

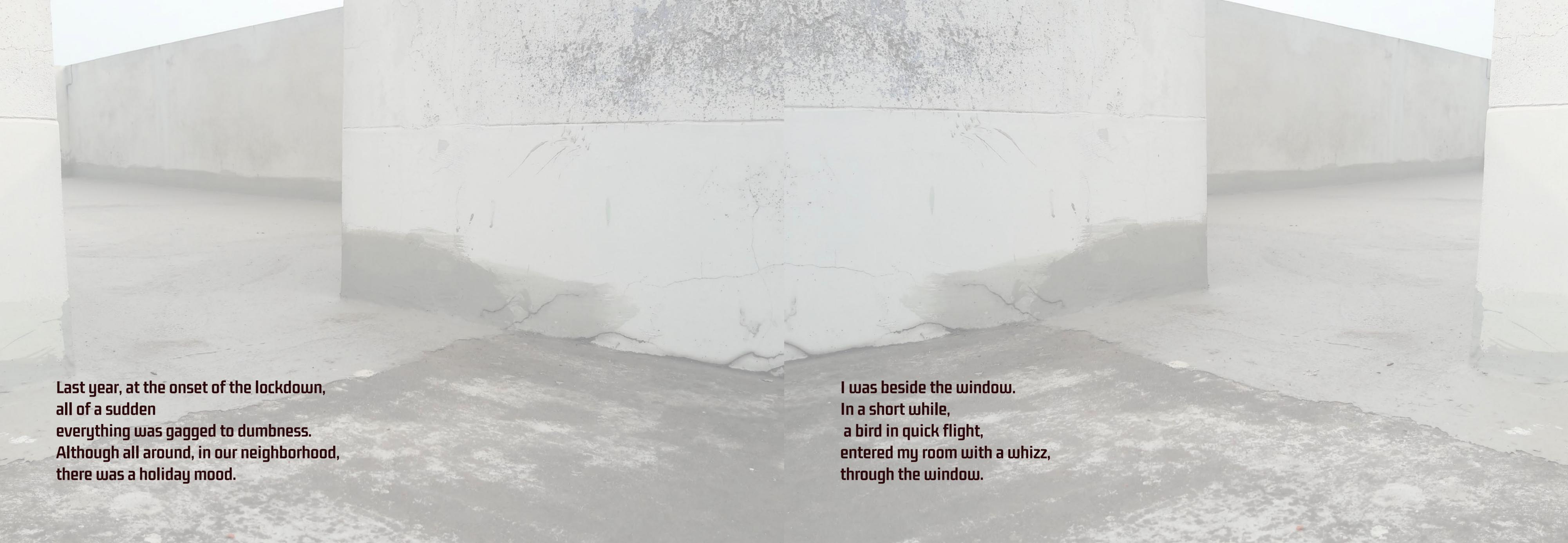
We are alive together



An art project by

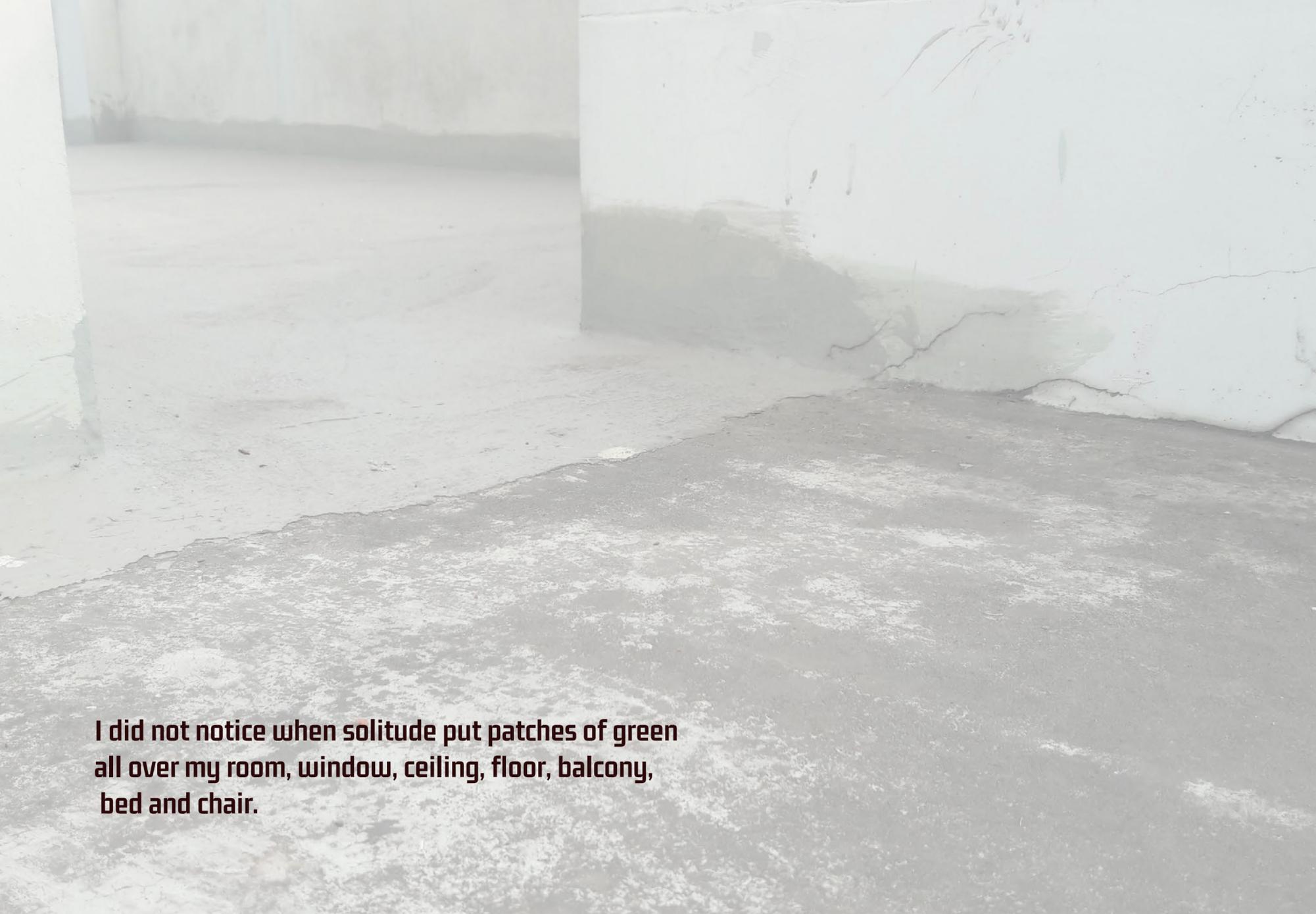
**Tahera Yesmin
Syeda Farhana**

**Text by Syeda Farhana
Translation: M Hasan Hera**

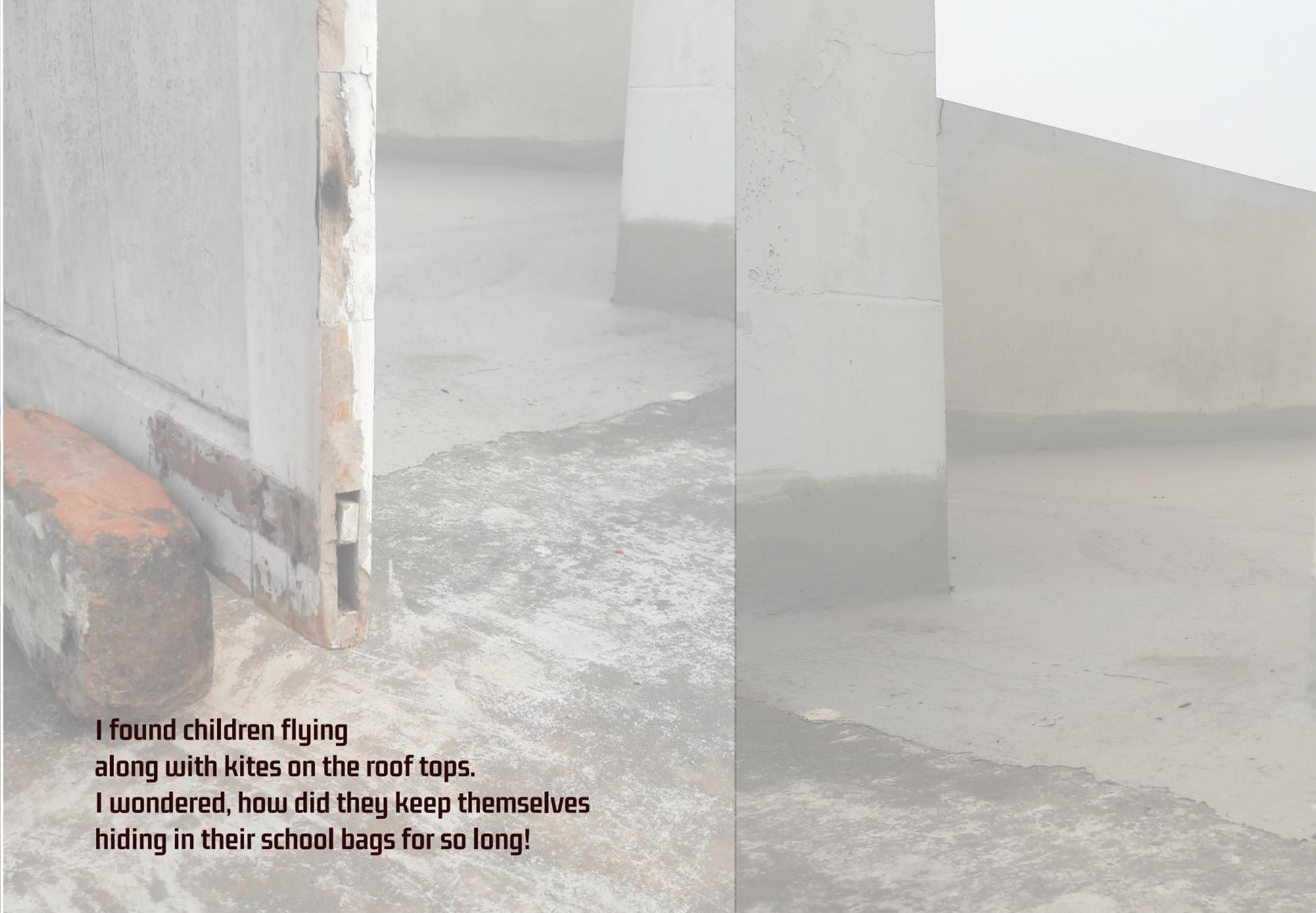


**Last year, at the onset of the lockdown,
all of a sudden
everything was gagged to dumbness.
Although all around, in our neighborhood,
there was a holiday mood.**

