

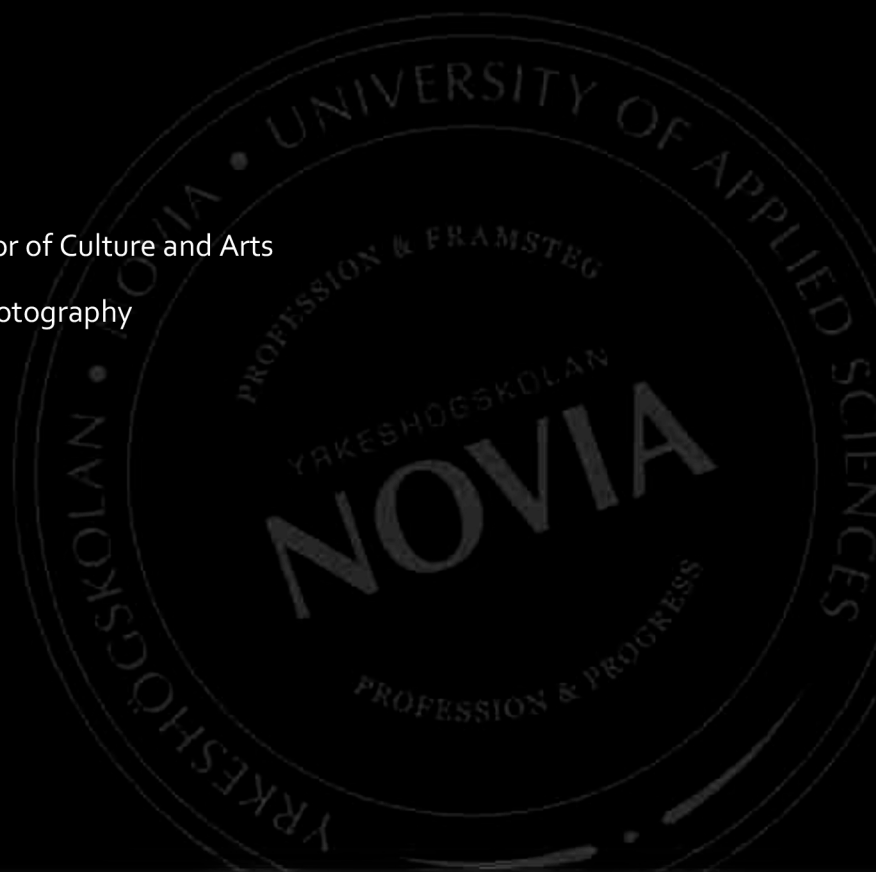
# Depression as a Source of Inspiration

Fedor Chuppin

Bachelor's Thesis, Bachelor of Culture and Arts

Degree Programme in Photography

Jakobstad 2020



## **BACHELOR'S THESIS**

Author: Fedor Chuppin

Degree Programme: Bachelor of Culture and Arts

Specialization: Photography

Supervisors: Lars Rebers, Emma Westerlund

Title: Depression as a Source of Inspiration

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Date: 23.03.2020    Number of pages: 72    Appendices: 0

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### **Summary**

Through my thesis I would like to share my personal thoughts and views on the topic of connection between mental issues and creative working process and to present my artwork "Soft Light Blue".

In October 2017 I was diagnosed with a mental condition known as depression. At that time I started to practice art therapy in the form of writing poems and creating abstract photographs, which were later compiled into a book titled "Soft Light Blue".

Soft Light Blue is a story of two people, which is inspired by feelings of love and grief. Divided into four chapters, the book contains eight unique art pieces, each a combination of photography and poetry art.

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Language: English

Key words: photography, art photography, abstract photography, poetry, literature art, depression, inspiration, art therapy, qr codes, book, art

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## EXAMENSARBETE

Författare: Fedor Chuppin

Utbildning och ort: Bildkonstnär, Jakobstad

Inriktning/alternativ/Fördjupning: Fotograf

Handledare: Lars Rebers, Emma Westerlund

Titel: Inspirationskällan är depression

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Datum: 23.03.2020    Sidantal: 72    Bilagor: 0

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### Abstrakt

Genom min avhandling skulle jag vilja dela med mig av mina personliga tankar och åsikter om kopplingen mellan mental ohälsa och kreativt arbete, samt presentera mitt konstverk "Soft Light Blue".

Oktober 2017 var jag diagnostiserad för depression. Jag började då utöva konstterapi i form av poesi och abstrakt fotografi, vilket jag senare sammanställde till boken "Soft Light Blue".

Soft Light Blue är en berättelse om två personer, inspirerad av kärlek och sorg. Boken innehåller åtta unika konstverk, uppdelat i fyra kapitel, och vart och ett är en kombination av fotografi och poetisk konst.

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Språk: Engelska

Nyckelord: fotografi, konstfotografering, abstrakt fotografi, poesi, litteraturkonst, depression, inspiration, konstterapi, qr-koder, bok, konst

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## OPINNÄYTETYÖ

Tekijä: Fedor Chuppin

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Ohjaajat: Lars Rebers, Emma Westerlund

Nimike: Masennus inspiraation lähteenä

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Päivämäärä: 23.03.2020

Sivumäärä: 72

Liitteet: 0

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### Tiivistelmä

Lopputyöni kautta haluan jakaa henkilökohtaiset ajatukseni ja näkemykseni mielenterveyden häiriöiden sekä luovan työprosessin välillä ja esitellä teokseni "Soft Light Blue".

Lokakuussa 2017 minulla diagnosoitiin masennus. Tuohon aikaan aloitin taideterapian runonkirjoituksen ja abstraktien valokuvien muodossa. Nämä kerättiin myöhemmin kirjaan nimeltä "Soft Light Blue".

Soft Light Blue on tarina kahdesta ihmisestä jonka inspiraationa toimii tunteet rakkaudesta ja surusta. Teos on jaettu neljään kappaleeseen ja sisältää kahdeksan uniikkia taideteosta joista jokainen on yhdistelmä valokuvausta ja runotaidetta.

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Kieli: Englanti

Avainsanat: valokuvaus, taidevalokuvaus, abstrakti valokuvaus, runous, kirjallisuus, masennus, inspiraatio, taideterapia, qr-koodit, kirja, taide

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# Introduction

As the topic of my thesis is strongly connected to my personal feelings and experiences, I felt like a proper introduction to my work and myself is necessary.

My name is Fedor Chuppin, I'm a 26 year old visual artist currently living and studying in Jakobstad, Finland. I started writing when I was 12, and ever since then I've been involved in all kinds of creative activities. I've been writing both prose and poetry, worked with film and performed with multiple local bands. For me life has been a constant search for an optimal way of expressing myself through art, and so I started my photography studies back in 2014 as I applied to Västra Nylands folkhögskola, folk high school based in Karjaa, Finland.

Nowadays I see myself as a contemporary artist, mostly working with my personal thoughts and experiences. I use different mediums, such as photo-, video and literature art to deliver my ideas to the potential viewer. Most of my work has a very clean, defined style, combination of minimalism and perfectionism.

Being perfectionist by nature, I've always struggled with finding perfection both in personal life and in my work. The term perfection by its nature is a very complicated and tricky concept, which requires an inconceivable amount of knowledge and wisdom, and in the end quite unlikely to be something a human being can ever achieve. But aiming for perfection serves quite a bit of both positive and negative outcomes.

I have always been a very emotional person. I've never been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, yet my emotional stability has always been a very sensitive attribute, following with extreme outburst of both happiness and sadness. And for an artist who is basing most of his work on personal life and life experiences, that factor obviously played a major role in my life. Every time I felt extreme sadness or happiness, I had to find the right way of expressing my emotions to avoid keeping everything to myself and provoking mental disorders.

# Depression and Creativity

Sadly enough, autumn 2017 was too much for me, as I faced multiple difficult life situations and was diagnosed with a condition known as depression. I personally don't think it was the first time I faced this mental issue, but it was the first time I was officially diagnosed with it. It was a very hard time, but through many years of self-reflection I already knew different tools and ways of overcoming my emotions and even getting something out of tough situations. And so I started writing poems in which I shared my feelings and thoughts with the potential reader.

That was the time when I mastered the craft of using negative emotions in my own favor. It is not something I would recommend anyone to practice and do on purpose, as this method requires constant awareness of one's situation. Imagine walking on a very thin rope and having hundreds of meters of freefall beneath you. It is basically the same, but in this case it is not your physical condition that will suffer from the fall, but rather your mental health. But for all of those who already suffer from mental disorders and are seeking help, I will try to explain my method of using mental illnesses as a source of inspiration to create art and express themselves. If it helped one person, it might help someone else as well.

Depression, also known as major depressive disorder, is a common and serious medical illness that affects the way one thinks, feels and acts in a negative way. Depression causes feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It often leads to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person's ability to function at work and at home. There are majority of different symptoms that can appear with the depression, including threads such as problems with sleep, changes in appetite, doubtfulness, loss of energy and sometimes thoughts of death and suicide.

We all experience a range of different emotions over the course of days and weeks, typically varying based on events and circumstances. When we are disappointed, we feel sad. After suffering a loss, we grieve. Normally these feelings ebb and flow. They respond to input and changes. By contrast, depression tends to feel heavy and constant. People who are depressed are less likely to be cheered, comforted or encouraged. Quite often people who have suffered and recovered from depression welcome the ability to feel normal sadness again, as opposed to a leaden weight on their minds and souls every single day.

However, some depressive mood disorders might have a positive effect for creativity. It cannot be denied that many well-known creative people, including writers, visual artists and musicians, have been mentally ill — for example icons like Vincent Van Gogh, Ludwig van Beethoven, Virginia Woolf, Kurt Cobain, Tracey Emin, Sylvia Plath. But how likely depression and other mental illnesses are actually connected to one's creativity?

Upon identifying several studies and analyzing data involving individuals with high levels of creativity, Christa Taylor, a postdoctoral researcher of Albany State University, was able to conclude that there is a clear positive relationship between creativity and depressive mood. Taylor identified 36 studies on the creativity-mood disorder relationship from a set of almost 3000 that were potentially relevant. She combined data from these different studies into separate "meta-analyses", depending on the specific examination she was trying to address. We can be confident in the findings from these meta-analyses because they involved data from thousands or even millions of participants.

# Expressive Therapies

Taylor first looked at whether creative people are more likely to have a mood disorder compared to non-creative controls. She looked at data from ten studies involving fine arts students, writers, and other remarkable figures from creative fields, and found that yes, there was a clear relationship between being creative and having a diagnosis of a mood disorder, such as depression. To address a slightly different question – compared to healthy controls, are people with a clinical diagnosis of mood disorder more creative? – Taylor used a second meta-analysis combining 13 studies, including a set of mega-studies involving millions of people. The answer was a quavering no, not really. Overall, differences in creativity between people with mood disorder and control were statistically non-significant.

There are also two other studies frequently cited in support of a link between mental illness and creativity. Nancy Andreasen's research which was published in 1987 compared 30 writers with an equal number of non-writers. The writers were more likely to have bipolar disorder than the non-writers. It's a small sample, with just 30 writers interviewed in 15 years and although it is cited widely, it has been also criticized quite a bit, mostly because the mental health problems were diagnosed via interviews and it is not clear what criteria were used.

The other popular study was conducted by Kay Redfield Jamison, best-known for her fascinating book *An Unquiet Mind*. Again, the research was based on interviews, this time with poets, novelists, biographers and artists. A total of 47 people took part, but there was no control group, so any comparisons can only be made with average rates in a population. She found surprising levels of mental illness. For example, half the poets had sought treatment at one time or another.

The direct relationship between creativity and depression remains unclear, but those researches among others have definitely shed some light that individuals who are struggling with a depressive disorder may be having even higher levels of creativity than normal people, and would be a close topic to monitor depending on the future trends of how creativity will be perceived and demanded.

However, purpose of my thesis work is not to prove scientific connection between depression and creativity, but rather to present my personal views on the topic.

The expressive therapies are defined as the use of art, music, dance, drama, poetry and creative writing within the context of psychotherapy, counseling, rehabilitation, or health care. Expressive therapies are built on the belief that self-expression through creative process has therapeutic value for those who are seeking healing or are in a search for deeper understanding of themselves and their personalities. They can be used to help people improve cognitive and sensory motor function, self-confidence, self-awareness, emotional stability. They may also aide in resolving conflicts and reduce distress.

Artmaking is a common activity used by many people to deal with illness. Art and the creative process can alleviate many illnesses including cancer, heart disease, influenza and many others. This form of therapy helps benefit those who suffer from mental illnesses as well (chronic depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, etc.). People can escape the emotional effects of illness through art making and many creative methods. Sometimes it might be difficult for people to express the way they feel, as it can be hard to put into words, and art can help people express their experiences. During art therapy, people can explore past, present and future experiences using art as a form of coping. Art can be a refuge for the intense emotions associated with illness; there are no limits to the imagination in finding creative ways to express emotions.

