



A NAVRITTO STORY

The Rain *Market.*

+ NAVRITTO STORIES · MYSTERY & THE STRANGE

The Rain Market

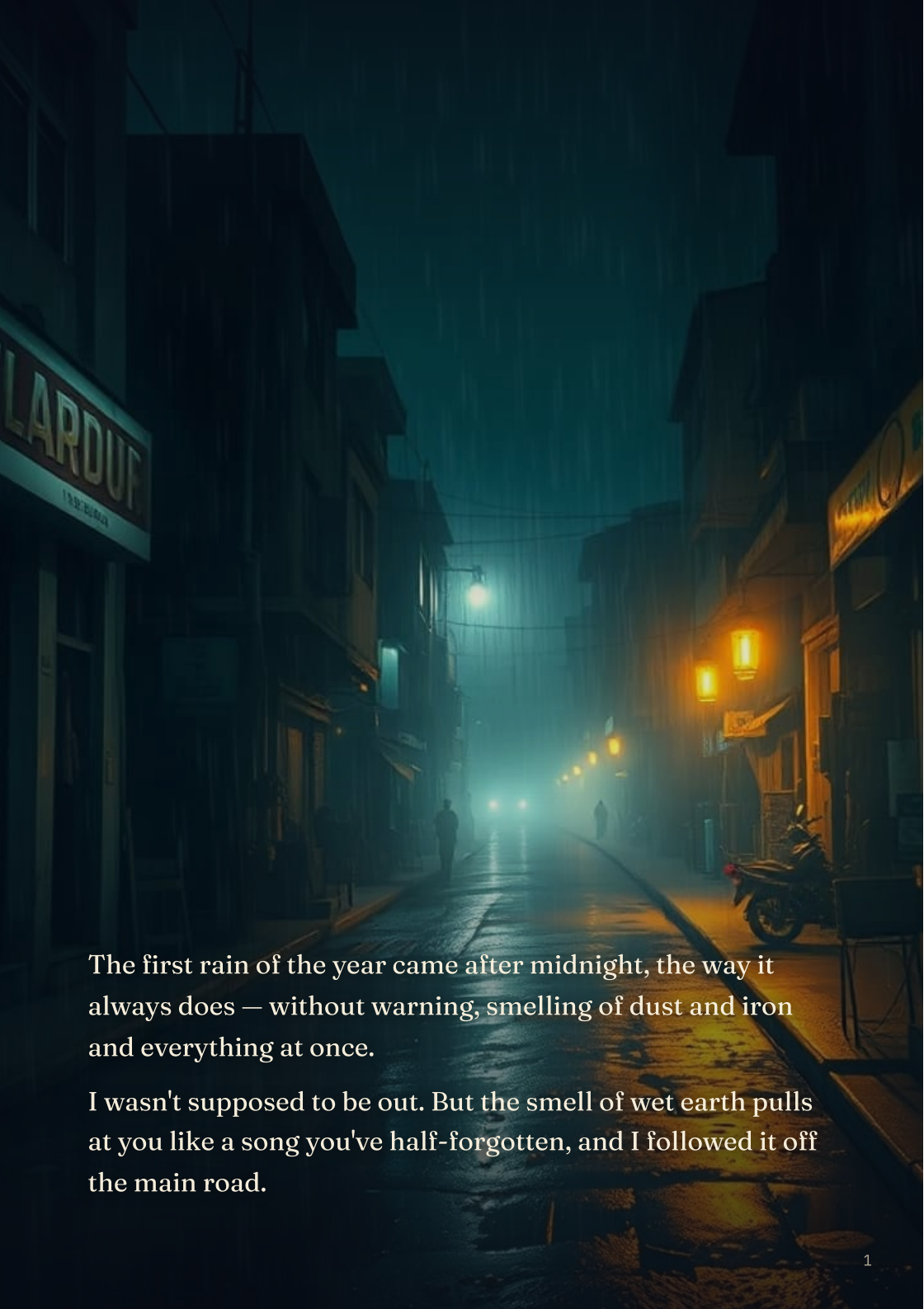
Written & illustrated by Navritto.

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First edition, 2026 · Published by Navritto Solutions Private Limited · navritto.com

CIN U62090HR2026PTC145030

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The first rain of the year came after midnight, the way it always does — without warning, smelling of dust and iron and everything at once.

