

UC San Diego

2025 UC San Diego Undergraduate Library Research Prize

Title

Theft- An Artist's Book

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/77m8t9v2>

Author

McFadden, Tate

Publication Date

2025

***Theft* Manuscript**

Enclosed below is the entire manuscript of the *Theft*. In theory, one could print, make, and bind their own edition of the book, an act that, in the spirit of this text, I would encourage anyone curious and enthusiastic about this project to do!

Cover

Theft

Envelope 0(Winning Envelope) - This envelope cannot be reached by following the envelopes' instructions. It is not marked, and thus may only be accessed by breaking the rules of the game. It is the only envelope that allows you to win the game, providing you with chopped up letters, offering you the infinite freedom of language.

You have arrived somewhere you could not have without breaking the rules. The knowledge enclosed here was gained by play and mischief. Enter into a world of infinite possibility.

Aa Bb Cc Dd

Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii

Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn

Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss

Tt Uu Vv Ww

Xx Yy Zz

Envelope 1

Theft by Tate McFadden

How to read this book:

Theft is a choose-your-own-adventure poem made up of poems and letters hidden within envelopes.

Starting here, you may jump to Envelopes #2, #3, #5, or #9.

You will be asked to do a number of activities as you read this book. None of them are inherently illegal, although you can likely make them so.

This book is meant to be read, to be torn open, cut up, and loved. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

Should you return to this page on your journey, do not be alarmed.

Envelope 2

The Oxford Shakespeare Othello

William Shakespeare

ISBN 978-0-19-953587-3

You have been caught shoplifting. Replace this poem and go to Envelope #6

Envelope 3

Kitchen Confidential
Anthony Bourdain
ISBN 978-0-06-089922-6

You have been caught shoplifting. Go to Envelope #7.

Envelope 4

You have been caught shoplifting. Return this poem to its envelope, return to Envelope #16, and read the damned book. I promise you it's alright.

Envelope 5

You have been caught shoplifting.

Call your father and have him donate a library.

Realize that not all that is extralegal is extralegal for all.

Drop your Performing Arts Major and go into finance.

Between 1882 and 1968
over 200 anti-lynching bills
were introduced to
congress.

Three passed the house.

The senate approved none.

The NAACP held a national conference on lynching in 1919.

After 1919, lynchings decreased drastically.

In 1919 there were 83
recorded lynchings.

In the fall 1919, 200
African Americans are
believed to have been
killed in the Elaine
Massacre.

In the summer of 1919, 23
African Americans were
killed in a Chicago riot.

This series of killings is known as the Red Summer.

On February 26, 2020, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act was passed into law, making lynching considered a federal hate crime.

In 2024, police murdered one thousand, one hundred seventy three people.

Of that number, 248 were African American and 177 were Hispanic.

Replace this letter in its envelope and select a letter from envelopes 10-20.

You may not mark this envelope as having been opened.

Go to Envelope #9.

Envelope 6

The ox

ford shake sp
eare offers authoritative—

authority
badge
strange boy are you selling me something
sell me your position
your power with your badge

make	eye	eye contact-
	I	I contact-

contact me through your badge
did you contract your authority like a
cold?

someone will contact you in two to three weeks

charles mingus
is playing
in my ear and—
was played
by spotify

You have been caught shoplifting. Replace this poem and go to Envelope #10

Envelope 7

“Portions of this book have appeared previously elsewhere: much of the “From Our Kitchen to Your Table” and a few other stray bits of business appeared in *The New Yorker*, under the title “Don’t Eat Before Reading This.” The “Mission to Tokyo” section appeared first in *Food Arts*, and readers of my short story for Canongate *Rover’s Books’ Return* collection will see that the fictional protagonist in my contribution, “Chef’s Night Out,” had a humiliating experience on a busy broiler station much like my own.”

“Portions [redacted] appeared [redacted] elsewhere [redacted] From [redacted]
[redacted] stray [redacted] business [redacted] Don’t Eat
Before [redacted] This [redacted] appear [redacted] first in [redacted]
[redacted] gate [redacted] see [redacted] the fictional [redacted]
[redacted] had a humiliating experience [redacted] much
like my

portions appeared!
elsewhere from
stray business
don't eat!
before this, appear
first in
gate—see
the fictional
humiliating
experience
much like my own!
my own?
i own?
do i own?
do you own?

i don't think
think you don't
own.
you're the weirdo
here,
the exception!
do you know
that?
sixty thousand
dollars stolen
every year...
you do
a great job!
a better thief
than i! you

and your badge...
eighty three
bucks i had
to pay for
books in my
hand!
surprised my hand
is still!
my own
the biomed
department needs
research materials
i'm sure and
after all i
am just material

material for
you to transport
cause you done
taken my
material wealth!
so now
my hand seems
like a good option—
AGH!



You have been caught shoplifting.

Take this poem and cut it into as many little pieces as you can.

(If you have a food processor, it will work great for this assignment.)

Using the recipe enclosed, bake the strips of paper into a tin of brownies.

Serve to the shitty boss of your choice.

Brownie Recipe

8 tablespoons(one stick) butter with a little extra for the pan
3 ounces of unsweetened chocolate, roughly chopped
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
½ cups all purpose flour
Pinch salt
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 shredded poem

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees and grease a brownie tin or line it with parchment paper.

Combine the butter and chocolate either in a pan over low heat, stirring occasionally, or in a microwave in 10 second intervals until the chocolate is just about melted. Then stir the mixture together until smooth.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl. stir in the sugar, then add the eggs one at a time. Add the dry ingredients and vanilla, folding them in gently until the mixture is smooth and combined. Add the shredded poem.

Pour mixture into brownie tin and bake for 20 to 25 minutes.

Allow the brownies to cool on a rack until fully set before removing them. Cut into squares and serve to your shitty boss.

Go to Envelope #11.

Envelope 8

explain:
owner got a
a hard-on?
thriving guys
beat[ing].
successful moneymaking!
these guys
overreach the
simple,
straightforward,
decent,
simple (2x)
loved!
gotta get them!
catch those
oversteppers—

they loved
making money.
is your hard-on
for me?
we have a crisis
into your
earpiece
i hope you
came a little
saying that.
1973's *Serpico*
and *baby*
you hot
like young
Al Pacino
you caught me,
so there you go!

Want to
have your way
with me?
don't get too deep
and lose yourself
undercover
can i tell
you a secret?
you already have!
you stole!
your dignity!
how's it feel?
you missing something,
like your car-keys?

You have been caught shoplifting.

*Use the instructions enclosed to create
an accordion book.*

*On the cover write FREE OF CHARGE
in bold letters.*

*Take your book to your nearest Barnes
& Noble.*

*Find the “Biography” section and
place your book between the
biographies of two billionaires.*

*Replace this poem and go to to
Envelope #12.*

Envelope 9

So why, then, do some people rocket to stardom on their first try? Six months before Athena's debut novel came out, she got a big, sexy photo spread in a widely read publishing magazine under the title "Publishing's Newest Prodigy Is Here to Tell the AAPI Stories We Need." She sold foreign rights in thirty different territories. Her debut launched amidst a fanfare of critical acclaim in venues like the New Yorker and the New York Times, and it occupied top spots on every bestseller list for weeks. The awards circuit the following year was a foregone conclusion. Athena's debut—Voice and Echo, about a Chinese American girl who can summon the ghosts of all the deceased women in her family—was one of those rare novels that perfectly straddled the line between speculative and commercial fiction, so she accrued nominations for the Booker, Nebula, Hugo, and World Fantasy awards, two of which she won. And that was only three years ago. She's published two more books since, and the critical consensus is that she's only gotten better and better.

So why, [redacted] people [redacted]?
 Six months [redacted] she got [redacted] big,
 [redacted] spread [redacted] widely [redacted] under the
 [redacted] Newest [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]
 [redacted] Need. [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] different territories [redacted]
 [redacted] amidst [redacted] [redacted] critical [redacted] [redacted]
 [redacted] New [redacted] [redacted] Times, [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]
 [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] weeks [redacted] award [redacted] the
 following [redacted] conclusion. [redacted] debut—Voice
 [redacted] Echo [redacted] about [redacted] girl [redacted] summon [redacted]
 ghosts [redacted] family [redacted] was [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So why, [REDACTED] people [REDACTED]?
Six months [REDACTED] she got [REDACTED] big,
[REDACTED] spread [REDACTED] widely [REDACTED] under the
[REDACTED] Newest [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Need. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] different territories [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] amidst [REDACTED] [REDACTED] critical [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] New [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Times, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] weeks [REDACTED] award [REDACTED] the
following [REDACTED] conclusion. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So why, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
people [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?
Six months
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] she
got [REDACTED] big, [REDACTED]

████████ spread

████████ widely

████████

████████

████████

under the ██████

████████

Newest

████████ █

████████ ██████

████████ ██████

████████ █

Need. ██████

████████ ██████

████████ ██████

different

territories ██████

████████

████████

amidst █

████████ █

(if you pull

this poem

and get this

far, you are

now faced

with a

choice: finish

the blackout

poem

yourself with

a black
marker or
pen; or allow
it to die.)
critical
acclaim in
venues like the
New Yorker
and the New
York Times,
and it
occupied top
spots on every
bestseller list
for weeks. The
awards circuit
the following
year was a
foregone
~~conclusion.~~
Athena's
debut—Voice
and Echo,(es)
about a
Chinese
American
girl(s.) who
can summon
the ghosts of
all the
deceased

women in her
family—was
one of those
rare novels
that perfectly
straddled the
line between
speculative
and
commercial
fiction, so she
accrued
nominations
for the
Booker,
Nebula, Hugo,
and World
Fantasy
awards, two of
which she
won. And that
was only three
years ago.
She's
published two
more books
since, and the
critical
consensus is
that she's only

gotten better
and better.

*You've been
caught
shoplifting. If
you chose to
complete the
blackout
poem, go to
Envelope #20.
If you chose
not to
complete it, go
to Envelope
#13.*

Envelope 10

“Spotify pays artists between \$0.003 - \$0.005 per stream on average.”

“That works out as an approx revenue split of 70/30 - so that’s 70% to the artist/rights holders and 30% to Spotify.”

“The rights holders of a song can include; the publisher, songwriter and the master recording owners (i.e. the artist and/or label if they’re signed to one).”

Spotify pays artists [REDACTED] ?

That works out [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] to Spotify.

The rights holders of a song can include [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

if
and
only
if
that artist is okay with
needing to steal
if they want
a book
an instrument
a loaf.

You have been caught shoplifting. If you’ve worked a minimum wage job, replace this poem and go to envelope #14. If you have not, keep this poem out and go to Envelope #15.

Envelope 11

You have been caught shoplifting.

