

The World of My Childhood Home

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

My childhood home ceased to exist and remained in the past. This thesis is a return to my childhood home through my memories. I return to it in remembering my child-self, who sought the heights from the roof and high platforms, the child who dug out the earth and mother's wardrobe, the one who feared the drainage holes in the kitchen and bathroom, and the child who desired the fire in the living room and the tall dark shaft. It is a return to the world of my childhood home in writing, drawing, rewriting, then redrawing. My memories of the house are literary imagination in architecture.

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To my mother, the person who started the world of my childhood home, thank you for giving me a childhood I can recall with fond.

A Letter to the Reader

Dear Reader,

I write my childhood memories because I miss it. I often think about my childhood home and return to it in my memories. In memory, I return to my child-self, the one who was six, seven, eight, all the way to twelve, I return to the child who wanted to reach the sky from her swing in the back of the house, the one who was scared of the dark bathrooms, and sat close to the k fire in the great dark blackouts. I remember her small body that dwelled in that house everyday, and I envy her; she gets to stay in that house, and she gets to stay there for eternity in my memory, and I want my share of dwell in the house, but I am unable to. We left it, and new families lived in it, and they turned it into two houses, then to a store and a house, then it was vacant; it was no longer that house.

So I return to my child-self; it is my only way in. It is to remember what I felt, saw, and heard, to remember the world that entered and exited the house, the world that I knew with my body and imagination. I am re-navigating the house with memory, the memory of the body that remembers the rough stucco, the terrazzo tiles, and the smells of rooms when a story was told. I remember my feelings, the desire of reaching the heights, and the anger in wanting to reach the heater's fire while mother scolded, and I remember the fear of darkness that made the bathrooms deeper at night, and I remember fully seeing the darkness in my bedroom when my sister told stories of the divine, then I remember seeking it in the deep and tall mother's wardrobe, and in the deep and muddy garden. I remember my child-self and her communion with that world of the house, and I remember her obliviousness of that world coming to an end.

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On Childhood Memories

On Childhood Memories

I knew my childhood home was a memory of a world, but I was not sure what world it was. Was it the world of the child's imagination? Or was it of a child playing? Or merely seeing, hearing, and feeling the house. I wondered if it was the world of my mother who arranged and rearranged the house, or whether it was the world of the stories my older sister told. I could not tell; they were all mixed, but I knew they were all childhood memories. In my chase after my childhood memories, I return to philosophers, architects, psychologists, and excerpts of poetry and children's books to find materials for rebuilding the world of my childhood home in my memories.

Memories: The Poetic Image *The Poetics of Space*

The dwelling of the house and the world is pursued in Bachelard's philosophy in his book *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard begins his philosophy with the phenomenology of the poetic image of the surrounding world, specifically the world within the space of the house. He explains the poetic image as the naïve image. "The image, in its simplicity, has no need of scholarship. It is the property of a naïve consciousness; in its expression, it is youthful language."¹ Bachelard uses the examples of poets who speak of their surrounding world within their homes; he views their produced poetry and their poetic images, as the naïve consciousness or experience of the surrounding world within the house.

Bachelard explains the phenomena of the poetic image to be the carrier of the being of its creator. "...a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image when it emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man..."² Bachelard further explains that the poetic image is not singular; it multiplies into many proceeding poetic images, and the poet's being changes with the multiplying poetic images. "The reverberations bring about a change of being."³ Bachelard proposes that the 'reverberation of the poetic image' extends to the poet's past being. "After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past."⁴ The poet remembers their past being in the multiplied poetic images.

In the memory of the past being, Bachelard tackles the intimate being, the poetic being that experienced the world most intimately. "The memory of the most intimate being is in the remembered images of the house."⁵ The past intimate being that experienced the house closely is a being that set roots in the world through its dwelling. Bachelard introduces the house as the place of the first experiences of the world. "For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty."⁶ The house that is remembered as an intimate space is the place where the world was first experienced.

In understanding Bachelard's philosophy of the poetic image and the intimate being, early concepts of the memory of the childhood home begin to develop. The memory images of the childhood home are poetic images of a naïve and youthful consciousness. The past child-self is viewed as naïve for she was developing her first experiences of the world, and she is remembered as the intimate being, for she experienced the world intimately.

Memories: Imagination: Childhood memories

Poetics of Reverie

In the *Poetics of Reverie*, Bachelard looks closer into the phenomenology of the poetic image through reverie. He defines reverie as the poetic image that holds the seed of the world in the poet's mind.⁷ Bachelard delves into the reverie in memory, specifically childhood memories. He further defines reverie in memory as the mental state of reliving the past, which is a re-live that can only happen in the union of imagination and memory.⁸

Bachelard perceives imagination as necessary for designating a memory with value; he views imagination as the agent that "colors the painting it will want to see again."⁹ In memory and imagination, Bachelard further explains the remembered past within reverie as an "image value." "The remembered past is not simply a part of perception. Since one is remembering, the past is already being designated in a reverie as an image value."¹⁰ The memory of childhood, as understood through *Poetics of Reverie*, becomes a world of images with values.

To further understand the concept of image value, Jung and his associates try to explain the world in the context of symbols in *Man and His Symbols*. Aneila Jeffe, one of the associates, views the world as "a potential symbol,"¹¹ She defines symbols as objects or forms with psychological significance.¹² In the light of psychology, memory, as image values, is viewed as a collection of images that hold psychological significance.

In pursuing childhood memories as reveries, as images of psychological values, Bachelard makes a point of the pursuit of reverie. He emphasizes the medium of writing to communicate with reverie: "To be communicated, it must be *written*, written with emotion and taste..."¹³ Bachelard emphasizes that personal emotional writing is the tool for pursuing reveries.

Memories: Memory of the Body

The eyes of the skin

In *The Eyes of the Skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa discusses the primacy of the haptic sense in the experience of the surrounding world. His book aims to revisit how the body experiences the world. Pallasmaa begins by quoting an anthropologist who praises the skin as the organ on which all senses rely: “[The skin] is the oldest and the most sensitive of our organs, our first medium of communication, and our most efficient protector [...] Touch is the parent of our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth...”¹⁴ The haptic is regarded as the primary body sensory.

Pallasmaa expands on the high sensitivity of the skin within scientific reasoning; he references the psychologist James J Gibson in explaining the integrated ways body senses work; he explains senses as integrated sensory systems rather than as individual receivers.¹⁵ In the concept of the multi-sensory system, Pallasmaa argues that all other senses are extensions of touch, including vision.¹⁶ He follows the explanation of the philosopher George Berkley, who explains that vision cannot recognize the tactility of materials, special depths, and distances without the help of haptic memory.¹⁷

Pallasmaa delves further into the primacy of the haptic over the sense of vision in the chapter “The Significance of the Shadow.” He necessitates the dimness or absence of light to ignite “tactile fantasy.”¹⁸ The reduced sense of vision invites a new realm of sensory, that is, a realm of imagination. “The imagination and daydreaming are stimulated by dim light and shadow.”¹⁹ It is understood that the senses become more alert in darkness, conjuring up the imagination of the mysterious shapes and forms under the dim light. This concept of sensory imagination is further understood in the philosophy of the mind article, “Sensory Memories and Recollective Images,” where sensory memories are explained as sensory mental images that inform what the object is, based on the recollected sensory images.²⁰ In returning to Pallasmaa’s explanation of haptic memory and its primacy over other senses, sensory imaginations are perceived to be a result of remembered past experiences stored in the skin.

As the skin envelopes the body, Pallasmaa expresses body and skin exchangeably. Pallasmaa positions the body at the center of the experiential world, and it makes the skin the boundary object through which the self interacts with the world. “Our contact with the world takes place at the boundary line of the self through specialized parts of our enveloping membrane.”²¹ Pallasmaa’s approach to the boundary of the skin and the self is perceived to be an association of the self with the body. “My body remembers who I am and how I am located in the world.”²²

It becomes recognizable that skin memory is body memory, and the body remembers the self. To expand further on the concept of the body's memory of the self, Moore and Bloomer, in their book *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, explain that the body carries the identity of the self in the memories of previous experiences of the world. The authors view the body as the beholder of an inside world.

Although we cannot see the inside of our body, we do develop memories of an inside world that include a panorama of experiences taken from the environment and etched into the "feelings" of our identity over a lifetime of personal encounters with the world.²³

The body is perceived to be the vessel that holds memories of the senses and the self. The memory of body senses and feelings becomes a mode of return to the past self, that is, the child-self and the way that past self interacted with the world within the childhood home.

The Four Elements: Elements and Imagination

Bachelard and the four elements: The four reveries

Bachelard confronts the phenomenology of the poetic image in its elemental forms. “True images, those that come out of reverie, are of one or two elements.”²⁴ As Bachelard explores the imagination within the reveries and daydreaming of the four elements, it becomes necessary to reinstate their origin, that is, the physical experience of the world. The pre-Socratic theory of the four elements is used to begin the formation of the physical world that surrounded my child-self. The article “Roots of All Things” is a brief study of the four principles of the world through Empedocles’ poem *On Nature*. The pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles believes that the root of being in the world is in the senses of the physical world. From the elements, he establishes his four principles of the world and assigns each element a divine character in his poem.²⁵ It is perceived from Empedocles’ philosophy that being in the world begins with the senses of the four elements, and the four elements become the agents that connect to the realm of the divine, which is viewed as a realm of reverie and imagination.

Bachelard returns to the four elements as the generators of imagination, as he calls them “the hormones of the imagination.”²⁶ He approaches the four elements from the physical senses that ignite the reveries toward the elements. The reveries, as the poetic images produced by the fusion of memory and imagination, are again explored through the memory of childhood. Bachelard reinstates his faith in childhood memory through the memory of the senses, the memory that connects to the world in its elements.

If the senses remember, aren’t they going to find, within some archeology of the perceptible, these “mineral dreams,” these dreams of the “elements, which attach us to the world in an “eternal childhood.”²⁷

The four elements are explored in the reveries and emotions they ignite within the psyche of the poet. In *Air and Dreams*, Bachelard explores air as the element that ignites the imagination of movement. He investigates the reveries of wind, wings, flight, fall, sky, and clouds; they are agents of the imagination of movement. “Imaginary air, specifically, is the hormone that allows us to grow physically.”²⁸ Bachelard classifies the poetic image of air as the image that that is “vectorial.”²⁹ In my own memories of swings and air coolers in my childhood home, desires and imaginations for flight and for the vertical ascent are ignited.

Fire is explored as the element of intense emotions; in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Bachelard views fire as the element that contradicts itself. Bachelard gives the example of the fire that attracts the child to its glow but also punishes them as soon as the child becomes too close.³⁰ Fire is also the element that ignites the imagination of the greater world in the change of matter. He gives the example of the burning log that inspires its contemplator images of destruction, and the images of a volcano in the fire of a hearth. The memories of fire in my childhood remind me of the contradicting feelings of desire and fear of fire, and they remind me of the imagined stories of the past world in the contemplation of fire.

In *Water and Dreams*, water is explored as an element that is in flux. "A being dedicated to water is a being in flux."³¹ Bachelard views water as the transitory element,³² the element that ignites imagination when it is mixed with other elements, such as the imagination of shaping in the union of water and earth. The most intriguing view of Bachelard's is that of the imagination associated with deep water. The understanding of such imagination is best explained in his *Poetics of Space*; he tells the story of the hero of L' Antiquaire, who comes across the deep water in a cellar; the hero fears the water that came out of the darkness that came from the depths.³³ Bachelard explains that deep water lends itself to the imagination of its contemplator, who imagines a universe inside a pool.³⁴ The memory of the sound of falling water in my childhood home reminds me of my fear of the darkness of the sewage system and the imagination of what lived in the underground.

In *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard explores earth as the material of interiority; he explores it in its depths, in the cave, labyrinths, and roots. Bachelard views earth as the element of curiosity to look inside things and see what is hidden.³⁵ He uses the example of children and their will to break their toys to see the inside. Such curiosity is vivid in my childhood memory, I am reminded of my desire in digging gardens and seeing inside drawers and wardrobes to discover what was hidden and kept away.

Psychology: The Magic of Childhood *The Child's Conception of The World*

Jean Piaget, the childhood development psychologist, hired nine female psychologists who went to parks and schools and asked children about the origin of the earth, the moon, the sun, water, and life. In his book, *The Child's Conception of The World*, Piaget and his associates research how children perceive the world. The purpose of the book is to use it as a second-hand reminder of the ways my child-self perceived the world, such as the belief of the sun following us, and the sky being changed by men from day to night. The book provides a detailed explanation of childhood theories developed from the collected interview answers.

There are some of the theories that hint at the ways my child-self interacted with the world. Piaget develops his theory of realism and participation, in which the child is viewed as ego-centric for their belief that the world is in obedience to them. In his theory, the world is viewed to be in constant interaction with the child. "...all the universe is felt to be in communion with and obedient to the self. There is participation and magic."³⁶ The theory reminds me of childhood moments when reality was fused with imagination without questioning. Piaget further explains in his theory of animism that children perceive things to be animate to serve a purpose in their own narratives of the world, such as the example of the sun following. "...of animism ("it's they who follow me")."³⁷ The theories of animism and participation are studied under the theory of moral necessity and physical determinism, where the ego-centric child believes that everything in the world serves a purpose within their natural regular movements and that everything has a moral attribute, such as the belief that inanimate objects have feelings and personalities.³⁸ Piaget's theories are extensive and vast, and even though they are expressed within scientific and analytical terms, they are, however, reminders of the normalized magic and livelihood of objects in childhood.

The understanding of Piaget's theories is further pursued in children's books, specifically through Maurice Sendak's works. In his work, egocentrism is perceived to be clearly expressed in the narratives and personalities in his stories. Jonathan Cott, in his book *There's a Mystery There*, views Sendak's stories as faithful to the ways children view the world. He expresses the magical perceptions of the world where the universe is fused with the child's ego, and thus, the universe always responds to the way the child perceives the world. "There is always a tension between that absolute ouroboros-like bliss, where there's no differentiation between you and the universe..."³⁹

One of the examples of Sendak's work is *A Hole is to Dig*, where a group of children define things around them in the way they serve a purpose to them, "A face is so you make faces," "a Tablespoon is to eat at the table with."⁴⁰ Piaget's theories become clearer in the narratives of children's books, and they further help confirm the memories of imagination, feelings, and the livelihood of objects.

Psychology: The End of Childhood

Necessary losses

The pursuit of childhood memories raises the question of how childhood ends. Judith Viorst is a psychoanalysis researcher and author of children's books. In her book *Necessary Losses*, she investigates the things that are given up and ended for growth, and that includes the end of childhood. The book serves the purpose of understanding how childhood ends, specifically recognizing the narrative in my childhood memories that lead to the eventual ending. Viorst explains that the process of leaving childhood begins with the desire for separation and assuming responsibility. "Moving from oneness to separateness, [...], we find that we are neither safe nor free. It becomes increasingly clear that the person in charge of us is...us..."⁴¹ She gives the example of a nine-and-a-half-year-old neighbor who listed what she could do without her parents, such as crossing the road and making her own toast.⁴² Viorst's observation and examples remind me of the curiosity and desire to explore hidden spaces and the outside of the house without my parents' company. Viorst further explains the growth process of adolescence as the phase where childhood is mourned, and innocence is given up in preparation for adulthood.⁴³ Her explanation brings back vital childhood memories, such as the curiosity and fear toward the adults' private lives and the found signs of their loss of innocence.

The concept of the childhood end is further explored through Jung's theory of the shadow. The theory of the shadow is learned through the journal article "The Child and the Shadow"; the author explores the concept through her childhood memories of children's books that she disliked and yet continued to read. She disliked Anderson's sad and grim endings, but she wanted to read more of them; she uses this example to explain the psyche of the shadow, where the ego is conscious and unconscious of its dark qualities. They are the qualities that the ego cannot or is denied access to.⁴⁴ The curiosity and the fear of the kept-away adult life are viewed as the dark psyche in childhood memories.

Writing the Memories

The Secret Staircase

In viewing personal memories, specifically childhood memories, writing becomes a necessary tool in constructing such memories. However, it poses the question of how childhood memories can be constructed when there are many memory images of value. Sonia Villegas-López explores in her article *Memory Lives inside Us*, the construct of memories through an art installation of a childhood memory, *The Secret Staircase*. The art installation is in the form of artifacts and a book that contains childhood memories of an eighteen-year-old who tries to reconnect with her deceased mother. The book is written with a poetic narrative that helps the daughter reconnect with the world where her mother existed. Villegas-López explores memory narratives through Paul Ricoeur's approach to memory and imagination; he is a philosopher of phenomenological descriptions. He associates memories with works of literature; he explains that memories have a similar aim as literature, that is, to convey meaning. "Literature works very much like memory since both form condensed *memory images* through which they create meaning. Both include narrative processes..."⁴⁵ In returning to Bachelard's memory in reveries, the designation of value or meaning to memory images is perceived to be the first step in constructing childhood memory, that is, the finding of a narrative within the collection of image values. Through writing, the construct of such a narrative becomes the tool for reconstructing the world of childhood home.

Drawing the Memories

Ways of Seeing, Lines: A Brief History,

“Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing ‘Tell’ a Different Story?”

Ways of Seeing is a book that includes seven essays that explore the ways of seeing, specifically artworks of drawing, painting, and photography. In one of the essays, John Berger discusses the ways of seeing through the written versus the graphic. He argues that words can describe what we know but can never fulfill what we see.” We explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it.”⁴⁶ For Berger, our ways of seeing are affected by our knowledge and beliefs; he gives the example of Medieval paintings of hell; hell is never seen, but it is portrayed with the knowledge of fire and the belief in its ability to consume everything.⁴⁷ Berger proposes that seeing within knowledge and belief is a way of situating oneself in the world. “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world.”⁴⁸ Berger then explores the role of the image and its representation of our ways of seeing. The image can enable seeing the absent, but it is influenced by the way the past is seen by the author and the viewer.⁴⁹ Berger’s approach to the produced image as a way of seeing informs early ideas of how memory images can be represented through image production, that is, through drawing. It is perceived that conveying experiences, images, and scenes from childhood memories are to be given a larger space of freedom in drawing to faithfully convey how the home was seen.

Huda Tayob is an architectural historian who uses the medium of hand drawing in her field research of what she classifies as “subaltern architecture.” Even though she is not documenting childhood memories, she uses hand drawings to record architectural spaces, specifically postcolonial spaces in South Africa, to convey architectural spaces that are overlooked or unseen by common architectural studies.⁵⁰ She relies on direct hand sketches of what she sees in her field study of the spaces, and this way, her convey of the spaces is not reduced or constricted with conventional architectural drawings. She classifies conventional orthographic drawings as an authoritative mode of drawing that does not faithfully convey subaltern architecture.” The use of conventions lends the drawings an apparent authority as they mimic precision and rationality.”⁵¹

The straight and precise lines are further critiqued by Tim Ingled in his book *Lines: A Brief History*. He views the straight line as the line that demands territory and control in conveying what is being drawn. “A ruler is a sovereign who controls and governs a territory. It is also an instrument for drawing straight lines [...]

In establishing the territory as his to control, the ruler lays down guidelines for its inhabitants to follow.”⁵² In understanding the ways of seeing and the role of the hand-drawn lines, it becomes clear that the record of an experience of space as faithfully as possible can be found in the non-straight and non-orthogonal drawings; the drawings that is connected to the remembering hand.

The World, The Memory, and Methods

The House: The Home

The house is the place that I kept returning to in my memory; it was not permanent physically, but it continued to be the permanent house in my memory. The house was my home because it was the place of my early experiences of the world. I saw the neighbors, the streets, and the power poles from its fences. I smelled the earth and touched it in the garden and the rough stucco fence walls. I felt the heat of the sun from the windows that glowed in the hot summer, and I dwelled in the cool darkness of the night on its big, flat roof. I smelled and caught glimpses of the underworld from its sinks and drainage holes, and I smelled the great darkness in the smell of fires on the nights when the power was out. My childhood house was my first world. It was the world I knew in its walls, roof, and windows.

When I remember my childhood home, I remember my child-self and my feelings. I remember my body feelings, the hot and rough feelings toward the sunlit stucco walls on my skin, the thick smell of the oil-fueled fire that I could taste while in the dark living room, and the cool air brushing against my arms and legs while on the flat roof at night; they are a few of the many memories I have of my child-self and my intimate dwelling of the home.

I was close and intimate with the world around me; and my intimate memories and bodily feelings remind me of my own impressions and imagination of the things that surrounded me. I remember the cold metal gate and its grim-looking face, for it stood between me and the outside, and the waking and the sleep of the fire heater in the setting and blow-out of its fire. I remember them in my bodily feelings of them, in the warmth of the heater and in the coldness of the gate, and in their looks and shapes. I remember more of my intimacy with my home beyond my body, and I find myself returning to my childhood home in the remembrance of my early intimate experiences.

The World of My Childhood Home

The world of my childhood home was the world that surrounded my body, and my child-self experienced it with her body and mind. My body and my child-self were at the center of it. The bigger world was the house surrounding my body; it was the physical world my child-self touched, smelled, heard, felt, and imagined. When the sun entered the house, it was the sun of the hot, glowing windows and the smell of warm curtains, and when the air flew in, it was the air of the marble-smelling air between the steps of the stairs and the air of the loud air cooler. The house was the physical medium through which my child-self experienced the world.

The told world was the stories that I imagined within the house, specifically in my bedroom, when I looked at the night sky from the window while my sister told stories of prophets and the divine. I imagined the scary deep well in the dark, the flight to the skies, the deep dig-out of the earth, and the taste of fire. The house was the first place to experience the world within it, and it was the place I returned to in my imagination of the told stories. The house was my early experience of the bigger surrounding world in the physical and the imagined.

I then return to that bigger world of my childhood home in my memory, and that world becomes concentrated in the smaller world, the world of my childhood memories. The house solely remains in that world, and it is spread out in my multiplied memory images; I return to that world of memory images; it is my only access to my childhood home.

The Bigger World

The Bigger World: The Physical

My house was the bigger world. It was the earth, for its floors and walls smelled of earth. The walls were gypsum and stucco, the floors were terrazzo and marble tiles, and the house was anchored to the earth. I saw its direct anchor through the floor openings to the underworld of sewage directly below. All the water in the house went underground; it came out from the bathroom and kitchen faucets and went down to the depths of the sewage. Water moved through the house through pipes and gutters, and it also leaked into the house through the old skylight on rainy days and nights.

The dark of the winter night entered the house when the power was out, and the fire heater and lamps were the light and the heat on such nights. Fire made movements and energy house when it was cooking time and made shadows on walls and floors on dark winter nights. On summer days, it was the air that moved the insides of the house. The windows and laundry gently swayed in the summer breeze, and the big box of a cooler released cool air into the living room with a loud hum. On summer nights, we slept on the flat roof, under the cool night sky.

The bigger world shaped, penetrated, and moved in the house, and my body sensed it before my child-self reacted and imagined. The physical world of the house enveloped my body's senses, and it is the root of my childhood experiences of that world.



1. The Bigger World: The Physical

Air

The power returned, and my brother and I sat in front of the TV and the air grille above. The cooler blew air onto our faces, and we leaned to the sides as my father moved back and forth in front of the TV. He stood in front of the TV and raised his hand to the air grille above. “Still dry,” he said and walked out of the living room. The door to the *tarma*, the back of the house, was opened and closed; my father moved between the *tarma*, where he pushed the water hose into the air cooler, then back to the living room, feeling the air coming from the cooler. The ceiling fans whooshed in the kitchen, the bedrooms, and by the stairs, where I used to sit between the steps and swing my legs into the air.

Air was at the high places and the outsides. When my family had their noon naps, I looked for the high places and the outsides of the house. I increased the speed of the fan in my bedroom and imagined a flight. I hung on to the outside metal gate and peeked on the outside. When my father woke from his nap, he lifted me to the top of the power cabinet and left me to watch the passers-by and the cars that moved below me. At night, when the power was out again, my mother jolted open the heavy metal door of the roof. We went up there for our night’s sleep under the night sky and the cool breeze brushing our faces and bodies.

Water

The sky poured rain over the house, and the flat roof caught it and swallowed it with its gutters. The gutter outside by the kitchen door shivered with the gushing water and spewed pebbles. My mother covered the gap under the kitchen door with a cloth that changed color to brown. Inside the house, the rain rattled on the windows and the skylight. Water leaked between the glass panes, and my mother lined up basins under the skylight. When the basins filled up, rain droplets made a deep drop sound.

Water came from a big tank on the roof and went through the many pipes in the house all the way to the underground. When my mother washed the big pots, the water sounded like a muffled stream under the kitchen floor. The pipes under the sink cupboards went through a hole, and cockroaches and mice crawled out of it, and out of other drainage holes in bathrooms and the *tarma*. I feared the bathrooms the most; they were the darkest places at night and had the most lizards in the house. Water came out from the places I feared and went into the deep underground.

Fire

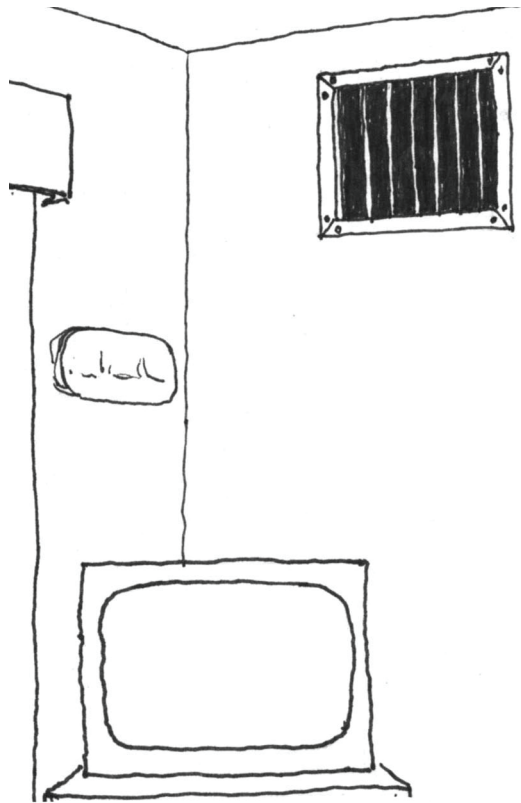
When my mother was away, the kitchen was not hot, and the sink and the stove were not alive. When she came back from work, they woke by the slam of the kitchen door, “who left the pots uncovered?!” she said. The kitchen was lit up with fluorescent lights, and she fired up the stove and ran water over the dishes in the sink. When my mother set the fire and heated the pots, we populated the kitchen with our many returns to the stove for our rice refills. The stove was a black box that turned into the mecca of the house. We came from bedrooms, some from the roof, and others from the living room; all stairs and corridors were maps to the stove.

When the winter night set and the power was out, my mother lit up Sopa, the fire heater, and the three Lalas, the fire lamps. The living room was filled with the many smells of fire: the smell of oil fuel, boiled tea, the crackling chestnut, and the hot bread. We gathered around Sopa, away from the cold bedrooms and corridors, and listened to the gossip of the past and the present mixing with the smells of fire. Lalas, the fire lamps, were carried around the dark corridors and bathrooms, and the house was revealed and hidden with the moving light of fire. The house was in movement with my mother’s set fires.

