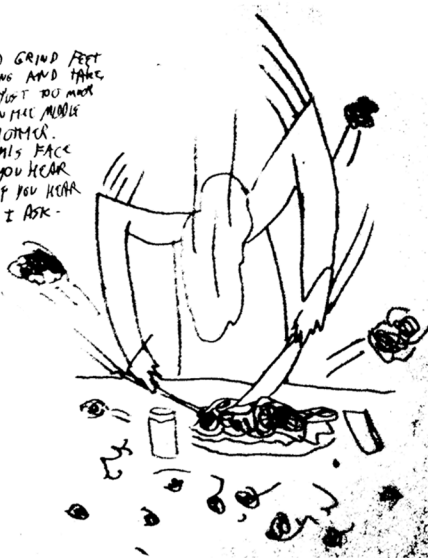
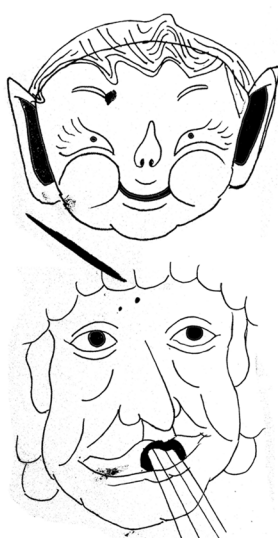
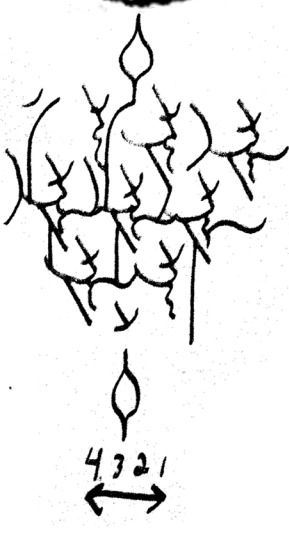




NIGHT WALK DOWN OUR ROAD GRIND FEET
ON THE BERRIES & SHUT WALKING AND TAKE
OFF EVERYTHING BECAUSE IT'S HOT TO MUR
SERIES I STEP ON A BOY IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE ROAD WE KNOW CACHORRA
IT'S FIERCE BLACK & I LIKE HIS FACE
WITH BRASSY PINE, DIDN'T YOU HEAR
ME SINGING? HE ASKS, DIDN'T YOU HEAR
ME WALKING UP JUST NOW? I ASK -
LIM TIDE CRUNCH OUT & STAND
A MILE OUT AND THE
WATER RUSH ALL IN, SOME
RANCID, SOME CARS.
UP & DOWN, PLOD ST.
BELIEVE IT

- LIST: (HEAD) ②
- DOUBT: WINNING +
LOSING
- CITY/COUNTRY ②
- GOODNIGHT! ①

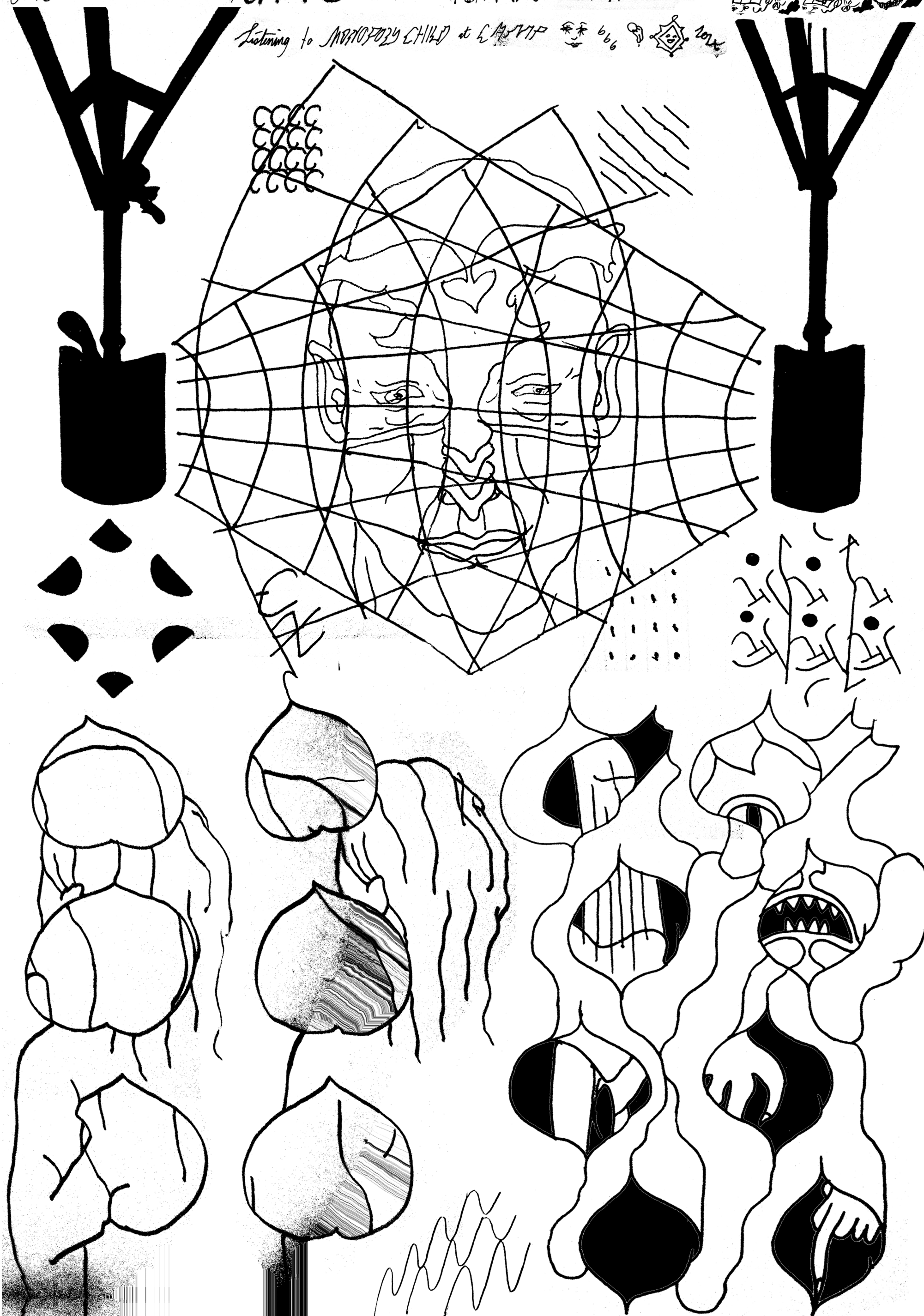


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Listening to MARYJOZ CHLD at 4:45 PM 6/6 10/4



FICTION WORKSHOP PRESENTS
"POSTCARD FROM MOST NIGHTS"
(DECEMBER 2010)

I've definitely been there, and maybe you've been there too, as Harold begins making a yawny, foot-shuffling case to leave, giving the normal drinking-man-to-drinking-man excuses, saying he has to go back home to grade papers, get enough sleep to keep his slippery grip on his tenuous humanity, and so on. His buddy tonight John is pushing for round five, because he's just not there yet on his own nighttime plan, which is to get medium-hammered and really completely whatever enough about sleeping with this undergrad he's been very unprofessionally sleeping with—unprofessionally in both senses—that he can go through with making the necessary gestures to make it happen again, because a little bit bad as he kinda feels about it, he also still just wants to go do it. To this end John orders a shot, while Harold dreams down into the last three sad sips of his fourth beer, and the night winds out.

John never speaks Harold's first name, and Harold accepts without having ever looked into it. But let's us look at it for a sec, and you can decide later if you think it's relevant, because it's relevant to me. It sources from when a kid one day decided at recess to split John's 3rd grade head wide with a rock, and to follow that up in festively satanic, pre-teen-monster fashion by etching a tiny swastika, a tiny block-lettered Fuck You, and a tiny smiley face into John's desk. John never saw this kid again, though he heard much later that the little guy totally classically/believe-it-or-notly supposedly grew up to become a cop, after time in juvey and then Afghanistan, where other reports suggest this boy died or was executed; take your pick from the available options. Nobody at the school ever noticed young John's desk, and he never said anything, so he had those reminders of the raw world down under his spelling tests for the rest of the year. John says Fuck You all the time, and taken individually, smiley faces and even swastikas don't bug him, but as a whole these three inscriptions in the desk spelled something horrible to his child brain: the name of his first and most brutal assailant, a boy named Harold, a name John still can't speak, that still makes him so-super-queazy to hear. John doesn't even remember the incident itself, doesn't even remember the desk inscription, but it had its power, it burned on the surface of his desk, and from there, through his eyes and terrified, tracing, forgetting fingers up into his brain. Now some fat cop somewhere or some beheaded corpse in a ditch in Afghanistan gets a disgusting erection when he/it feels his/its power-word name spoken around this goofed-up adult New England academic, this living adult man named John, who has grown into kind of a perv himself, or really not a perv, but definitely by common accounts a loser; a faculty loser creep who sleeps with an undergrad. The part of John's brain that lights up with fear to hear the name of the man in the world who controls him would light up in an MRI distinctly in the shapes of a smiley face, a swastika, and Fuck You written in kid-hand block letters, simultaneously as the cop's dick inscribes his week-old boxers with

this chlamydia-dripped inscription, and the hungry maggots in the infantry corpse's uniform's rotting underwear writhe themselves into this legible formation as well. Anyway, there you go; John hasn't said Harold's name since they met in '07 at a department luncheon, and here they both are sitting in this strange and retarded world considering their respective purgatories: John waiting for his shot to slide down the bar so he can put it toward feeling fine about going to do whatever, sitting next to his only friend, Harold, whose name invokes his ultimate fear of violent annihilation, and Harold, for his part, just kinda bored at this point, and worrying about his fiance.

