

12-2022

Monsters & Men

Christopher Ernest Garcia
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garcia, Christopher Ernest, "Monsters & Men" (2022). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1139.
<https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd/1139>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

MONSTERS & MEN

A Thesis

by

CHRISTOPHER ERNEST GARCIA

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major Subject: Creative Writing

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

December 2022

MONSTERS & MEN

A Thesis
by
CHRISTOPHER ERNEST GARCIA

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Jean Braithwaite
Chair of Committee

Dr. Emmy Perez
Committee Member

Dr. Paul Valadez
Committee Member

December 2022

Copyright 2022 Christopher Ernest Garcia
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Garcia, Christopher Ernest. Of Monsters and Men. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), December, 2022, 111 pp, references, 12 titles.

Monsters & Men is a collection of poetry and illustrations that explores the complex emotions associated with masculinity, grief, and personal development. I achieve this by heavily reflecting on my relationship with my late father and using this medium as an outlet to express my trauma in a healthy manner. How we perceive ourselves as men, and what is possible, is not reflected enough in society and I aim to be a proponent in stimulating the conversation revolving around men's mental health. Men and the patriarchy impose themselves on others to the point where we need to address the unethical inequalities that plague the world. Not only do men retain power over minority groups like women, the LGBT+ community, but also against other men themselves. We struggle to accept that there are many forms of masculinity and ideas of what a man can be, and it's time to evolve past archaic gender norms. As much as we are the problem, we can be part of the solution to move forward in unity and respect.

I go on to explore how processing grief of my father's passing can be a healthy aspect for me to grow from in order to help others do the same. Death itself is an enormous topic that has many aspects to it for many different cultures. Our ideas of death all differ, and we all have different assumptions of what takes place after our time has come. I indulge in these thoughts to express fears, hopes, and cultural representations.

DEDICATION

The completion of my masters' studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My mother, Ramona Cervantes, my father, Dr. Chris T. Garcia, my sister, Nicole Garcia, and my brother, Jason Garcia, wholeheartedly inspired, motivated and supported me to accomplish this degree. Thank you for your love and patience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Jean Braithwaite for her initial interest and enthusiasm with my growth and thesis work. From personal feedback, enrollment in her courses that directly correlate with poetry, graphic literature, and nonfiction work, as well as providing several opportunities to present my work to peers and underclassmen. Her guidance will forever be appreciated. I also am grateful for my other committee members: Dr. Emmy Perez, and Dr. Paul Valadez. Dr. Perez's expertise on poetry and prose have expanded my literary versatility, and Dr. Valadez has helped push my illustration work to greater heights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER I. CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Audience, Influences and Creative Process.....	4
REFERENCES.....	16
APPENDIX.....	17
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	111

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I'd like my work to be engaging for anyone willing to heed my message. As much as I'd like to selfishly use my project as a means for me to healthily cope with my own traumas and emotions, I would like to try to provide a gentle push to my audience to be open and welcome the idea of becoming more in touch with healthy coping techniques through some medium of expression. I've always wanted to help people with my life, and that may stem from my admiration of superheroes, or the other artists whose music and works of art helped give me strength in my time of need. Another contributing factor is that my father was a doctor, so I have some innate need to try and provide some semblance of lifesaving contributions to the world. Whatever the case, I'd like to position myself in a place in this world that gives me the power to help individuals in one-on-one scenarios, from presentations/performances, to helping on a global scale with my works helping me accomplish that goal.

I am a Chicano man. I approach my work with this perspective in mind. Masculinity in our culture is important. It is something that entangles itself with a pressure from the RGV/Mexican American community to be overtly masculine: macho. Unless you're in football, or work with your hands, and sleep with a lot of women, there is a stigma against you as a man if you embrace any perceived form of femininity. There are instances when someone overtly homophobic (something quite prevalent among the "masculine" in the valley) are too insecure to admit they may be a part of the LGBTQ+ community themselves. That's not to shame them, but

to bring to light that the stigma against femininity and homosexuality/trans men that many of them feel forced to keep their true selves a secret. This places an incredible pressure and burden on many that fear discrimination for embracing their femininity, sexuality, or gender identity. I have experienced this discrimination myself, even before I decided to lean into my femininity, I would be bullied for the colorful clothes I'd wear, and even the silly notion that growing my hair out made me look like a girl/gay. As I get older, the more I reject the stigma and embrace whoever I decide to be. It is liberating and has brought me great peace. I would love to be a catalyst for other young men, whether heterosexual, homosexual, trans, and anywhere on the spectrum, that there is nothing wrong with embracing who we are as individuals, because we all contain both feminine and masculine energies or attributes that compose our being. Learning about these qualities, and how they affect us, and how to interpret them makes a great difference in living a healthy, happy life.

This component also contributes to the theme of mental health, and its state in our modern world. I'd argue that the need for mental health improvement for everyone, especially in the United States, is quite a prominent issue that branches into many areas of our society. I believe there is several reasons that tensions seem to be so high in our Nation, and it reflects in the statistics depicting depression and anxiety on the rise. A large factor has to do with the rhetoric of our former president Trump, and how xenophobia is quite relevant in the mainstream media. Propaganda delivered by bigots and the corrupt warps the sensitive minds of their viewers, and psychology suggests it has detrimental effects on our citizens. Not to mention the misinformation and fear mongering delivered during the pandemic. If that's not enough, the stigma against mental health legitimacy is astonishing, especially against men. Men are more likely to end up homeless, or even commit suicide. One heartbreaking example is veterans who

statistically account for both the homeless and the suicidal, “Suicide rates following separation ranged from 34.8 per 100,000, for Veterans who separated in 2010, to 47.8 per 100,000 for Veterans who separated in 2019.” (mentalhealth.va.gov) They are trained to ignore emotions and instilled with pride of their country, but some are left unattended once they come home after being traumatized and sometimes injured from battle, “Mental illness has strong links to suicide among veterans. While alcohol and drug abuse accounts for higher suicide risk, other co-occurring mental disorders are often associated between substance abuse and suicide. The more common mental disorders among veterans are PTSD and depression.” (americanaddictioncenters.org) Those too proud/afraid to seek help usually take their life, and or the help provided is not sufficient to rectify the atrocities they endured.

Same could be said about the LGBTQ+ community. Those of whom that face discrimination are sometimes disowned by their own family, “Every year thousands of minors are forced into homelessness by their families because of their sexual orientation.² While the exact number of runaways and homeless youth in the United States each year is unknown,³ various sources estimate that at any given time, between 500,000 and 2.8 million youth are homeless. ⁴ Of those youth, between 20% and 40% identify as LGBT.” (repository.law) Suicide, again, takes thousands of lives within the community each year, “The Trevor Project’s 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.” (thetrevorproject.org) I feel there is far too many instances of individuals casting judgement on those they do not understand. Perhaps with mental health services, and more people in therapy, there will be a greater chance of people being more accepting of themselves and others; you know, empathy. I believe everyone can benefit from these services,

and perhaps there will be less shootings and sexual assault crimes committed because of it. If you apply enough pressure to someone, even if they lack a mental condition, they are likely to crack, and people do crazy things when they reach their breaking point. My work touches on the subject of suicide and self-harm to bring to light the mental health issues a spectrum of people contemplate. My on page 84 of this document are examples of this discussion. The stigma we face to be strong, heterosexual, and masculine in every manner, is unrealistic. It is ignorant to believe it is the only way to live life.

Audience, Influences and Creative Process

I'd like for mainstream poetry enthusiasts to embrace my work, as well as for university level poets/artists to hold it with some degree of respect for what I am trying to accomplish. I've always stressed the importance of my work being digestible to the public, but I also want it to have a level of challenge that encourages critical thinking and depth to it. I'd like to think I'm being minimalistic with my approach, yet I do so with the old saying in mind, "less is more." My experience so far with the general public has been that my work is received warmly with open minds. Surely, not everyone stops and takes the time to read each print at my table during art shows, but those that do, and those that have bought one, all discussed with me their excitement for the completion of my book, and how they respect what I am trying to accomplish. For me, if one person aside from myself benefits from my work, I am grateful.

There is a balancing act that must be observed when creating the lines that accompany my illustrations. It can't be too rhythmic, it must be subtle with the rhymes, and at times being too longwinded and abstract can also hurt the piece. I also made the initial mistake of writing the poetry/prose separately from the illustrations, then later attempting to merely pair them up with

what picture I felt suited the poem best. I had originally done this to prep for local art shows to preview my work to local audiences. My strongest pieces were the ones I took the time to reflect upon and write something that brought immediate inspiration from the illustrations themselves. For example, refer to page 78 of this document. This was an early piece that I only wrote one draft for, which stuck, and made it all the way to this submission of this thesis. As I work and learn more about art and poetry, I get ideas to expand and try new things, which makes me excited about the prospects of the project in its entirety. I feel more competent in my current writing, but I am aware of my room for growth. These art showings have also been incredibly helpful in understanding how my work initially appeals to different audiences. The shows are “DIY” (do it yourself) ran shows that are pieced together by the music, poetry and art community. I also attended shows that were hosted by cities in the Rio Grande Valley including: McAllen, Edinburg, and Harlingen. This allowed me to display early drafts of my work to a variety of people. I noticed I had the strongest response to my work by women and members of the LGBTQ+ community. This makes sense considering the marginalization these groups of people face, along with the themes my work addresses.

These art showings further promoted my passion for displaying my work and provided me with the idea of having a gallery viewing of my favorite pieces when this project has finally reached publication. I started my showings with 4x6” and 11x17” prints, but along the way in graduate school, I pivoted the art direction of my work, as well as the formatting of the illustrations. All my illustrations begin their life on my iPad Pro using the Procreate application. I originally formatted my work in 11x17” with a pixel density of 300. This DPI is the standard for printing, but I realized I would be foolish not to increase the DPI to 600 to insure if I need to reformat the sizing of my work for future publication that it will retain more of its fidelity. 300 is

too low, even at such a large size of 11x17, the aspect ratio is simply not ideal for standard book printing. This realization led me to change the size/aspect ratio to 8x10” with the previously stated 600 DPI. This provided me with a nice balance of size and fidelity, while also allowing me the opportunity to begin printing my work at home on a personal printer.

When I think of my work in a final form, and how I intend to celebrate an official “book release,” I would love to have a gallery viewing of my one hundred favorite pieces printed in a larger 20x30 format for the occasion. Each piece will be framed and ideally be hung up through a hallway allowing attendees to follow each one through like a mini synopsis of my collection. If there is no such hallway, I would create a synthetic one using sheets of wood to create dividers within a space that would allow me to hang my work as well. I envision this hallway of work leading to the back patio of the space where I will have a booth with my books, ready to sign and greet attendees. This back patio will also house a stage for me and invited poets to read from our work during the reception between six and ten p.m. After the reception I would invite my favorite local bands and artists to perform for those who wish to stick around and celebrate with me. This is a nod to my start as a musician, artist and poet within the community, as well to celebrate the other artists that supported me along the way.

The book itself I picture around 200 pages with each page being 8x10” or smaller. I don’t imagine wanting a very large book, but since it is my first book, I would respect the opinion of the publisher or the self-publishing format template. I currently have the illustrations and poems on their own page within this thesis but being able to play with two open pages in a book opens different possibilities. I like the idea of filling one page with an illustration, and the other with the poetry/prose. I also like the idea for filling both pages with an ongoing illustration that works with the poetry in a more integral manner. The nice thing about digital artwork is that I can

change the work to whatever the formatting needs to be or has the potential to be. As for distribution, I would appreciate finding a publisher that represents the philosophies I believe in. Perhaps one that is an LGBT ally along with sustainable printing practices to ensure I am not contributing in a negative way to the environment. I am aware that there are some publishers that plant a tree for each book sold, so that would be ideal. Digital copies would be nice as well.

In terms of inspiration for the overall project, it goes back to an idea I had in high school. I would use drawing as an outlet when I felt I couldn't express myself. There is a particular drawing I made that moved me to add a poem to it. It felt good to bring a voice to something that embodied emotion and sparked the motivation to create a book out of poetry and illustrations. This project fell by the wayside while I finished school, started my undergrad, and focused on becoming a vocalist for a hardcore band. It wasn't until after I graduated from my undergrad and immediately lost my father that I realized I needed a healthy outlet to explore the mixture of emotions I was engaged in. It was around this time I was recommended *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur. She is the biggest influence I've had to this project, along with inspiring another avenue for me to preview my artwork through "Instapoetry." Instapoetry is when you take poetry and post it as a picture on Instagram. Popularized by Rupi Kaur, which included delicate illustrations within the pictures accompanying the poetry. I have followed Rupi's example and previewed some of my work through Instagram, where I have garnered my largest audience for my work. Some of which have followed me based on our interaction with art shows. My followers have given me helpful feedback and encouragement that has made my consistency much more manageable. I am incredibly grateful to know there are people already eager to engage with my finished work.

