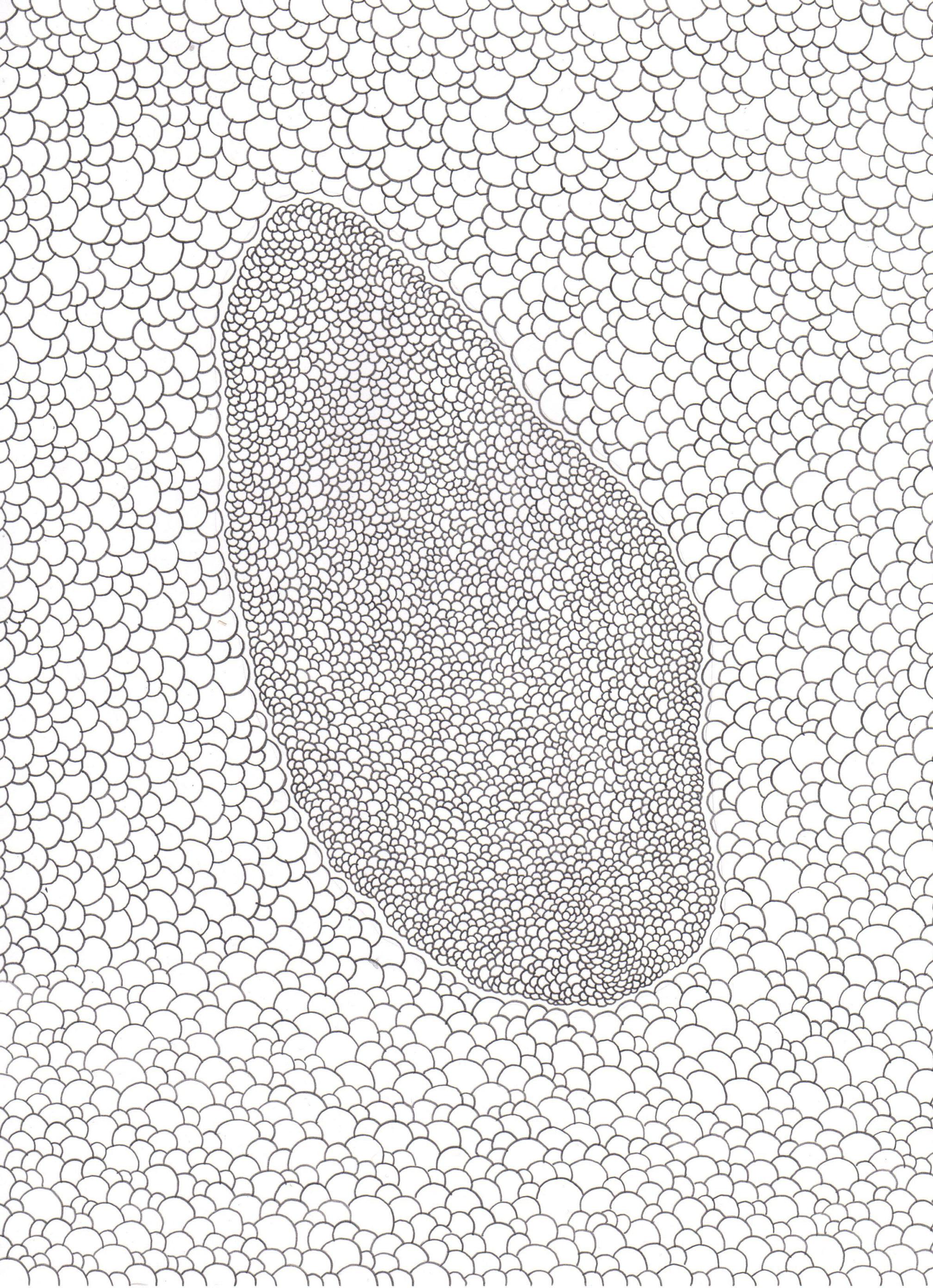
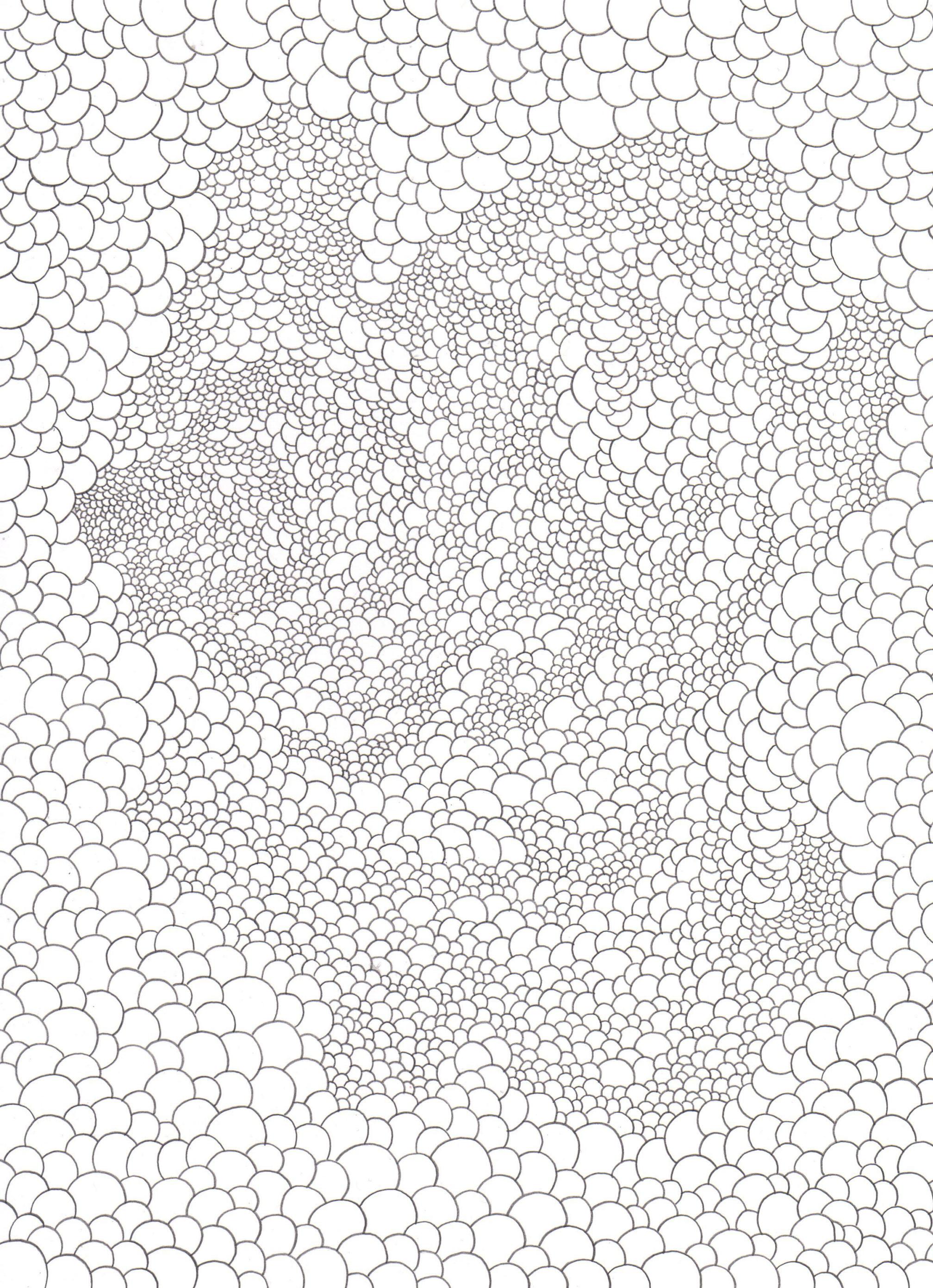




# TRANSMISSION

ISSUE - 01 : TRANSITION













## THE BEER PRAYER

OUR LAGER,  
WHICH ART IN BARRELS,  
HALLOWED BE THY DRINK.

THY WILL BE DRUNK,  
(I WILL BE DRUNK),  
AT HOME AS IN THE TAVERN.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR FOAMY HEAD,  
AND FORGIVE US OUR SPILLAGES,  
AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SPILL  
AGAINST US.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO INCARCERATION,  
BUT DELIVER US FROM HANGOVERS.

FOR THINE IS THE BEER,  
THE BITTER AND THE LAGER,  
FOR EVER AND EVER,  
BARMEN.



