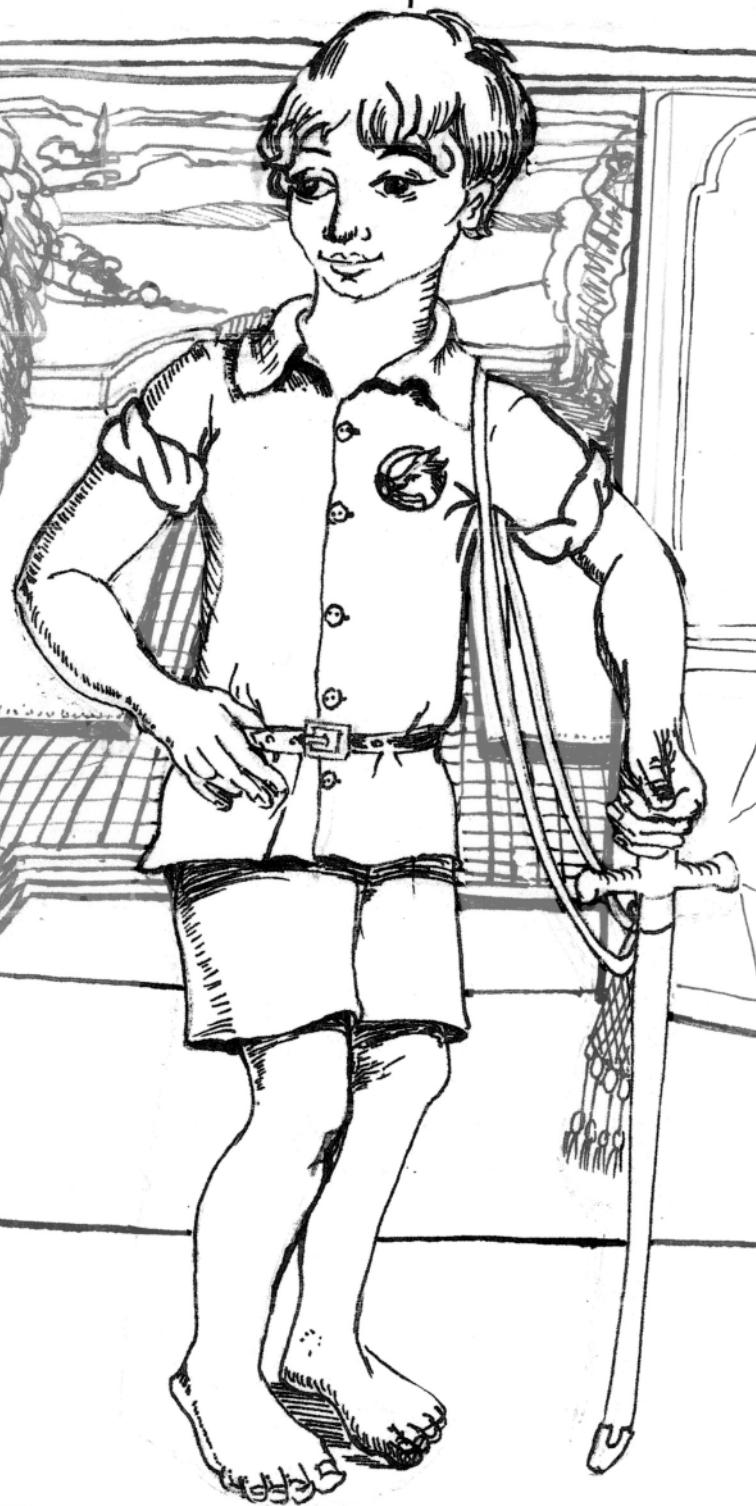


Pour
Gentien et Elodie
about our grandparents
Journey across three
Continents during WWII

Gentien The Corporal.



brought to you by Yolanda 

Dear Gentien and Elodie,

May, 2012

As I was checking out of my hotel in Paris, after your father's funeral and after visiting my dying father, I got chatting with the owner. He was an exotic man, an Ethiopian Jew, with a large extended family spread across the world. He insisted that this was the best time in history to be alive because this was the era of revealed secrets as there was nothing to hide any more. I told him a little about our grandfather - how he had fought in the French army, then worked alongside Charles de Gaulle in London, then ended up in the French Camerouns. His reaction surprised me. He insisted that men like Pierre were "bait" for the most interesting stories.

These people, although not honorable themselves, force us to look at the past in a way that challenges us to reexamine our core beliefs. I have come to discover this to be true at least for me. Your father, Robert, abandoned by his father, Pierre, devoted his life to restoring honor to the family name. Your job, as far as I can see, is to make his effort worth all the trouble and sacrifice that he put into the meaning he gave his life.

We have both lost an uncle and a father. My father's dying words to me were: "Yolanda, don't bother with the old people. It is the young that matter. Help them to get on with their lives."

I consider my father to have been a very lucky man. He died before his children or grandchildren, unlike our grandparents. He knew each of his six grandchildren into their maturity and has made a huge contribution to their development as amazing human beings. Your father did not have that blessing but I hope that I may be privileged enough to be a part of your children's lives. Even if I cannot, I hope that this book will give you courage and wisdom to carry on with your lives in ever more meaningful ways.

Much love from your American cousin,

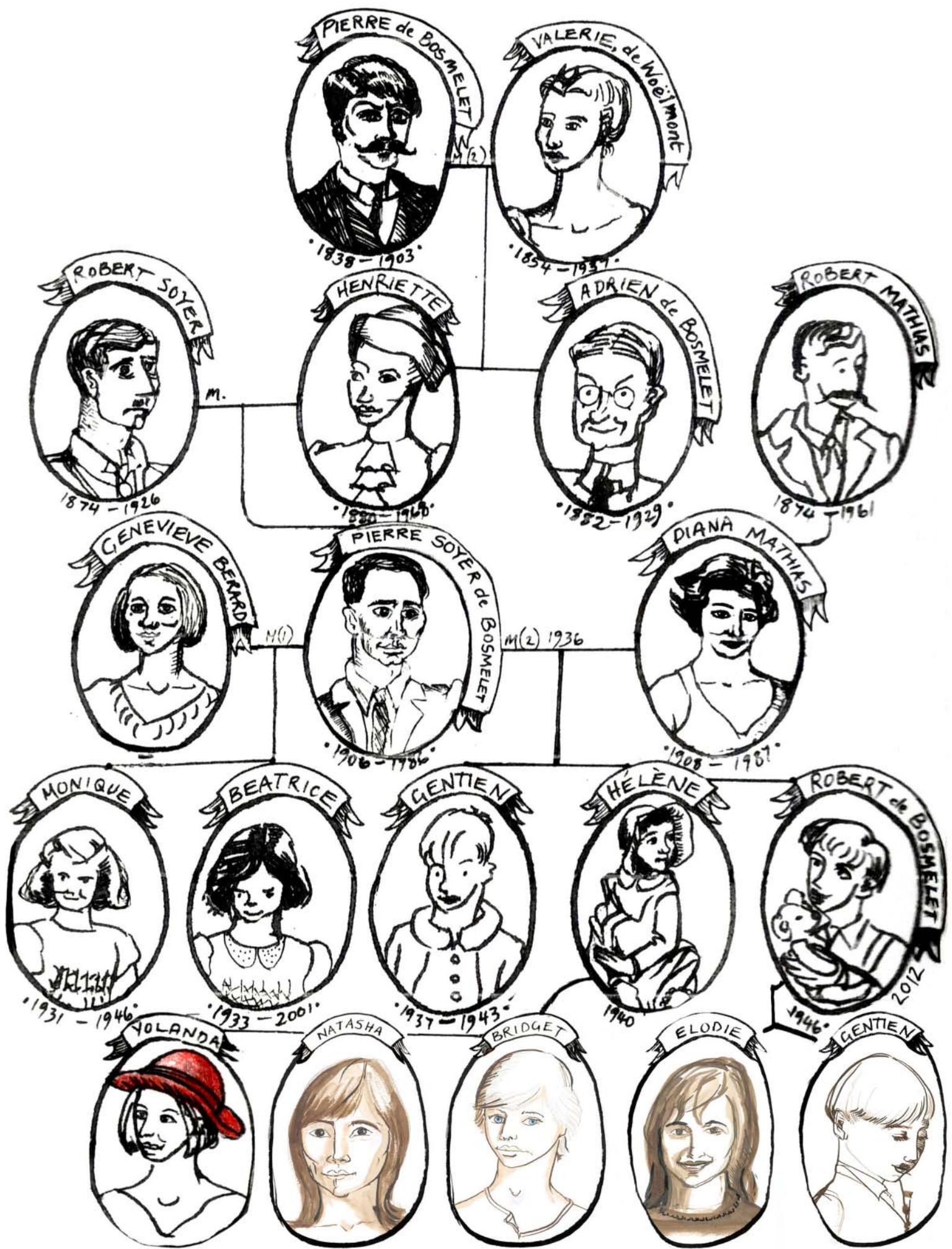


Yolanda Chetwynd

The booklet
is dedicated to:

Tom Chetwynd
- and -
Robert Soyer de Bosmelet

Two wonderful fathers.



I was walking back to my van, my hands grubby from helping garden at my daughter's High School.



My family had been refugees for most of the Second World War. The thought of leaving someone abandoned was abhorrent to me. I asked this stranger to give me signal that she was safe.



Why did my Grandfather abandon his family?



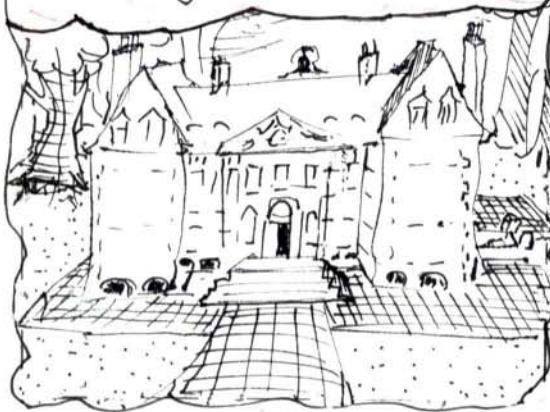
He left behind two wives, five children and his mother.



of His Estate in Normandy,



Bosmelet, had been in his family for many centuries.



I knew two of his children had died and that...



the Chateau had been bombed by the Allies during the war.



Even so, it seemed strange to walk away from so much.



My Grandmother had stayed to clean up "the mess", healing herself by attending to the estate...



...most of all by becoming a constant gardener.

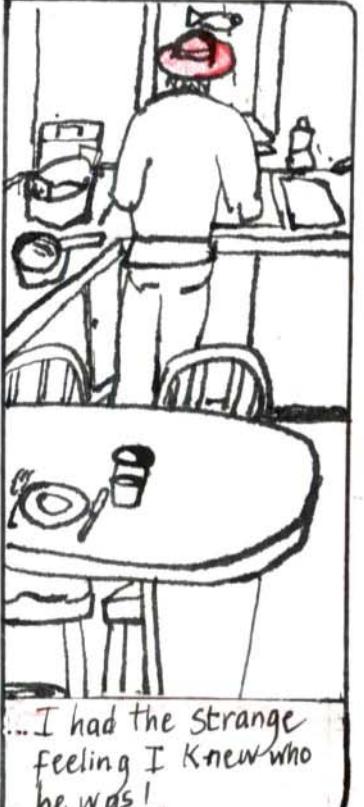
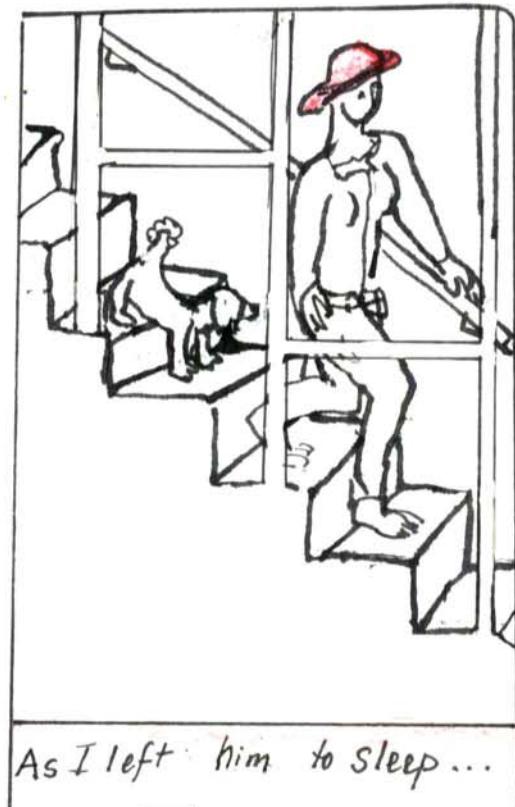
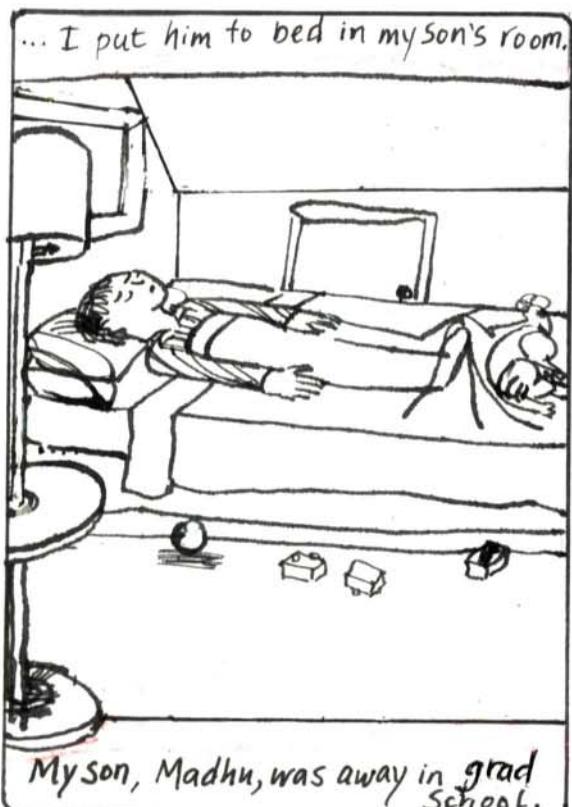
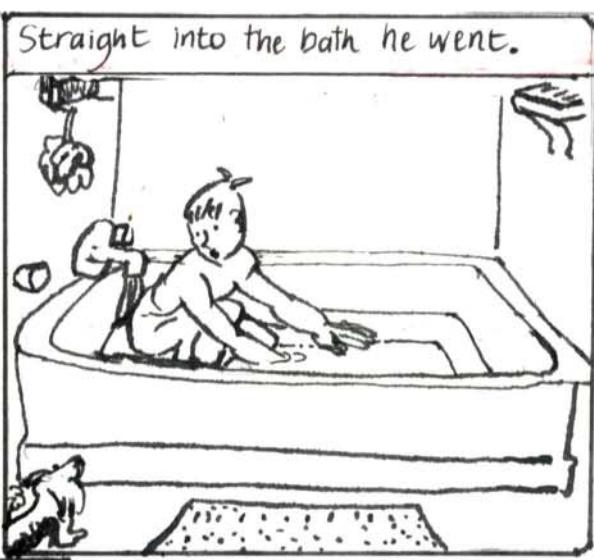


Some weeks later, one autumn day in my yard.



The wind picked up. Through the roar
I heard a sound.





My son, Madhu, was away in grad
School.

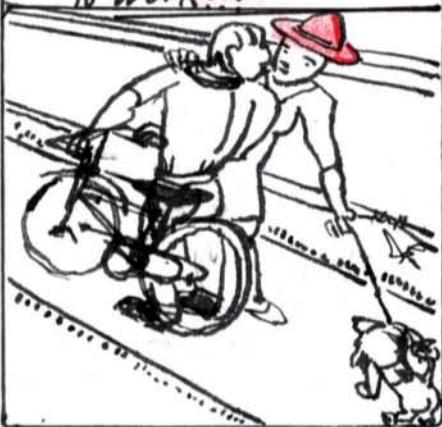
As I left him to sleep...

...I had the strange
feeling I knew who
he was!

The next day after I had seen my daughter off to high school...



...and my husband off to work...



...and taken our dog for her morning walk...



...I looked in on my patient.



Do you know who I am?



I think so.

Are you Gentien, my uncle?



Exactly!

We made small talk.

Are you well enough to get up out of bed?

I think so.

You look great for some one who has been dead for nearly 70 years!

Thank you.

Oh I'm losing it, 51 and talking to a figment of my imagination.

I heard that.





Henriette. She had one great love.



Not for any man...



...but for Bosmelet...



Henriette had only once flirted with another love.

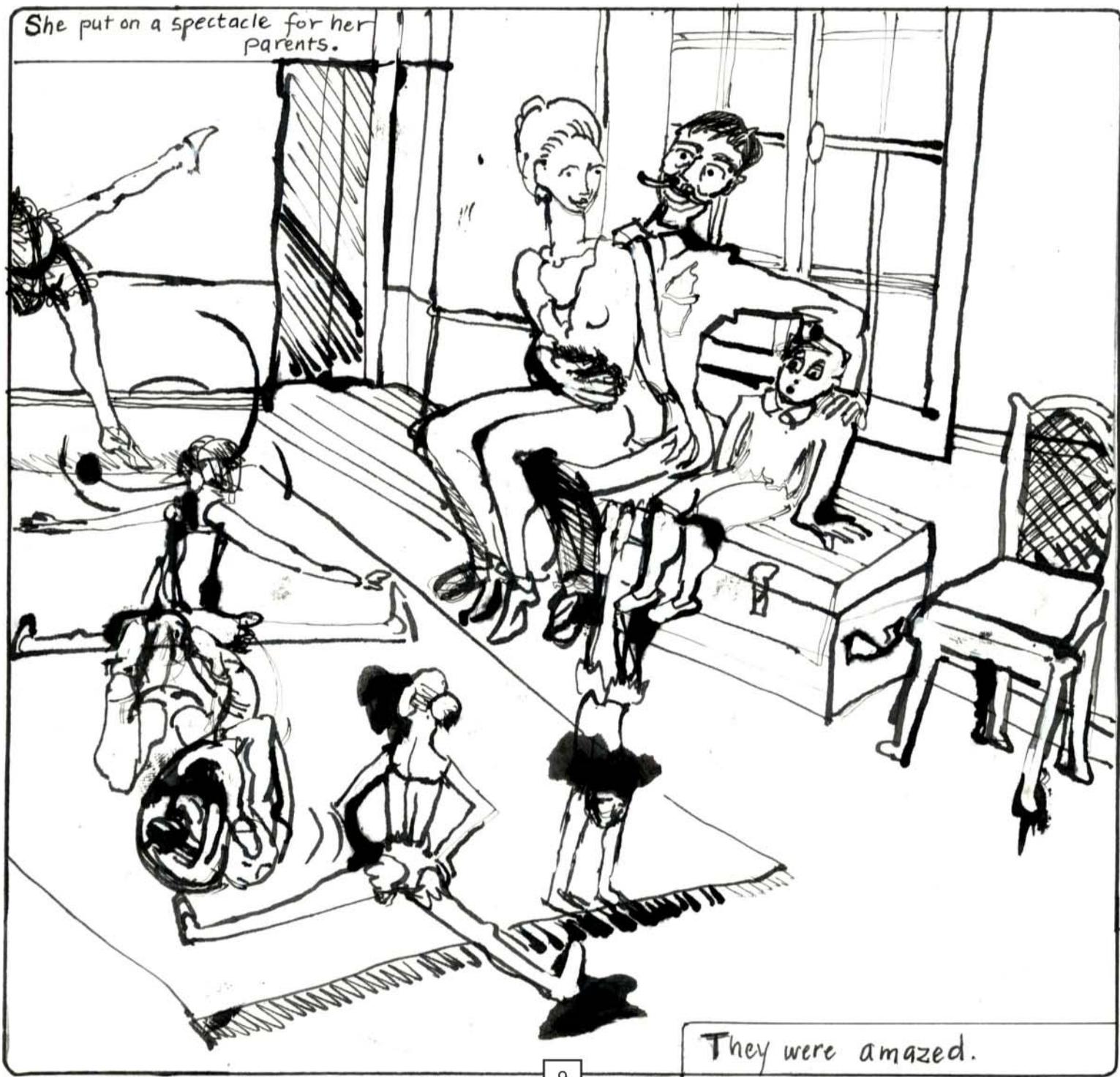


And that was when she was 8 years old.



She was mesmerized with the act.

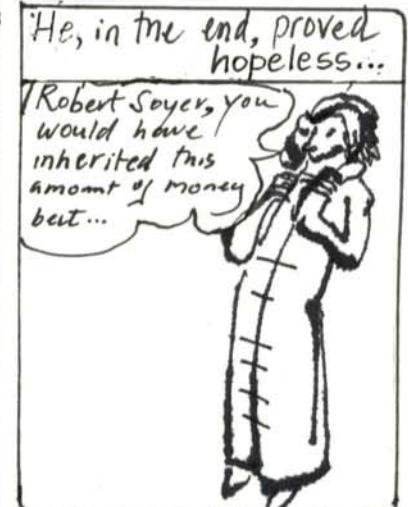




All agreed she was good.



Unfortunately her marriage proved disastrous.
Her husband,
Robert Soyer,
turned out to be a...



If kept her husband away.



WWI ended in 1918.



The next year when
the Treaty of Versailles
was signed...



...Robert Soyer fell ill.*



Henriette poured her hopes
into her beloved son...



...praying that he would not grow
up to be like his father.



Henriette & her mother
went to her brother.



Adrien, adopt your nephew and
make him your heir.



Adrien was a sweet but
indecisive man.



In 1929 he died
without producing
an heir.



* Robert Soyer died in 1926, 7 years later.



Gentien was an excellent traveling companion.



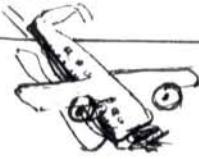
He did not seem to bother the other passengers.



The conductor did not ask for his ticket.



But if we took an airplane,
I need to know how to
fly.



Gentians you were
telling me about your
father, Pierre.



How in 1929 He became
the Baron de Bosmelet.



Yes after his Uncle died he
became the man of the House.



He quickly married
his childhood Sweet
heart...



