

BREATH



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DEDICATED TO



Shannon Cuthbert

the friend I met in Scotland who
always reads my short stories

A deep breath in,
slowly released,
a breath of promise.

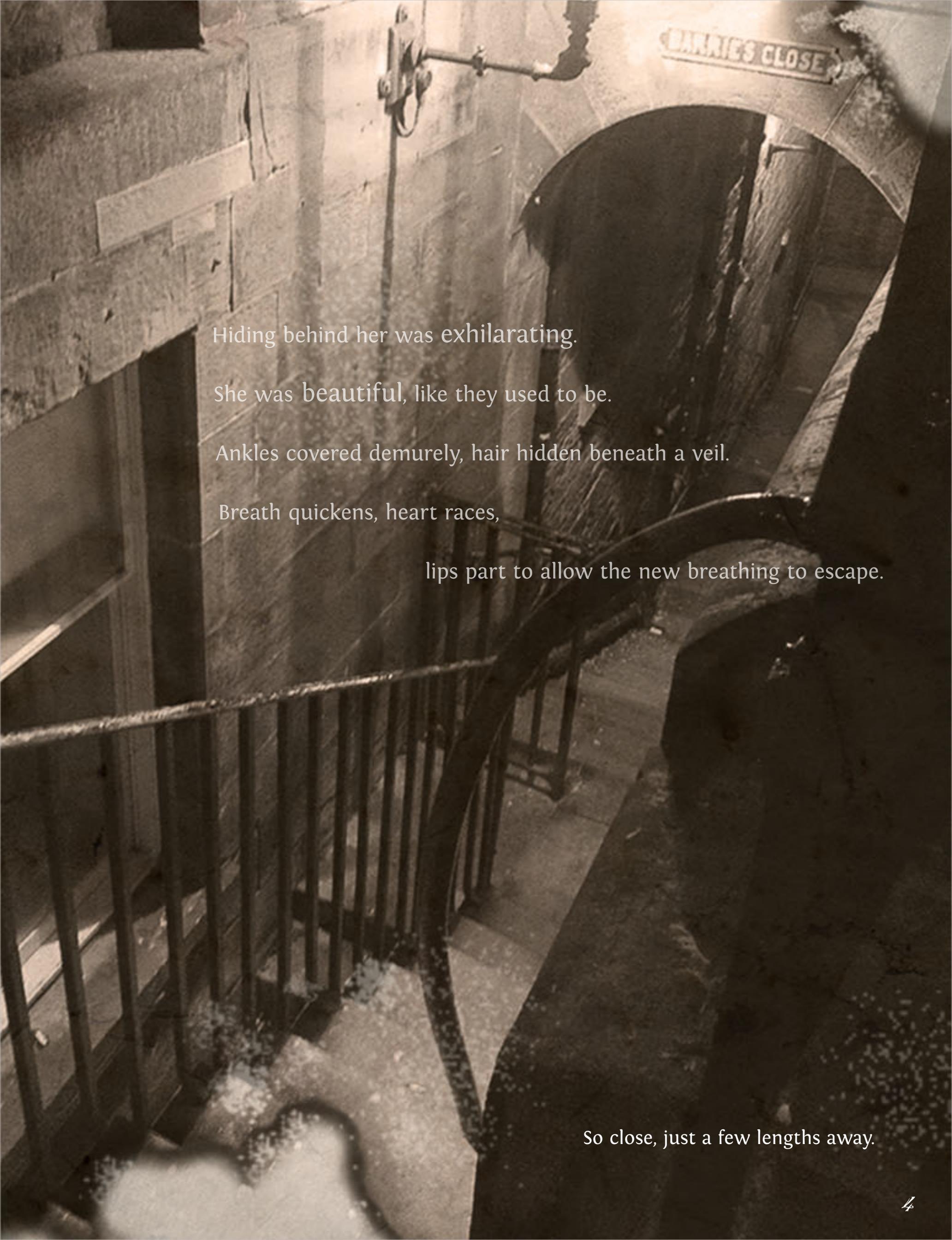
Life brought in and pushed out.