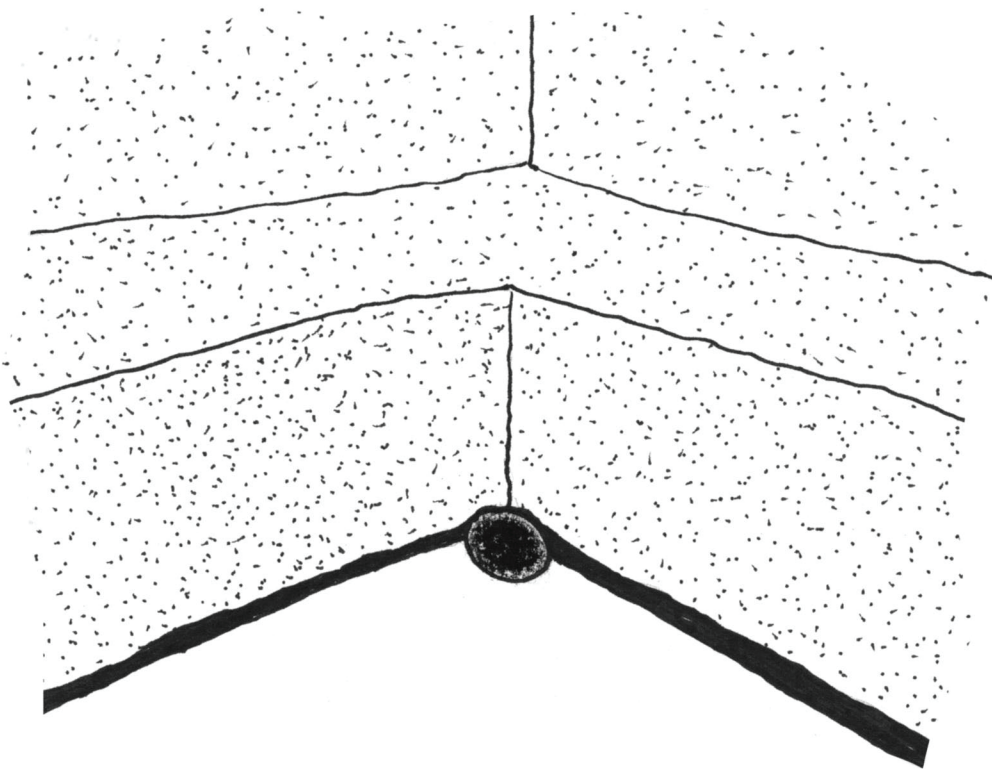
Earth

In the summer, it was the time to reveal and wash the terrazzo floors. My mother sprinkled the carpet with the white chunks of naphthalene, like a farmer spreading chemicals over crops; she then rolled and tied the carpet with ropes on each end and dragged it outside of the room. The terrazzo floor was then revealed with its thousands of marble chips. My mother dragged the rolled carpet up the marble stairs, and I followed the other tied end that bumped over each step and left a trail of dust. I ran my hand over a step, wiping away the dust, and I felt its smooth surfaces and its coolness that smelled of earth. My mother then dropped the carpet in a corner behind the stair's railing and went into her room to grab more ropes from her wardrobe. My mother's wardrobe was a deep closet that smelled of wood and perfume, and it was filled with many clothes and fabrics that rubbed against my face when I entered the wardrobe.

In the early morning, when the yellow sun shone over the stucco wall fences, my mother sprayed the stucco, and it released its heavy and deep smells of earth. The stucco was wet and rough; it poked my arm when I leaned on it and covered my eyes in my counting for a hide. My mother then sprayed the giant vines over the garden and left the water run between the plants in the garden pit. In her absence, I grabbed mud from the depths of the garden and felt the soft and runny earth. The walls and grounds and the depths of the garden and the wardrobe smelled of earth, wood, and smells of what was hidden inside.



2. Air: The Air Grille



3. Water: The Gutter



4. Fire: Sopa: The Fire Heater



5. Earth: The Garden

Darkness

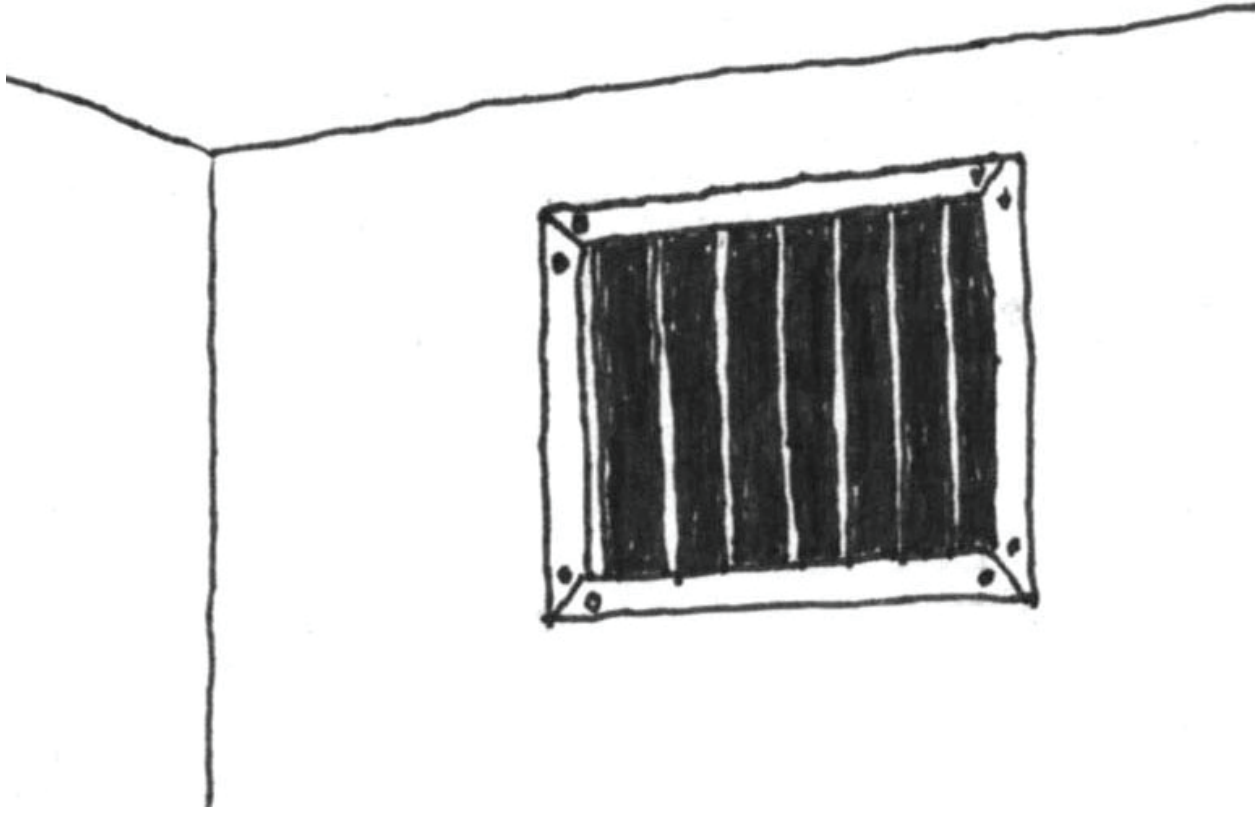
When it was nighttime, and everyone slept, darkness filled the house. I remember the sound of scratching my skin and the rustle of bed sheets when I changed sides. I slept by the edge of the bed with my nose close to the gypsum wall. I feared catching a glimpse of what was hiding in the dark. The depths of spaces were unknown in the dark, and the body's senses awakened my fantasies. Darkness was the thing my body could not sense, and I was left to my imagination.

I remember the dark opening of the air grille in the living room and the many dark slits on the sides of the cooler. The cooler was the metal box that was placed on a high platform in the *tarma*. The cooler made a loud beating sound; I heard it from the *tarma* and from the living room where the dark grille was. I remember my want for a flight to peek into the dark air openings. I wanted to see how the air was made cool in the dark. The dark inside the cooler box and the grille woke my imagination for a flight.

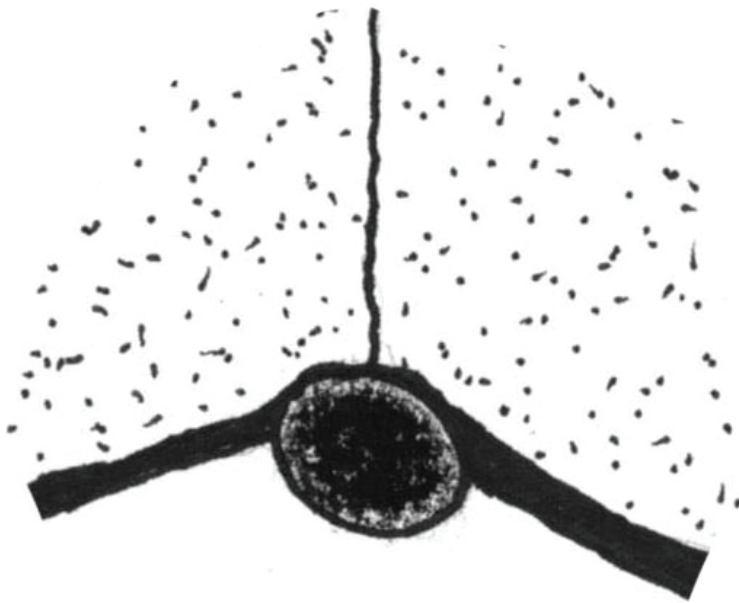
From below the cooler, the terrazzo floor was wet with shallow streams of water that went all the way to the floor drainage hole in the *tarma*. I remember the endless darkness of the hole. The sound of water falling into the floor drainage was the sound of the depths below the ground. I remember the tingling feeling on my legs when I once saw water overflow from the drainage hole; the water came out thick with lumps of hair and pebbles, and it had a faint smell of oil. I feared that water because it brought up things from the underground, and it stirred my imagination of the underworld.

The greatest dark was when the power went out at night. The outside was the darkest, and the windows were squares of black. Fire was the only light on such nights, and I remember learning the colors of fire in the great dark. I desired the orange fire, for it was brighter and made darkness lighter, and when the fire became low and blue, I was impatient, for darkness became darker. Fire made darkness heavy and light in one night. In my memories of the blue and orange fire and the smell of oil, I remember my imagination of the past that my mother told my sister. I remember the image of the shivering fire when I listened to the stories of factories, oil, and old kitchens. In the dark, the fire ignited my imagination of past fire stories.

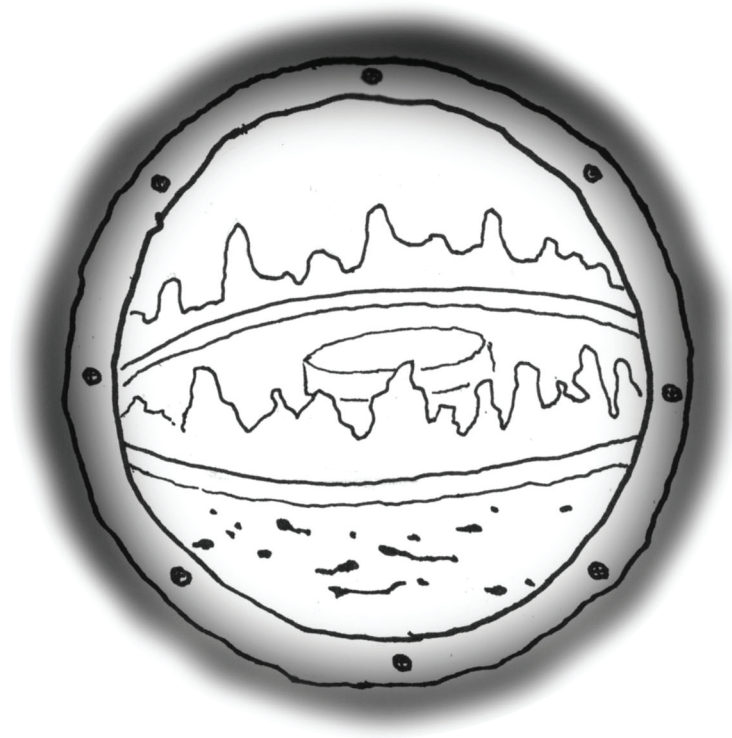
I feared darkness, but I also remember seeking it in my search for the hidden and the unknown. I dug out the earth of the garden to feel and see what was inside the soil. I sought the dim and dark interiors of drawers and wardrobes in a hunt for the things that were kept away. In the folds of the clothes and the crowded drawers, I found things and smelled perfumes, and I imagined the places, the past, and the more hidden things my family kept away and did not tell.



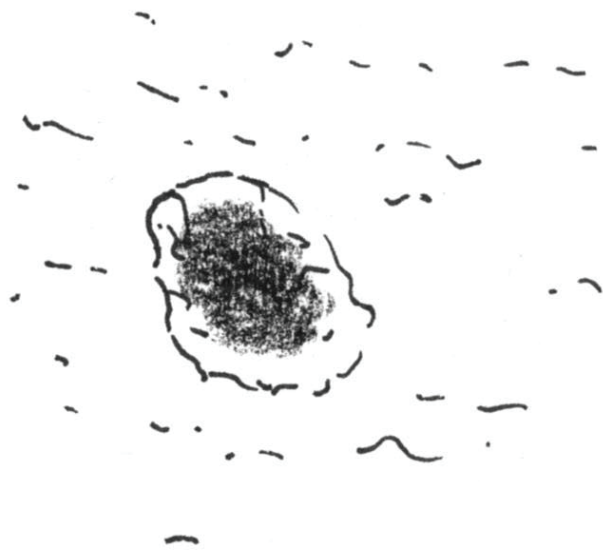
7. Air: The Dark Depths of the Air Grille



8. Water: The Dark Underworld of the Gutter



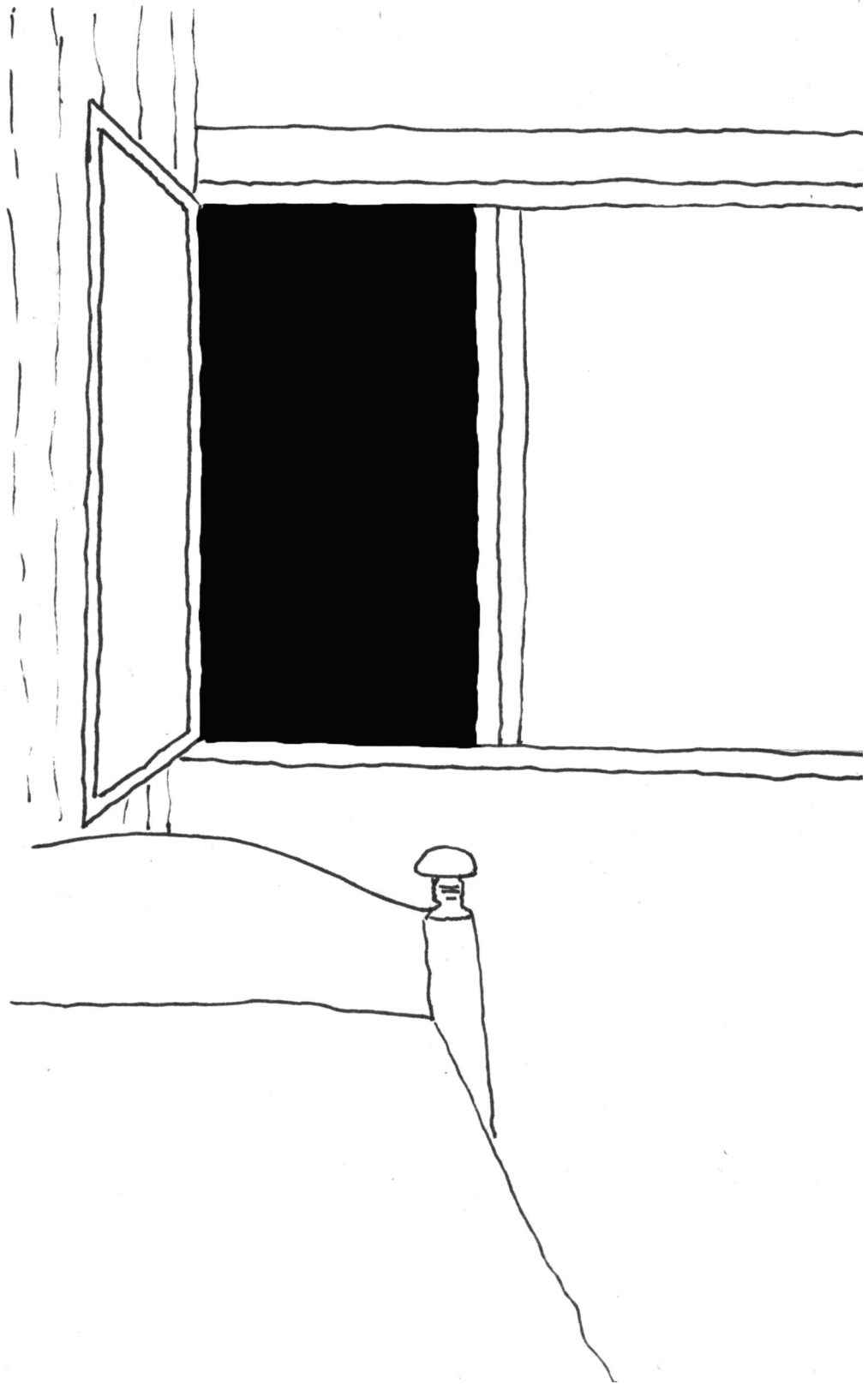
9. Fire: Darkness vs. Sopa



10. Earth: The Dark Depths of the Garden

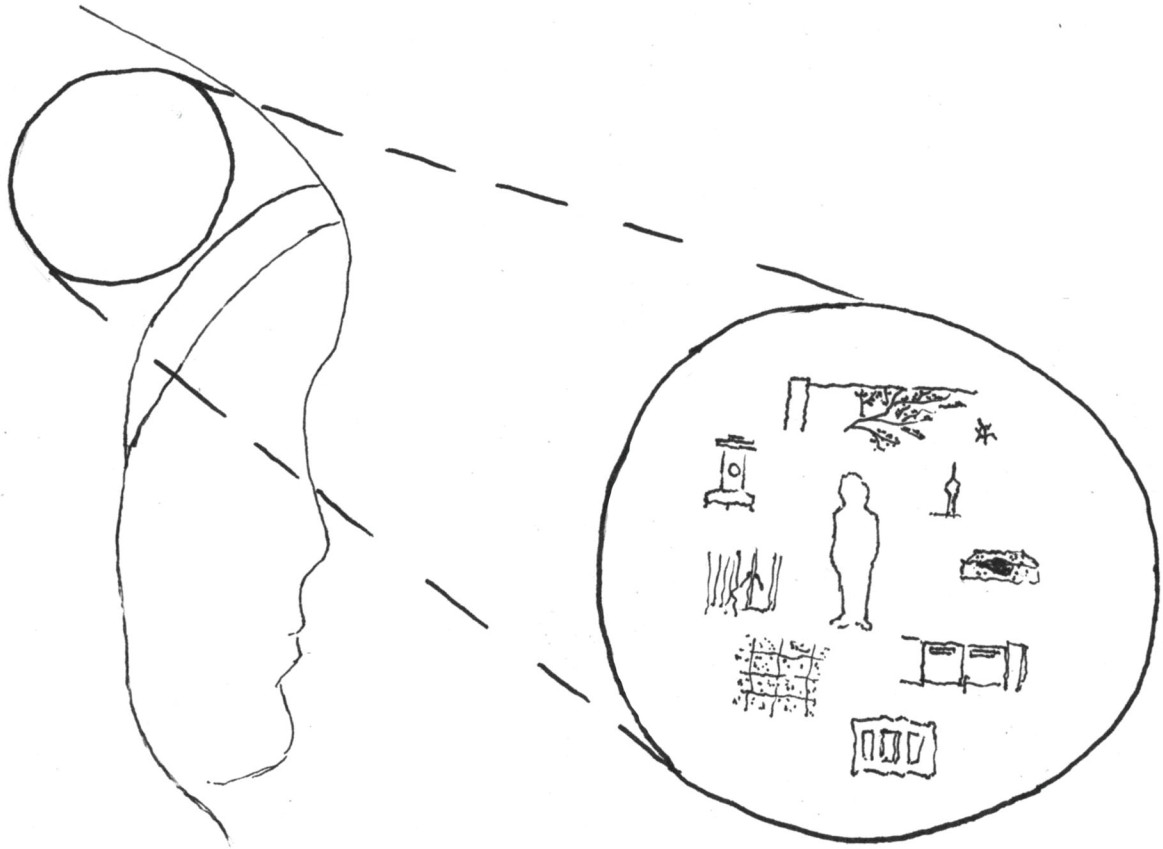
The Told World

My earliest memories of the dark night are of the open window of my bedroom. My bedroom was also my sister's; she arranged, rearranged, cleaned it, and I slept in it. At night, when I lay in bed, my feet were under the window, and my head was across from it; I looked at the black sky and imagined the stories of the divine that my sister told. I imagined the fear of the dark and the earthly smell of the underground when she told me of the child who was left in a well. I imagined the taste of fire when a toddler brought a lump of burning coal to his mouth. I imagined the cool water coming from the earth under my foot when she told of the toddler who dug out water with his foot. The stories were alive in my imagination, and they were my world-makings of the divine prophets who reached the sky and the bottoms of the earth, touched fire, and brought out the insides of the earth.



11. The Told World: Stories Imagined from My Bedroom

The Smaller World



12. The Smaller World: The Memories

Memory of the House: Memory of the Body and Self

My body was at the center of the house world. I saw things outside my body and sensed many things inside and outside of it. The memory images of a space come with the body feelings of that space; the same feelings remind me of events that happened in that space. The experiences of the spaces and events entered my memory through my body, and I cannot return to my childhood home without returning to the memory of my body.

When I remember an image of a space or an object in the house, my body senses the image. I remember the stairs with the memory image of the black patches of marble on the steps, it reminds me the cold air around my feet, and the earthly smell of marble on my nose. I cannot remember the marble stairs without the cold feet and the earthly scent. The image of the orange pot on the black stove under the white morning light comes with heat sensed on my neck and cheeks; it is a memory of the hot kitchen and of my mother cooking. I cannot remember the kitchen without the color of orange of the boiling pot and the heat that smelled of rice. The remembered images come with the sense of skin. The image of the orange pot comes with my skin feeling the heat, and the sense of the cold air on my feet comes with the memory of the marble stairs. The senses in my memory come back concentrated in my skin. My body memory is my skin memory.

My body remembers on the inside as well. The remembered experiences are mixtures of skin senses and internal feelings; together, they stitch the story of the experience. My breathing tightens when I remember the rough stucco on my thighs and palms; I remember the mixed feelings of excitement and weariness of being close to the outside by the stucco fence wall. My heart feels lighter when I remember the smell of fuel oil; it was the smell of a fire that was soon to be set. My body holds inside the world of my experiences of the house.

When I remember my feelings, I feel that world of that house inside my body, and with my feelings, I remember how I interacted with that world. I remember fearing the smell of oil fuel because I spilled it once in the *tarma*, and my mother was mad. I remember my boredom in my memory of the terrazzo floors when I traced its many marble chips with my hand while waiting to be found in a hide and seek. My feelings remind me of my child-self, and of how she interacted with that world.

Memory: Imagination

When I remember myself in that house, images come to my mind. When I remember the living room, I remember the window, the black window at night, Sopa, the small round window of Sopa, and the smell of fuel oil. I remember the living room at other times; I remember the image of the bright sun behind the beige curtains and the sound and feel of the cool air coming from the air grille. I remember the living room at different times, I imagine it. I imagine my child-self being in the living room; I imagine feeling and seeing the cooler at noon in the summer and seeing and smelling the heater on a winter night. Imagination and memory are mixed in my childhood memories; I am unable to relive my childhood home without my imagination.

The many memory images of my childhood home are not singular in my mind; they are not limited to the seen and experienced spaces; there are images from beyond my childhood home. When I return to the images of the living room on a winter night, the smell of Sopa brings back the image of the black oil fountain coming from the earth and the black and white image of factory men stuffing coal into the big machines. I find myself wondering if I am now imagining in my chase of my childhood memories or if I am remembering my child-self imagining. I am unable to tell, and I find myself unable to remember the smell, the fire, and the living room without these memory images. Imagination is present in creating my childhood memories.

The many memory images of the house and beyond the house come together to reveal the narrative of my experience in the space. The image of the dark living room, Sopa, the smell of oil, and the images of black oil and factory men are the narrative of my childhood experience in the dark living room. I am continuously constructing a narrative in remembering my child-self in the spaces. It is a narrative of the body and the mind coming to know the world in the dark living room.

In the construction of narratives of my memories of the house, I am in search of the essential image, in which the remembered child-self and the body senses are held within it. The returning images of Sopa in the winter and the cooler in the summer are the essential memory images of the living room. I choose them because they return to me often, and they return with the vivid memory of my emotions, the emotions of excitement toward the fire in the dark, and the emotions of curiosity in the cool air coming from the dark opening of the grille. I choose an essential image that holds the memory of the body and the feelings of my child-self.

Capturing the World: Methodology

Writing

I write to remember. My memories are fleeting images of my childhood home, and writing is my way to trace them, and it is my tool to re-live my childhood home through memory. When I wrote my memory of the green bathroom: the sunlight, the tiles, and the rising steam. When I wrote about the smell of the steam, it reminded me of lizards that fell on the floor when the steam became thick; then I remembered the medicine cabinet where the lizards hid. I wrote on the cabinet and remembered the baby-head jar that was kept in there and the salt crystals inside the jar. I wrote about the bathroom with the memory of the steam, and I ended with memories of the lizard and the cabinet. I wrote and I traced a narrative of a memory.

