

F. Johnson

2019

This reminder that whatever pain you are

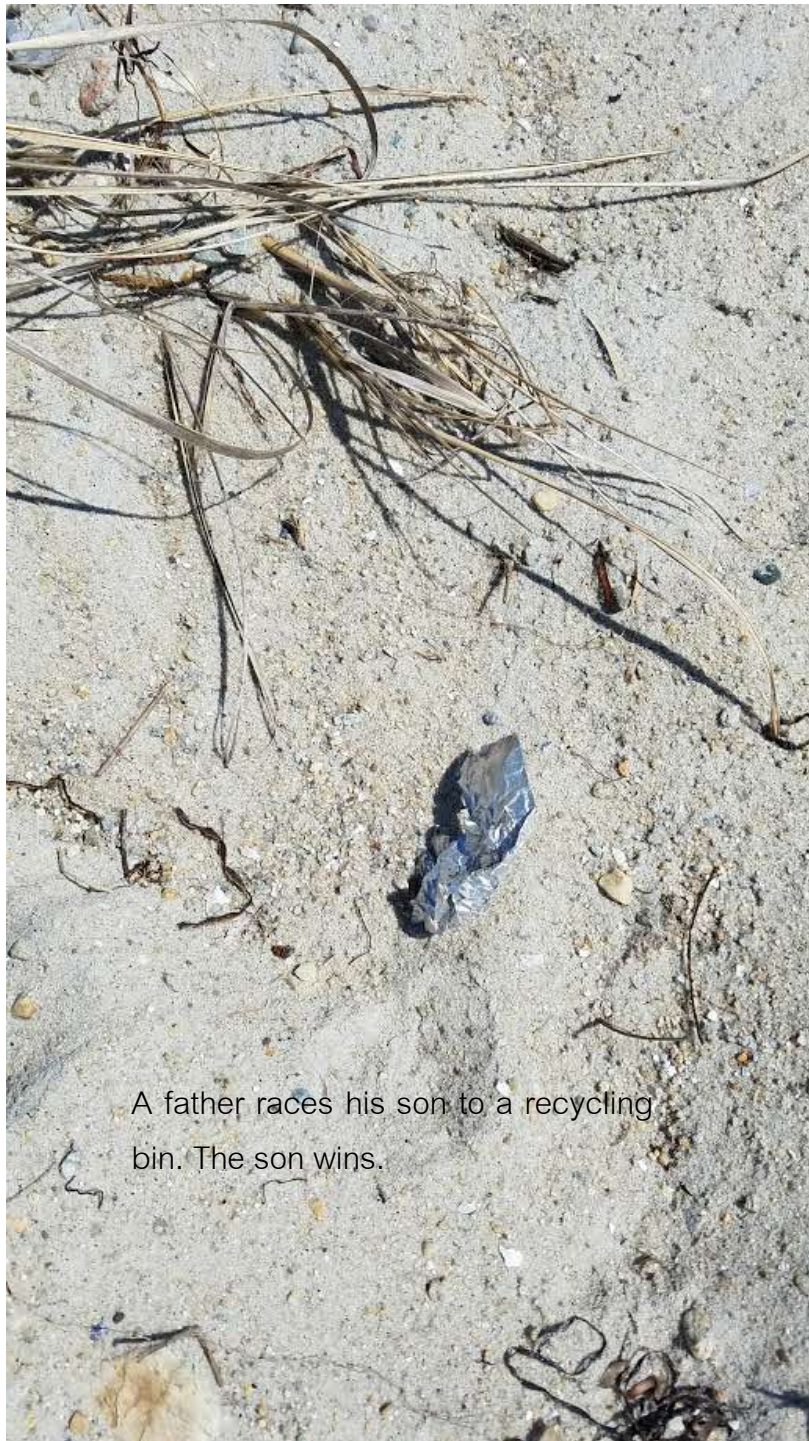
feeling, let it out.

You do not have to hold it.

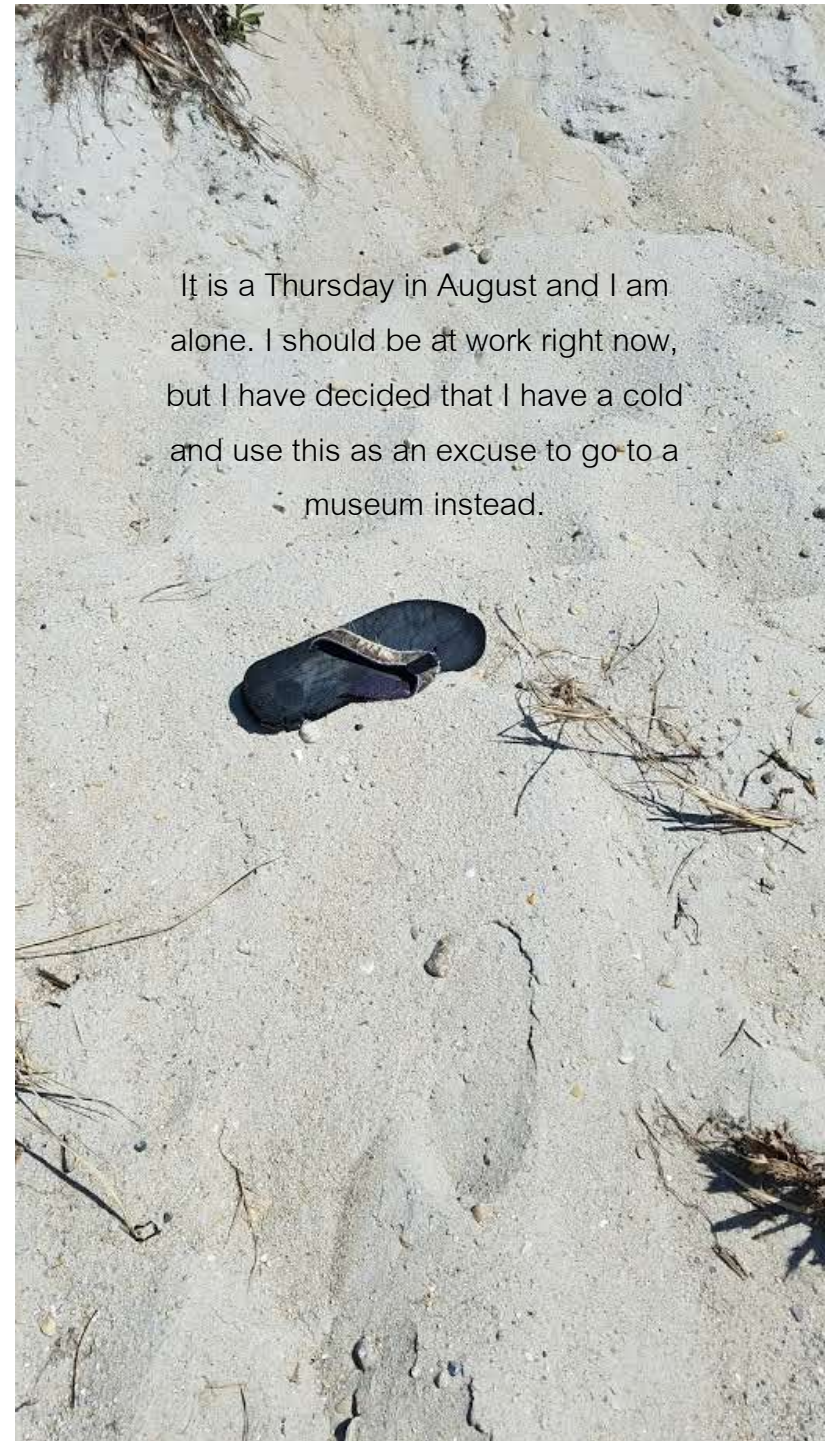
Not alone, not any longer.