*M*ary walked down the street, her cloak was brushing the ground making a soft shushing sound as it passed over the cobblestones beneath her feet. It was Halloween, dark and damp, with fallen leaves strewn about, she was on her way to festivities. Dressed as her namesake Mary Queen of Scots, she felt appropriate for the first time in her ancient home. Edinburgh, Scotland, founded during the Bronze age, was properly historic. Atop one of the age-old volcanoes high above her, was the ancient castle that so defines the Edinburgh skyline. The strong stone walls surround the castle on multiple levels up the hill, and the walls of the buildings peak above them, lit an eerie orange in celebration of the holiday. Wearing an old fashioned dress and cloak, head topped

with a crown of a very regal nature, Mary realized how much better she fit in with her surroundings. Gothic buildings with turreted towers that reached towards the sky and peaked arches lined the edge of her path through the giant park called the Meadows. The buildings up ahead were old enough that the originally white stone had turned dark and gray with the soot of modern advancement. This outfit went much better with the gothic buildings than jeans and a t-shirt.



A black and white photograph showing a person's lower body and feet inside a metal cage. The person is wearing dark clothing. Above the cage, a sign with the words "GATES CLOSE" is partially visible.

GATES CLOSE

Hiding behind her was exhilarating.

She was beautiful, like they used to be.

Ankles covered demurely, hair hidden beneath a veil.

Breath quickens, heart races,

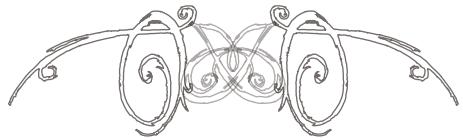
lips part to allow the new breathing to escape.

So close, just a few lengths away.

*M*ary stopped suddenly. The refurbished apartments to her left were filled with shadows, and something had moved. She had finally reached campus. She wasn't usually afraid of walking through it at night, but her heart was picking up its pace seeing the movement. The apartments which were now used to house small classrooms, libraries, offices, and a chapel suddenly seemed threatening. The wrought iron staircases, the tall multi-chimneyed roofs, the beige brickwork, that normally seemed so ordinary had taken to relishing in their shadows. Placing a hand on her chest, she whispered quietly to herself,

"Hey, you're just freaking out over a cat or something. Nothing to worry about." Then with a purposeful movement, she removed her hand to put her arm straight and strong at her side. Each hand curled into a preventative fist, because even though she knew it was just a cat, there was no harm in being prepared. She started walking again, possibly slightly quicker now; who could really say how fast she had been going before. It wasn't until she'd gone around the corner of the courtyard garden that she heard the steps. They were muffled, as if the shoes making them were soft soled. She slowed slightly and looked behind her....

Nothing.



