



# The. Perennials

series I  
BOOK 3  
JAINSCOUGH

# Flotsam

I walked home full.

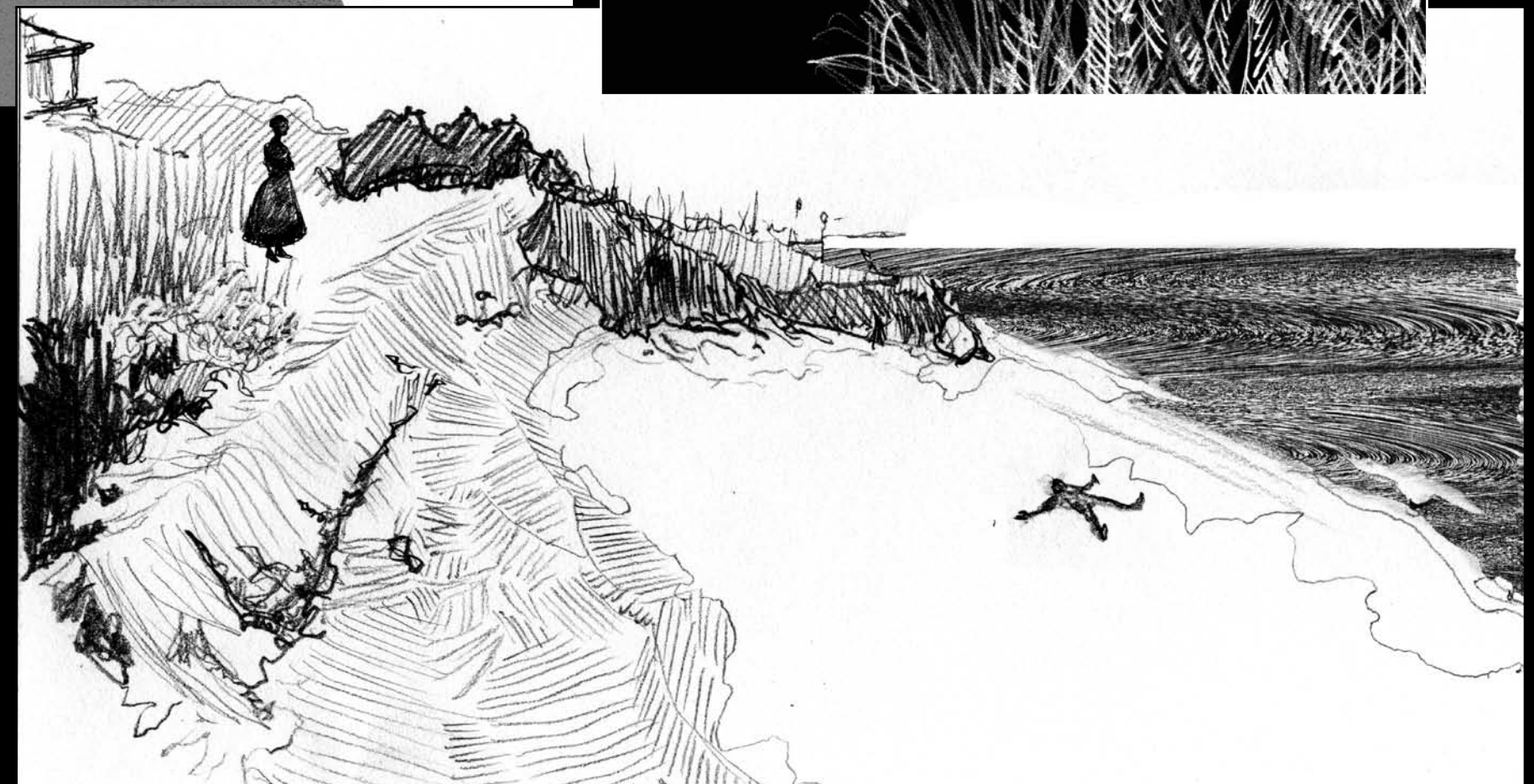
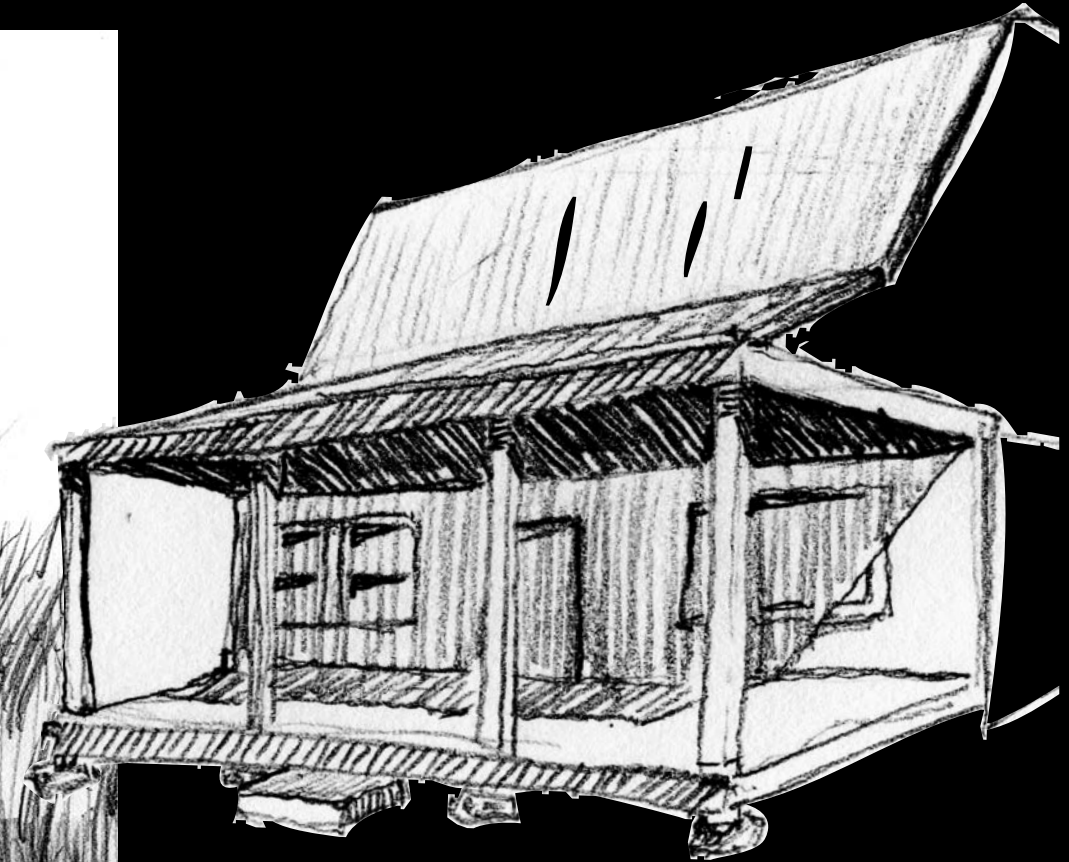
Overflowing.

Pregnant.

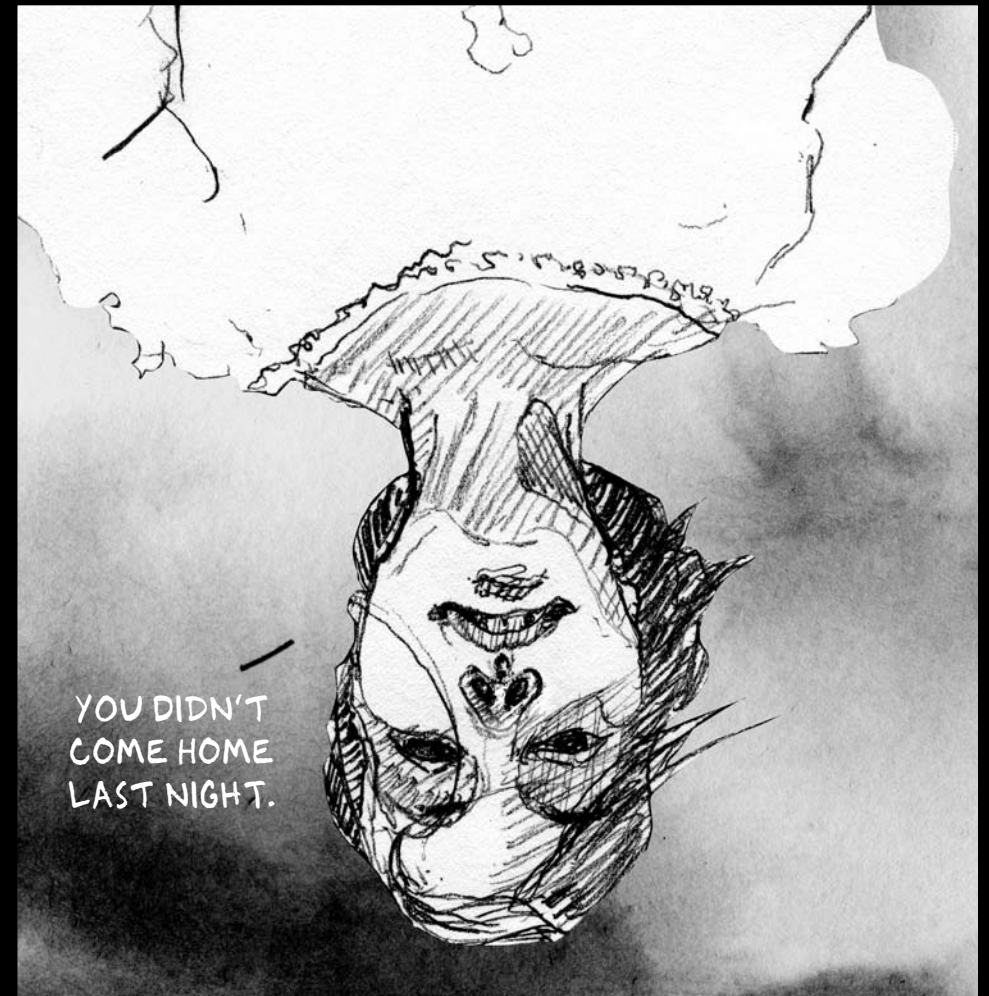
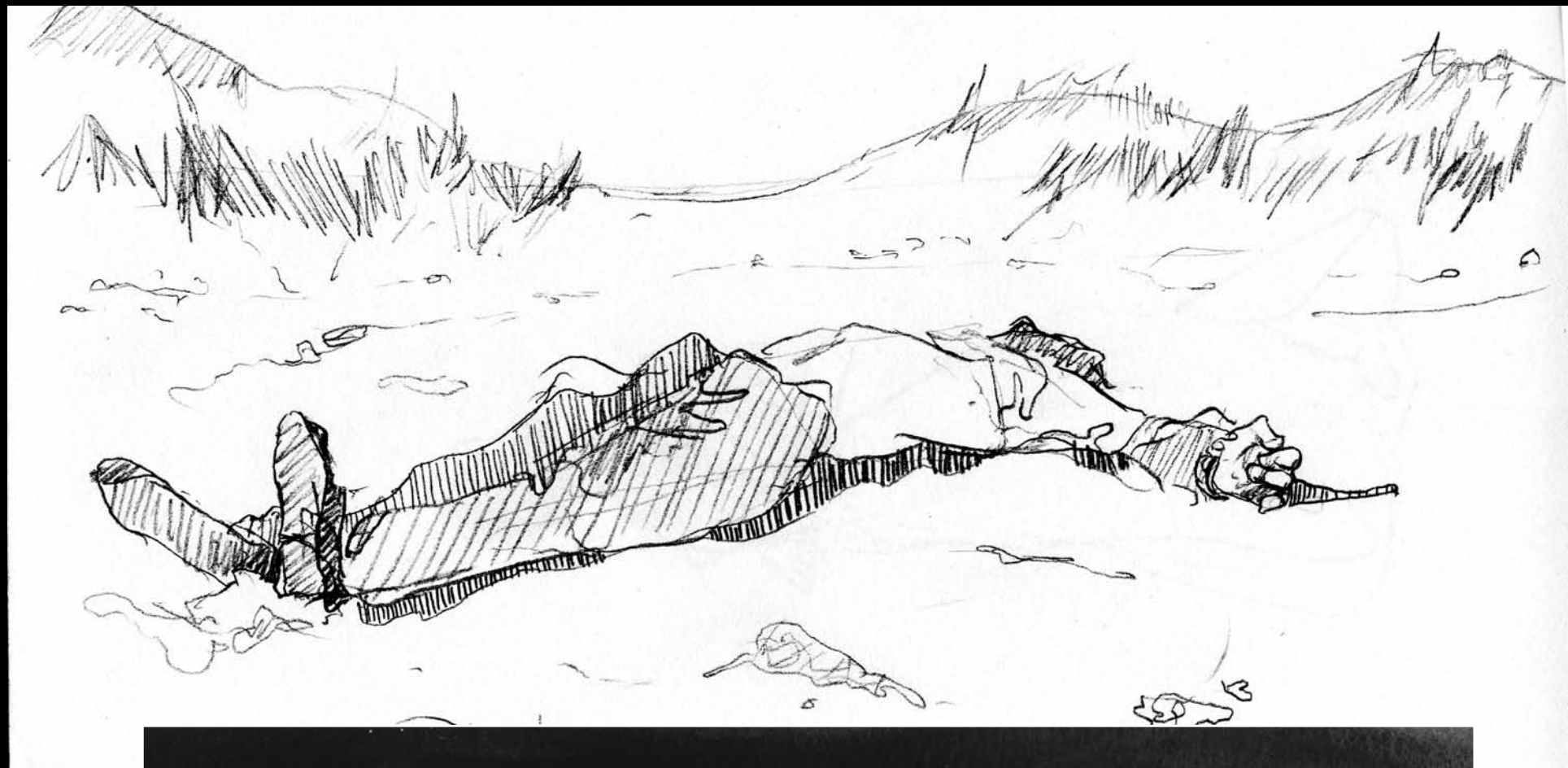


Pregnant with child,  
but also possibility,  
and hope.

And a secret.







I WAS ON A WHALING SHIP.  
I MET A SHIP STEWARD.

HE OFFERED  
ME A JOB.

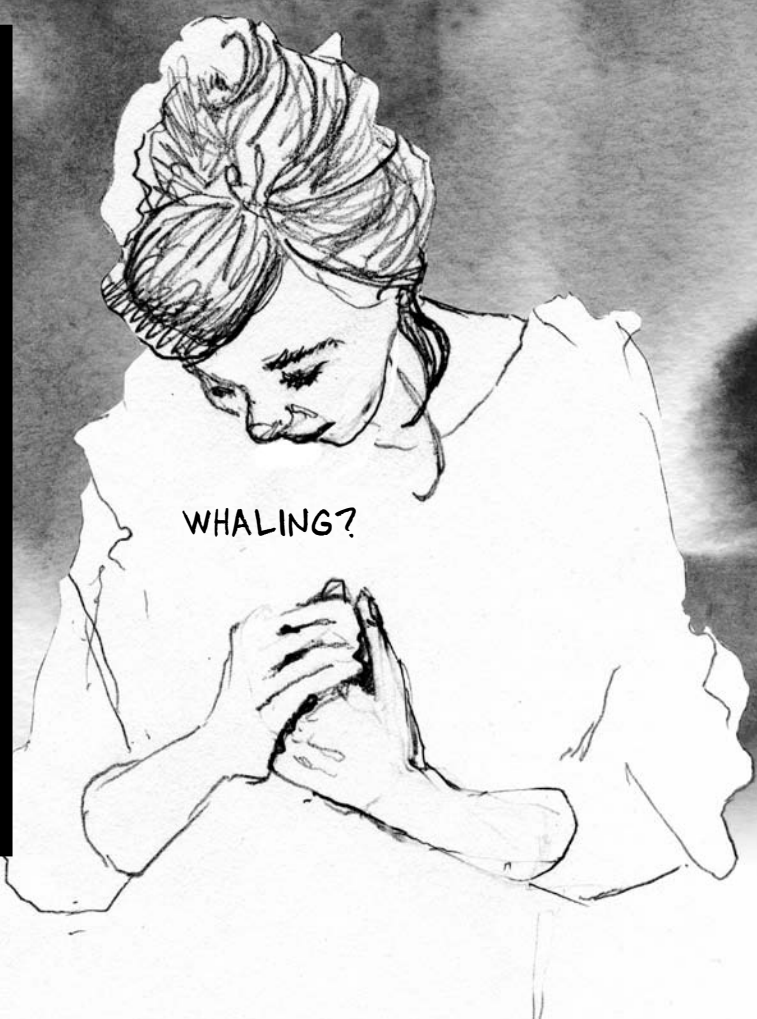




HE SEEMED TO THINK I WAS A WHALER, AT HEART  
AND THAT I HAD A FUTURE ON HIS SHIP.



WHALING?



FISH EYES.

JUST BUTCHERS  
PAPER NOW.

I ATE THEM ON  
THE WAY HOME.



I KNOW...  
I KNOW.

SO I'VE BEEN  
LYING HERE.

THINKING  
ABOUT IT.



LYING?



THINKING.



WHAT'S THAT?



FISH EYES.

JUST BUTCHERS  
PAPER NOW.

I ATE THEM ON  
THE WAY HOME.



WHALING?



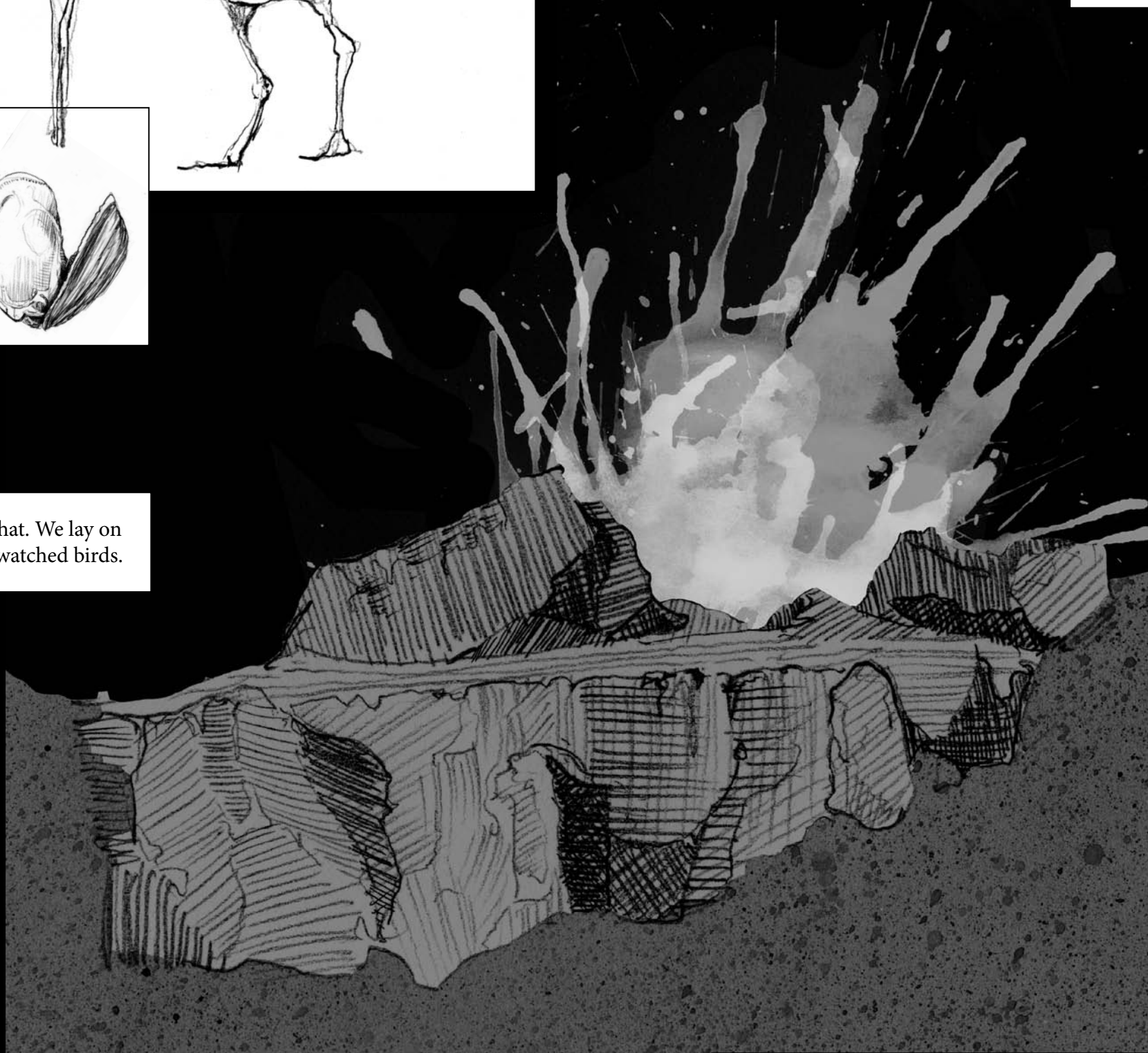
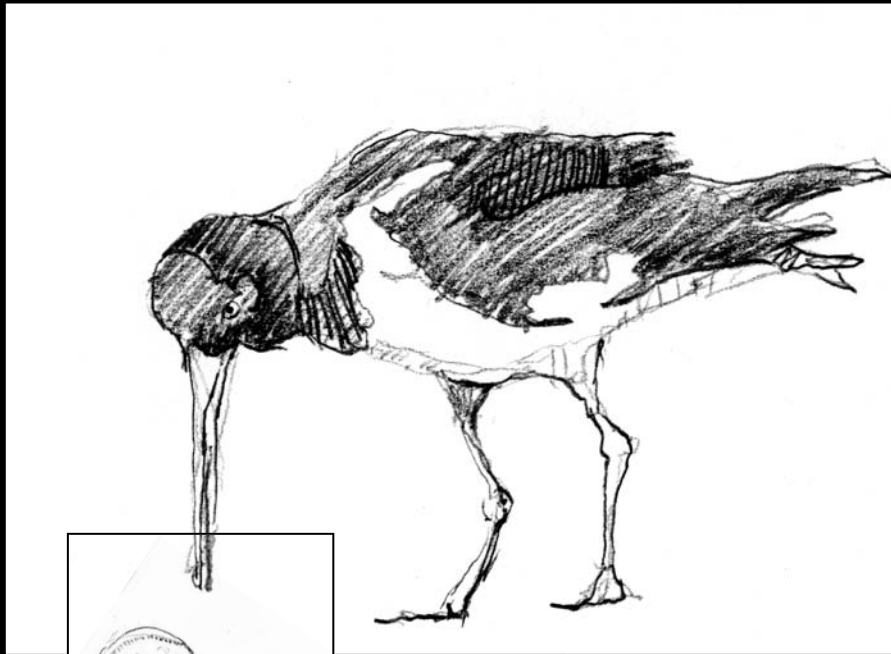
I KNOW.



