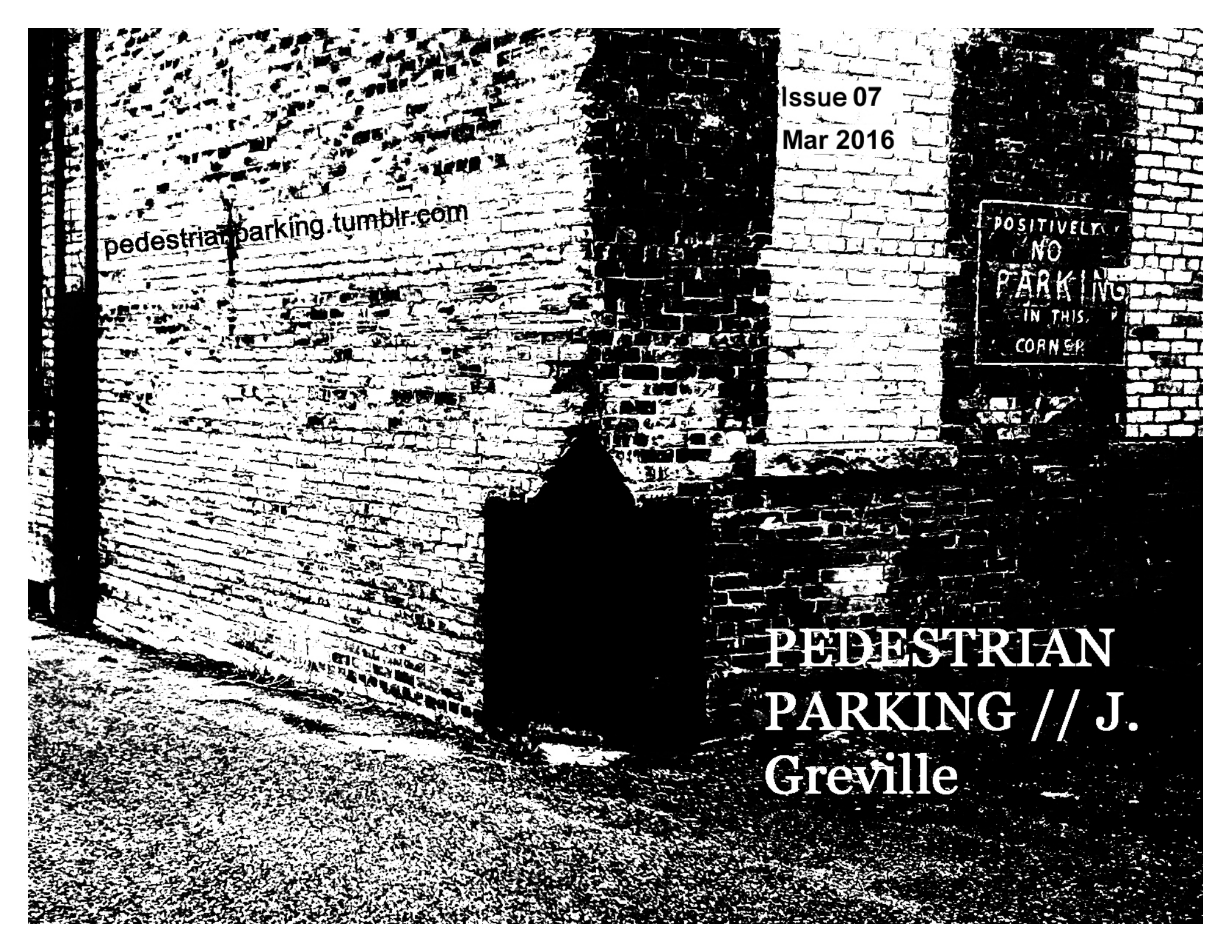


A black and white photograph of a brick wall. On the left, there is graffiti that reads 'pedestrianparking.tumblr.com'. On the right, there is a rectangular sign that says 'POSITIVELY NO PARKING IN THIS CORNER'. The wall is made of bricks and has some shadows. The ground in the foreground is dark and textured.

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pedestrianparking.tumblr.com

POSITIVELY
NO
PARKING
IN THIS
CORNER

PEDESTRIAN PARKING // J. Greville

ISLAND OF TWO

They swam to each others' shores and made camp on private beaches. Sex and surf. She was all he needed and he was all she needed and she was all she needed and he was all he needed and they were all they would ever need. But a beach is an open place, and the surf laps upon the shore, taunting and tainting the sand. Wet wet wet.

And they were all that they had, and despite the shore that sometimes isn't enough. Sometimes the sand gets in your cracks and makes you wish you were somewhere else, that someone else was your home, even for a night.

Make camp here, stranger.

