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Vladimir Nabokov

The Original of Laura

A novel in fragments

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When Vladimir Nabokov died in 1977, he left instructions for his heirs to burn the 138 handwritten index cards that made up the rough draft of his final and unfinished novel, *The Original of Laura*. But Nabokov's wife, Vera, could not bear to destroy her husband's last work, and when she died, the fate of the manuscript fell to her son. Dmitri Nabokov, now seventy-five—the Russian novelist's only surviving heir, and translator of many of his books—has wrestled for three decades with the decision of whether to honor his father's wish or preserve for posterity the last piece of writing of one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. His decision finally to allow publication of the fragmented narrative—dark yet playful, preoccupied with mortality—affords us one last experience of Nabokov's magnificent creativity, the quintessence of his unparalleled body of work.

INTRODUCTION BY DMITRI NABOKOV

(DYING IS FUN



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VLADIMIR NABOKOV

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Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya:

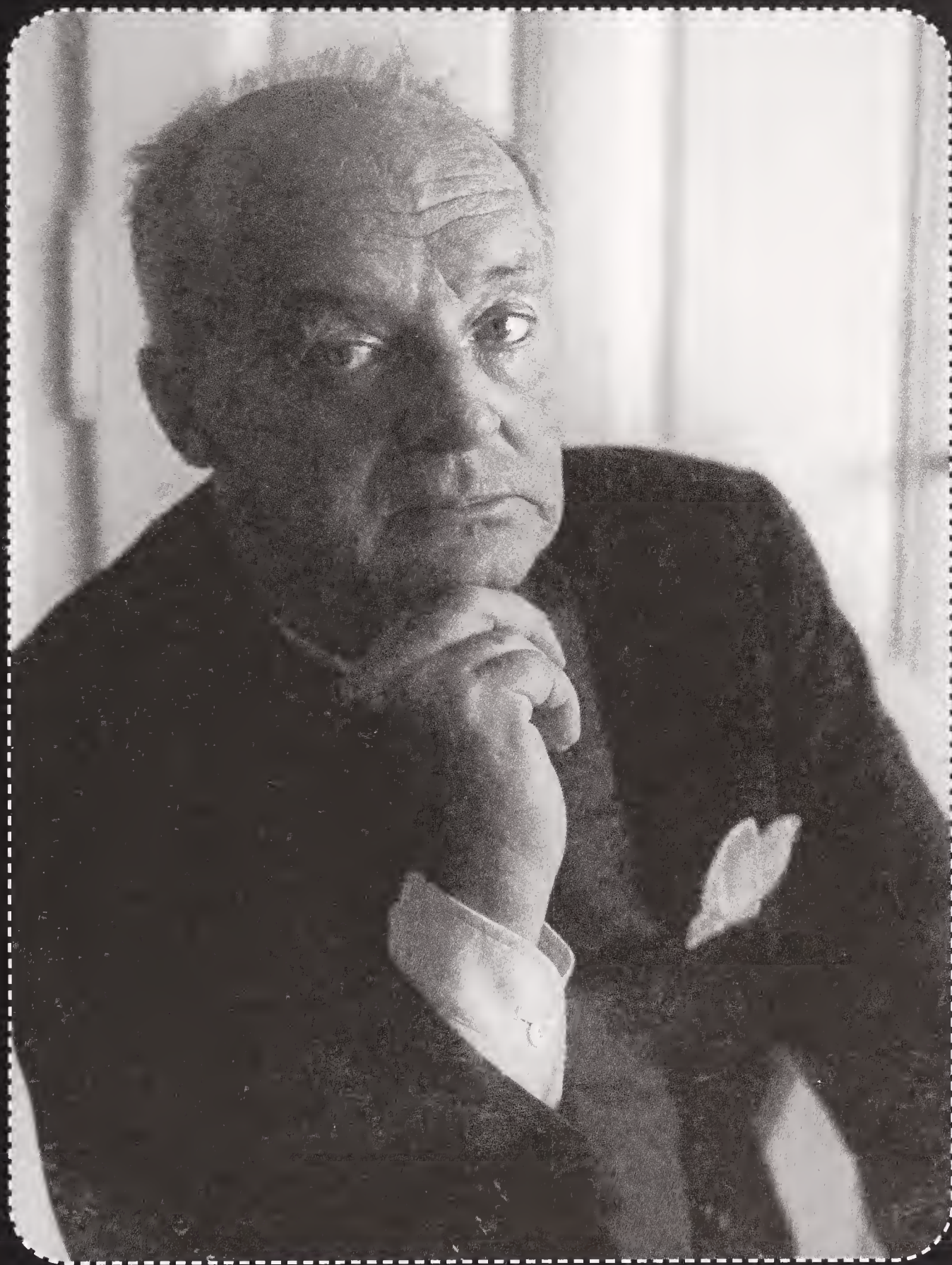
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MISCELLANEOUS

Poems and Problems

The Annotated Lolita



The Origin

(Dying

Vladimir

Edited by



Alfred A. Knopf

al of Law

s Fun)

Nabokov

mitri Nabokov

New York 1924

This Is a Borzoi Book

Published by Alfred A. Knopf

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Manufactured in China

First Edition

efface

expunge

erase

delete

rub out

~~scribble~~

wipe out

obliterate

THE ORIGINAL OF LAURA

(*Dying Is Fun*)

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

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Vladimir
Nabokov

The Origin
of Laura

Introduction

BY DMITRI NABOKOV

As a tepid spring settled on lakeside Switzerland in 1977, I was called from abroad to my father's bedside in a Lausanne clinic. During recovery from what is considered a banal operation, he had apparently been infected with a hospital bacillus that severely lessened his resistance. Such obvious signals of deterioration as dramatically reduced sodium and potassium levels had been totally ignored. It was high time to intervene if he was to be kept alive.

Transfer to the Vaud Cantonal University Hospital was immediately arranged, and a long and harrowing search for the noisome germ began.

My father had fallen on a hillside in Davos while pursuing his beloved pastime of entomology, and had gotten stuck in an awkward position on the steep slope as cabin-carloads of tourists responded with guffaws, misinterpreting as a holiday prank the cries for help and waves of a butterfly net. Officialdom can be ruthless; he was subsequently reprimanded by the hotel staff for stumbling back into the lobby, supported by two bellhops, with his shorts in disarray.

There may have been no connection, but this incident in 1975 seemed to set off a period of illness, which never quite receded until those dreadful days in Lausanne. There were several tentative forays to his former life at the *hôtel* Palace in Montreux, the majestic recol-

lection of which floats forth as I read, in some asinine electronic biography, that the success of *Lolita* “did not go to Nabokov’s head, and he continued to live in a *shabby Swiss hotel*.” (Italics mine.)

Nabokov did begin to lose his own physical majesty. His six-foot frame seemed to stoop a little, his steps on our lakeside promenades became short and insecure.

But he did not cease to write. He was working on a novel that he had begun in 1975—that same crucial year: an embryonic masterpiece whose pockets of genius were beginning to pupate here and there on his ever-present index cards. He very seldom spoke about the details of what he was writing, but, perhaps because he felt that the opportunities of revealing them were numbered, he began to recount certain details to my mother and to me. Our after-dinner chats grew shorter and more fitful, and he would withdraw into his room as if in a hurry to complete his work.

Soon came the final ride to the Hôpital Nestlé. Father felt worse. The tests continued; a succession of doctors rubbed their chins as their bedside manner edged toward the graveside. Finally the draft from a window left open by a sneezing young nurse contributed to a terminal cold. My mother and I sat near him as, choking on the food I was urging him to consume, he succumbed, in three convulsive gasps, to congestive bronchitis.

Little was said about the exact causes of his malady. The death of the great man seemed to be veiled in embarrassed silence. Some years later, when, for biographical purposes, I wanted to pin things down, all access to the details of his death would remain obscure.

Only during the final stages of his life did I learn about certain confidential family matters. Among them were his express instructions that the manuscript of *The Original of Laura* be destroyed if he were to die without completing it. Individuals of limited imagination, intent on adding their suppositions to the maelstrom of hypotheses that has engulfed the unfinished work, have ridiculed the notion that a doomed artist might decide to destroy a work of his, whatever the reason, rather than allow it to outlive him.

An author may be seriously, even terminally ill and yet continue

his desperate sprint against Fate to the last finish line, losing despite his intent to win. He may be thwarted by a chance occurrence or by the intervention of others, as was Nabokov many years earlier, on the way to the incinerator, when his wife snatched a draft of *Lolita* from his grasp.

My father's recollection and mine differed regarding the color of the impressive object that I, a child of almost six, distinguished with disbelief amid the puzzle-like jumble of buildings in the seaside town of Saint-Nazaire. It was the immense funnel of the *Champlain*, which was waiting to transport us to New York. I recall its being light yellow, while Father, in the concluding lines of *Speak, Memory*, says that it was white.

I shall stick to my image, no matter what researchers ferret from historical records of the French Line's liveries of the period. I am equally sure of the colors I saw in my final onboard dream as we approached America: the varying shades of depressing gray that colored my dream vision of a shabby, low-lying New York, instead of the exciting skyscrapers that my parents had been promising. Upon disembarking, we also saw two differing visions of America: a small flask of Cognac vanished from our baggage during the customs inspection; on the other hand, when my father (or was it my mother? memory sometimes conflates the two) attempted to pay the cabbie who took us to our destination with the entire contents of his wallet—a hundred-dollar bill of a currency that was new to us—the honest driver immediately refused the bill with a comprehending smile.

In the years that had preceded our departure from Europe, I had learned little, in a specific sense, of what my father “did.” Even the term “writer” meant little to me. Only in the chance vignette that he might recount as a bedtime story might I retrospectively recognize the foretaste of a work that was in progress. The idea of a “book” was embodied by the many tomes bound in red leather that I would

admire on the top shelves of the studies of my parents' friends. To me, they were "appetizing," as we would say in Russian. But my first "reading" was listening to my mother recite Father's Russian translation of *Alice in Wonderland*.

We traveled to the sunny beaches of the Riviera, and thus finally embarked for New York. There, after my first day at the now-defunct Walt Whitman School, I announced to my mother that I had learned English. I really learned English much more gradually, and it became my favorite and most flexible means of expression. I shall, however, always take pride in having been the only child in the world to have studied elementary Russian, with textbooks and all, under Vladimir Nabokov.

My father was in the midst of a transition of his own. Having grown up as a "perfectly normal trilingual child," he nonetheless found it profoundly challenging to abandon his "rich, untrammelled Russian" for a new language, not the domestic English he had shared with his Anglophone father, but an instrument as expressive, docile, and poetic as the mother tongue he had so thoroughly mastered. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, his first English-language novel, cost him infinite doubt and suffering as he relinquished his beloved Russian—the "Softest of Tongues," as he entitled an English poem that appeared later (in 1947) in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Meanwhile, during the transition to a new tongue and on the verge of our move to America, he had written his last significant freestanding prose work in Russian (in other words, neither a portion of a work in progress nor a Russian version of an existing one). This was *Volshebnik (The Enchanter)*, in a sense a precursor of *Lolita*. He thought he had destroyed or lost this small manuscript and that its creative essence had been consumed by *Lolita*. He recalled having read it to group of friends one Paris night, blue-papered against the threat of Nazi bombs. When, eventually, it did turn up again, he examined it with his wife, and they decided, in 1959, that it would make artistic sense if it were "done into English by the Nabokovs" and published.

That was not accomplished until a decade after his death, and the

publication of *Lolita* itself preceded that of its forebear. Several American publishers, fearing the repercussions of the delicate subject matter of *Lolita*, had abstained. Convinced that it would remain forever a victim of incomprehension, Nabokov had resolved to destroy the draft, and it was only the intervention of Véra Nabokov that, on two occasions, kept it from going up in smoke in our Ithaca incinerator.

Eventually, unaware of the publisher's dubious reputation, Nabokov consented to have an agent place it with Girodias's Olympia Press. And it was the eulogy of Graham Greene that propelled *Lolita* far beyond the trashy tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, inherited by Girodias from his father at Obelisk, and along with pornier Olympia stablemates, on its way to becoming what some have acclaimed as one of the best books ever written.

The highways and motels of 1940s America are immortalized in this proto-road novel, and countless names and places live on in Nabokov's puns and anagrams. In 1961 the Nabokovs would take up residence at the Montreux Palace and there, on one of their first evenings, a well-meaning maid would empty forever a butterfly-adorned gift wastebasket of its contents: a thick batch of U.S. road maps on which my father had meticulously marked the roads and towns that he and my mother had traversed. Chance comments of his were recorded there, as well as names of butterflies and their habitats. How sad, especially now when every such detail is being researched by scholars on several continents. How sad, too, that a first edition of *Lolita*, lovingly inscribed to me, was purloined from a New York cellar and, on its way to the digs of a Cornell graduate student, sold for two dollars.

The theme of book burning would pursue us. Invited to lecture at Harvard on *Don Quixote*, Nabokov, while recognizing certain merits of Cervantes, criticized the book as "crude" and "cruel." The expression "torn apart," applied years later to Nabokov's evaluation, was further garbled by half-literate journalists until one perceived the image of a caricature Nabokov holding up a blazing volume before his class, accompanied by all the appropriate de rigueur moralizing.

And so, at last, we come to *Laura*, and again to thoughts of fire. During the last months of his life in the Lausanne hospital, Nabokov was working feverishly on the book, impervious to hoaxes from the insensitive, quizzes from the well-meaning, conjectures from the curious in the outside world, and to his own suffering. Among those were incessant inflammations under and around his toenails. At times, he felt almost as if he would rather be rid of them altogether than undergo tentative pedicures from the nurses, and the compulsion to correct them and seek relief by painfully digging at the digits himself. We shall recognize, in *Laura*, some echoes of these torments.

He looked at the sunny outdoors and softly exclaimed that a certain butterfly was already on the wing. But there were to be no more rambles on the hillside meadows, net in hand, book working in his mind. The book worked on, but in the claustrophobic microcosm of a hospital room, and Nabokov began to fear that his inspiration and his concentration would not win the race against his failing health. He then had a very serious conversation with his wife, in which he impressed upon her that if *Laura* remained unfinished at his death, it was to be burned.

The lesser minds among the hordes of letter writers that were to descend upon me would affirm that if an artist wishes to destroy a work of his that he has deemed imperfect or incomplete, he should logically proceed to do so neatly and providently ahead of time. These sages forget, though, that Nabokov did *not* desire to burn *The Original of Laura* willy-nilly, but to live on for the last few card lengths needed to finish at least a complete draft. It was also theorized that Franz Kafka had deliberately charged Max Brod with the destruction of the reprinted *Metamorphosis* and other masterpieces published and unpublished, including *The Castle* and *The Trial*, knowing full well that Brod could never bring himself to carry out the task (a rather naive stratagem for a brave and lucid mind like Kafka's), and that Nabokov had exercised similar reasoning when he assigned *Laura's* annihilation to my mother, who was an impeccably courageous and trustworthy emissary. Her failure to perform was

rooted in procrastination—procrastination due to age, weakness, and immeasurable love.

For my part, when the task passed to me, I did a great deal of thinking. I have said and written more than once that, to me, my parents, in a sense, had never died but lived on, looking over my shoulder in a kind of virtual limbo, available to offer a thought or counsel to assist me with a vital decision, whether a crucial *mot juste* or a more mundane concern. I did not need to borrow my “*ton bon*” (thus deliberately garbled) from the titles of fashionable morons but had it from the source. If it pleases an adventurous commentator to liken the case to mystical phenomena, so be it. I decided at this juncture that, in putative retrospect, Nabokov would not have wanted me to become his Person from Porlock or allow little Juanita Dark—for that was the name of an early Lolita, destined for cremation—to burn like a latter-day Jeanne d’Arc.

On Father’s ever shorter and less frequent visits home we tried bravely to keep up our chatty dinnertime conversation, but the otherworldly world of *Laura* would not be mentioned. By that time I and, I think, my mother knew, in every sense, how things would go.

Some time passed before I could bring myself to open Father’s index-card box. I needed to traverse a stifling barrier of pain before touching the cards he had lovingly arranged and shuffled. After several tries, during a hospital stay of my own, I first read what, despite its incompleteness, was unprecedented in structure and style, written in a new “softest of tongues” that English had become for Nabokov. I attacked the task of ordering and preparing, and then dictating, a preliminary transcript to my faithful secretary Cristiane Galliker. *Laura* lived on in a penumbra, emerging only occasionally for my perusal and the bits of editing I dared perform. Very gradually I became accustomed to this disturbing specter that seemed to be living a simultaneous twin life of its own in the stillness of a strong-box and the meanders of my mind. I could no longer even think of burning *Laura*, and my urge was to let it peek for an occasional instant from its gloom. Hence my minimal mentions of the work, which I sensed my father would not disapprove, and which, together

with a few approximate leaks and suppositions from others, led to the fragmentary notions of *Laura* now flaunted by a press ever eager for the tasty scoop. Nor, as I have said, do I think that my father or my father's shade would have opposed the release of *Laura* once *Laura* had survived the hum of time this long. A survival to which I may have contributed, motivated not by playfulness or calculation, but by an otherforce I could not resist. Should I be damned or thanked?

But why, Mr. Nabokov, why did you *really* decide to publish *Laura*?

Well, I am a nice guy, and, having noticed that people the world over find themselves on a first-name basis with me as they empathize with "Dmitri's dilemma," I felt it would be kind to alleviate their sufferings.

A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s

For their generous assistance and advice:

Professor Gennady Barabtarlo

Professor Brian Boyd

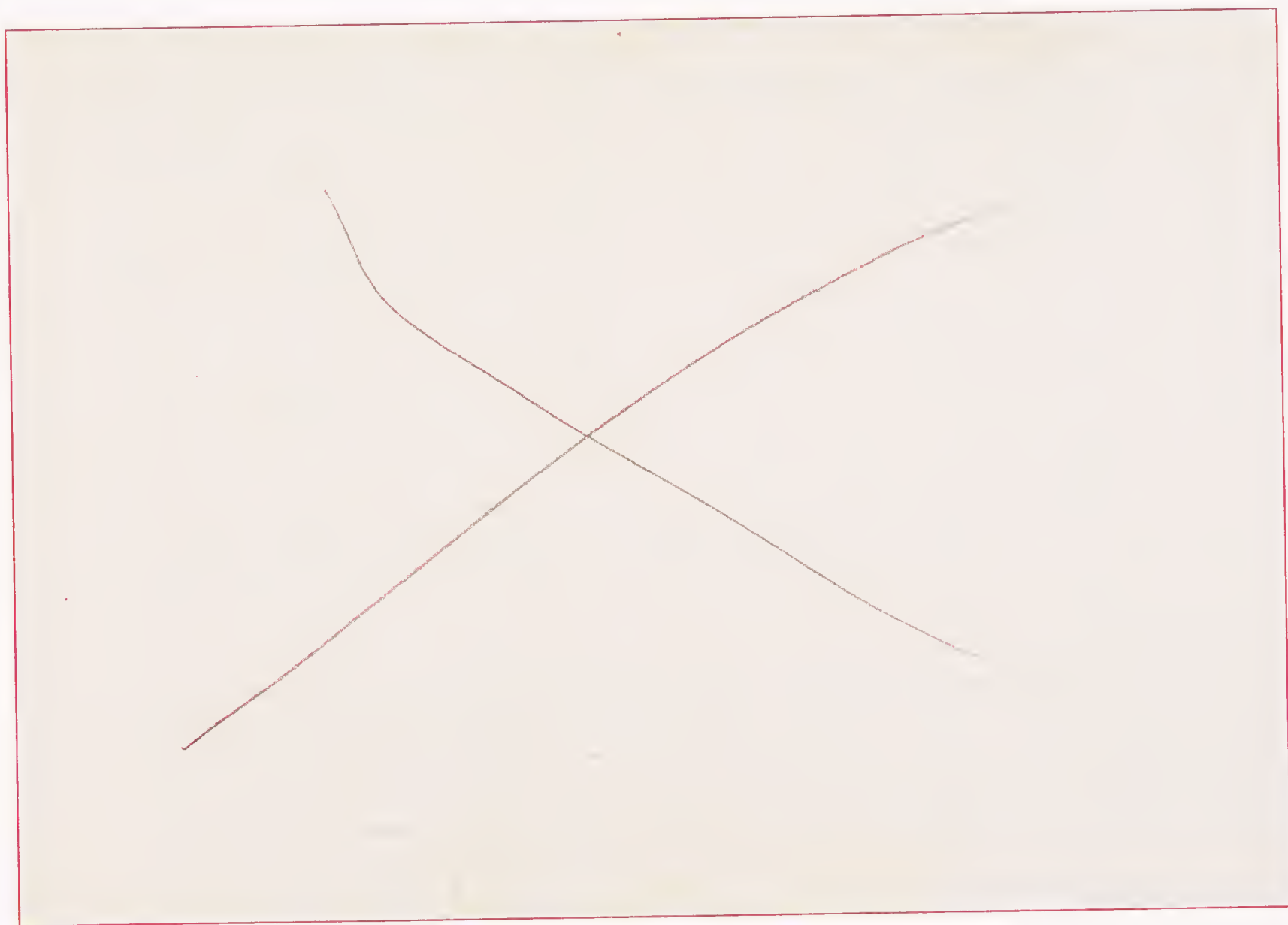
Ariane Csonka Comstock

Aleksei Konovalov

Professor Stanislav Shvabrin

Ron Rosenbaum, who could not have set off a better publicity campaign had it been planned (it was not).

To all the worldwide contributors of opinion, comment, and advice, of whatever its stripe, who imagined that their views, sometimes deftly expressed, might somehow change mine.



A N O T E O N T H E T E X T

The typeset text of *The Original of Laura* preserves Vladimir Nabokov's original markings from the handwritten cards. Nonstandard spellings (i.e., "bicycle") and punctuation have been retained, and accents have not been added to French words where they do not appear on the cards. Some additional material is included within brackets or as footnotes for clarity.

The photos of the cards that accompany the text are perforated and can be removed and rearranged, as the author likely did when he was writing the novel.

Vladim
Naboko

The Origin
of Laura

Vladimir
Nabokov

The Origin
of Laura

The Original of Laura

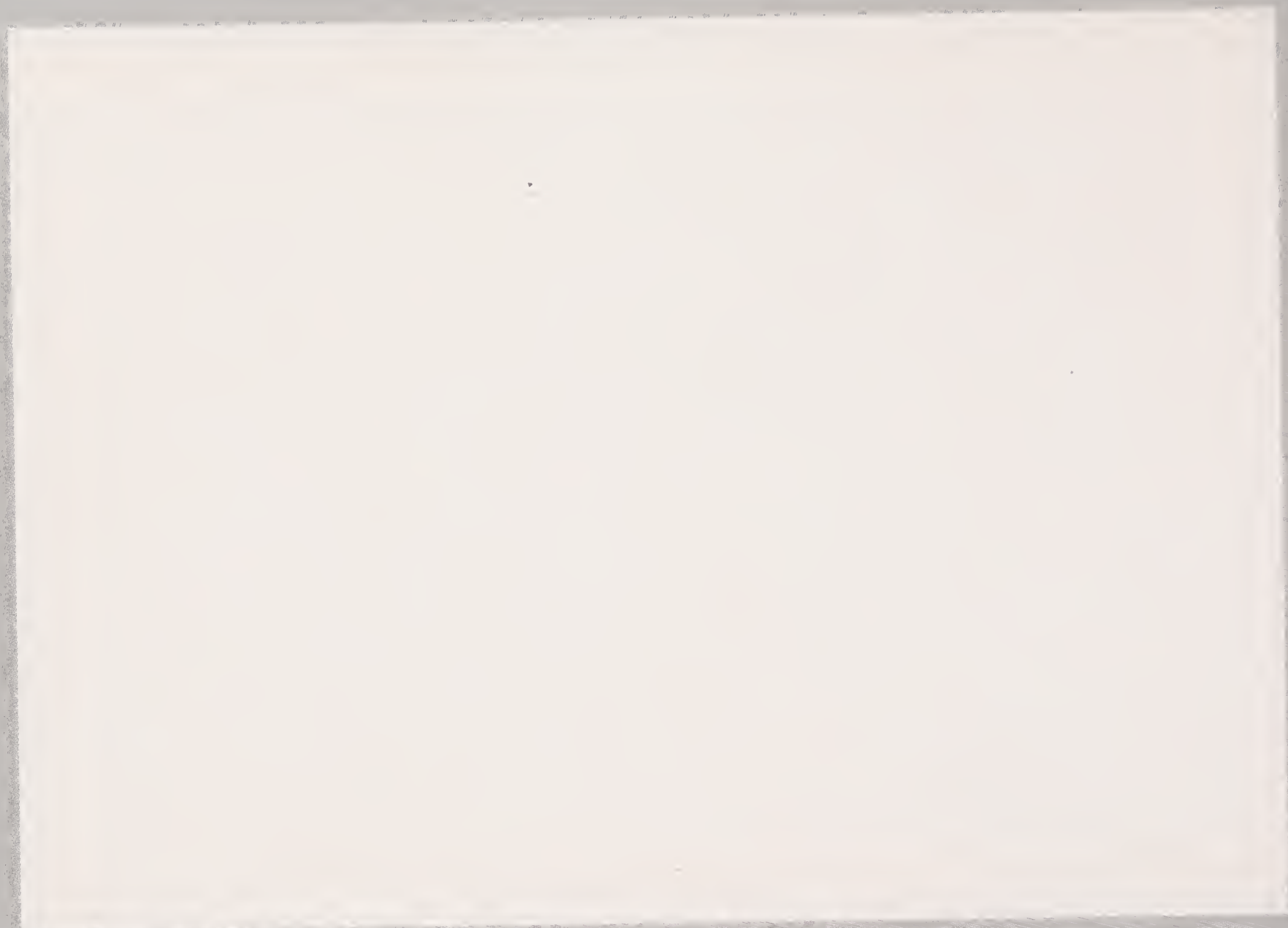
Ch. One

Her husband, she answered, was a writer, too — at least, after a fashion. Fat men beat their wives, it is said, and he certainly looked fierce, when he caught her riffling ~~through~~ through his papers. He pretended to slam down a marble paperweight and crush this weak little hand (displaying the little hand in febrile motion). Actually she was searching for ~~an~~ a silly business letter, — and not ^{in the least} trying to decipher his mysterious

THE ORIGINAL OF LAURA

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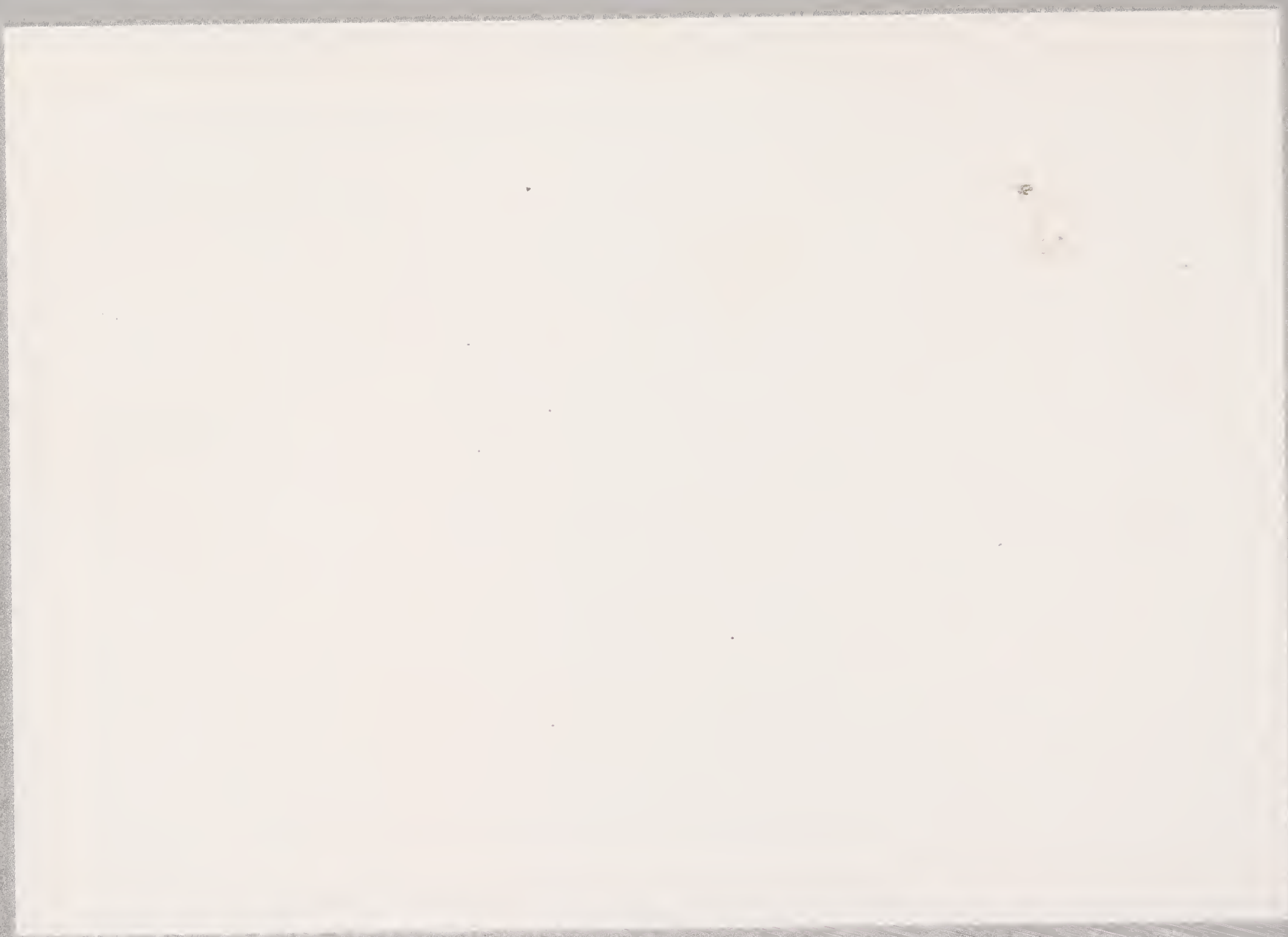
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manuscript. Oh no, it was not a ^{work of fiction} ~~work~~ (2)

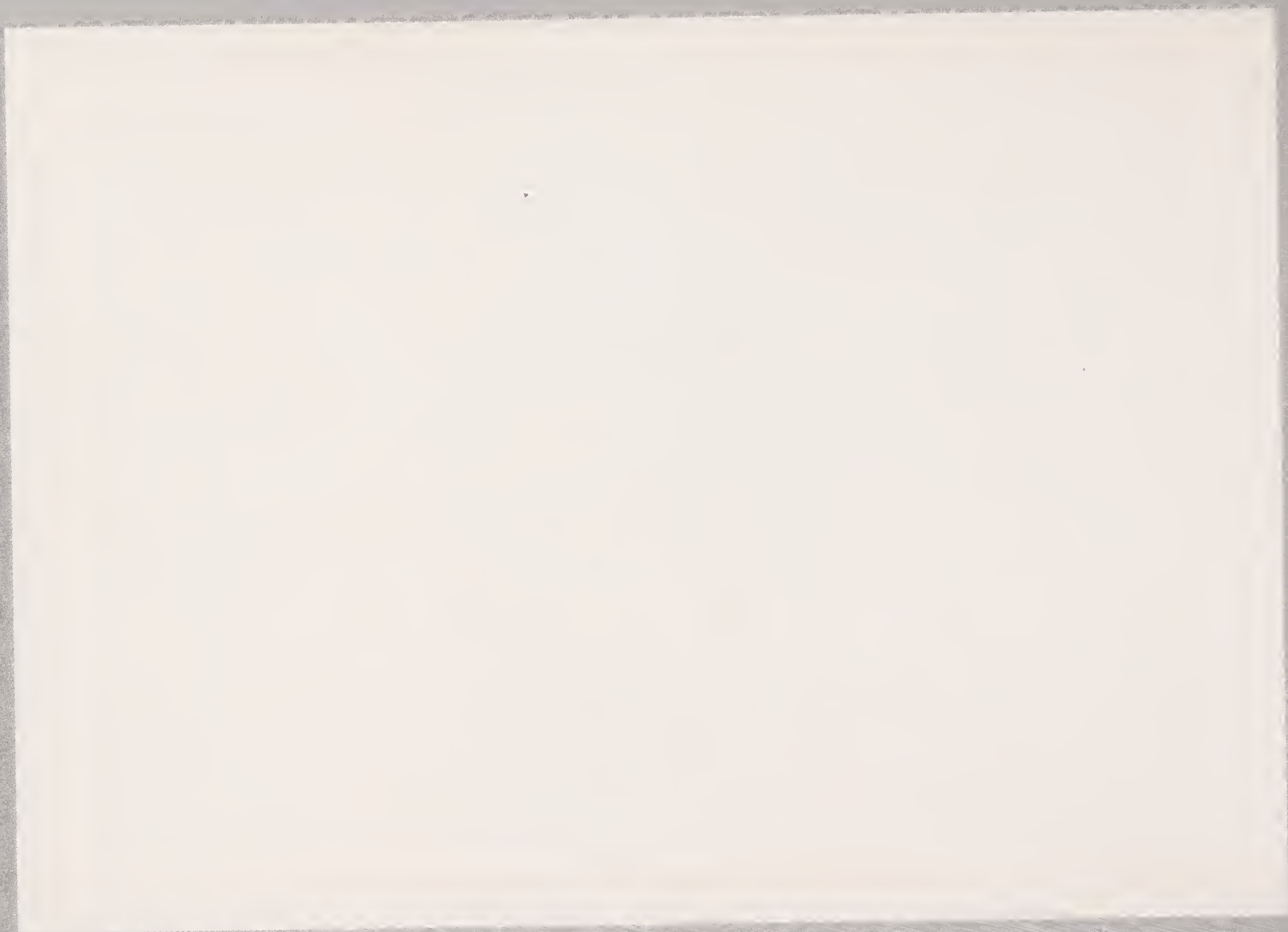
which ~~one~~ dashes off, you know, to make money; it was a mad neurologist's ~~reconstruction~~ testament, a kind of Poisonous Opus as in that film. It had cost him, ~~the~~ ~~years~~ and would still cost him, years of toil, but ~~the~~ ^{thing} was of course, an absolute secret. If she mentioned it at all, she added, it ~~was~~ ^{was} because she was drunk. She wished to be taken home or preferably to some cool quiet place with a clean bed and room service. She wore a strapless gown

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and slippers of black velvet. Her bare insteps were as white as her young shoulders. The party seemed to have degenerated into a lot of sober eyes staring at her with nasty compassion from every corner, every cushion and ashtray, and even from the hills of the ~~spring~~ ~~night~~ ~~framed~~ in the open french window. Mrs. Carr, her hostess, repeated what a pity it was that Philip could not come or rather that Flora could not have induced

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him to come! I'll drug him ~~and~~
~~and~~ next time said Flora,

(4)

~~in the room~~ rummaging all around
~~her seat~~ her seat for her small formless vanity
bag, a blind black puppy. Here it is,
cried an anonymous girl, squatting
quickly.

Mrs Carr's nephew, Anthony Carr
and his wife Winny, ^{one of those} ~~were~~ ~~easygoing~~
~~easygoing~~ easygoing, over-generous
couples that positively ~~crave~~ ^{any friend,} to
lend their flat to a friend, when
they and their ~~dog~~ do not happen

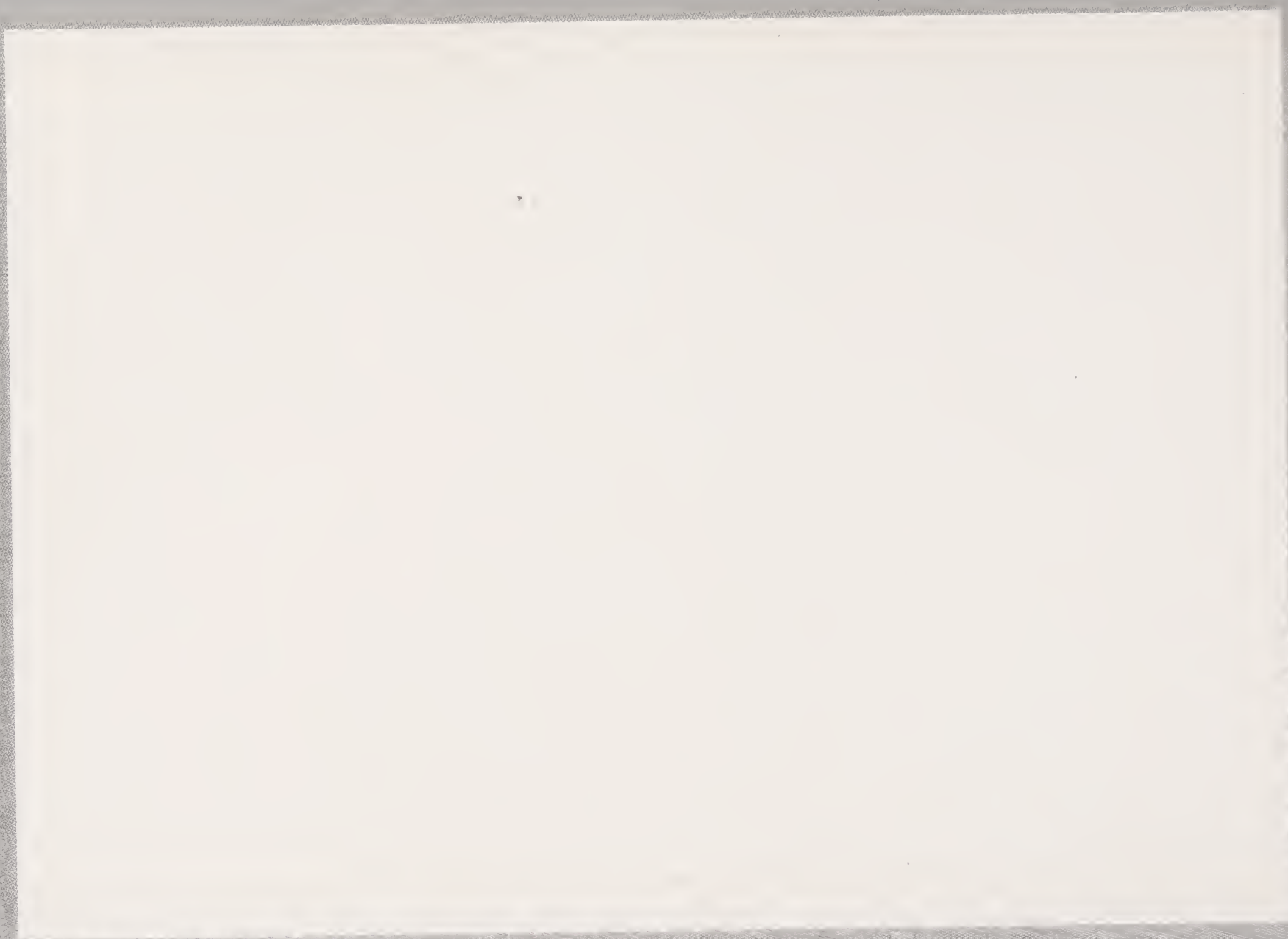
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Mrs Carr's nephew, Anthony Carr, and his wife Winny,
were one of those easygoing, over-generous couples that
positively crave to lend their flat to a friend, any friend,
when they and their dog do not happen



to need it. Flora spotted at once ~~the~~ the alien creams in the bathroom and the open can of Fido's Feast next to the naked cheese in the cluttered fridge. A brief set of instructions ~~(concerning)~~ (pertaining to the superintendent and the charwoman) ended on: "Ring up my aunt Emily Carr," which evidently had be already done to lamentation in Heaven and laughter in Hell. The double bed was made but was unfresh inside. With comic fastidiousness Flora spread

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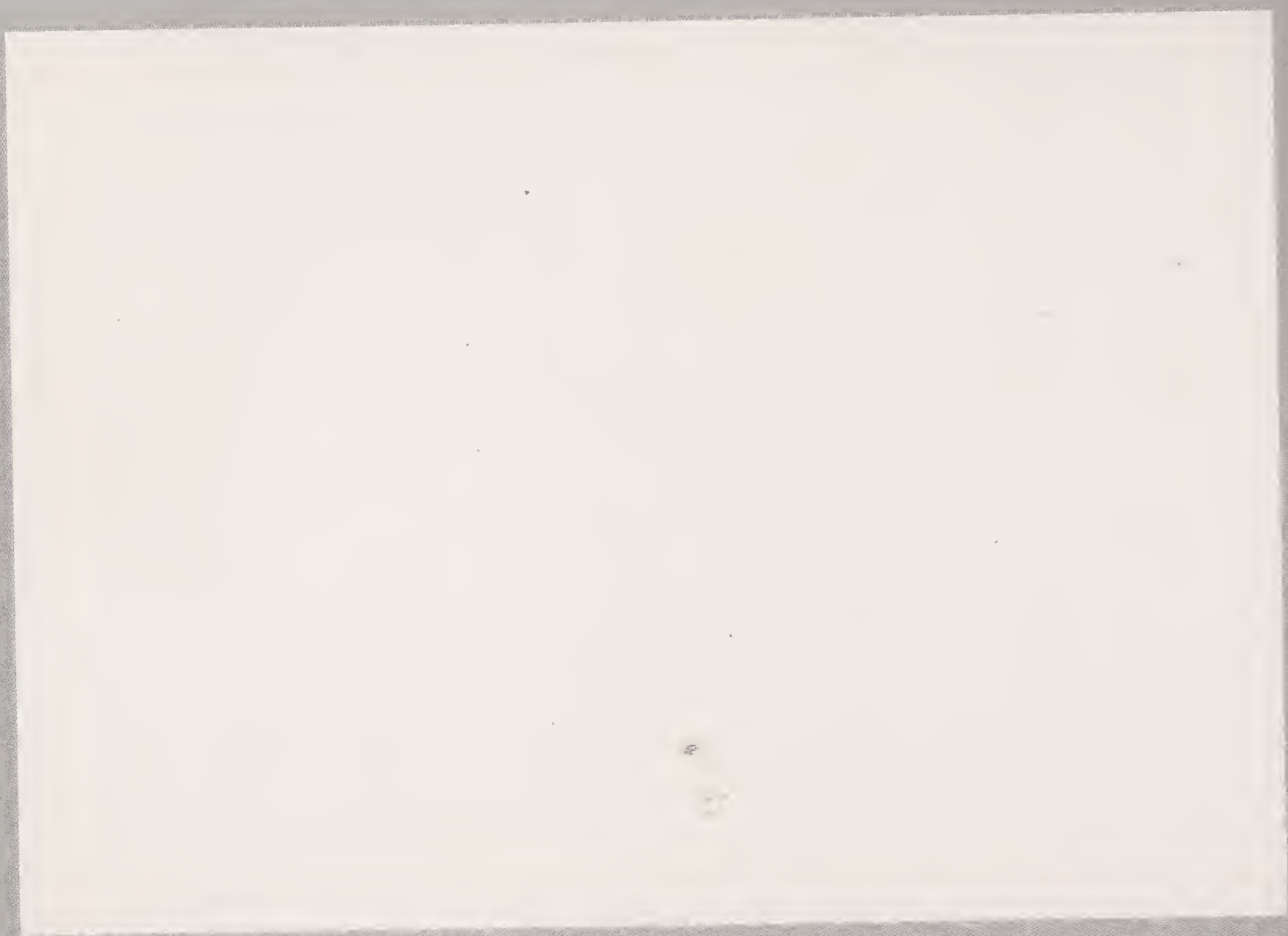
(6)

her furcoat over it ~~before undressing~~
before undressing and lying down.
Where was the damned valise
that ^{had been} brought up earlier? ~~Where was the damned valise~~
In the vestibule closet. Had everything
to be shaken out before the pair
of morocco slippers could be located
foetally folded in their zippered
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Let us choose the smallest. On the way ^{back} ~~out~~
 the distal edge of the right slipper lost
 its grip and had to be pried ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{the grateful heel}
 with a finger for shoeing-horn.

no quotes

no comma

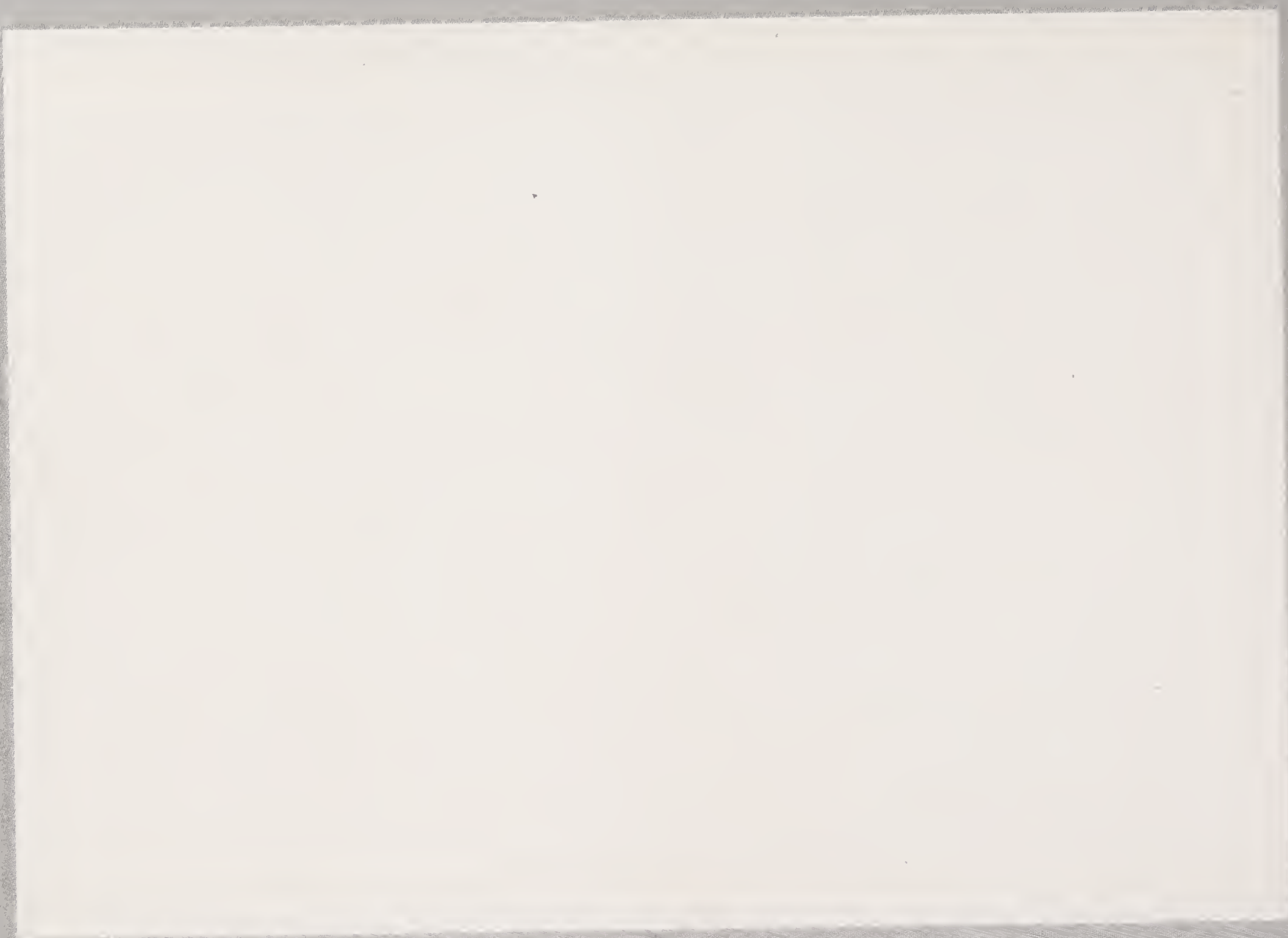
¶ Oh, hurry up, she said softly

¶ That first surrender of hers
 was a little sudden, if not downright
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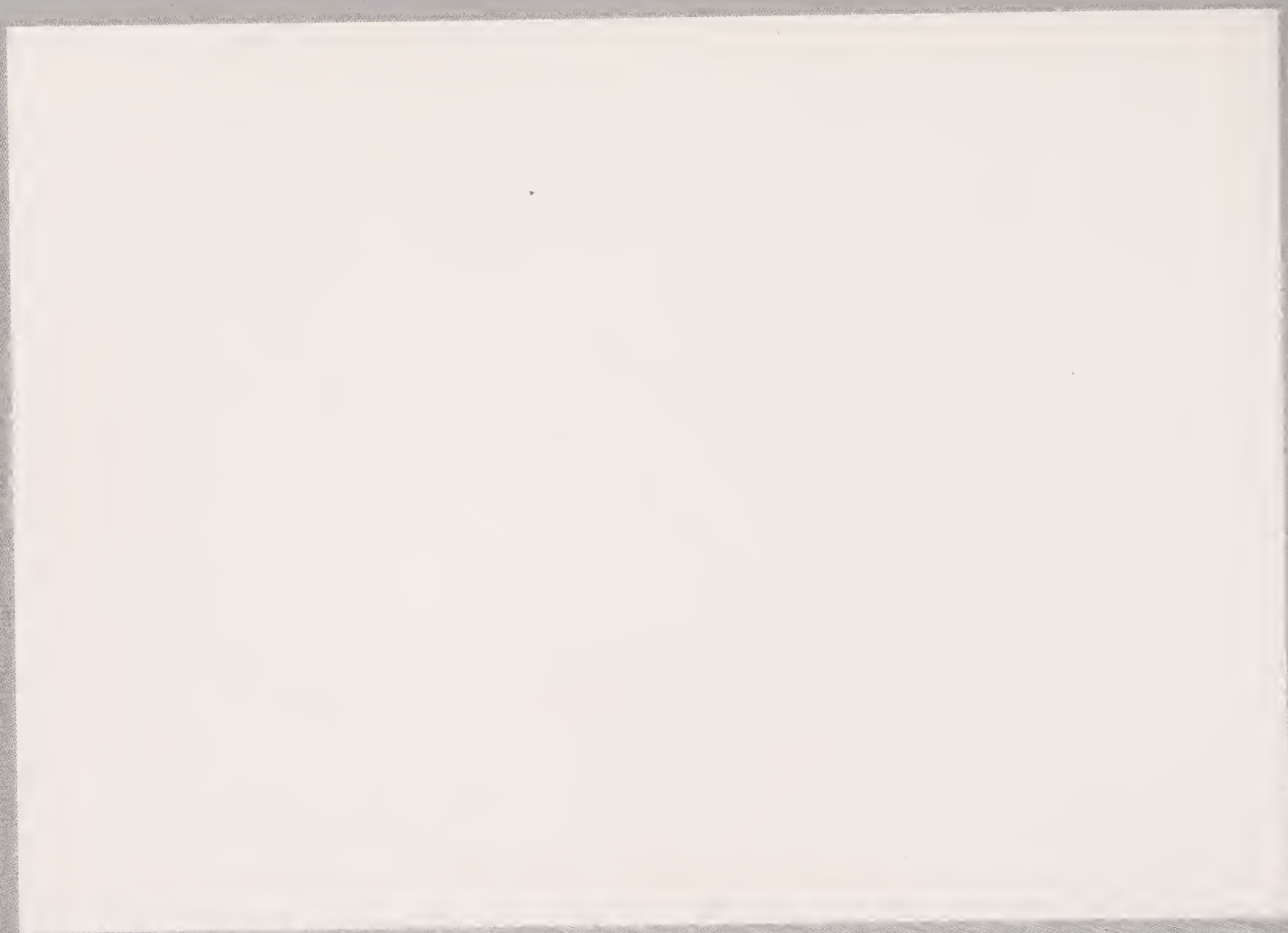
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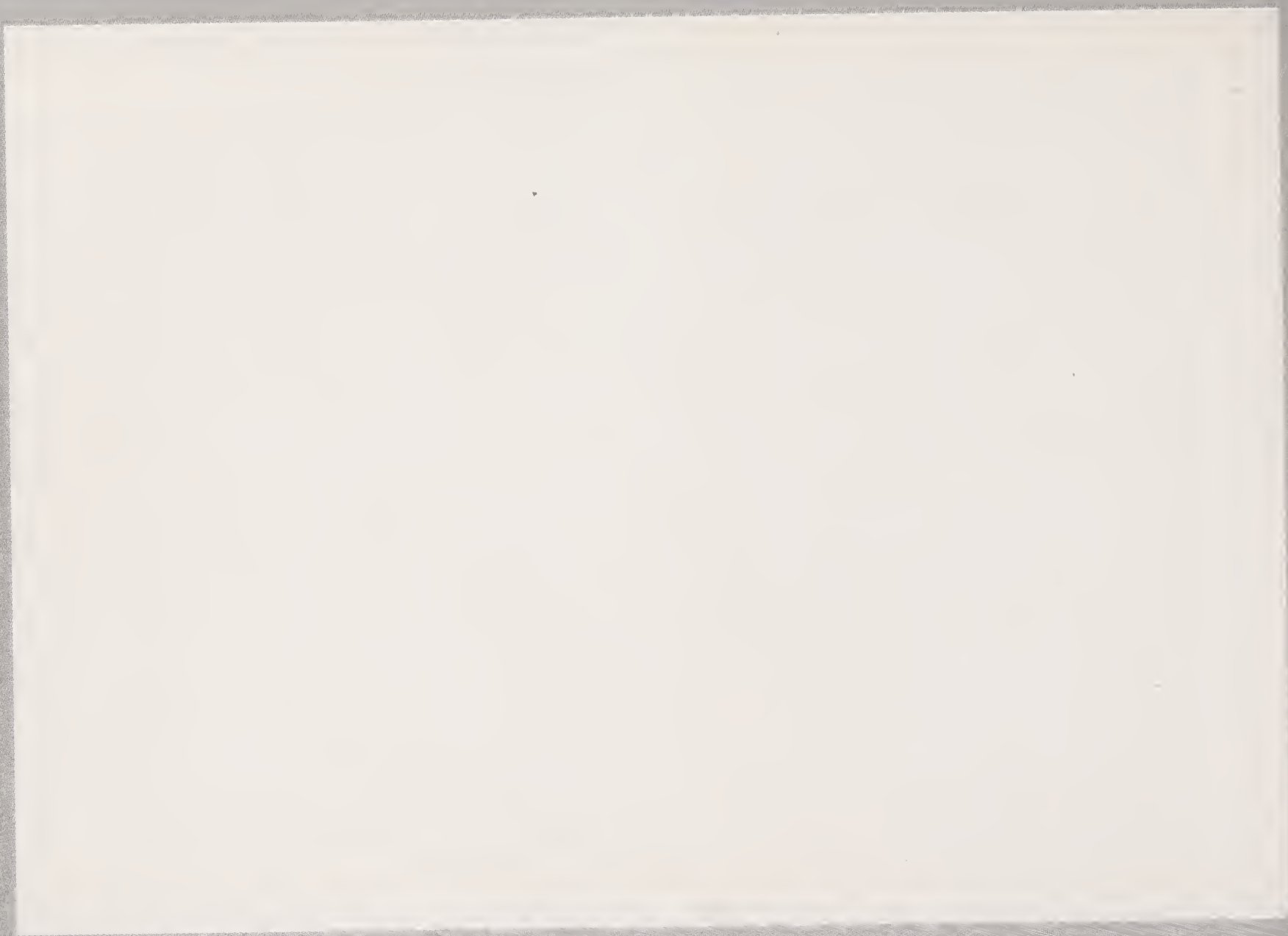
an extravagantly slender girl. Her ribs showed. The conspicuous knobs^{of} her hip bones framed a hollowed abdomen, so flat as to belie the notion of "belly". Her exquisite bone structure immediately slipped into a novel — became in fact the secret structure of that novel, besides supporting a number of poems. The cup-sized breasts of that twenty-four year old impatient beauty seemed a dozen years younger than she, with those pale squinty nipples and firm form.

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Her painted eyelids were closed. A tear of no particular meaning ~~gemmed~~ gemmed the hard top of her cheek. Nobody could tell what went on in that little head. Waves of desire rippled there, a recent lover fell back in a swoon, hygienic doubts were raised and dismissed, contempt for everyone but herself ~~adverted~~ advertised with a flush of warmth its constant presence, here it is, cried what's her name squatting quickly my darling, dushka moya (eyebrows ~~eyebrows~~)

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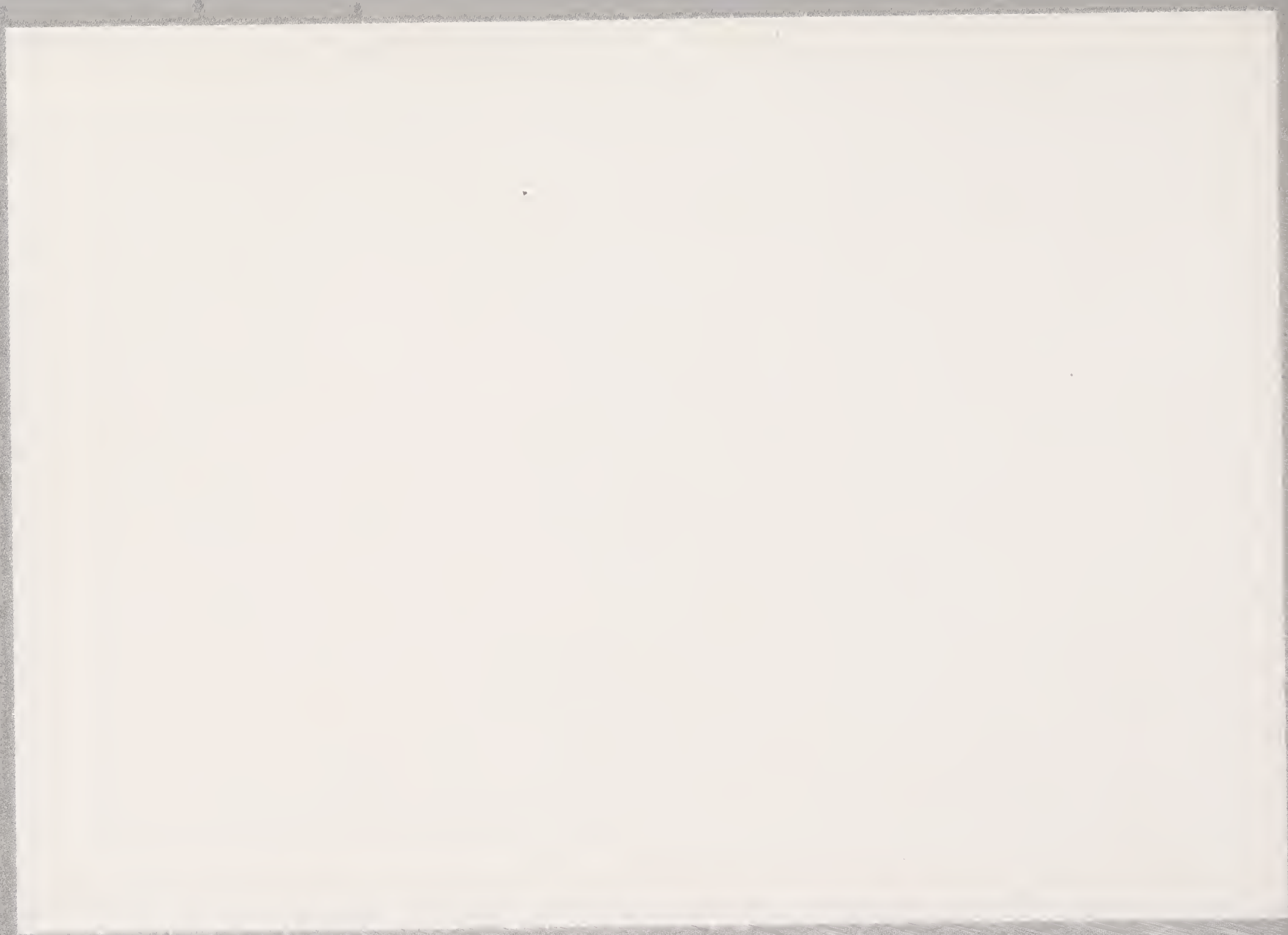
¶ Masking her face, coating her side, pinafores her stomach with kisses — all very acceptable while they remained dry.

