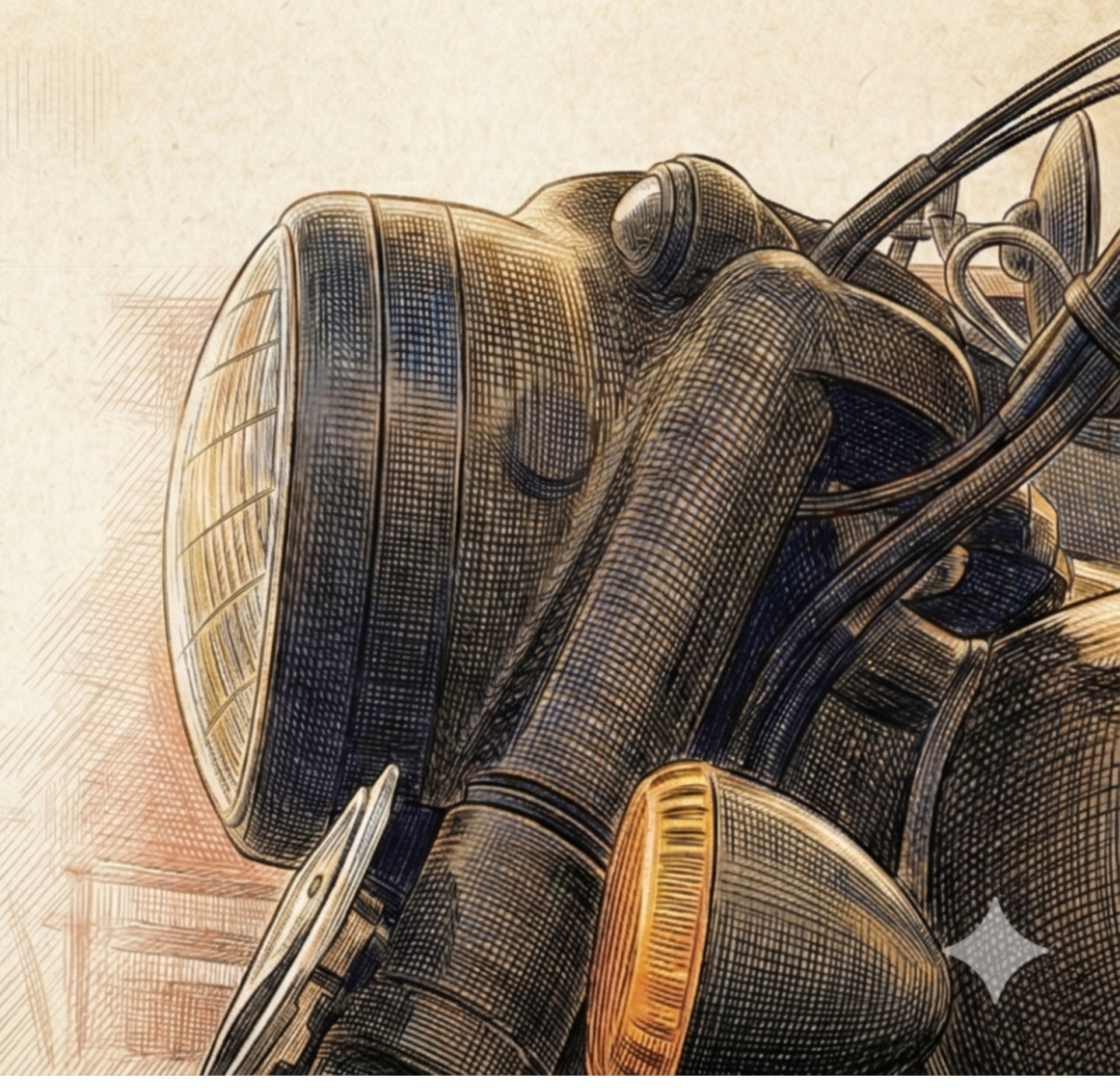




The Road That Did Not Move

a spin-off of NeelaKasham PachaKadal Chuvanna Bhoomi

Nikhil Ali





By the time Kasi and Suhi reached the forested hills, the night had already swallowed the road.

