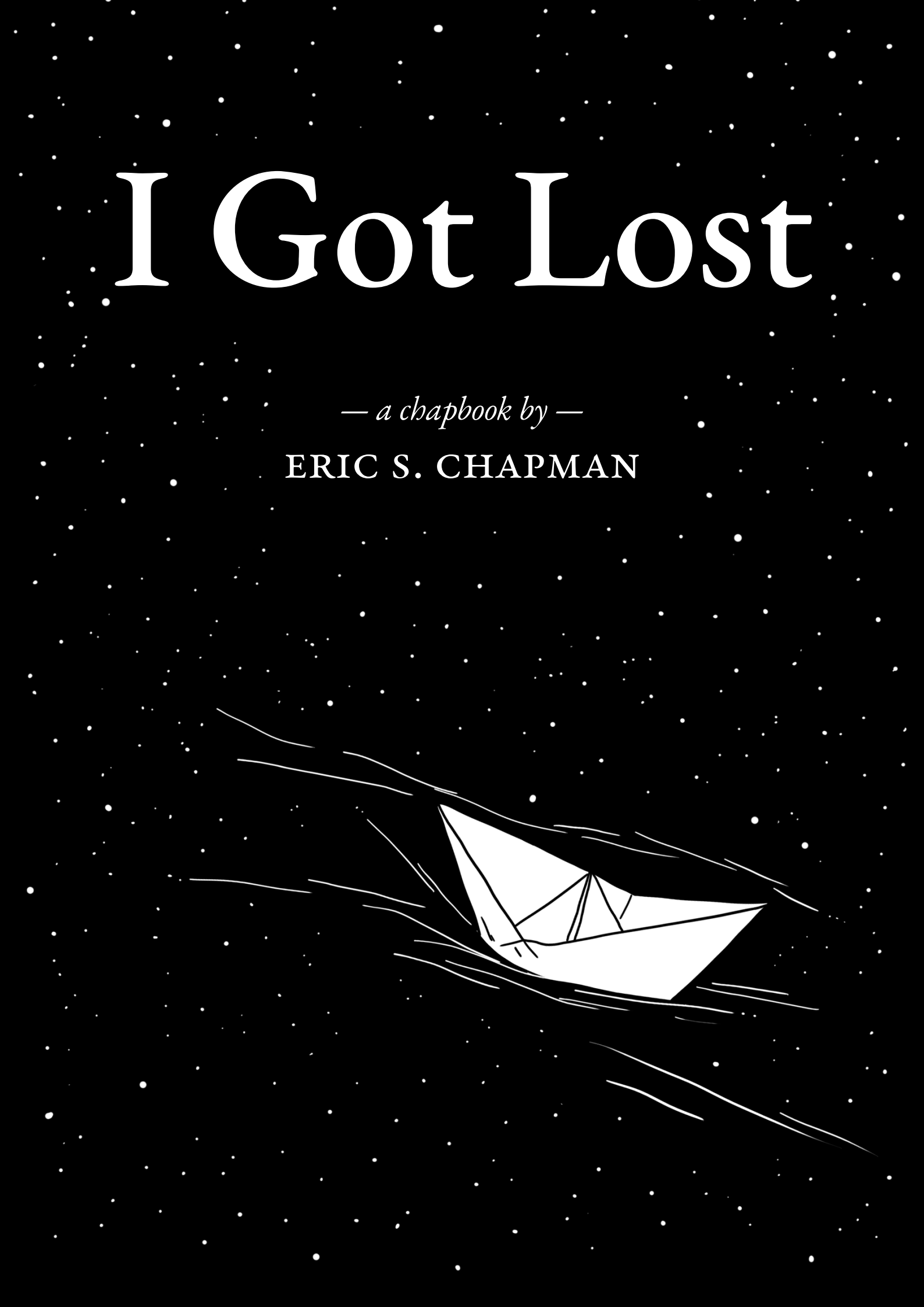
I Got Lost

— a chapbook by —

ERIC S. CHAPMAN



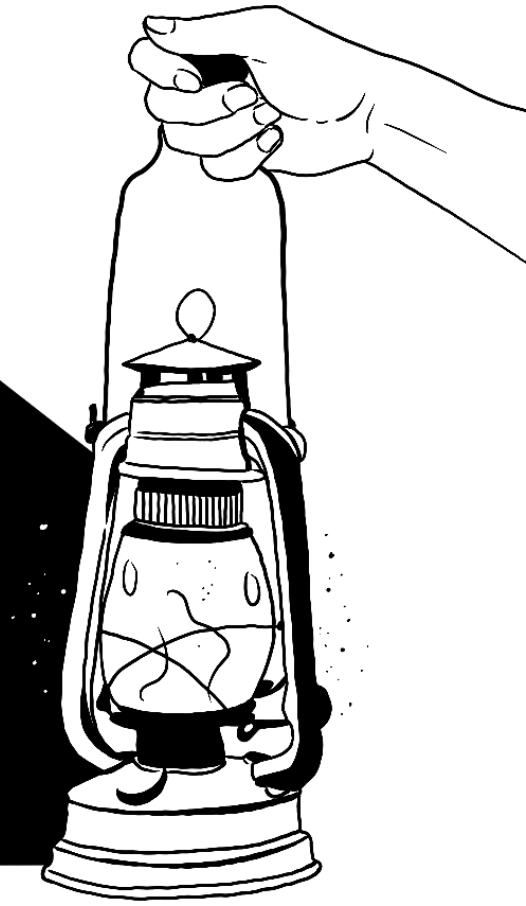
Coward's Lantern

I was not there
when they laid her down,
I was somewhere else,
holding nothing,
my hands like two animals
that did not know
what they were for

Leia waited
the way she always waited,
her good ear up,
her bad ear soft against the floor,
her name a small thing
I had given her years ago
that I could not say out loud
into the room she was in

The vet's hands were kind,
the way other people's hands
are sometimes kind to your dog
when you are not there
to be the kind one yourself

Now I carry a lantern
through the rooms of the house,



