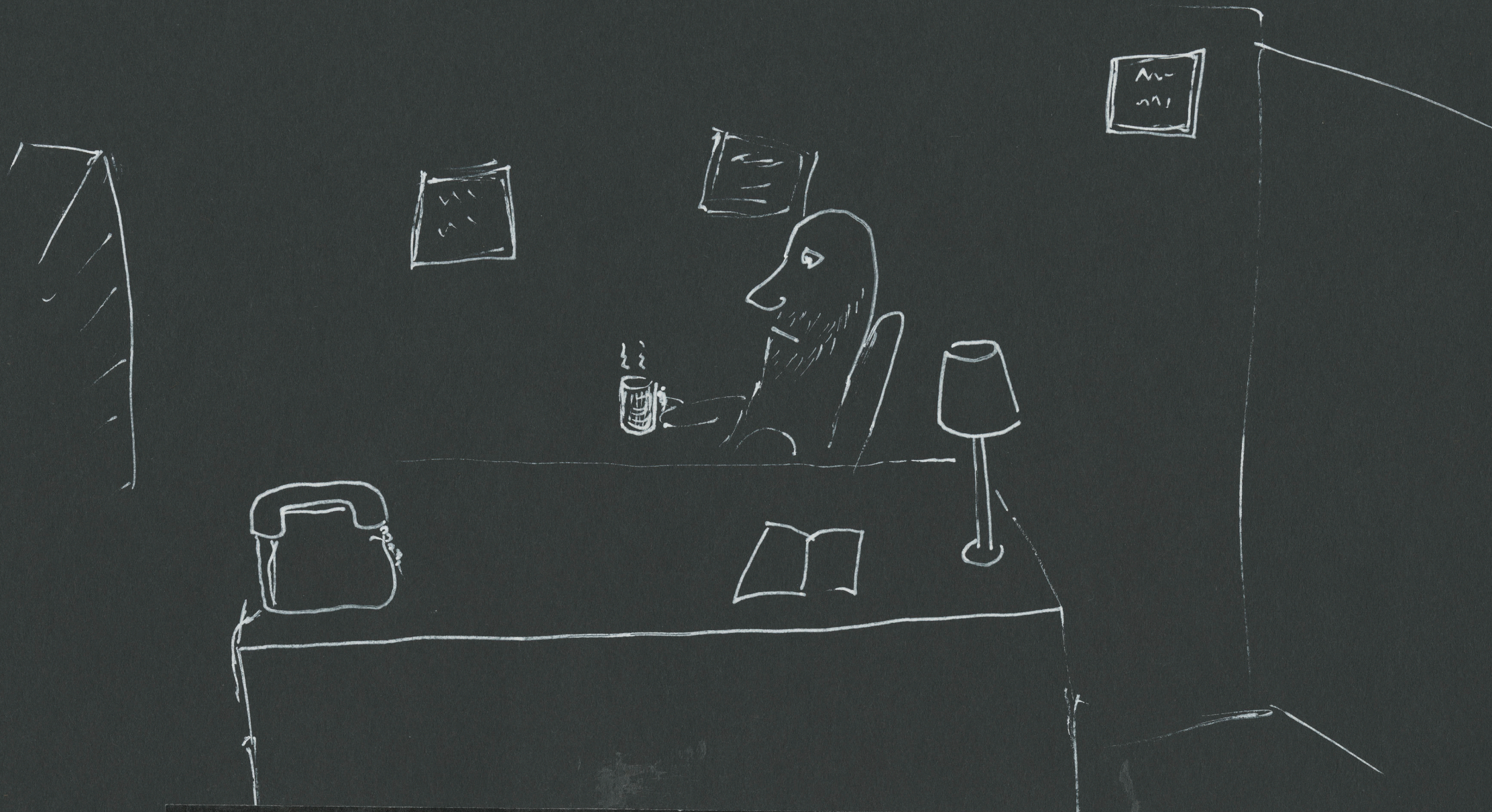


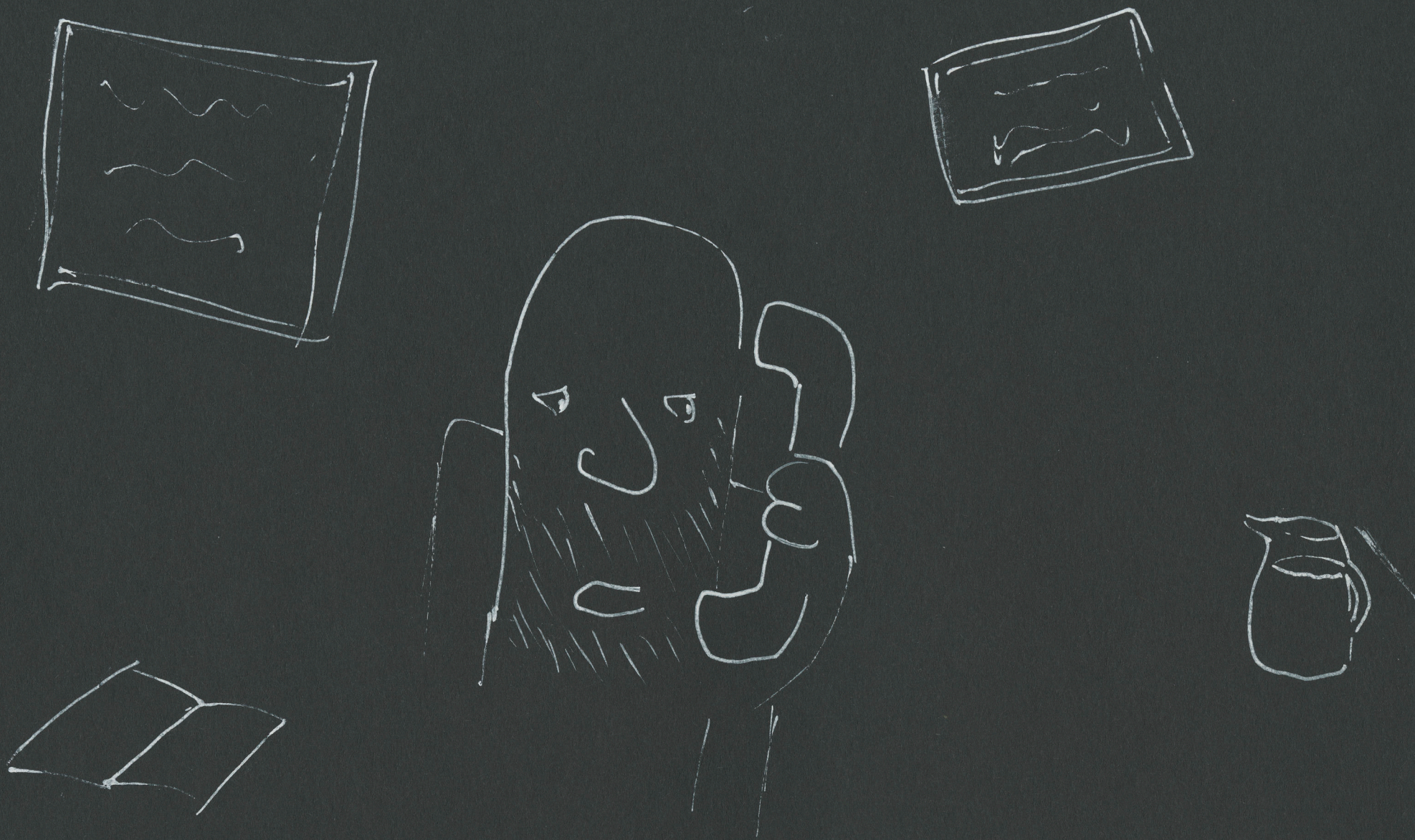
Fushanoonoo, P.I.