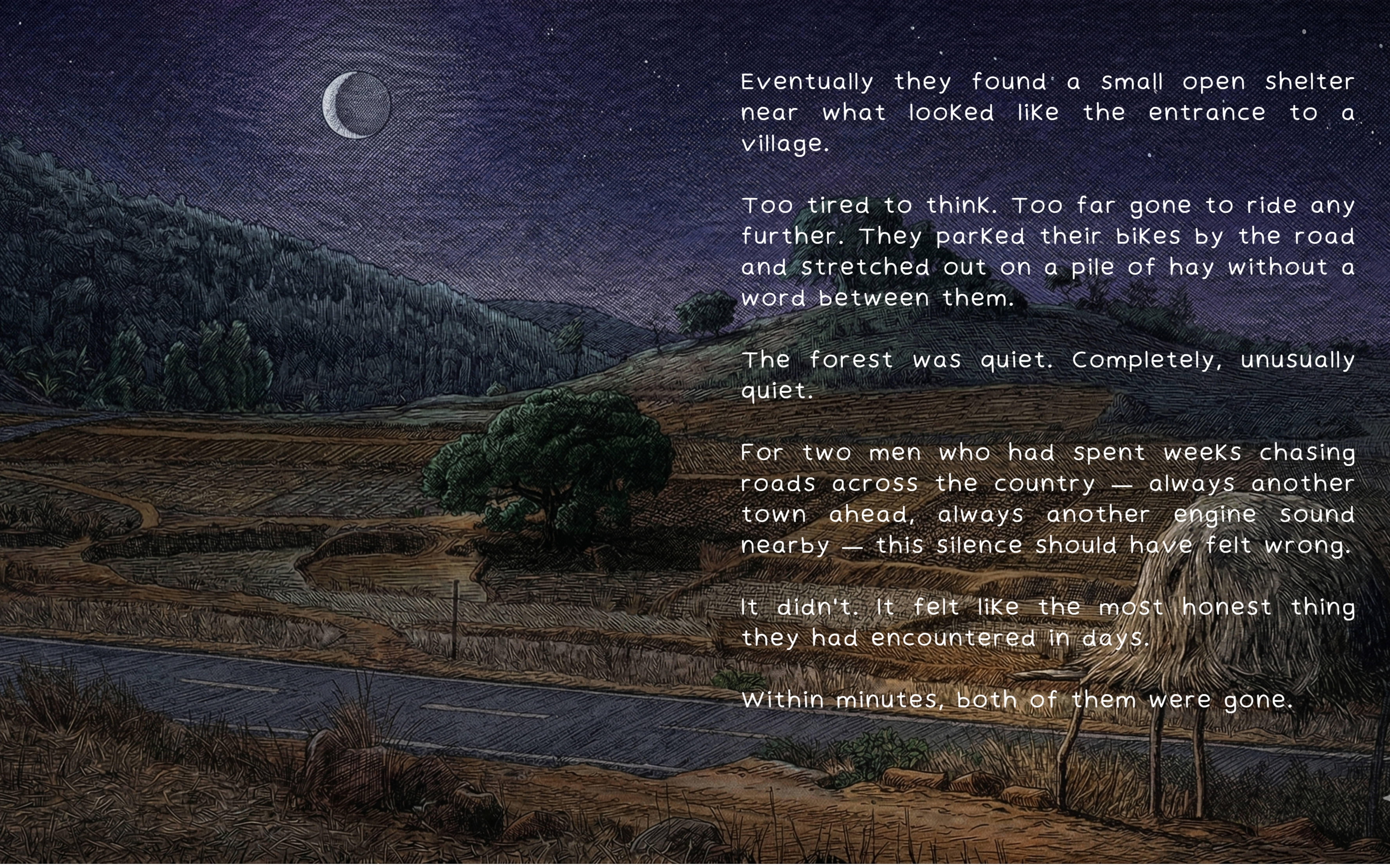
They had been riding for hours. The last town had quietly disappeared behind them somewhere before sunset. What remained now was just a narrow strip of bitumen, slipping through dark trees and silent hills, lit only by two sets of headlights cutting into nothing.

They should have hit the highway intersection an hour ago.

The trees were only getting thicker.

The strange part? The road looked almost too good. Fresh tar. Clean edges. The kind of road that back home in Kerala would never be this quiet — buses, goods vehicles, the occasional late-night tea stall crowd filling it with noise and life. But here, nothing moved in either direction. No headlights from the opposite side. No roadside shops. No sound except the steady thump of two Bullet engines talking to the dark.

