

Mt town



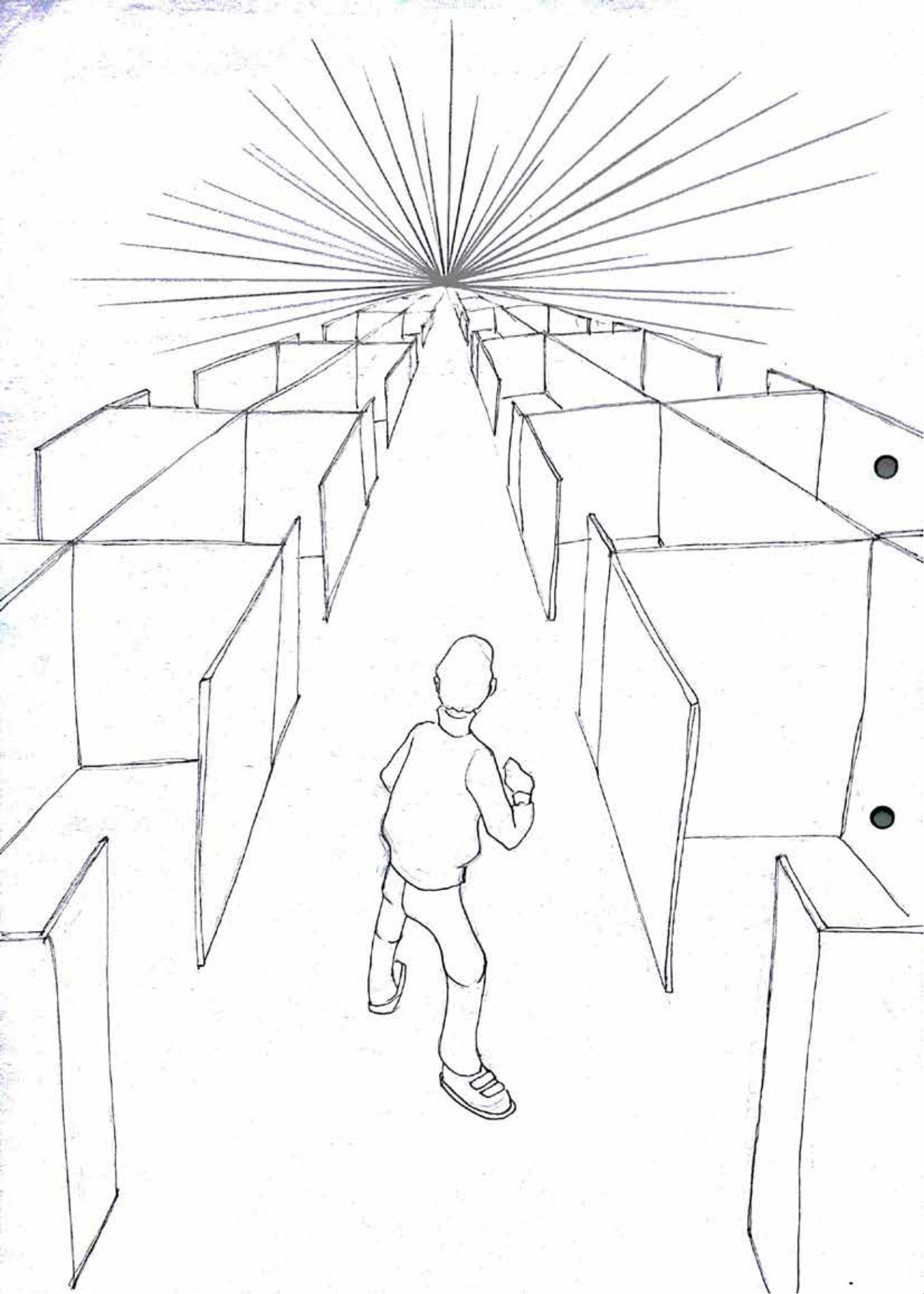
A special thanks to Jaya Kapoor



"These accounts, arrggh. Seems I started on these an year ago. And now this good for nothing pen." A tired man who appeared to be in his late forties sighs as he gets up to find a replacement pen, only to fail at doing so.

"I'll again have to face that....umm....wait, what was his name again? I've never met the person who sits in the cubicle next to me? Well, I guess now is as good a time as any!" He lifts up from the chair filling a hitherto silent hall with a boing which definitely did not seem as if it emerged from the spring of a harmless office chair. As he reaches the neighboring booth, which was more an enclosure of three and a half walls than a cubicle, he realizes that the name of his co-employee is not the only piece of missing memory today.

"Wh...ere am I? More importantly, who am I? What am I doing here? What was I doing here?" Honestly, it is a rather difficult exercise explaining his current emotional state. His memory had become like a lost, buried treasure on the ocean floor. Each attempt at acquiring a piece of this treasure meant exertion of diving in the water, holding your breath till a point where the lung walls seem to collapse into each other. And after all this effort, when he



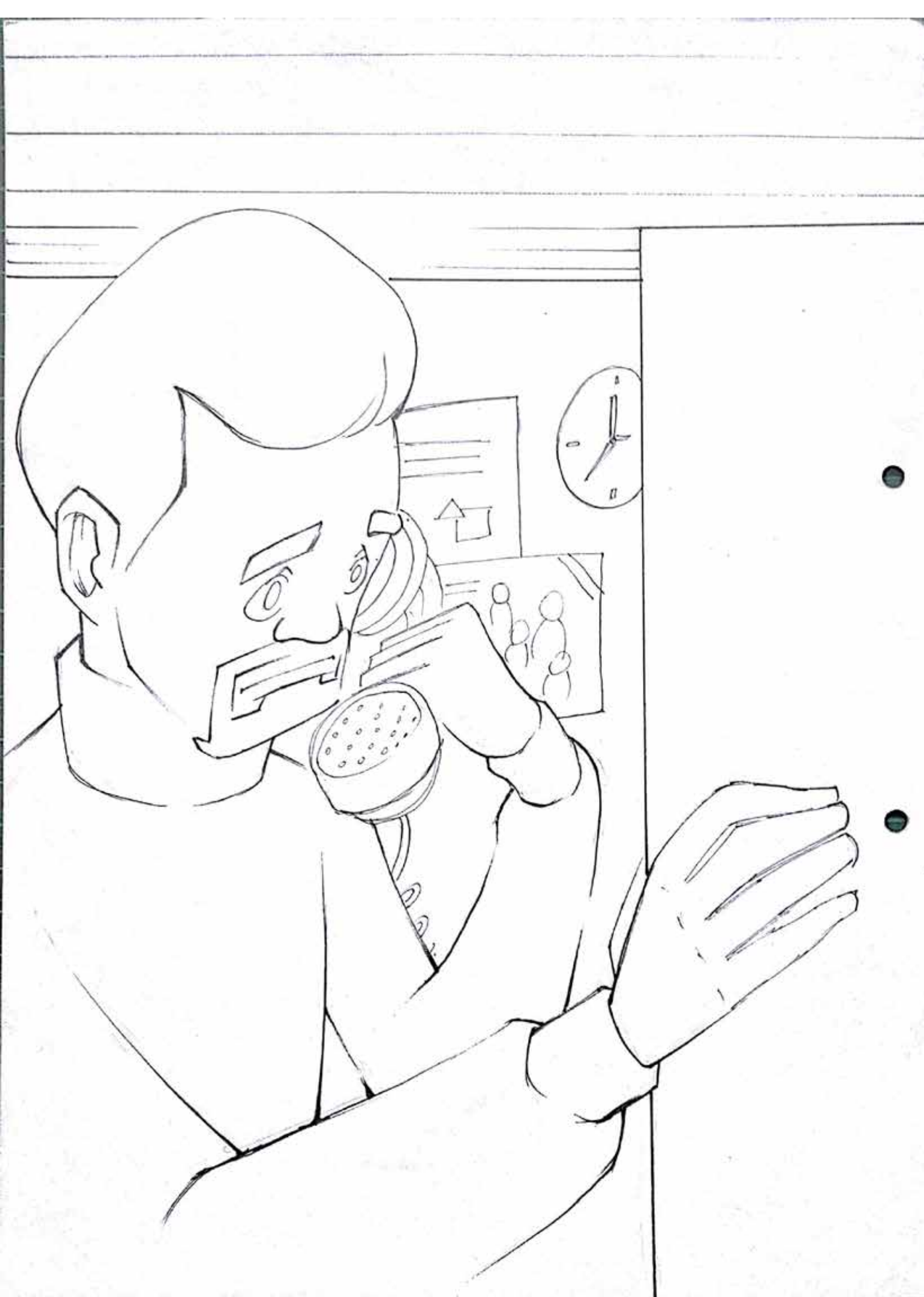
tries to look inside, the objects were all black and shapeless, neither can he draw out anything, nor can he make out the contents of it; all he knew is that the chunks were all there, just away from his reach. So what do you expect a person like that do? Well of course he ran! He yelled!