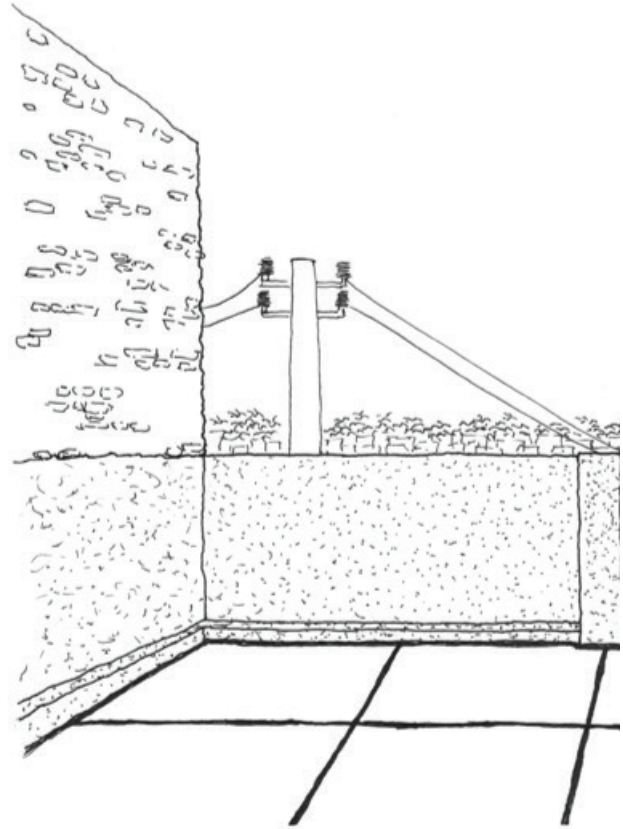
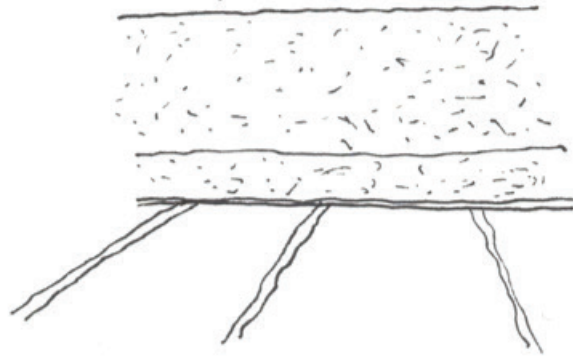
The narration in my writing is of a poetic language, a language of imagery, that invokes my childhood experiences. The language is poetic because it narrates that world as it is without reasoning or analysis of the experience. The poetic language is faithful to the feelings and experiences of my child-self. When I remember Sopa, the fire heater, I do not remember it in the background as the heater that warmed the room with fire; I remember it as Sopa of the long head with a cyclone of a fire eye, of the oil smell that filled the living room. It is a naïve language that does not stop at the fact that objects are inanimate. Through the naïve and poetic language, I remember that everything in the world of my childhood home had a purpose in my experiences. Lizards watched me in the bathroom; the garden was for digging, and the metal gate was to keep me from the outside. I use poetic and naïve language to connect to the child-self who intimately dwelled in my childhood home.

Drawing

I draw to see. When I write, the image remains incomplete, so I draw the space with my hand and follow the line. When I draw a memory, I am forced to commit to the line to create a complete memory image. When I drew the flat roof, I drew the horizontal line of the stucco wall, and I was not convinced with the continuous line; I felt the wall was missing something, and I remembered the pilasters at the corners and in between the stucco walls. I drew the pilasters, and I reached the bottom of the wall, and I remembered the thick wall base at the bottom that I stood on in my watch of the city, so I returned to my story and wrote how my small child-body stood on the base to peek on the city from the roof. I then began drawing the roof with its pilasters and thick base in all other memory images of the roof. The drawing, the rewriting then the redrawing is my medium in reconstructing my memories of my childhood spaces.

The line I draw in constructing the memories is not a straight line; it is the line drawn by the remembering hand. My education in architecture trained my eyes to see architectural narratives through straight orthogonal lines, which was necessary for telling the narrative of non-lived-in spaces, spaces born out of concepts and ideas. The language of my childhood home memory is a language of the remembering body and mind, and the hand-drawn lines allow the instant connection between my memory and the drawn memory image. When I follow the line, I follow a space narrative that grows and tells more of my memory.

My drawings of the spaces remind me of how my child-body. When I drew my memory of the *tarma*, I drew the air cooler high up when my father could reach it with an arm stretch, and when I drew the kitchen cupboards, I was reminded of my closeness to the ground and the space below the cupboards. My drawings also remind me of my feelings in the space. When I remembered the loud bang of the outside gate, I drew the two big metal squares of the door, and before I filled them up with the black color of the gate's metal, I drew the two long slits at the top, then the latch in the middle and the anchor at the bottom, then filled up the two squares with the solid black color. I remembered from the drawing the rigid face the gate had for me; it was the face that kept me from the outside. Following the line and the narrative of the written memories are in a constant dialogue that reveals to me the spaces and the ways my child-self perceived them..



13. Drawing a Memory

Entry

Air

Reaching the Sky

On a dark night, in an hour of deep sleep, Mohammed was awakened by the archangel Gabriel. He stood by the door and gestured to Mohammed for a walk in the night, and they walked, they walked to the Kaaba, the big black cube that stood like a giant under the dark night. When they reached, Gabriel pushed open a big gate that revealed a white beast standing inside the thick dark of the black cube. The beast was half-mule and half-donkey with big white wings that glowed in the dark. Gabriel told Mohammed to mount the beast for an ascent into the skies, and so he did. They flew into the clouds and the seven skies until they reached the highest and the place of most light; it was the place of the throne of the skies.

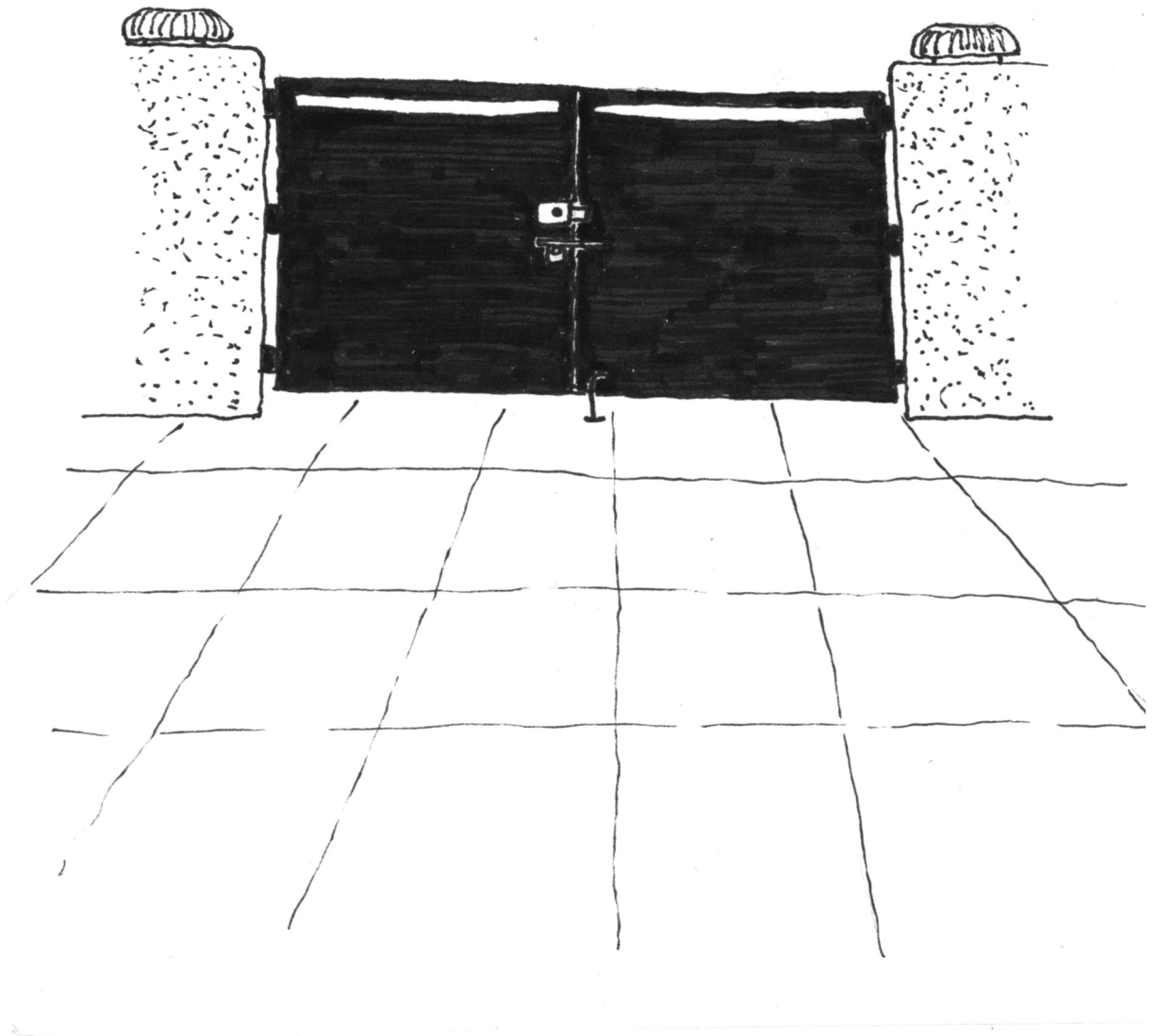
We slept on the flat roof on summer nights. We entered it at night and escaped it in the morning when the sun stung our sleeping faces with its hot rays. We escaped the roof, heating up under the morning sun, and descended to the insides of the house. From inside the house, I sought the outside and the high places that were closer to the sky. I peeked on the outside from the power cabinet and the driveway gate; I watched the air cooler hum from a high platform and tried to grab on the vines that reached the roof. I wanted their heights and closeness to the sky, and I wanted the sight of all that was outside. My memories of the climb up and the want and tempts of becoming closer to the sky are memories of air running on my face and my body.

Driveway: The Gate

“But he had to draw.” Peter Sis drew on the big concrete walls that kept his city away from the rest of the world.

My mother dumped water in the driveway when my uncle left home. She said that water eased far travels. The driveway stretched from the kitchen door to the outdoor gate, and the thrown water moved all the way to the outside. The tiles were wet and made a humid and earthy smell. The car was not in; it was my chance to slide on the wet floor. I bolted from the kitchen door at my highest speed, then slid on the tiles all the way to the big gate. I crashed, and the gate made a loud bang; my mother yelled from the kitchen window.

The gate was held by the light pillars on each side, and it was a two-door metal gate. Each door latched to the other, and a long slide latch kept them locked. The gate had two long slits at the top; when it was closed and locked, it looked like a gazing face with crossed arms, guarding the outside. I slid into its gazing face and made a loud bang; I tried it faster each time; the louder the bang, the faster I was, the louder the bang. I slid many times when my mother was not around, and when she was around, I drew on its face; chalk ran smoothly on its metal face. I waited for the time when the gate was left open when my brother had his long talks with a friend outside. I hung on the open gate door and swung between the outside and the inside. I felt a tickle in my stomach, and I swung harder. When my brother said his goodbyes, we got inside and he closed the gate behind, and the outside was kept outside.

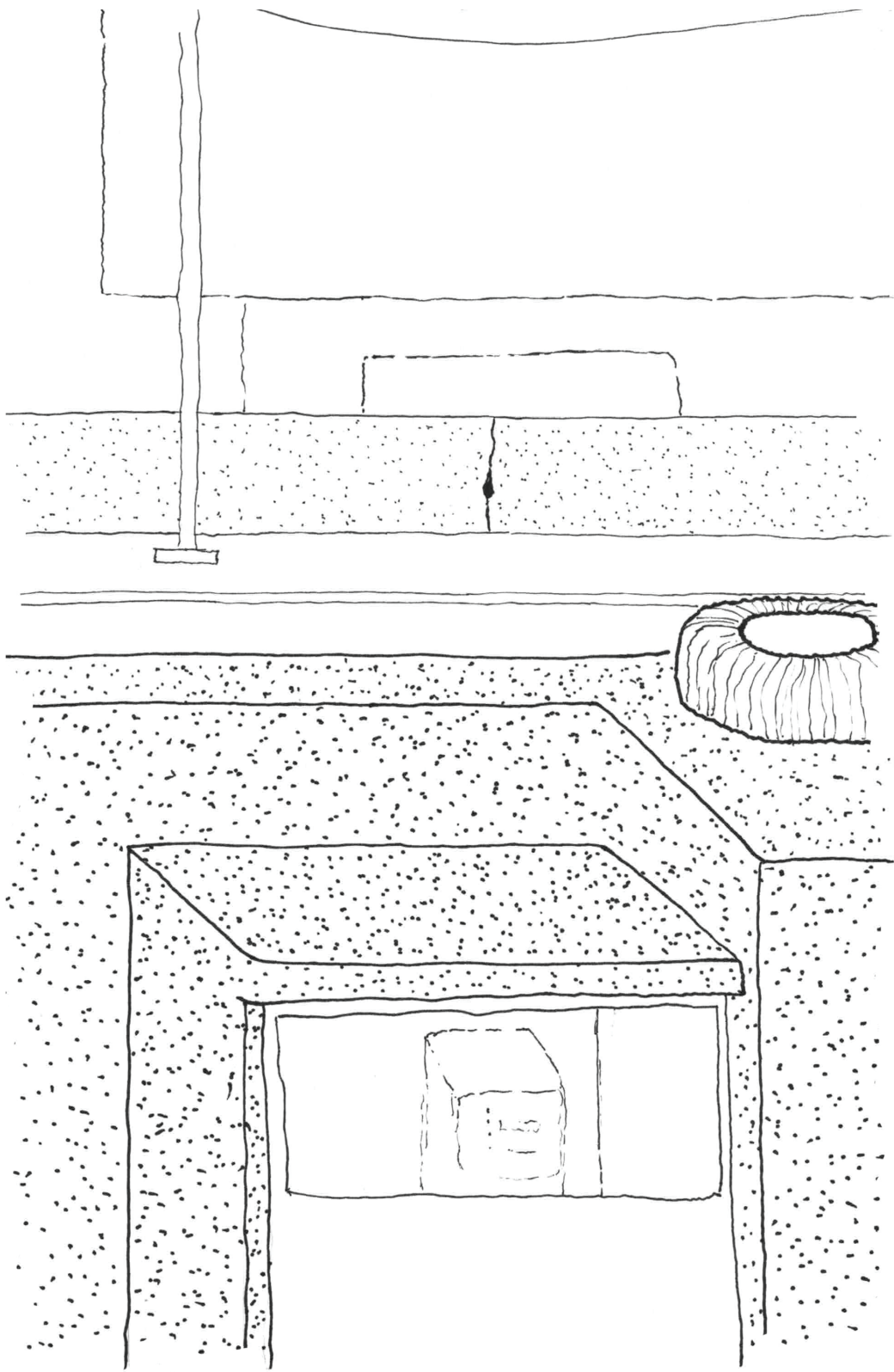


Driveway: The Power Cabinet

The stucco fence wall had two light pillars that stood like big stucco boulders on each side of the gate. They had lights on top, and they were by the power cabinets. Their lights never lit up; my father never changed the light bulbs, and I wanted the yellow lights for my lighthouse.

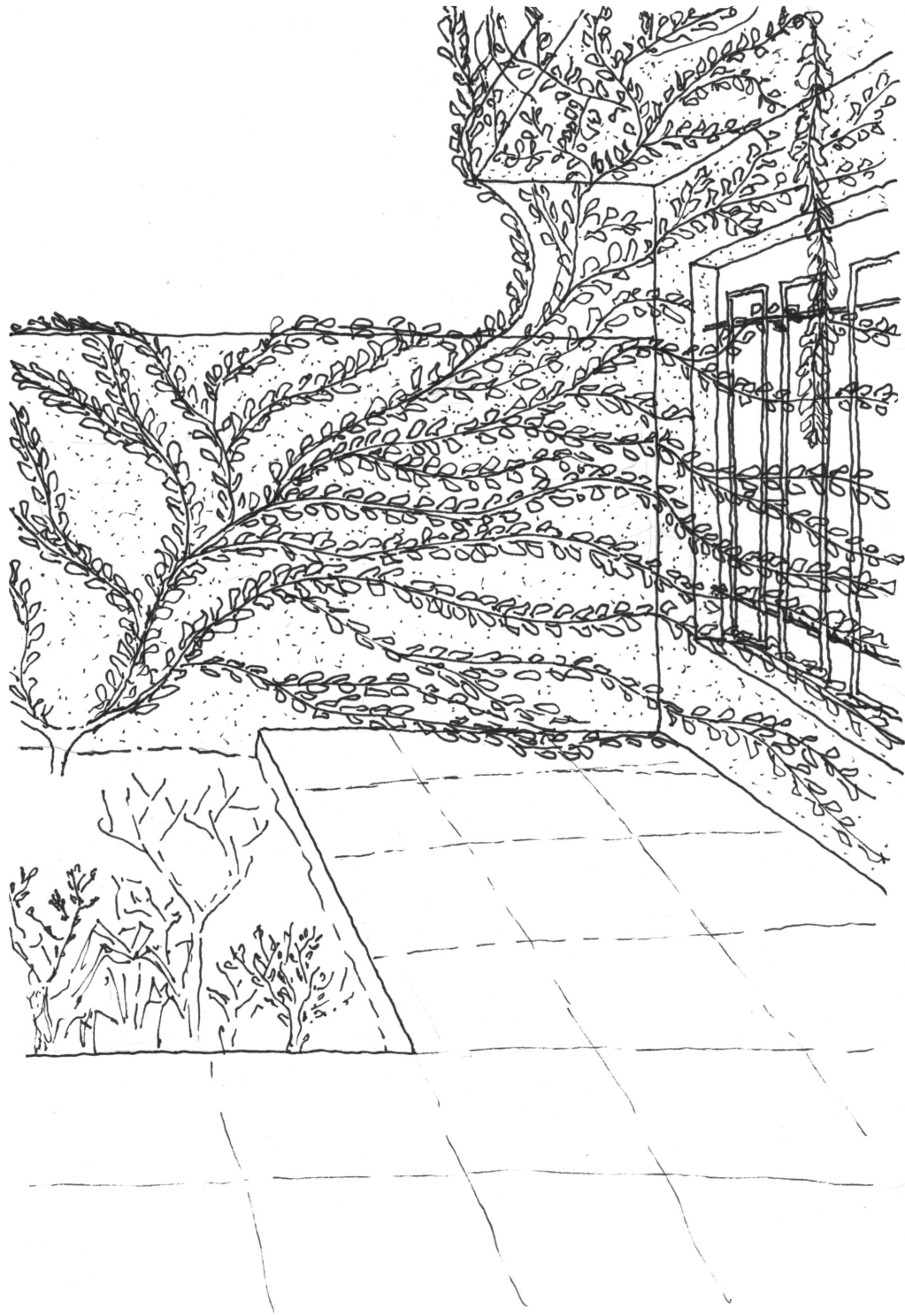
From my lighthouse, I watched the outsiders; I had my father lift me up to the top of the cabinet, the one that was covered with stucco. I kneeled on the rough stucco and rested my arms on the top of the fence wall; the stucco poked my knees like needles, but I ignored it; I was on my duty of watching. I felt the buzz of the cabinet under me; it was the power coming from the giant pole outside and into the cabinet. The buzz meant the lighthouse was on duty.

I watched the passing cars, the floating plastic bags, the passers-by, and how they walked. Things moved far and below my lighthouse. I looked over to my friend's stucco fence from across the street. There was a crack in their wall, and it was shaped like a flipped eye. From that crack, my friend did her watch, and called names when she saw a familiar face on the sidewalk. When they looked puzzled, she giggled; she once did it to me on my way to the bakery. I wanted my share of teasing the passersby, but I was seen from my high lighthouse, and some passers-by asked where my parents were as they walked by, but I never answered; I was higher than them.



Garden: The Vines

There was the green power cabinet on the other side of the gate. It did not buzz with power like the other one, and it was right by the garden, and it was covered with green vines. My mother never let me be on top of that cabinet; she feared the vines would be crushed under my knees. The vines took over everything that was nearby; they were the lush green beast that stretched its arm on the fence walls and curled its hand around the cabinet. The other arm reached the window by the garden, then it went up to the balcony, then over the window behind the balcony. My mother loved how fast it climbed in one summer. I knew it climbed at night when no one could see in the dark. I once got out at night into the driveway when the power was out, and the vines looked like a big dark mass. I fixed my eyes on a spot of the vines to see it move and catch its climb. The leaves flickered in the night breeze, and I did not see the beast stretch up or climb. One afternoon, I saw the highest vine leaf was by the roof wall. It glistened in the sun and shook in the high breeze; It was the smallest leaf and the closest to the sky. Down below, by the garden, there were dangling vines swaying in the breeze. I jumped up with my arm stretched to hang on on one, but the vines were soft and high, and I could not get a grab. I stepped away and looked at the leaf that was by the roof, how high and close it was to the sky.



Tarma: The Air Cooler

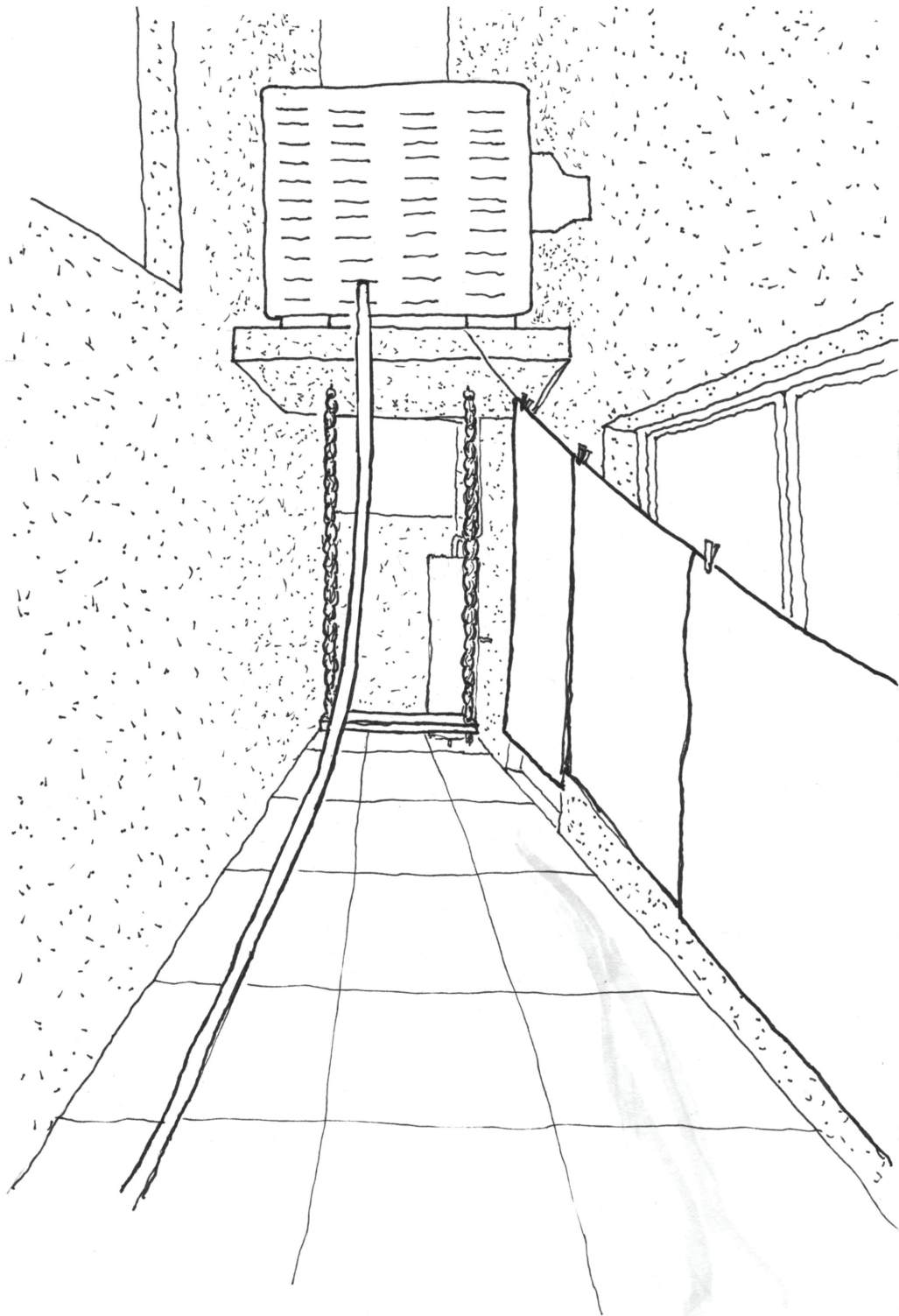
“...Argus who is not only wide-seeing and watchful, but far-seeing...”

I was on the swing under the stucco platform when I tried to reach the sky. I was in our *tarma*, which was the leftover space behind the house. It was narrow and between two stucco walls that went up to the sky. A platform of stucco stretched between the two walls, and an air cooler was settled on. I swung underneath, and I watched my feet go higher and higher when I felt a jolt and a loud beat from above.

The air cooler was turned on; it always started with a loud beat and a hum. My father came out and said that the hum sounded dry.

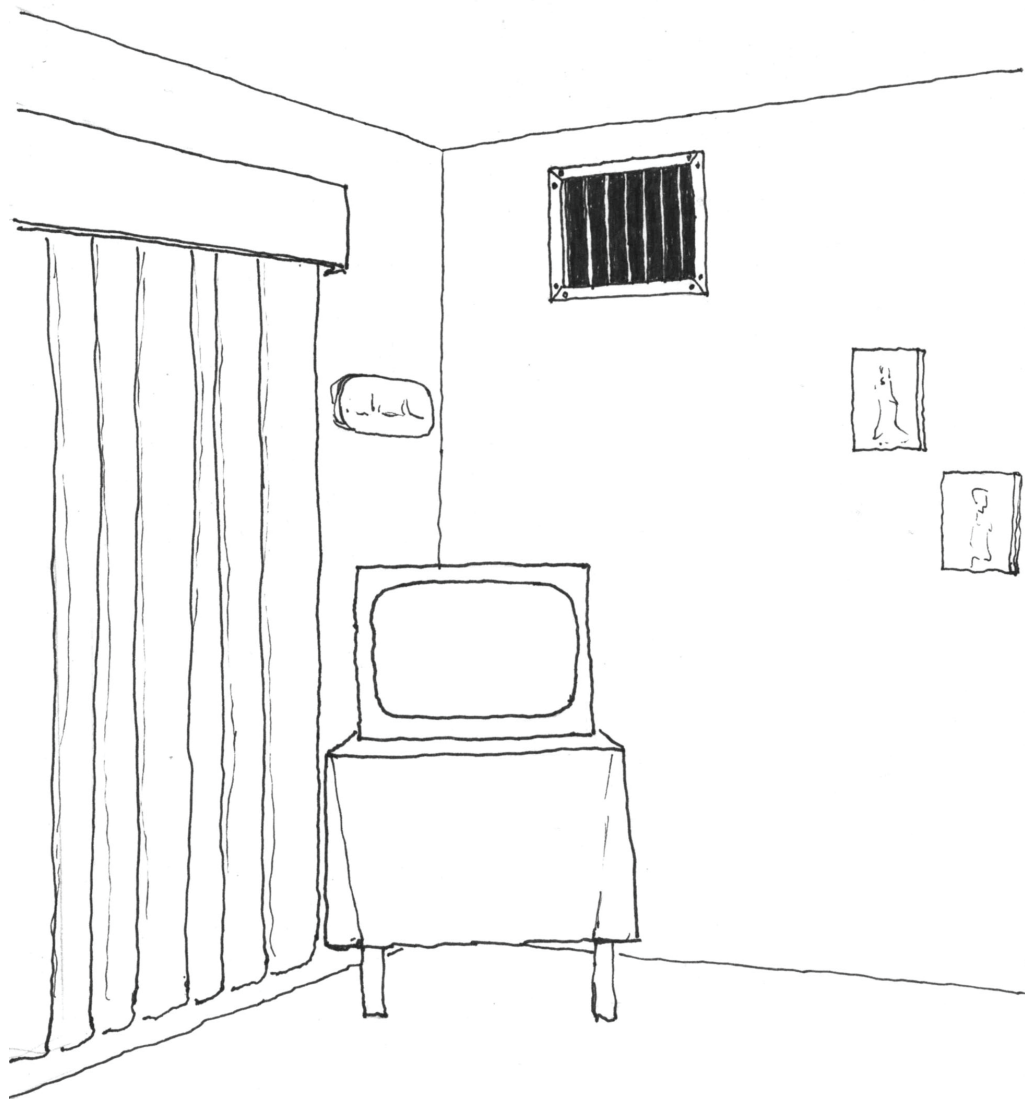
The air cooler was a metal box with rows of slits on the sides; they looked like many narrow eyes. My father grabbed a hose and pushed it into one of the eyes. He said that water cooled the air inside, and he told how it used to be a thing of a window. His mother used to stuff hay into windows, spray it with water, and then leave the wet hay to the sun, turning water into cool air. I could see from the cooler's narrow slits a few straws of hay in the dark insides of the cooler box. I wanted to be high, peek into the slits, and see how the water turned to air.

