

A decorative white frame with ornate floral and scrollwork details at the corners, enclosing the word 'Grief'.

# Grief



Rayji de Guia

**"And where is the edge of the electrified grid? "**

— from "The Animal Model of Inescapable Shock" by Anne Boyer

Content warning:  
Mental illness, suicide, and self-harm.



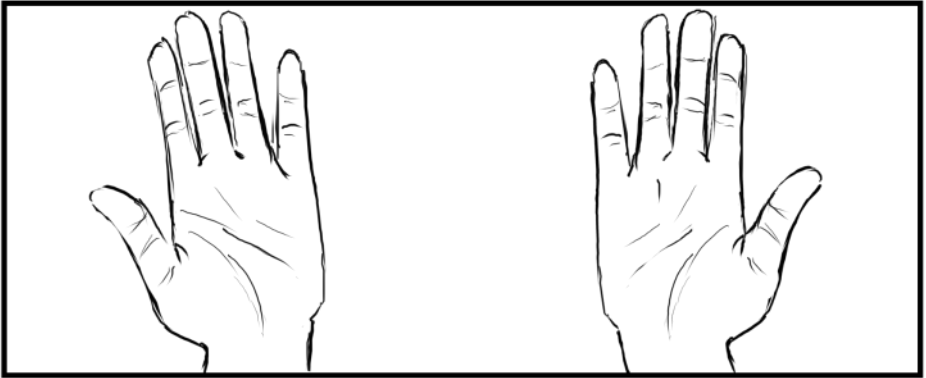
I grieve my art—



—which died in a cage inside my chest. It heaved its last breath, barely farewell, gone before I knew—



—before I realized that now I only chase its ghost.



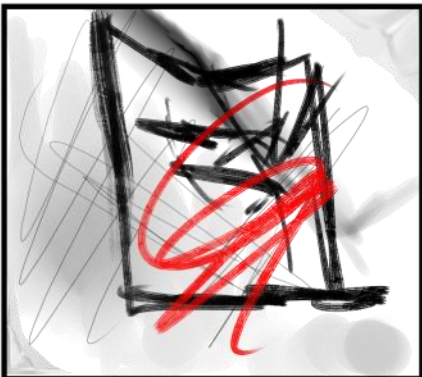
In this comic, I grieve not only my art, but also my unloathing.



I long for when I loved drawing so much I could not stop.



This comic is a process of grief.



It won't be clean.



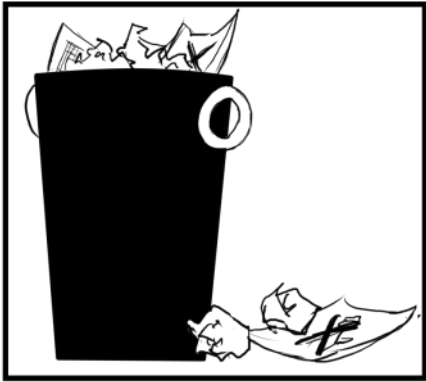
I will sob in some panels, be angry or indifferent in a few.



In almost a decade, I didn't allow myself to feel its loss.



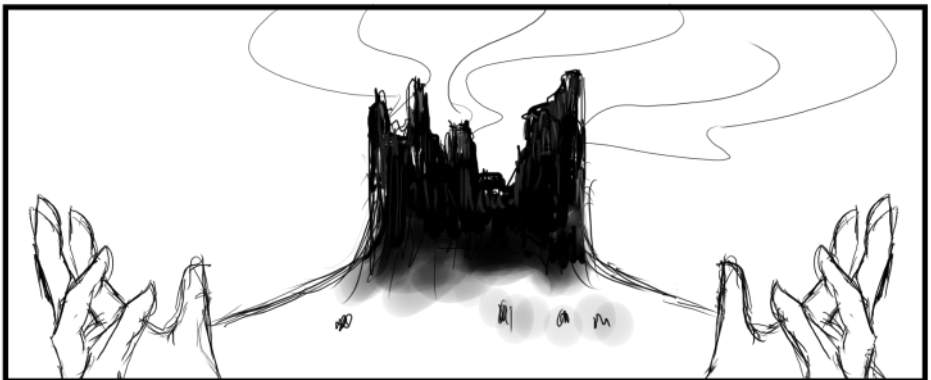
I can't point exactly when I stopped loving drawing—



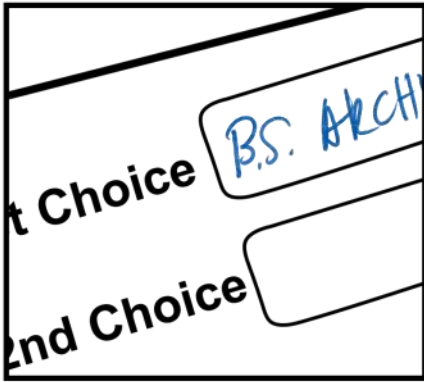
—when I started to hate it instead.



