

SINGLE OCCUPANCY

Lewis Warsh
& Archie Rand



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LEWIS WARSH
& ARCHIE RAND

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Designed by Kyle Schlesinger

Single Occupancy is a series of 126 units, ink on paper, text by Lewis Warsh, drawings by Archie Rand, 19 x 16 inches, each embossed with stamp "Lewis Warsh Archie Rand 2017."

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David A. Kirschenbaum, editor and publisher

INTRODUCTION

A fevered atmosphere of intellectual competition and camaraderie had settled over CCNY in 1965. Poets and musicians of extraordinary gifts seeded the south campus making obligatory courses irrelevant to our education. I was there for one semester. Paul Blackburn was teaching poetry, Fred Tuten and Philip Zimbardo were faculty, Ravi Shankar and Luciano Berio showed up and The Blues Project, Van Ronk's band, Left Banke, David Bromberg, Felix Galimir's resident quartet and my classmates, the remarkable Jody Stecher and Andy Statman with their clutch of stellar bluegrass instrumentalists, jammed on the grass and in the halls. I drew a cover for my friend Ross Feld who edited *Promethean*, the school art/lit mag that could feature in one year's output the work of George Oppen, Jack Spicer, Diane di Prima, Eugenio Montale, Denise Levertov, and Gil Sorrentino.

Evenings at jazz clubs gradually morphed into my attending the goings-on at St. Mark's Church where swarms of poets would assemble in astonishing numbers. Clerking at The Record Centre found me almost next door to the 8th Street Bookshop's mezzanine, stocked with mimeo, type and offset publications powered by a national poetry ferment. It was my CCNY acquaintance, from *Promethean*, poet Robert David Cohen, who mentioned to me the name of his friend, Lewis Warsh, with whose poetry I soon familiarized myself. Lewis was also a *Promethean* alum, steeped in that cauldron of poetry hysteria—but he had just graduated, so the chance for that introductory handshake was lost.

We got together much later when I was working with Bill Berkson and attended Lewis' frequent readings. My wife Maria, whose declining health made it so difficult for her to travel and converse, had a rare, delightful time when we visited Lewis and Katt near their Massachusetts summer digs. Lewis and I clicked. Our personalities were consonant, infected by that sediment of cultural silt deposited over post-war New York. We had both been marooned on the tail end of that cohort of wise-guy New Yorkers whose ascendancy held sway for a few years giving birth to Sid Caesar, Mel Brooks, Lenny Bruce, and Woody Allen. That curve-balled straight talk retained enough velocity to cede us a whiff of its' be-bop hipness.

Lewis had a paradoxically caring form of removed sarcasm, devoid of slapstick, bitterness or preaching, steering just shy of cynicism that was saturated, if you peeked under the covers, with love. There is empathy in his novels. He is never kidding. With no sublimated anger he was equipped, truly, with wonder. Located somewhere between Oscar Levant's pith and Elaine May's deadpan fear of the maudlin, strengthened with the calming steel of a reporter's accuracy, his observations were flavored with an even-too-young avoidance of jadedness. Wry and specific, I so admired his work. Lewis wrote like no other. Each sentence could be a novel. Every line, from his earliest work onward, insulated and self-contained, attaches to a chain of pulsing clots. A megaphone so oddly

low in volume that one can hardly discern that it is issuing relentless announcement. Instantly we wanted to work together.

We took to each other's responses and turned out a series of 126 remarkable collaborative units. He called this sequential graphic poem, *Single Occupancy*. Each conversational pronouncement is written under an image that appears untethered, awaiting salvage, desperate for context. Lewis' self-deprecating hand, is so faint that the reader/viewer is gasping, coerced into engaging the scrawl to extract that hint of significance, unlocking these arbitrary icons, these representations that, apparently, required, no, deserved, a commemorating narrative. Warmly baffled, the observer juggles the possibles to ascertain what, if any, story could weld the drawing to its floating word bubble. Each unit catalyzes to a freestanding broadside, the entire grouping annealed by the pressure of its own gravitational mass. Somehow we feel wiser, enlisted.

Lewis' legacy of generosity as a teacher is legendary. There is a generosity in his offerings that is not flip. That is the word for Lewis: generous. In *Single Occupancy* the reader gets a full serving:

- 105. You have to wait in line for a drink at intermission
- 106. If you go to the well once too often, you fall in
- 107. The phrase "no stone unturned" does not apply
- 108. I wiped my boots on the welcome mat and begged for more
- 109. The planes are stranded on the runway and the ice is
melting on the wing
- 110. You can park in front of a hydrant and no one will write
you a ticket

The first book I bought of Lewis' was *Long Distance* (Ferry Press, 1971), the title itself offering enough distance, as Paul Blackburn would say, "Pennsylvania Turnpikes" of distance, that one could continue to revisit the territorial expanse fabricated by the conjoining of just those two words. The last poem in that early volume still points to how nourishing, joyous, it was to work with him. Rest in poetry dear, sweet, great, Lewis.