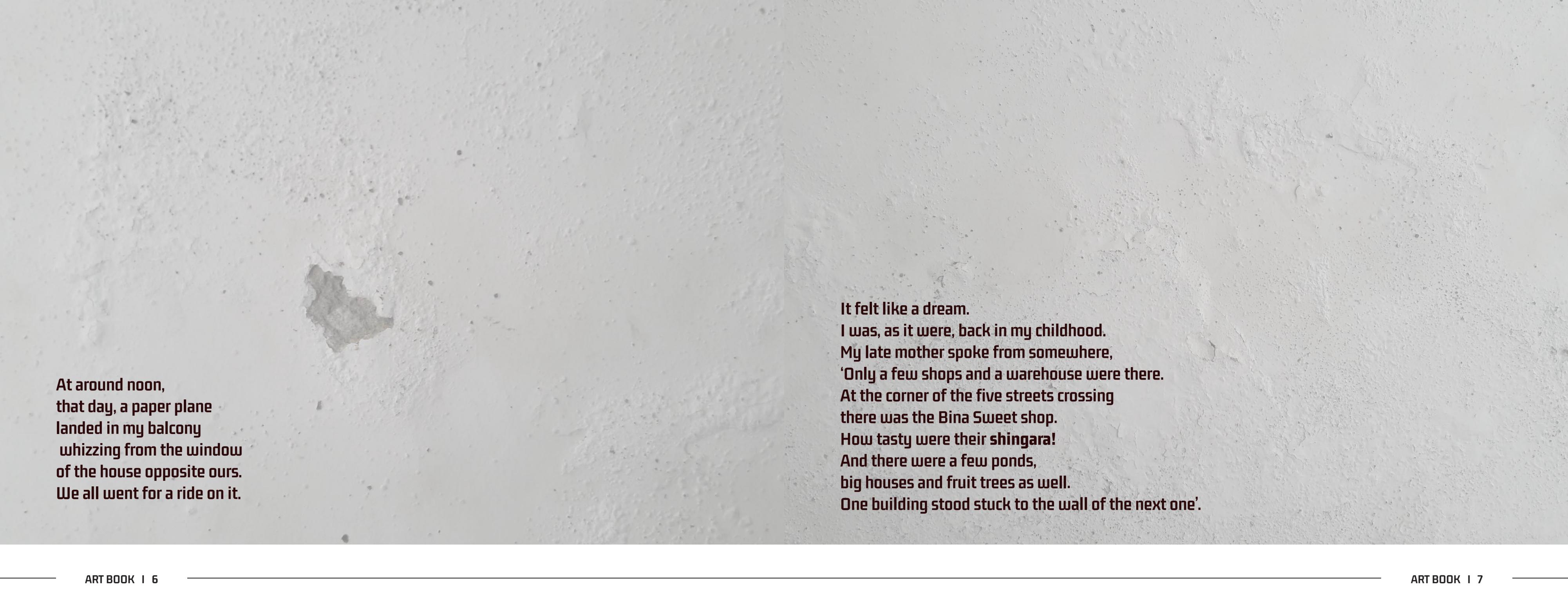
**I was beside the window.
In a short while,
a bird in quick flight,
entered my room with a whizz,
through the window.**



**I did not notice when solitude put patches of green
all over my room, window, ceiling, floor, balcony,
bed and chair.**



**I found children flying
along with kites on the roof tops.
I wondered, how did they keep themselves
hiding in their school bags for so long!**

