

The tattoo is  
what sticks out  
in my memory

And her, smoking  
my cigarette

It comes in handy,  
she had said

(I got the joke days later)

I was working the front desk of a  
Colorado ski resort that summer  
It consisted mostly of standing  
around looking helpful, and hoping  
nothing would happen



While wishing I  
weren't so bored



After my shift, I would take the  
night shuttle down the mountain

To the employee housing complex

Where I shared an apartment  
with three guys from Arkansas

Who loved 'bro-country'

And benzos

BELL RIVER APARTMENTS

I spent most of my time in my room

most...

This was when I used to smoke\*

\*two quits in

The smoking area was essentially a  
square of concrete behind the complex,  
covered by a wooden overhang

There was only one seat,  
so if someone else was out  
there, you'd have to stand

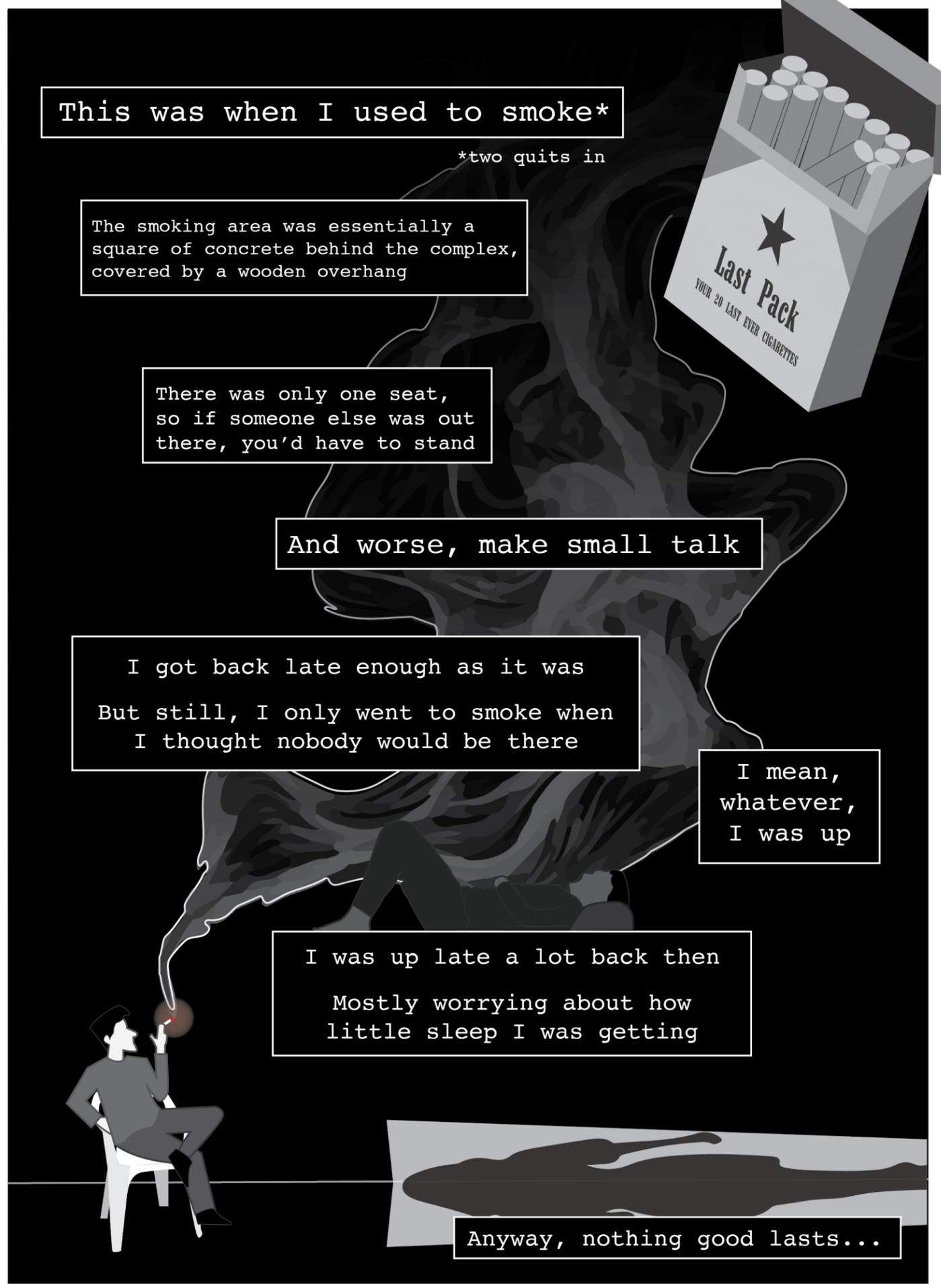
And worse, make small talk

I got back late enough as it was  
But still, I only went to smoke when  
I thought nobody would be there

