

The
Light-
Haunted
Museum:
A Graphic
Novella

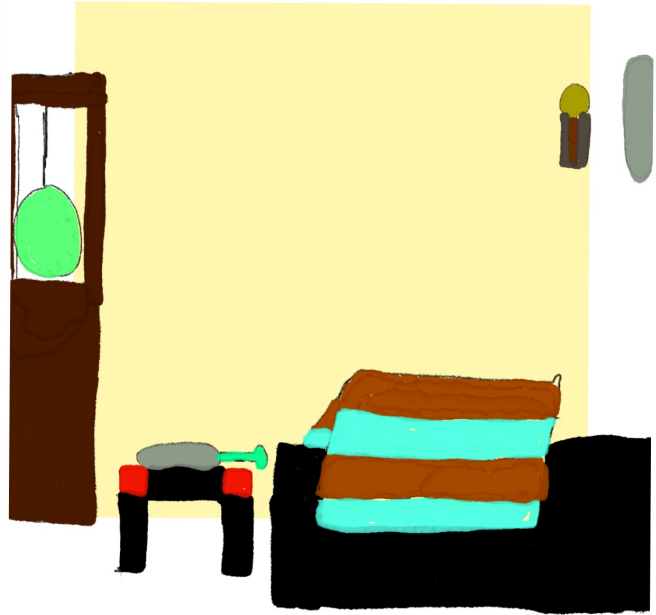
by
Andrew Field

I remember one time as a child,
eating dinner at my grandparents.
It was snowing outside,



and I distinctly felt the world
was an illusion.

After dinner I ran to the den,
and buried my head into the blanket.



What was real was the scratchy blanket
on my face, the snow accumulating outside,
but also a sense I had, of strangeness,



like a different person living inside
my body. What was real?

In school my friend Robert told me
the Mashiach was coming.





What would the Mashiach even look like?

He wouldn't be a man.
The Mashiach was April Boxwood,
the hottest girl in school.



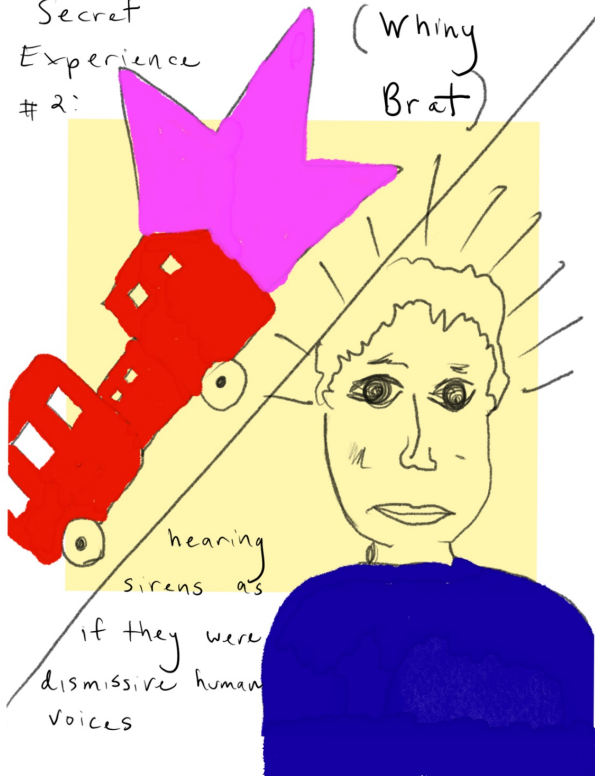
I wanted the Mashiach to come because I was tired of my secret experiences. If he came, and the world ended, I figured my secret experiences would go away.



Secret Experience #1:
hearing words in bird sounds

Secret Experience #2:

(Whiny Brat)



Secret Experience #3:

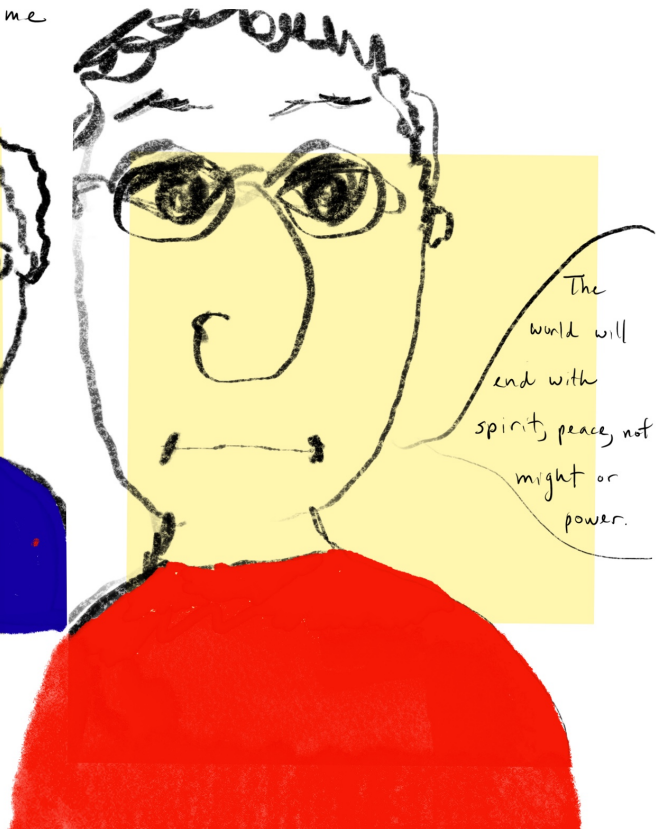
Seeing objects

in the world

as if they were entirely new



The next day at school, Robert told me a new piece of information about the Mashiach.





When I walked home the secret experiences started happening again.



Was that the Mashiach?

At home, no one seemed to notice any difference.



There was a mask in our basement that hung on the wall, and I walked downstairs to look at it.



It was strange - it had a strangeness that seemed to validate the strangeness of the voices I heard.



My grandfather, Morris, brought the mask to Detroit from Mexico City, where he immigrated from Poland, before the Nazis invaded.

What had he seen in it? To carry it all the way from Mexico City to Detroit?

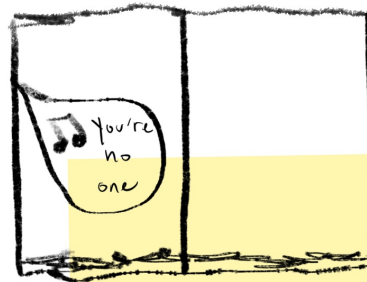
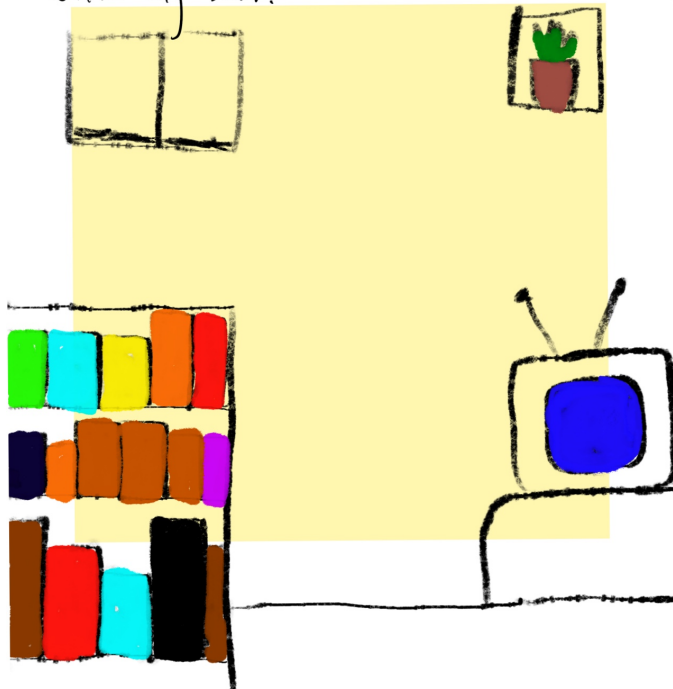


I reached for it and lifted it off the wall, feeling the smooth wood behind the mask on my fingers. It was heavy.



Then I turned it around and stared through the eyes.

The basement was the same, but I felt different, like playing hide and seek with my self.

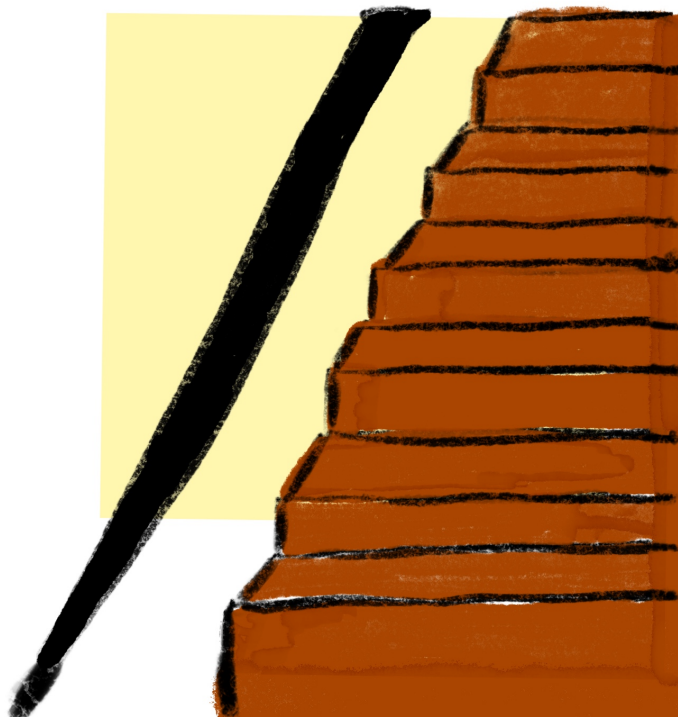


Just then I heard a bird outside the window, and for a moment hallucinated. I held the mask over my face and felt afraid.

