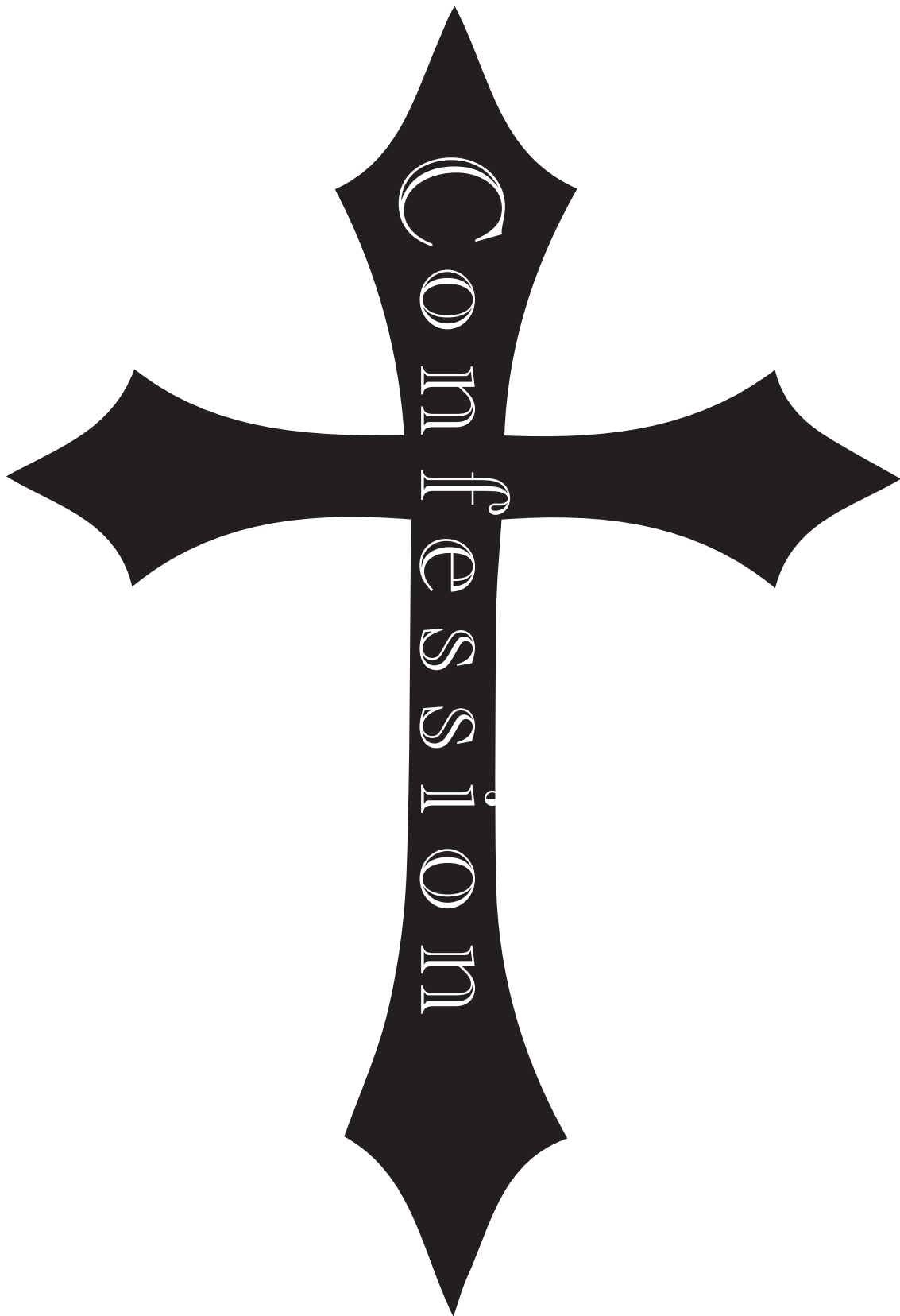


NONBELIEVER'S



or

HOW BEIJUM SAVED ME

What could be worse than falling into depression after breaking up with a boyfriend?

When you lie in bed for months, and the only thing you have the strength for is ordering food delivery, spending hours trying to get up to go to the bathroom, and days convincing yourself to take a shower. The psychologist doesn't help, and you just hope for a miracle.

A month goes by.

It seems like you're getting better. Your friends drag you out for a walk around the neighborhood, you're now sleeping 12 hours a day instead of 20, and it feels like things are getting better.

One day, you hear that your favorite bar is having smth like a birthday party with free beer. You decide to go. Everything is fine, you're drinking and suddenly... you see HIM. He approaches, offers you a drink, and you agree. And now you're sitting in a group of mutual friends, and he's trying to flirt. You try not to react, but then he shows you something on his phone, when you try to respond, he kisses you. Just like in those cheap romantic movies,