When the sun was high above the cooler, my mother hung laundry on the clothesline that stretched from the cooler's platform to the stucco wall at the other end of the *tarma*. The laundry dripped on the terrazzo tiles, and the water glistened under the sun. She said that wet laundry made the air cool, which was then sucked by the cooler. The breeze smelled of detergent, and I felt it fly up to the cooler, to the cooler's narrow eyes. The cooler was high up under the sky, and it saw what I could not see from below.



Living Room: The Air Grille

We saw the *tarma* from the living room window, and we saw and heard when the hose fell off of the cooler, and my father coming out to fix it. When it was high noon, my father pulled in all the curtains to keep the sun away and cool the living room. He turned the cooler on from a switch, that was behind the wall of the living room. The black square, the cooler's open mouth, filled the room with cool air. The black square of a mouth was high up; it was above the T.V., the windows, the couches, and us. My brother and I took our places in the living room, anywhere close to the black square. The closest one had most of the cool air that gushed from the deep black of the cooler's mouth.

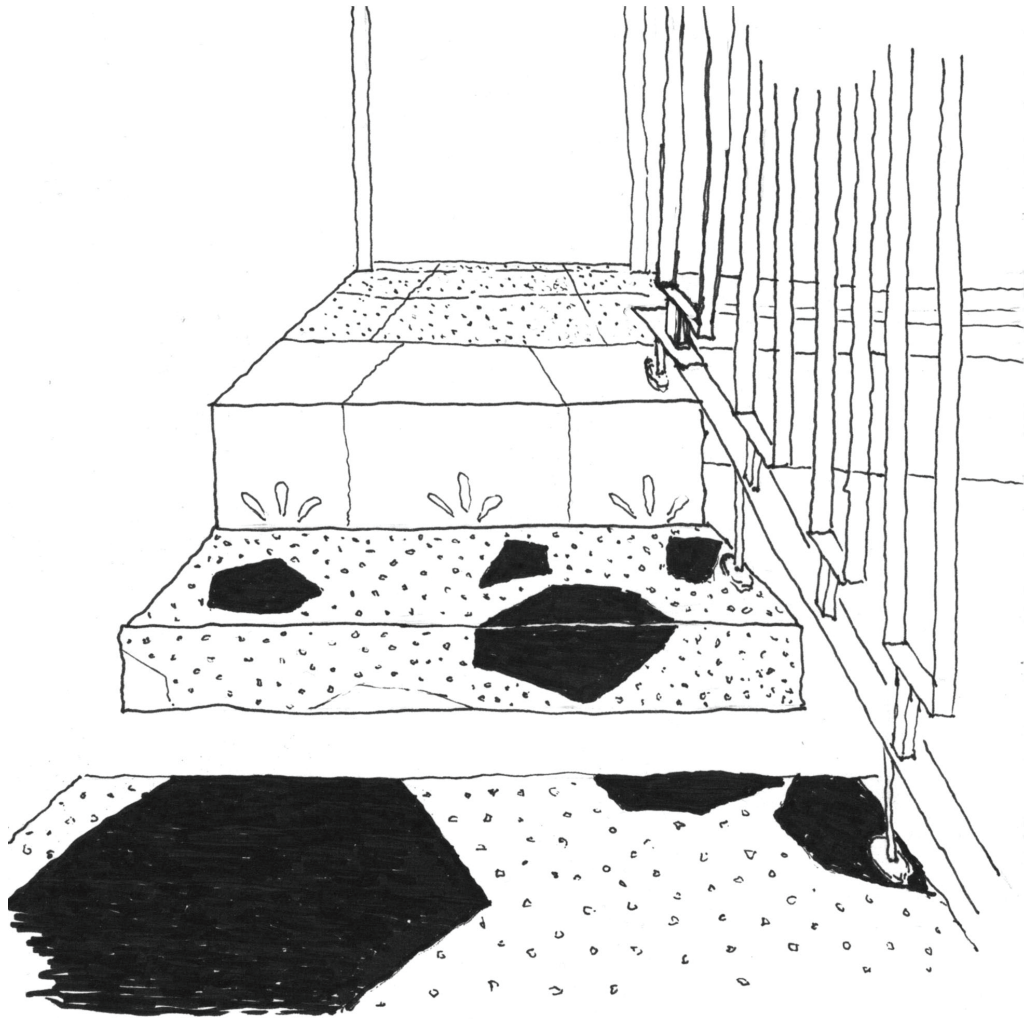


Stairs: The Marble Steps

“...he saw in front of him a wide, shining white road stretching away, and away, and away.” When Jack reached the sky at the top of the beanstalk.

On windy days, the air moved from under the door of the *tarma* to a long corridor, then to the stairs, then up to the second floor. It was the pushed-in wind that whistled in the house. On the second floor, my mother’s bedroom door was shut. I knew the wind had it shut. I was at the top of the marble stairs when I felt a rushing wind coming from the bottom gap of her door. I went up and put my cheek on the terrazzo floor to peek at the bedroom from under the door. I wanted to see if the balcony door was open, and it was not, but the wind gushed on my face, and I felt the terrazzo floor and the bedroom stretch away to the outside, to the cloudy sky.

I got up and went down a few steps. I sat on a cold marble and dangled my feet from between the steps. I faced my mother’s door gap and felt the gushing wind hit my face and shoulders. I began to paddle. I started with a slow paddle, feeling the air from between the steps; my stomach felt lighter. I paddled faster, and the smell of marble air grew stronger; my nose and feet felt cold from the marble air. I paddled even faster and hung on tighter; I felt the air rising and the steps feeling lighter; I was in a took-off and a float in the marble air. I clenched my teeth as I paddled to the highest speed, and I imagined a float into the clouds until I felt a blow of wind hit my face. My mother opened her door, and the wind blew from her room. She came down the stairs and told me to get off the steps. The gushing air was gone, and the marble steps felt heavy again; the ride was off.

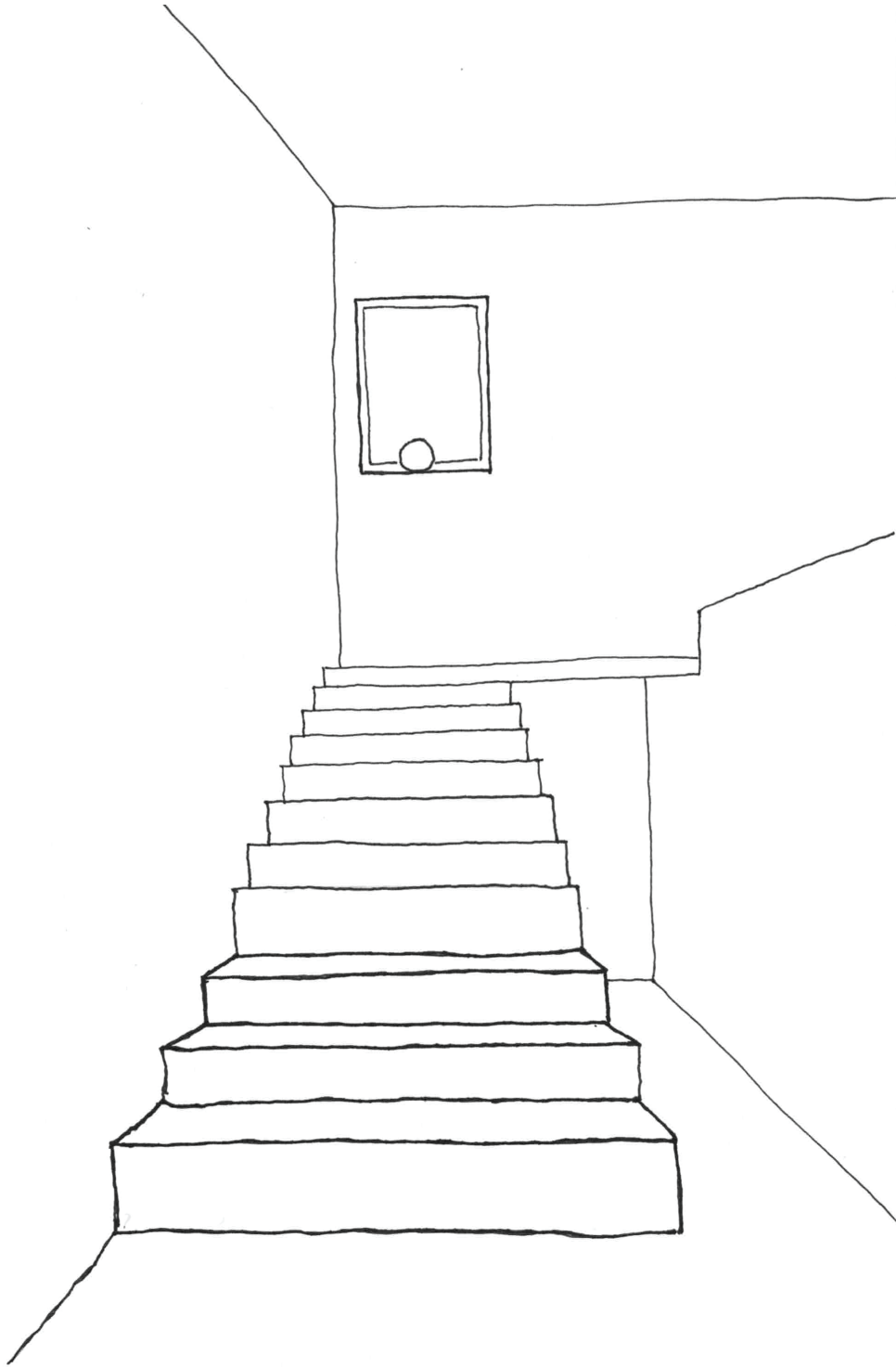


Baytoona: The Small Window

“...she looked up and saw a bright hole in the clouds...”I know”, she said. The sun has dropped an egg...” An elf finds a sun egg.

At the end of the second floor, and beyond our bedrooms, there was *the baytoona*. It was the highest place and the closest to the roof. It was a narrow and long landing that led to the roof's door and that went up from the second floor to the *baytoona* were naked of all railings. The stairs ran naked all the way to a small window at the top. The window was the highest in the house and the closest to the sky. When the sun entered it in the summer, the *baytoona* glowed with a white hallow and became the house of the sun.

On one of the hot and bright days, I was entering my bedroom when I saw a white bright circle on the sill of the small window. The window was open, and the bright circle rolled to the sides with the breeze coming in. The circle seemed as light as a plastic jar, like the ones my mother my mother used to pickle fruit pits under the sun. This one was empty, and it was left open, releasing old smells into the *baytoona*, the smells of sun-pickled fruit pits. The jar was laid on its side with its open head facing the sky and its bottom facing me. I stood still by the foot of the naked stairs, watching the bottom of the jar glow with the sunlight it swallowed. I wanted to climb up and feel the hot and sun-filled jar, but it rocked to the sides again; it was alive, and I feared that, so I stayed down below, watching the sun glow in a jar.

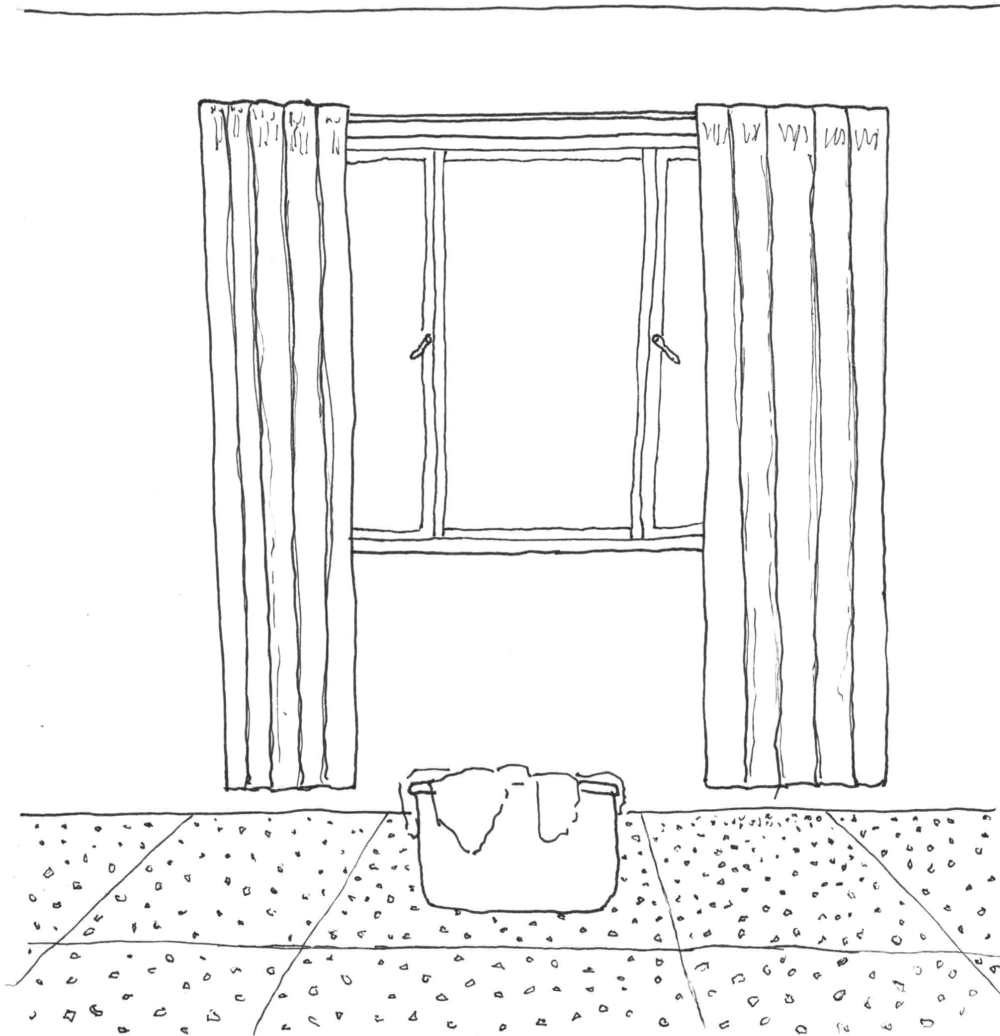


My Bedroom: The Laundry Basket

“...the Sun gave his child the fiery thongs and placed him in the rapid car...” The young Phaethon reached the heavens with a fiery chariot.

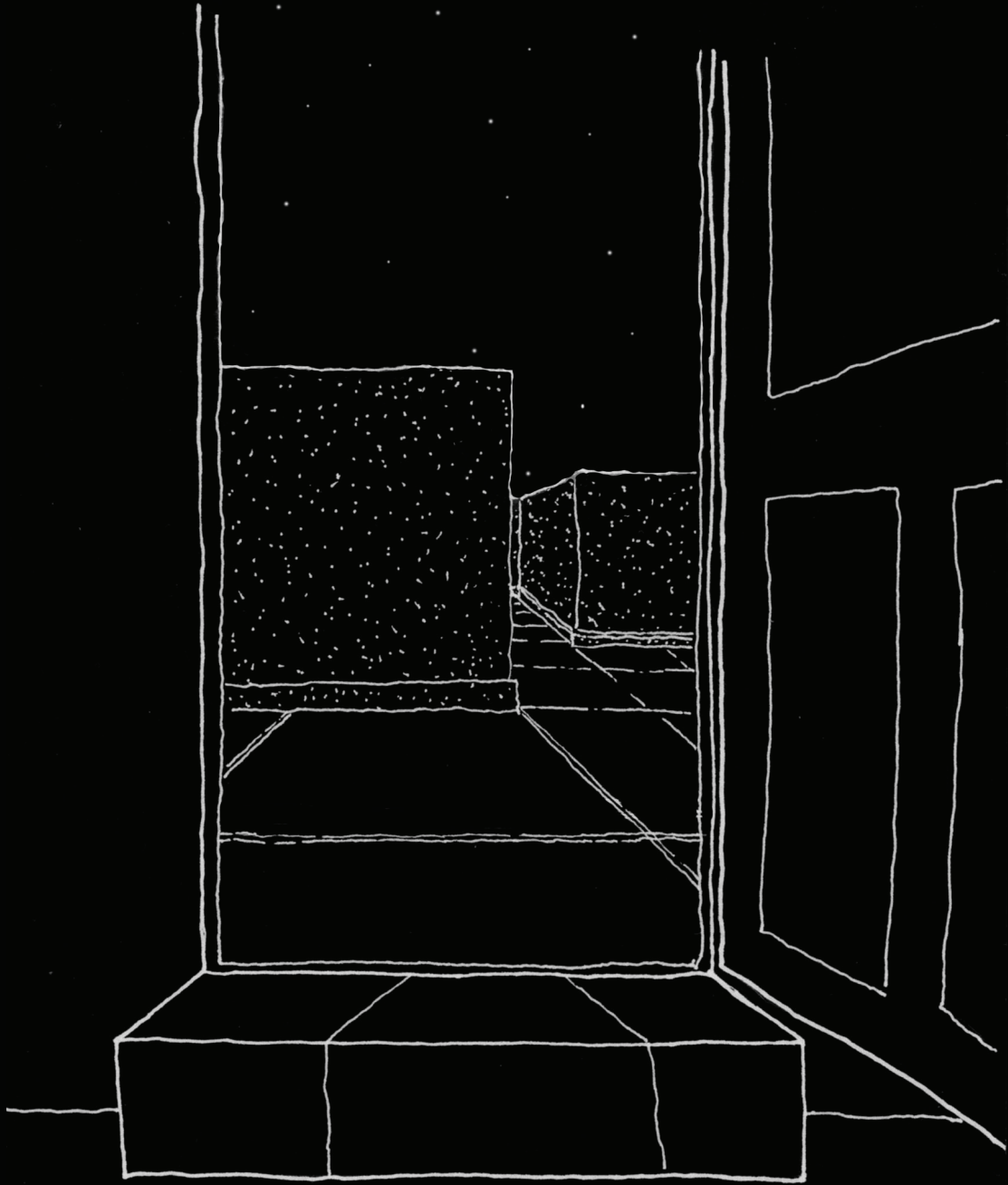
On a hot summer afternoon, the sun took hold of the windowpanes; they were as bright as white sheets. The sun spread over the napping neighborhood, and the house and the bedroom were as quiet as four a.m. I did not like naps; I roamed around plotting for a play. My sister napped in the bedroom under the fan and in the hot sun. I dragged the laundry basket from my wardrobe and placed it right across the glowing windows. I set the ceiling fan to the highest speed and sunk myself into the basket, into my throne.

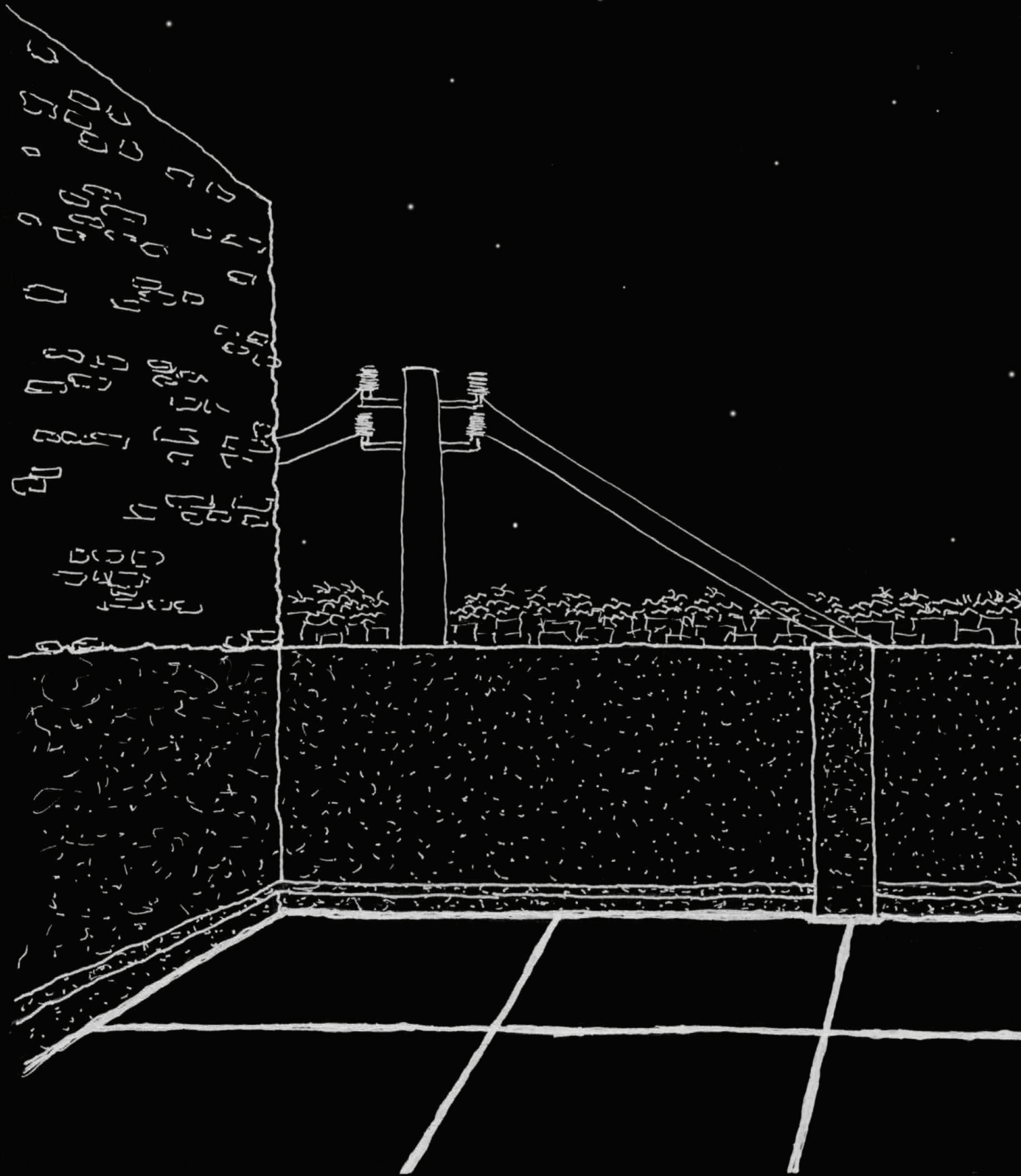
The room was windy and hot, and the smells of the hot sun rose up. It was the smell of plastic from the basket and polyester curtains. I felt the heat around my feet from the terrazzo floor, and the hot sun rays bathed my face. I closed my eyes and rested my head on the rim of the basket, and I faced the fan above. I saw darkness in a bright beating red; it was a beating with the turning fan above. I felt the beating become faster and closer, then faster and closer; my body felt lighter. I kept my eyes shut to see how close I could get to the ceiling fan and then to the sun, but I could not. The beating red was growing faster and larger, and I opened my eyes wide. The sun glared into my eyes, and I felt the swift return of my body to the ground. The sun grew too bright; I was too close to the sun.

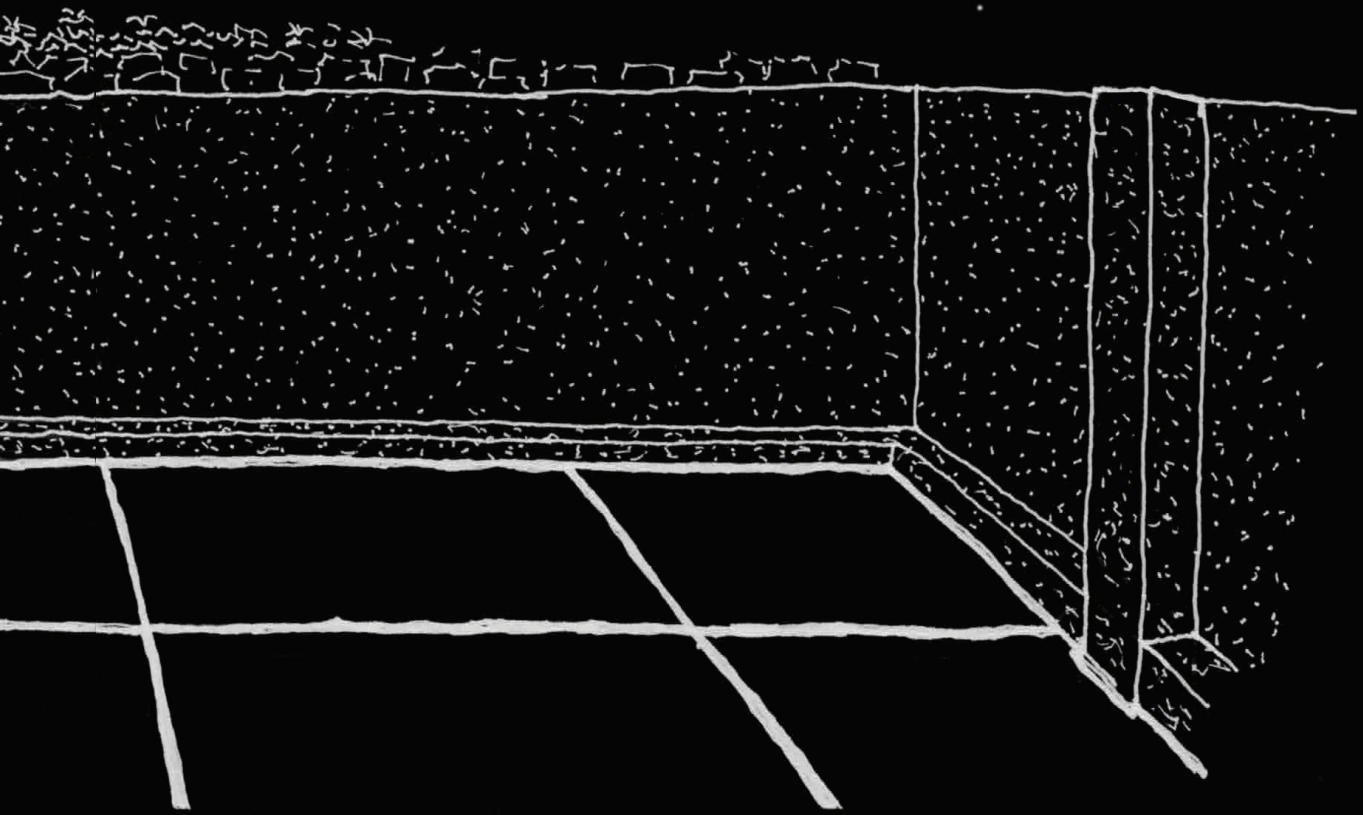


Roof: The Roof Door

At night, when the power was out, I gathered my pillow from my bedroom and went out to the metal cabinets next door, to grab a mattress. I heard the loud latch of the metal door opening above; my mother opened up the roof's door and released the wind into the insides of the house. The second floor was filled with the smell of cement and tar, the smell of the roof. We gathered by the metal cabinets, and each collected their mattress and headed to the naked stairs of the *baytoona*. The moon peeked from the small window at the end of the stairs, and a faint moonlight fell on the naked stairs. Each felt the first step in the faint moonlight and went up. The peaks of the mattresses moved up one after the other, and the moon was covered and revealed in the rising mattress' peaks. I leaned on the wall and hugged my mattress to the side of my body; I feared a fall from the stairs. I heard the first steps hitting the floor of the roof, and I quickened my climb-up to reach the metal door. I saw the thick white marble doorstep; it had a dim glow in the dark. I made the big step over it and onto the floor of the roof, and the air of the sky brushed my cheeks and arms. I dropped my mattress on a metal bed and ran to the stucco fence wall; from it, I watched the big silent city under the big night sky; I was then, the highest and closest to the sky.