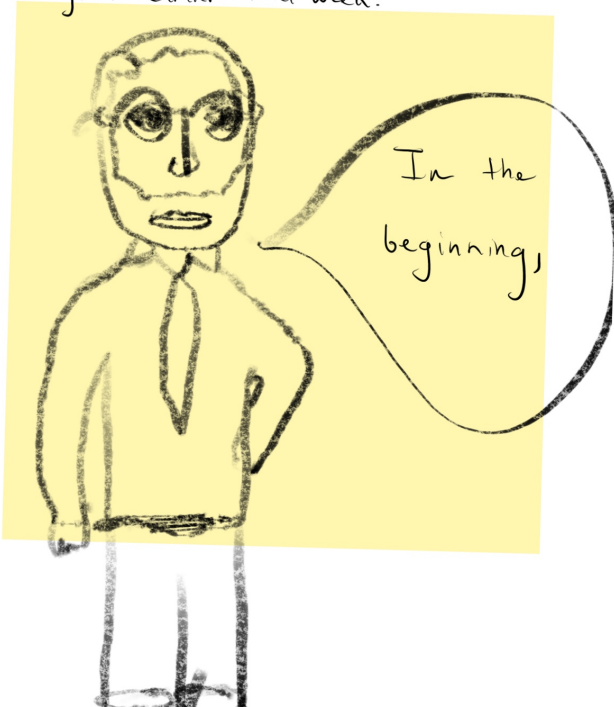
Then I started to cry. I held the mask just where it was.



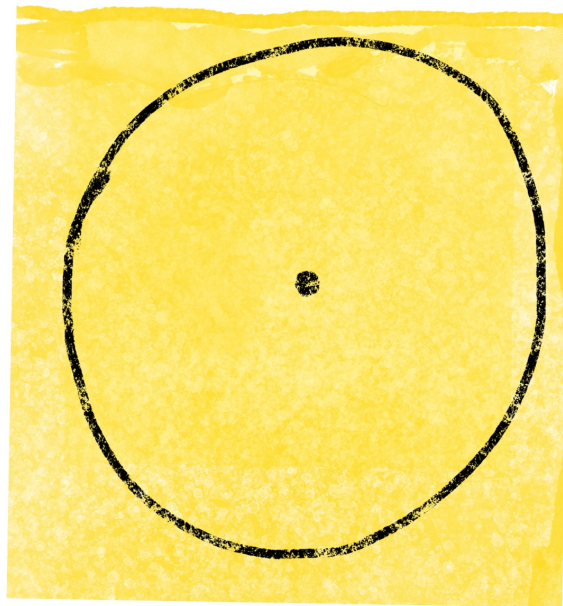
Then I walked back up the stairs.



As I walked up the stairs, I thought about a lecture our Torah teacher, Rabbi Belinsky, had given earlier that week.

