



well, come home

jess rizkallah





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thank you for reading!

# Mama(merican)

1.

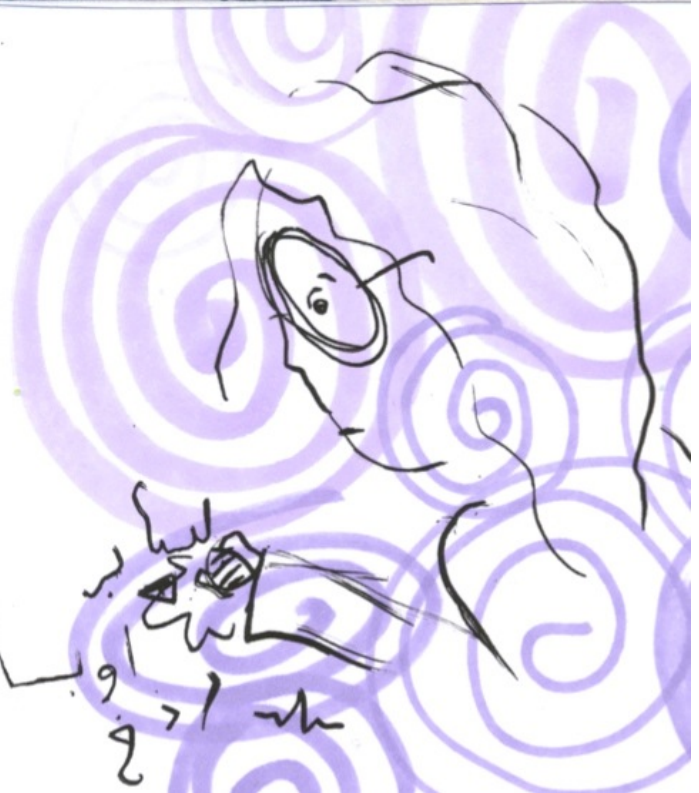
Mama came to Lawrence, Massachusetts with her sister, two brothers, and parents. September 1983. Their home was decimated. shards of kitchen tiles like baby teeth in the garden, a grandmother gone and and there wasn't much of a choice. Well there were two: stay in Lebanon and live in terror - eventually maybe dying or go to America knowing no English but having some family that found their way over and were ready to welcome them.

They learned English in school.

A is for Apple, B is for Boat, C is for Cat, D is for

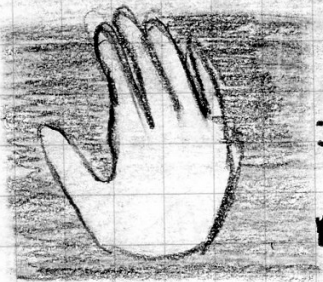
*Don't let this new language peel the Arabic buds that fill the grooves in your mouth*

but English piggybacks Arabic on my tongue, sometimes stepping on it in places where my first language hides to stay alive, to multiply in my mouth. i don't take better care of something my mother kept like pearls in her tongue for me before she even knew i was coming. i've inherited something i will pass on to my children in worse condition. I think of my kids calling me "mom," instead of "mama" and their grandparents "grandma and grandpa" instead of "teta and jaba." Not being able to roll their R's or know that their throats can hold sound like entire tree trunks. i hate those thoughts but i still answer most Arabic sentences that come my way with a string of English - a language encasing the broken seashell of my Arabic.





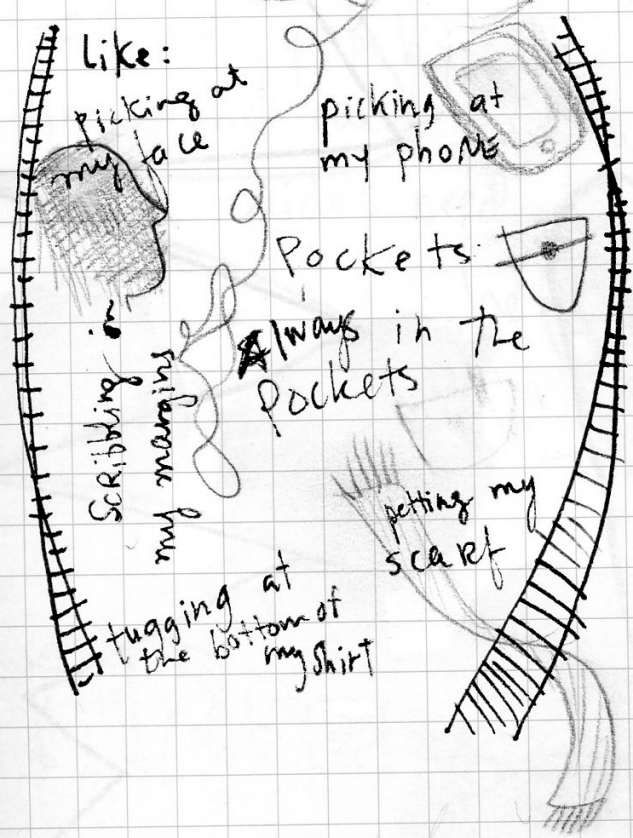
The other day I looked down ~~at~~ at my hands for a second and I thought they were my mom's.



