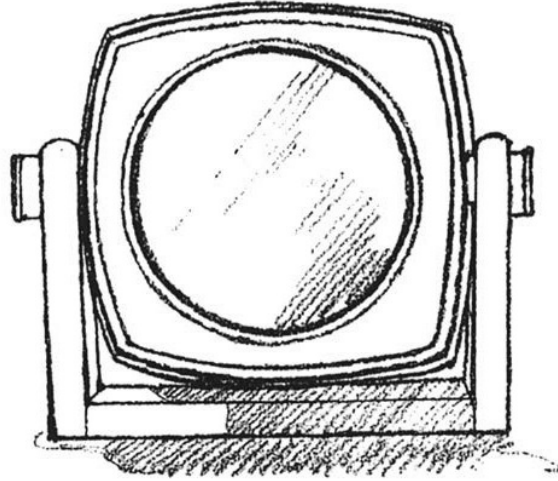
Dr. M. Krupnick, from the University of Chicago, who wrote to me in 1981.

His wife, Kathryn Krupnick.

The Very Reverend Robert Giannini, Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. Peter, St. Petersburg, Florida, who wrote to me in 1985.

And lots of Anastasias.

one



“Everybody in the whole world skis, except me,” announced Anastasia as she reached for another helping of dessert. It was apple crisp, one of her favorites.

“I don’t ski,” said her brother, Sam, with his mouth full.

“Well, you’re only three years old,” Anastasia pointed out. “Everybody else skis.”

Mrs. Krupnik, Anastasia’s mother, wiped her mouth with a paper napkin. “Mr. Fosburgh, across the street, doesn’t ski,” she commented.

“Mr. Fosburgh has been in a wheelchair for thirty-four years,” Anastasia said. “Everybody *else* skis.”

Anastasia’s father looked up. “I was just reading an article about tribespeople in the Kalahari Desert in Africa. It didn’t mention that they ski.”

Anastasia gave her entire family a look of disgust. It wasn’t easy, because it meant that she had to maintain a look of disgust while turning her head slowly to focus first on Sam, then on her mother, then on her father.

“I *meant*,” she said after a moment, after she had completed her look of disgust, “that it seems as if everyone in my class skis. Everyone in the seventh grade. Winter vacation starts next week, and all my friends are disappearing. They’re all going skiing.”

“No kidding,” her father said. “Everyone? Are they all going together? Why didn’t they invite us?” He reached over and took some more apple crisp.

“No,” Anastasia said gloomily. “Not all together. Daphne’s going with her grandmother. Daphne’s grandmother is taking her to Austria to ski. Can you imagine that? Daphne’s grandmother skiing? She’s *ancient!*”

“Well,” Mrs. Krupnik said, “she’s also extremely rich. Somehow extremely rich people seem to be able to do extremely amazing things.”

“And Meredith,” Anastasia went on. “Meredith’s family isn’t rich. But every single winter they go to New Hampshire to ski. They have these special ski outfits and

everything. Meredith's is blue." Anastasia sighed, thinking about the blue skiing outfit Meredith Halberg had shown her. "It has snowflakes embroidered on the sleeves."

"I bet anything I could knit a sweater with snowflakes on the sleeves," Mrs. Krupnik said. "Remember I made that sweater for Sam last winter, with a cow across the chest? What ever happened to that sweater, Sam? You didn't lose it, did you?"

Sam shook his head. "It's under my bed," he said.

"Would you like me to make you a sweater with snowflakes on the sleeves, Anastasia?"

"No," Anastasia said, emphatically. Then she added, "Thank you anyway."

Myron Krupnik took a third helping of apple crisp. "How about Steve Harvey?" he asked.

Anastasia groaned. "Steve Harvey is going with his father to Colorado because his father is covering some world championship ski races for NBC. Talk about *lucky*. I wish you were a sportscaster, Dad."

He laughed. "I think I'll stick with being a college professor and a poet. I don't know a soccer ball from a coronation ball. Anyway, even if I did, I could never be a sportscaster because I have arthritis in my neck and shoulders."

Anastasia stared at him. "So? What difference does that make? You could sit up straight and stare into a camera just fine. And they'd put powder over your bald spot so it wouldn't glisten. Maybe they'd even give you a toupee, if you were a sportscaster."

"My neck doesn't swivel. Picture me trying to announce a tennis match."

Anastasia pictured a tennis match, and she could see that her father was correct. You definitely needed a swivelly neck to announce a tennis match. Just her luck, to have a father with an unswivelly neck and a boring job.

