

Chapter XIII

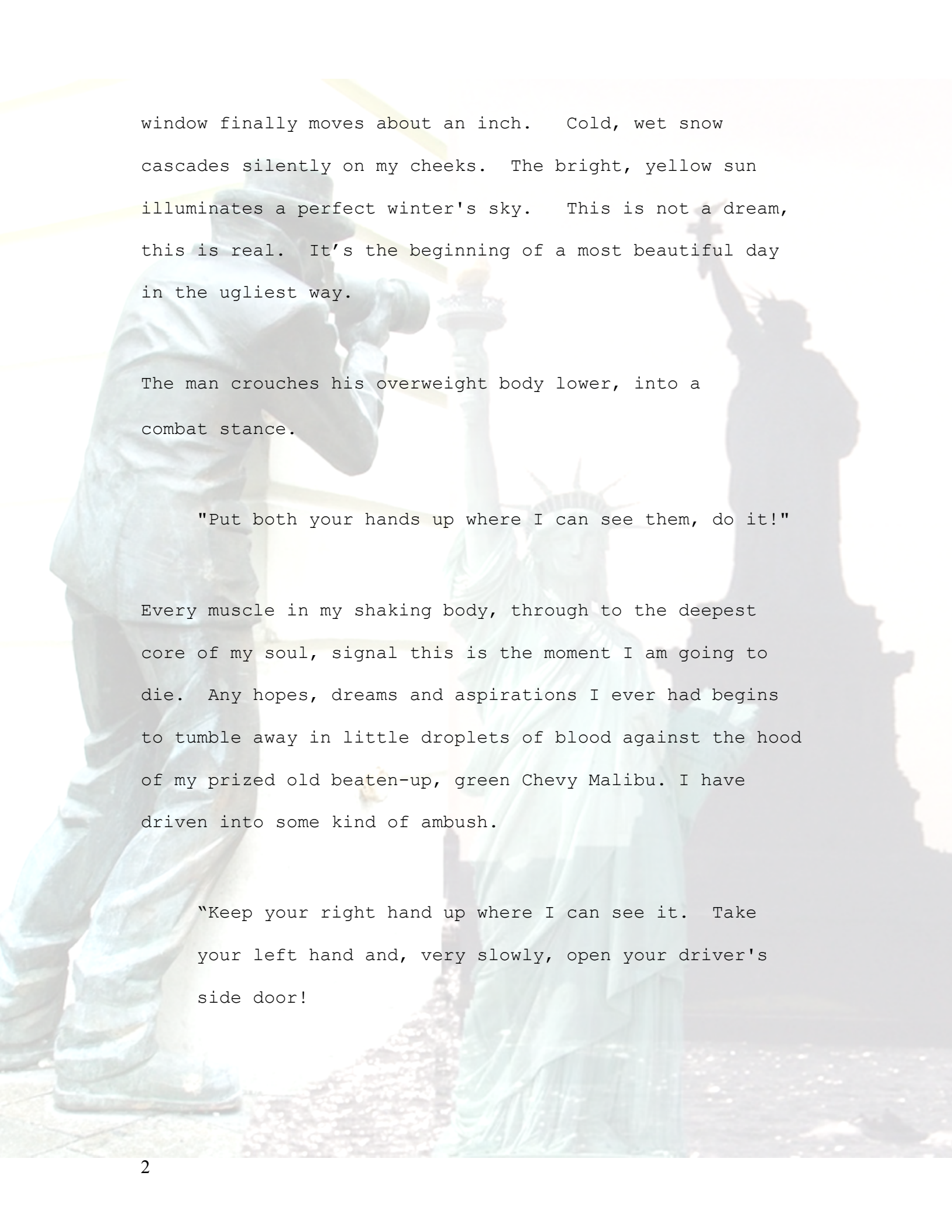
The Ambush

"Get out of the car!"

Trembling like an old woman with Parkinson's disease, my mouth flies open. A glob of drool drops onto the seat between my legs. The purple tootsie pop that has been held tightly between my lips fall into my lap, sticking to the inside of my right pant leg. I squint into the frozen winter scene and all that stares back at me is a sea of assault weapons. A big, burly man with a menacing smirk points a huge revolver straight at my head.