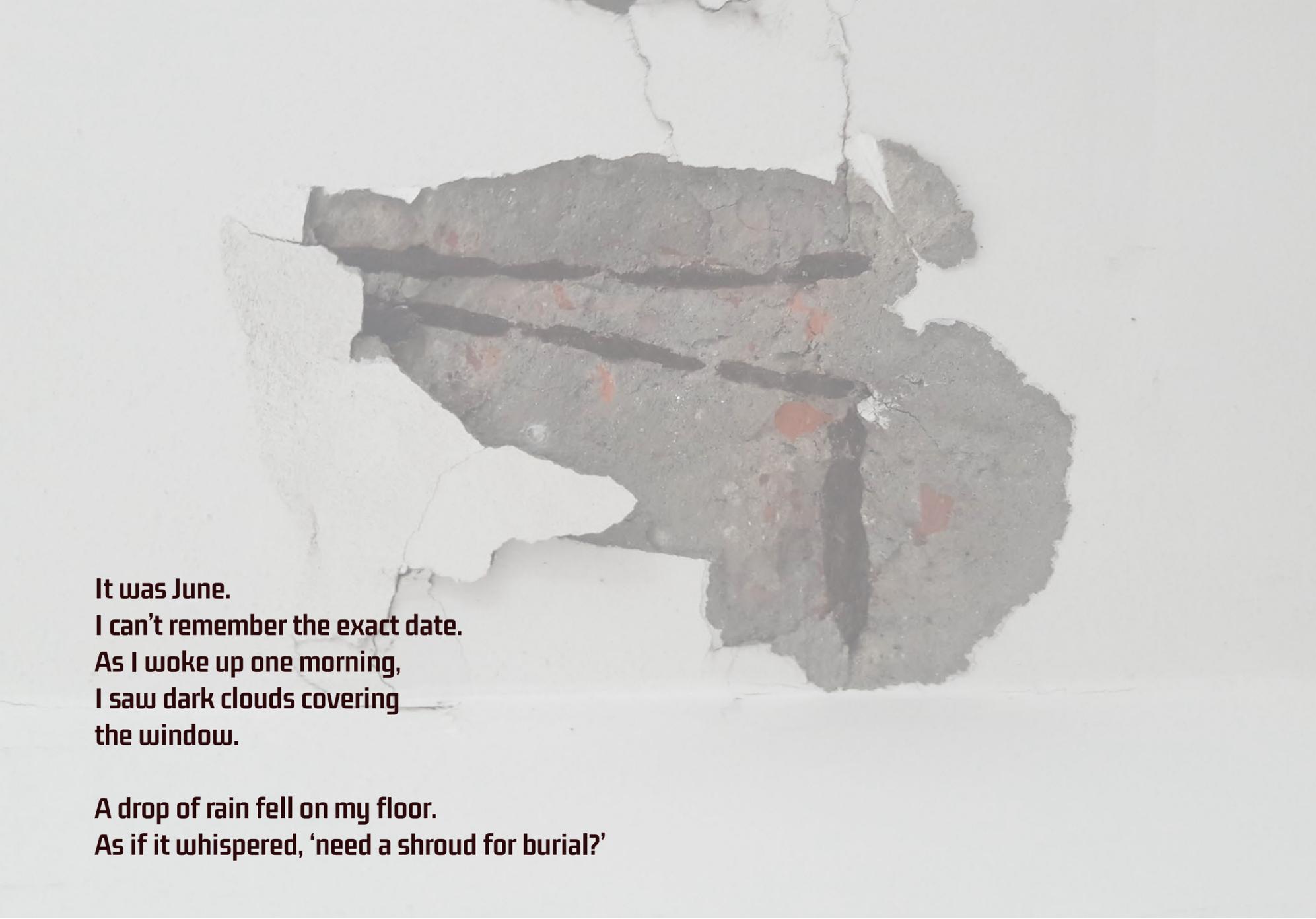


At around noon,
that day, a paper plane
landed in my balcony
whizzing from the window
of the house opposite ours.
We all went for a ride on it.

It felt like a dream.
I was, as it were, back in my childhood.
My late mother spoke from somewhere,
'Only a few shops and a warehouse were there.
At the corner of the five streets crossing
there was the Bina Sweet shop.
How tasty were their *shingara*!
And there were a few ponds,
big houses and fruit trees as well.
One building stood stuck to the wall of the next one'.

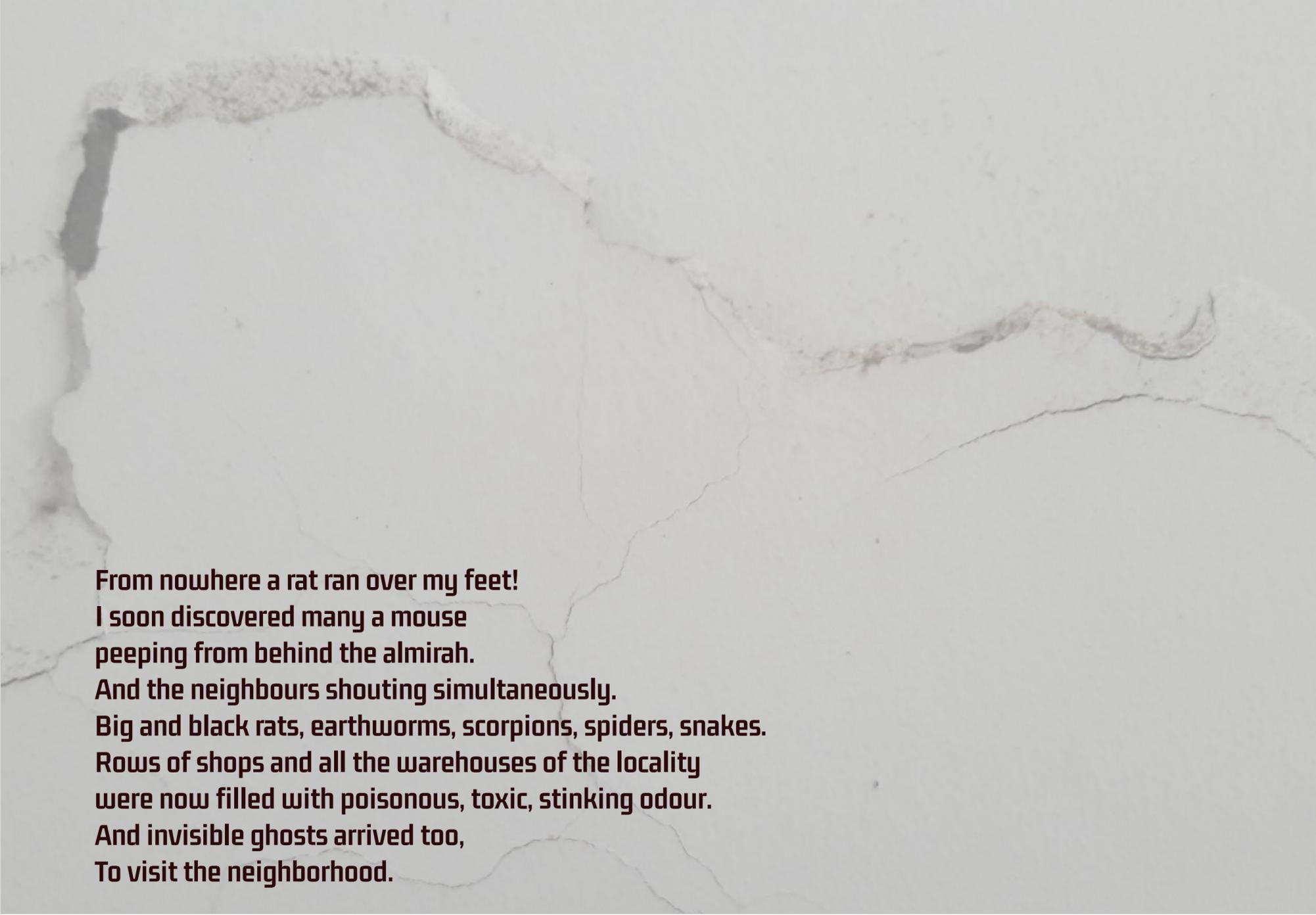
I felt like walking on the roof of my childhood.
My mother's hand-made quilt used to be dried there
in the sun of the month of 'bhadra'.
The pickle jar too took a share of that sunshine.
And in the golden winter morning kumra bori,
dried pumpkin balls enjoyed the sun
on my grandmother-saree's embrace

The paper-plane suddenly turned its back
and flew away.
And again,
I was back to the present.
The moment I pressed the cell in my grip,
terrible bunch of numbers pour out!
It seemed that a fear was rampaging the streets of the city.
But I thought this time it won't enter our narrow alley.

