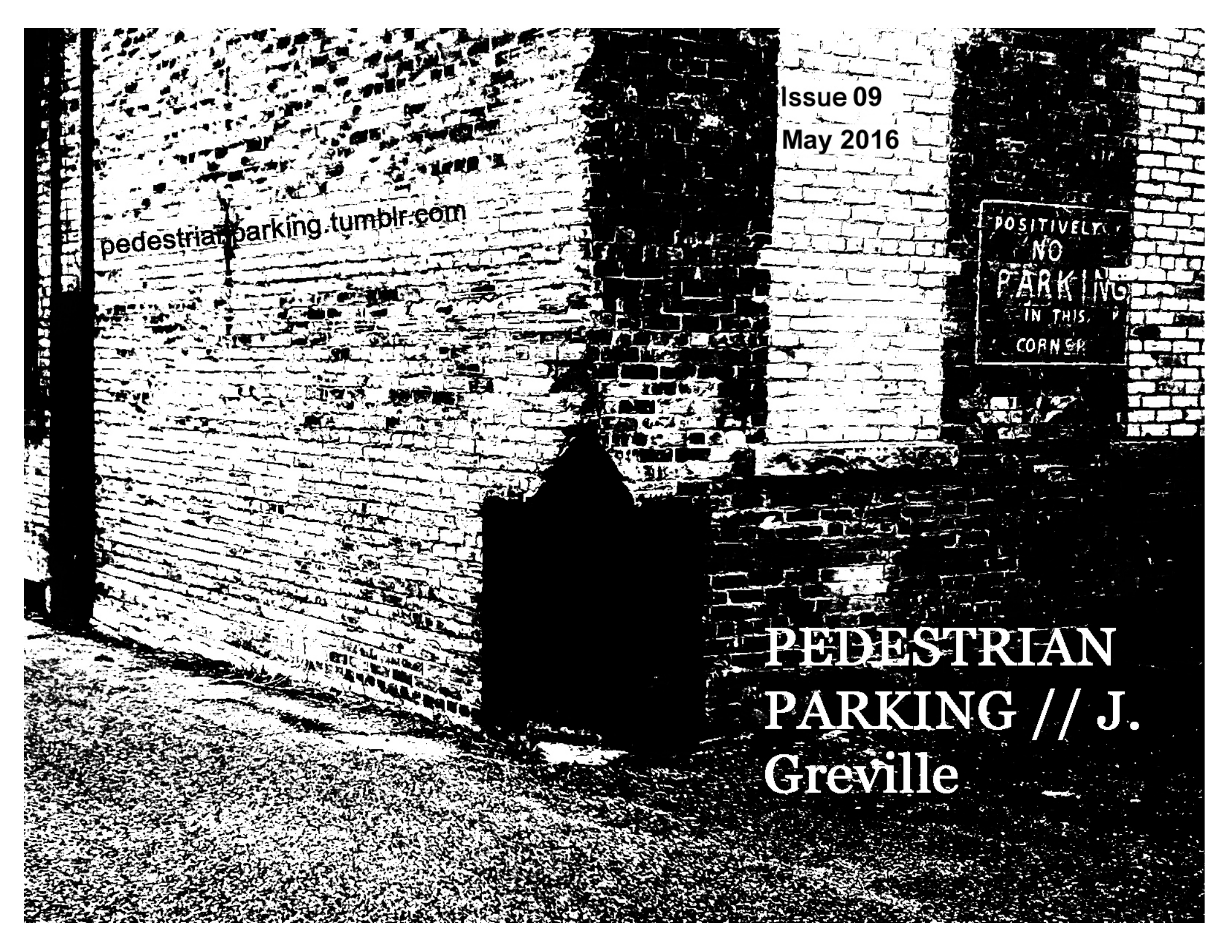




Issue 09

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pedestrianparking.tumblr.com