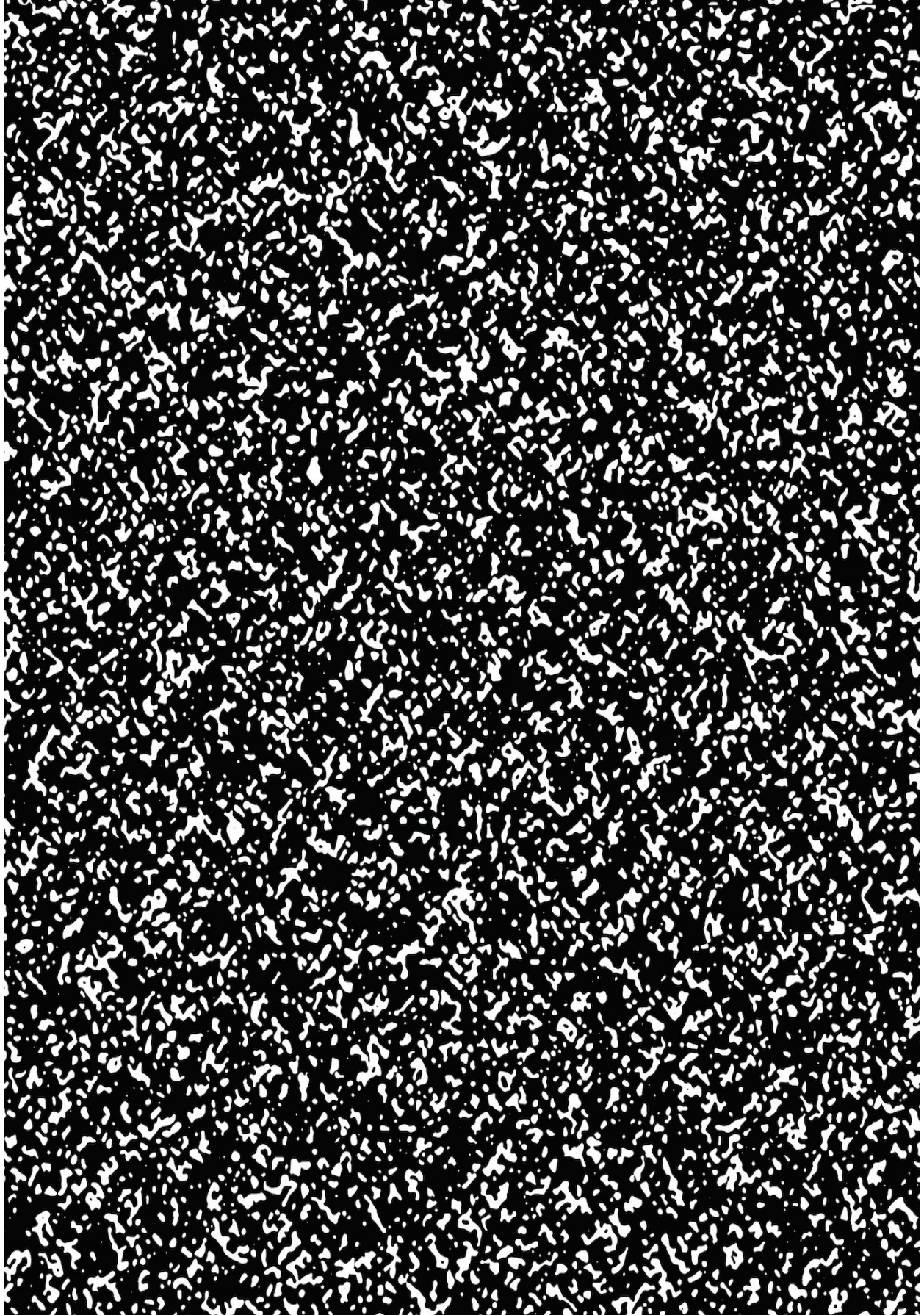
Keep a Wide-Ruled Composition Notebook of the kind you used in fourth grade.

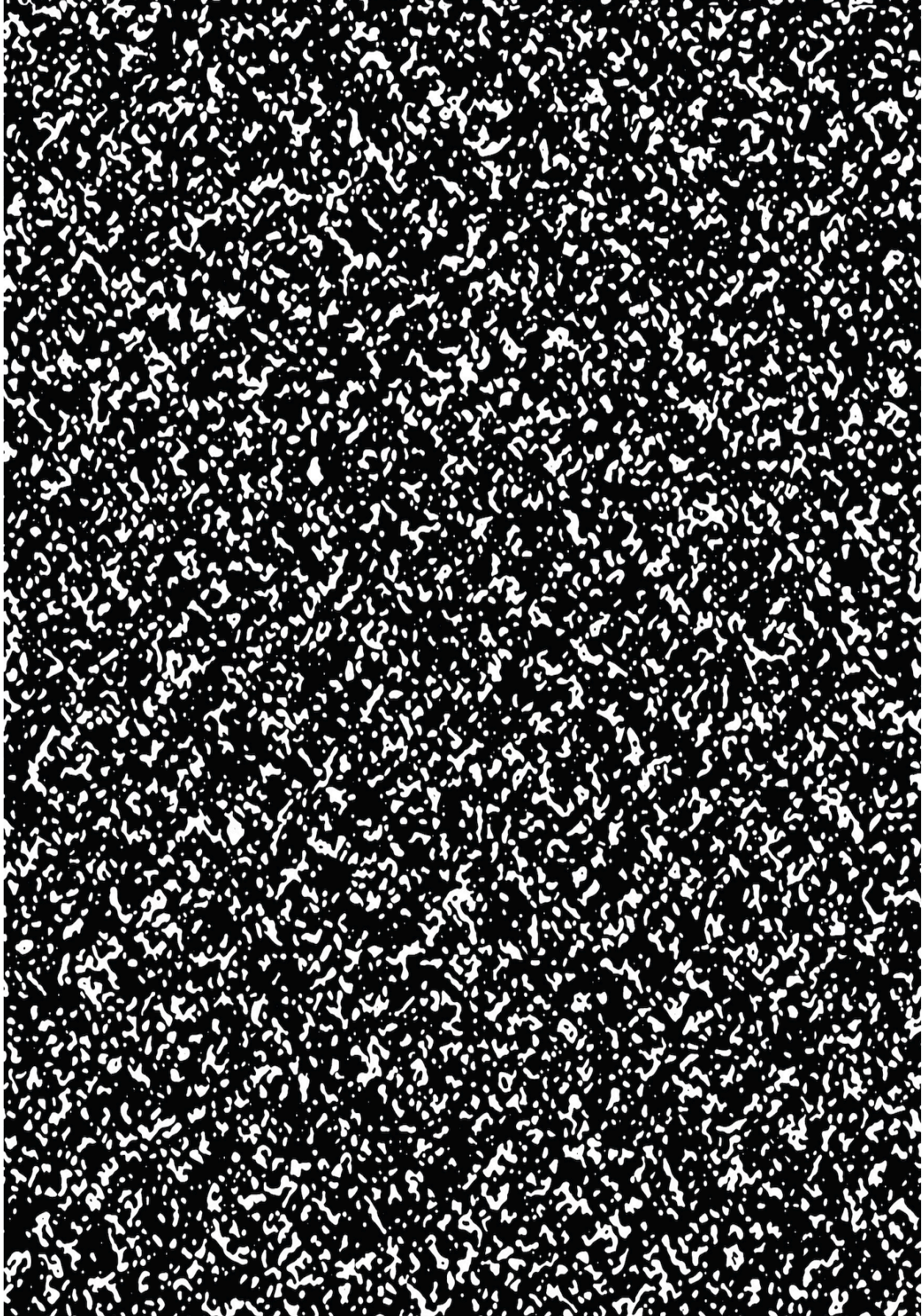


Every morning for thirty days, write at least two hundred words about your dreams. Do not read more of this book until the thirty days are up.

For thirty nights, before going to sleep, read your dreams to the moon.

After the thirtieth reading, go to Envelope #16.





Envelope 12

“I also got to know the heavy hitters: the silent butcher and his assistant, the mercurial baby-faced chef pâtissier, the doomed-looking saucier. And most memorably, Juan the sixtyish day broiler man, a fierce, trash-talking Basque, who I swear, I saw one time sewing up a very bad knife wound on his hand—right on the line—with a sewing needle, and thread, muttering all the while as he pushed through the flaps of skin with the point, “I am a *tough* (skronk) ... mother *fucker* (skronk!). I am a *tough* son of a *beetch!* (skronk!). I am a *tough*...mother (skronk!) ... *fucker!*” Juan was also famous for allegedly following up a bad finger wound with a self-inflicted amputation. After catching a finger in an oven door, he had consulted the union benefit list for amount given for victims of “partial amputation” and decided to cash in by lopping off the dangling portion. Whether this story was true or not mattered little to me; it was entirely believable after getting to know Juan.”

██████████ know the ██████████ silent butcher ██████████
██████████ baby-faced ██████████ the
doomed ██████████
██████████ man ██████████ swear ██████████
one time ██████████ on
the line ██████████ muttering ██████████
██████████ "I am a ██████████
██████████ mother *fucker* ██████████ a ██████████ son of a *beetch*!
██████████ ... *fucker*! ██████████
██████████ following ██████████
██████████ After catching ██████████
██████████ consult ██████████ the union ██████████ for victims
██████████ decide ██████████ to cash in ██████████
██████████ true or not mattered little
██████████

know the
silent butcher
baby-faced—
the doomed
man
swear
one time
on the line
muttering
i am a mother *fucker*
a son of a
bitch
...fucker!
following after
catching!
consult
the union
for victims
decide
to cash in
true or not mattered
little—
is it because
you make
a buck twenty
more than me
upon entry
to your job?
i sure hope
it is because
power at least

needs a(somewhat)
concrete
ghostly backing
is it just
the badge?
can i walk
walk through your
paper
shield?
he's got stuff
in his pocket!
will you cleave
off my
fingers?
i sure do
hope so!
stealing
with my feet
would be a
brand new
challenge!

*You have been caught shoplifting. Replace this poem in its envelope and go to
Envelope #17.*

This piece is to be read with two people, ideally friends who love each other, or at least two people who can share a mutual peace.

One person should take the ring depicting the original text and its erasure.

A second should take the ring depicting the final elaboration upon the erasure.

Read each piece at once. If one of you finishes before the other, begin again in a new order.

Envelope 13

You've been caught shoplifting.

Return to Envelope #9 and complete the blackout poem.

Realize that without love, all things die.

Envelope 15

You have been caught shoplifting.

Take this poem and cut out twenty words from it of your choice.

Wait until nightfall and move as far from civilization as you can between one and two hours.

Bring a book of matches, a ceramic mug, and your cut-out words.

Lay down a blanket and sit cross-legged looking at the sky.

Find five stars whose names you do not know or which remain unnamed.

Use your twenty words to name those five stars.

Repeat them to yourself five times.

Place your twenty words in your mug and light them on fire.

Let go of your names and realize the stars were never yours.

see back.

Replace the remains of this poem and go to Envelope #19

Envelope 16

“These knuckleheads are even less easy to explain than the novice owner with a hard-on for waitron nookie. Proven operators, guys with two or three or even more thriving restaurants, guys who’ve already beaten the odds, who have had and *still* have successful moneymaking joints, spitting out dough—what makes these guys overreach? Often, the original flagship operation is a simple, straightforward concept: a bar with decent food, or a simple country Italian restaurant or a bistro loved for its lack of pretension. But success makes these guys feel invulnerable. They *must* be geniuses, right? They’re making money in the restaurant business!”

explain
 owner a hard-on
 thriving guys beaten
 successful
 moneymaking
 these guys overreach the
 simple, straightforward
 decent simple
 loved

■ They're making money ■

*You may cut the thread which binds this poem
to read.*

If you chose not to cut the thread, replace this poem and go to Envelope #4. If you chose to cut the thread, go to Envelope #8.

Envelope 17

You have been caught shoplifting.

Change every aspect of yourself to its polar opposite.

If you are tattooed or pierced, join the seminary.

If you remain unmarried, get an impromptu clitoris piercing.

If you do not have a clitoris, get bottom surgery.

Replace this letter in its envelope and go to Envelope #5.

Make one change a day for thirty days.

On the front half of this book, write the original state.

On the corresponding color on the back half, write the changed state.

Envelope 18

You have been caught shoplifting.

Find six smooth stones of varying sizes.

With your eyes closed, align the stones in a circle around you outside. Open your eyes and take a photo of the result.

Close your eyes again. Stack the stones into a precariously balanced cairn. Open your eyes and take a photo of the result.

Close your eyes again. With varying degrees of care, disassemble the cairn you made. Open your eyes and take a photo of the result.

Close your eyes again. Build a new cairn with the poem and these instructions balanced in the middle. Open your eyes and take a photo of the result.

Allow the cairn and poem to sit in the open for ten days. Return and take a photo of the result.

Send your photos to tate.t.mcfadden@gmail.com

go to back

Go to Envelope #22

Envelope 19

In-state tuition comes in at!