"Get out of the car, Now!"

With each growl, the fat man's potbelly jiggles through open buttons on his too tight blue shirt. This has to be a dream, a nightmare. I fumble, trying to find the handle to roll down the car window. Seconds weigh into my conscious like hours and minutes become an eternity as the



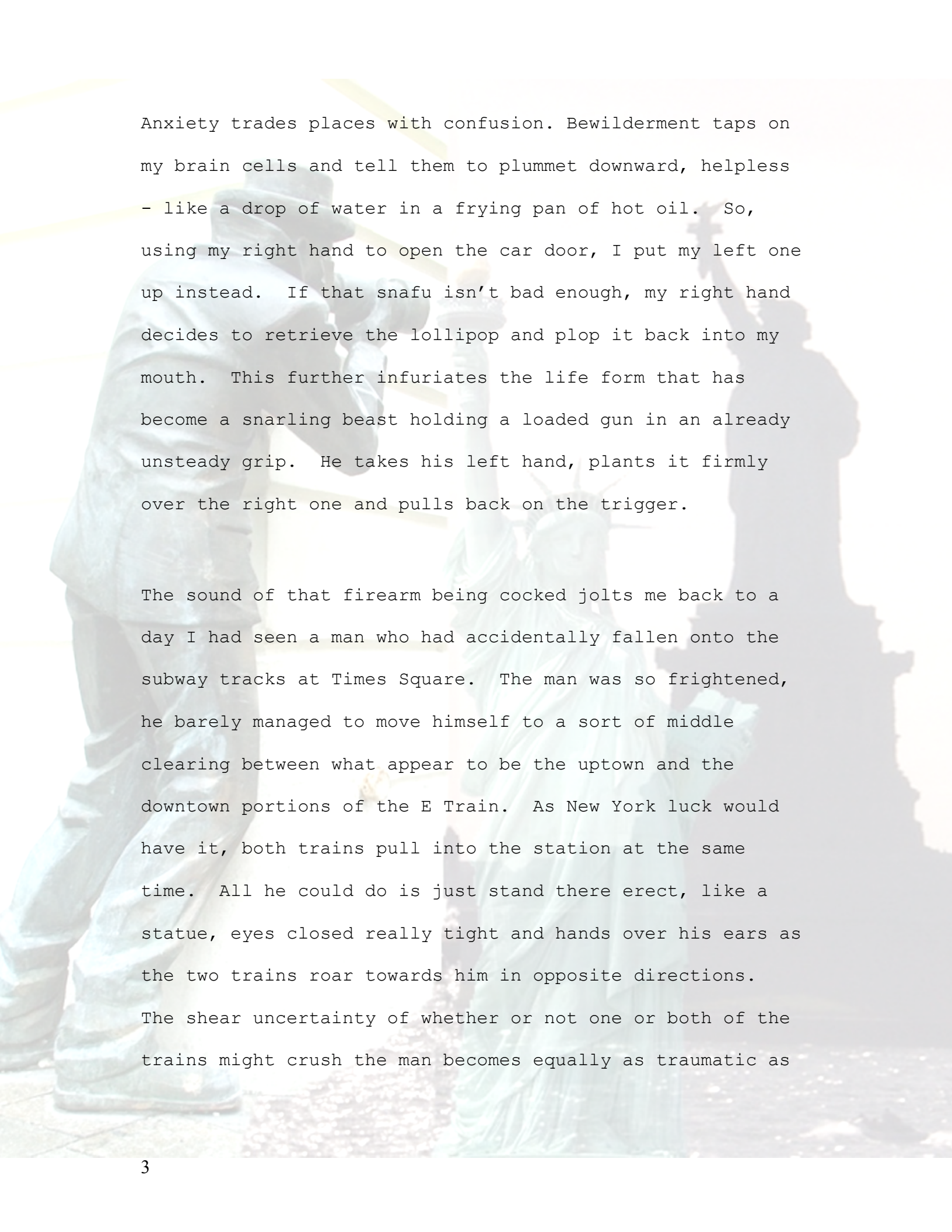
window finally moves about an inch. Cold, wet snow cascades silently on my cheeks. The bright, yellow sun illuminates a perfect winter's sky. This is not a dream, this is real. It's the beginning of a most beautiful day in the ugliest way.