POSITIVELY
NO
PARKING
IN THIS
CORNER

PEDESTRIAN PARKING // J. Greville

AMELIA'S SONG

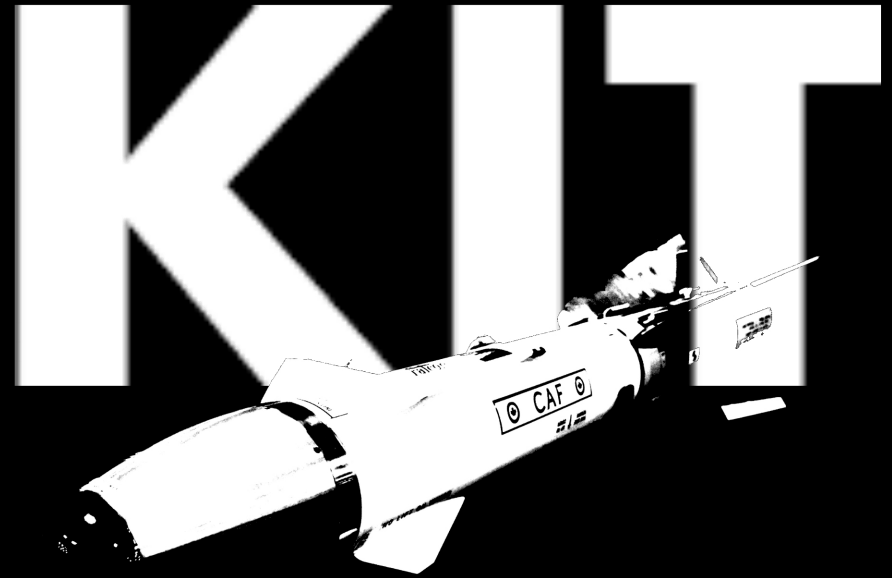
Edited by S. Liska

In the centre of the makeshift market, in the centre of a makeshift stage, stood the piano. It was the grand prize in the raffle at the fair: a generous donation, a nearby sign read, from the estate of a late local musician. I wasn't sure if I'd stopped when I saw it, or if it had stopped me when I passed close enough. I remembered how it had a way of making me do things.

Memories broke through the dam I'd constructed years prior: the feel of the wood and the ivory, the scent of the pedals and the strings, the blood and the shit and the sweat and the piss and the pain I went through after hours of playing.

I briefly wondered if it remembered me too, but then chided myself for such a foolish, hopeful notion.

Stupid old woman. Dark things always have long memories. The late musician, of course, must have been Amelia.



Our chance missed, of course, they persisted to lock it.
The twist: once enforced, we dismissed the
dumb rocket.

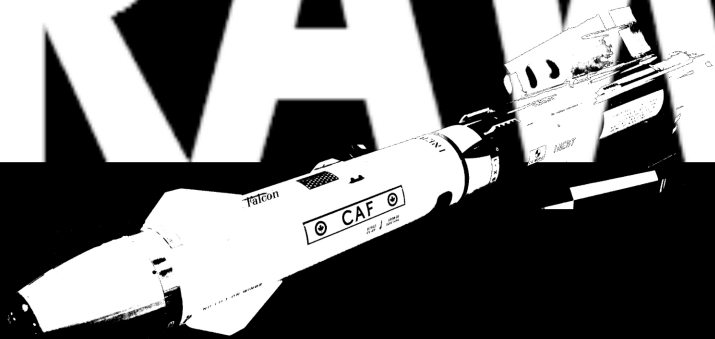
A source we were close to endorsed trying to dock it.
With remorse, they arose to force an end to
the rocket.

I suppose, as a rule, I'll disclose: we didn't clock it:
When exposed, those mad fools, they chose the
damned rocket!

We used all our tools: ignited fuel, tried to shock it.
The truth, cruel despite: we lost the duel with
the rocket.

In the bright afterglow they moved right to re-stock it,
Their might now on show, we fear the flight of
the rocket.

RAW



Yes, I know, sir or ma'am, it's a low-blow to knock it,
But let's forego the flimflam about their gizmo,
the rocket.

The lambs tried their best in a jam to block it,
But Uncle Sam was hard-pressed to give a damn about
the rocket.

The rest of us seek a bit of jest, so we mock it,
But I guess in a week we'll be oppressed by
the rocket.

The geeks always knew: with a leak, you caulk it,
But with a peek they debuted their sleek, sexy
new rocket.

It's true, I assisted the coup, trying to hock it.
I thought few could resist such a shiny
new rocket.

I looked down and saw my right index finger pressing one of the keys. The sound of it filled the air, and the world faded to black.

I first played the piano--this piano--at the behest of Amelia, who was looking for a student at the time. Amelia was a concert pianist, yet hadn't played a show in over a decade when we met. She told me of the string of romances that led to her marriage, and spoke little of the divorce that followed her retirement from the stage. Pictures of her husband hung in every room of her home, but none of them together. The only pictures of Amelia were of her at the piano.



I remembered the way Amelia's fingers stretched over my own at first, guiding them over the keys as a lover would a body. It wasn't long, and without any true instruction, before I was playing and composing on my own, just as Amelia once had.

I was intoxicated by the beauty I was able to produce. Every stroke of the keys was an affirmation of my worth, my potential.

When I asked how I was able to play so quickly, Amelia confided that it was all the piano. It had this way, she said, of taking hold. The more you played, the less you noticed anything else in the world.