I only know why: I burnt out—



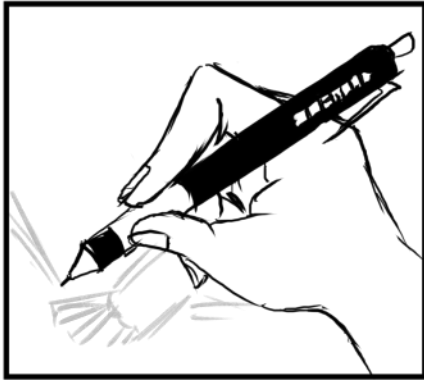
—to the point of trauma.



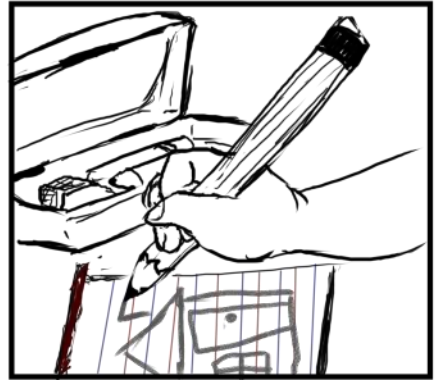
I took up architecture in 2008. It felt natural. I was a decent artist and I liked mathematics enough.



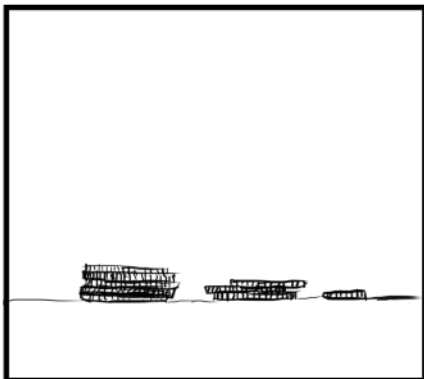
Having grown up in a household with hardly any money, I wanted a degree that guaranteed profit.



I'd thought it would be the easiest job in the world because I was drawing before I even knew.



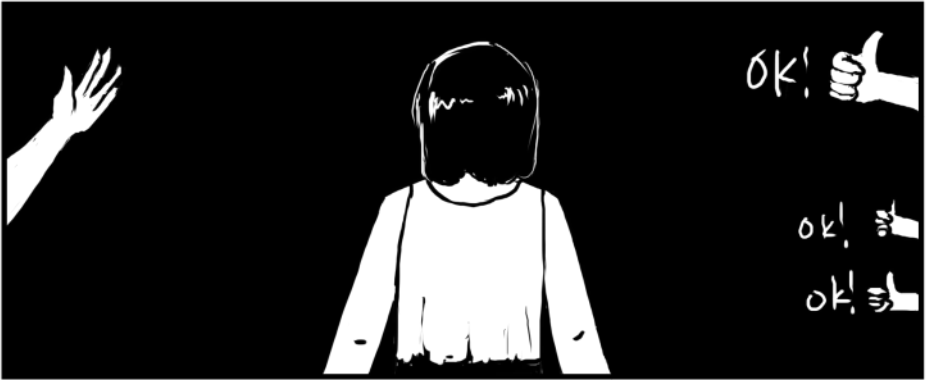
My mother had often scolded me for wasting my school pads and notebooks because money wasn't easy.



