



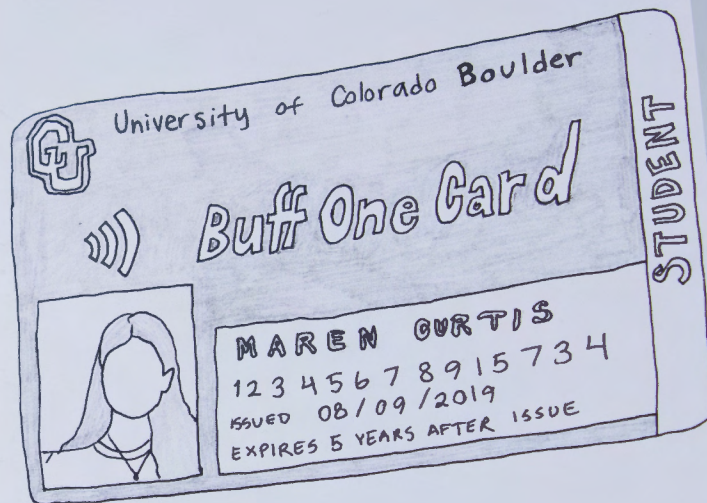


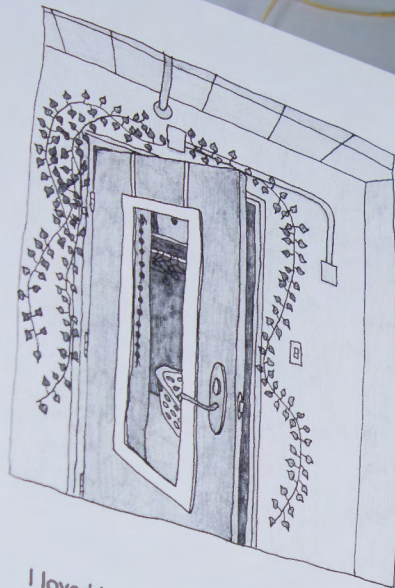


Colorado is dry, severe and expansive.
Golden fields stretch for miles -
the sky goes even further.

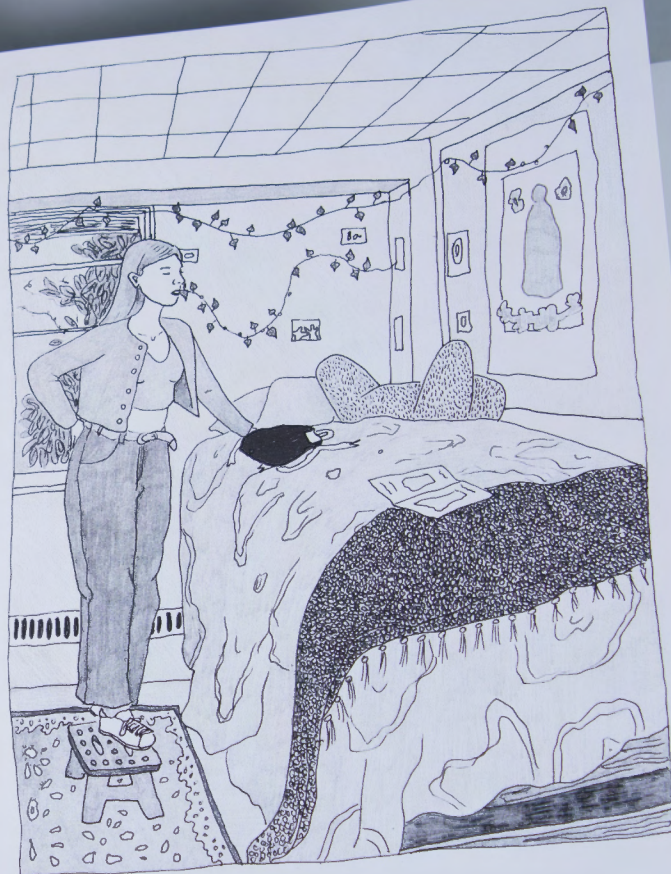
You can feel how much closer you are to the sun.