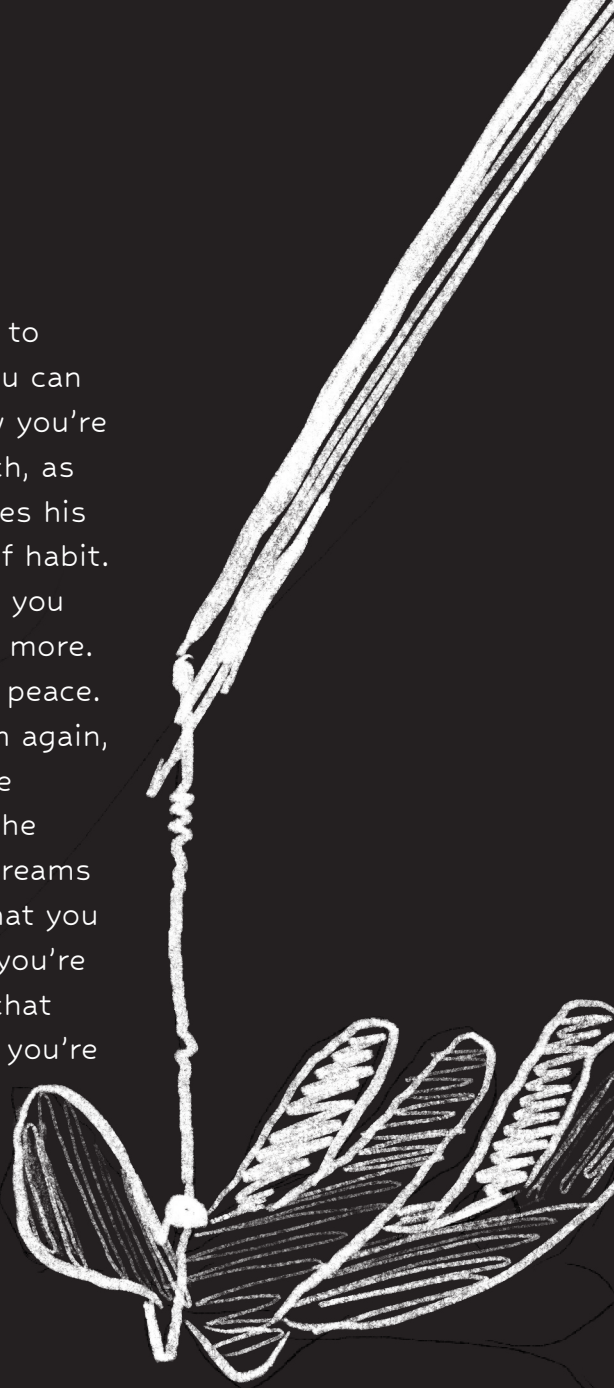
you feel like the main character.

That night.

It's already late, you missed the bus, and you don't want to walk an hour in the winter cold. So you casually ask if you can stay over at his place, and of course, he agrees. And now you're sitting in the smoking area of his dormitory on that couch, as if you never broke up, surrounded by his friends. He places his hand on your knee, with any hidden meaning, more out of habit. He gives you his sweater so you won't be cold. And then you stay over at his place. You just sleep on his bed, nothing more. And for the first time in three months, you finally feel at peace. An idyll? Hardly, you realize you're falling in love with him again, head over heels. So much that you'll wait for his message again, search for hours for a good meme to send him so he can see how smart you are. And, damn, he'll be in your dreams when you sleep, again. Where everything is so perfect that you wake up in a cold sweat, realizing the harsh reality. And you're back in that abyss. Yes, you see each other sometimes, chat on social media, so closely as if you never broke up. And you're overwhelmed again when he starts to disappear.

What could be worse than falling into depression after breaking up with a boyfriend?

Maybe falling in love with him again. But stronger.



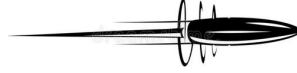
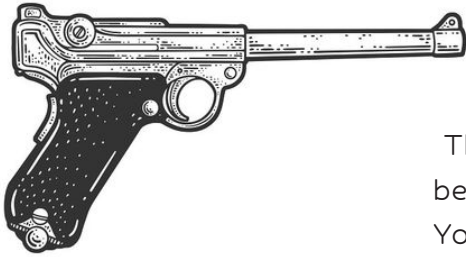
Maybe when the walls of your room press
down so hard that you can't take it anymore.
Maybe it's time to move.
Leave everything there, far away.
Maybe...
And you decide, you're not sure about anything.
Maybe...



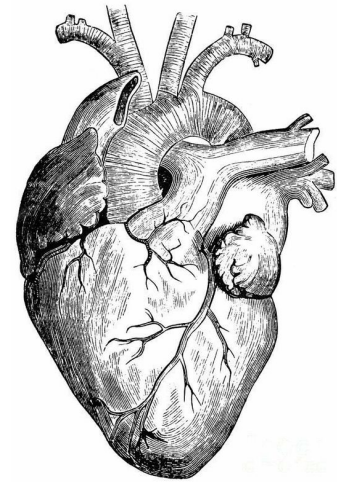
Maybe when the walls of your room
press down so hard that you can't take it
anymore.
Maybe it's time to move.
Leave everything there, far away.
Maybe...
And you decide, you're not sure about
anything.
Maybe...

Relocation.

How lucky that your friend is tired of her old roommate. She's moving to Groningen, but to the outskirts, to Beijum. And you suggest living together. She agrees, and you start your life from the start.



There's no internet; it will be installed only in a week. You download movies and TV shows through the weak Wi-Fi of Albert Heijn.



He still chats to you, but you don't respond as eagerly, you understand it's time to let go. And you really try to let go. Your heart still hurts, but somehow a little less. Just a little, but less.