The realisation arrived slowly, the way uncomfortable truths usually do. They had missed the turnoff. Miles ago.



Eventually they found a small open shelter near what looked like the entrance to a village.

Too tired to think. Too far gone to ride any further. They parked their bikes by the road and stretched out on a pile of hay without a word between them.

The forest was quiet. Completely, unusually quiet.

For two men who had spent weeks chasing roads across the country — always another town ahead, always another engine sound nearby — this silence should have felt wrong.

It didn't. It felt like the most honest thing they had encountered in days.

Within minutes, both of them were gone.



The morning did not arrive gently.

Suni woke first — to voices. Sharp. Unfamiliar. Close.

When he opened his eyes, there were men standing in a circle around them. Some carried rifles. Others held sticks. Kasi sat up slowly, still half inside a dream. The circle tightened just slightly.

The villagers were not angry.

But they were watching.

And in that part of the country, a Bullet engine arriving in the dead of night meant something very specific. Police. Or militants. Ordinary travellers did not appear on this road without reason. Nobody just passed through. Nobody just got lost here.

The silence that followed lasted long enough to matter.



Then an elderly man pushed through the crowd. "Bimalda"

He didn't say anything immediately. He didn't need to — his presence alone seemed to tell the others to wait. He looked at the two dusty riders for a long moment. Then came the questions. Where are you from. Why are you travelling. Where are you going.

Wanderers from Kerala.

Something shifted in the air the moment those words landed. Slowly, the rifles came down.

Once he understood they were simply two young men who had ridden farther than they had planned, his tone changed entirely. He invited them in. To wash. To eat. To rest.

Just like that, strangers became guests.



In daylight, the village looked peaceful. Almost unremarkable.

A narrow river ran quietly behind the houses. Small fields stretched beyond the trees. Smoke rose from morning kitchens. And running parallel to the village — the same road they had followed the previous night. In daylight it looked even better. A smooth black ribbon of bitumen disappearing into the hills with barely a bend out of place.

It was a good road. Anyone would say so.

But something about it didn't sit right.

It was too empty. Too still. A road that good, in a village this size, should have been alive with movement by morning. It wasn't.



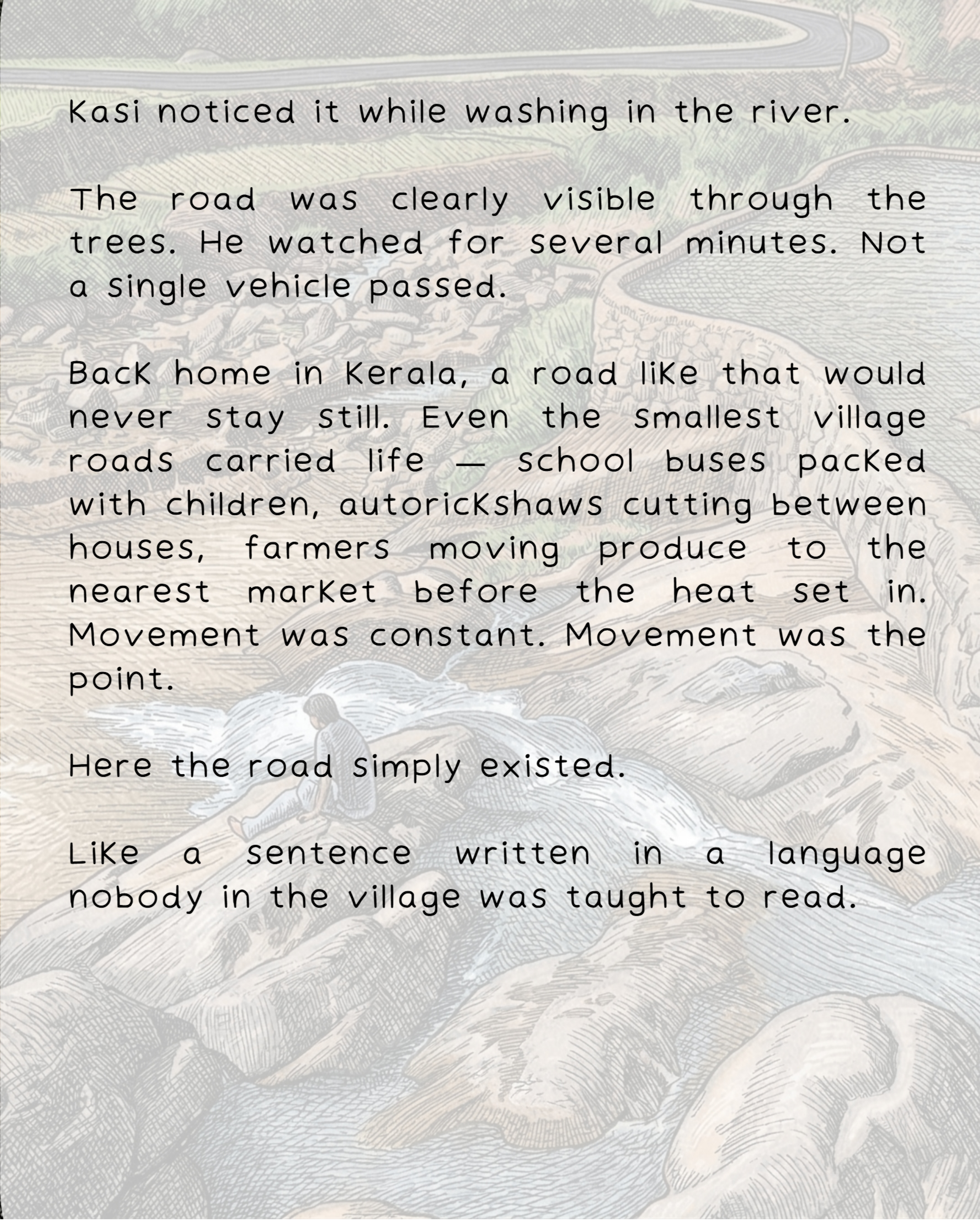
Kasi noticed it while washing in the river.

