

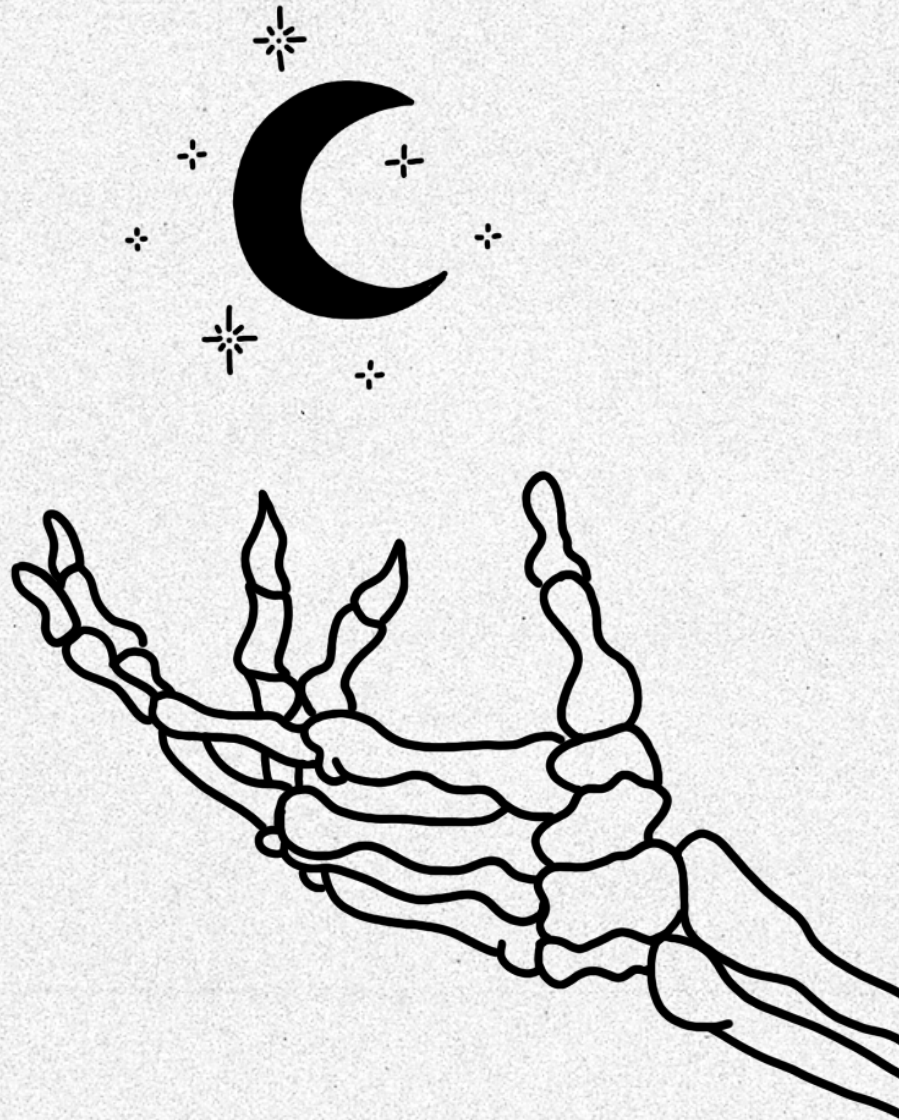
HANNAH NOWAK

The telling of tenacity through assorted works.

# The Language of Resilience



VOL. 1



THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MY THOUGHTS:

# An Epitaph.

My thoughts are constantly brimming over with clutter and chaos, so, like a splinter, i'm forced to get some of them out to stop the pain and make space for healing. Those dead words, those fragments of phrases strung together to create a narrative, find a new finite home. Once they've been written down or spoken, they live in that space forever. Just because they are no longer living— no longer active— does not mean that they bear no weight. Though they have passed on, they still serve as a memory, as a story of what was once true. When it's over, it just becomes a story, memory, or a lesson learned. When it's over, all that's left is the mark where a splinter once lived.

This collection serves as its delicate epitaph of stories I've written. By gifting myself the permission and space to explore the most intimate parts of my brain without judgment, I've been able to grow with resilience and tenacity. A lot of times, I find trouble finding the one, right way to say something. Instead, I gave myself the freedom to try out different styles, voices, narratives, and characters to work through what I needed to. I started writing with the intention of creating a children's book, but found myself needing to tell different stories that didn't necessarily align with this mentality.

Before you rests a collection of written word, ranging from short story to poetry. I recognize that this may not appear in the format you're used to. With my polymathic background, I've broken out of a mold and become a visual storyteller that writes with both language and design. I'm learning to live spontaneously by what is calling to me.

**I knew a girl once  
There were splinters  
from her thoughts**

...

**I'm a cryptic writer  
I'm an ignorant fool  
I'm a poor excuse for poetry  
Trying to play it cool**

...

**I need nothing more  
than my problems**

-Hippo Campus  
Lyrics to "epitaph"

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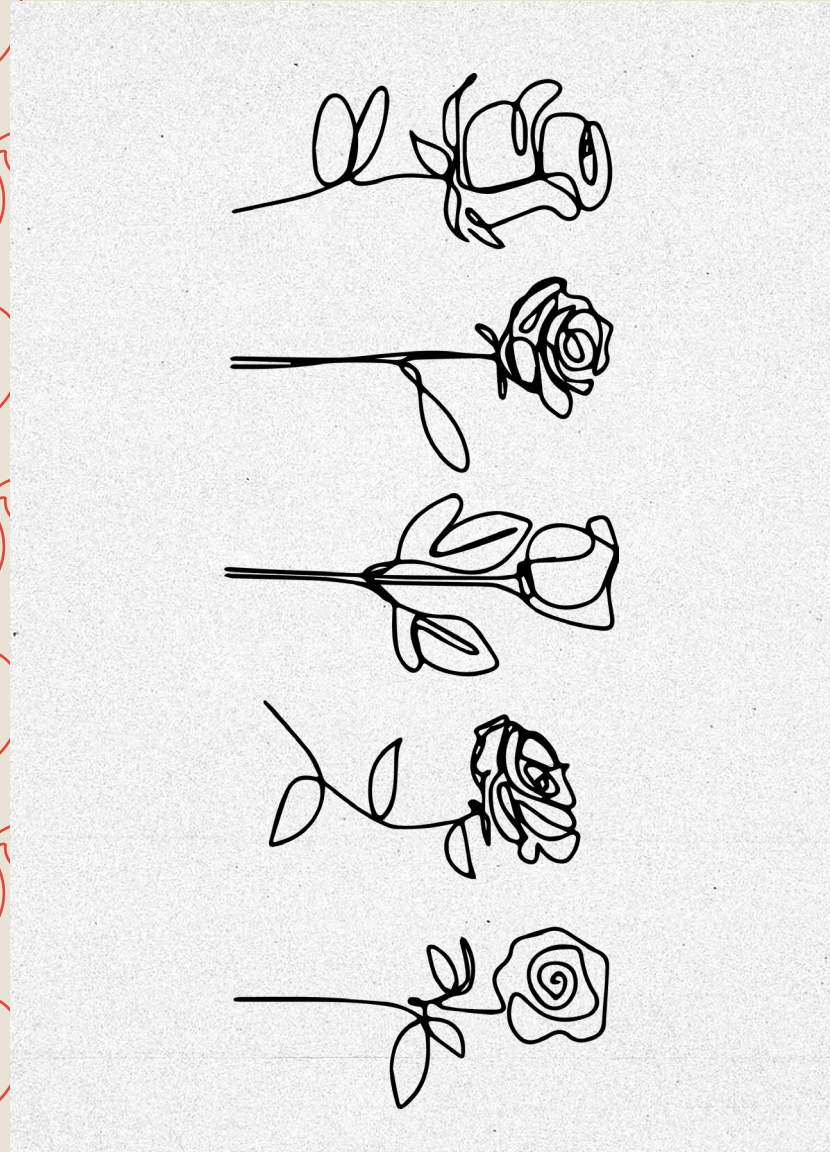
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## GARDENER OF NOTHING

At midnight, the church bells chimed as they did every night. Rising from his worn wine-leather chair, he slapped a paper boy hat on and headed out the door. With hands wilted and cracked with age, he pushed the wrought iron gate open and let the coolness of the metal numb his thoughts. When he used to overflow with life, he had made that fence, welding it into existence. Now, his face was red with suffering, blushing with each wave of knowing that without a purpose, he was nothing. The translucent skin that exposed varicose veins and disease on his face hung, wilted like hanging gardens at the cusp of winter. The old man wore a tweed suit and the smell of tobacco around his neck like a scarf; the residual cigar smoke was the only indicator of his sickness other than a cough so harsh that it now replaced his regular breathing. The sloped cobblestone path to his garden bit at his work boots as loose drops from his watering can created a steady rhythm of sizzles. Cool water kissed the path still hot from the day. With eyes ringed with exhaustion, the gardener looked at the intricate network of flowers and shrubs that formed a maze before him. The field of flora embedded between bushes and shrubbery was abundant and exuberant with life. He sighed as he buttoned the jacket of his suit. The greenery may bloom, but the plants exist only to perish. He looked of living death, and proceed forward into the maze.