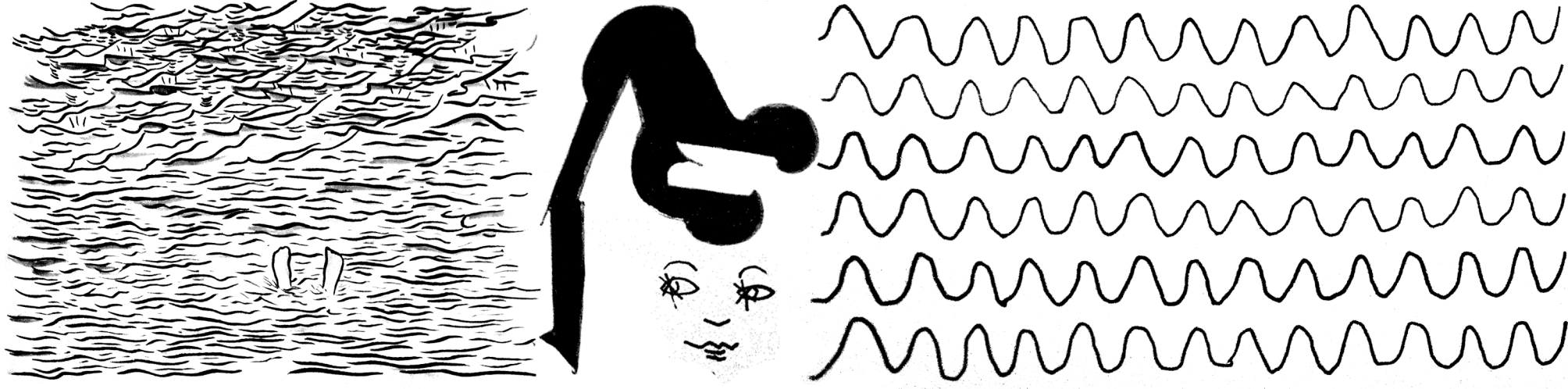
The shot comes; John drinks it and starts playing with his phone. The object of his texting is the undergraduate Maria, who John distances himself from/dehumanizes by insisting to himself that she lacks taste or compelling opinions, and who he glorifies to himself and creep-worships as having this rich olive skin in a previously unseen, maddening combo of soft *just here* and firm *just here* that's been making him totally nutso since he first touched it at this very bar around midterms. As far as it goes, John knows he's beyond defense or justification, that his spot in the department is at stake, and even that he's leaving a trail with his cellphone that this kid can ruin him with if she ever wants to. He drinks beer so he can hear that wonderful whacking of the nighttime gavel, regularly hammering Whatever, Whatever, Whatever, dismissing his concerns one drink at a time from the judge-stand of his brain; that sound in turn becoming the rhythm to which he eventually produces the text messages that convey to Maria kinda slyly, kinda funnily, kinda flirtily, and in less than 160 characters that it's that time again: the time where John wants to come visit her at her *off-campus apartment*. Five drinks deep he wants to touch that skin so bad; he seriously just can't get a hold of himself. Once while thinking about turning 30 in his post-coital dread Maria invited him to her 22nd. This was so sad to him that he thought he might be free, but time passed, boredom set in, and with drinking, the craving; and since the magic window of 9:30pm-12:30am happen day after day in John's world, it was just a matter of time. It's been six times now that John has seen her, and after the first time, only ever at her off-campus apartment.

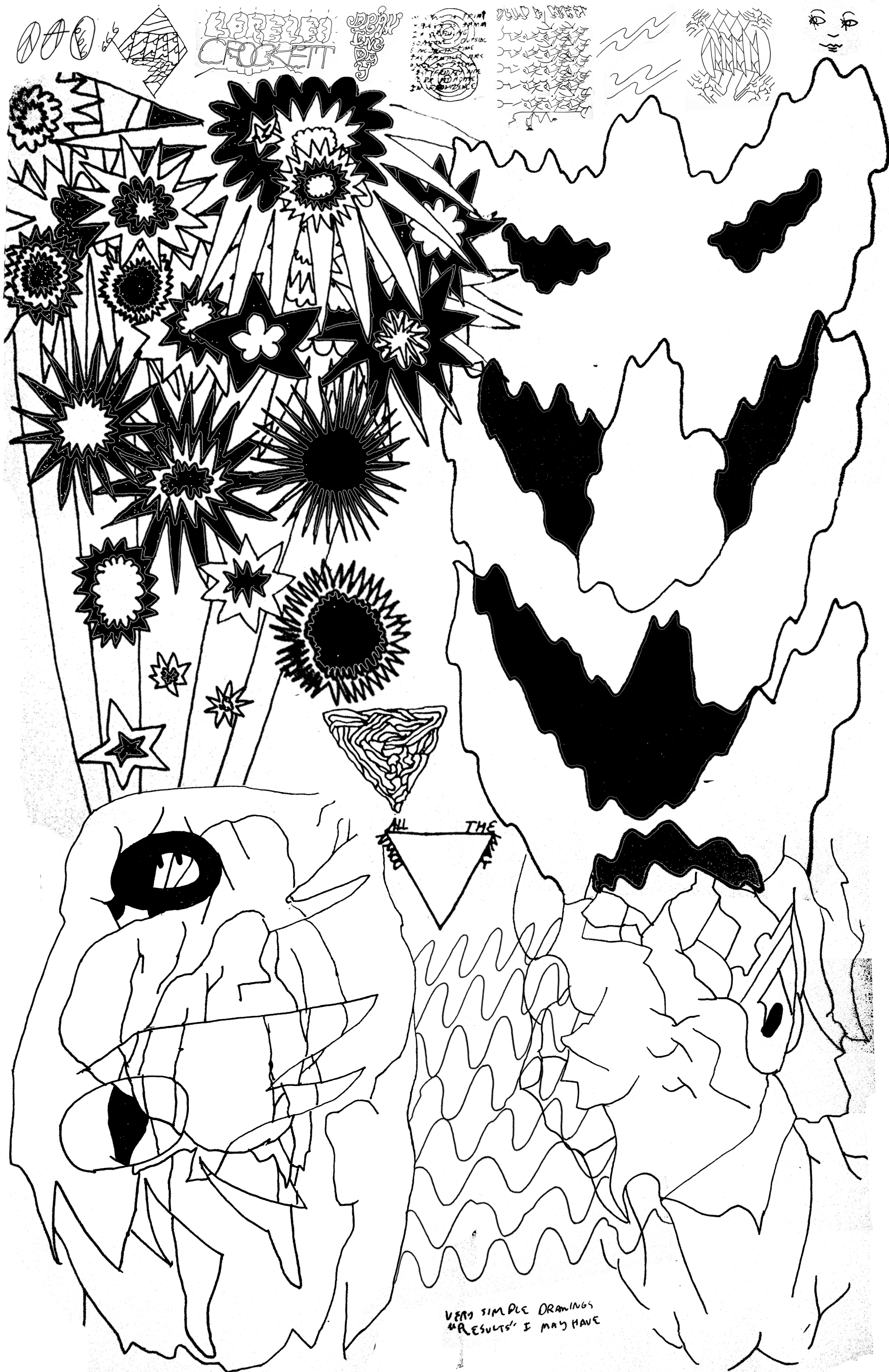
On the next stool over, Harold finds this whole thing mainly boring, and secondarily, more than medium-distasteful. Boring because, for Harold, other people's personal lives are basically like their dreams—so weird and crazy, he might airquote, talking about his own dreams—but ultimately too rich and dense with private context, investment and obscure signifiers to ever be worth teasing into something knowable. Harold is fine partitioning and ignoring John's stupid stuff because he likes drinking with a guy about his age who will go as far as four-plus good beers while dissecting his week's reading with vigor. And I mean, Harold is just kinda lonely. His fiance Cheryl decided she preferred the life back in Chicago to this