The beautiful and rich
Geneviève Berard.



They had two lovely daughters
Monsign & Beatrice.



A year after Beatrice
was born, while Pierre
was studying International
law in London...



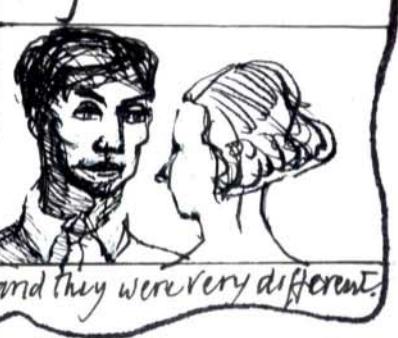
Pierre met my mother.



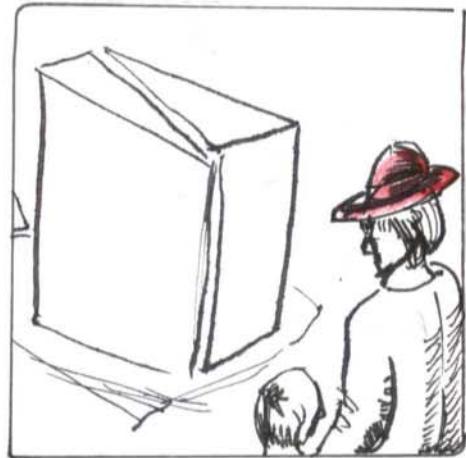
They both fell madly in love.

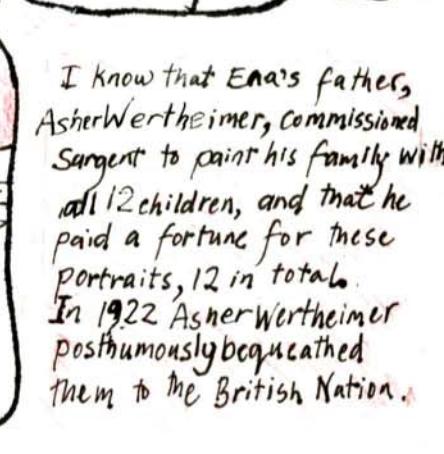
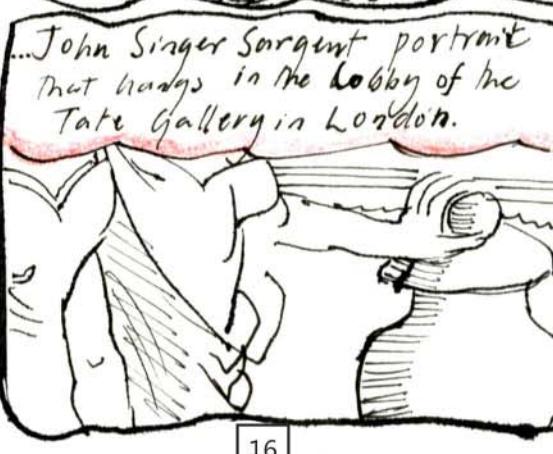


They had a lot in common



and they were very different.





By 1925, the time John Singer Sargent died, the paintings were tucked away in a vestibule of the Tate Gallery. The family demanded to know why! The answer shocked our family to the core. A debate in Parliament argued that they were too "Jewish" to be seen by the British Public.



Crowds of art lovers flock to see them.



The family had the uncomfortable feeling they were being examined...



...as if in a human zoo.



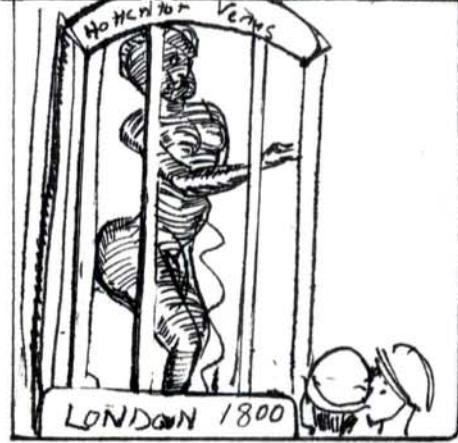
Human zoos were popular.



Millions of Europeans...



would come and gawk..



at the tribal people...



...of the world,



along side exotic animals.



Going to the Holocaust Museum feels like the equivalent of visiting a human zoo.

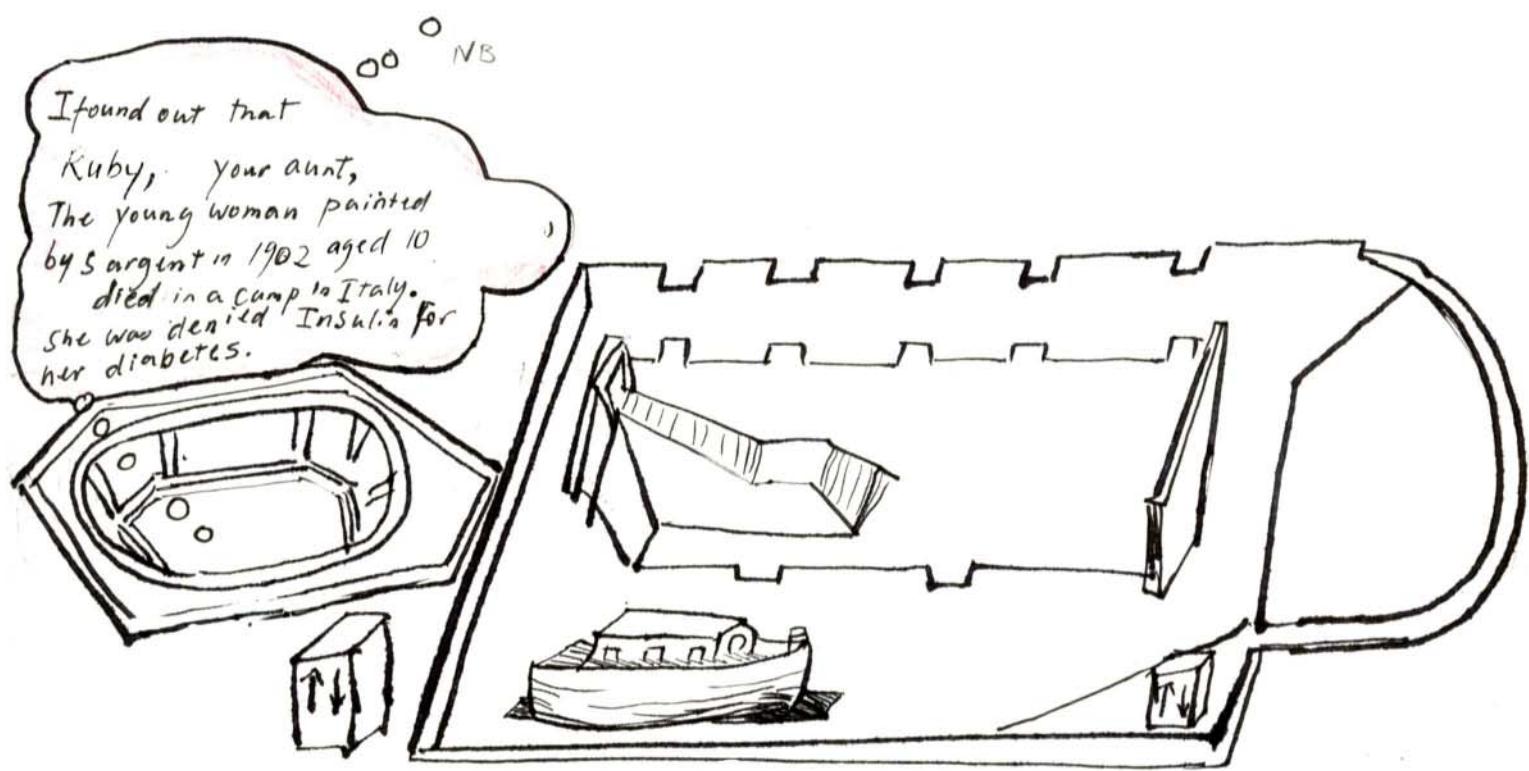


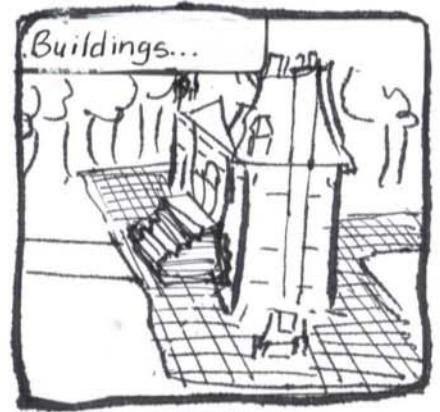
Yes, we are about to look into the soul of what we are capable of as a race.

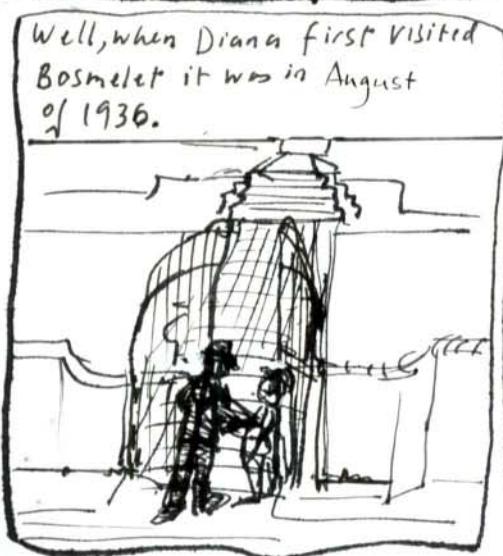


Holo
Me
Muse









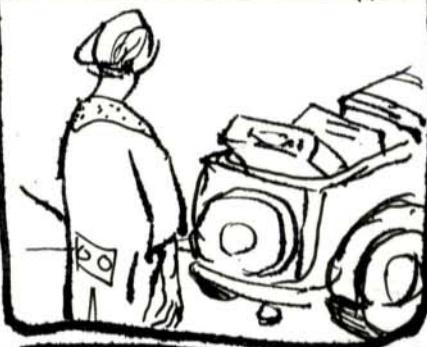
Things got easier for Diana...



...when in Feb, 1937 Valerie died.



Genevieve moved to Dieppe.



The girls...



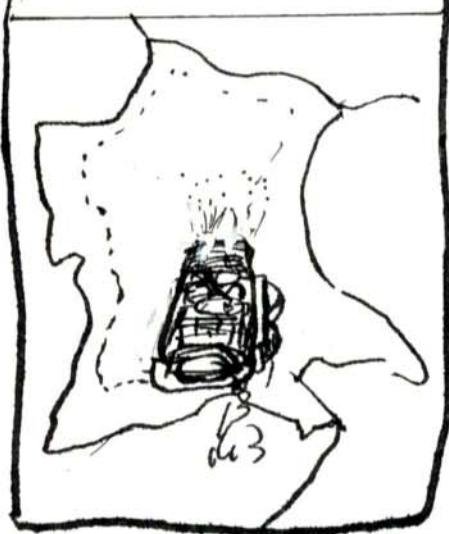
...came just on the weekends to be with their father.



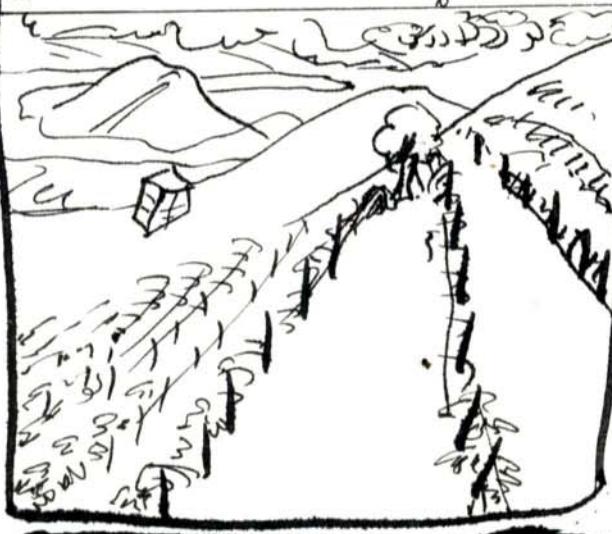
I was born June 1937



Before the war broke out...



Pierre took us on a tour of France.



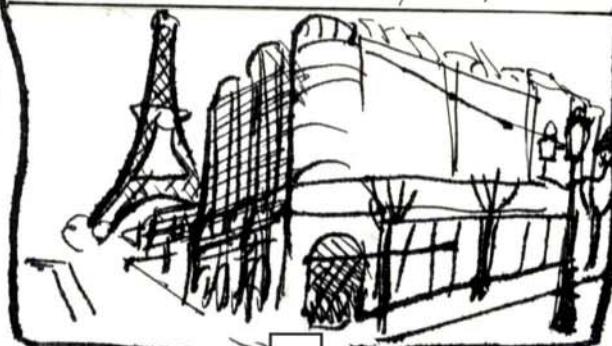
We ate at the best establishments.



We also assimilated the land...



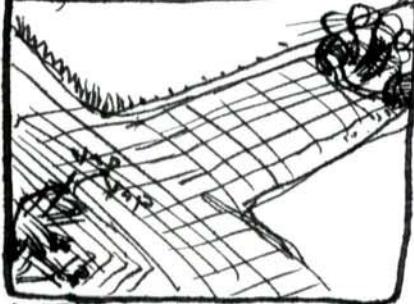
...which was to prove very useful later.



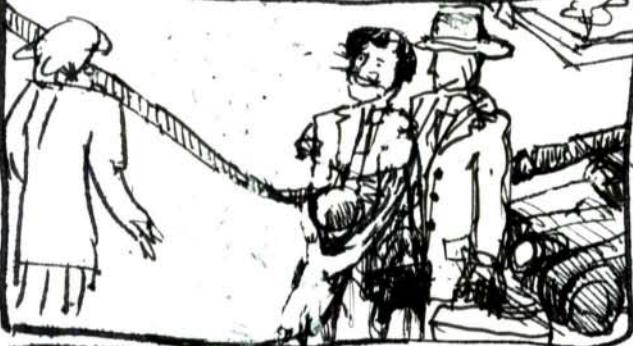
Meanwhile we moved back to Bosmelet.



My grandfather from England came to visit.



He tried to persuade us to go back with him...



...so that Diana could deliver...



...My Sister in England:



Diana & Pierre were adamant that...



France would be safe...



From invasion...



My grandfather left forlorn.



It was the last time...



I would kiss him...



...goodbye.



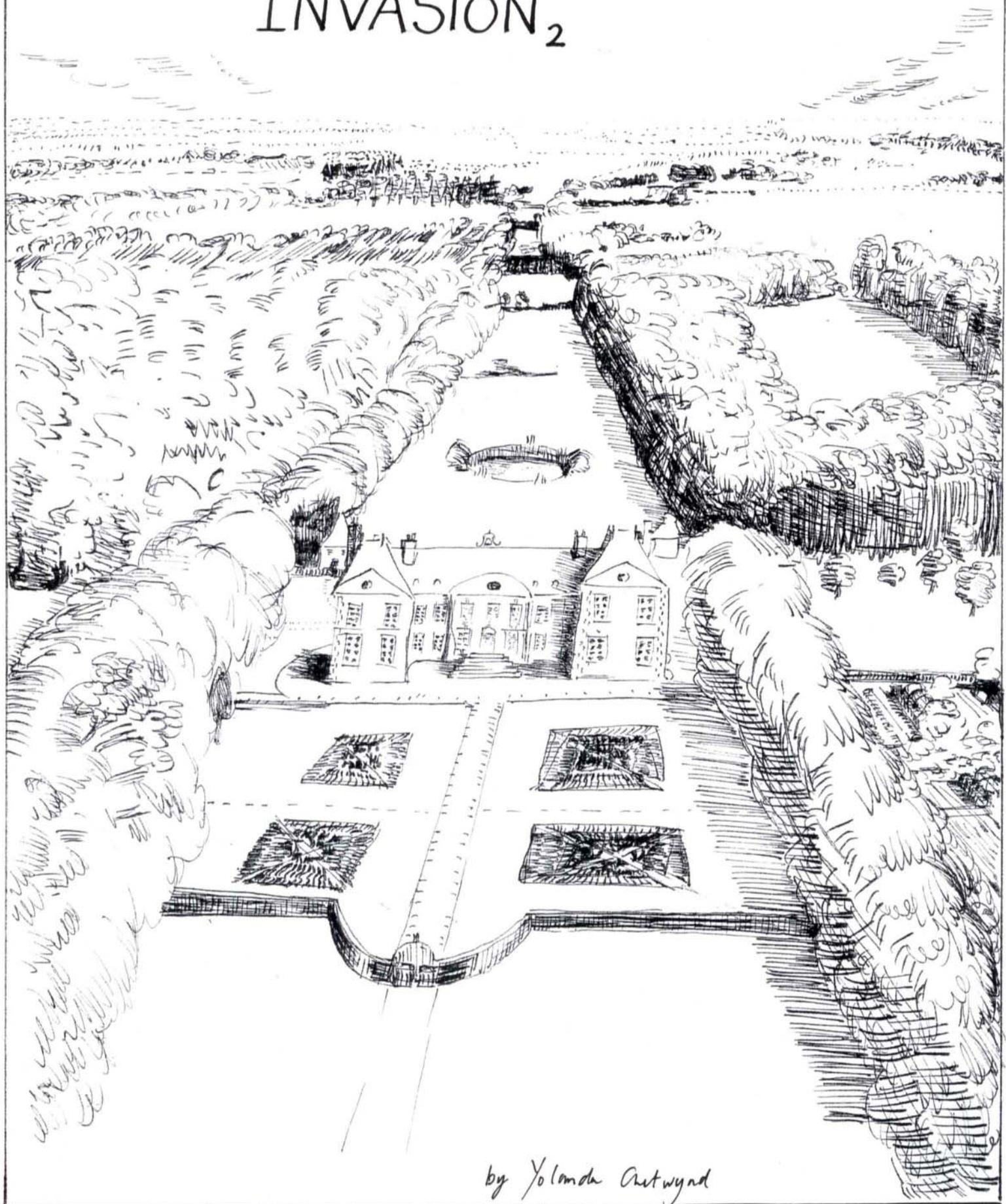
In September 1939
Pierre had gone to fight
the Germans.





