

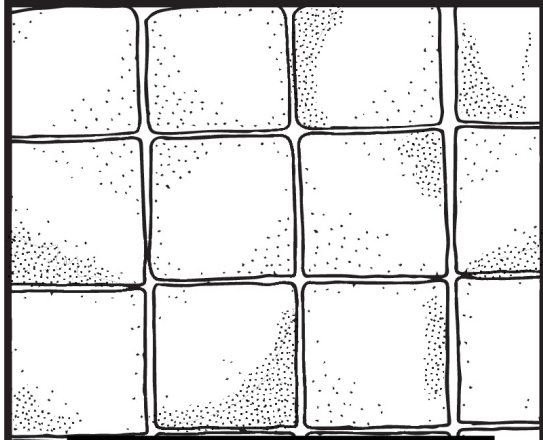


# THE LANGUAGE OF TRAUMA

BY

AUBREY HIRSCH

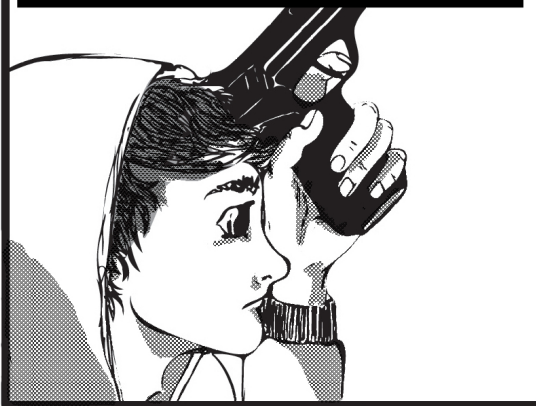
WHEN I USED TO PICTURE ARMED ROBBERY  
IN MY HEAD, IT LOOKED LIKE THIS.



BUT WHEN IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED  
TO ME, IT LOOKED LIKE THIS.

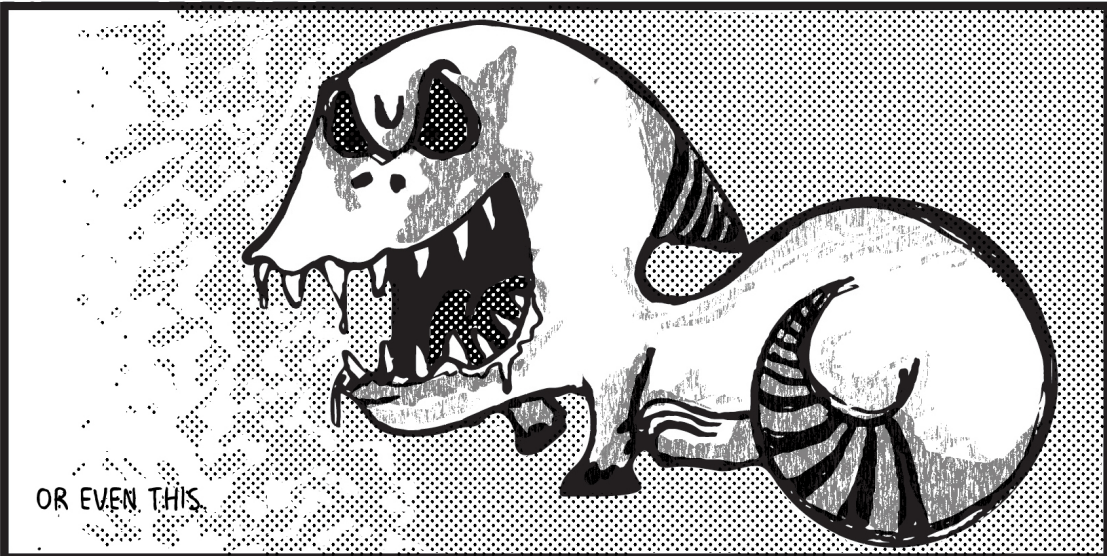
I'M TELLING YOU THIS BECAUSE LOOKS ARE IMPORTANT.

YOU'D PROBABLY FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT  
THE PERSON WHO ROBBED ME IF I DREW  
HIM LIKE THIS:



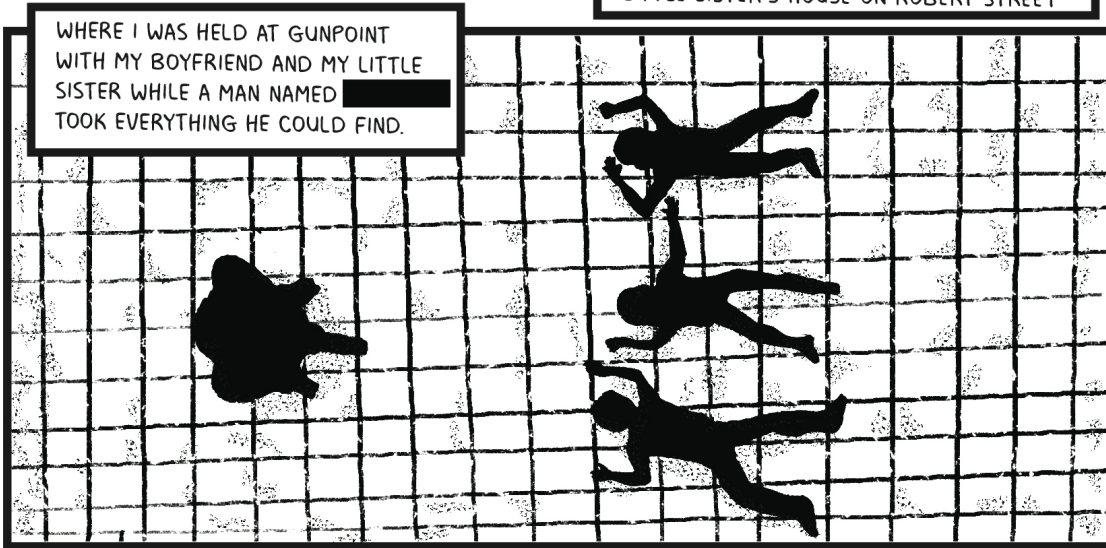
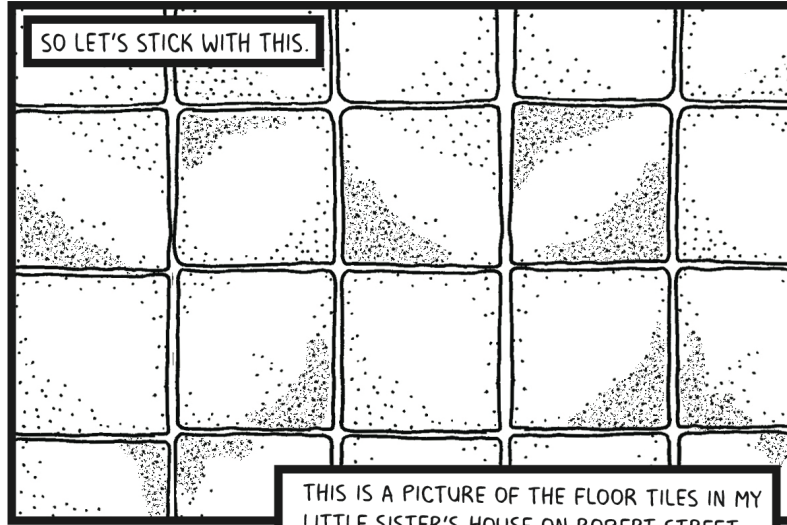
INSTEAD OF THIS