Water

Seeing the Underground

“...and throw him into the unknowns of the deep wet well...”

Joseph was the youngest, and he loved his older siblings. He wanted to be around them in their father’s field, but the father did not allow it. One day, the eleven siblings asked their father to have Joseph come with them for a play in the open fields, and Jacob refused; he feared for Joseph from the wolves. They swore to protect him, and Joseph swore to be careful; they swore and pleaded until the father agreed.

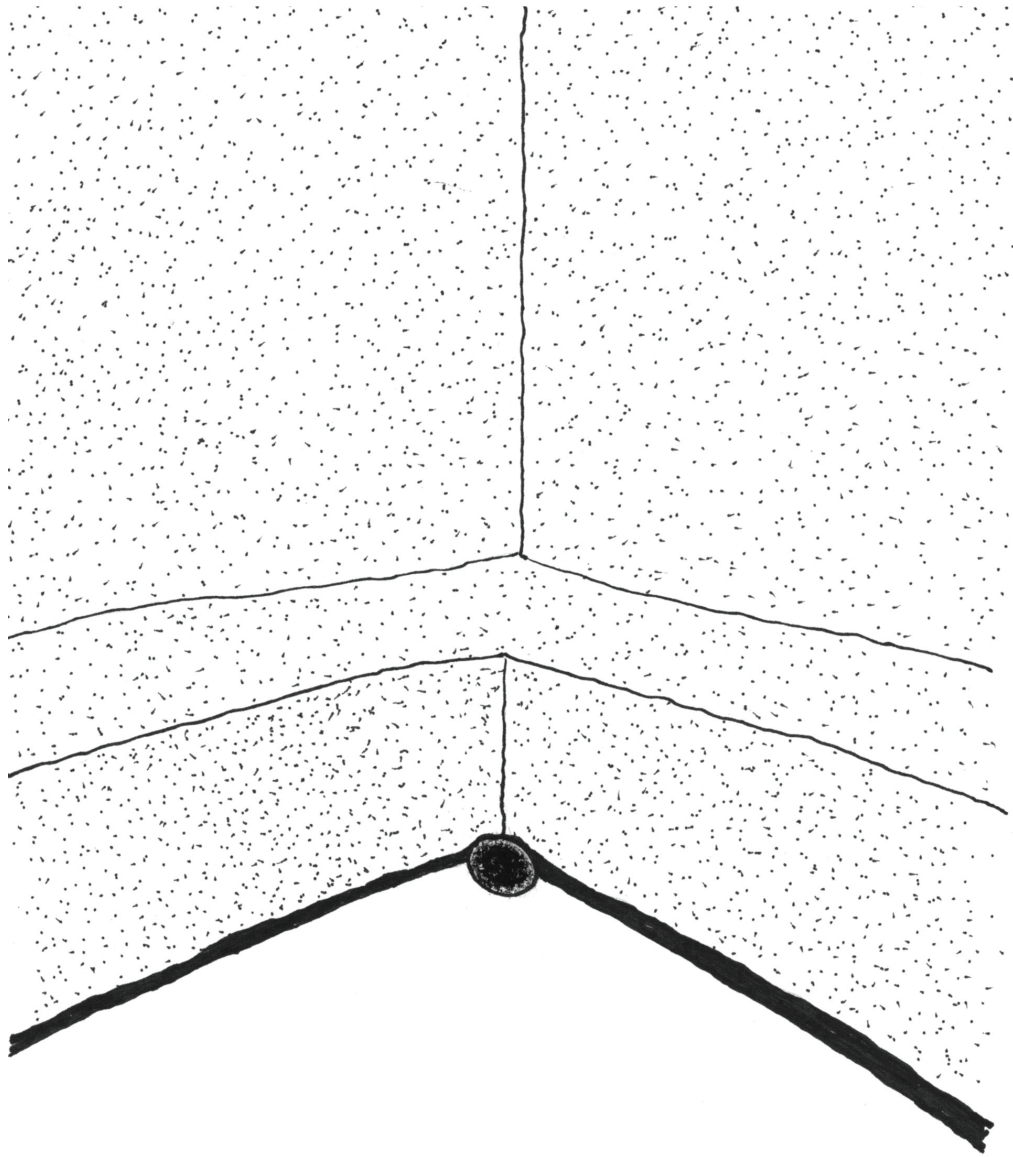
They took Joseph to the outskirts of Canaan, for the fields were vast for free play and run. When they reached, they let Joseph off the mule, and before he could run in the open fields, they grabbed his arms and legs and lifted him to a well. Joseph fought them, but they were bigger and stronger, and they dropped him down into the depths of a well. They left him there, and Joseph called out into the night sky above him, but no one heard. He was alone in the dark well with the rats and insects and the wet ground around his feet.

I feared drainage holes and gutters; they were dark and deep, and the underworld things lived inside them. Batts slept inside gutters, and cockroaches and mice lived inside drainage holes in the bathrooms, the kitchen, and the *tarma* outside. Lizards hid in the bathrooms and the shaft where the vanity sink was. They watched from high up; they watched my handwashing and my bathing. I feared the bathroom the most; in there, my family left their adult things of blood clothes and razors, and I feared mice the most; I saw my mother’s adult ways of handling them. My memory of water going down to the underground is a memory of my leg’s hair rising.

Roof: The Gutter

There was a black hole in one of the roof's corners. A small black circle was nestled on the floor between two stucco wall bases. It was the mouth of the gutter that leached on the stucco wall and made its way into the roof. The mouth blew a cold breeze that smelled of cement and plastic.

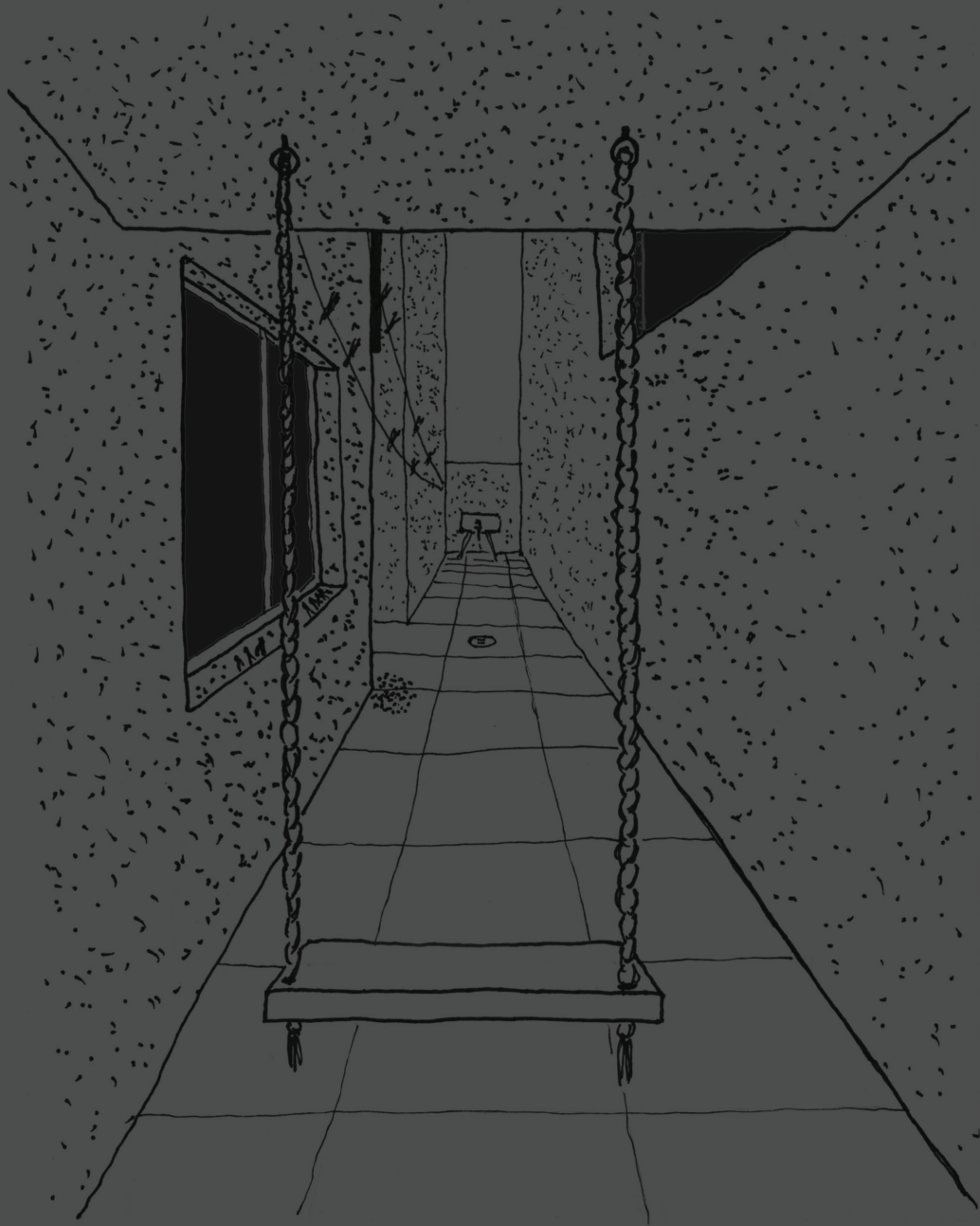
I remember the sun was still low, and the floor looked blue when I found a bird's nest stuffed into the gutter's mouth. The eggs were gone, and the golden strands were coming apart, revealing the black hole. I grabbed a big pebble from the wall base and threw it into the hole. I saw it disappear into the dark, and it rattled in its fall. The rattle was quickly muffled, and I felt a pull inside. I grabbed more pebbles and stuffed them into the hole. They held up then fell, and I stuffed in more to cover the hole; they kept falling and rattling into the down below.



Tarma: The Gutter and the Drainage Hole

“...a grim “hell” whose residents are clad like birds, deprived of light, and have soil and clay as their food...” An imagination of the Netherlands.

Sunlight was fading into dusk, and things in the *tarma* were turning into shadows. At the very end of the *tarma*, there was the small oil barrel that sat on a four-legged table; it looked like a big spider that watched from that end under the darkening sky. My sister and I were at the wet end, the end where the clothesline stretched, and the gutter stuck out from the roof above. My sister looked up to the gutter’s black hole; there were batts stuffed inside. I saw the black angles of their wings come in and out of the black hole above. She grabbed a hose and began scrubbing the batt’s droppings on the terrazzo floor. They floated in the water and were pushed away like black rice into the floor drainage. The drainage babbled, and my sister sent away more waves of water in her scrubbing, and it began to smell like oil, it was the smell the drainage made when it was about to overflow. I looked at the drainage and saw the water fall into a pitch-black hole. I could not see how close the sewage water was, but I heard the water babble change into a gurgle, and my feet and legs tingled. The drainage was overflowed, and it spewed a black lump of hair and a cockroach. I scurried back with splashing steps, and my sister, under the dim skylight, aimlessly sprayed the drainage.

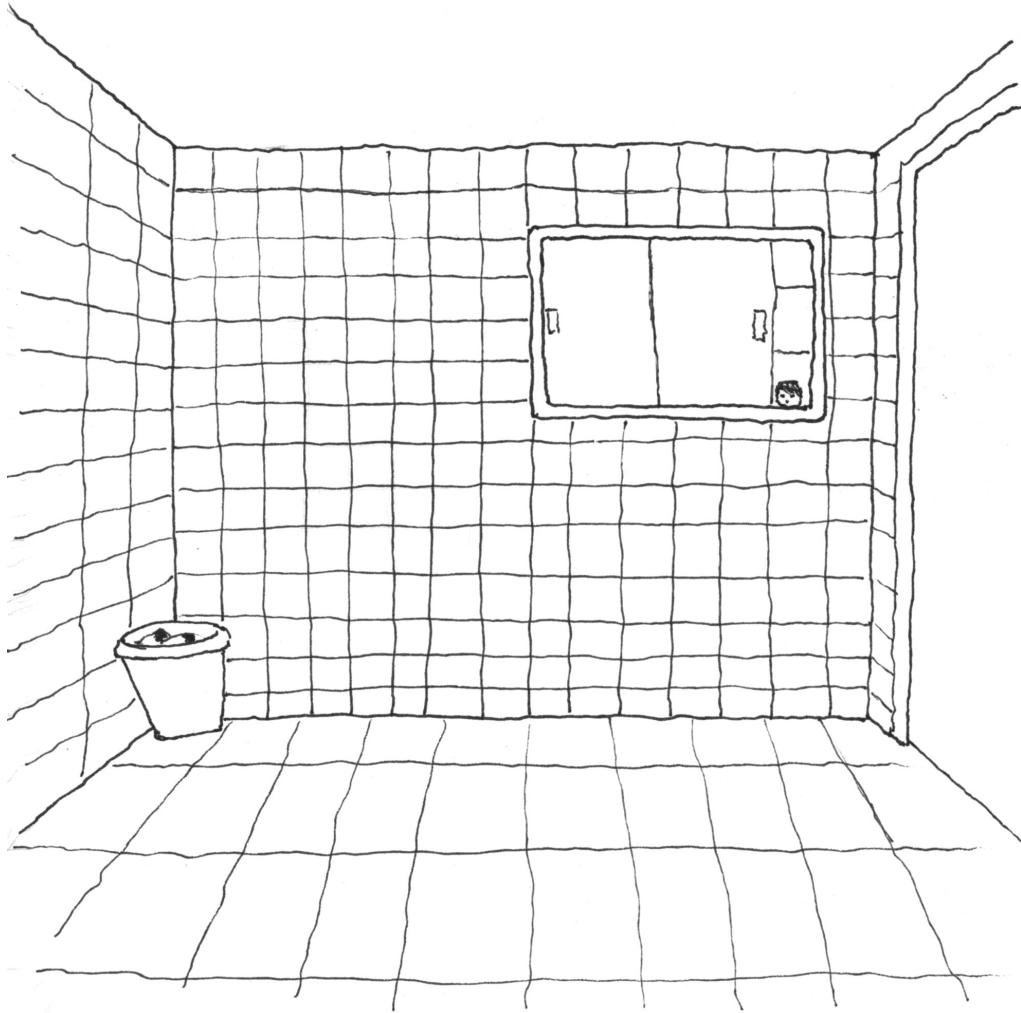


Bathroom: The Trash Basket and the Cabinet

The green bathroom was the shower room that had faucets, two drainage holes, green floor tiles, and a narrow window that was close to the ceiling, and it overlooked the *tarma*. A big silver faucet was below the window, and it dripped over a green plastic basin. I turned the hot and cold to the highest speed, and the water came out gushing into the basin.

I watched the steam rise to the sunlit window, and the bathroom began to smell of something pressed. I looked at the ceiling above where the steam rose and scanned for lizards; they often pressed their bodies against the ceiling and corners. I scanned the corners more than once; I feared their dizziness with the rising steam and their eventual fall to the bathroom floor. I watched the basin fill up with water and gave my back to the back wall; it was the side of the lizards and the garbage basket of blood clothes. The bigger lizards hid behind the rusted mirror cabinet that was hung to that wall. One of the mirror doors was jammed and did not close; the baby-head jar peeked from the jammed opening. The baby jar was filled with sour crystals; “for adults,” my sister told me once when I showed her one.

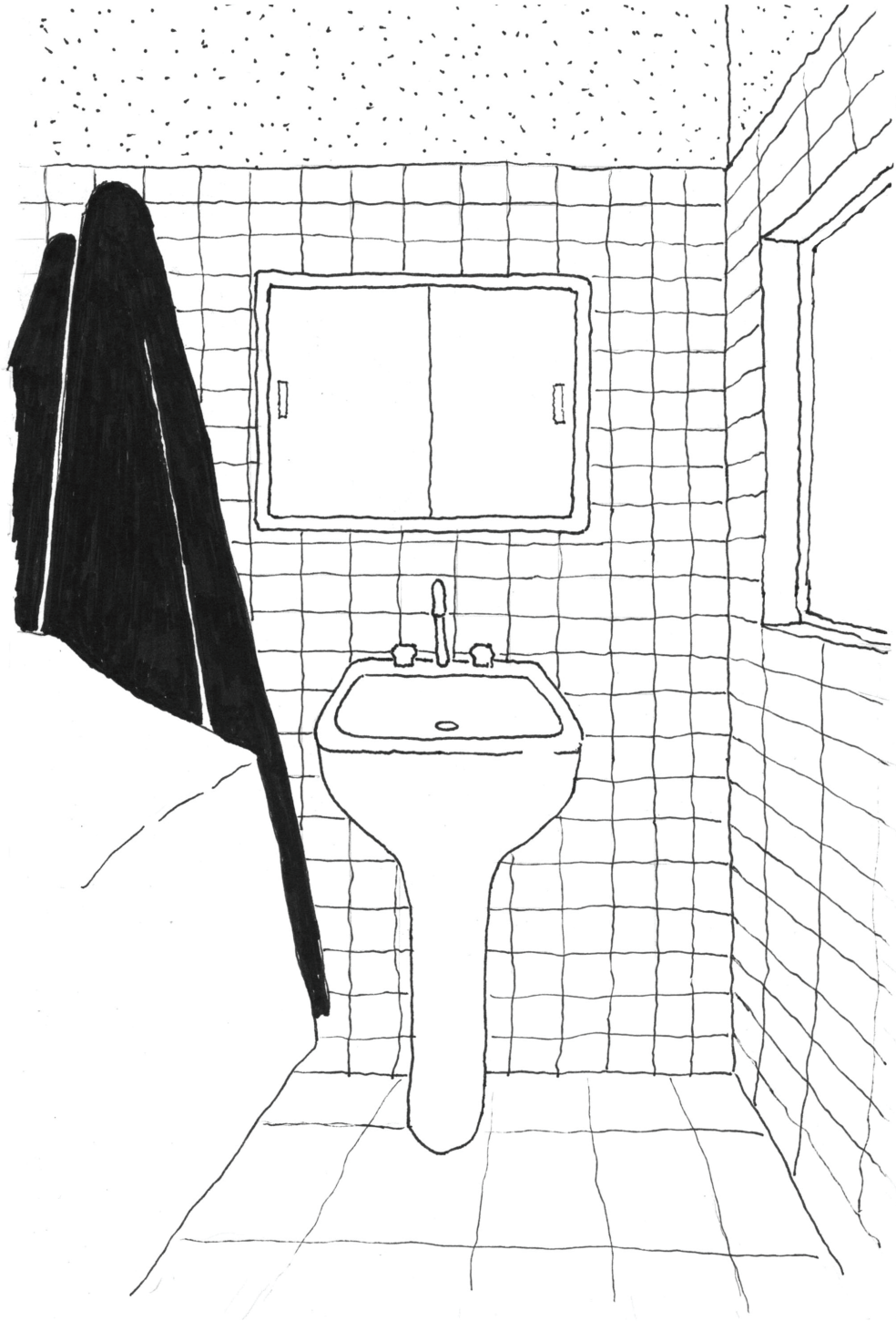
The basin overflowed, and I kept the water running. I threw my clothes to the back and dumped water over me with the sunny-yellow bowl. The warm water ran all over my body, and I inhaled the thick steam after every dump of water. I did my washing with my back to that wall and stopped the water from running when I heard a small slapping sound, the sound of a lizard hitting the floor.



Shaft: Sunny Day

It was the stucco shaft that went all the way up to the sky, covered with a pyramid-shaped skylight. The glass triangles were painted white, and the skylight let in a soft white glow of sunlight. Down below, the white ceramics of the vanity sink gave a white hew under the skylight. Beside the vanity, there was the washing machine and the coat tree jammed to the side; my mother covered the machine with a thick black cloth and threw her long black head covers on the coat tree; they both did not see what moved in the shaft.

Up in the shaft, the stucco was not always stucco in some spots; they were lizards, beige lizards that blended with the stucco. They were only seen in one of their sudden moves when a fly was near. They were the highest, and we were below them; no one could reach them, and they grew big with time, and their eyes got bigger. They watched our daily washings, my mother's laundry days, and they watched her coming in and out when she grabbed one of her covers. My head tingled when I washed my hands; I feared their fall on my head.

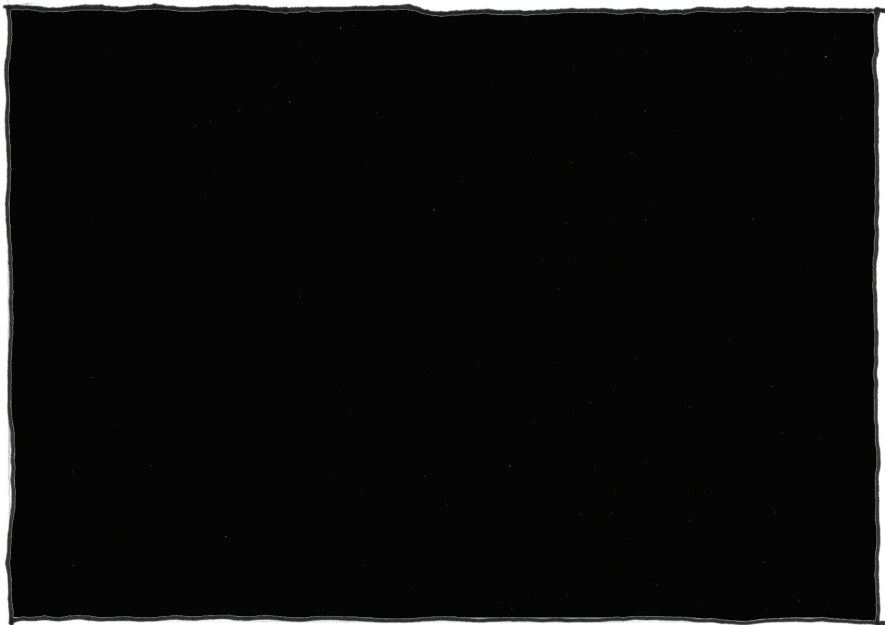
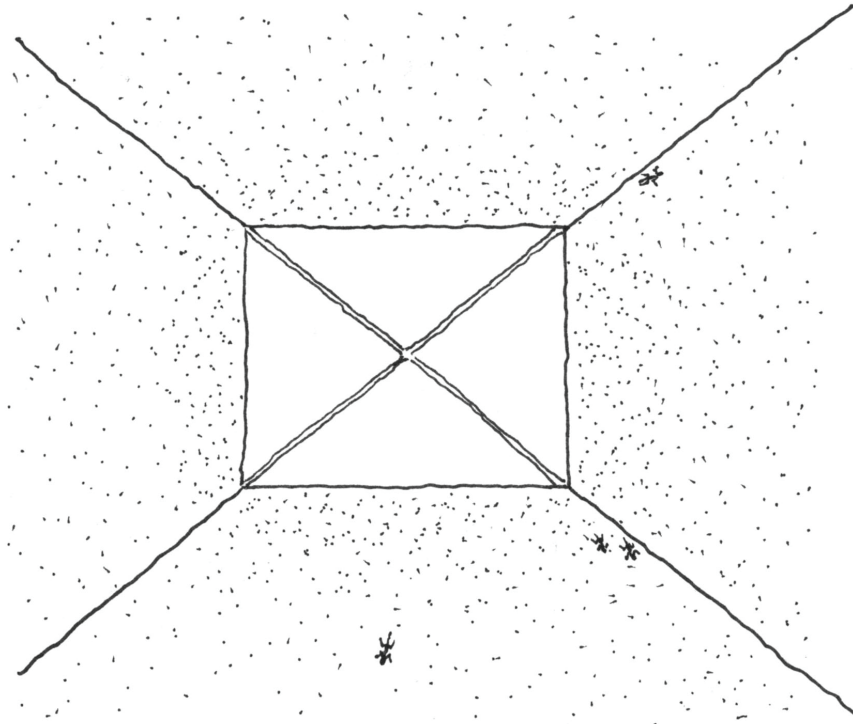


Shaft: Storm Night

“I knew he was [...] somebody who knows about the great dark.” A group of kids explored the underworld of the sewage.

I passed by it many times on my way to the bathroom at night, the nights when the power was out. When I left my bedroom, I faced the square of dark, the opening that overlooked the shaft.

The shaft, the one the lizards lived inside its walls, was dark, deep dark; the skylight was not seen, nor the four walls of the shaft; It was a black square. The rain on the skylight was heard but not seen; raindrops got inside, for the skylight had gaps and was never fixed. My mother lined the basins below, and it was filled up fast on storm nights. The raindrops hit the bottom of the basin with a deep blob sound, and the dark shaft felt deeper. I once dared and stood there in the dark and looked up at the unseen skylight, and rain drops hit my forehead, and shallow water on the floor entered between my toes; I felt I was inside a well under a rainy black sky. It was the endless wet black.