\$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$ \$14,700\$
\$14,700\$

Out-of-state tuition is a whopping(as in punch you in the face)

\$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$ \$44,454\$
\$44,454\$

“The UC San Diego Bookstore is a not-for-profit auxiliary which supports student success and provides funding for UC San Diego services and programs. The money that you spend at the Bookstore and Sunshine Market stays here on campus.

In the past five years, the UC San Diego Bookstore has contributed \$6.5 million to our campus!”

Bookstore supports
funding UC
spend at the Bookstore

contribute \$6.5 million to
our campus!”

to our campus

to our campus!

TO OUR CAMPUS!

You have been caught shoplifting. Replace this poem and go to Envelope #22.

Envelope 20

You have been caught shoplifting.

Cut Poem #6 into strips of thoughtless shape and size.

While doing this, boil water.

When the water is boiling, steep this poem into a tea.

When the tea is cooled to room temperature, use it to water those tough plants which grow in cracks in the sidewalk and noxious roundabouts.

Go to Envelope #21.

Envelope 21

*This is the end. Replace this poem
in its envelope and go to Envelope #1.*

Envelope 22

success is

the badge a boy flashes to you?

the earpiece in his ear?

he has more stuff in his pocket

these are just my cigarettes is it not enough to kill myself slowly?

success is

i dont swallow you're a non-profit

nonprofits don't have cops

your not for profit enterprise don't profit me

y'all take six hundred and three dollar on average in required books alone

so i hope the gold on that badge is real cause what's behind it sure ain't.

Go to back.

You have been caught shoplifting.

Consider what(read who) a success is to you.

Consider what(read shoplifter) a failure is to you.

Using black ink, draw a failure on the white paper provided to you here.

Using black ink, draw a success on the black paper provided to you here.

Take these drawings with you to your local bookstore.

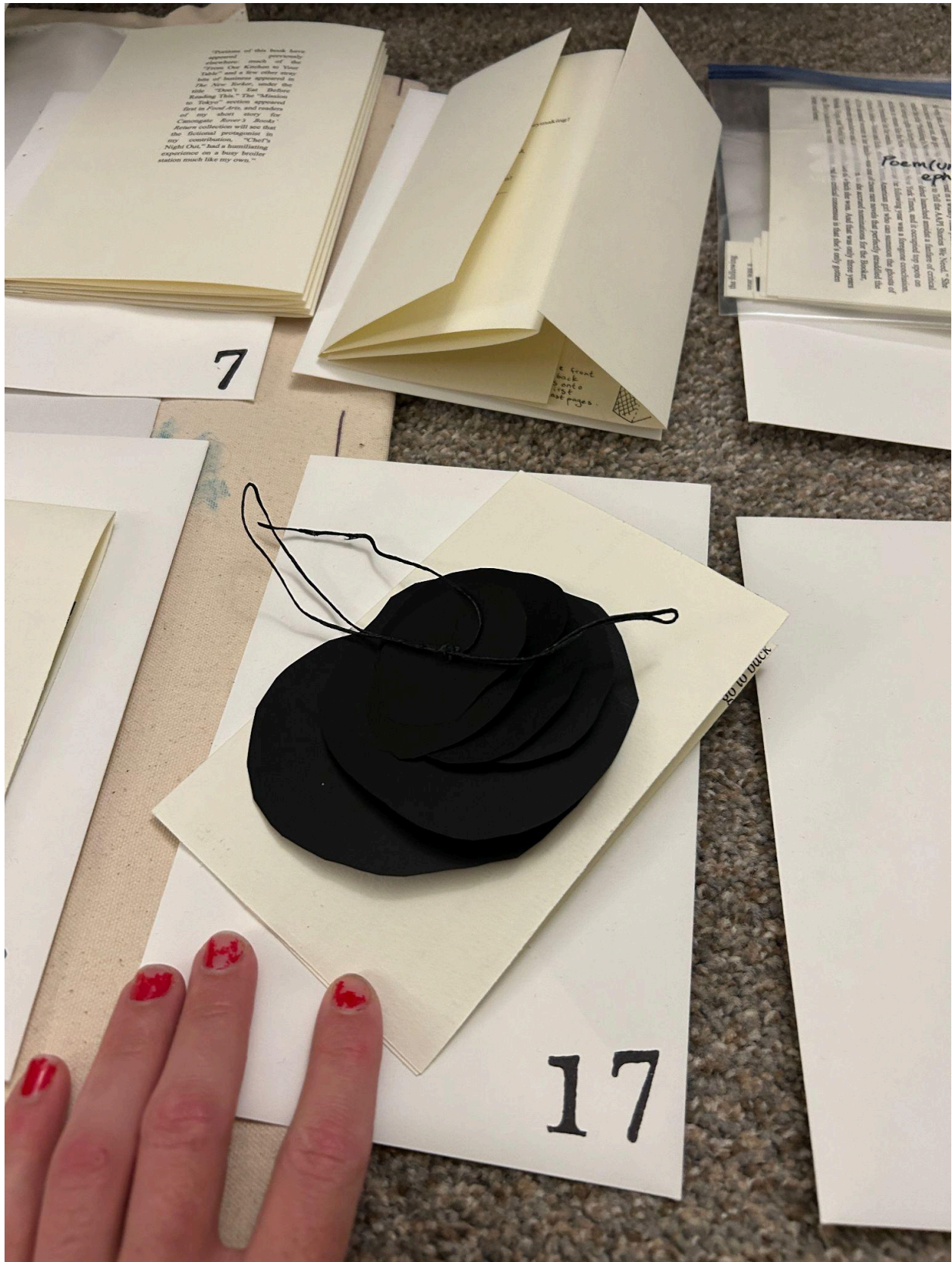
Find the small press or poetry section and hide your drawings between the pages of some misguided poet's book.

