

A COLLECTION OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY POEMS

TOUCHED BY RAIN
REACHED BY THUNDER



WRITTEN BY

KHUNYING CHAMNONGSRI RUTNIN HANCHANLASH



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Little Lark

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder is an introspective memoir of poetry inviting deep contemplation. Boredom and loneliness are familiar feelings, yet few people explore them deeply, foregoing the opportunity to witness how they devour our purpose for living, constantly sucking the heart's energy as they slip by unattended.

By undertaking a journey within one discovers how with little effort such processes reveal themselves naturally. But these contemplative adventures can be unpleasant, especially when one fears encountering something they are unwilling to admit exists—easier to allow the mind to stay a slave to boredom and loneliness.

Khunying Chamnongsri Rutnin's poetry explains the wonders of grappling with the interplay of thoughts and feelings as they unfolded during a meditation retreat she undertook at **Suan Mokkhabalarama**. It is a captivating struggle of a Dhamma practitioner, who is also a public intellectual, writer and social organiser — personas all vying for attention in a seemingly unstoppable mind. Highly skilled in observation, analysis and criticism, it is a mind that allows no thoughts to pass unscrutinised, nor the resulting imbalances brought on by strong emotions that may trail in their wakes.

Such an outward-inclined mind, however, presents an obstacle to Dhamma practice, distracting it from venturing within where the fruits of practice await. **Khunying Chamnongsri** finds navigating this U-turn formidable, as it necessitates fighting an inertia her mind sought comfort from throughout her life.

The challenge is daunting. Knowing to peer inside is just the beginning, because once there, it can be an uneasy place to dwell. In contrast, remaining outside one finds an infinite array of characters and constructs to frame stories about, "...remarkable intelligence and sharp analysis. Yes, I'm truly brilliant, what an ego boost."

Returning inward, there are no companions to join in the journey. There is neither praise nor admiration, only silence and noise alternating for attention. To observe and contemplate them is difficult. Where does the noise stop and the silence begin?

Across 40 brief passages, **Khunying Chamnongsri** chronicles the mishaps and marvels when witnessing all that emerges, lingers then exits the mind. It is a perpetual carousel ride that ceases only when practice leads to abandoning any quest to acquire, and the mind becomes calm, cool, clear and content.

Until that day arrives, the mind remains *Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder*. But so long as one does not abandon the training, continues on the journey within and forgoes anticipation and expectation along the way, that day will come.

The melodic writing style is engaging, allowing readers to gather insight as they float along in the flow of thoughts and feelings. In sharing these personal experiences from her own Dhamma practice, **Khunying Chamnongsri** hopes they might aid others, an intention I trust she fulfills.

*Runjuan Intharakamhaeng
Suan Mokkhabalarama, Chaiya District
25 February 1992*

1. BOREDOM



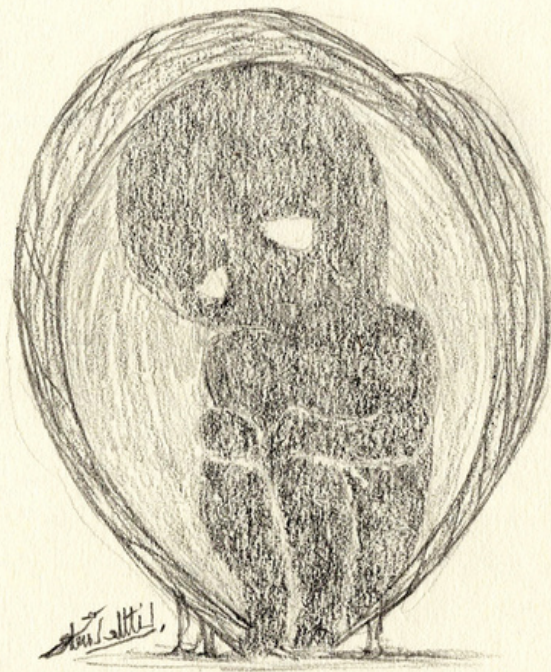
Finally I see you for what you are, Boredom.
You sprout and grow from desire.

Desiring that to happen, this to become.
Wanting the future, wanting the past.
Wanting something, or anything not of this moment.
Wanting to be anywhere but here,
Wishing to do anything other than the now-doing.

Desire infiltrates every minute, making
The mind writhe to escape this place, this time,
To be where it is not.

To be rid of you is far easier than I ever imagined!
I merely look into the mind at you,
Step away and gaze at you, quietly, or intently,
and you simply dissolve, Boredom...
Until I'm unmindful again.

2. LONELINESS



Loneliness -

You are a sibling of boredom:

Also born from desire.

Desire to escape oneself,

Desire for another's understanding, sympathy, love.

The heart struggles, reaches out,

Longs for. Yearns for.

The solution is the same as when getting rid of boredom:

It requires profound self observation.

Watch your mind closely, watch your thoughts,

Seek them out. Scrutinise them.

Be careful not to tumble into their trap.

I know from experience that it is harder to beat loneliness

Because you will feel sorry for yourself.

Self-pity takes over and fills thoroughly, the void inside,

Obstructing your observation.

Keep examining!

When you see it,

That will be the end of loneliness.

3. BEUNG YAI



The Beung Yai under the tall coconut tree,
The spider-like creature who attached her web to the
tips of tall grass,
A web delicate and light as mist, spread across her
domain,
The centre of which drops into a small cone, like the eye
of a cyclone.
I almost lost myself, staring into that hole; it felt ominous,
that soft, white cavity.

An ant trotted over the misty surface several times, safely,
But when a small cricket the colour of dry grass sprang
on to the web,
The eight-legged Beung jumped astride him and pierced
her fangs into the cricket's neck.
The cricket's tentacles shook sporadically,
His eyes, the only other movement.
I shooed her away: the Beung Yai scurried in to her
webbed hole but still poked her head back out to keep
watch on her prey.

The cricket was immobile, only his tentacles swayed:
He wasn't dead yet but completely paralysed by the
Beung's venom.

The covetous Beung rushed out again to retrieve her
victim, clasping him to her chest,
Hugging him so tightly that if you didn't know you
would have thought he was a long lost lover.
Attached to her bosom, she possessed him as she
roamed her web,
Sucking into her body all his insides, leaving his shell
whole, as if he was still full of life.

And from now on the cricket will not spring or jump on
his grass-coloured legs;
The Beung Yai will carry him, close to her heart.

4. THE DITCH

First time I came here last October I couldn't jump over this ditch.

Others did it easily but I was anxious and wary,
Dreading the moment it would be my turn. And so I fell in.
Not once have I been able to jump over this ditch of tall grass and dark water.

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Abra Little

Coming back this time I said to myself, if I fall, I fall: it doesn't matter.

Oh! But I crossed over easily.

Let's try again, over where it's wider. I did it again!

I walked along looking for larger widths, to test myself.

This ditch teaches me more than anyone could have expected.

Why caution, dodge or escape?

Nothing is more frightening than fear.

You know, don't you? That fear will persist until your life is all of avoiding problems.

Look at it, look at the fear which has swelled up in your heart,

Stare it eye to eye. Don't let yourself be a slave to it.

Train yourself. Practice everyday.

Inspect it until you understand, study it until you realise,

That it is only a thought.

Fight it! At worst it would bring only death.

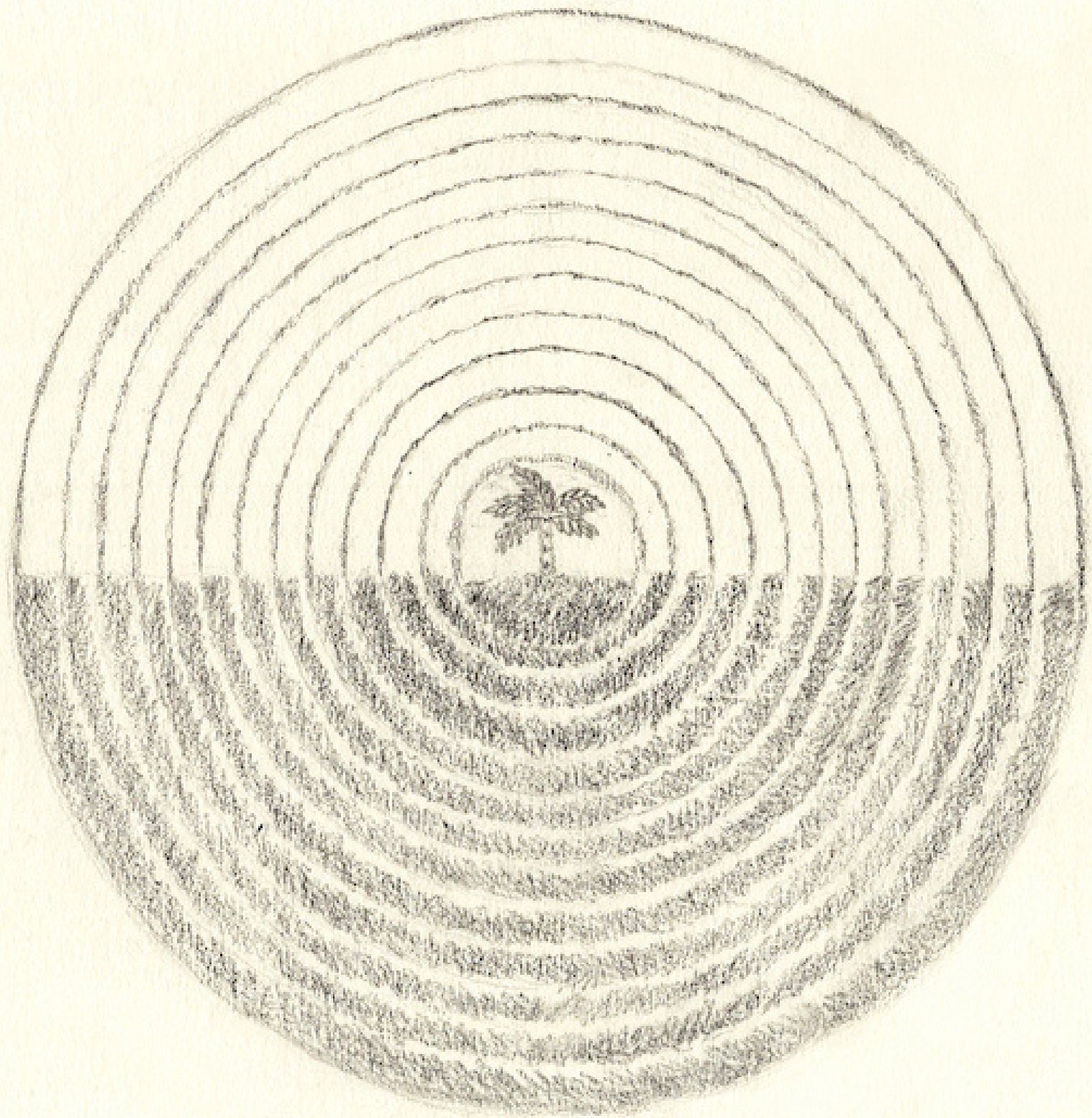
Madness comes from fear, you know.

Don't let it take over your heart,

Don't let it imprison you,

And never let you free.

5. THE POND



Abu Lattif

The morning sun shines soft on the Naligae pond.
The water looks bright,
Still,
And clear.

But it is not so;
It is an illusion.
If it were really clear, really still, we would see to
the bottom.
What we see are tricks of light on the surface,
Reflecting surrounding objects and colours,
So that they look real.
But no,
They are not real.

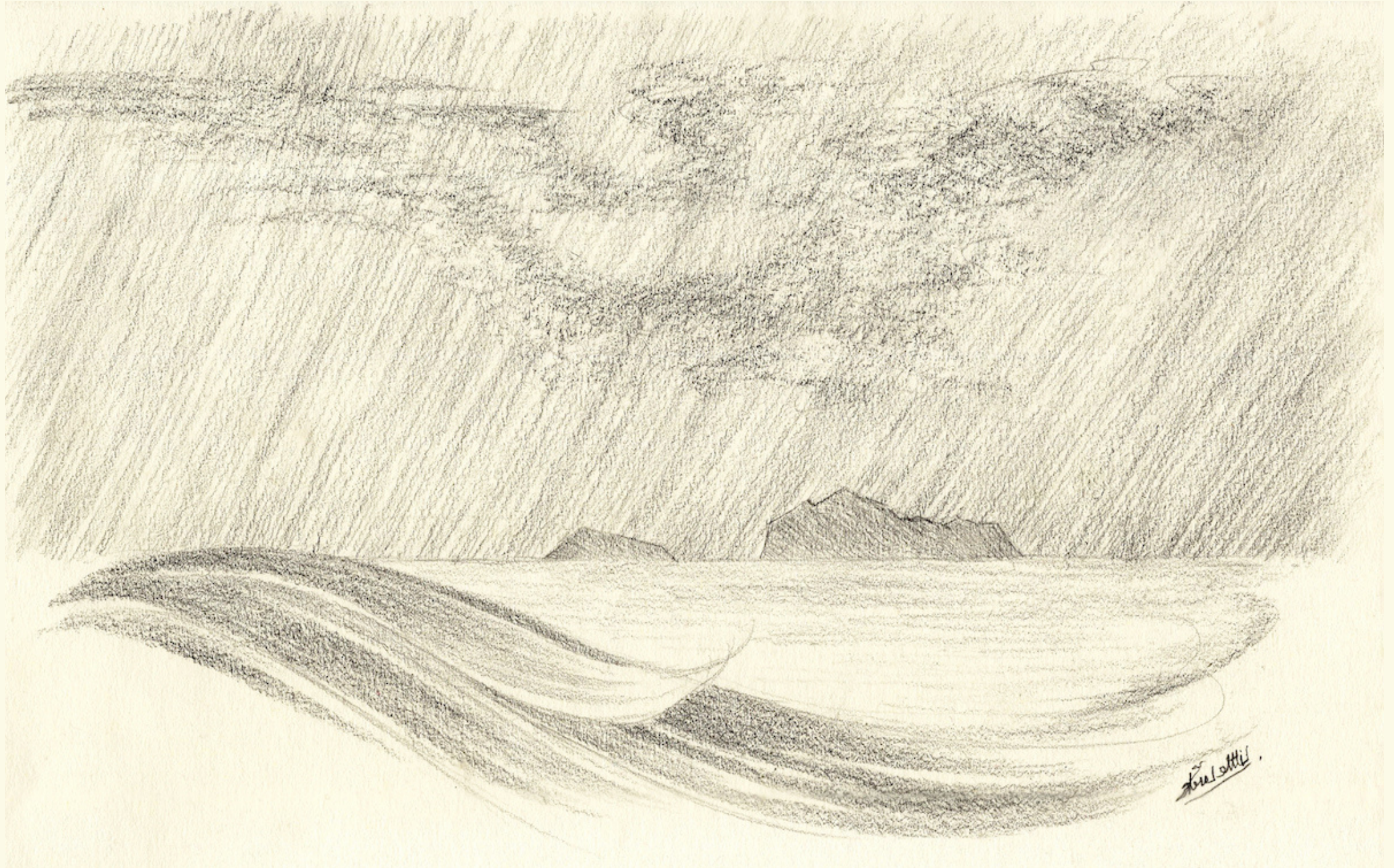
Look carefully. Observe the colour of the leaves of that
Liew tree,
It is darker in the reflection, marred by the algae below.
Look closely. Look at the colour of the sky,
The water's surface tension makes it a shade darker
below than above.