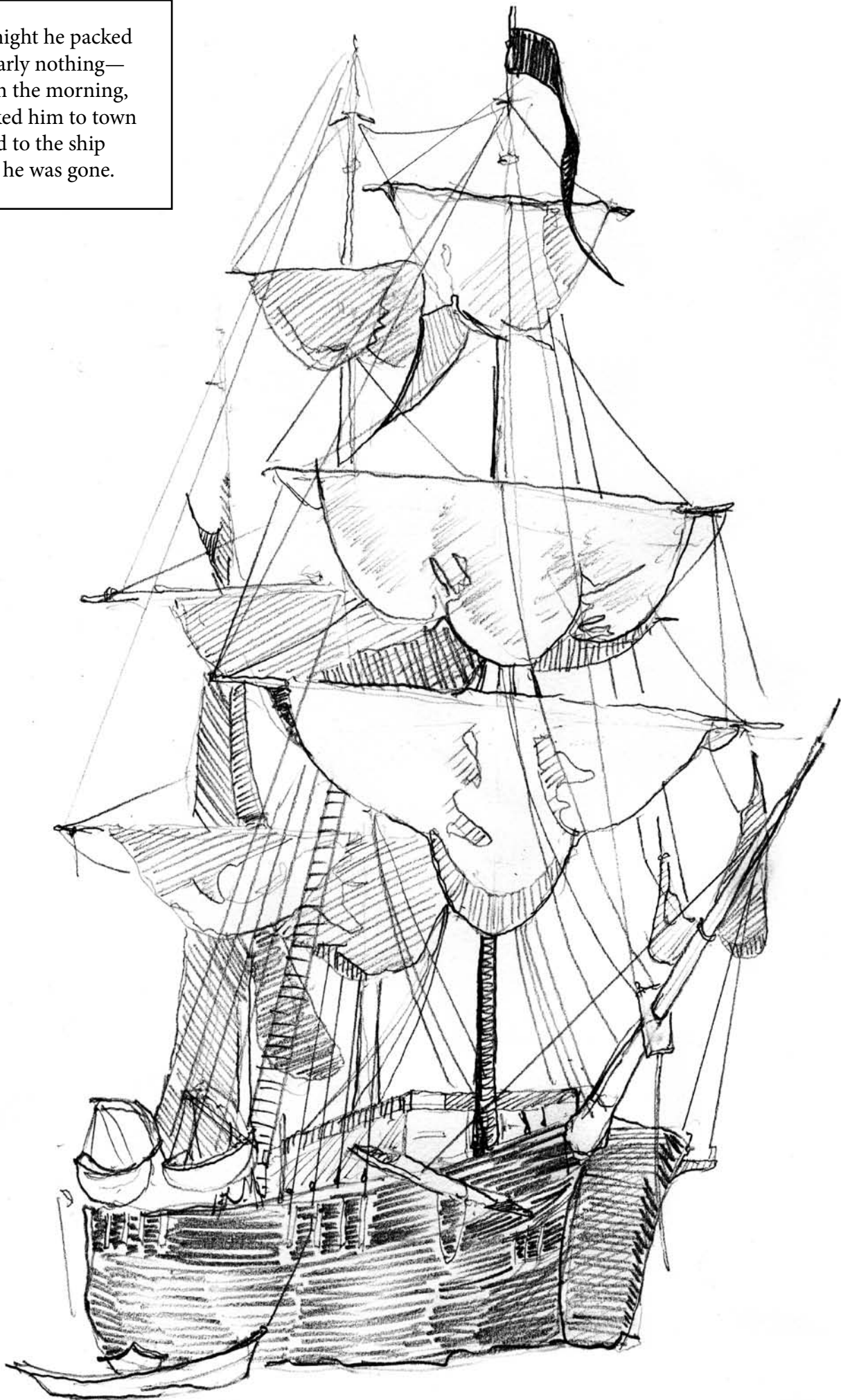




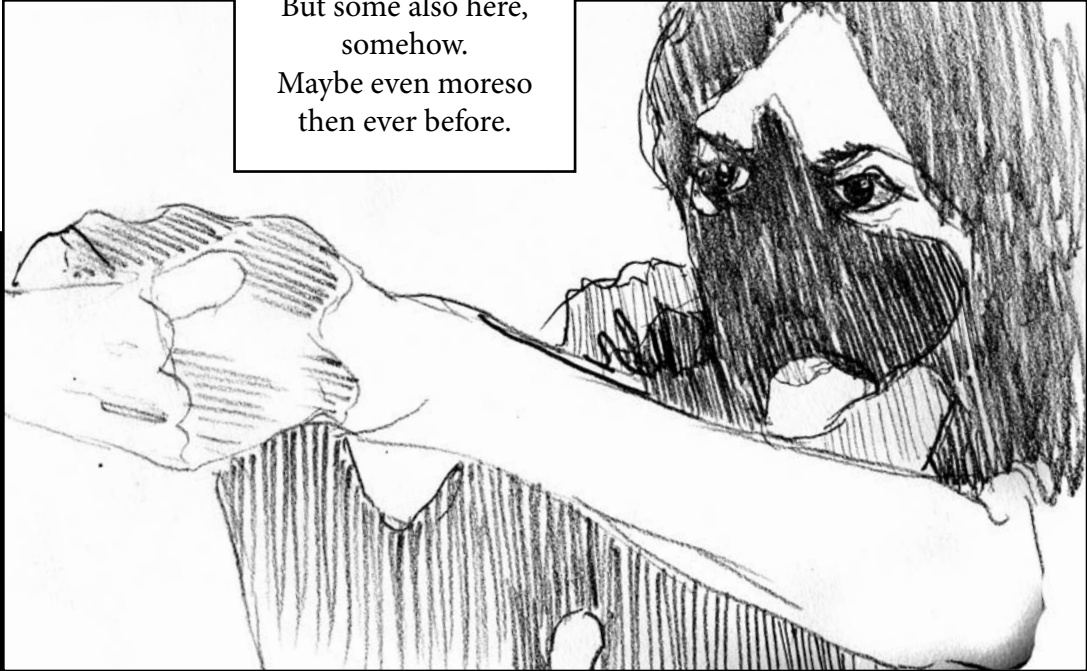
And that was that. We lay on the beach and watched birds.



That night he packed  
—nearly nothing—  
and in the morning,  
I walked him to town  
and to the ship  
and he was gone.



What else  
could we do?



But some also here,  
somehow.  
Maybe even moreso  
then ever before.



# Whaling

It was peaceful in the morning.

When the sun broke through the clouds it was brilliant and yellow like a warm sheet over our eyes and faces.

But at first...

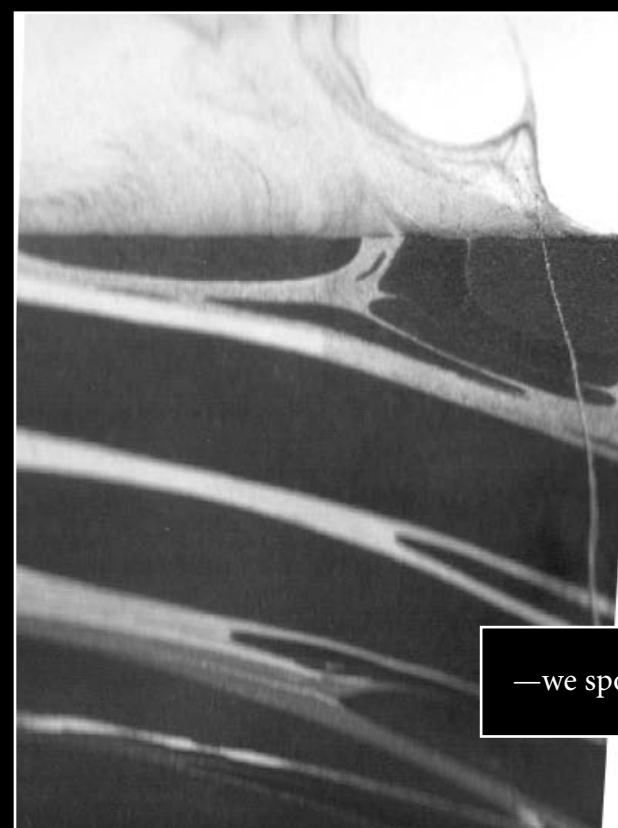
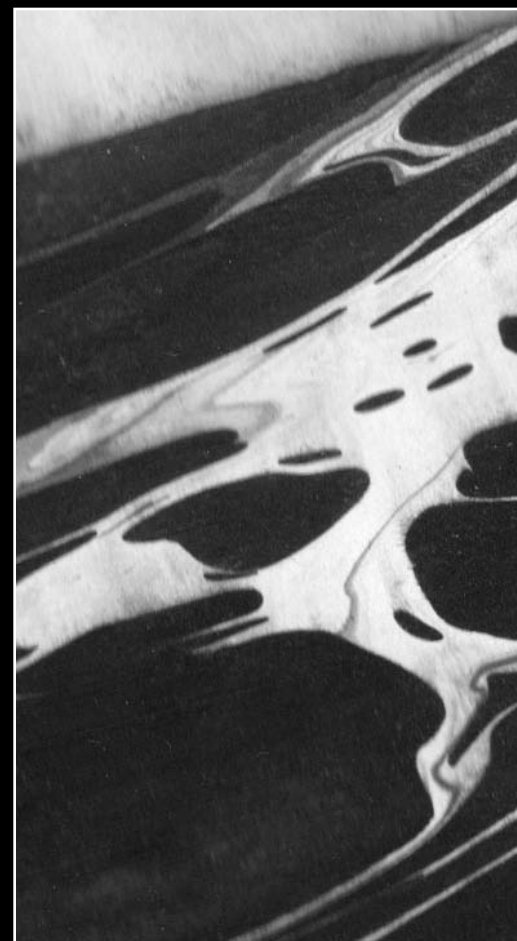
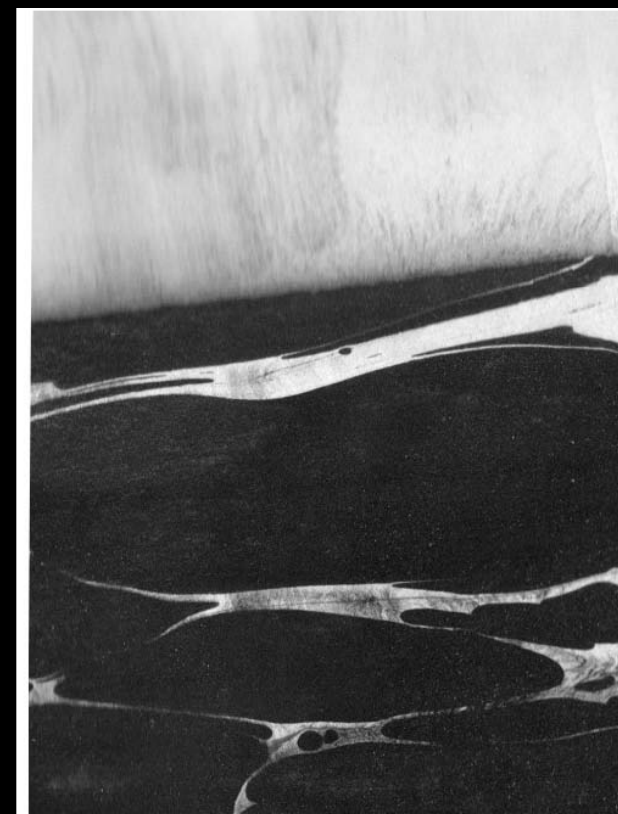
...at first I was nauseous and my head throbbed. I was able to push through and maintain a slight thread of composure. My stomach turned fast and fuller as the hours passed. Then I was vomiting. At first even that was subtle and controlled, standing at the back of the ship with my head hung over the side. Then I lost all control. The sickness turned on me and I was vomiting constantly and gagging—all over myself and anything near.

My stomach was empty but I continued to retch. My mouth, eyes and nose were constantly filled with sweat and oil. I had no dignity and no pride. I was too exhausted to pretend. I had feverish fits wherein I convinced myself that I was dying, or dead and in hell. My clothes were ruined, soiled with vomit and filth. I tried to wash them in salt water, but they smelled terrible.

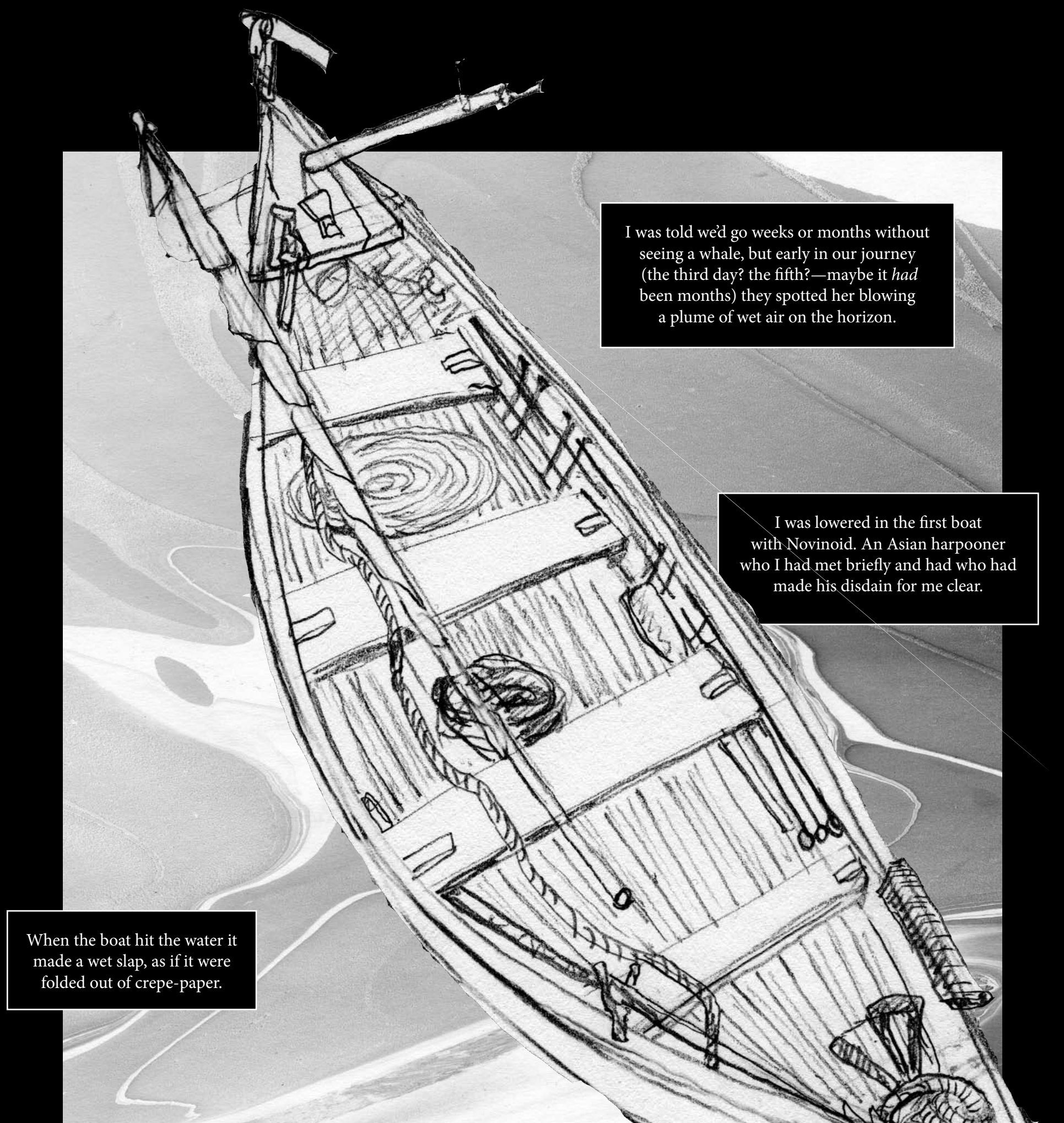
It was an immediate and total immersion in the crew. In a few short days they had seen me at my worst. The deep dark caverns of total despair. I could tell from one look they didn't care. I was a tool to them. I was either working or I wasn't.

And as if by some cruel joke, on one of our first days—

—we spotted a whale.



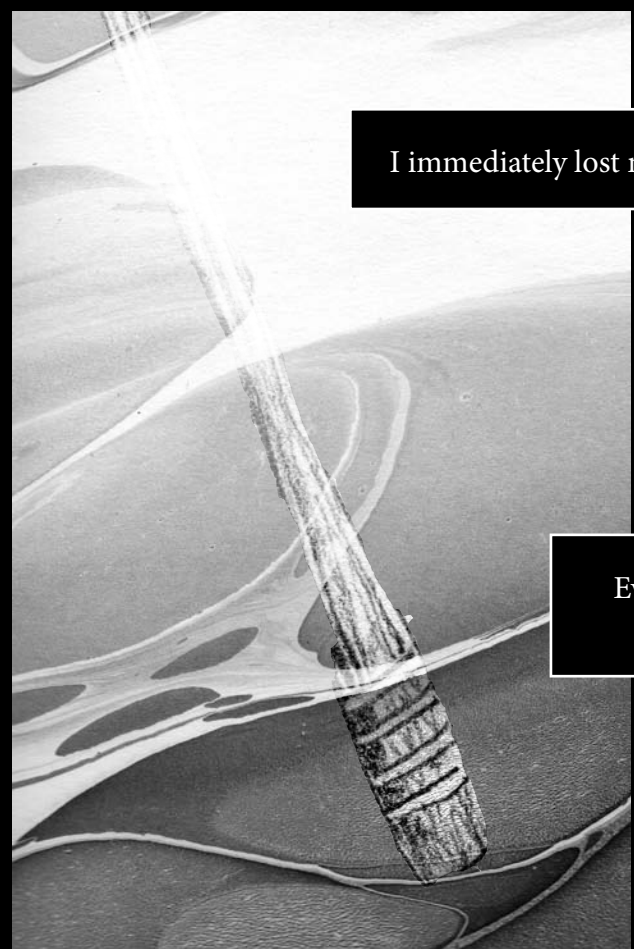




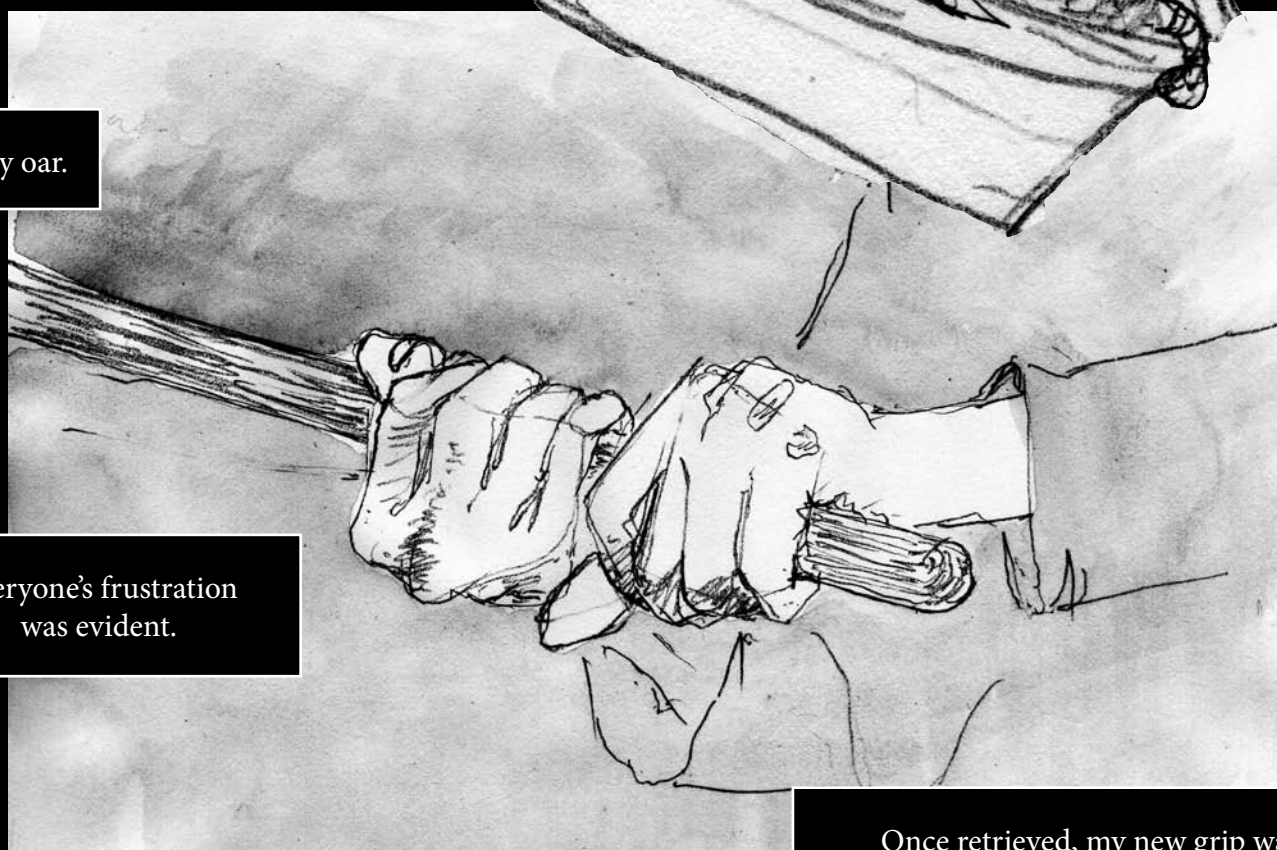
I was told we'd go weeks or months without seeing a whale, but early in our journey (the third day? the fifth?—maybe it *had* been months) they spotted her blowing a plume of wet air on the horizon.