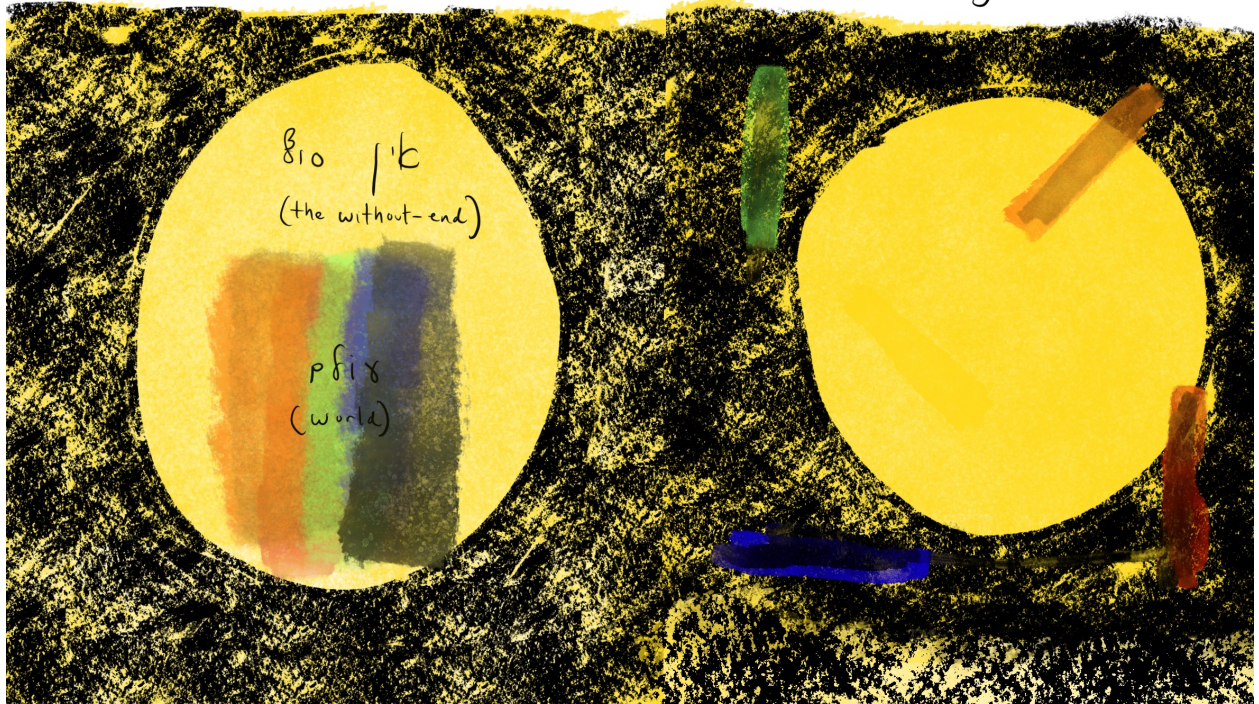


"God contracted within Himself."

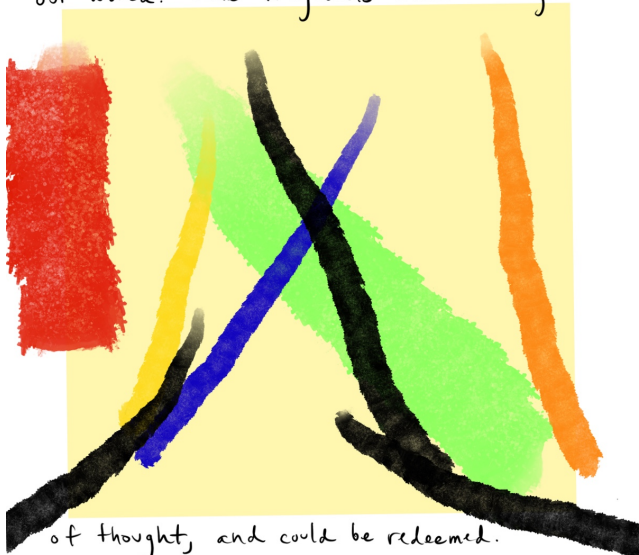


"to make room for the Creation."

But the divine light was so bright that the world coming into being shattered into pieces.



The fragments of the broken world coming into being fell down, eventually reaching our world. Some fragments held the light

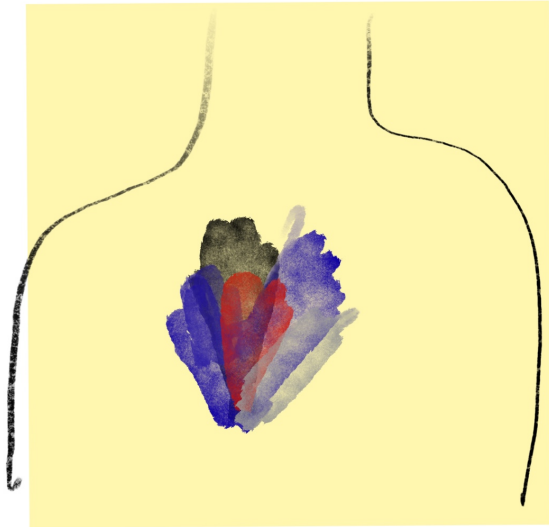


of thought, and could be redeemed. But some fragments, the husks, were composed of thoughtlessness, and contained only darkness.

But my mind couldn't think sometimes.



And my moods prevented me from thinking.



