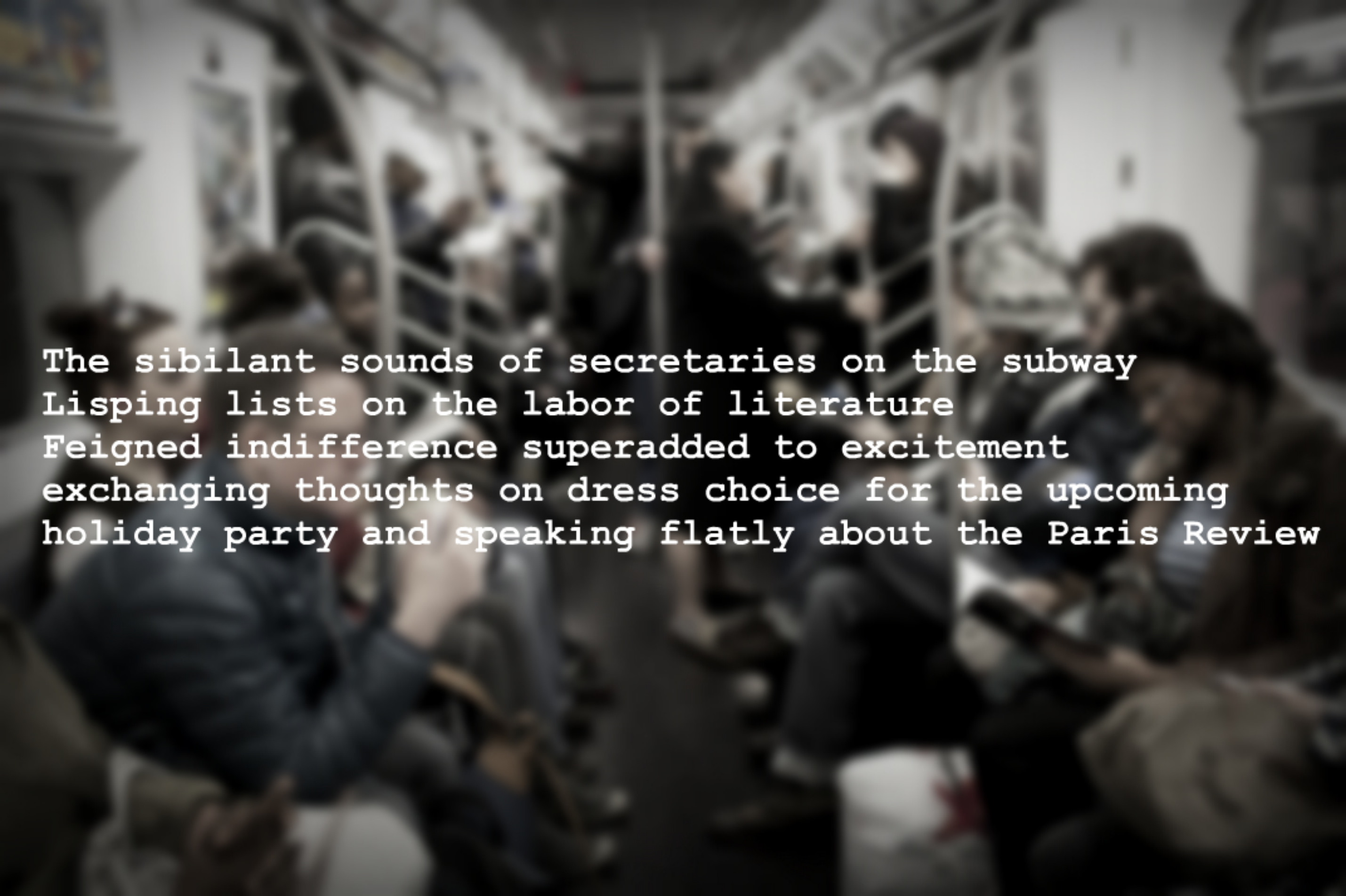


A sepia-toned photograph of a subway tunnel. The tracks run down the center of the frame, receding into the distance. The tunnel walls are curved and show signs of wear, with some graffiti visible. The lighting is dim, creating a moody atmosphere.

# The Apple & The Worm

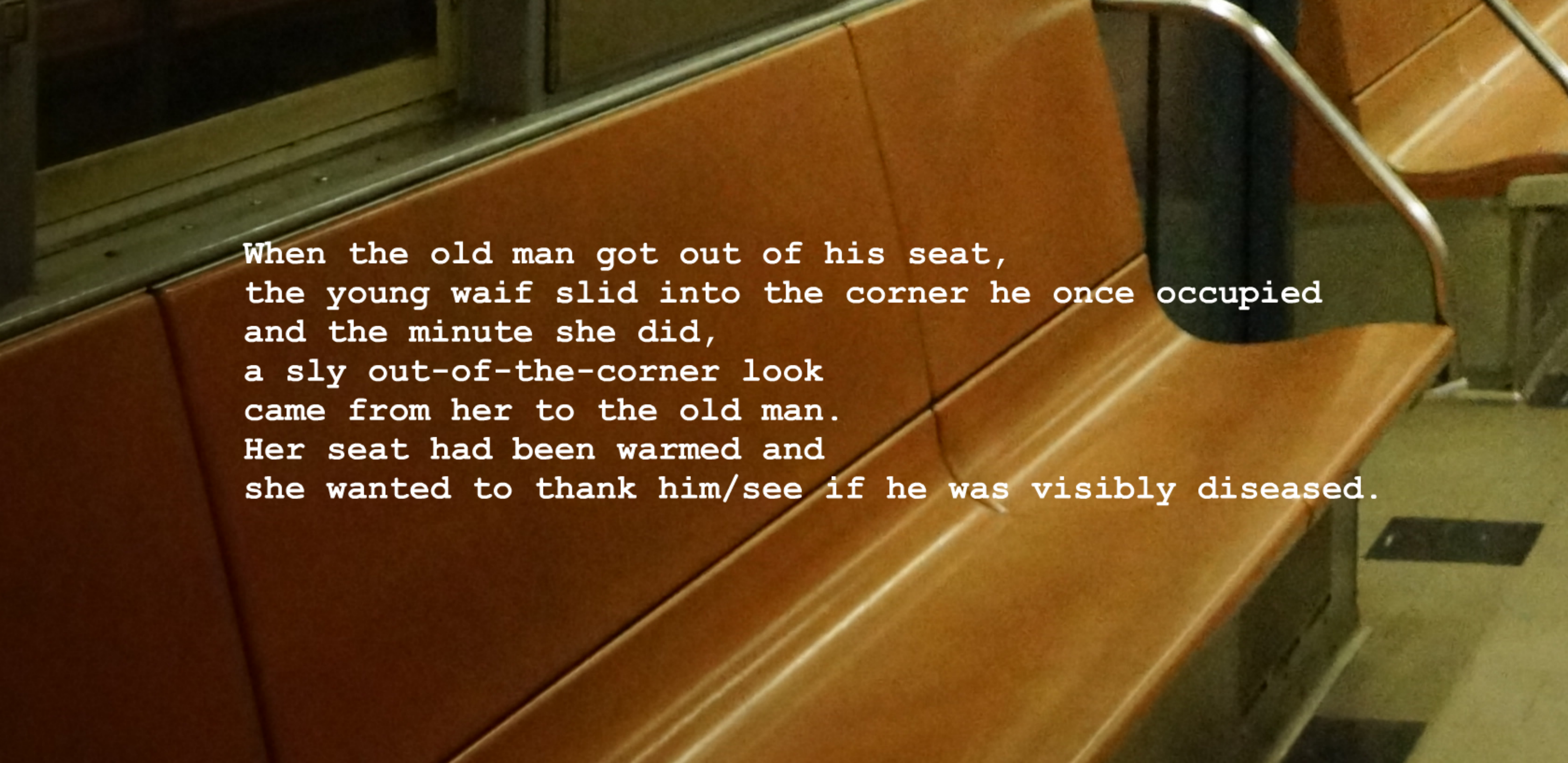
Poems from the NYC Subway  
by Jacob Sanders





The sibilant sounds of secretaries on the subway  
Lisping lists on the labor of literature  
Feigned indifference superadded to excitement  
exchanging thoughts on dress choice for the upcoming  
holiday party and speaking flatly about the Paris Review



A photograph of a wooden bench in a public space, possibly a train station or airport. The bench is made of light-colored wood and has a curved metal handrail. In the background, the legs and feet of a person are visible, suggesting they are sitting on the bench. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, monospaced font.

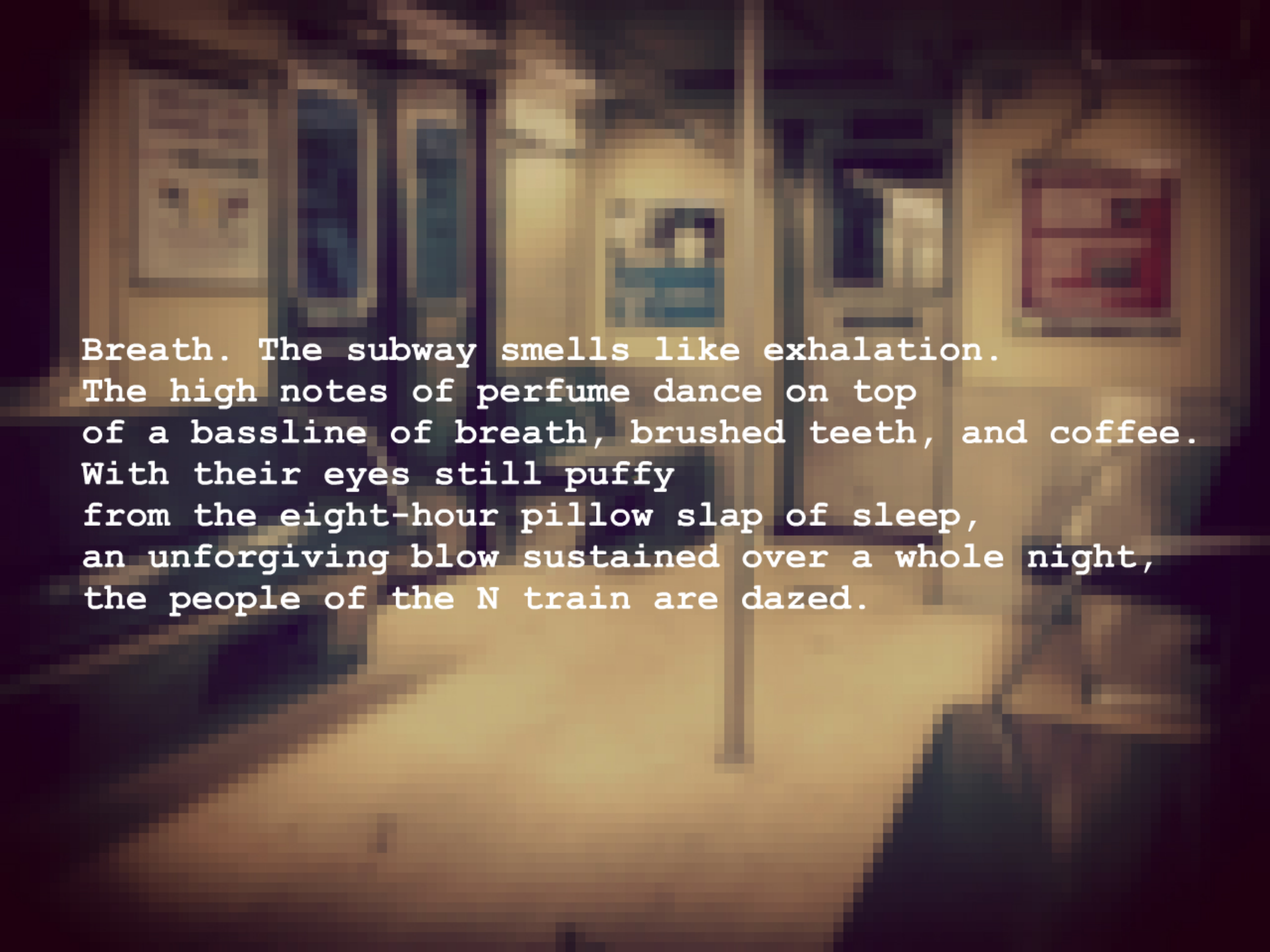
When the old man got out of his seat,  
the young waif slid into the corner he once occupied  
and the minute she did,  
a sly out-of-the-corner look  
came from her to the old man.  
Her seat had been warmed and  
she wanted to thank him/see if he was visibly diseased.





