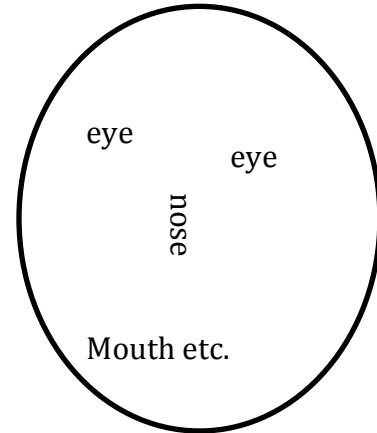


After a few minutes of feverish looking and marking down, I had rendered an eyebrow, a long shadow beneath it, an eye, with lashes and a lid, iris, pupil, a glint of sunlight within, and lastly below that a shadow outlining a bit of puffiness from a sleepless night before. The eye, and its constituent parts looked familiar enough -- familiar enough to continue on to the nose, of which I had already outlined the sharp dip of the bridge while shading the eye socket.

I drew the nose by drawing what was not the nose, if you know what I mean: the shadowy areas on either side, a stripe of shadow along the ridge, the dark abyss of the nostrils. It crossed my mind then that all drawing was something like this, defining a thing by carrying on about the things around it. Like how a fact is a fact because of the string of other facts we string along behind.



On to the mouth: starting with the ravine at the center of the upper lip, moving downward to the long crack bisecting the mouth. Some errant marks around the cheeks and chin for stubble. The hair, my final subject, is a tangled mess of graphite.

I stopped, leaned back into a creaking chair, and had a look at the thing. As I said before, all discrete parts seemed familiar enough, yet when I looked at the drawing as a whole I was startled at how remarkably *unlike* me the portrait was. I was suddenly in the presence of a stranger.

I was overcome by a sense of rising dread. This mug before me was certainly *someone*, that much was clear. With all the distinguishing features, all the necessary parts, this was, undoubtedly, a person, a person you might know, say, if you knew him. But I didn't know this person, this man, and it made my stomach turn.

Could it be my spirit?

So unfamiliar?

Certainly not.

More unsettling still was the possibility that this was, in fact, me -- me whom I was unable to recognize as myself. This was some scary shit. I was slipping a bit now. A bead of sweat dripped down my armpit, as I chewed at the metal ring that joined my pencil to its eraser. At the sight of my increasing dread, the face was growing more confident, its gaze more resolved and more intent. My palms were now soaked, my pencil chewed up like a bit of driftwood in the sea, the stranger still staring back at me, brow furrowed, wearing my face like some cheap mask.

I knew then surely that any thing would fracture if I looked hard enough. A moment had passed, and things had shifted again, maybe in the changing light but maybe something more. All things slippery, soft, and always managing to contort themselves just beyond my grasp.