As for Rupi Kaur's work, it is simple to say the least, but her humble tone and the awareness she brought to me about the feminine spectrum was an eye-opener. I already held women to a high regard, being as how I was raised mostly by strong women, in a home with an often-toxic father, but I also learned more intimate details and insights about women I never truly took the time to reflect upon, because of her work. I also must credit my girlfriend for convincing me to read her work. It meant a lot to her and how she's handled her trauma, so that is another reason I am inclined to appreciate Rupi Kaur. I am inspired to replicate the effect her book had on me, but through the masculine, male perspective, and what hurdles we as men deal with in our society. I, however, would like to take that idea to the next level compared to Rupi. I want to have my illustrations be equally as powerful as my poetry/prose. I want each to strike an emotional response with my readers on their own, so when combined it will make it more effective. Rupi Kaur leans on having silhouette pieces that are dainty and feminine. There's lots of negative space and a good flow to them that provides the piece with breathability. I wish for my pieces to be heavy and aggressive in nature to reflect the morose and bottled-up state of men.

I have also taken direct influence from *Milk and Honey* in terms of formatting my poetry. I have learned to appreciate what contemporary poets are doing, and so I have applied several techniques that Rupi Kaur employs. For starters, I have chosen a strong piece as a preface to the first section of my book. This piece is located on page 21 of this document. I believe this piece is successful in setting the tone for the overall collection, as well as succeeds in being a powerful standalone piece. The image itself incorporates a red hand with what can be depicted as two eyes, one shut on the left. There are also two faces that seem to be melded together, one with a mustache, and the other with a goatee. The poem suggests these faces represent the father and son, and the pig snout touches on the idea of monsters. Rupi Kaur includes a second poem as part

of her preface that helps establish that the book helped her in her healing. I haven't decided whether I'd like more than one piece for my own preface. I also decided to follow her example in terms of how few capitalizations I make within each poem, as well as very selective punctuation. I studied *Milk and Honey* to get a good idea of the ratio she used for how many of her pieces are illustrated. I set out to do every page illustrated, but I found it is an unrealistic goal with how many pages I intend to create. I also respect that spacing out the illustrations may improve the impact they have overall.

Exclusively reflecting on my views of poetry, Henry David Thoreau is number one in terms of influences based on his philosophies. I was exposed to his work in high school, and he made a major impact on me in terms of how powerful a medium poetry can be. On top of being associated with transcendentalists, he believed mankind is starving for a reconnection with mother nature. How the spirit of nature confirms our purpose in this world and provides a much-needed serenity in an ever-moving society, "Ultimately, Thoreau's philosophies critically examined institutions and ideals normalized by his society. By spending time in nature, Thoreau was able to reflect on these systems. He endeavored to think for himself instead of mindlessly following the trends of capitalism. Furthermore, his philosophies also criticized the formal institutions of his society. His dissent against the church and the government demonstrates how Thoreau poked holes in organizations very few dared to question." (walden.org)

Early in his career he was known to promote the idea that poetry was the most powerful form of writing. In his book *Civil Disobedience*, he sprinkles poetry throughout the work to further emphasize his key points. This was the biggest push for me to start writing poetry when I was in high school, and it was my love of music that encouraged me to combine both through hip hop/rap metal. Therefore, I chose poetry as the medium to combine with my illustrations.

Moving on to the philosophies of William Blake, he believed that there is nothing wrong with poetry that is digestible, “Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular.” (poets.org) It is somewhat pretentious to sequentially arrange words to a degree that makes them almost incomprehensible for the average reader. He also believed that it is the duty of the educated and privileged nobles to look after the flock of less fortunate and less educated. He believed they should be educated, looked after, and protected from those that wish to take advantage of them. He exemplified this in his work openly challenging the throne and treatment of American colonies. I share this philosophy with him, because I believe our society is established in a way that takes advantage of those who are simply ignorant and afraid, playing on their insecurities to profit and gain power from. This contributes to the *MEN* section of my collection, as it serves as a principle that makes a truly noble man noble. I reflect these ideas on document pages 68 and 72 of this document. I believe we need to redefine what a good man truly is. I believe a part of that is allowing others to come their own conclusion about that for themselves. The primary distinction is not harming others with our decisions on what makes a man. People wish for freedom to be themselves, but it is the coward that wishes to revoke those freedoms for others.

Just like with my lyrics for songs, I do my best to challenge the listener to think a little deeper about what I am trying to convey, while still providing instances where I am being more liberally concrete with my writing. I will try to strike that balance while attempting to educate them. Music has played a vital role in my writing. In high school, I believed music was the purest form of art, and placed a heavy importance on its effect on my mental stability and growth. It helped me push through days when I felt I was at my lowest. I appreciated that music,

especially rap, was the biggest genre of music. Rap is basically poetry, so that's where my love for poetry grew. Songwriting is a completely different game, but there are many valuable lessons to take from it. I'd also appreciate being able to credit lyricists/vocalists like Zack De La Rocha from the rock band *Rage Against the Machine*. His poetic lyrics also bring awareness to how a lot of our issues in society stem from propaganda, and consumerism/capitalistic culture that preys on human psychology, allowing those on top to dictate how history is written, and how the lower class is usually discriminated against/taken advantage of. Same could be said about Serj Tankian, Armenian American lead singer for the band *System Of A Down*. He and his band used their music to bring awareness and demand for the acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide, which some governments still refuse to do. I find these activist musicians highly inspirational. Grunge era artists as well, like Chris Cornell, and Kurt Cobain, and how their music touched on the emotional state of the youth at their time, and how revolutionary their lyrical style is to reflect these feelings of dishevelment. Something about artistry like music and art allow men to express themselves, yet there is still an underlying issue that is prevalent presently, and that's mental illness. Depression has taken multiple artists I revere through suicide, and it emphasizes my point that we must take action to address the chaos within ourselves as men. We are as much the problem, as I'd like to believe, we can become part of the solution. I refer to these artists along with my father on documents page 56 of this document. It's important to acknowledge that it's not just a coincidence that these artists, and men, took their lives.

Charles Bukowski is another largely influential poet that helped me find my voice in poetry. I was recommended his work by my best friend, Kevin Faraji, and I couldn't put down his book *Love is a Dog from Hell*. I had yet to encounter poetry that matched my angst and pessimism the way Bukowski does it. He crafts characters and stories within such small pieces

that have such gravitas to them. My favorite piece is *how to be a great writer*. He has a couple stanzas that really hit home with me and how I confine myself in isolation to write, “And remember the old dogs, who fought so well: Hemingway, Celine, Dostoevsky, Hamsun. If you think they didn’t go crazy, in tiny rooms, just like you’re doing now, Without women, without food, without hope, Then you’re not ready...” That dance with madness is the beauty and horror of being an artist and writer. It’s no wonder I connect so deeply with tortured spirits.

Monsters are a fascinating subject to me because they can be seen as something to be fearful of, but they are also considerably misunderstood. Shrek is a prime example of this idea. I would like to take the time to further develop more entries in my collection down the line that incorporate this idea in later sections of my book. I aim to set the pace of the collection with surface level examples of what societal monsters are perceived as: people and ideas that create destruction that’s painful and sometimes fatal. The illustrations will reflect the morose and aggressive nature that accompanies this version of monsters. In the latter sections we will continue to see self-portraits and characters perceived with consistent traits and features like heavy wrinkles, pig snouts, elf ears, piercings, etc. It’s a style I have adopted overtime because I believe it best elicits the sorrowful and tired traits I aim to be perceived. I find pig snouts to be ideal for the symbolism they carry. Pigs are commonly dirty, associated with greed, gluttony and capitalism, but as well as authoritative figures that are linked with brutality like the police. Not only these negative attributes, but pigs are also highly intelligent, and have been known to potentially be domesticated as quality pets in a household. This intelligence, paired with negative associations, perfectly describes man. A complex creature that is capable of not only being compassionate, working in unity for a positive future, but are also completely capable of raining down destruction, embracing selfish tendencies that could doom our world. This sounds

hyperbolic but is factual. If mankind didn't insist on engaging in war and capitalism, we would not be contributing to global pollution, famine, and deadly bombings and the extinction of age-old species. This quote from BBC helps put this in perspective how we all contribute to this fact, "For every bit of this material we use, there is a growing web of global actions that is slowly stripping human's emotional health, depleting Earth's resources and degrading our planet's habitats." (BBC.com)

The idea of monsters led me to indulge in the novel *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* which is a graphic novel written by Emil Ferris. I took the idea to create self portraits of monsters to represent men, and especially myself. This narrative is powerful when Ferris does this. Their book is an outstanding work of art that I simply aspire to. They take classic, well known monsters, like Frankenstein, werewolves, and vampires, and portray them as modern characters. This is similar to what I aim to do, but I have crafted my own forms of monsters that I have developed over a decade of drawing.

J.R.R. Tolkien is a great influence as well. My father introduced me to the movies when I was a kid. It has become something sentimental to me and has instilled a love of fantasy for me. I like his orcs and fantastic heroes and warriors. The Lord of the Rings taught me that even those as small as Hobbits can have a large positive impact on the world. The characters and design of the world in the movies contributed to my use of elf ears and orc-like qualities in my illustrations. Outside of the monster's element, I also appreciate the grandeur of iconic warriors on great quests to save the world. This is another theme I touch on in the *Men* section of my collection. It is what we dream of becoming, warriors of legend. Men that leave the world better than when we entered it. I reference this idea on page (80).

Japan, almost in its entirety, has had an incredible impression on my work for years. Influences for me stemming from their rich, fine art history, architecture, fashion, martial arts, manga/anime, video games, as well as warrior philosophies like Bushido, the way of the samurai. Bushido reflects a moral code, much like knights have, to be true and just. This attributes to the warrior element of my work like on page (69). Bushido has a large role in themes within many Japanese narrative mediums. Manga is one of them. Manga work has deeply influenced the linework for my illustrations as well. I think the most critical work I've read to have this impact is the series *Berserk* by Kentaro Miura. This series is a dark fantasy that depicts a lone swordsman that was born into war, nurtured by mercenaries, only to be betrayed and sacrificed to devils. He goes on to fight back, all while attempting to save his love interest and defeat his sole betrayer. The series is iconic for its brutal narrative and immensely detailed linework. Kentaro created something that has a growing cult following including myself. The main character, Guts, has such a tragic and traumatic life, he has become another prime example of what someone like me looks up to. Seeing characters that endure genuine trauma and grow to become a beacon of hope is awe-inspiring. Another factor I've taken from the manga community is the use of Copic Markers, which are alcohol-based brush markers. I have been using these to play with my color theory skills, and I'm considering revisit my current rendition of illustrations and replacing them with Copic colored illustrations. Manga artists use these markers because they have the capability of blending with one another, as well as being able to bring sketches to life in color rather quickly. These markers were created in Japan and have since spread to other countries and forms of business and art industries.

The last major references I make in my work is the seven Satanic tenets references are embedded in the last section of my book. These are found on pages: 95, 98, 101, 103, 105, 107,

109. (thesatanictemple.com) I believe these tenets reflect quality philosophies that would be beneficial to progress of mankind. I personally do not subscribe to any organized religion or institution, and that is exactly why I believe these have a rational approach to belief. The Satanic Temple believes in the separation of church and state, as well as the funding of science. They approach all subjects from a rational, non-violent perspective. The pursuit of factually based truth is an honorable pursuit. Radical evangelicals and far-right conservatives have made it their mission to push policies that reflect misinterpreted Bible verses. These policies hurt not only women, the LGBT+ community, and our voting rights, but our rights to practice freedom of religion. This is reflected in this *Time* article, “In its most extreme form it legitimizes the type of violence we saw on Jan. 6 and the recent flood of voting restrictions. Violence and legislation not in service of democracy, but instead for fundamentally *anti*-democratic goals.” (Time.com) Trump’s cult following has proven the necessity of entities like the Satanic Temple and its guidelines. If we allow Christian nationalism to prevail, that’s a bleak future for the nation, and globally since the U.S. is a superpower.