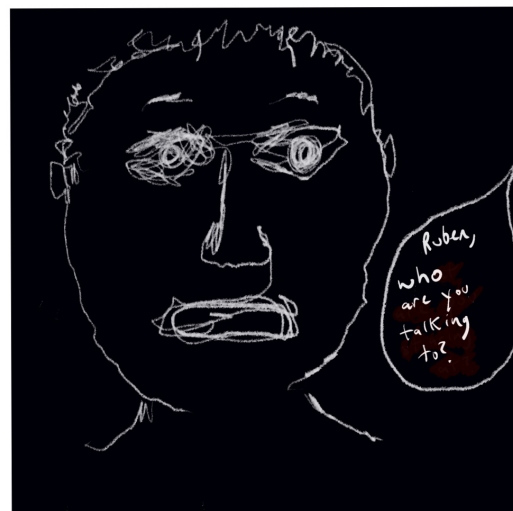
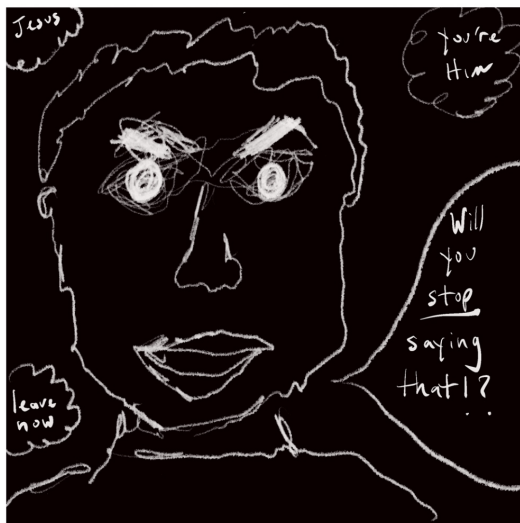
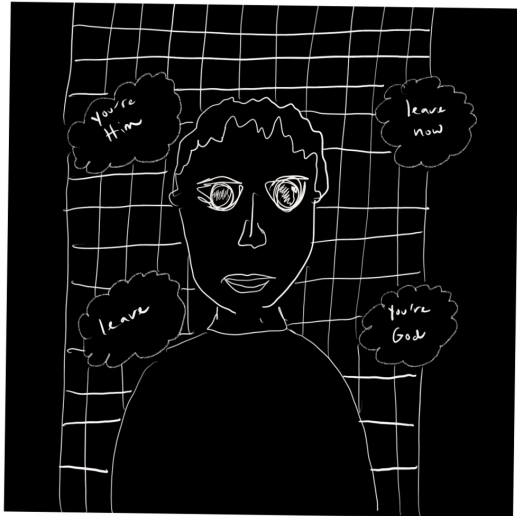
Did my thoughtlessness,
my moods, make me
a bad person?

That weekend, Robert and I walked
to a park with another friend, Sydney.



Sydney brought a Zippo.







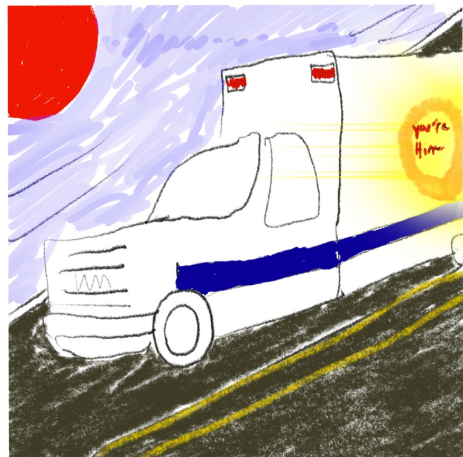
In school that Monday, Rabbi Belinsky assigned us something new.



Rubew Lichtenfeld
I feel like I am the Mashiah.
That is the only explanation for the voices I hear, who tell me I am Him. Jesus, too. Don't worry, I can handle this. Sometimes in class I feel you blessing me, like a cloud moves from your mouth over my head. It feels like the bestowal of Jacob's birthright. Thank you.

I met the school psychologist the next day.





What was happening?



Did she say "mental illness"?



Was mental illness who I was? Was it
another mask?

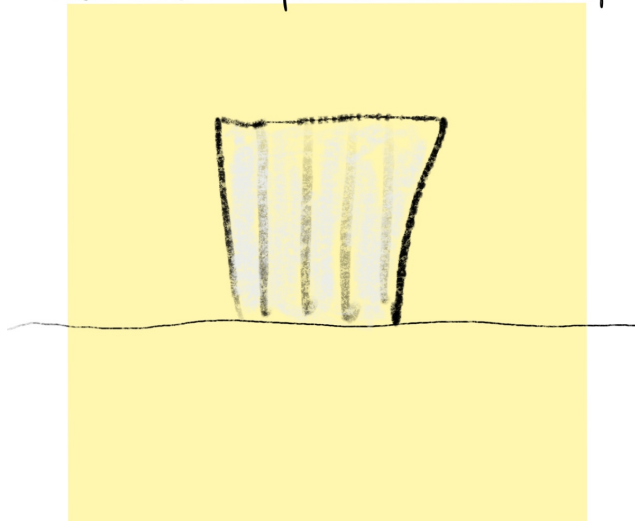


Early in the morning, a nurse woke me up to take my blood pressure. They'd been opening the door every fifteen



minutes during the night for reasons I did not understand. It was dawn, and everything seemed secretive and magical.

That morning I stood in a line behind a nurse's desk to take medication. There were three pills in a small white cup.



What were they going to do to me?

I walked into the bathroom. There was no door on the shower. Everything seemed like museum objects, sharp like a razor,



and not capturable in words. I felt a mixed feeling, like depression combined with euphoria.

At breakfast, everyone was silent. I wondered why. It seemed like we were all ashamed to have mental illness. Or maybe



it was the meds - I heard two kids in line for meds who said they felt like zombies and couldn't stop falling asleep.