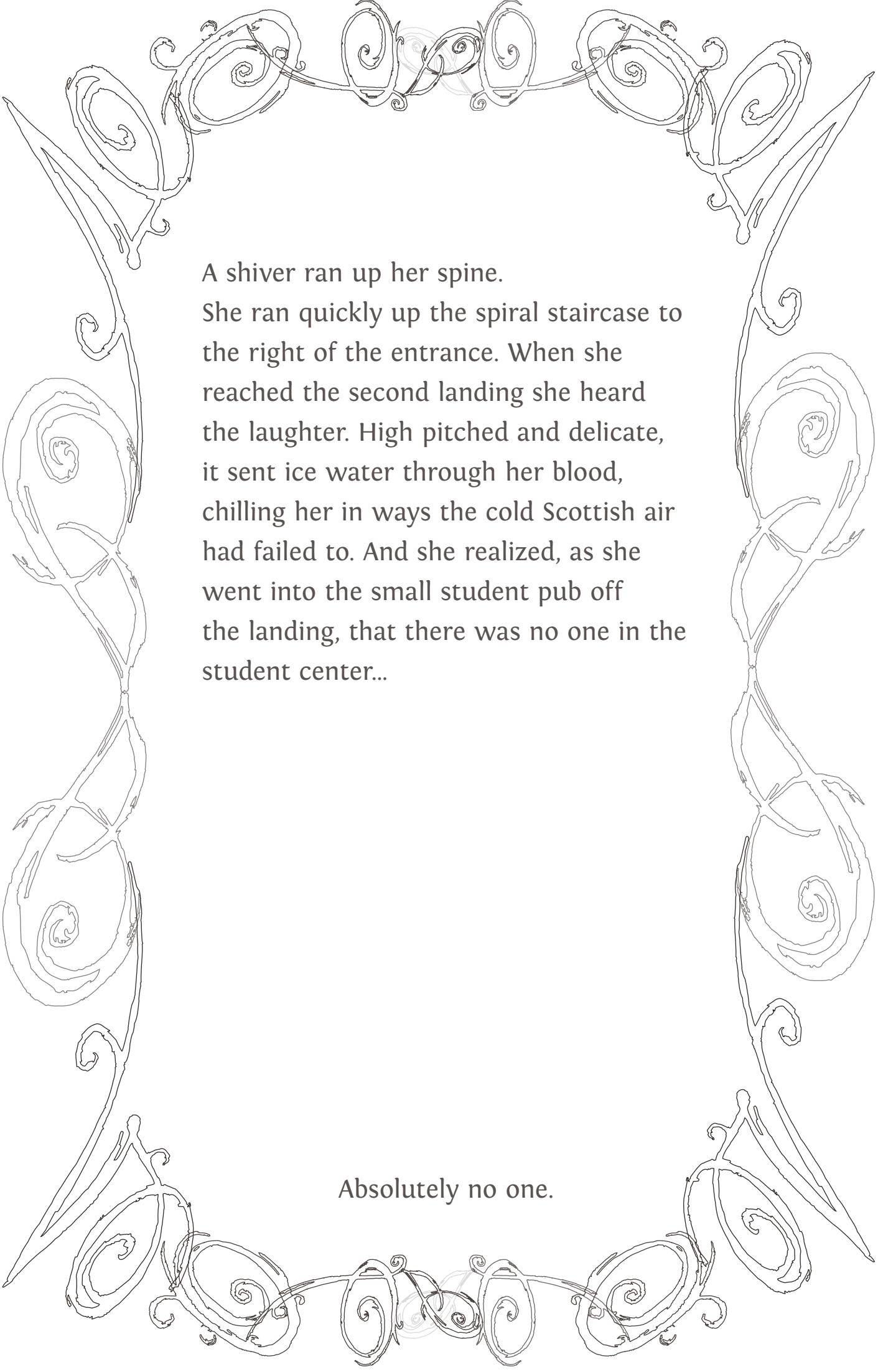
She was definitely walking faster now, her speed almost a run at this point. The footsteps' speed increased too, and she ran full out at this point. Running across the cobblestones, the sound of her feet pounding was drowned out by her heart pumping. Mary ran towards the light of the student center. It too looked celebratory and terrifying. Its dark towers were lit orange, creating deep shadows that now looked dangerous rather than beautiful. Pulling around the corner, she bolted towards the entrance. Strangely there were no campus police guarding it, she was able to run straight through into the lobby.

It was silent.