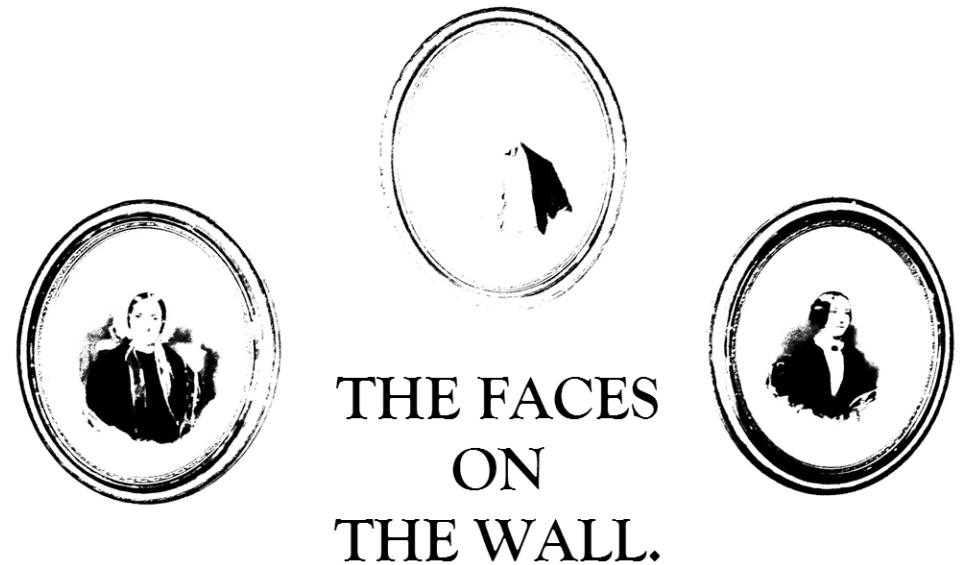


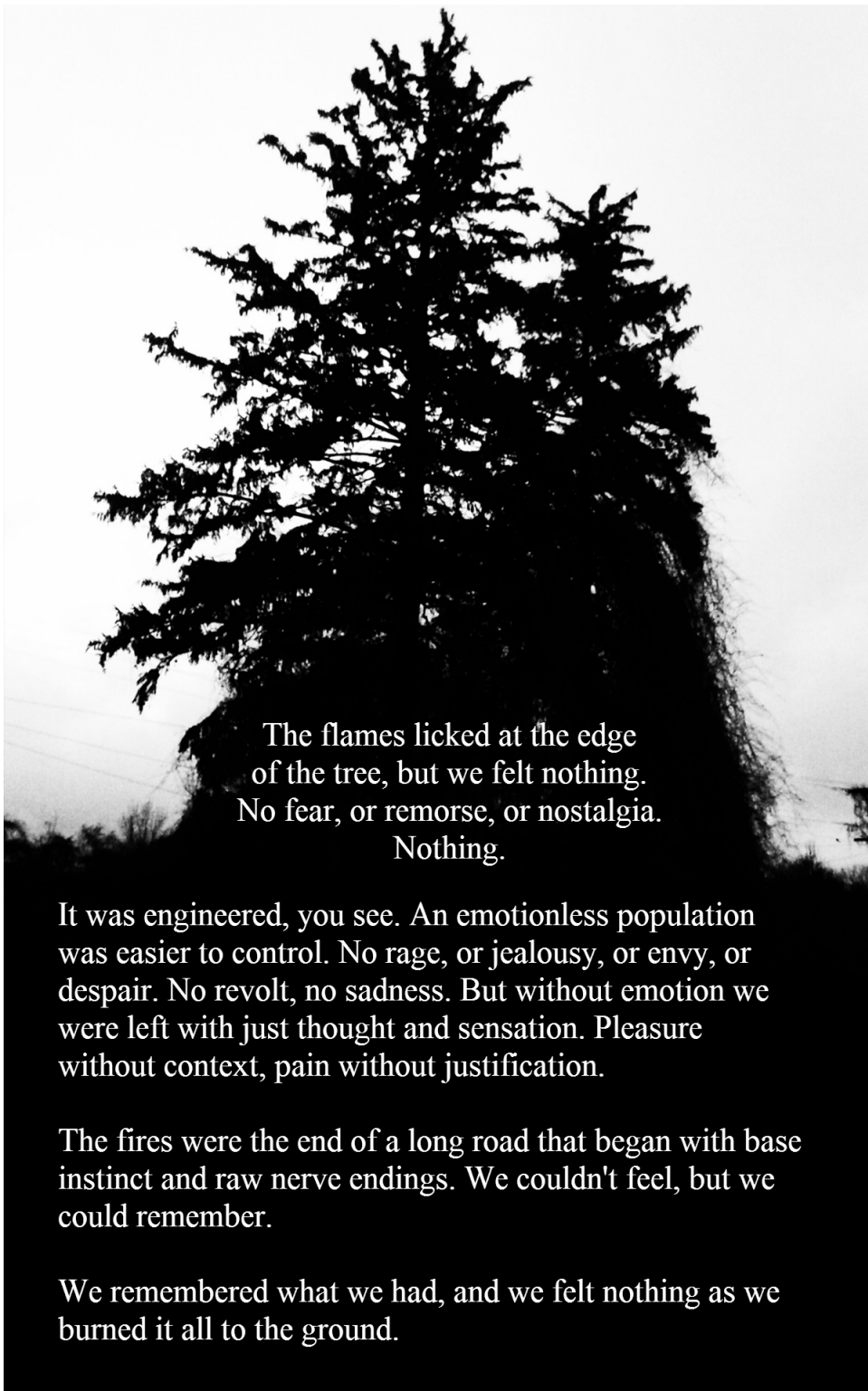
So they opened the beach.