I mean,  
whatever,  
I was up

I was up late a lot back then  
Mostly worrying about how  
little sleep I was getting

Anyway, nothing good lasts...



Of course, it occurs to me now:



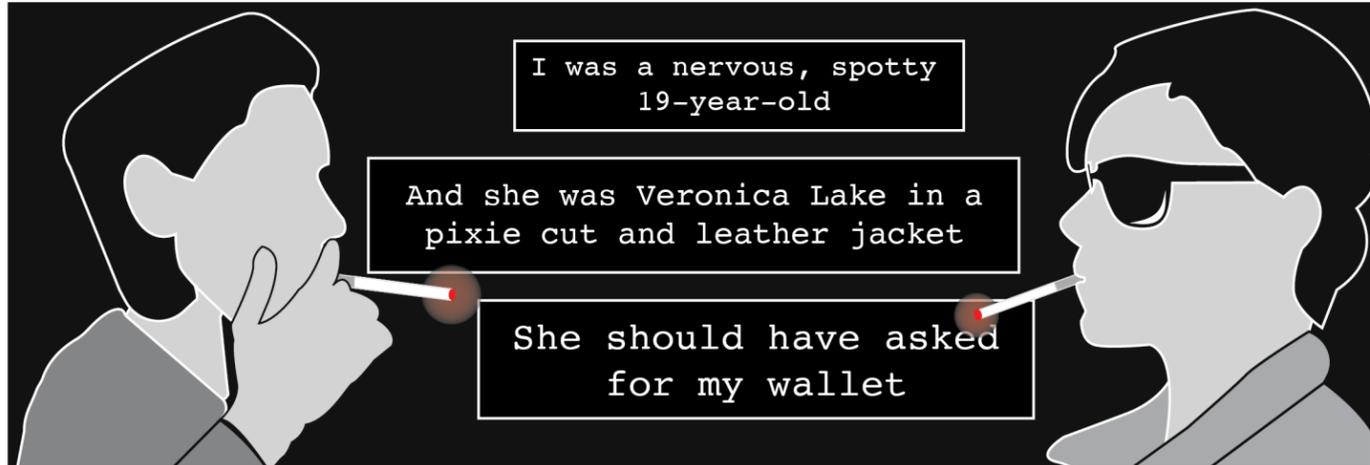
Who goes for a smoke without a cigarette?

But back then I was an easy mark...