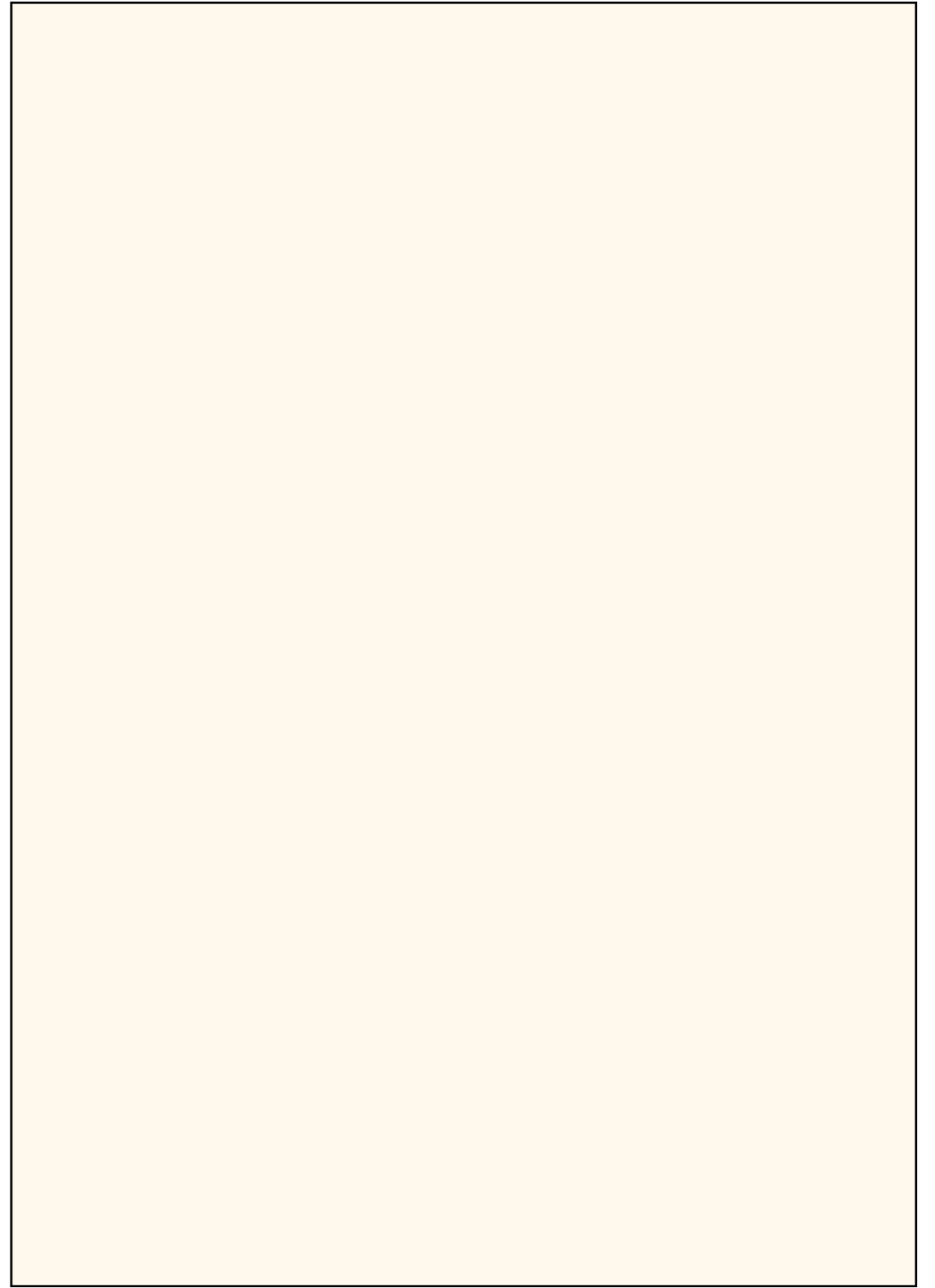
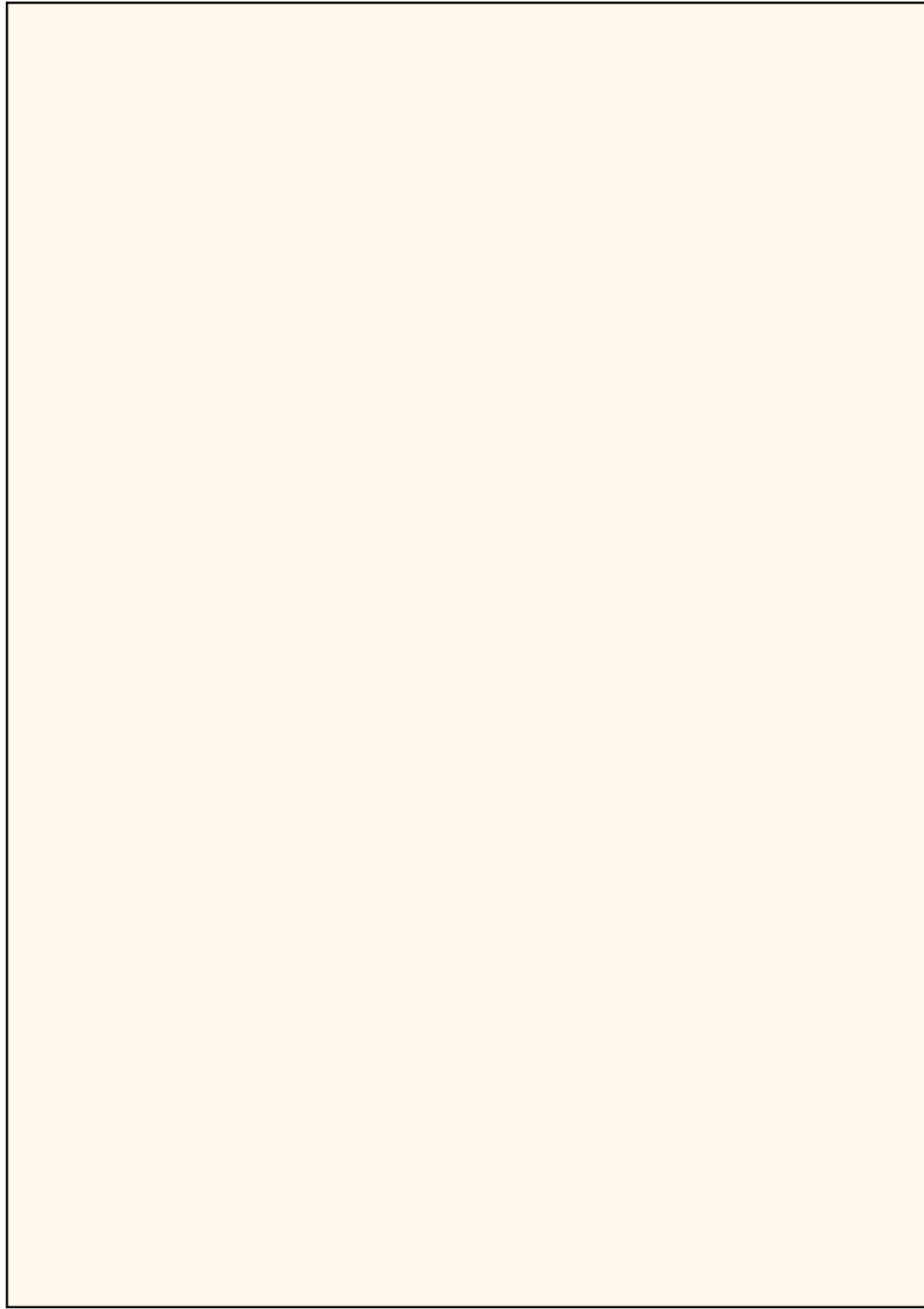
The goal of expressive therapies is to make use of the creative process to help people explore self-expression and, in doing so, find new ways to gain personal insight and develop new coping skills.

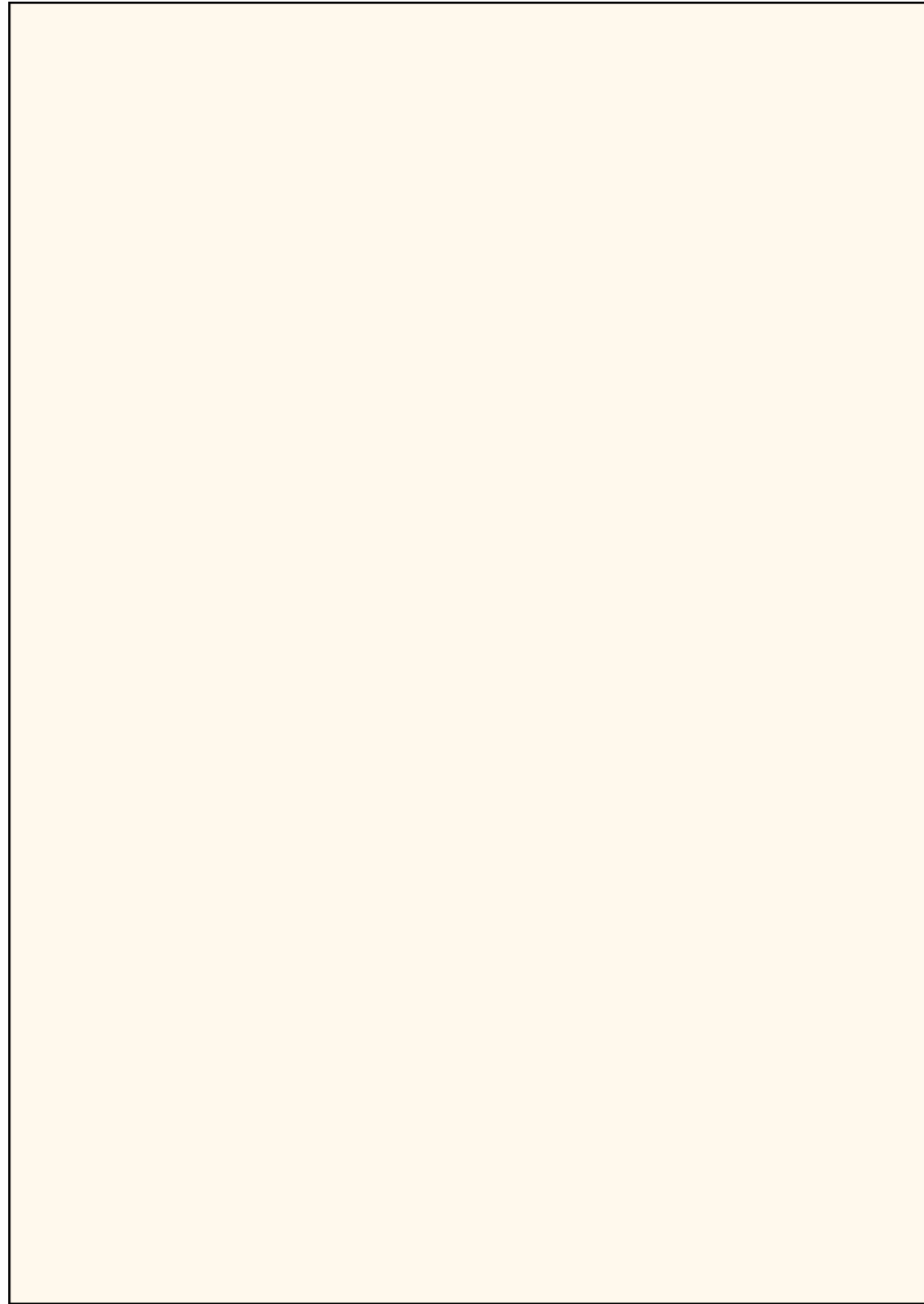
Great thing about expressive therapies is that people do not need to have artistic abilities or special talents to participate in art therapy, and people of all ages including children, teens, adults and elders can profit from it. There is a strong believe that just the presence of art can play a part in boosting mental health.

In a way, you can see my book "Soft Light Blue" as a big art therapy session, as for the period of many years I've been using mediums such as photography and poetry to explore myself and my feelings through art.