As I sit on a cedar park bench, hidden by leaves that will turn and fall,  
I watch as the man moves through the maze.





## The old man kept to himself;

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I only ever noticed him leaving the timeworn red brick estate to grab the mail or pick up groceries. The garden maze acted as a border between each of our respective houses. It was a line I never crossed, but always approached. For the past four years, I've been coming out to the maze to sit, trying to find solace and purpose in the sky glittered with stars. When I don't, I find comfort in watching the man work. He's reliable, consistent, and enigmatic. We don't share sugar or eggs when we run out of our own. We don't share niceties or pleasantries when we see each other in passing. But we do share the night.

Some great burden must have shaped his hunched shoulders. He swept across the flora with a face painted with struggle. He worked in bunches, watering each bush of brush and petal until the stream of

excess water met his boot. Each bunch stretched no more than three feet, yet after each one, he dropped a stone behind him, weaving a trail of pebble and rubble. It was comforting to watch him work each night, with only the moonlight guiding his already blinding eyes. He didn't need the light as it wasn't a maze to escape; to him it was just a trail, familiar, but unimportant. The man walked through the maze like he was the gardener of nothingness, yet he was the source of life for the garden. He was the man responsible for growing a color wheel of flowers. The man that trimmed the weeds when they tried to stage a coup. The man that knows the outcome, the exit, but enters the labyrinth anyways. It's a puzzle to me, but familiar to him. For the first time in four years, overwhelmed with a sad mix of curiosity and boredom, I followed the stones through the maze.

As I approached him, the gardener turned around later than I expected, apparently not detecting the sound of my slippers shuffling on the cobblestone. He whipped around, fear and fire filling his wide eyes. Upon recognition, he calmed. He stared at me blankly.

"When I come out at night to look at the stars, I always see you watering the flowers of the maze at the same exact time, every night without fail. This garden you've created and maintained is lovely, but why do you do that? Why do you lay these stones down?" I asked, immediately having an internal argument about my current level of nosiness.

The gardener opened his mouth, but nothing came out— his brain seemed slower than his words. He closed his mouth and waited.



When he was ready, he asked in response, “Do you know the sadness of the bottom of the ocean, forgotten amongst the shadows—unperturbed, undisturbed by man? Do you understand sound, and the path it took to find you, to provide for you?”

I looked at him with wild eyes, my forehead crinkling as I tried to process his words which were drawn out and divided into sweet, crisp syllables. He took my silence as a response.

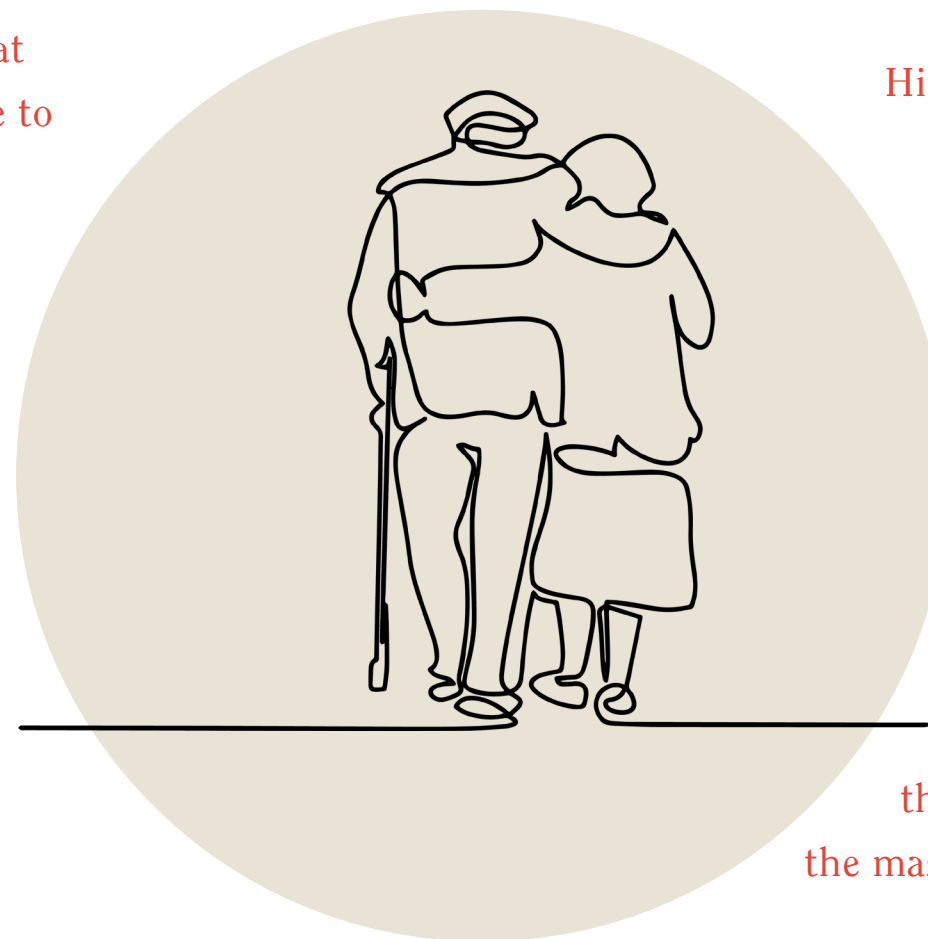
“Look kid— It’s like a poor man finding a coin at the bottom of a wishing well, then noticing its absence when he discovers nothing but a hole at the base of his pocket. It’s almost perfect and yet it’s fleeting. Then it’s gone. Who are we to assume that we are the lucky ones? That we’ve been selected to accept some coincidence as a sign? Who are we to think we are special, when there’s so much more? We are merely an instant, a moment in time, frozen. We fly through this life blushing, fluttering, and shining in silent whirls of weakness, pain, and grievances. We collapse and we continue on, it’s all the same. The world doesn’t owe us anything. You say that I created this garden? No. I might’ve helped by watering and maintaining them, but these shrubs and flowers do not exist because of me. They do not exist for me,” He paused, anticipating my next question.

“Who then do they exist for? Who do we exist for?” I questioned. Between the sleeplessness and the existentialism, I wasn’t sure what provoked me to ask for an answer that did not exist.

He gestured with slow, sweeping arms across the length of the maze. “Look, boy, out over this garden. Laden here are a thousand kaleidoscopic possibilities of indefinite basic life, death, sadness, and growth. Whether or not these flowers choose to grow, wilt, bloom, or die, is not up to me. I am only just a man. I could claim responsibility as ephemeral as these plants, but who am I in comparison to the natural process of life?”

This time, my own mouth hung open with the inability to turn air into audible tones or words. He continued, “But to answer your question, in short, my wife always asked me to look after this garden.”

“But why the stones?” I asked. I figured I would pose a simple question and try to break down his monologue later.



