

GRAVITY

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Gravity is a work of fiction focused on our inevitable endings and our ability to ignore the signs of impending termination. The protagonist is a depressed, alienated office worker who gets off the elevator on the floor of his employer just after a catastrophic event occurs that will lead to the collapse of the structure. He is able to ignore the screams of everyone else in the office space, and his reaction to the panic of everyone else is that of a “Home Alone”-esque self indulgence, while he still finds himself unable to escape his feelings of inadequacy and paranoia of being judged by others. His realization of impending death comes after passing a point-of-no-return for postponing his death.

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INTRODUCTION

gravity n. 1 Physics. the force that attracts a body towards the centre of the earth, or towards any other physical body having mass. 2 extreme importance; seriousness. 3. solemnity or dignity of manner.

CHAPTER 1

My weight diminishes briefly as the elevator transitions from going up to going nowhere. The doors slide open and people are screaming. Some people are possibly not screaming but I can't hear them. I don't know why the screaming people scream. I tell myself it has nothing to do with me. I know the people in this office possess tendencies to make a big deal of a little thing. So I ignore them all, walking from the elevator banks to my cube, feet shuffling along the short carpet laid in one-foot by one-foot squares. The color of the carpet could not be named easily. I call it, the carpet's color, or my description of it "Halloween," though I never really call the carpet that to anyone's face. I call it "Halloween" to myself and sometimes to the carpet. To call the carpet "Halloween" to anyone but myself or the carpet would be somewhat meaningless. The carpet is not orange and black. The carpet is a shade that you wouldn't notice standing and walking over, but hunched over as you might be after eating too many Sweet Tarts and peanut butter cups and Starbursts and M&Ms and bite size Snickers and Mars bars and candied and carameled apples that were left by your mother for you to hand out to trick-or-treaters and then going to a small costume party dressed as a turtle and while at the party eating several slices of sausage pizza and drinking coke and then try to prove to everyone at the party that you know how to use the nunchakas that are part of your costume, and in your failed usage make the classic America's Funniest Home Video

highlight, crouched over, hands between legs, eyes about three feet from shag, staring straight down at it as all your consumption reverses itself.

CHAPTER 2

My last pair of slacks gained a tear last week, so I'm wearing new, blue pleated slacks that keep my legs itchy. I hate new clothes, all clothes really, new more than old, but I find it difficult to escape the wearing of new clothes before I can get to the old clothes.

I've tried, and still try periodically, running new clothes through several cycles of washing and drying followed by the balling up, the stretching, the shaking. They still don't sit calmly next to my skin.

CHAPTER 3

My desk is where it always is. I feel fortunate, at least to have saved two pennies, making my commute entirely by foot. I pull a nearly translucent grocery sack from my briefcase and shove it deep into my bottom drawer hoping that maybe today would be the day that the aluminum foil will keep enough heat inside that my half dozen chicken nuggets will not grow pale and cold by lunch time. I'm not sure why I would have any hope that today will somehow defy the physics of thermodynamics. Maybe it is my ignorance of thermodynamics. My ignorance extending to the point that I don't know that it is or is not the correct term for the holding of temperatures of microwaved chicken inside of foil. I'm also not sure if ignorance can extend, as it is more of a void or absence and should probably remain passive, unable to reach up and swallow things like me or my imitation of a lunch.

I close my briefcase and lock it. There is nothing inside worth stealing, but I understand that a locked door or a locked anything will draw attention and desire to open than an unlocked object, and with it locked the people in this office might wonder what is in my briefcase, besides what is actually in there--paperclips and rubber bands--and if I'm really lucky, someone, hopefully not somewhere here at the office but maybe a man on the street as I walk out the front doors will come running by and grab the case from my hand and run off, and then people might approach me and ask me about the incident.

If it were someone in the office that were to steal my briefcase and then at home

that night to pry the case open finding only the paperclips and rubber bands and empty file folders, who would be more embarrassed, and if he would confess and play it off like a prank and everyone in the office would know that all I kept in the case was paperclips and rubber bands and empty file folders and an unopened package of Polaroid film, and, as they know I keep it locked, they might wonder why I locked a case that only held paperclips, rubber bands, empty file folders, Polaroid film, and a cheap plastic-handled letter opener, and that they reach the conclusion that I locked the case to elicit some sort of curiosity in them, and the laughter and pity that would follow would be smothering.

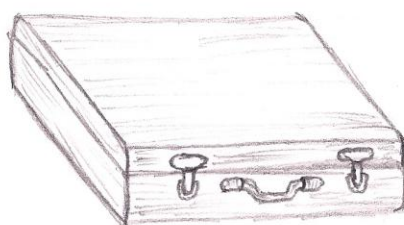


Figure 1: Briefcase

CHAPTER 4

Again, there is a rectangle of not dust on my desk where the day before there was a black rectangle with shiny, metal parallel bars rising up with what I think is fishing line tied to the bars holding five shiny, metal balls in a row. None of these things are there now. The only thing there, where all of it was yesterday, is a rectangle of clean desk.

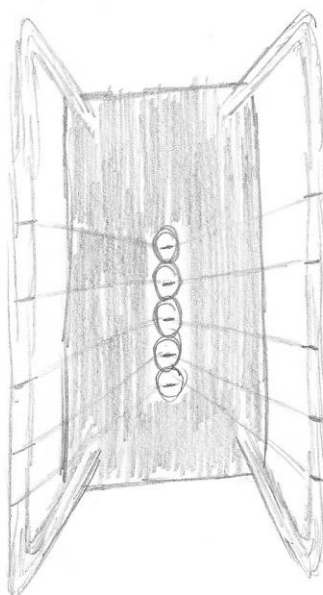


Figure 2: Balls

CHAPTER 5

I pull a stack of magazines from a deep drawer. The stack slams against the desk and unstacks itself, the glossy faces and bodies of the covers sliding off one another to form a landscape of flesh and bold, vague titles like People, Life, and Time. I pull more magazines, and GQ, National Geographic Adventure, Outside sprawl farther, reaching the fuzzy panel that makes the wall I face everyday.

I keep trying to push the mags into a single stack, but despite their regular dimensions the glossy covers elude ordering, stacking as well as one might stack fish.

The magazines are not a distraction from my work but my Monday morning task. My official title is Speaker Acquisition Assistant. My unofficial title is HOS (Head of SAD (Speaker Acquisition Department)). Before me, there was no SAD. And without me, there would be no SAD. I am the only person in the Speaker Acquisition Department. “Everyone else handles real business problems” my supervisor informed me during my yearly review when I inquired about other positions within Waters Business Solutions.

My main job duty is to fulfill requests from businesses and schools for motivational speakers.

CHAPTER 6

I slice syllables from the page with an X-acto knife. Four lines and a poke removes the sound from the page. I inspect the backside to see what I've incidentally dismembered. Curvedly striped in shades of brown. The grain of cut wood or silky, smooth hair. I remember the magazine, Women's Health, and conclude it must be from a hair products ad, probably shampoo and/or conditioner, as the shade is not the desirable red or blonde that would move coloring products.

The knife looks like a scalpel but my hands move with such clums that this procedure could never be mistaken for surgery. The incisions go beyond their intersections, leaving the scar of a numeral sign that reaches a few pages deep.

I push the syllable, "eke" off the end of the blade and into a loose pile of "tion"s, "ab"s, and "lis"s. I look over each shoulder before sweeping the pile with my hand into a brown envelope that shows in the center of a something being held. I fold and return it to a cabinet drawer. I look around again, this time standing. Everyone but me is still at the windows, but now they are moving less. It looks like some are talking to each other. Holding hands. I sit back down and return to the dissection of the articles.

CHAPTER 7

The most important part of my job is being able to read through a TOC (table of contents). I have to be able to translate hype into reality, to figure out which supposedly heroic tales are actually about the person and not about the place/event that they passed through, because almost everybody wants to frame himself a hero, or even a survivor, as if there is some value to that and not just statistics and probabilities playing themselves out. The TOC can eliminate a third of the stories. Another third should be eliminated in the first paragraph. The others take research, a phone call, a face to face, and if they pass the first two, sometimes, depending on the client, verification of the facts.

At least that is what my trainer told me. He acted like my day would be a frantic search through a haystack looking for that needle to pump some suits full of whatever juice you want to put in that needle. But my day is far from frantic. I don't even look at the TOC. I don't judge the first paragraph. I have enough time to read every magazine from front to back, including the ads, full-page spreads and the pages of smaller pleas for help in the back.

We only have, on a good week for the company, maybe three requests for a motivational speaker. Our yearly profit off securing these speaker engagements has averaged \$13,700 since I've worked here, and while my salary isn't much, it is significantly more than that. So while I was told that the most important part of my job is whatever, the most important task in maintaining my position here is creating an aura of

someone who might shoot up the office if fired. This certainly isn't an easy task. You can't be the bubble that's about to burst. You have to be a somewhat stable bubble that will only pop if poked.