DEFINITION OF GREAT

Momentarily

the language of description is lost
what you see with your eyes is enough, for you, anyway
but how to get that sense of what you saw across
to another person

it's possible

through the spirit in your voice
when you say
"it was great!"

to convey

what happened
in that moment

& it was great

not only that
it was terrific, & interesting too
it was nice

& I had a good time doing it. I had fun.

You should have been there. Not only that, it was beautiful.
It was inspiring.

— Archie Rand
New York City
March 1, 2021



All The mornings of your life
begin in the same way



There are Things ^s to do -- at any given moment
there are many Things to do -- and it's important
not to forget any of them



Nothing stands between the precipice
and the ledge



A tornado watch is in effect until
midnight, and all the midnights
to come



GIVE credit where it's due,
or claim it as your own



The children on the beach
chasing a ball into the
tide



It's a good idea to go AWOL
and spend the night on
dry land



Equate "maturity" with the ability
to take care of yourself, but
something goes wrong



They came out of nowhere
and disappeared into The
night



This is the room where I
lost my virginity



Children appear out of
Nowhere to eat the
leftovers



The midnight train to Georgia
is leaving in a few
minutes



The stun-gun comes in handy
when an unexpected visitor
appears at your Bedroom door



Rapunzel let down her hair
and rode out of town



look at me for a moment
when you have a moment



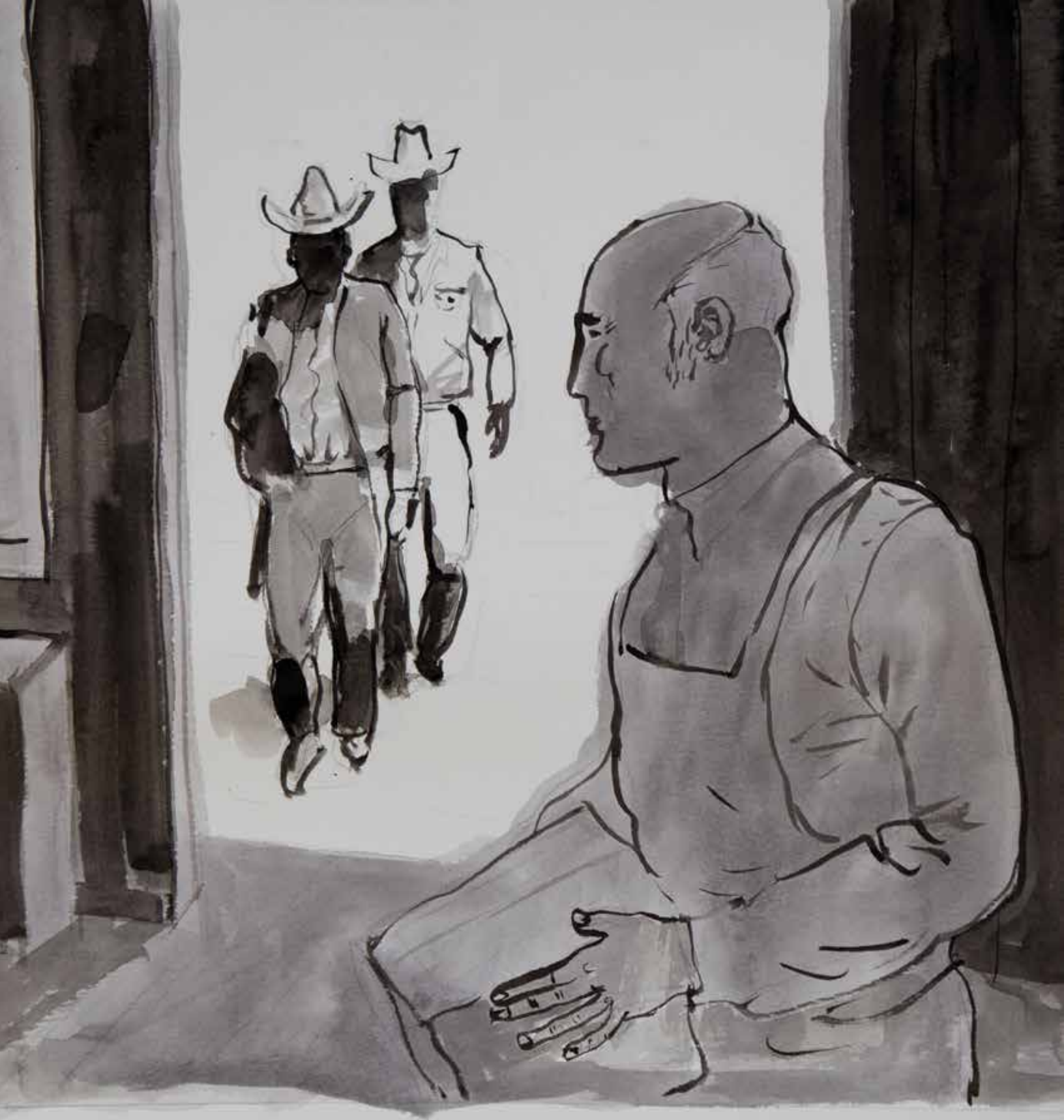
Crawl back into your cave
until the storm subsides