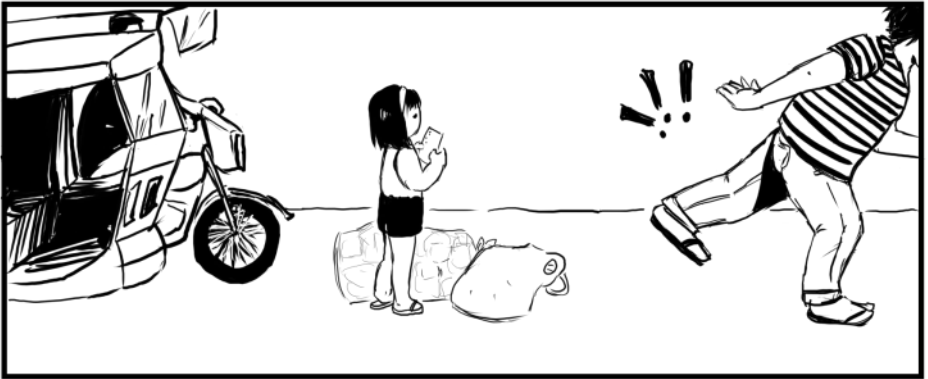
I didn't understand money or its easiness or the lack of it.



Drawing was all that mattered.



An anecdote my mother would tell, a memory I don't remember: How she left me and my sisters to my older cousin's care so she could replenish our sari-sari store from the palengke.



When she returned, I ran up to her and showed her a drawing that made her rush into the house in panic.



Apparently, I'd drawn how our cabinet fell over the bed because of my sisters' rowdiness in exact detail.

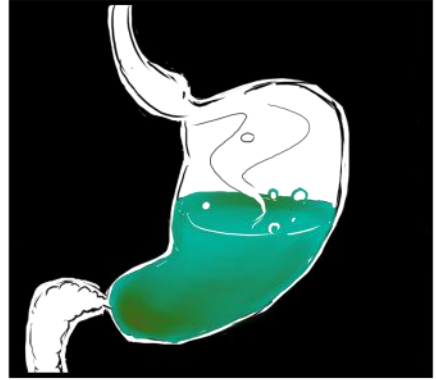


Drawing used to be instinctive, a sister language to my first.





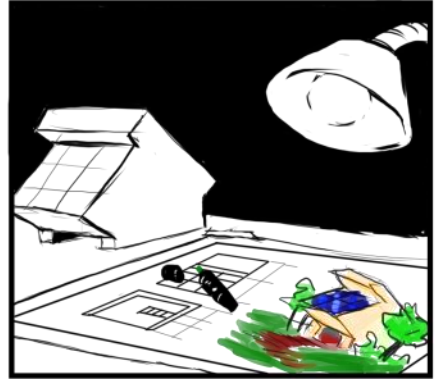
I suppose there's no point hiding the fact that I didn't last in architecture.



Not when I could only take naps every three days or so, mostly running on the volatile potion in my stomach—



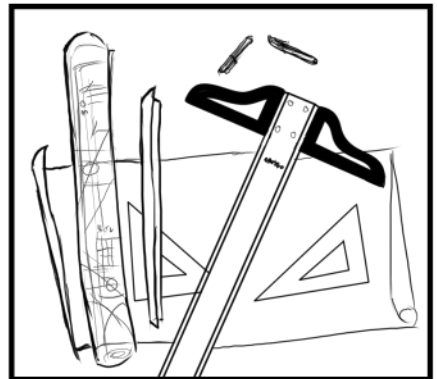
—consisting of coffee, Extra Joss, Red Bull, and Monster—



—just to keep that floorplan clean and presentable, and the rendering beautiful and eye-catching.



I kept the act of drawing close to me, so close and so dear I caged it.



I had to keep up with the requirements and deadlines.

# Units Grade

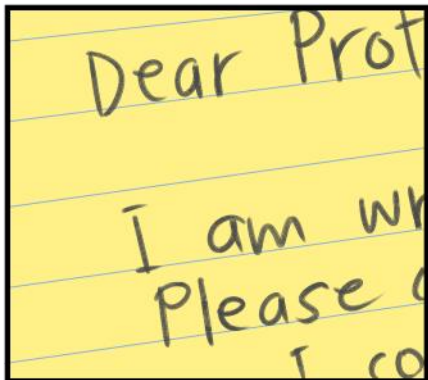
3.0 INC

3.0 2.00

One semester, a professor claimed she didn't receive my submission.



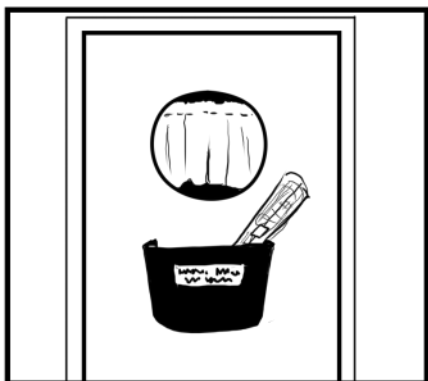
That design prevented me from helping out in our small baking business, our only source of income.