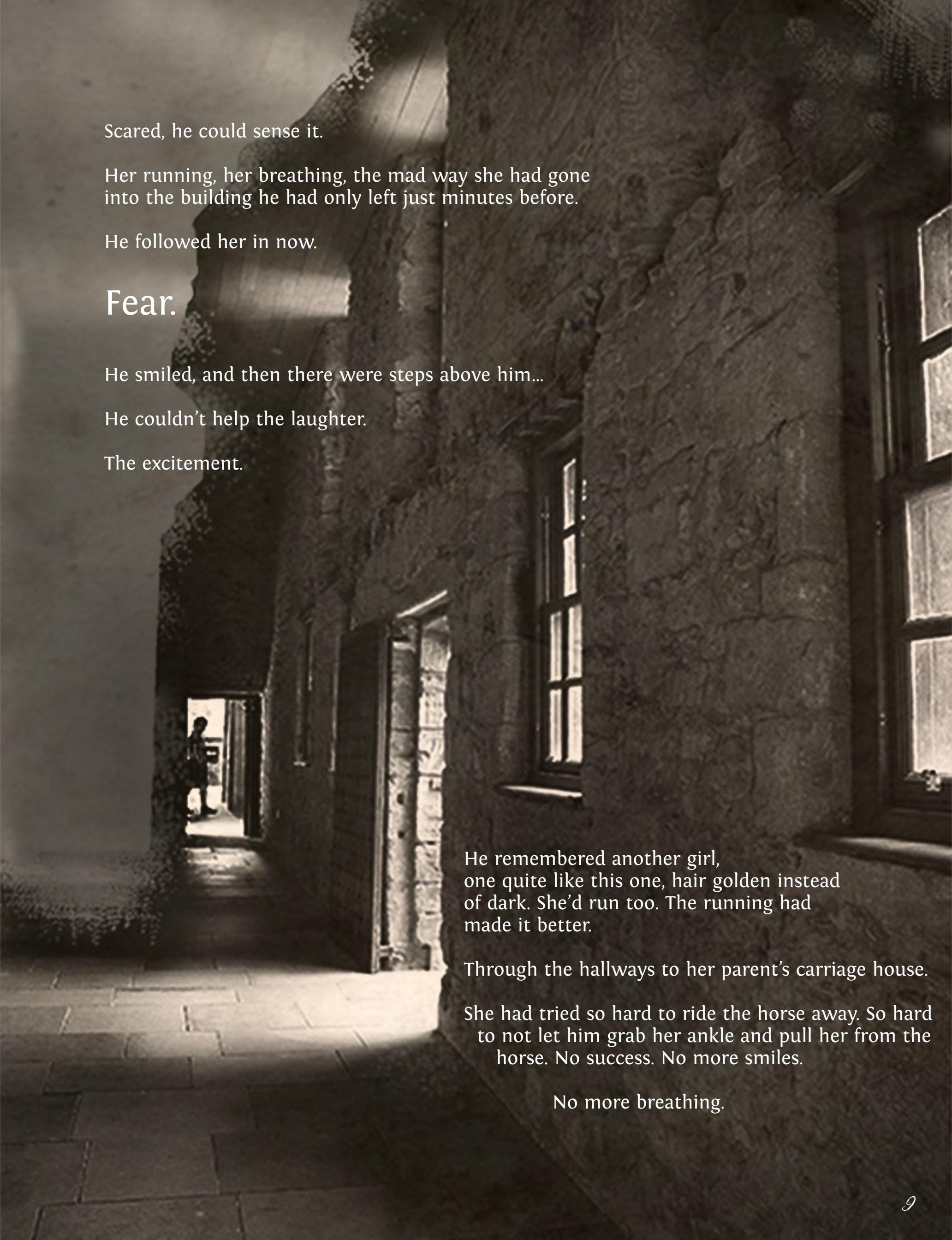


No music, no singing, no overlapping conversations,
no drink orders. The shuffling of feet, the sounds of
happy laughter, soccer playing on TV,
all absent.



A shiver ran up her spine.
She ran quickly up the spiral staircase to
the right of the entrance. When she
reached the second landing she heard
the laughter. High pitched and delicate,
it sent ice water through her blood,
chilling her in ways the cold Scottish air
had failed to. And she realized, as she
went into the small student pub off
the landing, that there was no one in the
student center...

Absolutely no one.



Scared, he could sense it.

Her running, her breathing, the mad way she had gone
into the building he had only left just minutes before.

He followed her in now.

Fear.

He smiled, and then there were steps above him...

He couldn't help the laughter.

The excitement.

He remembered another girl,
one quite like this one, hair golden instead
of dark. She'd run too. The running had
made it better.

Through the hallways to her parent's carriage house.

She had tried so hard to ride the horse away. So hard
to not let him grab her ankle and pull her from the
horse. No success. No more smiles.

No more breathing.