and the Case of the Missing Hyena



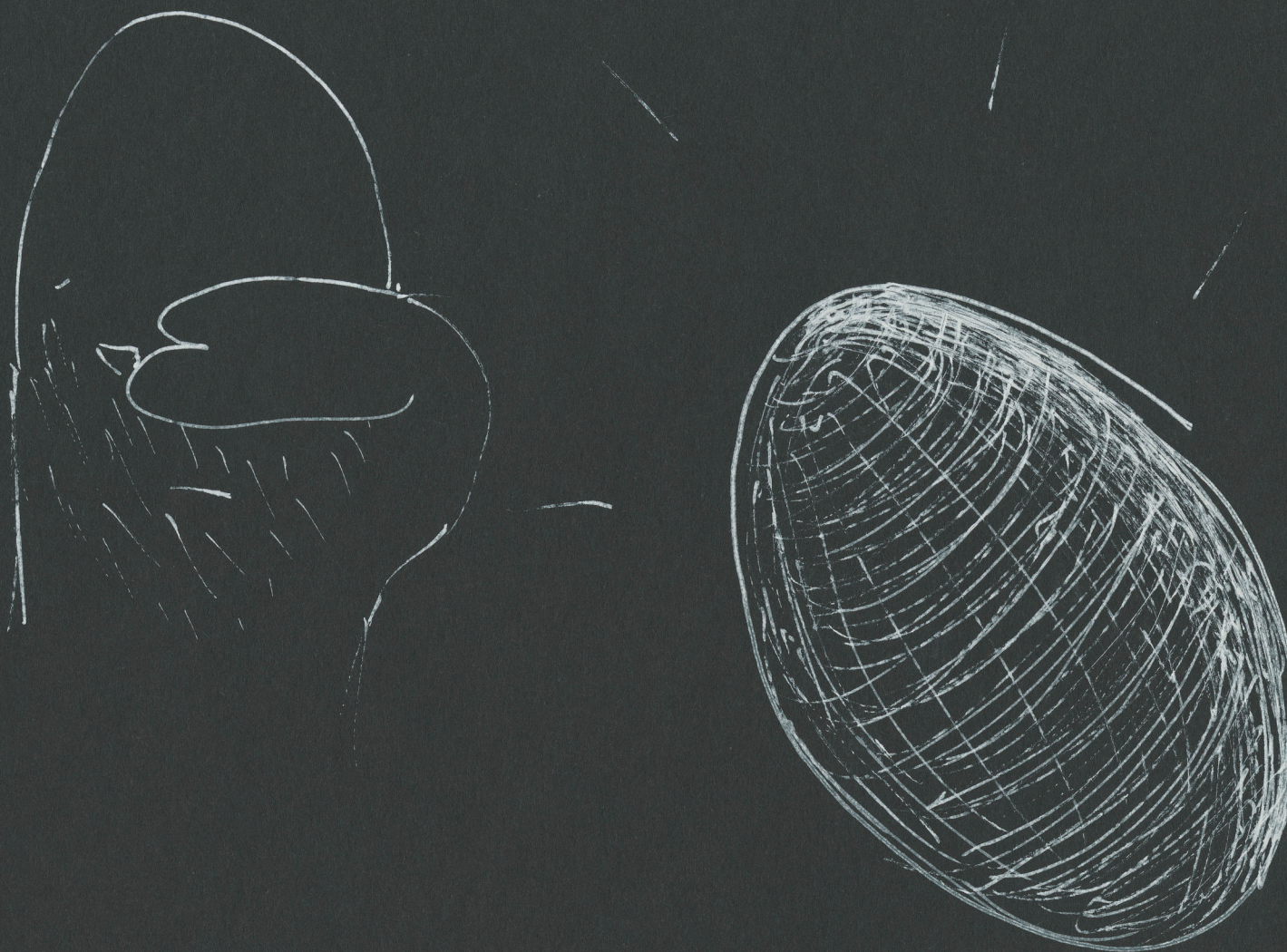
There I was in my dimly-lit office, waiting for a call from my manager. 'Manager' is show business talk. It shouldn't surprise you to learn that it takes more than one finger to count my talents. Private investigator, dancing hot dog. When I'm not snooping I'm entertaining. And when I'm not entertaining I'm snooping. If I could sing too I would shut down my practice in a heartbeat and do showbiz full-time.

I was sick of the P.I. grind: people expecting you to bend reality, translate their unfounded fears into material facts, and all you can think about is the check. The better job you do the less likely you are to hear from them again. And the type of person who calls a P.I. is far too paranoid to ever refer you to others for future work.

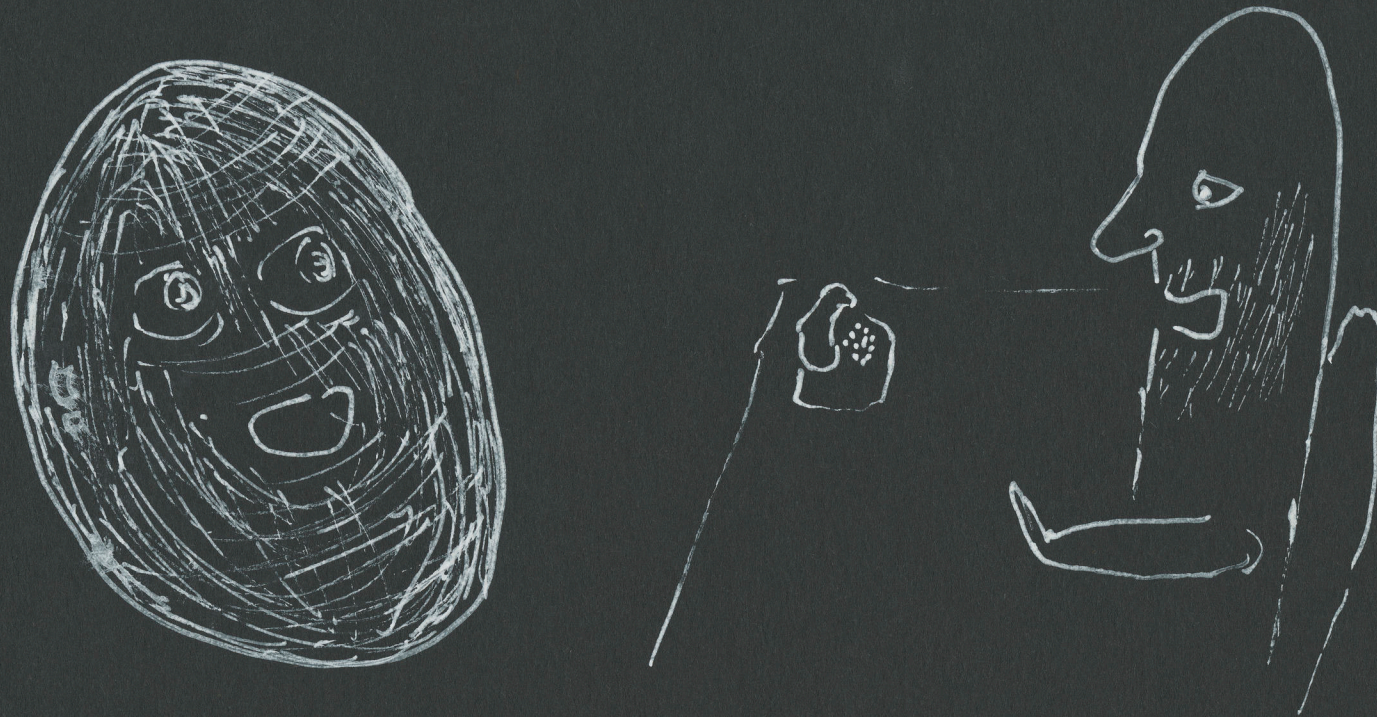


So imagine this: Hours pass, then the phone rings. Finally. I answer. "What's the word? Did you tell them I'm not performing for tips anymore?" Silence. "When I fill seats they'd better make it worth my while." More silence. Then an otherworldly voice asks where to park. Glory be. The only thing more boring than sitting in my office waiting for the phone to ring is actually talking to a client.

I look to see how much coffee is left in the pot. There's a show business weekly on my desk opened to the auditions page. I toss it into a drawer and straighten a couple few framed certificates on the wall. Some sucker thinks I might be useful to him, or saw how low my fee is in that ad I took out in the neighborhood paper. But what's the difference?



An egg walks in. Rolls, to be more precise. The egg is radiant. I've never seen an egg so bright, or my office for that matter. Naturally I cover my face because I haven't shaved since Ancient Egypt. In a way the egg's blinding hue is a welcome sight; I know in an instant that it isn't a wereegg. I've squared off against enough wereeggs to know that I will never take a case if a wereegg is involved. Not in a million years. Maybe for a million dollars. (A wereegg is like a werewolf but an egg.)

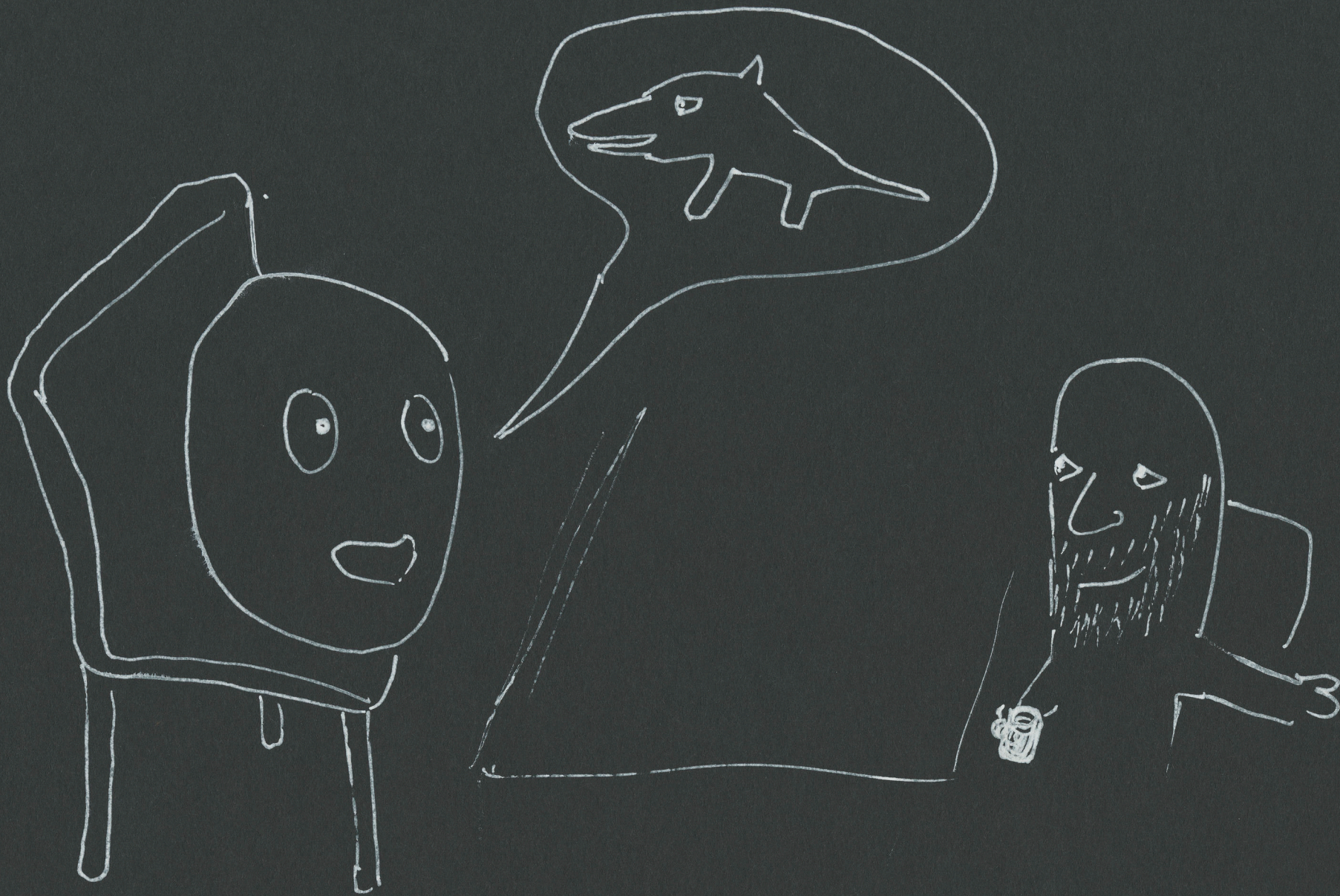


"Mr. Fushanoonoo, my name is the Golden Egg. I have lost my best friend."