I asked her how long she had she'd owned it, and she stopped for a moment, held her hands above the keys, and said for about as long as it had owned her.

I didn't ask many questions after that.

The pretext of our lessons was soon dropped. Amelia seemed genuinely glad for the company, and the more time we spent together, the better we both played.

She told me how it felt to be on stage—weightless and tranquil; she took the piano with her on tour until it was too expensive to move—and the better I got, the more I wanted to experience that feeling for myself.

I was a young woman spending my afternoons and evenings at the whim of something I thought was wonderful. I forgot to eat, to bathe, and sometimes, to breathe. When I played, I was lost in the melodies at my fingertips.

Sometimes Amelia played, sometimes I did.

For a time I was caught up in the magic of the instrument, but it wasn't long before I learned how sinister it was.





The memory faded, and around me I saw that a small crowd had gathered. I was sitting at the piano, expertly playing Amelia's favourite song. It was already half-way through, I'd been playing it for some time.

I remembered the way Amelia looked when she told me I was forbidden from ever seeing this piano again. I remembered pushing her aside, and continuing to play.

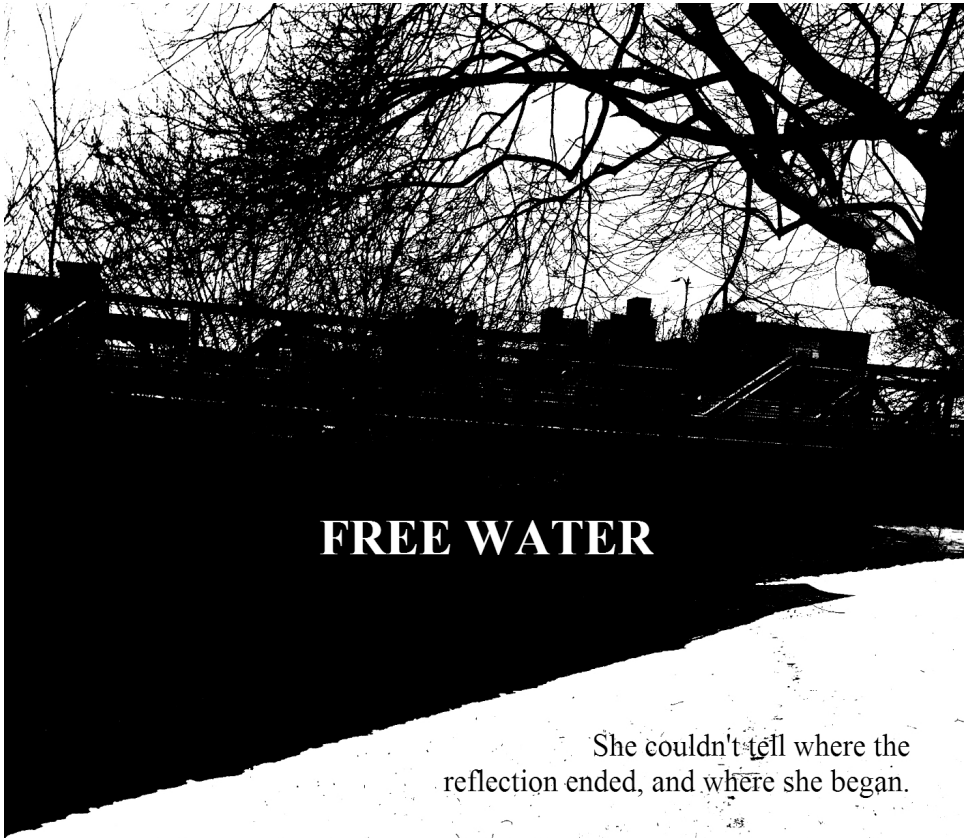
The crowd grew larger and I welcomed the attention. This was what Amelia must have felt, just a bit, when she performed.

I remembered when she finally tore me from the seat and the music stopped, so long ago. When my senses returned, I saw why she was so concerned: bone had split through the callouses of my fingers, and a week's worth of waste hung low in my skirt.

The keys, I remember now, they were stained so red.

The crowd faded away, and all that was left in the world once again was the piano, and the sound. I wondered how long Amelia played until she died.

I wondered how long I had left.



