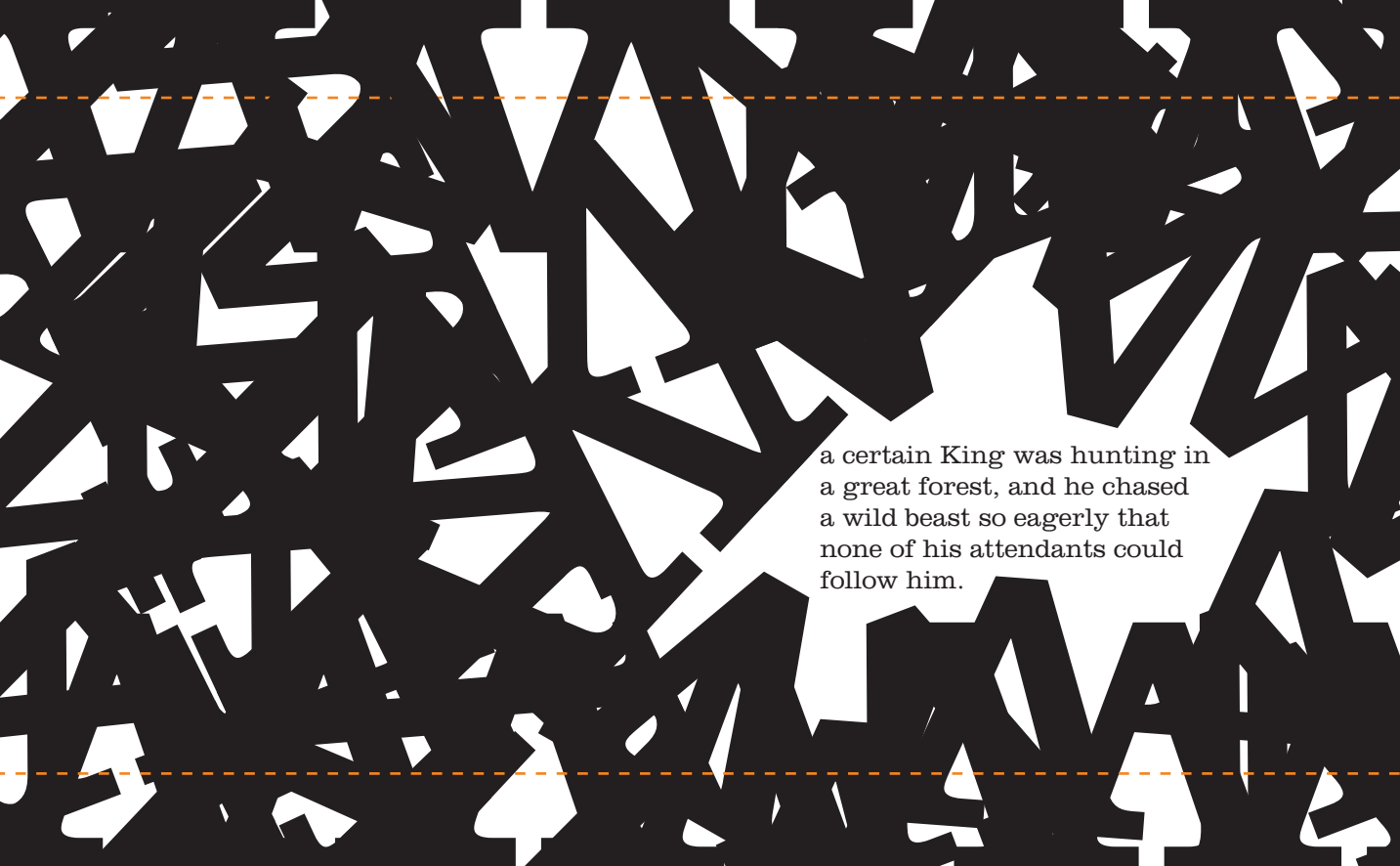


The image features a white background with two horizontal orange dashed lines. In the top right corner, there is a large, stylized black letter 'W'. In the bottom right corner, there is a large, stylized black letter 'M'. The text 'Once upon a time,' is centered between the two dashed lines.