I was lowered in the first boat with Novinoid. An Asian harpooner who I had met briefly and had who had made his disdain for me clear.

When the boat hit the water it made a wet slap, as if it were folded out of crepe-paper.



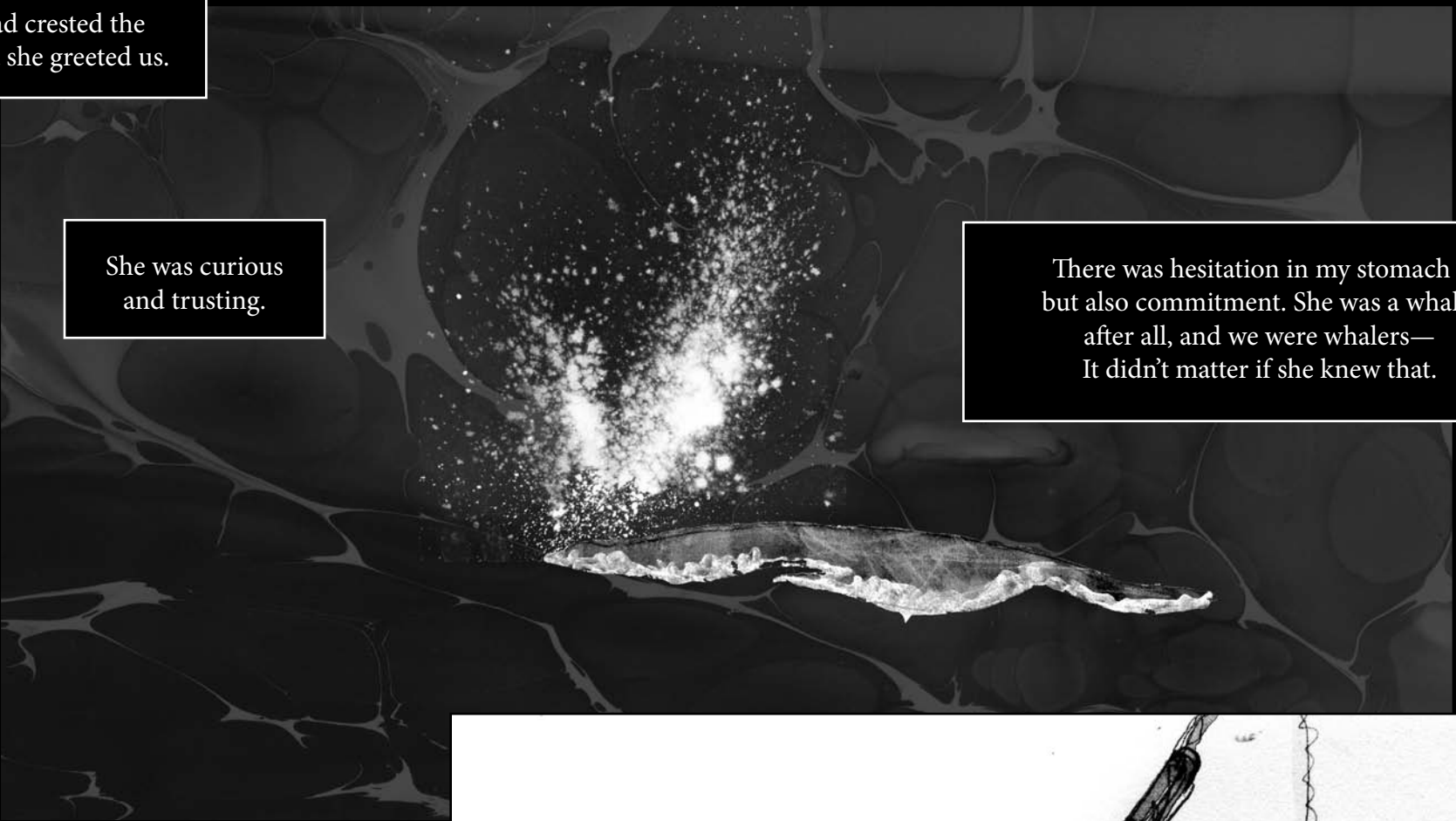
I immediately lost my oar.



Everyone's frustration was evident.

Once retrieved, my new grip was nearly tight enough to split the wood and I'd never drop it again.

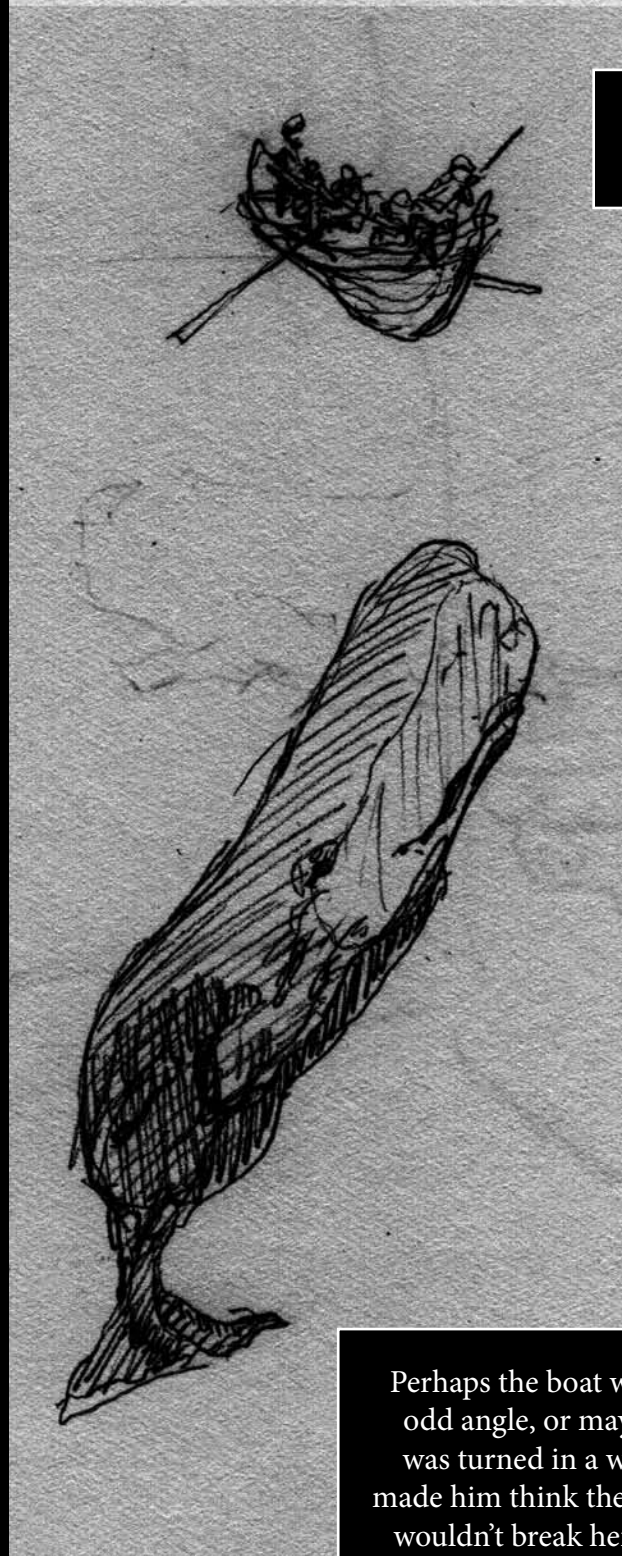
Her head crested the water and she greeted us.



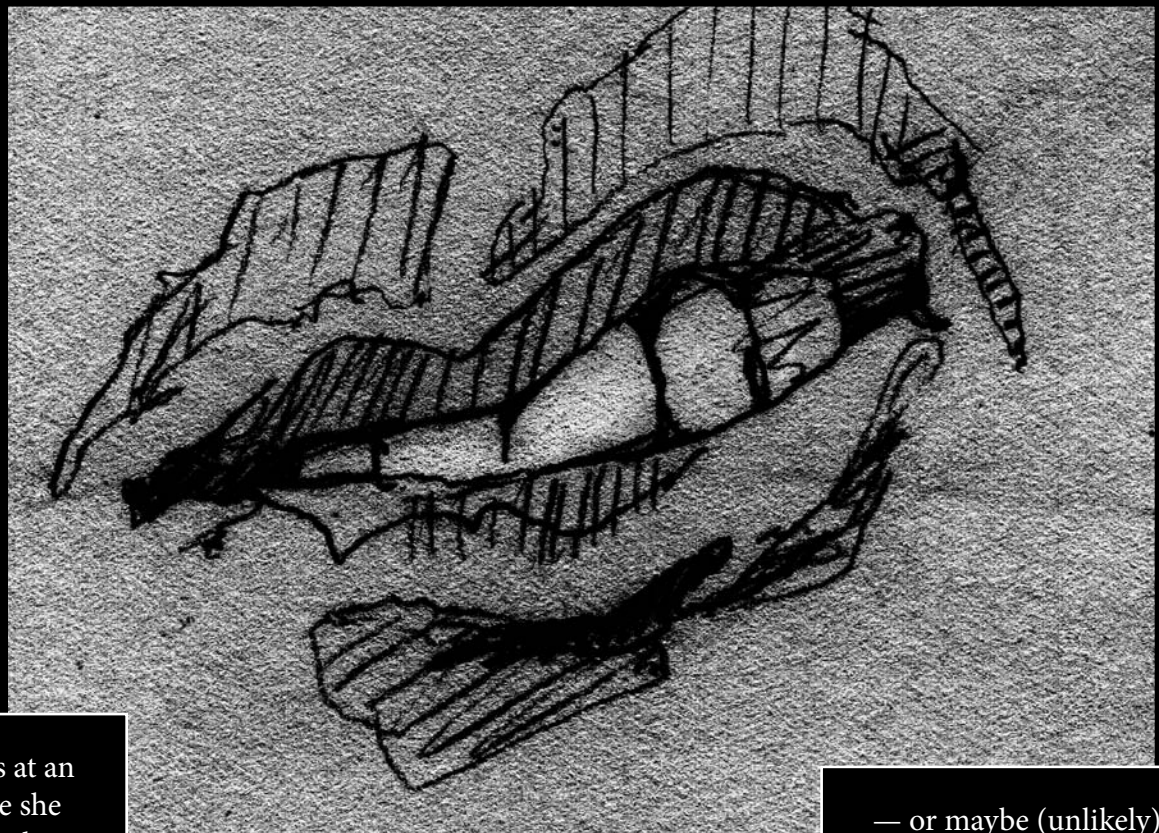
She was curious and trusting.

There was hesitation in my stomach - but also commitment. She was a whale, after all, and we were whalers—It didn't matter if she knew that.

Novinoid raised his harpoon above his head, but stopped at the full extension of his arms.



He waited, and then buckled his elbows.



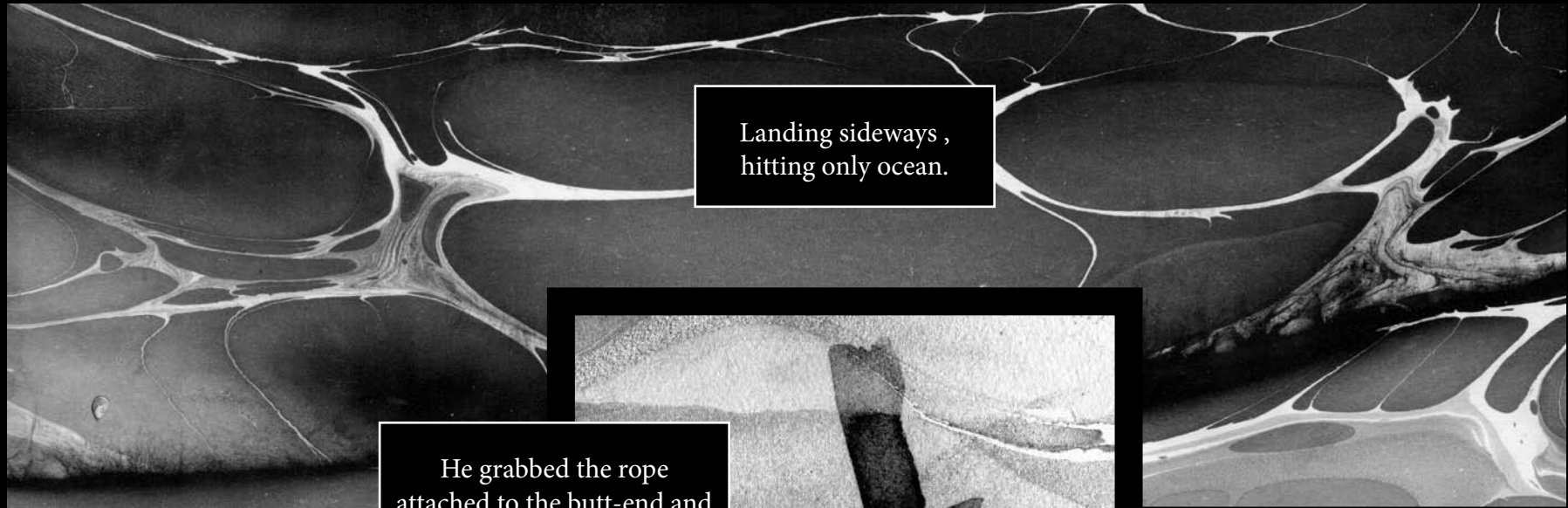
Perhaps the boat was at an odd angle, or maybe she was turned in a way that made him think the harpoon wouldn't break her skin—

— or maybe (unlikely) he was hesitating out of sadness.

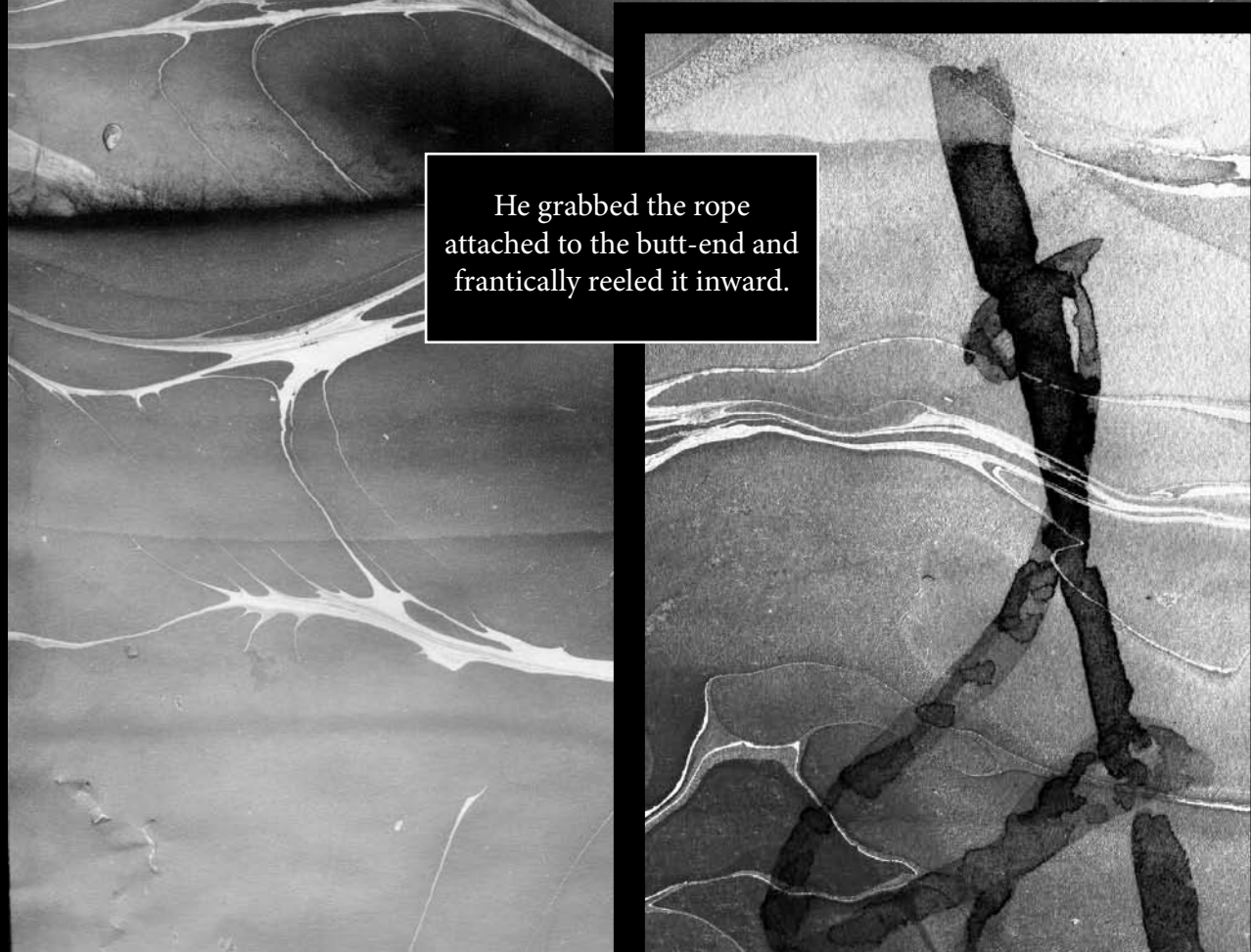




He chuckled the harpoon  
and it crashed into the water—



Landing sideways ,  
hitting only ocean.



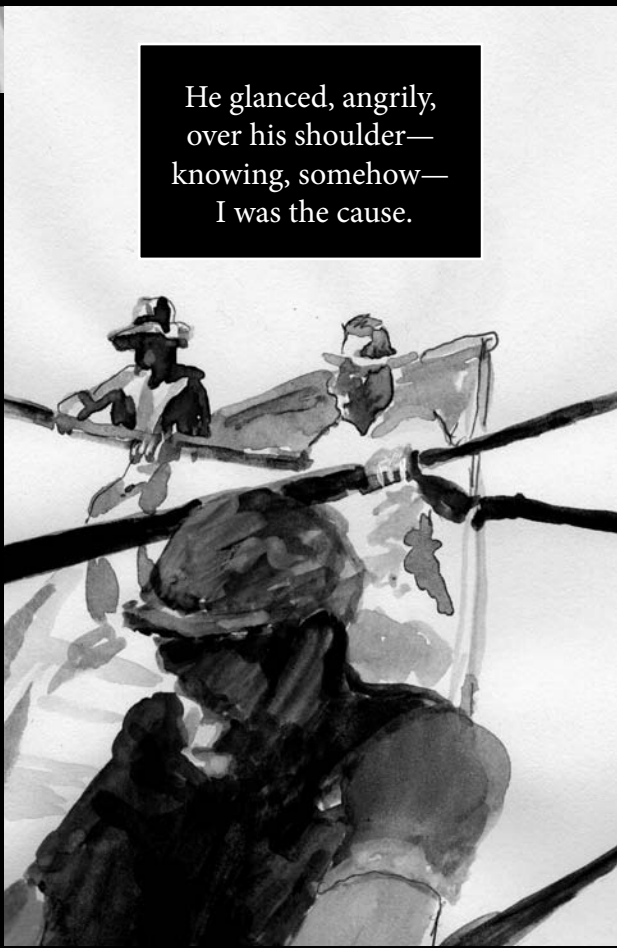
He grabbed the rope  
attached to the butt-end and  
frantically reeled it inward.



and again—nothing.



He heaved again.



