DEC 2025

RKISKEN

Vulnerability

You asked me about the
precarious
and jimmy-rigged
precious
treasures shelf
above your bed. Too
delicate?
Does it need
reinforcement?
I say: What's the worst
thing that could happen?

It falls on your head.
What will you feel
once treasured hurts
you? Like you
saw it coming.
Predictable, inevitable,
natural law,
an apple hits the ground,
a bee stings, a bird nests.

Sounds like a pain we
can live with.
Keep hanging is my vote.



Scribble Pillow



Crying and Driving

My gut feels
bubblegum medicine
from the dispenser

I cry
hysterics while driving
the car

The street lights blink
together I don't know
why I am upset anymore

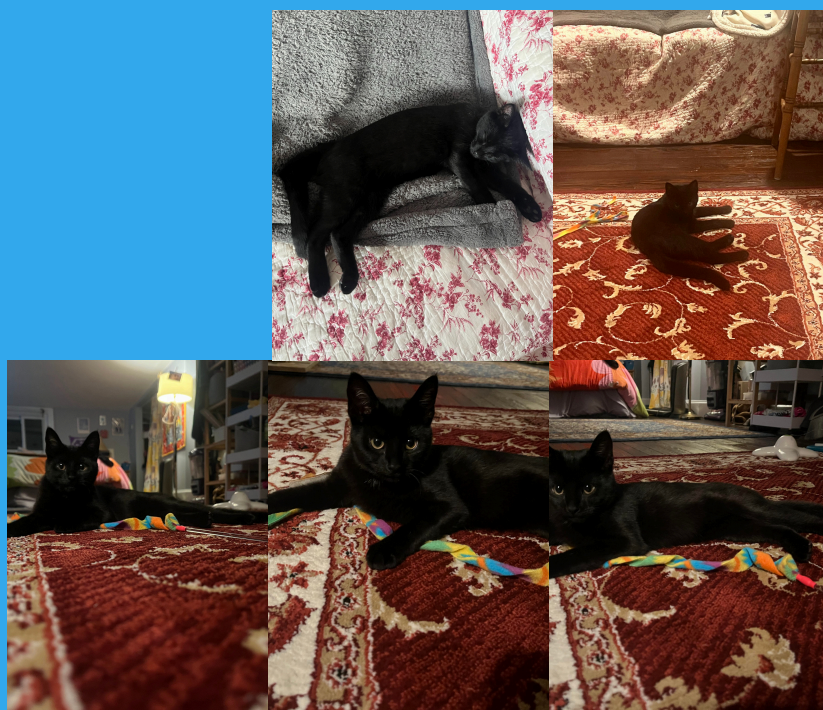
Emotions are so much
more than I can
understand

This hole in
my gut, in my soul
in my bones, in my lungs
I don't

know how to
see the positives
right now: My kitten
so cute, she walks
with her toy
in her mouth
and her sits her kill
next to me.

I'm excited for quaker
meeting this week
where I can pray.

I can't wait to see
this time of my life
in the rearview.



Scribble Pillow #3











Prayer

I can’t wait to go pray
with the gay people in
silence

One person’s shirt said –
worship in silence, love
out loud
The last meeting I went to
was

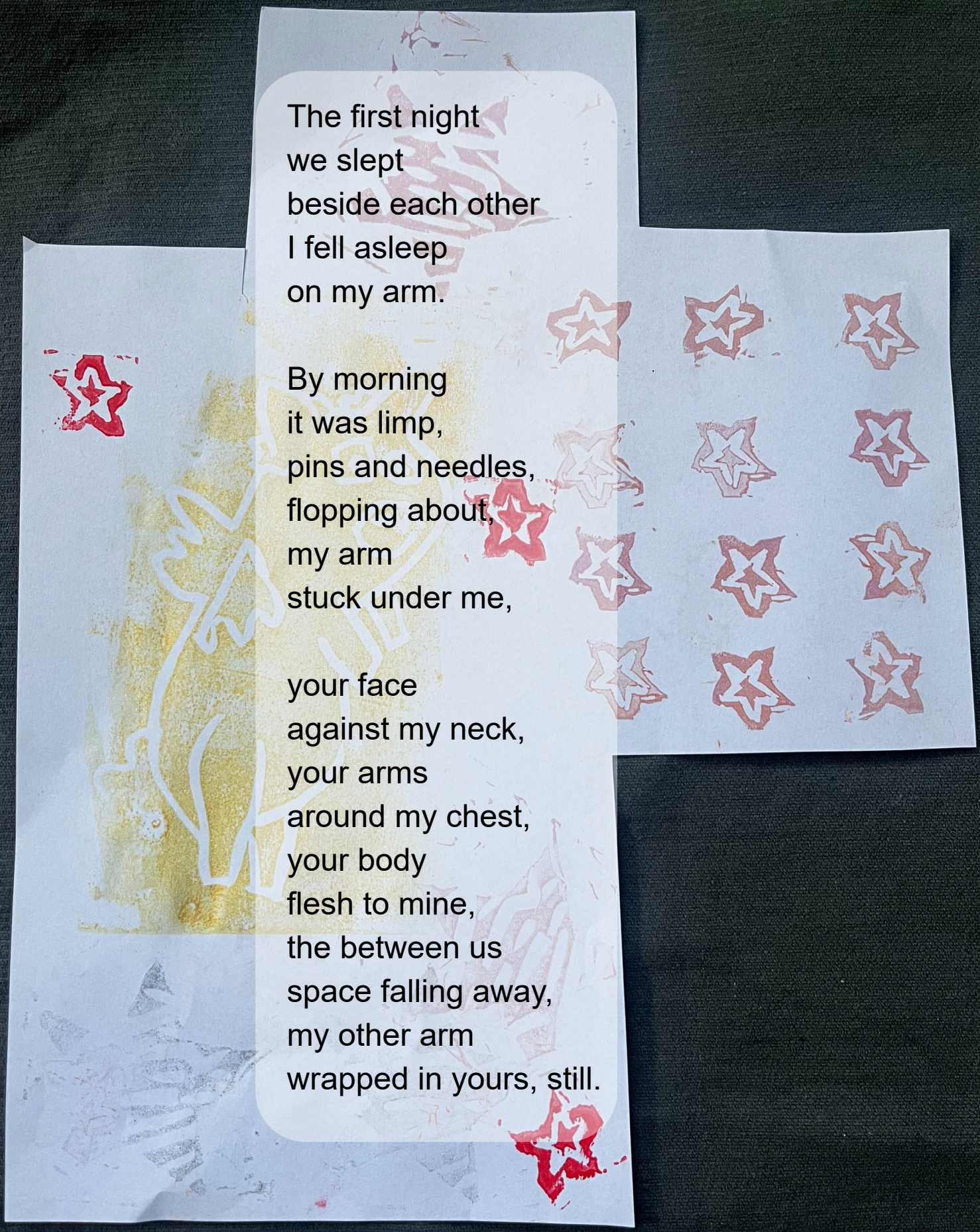
the first meeting I went to
and it was so inspiring

I am trying to lead with
my light now
There’s so much to do
when you are leading
with your light

I am trying my best to be
kind
I’m always trying
to own what is mine and
not
give it to other people

Stay my lane


Tree and clouds weaving


The first night
we slept
beside each other
I fell asleep
on my arm.
By morning
it was limp,
pins and needles,
flopping about,
my arm
stuck under me,
your face
against my neck,
your arms
around my chest,
your body
flesh to mine,
the between us
space falling away,
my other arm
wrapped in yours, still.



