

Worrier

In total darkness or in a very large room, quietly - very quietly, she repeats the words.

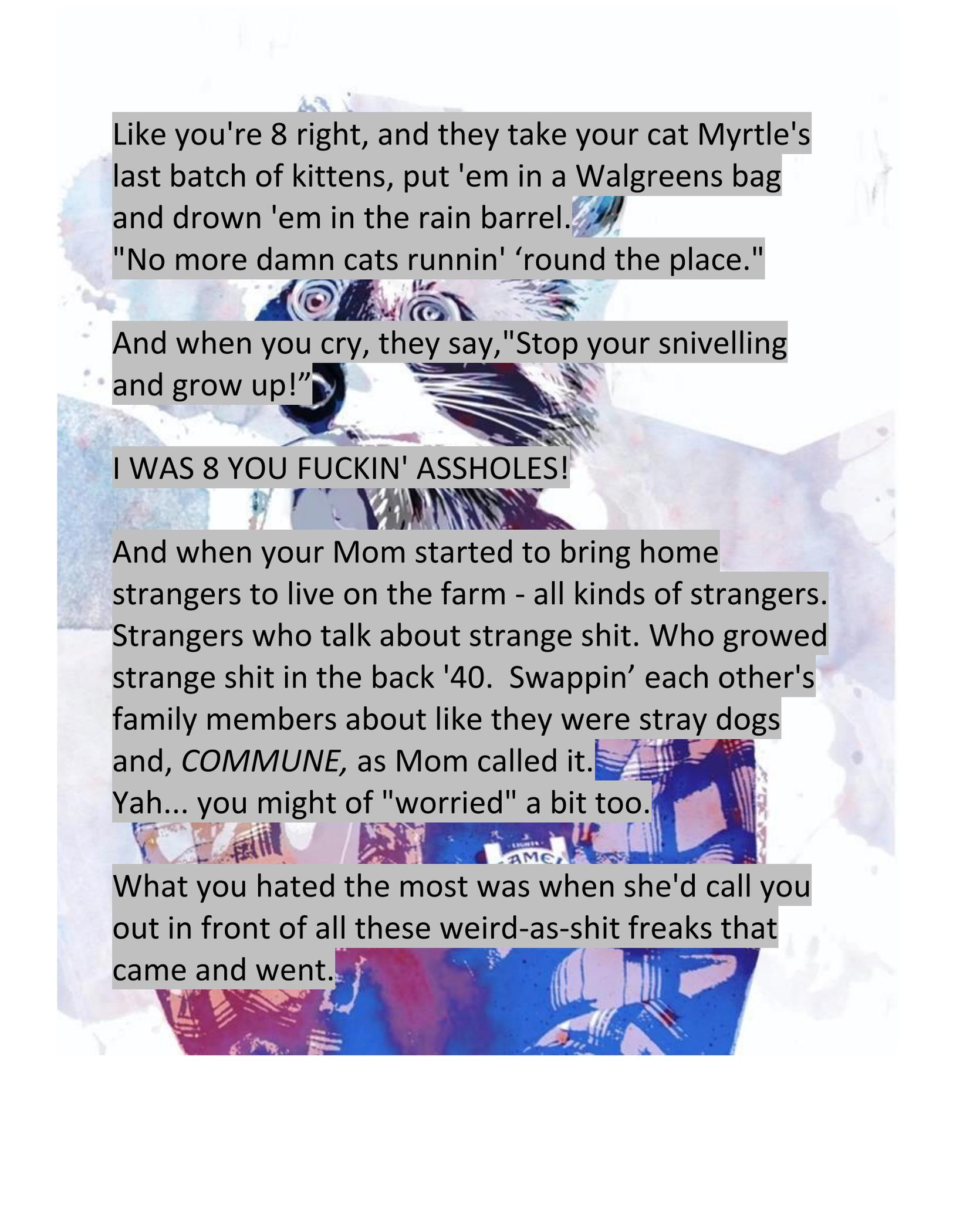
"strawberry jam, strawberry jam, strawberry jam..."

A worrier.