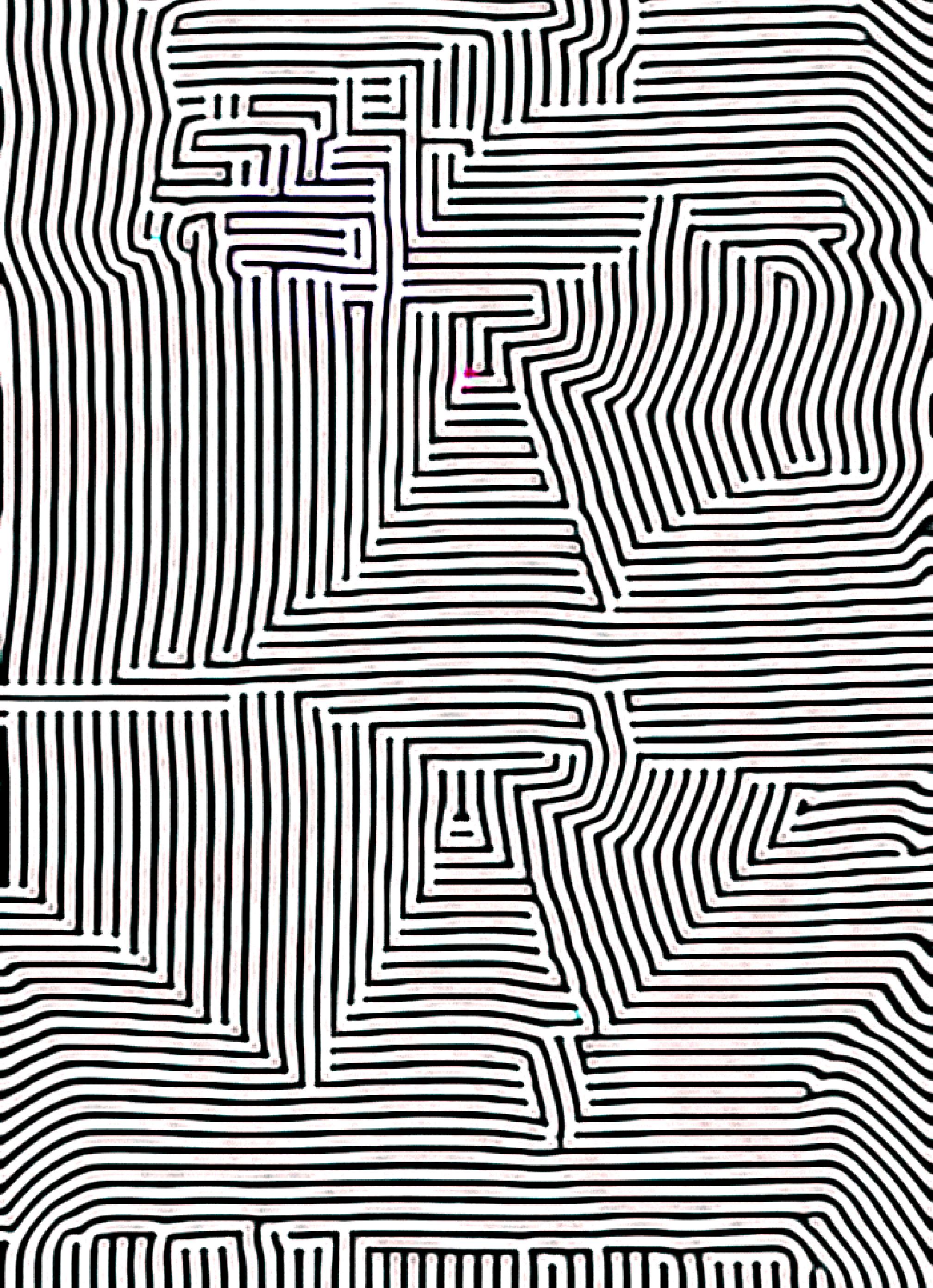


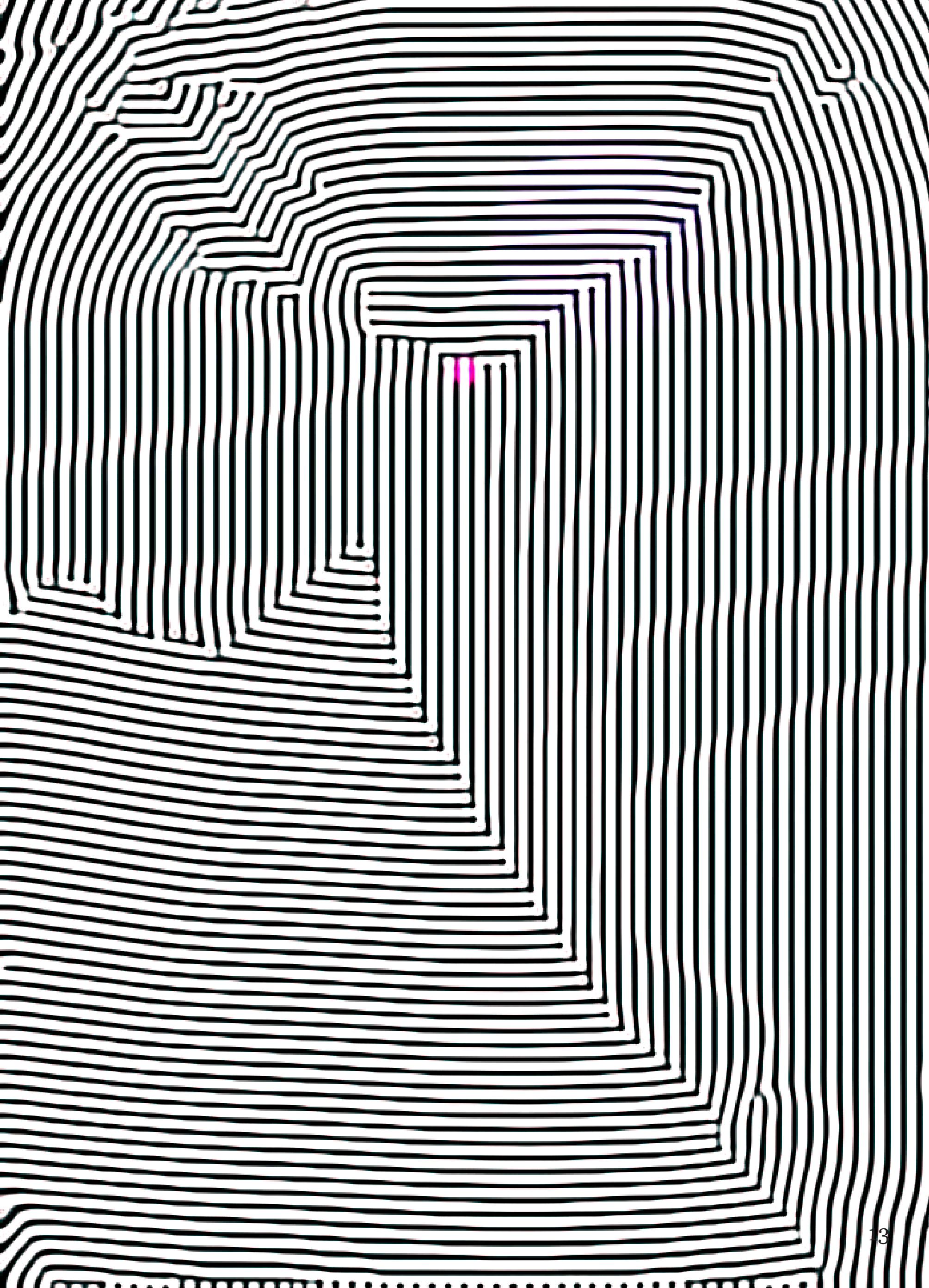


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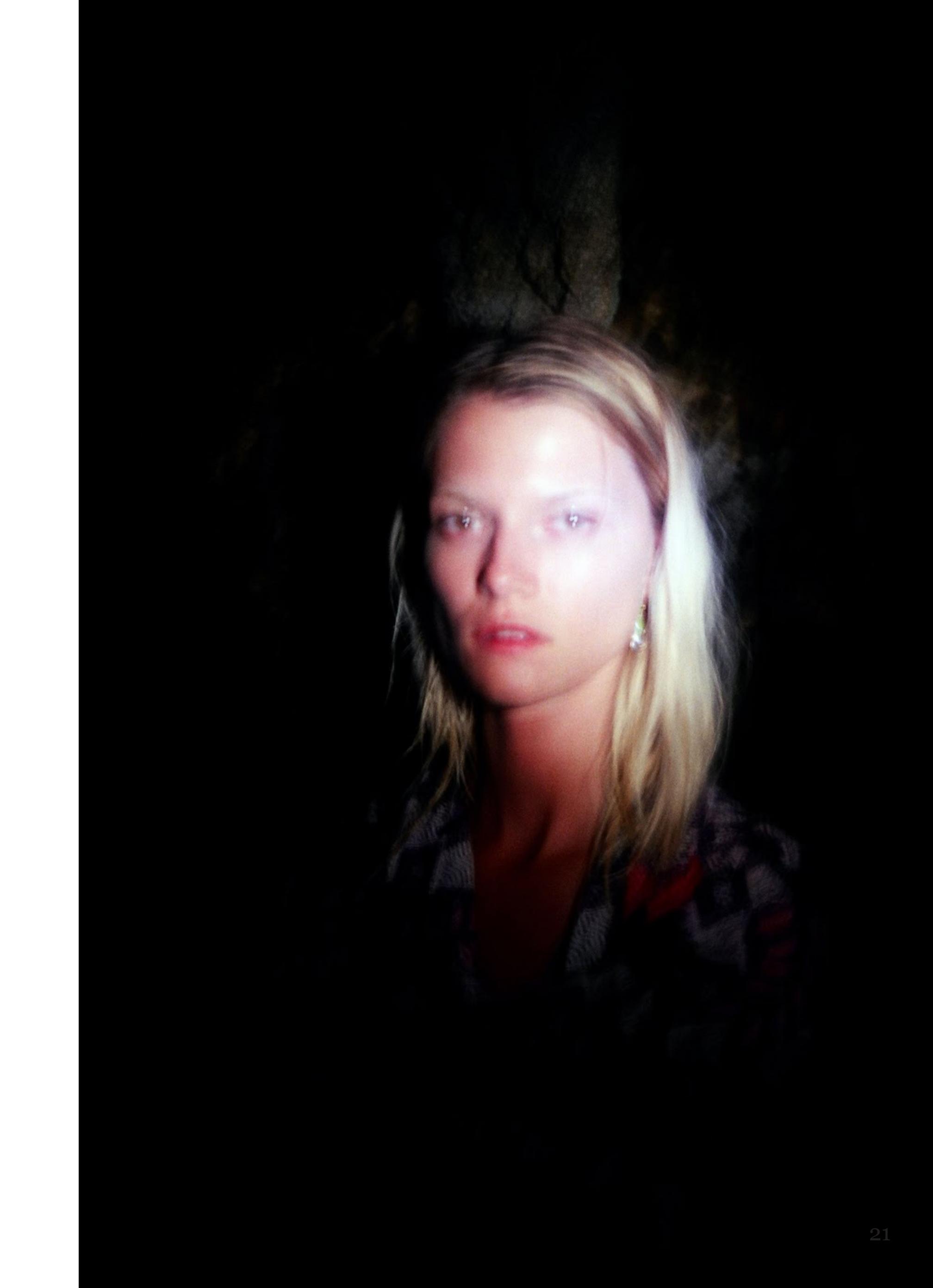


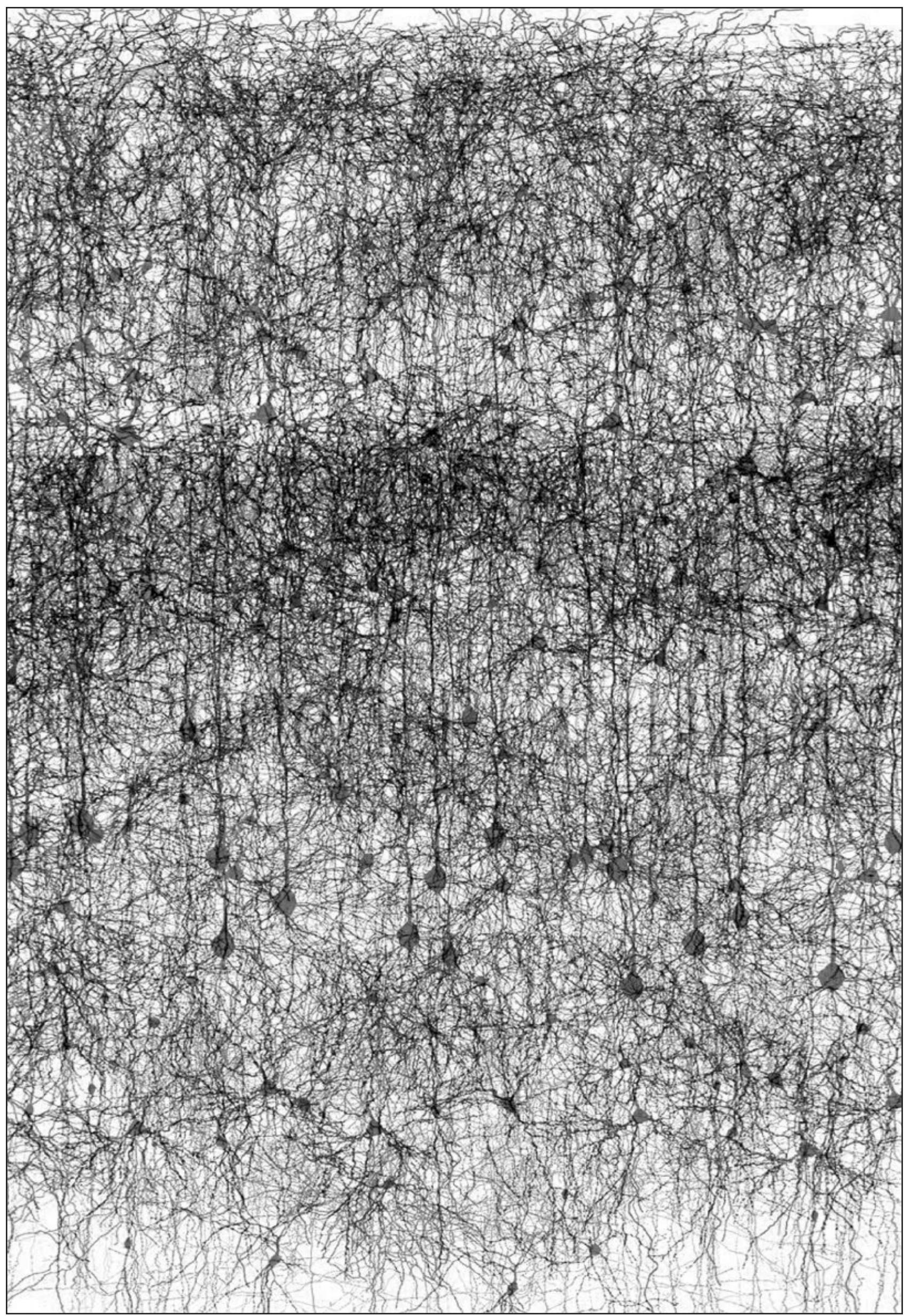






Thank you for everything.





I was having feelings that no language based on concrete physical objects, on actual feeling, can describe. I think I was aware of the metaphoricality of what I felt. I knew words were like chains, they held me back; and like walls with holes in them. Reality kept rushing through; and yet I could not get out to fully exist in it. This is interpreting what I struggled to remember feeling; the act of description taints the description.