WARNING

This bag is not a toy.
To avoid danger of
suffocation, keep out
of reach of babies
and children.



A father races his son to a recycling bin. The son wins.



It is a Thursday in August and I am alone. I should be at work right now, but I have decided that I have a cold and use this as an excuse to go to a museum instead.



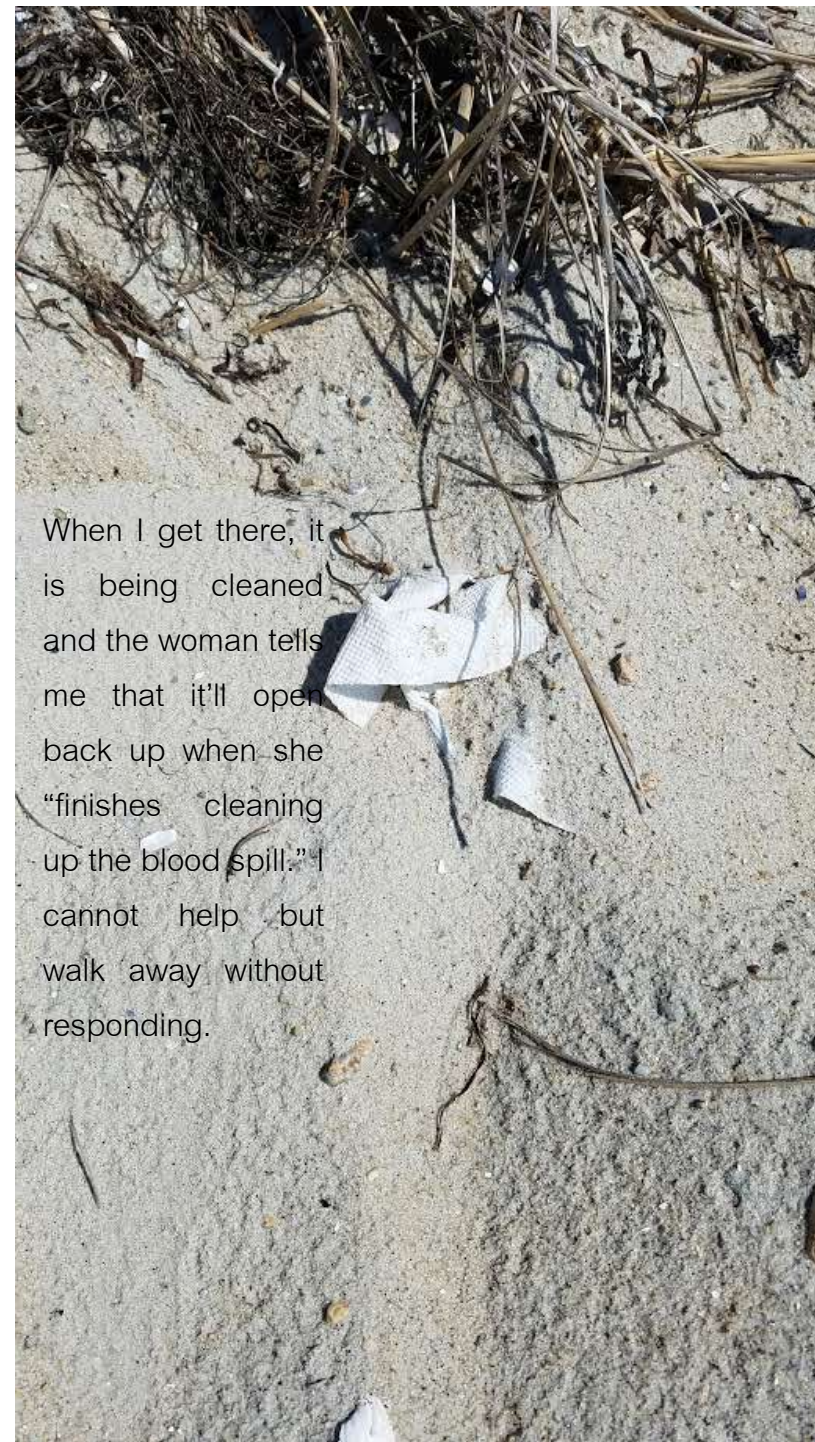
Inside I sign to the woman at the front desk; rocking my hand back and forth in the “t” position, slowly mouthing bathroom.



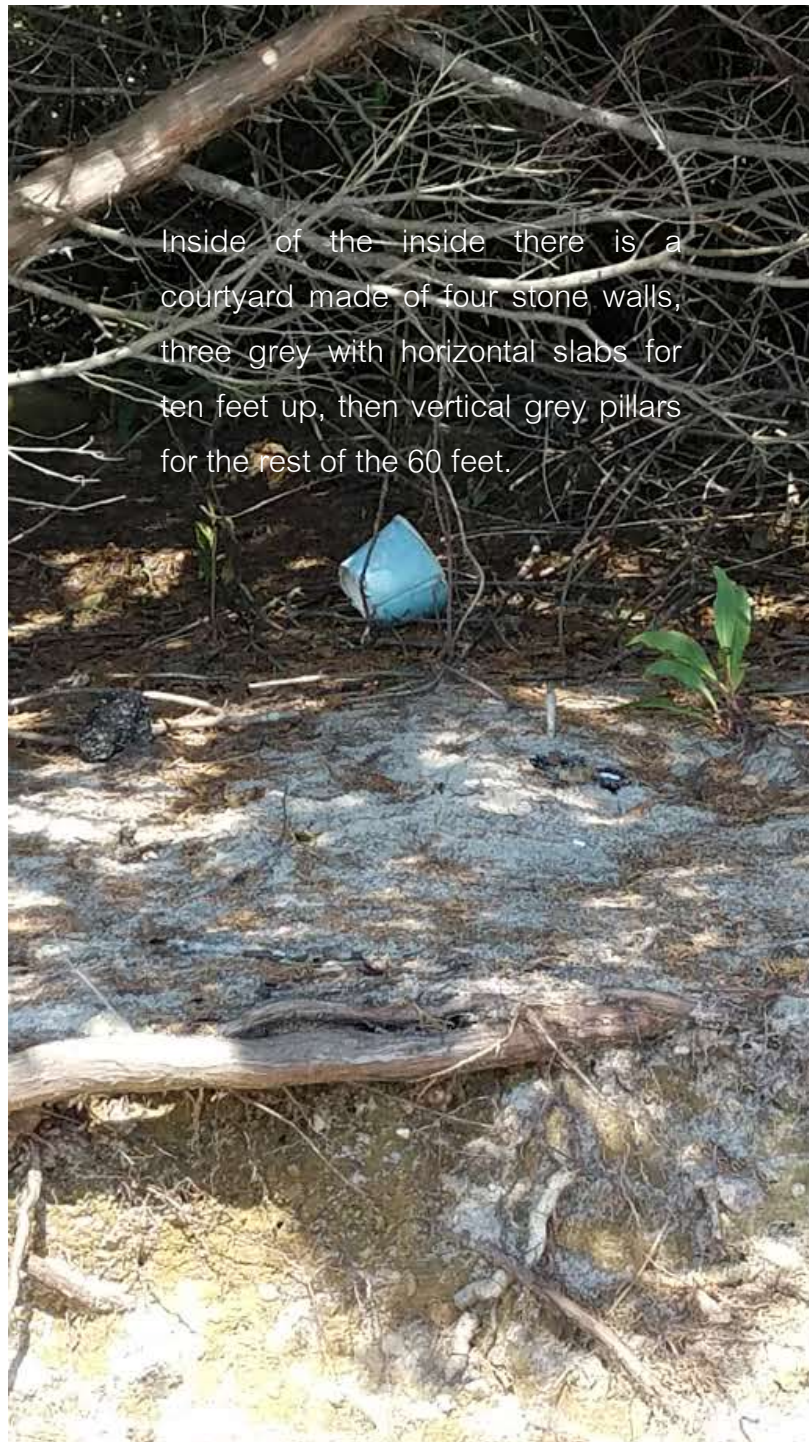
Sometimes I do this type of thing—signing instead of speaking so that I do not have to hear the sound of myself.