STUDENT





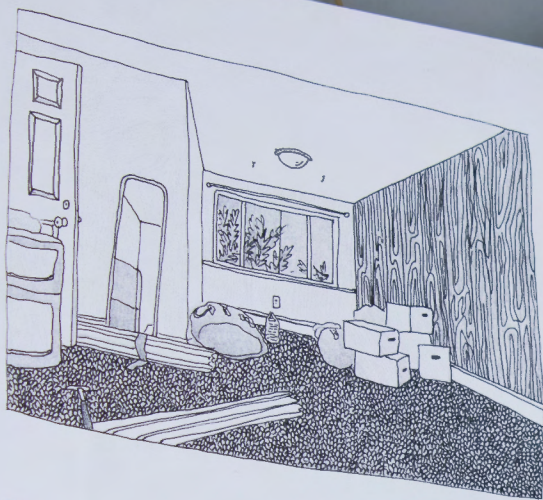
I loved how I put my dorm together.
Having always shared a room, I never had any
autonomy over decorating.
I was ecstatic to cover my walls in whatever
photos or drawings I had.
Everything felt new.





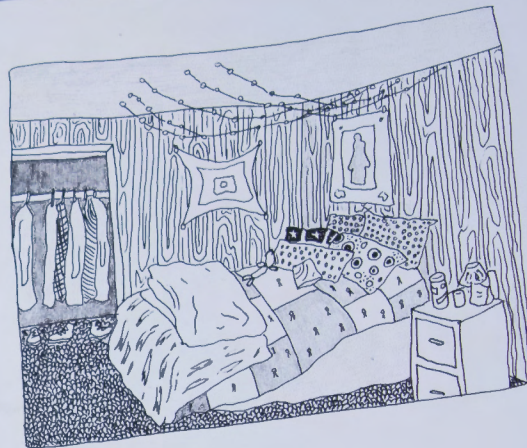
The next day I found bruises on my chest and my arm.
My whole body hurt.
The finger marks on my arm faded quickly,
but the tenderness on my collarbone lingered for
what felt like weeks.

I told my sister I felt like a doll,
like I had just been there to serve a purpose,
but not that I couldn't consent.
I felt I had brought it onto myself,
so calling it rape would have been dramatic.



The room was large and oblong
with shag carpeting and a single window.
It had its own bathroom and sat directly next to the laundry.

The carpet smelled strongly of tobacco
from the last tenant and
the wood paneled walls were horrifically ugly.



I shoved my bed in the back corner
surrounded by walls.
Whenever I had nightmares as a kid,
they'd always begin with a window.

For my whole life, when night fell -
I'd run around the house with
my hands over my eyes.

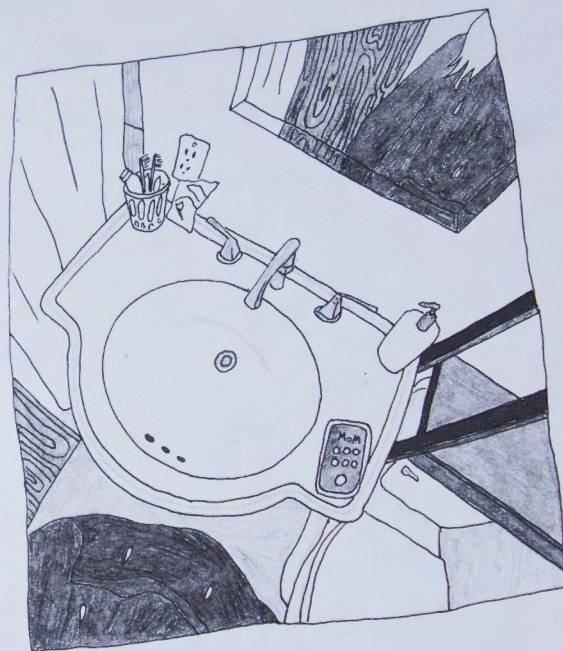
It was a childish habit I never grew out of
like biting your nails or sucking your thumb.
Naturally, I found comfort in the dark corner.

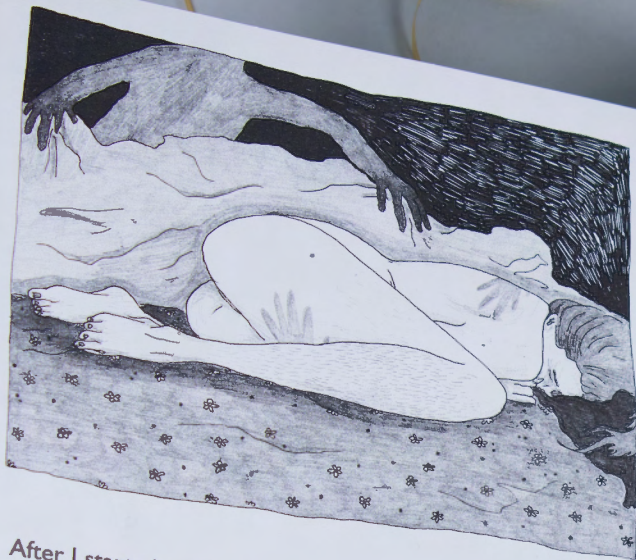
I was furious with my mom.
Standing over my bathroom sink,
I called her screaming and sobbing
that she had lied.