REFERENCES

- “Could Humans Really Destroy All Life on Earth?” *BBC Future*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210520-could-humans-really-destroy-all-life-on-earth>.
- “Could Humans Really Destroy All Life on Earth?” *BBC Future*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210520-could-humans-really-destroy-all-life-on-earth>.
- “Facts about LGBTQ Youth Suicide.” *The Trevor Project*, 25 Oct. 2022, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>.
- Ferris, Emil. *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*. Fantagraphics Books, 2017.
- Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality*. <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=ijlse>.
- Kaur, Rup. *Milk and Honey*. Simon & Schuster UK, 2018.
- “Suicide among Veterans - Why Are Veterans at a Higher Risk of Suicide?” *American Addiction Centers*, 15 Sept. 2022, <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/veterans/suicide-among-veterans>.
- “Thoreau as a Philosopher.” *The Walden Woods Project*, <https://www.walden.org/what-we-do/library/thoreau/philosophy/>.
- Tst. “There Are Seven Fundamental Tenets.” *TST*, <https://thesatanictemple.com/blogs/the-satanic-temple-tenets/there-are-seven-fundamental-tenets>.
- “Va.gov: Veterans Affairs.” *Veteran Suicide Data and Reporting*, 14 Sept. 2018, https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide_prevention/data.asp.
- Whitehead, Andrew, et al. “The Growing Threat of Christian Nationalism in the U.S.” *Time*, 27 May 2021, <https://time.com/6052051/anti-democratic-threat-christian-nationalism/>.
- “William Blake.” *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, <https://poets.org/poet/william-blake>.

APPENDIX

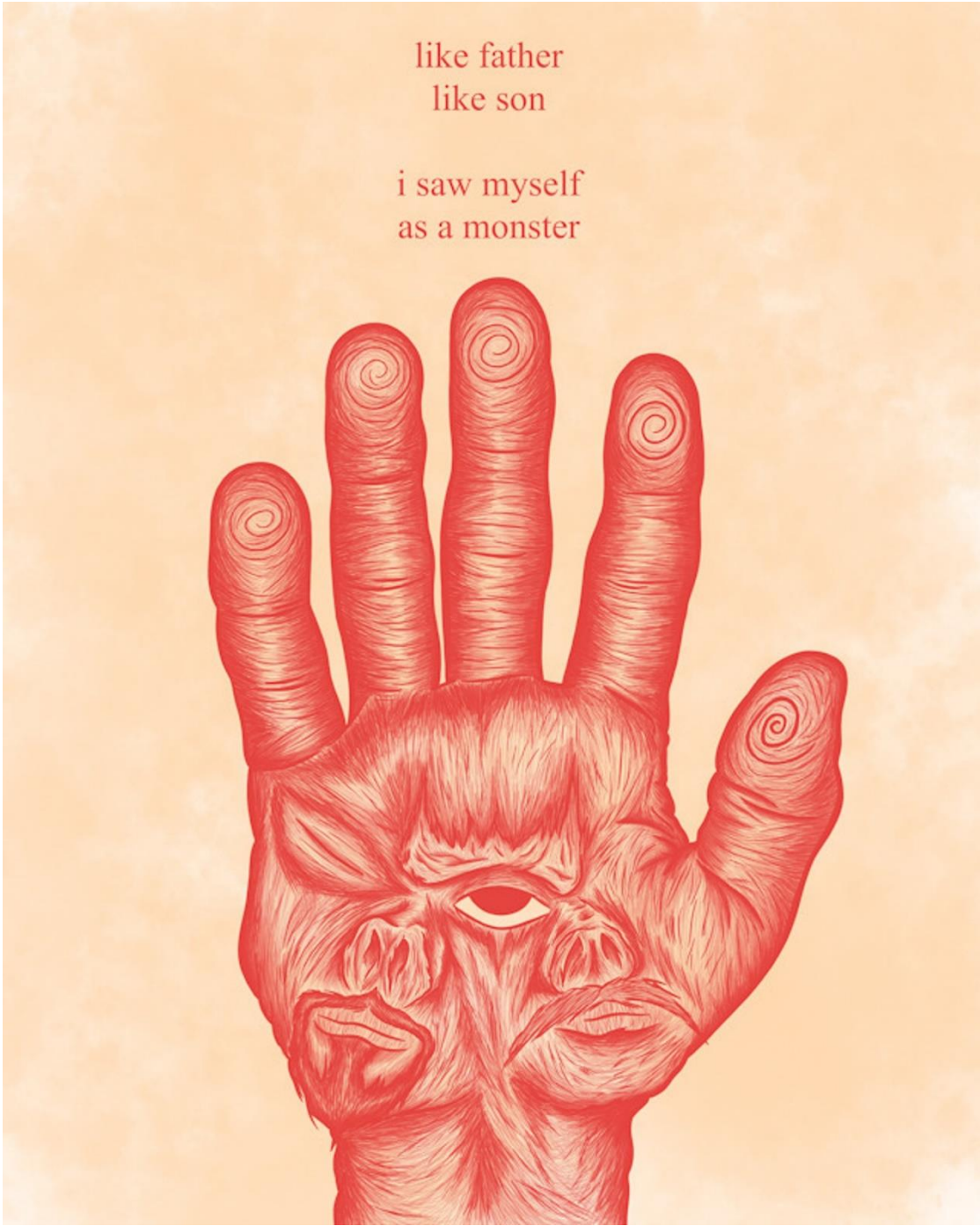
MONSTERS & MEN

MONSTERS & MEN



like father
like son

i saw myself
as a monster



CONTENTS

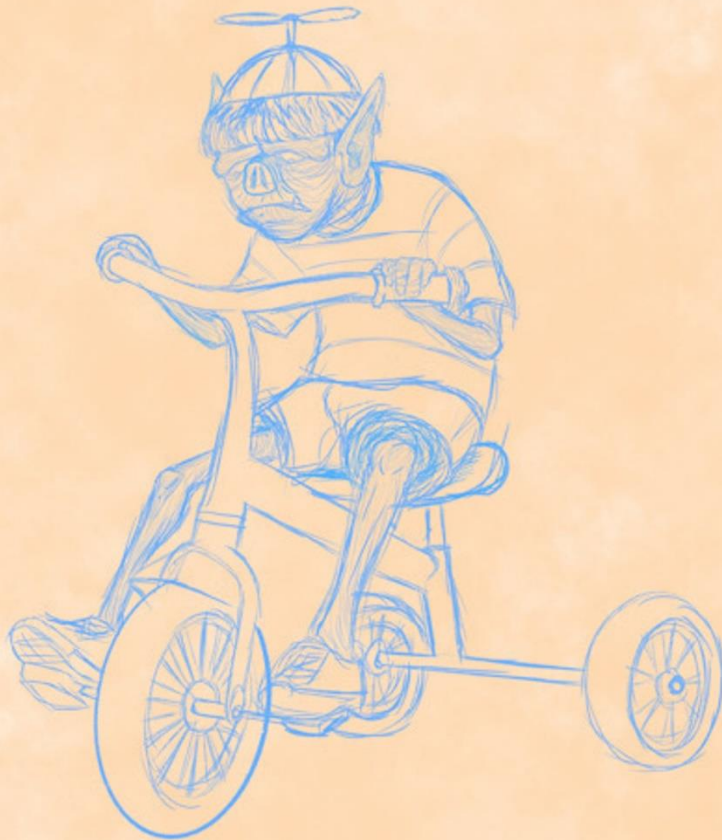
1. MONSTERS
2. MEN
3. WHERE WE GO
4. WHAT SAVES US

MONSTERS

*there's no way he's my son
he's a bastard
just look at him*

*what are you talking about?
he looks just like you*

-family bike ride 1999



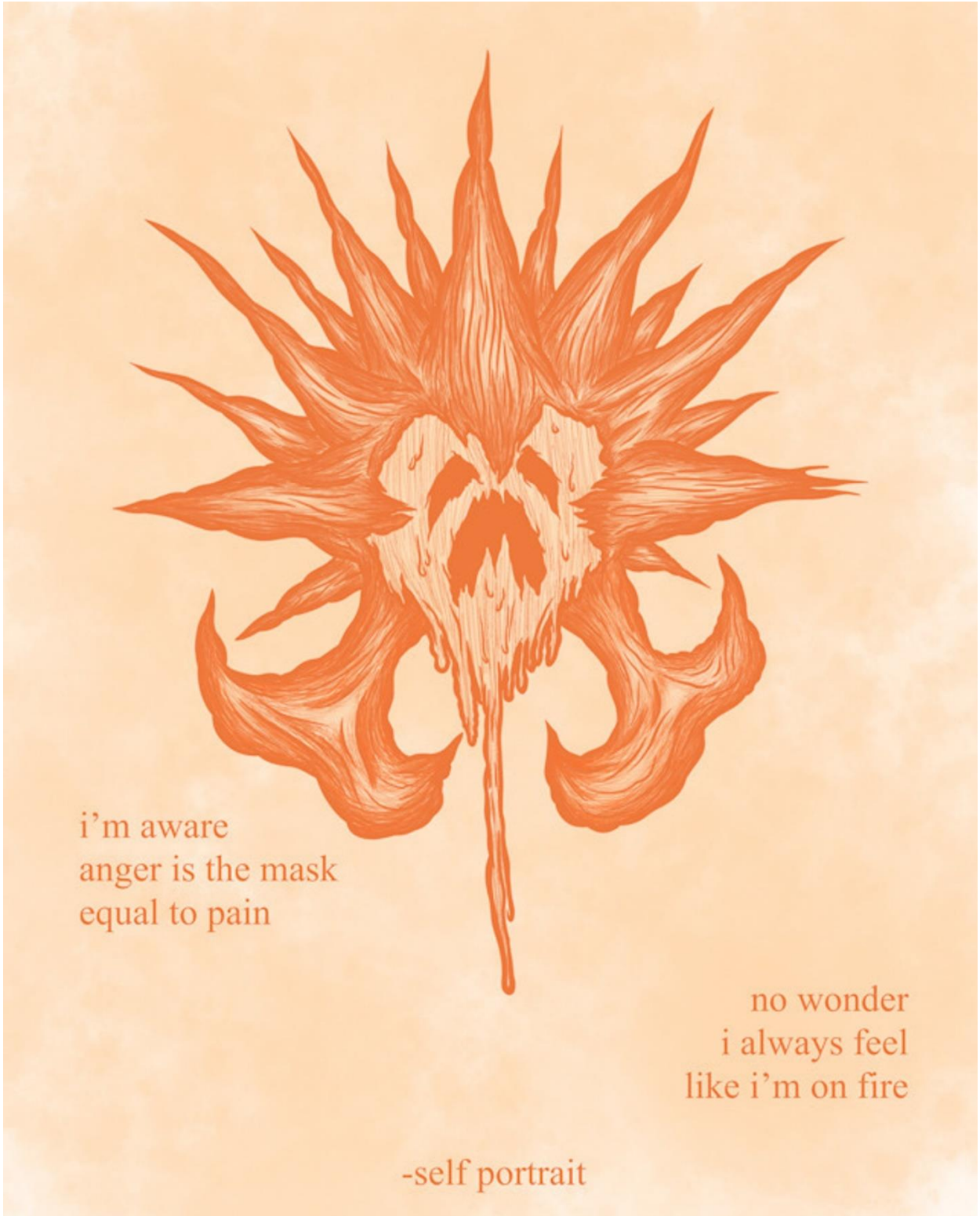
the best part about growing up in a big house
was that there were many places to hide

hallways and channels to navigate
when you came home from saving lives
day or night

fumbling
malice in your eyes
alcohol on your breath

-hunting for me

you put others to sleep with anesthesia
you put me to sleep with memories I blacked out
i'm trying to wake up now



i'm aware
anger is the mask
equal to pain

no wonder
i always feel
like i'm on fire

-self portrait

i have to remind myself to breathe
remind myself
it's not the monsters under the bed
initiating their attack