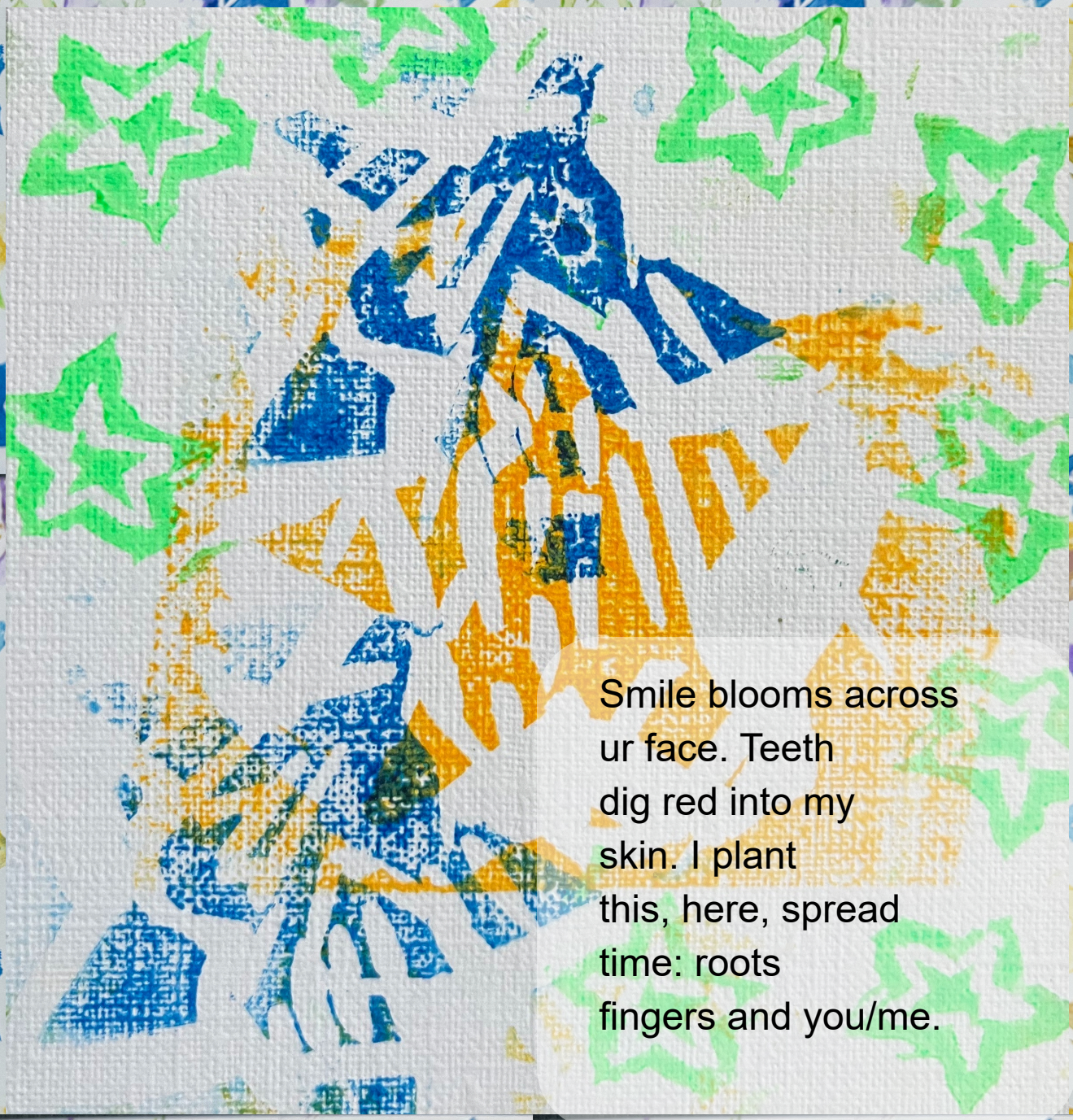




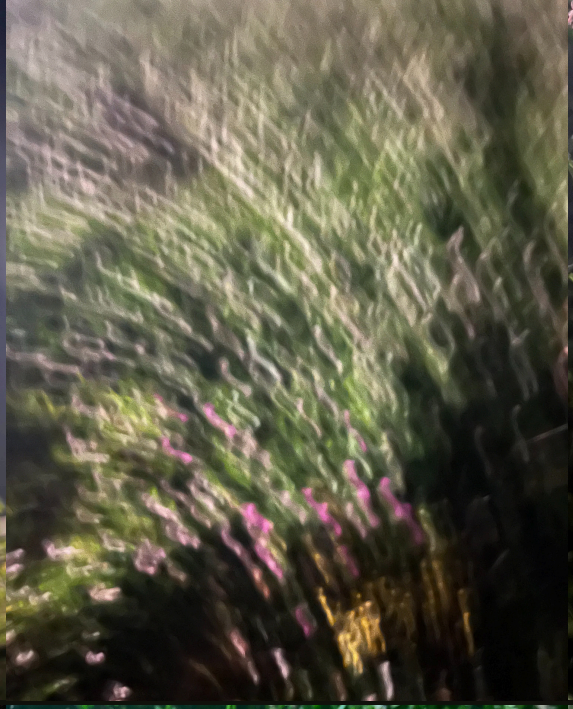


Stitch piñata for my birthday

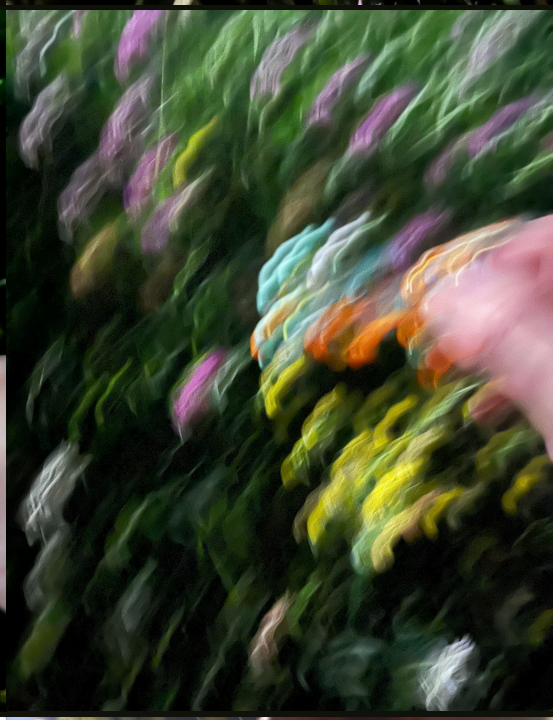




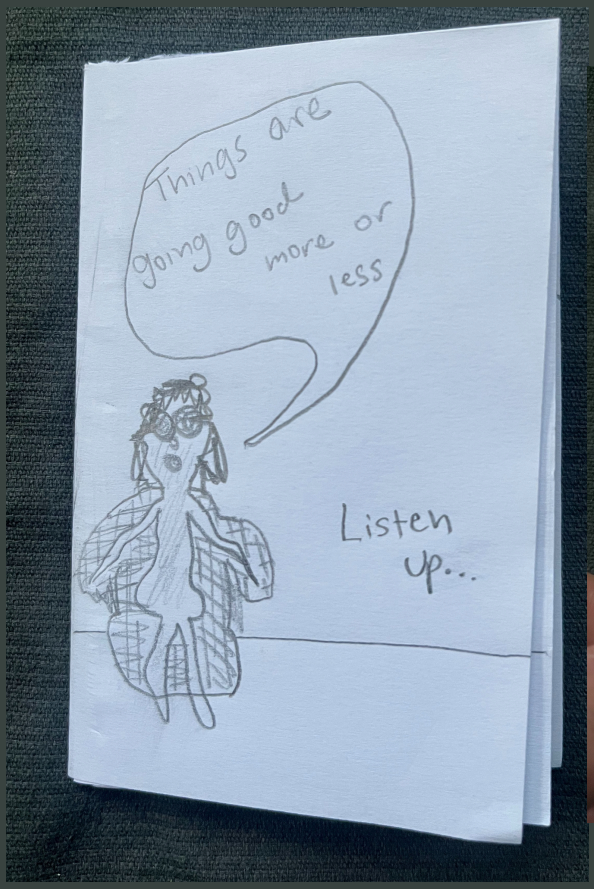
Smile blooms across
ur face. Teeth
dig red into my
skin. I plant
this, here, spread
time: roots
fingers and you/me.