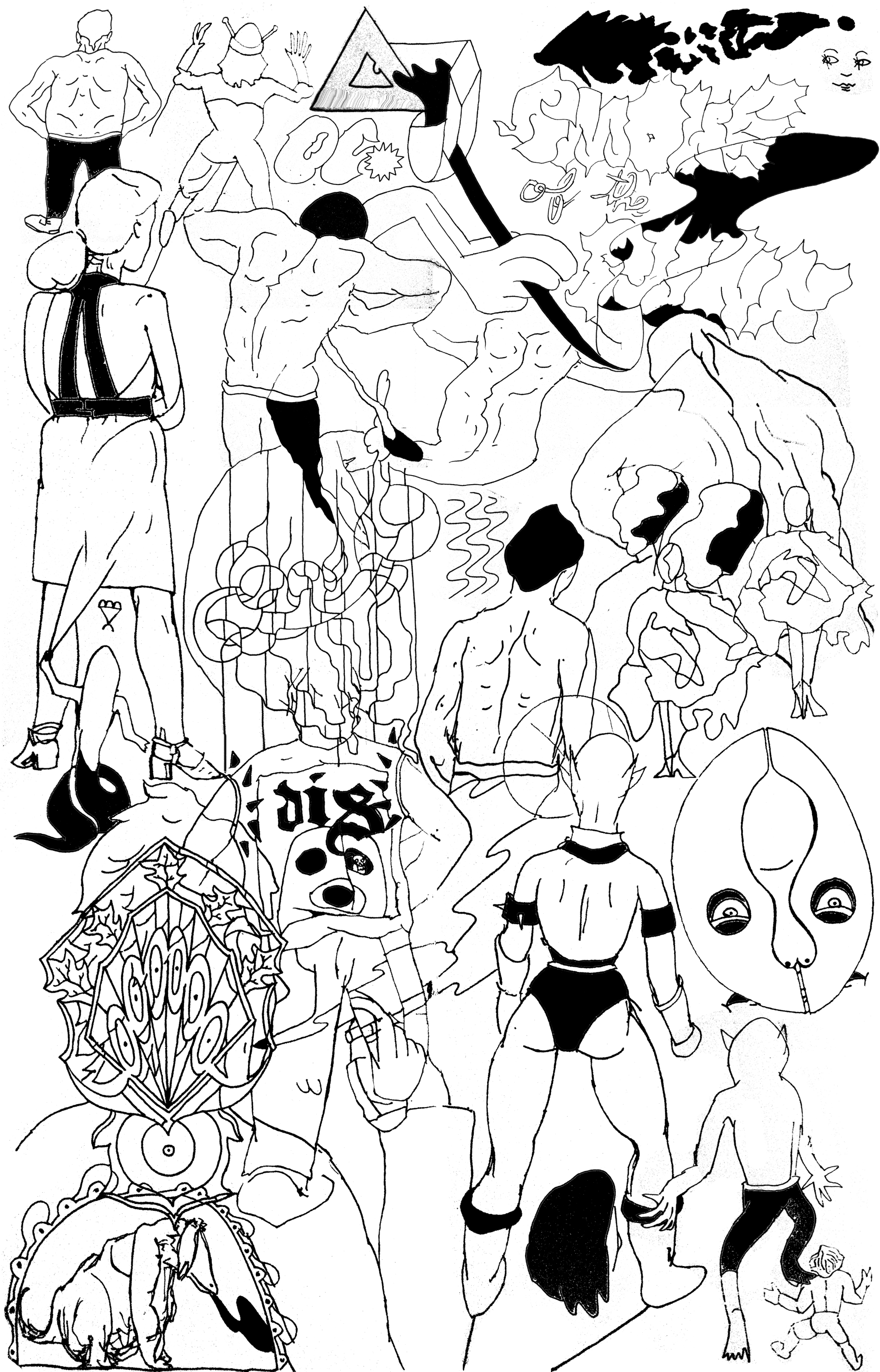
nowhere zone, which seemed reasonable to him at the time, but every weekend together became every other weekend together became once a month while the gray area before being married but well beyond dating slowly coagulated into a suffocating, horizonless soup that even still only thins with beer and the company of men, of whom Harold knows very few, or theoretically women, though Harold doesn't feel comfortable talking to interesting women his age with things such as they are with Cheryl, i.e., hopeful and love-based but super tenuous. He's a good, depressed boyfriend. He probably correctly assumes that Cheryl is not cheating on him at this point either, but he also probably correctly assumes that she, like him, is miserable. I have no idea or opinion on whether or not she's happy, miserable, or chaste; I can imagine all possible combos pretty easily. What me and Harold both know, though, is that Harold and Cheryl love each other, and that if this current holding pattern continues for too long, this love will take on the classic cement aspect, by which I mean it will harden and become heavy, cold, sinking, and really however else you feel like extending the metaphor, and eventually they'll stop seeing each other altogether. But right now maybe it's hopeful? I don't know, Harold doesn't know, but he feels like if he sleeps with some girl, or goes on a pseudo-date, or even tells a woman that he enjoys being with about this situation, that his description of his relationship with Cheryl will hang in the air like a horrible magic word, and it will burn him and definitely the woman he's telling about it, and he just isn't ready for that right now. So he takes what he can get, which is John.

As he's getting on his coat to go, Harold mouth-covers a burp, and relates a bar story. John takes another shot for good measure. In Harold's story, in his town growing up, his dad was putting on his coat at a bar called Bottoms Up; a possibly intended double-entendre, he notes. Harold tells how his father deflected a hail of broken glass by making the move he, Harold, is making right now, which is lifting a long coat, and putting your arm in the sleeve, popping the back of the coat over your head. This glass is coming from across the bar by way of many thrown and smashed pint glasses, via this neighborhood crackpot Harold calls TC. In the story the guy next to Harold's dad gets glass in his eyes, cuts a cornea; another guy gets knocked out, falls on the ground with a bleeding head, the blood running alcohol-thin and fast across the floor. Across the way there's puke coming out of TC's mouth, as he's barf-babbling, red-faced, getting dragged out of the Bottoms Up, screaming, I'm TC, I'm the fucking man.









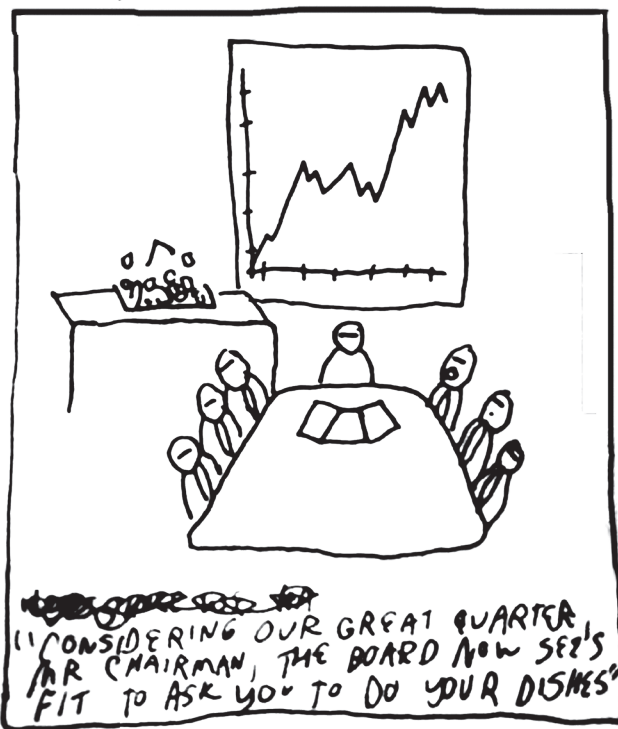
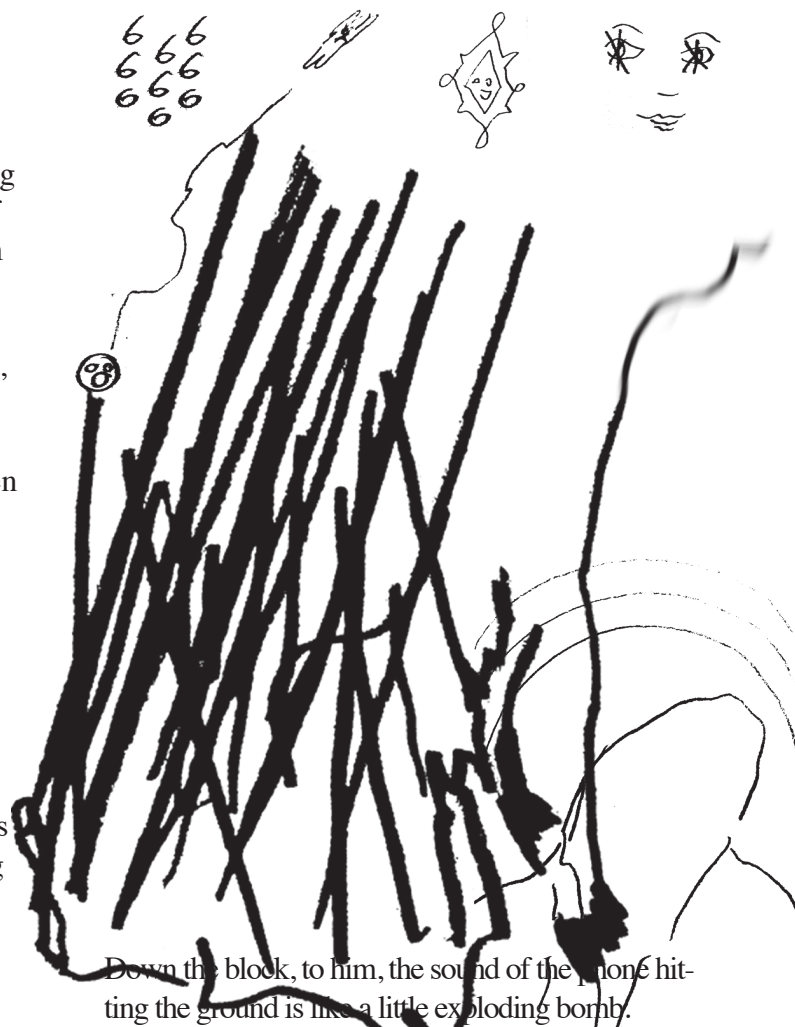
Harold's intentions in telling this story are unclear to John, but to me, memorably intense violence, drunken ambivalence, confidence in acting like a total shithead in public, making a narrow escape, and loudly proclaiming who you are are all obvious masks or points of reference for Harold's own persistent boredom and self-disgust at having pursued a path that has estranged him from his fiancée Cheryl in order to do another year of adjunct grunt work, and which he doesn't know how to talk about as such. Harold is glum these days but he's okay, not a bad guy, and not-not funny, so when the story finishes, the two guys chuckle black chuckles, finish their drinks, and head out into the frigid 12:30am January night.