The reflections show wispy clouds,
But if you are still, if you really pay attention,
You would see they are not seamless as the original,
But ripple with the water.
After the storm last night the water is clear and still,
In the same way my mind is still.
Just as the pond, clear as a mirror,
Shows only reflections,
Illusions trick our eyes and attract our minds,
Distracting us.

This morning the surface images continue to deceive and
distract me,
Their shimmerings mesmerising,
Entertaining,
Like so many things in life
Which constantly demand and attract our attention,
Until we forget to stop and look deep within.

Stop awhile.
Look to the bottom of the pond.
Then you'll at least see that
The deeper it is, the more the water is tranquil, and still,
The deeper it is, the more the water is clear,
And cool.

6. STILL TOUCHED BY RAIN



I liked walking in the rain; the stronger it poured,
the better.

I liked to turn my face to receive the water, to let it
soak into my hair and flow in little rivulets down my
collars.

I liked how the raindrops oozed into my earlobes, how
they trickled down my face to my mouth and how I
would taste their sweet freshness.

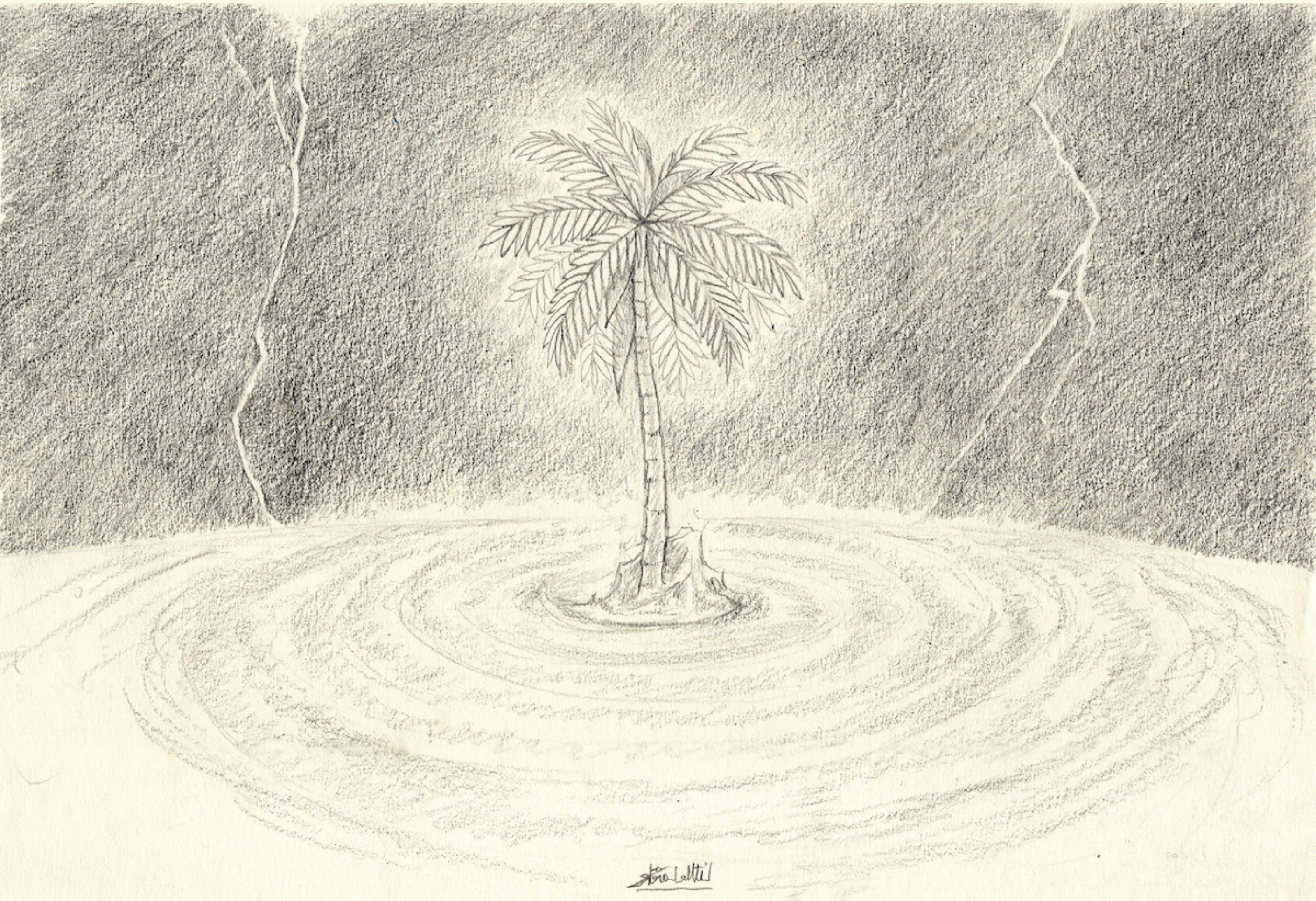
I would close my eyes and feel droplets of water on
my eyelashes, their coolness on my eyelids.

I liked so much, all precipitation coming down from the skies: the soft, misty droplets were refreshing; the unrelenting downpour as the sky burst open would make my heart beat in rhythm as the water softened and cooled the body.

Thunder I also adored, in all the different ways it came. The sudden, slamming crash which startles you, as though someone lit dynamite in the corner of your heart; the omnipotent rumble behind large dark clouds that you anticipate as it came nearer, becoming louder, or moved away, to leave an empty, silent sky; the thunder claps; and the powerful roar that sounds as though **Tosakan, Lord of Demons**, was bellowing out of all his ten mouths.

So why? Why does the phrase "*Not touched by rain, nor reached by thunder*" keep running through my thoughts? Why only this phrase? It's been several days now.

7. REACHED BY THUNDER



If I keep working, persevering to get closer,
If I try, little by little,
Maybe one day I will reach that Nalika Island.

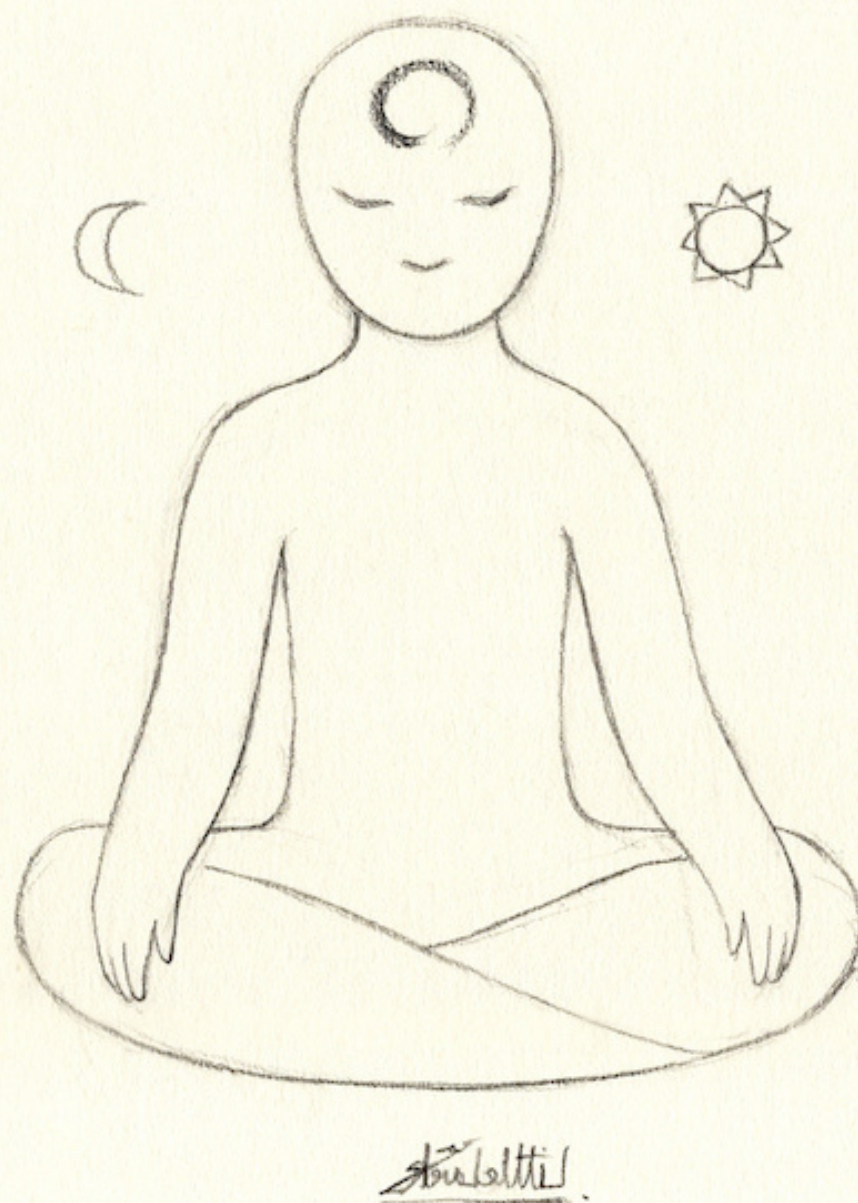
The water looks calm, but under currents are strong.
Attachments run deep.
Attachment to what I have, what I am - even though
I know it is all illusion.
I know. But only in my mind.
Only in some moments do I realise it in my heart -
Every once in a while, in a flash, like lightning -
To remind me how different mental knowledge and true
understanding is:
A different kind of realisation.
I know all is impermanent, but I know only in thought,
Deep down, all those illusions that my attachments create
to fool me still enchant me,
Even though **Ajarn*** keeps telling me, '*Observe! Observe
Impermanence.*'

*Dear Little One,
There is the Nalika coconut tree,
Growing there in the sea of wax.
Neither touched by rain,
Nor reached by thunder.
There, in the middle of the sea of wax,
Reached only by the one who's free.*

Which generation of incredible Southerners were these,
who rocked their children to sleep with lullabies of
Nirvana?

*Ajarn refers to Khun Ranjuan Intharakamhaeng

8. CONTINUOUSLY RECITING



<Pali>

When a person sees with wisdom, that all is impermanent,
Then he would tire of all that cause his unhappiness and
delusions.

That, then, is the path of Nirvana and pure Dhamma.

So I am reciting night and day to dispel the distracting
thoughts that keep flowing into my mind.

9. IMPERMANENCE AT THE END OF A BROOM



I sweep the concrete clearing next to the house three or four times a day.

Dry leaves litter the floor even where there is roof cover. The leaves keep falling.

I cleared the area thoroughly and not half an hour later it would be carpeted again.

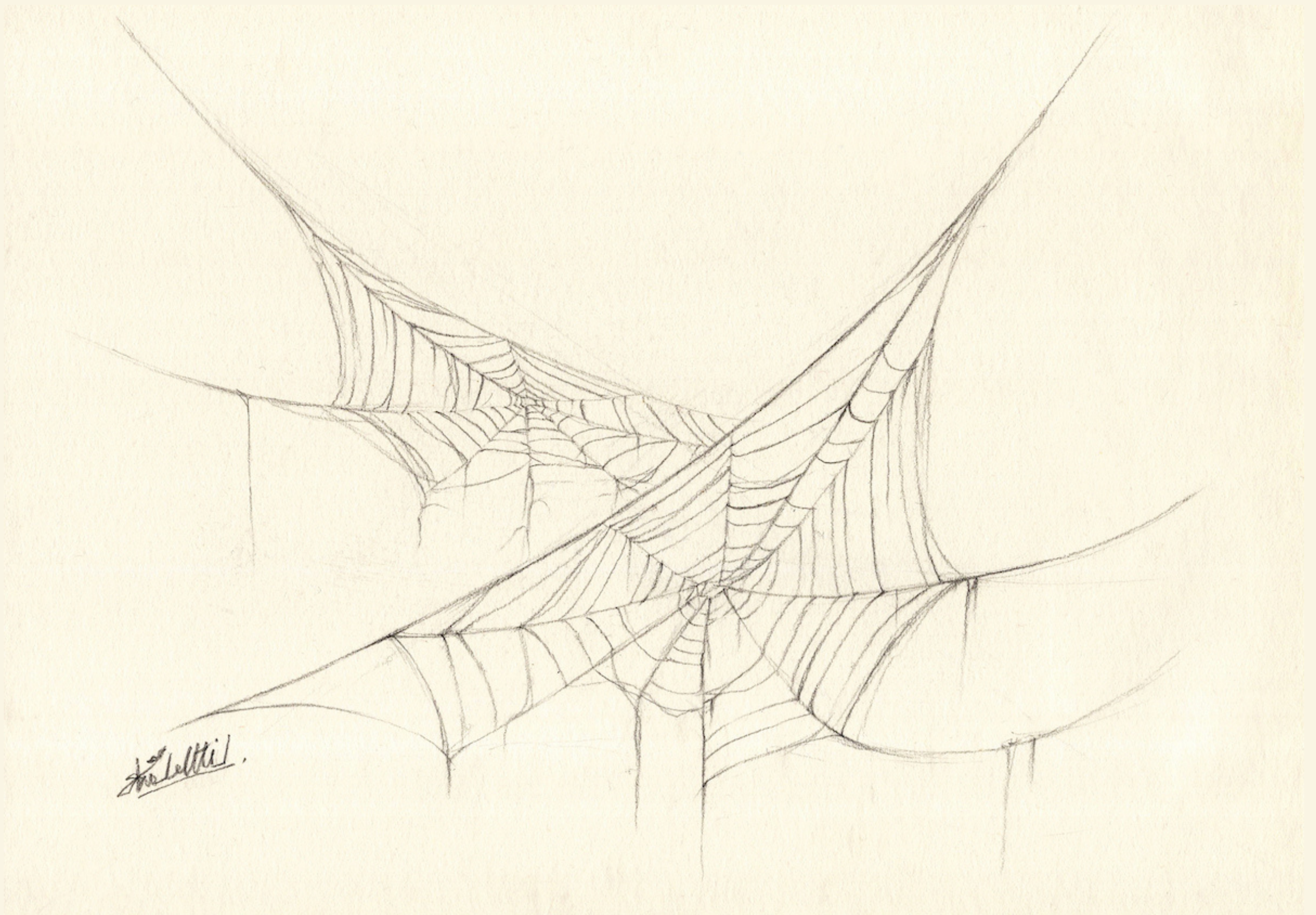
It never ends!