OR EVEN THIS.



BUT EACH OF THOSE HAS EYES AND A MOUTH AND, PRESUMABLY, A HEART.

AND I DON'T WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT HIS HEART.

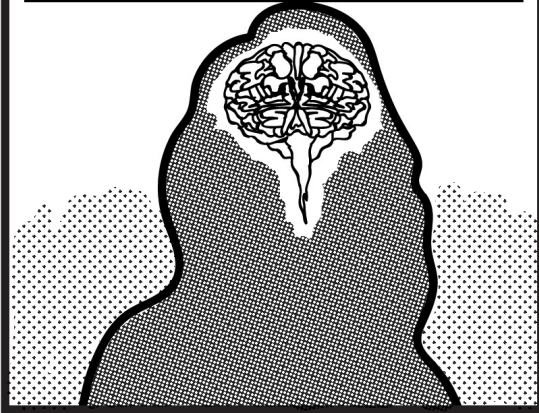


ANOTHER WRITER ASKED ME RECENTLY:

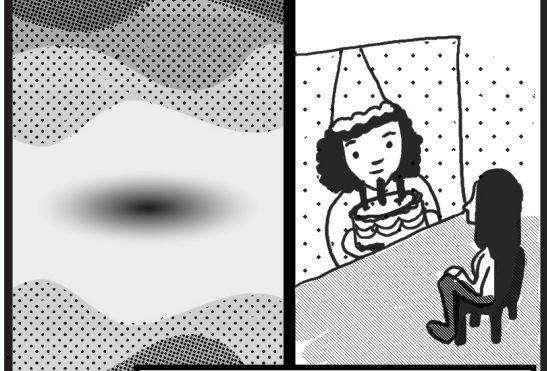
I HAD A LOT OF REASONS.



THEY WERE ALL TRUE. BUT ALSO TRUE IS THAT THERE'S THIS WEIRD THING HAPPENING IN MY BRAIN WHERE I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER IT.

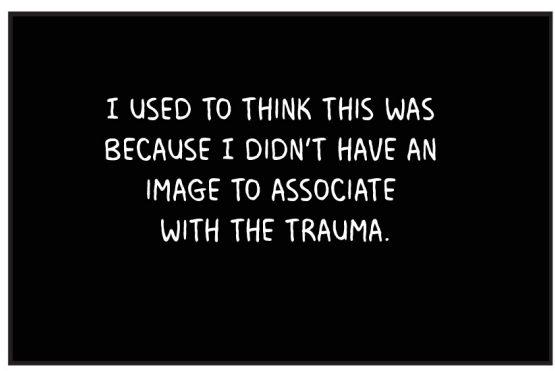


THERE'S SOMETHING THERE. A KIND OF PROOF THAT SOMETHING HAPPENED.



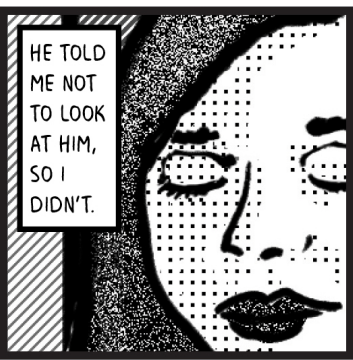
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE A NORMAL MEMORY, LIKE A MOVIE THAT PLAYS IN YOUR MIND.

I USED TO THINK THIS WAS BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE AN IMAGE TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE TRAUMA.

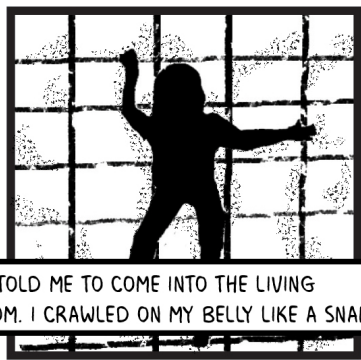


WHEN THE MAN FORCED HIS WAY INTO THE HOUSE, I WAS IN THE KITCHEN WASHING MY HANDS.

HE TOLD ME NOT TO LOOK AT HIM, SO I DIDN'T.



HE TOLD ME TO GET DOWN ON THE GROUND, SO I DID.