Soft Light Blue

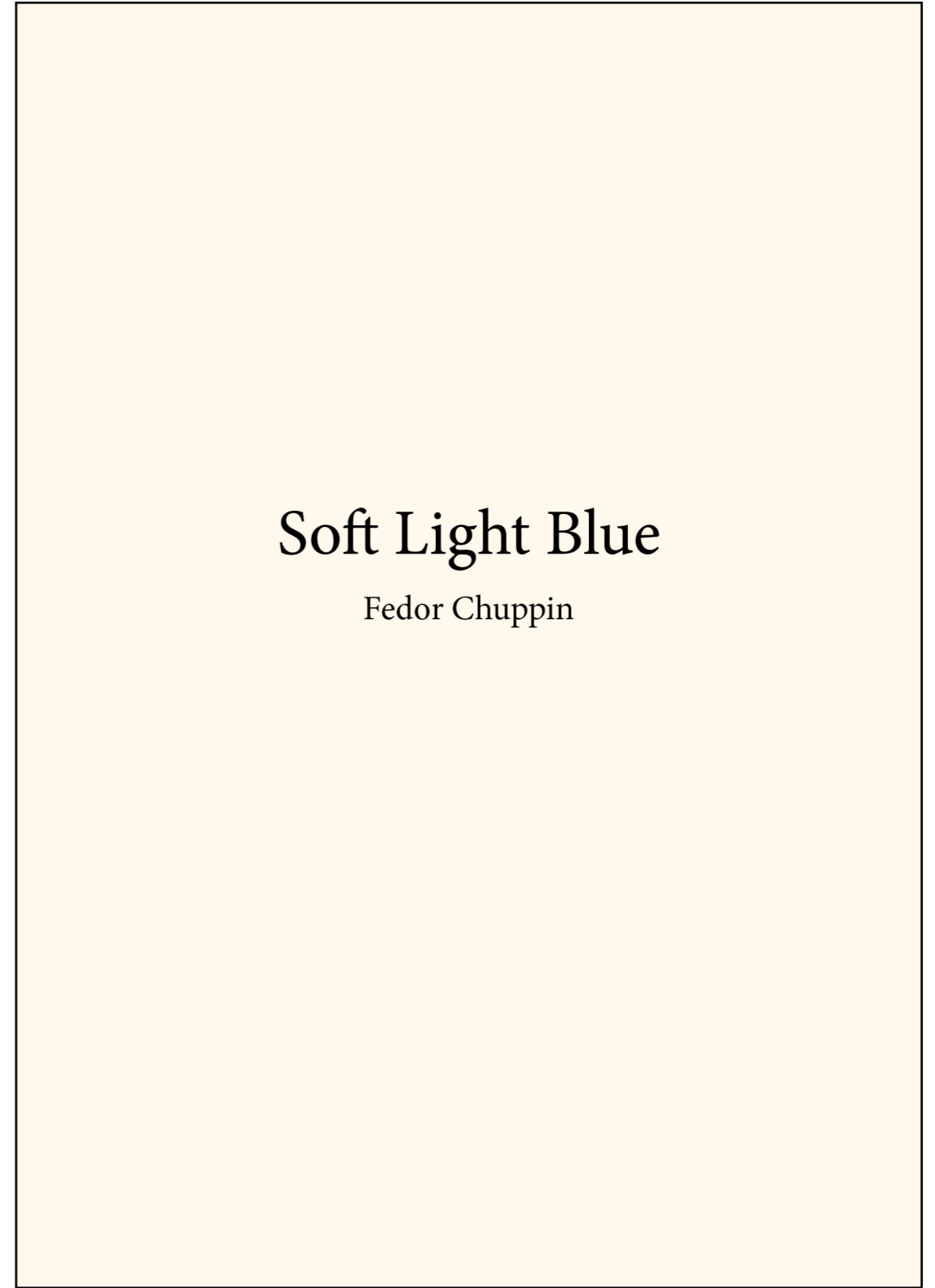


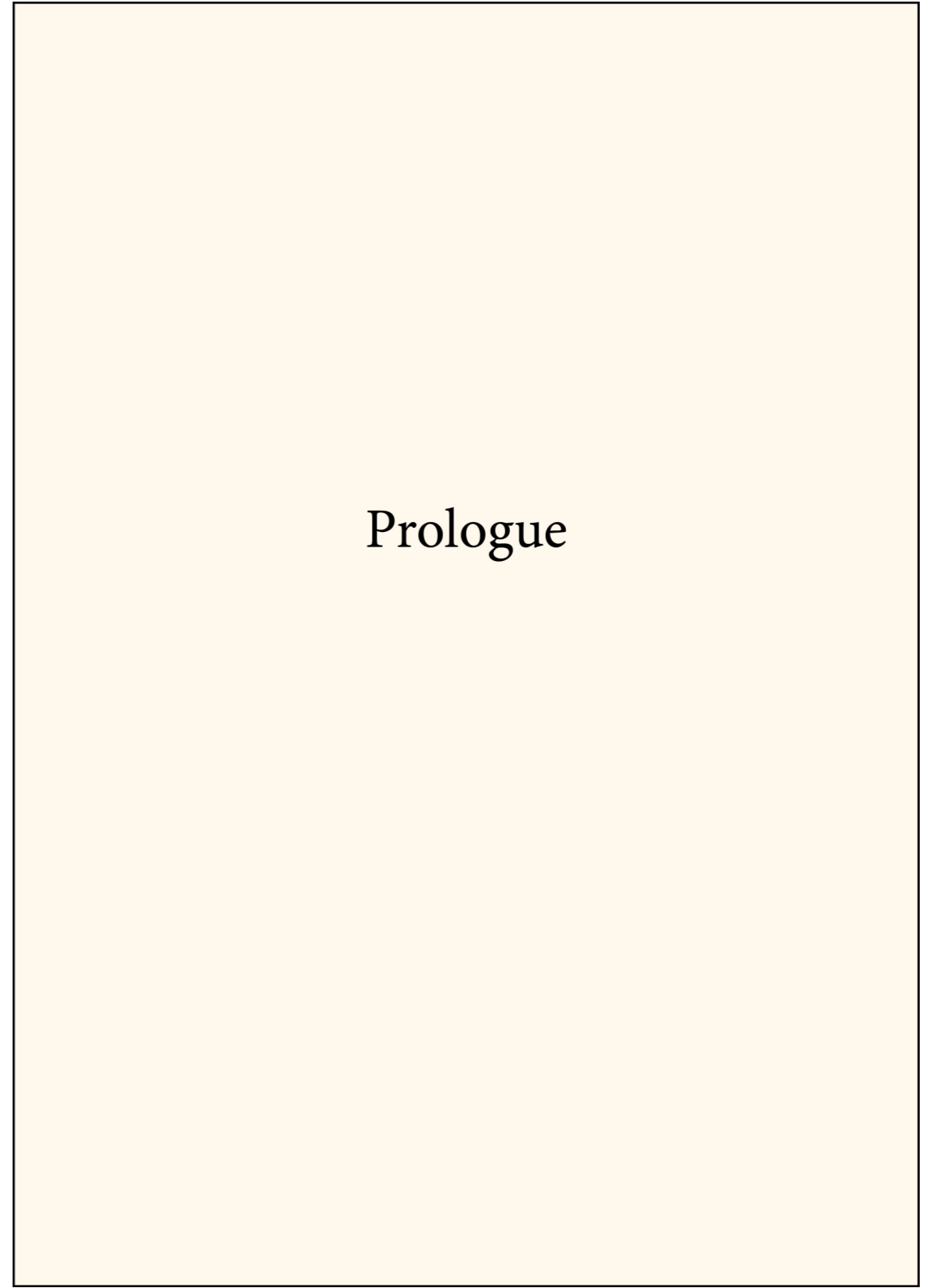
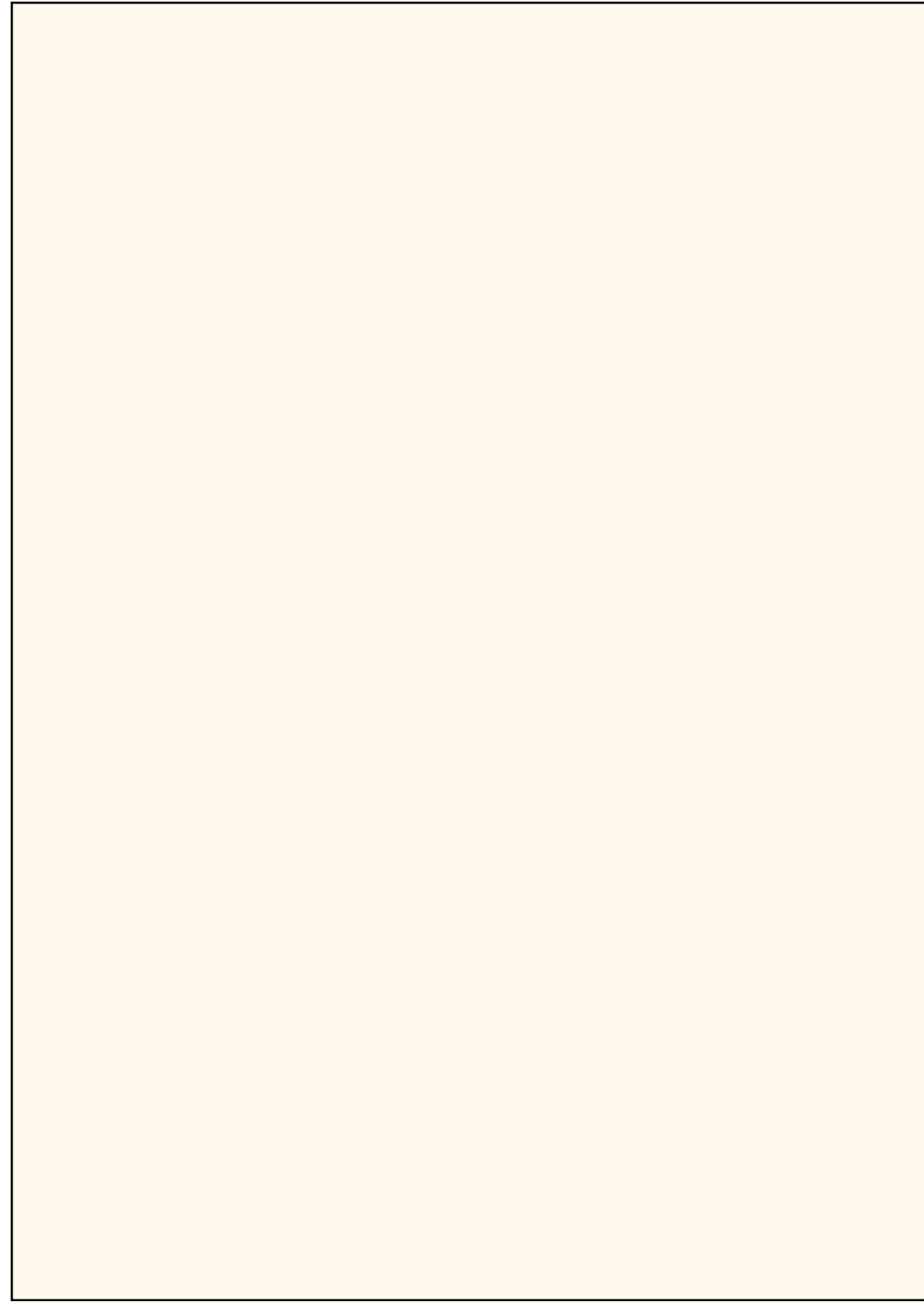


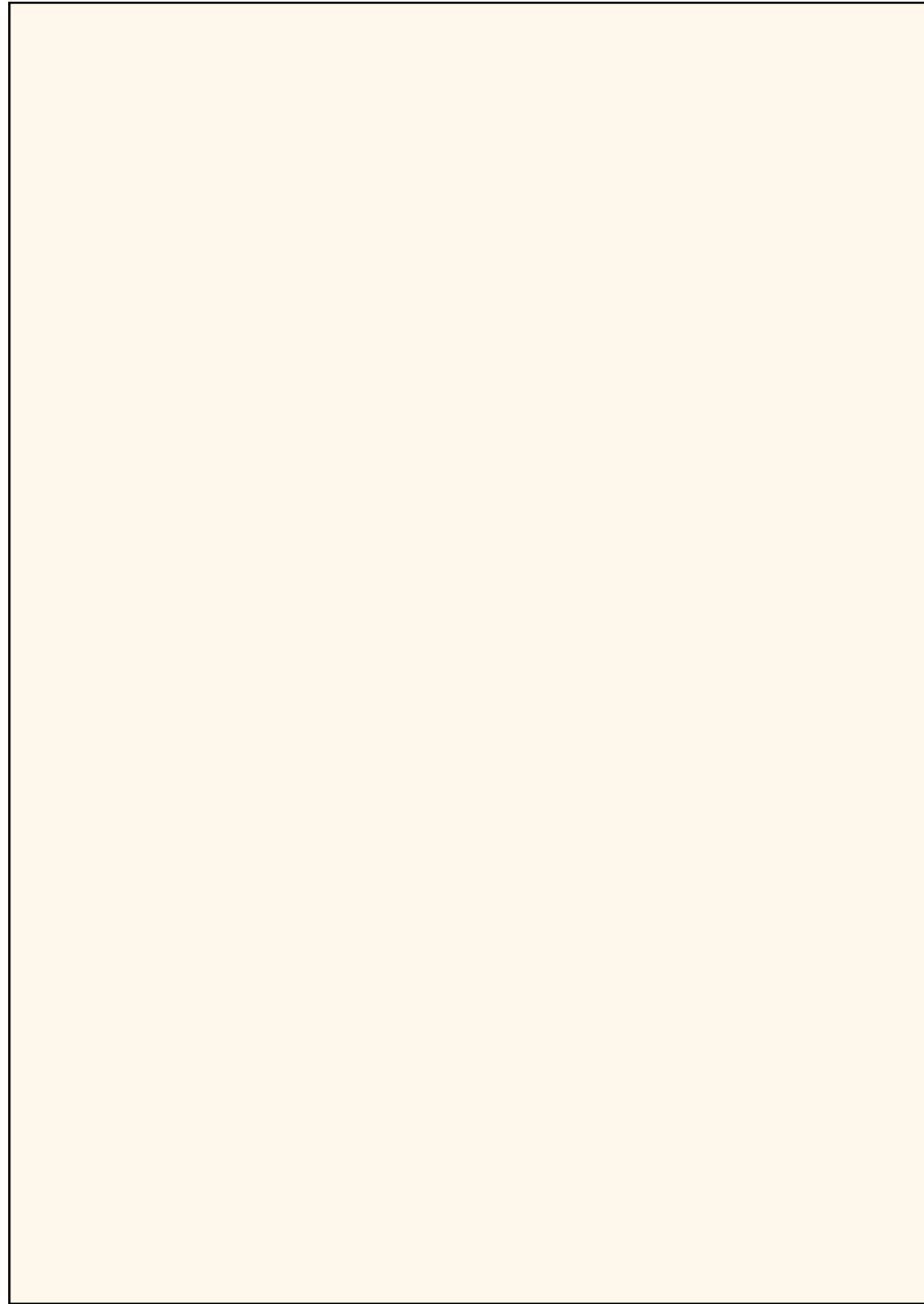


Soft Light Blue

Fedor Chuppin

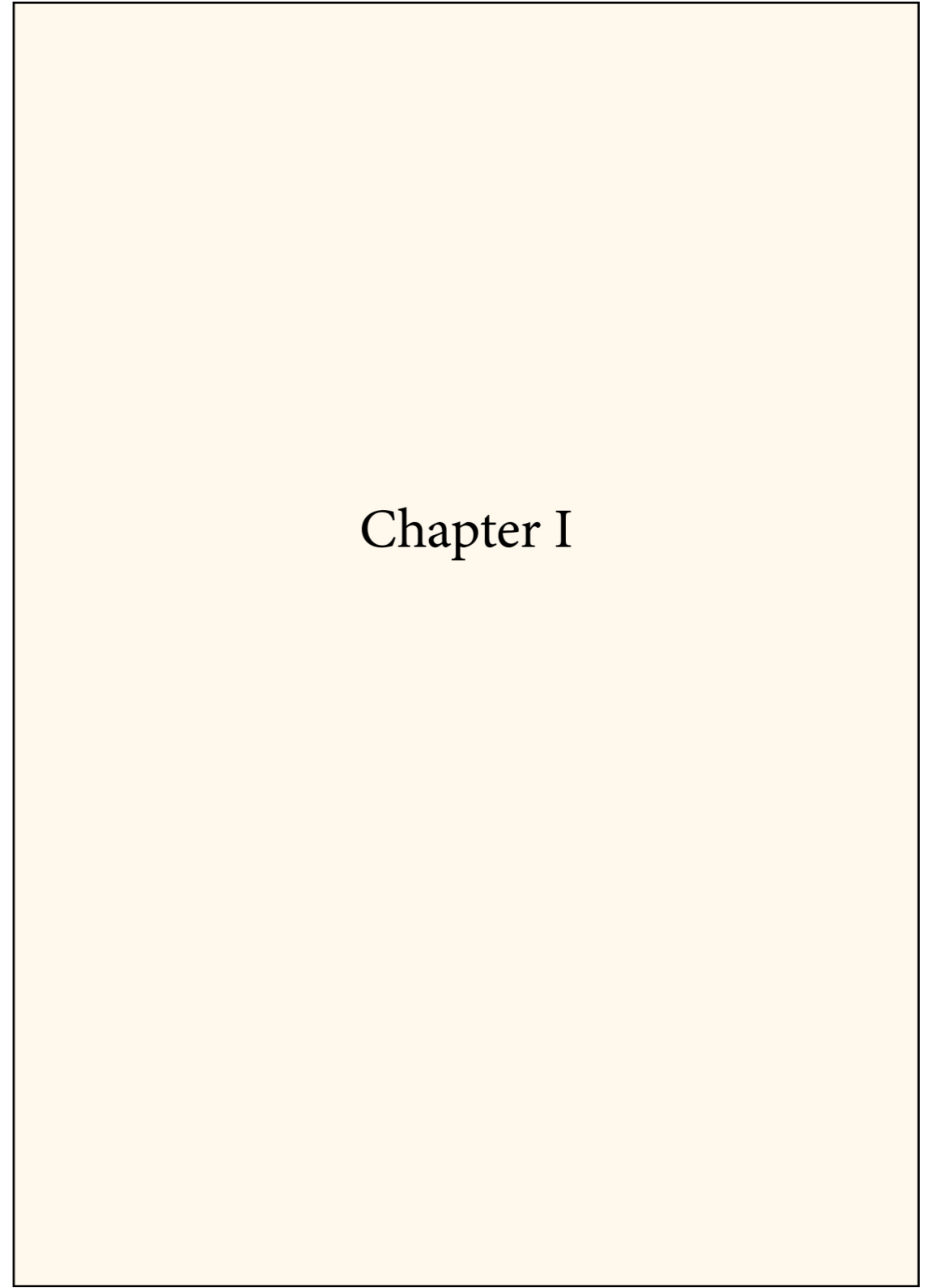
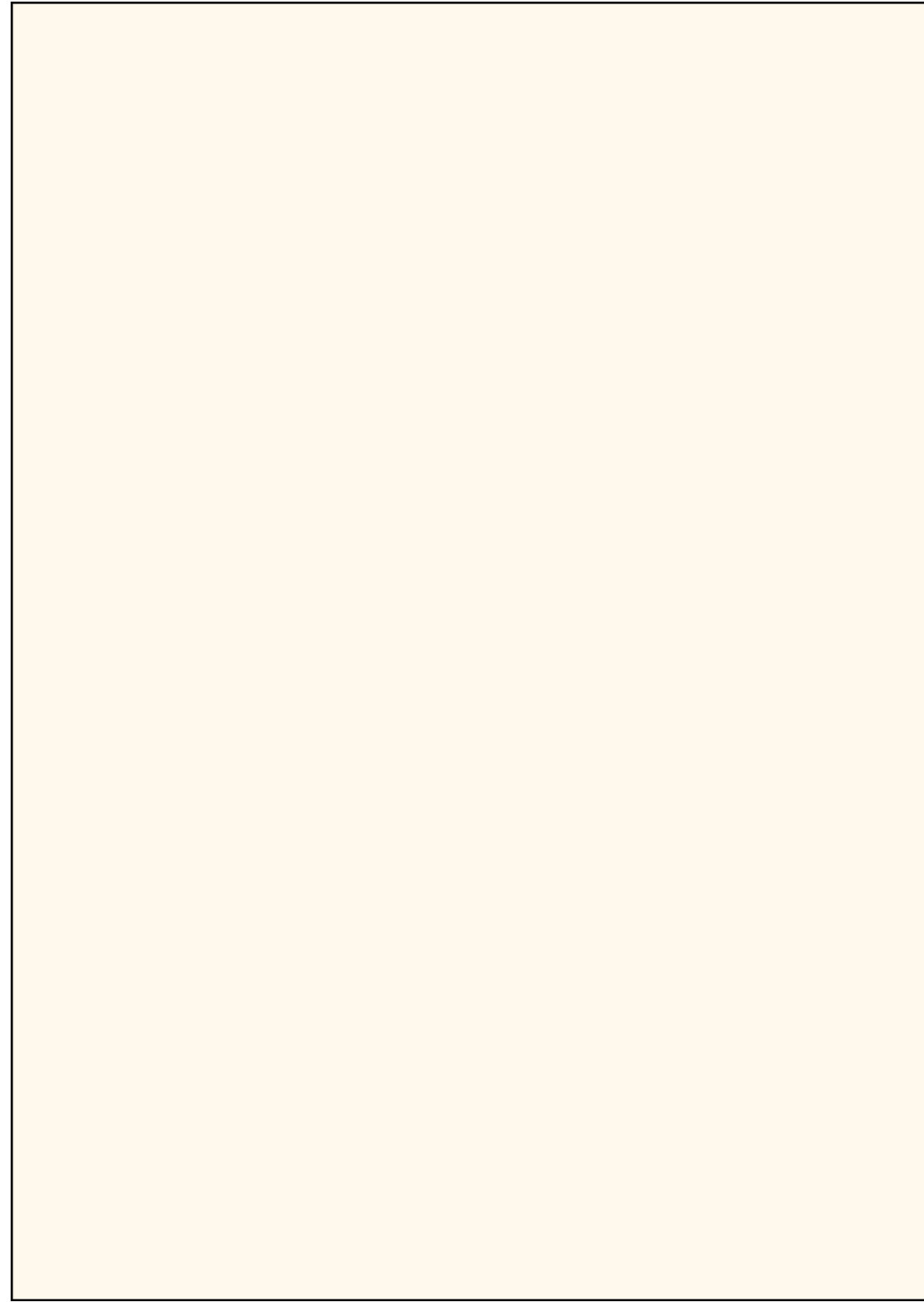