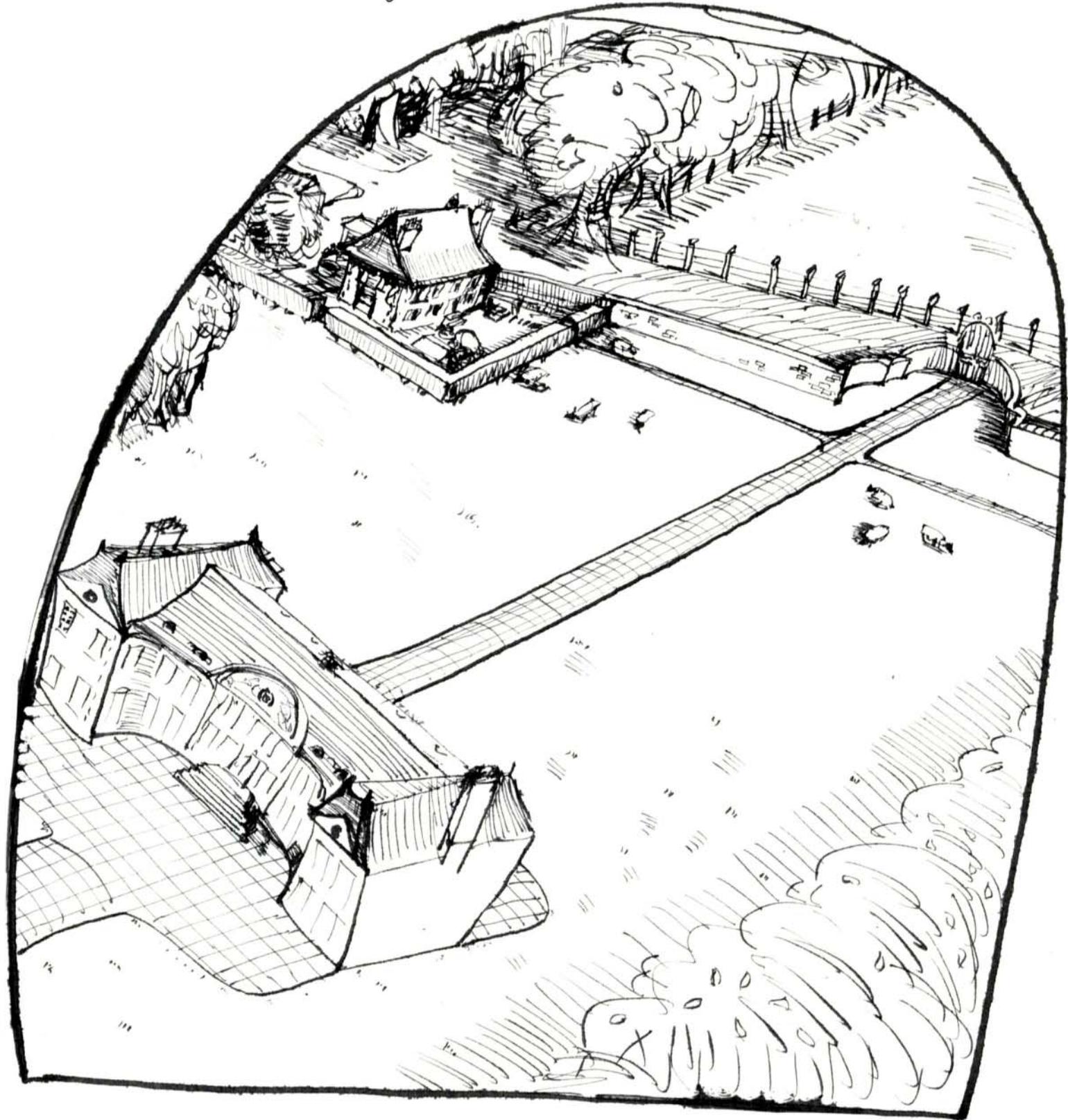


INVASION₂



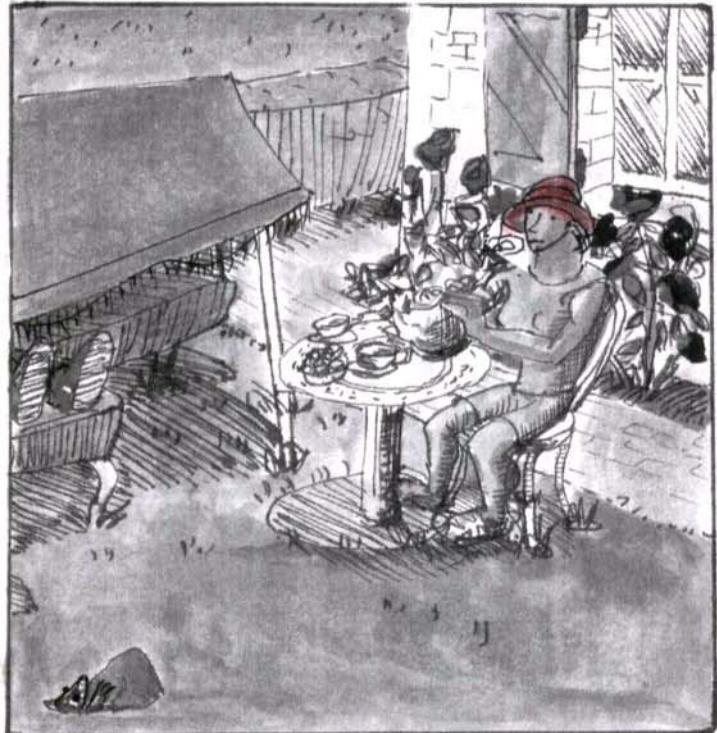
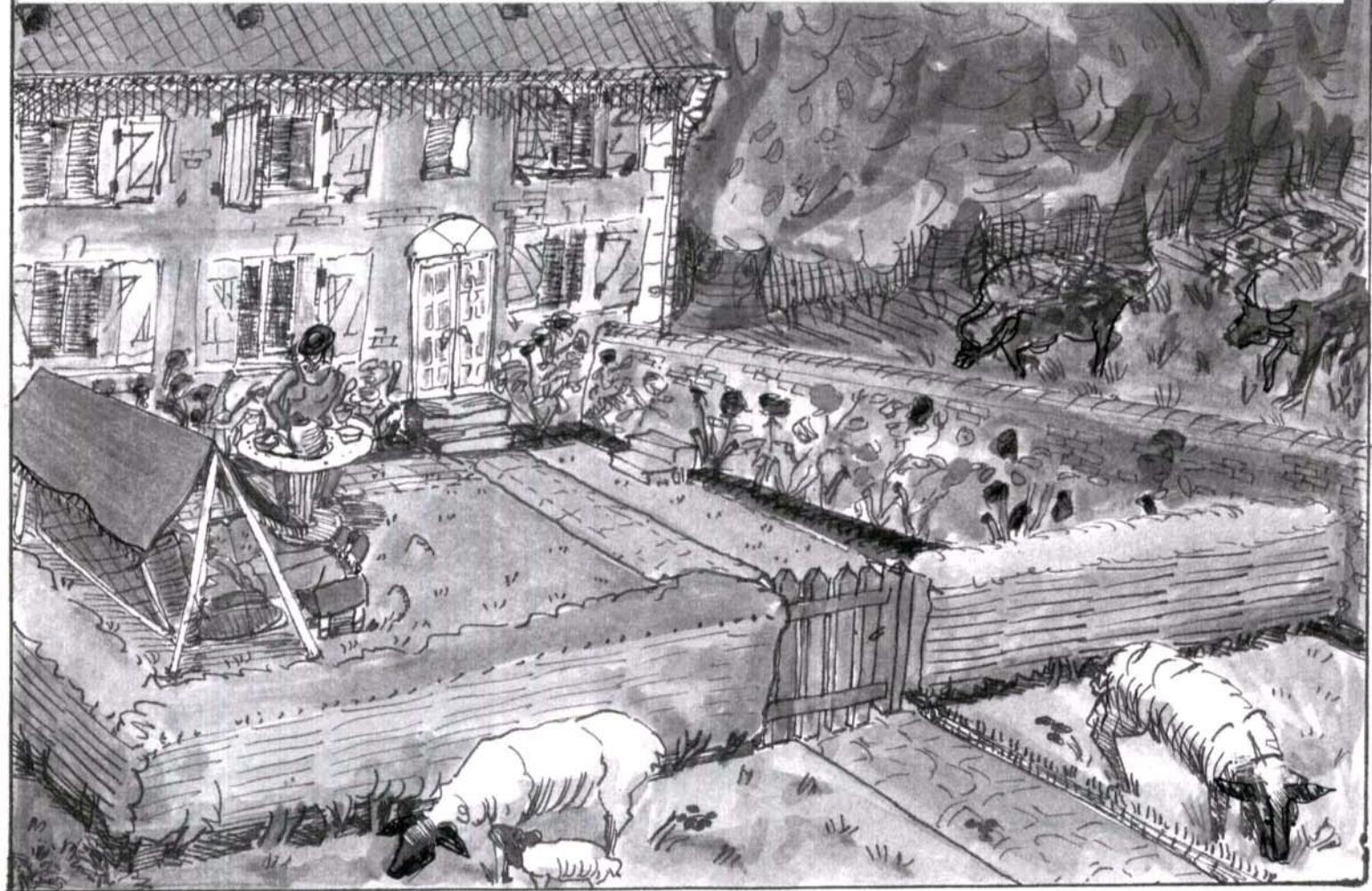
by Yolanda Artwynd

In the Summer of 1987 I was about to embark on a new life in America with my then fiancé, Suresh Advani.



When I heard that my grandmother had been diagnosed with lung Cancer, I was happy to spend three weeks with her because she & I were very close.

That Summer was very beautiful. My Grandmother, her garden and the estate seemed full of a special kind of magic where all life seemed interconnected and in harmony.



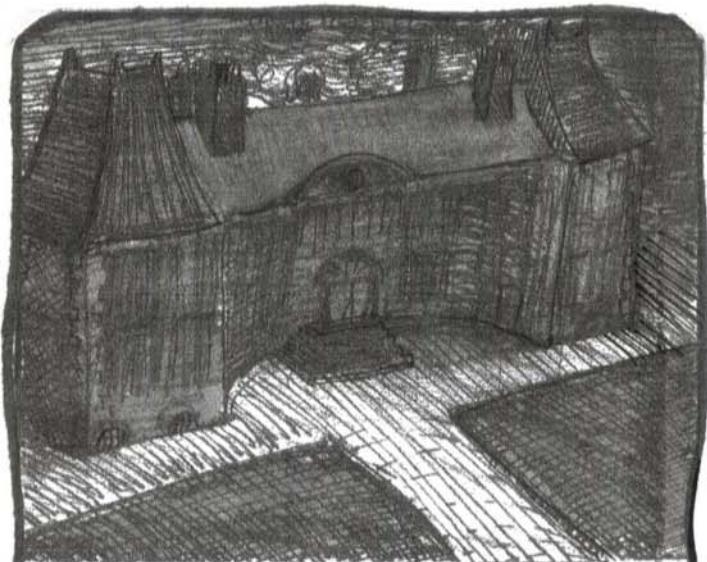


...then looked over her shoulder.

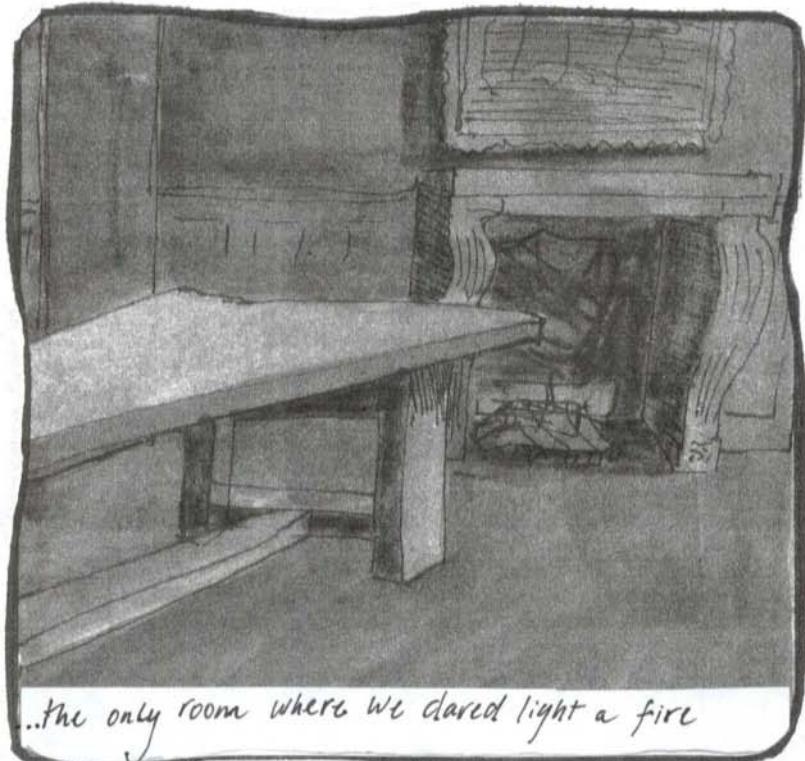


My grandmother then told me the story of my mother's birth on January 1st 1940.

A cold winter night



The war was raging. The windows of the Chateau were blacked out...



...the only room where we dared light a fire



There were no men around as they had all gone to war.



My handsome husband, Pierre Soyer de Bosmelet...



...was gone like the others.

I thought back to our early married life.



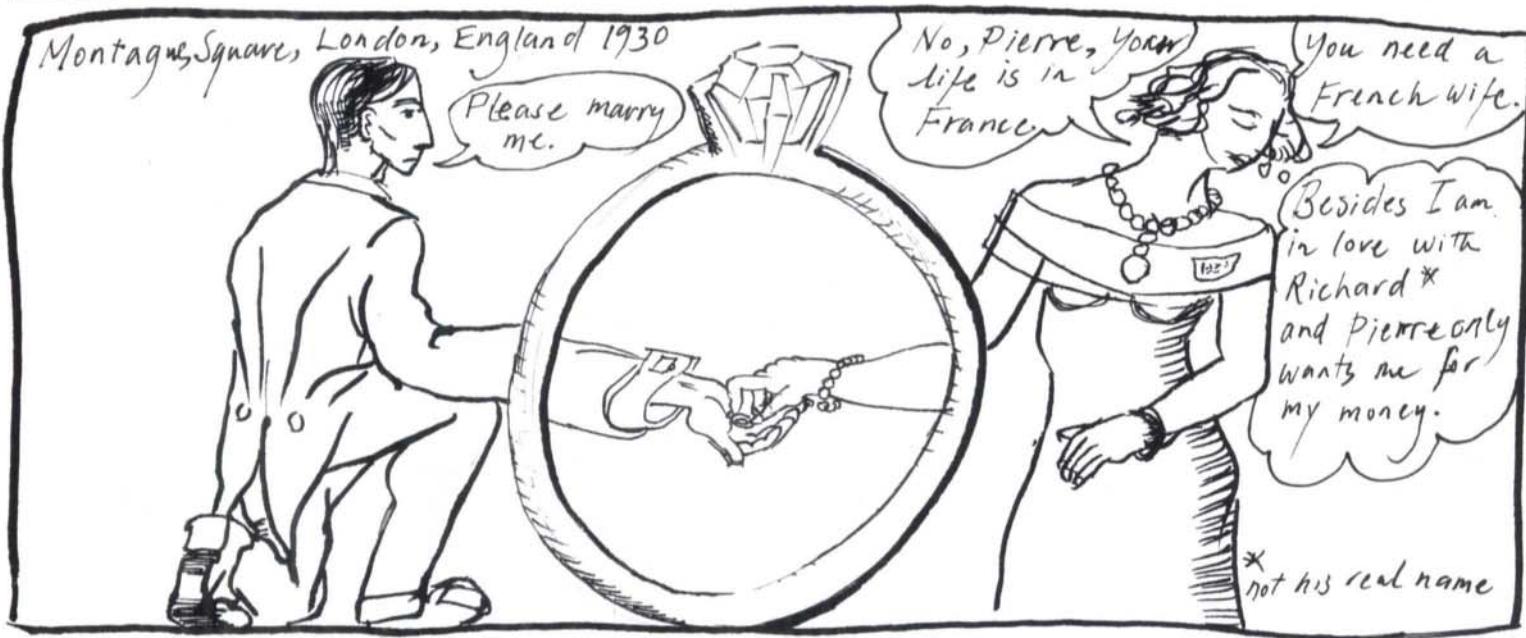
Our perfect son, Gentien...



...was 2 years old.



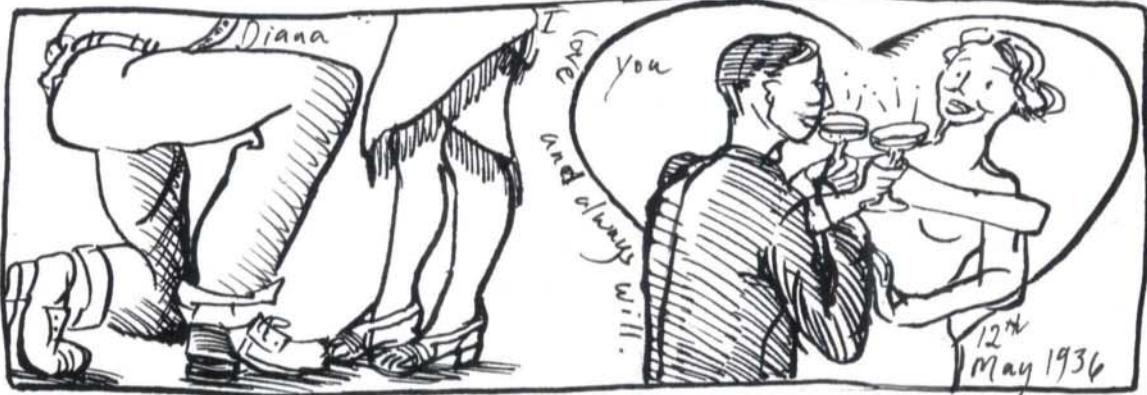
I wanted his
children.
But we had a
stormy courtship
marriage
and Separation.



Our family was rich, so rich.
My mother's father had
made a fortune selling
junk from Old English houses
to the Americans and calling
them antiques.

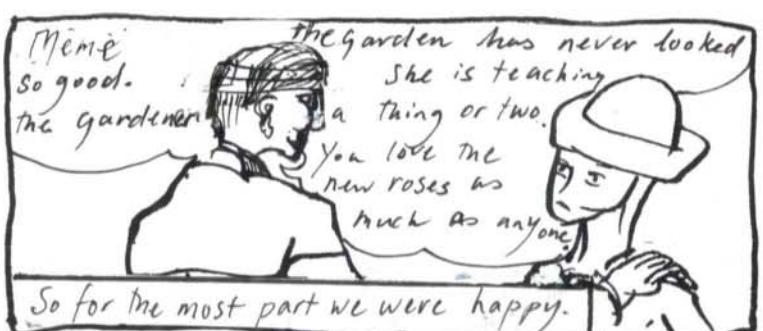
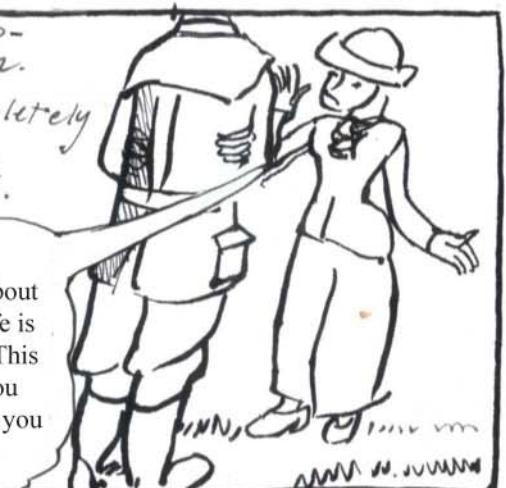


Pierre did marry a rich French Lady. They had two daughters named Monique and Béatrice. Their marriage did not last. He could not forget me.



...at Bosmelet. My two step-daughters visited us often. The only person not completely happy was Pierre's mother, Henriette Soyer de Bosmelet.

Son, why did you divorce your French wife? She was perfect for you. What about your daughters? Besides, your new wife is Jewish. What will the villagers think? This is not Paris, you know. As the Baron you must set a good example. And why are you drinking so much? You know, that...



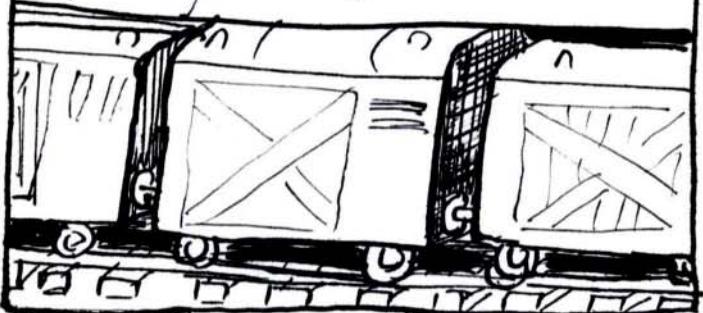
World War II shattered everything.



The German army was marching across...



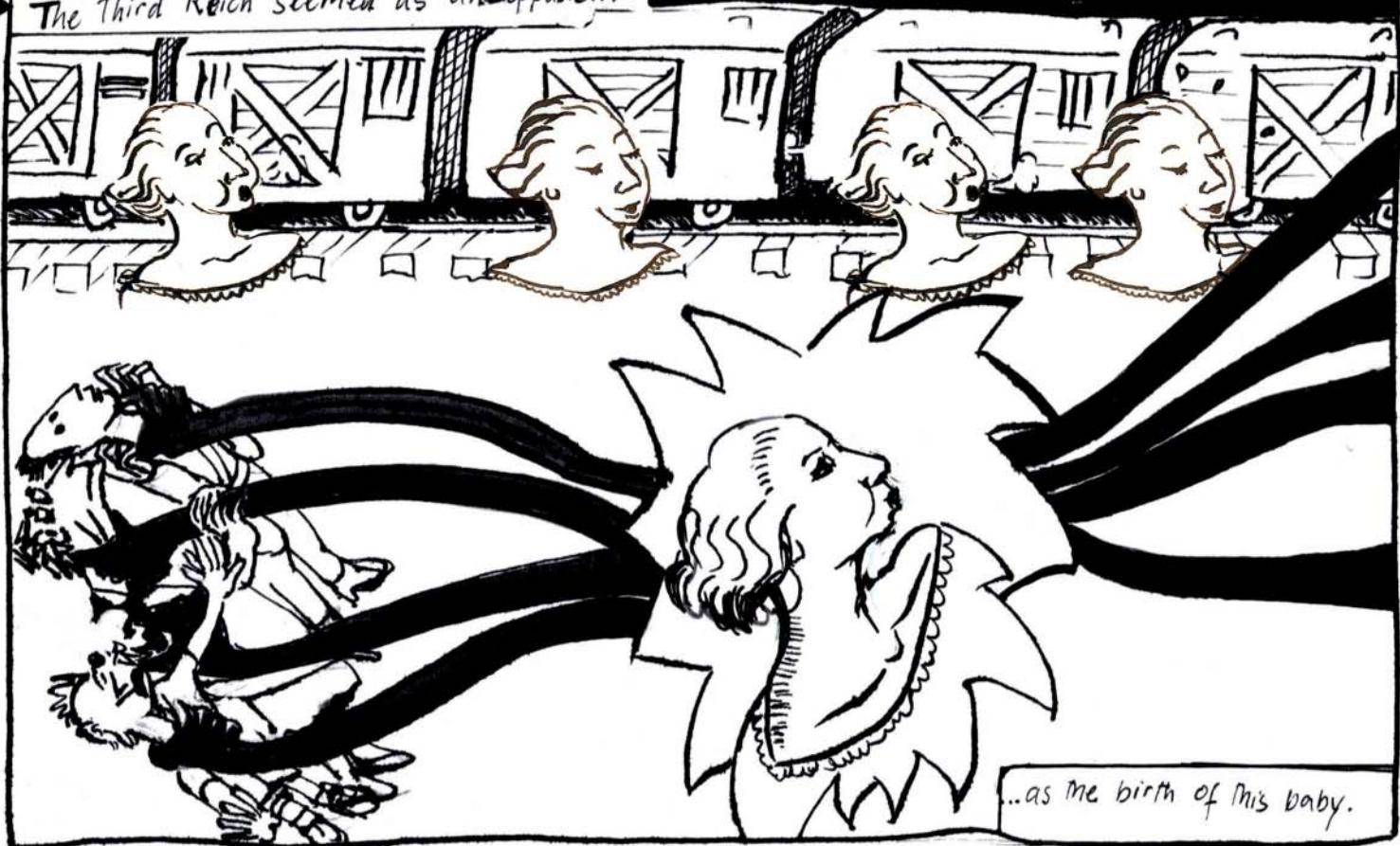
...especially for us Jews.



I had helped out...

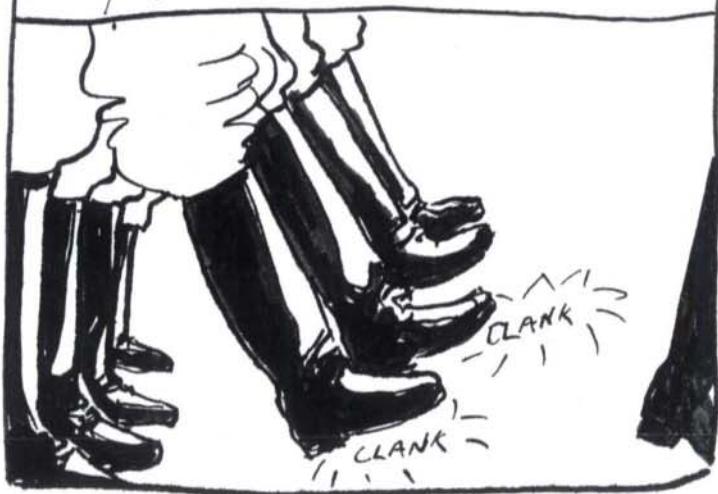


The Third Reich seemed as unstoppable...