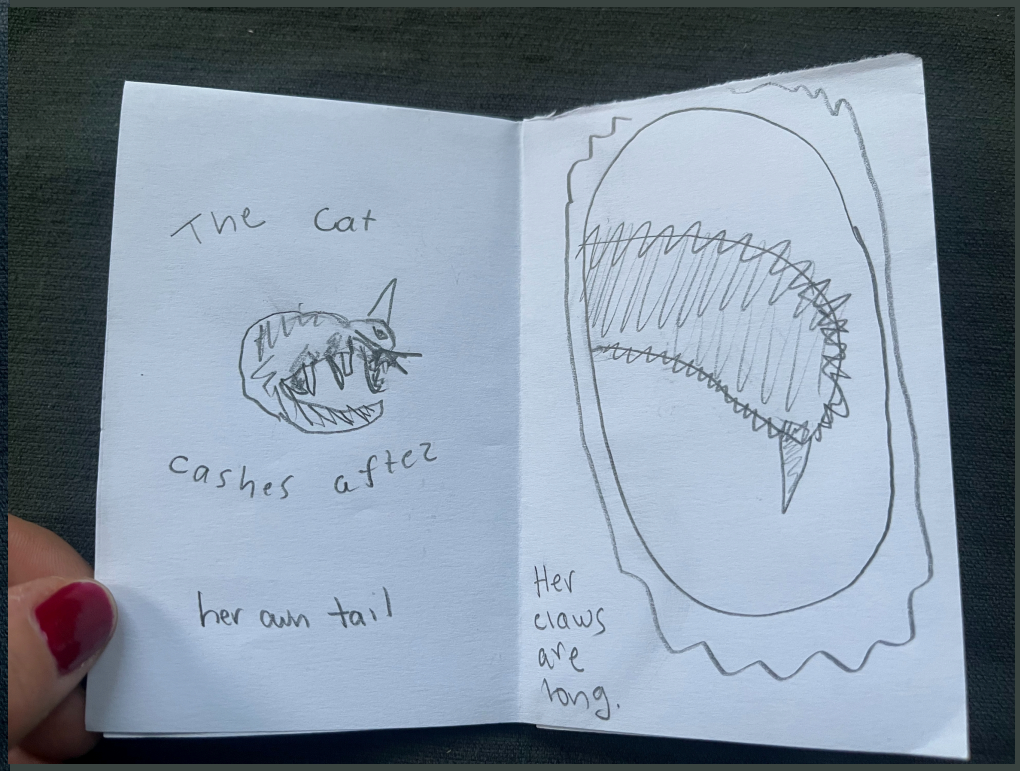



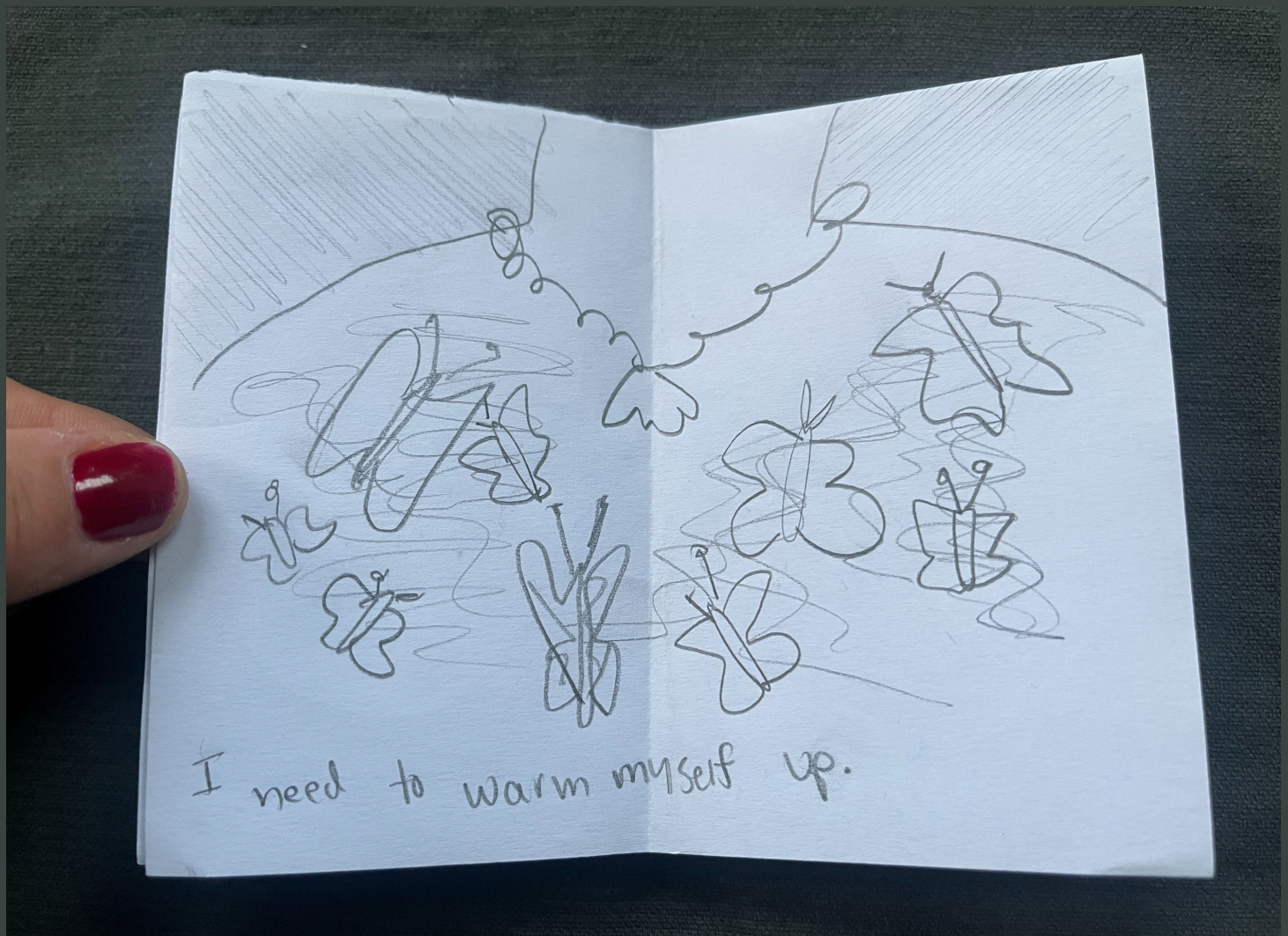




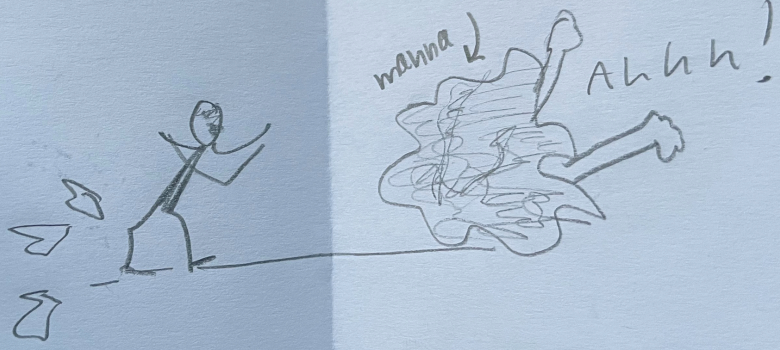




Things are going good more or less
