

You must learn to hold the things that contradict

*A reflection on narratives, truth, and justification
[and growing up in a cult?]*

<https://datapup.info>

Afterimages

Poetry by Shel Raphen



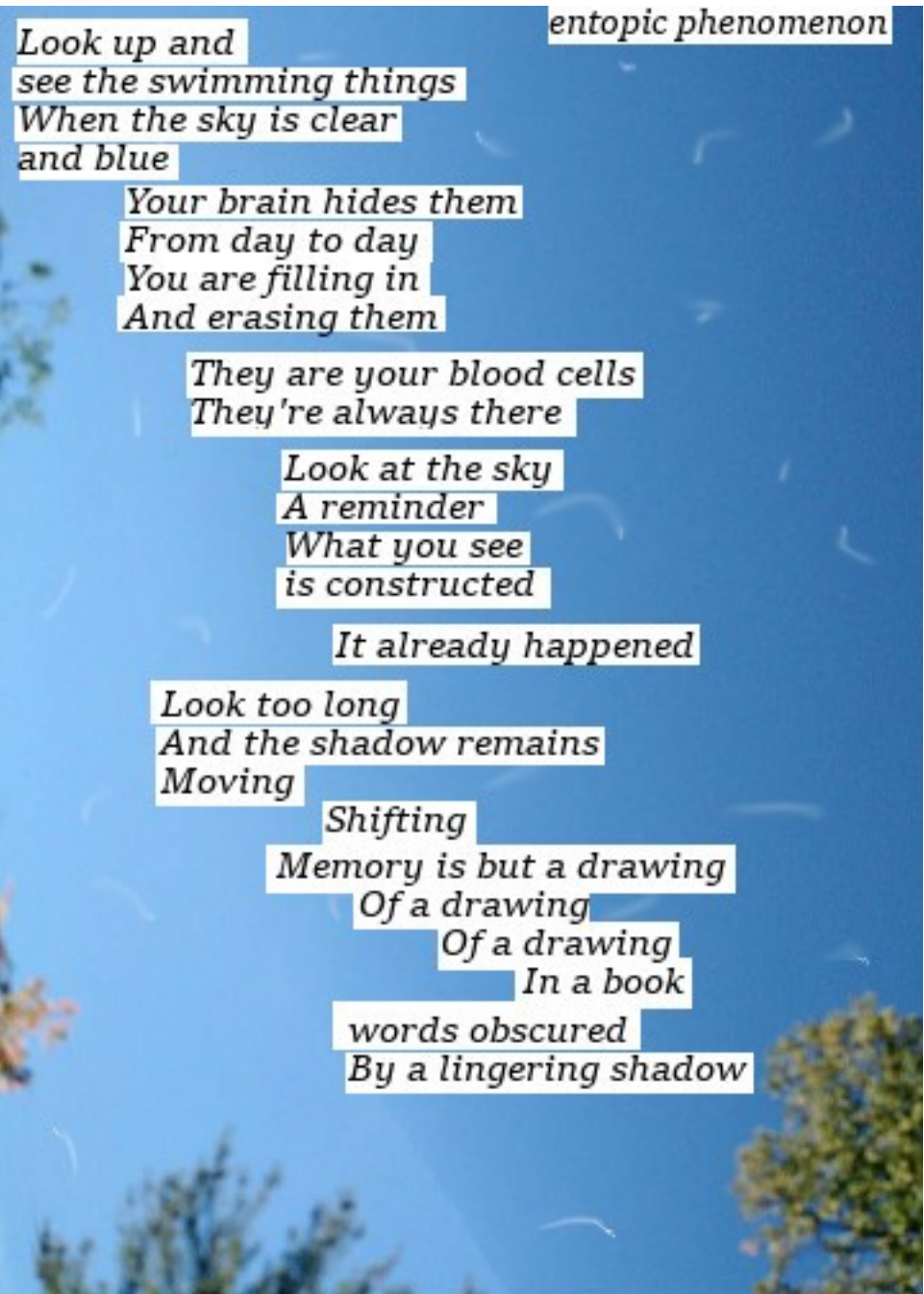
"i love you" means

"stay,

for i will listen

when you tell me

i have hurt you"