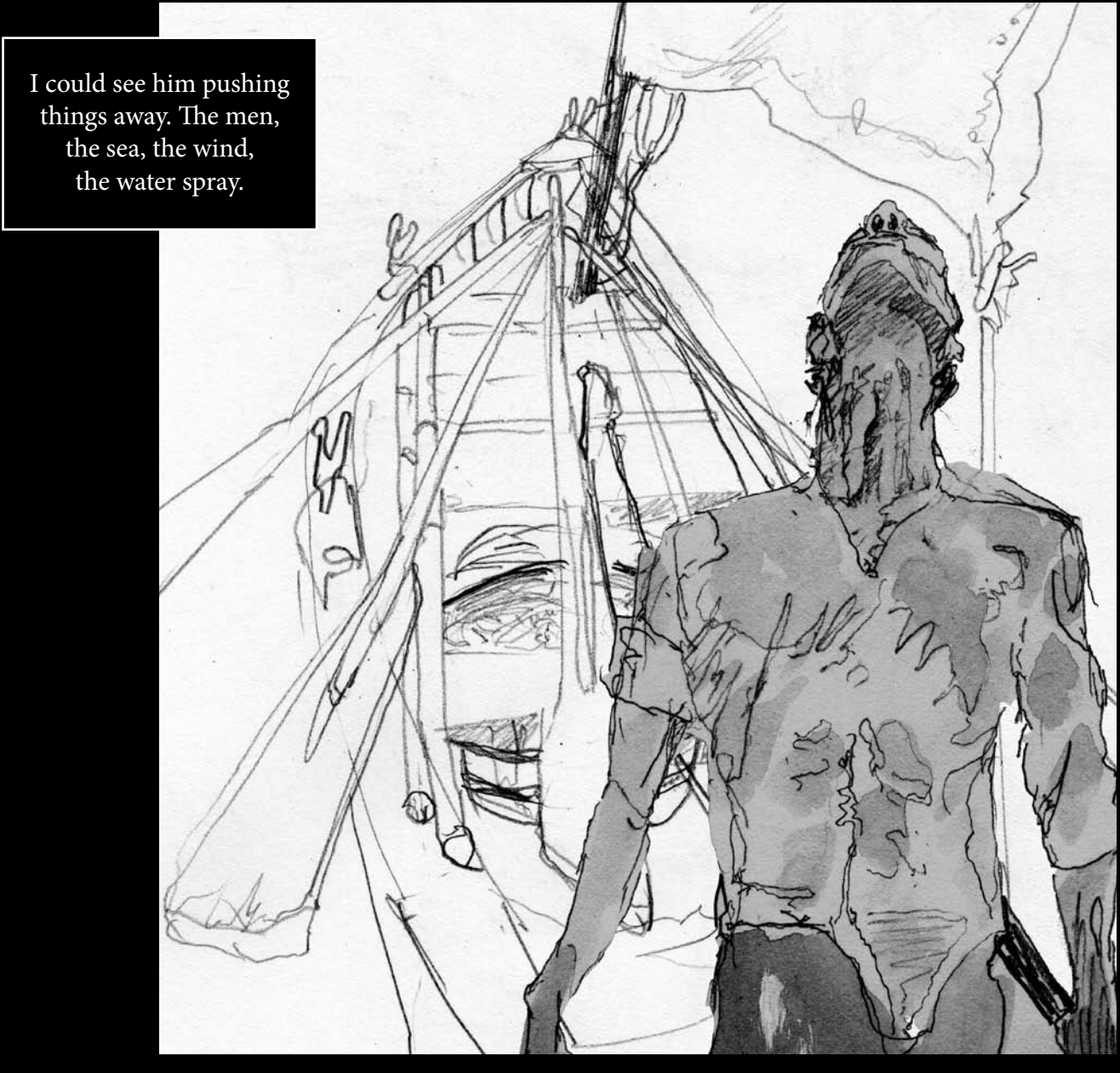
He glanced, angrily,  
over his shoulder—  
knowing, somehow—  
I was the cause.



I swear I could hear  
his teeth clench as a  
guttural growl began  
in his chest.

Or possibly lower. His  
stomach, or his bowels.

Anger was growing up inside  
of him like a bubble of blood.  
Or maybe it wasn't anger,  
but something else.



I could see him pushing  
things away. The men,  
the sea, the wind,  
the water spray.



Whittling his mind  
and focus down to  
the glistening point  
of his harpoon.



When she rose again  
there was no hesitation.



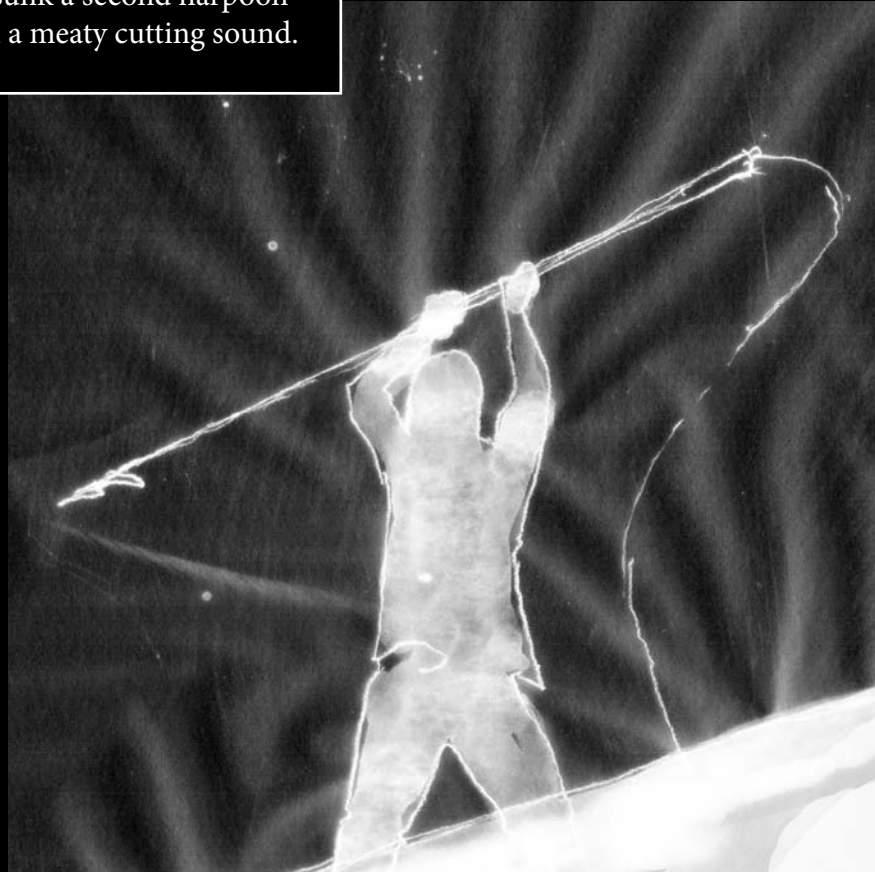
He let out a savage cry.



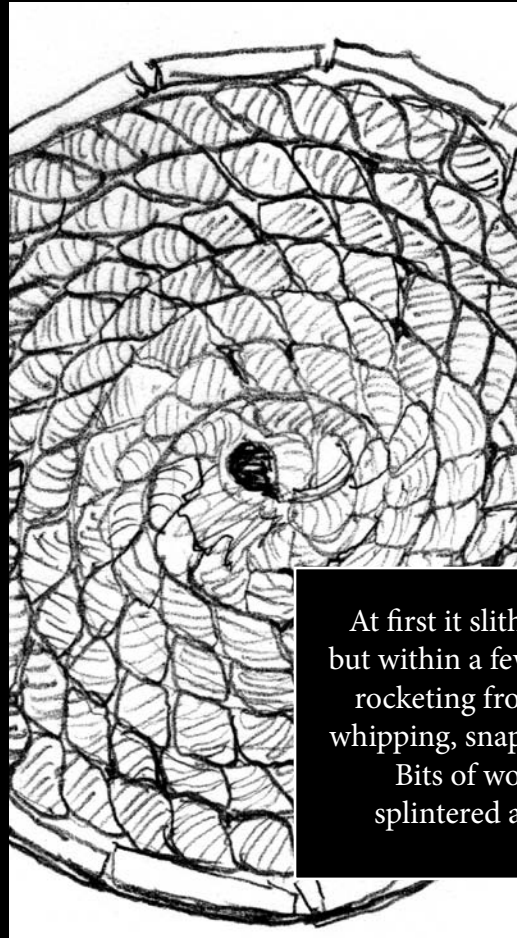
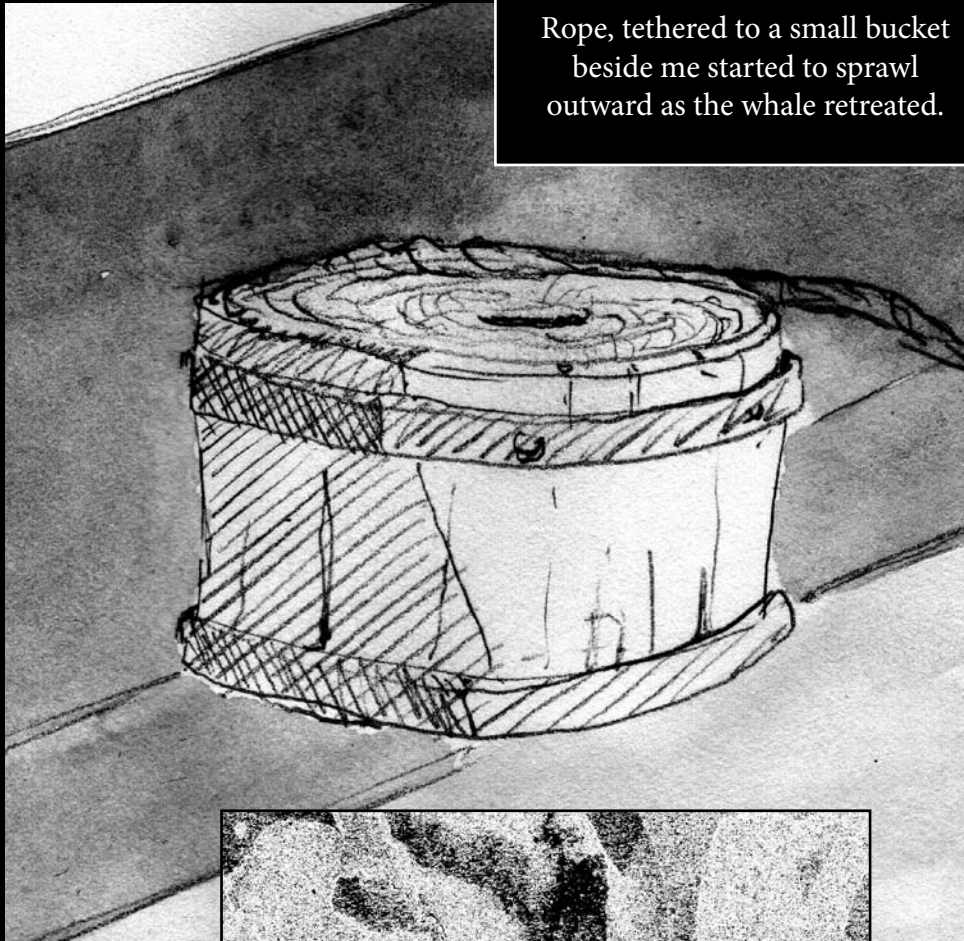
He plunged the  
harpoon into the skin  
just below her head.

The muscles under her  
skin clenched tightly and  
started to fold in half.

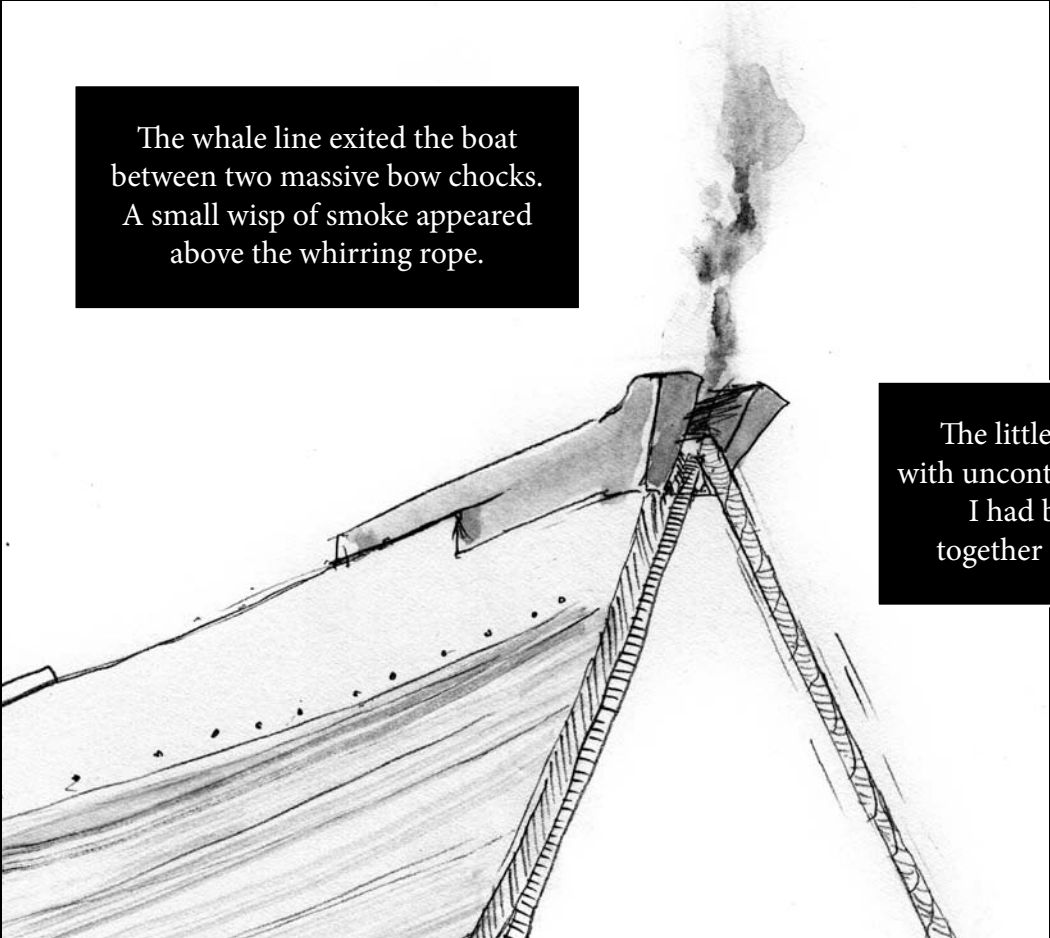
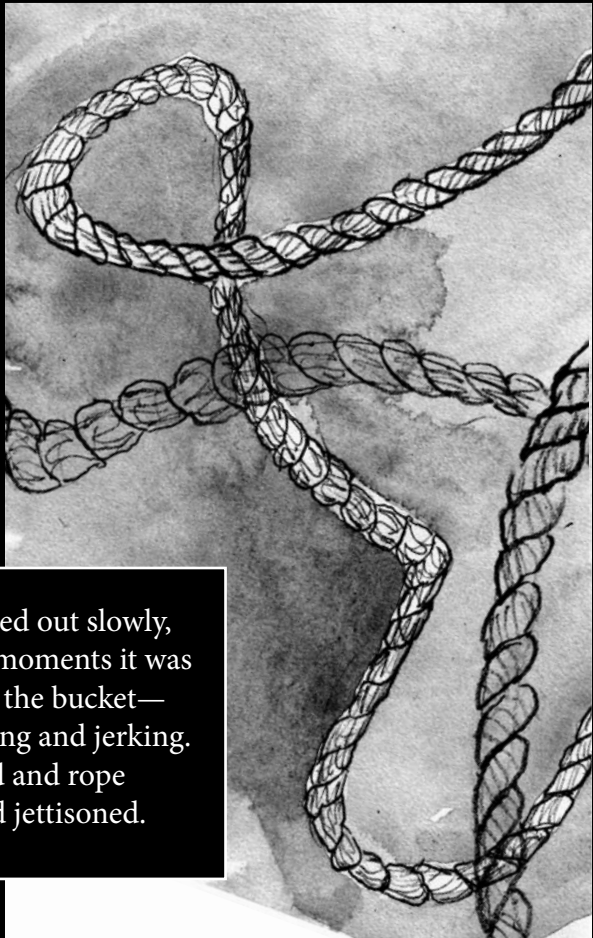
Before she could flinch  
he sunk a second harpoon  
with a meaty cutting sound.



Rope, tethered to a small bucket  
beside me started to sprawl  
outward as the whale retreated.



At first it slithered out slowly,  
but within a few moments it was  
rocketing from the bucket—  
whipping, snapping and jerking.  
Bits of wood and rope  
splintered and jettisoned.



The whale line exited the boat  
between two massive bow chocks.  
A small wisp of smoke appeared  
above the whirring rope.

The little grey plume filled me  
with uncontainable terror. I realized,  
I had been holding myself  
together pretty well until then.

No longer.



# Visitor

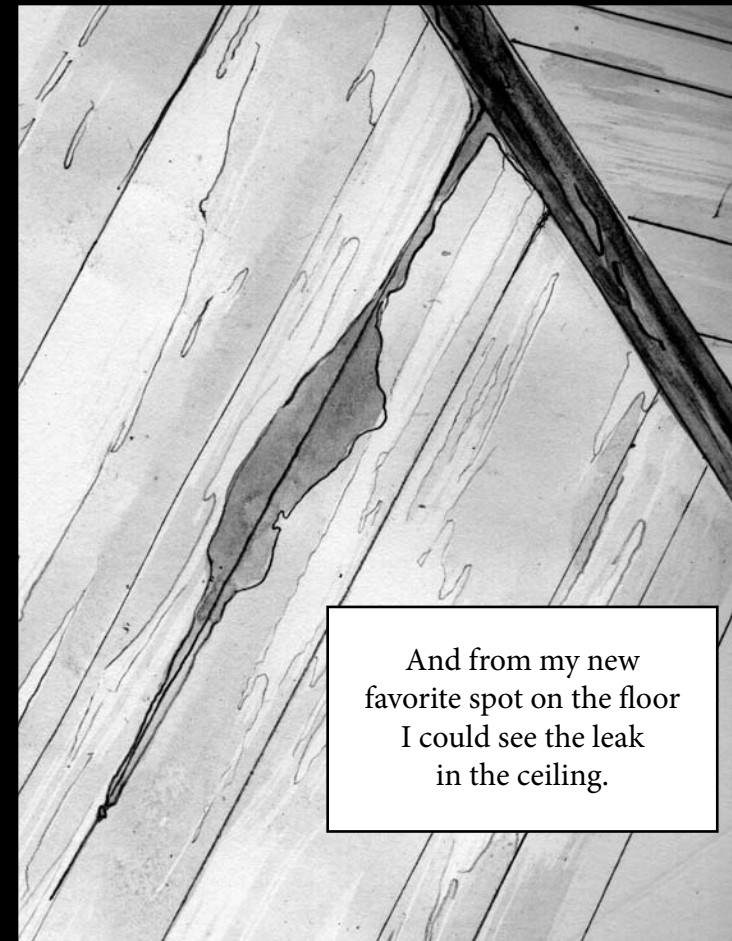


I knew pregnancy  
made you tired

Sure

But not this.

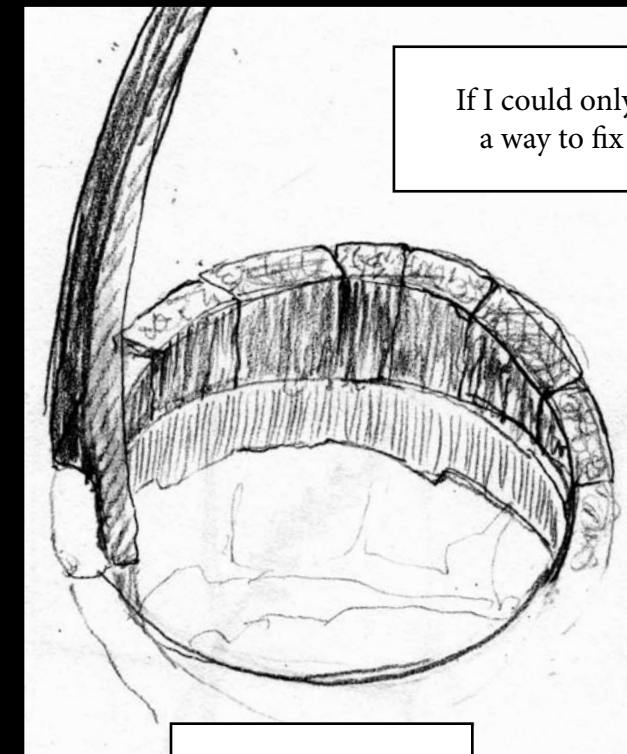
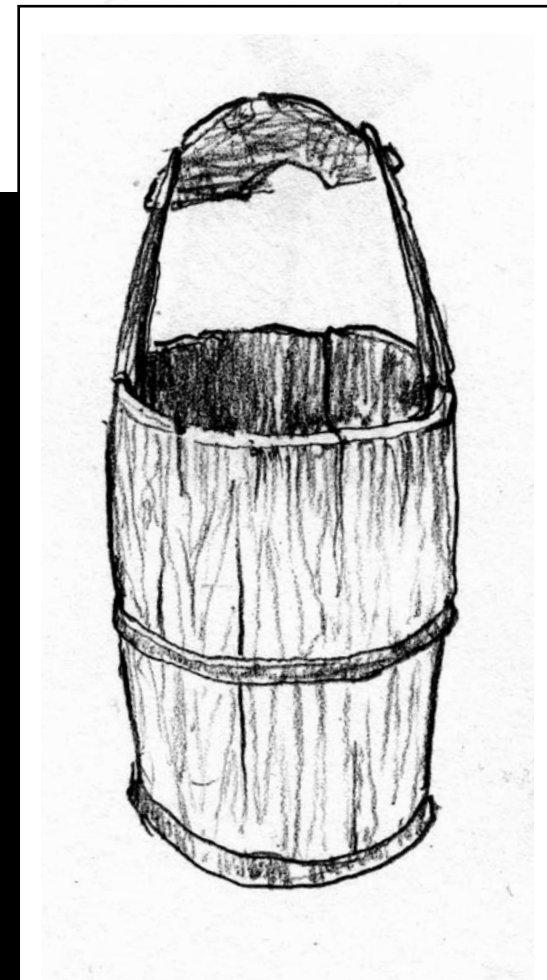
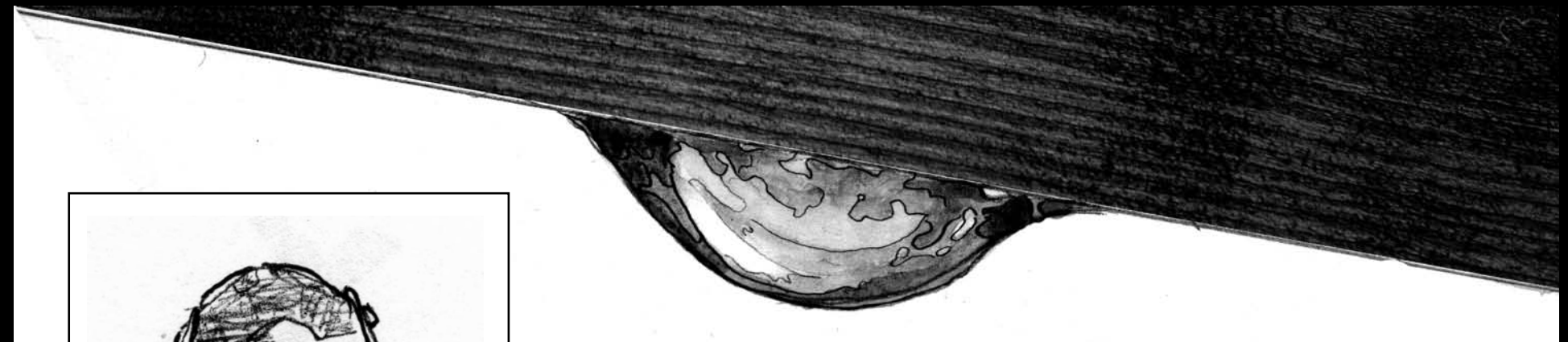
I barely existed.