In the next semester, I negotiated for a deferred grade so I could advance to the next class—



—with a promise to remake my submission.



On the day of the deadline, I left my design at her door's pigeonhole because she was on vacation.



For the second time, she lost my submission.

Was this the breaking point?



At 4:00 AM every Tuesday, I'd leave my hometown to catch a design class.



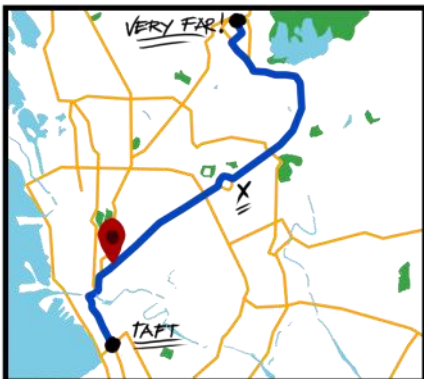
Once, I woke up in my seat way past 9:00 AM, the bus crammed like sardines.



It took me a while to orient myself. I was in the bus but it was on the southbound lane of España.



It meant that the bus had reached its last stop at Fairview, jokingly called by many as FARview—

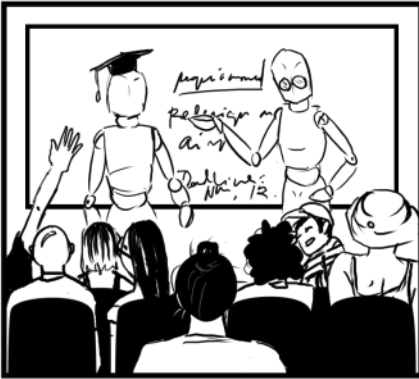


—because of how far it was, and the same bus was then bringing me back to where I first got on at Taft.

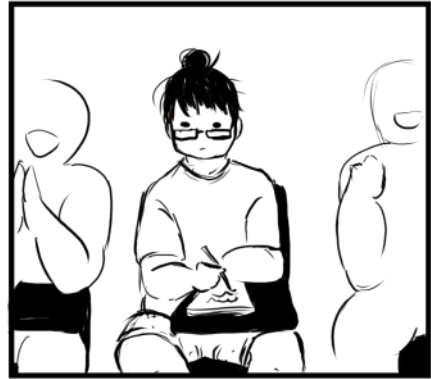


And while I don't know anything about Fairview except that it's far, I can now say that I've been there.

Was this the breaking point?



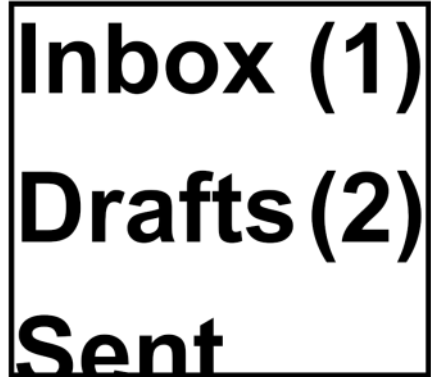
In my third year, two design classes were merged.



A major requirement was to redesign an airport in a region down south.



I didn't know anyone nor did I have friends, so I couldn't find a partner to work with.



Somehow, someone managed to get everyone's contact and invited us to do a site visit.



Via bus or plane.



I was an overworked student, unaware of my slow descent to depression and possible suicide, and I was poor.

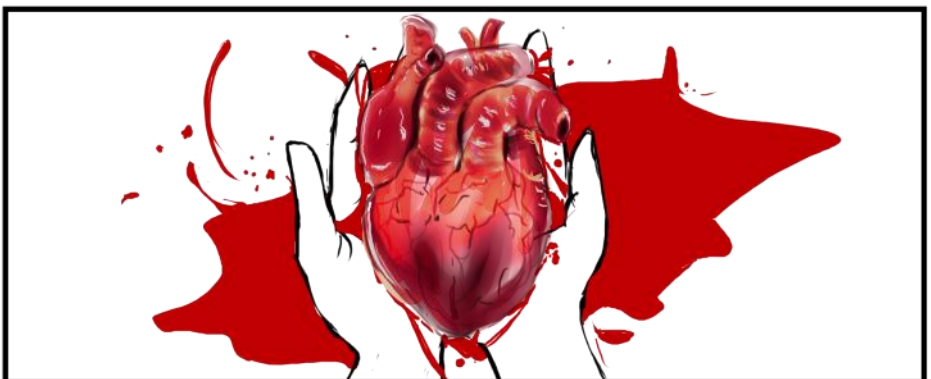
Was this the breaking point?



