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POSITIVELY  
NO  
PARKING  
IN THIS  
CORNER

# PEDESTRIAN PARKING // J. Greville

# CARNIVAL



Ogden wiped the vomit from his lips as the Ferris wheel came to a stop behind him. He turned, and saw that the boy was no longer there. He coughed, spat on the ground, then looked around.

The people no longer paid him any mind. The orderly blue and the chaotic yellows still traveled, separate, as they had and would always do. The rush of pain to his forehead arrived upon a wave of vertigo, and he thanked whatever Gods still existed for it. It was the momentary clarity that always followed the worst hallucinations, but he had time now. The boy was home.

"To hell with this place," Ogden said as he reached into his jacket. He looked at the ball for a moment--such a strange, small thing to infect a universe with--and placed it in his right inside pocket. From the left, he withdrew a small silvery tuning fork.

He stumbled as gracefully as he could to the edge of the Ferris wheel, and hit the small tuning fork against the side of the beastly machine. The artificial synchronicity shuddered violently, vibrating in pitch with the tuning fork in Ogden's hand. The yellow people shrieked, and the blue people stared as the ground around them started to shake.

Ogden spat again, then laughed. It was the heaviest burden a Gardener had, but he welcomed the responsibility of tearing this dead place from the Garden. The carnival was over. Harvest had begun.

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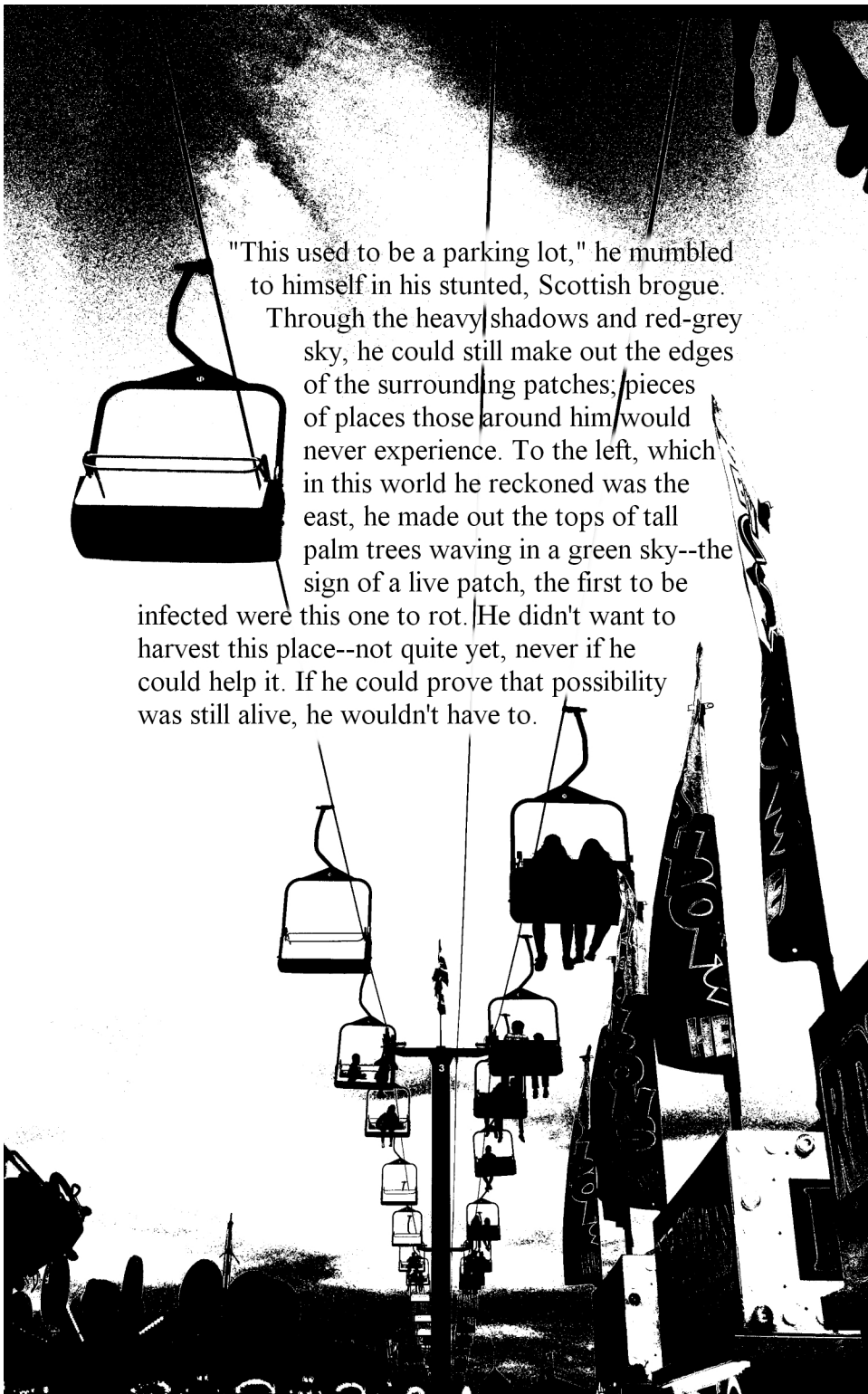


He stepped through the plastic partition and into the fairground, his eyes blurry from the flashing lights and the buzzing mescaline. Peyote was smooth; this was harsh and jagged, like the part of the fruit you were never meant to eat. He wasn't used to going this deep. He wasn't sure if the carnival was the best place for it, but here he was.

His teeth rattled dry and grimy in his mouth, and shook in unison with each vibration that pulsed through his fingertips. His eyes darted, staccato, back and forth over the carousel and the double shot and the Ferris wheel and the pendulum motions of the pirate ship. The people around him moved in two separate, distinct groups: those that lined up and filed themselves orderly buzzed a soft blue, while those that skittered about without direction undulated a faint yellow every time they breathed. They were two entities, moving in the spaces the other left unoccupied. He wondered if one side of the coin was ever aware of the other.

Ogden glided through the blue and the yellow, and found it fitting that the edges of the sky blazed a hazy red that only he could see. Primary colours pulsing in a dead patch he'd travelled many times. The carnival was something new, however, and he wondered through the mescaline high if some sort of possibility had infected this dreary place. Dead patches infected live ones, not each other, and not the other way around. If it had happened, it was unprecedented--or at least unknown. He was here to find out.





"This used to be a parking lot," he mumbled to himself in his stunted, Scottish brogue.

Through the heavy shadows and red-grey sky, he could still make out the edges of the surrounding patches, pieces of places those around him would never experience. To the left, which in this world he reckoned was the east, he made out the tops of tall palm trees waving in a green sky--the sign of a live patch, the first to be infected were this one to rot. He didn't want to harvest this place--not quite yet, never if he could help it. If he could prove that possibility was still alive, he wouldn't have to.