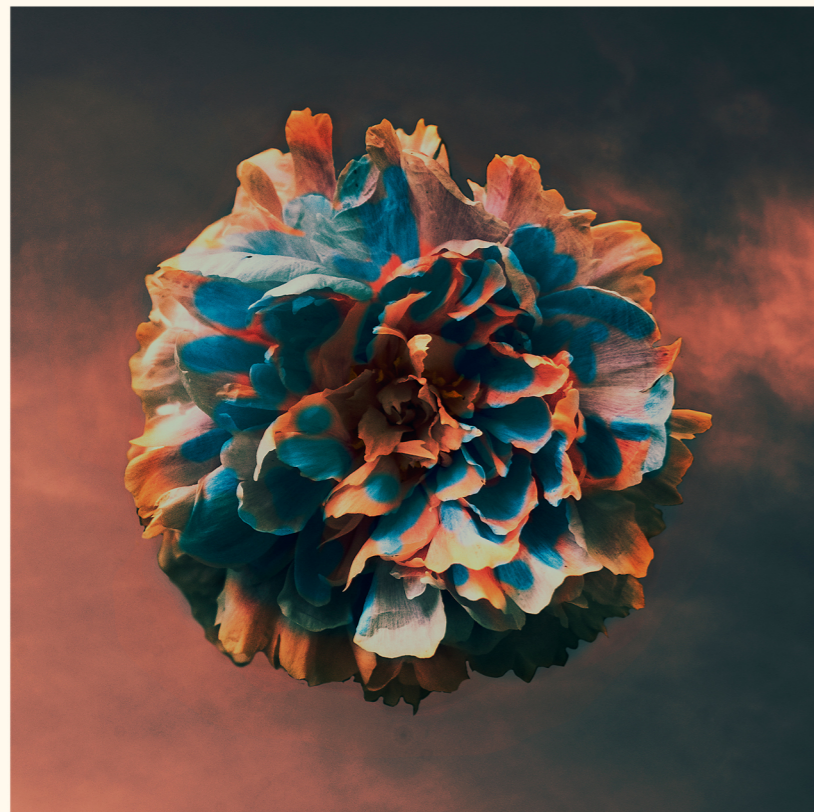


Heaven has fallen apart  
From now on, in two pieces it shall remain  
Until the eye will meet the dawn  
They both will have, to lay in dusk





Chapter I



## Soft Light Blue

In the middle of the gray desert  
With the gray sky and gray sand  
Gray past and gray future  
We paint our dreams in color

Soft Light Blue

Purple dotes on the bright red sky  
Stroke of white on a clear cyan sea  
We make our nights as warm as pink  
We paint our days as free as green

You move your brush so close to me  
You fill my eyes with the color

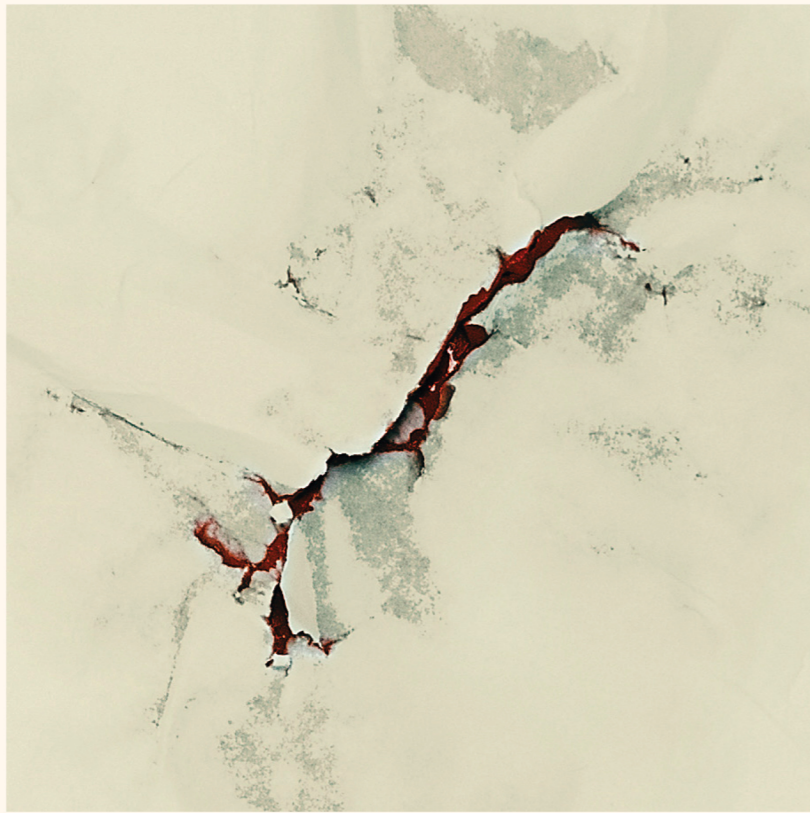
Soft Light Blue

I know you have to go  
You know I have to stay

In the middle of the gray desert  
With the gray wind and gray dust  
Gray mind and gray tears  
I paint my dreams in color

Soft Light Blue



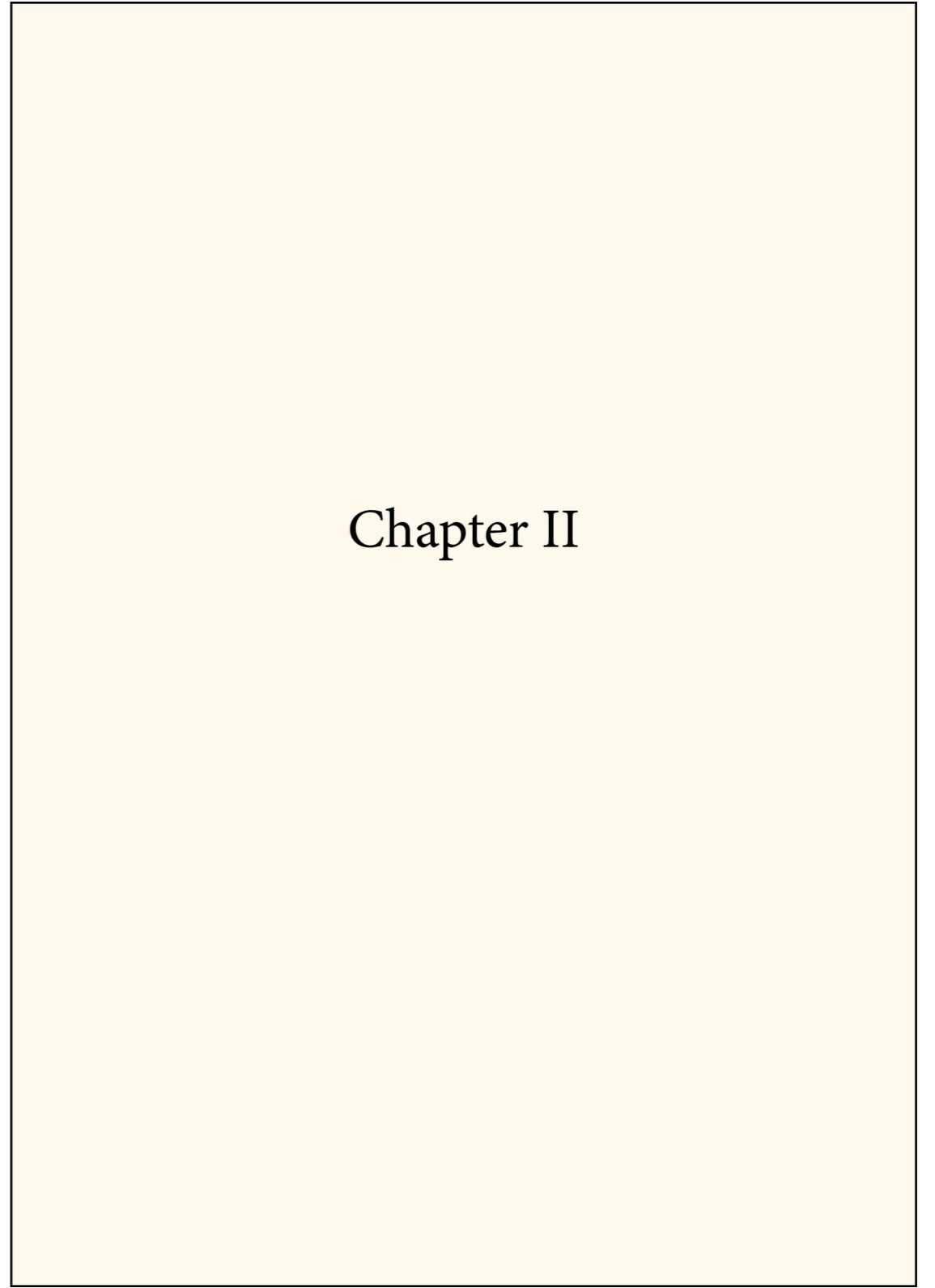
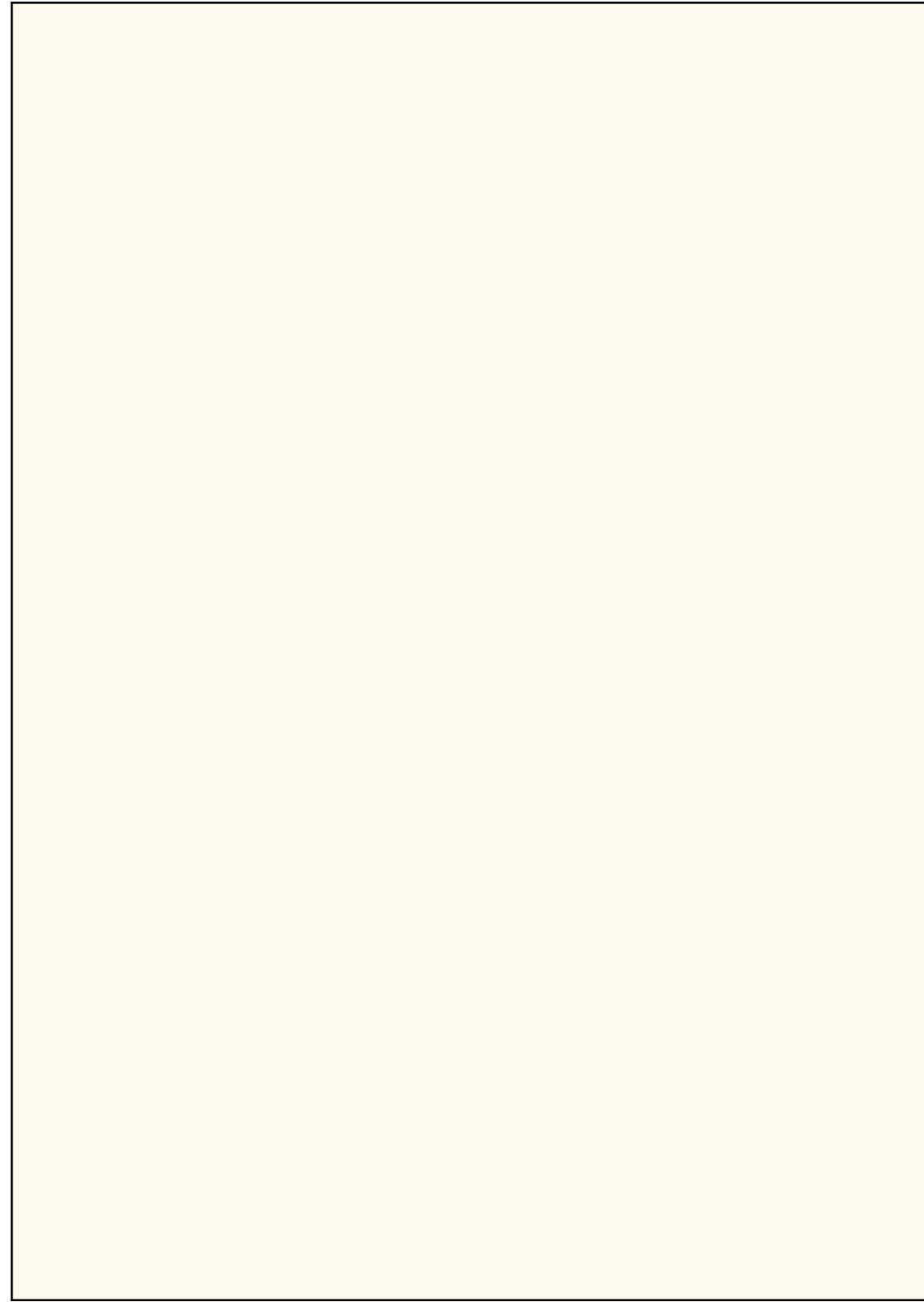


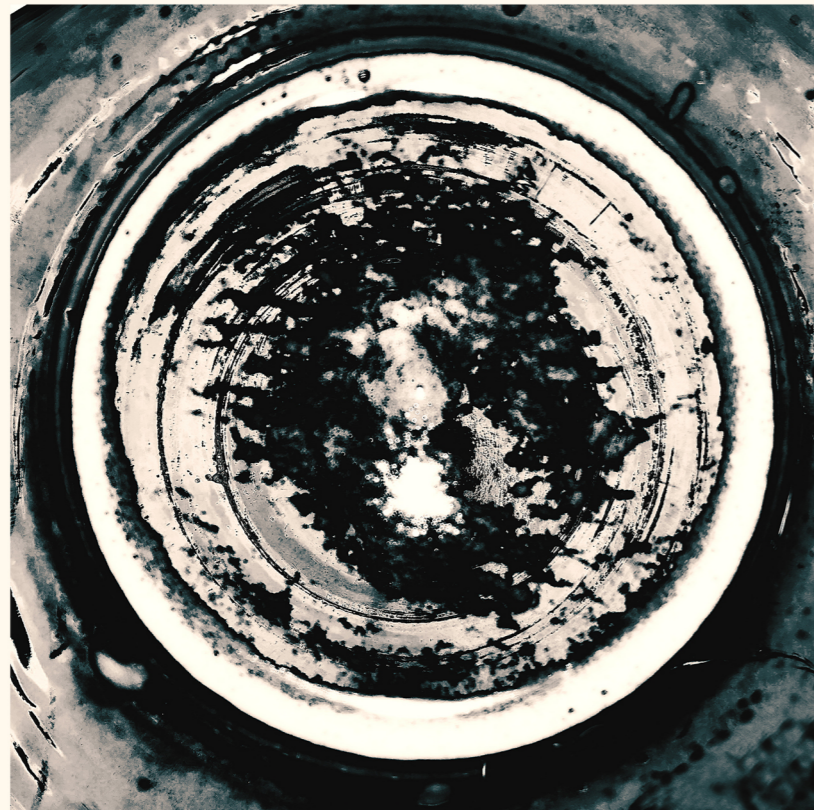
I still remember the day I met you  
I still do think of it sometimes  
Back then I saw it as a blessing  
A gift fell down from night sky

Do you remember the day you left me?  
Do you remember how it felt?  
The sun and rain which never ended  
The sound of a dying bell

You still don't know what back then happened  
I still can't find the words to ask  
And only sun and rain which never ended  
Will know the truth about us.