it's just

a bang from something being dropped

a scream from someone falling

a door slamming by accident

a child's high-pitched laugh

nothing i haven't
heard before

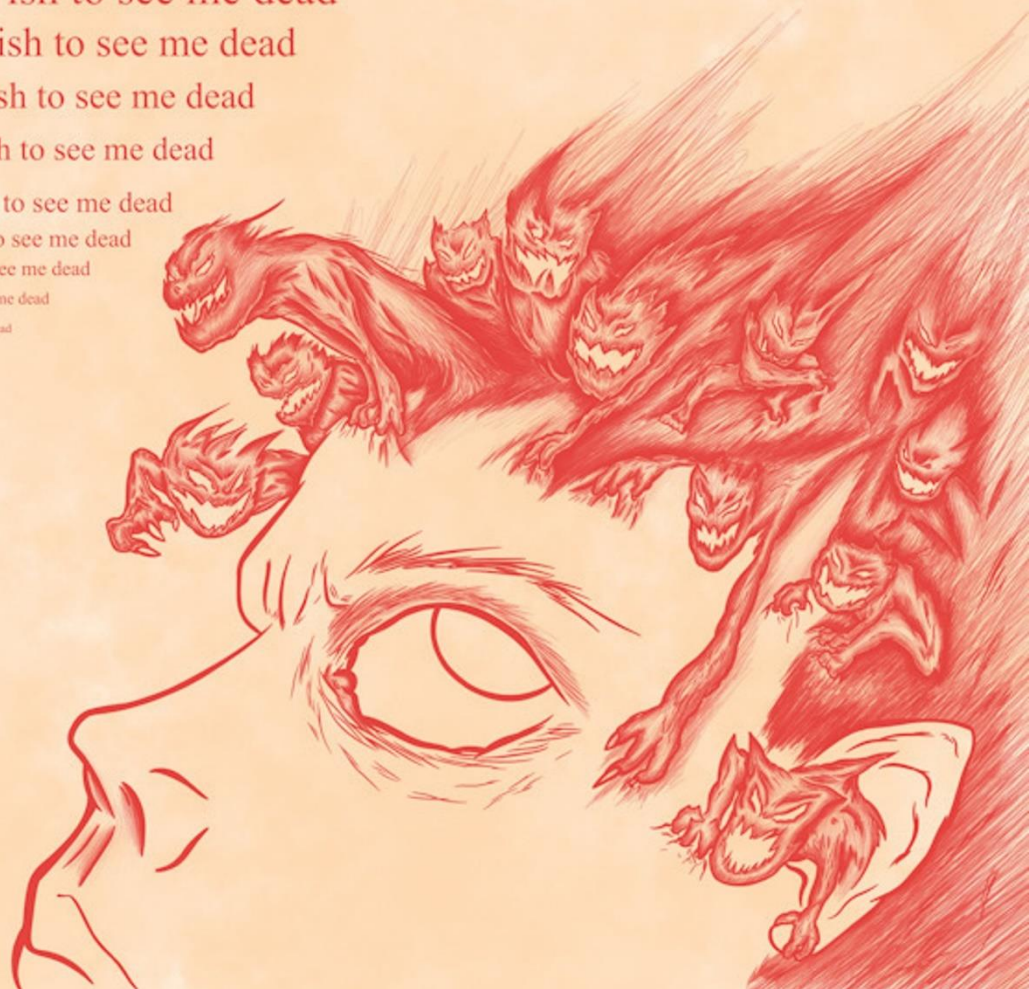
for as long as i can remember
i've sailed these rough seas
where storms run through me

it's nothing i haven't
felt before

-ptsd symptoms

intrusive thoughts
discord devils
dance upon my crown
heavy with two left feet
they deplete what's left of me
the rhythm feels like a hymn
a voice I've repressed
that wishes to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead

they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead
they wish to see me dead



it was junior year of high school
you should go see your father
he isn't doing so well

i'm sure he's fine
(I wasn't sure)
he's a doctor
he would know

her eyebrows looked like caterpillars

i went out to skate with my crew
until his jaguar pulled up
with his mistress driving him
hey chris
he said

he looked so small and fragile
greyer and withered
more so
than his beer-belly self

but I was sure he was fine
(i wasn't sure)

crying into the sky
i offer up
my reverse raindrops

they don't count down here
where others may shame me
because they don't slither down my cheeks
or hit the ground

i keep them in my head
send them up at night

no screams of agony
to give away my position
to my enemies
no escape

i don't want anyone to worry
i don't want them to see

me
for me.

-isolation is key

i'll never be a kid again
my parents will never be together again
we'll never be in our home again
we'll never live the way we lived together
again



the human experience
is exhausting



i fear death
i fear living

-confessions of a coward





questions of my origin torment me
was it really God in their good grace that chose to grant me this upbringing
what power declared i be luckier than though
privilege of parents that fought tooth and nail to love and provide for me

who dropped me here

guilt is all that prevails
the world does not benefit from my presence
i am undeserving of these blessings
i have met better, brighter souls
with less than i

the Power must have mistakenly passed down what I have
the Power has taken those who glimmer
and left me, a bastion of shadow, behind
what could possibly be the reasoning

how could I ever make them proud
how could I ever compare to those that chime laughter into others
how could I ever wage a war against the depths of agony when my being has been
corrupted

i feel abandoned to a life i never asked for.

My grandmother used to send me letters. With some money. Years after the divorce. When he started getting sick

Dear Christopher,

Your father is a good man deep down. I left him when he was very young with medical complications. His siblings needed me. He endured harsh procedures with a stonewall father by his side. He never forgave me. I hope you forgive him. He did everything he could to provide for you and us. He took us all on so many trips. He just couldn't keep himself from relying on alcohol to solve his problems. He needs us more than ever. I'll tell you more in time.

*Love,
Grandma*

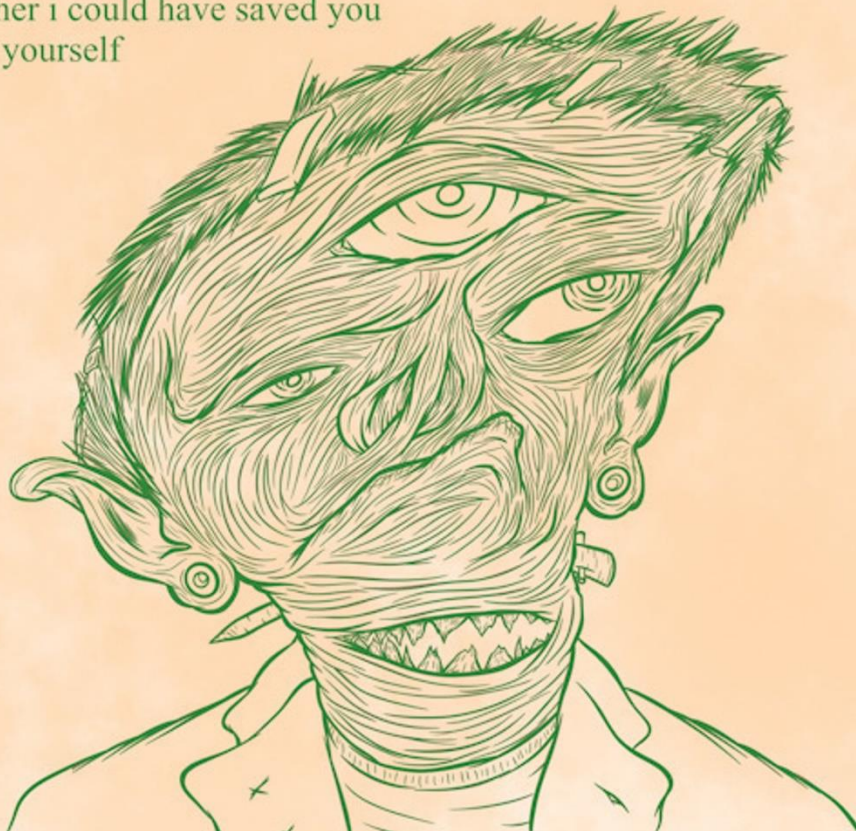
*every monster must have a
Creator*

i used to wonder what was mine
as i pointed my ten fingers
in every direction
but inwards

now i wonder
who was yours

i already know.

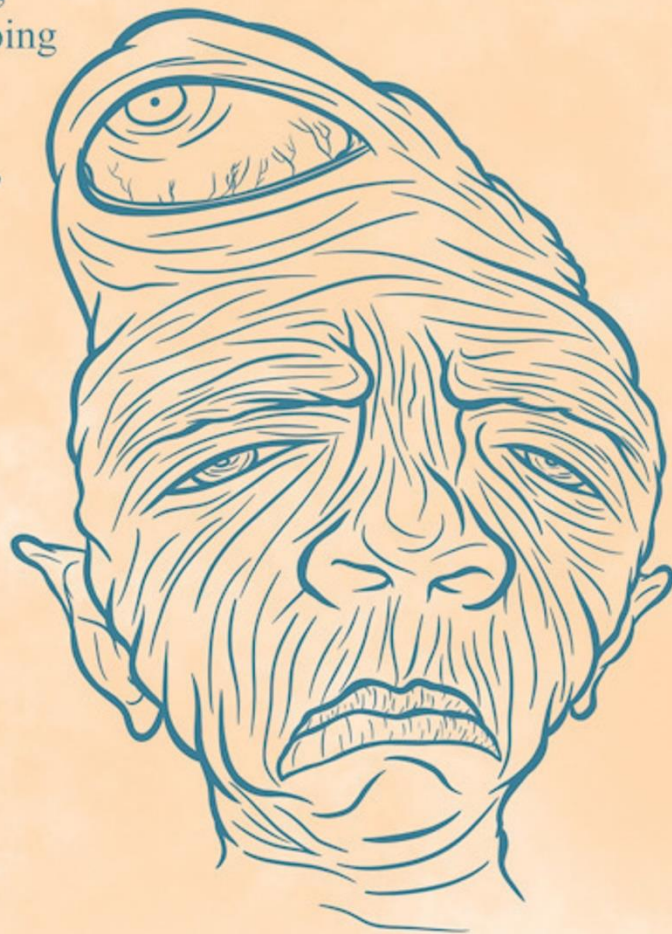
now i wonder
whether i could have saved you
from yourself



i bask in this emptiness
forgetting all i've learned
just a cog
a gear
someone left here
to take the wheel you've left behind

i am guilty
i am wrong
i am not doing
enough

-i am sorry



fight or flight is all i've known
i run with the torch
the champion of cowards
as if it's a race
to outrun your companionship

intimacy has never been my strong suit

i would be scolded by him
for speaking out
for speaking up for myself at home
i fear the same result here with you
out in the wild

intimacy has never been my strong suit

i'd rather you perceive
something is wrong with me
than hear how i am
merely a yellow-belly
burning bridges

intimacy has never been my strong suit

i'm sorry,
not for what i've done
to our friendship
but for what could have been
had i not been
a coward

Intimacy has never been my strong suit

ANGER IS A GIFT

shards of broken bottles
rain down
ride my skin like fins piercing
oceans

time halts boldly when you tell
yourself stories
i am lost to my woes
determined to defeat myself

to take a chainsaw to the weeping
willow of fiction i write
pretending
I'm something I'm not
mighty as it falls

i forfeit my health
and ignite rum on these wounds
scorched earth solutions
seem fit
for this anger of mine

is a gift.





the man in the mirror
is my mortal enemy
the childhood me
would be ashamed

i've allowed the darkest parts of me to shine
flaming those i love in frustration of this life
hammering my fists against my concealed skin
in an act of repentance

i fear there's nothing I can do
to forgive myself

i've become what I hate



How To Lengthen Suffering

1. Ignore the source! fingers in the ears! Can't hear the hurt if you close yourself like a bad book!
2. autopilot: emotional stoicism. No one can help if you seem fine! You got this!
3. escapism! subvert attention to distractions to avoid the breath of intuition! So simple! I'm a genius!

bastards
with bastard brains
with bastard hearts
tear the world to shreds
we sit and watch
expecting earth
to fight back



as I write these words
the people I love
the people I revere
and those I fear
shall judge me