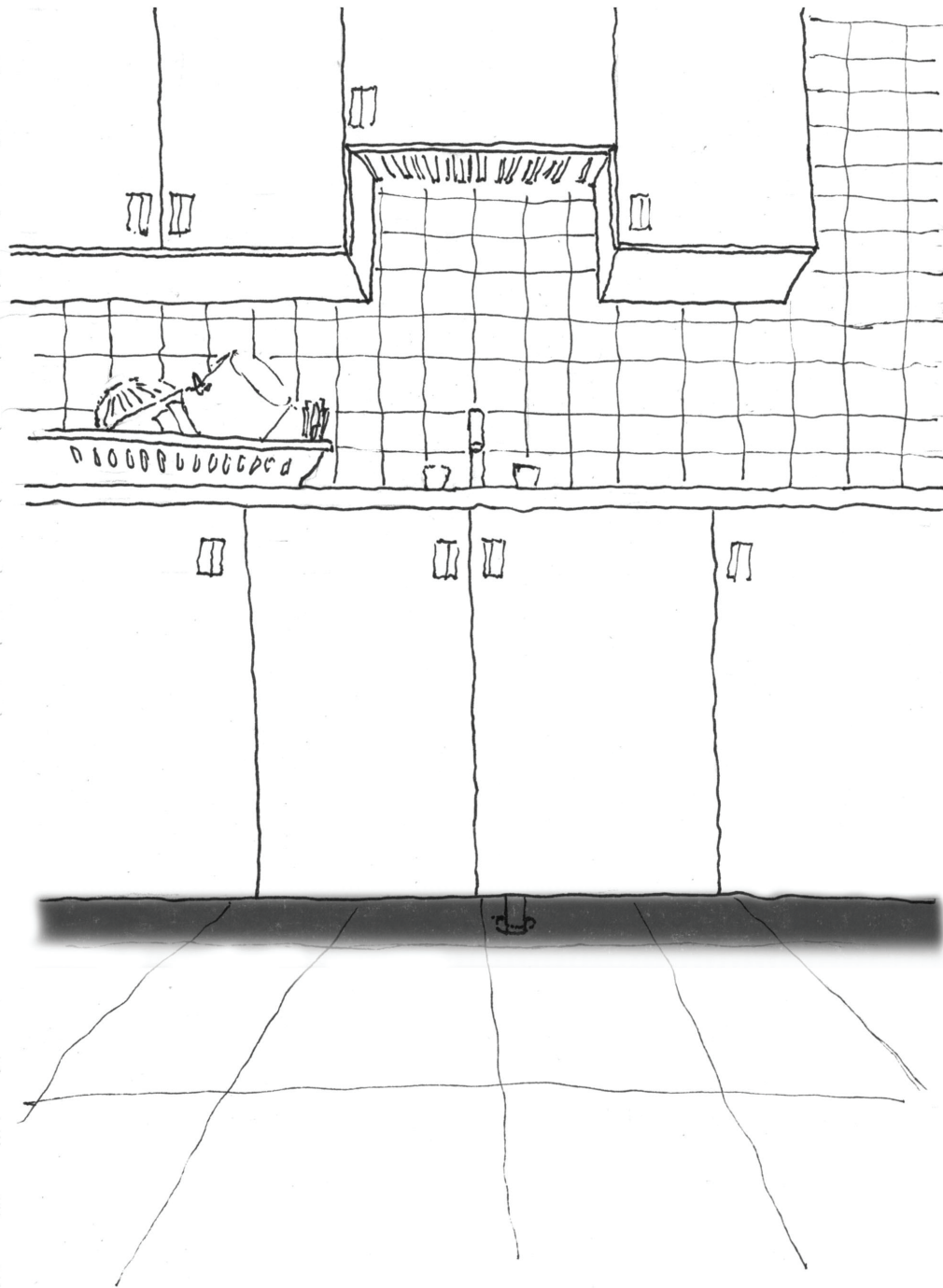


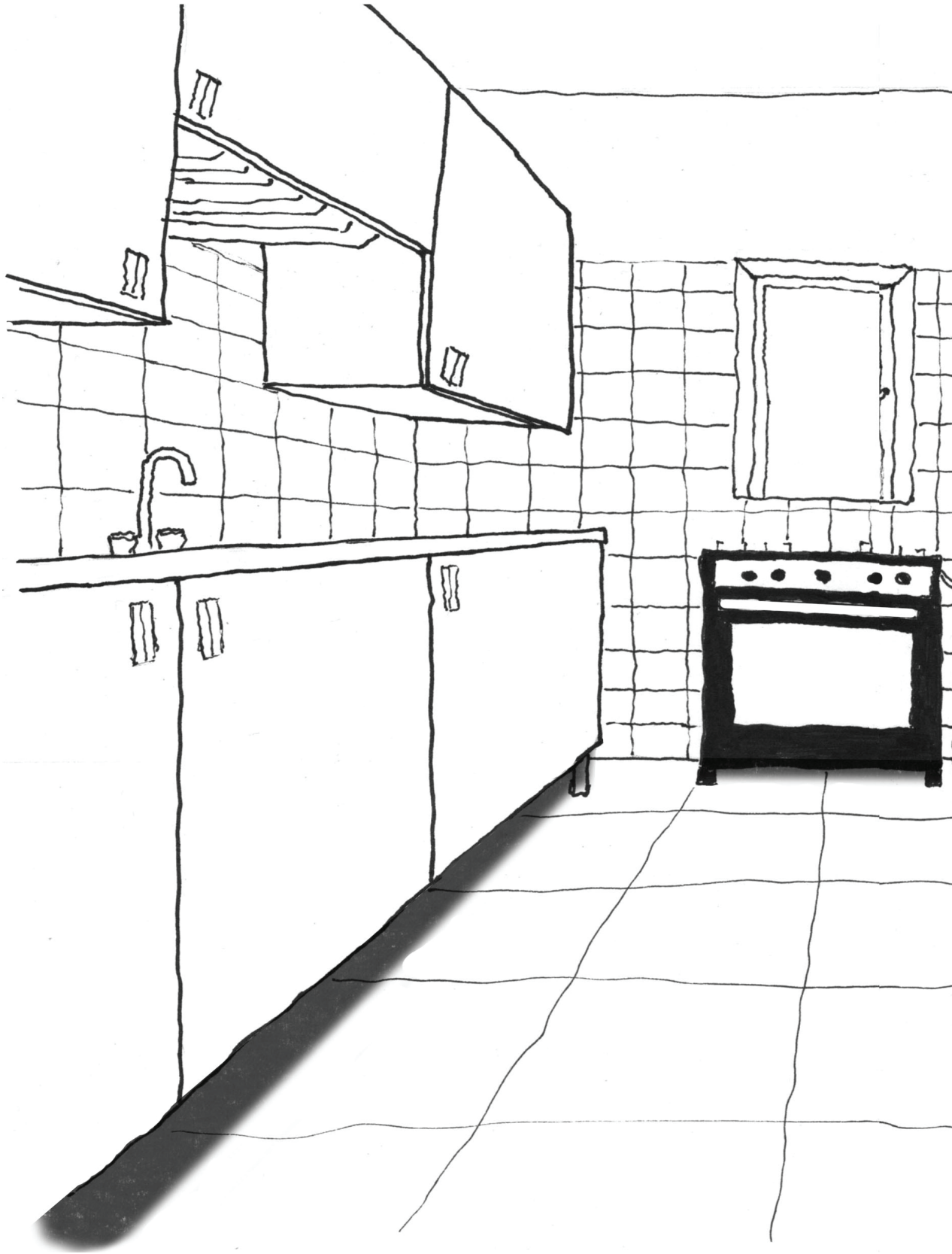
Kitchen: Under the Cupboards

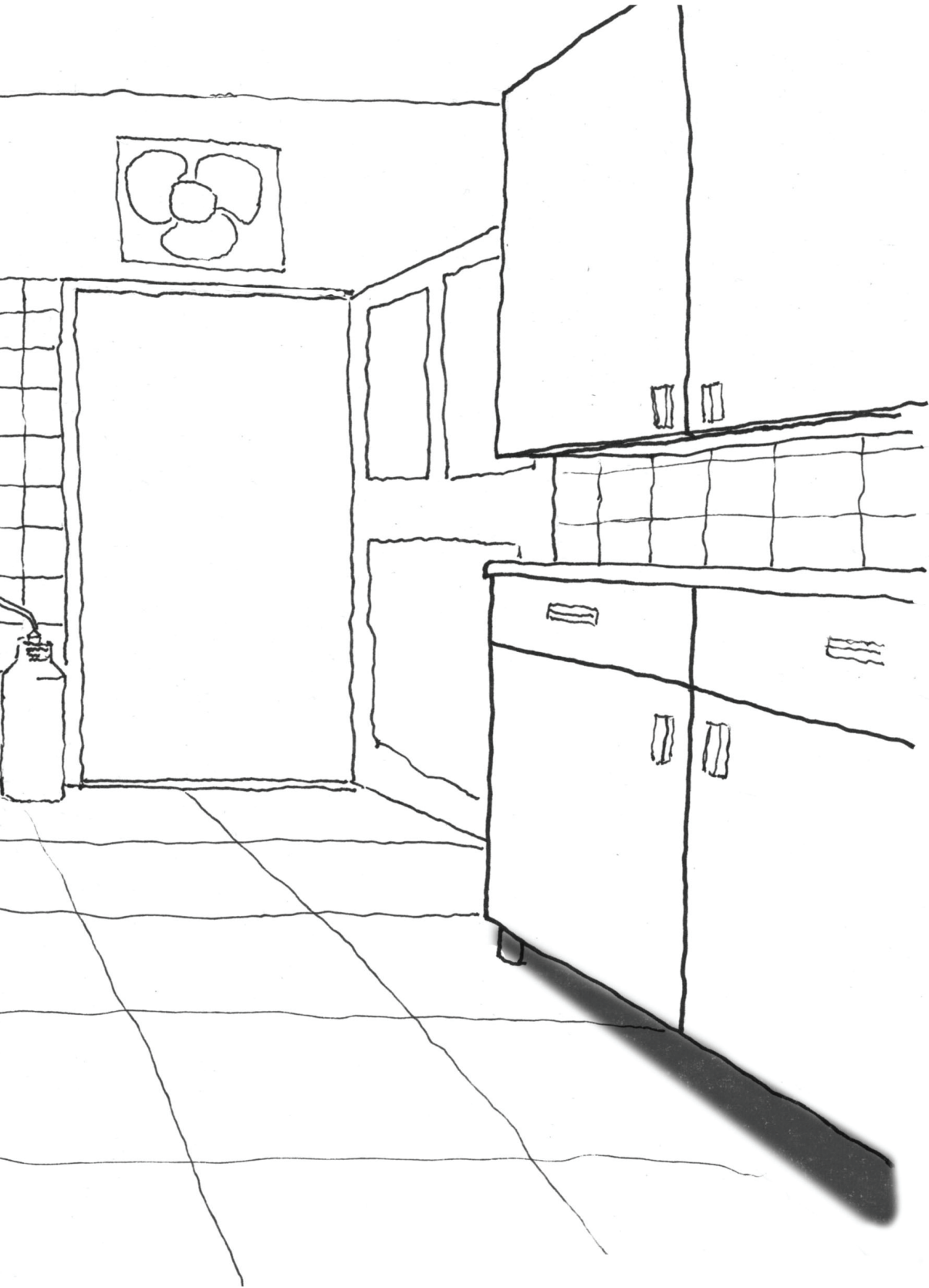
When my mother washed the big pots with a running faucet, sink water sounded like a gurgle going into the pipes and then into the underground. I was crouched on the floor when I felt the water run like a muffled stream under the kitchen floor. I was crushing pickled fruit pits to take out the white hearts inside and collect them in a bowl; the pits' hearts were my mother's replacement for almonds. The smallest pits were the hardest to crush; they slipped under the hammer and twirled all the way to under the cupboards. I looked under to see how far they were; some were by the hole, the one where the sink pipe went through. I sat cross-legged and hunched over the small pits to crush them gently and stop them from flying to that side. My mother saw the many pit shells on the floor; she asked to clear them up before the insects smelled them.

On a winter night, the mouse ran around in the kitchen. My mother was out, and my sister and I perched on top of the kitchen counters. The power was out, and we talked in our wait for the return of the neon lights. The mouse came out from the drainage hole under the stove, and it was black; it was stained with the underground gunk. The mouse came out from under the sink, under the freezer, and then under the stove; we squirmed every time it came out and disappeared into the dark. We could not land and return to the fire heater on the floor; the mouse took over the floor that night.

It was a grey, cloudy day when I heard my mother move the stove. I entered the kitchen at a fast pace to see the revealed floor below the stove. The black mouse was moving frantically inside my mother's trap, it was the small cage under the stove. I stood stiffly behind my mother, who crouched in front of the cage. I saw the kitchen door open, and I waited for my mother to take it outside of the house, but instead, she grabbed a hot kettle and poured the boiling water over the cage; the rattle got louder behind the thick steam. I shrieked; I called out for Mother!







Fire

Touching Fire

My sister told the story of the pharaoh's test for child Moses. The pharaoh threw Moses dates and coal. Moses saw the glowing coal; it had streaks of glowing orange, and it flickered; Moses' mouth watered. He stretched his arm and fingers to the flickering coal and burned his finger and tongue. He failed the test; he was not to choose fire.

I watched the fire from a distance when my mother set the stove. The fire was blue and steady, and I watched the gas barrel give gas to the stove. That fire belonged to my mother, and I was not allowed to be near it.

When the power was out, my mother turned on the fire heater, Sopa, and the fire lamp, Lala. When Sopa had the blue fire inside, the darkness in the room was darker, and I wanted it to be lighter. I watched Sopa's fire change from blue to yellow, then to orange. The orange fire shivered and shook the shadows with it; it made the room the brightest, and the smell of oil was the strongest. I wanted a play with angry orange fire, but my mother never allowed it, so I brought things close to it and watched them glow and burn.

Kitchen: From Curbside to Kitchen Door

Prometheus, the titan, stole fire and was punished by the gods. He was disobedient.

The gas barrel had fire in its belly. It was fat and heavy, but it appeared small and low by the big stove. The barrel was bought from a cart from outside, from a street vendor who roamed around the neighborhood and called out "Gas!". We heard him from the back of the house, then from the front of the house. My mother stopped him from the iron gate outside, and she made her pick for an undented fat barrel. The vendor dropped one off the cart; he then rolled it with his foot. He rolled it from the curbside, and up the driveway, then all the way to the kitchen door. I was by the kitchen door, and I felt the vibrations of the rolling around my feet. "It could explode!" my mother muttered, for the rolling could stir fire inside the barrel. The vendor then lifted it up straight and left it to my mother. She dragged it from the head and placed it beside the stove. I saw her take out a black hose from behind the stove and attach it to the nozzle on the barrel's head. The stove took gas from the barrel, and it was lit with fire. I watched from afar, for I was not allowed to be close to fire.

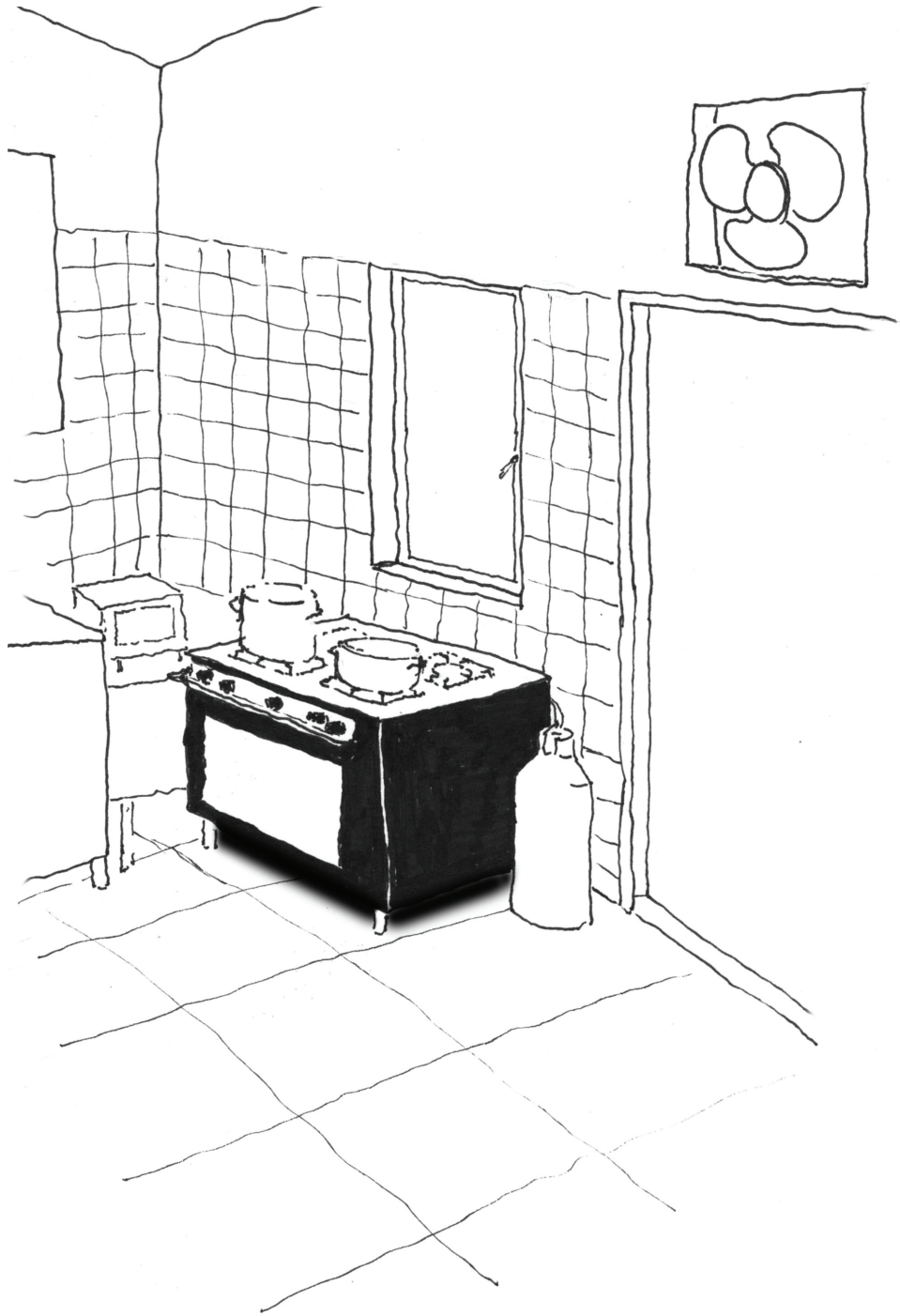


Kitchen: Stove

I don't remember my mother in one place; she moved between her sink and the stove and chatted with a vendor, who had no time to enter but enough time for a chat by the door. It was my mother's rush time; I knew from the boiling pot. The kitchen phone rang now and then. She answered, standing; she had no time for another chat.

I wore shorts, and breadcrumbs poked my thighs. The counter was warm from the kitchen heat and the white morning light. I glanced over the orange pot. I saw its black bottom and mouth wide open, emitting angry steam into the white light. My mother turned an oven knob and fed the burner a match; a blue fire sprang out. She threw onions into the pot, and a splatter of oil spat out, she dumped water into the fry and muffled the loud hissing pot with a cover.

The vendor talked loud and fast; she told of the milk's high prices and the travels she took to sell her cheese to my mother and the next-door neighbors, and the ones across and the ones on the other side of the block. The boiling water overflowed, and the fire hissed under the pot; the flowing water put away the fire, and the chat was cut. The vendor got her pay, my mother bid her well, and the kitchen door was closed. "How much can she talk?!" my mother complained to the pot.



Kitchen: Inside the Stove

“21. O Shamash, organizer of darkness, bringer of light...” A prayer for a god who ruled darkness and light.

The stove made loud squeaks and shook to the sides. My mother was scrubbing the stovetops. The black box of a stove was covered in patches of soap foam; some slid to the ground, around the foot of the stove and the gas barrel beside. I remember the smooth metal surface of the gas barrel; it was stained with oil. I scrubbed the barrel, but my mother grabbed away the sponge and asked me to step away from the gas. She scrubbed the stove knobs, removing oil smudges of her fingerprints, she then opened the stove door, and the inside was revealed.

It was dark inside. The smell of gas and burned grease was the breath of the stove. The stove’s big square mouth was from my waist to the top of my head, and it was cold; I felt it on my face and arms. It was a deep blackness; my breathing halted when I saw the depth. It was a big black oven, and its deep end inside was not reachable; the oven door stretched to the front. The inside was stained with patches of grease that my mother scrubbed with pink fists; It was an angry scrub; she wanted the shiny blackness.

I stood beside the stove’s mouth and peeked into the dark inside. I saw the light bulb in the far corner. “Turn it on!” I said to my mother; she asked me to step aside, I nagged, and she clicked the switch beside the knob; the darkness inside was phased away with a warm yellow light. The oven had darkness and light inside its big square mouth.

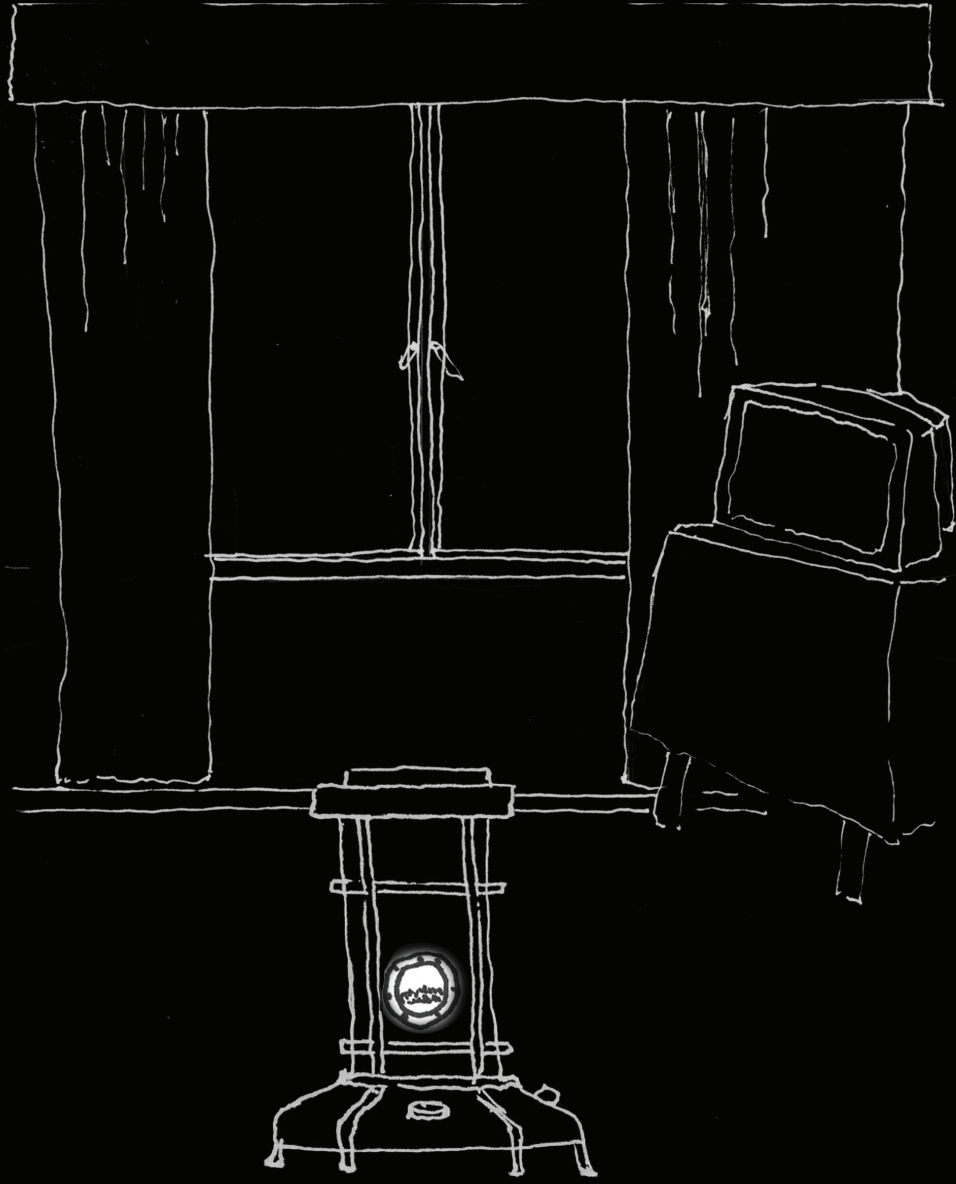


Living Room: Sopa

The furthest circle of the hearth is where you cannot see the light.

The living room was cold and dark; the power was out. The living room window was pitch black when I heard the clanking of metal outside. My mother was filling up Sopa, the fire heater, from the oil tank outside in the *tarma*. My mother dragged it inside; I heard the whooshing of oil inside Sopa.

Mother swung the heavy Sopa into the living room, and the room became darker and heavier with the smell of oil. I saw my mother snap Sopa's head; it fainted on my mother's arm, and my mother gently laid the heavy head on the ground. I saw Sopa's white wick appear in the dark; it was soaked with oil, and the smell stung the roof of my mouth. My mother stroked up a match and dabbled on the oil-soaked wick with fire. Pointy orange tongues of fire rose, and my mother snapped Sopa's head back on; the orange fire changed to a low blue fire. Sopa was woken back with a glowing blue eye. I came down from the dark sofa to the blue light that pushed away the dark around. I sat close to Sopa and plotted for a play with fire.

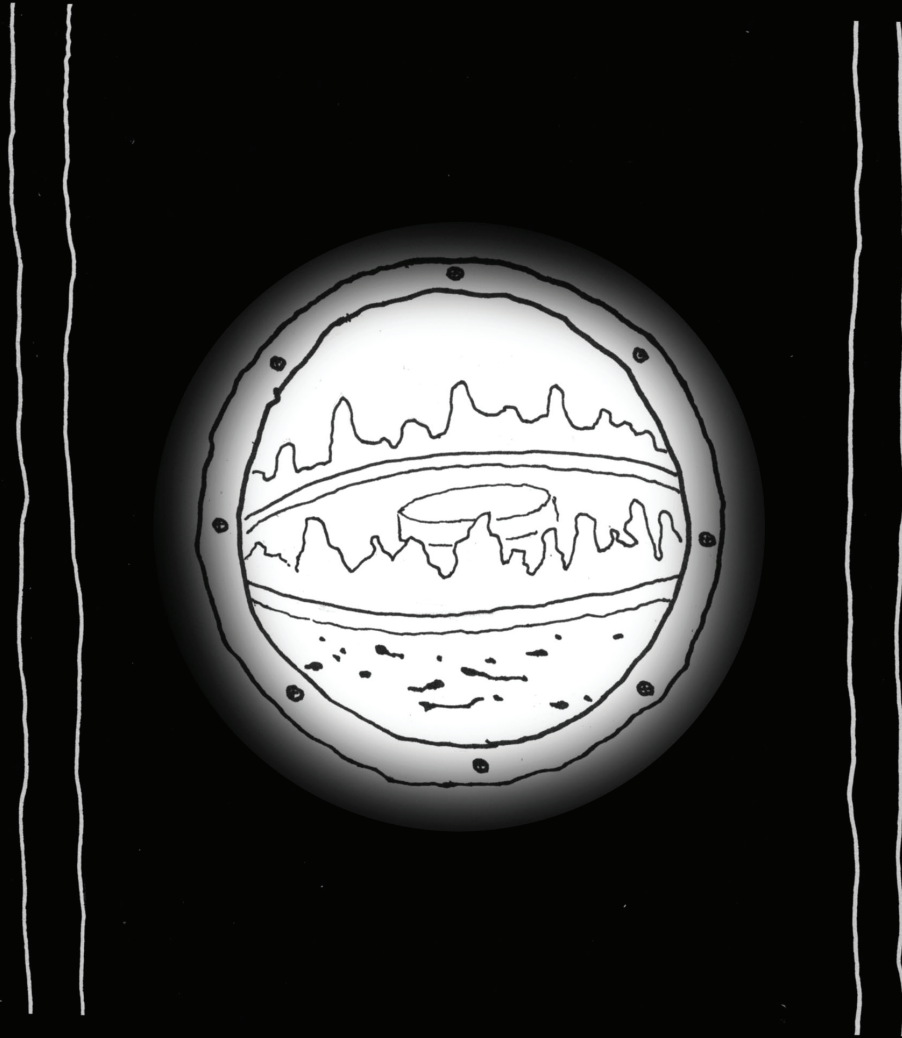


Living Room: Inside Sopa

My mother placed chestnuts on Sopa's head; it cracked open and showed its flesh; the living room smelled of chestnuts, of burned wood. I wanted to snatch one, but mother was around, telling the stories of the neighbor's whereabouts and of the past, of her mother's fire things, teapots, and spilled tea, and of a father trading factory things, back when spice was sold in grams. She said that the English brought in the factory things. I saw once on TV Englishmen stuffing coal into machines. She told them to my sister around Sopa.