The disgraced plated faces hung straight in their places, their hate blazing traces through the long corridor. Their late grating gazes dictated our spaces-chasing gates and staircases, we hid from their floor.

It's hard to conceive of the scene that they weaved, the bereaved forced to leave, to grieve on their own. Their malice achieved, the gleaming plates preened, obscenely serene, and never forced to atone.

Yet soon their grave threat proved a boon and asset, as their cave was beset with buffoons down the hall. Their fame was their debt, the tomb they'd regret, as folks gave all they could to see ~





The flames licked at the edge
of the tree, but we felt nothing.
No fear, or remorse, or nostalgia.
Nothing.

It was engineered, you see. An emotionless population
was easier to control. No rage, or jealousy, or envy, or
despair. No revolt, no sadness. But without emotion we
were left with just thought and sensation. Pleasure
without context, pain without justification.

The fires were the end of a long road that began with base
instinct and raw nerve endings. We couldn't feel, but we
could remember.

We remembered what we had, and we felt nothing as we
burned it all to the ground.

It's cool in the water and hot in the sand. Swim with us, they said.
And it was, and others did. Their shared island welcomed some for
a dip, but soon their beaches were cluttered with too many
footprints.

And one said to the other, there are rules, and you broke them. And
the other said to the one, this is my island too. And an island of two
became an island split in two, and the two become none.

Until he swam to her shore and she swam to his shore and she
swam to her shore and he swam to his shore and they all swam
together, and two islands became one again. Everyone is an island.



But I see no island here.

REFRACTORY
PERIOD

I remembered when I was a child, and still
felt things.

We didn't know, at first, that a side-effect of
emotions for hire would be the loss of our
ability to independently create or
experience them, but by the time the
practice became mainstream, it no
longer mattered.

What was sold was better than what we had,
and, soon, was all that we had.

The smoke filled the sky, filtering
the sun a bright grey before
swallowing the light, slowly, and
dimming the clouds with premature night.

There was no emotional cause to the fire,
of course. we weren't
capable of such things
anymore.

We called ourselves rational,
but that wasn't true either.

We were without emotion, but we were
still human. And humans are anything but
rational.