Mrs. Krupnik stood up and began to collect the dessert plates. "Are you finished, Myron, or do you want to lick the bowl?"

Dr. Krupnik grinned and scraped the last invisible bits of apple crisp from his plate. Then he handed the empty plate to his wife.

Sam had climbed down from his chair and removed his shoes. In his stocking feet, he ran suddenly across the dining room to the place where the rug ended, and slid across the wooden floor out into the hall. Anastasia and her parents could hear the crash as Sam ran into the wall and fell against a small table that had been piled with books. They heard the books hit the floor.

After a moment Sam came back into the dining room, rubbing his behind. "I was skiing," he explained. "But it wasn't that much fun."

Anastasia trudged up the stairs to her third-floor bedroom after *The Cosby Show* ended. She wondered if Bill Cosby's family went skiing, and decided that they probably did. It sure was boring, living in a family that never did anything truly exciting, especially during school vacations. Sometimes they went to the New England Aquarium. Big deal: penguins and turtles. Sometimes they went to the Museum of Science. Big deal: exhibits about friction and gravity, two of the most boring things in the world. Sometimes they went to the Museum of Fine Arts. Big deal: paintings, and statues of naked people, usually with their more interesting parts crumbled.

In her room, Anastasia first did the thing she almost always did every evening. She sat in front of the mirror and stared at herself. She gathered up her hair in one hand and tried to arrange it in various styles. First she gathered it into a big ball on top of her head. Then she tried it pulled entirely to one side, hanging down beside her left ear. Next, she parted it in the middle and pulled it into two ponytails, one on either side of her head. Each time, she sighed, staring at her reflection, and let her hair drop again into its ordinary thick, shoulder-length mass.

She pushed her glasses down farther on her nose and pursed her lips into a tight, refined look. She stared at herself and decided that she looked like a schoolmistress from the nineteenth century. Then she pushed her glasses back up where they belonged and tried a broad, toothy smile. She turned sideways, flung her head back, and looked at herself out of the corners of her eyes. She moved her shoulder forward, turned her neck—*her* neck swiveled, at least—and sucked in her cheeks, although it meant that she couldn't smile. She pulled some hair over her face and tugged at the neck of her sweatshirt until one shoulder was exposed. There. She held that pose, her favorite, for a moment. She liked it: haughty, disheveled, devil-may-care, flagrant. Anastasia liked the idea of being *flagrant*, even though she wasn't exactly sure what the word meant.

She stood up and wandered over to her unmade bed where her schoolbooks were strewn. She flipped through her history book, glanced at her homework paper, and decided she'd done enough, even though she'd answered only ten questions out of the twelve. She could do the other two in study hall before history class.

Anastasia lay down on her bed, wiggled a little to keep the corner of her notebook from poking her in the back, and thought about the coming weeklong vacation from seventh grade. She had absolutely nothing to do during vacation except to work on her school project: a paper called "My Chosen Career."

Gross. How could you write about "My Chosen Career" when you hadn't even chosen one yet? Worse: all the seventh-graders were supposed to interview a person already working in their chosen career. Meredith was going to cheat; she was going to interview the owner of the ski lodge where her family always stayed. Then she was going to pretend that she wanted to own a ski lodge when she grew up.

Steve Harvey was going to interview his own father, for Pete's sake. Talk about *easy*.

Daphne had already interviewed the guy her mother worked for, and now she was pretending that she wanted to be a lawyer. What a fake. Everybody *knew* that Daphne wanted to be an actress when she grew up. But Anastasia could sympathize with Daphne's problem; Daphne had written letters to Katharine Hepburn, Debra Winger, and Joanne Woodward, asking for interviews. All she got back were autographed pictures, and the autographs weren't even real—when you licked your finger and tried to smear them, they didn't smear at all.

It really wasn't entirely true that *everyone* was going skiing. Daphne was going to Austria with her grandmother; that was true. They were flying from Boston tomorrow, and Daphne got to miss a whole day of school. Meredith's family really was going to New Hampshire, as they always did. And Steve Harvey was leaving for Colorado with his father on Sunday.

But Sonya Isaacson—one of Anastasia's very best friends—would be around. The Isaacson family didn't ski, maybe because every one of them was a little bit plump,

Anastasia thought; maybe that would make skiing difficult.

Anastasia wasn't plump at all. I am *slender*, she thought, and held up one arm to look at it, hoping it would look long-limbed and graceful. Long-limbed and graceful my foot, she thought. I'm *bony*. Skinny and bony. *Tall* and skinny and bony. And my hair is gross. My posture is disgusting. I'm nearsighted. I have a chickenpox scar on my forehead, and I hate my nose.