Two for the price of one,
a half-dozen of the other



No one told you what it was
like to run naked through
the grass



This office is closed until
further notice



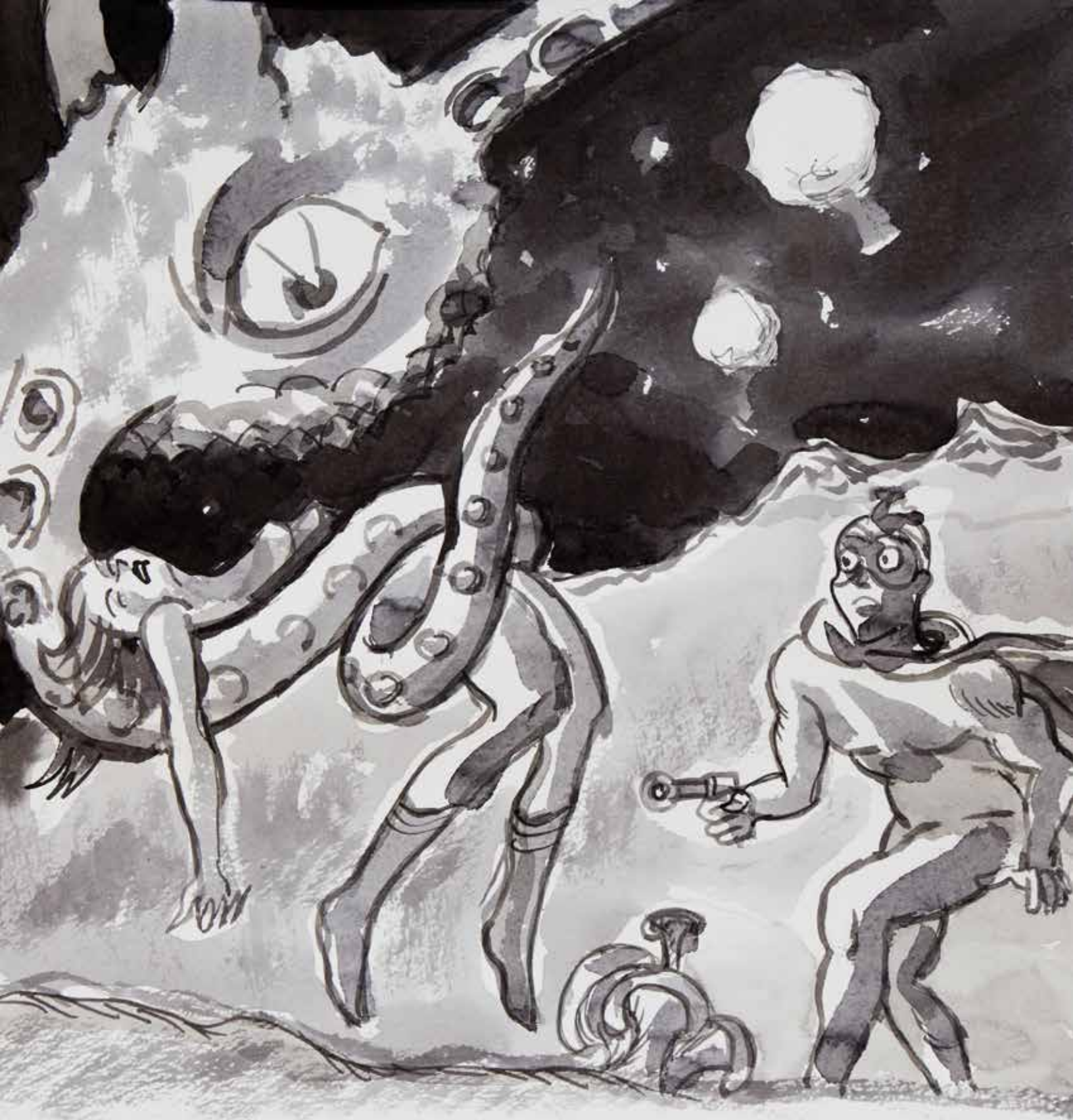
There's a diver around the bend
where you can get coffee to go
and a slice of pie