CHAPTER 8

I remove a copper thermos from an interior pocket of the green coat that hangs over the edge of the last piece of wall that divides me from my nearest neighbor's work station to the left. But I don't have a nearest neighbor to the left, nor to the right. And the fourth station in the quad, diagonal from the back of my chair if I were facing my PC, also holds no body. They are all empty, except mine, and not just today. The three stations in my pod that I don't occupy don't even have the hope of being filled. There are no swiveling chairs. There are no countertop desk surfaces. Just a grey cord, coming out from the floor, so thick I often wrap a thumb and middle finger around a wrist before judging the cable as less than my wrists. I've checked my cube, and it vines up the back corner shaded by whatever cheap materials are pressed and glued together to make a shelf for work. In the uppermost corner of that back corner are other plugs: computer, phone, lights. The other cubes are just that, four adjoined surfaces with a corner cut out. I think often of their shape as a slice of birthday cake with the first bite taken. I wondered, one time, if that, the cubes being cake, meant that I am the decoration--the little plastic football or balloon that sits on the frosting and is pulled off before consumption. But as soon as I realized the thought I realized how stupid a thought it was.

I get up and walk by the gaping mouths towards the break area that is a sort of confine near the center of the building. It is one of the few rooms with full walls, the sort of walls that can't be moved by a guy with a drill. Walking in through one of the break

area's three doors always gives my stomach the feeling that it needs to escape from its place. "The lighting in here is horrible," I often say if someone sits within the distance in which people should have a type of conversation. I go on that it reminds me of a junior high cafeteria, if I think a second sentence is appropriate. I never read anything about feng shui because I fear it would ruin my ability to blame anything on poor lighting.

I set my thermos on the counter colored like a faded tuxedo that runs along the entire north wall. Its surface is landscaped with stainless microwaves and large, black coffee makers. I grab a pot and tip it so that the clarity of the thermos bottom is no more. There is now, in its place, a deep brown. A smell also comes with this that makes me clench up a little. There is no one in front of the plastic bins that hold the plastic mini tubs of cream and paper packets of sugar and something like sugar, so I move close, and after a look over a shoulder at the empty room that is never empty, I pick a little blue tub of creamer, squeezing it between thumb and fore finger, rolling it in my pinch listening to the crackle of the thin skin that slightly whitens from the bending. I peel its lid back and dump the cream in. It sinks, leaving a grey cloud. I stare down at the surface that fades from two-tone back to one. I grab a light blue packet, read the back, then return it to its place.

CHAPTER 9

It's not often I get to play with the cream. I can sometimes find a moment to add it but only in a hurried way before someone else comes over to force me from the area. But today no one is in a position to bother me. I stare down at the surface, once again tensioned to a flat skin, the light hue already drowning below. I disturb the thermos a little with my hand. Clouds come up to the surface. I look quickly to each of my backward corners to confirm my solitude. If there is one thing I know, it is that today is the best day since I started working here, and before that for at least a time close to my memory's distance.

I'm actually smiling while I quick over to the sink splashing the coffee in, turning with a return to the pot. I move more of the coffee from the glass to my copper. It smells of burning and most of the pots are close to full. Before I reach the plastic bins, I change my mind. I feel a little euphoric, or how I imagine euphoria might feel, and I pause with an idea, for a moment before grabbing a handful of the crinkly cream containers. I rip their lids clear from the base and line up the little buckets. I take a half-full pot. One with an orange handle that I use to swirl it all a little. With a whirlpool going, I pour the buckets in. This might make a good commercial for some dairy product. It strikes me that I've seen something before like this--chocolate milk or syrup perhaps. The mass is too thick though to see from the side the sucking and mixing of the two viscous. I let it

slow. There is still no one in here. I dump the mixed pot and my mug. I don't drink coffee. I just come in here and get coffee and return to my desk usually. It keeps my legs and butt from getting sore spots. There are drops of white and brown on the counter. I leave them.

CHAPTER 10

A few of the straws flow over and out of their box as I weave my hand between the plastic tubes that massaged more than they resisted. Despite their parallelness while boxed, the runaways quickly cartwheel away at every angle once out of the colony. A few make it past the counter, making it to the floor where they contrast the everything color of the carpet, and as I fist and unfist my hand inside the box of mostly hollowness I try to figure the cost difference between buying sheathed and unsheathed drinking straws, and though, while it is likely substantial, I also think that it would be a worthy expense considering the very notable sanitary differences.

CHAPTER 11

Everyone is still painted on the glass, a sort of hands across America mural from the backside. I feel like a kid whose parents didn't come home at night and the next morning still holds no patriarchs, and I don't have to go to school.

My walk feels funny, like my legs aren't my own. I can still tell them what to do but they have their own style and I can't tell if it's more fluid or less fluid than usual. I wrap around the corner and let these legs take me the few more steps to the bathroom.

Inside a man is crying over a sink. He looks normal otherwise and doesn't seem to be bleeding or holding any sort of wound. I creep by hoping neither of us see me in the mirror. Placed in a stall, I can't decide whether to drop my pants before sitting. I'm not here for any sort of evacuation. But also, I don't want, from some sort of mishap, that something become wet that should not. But also, I don't want my penis hanging out and looking at me.

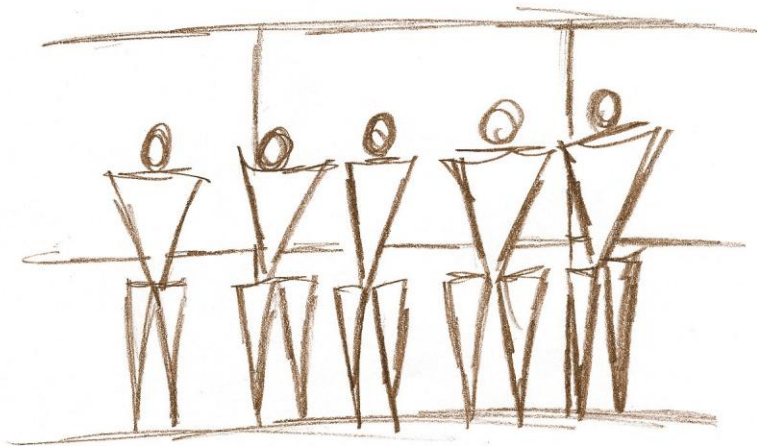


Figure 3: People

CHAPTER 12

I compromise, letting my brown pants drop and my grey undies protect me from the unblinking eye.

I wonder who these other people are. There doesn't seem to be anyone else in this office that would take to bathroom graffiti. But apparently, I'm not the only one in here who realizes that this is what archeologists will find when they come looking for us. Paper will be gone. Computer chips will be unreadable, corrupted. And all that will be left is the writing on the stalls.

CHAPTER 13

I float passed the man that is only sniffing now, and I'm out the door. I feel almost graceful, being able to sneak by on the tile. With the door closed behind me on him, my limbs again return to their burdensome state of dragging against my body as it moves around and back towards my cube.

CHAPTER 14

I own a gun but no bullets. I've never fired a gun, though, mine or anyone else's. Not even dry fired, which is supposed to be bad for the gun. Somehow, setting off a little explosion that sets off a bigger explosion is better for the gun than not having anything in there to explode at all. Maybe the gun would gain some sort of consciousness of emptiness.

I own the gun because it seems like the sort of thing I should own. It was sort of like getting a puppy from the pound. A pound is no place for a dog but there they are, so many of them there, and if you take it home, your home will be a different place.

I mostly sat with the revolver, holding it, being contemplative while its weight secured my arm in the steady activity of connecting us. I leaned forward at one point and tapped the barrel against the side of my head twice. I underestimated the gun's potential, its unsoftness. I rubbed my head for awhile.

CHAPTER 15

A legal pad sits in front of me and from its yellowness comes little screeches as I carve a square with a pen. I'm not looking at the pad. The pen is guided through its simple shape by the grooves it has already carved into the pulp. I'm looking off with neck girraffed at the people along the glass, pressing down with my hand hard enough to give me a little lift in my chair to see the wall of everyone.

CHAPTER 16

My hand burrows into my jacket pocket until it finds the soft metalness of the model glue tube, shaped mostly like a travel-size tube of toothpaste except that the snout is more needlelike as if it belonged to a bird that had to beak around in deep, narrow voids, and the body is not a soft plastic but something like lead, heavy and flexing and with a good memory that pushes my discipline, as in moments of sitting on public transportation I want to squeeze, massaging its innards. But wanting to avoid the scars this leaves on the smooth orange painted surface, I limit myself to bending the tube's tail so that only one crease develops, but even this has a downside as the crease will soon enough crack just like an expired credit card and the pleasantly toxic, very gluey substance will leak into my pocket essentially killing the pocket.

Usually I just squirt a little dab onto the inside of the flap of an envelope and let it breathe, but today I think I can get away with almost anything.

CHAPTER 17

I don't know who to ask about this condition. It's not that I don't know who would be able to answer the question but that I don't know who, if answering in a certain way, isn't obligated to report or restrain me. And part of me, sometimes, thinks that some sort of mental institute would be a nice place to live if it weren't for all the people.