**Once upon a time,**



a certain King was hunting in  
a great forest, and he chased  
a wild beast so eagerly that  
none of his attendants could  
follow him.

The image features a black background filled with white, irregular, confetti-like shapes scattered across the entire surface. Two horizontal dashed orange lines are positioned near the top and bottom of the frame, framing the central text.

When evening drew near,

and looked around him,

He sought a way out, but could find none.

and then he

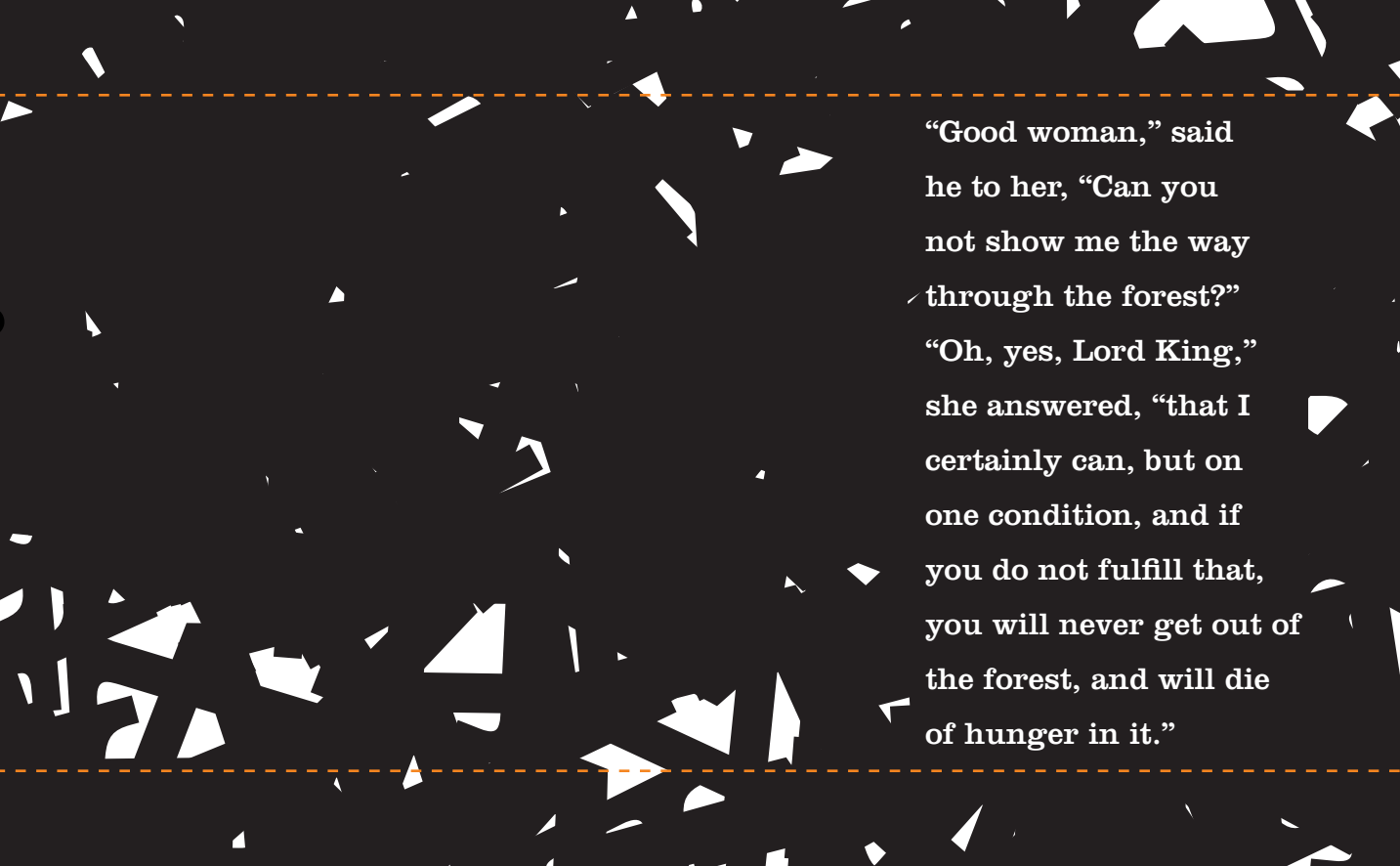
that he had lost his way.