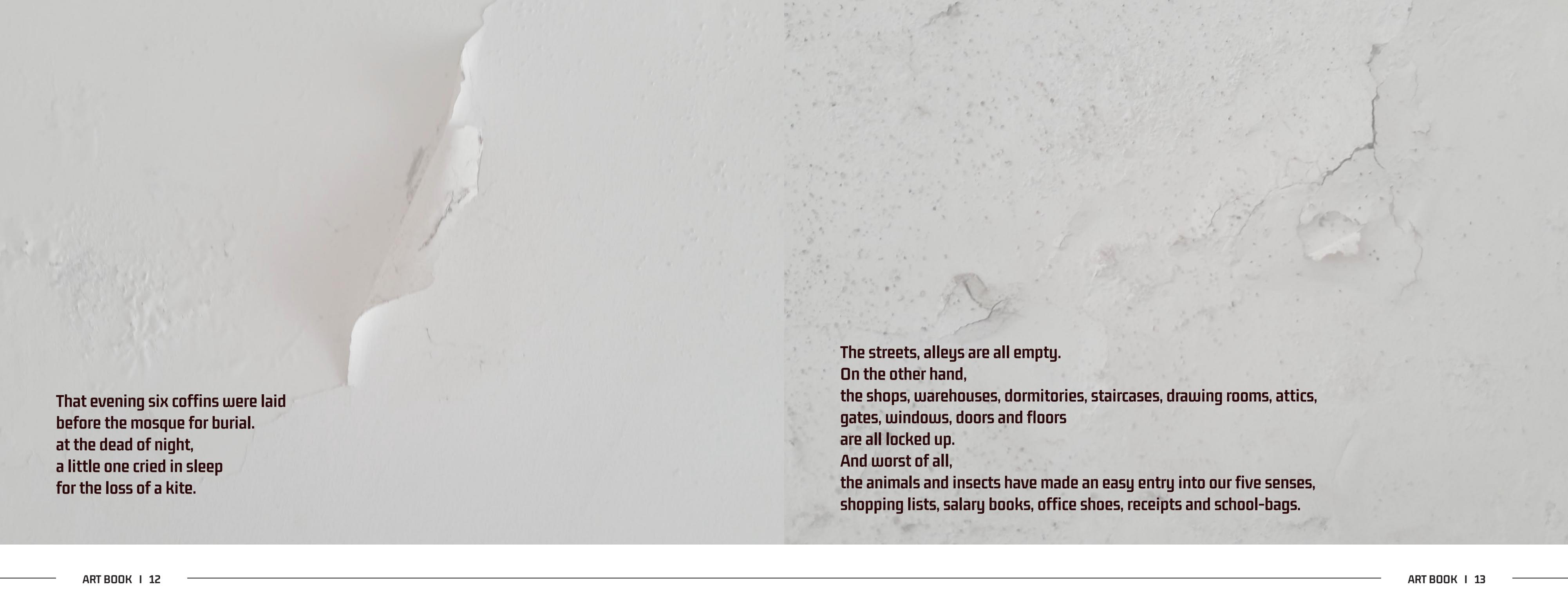


**It was June.
I can't remember the exact date.
As I woke up one morning,
I saw dark clouds covering
the window.**

**A drop of rain fell on my floor.
As if it whispered, 'need a shroud for burial?'**

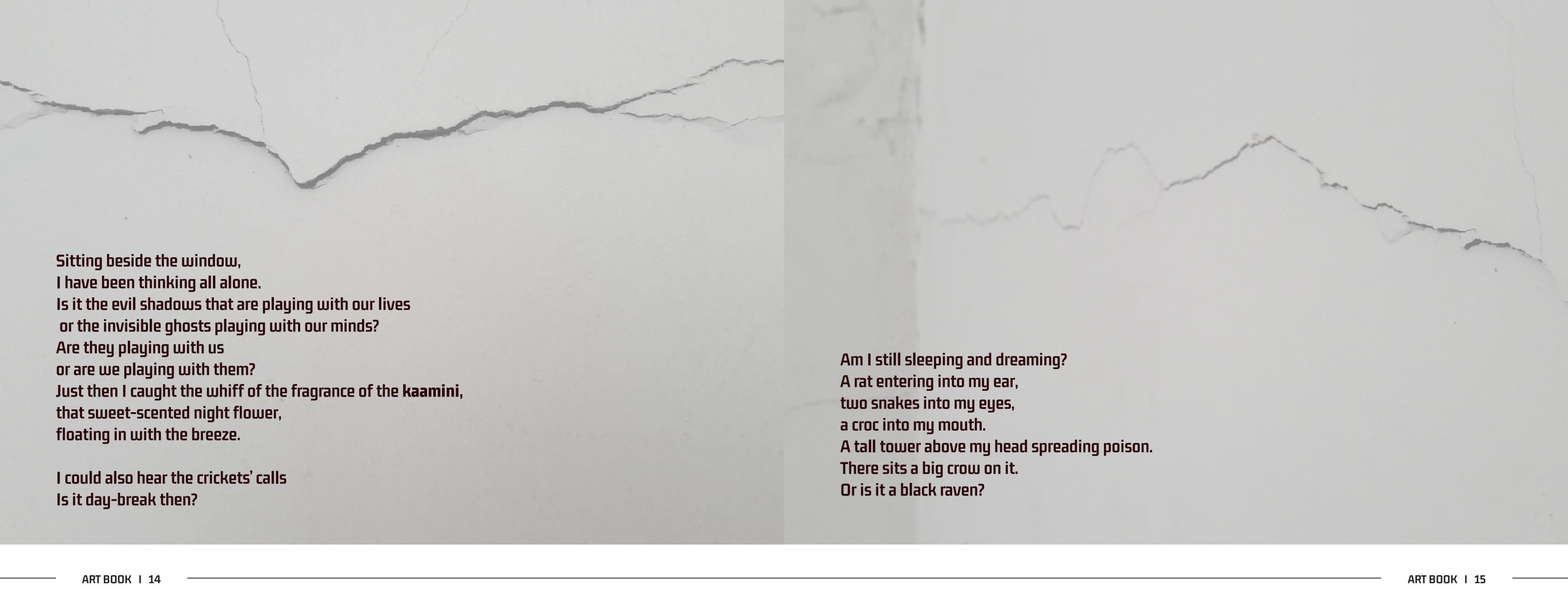


**From nowhere a rat ran over my feet!
I soon discovered many a mouse
peeping from behind the almirah.
And the neighbours shouting simultaneously.
Big and black rats, earthworms, scorpions, spiders, snakes.
Rows of shops and all the warehouses of the locality
were now filled with poisonous, toxic, stinking odour.
And invisible ghosts arrived too,
To visit the neighborhood.**



That evening six coffins were laid
before the mosque for burial.
at the dead of night,
a little one cried in sleep
for the loss of a kite.