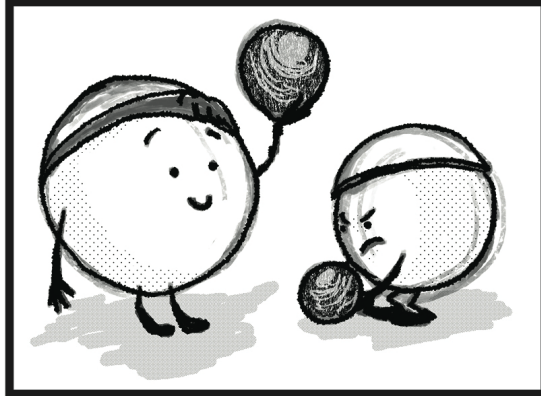
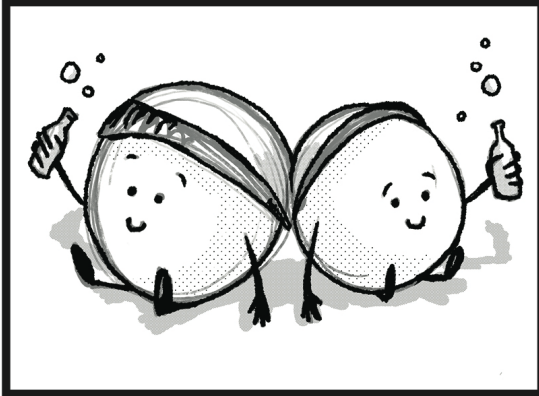


HE TOLD ME TO COME INTO THE LIVING ROOM. I CRAWLED ON MY BELLY LIKE A SNAKE

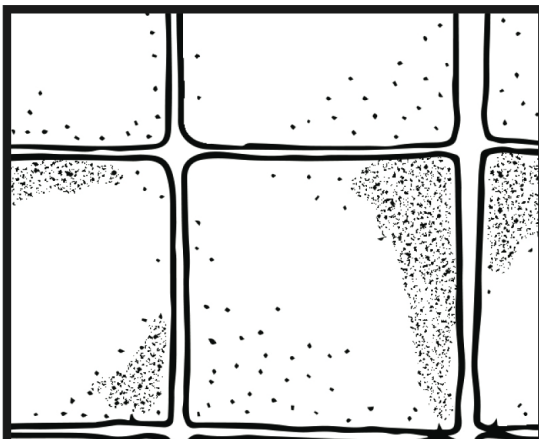
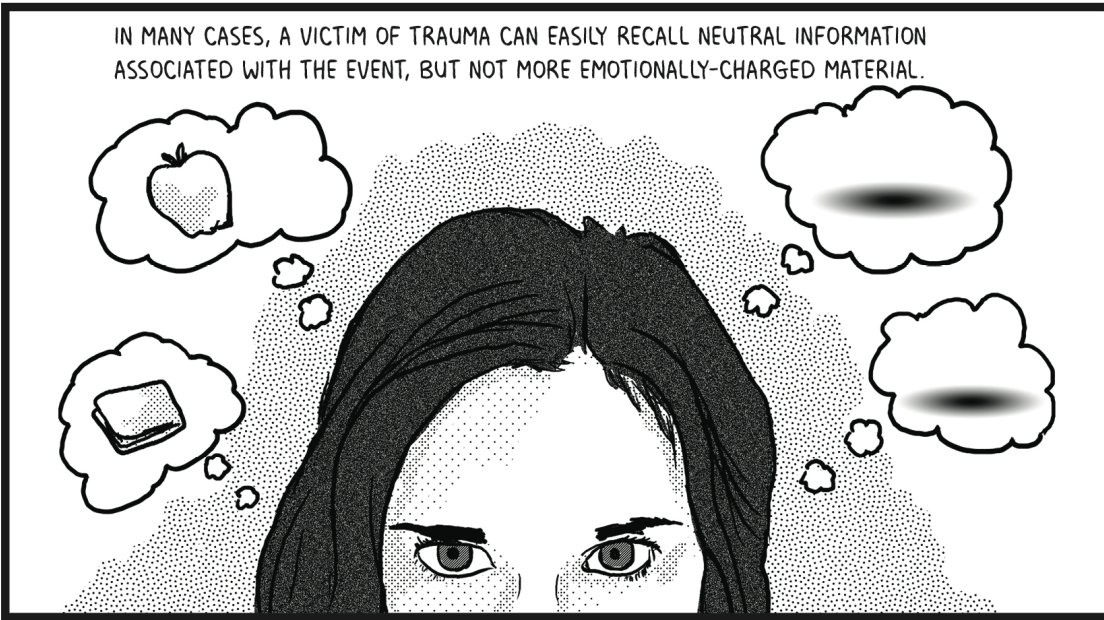
I NEVER PICKED MY FACE UP OFF THE TILE. I THOUGHT THAT IF HE WAS CONVINCED I DIDN'T SEE HIM, HE MIGHT NOT KILL ME.



IT TURNS OUT THIS KIND OF MEMORY FAILURE IS REALLY COMMON WITH TRAUMA. STRESS HORMONES LIKE GLUCOSE, CORTISOL AND ADRENALINE CAN WORK IN CONFLICTING WAYS. DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY MAY ENHANCE MEMORY OR INHIBIT IT.

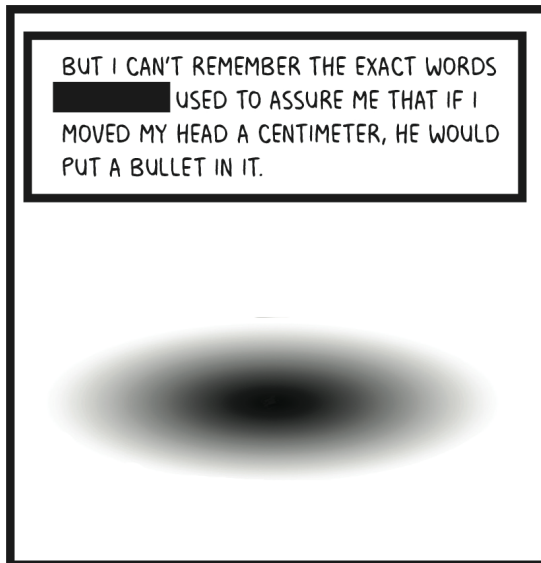


IN MANY CASES, A VICTIM OF TRAUMA CAN EASILY RECALL NEUTRAL INFORMATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE EVENT, BUT NOT MORE EMOTIONALLY-CHARGED MATERIAL.



WHICH IS WHY I CAN TELL YOU ABOUT EVERY DIP AND DIVOT IN THOSE FLOOR TILES.

BUT I CAN'T REMEMBER THE EXACT WORDS [REDACTED] USED TO ASSURE ME THAT IF I MOVED MY HEAD A CENTIMETER, HE WOULD PUT A BULLET IN IT.