he stopped



Then he perceived an aged  
woman with a head which  
nodded perpetually, who  
came towards him,

***but she was a witch.***

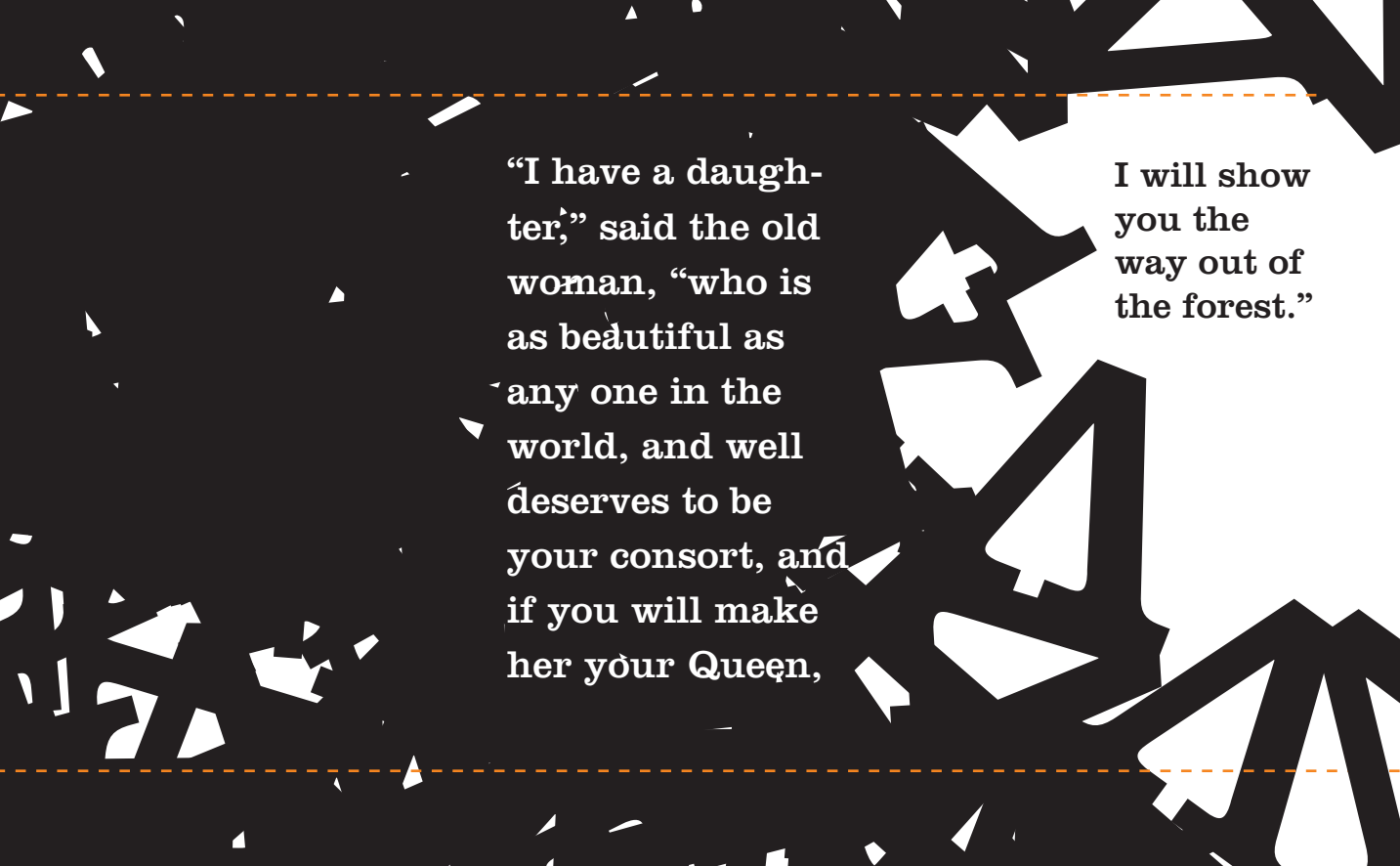


“Good woman,” said  
he to her, “Can you  
not show me the way  
through the forest?”

“Oh, yes, Lord King,”  
she answered, “that I  
certainly can, but on  
one condition, and if  
you do not fulfill that,  
you will never get out of  
the forest, and will die  
of hunger in it.”