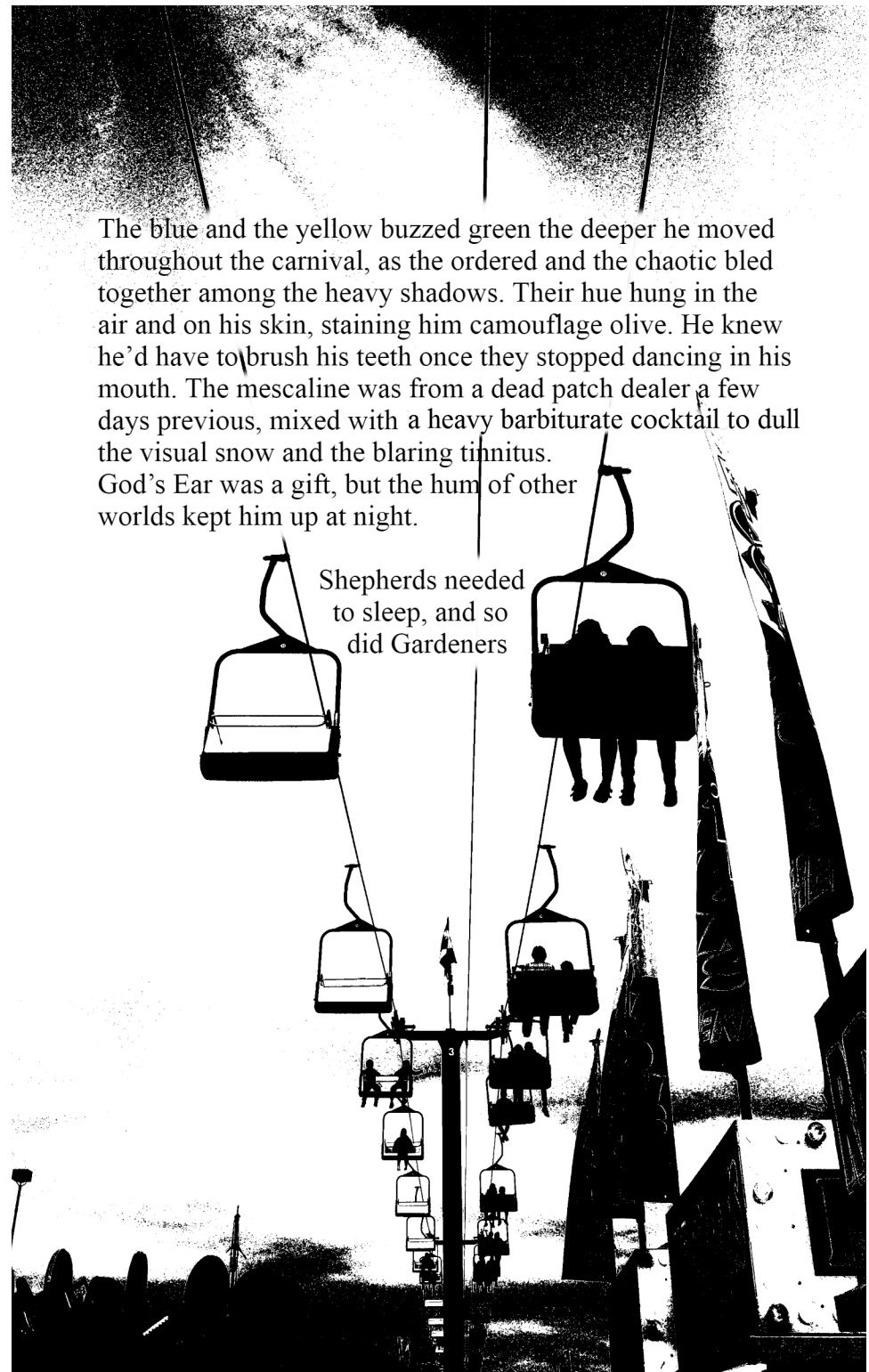


And he turned his head and saw the blue people fight the yellow people, all for him, each tribe begging to be joined, each group smiling then howling then laughing then screaming. He heard them call his name and curse his name and demand that his name be forgotten, like theirs, and threw themselves at his feet, and each other to the side, all for him, begging him to stay. And he thought that this was good, and he thought that this was home, and then he turned and thought that he was going to be sick, and then was.





The wheel spun, and sparked, and the colours ran together, and the boy screamed at the wheel, and for his ball, and to stay forever and ever as Ogden watched, his head spinning, his eyes rolling back into his head, his heart beating against his ribs as if trying to break free, his skin peeling back from the tips of his fingers; every bit of himself trying to escape, but why? Such a silly thing to do; to escape, to go anywhere else.

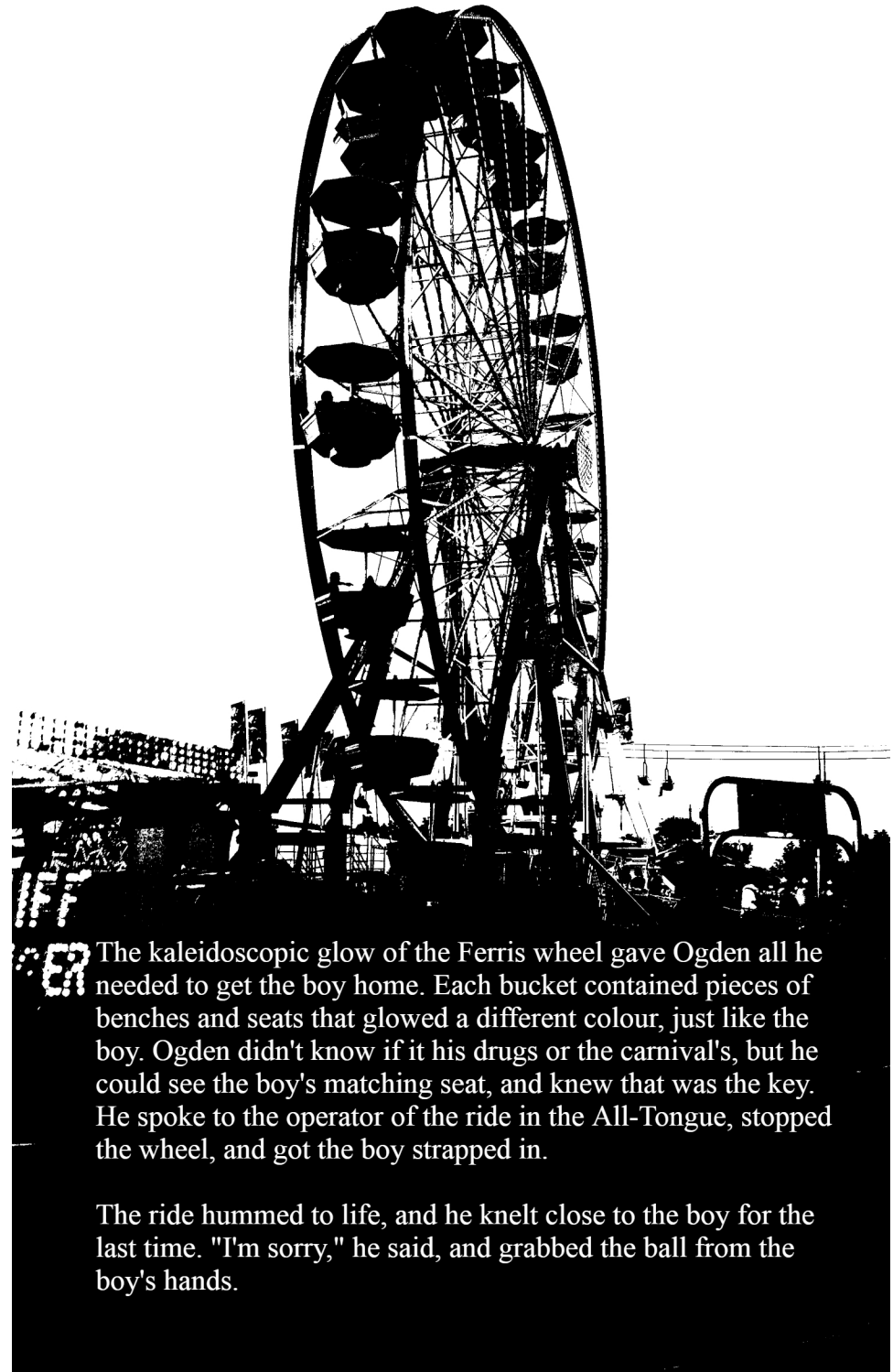


The blue and the yellow buzzed green the deeper he moved throughout the carnival, as the ordered and the chaotic bled together among the heavy shadows. Their hue hung in the air and on his skin, staining him camouflage olive. He knew he'd have to brush his teeth once they stopped dancing in his mouth. The mescaline was from a dead patch dealer a few days previous, mixed with a heavy barbiturate cocktail to dull the visual snow and the blaring tinnitus. God's Ear was a gift, but the hum of other worlds kept him up at night.