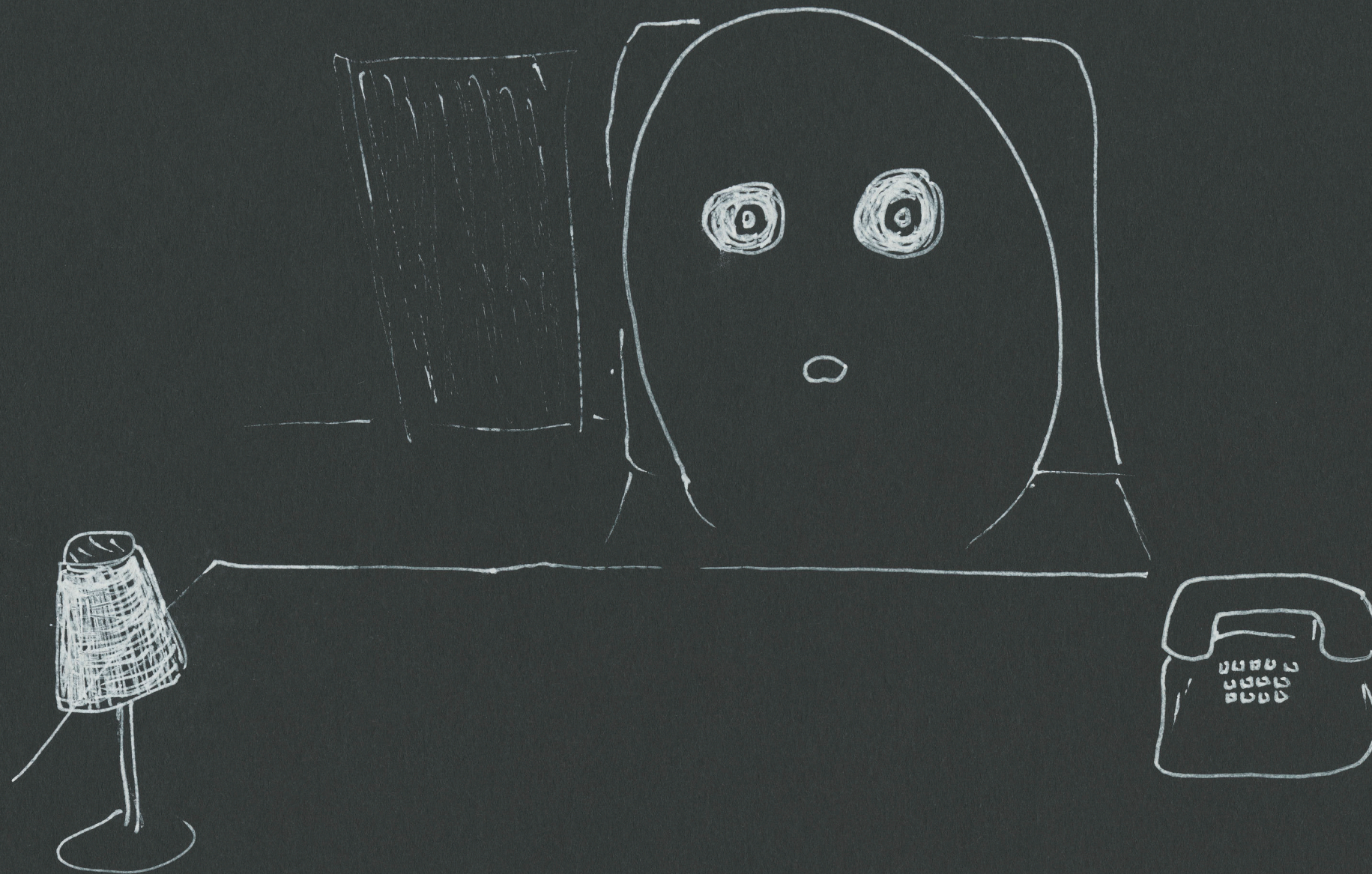
"Please, call me Fushanoonoo. Well, Mr. Egg, what happened to your friend?"

"Oh, please, no 'Mr.'"

"Oh, not at all. Golden, how can I help?"



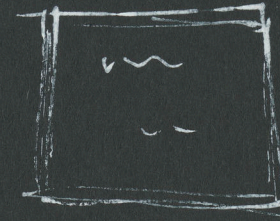
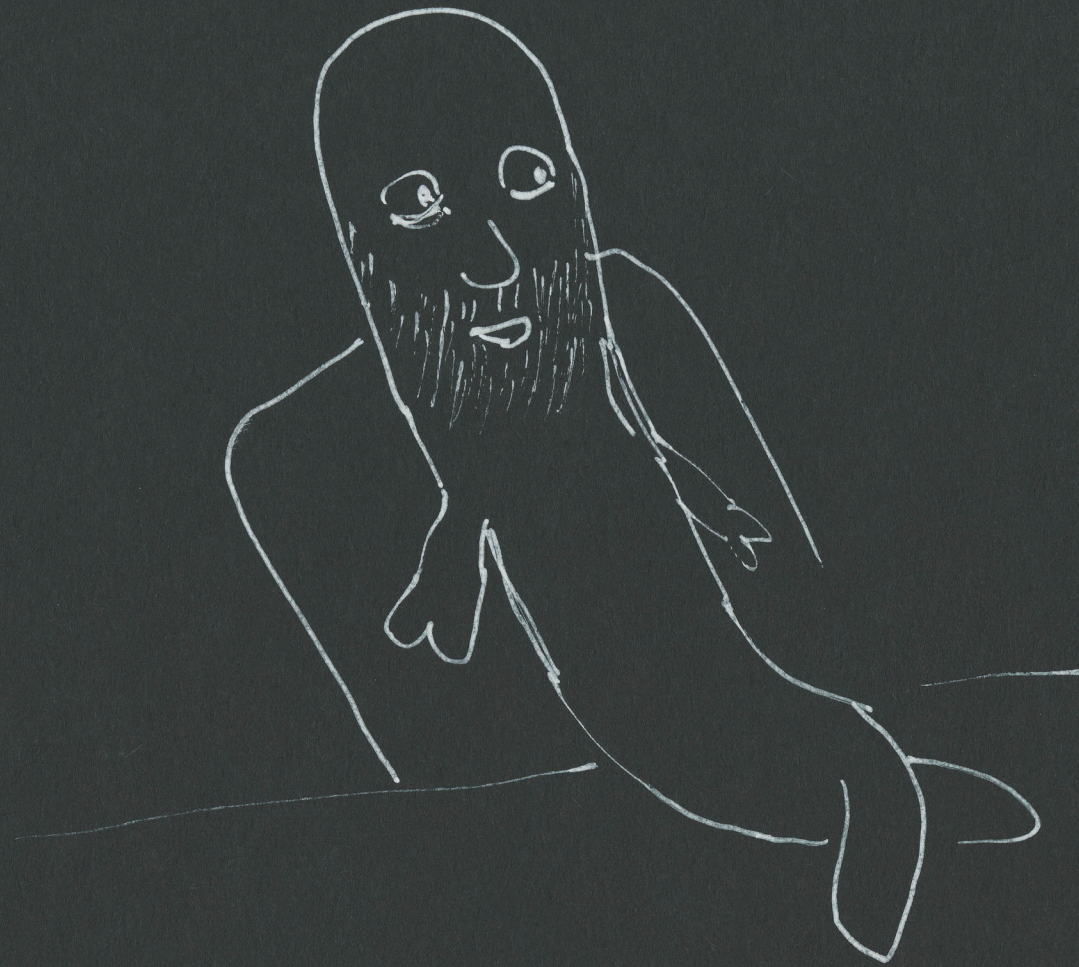
Formalities aside, I learned that the Golden Egg belonged to a hyena but the hyena had gone missing and now the G.E. didn't know how to feed himself, or do anything, which is customary for eggs. In a panic the G.E. came to see me. What has my life come to, I wonder. The light at the end of this tunnel is the ham sandwich I packed for lunch.