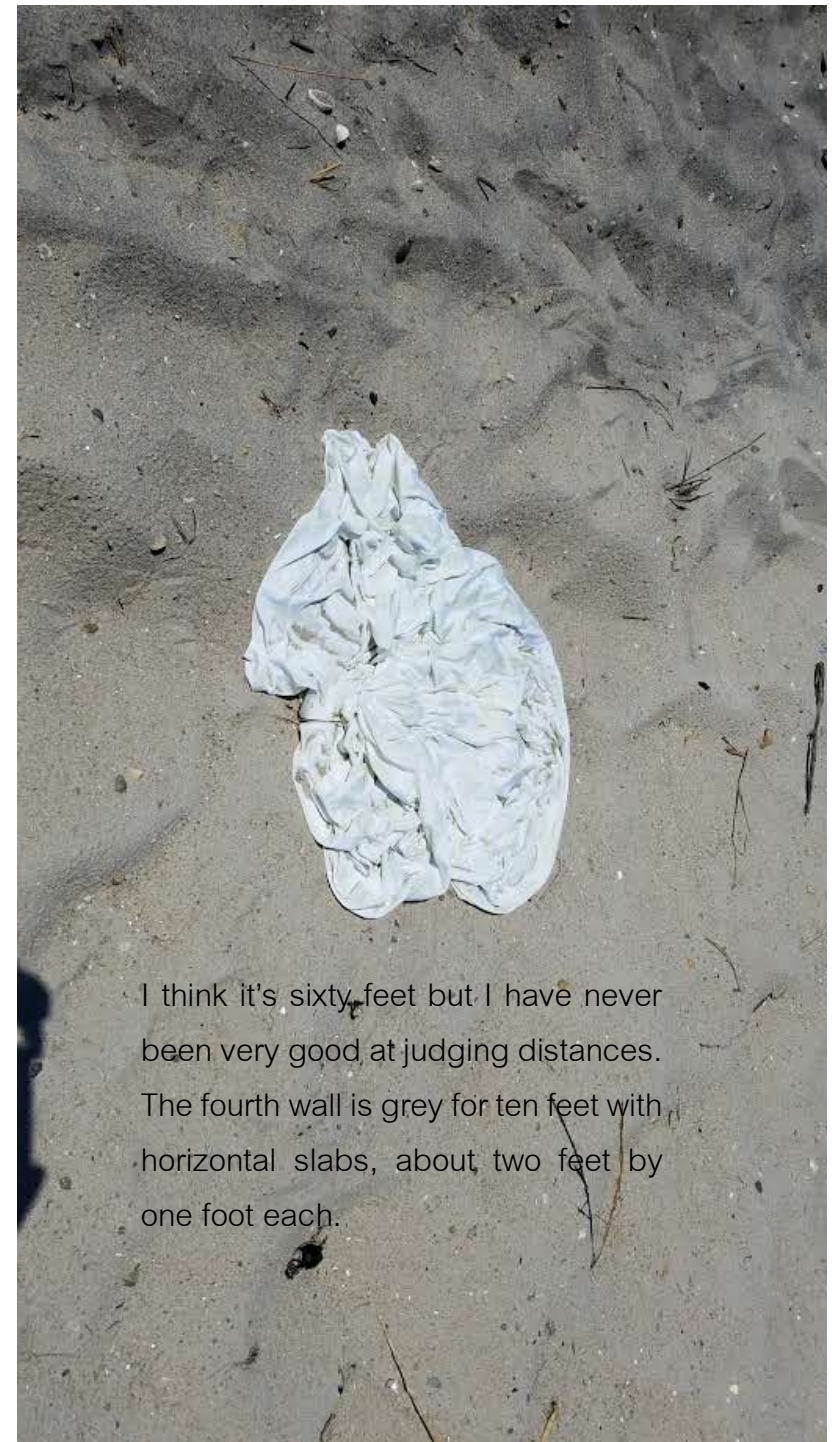
She points to the right and I follow the curve of her index finger toward a portrait of Abraham Lincoln.



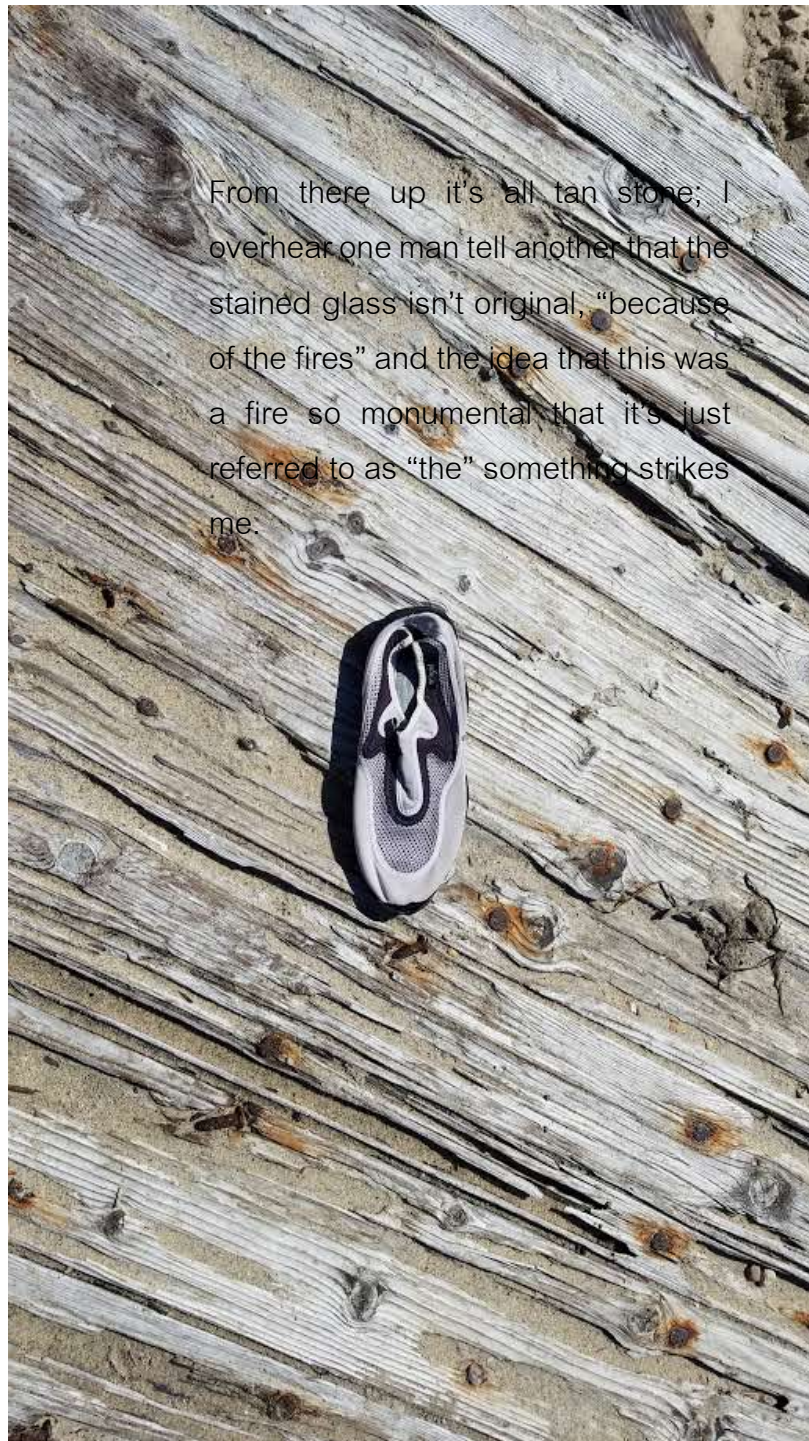
When I get there, it is being cleaned and the woman tells me that it'll open back up when she "finishes cleaning up the blood spill." I cannot help but walk away without responding.