Listen up..

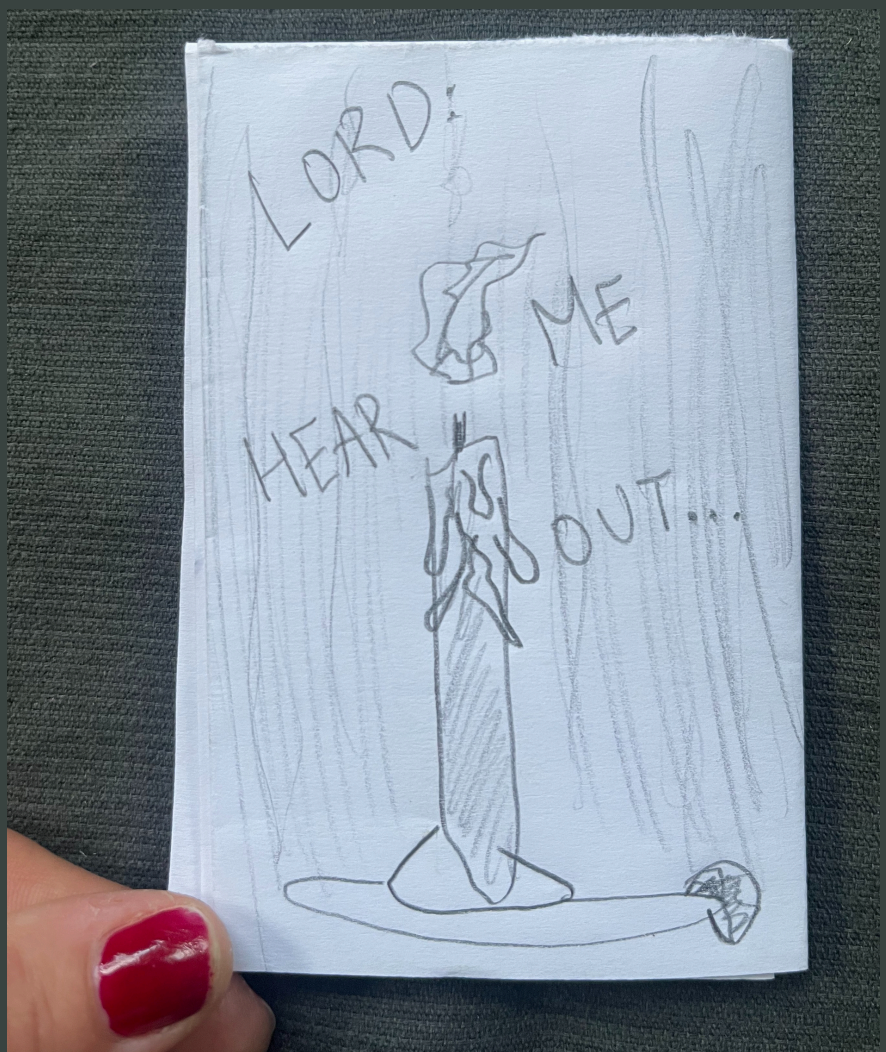

The cat
crashes after
her own tail
Her claws are long.


I need to warm myself up.