CHAPTER 18

I make fists with my feet inside my shoes as I try to remember whether or not I closed the refrigerator door completely this morning. I know that too often I leave it ajar with light and cool polluting the kitchen. The problem is not with the pollution that leaks out but that which flows in to fill for the flowing out and the equilibrium of energies of hot and cold results in something whose importance is that the balance is higher than the refrigerator's thermostat setting and possesses greater endurance than the spinning coils of the electric motor that will eventually, before I get home to seal the door if I've left it open, surrender or die if you consider there to be a difference between the two.

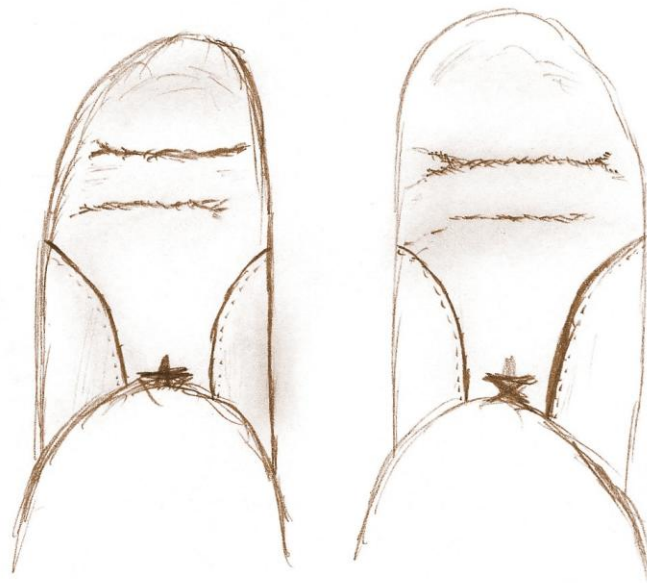


Figure 4: Shoes

CHAPTER 19

The only windows in Conference Room Omega surround the door and are of the glass that is cross-hatched in some thin gold material that makes the glass all stay together if it is broken. My heart rate always rises in this room either because I am having to sit through a meeting or because I am doing something in here that if someone walked in they would instantly ask “What are you doing in here?”

I grab another one hundred pencils in a flimsy cardboard box that struggles to maintain its shape in my hand. It bulges at its angles and little flaps are ready to tear and release the contents onto the floor. To explain this would be fine if there weren't three hundred pencils without erasers in a larger corrugated cardboard box on my desk.

CHAPTER 20

I roll the paper tight into a cylinder and, holding it to my right eye, look out over the people on the glass. The diameter is small enough that I can't see any body as whole. I can only eye pieces of bodies. Mostly though, I only see colors from the backs of shirts and blouses, and I sway my head to make the colors shift in a way that I want to be kaleidoscope-like but the rolled paper doesn't quite achieve that effect. I let the paper unroll and fall out of my hand and the colors return to being things on people.

CHAPTER 21

My fingers press down making keys clack. My face stares straight ahead. Being an almost proficient typist, sometimes even practicing at home on an old manual typewriter, that shoots with each letter's strike like a gun through my apartment, I don't stare at my hands which I do in so many other situations but straight ahead into the blackness of a monitor without power running through it, holding my face reflecting back dimly. It is always this that shows me my first view of my face each morning. I like to tell people who ask that I grew up in a house with antiqued mirrors at the end of the hardwood-floored hallway that led to my bedroom. As I'd get closer to my room, in the mirror, more and more space opened up behind me from which I feared all the sorts of things that children alone feared in a dark house.

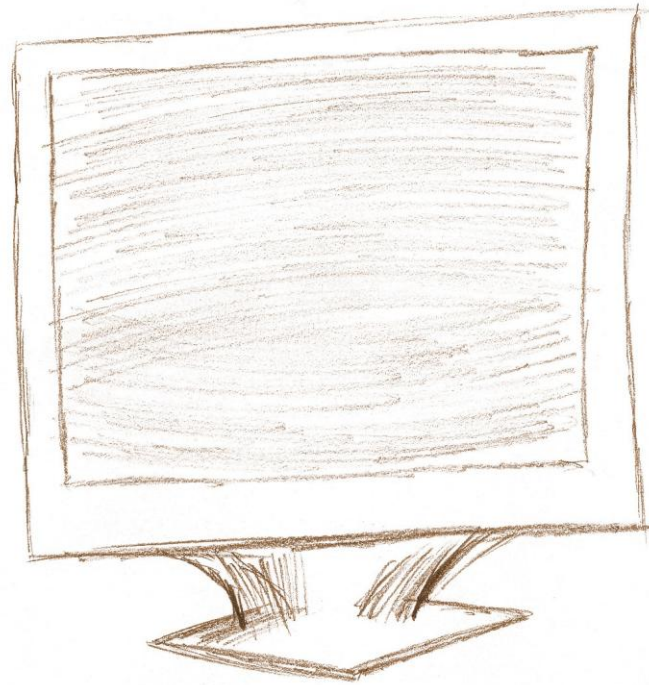


Figure 5: Monitor

CHAPTER 22

I'm not sure if this would be qualified as stealing as I'm not even taking a whole word, and none of it has left the office yet. I don't know that it ever will. This, despite nudging up against theft type crimes, improves my job security. But I'm trying to avoid getting caught actually doing it. I think it will work better if people just come across the remnants and wonder what is going on, "What is Bob doing?" It provides that certain element of mystery and establishes a certain obsessive attribute which people who care so little about anything find so creepy.

This perception of obsessiveness, I'm not sure how it works for me. What I worry about is that this obsessive quality I'm trying to portray sets me up as someone who should be able to perform well in the office. I really need to establish a persona of incompetence, so that I cannot be considered indifferent. Indifference would mean my death. If I don't care, then, if fired, I wouldn't come here and spread everyone's blood. But a stupid person that really cares, who has managed to figure out that they will never be able to do anything else, might explode. I guess my body sort of helps me here. Nothing looks slower than heavy arms and a sprawling forehead. I just don't know what to do with this thing.

CHAPTER 23

With a letter opener wedged between keys, I pop all the letters from the keyboard. The black near-cubes tumble across my desk. Some fall to the floor. I forget to secure a few, and they pop into the air and land in a scatter on the ground.

When I'm finished with the removal, I pull my face close to the board and create a wind with my mouth, clearing the hair and skin from the flat black field rowed with squares. I see inside all the squares a conductive metal. I consider filling the channels between each key's housing with water as the area appears solid.

I also consider pasting the pieces of words into the void as some English language message for some replacement sufferer that will have to fondle this keyboard after my passage from this position.

CHAPTER 24

Footfalls are coming down on the opposite side of the ceiling above me sounding like I imagine a stampede of rabbits would sound. I've always suspected such a thing, that it is a hallway filling the space above me. I knew in all my time staring at the white grid over me that it has to be an area that people only pass through to get from where they were to where they were going. And though I'll never know, I feel certain of the same below and probably for the whole building. You could drop a plumb line from me and never strike another being, assuming that the floors would not stop its falling. And from a point above me you could do the same with again no interference until it spikes through my skull.

CHAPTER 25

The feet have been falling all day. My floor is apparently the only to fall into such a static state. Maybe they, upstairs, don't have to worry about me. There is after all an amount of physical density that they can rest assured knowing I will never penetrate. I'm sure if I were to violate this barrier like some cartoon dog that jumps on the bed and bounces high and hard enough for his head to poke through to the other side, they would scream and move to the farthest places from me just like everyone on this floor.

CHAPTER 26

I put my head down on top of the copier as it births pages. The machine grunts in unison with each expulsion and I breathe deeply wanting to make love with the smell of warm paper.

In the tray collects the same thought again and again, stacking on itself to make nothing more, but a lot more of it. I imagine that I could kill maybe forty minutes of the afternoon shredding all these copies if I do it slow enough.

CHAPTER 27

There is a sliver in my ring finger and I don't know where it was born. I have never noticed the absolute absence of wood from the building. There are pictures of trees but they're behind glass and framed in sleek, black metal.

The next closest thing to wood are the pencils that are wood but the compressed particles of wood that don't bare the proof of life of grain and knots and do not sliver but sharpen more easily in the little hand-held sharpeners that are just a blade affixed to a tiny square of plastic hollowed for the tip. Too often real wood pencils catch an edge of grain, and you are left with unsupported lead.

My stomach nauseates as I pull my thumb nail back against the splinter to assure myself that it is a splinter. I bring my head close to it in my finger to make sure it is wood and not some other material.

I have tweezers. Four sets actually. Two are duplicates so I only have to choose from three styles. Though I hope there won't be a need for a choice between the two singles as I love the very common set that I have a double of, one of which I've never used, and is still cocooned in plastic backed by cardboard, that should be more innocent than all the others I have.

CHAPTER 28

I'm checkerboarding a piece of paper that I press to the desk surface at an angle so that one corner points at me. There is no red or black to the squares, only white insides and blue ink walls. So really what I'm doing physically is taking blank, multi-purpose paper and turning it into graph paper only with thicker, less perfect cubes. And to follow my movements you'd see that I'm not making cubes but V's. But if you asked me about the V's I wouldn't know what you were talking about because what I see myself doing is layering the paper with open or incomplete isosceles triangles. I think it's sad when I see a right angle without a hypotenuse and this thought, seeing so many, creating so many, might help me reach the right mood. I think my face feels more pulled down into an expression of sadness than usual but still I don't think it matches anyone else's face.