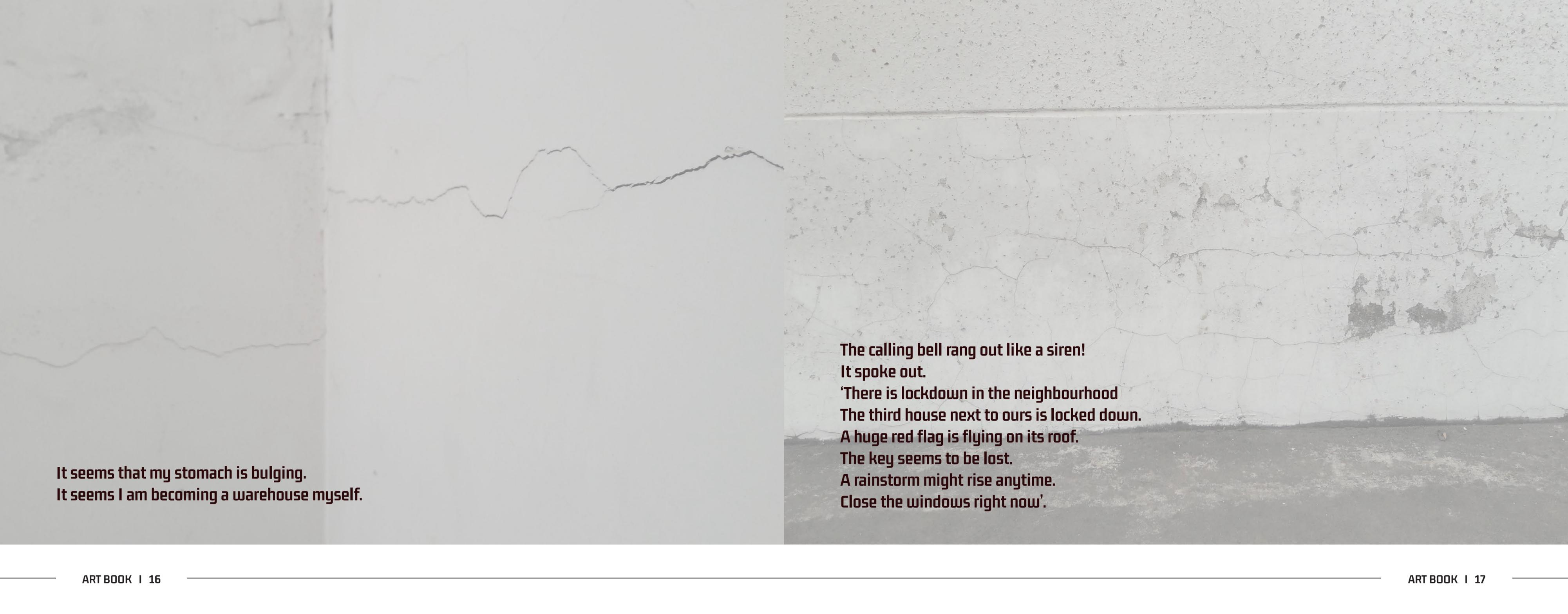
The streets, alleys are all empty.
On the other hand,
the shops, warehouses, dormitories, staircases, drawing rooms, attics,
gates, windows, doors and floors
are all locked up.
And worst of all,
the animals and insects have made an easy entry into our five senses,
shopping lists, salary books, office shoes, receipts and school-bags.



**Sitting beside the window,
I have been thinking all alone.
Is it the evil shadows that are playing with our lives
or the invisible ghosts playing with our minds?
Are they playing with us
or are we playing with them?
Just then I caught the whiff of the fragrance of the kaamini,
that sweet-scented night flower,
floating in with the breeze.**

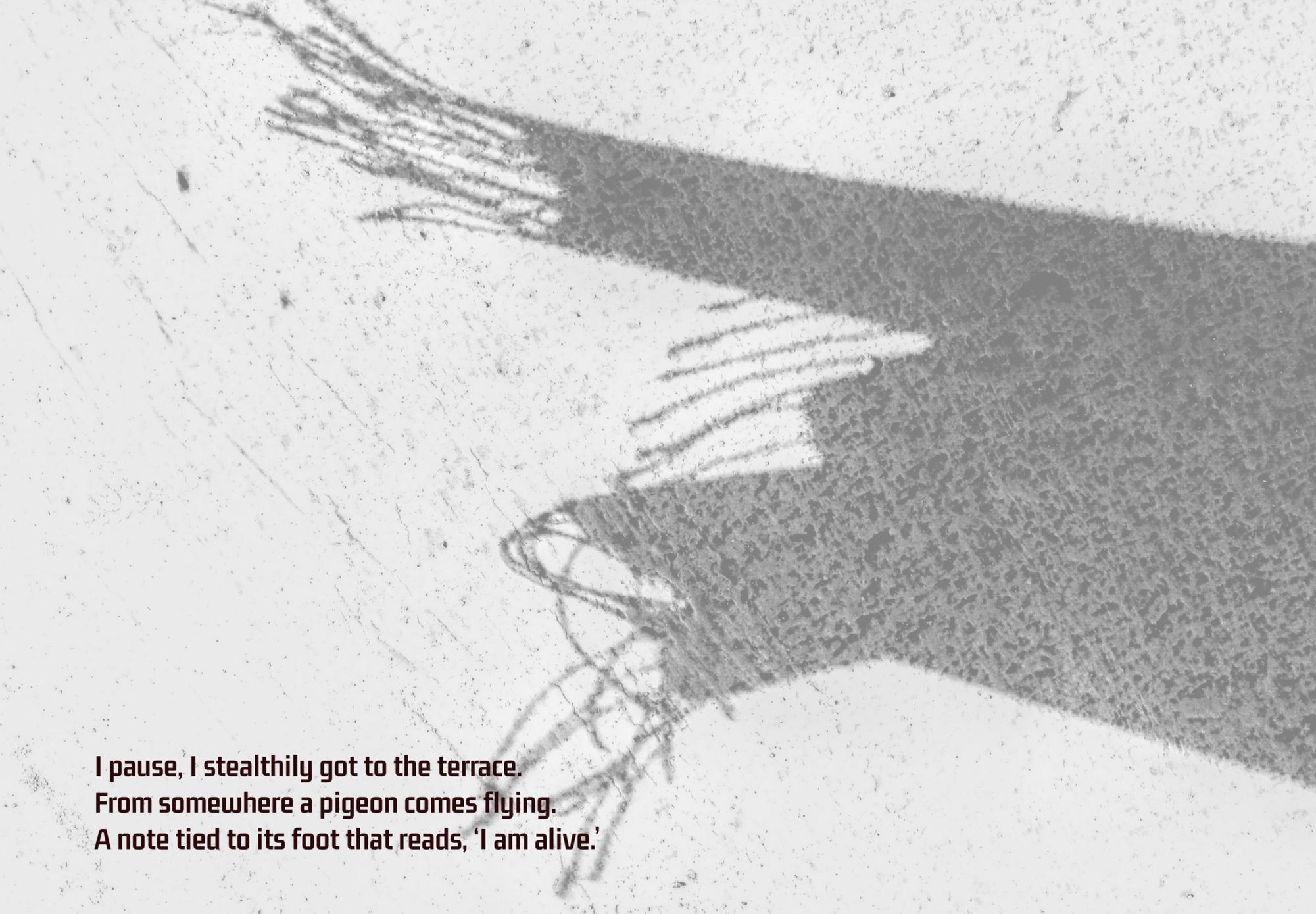
**I could also hear the crickets' calls
Is it day-break then?**