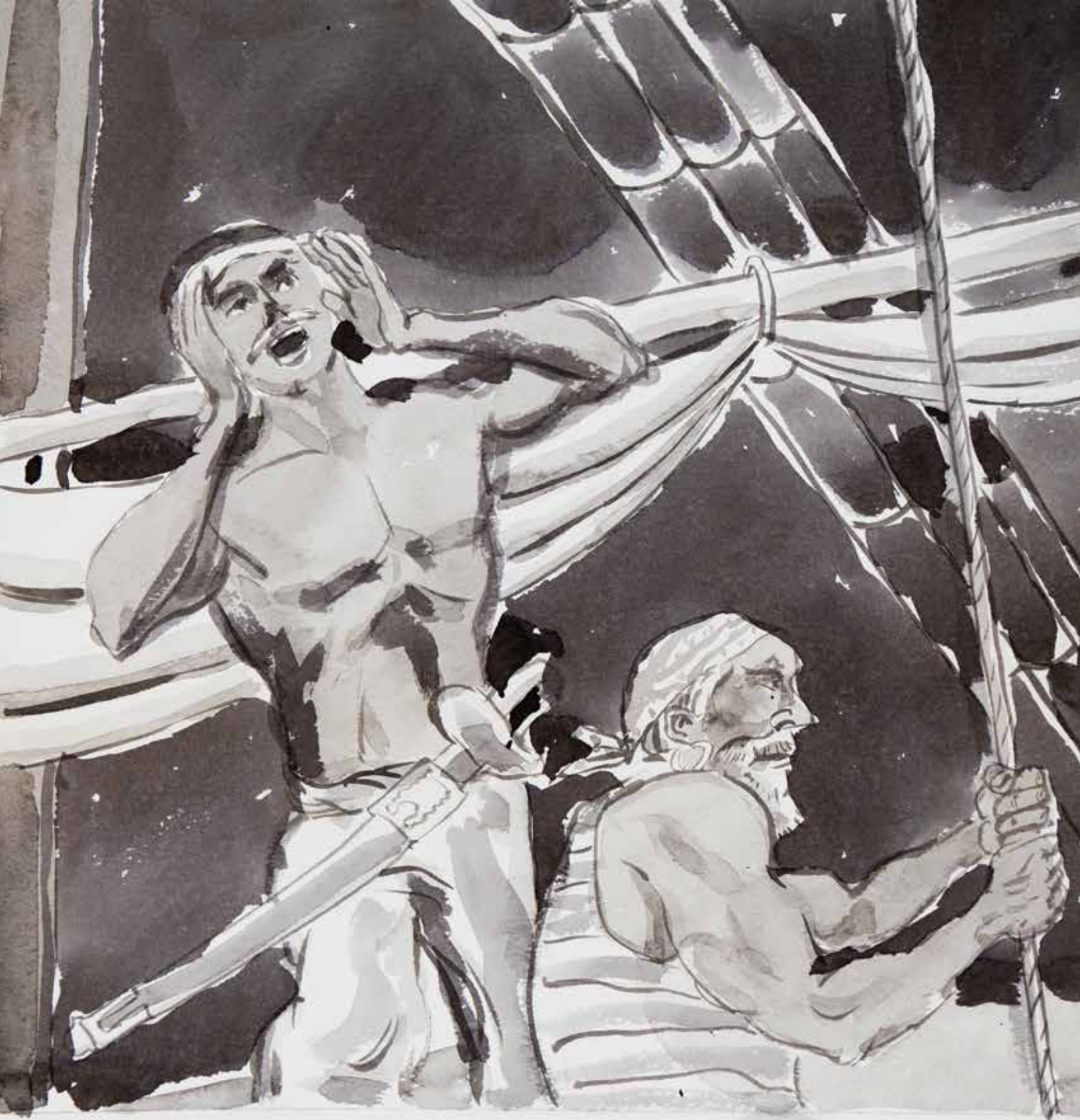
This is the Road where we
got lost in the fog



A can of paint thinner
was left out in the rain



A blur undefined, barely
visible to the naked eye



I missed The turn - off
and landed in the swamp



The usherettes line up to use
the pay phones in the
lobby



Nothing can prevent me
from having my own
Thoughts



A Kid in short pants
with a chip on his
shoulder



You were playing in the street
with your friends and it
was time for dinner



The riders on The storm are
waiting for you around
the bend



Remember to close The windows
when you leave The house



A cop in uniform shopping
for sheets at Target



Why not give yourself The
present you think you
deserve



I forget what I wanted
to tell you put the check
in the mail



Stop me if I'm confusing you
with someone else



" You're not going to kiss
her, are you? "