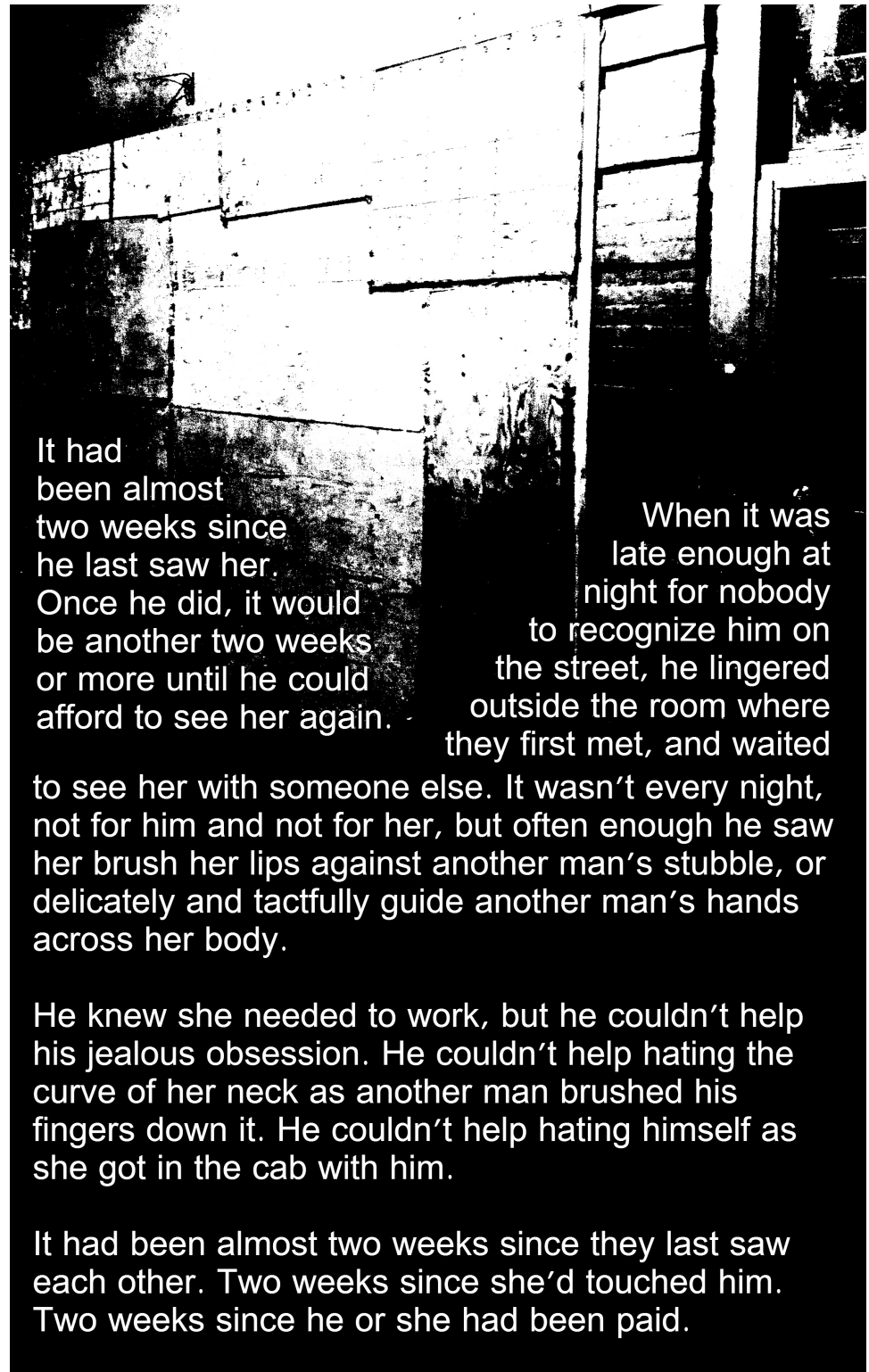
FIRE

The smoke bloomed on the horizon. Smog petals rose from a bed of flame, opening with the wind to reveal black stamen and burnt ovule. The scent of it stung the inside of our nostrils, so we breathed deeply.

I almost felt something, I'm sure, but it was merely a memory. That was all we had now, memories. The memory of how it was to feel emotions ourselves, before we were able to download them at will. I almost felt something, but it was just an echo from my childhood, a shadow seared into the background of my psyche in the thermal radiation of the new world. The emotion didn't exist, but I could still trace the edges of it with my fingers.

Perhaps, later, I would find the name of it on the market. I had to be certain it was for sale. They all were, of course.

No emotions were unique. Nobody was special.