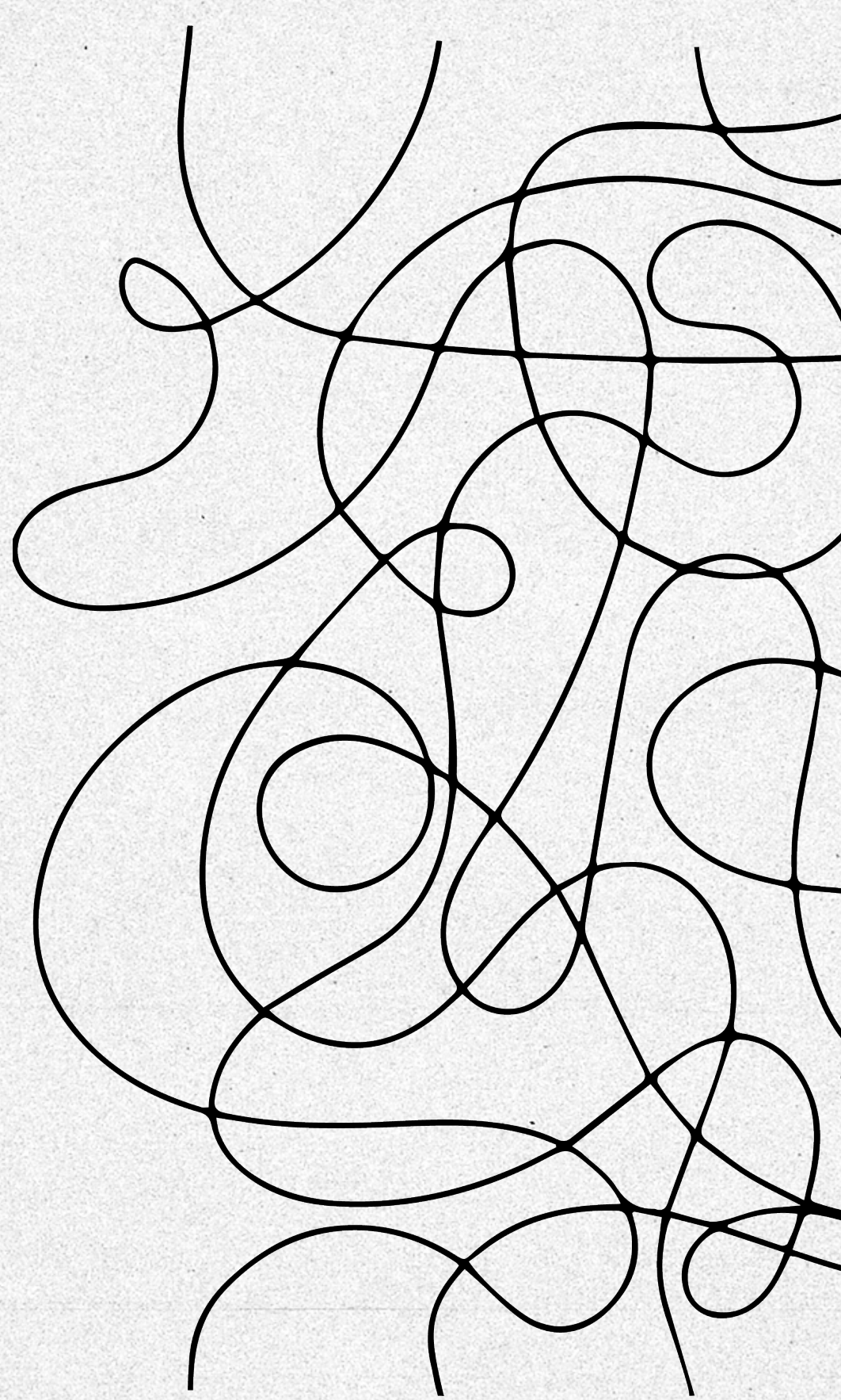
His eyes hardened slightly, and then softened just as quickly. Nearly undetectable, but still noticeable. He sighed with more air than I thought he was capable of producing, “When my wife’s dementia started to worsen, she started taking stones out with her as she watered the maze, dropping them along the path so she could find her way back. One night, when I was up north for business, she forgot to take the stones with her. She wandered out into the maze.

When she couldn't find her way out, she started panicking, turning in circles for hours. She tried to run, but slipped and fell, breaking her hip. I found her a week later when I got back."

Tears streamed from his strained eyes down his face, mirroring my own. "Since then, I make sure that whoever wanders out here can find their way back out. I cannot control whether people grow, live, or die— but I can help them find their way.

**Do you know**  
**where you want**  
**to go?"**

**i didn't know.**



SETTING

# the trench.

“You can’t spray here,” I hesitantly draw out each syllable while looking up at him with desperate eyes.

“We are once again writing to inform you that we have a cricket problem,” I angrily smacked the keys as I placed another work order. Despite our correspondence with our incompetent house manager, nothing had been done. Jack and I really didn’t get along; I had the tendency to complain a lot, but he had the tendency to be a misogynistic asshole— objectively speaking, of course. Regardless, this was the fifth time this month we requested assistance as the crickets beneath the refrigerator continued to click and chirp in a language unknown to us. Other than their noise, they don’t bother us all too much with their presence. They kept to themselves in the dark, cool nothingness beneath the electrical hum of our fridge. But having a sixth housemate isn’t exactly what we signed up for.

They’ve become the type of roommate that gets loud when the lights go out. They have friends come over and stay the night without asking. They don’t empty the dishwasher or take out the trash. They don’t even pay the rent. It’s gotten out of hand and it’s completely unacceptable.

By the time the exterminator has drawn new boundaries around the fridge and front door with an invisible chemical spray, I follow him as we venture outside. He peers down between the crack dividing our concrete porch and the neighbors fence. He reaches down to draw his chemical sword, but I stop him.

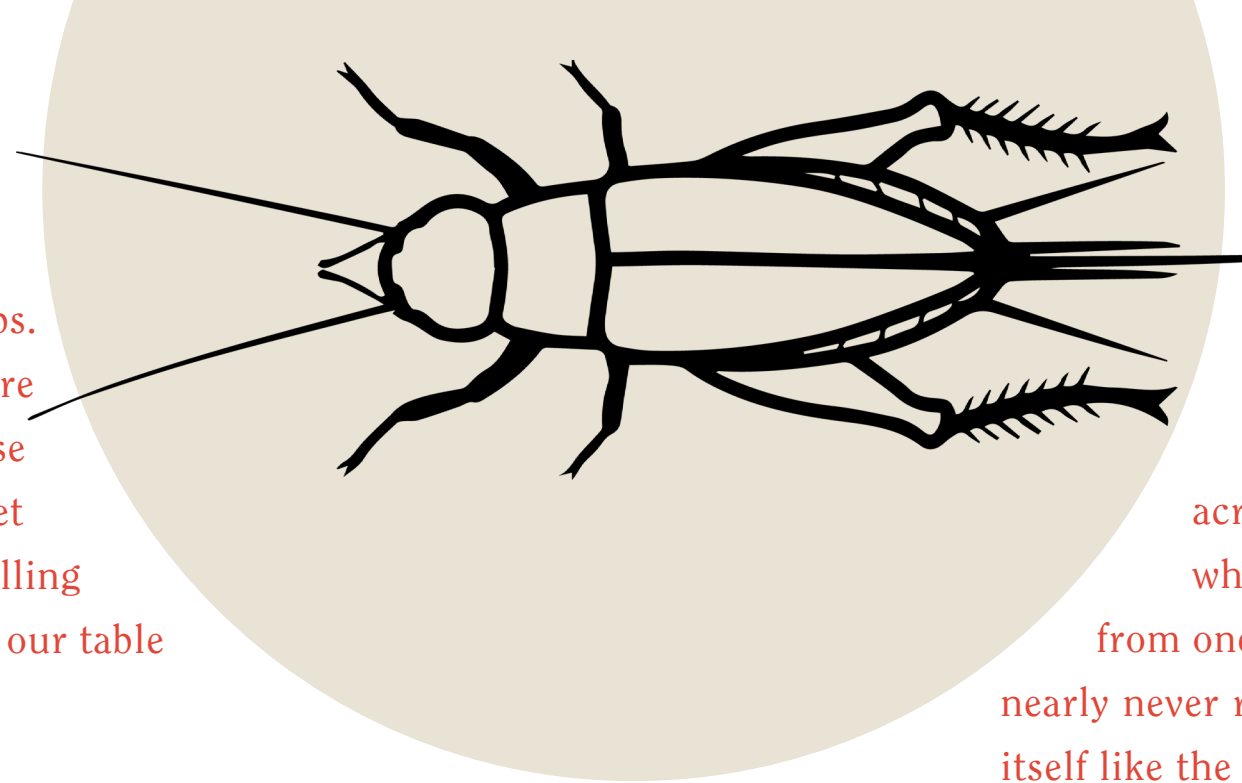
I was uncertain if I really cared enough about the invertebrates to sacrifice their lives in exchange for the comfort of having a quiet home once again. We’ve been known in our gated community neither to harbor fugitive bugs nor slaughter them. When we did come in contact with the multi-legged, grimy foreigners, we’d call our local neighbor boy and have him trap the bugs under a clear drinking glass and slip a sliver of paper beneath. We’d walk down to the end of our lengthy driveway, out the communal gates of our compound, and watch as they scurried away once freed. I didn’t particularly want to be the responsible for their death— we weren’t killers after all.

“Ma’am, this is the root of the issue. This is where they live,” he proceeds by drenching the trench.

He made a valid point; this was our home. Sure, it was theirs too, but this made it easier to justify the massacre. At the same time, we currently don’t spend too much time on our porch, as there’s not much to it. A lonely wooden picnic table takes up the majority of the space, but now rests abandoned, draped in cobwebs and covered with neglect. Our resident skeleton from Halloween still sits perched on the edge, and an orange traffic cone has comfortably made its home on the tabletop. When the air was warmer, the sun gleaming between the houses surrounding us, we would sit around the table in silence.



The touching of our charging cords became the only link between us, as we would sit and work on our laptops. At the time, my freckles became more apparent as did the background noise of the crickets. The sun started to set faster, and the air gained a bone-chilling aura, so we slowly retreated back to our table indoors. The crickets came with.



only concerned with the now. Cobwebs linked a canopy above their heads, casting shattered shadows upon their ground. Walls at least three feet high surrounded them, offering no hope for escape. I'm sure it was a turbulent life, having to scale mountains of broken glass and trek across valleys of plastic that threatened to swallow them whole. How many of them were lost trying to make their way from one end to the other? It would take days; I was sure of it. It nearly never rained, but when it did, the trench would reorganize itself like the shuffle button on a playlist. How they survived like that was beyond me, but they did. Maybe that's why they escaped, looking for a safer, more sustainable land. I watched as the chemical spray flooded through the trench like a plague. Those moving started to twitch violently before reaching a final stillness. I peered down at the trench, now frozen with a frosty white coating. The blanket of chemicals hardened over their carcasses like a custom made mold. The trench was now a moment of stopped time, unmoving, for a lifetime. I turned my back to it and entered the red front door of our house.