A line outside the porta-potty
from dusk to dawn



Not every night, but maybe
twice a week



Suddenly the world was
created out of
nothing



Keep your mouth shut and
nothing will happen to you
or your friends



The names of all the planets
and stars are on the tip
of my tongue



No one knows about any
of this except me



She lived on the same street
all her life, I kid you not



Write down the words you
won't get a second
chance



I went in one door
and came out the other



Surprise me for once in your life
and arrive on time



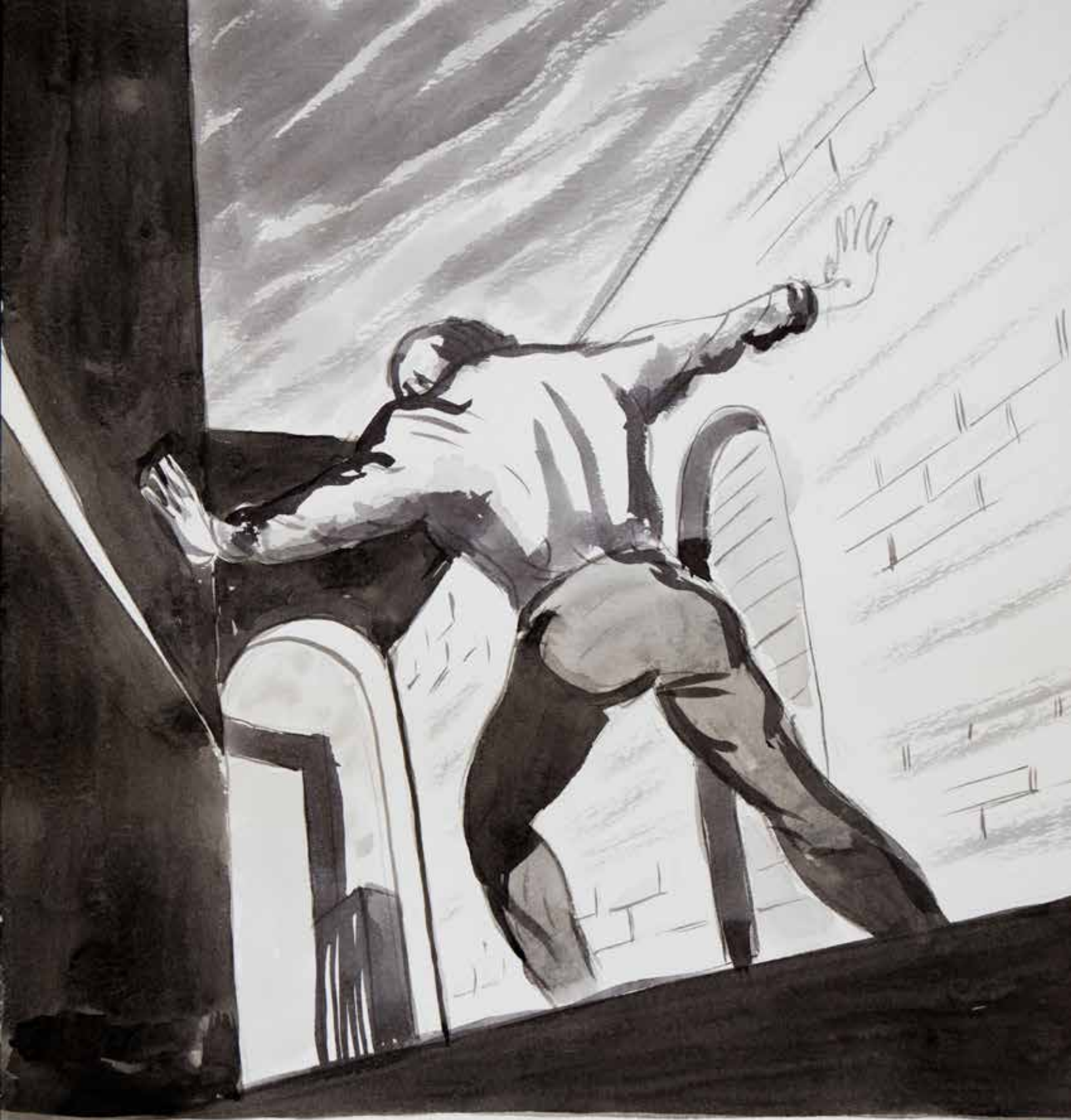
All I can offer you is some
warm papaya juice, and
a spittoon