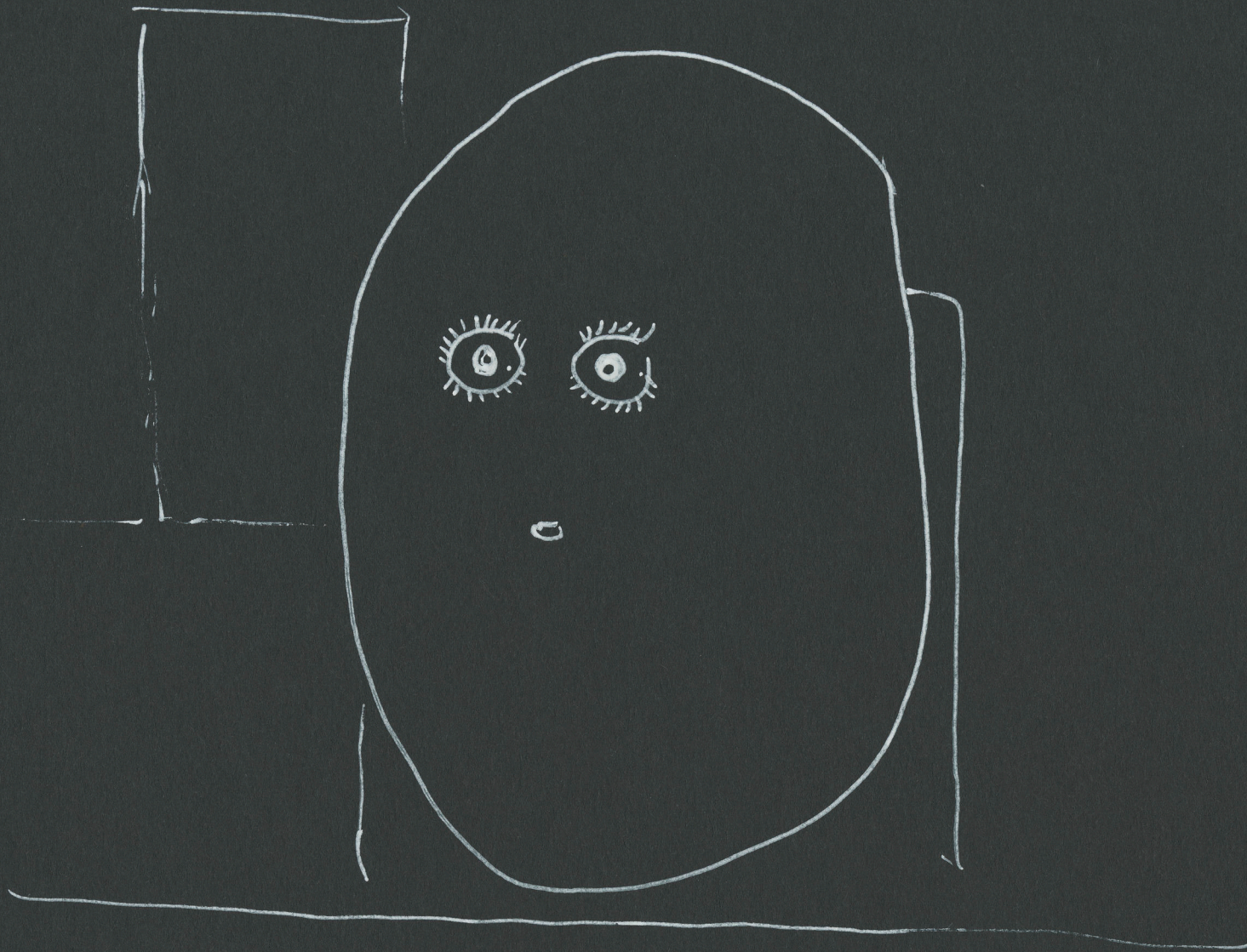
"I need you to find Hyena."

"Where did you last see him?"

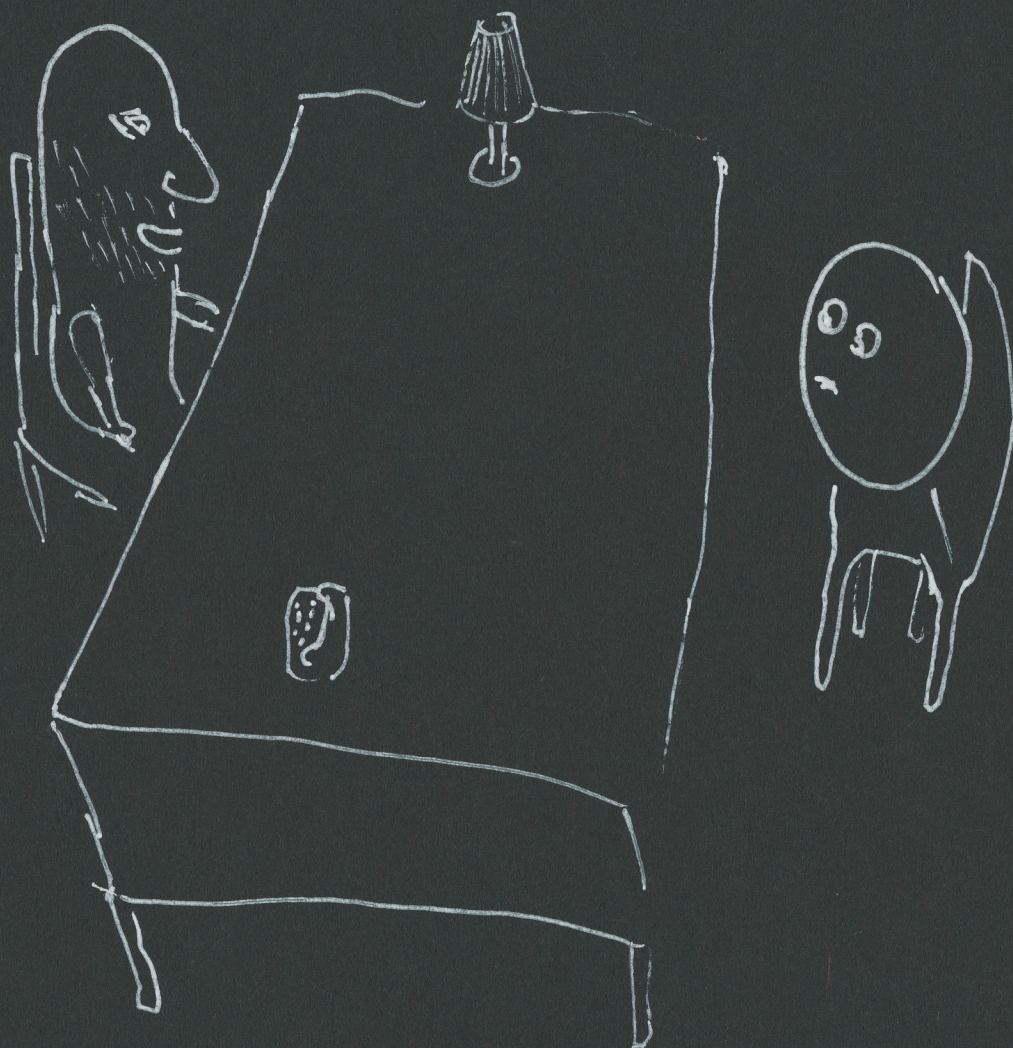
"We were going to ride the touring merry-go-round. It's our favorite, and we decided to make an afternoon of it. There weren't enough merry-go-round tickets for both of us to ride, so like a gentleegg I let Hyena ride. Which was fine with me because I was in the mood for popcorn and cotton candy and I had just gotten my allowance. Then what? Guess."



I snap out of a staring spell, pretending to be interested. An egg eating cotton candy? At this point I would pay to be onstage and away from this drip. After a pregnant pause and a sip of cold coffee and then another pregnant pause I join the conversation. "The merry-go-round spun out of control, sending Hyena off into a crowd of thousands." That's my cotton candy, reading minds.