I had the sense that this was the fundamental reality and that reality had a universal mouth to tell me so; no sense of divinity, of communion, of the brotherhood of man, of anything I had expected before I became suggestible. No pantheism, no humanism. But something much wider, cooler and more abstruse. That reality was endless interaction. No good, no evil; no beauty, no ugliness. No sympathy, no antipathy. But simply interaction. The endless solitude of the one, its total enislement from all else, seemed the same thing as the total interrelationship of the all. All opposites seemed one, because each was indispensable to each. The indifference and the indispensability of all seemed one. I suddenly knew, but in a new hitherto unexperienced sense of knowing, that all else exists.

Knowing, willing, being wise, being good, education, information, classification, knowledge of all kinds, sensibility, sexuality, these things seemed superficial. I had no desire to state or define or analyze this interaction, I simply wished to constitute it--not even "wished to"--I constituted it. I was volitionless. There was no meaning. Only being.

But the fountain changed, the eddy whirled. It seemed at first to be a kind of reversion to the stage of the dark wind breathing in on me from every side, except that there was no wind, the wind had been only a metaphor, and now it was millions, trillions of such consciousnesses of being, countless nuclei of hope suspended in a vast solution of hazard, a pouring out not of photons, but noons, consciousness-of-being particles. An enormous and vertiginous sense of the innumerability of the universe; an innumerability in which transience and unchangingness seemed integral, essential and uncontradictory. I felt like a germ that had landed, like the first penicillin microbe, not only in a culture where it was totally at home, totally nourished; but in a situation in which it was infinitely significant. A condition of acute physical and intellectual pleasure, a floating suspension, a being perfectly adjusted and related; a quintessential arrival. An intercognition.

At the same time a parabola, a fall, an ejaculation; but the transience, the passage, had become an integral part of the knowledge of the experience. The becoming and the being were one.

I think I saw the star again for a while, the star as it simply was, hanging in the sky above, but now in all its being-and-becoming. It was like walking through a door, going all round the world, and then walking through the same door but a different door.

Then darkness. I remember nothing.

Then light.



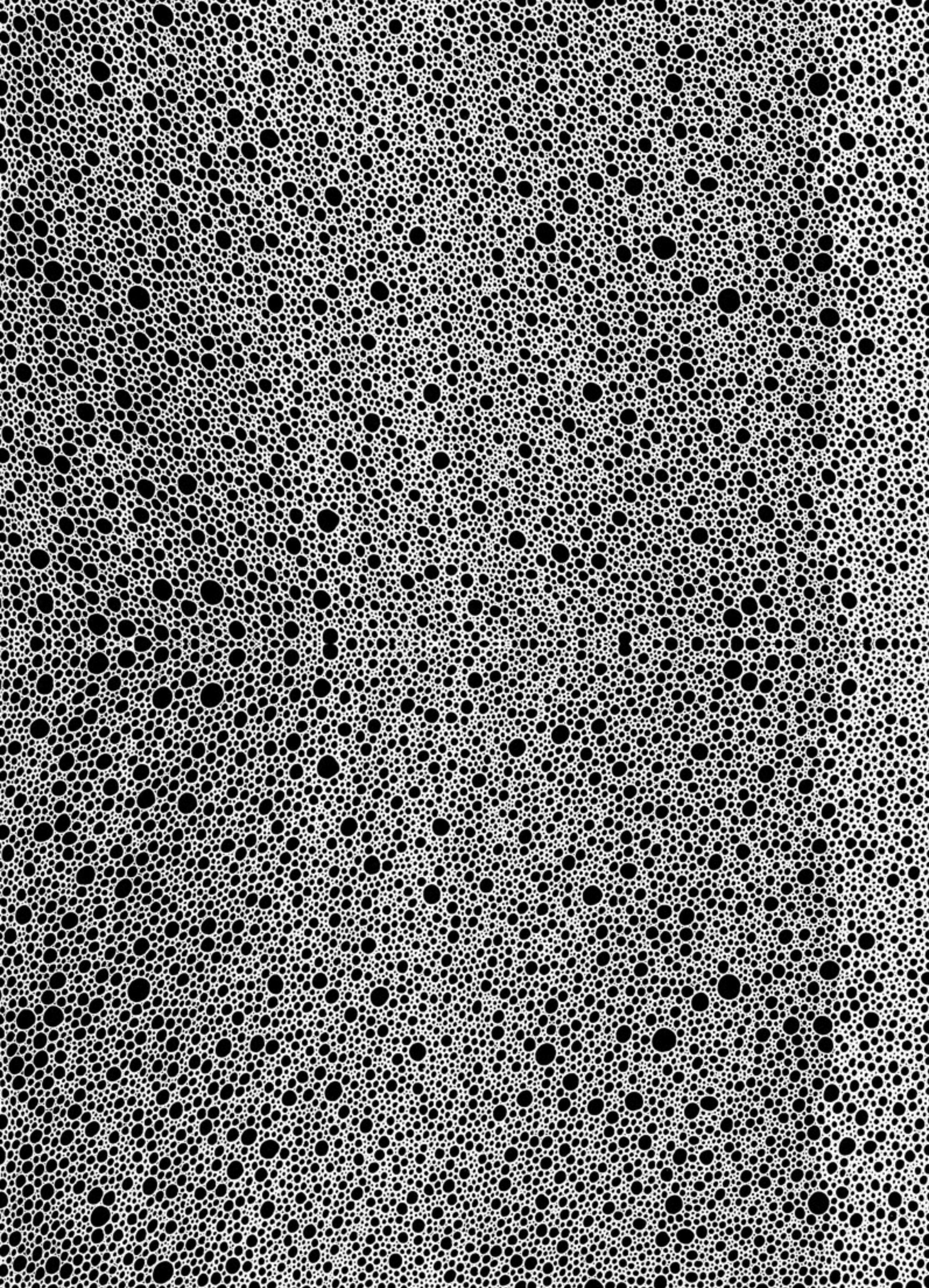


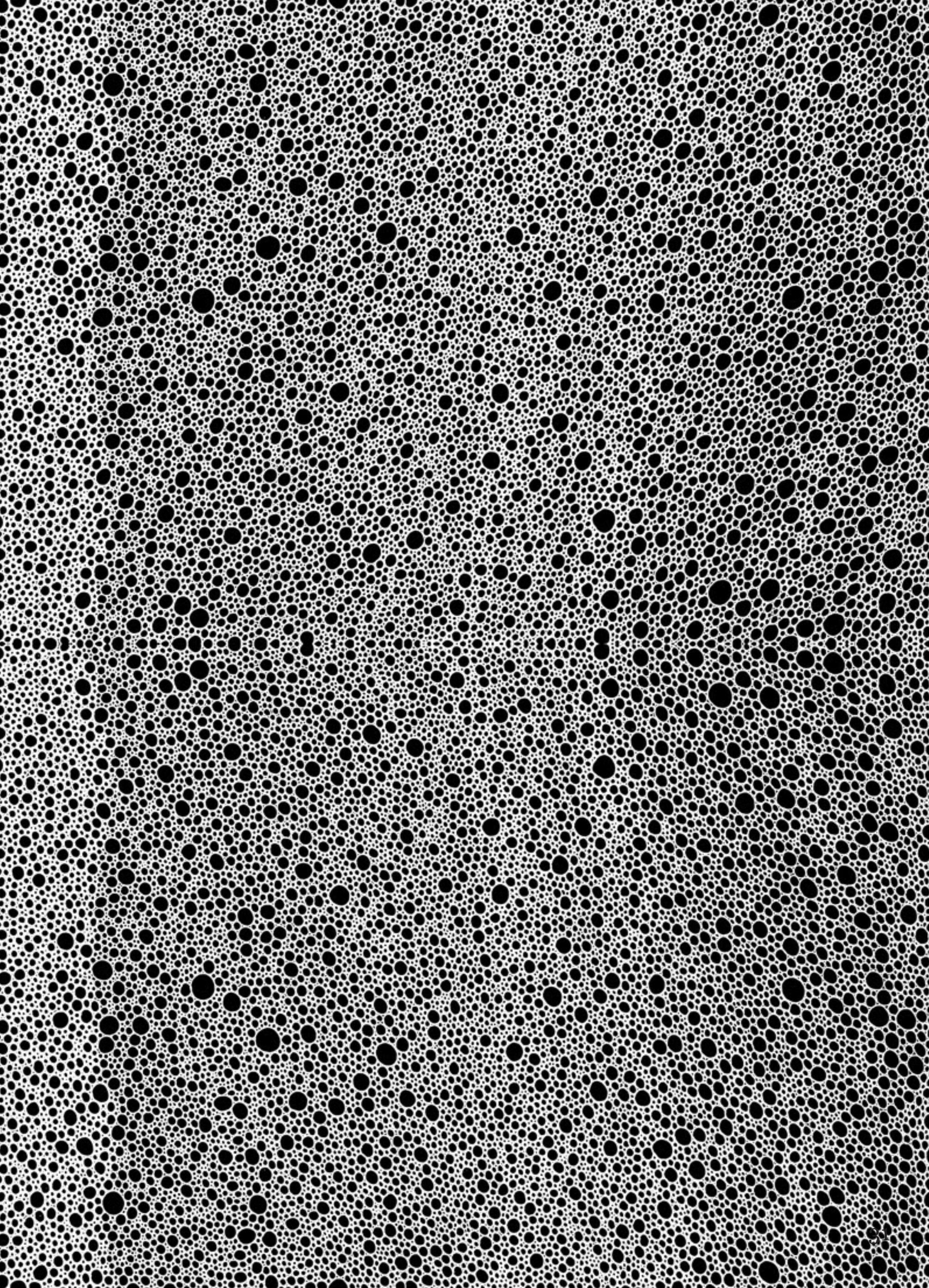














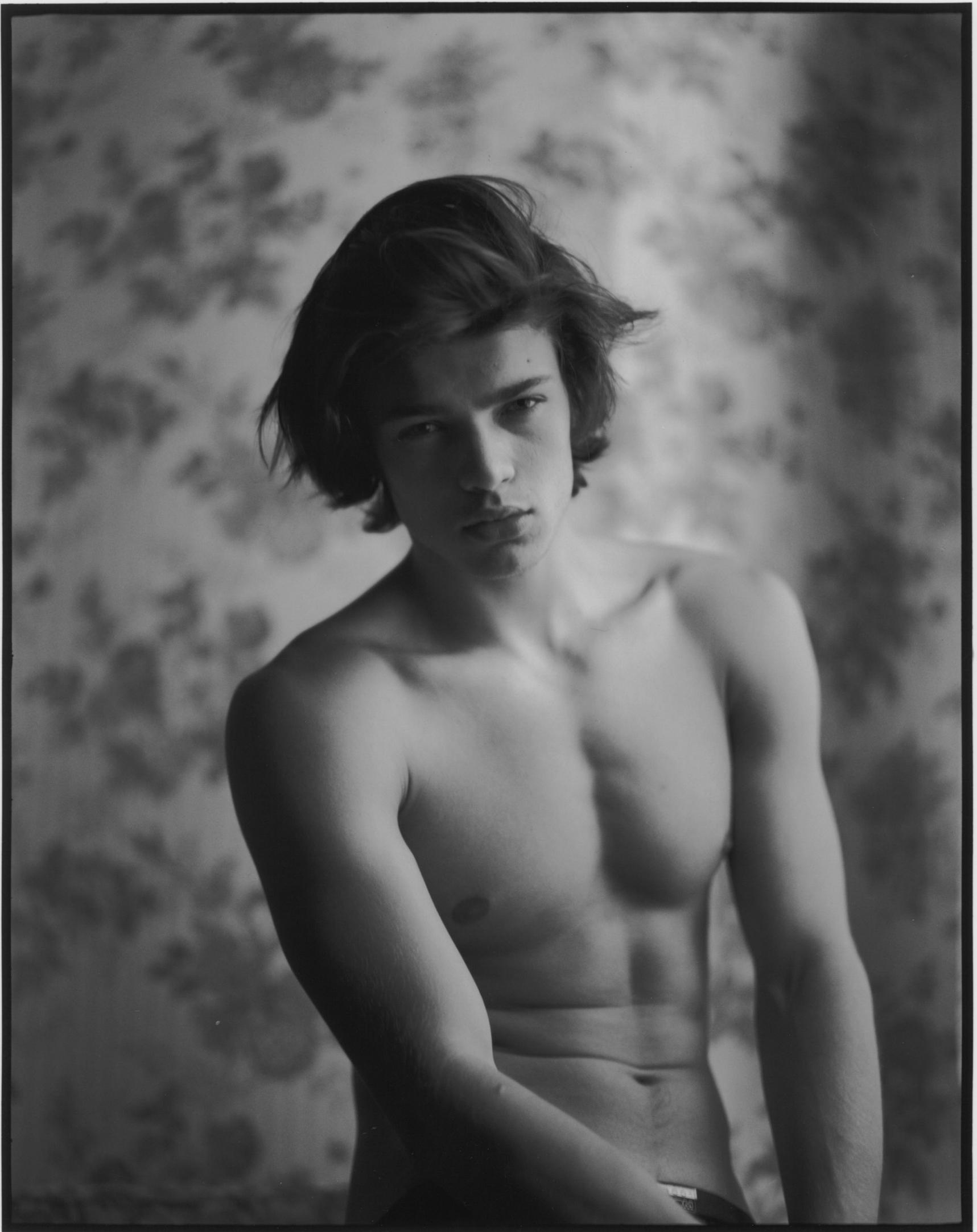
‘French’ Chris, N.Y.C. 1978



Felicity, London 2006



Kenny, N.Y.C. 1979



Eugen, Berlin 2006



Rise, N.Y.C. 1979



Natalya, N.Y.C. 2004



George, Provincetown 1976



Jeremy, St. Paul de Vence 2005

I tried once more to escape my hometown.