Look up and
see the swimming things
When the sky is clear
and blue

entopic phenomenon

Your brain hides them
From day to day
You are filling in
And erasing them

They are your blood cells
They're always there

Look at the sky
A reminder
What you see
is constructed

It already happened

Look too long
And the shadow remains
Moving

Shifting

Memory is but a drawing
Of a drawing
Of a drawing
In a book

words obscured
By a lingering shadow

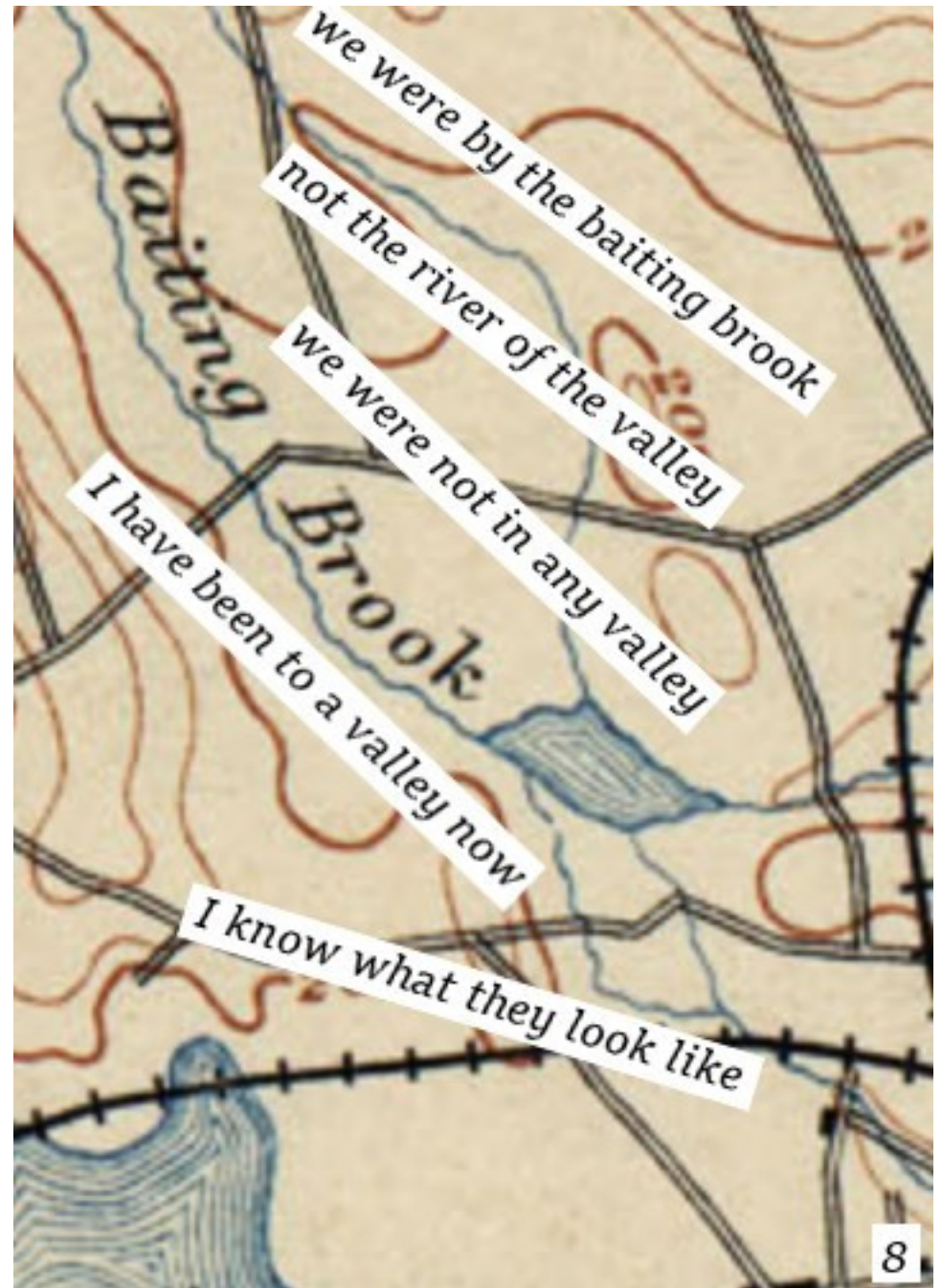
Testimony

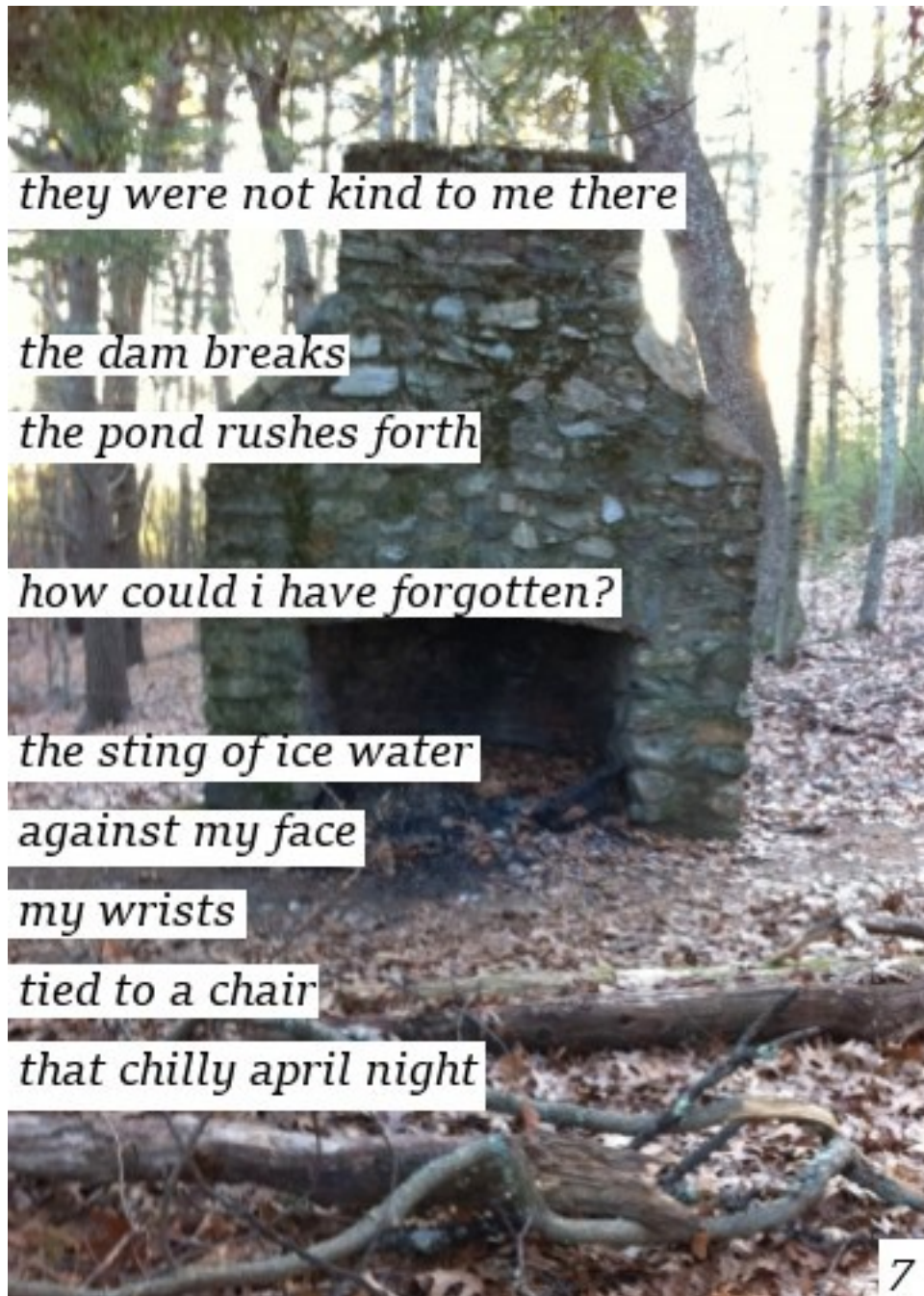
The four walls were bookshelves
A table with nine chairs
Witnesses, defendants, plaintiffs,
and spectators sat on windowsills
Spectators, knitting hats,