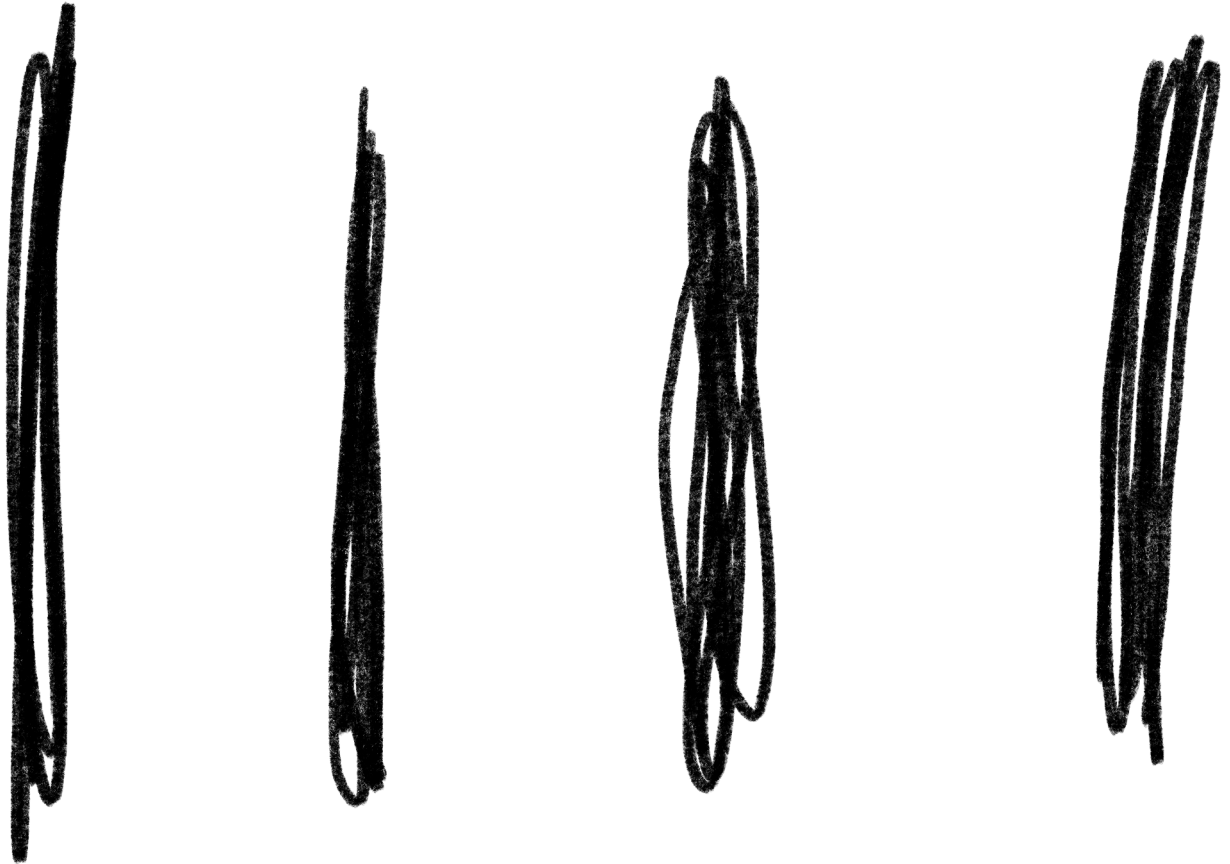
And that's encouraging.

You moved, you have a lot of things to take care of: arranging the furniture and figuring out where to put things. In the evenings, you play board games; another friend comes over, a red-haired beauty. She doesn't live with you, of course, but at least spends time, and now there are three of you. You explore new areas, have barbecues, celebrate the move, just have tea and cake, so homely. Phew...

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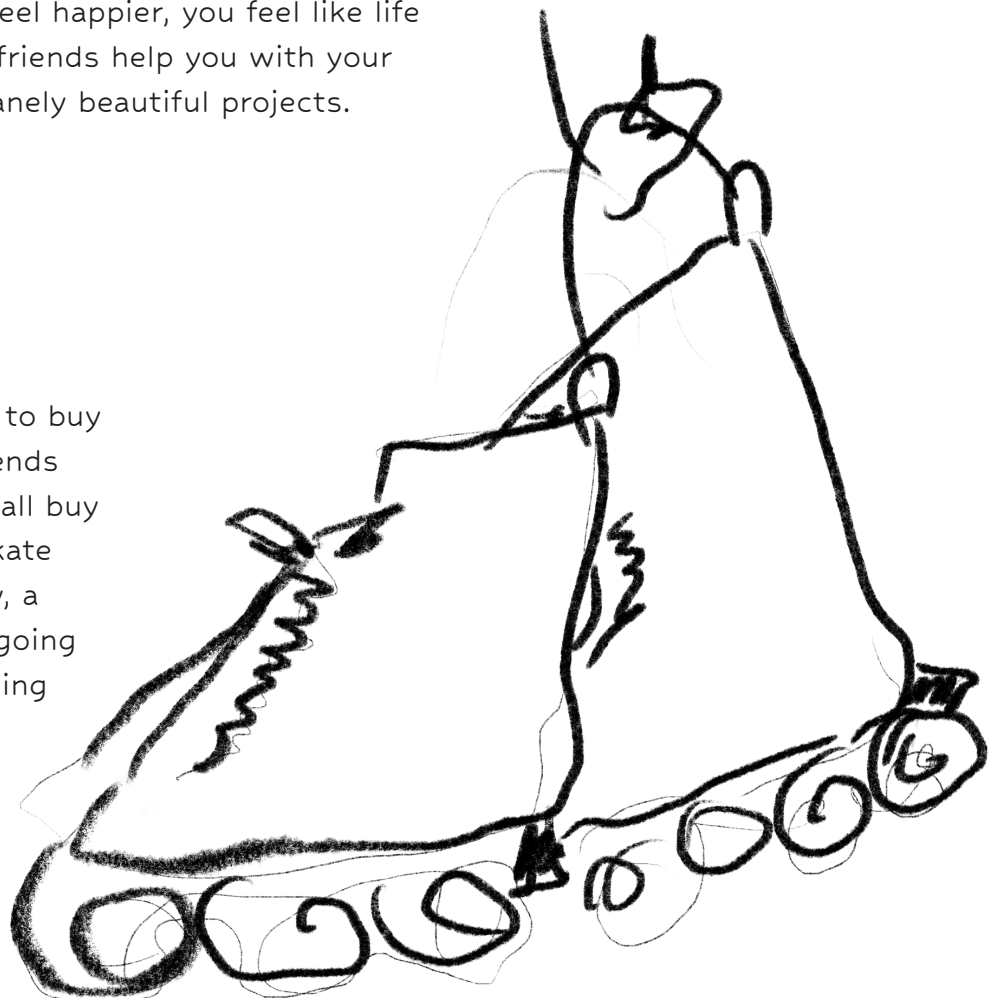
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The three of you keep walking, there are a lot of fields near your house, and further, a beach with a lake. It's a pity the water is still cold, you can only dip your feet for a short time. But you know that soon it will get warmer.