Shepherds needed  
to sleep, and so  
did Gardeners

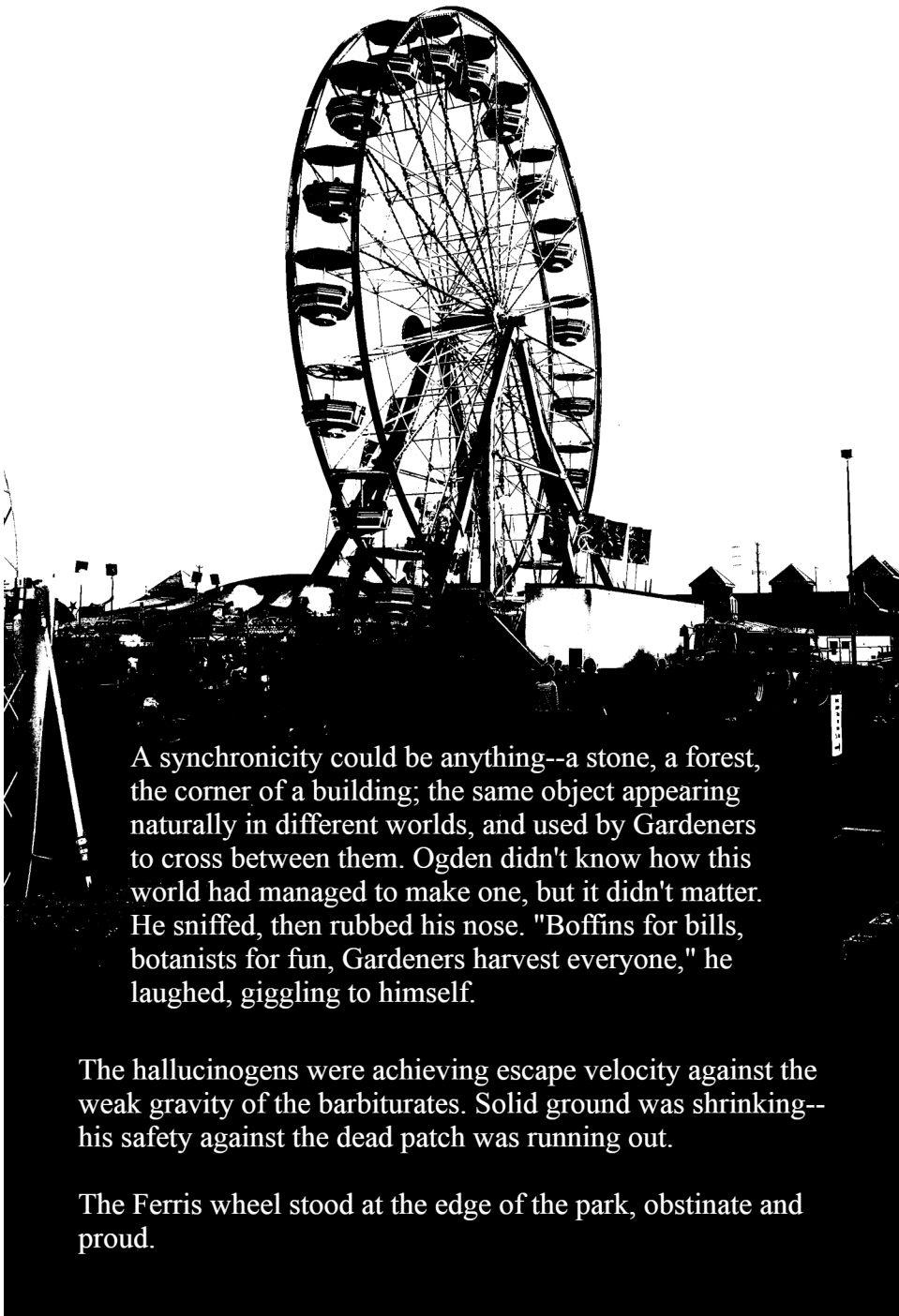
Ahead of him loomed a large hanging carousel, decorated on each side with ornate pastoral scenes. Ogden approached the great mechanical beast and stared at the faded oils running together in each panel. They told the simple story of a child befriending a friendly goat. He watched as the goat approached the child in one panel, then as the carousel turned, he watched the goat run away playfully. The boy followed, then tripped, then in the next panel was approached by the goat, who licked his wound. The last panel showed the two of them laughing. The more the carousel spun, the further it whipped its human cargo with each rotation; the faster the story in the panels played out.

He watched as the boy and the goat went from still images to a moving motion blur. The mescaline-fueled drone of the carousel started to sound a bit like a child's laughter as the scenes repeated, faster and faster. He worried for a moment that the ride was coming to life. As the spinning finally slowed and the still images started to emerge, he noticed a boy—like the one in the picture—chasing a ball behind the carousel, laughing.



The kaleidoscopic glow of the Ferris wheel gave Ogden all he needed to get the boy home. Each bucket contained pieces of benches and seats that glowed a different colour, just like the boy. Ogden didn't know if it his drugs or the carnival's, but he could see the boy's matching seat, and knew that was the key. He spoke to the operator of the ride in the All-Tongue, stopped the wheel, and got the boy strapped in.

The ride hummed to life, and he knelt close to the boy for the last time. "I'm sorry," he said, and grabbed the ball from the boy's hands.



A synchronicity could be anything--a stone, a forest, the corner of a building; the same object appearing naturally in different worlds, and used by Gardeners to cross between them. Ogden didn't know how this world had managed to make one, but it didn't matter. He sniffed, then rubbed his nose. "Boffins for bills, botanists for fun, Gardeners harvest everyone," he laughed, giggling to himself.