The subway is a human meatball sandwich  
with clothes and glowing screens for sauce.  
The worn-in jeans of the drywall worker,  
the dusty shoes and backpack  
the skin tags on the chins of the gravely serious  
Pant choice as job advertisement - less pleats, less zeros.  
Centrifugal force sending one armed riders  
clawing into the handrails.



A blurry, low-angle shot of a subway car interior. The walls are yellow, and the seats are blue. The image is out of focus, creating a sense of motion and atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Breath. The subway smells like exhalation.  
The high notes of perfume dance on top  
of a bassline of breath, brushed teeth, and coffee.  
With their eyes still puffy  
from the eight-hour pillow slap of sleep,  
an unforgiving blow sustained over a whole night,  
the people of the N train are dazed.





What the fuck smells like onions?

A spilled container of middle eastern food  
The cubes of Halal meat stranded on the ground  
ribbons of lettuce and white sauce  
explode like entrails out of aluminum housing  
A botched homicide, foiled during carry-out



Late in December, before Christmas break would separate us  
we would coax our otherwise tender and anxious teenaged hearts out from their burrows,  
to hopefully capitalize on the emotions & goodwill of the season.  
Mankind was advertised as being on it's best behavior during this time  
and being young inductees into the self-coronated halls of heartbreak, we walked together.

She, much more beautiful and graceful than I...I  
Maker of mixtapes, my heart stoking inside of my chest, an effulgent glow from a cauldron,  
within, the noble herbs and seasonings of romantic reasoning, the indirect heat gleaned  
from mother and sister stories, still campfire warm.  
Nervously decided to buy the girl earrings at our school's holiday fair.  
MidWay quality jewelry, purchased this time with money  
otherwise, acquired by money, marksmanship, and milk jugs.  
Leaf shaped flecks of tin, colored in harvest brown and yellow.

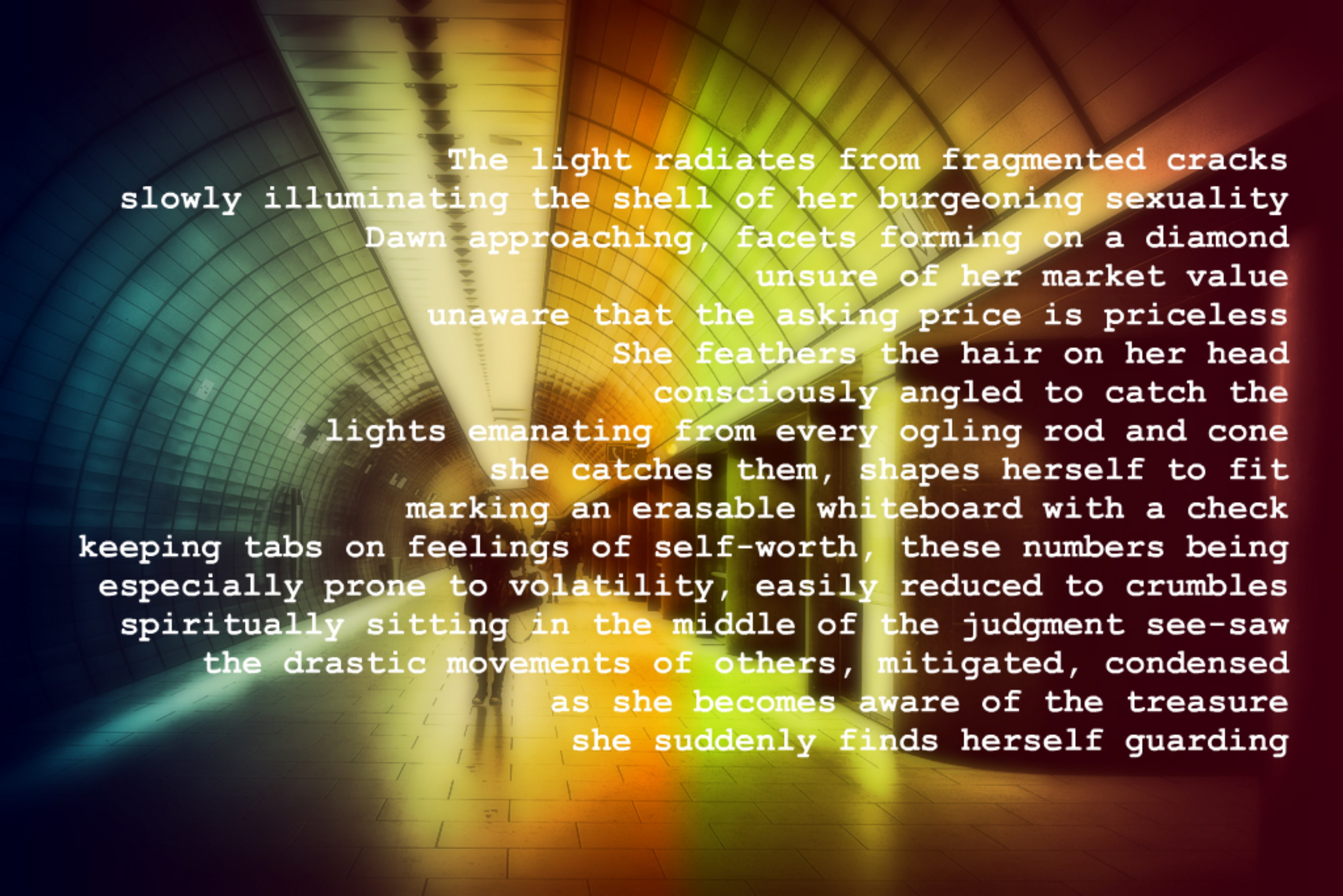
Late in December, in the basement of her parent's home, she entertained fumbling advances.  
Both of us standing still long enough, as to almost shout a willingness to concede,  
my hand sneaking through straps of denim, on the small of her back, inside overalls  
My heart, thrumming like a miniature sewing machine  
hurriedly printing the strange new fabric of reciprocated love,  
yards of this cloth, smothering my intellect  
like a man being piled upon at a re-birthing ceremony,  
desperate with abandonment, crushed under the softest anvil.

By January, the opiate of goodwill had lost it's potency  
the balcony scenes of us pretending love had been revealed as just that.  
Well rehearsed & almost naturally timed vignettes,  
bearing remarkable resemblances to the source material.  
All of them immersed into a fog, brought on by the barometric pressure of brown bag lunch,  
Algebra tests, orthodontists and the death rattles of childhood.



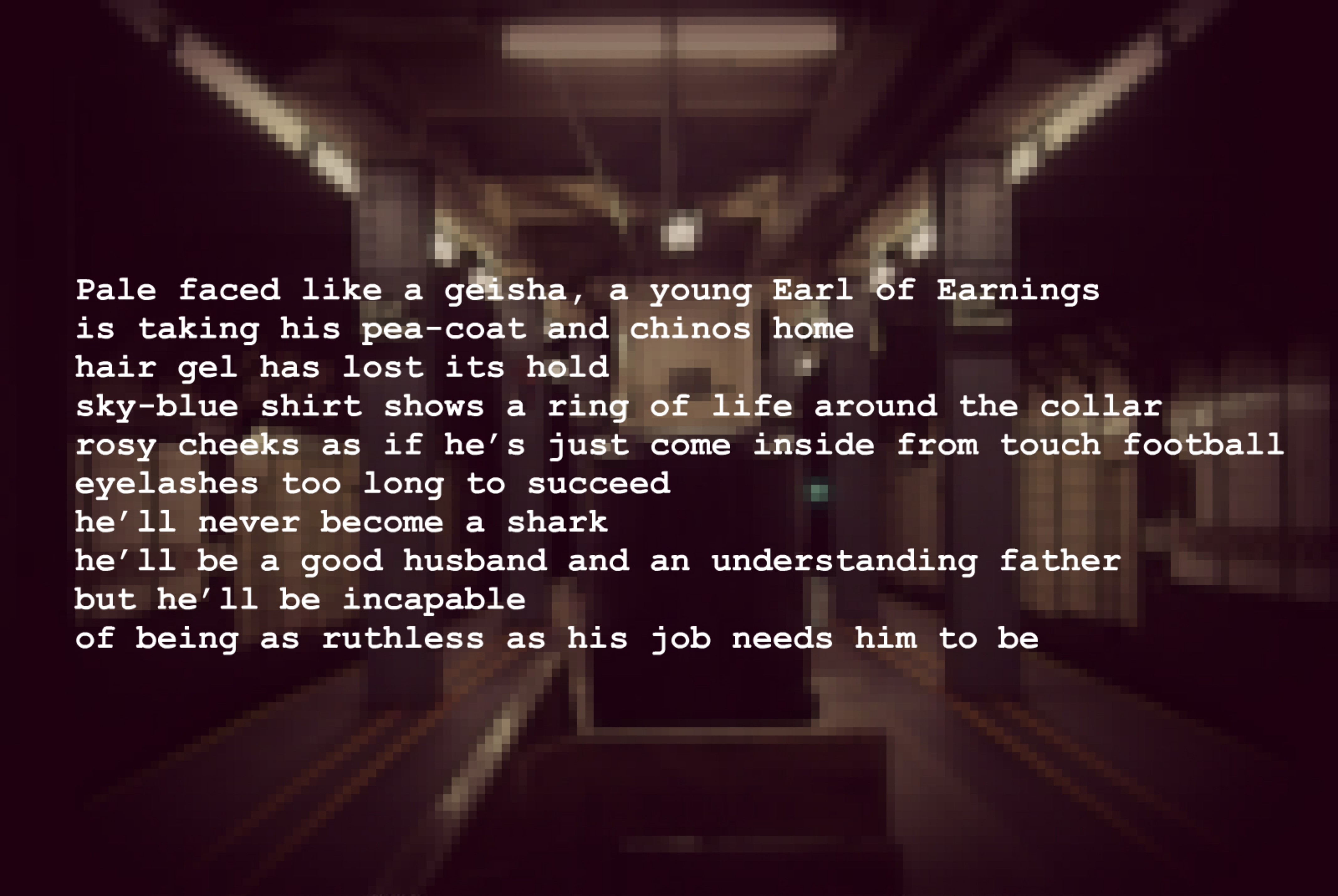
Studying and staring at the curiousness of our subterranean citizens  
glossing over the fact that I myself present a singular countenance;  
close-fitting Kangol, charcoal grey coat  
long legs extended into the middle of the car  
my small mouth surrounded by a chin curtain  
topped by a nose like an Anglo-Saxon toucan  
constantly and feverishly scrawling into a spiral bound  
surrounded by weary stares, each one of us together going somewhere else  
this quick preview of the underground, a hint at our final destination.  
We slide like worms through the long dead body of Manhattan,  
a macro-foreshadowing of that anxious tango  
partner of life, Death, waiting to take the lead,  
take the rose from our mouths, the final and passionate  
flamenco flourish, the dip, plunging backwards,  
into the tunnels, never to be raised again.



The background image shows a person walking away from the viewer down a long, arched tunnel. The ceiling is composed of a grid of square panels, and the floor is also tiled. Warm, golden light emanates from the distance, creating a strong perspective and illuminating the person's path. The overall mood is one of journey and discovery.