Even if my parents bought me a pale blue skiing outfit and took me to New Hampshire—no, took me to *Austria*—I would still be me, Anastasia thought. I would still be a tall, skinny, bony, gross-haired, slump-shouldered, nearsighted, big-nosed freak of a person.

She pictured a gorgeous, tan, blond ski instructor named—what? Hans. He would be named Hans. He would be wearing goggles pushed up over his blond hair and a black turtleneck sweater, she decided. His ski pants would be skintight, and she would be able to see the rippling muscles in his long, slim, ski instructor legs. His even white teeth would gleam in the Austrian sunshine. He would smile at her—gleam, gleam, gleam. And he would say in a deep, masculine, ski instructor voice—

Anastasia groaned aloud. She knew *exactly* what he would say. And he would say it in a sexy-ski-instructor Austrian accent, which made it even worse.

He would say, “Young lady, you vill have to leave dis mountain immediately. Ve don't allow skinny, bony, nearsighted, big-nosed people to come to ski slopes. Go back to Boston and improve yourself.”

Anastasia sat up. That did it. A *daydream* did it: made a decision for her.

“Thanks, Hans,” she said. “You've forced me to face reality.” She reached over to the drawer of the table beside her bed. On the table, in his bowl, her goldfish looked at her with amazed eyes.

“Don't bug me, Frank,” Anastasia said to her goldfish. “Just don't bug me.”

She opened the drawer and took out the piece of paper that had been stored there for several months, ever since the day it had appeared under the windshield wiper of her father's car when they came out of the Paris Cinema after seeing a Woody Allen movie.

With the paper in her hands, she opened the door to her room and called down the stairs.

“Mom? Dad?”

No answer. Far below, on the first floor, she could hear the television. They were watching *Hill Street Blues*, their favorite TV show.

Anastasia went down to the second floor, tiptoed past the bedroom door where Sam was sleeping, and then went partway down the stairs to the first floor. She sat down on the stairs, pressed her face against the railing, and called into the study.

“Mom? Dad?”

Her mother came into the hall from the study and looked up at Anastasia. “What?” she asked.

“Mom,” Anastasia said, “you said that you and Dad would talk over what I asked you, about going into Boston all by myself on the bus during school vacation. Did you? Did you talk it over?”

Sounds of gunshots came from the television. Mrs. Krupnik was standing there, but it was obvious to Anastasia that her mother hadn't even listened to her question. Her

mother was listening to the television. Talk about supportive parents.

“To take that course, Mom. Remember?”

“Katherine!” Dr. Krupnik called urgently. “They’ve taken Bobby Hill hostage!”

“Go on back, Mom,” Anastasia said with a sigh. “I’ll discuss it with you at breakfast.”

Anastasia read the paper again as she wandered back up to the third floor to get ready for bed. She had had it memorized for several weeks, but still she read the words over and over.

“Frank?” she said. She looked over at her goldfish. Frank opened and closed his mouth several times, very slowly. If Frank could talk, Anastasia thought, he would say nothing but “Oh. Oh. Oh.”

“Frank,” Anastasia told him, “if my parents will let me go all by myself into Boston on the bus during school vacation next week—”

Frank flipped his translucent tail and executed a languid somersault through the water.

“And they’d *better* let me, because I’m old enough—I’m thirteen, after all—well, then my school vacation isn’t going to be at all boring. Because I’m going to do something absolutely incredible! And educational, too. And to prepare me for my chosen career: how about *that*, Frank?”

Frank stared at Anastasia and moved his mouth again. “Oh. Oh. Oh,” he said silently, as if maybe he knew something that she didn’t.

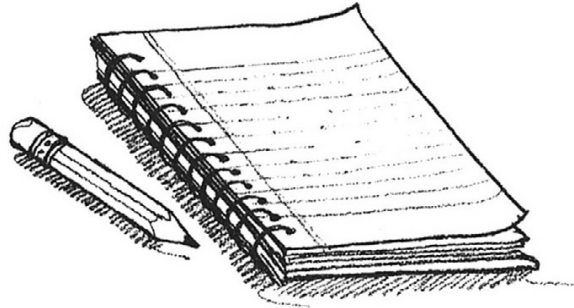
Anastasia sighed, opened her notebook, and began to work on her school project.

Anastasia Krupnik

My Chosen Career

After a great deal of careful thought about my future, I have chosen a career which will be exciting, glamorous, and

two



Mrs. Krupnik shook her head apprehensively. Her hair was tied back with a piece of yellow yarn, and she was wearing her plaid bathrobe.