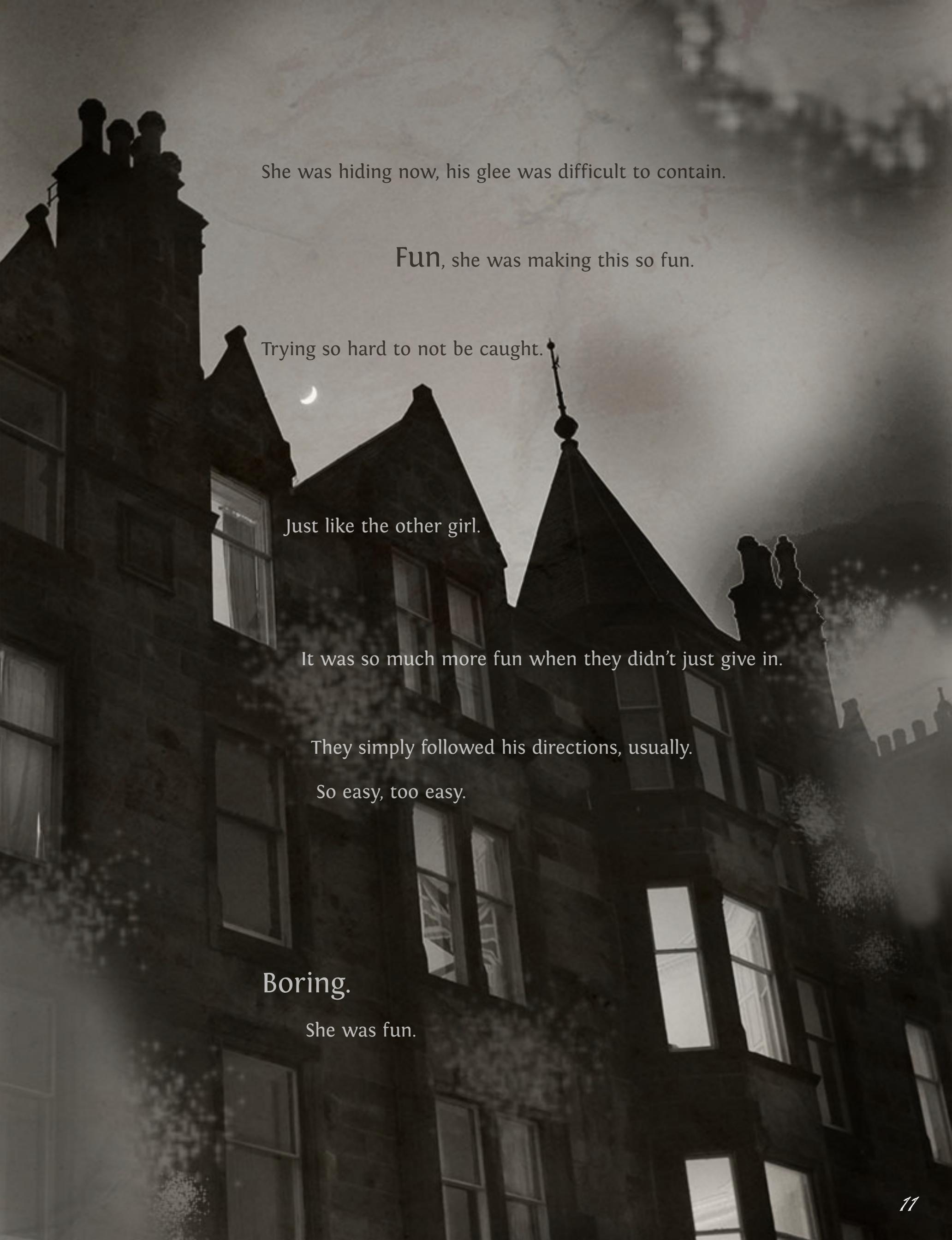
Something was not right.

The pub was usually filled to the brim with students and, on Halloween, strange and fanciful costumes. Mary saw only furniture. Her breathing, which had previously been fast and hurried, began to slow, but her heart raced even more. Something terrible was going on. Teviot was never empty; just today she'd been sitting in the library listening to three girls plan their Halloween. They were going to start at the student center. She remembered thinking how it had made her excited for her own plans. She was supposed to be dancing right now, listening to excessively loud music in a cramped little flat with her friends as they enjoyed their lack of sobriety. But she wasn't doing that.

She heard him then, coming up the stairs. There was a creak, and then the muffled sound of his footsteps. She quickly ran behind the bar, hoping he wouldn't look there until after scouring both rooms of the pub. She attempted with difficulty to quiet her heart and lungs, tried to be as silent as Teviot was. The door opened and then slowly closed. The tension in the room seemed to thicken, and it was almost as though she could feel the space between them. She heard him walk towards the bar, heard his short excited breaths, and heard his laugh escape him.

She could barely breathe, she couldn't move, she couldn't think. She just waited, hoping, praying that he wouldn't look. Her eyes were wide open, staring at the freezer full of alcohol on the other side of the bar. Her hands wrapped around her elbows and her knees pulled towards her chest...