...as the birth of this baby.

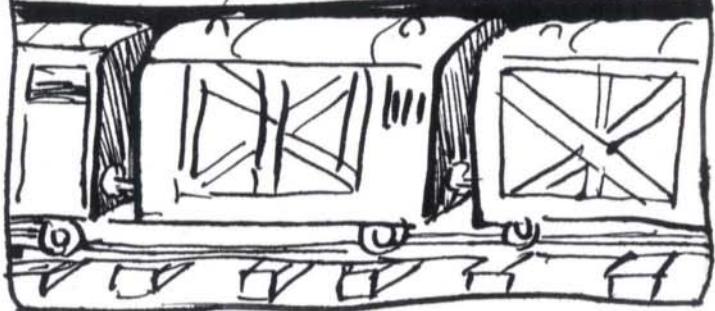
Europe.



Things looked bleak...

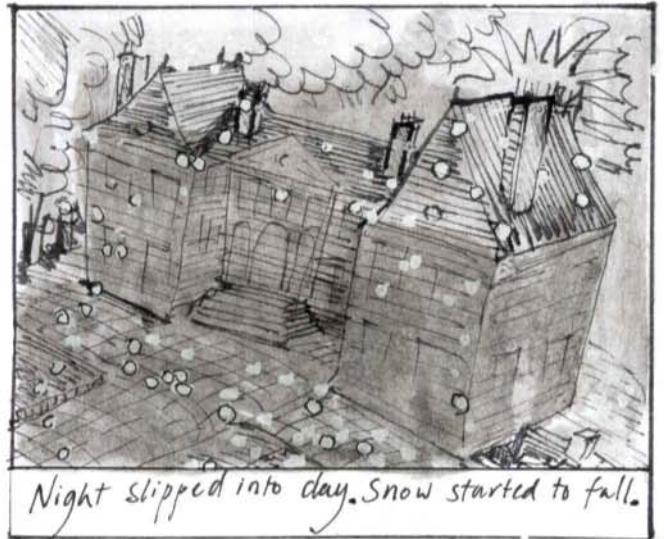
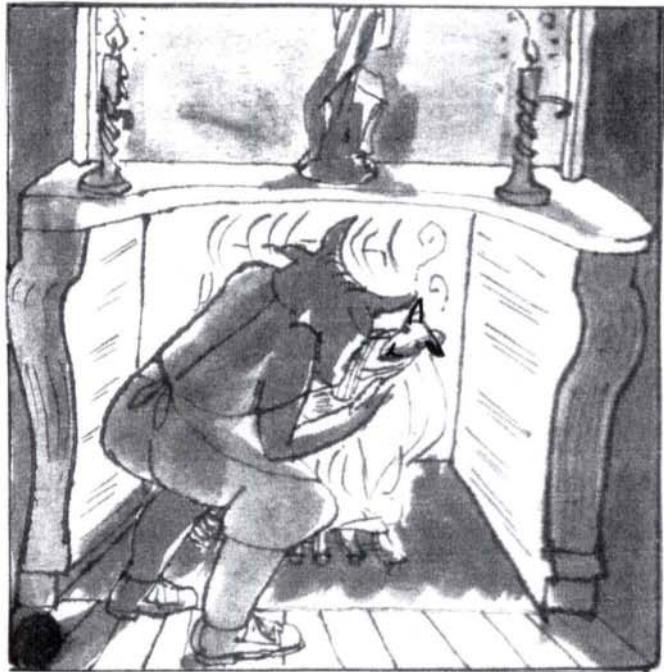


...at the village station...

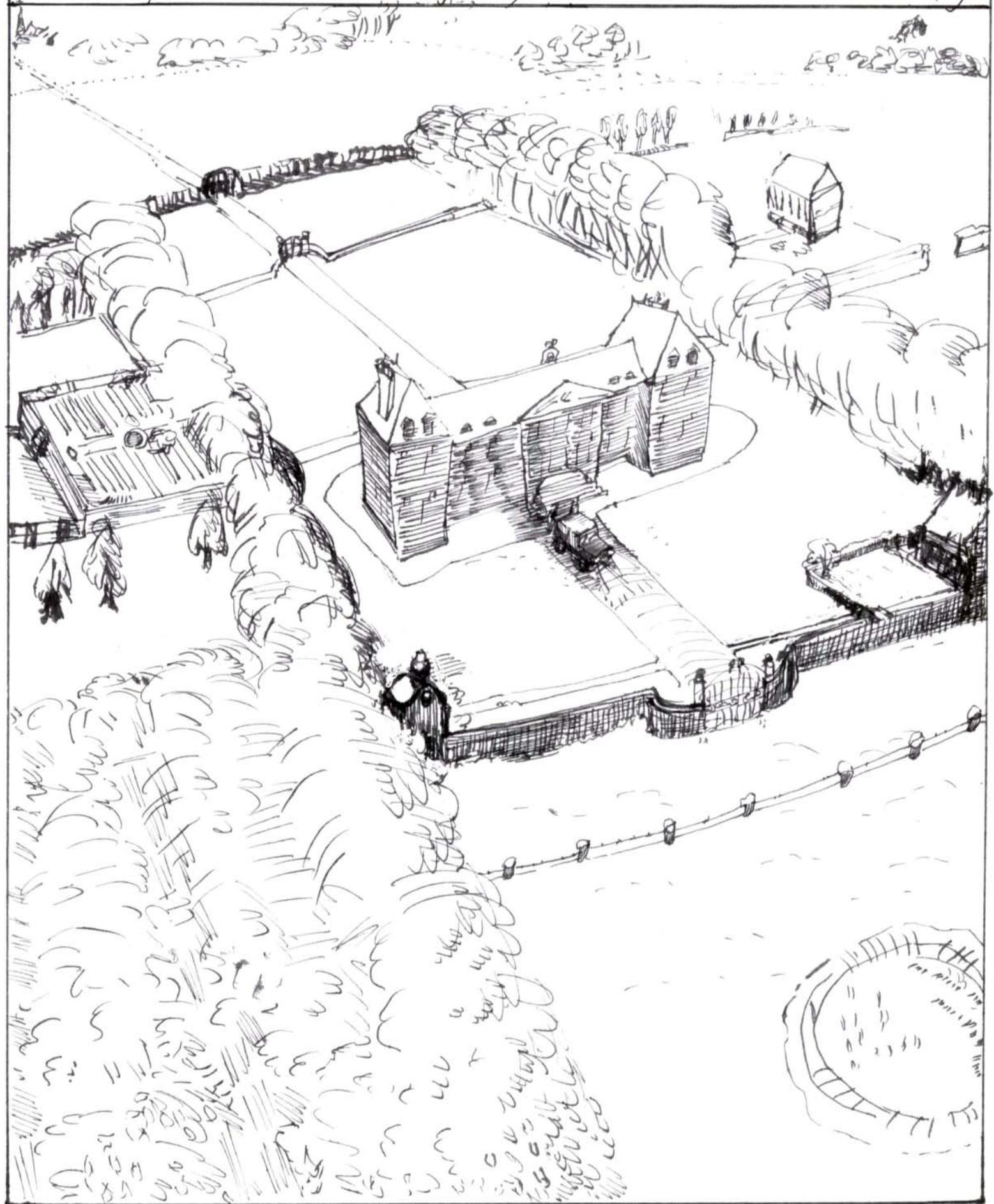


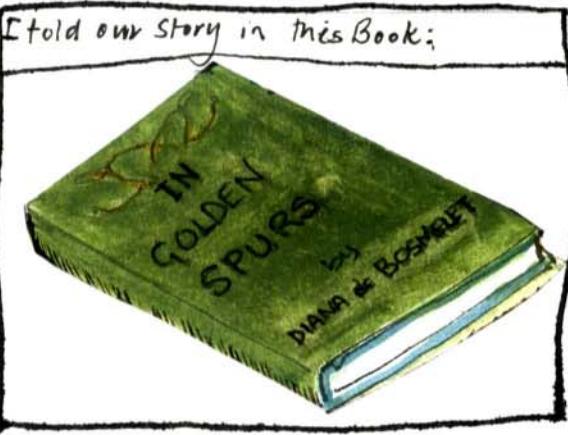
...feeding cattle cars loaded with people.

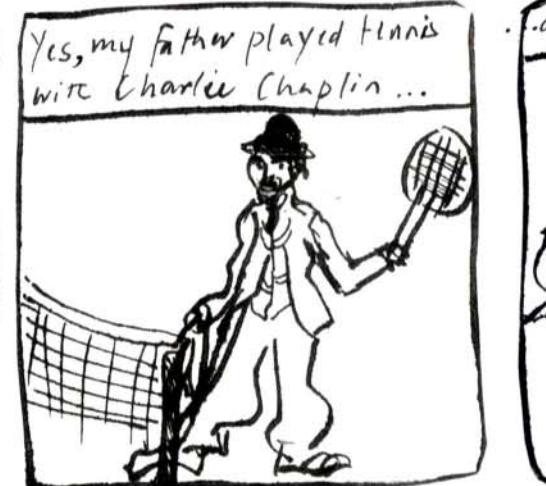
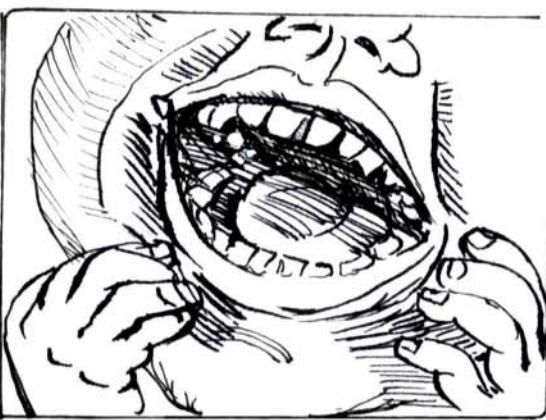




I could rest for now. I could recover my strength. I would need it to face what was coming.



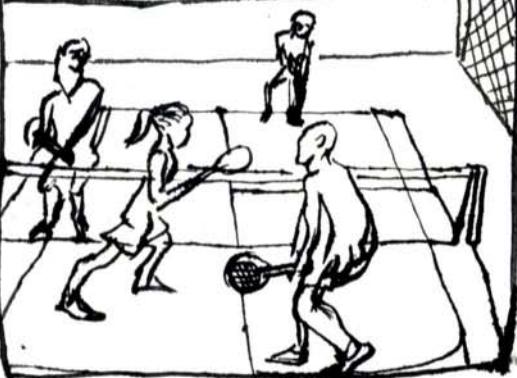




I think the other player was
Errol Flynn.



They asked my father to join them
for a set.



What did your
dad make of
them?

He thought
they were very
dowdy.



Being in Hollywood in the early 40's.



...must have been
amazing!

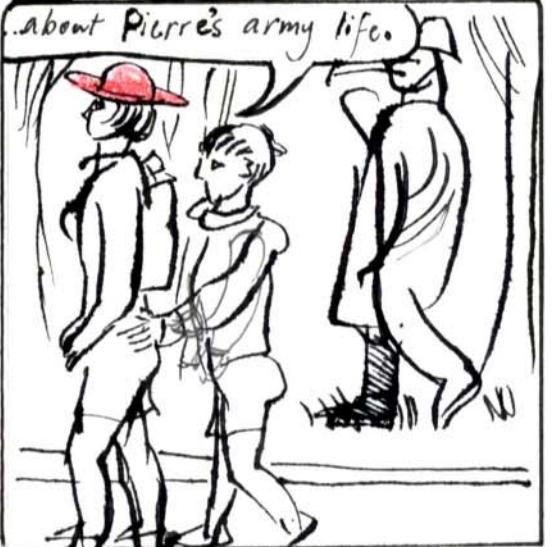
Yes, but we are
Jumping ahead.



I want to tell the story...



about Pierre's army life.



My father was a brilliant soldier.



He started his army career
as a first Lieutenant



The French Army...



...in the late 30's...



...was considered the
strongest army in the world.







Both Pierre & Diana wrote about the famous Captain N'Tchorere. Diana thought he was a "Witch Doctor", Pierre admired his understanding of the tribal complication among the Senegalese troops and that he could command fluently with almost all of the African troops because he could speak so many different languages.

Captain N'Tchorere



During the first World War the Senegalese troops from French Colonial West Africa fought bravely against the Germans. Those who survived went back and became chiefs of their villages and were seen as great heroes of both France & Africa.

Captain Pierre Soyer de Bosmelet
in his uniform London
Nov 1941



I feel my Grandfather winking at me across time, wanting me to tell ~~this~~ story, just the way I see it.

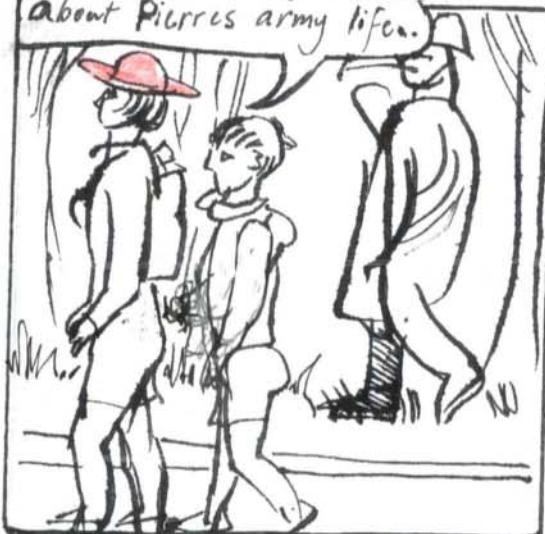


The French Army in the late 30's... was considered the strongest army in the world.



My Uncle took up the story.

I want to tell you about Pierre's army life..



...and put in charge of colonial Troops, Natives of Senegal.



My mother came to visit her husband in camp.



When the Senegalese first arrived.



Both Pierro and Diana were very fond of **Lama** Sountoura, Pierre's orderly.



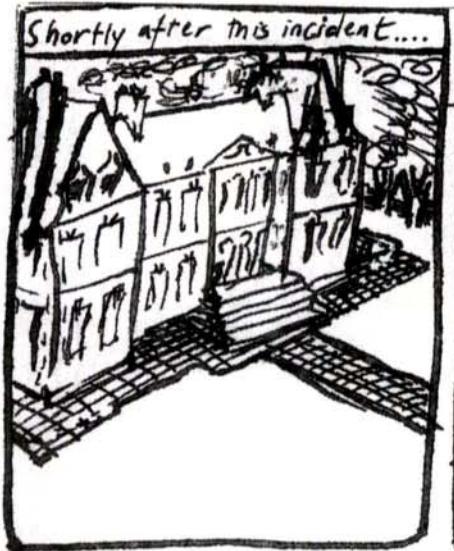
Diana taught Sountoura how to iron. He was so eager to help. He even practiced on her underwear.

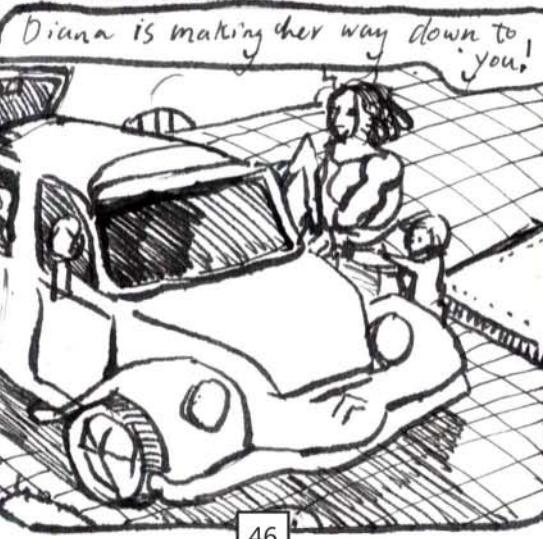


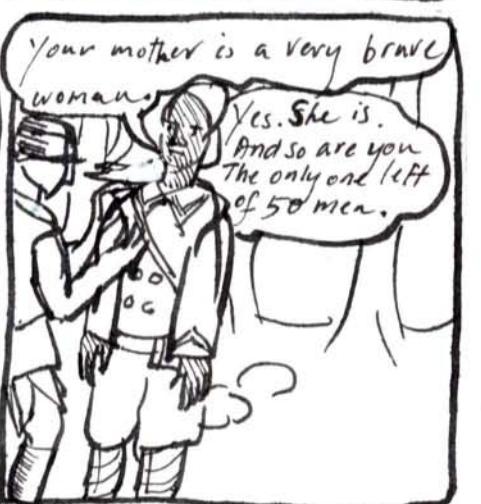
The Battle of Amiens
The French army although strong fell into German possession pitifully quickly.

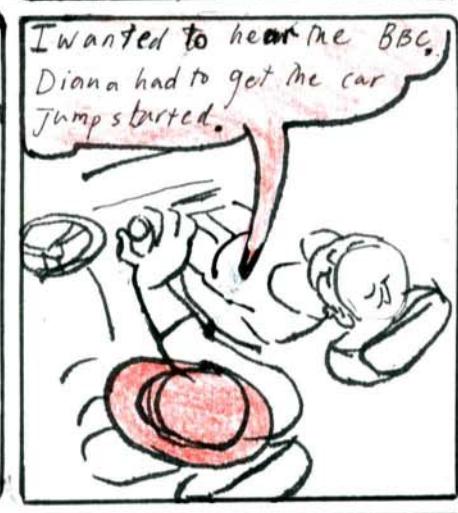
Many of the black soldiers died on the battle field others were shot rather than taken prisoners by the Germans.













Pierre wanted to join de Gaulle...



...but before he could, he needed...



...to find and save...



...his Jewish family.



The last two months had been so intense. Pierre had been focused on looking after his men. Making sure they were ready to fight. He had difficulty feeding them. His Senegalese Troops needed Kola nuts.



Oh I thought Kola nuts were used in making the Coca-cola drink?



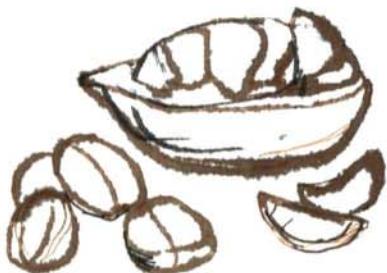
Yes but in West Africa they chew on the seeds, for the caffeine and it is food they are familiar with.



Wow! It must have been hard to get Kola nuts during the war.



My father had a secret source. A chemist in Paris who had many.



The chemist did a roaring trade in Heroin. Pierre only used the contact once, as within two months the African soldiers were wiped out.





All the armies of the Second World War were reacting to the mistakes that each had made during the 1914-1918 war. Instead of battalions being thrown in front of machine-guns, armies were divided into small units and given orders to hold a bridge or village until reinforcements could arrive. Pierre thrived in this thrilling environment.



He did things he did not enjoy. He had to get his men to bury a dead horse, and he lived in cramped quarters with his babies' dirty diapers. On the whole, however, the war was the most exciting time of his life.

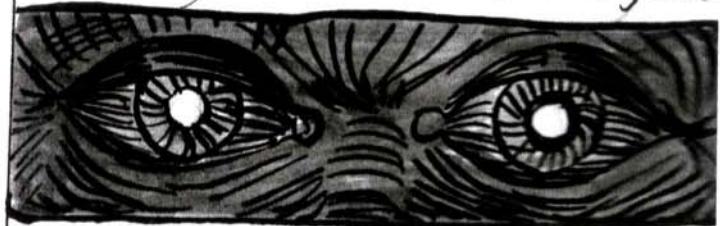


Before my father could help "de Gaulle
he had to get us out of Europe.



The family arrived.

My parents decided to go to the US
as they had connections in Hollywood.



They were greeted by a photographer.



Although exhausted the family recovered quickly.
This shot was taken a few months later, at the beach.



Last night, I had a strange dream...

My Uncle, Gentien, was dancing dressed in a traditional African Ghost Mask. The death mask looked like his mother.

In This dance a male appears Wearing a white mask of a female ancestor in order to bring the two spirits closer.

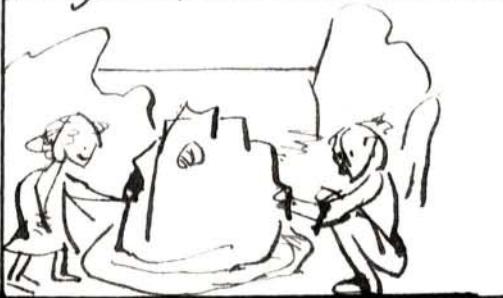


He told me the story of his death and the great sadness it brought to our family.

Gentien reminded me that after his family had escaped from the Nazis, through war torn Europe, and...



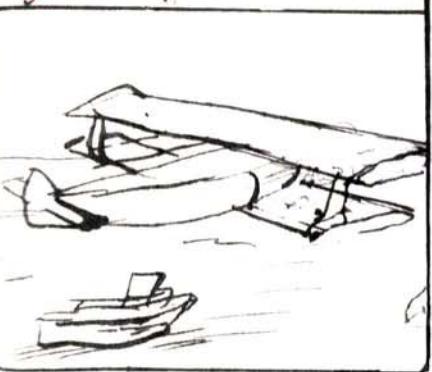
...he and his sister, Hélène, had spent 1 1/2 years recovering in sunny Hollywood.



Diana, his mother, made up her mind to join her husband in West Africa.



She had managed to get to Africa.



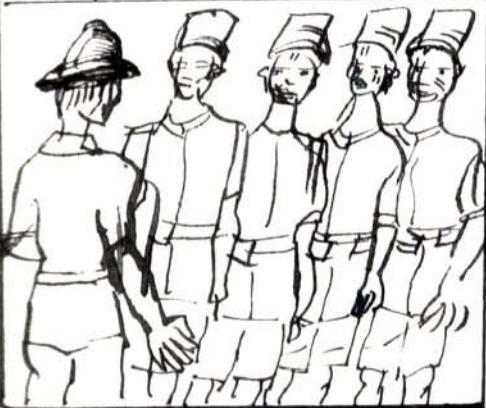
So the young family was reunited.



Gentien then took up the story.



Pierre, my father was busy training French colonial troops called Tirailleurs...



...to fight the Germans in North Africa.



So my father did not get to spend much time with us.



When he did get a few weeks leave it was wonderful.