Trees so efficiently producing leaves to bathe in the sun,
Play in the rain,

Dance in the breeze,

And fall to be swept away.

10. SPIDER WEBS



And so with spider webs.
Beautiful, transparent, strong.
Swept away today, woven again the next.
The sunlight glitters on this one just as the one before.
No, now I won't clear them away; let the web creators
use their insect traps,
My broom will only brush off the old ones that have torn
and gathered dust,
The ones I am certain have been abandoned by those
accomplished weavers
For their new creations.

11. THE COCKERELS



This morning **Tan Ajarn**'s cockerels were positively cocky,
As only they would know how.

Fluffing up feathers, stamping, flapping wings -
challenging and provoking.

They puff out their chest as if to say, '*I am the best,*'

And ran after hens whilst Tan Ajarn spoke of release from
worldly attachments,

To hundreds of people, people who'd travelled from near
and afar, Europeans, Indians, Japanese, Thais;

All who endeavoured to be there for the sermon at dawn,
on the Kanikar clearing.

Tan Ajarn talked about the ultimate truth,

But those red-crested cocks were not interested.

Their egos competing,

They strut around in their own world -

A world of rice husks mixed with dust and rye,

Among petals of the Kanikar tree.

*Tan Ajarn refers to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

12. THE LARGE HOUSE

This house is a large teak house,
It is the furthest away from the community and next to
the forest.

I moved here from the small house inside the compound
ten days ago.

It is peaceful, quiet.

Only sounds of birds, shrews and falling leaves are heard;
And the sounds of dogs and forest creatures that drift in
at night.

There is another sound, at first a mystery,
Like someone opening and closing a creaking door in
the sky,

After a few days I realised, oh! it's the sound of branches
scraping against one another when the wind blows.

Since being in this out of the way location
I haven't for a minute been bored or lonely.

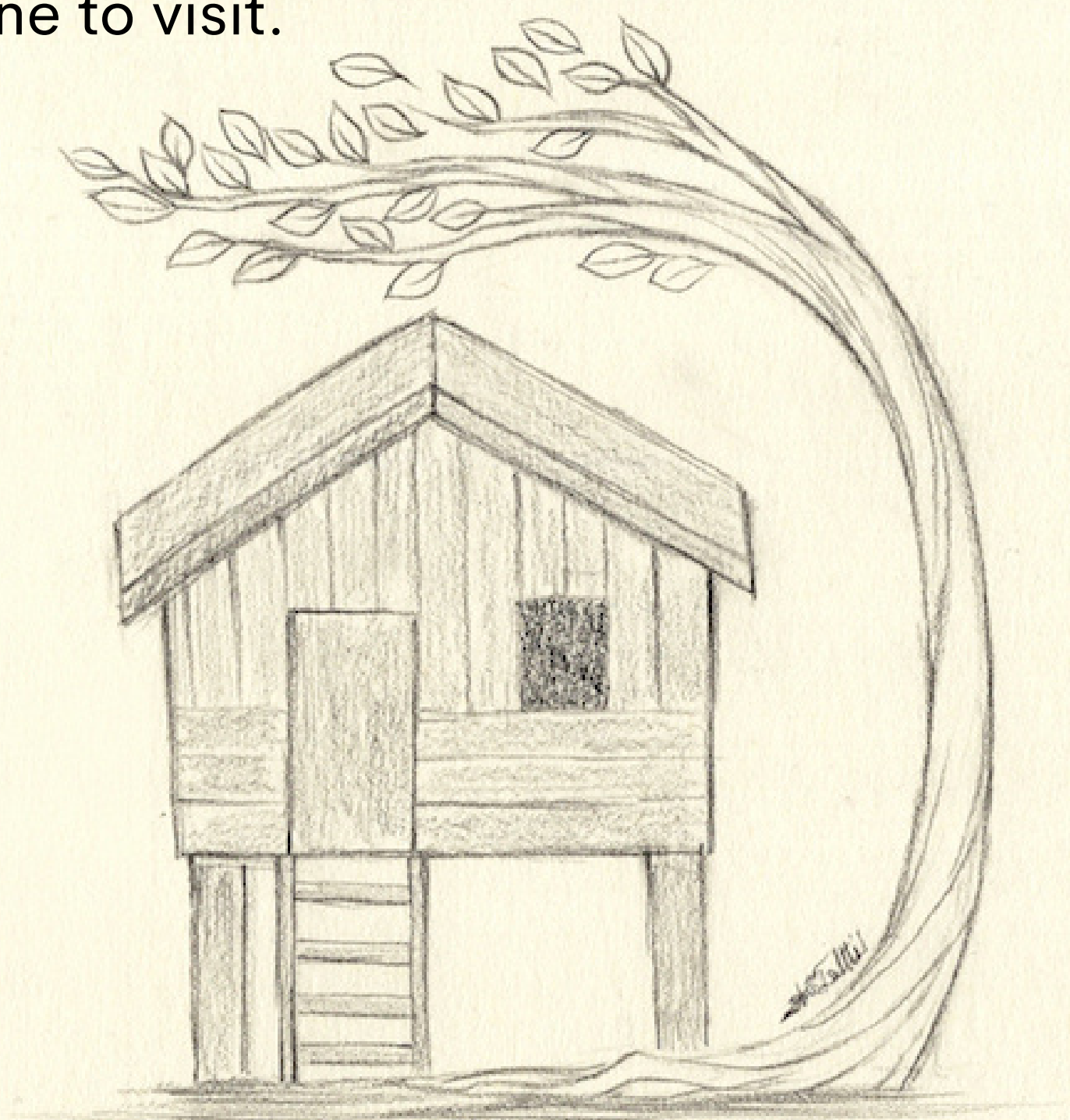
I don't wait around;

I am not expecting anyone to visit.

There is no anxiety,

Or anticipation.

No expectations



13. BUTTERFLY OF MAYA

To hold a thought when the mind is restless
is like catching an illusionary butterfly:
You aim and grab, hold it tight in your hands,
Then open up to see it for all its colours and
patterns
But find nothing there.
Then at the slightest inattention, there it is
again dancing in the air before you,
The butterfly of Maya.



When I observe my emotions within a shifting mind -
Whether love, anger, self-pity, or delight - they disappear.
There is stillness and silence for as long as I'm looking,
Then with a slip of my concentration, the mind is lost again
to endless thoughts and feelings.

The more I look at the thoughts, the more I see they are
just illusions;
They come and go, replace each other, turn into another,
constantly changing.
Different colours, different rhythms, different movements.
None can be pinned down.

Who can tell me,
How can we teach our children not to be led astray by
those butterflies of illusion,
Those hundreds, thousands, of thoughts that hatch in
their minds each day?

How do we teach them to catch those butterflies as they
dance in their hearts,
Before they fly out.
To teach them to do it again and again
So their minds stay clear, and bright,
And not distracted every time those hundred, thousand
butterflies of illusion flap their wings.

14. THE ORIGINAL CAUSE

It is becoming clearer,
What causes the unhappiness
and happiness in each of us
To appear, transform and
disappear.

I gradually came to realise,
by observation:
I used to think it was the result
of external influences;
Because that person did this,
this person did that,
Because of chance,
because it rained, or didn't rain...
But no, these are not the cause,

The true causes are within,
Old and new, they mix and match,
accumulate,
Just like the different leaves swept into that pile,
Fermenting, becoming fertile ground for
our happiness, sadness;
Loving, hating.

But even seeing this -
it is only mental acknowledgement -
I'm still in the habit of putting the blame on
those outside influences.
Must practise to know it from the heart.



15. CONTEMPLATING DHAMMA



Contemplating the Dhamma of my surroundings comes naturally to me:

The termite-riddled log beside the old hut, the sparkle of a stream,

The posse of cats, the gang of dogs...

But the practice of emptying the mind of thoughts, that is harder.

The contemplation of Dhamma becomes more profound when the mind is empty;

The more the mind is still, the deeper the realisations.

But a moment of unmindfulness could turn '*contemplation*' into '*dreaming*,'

Especially in one whose mind is prone to imagine.

I must be attentive.

16. THE LIZARD



Four or five days ago I was looking at a lizard
sunbathing on a big boulder;
It was a plain looking lizard,
Its colour so pale it seemed to meld with the rock.
My mind was still, my heart light,
As a gentle breeze brushed the soft morning sunlight.

Suddenly, another lizard jumped out from nowhere,
Its body red as flames -
It even had a black strip over its eyes like a
renegade's mask.
It landed smack on top of the pale lizard.
They tumbled down into a pile of dry leaves someone
had swept together.
The first lizard scuttled away deep into the pile,
Whilst the scarlet one leapt back on to the boulder,
prominent and proud,
Its head held high, ego spread in defiance, body sleek,
its stomach warm against the rock.
Its slit eyes looked at me, challengingly.

All was lost. My peace usurped by a fast beating heart,
scattered mind.

My meditation, shattered by one mere lizard.
I closed my eyes for a second,
And the flame-coloured lizard was gone.

There, you lover of the sensational, take a look at your
awareness - there's Impermanence!
Well, it has to be this way for now; I'll struggle along,
deal with challenges as they come.
Sigh! Must keep trying.

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17. MOVEMENT



Dawn.

I look up to see the treetops circle above me like
a crown,

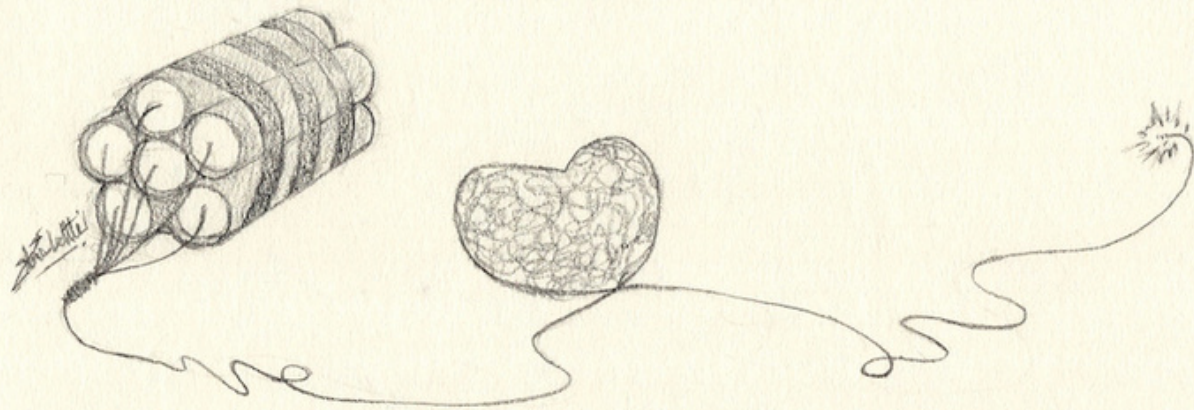
The sky within stretched as a tapestry embroidered
by streaks of clouds,

The morning sun, still shy, lights up only the topmost
leaves.

What was that, fluttering softly across my mind?
When I look in, it ceases.
The freshness coursing through me is palpable,
But something else caused a ripple then disappeared,
leaving only stillness;
So fast it couldn't be discerned.
What was it that disturbed the fabric of my mind?
Was it a shadow of the past? One of the old leaves
in the pile of memories, rotten and unsorted?

Don't analyse it: I would only be using old patterns
of thought, and be led by what the mind wants to think.
Instead I have to feel it, and hold it with awareness.
I must build Samadhi.
Samadhi.
Samadhi.
My Samadhi is still so weak.

18. FORGIVENESS



Forgiveness

Is the most difficult act of giving.

I am talking about the important issues, the complex ones;
The small acts of forgiving are easy, and we are fooled
into thinking all of it is easy.

I must be able to forgive, in order to unburden my heart.

For I know certainly that forgiveness can purify one's life
and one's awareness,

For what else is more tormenting than vengeance's poison?

I am learning now that,

Reason and logic do not provide the ability to really forgive.

To pardon, to say '*never mind,*'

And think it doesn't matter any more,

Is not forgiveness; it is tainted -

Deep down there is a vested interest for a peaceful mind.

Be careful, the wrath can collect and build up in pressure
until, unbearable,

Explodes one day, into smithereens.

I am realising,

That when the mind is truly still,

Then pure forgiveness will arise of its own accord.

19. TUA UNG



Tua Ung are inky black flying insects; they are similar to house flies but smaller, Their back legs are soft and furry, as if they wear velvet trousers.

On the first day about twenty of them came and explored the basement of the house.

They flew around the wooden pillars, looking for a nesting place.

The next morning another group came.

They spent all day buzzing around one of the pillars, As though weighing up the advantages of the site.

But the morning after there was a strange scenario: many Tua Ung were locked together in tiny bundles on the concrete floor.

They looked like writhing raisins, wiggling about.