It's possible to fall in love
with everyone you meet,
at least for a minute



The concourse of reckless
abandon is open to everyone



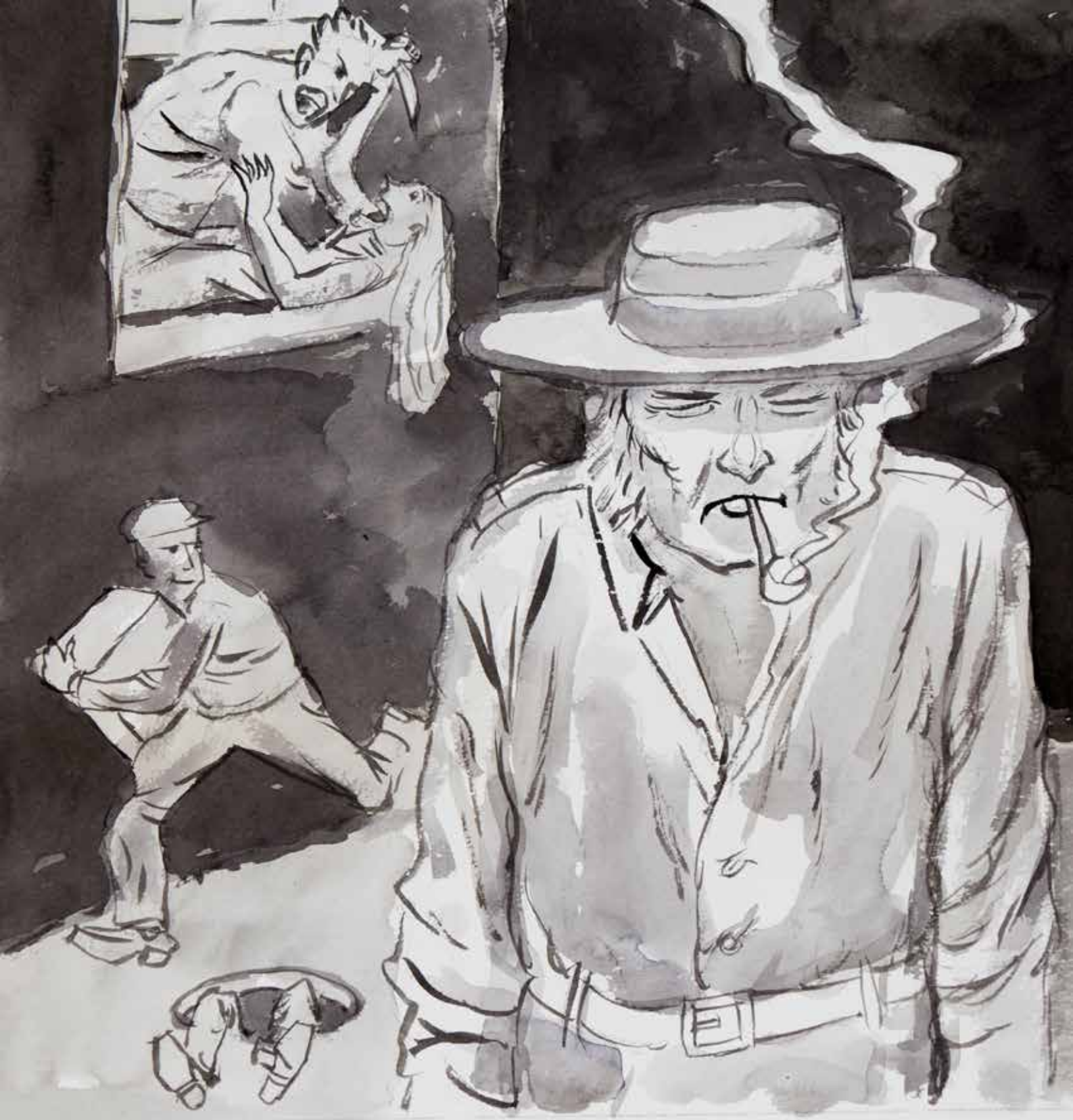
Slip into something cool
and join me on the patio



You are barred from these
premises until further notice



The last time I drove through
town I had a tuna melt
and a Coke



Here I am, in broad daylight,
The person you once knew



He was a stranger in his own
country who was talking off
the top of his head



The hour before noon when
the toilet is occupied



How about a night on the town
at your favorite bistro?



You can drop me at the
corner of Forgive & Forget



Here , in the dark , it
doesn't matter what you're
wearing



You can always get a rain check
and come back tomorrow



It was right in front of my
nose but I didn't see it



A date in the future
when you must vacate the premises



All the mornings of your
life begin in the same way



The wedding will go on,
whether you're there or not



If we lived in London, we
might retire to the local
pub



Steal off to the steam room
for a change of heart



Come back to where you were,
never leaving, never saying
goodbye



The apartment comes with
a hot plate and a tub



How many times can you say
"goodbye" in one day?



The great neon bulb went
out above my head



The wolf at the door begins to
bark when I say your name



I pause under The street light
and stare at her window



It's all happening off-stage
whether you like it or not



I bagged some groceries at the
checkout counter of the empty heart
and ate a corn muffin in the pouring
rain



"The drinks are on me," one might
say, and leave it at that



You can lie to yourself, ad
infinitum, even as you sleep



You are barred from these premises
until further notice



You had offered me something --
your hand -- and now you were
taking it away



Someone I didn't know was standing
under the shower



If you listen to the music you might
dissolve the tension,
two left feet -- quicksand + chaos