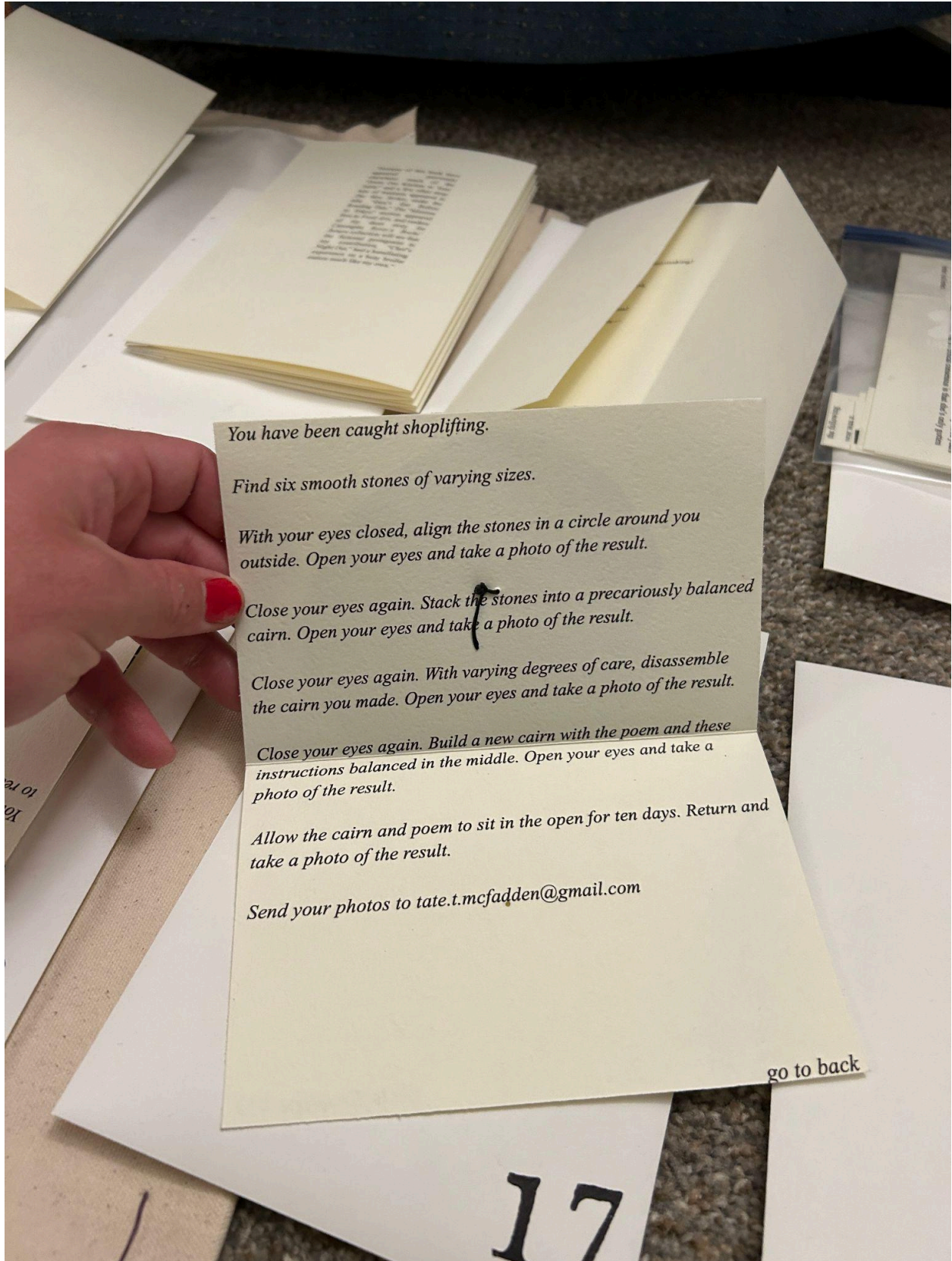
Go to Envelope #1

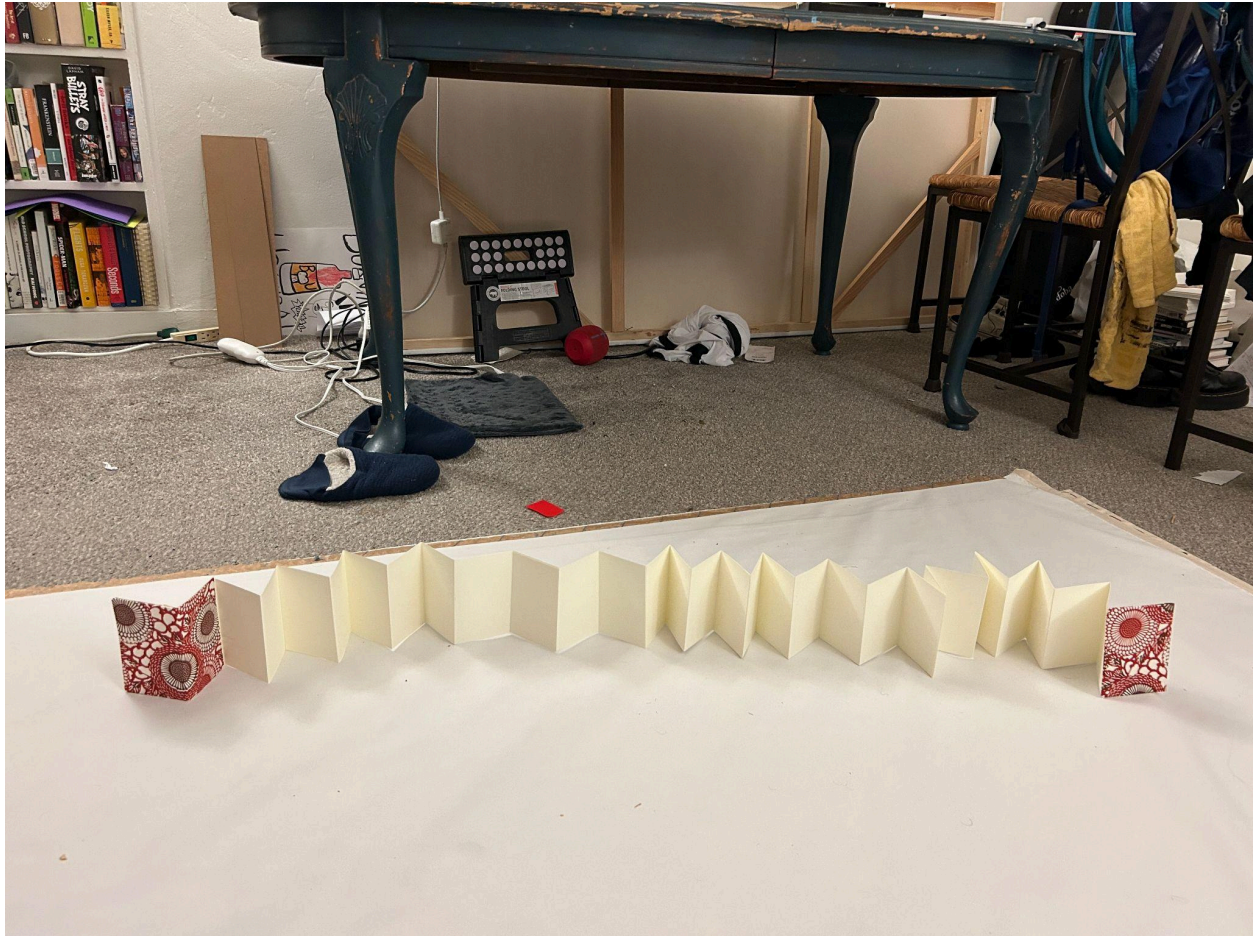
Images of *Theft*



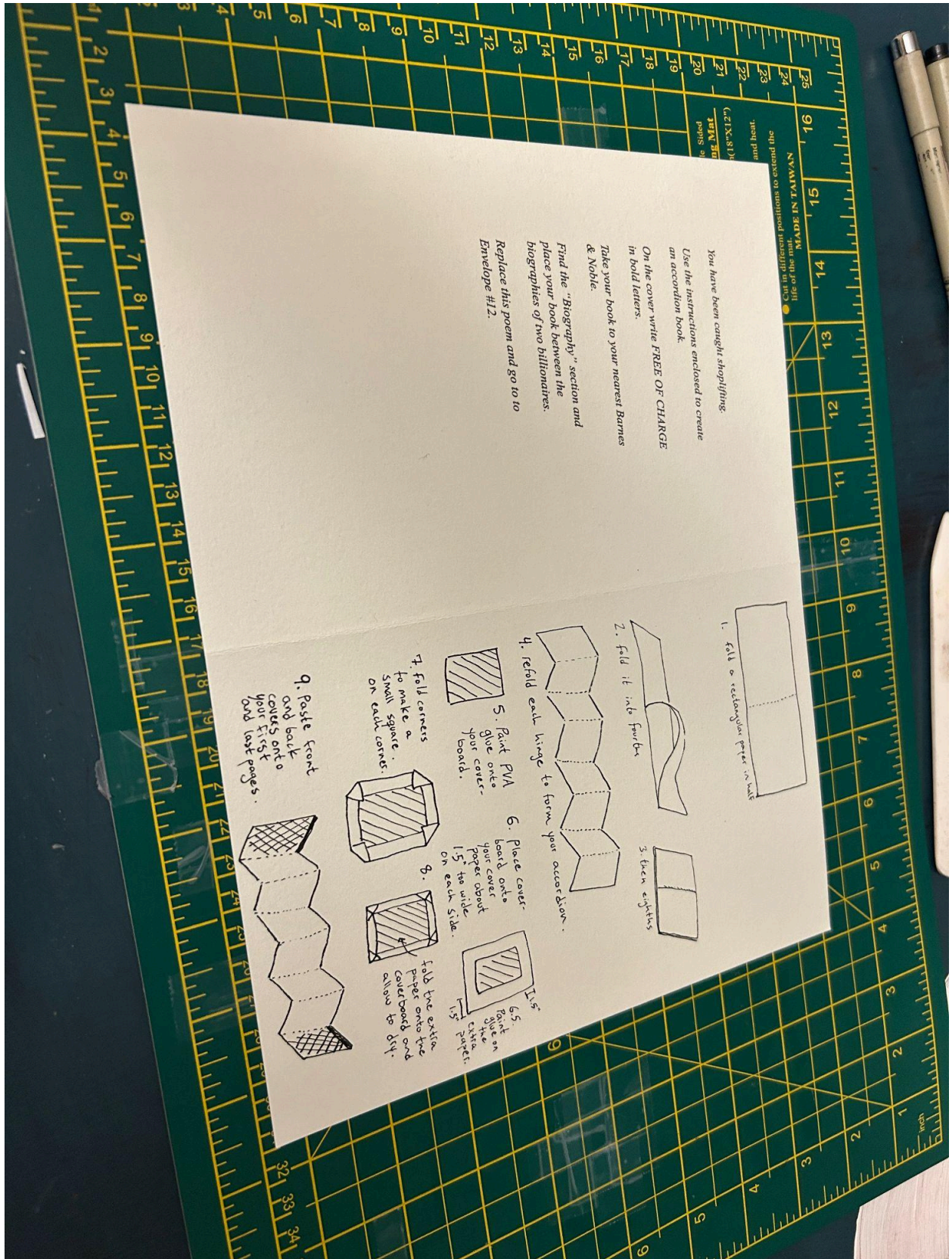


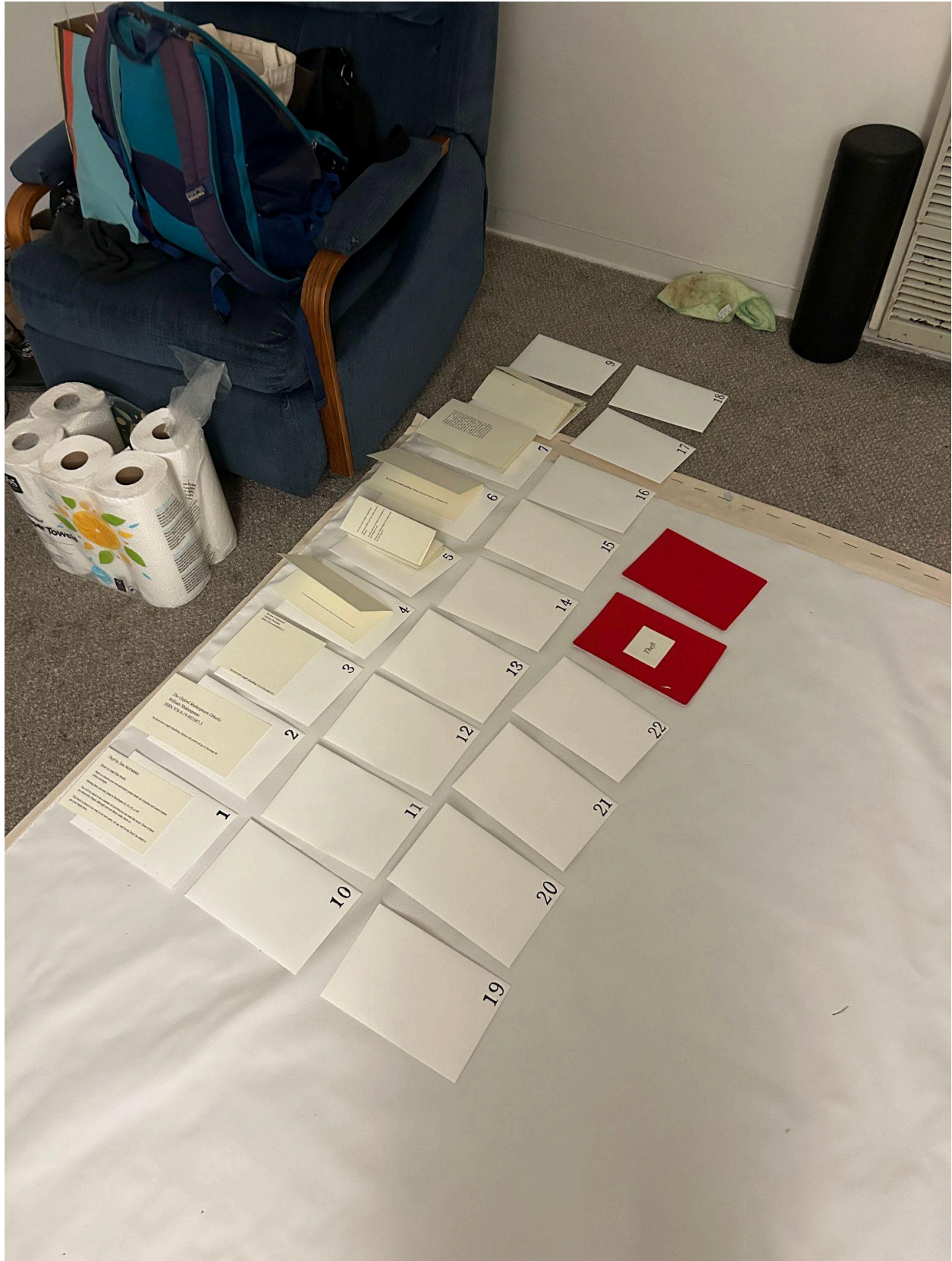


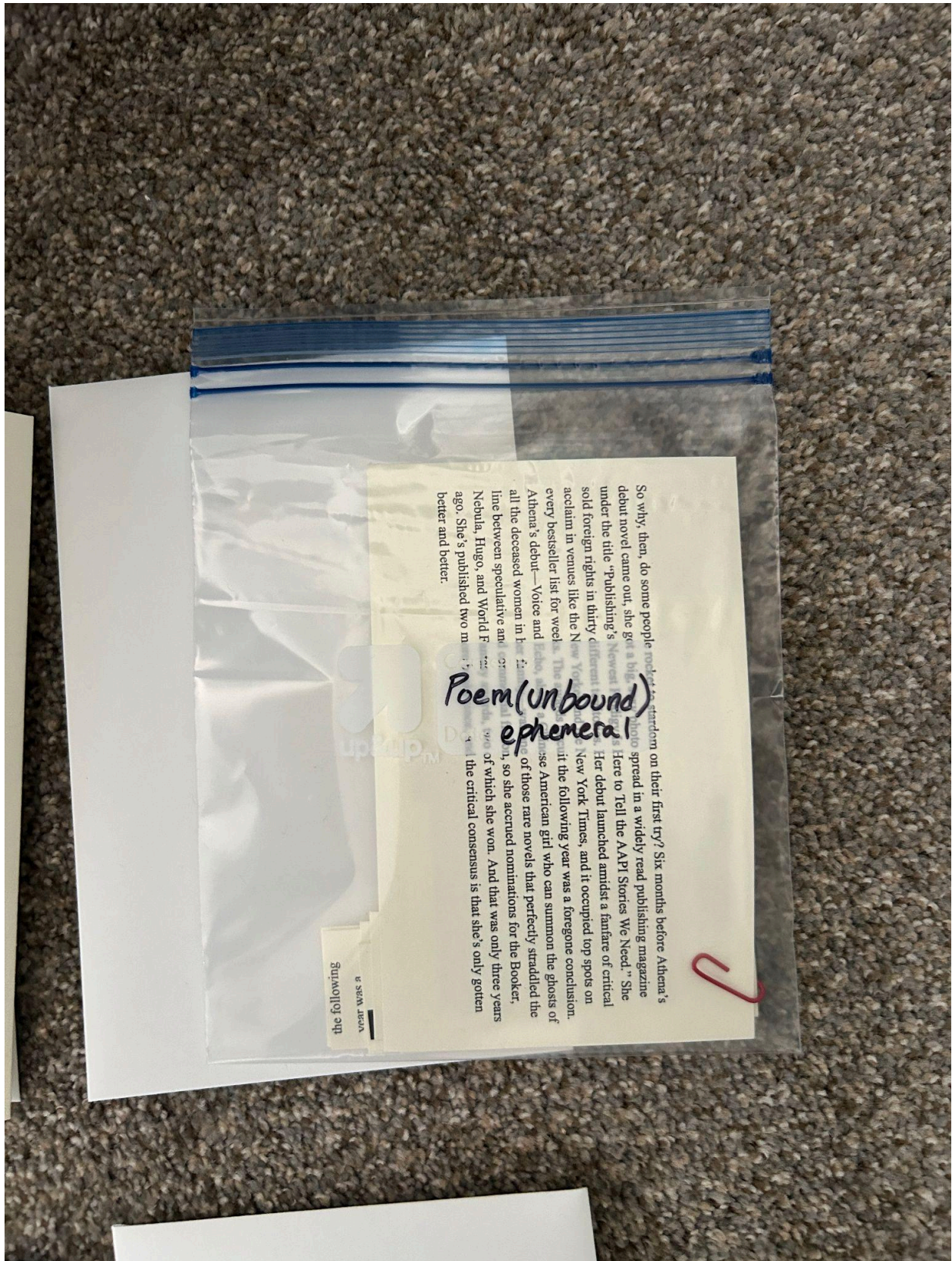