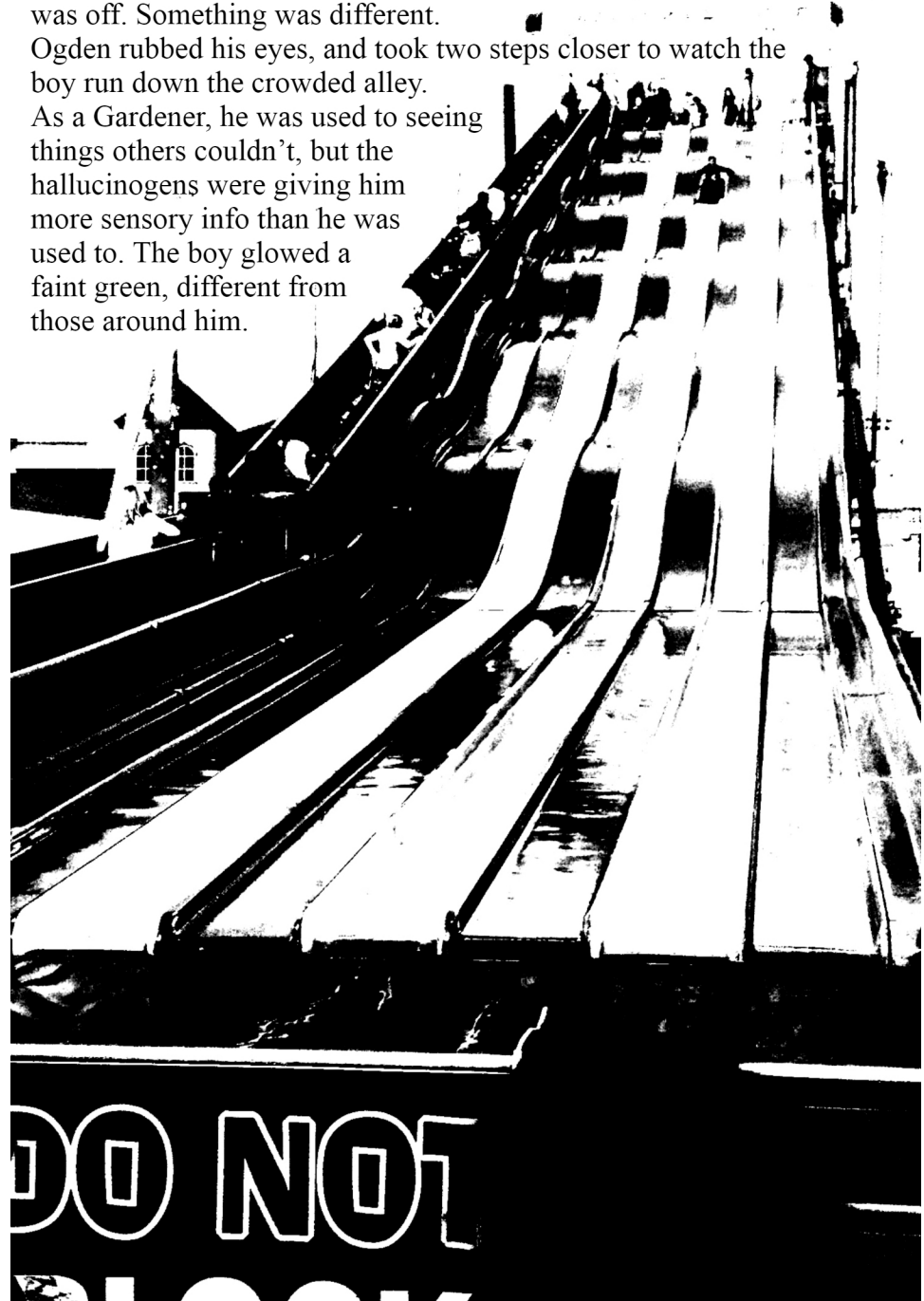
The hallucinogens were achieving escape velocity against the weak gravity of the barbiturates. Solid ground was shrinking--his safety against the dead patch was running out.

The Ferris wheel stood at the edge of the park, obstinate and proud.

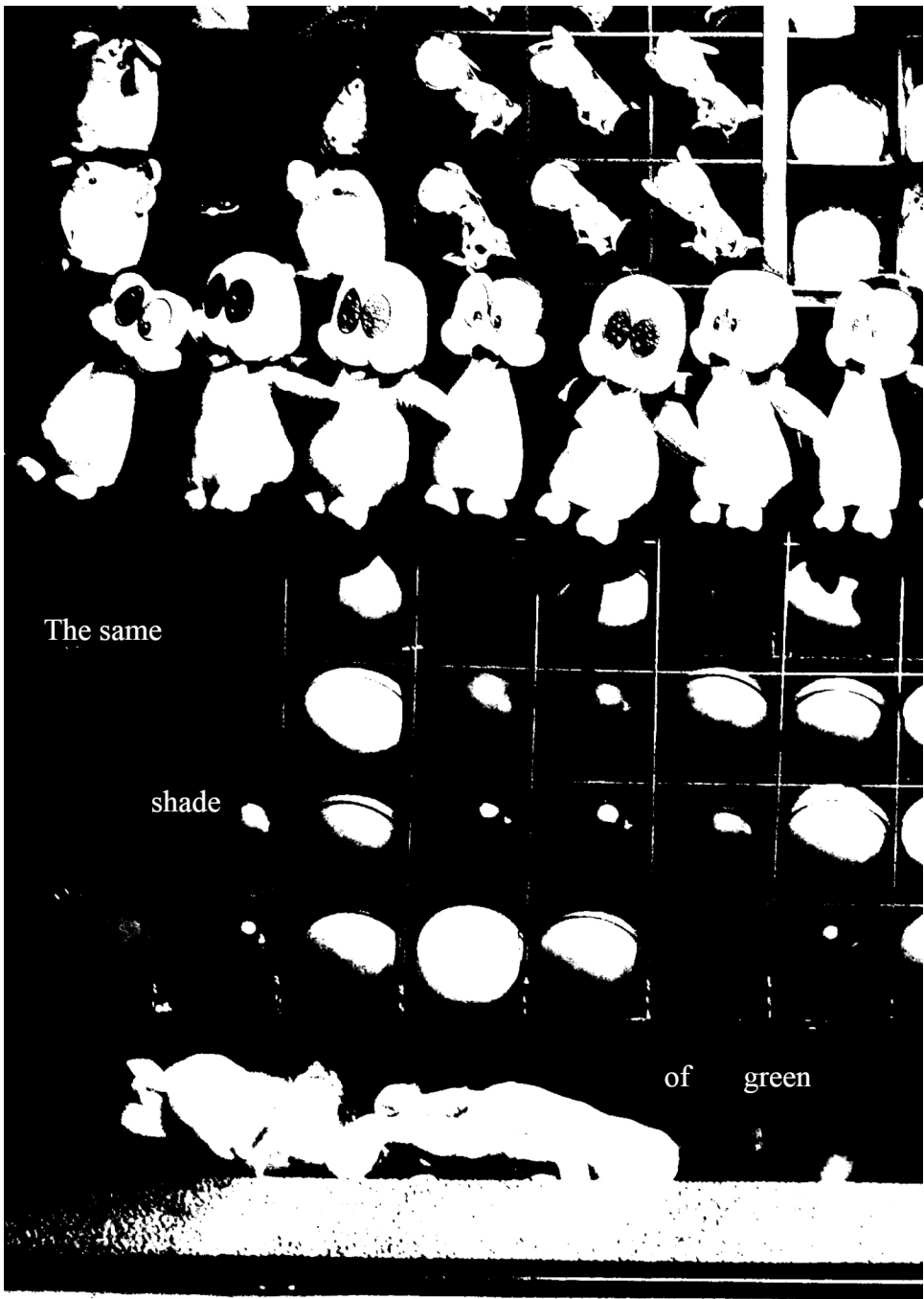
Ogden shook his head and patted his cheeks, steadying himself against the pull of the barbiturates. He didn't expect to be hallucinating this quickly, and reckoned the carnival was doing more than it's fair share of the work. The boy was real, and so was his laughter, but something was off. Something was different.

Ogden rubbed his eyes, and took two steps closer to watch the boy run down the crowded alley.

As a Gardener, he was used to seeing things others couldn't, but the hallucinogens were giving him more sensory info than he was used to. The boy glowed a faint green, different from those around him.