## The Void

Today waking up  
Eyes wide shut  
Couldn't feel my body  
Couldn't feel my thoughts

Didn't cry  
Didn't smile  
Didn't talk  
Didn't hear

Wasn't happy  
Wasn't sad  
Wasn't dead  
Wasn't alive

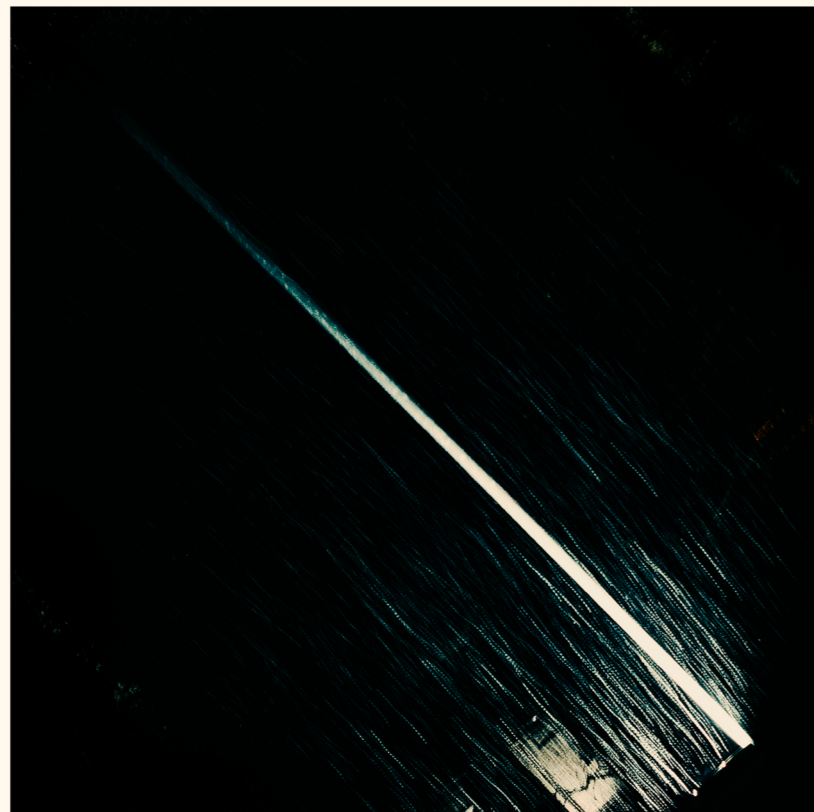
No blood in my veins  
No water in my glass  
No heartbeat in my pulse  
Only void

Drinking coffee  
Black  
Cup after cup  
Only void

Smoking cigarettes  
Red  
Pack after pack  
Only void

I sit on my bed  
There is a window  
No winter outside  
Only void



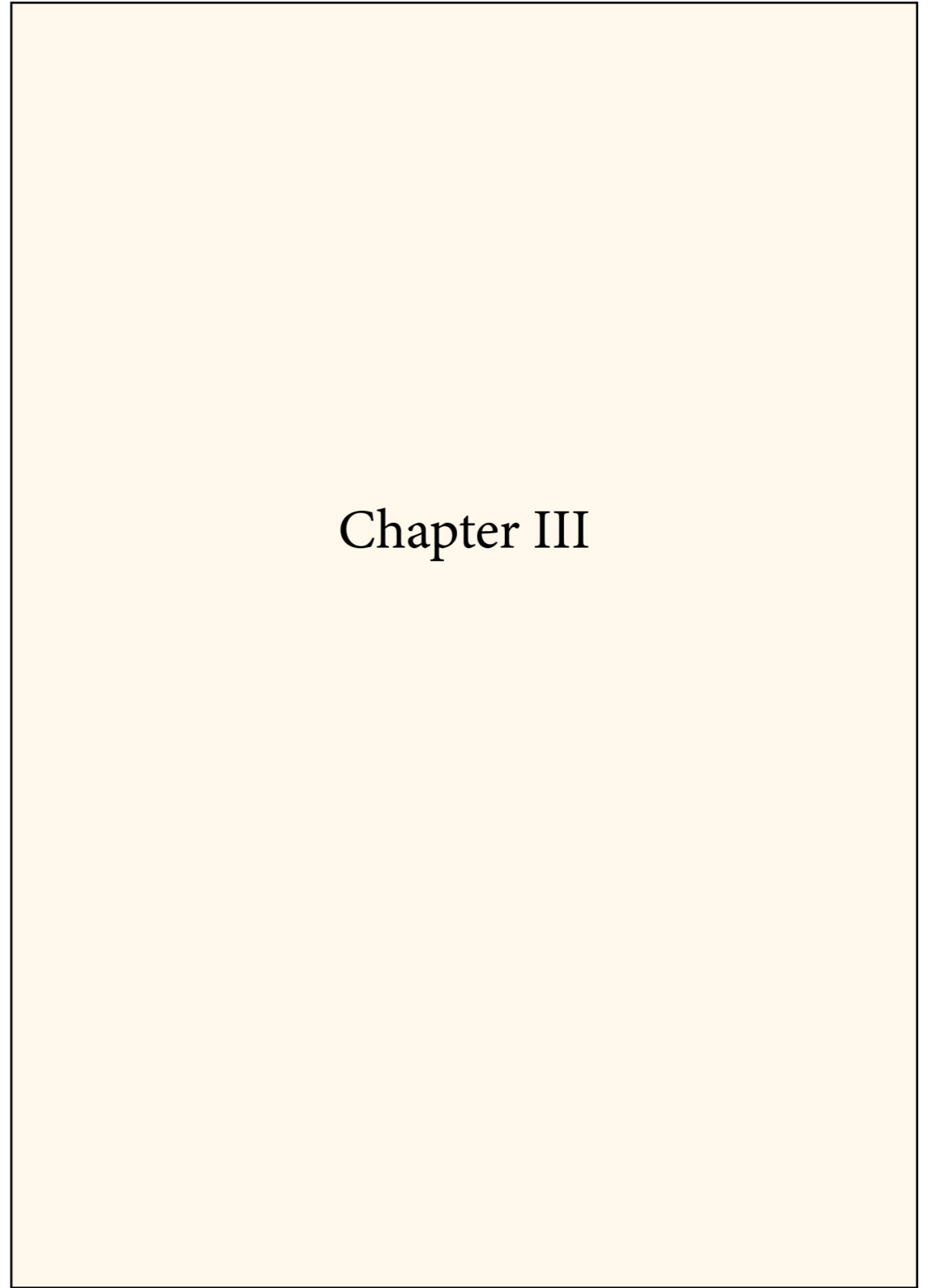
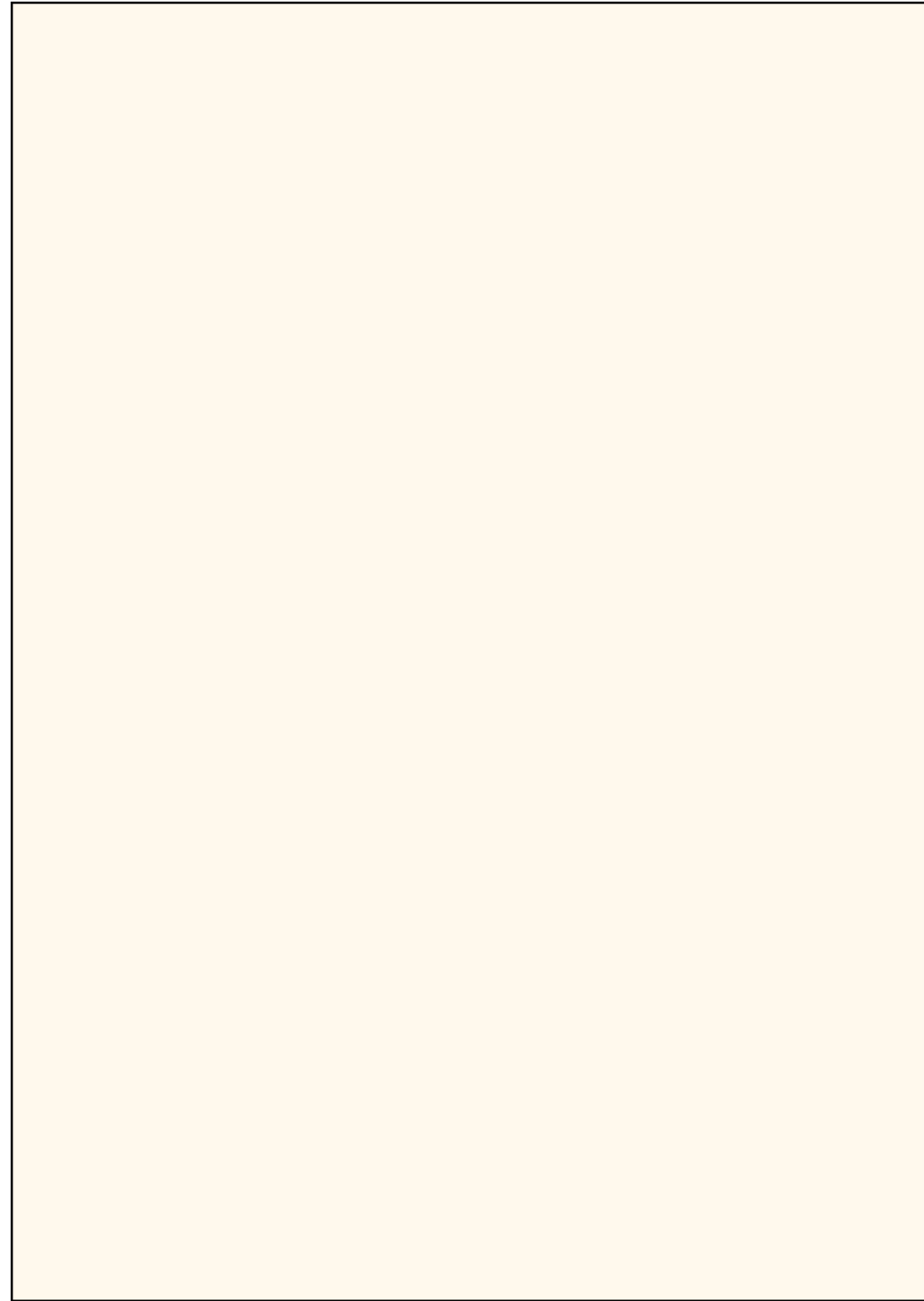


Why would everything end so ordinary sad  
On this black December night  
White trees and dying lights  
Migrant birds and lonely people

A novel on my chest  
A poem in your eyes  
Anger, slowly turning into sorrow  
Pain, becoming empty numbness

All paths are crossed  
The dreams have changed  
Soon you will be far away  
But never as far, as you are today





Chapter III



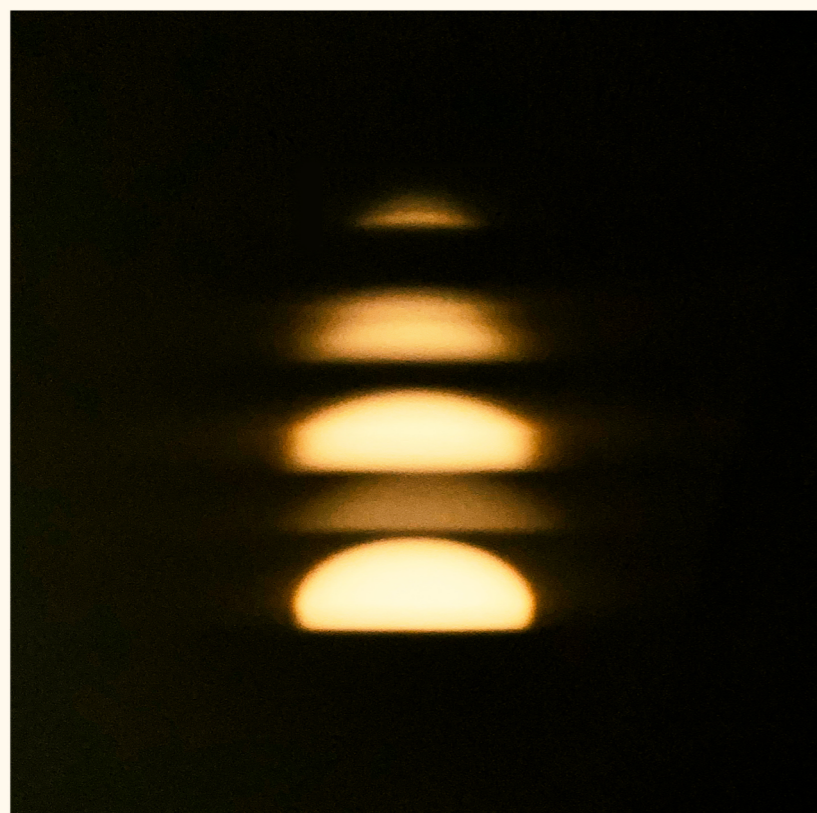
When you are close  
I can't think  
When you walk past  
I can't breathe

When our eyes meet  
There is nothing else  
Just these two caramel moons  
Melting my mercury heart

That short lighting strike  
Leaving a scar  
On the flat surface  
Of my lonely desert

Ocean, full of gold  
Treasure, made out of hope  
Crushing every time you walk away  
Leaving me drowning in the poison of my empty world