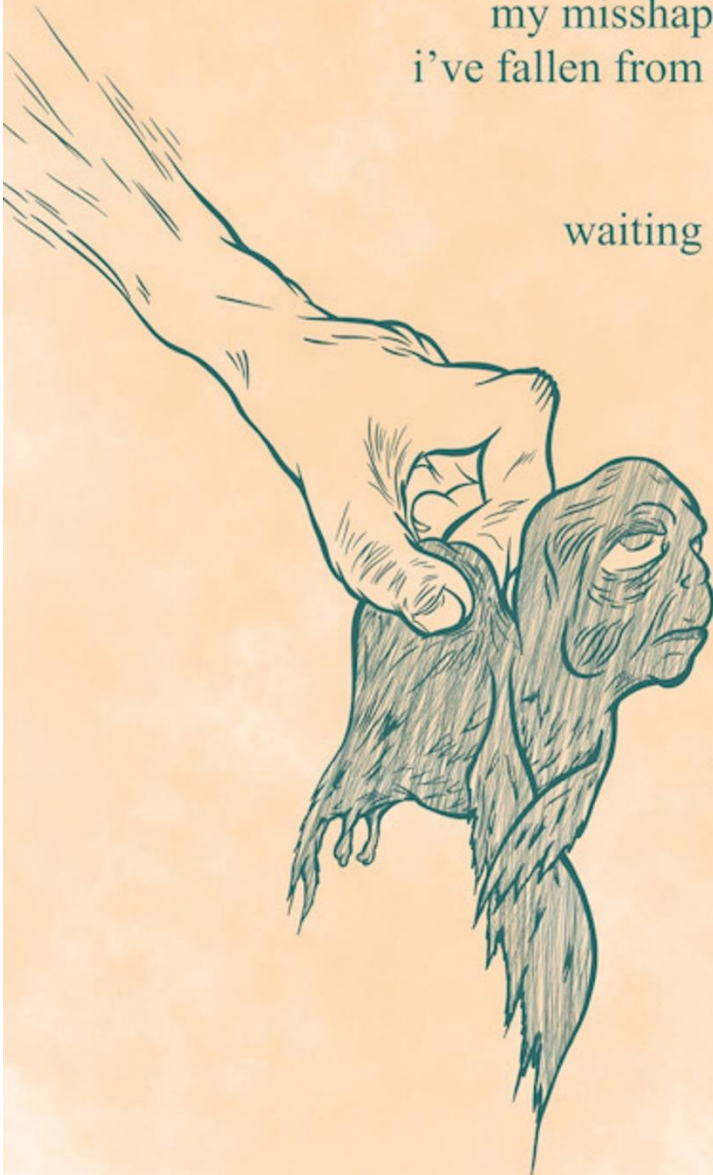
-to be an open book

you tell me in your dreams you can fly
you say you wish you could fly
i think every kid wishes they could fly

when i try
my misshapen wings can't carry me
i've fallen from every tall palm tree i've
climbed
in this dreary valley
waiting for mercy to raise me to
salvation
through blistering heat

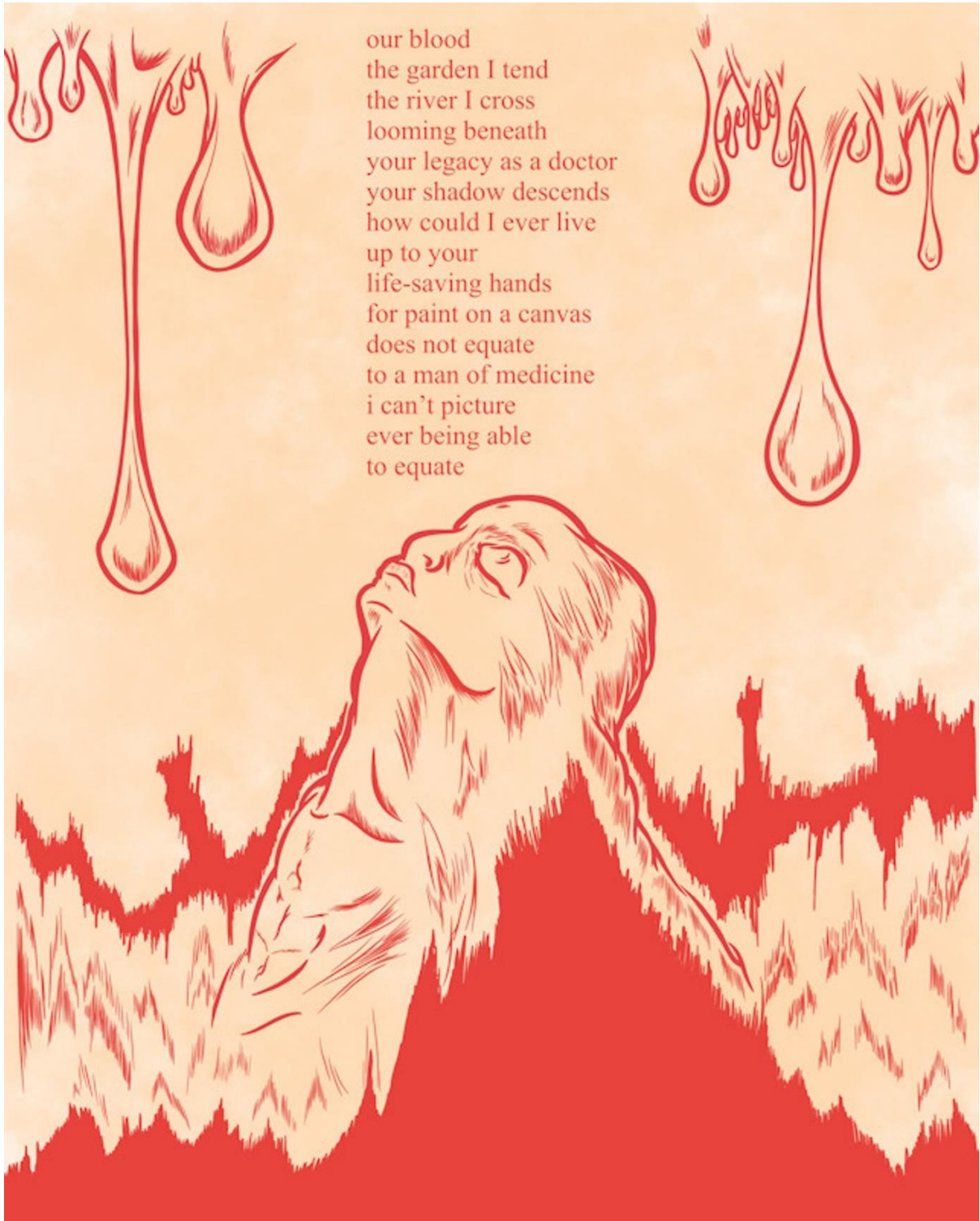
i think every person
dreams of salvation
i think everyone
wishes for salvation

but only some of us
have the gull to admit it



it's miserable here
in this flesh prison
no matter who you are





our blood
the garden I tend
the river I cross
looming beneath
your legacy as a doctor
your shadow descends
how could I ever live
up to your
life-saving hands
for paint on a canvas
does not equate
to a man of medicine
i can't picture
ever being able
to equate

sleep is hard

i've swam through quicksand
ran on all fours
as the road is pulled away from me

i'm not sure what i'm chasing
or should I say
running from

there's always a storm
in my childhood neighborhood
i'm pulled into the hurricane
catch a branch
over the lake
stranded on one of the islands
but we all have boats here

it floods regularly
i get reset
each time
at the entrance of our neighborhood
Lake James.

my bones rub against one another
cold wet streets slosh against my legs
i check on my friends
to see what has happened to their home
whether their families are safe
still together
what about mine?
displaced

i was always afraid of being kidnapped
so now I must be stealthy
as i ride back and forth on my bike
only riding when the streets are clear
we used to ride a lot
between our old home, our new home next door, my neighbors
where my best friend lived

(continued)

i don't know where he lives anymore

i've considered seeking help
but fear rings my neck
it pulls me

i've made this dark space my home
because the sun
will just expose me

-i need therapy



MEN

a door was kicked in
a gaping hole left inviting
future invaders

you stayed up all night
with your rifle
ready and willing

as the sun gets low
casting beautiful colors on the sky
abyss sets in on me
night hails uncertainty

i am the man of the house now

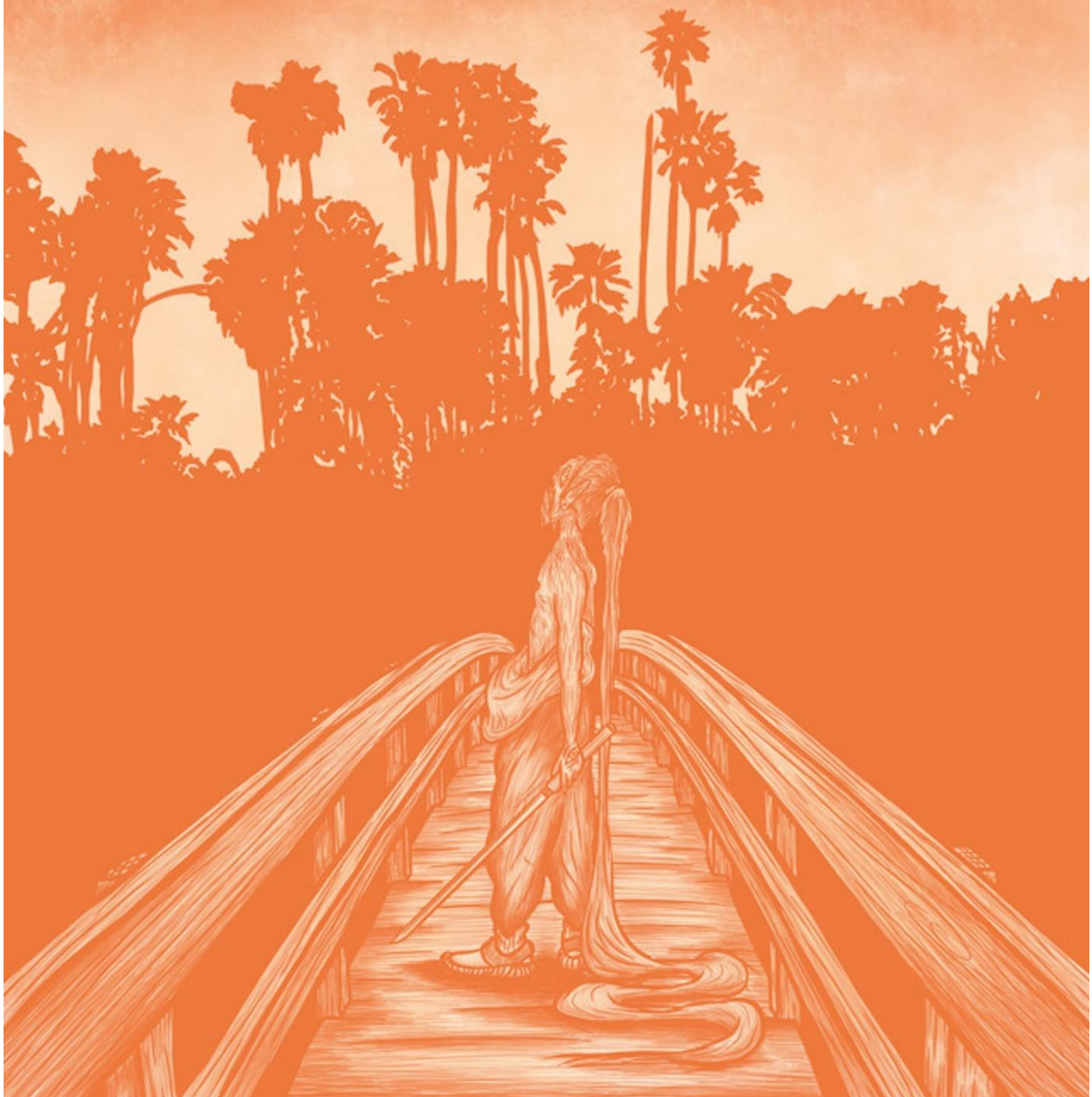
a fight to the death
may rattle at my doors
my windows are shut
but the void peers in
as i draw the curtains
i must turn off all lights
or risk their unobstructed gaze

to safeguard my loved ones
i must embrace the fear
as you did



a warrior's words
are only as good as their fate
to die by the sword
for those I love
while shouting out the name
of my ultimate attack
would be an honor
-super hero complex

ode to the *Palm City Samurai* // my fight and flight response //
facing love and loss // under sun and palms // at the foot of my
ancestors glory // slashing at silhouettes of my former self // a catcher
in the rye // desperate to save anyone // unleashing my battle cry //
begging for might // to redeem my inner child