I wasn't supposed to be out. But the smell of wet earth pulls at you like a song you've half-forgotten, and I followed it off the main road.



The lane behind the old cloth bazaar had always ended at a wall. That night it didn't.

It opened — lantern after lantern, stall after stall — further than the street had any right to go.



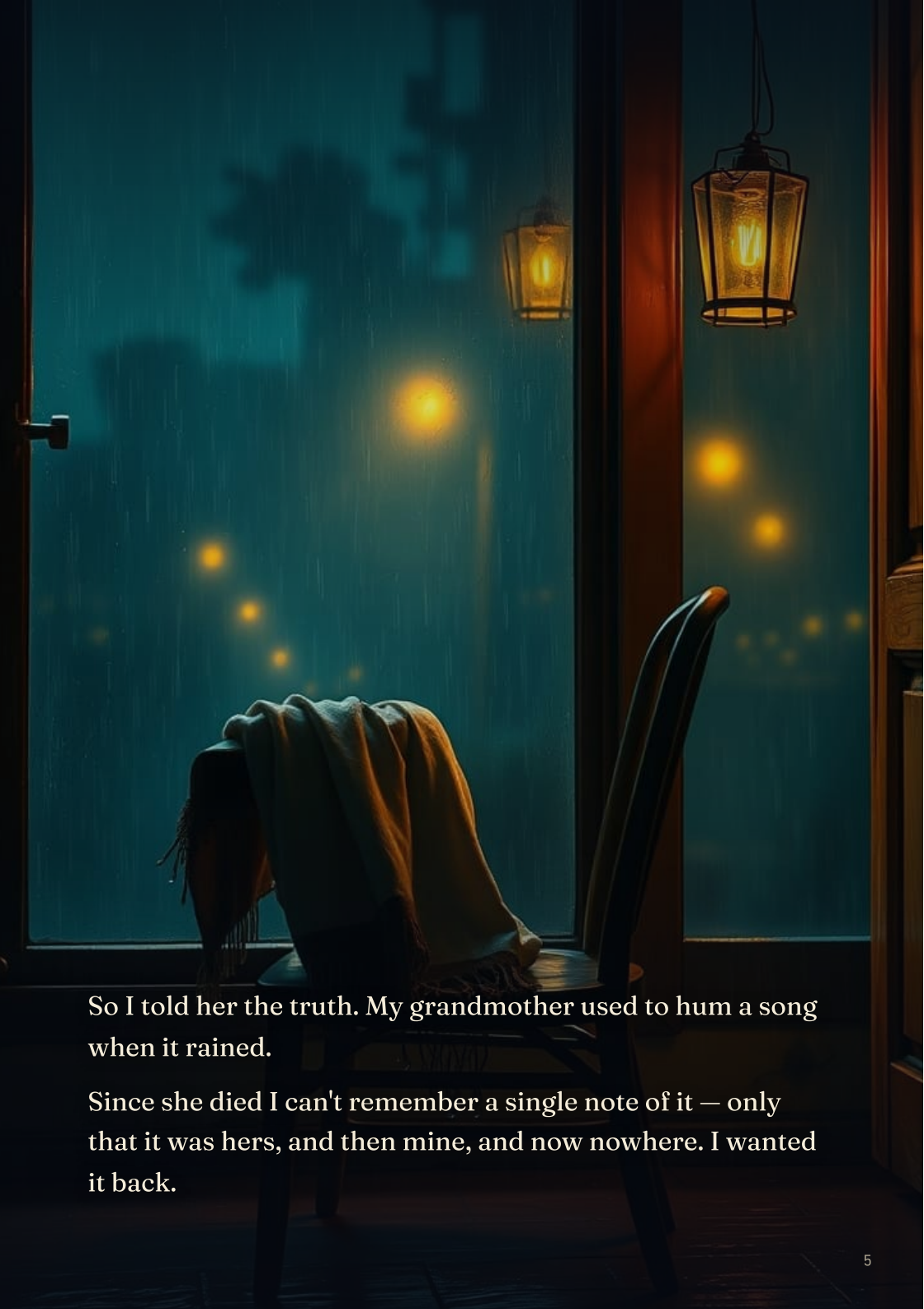
They were selling things you cannot hold. A jar of someone's courage, still warm. A bottled first kiss. A dream folded into a paper map.