“I don’t know, Anastasia. Dad and I *have* talked about it, and we don’t entirely agree. It really sounds risky to me. Sam, quit playing with your eggs. *Eat* them, please.”

“I’m making a mountain,” Sam said. He piled another forkload of scrambled eggs on top of the mound he’d fashioned on his plate. “When it’s all made, then my fork will ski down. *Then* I’ll eat it.”

Mrs. Krupnik looked at her watch. “Sam, your carpool driver will be here in ten minutes. Think of all the exciting stuff you’re going to do at nursery school this morning. Eat your breakfast.”

Carefully Sam reached over to the sugar bowl, took a spoonful of sugar, and sprinkled it on top of his scrambled-egg mound. “Snow,” he said happily. “Snow on my skiing mountain.”

Anastasia carried her own empty plate to the kitchen sink. “*Mom*,” she said, “I am thirteen years old. Practically adult. What’s risky about a practically adult person going alone to Boston on the bus in broad daylight?”

Mrs. Krupnik frowned and sipped her coffee. “I keep remembering what that guy says at the beginning of *Hill Street Blues*. He gives everybody their assignments, and then he looks very solemn, and he says . . .” She took another sip of coffee. “Myron, what does he say when he sends them all out after roll call?”

Dr. Krupnik looked up from the newspaper. “Remember,” he said in a serious voice, “be very, very careful out there.”

“Right.” Mrs. Krupnik picked up a piece of toast and began to spread some raspberry jam on it. “There’s all sorts of crime and violence in cities, Anastasia.” She looked over at Sam. “*Sam!* Stop it!”

Sam was sprinkling more and more sugar on his egg mountain. “Blizzard,” he said blissfully.

Anastasia tried very hard to be patient and reasonable, because she knew that if they got into a big argument she would lose. “*Mom*,” she said, “and Dad. I *am* a very, very careful person. I’ve been in Boston a million times, with you guys. I know my way

around. I don't ever speak to strangers. The bus goes right to the corner of Tremont Street and I'd only have to walk two blocks. It would be daylight. They said on the news that the mayor has cracked down on the drug dealers in Boston Common—"

"The *what?*" Mrs. Krupnik asked in an astonished voice.

Whoops. That had been a mistake, mentioning drug dealers, Anastasia realized. Parents wanted to think that thirteen-year-old people had never heard about drug dealers.

"Actually," Anastasia said hastily, "I was referring to last summer, when there was a small problem with crime in the city. But now the mayor has solved that.

"And you know," she went on slyly, changing her tactic a little, "I have this very important school project to work on. So this will give me a chance to do the research."

"Research?" her father asked, looking up from his paper with interest. "For school?" There was nothing her father liked more than the thought of one of his children doing research for school.

Mrs. Krupnik looked at her watch again. She got up and went to get Sam's winter jacket, which was hanging on a hook by the back door. "Sam," she said, "you now have about three minutes until your ride comes."

Sam aimed his fork into the top of his sugar-and-egg mountain, pried off a large forkful, and put it into his mouth. He made a terrible face. "I hate my eggs," he said.

Mrs. Krupnik sighed. "Here, Sam," she said. She handed him the half slice of toast she had left. "Eat this." She helped Sam into his jacket, pulled a woolen hat down over his curls, and thrust his mittens into his pockets. "There's Mrs. Harrington now, beeping her horn. Goodbye. See you at lunch." She closed the back door behind Sam and they all watched from the window as he climbed into the back seat of the nursery school car.

"Now *I* only have ten minutes before I have to leave," Anastasia said. "Please, Mom. Please, Dad. I really want to do this. And I have to make the phone call this afternoon."

"Anastasia, it is so much money," said her mother. "Your dad and I were hoping that after your summer job, after you put all that money in the bank, you would develop some sense of financial responsibility—you know, looking ahead to the future."

Anastasia tried to be patient. "Mom, I *told* you that this would be in preparation for a career. It would be *educational*."

"Well," said Mrs. Krupnik. "Myron, what do you think?"

"I like the idea of school research," Dr. Krupnik said. "I wish *my* students would do research during vacations. What kind of research would you be doing?"

"My chosen career," Anastasia reminded him.

Her father's face brightened. "That's right," he said. "I forgot that you had that assignment. You were thinking about Bookstore Owner. I think that's a terrific idea."

"Actually," Anastasia told her father, "I've kind of changed my mind about Bookstore Owner. Now, since I want to take this course, I'm thinking more along the lines of—"

But her father was already reaching for the telephone book. "Let me check the address," he said. "There's a wonderful little bookstore on Beacon Hill, and I met the owner when my last book of poetry came out. She had a wine and cheese party there at the store, and an autographing."