As they're walking up Knight to Harold's car, John is texting, and Harold is giving him a mildly hard time about it. They make literary jokes: Harold refers to a Sade line he loves, John intentionally mistakes it for Ben Franklin; they both find this funny. Harold riffs through a routine about a transexual Queequeg with seasonal affective disorder living in the 90s; John suggests that if Nabokov could text at 12:30am, he could overcome any nighttime ambivalence/boredom/tiredness/guilt, and no one in the world would have the power to resist sleeping with him. The night street is empty and frozen. John's phone is flipped open to the keyboard; Harold's hands are in his pockets. In one pocket is his wallet; in the wallet is Cheryl's college ID. Harold thumbs the edge of this card and wonders if Cheryl can feel his finger on the back of her neck in Chicago, massaging what she calls the sore spot below her brain. There's a distant car sound like faraway surf and the echoing clank of traffic signals changing.

Watching these guys go up the street, John drunk texting and shuffling on the ice, you can see it from a million miles, and before long, there it is: John slips, has a vaudeville legs-up bone-cracker wipe-out, and in the process, accidentally flings his phone off into the dark. He lands with a crushing sound, maybe snow, maybe bones. As the phone flies through the air it vibrates with an incoming whatever, and lands and skids away broken, way down the block, sounding like the last rail click of a passing train. In other versions as it flies through the air the camera clicks on and snaps a perfect postcard pic of this scene, the medium-drunk, wiping-out, text-messaging pseudo-boyfriend, and sends it to every miserable, waiting, shrugging or pseudo-girlfriend in the world.

In that version John is swear-gasping and bracing himself even as he's flying through the air. The cameraphone picture snaps just as his head hits the ground, just as the gavel comes down on his night, hammering Oh Shit, Oh Shit. Harold is sucked out of his memory/desire doldrum into the shocked-sober present, and he looks down at his busted-head friend.

NEW YORKER COMICS



Down the block, to him, the sound of the phone hitting the ground is like a little exploding bomb.

Later I can imagine one of my friends cruising by, scooping up the phone, selling the battery on craigslist, extracting its pictures via some young-person process these 30-year-old guys couldn't possibly imagine. By then everyone will have heard the head-crack sound and the snap of the perfect accidental cellphone picture itself. Both sounds will already have been echoing all across the night streets of New England, and even all along the whole East Coast. When Maria hears the sound, she plugs in her phone to charge and rolls her eyes; she does in fact have the entire text message history with John logged to a Micro SD card, and is already working it into a sun-bomber of an essay for a feminism and modern media conference next month in New York. Despite what she agrees with Harold to be the inherent total creepiness and distastefulness of a teacher/student relationship, her opinion of the sex is that it's better than nothing; she even savors the aggravation of being underrated and even disrespected by this fucking guy, who hasn't read anything that's come out in the last twenty years and who knows way less about Moby Dick than he thinks, because she knows she's totally going to destroy him.

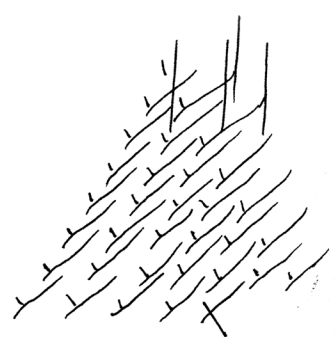
When Cheryl hears the crushing sound of the fall she frowns at her page and sighs; she doesn't know why, she doesn't recognize the sound. I really can't guess how Cheryl feels. She's the triple-question mark. You can decide whether she feels Harold's finger on the spot below her brain for yourself; sometimes I would say she does, other times I would say she doesn't. What we know for sure is that right now she's reading, and that she's safe. We know that from the one time she met John, she thought he was an asshole, but also that she would probably be worried if she saw him fall such as he did.

When all of the men's groups up and down the coast hear the sound of John's head hitting the pavement and the cellphone picture snapping, they look up from their own trips back to the pen after their own night's wishes for a wildness, and they turn north (the few in Boston and further up I-95 turn south) toward the shadow city, to see what Harold will do, and for a second, they stop straining in their reaches toward the unknown future—where some formless satisfaction has arrived, or some version of themselves that makes sense is living and doing something good or cool, either of these options detached from the present by a string of unimaginable decisions—they stop straining to turn to listen to the maybe bone, maybe snow sound of one of their own gone

down. Some of them don't look north; some of them are wiping out, just like John (though they do not share his distinction as the icon for this particular iteration of this behavior, and nobody hears them), or are distracted by some combination of factors including sleeping with or trying to sleep with some girlfriend, non-girlfriend, or gray-area potential, ex-, pseudo-, or other type of girlfriend; writing amateur graffiti mainly on stop signs, metal poles, and utility boxes, applied with stickers, paint pens, streaks, and aerosol cans; making mixed-results attempts at drunk-driving; blowing cocaine, ripping a couple from a bong in a freezing backseat, or further drinking via some well-prepared crew member's flask, thirty pack, etcetera; participating in mainly non-lethal combat (almost exclusively with other men concerned with one of the above); and always texting, documenting the ancient night-pull from the empty space a healthy person's functioning heart typically fills or from the vibrating itchy space below the brain (depending on the person, and sometimes it's impossible to tell) toward these strange, small violences in short, desperate messages that all eventually get deleted as inboxes fill up.

With any luck, these groups of men make it to their final resignations without car accidents, cop run-ins, getting stabbed, passing out in a gutter, ending up in an ambulance, staying up all night fighting with someone, or worrying too much about the future. Their keys will fumble at apartment doors, which will open to reveal what feels like an endlessness of mid-to-late-20s/early-30s roommate dishes in the sink, wet collards stuck in the fold-out steamer, a mouse or a cockroach spelling out the day's decisions in big cursive letters on the floor when the lights flick on. These men will set alarm clocks to get up in the morning and steel themselves to go and just act right, and do some daytime garbage, made delirious by the fading wild feeling of most nights, the sense that somehow there's a way to shatter the present and do some clear, morning-colored future thing, far beyond trying to sleep with some girl, or lazily grading a stack of papers while thinking about a woman in Chicago you were lucky enough to trick into loving you for even a little while. Far beyond the small consolation of commiserating with a man who won't even say your name, commiserating not even because you like each other that much, but because you're both reasonably smart, and share the chafing understanding that neither of you are where you want to be. /////