I stop my pen just short of filling the page with what I think looks mostly like the skin of a fish and realize I might need my pain to be more physical or unfamiliar, but as the point of a yellow thumbtack dimples my forearm, I think maybe I could try something else first, something a little more blunt, so I slide the little finger of my left hand under the lever of the stapler and press down slowly and ache my knuckle as a staple falls out the end farther down from where my finger is easily withstanding my lack of commitment to pain.

CHAPTER 29

I pull some twine from my jacket pocket and begin unknitting all the knots that I had tied in it with my left hand while riding to work this morning. It will grow to about a foot long when I untie it all. Now, the way it is all looped around itself, it is less than half that length.

I had done a good job keeping the tightness inconsistent. There is nothing worse than getting to work and having nothing but all tight knots or nothing but all loose knots. It is not easy to tie a knot with one hand when the twine is almost all knots and not have the previous knots tighten when you pull on the two ends that you can only pinch between fingers of the same hand.

CHAPTER 30

I rise and fall on a cushion of air trapped inside the cylinder of my chair, released and inflated by my hand and leverage. When I tire of the monotony and pointlessness of this activity, I test the friction, pushing off with one foot. First, clockwise I spin, three quarters, two hundred seventy degrees, give or take. I push off with the same foot, right, only spinning counter, and I make it farther -- not a full three hundred sixty. I am disappointed in not making a full revolution. Very easily I could make other attempts -- "failures," my father would call them. I'm sort of surprised he isn't calling right now to tell me that any attempt at spinning fully in my chair would be a waste of my time. He would probably be right. If I were to make a full revolution, I'd still be here, and facing the same way. I guess I can't escape this place. But why isn't he calling? He calls every day. He somehow knows when I'm sitting here doing nothing, and happens to call right at the peak of my nothingness, leading to a plummet of nothingness in what is a conversation with a figure in my life who is very statuesque. But he is also anything but. He is treesque, and when I was very small he was large, relatively, but now that I've grown he has grown more and is now large, and he still has those big branches and pointy, sharp leaves that are also sort of soft so that you could never really hurt anyone intentionally with them, but if the two of you, the leaf and you, were to pass, your skin could get cut.

CHAPTER 31

I try to do a magic trick, moving my hands around themselves with a coin moving from palm to palm, but it is only falling as whichever hand that is holding it moves from palm up to palm down and anyone could see what was happening if they watched and even with eyes closed, hear the occasional slap of the quarter hitting flat against my skin. I don't know any magic tricks and don't know where, if anywhere, this thing is going.

CHAPTER 32

I'm getting the way I get when I close my eyes and can't imagine anything in scale. So I alternate between crumpling copier paper with my hands and uncrumpling it smooth, hoping that it will become less paperish and not hold any of the creases I'm giving it. I don't know if it will tear or become holed in the intersections of folds that keep recurring in the same places because apparently it is hard for paper to let go of its memory.

CHAPTER 33

If there is one thing I can't do well it is draw. But there are many things I can't do well and drawing is still one of them. But I still almost always cover the backs of envelopes with figures of people with big grotesque hands and round, flat faces with mountain noses sometimes sharp sometimes round. The hair looks like Charlie Brown's and the eyes are not close to friendly. Legs untapered, and feet with round bottoms that would make walking an odd thing.

I'm a little scared to draw women at work, because I worry of someone seeing them and whether it would be taken as a certain someone and if it would lead to some sort of intervention. Or, if it would only be seen as creepy, and a posse would form and drag me into some abandoned office and stone me or some corporal punishment that would probably, for the sake of justice, involve genital mutilation, or simply that the picture would be ripped out from under hands and posted in some public or semi-public place where people could share a laugh and coffee, and how good those people could feel.

CHAPTER 34

I eye the clock across several rows, hanging at the center of the bank of elevator doors. The clock matches the one at my house. It keeps moving clockwise and I think what I always think at least once a day when looking at that face: that one man can change the world, as did the first person that wound a clock counter-wise to unwind clockwise.

CHAPTER 35

I release my head down and shake it a few times to loosen the thoughts from their perches inside my mind.

CHAPTER 36

I glacier toward the bathroom. My steps are slow, so low you can't see light between my feet and the surface below. My arms don't move. My head drifts from one side to the other in eye-contact avoiding instincts. I would let my chin sag if I wasn't worried about the thinning hair. I keep filling and unfilling my pockets with my hands.

CHAPTER 37

The center of the building is the opposite of a donut's hole, filled and surrounded by the emptiness that is everything else. I let the back of my hand rub against the cool paint covering the drywall. I notice no one noticing, and after several quick looks, I allow both palms against the cool. And then one cheek. Then the other, letting my eyes close.

CHAPTER 38

The coolness of the painted wall takes me. With my eyes closed I could be in bed, my overly warm body pressing away from some other body. It is nothing but an escape, I guess you could say. But I also think escape is underrated.

I push away from the wall because people have been moving lately. They aren't statues anymore.

CHAPTER 39

The soda falls out of the can in unbound bodies interrupted by the inside's gasps for air, and the brown fizzes and foams in the stainless basin of the drinking fountain and hisses a miniature applause as I lean my ear to the foam that remains after the liquid has gravitated through the openings into a place I've never seen.

CHAPTER 40

Inside the room marked “MEN” or “GENTLEMEN,” I already can’t remember. I find several other men. Some of the men are touching themselves. Others touch others. The stalls are filled with too many feet pointing the same way. Groaning has filled the airspace. The baby blue dividers make it look like piles of pants and shoes are alive.

These people aren’t peeing or shitting or washing their hands. And I wonder if all along this room has just been about privacy, and people only come here for moments of respite from the other side of the door which contains an impending not privacy. It isn’t that the things outside of this room are public, necessarily, but that every movement can escape into the public. I feel close to all these men.

I feel weak and wash my hands in cold water.

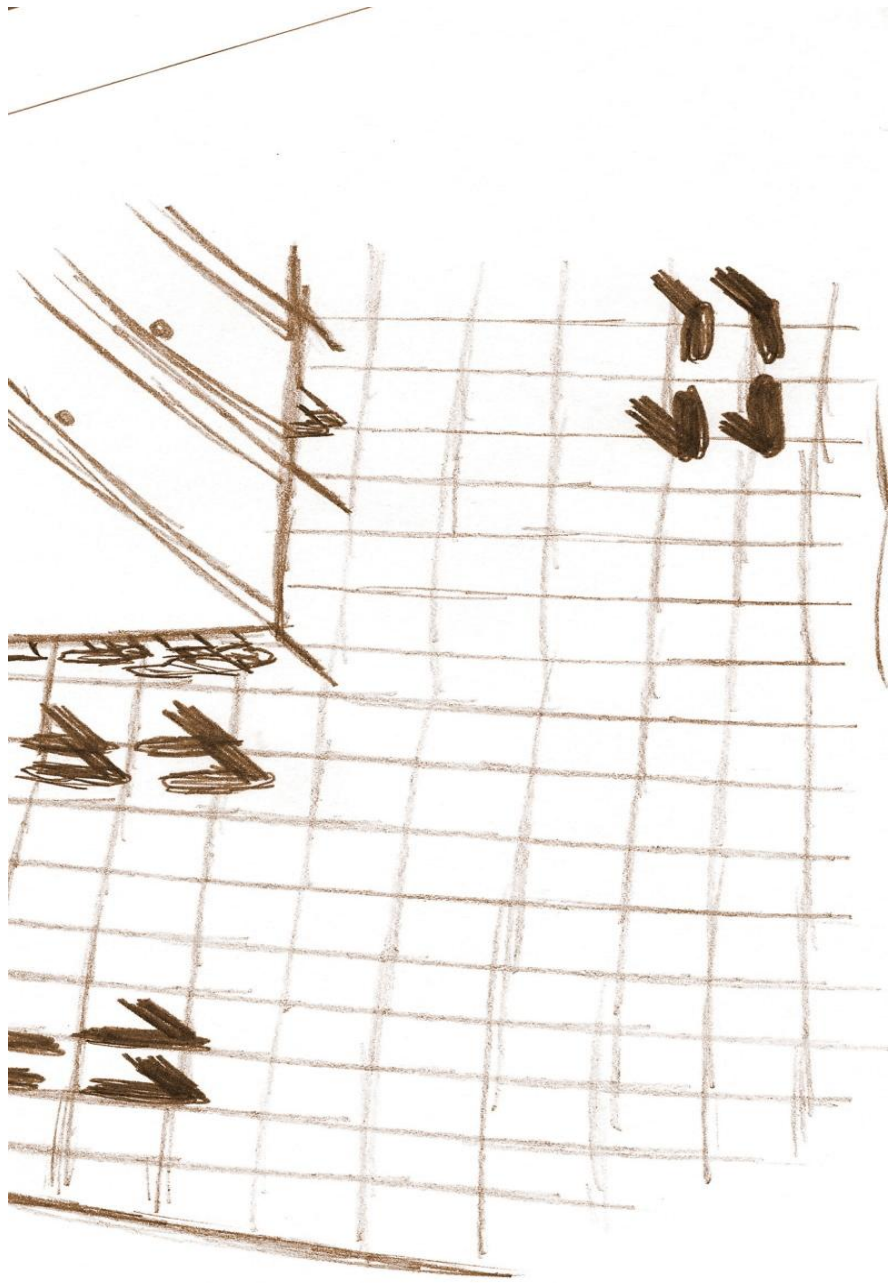


Figure 6: Bathroom

CHAPTER 41

My legs conveyor me away from all that is in the restroom. I sort of wish that I could be something more likely to satisfy myself.