The road was clearly visible through the trees. He watched for several minutes. Not a single vehicle passed.

Back home in Kerala, a road like that would never stay still. Even the smallest village roads carried life — school buses packed with children, autorickshaws cutting between houses, farmers moving produce to the nearest market before the heat set in. Movement was constant. Movement was the point.

Here the road simply existed.

Like a sentence written in a language nobody in the village was taught to read.





During breakfast, Bimalda spoke.

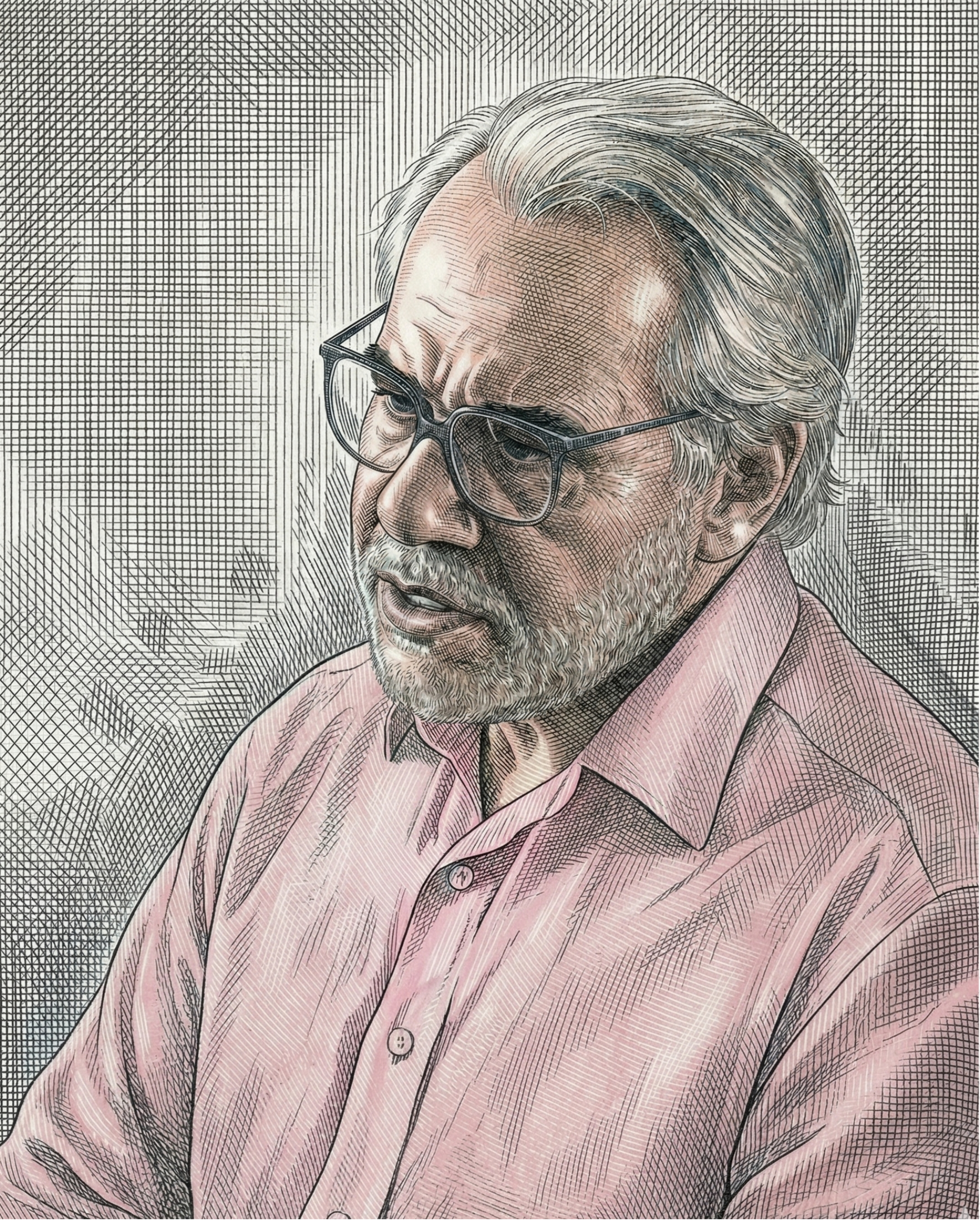
His memories wandered far beyond these hills. Younger days in Calcutta. The electricity of political movements. A chance encounter with EMS Namboodiripadu from Kerala, who spoke about justice and dignity in a way that stayed with him for decades.