the way you walk a yard at dusk,
calling a name
that does not come back,
the way she went somewhere else
without me

In the kitchen, the bowl,
in the hall, the leash,
in the corner, the small worn shape
of where she used to sleep

I light the lantern,
I walk the same hallway,
I say her name
the way I should have said it then,
warm into her ear
which is not here

I tell myself
the cowards are loved too,
the cowards do not believe it,
the lantern keeps burning
because I cannot put it down

No Real Grass

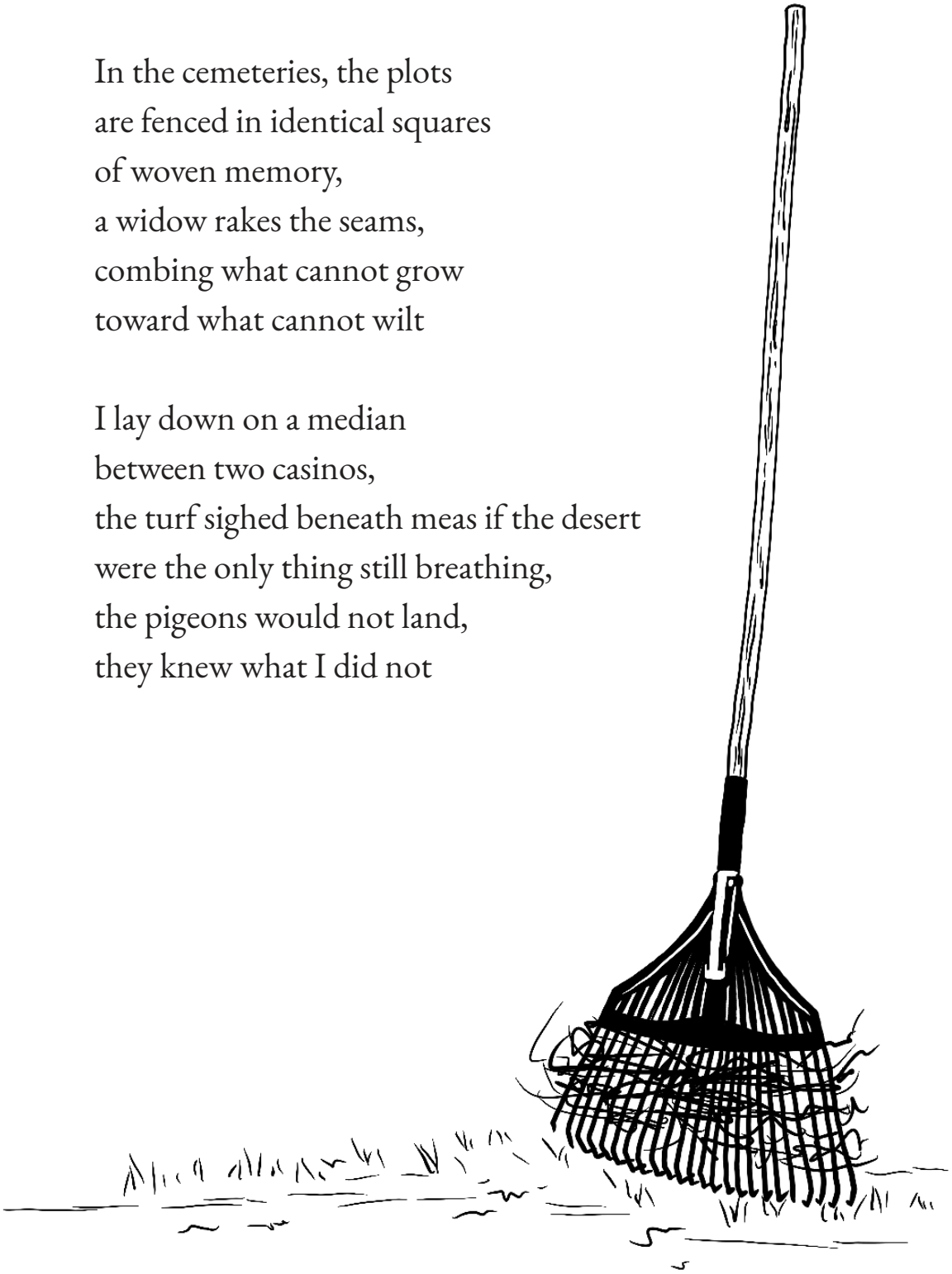
In Vegas the grass is a plastic lie
told by the sprinklers
to the small dry birds
who do not believe it