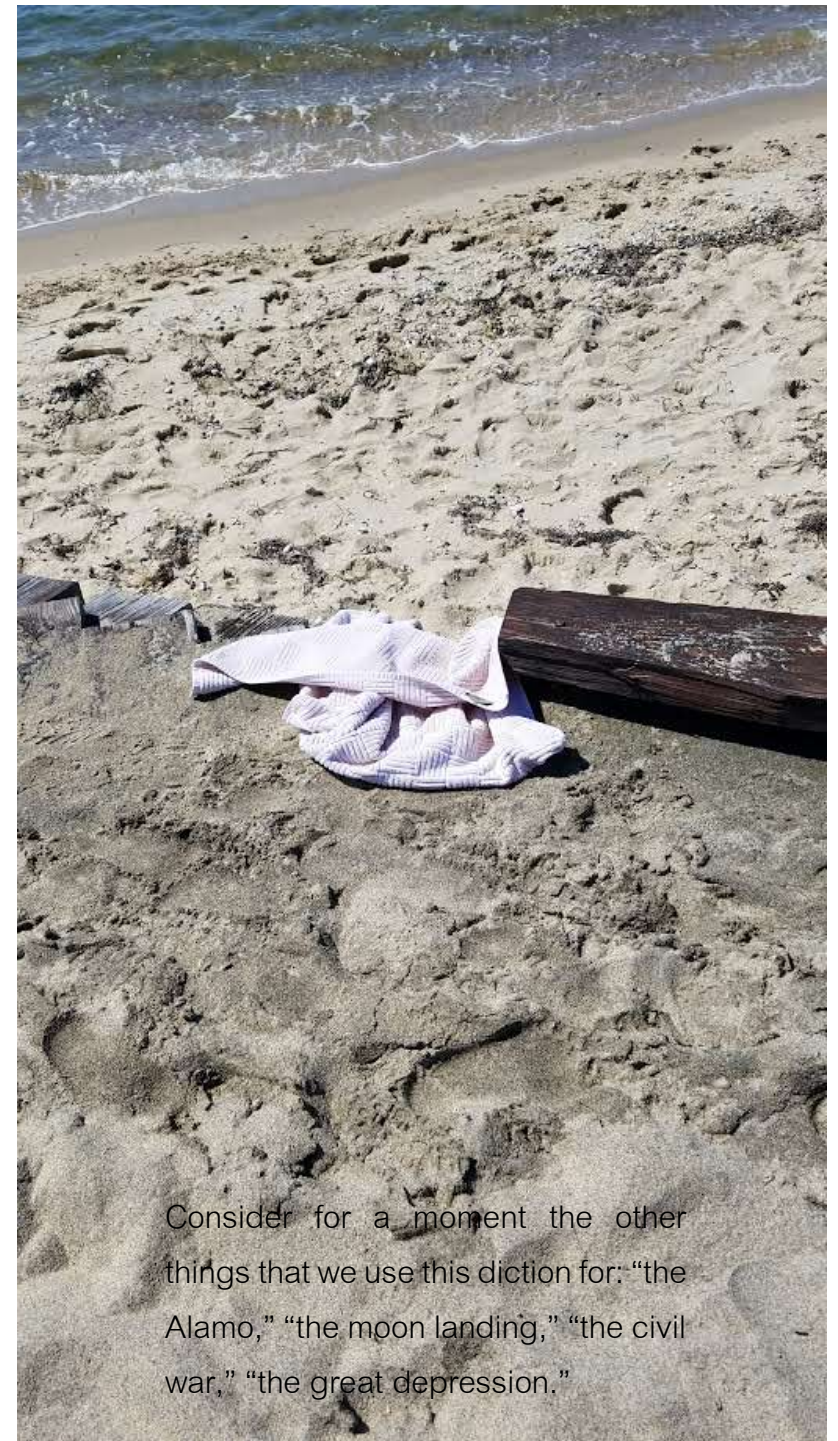
Inside of the inside there is a courtyard made of four stone walls, three grey with horizontal slabs for ten feet up, then vertical grey pillars for the rest of the 60 feet.



I think it's sixty feet but I have never been very good at judging distances. The fourth wall is grey for ten feet with horizontal slabs, about two feet by one foot each.



From there up it's all tan stone; I
overhear one man tell another that the
stained glass isn't original, "because
of the fires" and the idea that this was
a fire so monumental that it's just
referred to as "the" something strikes
me.



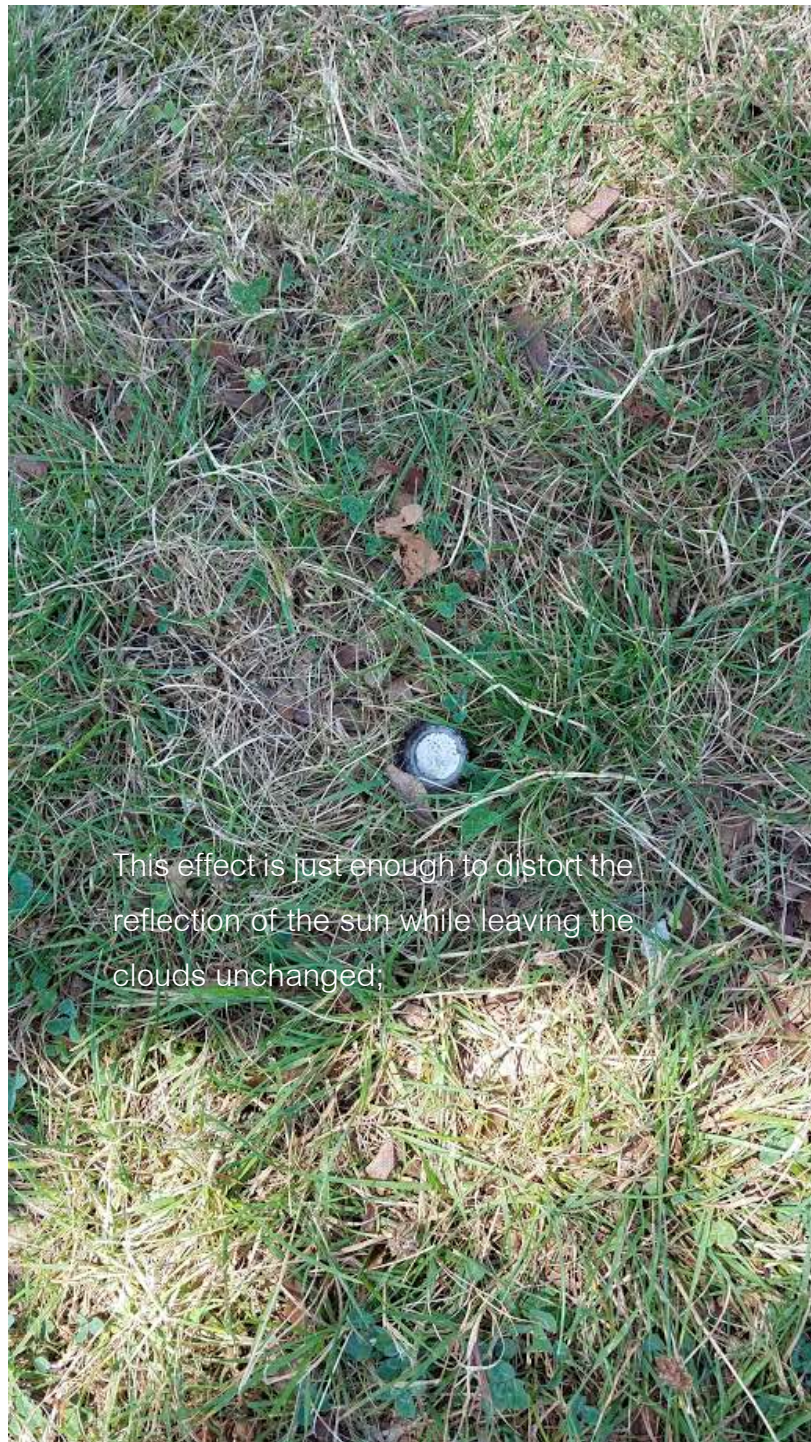
Consider for a moment the other
things that we use this diction for: "the
Alamo," "the moon landing," "the civil
war," "the great depression."