The act of walking is becoming more difficult. Before, for some time, my legs have felt divorced from me, acting on their own, and now, they are all mine, awkwardly and joint locking at all the wrong times. I'm having to think about placing one foot in front of the other and more, because my knees don't know what to do either and want to rise up to high with everything below them just dangling limp and the upper wants to come down on these things that every time I think wouldn't be up to the task. And my body sways a bit front to back or back to front.

I don't want to stop because I have to be going somewhere, getting out of this passage that people will surely be coming one way or another through, now that they have come back to life. And some of those people that are in the restroom might be coming from there and overtake me and at least I, if not both of us, will have to acknowledge and ignore what I witnessed. But more likely, as I don't know why anyone would leave there, except for me, is that people will be going to there, and maybe they won't even be hiding it, maybe two men will come running down this path, holding hands, and one of them, probably the one closer to me, will glance over and I'll have to acknowledge and try to ignore that they are going to pleasure each other and I will not. But I'll have to wonder if his glance is some sort of invitation, as opposed to a judgment,

for me to come and join in one of the many things I've never been invited into. But I'd never go because I never have and he probably isn't inviting anyway, and I'll just be standing here with legs like linked sausages all meaty and not erect enough to move me back to my desk and a man who is going to have sex having just passed me and judged me not worth a hello -- two men actually who will have passed and thought we can't say hello to this person because we have to get off.

CHAPTER 42

So I keep moving my legs toward my wall panels. And maybe when they get me there, I can separate the wall panels, or at least one, and take it with me so I will always have a side of not seeing, so that when my mind gets tired of telling my leg parts what to do I can squat down and lean the panel against some other structure and huddle between, and people, if they pass, might only wonder what that is doing there, and not the things they usually think when they see me. I really should've thought about this a long time ago. But on any other day, people might be moving at the sort of pace or with a not-so-urgency that would cause them to stop and pull my panel away from the wall it is leaning against and they'd see me all curled like a roly-poly and they'd probably laugh and they'd look at each other and laugh and then they'd both keep going with a chuckle all the way to the coffee pots and then they'd go back to full laugh as they told other people that would laugh and in this way, the wall would not be giving any sort of protection or privacy. And then after the knowledge spreads, I'd be back at my desk, because things never seem to go back easily for me, with one less wall and people would probably come by just so they could laugh with me and not just at me from afar and I'd have less shielding. I'd be all exposed on one side and while working at my computer I'd have to see them out of the corner of my eye and not just reflecting back all alienated by the convexity of my monitor. So I keep vaulting myself forward on my legs until I plant in my seat that sighs again with my return.

CHAPTER 43

I keep moving myself back and forth down the row in forwards and backwards. I believe that with enough effort and practice I can develop a natural walk, a fluidity that everyone else who isn't crippled seems to have. And with my legs uninjured I should be able to flow to a place or from a place and be able to escape the fear that even my ghost will only be able to clunk along and attempts at haunting will not be scary at all but awkward for all involved as my ghostly figure will be face to face with a confident man and the my spectre would be trying to figure out what to do with the hands and arms while also trying to think of something to say.

I count my steps as I make them and cannot cover the distance with a consistent count, which I don't consider a bad thing as consistency would trap me in my mangled gait. But even with steps per pace ranging from twenty-three to thirty-seven I can't get it right.

To move back south I walk backwards which I think will help me find the right stride and I find a consistent backwards count of forty-four. Backwards I notice that I land on my toes and step off a flat foot. If I reverse this I should step off the toes and land on a flat foot that is directly under me. The problem with this, I learn, is that it feels a jerky but very quick as my body has to almost lean out in front of the landing foot, momentuming me into my next step. I fear I might, if this becomes a habit, never be able

to stop walking.

“You would think,” I think, “that by the end of one’s life I would have mastered, or at least become proficient at, the movement of body.” And as I complete the thought, my body slumps halfway down the row into a chair in a cube that is not mine.

CHAPTER 44

I slip my right shoe off and pull out the insole that will stink my fingers and reveal a lime-green dragon sticker that used to be puffy but has since resigned to flatness with a little bit of ridge on its border. I'm running out of these stickers. I have maybe fourteen left from a pack of one hundred I got years ago the night I realized dragons, if not real, are the only instance of universal imagination, as all cultures that a TV show focused on believed, or at least had sculptures or artwork of some sort depicting dragons. And while I was too old at the time to buy puffy dragon stickers, I couldn't find any other dragon stickers at two in the morning. I'm not sure what I'll do when all the dragons are gone, as I've had one with me since that night, and the shoe seems to be the best place to keep them stuck the longest, but of course, they get flattened and develop a sort of grime that I have to wipe away from them every few days.

CHAPTER 45

I've moved into a cube scattered with paper shaped things. Large, brown envelopes with names scribbled and crossed out all down one side and strings dangling from just below their mouths slithered all over the desk. And paper that has been folded in on itself in an almost infinite number of creases collect mostly near the corners but also by the keyboard and wedged under the monitor or nestled in the crevasse between a frame and the cardboard it leans back on. Most of the paper is yellow.

I handle all the envelopes onto each other to make a stack. I press down with my left hand, accordioneing out the air that lofted the column. I raise my hand and the brown breathes in. I press again. Then release for the inhale.

CHAPTER 46

Because I don't know how to shape my mouth and tongue to whistle, I simply push air out and pull it in with an unusual look on my face. And after frustration moves me to quit my whistling attempts, I take to creasing paper, hoping that origami is a thing you can channel or at least pick up on your own. And while it might be that one or both are true, I can only create a small tray weak enough to hold only paper clips and a few pens if both hands are used and positioned right and pull the paper into tension.

And this, along with all my other creations, I put in the little blue recycle bin under my desk.

CHAPTER 47

I feel warmer as soon as I sit down in the unfamiliar chair, not that I was feeling cold before, just neutral until the comfortingness of the cube enveloped me the way a good hotel bed can, with its heavy, soft comforter, make you realize how your own bed is merely a comfort in that you don't have to think about it or feel anything but that life is easier because you don't have to worry about some animal chewing on you while you sleep.

There are greeting cards clinging to the taupe, coarse-fabrics pseudo-walls. A pushpin pierces near the spine holding a card with a black and white cat and dog on its cover. Some other pushpins hold other cards, acting the same way, keeping the cards suspended and its butt props open a little the face of the card in a way that looks inviting.

The cat and dog card is to "MOM" who they love. The "they" is "Joey and Mikey." There are other words too but they are printed by a machine or computer of some sort so not really the words Joey or Mikey would likely have chosen to represent themselves if the choice were open but it was the multiple choice answer of sentiments.



Figure 7: Mug

CHAPTER 48

I can't put myself into another body, though I've been trying for as long as I know. I don't think that the sort of body that I could get my hands on, if I could get my hands on one, would be the sort of thing that one would want. At least with the not being able to transfer out, I can claim a dedication to this one. But I've never heard of someone lost in the woods or desert or other place being described as being dedicated to that place.

CHAPTER 49

I stand my neck up high wondering what a beheading feels like, if there is some sort of screaming of silence in the parts of the brain that tell me about what the rest of my body is trying to say and now in that same way that when in an air conditioned room alone when the air stops being pushed into the room you hear the silence louder than you heard the compressor's vibrations.

I let the thought go as I scrape into piles the eraser dust with my state ID card. And while I try to add pyramid sides to my loose piles, the thought of how the present will be archeologized will not escape me. All I can be sure of about the permanence of my life is that my foaming hand soap dispenser will outlast almost everything else I own, and when it is found it will be regarded as an artifact and possibly art and not in the annoying, supposedly witty and ironic way that trash is claimed into art in contemporary museums.

CHAPTER 50

I wish that I had sea shells at my desk so that I could push down on them until the shells' soon to be pieces stop holding together and let go in jagged ways, and maybe I'm happy I don't have any with me now. Because in my mind the pieces that separate are cleanly separate and not still clinged by the papery skin on the inside which I can't remember as being just over or just under the rainbowy, shiny surface that is the empty part of the shell.

In my mind there is no papery skin.

CHAPTER 51

I try to narrow myself so I can fit some place tighter or smaller or into cracks ideally. I've always envied the cockroach. And I think maybe that I have a piece of them in my past. I too feel uncomfortable when not squeezed on three sides, and as a child, I would often belly slither into our Spaniel's house that was as simple as every doghouse on TV except that the door was rectangular instead of the more old world arch.

