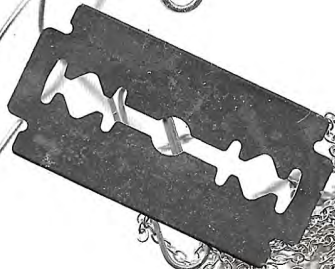
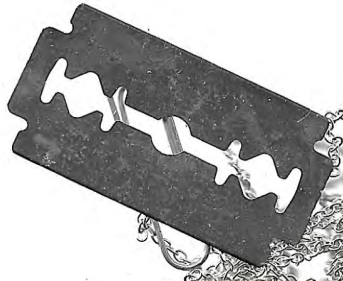
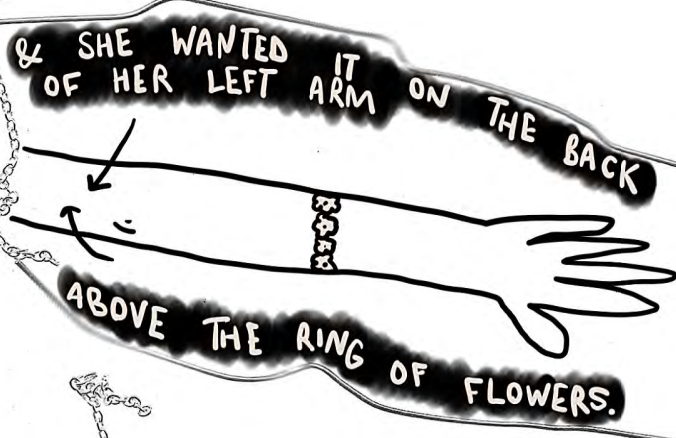
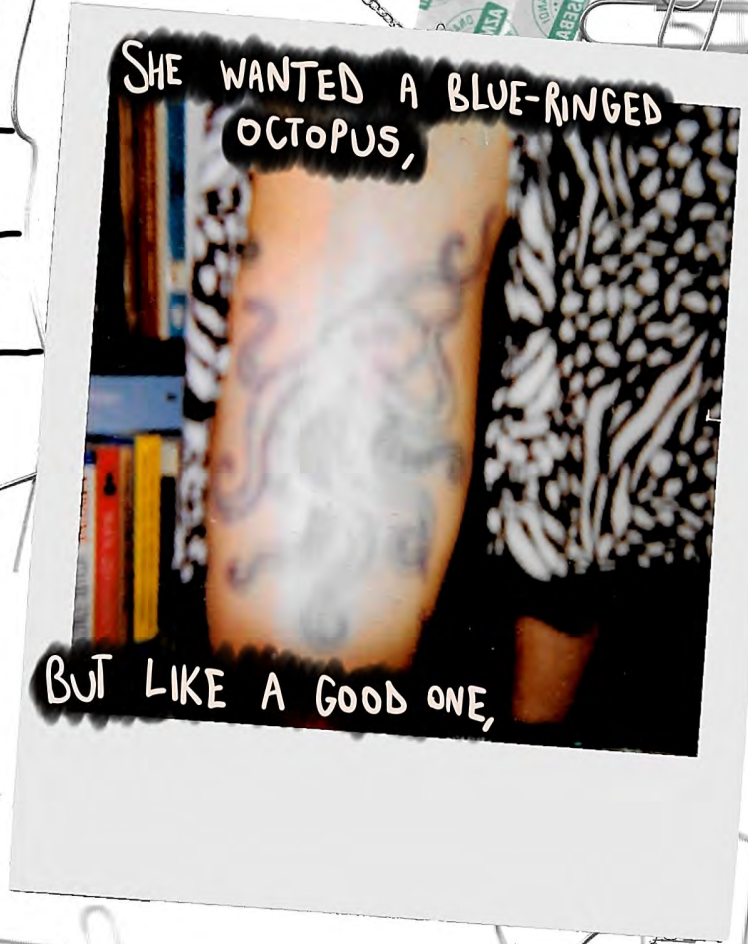
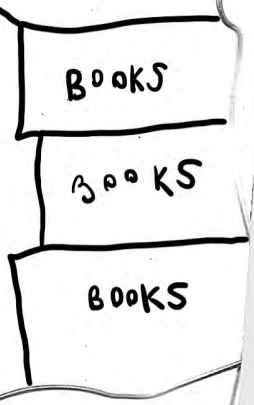
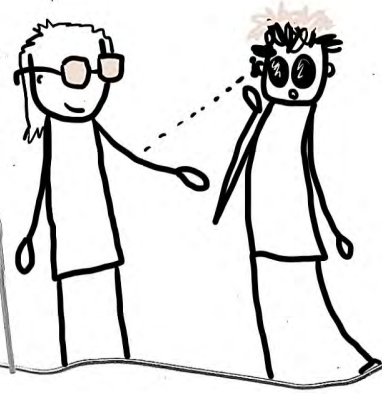


PART
SEVEN

"OCTOPUS
BOOKS"



THE OTHER DAY, WE WERE WORKING
& WE WERE PACKING RETURNS,
& INSTEAD OF WORKING WE WERE CHATTING,
& SANE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT
HER NEXT TATTOO:





IT'S A GOOD
PLACE FOR
A TATTOO,

I SAID.

IT WON'T
HURT
TOO
MUCH.

I FELT THE CORRESPONDING FLESH

ON MY OWN RIGHT ARM.

I HAVE A BEE THERE.

WINGLESS BEE.

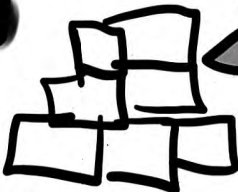
IT WAS DONE STICK-&-POKE
IN SOME BASEMENT BAR,

STRIPY DISK.

& IT DIDN'T HURT
AT ALL.

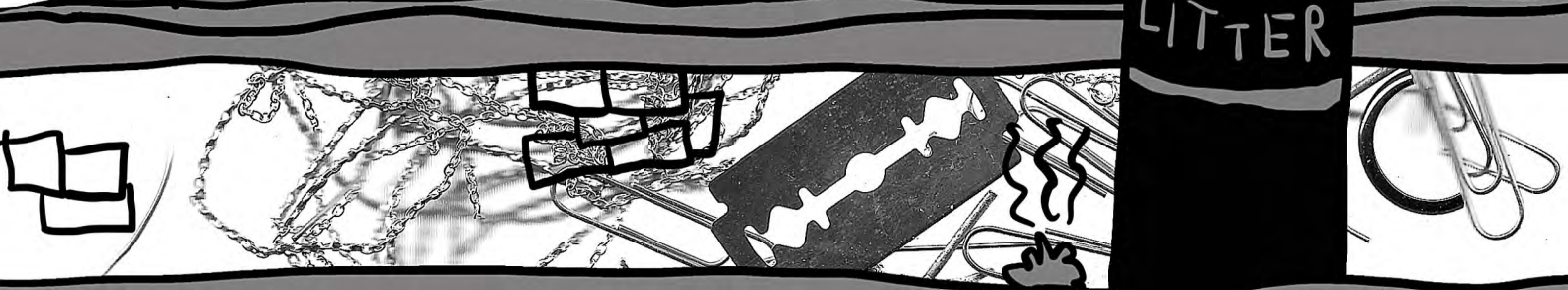


WE HAVE AN OBSESSION
OF OCTOPUSES
IN THE SHOP
AT THE MOMENT.