I wasn't doing anything purposeful or deliberate or even productive.

I think I was putting something in my pocket. Or checking the time (though, I don't wear a watch but I resent that time itself is all the things I wasn't doing because I need a lot more of it so I can understand) (But anyway)

I think a lot about how I waste so much of my movement doing Trivial Things



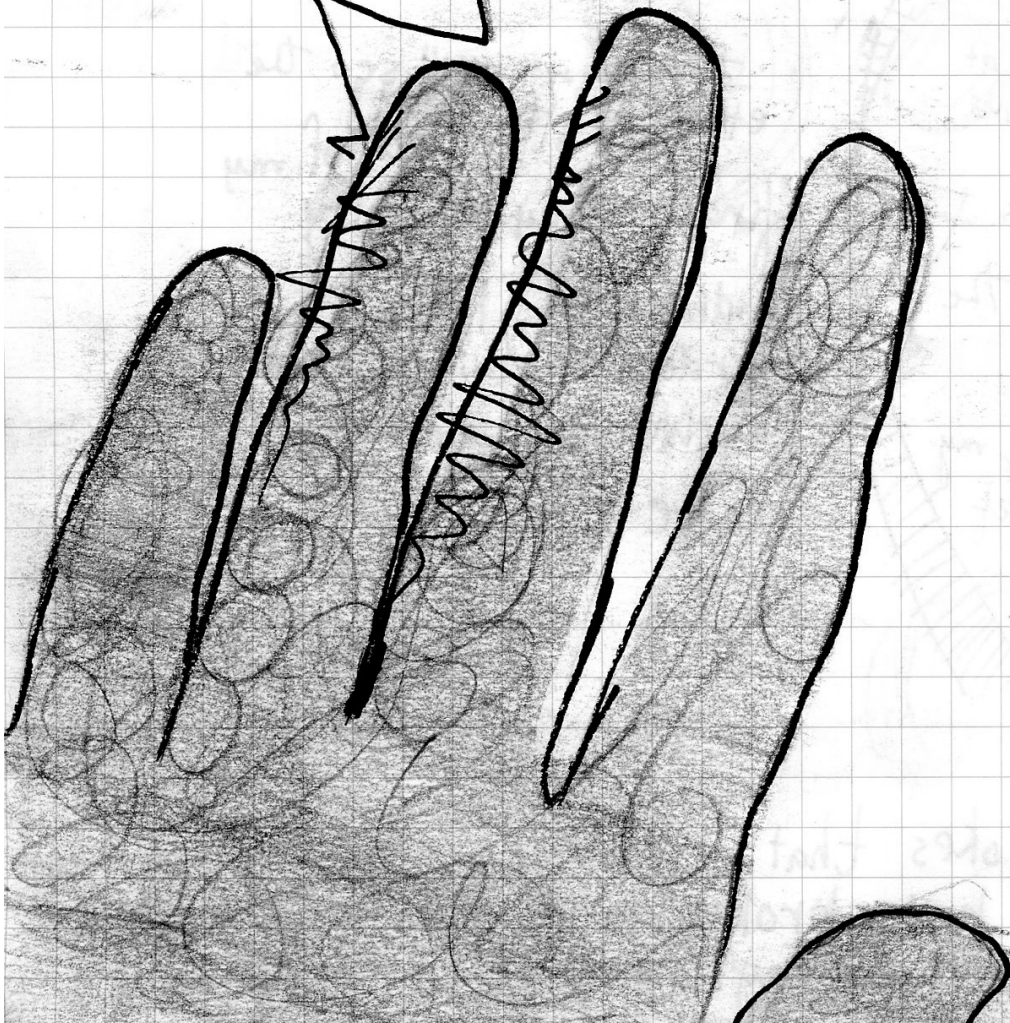
I can still see the etches on the pads of my fingers. They're pretty undisrupted, little zen gardens nothing I've fouched has ever really tested.