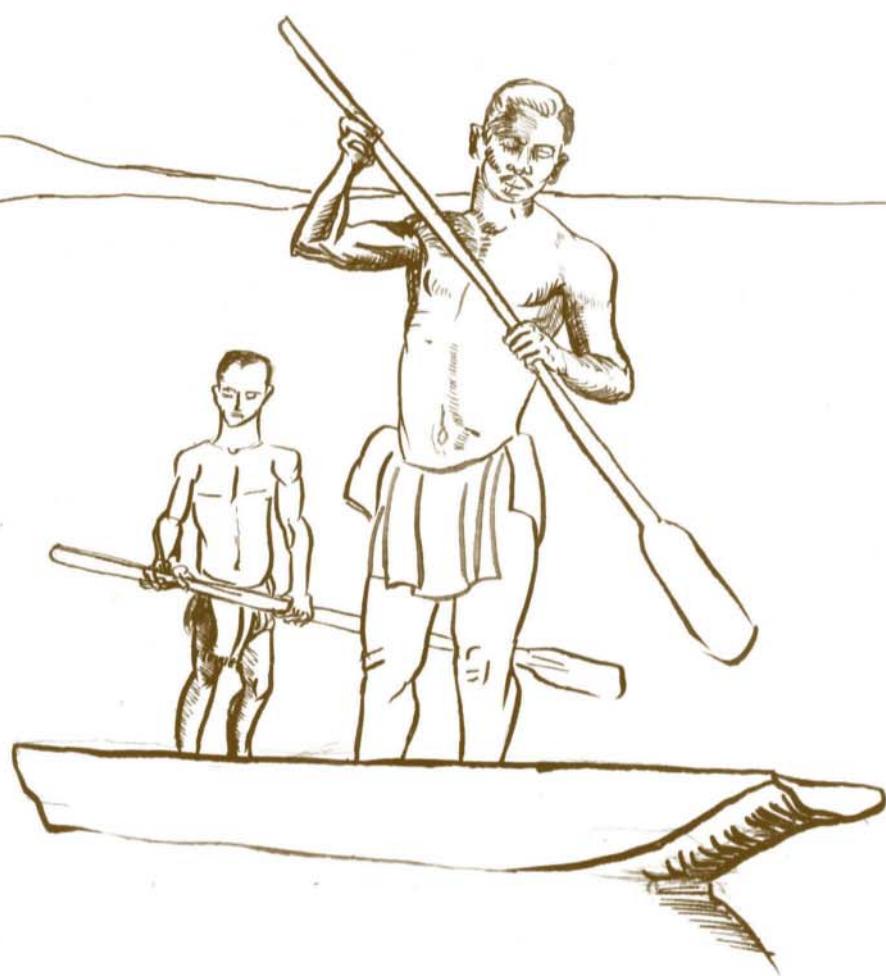
I would watch my parents set off riding each morning

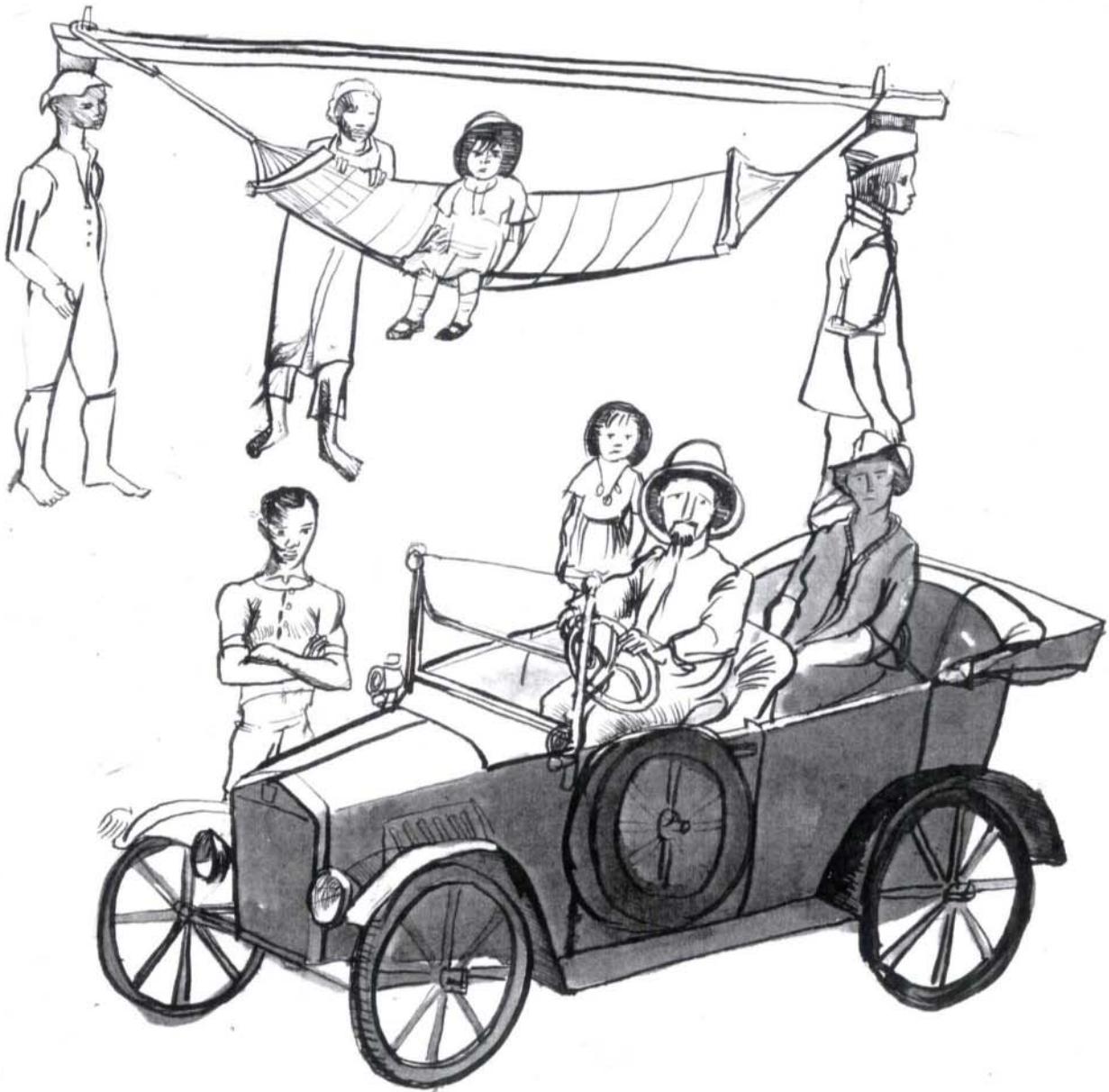


Even when my parents were not around there was so much to do.



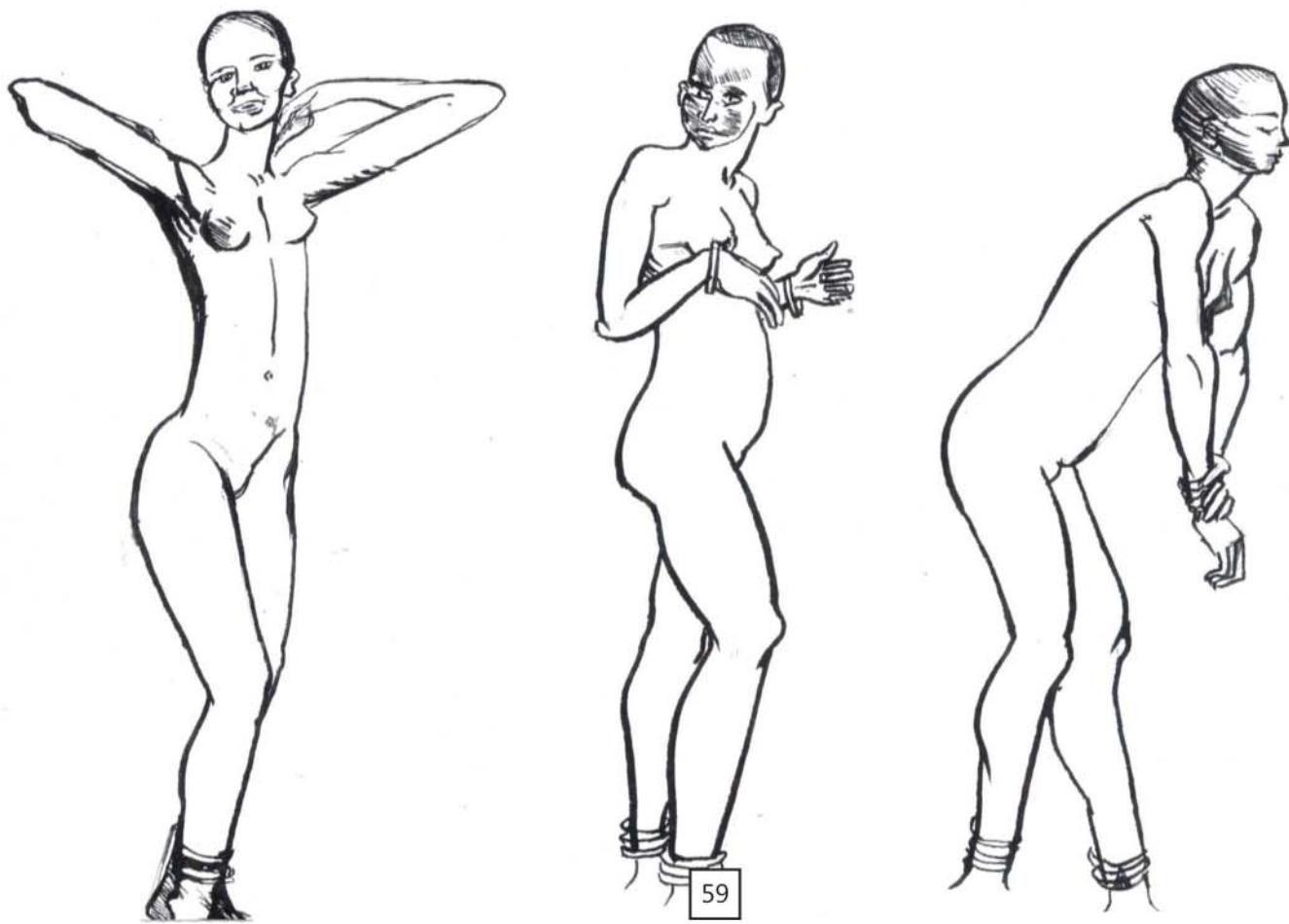


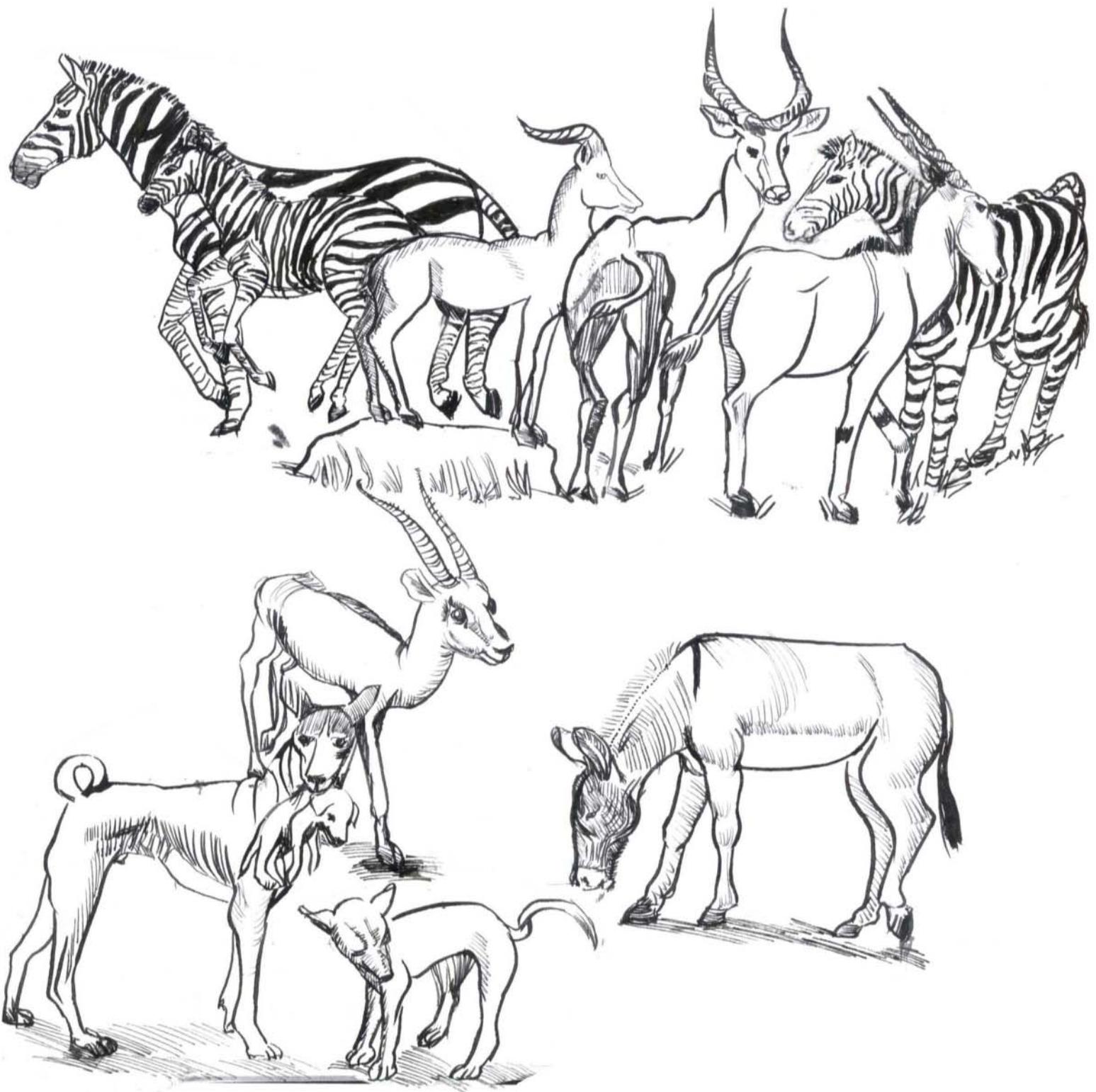




The French and British took over the Cameroun from the Germans after the first World War in 1919. For the next twenty years, the French colonies enjoyed luxuries unheard of in France.

In our town the people wore clothes and head turbans, but in the villages nearby the people wore almost nothing.





We had many native pets.

My sister and I learned to ride on a lovely tame donkey.

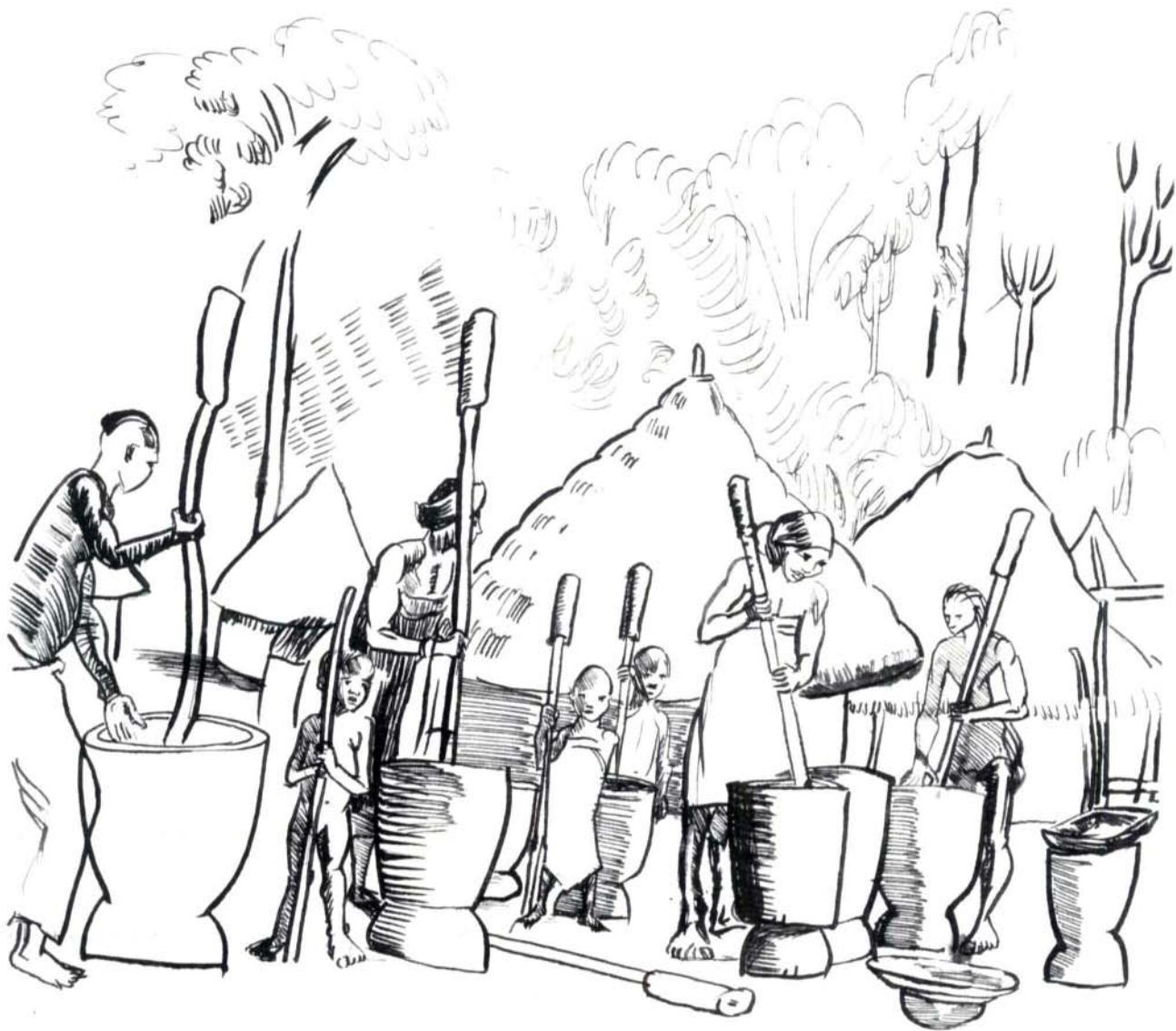
Later, my father found a perfect white pony for me.



The people that Diana met would stare at her.
She was the first white woman they had seen.

Below are the wives and concubines of the palace. The word for "woman" in the Fulbe language means "submission."





The women thresh the millet ears with long wooden pestles.

In 1890, Europeans said that Ngaundere was the El Dorado of slavery because there were between 8,000 to 10,000 slaves traded per year in Ngaundere. There were four different types of slaves in this society:

Domestic servants: These slaves lived in separate quarters and were considered to be an extended part of the family. These slaves often had the best treatment. They were similar to the "house" slaves in America.

Plantation or village slaves: These slaves were from the Laka, Kaka, and Mandang tribe.

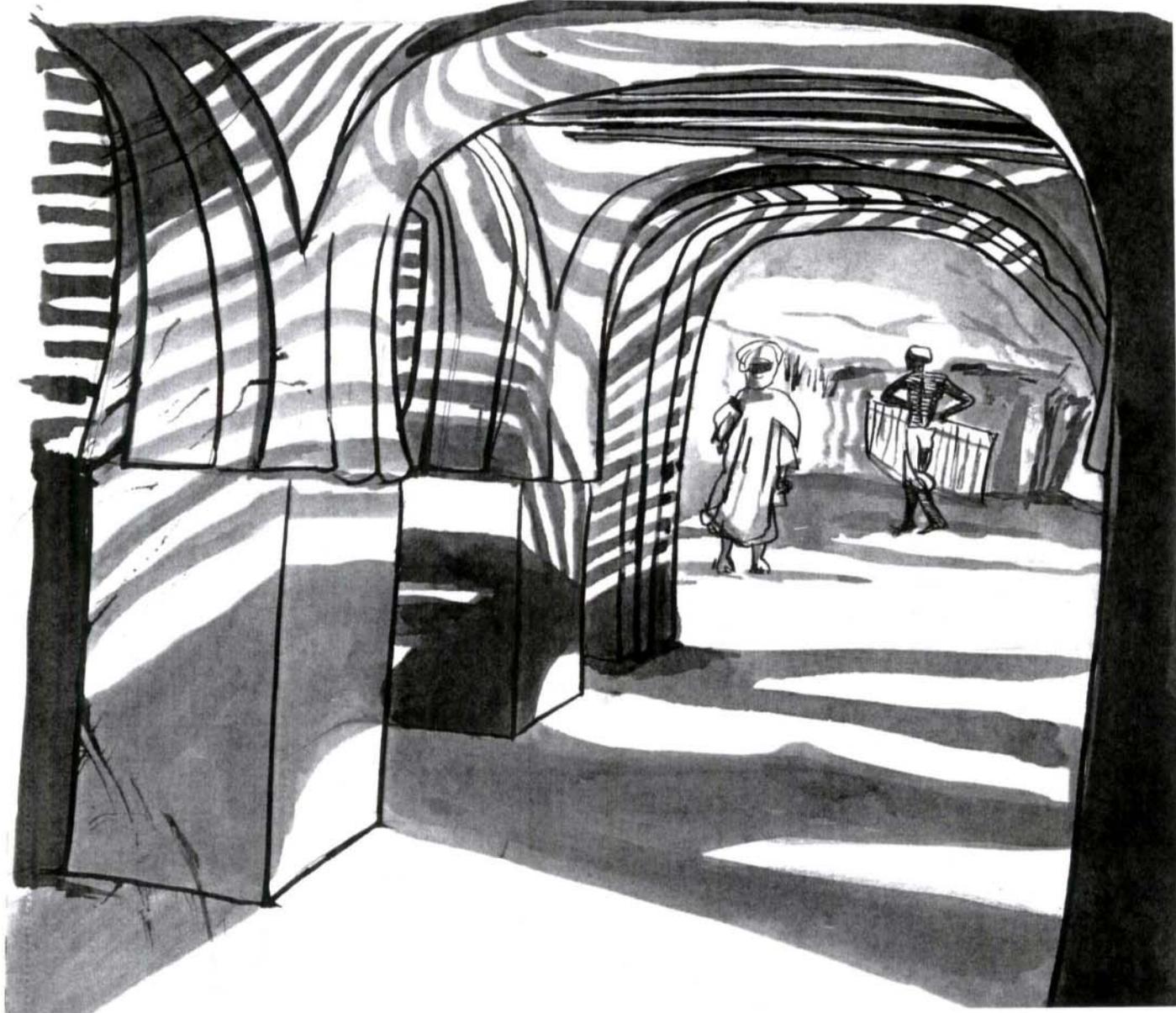
Concubines: Women that could be any other tribe other than the Fulbe. The Fulbe were Muslim and could only have four wives, so their other "wives" were sex slaves with no rights.