I sat at a table with Jacob, who had long curly hair and staring eyes. He loved wrestling, I learned later-



WCW - and Eminem, and used to weigh 300 pounds. Then another kid, Mohammed, joined us. His Dad owned a 7-11.

After lunch and a group therapy session, where no one talked, I did a puzzle with Jacob and Mohammed in the lunch room.



We ate crackers and peanut butter. Elf was on TV behind us.



I had never talked about the voices I heard with other people my age.



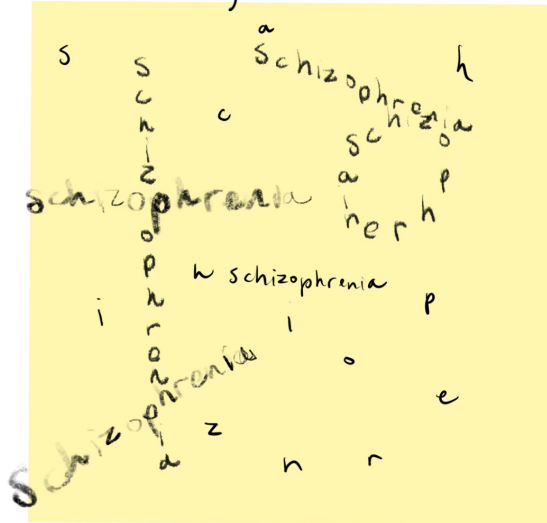
They both nodded their heads, and I felt relieved.



They said it at the same time.

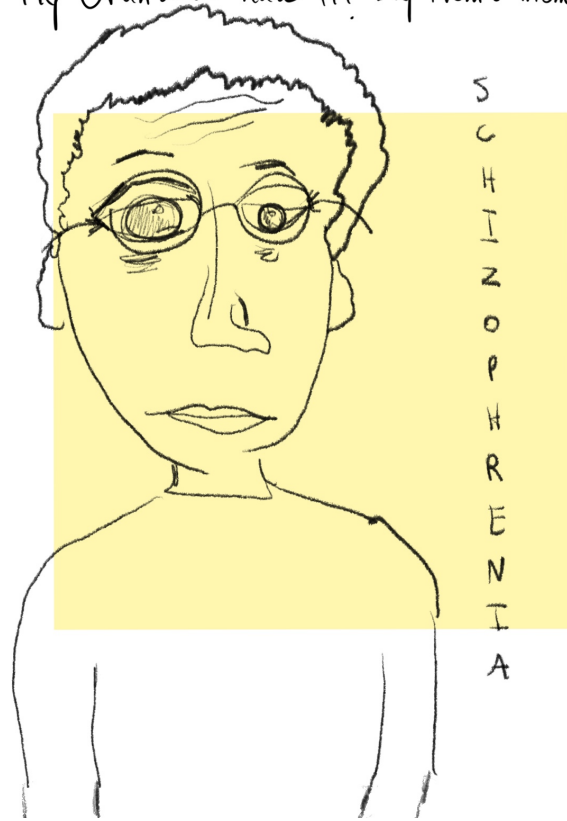


I said the word to myself, over and over, until it lost all meaning, like a husk of thoughtlessness.



Then I remembered I had heard the word before, and it came together in an image.