**Am I still sleeping and dreaming?
A rat entering into my ear,
two snakes into my eyes,
a croc into my mouth.
A tall tower above my head spreading poison.
There sits a big crow on it.
Or is it a black raven?**



**It seems that my stomach is bulging.
It seems I am becoming a warehouse myself.**

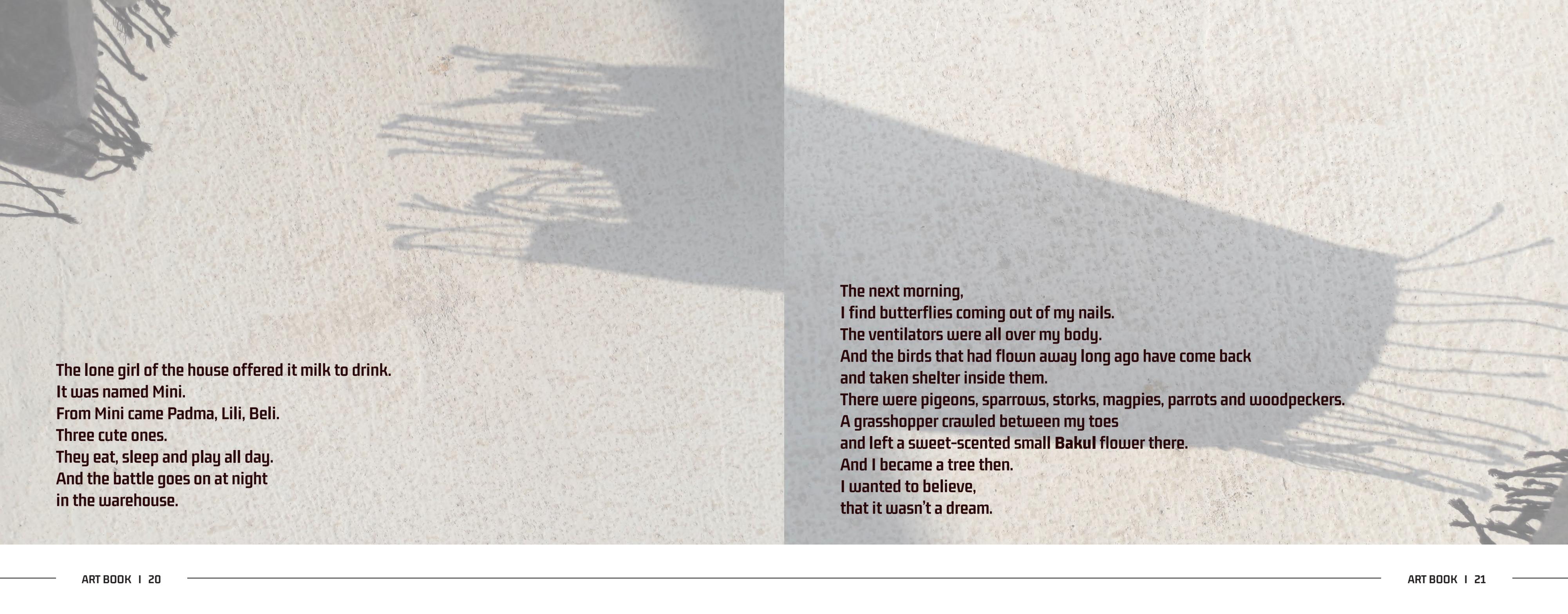
**The calling bell rang out like a siren!
It spoke out.
'There is lockdown in the neighbourhood
The third house next to ours is locked down.
A huge red flag is flying on its roof.
The key seems to be lost.
A rainstorm might rise anytime.
Close the windows right now'.**



**I pause, I stealthily got to the terrace.
From somewhere a pigeon comes flying.
A note tied to its foot that reads, 'I am alive.'**