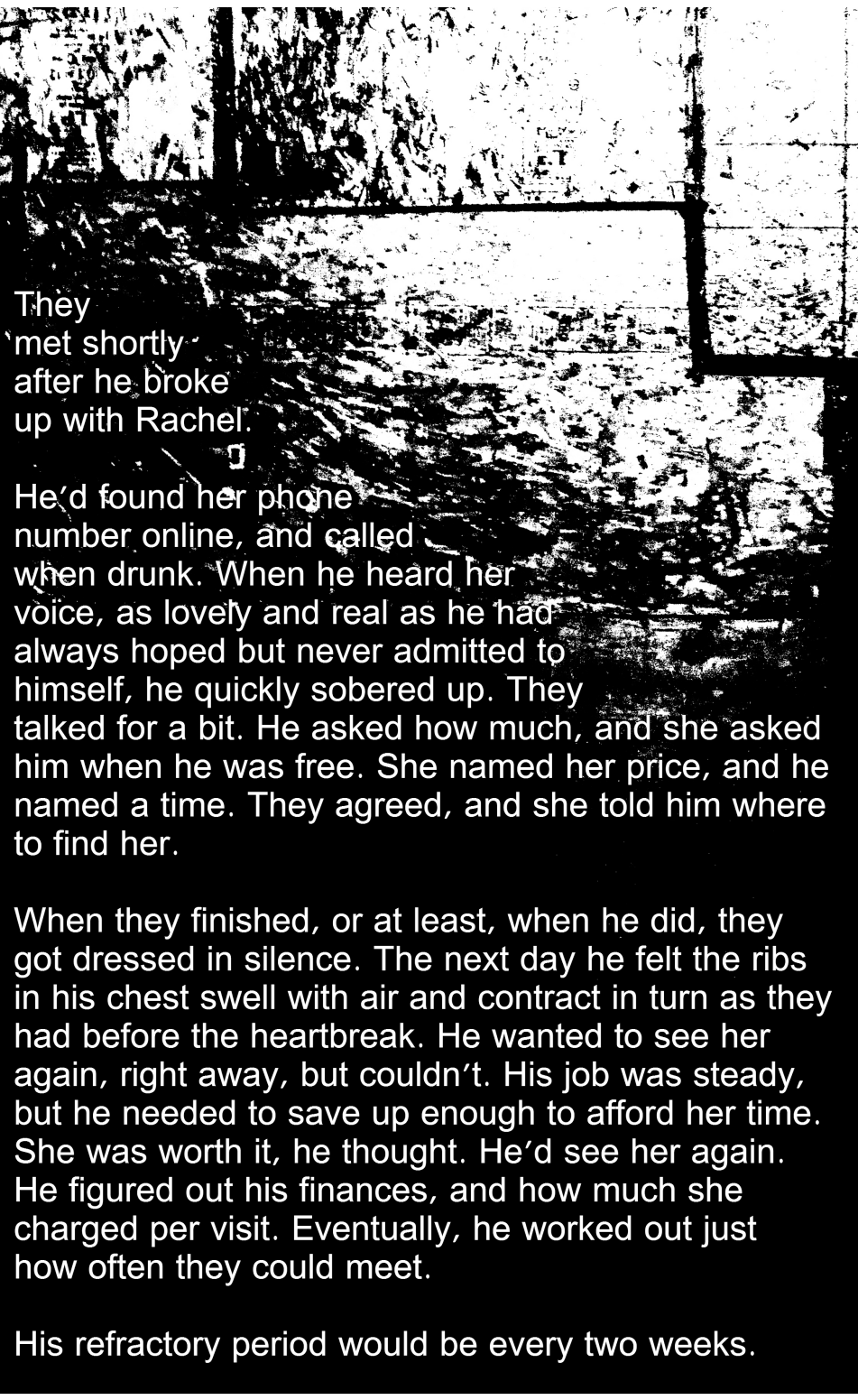
It had been almost two weeks since he last saw her. Once he did, it would be another two weeks or more until he could afford to see her again.

When it was late enough at night for nobody to recognize him on the street, he lingered outside the room where they first met, and waited

to see her with someone else. It wasn't every night, not for him and not for her, but often enough he saw her brush her lips against another man's stubble, or delicately and tactfully guide another man's hands across her body.

He knew she needed to work, but he couldn't help his jealous obsession. He couldn't help hating the curve of her neck as another man brushed his fingers down it. He couldn't help hating himself as she got in the cab with him.

It had been almost two weeks since they last saw each other. Two weeks since she'd touched him. Two weeks since he or she had been paid.



They
met shortly
after he broke
up with Rachel.

He'd found her phone
number online, and called
when drunk. When he heard her
voice, as lovely and real as he had
always hoped but never admitted to
himself, he quickly sobered up. They
talked for a bit. He asked how much, and she asked
him when he was free. She named her price, and he
named a time. They agreed, and she told him where
to find her.

When they finished, or at least, when he did, they
got dressed in silence. The next day he felt the ribs
in his chest swell with air and contract in turn as they
had before the heartbreak. He wanted to see her
again, right away, but couldn't. His job was steady,
but he needed to save up enough to afford her time.
She was worth it, he thought. He'd see her again.
He figured out his finances, and how much she
charged per visit. Eventually, he worked out just
how often they could meet.

His refractory period would be every two weeks.

Oh no. No.

No.

No.

Not me. I'm not like
the others. I'm not.

Please, not
me. Please.