But from here under my desk with chair pulled in near my feet and trash and recycle bins filled with large, bound training manuals to give the light plastic bins some heft so as not to be knocked over by an elbow when I rearrange my body into a newer position to relieve the aches of being sedentary, to a greater degree than usual, for too long.

CHAPTER 52

I wish that it would rain in here. People are less judgmental in the rain, their eyes more straight-ahead and far less gossipy. When it's raining I feel like I know almost appropriate things to say--"Sure is coming down." Maybe it's the shortened visibility too that I like, my propensity always towards blindness.

CHAPTER 53

Stairs frighten me a little bit. It's not irrational. It's been conditioned. When I was a boy with a brother, and when the sort of things that children do that lead to punishment would happen, we would not be punished right away. I guess they say you shouldn't hit your kids out of anger, but hitting them in a ritualistic way at the landing at the top of a flight of stairs is probably not the best way to do it either. Associations are made, and you will later in life be thankful that green and black shag is not a very popular carpet choice. But stairs are a tough thing to avoid, and it didn't matter which one of you did anything, you both got hit, and when you laughed from some weird instinct in your body that made you laugh when you wanted to cry and got hit several more times, these likely out of anger, you start to really understand the world.

CHAPTER 54

I wonder if this is what my ghost feels like, everyone's eyes turned otherwise. All backs of skulls and asses. I haven't seen a front since the elevator's shiny doors clamped shut, and maybe a cable snapped. I unsuccessfully try to remember my death.

I pinch my head between fingers and thumb. It still feels to be there at the top of my neck, my head. I want to throw myself back into my chair letting all the things that make me up fall slack, but I know that wouldn't be me, to be so untensed. My body is by no means solid but it is farther from fluid, I think. I guess I'm a gel, but more of a paste, or whatever play-doh is or silly putty or warm butter or something that doesn't really possess a shape, but borrows one and will eventually have to give it back. So I stay leaned forward in the chair. With the arm that doesn't prop my head, I search for a release on my chair, the lever that will release the compressed air in the cylinder underneath the particleboard underneath the foam underneath the imitation leather, underneath my ass. It is on the wrong side, the arm. I bring it up from its search and roll my head into the hand and let the now empty thing reach down and pull up. With a sound a little different than the opening of a peanut jar, I drop an inch or two closer to the rest of the world, except for the people that are above me.

CHAPTER 55

My fingers navigate into the purse of a waxy-looking, tall, jet-haired woman that I know smokes, hoping to find a loose pack to lift and try a cigarette, knowing now that it won't kill me.

I find a white and teal box resting with two others, one of which is open. I don't look over either shoulder like something in my mind tells me to do but instead tip back the lid of the unsealed pack. There is a handful of stalks leaning in different directions and flakes of tobacco snow out and into the purse. I close the lid and place it back where it was before, grabbing a full pack instead.



Figure 8: Hand

CHAPTER 56

I light a cigarette, taking a quick pull without inhaling, and let the stick hang in my hand as I kick my feet up on my desk. I again, occasionally, puff to keep it lit but don't really smoke the cigarette. It is mostly a display of relax and pleasure. I am, I think, genuinely smiling. A legal pad sits in my lap all yellow and without even the first page missing and I tap it repeatedly with a pen that is in my left hand so that if something came to me to write I would have to trade the objects possessed in each hand to the other.

I fumble with the cigarette and ash falls to the carpet where it disappears.

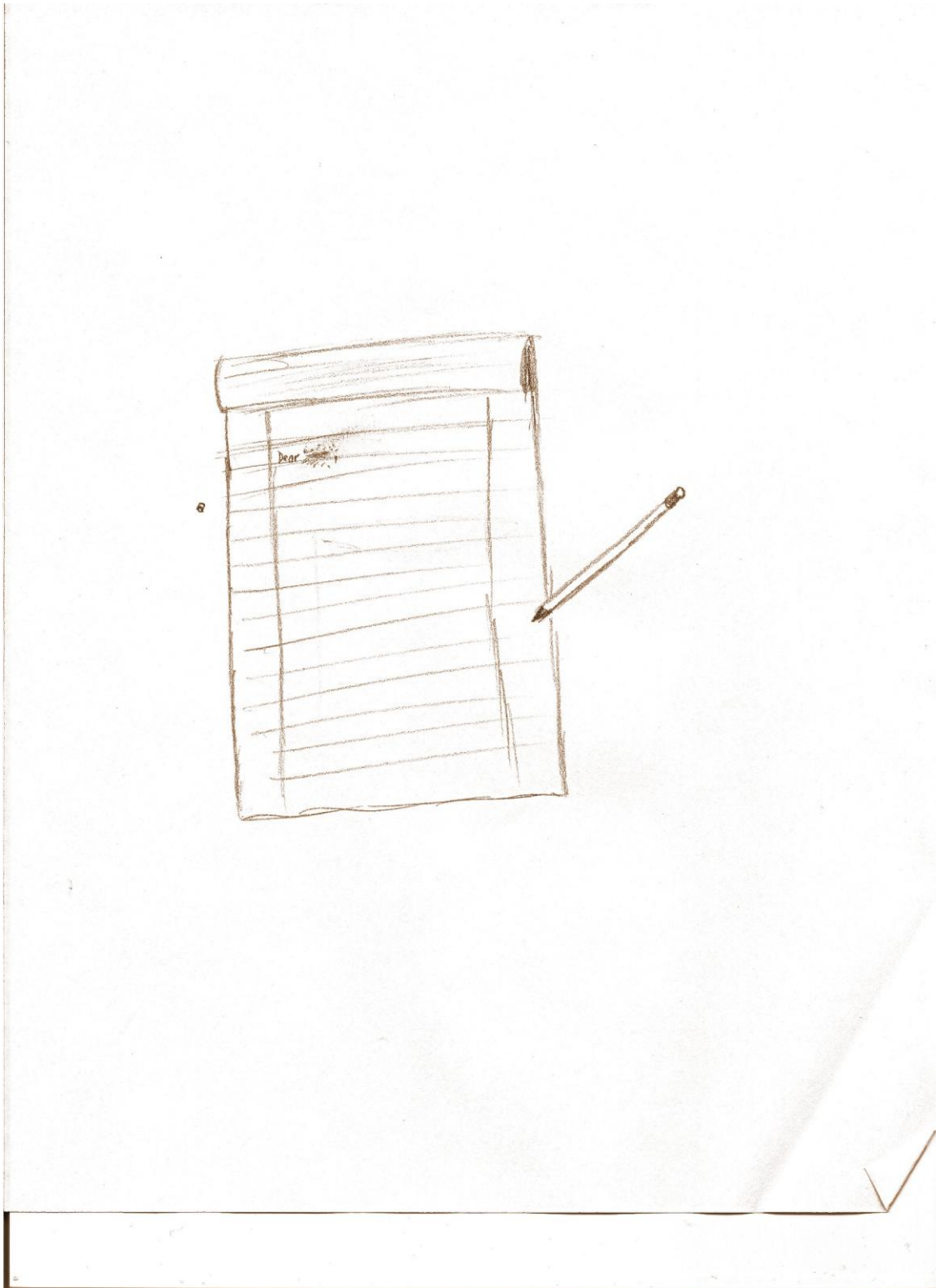


Figure 9: Notepad

CHAPTER 57

My eyes peek over a pseudo-wall and watch as men with loosened ties and white, rolled up sleeves pull the silvery doors apart. I'm focused on the swirl patterns on the surface, the signs of constant cleaning, of a man or woman who every night would wipe a chemicaled rag in arcs and circles to remove the smudges of oiled hands and arms that had bumped against the previous day. As smoke comes between me and my focus, screams rise. A warm breeze pushes through and I remember the unescapable campfire smoke that would always be blowing into my face tearing eyes. The smoke that fills the floor is dark but inside the shaft it is glowing.

CHAPTER 58

I'm thinking about food. The thought of Twinkies is followed by the uncontrollable imagining of the Twinkie Cowboy fake-galloping through these pseudo-halls firing his cartoon six-guns, never reloading and never aiming at anything just firing into the air that is the ceiling that snows down whatever whiteness is pressed into the sheets that make the top of our little slice of the building.

I am able to quickly shake this imagination but cannot put aside the idea of food and how my relationship with it has so quickly changed. Its consumption or lack of will not have repercussions. Its effects, in the biological sense, will never be realized, but it will still taste good, I think, if I can keep my head focused away from my timeline.

CHAPTER 59

It probably isn't the right time to consider suicide. There have been so many better opportunities. But the thought peeks in and stays awhile. I know it could be easy and violent, but it just seems so unnecessary. The act will probably just be awkward with people staring, wondering what I was trying to do. And I'd botch it and be all sticky in blood, clothes stained brown and tight to my skin.

CHAPTER 60

I pick up my phone but it's empty. I say hello. Then goodbye. I put the receiver back in its cradle.

CHAPTER 61

I try to consider the morality of weather--what does rain intend?