OPEN
with some
E. O. W. W.
W. L. W. W. W.
W. L. W. W. W.
W. L. W. W. W.

LITTER



SOME MIGHT SAY THE OBSESSION IS BEGINNING TO AFFECT CUSTOMERS,



I'M AFTER A BOOK FOR A 6-YEAR-OLD WHO LIKES SPACE.

I'VE GOT JUST THE THING.

BUT WE CAN'T MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS WE DON'T BELIEVE IN,

& ANYWAY, SOMETIMES PEOPLE NEED HELP TO KNOW WHAT THEY WANT.



ONE DAY, WE WERE WORKING
& THERE WERE NO CUSTOMERS,
& WE WERE CHATTING
& SADIE SAID,

DID YOU KNOW
OCTOPUSES
CAN FEEL PAIN?

BOOKS

BOOKS

BOOKS



& WE WERE
BOTH QUIET
FOR A MINUTE,

BOOKS

BOOKS

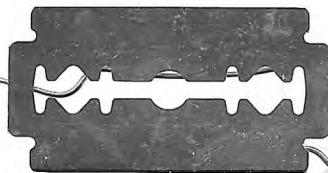
THINKING ABOUT
OCTOPUSES.

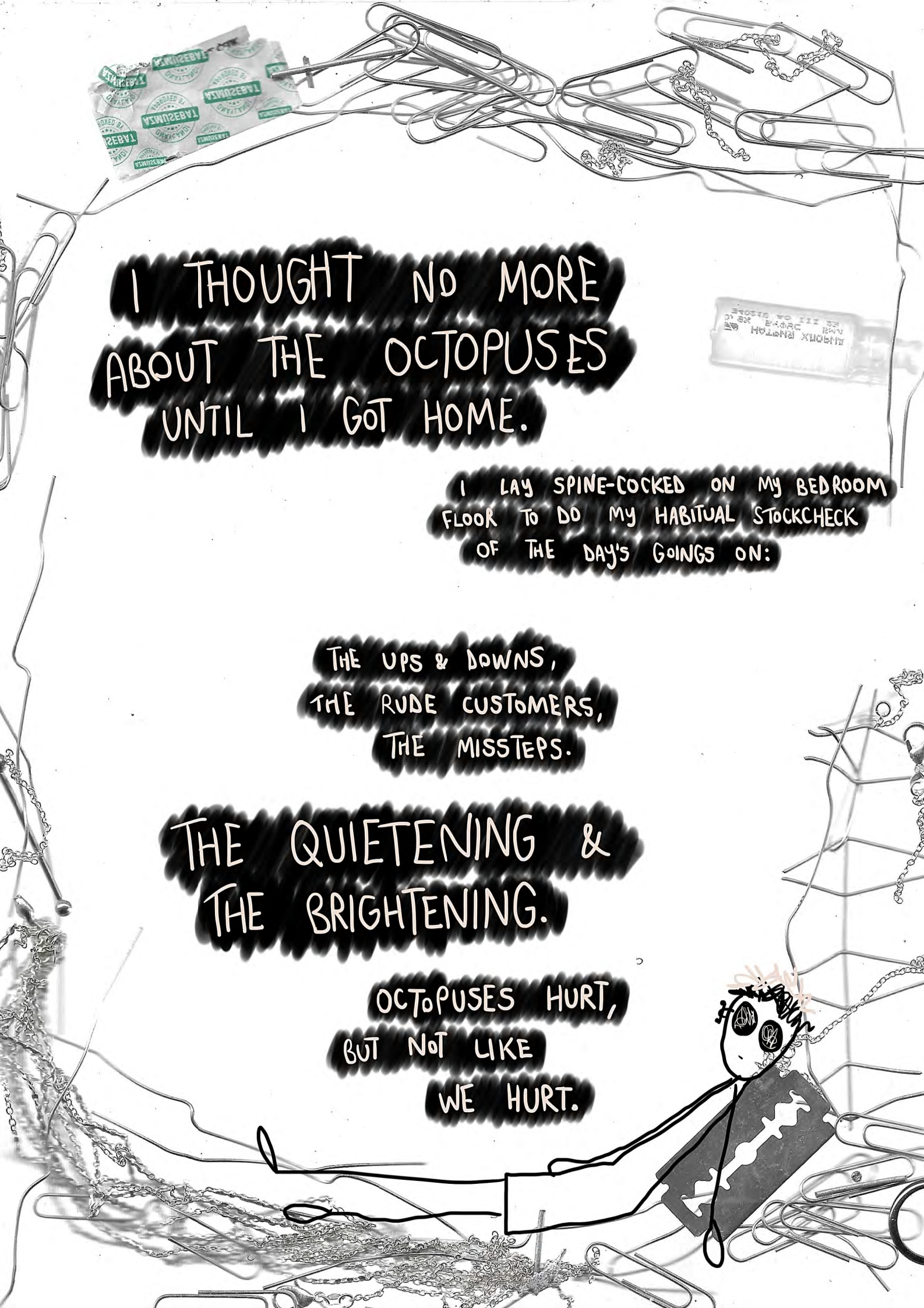


BOOKS
& WE BOTH
BRIGHTENED.

BUT NOT LIKE
PEOPLE DO.

BOOKS





I THOUGHT NO MORE
ABOUT THE OCTOPUSES
UNTIL I GOT HOME.

I LAY SPINE-COCKED ON MY BEDROOM
FLOOR TO DO MY HABITUAL STOCKCHECK
OF THE DAY'S GOINGS ON:

THE UPS & DOWNS,
THE RUDE CUSTOMERS,
THE MISSTEPS.

THE QUIETENING &
THE BRIGHTENING.

OCTOPUSES HURT,
BUT NOT LIKE
WE HURT.



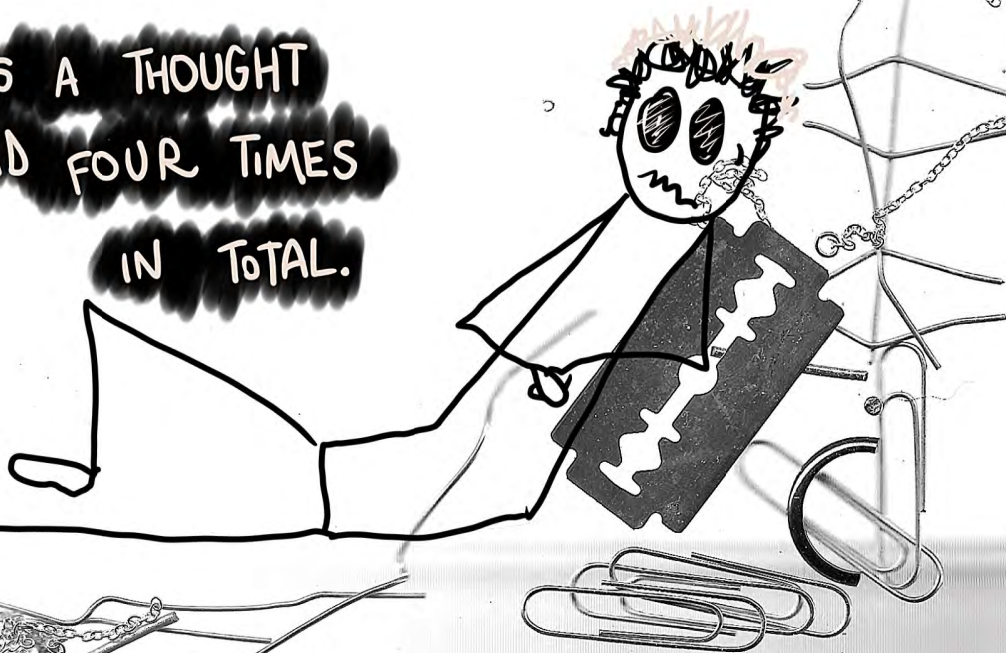
I TRIED TO PUZZLE OUT
WHY I'D FELT SUCH RELIEF,

AS THOUGH I WAS PLEASED
THE OCTOPUSES WERE SPARED
MY EXPERIENCE OF PAIN.