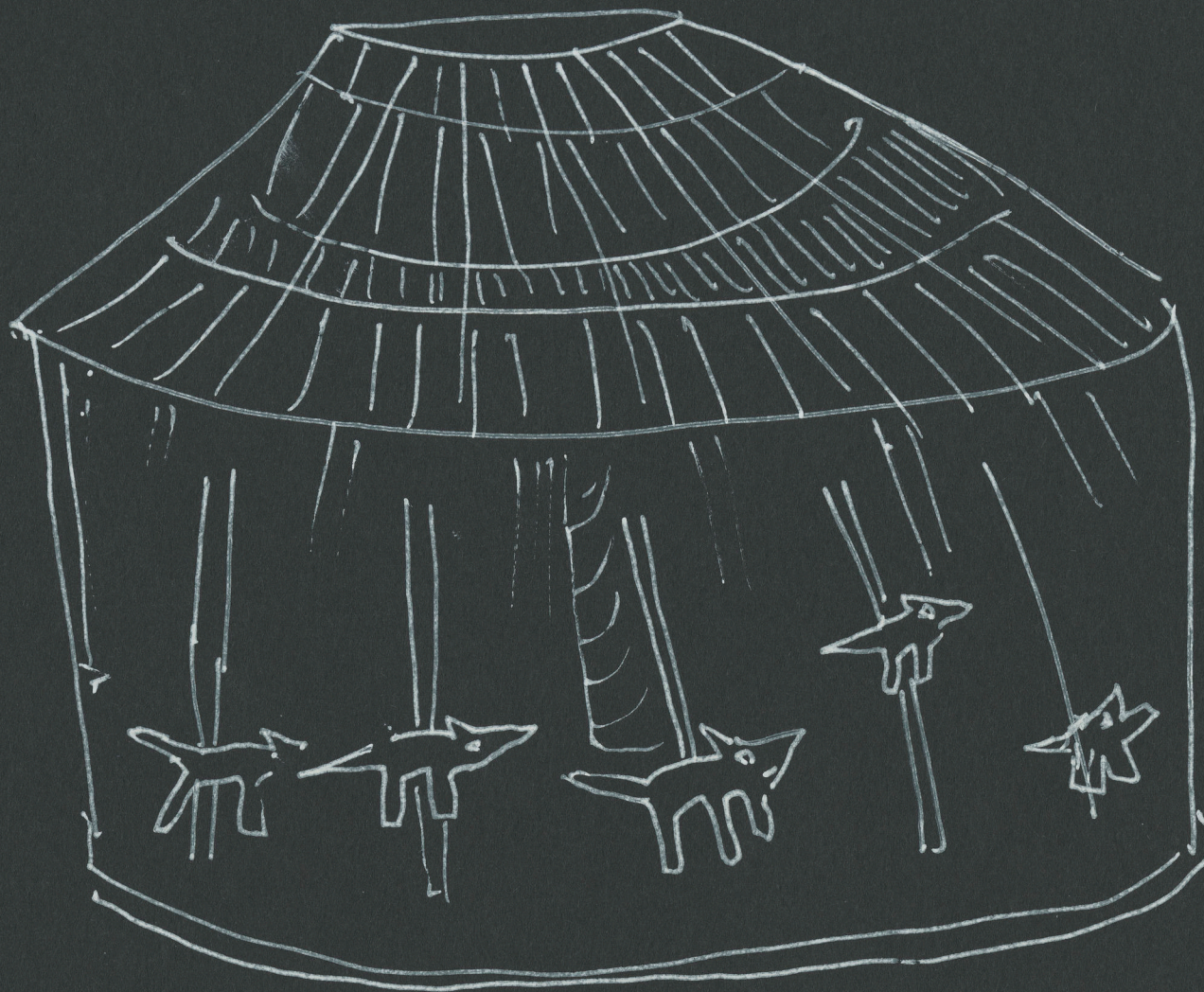


The Golden Egg blinks. Just as I suspected. I was righter than an atomic clock on New Year's and he knew it. At this late date I can't count how many cases I took on related to the merry-go-round incident. Lost spouses, children, grandparents, great-grandparents (a pair of them, even (on polar opposites of the client's family tree if you can believe that)).



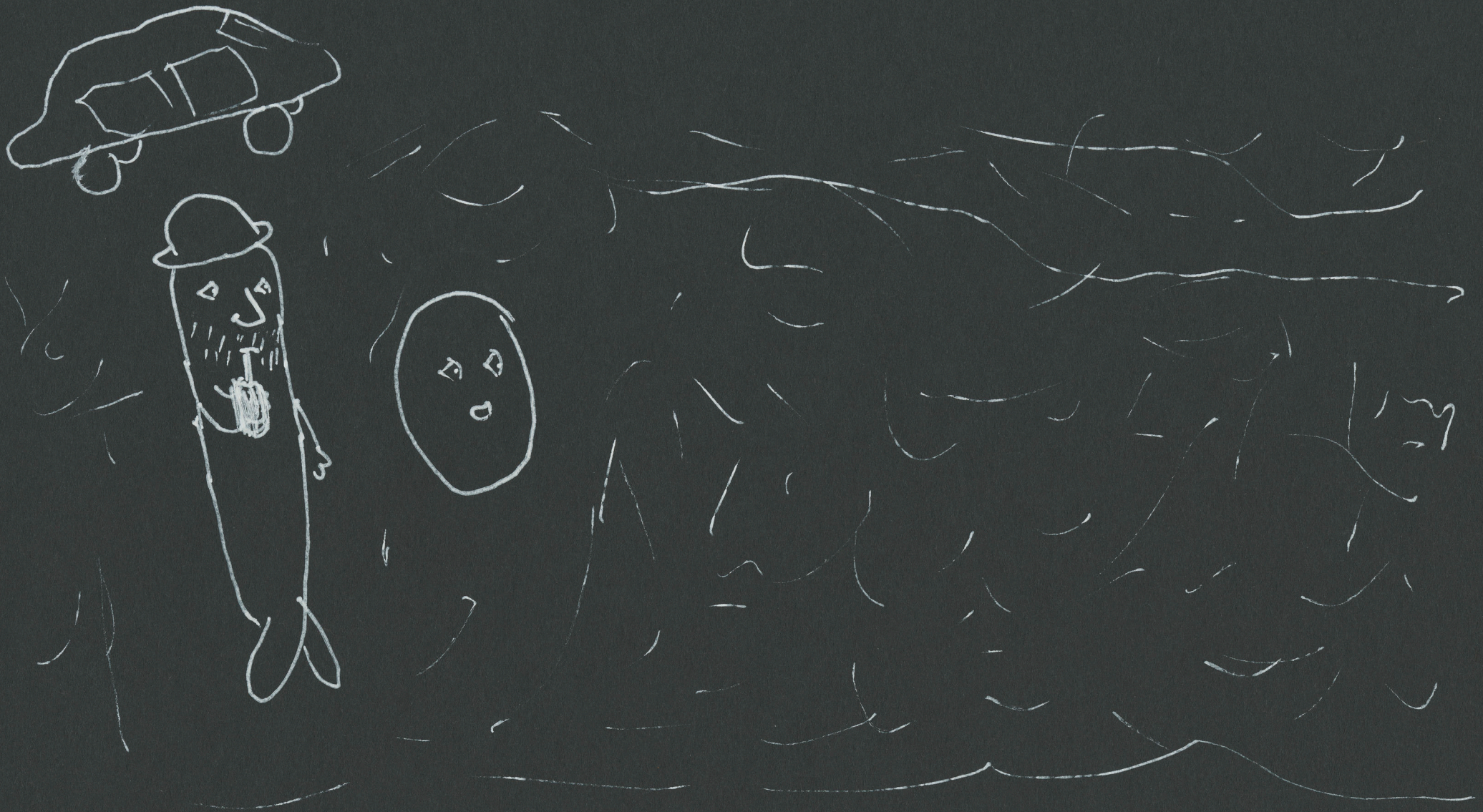
"Did you look for your friend?" The egg makes a face like a bank customer's child who just found out that his lollipop is a rusty coin on a stick.

"Of course. It was hard to tell him apart from the other hyenas at the merry-go-round convention."

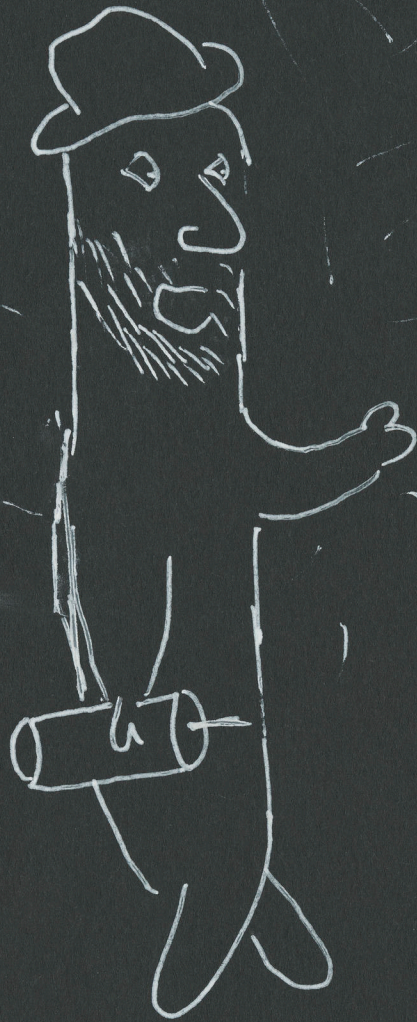


How stupid could this egg be? Or how stupid am I might be the better question. It was far too simple. I knew that there was a traveling petting zoo as part of the merry-go-round tour, and that instead of horses to ride, this merry-go-round had hyenas. But petting zoo hyenas have a sedated look to them, and every carousel hyena I've ever seen is made of plastic.

There's no other explanation. For them to have gone to this event, they must have had some ulterior motive. Fishy, and I should know.



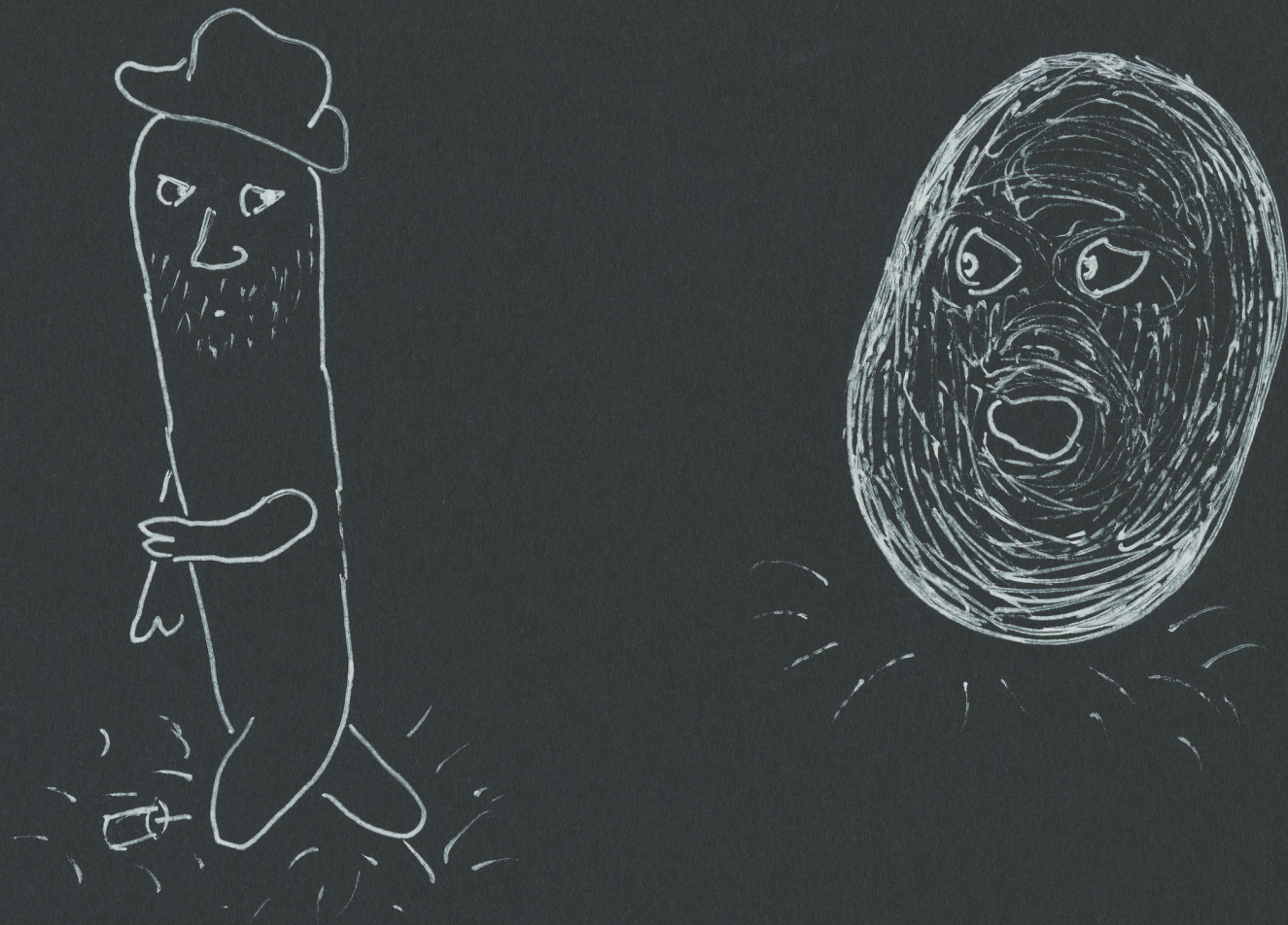
I bite. "Okay, get in my car, Golden." We stop for a milkshake and then go over to the empty lot previously occupied by the merry-go-round. You'd think my belly was on fire the way I slurped that milkshake down into oblivion. (I'm partial to strawberry, if by chance you were curious.)