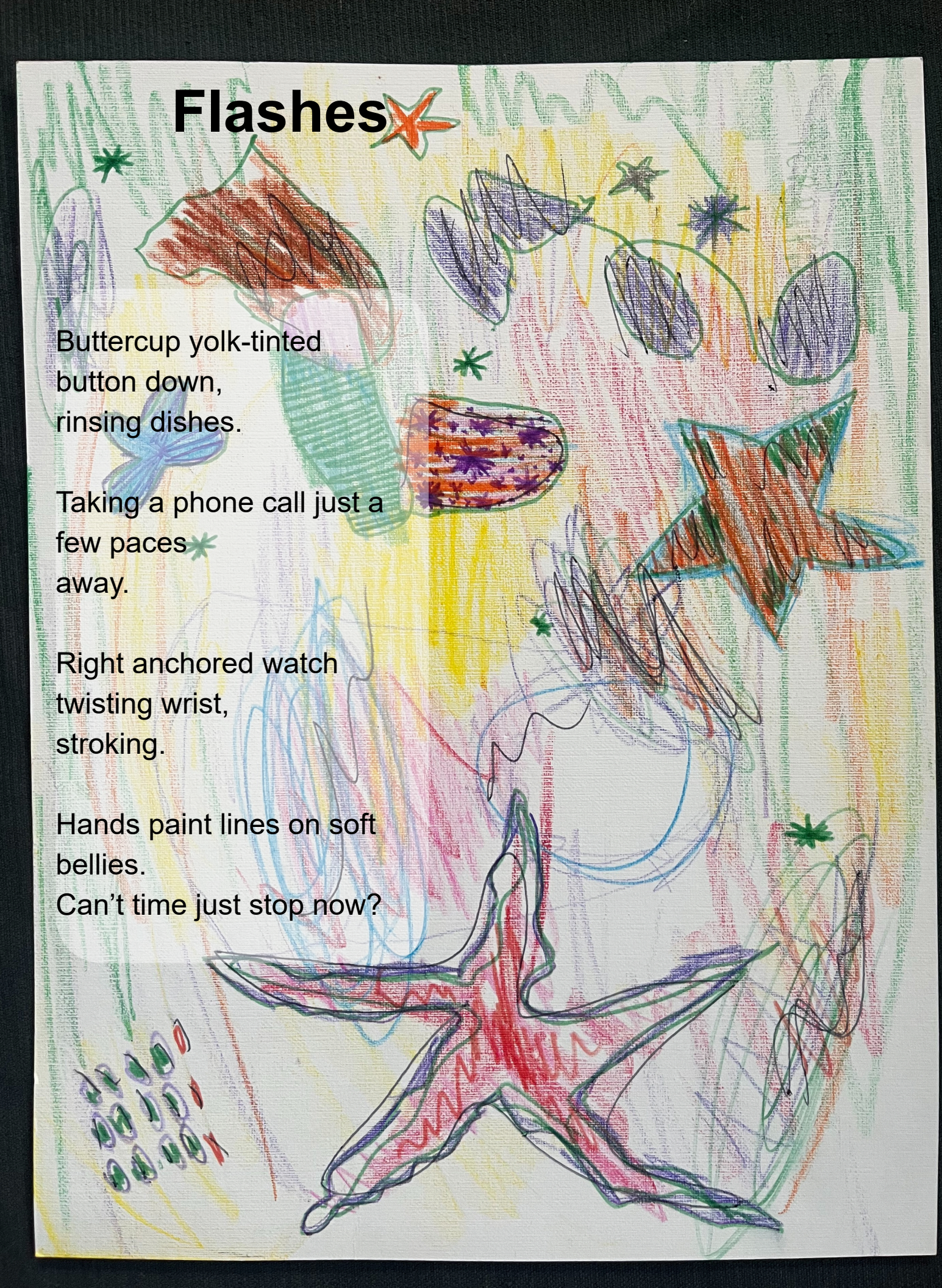
Im chasing after that



wanna | energy



Flashes



Buttercup yolk-tinted
button down,
rinsing dishes.

Taking a phone call just a
few paces
away.

Right anchored watch
twisting wrist,
stroking.

Hands paint lines on soft
bellies.
Can’t time just stop now?

Scribble Pillow #2





Sundae Topping

I stared at the dryness in his ear

I had never been this obsessed before or
at least this obsessed out in the open

I like the chemical or natural or innate
explanation for things because I have no words

I got speechless
when he was fucking me so deep my lips
tingled and I lost feeling in my hand

This is what good sex does
to me, macerates

I was not thinking clearly at all in fact I was
separated, softened gaze

I saw him, we dived deeper in this
Strawberry ice cream never ever ever ending oh this –
Velvety smoothness and rolling hills

River valley verdant lush flush ready
to be dived into again and again and he

pinched my nipple like twisting
leaves off a berry

Pillow for Katy











Pussycat

i share
my room with a kitten

i lay
in bed
thinking what if

poetry is just a space
to tell everything you
would have said to a lover

mourning this ex
i can’t stop thinking about
the last one

how learning arabic made
me better at spanish

the second one really
sets everything in

my poetry is meowing
tons and jumping
on to my bed













runn
ing a
cross my
knees



always i end up
back on my knees, my
poetry is getting f u c k ed
a pit is:

keeping going
put more in
my cunt could
swallow you whole



i could wipe you out

your body never stops
being in
mine

you'll only stop
when you want to
stop

it feels good
when she runs
across my knees

her paws are so
light and airy

it is a dance
kis
5tsing each
sweet spot

aligning my b
ack
all our bodies
are co
nnected











Karaoke

Check in on your
friends who want to sing
Landside for karaoke

Try your best not to
fall in temporary
love with Amy Winehouse
singers especially
Valerie belters

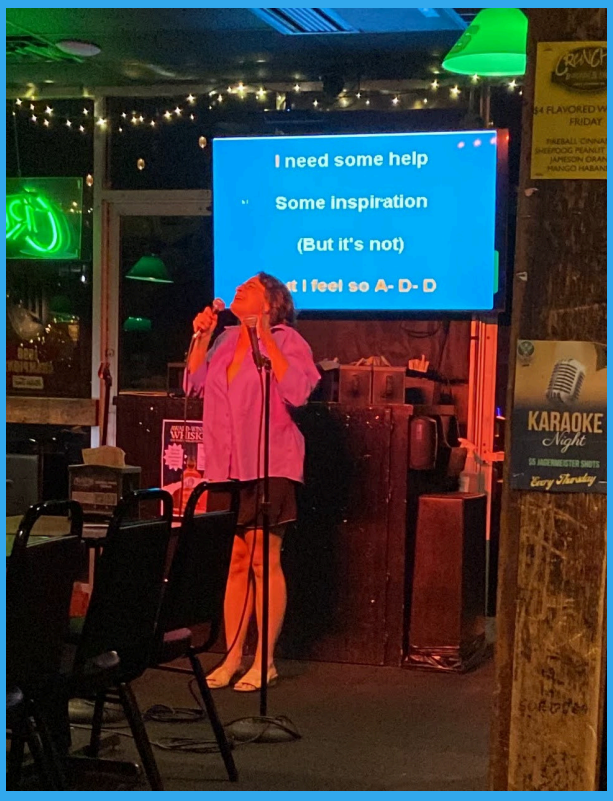
Duets are obscene
Group songs are cowardice

The more intense
obscure
personal
the better

The less crowd
appeal
the better

Doesn't make for a
good performance
but makes for a
good soul

Makes mountains move far away
even if the crowd starts
to talk over everything



I did "Is that All There Is?"
Peggy lee
No one got it
I did a Lorde song but
the crowd was too old
I did "Don't You Forget About Me"
All froggy rasp

Karaoke is not for good singers
That's an open mic
This is a catharsis
This is musical reality
There is no theater
There shouldn't be a stage

The best performances
I've witnessed:
Touch my body
Prince x2
California Dreaming
Home

Karaoke is for The People
People in the common sense
People in the shared sense
Karaoke is for passing

I have KJ'd I have sat
As audience I have stood
As performer

I clapped and cheered
I belted
I sang
I harmonized
I was shy
I was bashful
I was bold
I was offensive





bread & beverage

my breakfast sandwich was unexpectedly so good it made me cry, thinking this is what home is, some over easy eggs smashed between a toasted hard roll with poppy seeds from the deli my cousin works at. this is what bread culture around here doesn't get, there's no hard rolls, you can't really find a good bagel in dc, not a real one, and i miss bagels from back home. breads my major food group. as a kid going to the farmers market with my mom and buying a loaf of bread and the whole short car ride home we ripped off chunks of it, stuffing our mouths as she drove and we barely had a loaf by the time we get home, just bloated stomachs. i love bread. I had a bread maker as a kid and my high school friend-lover was amazed when i used it. i was offended by his amazement, no spectacle in me cooking, i cooked all the time, but the bread baking really impressed him. i made bread come into this world. i love warm bread with butter or stale bread toasted again, when bagels come out of the freezer and you have to dress them in wet paper towel to reanimate back to life. im always getting sick from the bread, id rather die ill than admit to being gluten intolerant. the smell of wheat toasting, the way dough bubbles into sustenance, i love bread. i want hard rolls for days, my dad always had Portuguese rolls at hand, my mom a loaf, i only buy this one kind of bread from the bakery section of the grocery store because nothing else is good, forget the "bread aisle" who even shops there how can they sustain that many options when all of them are phony terrible, didn't they say subways bread was all plastics anyway, i mean everything's plastics now anyway, my students have a credit card worth of microplastic in their body and their bodies aren't even that big yet.









i haven’t been able to have a good cup of coffee in days, the kind you can just sip, my stomachs too weak in the morning and by the time i finish breakfast it’s time to rush off somewhere, always on the move, i think i might have tired myself out by now, i want to curl up like my cat, i want a warm drink in my hand to just sip and watch the world turn. i don’t get pastries but i get bread, maybe because i prefer savory bread, an olive bread over anything like a croissant or a cinnamon roll. i could go for a pumpkin mead right now at 728 am, they are so refreshing. i want to sip a beverage and relax, but none of that lately, I went on a date last tuesday and i think they’re already done with me, that didn’t even take off the ground, anyway i forgot to sip my beverage then too. i got a date tonight maybe ill remember to drink my beer.



