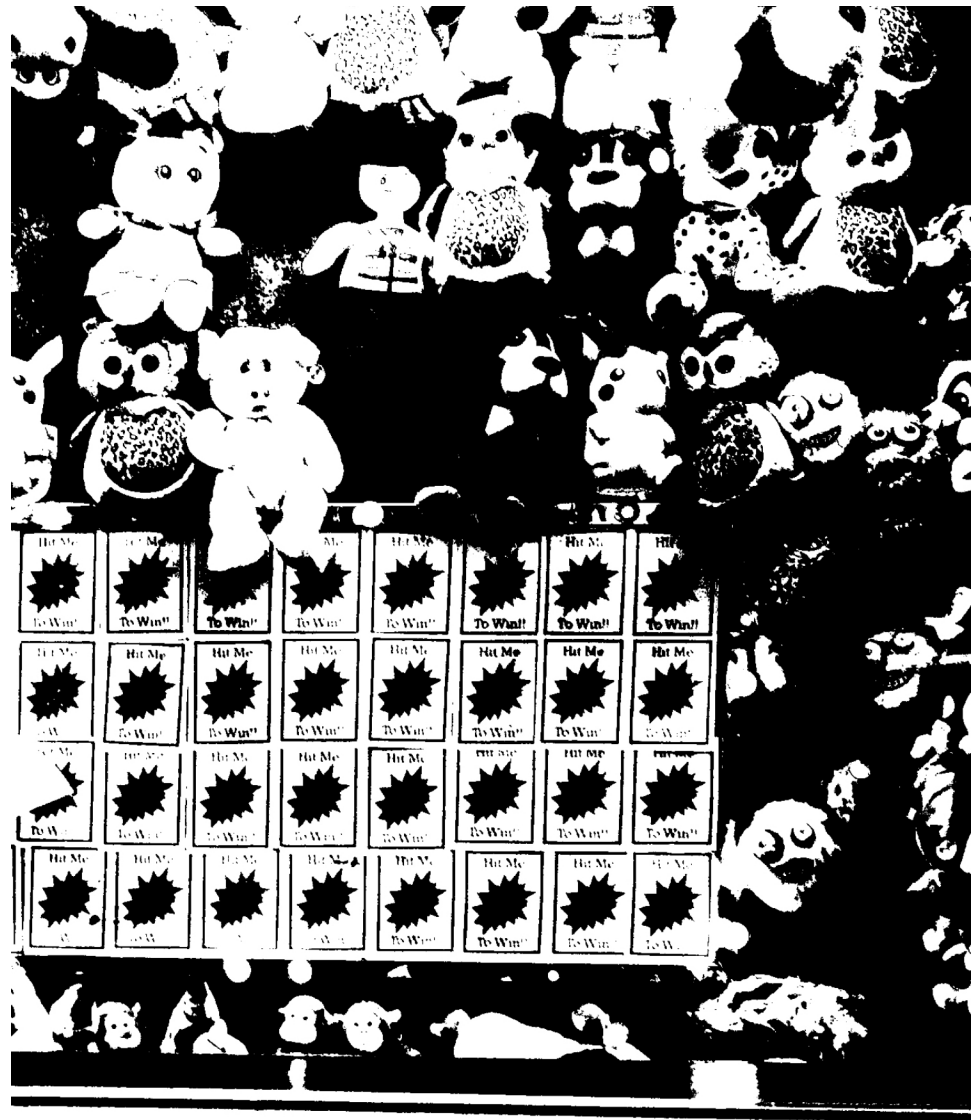
DO NOT



The same

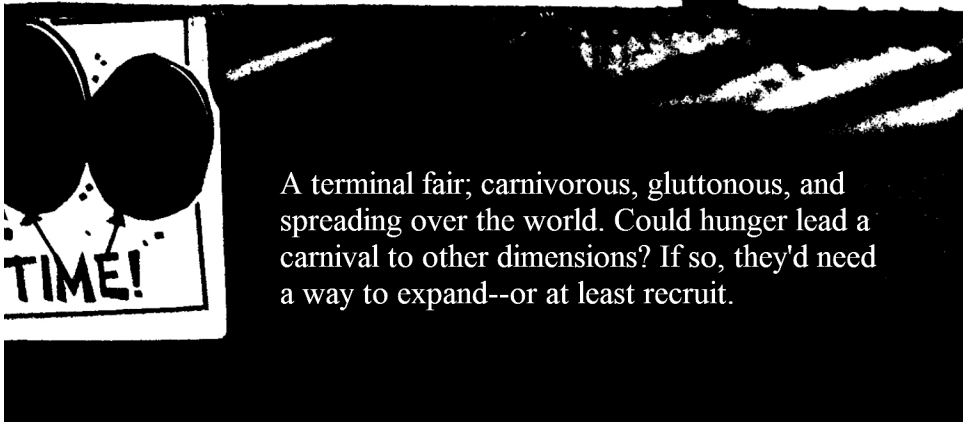
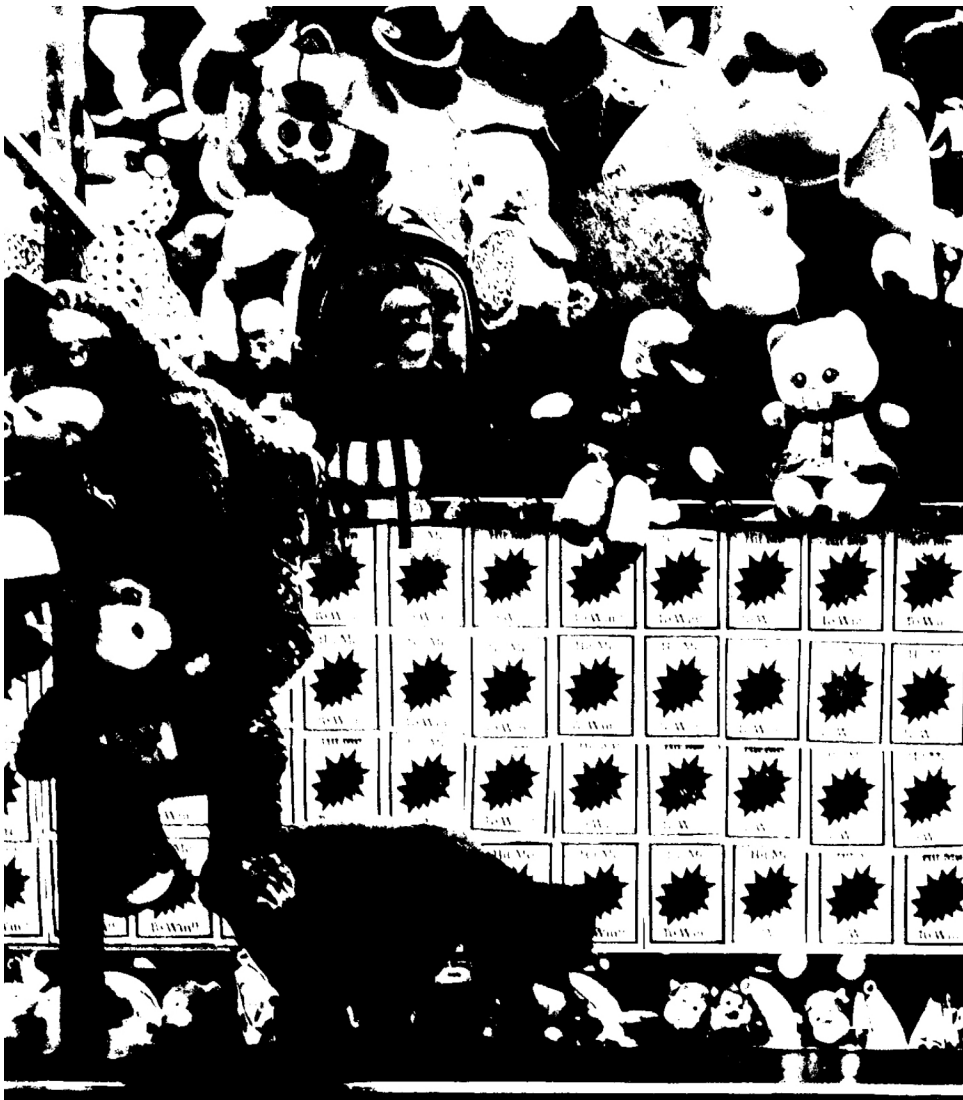
shade