BUT I'M NOT SURE I KNOW
WHAT MY EXPERIENCE OF PAIN IS;

I DON'T KNOW WHAT
PAIN FEELS LIKE.

THIS IS A THOUGHT
I'VE HAD FOUR TIMES
IN TOTAL.



JUNE 2018:
I LEAVE
ST PETERSBURG
FOR PRAGUE

FEBRUARY 2018:
I MOVE
TO RUSSIA

APRIL 2018:
SCAFFOLD

NEW YEAR 2019:

TOTAL
BREAKDOWN

SOMETIMES I FIND IT HELPS
TO THINK ABOUT TIME
AS A BENDY MESH
MADE OF GALVANISED WIRE
THROUGH WHICH
TIME FLOWS
UNEVENLY.

SEPTEMBER

2019:
I MOVE BACK
TO SHEFFIELD
TO FINISH
MY DEGREE

MARCH 2019:
BREAKDOWN
BEGINS
TO LIFT

OCTOBER 2020:
GLEB TATTOOS
MY BACK

JUNE 2021:
SPINECOCKED

DECEMBER 2021:
I READ A
HORROR STORY
IN A SALTY
BATH

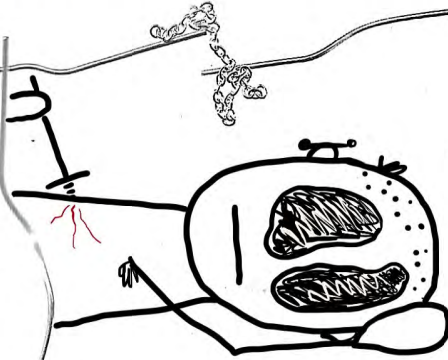


OCTOBER 2020, ON MY FRONT ON MY BEDROOM FLOOR.

MY FRIEND GLEB, VISITING FROM RUSSIA, WAS TATTOOING A SWALLOW SILHOUETTED OVER AN ASYMMETRICAL SUN ON MY BACK.



HE WAS WORKING FOR AGES, SO I HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO REFLECT ON HOW IT FELT,



BUT ALL I COULD COME UP WITH WAS



HURTS.



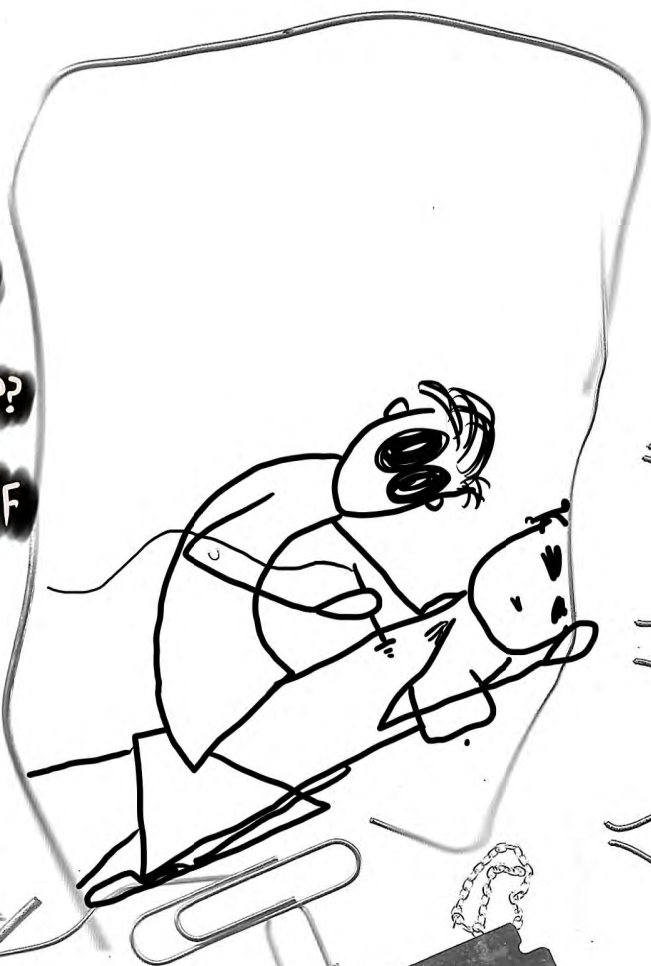
I STARTED TO WONDER WHETHER I'D WRONGED GLEB & HE'D RETALIATED BY HOOKING A CHISEL UP TO THE GUN.

WAS THIS ON PURPOSE, A SINISTER CONSPIRACY TO MAKE ME ANSWER FOR SOME UNFORGIVEN MISSTEP?

WAS HE GETTING OFF ON IT?

I IMAGINED I COULD FEEL HIM CONVULSING WITH ECSTASY THROUGH THE GUN'S WHINE.

A FAMILIAR EXCHANGE RATE: YOUR PLEASURE FOR MY PAIN.



WHEN HE FINISHED,
I TRIED TO TALK TO GLEB
IN MY BROKEN RUSSIAN
ABOUT THE TRADE I HAD PERCEIVED
AS ENGAGING IN,
ABOUT THE VIOLENTLY SEXUAL
DYNAMIC I'D FELT.

СЛУШАЙ?



BUT PARTWAY THROUGH,
I WAS STIFLED BY AWKWARDNESS.

WITHOUT HIS WEIGHT ON ME,
WITHOUT HIS GUN DRILLING MY BACK,
THE ASSOCIATION HELD LESS WATER.

NOW I HAD MY TSHIRT ON,
TENDER ON MY SORE BACK,
IT WAS CLEAR:

HE WAS JUST
TATTOOING ME.