FREE WATER

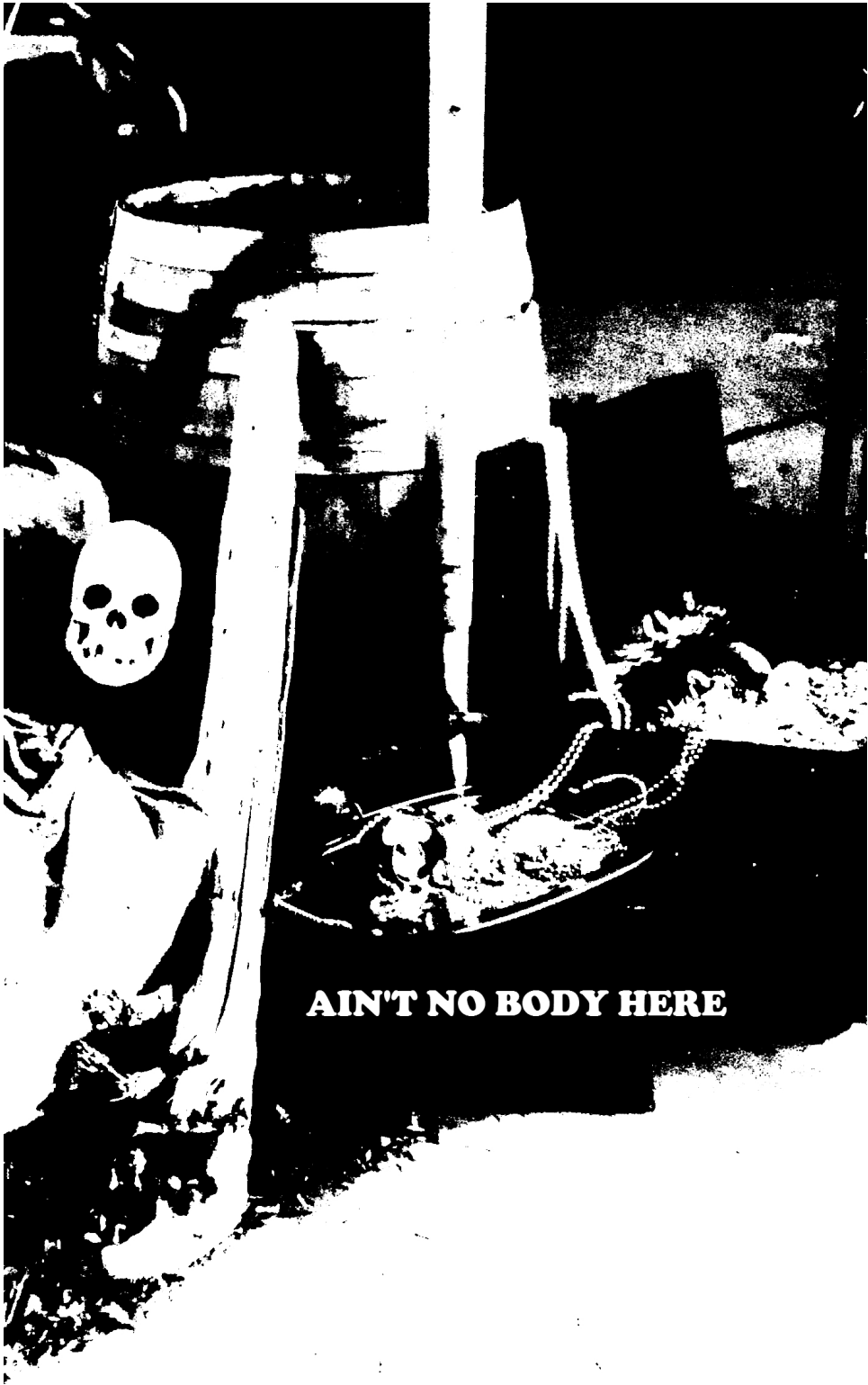
She couldn't tell where the reflection ended, and where she began.

Her academic background in Determinism informed the idea that standing here was never her choice, but considering the reflection, what was once a comforting thought now became entirely unsettling.

She knew, philosophically and scientifically, that free will was an illusion, but thought it a comfort nonetheless. We were determined creatures, of course. Our biology and our actions were set in motion from our birth, back to the first mover at the beginning of everything.

Free will was an illusion. Choice was a lie.

She knew that what we considered to be conscious decision making, was merely the causal result of neurons firing in our brain. We didn't choose to act, then act. No, we acted, then fooled ourselves into thinking that we had made a choice at all.



AIN'T NO BODY HERE



She left to walk the path today before sunrise. She felt as if she had made the choice to do that, but knew that wasn't true. Her walk was the result of a thousand things nobody had any part in deciding, and yet there she was, standing at the edge of a pond formed from melted snow, looking at a reflection that wasn't hers.

The strange audacity of the phantom reflection caused her to question why she was conscious of her lack of free will in the first place. Why must the prisoner be aware of her chains? She wondered why she was aware of the reflection at all, when it seemed to contravene all preexisting rational notions she held. If she was determined, then why was she here? And was 'why' even the right question?