She waited

A dark, atmospheric night scene featuring silhouettes of buildings with gabled roofs and a church spire. A crescent moon is visible in the sky. In the upper right, a silhouette of two figures stands on a rooftop. The text is integrated into this scene.

She was hiding now, his glee was difficult to contain.

Fun, she was making this so fun.

Trying so hard to not be caught.

Just like the other girl.

It was so much more fun when they didn't just give in.

They simply followed his directions, usually.

So easy, too easy.

Boring.

She was fun.

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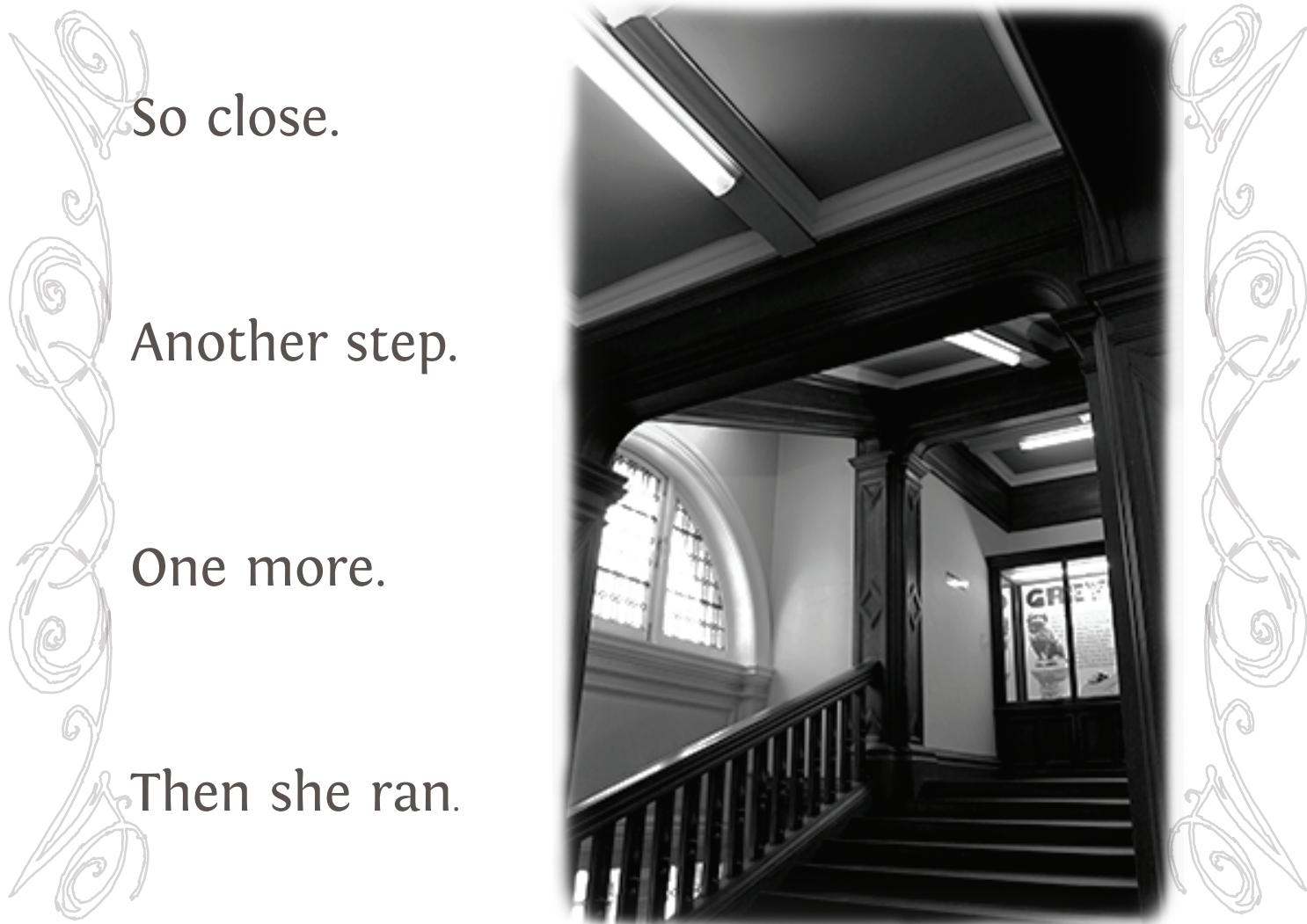
She was moving away! Into the other room. She heard him open the door, waited for it to close. She bolted. Down the back staircase, past the main pub, and sports pub, and into the bathroom with its second exit. Mary had watched enough crime dramas to know being cornered was a bad idea. Going into that pub upstairs had been an idiotic move. Now she could run out, and he might not even realize she'd left the building. Stepping into the bathroom was always an interesting experience. The transition from the main area with its large spiraling staircase, and intricate woodwork to the bathroom with its cold plastic stalls and modern appliances was always a harsh one, but this time it was worse.