I saw Sopa's blue fire eye. I saw it behind the small round window that was bolted to its face with metal screws. I watched Sopa drink up the fuel with its blue fire stare. Inside Sopa, around its fire circle, I saw the many burned matches, the ones my mother threw in after kindling the fire. They burned and charred into pieces; some glowed with an orange glow; they were tiny coal inside the giant machine of Sopa. I wanted a share of the glow; I pulled a hair from the carpet and brought it close to the round window; the hair curled, glowed, and then released grey smoke. "Will you leave it!" my mother snapped in the middle of her history-telling.

The fire turned orange; it meant the oil was becoming less; my mother lowered the wick to make the fire last long enough until the power was back. When the power was back, my father grabbed Sopa by the handle and shook it up and down, then again in one breath, up and down, then he laid Sopa on the ground unconscious; the fire was gone.



Stairs: The Window of the Shaft

Having set light to a torch and [lifted it] in his hand,

.

.

.

A person passes with ease along the silent streets of nighttime.

The fire lamps, Lalas, were placed on the windowsills of the kitchen, the living room, and the window by the stairs. I knew where everyone was from the shivering light of Lala moving in the corridors and rooms at night. On the big landing where the stairs turned, I climbed up two steps to enter it and placed Lala on the windowsill that overlooked the deep, dark shaft.

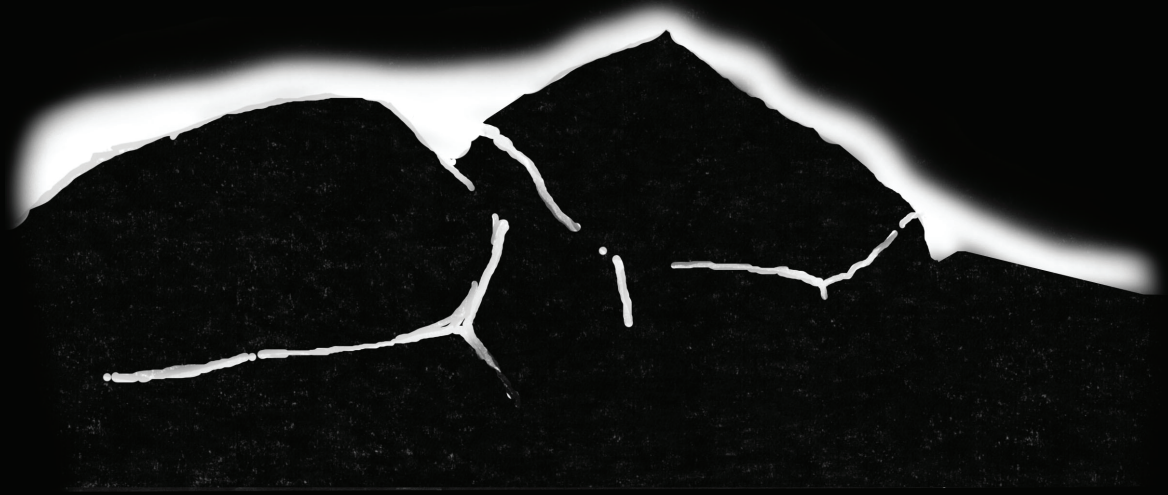
The darkness of the night filled the shaft and made the window black. It was a cold night; I felt it on my face from the window and around my feet from the marble stairs. Lala shivered over my history book; it was a long and confusing Epic. Lala smelled of oil and made black threads of smoke whenever the fire twitched. Lala's glass cover was black at the top; it was a glass chimney. I turned the knob on the side of Lala, and I watched the fire become taller and madder. The oil smell grew stronger, and the darkness of the shaft became lighter. I made the fire higher, taller than the chimney, and it split at the top like a snake's tongue. It spewed puffs of black smoke into the space. "Who is playing with Lala?!" Mother cried out from the other room. I lowered the fire, and the darkness of the shaft repainted the window black.

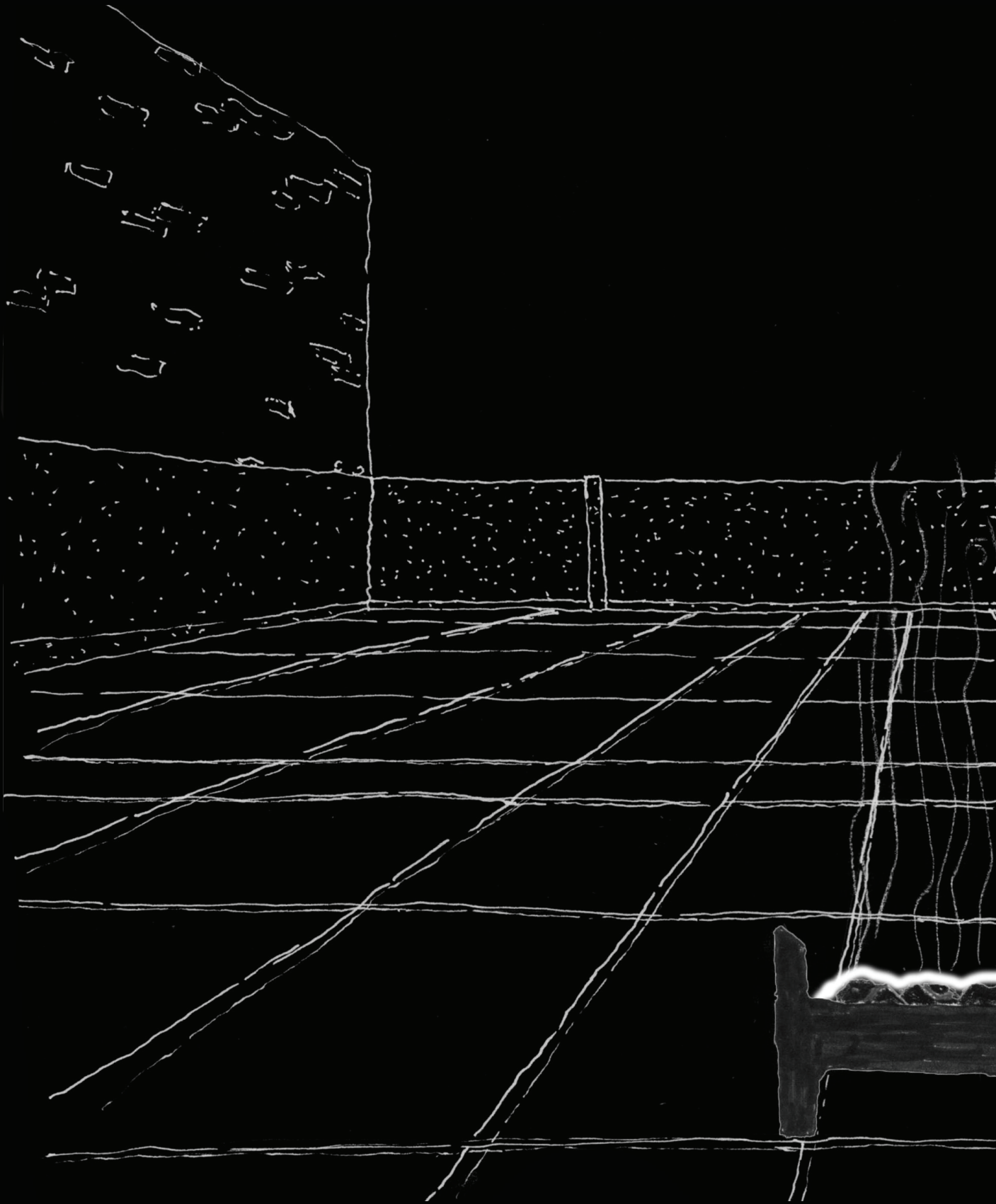


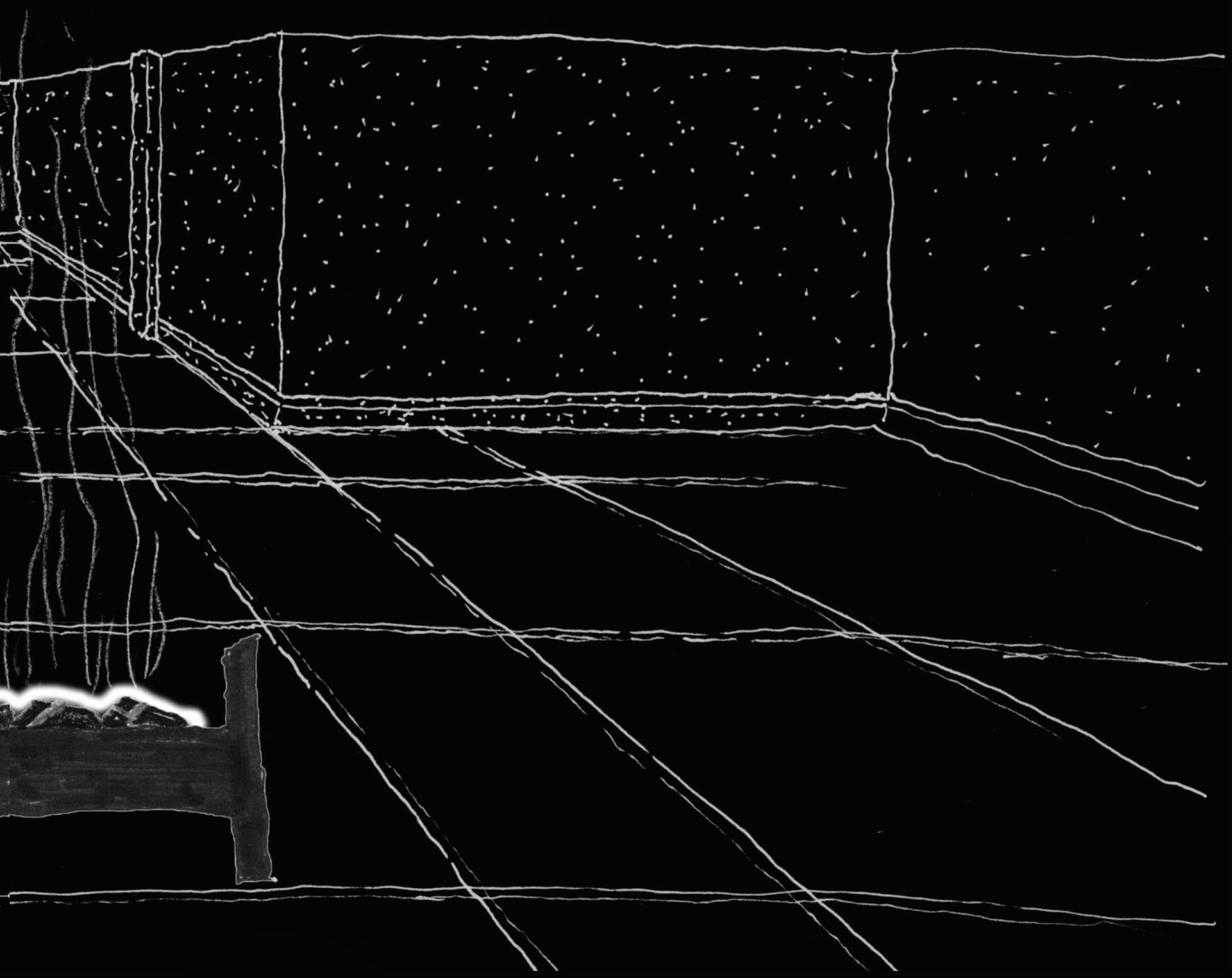
Roof: The Coal

It was meat night, and my mother made my father start the fire on the roof. She was downstairs stabbing meat with skewers. I flew down the stairs to the kitchen to see if the meat was ready to go so I could take it up, give it to my father, and be close to the fire. It was not ready; I flew up to the roof and began my bargain with my father for a chance with the fan. He fanned the burning coal, and the coal pulsed with orange streaks. I stepped closer, and my father pointed to the side and told me to stay as far as where it was pitch dark.

It was a moonless night on the flat roof. The sky above was an endless black. My father was at the center of the roof, surrounded by the stucco fence walls and the black sky above. The grill was a miniature metal bed on which coal was spread. The grill was pitch black, smudged with the smog of many grilling nights. I was not to touch nor near the grille; it was hot and smudged. The orange lines in the coal pulsed with the violent wave of my father's fan. The coal sent out sparks and grey smoke into the black sky. I watched the glow from a distance; I watched the fine orange lines become finer against the big, dark sky. I watched the smoke and orange fire come out of the deep dark of the coal and into the dark sky.







Earth

Digging

Hagar was alone in the desert with her infant Ishmael, who cried for water. Her milk had gone dry, so she began her run to the far hill in search for water. She ran back and forth between crying Ishmael and the far hill, and no water was found; she ran six times, marking her many footsteps on the earth between the two hills, and still, no water. When she returned the seventh time to her crying Ishmael, she saw a puddle of water under his foot. Ishmael dug it out when he cried and kicked the ground.

That puddle- my sister told- grew deeper over time, until it became a well. The traveling tribes began to show and stay by the well, and then when more showed, they stayed all the way to the far hill. The land between the two hills was the land of Hager and Ishmael, and when they left it, the well was swallowed by the earth again, until a man saw in a dream where it was, he was told to find it and dig it.

I gazed at the city from the roof at night; I looked for window lights to catch glimpses of the insides of the many houses. I wanted to see things move and walk when I was not seen in the dark. I wanted to step into places with my eyes where I was not allowed. Inside the house, I stepped into spaces I was not allowed to be inside, I looked inside my parents' closets and drawers, and I hid under the stairs and watched them move around the house. I wanted to see the things they did not tell nor show, and I dug their wardrobes, drawers and the insides of the garden to see what was hidden away.

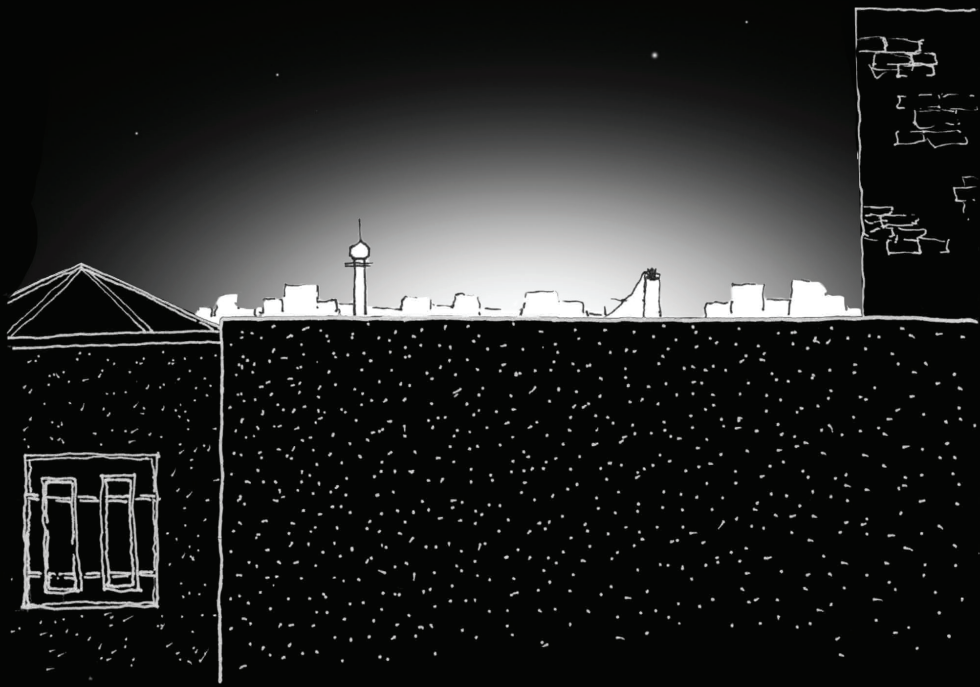
Roof: The City

“Upstairs, the tree house was my living room with a ‘panoramic view of the city-really just my backyard.’”

My family chatted away on the roof under the moonlight. I stood close to one of the roof’s stucco walls, the one that was topped by the neighbors’ brick wall. Their roof was higher than ours, and I looked up to catch their kid. The kid’s head popped up from the brick wall, and she threw grapes onto our roof. I called her out: “I see you!” She giggled, and her head disappeared into the dark.

I returned to watching the city on the other side of the roof. I stepped on the wall base and crossed my arms atop the wall. The power pole was to my left and high over the stucco wall; the pole did not buzz; the power was out. I watched the dark city while the stucco poked my arms; I hung on to it still to get a good look at the layers of darkness under the faint moonlight. I watched the dark far away while the highway moaned somewhere in the distance. I then heard a buzz in the power pole, and people cheered from their roofs.

I ran to the iron beds and jumped on top of one; from it, I watched the power turn on the city. The white neon lights blinked awake, and the houses to the left of the roof lit up, then the ones behind them, then the ones to the right. The streets were lit again with dimmed yellow lights, and the yellow hallow in the far distance, over the downtown, was back on. Among the sea of lights of many dots of yellow and white, I saw the city tower blinking with a red dot; it blinked at me, and I blinked back. To the right of the tower, a tall sculpture was lit by neon lights. The sculpture had two curves pointing to the sky; between them, a bronze child gave his fists up to the sky. It was the sculpture of our neighborhood; when it was seen, it meant the power was near. From the iron bed, I saw the city and our neighborhood come out of the dark.



Landing: The Metal Cupboards

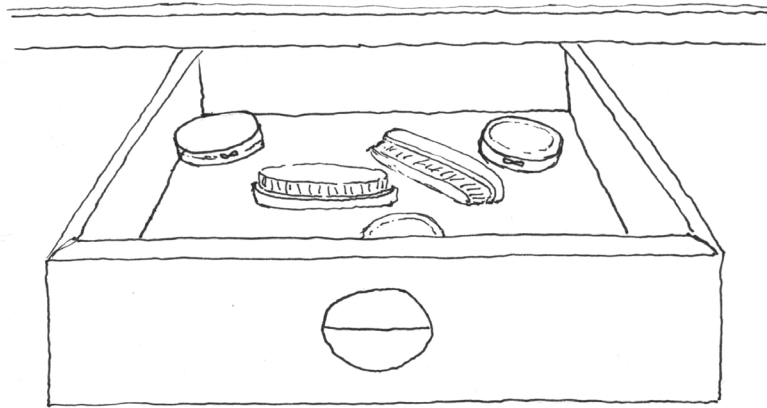
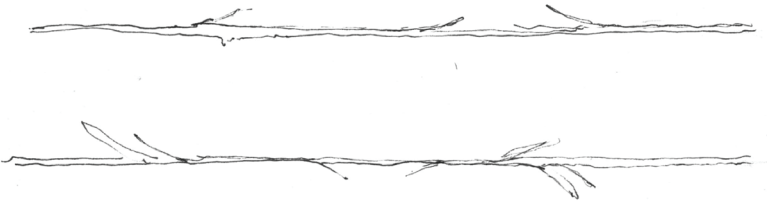
“...Boxes that preserve fragments of the past.”

In the morning, we collected the mattresses off the iron beds and went down the narrow naked stairs in a row like ants holding up chunks and going down a hole. I held up my mattress with my arms around it; its rough fabric rubbed my face, and I peeked behind it every few steps. We placed them on top of the old steel cupboards one by one, building up layers of mattresses in the long landing of the second floor. We left them to a high mount and broke away to our bedrooms.

My mother stored carpets, mattresses, and things unseen in that long landing. We called it the railing place; It was lined up with the stairs' iron railing on one side and the steel cupboards on the other; it smelled of metal. My mother locked away inside the cupboards all the things she did not want to see, but I wanted to see.

I felt the cold metal handles in the faint light to find the grip, and I pulled with all of my body weight; the cupboard door did not open. I tried the next ones, but they were jammed; I pulled harder each time, and my fingers turned red. I tried the drawers; they giggled but were too heavy to pull out. I gave the last one an angry jiggle and a pull, and it snapped open. A thick and sweet kind of oil smell was released from it. I looked inside the drawer and there were shoeshine tins and brushes. I ran my palm over a brush, and it stained my hand with black oily stains. I grabbed the one of shoeshine tins; it had a small butterfly lock on its rim, and it was flipped upside down, so I flipped it back up, and the cover snapped open. The sweet-scented oil smell attacked my face; I remember it in my throat when I think of that tin.

I often returned to that drawer whenever my parents were not around to hear the jiggle. I wanted to see if new things were put in, but it always opened to the brushes and the tins; I smelled them every time I opened them.



Parents' Bedroom: Mother's Wardrobe

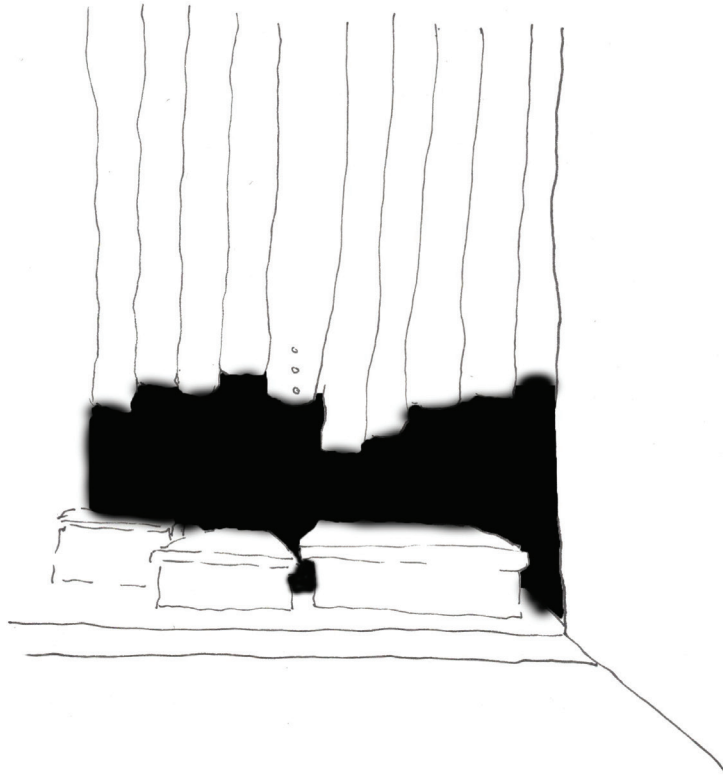
"A wardrobe, [...] is filled with the mute tumult of memories."

At the other end of the landing, at the end of the metal cabinet, there was my parents' bedroom. Inside, there stood the big white wardrobe of the five doors. I knew what each door kept inside at different times.

My mother once sat cross-legged in front of the wardrobe. She had the last two doors wide open, and it smelled of wood. She was stuffing fabric into big pouches; they belonged to her mother, she told me while tightening a knot. One of the pouches was at the back, in the dark insides of the wardrobe; it was loose, and pictures fell from it. I crawled inside and grabbed a few; they were old pictures of my aunts in big green parks. I asked why she was not with them; she told me that only army wives got to travel and asked me to put them back.

One afternoon, when my father napped away, my mother opened the middle door. She lifted the many layers of fabric inside with one arm, like a giant lifting the earth, and she pulled out drawings with the other hand, "the drawings of the house," she said and lowered them to me.

When my mother rushed for work in the morning, she left the first two unlocked; I opened one of them to full swing, and my mother's perfume took over my nose. At the top shelf, I saw bag straps hanging; I saw the golden strap of the golden purse; she had that when she was a girl. I saw the red velvet box, the one my sister could reach and reveal the many watches inside; they were mother's when she was a bride. At the bottom, the wood floor was not seen in the piles of shoes. I climbed over the boxes of shoes and pushed with force between the hung clothes; I wanted to see more of the wardrobe, but the many clothes closed on me when I made my body in. I stepped back for air and pushed back in again; the clothes closed on even tighter when I pushed harder. I stepped outside of it and looked at the many clothes and bag straps; the wardrobe never let me see more of my mother's things.

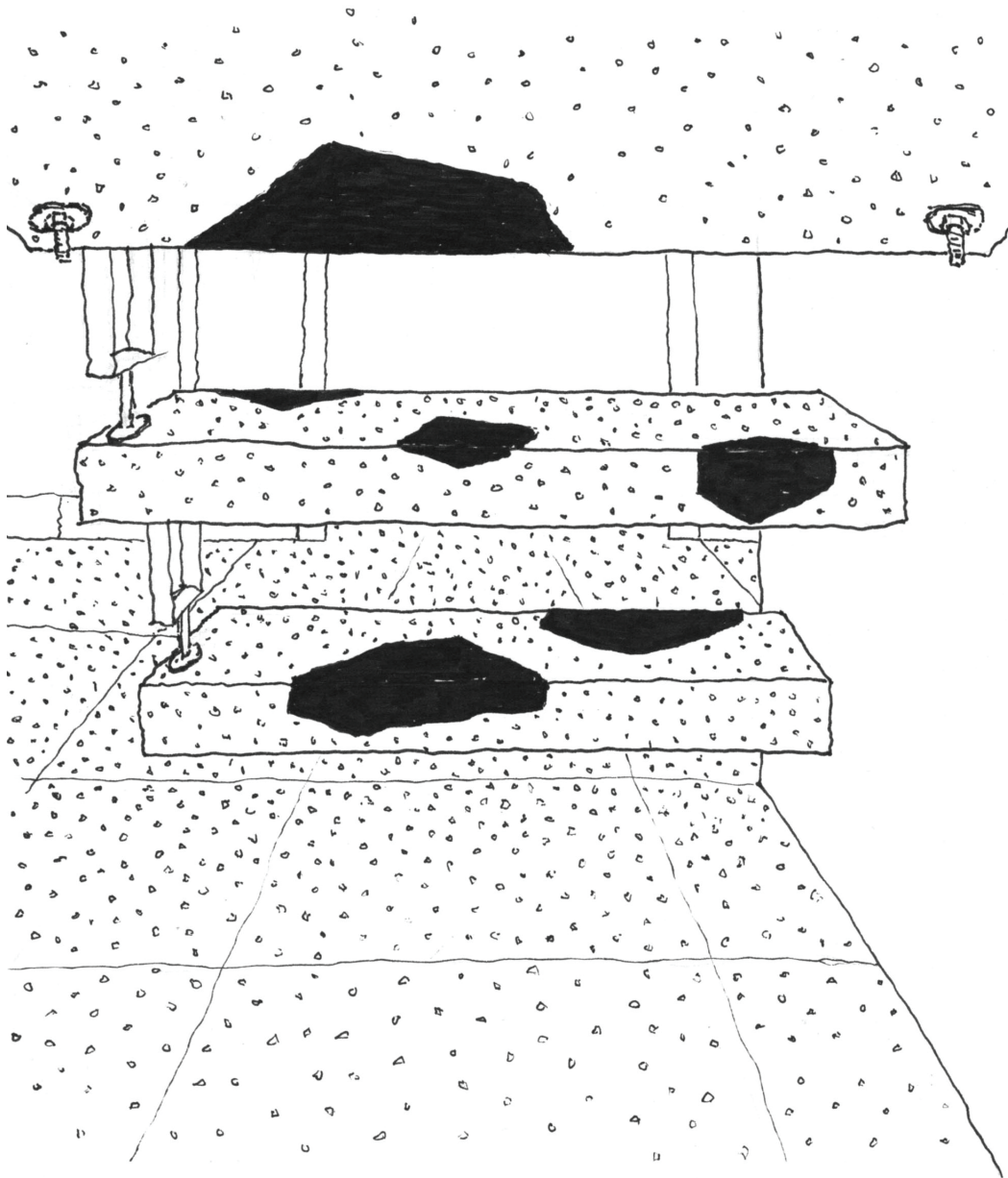


Under the stairs: Between the Steps

Gyges was a shepherd who found a ring; it was an invisibility ring.