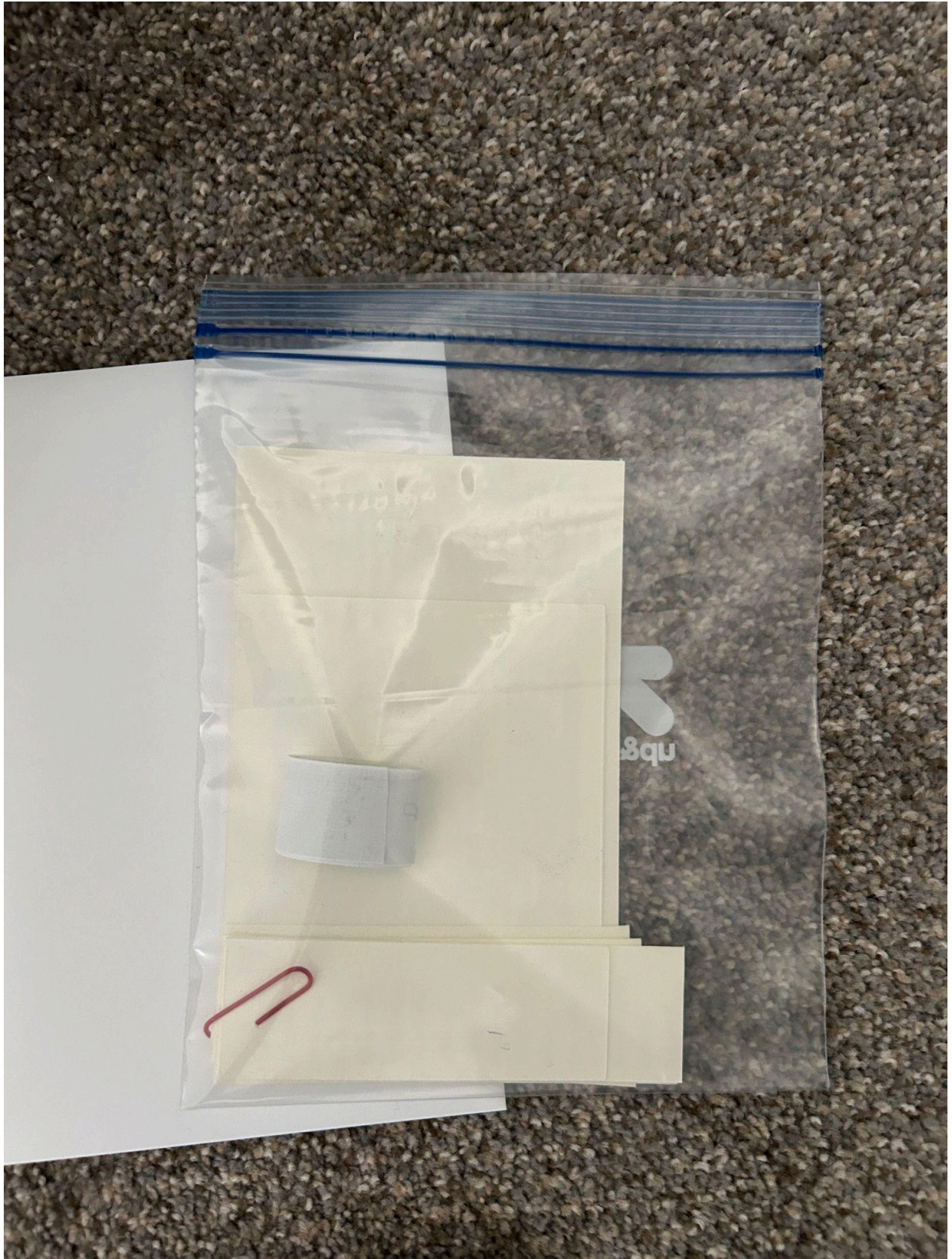






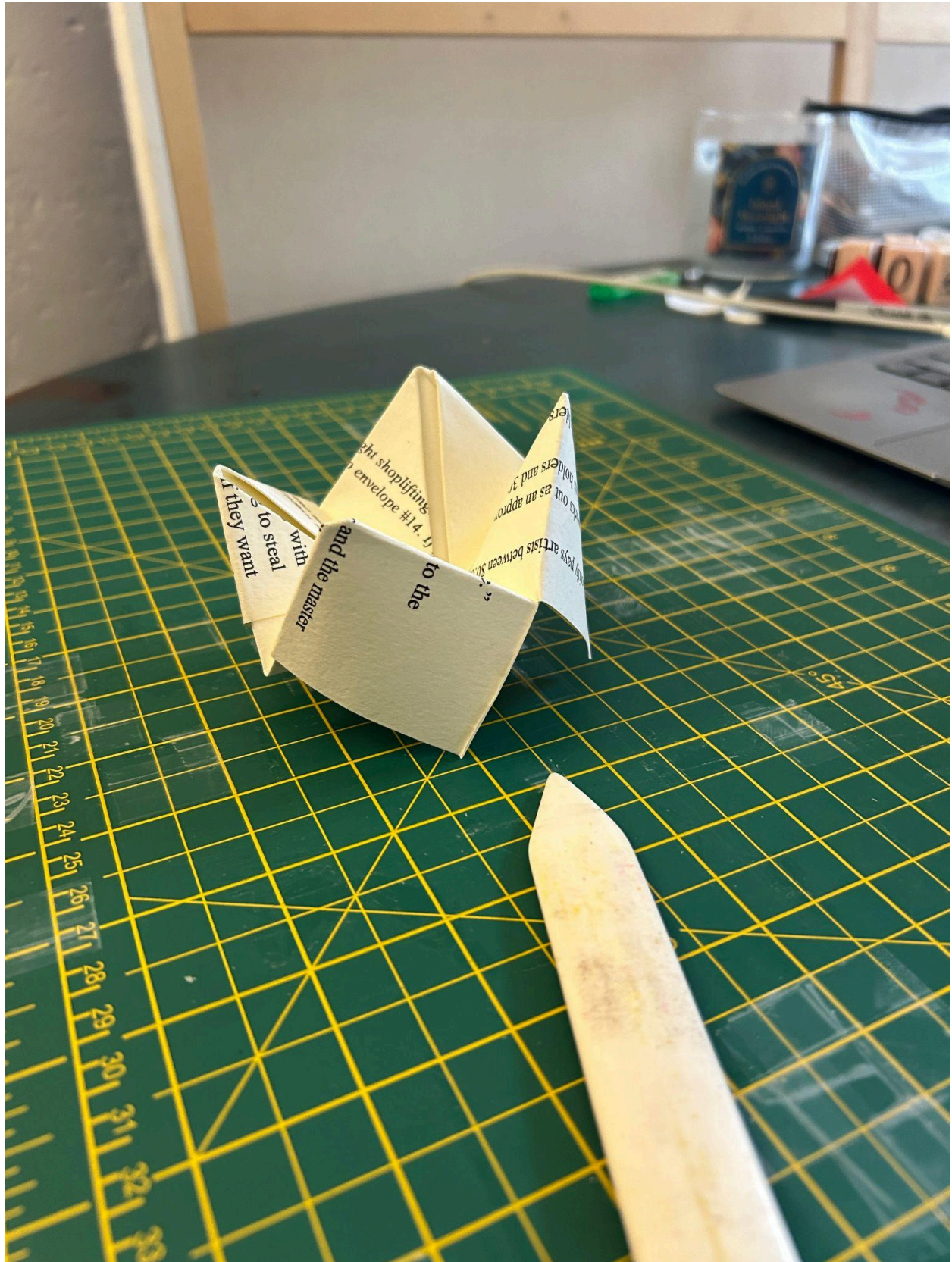


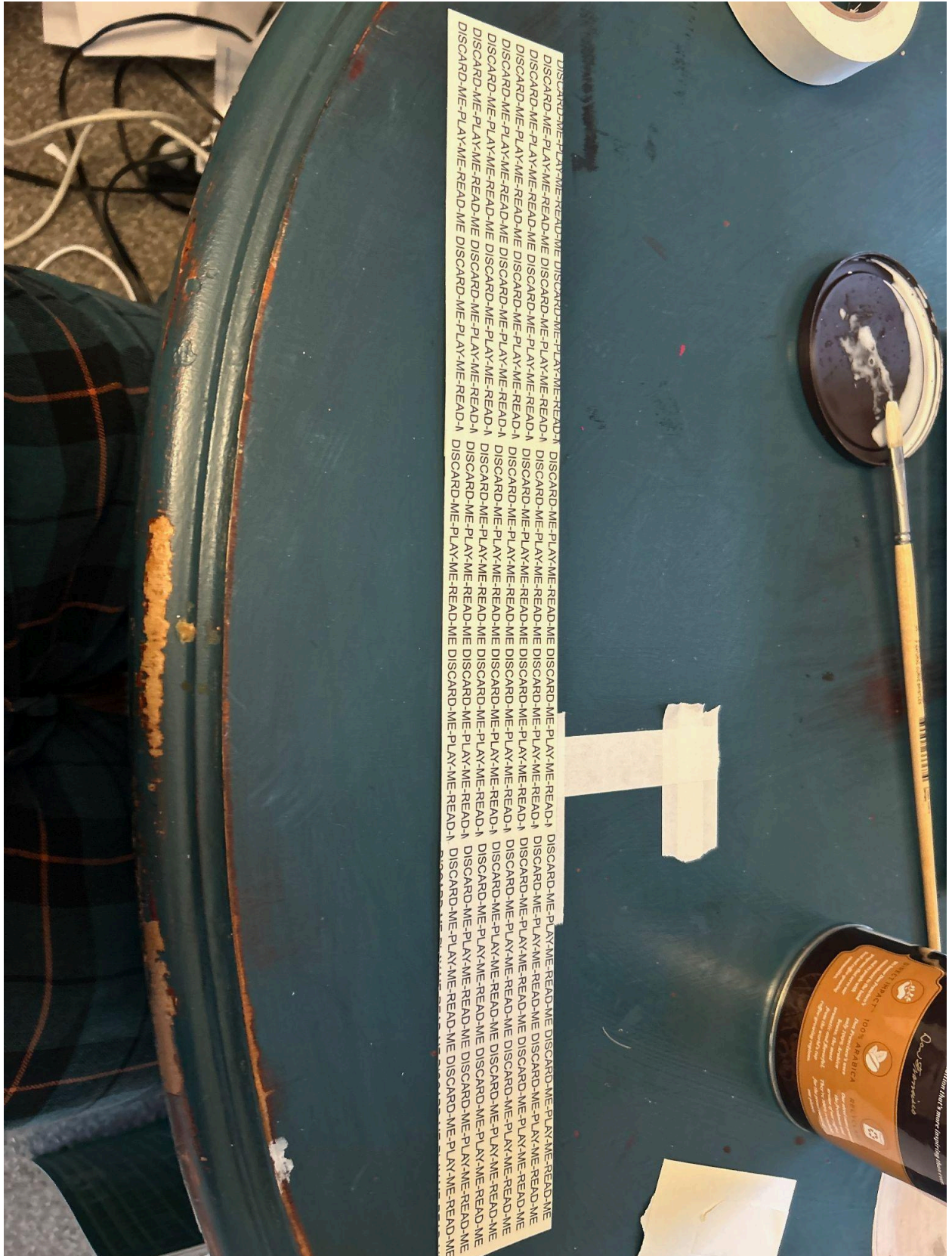










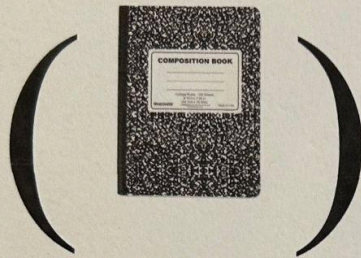






You have been caught shoplifting.