The smell hit her like a wave, gut-wrenching, nauseating and terrifying. Like copper, but it left a horrible feeling in the pit of her stomach. Her breath sped up again as she prayed to who knows what that this wasn't actually happening. Mary walked slowly past all the stalls, staring intently at the gap between the doors and the floor. Approaching the tenth one, she saw the door was wide open, and a hand was peeking out of it.

Mary didn't want to look, but she couldn't not.

The body of the hand was entirely obscured by that of another body. The entire stall was transformed into a mass grave. Body upon body, completely hiding the toilet, the trash, and the toilet paper receptacle. Someone's face was peaking out from the mass, head thrown back and throat slit. Blood caked her neck and the bodies below her. Her eyes were wide open and her mouth was opened in a silent scream.

Mary let out a soft sob, her body trying to respond to the terrifying sight in front of her. She didn't cry though, she had to get out; who knew how long she'd been in the bathroom, trying to process it. The adrenaline kicking in again, she moved quickly towards the far entrance. She ran up the tight spiral staircase, and then stopped. She crouched low, and looked around the corner into Teviot's lobby. The staircase made her feel momentarily secure. Like a perfect wooden hiding place, it comforted her with its old style design, and the knowledge, that like all tight spiral staircases, it was designed to make it difficult to attack someone while in it. He wasn't in the lobby, the person who'd been following her. She took one step out of the staircase and then another.



So close.

Another step.

One more.

Then she ran.

From the beautiful Teviot lobby, and through the stone courtyard outside, and when she reached Potter Row, she stopped to catch her breath.

She made a bad decision then.

He had felt her behind the bar.

Felt her terror, and longing, and hope.

The fear had been so enticing. The drug that kept him going throughout the many years. The centuries of the chase. But he decided not to grab her. He would wait, let her be more afraid, give her enough hope to make the fear worse.

Walking into the next room, he waited for the sounds of her escape. He felt her go down the stairs.

Into the girls' bathroom.

True pleasure then. What she would find. She would be terrified. He headed down the stairs, slowly. Her unvoiced scream reached his ears.

His smile would have terrified her even more.

Stretched too tight and teeth bared.
It was a frighteningly pleased smile.

He quickened.
Headed towards the entrance.
She appeared at the far end when he entered the lobby.
Stopping, he watched her.
So beautiful.
Haunted and prey-like.
Every movement was jittery and tense.
The smile remained plastered on his face.
Suddenly she broke into a run, speeding out the front door.
He followed her in his way.
Stopping as she raced across the courtyard.
He stood there in the light from the building.

Watching as the beautiful girl stopped.

H

is laughter rent the air. His head was thrown back at the sky, and in that moment Mary knew. He was terrifying. He looked so normal, like anyone else she'd ever seen. But his smile ripped holes in her security, and his laugh split them more. He felt wrong, completely and utterly incorrect. Her breath left her body, her heart beat at an astounding rate, she felt like she might shatter.