I had been living in my mother's basement, depressed and exhausted yet always awake, beginning to wonder if what I thought of myself and my potential were only delusions of grandeur. My previous escape-attempt, bicycling to North Carolina, lasted only two months before I was back again; trapped in New Hampshire. I could hardly leave my room, and would smoke pot every day just to calm my thoughts. I could see the effect it was having on my family. Though they loved having me around, the sight of me stagnant and morose killed them nearly as much as it killed me. I was supposed to be their savior, but I could barely leave bed.

I began to think I might have been wrong in my decision to opt out of college. I had felt like such a loser when all the students' names were posted with the schools they'd be attending, but thought I didn't need it. Besides, my insomnia made it impossible for me to work on a regular schedule and high school had already been hellish enough. During the second half I rarely attended and only made sure to maintain a D average so I could graduate with the least amount of effort possible. "Not working up to potential." I didn't feel I had to. I thought I'd figure out another way to get ahead in life ... or I'd finally go through with ending it.

One day, my great-uncle, Kenny, came to visit. He was my grandfather's brother, though I had never before known of his existence. My mother and I spent the afternoon with him and his family getting lunch by the water before they headed back to Colorado. Kenny was a 'straight arrow,' much different from my stoner grandfather.

I couldn't stand cleaning tables any longer and began to accept that college might be my only way out. I was too embarrassed to go to a community college in my area though, so I called my newfound relatives in Denver and asked to stay with them so I could get my grades up at a school out there. "We'd love to have you." I got ready to leave.

I decided to quit smoking cigarettes before I left to make a good impression on my new conservative hosts. My throat had already been itchy so I attributed it to withdrawals and figured I might as well keep on with it. I quit cold turkey. I got the first ticket to Denver I could but realized I had run out of my sleeping medication and wouldn't have time to fill it. The only other way for me to sleep at night was by smoking pot, so I took the risk and snuck some in my suitcase, hidden in a shampoo bottle.

I arrived in Denver and waited for my bags while everyone from my flight collected theirs and left. Eventually, my great-aunt met me in the deserted terminal and we waited together. I wondered why my luggage was taking so long and began to imagine two large men in black suits walking up to take me in for transportation of narcotics. It wouldn't have made for a good first impression ... but the bags finally came and we left.

Soon after my arrival I realized that my itchy throat wasn't from nicotine withdrawals but a cold coming on; so now, with my weakened immune system from quitting and the new altitude of the mile high city, I came down with pneumonia.

For the first week, I could barely leave bed. I was coughing so hard that I bruised my ribs and it was painful to breathe. I'd puke randomly and was a total burden on the house. Even worse, I'd have to smoke a tiny bowl-pack out of a chillum in the back yard to sleep at night, causing me to cough violently every time I inhaled. It did have an upside though. It's common knowledge that coughing gets you higher and I got so high that anything I watched on TV was hilarious. I actually enjoyed myself that week, even with all the pain and puking. It was nice to do nothing and to have nothing expected of me, and it gave me the chance to get a better idea of who I was living with.

I soon found out that Kenny and I were polar opposites. He was a closed-minded conservative who never missed church and believed everything he heard on Fox News as the word of God. If they said all Iranians were terrorists, all Iranians were terrorists. If our country decided to go to war, he didn't question it. He'd sit around, laughing along with the T.V. for hours, repeating the opinions he heard as his own, never disagreeing, never questioning.

As I started to get better, I could tell he was getting a little tired of my lounging about, so I began to go to the city every day just to be out of the house.

It was a thirty-minute walk followed by an hour train ride from the house to the city, so to speed things up I started to run. I figured it might help my lungs to force some clean air into them anyway. At first I could only run a block before being consumed by terrible pain and coughing, my face beet-red and dripping with sweat, but each time I'd set small goals for myself to conquer. One block, two blocks, to the end of the cemetery, and I'd push myself. Once I set a goal, no matter how hard it was or how much pain I was in, I wouldn't stop running full-force until I reached it. Each day I could visibly see my progress through the goals I had reached and it gave me the drive to push harder. I got further and further until finally I could run the entire way from the house to the train in ten minutes. I was inspired; I took it as a sign that things were going to change for me in Denver, finally improve.

I applied for jobs, applied to schools; I locked eyes with girls on the street, but never worked up the courage to approach them. I added people from the area on MySpace and tried to get a few to meet me. And I waited. I probably applied to every restaurant on the main strip. Denver is really only one long road. It's like Broadway in NYC (it even shares its name) but as soon as you leave this one road, there's nothing.

Kenny thought I might be able to find a job more easily if I looked ‘presentable,’ so he had me cut my curly Afro short and trade in my jeans and t-shirts for khakis, a button up, and brown dress shoes. It probably didn’t help my chances of finding a job. Who wants to work with a dorky fourteen-year-old-looking square who’s grandparents dressed him as if he was on his way to church?

Back at the house, religion was becoming an issue. I’ve never been very religious, nor have I ever felt comfortable going to church. My relatives wanted me to come with them on Sundays, but I refused. Once during dinner, Kenny announced, “I know I’m going to heaven,” then pointed at each person sitting at the table, saying, “I know he’s going to heaven, she’s going to heaven,” skipped right over me, then proceeded, “she’s going to heaven and he’s going to heaven.” The skip was obvious. It was after a conversation when he had asked me if I accepted Jesus into my heart and I said it didn’t make sense to me. Could I just say, “I accept Jesus into my heart,” and that’s that? I sure didn’t feel it.

He would only ever listen to Christian music, so one day I got tired of it and asked him why. He told me, “A song not about God is a song not worth listening to.” I tried to explain that because other songs were about God’s creations, about the emotions He’d given us, the trials, the love, that essentially all songs were about God. I was wrong again.

Kenny must have finally figured out I was smoking in the back yard, though he didn’t know it was pot, so he came up to me and asked, “Dylan, do you think smokers are allowed into heaven?” I was taken aback for a second, realizing I had been caught, but was also confused as to what answer he expected. Obviously smoking isn’t something that would bar you from heaven; even one of his daughters smoked cigarettes. So why the question? What point was he trying to make? “...Yes?” I replied. He looked shocked for a second, taken aback just as I had been. He seemed to realize the stupidity of his question, “Yes, I guess you’re right,” a pause of confusion, trying to figure out how he had gotten himself into this situation. “But God also says your body is your temple and you should protect it.” I agreed and walked away. I started to wonder if he was slightly retarded.

Eventually I began to run low on pot, so I tried to find some on the street.

I met a slightly older white guy as I was getting off the train in the city and mentioned pot offhand during our conversation. He said he could sell me some and took me to a back alley. We did the hand slap exchange; me with twenty dollars in my hand, him with the pot in his, but when I opened my hand I held an empty bag. I followed him, “Man, come on, give me my money back.” He kept walking; I kept following. Finally, he turned and said, “Stop following me, what do you think you’re going to do?” I realized he was right. There was no way I could fight him. I had lost.

I started to lose all the optimism I had built. Denver was just like home: not working out. I had no job, no money, no girls, no friends, and nowhere to go. I couldn’t stay home because my relatives had decided that since I hadn’t found a job, I was lazy.

That’s when I met Eric. I had walked up and down the same Denver strip hundreds of times before making contact with anyone, when finally a man approached and asked for a lighter. I traded him for a cigarette (who cared about my progress, it wasn’t working out) and we talked while we smoked. It was nice to finally have someone to talk to, even though he was older, maybe late fifties, so I told him about my situation and my past. He asked if I was hungry and offered to buy me lunch so that we could continue our conversation. I accepted, and we shared a few sliders.

I told him about my rough childhood, about my solo bicycle ride from New Hampshire to North Carolina, about everything; and when you tell someone everything, trust is built. I always loved talking to strangers for that reason: there are no barriers. When I was done, I asked him if he had any interesting stories of his own and he acted shocked. No one had ever asked him that before, he said, and because I was the first, I’d be the first to hear a story he had never told anyone.

He had moved on his own from Hawaii to California in his late teens. He arrived without any money and ended up on the streets. He would sleep on the beach or behind a store where he’d run small errands for small amounts of money. One day on the beach, he met an attractive older lady who took a liking to him. She let him stay with her and fed him in return for sex. They got along well and he began to feel comfortable. Eventually though, as those arrangements usually go, he sensed she was losing interest; had other boys in mind maybe.

One evening, on his way home from looking for jobs, a car pulled up and the driver asked if he wanted a ride. Hitchhiking was pretty common back then, so he accepted and got into the backseat beside another man. The mood changed abruptly; they told him that while they weren’t going to hurt him, they were going to suck his dick and pay him for it. He argued for a while, but they wouldn’t let him out of the car. He was afraid and couldn’t do anything to stop it. It happened. He got home and decided California wasn’t for him. He moved east, married a woman, had a son, and after years of marriage, got a divorce and had since lived in Denver alone.

I wondered how much of his story was true. His eyes seemed to be gauging my reaction at times, either because he was slightly embarrassed or because he was preparing me for something. You can never fully believe anyone about anything. We finished dinner, and after sharing such personal stories, decided to exchange numbers and meet again.

I started hanging out with Eric every day I came to the city, which was every day. He was popular around

town. He'd hang out with the homeless kids in the park and we'd walk around talking, greeting acquaintances. I told him about my marijuana dilemma so he bought me a dime bag off of one of the kids in the center. We'd smoke, talk, eat, and I always felt comfortable.

One day, I was eating at Eric's house when I mentioned that my hair was drying out from the new climate. He offered to rub aloe into it from one of his plants and I decided to try it. He told me I should take off my shirt so that it wouldn't get aloe on it. It made sense, so I took it off. Aloe dripped onto my shoulders. A bit fell onto my pants and he told me I should take those off as well. I said I didn't mind getting my pants dirty and that I preferred to keep them on. I started to get a strange vibe. He finished applying the aloe and told me I'd have to leave it in for a while. He sat across from me and as we started talking again, he noticed I had a small tattoo on my lower stomach where the hip creates a curve. Some of it was hidden, so he asked if he could see the rest. I'd had the request often enough, so I lowered part of my jeans with my thumb, "IN HEAVEN, EVERYTHING IS FINE," a Pixies lyric and a reminder of the week I once spent in a mental hospital. He reached out and touched it, slightly brushing my pubic hair. I pulled back, deciding it was time to wash out the aloe and told him I should be getting home.

I didn't hang out with Eric for a while after that, and just as he had decided California wasn't for him, I decided Denver wasn't for me.