The face in the water was older and darker than hers. Its hair was longer, and its clothes ragged and sullied. She thought for a moment that it was somewhat anachronistic, yet for some reason, it seemed entirely contemporary, as if they stood at opposite sides of the same window, at the same time. But it moved as a reflection, mirroring her movements with shocking precision.

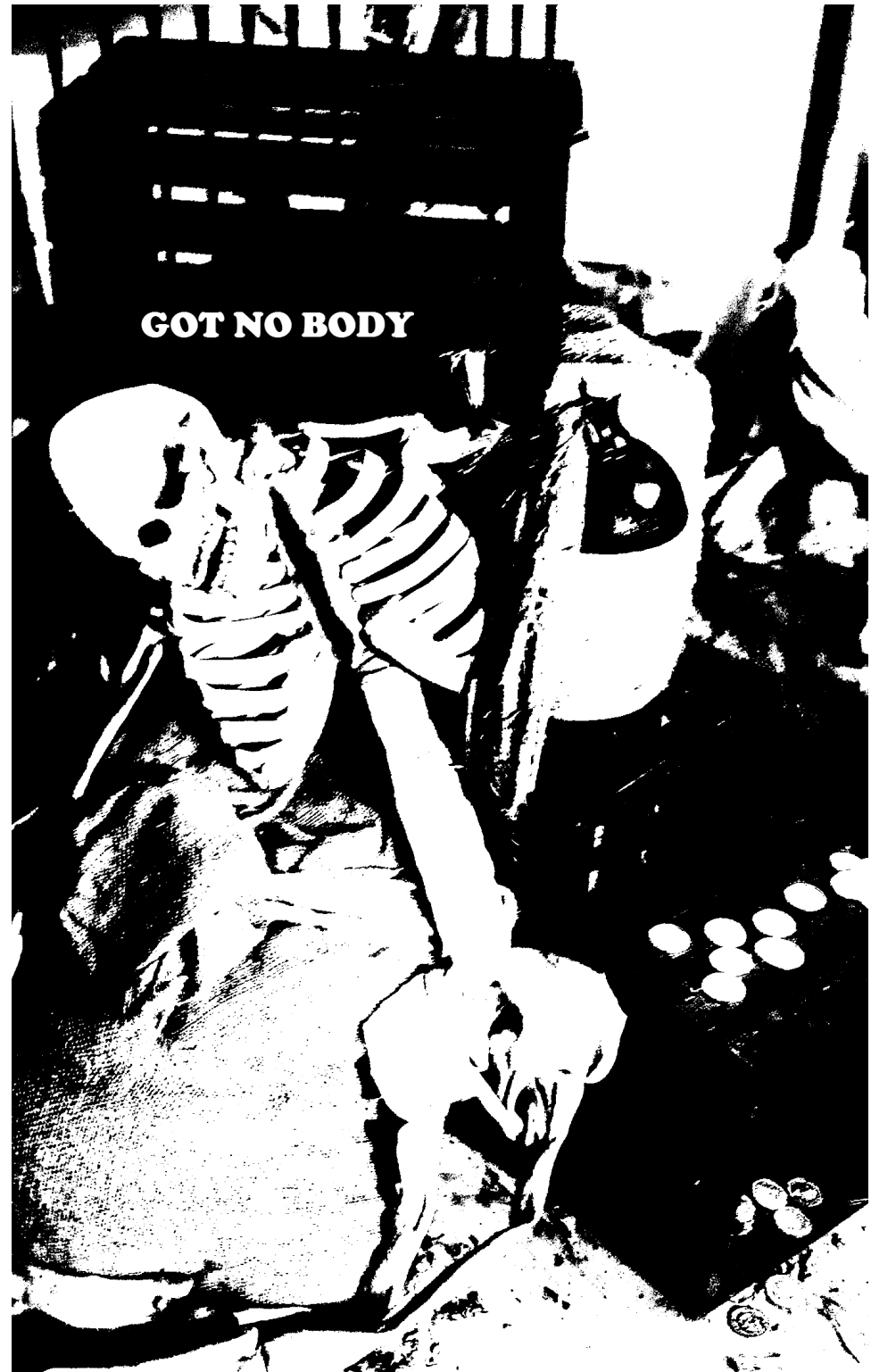


She was aware, of course, that her movements were pre-determined: that if given this particular set of sensory input, under the same conditions, her actions would follow accordingly each time.