BLUSHING AT MY OWN
PERVERSE CONNECTIONS,
I SWERVED
FOR AN ALTERNATIVE
POINT,

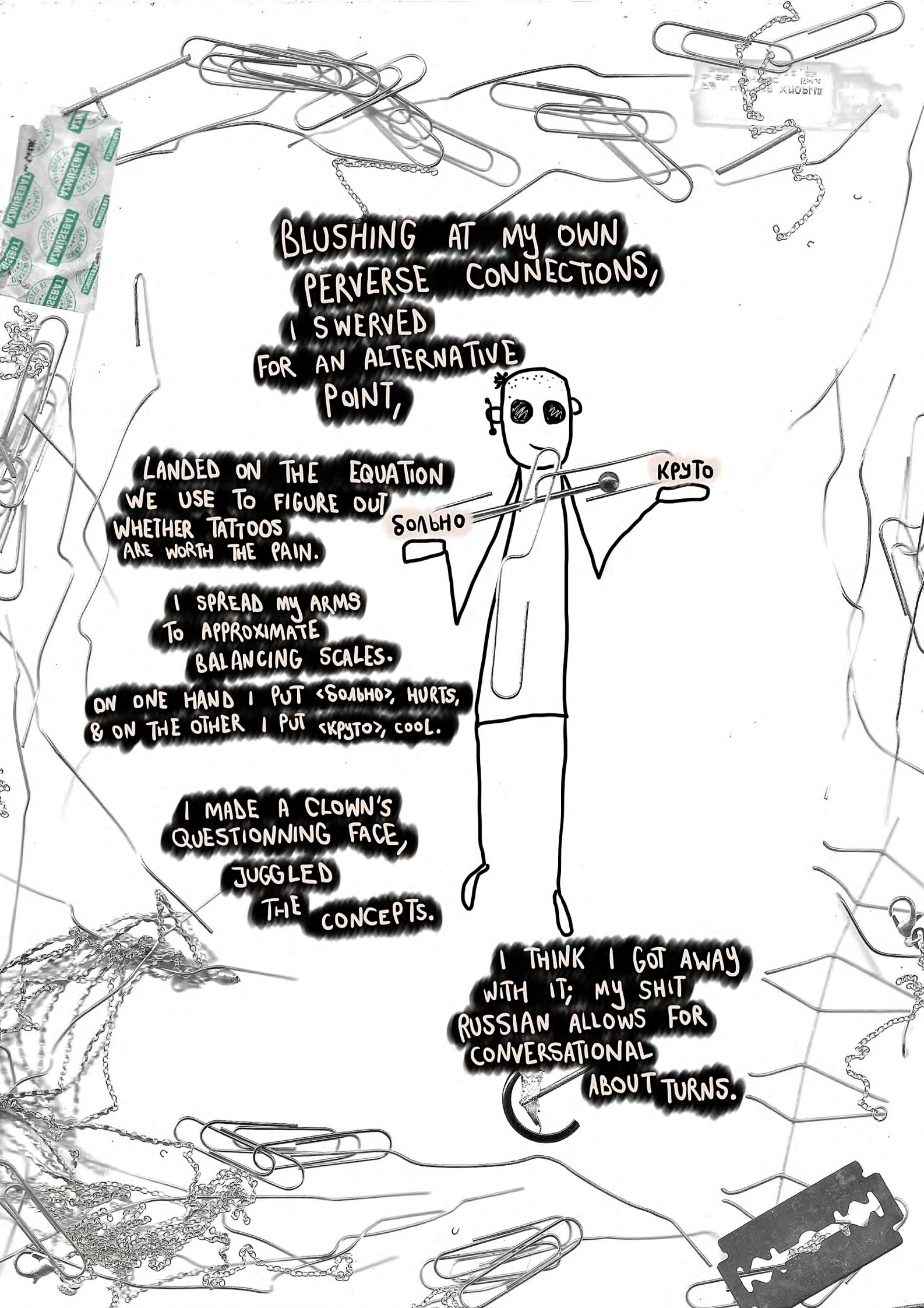
LANDED ON THE EQUATION
WE USE TO FIGURE OUT
WHETHER TATTOOS
ARE WORTH THE PAIN.

I SPREAD MY ARMS
TO APPROXIMATE
BALANCING SCALES.

ON ONE HAND I PUT <СОЛБНО>, HURTS,
& ON THE OTHER I PUT <КРЫТО>, COOL.

I MADE A CLOWN'S
QUESTIONING FACE,
JUGGLED
THE CONCEPTS.

I THINK I GOT AWAY
WITH IT; MY SHIT
RUSSIAN ALLOWS FOR
CONVERSATIONAL
ABOUT TURNS.





Со́лбнo

Крyтo

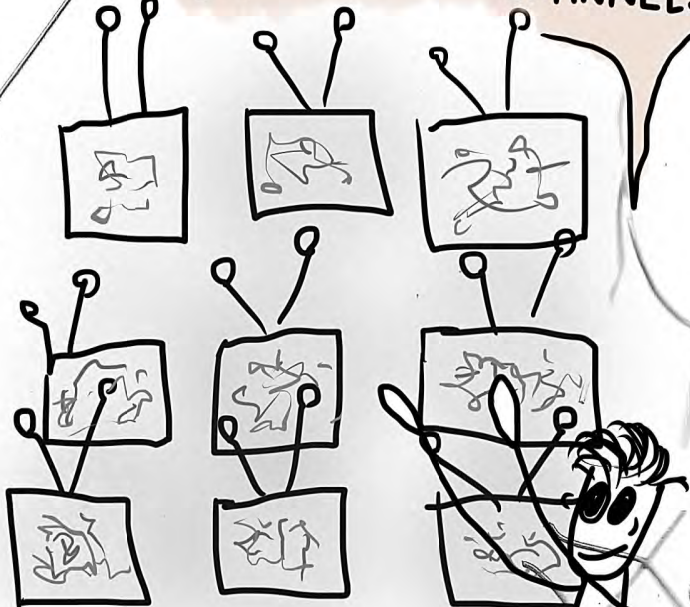
I MADE SURE TO PUT <COOL>
HIGHER THAN <HURTS>.

ALTHOUGH I NOW REALISE
I HAD THAT BACKWARDS.

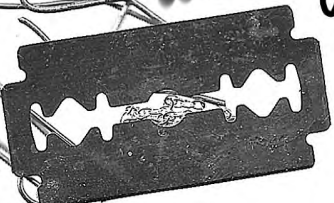
Крyтo

I WAS PUTTING <kruto> HIGH,
THINKING <IMPORTANT>
BUT I SHOULD'VE PUT IT LOW,
AS IN <HEAVY>.

AFTER I DID MY
BALANCING MIME,
GLEB SAID HE THOUGHT
OF PAIN MORE LIKE
A WALL OF TVS
SET TO A DEAD CHANNEL.



I DIDN'T GET IT, BUT
FUCK
IT WAS
EVOCATIVE.



LATER, IN BED
ON MY TUMMY,
I REALISED
ANOTHER FLAW
IN MY SCALES.



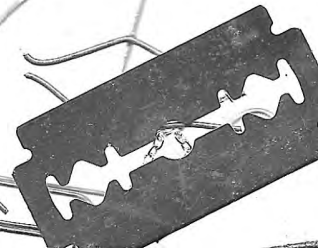
EVEN IF <СОЛНЦО>
WEIGHED HEAVIER THAN
<КРЫТО>, IT WAS
FLEETING
LIKE A BLINK.



MEANWHILE, THE SWALLOW
OVER THE ASYMMETRICAL SUN
WILL BE COOL FOREVER,



OR AT LEAST UNTIL
MY SKIN FALLS OFF.



THIS BALANCING ACT SEEMED FAR MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD BACK IN APRIL 2018, WHEN I WAS FIRST TROUBLED BY HOW PAIN FEELS.

I WAS HAVING MY SCAFFOLD PUT IN.

THE PAIN WOULD BE MINOR, MOMENTARY, & THEN I'D BE COOL FOREVER,



WHICH WAS IDEAL, BECAUSE I WAS GETTING IT TO BE COOL,

SCAFFOLD



RECOGNISE THE HAIR?