EVEN IF I HAD SNUCK A GLANCE,  
I WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN A GOOD  
LOOK AT HIM.

BEFORE [REDACTED] CAME INTO THE  
HOUSE, HE PULLED THE COLLAR OF HIS  
SHIRT UP OVER HIS MOUTH AND NOSE  
AND LEFT IT THERE THE WHOLE TIME.



I JUST MADE THAT IMAGE UP,  
BY THE WAY

AS NICKNAME LINDO STREET  
D E R XX  
ARRESTEE ARMED AT TIME OF ARREST  
CHARGES  
RS 14:60 RELATIVE TO AGGRAVATED BURGLARY  
RS 14:67 RELATIVE TO AUTO THEFT IN THE AMOUNT OF 10,000

01 BUILD	02 ODDITIES	03 SCAPS
04 HAIR	05 LIMBS	06 ARMS
07 SHOULDERS	08 CHEST	09 EARS
10 SHOULDERS	11 NECK	12 EYES
13 SHOULDERS	14 GENITALS	15 MOUTH
16 SHOULDERS	17 HANDS	18 FEET
19 SHOULDERS	20 FEET	21 HANDS
22 SHOULDERS	23 FEET	24 HANDS
25 SHOULDERS	26 FEET	27 HANDS
28 SHOULDERS	29 FEET	30 HANDS
31 SHOULDERS	32 FEET	33 HANDS
34 SHOULDERS	35 FEET	36 HANDS
37 SHOULDERS	38 FEET	39 HANDS
40 SHOULDERS	41 FEET	42 HANDS
43 SHOULDERS	44 FEET	45 HANDS
46 SHOULDERS	47 FEET	48 HANDS
49 SHOULDERS	50 FEET	51 HANDS
52 SHOULDERS	53 FEET	54 HANDS
55 SHOULDERS	56 FEET	57 HANDS
58 SHOULDERS	59 FEET	60 HANDS
61 SHOULDERS	62 FEET	63 HANDS
64 SHOULDERS	65 FEET	66 HANDS
67 SHOULDERS	68 FEET	69 HANDS
70 SHOULDERS	71 FEET	72 HANDS
73 SHOULDERS	74 FEET	75 HANDS
76 SHOULDERS	77 FEET	78 HANDS
79 SHOULDERS	80 FEET	81 HANDS
82 SHOULDERS	83 FEET	84 HANDS
85 SHOULDERS	86 FEET	87 HANDS
88 SHOULDERS	89 FEET	90 HANDS
91 SHOULDERS	92 FEET	93 HANDS
94 SHOULDERS	95 FEET	96 HANDS
97 SHOULDERS	98 FEET	99 HANDS
100 SHOULDERS	101 FEET	102 HANDS

USING THE DESCRIPTION  
IN THE POLICE REPORT.



IN THE POLICE REPORT, I AM VICTIM #3.

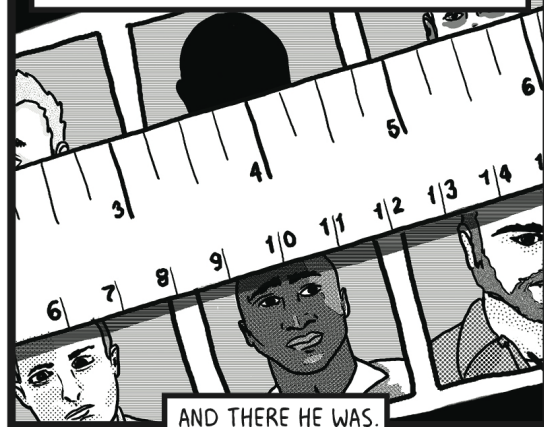
BEFORE THEY FOUND ██████'S FINGERPRINTS IN MY SISTER'S STOLEN CAR, THEY ASKED HER TO LOOK AT A PHOTO LINE-UP.



AT FIRST, SHE COULDN'T SEE HIM.

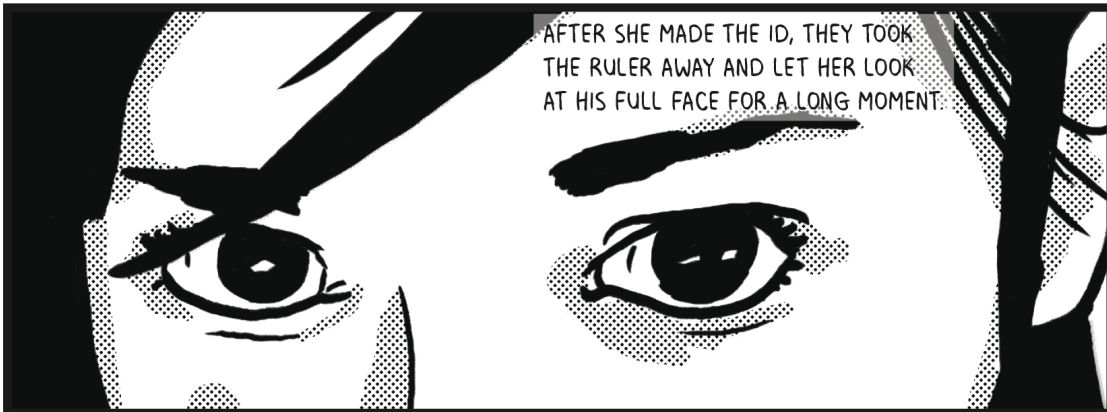


BUT THEN THE LEAD DETECTIVE COVERED THE BOTTOM HALVES OF THE PHOTOS WITH A RULER

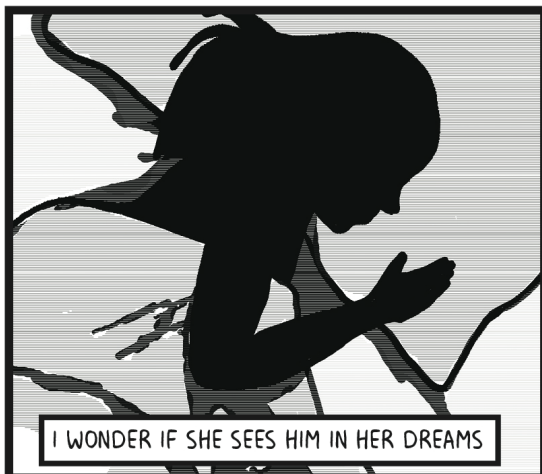


AND THERE HE WAS.