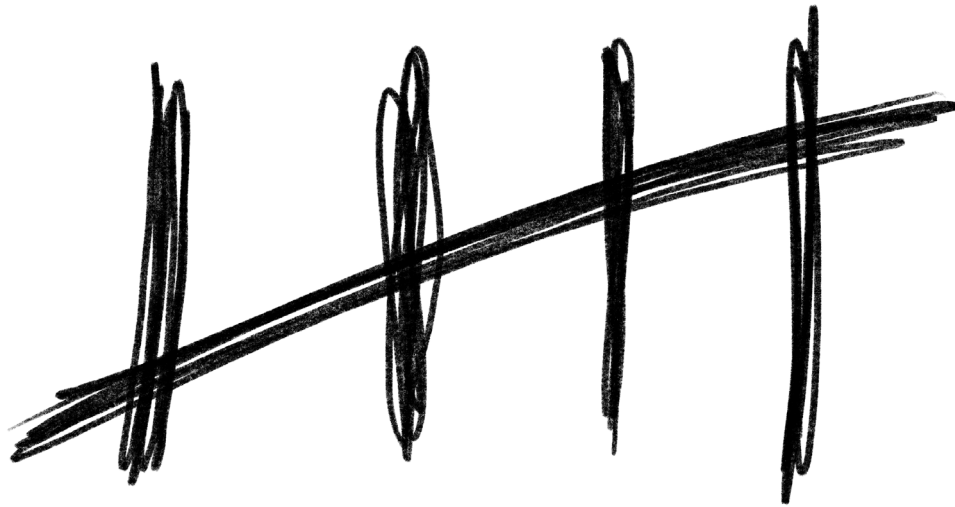
And it's getting warmer. Then another friend comes over, and now there are four of you. You go to the beach, and you feel happier, you feel like life is getting better. Your friends help you with your studies, you create insanely beautiful projects.

You have a crazy idea to buy roller skates. Your friends support you, and you all buy them together. You skate at any time of the day, a couple of times even going beyond the city, reaching neighboring villages.



And so, the year ends.

Your heart is still aching.
He even congratulated
you on your birthday.
Deep down, somewhere
far away, the thought still
lingers that you could
be together, but you
immediately push that
idea away.



You're waiting for her, your best friend, to come for your 18th
birthday, traveling a long and difficult three-day journey in a stu
car for you. And now she's here, the birthdays passes, not
just yours, everything is good, you're happy.