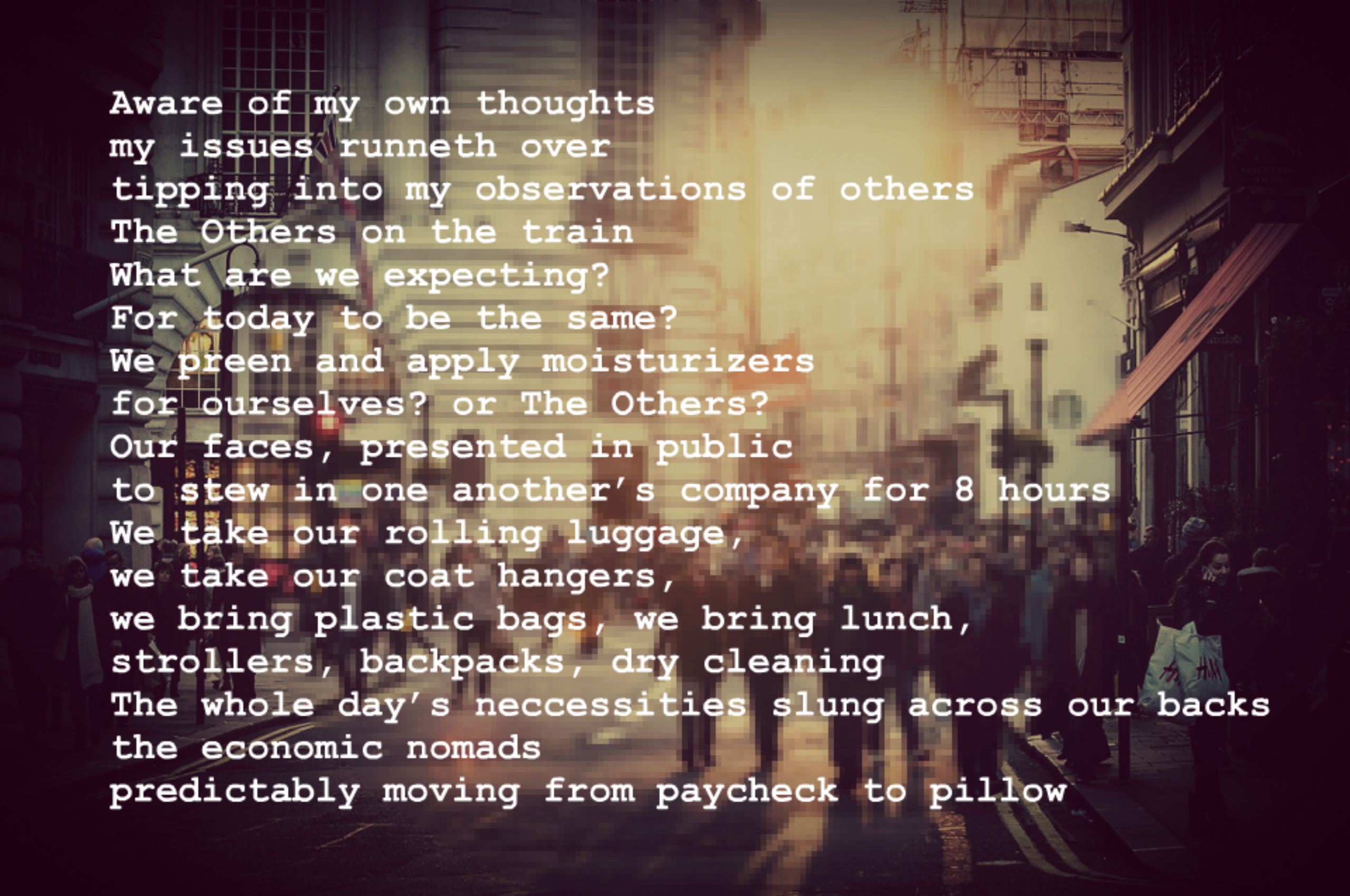
The light radiates from fragmented cracks  
slowly illuminating the shell of her burgeoning sexuality  
Dawn approaching, facets forming on a diamond  
unsure of her market value  
unaware that the asking price is priceless  
She feathers the hair on her head  
consciously angled to catch the  
lights emanating from every ogling rod and cone  
she catches them, shapes herself to fit  
marking an erasable whiteboard with a check  
keeping tabs on feelings of self-worth, these numbers being  
especially prone to volatility, easily reduced to crumbles  
spiritually sitting in the middle of the judgment see-saw  
the drastic movements of others, mitigated, condensed  
as she becomes aware of the treasure  
she suddenly finds herself guarding





Pale faced like a geisha, a young Earl of Earnings  
is taking his pea-coat and chinos home  
hair gel has lost its hold  
sky-blue shirt shows a ring of life around the collar  
rosy cheeks as if he's just come inside from touch football  
eyelashes too long to succeed  
he'll never become a shark  
he'll be a good husband and an understanding father  
but he'll be incapable  
of being as ruthless as his job needs him to be





Aware of my own thoughts  
my issues runneth over  
tipping into my observations of others  
The Others on the train  
What are we expecting?  
For today to be the same?  
We preen and apply moisturizers  
for ourselves? or The Others?  
Our faces, presented in public  
to stew in one another's company for 8 hours  
We take our rolling luggage,  
we take our coat hangers,  
we bring plastic bags, we bring lunch,  
strollers, backpacks, dry cleaning  
The whole day's neccessities slung across our backs  
the economic nomads  
predictably moving from paycheck to pillow



The violent snapshots from surveillance cameras frozen in the moments before blood is shed make the morning newspaper's front page.

The intent is to let us know that while the security of the city cannot prevent these murders, they will definitely use the image of it's perpetration to tell us they are watching.

Like lifeguards with no legs or whistles, totally mute, but with an iPhone raised capturing the shark as it tears into the waves, crimson foam surrounding it's black eyes.

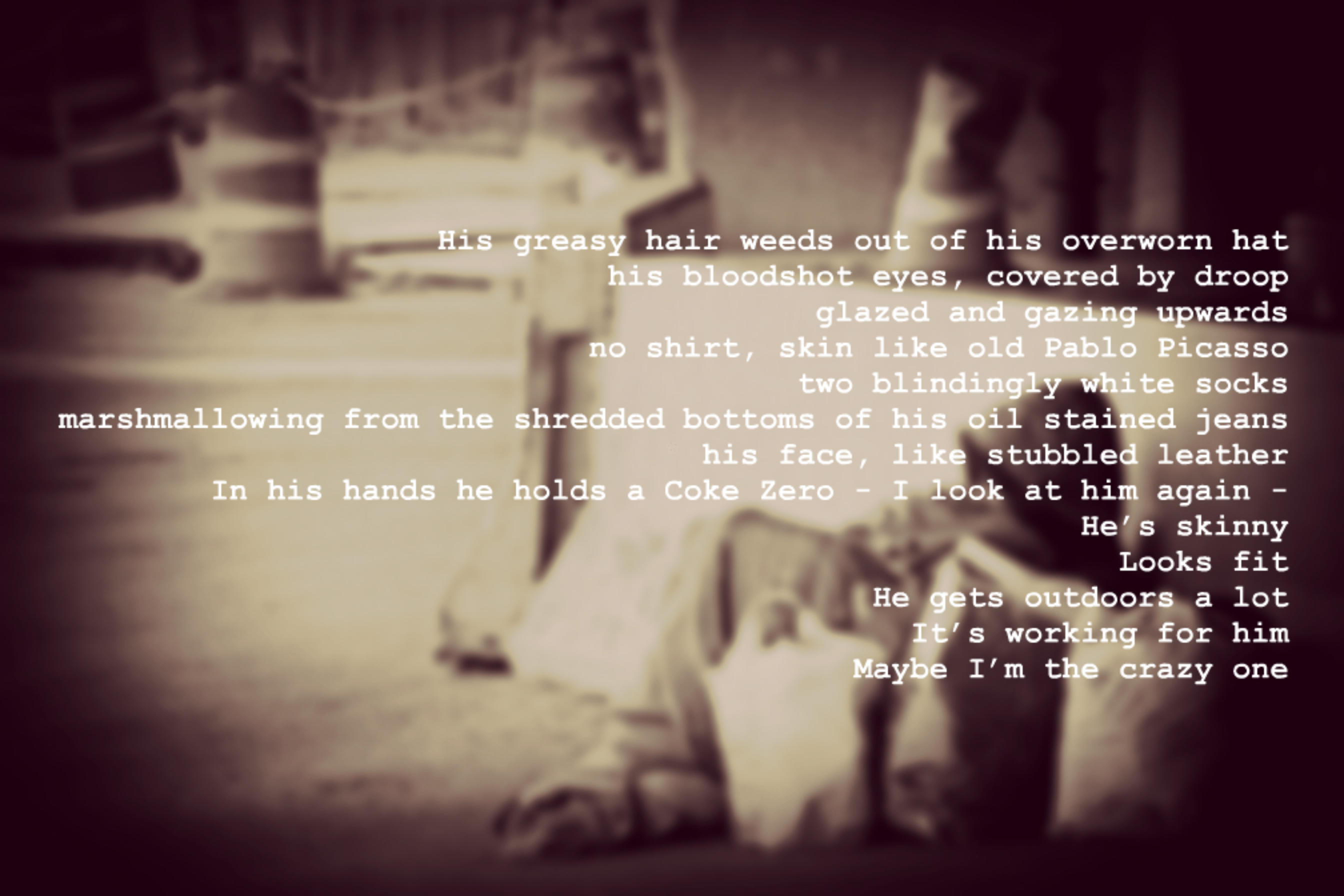
Have you seen this shark?



↑ Exit 72 St & Central Pk West SW corner

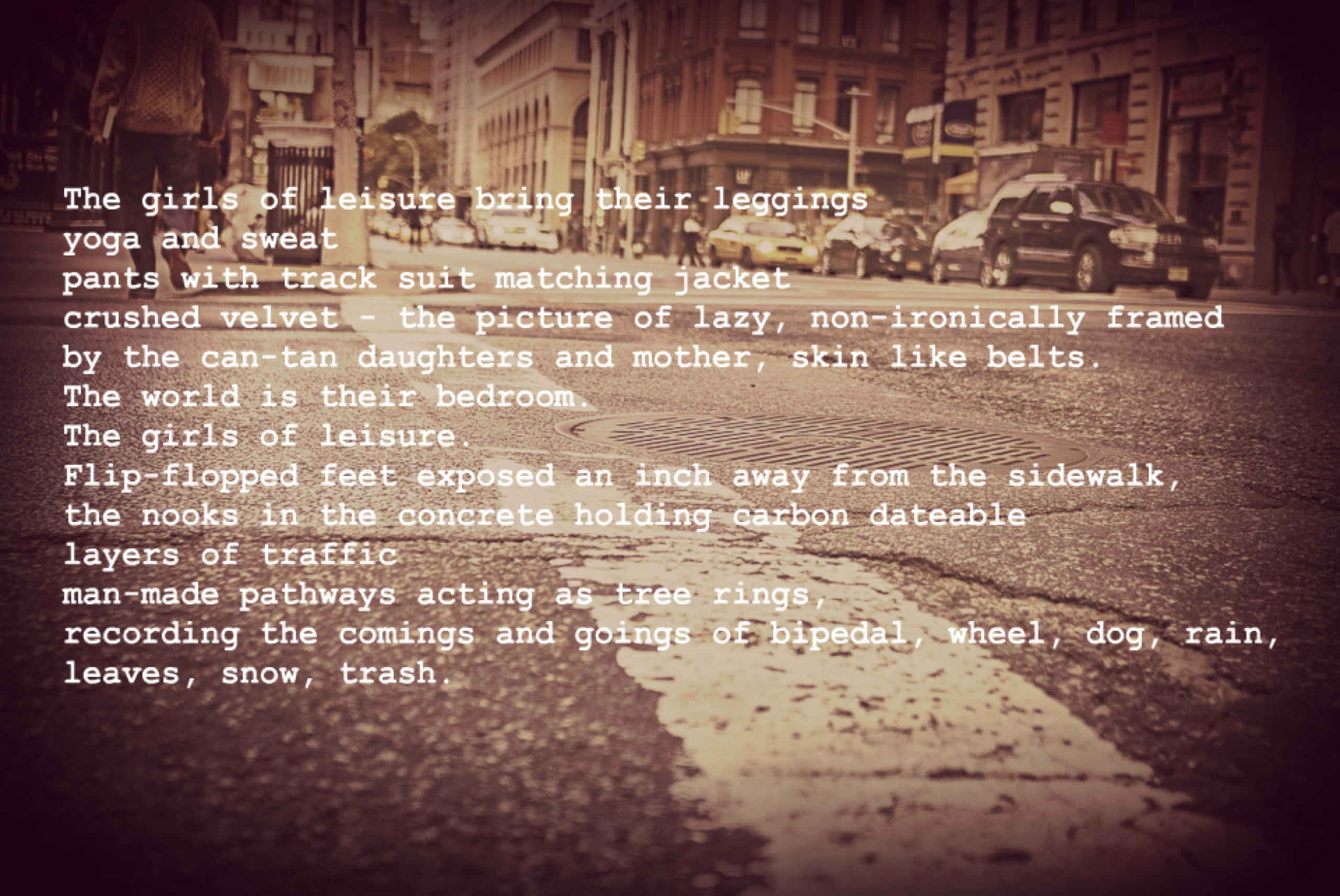
My ears, binoculars in a forest of sound  
conversations and pieces of speech sighing around me  
like aspen leaves.  
The birdsong of humans -  
advice,  
gossip,  
competitive complaining,  
wit,  
bad advice  
looking down the platform I see no one actively talking  
but I know it's all around me  
hidden like underground rivers  
or branches that chatter invisibly.