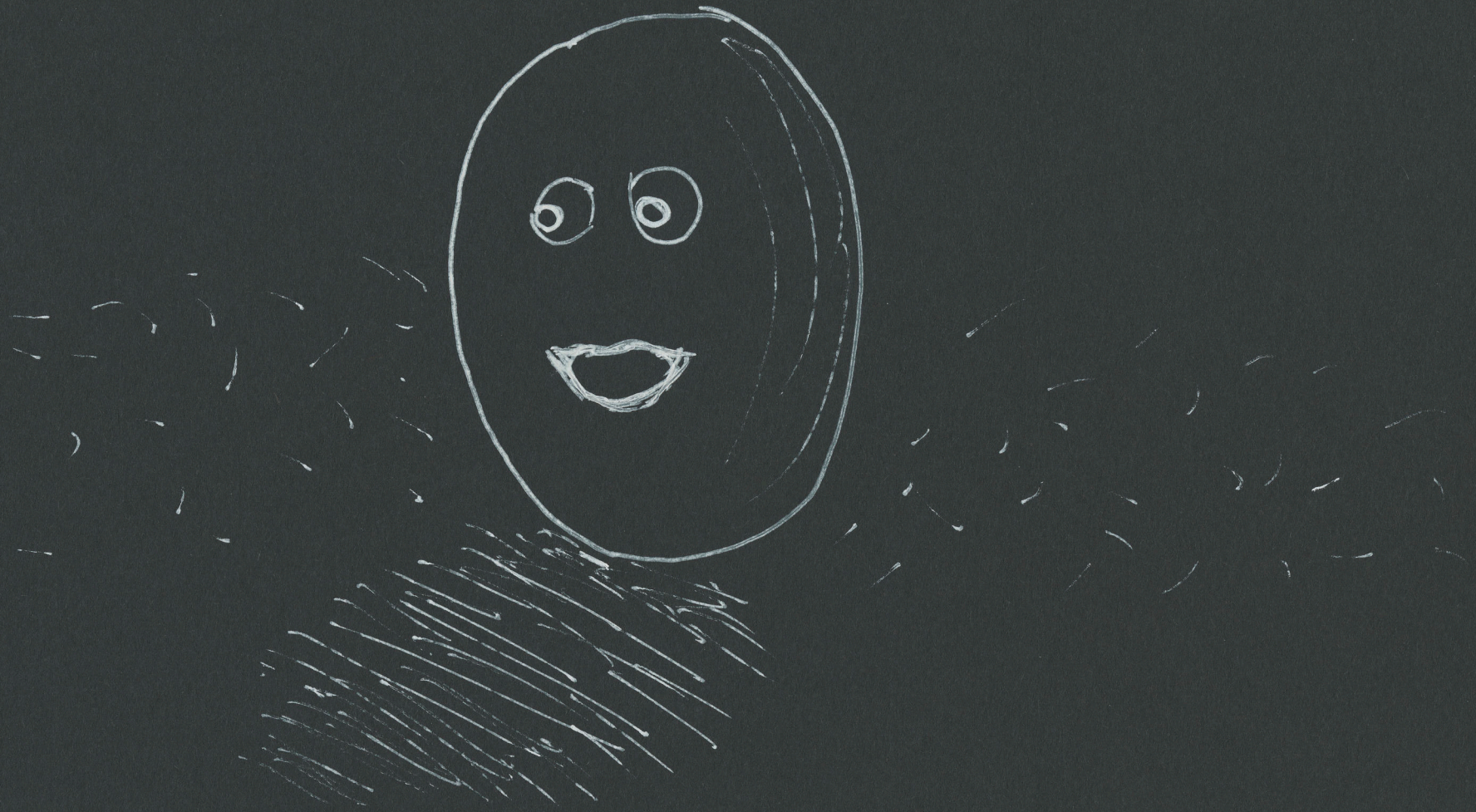
"Let's retrace our steps. Where were you when it happened, Golden?"

"I was near the popcorn stand," he says whimperingly.

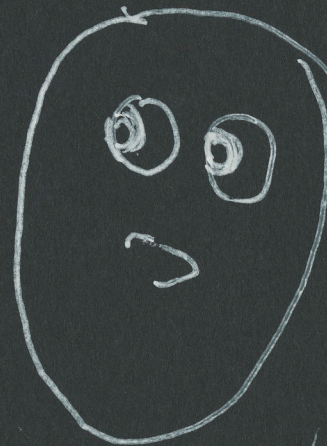
"Did anyone try to make you into a buttered egg?" I respond wryly. This is my way of getting the lay of the proverbial land inside a client's head. You make them laugh, you catch them off guard and you get a glimpse of what's going on behind their damsel-in-distress façade.



"Are you a gambler?" asks the Golden Egg, apropos of nothing. "I used to be," I say reminiscingly. There was a time when I spent 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in a casino but it feels like eons ago. And in this age of abundance what kind of crackpot wants to play blackjack with a frankfurter . . .



"Do you like soccer?" This egg has some gall, I think, bemusement washing over me. I'm supposed to be asking the questions, but then again, he's the customer. So I assumed . . .



"Don't be such a commoner, Golden." He cringes. Eggs can't spot sarcasm to save their life.



I didn't mean anything by it; I'm as common as a worm. You see, I'm a hot dog who knows nothing but the dirty, filthy streets I was raised in. I dwell in back alleys where garbage rots and I will guarantee you that I am not from even the slightest bit of beef stock. Heck, all I am is a sausage without quality control.



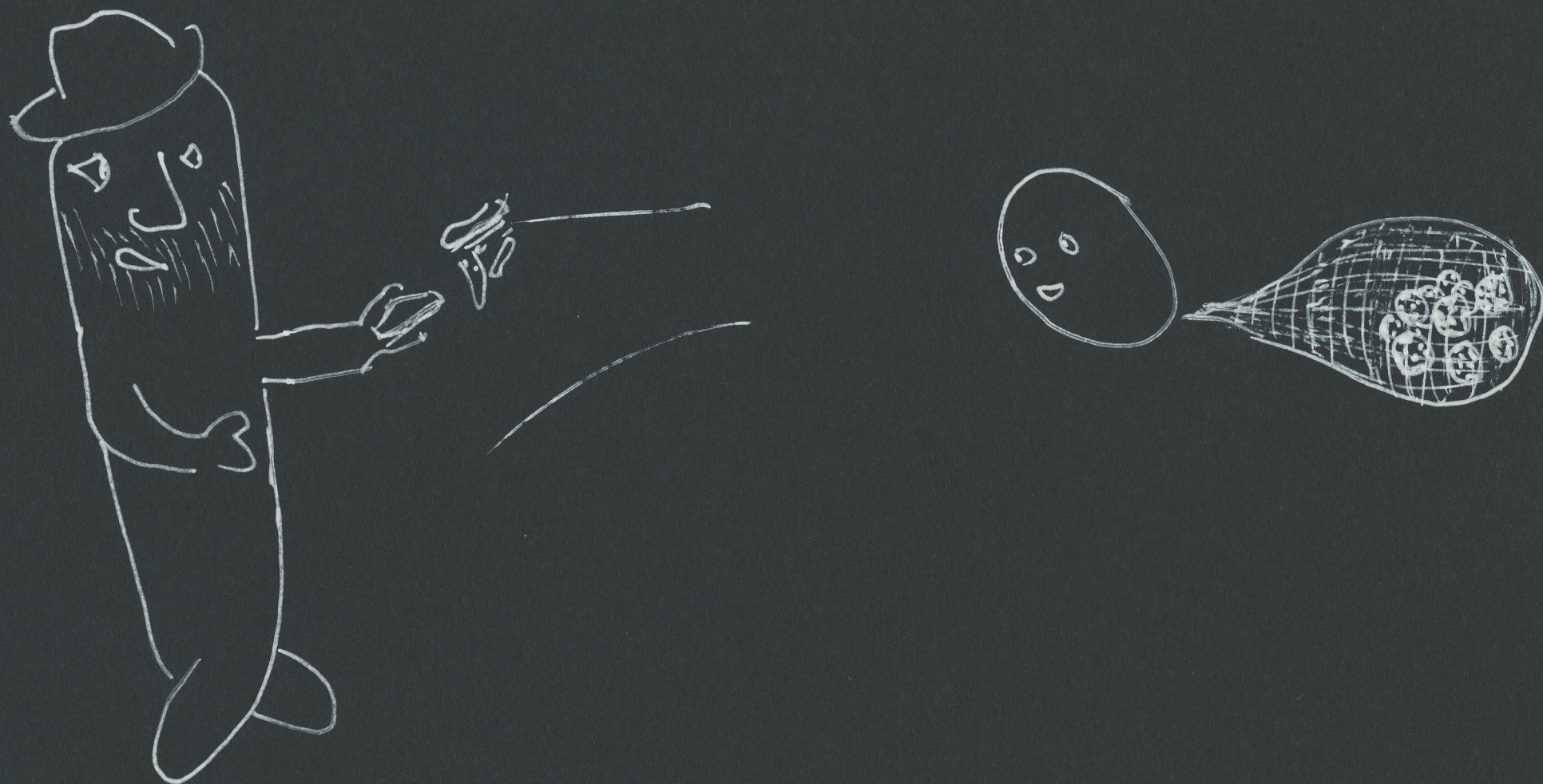
I repeat my admonition, this time striking a comedic pose. "Don't be a commoner. It's called football. But yes, I've been known to kick a ball every now and again."