YELLOW COAT

FUCK HE'S COOL.



TO ALIGN MYSELF WITH OLI, A FELLOW BRITISH STUDENT IN ST PETERSBURG,

WHO I'D FALLEN EMBARRASSINGLY IN LOVE WITH.

I WANTED TO BE RAZED & REMADE IN HIS SHADOW.

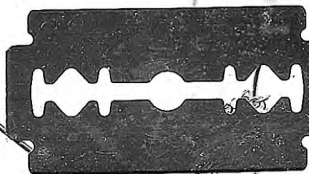


I BECAME THE SPACE THE LIGHT THAT FELL ON HIM COULDN'T REACH.

YOU SHOULD GET ONE.



кpyтo



OLI WENT WITH ME
TO THE PIERCING PLACE.

A WOMAN WITH AQUARIUM
TATTOOS LAY ME ON A
PLASTIC-SHEETED TABLE.

SHE & I WERE IN A DEMARCATED
STERILE ZONE INTO WHICH OLI
WASN'T ALLOWED TO PENETRATE.

I LOOKED WITHOUT LIFTING MY HEAD
& OVER MY EYES' BOTTOM RIMS
I SAW HIS NECK BENT
OVER A TANK OF STUDS & BARS.

WILL IT
HURT?

YEH, BUT
IT'LL BE
COOL.

DONE.

TAKE A DEEP
BREATH...

STERILISING
WIPE



AND THEN IT WAS COOL
FOREVER

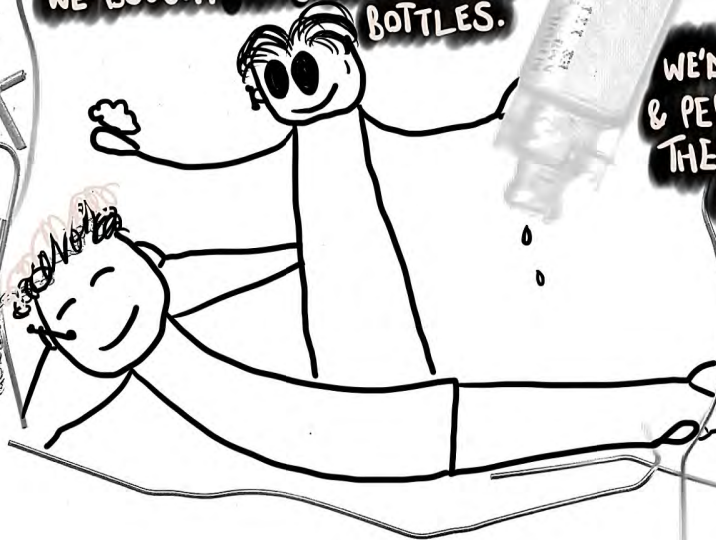
...

THE EAGLE-EYED WILL NOTICE
THAT THE METAL NO LONGER
THREADS MY FACE,
BUT SITS OVER IT, LOOSE.

IT TURNED OUT THE SCAFFOLD'S SCALES
WEREN'T AS SIMPLE
AS THE MOMENTARY <БОЛЬНО>
VS THE ETERNAL <КРЫТО>.

**THE SCAFFOLD ADMIN
WAS MANAGEABLE
—EVEN ENJOYABLE—
WHILE WE WERE IN RUSSIA.**

**WE HAD TO CLEAN
EACH OTHER'S EARS
A COUPLE OF TIMES A DAY
WITH A SALINE SOLUTION
WE BOUGHT IN BULLET-SHAPED
BOTTLES.**



**WE'D GET HOME
& PERFORM
THE MUTUAL
CLEANING,**

**REGARDLESS OF
HOW DRUNK WE WERE
OR HOW MANY PEOPLE
WERE THERE.**

**WHERE THE
JUICE?
GET THAT EAR
HERE!**



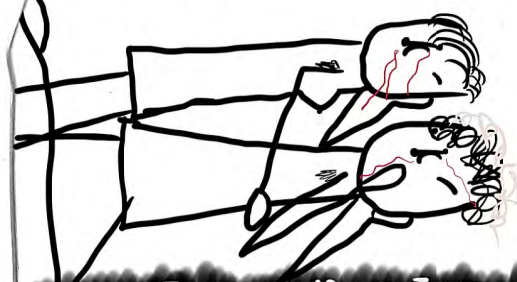
**WE WERE TWO CREATURES
WHOSE INSTINCTS
ALLOWED FOR
NO DEVIATION.**

COTTON BUDS POISED,

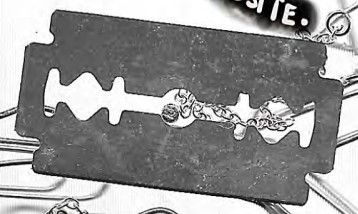
**CYBERPUNK
PRAYING
MANTISES.**



**IT BLED.
WE BLED TOGETHER.**



**WE SLEPT SPOONING, SLIT LEFT EARS
SKY WARDS.
HERE WAS BLISS. HERE WAS PAIN'S
OPPOSITE.**



OLI & I LEFT RUSSIA
— & EACH OTHER —
AFTER ONLY A FEW,
PERFECT
MONTHS.

PIERCED & ALONE,
I NOTICED
CALLUSES
SPRING UP
AROUND THE SCAFFOLD'S
ENTRY POINTS.

THEY GOT BIGGER & HARDER
WEEK ON WEEK
AS THOUGH MY FLESH
WAS STRIVING TO COMPETE
WITH THE METAL.

UGLY, SURE, LIKE ALL
RUSHED ADAPTATIONS.

THEY GREW OVER THE BAR'S BALLS,
SORE HOODS.

THEY BLED,
I BLED ALONE.

ALONE, THE SCAFFOLD'S ADMIN
BROUGHT LESS JOY
THAN THE MUTUAL CLEANING.

IN WINTER, THE BAR
TOOK ON THE COLD
& BURNED MY FLESH.

WHEN I WAS
ANXIOUS, I'D PUT
TWO FINGERS IN
TO THE BALLS
& SPIN THEM,

FURTHER AGGRAVATING
MY POOR EAR.

EVERY NIGHT I WENT TO SLEEP
WITH MY LEFT EAR GINGERLY UPWARDS.

EVERY MORNING MY PILLOWS
WERE BLOODY.

PLEASE
HELP

DON'T WORRY,
I'VE GOT JUST
THE THING.

NEW
BALL

THIS DUDE REMINDED
ME OF GLEB.
HE SCREWED IN
THE NEW BALL,
WAVED AWAY
MY CLAMMY FISTFUL
OF MONEY.
A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER,
HE POPPED UP ON MY INSTA.
I DIDN'T FOLLOW BACK,
COULDN'T FACE THE THOUGHT
OF BEING RAZED
& REMADE
AGAIN.

ONE DAY,
I TOOK THE WHOLE
THING OUT
FOR A DEEP CLEAN.

THE BACK BALL
ROLLED INTO
AN ABYSS.

I WENT TO A LOCAL
TATTOO PLACE.