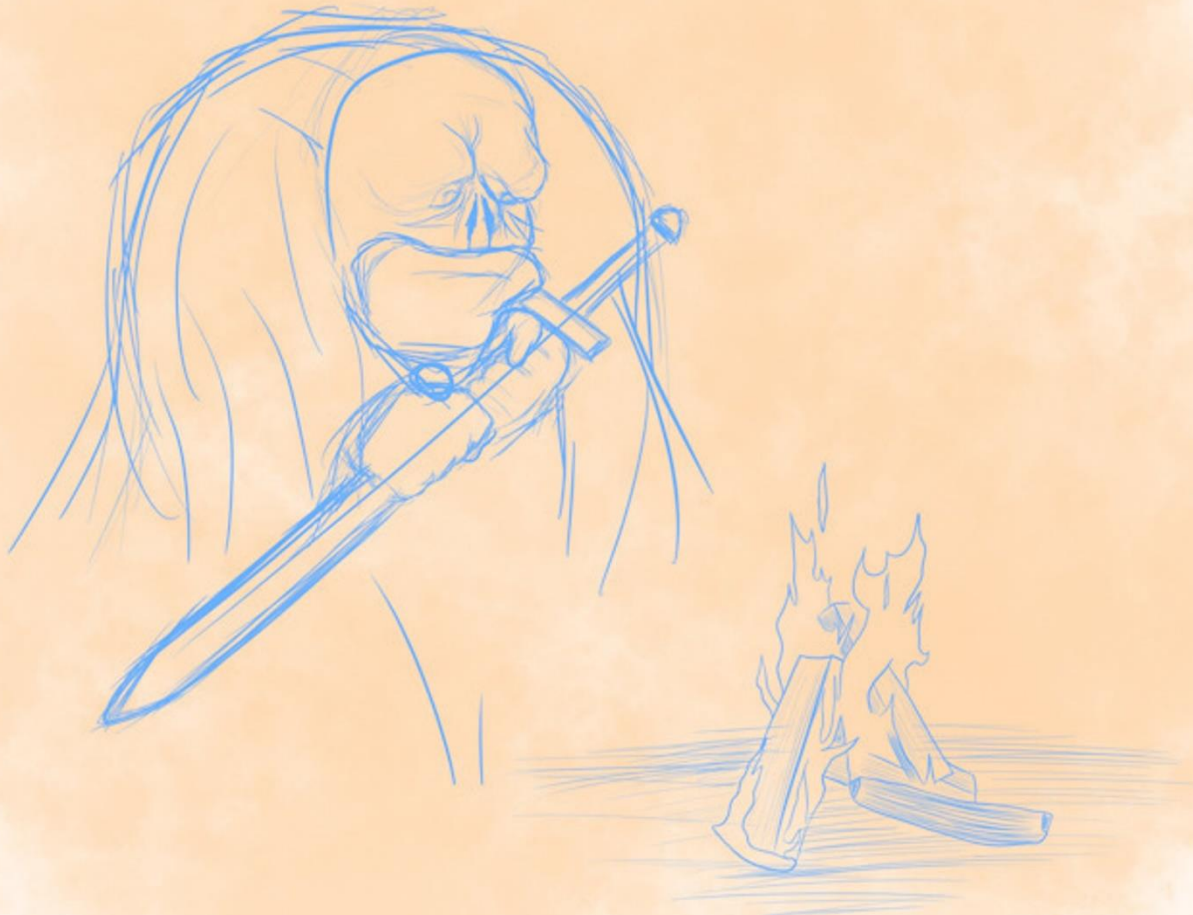
i loved to listen to *Chris Cornell*
i loved to listen to *Kurt Cobain*
i loved to listen to *Chester Bennington*
i loved to listen to you talk on the phone with me

-why do all my heroes kill themselves

i must be brave
so that I may get better
so that I may be my best

-for those that may need me

to mend
is to fight
a war of attrition



Dear Christopher,

Please help your father. I know what it's like having a father that drinks. My son would write me so many letters admitting that he hates drinking. He didn't intend to become an alcoholic. He's almost died multiple times. He's faced things like racism and assault. He's not a bad man. He's becoming more ill. A lifetime of drinking has made him sick. If he goes completely blind, I fear he'll become depressed. Please help him.

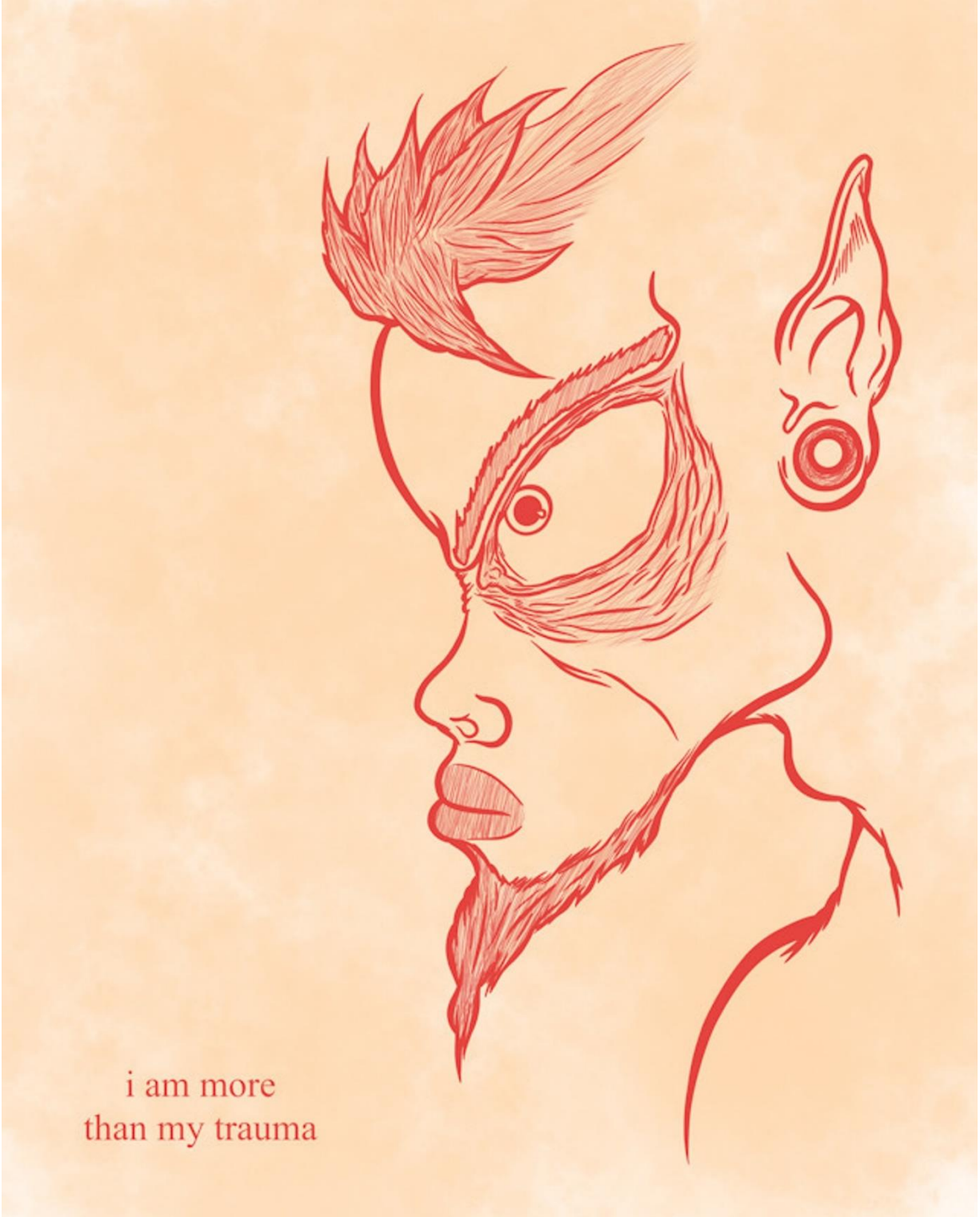
*Love,
Grandma*

leave me alone
corrode
oh, gates of empathy
grant no passage to those that seek asylum
in my exasperated heart

your toxic slanging like acid beckons the thundering allure of solitude within me
this generator possesses no more energy to pander to lesser beings
i die happily alone with my books and pets
this combative world does not deserve our desire to see it mended

we are far too few
we are forlorn men
but still, we are men
left behind with typewriters

-men going mad



i am more
than my trauma

to process every shade of your being
and come to terms with the fact
you did your best
to do your best for us

who am I to reflect
solely on the pain you caused

no one's perfect

i'm far from it
now I'm doing my best
to forgive us both

pushing forward means
to tear away at the layers
of sheetrock i've developed
to isolate my tender core

the revelation achieved
sends tremors down my spine
which is exactly
what i need

-to feel safe being soft

dispose of the hate
before you're burnt to ash
forgive the thoughts that break you
before there's nothing left

-don't defeat yourself

solitude
repeatedly
is the only real connection
i have with the universe

-i no longer loathe being with myself

We used to love training karate. He had some amazing snap kicks and was a tough fighter. He and I used to spar a fair amount. He was a real warrior.

- a message from his brother

when you start doing better
you stop worrying about
who got the best of you



men are not granted the freedom
to be weak
and therefore
so many of us break

-grant yourself freedom

my father casts a tall shadow
i too once dreamed
of being a monument
now I aspire
to be a light

men are told to be strong
we must achieve through brute force
to mold the world with our hands

but I have always felt that true strength
is the power to love
vulnerably

i do not feel I am strong yet
but I am trying

as a child
you taught me the game of chess
you said

*this is real life
we are smaller than others
we have to use our brain
to defeat our foe
think ten moves ahead
beat them before the game has even started*

i carved those words on my roots
to earn the family name



i am a champion of love and peace
i am on a lifelong quest to create works of art
to help those in their time of need

my ambition and passion take me to new levels every day
gratitude grounds me, keeping me happy and humble
ancestors, bless me with your glory
grant me clairvoyance
to live and fight in the light

keep me soft
keep me strong
keep me moving forward

-daily affirmations

your day of remembrance has come and gone
i am far too numb to carry the weight of its magnitude
i strive to live in the light
and make you proud

but alas
it is a war in itself
just to keep from breaking down
from the gashes in my spirit

i wish to provide my future offspring with a life like you provided me
i wish to bless them with lessons
with love and patience
to show them this life can be more
if we are brave enough to fight for it

i want them to have faith in humanity
to have faith in themselves
i want them to remember you
just as I do

a warrior
of love and peace
my father
my hero

WHERE WE GO

My grandmother died on October 31, 2017. We expected her to go soon. Mostly because she would call often from the hospital. *I'm ready to go!* She'd say enthusiastically. However, I didn't expect that date to be the day she decided to let go. *I believe it was because that's when the veil of the universe is most thin* said my sister. I like that idea. That she held on until it felt right for her. That she wanted to go on a night that would be special to our culture. She would always do her best to make things special. She'd always make me feel special for my art, because she was an artist. I'm sure she made my dad feel special too. As much as he'd complain about her, he only waited two months before he decided to follow her on her journey.

when i've slain my last dragon
when I have fulfilled my last quest
lay me down in a warriors garbs
i will need them
for I will be naked and weary

it is dangerous to go alone

equip me with my sword
passed down from my father
it has been with me through it all

it is perilous to go blind
place sunflowers on my eyes
to light my way
as I sink into earth

do what else you may need
to be at peace with my farewell
then set me adrift
on the lake of my childhood

gather round as I return
to the center of legacy
arm my peer whom I'm most proud
with a bow and flaming arrow
have faith they'll aim true and

let me go

watch as I burn
as I become
smoke
water
earth
everything

nothing

rejoice my journey
as I set off

(continued)
-the big adventure

grief comes in waves



i tend to wonder
if I could go back in time
would we have been friends

could I have helped you
in your battle with the bottle
and been there to steer you clear
would you be here now
if I could go back

-if only

i know you have to go
below and above
our lake has your essence
like your mountains that you loved
to wander

from the ducks and geese
these palm trees crave your adventure
while I await your call