"Splendid," said the round oval with eyes. "Tell you what: Let's have a little bet. I have in my possession twenty soccer balls. Penalty shots. I'm goalie. For each goal you score on me, we multiply that number by the amount you're charging for my ~~case~~ case. If you miss twenty the whole thing is gratis."



I knew from my casino days that the house always wins. But when the house is an egg, well, you do the math. That was a lot of money; at least when you consider the bargain these parasites get from me.



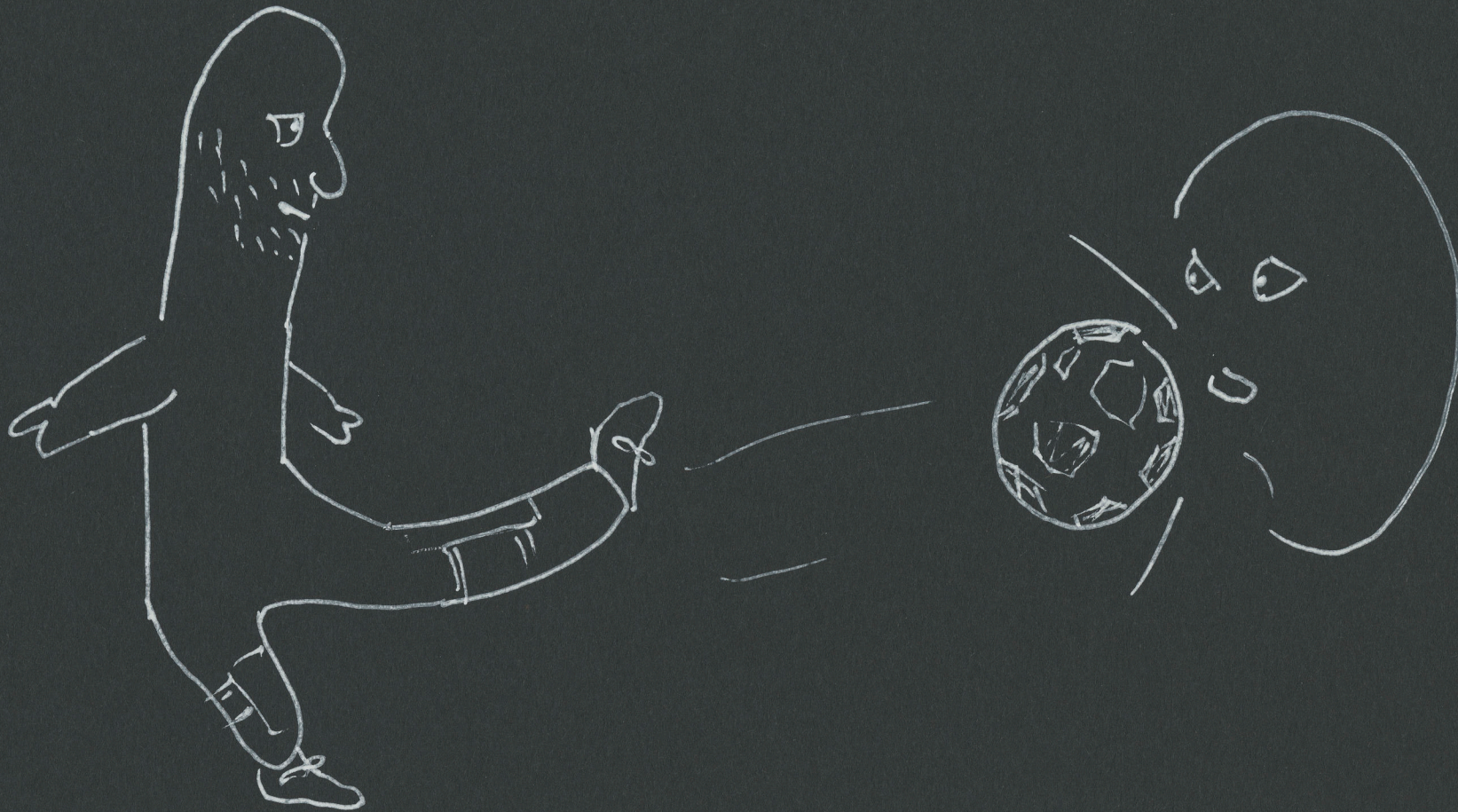
"Okay." The Golden Egg rolls into the distance and some minutes later comes back with a sack of standard-sized regulation soccer balls. "Lace up," he says, tossing me a pair of cleats, shin guards and a jock strap. Hilarious. Barring a sudden gust of wind, these penalty shots will not be returning to my vicinity. Essentially a driving range, my keen sense of situations tells me. Why would I need a jock strap?



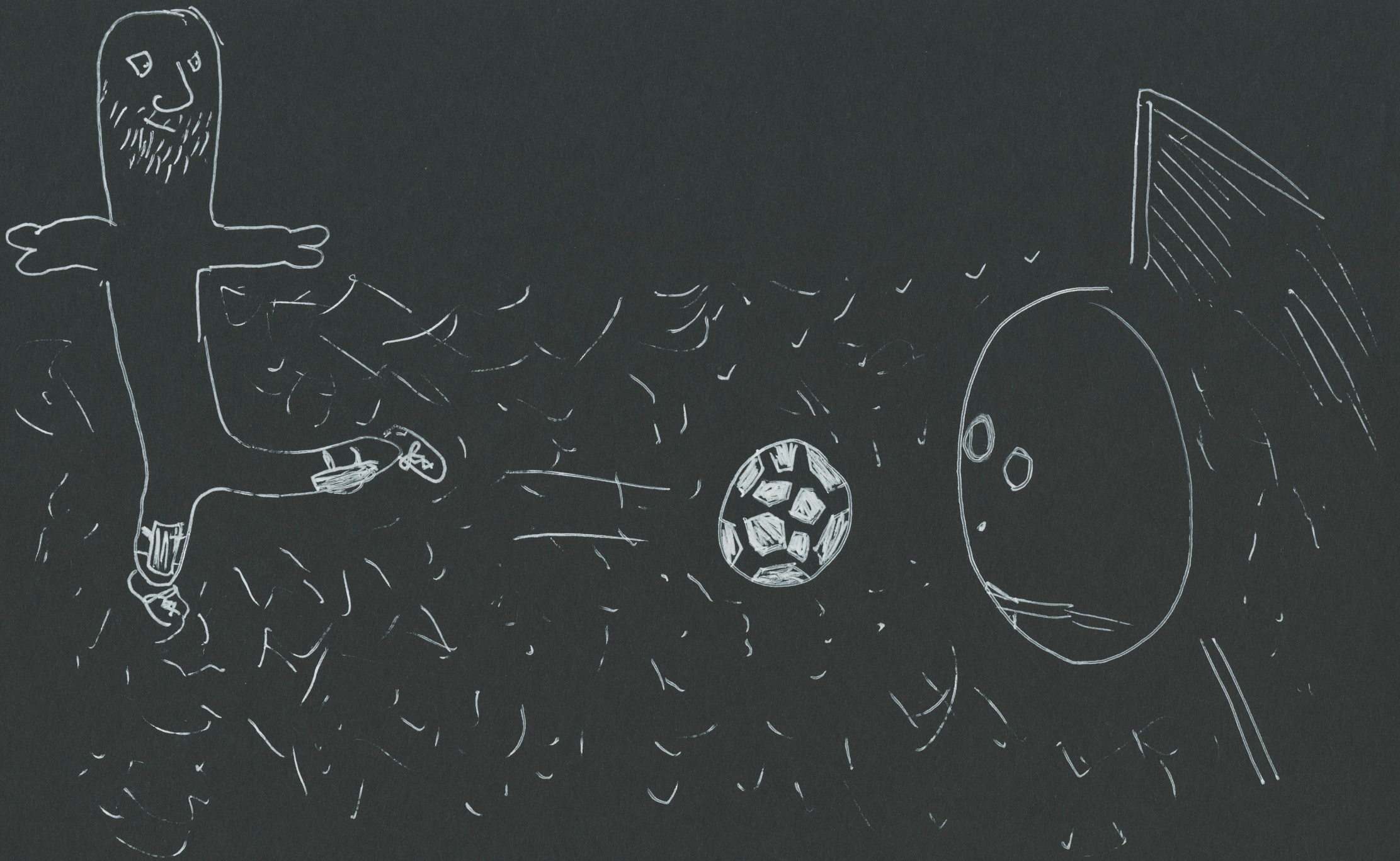
He sees me smirking, dumbfounded. "Sorry, the jock strap is for me." A goalie egg wearing a jock strap. File this under "what have I gotten myself into." I lace up; he stretches.