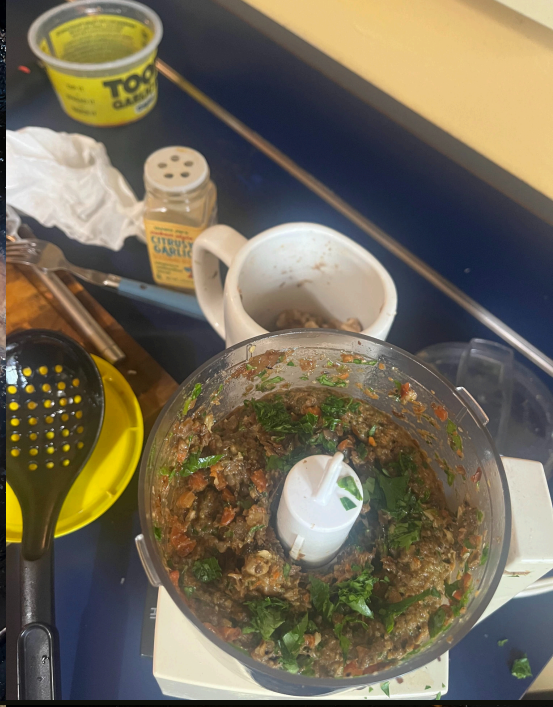




Shrimp tacos with tortillas and salsa verde





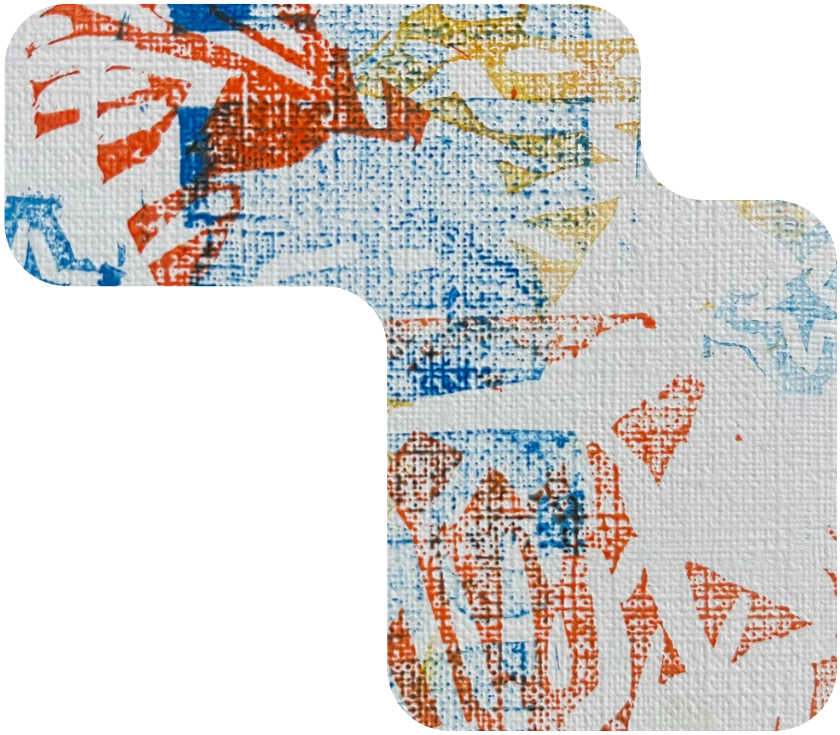






Words and Relaxation

love personal expression
express myself, lately



trapped energy
inside body
forgot how to
listen to upbeat music

soothe myself sonically
to yielding rnb

pounding within me
wants no docile

tap back
into that part
more courageous



pound against things
break stuff

last weekend at a party
I broke the bong by accident

so crossed, super clumsy
out of it,

leaving cups everywhere
because none of the drinks
tasted like mine

it was a wine sampling
I liked the cheap
bottle I brought best

it was super cold
super cheap
white wine

if the wine
is cheap
and it’s chilled
you will never know
the difference

i was so burnt out
by playing host, being
in community, no time
to come back to myself

no time yet to
look inward

see what’s brew
ing
in
side





now that I have a sweetheart
it is easy to forget
parts of myself

before he came over on Monday
I thought, oh lord-please do not make me
eat dinner right away,
he walked in
and what do we do? we ate
so fast. while
I chewed each bite,
I thought, this is one bite closer
to freedom, to being
able to just relax on my couch

I love to relax on my couch
it is so nice for me

to stretch my feet out.
The other night I gave myself
a good foot massage

I felt parts of my body or
my soul through my sole,
in each dig into my
foot. I pressed my thumbs
up and down my arch,
pressing into each sensitive soft
spot, really digging into my toes,



moving them, wiggling them,
pushing them around,
feeling each joint, body, bone.



im no doctor
I just touch myself

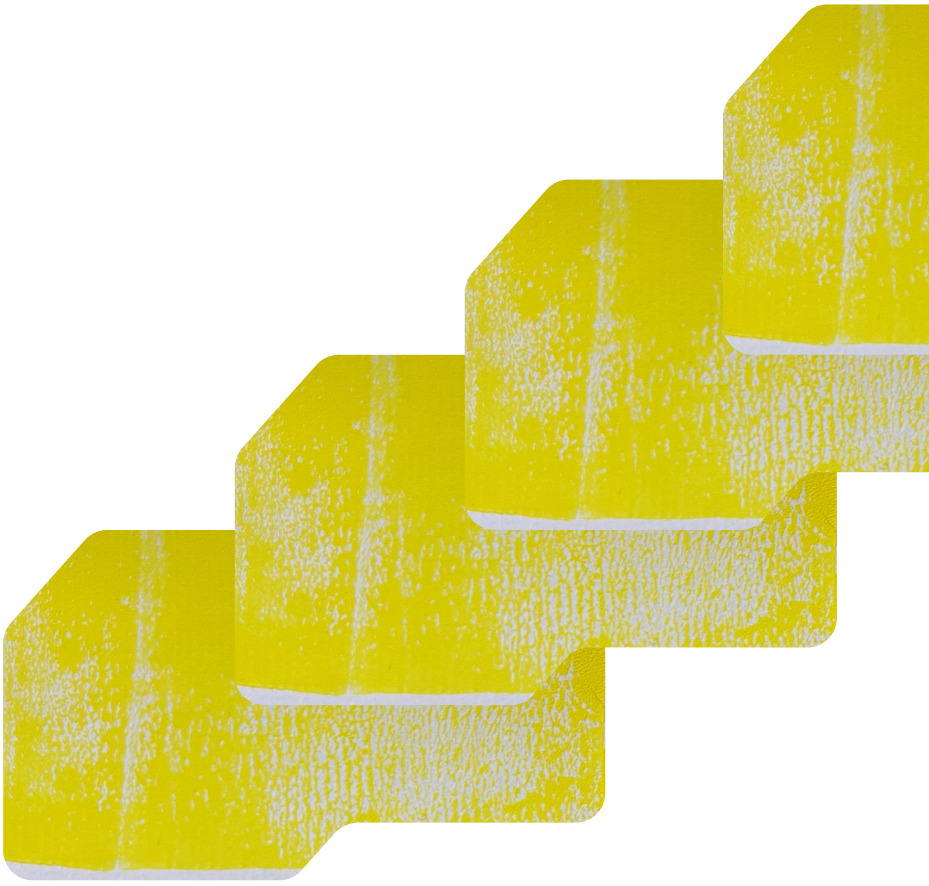
with what feels good
I love the burn a little bit