The person I was kissing had
changed her name



We smacked on sugarless gum
and ate day-old donuts, three
for a quarter



A split personality sleeping
on the couch of a friend



You can roll back the tide
and see what's coming, even before
it happens



Distant cousins eating couscous
on the grass behind The house



I put my hand on your face
in the darkness, but it
wasn't you



An envelope with a pink slip
and a subsequent trip to Alaska
changed my life



Offer something for half-price
no one wants



Hank somebody sucker-punched me
and I retaliated with a
low blow



A puddle of piss in a
crowded train terminal



Time to eat some tuna
right from the can



A loop of the same song
reverberating in your head



An object enters your line
of vision and you give it
a name



I'm free seven days a week,
afternoons and evenings



A tornado watch is in effect
until midnight



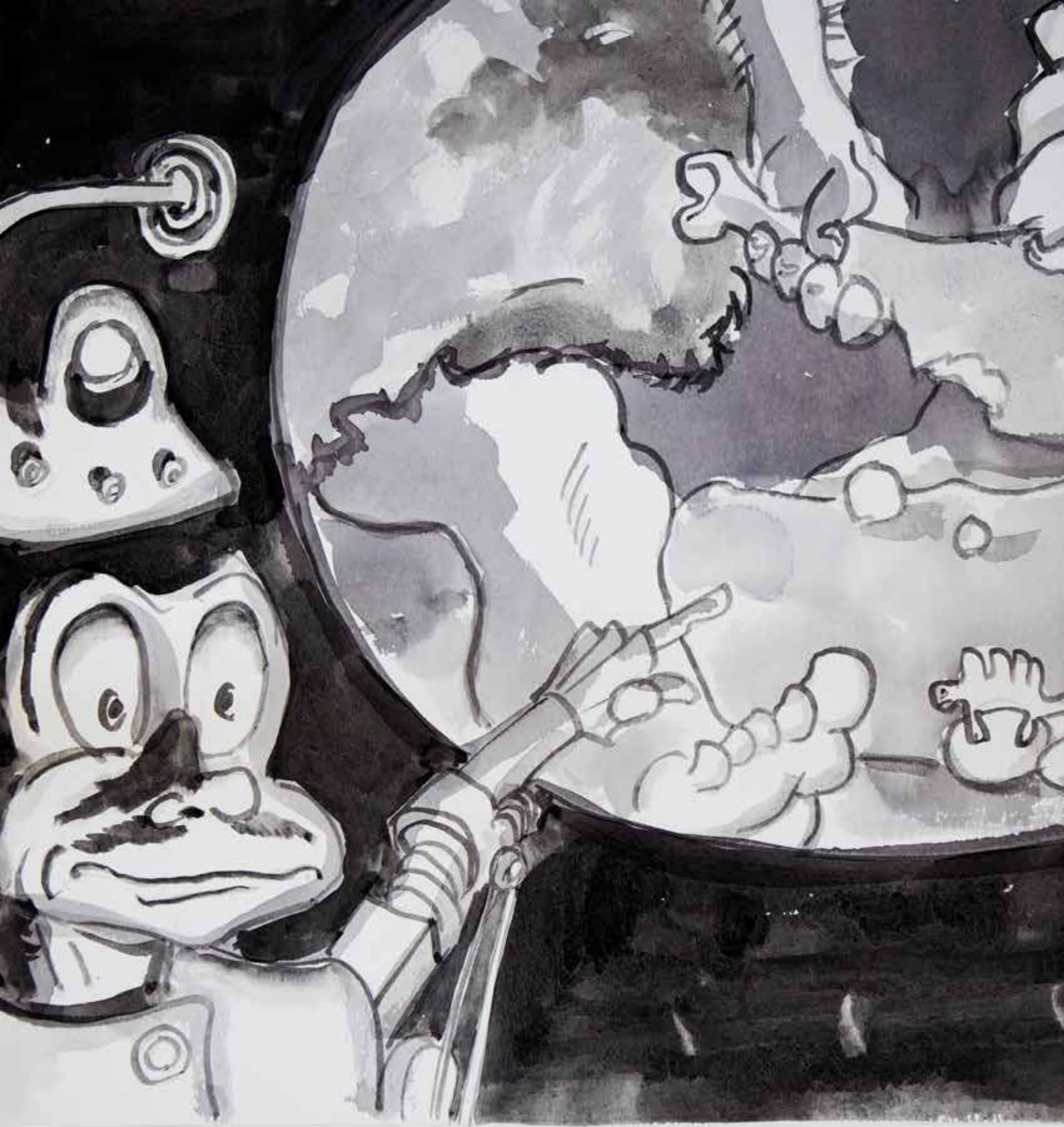
Dissolve two aspirin in a
spoon and swallow



Brief flashes of happiness,
colorless hair



We hold our breaths in the back
of the cab and close
our eyes



Portents of the future,
harbingers of the past



(It was all in your mind
from start to finish)