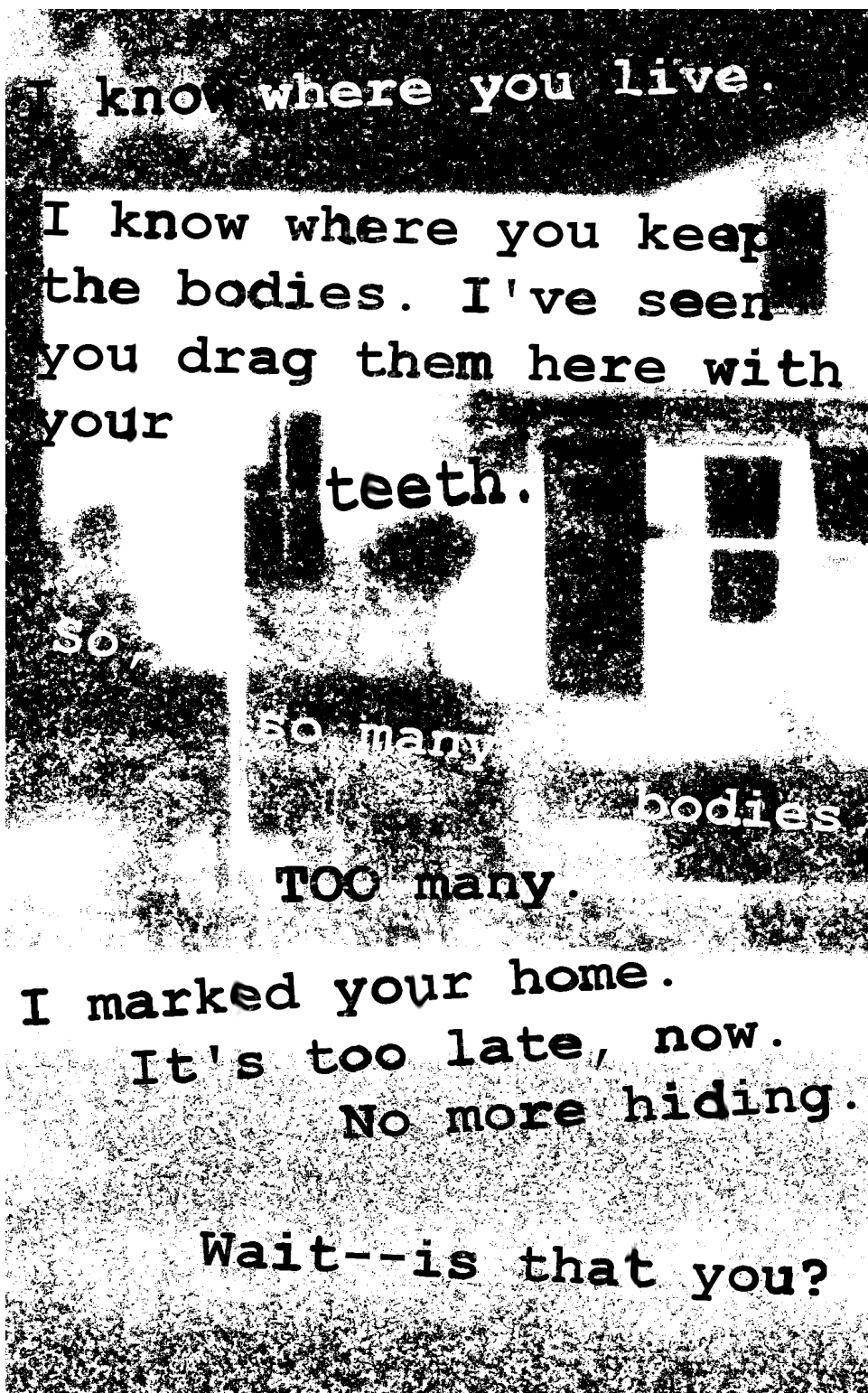
I'm so sorry.

Oh God. Oh God oh God oh God
oh God oh God oh God oh God
oh God oh God oh God oh God

Let go, please.

Please don't bite me.

Please don't drink
my blood. Please stop
drinking.



I know where you live.

I know where you keep
the bodies. I've seen
you drag them here with
your
teeth.