My mother jokes that I have Baby Skin - I'll never have broken in hands. She says she hopes they'll always be soft - even asks God for it.

~~She's always told me~~

She's always told me that she hopes my hands stay soft always, and that they'd never know the inside of ovens because knowing that and stoking the knowledge in your skin makes it so that eventually you'll stop feeling the burn, (a skill that hurts to earn)

and Sometimes you need to feel the burn.









The Ivory Trade is the commercial  
trade in the Ivory tusks  
of the hippopotamus

★ Illegal  
★ CRUEL

★ Walrus  
★ Narwhal

★ and most commonly  
Asian + African

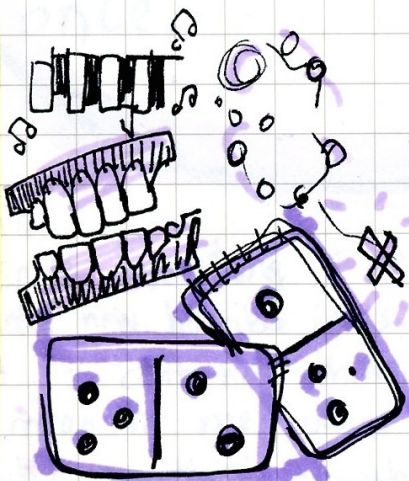
ELEPHANTS

since  
14th century  
BC

Ivory Trade has been happening  
for hundreds of years.  
It's lead to ENTIRE species going  
endangered or extinct.

Items made  
from IVORY:

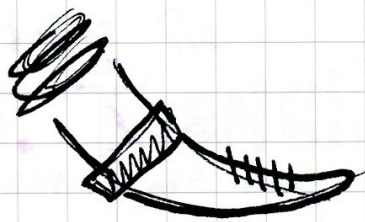
- Piano Keys
- False Teeth
- Dominoes
- Rosaries
- Jewelry



(La de  
da)

My Reactions:

- NO.
- Try floss
- This is a boring game
- God wouldn't be down w/ this
- WHY.



What a  
SURPRISE

The SYRIAN and  
NORTH AFRICAN Elephants  
were reduced to extinction  
because Ivory was in such  
high demand in the

Classical World

during the colonization of  
AFRICA, 800 - 1000 TONS  
of IVORY was sent  
to Europe

Also fucked  
up

Bans and restrictions were  
placed, and economic problems +  
world wars slowed it down

But . . .



The 1970's saw a resurgence of the Ivory Trade. my family was still in Lebanon in the 70's. I tell my ~~grandmother~~ Teta <sup>(Not far from North Africa)</sup> all this and She ~~looks~~ looks off in the distance and says

You know, I have a pair of Elephant toenails Somewhere in my nightstand. ... someone gave them to me once.

Holy shit. What. and now despite everything I've researched about Ivory trades, how horrible it is, what it cost the planet, I can't help thinking about what elephants mean to me, what they mean to Teta, and who I think of when I have the same look on my face that she has when she talks about the ELEPHANT TOENAILS that someone special once gave her.

Give them to you?  
"Teta, who"

(is what I want to ask her)



SELF PROCESS IN RELATION TO TETA / WHO WAS TETA'S  
FIRST LOVE? / DOES IT EVEN MATTER NOW / WILL MINE  
MATTER WHEN I LOSE EVERYTHING / will i lose everything /  
WHY DON'T I ASK TETA MORE QUESTIONS

P o e m #1

there's a landscape in the kneecap, probably  
something hidden in the hubcap of your elbow –  
i want to call it an elephant but i call everything  
elephant when i like it too much

but the wrist, we never crack that bone on purpose.  
it just snaps at the end of holding our faces up for so long  
to remind us that's not the type of weight it's meant to hold.  
the wristbone wears all the rope we braid our meanings into  
the beads we like to believe are salvaged human bones,  
the memories of wooden hugs our skin pines for  
like we once pined for God.

the wrist bone is strong, ivory probably  
all tusk and not quite leather just yet, but wait.

she doesn't say who they're from, but Teta smiles (the way I do at sidewalks)  
when she tells me about the elephant toenails hidden in her nightstand.  
their edges are gilded, like her age was before she learned the stench of loss,  
before darbukas drummed like knuckles against the atmosphere, like boots against skulls.

there will never be another day that she'll hear a bomb go off (for the first time)  
there will always be cliffs salivating jet-fuel into shores lining the Mediterranean.  
children still play there. it's still so easy to slip, so hard to hide  
the want of cracking something that curls more like fist than skeleton.