It may have been their way of mating but on closer inspection, no:

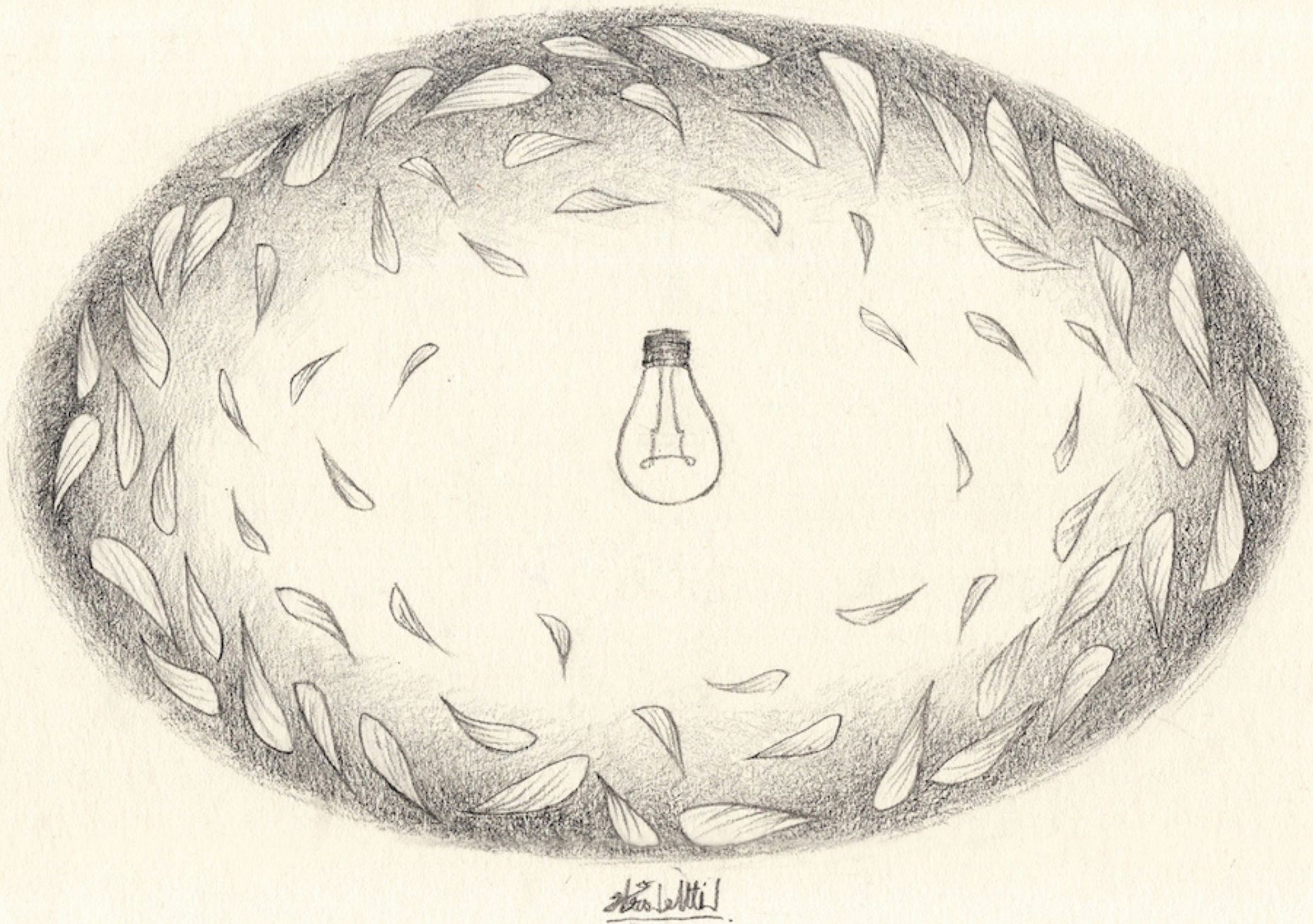
Abdul Kadir

They were fighting. Some were in pairs, others in
groups of three or four,
They clung and wrestled each other, intent on killing
their opponent.
They would not let go even when I nudged them with
the fronds of a broom.

At dusk I came back to find that the battle was over.
One, or often both, of the fighters were dead,
But none were allowed to go free:
The defeated clung to their enemies even in death.
The winners were a pathetic sight,
They struggled out of the battlefield pitifully,
Dragging dead opponents, stuck to their waist,
their wing or legs.
None of the victors went free,
They stumbled, swaying around with their burdens,
until they slowly died.
I tried to separate them but could not unlock their clasp.
Come evening there were still remnants of life on
the concrete,
No sweeping tonight then.

In the morning they were all dead,
Shrivelled up black specks on the floor.
Sweeping is never ending work;
This morning I swept hundreds of warriors to the ground.

20. THE WINGS OF MAYFLIES



Early one morning I came down to find wings all over
the floor.

Tiny little wings the size of tamarind leaves, translucent
as dew,
Ephemeral as sunlight.

Who has left their wings here, in the hundreds,
in thousands?

They float up in the wake of my broom.

The light loving fireflies have no doubt been dancing
and merry-making around our yellow bulb again,

Probably they played until

Exhausted, laid their wings down.

The owners have crawled underground,

But the soft wings still fancy flight;

At the swipe of the broom they billow up in the draft,

And scatter down liberally all over the floor again.

The coconut fronds of this brush are too harsh:

It is no way of disciplining these light, flighty wings,

I swap it for the soft grass broom,

And use its panned-out ends to gently persuade them
to the earth.

21. MENTAL ACTIVITIES

Ajarn reminded me to stop thinking,
So that in the stillness, my mind could turn inward;
And to stay with the breath.
I should also cease talking
So that my mind rests within.
And it is important to stop writing,
To put the pen down,
Stay the hand, fix the mind from picking it up again.

Writing is a form of communicating,
It is like talking to blank pages,
It is the ego showing off to itself.
It has to stop.
I have to let go of mental activities and take up those
of mindfulness.
I did not imagine it would be this difficult.



22. THE WHITE QUESTION MARK



Late afternoon.

My two feet take me tumbling down sandy banks.
Petals of the Flame tree cover the ground, fiercely red,
Each petal raucous against the dull brown earth,
Livid, fiery - as if their flames could swallow you.
Even trodden, stamped on until bruised, they retain
their intensity,
Not caring that they will soon become part of the ground.
So full of life even when they've fallen.

A little further on white Kaew petals cover the path,
bright and luminescent,
So pure they invite your eyes, your mind to take interest,
Each petal gently curved to make a delicate
question mark.

Flaming red, bright white - a contrast so intense it
thrills the mind.
Senses incensed, I was enticed to forget all about
Impermanence.

The dance of fire and the white question mark
Decorate the path of cats, people, dogs and chickens,
For all to see.



23. BEFORE DAWN



The scent of Dok Kaew drifts in with the breeze.
'Flowers bloom before dawn,' Tan Ajarn said,
'It is the time in which the Buddha reached Enlightenment.'

My mind is peaceful.
Light thoughts wander in,
And fade,
Appearing, disappearing,
Like the scent of Dok Kaew from far away.

24. THE SCENT OF DOK KAEW AND THE SOUND OF RAINFALL



Rain falls heavily.

The scent of Dok Kaew drifts in with the moist air,
Cooling the breath, refreshing.

The scent of the flowers alternates with faint smells of
rain and fresh soil.

Large raindrops falling

Endlessly, from a tireless sky,

Beat regularly on the aluminium *oong* cover,

Never too far apart, never too close together.

The smells and sound mix perfectly to fan the
smouldering coals inside my mind.

*Cut it off at the sensory contact, **Tan Ajarn** said.*
But it is so soft, comfortable, cool.
Cool? Maybe on the physical level,
It is refreshingly cool, but not on a deeper level.
I look at my mind, it is peaceful, but not still,
Peaceful because it is not seeking or grasping, but
not still.
It could easily be distracted by the senses;
It is anticipating the smells, and sounds, ready to bathe
in the sensations.
Yes, it would be cool, but not the fulfilling coolness
of Samadhi.

The rain drops fall rapidly now.
Observe the senses, observe the mind,
It looks calm, with only gentle ripples, like at the Nalikae
pond the other day.
I smell the Kaew flowers again, gentle in the breeze.
Birds call to each other in high pitched voices from
branches high above the house.

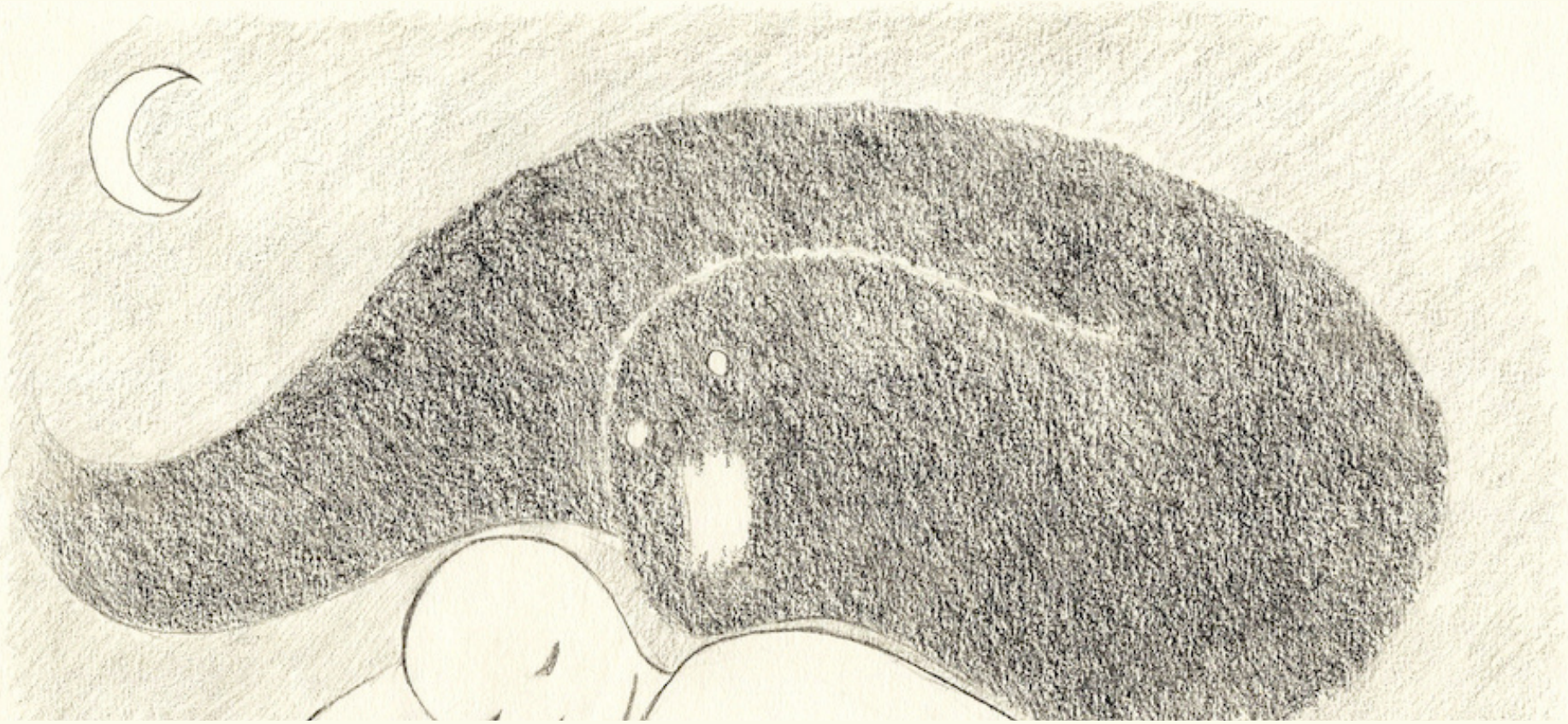
Now the raindrops on the aluminium lid are falling
further apart, making a deeper resonance,
But then faster again, making the sound of beads hitting
metal,
Then slower,
Uncertain, unpredictable.

My mind begins to waver.
I observe the uncertainty and it fades away,
Like a cloud passing overhead.

The rain recedes, only a pattering is heard.
The scent of Dok Kaew permeates, then fades.
The birds turn their chatter to songs,
Their voices clear as rain drops.
The sound of dogs, chicken, the noise of motorcycles
can be heard,
From nearby, then from afar, replacing each other,
responding to each other,
Alternating, just like thoughts,
Appearing, disappearing.
Just so.



25. THE STRANGE SOUND



A few nights ago
I heard a haunting, solitary howl from the direction
of the forest.

The sky was black, moonless.

The air was absolutely still; all else silent.

Fear moved inside me.

There was no glimmer of light, nothing to see but
darkness,

The tops of the trees were swallowed up by the ink
black sky.

The howl came again at intervals,

An unusual sound, like nothing I had ever heard.

My solitude became obvious:

The house on the right was empty, the one opposite
derelict,

On my left was the forest and at the back, a thicket
of trees.

I attached my mind to the movement of my breath,
tied it securely,
Kept it from creating unwanted images.
The howl could be heard periodically, a chilling,
piercing cry.
'It's an animal out hunting,' my mind reassured itself.
In my heart, I made peace with all beings.
I felt better, less afraid.

"Observe. Observe your fear."

Yes, looking at the fear made it go away.
I intercepted it in my mind, making sure it did not
sneak in further.

When did the sound cease? I don't know:
The conqueror of fear was asleep by then



26. FEAR



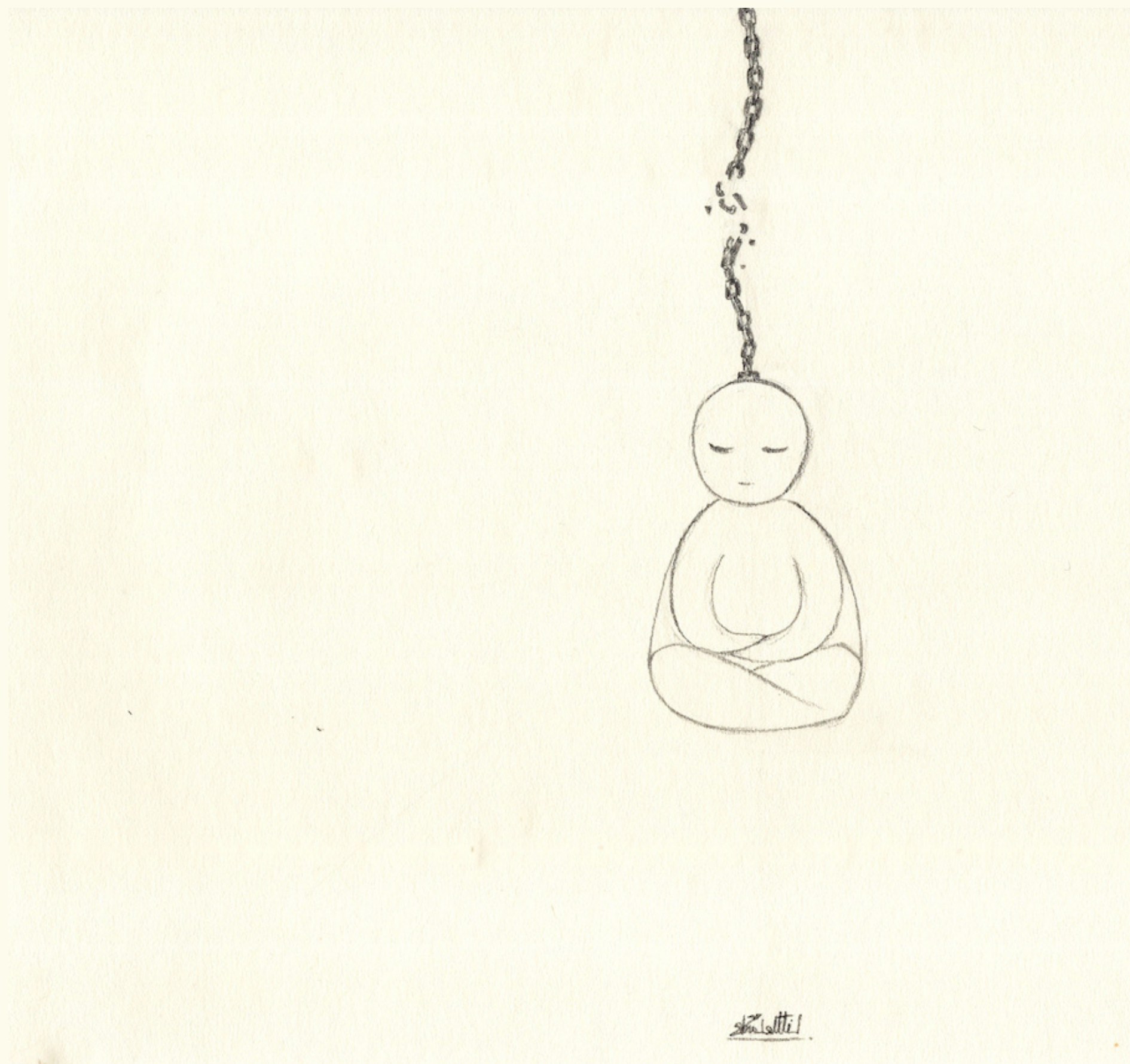
Fear has so many guises, so many deceptions.
I am certain now that those who take advantage of
others do so because they are afraid.
Afraid of being hurt, afraid of death, afraid of losing
honour, position,
Afraid of being without, being alone, afraid of not
having.
They get obsessive, nervous, paranoid.
Money chains down people;
Money is the spell that keeps people under one's
power,
To use them to generate more money.
It's a never ending cycle,
A lit fuse, sparking off more fear.
Pitiful.