My relatives had mentioned I'd have to find my own apartment soon, but with no job it would be impossible. I also had no way to pay for school, and knew I wouldn't be able to avoid running into Eric if I ever wanted to go to the city again. I decided I'd either have to borrow money to fly back home, defeated, or hitchhike to San Francisco, something I'd wanted to do ever since my bike trip and reading *On The Road*. I called my mom and discussed my decision with her. She was wary of the idea, but having already proved my street smarts through the bicycle trip, she decided it would be alright, so long as I texted her the license plate number of every car that drove me.

My aunt paid me forty dollars to set up a merchandise tent for a local festival, so I bought a back-to-school backpack and a tarp. I couldn't afford a tent, so I figured I'd sleep on top of the tarp to stay clean and under it to stay dry. I snuck my suitcases out the back and mailed them home, only keeping a few pairs of clothes and a thin sheet. It was hot out West, I thought, I wouldn't need much to stay warm. I cleaned up the room I was staying in and left a small note on my couch-bed saying I appreciated everything they had done for me and that I was sorry I couldn't say goodbye in person. I didn't say where I was going, or how.

I had spent all of my money on supplies and shipping, but still needed five dollars to fill my sleeping prescription. I decided to see Eric once more, figuring that as long as I didn't go back to his house, nothing weird could happen. I met with him, told him I was leaving, and asked for five dollars to fill my prescription. He gave it to me, we picked it up at the pharmacy, and decided to get lunch together one last time.

As we started walking, he said we'd eat at his place. I told him I preferred to eat elsewhere, in the city. He insisted, and I had to think fast. I began patting my jeans awkwardly, pretending I had left my wallet in the pharmacy. It must have been so obvious. I told him to wait there and I'd run back down to get it, but instead went to the train and took it as far west as it would go. As soon as I got on, I received a call from Eric, but let it go to voice mail. In a quiet voice, he said that he understood and wished me well. He sounded so sad, defeated that it broke my heart.

I still cared for him, still appreciated what he had done for me. He really was the only friend that I had made in Denver; it had just gone too far. I even sympathized with him. He was lonely, older. I hear that as men get older, their estrogen levels rise and they start to become more feminine; maybe even start to show interest in boys. On top of that, we had made a connection; we shared some form of love for each other by opening up to one another. He had just become confused about which type of love it was. I'd never believed that homosexuality was so black and white and I had seen that same look in his eyes before from other friends I'd made a connection with: confused by the feelings we shared as we confided in each other. I tried to think about the future instead of the past; Denver was now behind me.

Putting my thumb out when I came to the road was more difficult than expected. I began to walk along the side of it, still a normal person. Putting my thumb up would make me a new kind of person, a form of beggar. I would be throwing my life to hazard, dependent on someone other than myself. It reminded me of a feeling I'd had while bridge jumping with friends back home. You either stand there thinking and worrying about it and nothing changes, or you jump. There's only a split second when it finally comes down to it. Jump, or stay there. I put my thumb up and began walking backwards.

I actually got my first ride pretty quickly. A girl on her break from work told me she couldn't stray too far, but said she'd take me down the road for an hour before turning back. The thumb had worked!

My next ride came from a hunter-farmer type not much older than me. When he asked what I had seen of the state, I could only say Denver, so he decided to show me the real Colorado before I left. We drove all day in near silence through the back roads and mountains. It was beautiful, though I remember it now more through the misty black and white photographs I took than from actually being there. He brought me back to his place, we ate pizza, and he put me to bed on his couch.

During the night I imagined, every time I heard a creek coming from upstairs, that he would come down wearing a mask with a giant knife in hand. He had given me no reason to think he'd do such a thing, but the thought of it kept me up regardless. He was probably awake imagining the same about me. We woke up early and he dropped me off at an intersection where I could easily find a ride.

I had less luck the second day: I got maybe one or two short rides, but spent most of the day walking. Finally, as the sun was setting, I came to an on-ramp in the direction I wanted to go, but it was illegal to walk along it.

There was a homeless man and an older lady camped around the same junction, waiting for a ride as well. They had a small trailer (but no car) with a bunch of giant Tupperware containers atop it, labeled, "Katrina Refugees," which held their remaining possessions after the hurricane had destroyed their home. I stopped to talk with them briefly and was invited to stay with them, but decided to continue looking for a ride. "They won't pick you up if they can't see what you look like," the man warned, and he was right. I got most of my rides because of how young I looked. After waiting in the twilight for an hour, I gave up and walked back to talk with them some more.

They had been stuck there for about a week. He said that in other parts of the country they had been picked up more often, but they had run out of luck in Grand Junction. Previously, they had encountered generous people, who sometimes gave them a couple hundred dollars or supplies to make their travels run smoother. But here, no. Everyone saw them as a burden, as dirty homeless leaches.

He told me he would have liked to get a job, but his mother, the older lady with him, was a Schizophrenic with Tourette's and couldn't be left alone. She would burst out from her sleeping bag with nonsense from time to time as her son and I spoke. He was very religious, myself not at all. He attempted to inform me of his beliefs, rather than force them on me in the way I had become accustomed to. He taught me a short saying or prayer, no more than a sentence long ... supposedly, whenever you needed anything from God, you had only to say this phrase, followed by your request, and your prayer would be answered. I forgot it almost as he said it, a common problem of mine.

I don't remember where they were going, maybe west as well, though I kind of remember them having no destination at all. He looked older than he was, probably from hard times and the stress of his mother, and I believed his excuse for not being able to work because his intelligence was obvious and his words sincere. He was sad and hopeful all at once (a feeling we shared), shown through his melancholy eyes and his cracked, 'fuck my life' smile. We both wanted better for ourselves, only he was bound to duty, while I was young and on the run.

He mentioned that the only thing that made him feel like his situation wasn't so bad was sipping Dr. Pepper and smoking cigarettes, but he hadn't been able to enjoy either since they'd been stuck in this spot. He said it unassumingly, without a hint of presumption, but I walked back down to a gas station to buy some for him anyway. I only had ten dollars at this point, given to me from one of my past rides, but decided he needed it more than I did and that this would be the best way to spend it. Besides, I was young and skinny; people thought of their child in my shoes and were more likely to help me than two old homeless people. "They got themselves into this situation. They've had their chance" ... whereas I was young and couldn't be blamed.

I brought back the supplies and he thanked me. To return the favor, he cooked up some hot chocolate with spices in a dirty old pan and poured some for me in a crushed paper cup. I thought back to the leper scene with the cigar in *Papillon*, but even though I didn't have to prove anything to save my life, I still decided to prove it to myself. I was no better than him and I wouldn't refuse the only thing he could offer to thank me. It was some of the best hot chocolate I'd ever tasted.

Later that night, another hitchhiker wandered up and joined our conversation. He seemed shady and unintelligent; I didn't trust him much, or care for his company. He had just been released from prison and was already thinking of ways to get back inside. He said he had met a man there who told him about counterfeiting money and gave him a contact to meet on the outside who could help him get started. The homeless man tried to talk him out of it. He told him he was only headed back where he came from and insisted that God was the right direction. I fell back from the conversation and watched the stars, letting them talk amongst themselves.

When it got late, the homeless man offered me an extra sleeping bag and told me he'd make a special hemp bracelet for me in the morning to thank me for the gifts I'd brought him. Before I fell asleep, I thought about the conversation we had, the all-knowing look in his eyes and this strange, out-of-place feeling I got about him. I started to wonder if I had met God in disguise and if that hemp bracelet might actually be something special.

The sleeping bag he gave me smelled terrible so I slept on top of it, wrapped in the thin sheet I had taken with me. I learned quickly about the difference between desert days and nights when I awoke before dawn, completely freezing, unable to fall back asleep. I smelled the sleeping bag again and debated whether or not it was worth climbing inside. I didn't have a choice. I surrounded myself in my sheet, entered the bag, and thought about how lucky I was to end up here instead of somewhere in the desert alone, freezing to death.

When I awoke, I was covered in flies. Everything was covered in flies. The other hitchhiker was already gone and only the homeless man's dog was awake. I hung around for a bit, hoping to say goodbye and to get the hemp bracelet I had been promised, but they had their sheets over their heads and no one was moving. I

figured they'd want to sleep off as much of their sad day as possible anyway and didn't want to bother them. I got back on the road, annoyed with myself for forgetting the phrase that would grant my any wish and for failing to receive the hemp bracelet, which I had now blown up in my mind to be something magical. As my luck improved down the road, the thought that I might have met God kept coming back to me.



A car stopped at the on-ramp and two men got out. They each walked to their own sides of the car, took a piss, and waved for me to come over. I was more apprehensive than usual; I hadn't rode with two men before and knew they could easily overpower me if they wanted to, but I decided to go with them anyway, and it turned out all right. They were Hispanic and couldn't speak a word of English, so I sat in the back of the car with my map to figure out my route alone.

I pointed at the map to ask where they were going. "Las Vegas." I realized they'd be heading south at the next intersection, so I asked them to drop me off. When we saw the intersection, they looked at me to signal, "Are you sure?" and I nodded yes. I was in the middle of nowhere. Just road and sand. No town, no water.

It wasn't too long before I got a ride heading north. The driver must have realized it wasn't safe to be stranded there alone in the hot sun. When he asked where I was going, I said I had two choices: to travel further north to Salt Lake City where the new highway began, or to take the old highway that ran below it. Not only would it be easier to walk along the older highway, but the town where it began was called Holden, which I saw as a sign. *The Catcher in the Rye* was one of the first books that helped me to feel less alone and realize that I might not be the crazy one.

After getting dropped off, I walked a few miles into Holden. It appeared to be a deserted ghost town; the first I had ever seen. The entire town was light brown and broken down, with sand nearly covering everything. It was completely empty with no use since the new highway had been created to the north of it; even the one Pepsi machine was empty. No cars came.

I sat on my bag and waited for hours. A few trucks eventually passed but none stopped. I would watch them drive by until they were out of sight and began to lose hope. I decided to clip my nails. I heard a horn in the distance but ignored it and continued clipping. Then again. I looked up and saw a truck had stopped quite a ways down. I grabbed my bag and ran for it. Two men, construction workers, told me they were on their way to work, but felt the need to stop because I wouldn't find a ride otherwise. There's really an equal chance of getting rides anywhere: on busy roads everyone assumes someone else will pick you up, so no one does, and on slow roads no one comes, but the few that do feel guilty leaving you there.

The construction workers said they could drop me off at an intersection up the road, where I might find a ride but probably wouldn't, or I could come to their job site where they set up portable offices for construction sites. They said they'd let me spend the night at one of their houses and then drive me up to Salt Lake City to the busier highway in the morning. I went with them and we spent the day together.

They had leathery skin, smoked cigarettes constantly and reminded me of the old men I used to work with at McCauley's Auto Body back home; the type of men who are constantly driving but never get past the state line. They thought I was crazy for traveling around so young and alone, but liked me for it all the same. They even offered me a job and a place to stay if I wanted to live in Utah and offhandedly (yet I assume intentionally) mentioned their 'beautiful' daughters. I had to decline. I was starting to enjoy hitchhiking: seeing new things, meeting new people ... and I really wanted to see California.

I slept on one of their couches that night and in the morning they brought me to a truck stop outside of

Salt Lake City. Before they dropped me off they gave me a thick military sleeping bag that solved my biggest problem. "I don't know why you want to go there though, California's full of fruits and nuts!"

I had trouble finding a ride at the truck stop; laws had been passed which prohibited commercial truckers from picking up hitchhikers for safety reasons. The few that talked to me without immediately brushing me off were always going the opposite direction.

Finally I asked a somewhat nervous, awkward looking man with a shaved head who was maybe 15 years older than me. He looked around for a moment, as if to decide whether it was worth the possible trouble, then agreed. I had an idea what his motives were; I must have seemed like a prostitute waiting at that truck stop and I looked so young that I appeared vulnerable. In the cab, I could feel his eyes on me, gauging the situation. I started to talk, and fast. I bombarded him with my thoughts on life and everything else to keep his mind off of what he must have been thinking.

Eventually the mood changed. I wasn't as vulnerable as I looked and it soon became apparent that he was the weaker one in the situation. I figured he must have only felt comfortable picking me up because he thought he'd have the upper hand with someone so innocent looking, but all was well now. We started to get along as friends instead.