I was a nervous, spotty 19-year-old

And she was Veronica Lake in a pixie cut and leather jacket

She should have asked for my wallet

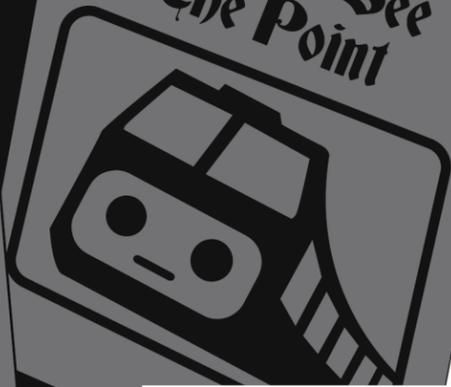


Those days, I spent a lot of time wondering if maybe I was in the wrong story

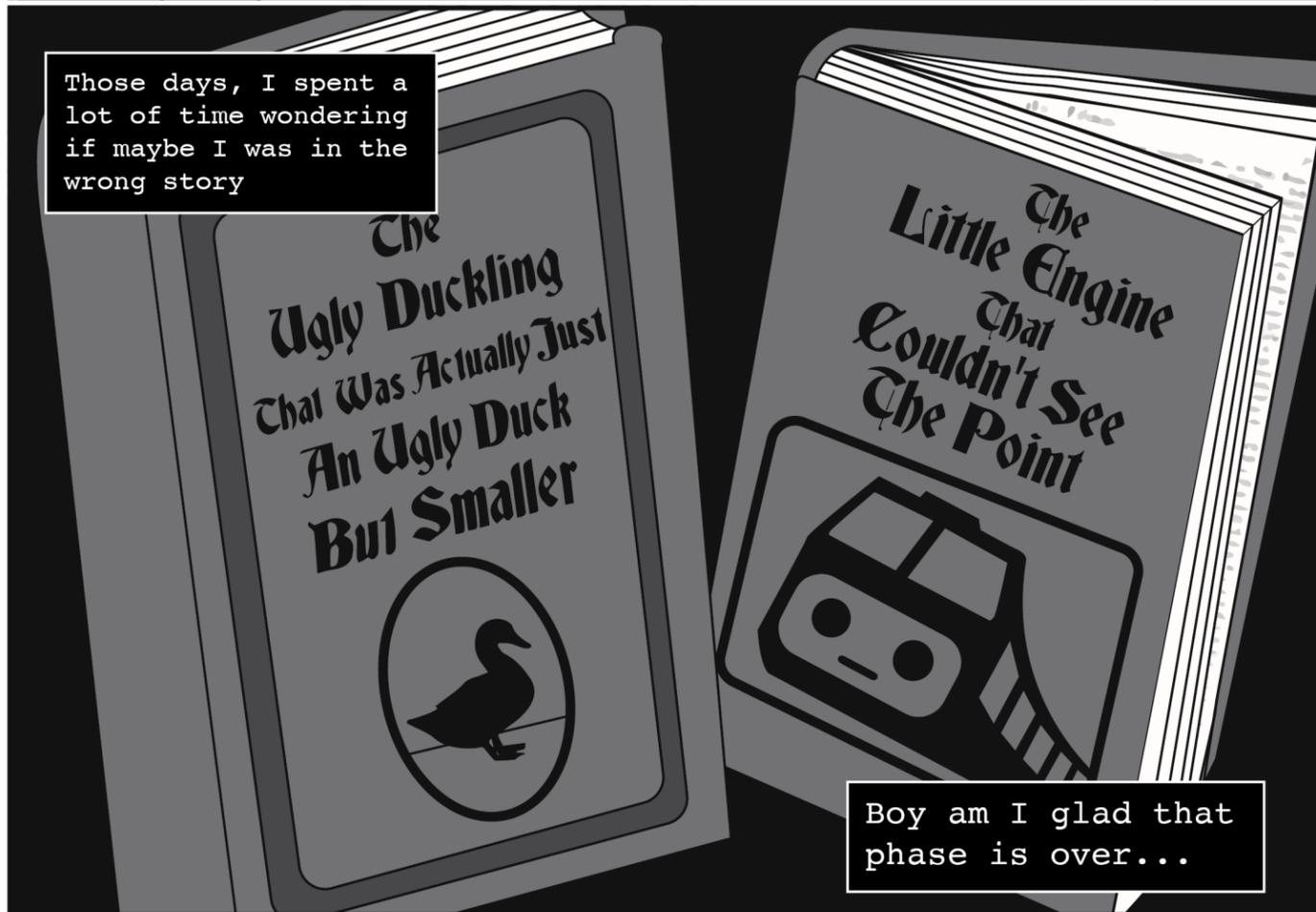
The Ugly Duckling That Was Actually Just An Ugly Duck But Smaller



The Little Engine That Couldn't See The Point



Boy am I glad that phase is over...



I don't know how it happened

Other than that I was not consulted

But suddenly this was our routine

I would get back from work around 11.15...



Change out of my uniform...



Go downstairs to smoke...