The stall-keepers never called out. They only waited.



At the far end waited one who was clearly in charge —
cloaked, unhurried, older than the rain.

“Everything here has a price,” she said, before I could speak.
“Never money. You pay with something you'd miss.”



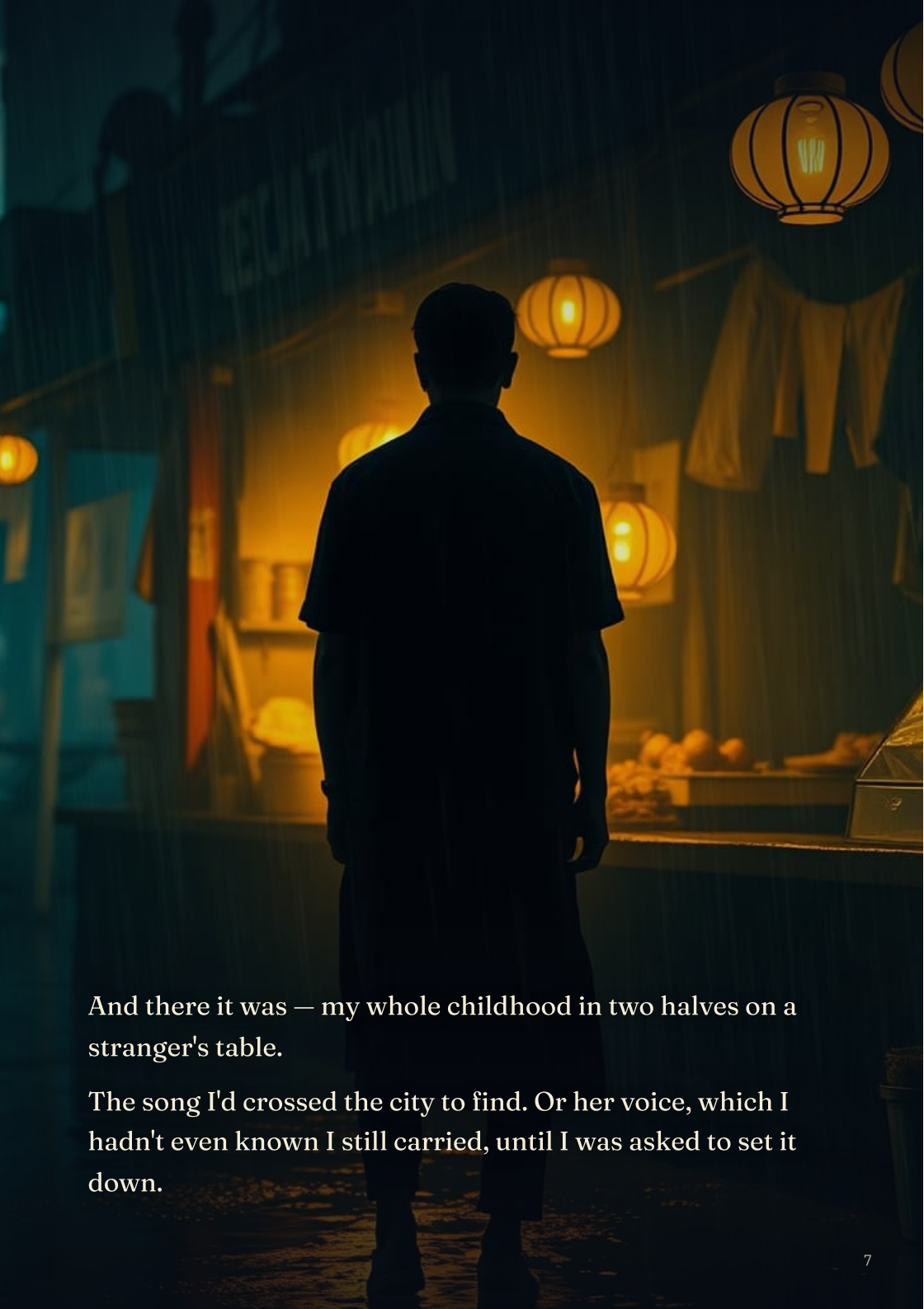
So I told her the truth. My grandmother used to hum a song when it rained.

Since she died I can't remember a single note of it — only that it was hers, and then mine, and now nowhere. I wanted it back.