He wasn't very educated but he still had ideas. Constantly driving a truck must make for a lot of time to think. We shared our views on spirituality and life, talking nonstop for the entire ride.

He had been operating a truck since he was old enough to drive and said he would probably continue until he was old enough to die. He didn't know much else, and after being on the road for so long he had lost connection with everyone who had stayed put. He had accepted the hand dealt to him in life and said he appreciated meeting someone who wasn't going to settle down so easily. It gave him hope that his life might change. Maybe he'd even find the strength to change things himself; if I was able to take such a large risk, why couldn't he?

Finally night fell so we pulled into a truck stop to sleep. He offered to let me stay in the truck but I told him I'd be more comfortable in the vineyard behind us. He was going all the way to San Francisco, but I decided that my trip was just as much about meeting new people as it was about getting somewhere. Besides, we had reached our peak in conversation so in the morning we split up.



I don't know how many rides I had or how many nights I slept outside, but the next ride that I remember was from a Mexican man with spruce-scented holy cards hanging from his rearview mirror. He spoke almost no English, so I pointed on the map to where I needed to go: San Jose.

Back in Denver, I had placed an ad on Craigslist looking for somewhere to stay near San Francisco. I offered to cook and clean or just provide company, because I couldn't afford to pay money. I got two responses.

The first call was from a man who somehow spoke more rapidly than myself. He was interested in the company. He said he just needed someone to talk to, because he felt used by his friends so often. He kept mentioning that people would ask him for money, he'd give it, and they'd never return it. Even though it kept happening, he kept allowing it. I saw this as a lure, as if he were hinting that if I came to stay with him, I'd be able to take advantage of him monetarily. I told him I'd contact him when I arrived, but never did.

The second call I received was from a jolly-sounding older man who lived with two women in San Jose. Though he gave me no reason to think so, I had a mythical vision of California and imagined a colorful hippy commune where everyone was hanging out in the yard, happily smoking pot. I decided to go there.

The Mexican man brought me back to his house, where he could phone his English-speaking sister who would be able to translate where I needed to go. His wife fed me a chicken-on-the-bone pot roast and I watched a program on the Spanish channel with their son, which appeared to switch back and forth between a classroom setting and a circus. I spoke with the sister, thanked the wife, and was brought to meet the man from San Jose.

I was dropped off at the arranged location, an abandoned gas station on a roundabout. After a few minutes, a grey, 'Back to the Future' car pulled up and a chubby bearded man got out. "Do you accept hugs?" he smiled. "Sure." He opened up and I was swallowed in his arms. I told myself that I had just been raised to equate friendliness with weirdness, and attributed his strange greeting to the hippy vision I had created of him. Still, for the first time, I texted my mom a license plate number.

She called immediately. I put him on the phone and he addressed himself as "Papa Santa Claus." I got back on the phone. "Honey, are you sure you feel comfortable going with him?" Earlier on in the trip, I'd decided that I'd give everything a shot and wouldn't leave any situation too soon. "I'll leave if it gets too weird." I wanted to write, and write from experience. If I didn't take risks, I'd have no story.

Everyone in Papa Santa Claus's small, poorly lit ranch-style apartment lived on the Internet. When we arrived, there was a "Big Beautiful Woman" (BBW) sitting at a computer, reading self-help manuals. She wasn't actually beautiful, only big, but that's how they like to refer to themselves.

At the back of the room there was an Asian woman, maybe Thai, cooking stir-fry. I later found out she was a "Girl Friend Experience" (GFE), which means she'd go on a date with an awkward guy to get him used to being around women, blow or fuck him at the end, and he'd pay her.

After introducing everyone, Papa Santa Claus told me he was a nudist and asked if I'd mind if he undressed. I obviously couldn't argue, it was his house, so I just tried not to look at it while I sat down and he stood talking.

He eventually threw on some shorts and took me to the gym where we walked on treadmills and sat in a Jacuzzi to talk. He told me that he had once been married and had a child, but was now divorced and unable to see either. His ex was an Asian woman who had belittled and emasculated him so much that it had caused him to lose all self-confidence and become impotent.

Because of his inability to have sex, he had developed an addiction to cuddling. He would go to websites like cuddleparty.com and pay to lie in a giant pile of people, I imagine gently groping each other, letting out sighs of comfort. He allowed the girls to live with him for free in exchange for cuddling with him at night and nothing more. The GFE did this, but the BBW declined, saying that after being mistreated by her father (the reason for the self-help manuals), she didn't feel comfortable being touched by men. Later on, this created some tension when Papa Santa Claus noticed she was sitting close to me on the couch, even brushing against me at times.

Back at the house, they told me a story:

One morning, the BBW woke up to find a stack of twenty-dollar bills on the desk by her bed. It continued to happen regularly. She asked PSC where the money was coming from, but he just chuckled, saying he didn't know, but he knew it was for her. She needed the money. Finally, one night, she woke up to a man watching her from a chair beside her bed, and realized he was masturbating. "What are you doing!?" she demanded. Rather than stopping, he asked if she would take off her shirt. The BBW screamed for PSC, who came in and told the man to leave. "What the hell was that about?"

PSC had put an ad on Craigslist, stating he'd leave the door open at night, welcoming men to come masturbate to a large sleeping woman. They were asked to leave some money and not say anything to her if she woke up. He thought he was doing her a favor. She asked him to take down the ad and to never do such a thing again, but didn't try to leave because she had nowhere to go.

I wondered what he had planned for me. Why had he invited me into his home? Did he want me to cuddle with him? He shot the idea down quickly. During the cuddle parties he had cuddled with both men and women, but said he preferred women. I think he noticed me become a little less tense as he told me. That wasn't why I was invited.

A while later, he mentioned that he had posted an ad on Craigslist with my picture attached. (I had included one in my ad looking for a place to stay to prove I wasn't a creep.) The ad said I was looking for a girl to show me around San Francisco. I found it a little strange, but didn't think much of it. Then it slipped.

What he had planned, or hoped would happen, was that I would meet a girl, be shown around San Francisco, and then invite her back to PSC's house so he could cuddle with her. It still makes me laugh ... what a ridiculous idea. It's hard enough to find a girl to show a stranger around a city, and I'm sure impossible to convince one to cuddle with an old man.

I decided I'd spent enough time there. The first night hadn't even come yet, but I figured I had enough stories and didn't want to wake up to someone masturbating over my head. I called my best friend back home and begged him to phone his biological mother in San Francisco to ask if I could stay with her for a few nights. I had been trying to avoid doing this because my friend, who was adopted, had only just met her for the first time. Thankfully, he understood the situation and gave her a call. I decided I'd stay one night at PSC's and leave in the morning.

That night, after PSC and the GFE had gone to bed, I stayed up talking with the BBW in the living room. We talked about her father and her feelings toward men and she warmed up to me, letting her defenses down slightly.

After a few hours, she revealed that she sometimes participated in BDSM (Sadism/Masochism, spanking and tying) so I asked her what she liked about it. She said that after being mistreated by men, it was a release for her to tie them up and spank them, to have her way with them as they'd had with her in the past, if only in a symbolic sense. I started to become curious about why a man would allow himself to be restrained and how he could enjoy the pain inflicted upon him.

And because I had decided to try everything that crossed my path on this trip, I suggested that she tie me up. She nervously agreed. I asked her if I should remove my clothes. "...It doesn't matter." I did anyway. I wanted to experience it fully. I laid down, stretched out in a straight line, with my hands tied high above my head and my legs fastened together with my belt. It felt interesting, even nice in a way. I started to get excited.

"What happens next?" She began to move her head over my body, her long hair sweeping across my stomach and legs. It all seemed very innocent and was actually quite soothing, but I could tell she was still insecure. She was still afraid of men, even me. I would have let it go further, I may have even hinted at it with her head so close to my waist, but she decided it was enough. She untied me and I put my clothes back on. We said goodnight and went to our separate mattresses on opposite sides of the room.

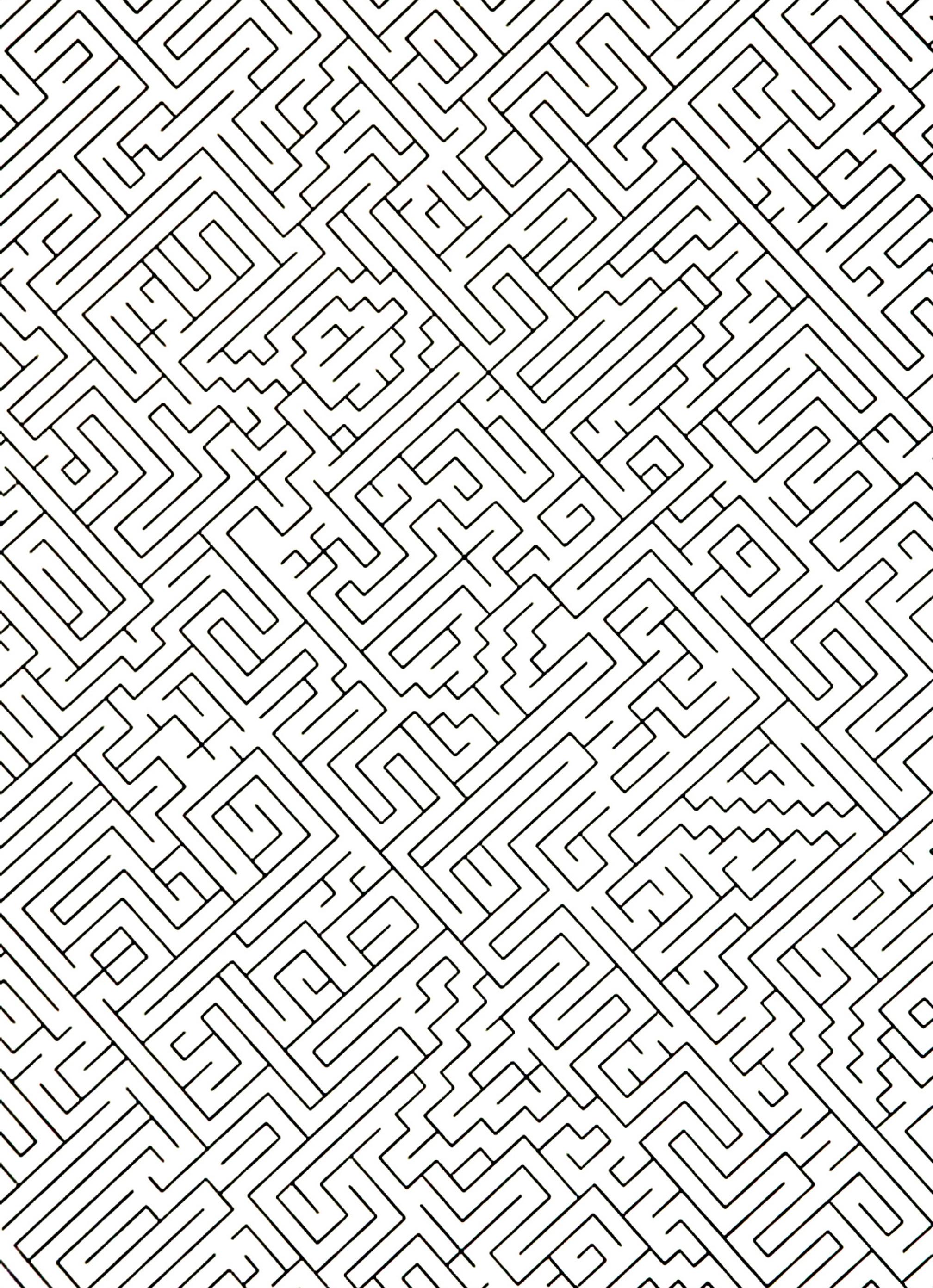
I stayed up for a while wondering if I should stick around; they really weren't such bad people. PSC had just lived on the Internet for so long that his social norms had become different from society's. He hadn't hurt anyone though, and seemed to be the only person these girls had met in their entire lives that would give them a comfortable and (moderately) safe place to live. He only asked that they would cuddle with him in return, and when the BBW wouldn't even do that, he still let her stay with him.