Is it not pity that leads us to forgive?
But even sympathy can be pushed aside by fear,
Fear of losing what you have, fear of things going wrong,
fear of the unknown...

Then even compassion is discarded.
I must get rid of this beast inside.
I must hunt it down, this creature, Fear.
I will apply myself to the book within,
Reading between the lines until I know where it lurks.
For fear is the fuel of greed,
And it's fear that feeds the fire of fury,
And that fear, to protect itself, deceives the mind.
Yes, I must deal with fear first of all.

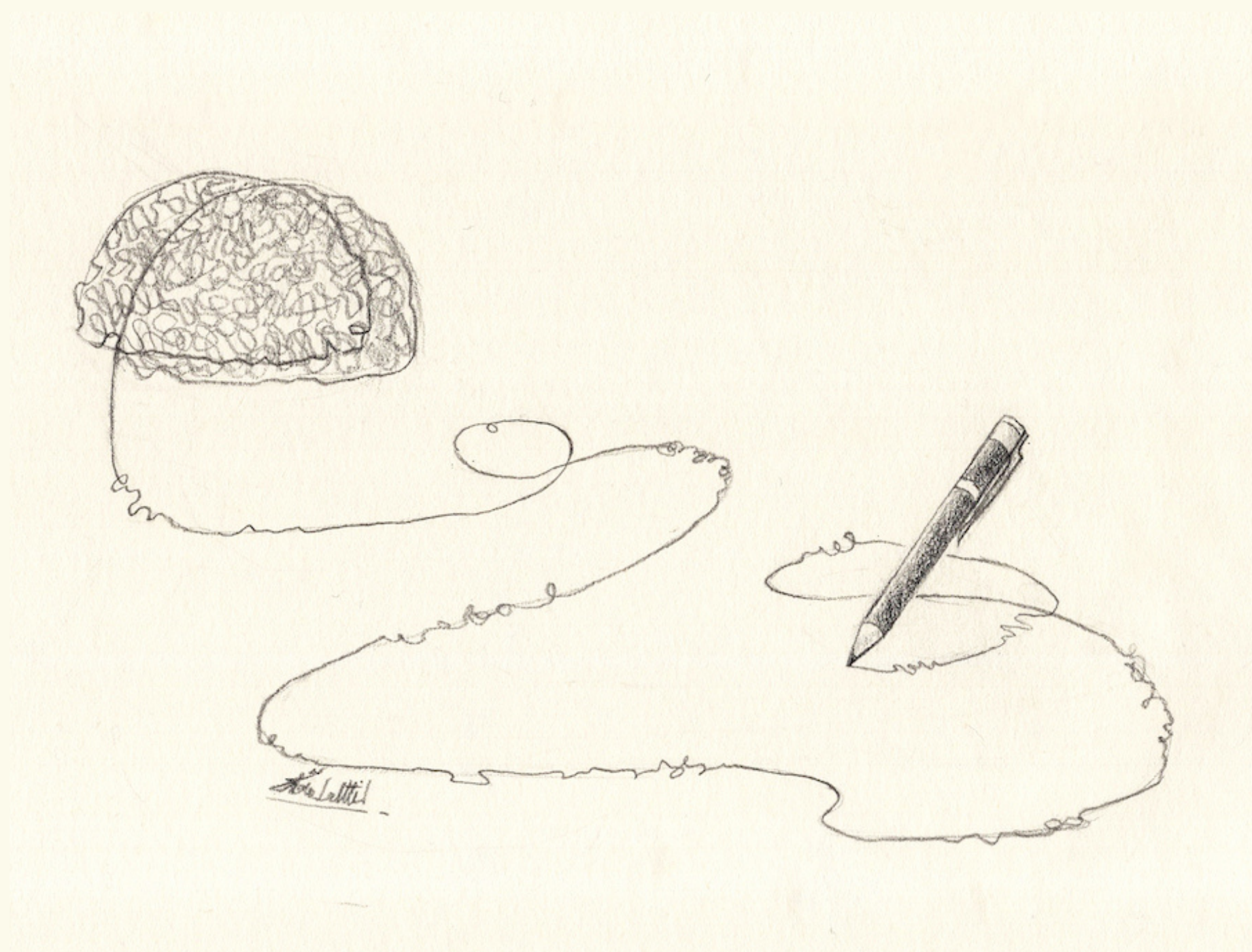
Awareness!

By using awareness and Samadhi.



27. THE PEN

The pen is the bane of Samadhi!
It distracts the mind from mindfulness.
It takes me dallying into realms of thoughts,
Showing me old musings in new disguises, tricking me
into
The stream of being and having been.
The flow of I, and mine.



28. BLACK ANTS

Yesterday, millions of small black ants moved house.
They poured out like a stream of black water –
When I first saw them in the morning: like a roaring,
swelling torrent.

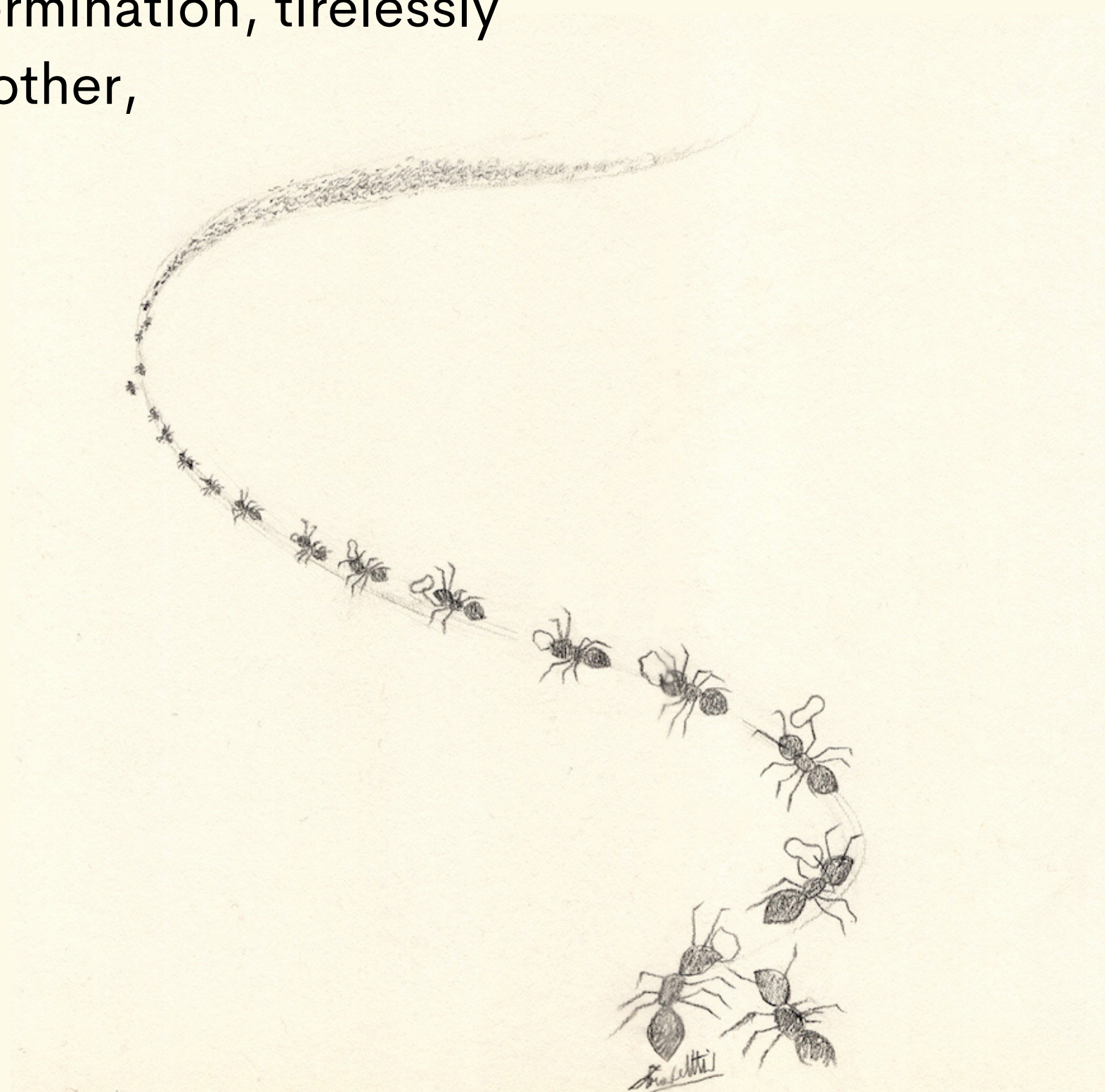
Later: an overflowing river.

When I went for walking meditation in the evening, they
were reduced to single file,
Meandering like a trickle of water in a dried-out river bed.

Where did they come from? Where were they going?
Who knows.

Out of those millions, how many knew their destination?
They follow each other with commitment – without
knowing where they would end up.

Diligent, so full of determination, tirelessly
Following after one another,
No questions asked.
Probably only a few
knew their destination.

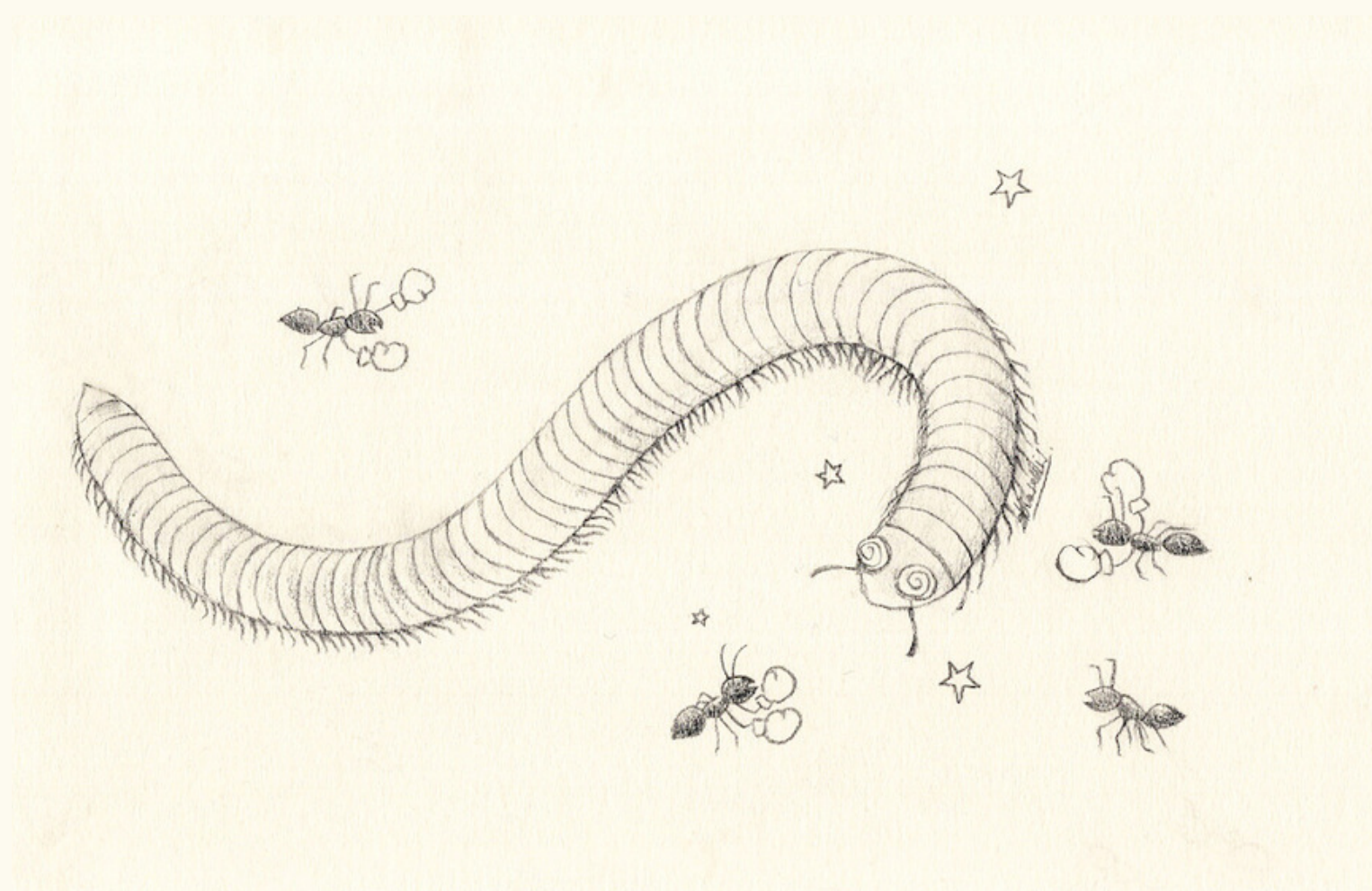


29. THE MILLIPEDE

Outside the iron gates on the edge of the forest,
An army of large ants were attacking a millipede.

They would rush at the millipede, seek out the soft spots
between its armour plates, bury their heads in, and bite
hard.

The millipede would wind itself up like a coil and spring
out, over and over, to shake off its enemies,
But the ants would recollect and attack again.
They surrounded the millipede; a hungry army charging
at fresh bait.



I used a stick to parry the millipede away many times,
But wherever it landed the scattered ants would reform
and attack again.

Often the foolish millipede, carried out of reach, would
head back towards the ants. It did this repeatedly.

Maybe it is too harsh to call the millipede foolish.

After all it is on the same eye level as the ants,

So how could it see where the majority of its enemies
were?

It did not have the perspective of my vantage point
above.

In the end I carried the millipede far away.

The ants that were clinging to it fell off one by one,
Until only one last warrior was left, persistent and still
returning to attack again and again.

The hapless millipede slowly regained its senses,
wriggled, and shook until it was finally free, then
slithered into a pile of dry leaves.