His greasy hair weeds out of his overworn hat  
his bloodshot eyes, covered by droop  
glazed and gazing upwards  
no shirt, skin like old Pablo Picasso  
two blindingly white socks  
marshmallowing from the shredded bottoms of his oil stained jeans  
his face, like stubbled leather  
In his hands he holds a Coke Zero - I look at him again -  
He's skinny  
Looks fit  
He gets outdoors a lot  
It's working for him  
Maybe I'm the crazy one



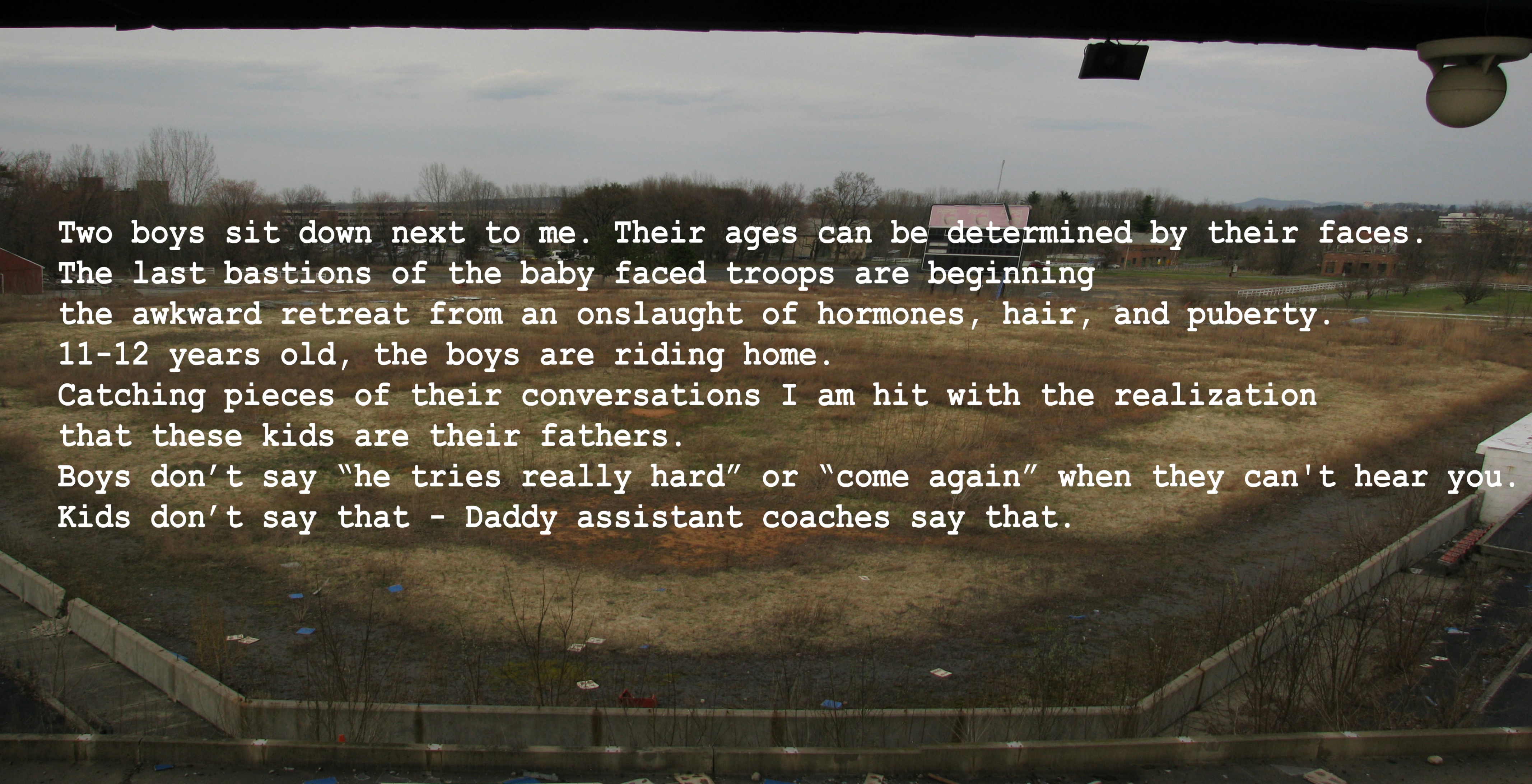


The girls of leisure bring their leggings  
yoga and sweat  
pants with track suit matching jacket  
crushed velvet - the picture of lazy, non-ironically framed  
by the can-tan daughters and mother, skin like belts.  
The world is their bedroom.  
The girls of leisure.  
Flip-flopped feet exposed an inch away from the sidewalk,  
the nooks in the concrete holding carbon dateable  
layers of traffic  
man-made pathways acting as tree rings,  
recording the comings and goings of bipedal, wheel, dog, rain,  
leaves, snow, trash.



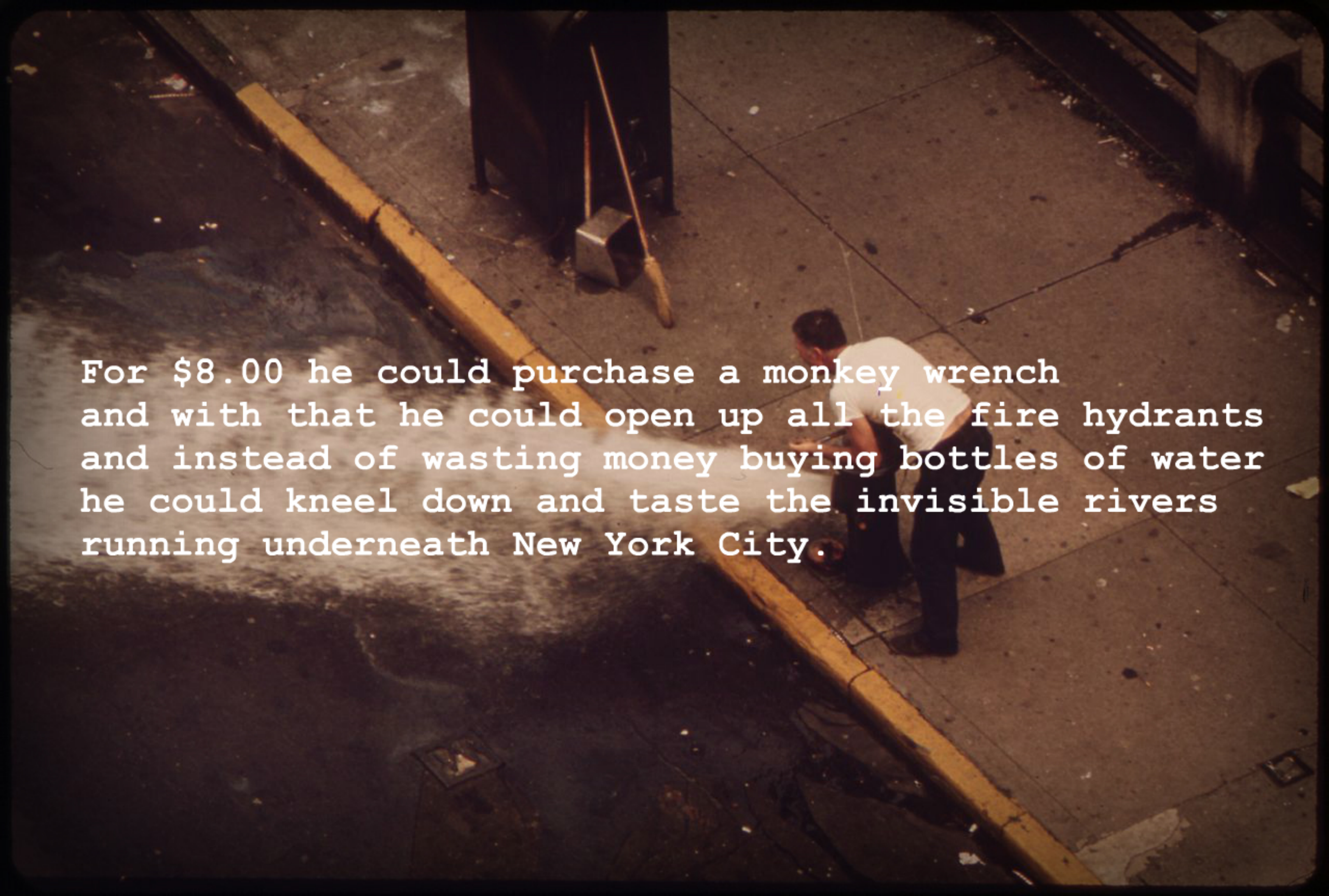
The vague, dormant threat that hangs in the air of our downtown train snaps to life  
when we understand this man is out of his mind  
spitting cuss words, glaring, waving people away, aggressively passive  
all of us crowded together  
he starts laughing  
baiting eye contact - an excuse to fly off the handle  
a small woman has quickly moved away from him i nestle her to my left  
The train stops moving  
it is being held in between the stations  
they apologize for the delay  
the air upgrades in amperage  
twitching, everyone wondering when the pressure cooker inside his brain is gonna  
pop  
open  
spilling the contents of repressed anger  
rage that has been buried next to an active fault line  
now sublimating with the combined tectonic force  
of savage and brutal plans aided by a human toolkit to carry them out  
hands that are both meant to rip open an orange  
and a human face  
with a gun, it would be done  
with a knife, might take a while  
with hands, it could take too long, it would be unbearable  
the undignified and pathetic chokeholds and slaps  
shirts pulled over heads, tackled  
both falling, his jaw shoved into the ground  
two jumping stomps to his hairline from the heel of a boot  
a piebald melon smashed apart, viscera seeping out  
the assailant heaves and pants and slowly realizes what he's done