of green

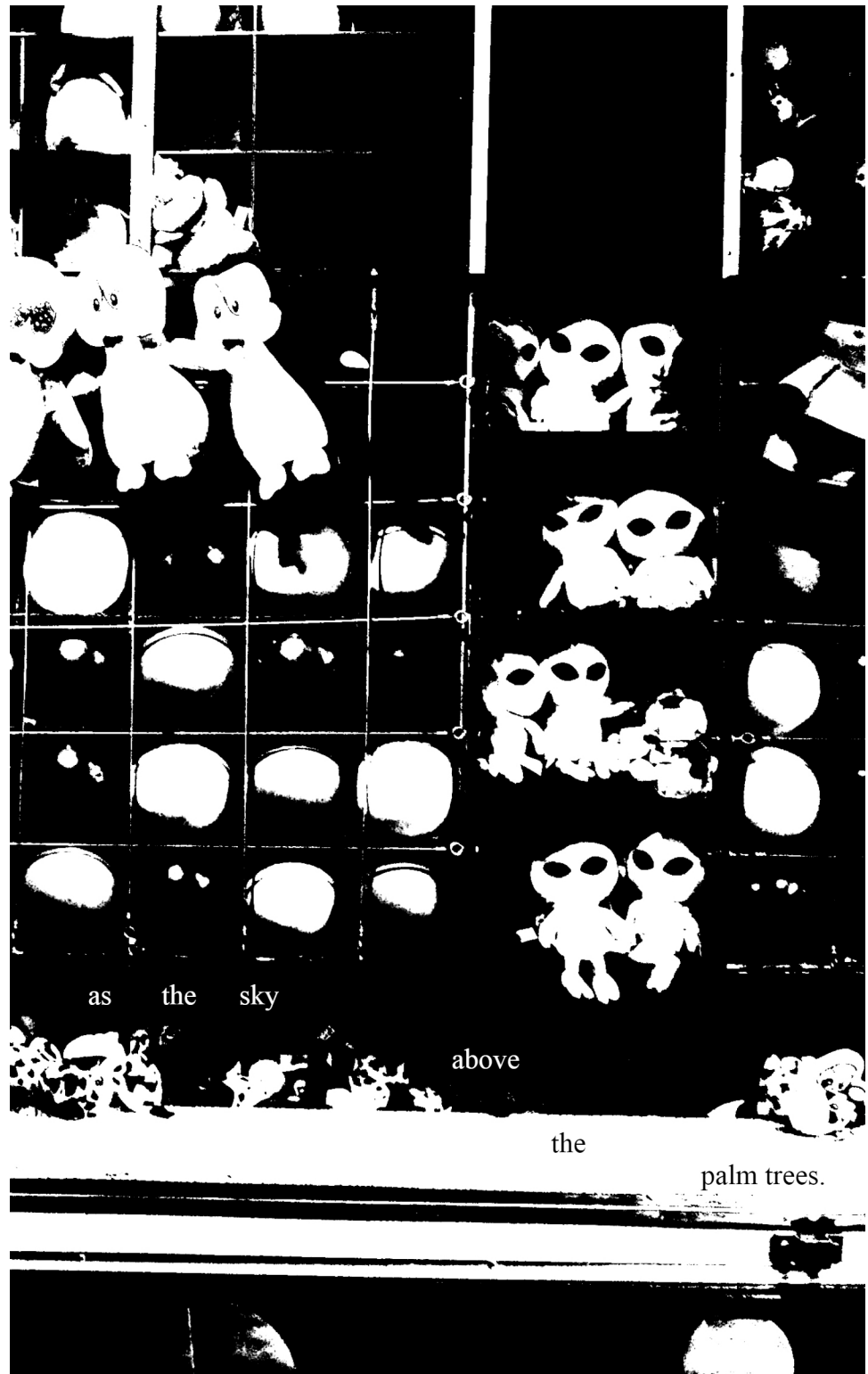


A gateway between worlds. A means of travel. The  
Ferris wheel--it had to be an artificial synchronicity.





A terminal fair; carnivorous, gluttonous, and spreading over the world. Could hunger lead a carnival to other dimensions? If so, they'd need a way to expand—or at least recruit.



as the sky

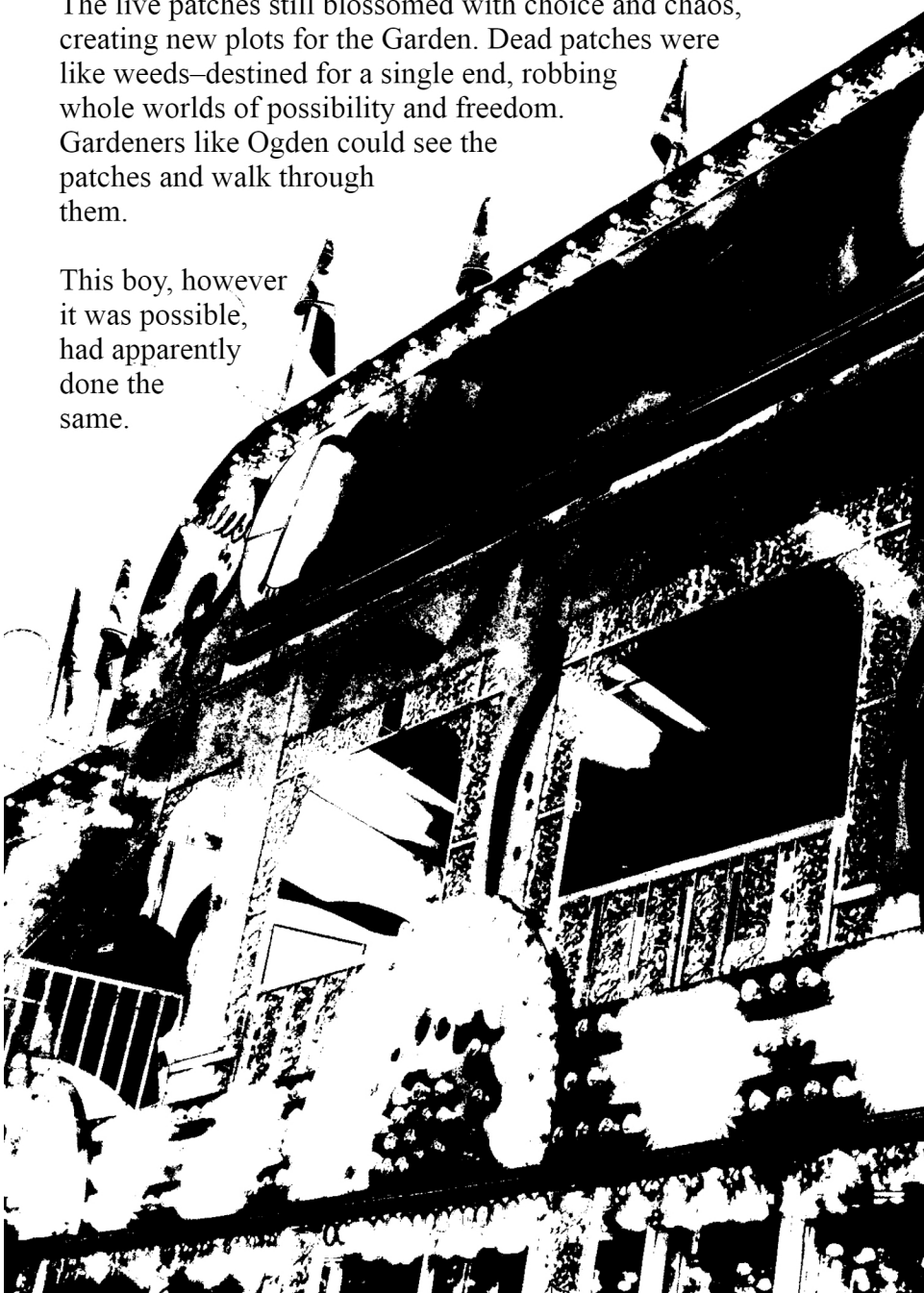
above

the

palm trees.