And there she'd be

Sometimes smoking,

Other times staring out at the sky

Usually both

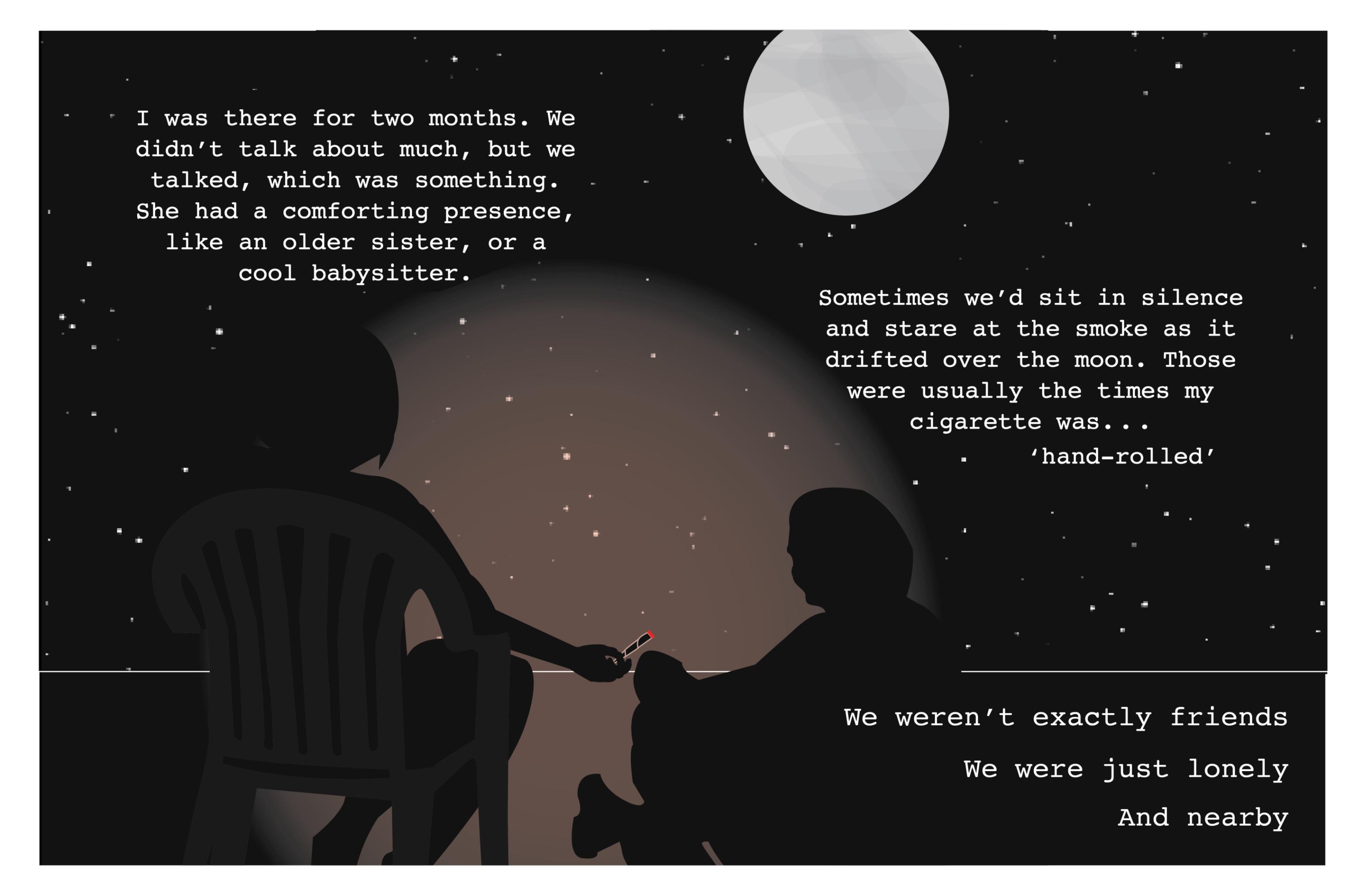


She always wore sunglasses, no matter the weather, or the time

Like she knew if she looked right at life

She'd go blind





I was there for two months. We  
didn't talk about much, but we  
talked, which was something.  
She had a comforting presence,  
like an older sister, or a  
cool babysitter.

Sometimes we'd sit in silence  
and stare at the smoke as it  
drifted over the moon. Those  
were usually the times my  
cigarette was...

'hand-rolled'

We weren't exactly friends  
We were just lonely  
And nearby

I don't know why I didn't tell her I was leaving

Well, I kind of know why

I think it was just that I didn't want her to think that I thought that my leaving would matter to her

Does that make sense?

04

003

002

001



It's just... How do you tell someone with whom you've shared two months of late-night smoke breaks that they've been your rock, your best friend in the whole world, that without them you don't know where you'd be or what you would've done?

How do you thank someone for something so immense

When you never even asked her name?