The man crouches his overweight body lower, into a combat stance.

"Put both your hands up where I can see them, do it!"

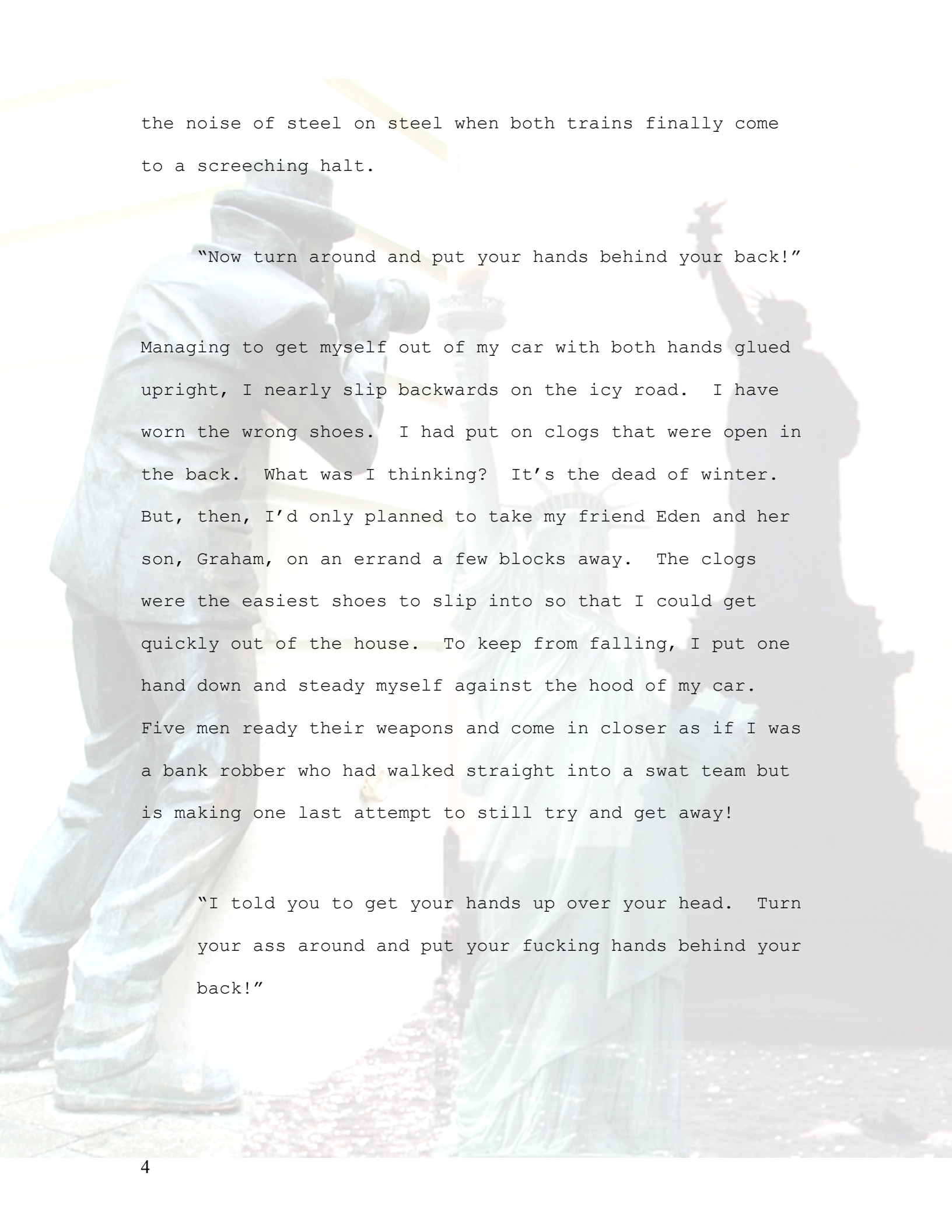
Every muscle in my shaking body, through to the deepest core of my soul, signal this is the moment I am going to die. Any hopes, dreams and aspirations I ever had begins to tumble away in little droplets of blood against the hood of my prized old beaten-up, green Chevy Malibu. I have driven into some kind of ambush.