I want to believe that rain doesn't mean to do the things it does. I want to believe that it just falls linearly. And who can blame it for that? And really that is gravity. And I'm amazed that the clouds can hold the rain for so long with some sort of magic before their cloudy fingers let go. And it falls, because of gravity, all the way to a hard thing.

And it was my brother, I'm almost sure, that pushed my back, half-jokingly I hope, towards the freight elevator shaft of an old building my father owned. I think I only fell from the ground to the basement that only had occasional bulbs that were so yellow that I remember them as orange and the concrete was smooth and dark and there were brick pillars and wooden things and I was bleeding and my brother's footfalls from running away muffled their way down to me as I groped my way around trying to find someone to cry in front of.

CHAPTER 62

Inside one cube I find a flat cat staring out at me demanding for someone to “Hang in there.” But I don’t believe it is talking to me instead that I have walked in on some intimate conversation either between two people one of which saw me while the other did not and my presence is the object of such ignorance that I might as well be dead. But I consider the second option more plausible, that I have somehow been mistaken for the desired object and the sender does not know of the mistake so I exist as a sort of impediment to knowledge between two parties that does not know of the impediment.

The cat is shades of grey and very young.

CHAPTER 63

I slippery my hands in lotion I pump out of a container on someone's desk. I can't remember ever lotioning but think I must have at some point, maybe as a child with my hands cupped in front of me as someone else plunged out the whiteness. My hands seem not to be able to escape the oily gloves that trap my hands.

CHAPTER 64

I fingerprint the glass all over figuring I will probably be the last to do so. Maybe the glass will be the only thing remaining with the ability to identify everyone. I imagine tables filling a warehouse with shards on white table cloths. The glass covered in dark-- either ash or the dust of a crime scene investigator--showing the oiled swirls and forks. I like the sight of the large usually dark, empty building filled with these modern artifacts and new lights that don't pollute the upper atmosphere of the warehouse much except for the reflection off the cloth.

CHAPTER 65

I, never being a fan of high places, plant a foot a few inches from the outer wall while the other stays back as I lean forward toward the glass. Down below it looks all Christmasy with lots of lights and people gathered into a mass full of movement on the edges and static at its center. I let myself stay in ignorance awhile before accepting the reality of everything the lights are attached to.



Figure 10: Head

CHAPTER 66

I see myself reflecting back transparently. I stare for a moment before raising a finger to touch the glass, making parallel, vertical lines bisected by a perpendicular. I draw another vertical with three perpendiculars like little flags from a pole blowing out at the bottom, top, and middle. I make a fourth vertical and keep my finger in place at the bottom, waiting to move it to one side when I just let it fall away, knowing I'm speaking only to myself.

CHAPTER 67

I stand on top of my cube's desk surface that creaks under me. I know it will break soon but need a new perspective on what is happening or at least how everyone is responding to it. I don't know how to make this present into history, but I think stick figures will not only be my only choice but appear maybe a little hyroglyphic-like and could be done with my abilities and time.

CHAPTER 68

I owl my head around in circles trying to take it all in as I try to conceive of the way that history, after I make it, will get out of here.

CHAPTER 69

I feel sort of close to them with them far off and looking like scared animals like maybe we are all animals in a cage, or at least finally aware of it, and our stupid little paws will never figure out the simple gate.

CHAPTER 70

Inside their suits and dresses and stiff, itchy, thick costumes, they are always able to act like a different thing than me, acting like they aren't all itchy and trapped inside. But now they are all motion. And here I am, receding.

CHAPTER 71

Crayons might be more appropriate to image this, as straight thin lines are doing nothing to capture the atmosphere. I can create a better sense of movement with pen but this isn't so much about that sort of movement of A to B. Or maybe that's all this is, but if it is, that doesn't really come through with my pen. The moments I'm trying to catch are all full of movements that don't go anywhere. I can just imagine the failed interpretations of ovalled arrows at some body's feet. I don't think pacing back and forth would be what people would take away from that ink.

CHAPTER 72

If only I had my camera I would be able to make a thing to remember this with, without my mind which won't survive long or my fumbling rants and grossly inadequate drawings. But I'm not sure what a photo would capture. I guess all that would really show is people in an office, people that look like they work there most days but on this day they weren't working very hard. The people would look like they were pulled together into groups by some sort of thing that no one would be able to see in the picture. They'd sort of look like they were orbiting a nothingness.

And of course, only a few people would ever see the color prints. I'm sure before mass production, they will become black and white. They will all look more dignified in black and white.

CHAPTER 73

I squish down into my chair and envy everyone in the bathroom, the ones in the stalls for their quick thinking and the ones not in the stalls for their absence of shame. All I'd really like to do right now is masturbate but instead I'm peeling a Twinkie off its little white cardboard serving tray. It leaves a sugary ghost of tan. My other hand, the one not squeezing the Twinkie's spongy body, rests on my thigh, dangerously close to my crotch that I tell myself I can only rub one or twice and be happy the way any junkie tells themselves that just a dab will do. But my hand doesn't move because I'm more afraid of shame than death, and though I know no one will come near me and I have enough privacy here in the open with my cube's apparent halo or invisible moat, I thought the same thing about my bedroom in an empty house with my mother having just left for the store, and I don't need again for someone to forget her purse and walk in at the point of pleasure that is close enough to climax that an unimagined face with wide eyes and a screaming mouth can't get you to stop.

CHAPTER 74

I steady myself to the floor, back pressed firmly, legs straight out and together, arms at sides, eyes closed. I picture in my mind how I must look lying in the empty cube next to mine. And the image that is in my mind convinces me that I am in a cult of some kind, lying so neatly, deadly looking. And my mind expands the vision by letting the floor drop down and widen the bird's eye, showing images of everyone else laying also cult-like in their cubes, or at least every cube is filled with a body except for the one I call my cube. I'm fairly sure that everyone must be in a cult of some kind and I'm more sure that I am. As the building drops further down and my mind travels farther up but without the interference of the structure above that would now, if in reality, be between my mind and all these bodies, the bodies become more dot-like inside the pods looking like fish eggs. This, the idea of being only a fish egg, is more peaceful than the belief that I'm in a cult, but the idea of being in a cult doesn't upset me much and is even a little calming.

Suddenly, as if I had blinked in my mind, I am back to a little farther than a tall folding ladder away from my body that lies still in the cube. I can only see a few other cubes but in them are still people lying prone. I want two of them to get up and start talking to each other but all that I can do with them is the hideous looking half sit-up I would do when trying to get off the living room floor when the remote isn't within a snow angel's arm swing away.

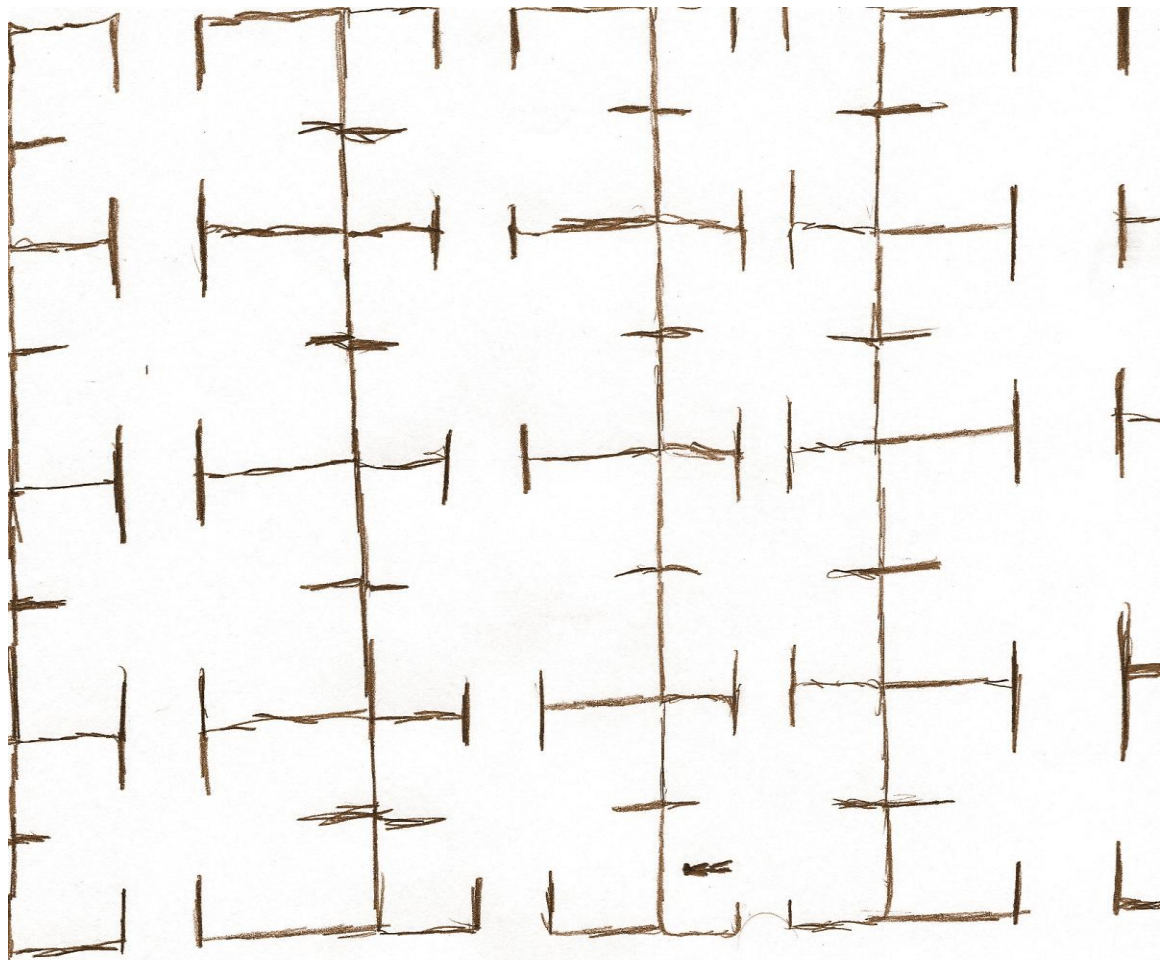


Figure 11: Map

CHAPTER 75

It was a little while ago when I realized that I would live for all eternity and sadly at about that moment, I can't remember if it was before or after, that I realized that eternity wasn't as long as I had always thought.