But you see, the cubicles were all the same as his neighbor's. The offices, the roads, the cars outside all empty. The only disturbance in this otherwise static and ideal town were the ones caused by his futile attempts at destroying things, hoping he would break this elaborate prank being played on him.

So meet your protagonist, a man with a lost memory in a city with no people to ask questions about his identity or his home. I cannot possibly imagine what your course of action would have been in this scenario, but I, as the writer of this story, chose to make this mature man in his late forties, to go back to his cubicle and calmly gather his wits to grasp a sense of the situation.

As he walked towards his chair, anticipating a boing to again fill the empty insides of the office hall, a ring from the phone inside his cubicle manages to flood it first, making the man run and almost trip. The desperation to listen to a human voice had never been so dire in him. Before a voice could speak first from the other side, he went ahead with a, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're punishing me



for, but I'm sorry, just please ask everyone to come out, I think I've had enough of this prank."

"You save that tone for your wife, Mister" replied a female sassy voice of African origin, if I may say so without being labeled racist.

"I'm sorry Ma'am, I'll calm my voice down, just please explain what's happening here, I don't know who I am and there is no one around to ask for help."

"My, my, my, isn't that a beautiful try. What you're really looking for, is yourself, but wish for people to comply."

"Umm...what? I don't understand. Can I know, who am I talking to? And also, if it's not too much to ask, who are YOU talking to?", the man replies, duly fulfilling his promise of a calm tone, why else, would you expect a man trapped in this strange situation to reply with such composure to artistic prose?

"You did not just say that! Oh hell, to that no. It's your cubicle talking to you, Mr. Benoy Bose!"

"I have a name, great. And I must be out of my mind talking to a person who is claiming to be a cubicle, but, What else can you tell me?"

"Only that what happens inside these walls three."

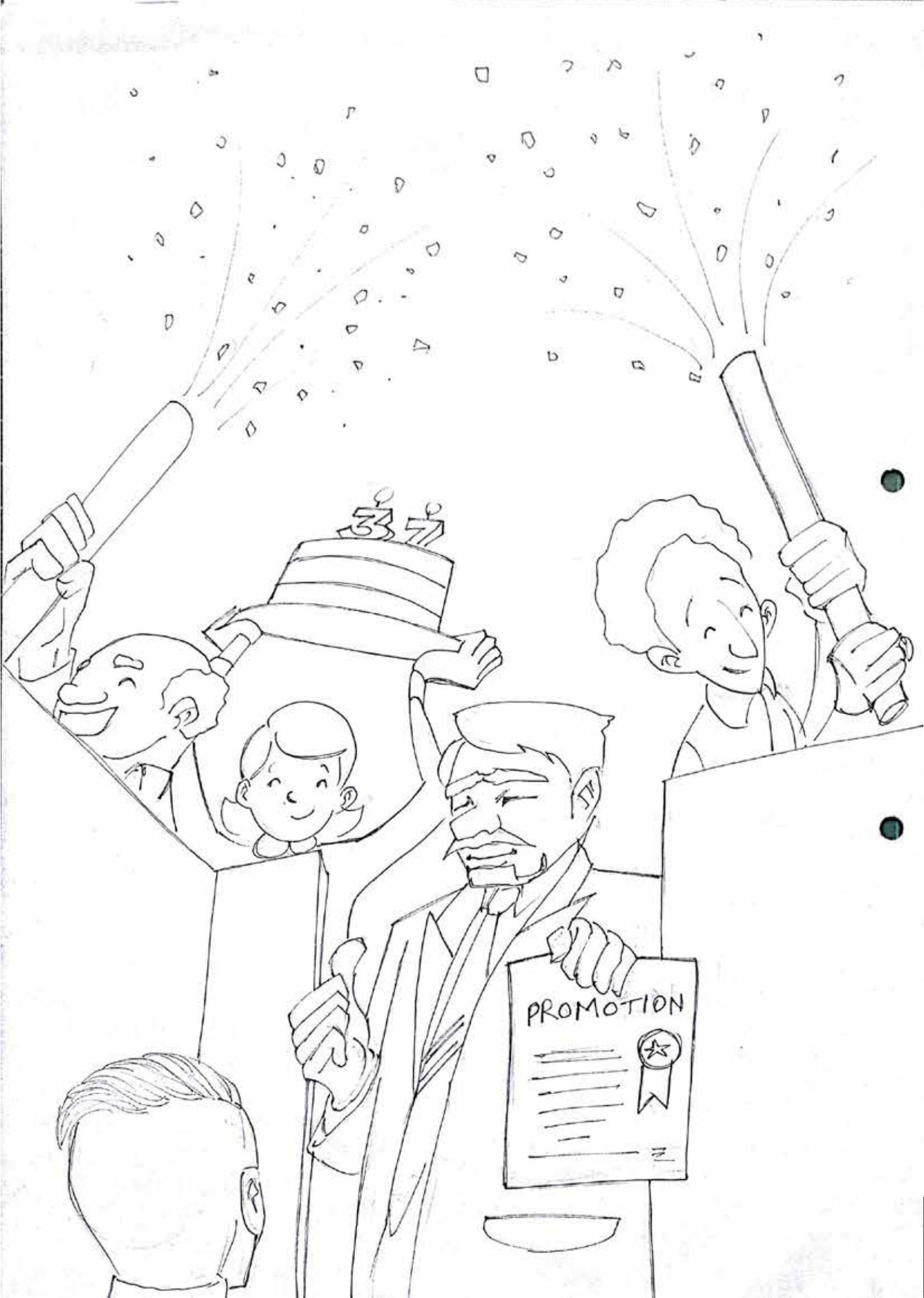


"Well then tell me how I reached here, my identity, how to go back to normality."