Distinguished slaves: Slaves of the Lamido could be any of the above and be slaves of the palace. Some palace slaves could rise to high ranks and become wealthy and powerful. They were not threatening to the Lamido as they could never replace them, but the slaves were trusted in positions of privilege such as tax collectors, judges, and other respected occupations.



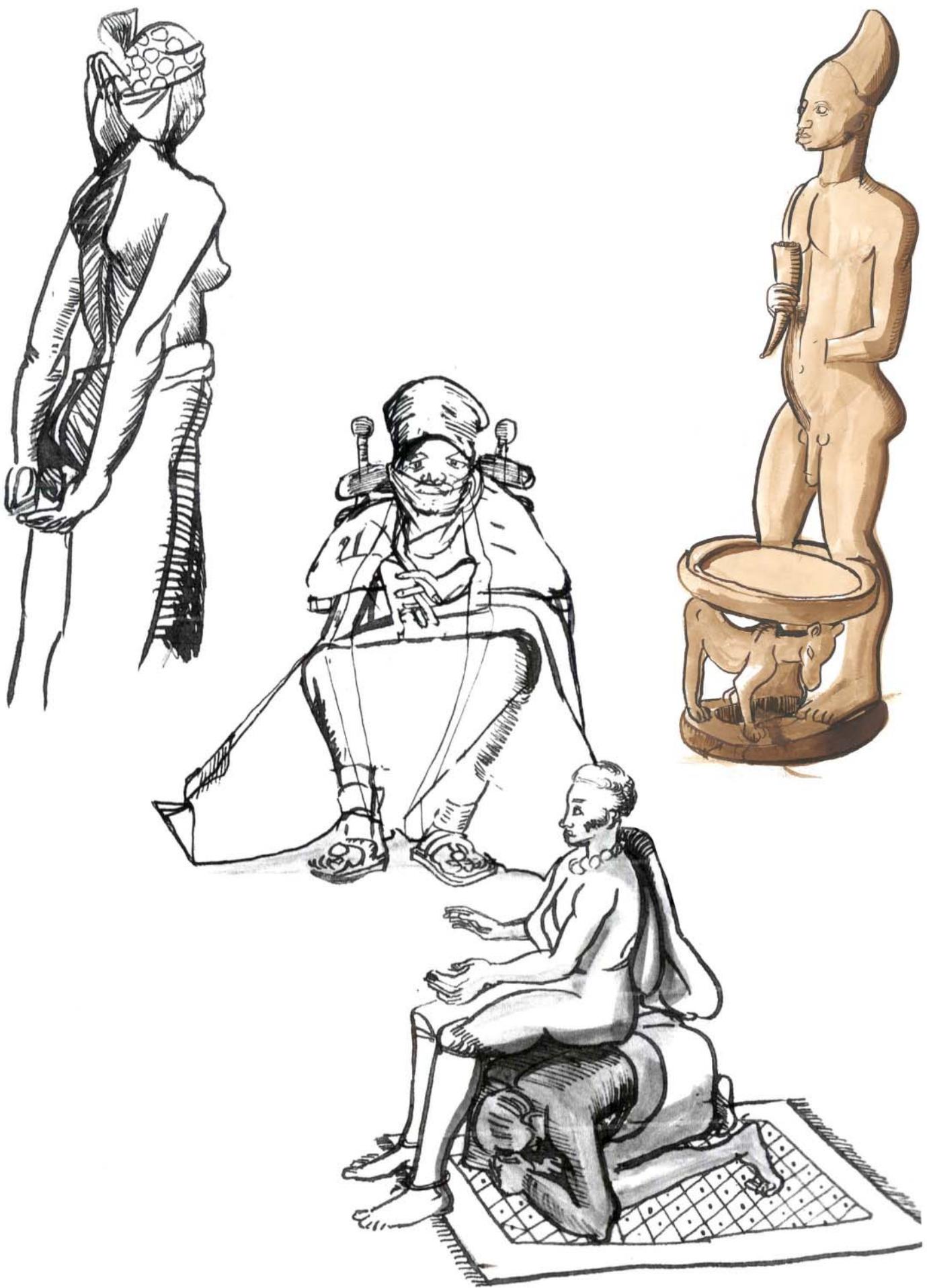
The Lamido of Ngaundere





The Lamido of Ngaundere ruled supreme over his people. One of the important signs of his power was his throne. In olden times, kings and queens sat on their subjects. Later, carved thrones were introduced. On the right is an example of these thrones, including one with a carved male holding a horn of plenty in his right hand as he stands behind the king.

Diana was asked to come to the Lamido Palace. The Lamido whom my grandmother met sat on a modern stainless steel dentist chair, to her amazement.



My Visit to the Lamido of Ngaundere
by Diana de Bosmelet

We were stationed at Nguandere in 1943 in the north of the French Cameroun. Our camp lay on the savannah, between the jungles to the south and the mountains to the north, beyond which lay the deserts of the Tchad. Several times the Lamido, the chief prince of the region, called on us in our round mud hut or, "cas," as it was called. Whenever the Lamido left his palace, situated in the middle of the village on the hill, a procession was formed. Drums were beaten and bugles blown. The Lamido on his horse, a beautiful Arab stallion, was surrounded by retainers on foot, running along holding a brightly fringed and tasseled canopy over his head. The chief courtiers, also on horseback, followed wearing voluminous turbans, flowing cloaks, and baggy trousers. The colors of the costumes were green, scarlet, and yellow. Their long leather boots and the horses' saddles and bridles were all embroidered in colored leather. Their multi-colored robes, the huge trumpets, and the embroidered trappings reminded me of the Benozzo Gazzoli painting in the Medici Chapel in Florence.

Pierre, my husband, was a captain with the Free French at the time, affirmed that the Lamido came to see us so often because Pierre (very wrongly I thought) gave him whisky to drink. The Lamido was a Muslim and was not allowed alcohol, but Pierre was careful not to announce what it was. With just a curt nod, Pierre passed him a glass. One day, on one such visit, with great pride the Lamido ordered his courier to show us his special treasure. It turned out to be an Iron Cross, which had been awarded to his father by the Germans in the 1914- 1918 war. Pierre greatly admired it and assured him that the Lamido was just as heroic as his father. The Lamido eagerly assented to fight for the valiant General de Gaulle, who had come to liberate them. All conversations were carried on in French through the court interpreter; etiquette would not allow him to speak French, though the Lamido understood and spoke French fluently.

The Lamido invited me to come and visit him in his Palace - not once, but each time he called. Once, in fact, he called when Pierre was out. There was a rumor that the regiment would be moving on, so he told me that my two children and I would be welcome in the Lamido Palace, and would be specially looked after. He was such a tall powerful-looking man, towering above all others. His huge black eyes seemed to glint straight through me, and this suggestion filled me with apprehension.

Soon after this, I made arrangements to visit him while Pierre was still with me.

I was told I must take presents for the Lamido's wives, but how many? It was known that he had at least one hundred wives. Pierre decided in the end that I need only take presents for the four chief wives. The only thing that I had were four Mary Chess beauty products obtained in New York, so I managed to collect four bottles of toilet water, various scents and four lipsticks. I packed them up the best I could and put them on a tray. Rumor had it that the Lamido, with his one hundred wives, was said to have extraordinary sexual prowess. It was known that he kept his wives extremely busy and had fathered hundreds of children. He possessed mysterious secret aphrodisiacal potions made from rare tropical flowers, roots, and ground rhinoceros horns. The garrison's men and wives were longing to know more details, as none had been invited.

At last the day arrived. We set off in the jeep carrying the precious presents and drove along the winding narrow mud track across the valley up the hill to the Palace, which looked like a village of Pota-pota (black rich mud) houses with their palm-thatched roofs. We halted in front of the main gate, which was made of palm thatched roofs and the Pota-pota high mud walls surrounding the compound. There we were told to get out, our presents taken from us, and we followed the courtier in his flowing robes through what seemed like endless passages and courtyards until we reached a larger courtyard. We were told that the Lamido's numerous wives and children lived there, but they were all but invisible to us. He ushered on still further. There the wall was painted, in this covered courtyard, decorated with small pebbles making mosaics designs. This was the Lamido's stables, where he kept his beautiful Arab horses that were far more precious than his numerous wives and children.

After crossing this large, pebbled space we were shown into the innermost courtyard, surrounded by more elaborately decorated walls and doorways, and on into a raised central throne room. The Lamido was swathed in layers of robes, a tall turban, and only his glinting eyes showing. He was sitting on a modern stainless steel dentist chair. Through his interpreter, who was squatted by his feet with some more courtiers standing behind the Lamido, he greeted us and announced - as a special treat - we would be allowed to meet his four chief wives. While waiting for them to arrive, I became aware of a beautiful scent that seemed to fill the mud hut. Ah, I thought, this must be some magical aphrodisiac potion!

The four wives were led in. They wore the heavily-draped robes of the Fulbe women - a very handsome race, thought to be from Ethiopia. Their faces were carefully veiled with only their eyes uncovered. They seemed young and slender, but were bent double bowing low. Their eyes were fixed on the ground, and they were not allowed to raise themselves in front of their lord and master. I stretched out a hand meaning to shake their hand, but they did not look up. My hand was left in mid-air. I felt very stupid and uncomfortable, but worst was yet to come. Not knowing what to say I mentioned the beautiful scent surrounding us. Everyone was puzzled and then the tray of presents was brought forward. I realized, to my horror, that most of the bottles of scent were lying on their side broken. That is what had created a smell which I had first thought was some aphrodisiac. Then I presented the lipsticks, one to each wife, and they examined them carefully on all side and in every direction. They then asked, through the interpreter, what to do with them. Were they to eat them? Carefully I tried to explain that they were to paint one's lips and demonstrated, but they were more puzzled than ever.

I was presented with a series of very pretty small round straw mats in colored raffia that I still have at Bosmelet and use as stands for flower vases. The sultan asked what we would like as a real present, and we asked for a traditional bed, which was a square platform that you could put your mattress on. They ushered us out, but by then both Pierre and I felt so awed by the meek modesty of the Lamido's wives that he found himself leading the way. I humbly followed, hardly daring to stand up even, after we had returned to our "Cas". It took me a few hours before I could even stand erect in front of Pierre, and he waved me to go first through the door.

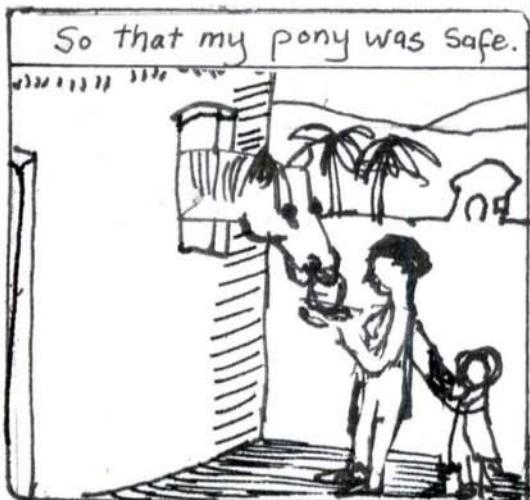
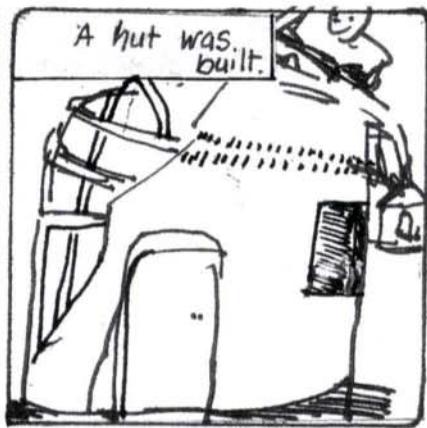
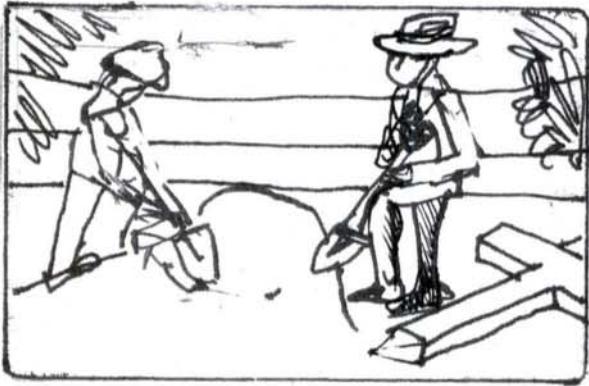
M'kamba and Pierre





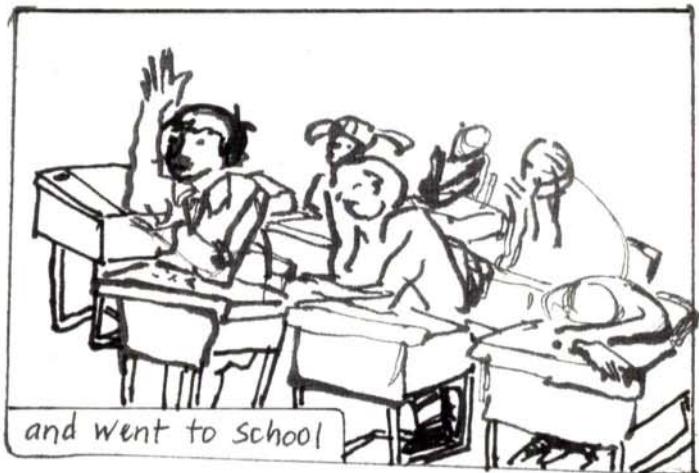


After M'kamba saved my sister Hélène from the python, Pierre spoke with him. He noticed that M'kamba was aloof from the people of the village, and he asked M'kamba why that was. M'kamba told Pierre that he was the last of an indigenous tribe that had all been slaughtered by the Fulbe. M'kamba seemed reluctant to disclose the reason for the slaughter. When Pierre pressed M'kamba, M'kamba admitted that it was because his tribe were cannibals. Pierre refused to believe him. Later, Pierre slyly asked if M'kamba had eaten human flesh, and what the tastiest part was if he had. M'kamba dreamily replied, "the cheeks."



My mother did her best.

On May 12th 1943
German and Italian
forces surrendered to
The Free French and
left Africa.



Where I excelled at math.

I got better...

and went to school



But I fell sick again



My sister came.



My father gave me the
Fulbe sword that I
longed for.



At 11pm on the June 5th



I fell asleep.



My mother went next
door to talk to the doctor



My father met my mother at
threshold of our
hut.

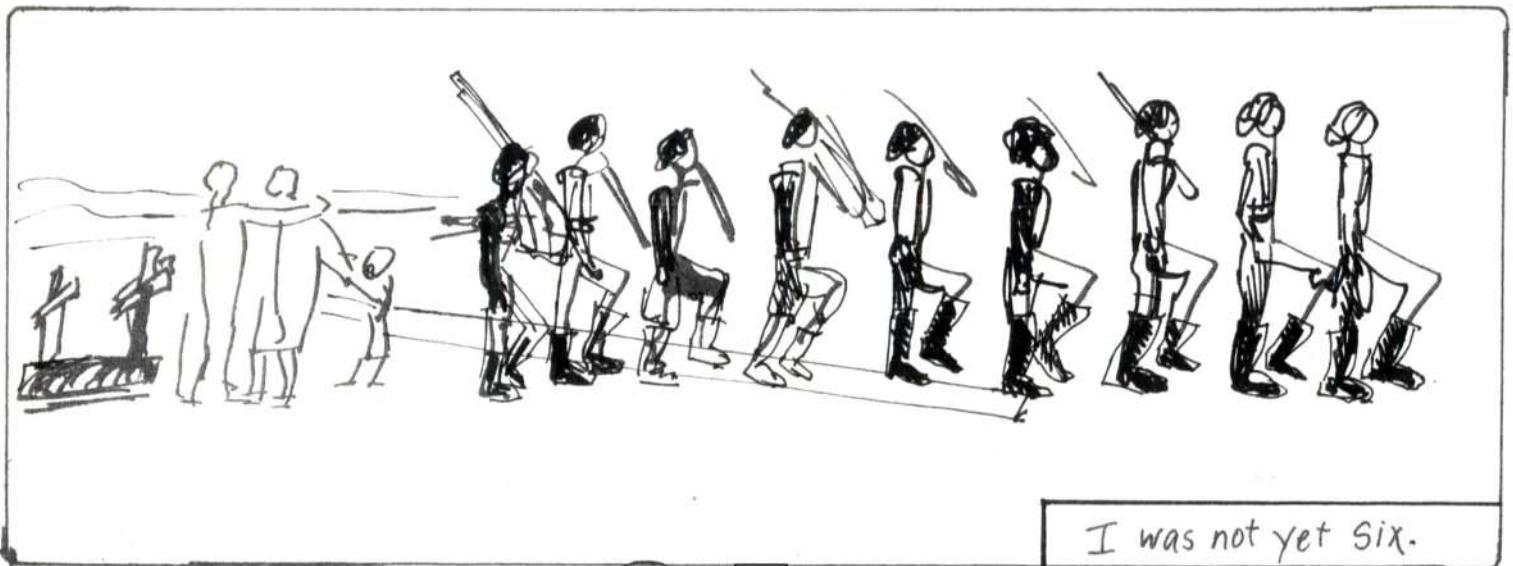
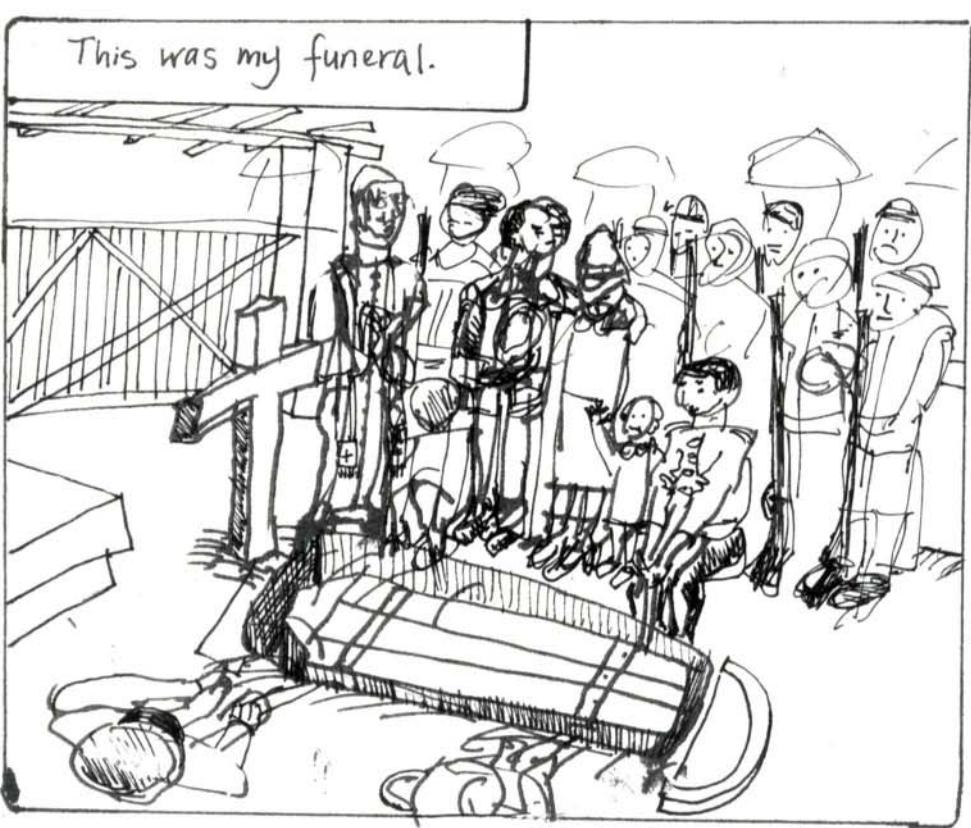
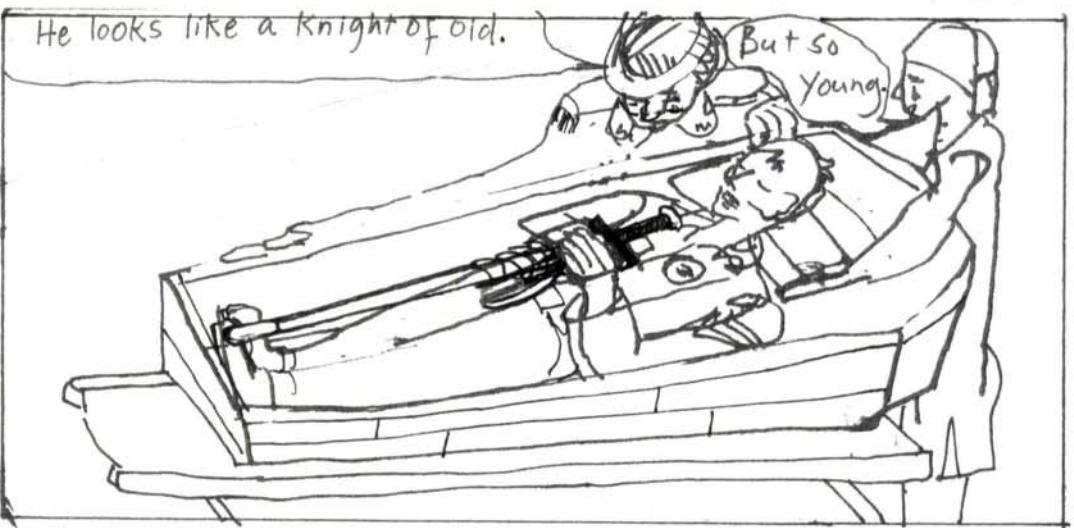


I died while she was
out of the room.