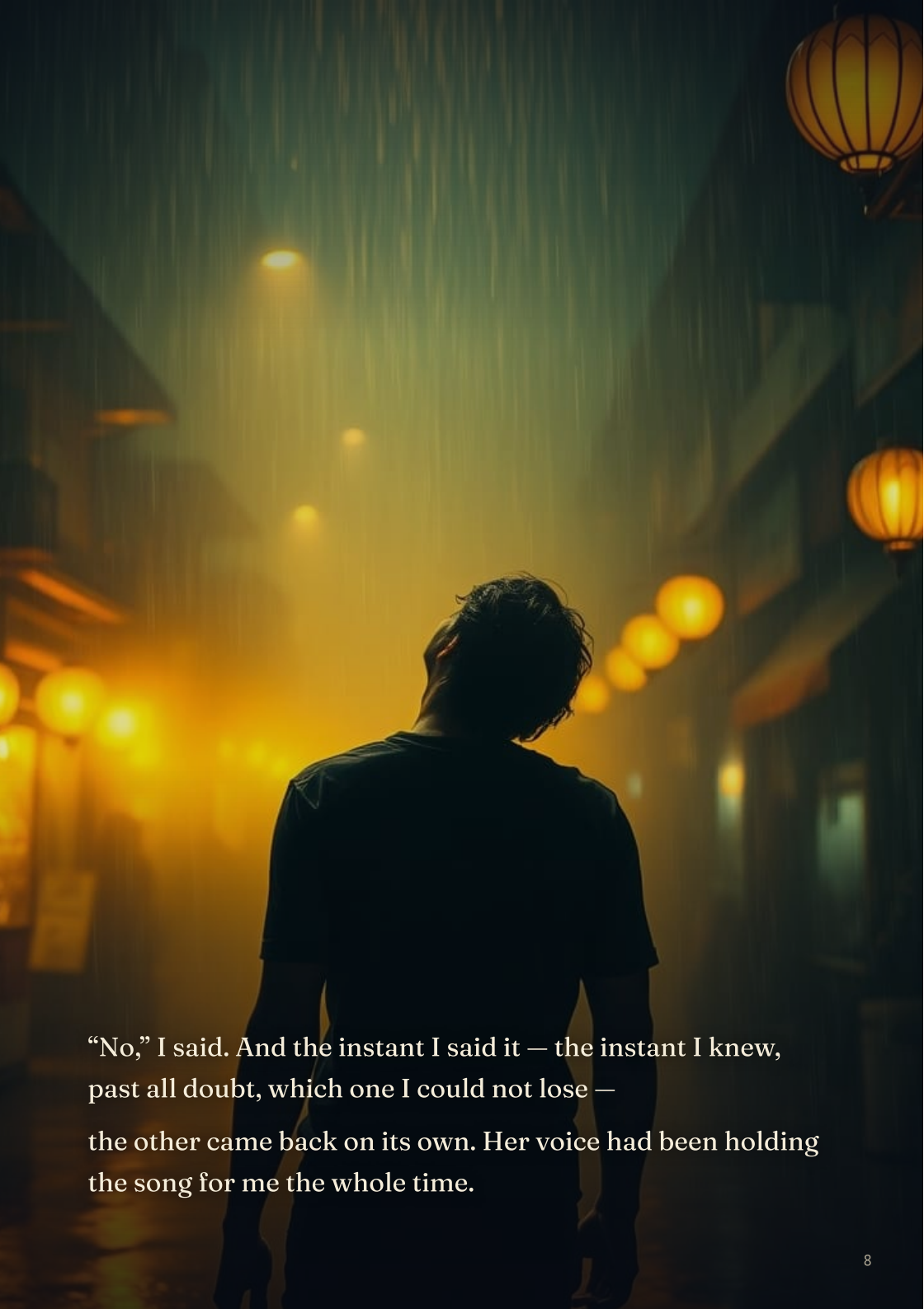
The Keeper set a small glass bottle on the counter. Inside, something stirred and settled, like a sleeping bird.

“The song,” she said. “The price is the sound of her voice. You may keep one. Never both.”