But the conversation always returned to the village. To the land around it.

Mining companies had once set their eyes on this forest. When the villagers resisted, they were branded militants. Conflict followed. Families scattered. Many moved deeper into the forest, not to explore it, but simply to survive inside it.

The road outside had nothing to do with any of this.

It arrived later. Long after the damage was done.



Bimalda spoke about those years without anger.

Only once did his voice slow — just slightly, just for a moment.

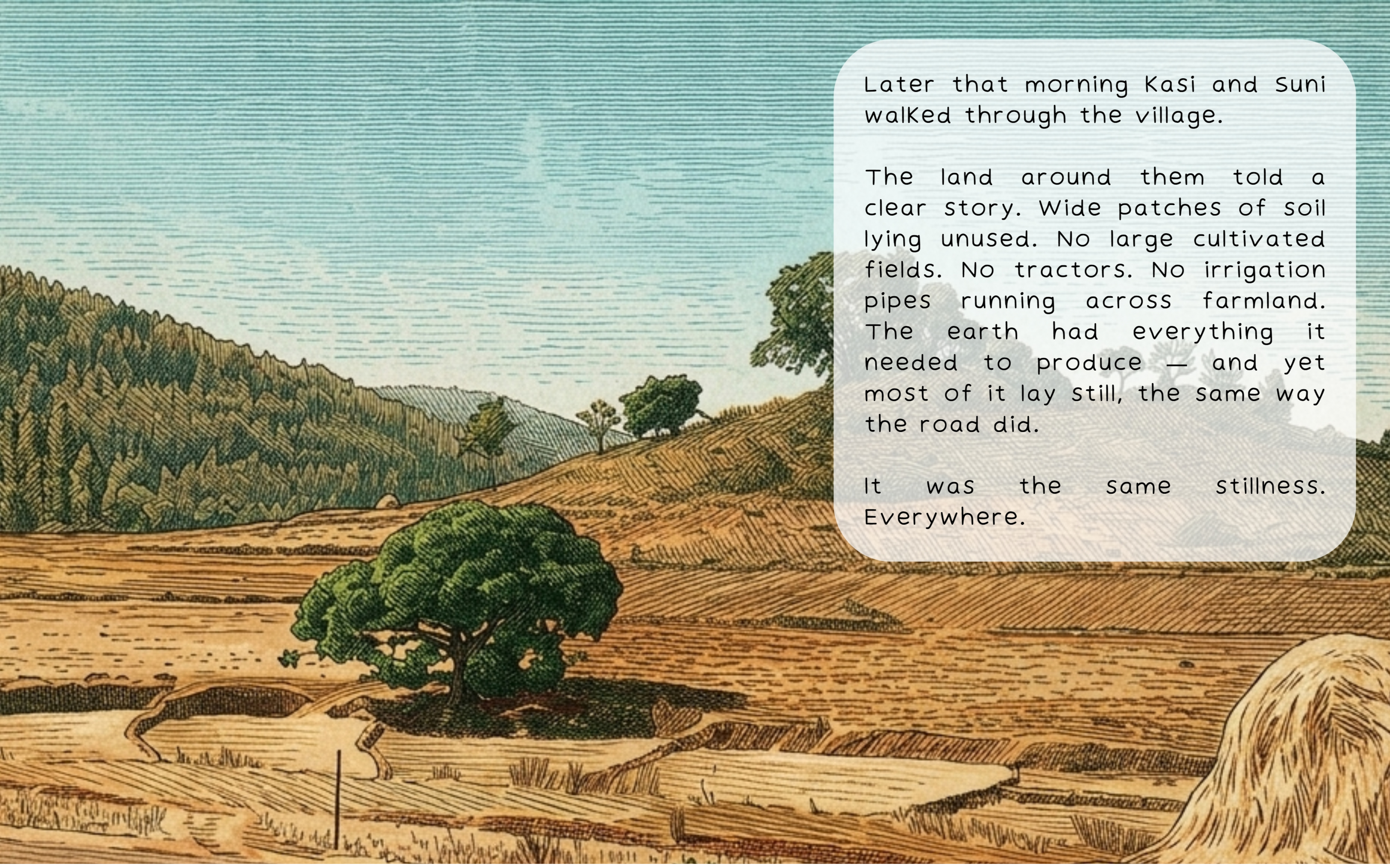
He had lost his wife during the troubled years. He had waited, hoping the violence would ease before moving her out. It didn't ease. He managed to get his daughter Gauri out in time.

But not his wife.

Kasi heard the word delay and felt its weight differently than he ever had before.

Back home, delay meant a missed bus. A late delivery. An inconvenience you complained about and forgot by evening.

Here, delay had meant something that couldn't be taken back.



Later that morning Kasi and Suni walked through the village.

The land around them told a clear story. Wide patches of soil lying unused. No large cultivated fields. No tractors. No irrigation pipes running across farmland. The earth had everything it needed to produce — and yet most of it lay still, the same way the road did.

It was the same stillness. Everywhere.