APRIL 2017 INSTANT
APR 2017 INSTANT
RES. 1111 CA DISCOUNT



**OLI CAVED & GOT RID OF HIS SCAFFOLD EVENTUALLY.
HE RANG ME TO TELL ME.**

**THE IDEA THAT HE'D RID HIMSELF
OF FUTURE-PROOF EVIDENCE
OF OUR RELATIONSHIP
TROUBLED MY ALREADY FRAGILE MIND:**

**WAS THIS
THE END?**

**NO.
IT HAD
ALREADY
ENDED.**



WHEN I MOVED BACK TO SHEFFIELD
TO FINISH MY UNDERGRAD,
I STARTED TO NOTICE CREEPING THOUGHTS.

I HAD AN EAR FULL OF PUS,
STAINED PILLOWS.

THE SCAFFOLD'S BALLS
WERE SHROUDED IN BLEEDING,
LEAKING CALLUSES.

WHAT KIND OF WOUND
STAYS FRESH
FOR TWO YEARS?

THE KIND HELD OPEN
BY METAL.

BUT I LIKED
THE SUPPORT:
A SCAFFOLD
TO KEEP ME
UPRIGHT.

I NEEDED THE PROOF
IT OFFERED
OF OIL
OF RUSSIA.

TRYING TO REMEMBER
THESE THINGS DIRECTLY
FELT LIKE TRYING
TO SNIFF A FLAME.

BESIDES, IF I TOOK IT OUT NOW,
WHAT WAS THE POINT
OF HAVING SUFFERED
FOR SO LONG?
WHERE WERE THE FRUITS
OF MY PAIN?

I SHELVED
THE THOUGHTS.

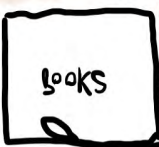


THE OTHER WEEK,
SUFFERING FROM
A CHARACTERISTIC ATTACK
OF INEXPLICABLE ANXIETY,



FUCK

WHAT'S
GOING ON?



LOOKS

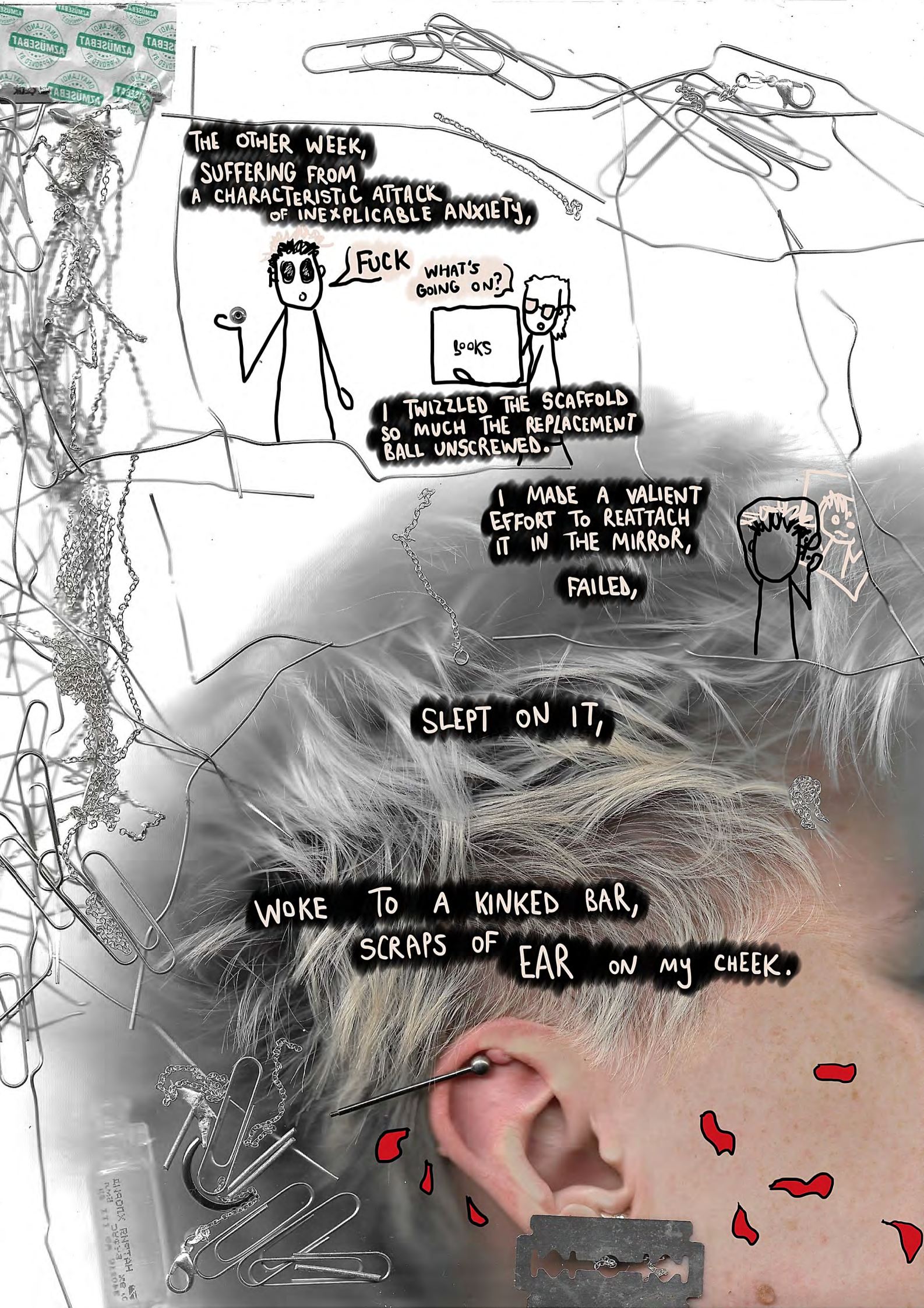
I TWIZZLED THE SCAFFOLD
SO MUCH THE REPLACEMENT
BALL UNSCREWED.

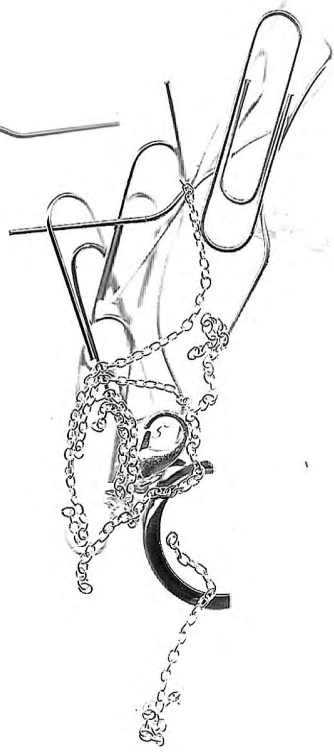
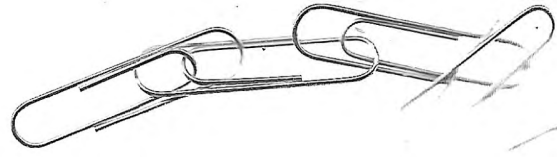
I MADE A VALIENT
EFFORT TO REATTACH
IT IN THE MIRROR,
FAILED,



SLEPT ON IT,

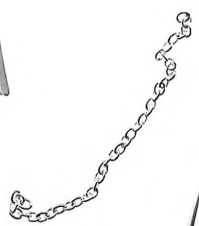
WOKE TO A KINKED BAR,
SCRAPS OF EAR ON MY CHEEK.