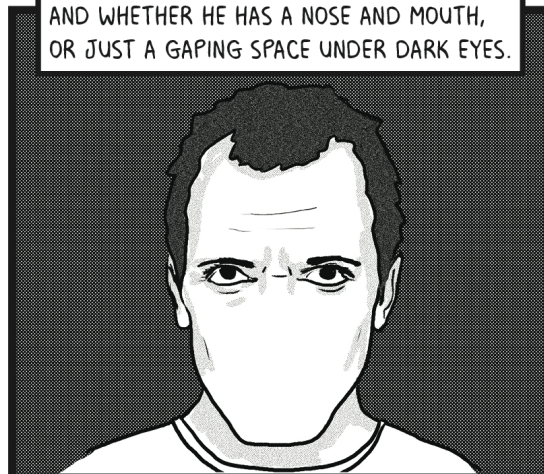
AFTER SHE MADE THE ID, THEY TOOK THE RULER AWAY AND LET HER LOOK AT HIS FULL FACE FOR A LONG MOMENT.

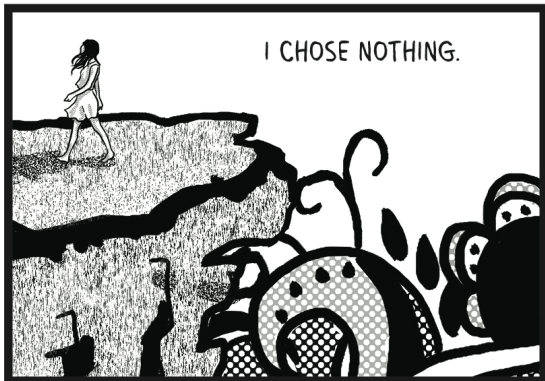
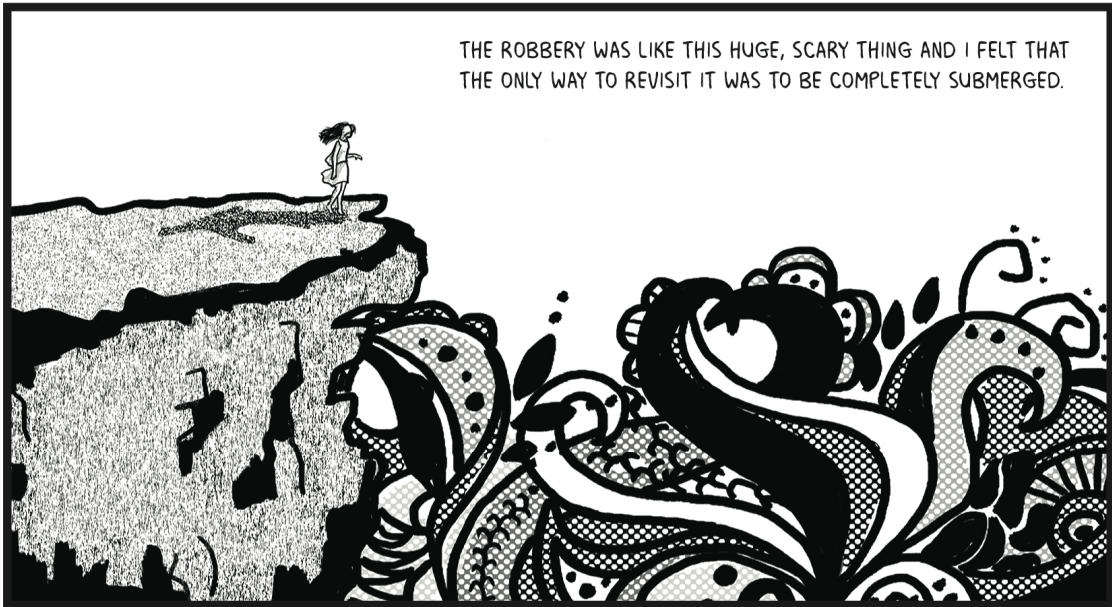
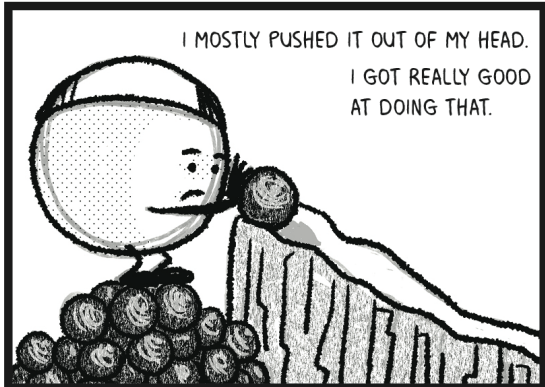


AND WHETHER HE HAS A NOSE AND MOUTH, OR JUST A GAPING SPACE UNDER DARK EYES.



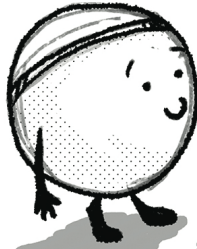
I WONDER IF SHE SEES HIM IN HER DREAMS



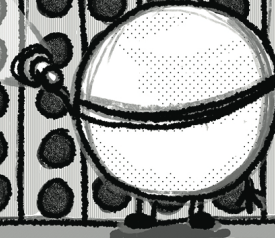




IN TIMES OF STRESS, GLUCOCORTICIDS FLOOD THE BRAIN, HELPING TO CODE AND STORE INFORMATION



BUT INHIBITING OUR ABILITY TO RETRIEVE IT.

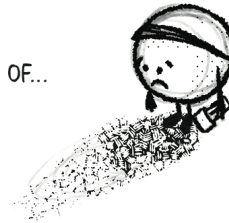


AFTER THE ROBBERY, I DIDN'T BEAT A CLEAR PATH TO THOSE MEMORIES.