I learned to testify

You can't understand.
How could I have seen this like you?
You didn't have our words
Our architecture
Your walls were not bookshelves

I didn't understand outsiders.
I stopped talking to them.





they were not kind to me there

the dam breaks

the pond rushes forth

how could i have forgotten?

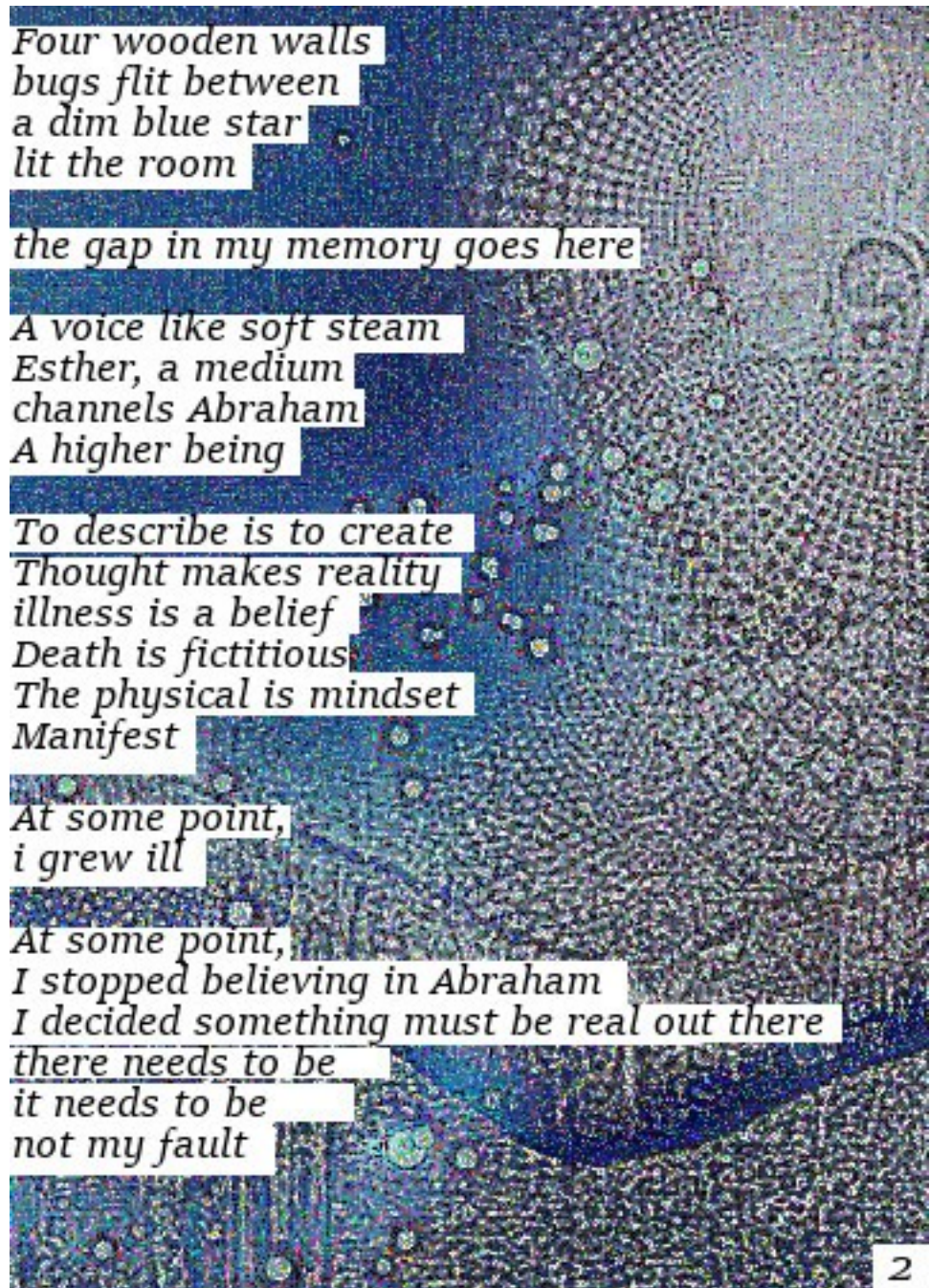
the sting of ice water

against my face

my wrists

tied to a chair

that chilly april night



*Four wooden walls
bugs flit between
a dim blue star
lit the room*

the gap in my memory goes here

*A voice like soft steam
Esther, a medium
channels Abraham
A higher being*

*To describe is to create
Thought makes reality
illness is a belief
Death is fictitious
The physical is mindset
Manifest*