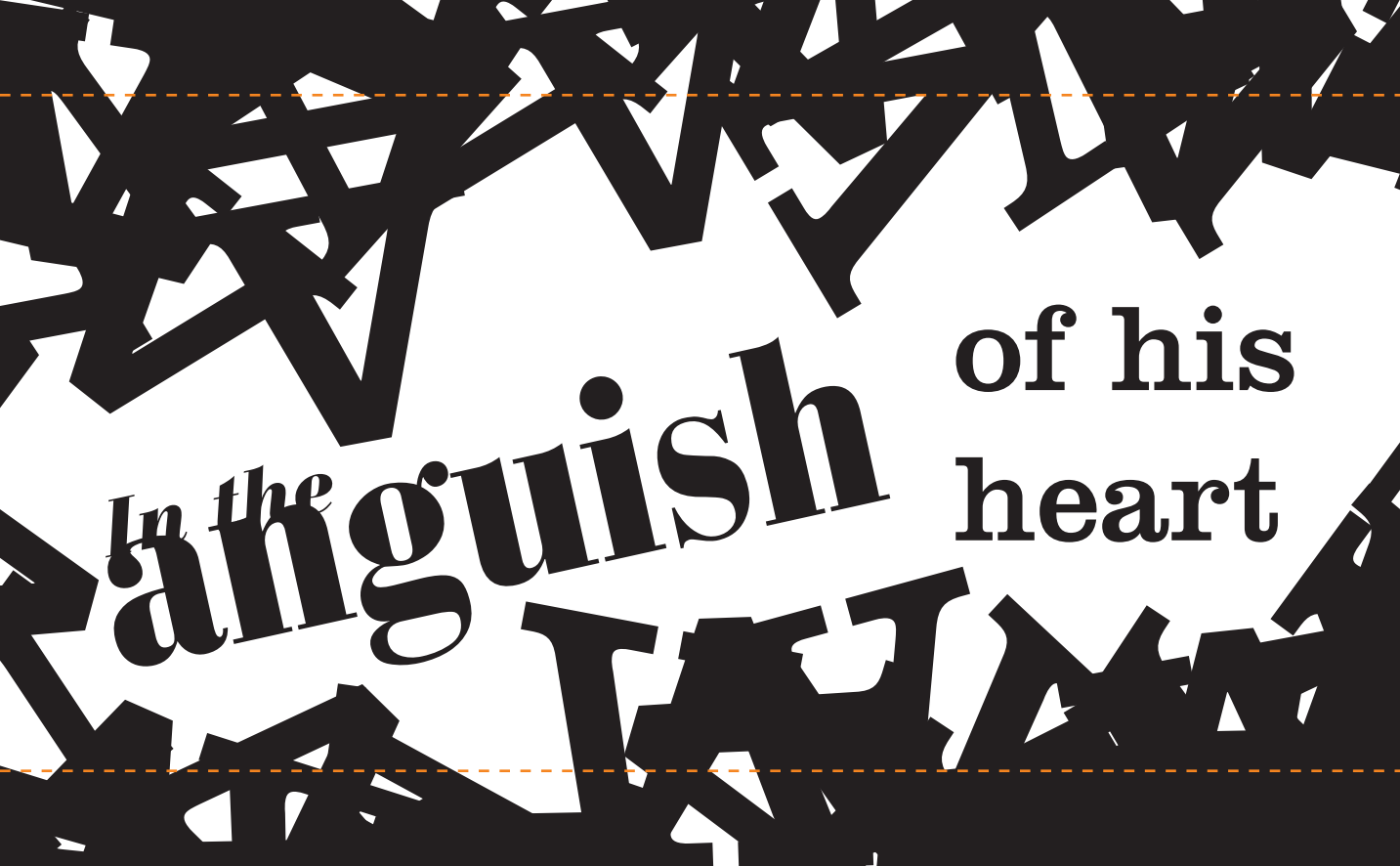


*“What kind of condition is it?”  
asked the king.*



**“I have a daughter,” said the old woman, “who is as beautiful as any one in the world, and well deserves to be your consort, and if you will make her your Queen,**

**I will show you the way out of the forest.”**



*In the*  
**anguish**

**of his  
heart**

the King consented, and the old woman led him to her little hut, where her daughter was sitting by the fire. She received the

King as if she had been expecting him, and he saw that she was very beautiful, but still she did not please him,