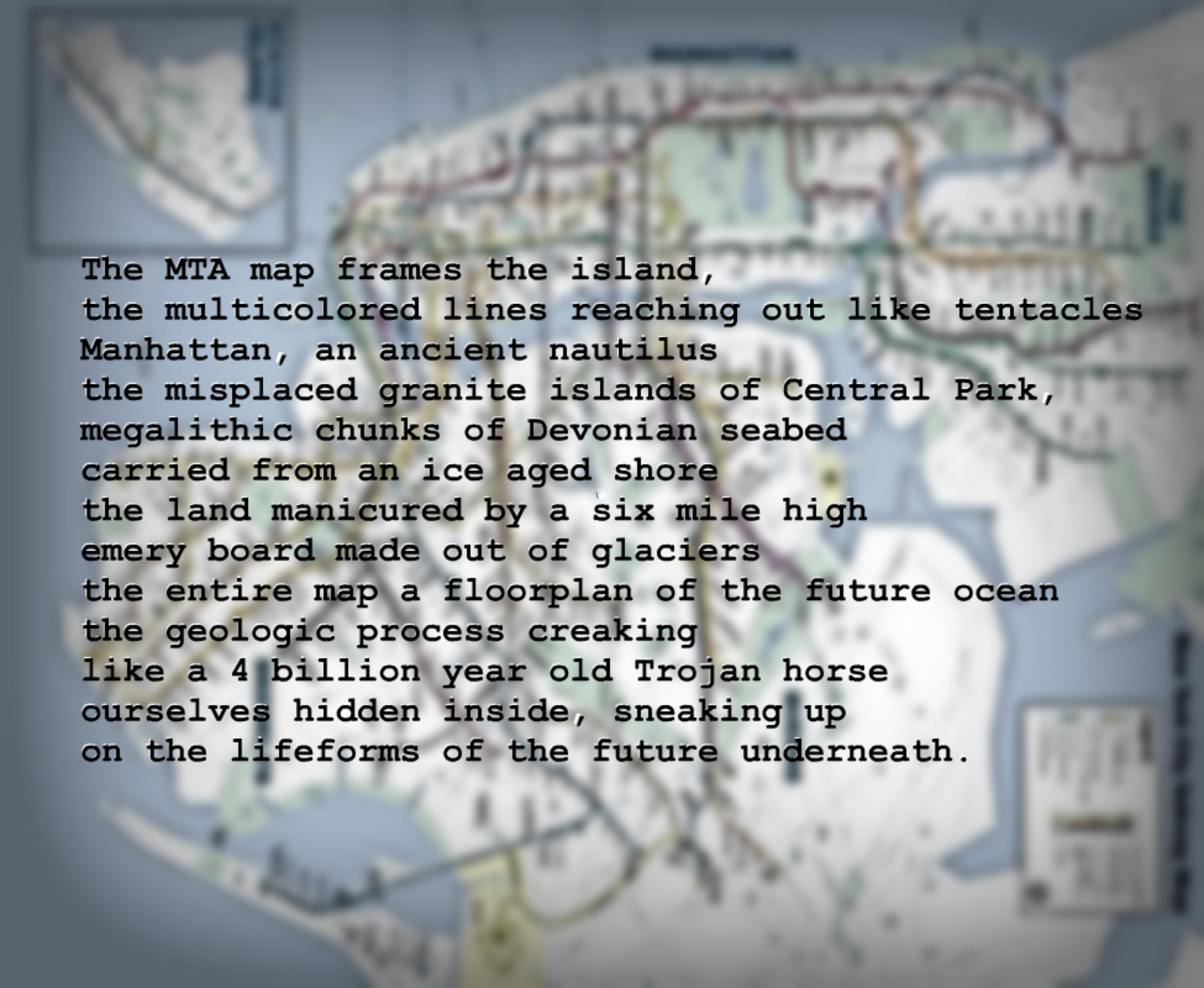
Two boys sit down next to me. Their ages can be determined by their faces.  
The last bastions of the baby faced troops are beginning  
the awkward retreat from an onslaught of hormones, hair, and puberty.  
11-12 years old, the boys are riding home.  
Catching pieces of their conversations I am hit with the realization  
that these kids are their fathers.  
Boys don't say "he tries really hard" or "come again" when they can't hear you.  
Kids don't say that - Daddy assistant coaches say that.



A high-angle, grainy photograph of a man in a white t-shirt and dark pants kneeling on a concrete sidewalk. He is positioned next to a fire hydrant, and a powerful stream of water is being sprayed from the hydrant onto the ground. The scene is set in an urban environment, with a yellow-painted curb and a dark, possibly wet, street surface visible. In the background, there are some dark, vertical structures and a small, light-colored object on the sidewalk. The overall tone of the image is somber and gritty.

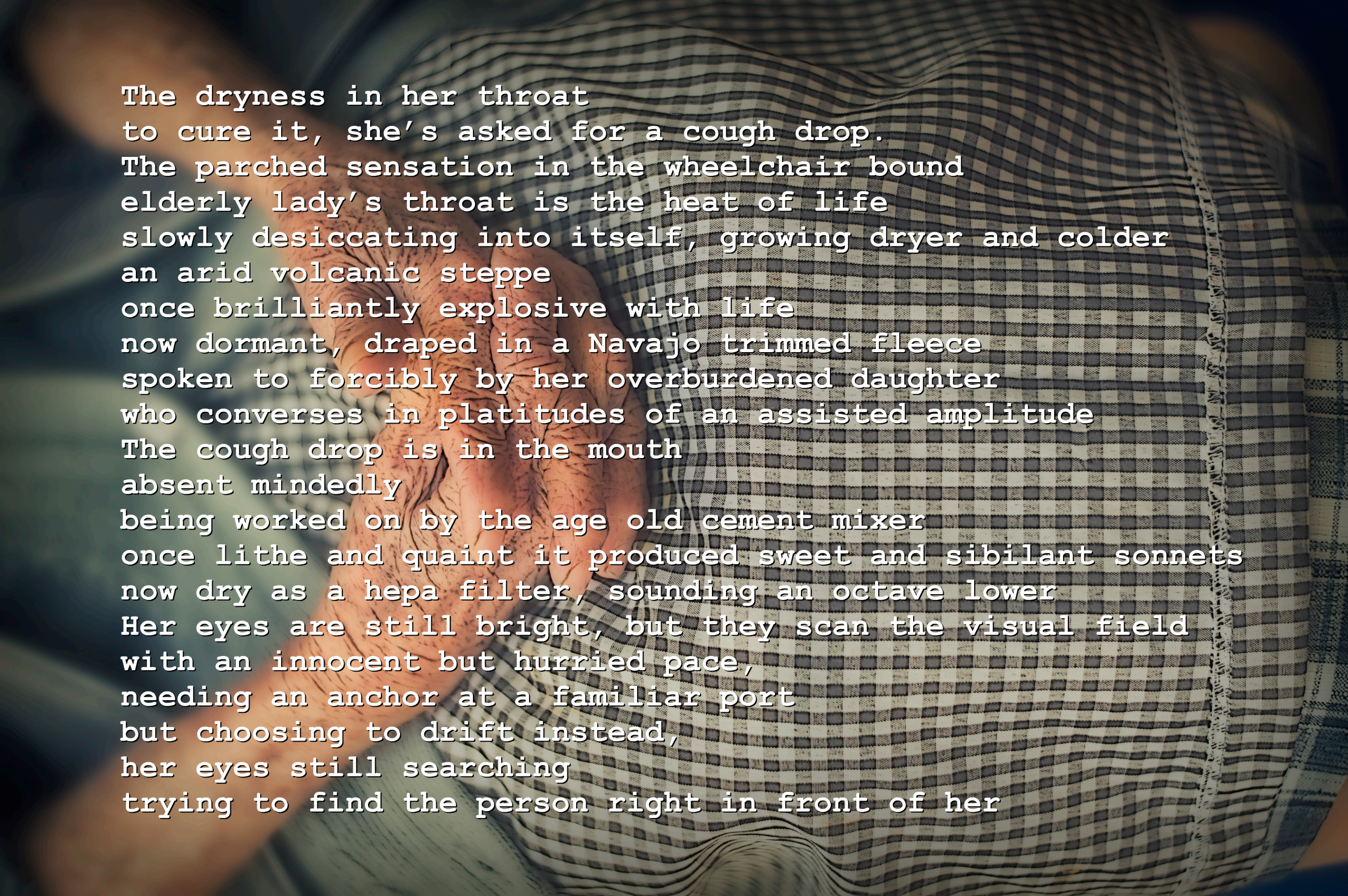
For \$8.00 he could purchase a monkey wrench  
and with that he could open up all the fire hydrants  
and instead of wasting money buying bottles of water  
he could kneel down and taste the invisible rivers  
running underneath New York City.





The MTA map frames the island,  
the multicolored lines reaching out like tentacles  
Manhattan, an ancient nautilus  
the misplaced granite islands of Central Park,  
megalthic chunks of Devonian seabed  
carried from an ice aged shore  
the land manicured by a six mile high  
emery board made out of glaciers  
the entire map a floorplan of the future ocean  
the geologic process creaking  
like a 4 billion year old Trojan horse  
ourselves hidden inside, sneaking up  
on the lifeforms of the future underneath.





The dryness in her throat  
to cure it, she's asked for a cough drop.  
The parched sensation in the wheelchair bound  
elderly lady's throat is the heat of life  
slowly desiccating into itself, growing dryer and colder  
an arid volcanic steppe  
once brilliantly explosive with life  
now dormant, draped in a Navajo trimmed fleece  
spoken to forcibly by her overburdened daughter  
who converses in platitudes of an assisted amplitude  
The cough drop is in the mouth  
absent minded  
being worked on by the age old cement mixer  
once lithe and quaint it produced sweet and sibilant sonnets  
now dry as a hepa filter, sounding an octave lower  
Her eyes are still bright, but they scan the visual field  
with an innocent but hurried pace,  
needing an anchor at a familiar port  
but choosing to drift instead,  
her eyes still searching  
trying to find the person right in front of her



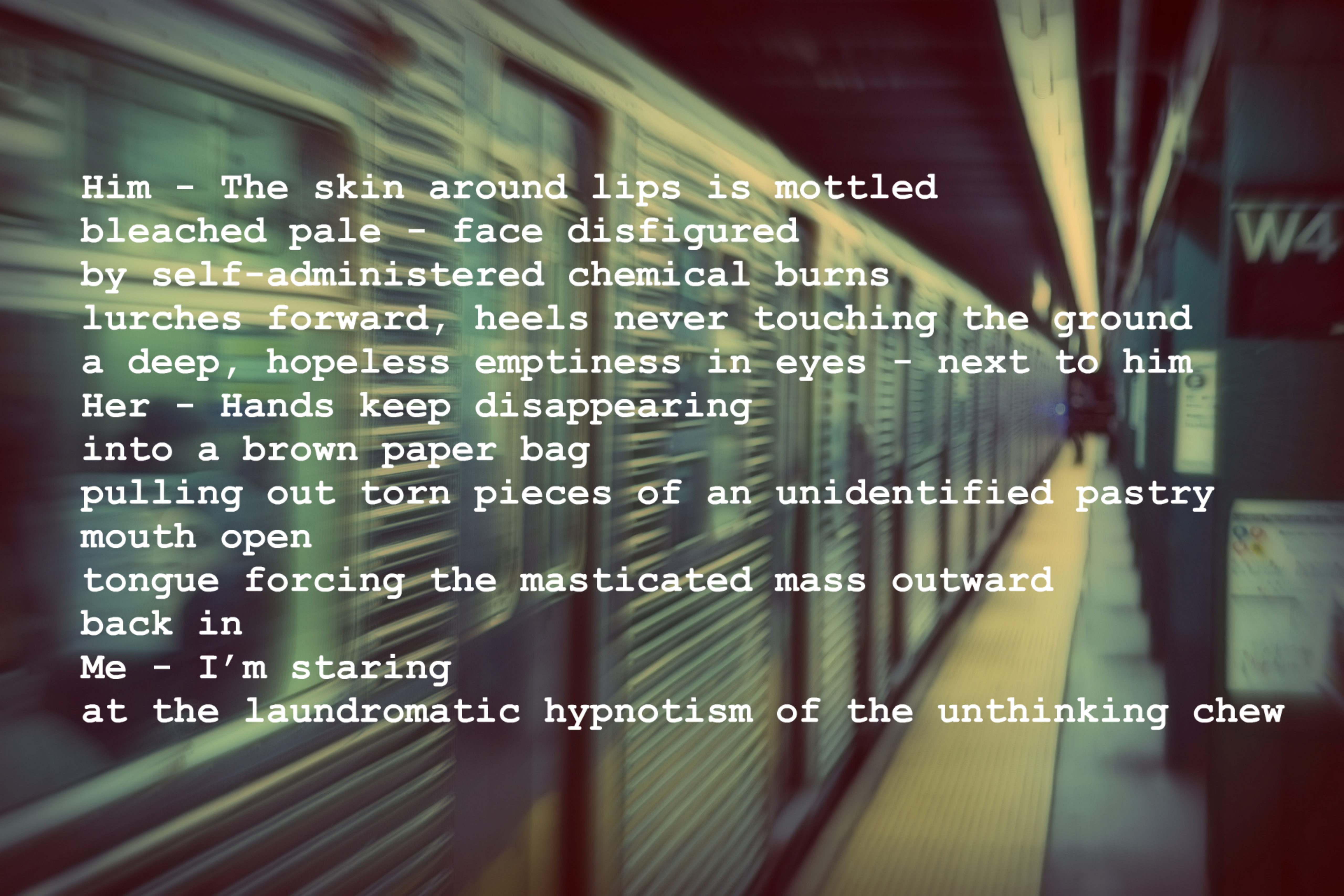
Older parents with middle aged child  
beaming in sustained appreciation  
their only daughter evenly invested by both  
year by year like an emotional joint-savings account  
The father overwhelmed with wisdom satisfied, sensible shoes  
the mother wearing low-rise jeans and Sherwood Forest boots  
The two of them in love with the balance on their life-ledger  
Time, deposited in metered drops, sealed in envelopes  
placed in tubes, locked in vacuums, leaning out of a car window  
convenient love  
always shown at appropriate levels





On a broken screen we see her thumb through three pictures of herself with a man, both of them bundled and huddled together at an ice skating rink. Her thumb swiping back and forth from one seemingly identical image to the next. She goes forward in the slideshow to more recent memories but quickly swipes back to the trio of images of the man and her bundled and huddled together at the ice skating rink.