"Keep your right hand up where I can see it. Take your left hand and, very slowly, open your driver's side door!"



Anxiety trades places with confusion. Bewilderment taps on my brain cells and tell them to plummet downward, helpless - like a drop of water in a frying pan of hot oil. So, using my right hand to open the car door, I put my left one up instead. If that snafu isn't bad enough, my right hand decides to retrieve the lollipop and plop it back into my mouth. This further infuriates the life form that has become a snarling beast holding a loaded gun in an already unsteady grip. He takes his left hand, plants it firmly over the right one and pulls back on the trigger.

The sound of that firearm being cocked jolts me back to a day I had seen a man who had accidentally fallen onto the subway tracks at Times Square. The man was so frightened, he barely managed to move himself to a sort of middle clearing between what appear to be the uptown and the downtown portions of the E Train. As New York luck would have it, both trains pull into the station at the same time. All he could do is just stand there erect, like a statue, eyes closed really tight and hands over his ears as the two trains roar towards him in opposite directions. The shear uncertainty of whether or not one or both of the trains might crush the man becomes equally as traumatic as

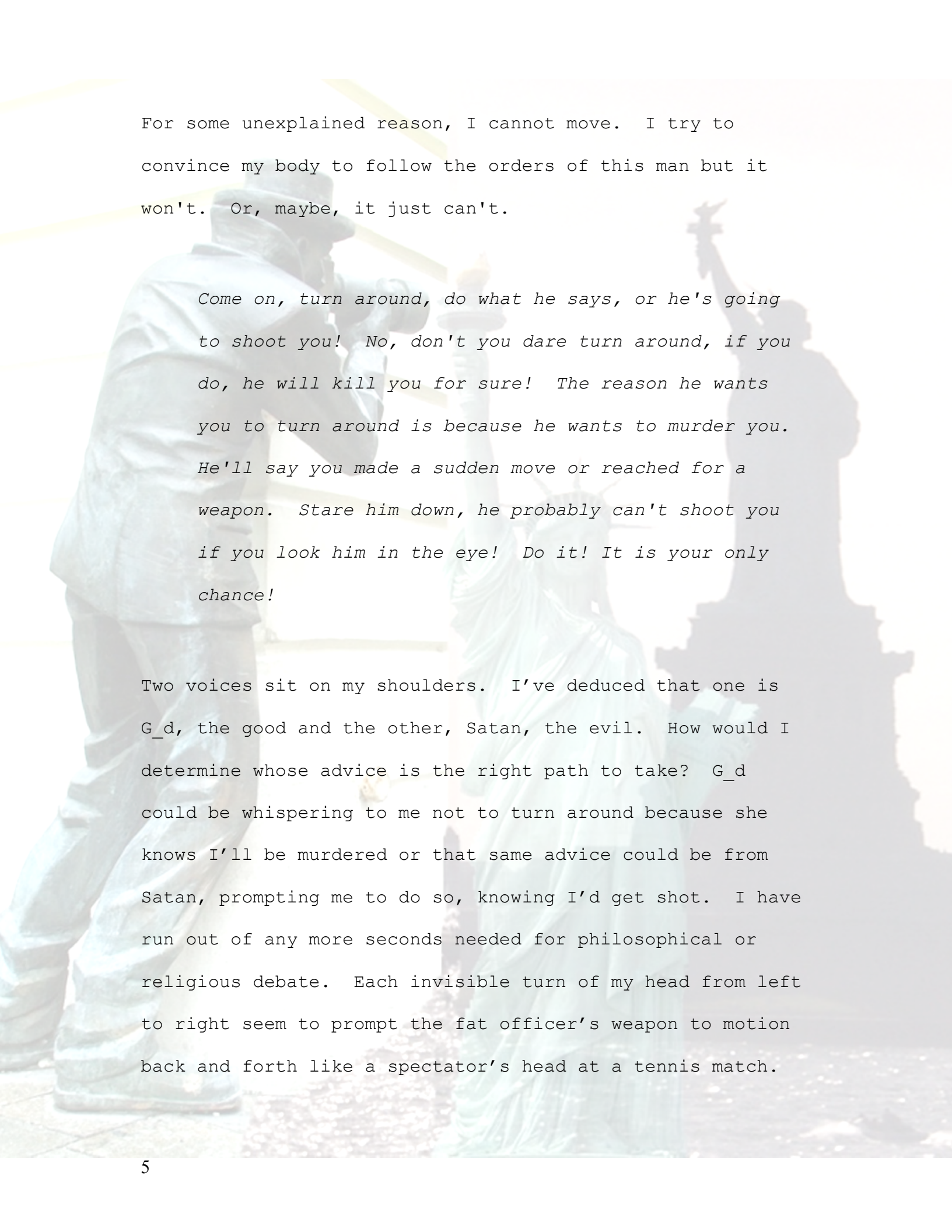


the noise of steel on steel when both trains finally come to a screeching halt.

“Now turn around and put your hands behind your back!”

Managing to get myself out of my car with both hands glued upright, I nearly slip backwards on the icy road. I have worn the wrong shoes. I had put on clogs that were open in the back. What was I thinking? It's the dead of winter. But, then, I'd only planned to take my friend Eden and her son, Graham, on an errand a few blocks away. The clogs were the easiest shoes to slip into so that I could get quickly out of the house. To keep from falling, I put one hand down and steady myself against the hood of my car. Five men ready their weapons and come in closer as if I was a bank robber who had walked straight into a swat team but is making one last attempt to still try and get away!

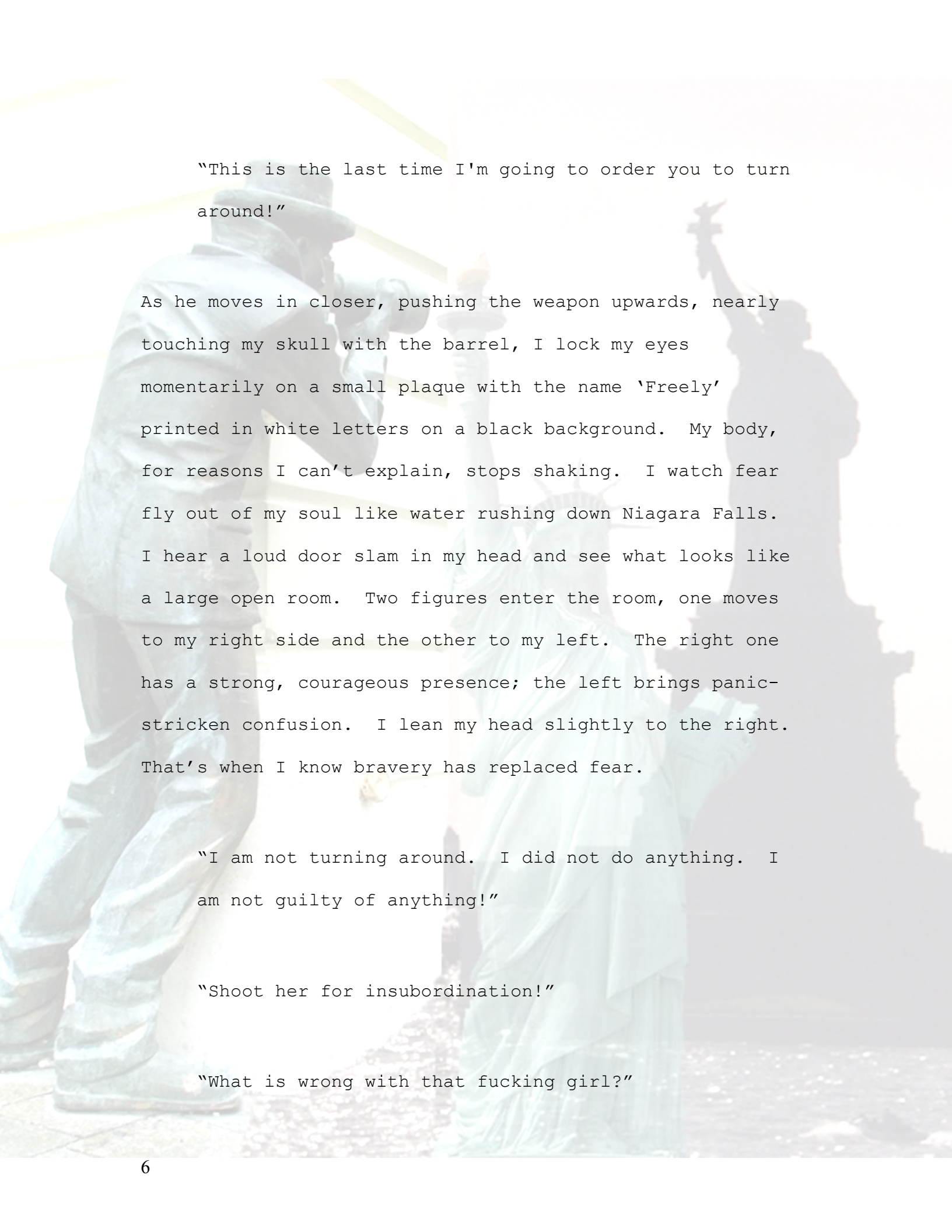
“I told you to get your hands up over your head. Turn your ass around and put your fucking hands behind your back!”