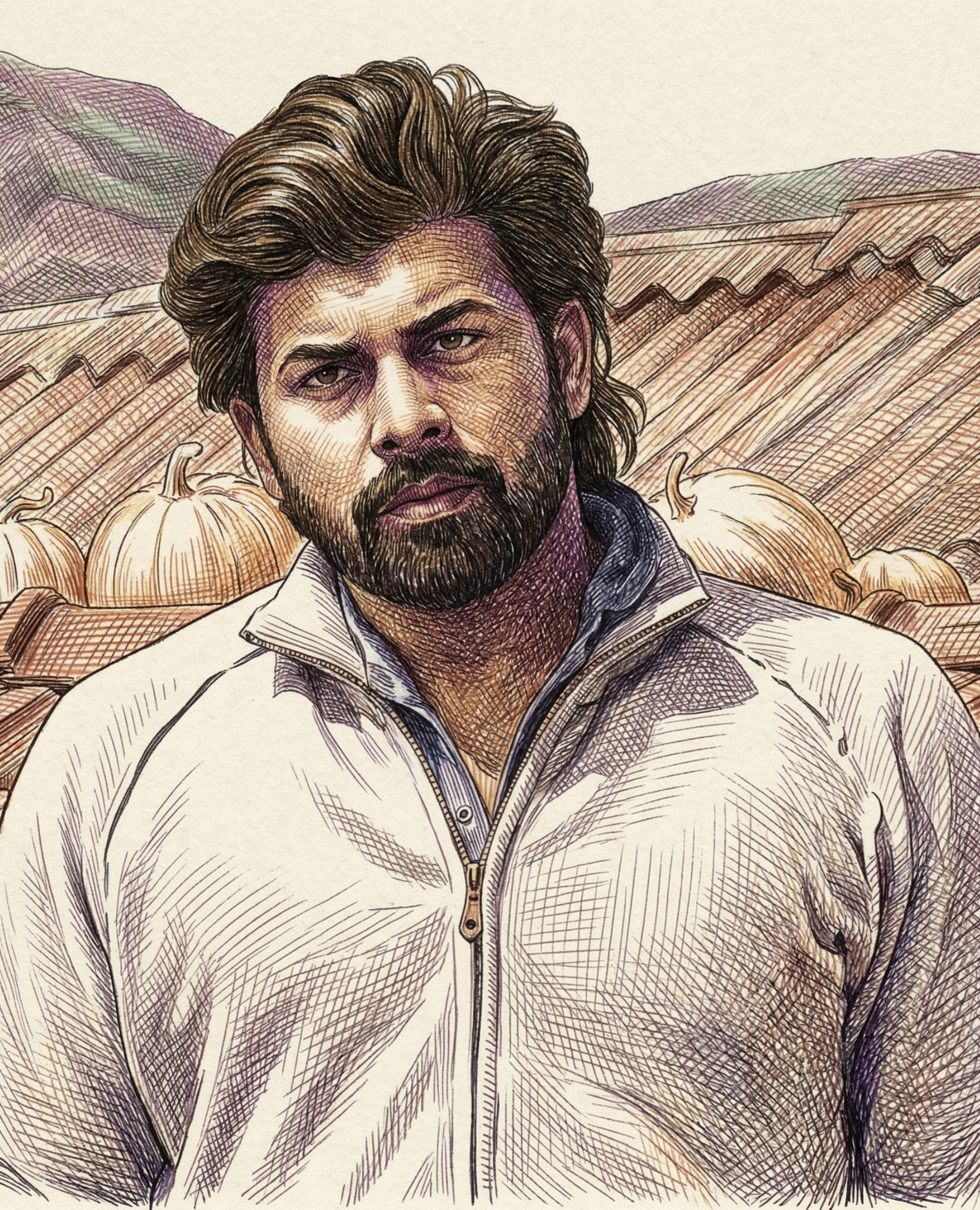
The activity was all happening indoors.

Women sat in small groups rolling dough. Others fried snacks in large pans — ribbon pakoda, murukku, other flour-based items. The smell of oil and spices drifted through the air. The village depended largely on these small food items to get by.

Suni watched quietly as freshly fried snacks were arranged carefully on cloth sheets to cool.

He had seen this before — this exact rhythm — in parts of Kerala. Small cottage industries running out of homes, hands doing careful, patient work.

But something was different here. He just hadn't placed it yet.



Then it came to him.

Back home, snacks like these were made because markets existed nearby. Vehicles came regularly to collect goods. Small distributors connected village kitchens to town shelves without anyone having to think too hard about it.

Here, the snacks were made.

But getting them to a larger market was a problem nobody had solved yet.

The road ran directly through the village. Anyone could see it from the window. And yet very few vehicles used it. Which meant the women rolling dough in these houses were working hard for a price that would be settled much later — and much lower.

Suni understood it then.

Back home, movement created value. Goods moved, prices held, effort was rewarded. Here, without that movement, the snacks simply waited. And waiting always came at a cost.

The road was present. The movement was not.



They came across the children in the afternoon.

A group of them playing in the open space at the centre of the village, beside the Kutcha houses that lined the river. Unbothered. Unselfconscious. Completely at ease in the only world they had ever known.