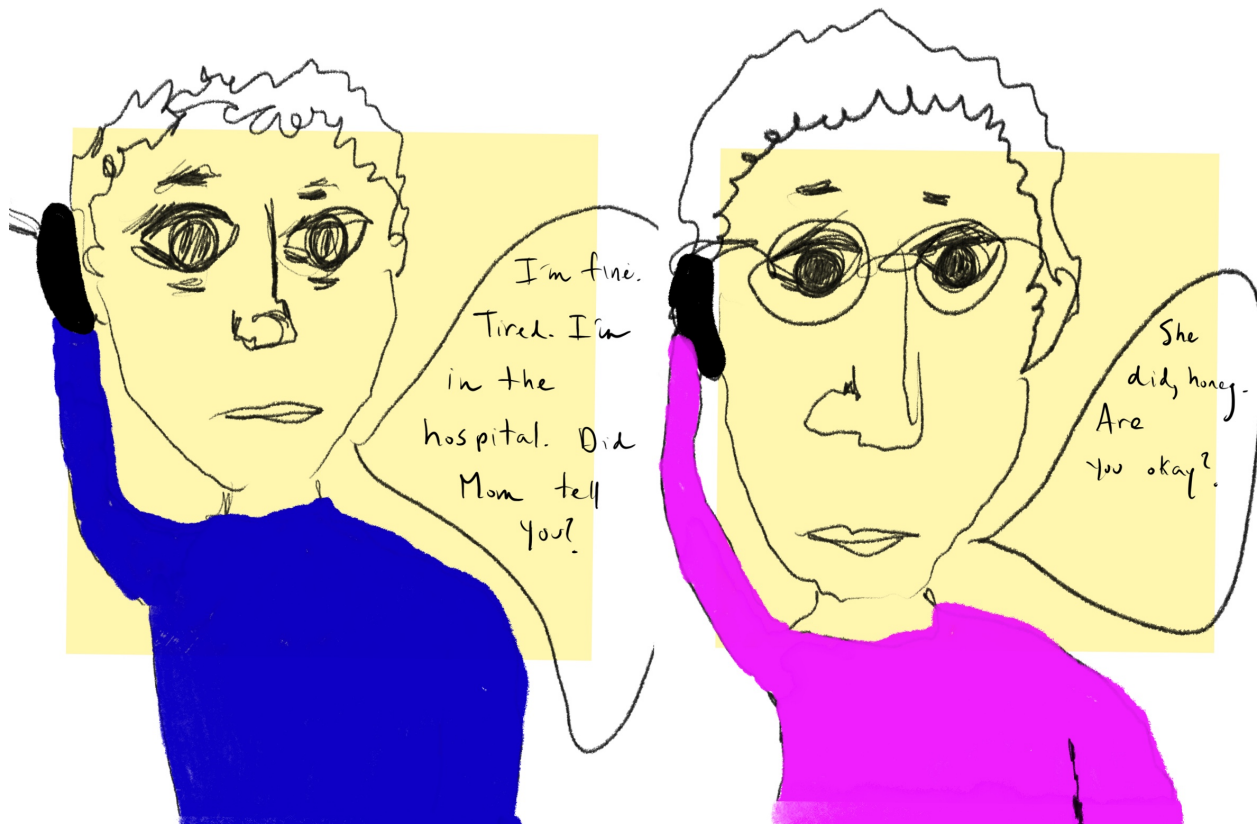
My Grandma had it! My Mom's mom.



I called her a few days later, before dinner. By then I started to feel the concrete feeling Jacob had mentioned.



But the voices were happening less. My grandma lived in a nursing home, and an attendant handed her the phone.

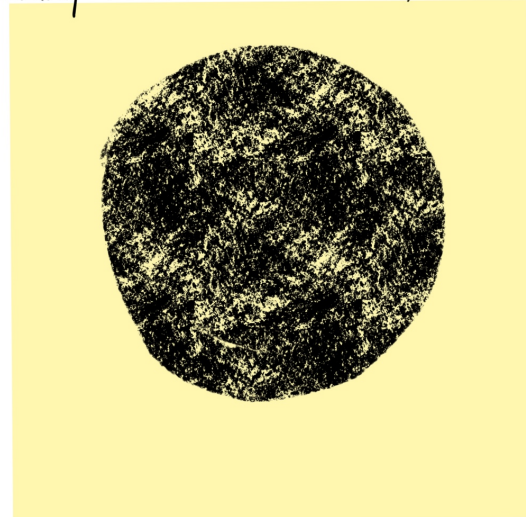


Was I okay? I had a mental illness. So did my grandma. So did Jacob and Mohammed. I looked into the lunchroom where Jacob

I thought about the voices I heard, which the meds cut out. I felt confused. Rabbi Belinsky talked about the "nefesh," the Jewish



and Mohammed were playing cards. Jacob was laughing about something, and Mohammed was smiling and shaking his head.



soul. I pictured it as round, near-perfect. But if I was taking medication, did that mean I had a defective soul?

Then my Grandma said,



When we hung up, I walked into my room to read a book my Dad had dropped off. Instead, I thought about the "club."

music traditions	artistic traditions
family traditions	school traditions
religious traditions	mental illness traditions?

My grandma meant "community." I wanted there to be a tradition of schizophrenia, as there was a Jewish tradition.

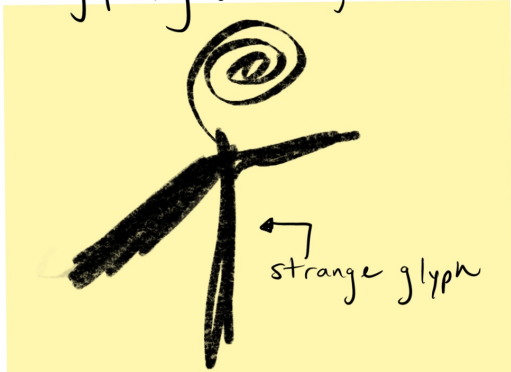
My Dad picked me up from the hospital after two weeks.

I knew he loved me, but found it hard to talk about the diagnosis. We let silence enter the car,



and I stared out the window.

I looked at the signs, the billboards, At home - it was a Saturday - my Mom
the businesses; people walking their dogs; tried to cheer me up.
a family pushing a stroller; and felt an



enormous guilt separating me from
the world. I felt raw, fragile,
vulnerable, and confused, like I was a glyph
people couldn't read, with this new identity,
"schizophrenic."