For some unexplained reason, I cannot move. I try to convince my body to follow the orders of this man but it won't. Or, maybe, it just can't.

Come on, turn around, do what he says, or he's going to shoot you! No, don't you dare turn around, if you do, he will kill you for sure! The reason he wants you to turn around is because he wants to murder you. He'll say you made a sudden move or reached for a weapon. Stare him down, he probably can't shoot you if you look him in the eye! Do it! It is your only chance!

Two voices sit on my shoulders. I've deduced that one is G_d, the good and the other, Satan, the evil. How would I determine whose advice is the right path to take? G_d could be whispering to me not to turn around because she knows I'll be murdered or that same advice could be from Satan, prompting me to do so, knowing I'd get shot. I have run out of any more seconds needed for philosophical or religious debate. Each invisible turn of my head from left to right seem to prompt the fat officer's weapon to motion back and forth like a spectator's head at a tennis match.

A faded background image of the Statue of Liberty. In the foreground, a soldier in a dark uniform and helmet is seen from the side, holding a rifle. The scene is set against a bright, hazy sky.

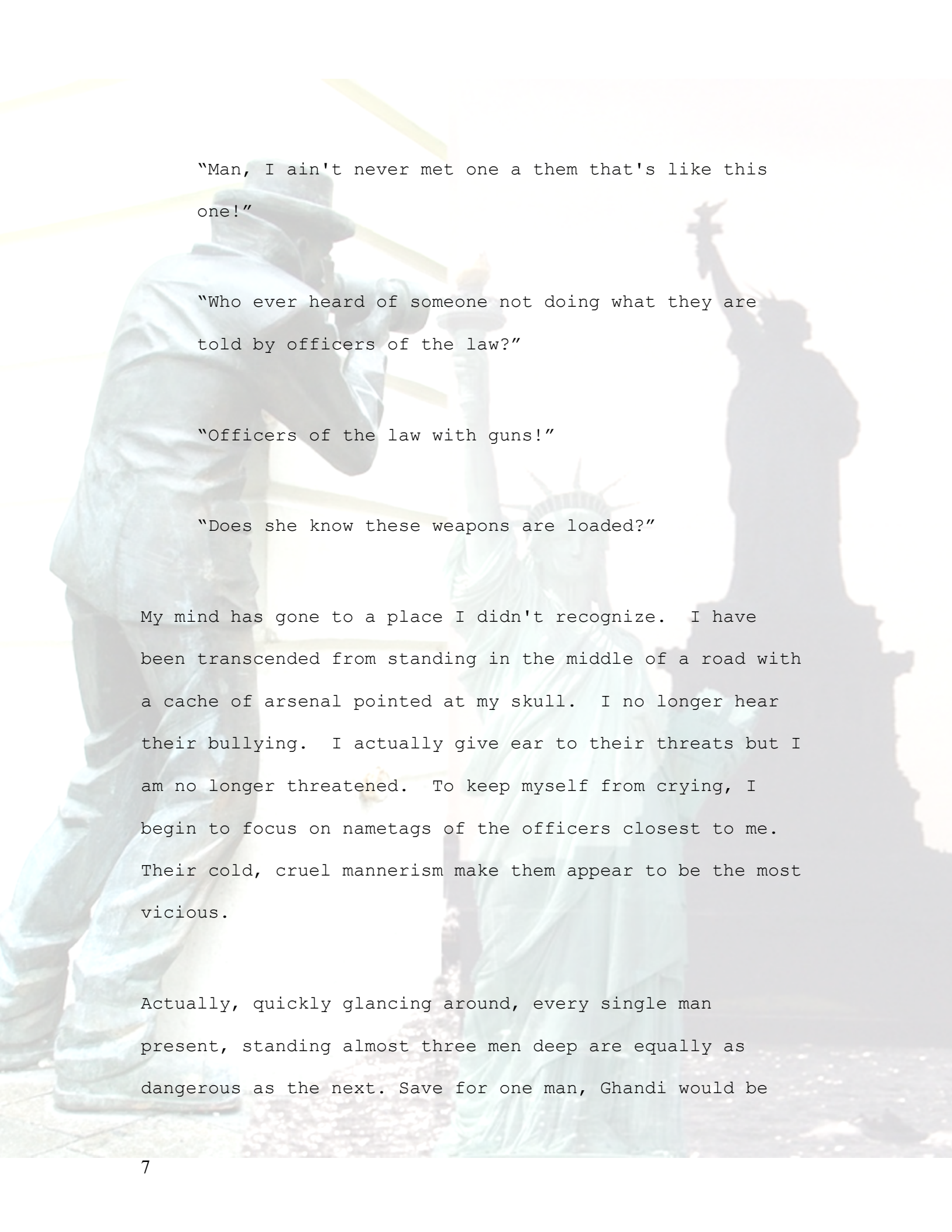
"This is the last time I'm going to order you to turn around!"

As he moves in closer, pushing the weapon upwards, nearly touching my skull with the barrel, I lock my eyes momentarily on a small plaque with the name 'Freely' printed in white letters on a black background. My body, for reasons I can't explain, stops shaking. I watch fear fly out of my soul like water rushing down Niagara Falls. I hear a loud door slam in my head and see what looks like a large open room. Two figures enter the room, one moves to my right side and the other to my left. The right one has a strong, courageous presence; the left brings panic-stricken confusion. I lean my head slightly to the right. That's when I know bravery has replaced fear.

"I am not turning around. I did not do anything. I am not guilty of anything!"

"Shoot her for insubordination!"

"What is wrong with that fucking girl?"



"Man, I ain't never met one a them that's like this one!"