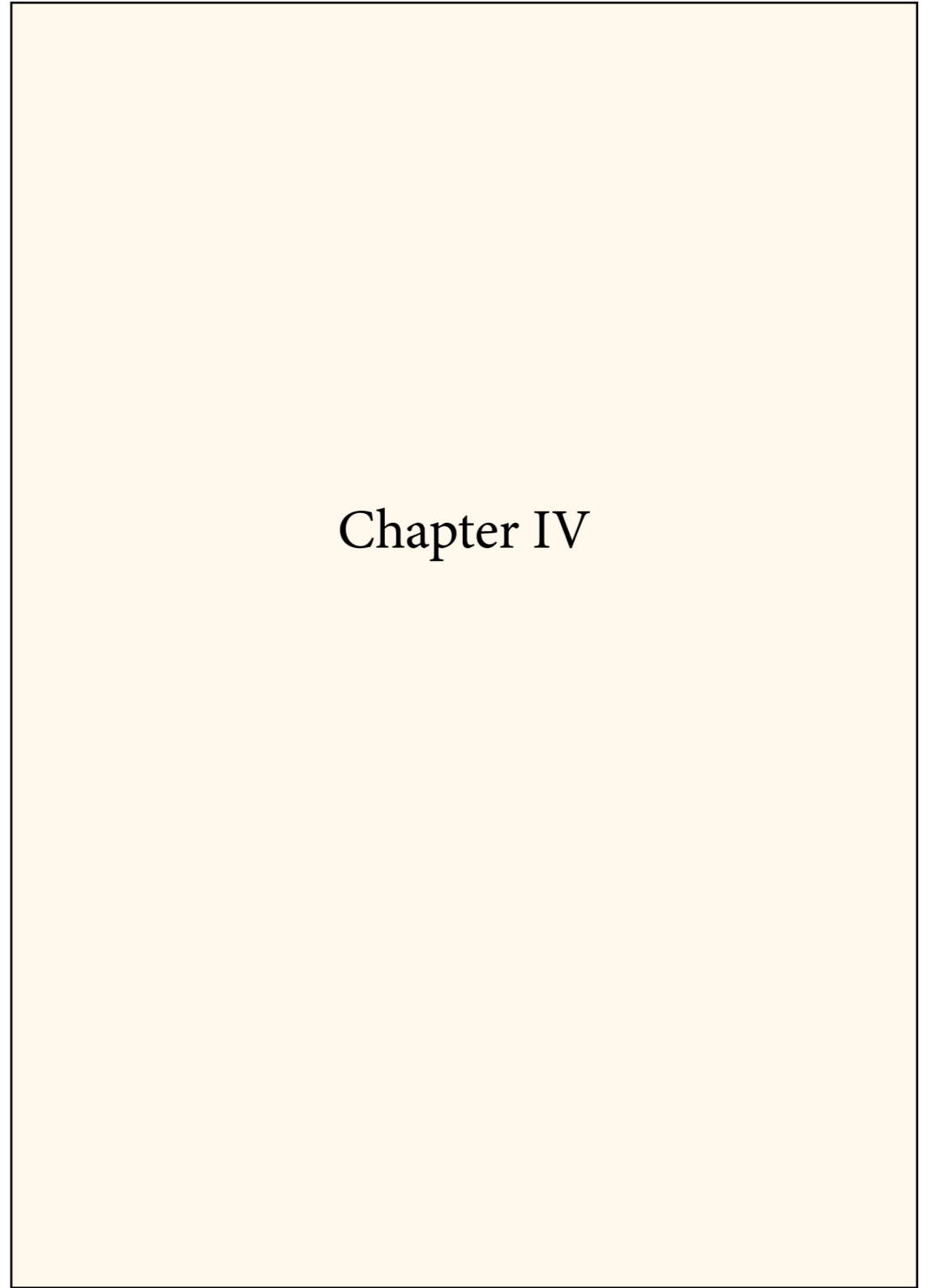
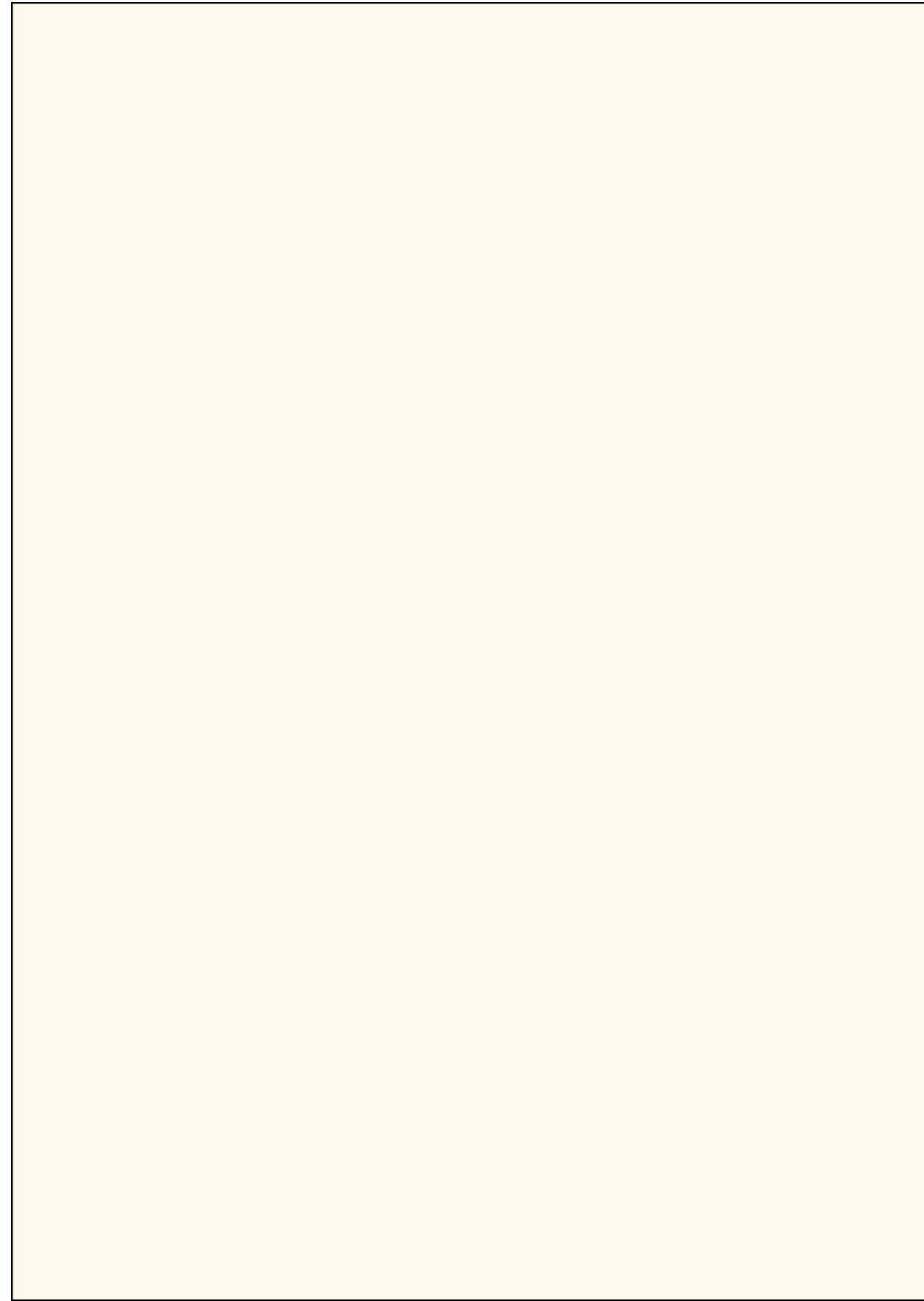
On the sunny edge of Mars  
Twenty-first day of the spring  
Let's make all usual be clear  
Just turn this day into the bliss

Forget the black December nights  
My fallen stars, and all the lies  
Don't turn the page, just take a pen  
The light today is no more gray

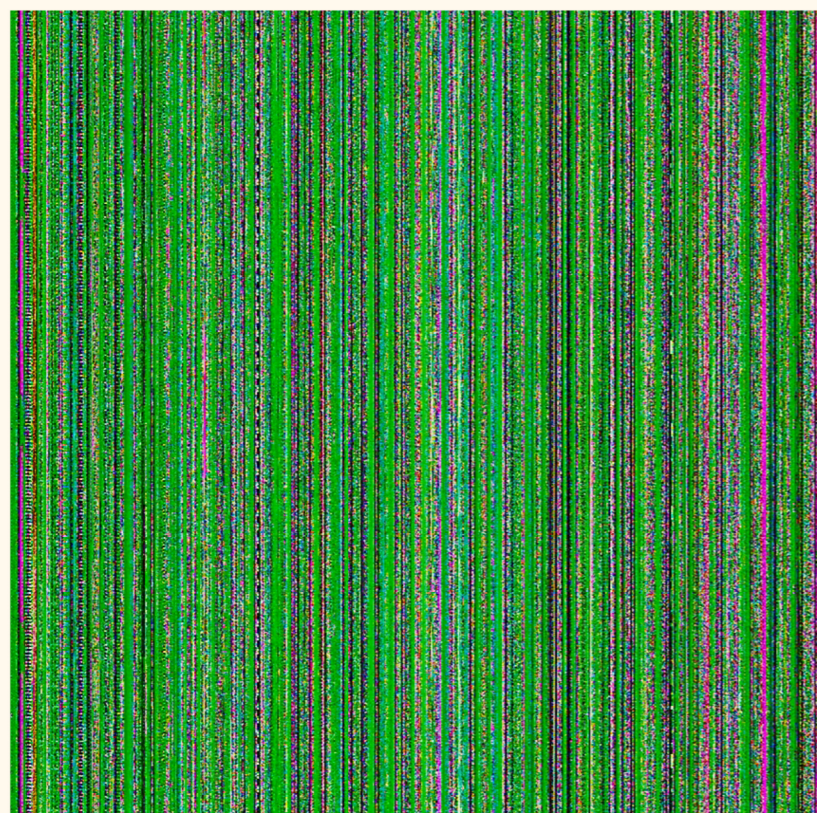
All the migrant birds are almost here  
Letters on my skin are gone  
On the twenty-first of spring I ask you for forgiveness  
Today I tell you:

"Please, don't go"





Chapter IV



## Attention

Okay, so listen carefully now  
You see the sky?  
It's falling down  
As I seal secret one last time

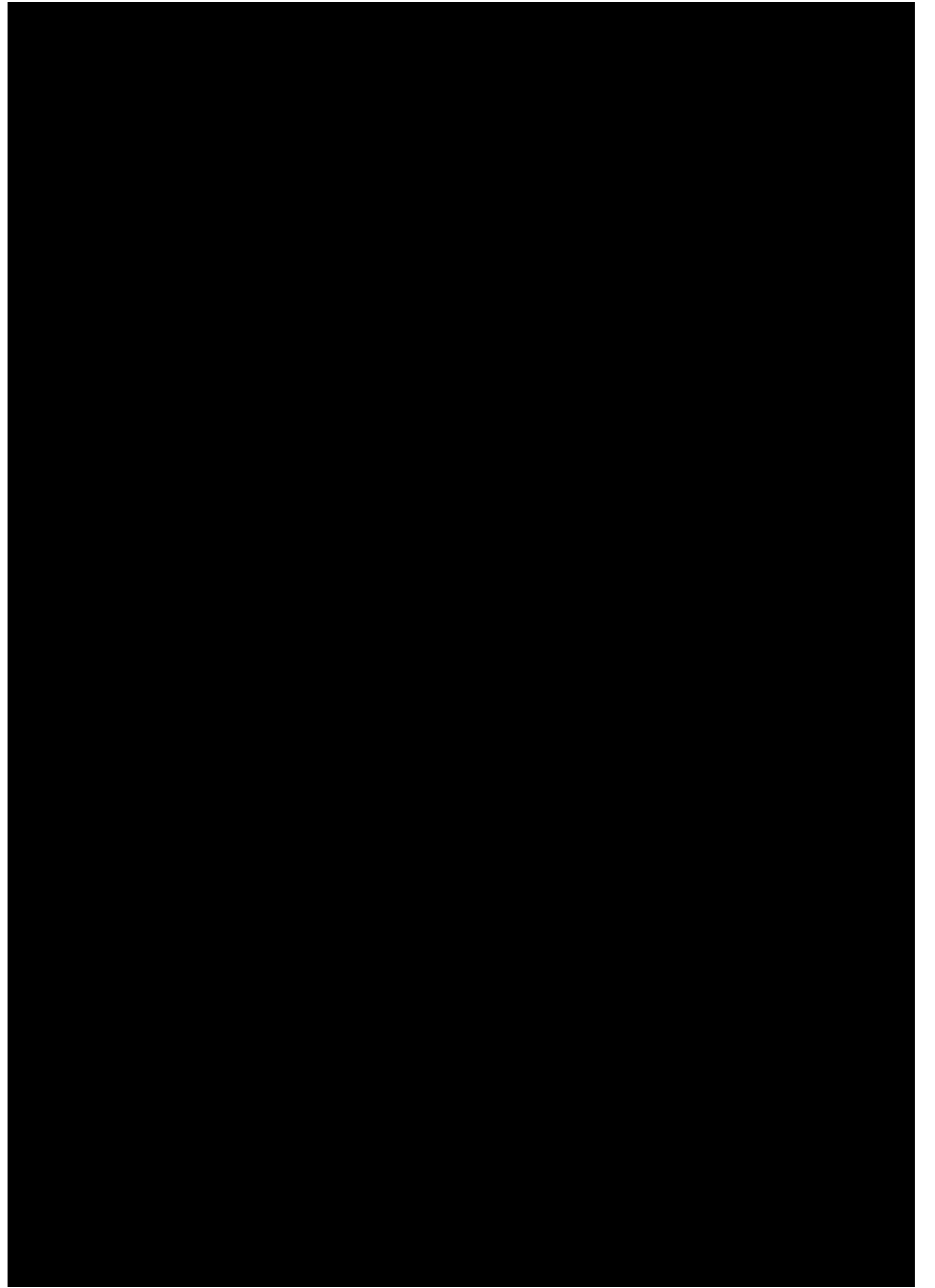
Believes of mine  
Will live another hour  
Your dreams  
Will never be the same

In nights I haunt my feelings down  
Through days they follow me instead  
The only way I'll be around  
Is the only way, which is concealed