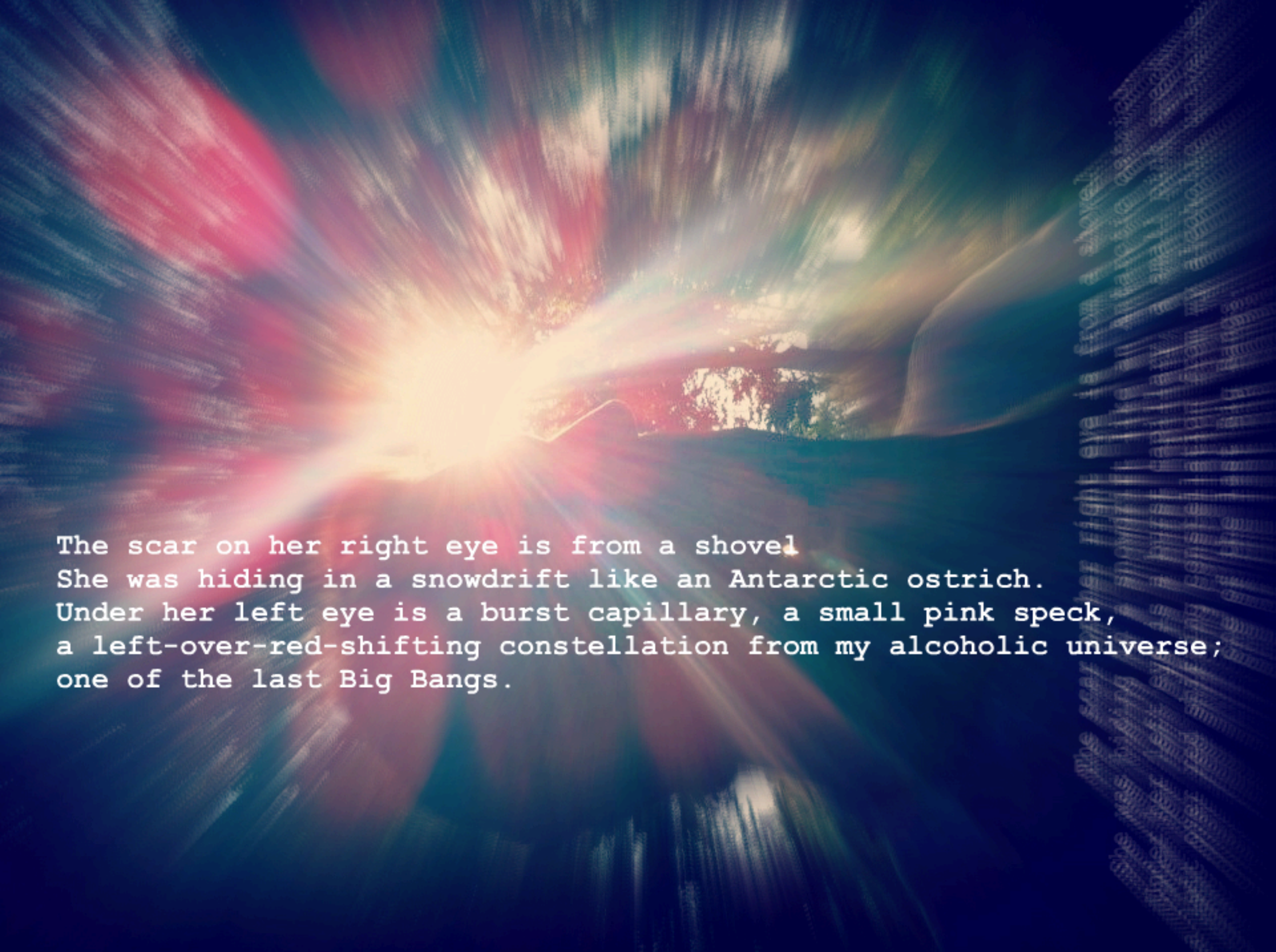
Him - The skin around lips is mottled  
bleached pale - face disfigured  
by self-administered chemical burns  
lurches forward, heels never touching the ground  
a deep, hopeless emptiness in eyes - next to him  
Her - Hands keep disappearing  
into a brown paper bag  
pulling out torn pieces of an unidentified pastry  
mouth open  
tongue forcing the masticated mass outward  
back in  
Me - I'm staring  
at the laundromatic hypnotism of the unthinking chew





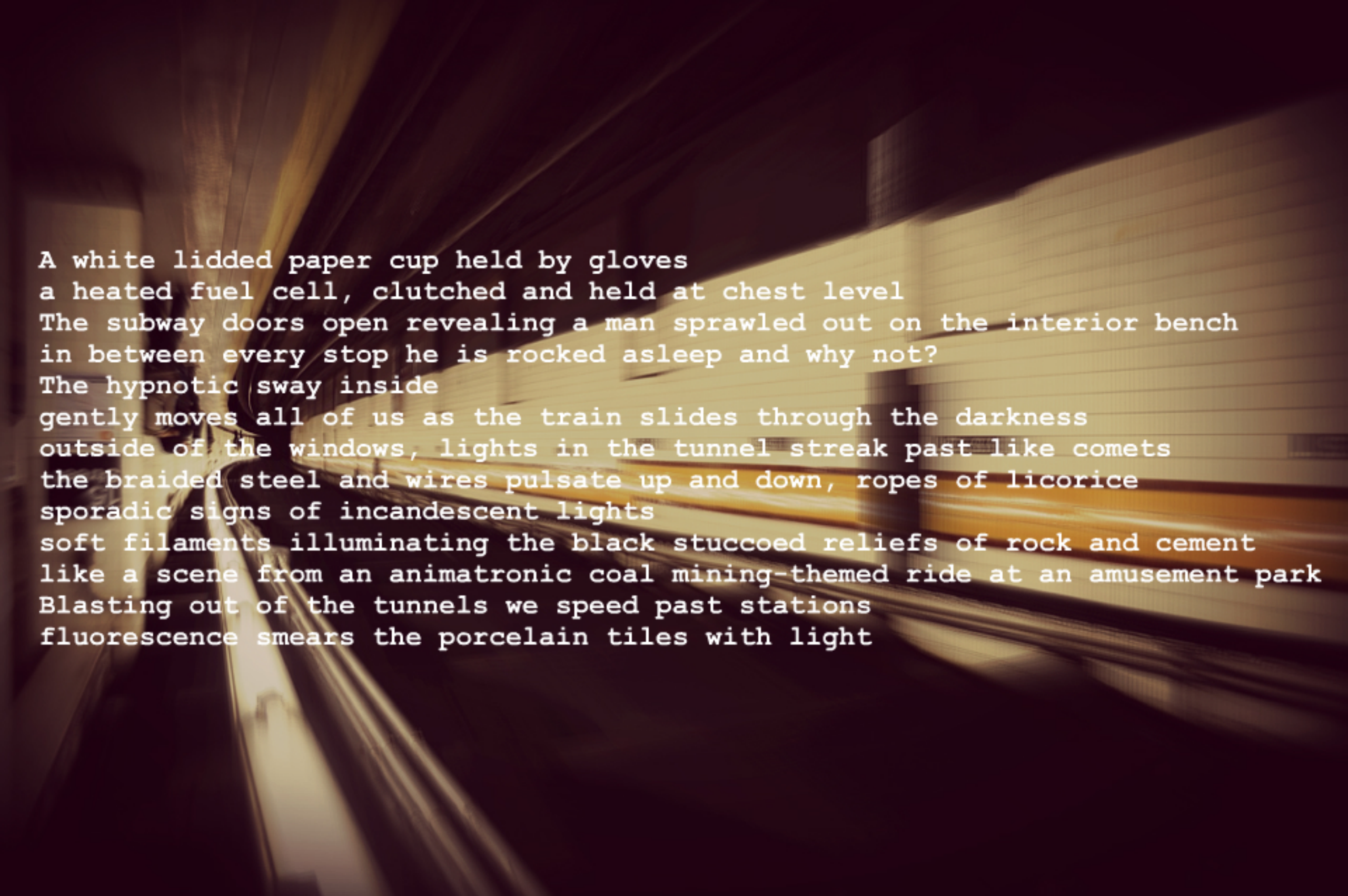
In the early morning winter sun  
the leaves are held loosely by branches  
a low-thread-count sheet of suspended dry cereal  
draped over the Queensbridge Projects.





The scar on her right eye is from a shovel  
She was hiding in a snowdrift like an Antarctic ostrich.  
Under her left eye is a burst capillary, a small pink speck,  
a left-over-red-shifting constellation from my alcoholic universe;  
one of the last Big Bangs.



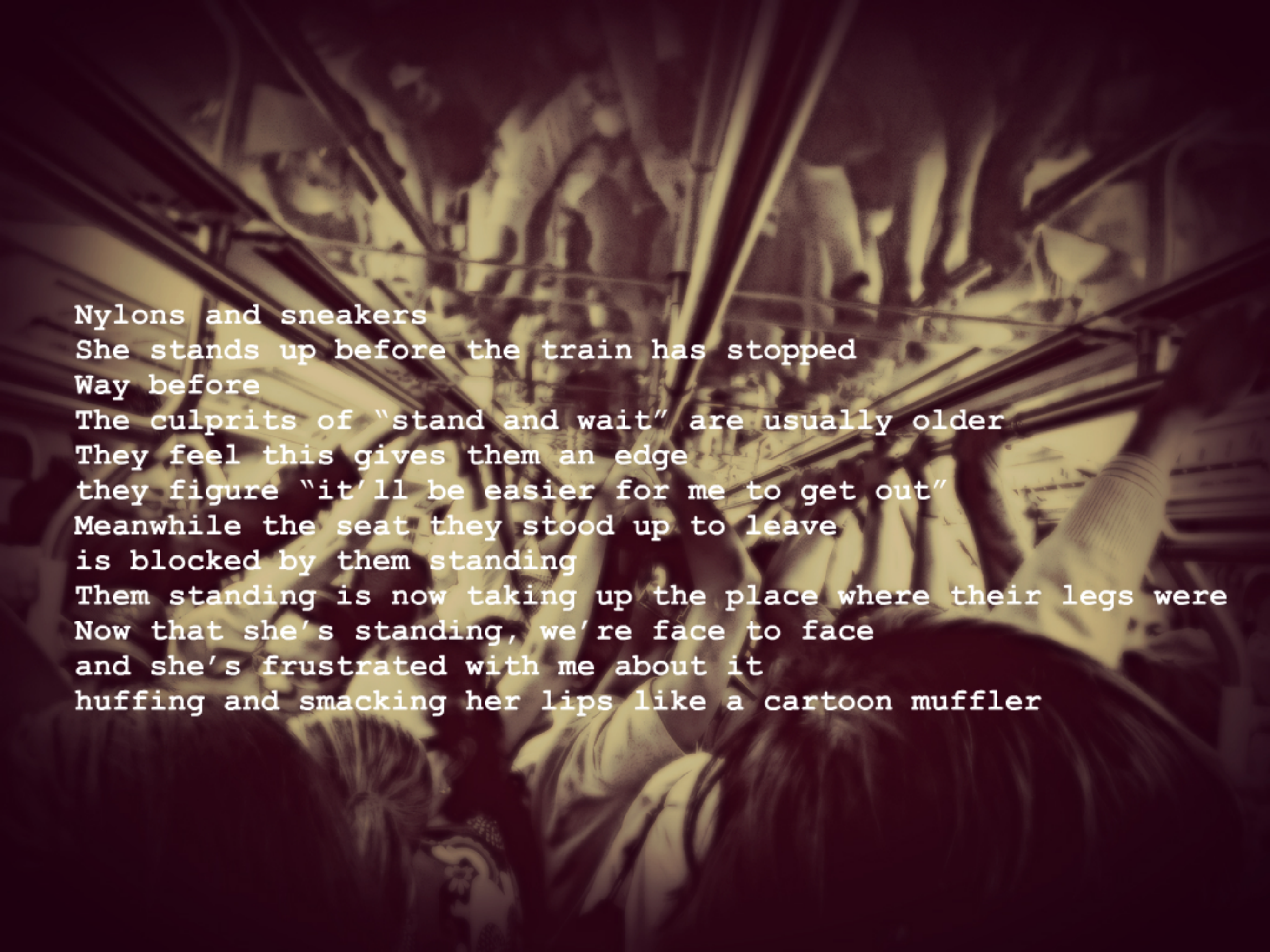


A white lidded paper cup held by gloves  
a heated fuel cell, clutched and held at chest level  
The subway doors open revealing a man sprawled out on the interior bench  
in between every stop he is rocked asleep and why not?  
The hypnotic sway inside  
gently moves all of us as the train slides through the darkness  
outside of the windows, lights in the tunnel streak past like comets  
the braided steel and wires pulsate up and down, ropes of licorice  
sporadic signs of incandescent lights  
soft filaments illuminating the black stuccoed reliefs of rock and cement  
like a scene from an animatronic coal mining-themed ride at an amusement park  
Blasting out of the tunnels we speed past stations  
fluorescence smears the porcelain tiles with light