She knows it. 'Been told it her whole life. She has reasons. Then and now. Especially now.

"Worry wracks the body. *PRAY* and let God worry." That's what they told her. People who had no reason to worry.

She'd never understood the shit logic of adults. For instance, they do something terrible to make you cry and then they say, "Stop your sniveling and grow up!"



Like you're 8 right, and they take your cat Myrtle's last batch of kittens, put 'em in a Walgreens bag and drown 'em in the rain barrel.

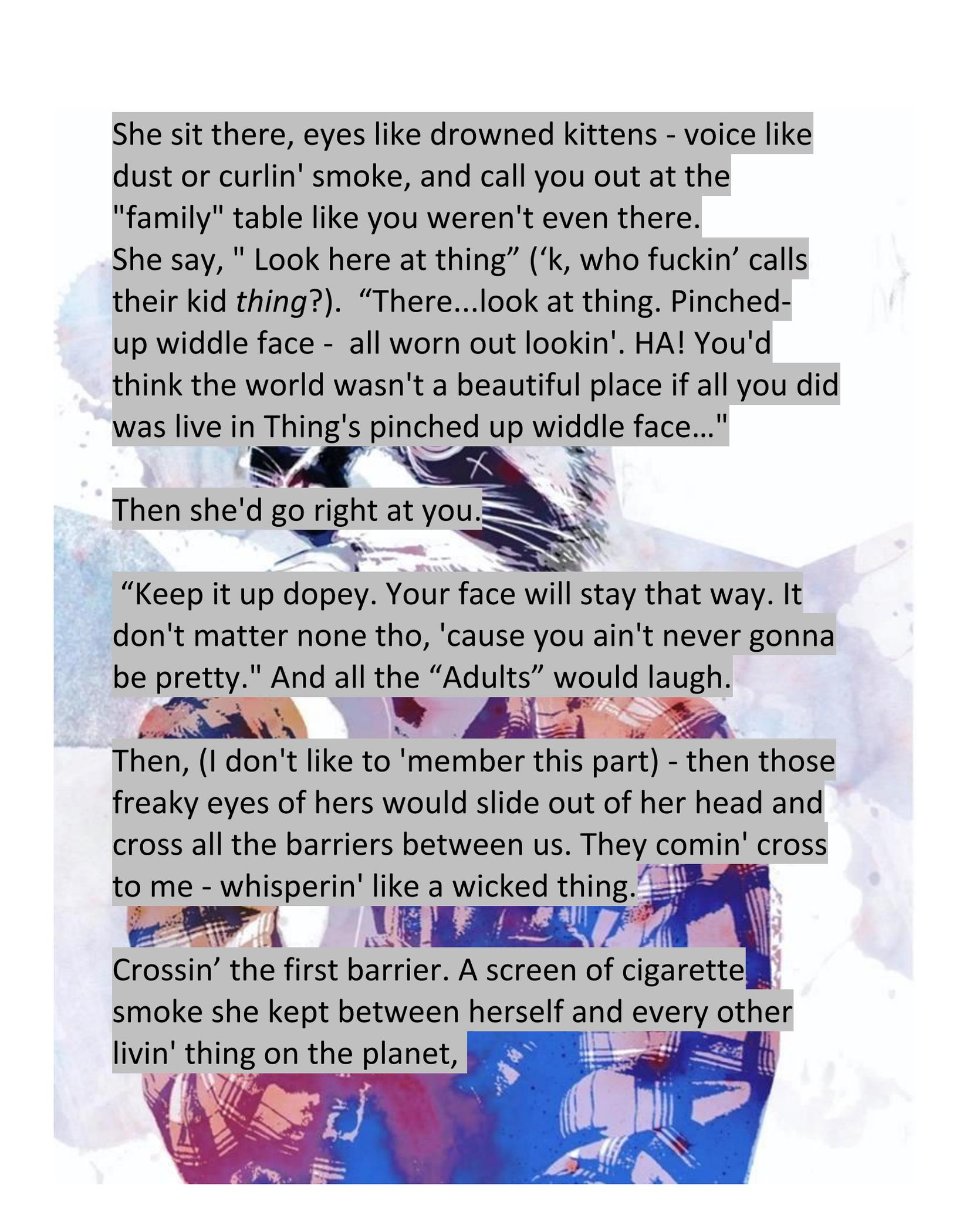
"No more damn cats runnin' 'round the place."