So please  
For one last time  
Remember darling  
The sky is falling down on us

So if you know a safty path  
Don't be afraid to tell me that







## The Circumstances

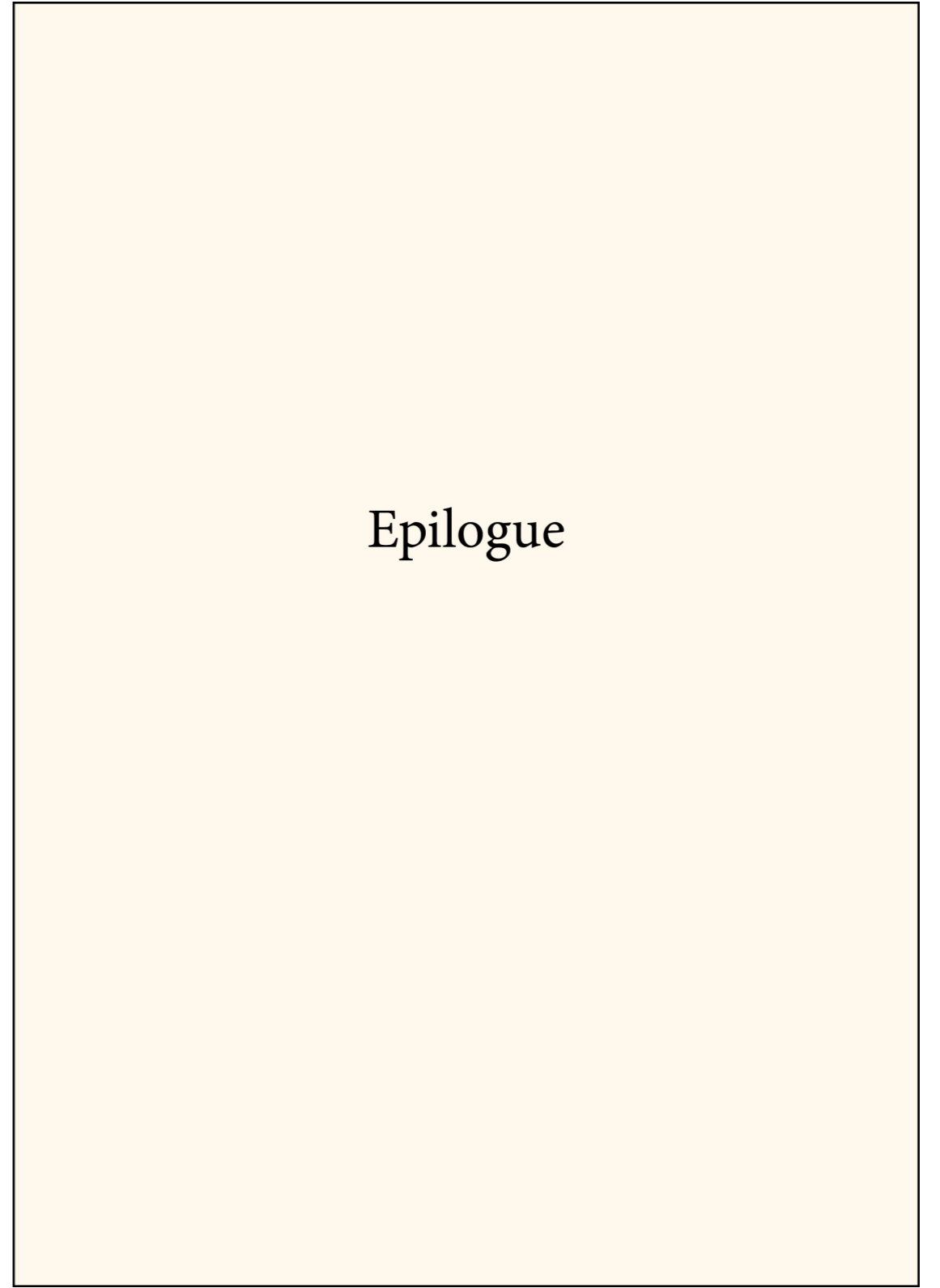
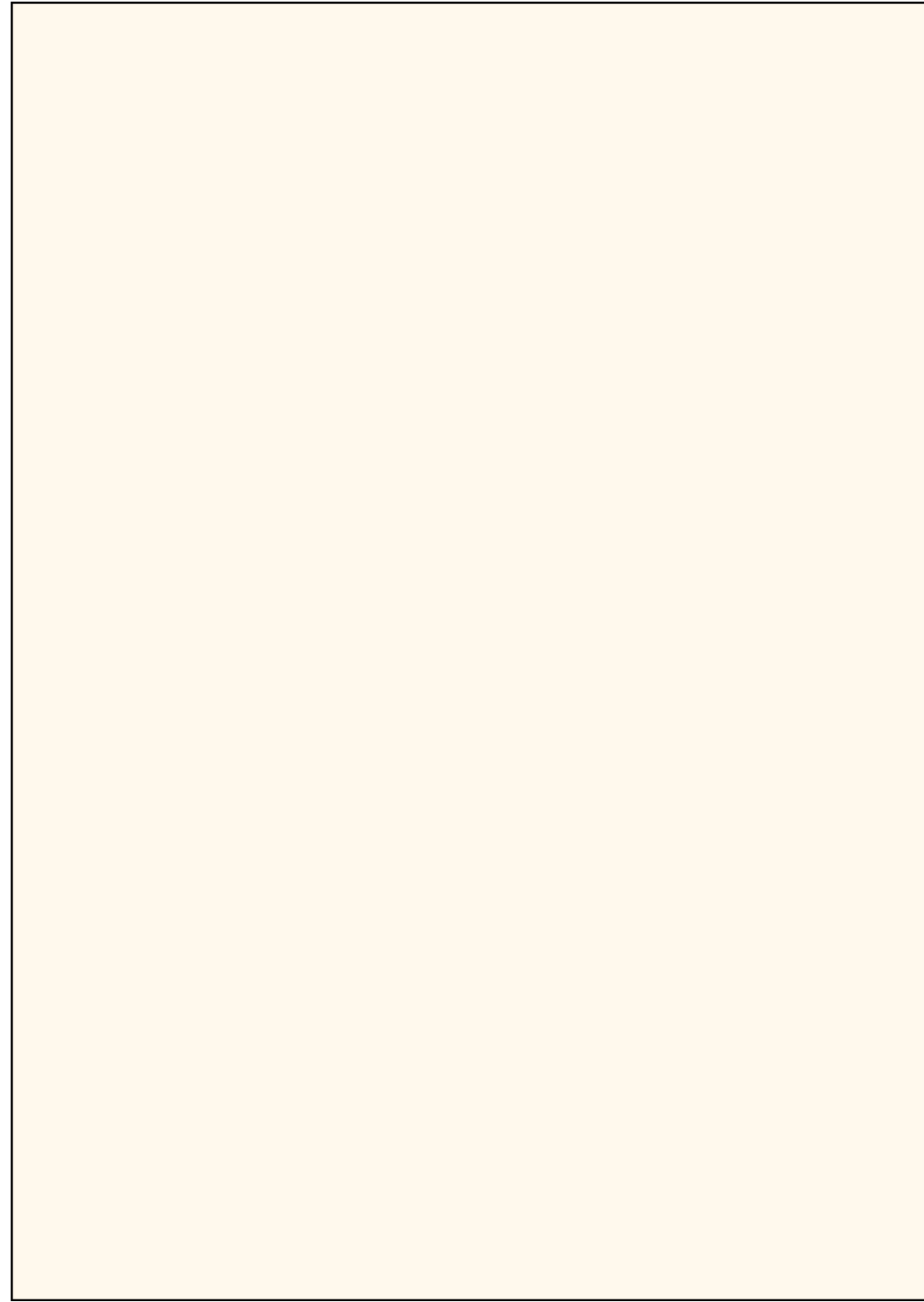
How many words are left unspoken  
It is unthinkable to think  
But then again, who dares even  
Remember, what has been abandoned since

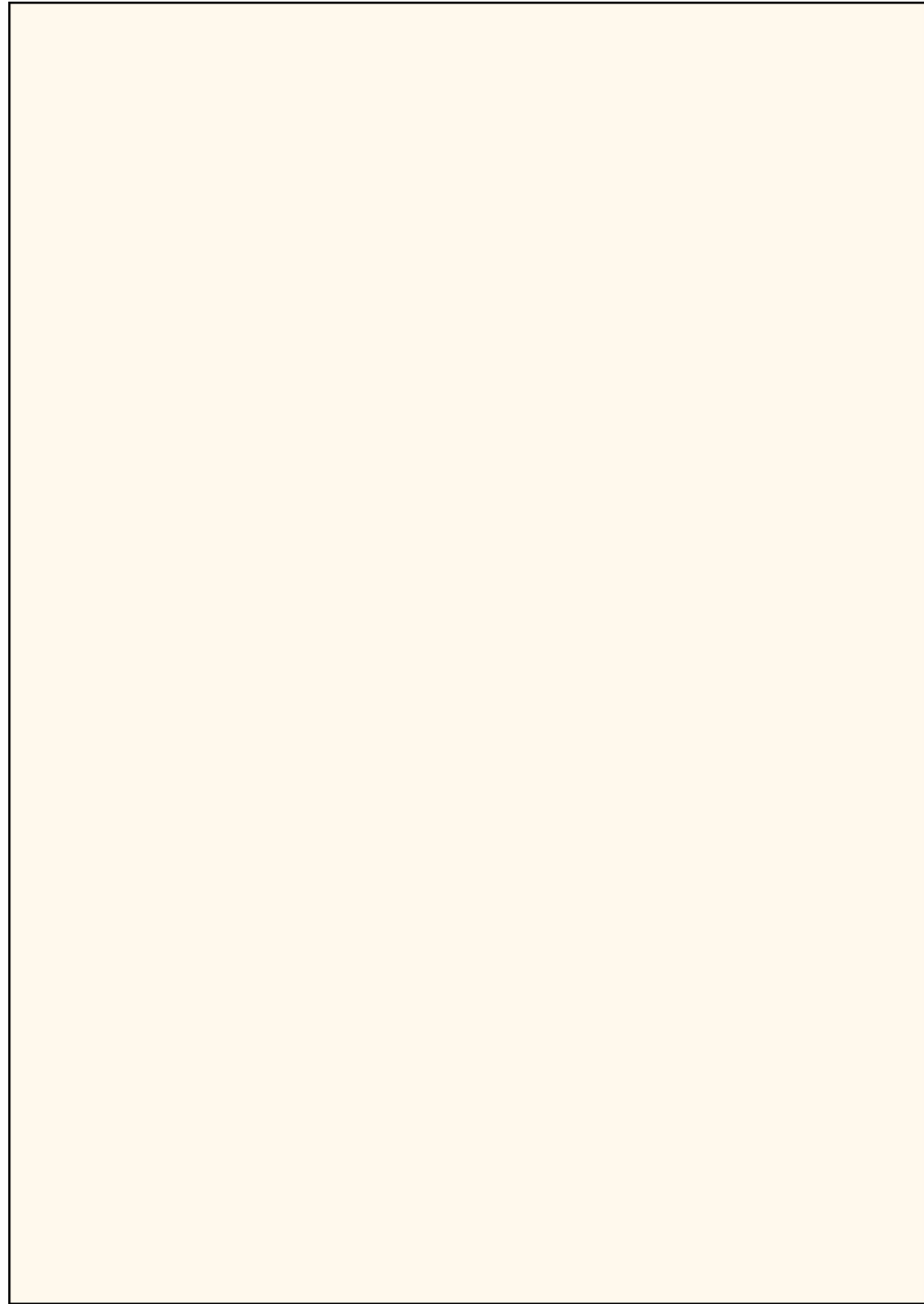
Because of many circumstances  
Important facts are left unknown  
They are forbidden to be wondered  
They are forsaken, lost and gone

And please don't say that this adventure  
Was something, that should've been erased and scold  
Because admit it, once, one day  
You felt exactly the same way

As I did  
And let me tell you: what I felt  
Was none the less  
The happiness itself







How many people are there  
With whom you could just live  
Drink coffee in the mornings  
Share all the beauty moments

With whom you could enjoy the sunset by the sea

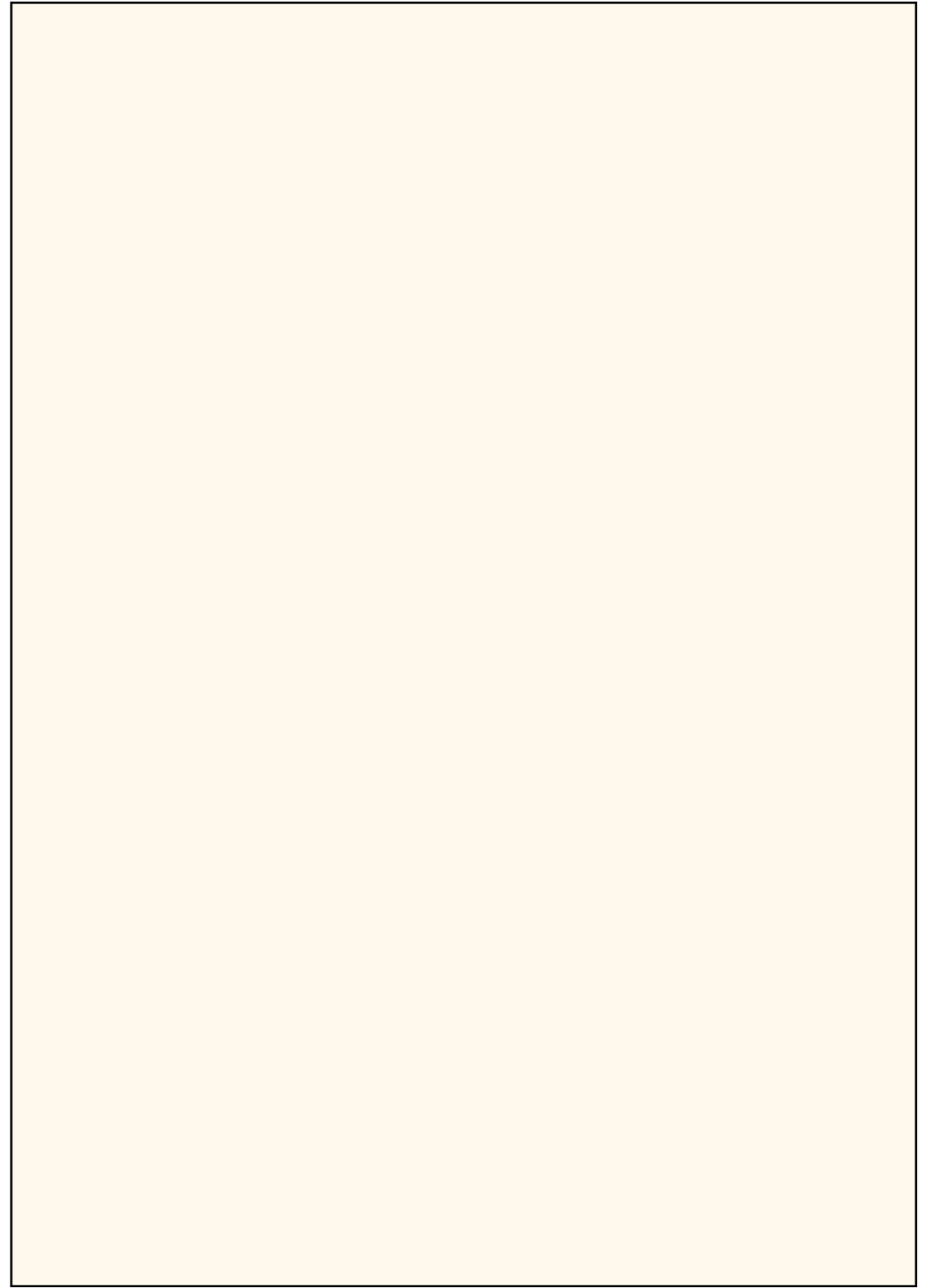
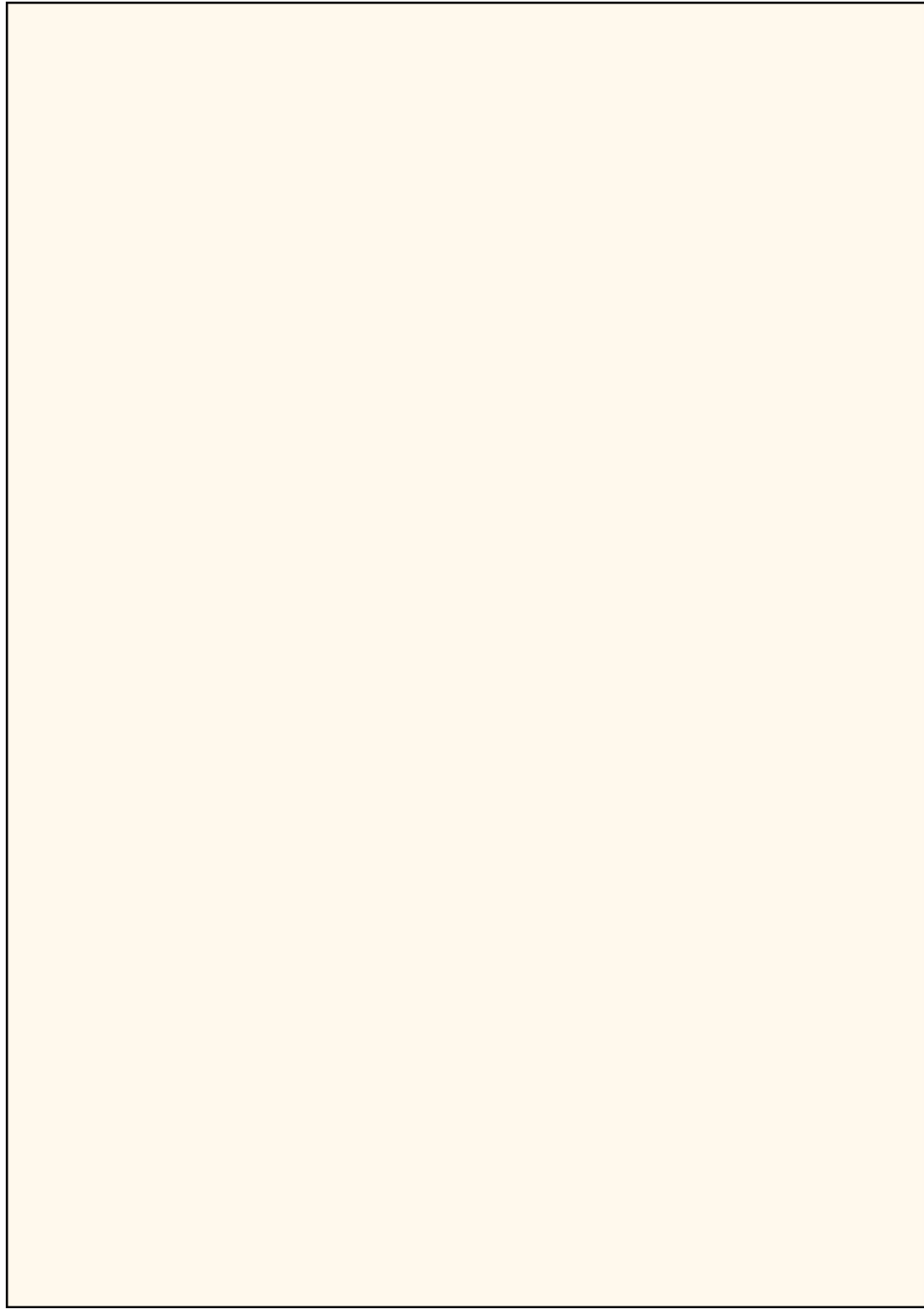
Who'll help to celebrate your birthday  
Be very close in everyday routine  
With whom to laugh and cry  
To spend your weekend in the park just walking