is it fair to claim her past for the hum underneath the hum of my hum,  
the one that keeps me balancing on sidewalks like they're not territory lines?  
i've never found gold crowns sprouting from the cracks, calling out  
for dimples, for a certain smile back. I don't know if I should smile back,  
if i deserve the phosphenes i find  
arranged into your teeth – if they are even yours.

i wonder if Teta ever found that smile like pressed jasmine.  
if she turns her head at passing wristbones, compares them  
to the ivory in her nightstand. has she ever let herself go gilded  
under the gaze of someone else's bones? has she ever compared  
their creak to hers? i will never ask

i just hold the elephant toenails to my ears and i hear  
what the inside of your kneecap might look like:  
sidewalks all sparrows for freckles  
instead of shrapnel and estranged fingers.  
everything is jasmine falling from fighter-jets  
to steep the air sage tea yellow.

This is the last memory before the bomb went off.

if it comes for me too, i will settle on trapping your memory in the night stand.  
i will know what Teta knows. i don't want to know what Teta knows. i don't want  
to know what the darbukas sing when they don't sound like the inside of your bones,  
like that last memory, like elephants  
balancing on their toes where no one really can anymore.

when the bombs go off, will you be important? will I have enough room  
to care about the certain Smile Back, the way the wrist pops, the way we  
are not quite broken in leather, but man, just wait

we could be elephant before Ivory Trade, we could stay Lebanon before Civil War.  
this is what I call everything when I'm afraid, when I like it too much.





here is a list of metaphors that  
have replaced my religion but  
please don't tell my grandmothers

purple  
trumpets  
elbows  
jazz  
elephants  
whales  
lizards  
the moon  
moon moon  
moon  
kneecaps  
apples  
october  
bubbles  
outer space



3/5/14  
The problem with having strong feelings for a person and also being prone to assume the Universe is doing things,

is that eventually you start making art that explores those feelings and then you keep making the art and it becomes some of the best shit you've done

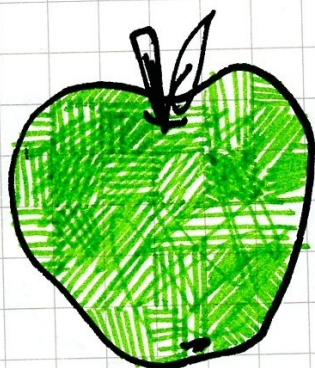
and you're left with the fear that this person you are totally enamored with might just be yet another lesson the universe had for you, or yet another muse when your art is the real relationship you'll end up with.

The problem with making art and having feelings is that you start stacking them too close to each other.

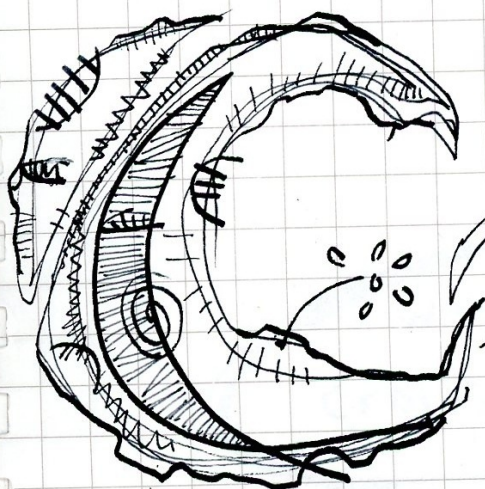




I am not  
a metaphor for  
ye love



I am not  
a metaphor  
4 your Luv



I was never a  
metaphor for your  
LOVE but I can be  
if you want

Jaded slam poets  
don't like me but I'm  
fucking here 4 you



9/24/14

I think about that time last year when I would eavesdrop on people in Panera I think about how you found your way in then, squirmed all spiderlike or more like a vein, I don't know what I'm saying but it's not actually the pumpkin spice that tastes like fall, it's the espresso and the pumpkin spice combined, I think if I keep stealing paper I'll keep finding things that shouldn't be mine but are, like this handwriting. And this paper. I think October is so good it's almost bad, I think for as long as I live, I will want to remember the people I met this year. I will remember them the way they remember people who had to leave them. Probably. Maybe. Maybe not, probably not but it will feel like that for me but it's okay it's okay, it's okay everything will be okay because it's supposed to be, how can it not? I have too much megafauna in my chest and nothing will coax it out and I wonder if my whole life will be spent attempting to carve it out, I wonder if my whole life is missing people