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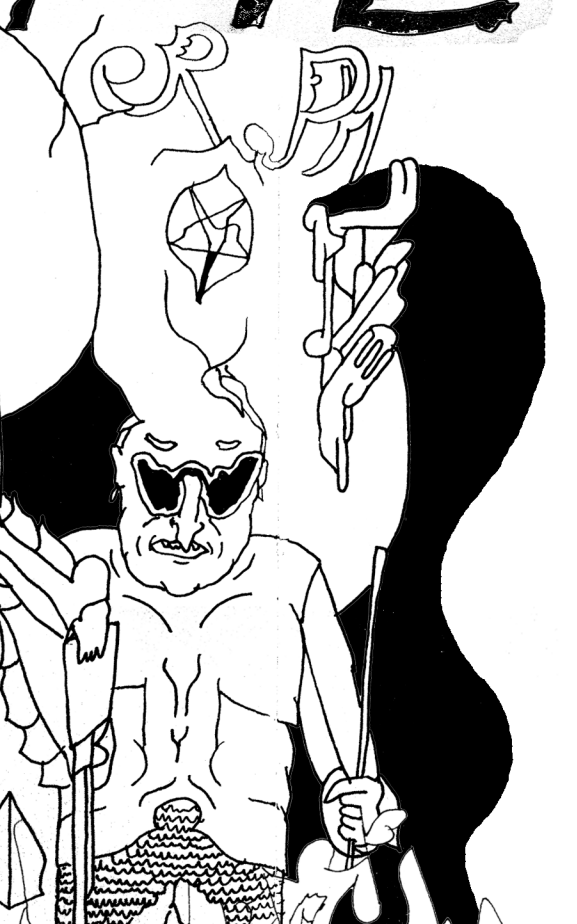
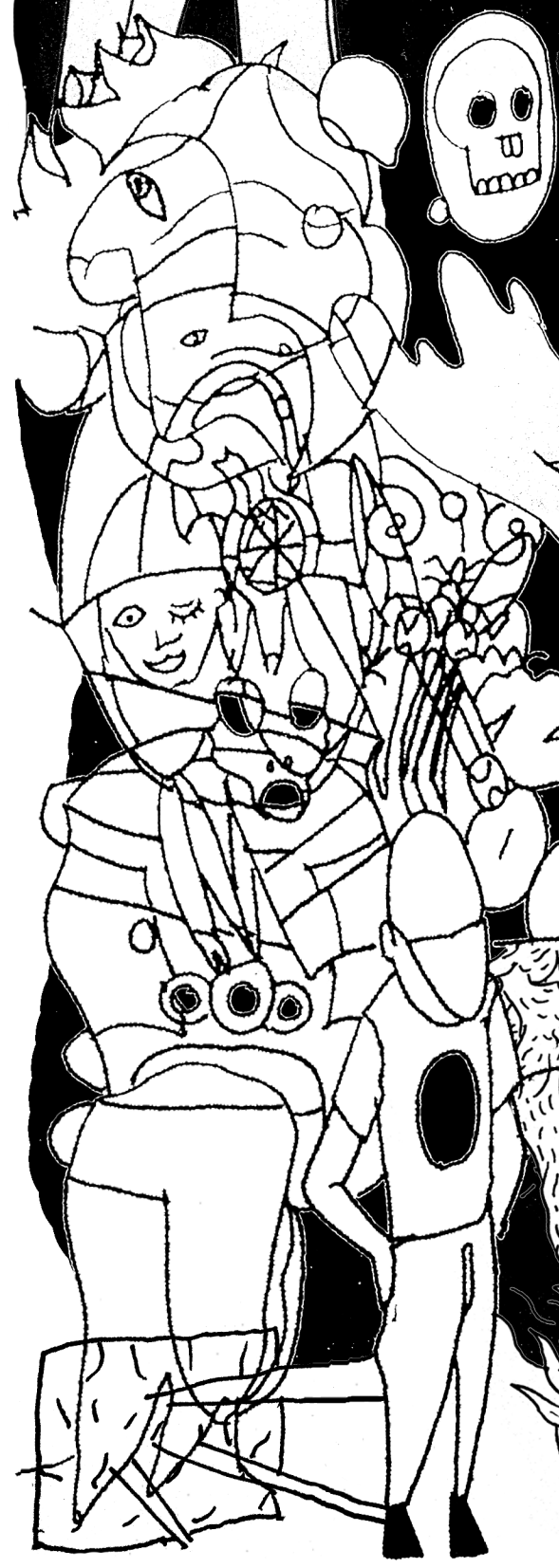
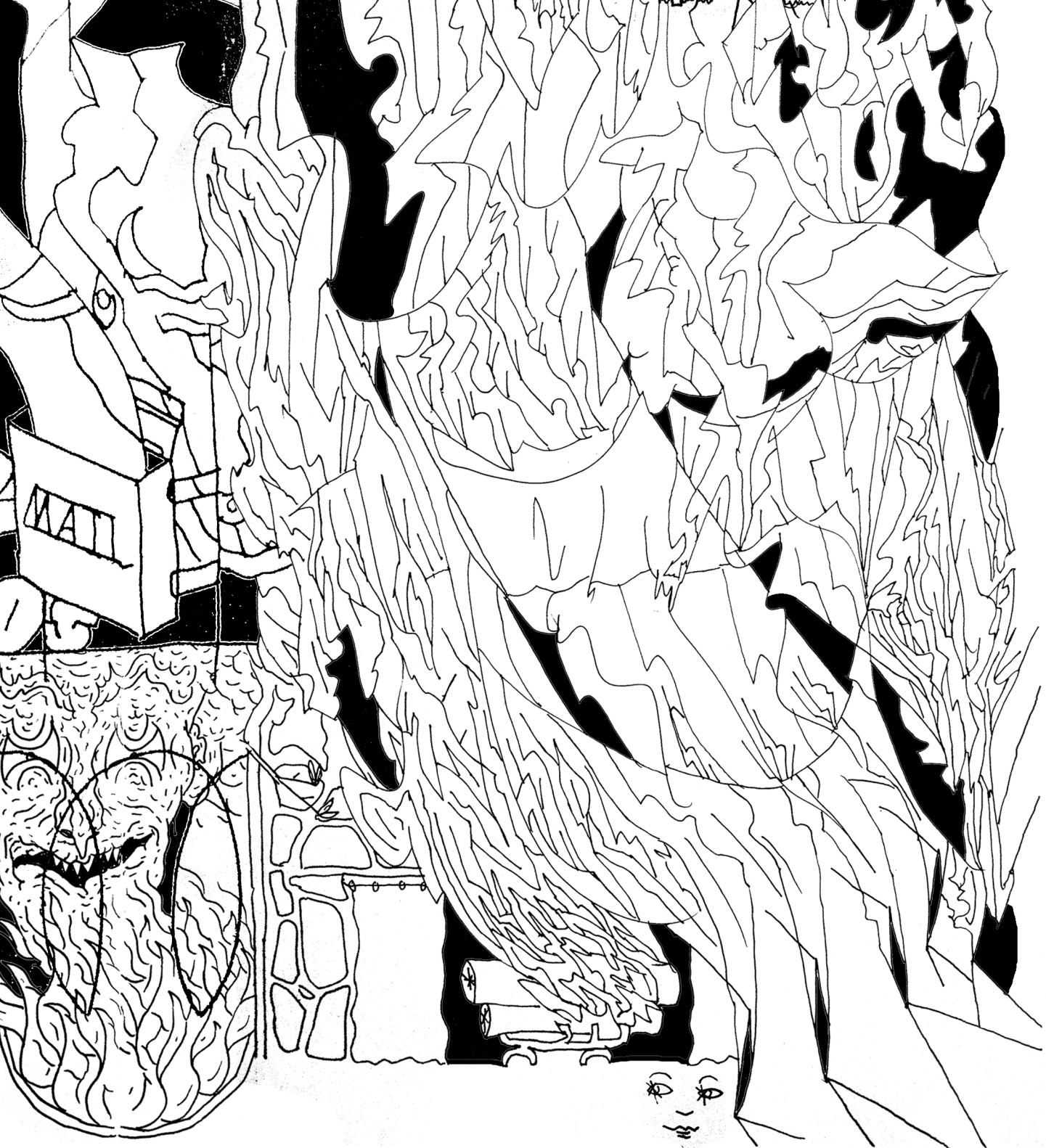


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FRIDAY
I AM
"LATE RITE"

HATE





FICTION WORKSHOP PRESENTS "RESTAURANT LIST" (January 2011) FOR WM

If you walked down Lockwood Street in Providence, Rhode Island during a certain time, you might have seen my house's back door, which lead into my restaurant. I get asked every once in a while, so here's a list of steps to follow if you want to open a restaurant in your own home.

Restaurant Steps

1) Begin with the desire to transform. This desire will be connected to the feeling that you contain a set of powerful letters. Visualize grand spells cast in these letters that will hang in the air, thundering in the stomachs of your friends and putrefying the eyes of the world's nonbelievers. These letters will be inscribed in a slow lightning that will travel in purple clouds over the streets, raining down sweet rain on people you haven't met who you think you might like to. It will also fall on a certain fine, old house. Find this house and move into it.

2) When you arrive at this house, park your car and move your books, records and self-expectations into a room the house's current occupants call the project room. In here, make difficult, slow attempts at drawing the letters out of yourself by casting tiny spells. These spells will take the form of to-do lists or scratchy drawings; functionally, they will accomplish little more than lowering the thermostat, finding another blanket for your bed, or on good days, clearing your sink of dishes. You will only be able to work this way for a few hours per week because you'll remain distracted by the possibility that a transformation can come from somewhere other than within yourself. But you'll know you are beginning to succeed when the project room begins to smell like the future (a smell you'll later recognize as soba noodles with curried vegetables, Scotch bonnets, peanut butter, tahini, rooster sauce and cilantro), and not like the past, which smells like burnt cooking oil. It will be at this point when you gain the maestro's attention, which you'll feel pressing down on your shoulders whenever you are alone in a room sitting at a desk.

3) In order to transform you must experience the fear of insecurity for the final time. Do this by getting a job. One day while working you'll hear how some young people who have nothing are still somehow making their way to a place they call Argon Beach, which they claim to be the wildest secret place in America. You'll imagine this beach in windy twilight beneath towering purple clouds, with silent, soft waves. The beach will look empty but when you look closer all of the shadows in the sand will be reclining men and women of all ages from everywhere, holding their hands behind their heads, wearing sunglasses with colored lenses, naked or in disintegrating clothes, broad-brimmed hats over their faces, bare foot or in taped sneakers. You'll be able to pick the cherry moon and eat it, and put the shining white pit back up into the shimmering fruit-leather sky, and you'll be able to lie down for a while with these people too. Walk home from work when your shift is done, and look at the moon.

If your mouth waters, quit your job. You're ready.

4) You'll be at home, unemployed in your underwear in the early afternoon, washing paint out of the bottoms of bowls and rinsing beer bottles, not sure which day of the week it is. The sky will be darkening and a storm will be blowing in while a car with shining rims slowly circles the block broadcasting aggressive bass that rattles the windows and makes the silverware chime. When the storm breaks the bass becomes indistinguishable from thunder. Each dish you do is a heat dream of the places that came before this one: A mildewy rug you huddled on half-asleep under a filthy towel, breathing mouse dander, listening to the possums behind the stove; concrete floors covered in broken glass, with twelve foot windows caked in cigarette smoke; stone buildings behind chain-link fences marked floor to ceiling with spells and curses cast by refugees from the above-ground world; depressing two or three bedroom apartments with unknowable roommates who sleep with prostitutes, are into serious drugs, or watch a lot of stupid television. As you remember these things away into your drying rack in the din of the pouring rain and bass-thundering humidity you'll detect a strange smoke; in the project room it will be all of your spells smoldering with the royal smell of the future. Enjoy this smell. As the storm slows, and you finish doing the dishes, the maestro will knock on your house's back door. He is your first guest. Invite him in.