As I type this at 2:00 AM, I am sobbing under a pillow.

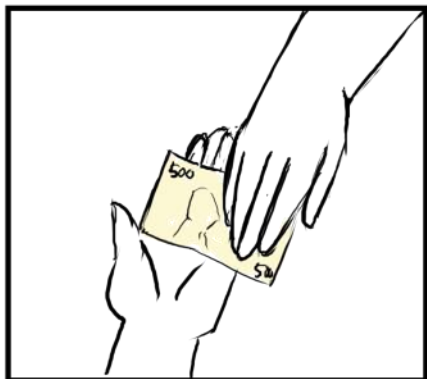


My sister once told me that pain cannot be stored in memory, cannot be described accurately in the aftermath.

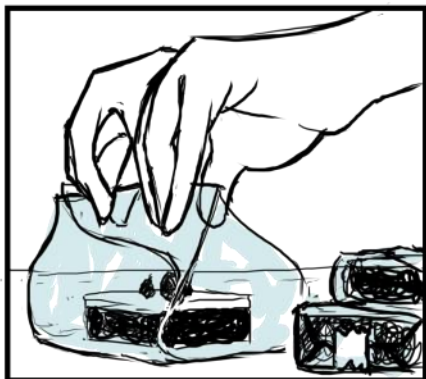


Does this mean I'm still hurting?





Clear as day, I remember the guilt whenever I'd asked my mother an extra ₱500 for art materials—



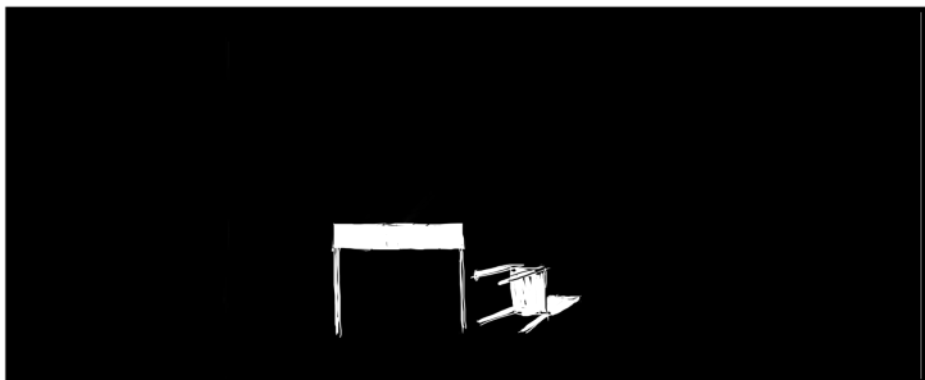
—the guilt whenever I was needed to help with the baking but I could not, even for one second, leave my plates—



—the guilt when it dawned on me that I abhor everything about this degree program—



—the guilt for desiring to be a writer instead, despite my three years in architecture—



—the guilt for living a wasteful existence.



The answer was no.

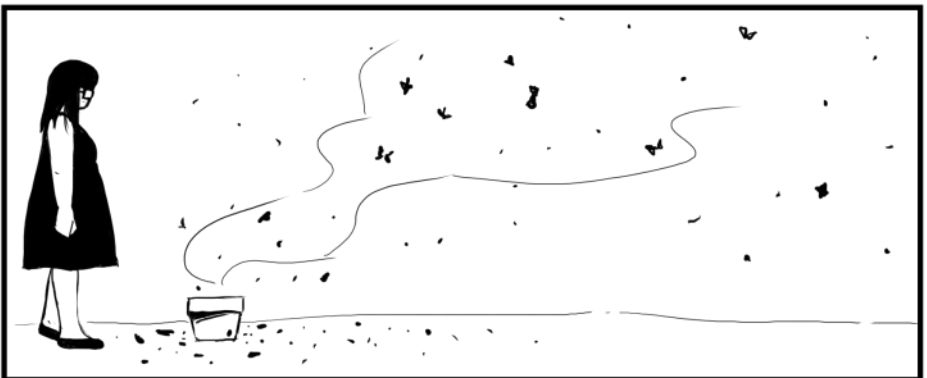
That enraged me.