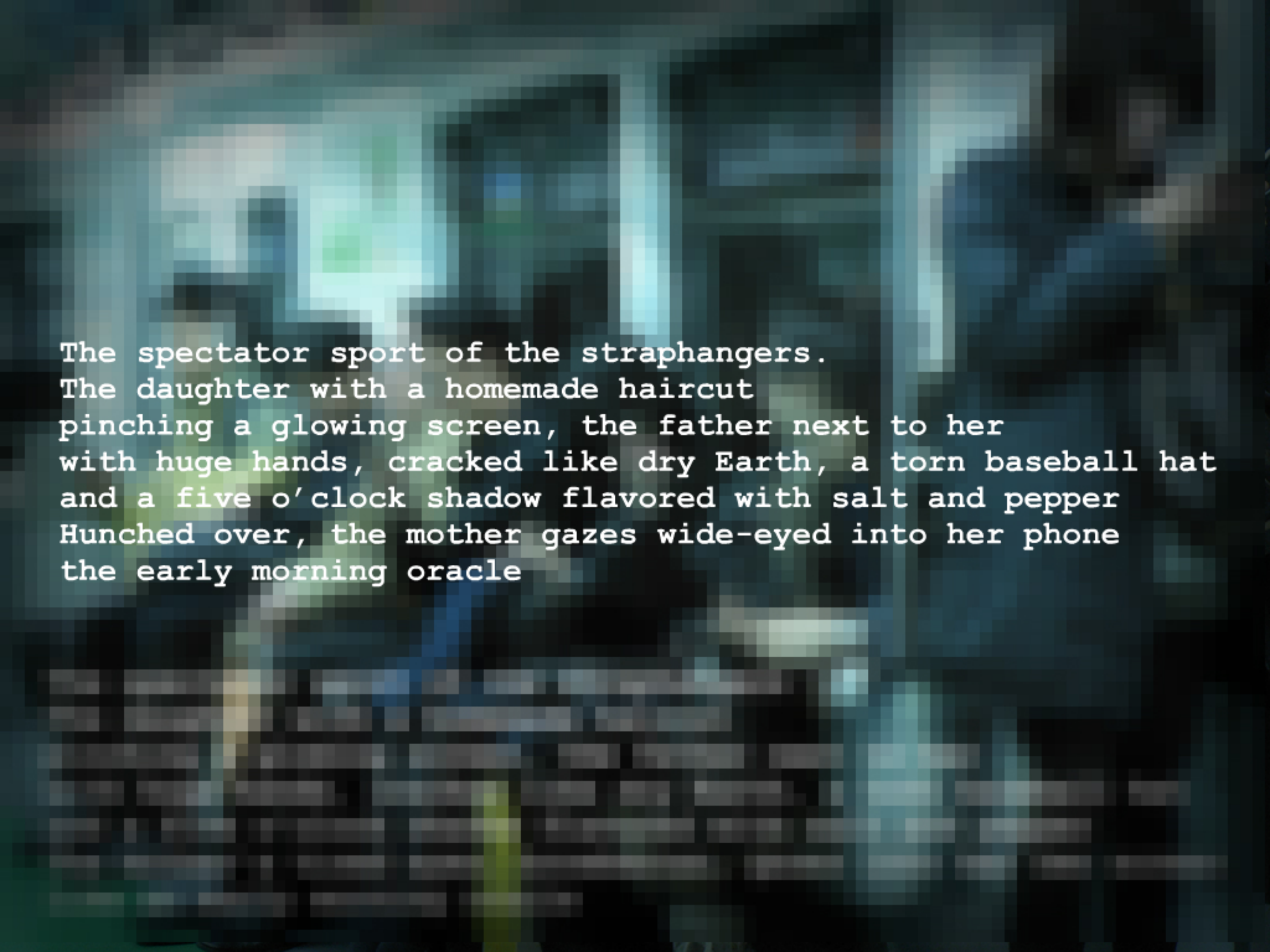
She's just legs  
one hand holds the pole  
the other spoons frozen yogurt  
and graham cracker dust from a paper bowl  
top lip fuzzed peach  
her feet - second position  
her eyes dart around after each bite  
satisfying the urge to feed herself a treat in public  
she holds the spoon upside down in her mouth  
breathing out to taste  
the whole thing bugs the shit out of me



A low-angle, upward-looking shot of a crowded train interior. Numerous passengers are visible, mostly from the waist up, standing and holding onto vertical poles and horizontal bars. The scene is dimly lit with a warm, yellowish-brown color grade. The perspective creates a sense of being in the middle of the crowd, looking up at the ceiling and other passengers.

Nylons and sneakers  
She stands up before the train has stopped  
Way before  
The culprits of "stand and wait" are usually older  
They feel this gives them an edge  
they figure "it'll be easier for me to get out"  
Meanwhile the seat they stood up to leave  
is blocked by them standing  
Them standing is now taking up the place where their legs were  
Now that she's standing, we're face to face  
and she's frustrated with me about it  
huffing and smacking her lips like a cartoon muffler



A blurry, low-angle photograph of a person's legs and feet walking on a sidewalk. The person is wearing dark pants and light-colored shoes. The background shows a building with a window and a street lamp. The text is overlaid on the image.

The spectator sport of the straphangers.  
The daughter with a homemade haircut  
pinching a glowing screen, the father next to her  
with huge hands, cracked like dry Earth, a torn baseball hat  
and a five o'clock shadow flavored with salt and pepper  
Hunched over, the mother gazes wide-eyed into her phone  
the early morning oracle

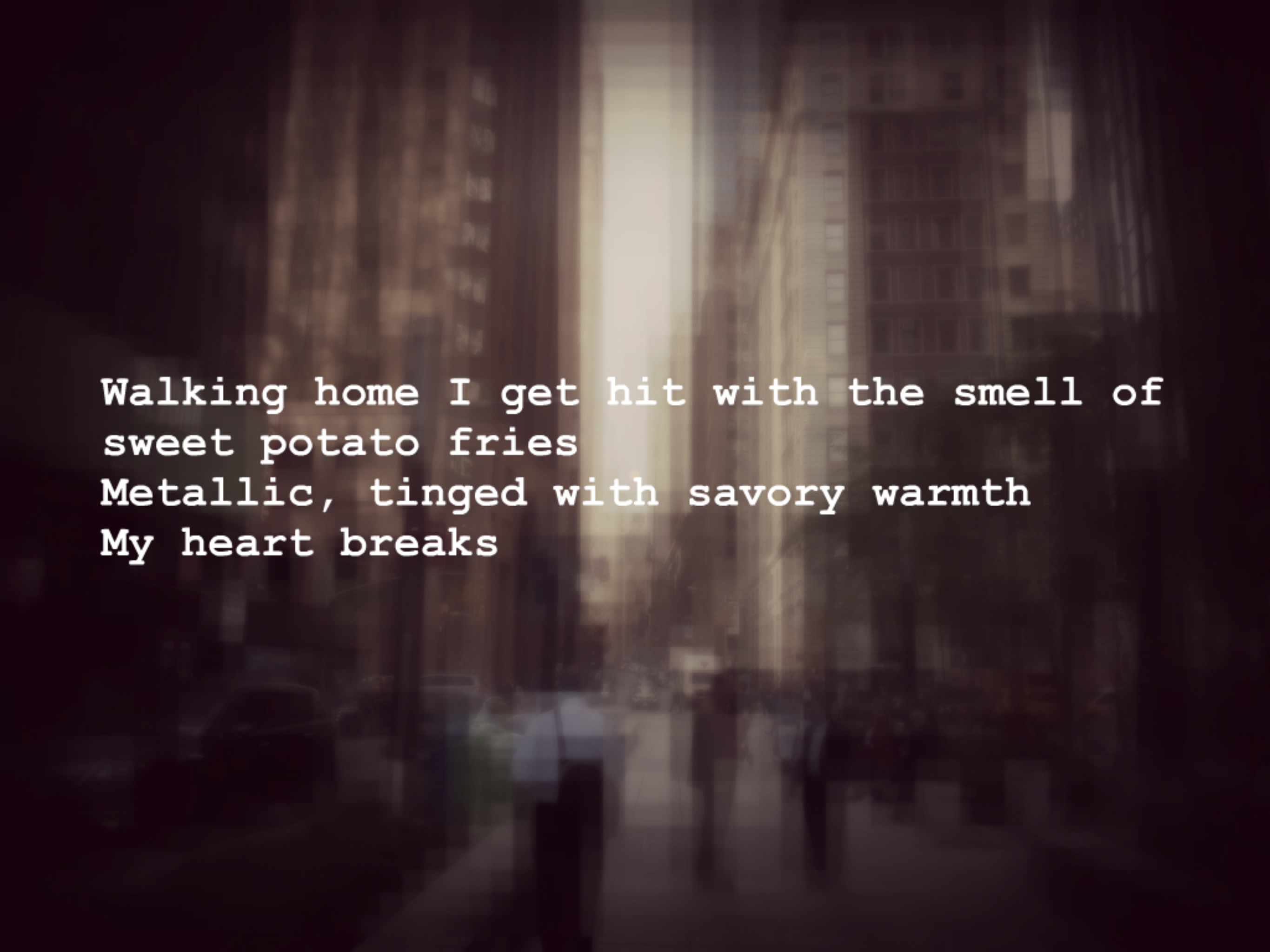


A cold blue mist has awakened Astoria  
and those of us with reasons to,  
have crowded onto a Coney Island bound Q train  
which runs on an elevated track between Ditmars Blvd. and Queensboro Plaza  
31st St. running underneath, trellis covered

We are inside a hexagon 80 feet long with powder blue benches lining frost white walls  
room enough for 6 on each, diet and age permitting.  
Vertically accessible brushed chrome handrails at the doors  
attached like plumbing to the rails running  
horizontally above, which frame the benches,  
and a center handrail in the shape of a chariot race track attached to the ceiling.  
3 bay windows with softened angles per side allow us to look out on what simplicity  
and stillness we are flying past, they also allow people to look in  
and see the faces of the straphangers who  
have given all of their keys to the train operator.

4 seat powder blue benches at each end of this car  
24 flourescent lights illuminating advertisements for trade-school jobs or track maps.  
6 doors, each opening in the middle from a black rubber stripe,  
both sides of each door featuring a large and rounded rectangular window.  
Below these windows safety warning stickers  
- Do Not Hold Doors, Do Not Lean On Doors -  
each with a picture of a stick figure both holding and leaning on the doors,  
circled and crossed out in red.