People escaping *Dukkha*, the millipede

escaping ants,

Equally befuddled.

Lacking direction, lacking vision;

Must be looking down from higher ground, then we
would see our escape.

30. DEATH

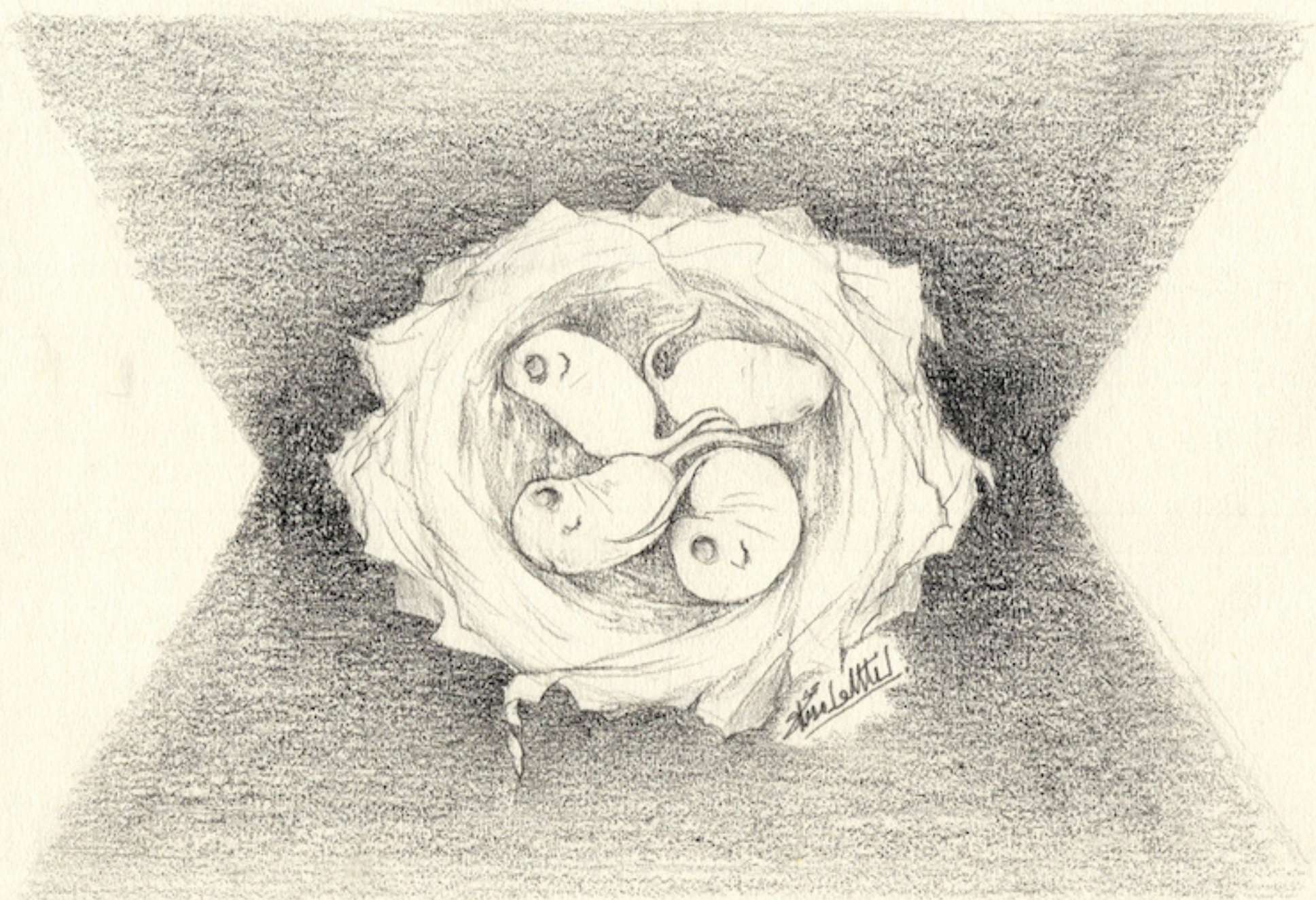


Last night I tried to be like a corpse.
I laid down, palms open, letting go of everything.
Pretended I was dead.
I looked at everything from 'the Other Side.'
Thoughts drifted in.
I am dead - why waste time with thoughts?
The present is death; death is the only presence.
What I become is dependant on my state of mind now,
So I tricked my mind.
Ajarn said later that it wasn't really a deception,
I had really tried to die from my attachments.

31. DEAD RAT

There's a dead rat under the floorboards -
it's likely the one that has been gnawing
noisily in the house throughout the month past,
It was probably stuck under there, slowly dying.
The gnawing had stopped in the last few days.

Two or three days ago I heard squeaking,
Sporadically through day and night.
This morning there was a bad smell, by evening it was
a stench.
By the time I deduced what had happened it was too
late to do anything about it.
Tonight the smell of death will permeate my dreams.
I looked for death inside my own living body.
I tried to view everything as if I'd already died.



Thoughts drifted in, love, hate, sadness, happiness,
The thoughts of a dead person who is
Full of attachments despite the certitude of being cut
off. It's pitiful.

From the smell of the dead - death of a month-long
house mate
Whose gnawing noises are no longer - death became
familiar.
It is normal, it warned,
Not unusual.

Later the next day workers came and opened up the
floorboards.

Four baby mice hardly bigger than my thumb were
found dead.

Their mother had made a hole to get under the
floorboards, and had given birth. She had brought in
many plastic bags to line her nest,
Made it safe for her newborns.

She probably went out to eat and fell prey to a cat.

I saw a cat with a big rat in her mouth the other day.
Her babies waited, cried out from the safe place,
And died in that safe place.

No one would've known about them if it wasn't for
the smell.

No one would've known they were in this world,
That they had been born, been hungry, been waiting,
Had called out, and died.

We are also part of this normality,
Don't get carried away with your Self and forget,
You death impersonator!

32. THE CAT



I am seeing death, more and more, as a part of life.

Birth, survival, death,

Separation, slaughter, co-operation -

I see it everyday.

Snakes, cats, monkeys, dogs, lizards, squirrels,

As well as with the rats, spiders and geckos which share
my house,

I've become accustomed to the balance brought about
by their mating, eating, being eaten,

Caring for, and preying on, one another.

The spider waiting to kill its victim;

The cat that catches a bird, or tears up a lizard,

Then bravely defends its kittens against a whole pack of
dogs.

The other day that cat jumped onto the roof with a huge
rat in its mouth.

And yesterday it left behind the body of a bird, feathers
intact,

But the insides consumed,

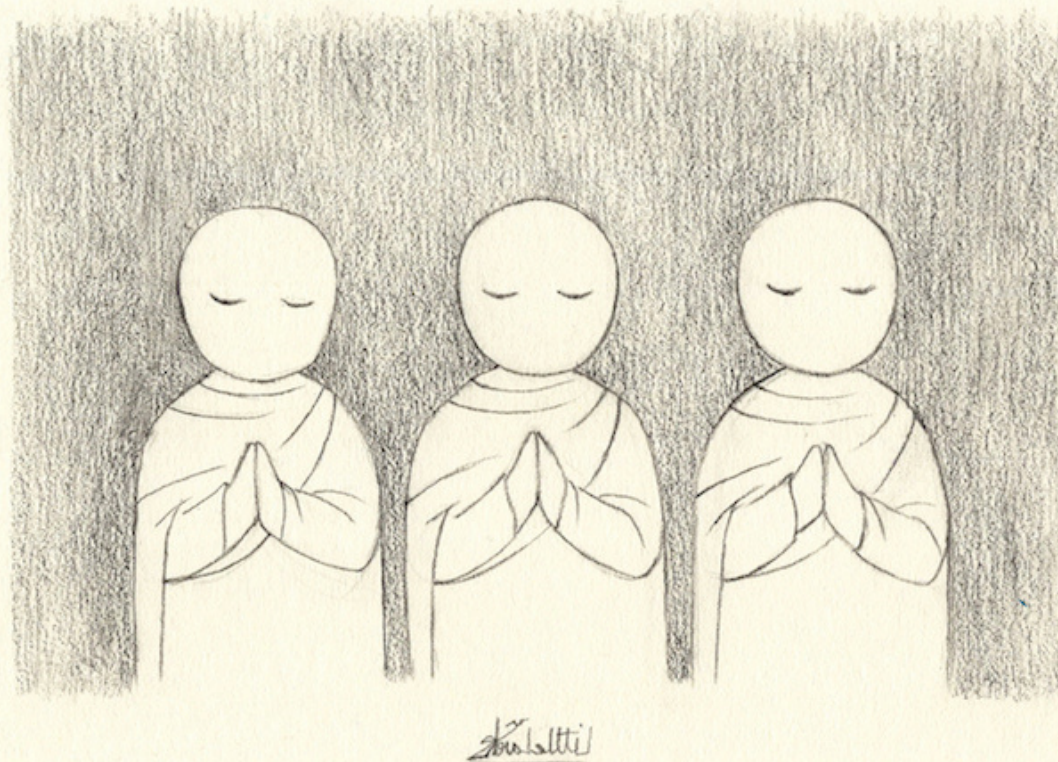
So skilfully the feathers weren't even ruffled.

It is normal; everything proceeds as normal.

The good or the bad in life doesn't seem so exceptional
any more.

And the fear in me seems to lessen by the day.

33. VISAKHA BUCHA



This is the first year **Tan Ajarn** has not made it to the top of *Bhudthong Hill* for his annual *Visaka Bucha* sermon.

His strength is rapidly leaving him,

Tan Po cautions,

As he turns on a recording of **Tan Ajarn**'s sermon from the previous year.

Prior to the traditional procession around the hilltop, it rained.

The monks' chanting blended with the sound of rain drops,

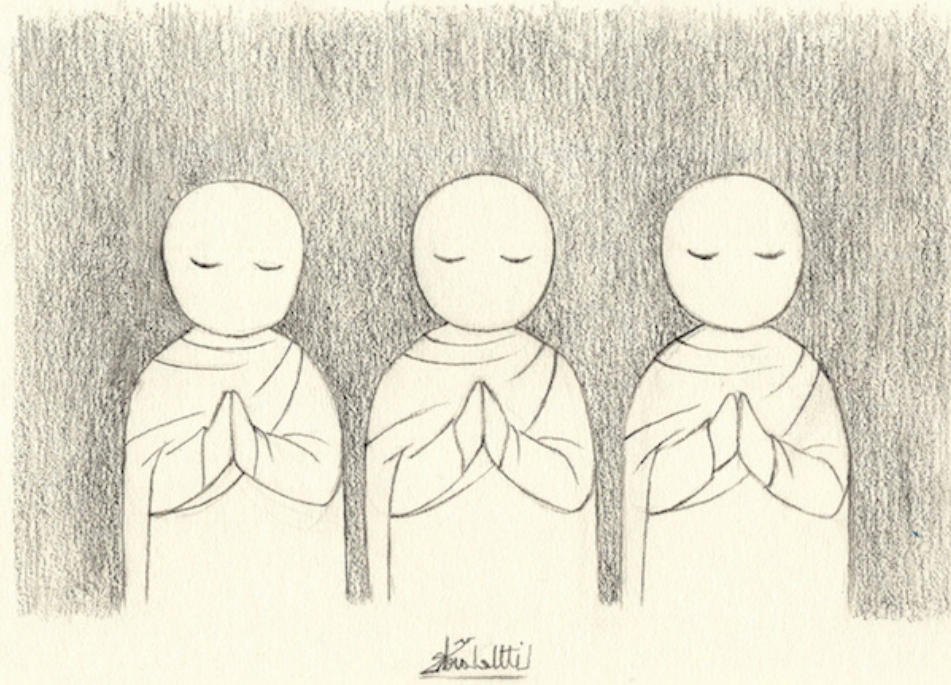
The sound of wind in the leaves and trees swaying around us.

The cold rain penetrated us all: monks, lay people, trees, pebbles, sand...

But the young and the old, hands together in prayer, did not retreat.

Water soaked the ground, so the monks stood up to chant,

Under the rain swept sky.



There were hundreds of them, from Esarn, the North,
Central Thailand, the South.
Their drenched robes clung; they resembled rows of
Buddha statues.

We made the procession, three times around,
With candles and joss sticks between our folded palms,
Then left our flowers on the wet rocks,
Our joss sticks in the water-laden ground.
Saturated, refreshed,
Light-hearted, smiling,
We absorb the reality of the End.

34. NIGHT TIME



<Pali Chant>

One should not dwell upon what has passed with regret,
Nor worry about what has not transpired.
Those things of the past have gone,
And those of the future have not come to be.

<Pali Chant>

He who realises the truth of a situation with clarity,
Without doubt or hesitation, should nurture that state.

Night is the time of thoughts.
Thoughts of the future, the past,
Flood in like water from a burst dam.

Yes, said **Ajarn**, because it is the time we are with
ourselves most,
Darkness keeps away the sky, the grass, trees,
and those other outward, visual things
Which distract us from the real,
And illusionary, thoughts in our minds.

Mankind is chained down by thoughts,
From birth to death, never free.

35. CAT KITCHEN

Suan Mokkh has repeatedly taught me that in nature,
'It is the way it is.'

A dog giving birth, pregnant cats, they disappear into
the forest when they are due, then come back to beg
for food.

The other day a mangy, watery-eyed, half blind male
follows a pretty new mother around; she feigned
disinterest, lets him smell her,
Then together they go again, with no sense of learning
from experience.



Someone had left two little kittens without a home.
Poor things,
I found them on the gate post, escaping from the dogs.
I took them to the cat kitchen, a penthouse
Built high to keep away the antagonistic dogs.
The temple people feed them well, and are kind to all,
but do not worry nor fret after them.
Cats come and go, some reproduce, some survive,
others don't, so be it.
If they survive they are cared for; if they are taken by
dogs, or disappear without trace, so be it.
It is nature, *Tathātā*, 'It is so.'

<Pali>

The five *Khandhas*, these are heavy!

<Pali>

People, are the ones carrying this load.