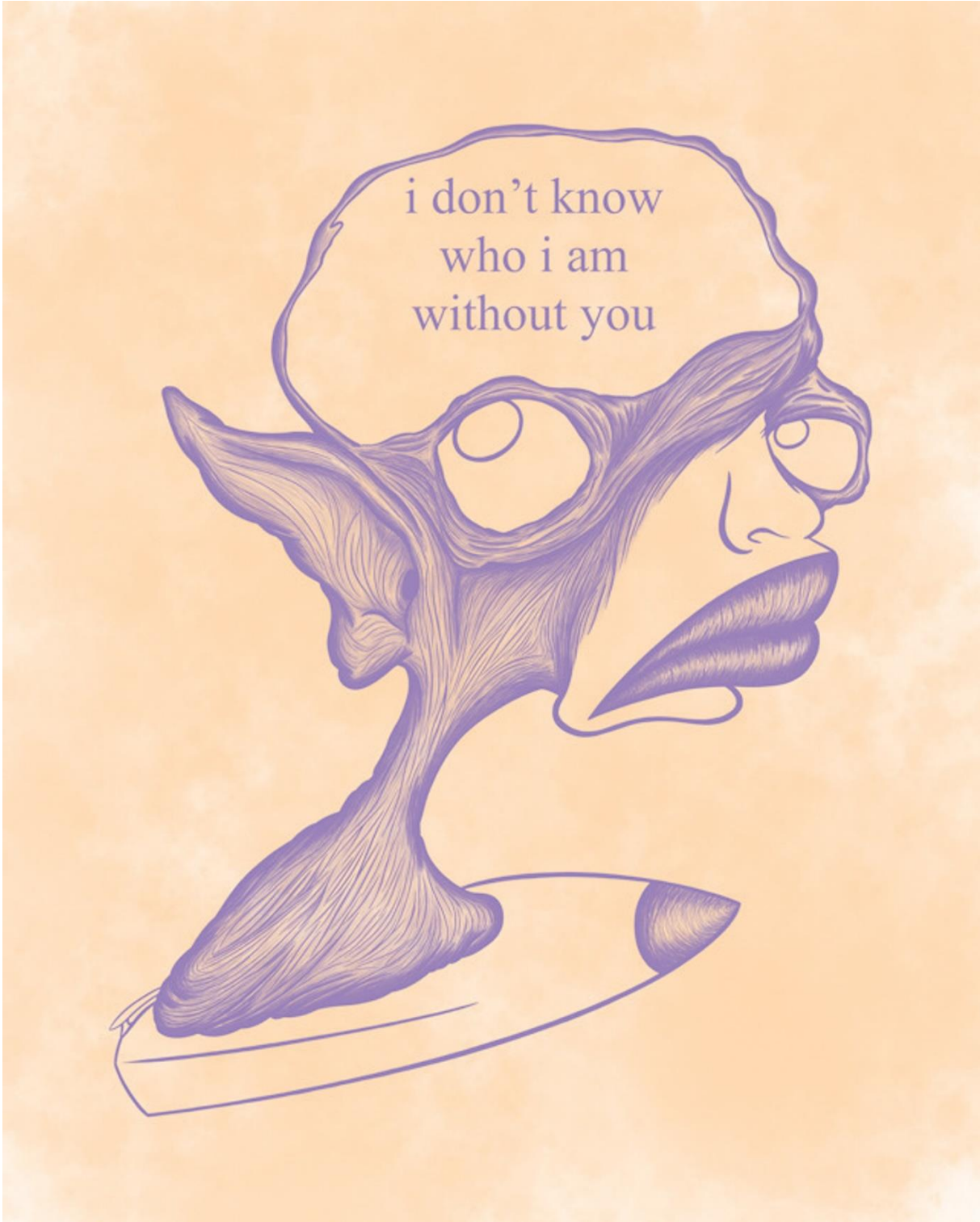
your voice is different and new
your face the setting sun that warms my skin
i feel pressure to evolve
to run from this agony

*i'll do my best not to change right now
i'll relax and take it easy
let the grief flow
i'm still young
it's my fault
for thinking i need to rush
there's just so much i want to know*

i was going too fast
and let you slip away
i need to slow down
and cradle who i have left
before they're gone like you

-i should have made more time

**in honor of Cat Stevens- Father & Son*



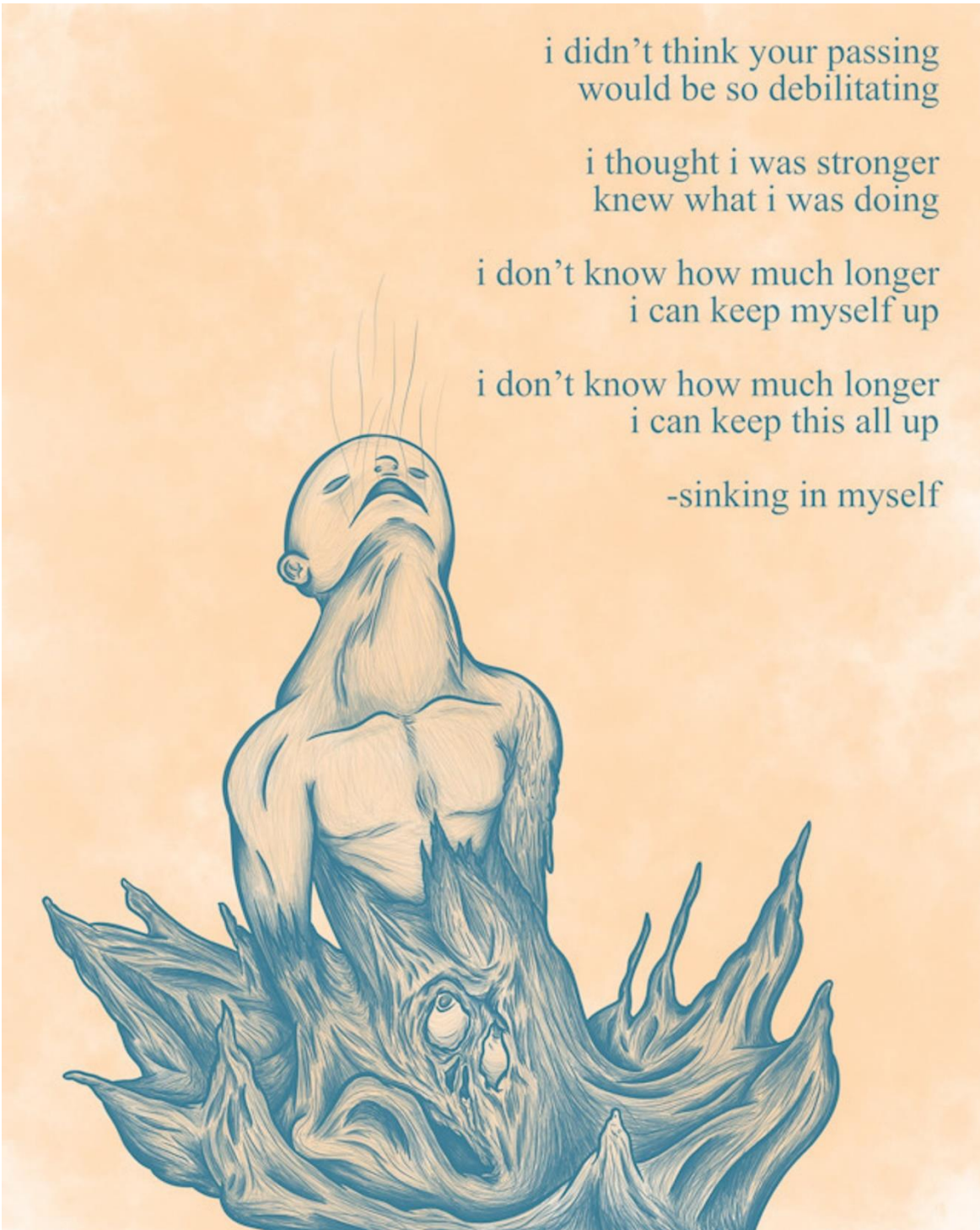
i didn't think your passing
would be so debilitating

i thought i was stronger
knew what i was doing

i don't know how much longer
i can keep myself up

i don't know how much longer
i can keep this all up

-sinking in myself



my heart swells
at the memories i've carved
upon its walls
for the people
i can no longer hold



i'm ashamed to admit
that I've thought about it
on more than one occasion
at different points in life

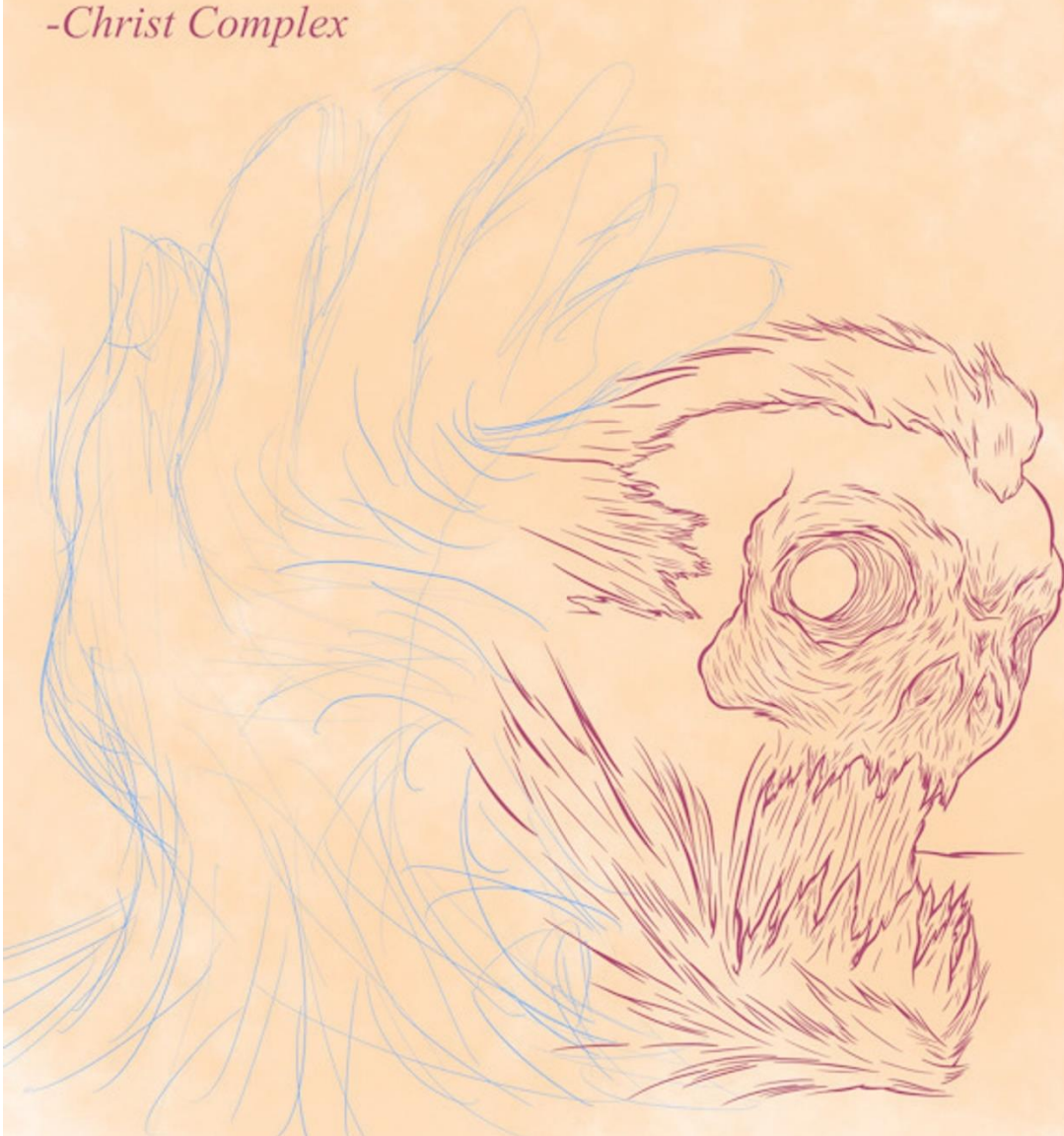
it's not that I wanted to die
i merely wished to be free
i'm not the only man to think so
just ask the statistics

*-males make up 80% of the suicide rate**

*<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>

i can't help but resist a world
where the people i love suffer
then die
and there's nothing
i can do about it

-Christ Complex



to step back is to step forward
i see with dying eyes
the oncoming darkness that awaits us