And from my new  
favorite spot on the floor  
I could see the leak  
in the ceiling.



A leak I'd fixed before.  
Simple really.

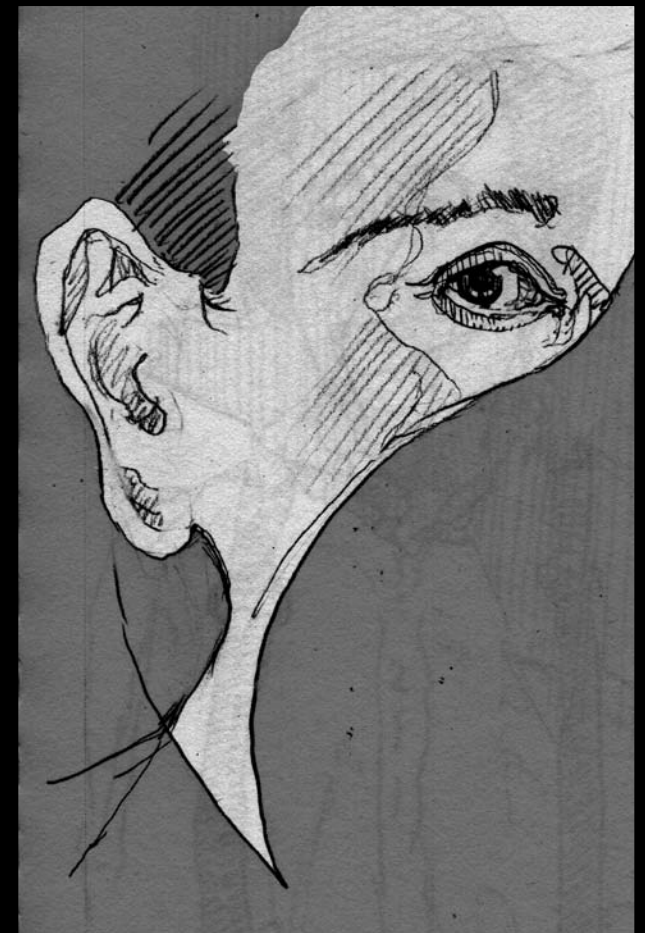
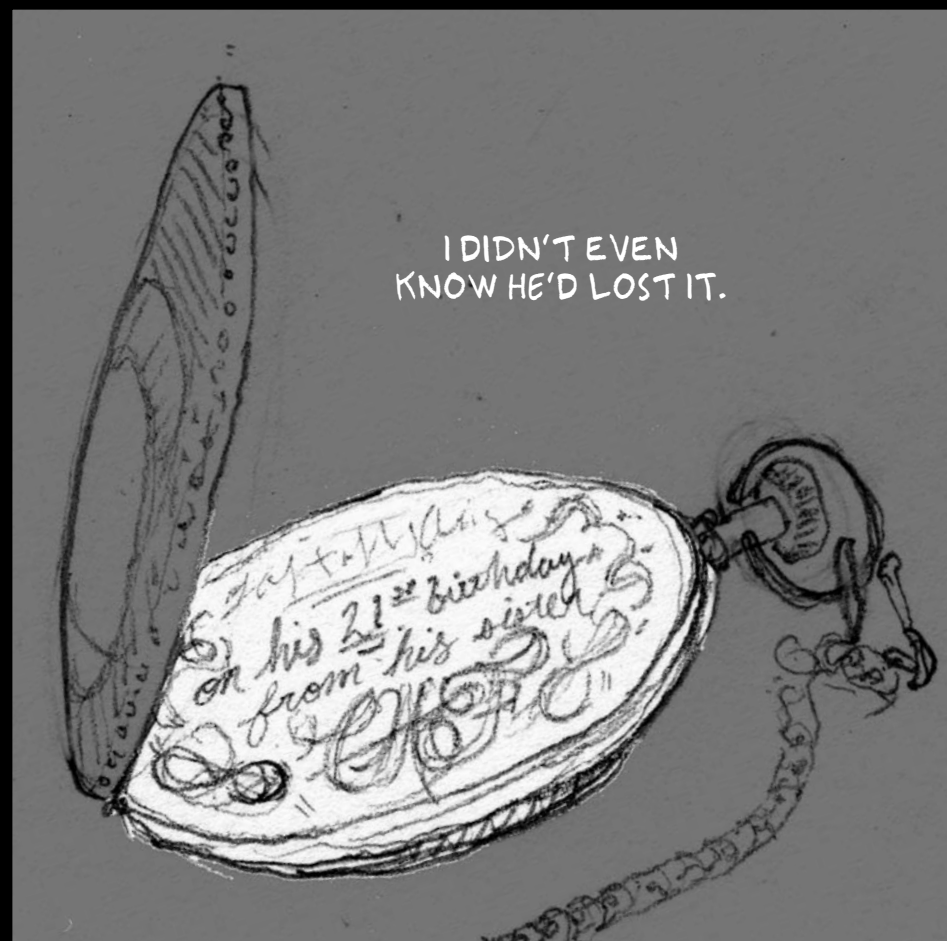
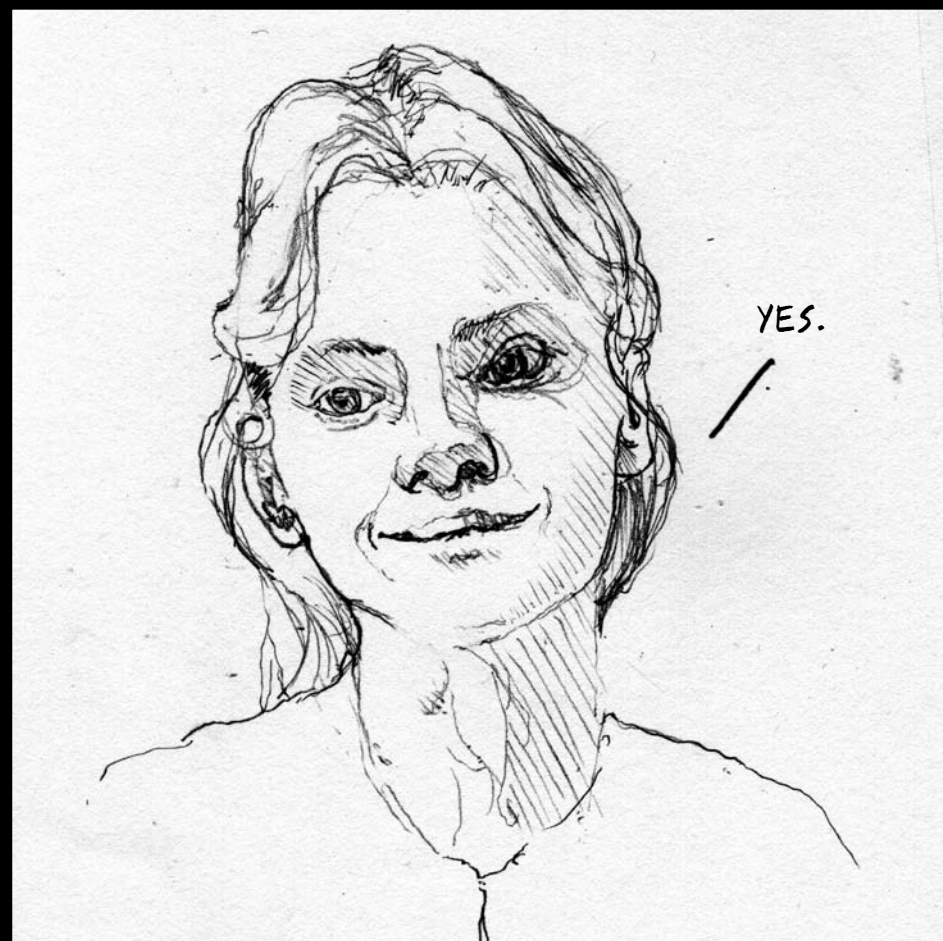
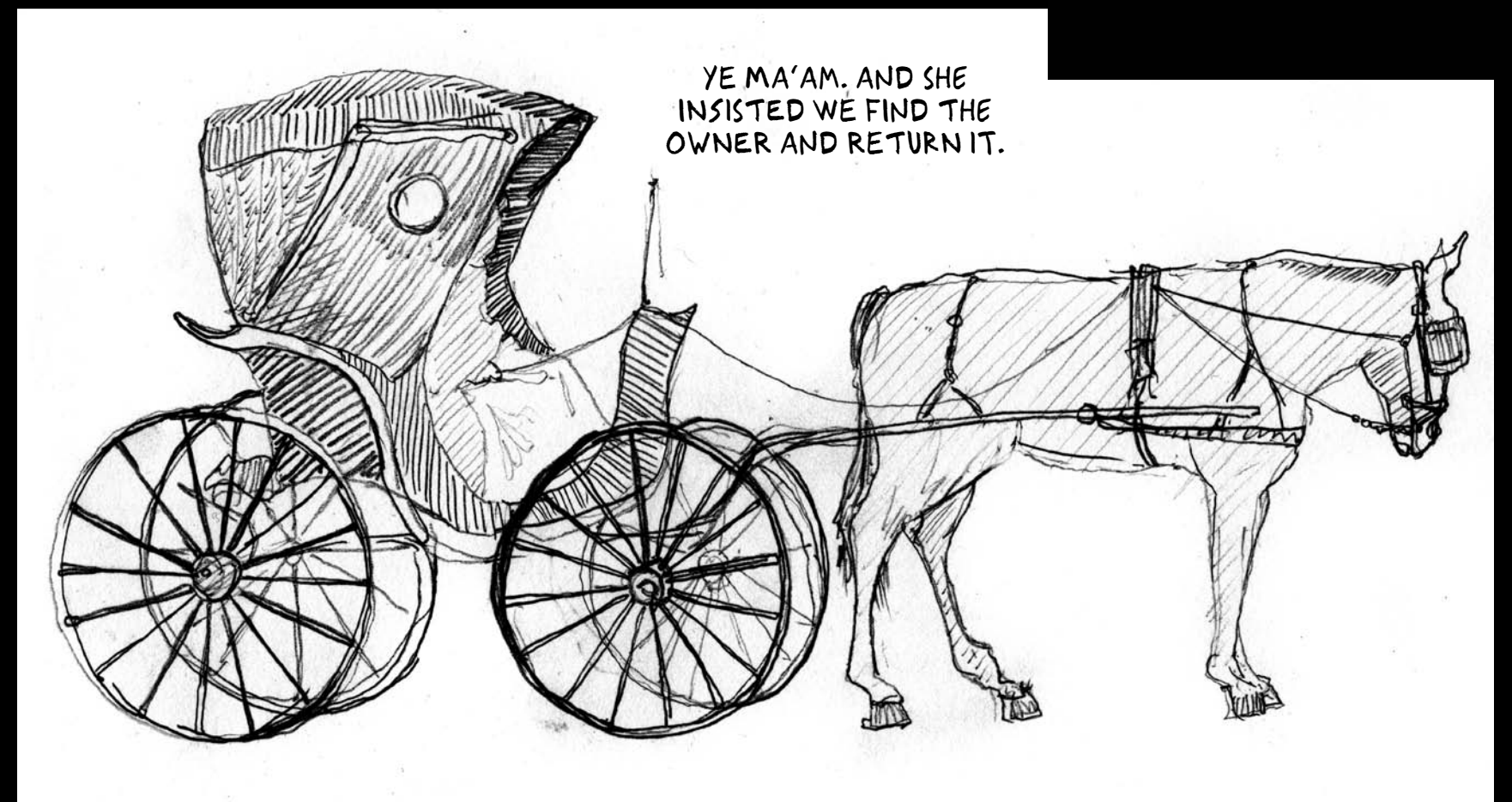
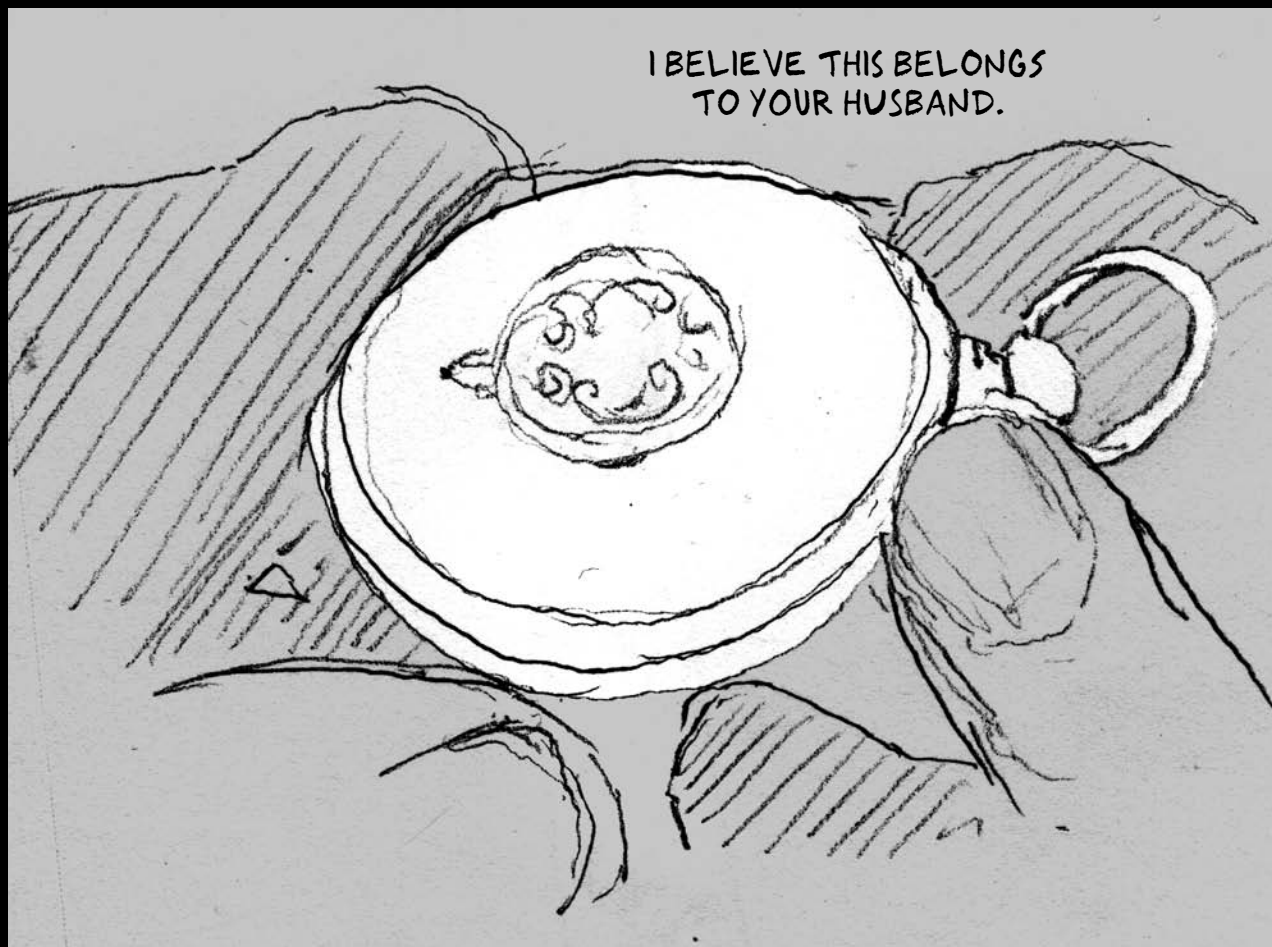
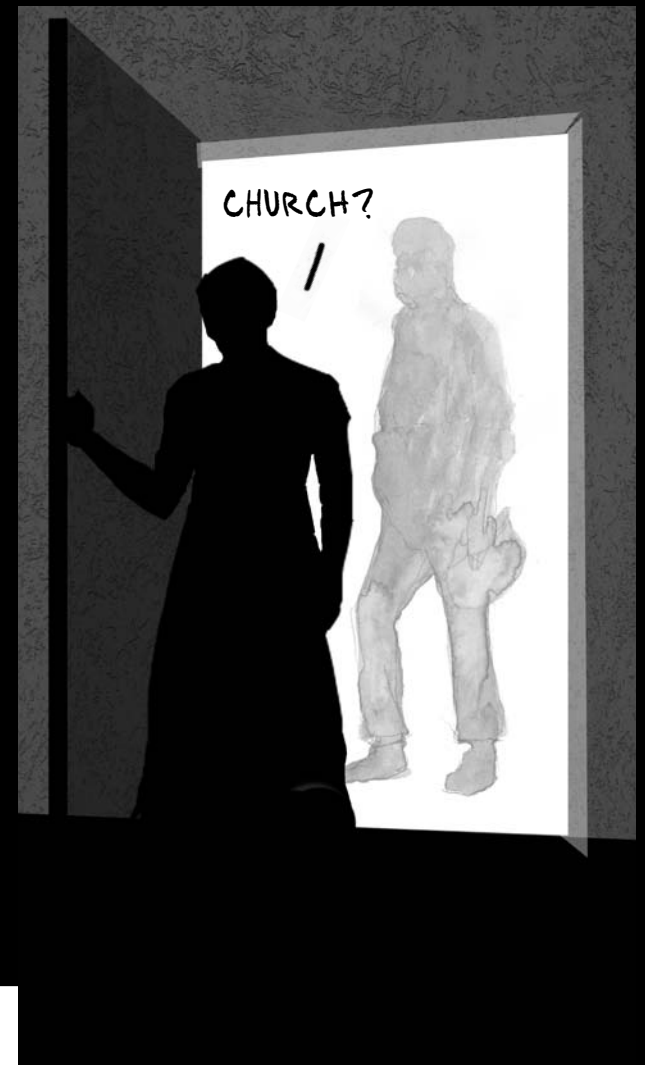
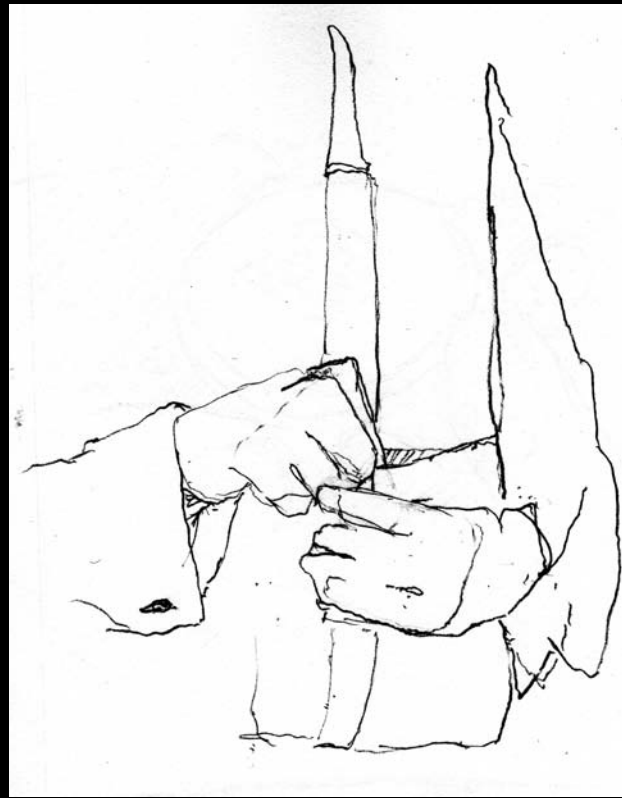


If I could only find  
a way to fix it...