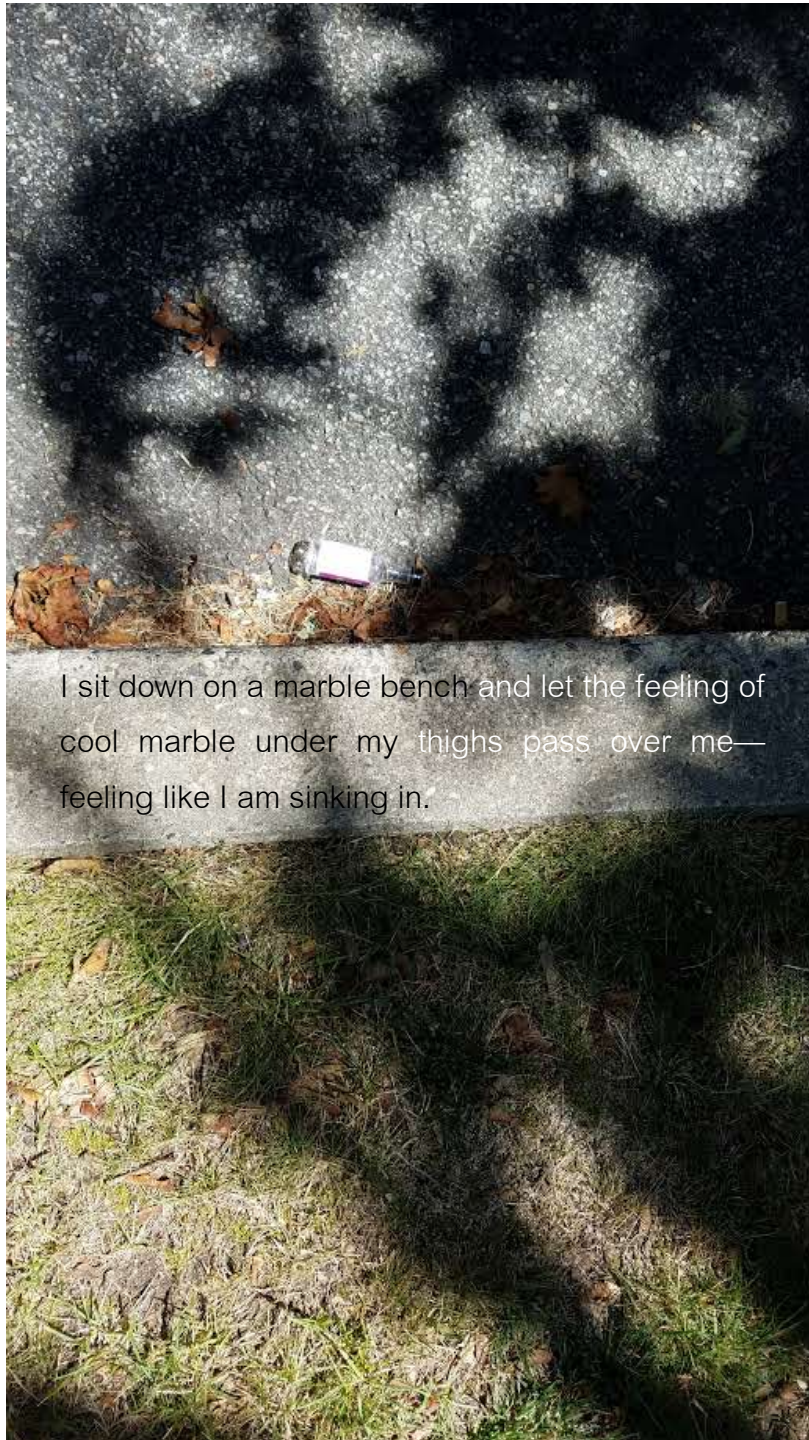


Anyway, I feel surprisingly comfortable in such an artificial environment—people walking back and forth, sitting down briefly to share a snack with a friend, a lover.