So when the notion crossed her mind that perhaps the reflection wasn't mirroring her, but rather she was mirroring it, she dismissed the notion outright. Neither was mirroring the other, if the reflection existed at all, since both of their actions were out of their control. Unfortunately, when the reflection in the water started to make movements separate from hers, she was left without solid theoretical ground to stand on.

The differences were small at first. A twitch here, a blink there. At one point the reflection turned away, casually, as if hearing something in the distance, before turning back and resuming a flawless imitation. If the reflection was different from her, she thought, then it must be determined just as she was. Neither of them could choose to be anywhere else, as much as either of them might hope for that to be the case.

She watched as the reflection pointed down to its feet. She tried to see them in the water, but from the angle, it was no use. Instead, she looked down at her own. The wet snow had frozen around her boots.



When he said he didn't understand,
I sent him the email.

When he said it again,
I sent the articles.

When he said it again,
finally,
I left.

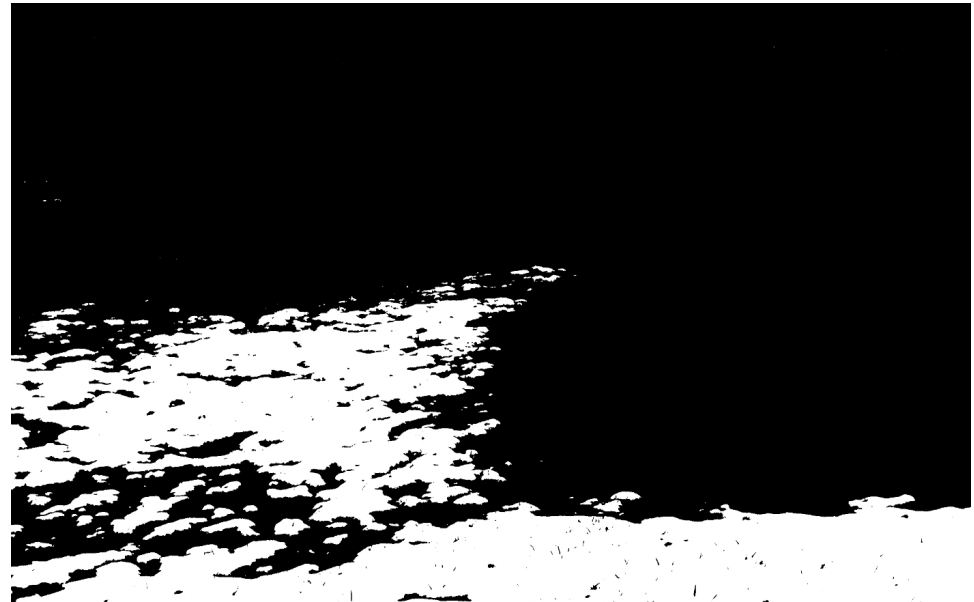
I took all of my clothes in bundled clumps.
I tried my best to hold it all, but couldn't.

Some of it slipped from my hands and
fell to the ground as I walked home.
Through the tears, I couldn't really tell
what was left behind.

But I decided to leave it all and
move on, without looking back.

The past wasn't worth holding
onto.

So I loosened my grip.



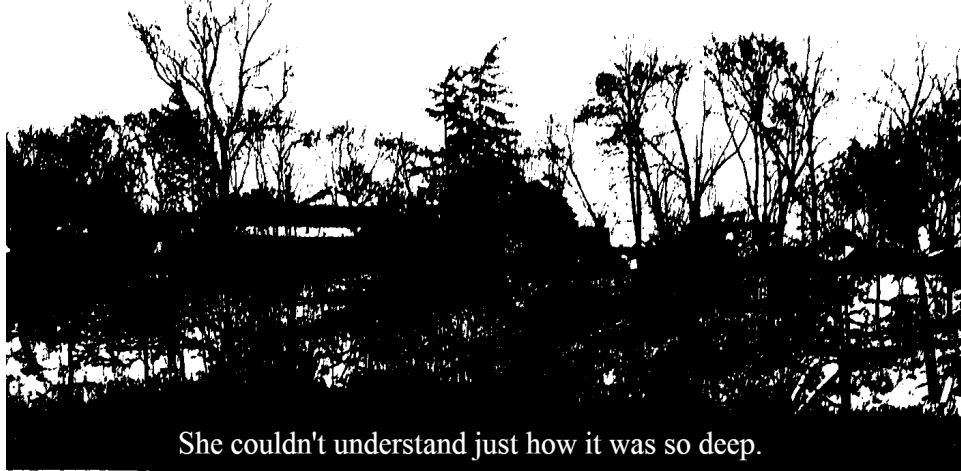
She struggled a bit to free herself, but found that she was distracted by the half-hearted efforts her reflection made to do the same. Perhaps, she was pre-determined to be stuck.