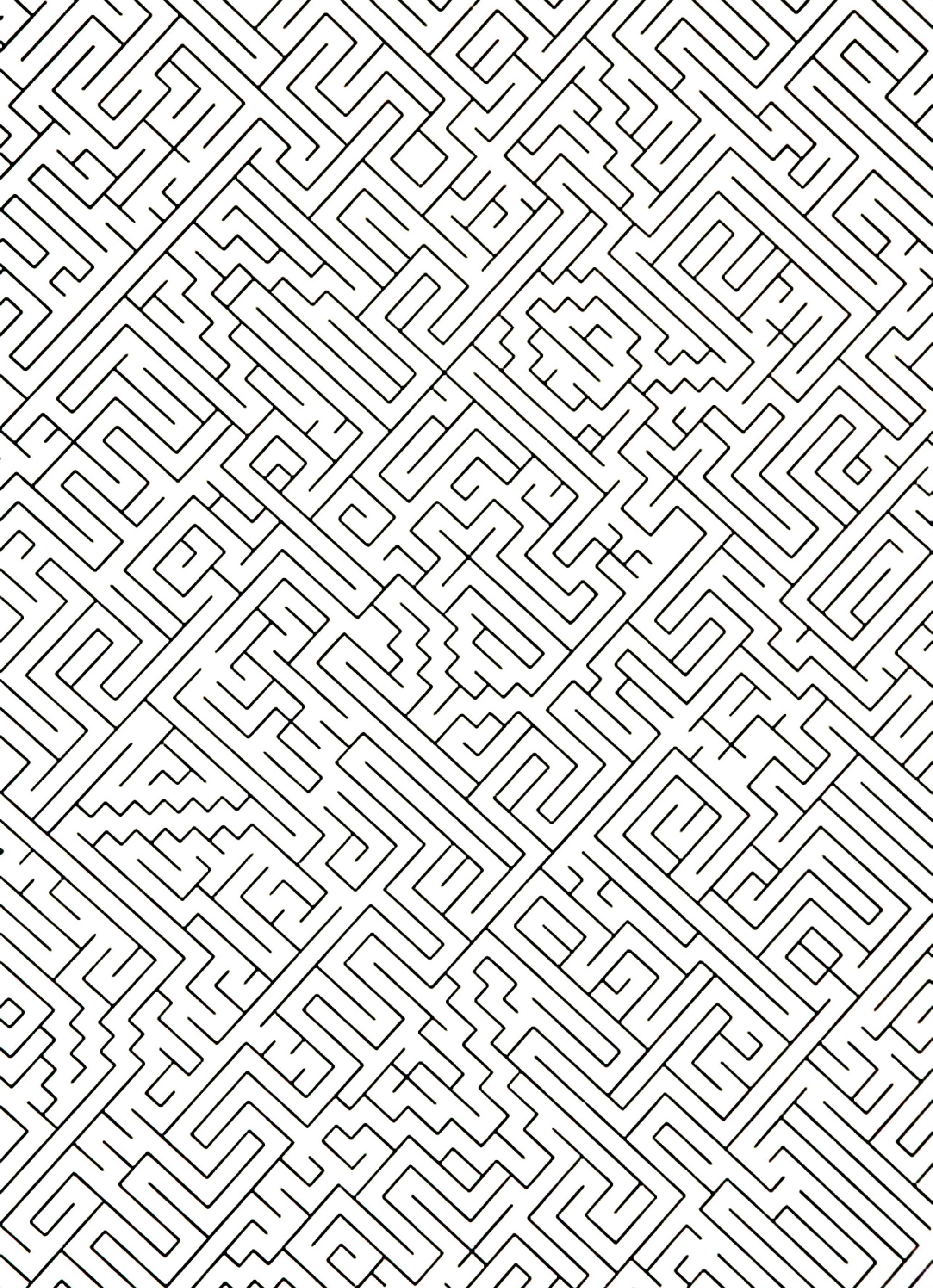
The GFE wasn't simply a prostitute, she taught men how to be around women so that they could go out on their own one day. I liked to imagine a dramatic 'break up' scene where she meets with a client for the last time and has to send him off with tears in her eyes, like the farewell to a now grown wild pet in a children's movie. "Go on, get out of here! You're free now! You don't need me anymore! *Just go!*"

Finally, the BBW was just a sweet girl who had been treated like shit her entire life due to how she looked and responded to the way people treated her. I could relate to that ... actually, I could relate to all of them.

It just wasn't my crowd. I didn't need their help like they needed each other. If I stuck around, things would either get weirder or I'd end up hurting these people who had already been hurt enough. I decided it was best to leave.

So with the sun coming up and everyone asleep, I gathered my belongings and went. "California's full of fruits and nuts," I was told. I was beginning to understand what it meant.