So,

so many

bodies

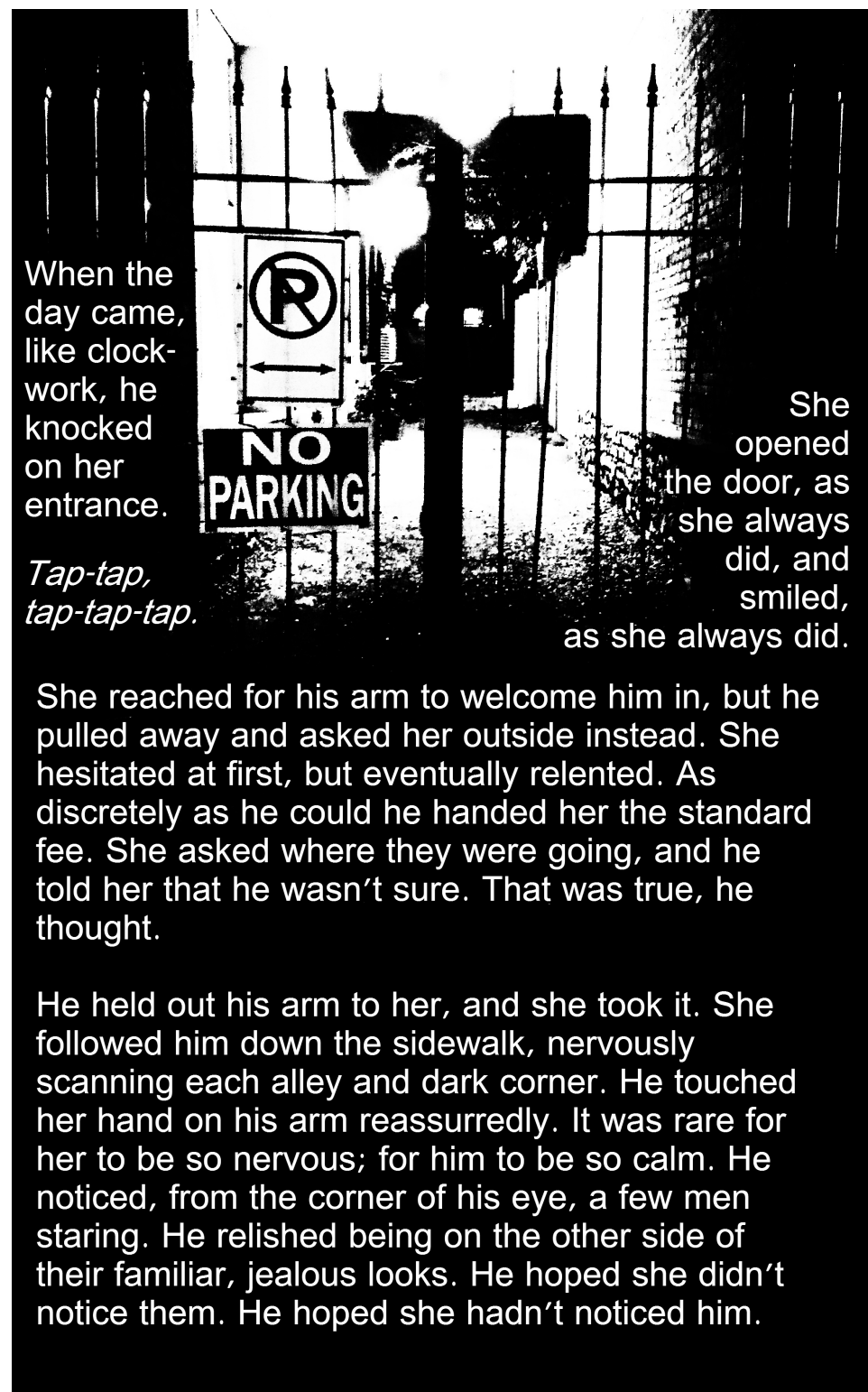
TOO many.

I marked your home.

It's too late, now.

No more hiding.

Wait--is that you?



When the
day came,
like clock-
work, he
knocked
on her
entrance.

*Tap-tap,
tap-tap-tap.*

She
opened
the door, as
she always
did, and
smiled,
as she always did.

She reached for his arm to welcome him in, but he pulled away and asked her outside instead. She hesitated at first, but eventually relented. As discretely as he could he handed her the standard fee. She asked where they were going, and he told her that he wasn't sure. That was true, he thought.

He held out his arm to her, and she took it. She followed him down the sidewalk, nervously scanning each alley and dark corner. He touched her hand on his arm reassuredly. It was rare for her to be so nervous; for him to be so calm. He noticed, from the corner of his eye, a few men staring. He relished being on the other side of their familiar, jealous looks. He hoped she didn't notice them. He hoped she hadn't noticed him.

They stopped by a gate, and he took her hand in his.

He told her that he loved her--
--she told him that he didn't,
that he was merely obsessed.

He tried to convince her that it was real, that it meant something, that they were good together. She told him the truth, that he was only ever another job. She said it without malice or scorn, without excuse. He was not the first, and probably wouldn't be the last.

Then she told him something else--that she wouldn't be the last for him either, that heartache and heart-break were just the pain between exhaling and inhaling. That the absence of love was temporary.

He nodded, and pretended
he was okay as she left,

and waited by the gate
until he could
breathe again.

Good..

Good.

Good.

But first, I'm
gonna show the
world what you are.

A FUCKING psycho.

Who does that to a kid?

They were so young.

Why?

Who drinks that?

YOU think you
hide? Think
you're clever?

I see you at night.

I've got you on TAPE.

I saw you with
those poor boys

and all of that
blood

It keeps me up at night.
I'm gonna see you
rot

in jail.