And when you cry, they say, "Stop your snivelling and grow up!"

I WAS 8 YOU FUCKIN' ASSHOLES!

And when your Mom started to bring home strangers to live on the farm - all kinds of strangers. Strangers who talk about strange shit. Who growed strange shit in the back '40. Swappin' each other's family members about like they were stray dogs and, *COMMUNE*, as Mom called it. Yah... you might of "worried" a bit too.

What you hated the most was when she'd call you out in front of all these weird-as-shit freaks that came and went.



She sit there, eyes like drowned kittens - voice like dust or curlin' smoke, and call you out at the "family" table like you weren't even there.

She say, " Look here at thing" ('k, who fuckin' calls their kid *thing*?). "There...look at thing. Pinched-up widdle face - all worn out lookin'. HA! You'd think the world wasn't a beautiful place if all you did was live in Thing's pinched up widdle face..."

Then she'd go right at you.

"Keep it up dopey. Your face will stay that way. It don't matter none tho, 'cause you ain't never gonna be pretty." And all the "Adults" would laugh.

Then, (I don't like to 'member this part) - then those freaky eyes of hers would slide out of her head and cross all the barriers between us. They comin' cross to me - whisperin' like a wicked thing.

Crossin' the first barrier. A screen of cigarette smoke she kept between herself and every other livin' thing on the planet,

Whispering:
"I'm comin..."

(strawberry jam...)

Crossin' the second barrier. The shredded mess of
the lives at the table around us,

Whispering:
"I'm comin'"

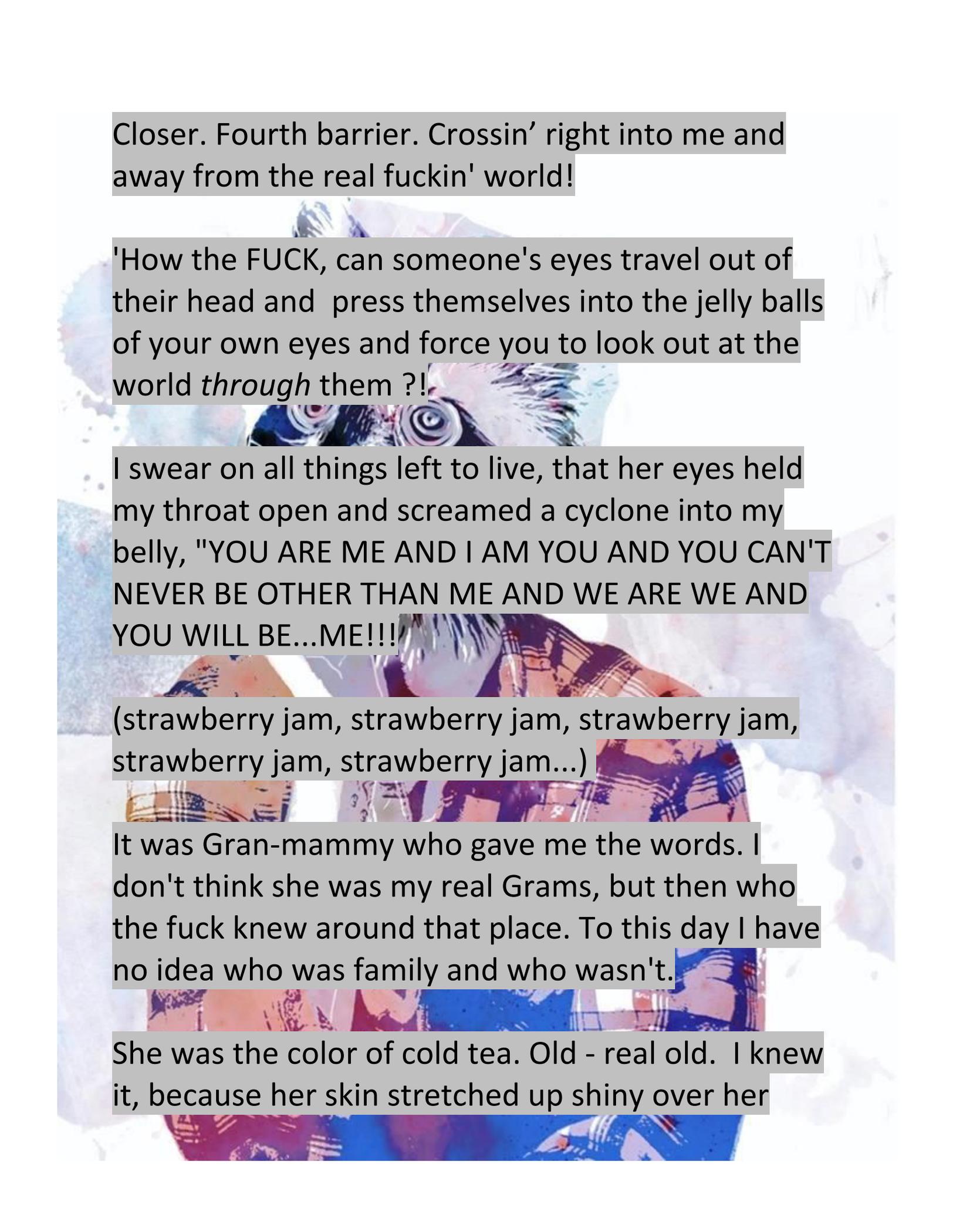
(strawberry jam...).