“Dad,” Anastasia said, “I’ve been thinking that—”

“Only three people actually bought the book,” he muttered. “Forty-seven people came and forty-seven people drank wine and ate cheese, but only three bought the book. Still, she was a nice woman.”

“Myron,” Mrs. Krupnik said, “she could interview a bookstore owner right here in town. She doesn’t have to go all the way into the city for that.”

“Here it is,” Dr. Krupnik said, with his finger on one of the yellow pages. “Mount Vernon Street. That’s a good, safe part of the city, if she goes in the daytime.”

“Myron,” said Mrs. Krupnik again. “She could go right down the street. There’s a Waldenbooks right down the street.”

“Mom,” Anastasia pointed out, “there are a million Waldenbooks all over the country. Mr. Walden probably lives in New York or something. And what I need is a bookstore owner, if I’m going to do Bookstore Owner for ‘My Chosen Career.’”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Krupnik. “You’re right.”

“Anyway,” Anastasia went on, “it’s really the *other* thing that I want to do in Boston. It would be so self-improving,” Anastasia exclaimed. “And I *need* self-improvement. Even if I were going to be a bookstore owner, I would need self-improvement.”

Dr. Krupnik was dialing. “I hope she remembers me,” he said. “Do you think a bookstore owner remembers someone whose book sold only three copies?”

But the bookstore owner did. She remembered him, and she said that she would be willing to be interviewed by Anastasia.

“At noon,” Anastasia whispered to her father while he was on the phone. “At lunchtime. Because I’m going to be doing this *other* thing too.”

“Here you are,” her father said after he had hung up. He handed Anastasia a slip of paper. “Her name and the address of the store. She’ll see you at twelve fifteen on Monday. She said you could have a sandwich with her, there in the shop, while you do the interview.”

Anastasia looked at it. “So now I’m going to be a Bookstore Owner,” she said.

“Right,” her father told her, grinning. “And you’ll have wine and cheese parties and autographings for poets. For your dad.”

Anastasia folded the paper. “Well, if I promise to do that—and I promise to sell more than three copies—can I do the other thing, *please*?”

“Oh, all right,” her father said. “At least it will keep you busy during vacation. It seems like a harmless enterprise to me. Katherine, what do you think?”

“Well,” Mrs. Krupnik said dubiously, “okay.”

Anastasia jumped up and hugged each of them. “Thank you!” she said. “I have such great parents! Greater than anybody’s! You know what Sonya’s parents said when she asked them if *she* could do it? They said it was incredibly low-class and tacky and revolting and expensive and absolutely ridiculous. What do *they* know, right?”

“They’re really letting you do it?” Sonya held her large notebook in front of her face so that Mr. Earnshaw wouldn’t see that she was whispering. They were in study hall. “Really?”

Anastasia, behind her notebook, nodded. “I’m going to call this afternoon.”

“How’re you going to pay for it? It costs a fortune!” Sonya peered up to the front of the room, but Mr. Earnshaw was busy at his desk, correcting papers.

“Out of my savings account. I have the money I earned last summer—remember I worked for Daphne’s grandmother? And also I have the money that my aunts and uncles send on my birthday every year; my parents always make me put it in the bank. So I have about three hundred dollars in my savings account. And this only costs a hundred and nineteen. Shhhh.” Anastasia ducked her head and pretended to read her history book. Mr. Earnshaw had stood up and begun to prowl around the room.

After he had passed her desk and observed her diligently reading about the Battle of Bull Run, Anastasia unfolded the piece of paper and read it for the billionth time.

INCREASED POISE, it said at the top.

Boy, thought Anastasia, I can sure use *that*. I have zero poise.

She remembered all the times that she had *needed* poise and it hadn’t been there. The time, just recently, for example, when on Careers Day at the junior high, Anastasia had been assigned to guide the lady architect around the corridors of the school as she visited classes. Anastasia had practiced the night before, things she might say to an architect—*poised* things—and then, when she tried to say them, when she began, “Architecture interests me a great deal. My family lives in a Victorian house that was built in—” she had walked right smack into a glass door, practically wrecking her nose.

She was still embarrassed thinking about it, even though the lady architect had been very sympathetic and kind and had given her a Kleenex to hold against her fat lip, which bled a little.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE, the paper said.