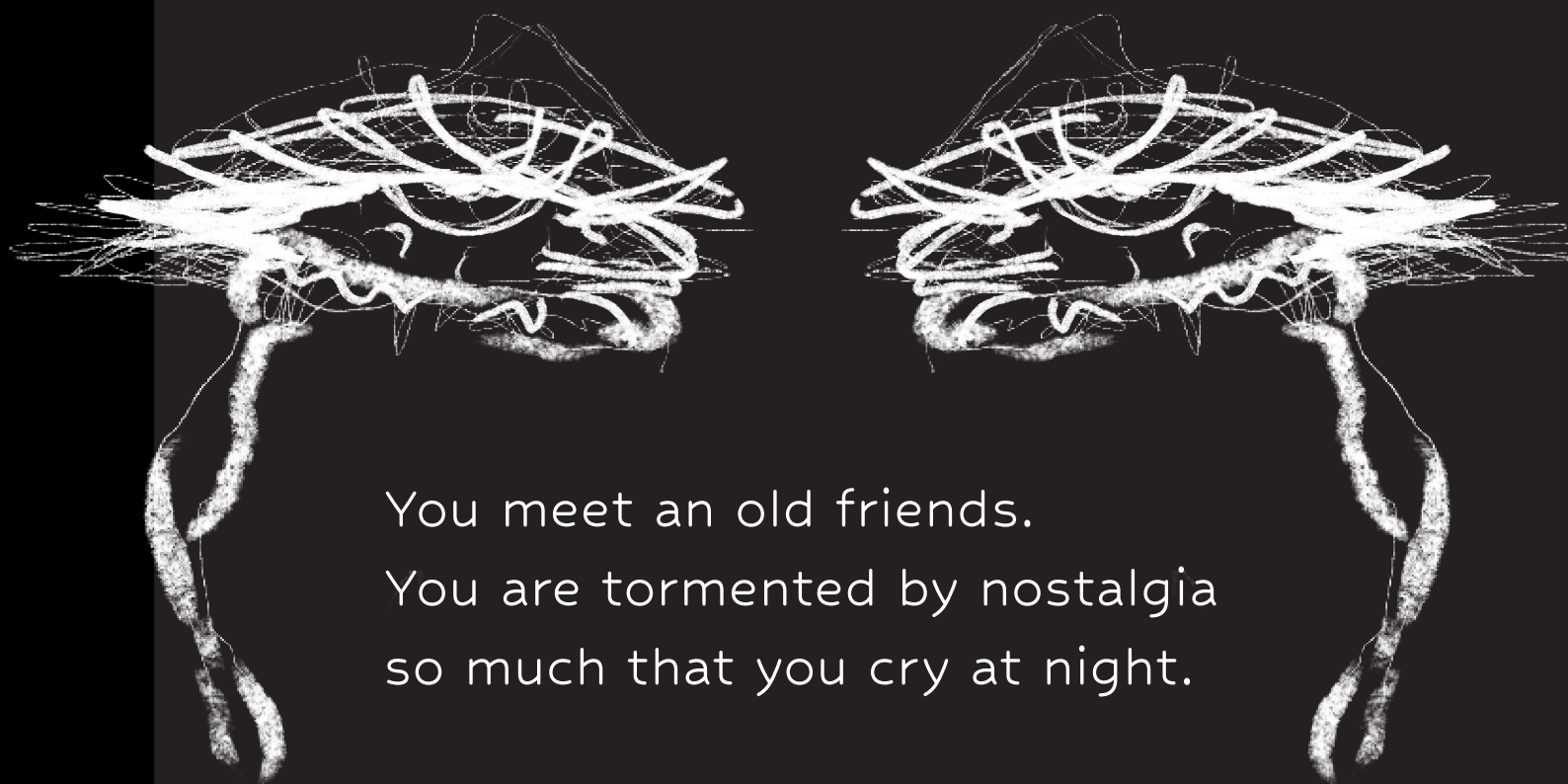
A month goes by.

And now it's the end of July, you congratulate the redhead in the morning and run to the train station with your suitcases to go to the place that has been home to you for 16 years. You've been traveling for 15 hours, and it's going to be the same amount of time, in a stuffy bus with no toilet or air conditioning.

Finally, in your hometown, one more minute and you'll see your grandfather. All the food tastes better, the sun is brighter, the grass is greener, I wish I could say that. But in two years, everything has changed.

You've changed, your surroundings have changed, the environment has changed. Lots of military, veterans, so-called military «hedgehogs.» Lots of police, crazy prices for everything, holes in the asphalt from kamikaze drones, bombed-out houses, some of them shamefully covered with cloth, supposedly for reconstruction.

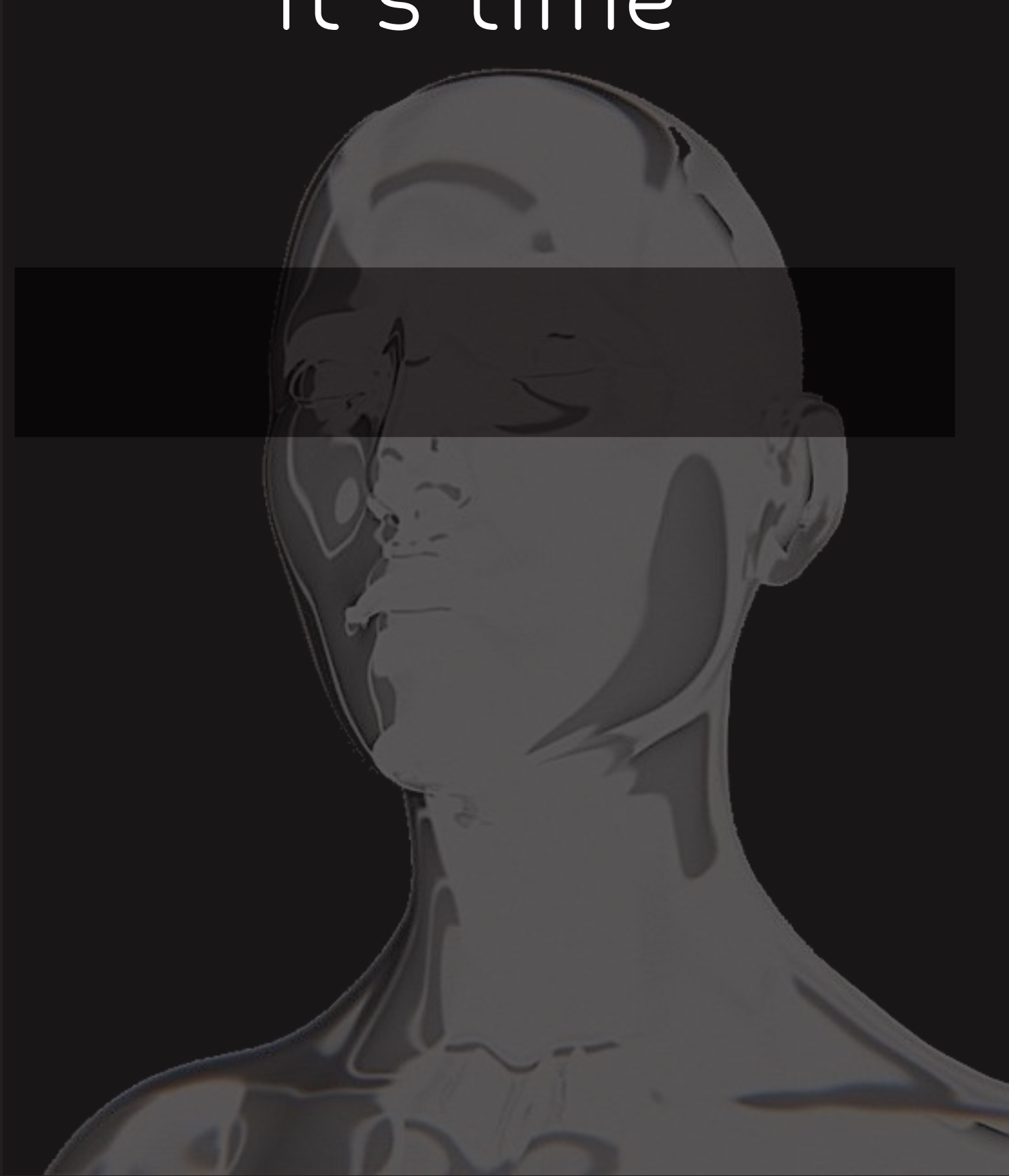
But on the road, strangely enough, you let it go completely.