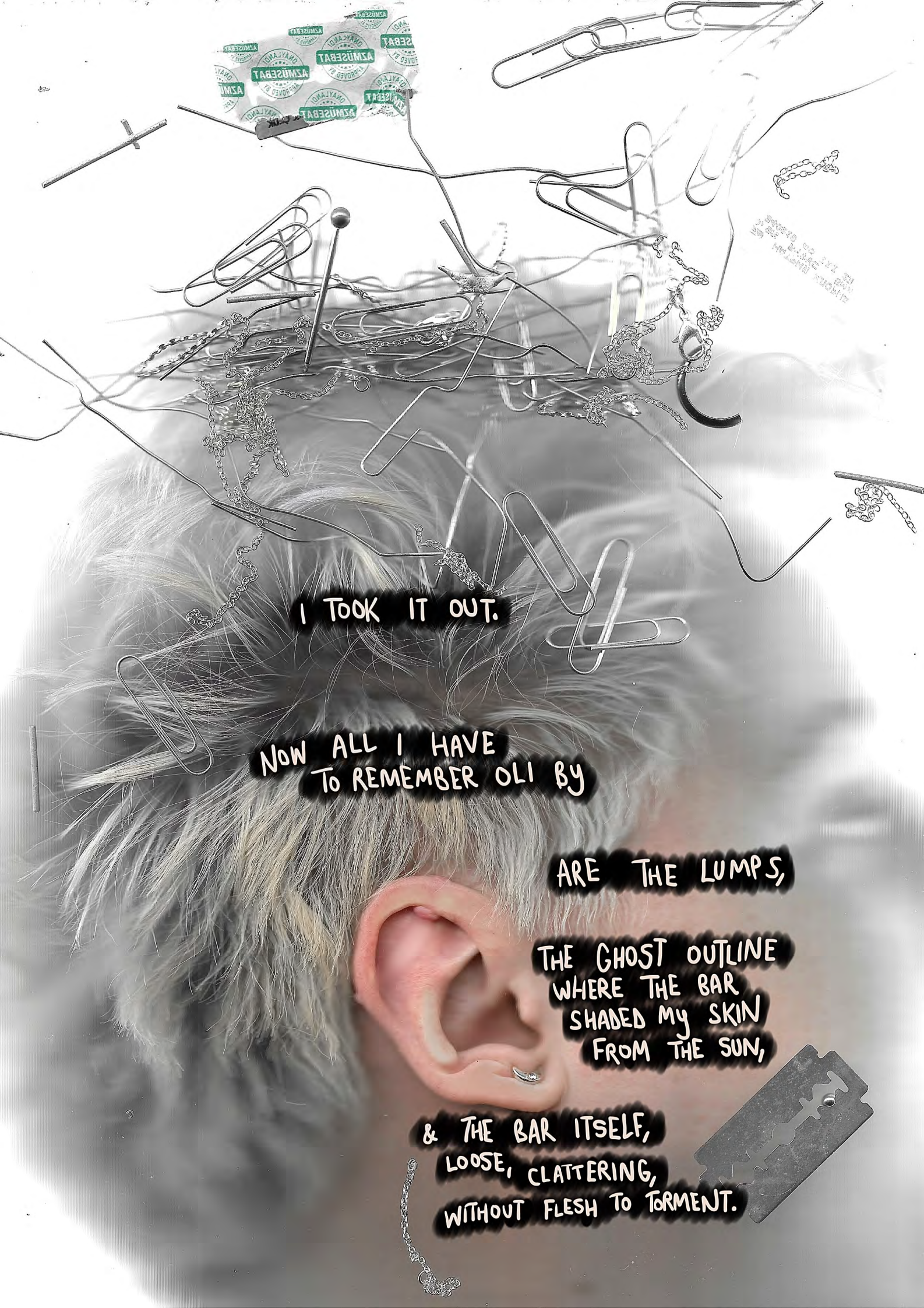




FUCK

THIS.





I TOOK IT OUT.

NOW ALL I HAVE
TO REMEMBER OLI BY

ARE THE LUMPS,

THE GHOST OUTLINE
WHERE THE BAR
SHADED MY SKIN
FROM THE SUN,

& THE BAR ITSELF,
LOOSE, CLATTERING,
WITHOUT FLESH TO TORTURE.



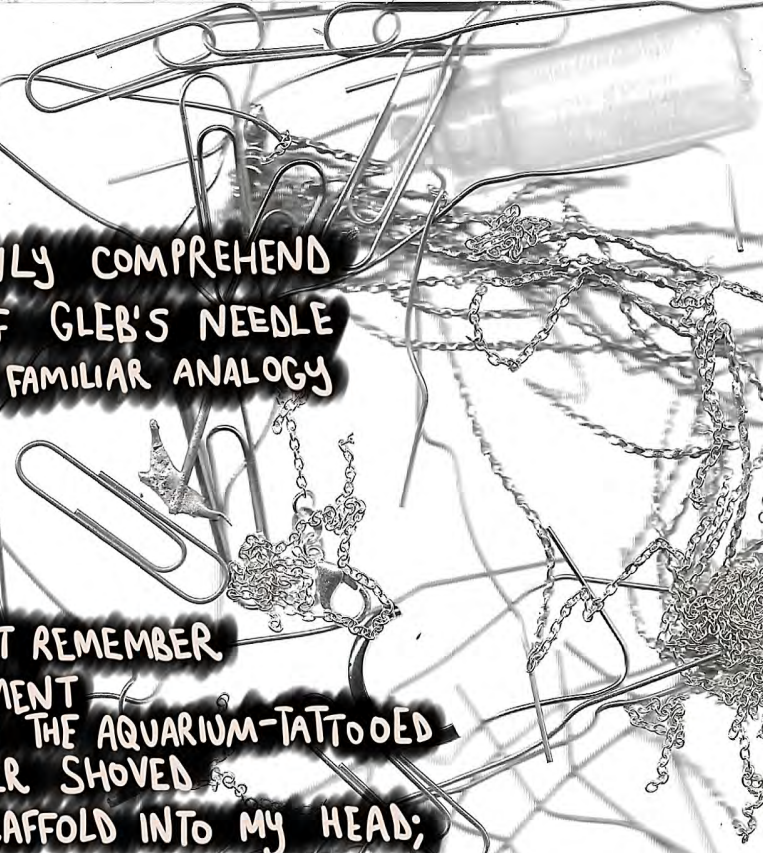
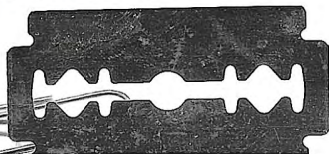
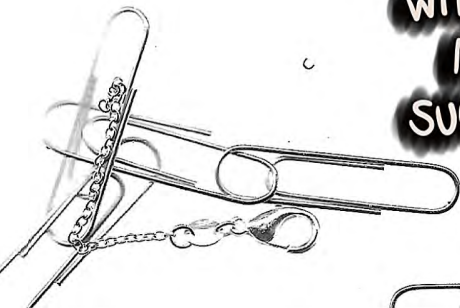
I COULD ONLY COMPREHEND
THE PAIN OF GLEB'S NEEDLE
THROUGH THE FAMILIAR ANALOGY
OF RAPE;


I CAN'T REMEMBER
THE MOMENT
WHEN THE AQUARIUM-TATTOOED
PIERCER SHOVED
THE SCAFFOLD INTO MY HEAD;

BUT I DO REMEMBER
THE BANAL, QUOTIDIAN PAIN
THE SCAFFOLD BROUGHT:
THE WINTER COLD,
ACCIDENTAL WRENCHES,
THE BLOODY MORNINGS.