And if anybody needed increased confidence, it was Anastasia. If she’d had enough confidence, she would have run for class secretary. She really *wanted* to be class secretary. She really liked taking minutes. She liked the *word* “minutes.” She wanted to write “Minutes” at the top of a page and then take notes. She would have done it better than anybody—certainly better than stupid old Emily Ewing, who had so much confidence that she had not only run for class secretary but had made posters that said

EXTRAORDINARY EXCELLENCE

EMILY EWING

and everybody voted for her. But Emily always forgot to go to the meetings. She only wanted to be class secretary because she wanted her picture in the yearbook. Anastasia would have been a much better class secretary, but she hadn’t had the confidence.

Soon I will, Anastasia thought with satisfaction.

She read the final phrase at the top of the paper. INCREASED MATURITY.

It didn’t seem as important as poise and confidence. Anastasia’s parents assured her often that she was very mature for thirteen. She read mature books, watched mature programs on TV, behaved in a mature way, not whining and fooling around the way her brother did. Sometimes she *sulked*, true; but mature people sulked now and then. Her mother had sulked all evening the time that she’d spent hours making a casserole with a whole lot of fancy ingredients and then practically no one in the family would eat it. Anastasia had started to eat it, until she found out that it contained liver, which she hated. Her father had started to eat it, until he saw an artichoke heart, which he hated. Sam ate it, because Sam ate just about anything, but Mrs. Krupnik had sulked

anyway. Anastasia had acted very maturely on that occasion, going to the kitchen to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for herself and her father.

It was the small print, farther down, that Anastasia really liked; and she read it now, again and again.

videotaping
hairstyling
makeup instruction
posture clinic
voice modulation
diet modification
fashion consultation

She wasn't quite sure what "modification" or "modulation" meant. But since the whole \$119 week was called "Junior High Models Workshop," she figured that they had to do with modeling. Weird. Maybe you modeled clothes and modified your diet and modulated your voice. She would learn about all that stuff when she took the course.

Of course, if she became a fashion model, there would be a whole new set of problems, Anastasia realized. She propped up her notebook again, ducked her head, and whispered, "Sonya?"

Sonya lifted her notebook and looked over from her desk. "What?"

"Would you pose for nude photographs if they asked you?" Anastasia whispered.

"New photographs? Of course. Especially if I lost weight. I'd throw my *old* photographs away. They're all *fat*."

"Not new. *Nude*," Anastasia whispered.

Sonya looked puzzled. "*Noon* photographs?" she asked.

"*NUDE*," Anastasia said aloud.

Everyone in the study hall burst out laughing. Mr. Earnshaw stood up, straightened his glasses, and aimed his eagle eyes at Anastasia.

"Anastasia Krupnik," he said, "I'll speak to you here at my desk privately, as soon as the bell rings." Then he smiled a pinched, sarcastic smile. "Fully clothed, of course," he added.

Blushing, Anastasia began to arrange her books. Poise and confidence: she thought hard, willing those two qualities into herself as she prepared to explain to Mr. Earnshaw. Poise and confidence.

"I have to confess I'm a little nervous about modeling school," Anastasia said to her parents that night. Sam was in bed, and they were sitting in the study in front of the fireplace. Her father had put one of his favorite records on the stereo. His eyes were closed, and he was directing the music with his hands in the air.

"Ta da dum, ta da dum," he sang softly, with the record. "Hear that phrasing? Mozart was a genius."

Anastasia nodded politely, even though her father still had his eyes closed and couldn't see her. He was so weird when he got involved with Mozart. Her mother just smiled and continued knitting.

Anastasia didn't know a single kid who knit, or who listened to Mozart. She wondered how those things came about. Did you wake up one morning, suddenly, at

age seventeen or so, with a sudden urge to knit mittens? And when did Mozart happen? Her father had once told her that he had loved the Beatles when he was young. What had gone wrong? Had he, years before, maybe when he was in college, had an overwhelming desire one day to turn off *Sergeant Pepper* and replace it with a symphony? She would have to ask him. But not, she knew, while the record was playing.

“Of course you’re nervous,” her mother was reassuring her. “You were nervous when you began your job last summer. You were nervous the first day of school. Everybody’s nervous when they set out on a new venture.”

“Actually,” Anastasia reminded her, “I have *two* new ventures going on at the same time. When I go to Boston, I’m not only going to go to the modeling course; I’m also going to do the Bookstore Owner interview . . .”

Her mother looked at her warily. “Anastasia, *promise* us that you will go directly to the bookstore. And to the modeling course. And to and from that bus. No fooling around in the city.”

“Fooling around? *Moi?*”

The music stopped, and Dr. Krupnik stood up to turn the record over. “I want you to listen carefully to the third movement,” he said.