You meet an old friends.
You are tormented by nostalgia
so much that you cry at night.

You have a good time, but you realize they're thinking narrowly, or perhaps you're thinking too broadly.

It's time



to face it



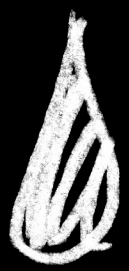
you've outgrown them, and it doesn't matter that in your senior year of high school you used to carve out a day off once a month to run away to them.



Maybe you weren't running away to them, but to somewhere else to douse your terrible stress with liters of whatever fuel you could find. You're even scared to remember how much vodka you might have drunk with your martinis. Half a liter, a liter, or more?



But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.
But it doesn't matter now.

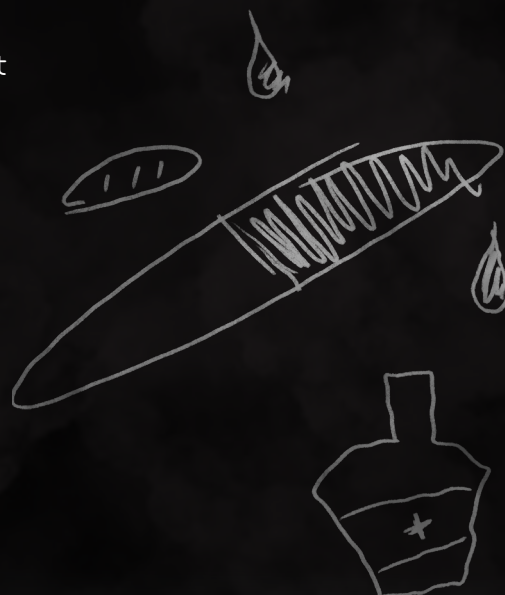


Yeah, nostalgia is cool, but you start to realize that you're just here to go to the doctors and take care of legal matters. You go to a private psychiatrist, they prescribe you strong antidepressants. You find it amusing that you've been screaming since you were 14 that until I was diagnosed with depression, I didn't have it. And it turns out you have a whole bunch of other things.

Ha, that's funny.



And then your friends send you audio and video messages from Groningen, and then a terrible reality hits you.