That night, I didn't sleep. Some say killing changes you, makes it unable for you to sleep. I really had no guilt about the situation. I focused on the near blackness of my room, outlining the familiar shapes of furniture and frames. I lied awake and restless, filled with anxiety. All I wanted was silence. Instead, all I could hear was the light chirping of a nearby fire alarm battery that needed to be replaced. I opened my laptop, wincing as the bright blue glow of the pixelated screen, and squinted as I placed another work order.

Between the fence and the elevated cement, the deep, dark divot housed more than I wanted to know. Discarded cans, assorted trinkets of trash, and forgotten receipts had blown into the trench over time. Between them lived beings of a simpler nature. Ones that I'd rather not interact with on the daily. They have their place and I have mine. We've always had a passive aggressive unspoken agreement between us, but these crickets crossed a line when they wandered too far out of their boundaries. With their ability to climb, hide, and jump, the crickets left the between and ventured into our territory.

Their world is marked by the artificial turf to the south and uneven steps of concrete to the north. It was only a mere two-foot gap, but it spread far in length. Completely concealed from the raccoons that watch guard along the fence post at nights and the crows that circle the sky in the morn, they are encapsulated in their sliver. This world is all that they know, flipping from pebble to stone and nesting within an old skittles wrapper. They can't travel far and they don't move up; they are

## CRAFT

When she heard the crack of his skull and the warm blood fill her hands, she knew it was done. Still, she brought the flat side of the hammer down once more, metallic clinking against limpness. She tasted pennies in her mouth, from either the blood or the smell of the hammer hitting flesh,. She felt the corners of her lips twitch up with a satisfied smile.

Screaming,  she broke from her nightmare. Her heart fluttered  irregularly as she tried to suck in any remaining air. Even years after she left him, he still found her in her sleep. Goosebumps spread across her skin like wildfire, and she flitted to her bathroom, unable to return to place of calm. She gripped the blue and white checkered tile of her counter as she dry heaved over the sink. Through sharp intakes and gags she felt a rush of light-headedness wash over her. By the time she was calm again, exhaustion consumed her as she slumped back to bed.

Rain plinked and slid down the window like kids sledding down slopes in the winter. The sound of the downpour lightly twinkling off to a mere sprinkle would've almost been soothing if it weren't for her alarm clock rudely blaring on like it was the only thing that occupied this worn space. With a limp, yet cautionary slap to the top of the alarm and an over-dramatized sigh, the weak and heavy lids of her already bloodshot eyes relinquished allowing slivers of sight through. Between slow, squinty blinks the blur began to clear, and the clock, like a provocative siren, stripping away its mystery before crushing her, revealed itself to read 4:45a.m.

She threw the wrinkled linen of her duvet back, exposing her naked mattress. While the quilted diamond pattern of the aged-yellowed, thin lump of fabric covering rusty springs felt exposed— either from the embarrassment of pretending to be an object or comfort or from being undress— she was fully clothed. The night before she had deliberately dressed in the clothing she would wear in the morning. She didn't care that when she woke they would be stuck to her skin with a sheen of sweat and the smell of must from restlessly simulating sleep. Sliding off her mattress, her toes gripped to the macramé rug until the rest of her body acknowledged the floor and regained rigidity. She paused, only momentarily, to appreciate the last bit of calm.

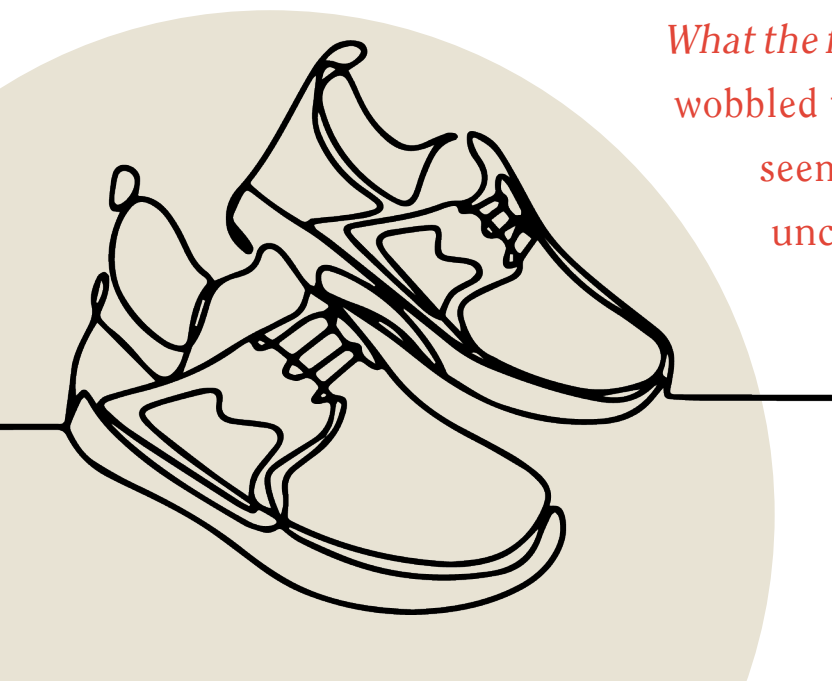
As she weaved them into a knot, the ragged and worn laces of her tennis shoes scraped across her nail beds, low from anxiously biting them away. With a swift pull of the handle, the door swung back and she exited into a veil of petrichor. Her feet barely tapped against the slick asphalt at a six minute mile pace, squeaking and churning with purpose.

# Eternal Sleep.

She let the meditative rhythm of a foot striking the ground consume her until she regained awareness of the outside world as it came crashing up to her. She had been on the last leg of her three mile run when she tripped over a hefty lump in the street, crashing hard on the rugged blacktop of the street. Her hands and knees stung as bits of gravel bit into her untarnished skin, but she used them anyway to stand again. She crept closer to the unmoving, disfigured mass. The sun had already started rising, casting a gradient over the openness above, but it was still dark. In the cone of light that bleed from the street lamp above, her eyes adjusted irregularly, taking a moment to absorb her environment. By the time her brain caught up to her eyes, she was already above him, peering down at his lifeless body. His face was mutilated and contorted in an inhuman haze, fully covered in blood. Still, she knew it was him. Before she had time to stop herself, her legs gave out, letting her knees pop with a harsh smack as they hit the ground once more. She could barely register the cold relief of the road beneath her, or the chirping of the birds as they woke. On her hands and knees, convulsing with panic, her thoughts muddled about, disorganized as she tried to piece together what was happening.

*What the fuck?* she thought as she disjointedly wobbled toward her house, her limbs seemingly unresponsive to her unconscious commands to run.

Leading up to the front steps, a crimson trail marked itself across the walkway. Someone had dragged him down here.



She kept moving, stumbling forward. The trail didn't stop as it passed the threshold of her doorway that should've been securely shut. It stood wide open, welcoming a flood of bungling thoughts into her already clogged head. Semi-paralyzed with horror, her eyes became stone dry from staring at the openness she was unfamiliar with. Without thinking or a shred of fear, she tended to the chaos in her once calm, orderly home.

She grabbed the rubber end of her sharpest kitchen knife, but it slipped from her sweaty palms. As it clattered to the floor with a fantastic chime, she grabbed another. Her nerves danced on ends as her comfortable world of safety was being forcibly ripped away. Sprinting up the stairs, skipping two steps at a time, she raced for her room that was so delicately maintained like it deserved to be treated better than her. As she flipped on the lights, she retched to the left, spilling the contents of her stomach onto the floor. Blood clung to everything like crocheted blankets, coating nearly everything, but leaving absent holes of nothingness. She slid as the traction of her shoes had been cloaked in a guise of rain and a blood bank's worth of O negative. She used it as momentum to get away faster.