The lawns are stitched
in green polyester,
combed nightly
by men in white coveralls
who have not slept since 1992

A child on the Strip
tries to pull up a blade
to put in her mouth
the way her grandmother used to,
the blade does not give,
it has been there longer
than the child has been alive

In the cemeteries, the plots
are fenced in identical squares
of woven memory,
a widow rakes the seams,
combing what cannot grow
toward what cannot wilt

I lay down on a median
between two casinos,
the turf sighed beneath meas if the desert
were the only thing still breathing,
the pigeons would not land,
they knew what I did not



The Prayer Shawl

Aunt Meg sent away
for a prayer shawl
blessed by Pat Robertson,
a thin acrylic thing
folded in cellophane,
arrived with a card
that promised the holy ghost
in two business days

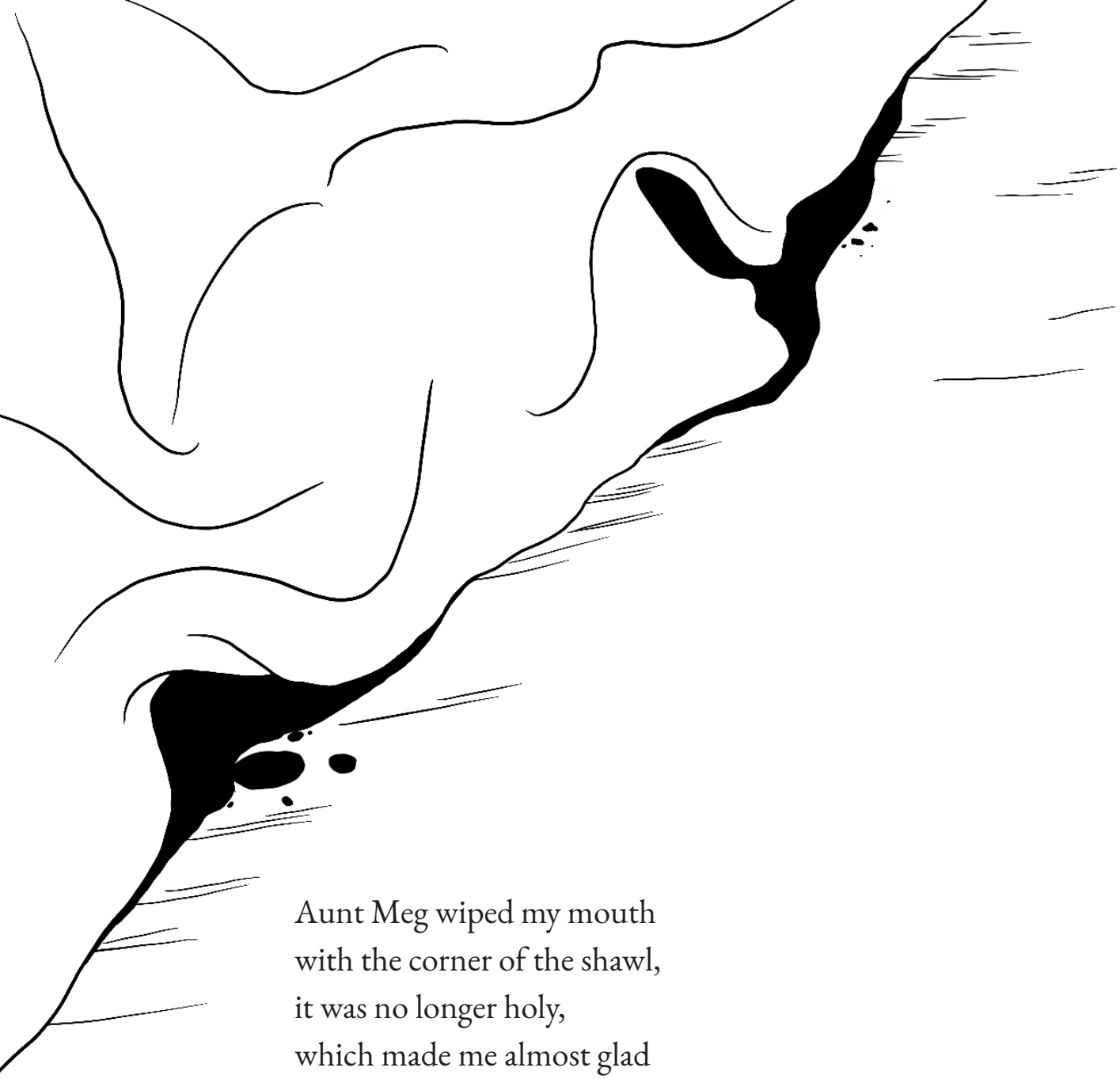
I was eight and could not breathe,
my lungs the size
of two small wet socks,
the inhaler hissed
like a cat hiding under a porch,
the doctor said one more attack

She drove me up north
to her church,
the parking lot gravel,
the building warm
in the way a kettle is warm,
the women all knew
which child was the sick one

They laid the shawl across my shoulders
the way you cover a body,
they put their hands
on my head, my back, my chest,