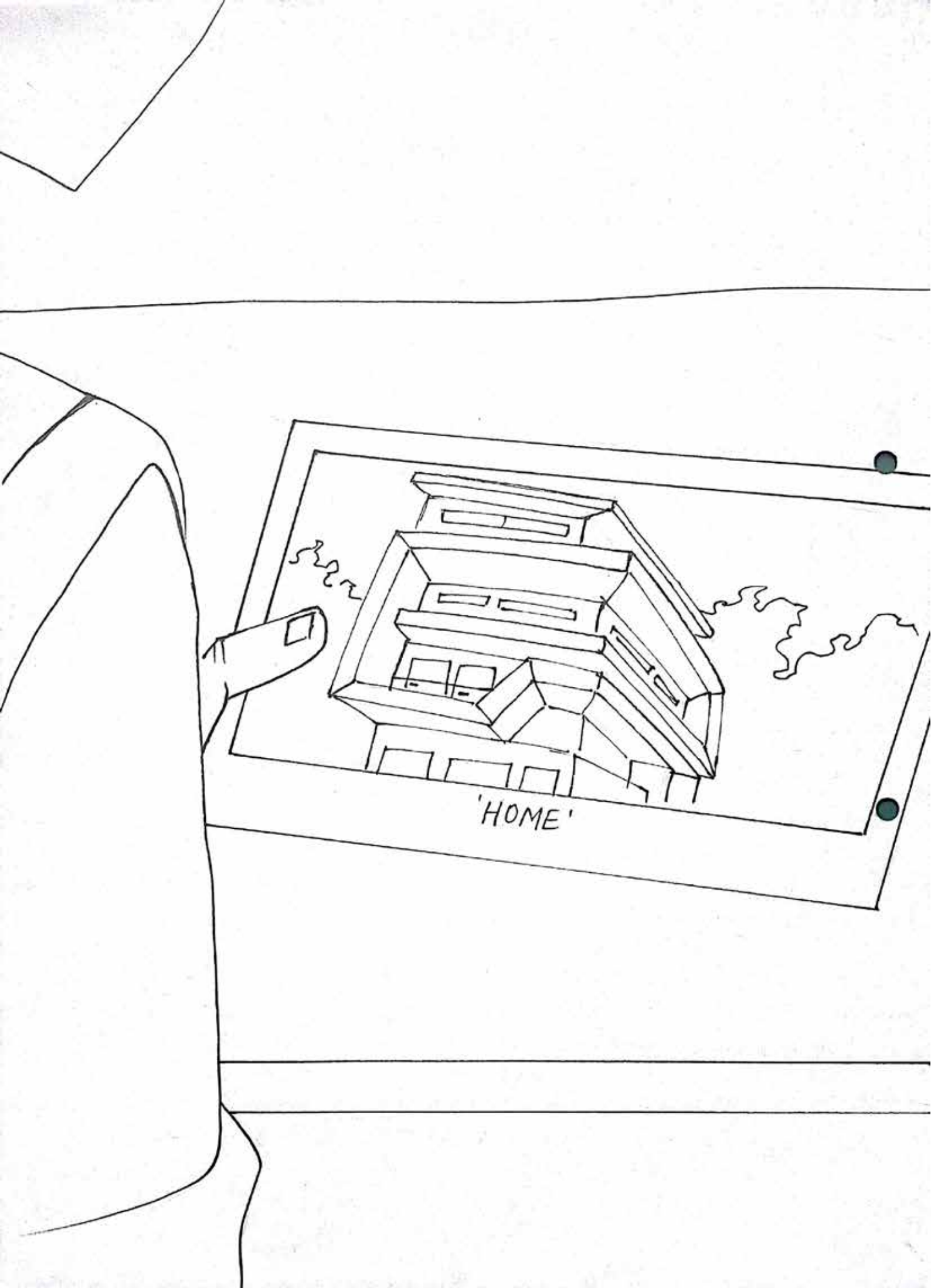
"In usual cases I'd answer 'No!', but you yourself seem to be familiar with a few tools of poetry.

So I'd make an exception this while, flip back those pages of Calendar in front of you and see yourself go back, in time!"

We don't know if it was the anticipation of finally getting a clue about himself, his self acceptance as a citizen to this strange town or his determination to know about himself, but Mr. Bose, without a freckle of doubt and awkwardness, picked up the calendar and started flipping back as if he exactly knew the outcome such a treatment would yield. As he shuffled back quickly through the months, the things around him started to grow...well...young! The photographs being replaced with the younger selves of the people in them, the stack of file reducing in height, the tea stain on his desk growing darker and brighter and finally, a reflection in his computer monitor confirmed the rush of youth inside Mr. Bose. He too was getting younger along. All those merry moments of the years of service spent on this bank, flashed in front of him.



This montage seemed a testimony solidifying Benoy's relation to this space inside these three and a half walls, which he, from now on, would never just call a cubicle. Either it was the joy of finding the pieces to a lost identity or finding that a seemingly plain cubicle was such a big part of it, the cubicle had now become a symbol of his memories, his experiences, all he ever did and stood for during these seventeen years of a bank servant. Further scrolling brought a picture of a grand lavish house pinned on his desk that seemed to have taken the interest of Benoy who was now thirty five years old, in an instant. He stopped flipping at this apogee, and snatched the photograph to pacify this growing intrigue. And as he very well doubted, the photograph was labeled 'home'. Picking up the phone, and bidding warm adieus to the cubicle whose sense of prose had hitherto only annoyed Mr. Bose, he cleared his throat and, "Goodbye, dear friend, I must go on." "Man, just leave. Balladry is no job for a moron."



His newly found resolve and zeal was only short lived as he stepped outside to the world which was as static when as initially found himself in it. But Mr. Bose was not yet ready to give up. Taking in a deep breath and spreading his arms open, Benoy had a sure look as if he just knew this world conjure him more aid if he let it to. And soon enough, a gentle male voice like that of a dutiful butler or a punctual train conductor, called out to him in a manner of implied scolding, "Mr. Bose, I realize that you are regular traveller. " Benoy looked back. "But the bus waits for none. It always sticks to it's schedule, scream, shriek or run." Benoy could muster this much that it was the very bus he took to and fro to work everyday who was talking to him and could very well get him closer to home and tell him more about himself, but there was a much more pressing doubt which still needed to be confirmed, "Do all of you speak out here in verse?"

"Well, yes of course!"

"How else do you expect a bunch of objects to pass their time? We are no outlaws, but yes, poetry is indeed our crime."



"Well, help me please, you humble being. Tell me more and take me home, make me reach my destiny." Benoy had now become a citizen of this place in language as well.

"Hop on for sure, So glad I'd be; to help make the man, for years who toiled making me."

The bus ignited to life as Benoy took his place comfortably on one of the seats, and started inquiring about the curiosity that the bus's last statement had ignited in him, "Made you? How can a simple servant of bank transactions, help with the building of this grand ship of locomotion."

"Oh Not me directly, I always had this faculty in me to move. But your supervision and expertise was leading the construction of the bus stop you just used."