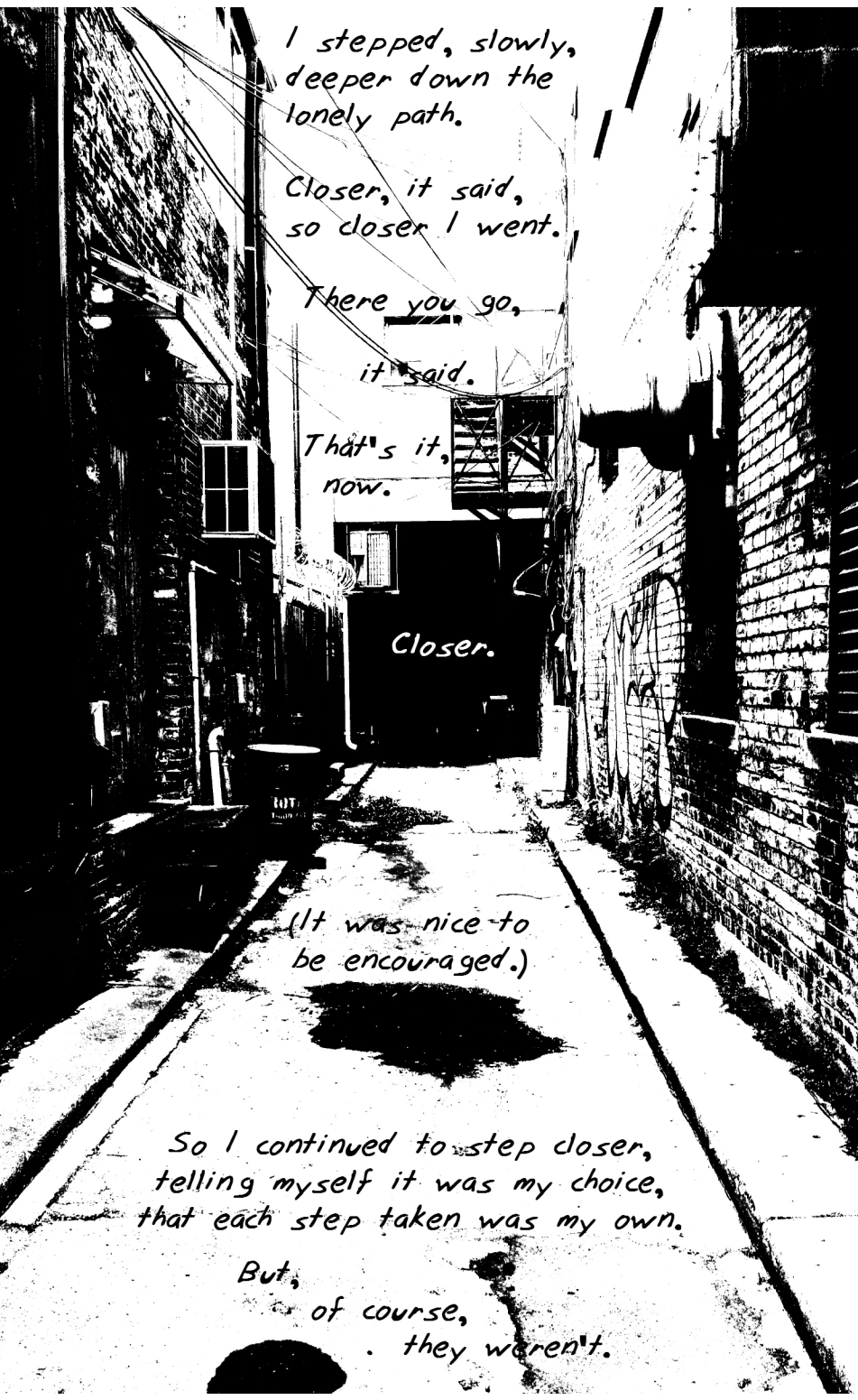
*Come closer,
the voice said.*

*The sound of
it carried on
the wind
like a
whisper.*

*Come
closer,
it said.*

*I tried not to listen, but the voice
didn't stop. I entered the ally,
and with each step, it taunted.*

Closer... Closer... Closer...



*I stepped, slowly,
deeper down the
lonely path.*

*Closer, it said,
so closer I went.*

There you go,

it said.

*That's it,
now.*

Closer.

*(It was nice to
be encouraged.)*

*So I continued to step closer,
telling myself it was my choice,
that each step taken was my own.*

But,

*of course,
they weren't.*

That'll show him. Good.

Good.

Good.

Good.

You fucking

PSYCHO.

Watching you for weeks.

Waiting here for days.

Good.

Good.

Good.

PSYCHO

Good, it said.

The shadows were cold. Though I wanted to leave, I couldn't. It had brought me this far, and wouldn't let me go. The voice had me.

What do you want, it asked me, as I wondered the same of it.

Before I could think, I spoke. The words tumbled

from my lips before I understood what the voice meant. Before I could take it back.

It's yours, the voice said.

All of it.

But I knew the lie as I heard it uttered.

The voice in the alley was my own, stolen. I was never in control, yet I bore the weight of the words spoken.

Never, ever, tell a demon your dreams.

Ha Ha
Ha Ha

HA HA
Ha

HA HA

For my dreams, it took the world.

Fair trade, it said.

Or was

that me?

It was hard to tell

(without a soul)

over all of

the

laughter.

Ha Ha Ha

HA HA

Ha Ha Ha

HA HA

Ha HA