She apologized and hung up the phone,
but was suspicious of my reaction.
She called me back moments later
and asked me what was really wrong.

Until this point, I never thought
I'd tell my parents.
I didn't want to upset them -
but every day the memories
that chased me were gaining speed.

I needed help.





After I started seeking real help,
the consequences of my avoidance came
swiftly and with a vengeance.
I had horrific nightmares.

He would appear looming over me.

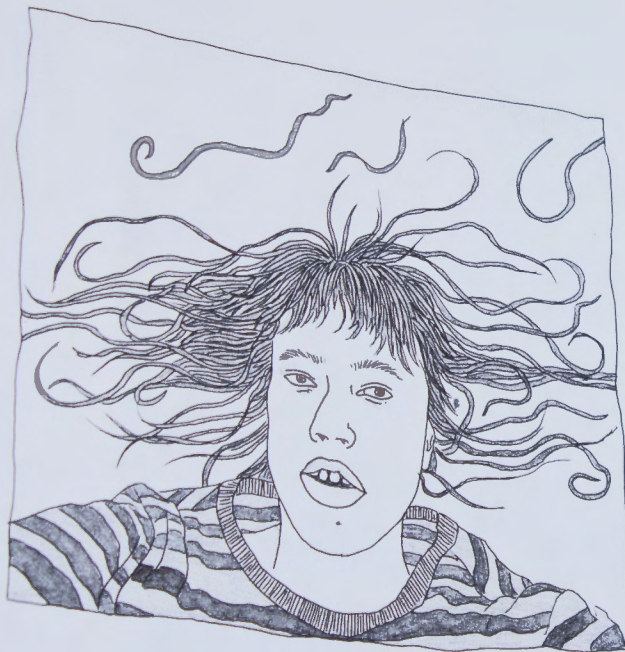
Even when I'd wake up,
I was convinced he was there.

My partner would open the curtains to
try and show me no one was waiting,
but I couldn't even look.



I did
I blar
The

Dece
I was



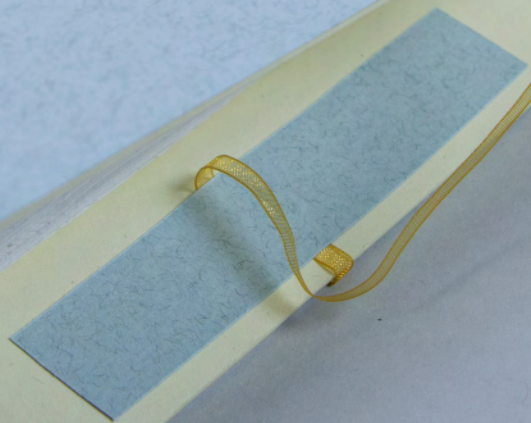
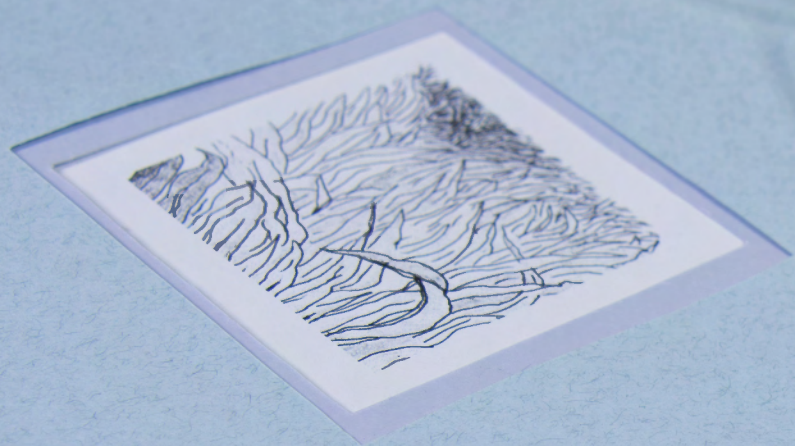
When I started my medication,
it made my hair fall out faster
before it began to grow back.

As it got longer and
reached my shoulders, I realized
just how much I had lost.

My hair had always been thick and full,
it was a huge part of my identity.
I didn't look like myself anymore.
And it wasn't just my hair.

My skin was sallow,
my eyes sunken,
my face was puffy.

It felt like everything I had
known about myself was
being slowly ripped away.



Heaven
is
con-
fused
in
the
dark