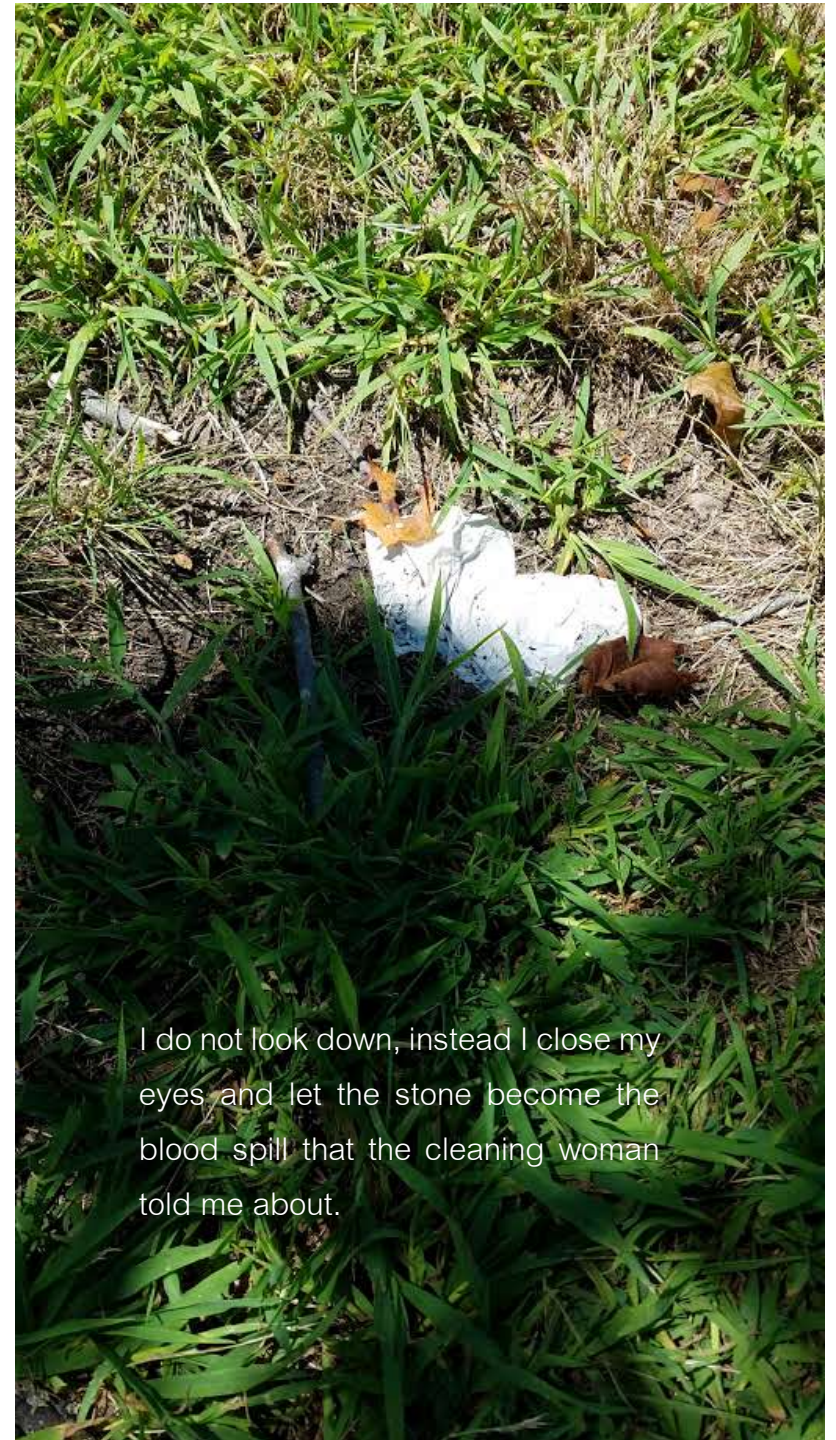


The ceiling is a crosshatch of glass with small curves in it, bending up toward the sky in some places and down toward me in others.