Now like a freight train, pressin' past the third
barrier. The jelly of my eyeballs. Past the *me* of me.

Whispering:
" comin, comin, comin..."

(strawberry jam...)

CAMEL



Closer. Fourth barrier. Crossin' right into me and away from the real fuckin' world!

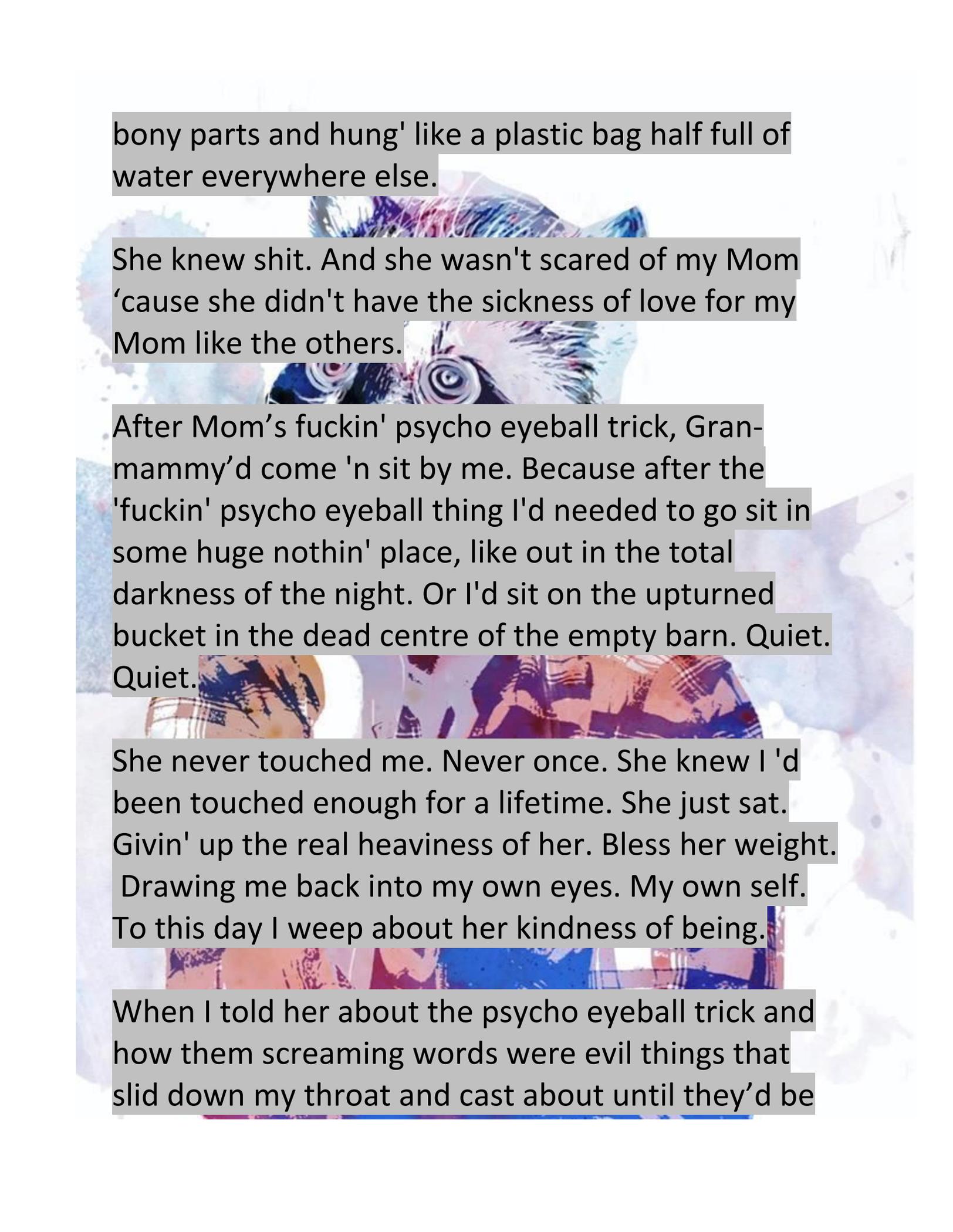
'How the FUCK, can someone's eyes travel out of their head and press themselves into the jelly balls of your own eyes and force you to look out at the world *through* them ?!