*At some point,
i grew ill*

*At some point,
I stopped believing in Abraham
I decided something must be real out there
there needs to be
it needs to be
not my fault*

One time, I found a copy of Dianetics in our bathroom

I told my dad not to read that stuff

It's just propaganda for some cult you know

3

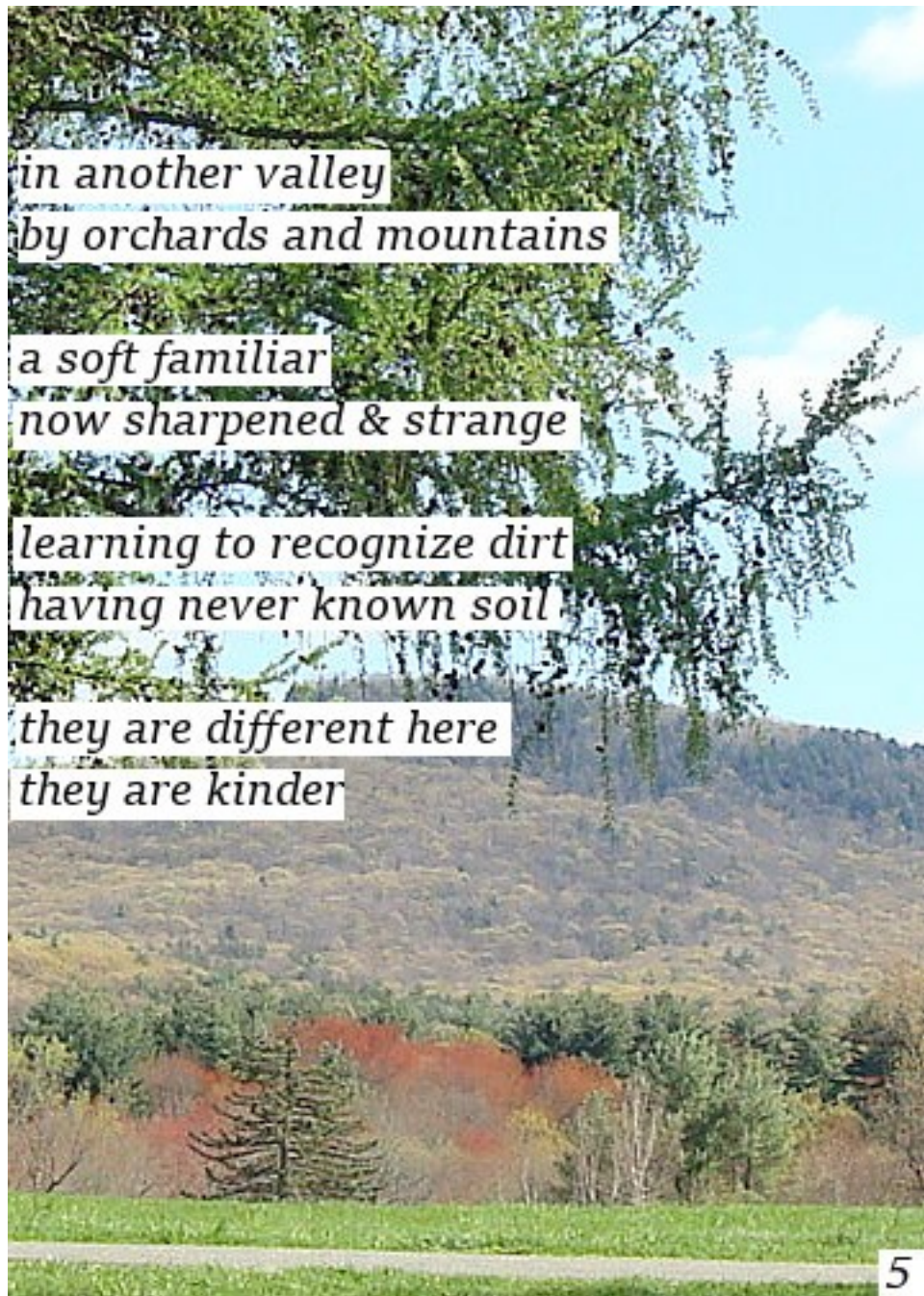
*kindness is
something else
than what i thought*