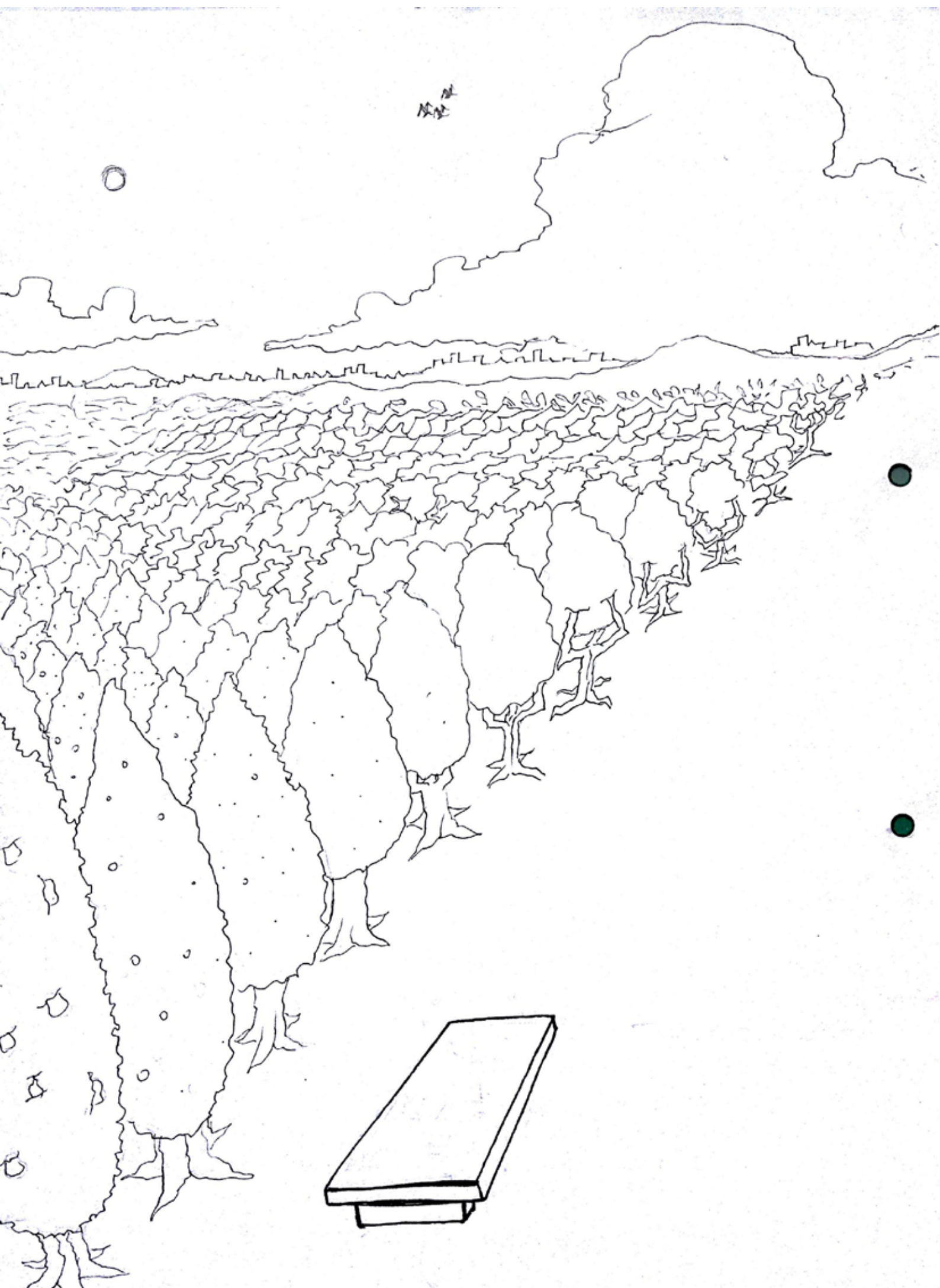
"I built the stop outside my office?!"

"Oh yes indeed. And not just that, also the one where I'll just drop thee."

Mr. Bose closed his eyes, once again attempting to dive in towards that treasure of memories and this time as he opened it, some of the pieces, though still formless, seemed to have acquired color and they were all warm hues of red. He couldn't exactly



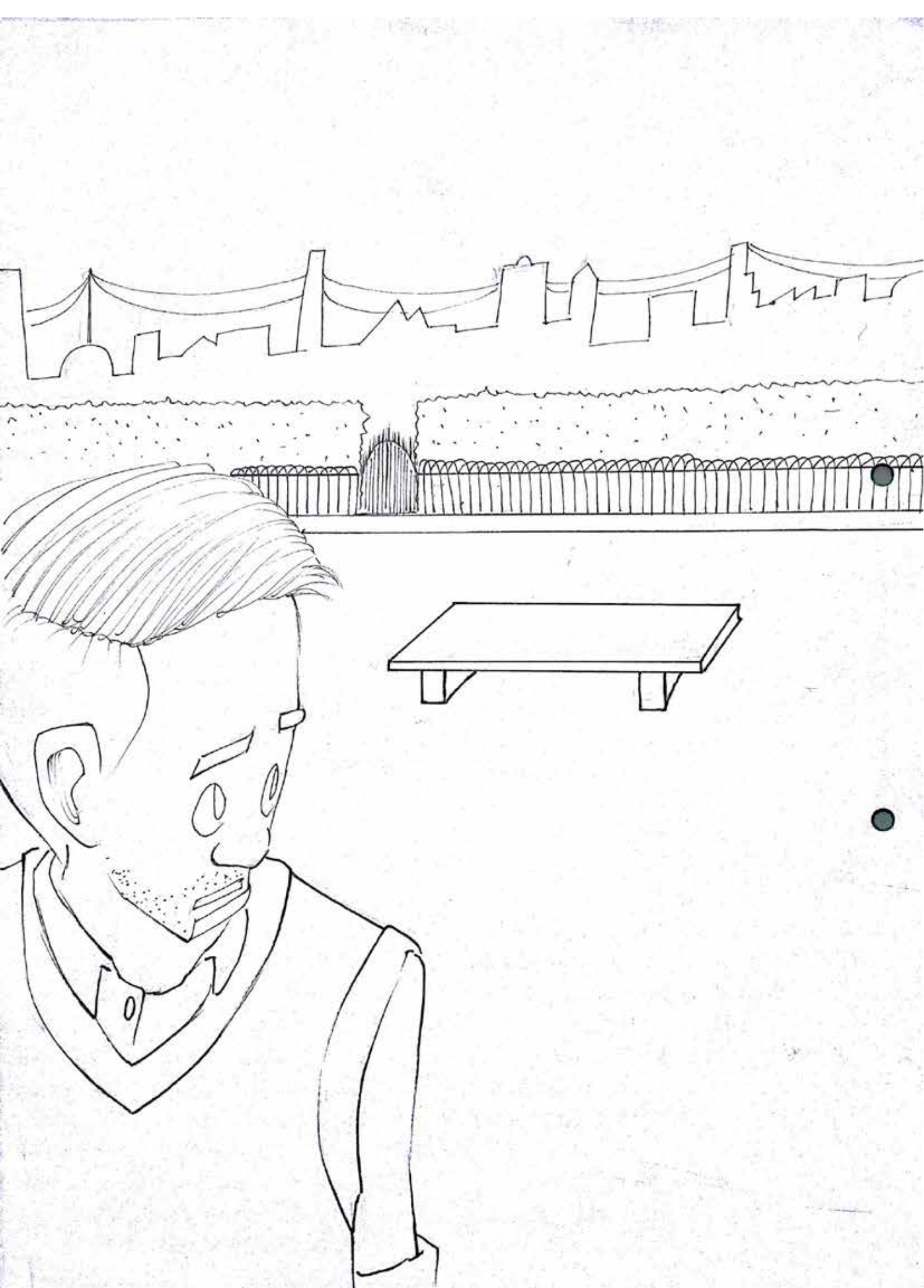
remember constructing these bus stops, and neither did his background as a bank worker nor the fact that he was hearing about this from a bus in any way helped add support to claim, but it seemed true anyways. For reasons inexplicable a similar gush of emotion filled him as it did watching that montage in his cubicle. Benoy couldn't and didn't want to label this weirdly merry sensation, but the truth was, that a stop and a cubicle was all, that right now, defined his sense of existence. The bus came to a halting jolt and Mr. Bose stepped down hoping to see this dream house he'd only seen through this photograph in his hand. But as you might have expected, I, your humble writer, wasn't just ready to simply cut short his grand expedition.