**and he could not  
look at her without  
secret horror.**




After he had taken the maiden up on his horse,

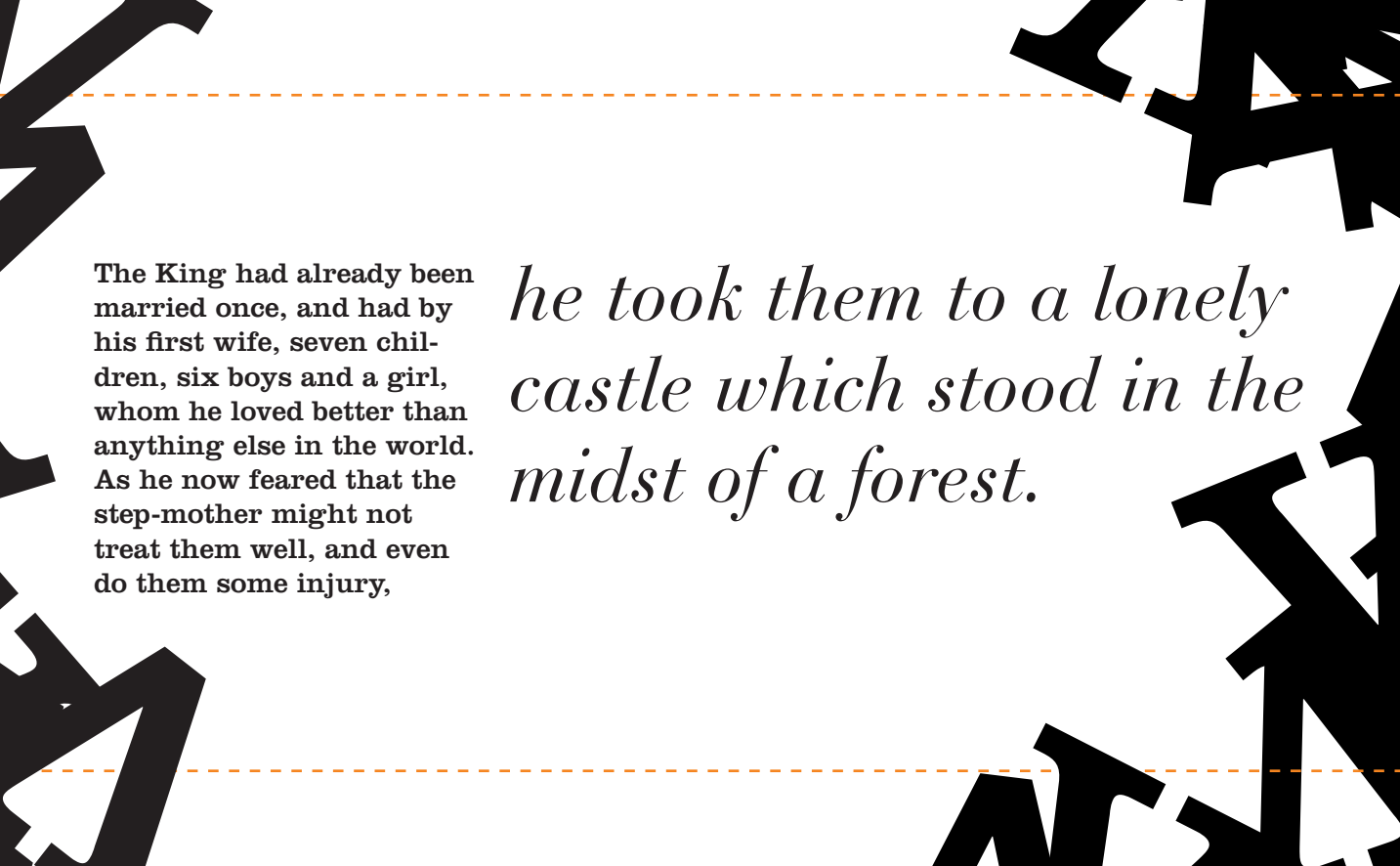




the old woman showed him the way,

and the King reached his  
royal palace again, where the  
wedding was celebrated.





The King had already been married once, and had by his first wife, seven children, six boys and a girl, whom he loved better than anything else in the world. As he now feared that the step-mother might not treat them well, and even do them some injury,

*he took them to a lonely castle which stood in the midst of a forest.*

as he had  
found it, is a  
wise woman  
had not given  
him a ball of  
yarn with  
wonderful  
properties.  
When he  
threw it  
down  
before  
him, it  
unrolled  
itself and  
showed  
him his  
path.

It lay so concealed, and the way was so difficult to find that he himself would not have found it, if a wise woman had not given him a ball of yarn with wonderful properties. When he threw it down before him, it unrolled itself and showed him his path.



all which alone could point out the way.

And now she knew no rest until she had learnt where the King kept the ball of yarn, and

then she made little shirts of white silk, and as she had learnt the art of witchcraft from her mother, she sewed a charm inside them.

and as she had learnt the art of witchcraft from her mother, she sewed a charm inside them.

---

The children, who saw from a distance that some one was approaching, thought that their dear father was coming to them, and full of joy, ran to meet him. Then she threw one of the

little shirts over each of them, and no sooner had the shirts touched their bodies than they were changed into swans,

swans

swans

swans

swans



swans

swans

swans

and flew away over the forest.




---

The Queen went home quite delighted, and thought she had got rid of her step-children, but the girl had not run out with her brothers, and the Queen knew nothing about her. Next day the King went to visit his children, but he found no one but the little girl. "Where are thy brothers?" asked the King. "Alas, dear father," she answered, "they have gone away and left me alone!" and she told him that she had seen from her little window how her brothers had flown away over the forest in the shape of

swans, and she showed him the feathers, which they had let fall in the courtyard, and which she had picked up. The King mourned, but he did not think that the Queen had done this wicked deed, and as he feared that the girl would also be stolen away from him, he wanted to take her away with him. But she was afraid of her step-mother, and entreated the King to let her stay just this one night more in the forest castle.

*The poor girl thought,*





*“I can no longer stay  
here. I will go and  
seek my brothers.”*