It would seem like love could last
a long time if you let it



You can spread your blanket on
the sand and toss a beach
ball into the air



Audrey Hepburn crawls across the
Kitchen floor with a Knife
in her teeth



I beg The reader to forgive
me in advance



It's pointless to get down on
your hands + knees for no
good reason



The judge tacked a day onto
your sentence, which ends here



You have to wait on line
for a drink at intermission



If you go to The well once too
often, you fall in



The phrase "no stone unturned"
does not apply



I wiped my boots on the
welcome mat and begged
for more



The planes are stranded on
the runway and the ice is
melting on the wing



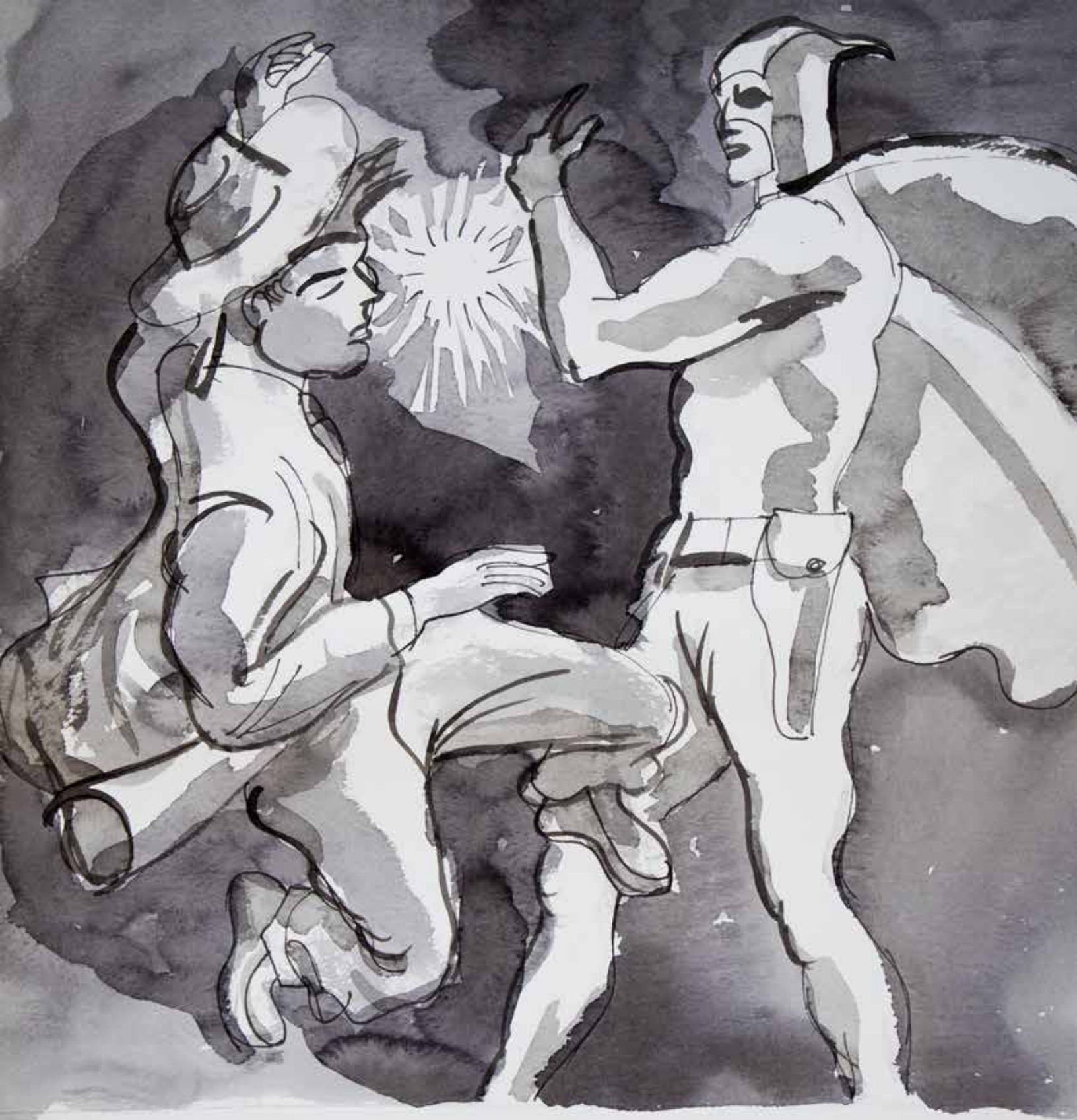
You can park in front of
a hydrant and no one will
write you a ticket



The worms are squirming
at the bottom of The can



I was playing blind man's bluff
in a room of my own



A man stands on a table
and takes off his pants



The hours in between feel
like nothing at all, like
years



The volunteer rubble
runs into the fireman



You have one thing on your
mind and it's better than
nothing

Hardy
Everything set for
hold-up - pick up
your cut of loot
at old tree to-
morrow.
xx

Dispense with your outer
garments and cross against
the green



It was like yesterday, today
and tomorrow rolled into one



Better run for cover before it gets
too late



If anyone asks about you, I'll say
I haven't seen you in years



A movie of animals
in a state of heat



What you know now through
memory who you are adds up
to nothing



It takes awhile for The truth
to sink in



The wedding will go on, whether
you're there or not



A twist of lemon at the
end of November



Pigments of desire among
the glossy shadows