The first act: I burned my floorplans and colorful renders, my scale models, my Staedtler, Rotring, and triangles, just as they'd burned me in three years.



It was a ceremony, a death. Even now, I don't regret this act. It was necessary.



It cleansed me.



The anger was a furnace that I fanned for years, even after I'd left.



I don't know when I stopped. At some point, I thought I had forgiven my art, that we'd have a happy reunion.



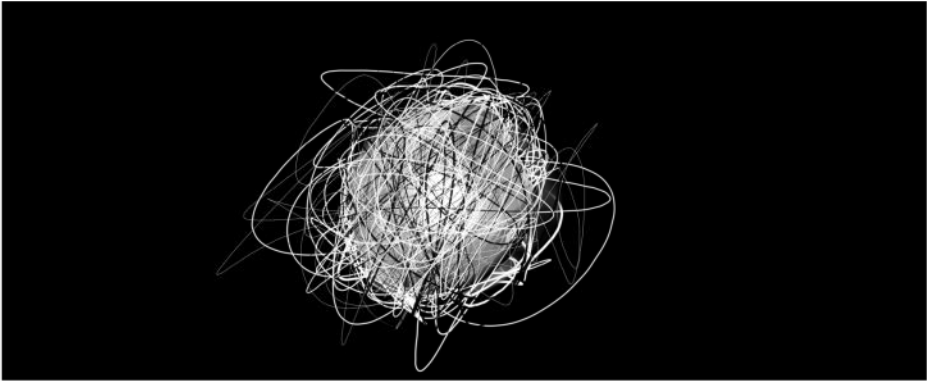
It wasn't caged within me anymore nor was I caged to architecture.



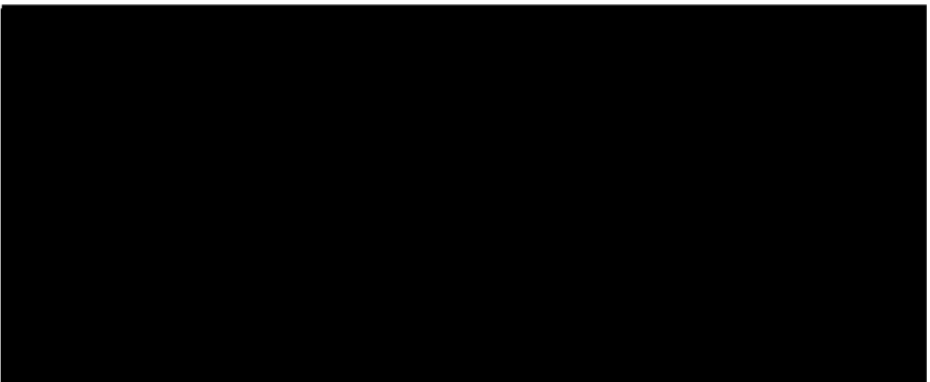
But my art died, and I could only chase its ghost.



You can't love a ghost. You can't nurture it the way you did when it had been alive.



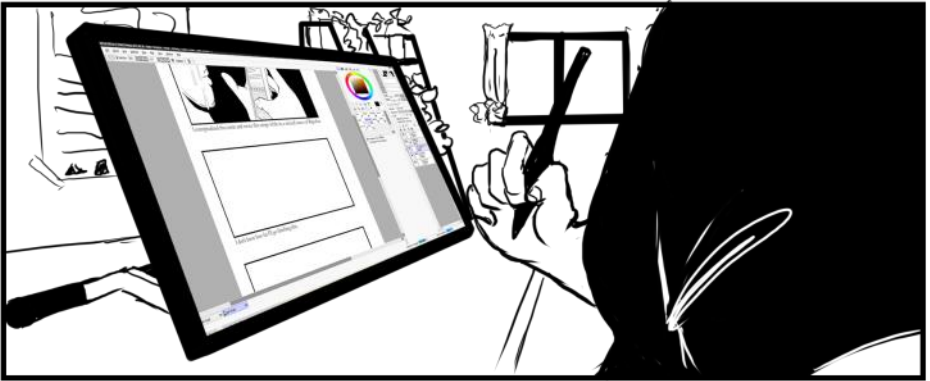
Now I loathe my inability to love a ghost.



It is my loss.