The boy must've come from the live patch, Ogden thought. It was rare for anyone without the sight to be able to cross from one patch to the other, and he wondered if the boy had come on his own. Each patch was its own slice of a separate reality. The live patches still blossomed with choice and chaos, creating new plots for the Garden. Dead patches were like weeds—destined for a single end, robbing whole worlds of possibility and freedom. Gardeners like Ogden could see the patches and walk through them.

This boy, however it was possible, had apparently done the same.



It was starting to make sense. Patches could die 'cause of the simplest mistake--a drug meant to draw people to a fair and keep them there would certainly do the trick. He reckoned this carnival extended for miles, maybe more, only recently reaching the patch for him to see it. Infinite worlds meant infinite ways to end. This wasn't the most original he'd seen, but it was certainly effective.



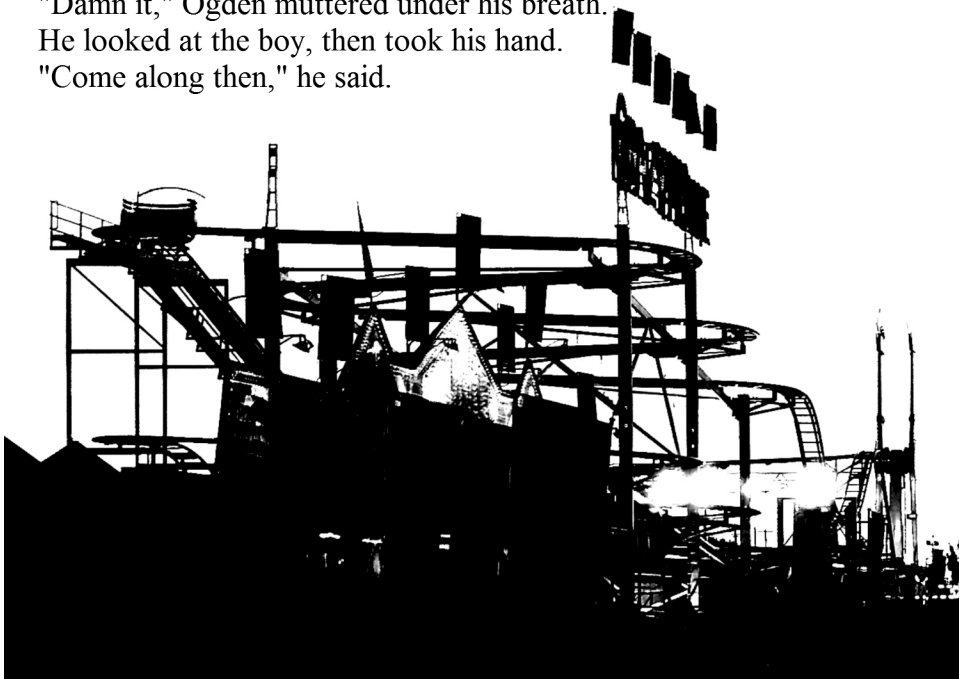
An addictive carnival, always growing and attracting. He followed the glow of the people for a moment and tried his best to steady himself, aligning the shake of the mescaline and familiar barbiturates against the hallucinogenic pull of the air around them. He could already see in the eye of the child that his will to leave this place was waning. Ogden didn't know how long he had before the drugs in his system gave way to those of the carnival.

He gripped the boy by his shoulders, putting more weight than he intended on the small child's frame. "You said the big wheel brought you here--which way is it?" he asked, swaying slightly. The boy pointed to the Ferris wheel at the edge of the park, and Ogden nodded. He had to get the boy home first. He'd start at the beginning.

He took a deep breath, shuddered, then rose to his feet. "Let's go for a ride," Ogden said.

That ball was from a dead patch, and had made its way into a live one. That meant infection—no new possibility, no hope for the Garden. This place would need to be harvested after all.

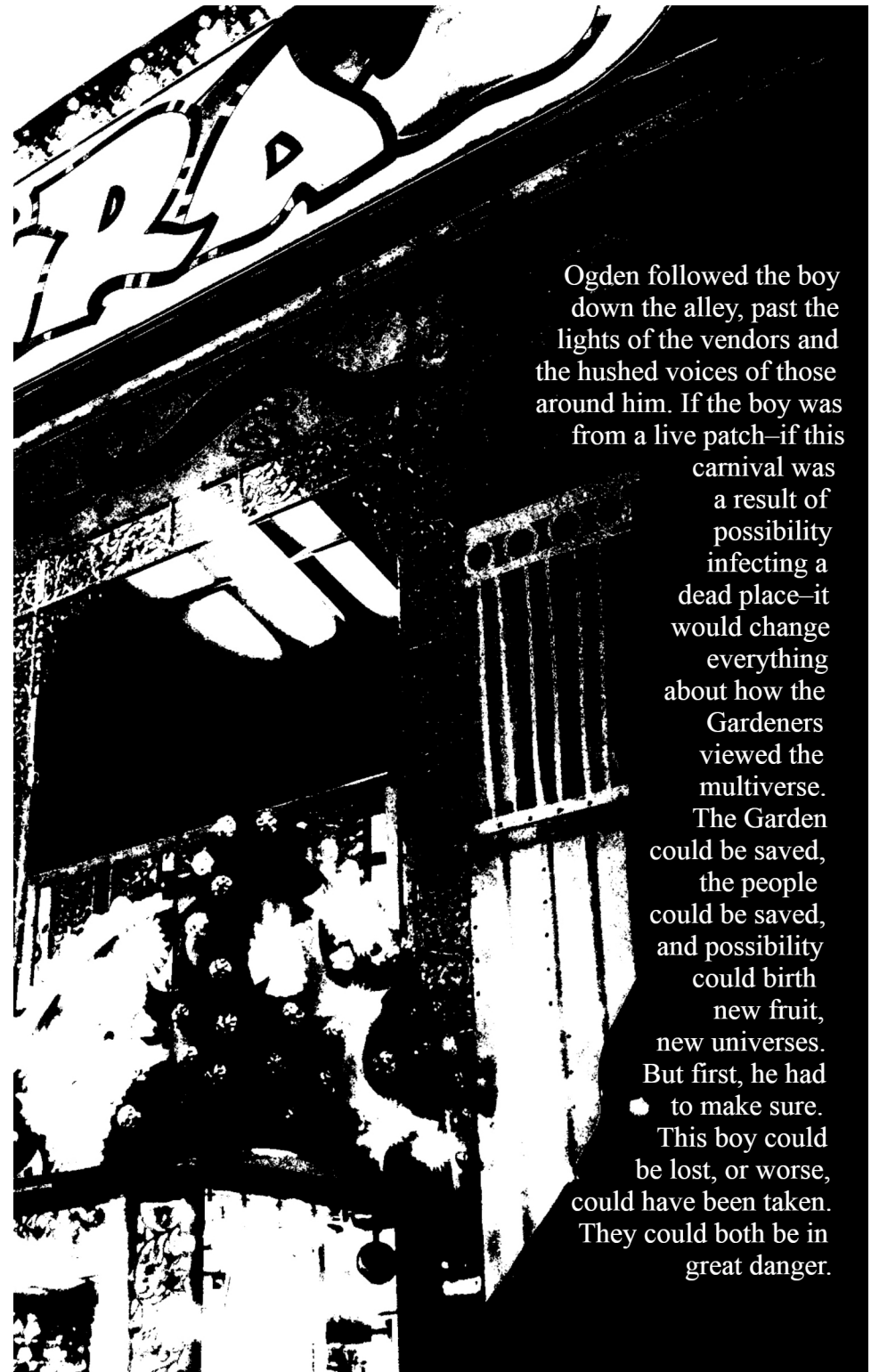
"Damn it," Ogden muttered under his breath. He looked at the boy, then took his hand. "Come along then," he said.