I swear on all things left to live, that her eyes held my throat open and screamed a cyclone into my belly, "YOU ARE ME AND I AM YOU AND YOU CAN'T NEVER BE OTHER THAN ME AND WE ARE WE AND YOU WILL BE...ME!!!"

(strawberry jam, strawberry jam, strawberry jam, strawberry jam, strawberry jam...)

It was Gran-mammy who gave me the words. I don't think she was my real Grams, but then who the fuck knew around that place. To this day I have no idea who was family and who wasn't.

She was the color of cold tea. Old - real old. I knew it, because her skin stretched up shiny over her



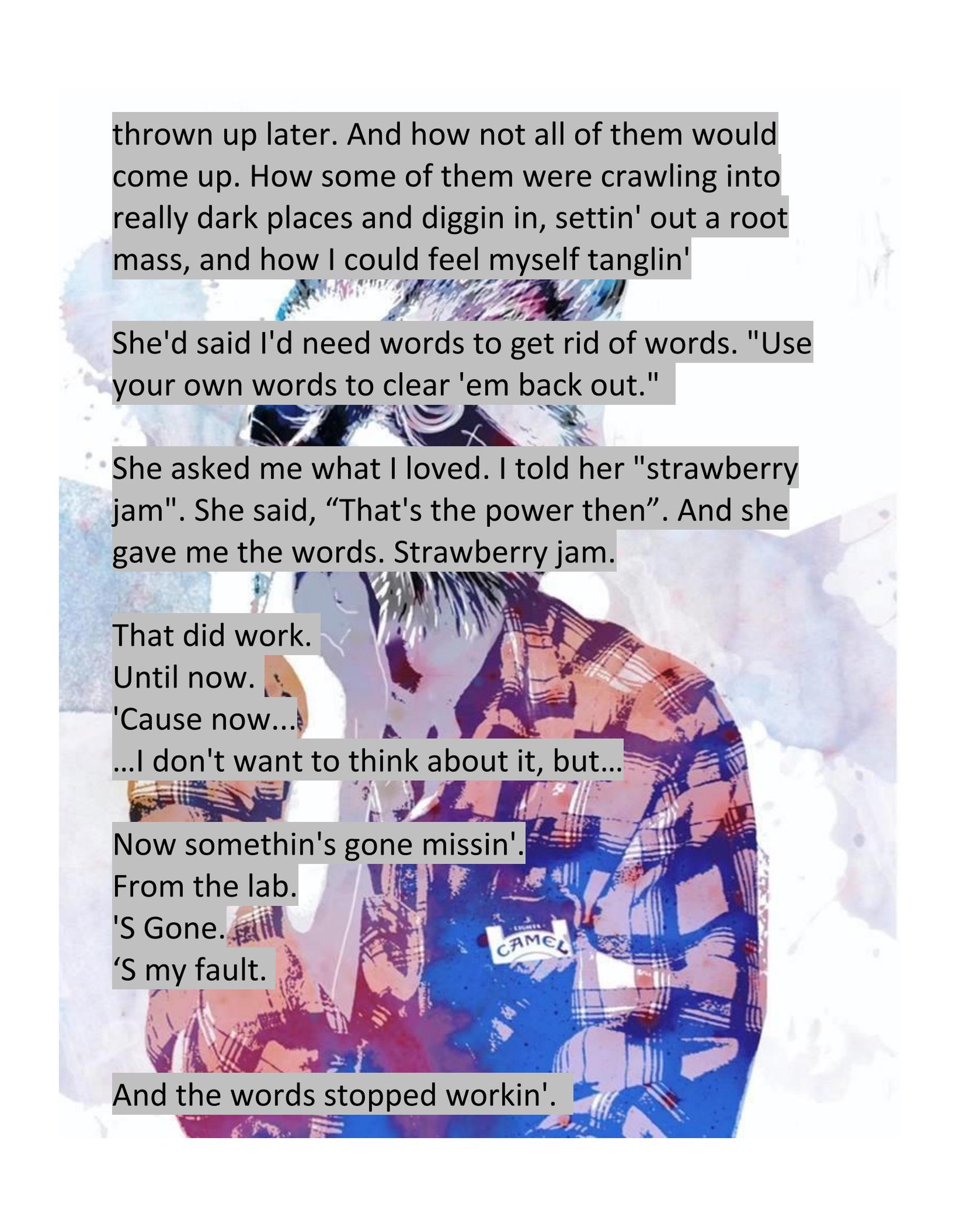
bony parts and hung' like a plastic bag half full of water everywhere else.

She knew shit. And she wasn't scared of my Mom 'cause she didn't have the sickness of love for my Mom like the others.

After Mom's fuckin' psycho eyeball trick, Grammammy'd come 'n sit by me. Because after the 'fuckin' psycho eyeball thing I'd needed to go sit in some huge nothin' place, like out in the total darkness of the night. Or I'd sit on the upturned bucket in the dead centre of the empty barn. Quiet. Quiet.

She never touched me. Never once. She knew I'd been touched enough for a lifetime. She just sat. Givin' up the real heaviness of her. Bless her weight. Drawing me back into my own eyes. My own self. To this day I weep about her kindness of being.

When I told her about the psycho eyeball trick and how them screaming words were evil things that slid down my throat and cast about until they'd be

A person with long, multi-colored hair (blue, purple, pink, green) is shown from the chest up. They are wearing a red and blue plaid shirt. A pack of Camel cigarettes is visible in their hand. The background is a light, textured surface.

thrown up later. And how not all of them would come up. How some of them were crawling into really dark places and diggin in, settin' out a root mass, and how I could feel myself tanglin'

She'd said I'd need words to get rid of words. "Use your own words to clear 'em back out."

She asked me what I loved. I told her "strawberry jam". She said, "That's the power then". And she gave me the words. Strawberry jam.

That did work.
Until now.
'Cause now...
...I don't want to think about it, but...

Now somethin's gone missin'.
From the lab.
'S Gone.
'S my fault.

And the words stopped workin'.

I'm losing my own ideas.