<Pali>

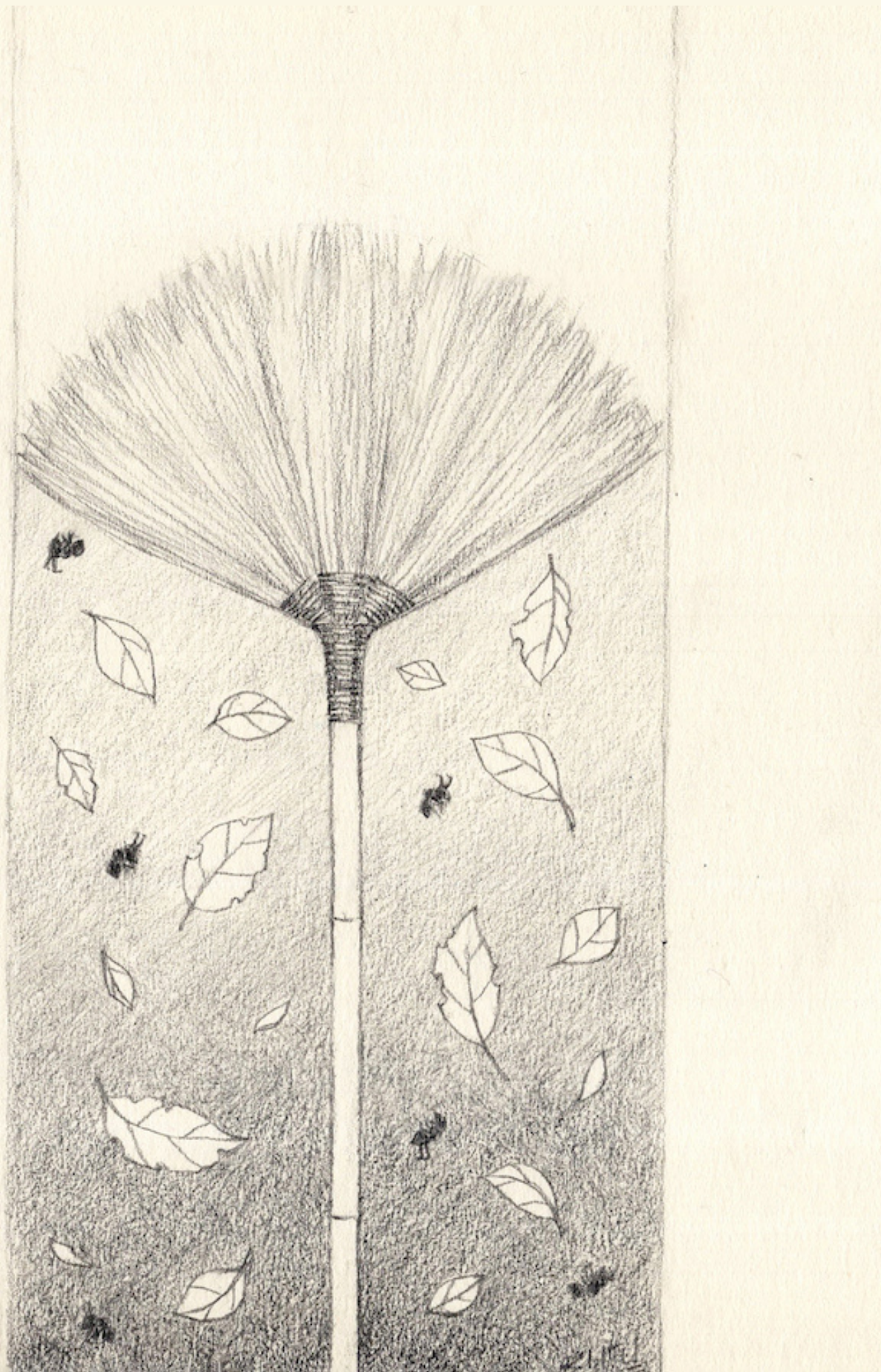
In this world, carrying a heavy load is *Dukkha*,

<Pali>

Letting go of the heavy load is *Sukkhā*



36. THE BROOM



Done with the leaves, I start on the dead ants.

Grass husks are bound together and,
When dry, become a magical golden broom,
For us to clear away all sorts of debris.

My arm is one with the broomstick, as though
connected.

Consciousness is in its place, arm moving with
the broom, clearing the yard of all refuse.

Today there are many green leaves, the work of
monkeys or squirrels - could be either,

It's not important to the sweeper.

The leaves fall again, green, gold, brown, red.

I sweep them away.

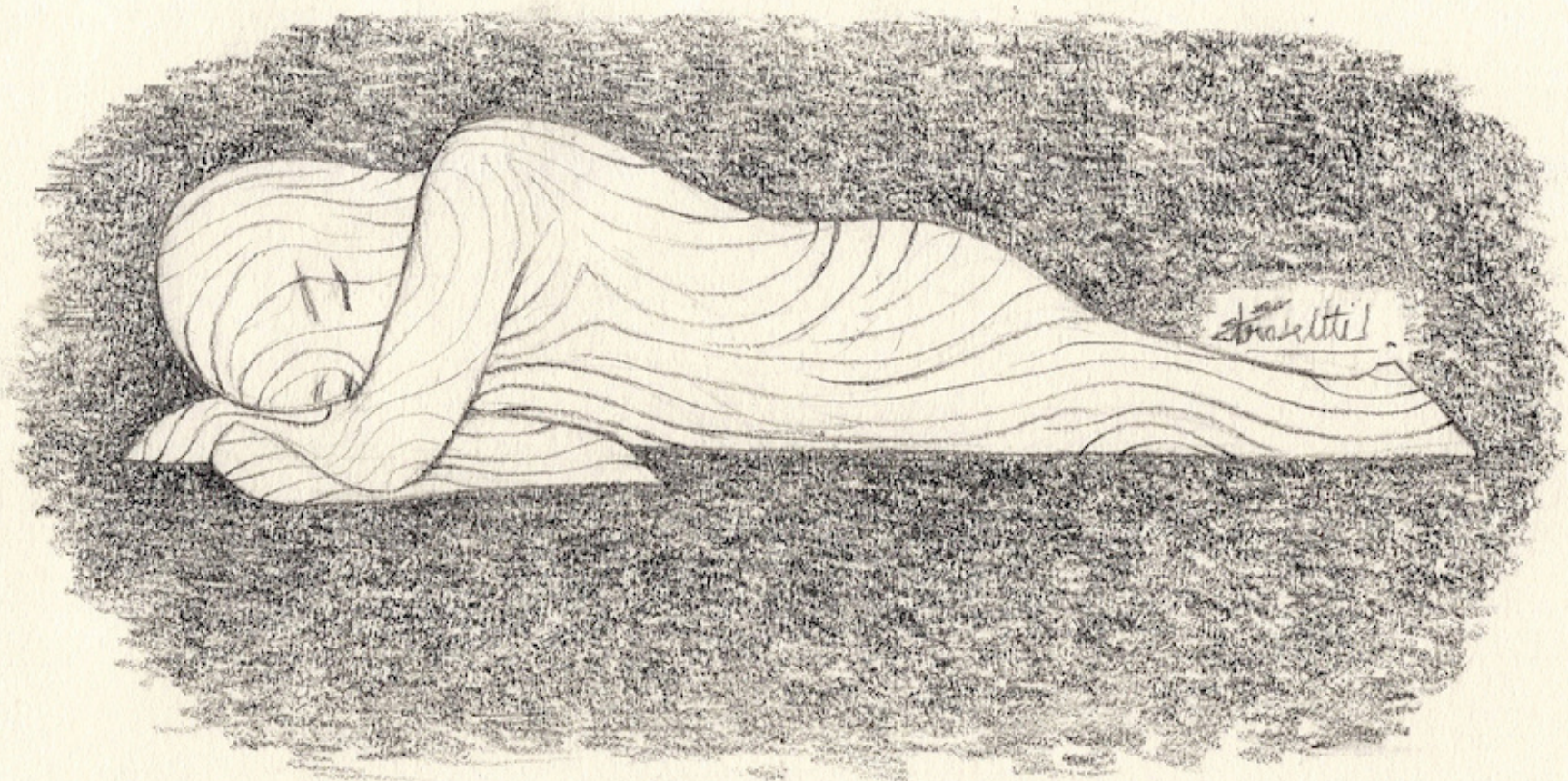
37. LOGS AND FIREWOOD

The mantras are slowly becoming more meaningful
and fulfilling to me.

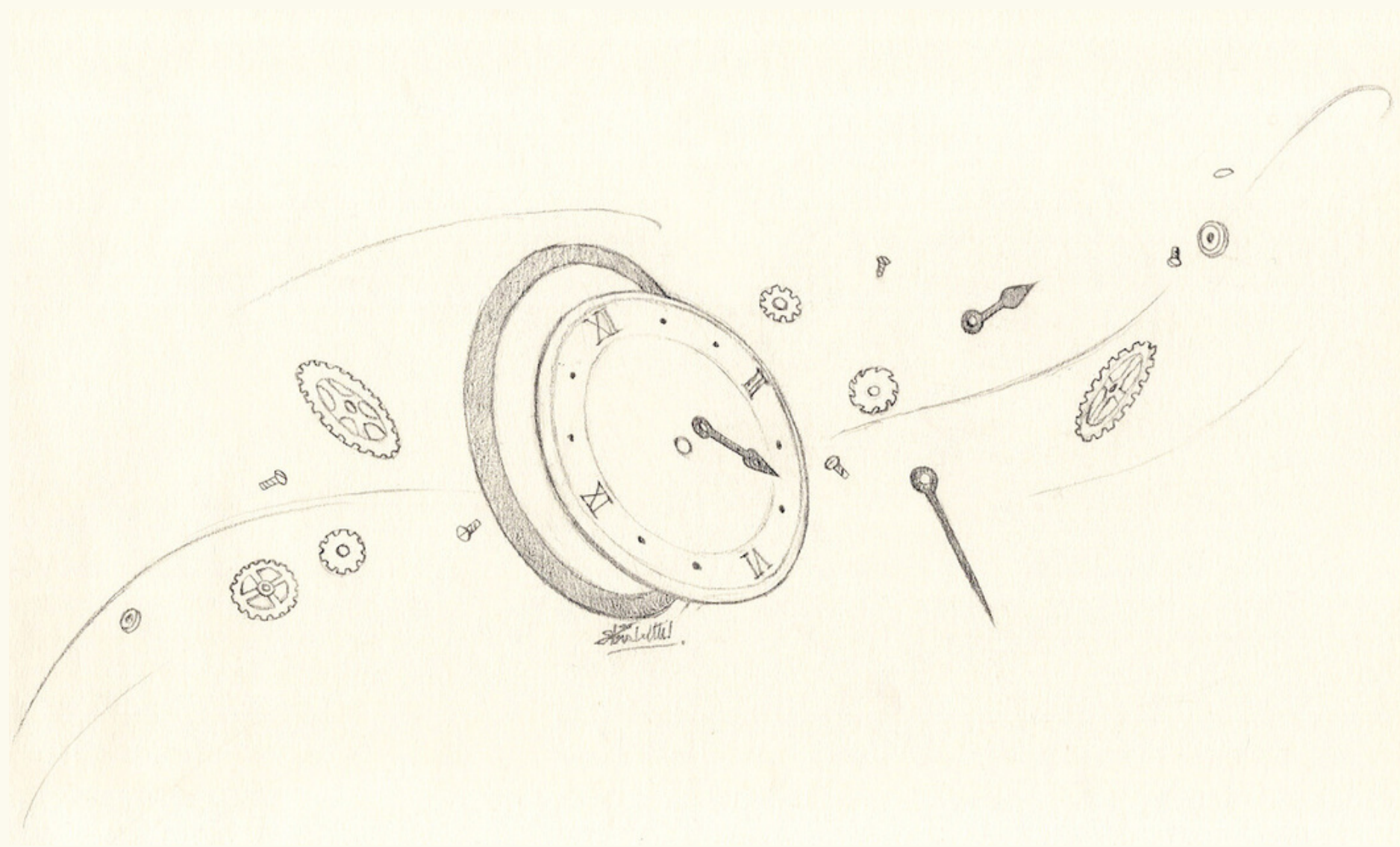
Why is it I never paid them heed until I came here?

<Pali>

This body is not permanent,
Once without the soul, that leaves,
It will lie on the ground
Alike logs and firewood



38. TIME



Yesterday, whilst observing the breath,
A sadness arose within that peaceful state, it swelled,
it expanded.

It was the first time I had felt sadness during mindful
observation,
Regrettably it did not remain long enough to be
contemplated.

I thought I would be able to study and understand it
today, but it did not return.

Well, it is just as all things that come and go, such
as time,

Or the breeze,

It is not up to us.

Tan Ajarn had said in his last birthday sermon:
If there were no Self, time would not matter.

The desire born of Self puts importance on dates,
measures on time.

If we lived without desire we would be ageless.

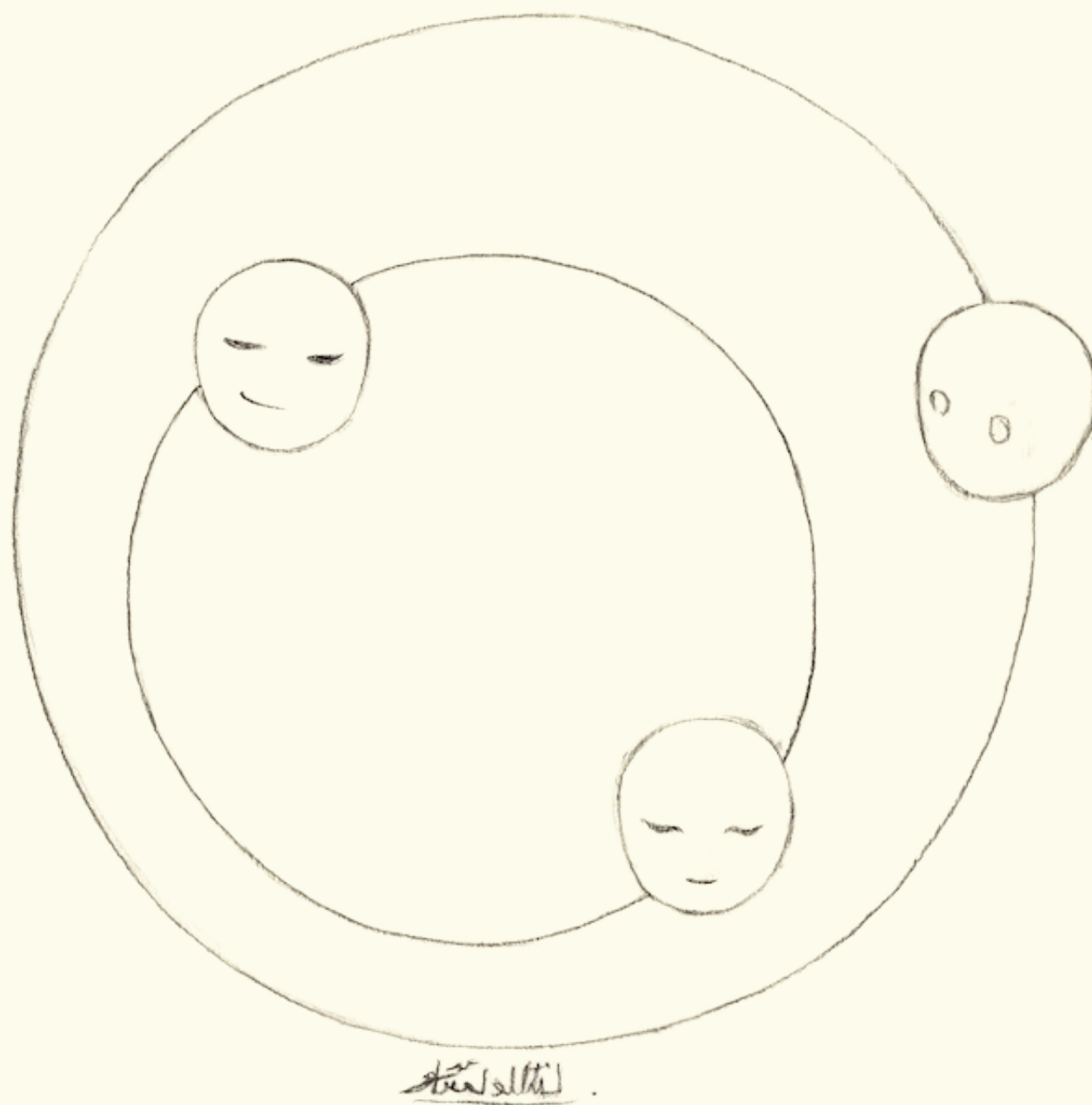
No Self therefore no Desire, or, in the reverse,

No Desire therefore no Self.