I like mixture
pain and pleasure

too shy to say what I like out loud
I was talking around it, the times
I go mute like

at the party
the other night
I went nonverbal

like leave me alone
why do you all have to hear
me talk
can’t I slip
in
to the back
ground
and just listen



can’t I become a fly, here’s
my place on this wall –

the time *** and I did
shrooms and we couldn’t talk
we didn’t even want to be hanging out
we both wanted to be at home

what were the shrooms even showing us?
a womb
hours on my bed
relearning how to feel safe
listening to diana ross

I loved her song ‘baby it’s me’
because baby, it is me,
hearing her grounded me in space
place, I was in Michigan
she had been too.

time and history
in every moment
if you let it

all
s e e p
in



that fourth of July
there was a lot of
seeping going on,
a lot of
sowing, planting
my seeds for who I would become.

Now I am a person
on the other side
of that trip. I am who
I was becoming,
I am still becoming,

I always want to
become a writer
or am a writer who
doesn’t write enough
more and more

baby it’s action
baby it’s unraveling



Timeout

I’m on my period
my uterus aches
I’m in pain

I was so depressed yesterday
today I’m mad

I opened an envelope on the street and
Just yelled
‘these motherfuckers’

I can’t do this paperwork today

The other night I pictured
all the space I need to just be me
alone with myself
I do like that place

Sometimes I want everyone gone
‘fuck you everyone’

I am just myself
I need only her right now

I’m an only child! I spent most of this
time alone and I like to keep up
this relationship to myself.







Pillow for my mom





Dragons in the Backyard

I shift all the weight to my right foot and lean toward the concrete as I swipe the turn on my scooter. I'm on the prowl for something to do. After lazily lapping the block a handful of times I trek up the hill to see what Simone is up to. The apartments up the hill have their own road and I take a sidewalk enclosed with trees. I'm nervous to knock on her door. The last time I was over she took her trumpet and kept blowing it in my ear. Another time we watched a movie where a girl was under bedsheets with a disgusting looking guy. I couldn't get the scene out of my head. It just replayed and replayed, first from fear or confusion, I wanted to help the girl escape the bedroom, then from desire, I wanted to be the naked woman, I wanted to be gross man, I wanted to be wrapped up in all those sheets. Swaddled.

Simone answers on the second knock. Her mom's not home, probably at the salon cutting hair decently and quickly. My mom says the reason Simone's mom doesn't work at Glitz and Glam Beauty Studio for wealthy people in town is because she cuts it fast, and there they want you to draw it all out, really make you feel special, not just some head of hair. I feel special enough in her salon chair because I'm not just some head of hair. I'm the head of hair that trails around the neighborhood and hangs around their house and will fight with her daughter or listen in the next room as she fights with her daughter. It's way more intimate than just another hair cut, even if it's quick. She's also the only person I like to brush my hair; she told my mom that mom's can't brush their daughters hair because that's when all the anger seeps out.

“Hey,” Simone says. “Wanna play?” I ask. I’m always asking that, it’s rarely someone at my door asking ME to go play. She lets me into the living room. Clean folded clothes stacked on the couch. Dishes on the kitchen counter. We hardly ever hang out in Simone’s bedroom because it’s darker, kind of gross, lots of stacks and piles of things both dirty and clean. When she blew the trumpet in my ear it was in her room. Part of me had wanted to get out, had thought about heading for the door the whole time. Part of me had wanted to stay. I always loved something loud; I always loved testing my own limits.

I trail her back to the couch where signs of life surround her: empty water cup, carton of goldfish, the tv remote, the action movie running. “Wait until it comes back from commercial,” I’m instructed. I press into the couch hoping to disappear a little between cushions. Her eyes are glued right back to screen, hand looping schools into her mouth. I hate TV face-eye-glaze. I probably get transfixed too, but at home, when there’s no one around. When there are people around I never want to look that hard at the tv. But the digital scenes always pull people in in a way I can’t. I start tapping my foot on the

coffee table. Her plastic cup chimes and vibrates. “Stop it,” she says, nearly a whisper, eyes still focused. I continue tapping. Goldfish swim through turbulent waters. “Stahp it,” she whines. In my head I’m playing a song now out with my foot. It’s a cover of Ashley Tisdale’s “He Said She Said” but it’s a pretty weak cover since I just have one foot to tap out all the rhythms. Heel tap, slide across the foot tap, toe tap, toe toe. He said, "You're amazing" “I said stop” she growls. Heel slide toe toe. She said, "Then why you waiting?" She laughed at the commercial, eyes glowing. Heel heel slide toe toe slide heel. "No more deliberating, what you doin'? Let's get to it" Slide slide slide toe. Just like that, they She slugs my bicep. “Hey!” I whine. “I warned ya,” she lies, because I didn’t feel warned, but now it smarts and warms up my whole arm. Her eyes still on the tv screen. I say, “You said just one more part anyway.” Finally her eyes move from the screen to me, pupils readjusting, her irises transforming to take me in.

“Let’s go check on the dragons and feed them,” I offer. Simone agrees. I got scared last fall that when she started high school she’d start saying the dragons were for middle school babies like me. I felt some way about her being in high school, me in still in the place we met, Walter S. Middle School, so I avoided her for the first month of school. It was one of the few times I heard a knock at my door. There she was, the girl I’d thought would be over me, asking me to come out, feed the dragons, ride our bikes, do all the normal shit, like nothing changed, like we were still classmates, like our bus route was still the same, sitting next to each other, tracing lines in the green seat creases, pretending it was a map, finding a path from one end of the seat to freedom.

The dragons live in the field below my house. The grasses are high and burnt and help to disguise them though they're invisible anyway. The best way to feed dragons is from up in a tree or a rock, any pedestal with ample space beneath, someplace where you look down on the world. You can throw or drape raw invisible meat into the grass for them to chomp. Don't get yourself caught in the scuffle that sways the grass around. Risk losing a hand or fingertip or acrylic from razor sharp secret jaws.

On the walk over to the field I wonder how Fireome is doing. He was a little sick last week, couldn't breathe fire. He shot smoke around. It got so gloomy. He's usually able to pick the mood up, making jokes, dancing around with Scarlett the Lava Dragon or Gladys the Ice Dragon. But last week when we saw him it was different. I kept calling for him to come to the rock, but he stayed at the far end of the field away from everyone, eyes longing but never approaching. I hope he's doing better. I don't know what I didn't visit him sooner. I should have checked in on him. What if he's much sicker now and he thinks so no one loves him because he feels neglected even though it wasn't intentional. I just

couldn’t be there yet, stuff came up, life keeps passing. I had other things to do. I went on a sleepover last weekend, free museum day Monday, didn’t leave my bed all Tuesday, Wednesday I made it to the living room, Thursday I had therapy, Friday my mom kept me by her side running errands, so I couldn’t visit, not yet, besides I usually don’t go unless I am with Simone. They’re our dragons, she could have visited him anyway. What’s she doing all day but watching TV and eating? She doesn’t even do her chores or what her mom tells her to do, that’s why they fight from what I hear when I press my ear to her bedroom door, waiting for her to return to me, back from the world her mom demands from her, back into the world I dream for us.