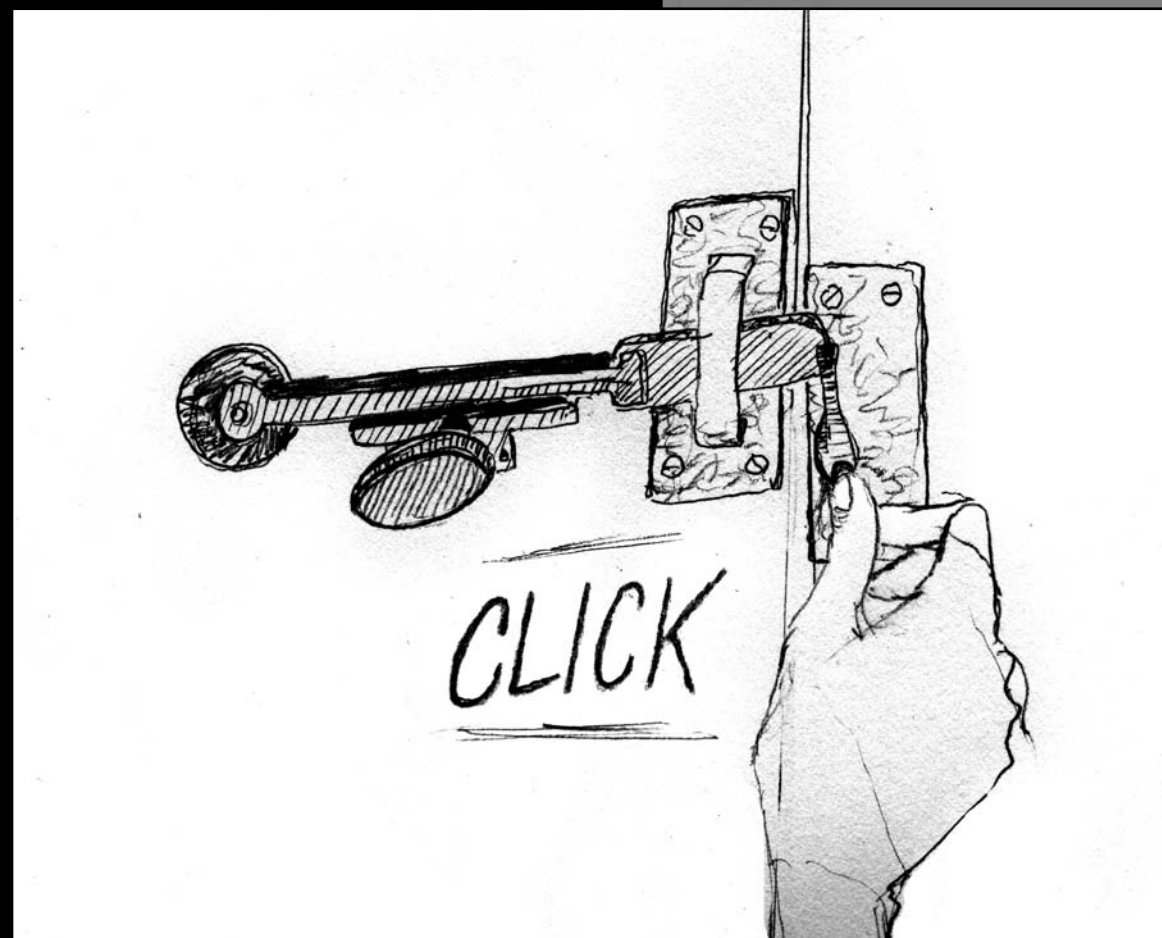
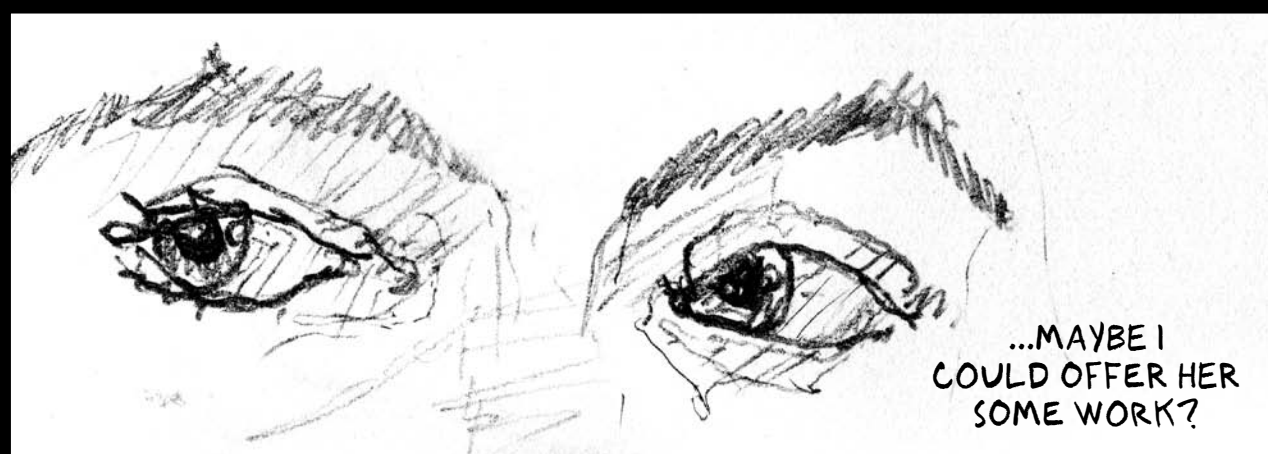
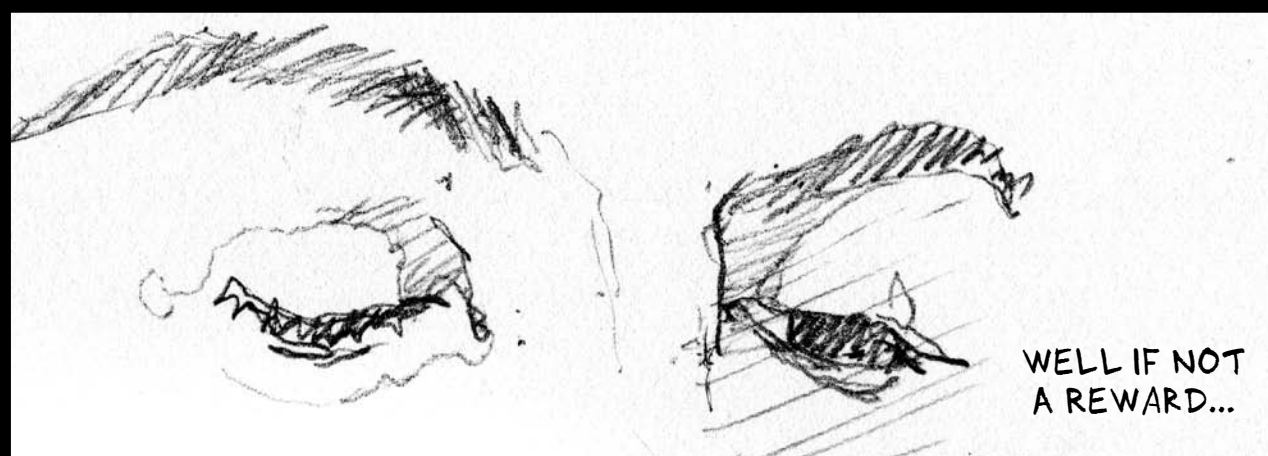
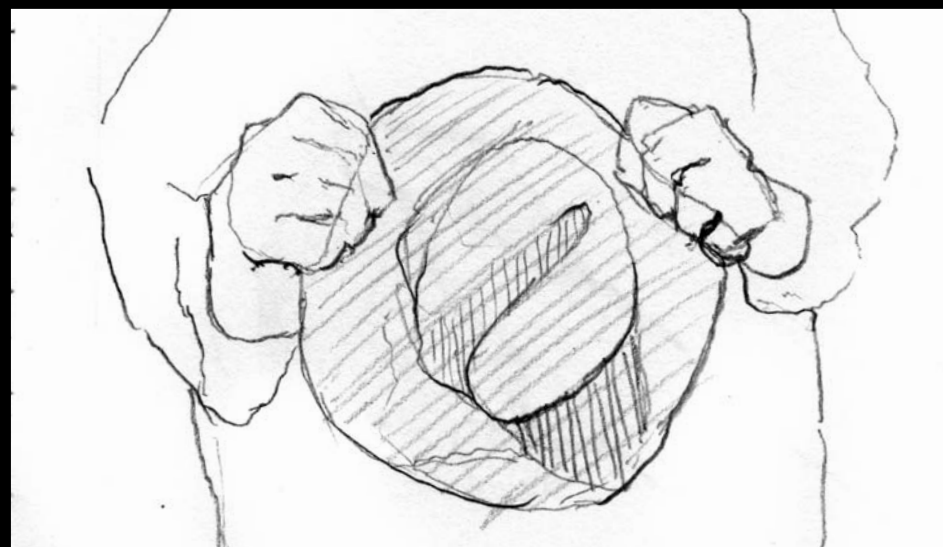
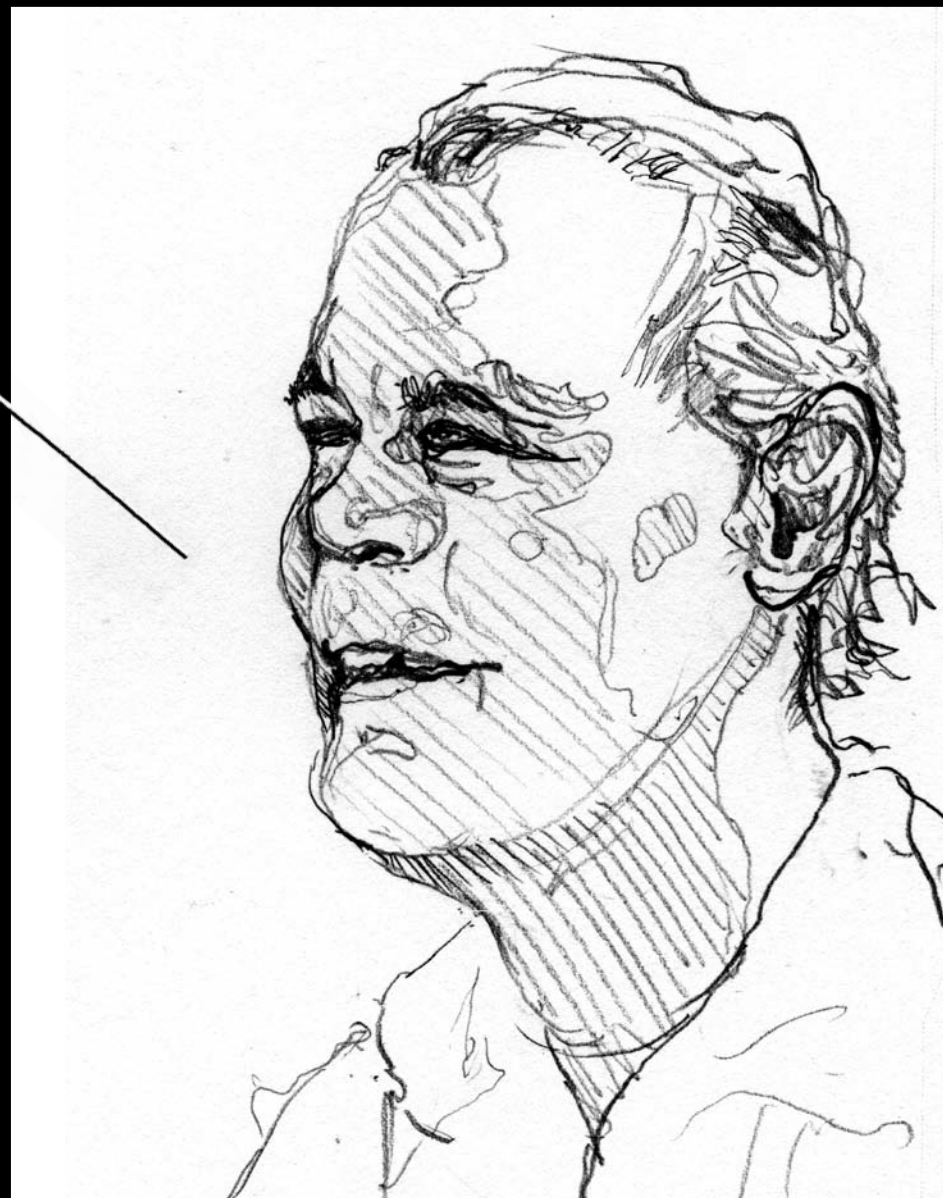
...from the floor.



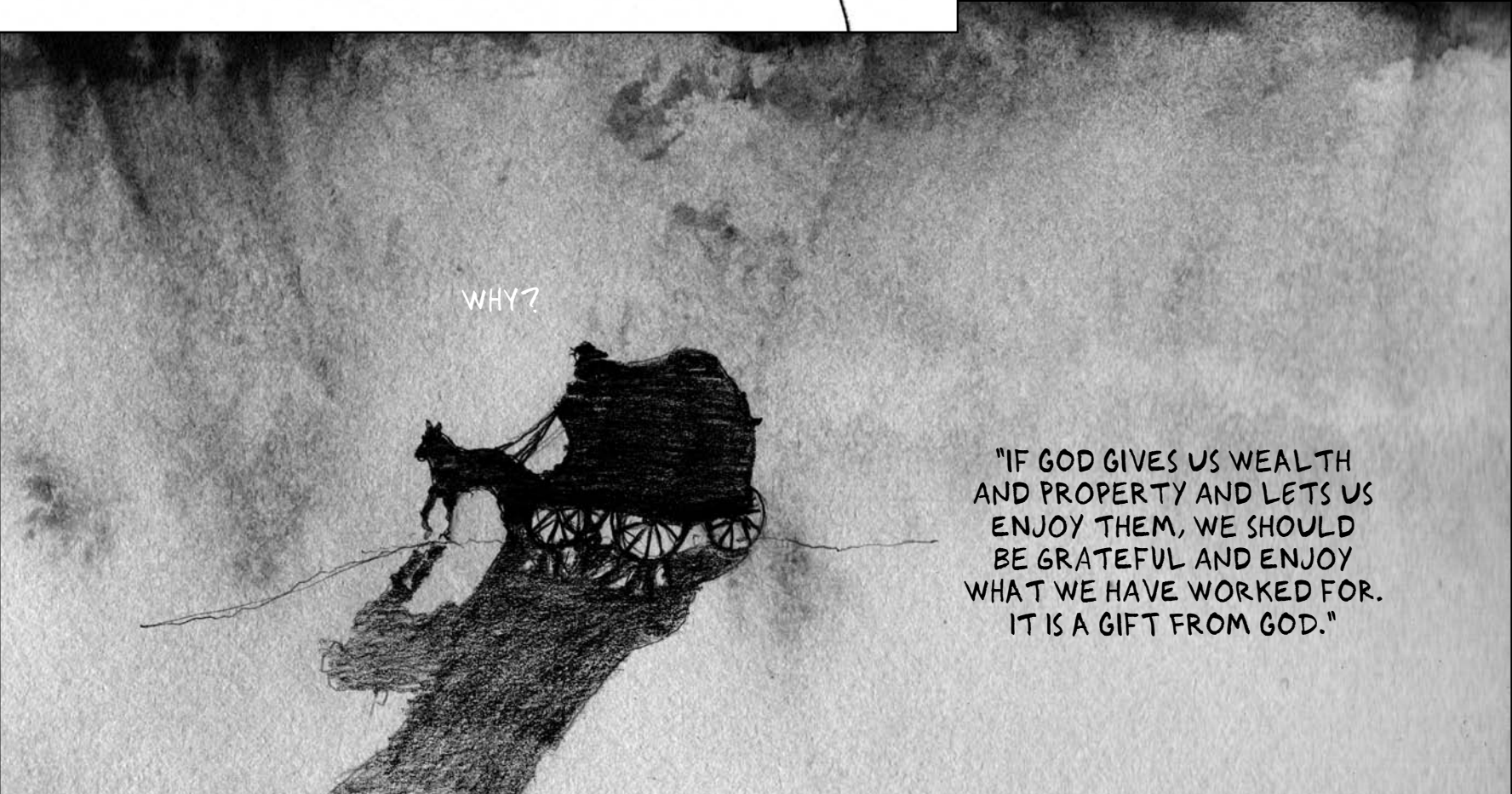
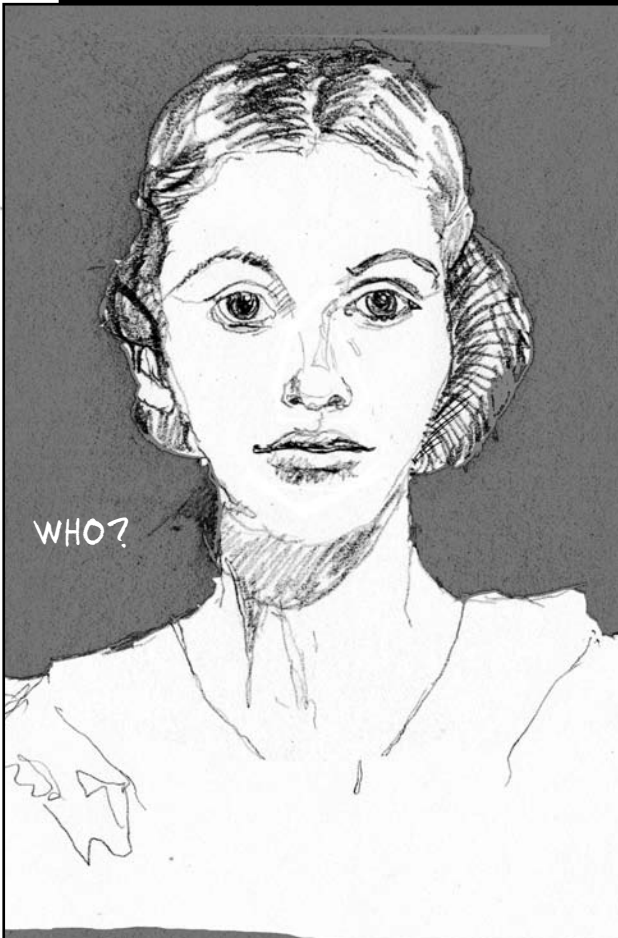
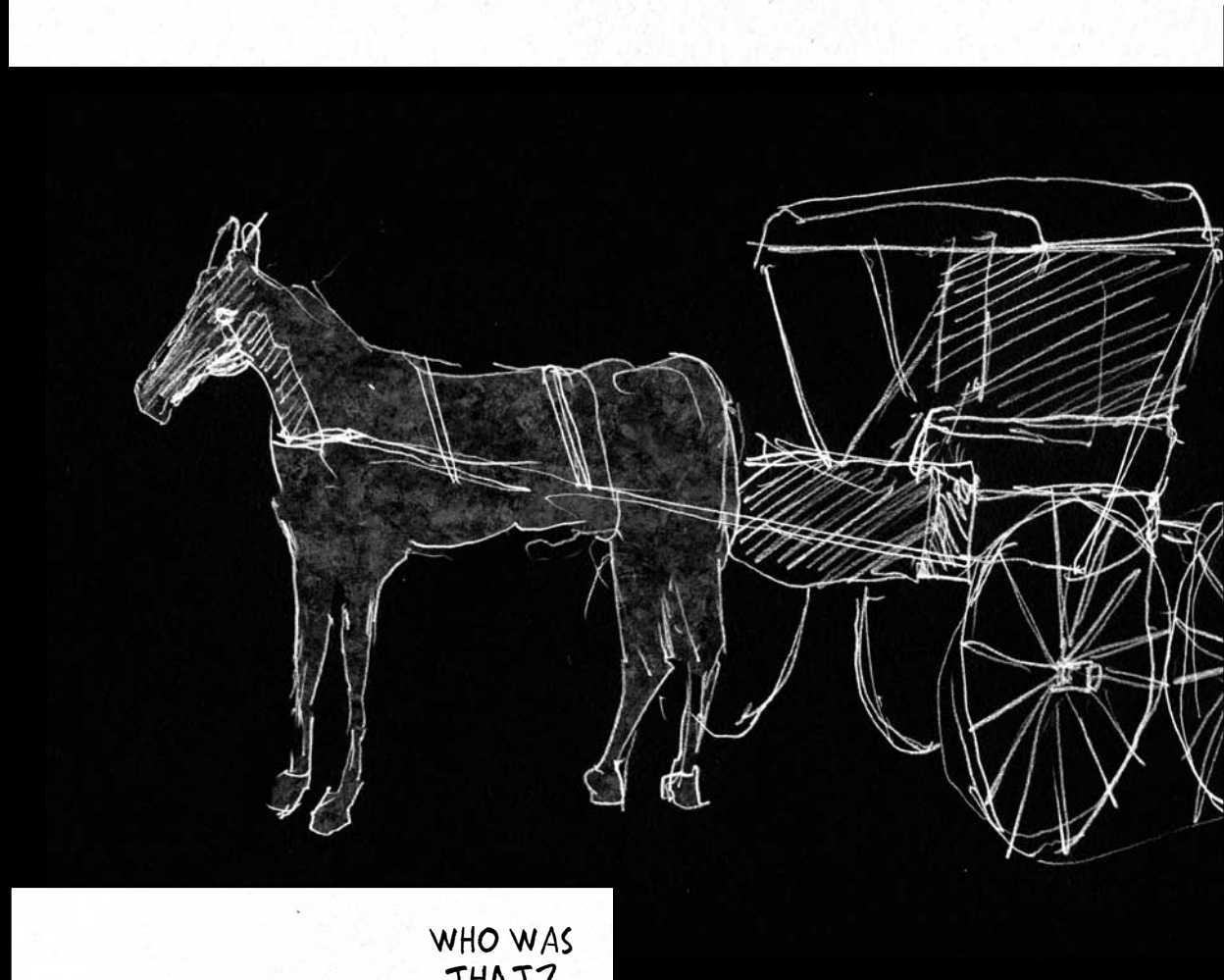
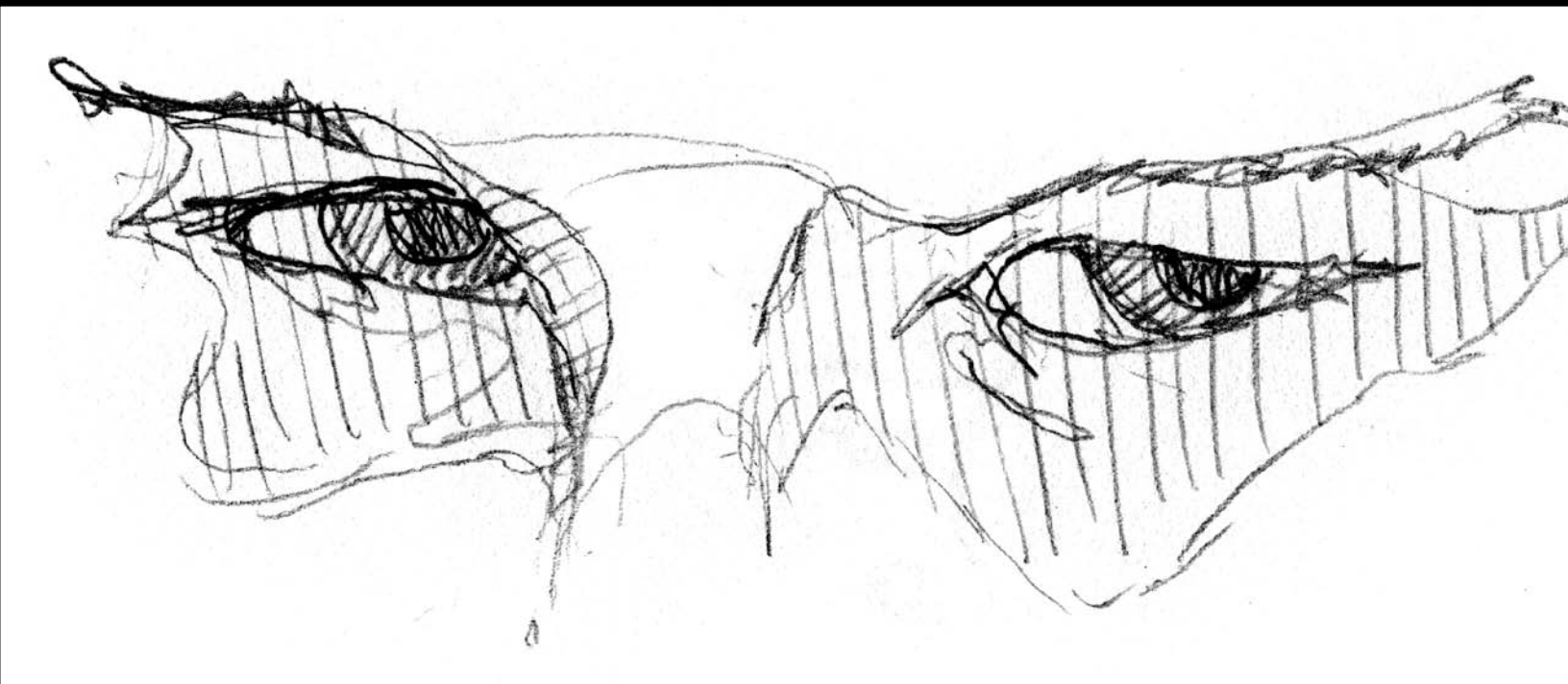
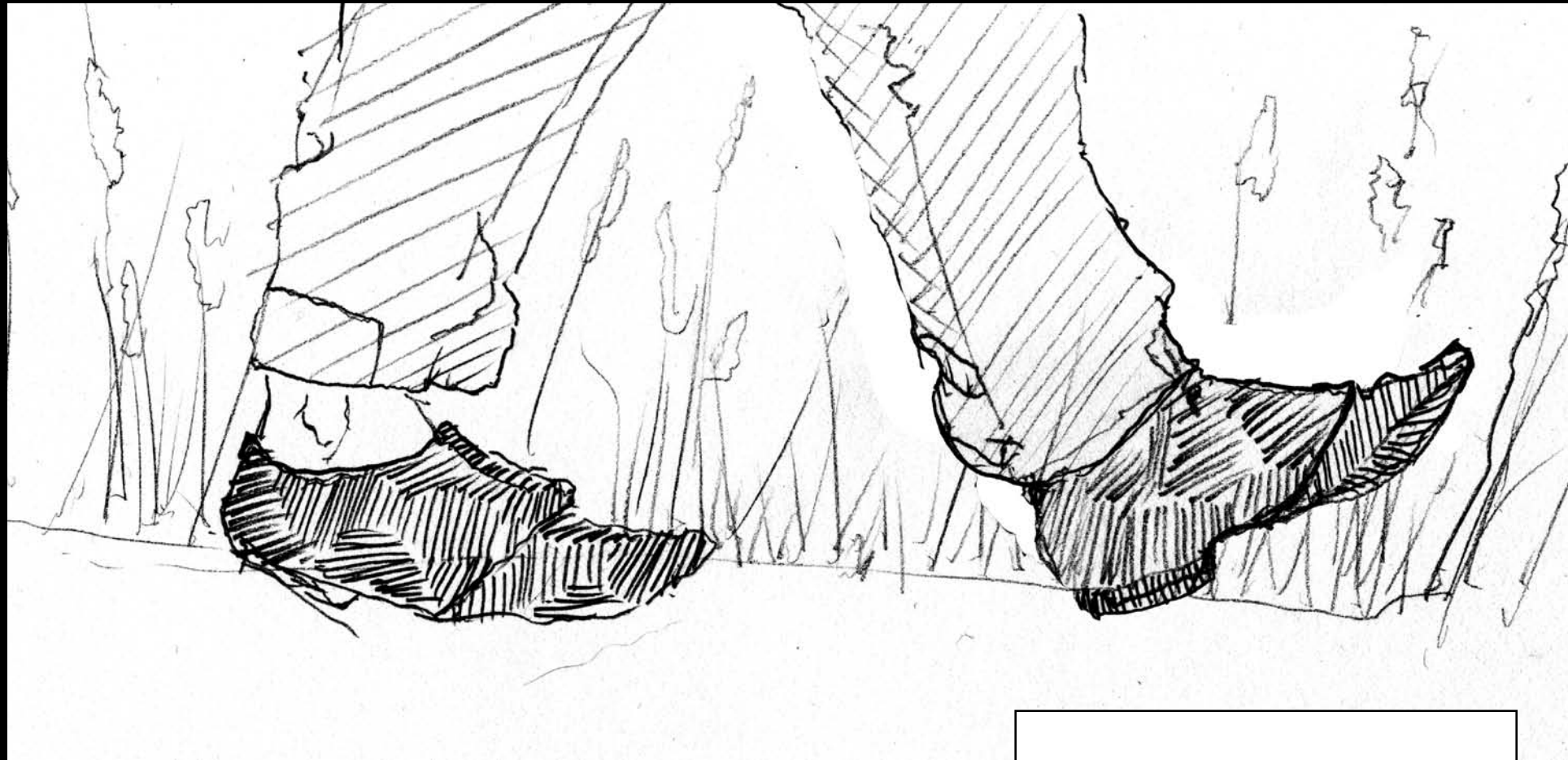