I hid under the stairs and waited for my sister to find me. The terrazzo floor below and the marble steps above made the air cold and smelled of earth. I crouched under like a mermaid, my thighs and legs laid on a side, and one arm held up my body; my palm was glued to the terrazzo floor. I hid under the third step; it was the dimmest and the lowest I could fit under. From between the steps, I saw my brother come out of the kitchen with a bowl and go into the living room, and I saw my sister come close; she looked left and right and went into the living room, then I saw my father go up the stairs; I said, "Hi," he flinched, looked down, then went up the rest of the stairs. From between the steps, I heard my mother in the kitchen talking on the phone; she talked about the ones who had flown away.

I felt needles poking my legs and feet; I changed to another position, and I saw the pink stamps of the terrazzo on my palm and leg. I stayed in the same dimmed place, and my body made it warm. I watched my family come in and out of the kitchen, and I plotted to live under the stairs and watch and hear everything in the house; it was small, and no one else could fit in there nor see who hid there until I heard my mother hang up the phone and she came out of the kitchen and told me to come out, or I caught a cold.



Garden: The Mud City

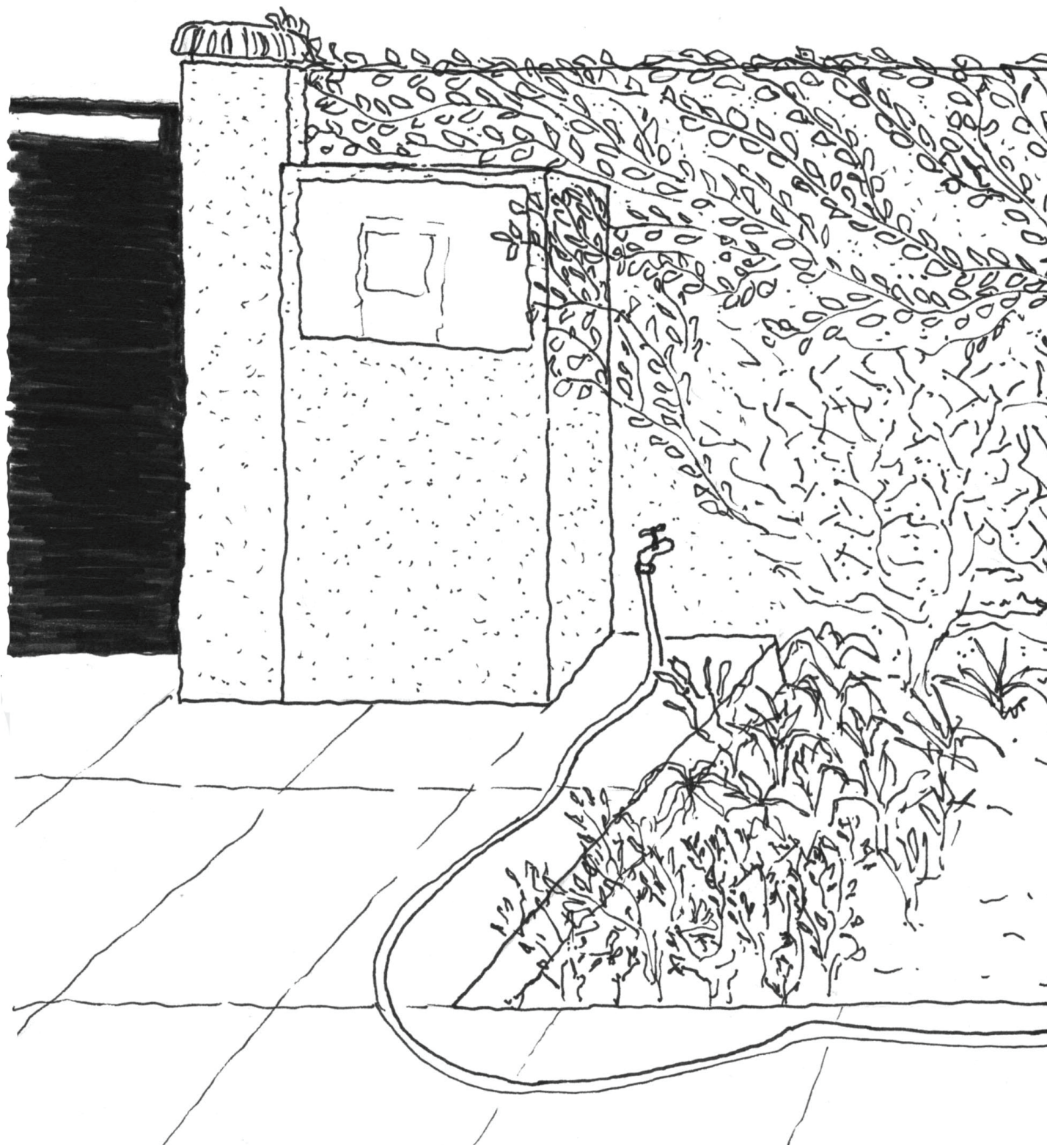
“I began accumulating suitable stones, gathering them partly from the lake shore and partly from the water. And I started building cottages, a castle, a whole village.” Jung was searching for his childhood village.

When my family napped, I gently slid the latch of the iron kitchen door and went out to the garden outside. The garden was a small square pit that was filled with soil. My mother planted thick, rubbery leaves, mint, a few flowers, shrubs of fine leaves, and vines that spread across the stucco walls. Ants scurried in paths and disappeared into my mother’s plants, which looked like giant trees to the ants. “This is their forest.” I thought, “And this is the forbidden land that lizards and ants go into and never come back.” It was an end where the stucco wall and the shrubs were. I once crawled in there; It was dark, and the soil was damp under the many layers of leaves from the shrubs above. I moved the dead leaves aside; they were yellow and dry, and I reached a layer of damp and cold leaves. I peeled them off the soil, and a stiff lizard corpse popped to the side. I crawled back fast and never returned to that end of the garden.

I stood at the center and planned with my eyes the mud houses, the river, the bridges, and the dams; I planned a city for the ants. I grabbed a hand shovel, and I dug and moved the earth. The hole had darker soil, and then it was darker as I dug deeper. I then dropped the hose into the dugout hole and sank my hand into it; I grabbed mud from the hole and threw it to the sides; I sank my hand deeper and grabbed more; I felt the tearing of fine roots in my grasp. I lined up the dug-out mud and shaped them into small mounds; they were the ant’s houses. I then made the hole longer and curvier; it was the ditch for the river. I made branches for the river and small lakes and dams at the end of each branch. I then brought back the hose to fill up the ditch and dams. The water rose and moved like a snake by the mound houses and turned into the branches, then swirled up by the dams; it filled up the lakes, and a city was made.

I stepped out of the garden and looked at the city I made. I envied the ants for it, and I feared its wreckage by the lizards. The hair on my skin rose whenever I heard a vine leaf flicker; I knew they hid behind the vines and watched the city from a height.







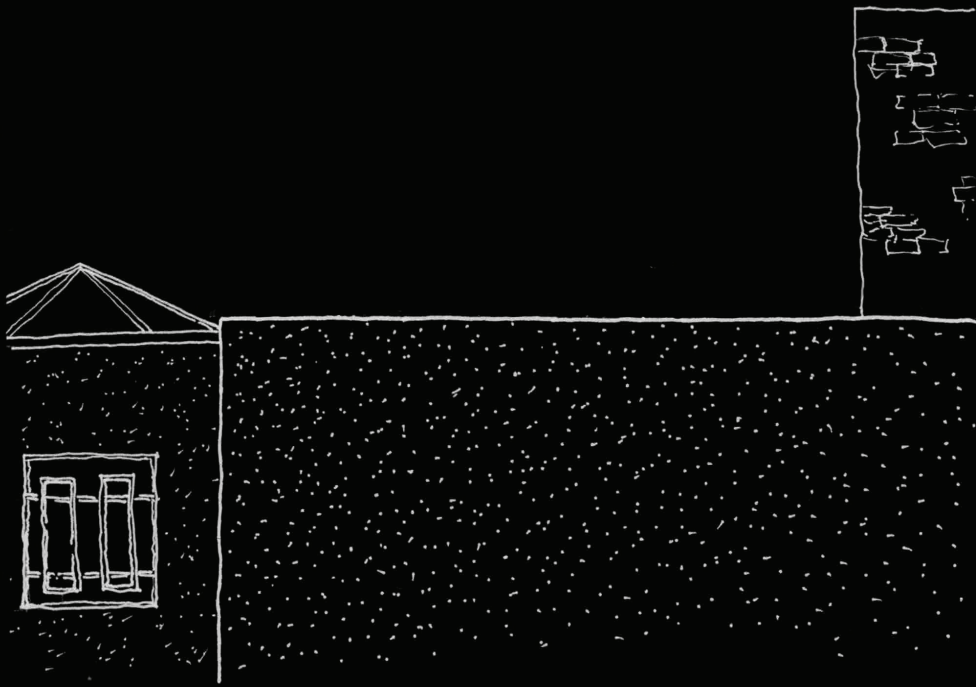
Exit

Air: Roof Exit

The kitchen door was open, and my father went in and out of the kitchen. He grabbed empty flour bags that my mother had taken out from him. I went out to the garden to see, and I saw. The lush green vines were stuffed into the flour bags. My father had pulled away the dangling vines and pulled away the rest from the balcony above. “no more insects!” he said and pressed the vines into the bag. The remaining vines looked thinner and weaker; they were no longer up by the roof.

My mother told my sister a roof story from her childhood; it was a story of a bride. She remembered a kid who bolted into the living room, where the women were dancing and the bride was seated; he shouted at the kids to come out and see something from the roof. All the kids came out running and shot up to the roof. My mother’s face turned red; she held back laughter and forced out the words: ‘The bride came up with us!’ She then released her laughs, and my sister had a nervous laugh. When the kids stormed onto that roof and chased for the front view by the stucco wall, the bride moved between the kids, looking for a spot by the stucco wall. She wanted a share of the roof watch, but she was not to be on that roof; she was a bride, no longer a child. I listened to my mother’s stories and gossip on the roof, and I glanced over to the neighbor’s roof walls to see if their kid did her roof watch.

I stood on the bed to watch the city. The tower was not blinking, and the bronze sculpture of the child giving his fists to the sky was not lit. The power was not returning as often, and the far downtown disappeared into the dark night sky. I missed the tower and the angry child, and I scanned with my eyes for glimpses of light, but they were off. A war was upon us, and it came with a sandstorm.



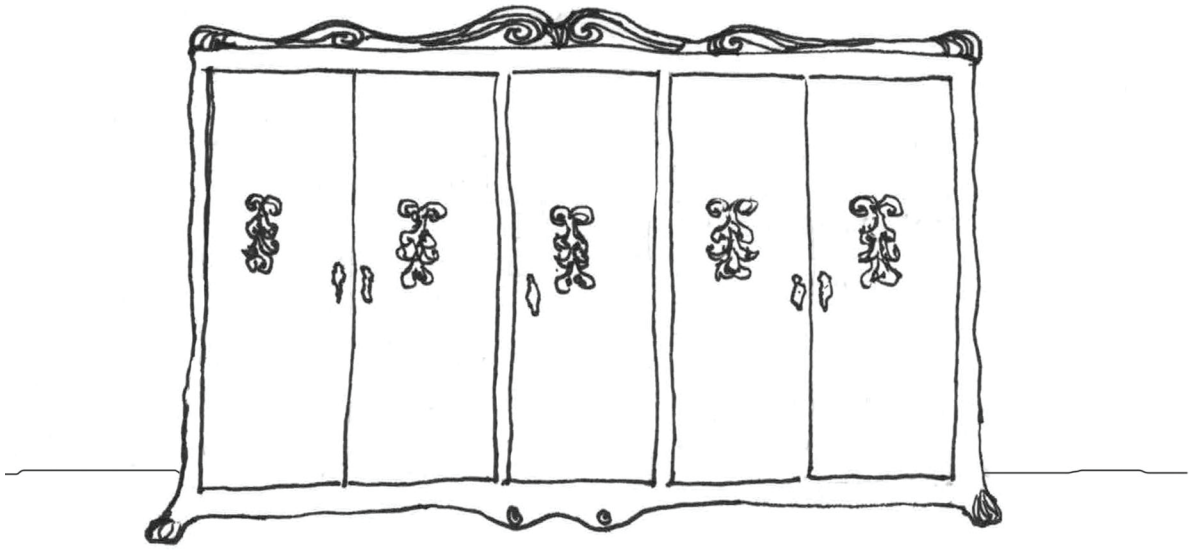
Earth: Wardrobe Closed-Up

Noah knew it was coming. He knew it from his oven. God told him that his sign of the flood was when the stone oven gushed with water.

My sister told the story of Noah and the ark. He called out for his son to get on the ark, but his son stayed behind. The son took refuge in a mountain; the flood could not reach the mountains, he thought. I saw a cartoon on TV that told the story of the flood. The houses stood still, and the blue water rose higher and higher; the windows of the houses were covered in blue, and Noah's son was at the top of the mountain, with no more space for him to climb to. The flood came fast and rose fast; houses, trees, and mountains were all covered in blue.

I had just started wearing the scarf, covering up my arms and legs, and staying away from the *tarma* and the driveway. I stayed away from the outside of the house so I was not seen without my scarf. I remember the covering up of the skin in the memory of the sandstorm. I was twelve years old and five months away from my thirteenth when the orange sandstorm hit. My fingertips were cold; a faint layer of dust sucked away the heat. "A sandstorm is coming," my mother said. The storm came from a desert, and it came in layers. It was first beige; we smelled it, then it was brown; our noses felt cold, and our tongues were dry, then orange; we could not see beyond. We did not see it coming; we only smelled it and tasted it, and then the sun was covered. It was big; I saw it on TV; the storm took over the whole city. The highways were fully covered in orange; the cars were dimmed, headlights moving slowly; the roofs became small deserts; the windows became squares of orange, and the colors of my mother's furniture turned to faint orange.

Angry whipping and pot clattering, I heard from the kitchen. My mother was behind layers of orange; she seemed in a far land of floating dust. I heard my brother go up the stairs; he said he wanted to see how bad it was, and I followed. The stairs were cold and slippery with layers of silky sand; I hung on to the railing that painted my grasp with faint orange. We entered our parents' bedroom, and it was faded with clouds of sand that entered from the small gaps in windows and balcony door. My mother had her wardrobe closed shut; she feared the sand reaching her clothes, fabrics, and all old things from her girlhood. I saw the top of the wardrobe disappear into the orange clouds of sand and its white paint covered with beige. My brother jolted open the balcony door, and the sandstorm was released to the inside; my legs and arms were all covered in sand.



Water: Bathroom Trash

Days after the sandstorm, the sun laid its yellow light in the afternoon. My mother stopped her dusting and left it to our movements between her furniture and the rooms, pushing away the dust to the sides, walls, and curtains. The house smelled of dust, but we could see the distances, the colors of things, and the terrazzo floors under the sunlight.

I found my mother in the kitchen; she was kneading a dough. I stood beside her and waited for an in-between moment. The kitchen counter was low, and I wanted to be on top of it, so my mother looked at me, but I did not fit; the upper cupboards made me hunch. I stood beside her and told her of the blood. She took out her bucket of flour from the lower cupboard and said: "Burry your hands into the flour and say: "A woman buried her hands in flour, so shall I." I did, and the flour felt like cold sand.

The power was out for days, and the bathrooms became the darkest rooms at night. I remember water coming out of faucets, looking like dark liquid. My bleeding sent me to the bathroom many times during the day and night; it sent me to the corner of the garbage basket that covered a drainage hole. I felt a closeness to that hole and the underground whenever I slightly bent over the basket in my discard of tissues; I remember the smell of blood tissues and sewage clouding my nose.

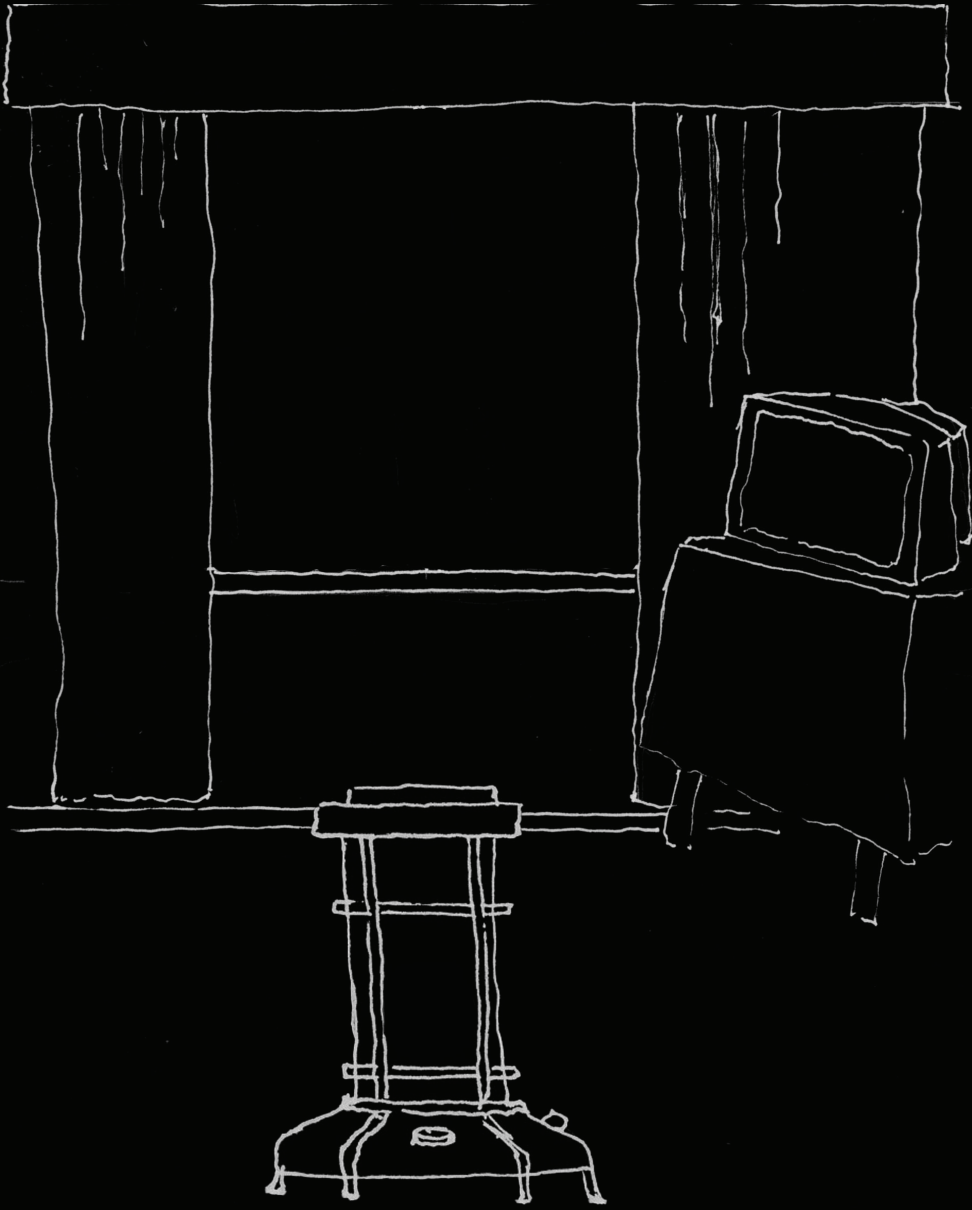


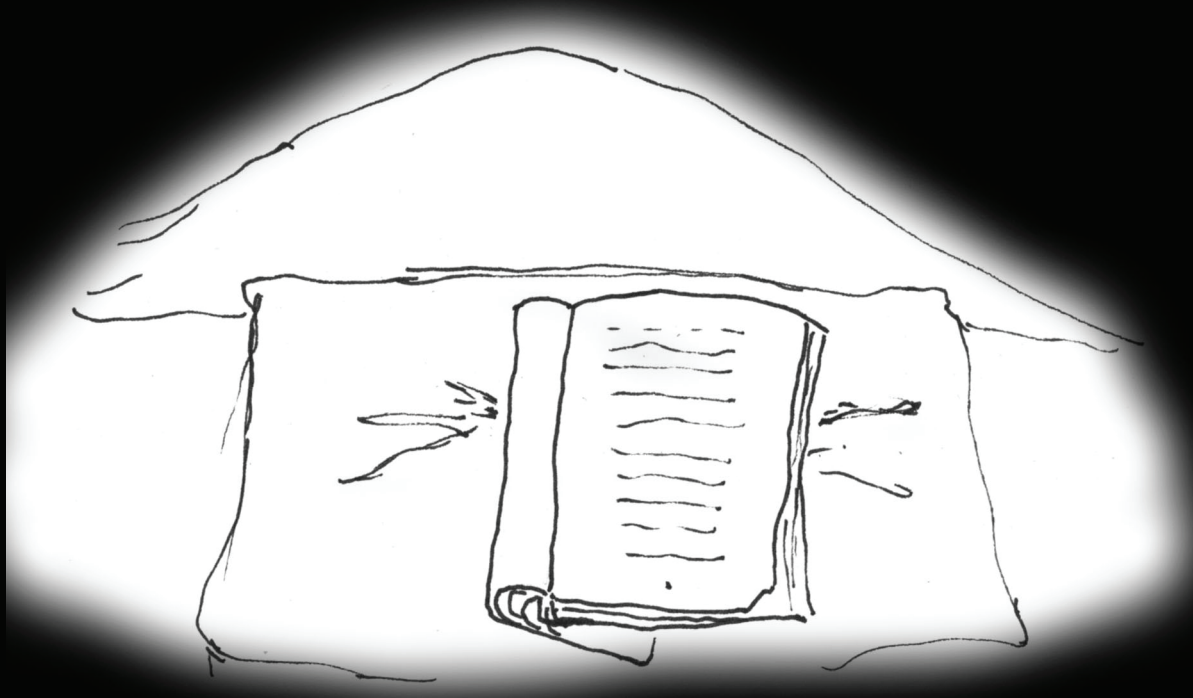
Fire: Sopa Off

“The sleep of the cave people!” my mother said to anyone who slept for too long. My sister asked: “Do you know the story of the cave?” The story of the men who escaped the wicked and took refuge in the wilderness. They hid in a cave, and they made no fire nor sound, and they slept in the darkness of the cave for hundreds of years.

During the days of the storm, the TV channels were on and off, and my father took out an old radio from the metal cabinets upstairs and placed it on the kitchen counter, where the phone was. We gathered around the radio and listened to what happened in the city. My mother was by the stove looking through the window into the outside metal gate; she made sure that the outside remained outside. She stood there shaking the gas barrel to the sides to move up the remaining gas inside. The gas vendors no longer roamed the neighborhood, so she cooked with a low fire with what remained of gas. The stove was becoming cold, and the smell of gas was in the air; it was the barrel’s way of telling her that the fire would soon be gone.

In the living room, the windows were covered away from the outside with my mother’s blue blankets; she feared a glass shatter with the blasts happening in the city. Sopa was off because the oil prices were high, so each claimed a blanket and a flashlight. My sister wrapped herself in one and did her embroidery, my brother took over the radio, and my parents moved between the sofa and the floor in their talks of the oil war and the ways my uncle could “pull us out,” a phrase my mother used in her plan of our soon leave. I read under the blankets the books that my sister had passed down to me; they were stories of the kids who got stranded on an island, stories of two boys who got lost in the sewage, and others about the men who flew to the space and learned the language of the alien. I stayed under there in the dark, away from the walls, the windows, the talks, and all that was around.







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The Story of Prometheus

Gaston Bachelard, *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, ed. Suzanne Bachelard, trans. Kenneth Haltman, Bachelard Translation Series (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1990), 82.

Page 87

“21. O Shamash, organizer of darkness, bringer of light...”

Alan Lenzi, ed., *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction*, Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Near East Monographs, v. 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 212.

Page 89

The Circles of Hearth

Michael A. Rappenglück, “The Housing of the World: The Significance of Cosmographic Concepts for Habitation,” *Nexus Network Journal* 15, no. 3 (December 2013): 387–422, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00004-013-0162-8>.

Page 93

Having set light to a torch and [lifted it] in his hand,

.
. .

A person passes with ease along the silent streets of nighttime.

A. R. George, "The Gods Išum and Hendursanga: Night Watchmen and Street-Lighting in Babylonia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1 (April 2015): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1086/679387>.

Earth

Page 100

Tracing The Story of Ishmael's Well

G.R. Hawting, "The Disappearance and Rediscovery of Zamzam and the 'Well of the Ka'Ba.," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 43, no. 1 (n.d.): 44–54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/616125>, 45.

Page 101

"Upstairs, the tree house was my living room with a 'panoramic view of the city-really just my backyard."

Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home* (Berkeley, Calif: Conari Press, 1995).

Page 103

"...Boxes that preserve fragments of the past."

Bergson, "...boxes that preserve fragments of the past." *Matiere et Memoire*(n.d.): chapters II and III, quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Paperback, 1969).

Page 105

"A wardrobe, [...] is filled with the mute tumult of memories."

Milosz, "A wardrobe is filled with the mute tumult of memories." *Amoureux initiation*(n.d.):217, quoted in Bachelard.

Page 107

The Story of Gyges and the Invisibility Ring

“Gyges’ Ring: Invisibility in Plato, Tolkien and Lope de Vega,”
2023.

Page 109

“I began accumulating suitable stones, gathering them partly from the lake shore and partly from the water. And I started building cottages, a castle, a whole village.”

Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

Exit

Page 117

Remembering the Story of Noah and the Flood

Shaykh Rizwan Arastu, *God’s Emissaries: Adam to Jesus* (Dearborn, Michigan: Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya, 2018).

Page 117

Photos of the Sandstorm

“24 Sand Storm Hits Baghdad Stock Photos, High-Res Pictures, and Images - Getty Images,” accessed October 12, 2023, <https://www.gettyimages.ca/photos/sand-storm-hits-baghdad>.

Page 121

Remembering the Story of the Cave

Bruce Fudge, “The Men of the Cave: Tafsīr, Tragedy and Tawfīq al-Hakīm,” *Arabica* 54, no. 1 (2007): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157005807779575007>.

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