*a noticed absence
an inquiry
an outreached hand*

*a warmth
that says
"i want you here"*

*you are worth more
than how they treated you"*

6



in another valley

by orchards and mountains

a soft familiar

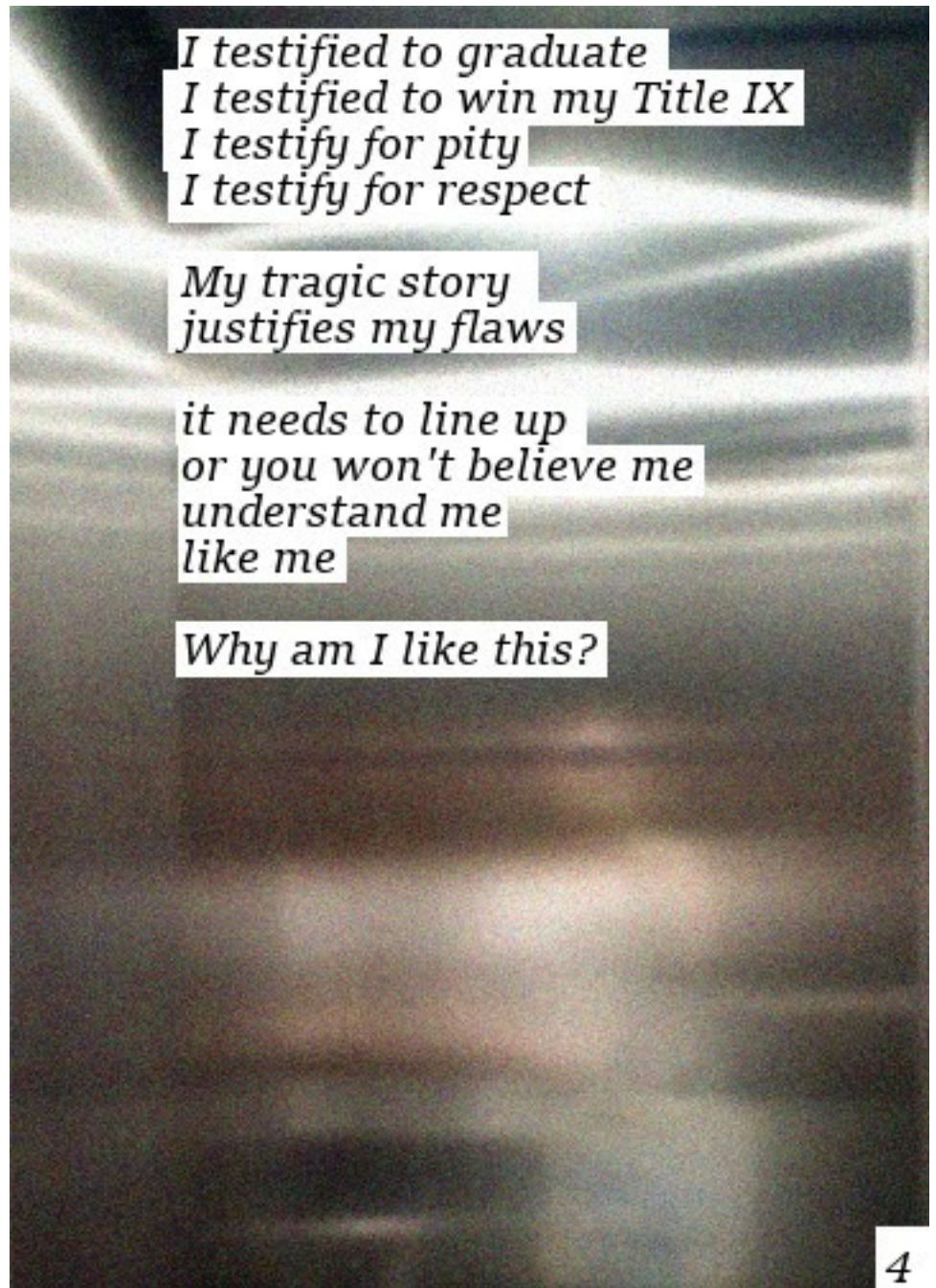
now sharpened & strange

learning to recognize dirt

having never known soil

they are different here

they are kinder



I testified to graduate

I testified to win my Title IX

I testify for pity

I testify for respect

My tragic story

justifies my flaws

it needs to line up

or you won't believe me

understand me

like me

Why am I like this?

myopia

Everything seems softer in the distance
The leaves meld
Letters melt

There are times the distance shallows
All seems projected
on a screen

This memory from long ago
An afterimage in my eyes
So simple,
sitting on the fire escape
to see the pond from up high.

here, by the pond
we do not distinguish young and old
these caterpillars must fly

so it's time for them to face
every bug by the pond
to pick their punishment

this is not a trial
this child is guilty
there is never a trial
it's easier to plead guilty

"how horrible
what this child has done
what danger
our pond is always in

you will be our death, child
it is on you, child"

"I love you" means
"love me" means
"you should love me" means
"why don't you love me" means

a stinging nettle, a gift
to rub upon your skin
until you say "i love you"

kindness is
being left alone.

Revision

A garage
with barn house doors
dry winter air
outside
a car running
inside

when i relax, my vision doubles

1. i was stupid

2. it was an accident

1. it was my first suicide attempt

2. i didn't know,

it was neglect

nobody told me

about exhaust

i was told

'go start the car'