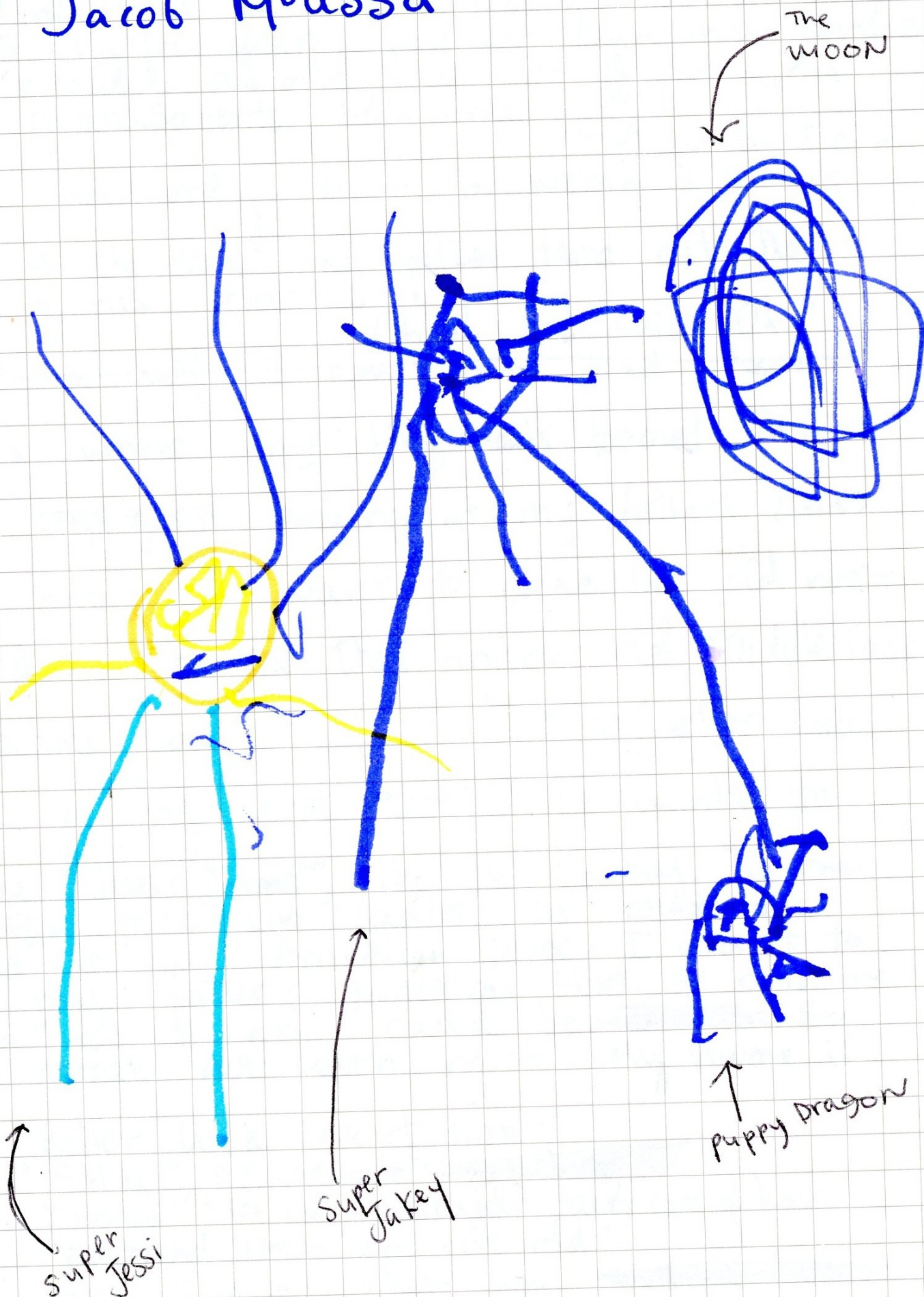


9/30/14

I told Marisa about the way boys sometimes smell funny, like work but like a body and like a stale something but also like old coffee and WOW, I like it a lot and she told me I sounded like the back of a romance novel. And ALRIGHT WHATEVER I'm just saying it's weird that the in between gagged spit of life when you're biting your lips on the bus on the way home from work or class or the grocery store or the ungleamorous things you just have to do, it's weird that those are the ~~purest~~ ~~stazzy~~ marbles between the couch cushion moments or frames of existence, where things are so much all at once ~~and~~ and ~~the~~ the pressure isn't going to make you a diamond but it's because you're already a marble. You're already ready to catch light and roll around to get where you must, to make a dent in the matter around you. It's why I'm still a real version of myself at work, it's why every thing around me makes me feel very present despite my desperate tired. It's all matter pressing on me, it all matters