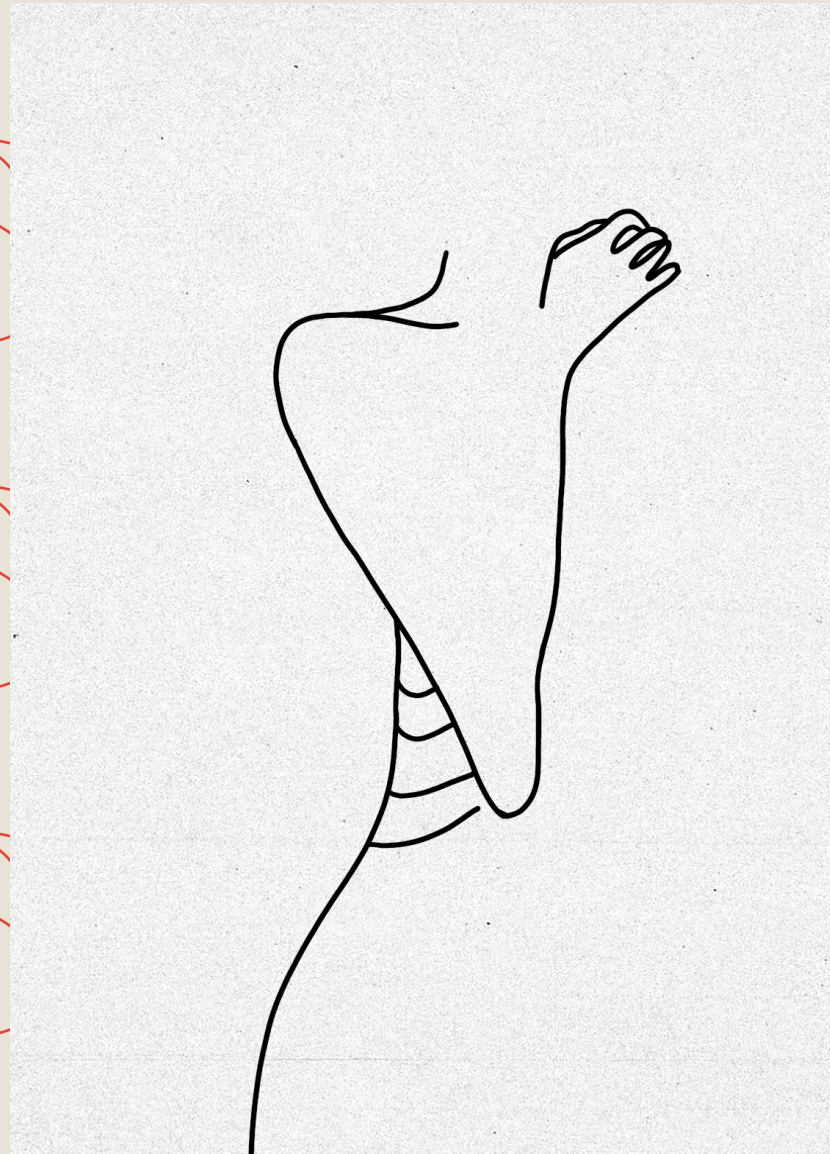
It was only now that she realized her hands were coated in a harsh crimson. Her clothes wore randomized brushstrokes of splatter. She had not touched the man in the street, leaving no explanation for the dried lumps of blood in her hair. She knew she needed to leave.

As she lifted her unsteady foot to flee, a firm, double tap on the open front door made her nearly jump out of her taunt skin. She froze, as the echo spread through the empty home. Allowing only her eyes to drift as they nervously darted back and forth, she held her body so still that she was almost convinced her body was concrete. “POLICE,” a gruff voiced shouted through the ether. She held her breath as she debated her next move. It tasted terrible— most likely degraded from the anxiety that circulated through her pulsating veins. She didn’t call for help, but she wasn’t silent either.

She slid back into her room and launched herself across it, ignoring the remnants of human existence around her, until she reached the window. With wobbly arms she flung the latch and glass up with force, like a blade across a glade. She threw herself from her second story window, still clutching the knife.

WHEN SHE LANDED, SHE **Ran.**

skinny



skinny

## ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

# CAGE OF BONES

Pellets of running water jabbed at her, forcing her to peel her sunken eyes open and blink a few times until clarity overcame cloudiness. Dazed, she studied her surroundings and felt the cool tile of her shower floor beneath her. Once white, the tiles were now streaked with blood and water as it pooled around her feet and down the drain. Steam licked across her skin freckled with bruises, and bounced off the glass walls that closed the shower in. A panic crept up her back as she peered up at the crystal cage shackled around her. She scrunched up the wall to a seated position, and the throbbing pain in her head registered with a pulsating determination. Weaving her shaking hands through her onyx hair, she splayed the strands until she reached the sore spot that radiated warmth. She watched with paralyzed eyes as the blood dripped from the wound down her arm.

*What happened?*

She left a smudged crimson handprint on the glass and slid it aside. She gripped the chrome rod that normally supported her plush towels and tried, with a mix of sheer will and every ounce of energy that she didn't sweat out while unconscious, to lift her frail body off the ground. Tears slid down her porcelain face through mascara rivers as her muscles cried.

**“I just have  
to make it to  
the phone.”**



11

She pushed through the pain silently, as every part of her body screamed.

*Where the fuck is my phone?*

Once she was in a crouched, hunchback position, just upright enough to move, a wave of light-headedness slashed through the pain. Her feet moved faster than her brain, using the momentum of the bathroom's marble floors and the slippery blood that covered her feet to glide her to the counter top. She smacked the side with a sharp crack as her left hip bone shattered. The pain overpowered her, turning everything black as she collapsed.

When she came to again, everything was still dark as night.

She tried to remember what happened, but was overpowered by the sharp pain in her hip. She gripped the countertop and hunched over the sink. Her hands that were once wet with shower water were now dripping in sweat. Holding her 82lb. body up by her faux toned arms, she closed her eyes while breathing deeply. She felt like she had woken up from a bad nightmare in the middle of the night. Everything around her was dark but she could still see outlines of familiar things. That eerie, unsettling feeling that there was something more to the story lingered, but she convinced herself that it was fleeting. Focusing on holding back her vomit, she realized it was quieter than before. The shower had been turned off.

*Did I do that?*

She listened closer. Over the hum of the reality TV show she had been watching earlier, she detected the light beeping sound of her security alarm.

*Someone was here. Or still is.*

She sucked in a breath and crept slowly close to the floor. Unable to walk she used her arms to pull herself along, slowly army-crawling towards the door. As she crossed the threshold of her bathroom door she peered out into the dim living room. In the glow of the TV she saw the scene as she had left it. Her dinner from four nights ago, three almonds, lay abandoned next to the velvet couch draped with a crocheted blanket. Peeking out of one of the corners of the blanket was her phone.



She inched forward when she noticed a shadow sitting in the corner of the room. Managing to muster enough energy, she screamed. Then, the shadow was suddenly before her taking form.

“Ed?” she looked at him in confusion. “What are you doing here? What’s happening?”

The corners of his lips turned up menacingly. “It’s almost over,” he whisper-sang in a creepily melodic tone.

She froze, finally grasping the reality of what happened. He wasn’t there to help; he was the reason.

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“Why are you doing this?! Please help me,” she croaked through gasps while tears streamed down her face.

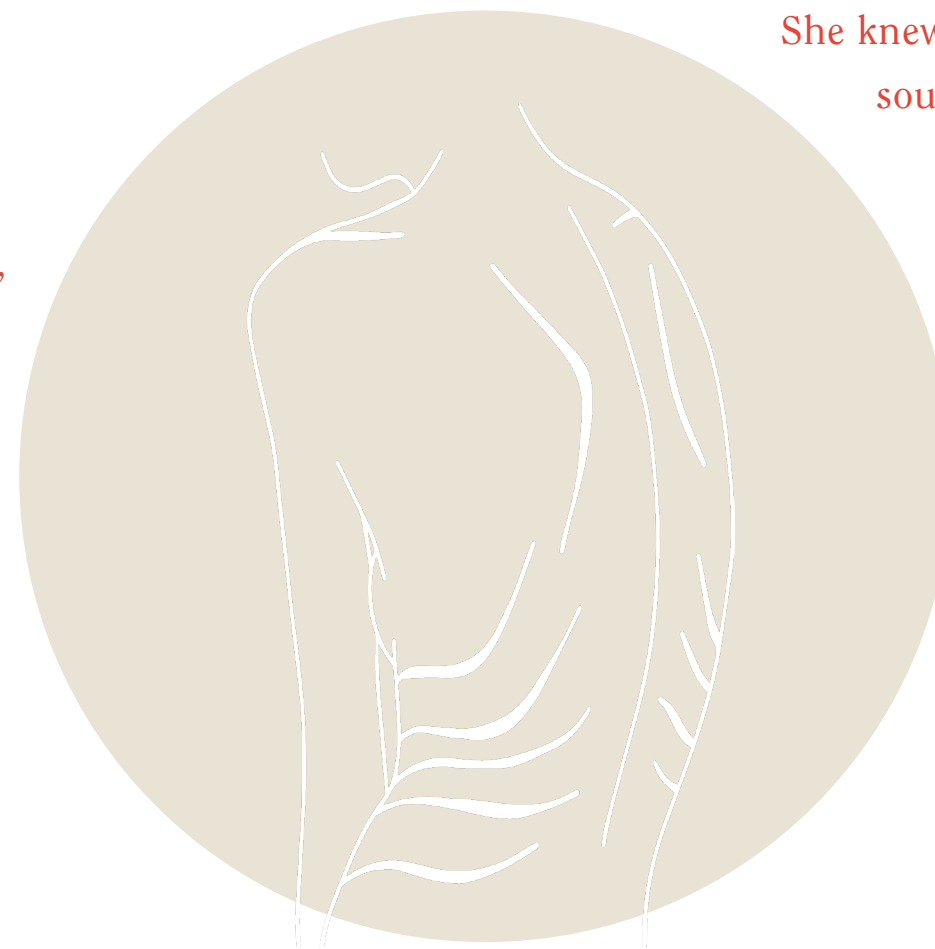
“We’re in this together, love. You’ve done so well, you’re almost done,” he said through sharpened teeth.