In front of him stood a park of humongous proportions. "Wasn't this supposed to take me to my home?" The bus replied with, "This is the station you take the bus on, of course you wouldn't expect to be landed straight at your home!", and Mr. Bose who knew rhetoricity of his question couldn't help but agree. If it hadn't already been too much help, the bus, as it left, gave another clue to aid Benoy in finding his identity, "I can't direct you to your humble stall. But I can say for fact, that the very first thing you do as you land here everyday, is go inside, I would guess, for a leisurely stroll "

"A leisurely stroll', hmm, before I even enter, I can say for sure that this stroll would serve many a purposes from self enlightenment to eerie simulations, but leisure would be the least of them."

Needless to say that as he entered through the small gate sandwiched between two lines of tall fence that would hide everything in sight from here till inside, his commotion was duly confirmed. What awaited him were long parallel rows of trees, running till what seemed like infinity, in an



increasing order of growth from right to left, and a bare bench on the extreme left. Every time he would think that he'd seen all strange that was offered by this city, he'd receive a new benchmark to the stuff he should label as 'uncanny'. Benoy walked towards the bench, now comfortably familiar with this practice of being on a constant outlook for any sources of voices. This time it was from the bench beneath as he was about to take his seat.

"And look who it is, if not the arrogant brat, who sowed these trees, for the mere purposes of flattery." Came a voice of a cranky old man, quite like the ones you'd find in a park like this.

"Oh, hello Sir, Sorry for this unintended mockery. I am Benoy Bose, a bank worker trying to recollect my memory, reach my home and find my identity."

"Aren't you just like all those, young men who know only rhyme and claim to have mastered prose. I know nothing about you and why should I too? Why would an old man like me, have any will, poking around in the matters of a lovely couple." Ignoring the obvious irony in the old bench's remark about rhyme, "Couple? Wait, of course yes I have a wife!"



"Please do tell me more!"

"I don't know, I don't know, go ahead and look for yourselves."

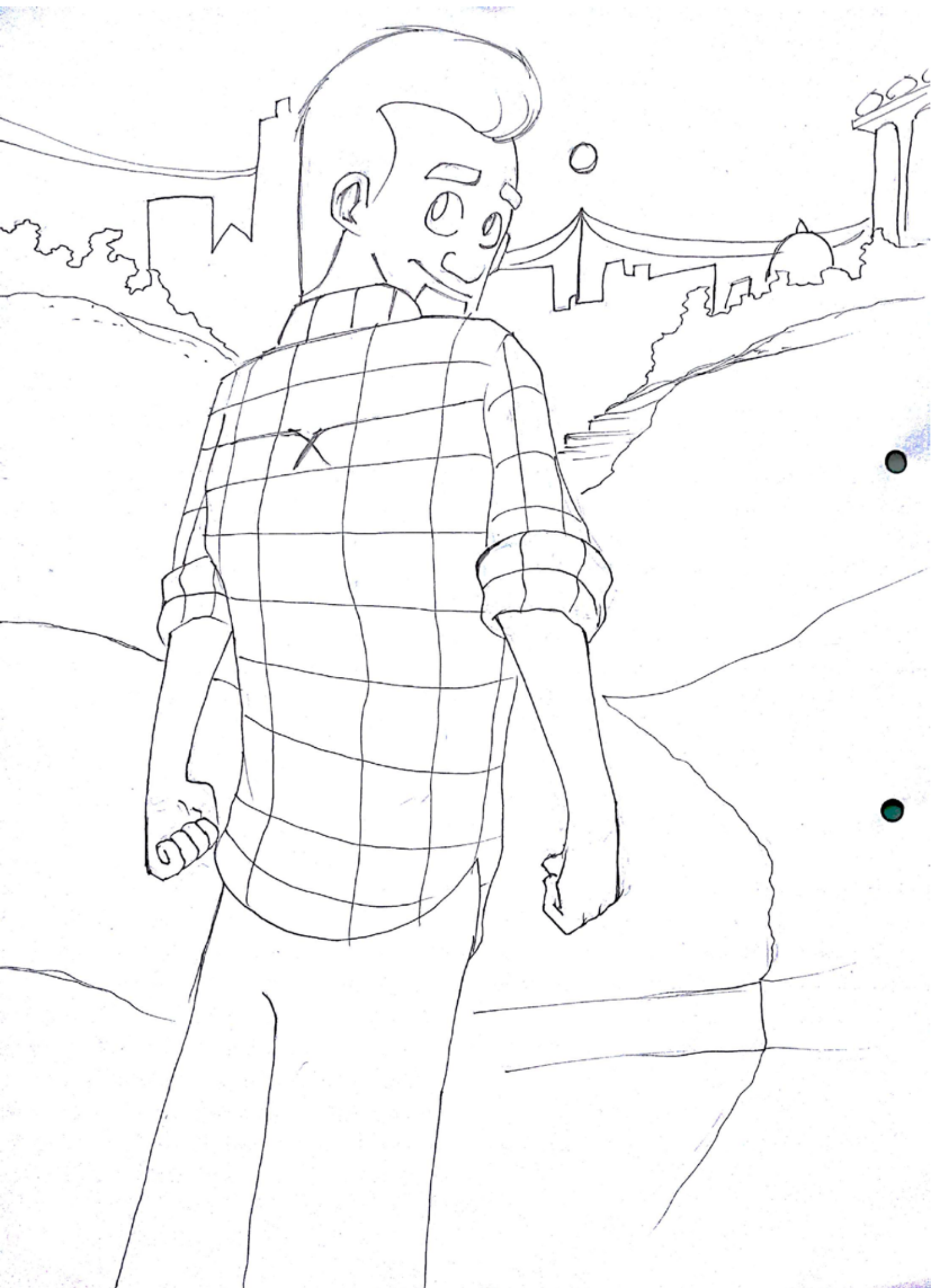
All these rows are a mere reflection, an image of each year of their progression.