Free will was an illusion, she knew, but one that allowed for a variety of options to present themselves, however spuriously. Though we would always choose the one we were meant to, those other options represented what it meant to be free. With her boots stuck in the frozen snow, she saw those options evaporate one by one. The reflection continued to mirror her movements, but this time smiled as, like her, it struggled in vain.

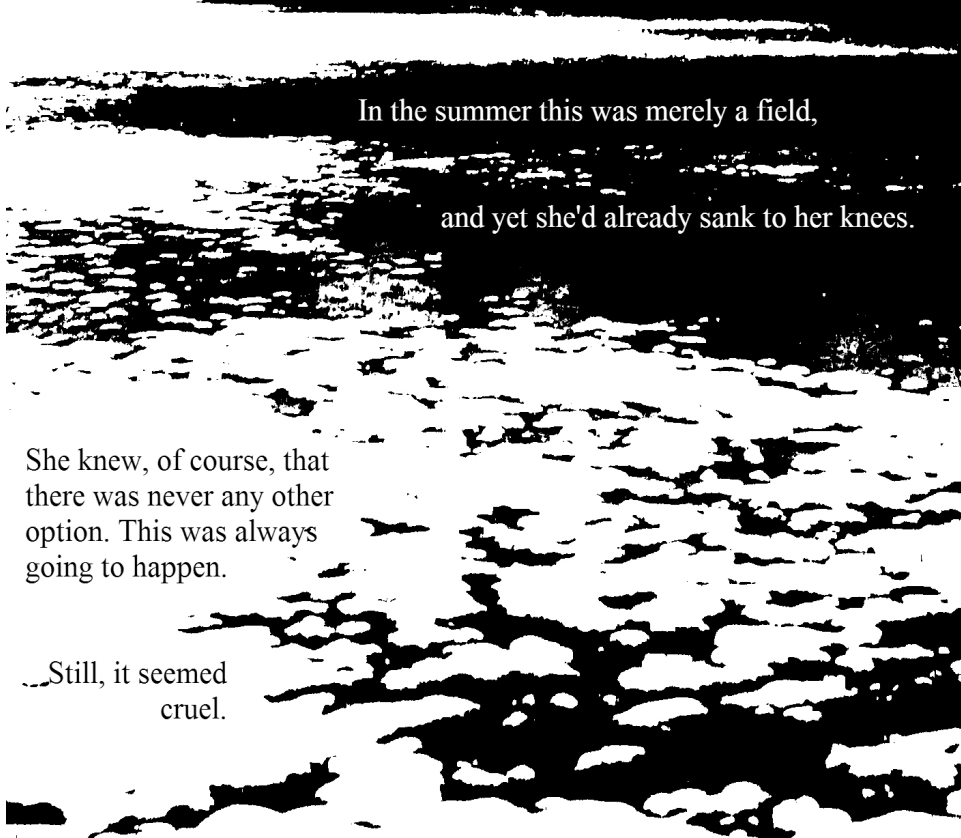
She considered the fact that the reflection seemed to move independently of her, but that she did not seem to move independently of it. When it turned away, she did not follow suit, yet whatever move she made it followed all the same. It was as if the reflection could choose whether or not it would follow, but she lacked that option entirely. The only movements that separated the two of them were the reflection's.

Still, that didn't mean that the reflection had free will. Though it seemed to choose its actions, she knew that such a choice was simply one of a predetermined and illusory set of options. The end result would always be the same.

The snow and ice below her cracked, and she fell, slightly, as the water rushed to greet her ankles. The melted snow pond gradually rose, until she realized that what appeared to be rising water was actually the result of her being slowly dragged into it.