¶ Her frail, docile frame when turned over by hand revealed new marvels — the mobile omoplates of a child being tubbed, the incurvation of a ballerina's spine, narrow nates

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Only by identifying her with
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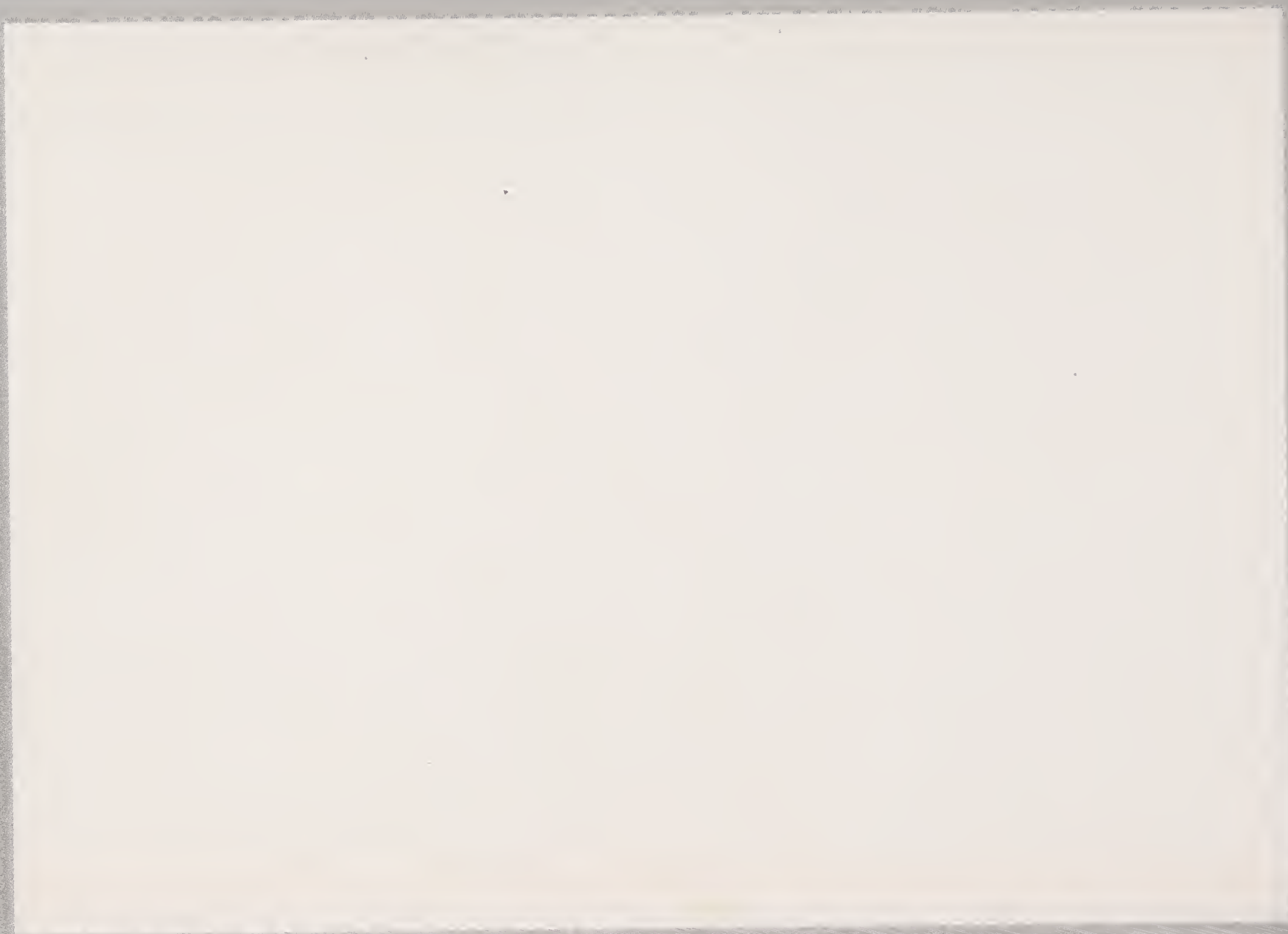
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already existing, as magic exists, and death, and as shall exist, from now on, the mouth she made automatically while using ~~that~~ that towel to wipe her thighs after the promised withdrawal.

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costly enough for its size to go right, she said (translating from Russian) and it ^{was} the first time ^{in her} stormy life that ^{she knew} ~~anyone~~ anyone take of his watch to make love. "But I'm sure it is sufficiently late to ring up another fellow (stretching her swift cruel arm toward the bedside telephone)."

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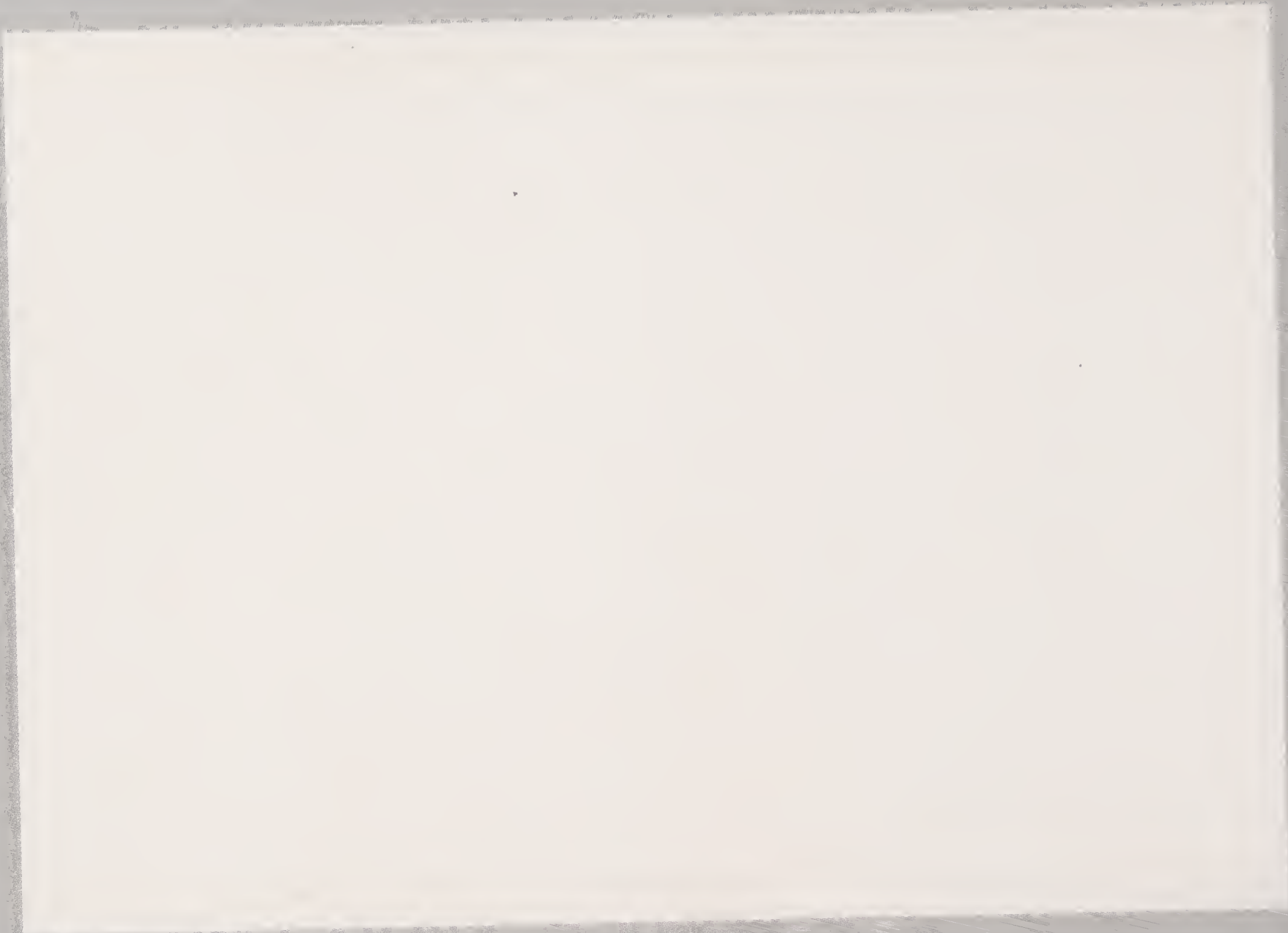


deserve. Now listen carefully." And with tigerish zest, monstrously magnifying a trivial tiff she had had with him whose pyjamas (the idiot subject of the tiff) were changing the while, in the spectrum of his surprise and distress, from heliotrope to a sickly gray, she dismissed the poor oaf for ever.

"That's done, she said, resolutely for replacing the receiver. Was I game now another round, she wanted to know."

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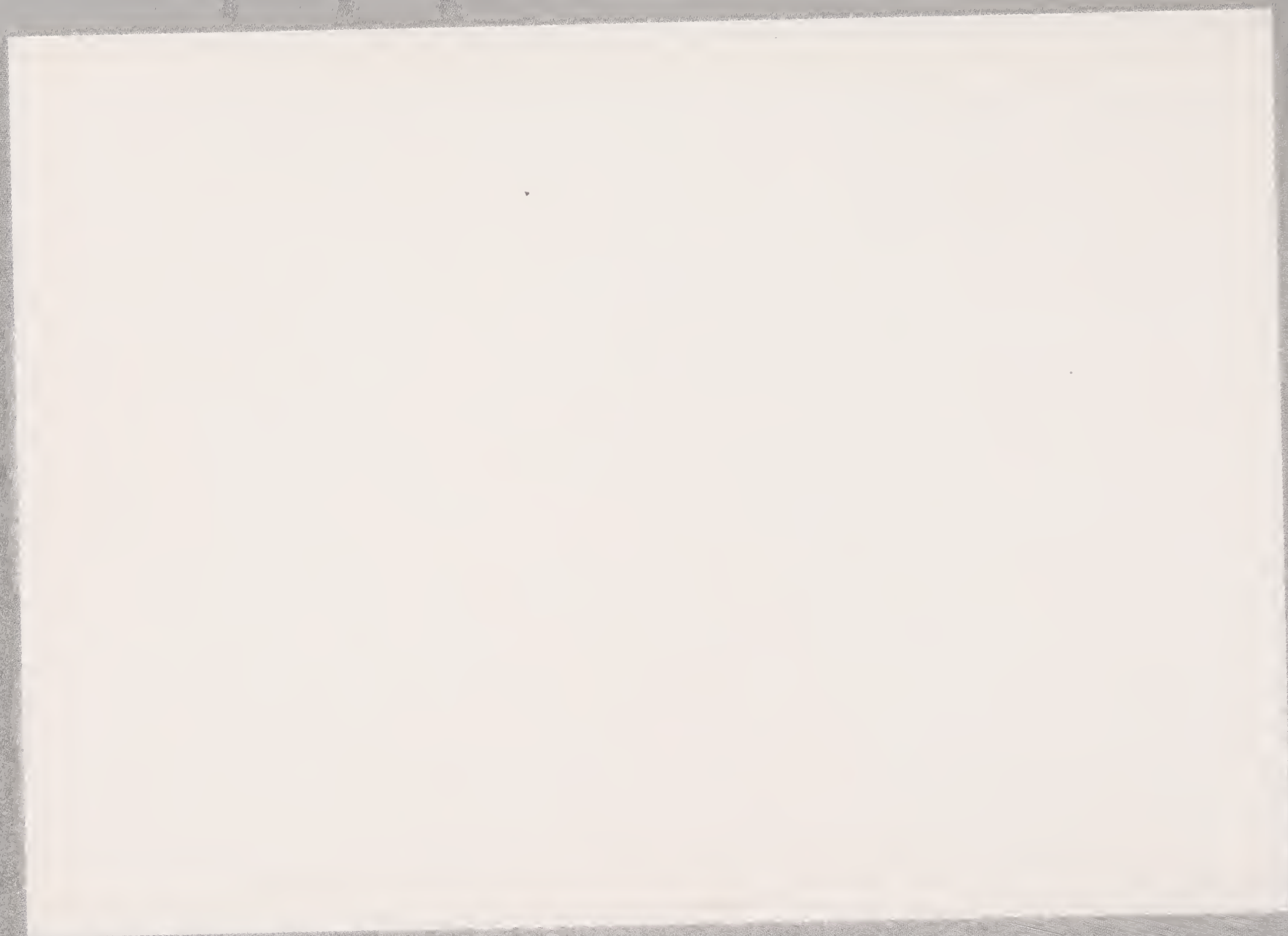


No? Not even a quickie? Well, tant pis. Try to find me some liquor in their kitchen, and then take ^{me} home.

¶ The position of her head, its trustful proximity, its gratefully shouldered weight, the tickle of her hair, endured all through the drive; yet ~~to~~ ~~she~~ she was not asleep and with the greatest exactitude had the taxi stop to let her out ~~at~~ ~~at~~ at the corner of Heine street, not too far from, nor too close to, her

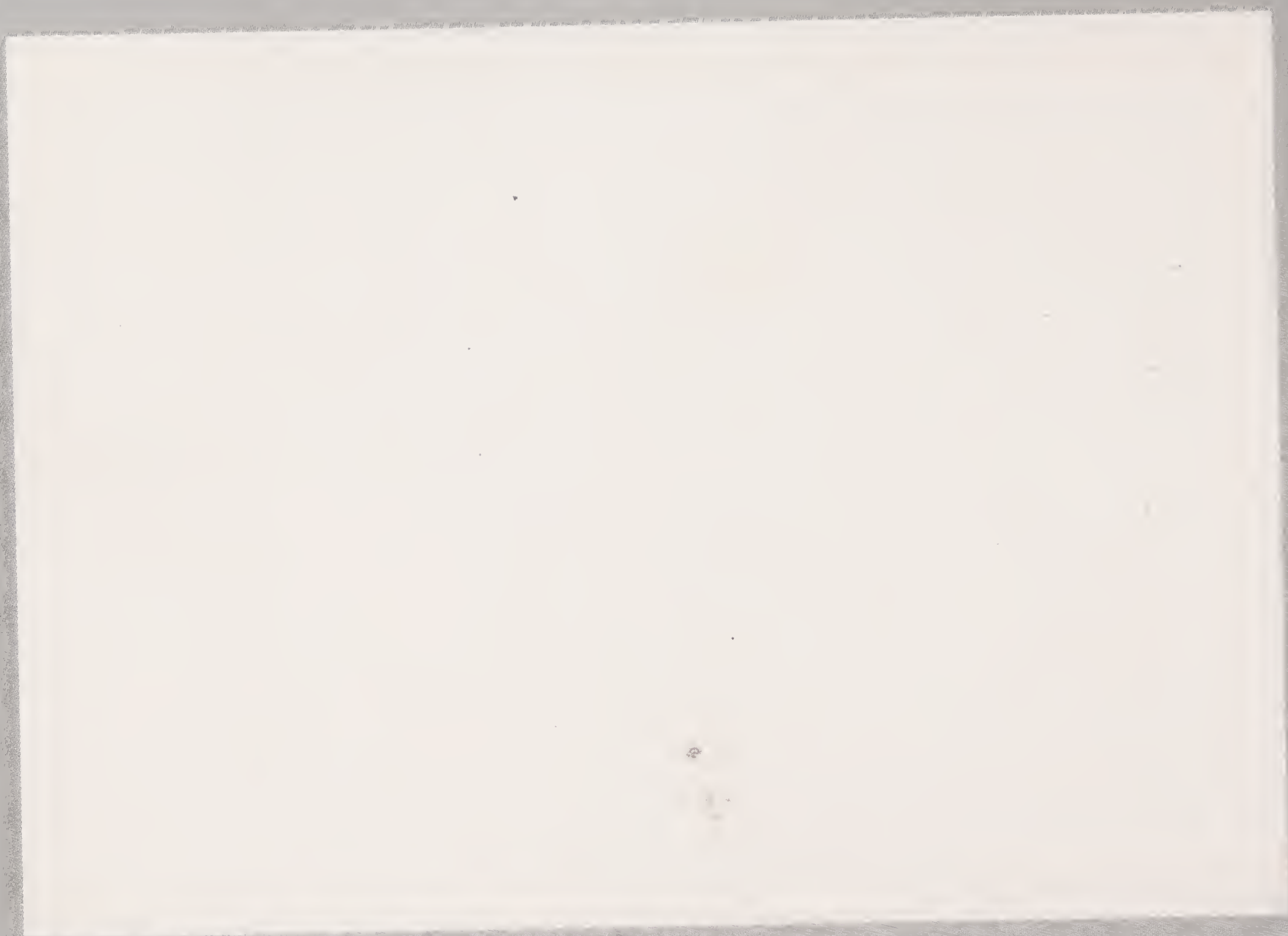
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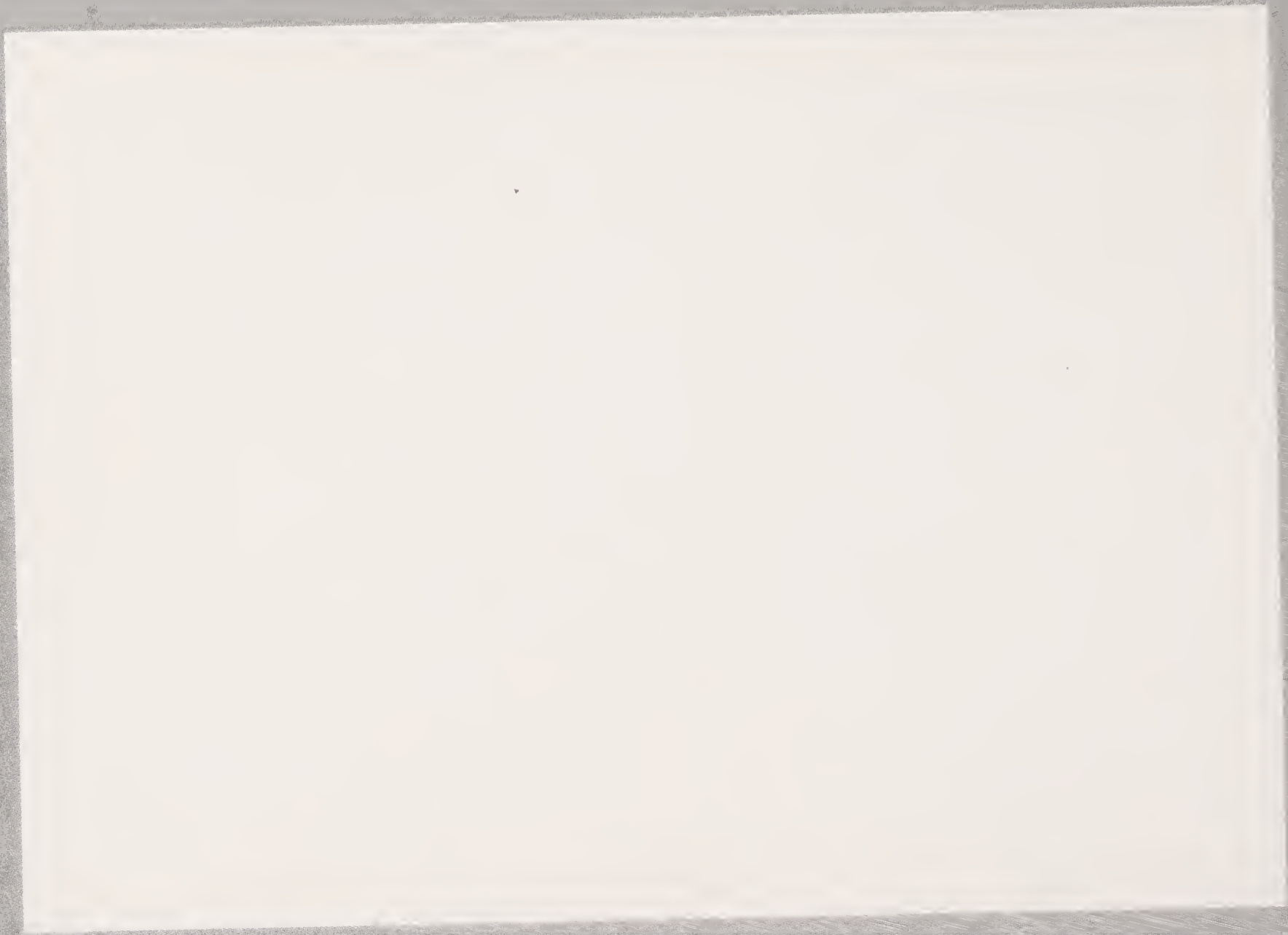


Her husband followed, now carrying the cat. The scene might be called somewhat incongruous. The animal seemed naively fascinated by the snake trailing behind on the ground.

¶¶¶ Not wishing to harness herself to futurity, she declined to discuss another rendez-vous. To prod her slightly, a messenger called at her domicile three days later. He brought from the favorite florist of fashionable girls a banal bevy ~~of flowers~~

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of bird-of-paradise flowers. Cora, the mulatto chambermaid, who let him in, surveyed the shabby courier, his comic cap, his wan countenance with it three days growth of blond beard, and was about to ^{raise her chin and} embrace his rustling load but he said "No, I've been ordered to give this to Madame herself" "You French?", asked scornful Cora (the whole scene was pretty artificial in a fishy theatrical way). He shook his head — and here

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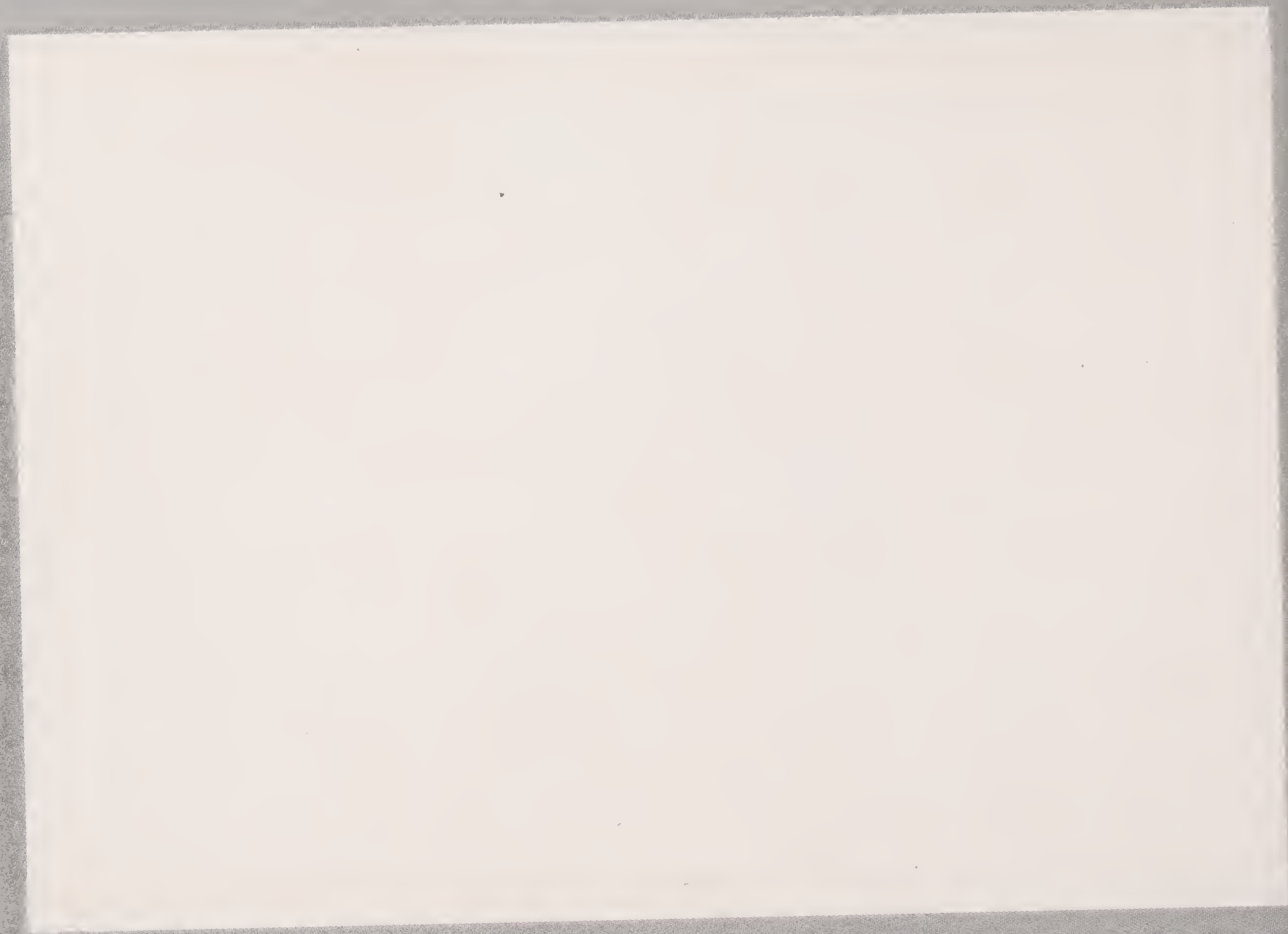
Madame appeared from the breakfast room. First of all she dismissed Cora with the strelitzias (hateful blooms, regalized bananas, really).

"Look," she said to the beaming bum, "if you ever repeat this idiotic performance, I will never see you again. I swear I won't! In fact, I have a great mind —" He flattened her against the wall between his outstretched arms; Flora ducked, and freed herself, and showed him the door; but the telephone was already ringing ~~ecstatically~~ ^{ecstatically} when he reached his lodgings.

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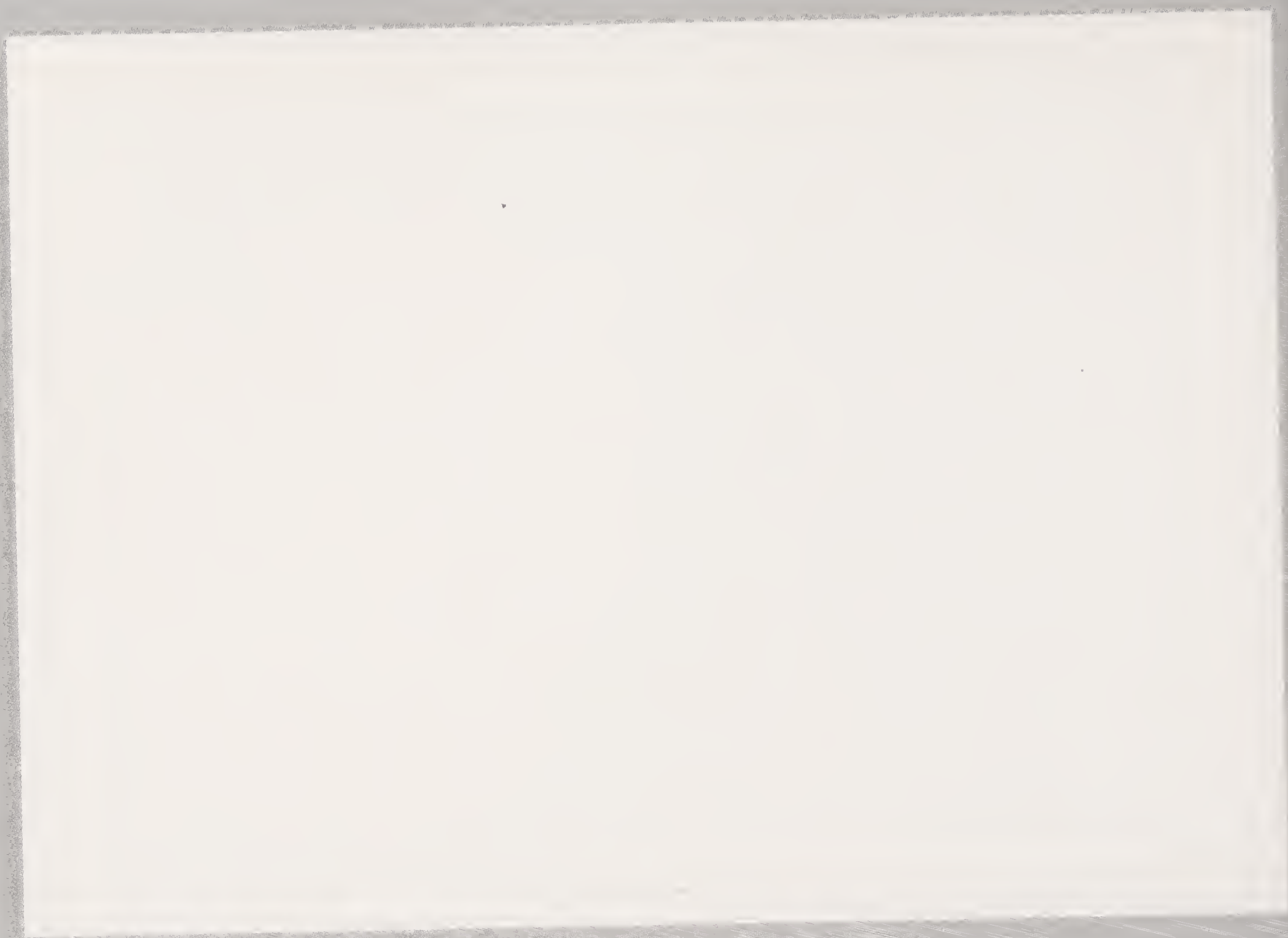
Ch Two

Her grandfather, the painter Lev Linde, emigrated in 1920 from Moscow to New York with his wife Eva and his son Adam. He also brought over a large collection of his landscapes, either unsold or loaned to him by kind friends and ignorant institutions — pictures that were said to be the glory of Russia, and the pride of the people. How many times art albums had reproduced those meticulous masterpieces — clearings in pine woods, with a bear cub or two, and brown brooks between thawing snow-banks, and the vastness of ~~barren~~ purple heaths!

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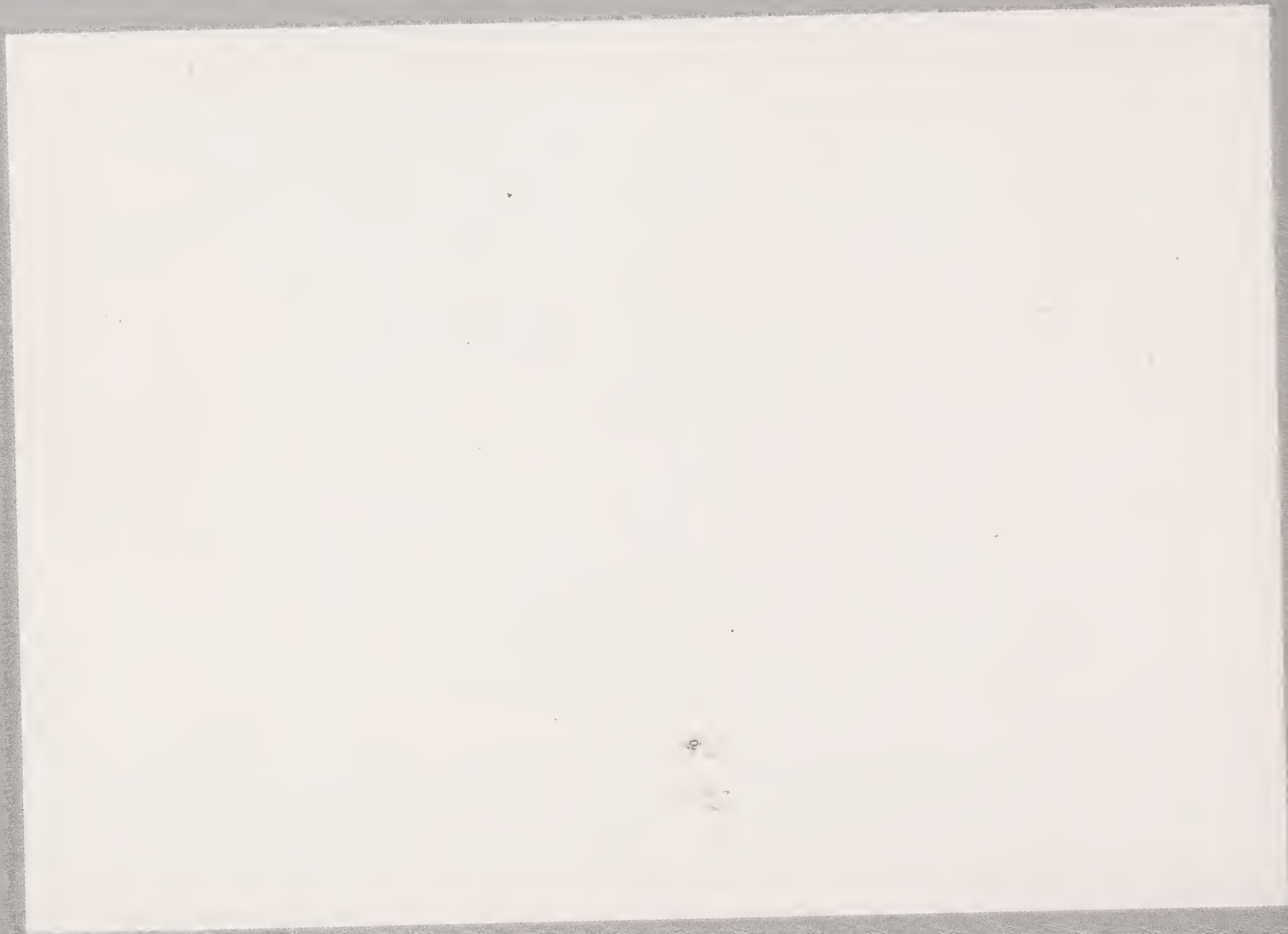
Native "decadents" had been calling them "calendar tripe" for the last three decades ~~unconsoled~~; yet ^{Linde} ~~there~~ had always had ~~the~~ an army of stout admirers; ~~the~~ mighty few of them turned up at his exhibitions in America. Very soon a number of ~~the~~ ~~unconsoled~~ ~~unconsoled~~ unconsoled oils found themselves being shipped back to Moscow, while another batch moped in rented flats before trouping up to ~~the~~ the attic or creeping down to the market stall.

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Two 2

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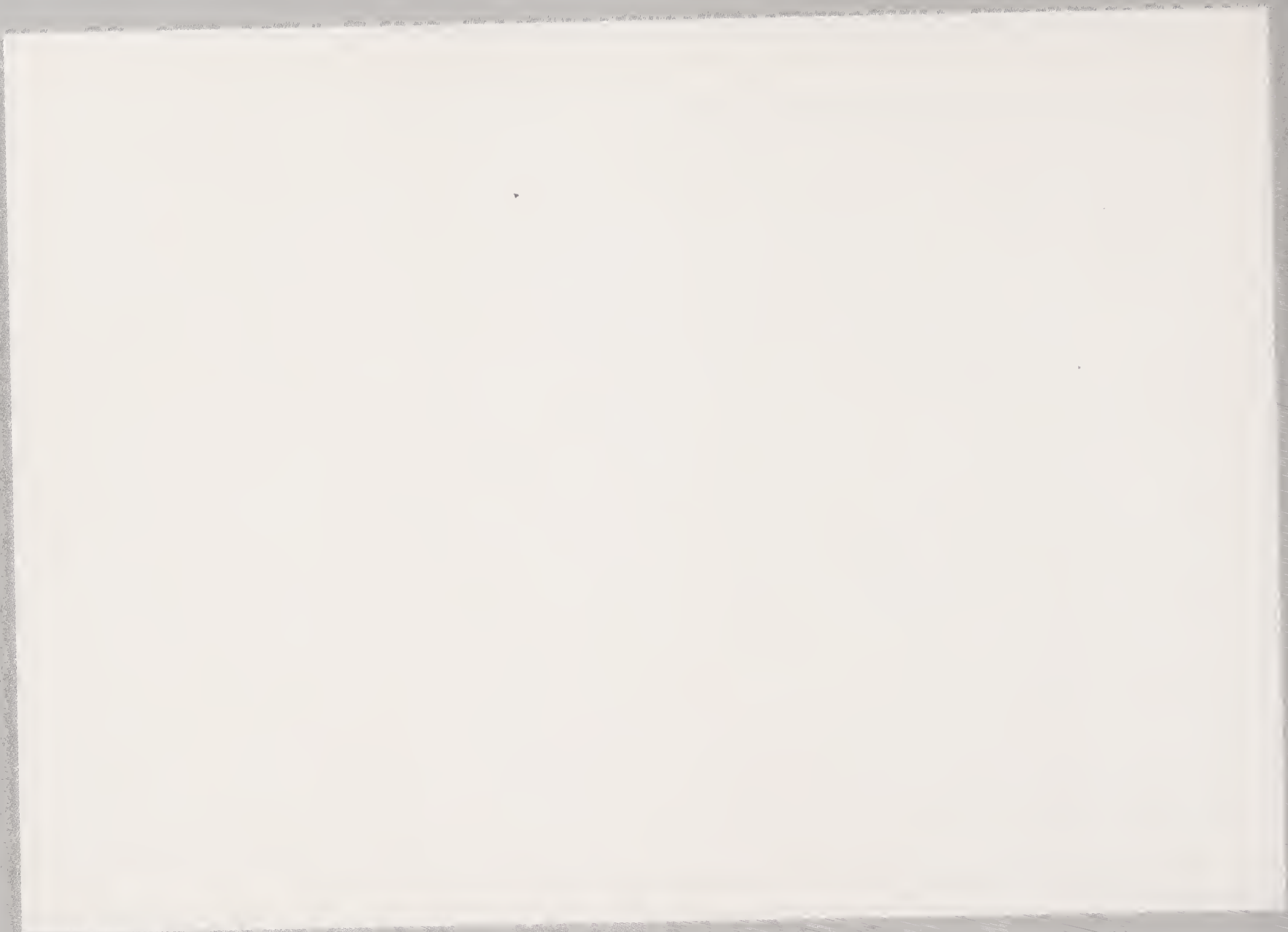
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Two 3

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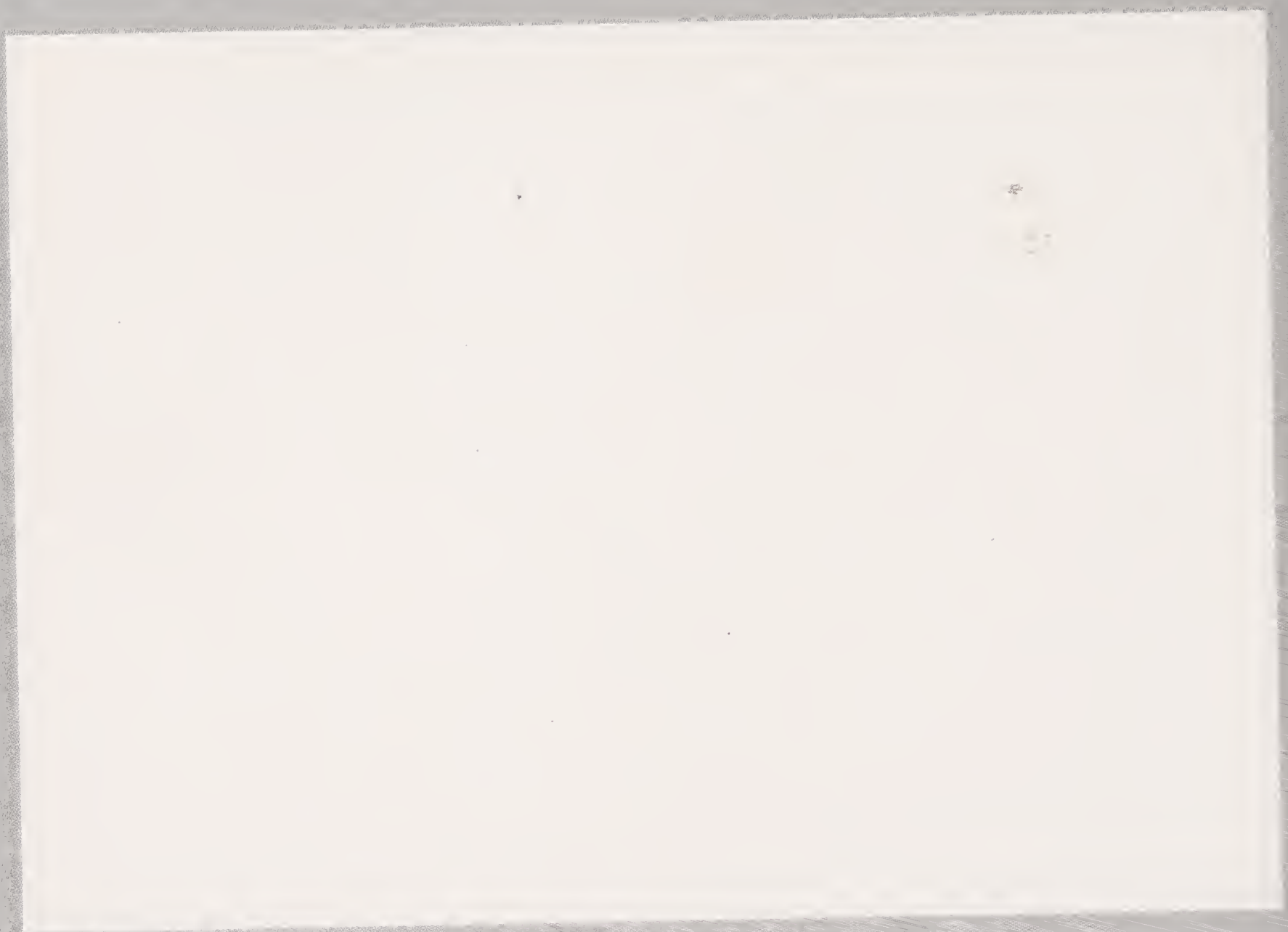
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Two 4

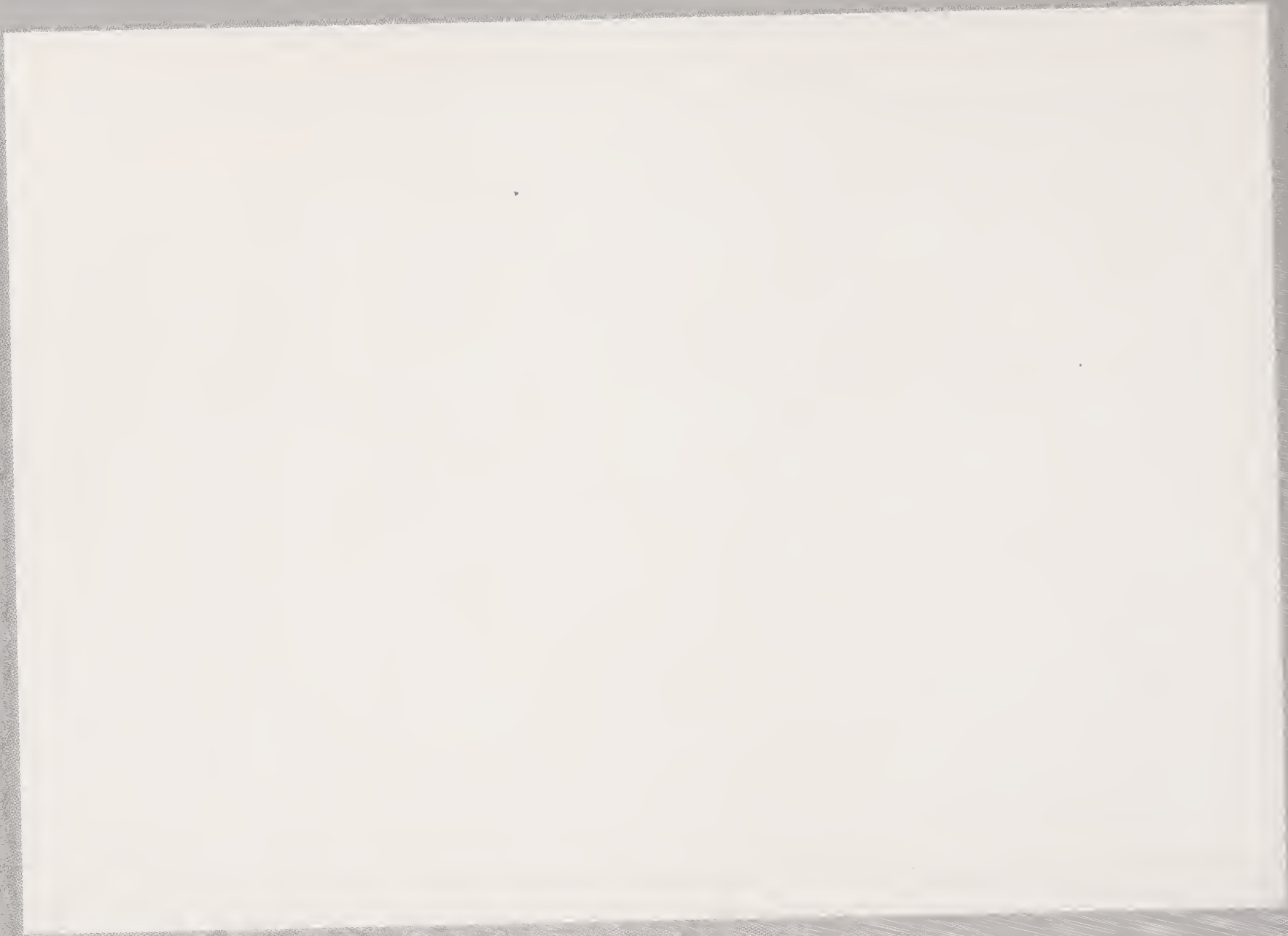
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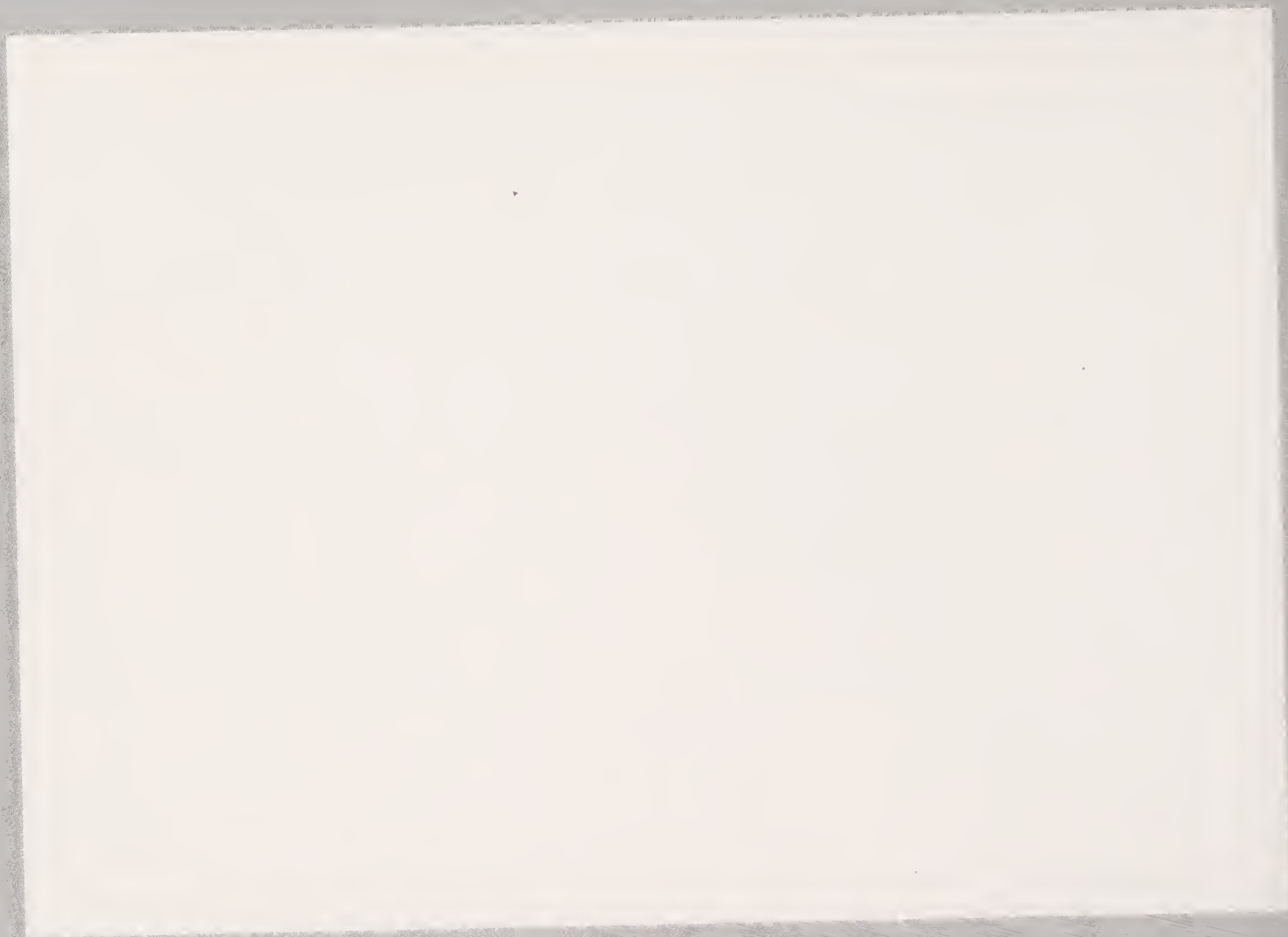
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¶ Her glamorous lovers were now replaced by an elderly but still vigorous Englishmen ~~Englishmen~~ who sought abroad a refuge from taxes and a convenient place to conduct his not quite legal transactions in the traffic of wines. He was what used to be termed a charmeur. His name, no doubt assumed, was Hubert H. Hubert.

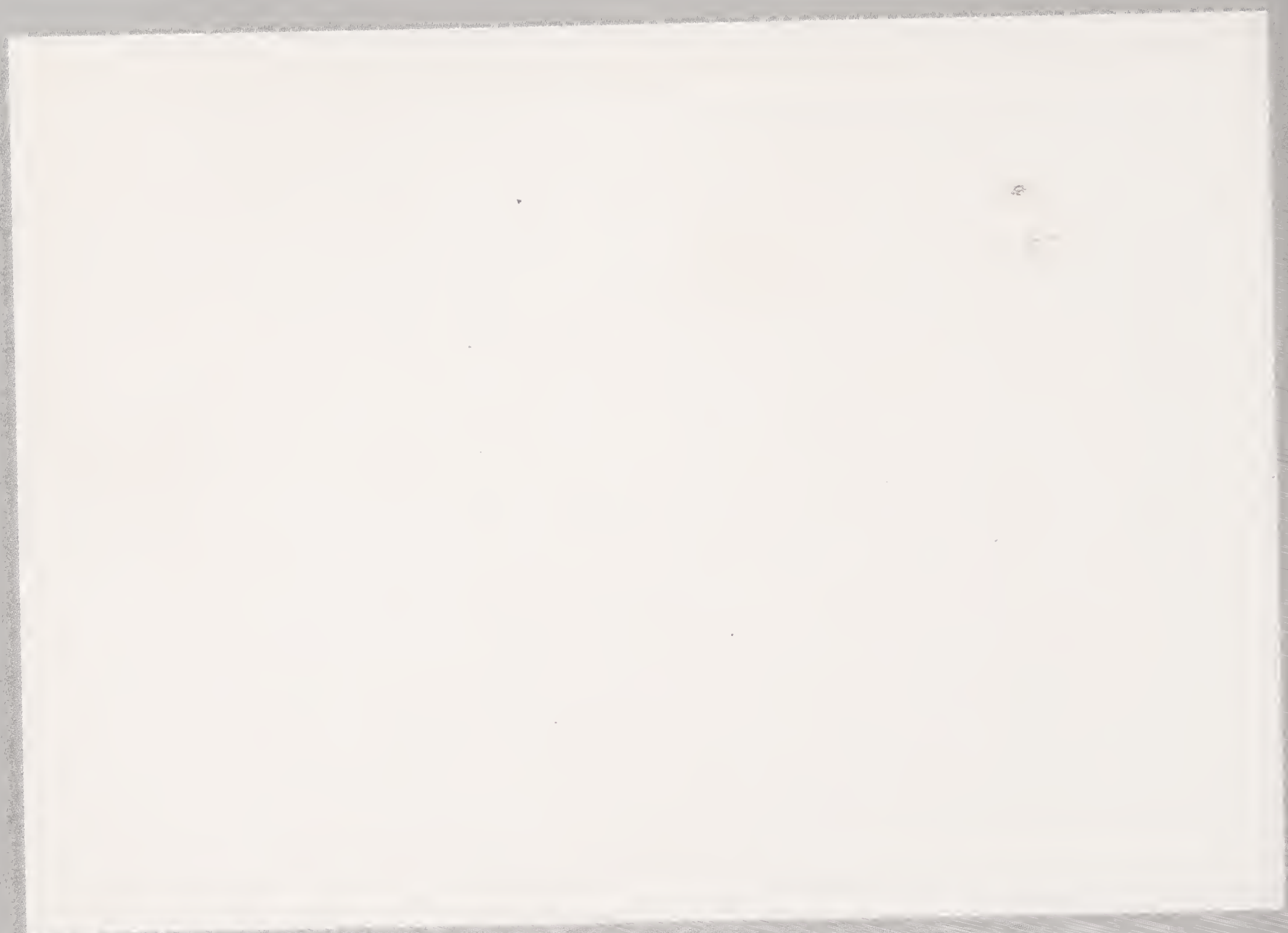
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Two 7

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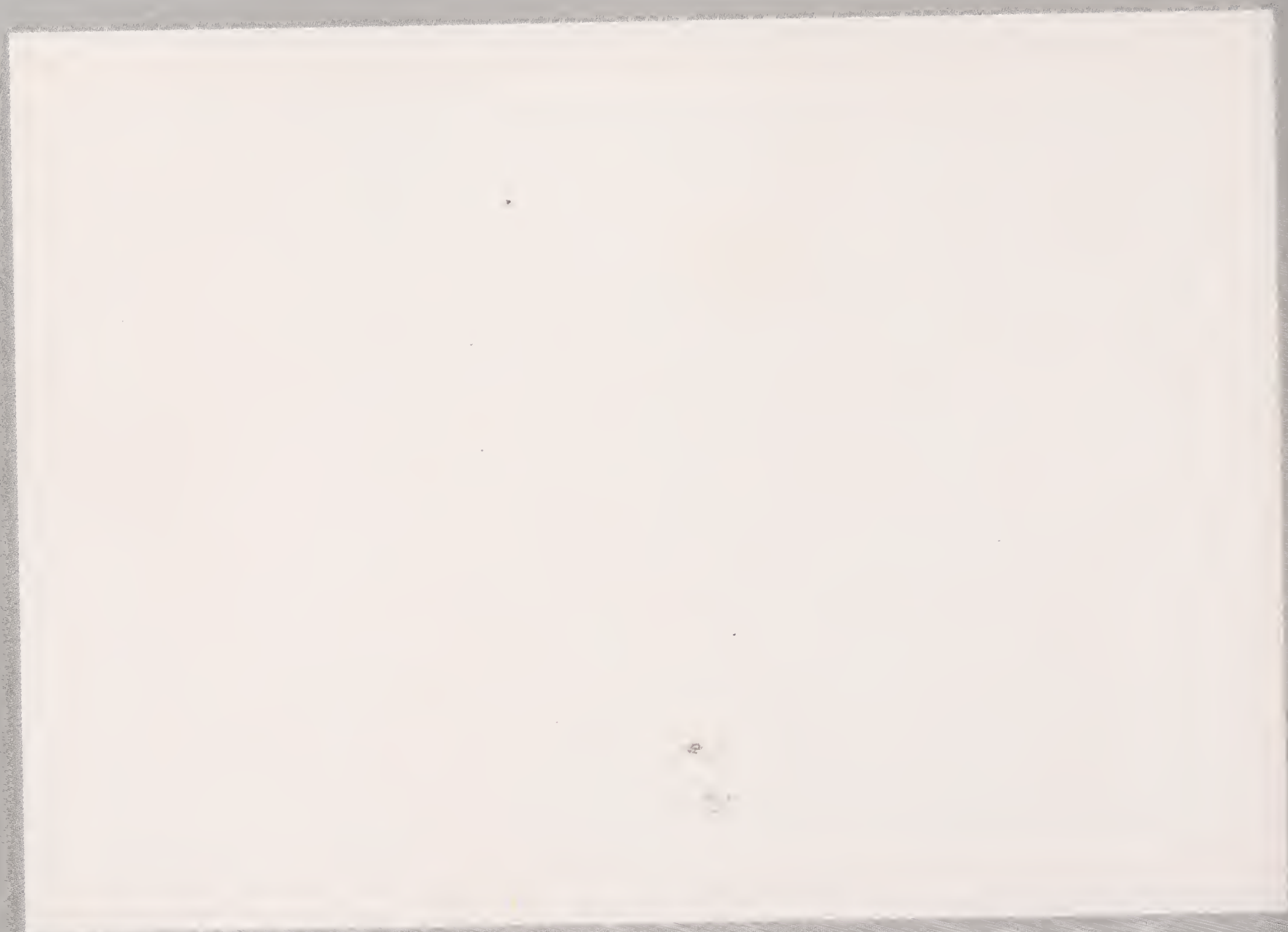


Two ⑧

herself with a slight shake (dreamy? ~~dreamy~~
incredulous?) of her head every time she
spoke of those prepubescent years, had
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Two 8

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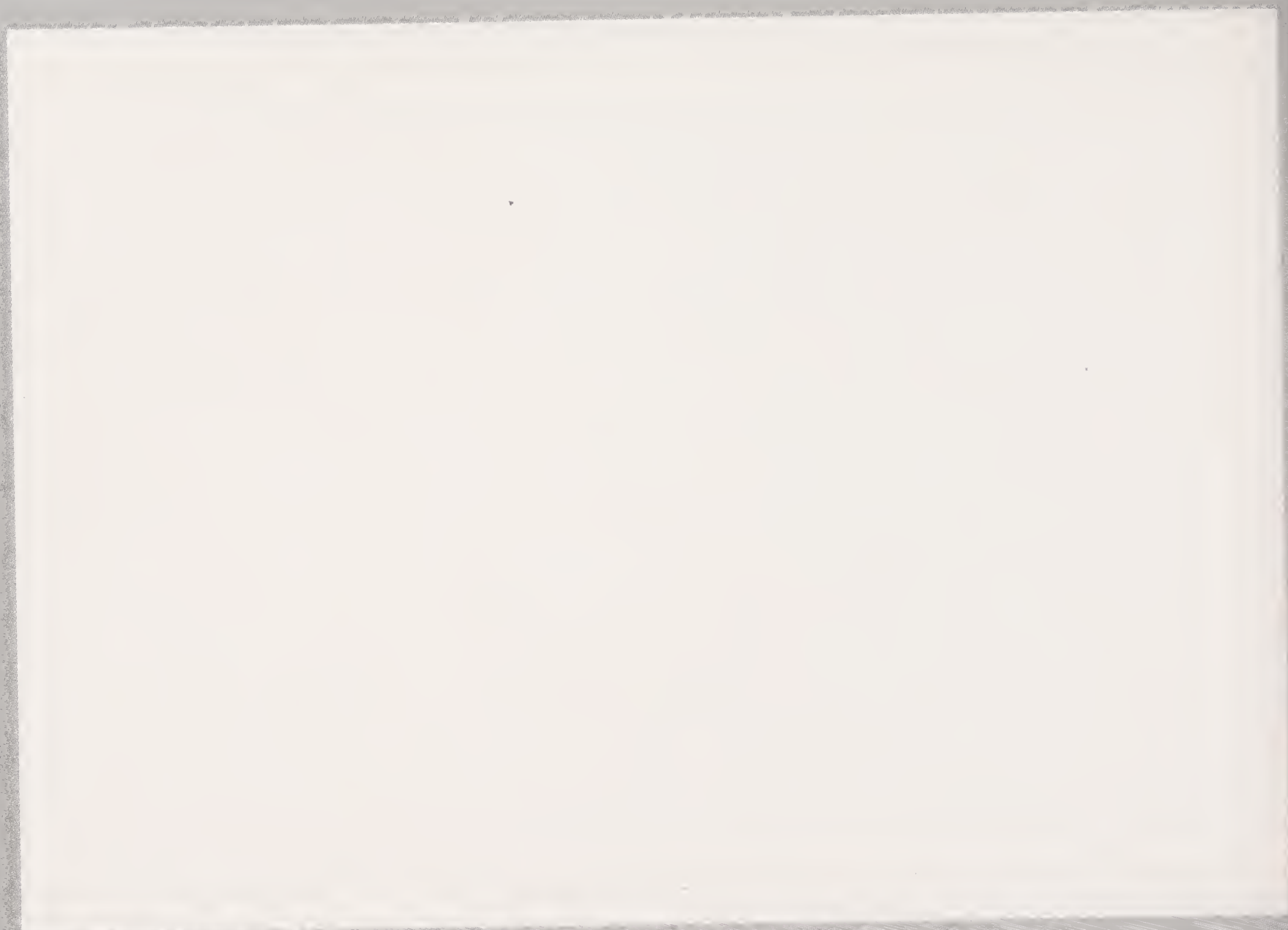


Two (9)

the house with Mr. Hubert, who constantly "prowled" (rodait) around her, humming a monotonous tune and sort of mesmerising her, envelopping her, so to speak in some sticky invisible substance and coming closer and closer no matter what way she turned. For instance she did not dare to let her arms hang aimlessly lest her knuckles came into contact with some horrible part of that kindly but smelly and "pushing" old ~~man~~ male.