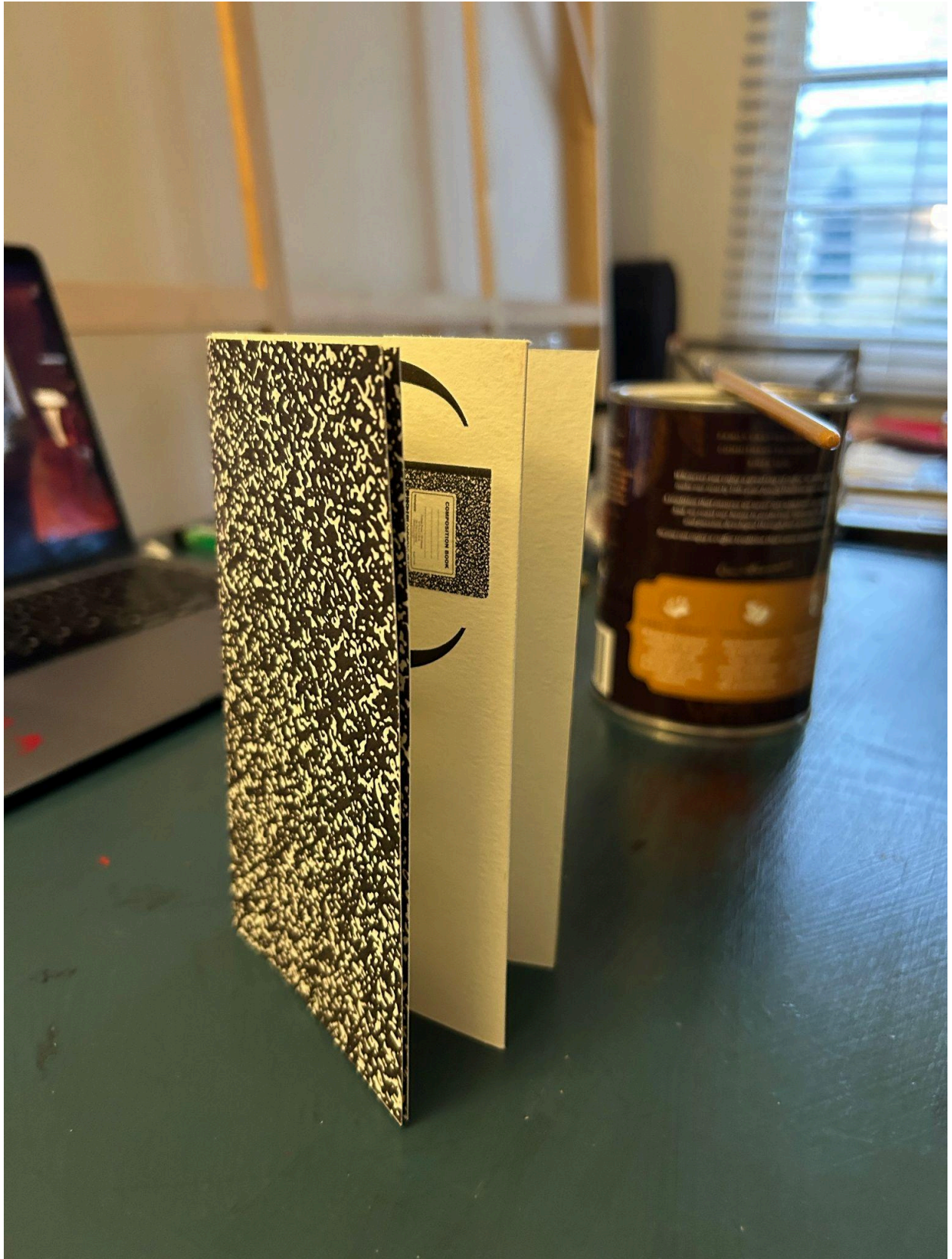
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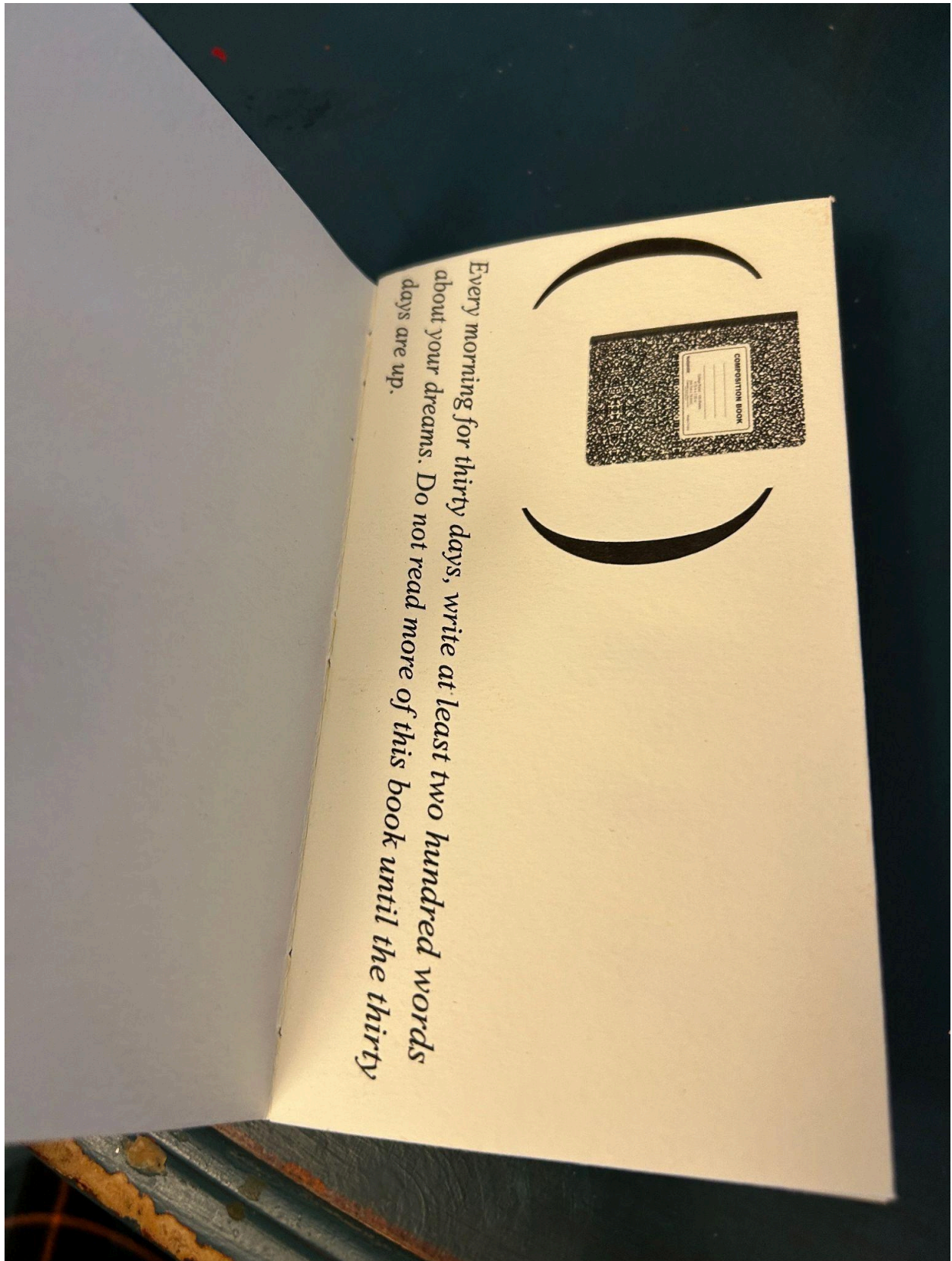