**Thereafter, one morning
I happen to find a cat
under the Bodhi tree across my window.**

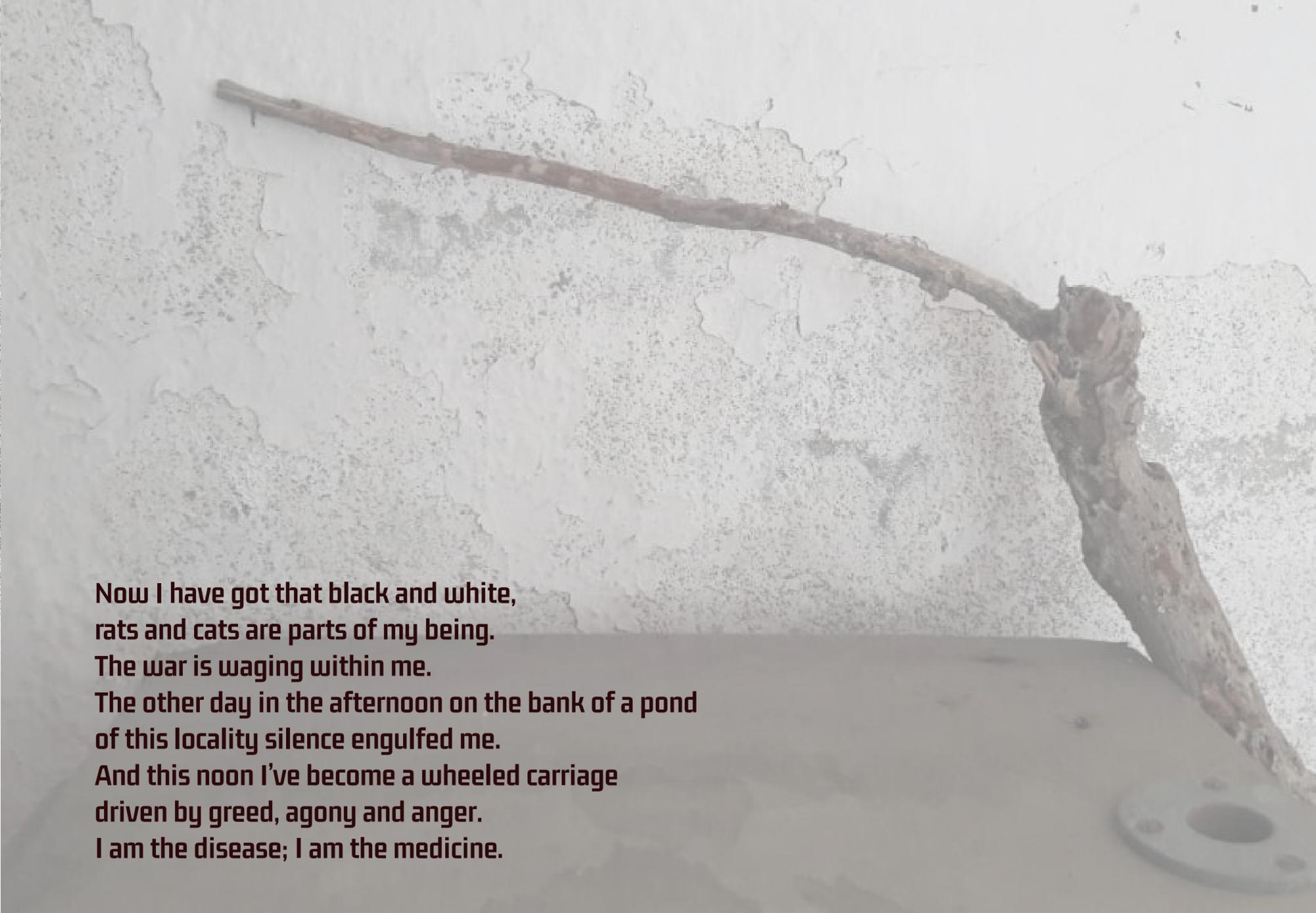


The lone girl of the house offered it milk to drink.
It was named Mini.
From Mini came Padma, Lili, Beli.
Three cute ones.
They eat, sleep and play all day.
And the battle goes on at night
in the warehouse.

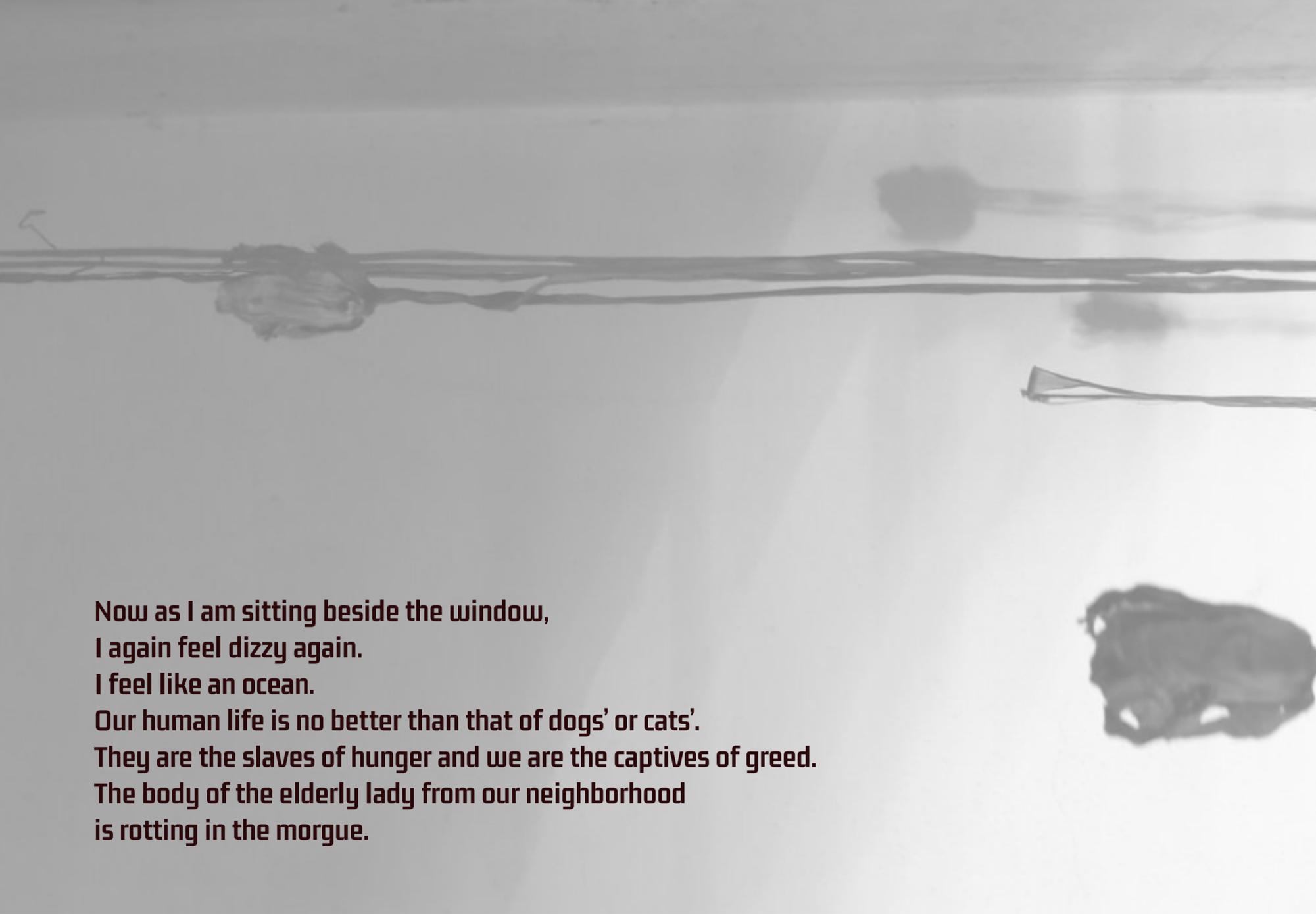
The next morning,
I find butterflies coming out of my nails.
The ventilators were all over my body.
And the birds that had flown away long ago have come back
and taken shelter inside them.
There were pigeons, sparrows, storks, magpies, parrots and woodpeckers.
A grasshopper crawled between my toes
and left a sweet-scented small **Bakul** flower there.
And I became a tree then.
I wanted to believe,
that it wasn't a dream.