She looked down at her nearly translucent skin, naked and deprived. Her skin was taunt so tightly around her bones so that her silhouette resembled that of a skeleton. She had been starving herself for weeks, living off merely celery and almonds. Her lips were cracked, and her once full, luscious hair had grown brittle and thin from the caloric depletion and lack of nutrition. Exhausted of restricting herself and listening to Ed, controlling what she could and couldn’t eat daily, she peered up at him with her glossy, sunken eyes.

“I don’t want this anymore. I don’t want you anymore,” she whispered. She pleaded, “please let me go.”

“What’s done is done,” he sneered. “It’s too late anyways.”

She lay there unable to move. There was nothing left for her to give. Her phone was only a few feet away, but felt like miles out of her reach. It coolly mocked her, knowing she didn’t have the strength to get to it. Sprawled out, face down, her body grew limp as her eating disorder, ED, consumed her. She watched as Ed walked to the front door that she had left open when she had come home that day, triggering her alarm. He was on to the next insecure girl, ready to consume her thoughts with lies and false promises.

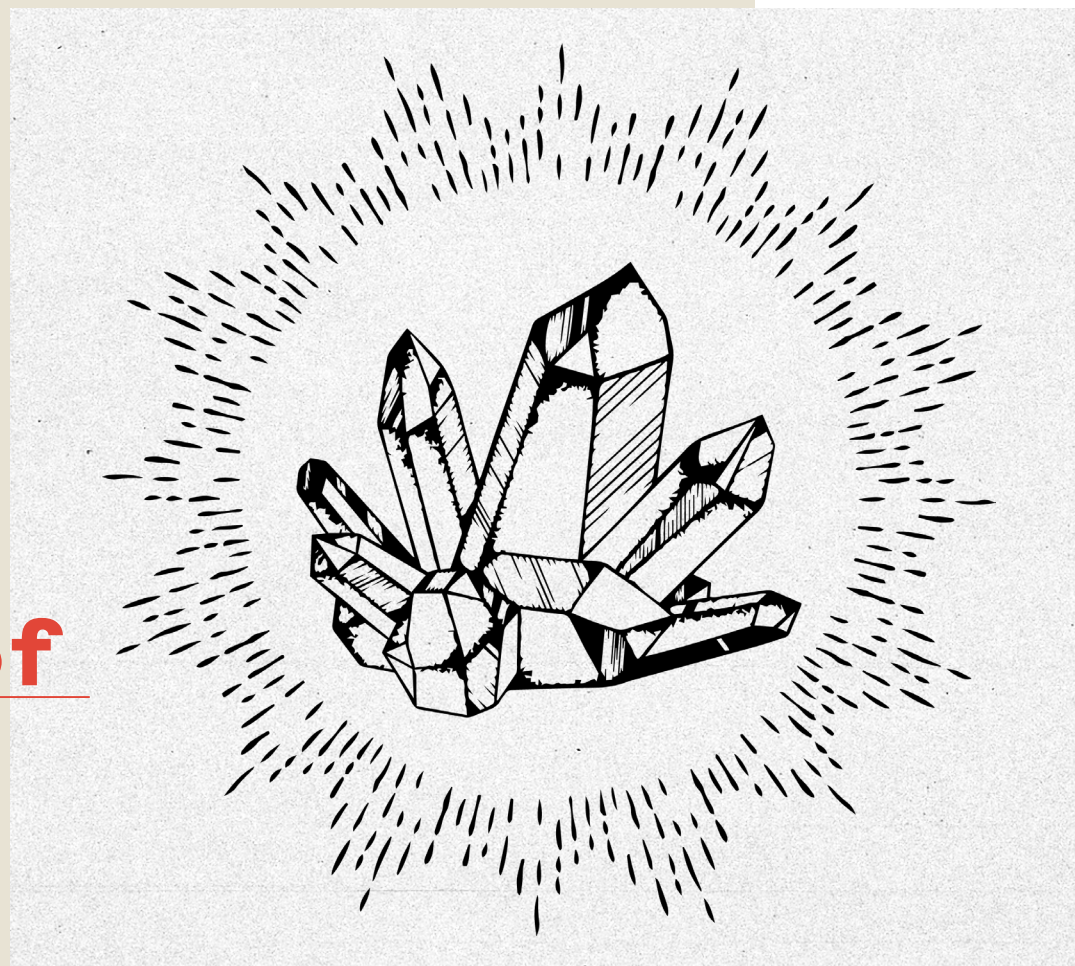


She knew that no one was coming; her alarm still sounded every so often, even though it hadn't been connected to a service for years. She listened to it beep as it synced up with her heartbeat. She closed her eyes and listened to the drum of blood thumping through her heart, until it stopped.

**“Please let  
me go.”**

# Fairytale.

## The Magic of the Unseen



### THE MAGIC OF THE UNSEEN

Clutching to the graphite as she had for thousands of years, the shadow gripped a little tighter as the Earth's core pressed down harder on the both of them. Heat seared, causing her shape to distort. She began sliding down the edges of the graphite as it transformed around her, its peaks and valleys changing too fast to leverage. Steadfast, she held tighter still, willing not to abandoned her friend. The graphite's edges began to glow, spreading crystallized clarity to the stone's core. The once rough, rugged, and muddied edges of the rock were now cloudy colored glass. Gone were the days of being teased by other stones and rocks for her imperfection. The crystal stood tall, reflecting images of the other deformed rocks.

"You're so beautiful," the shadow said to her glassy counterpart.

The shadow whispered the same line to the perfect stone every day for hundreds of years. The shadow kept the gem company, telling her prophetic stories to make the days pass a little more comfortably.

Just like that- 150 feet below the surface- a bond had been formed.

•



An earth-splitting crack reverberated from above, digging deep into the Earth's crust with grooves and nooks that pebbles avalanched down.

"I'm scared," the shadow whimpered to the stone as she hid among her crannies.

The cracking continued until a small beam of light poked through the crust. With one final crack, the duo was exposed and freed to the outside air. The shadow slipped away from her friend as the sun shone down, becoming more pronounced as they parted. She went from being a dark mass, hidden amongst the shadows, to a translucent being, gleaming in the light. She moved about the stone, glittering with excitement.

A gentle, wrinkled hand picked up the pair and tucked them into his pocket, blocking out all light. The shadow returned to her darkened form, and waited.

•

After days in the dark, they were finally reintroduced to the lightened world when they were laid upon a cold, metal surface. The translucent best friend dimmed a little, her luster slightly diminished by the fluorescent lights cast from above. The two huddled close as giant bug eyes appeared before them, magnified by glass. The same wrinkly hands picked them up, and they were airborne once more. They peered over fleshy hands as they neared a bucket of liquid.

The shadow gripped tighter, "don't worry, my beautiful stone," she said.

"I'm right he-." Her last remarks were cut off as they were submerged for hours in a tingling, stinging solution. The bits of muddied glass on the stone began to clear. If the shadow had been any solid being, she would've been able to see herself clean through the stone.

•

When the pair was finally brought to the surface, the shadow jumped from the dazzling diamond and danced about the air in a full spectrum of color.

"Look at you!" the rainbow shouted as she bounced off the walls. She was darkness no more. She no longer was the absence of light, or the absorption of color. She was a stream of color, emitting light frequencies with a full palette.

"Look at *you!*" the diamond gleamed in response.

The rainbow twirled about the diamond for hours as the stone was cut from corner to crevice, shining in the shadows she was once accustomed to. "You're so beautiful," she continued like she had every day, because for her, her stone hadn't changed.

As the old hands continued to cut the diamond, the rainbow matched her shape accordingly. She began to settle down as the sun set, before finally taking rest beneath the newly-shaped, teardrop diamond that was held securely by a golden

band.

The rainbow slumped against the curve of the circular gold casing and rocked back and forth as they were placed onto a deep, ultramarine velvet pillow. The rainbow stretched out on the cushion as she looked up at the glass casing above them. The diamond sparkled down on her, as she closed her eyes to sleep.

- 

The next day, the rainbow shot from side to side as the diamond was lifted from the pillow and forcibly wrapped around a woman's slender finger. The woman smiled at the diamond, "You know what they say— a diamond is a girl's best friend!"