their hands smelled like
casseroles and hairspray,
they prayed in the voice
people use for animals

The pulpit was breathing,
the carpet was breathing,
the men in the pew behind me
were not breathing,I could hear it

I threw up on the carpet,
on the shawl,
on the women's good shoes,
clear and warm and shameful,
a prayer of the body,
the only one I knew



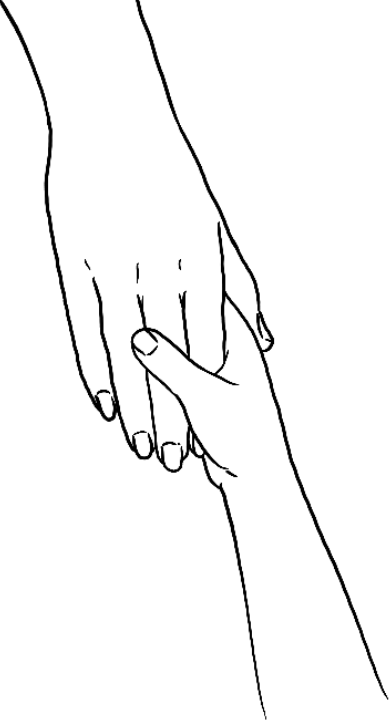
Aunt Meg wiped my mouth
with the corner of the shawl,
it was no longer holy,
which made me almost glad

I never walked into a church again
without first finding
the door

It Always Rains in Dallas

I land
and the sky starts up
like it has been holding it in,
the rental clerk
hands me an umbrella
before I ask,
the receipt says
welcome back







The Alley

In Howell there is an alley
where the season is hung overhead,
hearts in February,
a tree in December,
umbrellas in summer
floating upside down
like a flock that decided
to stop somewhere kind

My son walks underthe colored ceiling,
holding my hand,
holding his mother's hand,
he tilts his head back
to count what is hanging,
he counts wrong every time

My wife smiles
the smile that means
she is also a child here,
the brick walls hold us
the way two cupped hands
hold a small warm thing

Nothing follows us out
into the regular afternoon