MAYBE IT WAS LESS
<PAIN>
& MORE
<DISCOMFORT.>

BEING THREADED
WITH METAL
MAYBE ISN'T
SUCH A BIG THING.







I TEND TO PIN
MY UNDERSTANDING
OF THE WORLD
ON MY CAPACITY
TO DESCRIBE IT;

BEING UNABLE TO MOVE PAST
<HURTS> SPEAKS TO MY BEWILDERMENT
AROUND THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE:

A BLOCK IN THE BRAIN
WHICH SEEMS TO OPERATE
BOTH IN REAL TIME
& RETROSPECTIVELY.

WHEN GLEB WAS TATTOOING
ME, WHEN I WAS IN THE
PROCESS OF FEELING PAIN,
I COULDN'T DESCRIBE IT.



NOW, I REMEMBER
THE EFFECTS OF THE
PAIN — STREAMING
TEARS — & I REMEMBER
WHAT THE PAIN REMINDED
ME OF — RAPE —
BUT I DON'T REMEMBER
HOW IT FELT.

I'M GRATEFUL FOR & UNNERVED BY MY ABILITY TO FORGET,
MY BACKWARDS SUPERPOWER,
TOTAL UNRECALL.

I SPILLED THIS TO SANE
ON A BAD DAY,
FRIGHTENED BY THE MONTHS I'D LOST.

THAT IS
A NATURAL
COPING MECHANISM
WE SHARE
WITH THE
HUMBLE
OCTOPUS,

SHE SAID.

OUR MINDS CAN'T COPE
WITH THE DETAILS
OF WHAT HAPPENED,
SO EVERYTHING
GETS BLUNTED.

OTHERWISE WE'D
BE TOO UPSET
TO GET ANYTHING
DONE.

WE'RE JUST LEFT
WITH A SENSE OF
WHAT TO AVOID,
LIKE A FORCEFIELD
MADE OF DREAD.
US & THE OCTOPUSES.

HOW DO YOU KNOW
SO MUCH ABOUT
OCTOPUSES?

IT'S NOT ALL
NECESSARILY
FACTUAL
BUT IT
FEELS
TRUE.

THE
MIND
IS
A
MAGIC
MACHINE

WHETHER IT WAS TRUE
OR JUST FELT TRUE,
SADIE'S EXPLANATION
FOR MY MEMORY GAPS
WAS VERY COMFORTING.

SEA CREATURES AGREE:
MY FORGETTING,
MY SELECTIVE BEWILDERMENT,
HAS STRATEGIC
VALUE.



WHAT KIND OF TRAUMA
DO OCTOPUSES UNDERGO?

DON'T ASK ME.

ABSTRACT DREAD
AS EVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGE,
LIKE,
YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHY,
BUT DON'T GO THERE.



MY LIFE HISTORY TOLD FOR ME

BECAUSE METAL & INK & STARS WITHSTAND THE GREY HAZE.





SO FUTURE MORGUE WORKERS
CAN LOOK AT MY REMAINS
& BE LIKE,

DAMN

THAT

HAPPENED.

UNTIL THEN,

ME & THE OCTOPUSES

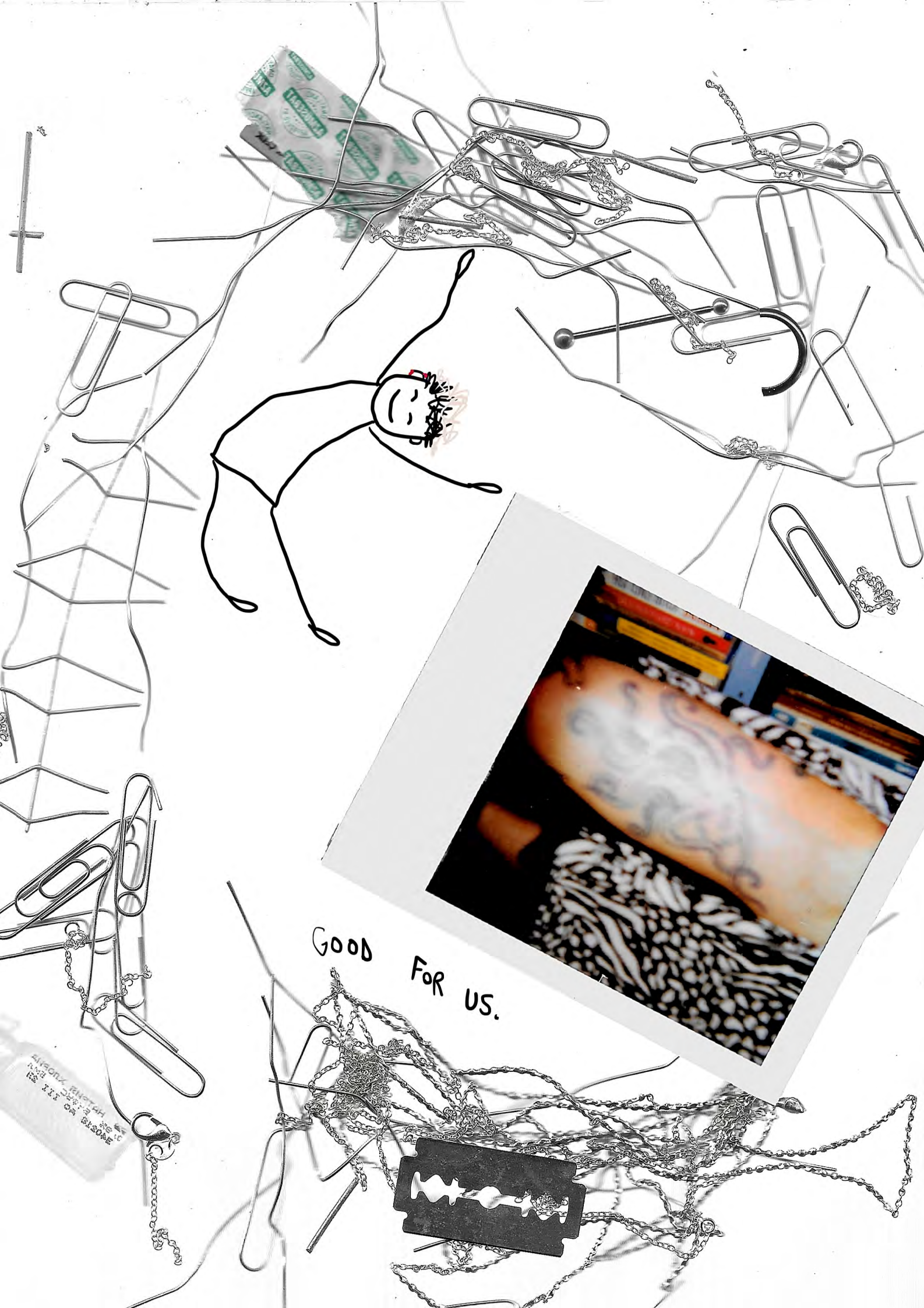
GET TO JUST FLOAT

UNREMEMBERING



IN A DREAD
HAZE.





GOOD FOR US.