The diamond shimmered back in response. The rainbow disappeared, only visible on the walls every so often. She was nowhere near being close to her own best friend, but the diamond was too preoccupied with her wearer that she refused to notice.

Finally, after weeks of crying the rainbow crept up to the diamond. "You let the beauty go to your head," blurted the rainbow. Her hue tinted pink with a mix of aggression and embarrassment. "You listen to everyone say how beautiful and rare you are. In response, you dance at their praise, pushing me far away. I thought you were beautiful before all of this, before you were morphed into someone I no longer recognize. I held you while you were cleaned with chemicals and chiseled away at. I have been there; you were supposed to be my friend. You've grown dull." With that, the rainbow detached herself from the diamond and fled.

She sought solace around the world, appearing when she pleased. When she didn't show her full spectrum, the rainbow hid in nooks and crannies, on edges, and around walls. She slept in the shadows where she couldn't be seen. The rainbow spoke in her own secret language of hums and frequencies with the other unseen elements. She found friends in these elements, from music, wishes, gravity, and light, to secrets, electricity, feelings, and silence. They created a cloaked friendship bound by an affinity for the invisible. They taught her how to love herself through courage and a belief in her abilities. Despite her reservations and shyness, she started to spread herself and grow after ghastly storms. She would fill the sky as the last final raindrops soaked into the Earth's crust, stretching her colors as far as the eye would see. Amidst the dark, blackened backdrop of clouds, she shown in full spectrum. This was her favorite.

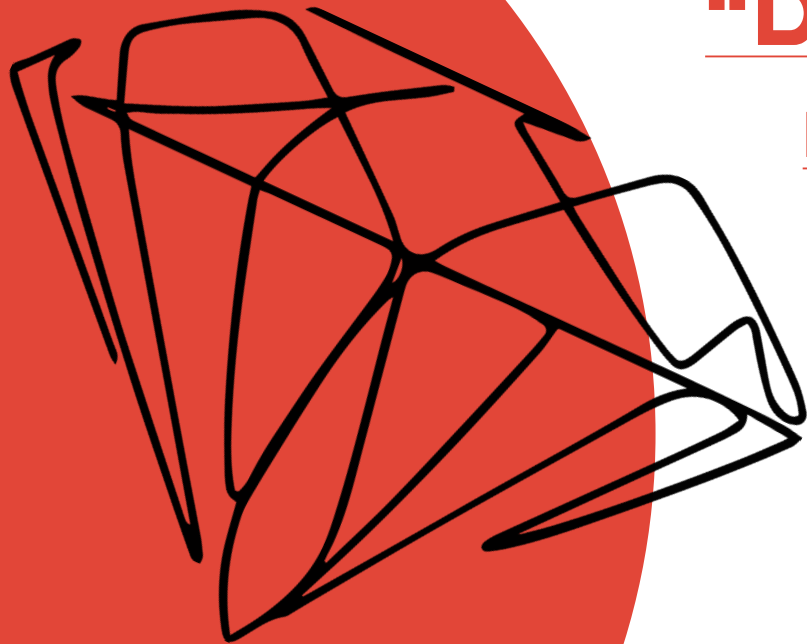
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She traveled like this, following the storms, appearing as beckon of hope. She grew tired one stormy afternoon and shrunk herself down onto a windowsill of a pub. A glint of light caught her eye as a woman with thick red lipstick and eyes rimmed with black approached. Attached to her wrinkled, cracking knuckles was the rainbow's diamond. The rainbow jumped up as the woman placed the ring in the pocket of her wool coat while she pushed open the doors of the pub. The rainbow chased her, springing from cup to cup. When the woman finally slowed to a stool, the rainbow jumped with a perfect arc that landed her in the lining of the pocket.

“Rainbow!” the diamond erupted. “I’m sorry I made you feel bad. The woman began taking her ring off when her love’s hand grew cold and his heartbeat stopped. Each time she goes out with someone new, she takes me off. I started to realize there might be a day when she doesn’t put me back on. Of what use will I be then? I exist with purpose because of her, just like you use to do with me. We are a pair meant to go our own ways, yet bonded together by friendship. If diamonds are a girl’s best friend, then rainbows are a diamond’s best friend. I am only whole because of you.”

The rainbow wept, blurring her colors together. She cuddled up to the diamond and stroked her polished, soft edges with forgiveness. The pair was nearly inseparable from woman to bride, and pawn shop to showroom floor. They reflected each other, the rainbow, a ray of hope, and the diamond, a piece of refined beauty. Their everlasting friendship endured since,

**“Diamonds, and  
rainbows, are  
forever.”**

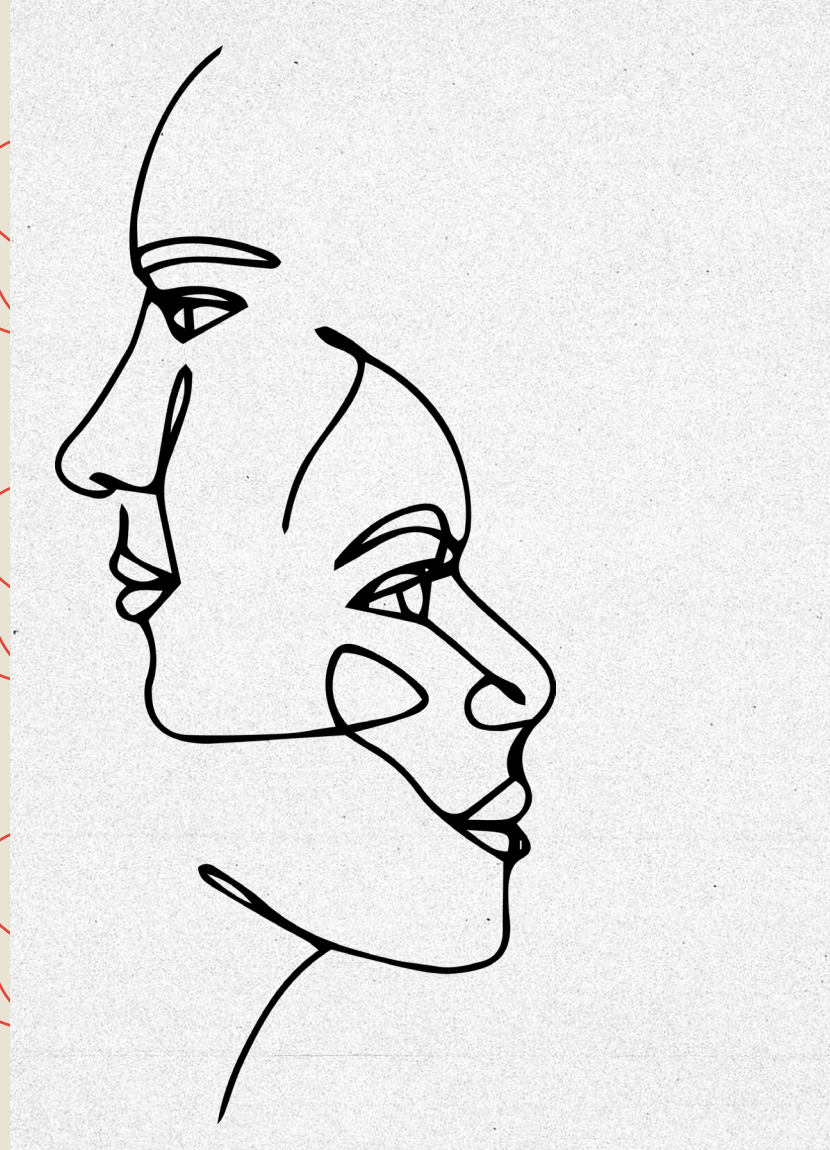


# The House I Built.

There is a house that lives in symmetry,  
Split in the center by a bright, red door.  
It's perfectly kept, and wrapped in fresh paint.  
Its blacktop driveway has recently been paved.  
The grass is sewn with the color of green.  
Its white picket fence gleams in the sunlight,  
But is only placed to keep people out.

Come closer. The exterior is merely a front.  
The house is empty and filled with neglect.  
Hairline fractures run through the windows while  
The buckled wooden floors are worn by dust.  
Cracked walls mirror the concrete foundation  
That it's built on. Unstable, yet it stands.  
It's livable, not nearly comfortable,  
But it's the only house I can call home.

sister



sister

## The Revival of Sister Eleanor

The sun kissed her freckles as it danced across her face, choosing the skin as a canvas to tattoo darker. The exceptions were the pieces of skin blocked from the sunlight by the swaying palms above, shifting their direction ever so slightly with the wind. She cast her hand above her eyes and slowly allowed light in, squinting one eye at a time so she could watch them move. The ginger strands of her hair gently tickled the edges of her chin with every gust of wind. When the clouds— that looked like leftover foam from a half-drunk latte— shifted above, goosebumps ran up her skin like an icy wildfire. For a moment, on the bluffs overlooking the sea below, Eleanor felt the world melt into her. It was an enchanted feeling— becoming one with your surroundings. Whether inanimate or living, all things originate from the same source. The buzz from her phone gently shook her from her little slice of uninterrupted serenity. She didn't have to look to know that the notification was a reminder that she had set years ago. She didn't have to look to know what day it was; June 13, 2020 had been burned in memory from years of repetition. She closed her eyelids, blocking out all light and all worry. She reminded herself, like she had been taught, that today would be like every other day. Hands curling into the grass and soil, gripping on like she was falling, Eleanor grounded herself. She breathed deeply trying to slow her racing heart. After a moment, the tranquility washed over her once more.