By Jacob Moussa





Dear Jakey,

9/24/14

The other day I lost your tiger rock. I hope you're not too angry with me. It fell out of my pocket, you know how unreliable pockets can be. I retraced my steps and my friends helped and I think all I needed to make it day was to remember that time you lost waddles, and how you were sad because you felt like you always lose everything. I feel that way too. Remember how I said that ~~was~~ you only lost things because you were full of so much love and excitement for them? That's still true. And I feel like a better human to have this in common with you. I love you always. I miss you always.

♡ Jessi



October 3rd, 2014

Dear Sasha,

Your heart is what I want to be when I grow up. You left 42 days ago but the one nail that you painted blue is still kind of there. I dunk my hands into the sanitizer every night at work and my skin is probably falling off because of it all the time, but the chipped teal is still on my nail. This means you have super powers. ~~I also~~ ~~means~~ you are a princess and you're also a super hero and you're also the moon living inside of a human. You're going to kick so many butts one day. One time I was crying and you said to me "Jessi, don't be sad, you're smart and beautiful. No be sad." I think about that all the time. You are smart and beautiful. Being sad is okay sometimes but I'll never let you stay sad. I miss you so so so so much and I love you even more than that. ♡ Jessi





Sasha



WELL,

COME

HOME



the fruits aren't tasting good today. they laze in the bowl by the window, humming  
there's a meteorologist living in my foot. in the scar. blowing his nose  
on the tissue every time it rains.

i keep thinking about guitars in october, about ian pinching a piece of my forearm  
to demonstrate the pain of the tattoo birthing itself into the skin  
he marked that spare infinitesimal space for him. it's his,  
i'm his in that one place when i stay up early enough  
when the sky becomes a pancake burnt in the middle but gilded at the edges.

the fruits aren't yelling at me today. they're usually yelling at me to call my mom  
to send in the rent, to stop playing with my face. but sonia lives there, and she's  
so annoying -- i've named my zit sonia. when i introduce her to jakey, he poses at  
my forehead like she is a camera, he asks me if she likes him. he wants sonia's  
approval.

i think about how even when no one is there, we give everything a name,  
there's always someone watching  
always a bamboo plant to carbonate with when we're sad  
always a humanized coffee filter on the counter crumpled into  
a boomerang crumpled into a dimple you never see around anymore

i never see the vendor around, i don't know where he peddles fruit anymore --  
the grapefruit gurgles at my thought of him but still reminds me that

dalia is moving to california. the fruits aren't yelling  
but the grapes suggest that maybe i should call her  
she was my sister before i was a sister. my feminist icon  
before i knew how to LOUDER, how turn on the Kill a Man function  
on my boots when i needed to. 6'2" in heels, dalia could kill a man

she's my sister's sister when my sister doesn't feel like  
she has one, so i dial the banana but jakey picks up instead  
i ask him "what's your favorite thing about outerspace"  
he says "sunflowers"



and i tell him "no, sunflowers used to be  
dinosaurs, they're in the earth not in space"  
he says "yeah they were, but that's why they're in space,  
they ran away from the earth"  
he says "i want to be a sunflower."

then he asks me to teach him how to fly to the moon  
he says it's squishy, it bounces, he says he wants a yoyo  
like the one he had a great many years ago. he's four years old,  
he measures his lives in yoyos. he asks  
"where's the moon, it's been gone for a great many years now"

the meteorologist is drunk at this point. he buzzes at my heel,  
says

"tell the boy to watch out for glass. no one told you and now we're both  
stuck with me. and the glass, it's still in here. it's still in your foot  
do you feel it? it's crying. it misses being part of a container, it misses  
the ocean. it was never part of the ocean, i keep telling it that, but it  
won't listen to me. even the ocean has glass, but it doesn't understand  
how lines work. it doesn't understand it was broken when you let it in  
also don't forget to wear an extra pair of socks,  
i'm moving into your heel tomorrow. you broke those boots in wrong  
you're always doing things wrong"

i broke my boots in wrong. i think about ian  
the pinch at my heel  
scar tissue deviating  
i hear jakey singing from the fruit bowl by the window sometimes  
he asks me



"when are you  
coming home?"



pizza pi press