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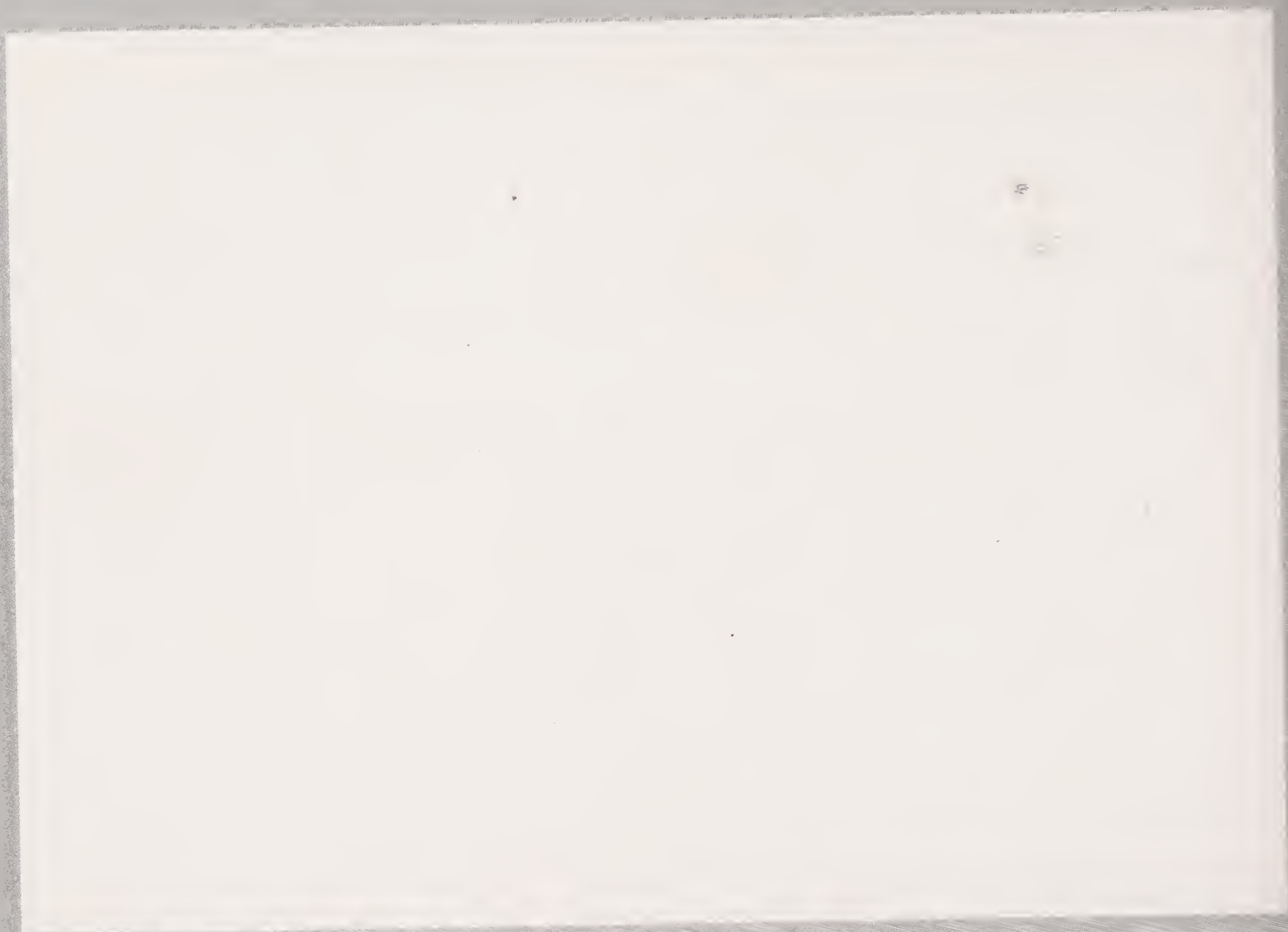
Two (10)

(her)

He told stories about his sad life, he told her about his daughter who was just like her, same age—twelve—, same eyelashes—darker than the dark blue ^{of the} iris, same ~~hair~~ hair, blondish or rather palomino, and so silky—if he could be allowed to stroke it, or l'effleurer des levres, like this, that's all, thank you. Poor Daisy had been crushed to death by a backing lorry on a country road—short cut home from school—

Two 10

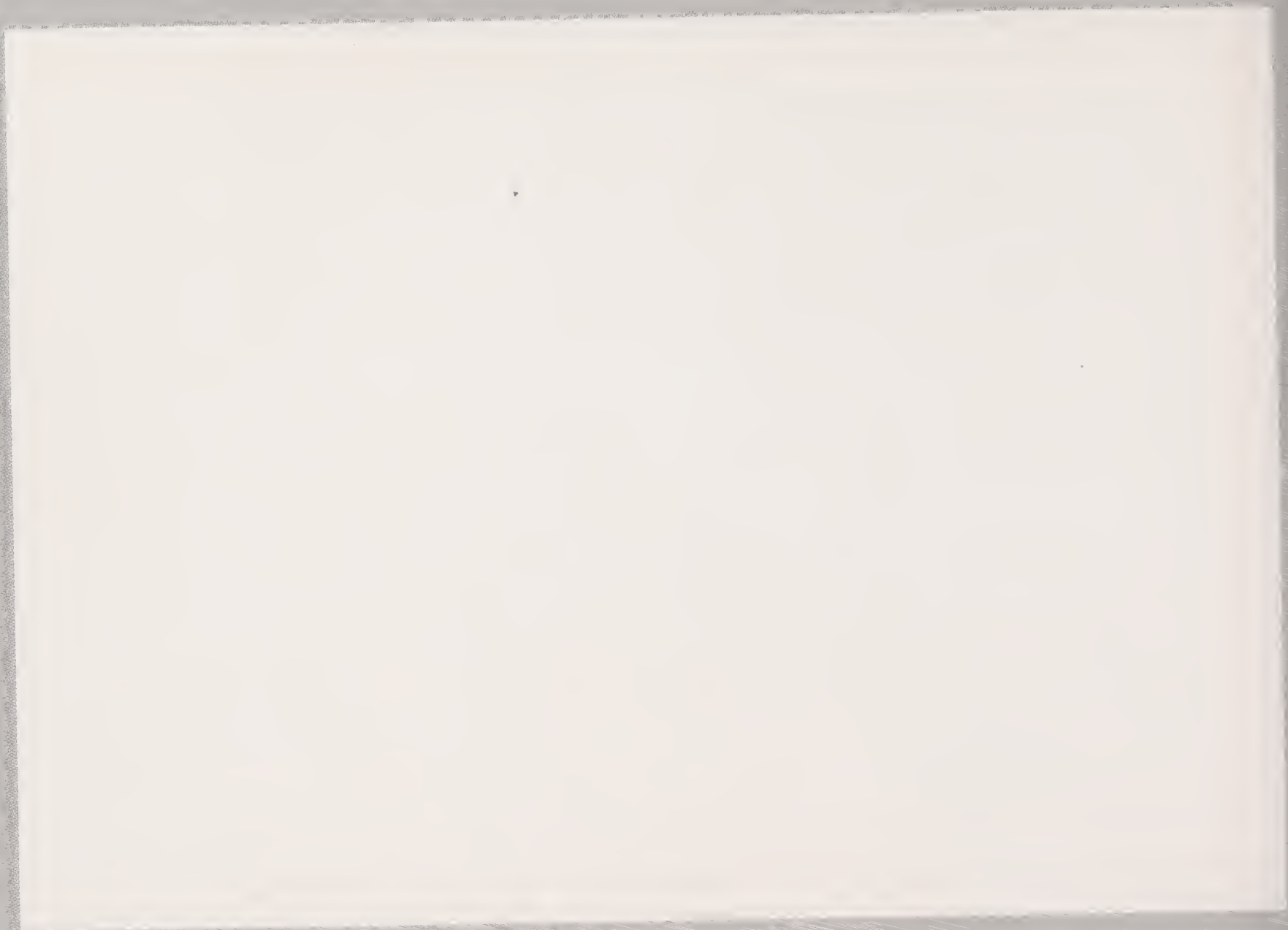
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through a muddy construction site - abominable
 tragedy - her mother ^{died} of a broken heart.
 Mr Hubert, ^{sat} ~~on~~ ^{on} Flora's bed and nodded
 acknowledging all the ~~in~~offences of life, and
 wiped his eyes with a violet ~~handkerchief~~
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 little parlor trick - when he stuffed ^{it} back
 into his heart-pocket, and continued to
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 the carpet. He looked now like a
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Two 11

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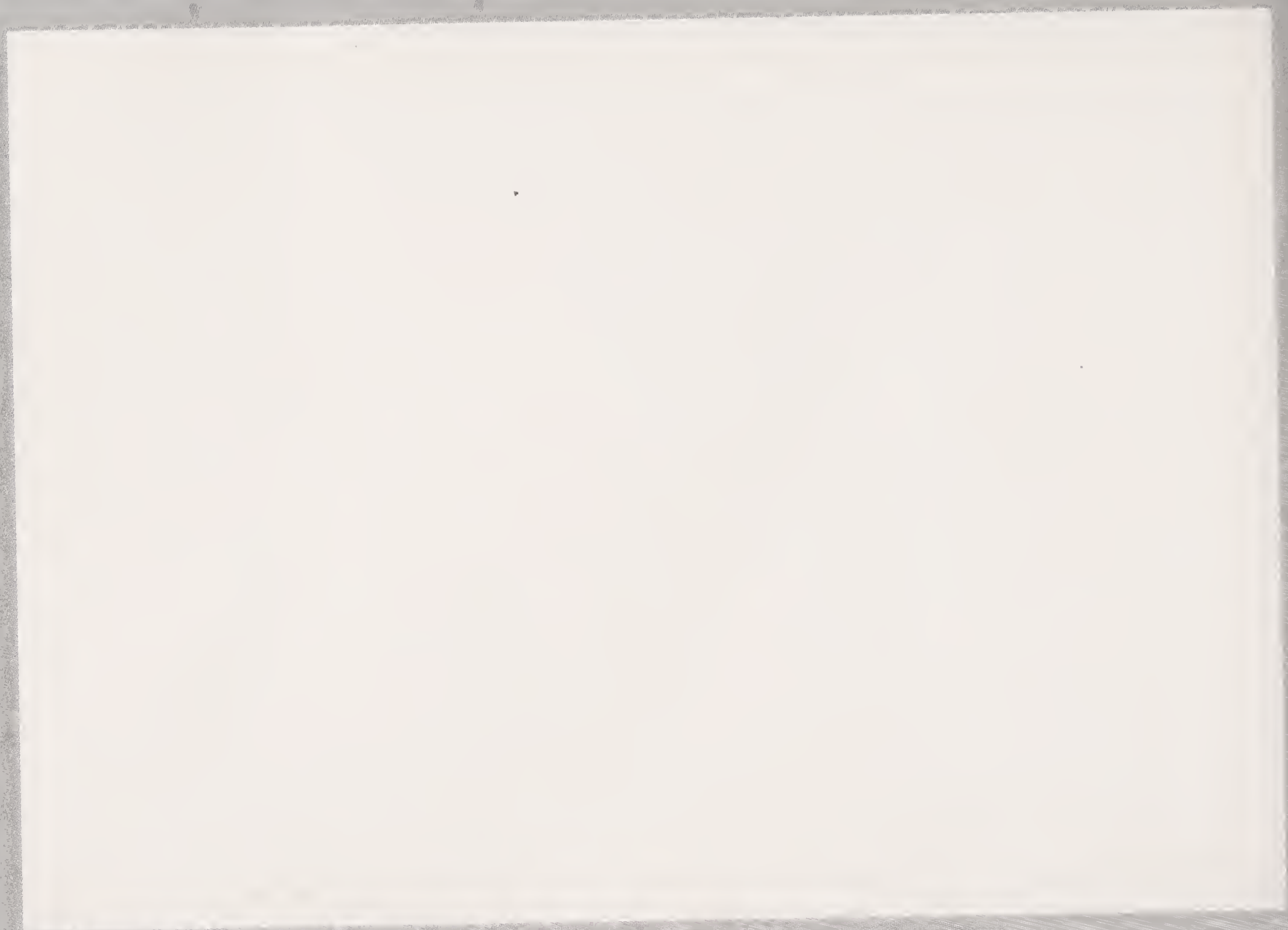


fairytale to a sleepy child at bedtime, but he sat a little too close. Flora wore a nightgown with short sleeves copied from that of the Montglas de Sancerre girl, ~~her~~ ^{a very} sweet and depraved schoolmate, who taught her where to kick an enterprising gentleman.

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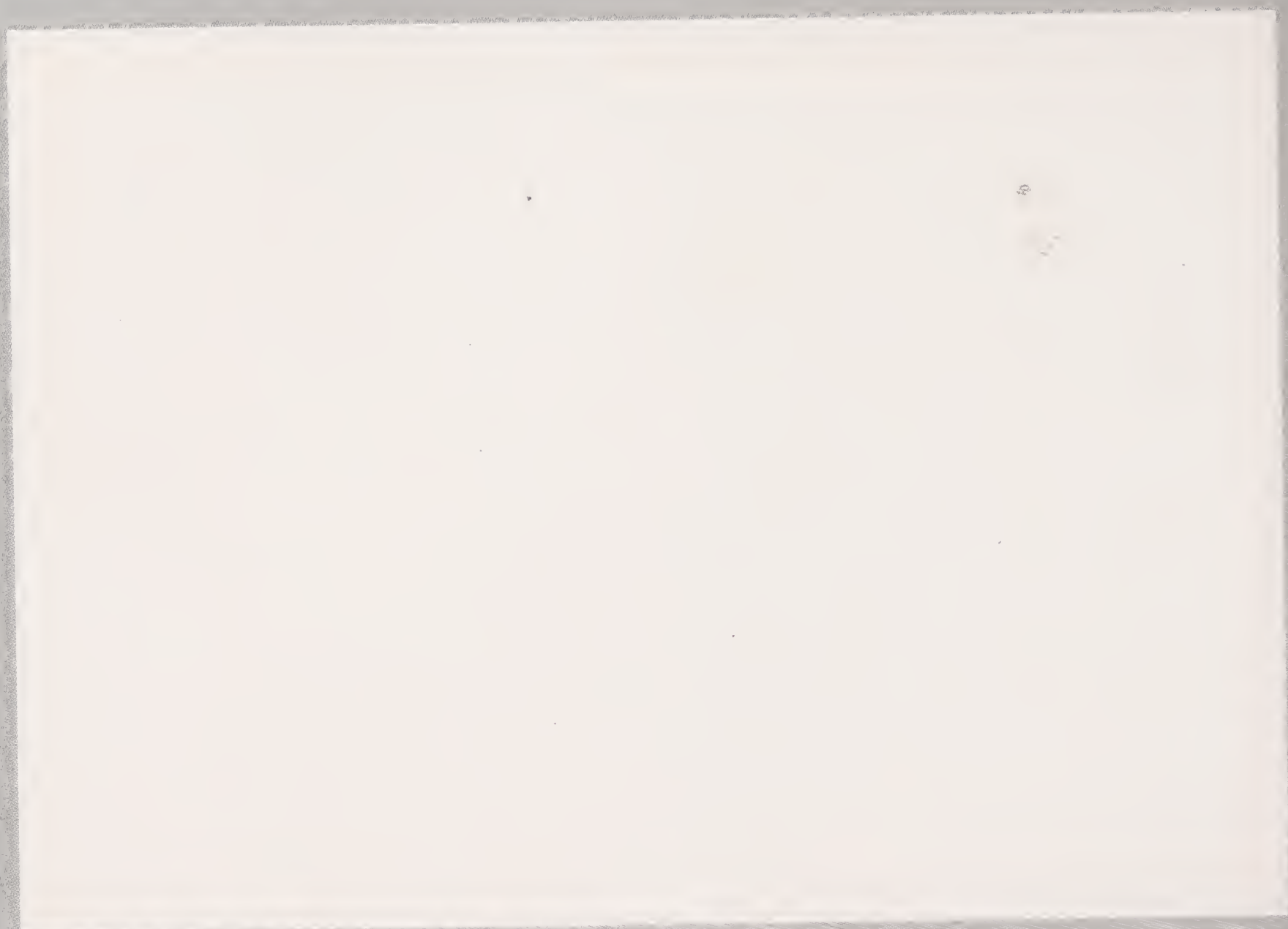
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Two 13

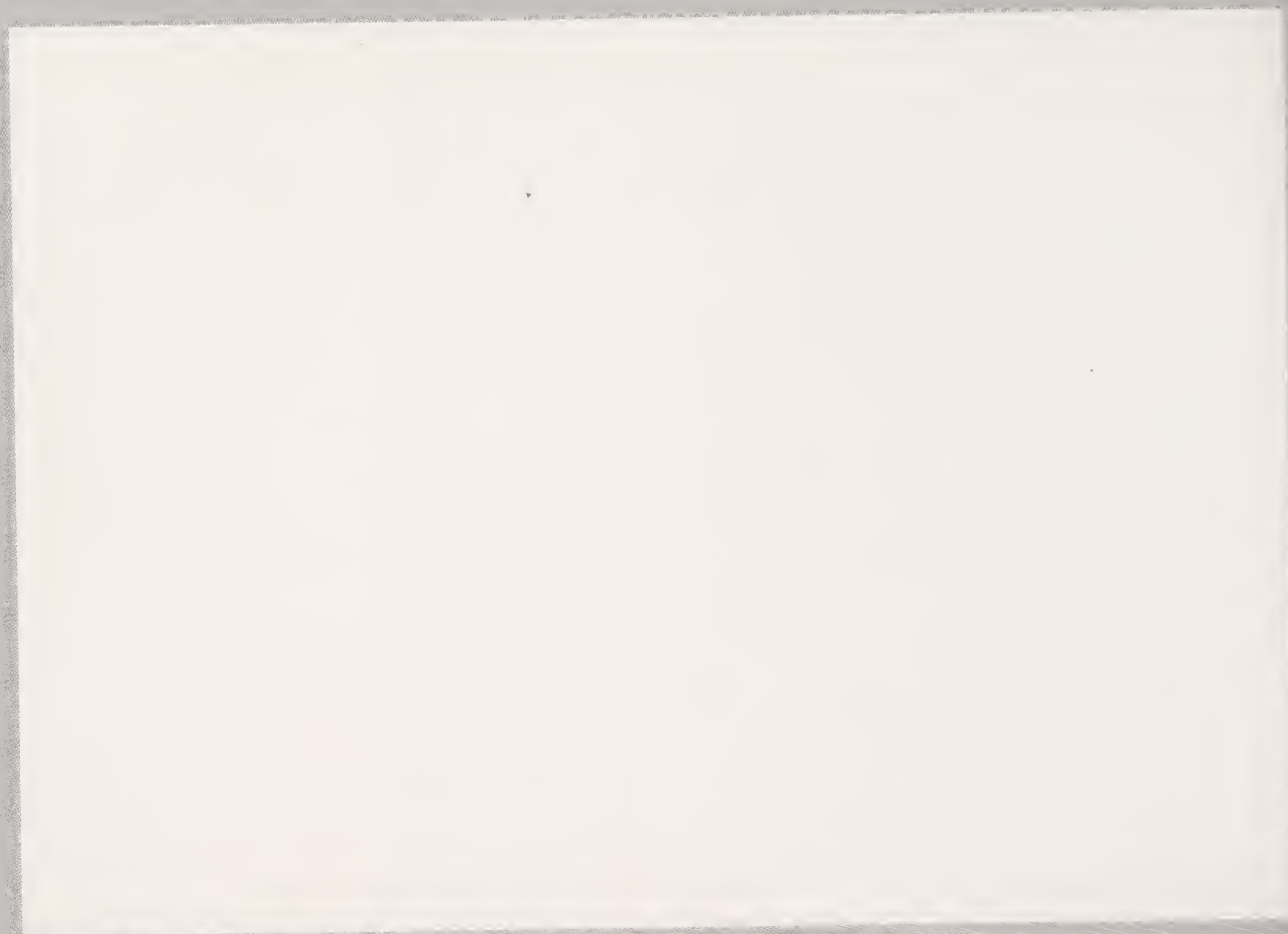
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Two 14

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with Daisy's bicycle wobbling in the indelible fog. She, too, "had" known the moves, and had loved the en passant trick as one loves a new toy, but it cropped up so seldom, though he tried to prepare those magic positions where the ghost of a pawn ^{can be} captured on the square it had crossed.

Fever, however, turns games of skill into ^{the} stuff of nightmares. After a few minutes of play Flora grew tired of it, put a rook in her mouth, ejected it,

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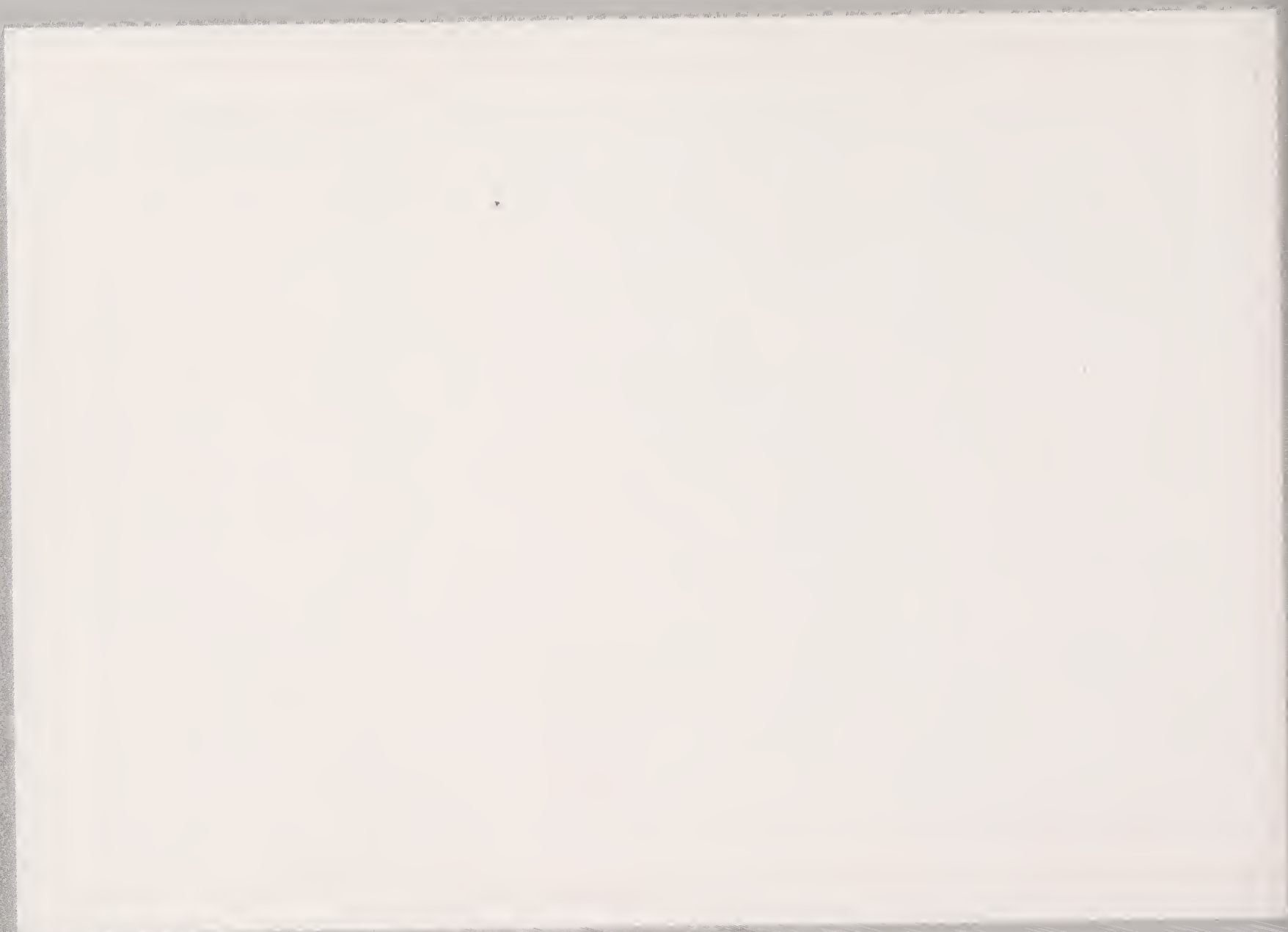
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clowning dully. She pushed the board away and Mr. Hubert carefully removed it to the chair that supported the tea things. Then, with a father's sudden concern, he said "I'm afraid you are chilly, my love," and plunging a hand under the bedclothes from his vantage point at the footboard, he felt her shins. Flora uttered a yelp and then a few screams. Freeing themselves from the tumbled sheets her pedalling legs hit him ⁱⁿ the crotch. As he lurched aside, the teapot, a saucer of raspberry jam,

Two 16

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an several tiny chessmen joined in the silly
 fray Mrs Lind who had just returned and
 was sampling some grapes she had bought,
 heard the screams and the crash and
 arrived at a dancer's run. She soothed
 the absolutely furious, deeply insulted
 Mr Hubert before scolding her daughter.
 He was a dear man, and his life lay
 in ruins all around him. He wanted
 to marry him, saying she was the image
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 and indeed to judge by the photographs

Two 17

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she, Madame Lanskaya, did resemble
~~poor Daisy's mother~~, poor Daisy's mother.

There is little to be added about the
~~that~~ incidental, but not unattractive
 Mr Hubert H. Hubert. He ~~lived~~ ^{lodged for} another
 happy year in that cosy house and
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— . —

Two 18

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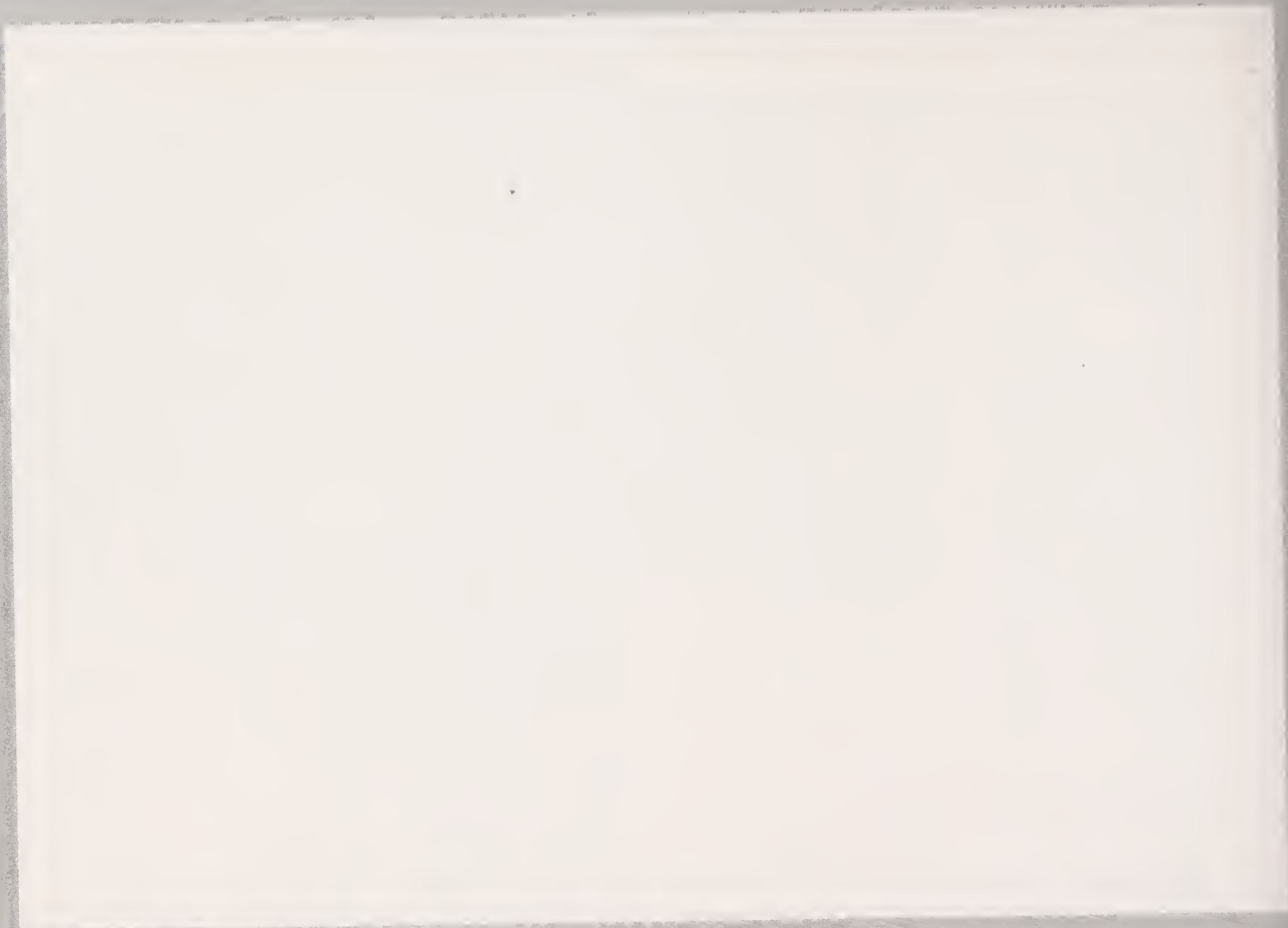


Flora was barely fourteen when she lost her virginity to a coeval, a handsome ballboy at the Carlton Courts in Cannes. Three or four broken porch steps—which was all that remained of an ornate public toilet or some ancient "templet"—smothered in mints and campanulas and surrounded by junipers, formed the site of a duty she had resolved to perform ^{rather} than ~~of~~ a casual pleasure she was now learning to taste. She observed with quiet interest the difficulty Jules had of drawing a junior-size sheath over an

Three 1

Ch. Three

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Three (2)

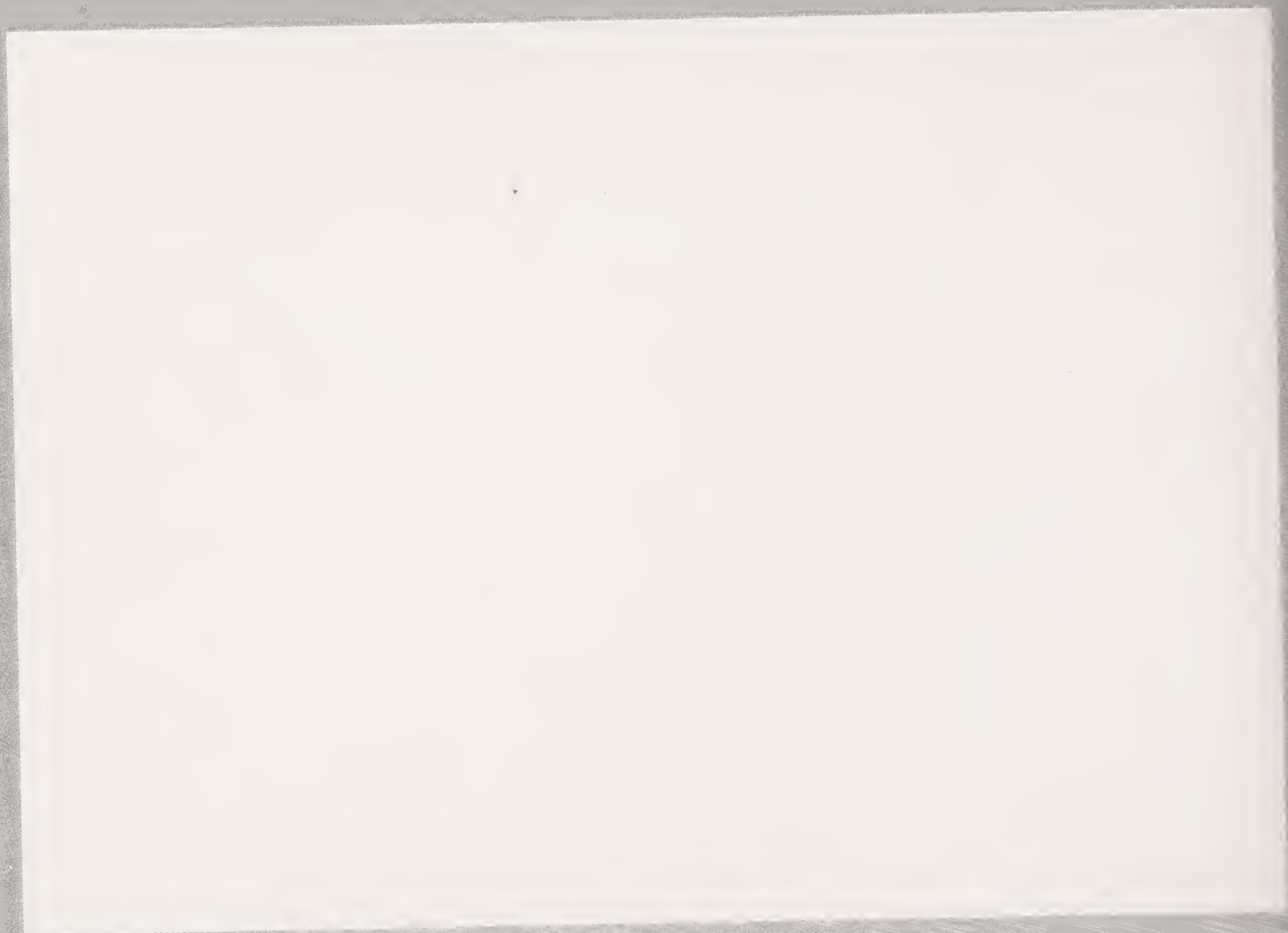
organ that looked ~~usually~~ ^{abnormally} stout and had a head turned somewhat askew as if wary of ~~receiving a~~ ^{receiving a} backhand slap at the decisive moment. Flora let ~~him~~ ^{Jules do} everything he desired except kiss her on the ~~mouth~~ ^{mouth}, and the only words ~~said~~ ^{said} referred to the next assignation. ~~at the decisive moment~~

¶ One evening after a hard day picking up and tossing balls and pattering in a crouch across court between the rallies of a long tournament the poor boy, stinking more than usual, pleaded

Three 2

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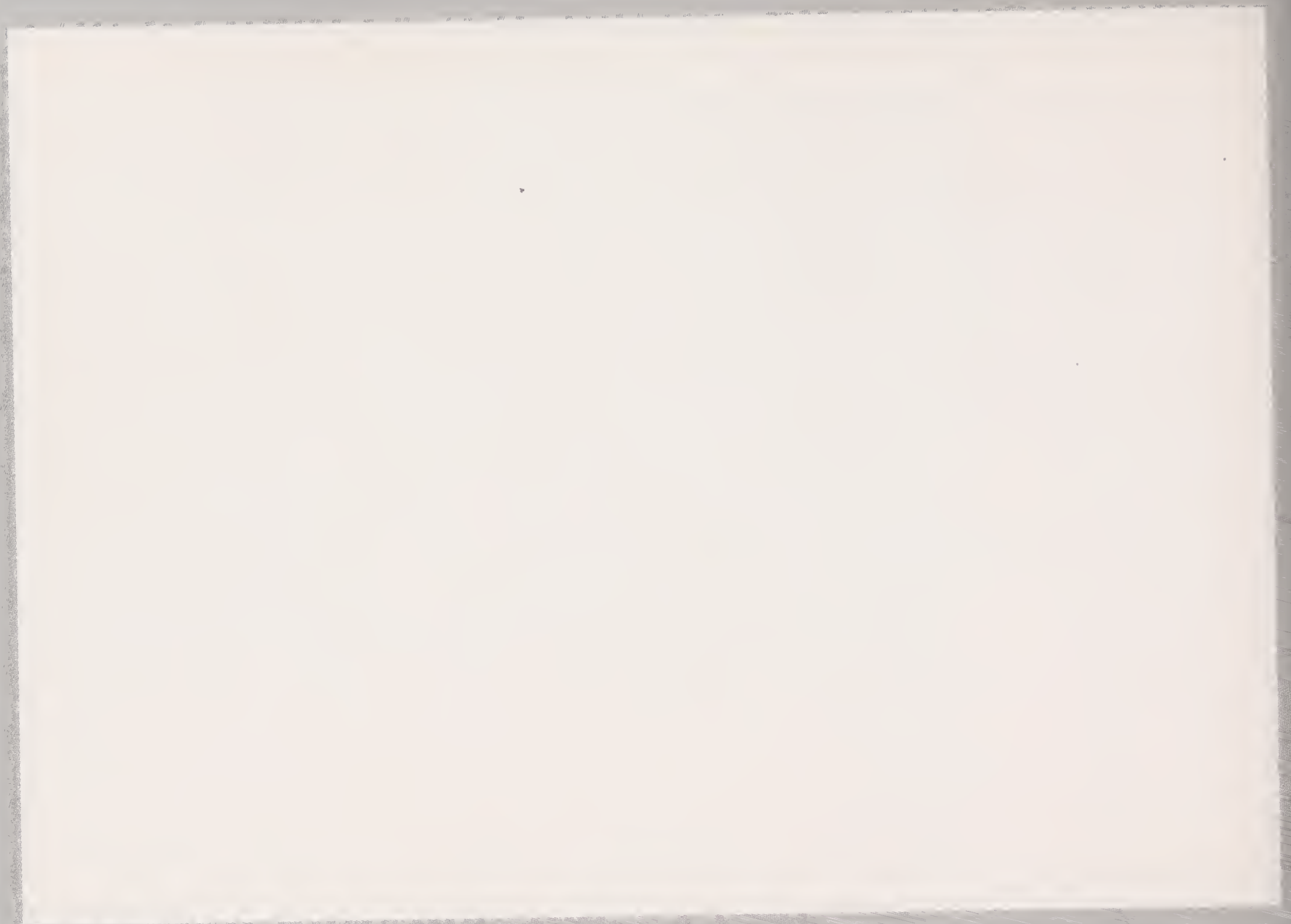
utter exhaustion and suggested going to a movie instead of making love; whereupon she walked away through the high heather and never saw Jules again — except when taking her tennis lessons with the ^{stodgy} old Basque in uncreased white trousers who had coached players in Odessa before World War One and still retained his effortless exquisite style.

¶ Back in Paris Flora found new lovers. With a gifted youngster from the Lanscraya school and another

Three 3

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eager, more or less interchangeable couple
 she would bicycle through the Blue Fountain
 Forest to a romantic refuge where a
 sparkle of broken glass or a lace-edged
 rag on the moss were the only signs of
 an earlier period of literature. A cloudless
 September maddened the crickets. The girls
 would compare the dimensions of their companions.
 Exchanges would ^{be} enjoyed with giggles
 and cries of surprise. Games of blindman's
 buff would be played in the buff. Sometimes
 a voyeur would be shaken out of a
 tree by the vigilant police.

Three 4

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 the vigilant police.



Three (5)

¶ This is Flora of the close-set dark-blue ~~eyes~~ eyes and cruel mouth recollecting in her midtwenties fragments of her past, with details lost or put back in the wrong order, TAIL between DELTA and SLIT, on dusty dim shelves, this is she. Everything about her is bound to remain blurry, even her name which seems to have been made expressly to have another one modelled upon it by a fantastically lucky artist of art, of love, of the

Three 5

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Three (6)

difference between dreaming and waking she
knew nothing but would have darted
at you like a flatheaded blue serpent if
you questioned her

Three 6

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She returned with her mother and Mr. Espenshade to Sutton, Mass. where she was born and now went to college in that town.

Tree (7)

At eleven she had read A quoi revent les enfants, by a certain Dr Freud, a madman.

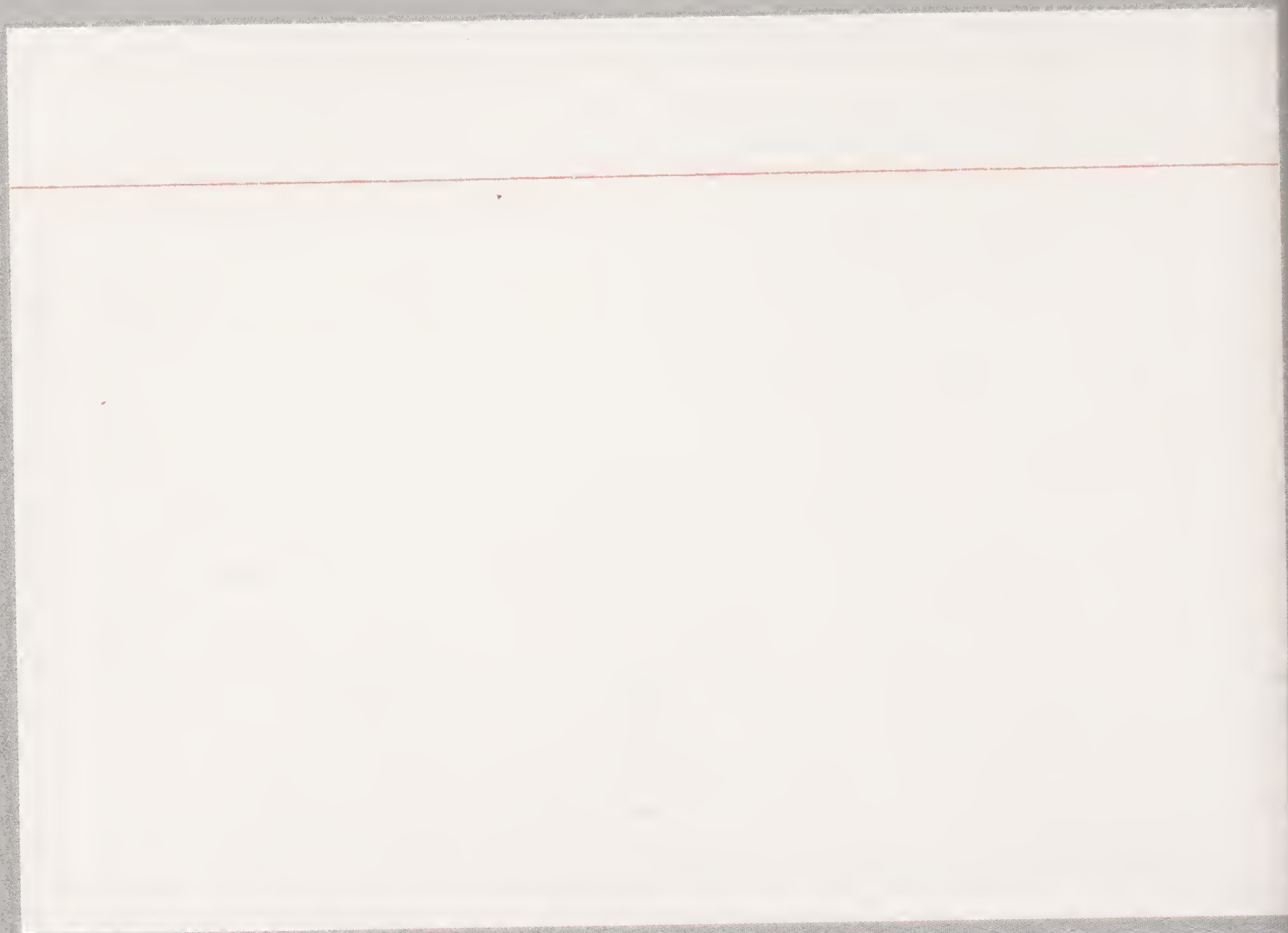
The extracts came in a St Leger d'Exuperse series of Les great representant de notre epoque though why great represent wrote so badly remained a mystery

Three 7

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Sutton College

Ex O

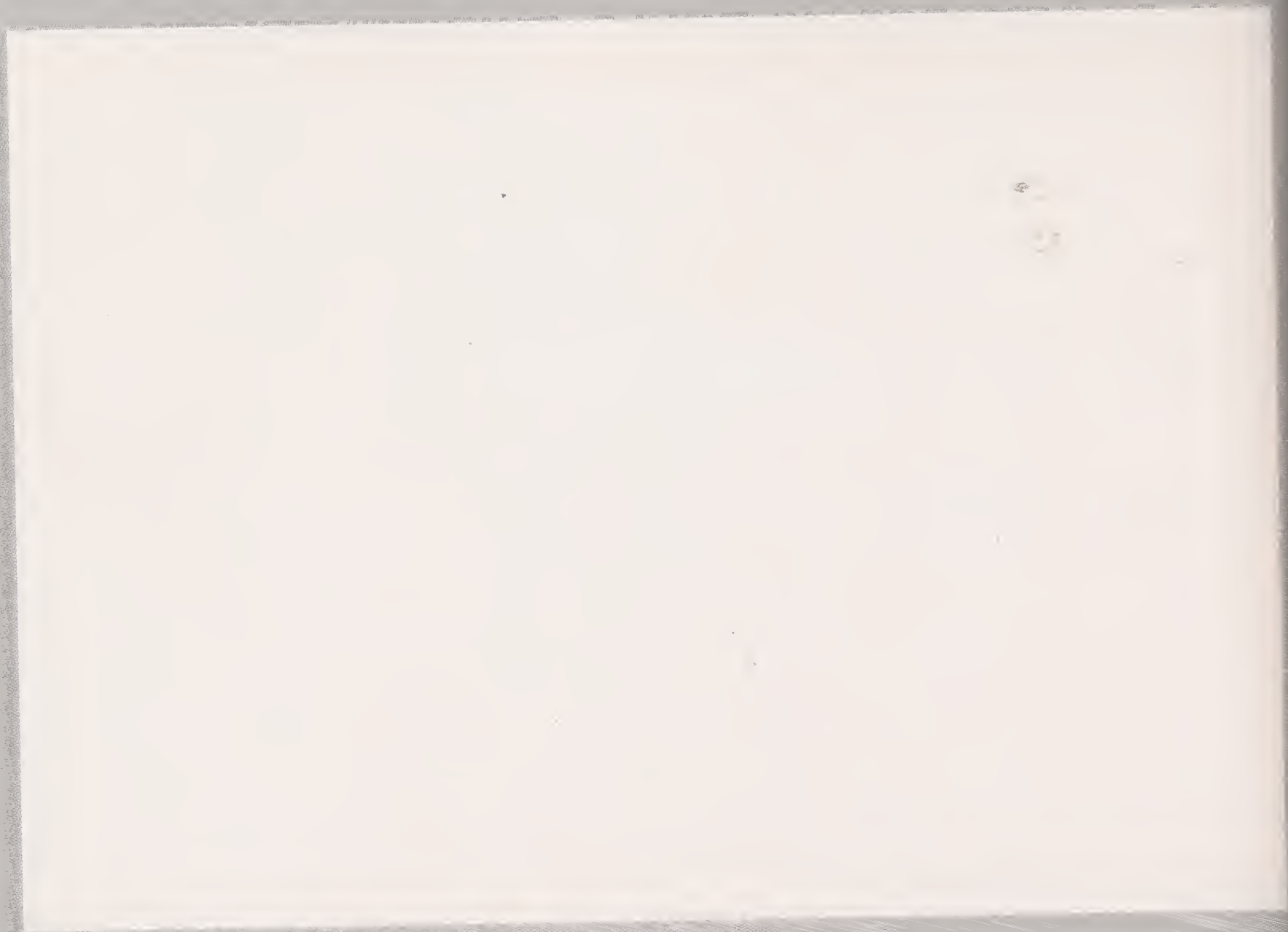
A sweet Japanese girl who took ^{and French} Russian because her stepfather was half French and half Russian, taught Flora to paint her left hand up to the radial artery (one of the tenderest areas of her beauty) with minuscule information, in so called "fairy" script, regarding names, dates and ideas. Both cheats had more French, than Russian; ^{but} in the latter the possible questions formed, as it were a banal bouquet of probabilities: ~~which~~

~~for~~

Ex [o]

Sutton College

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Kind of

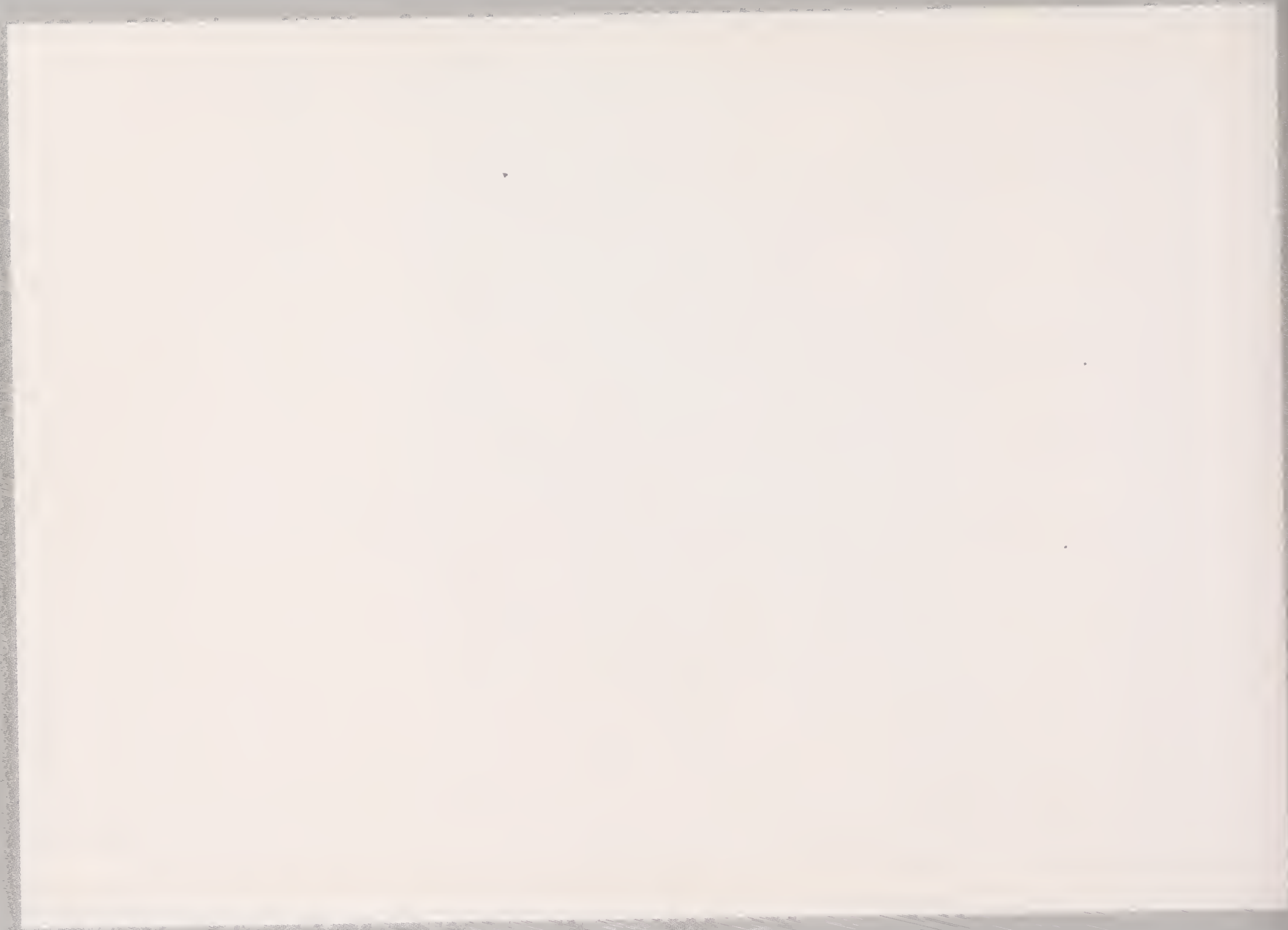
in Rus?