These trees are the key to your roots. These images carry a shadow of you too."

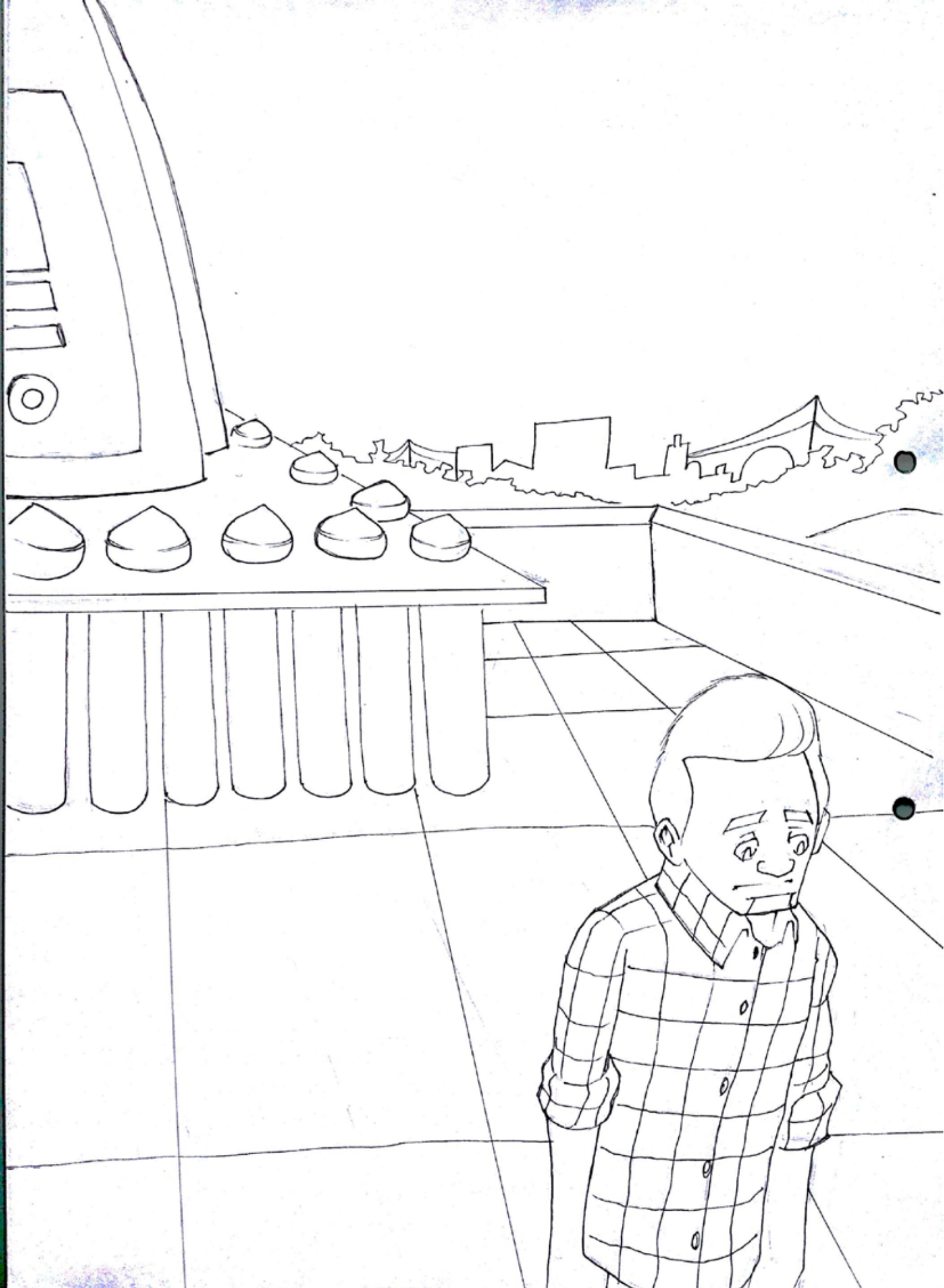
Mr. Bose walked closer to the row on the extreme left and saw him and his wife watering and tending for the trees. He tried calling them out, but like the bench said, they were a mere reflection, a few seconds of memory playing in a loop. As he moved towards the right, with each row he, and the images in the row grew younger and younger. Each image a testimony of their ever growing bond. All of them were significant defining moments of his life. The birth of their child, he announcing his promotion to his wife, the event could be any, but the common thread binding all these pearls of moments was this park, the row of trees, standing a live witness to all experiences that in Benoy's life had to be. The farthest row of trees was a mere series of pits being sown with seeds. He and his wife were both dressed in wedding attires. Moving further right made them walk back to the temple they had just



married in and come to plant the tree series. The row, thus becoming a living emblem of their marriage, an everlasting union. It was obvious he had to follow the image back to the temple to resume his journey, but before leaving the park premises, he looked back at the rows of trees and stood still for a moment. It was no casual gaze, it was a wide peer of absorption, like the eyes of a man leaving his home forever, looking at his foreboding for the last time to consume as much as it could in this final glance. He knew he wouldn't ever return here, by this point he had a fair idea this world wasn't his place, finding his home and finding himself meant leaving for the reality. But this brief visit had definitely ascertained a grudging respect for its iteration in the real world. Heaving in another deep breath, he turned his face and open his eyes with a fixed gaze. In front of him, he could see the next stop of his travel, a majestic temple.



A moment away from observing the unusual happenings of this world, Benoy saw that he was now a twenty seven year old. Looking back, he could see the temple whose grandeur was evermore owing to the wedding, but the decorations all went away as he walked further close to it. Guess he must have moved further back in time, what a pity, he was hoping to witness his wedding from a third person perspective. His next visitor, wasn't all that easy to find. Probably this was a means for this world to punish him for his growing cockiness in anticipating it, but whatever it was, the process for sure wasn't all that appealing. He had studied the temple thoroughly inside out for about an hour till the idea slowly started creeping in that walking in this temple might not have been his brightest decision. Almost giving up, he started walking towards the nearest exit, but just as he about to leave a voice called out to him.



"Is that all you've got? Is this your definition of a rigid resolve?", asked the voice of a lady disguised as a cow, which was as gentle as it was leisurely.

"Oh, thank you Miss, I had lost all hopes. I'm a traveler lost. Could you please help me in finding my home?"

"Well, I certainly ain't no traveller, being tied to this rope all my life.

But if it's the search for yourself, you just might be in luck this time.