5) The maestro will lead you through the woods to the quarry in Lincoln. Watch him swim while the storm clouds dissipate over Providence, remembering the things you've had to eat since you got here, with their associated secret rooms: Oysters and lobsters at Summer Street in September, as a surf tape played through a rattling speaker, and people danced slow; fish soup sitting on a throne in a tower overlooking Olneyville Square in August; pizzas and guacamole at a folding table on Primrose Street, with many bottles of Presidente, as the July night street boiled, and the neighbors argued and laughed; a tofu sandwich with sweet sauce, carrots, cucumbers and cilantro at Vinton Street in June, on the porch behind the hanging vines, with a fistful of dates and walnuts from a plastic bag; rabbit and pheasant cooked in forgotten styles at Calla Street in May; the homemade dumplings you shared in the basement at Quince Street in April; the perfect dozen rolls fresh from Tuxedo Avenue's oven in March, with burgers from a cow slaughtered at the family farm in Vermont; the omelette you shared at Lockwood Street in February, right when you got here, before you had seen any of these other places. You'll see a boy swim to the bottom of the quarry. He will be gone for two whole minutes until huge, metal-smelling bubbles break the surface and he bursts up behind them carrying a long, flat device. When you've seen all of this, ask the maestro whether it would be a good idea to open a secret restaurant. He will say things that you'll take to mean yes. When you get home, deposit all of your smoldered spells into an ashcan. Clear out the project room, saving the crystal chandelier cover, and the thousand X-ray envelopes; hide these somewhere. Throw away or repurpose everything else. Sweep and mop. This is your dining room.

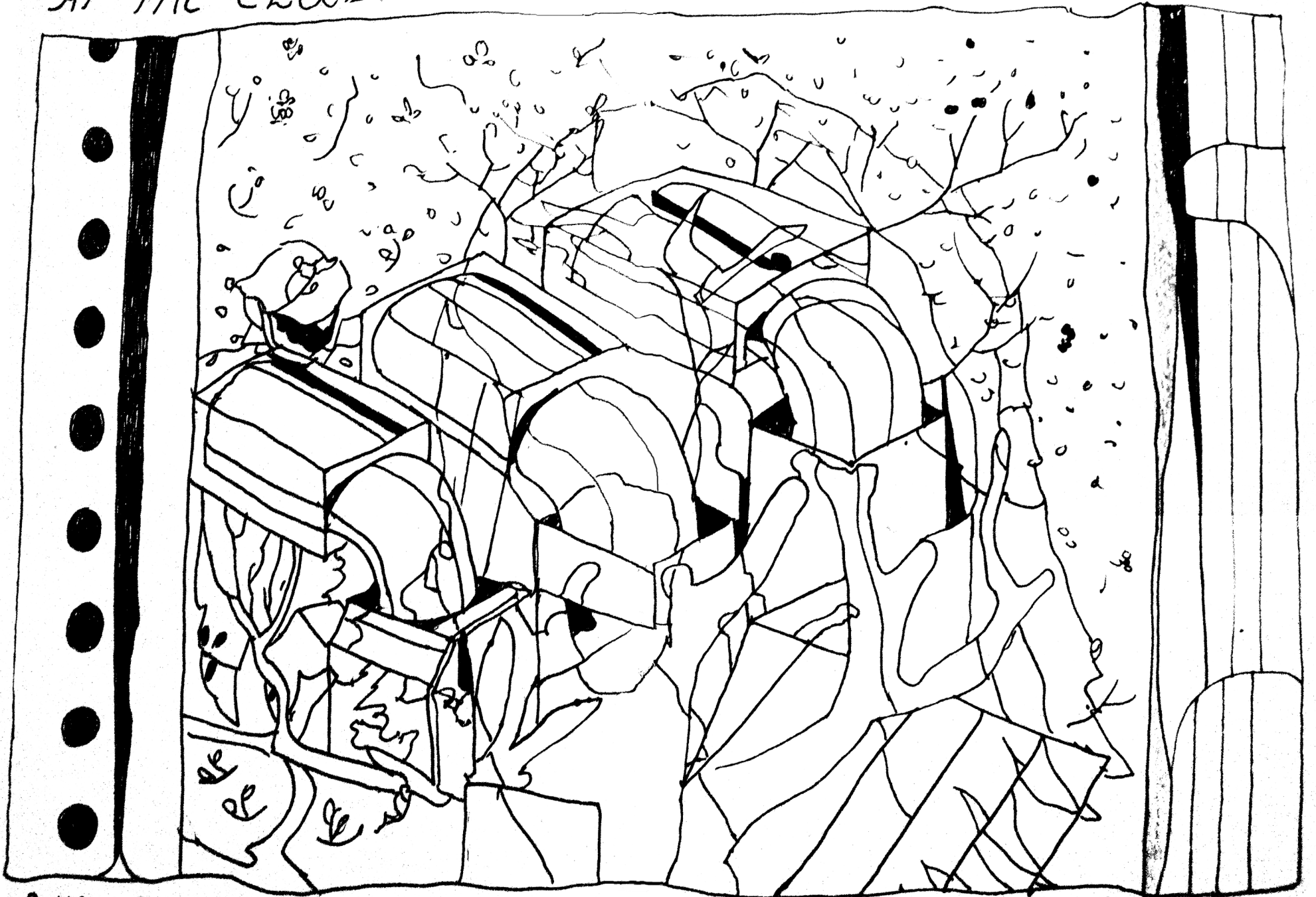
6) Plan to open on Friday. The maestro will suggest helpers; it will be useful for some of them to move in with you. One will be your chef; learn to cook from him. One will organize the kitchen; learn to do this yourself. One will be a hobgoblin who will try to suck the life from your body when you sleep; the maestro will explain that your vigilance against this creature will keep you from becoming lazy and indifferent. If living with this kind of threat doesn't make sense to you, quit now. If it does, these characters will move in while you summon your first diners by inscribing a spell on twenty small cards with a black Pilot pen, listing your phone number—I used (570) 574 2436—your hours, 6-10pm Fridays; and your details: four courses: salad, appetizer, entree, dessert. Then write "Secret Restaurant" on them with cyan, ultramarine, rose and vermilion pastels, give them a cloudy border with brushed black ink, and use silver tape to affix them to twenty friendly doors you know. Meanwhile the maestro's assistants will be decorating. They will weave tablecloths; make colorful paper chains they'll string from the ceilings; paint heartbreaking portraits of the house's residents and each other under a sign they letter that reads, "Our Home," and on one wall they'll make a large collage meant to suggest Argon Beach. Try to get some sleep, first checking your closet, then under your bed. When you find the hobgoblin have her go back downstairs.

7) As you fall asleep, consider the state of your personal life. It should be in disarray. If it is, the frustration and confusion emanating from your bedroom will be sublimated in the restaurant and will be a great source of energy. If you have a collaborator (it is not required that you call them "collaborators," though it is my wish for you that this label fits), he or she will wonder why you are spending so much time on the restaurant: at the store, writing emails, and worrying about cooking food. He or she will remind you of your pursuit of the throbbing letters you can feel when you sit at your desk, which by now, you'll have essentially forgotten. If you do not have a collaborator, these acts—cooking, shopping, organizing—will keep you from wondering about all of your past collaborators, whom you still love, but who are—for the typical mix of reasons, many of which you were complicit in forming—gone from you. You'll roll mangos in your hands instead of reaching to touch soft, black hair; squeeze avocados in the grocery store instead of driving with one hand on someone else's thigh; suck balls of tamarind paste instead of a copper earring; wash the plates instead of having rigorous arguments. Go to sleep, then wake up. If you wake up in bed with your collaborator, kiss them, dismiss the maestro's assistants, change your mind, and do something else. But if you wake up alone, gather up your cloudy love, and begin cooking it into your food.

8) After a few months the restaurant will be paying your rent. Even so, you'll be too obstinate to turn on the heat, despite the New England winter. You will go on dates that will all end vaporously in your 3am kitchen with the maestro's hobgoblin. You will talk to her over hot toddies about your willingness to become romantically embroiled with men or women who do not live in town, your capacity for self-sabotage, and your compulsion to revisit what should be left behind. After one of these nights, you will kiss her on the mouth. She will bite your lips and pull your hair; her tongue will taste like copper and cigarettes. As you fall asleep she will tell you about a trip she took to Argon Beach. You will be grayed-over by this story, and will have horrendous dreams. You will wake to find that she is gone; you will not see her again, but your room will smell like she