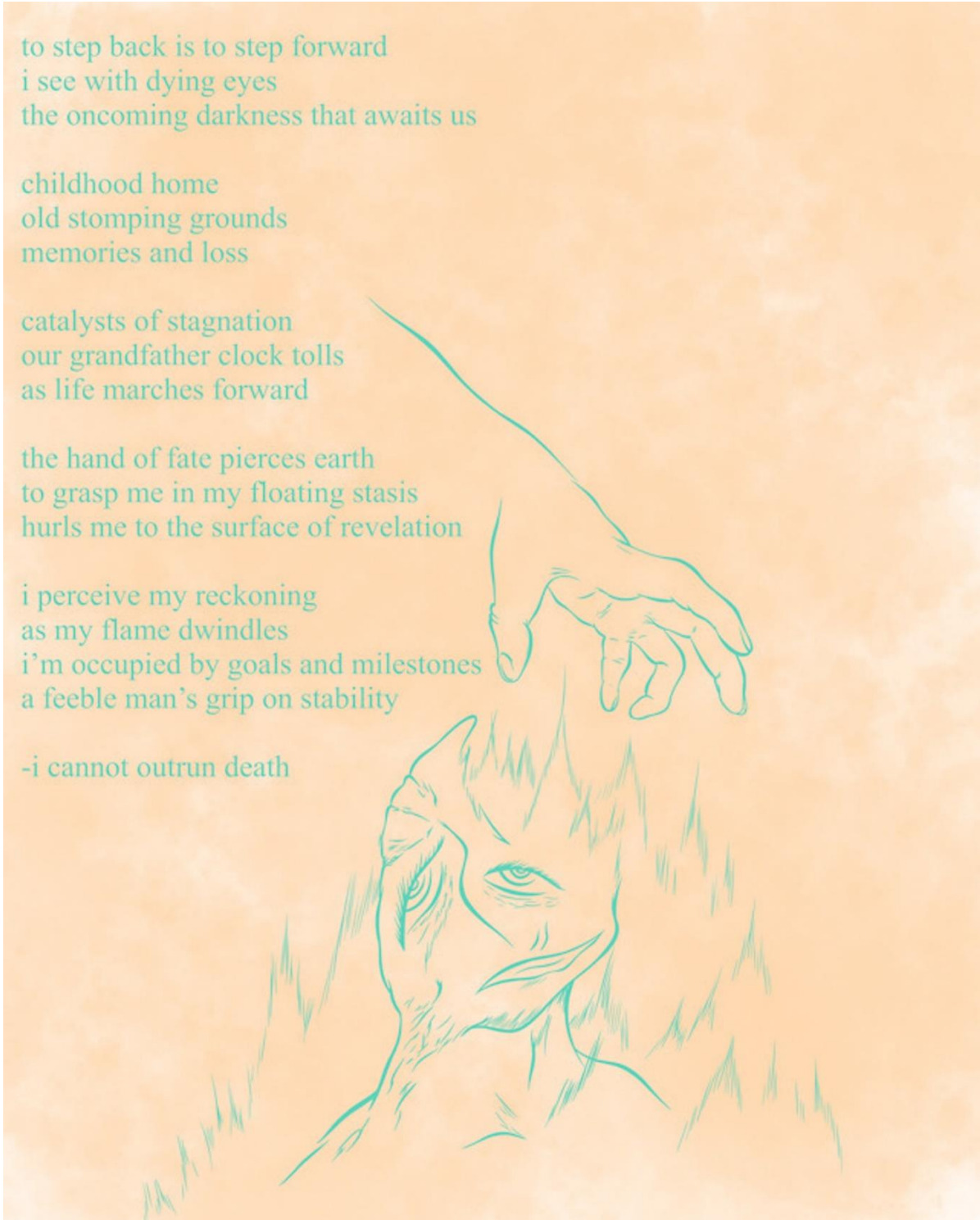
childhood home
old stomping grounds
memories and loss

catalysts of stagnation
our grandfather clock tolls
as life marches forward

the hand of fate pierces earth
to grasp me in my floating stasis
hurls me to the surface of revelation

i perceive my reckoning
as my flame dwindles
i'm occupied by goals and milestones
a feeble man's grip on stability

-i cannot outrun death

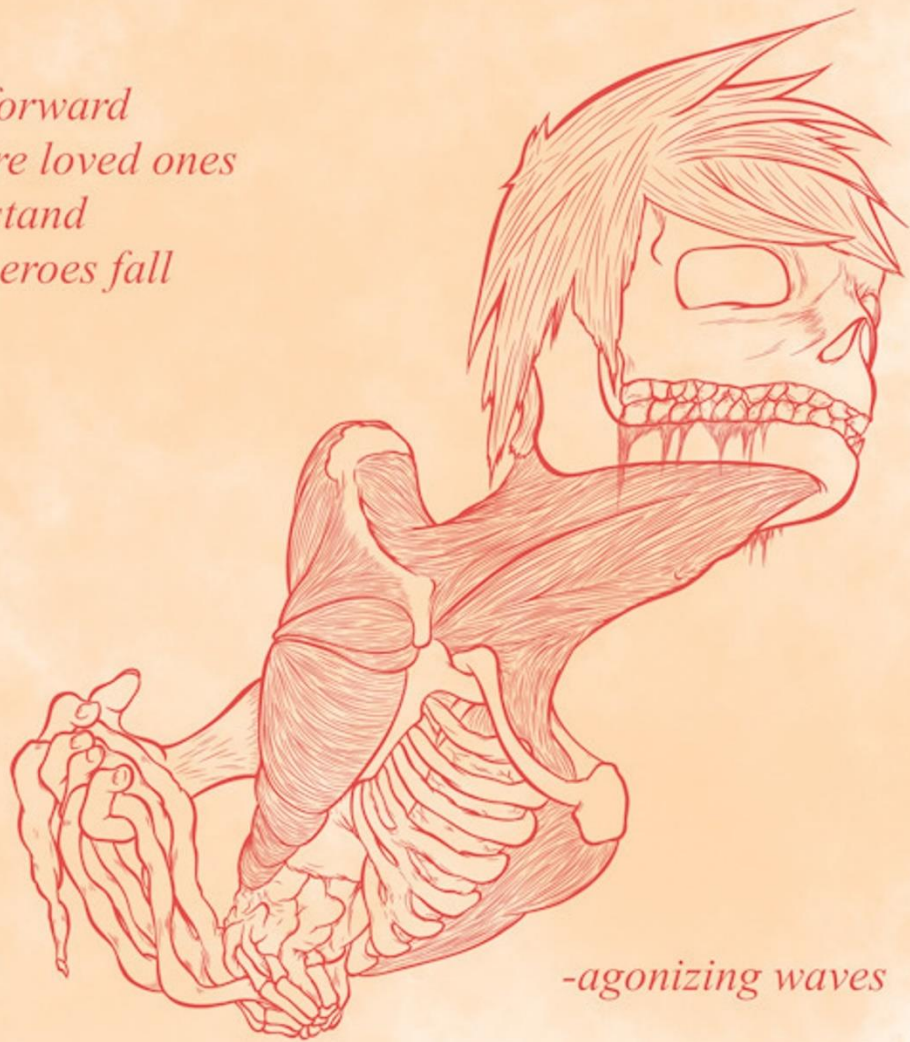


i fear the final farewell



*grieving is to be gutted
we all crumble
eventually*

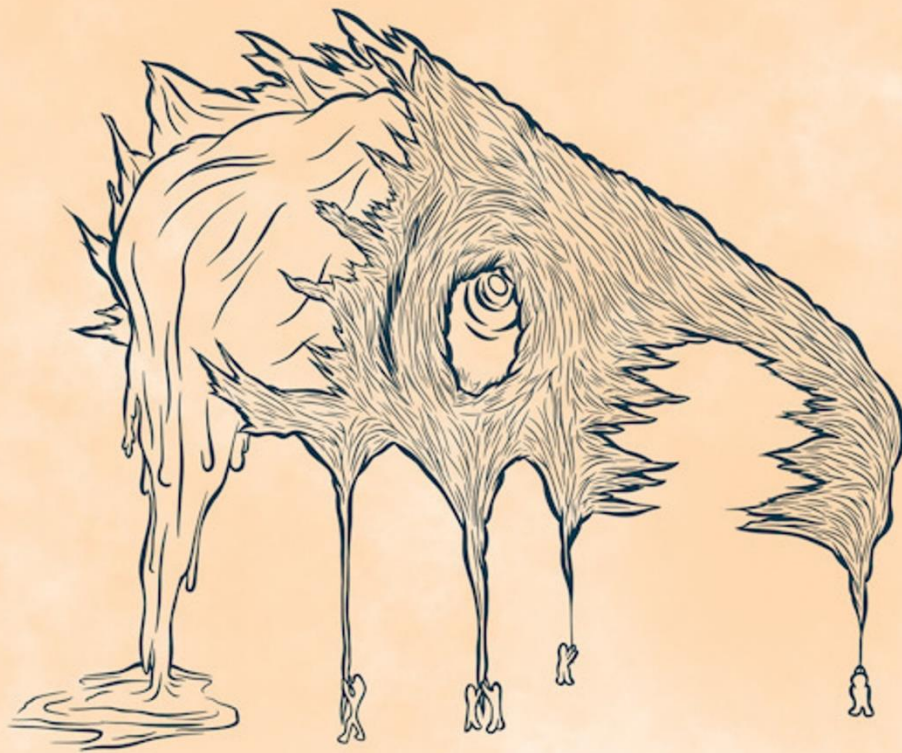
*i don't look forward
to losing more loved ones
now I understand
why strong heroes fall*



-agonizing waves

soon it would have been
my turn
to take care of you
in your old age
but now
i'll never get that chance

do we all go mad
the more we write
it seems
my heroes did



Friday December 22, 2017

Christopher, dad's not doing too good. His wife called us to come convince him to go to a clinic. He didn't want to but he's in so much pain. We finally got him to agree. We'll meet you there.

I arrived and took a seat in front of him while he laid in fetal position. He opened his eyes eventually. *Hey chris.*

Hey dad. Not feeling too hot?

Yeah. I was ready to die at home. But these damn women.

Well I'm glad you listened to them.

He got worse as the night went on. The clinic said he needed surgery. They sent him to the wrong hospital for it. Bastards. He had to wait to be seen. We waited all night. I let his siblings know.

I stayed up all night.

I'm not a doctor.

I'm just a doctor's son.

Helpless.

*he wouldn't listen to us
he's stubborn
insisted on treating himself all these years
doctors think they're Gods*

-a message from mom

WHAT SAVES US

i wore sunglasses in the hospital
i knew the time had come
i didn't want to be seen
i didn't want to see anymore
suffering
we knew it was time
for you to go

-January 3, 2018



I

One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.

thank you for being what I needed
when I needed you
you helped me become a better man
I learned what to do
and what not to do
how to act right
to stop being toxic
to be accountable
to be healthy after being unhealthy

i hope you're doing well

-to my past lovers

the more she grows
into her truest self
the more and more
i fall for her

II

The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.

the scars we share
are the valleys
in which our love
flows

she's sunshine in skin

-my sunflower girl

III

One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.

i lost both my jobs this summer
well
i guess i was let go
but i had the option to stay
i didn't want to
and well
i guess i never started the second job
so, i guess i never had it

i get to work on art all day
be with my sunshine girl
she's an artist too
she tells me how i can improve
she's an art teacher too

i work on my poetry
i'm just ok right now
we go to jiu jitsu
we're getting better
my acl doesn't hurt anymore
but i still can't run
but i can train

yeah

i can train
i can get better

-getting better

IV

The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own.

punk rock saved me
to hear i'm not the only one
who wants to shout out
against it all
to revolt against the norms
to live in peace and anarchy



V

Beliefs should conform to one's best scientific understanding of the world. One should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit one's beliefs.

the more people
at peace
in the world
the more peace
there will be
in the world

VI

People are fallible. If one makes a mistake, one should do one's best to rectify it and resolve any harm that might have been caused.

being there for you
when I also need you there for me
is such a delicate thing
we're still so naive
but you make it easy to be
a part of a difficult,
mesmerizing thing

-the balancing act of love

VII

Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.

in regards to the love of my life
i hope that I die first
so I never have to
live a day without you



it's not easy
trying to soar
when i've clipped
my own wings
but something
worth doing
is rarely easy



i've learned to love
to be alone
with oneself

at first
i was hurt and fearful
lashing out at myself

now
i'm forgiving myself
finding peace

-I love me

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Ernest Garcia was born in Boulder, Colorado on September 18th, 1993. He enrolled at Canterbury Elementary School in South Texas for his elementary education. He continued his secondary schooling in Edinburg at Edinburg High School. In the Fall of 2012, he enrolled at the University of Texas Pan American, majoring in English education. He graduated in Fall of 2017, going on to substitute teach in the Edinburg school district where he did his clinical teaching. He enrolled in the Graduate College at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing in Fall 2019. He graduated in Fall 2022. He may be reached at chriscgarcia956tx@gmail.com.