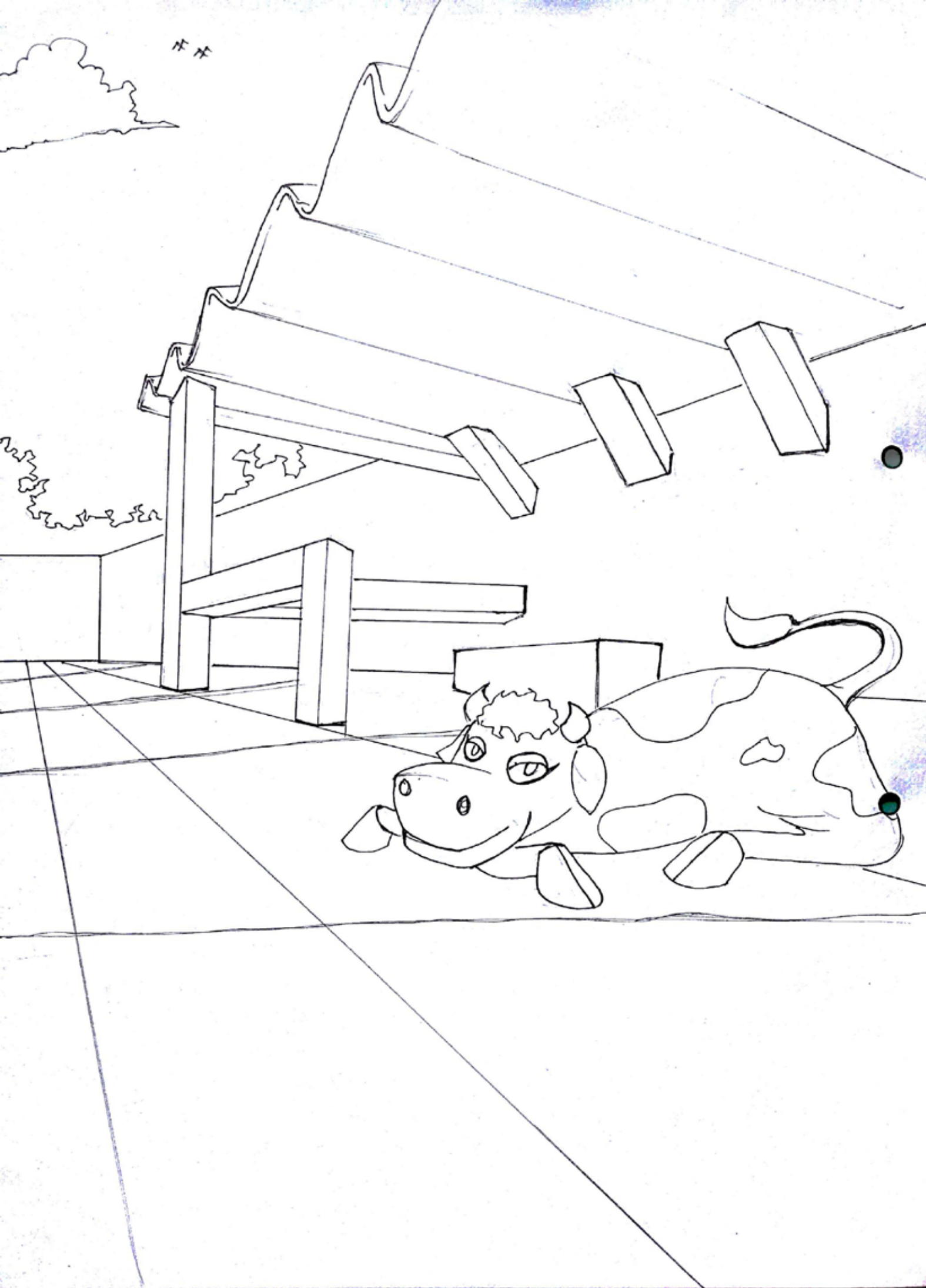
You see this shed that you stand underneath, was carved by your very hands that no longer hold tools and machines."

"With all due respect, is there any new information? For this rumor is old of a banker who goes around making, planting, and god knows, doing what sorts of constructions."

"Well, you can reject as much as you want, but the truth remains ever strong.

Close your eyes and for yourselves, you tell me, don't you too see these hands are in love with drudgery?"

He did close his eyes, not in acceptance and faith to her instruction, but in a sigh rejection of her

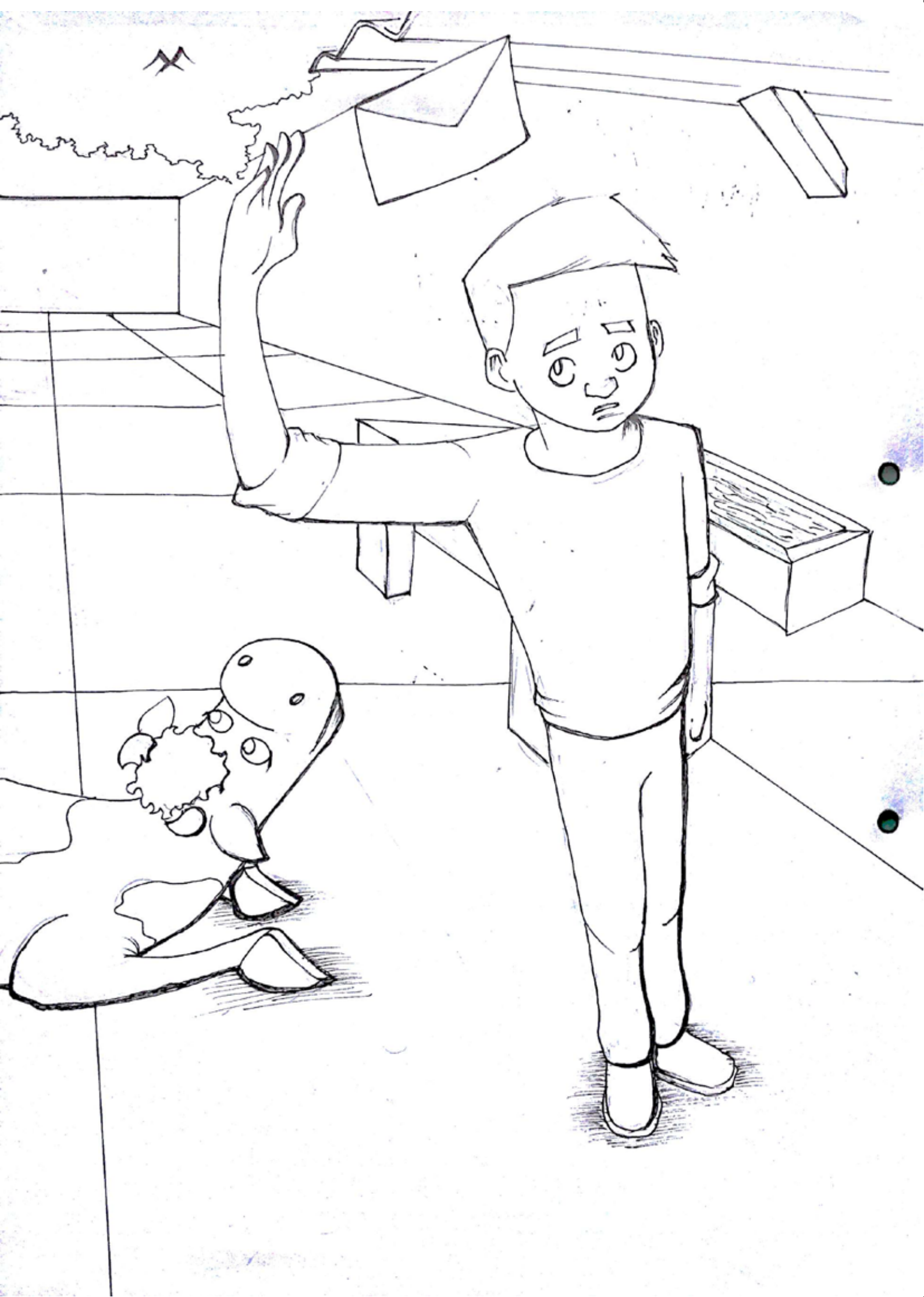


futile suggestion. But to his surprise it was all true; all those memories of working and toiling to make this shed came back to him in a jiff. It had been a long pending self ambition that he wanted to see to the end but got the time to do so only after finishing his higher secondary examinations. As he opened his eyes back, he saw himself transformed to the eighteen year old self, looking at the shed feeling the very sensation of pride and ecstasy as he did when he first completed it.