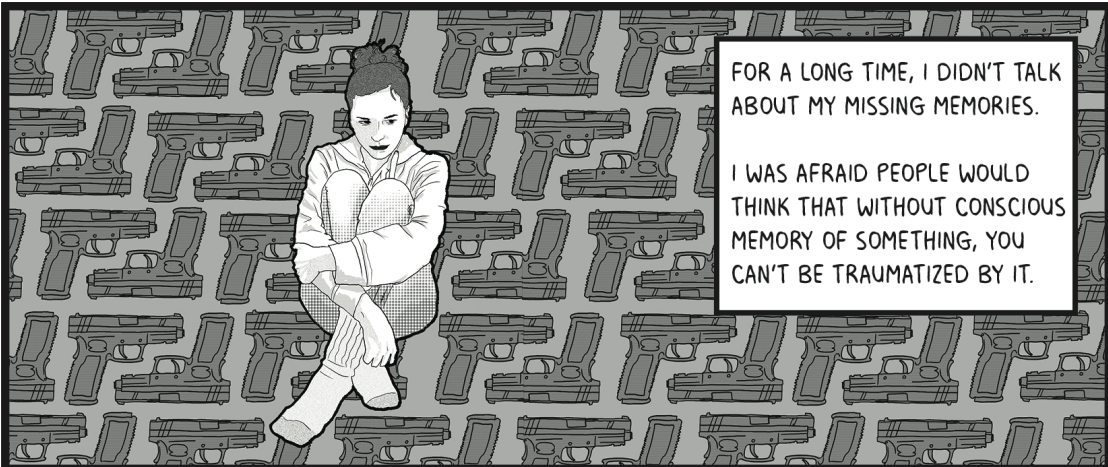


AND NOW THEY'RE HARD TO FIND IN THE OVERGROWTH OF MY BRAIN.

WHEN I TRY TO GO BACK THERE IN MY MIND, I JUST GET SORT OF...



...LOST.



FOR A LONG TIME, I DIDN'T TALK ABOUT MY MISSING MEMORIES.

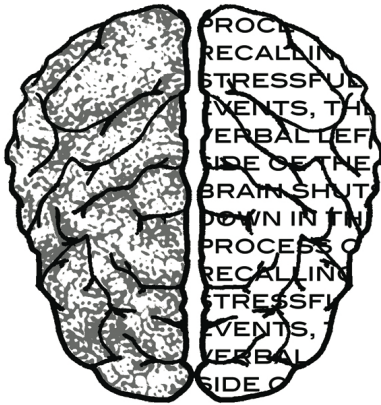
I WAS AFRAID PEOPLE WOULD THINK THAT WITHOUT CONSCIOUS MEMORY OF SOMETHING, YOU CAN'T BE TRAUMATIZED BY IT.

I DON'T HAVE A GOOD WAY OF EXPLAINING THAT IT'S ALL STILL THERE INSIDE ME.  
I CAN STILL FEEL IT,  
EVEN IF IT'S DIFFICULT  
TO PIN DOWN,

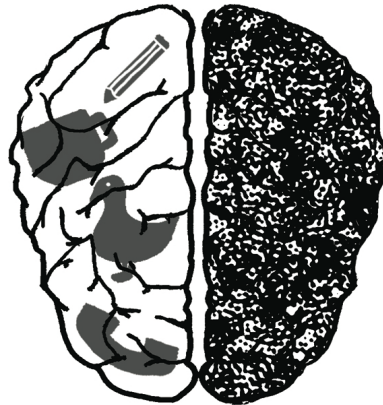


DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT.

WHEN WE RECALL STRESSFUL EVENTS, THE  
VERBAL SIDE OF THE BRAIN SHUTS DOWN

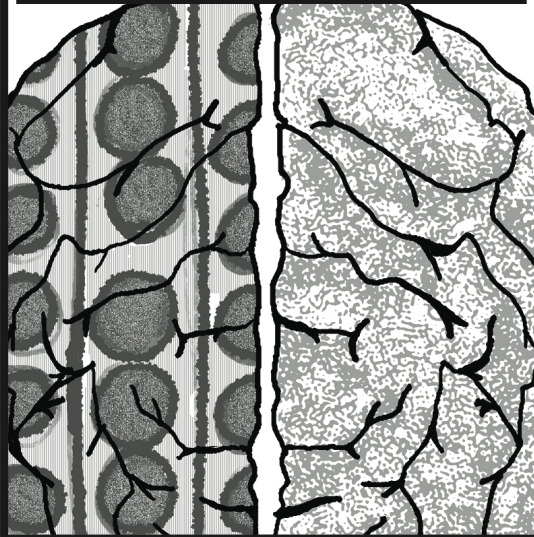


AND THE VISUAL SIDE REMAINS ACTIVE.