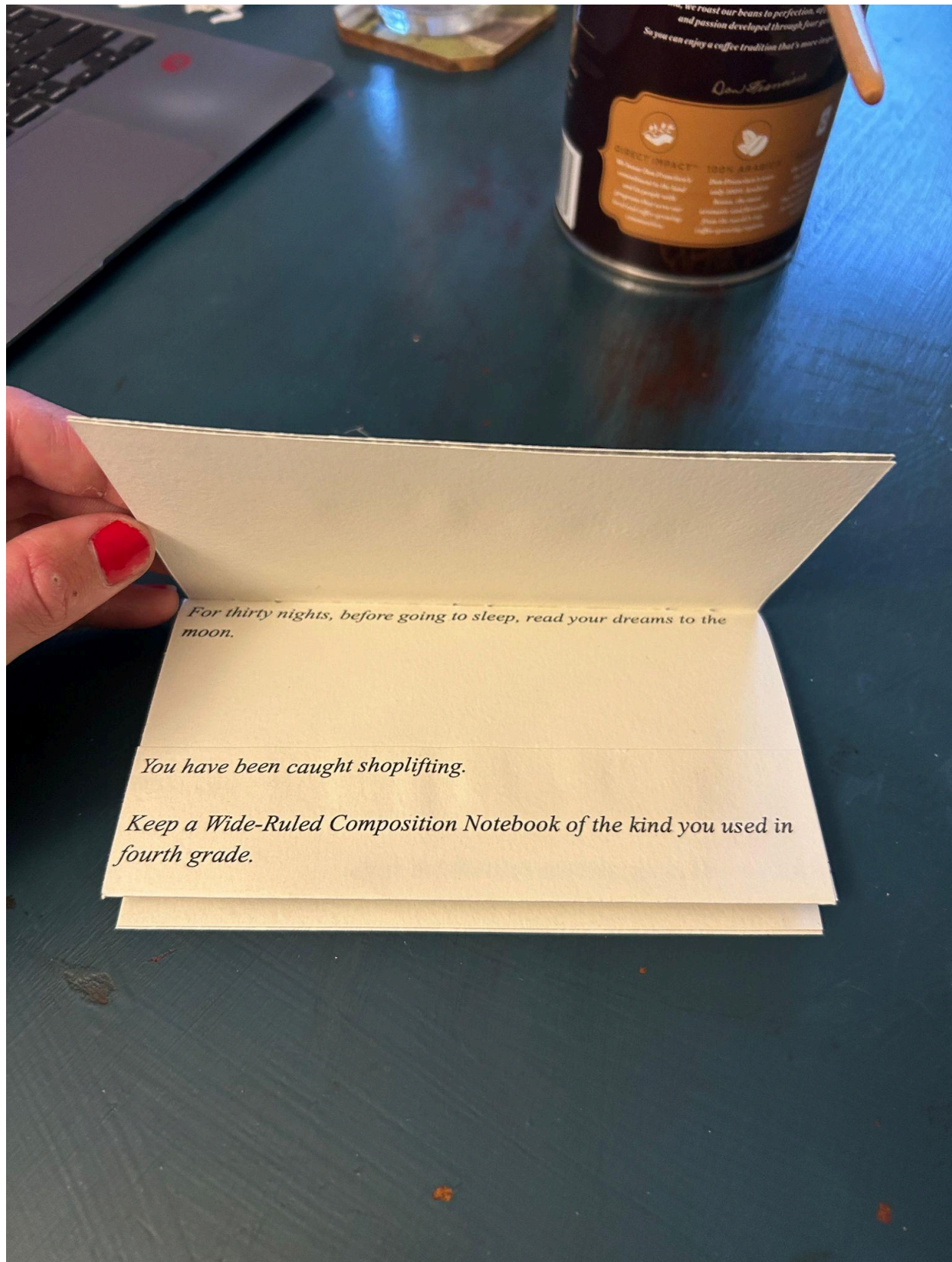
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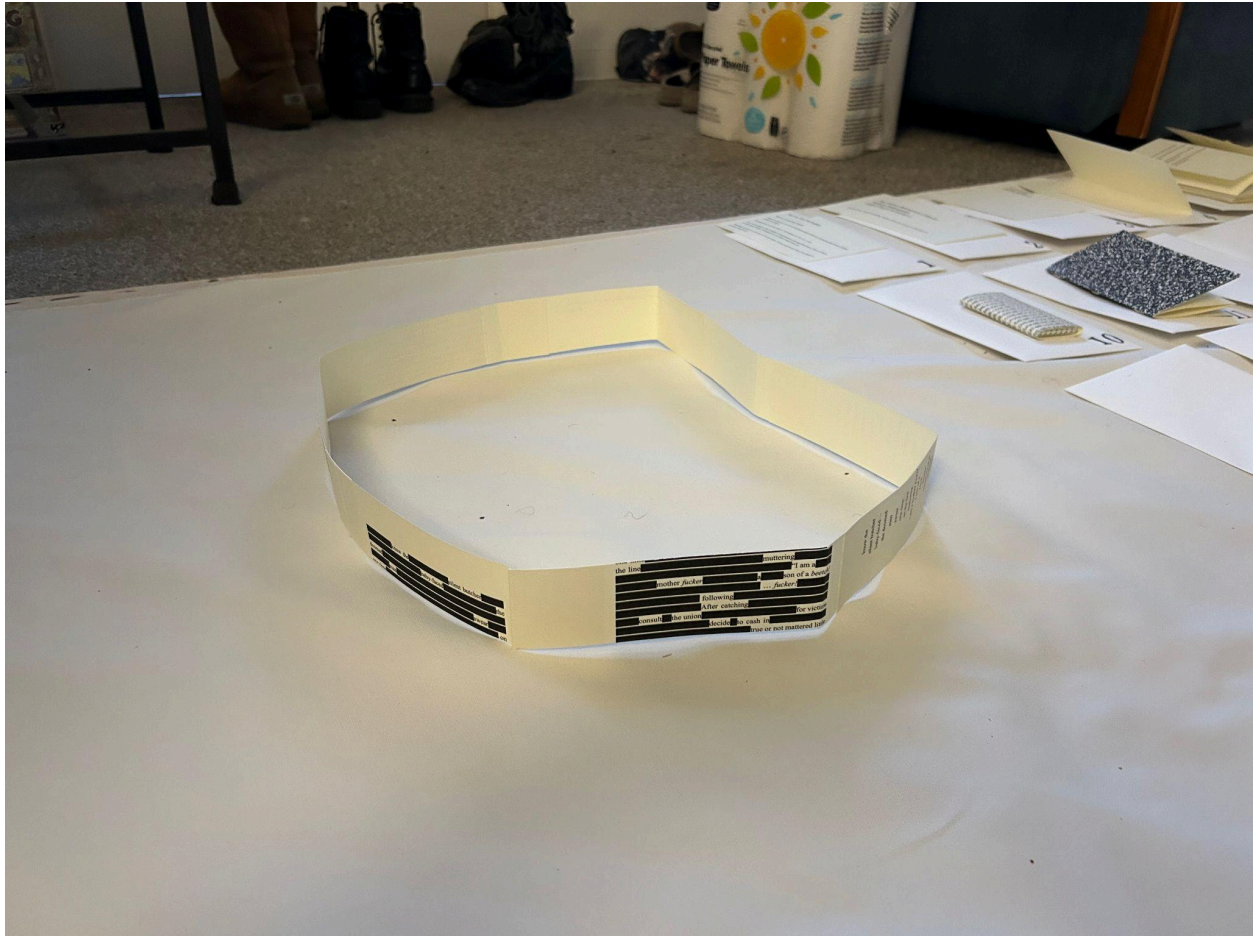
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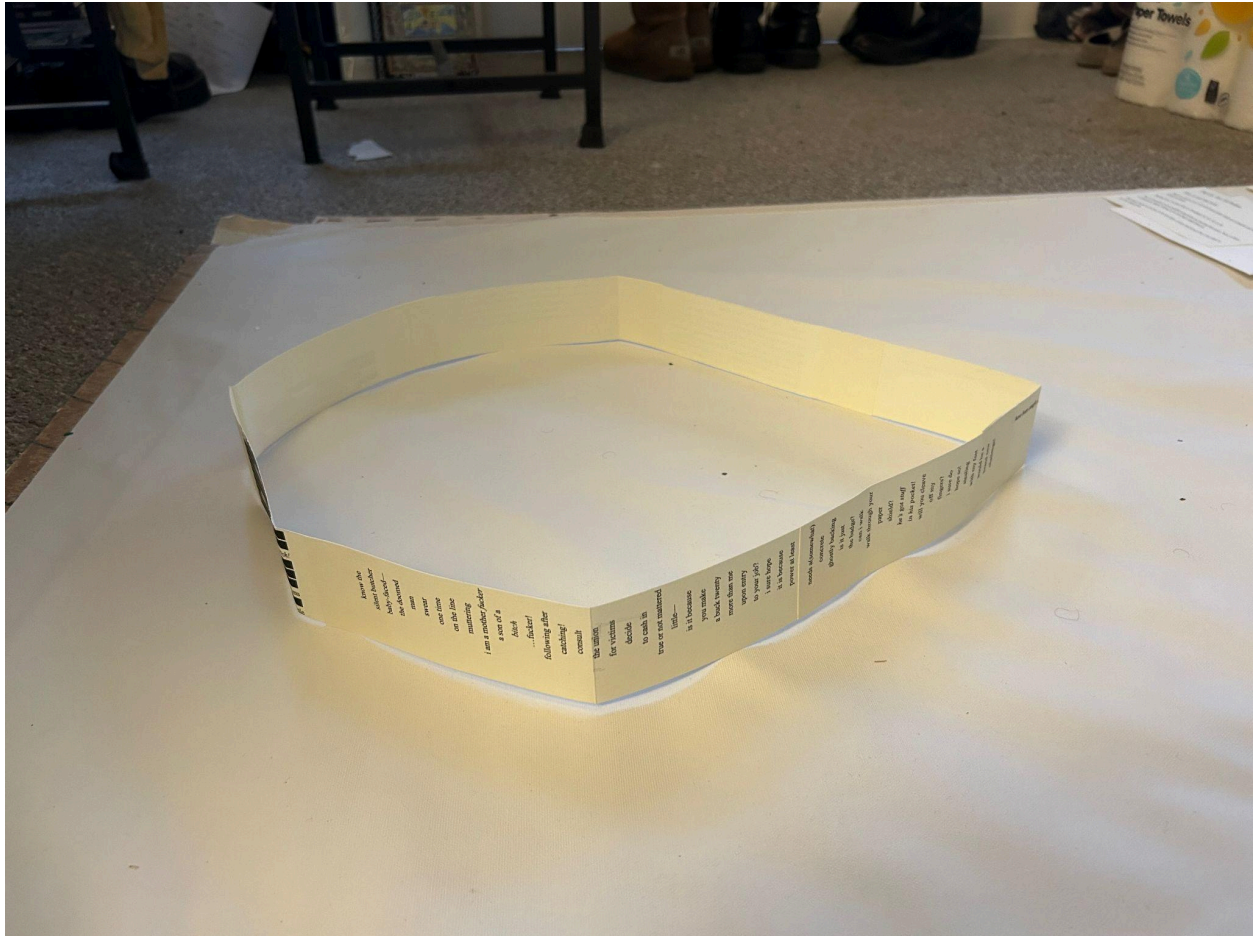
After the thirtieth reading, go to Envelope #16.