You know how this goes. I score all but one goal and I'm on ball 16. 15 for 16. He rolls me a ball. I kick and this one feels thick. It's like a medicine ball but just on one side. It lists unevenly and I miss.



Ball 17: Just like the old days. My leg is a cannon and the G.E. is the target. He should be an omelet at this point the way #17 smashes into his gut;



Ball 18: Full-on medicine ball. It stops just short of the goal.



19: This one could easily be a metal sculpture. Ouch. Why do I continue going along with this? Oh, right. I already scored 15 goals. The rest is just gravy. My gamble paid off in spades.



20: "You're not very bright, I shout. "Yes I am," he reassures me with a goalie's wink.



He slides the ball over to me, cool as a cucumber (a fishy cucumber if we can indulge in mixed metaphors). I stand back to get a running start. "Do your worst, Fushy," he says, an unmistakable note of hostility underneath the teasing. Are you actually going to let an egg teach a weenie who's boss. I ask myself, then smash that ball like it's a grenade and I have no choice but to get it as far away from me as possible: I'm about to save the last battalion in the Franco-Prussian War.



Impact. I feel the yolk soak my shoes and socks before I smell it. The ball's shell.
The shell of the ball? It's covered in black and white paint.



I look at the Golden Egg. "You. Why did you do this?"



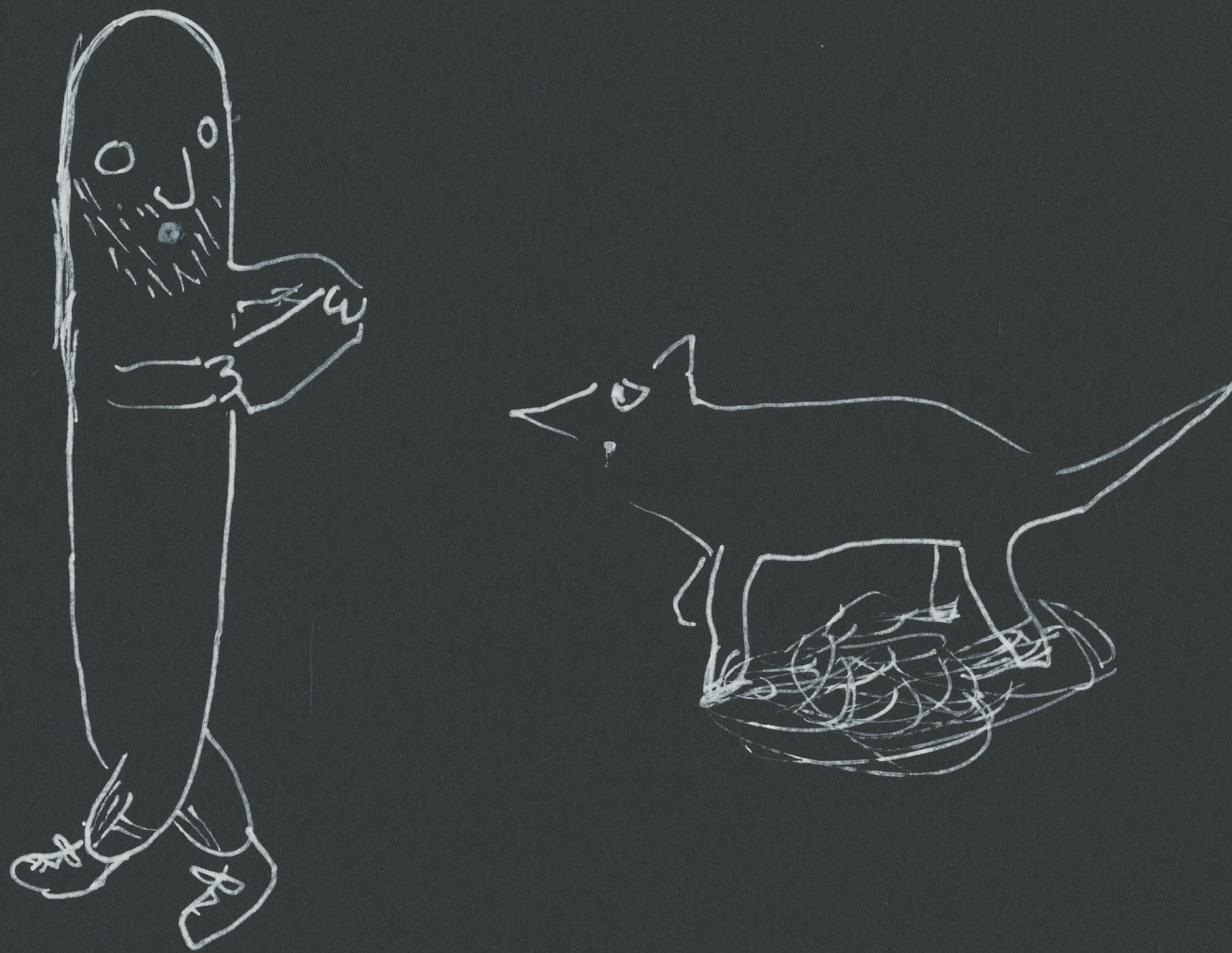
The Golden Egg takes off a . . . mask? Costume? Oh no, a wereegg. Except it wasn't a wereegg.



It was a hyena.



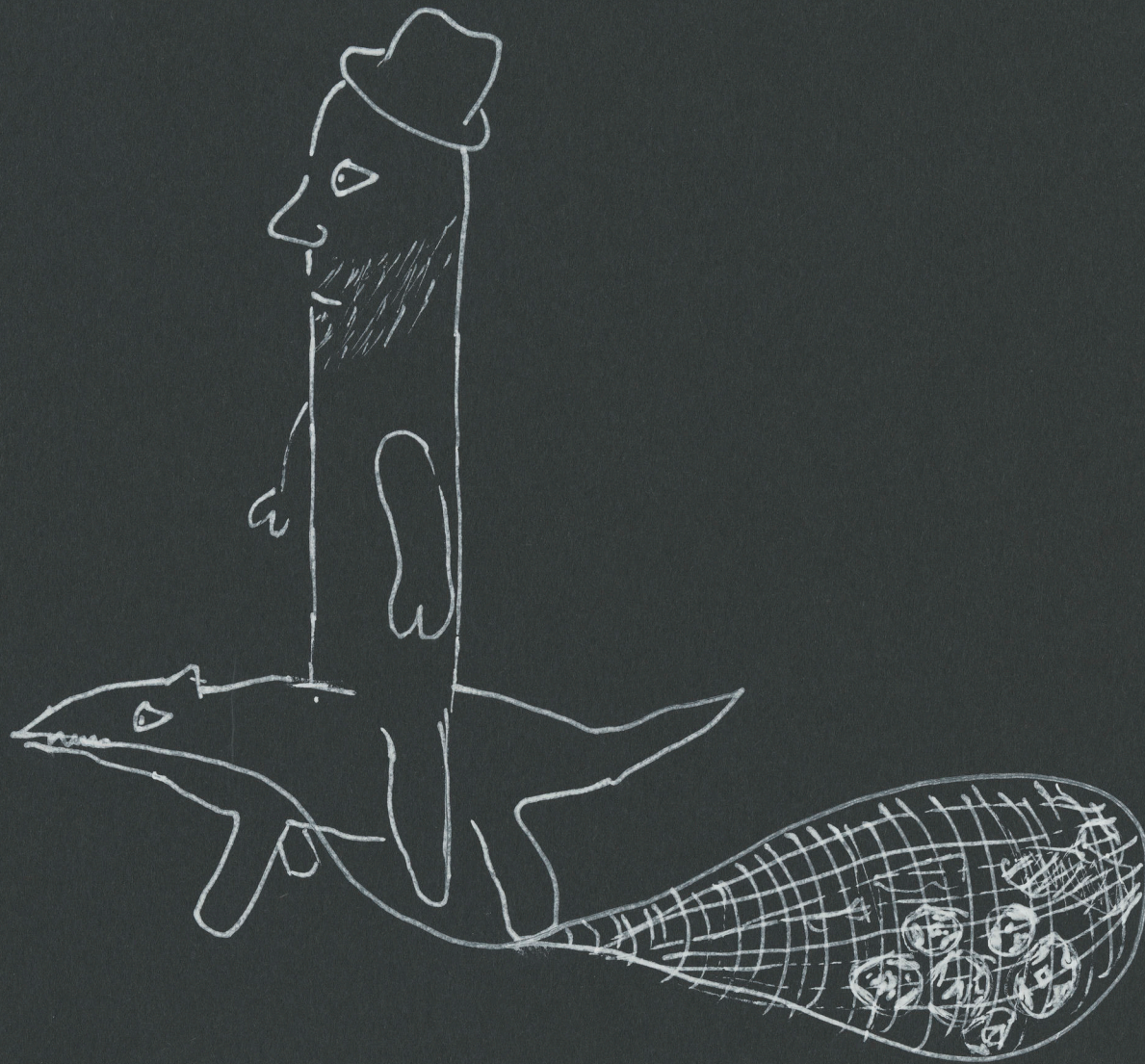
"Golden?"



"I can't thank you enough." He waddles over, legs ensconced in an egg costume, pulls out a check and hands it to me. 100,000. I whistle. The zeros look like soccer balls.



"You just helped me get rid of that pesky egg. My name is Hyena."



Case closed.

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