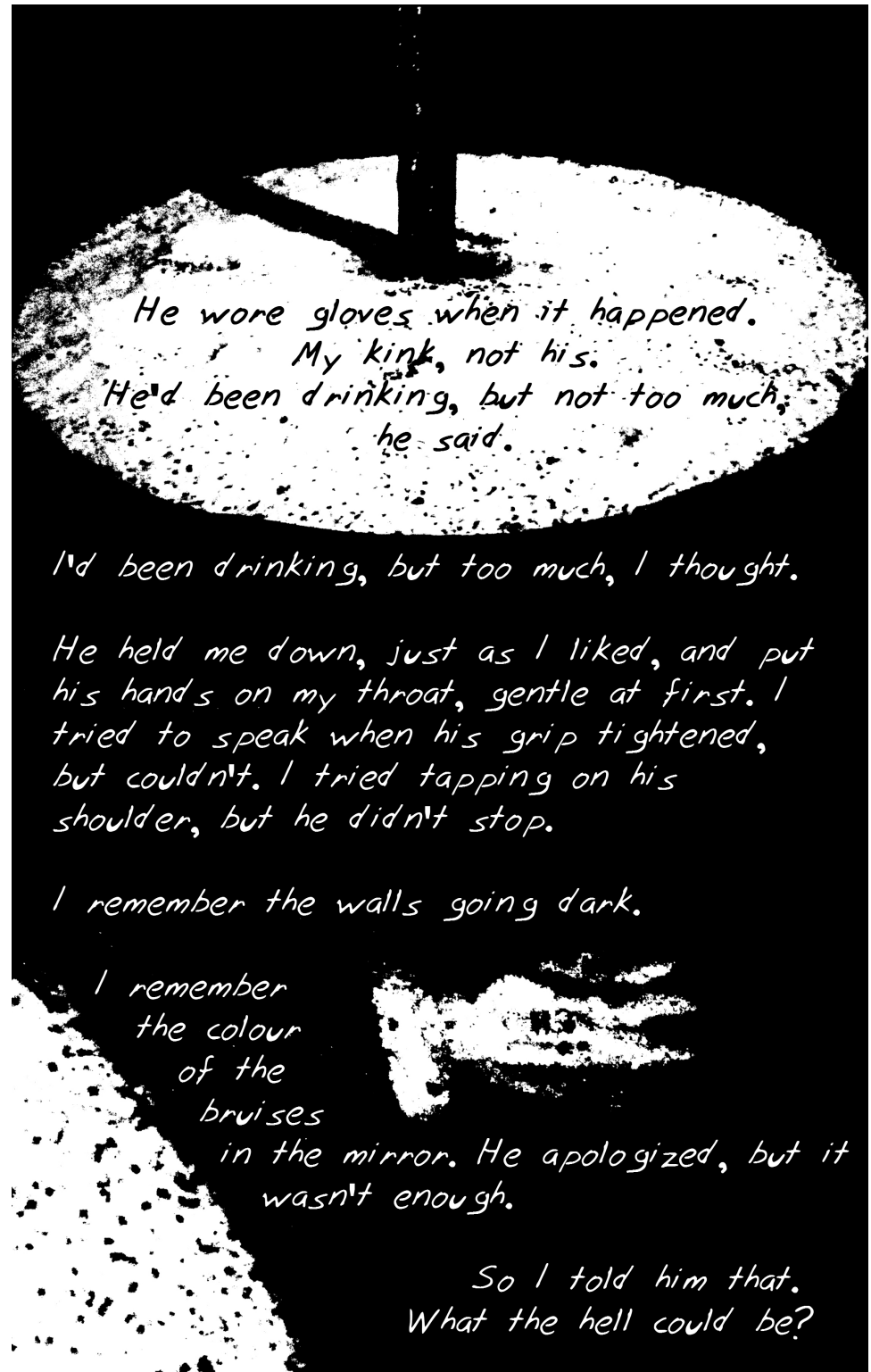
She couldn't understand just how it was so deep.



In the summer this was merely a field,
and yet she'd already sank to her knees.

She knew, of course, that there was never any other option. This was always going to happen.

...Still, it seemed cruel.



He wore gloves when it happened.
My kink, not his.
'He'd been drinking, but not too much,'
he said.

I'd been drinking, but too much, I thought.

He held me down, just as I liked, and put his hands on my throat, gentle at first. I tried to speak when his grip tightened, but couldn't. I tried tapping on his shoulder, but he didn't stop.

I remember the walls going dark.

I remember
the colour
of the
bruises
in the mirror. He apologized, but it
wasn't enough.

So I told him that.
What the hell could be?

GRIP

I watched him study his computer screen.
Whenever he looked at me, I turned away.

I didn't have to turn away very often.

He read each comment on each article in
silence.

He had already read the email I sent him.
I still loved him. I still cared for him.
I said all that in the email.

We knew our kinks and our limits.
We both liked it rough.
But last night he choked me.

Last night he didn't stop.

The water was, impossibly, now up to her waist. Still, she moved deeper, sinking slowly into the desolate pond. Free will was a lie, but a comforting one. And though she knew, on an academic level, that there was no escaping her fate, she nonetheless held fast to the hope that she could break free. Her reflection ran its fingers through the water, though there were no ripples. She touched a bit of the cold pond with her fingertips, and the reflection did the same.

As she sank, she realized that the reflection and her were always going to join this way. Their fingers entwined in the water, they moved in unison. Deeper into the pond. Deeper into the cold water.

Up to her neck, she
took one last look
into the water.



She couldn't tell where the reflection
began, and where she ended.