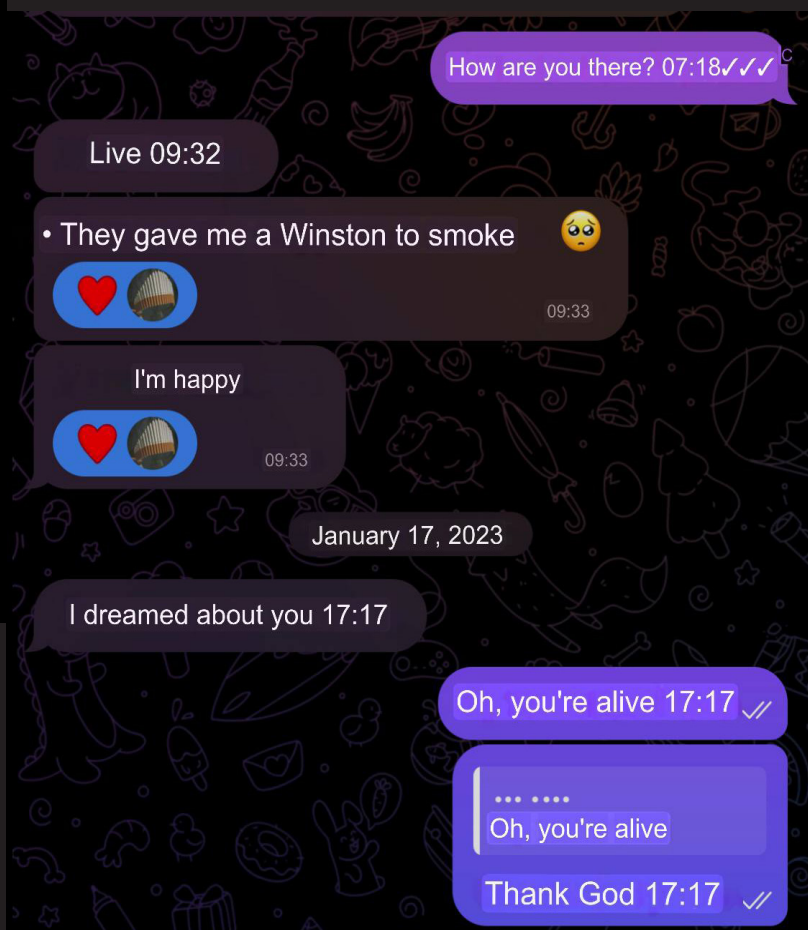
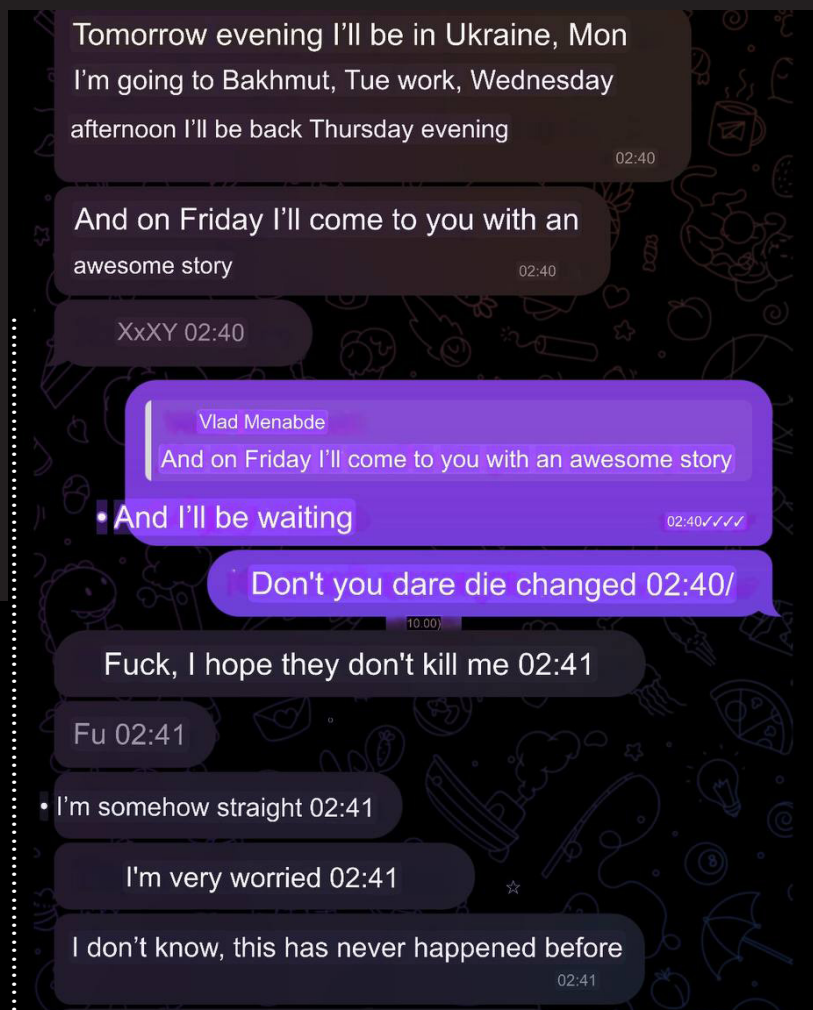
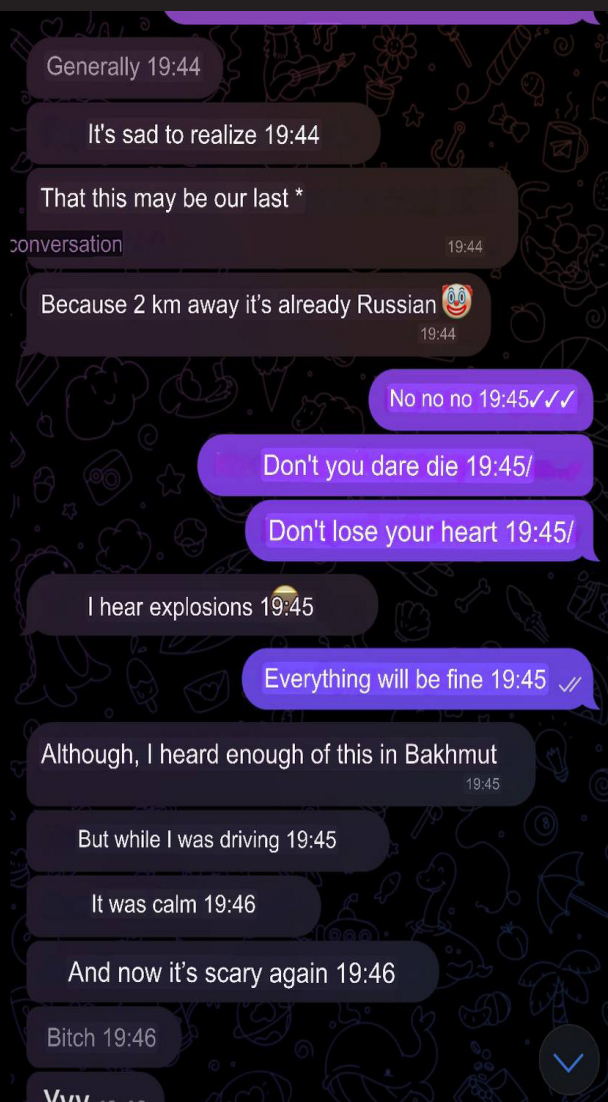
So you start taking these miserable medications. More than 10 pills a day, you are already sick of them, but, strangely enough, you completely let go, no more terrible anxiety and panic attacks to vomit.