CHAPTER 76

I try to remember if I have ever seen the stairs. I know I have never seen the actual stairs but the door that would have had a two-toned plastic rectangle on it with one of the tones shaping out "STAIRS." I think about the memory of seeing such a door. But even if I can find the memory, or the door, there is no guarantee of stairs behind it.

CHAPTER 77

I can't help thinking that if only I could sing and scream at the same time, sort of like an 80's hair-band front-man, that that sort of action might be beneficial and pleasant in the way that so many valuable things are temporary and pleasant and not beneficial. But there is no way I would ever sing, having sung before, and knowing from the look of my teacher who already pitied me that she was discovering a hidden vault of pity.

I like to think I'm tone-deaf and not that I just lack that thing inside that lets you make a beautiful thing. Because it's nice to say to myself that if I had the time, even if that time was eighty years interrupted only by my body, I could create something beautiful. But I'm not totally sure what tone-deaf is. I know that my voice is, when played back from a recording, not at all like the one I hear through the inside of my head when I speak. Of course, I also never believe it's me in photographs, and I'm scared of mirrors.

CHAPTER 78

I don't know whether or not to file into the stairs' door with a good portion of the office employment. I think it would be nice to change the scenery but don't think it would be any more pleasant. Part of me wants to go though, just wanting to embrace the cramped togetherness.

CHAPTER 79

I regret that I haven't seen more black and white movies. I've thought for years that viewing more of them could make me more human in the way that kids become this human thing by watching others. I'd read this idea, about the way that kids become more like everyone that had preceded them, in a book having to do with psychology.

CHAPTER 80

I veneer my face to match everyone else's but I can't cry and scream like the more animated.

CHAPTER 81

I peek to my side and see a blonde lady with her hands over her mouth and nose.

“She is going to die,” I think and straighten my head and go back to my cube.

CHAPTER 82

I am closer to something big than I have ever been before, which isn't surprising, as big things have that force of pulling things nearer. I don't know much of this big thing that I'm getting closer to but that it must be awfully quiet because I don't hear much right now. Unless, of course, it is very loud, louder than everything else, but it's been always drawing nearer slowly so that it has eased into me like the temperature on a bath lowering so slowly it isn't until I notice that all the bubbles are gone that I recognize an uncomfortability in the tub.

CHAPTER 83

Maybe the building is shrinking or the people swelling. There is much less space between me and everyone else. And they are all so loud and distinguishable. I'm starting to pity them, I think, if pity is the term for actually being happy with being trapped in your own body and not someone else's. I know I can't talk to any of them, that much hasn't changed, but if I had crayons, I could draw them pictures. But of course I have no crayons. These people seem far less judgmental now and might let slip past them the fact that I am not an adequate artist or renderer. They might just be happy with the intrusion into their panic and might even forget the panic if just for a moment. Even if this distraction from panic is more from the awkwardness of an adult being presented with a stick figure drawing by a balding man that isn't yet old enough to be thought of as cute in his senility.

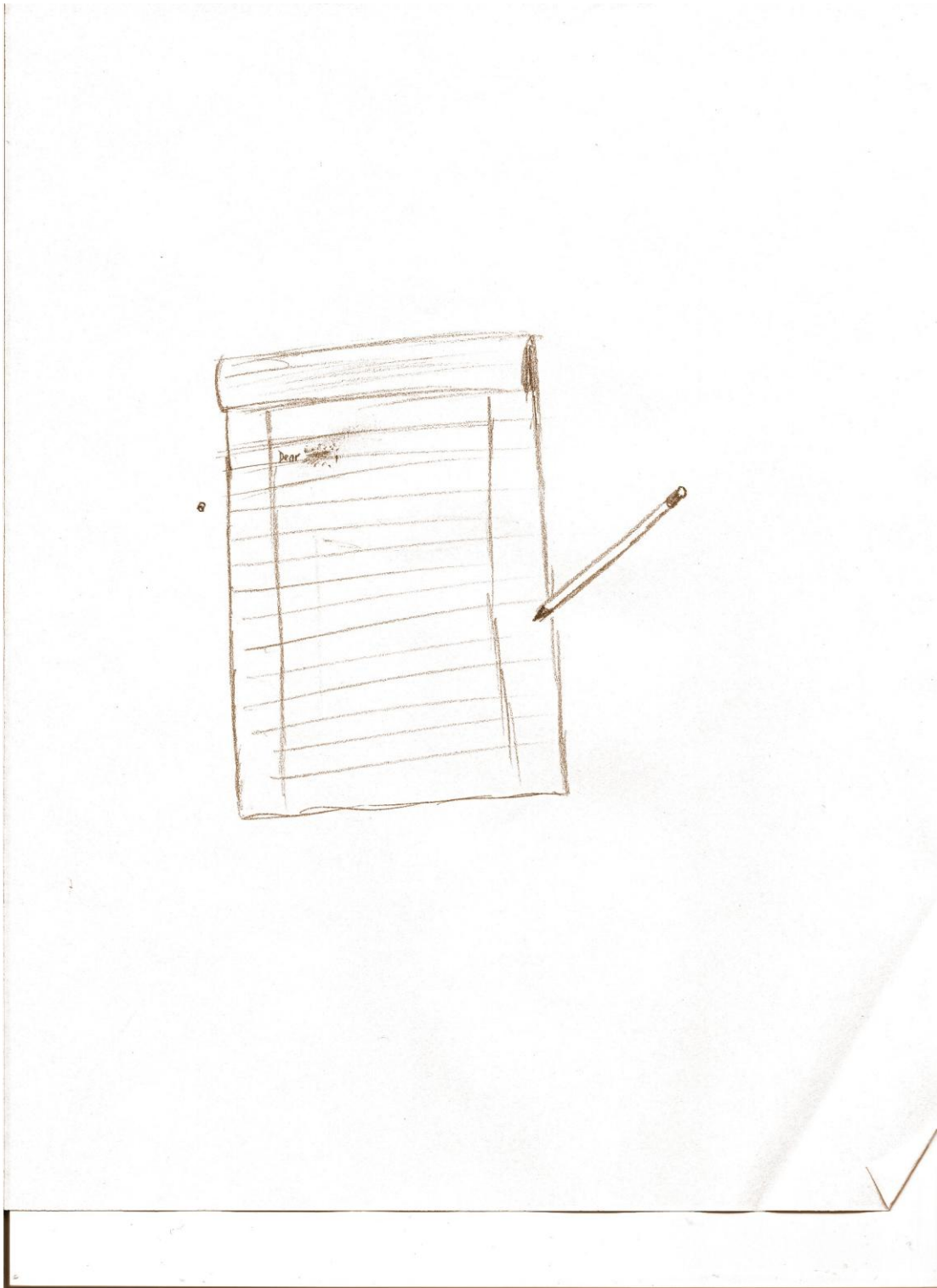


Figure 12: Paper

CHAPTER 84

I look over at Sara, who I don't think uses an 'h' at the end of her name, and I think to myself, "she is going to die." And she is going to die. She has her hands over her eyes. If she had more hands, would she cover her ears and mouth too like the evil monkeys, the ones that don't want to see or hear or speak?

CHAPTER 85

Sara's dress will dance in the up flow of its terminal velocity, slower than her terminal velocity. The dress will no longer be a body accessory or self-accessory. I don't know what it is exactly, but it really looks like her, the red and white waving goodbye. The material might not lift high. Maybe barely showing her knees.

CHAPTER 86

One time Sara told me, while we were riding in the elevator together alone, “I sort of envy you.” I was still looking for the sarcasm when the bell rung and the doors let her out. I followed, in that I walked out of the elevator after her, but I wasn’t stepping behind her all the way down the hall. When she turned left, I turned right, away from my desk, and read a sort of plaque that annually honored people that held claims to being charitable. “Philanthropists” they were called. “Philanthropist of the Year.” It was attached to the wall with a security beyond my strength.