Walking home I get hit with the smell of  
sweet potato fries  
Metallic, tinged with savory warmth  
My heart breaks



The black octopus unfurled it's barbed tentacles  
to lash out, grasp and pull closer to it's beaked nothingness  
the hearts of 19 weaponized terrorists as they  
fused their pigments with ash and drywall  
The unholy cephalopod tickled the intestines of coastal communities  
for eons sucking the brains of helpless langostines  
the octopus gave us our avarice  
the of joy stabbing one another  
with improvised and terminal weapons  
in a horrible and lonesome corner of the deepest parts  
of the pelagic expanses on the brink of an ungodly sunken  
mountain in an obstructed cave, the black octopus  
controls the darkened hearts of man.  
Do you doubt for one second, the the man with a pointed weapon  
won't have his senses snatched from his mind?  
His seat of wisdom stewarded by the awful slick of jet black arms  
piercing white as the flu, with thin slits of  
vanishing that peer into your soul, as he squeezes so  
squeezes the trigger - a face disappearing into a crimson spray  
the creature that eats your soul, and the souls of all men in war  
It's been this way since before was a time  
the creature, ready, waiting, to feed on the destruction of worlds

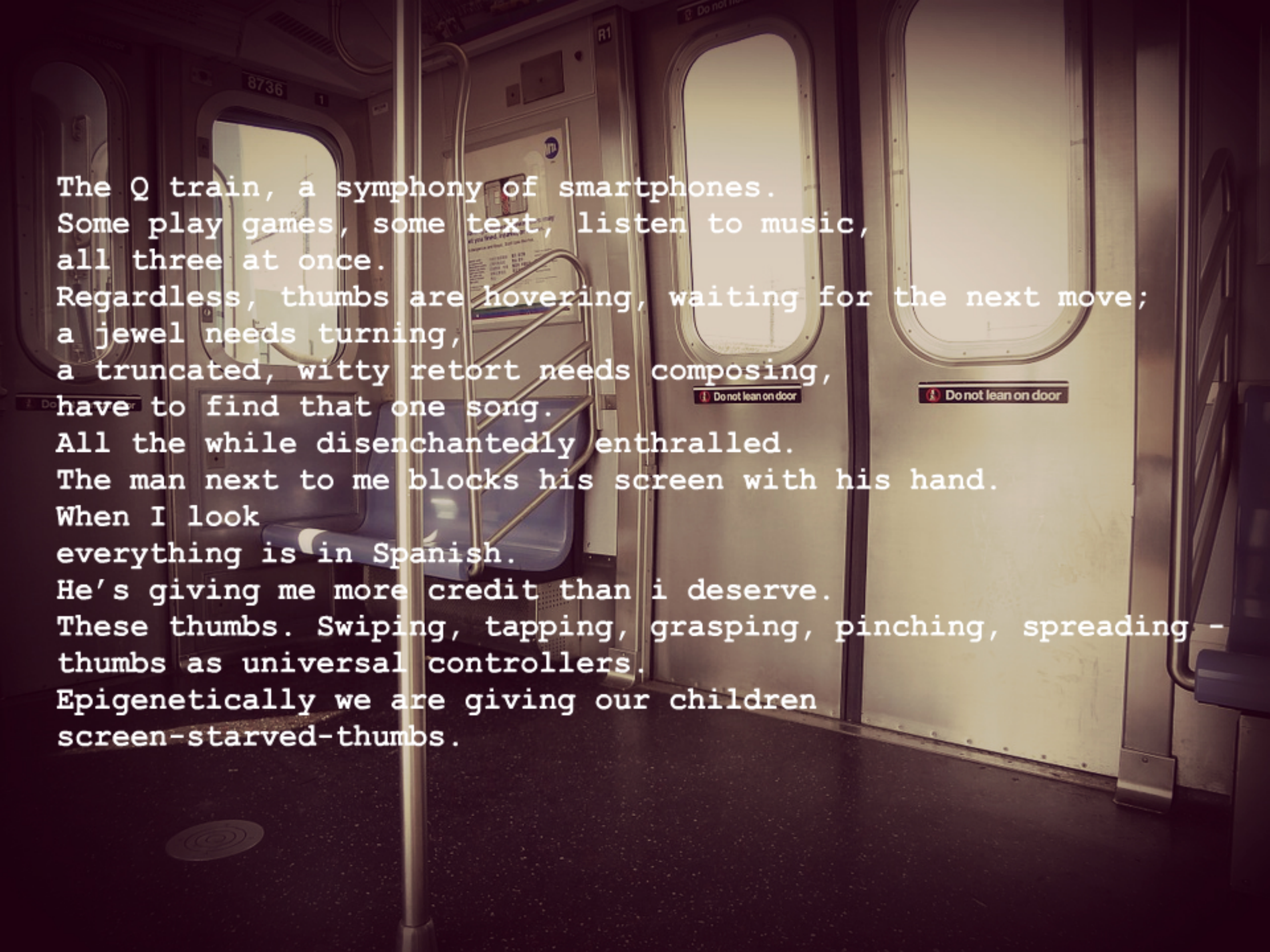




## The Dairy Section

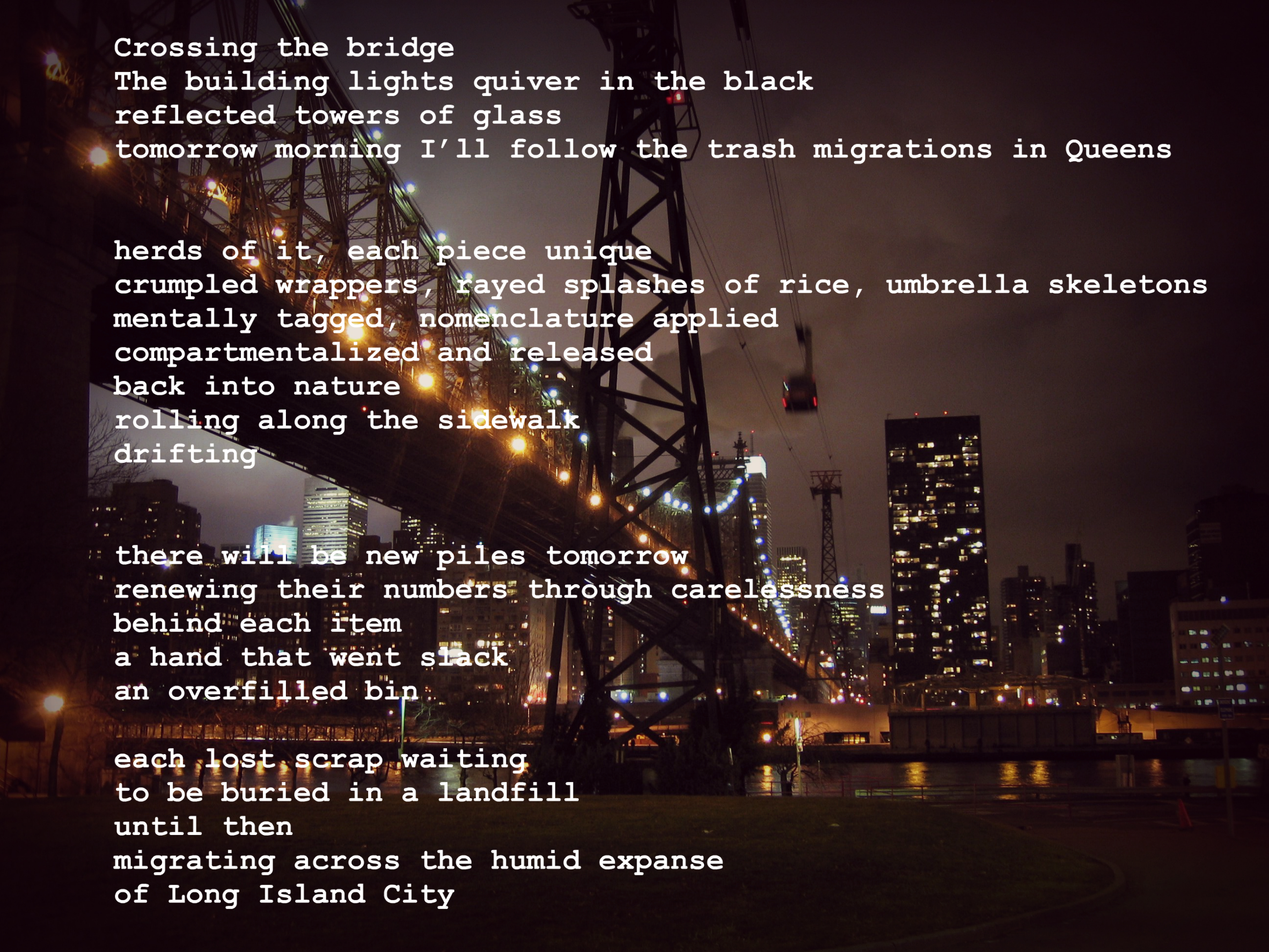
The refrigerated butter of money  
destroys the bread of life  
it rips it apart  
The fruit-at-the-bottom yogurt of depression  
needs to be stirred  
The cream cheese of platitudes  
turns viscous on the hot bagel of bullshit  
they become indistinguishable  
The shredded 4-cheese blend of bossy people  
remains inedible  
inside the styrofoam leftovers  
of yesterday's assholes



The background image shows the interior of a subway car. It features blue plastic seats, metal handrails, and doors with windows. There are signs on the doors that say "Do not lean on door". The text is overlaid on this image in a white, monospaced font.

The Q train, a symphony of smartphones.  
Some play games, some text, listen to music,  
all three at once.  
Regardless, thumbs are hovering, waiting for the next move;  
a jewel needs turning,  
a truncated, witty retort needs composing,  
have to find that one song.  
All the while disenchantedly enthralled.  
The man next to me blocks his screen with his hand.  
When I look  
everything is in Spanish.  
He's giving me more credit than i deserve.  
These thumbs. Swiping, tapping, grasping, pinching, spreading -  
thumbs as universal controllers.  
Epigenetically we are giving our children  
screen-starved-thumbs.





Crossing the bridge  
The building lights quiver in the black  
reflected towers of glass  
tomorrow morning I'll follow the trash migrations in Queens

herds of it, each piece unique  
crumpled wrappers, rayed splashes of rice, umbrella skeletons  
mentally tagged, nomenclature applied  
compartmentalized and released  
back into nature  
rolling along the sidewalk  
drifting

there will be new piles tomorrow  
renewing their numbers through carelessness  
behind each item  
a hand that went slack  
an overfilled bin

each lost scrap waiting  
to be buried in a landfill  
until then  
migrating across the humid expanse  
of Long Island City



The stop before me is Wall St.  
He's been sitting since then  
stuck in between getting up and sitting down  
his hand is behind him  
What does he know? What did he find out on the trading floor today?  
I see his jaw clenched, teeth gritting and every so often he puts  
the back of his wrist on his forehead, as if to check the temperature  
He's in a state of disbelief. Where is his mind taking him?  
He'll have to enroll the kids into a public school  
Dinners at PerSe are going to be downgraded  
might have to be cancelled  
She'll have to adjust her tastes  
maybe hold off on item acquirement all together  
This is his first time wishing his AmEx had a limit  
Each man with his hand on the equity hose occasionally puts his  
mouth to the stream -but- when the drought comes  
He's not focused on the million per-square of the mutual fund  
he can only stare in disbelief on the 4 Train and wonder where  
his next drink is coming from, the next hit  
for his thirst threshold has been raised  
made unslakable and he knows he's helped  
everyone get to the same point  
Thirsty, looking for rivers and shadows in the valley of buildings



The teenage boys are hot  
Hot from unstable isotopes  
the caustic plutonium of adolescence glowing behind their eyes  
geiger counter clicking wildly  
one of them stands in the middle of the road, on the phone  
flat brim hat sat sideways, a van honks as it passes  
indignant and unaware, sweatpants and shirt, a close-trimmed neckline  
the dichotomy of the lazy and the manicured  
sleepy-pretty-boy  
a hormone laden march towards manhood  
thriving on stupidity with a middle finger raised in your face  
"That's Me"

Following the van that passed  
- the driver is now driving like a complete asshole  
enraged by the teenager in the road  
he revs the engine and rides the bumper of the car in front  
I've seen plenty of adults lose their shit at teenagers  
on the subway face to face age based slander  
youngblood flying through a heart  
that doesn't acknowledge that it will one day stop beating  
the older single man's alimony is exuded from his paycheck  
supporting an ungrateful prick  
not unlike the one right before his eyes  
the full body burden of the teenager  
hardwired with shortsighted circuitry  
the plutonium of adolescence burning a hole in their chest  
a half-life of possibly their whole life



What will you miss from NYC?

I'll miss the weight and lean of this stranger sitting  
next to me on the train, she's  
fighting sleep in between every stop  
slowly melting into the bench, head tilted  
drifting towards my shoulder like an iceberg

& right before she rests her head

she corrects  
snaps out of it  
looks around like "what's that sound?" before she  
closes her eyes  
and repeats the sudden somnolescent cycle