“Myron,” Anastasia’s mother said, “do you have any advice for Anastasia about the interview?”

“You could ask her why my book sold only three copies in her store,” he suggested.

“Ha ha,” Anastasia said sarcastically. “I wouldn’t ask something like that. It’s important to be super polite during the interview. We have this sheet of instructions. Also we’re supposed to ask open-ended questions.”

“What’s an open-ended question?” asked Mrs. Krupnik.

Anastasia remembered the instructions their class had been given. “Well,” she explained, “if you just ask, ‘Do you like being a bookstore owner?’ she could just say yes or no. And it would be boring. So, instead, you ask, ‘What exactly do you like about being a bookstore owner?’ Then she has to say something. That’s an open-ended question.”

Her father frowned. He was holding the arm of his stereo turntable carefully in his hand. “Now pay attention, you guys. This third movement is incredible,” he said.

“Dad,” Anastasia asked, “what exactly do you like about Mozart? That’s an open-ended question.”

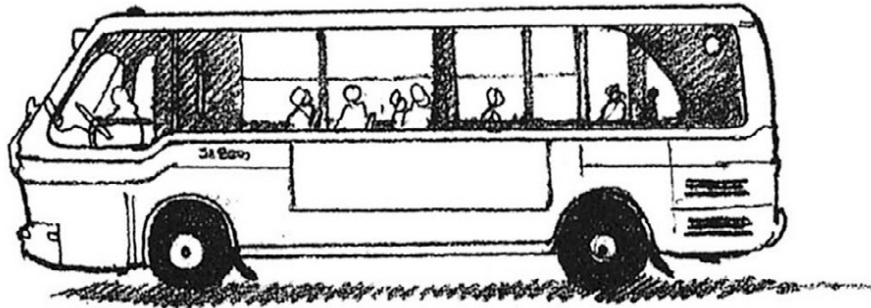
“Shhhhh,” said her father.

Anastasia Krupnik

My Chosen Career

After a lot of careful thought, I have decided that for my chosen career I am going to be a bookstore owner. To be a bookstore owner it is necessary to have increased poise and self-confidence. So as part of the educational requirements it is probably a good idea to take a modeling course.

three



The bus will be late, Anastasia thought, stamping her feet in the snow. I know the bus will be late. The bus will be late, and then I will be late, and I'll be the only person in the whole class who is late. How humiliating. They'll probably kick me out, before I ever start. And they'll make me pay the money anyway. I'll have to pay the whole \$119, and they won't even let me take the course because I'm late the first day.

But then she heard the hiss of brakes and looked up, and the bus was there.

Waiting in line behind a lady who had to wrestle two small children up the slippery bus steps, Anastasia looked at her watch.

I'm going to be early, she thought. Good grief. I'm going to be a whole half hour early. I'll be the first one there, and they'll all laugh at me. How humiliating. The earliest one there. You're not *eager* or anything, Krupnik?

The bus lurched, starting up, and Anastasia stumbled toward an empty seat after paying her fare. I hope this is the right bus, she thought nervously. What if I got on the wrong bus? What if this bus is headed to New York or something? Oh, great. I should have asked the driver if this was the right bus.

She looked toward the front and studied the back of the bus driver's head. He was a middle-aged man with a mustache, and he was staring straight ahead as he drove, squinting against the bright sunlight reflected off the snow.

That looks like a New York bus driver, Anastasia decided. I am on the wrong bus. Good grief, I am going to New York. I always *wanted* to go to New York someday, but I sure didn't want to go to New York all by myself, wearing jeans. How will I get home?

"You going shopping?"

Anastasia was startled when the woman beside her spoke. She glanced over at an elderly woman in a tweed coat, clutching a fat green pocketbook in her lap.

"Excuse me?"

"I asked if you were going shopping. I'm going to Filene's Basement. I go to Filene's Basement every day. The only way you can get bargains is to go every single day. Are you headed for Filene's?"

That was a relief. Filene's was in downtown Boston, so she was on the right bus. Anastasia shook her head and smiled politely at the lady. She had promised her mother

and father that she wouldn't speak to strangers, but she figured that shaking her head and smiling politely was okay.

The woman kept on talking. "Half the people on this bus are going to Filene's Basement. Right now you see them all in coats and hats, right? Half an hour from now, they'll all be standing around Filene's Basement in their underwear."

Anastasia stared at her. "I beg your pardon?" she asked.

"No dressing rooms," the woman explained. "So you have to try things on right out in the open. That woman over there—you see her, in the blue hat? She always wears two slips, one on top of the other."