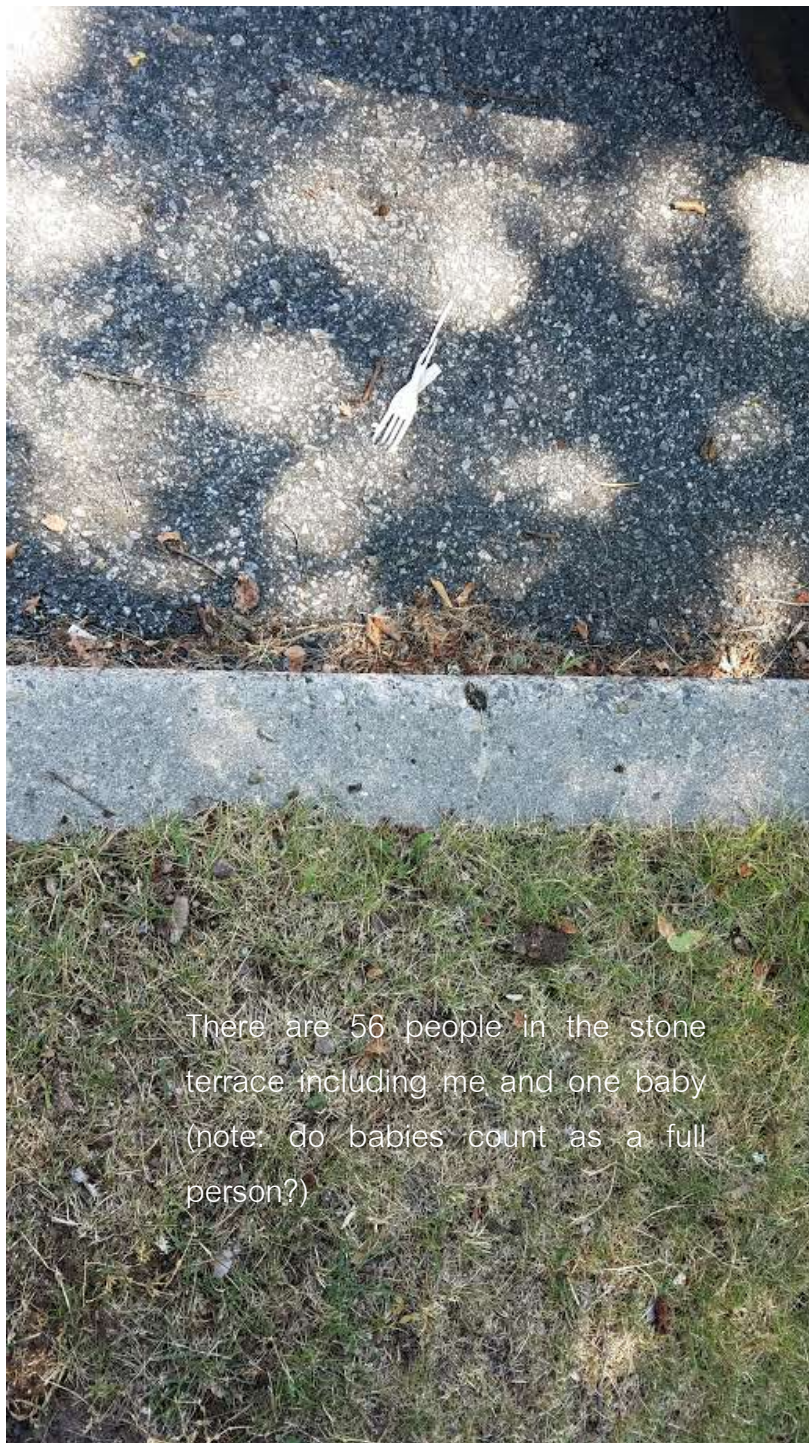




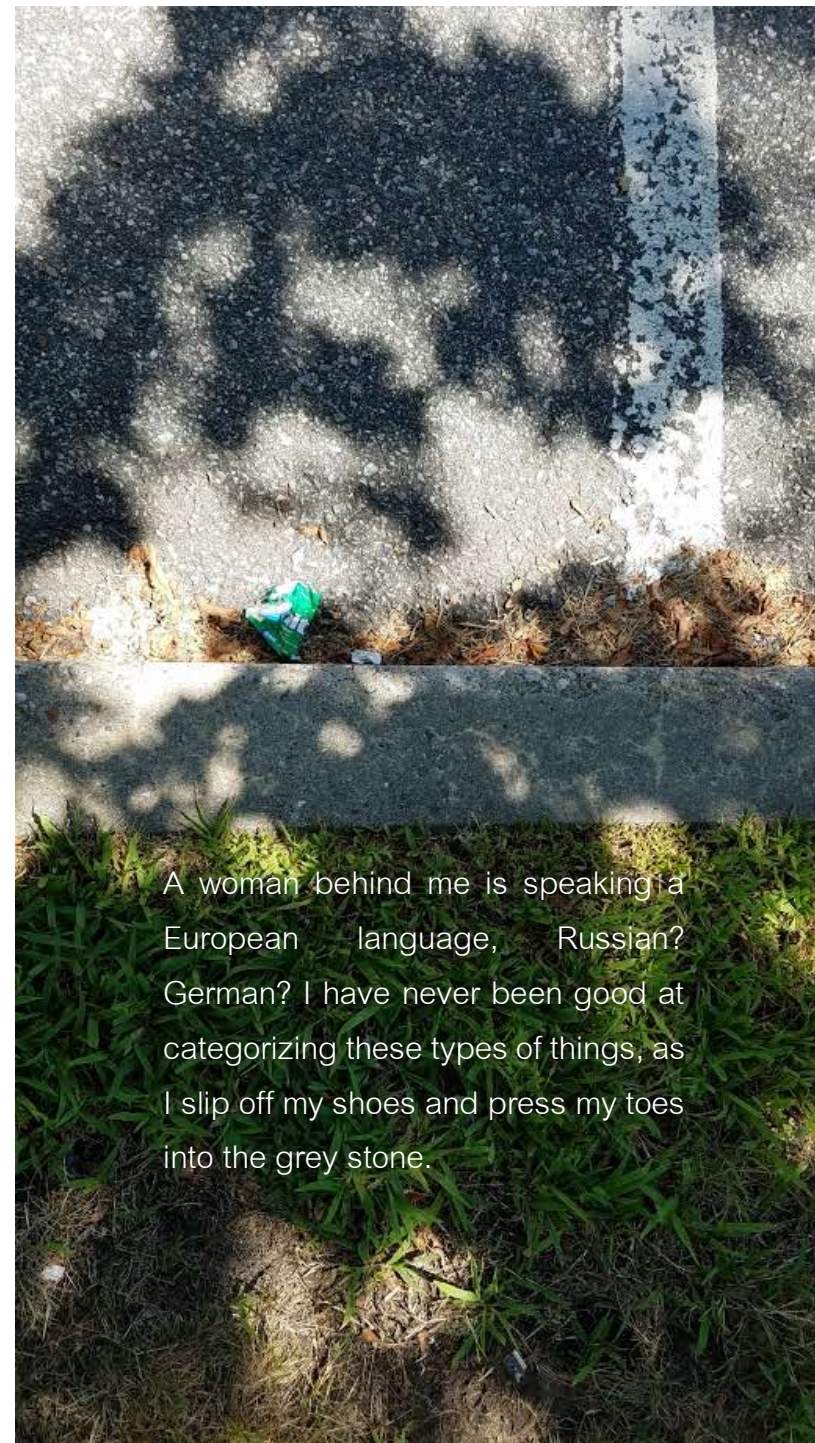
I sit down on a marble bench and let the feeling of cool marble under my thighs pass over me—feeling like I am sinking in.



I do not look down, instead I close my eyes and let the stone become the blood spill that the cleaning woman told me about.



There are 56 people in the stone terrace including me and one baby (note: do babies count as a full person?)



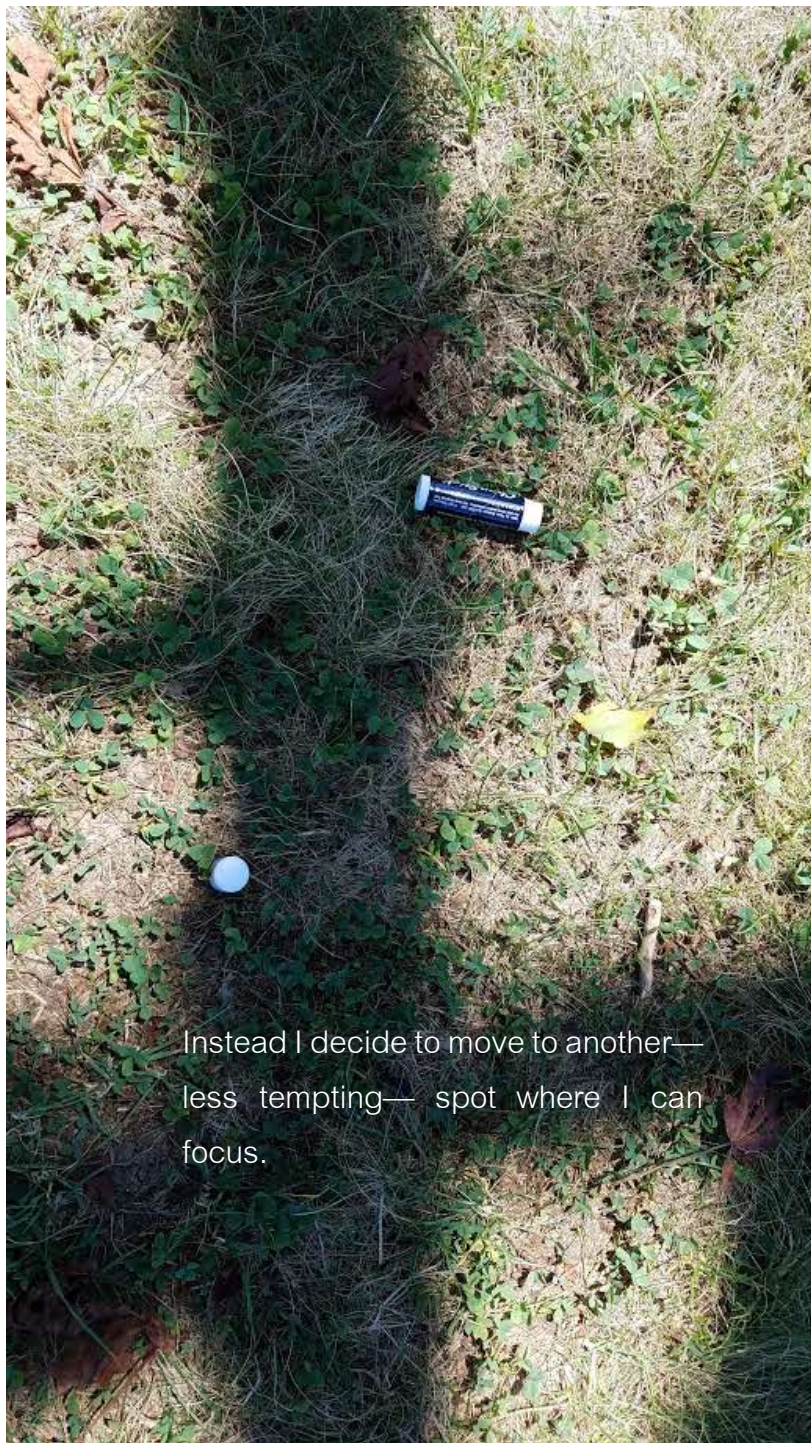
A woman behind me is speaking a European language, Russian? German? I have never been good at categorizing these types of things, as I slip off my shoes and press my toes into the grey stone.

I am waiting for someone to come tell me to put them back on when I notice another girl slip her own shoes back on and I decide that mine are already off so it's fine.



I want to lay down and take a small nap because I think I have a cold and I am, quite frankly, exhausted.





Instead I decide to move to another—
less tempting— spot where I can
focus.



This time when I sit
I can feel my
stomach poking out
just above the
highest part of my
thighs, and I am
reminded that my
body is not always
something that I
recognize.



I have stopped looking at my face in the mirror, stopped using storefront glass as an excuse to check my outfit. I have stopped, because I am no longer interested in seeing myself.



Speaking of blood, today I tried to donate blood and halfway through I passed out.



They told me I am anemic and that I
hadn't completed the donation
process so my blood wasn't usable.



I decided to stay until I was feeling
better so that I could give them the
rest of the blood that they needed.

I think that I wanted to save someone.