What folklore preceded poetry; speak a little of
~~about~~ Lom. and Derzh.; paraphrase T's
 letter to E.O.; what does T.I.'s doctor
 deplore ^{about} the temperature of his own hands
 when preparing to ^{his} patient?—such
 was the information ^{demanding} the Professor of Russian
 Literature (a forlorn looking man bored
 to extinction by his subject). As to the lady
 who taught French Literature all she needed
 were the names of modern French writers
 and their listing on Flora's palm caused
 a much denser tickle Especially memorable

Ex [1]

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 hands when preparing to [] his patient?—such was the
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 ject).* As to the lady who taught French Literature[,] all
 she needed were the names of modern French writers and
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 Especially memorable

*References are to Lomonosov and Derzhavin, Pushkin's Eugene Onegin and Tatanya, and Tol-
 stoy's Ivan Ilyich; [] is used to indicate an intentional blank space throughout. —Dmitri Nabokov

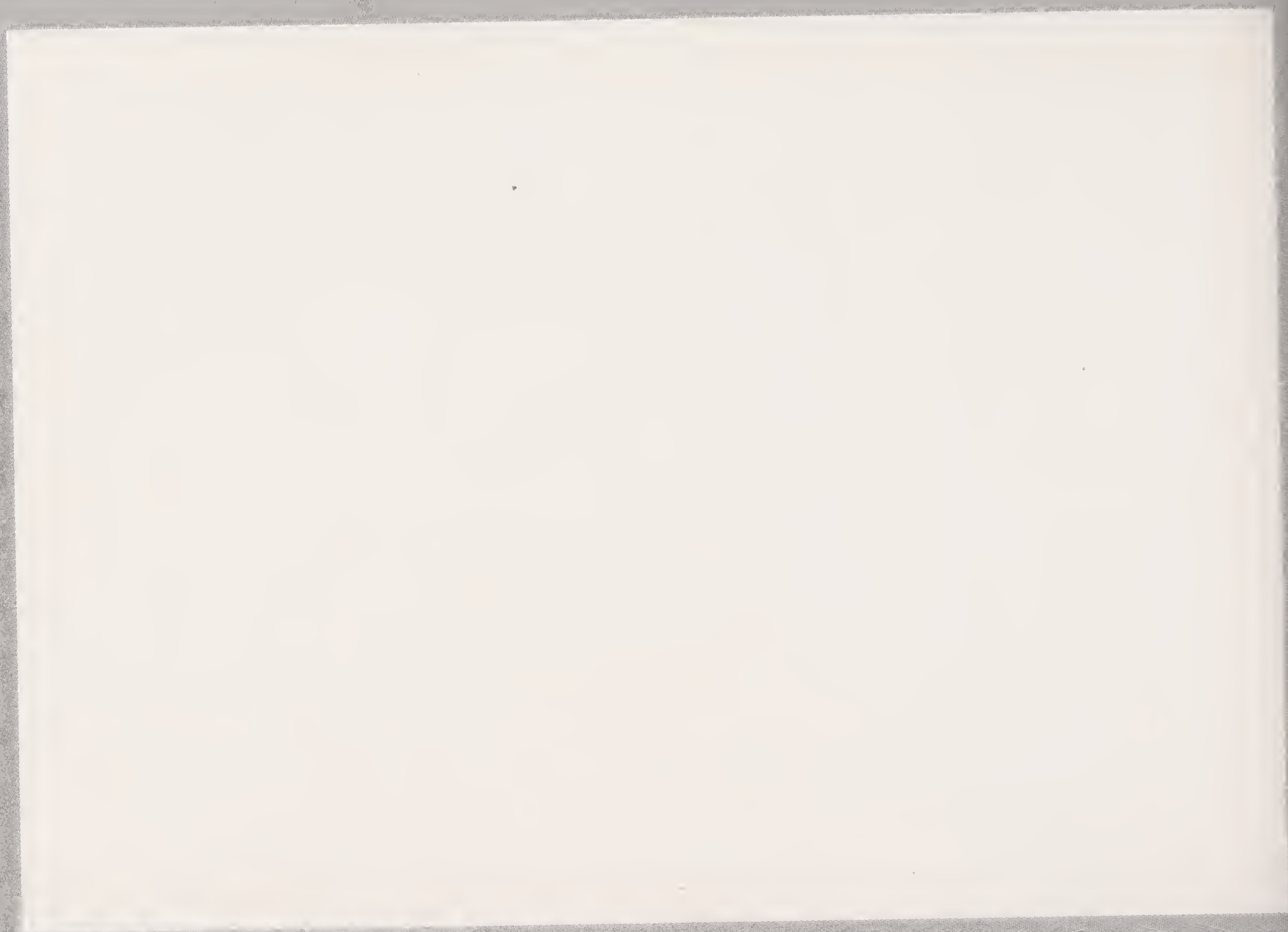


was the ^{little} cluster of interlocked names on the ball of Flora's thumb: Malraux, Mauriac, Maurois, Michaux, Michima, Montherland ^{and} Morand. What amazes one is not the alliteration (a joke on the part of a mannered alphabet); not the inclusion of a foreign performer (a joke on the part of that fun loving little Japanese girl who would twist her limbs into a pretzel when entertaining Flora's Lesbian friends); and not even the fact that virtually all those writers were stunning mediocrities

Ex [2]

Modern French writers

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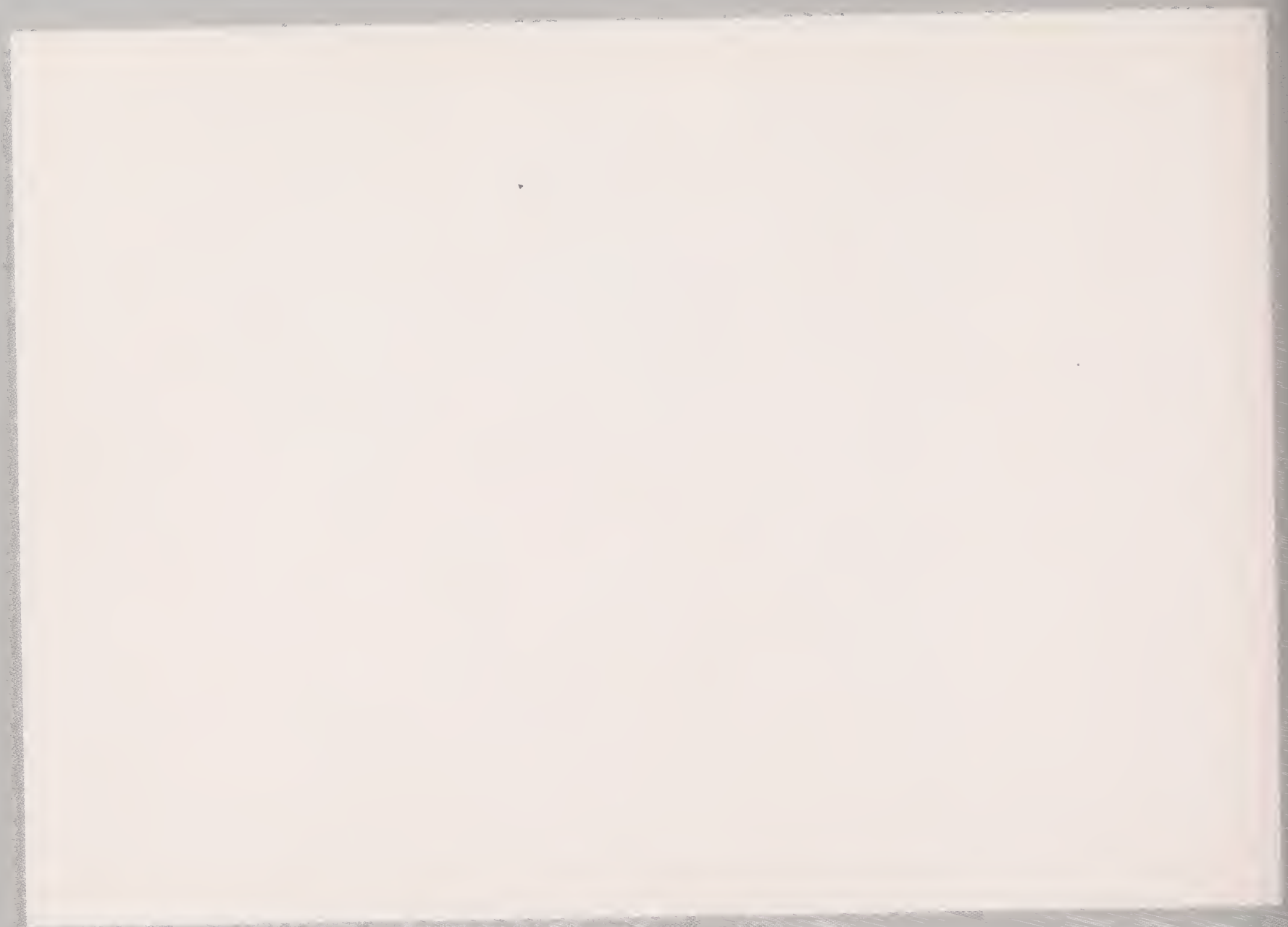
Ex



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Ex [3]

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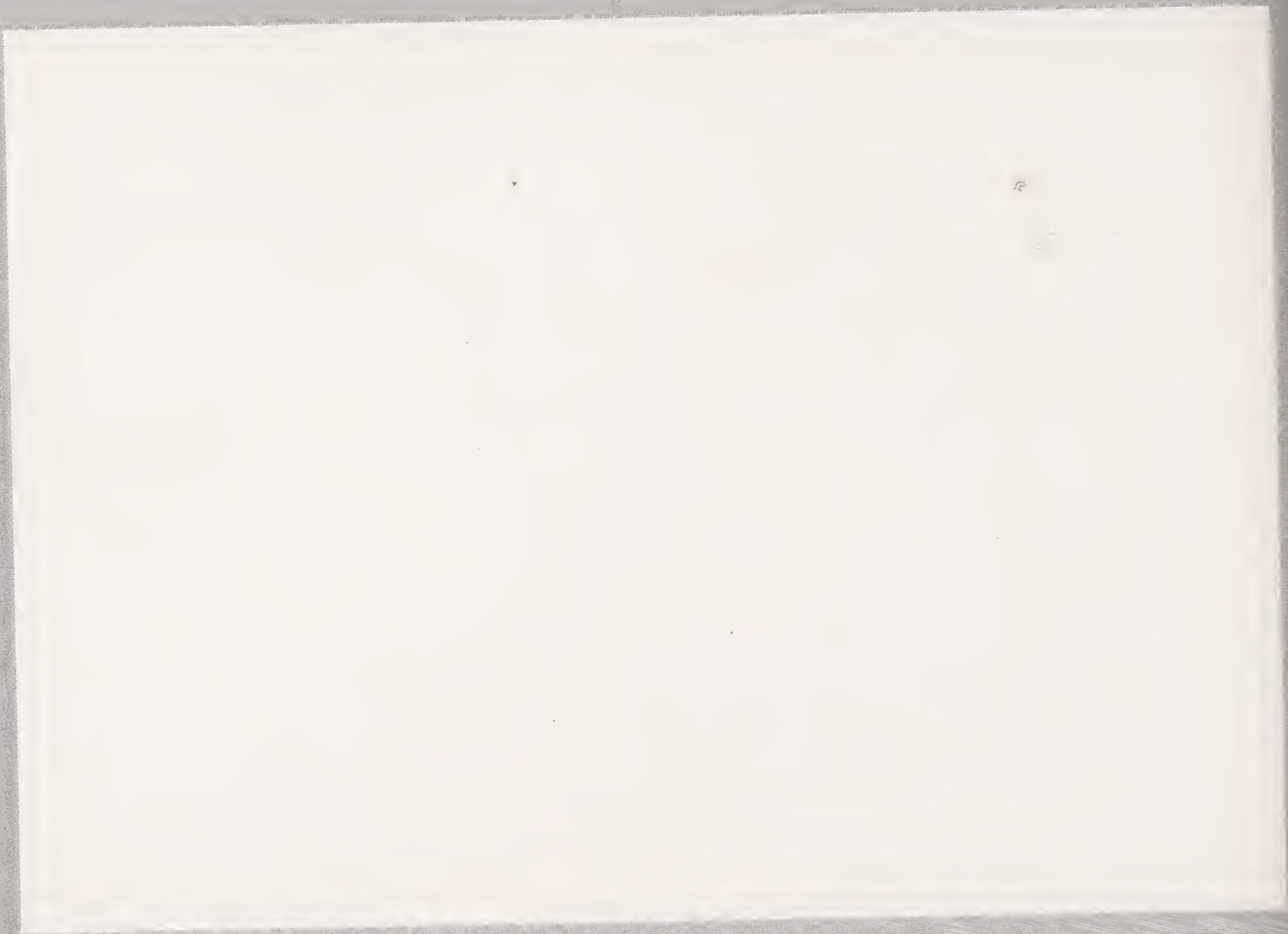
Chapter Four

A Mrs Lanskaya died on the day her daughter graduated from Sutton College. A new fountain had just been bequeathed to its campus by a former student, the widow of a shah. Generally speaking, one should carefully preserve in transliteration the feminine ending of a Russian surname (such as -aya, instead of the masculine -iy or -oy) when the woman in question is an artistic celebrity. So let it be "Landskaya" — land and sky and the melancholy echo

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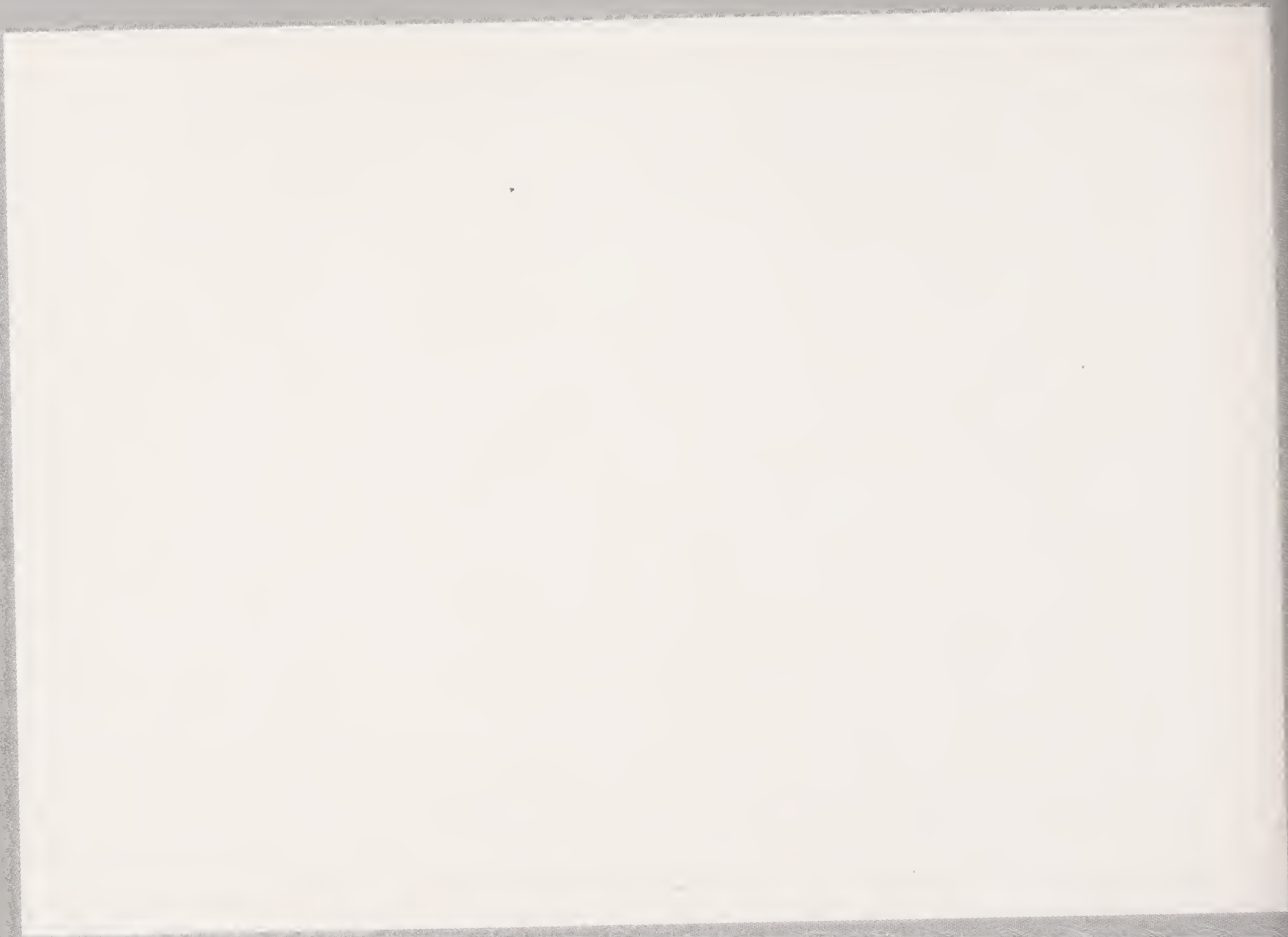


Four ②

of her dancing name. The fountain took quite a time to get correctly erected after an initial series of unevenly spaced spasms. The potentate had been potent till the absurd age of eighty. It was a very hot day with its blue somewhat veiled. A few photographs moved among the crowd as indifferent to it as specters doing their spectral job. And certainly for no earthly reason does this passage ~~resemble~~ ~~another~~ ~~novel~~ resemble in rhythm another novel,

Four 2

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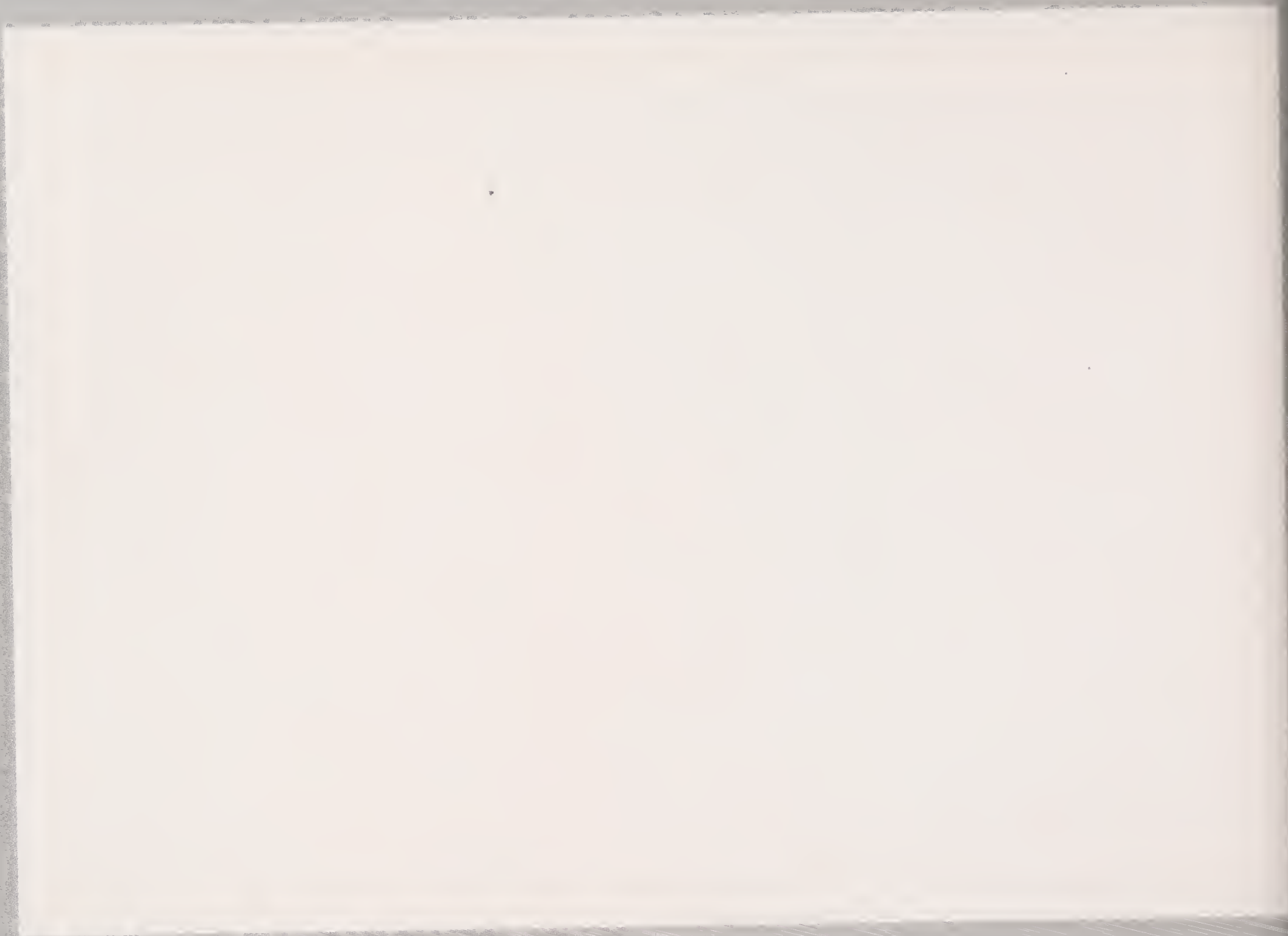
My Laura, where the mother appears as "Maya Umanskaya", a fabricated film actress.

Anyway, she suddenly collapsed on the lawn in the middle of the beautiful ceremony. A remarkable picture commemorated the event in "File". It showed Flora kneeling belatedly in the act of taking her mother's non-existent pulse, and it also showed a man of great corpulence and fame, still unacquainted with Flora: he stood just behind her, head bared and bowed, staring at the white of her

Four 3

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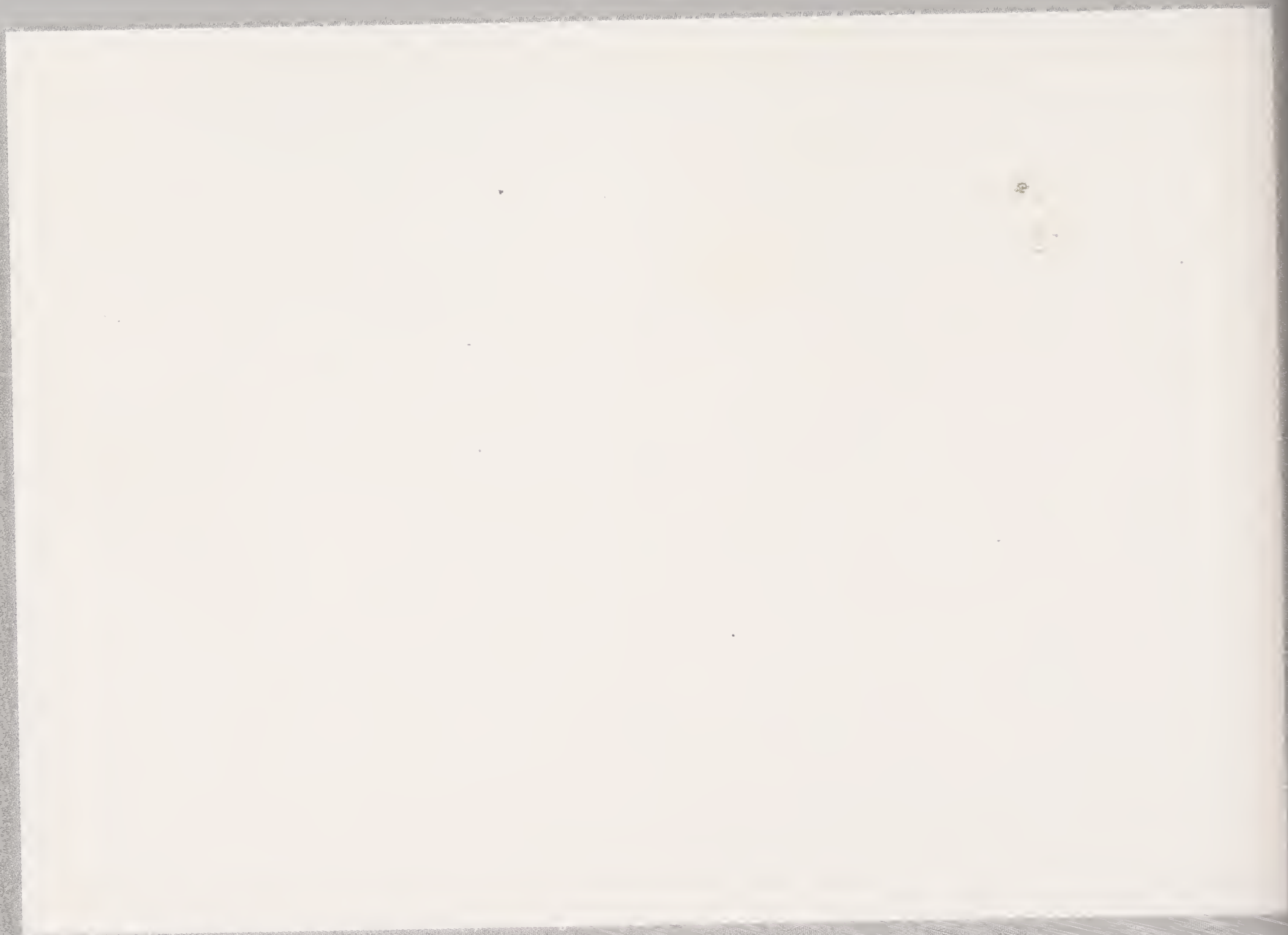


Four (4)

legs under her black gown and at the
fair hair under her academic cap.

Four 4

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academic cap.



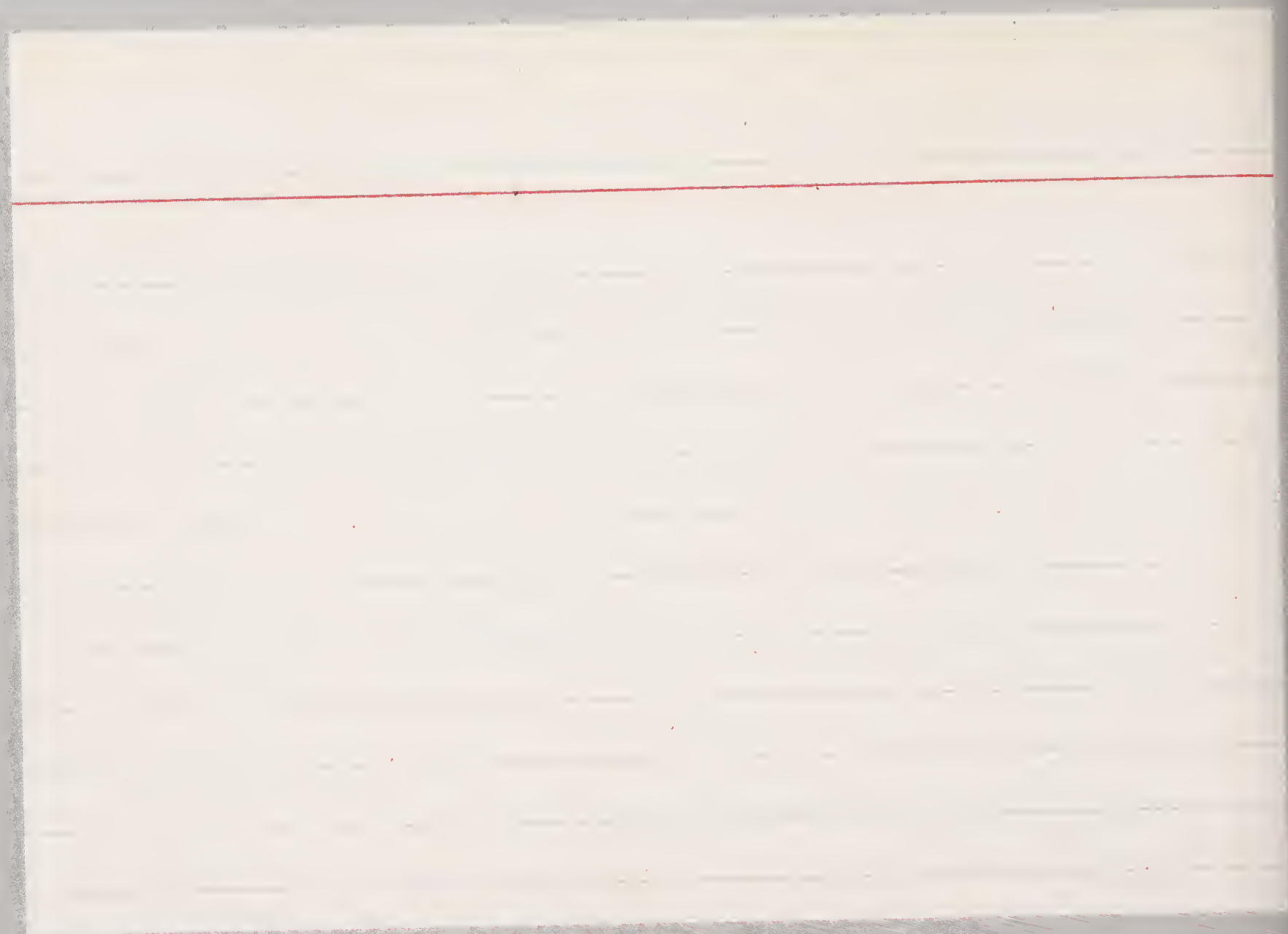
Chapter Five

¶ A brilliant neurologist, a renowned lecturer a gentleman of independent means, Dr Philip Wild had everything save an attractive exterior. However, one soon got over the shock of seeing that enormously fat creature mince toward the lectern on ridiculously small feet and of hearing the cock-a-doodle sound with which he cleared his throat before starting to enchant one with his wit. Laura disregarded the wit but was mesmerized by his fame and fortune.

Five 1

Chapter Five

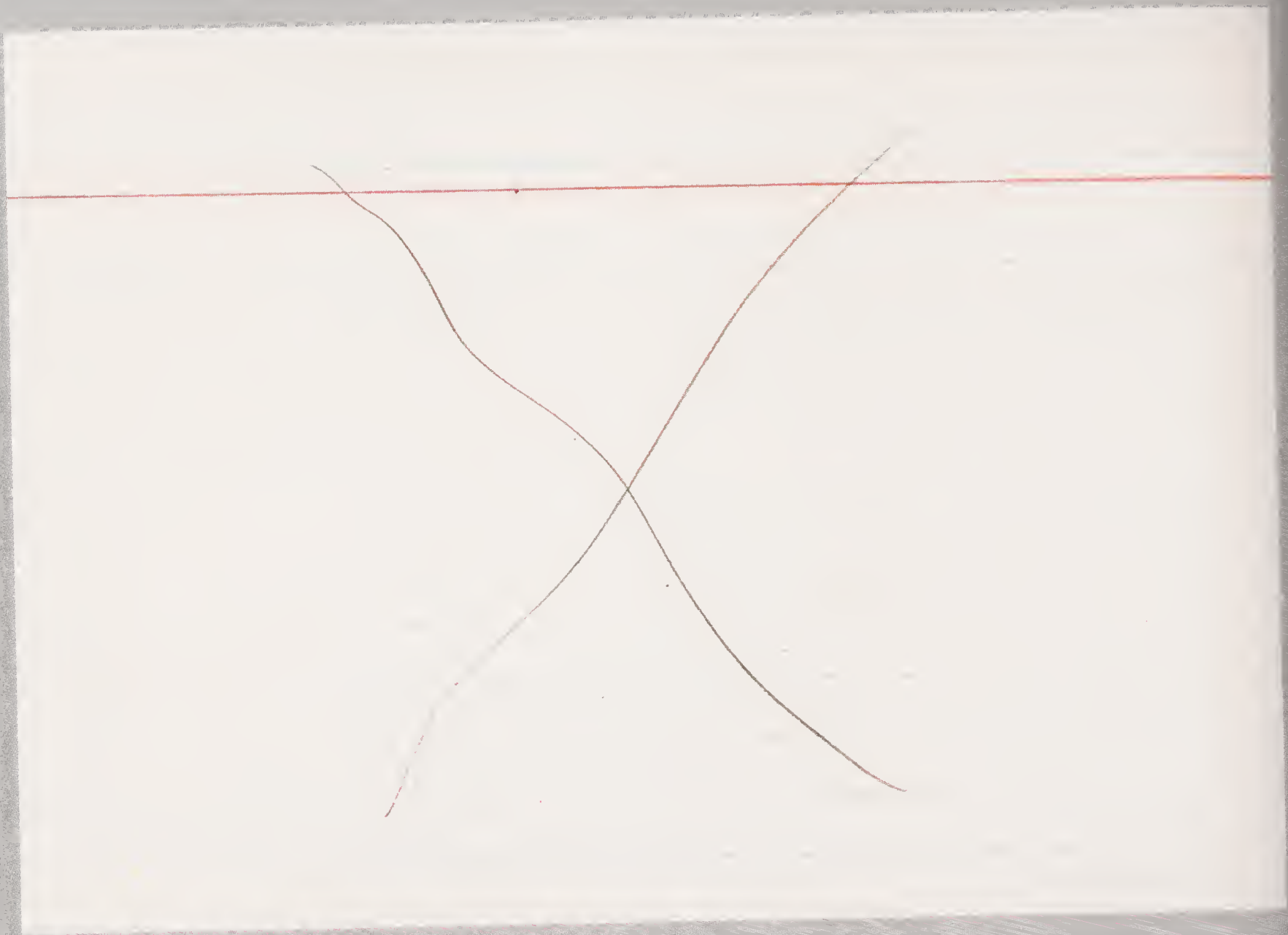
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9) Fans were back that summer - the summer she made up her mind that the eminent Philip Wild, PH, would marry her. She had just opened a boutique d'éventails with another Sutton coed and the Polish artist Rawitch, pronounced by some Raw Itch, by him Rah Witch. Black fans and violet ones, fans like orange sunbursts, painted fans with clubtailed Chinese butterflies oh they were a great hit, and one day Wild came and bought five (five spreading out her own fingers like pleats)

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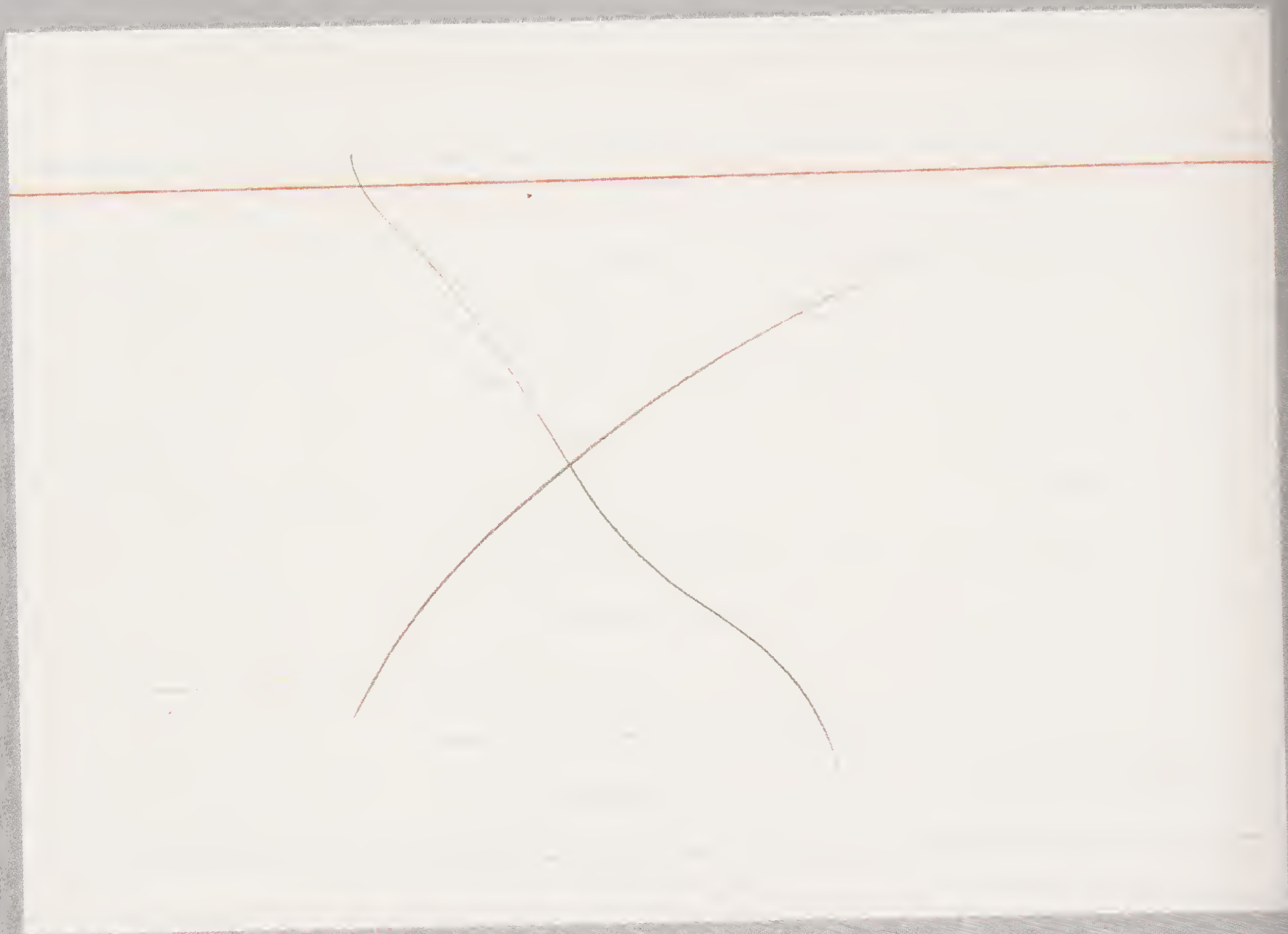
for "two aunts and three nieces" who did not really exist, but nevermind, it was an unusual extravagance on his part. His shyness surprised and amused FLaura.

¶ Less amusing surprises awaited her. To day after three years of marriage she had enough of his fortune and fame. He was a domestic miser. His New Jersey house was absurdly understaffed. The ranchito in Arizona had not been redecorated for years. The villa on the

Five 3

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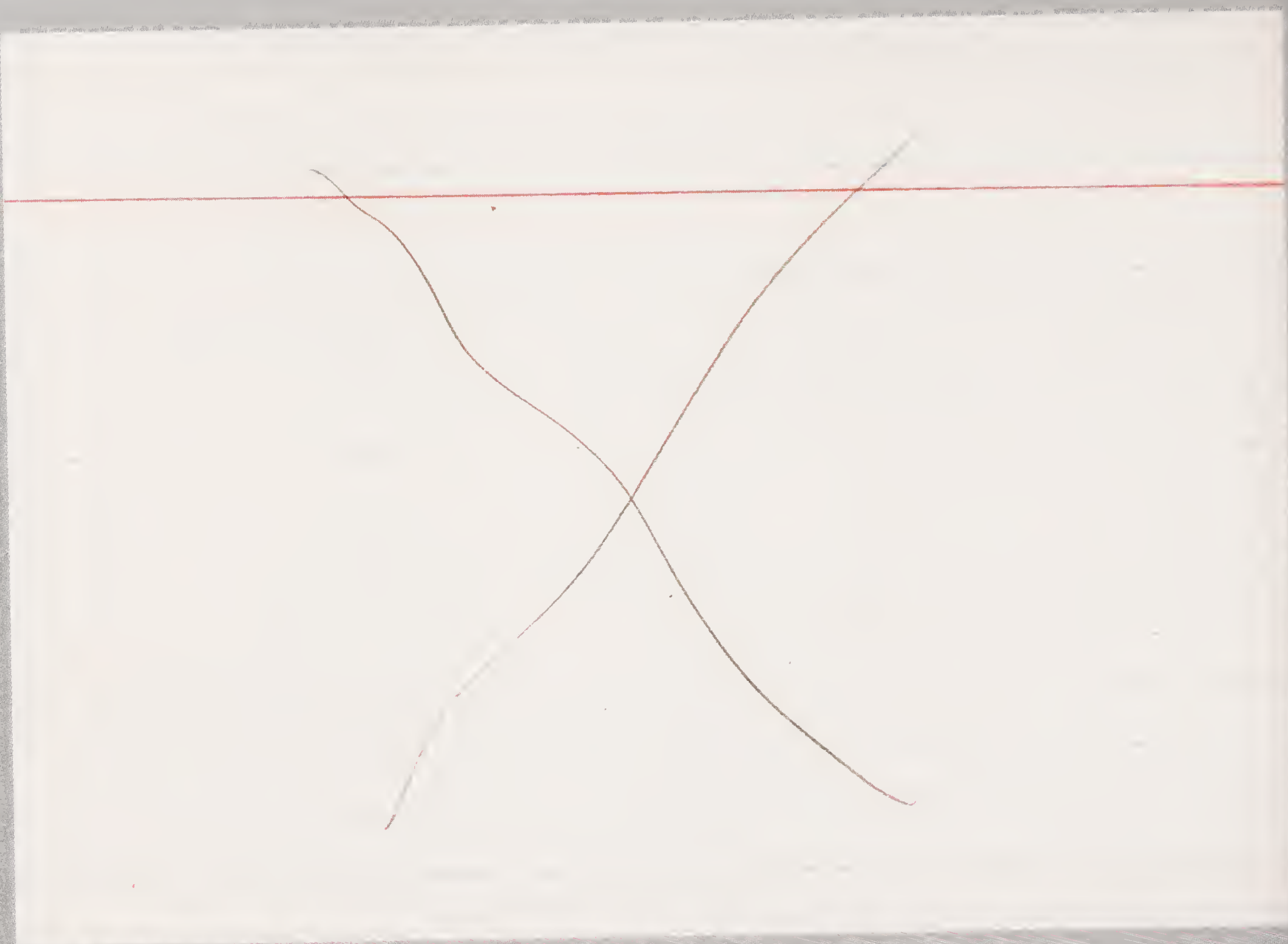
Five ④

Riviera had no swimming pool and only one bathroom. When she started to change all that, he would emit a kind of mild creak or squeak, and his brown eyes brimmed with sudden tears.

91

Five 4

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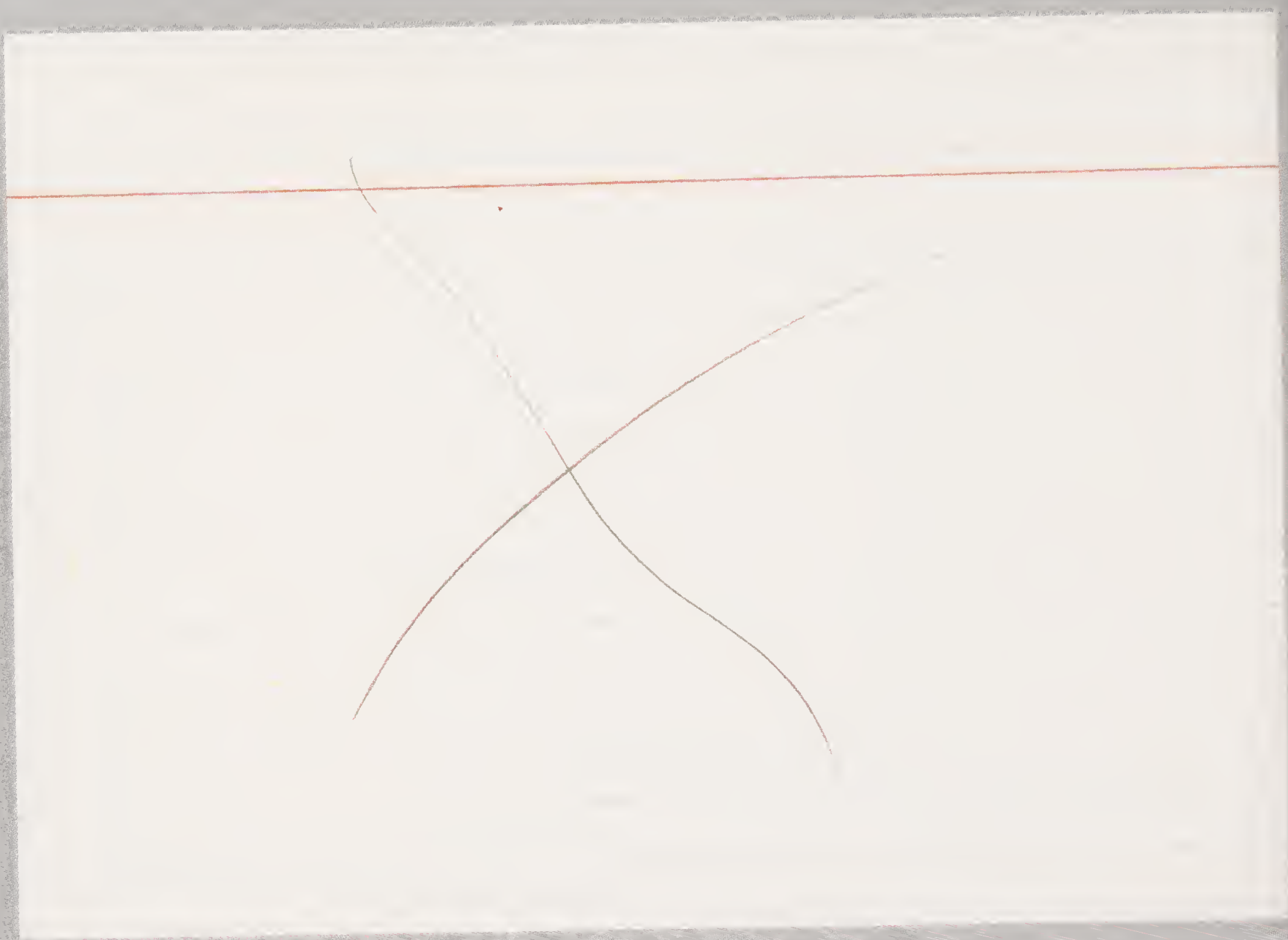
~~Chapter~~

Five (5)

She saw their travels in terms of
adverts and a long talcum-white beach with
the tropical breeze tossing the palms and her hair;
he saw it ⁱⁿ terms of forbidden foods,
frittered away time, and ghastly expenses.

Five 5

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talcum-white beach with the tropical breeze tossing the
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~~My Laura~~
Ivan Vaughan

Page 1

chapter five

^{My ~~novel~~}
The novel Laura was begun very soon after the end of the love affair it depicts, was completed in one year, and published three months later. and promptly ~~torn apart~~ by a book reviewer in a leading newspaper. It grimly survived and to the accompaniment of muffled grunts on the part of the librarious fates, its invisible hoisters, it wriggled up to the top of the bestsellers' list then started to slip, but stopped at a midway step in the vertical ice: A dozen

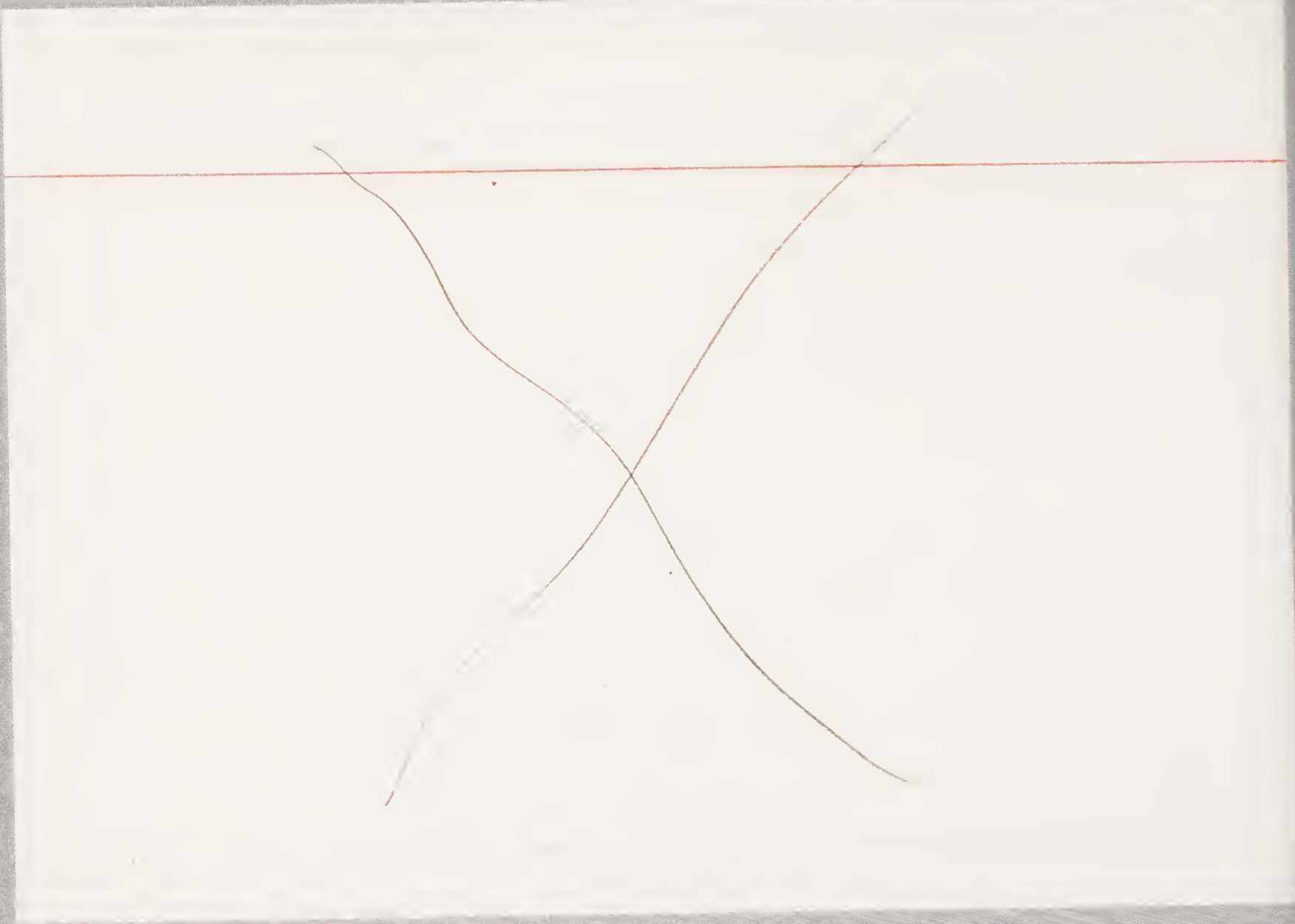
Five 1

Chapter [Five]*

Ivan Vaughan

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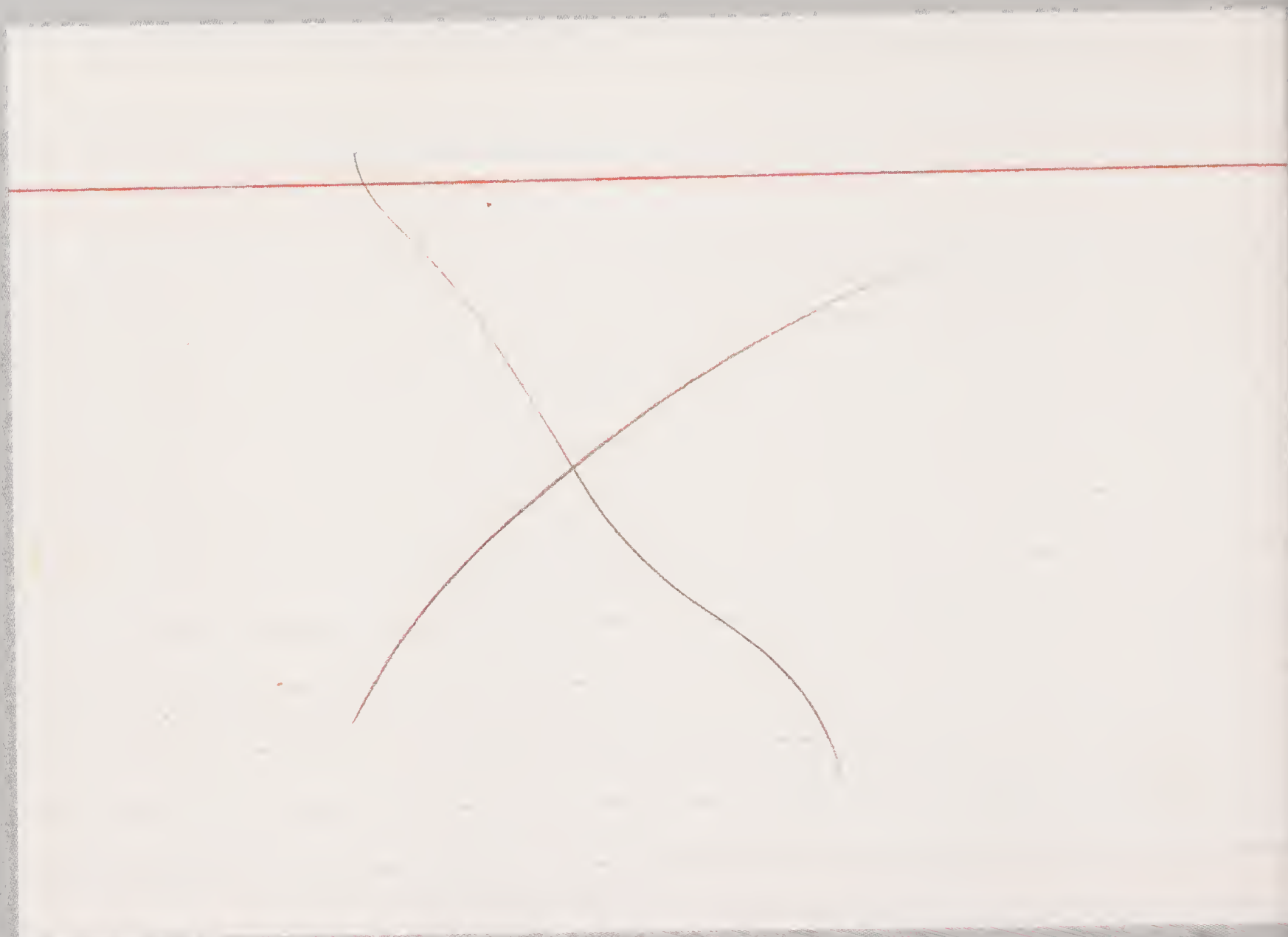
* This chapter was originally numbered as chapter five, but the author seems to have intended to change its number.



Sundays passed and one had the impression that Laura had somehow got stuck on the seventh step (the last respectable one) or that, perhaps, some anonymous agent working for the author was buying up every week just enough copies to keep Laura there; but a day came when the climber above lost his foothold and toppled down dislodging number seven and eight and nine in a general collapse beyond any hope of recovery.

Five 2

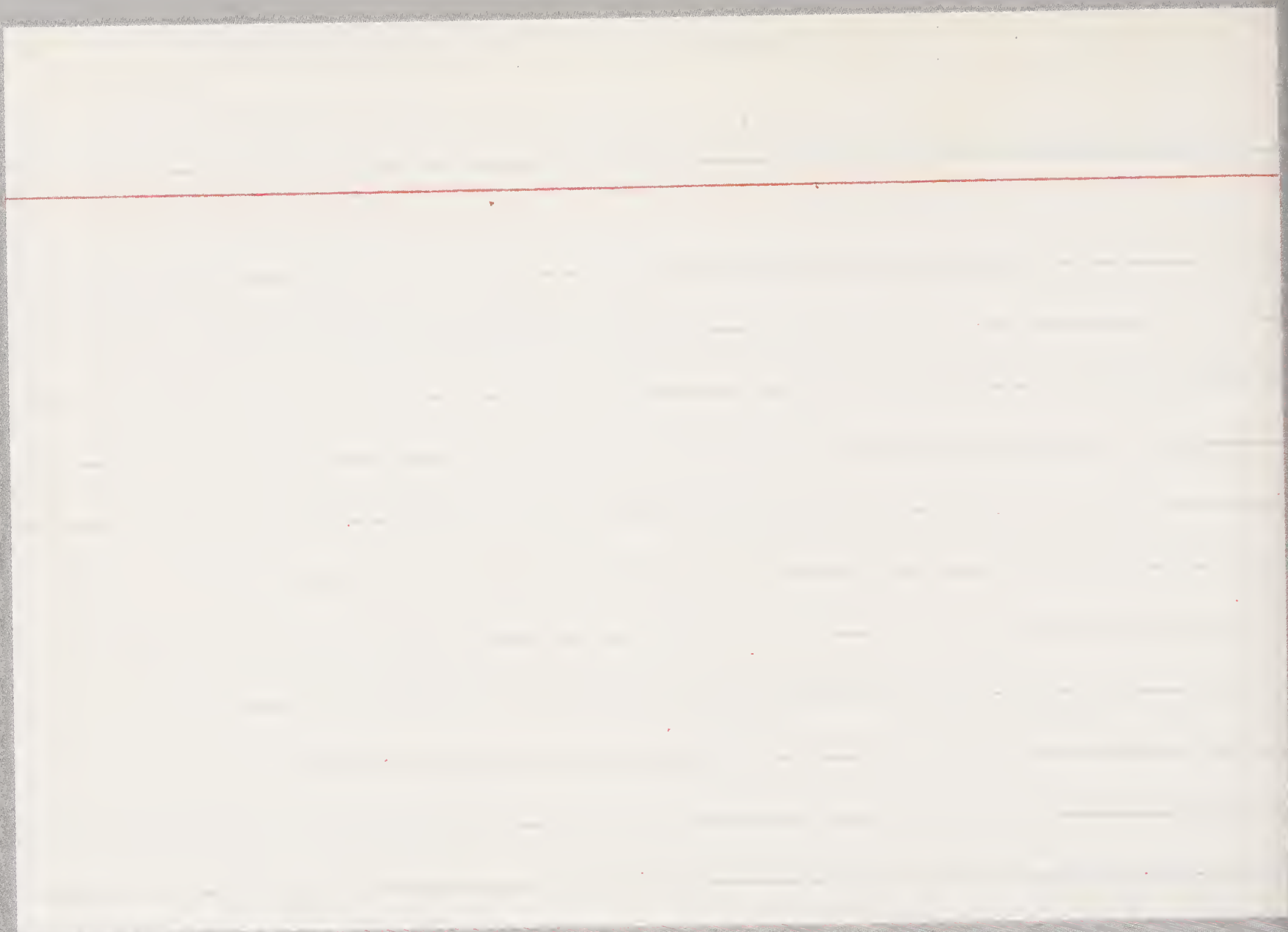
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¶ The "I" of the book is ~~neurotic and hesitant~~
 a neurotic and hesitant man of letters,
 who destroys his mistress in the act of
 portraying her. Statically - if one can
 put it that way - the portrait is a faithful
 one. Such fixed details as her trick of
 opening her mouth when toweling her inguen
 or of closing her eyes when smelling ^{an inodorous} rose
 are absolutely true to the original.