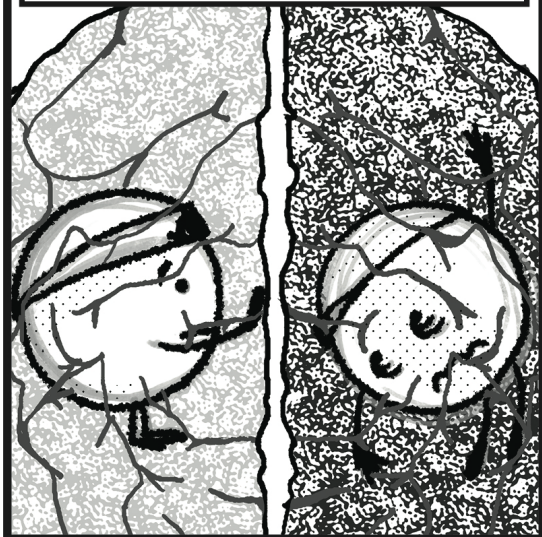


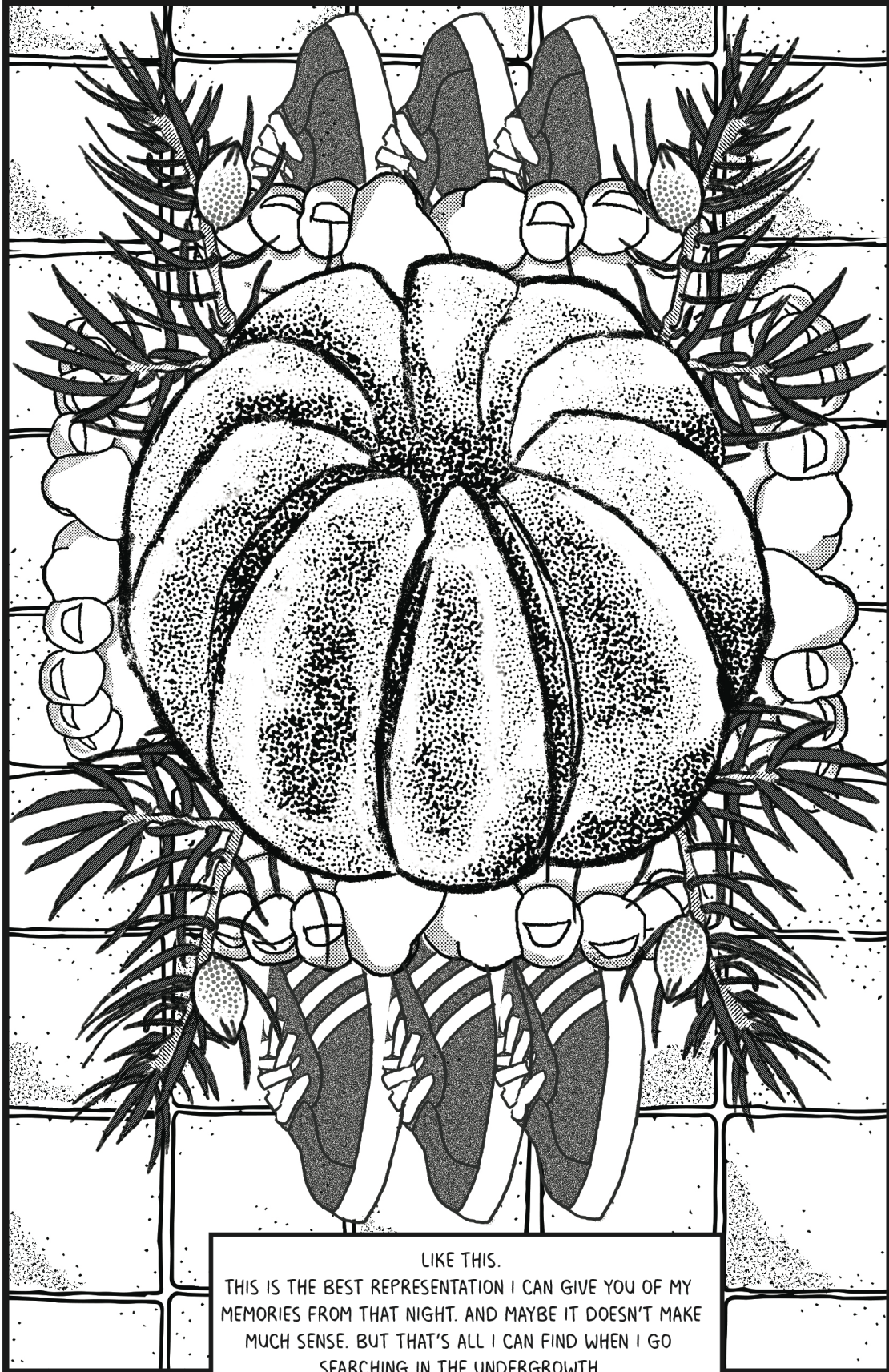
THE LANGUAGE OF TRAUMA ISN'T WORDS,  
IT'S PICTURES.

EXPERIENCES OF TRAUMA ARE STORED AS VIVID  
SENSE MEMORIES, BUT CAN BECOME INACCESSIBLE  
TO THE MORE LOGICAL PARTS OF OUR BRAINS.



IF THE TWO HALVES CAN'T WORK TOGETHER, THERE'S  
NO STORY, NO NARRATIVE. WHAT'S RECALLED IS  
CHAOTIC AND CONFUSING.





LIKE THIS.  
THIS IS THE BEST REPRESENTATION I CAN GIVE YOU OF MY  
MEMORIES FROM THAT NIGHT. AND MAYBE IT DOESN'T MAKE  
MUCH SENSE. BUT THAT'S ALL I CAN FIND WHEN I GO  
SEARCHING IN THE UNDERGROWTH.



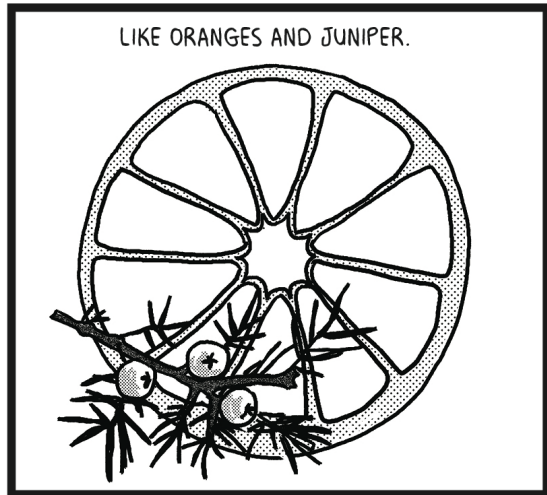
THE SOUND OF HIS SHOES ON THE FLOOR.



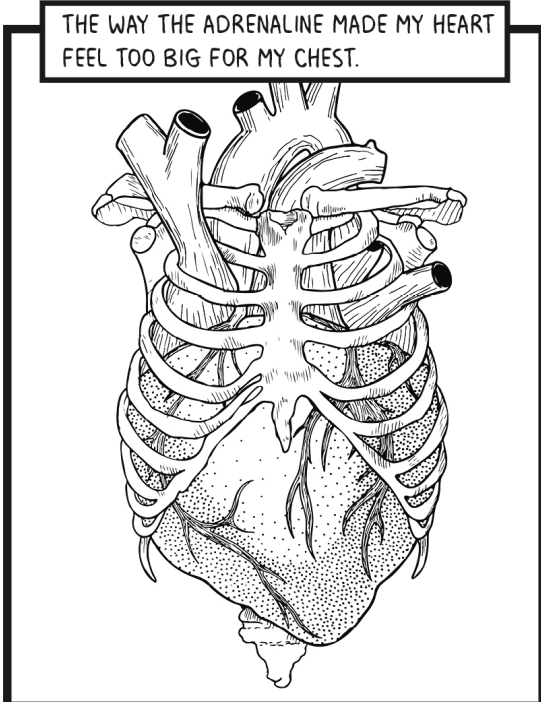
THE FEEL OF THE COLD TILE ON MY FEET.