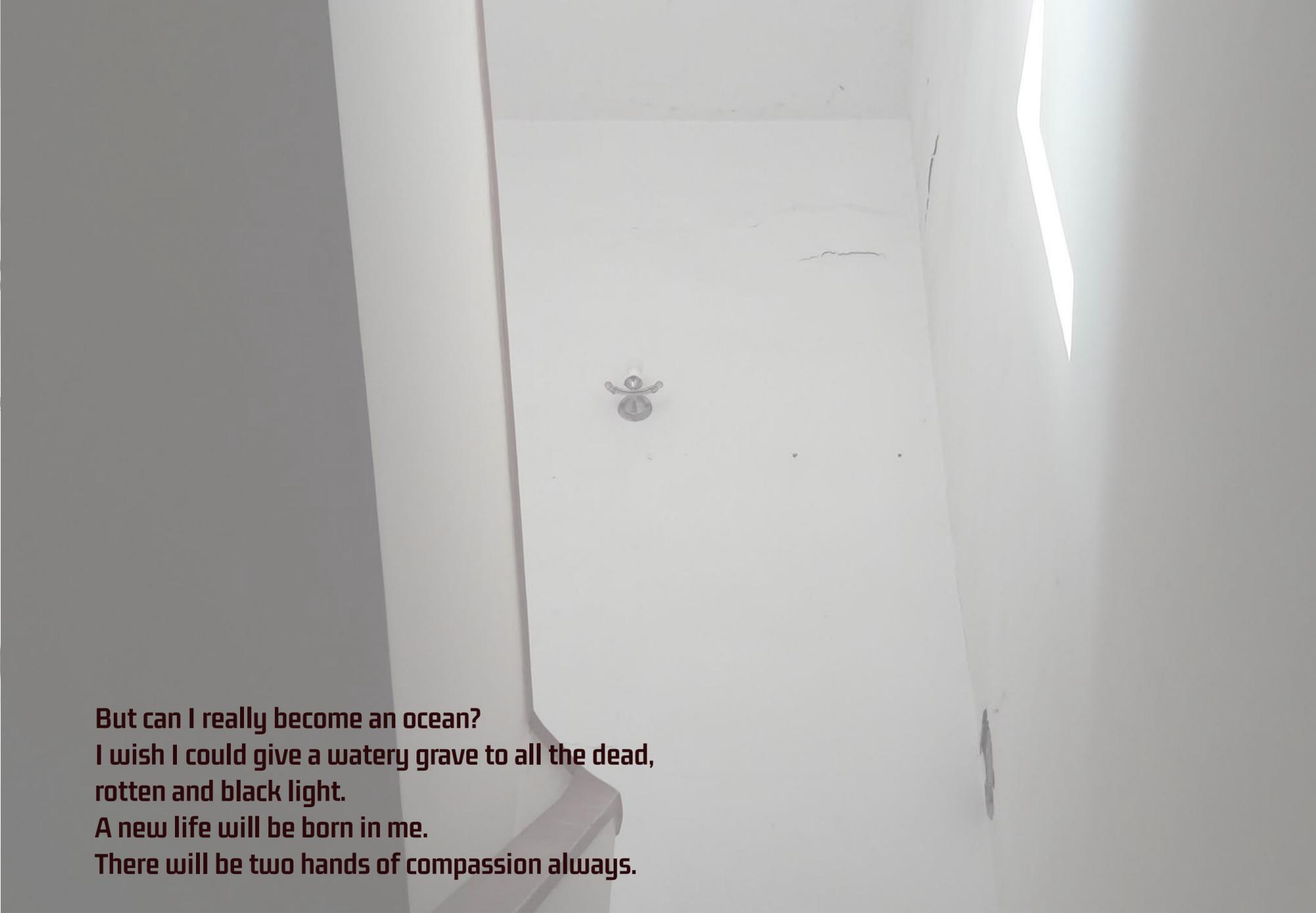
**Not even a couple of years have passed,
yet it seems that
we are on a long, tiring, hopeless journey.
Thus, the sovereignty of rats and that of cats
went on for some days in the neighborhood.**



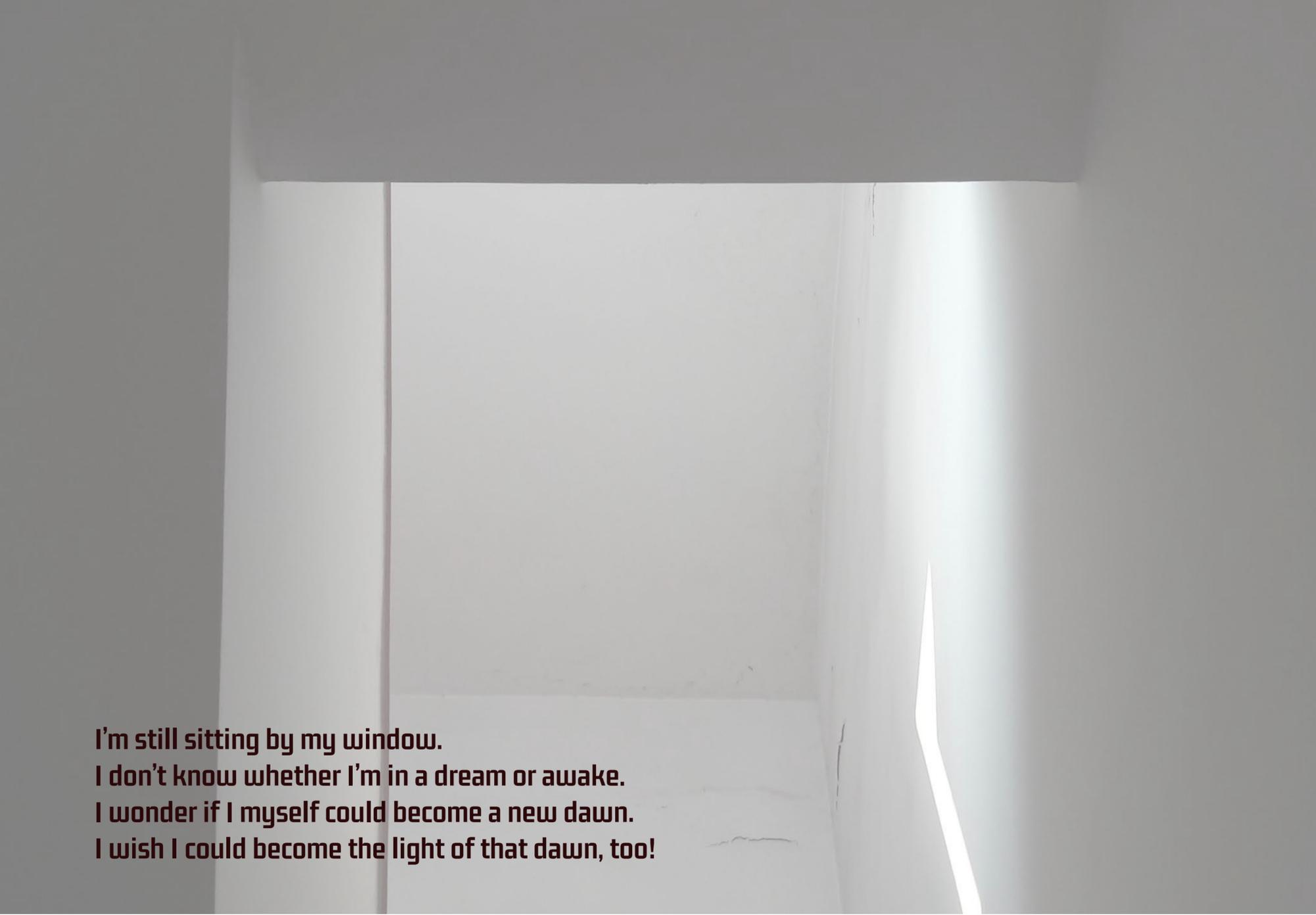
**Now I have got that black and white,
rats and cats are parts of my being.
The war is waging within me.
The other day in the afternoon on the bank of a pond
of this locality silence engulfed me.
And this noon I've become a wheeled carriage
driven by greed, agony and anger.
I am the disease; I am the medicine.**



Now as I am sitting beside the window,
I again feel dizzy again.
I feel like an ocean.
Our human life is no better than that of dogs' or cats'.
They are the slaves of hunger and we are the captives of greed.
The body of the elderly lady from our neighborhood
is rotting in the morgue.



But can I really become an ocean?
I wish I could give a watery grave to all the dead,
rotten and black light.
A new life will be born in me.
There will be two hands of compassion always.



**I'm still sitting by my window.
I don't know whether I'm in a dream or awake.
I wonder if I myself could become a new dawn.
I wish I could become the light of that dawn, too!**



**Now it's time for me to send
short messages to all the roofs.
It will be written:
'We are all alive, together.'**