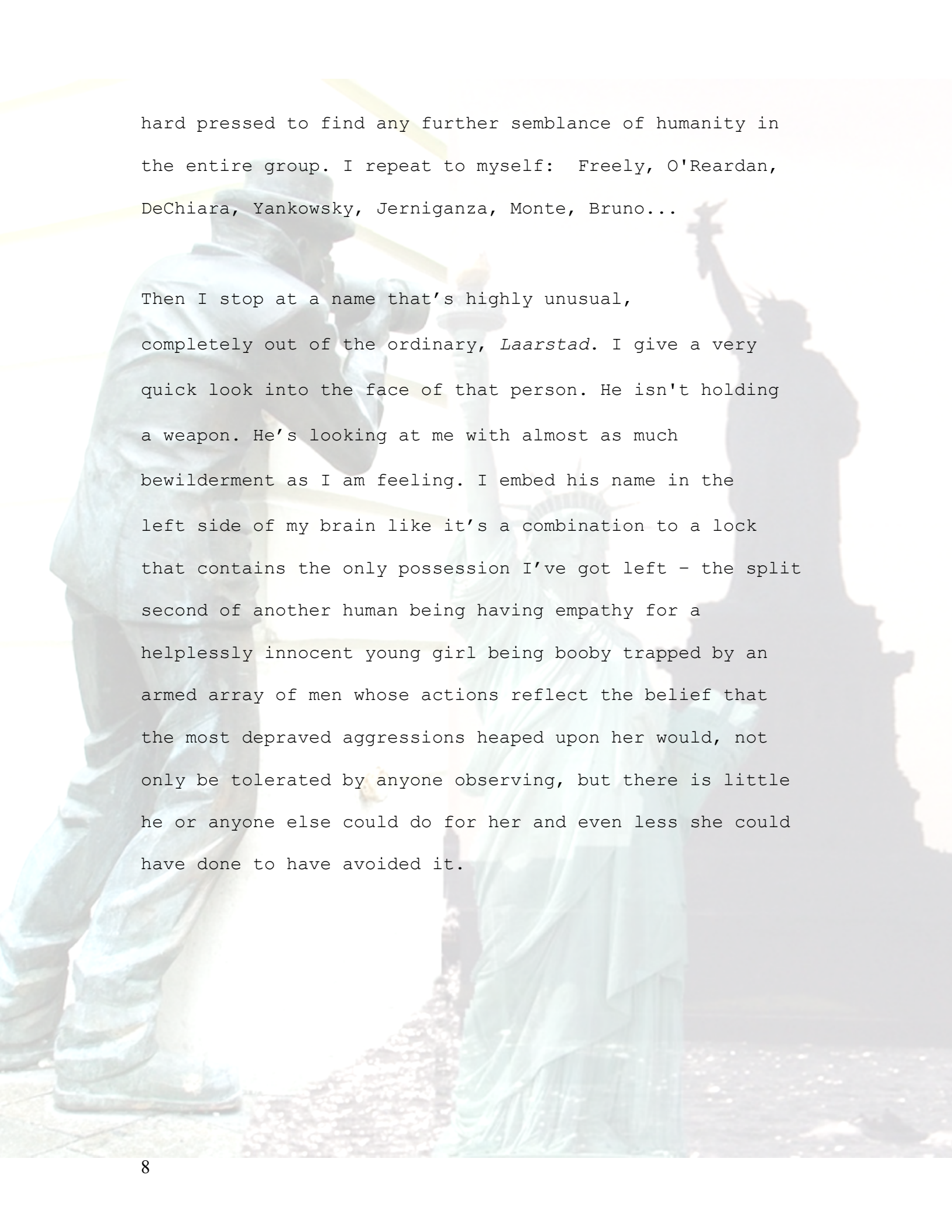
"Who ever heard of someone not doing what they are told by officers of the law?"

"Officers of the law with guns!"

"Does she know these weapons are loaded?"

My mind has gone to a place I didn't recognize. I have been transcended from standing in the middle of a road with a cache of arsenal pointed at my skull. I no longer hear their bullying. I actually give ear to their threats but I am no longer threatened. To keep myself from crying, I begin to focus on nametags of the officers closest to me. Their cold, cruel mannerism make them appear to be the most vicious.

Actually, quickly glancing around, every single man present, standing almost three men deep are equally as dangerous as the next. Save for one man, Ghandi would be



hard pressed to find any further semblance of humanity in the entire group. I repeat to myself: Freely, O'Reardan, DeChiara, Yankowsky, Jerniganza, Monte, Bruno...

Then I stop at a name that's highly unusual, completely out of the ordinary, *Laarstad*. I give a very quick look into the face of that person. He isn't holding a weapon. He's looking at me with almost as much bewilderment as I am feeling. I embed his name in the left side of my brain like it's a combination to a lock that contains the only possession I've got left - the split second of another human being having empathy for a helplessly innocent young girl being booby trapped by an armed array of men whose actions reflect the belief that the most depraved aggressions heaped upon her would, not only be tolerated by anyone observing, but there is little he or anyone else could do for her and even less she could have done to have avoided it.