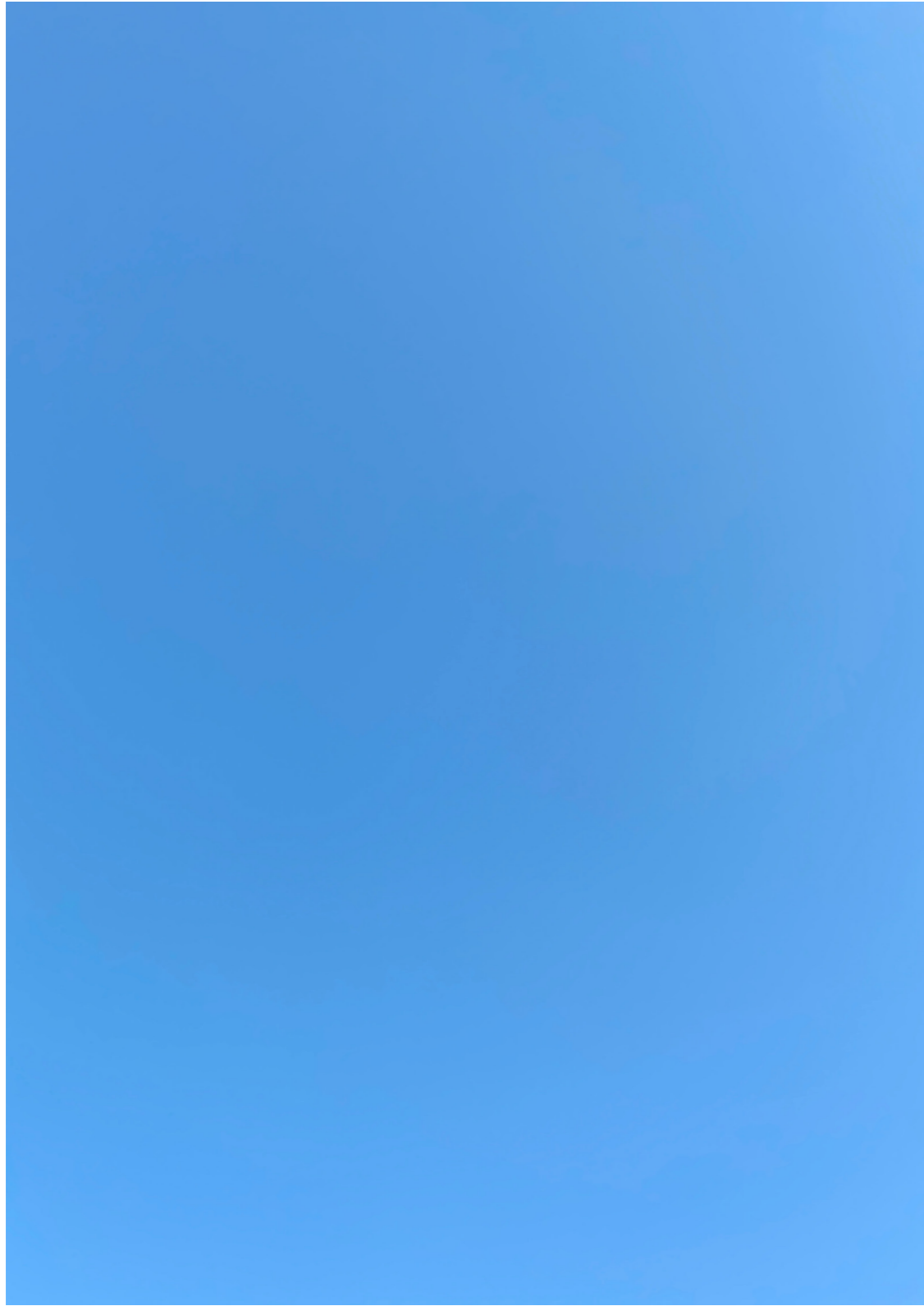
To hug them tight, and even kiss

How many people are there  
With whom you could just live  
Share all the beauty moments  
Be very close

But never, fall in love with







# Process

It has all started with "Soft Light Blue", the first poem I wrote in a long time. Back then I didn't think about creating a book, I just felt like I had to somehow express myself and deliver my thoughts and feelings to the person of my interest. Using poetry as my tool and Instagram Stories as my platform, writing helped me deal with my loneliness, sadness and depression. At that time of my life I went through a lot of things, including major heartbreak and learning that my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

To be honest, it wasn't a choice for me to write, it was a necessity to keep myself together. I wrote Soft Light Blue on October 19, 2017, and sent it directly to the person of my interest. The reaction was not what I expected it to be, but now I also realize that at that moment an anonymous letter with a poem was perhaps a little too much.

All my poems are written in chronological order, as I shared them on my Instagram. There are two black pages before "The Circumstances" which mark the time when I realized that all of my romantic feelings towards the person of my interest have faded.

Each combination of a photograph and a poem has its own unique story behind it. Next, I'm going to present you the backgrounds of three art pieces presented in my book.

## 1. "Soft Light Blue"

Autumn 2017 was probably the toughest time of my life. Multiple difficult life situations had a major impact on both my mental and physical health, and since life doesn't really wait for one to gather their things together, I had to come up with something that could've helped me feel better. And so I did.

It was the first time in my life I felt like I HAVE to go see a doctor and get professional help. I can't recall enjoying a single moment of my life at that time, and so I started searching for new ways of expressing myself and my feelings. Digging deep into the past, I remembered how previously writing has helped me deal with my issues. I went to a local supply shop, bought a little notebook and the fanciest pen they could offer. My next destination was café Fiika, where the majority of poems presented in the book were written.

"You move your brush so close to me  
You fill my eyes with the color

Soft Light Blue

I know you have to go  
You know I have to stay"

As I've mentioned before, once the poem was finished, I bought an envelope and, without much deliberation, sent it anonymously by post to the person of my interest. At the moment I deemed it smart and romantic, while in reality it was just another step in making everything even more complicated. The situation was already quite tough; as I say it in the poem, I knew that our ways are separating. But writing something down on paper and accepting the same thing in real life are two very different things.

The photograph for this piece was made 2 months prior to the poem. The dominant color of the photo is red, with a few strokes of color blue. It is the only image in my book that is made by using collage technique, therefore it clearly stands apart from all of the other pieces.

## 2. “Caramel Moons”

There are not many poems in my book that still touch me. In fact, this one might be the only one such. I remember quite well when I came up with the idea for caramel moons. It was February 2018, I was at home alone and somehow ended up going through photos and messages on my old phone. Obviously a very bad idea, but I did get something out of it.

There is this one specific moment I live through every time I read this poem. It is lunchtime at our school, I sit with my friends enjoying my meal, as the person of my interest walks past and gives me the look I will probably never forget.

“When our eyes meet  
There is nothing else  
Just these two caramel moons  
Melting my mercury heart”

As the moment passed by and the person of my interest walked away, I felt like I’ve lost everything in a matter of a seconds.

“Ocean, full of gold  
Treasure, made out of hope  
Crushing, every time you walk away  
Leaving me drawing in the poison of my empty world”

I don’t think there could be any better words to express what I felt at that moment.

Unfortunately, due to certain circumstances I was not able to include the original photograph for this piece, so I had to come up with a replacement. The photograph you can currently see in the book is more of an evil twin of the original one.

## 3. “The Circumstances”

The last piece before the epilogue, titled “The Circumstances”, is in sharp contrast with the rest of poems and photographs in my book. Each of the other pieces in “Soft Light Blue” are poems and photographs made as a result of an urge to express. As I mentioned before, initially I wasn’t planning to combine all of those pieces, and the idea came up to me pretty much out of nowhere. All I needed to complete my book was the last poem that would work as a conclusion for my story. But since my book is also based on a true story, I felt like it would have been cheating if I closed my story with a cooked-up ending. And so it took me almost a year to see the whole picture and finally come up with a conclusion of sorts.

The process of writing this poem was long and morbid. I knew I wanted a truthful ending for the story, but the situation was very unclear for a very long period of time. In a way I feel like I didn’t want to face the reality and conclude my story in the most ordinary and boring way possible, with two people just growing apart from each other and finally leaving each other behind. But after some time, I realized that it is exactly what happened, and once I finally got brave enough to face the truth, I wrote it down on paper.

“And please don’t say that this adventure  
Was something, that should’ve been erased and scold  
Because admit it, once, one day  
You felt exactly the same way

As I did  
And let me tell you: what I felt  
Was nonetheless  
The happiness itself”

The photograph, on the other hand, as are most of the visuals I have in my book, was made by a quick and amusing coincidence, a result of a multitude of random events. It is still one of my favorite photos included in the book, as it can be interpreted in many different ways, but works with the poem equally well.

## The Book

Produced as a single copy, Soft Light Blue is a handmade book created by craft masters from St. Petersburg. Since I see my book as a unique piece of art, every single detail in the process of developing it was important. It is a very clean and simple book, which follows classic standards of traditional book binding, but also includes a little touch of modern technology.

When I was a little kid, I used to spend a lot of time at my grandparents' place. Being quite intelligent and academic people, each room of their flat in Moscow had many bookshelves filled with all kinds of books. My grandmother used to read a lot to me, and I've always been mesmerized by her reading, whether it be ancient Greek mythology or history of Russian art. But my absolute favorite book was "The Tale of Tsar Saltan", a poetic fairy tale by Russian writer Alexander Pushkin. We went through that book countless times, and my grandma never ceased being amazed by how much I enjoyed the story of Tsar Saltan.

Even though Soft Light Blue has absolutely nothing to do with the genre of fairy tales and Pushkin's style in general, I feel like a great amount of my inspiration and interest towards poetry and literature comes from my childhood and all the books my grandmother used to read to me. Did I think that I will ever write a book myself back then? Of course not, but here we are.



*Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic, my book didn't arrive in time to Finland, so I had no chance of taking any photos of it. Luckily, my colleague and friend Eetu Heikkinen made a 3D model of "Soft Light Blue" based on the mock-up of the book I provided him.*

## QR Codes and Studio Recording

I remember in summer 2019, when I read my book to a friend, she pointed out that since I have interesting rhymes and pretty peculiar rhythm in my poetry, it would be important for the potential reader to hear the way I read it myself. At the time I was thinking of organizing a poetry night, in which I could've presented my book and read through it. But obviously it wasn't the most convenient way, as only the visitors of the event would have a clue of my reading style. And so, I started to think of another way of presenting my poetry in an audio form.

In Spring 2019 me and two of my colleagues from Helsinki had our augmented reality (AR) exhibition held in Gallery White Box in Jakobstad, and when I showed a video from there to one of my friends from Russia, she mistakenly called our work "QR Code Project". Funny how a tiny accident like that had such a big impact on my bachelor work later on.

As a big fan of combining modern technologies with classic and traditional ways of art, I figured out I could use QR codes in my book. I decided that each poem will have its own unique QR link, leading to an audio file of me reading the piece. Now I just had to find the right place and the right person to help me with recording my voice.

Luckily enough, I happened to have the exact person I needed. Me and Oskar Packalen have already done multiple projects together, including my video performance "Message", in which he recorded and mixed my voice. I've always been very pleased with the work we did together, so it didn't take us long to book the studio and get down to business.

First I was thinking of recording the book step by step in multiple days, but after showing my work to a Swedish guest teacher Joakim Eskildsen, with whom I had a personal meeting at my school, I realized a simple truth: if I want to achieve the right mood with my story, I have to read it through in one go, just as I would do during a live performance. And so I did, letting maestro Packalen do all the cutting and mixing. Once again, I wasn't disappointed with the results I got. It is always a pleasure to work with someone who knows their craft.

# Conclusion

Quoting my teacher Emma Westerlund: "Final thesis usually works as a bridge from student's studies to his working life".

In my case I see my work more as a memorial, tribute to my studies, to particular feelings and my mental disorder.

As the first poem for my book was written in the beginning of the second year of my studies and the last one was finished during the second half of my last study year, I see this project as a perfect conclusion to my studies in YH Novia.

I'm very proud of my work and quite satisfied with the end result. I'm truly happy to be finally finished with my thesis and I'm forever grateful to everyone who helped me make this project happen.

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## Acknowledgements Section

I would like to thank:

Lars Rebers  
Emma Westerlund  
Ivan Chuppin  
Oskar Packalen  
Joakim Finholm  
Ingela Bodbacka-Rak  
Eetu Heikkinen  
Alexander Chuppin  
Elena Chuppina  
Joakim Eskildsen  
Conny Emmerstedt  
Janne Rönkkö