She never saw my dead body.



Pierre and Mkamba, his Tirailleur, pinned the Corporal badge to my pajama Shirt and laid the Fulbe sword in my hands. Under my head Pierre put the "Volontaire Grannaises.





Gentien's Illness and Cause of Death

Written by Sonali Advani, MD, MPH

Dr. Sonali Advani is trained in the study of medicine and pediatric infectious diseases. Based on her analysis of the documents and reports from Pierre and Diana, Pierre's assertion "that Gentien died of complications due to the illnesses that he suffered whilst a refugee in Europe" may not be true. Gentien could have possibly suffered from tubercular meningitis.

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacterium known as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The primary infection affects the lungs and is usually mild. This seems to have been caught when the family was at Yaoande in January of 1943. Tuberculosis is endemic in the Cameroun. All three- Diana, Gentien and Hélène might have suffered from the primary lung infection at that time. Diana thought it was whooping cough but once it is unlikely, as the family reported history of whooping cough infection on the ship to Africa, and repeat infections within a short time span are uncommon due to immunity from the previous infection.

About ninety percent of those infected with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* do not have symptoms (latent TB infections). The bacteria enter the lungs, most times form a Ghon's focus which can be dormant for many years. However, in some cases, the disease may become active within weeks after the primary infection. There is about a ten percent lifetime chance that the latent infection will progress to active tuberculous disease.

Tuberculous meningitis occurs when localized infection escalates within the lungs, with dissemination to the regional lymph nodes like the ones described in the back of Gentien nose, and further spreads to the brain. The duration of this illness can range from one day to nine months with a waxing and waning course, so that Gentien's intermittent periods of recovery are consistent with the course of the disease. The diagnosis of TBM cannot be made or excluded solely on the basis of clinical findings, however findings of headache, stiff neck and altered mental status strongly suggest meningitis. Diana said on the 1st April 1943 that she "was terrified of Meningitis as it is prevalent" and that Gentien had a stiff neck for two days, which is also consistent with the diagnoses. Drugs like Isoniazid used to treat tuberculosis, and the vaccine to prevent TB Meningitis were only available by 1952. Gentien was exposed to many animals and pets: ponies, donkeys, antelopes, cats, lizards and snakes. Also, zoonotic diseases spread to children through close contact with animals and due to their hand to mouth behavior.

Gentien may have also had an incomplete de-worming treatment. Diana mentions a "huge chig, complete with eggs and poisonous matter" that Victor removed, she thought successfully, from Gentien's foot at the end of Jan 1943. All these factors in addition to poor nutrition, and hot and humid climate, may have led to a drop in Gentien's immunity, causing reactivation of TB, and spread of the infection to the brain.

Footnote: After I sent this report to Robert, he mentioned that when he had an allergic reaction to Penicillin Diana had commented that Gentian had died of a Penicillin reaction. This might have been a last-minute intervention by the doctor to give Gentien Penicillin and may have been the reason that Pierre blocked Diana from seeing Gentian after he died as he may have swollen from the allergic reaction to the Penicillin.

- Yolanda

Some days later...



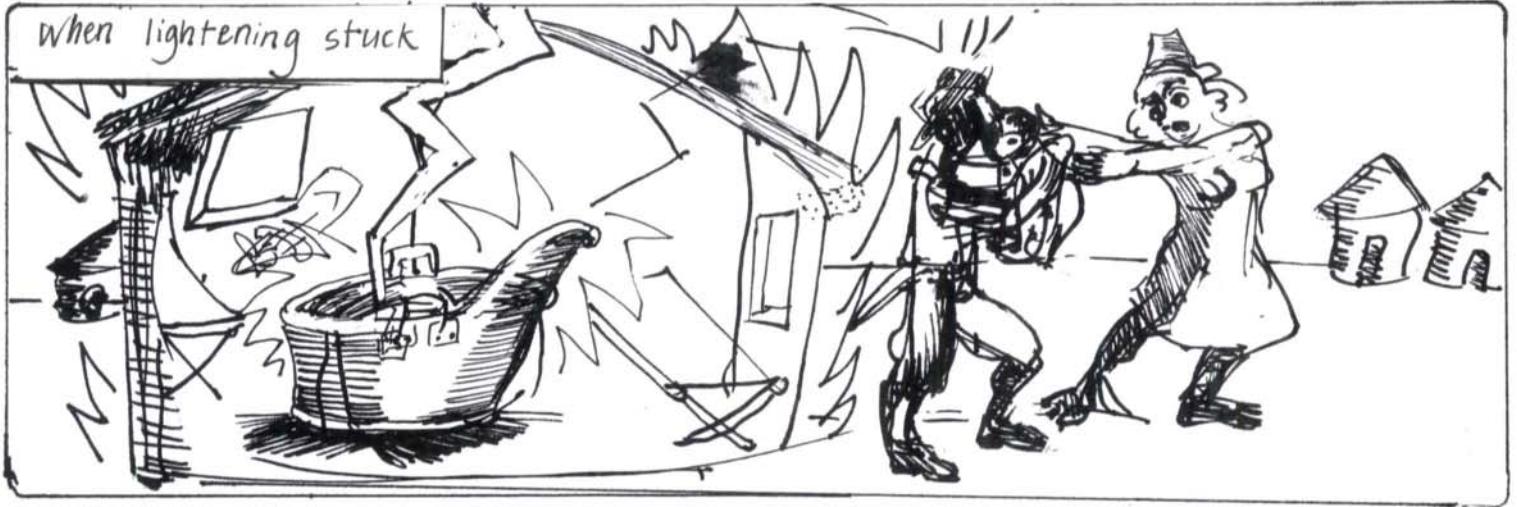
in our hut.



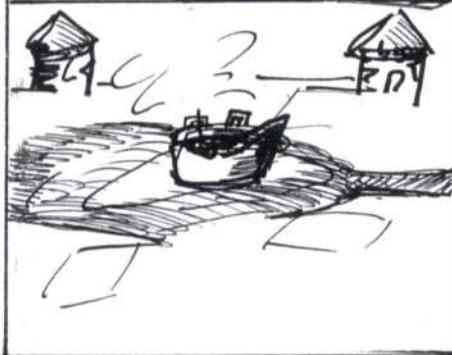
Mysister was just about to be put in the bath...



When lightening struck



We were refugees again!



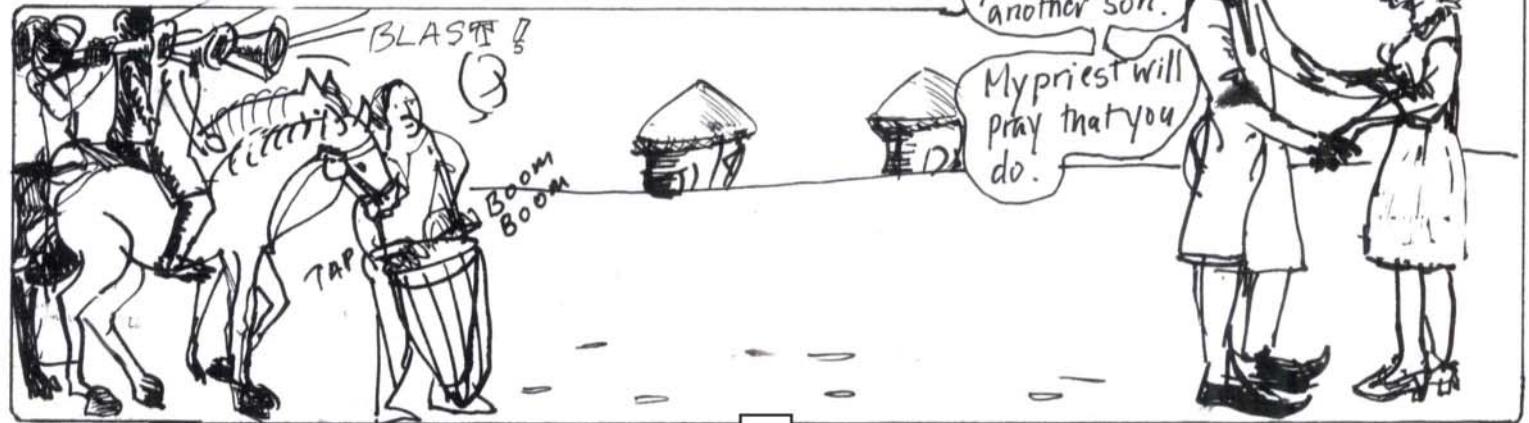
The Lamido's Messenger...



...asked if my mother would receive him.



You will have another son.



My uncle, Gentien, told me what happened after he died. His mother, Diana, was frantic with grief. Gentien took up the story. "Nothing and no one could console her, not her husband, not the other European couples, and not the African tribal people who lived among them."

The Fulbe are, nominally, a Muslim culture, but they hold onto older magical beliefs. "Magical beliefs," according to anthropologists, are beliefs that humans can control natural and supernatural forces by casting spells or performing rituals. My mother, always a romantic, came to believe this too.

The Lamido, the local sultan, made a secret arrangement to have Diana see his Witch Doctor. Why did he bestow this great honor on Diana? The Lamido was filled with dread at the intensity of grief that the wife of his white friend was expressing at the death of her child. In Fulbe society the people live by the moral code of "Pulaaku" that mandates stoicism. The Lamido felt rather guilty about the part he had played in getting Pierre to bring his wife and children out to Africa, because without his insistence he was sure that Pierre would not have asked her to come. He was attracted to this white woman, who was different from the other officers' wives. This one was so warm and vivacious - he found her exotic. He, who had a hundred wives, had asked her to come and live with him not once but twice, even though he knew she would refuse him. So out of guilt and fear he wanted to make it up to her and give back to her what she wanted above all things - her son. The Witch Doctor agreed to see the white woman as a favor to the Lamido.

The Witch Doctor was involved in hunting down a cannibal witch who had sent out every night her villainous bird/creature to bring her the intestines and souls of some Fulbe people for her to eat. He had worried that the witch had eaten this white woman's son, and so he wanted to appease this white woman. The witch Doctor carefully built a doll for her.

Dolls, like the one he was making, were usually given by a man to his betrothed and kept until the birth of the couple's first child, but this doll was different. With special care and devotion he wove into this doll three powerful spells: the first was to help Diana seduce her husband, the second was to make sure that it would be a male childe, and the third was that this child would carry the charm to heal this woman's broken heart and live a long and healthy life. When the Witch Doctor gave the doll to my mother, he told her to put it under the pillow the night that the child was conceived. As it turned out, Diana had to wait a long time to use the Witch Doctor's magic, but it worked just as the doctor had predicted.



In Cameroon, when a young Fali man becomes betrothed, he makes a doll (ham pilu) from wood and decorates it with hair, beads, and other small objects. He then gives it to his fiancee, who wears it in a baby carrier on her back. The doll is a symbol of their marriage commitment and represents their future child. The man gives the doll the gender that he desires for his first-born.



The End of the Great Love Affair

Although it is 2012 and almost all of the people who I have talked about are dead, I, their eldest grandchild, still wonder what the relationship between Pierre and Diana was really about.



I found that Gentien was haunting me less these days. I was left with my own memories of my grandparents.



Part: The Hero, the handsome foreign stranger
Name: Pierre Soyer de Bosmelet
Educated: London and Paris
Occupation: International lawyer
Hobbies: Hunting and riding, driving fast cars,
and general thrill-seeking
Family: Only child, mother and grandmother living in France



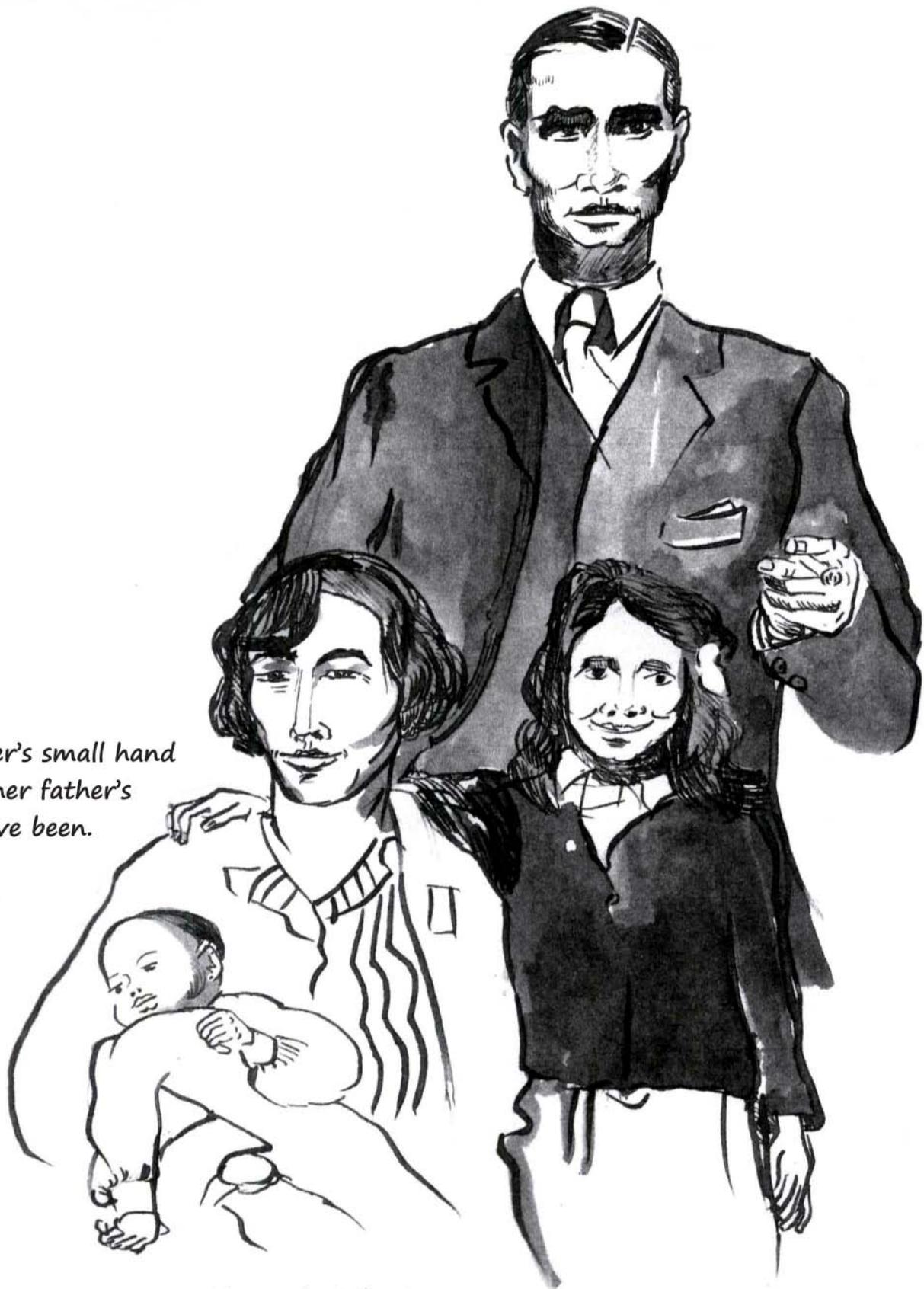
Part: The Heroine, the beautiful, kind, and brave female
Name: Diana Henriette Mathias
Educated: London, Paris, and Vienna
Occupation: Singer of independent means
Hobbies: Hunting and riding, driving fast cars,
and general thrill-seeking
Family: Eldest daughter of five, large German Jewish
family settled in England



Diana imagined that Pierre would die in her arms at the age of eighty, surrounded by his family, and Diana would die a few months later. She dreamed that they would live a happy and contented life together. Sure, it would have its ups and downs, but what marriage is without those?

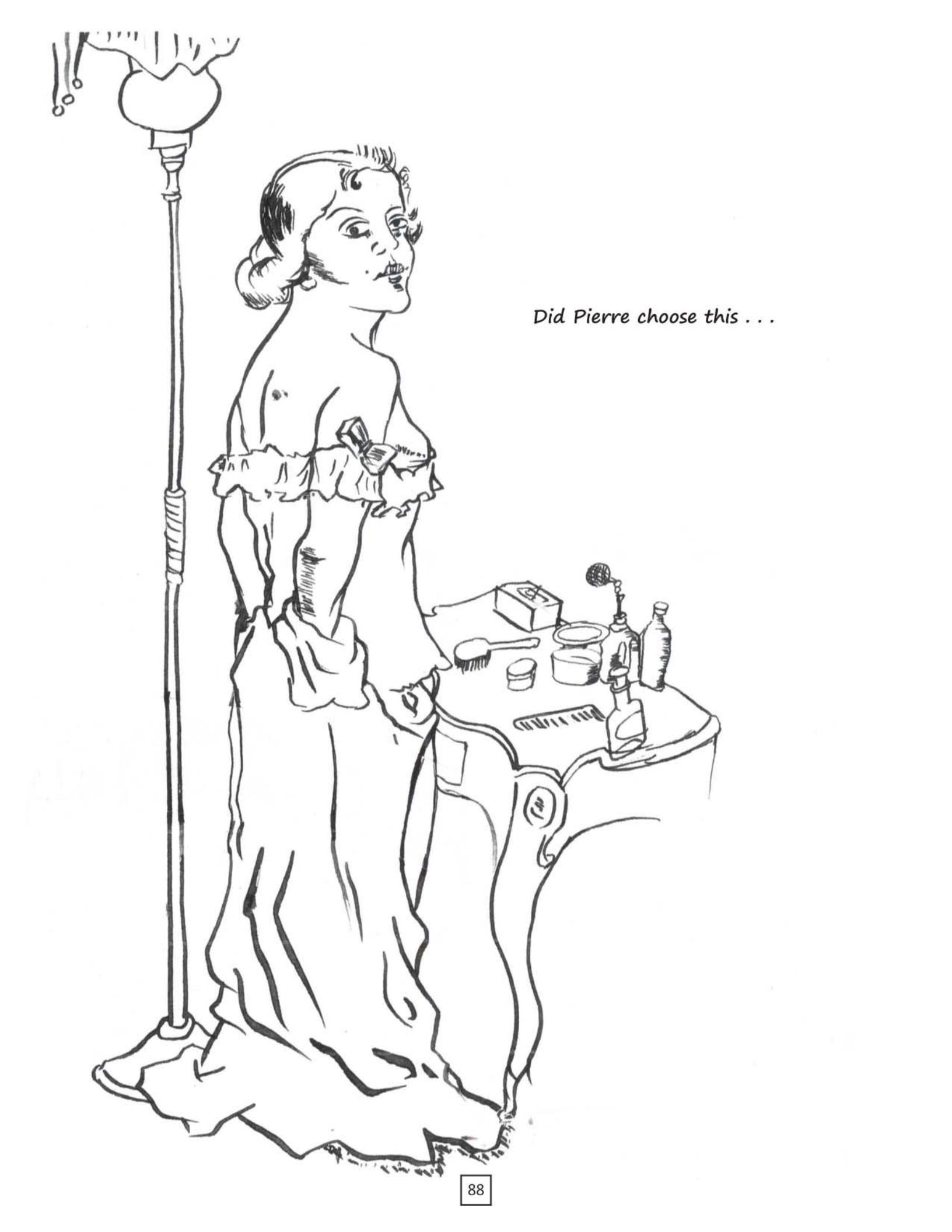
She imagined that Pierre would rebuild the Château with her money and his charm. What could be more perfect? Diana fantasized how wonderful it would be for Pierre's mother Henriette to be at the Château with her grandchildren and her only child as she watched his family grow up. Unlike the swans that mate for life, Pierre and Diana lived apart. Maybe the ruins of war were too savage. Still, they died within months of each other. Pierre had just tipped the scales at eighty.

This is what Pierre walked away from — his family.



My mother's small hand
is where her father's
should have been.

My uncle Robert.

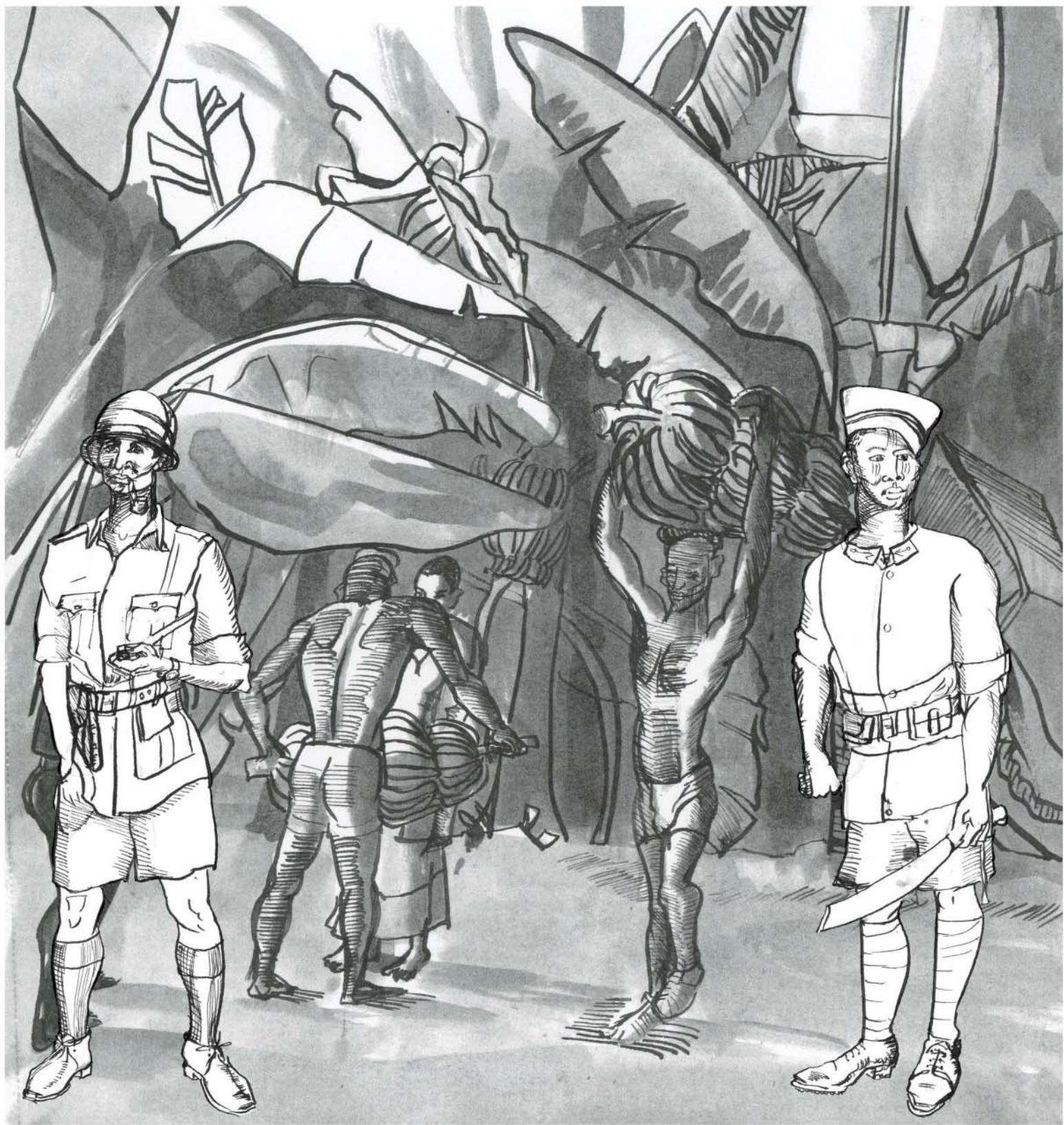


Did Pierre choose this . . .