SHE OFFERED  
YOU A JOB.

YOU.

WHO?

WHO WAS  
THAT?

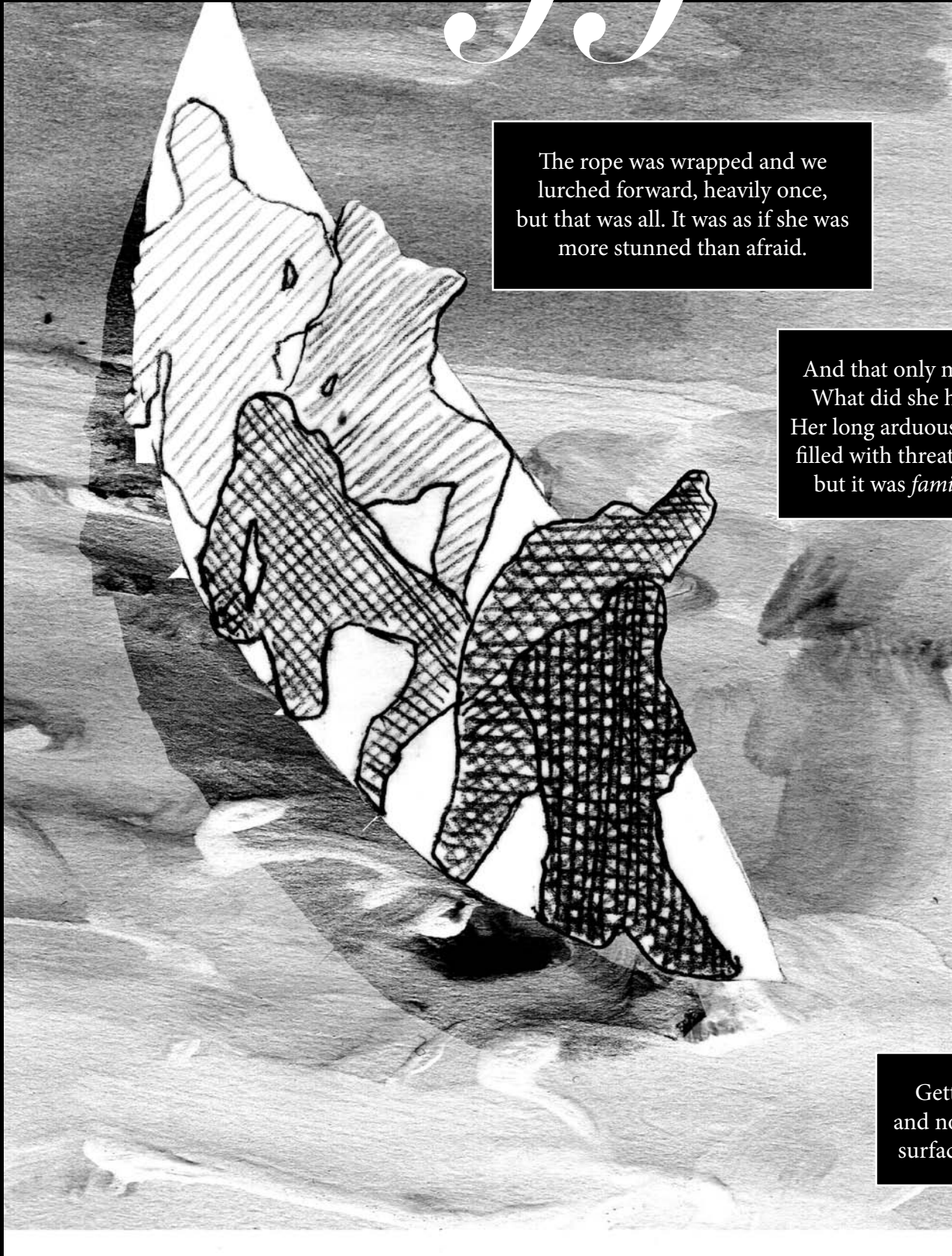
LADY OF  
THE HOUSE.

WHY?

"IF GOD GIVES US WEALTH  
AND PROPERTY AND LETS US  
ENJOY THEM, WE SHOULD  
BE GRATEFUL AND ENJOY  
WHAT WE HAVE WORKED FOR.  
IT IS A GIFT FROM GOD."



# Dragged



The rope was wrapped and we lurched forward, heavily once, but that was all. It was as if she was more stunned than afraid.

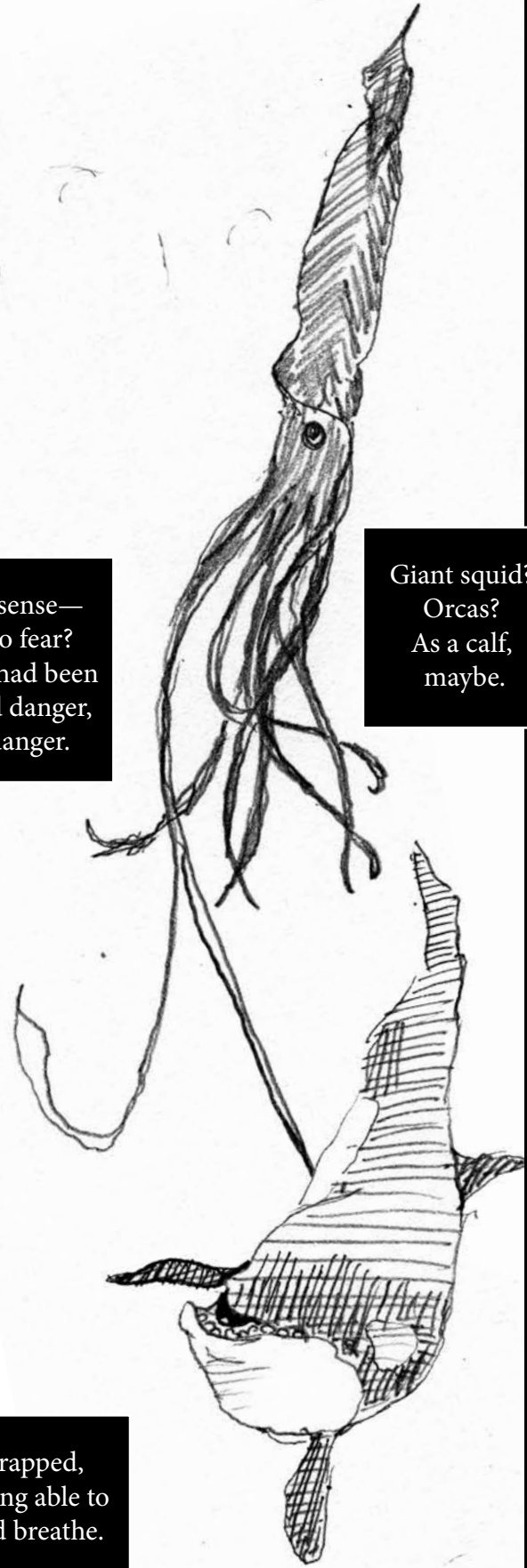
And that only made sense—  
What did she have to fear?  
Her long arduous life had been filled with threats and danger, but it was *familiar* danger.

Getting trapped,  
and not being able to  
surface and breathe.

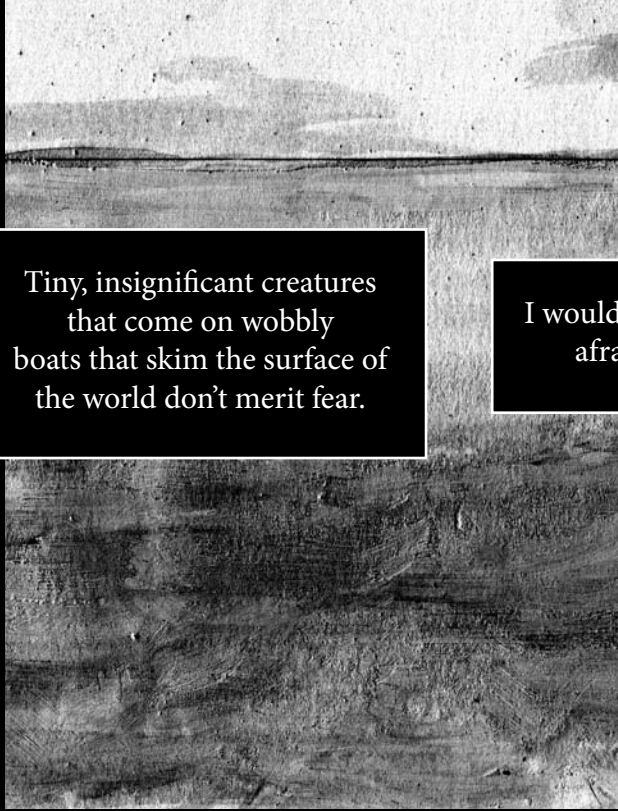
All things that could be  
feared—*should* be.

But *men*?  
Men in a *boat*?


Why? It made no more  
sense to fear the sun  
in the sky, or the  
breeze in summer.



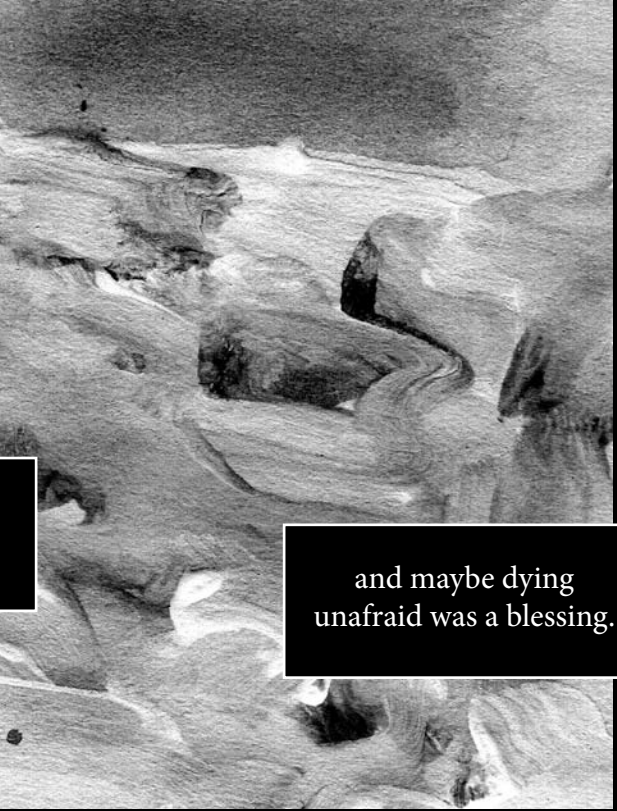
Giant squid?  
Orcas?  
As a calf,  
maybe.



Tiny, insignificant creatures  
that come on wobbly  
boats that skim the surface of  
the world don't merit fear.




I wouldn't have been  
afraid either.




And I, too,  
would have died.

and maybe dying  
unafraid was a blessing.




because if I died—  
here—  
on this tiny  
wooden clutch



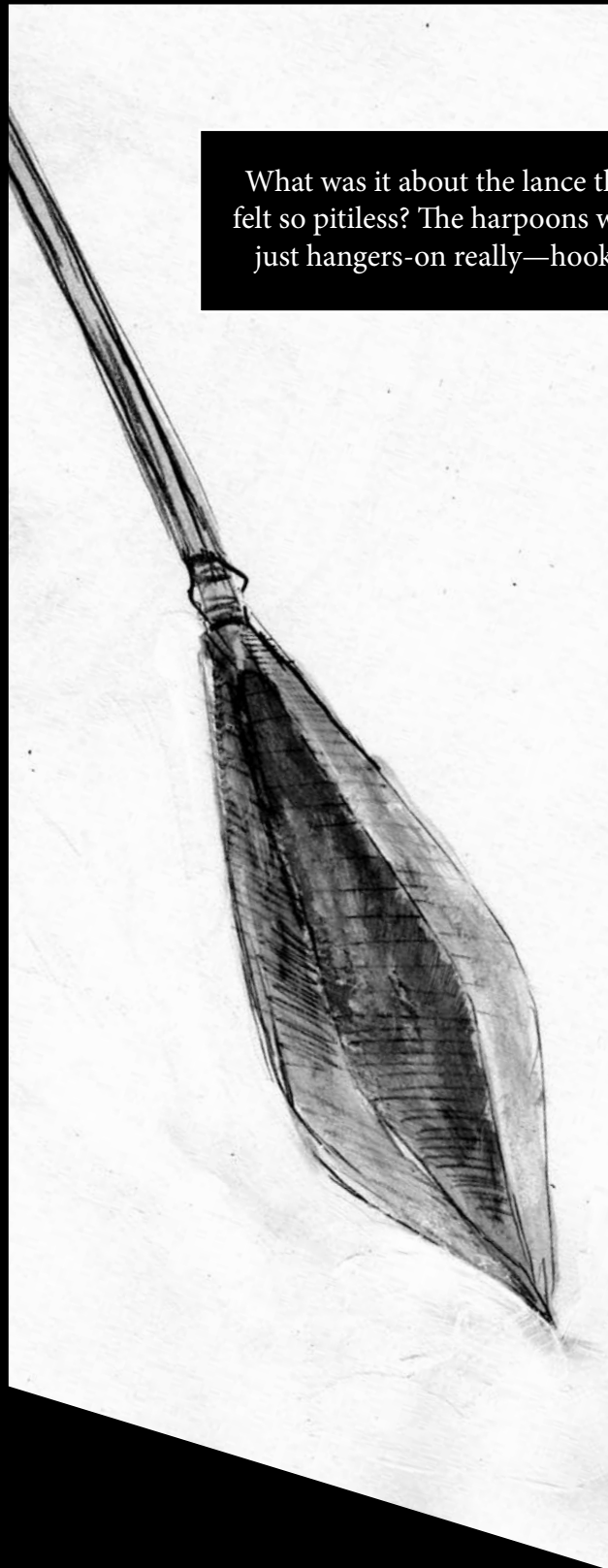
I would die terrified.  
and worse—

I would die *knowing*.  
Knowing why we'd come,  
and where we'd been, and  
where we were going.

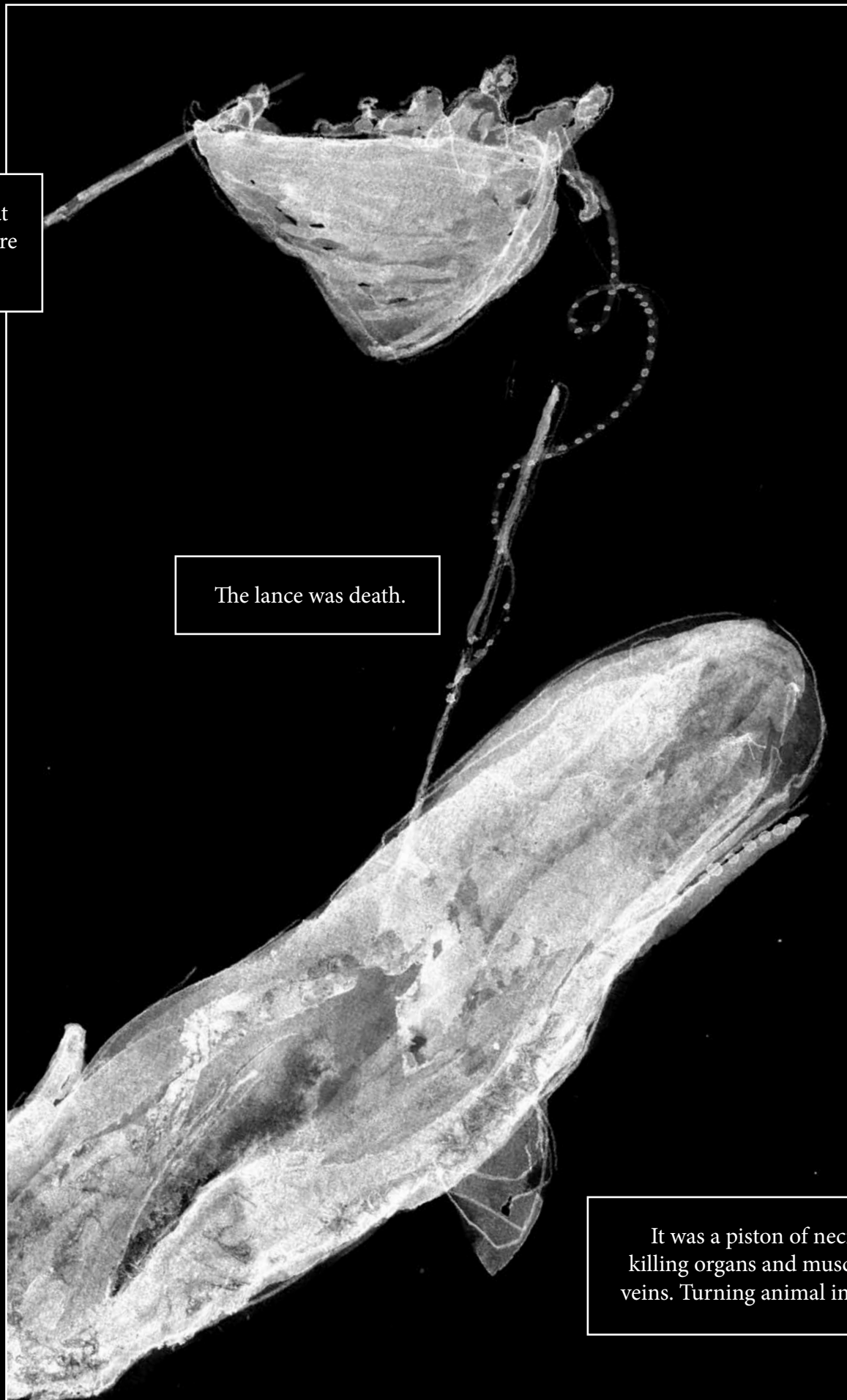


And if I was called to  
answer for my actions,  
I'd have no excuse.