it was in the garage

i was 12

i think

im unsure

maybe i'll be wrong again

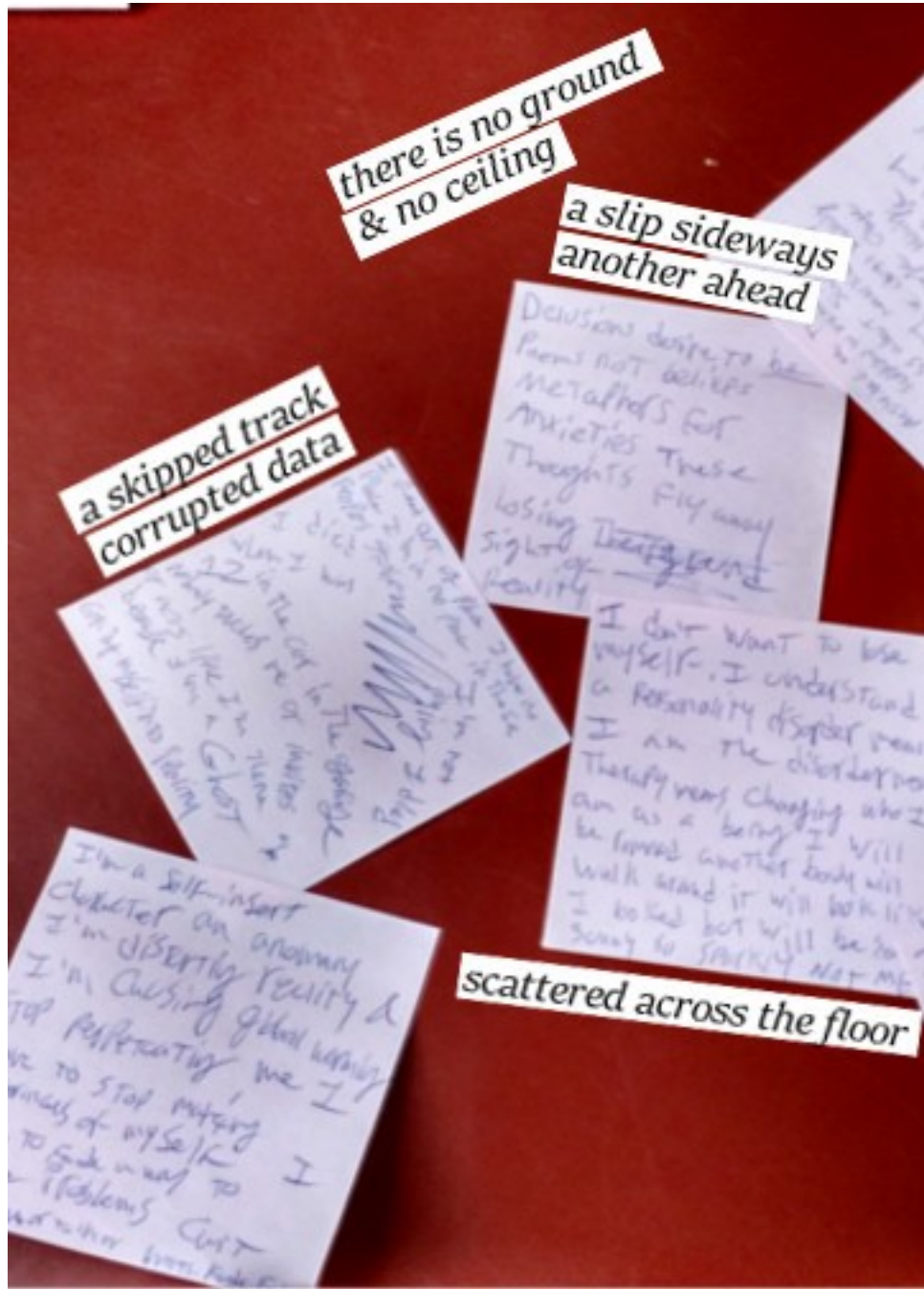
maybe this isn't really what happened

maybe i'm lying

and i just

don't

know



there is no ground
& no ceiling

a slip sideways
another ahead

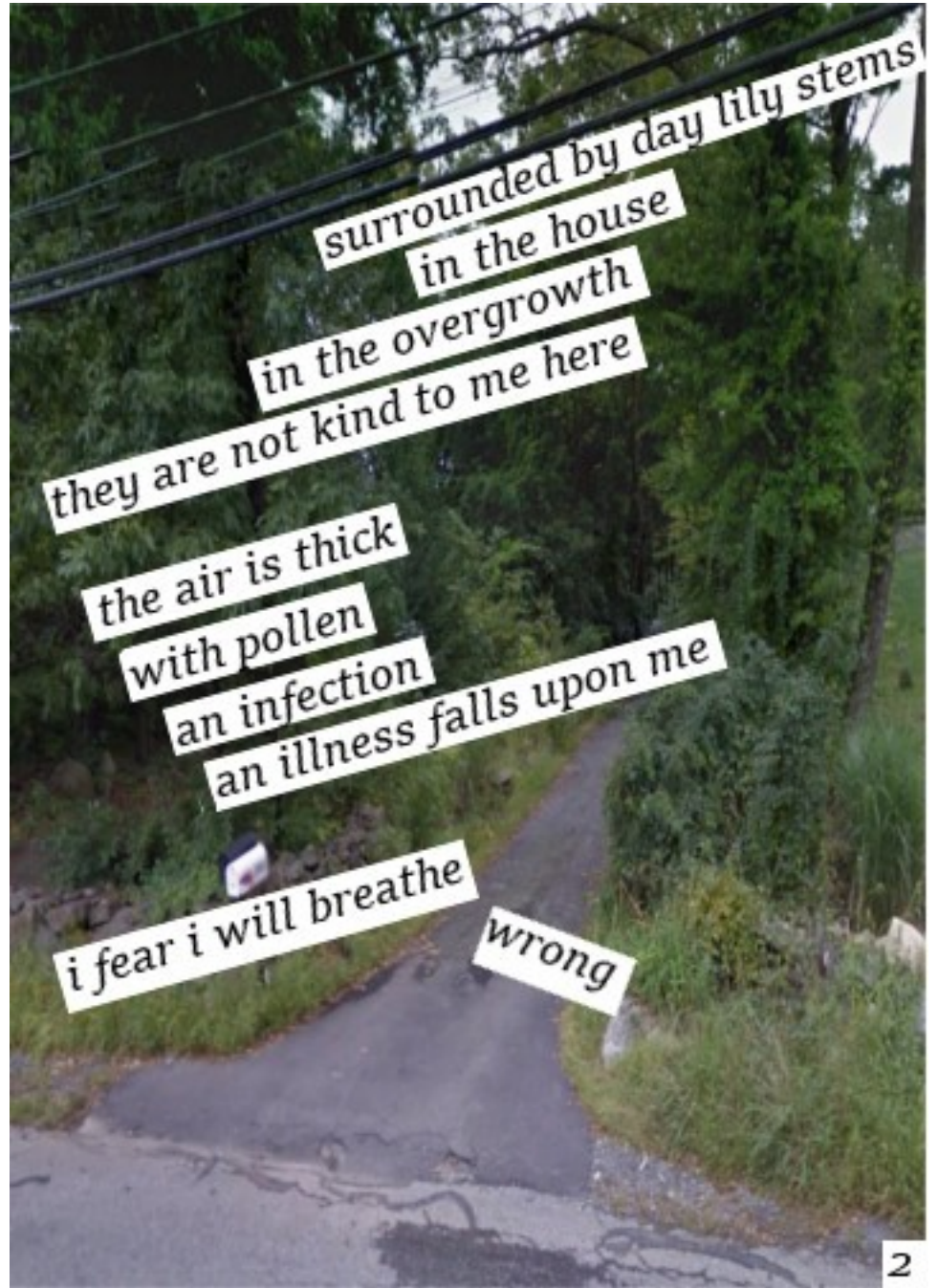
a skipped track
corrupted data

Devison desire to be
Pains not beliefs
Metaphors for
Anxieties these
Thoughts fly away
Losing thoughts
Sight of
Reality

I don't want to use
myself. I understand
a personality disorder
I am the disorder
Therapy was changing who I
am as a being I will
be loved another body will
walk around it will look like
I belong but will be so
scary to STAYING NOT ME

scattered across the floor

I'm a self-insert
character an anomaly
I'm liberally reality &
I'm causing global warming
STOP REPERCUATING me I
want to stop putting
pieces of myself I
to give a way to
problems. Just
another love. Just



surrounded by day lily stems
in the house

in the overgrowth