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In a country where you have less rights than a dog, in a country where at the mention of being a refugee you are labeled a stupid uneducated primate. Where you are second-class. In a country where you can't find a high paying job, because your diplomas and certificates that you literally put your physical and mental health on don't count, because your country isn't the EU.
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Frustrating? It's insane.

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But what can you do?
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But at the same time you realize that people are tired of hearing about someone else's war, no one cares how many friends or family members are already dead. Some of them died from a rocket, some of them were taken to the front. Nobody cares about your worries.



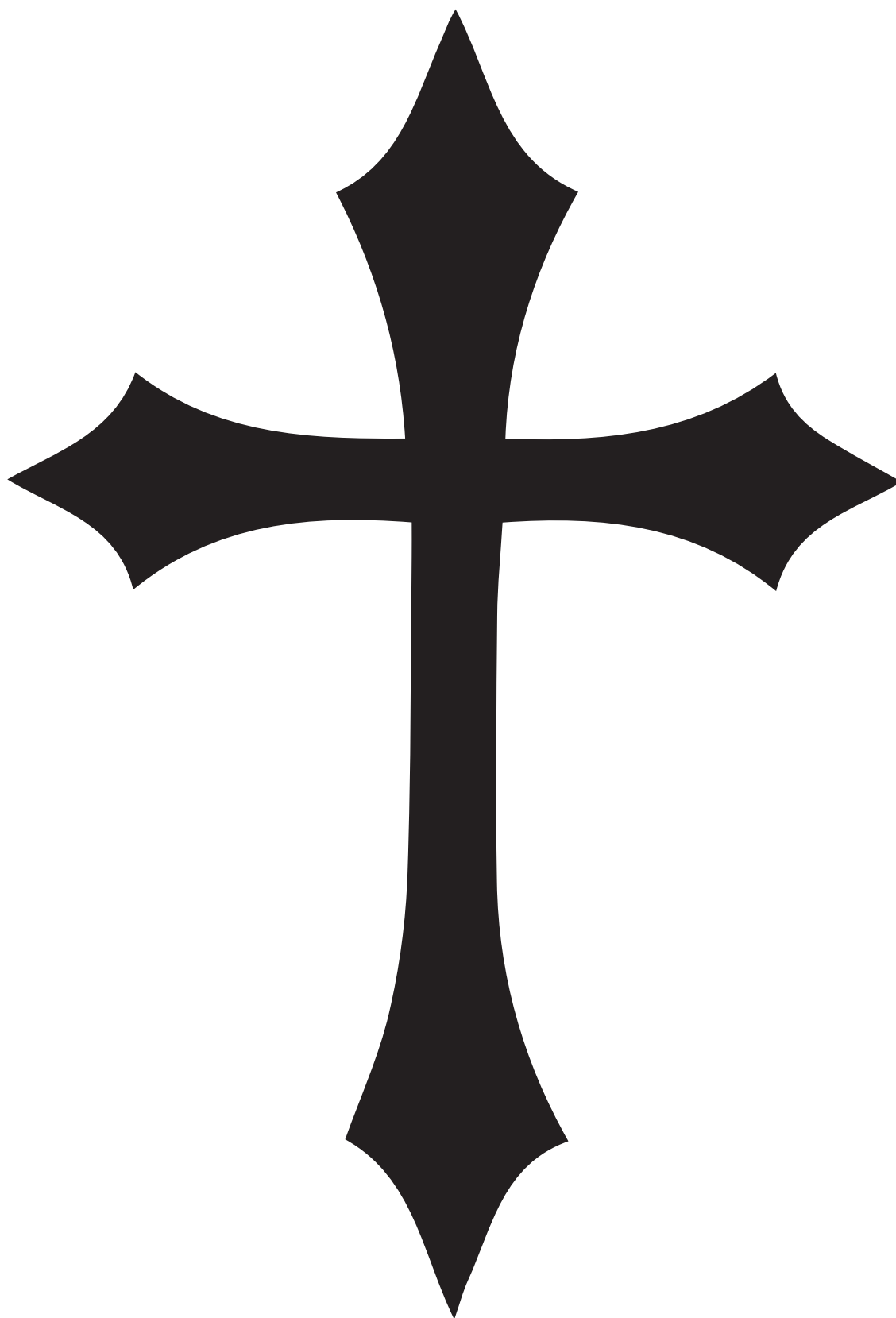
But at the same time you remember the kind people, the clean streets, the warm welcome when you arrived. The cute streets, the crazy variety of cultures that mixed so organically that you can't tell whose is whose anymore. You realize that Groningen has already become more native to you, with your favorite places, you've already figured out where to get products from your country. And you just don't have a choice. You're already a stranger in your own country. And there's no going back.

And so you go from your hometown to a place that feels like home, again a 40 hour journey in a stuffy bus. And then you get off at the train station and realize that you are home after all. Yes, the way will be thorny, there is still no certainty of what will be even in a year. But you already understand them better than your own.

You go to Baijum, and you are greeted by your friends. You are insanely tired, but happy. Inhale, exhale, and there you are...

you're home

You finally realize it!



VALERIIA LYKHOLIT