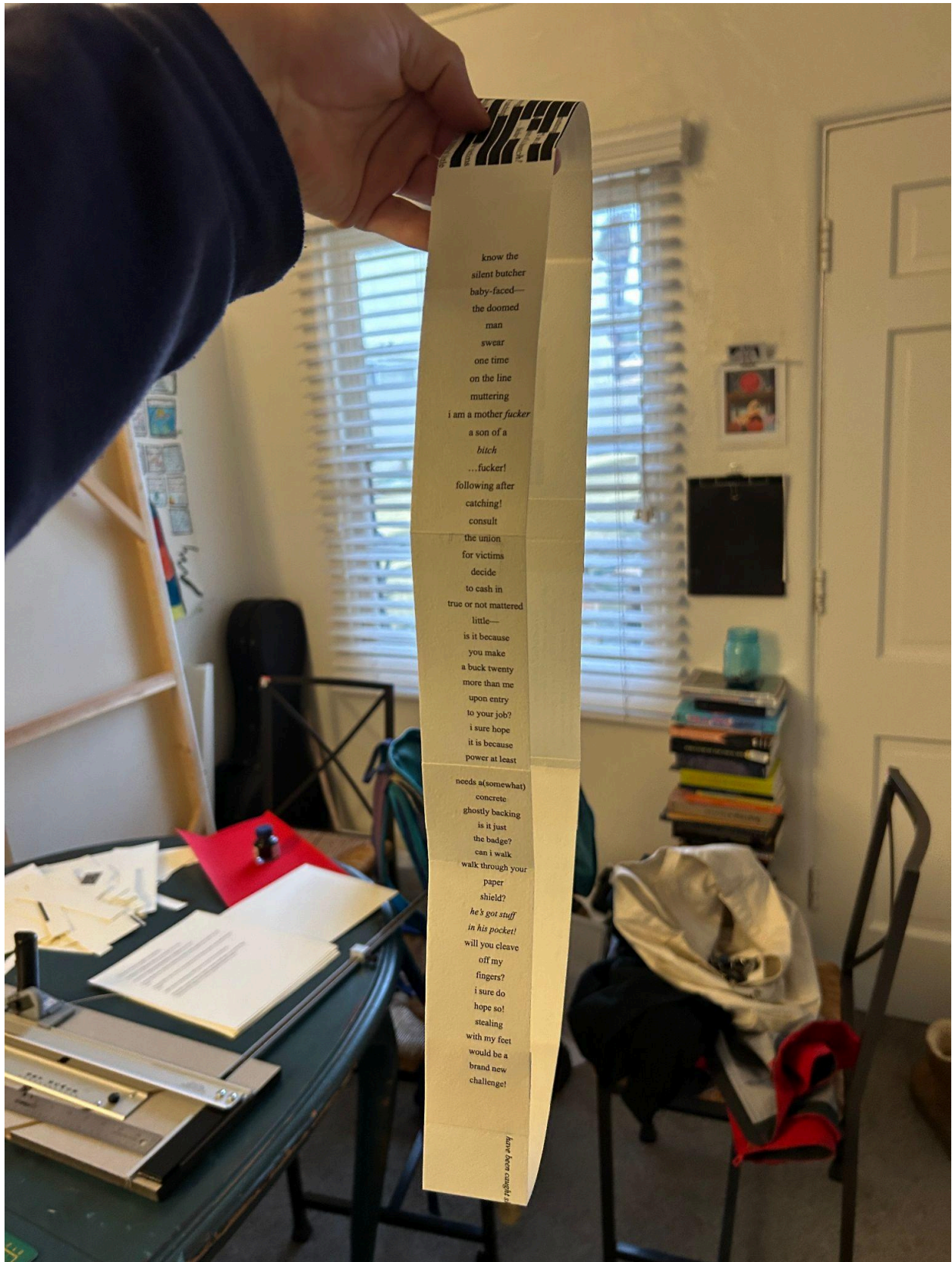




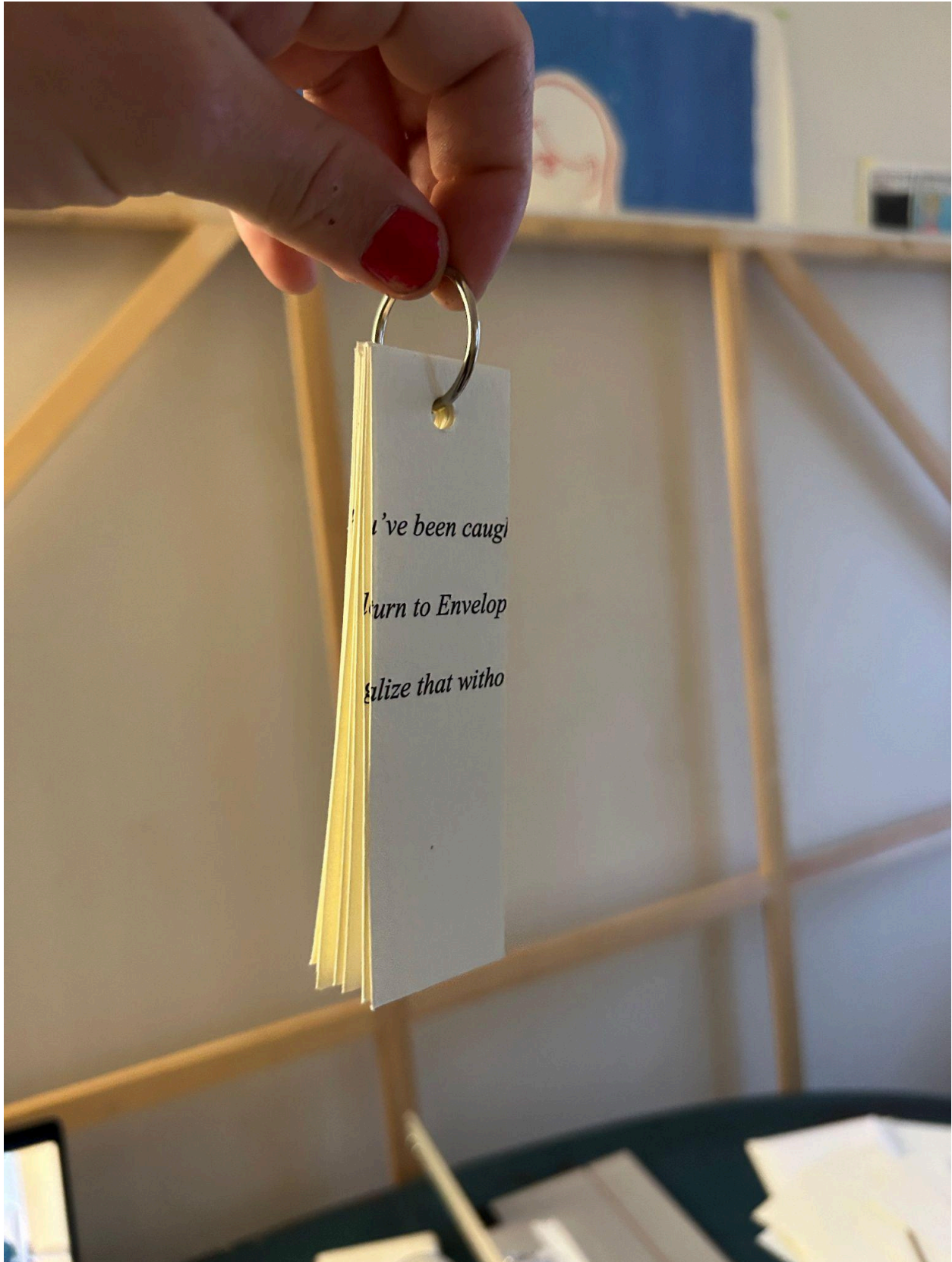


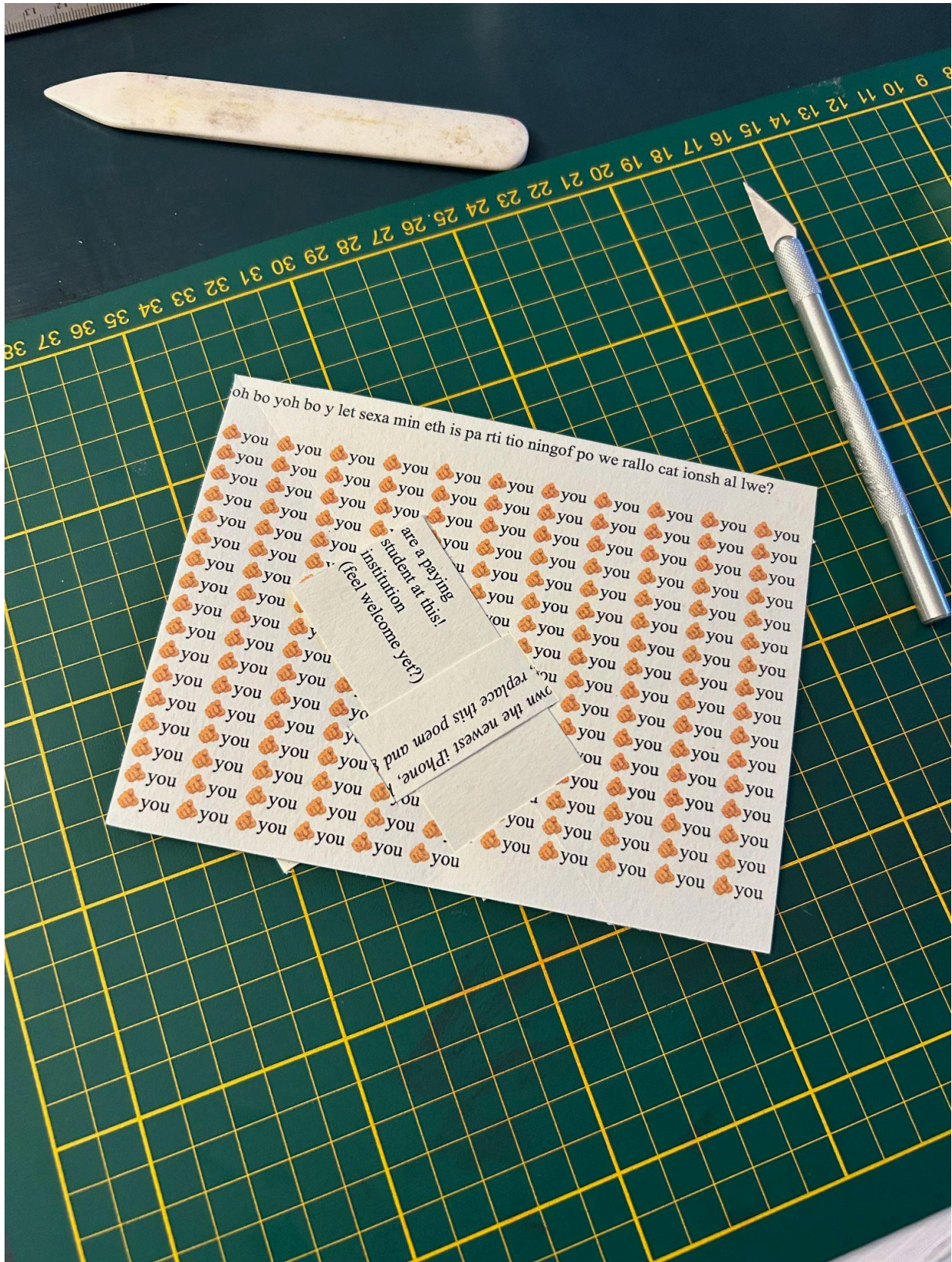




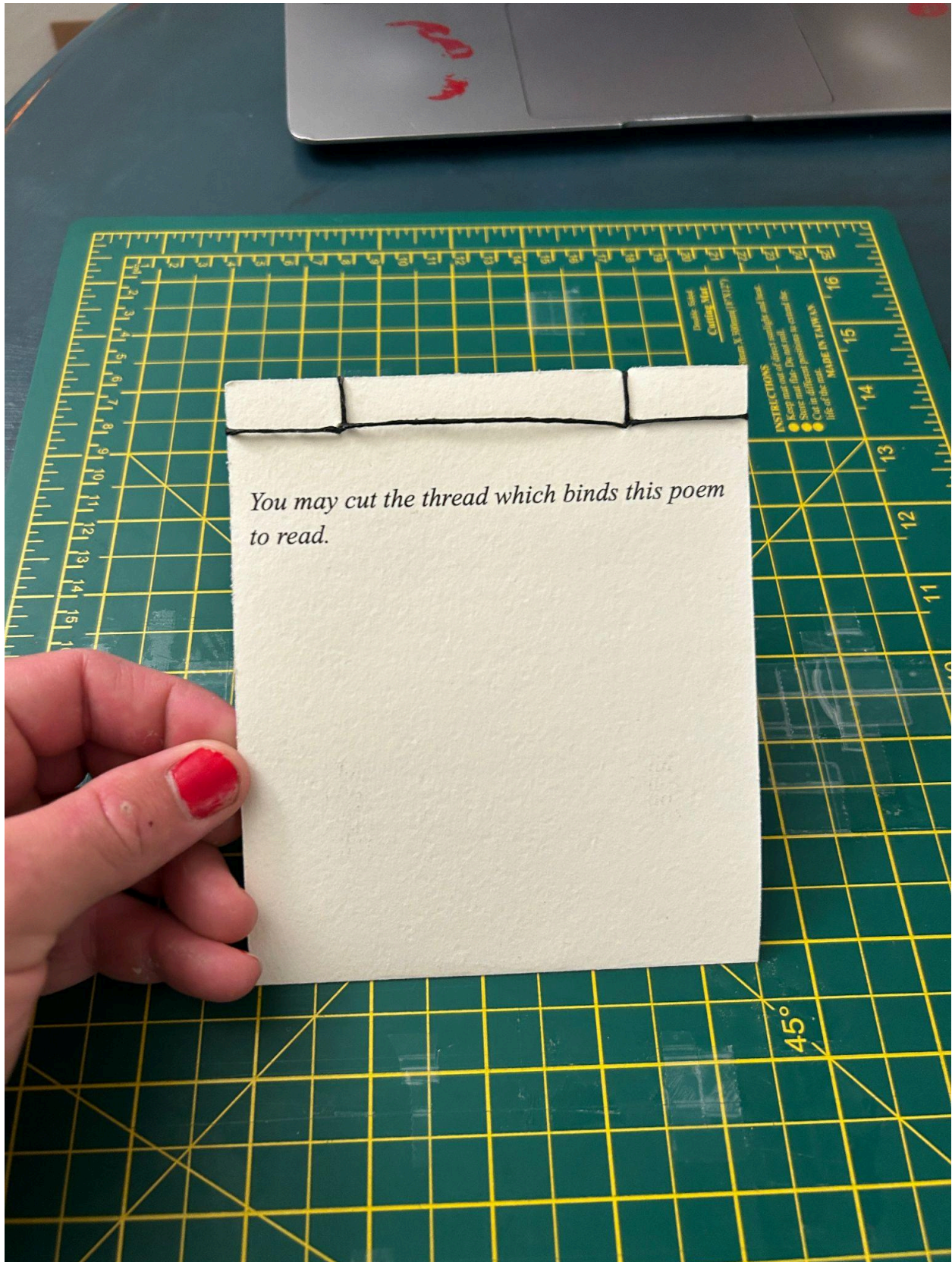
















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