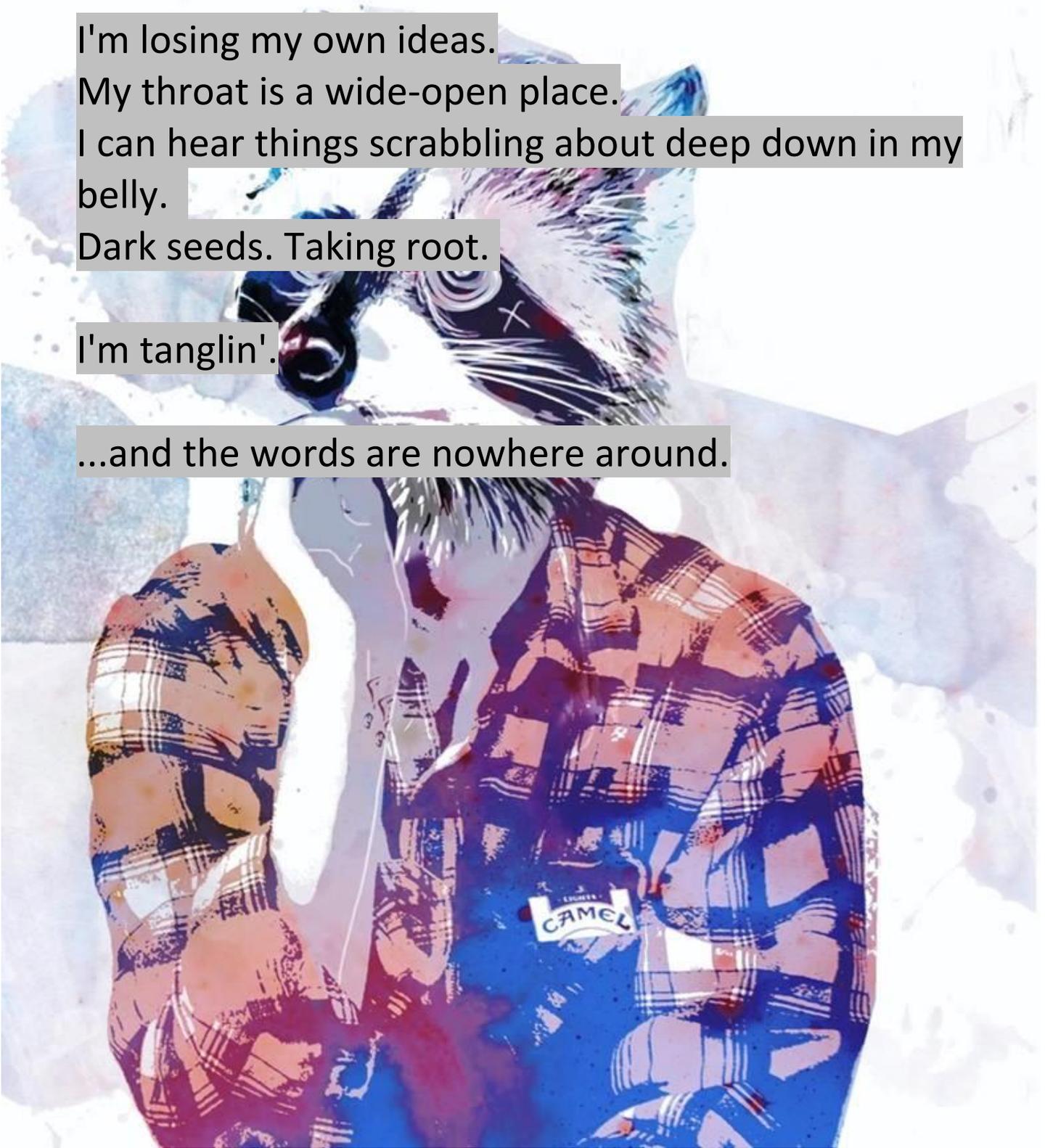
My throat is a wide-open place.

I can hear things scrabbling about deep down in my belly.

Dark seeds. Taking root.

I'm tanglin'.

...and the words are nowhere around.



Graphic by Ivan Amadeus Anderson