My Mom said to give it time. Then I
walked up the stairs to my bedroom.
I sat on my bed and heard a bird outside.

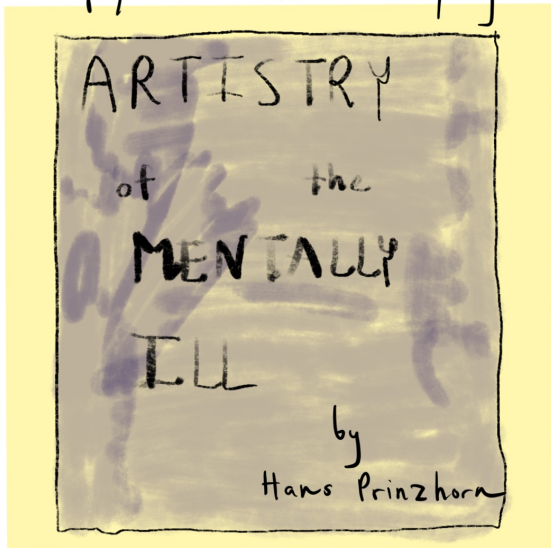


At first the birdsound held no hallucinations, and I just heard it, as it was. Then, suddenly:



But this time the hallucination didn't alarm me. It wasn't a comfort, but it also wasn't the end of the world.

Things slowed down after the hospital. People at school didn't seem to know I'd been in the psych ward. Robert and Sydney felt



distant. One weekend, I came across a book on the Internet Archive, and borrowed it for an hour:

It was a part of my life, but it wasn't my whole life. It was like I was wearing a different coat.



When the hallucinations happened, I could let them happen without freaking out.

The images in the book, drawn by many artists with schizophrenia, seemed to be drawn for me. It was the tradition



I had craved, with its qualities of folk art, its sense of being other. I had always felt that sense,

a disconnection in my soul. When I stopped reading the book, I looked up and remembered a time I had walked



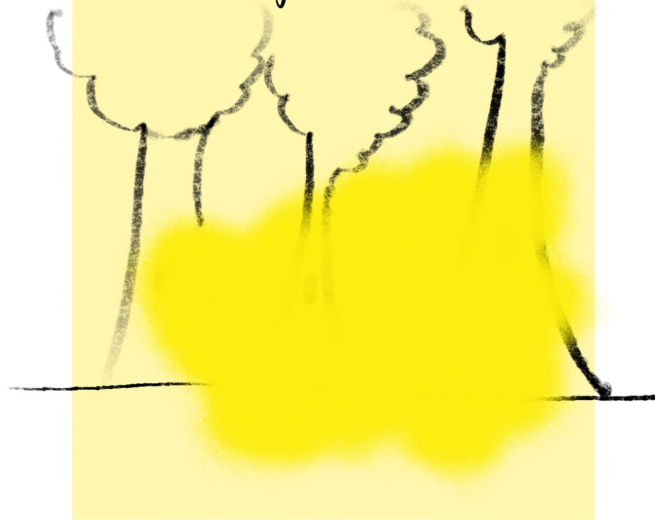
to the park alone, how strange my experience had been, like a living form of the art I was looking at.

There was a fullness to the moment that felt holy, like a poem, as if the world was a kind of light-haunted museum.



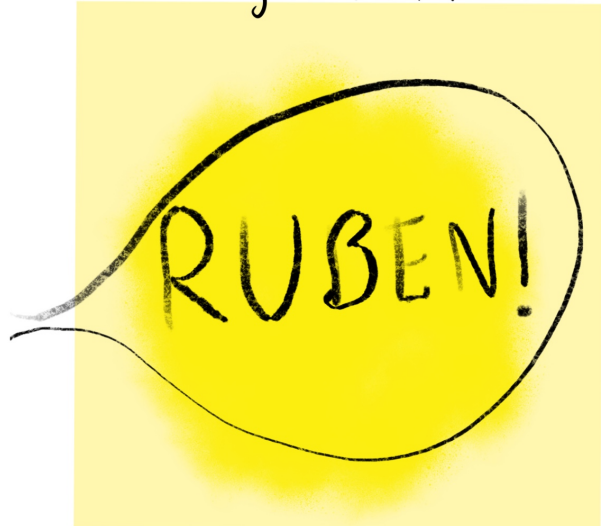
The sound of the wind was loud, and the golden light flooded me and left me speechless. I felt fragile and far away,

I remember it seemed like the traffic sounds in the distance were focusing on me. The color of the sunlight seemed like a detective



slipping enigmatically through the trees. It was so bright it hurt.

as if everything in the world was suddenly speaking, on fire with its own tongue. And all of it felt



significant, though I didn't know why. As if the world were speaking my name.

I kept this experience a secret, but it found
a home in Artistry of the Mentally Ill.
My meds did not like such experiences.



But I could access the magic
of them, safely and powerfully,
through art.