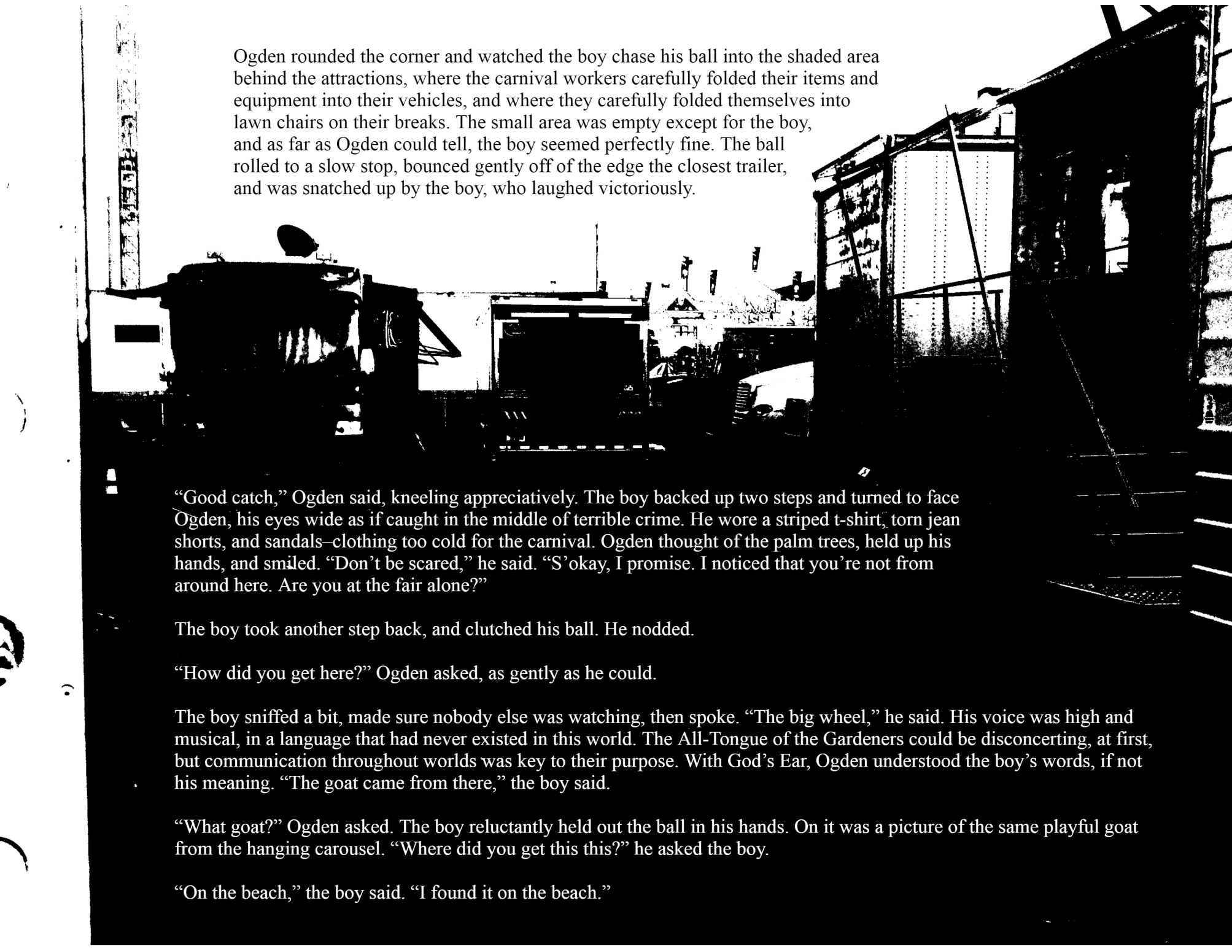
They stepped back into the buzzing lights and sounds, and Ogden felt the base of his stomach give out. The high hit him all at once—it was too much. Being away from the blare, however briefly, made the colours and scents of the carnival almost unbearable. He stopped for a moment, and knelt to catch his breath. Gardeners were used to drugs. Why was he suddenly overwhelmed?

"I like the yellow ones," the boy said in his high-pitched, musical language. "The blue ones are boring." He pointed to the people around them, smiling.

"Ah, shit," Ogden mumbled, trying not to vomit. He'd thought it was him, but the mescaline wasn't the issue—it was the air itself. The dead patch, of course. He, the boy, everyone—were already drugged.



Ogden followed the boy down the alley, past the lights of the vendors and the hushed voices of those around him. If the boy was from a live patch—if this carnival was a result of possibility infecting a dead place—it would change everything about how the Gardeners viewed the multiverse. The Garden could be saved, the people could be saved, and possibility could birth new fruit, new universes. But first, he had to make sure. This boy could be lost, or worse, could have been taken. They could both be in great danger.



Ogden rounded the corner and watched the boy chase his ball into the shaded area behind the attractions, where the carnival workers carefully folded their items and equipment into their vehicles, and where they carefully folded themselves into lawn chairs on their breaks. The small area was empty except for the boy, and as far as Ogden could tell, the boy seemed perfectly fine. The ball rolled to a slow stop, bounced gently off of the edge the closest trailer, and was snatched up by the boy, who laughed victoriously.

“Good catch,” Ogden said, kneeling appreciatively. The boy backed up two steps and turned to face Ogden, his eyes wide as if caught in the middle of terrible crime. He wore a striped t-shirt, torn jean shorts, and sandals—clothing too cold for the carnival. Ogden thought of the palm trees, held up his hands, and smiled. “Don’t be scared,” he said. “S’okay, I promise. I noticed that you’re not from around here. Are you at the fair alone?”

The boy took another step back, and clutched his ball. He nodded.

“How did you get here?” Ogden asked, as gently as he could.

The boy sniffed a bit, made sure nobody else was watching, then spoke. “The big wheel,” he said. His voice was high and musical, in a language that had never existed in this world. The All-Tongue of the Gardeners could be disconcerting, at first, but communication throughout worlds was key to their purpose. With God’s Ear, Ogden understood the boy’s words, if not his meaning. “The goat came from there,” the boy said.

“What goat?” Ogden asked. The boy reluctantly held out the ball in his hands. On it was a picture of the same playful goat from the hanging carousel. “Where did you get this this?” he asked the boy.

“On the beach,” the boy said. “I found it on the beach.”