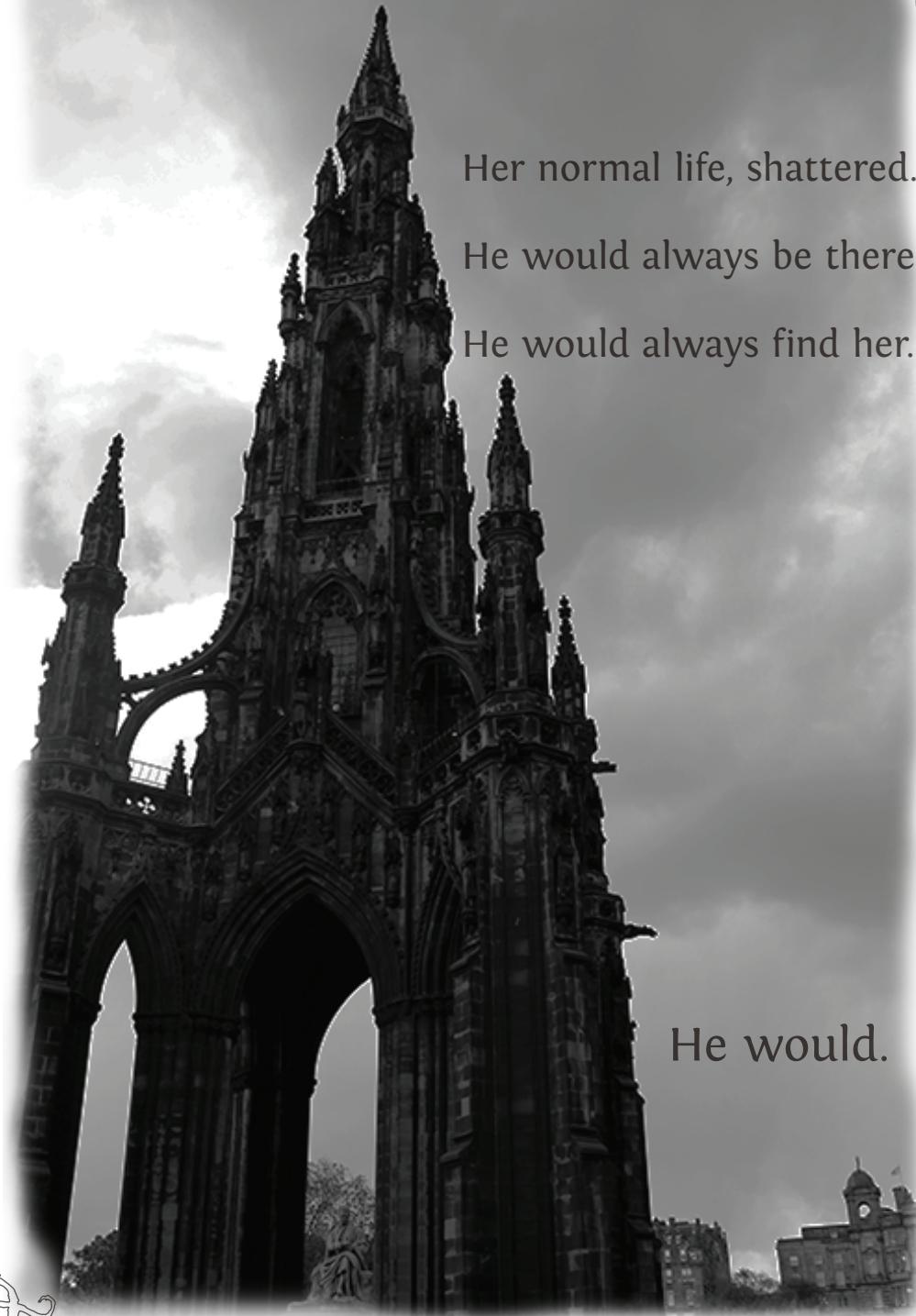
And she did.



Her normal life, shattered.

He would always be there.

He would always find her.



He would.





he story of Breath.

As part of a fiction writing class in my final semester of Junior year, I was asked to write a horror story. Inspired by my semester abroad, I concocted a supernatural serial killer to chase my protagonist. An average girl living in Edinburgh, I wanted to throw her life for a loop, adding fantasy to a historical reality.

A semester later I was asked to design an Ebook for the iBooks store in my Web and Interface design class. The result is the book you have just read.

I used two typefaces:

FONTIN

&

The King & Queen font

The images were all taken by me using my Canon Rebel T3 while studying abroad in Edinburgh. The majority of them are images of the actual places I am describing in the story. The ones used in the killer's point of view are mostly for atmospheric purposes rather than showing location.

I would like to thank The Tab, an online magazine concerned with British Universities, for providing me with the image of Teviot Hall.

See page five for the image

(<http://edinburgh.tab.co.uk//2013/11/27/edinburgh-student-in-the-final-for-30000-party-at-teviot>)

Thank you for reading