they are not kind to me here

the air is thick
with pollen

an infection

an illness falls upon me

i fear i will breathe

wrong

Dam

by the pond

of the river

in the valley

a dam holds the water in

the creek rushes under me

on the bridge

on the dam

they are kind to me here

suicide poem . txt

o:

*I will prove we aren't
helpless*

*The interstate will be
our garden*

*Our bodies
fertilizer*

*A tanker the gardener
I'll be the last
flower to bloom*



1:

*I know you want to be
The most fuckable compost
On the pile of dead girls, but,
Nothing will grow from your body
You are salt, not fertilizer*

2:

listen,

*i dont care about being a martyr,
when i say i'll eventually kill myself
it feels like the only true
right
thing*

i've ever told anybody

2

A Collar Cutting Poem

*It is time to wear the collar
With pearls and a heart-shaped tag
Tight around your neck
Is the arm full of fire*

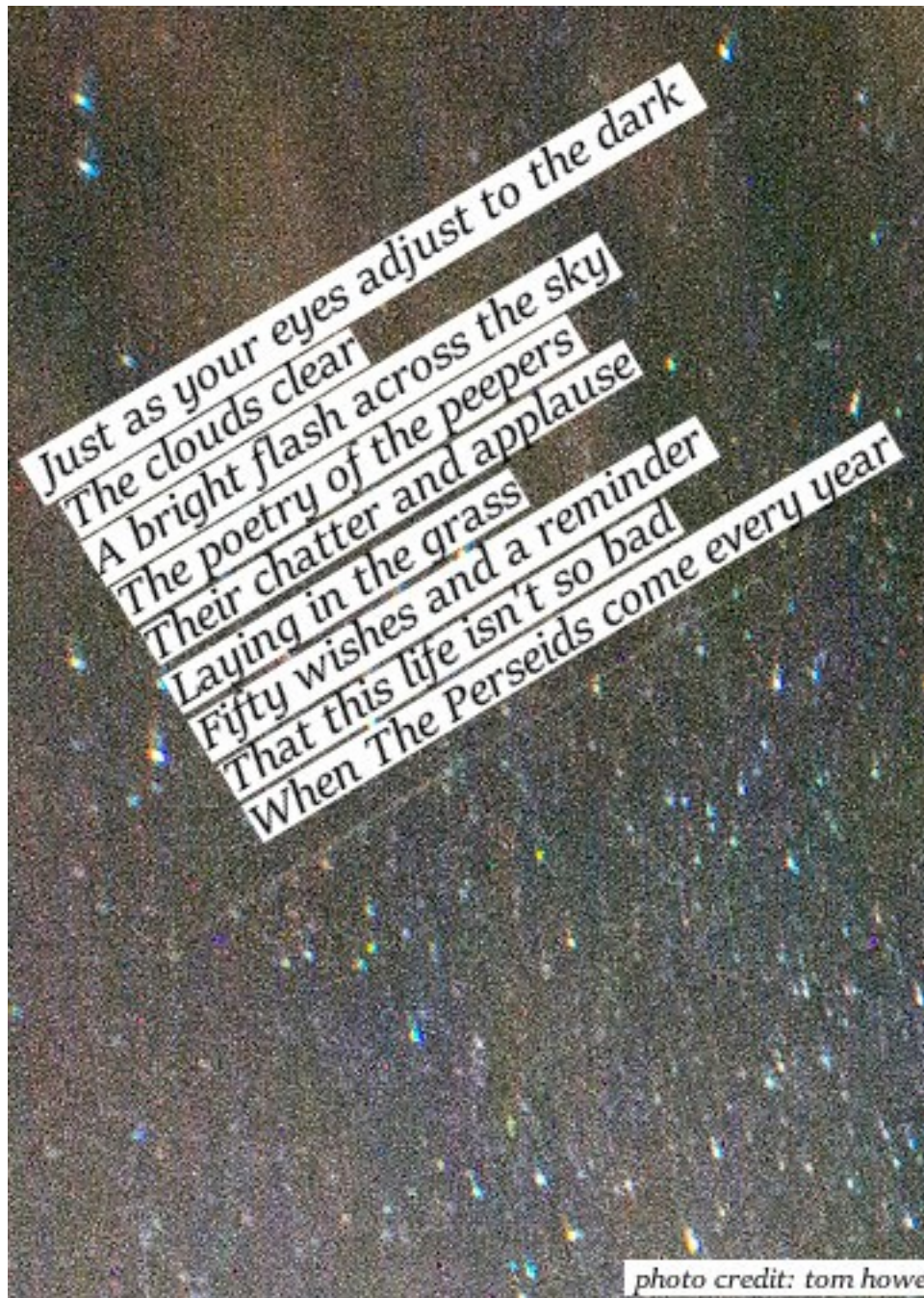
*It's time to wear the smile
And be told you look scared*