Anastasia blinked her eyes and looked straight ahead. Ten minutes after I promise my parents that I won't talk to strangers, she thought, and here I am involved in a conversation about underwear.

"So," the woman continued, while she opened her pocketbook, took out a compact, opened it, and examined her lipstick in the mirror, "are you going shopping?"

"No," Anastasia said uncomfortably, "I'm going to modeling school."

The woman snapped the compact closed. "Oh," she said, "of course. I should have guessed."

"Guessed? Why?"

"Because you're tall," the woman said. "And thin."

Anastasia slouched down in the bus seat gloomily. Thanks a lot, she thought. You *could* have said "because you have such great cheekbones."

The woman droned on and on, talking about the bargains in Filene's Basement, but Anastasia stopped listening. She began to picture herself at the end of the week, getting on this same bus Friday afternoon, maybe sitting beside this same lady. Ha. The woman would look exactly the same—green pocketbook, frizzy gray hair—but Anastasia would be entirely different. Tall, yes. Thin, yes. But poised, confident, with—she thought about the small print on the paper—a new hairstyle, a modified diet, better posture, a modulated voice, and an entirely revised sense of fashion.

She remembered that it had said makeup, also. Anastasia had never worn makeup. Well, not *really*. Occasionally she had *tried* wearing makeup, but it never seemed to work. She didn't seem to have the hang of it. But of course modeling school would teach her that.

Now the bus was entering the city. Anastasia peered through the grimy window and watched the tall buildings pass. She watched all the poised, confident people striding briskly along the sidewalks. Soon she would be one of them—well, not *that* one, she thought, as she spied an obese woman waddling along, bellowing at a small child scurrying by her side.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the yellow slip of paper on which her father had written the address of the bookstore and its name: PAGES.

What a neat name for a bookstore, Anastasia thought: *Pages*. The owner had probably agonized for hours and hours before she thought of the perfect name.

Anastasia thought about some questions she could ask the owner.

"Was it fun, choosing just the right name for your bookstore?"

No. That wasn't open-ended. The owner could just say, "Yes."

Anastasia tried to rephrase the question. “What thinking process did you go through, choosing just the right name for your bookstore?” There. That was just right.

Maybe, she realized, in order to be super polite, she ought to include the woman’s name in the question. “What thinking process did you go through, choosing just the right name for your bookstore, Ms.—” She looked again at the paper and read the name of the owner.

BARBARA PAGE.

Oh. Well, maybe she *hadn’t* agonized for hours and hours before she thought of the perfect name for her bookstore.

The bus slid to a stop and interrupted Anastasia’s thoughts. They were here: downtown Boston. She could see the Boston Common on one side of her and the State House, with its gold dome, beyond.

She waited while the people around her stood and made their way to the front of the bus: women, mostly, with shopping bags, umbrellas, and pocketbooks. They looked like housewives, grandmothers, schoolteachers; Anastasia found it hard to believe that within a few minutes they would all be standing around Filene’s Basement in their underwear.

“Excuse me, dear.” The woman beside her shoved past and hurried off. Anastasia followed.

She had to walk two blocks to the modeling school. Anastasia hitched up her jeans, smoothed her parka, and adjusted her posture—she had been trying since Friday to remember good posture. The evening before, with her parents, she had examined a street map of Boston. With her finger she had traced the direction in which she would walk. Now she got her bearings and started off.

She wondered what the modeling school would look like. Of course, she had a pretty good idea from TV movies. There would be a tasteful bronze sign attached to the wall beside the front door. Inside, there would be soft carpeting—gray, she thought, or beige—with some colorful cushions, maybe red or yellow, strewn on the soft couches in the waiting room. The lights would be bright, and there would be a gorgeous receptionist in designer clothes at a big semicircular desk. Phones would be ringing constantly. In the background, music would be playing.

She turned a corner and passed a Chinese fast-food place and a typewriter repair shop. A young woman standing beside the typewriter place was stamping her feet to warm them and saying something to people who passed by.

“Got a quarter? Spare a quarter?” the woman asked Anastasia as she walked past.

Anastasia shook her head as the other people had done. She felt a little guilty, because she *did* have a quarter, and she could probably spare it, too. But she had noticed that the woman was wearing L. L. Bean boots. Anastasia knew what those cost, and she was pretty certain that someone who could afford L. L. Bean boots didn’t need to scrounge quarters.

Still, she thought, maybe the woman had *found* the boots someplace. Maybe she was really, truly hungry. Maybe she had small, starving children . . .

Anastasia hesitated. She turned and looked back at the young woman again. A man had stopped and was dropping some change into her outstretched hand. Then he