Five 3

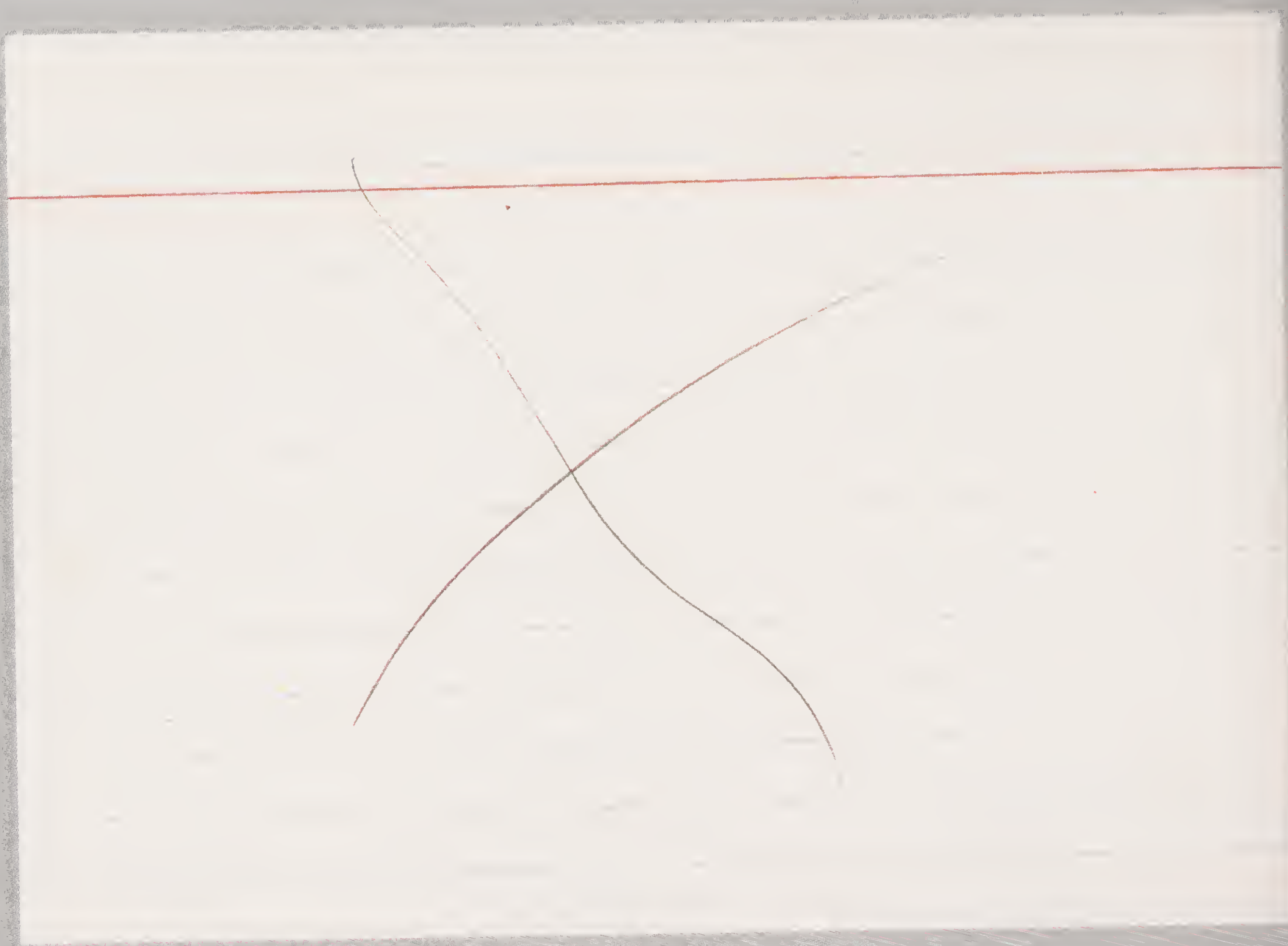
The "I" of the book is a neurotic and hesitant man of letters, who destroys his mistress in the act of portraying her. Statically—if one can put it that way—the portrait is a faithful one. Such fixed details as her trick of opening her mouth when toweling her inguen or of closing her eyes when smelling an inodorous rose are absolutely true to the original.



Similarly

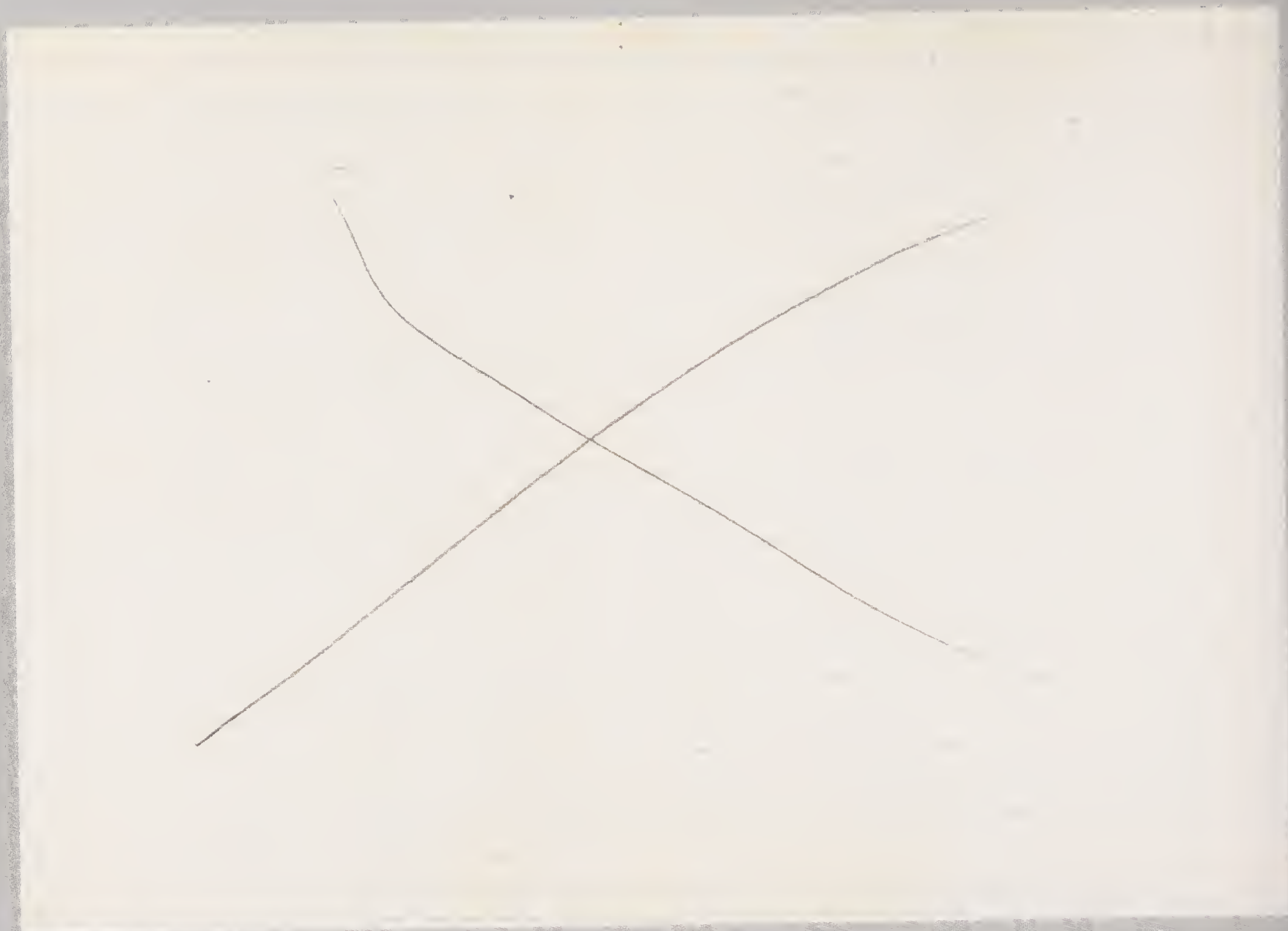
spare prose of the author
with its pruning of rich
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Similarly [the] spare prose of the author with its pruning of
rich adjectives




Philip Wild read "Laura" where
he is sympathetically depicted as a conventional
"great scientist." and though not a single
physical trait is mentioned, comes out
with astounding classical clarity.
under the name of ~~Philip~~ Philidor Sauvage
1891

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depicted as a co[n]ventional "great s[c]ientist" and though
not a single physical trait is mentioned, comes out with
astounding classical clarity, under the name of Philidor
Sauvage



Times Dec. 18 75

find substitute
term for enkephalin

"An ^[c?]enkephalin present in the brain
has now been produced synthetically." "It is
like morphine and other opiate drugs"
Further research will show how and why
"morphine has for centuries produced relief
from pain and feelings of euphoria"
[invent tradename, e.g. cephalopium] 
[I taught thought to mimick an
^{imperial} ~~imperial~~ awesome messenger
~~carrying~~ neurotransmitter carrying
my order of self destruction
to my ~~own~~ brain. Suicide made
a pleasure,

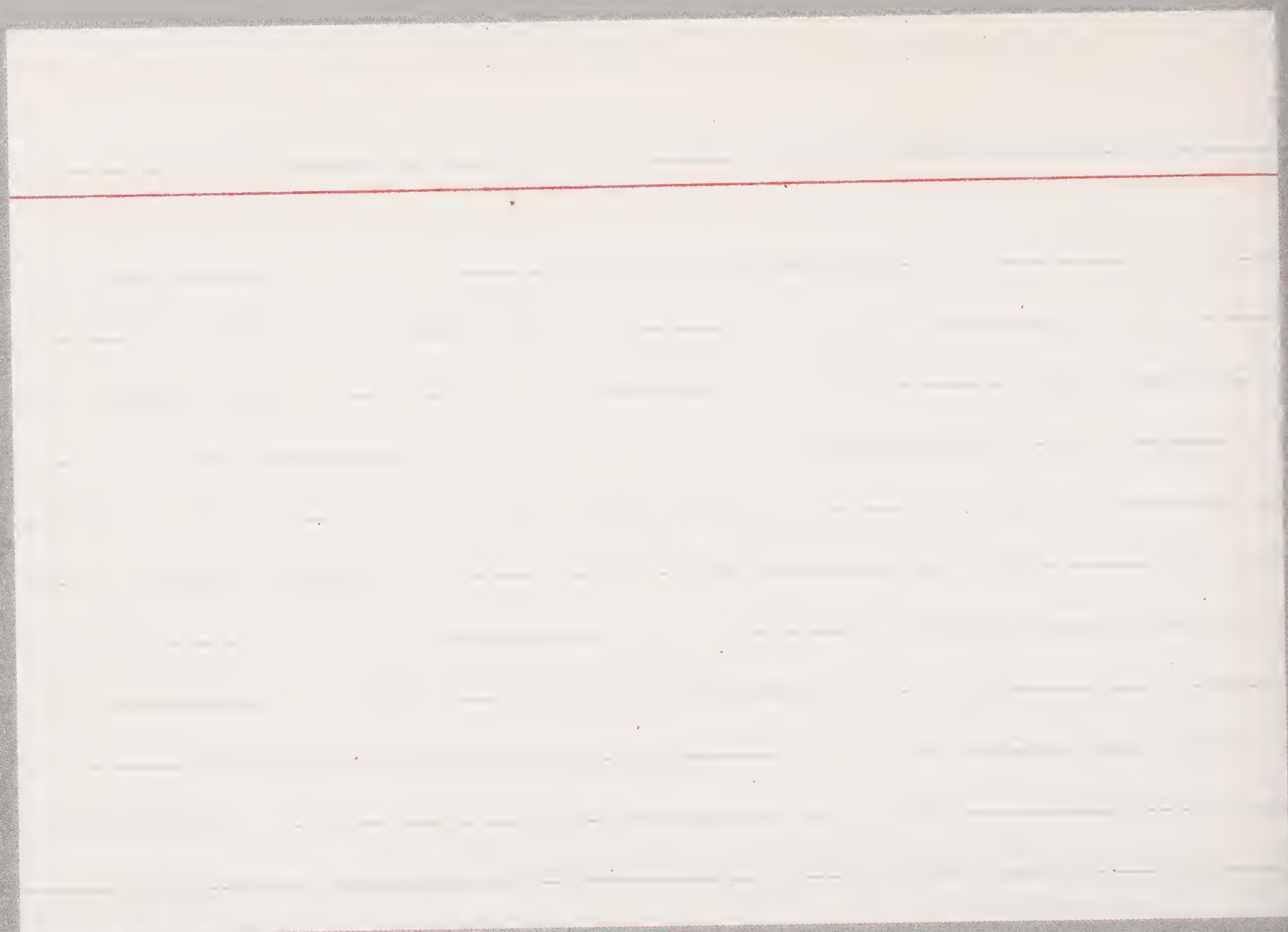
[Chapter Six]

Times Dec. 18 75

"An enk(c?)ephalin present in the brain has now been produced synthetically" "It is like morphine and other opiate drugs" Further research will show how and why "morphine has for centuries produced relief from pain and feelings of euphoria".

(invent tradename, e.g. cephalopium[;] find substitute term for enkephalin)

I taught thought to mimick an imperial neurotransmitter an aw[e]some messenger carrying my order of self destruction to my own brain. Suicide made a pleasure,



Do -

8

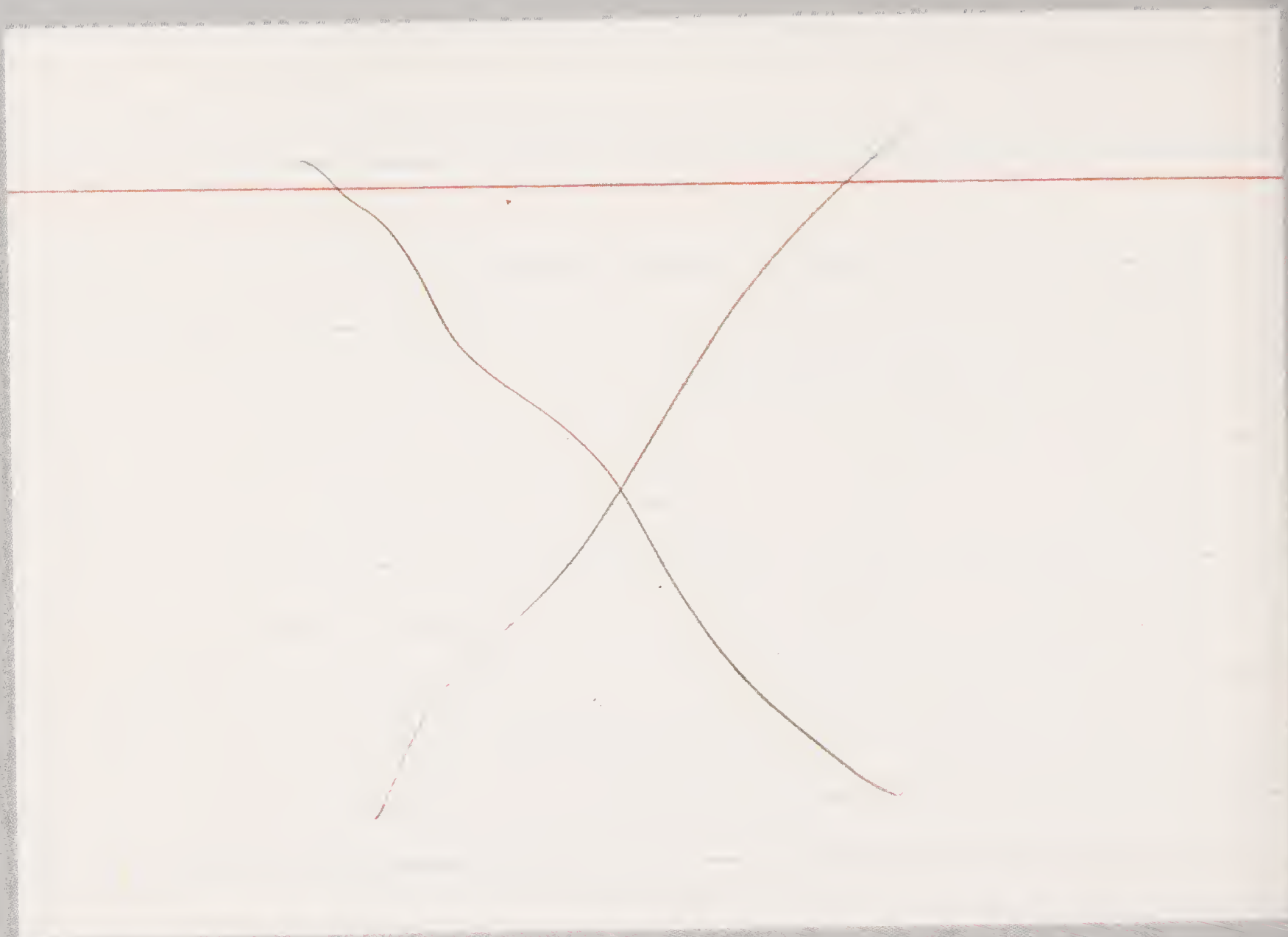
its tempting emptiness

~~Do -~~
~~Do -~~

Do

D

its tempting emptiness



The student who desires to die should learn first of all to project a mental image of himself upon his inner blackboard. This surface which at its virgin best has a dark-plum, rather than black, depth of opacity is none other than the underside of one's closed eyelids.

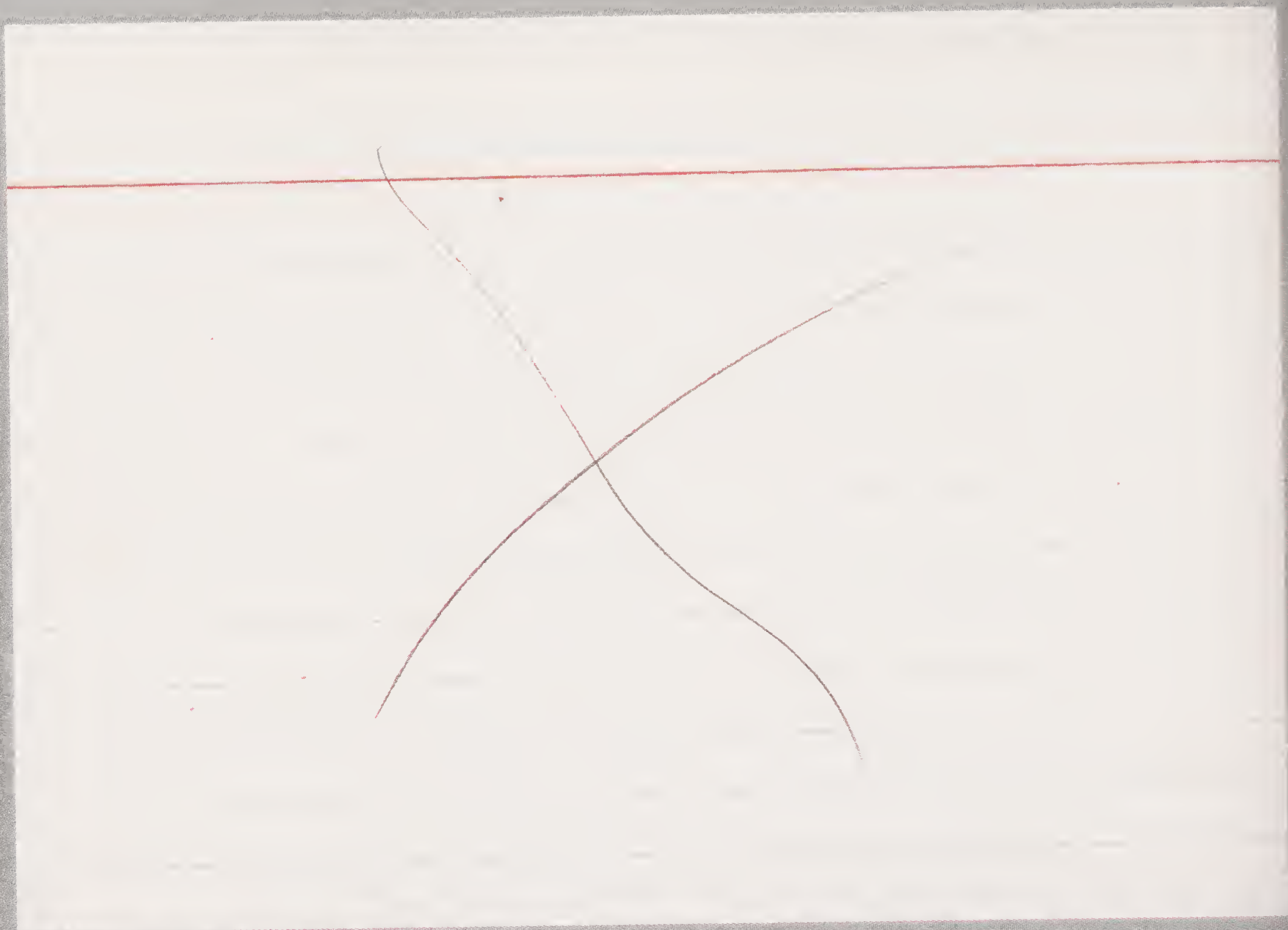
¶ To ensure a complete smoothness of background, care must be taken to eliminate the hypnagogic gargoyles and entoptic swarms which plague tired

D 1

Settling for a single line

The student who desires to die should learn first of all to project a mental image of himself upon his inner blackboard. This surface which at its virgin best has a dark-plum, rather than black, depth of opacity is none other than the underside of one's closed eyelids.

To ensure a complete smoothness of background, care must be taken to eliminate the hypnagogic gargoyles and entoptic swarms which plague tired



(ch.)

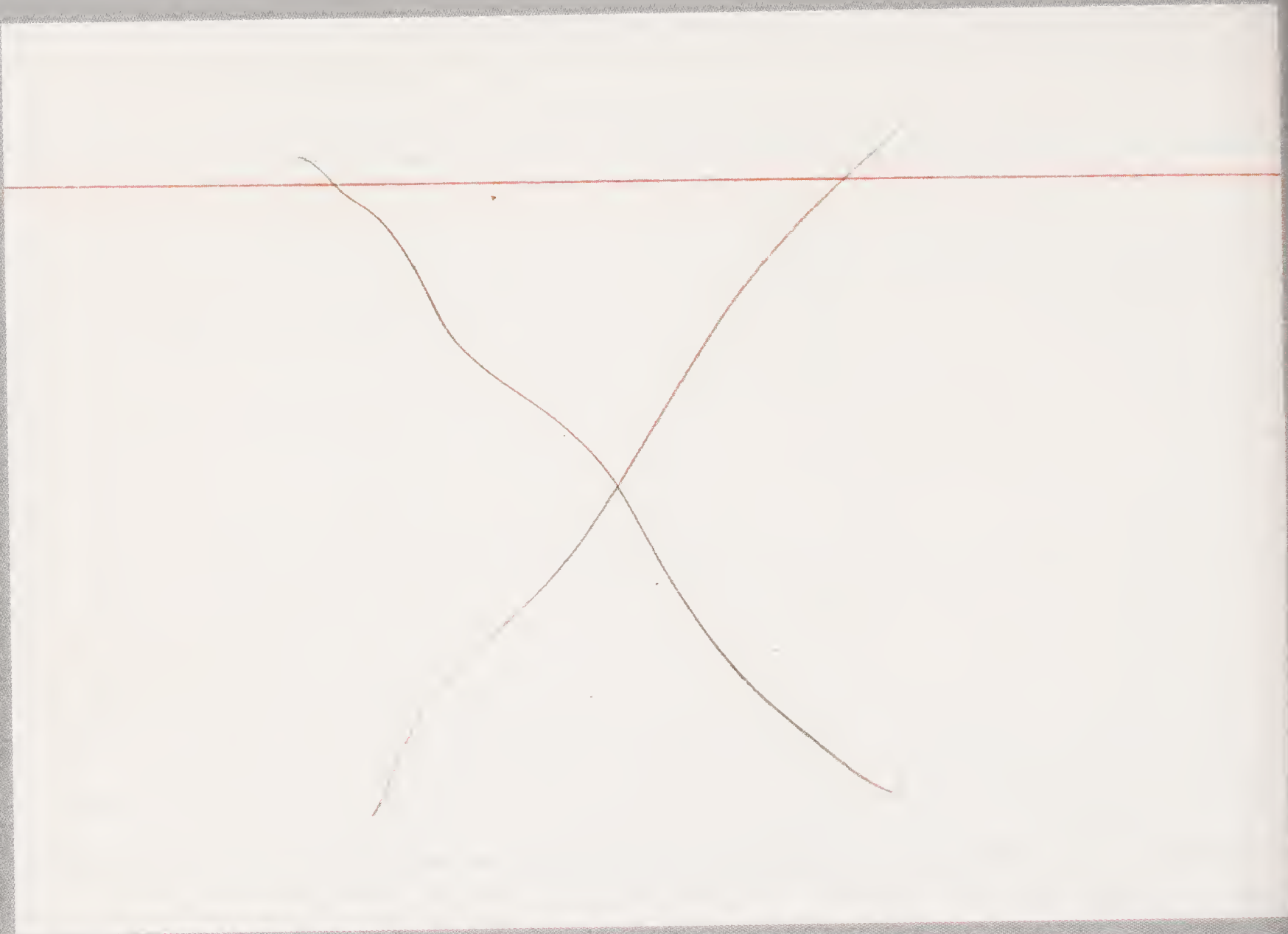
vision after ~~seeing~~ a surfeit of
 poring over a collection of coins
 or insects. Sound sleep and an eye bath
 should be enough to cleanse the locus.

Now comes the mental image. In
 preparing for my own experiments - a
 long fumble which these notes shall
~~be~~ help novices to avoid - I toyed
 with the idea of drawing a fairly detailed,
 fairly recognizable portrait of myself ^{on}
 on my private blackboard. I see myself

D 2

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 insects. Sound sleep and an eye bath should be enough to
 cleanse the locus.

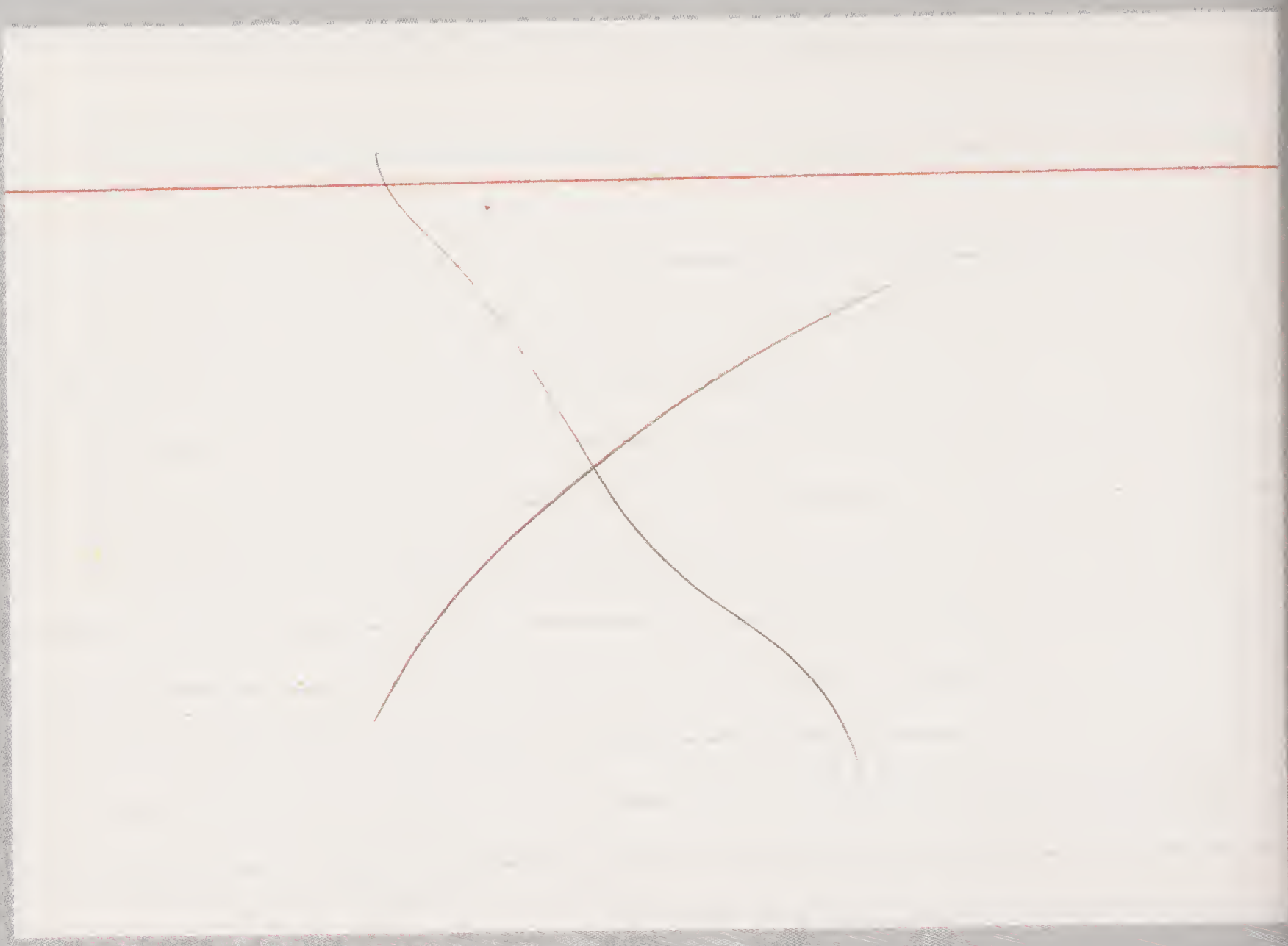
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 detailed, fairly recognizable portrait of myself on my pri-
 vate blackboard. I see myself



in my closet glass as an obese ^{bulk} ~~bulk~~ with formless features and a sad porcine stare; but my visual imagination is nil, I am quite unable to tuck Nigel Delling under my eyelid, let alone keeping him there in ~~fixed~~ a fixed aspect of flesh for any length of time. I then tried various stylizations: a Delling-like doll, a sketchy skeleton. Or would the letters of my name do? Its recurrent "i"

D3

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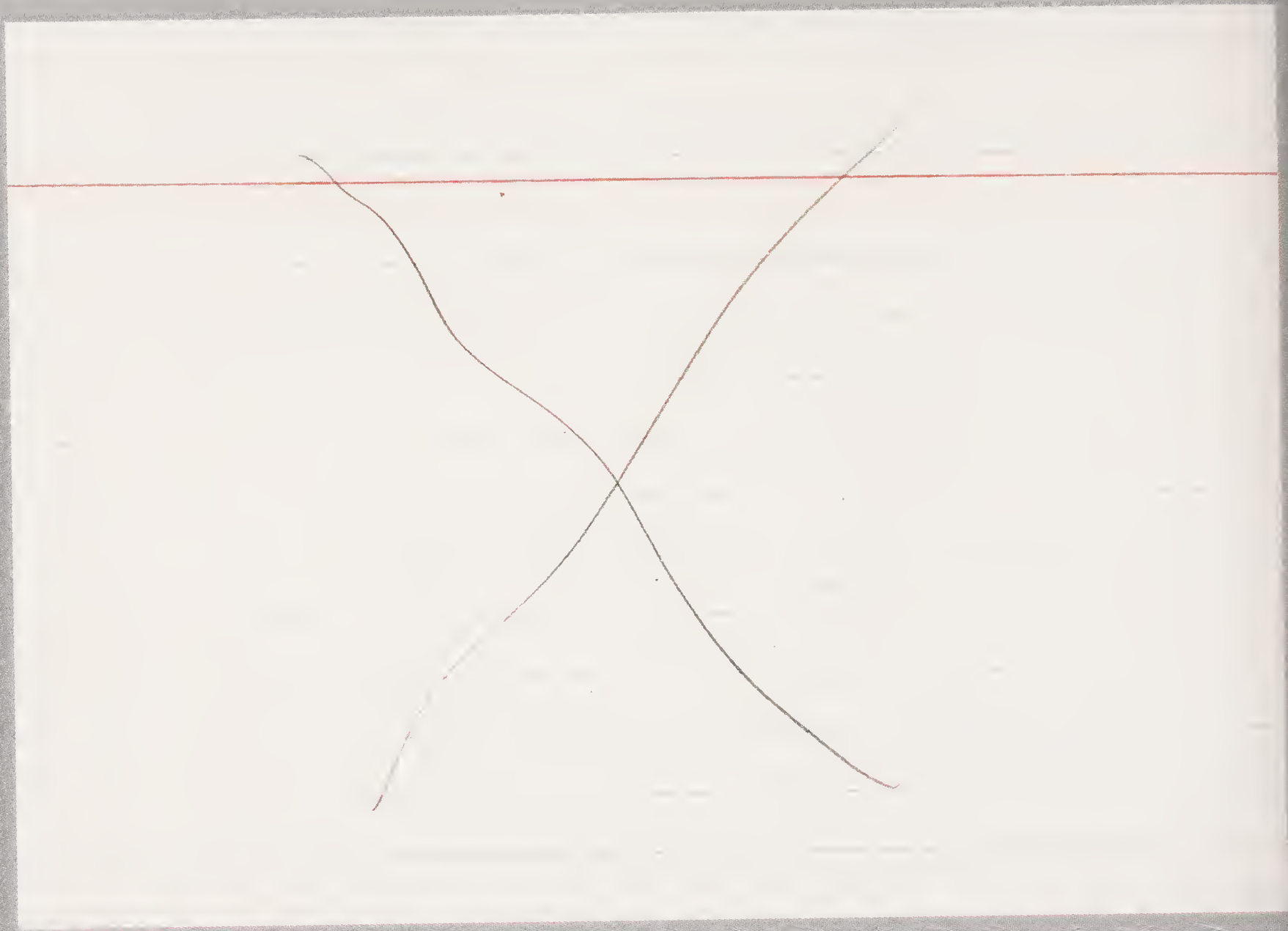
D 4

coinciding with our favorite pronoun)

(suggested an elegant solution: a simple vertical line across my field of inner vision ~~could~~ could be chalked in an instant, and what is more I could mark lightly by transverse ^{marks} ~~the~~ the three divisions of my physical self: legs, torso, and head
9

D 4

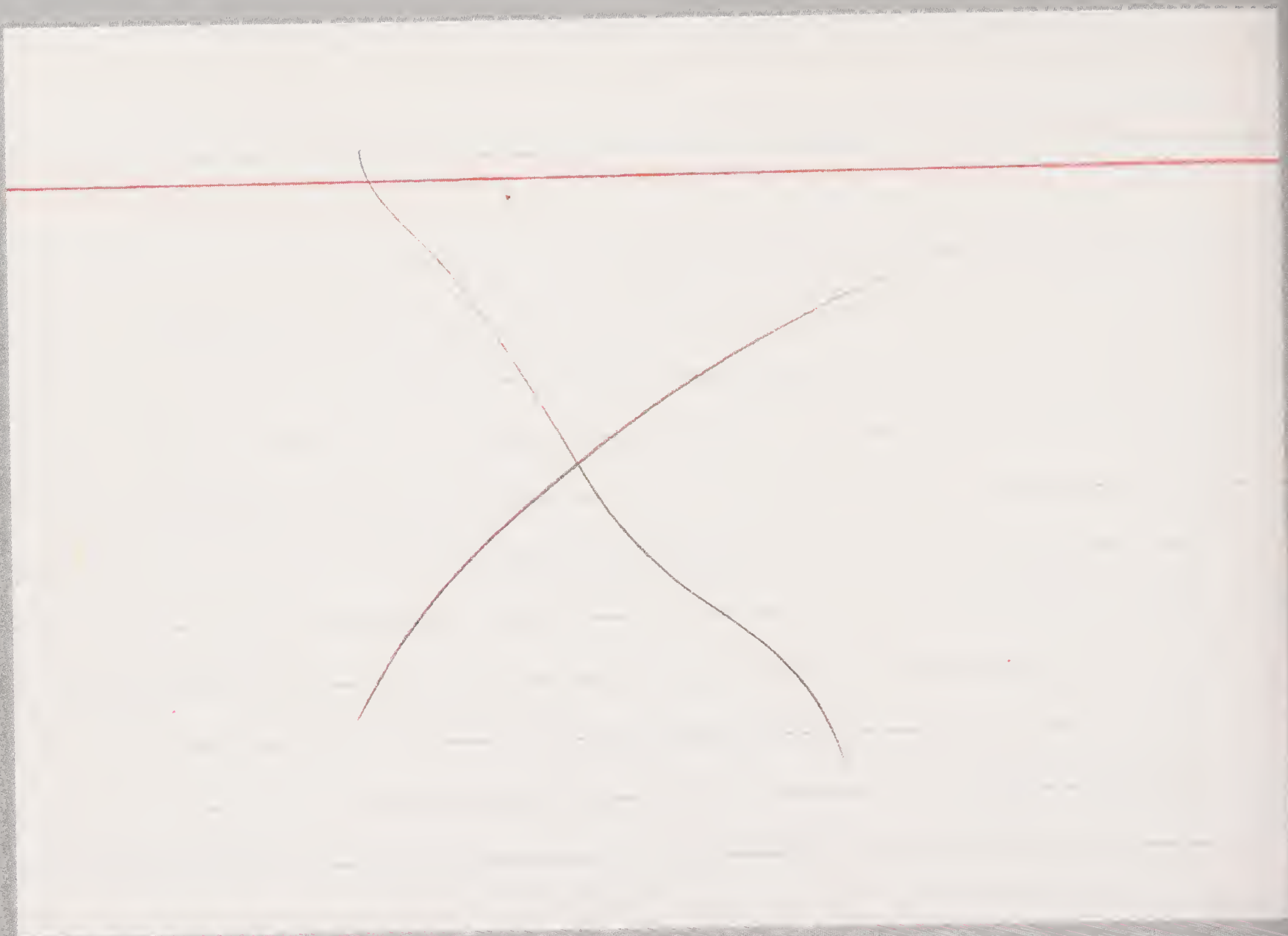
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¶ Several months have ^{now gone} ~~passed~~ since I began
 working — not every day and not for protracted
 periods — on the ^{line} upright, emblemizing me.
 Soon, with the strong thumb of thought I could
 rub out its base, which corresponded to
 my joined feet. Being new to the process
 of self-deletion, I attributed the ecstatic
 relief of getting rid of my toes (as represented
 by the white pedicule I was erasing with
 more than masturbatory joy) to the fact
 that, ever since ~~ever since I began~~
I suffered torture

D 5

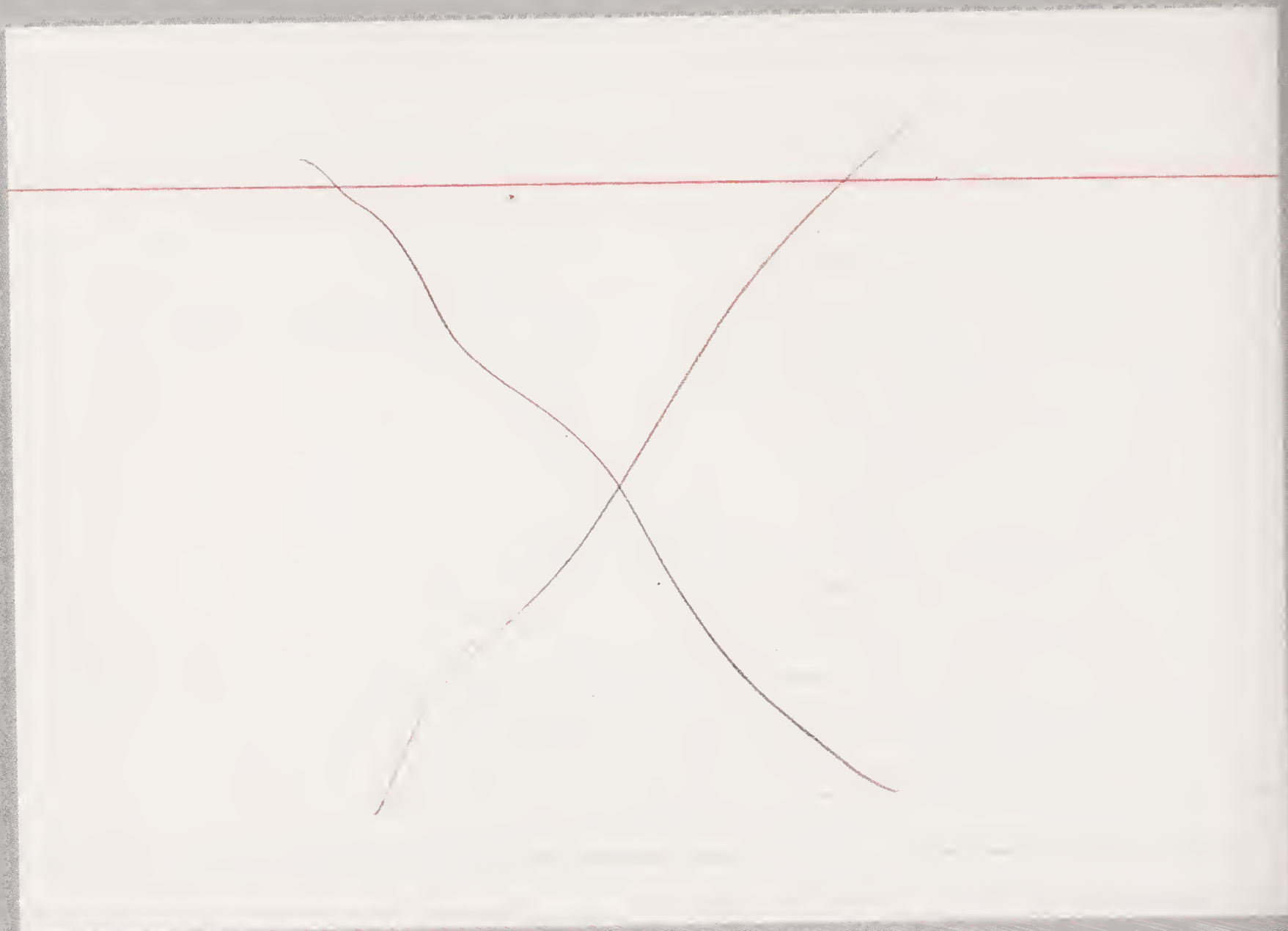
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the sandals of childhood were replaced by smart shoes, whose very polish reflected pain and poison. So what a delight it was to amputate my tiny feet! Yes, tiny, yet I always wanted them, rolly polly dandy that I am, to seem even smaller. The daytime ^(ch)footware always hurt, always hurt. ~~when~~ I waddled home from work and replaced the agony of my dapper oxfords by the comfort of old bed slippers. This act of mercy inevitably drew from me a voluptuous

D 6

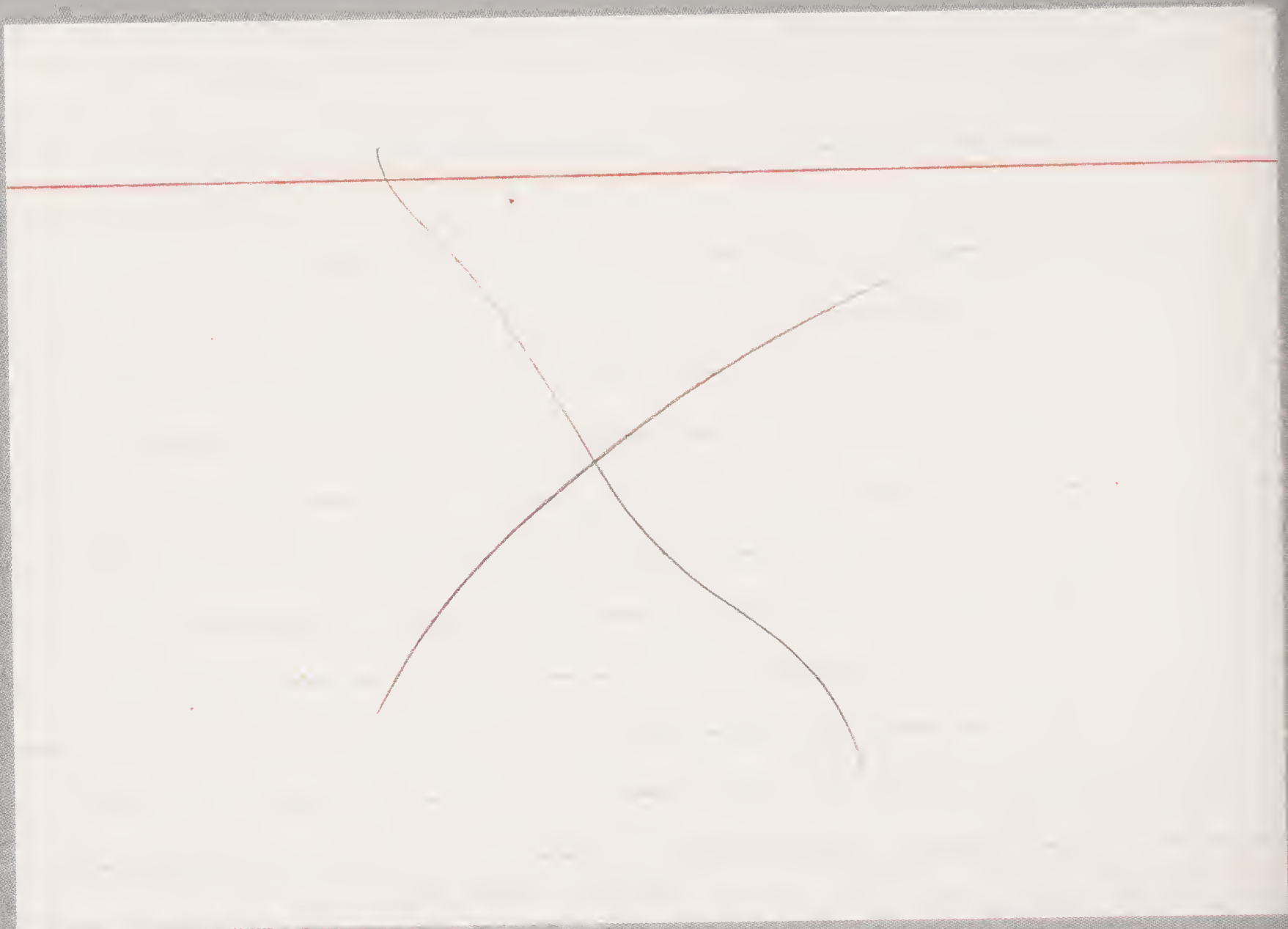
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sigh which my wife, whenever I imprudently
 let her hear it, denounced as vulgar,
 disgusting, obscene. Because she was a
 cruel lady or because she thought I
 might be clowning on purpose to irritate her,
 she once hid my slippers, hid them
 furthermore in separate spot as one does
 with delicate siblings in ~~orphanages~~ orphanages,
 especially on chilly nights, but I forthwith
 went out and bought twenty pairs of soft, soft
 Carpetoes while hiding my tear-staining face
 under a Father Christmas mask, which frightened the shopgirls.

D 7

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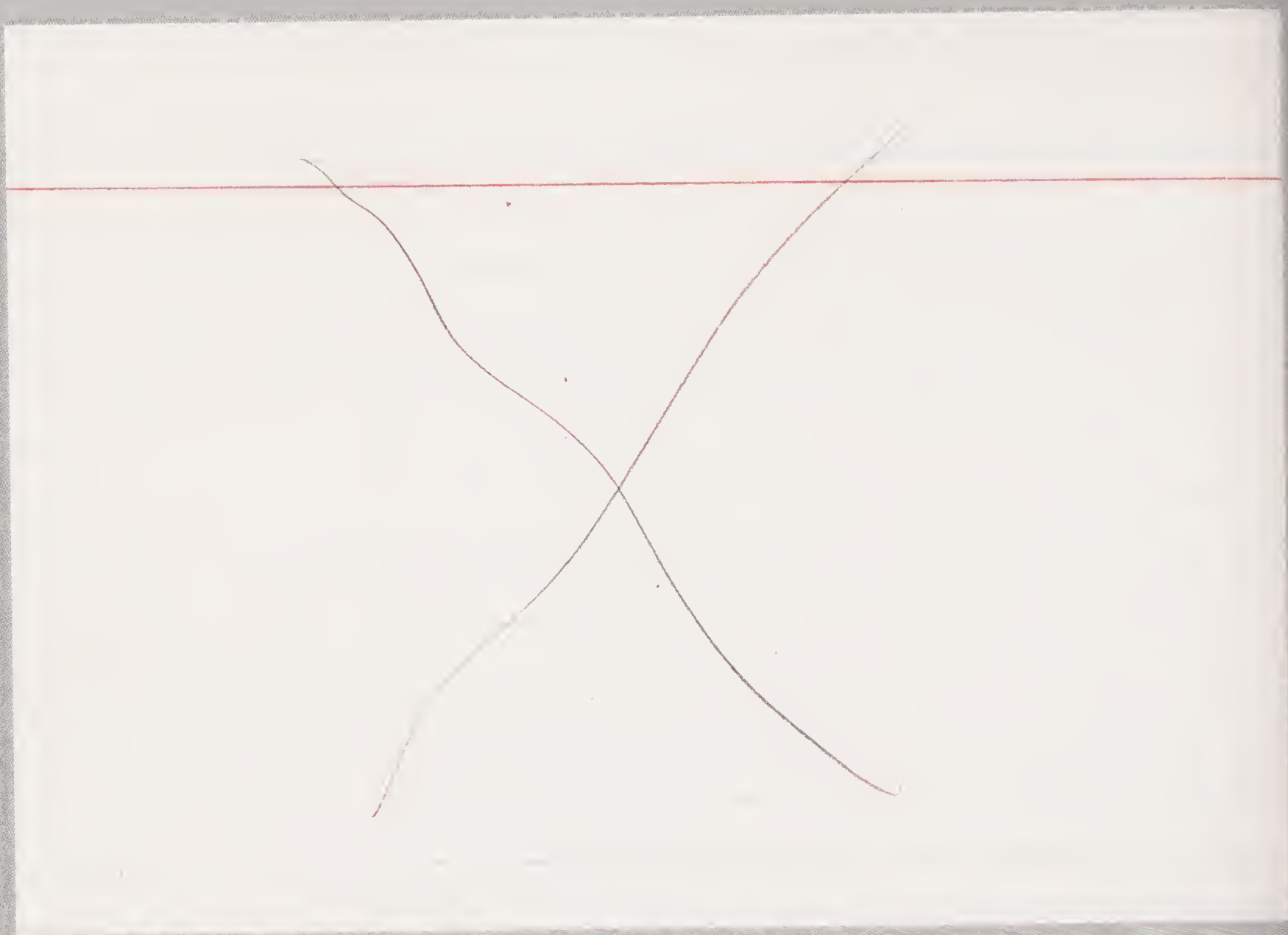


¶ For a moment I wondered with some apprehension if the deletion of my procreative system might produce nothing much more than a magnified orgasm. I was relieved to discover that the process continued ~~the~~ sweet death's ineffable sensation which had nothing in common with ejaculations or sneezes. The three or four times that I reached that stage I forced myself to restore the lower half of my white "I" on my mental blackboard and thus wriggle out of my perilous trance. ¶

D 8

The orange awnings of southern summers.

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I, Philip Wilder

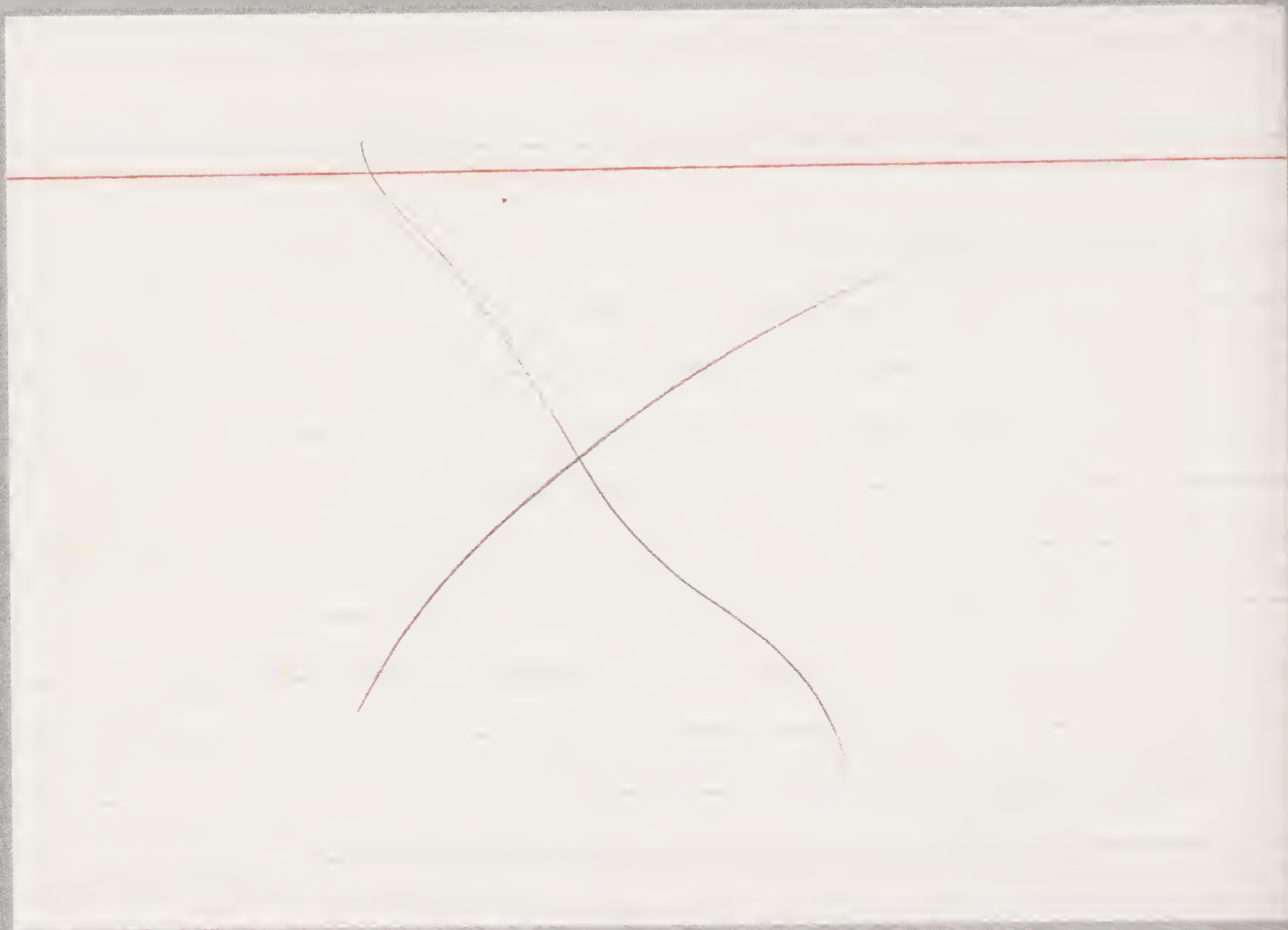
D 9

Lecturer in Experimental Psychology, University
of Ganglia

I ~~have~~ suffered for ^{the last} seventeen years from
a humiliating stomach ailment which
severely limited the jollities of companionship
in small dining rooms

D 9

I, Philip Wild[,] Lecturer in Experimental Psychology, Uni-
versity of Ganglia [, have] suffered for the last seventeen
years from a humiliating stomach ailment which severely
limited the jollities of companionship in small dining-
rooms



which) I loathe my belly, that trunkful of bowels,
 I have to carry around, and everything connects
 with it—the wrong food, heartburn, consti-
 pation's leaden load, or else indigestion
 with a ^{first installment} hot torrent of filth pouring out of
 me in a public toilet three minutes
 before a punctual engagement.

D 10

I loathe my belly, that trunkful of bowels, which I have to
 carry around, and everything connected with it—the wrong
 food, heartburn, constipation's leaden load, or else indi-
 gestion with a first installment of hot filth pouring out of
 me in a public toilet three minutes before a punctual
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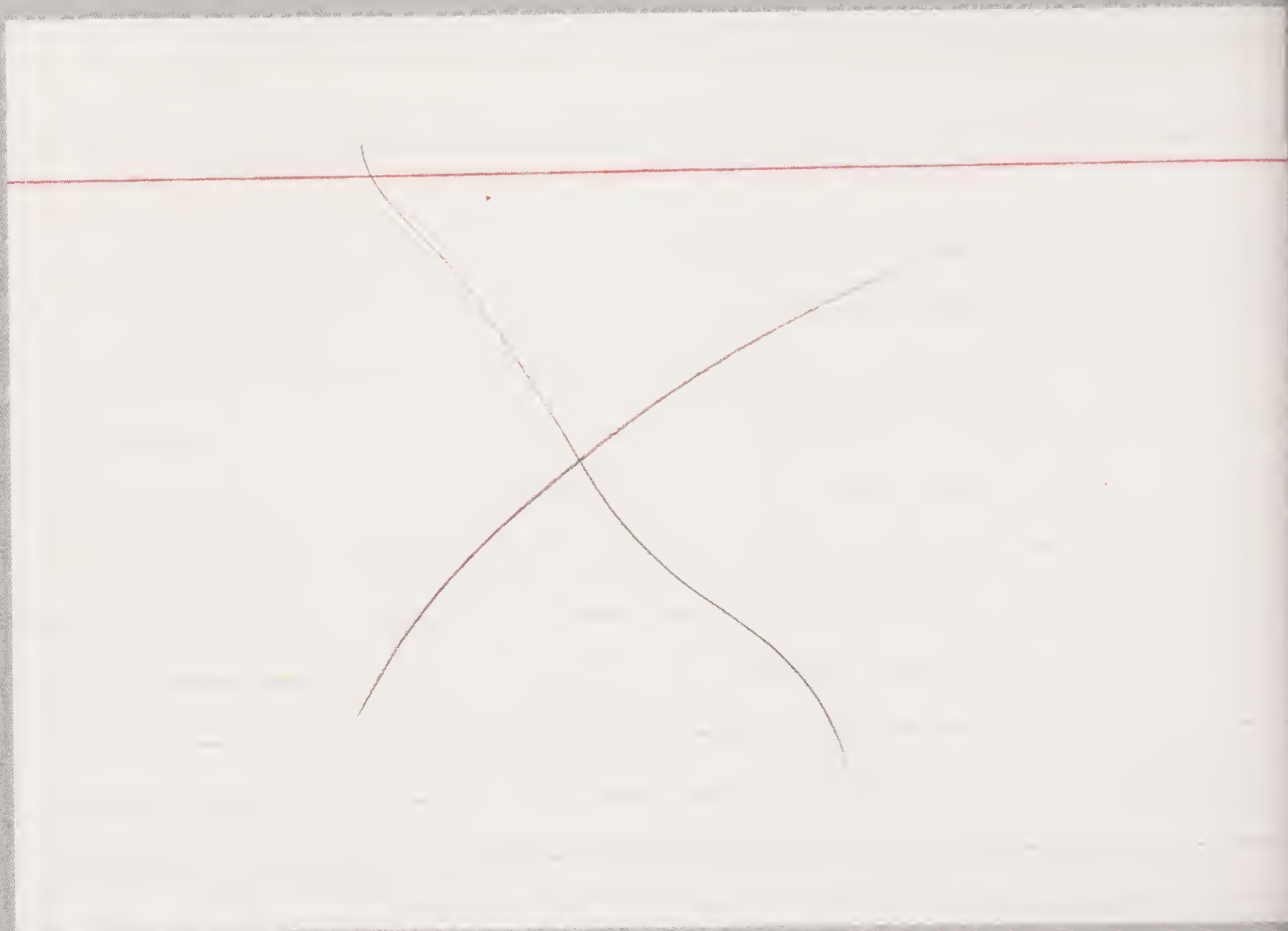
~~Heart~~ (21)
Heart
[or Loins?]