## As quickly as the feeling came,

18 it fled once more, as the fronds above fell like blades. Rather than swaying, the palms shook as the ground quaked below. Eleanor focused on finding stability, but the earth was giving out. Reverberating from a fault with too great a depth to comprehend, seismic waves shifted with the plates below. She held on as the land began to divorce itself and the grass split from the soil. She watched, paralyzed, as the edges of the bluff began to disintegrate, eroding into the ocean. She tried to stand— to run. Still, the earth knocked her back to her buckling knees. With a combination of desperation, fear, and a thick layer of sweat she began to crawl, gliding across the grass with a dark sheen. Trees fell around her, echoing the booms she felt from below. Eleanor inched to her car, which now tilted so far to the right it looked like it would tip over with a gust of wind. The pavement below had buckled, slicing the road with a jagged edge. The yellow paint that served as a divider between lanes now fell askew, creating infinite paths of no security.

The shaking had stopped by the time she made it to her car. She pushed against the metal of her trunk. Her hands, slick with sweat helped push her shaking limbs forward. Eleanor jumped into her car and managed to steer it back towards its normal orientation. She watched out of her window that had shattered like the earth, as the houses around her crumbled; cracked concrete forcing them to fall. She turned onto a cobblestone alley, with its stones and bricks dislodged and in disarray. Jumping out of her car, trying to make her way to the third cottage on the left, Eleanor tripped and stumbled as she ran to her home. She halted at the sight of where her pale yellow Cape Cod style bungalow was supposed to stand. She froze, slack-jawed, at the deconstructed clapboard. Shakes and shingles splintered apart like spears sharpened with intent. The double doors that she had tinted lilac with a brush, a can of paint, and care, were now severed with fractures. This home was the first place she felt safe since the incident. Within only fifteen seconds of earth slipping past itself, her quaint shelter and any sense of security completely disappeared.

She turned, moving in slow motion like a body stuttering through time and space, and attempted to make her way to her car. Her eyes traced across the scene in front of her— a palm had cracked at its base and was on its way to meet her car with all of its force and beauty. At the sound of the crash, her heart broke. She had only bought the car a week ago after saving a year's worth of paychecks. Eleanor's shoulders slacked with the rest of her limp body. Around her, pipes were screaming with streams of water, like a wave of tears escaping for the first time after a long drought. Powerlines leaned with sparks and fireworks.

The overwhelming combination of the scent of gas, burnt rubber, and smoke sprinkled onto her skin like a custom perfume. The normally foamy, crisp clouds with their purity and tint of white melted into the residual black veil of fog from a great fire. It almost felt beautifully harmonious with the crass, green backdrop of the sky.

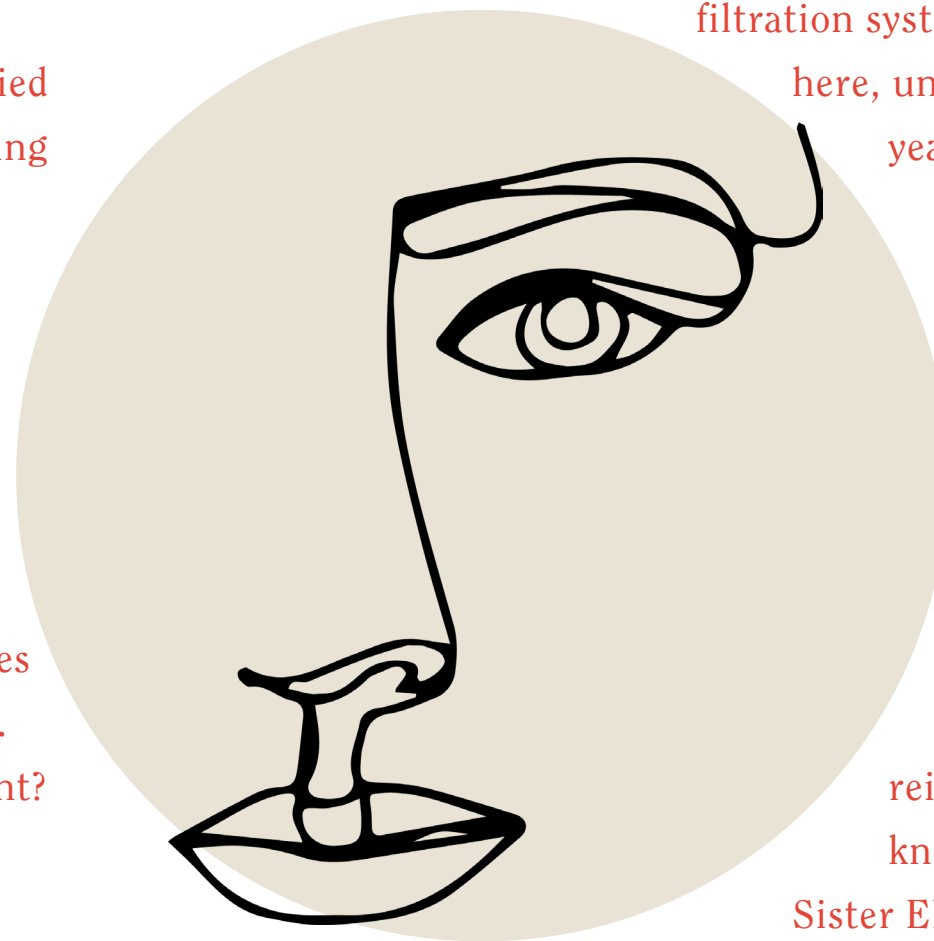
She dragged the gridded soles of her sneakers along grass, damp with water from leaky pipes. Tiny pebbles stuck into the grooves of the shoe, the only trace of her home that was no more than a pile of rubble. She peered down the hill that she stood atop. Like little ants, scrambling after their ant hill had been knocked down by a kid, Eleanor gaped at the people spurting with screams and intent. They clumped together in a great commotion, erupting with panic as each person tried to take what they could get from the stores. Breaking glass and crashing cars sounded as little fires burned bright until each store had been looted and compromised.

Eleanor's brain swelled, trying to process her surroundings. Light-headed like a balloon filled with anguish, she allowed her knees to sink to the earth, knowing that it would cake her jeans with mud. Instead, with a pop and a crack, her knees crashed against smooth, polished metal. She began digging, soil and pebbles making themselves at home under her fingernails, as her brain finally snapped into focus. How had she forgotten about the one thing she saved from the incident? Fear had driven her to leave, but it also had given her a place to come back to.

She brushed away the remaining pieces of torn up earth revealing a circular lid with an ornate handle. After wiping her grit crusted hands across her ecru linen shirt, she twisted the handle, freeing it from a ring of rust and neglect. She tore the door open like it was nothing— like it wasn't 120 pounds of double-plated solid steel. Eleanor scattered down the ladder and sealed the door above her tightly. She paused, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the darkness as her hands traced the walls of the cylinder, fumbling for the switch.

With a quick flick, light flickered and then flooded the room. It shone down upon the furniture that was wearing a blanket of dust and the kitchen coated in cobwebs. Before her was a fully stocked pantry, single mattress, and a shelf of linen and garb. The bunker had been outfitted with electricity from three backup generators, a septic tank, and a water filtration system— she had made sure of it. It had laid

here, undisturbed, ever since she built it three years ago. Even after her family pulled her from the cult, after seeing signs of her increasing financial ruin and abuse, she still carried a lingering trust in Pastor Carl's teachings. He had drilled it into them— in the temple, the dinner table, and the beds he forced them into with him. The world would end and they had to be prepared. Despite the therapy and reintegration to normal civilian life, she still knew she had to be prepared. She carried Sister Eleanor deep within her soul—



hidden and unchanged by the woman she had become once she left the cult. She held onto that persona, knowing she would need it someday. Knowing she would need it today.

Sister Eleanor plopped down on the bed, kicking up a cloud of dust. She could hear the chaos and terror, but only as if it were a soft drum accompanying an undetectable band. The double insulated, temperature controlled walls blocked out the majority of the screams and the increasing heat of the fires that started to sweep by above.

**Buried five feet under, in a shelter of steel, she was once again one with the earth surrounding her.**

**SISTER ELEANOR SMILED AND SOFTLY BOBBED HER HEAD TO THE BEAT.**

**The End.**

That's all.  
Thanks.

HANNAH NOWAK