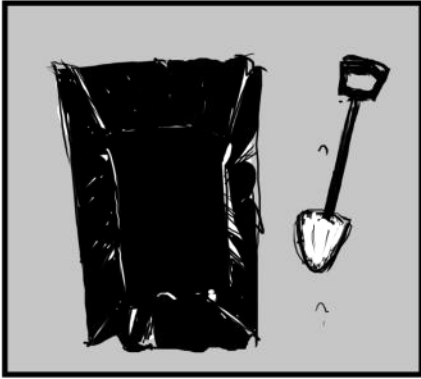
I conceptualized this comic and wrote this script while in a mixed bipolar state.



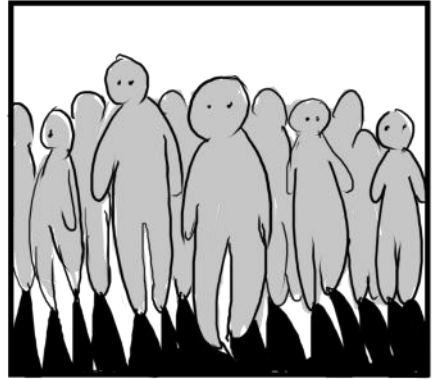
I don't know how far I'll go in finishing this.



After all, I hate doing this. I hate drawing now. It's not the same as before.



Who is to blame for my loss:



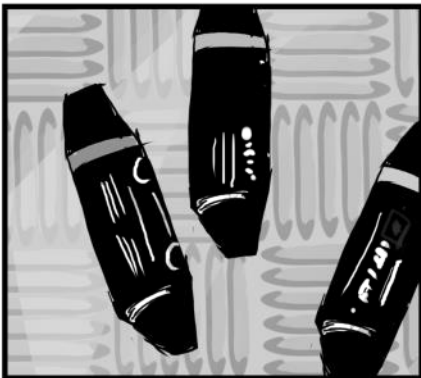
the college? my professors? my family?



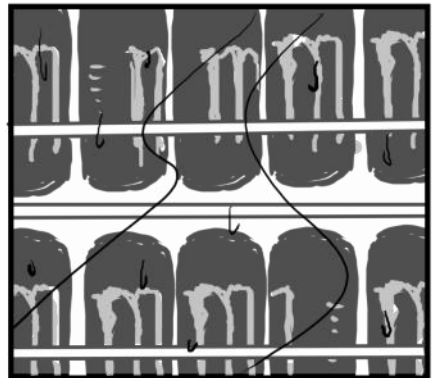
god? the ineffectiveness of prayers?  
the lack of a god?



my bedroom wall for not killing me  
when I repeatedly bashed my head  
against it?

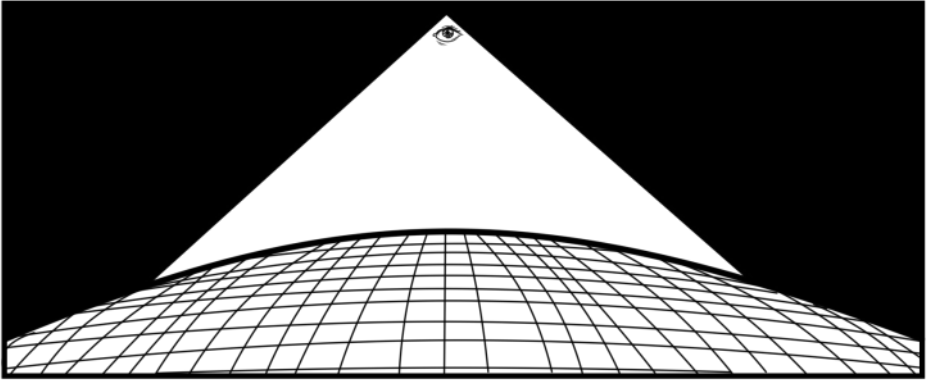


the bus passenger who claimed my  
expensive markers when they rolled  
from my tote bag while I napped?



the manufacturers of energy drinks?





Capitalism?



Myself?



I have no answer. I am still grieving.

**Rayji de Guia** is a fictionist, poet, and illustrator. This might be her last comic.



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@rayjideguia  
rayjideguia.com

*Grief* attempts to process the loss of an artist's love for art from a time when she lacked the tools and resources to grieve; when she did not know how to even begin grieving; when poverty, overworking and the ceaseless need to produce, and a declining mental health made it impossible.