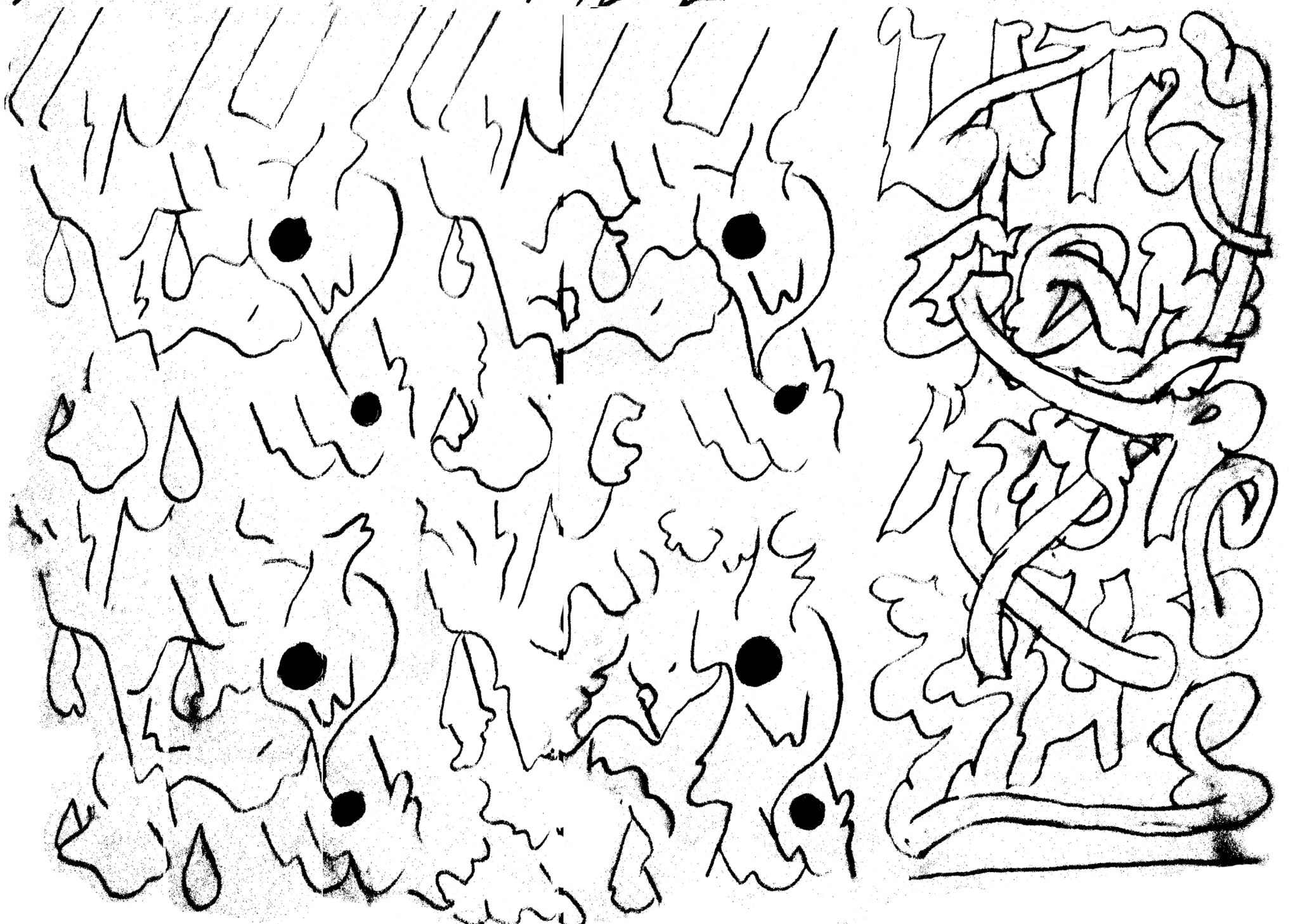
AT THE CLUBHOUSE

"OCTOBER 2010"