This cow shed was quite possibly the first medal of achievement Benoy had ever won for himself. And the choice of location was perfect as well, a temple, he visited weekly with his family as part of a religious ritual and the future venue for his wedding. What a perfect way to mark all that in such an elegant dedication.

Mr. Bose, by now, had an almost entire image of himself. But there was a resurfacing doubt that yet remained. And a letter came swirling through the sky and landed in his hand to further strengthen this commotion. It was the acceptance letter to an architecture college. This finally explained his passion and natural instinct for building and creating. But if everything was so perfect why is our poor protagonist spending day and night grinding at a desk job when he is clearly functioned to work as an architect? He knew his past, he knew his present and the envelope gave an address of the home on the photograph. So only one more job

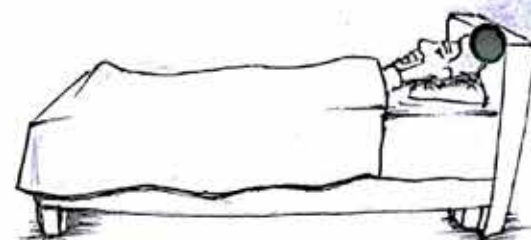


was left. To go home and find reasons for this dream that was left incomplete.

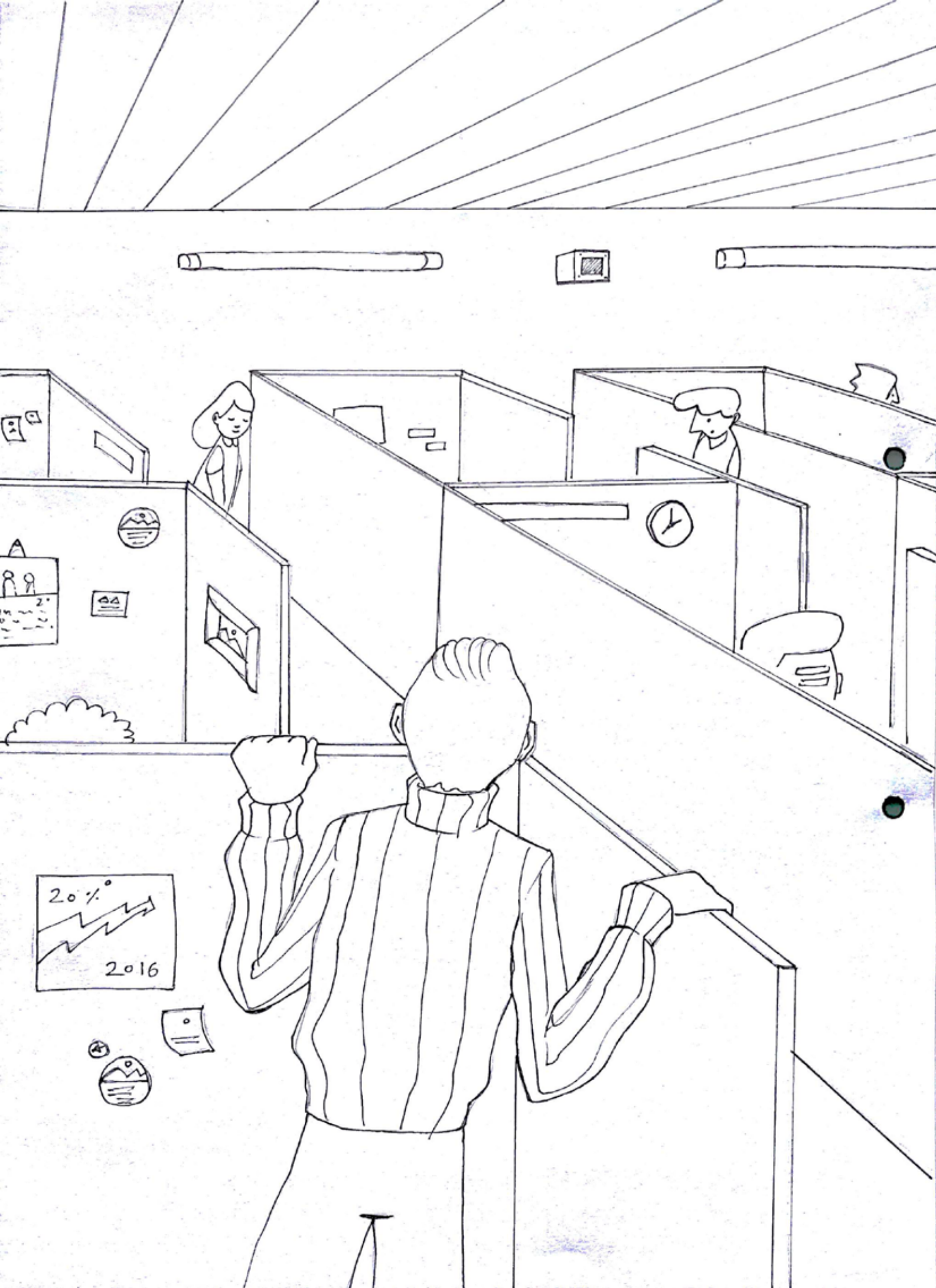
He tightly clenched the photograph of his home and the envelope with the address and started running towards it. As he ran years rolled down and he saw himself wearing the graduation robe and holding an architect's degree, taking a moment of joy and pleasure, he ran further and found himself standing in front of the mentioned address, but it was not the home in the photograph.



He went in, dressed in whites and saw himself attending a mourning. The answer to 'whose?' had been answered too, by a big photo frame that rested in the center of the hall adorned with marigold garlands. The image was that of his father's, twenty years ago his father had died owing to a chronic and he was pushed to take up the job left at the bank he worked in. He had younger siblings and the remaining family to take care of, and architecture was far from a stable vocation back then. The photograph in his hand was not his real home, but one he had designed to someday make for himself.



He had found all the answers he had been looking for, but the reality was far from enlightening, he found himself in a pitch black hall, there was just him. No, wait, he could see a bed at a distance with a person lying on it. He walked towards it and found the forty five year old him sleeping on it. He knelt down and started whispering something in his ears breaking the old man's sleep.



As he woke up in a state of increased heart rate, he finds himself back in his office. He gets up, the boing now vanishing in the gush of usual office clamor and the havoc around him confirmed his return to reality.

Everything was back to the same except Mr. Benoy Bose, who strangely had a different air to him. He pulls a sheet of drawing paper, finds a pencil and a T-square in the drawer of unused articles. Cracks his knuckles and clears his voice, "Let's get started!"

*Written and Illustrated
By Nitish Chopra*