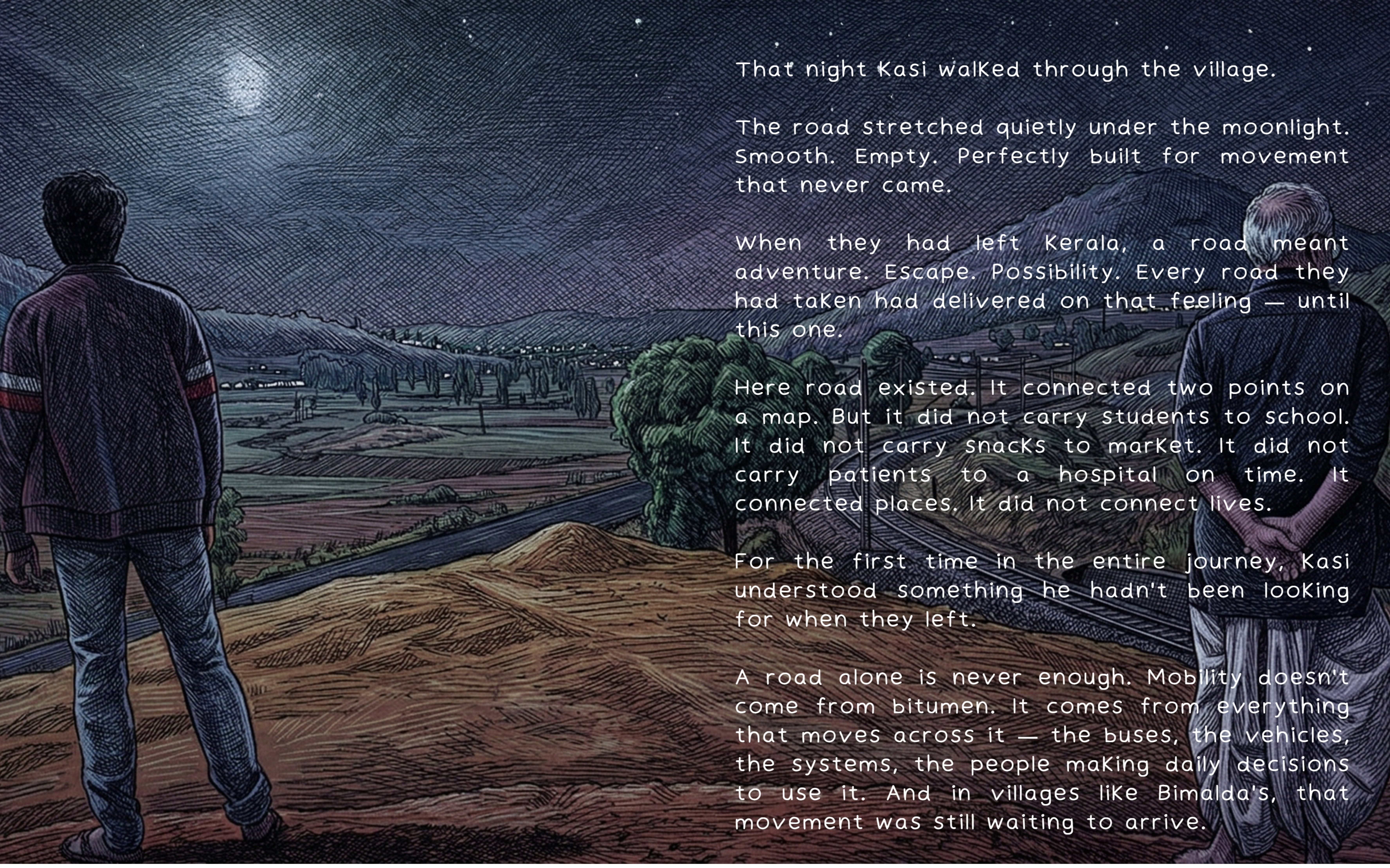
None of them had ever attended school.

In Kerala, even the most remote villages managed to get children to distant schools. Because buses existed. Because a journey that would take a child two hours on foot could take twenty minutes in a vehicle. Transport made the distance manageable. Transport made education possible.

Here, the nearest school was kilometres away — not as a number on a map, but as an actual walk that nobody could realistically expect a child to make every day.

The road passed near the village. But it did not carry the children to school.

A road and a route are not the same thing.



That night Kasi walked through the village.

The road stretched quietly under the moonlight. Smooth. Empty. Perfectly built for movement that never came.

When they had left Kerala, a road meant adventure. Escape. Possibility. Every road they had taken had delivered on that feeling — until this one.

Here road existed. It connected two points on a map. But it did not carry students to school. It did not carry snacks to market. It did not carry patients to a hospital on time. It connected places. It did not connect lives.

For the first time in the entire journey, Kasi understood something he hadn't been looking for when they left.

A road alone is never enough. Mobility doesn't come from bitumen. It comes from everything that moves across it — the buses, the vehicles, the systems, the people making daily decisions to use it. And in villages like Bimalda's, that movement was still waiting to arrive.