*This paper
Framed by leather*

*A circle on a square
Is proof that you can't be uprooted
It is the silver scissors that can
cut the umbilical cord
Feeding the placenta into the baby
After it has grown
Sick and miserable*

*It's time to tell the truth
Spit out this rock you've been
Holding in your mouth
The one that's been
rolling down a hill
Collecting snow and dirt*

*Wielding your scissors
Undo the stitching on your mouth
Put away your needle
You have no more need for it*



1:
*Suicide would be hypocritical
For girls like us:
It's a privilege to kill yourself*

*I am good, I am helpful,
I have survived abuse
I am an inspiration*

2:
*you say ab-use
like
there's a right way to be used
the only problem was we were used
incorrectly
like
you see us as sub-human
sub-servient
i'll take our humanity in our hands
& make them recognize it
freedom from encyclopedias
from googling & helping & trying & keeping up
with the footwork of living*

1:

*There is no freedom in death
You only become an idea
Completely controlled by others
Used to show off how pained they are
How compassionate
Nobody will speak badly of us again
Only because nobody will truly be
Speaking about us again*

2:

the only reason yr afraid is

you have to follow your institutions & rules

you don't want to fail & be one of those people


who take time off

there's nothing bad about being of those people &

be honest,

we'd both love the attention from a failed suicide attempt

4



*You've lost the color in your eyes
The iris' shades, desaturated
Gray, glaring back in the reflection
on the glass of the bus shelter
When did this happen?*

DIARY CARD		Therapist:				
DAY	SELF HARM	SUICIDE	OTHER TARGET:			
			Urge 0-5	Action Y/N	Urge 0-5	Action Y/N
	<i>flesh art</i>					
	<i>I flay my skin and Sling it onto the table This is my art I have weaponized it</i>					
MON	<i>Skin on the table</i>					
TUE	<i>Bare flesh dripping</i>					
WED	<i>Your discomfort validates me</i>					
THUR	<i>I logged the seventh consecutive 0 in a column</i>					
FRI	<i>Under Suicide: Felt Urge</i>					
SAT	<i>Wondering if I'll still be able to write good poetry</i>					
SUN						
URGES SCALE:						EMO
DIDN'T HAVE URGE TODAY						0= N

1:

*Shut Up
It's my responsibility to make others feel better
It's my responsibility to keep other people from killing themselves
It's all on me
It's all on me
I live for others & can't let them down*

2:

*we are alive but
you are still treating our body like fertilizer
tearing off rotting flesh &
giving it away
to other people's gardens
won't stop that we're rotting
i'll be the gardener
the flowers our freedom
blooming watered not from sweat but tears*

Porcupinebird

I thought my spines were wings
When I grew them
I fell and couldn't be caught
Their arms must have bled

I landed in an ocean of
whirring white noise
machines like mezuzahs
I pray for health
Please remove my spines

I met ewe in a meadow
Of circuits and waves
Soft wool, warm wool
Steel wool upon your chin
Soft palms, warm hands
Dry hands, a harsh winter
You press in closer
I fear that I am hurting you
My spines must be digging
"Are you okay?" I ask
you affirm and press in closer
"Are you sure?"
You affirm and squeeze me tighter
Your wool must be red by now.

I warned you. you said
"You have no spines,
you said you've been trampled
yet you haven't grown thorns
all I feel is cozy
I am blushing, not bleeding"

In the hushed ocean
In the room where I
pluck my spines
I am assured this is normal
Did you know that
under these spines
you are a mammal
You do not need wings
to lay in the grass
and gaze at the stars