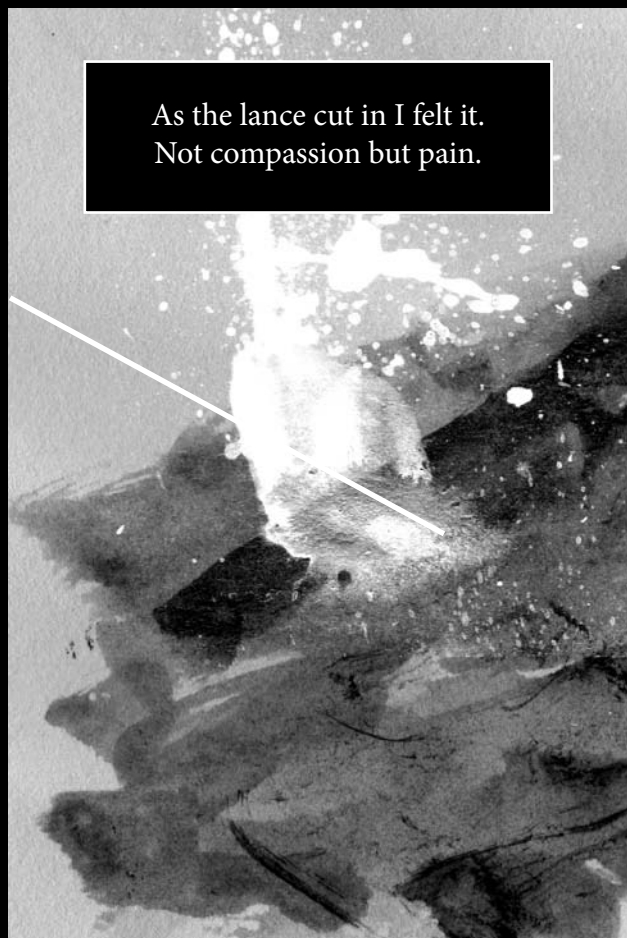


What was it about the lance that felt so pitiless? The harpoons were just hangers-on really—hooks.

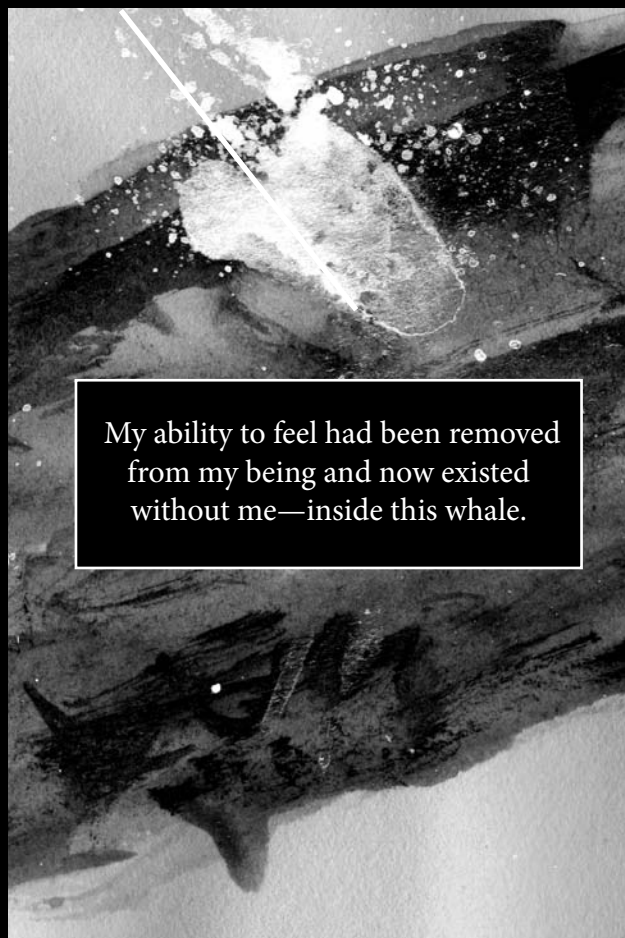


The lance was death.

It was a piston of necrosis, killing organs and muscles and veins. Turning animal into meat.



As the lance cut in I felt it. Not compassion but pain.



My ability to feel had been removed from my being and now existed without me—inside this whale.



My body was its body. My mind was its terrified, vibrating mind.



I felt its skin split and its fat and muscle cleave. Hot blood frothed from a clenching wound.



I felt the terribly permanent realization that my life was slipping out of my body from five large lance wounds and that I had passed the point of no return. There was no last-minute burst that would save me. No retreat to the depths to heal. I was going to die and be dead forever.



I was a witness. I was helpless. And it wasn't the first time I had felt that way.



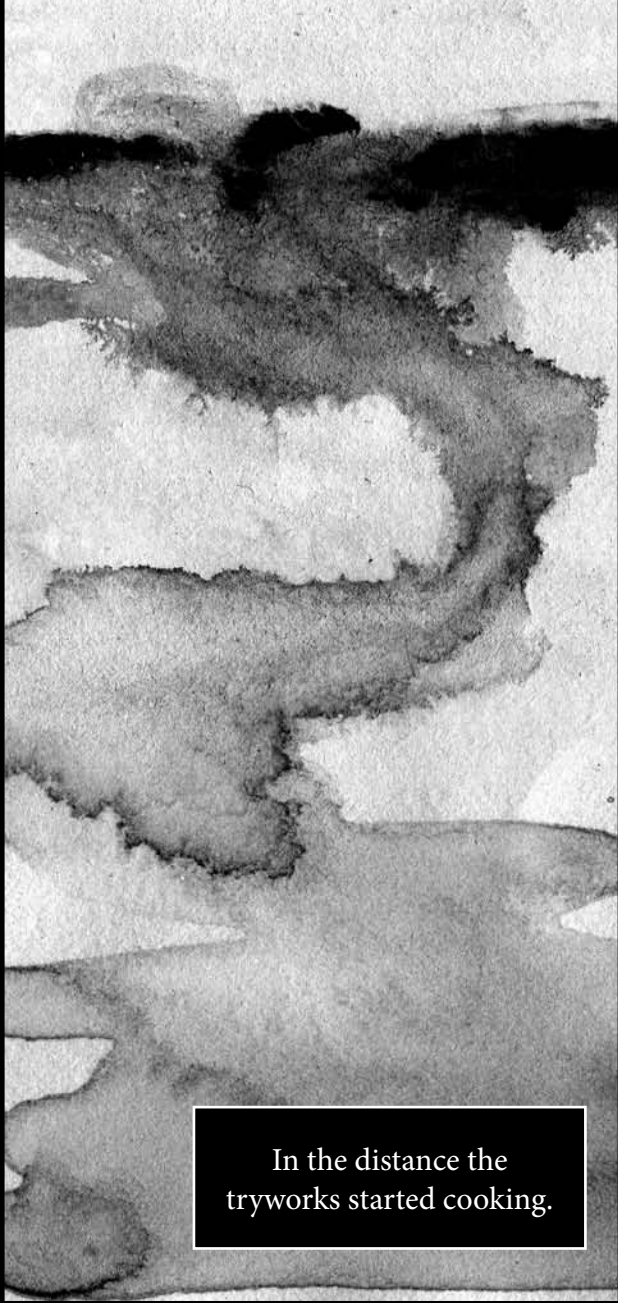




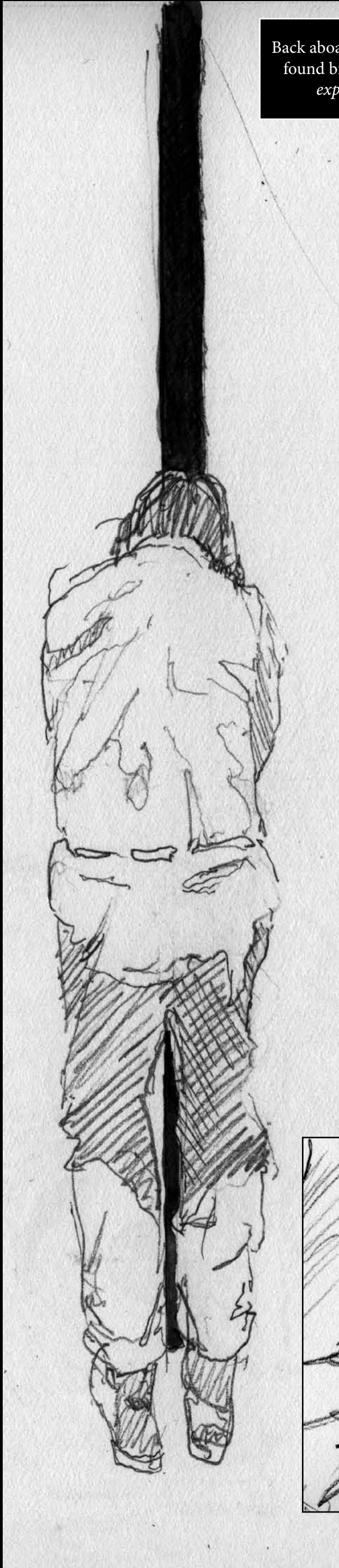
In my mind's eye, I saw Big Boss. Watching us.  
He felt very far away—unimportant.



Men celebrated, and blood  
spread, endlessly in the water.



In the distance the  
tryworks started cooking.



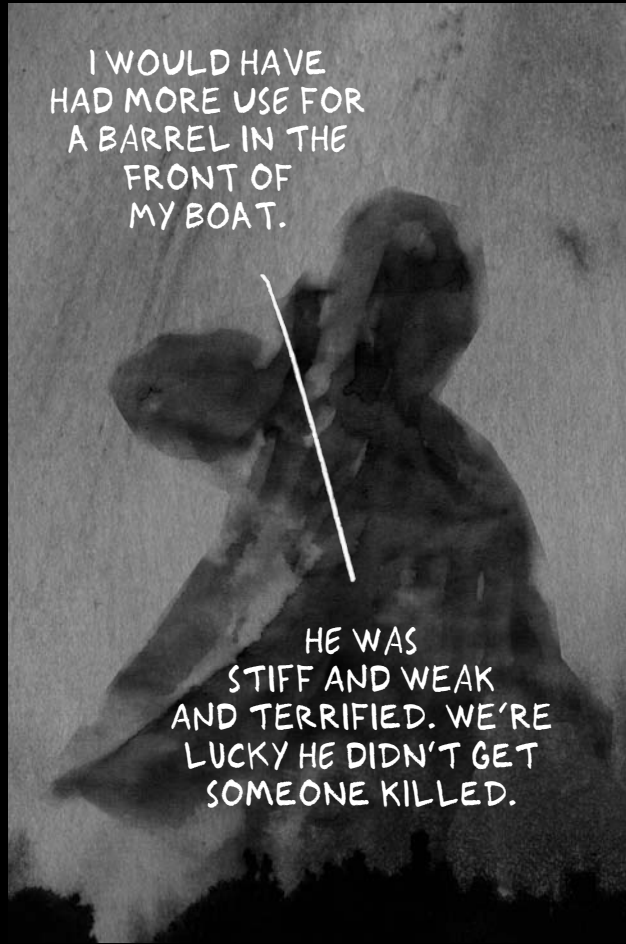
Back aboard, Novonid  
found big boss and  
exploded.



HE IS  
WORTHLESS.

The word *worthless* came  
out like a growling hiss—

—nearly endless  
on his tongue.



I WOULD HAVE  
HAD MORE USE FOR  
A BARREL IN THE  
FRONT OF  
MY BOAT.

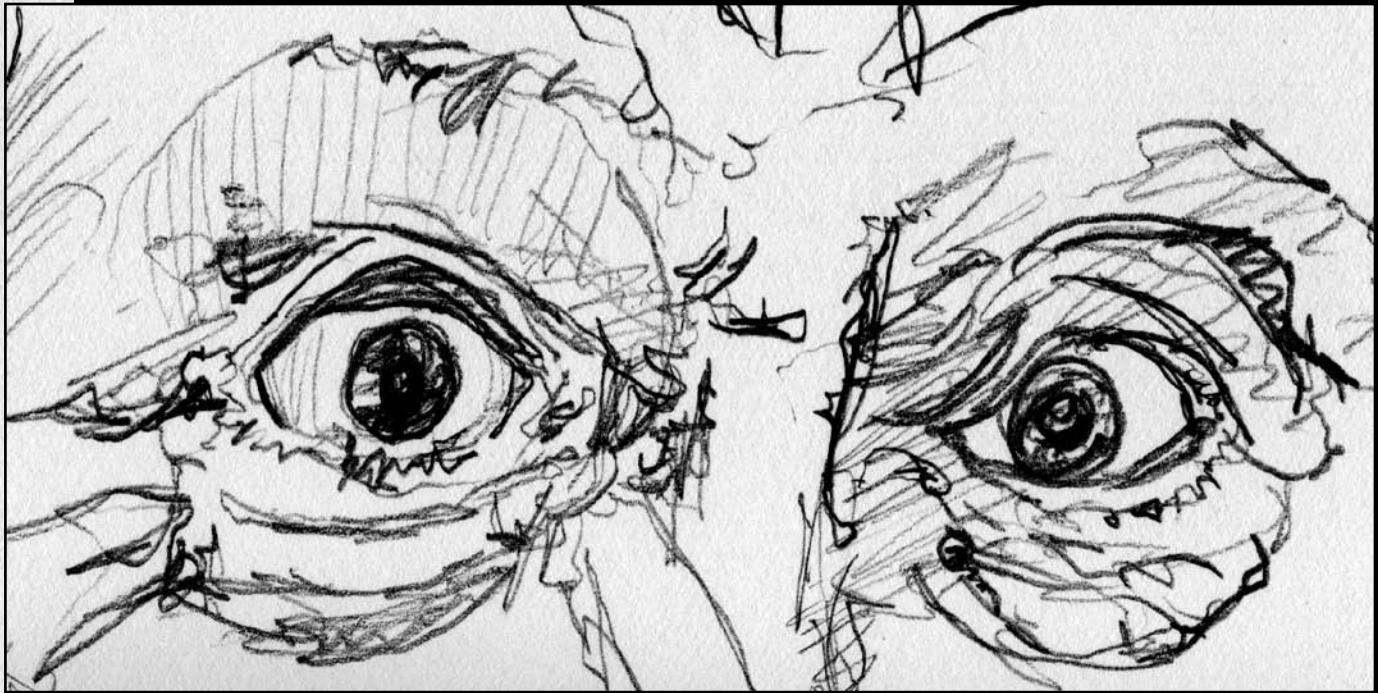
HE WAS  
STIFF AND WEAK  
AND TERRIFIED. WE'RE  
LUCKY HE DIDN'T GET  
SOMEONE KILLED.



I BROUGHT HIM ON  
AS A HARPOONER,  
NOT AN OARSMAN.

A HARPOONER!

AND IF HE FAILS AT THAT,  
YOU'LL MAKE HIM CAPTAIN?!



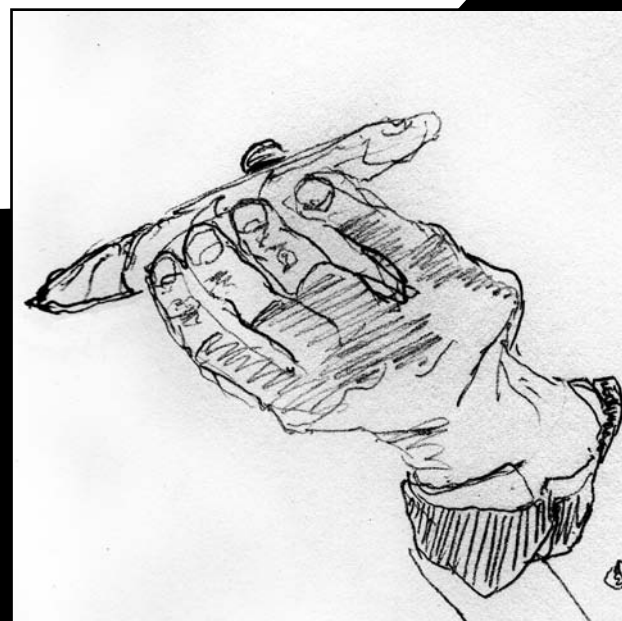




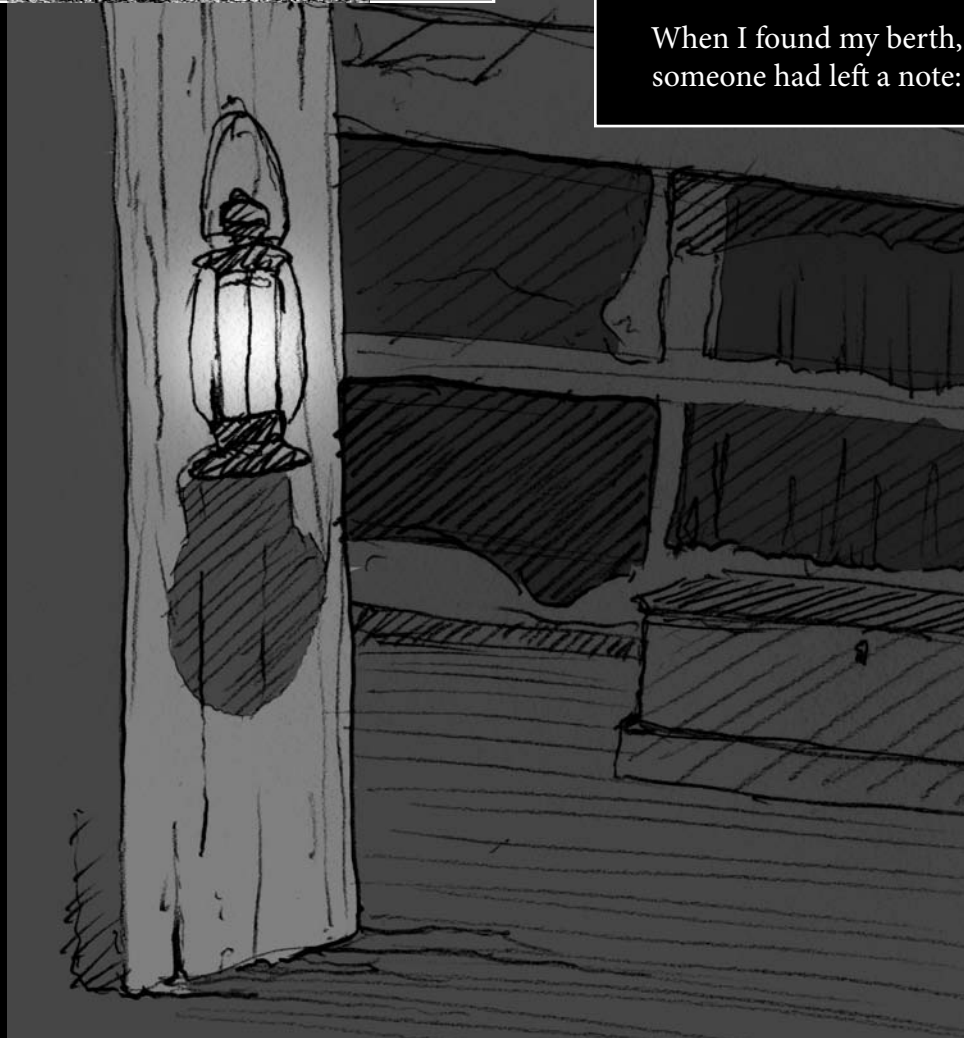
NOVONID,  
PLEASE. YOU GOT  
YOUR WHALE.  
YOU FILLED  
11 BARRELS.

ENJOY  
YOUR VICTORY.

LEAVE ME  
ALONE.



When I found my berth,  
someone had left a note:



Death  
to the  
living

When the sun set, ocean swashed  
like boiling water. I aimed for  
my bunk before a sudden sickness  
overcame me.

The inside of my nose, throat,  
and stomach felt like the  
fragrant wet skin under a  
scab that had been peeled.



In the night— in that sickness, in that anger—I was an animal.  
A sleepless, breathless mutt. My muscles felt like molten embers beneath  
my skin, my blood was boiling whale fat. My brain was pried from the  
walls of my skull with a galley steel. I hated whales. I hated their  
pointless lives and their dead, featureless faces. I hated their pathetic,  
helpless souls. I hated them with a hate so thick I could grasp it between  
my clutched fingers and squeeze it like a piece of rotting fruit. I held  
that hate for hours that felt like days and writhed inside of it  
like a fetus. And when I was finally born from it I had changed.

I was no longer embarrassed or ashamed or regretful.  
I was shame. I was regret. I was extinction. I was a whaler.

And as predicted, I was gifted.