There is, there was, only one girl in my life, an object of terror and tenderness, an object, too, of universal compassion on the part of millions who read about her in her lover's books. I say "girl" and not woman, not wife nor wench. If I were writing in my first language I would have said "fille". A sidewalk cafe, a summer-striped Sunday: il regardait passer les filles — that sense. Not professional whores, not necessarily well to-do tourists but "fille" as a translation of "girl" which I now retranslate:

D11

Heart (or Loins?)

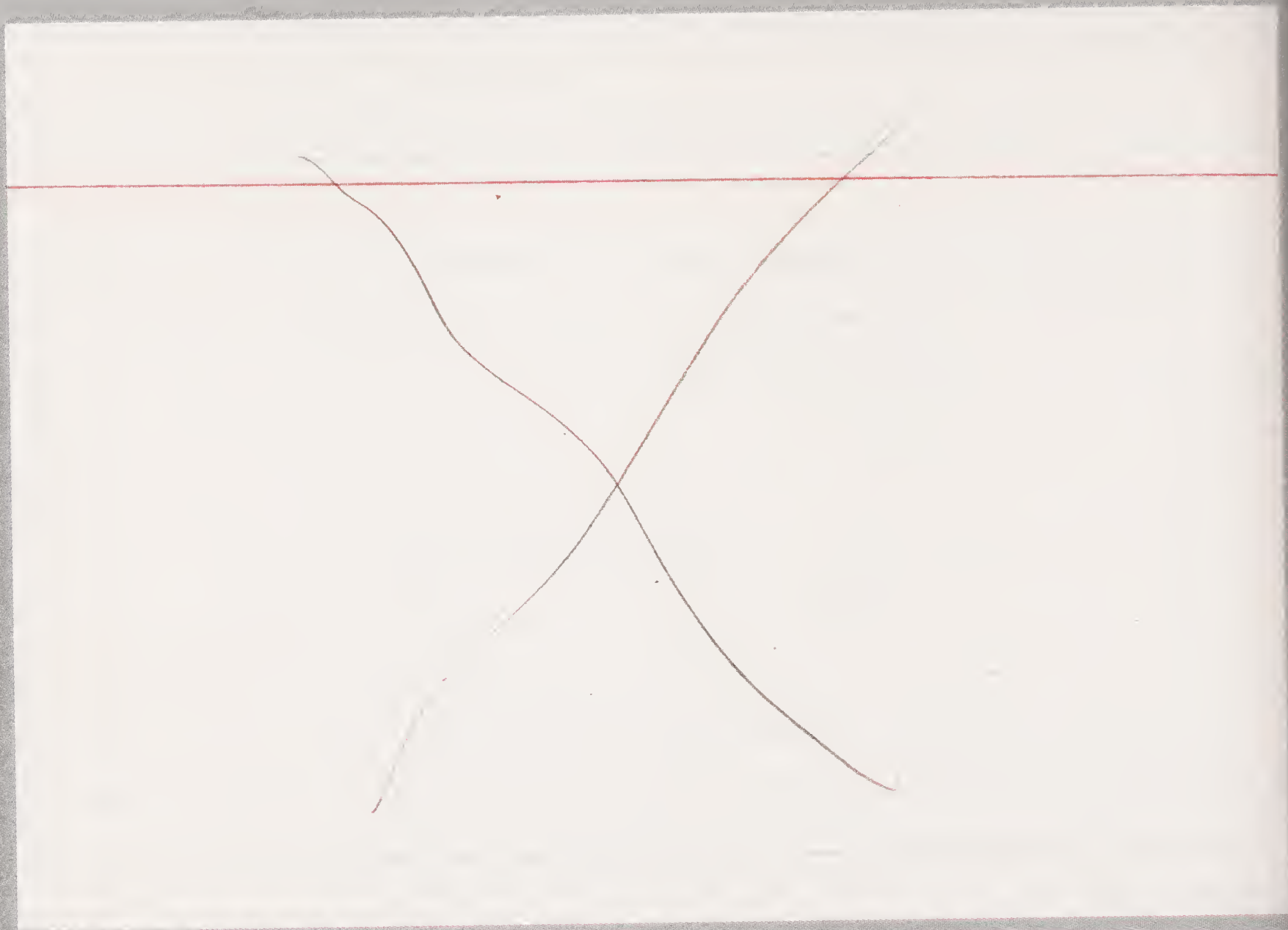
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from heel to hip, then the
trunk, then the head

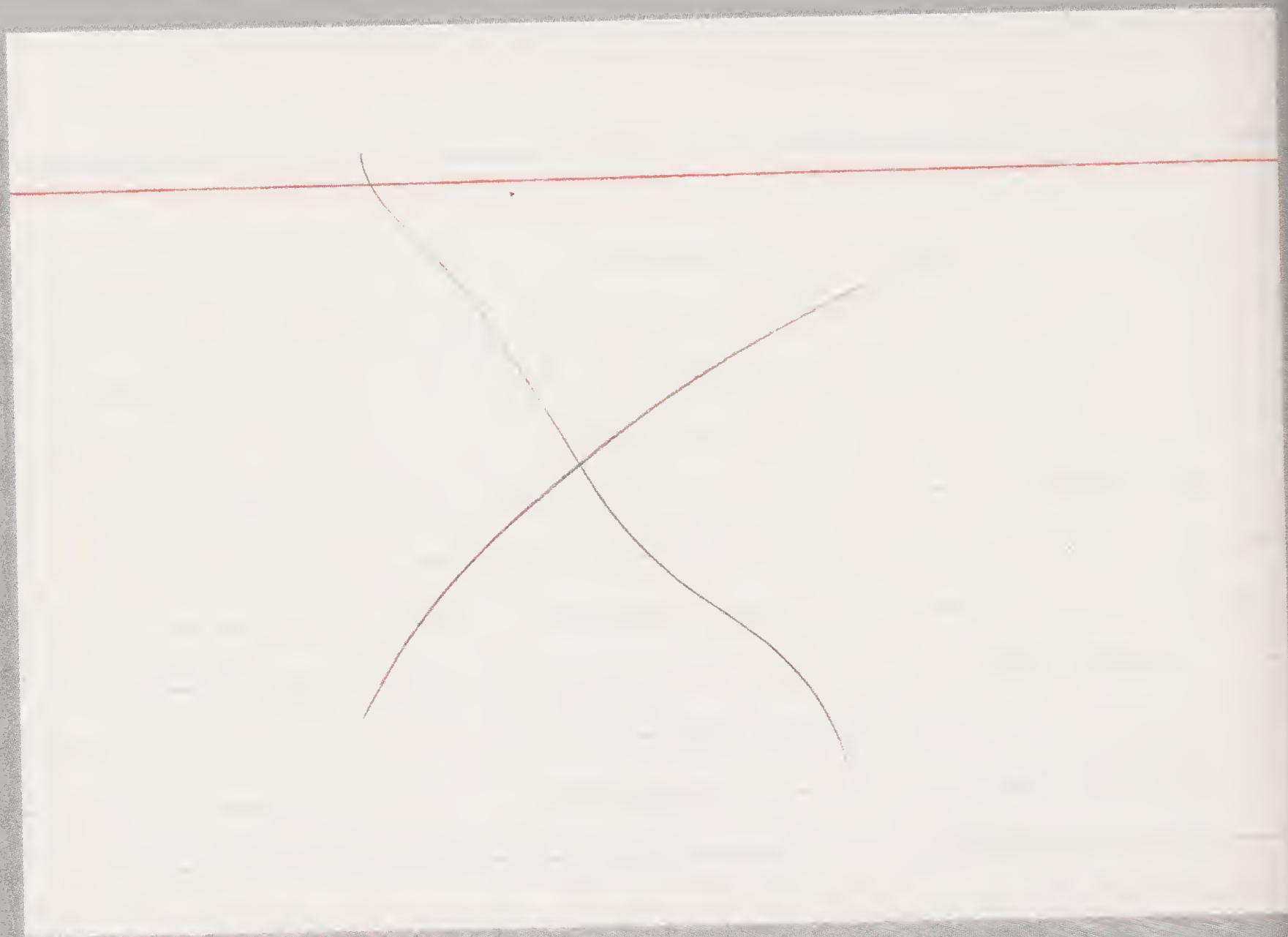
A when no leg was
left but a grotesque
bust and with staring eyes

from heel to hip, then the trunk, then the head when noth-
ing was left but a grotesque bust with staring eyes



Sophrosyne a platonic term for ideal
self-control stemming from man's
rational core.

Sophrosyne, a platonic term for ideal self-control stem-
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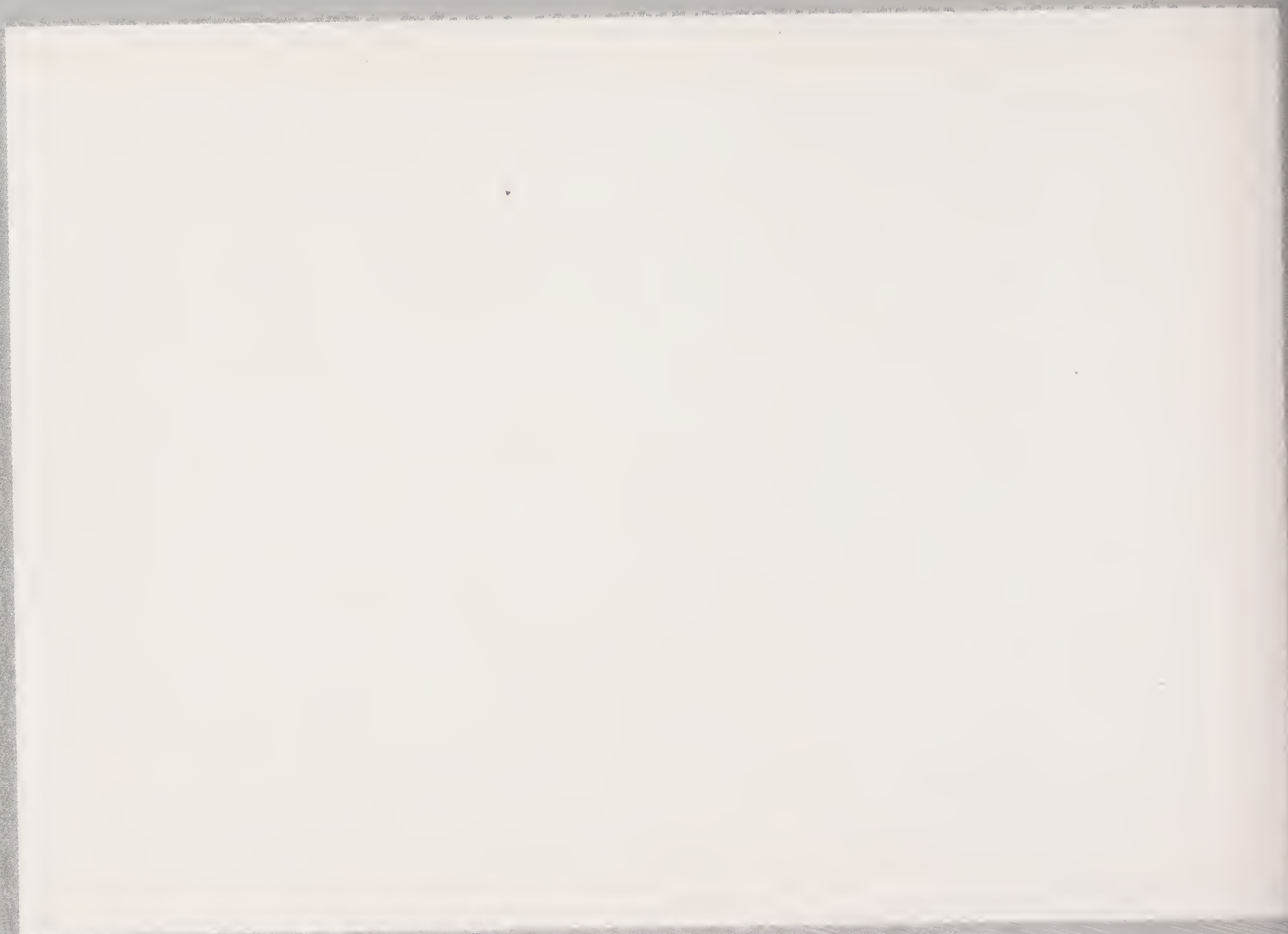


Wild O

¶ I was enjoying a petit-beurre with my ^{noontime} ~~noontime~~ tea when the droll configuration of that particular Bisquit's margins set into motion a train of thought that may have occurred to the reader even before it occurred to me. He knows already how much I disliked my toes. An ingrown nail on one foot and a corn on the other were now pestering me. Would it not be a brilliant move, I thought, to get rid of my toes by sacrificing them to an experiment that only

Wild [o]
[Chapter Seven]

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cowardness kept postponing? I had always restored, on my mental blackboard, the symbols of deleted organs before backing out of my trance. Scientific curiosity and plain logic demanded I prove to myself that if I left the flawed line alone, its ^{flaw} would be reflected in the condition of this or that part of my body. I dipped a last ~~petit-beurre~~ petit-beurre in my tea, swallowed the sweet mush and resolutely started to work on my wretched flesh.

Wild [1]

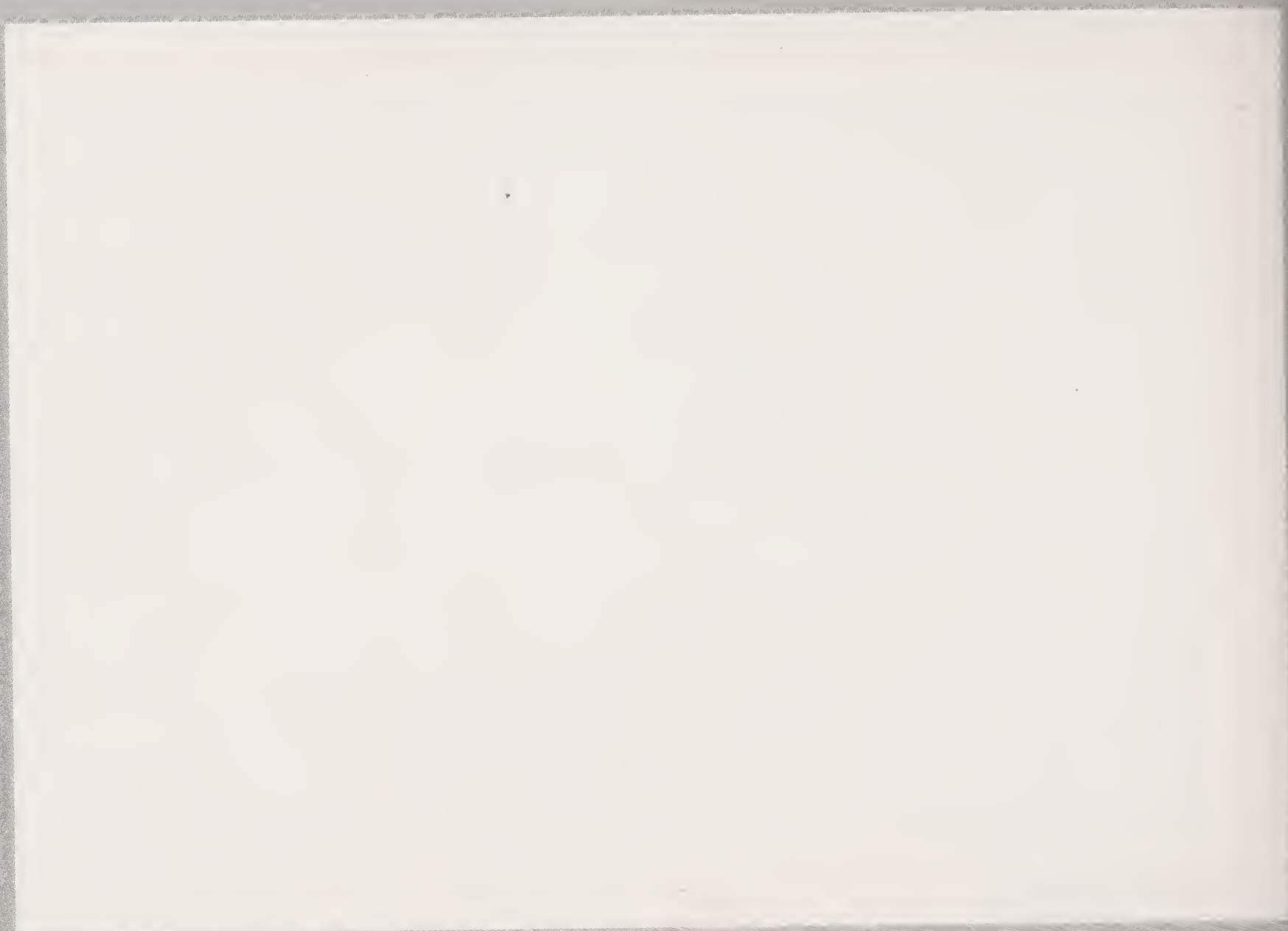
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¶ Testing a discovery and finding it correct can be a great satisfaction but it can be also a great shock mixed with all the torments of rivalry and ignoble envy. I know at least two such rivals of mine—~~you~~ you, Curson, and you, Croydon—who will clap their claws like crabs ~~reacting~~ in boiling water. Now when it is the discoverer himself who ~~reacts~~ tests his discovery and finds that it works he will feel a torrent of pride and purity that will cause him

Wild [2]

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~~to pity Prof. Curson and pet Dr. Croydon~~ actually to
 pity Prof. Curson and pet Dr. Croydon
 (whom I see Mr West has demolished in a
 recent paper). We are above petty revenge.

¶ On a hot Sunday afternoon, in
 my empty house — Flora and Cora being
 somewhere in bed with their boyfriends —
 I started the crucial test. The fine
 base of my chalk white "I" was erased and
 left erased when I decided to break
 my hypnotrance. The extermination of
 my ten toes had been accompanied with

Wild [3]

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 accompanied with



the usual volupty. I was lying on a mattress in my bath, with the strong beam of my shaving lamp trained on my feet. ^{when I opened my eyes,} I saw at once that my toes were intact.

After ~~the~~ swallowing my disappointment I scrambled out of the tub, landed on the tiled floor and fell on my face. To my intense joy I could not stand properly because my ten toes were in a state of indescribable numbness. They looked all right, though perhaps a

Wild [4]

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a little paler than usual, but all sensation had been slashed away by a razor of ice. I palpated warily the hallux and the four other digits of my right foot, then of my left one and all was rubber and rot. The immediate setting in of decay was especially sensationally. I crept on all fours into the adjacent bedroom and with infinite effort into my bed.

The rest was mere cleaning-up. In the course of the night I teased off the shrivelled white flesh and contem-
 plated with utmost delight

before his bath

Wild [5]

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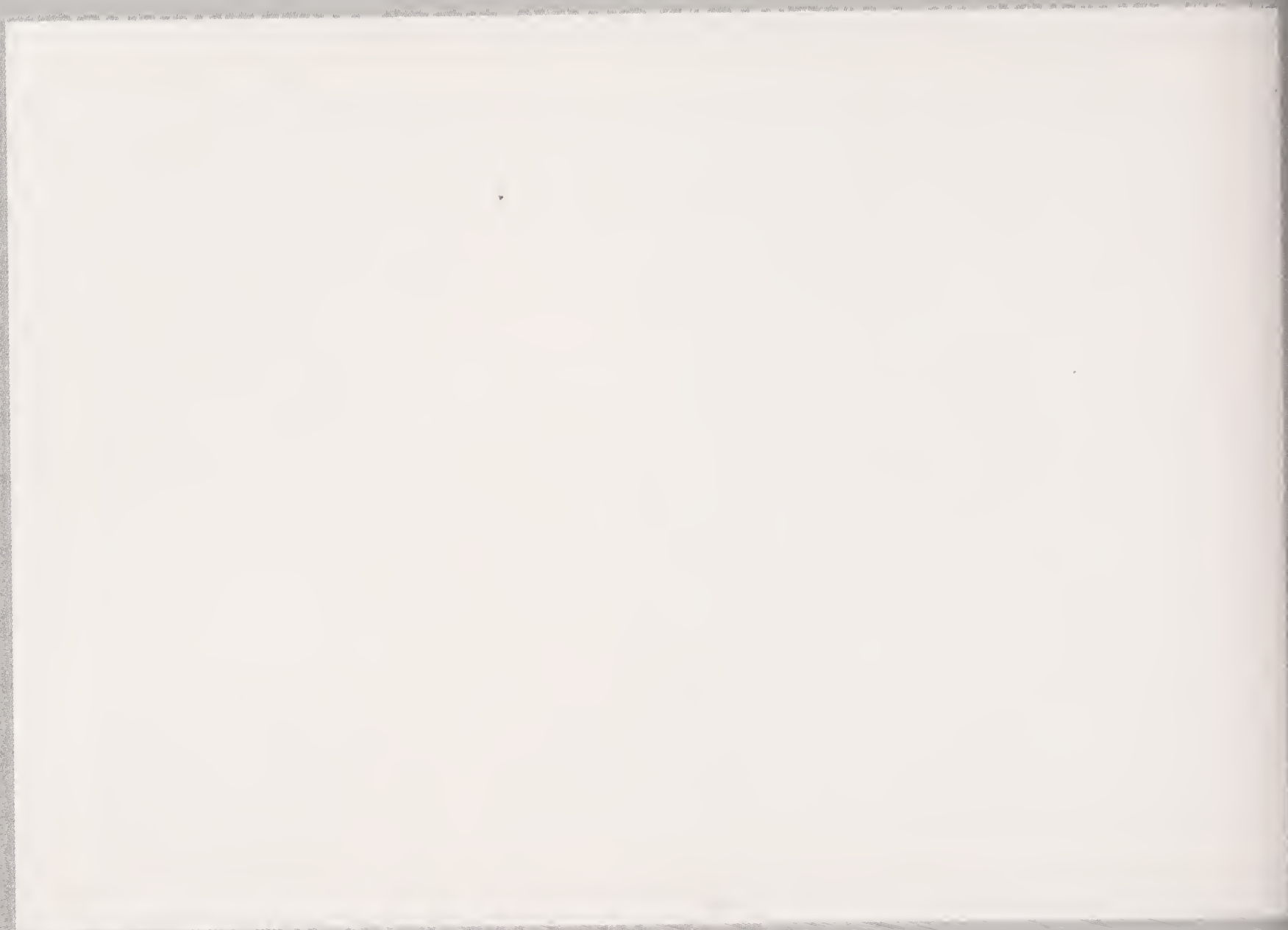
Wild



I know my feet smelled despite daily
baths, but this reek was something special

Wild [6]

I know my feet smelled despite daily baths, but this reek
was something special



That test—though admittedly a trivial affair—confirmed me in the belief that I was working in the right direction and that (unless some hideous wound or excruciating sickness joined the merry pallbearers) the process of dying by auto-dissolution afforded the greatest ecstasy known to man.

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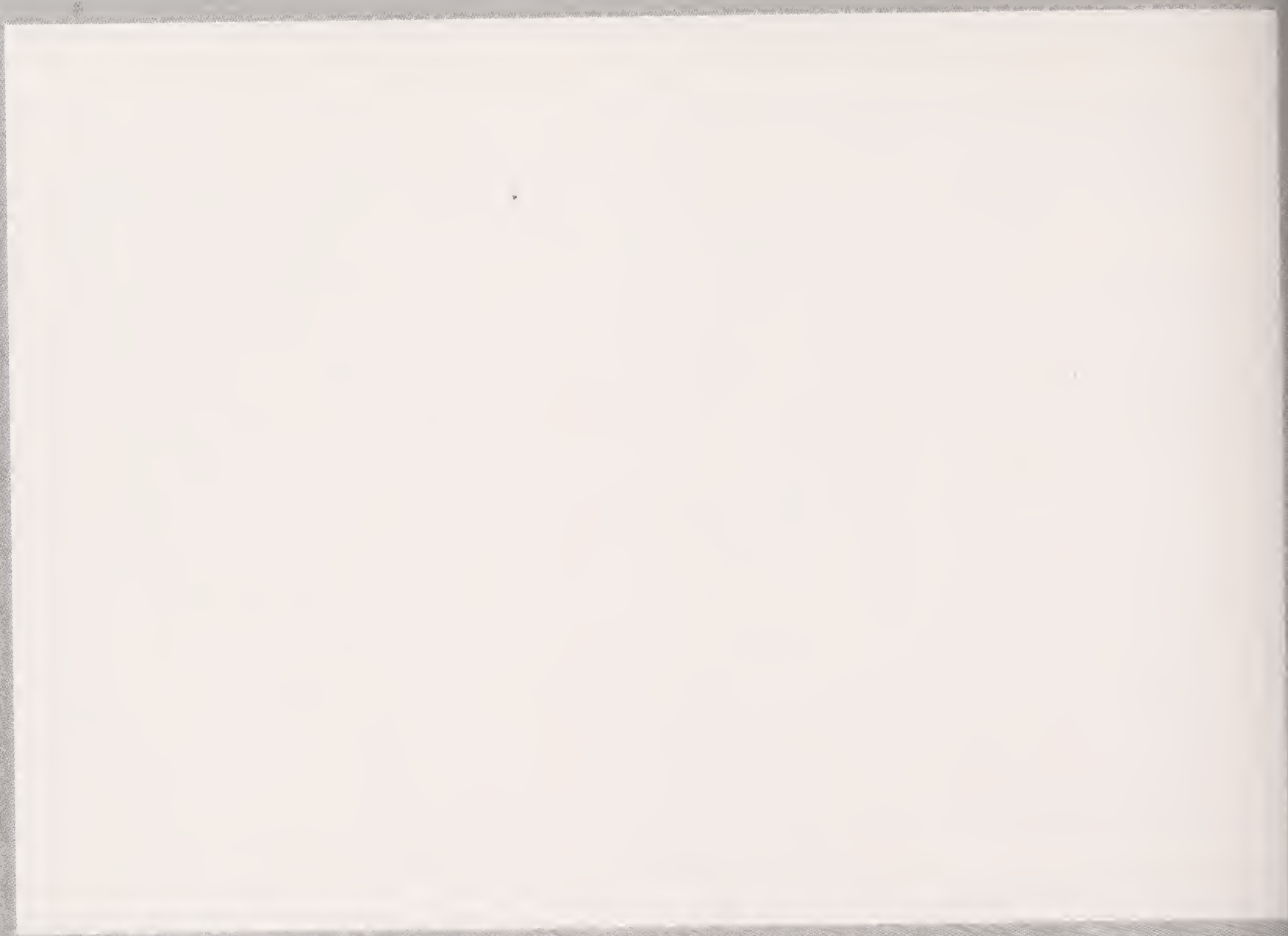


(Toes)

I expected to see at best the length of each foot 'greatly reduced with' its distal edge neatly transformed into the semblance of ^{the} end of a breadloaf without any trace of toes. At worst I was ready to face an anatomical preparation of ten ^{bare} phalanges sticking out of my feet like a skeleton's claws. Actually all I saw was ~~a row of digits~~ the familiar rows of digits.

Toes

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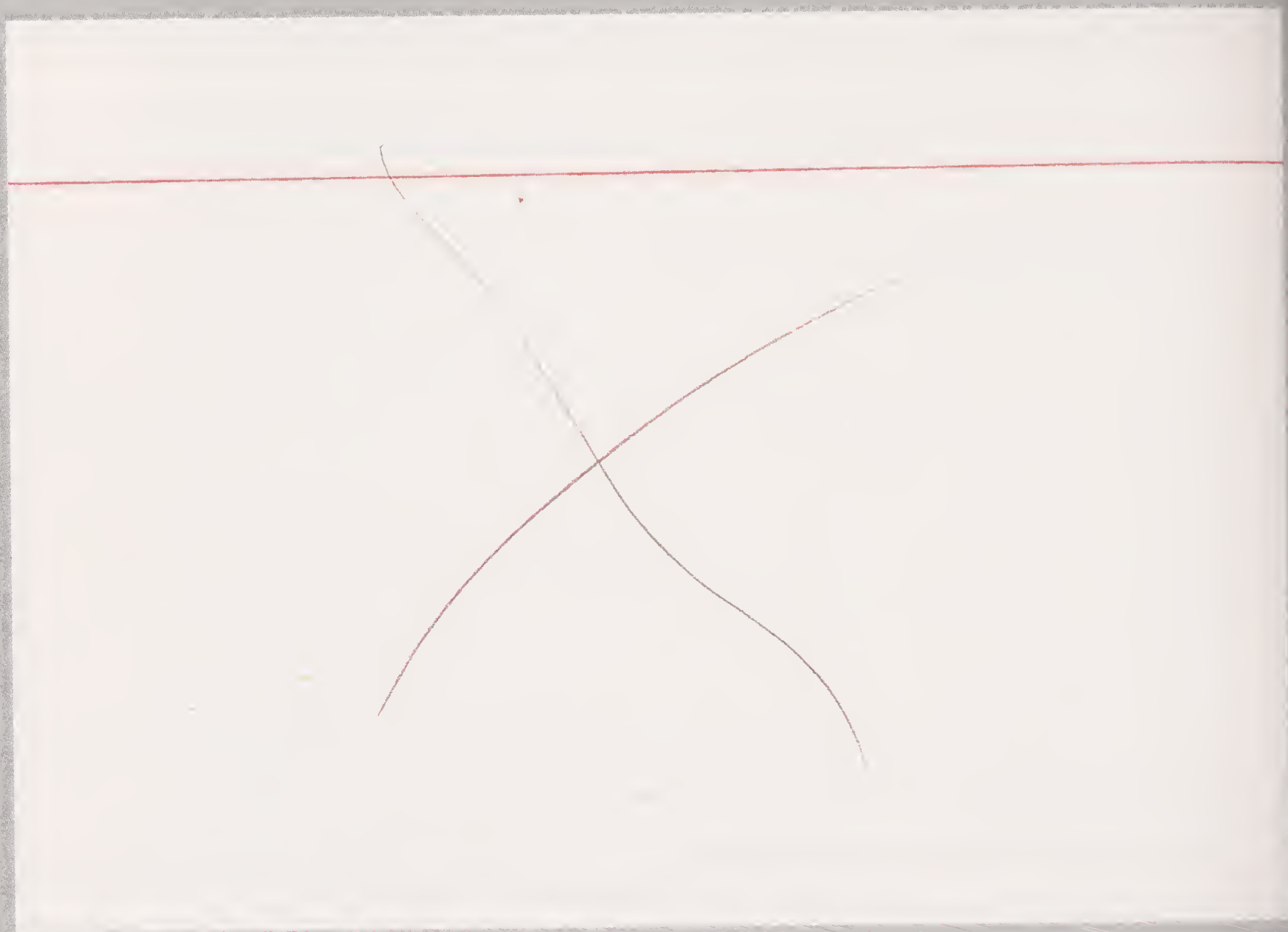


¶ "Install yourself", said the youngish suntanned, cheerful Dr. Aupert, indicating, openheartedly an armchair at the north rim of his desk, and proceeded to explain the necessity of a surgical intervention. He showed A.N.D. one of the dark ^{grim} urograms that had been taken of A.N.D.'s rear anatomy. The globular shadow of an adenoma eclipsed the greater part of the whitish bladder. This

1

Medical Intermezzo

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(2)

~~Benign tumor~~

benign tumor ~~that~~ had been growing on the prostate for some fifteen years and was now as many times its size. The unfortunate gland

~~with the great gray parasite clinging to it could and should be removed at once.~~

with the great gray parasite clinging to it could and should be removed ^{at once}

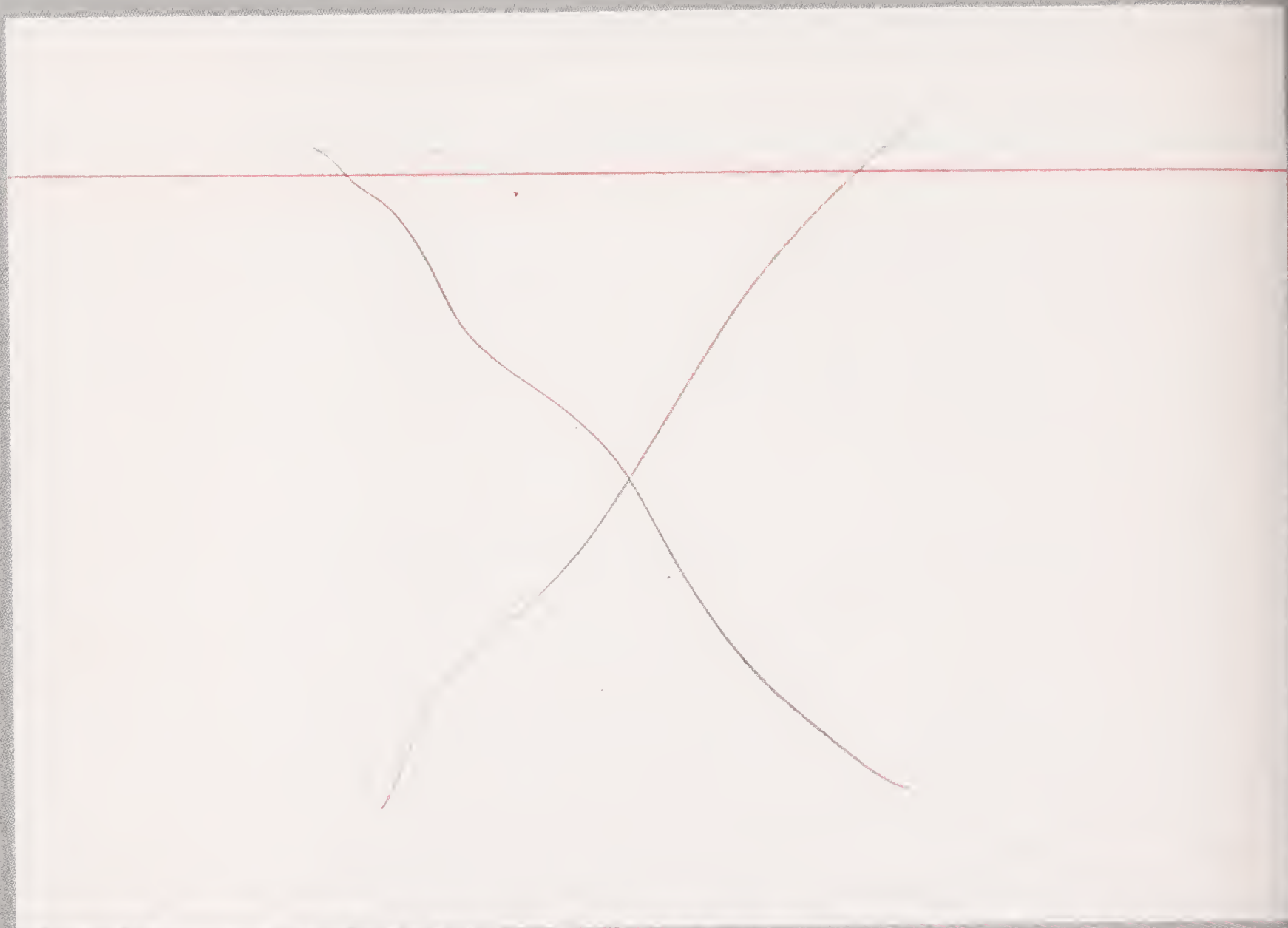
"And if I refuse?" said AND

"Then, one of these days,

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that back[grd]
Keep it free from
any intervention.

tired eyes.

gargoyles
Such as hypnagogic ~~images~~
~~hallucinations~~ or the
~~entoptic sensations~~

a ~~breeding brood~~ ^{swarms}
entoptic ~~phantoms~~
a vertical line chalked against
a ~~plum~~ ^{plum} tinted darkness
over one's collection
of coins or insects

a manikin or a
little skeleton but
that demanded

that back[grd] keep it free from any intervention. tired eyes.

Such as hypnagogic gargoyles* or entoptic swarms*
a vertical line chalked against a plum* tinted darkness
over one's collection of coins or insects
a manikin or a little skeleton but that demanded

* These phrases appear as well on page 131, which may indicate that this card is a draft of that material.

very special

In this self-hypnotic state there can be no question of getting out of touch with oneself and floating into a normal sleep (unless you are very tired at the start)

To break the trance all you do is to restore in ~~every~~ ^{even} chalk bright details the simple picture of yourself ^{a stylized skeleton} on your mental blackboard.

One should remember, however, that the divine delight in destroying, say one's breastbone should not be indulged in. Enjoy the destruction but do not linger over your own ruins lest you develop an incurable illness, or die before you are ready to die.

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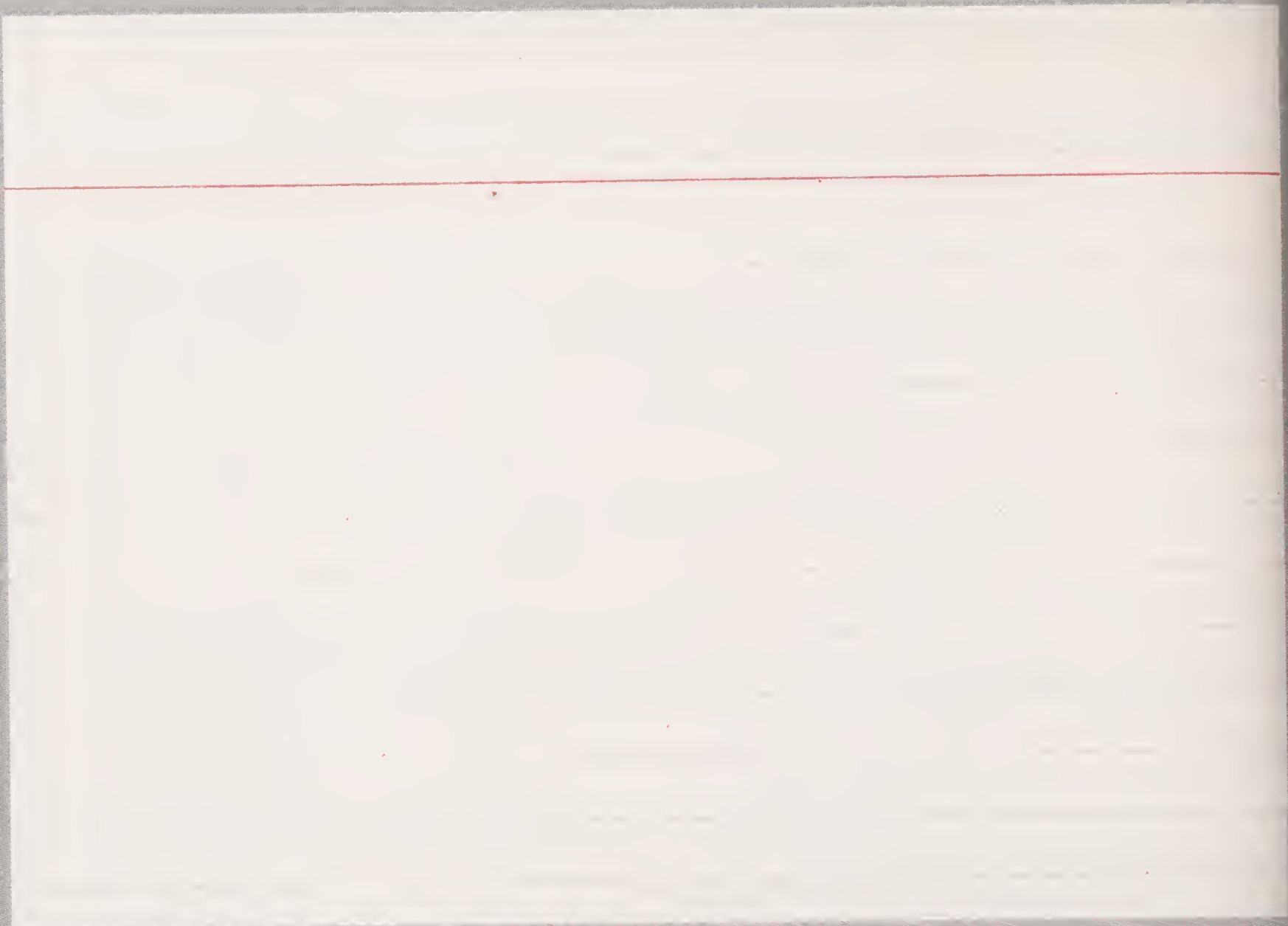


the delight of getting under ~~the corner~~
of an ingrown toenail with sharp scissors
and snipping off the offending corner
and the added ecstasy of finding beneath it
an amber abscess whose blood flows
carrying away the ignoble pain

But with age I could not
bend any longer toward my feet
and was ashamed to present
them to a pedicure.

the delight of getting under an ingrown toenail with
sharp scissors and snipping off the offending corner and
the added ecstasy of finding beneath it an amber ab[s]cess
whose blood flows[,] carrying away the ignoble pain

But with age I could not bend any longer toward my feet
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~~at the beginning of the~~
Last Chapter

Beginning
of last chapter

¶ [Miss Ure, this is the MS of my last chapter which you will, please, type out in three copies — I need the additional one for prepub in Bud — or some other ~~magazine~~ magazine]

¶ Several years ago, when I was still working at the Horloge Institute of Neurologie, a silly female interviewer introduced me in a silly radio series ("Modern Eccentrics") as "a gentle Oriental sage, founder of (insert cards)"

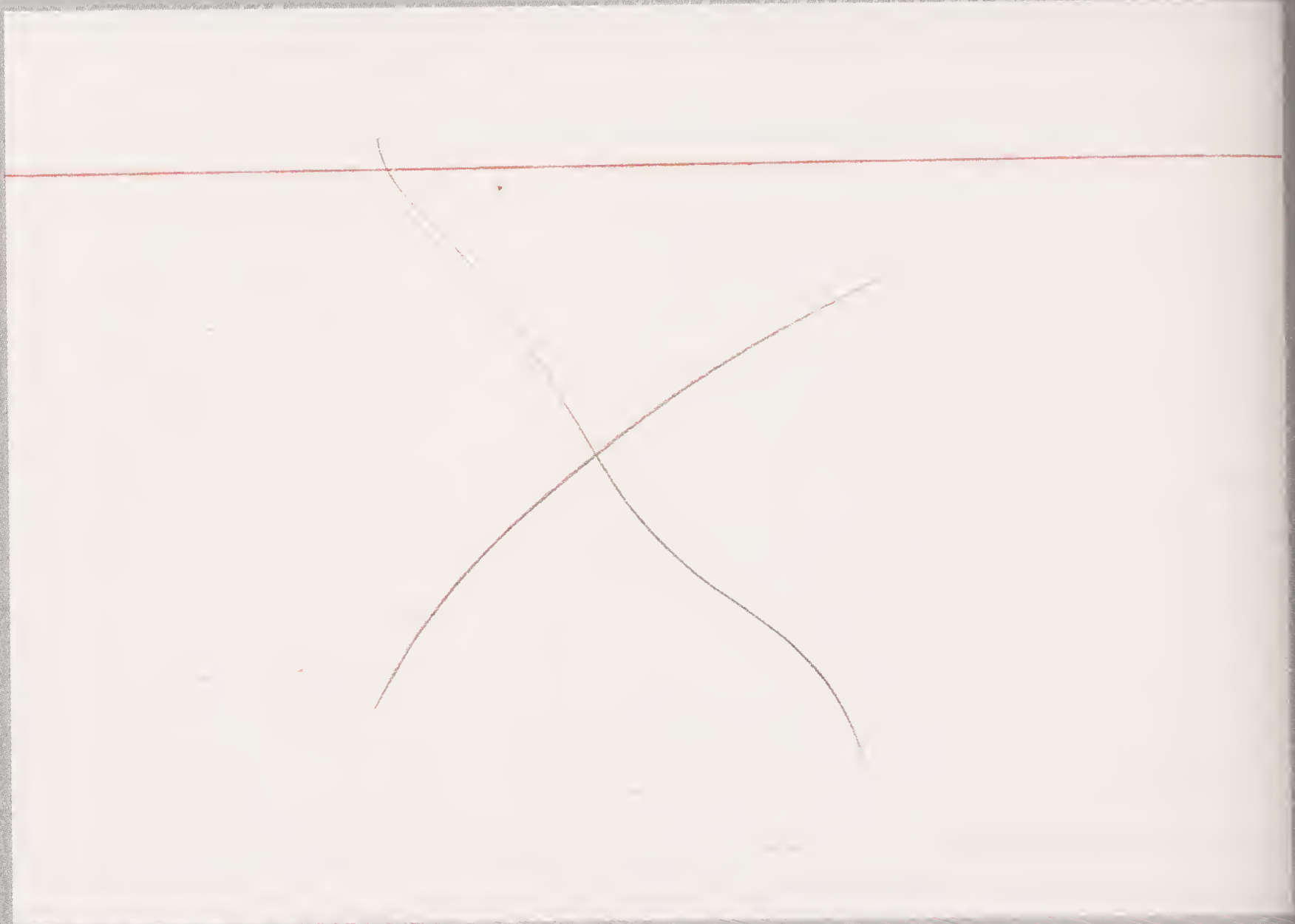
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*Brackets around the first paragraph may be a reminder to set it as extract.



Penult. End

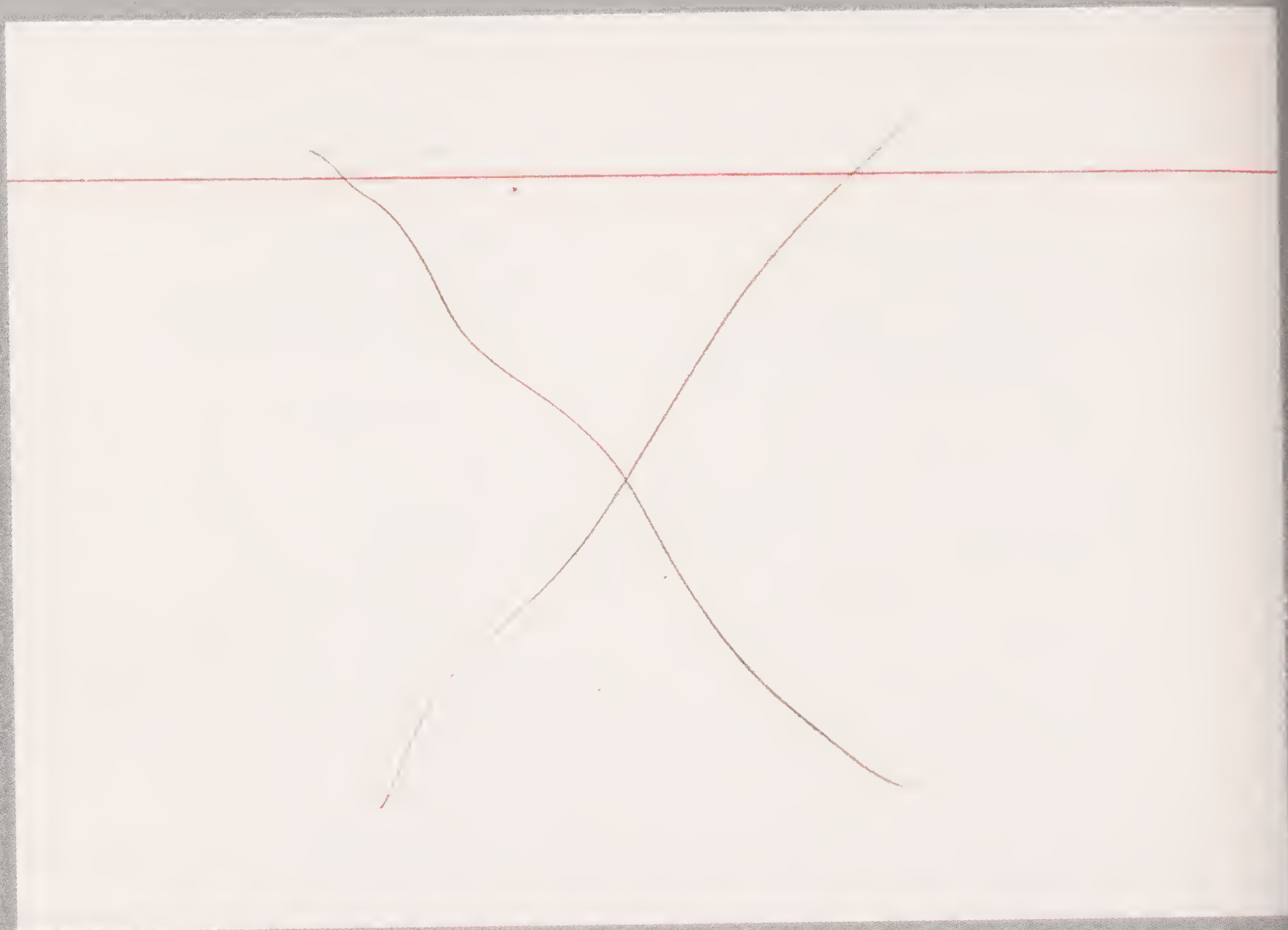
End of penult chapter.

The manuscript in longhand of Wild's last chapter, which at the time of his fatal heart attack, ten blocks away, his typist, Sue U, had not had the time to tackle because of urgent work for another employer was deftly plucked from her hand by that other fellow to find a place of publication more permanent than Bud or Root.

Penult. End.

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First

Well, a writer of sorts. A budding and
already rotting writer. After being a poor
lector in ^{some of} our last dreary castles.

Yes, he's a lecturer too. A rich rotten
Lecturer (complete misunderstanding, another world)

Whom are they talking about? Her
husband I guess. Flo is horribly frank
about Philipp. (who could not come to
the party. — to any party)

First a

Well, a writer of sorts. A budding and already rotting
writer. After being a poor lector in some of our last dreary
castles.

Yes, he's a lecturer too[.] A rich rotten lecturer (com-
plete misunderstanding, another world).

Whom are they talking about? Her husband I guess. Flo
is horribly frank about Philipp. (who could not come to the
party—to any party)*

* This material fits in with conversation in the first chapter.

~~Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, crossed out by a large X.~~



Brain - when the ray projected by me
 reaches the lake of Dante ~~Fontaine~~ or
 the Island of Reil ~~in the brain~~

First b

heart or brain—when the ray projected by me reaches the
 lake of Dante [or] the Island of Reil.



Wild's : I do not believe that ~~the~~ the spinal cord is the only or even main conductor of the extravagant messages that reach my brain. I have to find out more about that — about the strange impressions I have of there being some underpath, so to speak, along which the commands of my will power are passed to and fro along the shadow of nerves, rather along the nerves proper.

First c

Thornton + Smart Hum. Physiology

p. 299

Wild's [ms.]: I do not believe that the spinal cord is the only or even main conductor of the extravagant messages that reach my brain. I have to find out more about that—about the strange impression I have of there being some underpath, so to speak, along which the commands of my will power are passed to and fro along the shadow of nerves, rather [than] along the nerves proper.



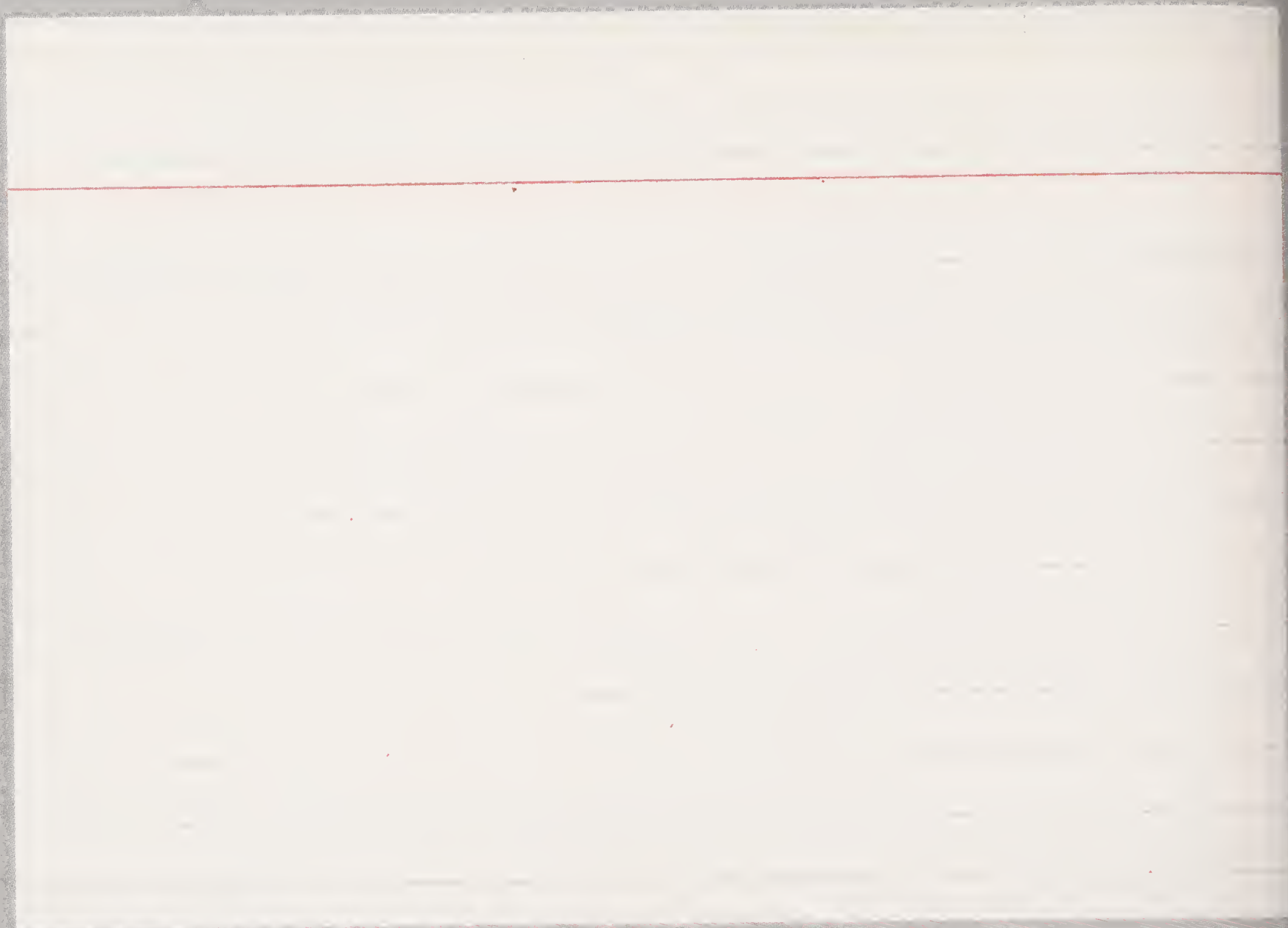
The photograph[er] was setting up

I always know she is cheating on me with a new boyfriend whenever she visits my bleak bedroom more often than once a month (which is the average since I turned sixty)

First d

The photograph[er] was setting up

I always[s] know she is cheating on me with a new boy friend whenever she visits my bleak bedroom more often than once a month (which is the average since I turned sixty)

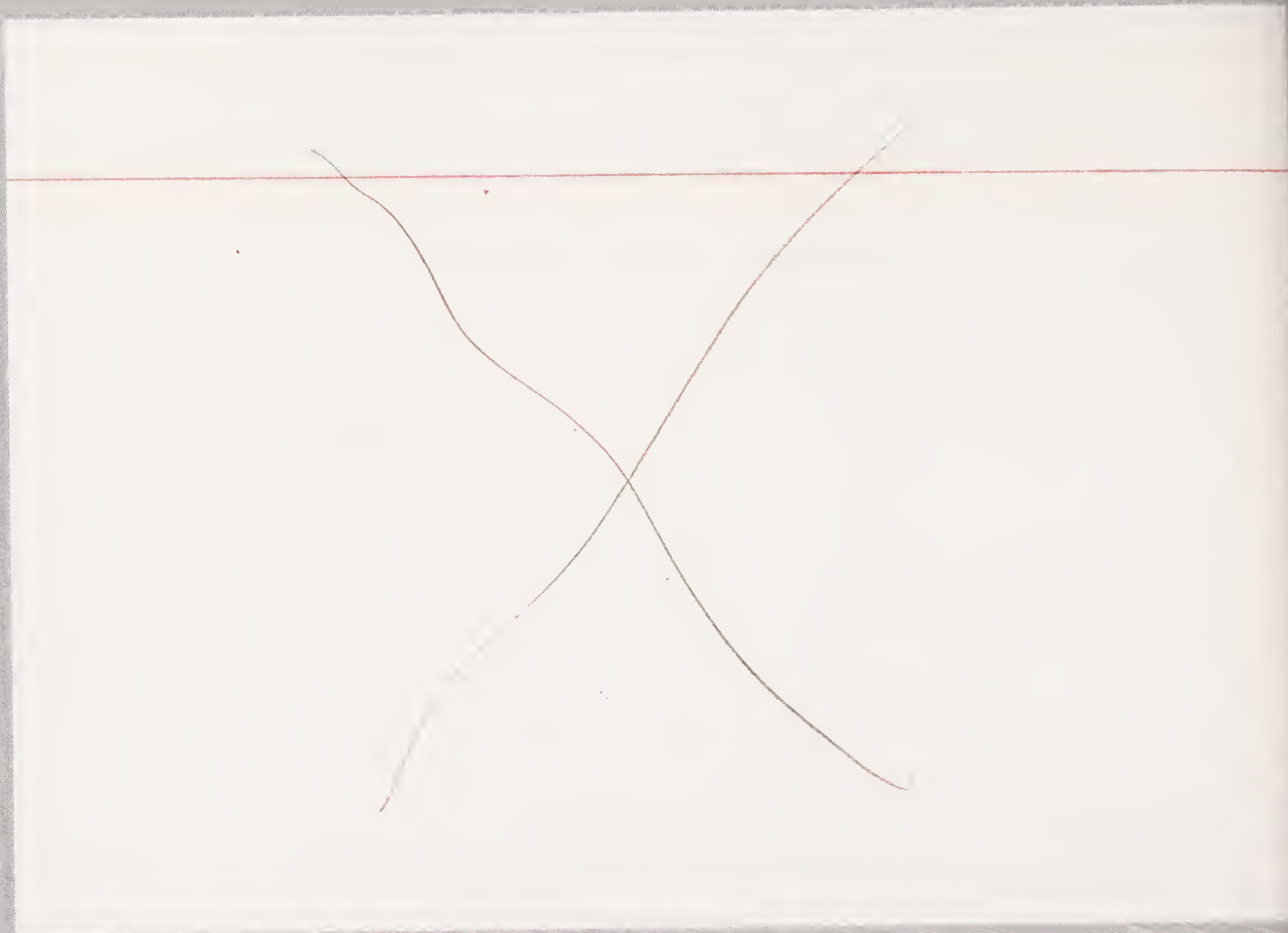


I

The only way he could possess her was
in the most position of copulation:
he reclining on cushions, she sitting in
the fauteuil of his flesh with her back to
him. The procedure - a few bounces
over very small humps - meant nothing to her.
She looked at the snow-scape on the
footboard of the bed -
at the
and he holding her in front of him like a
child being given a sleighride down a

I

The only way he could possess her was in the most []
position of copulation: he reclining on cushions: she sit-
ting in the fauteuil of his flesh with her back to him. The
procedure—a few bounces over very small humps—meant
nothing to her[.] She looked at the snow-scape on the foot-
board of the bed—at the [curtains]; and he holding her in
front of him like a child being given a sleighride down a



II,

fell short slope by a kind stranger,
he saw her back, her
hip between his hands

Like toads or tortoises neither saw each
others faces See animaux

II

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between his hands.