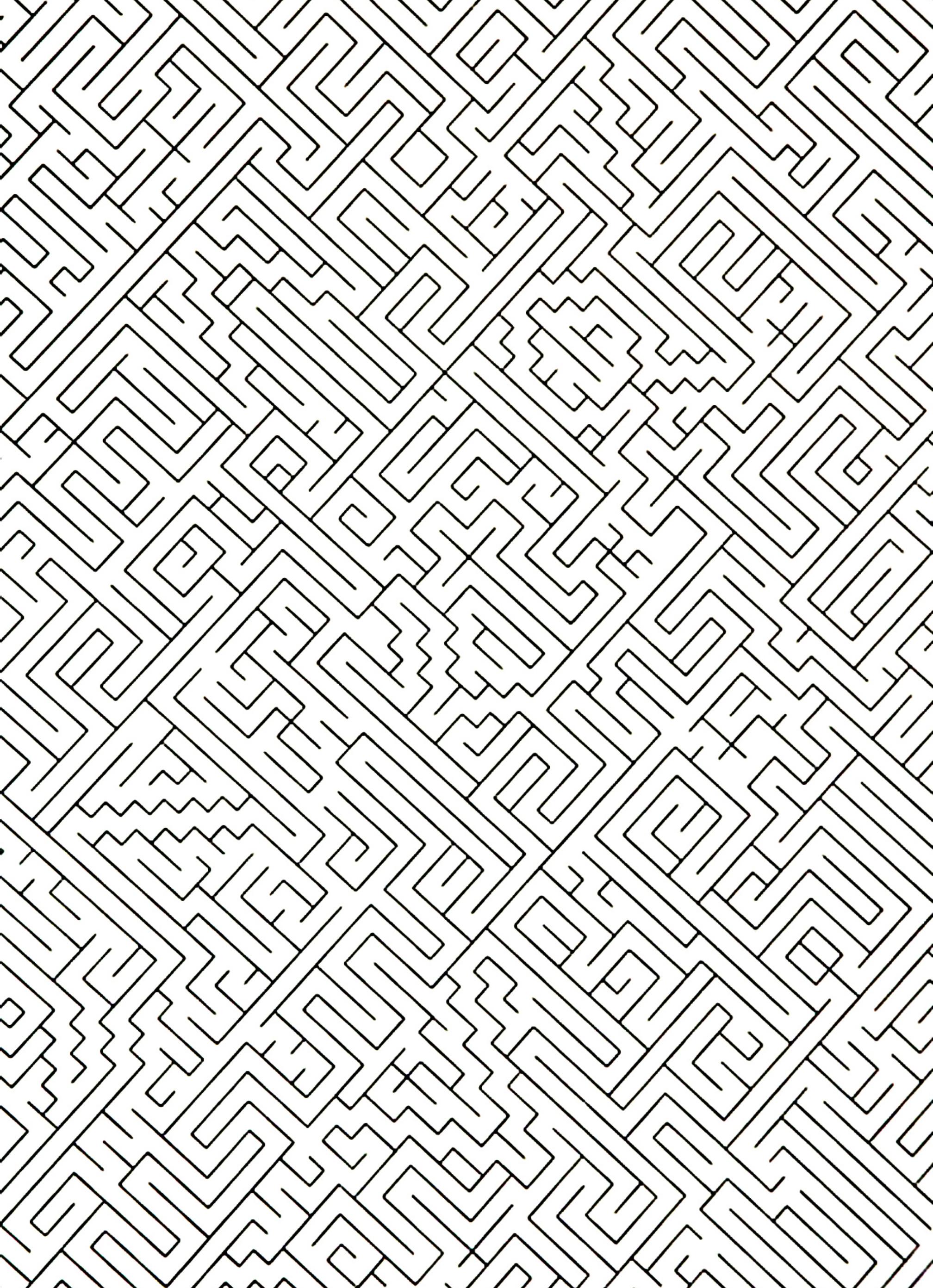


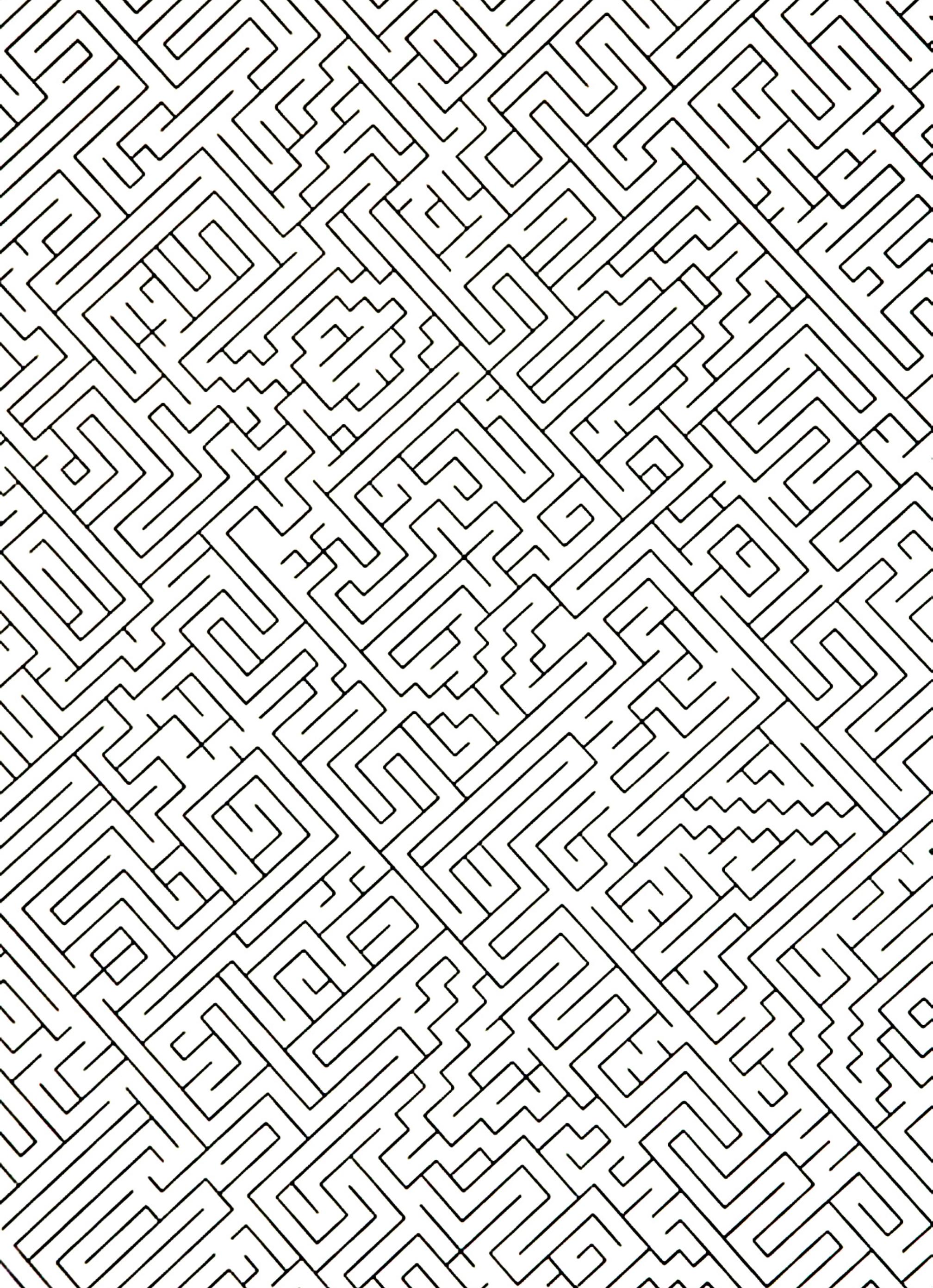






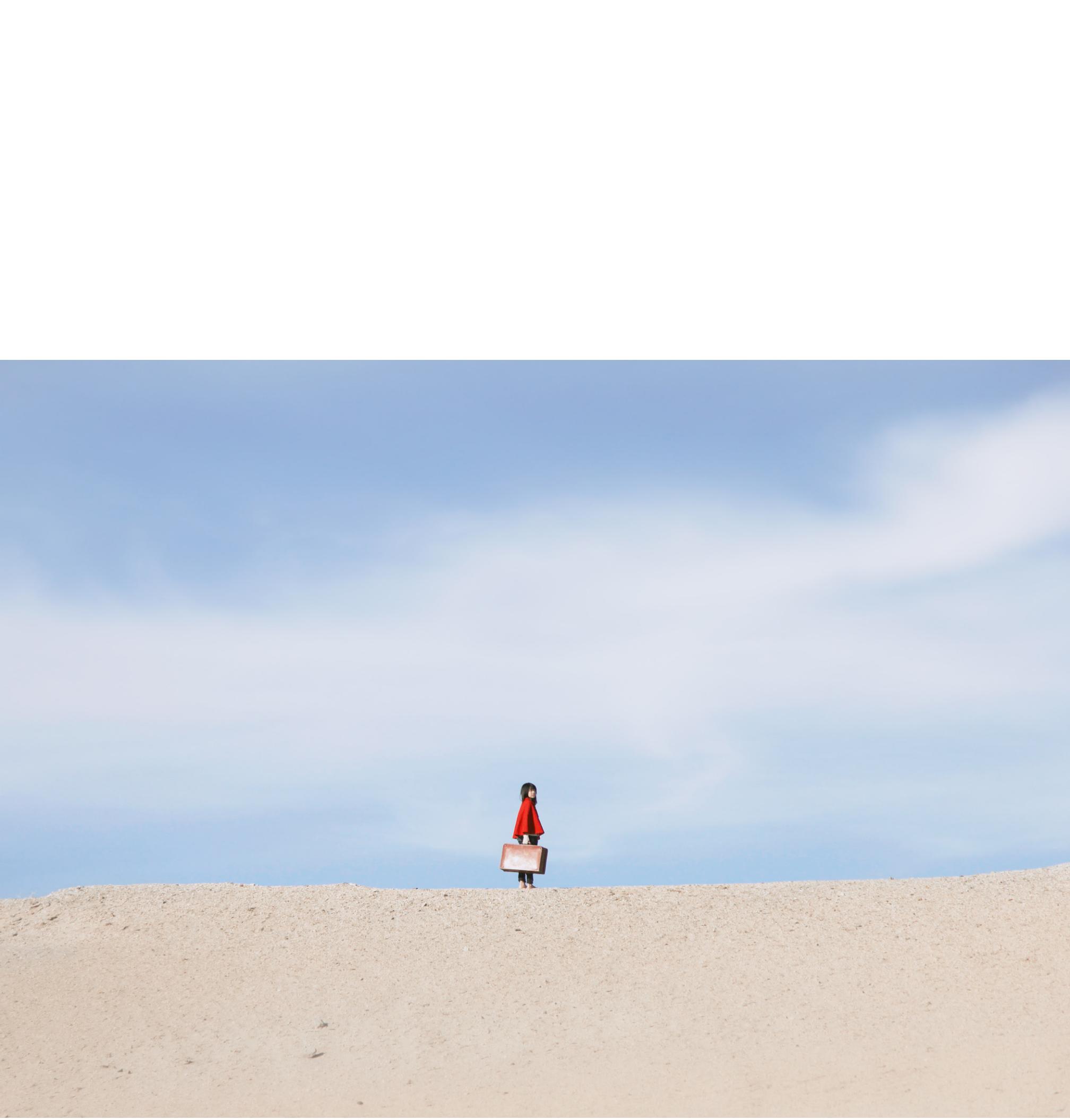








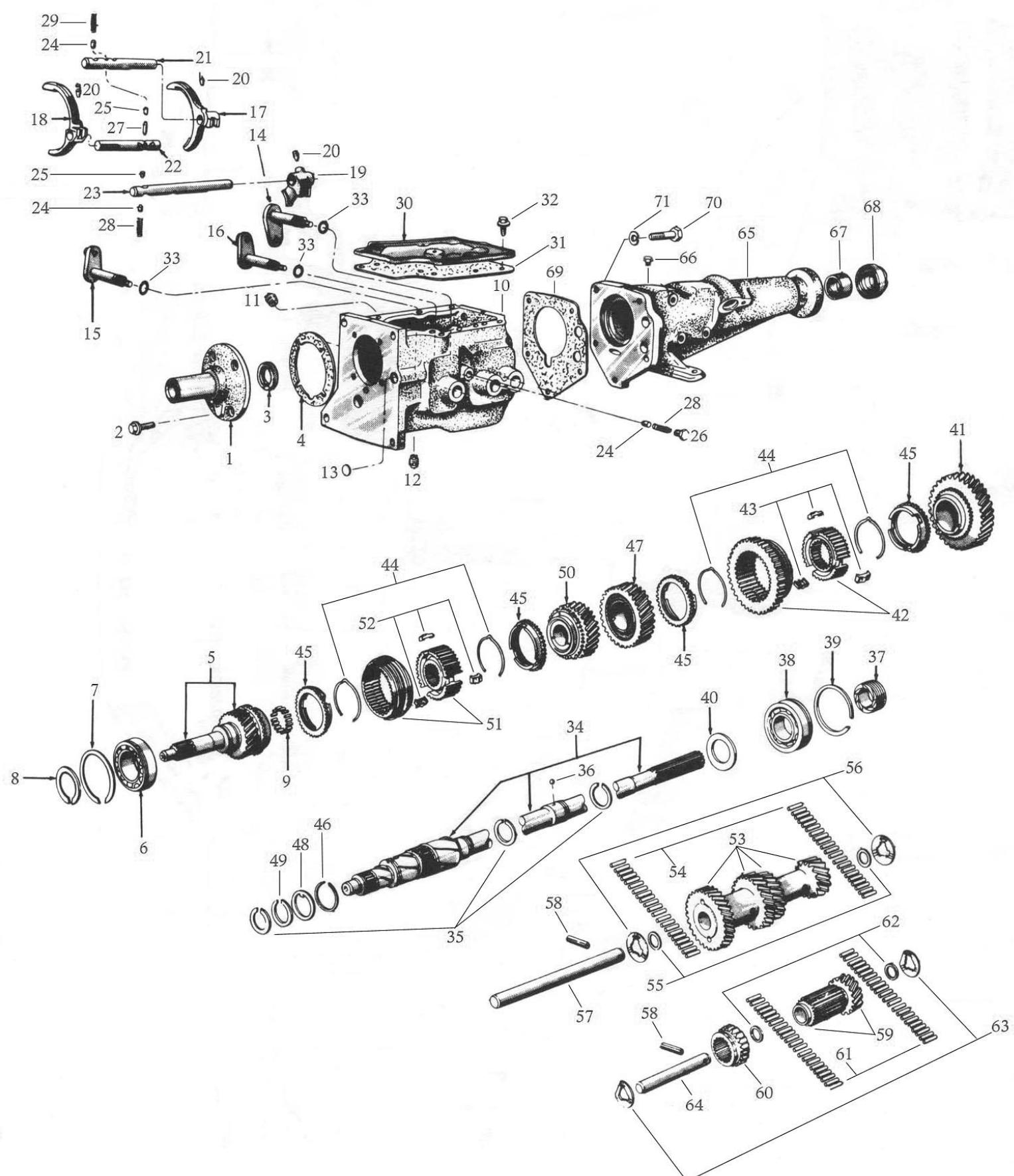




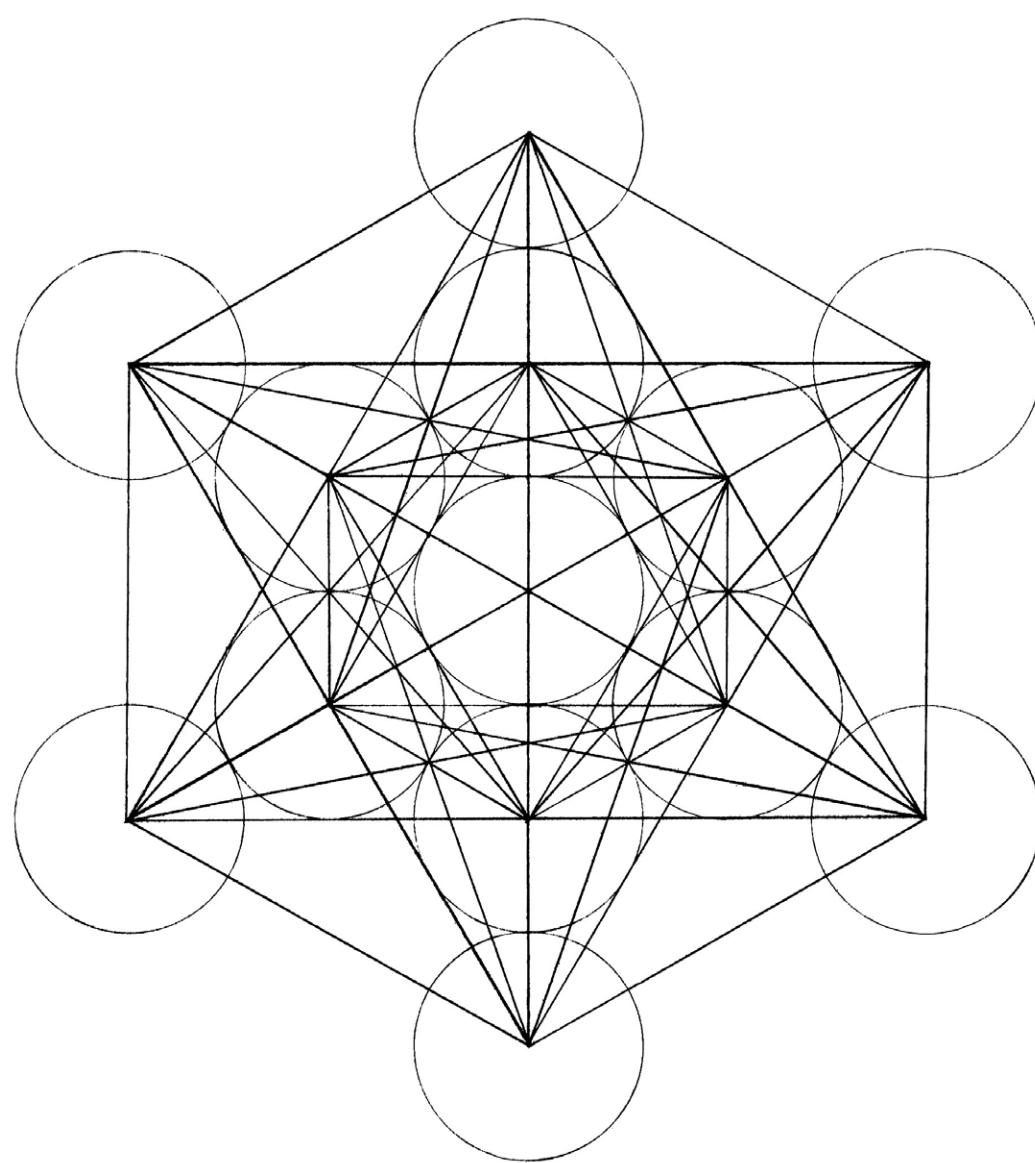








**C O V E R**  
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**1** K A S I A . S T R U S S . B Y . D Y L A N . F O R S B E R G  
**2** E X C E R P T . F R O M . *T H E . M A G U S* . B Y . J O H N . F O W L E S  
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**C O N T A C T**  
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“Life only avails, not the having lived.

Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state.”