By the time we get to the field I’m running to find Fireome with Simone keeping up. Simone likes when I part the grass for her, leading the way to the rock. I face the brunt of the grass’s kisses. She sleeks around and spends a lot of time trying to dodge when the earth reaches up for her. Walking through the grass to the best feeding rock tickles my fat thighs tumbling out of denim cutoffs. A month ago I cut all my jeans into shorts forgetting in seasons, that someday it will be cold again, I will need thighs hidden from air. I skip onto the rock in one leap but Simone slides her foot up halfway, rests it on a rivet, then throws her arms up for me to grab. I pull her up. I get up on my own to turn around and give her my arm as a railing, what’s needed for grace.

“Hurrghuf,” she snorts. I start dropping ribeyes and she joins me. Quickly Gladys and Fireome leave their hiding spots. Fireome walks to the edge of the rock. I stroke his armored snout. He nestles into my hand. Purring. Tries to breathe out fire but it’s just plumes of smoke. “He’s doing better but he’s not 100%,” I tell Simone. Simone throws a bone for Gladys who lunges after it. Gladys sets the bone at Simone’s feet. Simone throws it again. Gladys regifts. She nudges it. Simone lobs it ahead. Gladys catches it before it hits the ground. Spits it back. Simone throws it and it lands in Gladys mouth. Gladys blows it back to Simone. They keep at it for a while.

“Let’s find Peg.” “Huh?”

“We got nothing to do maybe she’s up to something,” Leah offers.

“Guess’so. She’s at home?” I ask.

“Prabably.” One bike ride later we’re panting and ringing Peg’s bell. She pounds down the hall. Footsteps thump to a stop. Here we go, same opening routine every time: First she opens the door with the deadbolt undone but the chain still on. She goes “lemme see who it is” out the crack. Then she looks us both up and down real slow. Sometimes her eyes swivel from side to side or she goes crossed at our stomachs then takes her time to refocus and finish the evaluation. Simone’s drooling for it at this point. I’m taking a deep breath. Inhale down into the belly. Stretching the diaphragm. On the exhale, push out how she always undoes the chain, pushes open the door, and undoes my peace. Smack, doors open, we’re following her to hot concrete, lounge chairs, chlorine, a waterfall off the hot tub. She pounces into the day’s latest injustice. Simone nods along, her eyes doing her evaluation. She moves clockwise across Peg’s body: head to shoulder, arm to hip, thigh to foot, repeat

upward. A few times I caught her wetting her lips. Simone loves when Peg talks about arguing with her rich Republican dad, trying to rehabilitate him, to show how leftism wins later down the road.

"My dad's been on my case about getting a job since I graduated Regis High in June. Said he'd cut me off, some shit, just started like screeching. I tired to tune it out but eventually I started going fucking ballistic," Peg says.

"It's like he's hurting you without laying a finger on you," Simone tells her. "Totally. I was talking to Jennifer about it and she said it was borderline abusive." "It's certainly not supportive."

My eyes glaze over and ears fill with static. Physically I'm sticking to Peg's white plastic lounge chair, mentally I'm in the field with Fireome. I wonder if he wants to play fetch sometime. It seems so fun when Simone does it with Gladys. When Simone's dog was alive we used play fetch with him. Toward the end of his life the game was harder. His legs got tense. He limped. The limping got worse. He slowly inched forward. Simone loved to still toss it for him. He would still go after it happily. But the game stalled. It was boring and filled with long pauses. Simone had no control over the ball. Sometimes she tossed it softly and it stayed near him. Other times she chucked it and it soared far away. When the game was about to get too slow, I would intervene. As he started toward the distant ball, I ran toward it too. I kicked the ball closer to him. He'd jog it to Simone. In the last month of his life he got even slower. Simone'd belt the ball far. It took too long for him to reach. He was crawling to it. I'd kick it to him. He'd start hobbling back to her. I started to walk after him, pick him up, and place him in front of Simone. He'd kiss the toy into her palm. She'd throw the ball way too far. I'd run for it again. Kick it. He started back to her. I deliver him. Again and again, throw and fetch and fetch cycled until the dog died.

“What’d you get up to today?” Peg asks.

“Oh we went to feed the dragons,” Simone answers. I shoot her a look. Raise my eyebrows. Purse my lips. Squint. I can’t believe she actually said that.

“At the zoo?” Peg clarifies.

“No the ones we have in Rachel’s backyard.” This is enough. It’s not Peg’s business.

“No way you do.”

“Of course we do,” I double down. I know the ways they’re real but I don’t expect Peg to understand even if it was spelled out to her. I would never show her them.

“Wanna see them?” Simone offers. Fuck. “Sure,” Peg answers. Peg grabs her bike and the three of us set off. Peg’s bike has long pink tassels off the handlebars that sing in the wind. Mine used to have some tassels like that too. Now I have like 4 of those left. I echo in the wind. Her bike’s a choir. Biking together us three’s fun because we all like going fast. No one’s trailing behind instead we compete to be the leader. I will stop short in front of people just to hiccup an advantage. Simone will pretend to lose control of the bike to scare you into swiveling away before her lead. Peg’s even spit at me to get me to slow down. Of course I get to my own yard first and I want to warn Fireome to stay away from the riff raff Simone’s brought home to us. “Run off!” I shout before they pull up behind me.

We walk Peg up to the best feeding rock. Peg scans the yard real slow. “Where are they?” she asks. “In the grasses,” Simone says. Peg gets a smirk on her face. Then she snorts. Then she laughs. It starts as a giggle just barely escaping the back of her throat. It turns into belly-shaking air-piercing shouts. “You have nothing here,” she finally spits out. Simone’s smile is slapped off her face. Her eyebrows crease. Peg’s still cracking herself up. My face is getting hot. My head hurts. “Yeah, nothings here,” Simone agrees. She tries to laugh too, but it doesn’t join Simone’s, just sits in the air next to hers. “Of course there’s nothing you can see,” I growl, “did you really expect some fucking mythical creature out back here? Are you that stupid?” Peg stops laughing and looks at me. Didn’t she realize she was asking to be let into a game of make-believe that wasn’t made for her? “I just wanted to see where your dumb game was played,” Peg pretends. “Bullshit you’re so gullible you really thought there was something out here,” I’m not backing down. “I knew baby-type bullshit went on here.” “Only thing infantile here is the size of your pea brain.” “Try that again.” “The one tiny thing here is definitely your smarts.” “Try me one more time.” “You are so stupid you’re going to starve if your dad cuts you off.” WHAP! I’m off the rock on the grass before I realize Peg’s shoved me.

I huff. Stand back up. Look up at Simone and Peg still on the rock. I exhale and pounce. First I grab at Peg’s hair, then I’m trying to step on her feet. She slaps me across the face. Simone is back away slowly. I lose my balance and topple me and Peg into the grass again. We roll around on top of each other, fingers curling around whatever hair arm leg they can get. “Stop it,” Simone’s calling out. “Get up.” Her voice cracks. Peg’s got her elbow wrapped around my neck. I notice the scratch across Peg’s cheek when Fireome comes towards us and breathes in. Breathe out.