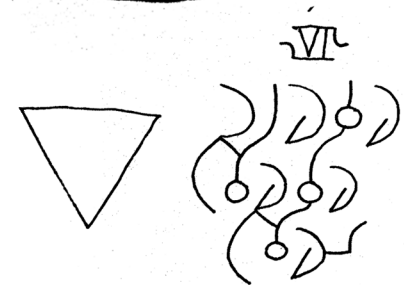


BUZZELL TUTTÉ FOLEY STOLTZ PEOPLES

DECEMBER SNIPLE

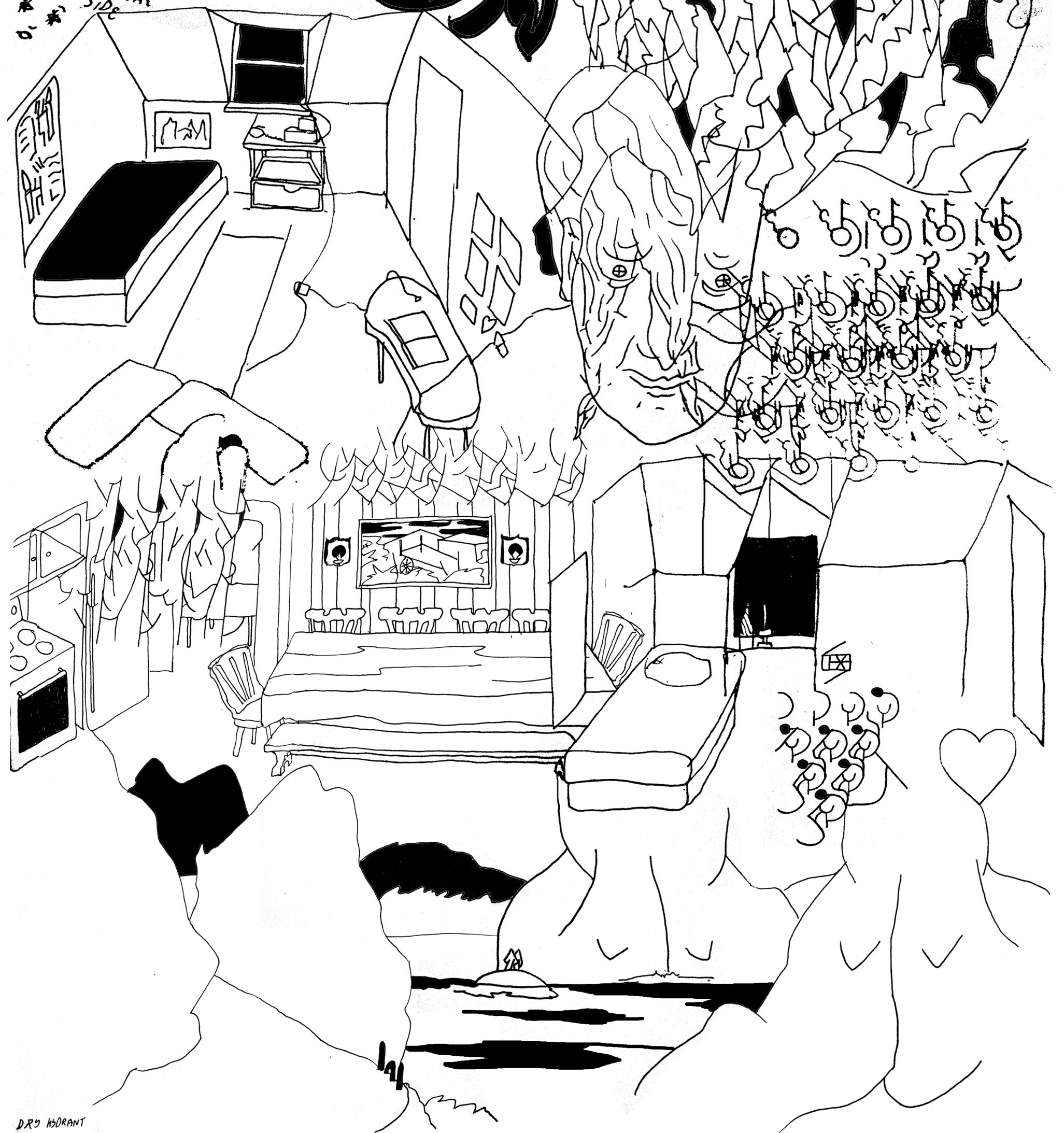


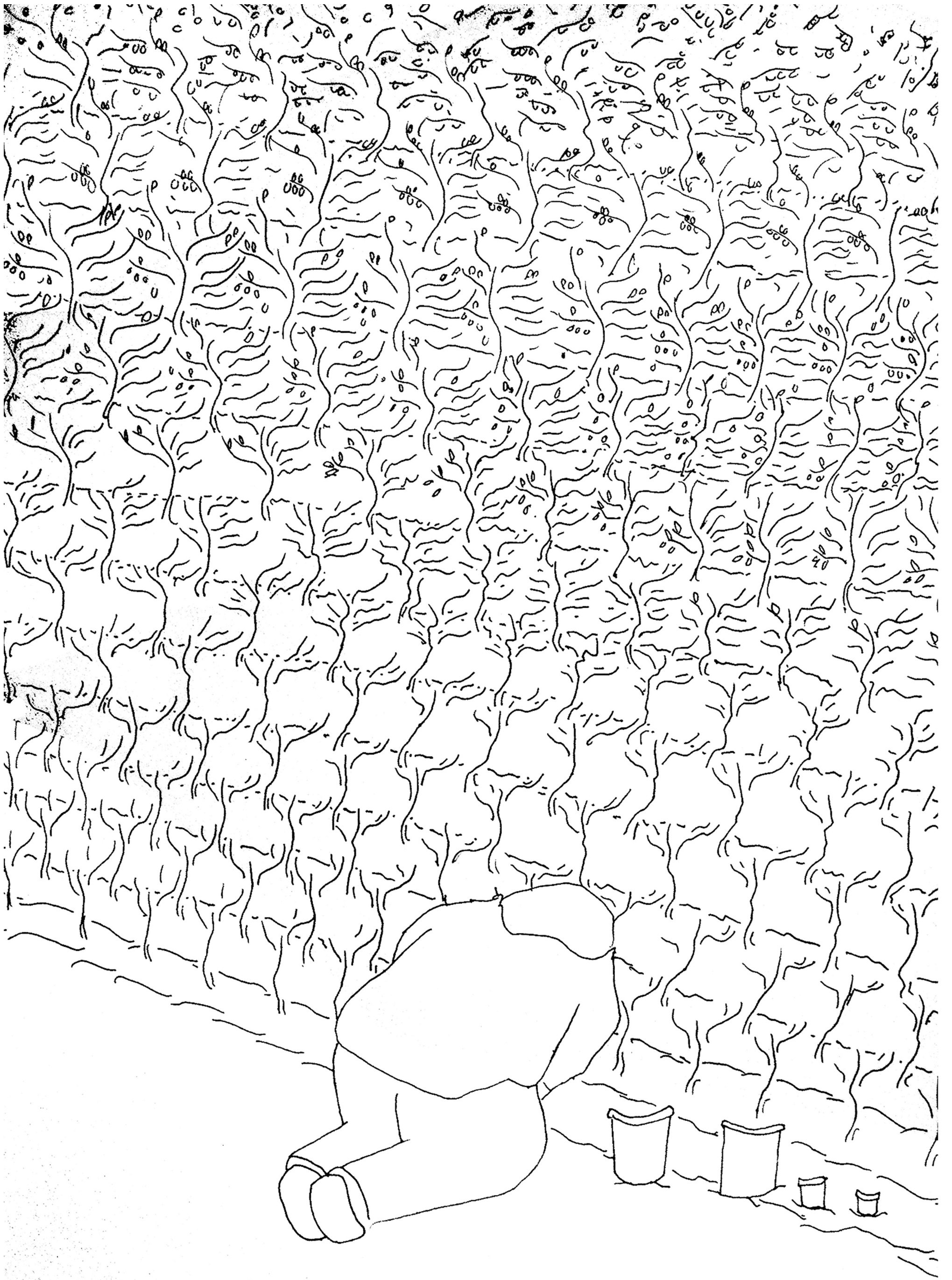
IN A LITTLE NIGHTTIME ROOM
DOING LITTLE NIGHTTIME THINGS



DRY

SEEK ON THE
OTHER SIDE





just left, or is just about to come in, so you will close this room off and begin sleeping in the dining room. You will find that if you cook for yourself, you will feel as if she is approaching you from behind, about to put her arms around your waist, to lean her head against your back, and sway there. You will find distraction by designing a menu for yourself, ordering from it, and serving yourself. You will sit at a dining room table to eat. This will only work if you are cooking for six people or more, or you will still be able to feel the nearness of her specter, and the specter will eat your appetite. Begin inviting five people over for breakfast every morning, five more for lunch, and five more for dinner. Roll your sleeping bag out under the table you most like eating at. Overhang large tablecloths from its sides, and think of it as a four-poster bed. You might dream that other people are eating up above, and that they are kicking you, and dropping food onto your face.

9) People will begin asking for jobs. Hire a waitstaff, a kitchen staff, a dishwasher, a night manager. Expand the restaurant’s dining room into your old bedroom. To make space, give away your books, records, and self-expectations; they will smell like the past now and you will not miss them. On the underside of the dining room table—the top of your bed—you will have tacked photos of “the early days” of the restaurant. You are much skinnier in these. There is one of you and the maestro at the quarry, taken as the boy erupted its surface carrying the flat device. There is one of you in this room, when it was the project room, working with an interested frown on something small. The chef will have moved with the rest of the restaurant staff into a separate house erected in the back yard that, by now, will be nearly the size of the main house itself. When it occurs to you to look into it, you will find that his fermentation experiments out there have become reasonably successful; that he has a staff of his own, working on things you don’t recognize. Along with the rest of the restaurant staff, he continues to show up to do his job. Then he returns to the other house, while you return to your place under the table.

10) The photo of your working in the project room will possess you. You will remember the letters, but they will be grayed by the maestro’s hobgoblin. If you are ever to write these letters in the air, you must rid yourself of this grayness. Because your eyes have been putrefied and you yourself are now a nonbeliever, you must get rid of everything. Scatter your grayness across the entire United States. Drink the contents of many bottles. Get totally naked in a bar in Nashville, throw a guitar amp out an open window, and have your face punched to pulp. Sleep in dog shit in Oakland, wake up, and drink coffee while looking at the clouds on the mountains, listening for something. Get drunk with a trannie on a porch in LA, smoke crack, dance to the Ronnettes, and fall asleep crying. Snort coke in a swamp outside of Atlanta with men in cowboy hats, go swimming and get covered in leeches, pull them off, and text pictures of them to everyone. Sweep everything off of the desk and onto the floor of some dorm room in rural Indiana, smashing a coffee mug, a beer bottle, and a lamp, and have sex with someone on this desk. When this person stabs you, take six low-dose oxycontin and wake up in Chicago with a sinus infection. Trade a half bottle of whiskey for six klonopin in Missoula; trade these to an undergrad in New York complaining of menstrual pain for some psychedelic mushrooms; trade these to a quadriplegic in New Orleans for a 20mg Ambien; take

this to Philadelphia, crush it into some shitty weed, and smoke it, even though you’ve heard that this can give you irreversible brain damage. Carry on in this way until you find yourself eating the final pot brownie, or drinking the last of the Ancient Age bourbon to be found anywhere in the United States; when the local demons of wherever-you-are invite you to the damaged cave they’ve built that becomes visible in the air over their town after midnight, you won’t be able to join them. Through their open portal, as you fall into dehydrated fever dreams, you will see the writhing forms of bodies on Argon Beach, crawling sick with torn skin under a weeping sore of a red moon. You will make eye contact with the maestro’s hobgoblin. If you want to move forward, fling your desire for this place in through the open portal. The hobgoblin will turn away, and you will wake up with a hangover. On the drive home, crash your car into a ditch, leave it there, and get a bus. Somewhere on I-80 the maestro will get on. He will sit next to you and offer you some water and a bite of his sandwich. The sandwich will be pita with a whole avocado, hummus, grilled onions, carrots, sprouts, and Brussels sprouts cooked in chili garlic sauce.

11) Back at the house all of the maestro’s assistants and their second house will be gone, but the restaurant will be fine. There will be a new staff, who took down the collage of Argon Beach, and cleared away your space under the table. Business will have slowed somewhat, and they will have closed off your bedroom again. You will move back into that room and know that it is time to begin closing the restaurant. In this final season, you will be the chef, and the maestro will help you directly. You will develop a repertoire in which curry powder, tahini, and coconut milk will be staple ingredients. You will become a reasonable baker. Your soups, which were always well-received, will become a feature. You will fill your house to its modest capacity week after week, serving fifty or sixty people; when you aren’t cooking, you will be learning how to sit at a desk again. Sitting at the desk, you will cast small spells. It will be easier to do this than it was before. You will become more and more ambitious at this desk.

12) One night the boy from the quarry will come to dinner. He has been building a houseboat with the help of the maestro’s builders. It floats on great cement pontoons at the mouth of the Blackstone. The houseboat, he will tell you, has several bedrooms, a full kitchen, a septic system, and a ballroom. Its lookout tower has stained-glass windows he salvaged from an old church. At the river’s narrower points the houseboat spans it almost completely. When the tides are low, it looks like a palace washed in from the bay. He will tell you how he found your car on I-80, and how he repurposed many of its parts, how he even wound up using its wheel in the system that weighs the secondary its anchor. When you bring him coffee and dessert—a slice of mince pie with coconut whipped cream and figs—he will ask if you remember the device he found in the quarry, and if you would like to borrow it. It’s a divining rod, he says, to help find the future.

13) Moments after you install this antenna at your desk, the phone will ring. It will be a woman from the local news, who will ask if she can come to the restaurant with a camera crew. Remember all of the blessings and curses of this project. All of your helpers; the hot loaves of bread that came out of the oven one by one, lined up end to end, spanning the distance in a high arc between the kitchen window and anyone in this hemisphere you still think about

fondly; the potions you drank in these rooms, and the silly things they caused you to do once the dishes were clean; the number of times someone you didn’t know came here, and kissed someone else you didn’t know; all of the parents and babies you’ve fed; all of the times young people stopped here on their quests and screamed, smashed plates, and laughed and laughed, recognizing the restaurant as a spell in itself, a gesture toward a certain kind of freedom. Gather up these victories and drip them all at once into this woman’s ear. Let her and her crew come or not, but close after one more dinner.

14) Perhaps the crew will come, and perhaps that will attract the Mob or the city. If the Mob comes, give them \$200 and tell them it’s all you have; that you will not be doing the restaurant any more. When they see you and your house, they will believe you. Feed them pumpkin soup, leftover sushi, tamales with apple and vegetable tofu filling, with mango-pineapple salsa and spicy black beans; open-face egg sandwiches with avocado, homemade barbecue sauce, grilled onions; feed them soba noodles with curried vegetables, Scotch bonnets, peanut butter, tahini, rooster sauce and cilantro; lasagna with homemade ricotta, sauce, apple-ginger-beet salad, and butternut squash puree; barbecue tofu sandwiches on fresh loaves with sweet potato fries and nettle pies. Give them whatever desserts you have. For the gluten-free mobsters, braise pineapple slices in brown sugar. They will pay you for dinner with your own \$200, because they will understand what you’re doing, and will find it both touching and laughable. If the police show up with the licenses and inspections people, give them nothing; they will fine you in the amount of \$194.00 no matter what, having no interest in or sympathy for what you’re doing. Get the fine halved in court. When the maestro’s helpers get wind of this from the almond farm they settled on in California, they’ll write you a check for \$98.00, and include a carton of homemade granola. It will be better if none of this happens. If you invite the news, it will be easier for you to cast your next spells, but it will be better if you do not. It will be better if you give all the food away to the people who helped; if you mail the \$98.00 you have left after paying rent to California, and apologize for not being in better touch. It will be better if you keep in mind the secret rooms that inspired this project, but you can decide what you want to do. Either way, when the final dinner is done, you will sweep the floor and do the dishes, as with all the others.

15) In the morning you will reform the dining room into what you will call the clubhouse, where you will sit with the maestro, and the people who helped you see the past few years through. You will install the crystal chandelier cover in your room. You will now be able to work for long periods of time at your desk. Your spells will take the form of poems and small paintings; these will have results that you will not be able to predict. Send them out into the world in the rescued X-ray envelopes. Though your personal life will remain in disarray, you will be much more resistant to being distracted from bringing the letters out of yourself. In the street you will hear people speak fondly of the time when you were running the restaurant. You will remember how to fry just two eggs, and how to cook for just yourself. //

SEE YA NEXT TIME