But I think that I was
also hoping that I
would feel lighter
afterwards—





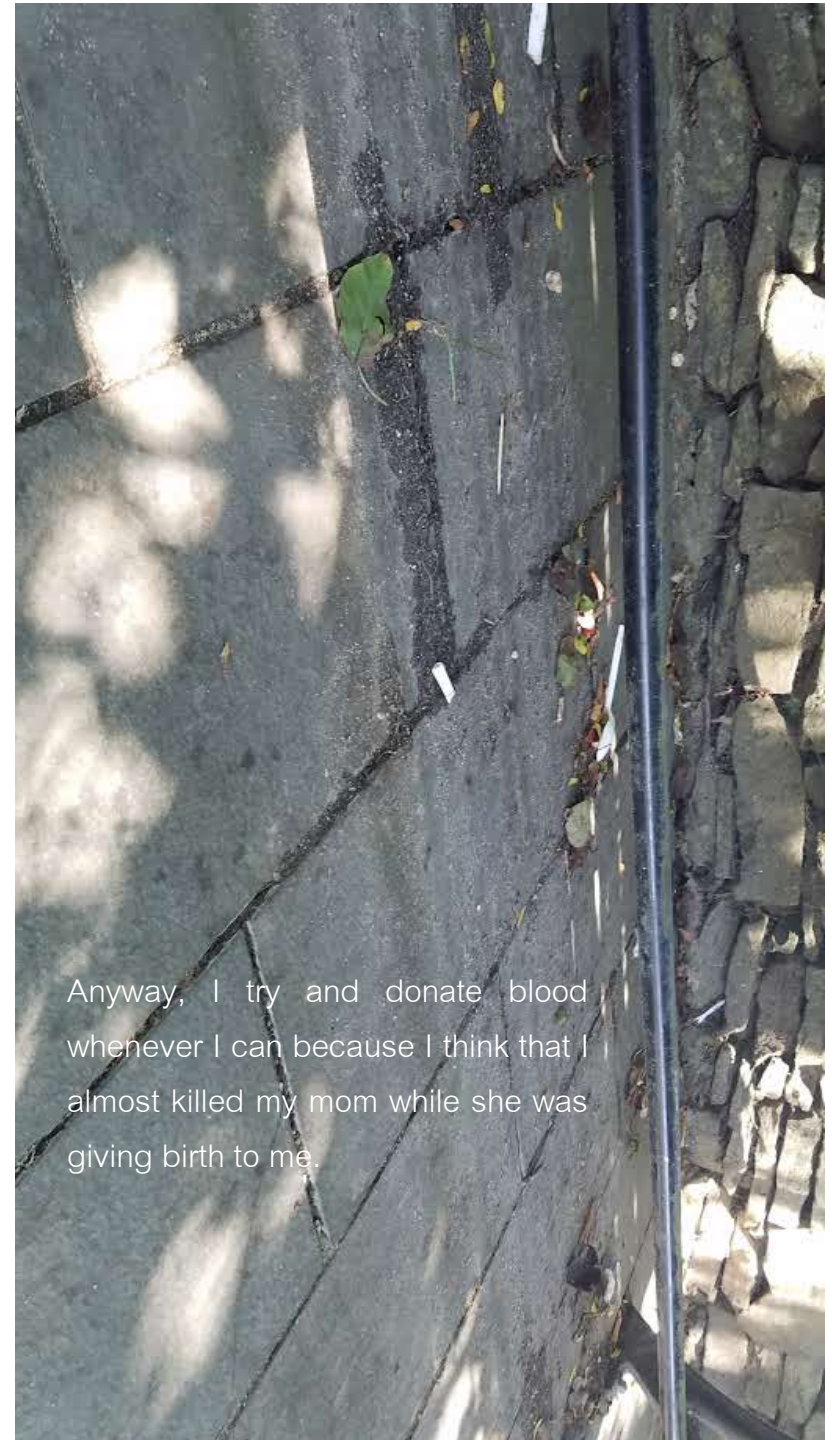
that I could shed the parts that people
have told me are flawed



the parts that they say are trash.

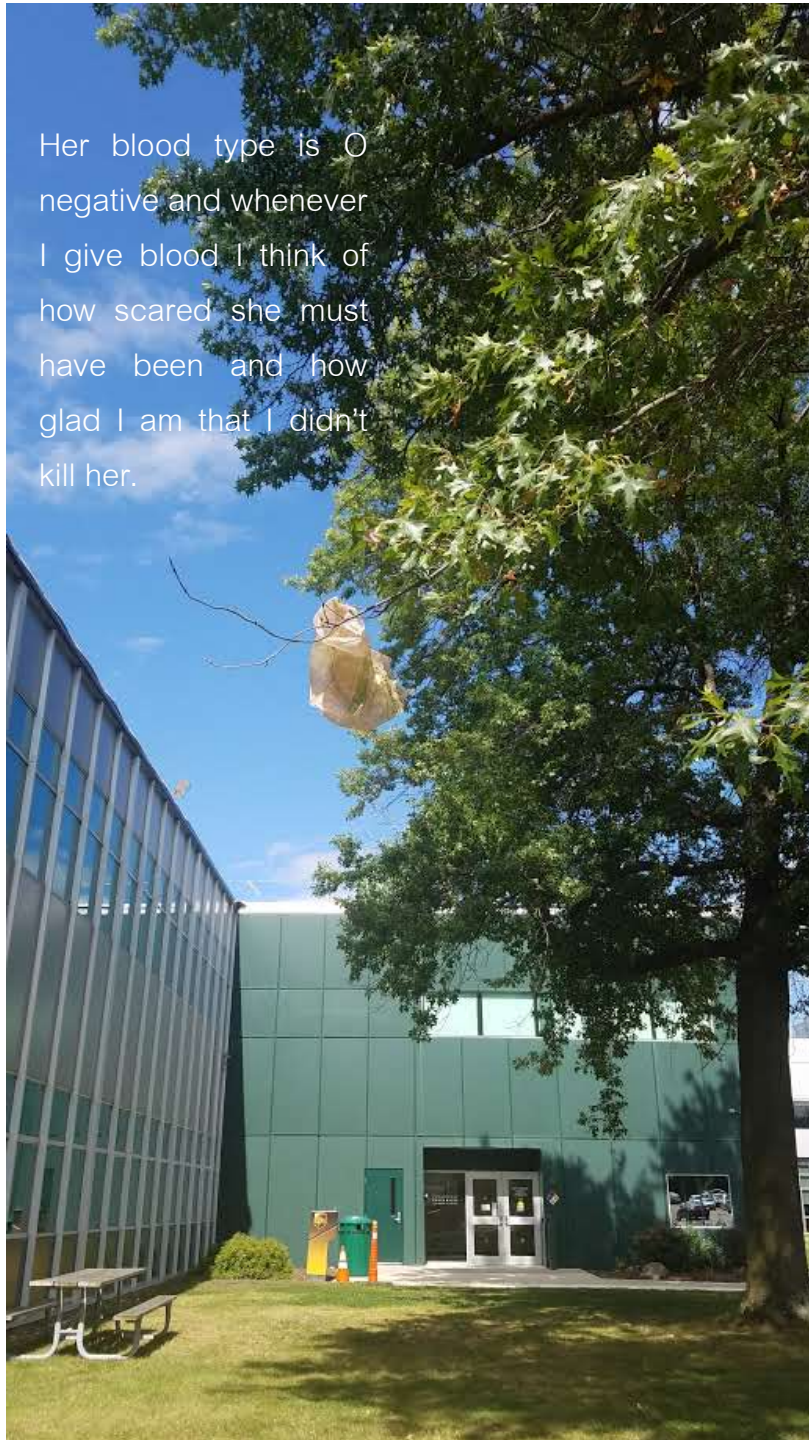


In case you were
wondering, no, I didn't
feel different
afterwards.



Anyway, I try and donate blood
whenever I can because I think that I
almost killed my mom while she was
giving birth to me.

Her blood type is O
negative and whenever
I give blood I think of
how scared she must
have been and how
glad I am that I didn't
kill her.



If you're reading this,
I'm glad I didn't kill you.



If you are reading this



I am so, so glad that I didn't kill you.



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