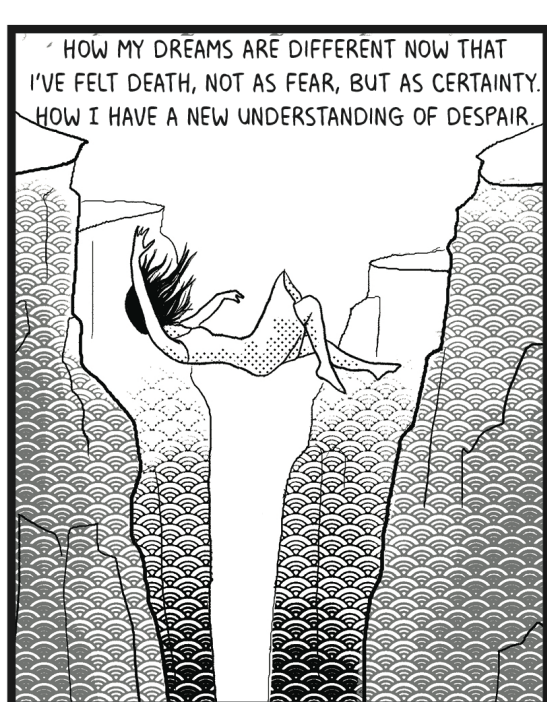
THE SMELL OF THE SOAP I HADN'T FINISHED RINSING FROM MY HANDS



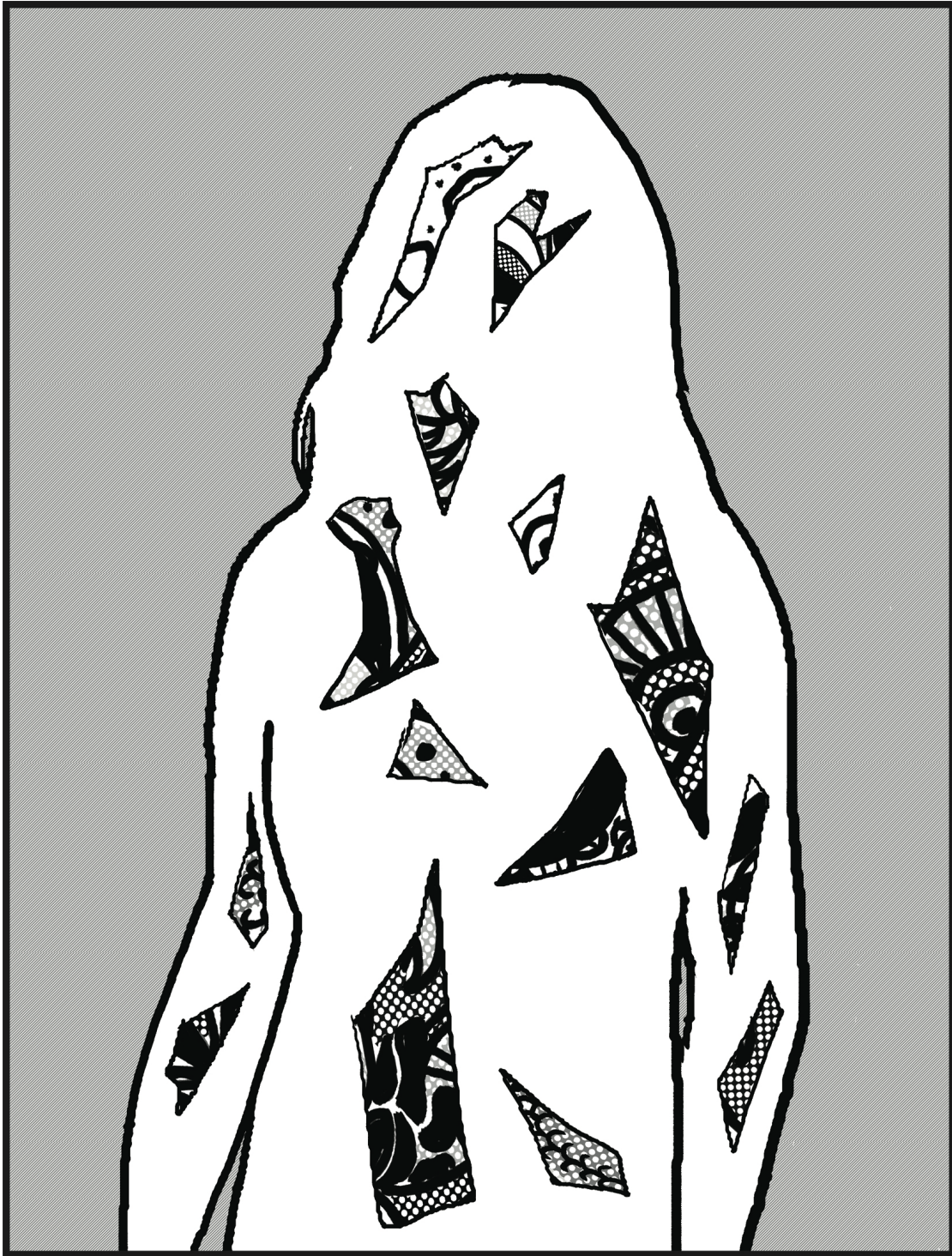
LIKE ORANGES AND JUNIPER.



THE WAY THE ADRENALINE MADE MY HEART FEEL TOO BIG FOR MY CHEST.



HOW MY DREAMS ARE DIFFERENT NOW THAT I'VE FELT DEATH, NOT AS FEAR, BUT AS CERTAINTY. HOW I HAVE A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF DESPAIR.



MAYBE THAT'S THE REAL REASON  
I NEVER WROTE ANY OF IT DOWN.

WRITING NEVER QUITE SEEMED LIKE ENOUGH.