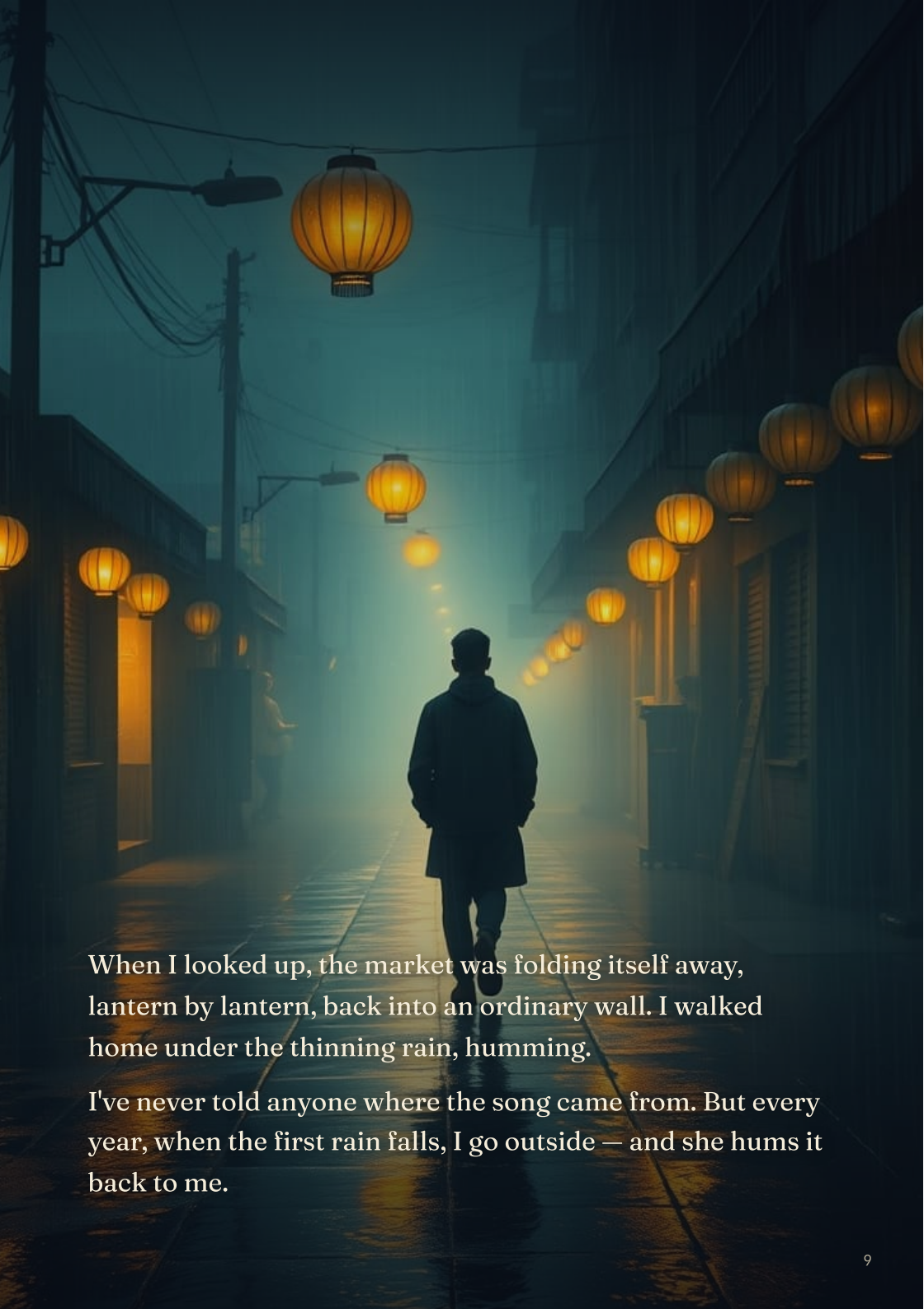


And there it was — my whole childhood in two halves on a stranger's table.

The song I'd crossed the city to find. Or her voice, which I hadn't even known I still carried, until I was asked to set it down.



“No,” I said. And the instant I said it — the instant I knew,
past all doubt, which one I could not lose —
the other came back on its own. Her voice had been holding
the song for me the whole time.



When I looked up, the market was folding itself away,
lantern by lantern, back into an ordinary wall. I walked
home under the thinning rain, humming.

I've never told anyone where the song came from. But every
year, when the first rain falls, I go outside — and she hums it
back to me.

✦ THE END

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