With no Self there is no *'Time'*.

True.

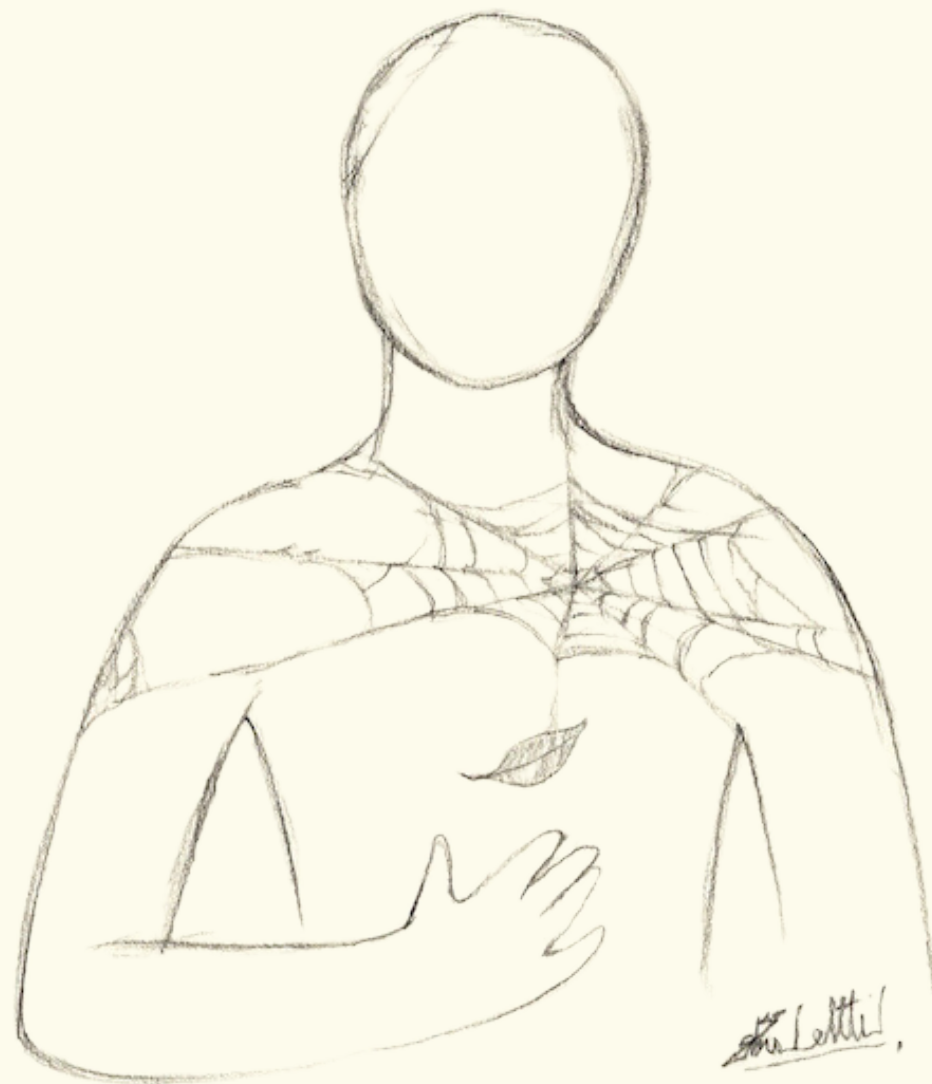
39. EXTREMES



I feel as if I am split into three,
Three disparate people.
One is slave to the Ego, and likes to show off.
The other is cool and calm, light, free, detached.
Each one carries on in their own way.
The third person sits off-stage,
Quietly observing the scene within.

Don't be extreme.
Be careful of being too much or too little,
Take care to keep to the middle ground.

40. THE PRADU LEAF



This morning I saw a dry *Pradu leaf* suspended mid-air;
Fallen from its tree but not yet reached the ground.
It was spinning with the breeze, alternately fast, then
slow, in the late morning sun.

Looking closely I saw it was hanging on a transparent
thread of spider's web,
Visible only when sunlight reflected on it,
The subtle thread would shine like a diamond's sparkle.

So, there, look at the Pradu leaf, seeming to fly freely,
but actually bound, enslaved to the wind.

We humans always search out attachments.
Liberated from object-dependance, we become
attached to the mental, the spiritual...

It's a web so fine and delicate.
So extremely binding.

EPILOGUE

Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder is a collection of writings selected from a daily journal I endeavoured not to keep while abandoning the city for seven months in the countryside.

The Buddha teaches that the root of suffering resides in the mind. So too must the end of suffering be sought from the mind. City life, however, with social opportunities and material wealth lure one to rely on friends, money and things for life's 'solutions'. Unfortunately, grasping such solutions routinely lengthens the problems' tail.

In 1989 I became entrapped by a conflagration of seemingly unsolvable problems burning inside me. Attempts to dampen the flames succeeded only in stranding my mind on an endless loop of entangled thoughts. The sole way off, I eventually concluded, was to step away from my family, my friends and the comforts of urbanity. I would seek refuge in a far-away forest monastery — a decision I remain thankful for to this day.

I was not running from my problems. I was heading toward an opportunity to cultivate strength and understanding within my mind so that it could become calm and cool. Upon my return to the city, I would try to embrace my dilemmas with loving kindness to both myself and others.

The journey began when I committed to stay at **Suan Mokkhabalarama (Wat Suan Mokkh)** in **Chaiya District, Surat Thani Province**. When I arrived in October that year, **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa** had been unwell for some time.

Initially, I took part in *Anapanasati* meditation training offered at **Wat Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage**.

Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa designated this hermitage to be a *Dhamma meditation destination* for people of all nationalities and faiths. The 150-rai hermitage was about two kilometres from the main monastery. It was surrounded by verdant hills. A natural hot spring fed a creek that meandered through the grounds, much of which was covered by a peaceful coconut grove. This provided habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Butterflies, ants, and frogs seemed ever-present, but all manner of birds, insects, amphibians and reptiles, particularly snakes, made themselves known.

The beauty and freshness of these surrounding combined with practice to understand the nature of body and mind nurtured a greater friendship with these creatures. They were here before us. For aeons they have gone through birth, reproduction and death. After all, we and they were not too different — swimming in circles full of suffering we want to avoid, pleasantries we try to cling to, and all the while generally oblivious to the ever-changing realities both inside and out.

The hermitage structured the trainings as 10-day residential retreat courses. They were offered twice per month, once in Thai and once in English.

Many mornings we were on the move by 4:30 a.m. We had to walk the two kilometres to the main monastery to hear sermons from **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa**. He was punctual, starting his talks precisely at 5:00 a.m. He delivered them from what was called the *Stone Bench Courtyard* in front of his kuti. This name came from the polished concrete benches available for his audiences.

I, however, quietly renamed this area *Kannikar* Clearing. I chose this because of a *parijat* (*kannika*) tree that produced beautiful, tiny white flowers with bright orange pistils. The blooms were wonderfully fragrant at dawn. **Tan Ajarn** explained how *parijat* originated from India, and was the flower of the Buddha. I have always remembered this, and my mind returns to that clearing whenever someone mentions *Kannikar*.

Tan Ajarn's sermons focussed on *Paticca-samuppada* (Dependent Origination). They went on for two hours. It generally took him three to five sermons to convey all he wanted to share on the topic, depending on his health and the language of the retreat attendees. For Thai participants, he usually covered the material over three days, but if translation into English by a western monk was required, five visits to the courtyard might be necessary.

In the beginning, as I was completely unaccustomed to rising before dawn, I could not follow his talks. I was repeatedly dozing off, catching only bits and pieces of what he was saying. My alertness gradually improve though. And finally, with help from the dogs and chickens that were always on hand and messing about, I could remain awake and absorb every word.

After concluding six retreats, I felt I needed more specific guidance and practice. I asked my teacher, **Ajarn Khun Runjuan Intharakamhaeng**, if I could stay on for another month. **Ajarn** agreed, but advised me not to specify a time-frame, only to take things day by day.

Indeed, her advice led me to remain for three months instead of one. It would have been longer, but an obligation awaiting

in Bangkok could not be ignored. Those months turned out to be the most valuable educational experience of my life — learning from inside myself, not from what I was told.

Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa allowed me to stay in the upasaka section of **Suan Mokkhabalarama**, under **Ajarn Khun Runjuan**'s supervision. **Ajarn** recognised my intention to practice intensively so assigned me to an isolated cottage. She also instructed me to neither speak nor write. I was only to observe what happened to my own body and mind.

Keeping silence in speech was crucial to understanding the nature inside. It created an atmosphere for continuous observation of the effects of thoughts and feelings.

The silence helped to reveal how extremely hard it could be to stop thinking. Even without anyone to speak with, the mind would churn out dialogue continuously. Day after day thoughts persisted to engage me in conversation. With no one to speak with I turned to writing. I would communicate on paper, and *Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder* became an unplanned result.

My first month alone I stirred like a newly-captured wild animal, constantly pushing up against the walls of its cage. Gradually, a soothing energy I felt raining down on me from the tall trees above, tamed me.

Suan Mokkhabalarama's ambience was even more enriching than what I experienced during meditation trainings at the hermitage. The canopies created by all the large trees engulfed the grounds in tranquil shade. Sounds of the wild were constant companions day and night. I saw the largest scorpion I had ever seen, as large as a man's hand. I shared

my cottage with a gigantic spider and a gecko almost a foot long. And I could never count the number of large rats that ran in and out at will.

I became acquainted with many of the abandoned dogs and cats that found homes on the monastery grounds. Their presence caused me to contemplate more intensively themes that I saw us sharing in our respective cycles of suffering and survival. As a result, things like birth, love, jealousy, striving, attachment, sickness and death all found a deeper place to rest near my heart thanks to these cast offs.

My life as a whole felt comparatively unimportant relative to my views about life when living in the city. I noticed the less important life felt, the lighter the load of suffering that accumulated atop my shoulders. This further helped to calm the mind, making mindfulness practice easier.

The first month in the cottage I had no desire to hold a pen. Perhaps the mind was too unsettled. But as the second month began, an urge to write arose, and it intensified the more I tried to suppress it. I began to feel destined to fail miserably in heeding Ajarn Khun Runjuan's repeated warnings about maintaining silence. She stressed that no writing was allowed either, since both speaking and writing sent the mind outside.

But I gave in. I began to chronicle my thoughts every day. Then after a month, this need to write suddenly vanished.

When **Trasvin Jittidecharak** from Silkworm Books became aware of this journal, she found it fitting for a book. She had the text rearranged into chapters, and published it in 1991.

During the book's preparation, I was repeatedly asked about

its title by readers. At **Suan Mokkh, Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa** had a large pond dug. A small island was left in the middle for a solitary coconut tree. He called it the *Nalika* Pond to draw attention to an old southern lullaby containing a profound Dhamma teaching.

*"Dear Little One,
There is the Nalika coconut tree,
Growing there in the sea of wax.
Neither touched by rain,
Nor reached by thunder.
There, in the middle of the sea of wax,
Reached only by the one who's free."*

Nalika is a coconut species cultivated in Southern Thailand. **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa** explained that the *Nalika* in the lullaby represents *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is not a place but a state of mind. It stands in the middle of a sea of wax — the nature of the mind that is ever-changing — liquid and impassable when hot, solid like a bridge when cool.

But the lonely *Nalika* tree standing tall amidst the sea of wax, remains unchanged — undisturbed by its environment. *"Neither touched by rain, Nor reached by thunder"* represents a state beyond merit — no attachment to anything even the 'boon' or good merit many Buddhists aspire to accumulate. It symbolises one who lets go completely.

As a Dhamma practitioner still adrift in my own sea of wax, *Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder* seemed a fitting tribute to my time there.

Bhudthong Hill, which I mentioned in the Visaka Bucha chapter, was the ubosot of Suan Mokkhabalarama. Atop it

sat a small, pure-white plaster Buddha image serving as the ubosot's main feature. Boundary stones helped to demarcate a natural amphitheater facing the statue. There were no other man-made structures. Tall trees surrounded everything, furthering an atmosphere harkening back to the time of the Buddha.

Prior to leaving **Suan Mokkhabalarama** for Bangkok, I planned to come back to the temple and further my training once my task in the city was completed. **Ajarn Khun Runjuan**, however, observed that I had begun to cling to the place: its routine, its atmosphere and its teachers. She felt that I created an illusion that this was my place to practice, and I thought it was the best. Instead, she recommended that I continue my practice at a forest monastery in the Northeast so that I could gain perspective and further open up my mind.

When I went to pay respects and say good-bye to **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa**, I informed him of my plan to take my practice to the Northeast. He proceeded to spend several hours lecturing me about Dhamma practice, and answering all of my questions in great detail. This experience differed immensely from our brief interactions when my training began months earlier. He repeatedly stressed that Dhamma learning must emphasise practice. Only after practicing could one develop sufficient grounding to put forth truly beneficial questions.

I returned to **Suan Mokkhabalarama** just a handful of times to pay respect to **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa** before his passing. When I presented him *Touched by Rain, Reached by Thunder* he complimented me on my writing, adding that it was useful. I felt tremendous relief.

My last opportunity to pay respect to **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa**

was when I said good-bye to him as his body lay atop his cremation pyre on Bhudthong Hill. The intense yellow flames flashing in front of me fought hard to push through the rain coming down from the sky. From a loudspeaker nearby, my ears heard a recording of **Tan Ajarn Buddhadasa**'s own voice speaking of death, while my eyes witnessed his charred body turning to ash.

I will forever remember how **Tan Ajarn** taught us about awareness of death until his own last second.

Khunying Chamnongsri (Rutnin) Hanchanlash