Like toads or tortoises neither saw each other's faces
See animaux



(Wild's note)

Aurora 1

My sexual life is virtually over but —

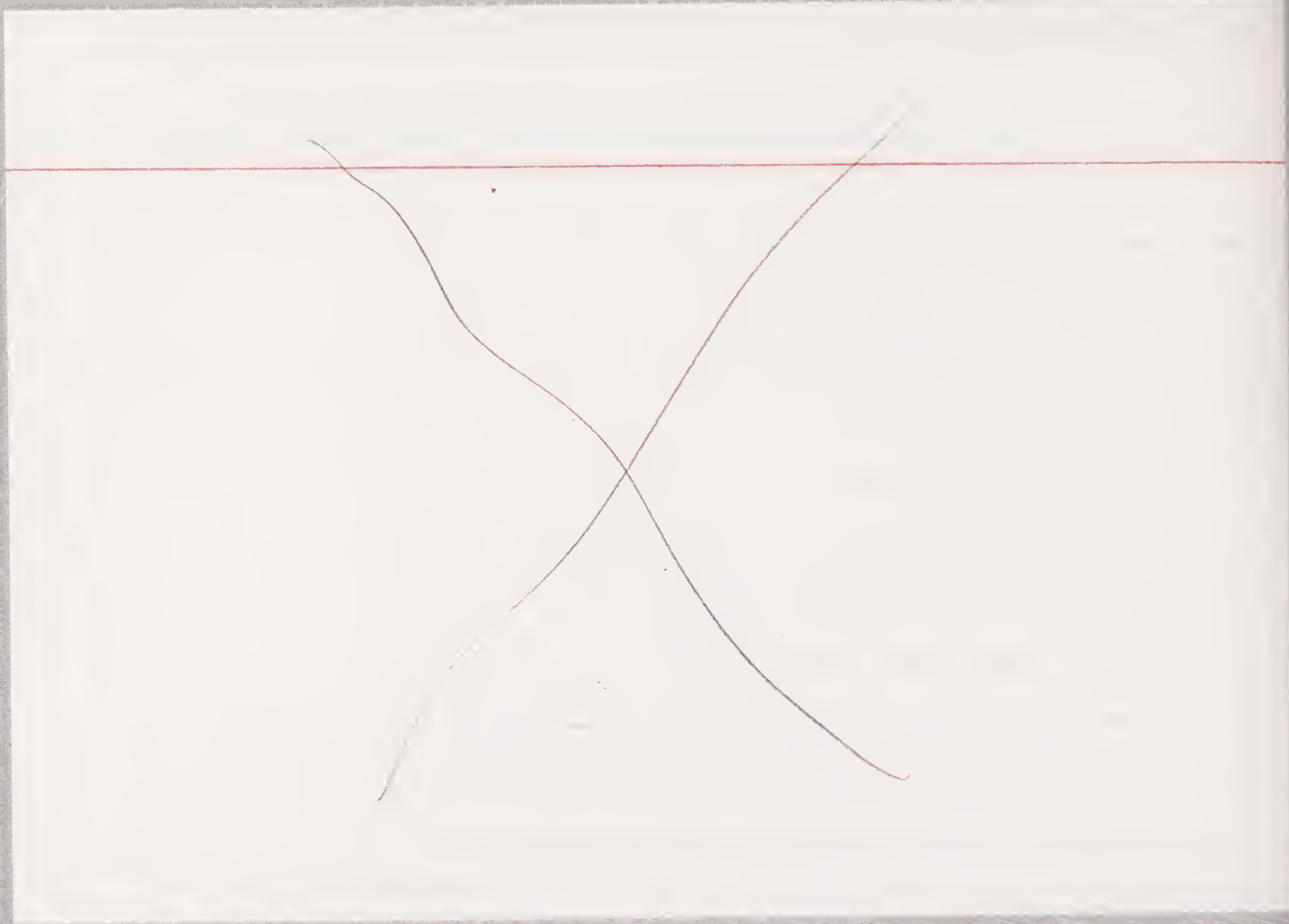
I saw you again, Aurora Lee, whom as a youth I had pursued with hopeless desire at high-school balls — and whom I ^{have} cornered now fifty years later, on a terrace of my dream. Your painted pout and cold gaze were, come to think of it, very like the official lips and eyes of Flora, my wayward wife, and your flimsy frock of black silk might have come from her recent wardrobe. You turned away, but could not escape, trapped.

Aurora 1

Wild's notes

My sexual life is virtually over but—

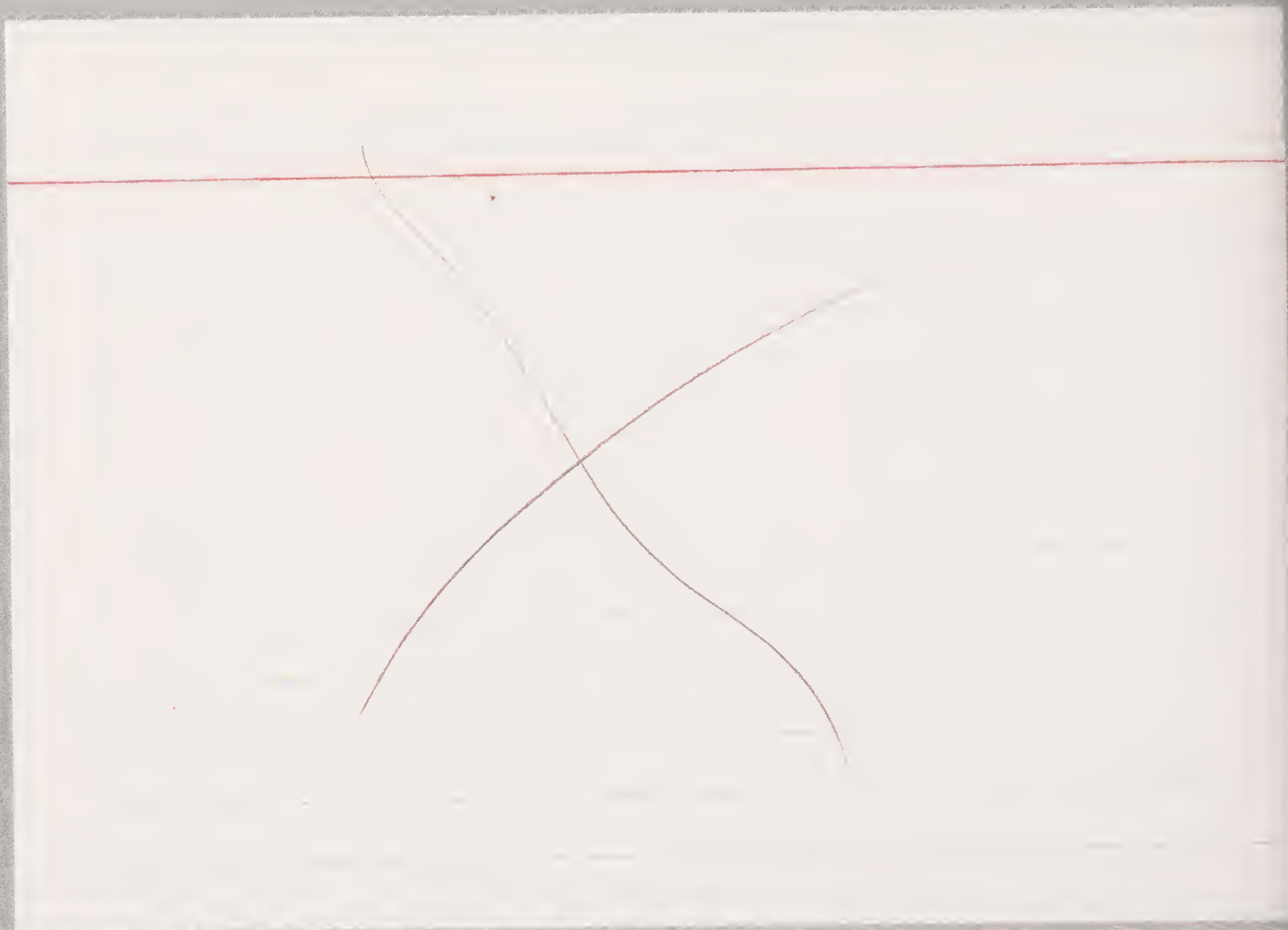
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as you were among the
 close-set columns of moonlight and I
 lifted the hem of your dress—something I ~~had~~
 never had done in the past—and stroked,
 moulded, pinched ever so softly your pale
 prominent nates, while you stood perfectly still
 as if considering new possibilities of
 power and pleasure and interior decoration.
 At the height of your guarded ecstasy I thrust
 my cupped hand ^{from behind} between your consenting
 thighs and felt the ~~folded~~
 sweat-stuck folds of a long scrotum and

Aurora 2

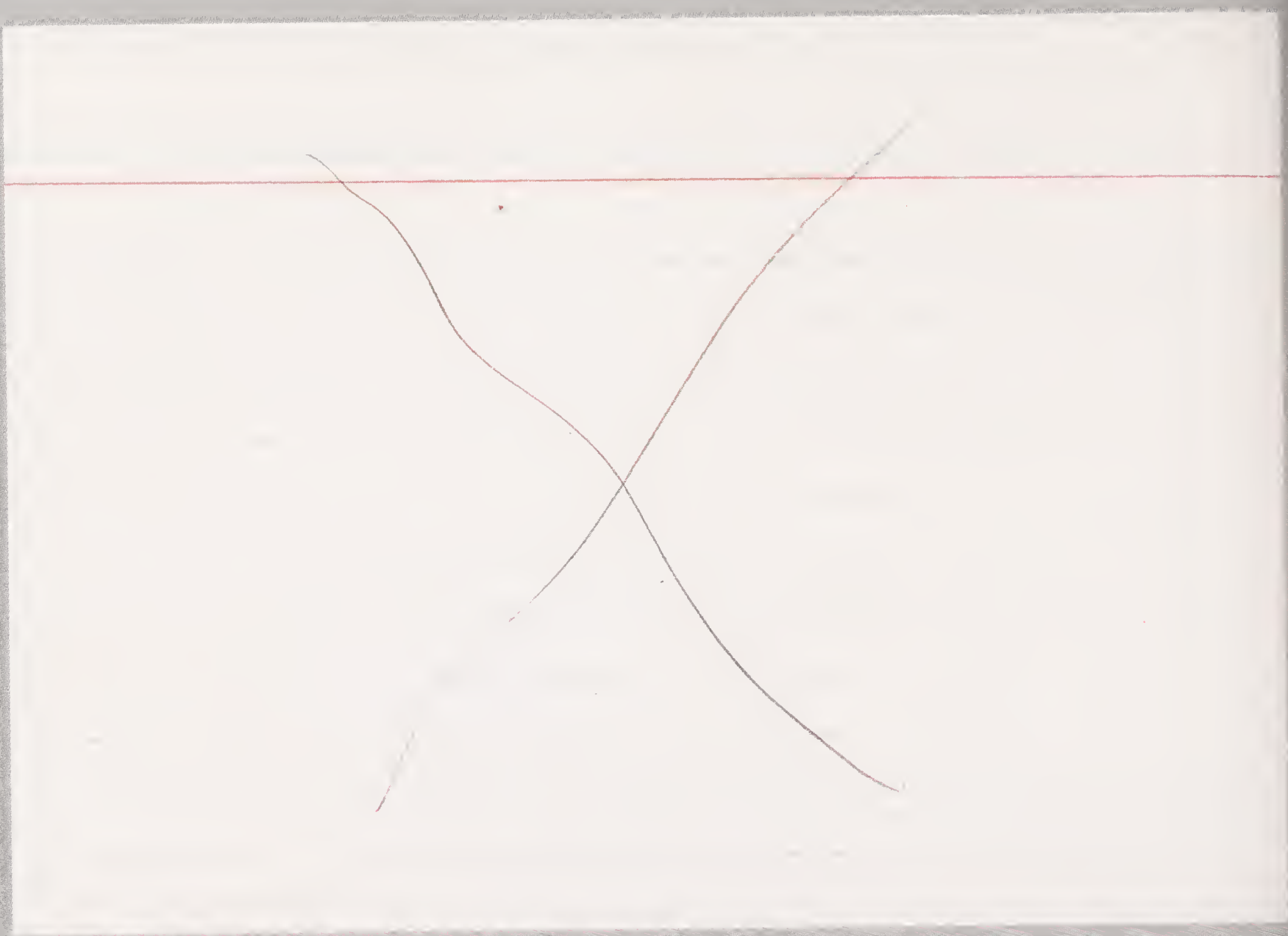
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 tum and



then, further in front, the droop of a short member. Speaking as ^{an} authority on dreams, I wish to add that this was no homosexual manifestation but a splendid example of terminal gynandzism. Young Aurora Lee (who was to be axed and chopped up at seventeen by an idiot lover, all glasses and beard) and half-impotent old Wild formed for a moment one creature. But quite apart from all that, in a more

Aurora 3

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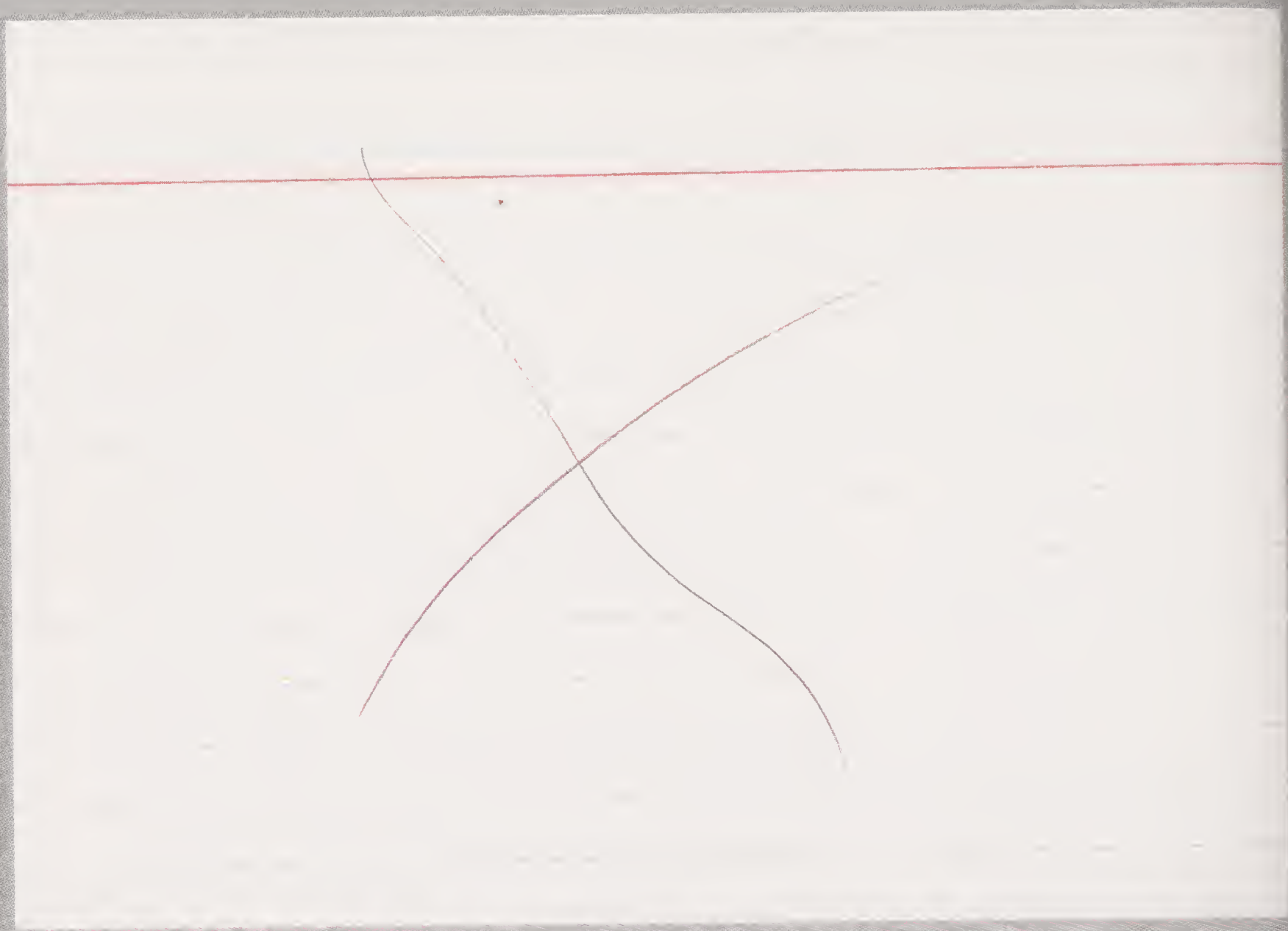


Aurora 4

disgusting and delicious sense, her little bottom, so smooth, so moonlit, a replica, in fact, of her twin brother's charms, ~~sampled~~ sampled rather brutally on my last night at boarding school, ~~remained~~ remained inset in the medalion of every following day.

Aurora 4

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(Miscel.)

Willpower,

absolute

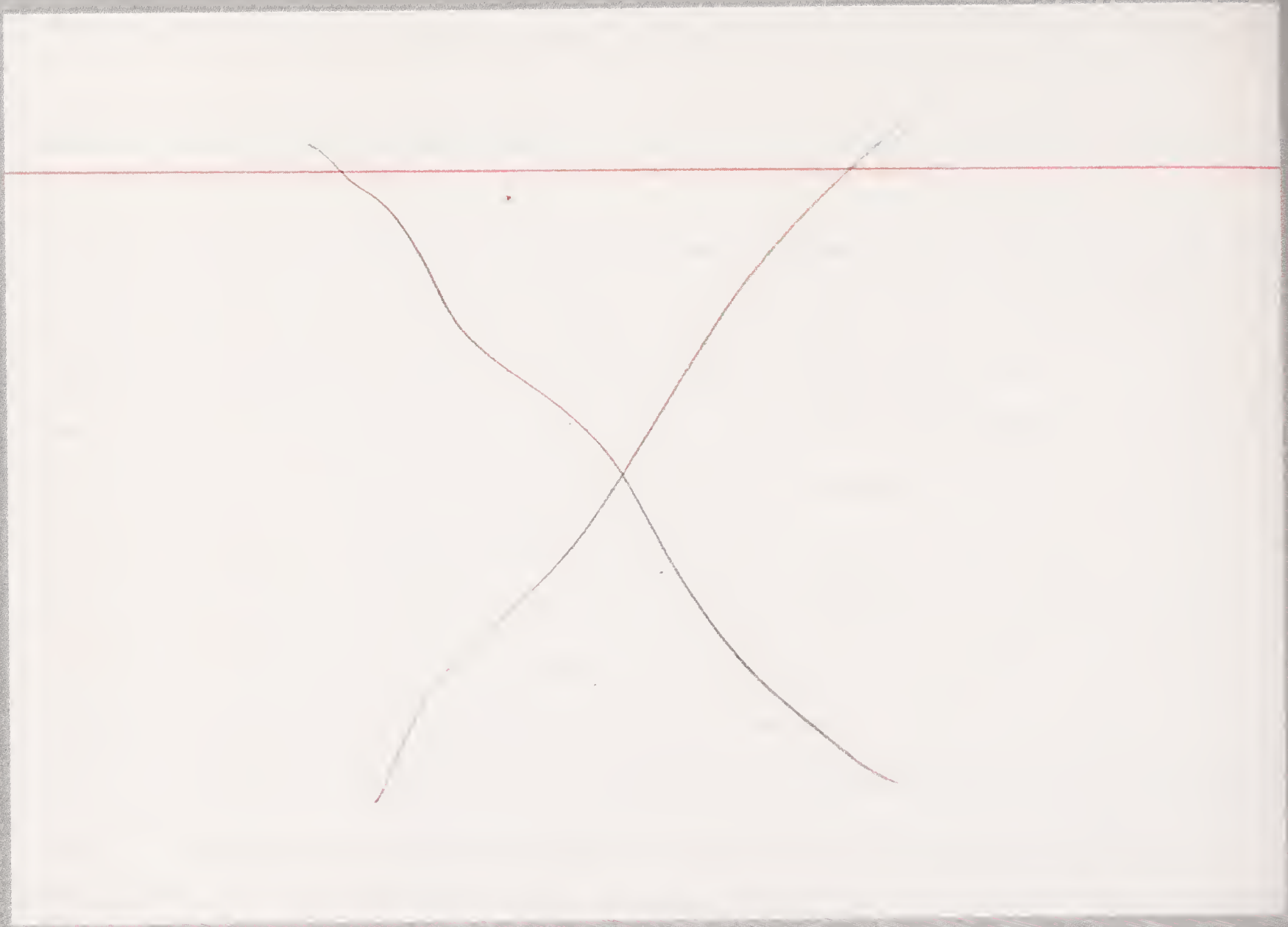
self domination.

Electroencephalographic recordings of the hypnotic 'sleep' are very similar to those of the waking state and quite different from those of normal sleep; yet there are certain minute details about the pattern of the trance which are of extraordinary interest and place it specifically apart both from sleep and [waking].

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self extinction
self immolation

Will
n.

these cards at front
of the left

As I destroyed my thorax I also destroyed
and the

and the laughing people in theaters a
not longer visible stage or screen and
the

and the on the cemetery
of the asymmetrical heart

autosuggestion autosuggest
autosuggestive

Wild's note

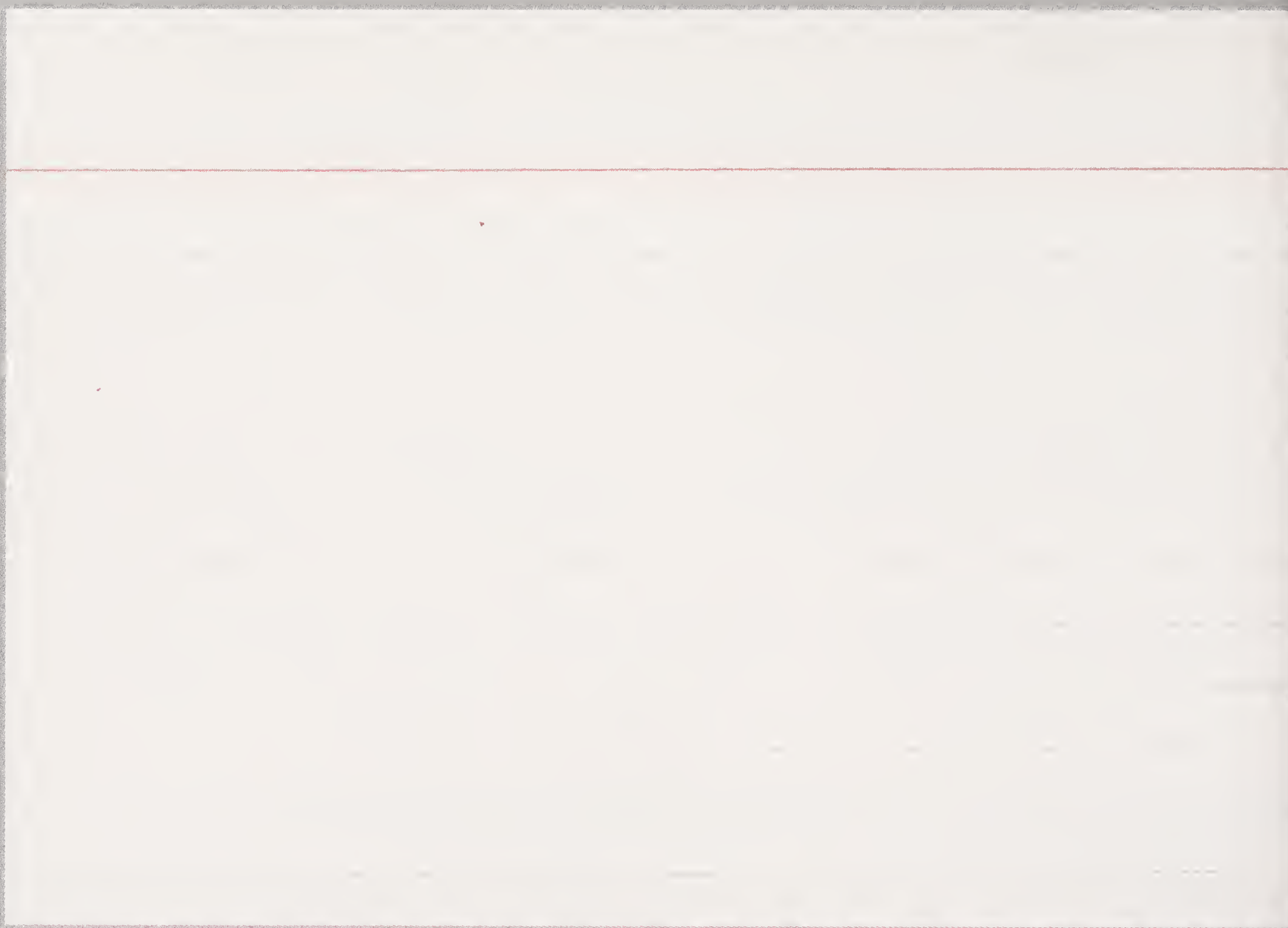
self-extinction

self-immolation, -tor

As I destroyed my thorax, I also destroyed [] and the
[] and the laughing people in theaters with a not longer
visible stage or screen, and the [] and the [] in the ceme-
tery of the asym[m]etrical heart

autosuggestion, autosugetist

autosuggestive



A process of self-obliteration conducted by an effort of ^{the} will. ~~The~~ pleasure, bordering on almost ~~unendurable~~ ^{unen-}endurable ecstasy, comes from feeling the will working at a ~~completely~~ new task: an act of destruction which develops paradoxically an element of creativeness in the totally new application of totally free will. Learning to use the vigor of the body for the purpose of its own deletion, standing vitality on its head.

Wild's notes

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OED

Nirvana blowing out, [extinguishing],
extinction, disappearance the Buddha
theology extinction and absorption into
the Supreme spirit.

[Nirvanic embrace of Brahma]

bonze = Buddhist monk

bonzery, bonzeries

the doctrine of Buddhist incarnation,

Brahmahood = absorption into the divine
essence.

Brahmism

[all this postulates a Supreme god]

OED

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disappearance. In Buddhist theology extinction . . . and
absorption into the supreme spirit.

(nirvanic embrace of Brahma)

bonze = Buddhist monk

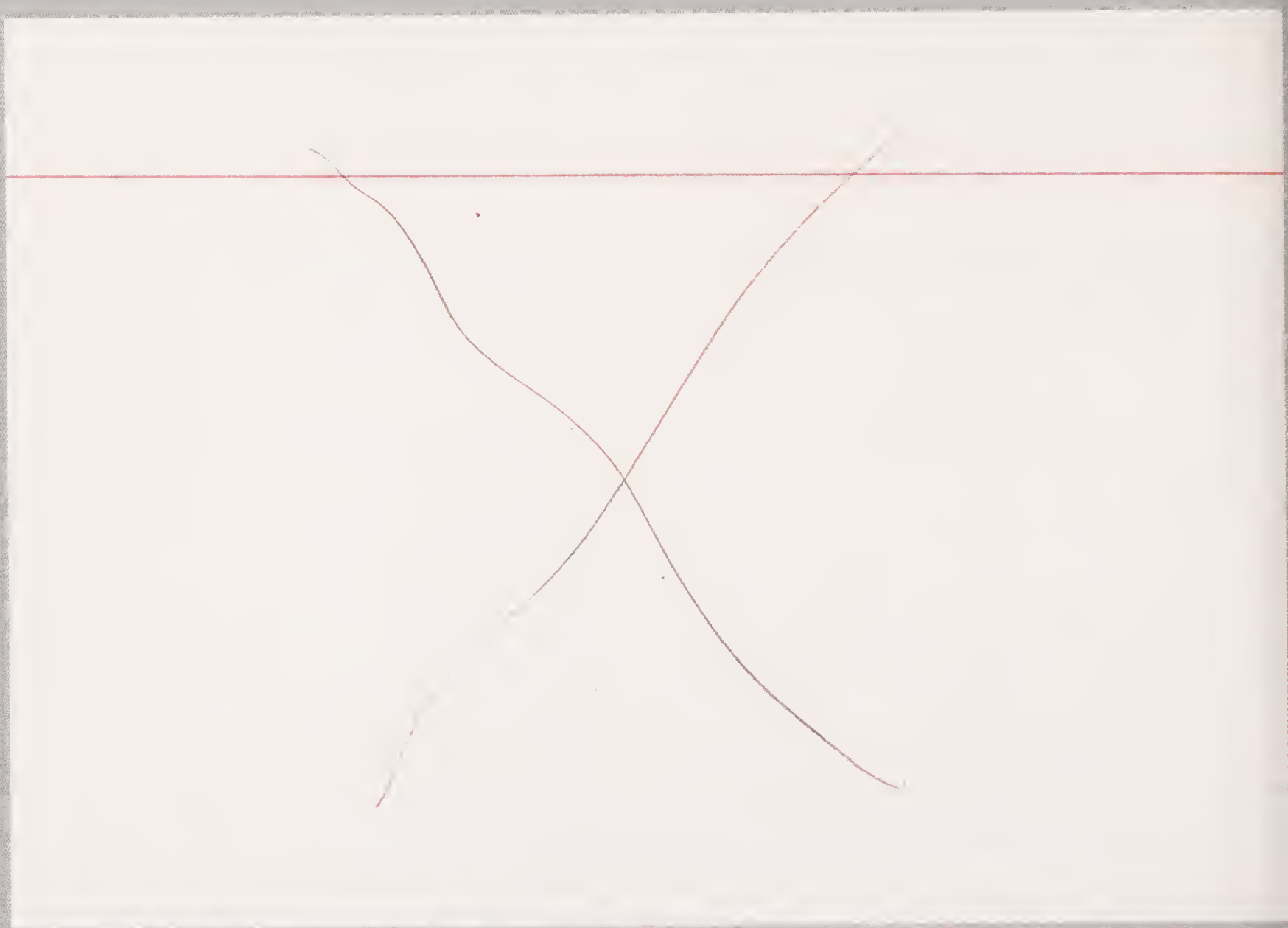
bonzery, bonzeries

the doctrine of Buddhist incarnation

Brahmahood = absorption into the divine essence.

Brahmism

(all this postulates a supreme god)



Buddhism ~~best~~

Nirvana = "extinction of the self" ^{"individual existence"}
"release from the cycle of incarnations"
"reunion with Brahma" (Hinduism)
attained through the suppression of individual
existence.

Buddhism: Beatic spiritual condition

The religious rubbish and ~~mysticism~~
mysticism of Oriental wisdom

The minor poetry of mystical myths

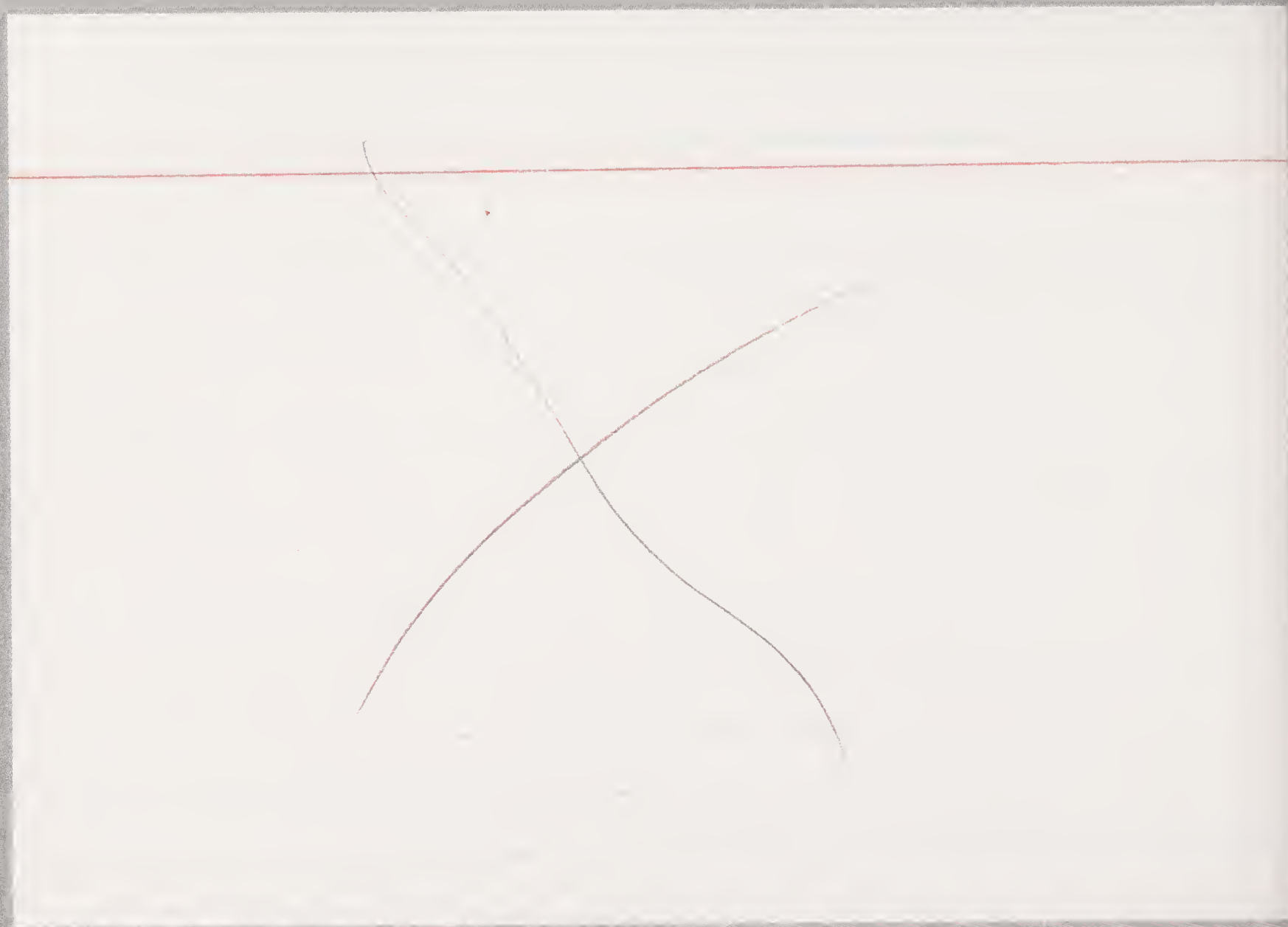
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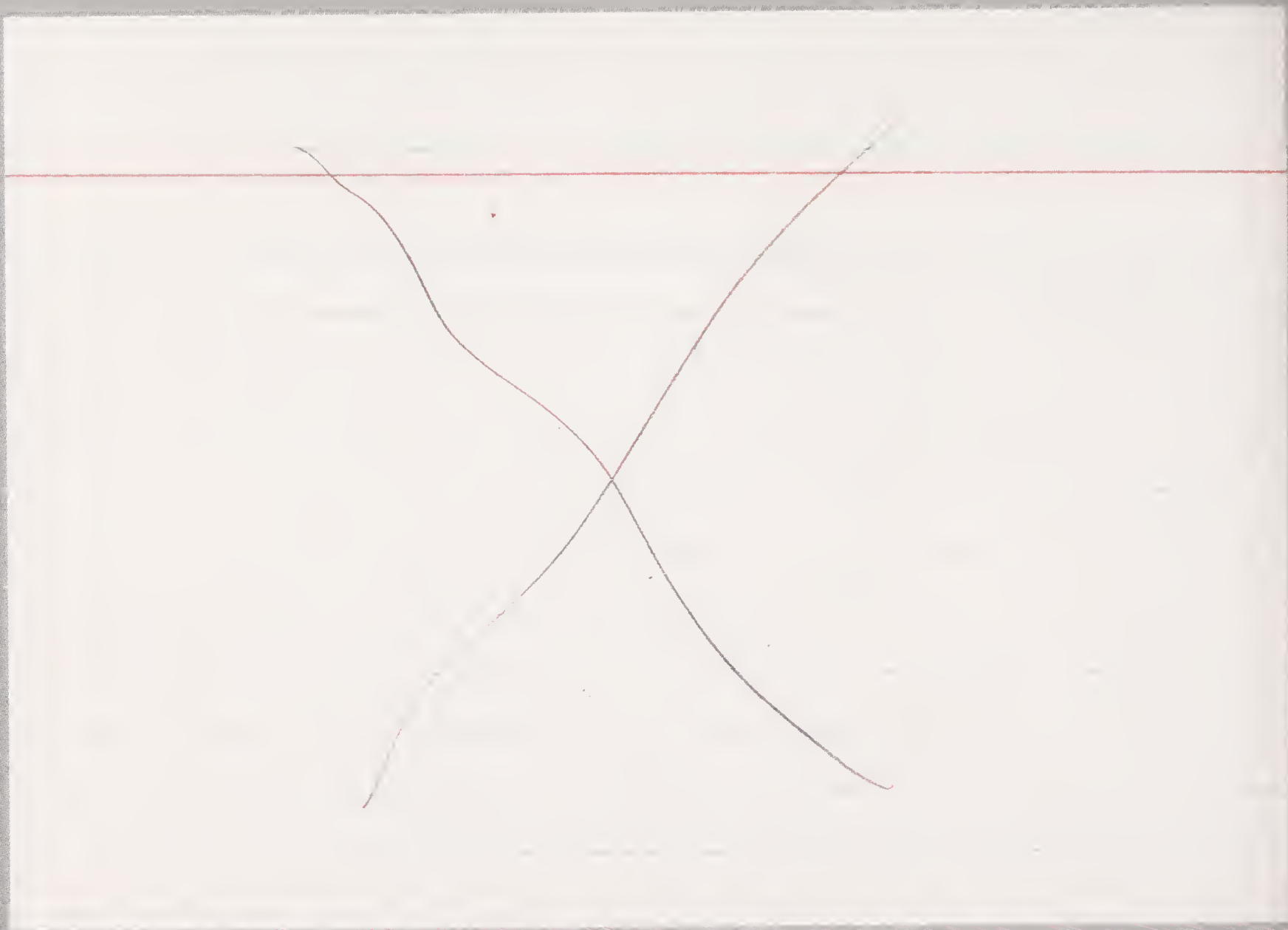
The minor poetry of mystical myths



The novel Laura was sent to me by the painter Rawitch, a rejected admirer of my wife, of whom he did an exquisite oil a few years ago. The way I was led by delicate clues and ghostly nudges to the exhibition where "Lady with Fan" was sold to me by his girl friend, a sniggering tart with gilt fingernails, is a separate anecdote in the anthology of humiliation to which, since my marriage, I have been a constant contributor. As to the book,

Wild A

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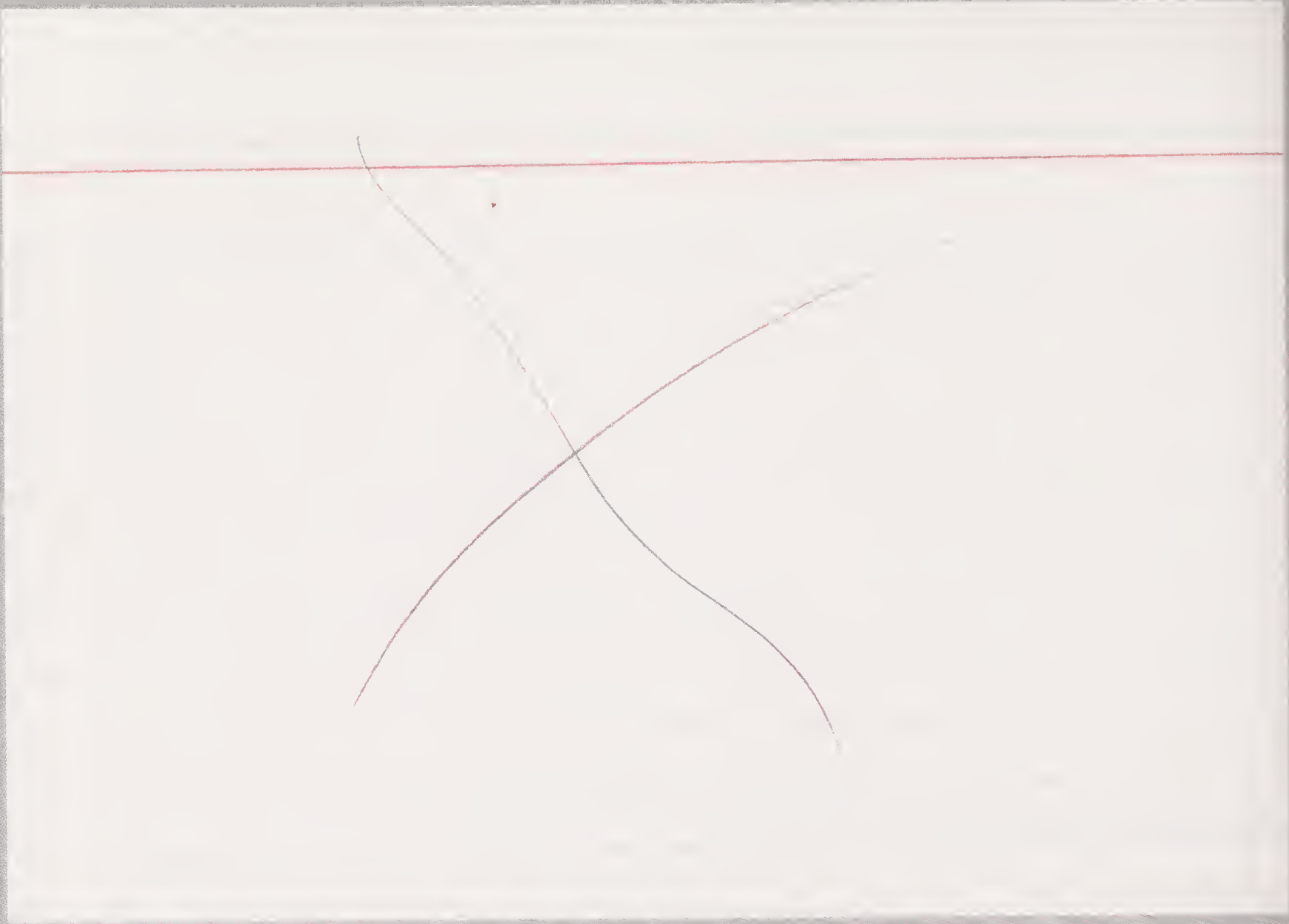


Wild B

a bestseller, ^{which} the blurb described as
"a roman à clef with the clef lost for
ever", the demonic hands of one of
my servants, the Velvet Valet - as
Flora called him, kept slipping it
into my visual field until I
opened the damned thing and discovered
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¶¶¶ Winny Carr waiting for her train on the station platform of Sex, a delightful Swiss resort famed for its crimson plums noticed her old friend Flora on a bench near the bookstall ^{with a} paperback in her lap. This was the soft cover copy of Laura issued virtually at the same time as its ~~stouter~~ much stouter and comelier ~~hardback~~ ~~edition~~ ~~hardback~~ edition. She had just bought it at the station bookstall,

Z

Last §

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Z_2

and in answer to Winny's jocular remark ("hope you'll enjoy the story of your life") said she doubted if she could force herself to start reading it.

Oh you must! said Winnie,
it is of, course, fictionalized and all
that but ~~as Tracy says pretty~~
you'll come ~~to~~ face to face with yourself ~~and~~
~~and then you'll see your~~
~~own heart~~ ~~at every other corner~~ And
there's your wonderful death. Let me

Z2

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(Z₃)

show you your wonderful death. Damn, here's my train. Are ~~you~~ we going together?

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm expecting somebody. Nothing very exciting. Please, let me have my book."

"Oh, but I simply must find that ^{passage} ~~chapter~~ for you. It's not quite at the end. You'll scream with laughter. It's the craziest death in the world."

"You'll miss your train" said Flora

Z₃

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Philip Wild spent most of the afternoon in the shade of a marbrosa tree (that he vaguely mistook for an opulent ~~tree~~ tropical race of the birch) sipping tea with lemon and ~~sparsely~~ making ~~embryonic notes~~ with a diminutive pencil attached to a diminutive agenda-book which seemed to melt into his broad moist palm where it would spread in sporadic crucifixions. He sat with widespread

Five A

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legs to accomodate his enormous stomach and now and then checked or made in midthought half a movement to check the fly buttons of his old fashioned white trousers. There was also the recurrent search for his pencil sharpener, which he absently put into a different pocket every time after use. Otherwise, between all those small movements, he sat perfectly still, like a meditative idol. Flora would be often present lolling in a deckchair,

Five B

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enclosing his chair in a ^{her progression} of strewn magazines C

moving it from time to time, circling as it were around her husband, ^{and} as she sought an even denser shade than the one sheltering him. The urge to expose the maximum of naked flesh permitted by fashion was combined in her strange little mind with a ^{dread of the} least touch of tan ~~defiling her ivory skin~~

~~the woman's body was a masterpiece of art~~
~~the woman's body was a masterpiece of art~~
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C

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Eric's notes

To all contraceptive precautions, and indeed to orgasm at its safest and deepest, I much preferred—madly preferred—finishing off at my ease against the softest part of her thigh. This predilection might have ~~been~~ been due to the unforgettable impact of my romps with schoolmates of different but erotically identical, sexes

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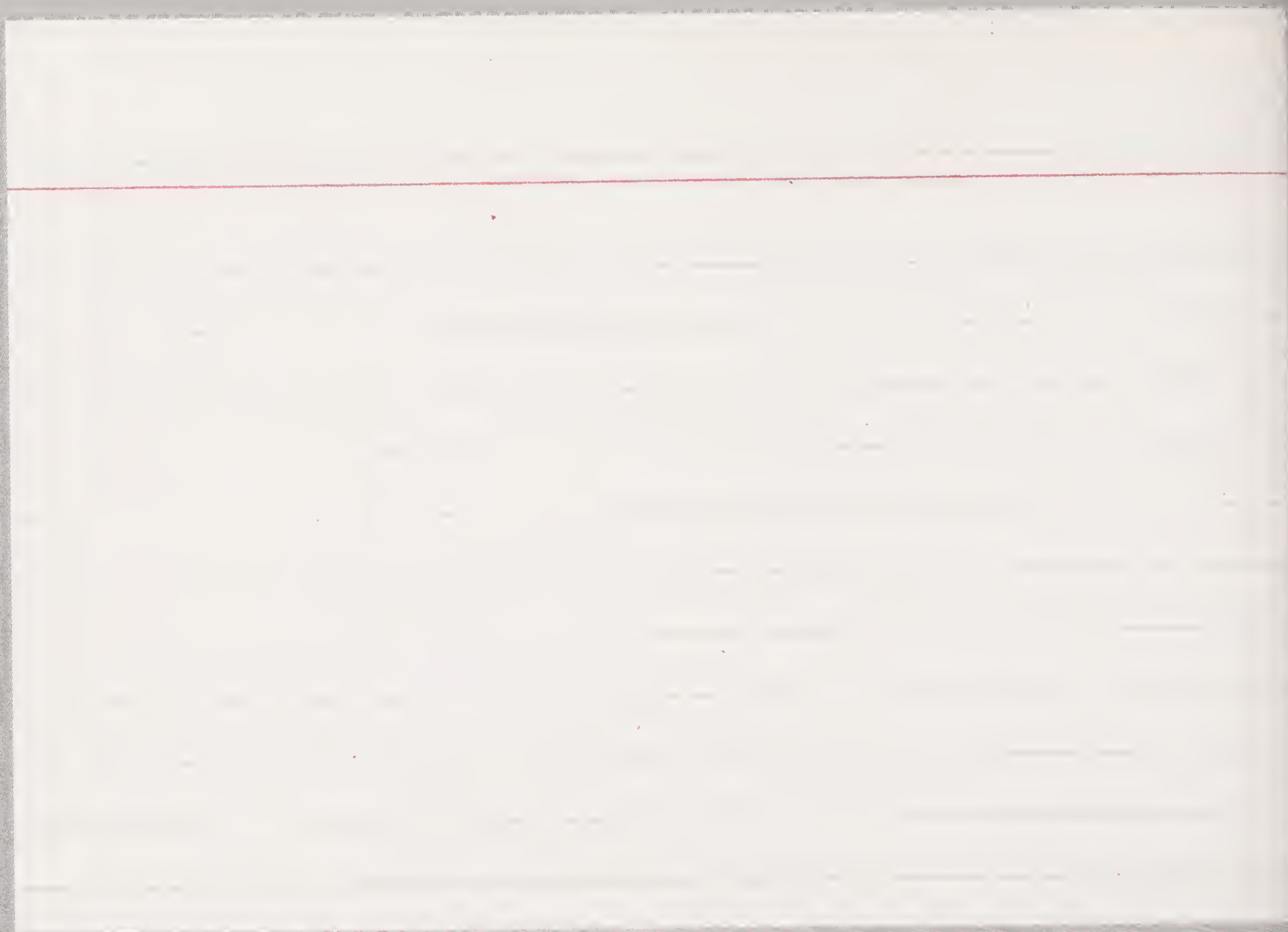


he too needed
and that he would come to
stay for for at least a
week every other month

Thank you for a Theme
Begin with [poem] etc and
finish with mast and Flora, ascribe to picture

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and that he would come to stay for for at least a week every
other month

This [key] for a Theme
Begin with [poem] etc and
finish with mast and Flora, ascribe to picture

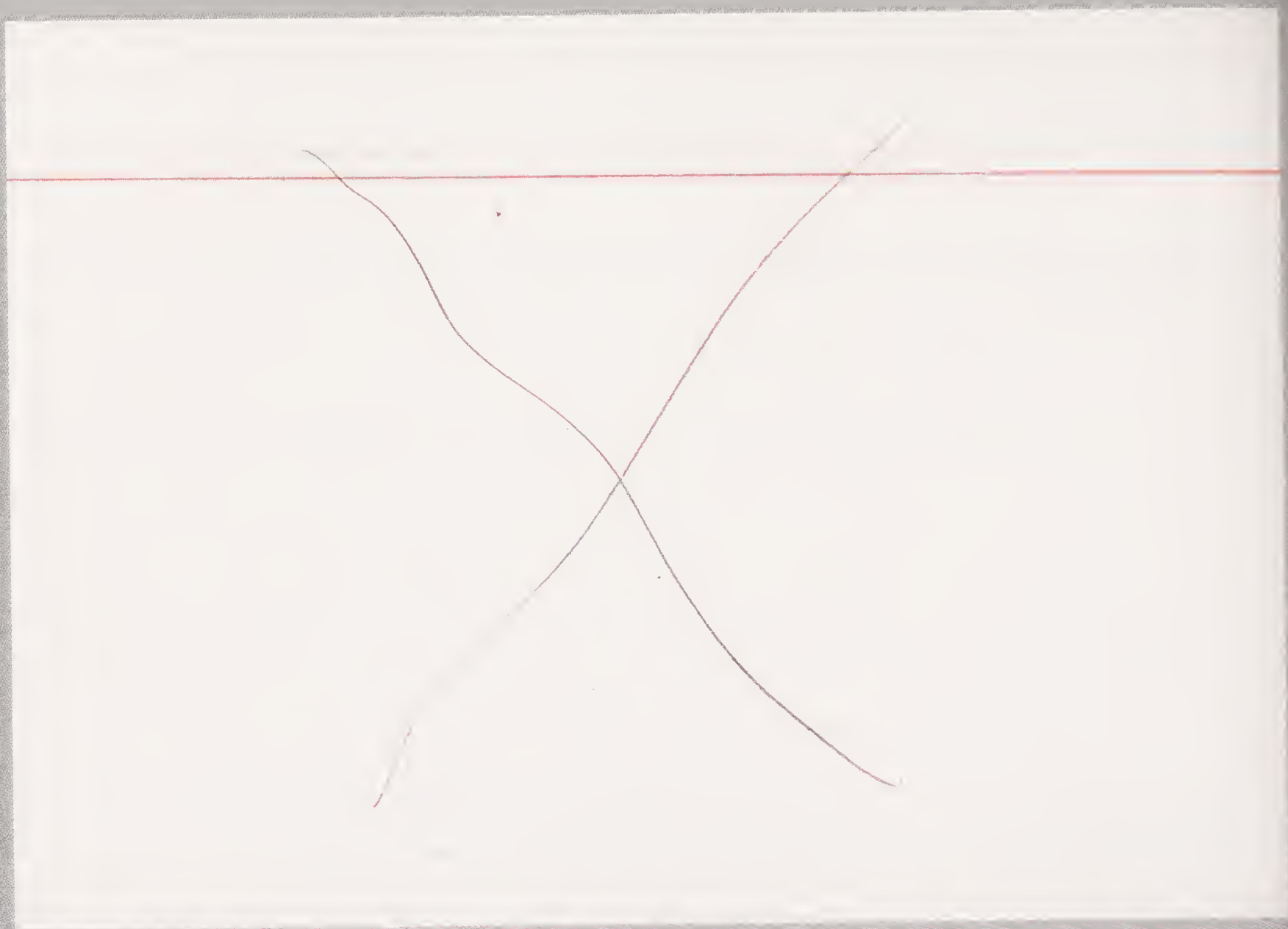


X

After a three-year separation (distant war, regular exchange of tender letters) we met again. Though still married to that hog she kept away from him and at the moment sojourned at a central European resort in eccentric solitude. We met in a splendid park that she praised with exaggerated warmth—picturesque trees, blooming meadows—and in a secluded part of it an ancient "^{rotunda} ~~parthenon~~" with pictures and music where

X

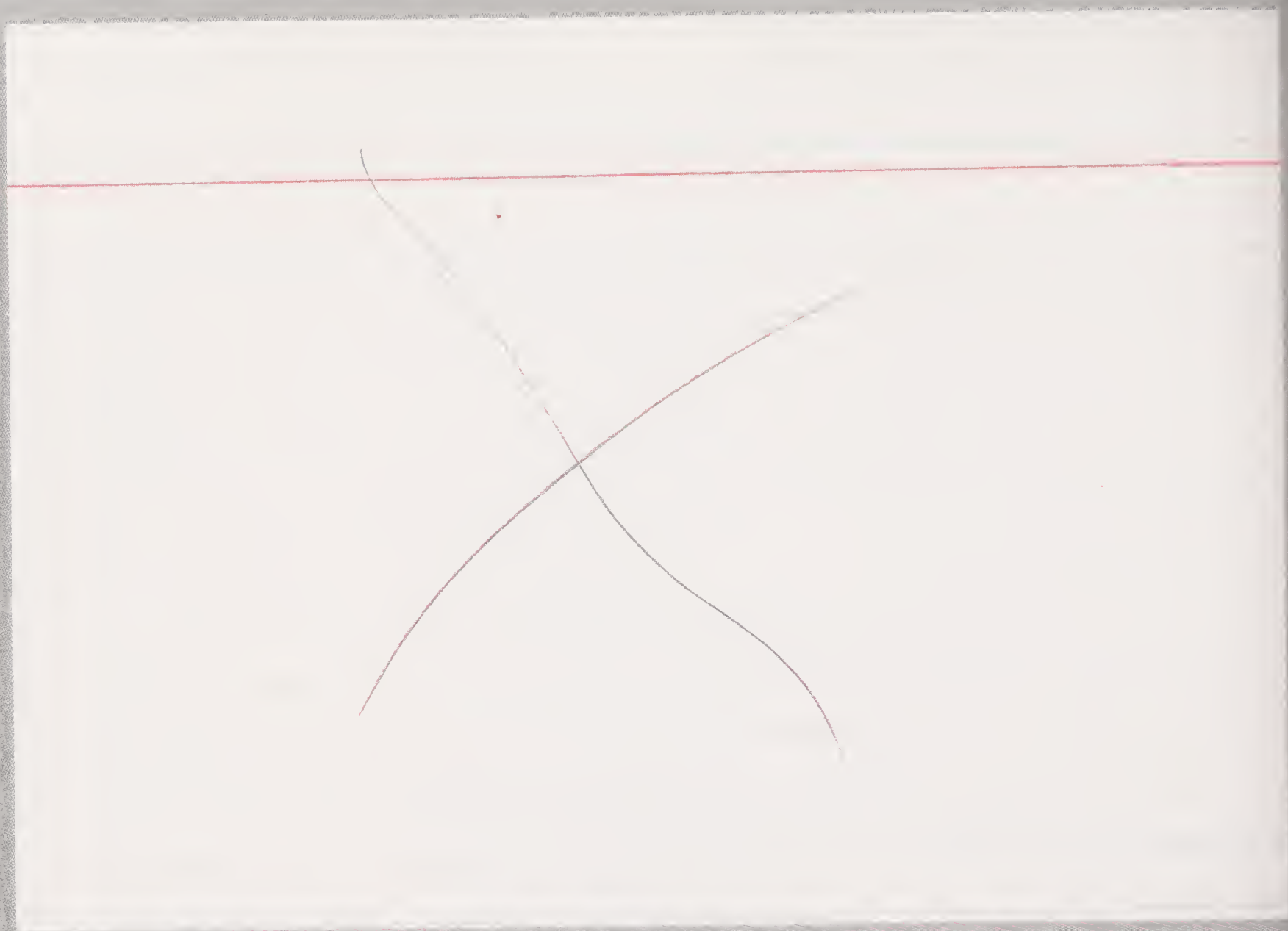
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we simply had to stop for a rest and a
 bite — the sisters, I mean, ^{she said} the attendant
 there — served iced coffee and cherry
 tart of quite special quality — and
 as she spoke I suddenly began to
 realise with a sense of utter depression
 and embarrassment that the "pavillon"
 was ~~the~~ the celebrated Green Chapel
 of St Esmeralda and that she was brimming
 with religious fervor and yet miserably, ^{desperately} fearful, despite
 bright smiles and un air enjoué, of my
 insulting her by some mocking remark.

XX

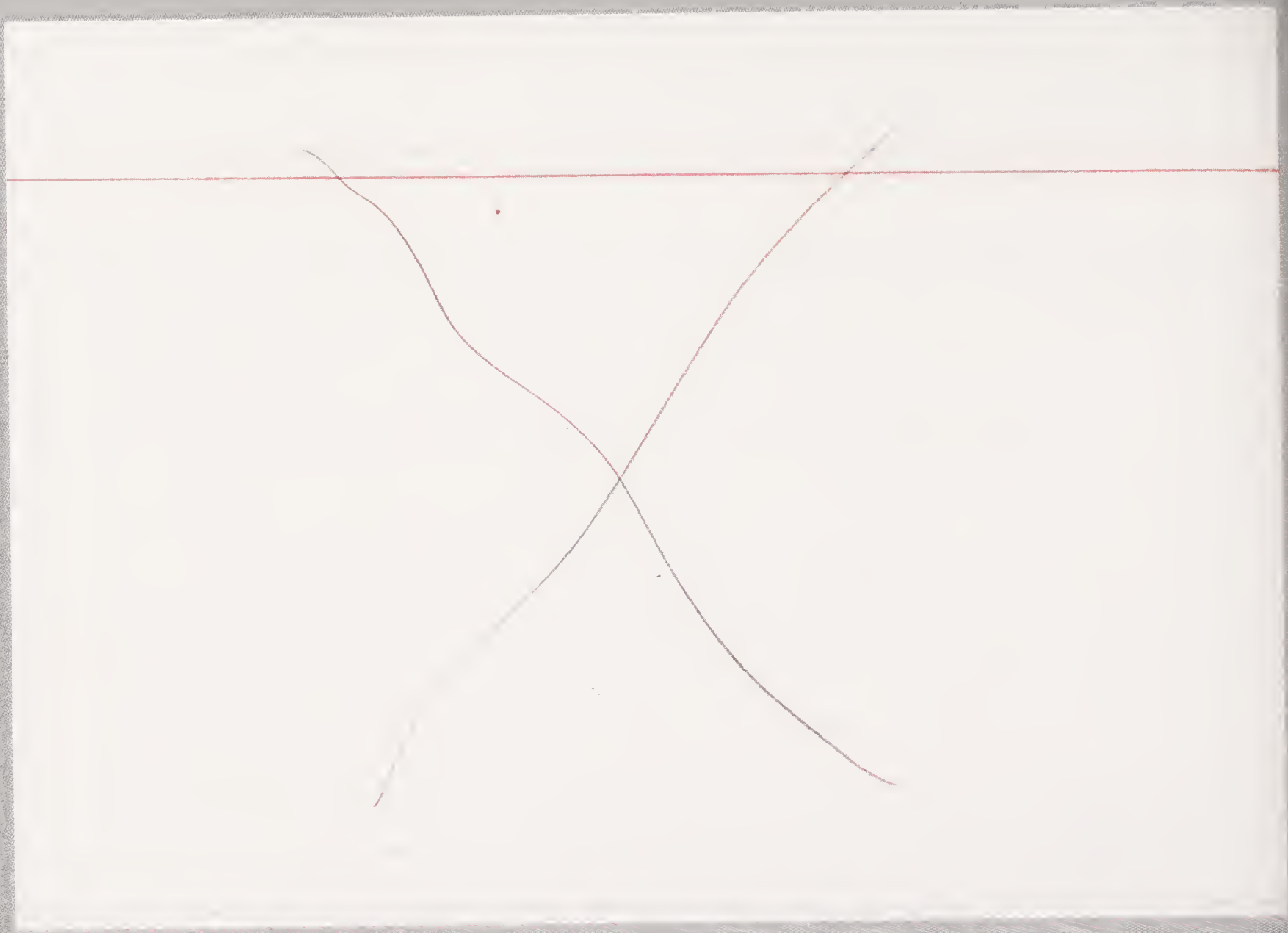
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4 I hit upon the art of thinking away my body, my being, ~~my~~ mind itself. To think away thought—luxurious suicide, delicious dissolution! Dissolution, in fact, is a marvelously apt term here, for as you sit relaxed in this comfortable chair (narrator striking its armrests) and start destroying yourself, the first thing you feel is a mounting melting from the feet upward.

D o

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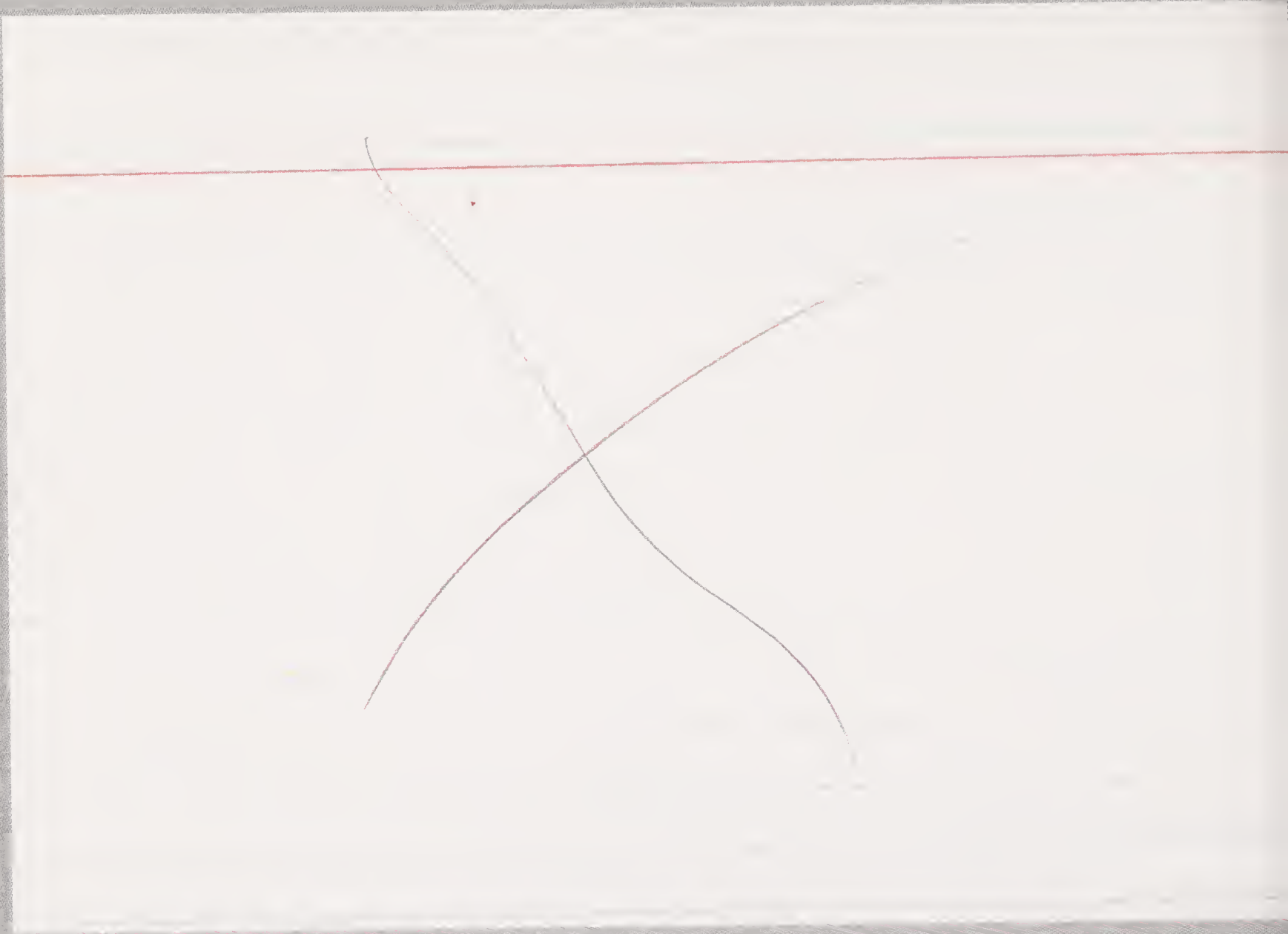


D one

In experimenting on oneself in order to pick out the sweetest death, one cannot, obviously, set ~~a~~ part of one's body on fire or drain it of blood or subject it to any other drastic operation, for the simple reason that these are one-way treatments: ~~and~~ there is no resurrecting the organ one has destroyed. It is the ability to stop the experiment and return intact from the perilous journey that makes all the difference, once ~~reaching~~ its mysterious technique

D one

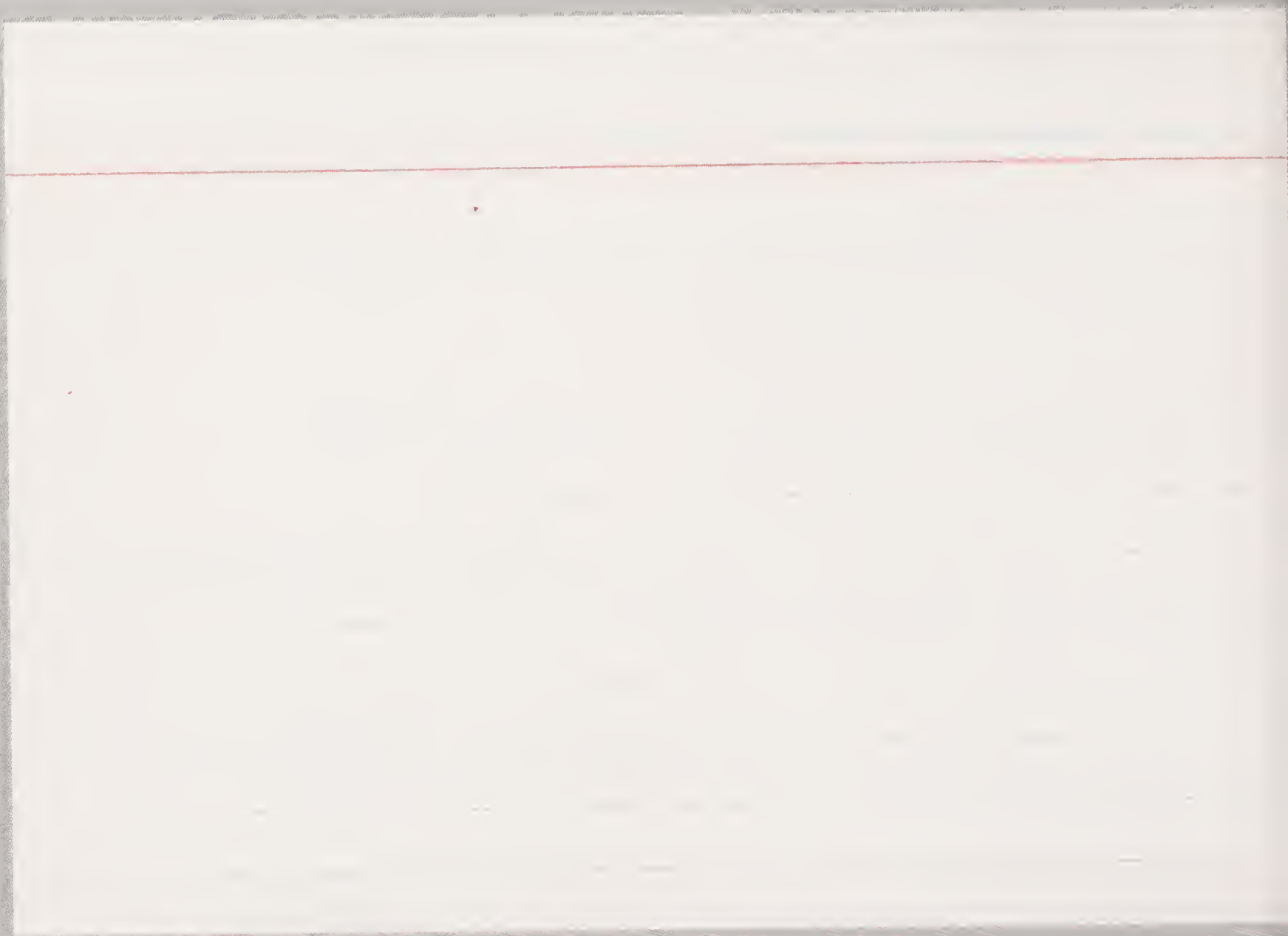
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has been mastered by the student of self-annihilation. From the preceding chapters and the footnotes to them, he has learned, I hope, how to put himself into neutral, i.e. into a harmless trance and how to get out of it by a resolute wrench of the watchful will. What cannot be taught is the specific method of dissolving one's body - or at least part of one's body, while tranced. A deep probe of one's darkest self, the unraveling of subjective associations, may suddenly

D two

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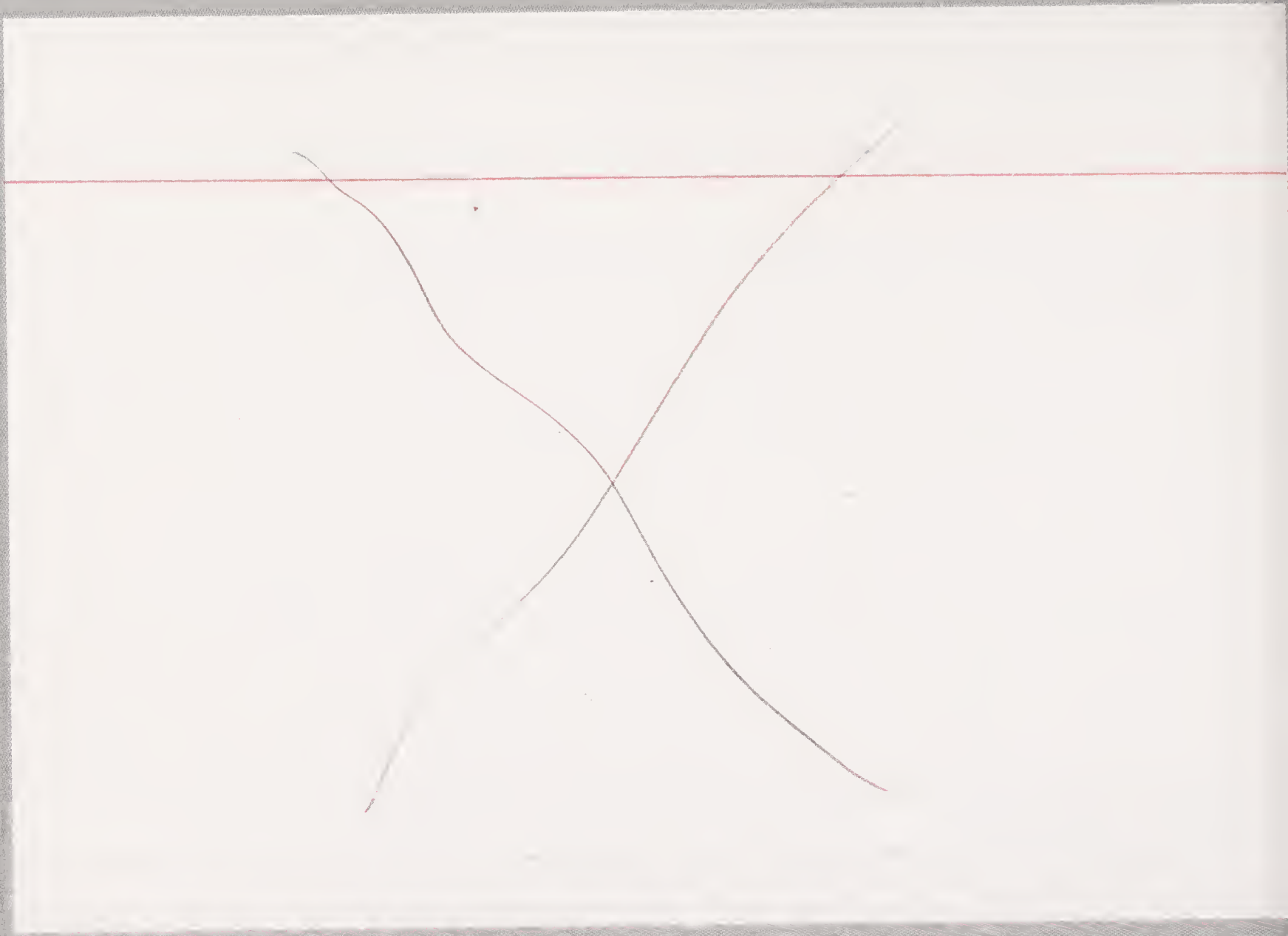
lead to the shadow of a clue and then to the clue itself. The only help I can provide is not even paradigmatic. For all I know, the way I found to woo death may be quite atypical; yet the story has to be told for the sake of its strange logic.

In a recurrent dream of my childhood I used to see a smudge on the wallpaper or on a whitewashed door, a nasty smudge that started to come alive,

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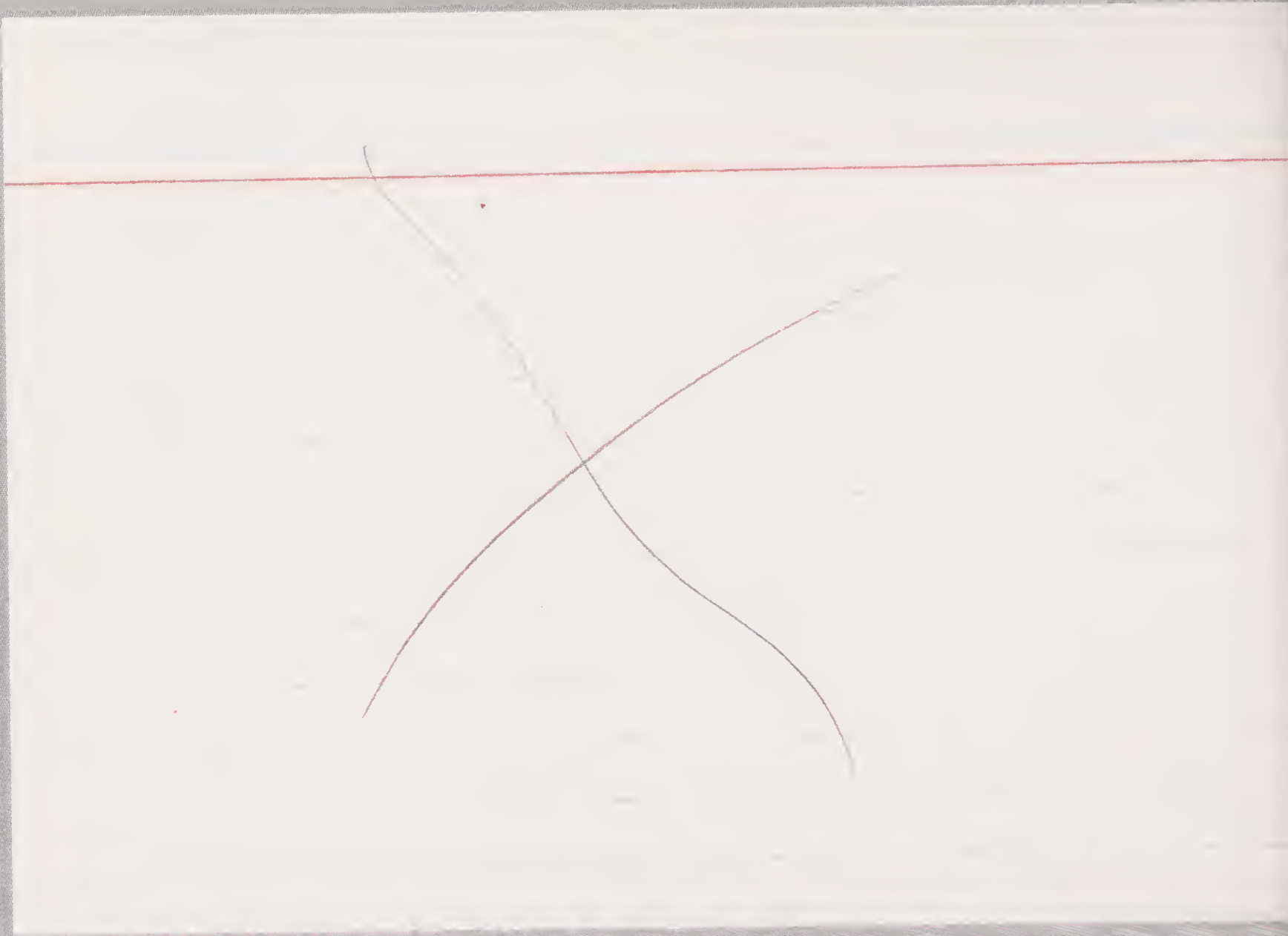


D four

turning into a crustacean-like monster. As its appendages began to move, a thrill of foolish horror shook me awake, but the same night or the next I would be again facing idly some wall or screen on which a spot of dirt would attract the naive sleeper's attention - by starting to grow and ~~beginning~~ make groping and clasping gestures - and again I managed to wake up before its bloated bulk got unstuck from the wall. But one night

D four

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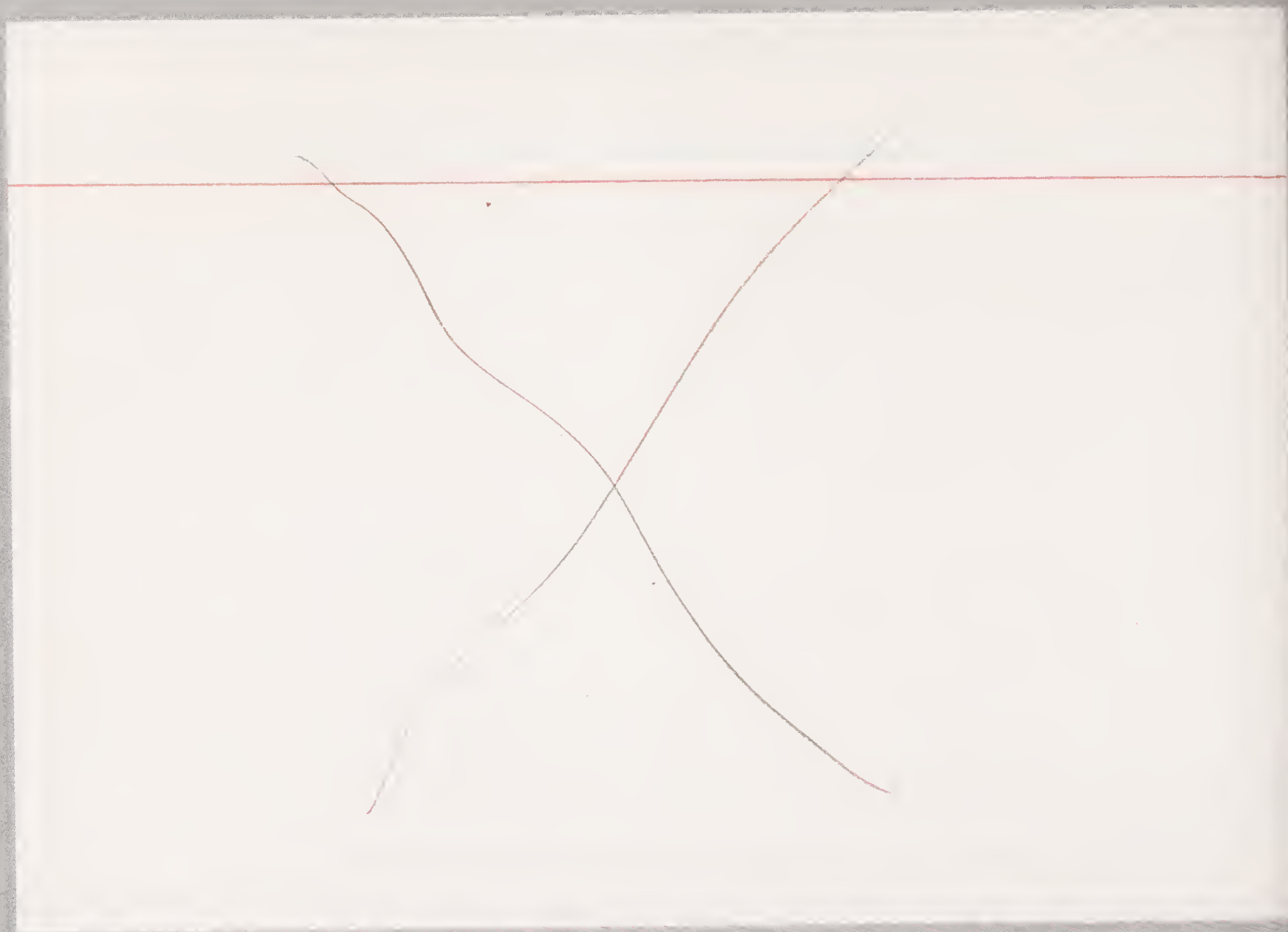


D five

when some trick of position, some dimple of pillow, some fold of bedclothes made me feel brighter and braver than usual, I let the smudge start its evolution and, drawing on an ^{imagined} mitten, I simply rubbed out the beast. Three or four times it appeared again in my dreams but now I welcomed its growing shape and gleefully erased it. Finally it gave up ~~bothering me~~ — as some day life will give up — bothering me.

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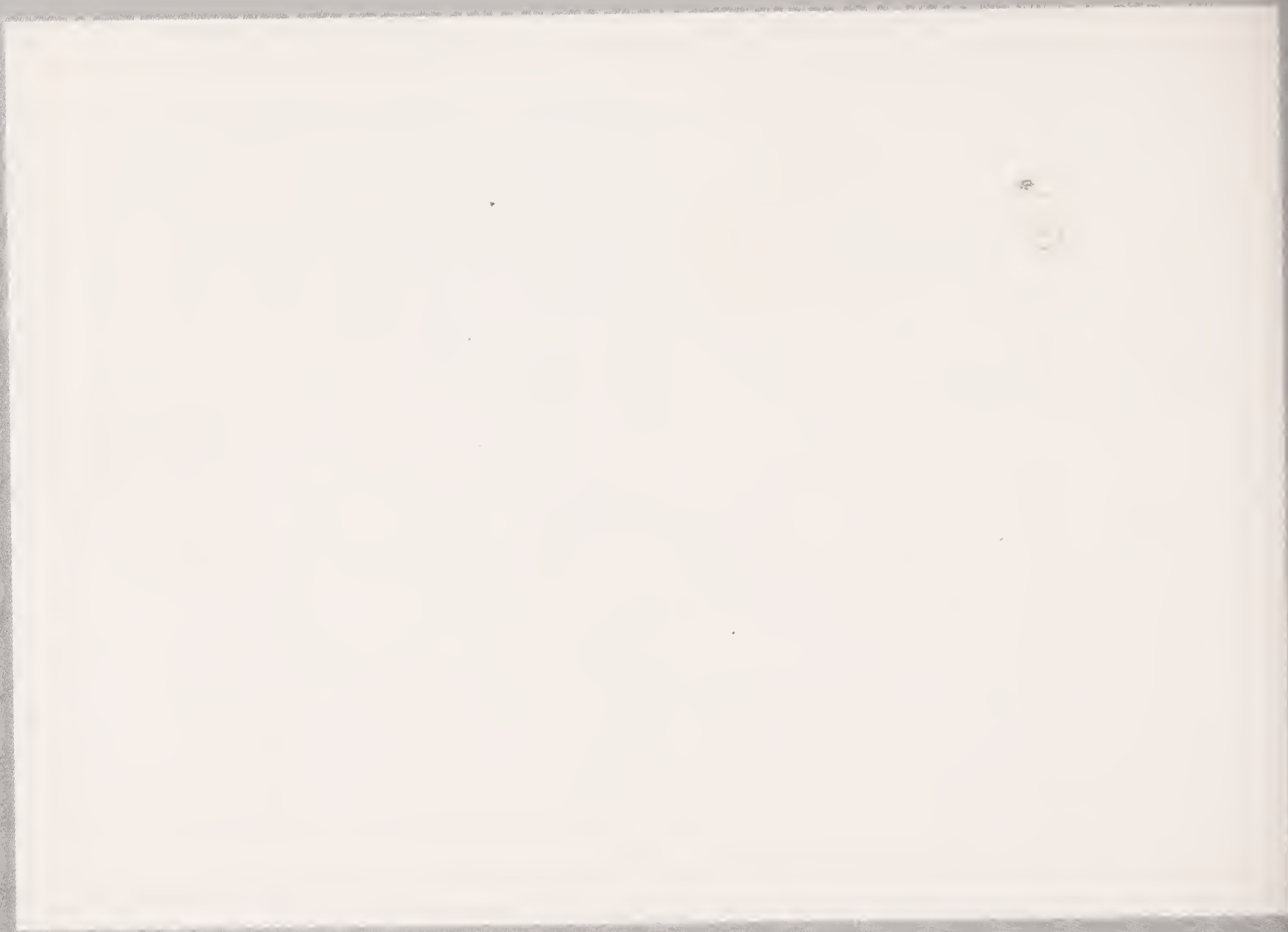


Legs (2)

I also loath ~~the~~ ~~proximity~~ the proximity of valets and the vile touch of their hands. The last one I had was at least clean ~~and~~ but he regarded the act of dressing his master as a battle of wits, he doing his best ~~to~~ ~~turn the wrong outside into the right inside~~ to turn the wrong outside into the right inside and I undoing his endeavors by 'working my right foot into my left trouser leg'. Our complicated exertions which to an onlooker might

Legs 2 8

I also loath[e] the proximity of valets and the vile touch of their hands. The last one I had was at least clean but he regarded the act of dressing his master as a battle of wits, he doing his best to turn the wrong outside into the right inside and I undoing his endeavors by working my right foot into my left trouser leg. Our complicated exertions, which to an onlooker might



Legs ③

have seemed some sort of exotic wrestling match. Would take us from one room to another and end by my sitting on the floor, exhausted and hot, with the bottom of my trousers mis-clothing my heaving abdomen.

Finally, in my sixties, I found the right person to ~~come out~~ dress and undress me; an old illusionist who is able to go behind a screen in the guise of a cossack and instantly come out at the other end as

Legs 3 9

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Legs ¹⁰(4)

Uncle Sam. He is tasteless and rude and altogether not a nice person, but he has taught me many a subtle trick such as ~~as~~ folding trousers properly ~~and~~ and I think I shall keep him despite the fantastic wages ~~he asks~~! the rascal asks.

11

Legs 4 10

Uncle Sam. He is tasteless and rude and altogether not a nice person, but he has taught me many a subtle trick such as folding trousers properly and I think I shall keep him despite the fantastic wages the rascal asks.



Wild remembers

Every now and then she would turn up for a few moments between trains, between planes, between lovers. My morning sleep would be interrupted by heartrending sound — a window opening, a little bustle downstairs a trunk coming, a trunk going, distant telephone conversations that seemed to be conducted in conspiratorial whispers. If shivering in my nightshirt I dared to waylay her all she said would be "you really ought to lose some weight" or "I hope you transferred that money as I indicated" — and all doors closed again.

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Notes

the art of self-slaughter

TLS

16.I.76

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Philip Nikitin:

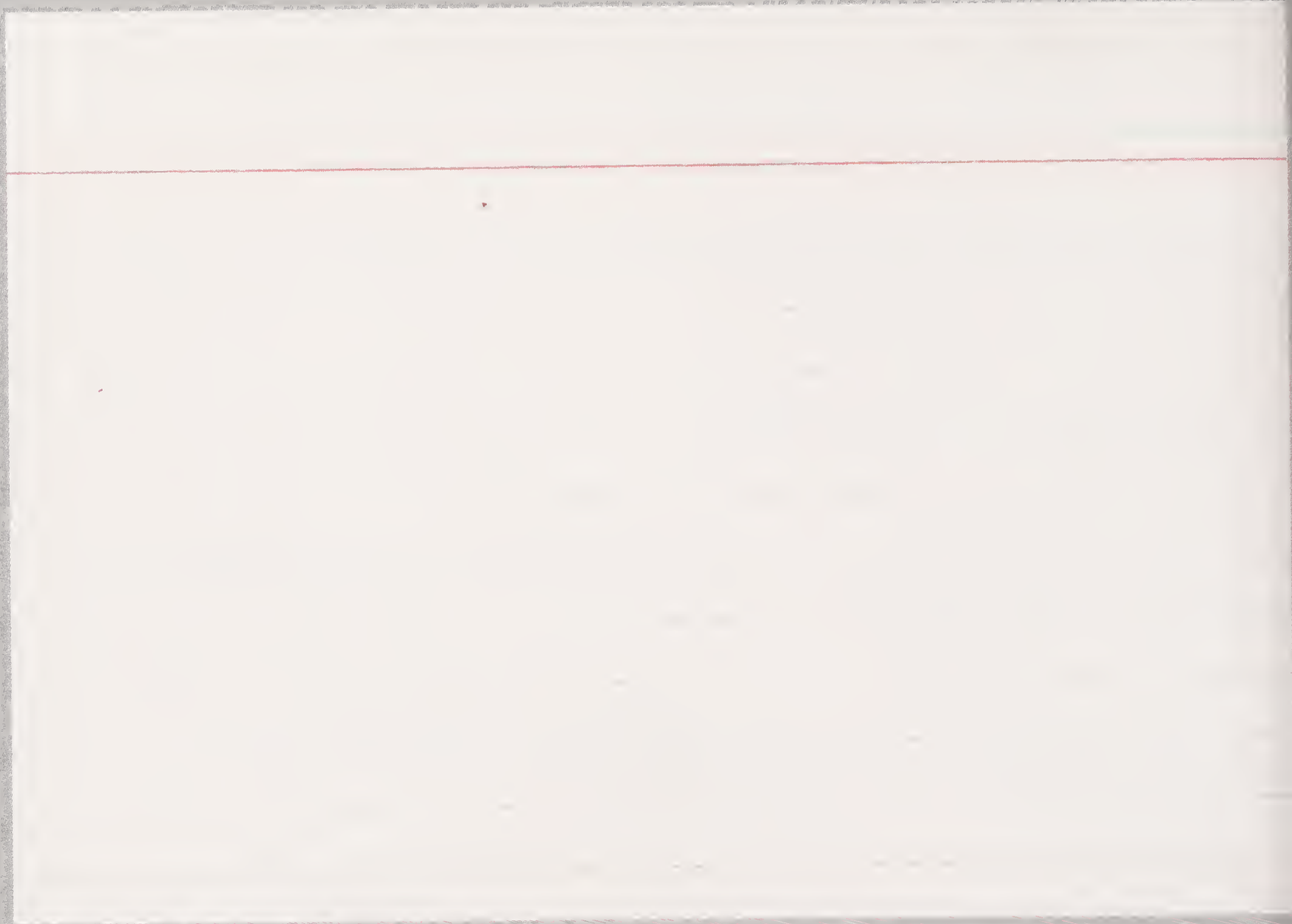
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Notes

the art of self-slaughter

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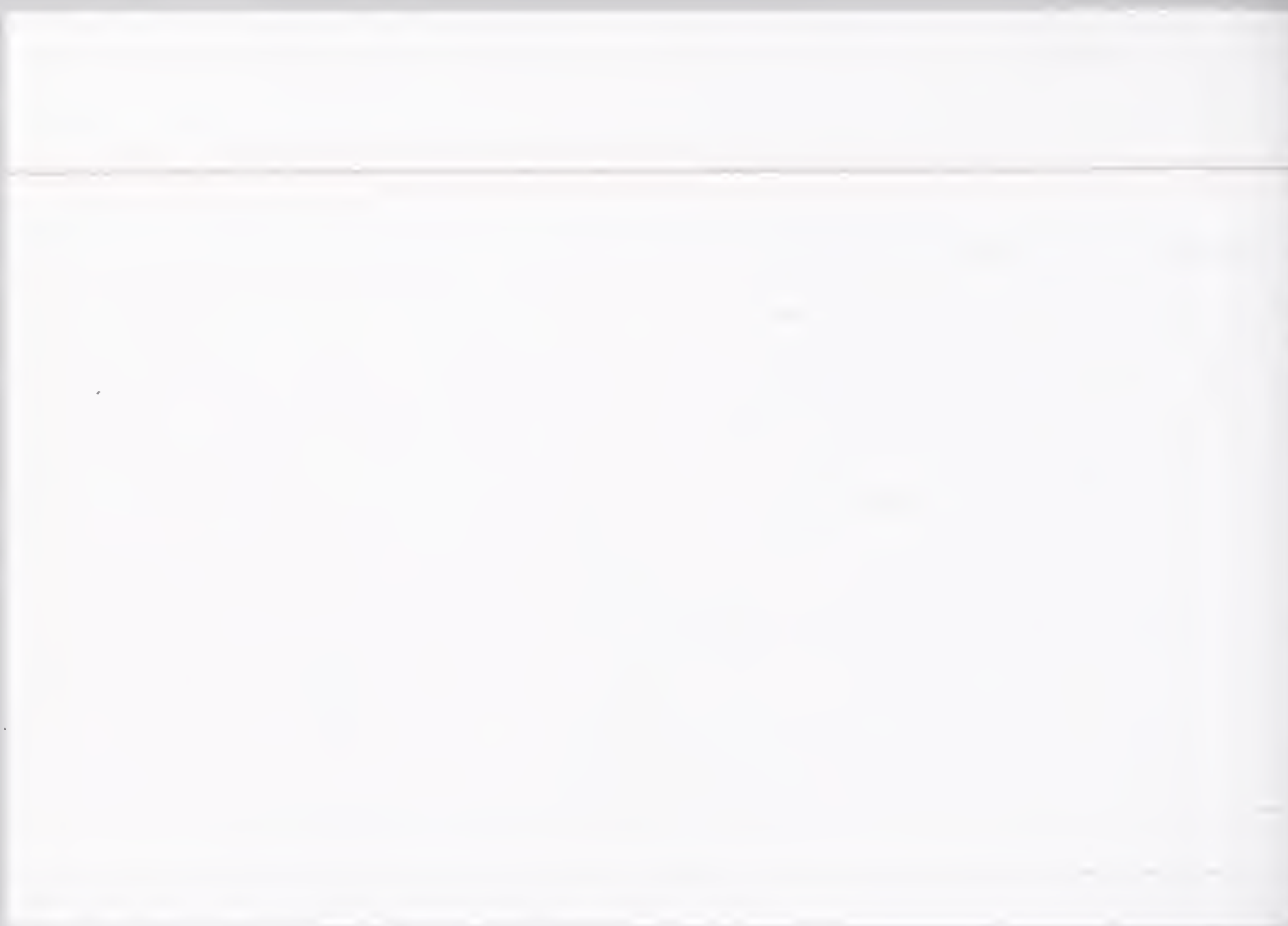


Wild D

By now I have died up to my navel
some fifty times in less than three
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anxiety and even panic. More

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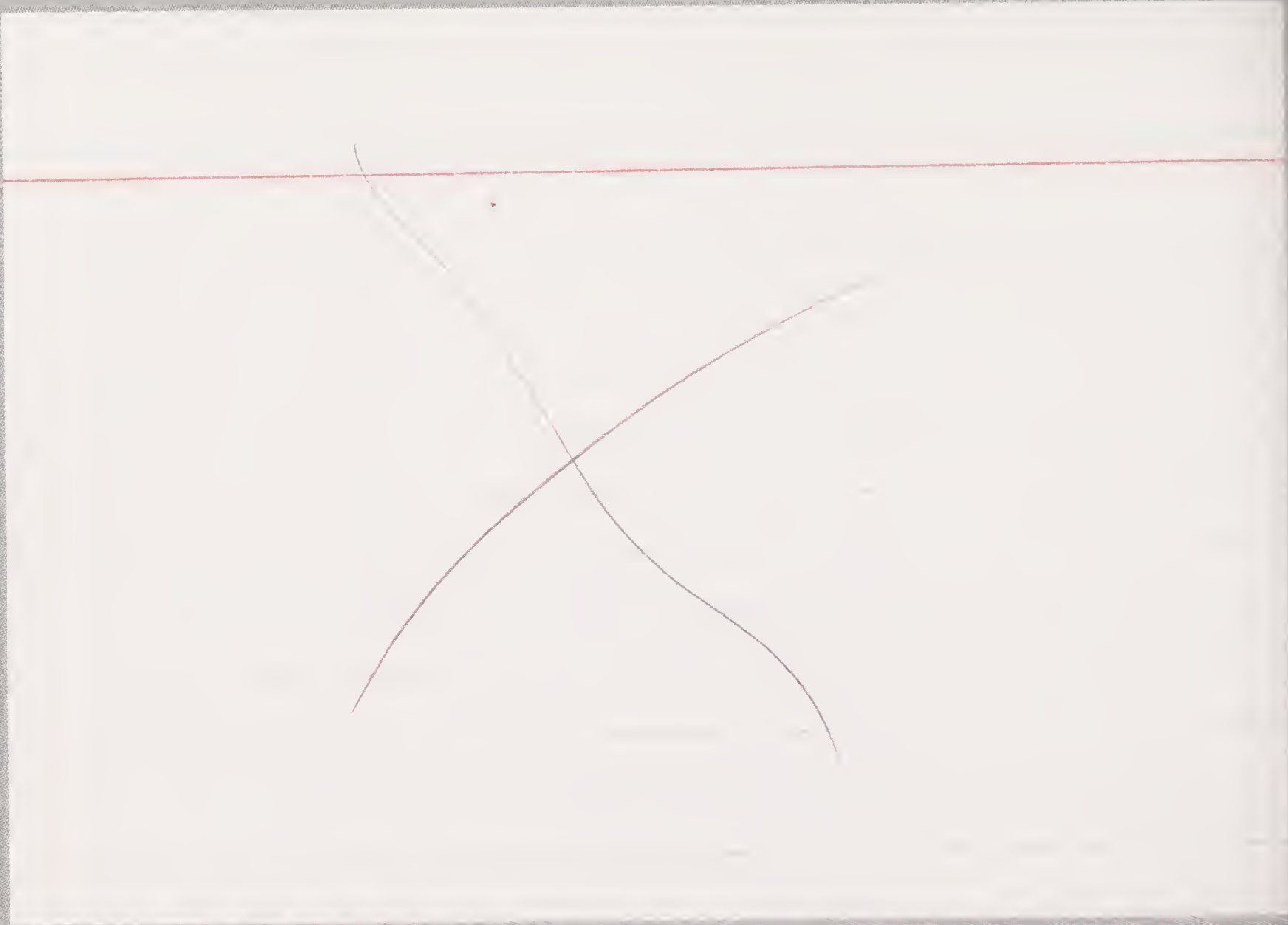
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How curious to recall the trouble I had in finding an adequate spot for my first experiments. There was an old swing hanging from a branch of an old oak tree in a corner of the garden. Its ropes looked sturdy enough; its seat was provided with a comfortable safety bar of the kind inherited nowadays by chair lifts. It had been much used years ago by my half sister, a fat dreamy pigtailed creature who died before reaching puberty. I now had to take a ladder to it, for the sentimental

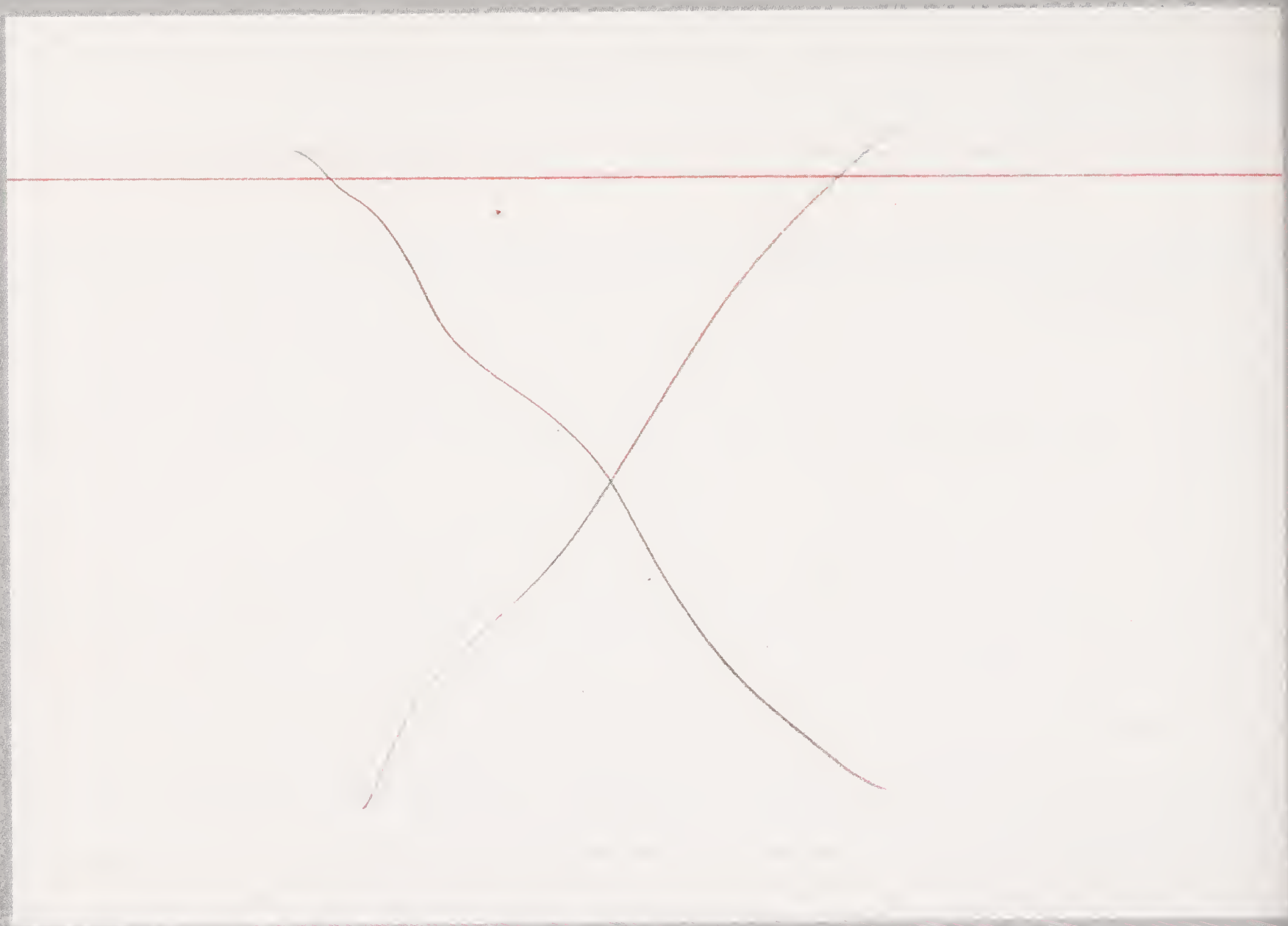
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Thinking away onself

a melting sensation

an envahissement of delicious dissolution
(what a miraculous appropriate
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aftereffect of certain drug
used by anaesthetist

I have never been much
interested in navel

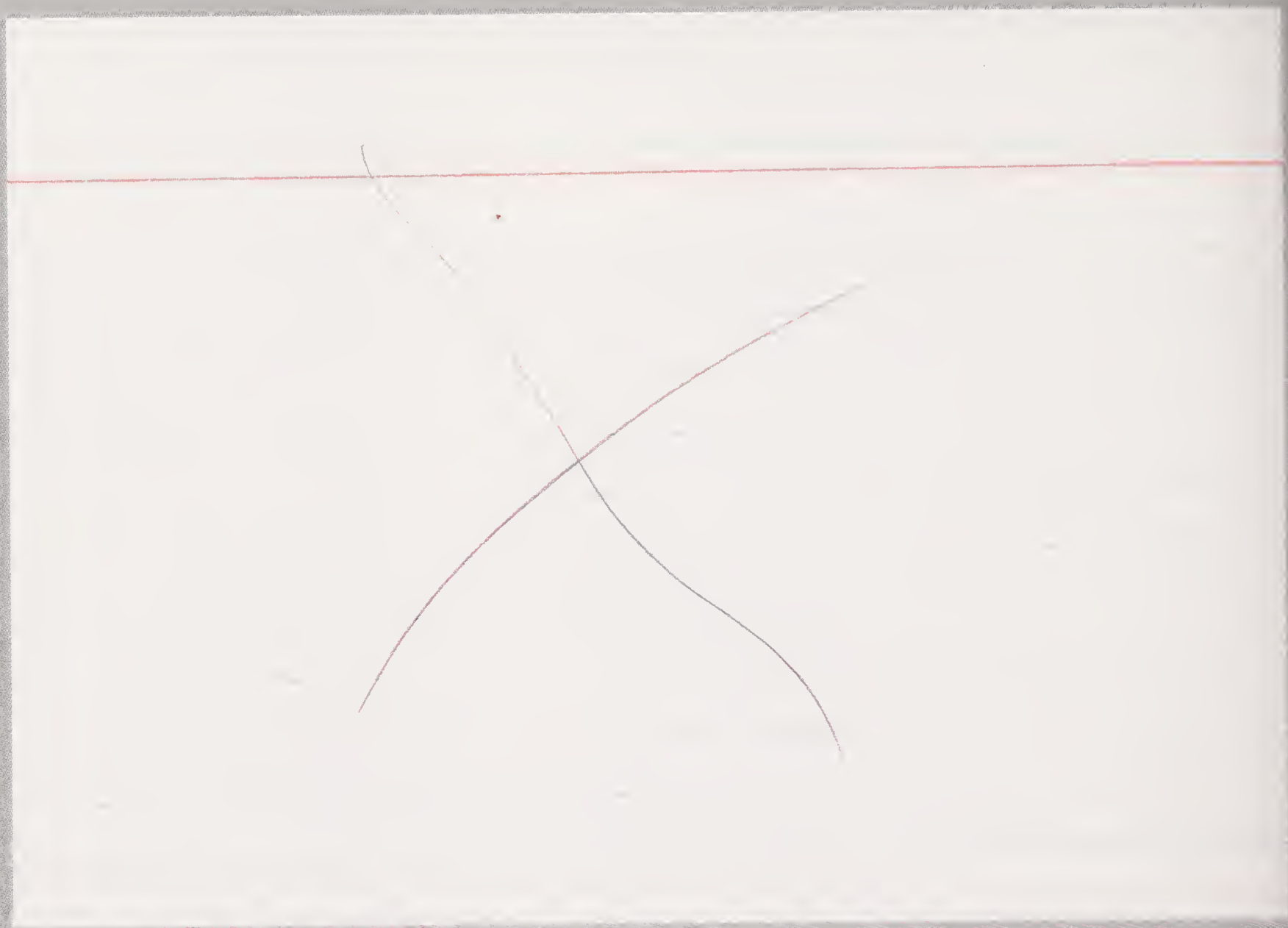
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efface
expunge
erase

delete
rub out

~~scribble~~
wipe out
obliterate

efface
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delete
rub out
wipe out
obliterate



A Note About the Author

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was born on April 23, 1899, in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Nabokovs were known for their high culture and commitment to public service, and the elder Nabokov was an outspoken opponent of anti-Semitism and one of the leaders of the opposition party, the Kadets. In 1919, following the Bolshevik revolution, he took his family into exile. Three years later he was shot and killed at a political rally in Berlin while trying to shield the speaker from right-wing assassins.

The Nabokov household was trilingual, and as a child Vladimir was already reading Wells, Poe, Browning, Keats, Flaubert, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, alongside the popular entertainments of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Jules Verne. As a young man, he studied Slavic and Romance languages at Trinity College, Cambridge, taking his honors degree in 1922. For the next eighteen years he lived in Berlin and Paris, writing prolifically in Russian under the pseudonym Sirin and supporting himself through translations, lessons in English and tennis, and by composing the first crossword puzzles in Russian. In 1925 he married Véra Slonim, with whom he had one child, a son, Dmitri.

Having already fled Russia and Germany, Nabokov became a refugee once more in 1940, when he was forced to leave France for the United States. There he taught at Wellesley, Harvard, and Cornell. He also gave up writing in Russian and began composing fiction

in English. In his afterword to *Lolita* he claimed, “My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody’s concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way.” Yet Nabokov’s American period saw the creation of what are arguably his greatest works, *Bend Sinister* (1947), *Lolita* (1955), *Invitation to a Beheading* (1957), and *Pale Fire* (1962), as well as the translation of his earlier Russian novels into English. He also undertook English translations of works by Lermontov and Pushkin and wrote several books of criticism. Vladimir Nabokov died in a hospital near Montreux, Switzerland, in 1977.

A N O T E O N T H E T Y P E

The text of this book was set in Filosofia, a reinvention by type designer Zuzana Licko of the classic Bodoni font. Introduced by the Emigre digital type foundry in 1996, it reduces the contrast of the original's thick and thin strokes for easier reading, while rounding out the ends of the serifs to mimic Bodoni's original letterpress technique. Selected headlines were set in the font's unicas version, which uses a single height for characters that are otherwise separated by upper and lower case, producing an effect that is at once familiar and foreign.

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V L A D I M I R N a B O K O V

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Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada, or Ardor*; *Bend Sinister*; *The Defense*; *Despair*; *The Enchanter*; *The Eye*; *The Gift*; *Glory*; *Invitation to a Beheading*; *King, Queen, Knave*; *Laughter in the Dark*; *Lolita*; *Look at the Harlequins!*; *Mary*; *Pale Fire*; *Pnin*; *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*; *Speak, Memory*; *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*; *Strong Opinions*; *Transparent Things*; and *Vintage Nabokov* are available in Vintage paperback.

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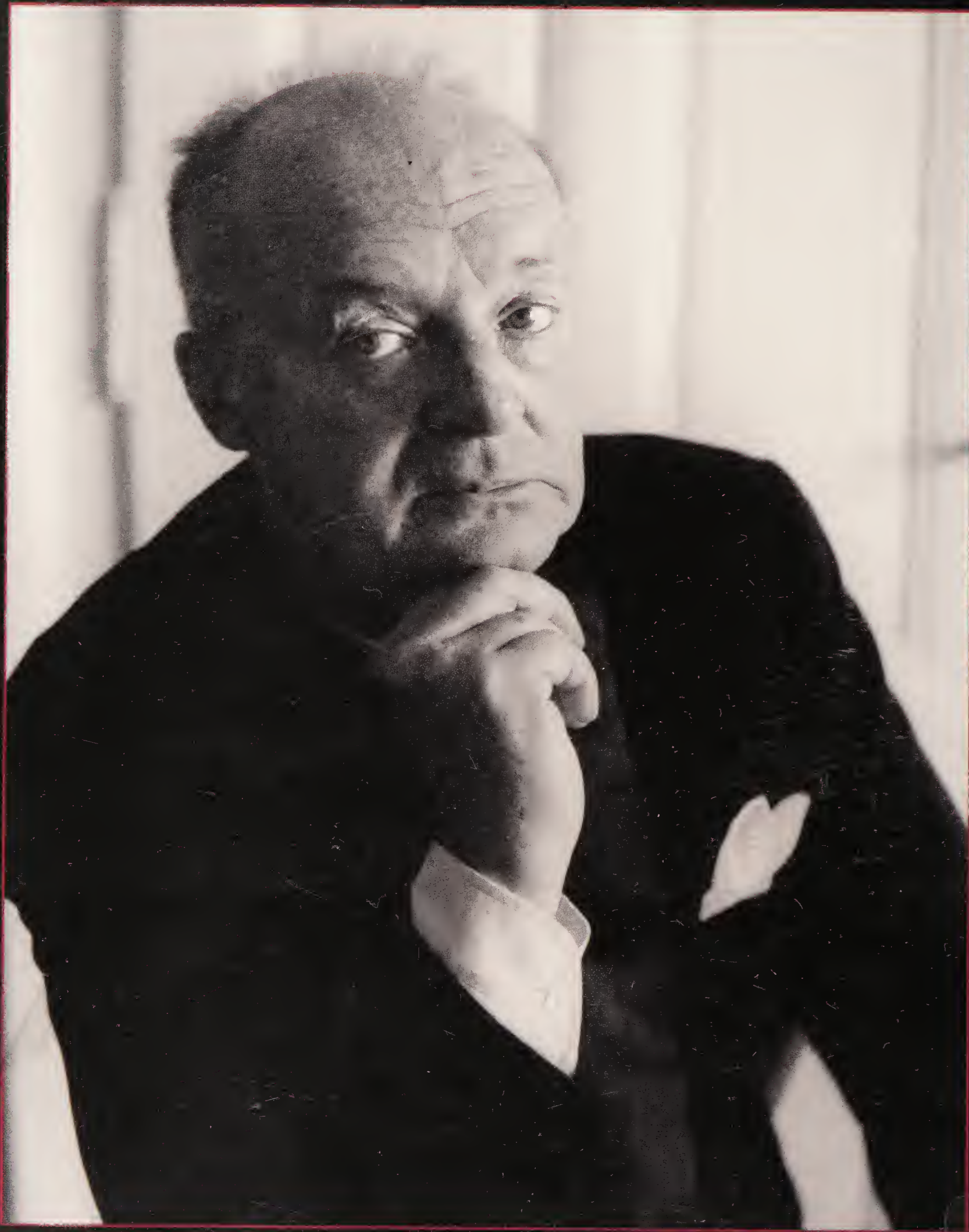
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