... or that?

After the war, Pierre took M'kambo back to France. When M'kambo saw that the Allies had bombed Pierre's ancestral Château he fell into a deep depression, which echoed Pierre's sentiments.



Pierre and M'kambo decided to go back to the Cameroun to make their fortunes running a banana plantation. Unfortunately, the venture was a spectacular failure. Maybe they did not know that banana trees take three years to grow and in harvesting the bananas the trees die. Or maybe Pierre insisted on paying the workers who, up to that time, had been slaves of the Lamido, or maybe they should have grown Kola nuts.

I found some photographs of my mother as a child. In one she is a beautiful ballerina, draped on a shell; in another she is on a skiing holiday; and in the third she and her mother look happy.

Robert as a toddler looks upset, perhaps he does not appreciate the halter dress he was made to wear.





After the war, all the world
focused on the next generation.



The relationship between France and her African colonies seems as complicated as my grandparents' marriage.

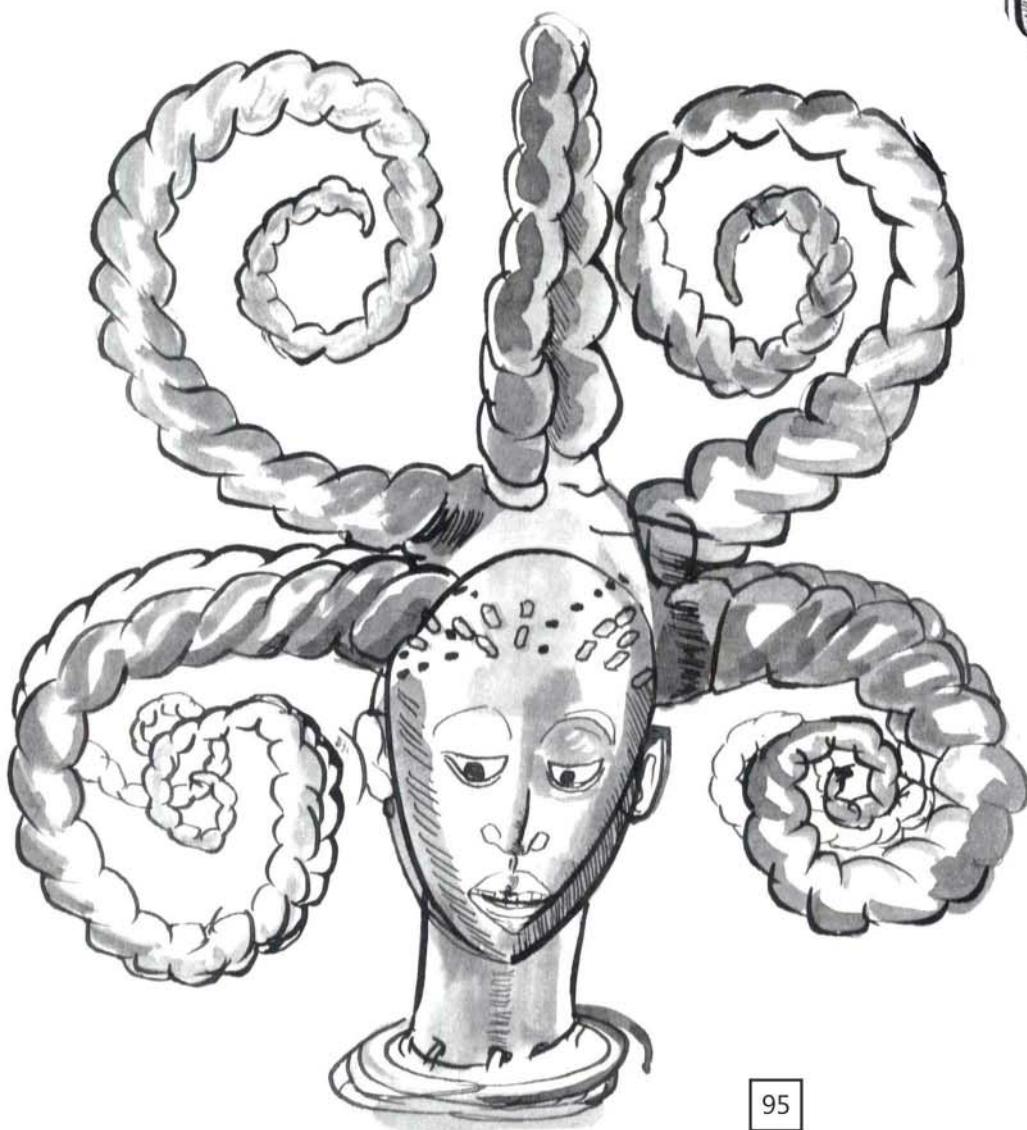


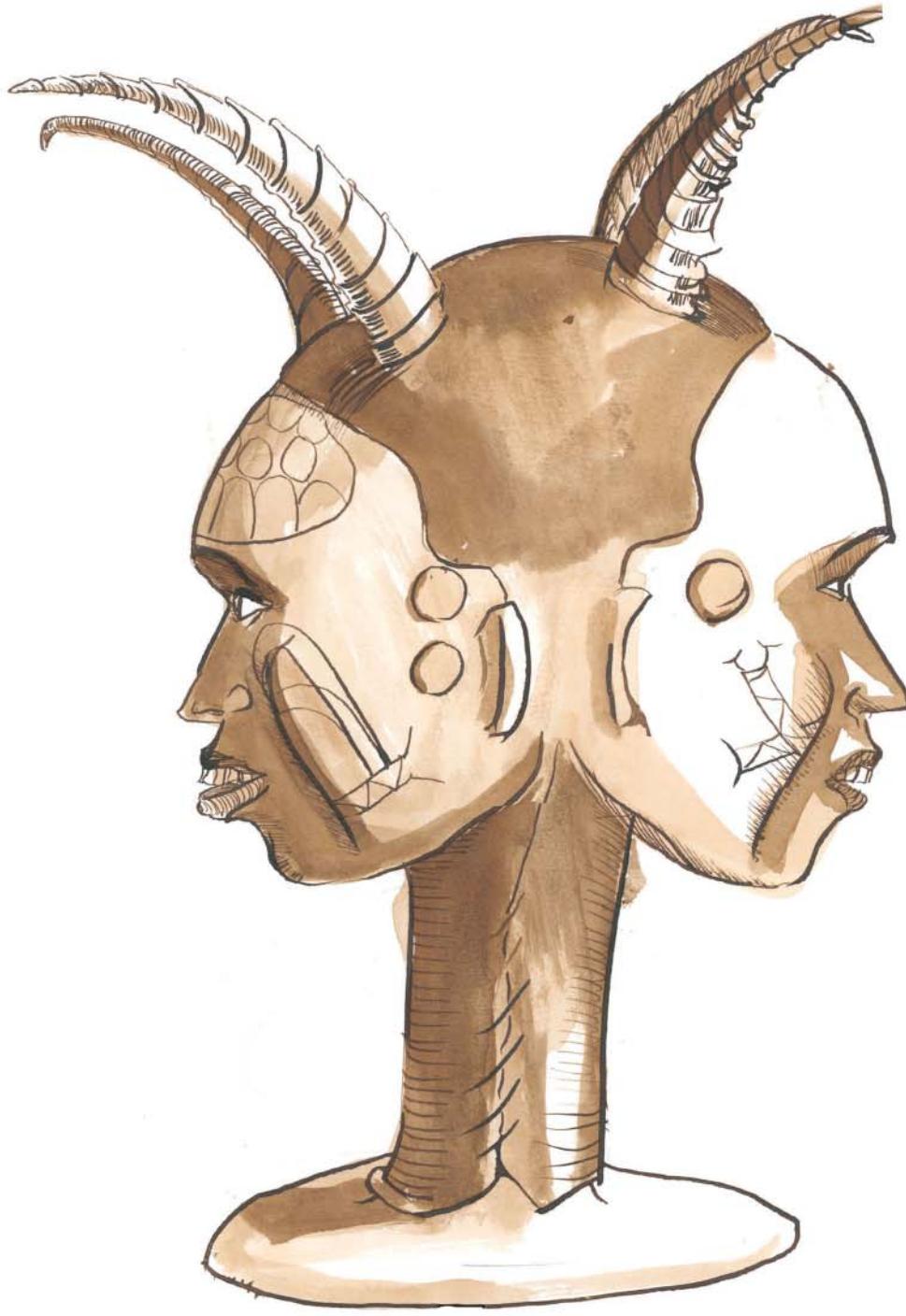
I found this photo taken after the Second World War of General de Gaulle sitting with Marthe Savorgnan de Brazza. She was the daughter of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, the great Franco-Italian explorer. They are pictured above on a state visit to the Congo.



In the end it was hard to
know who or what was the
hope of this brave new world.

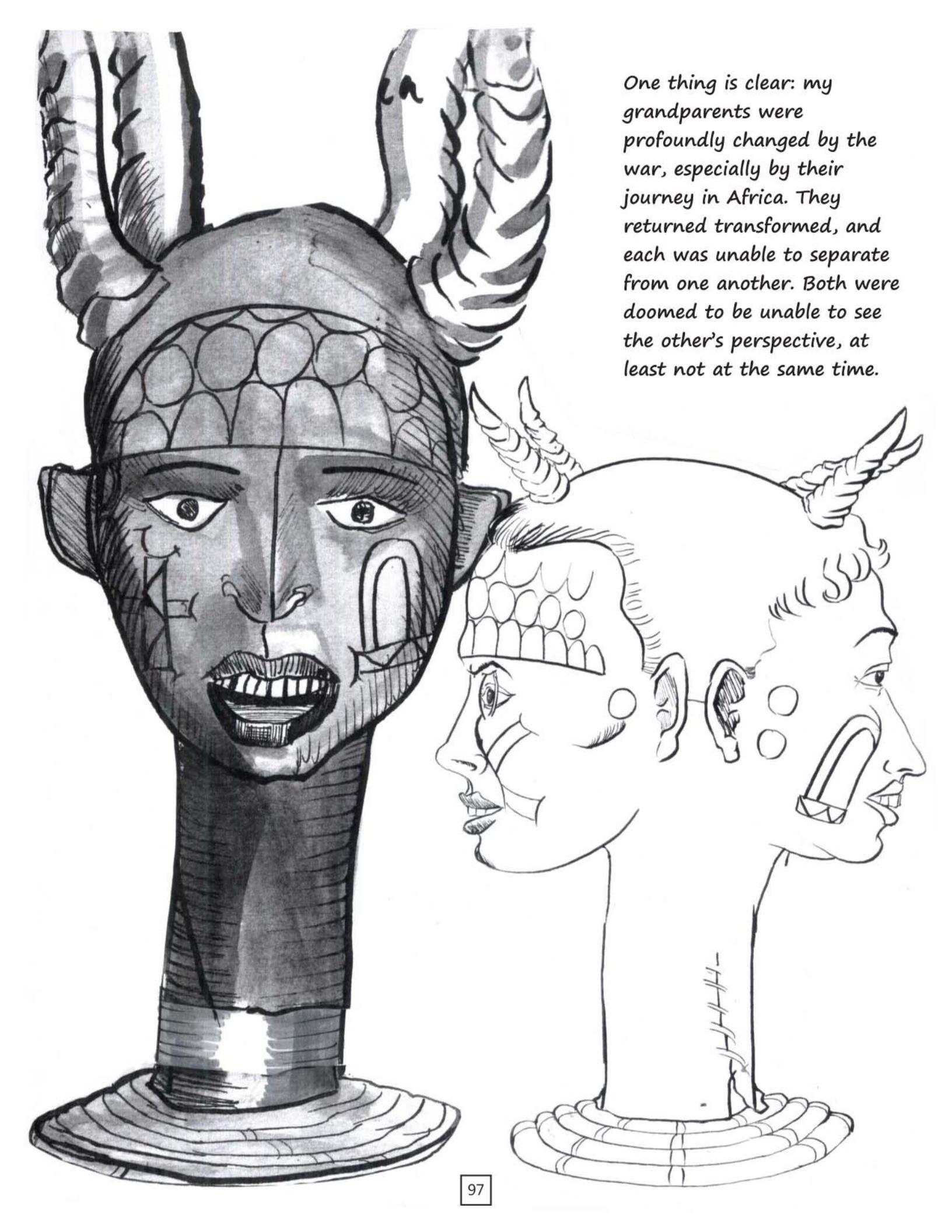
Whatever the reason for Pierre's failure, the political climate in Africa to the intoxicating relationship before the war, much like Pierre and Diana's relationship, the romance of early marriage was over. In the process of getting to know each other, the Africans had found out what a hypocrite the French republic was, and the French had found the complex social structure too fragile to disband. Both, like old lovers, were "disillusioned" — a word that only came into use in the late 1800's, the same time that Europeans had claimed possession of Africa. Despite all of the attraction that had brought these continents together, they were bound to break apart. One was abandoned, the other left without a backward glance.





Wooden Janus are found in this part of the Cameroun. Depicted on one side is a female face, on the other is a darker male visage. The wooden carvings are covered with a thin layer of antelope skin, but originally with human skin. These masks rest on top of the head atop a raffia basket, and they are fastened by string under the chins of Masqueraders. The rest of the body is covered with a costume.

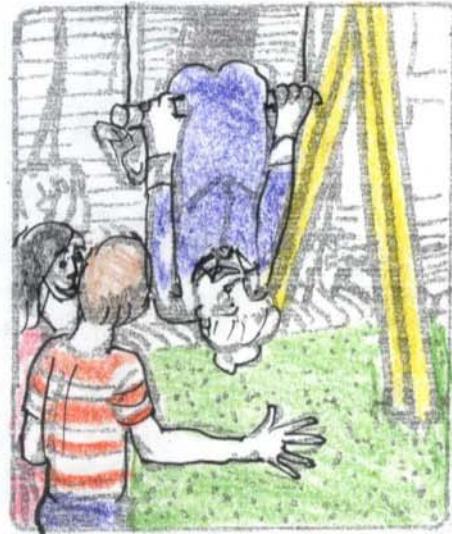
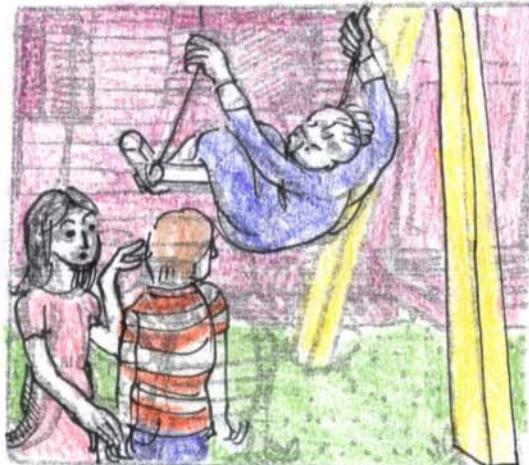
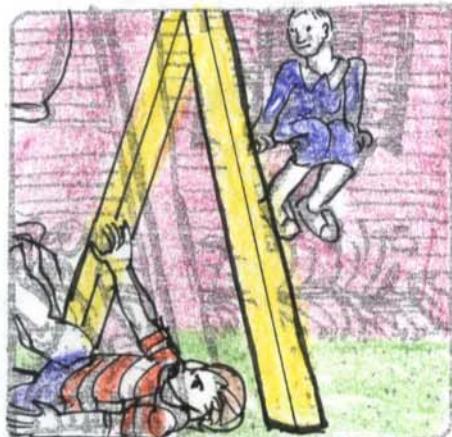
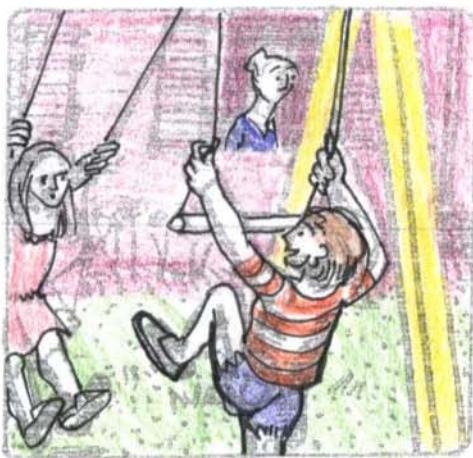
Gentien made a Janus for me that depicted his parents. He must have found out how to make one from watching the tribal artisans over the years. I wondered if he would perform a dance for me.

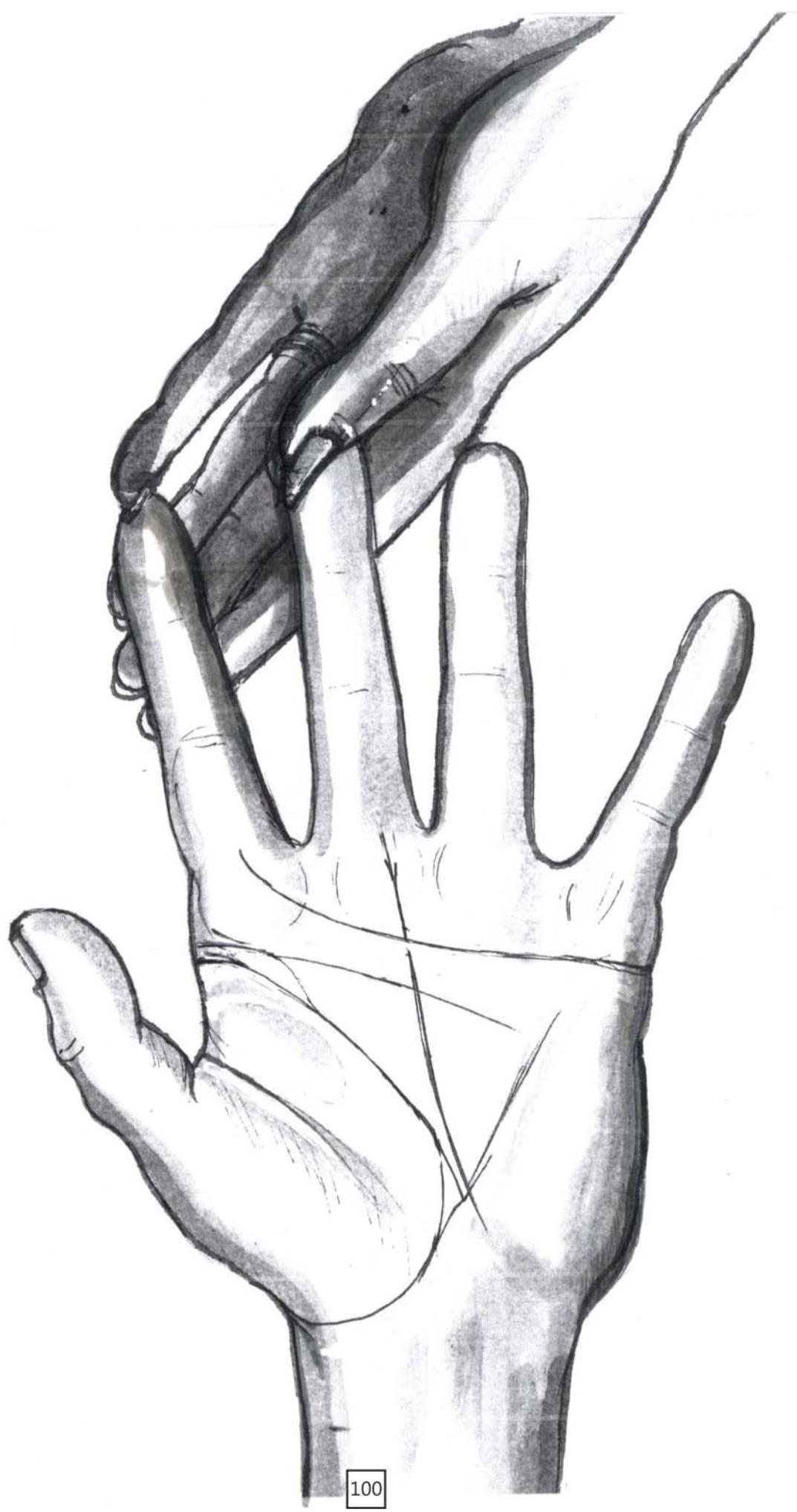


One thing is clear: my grandparents were profoundly changed by the war, especially by their journey in Africa. They returned transformed, and each was unable to separate from one another. Both were doomed to be unable to see the other's perspective, at least not at the same time.



What happened to
Henriette, the supple
young woman? She
had many wartime
adventures of her own.
My sister and I have
only one memory of
our great-grandmother.
One day at Bosmelet . . .





One day my grandmother asked to see my hand.

"It's a good hand," she said, "well balanced, and you have a strong destiny line. That is surprising! You will be rich, but from your husband's wealth. Not your own or your family's money." She noticed that my mount of Venus was divided. The divide showed a propensity towards separating love and sex.

It must have reminded her of her husband Pierre's hands.



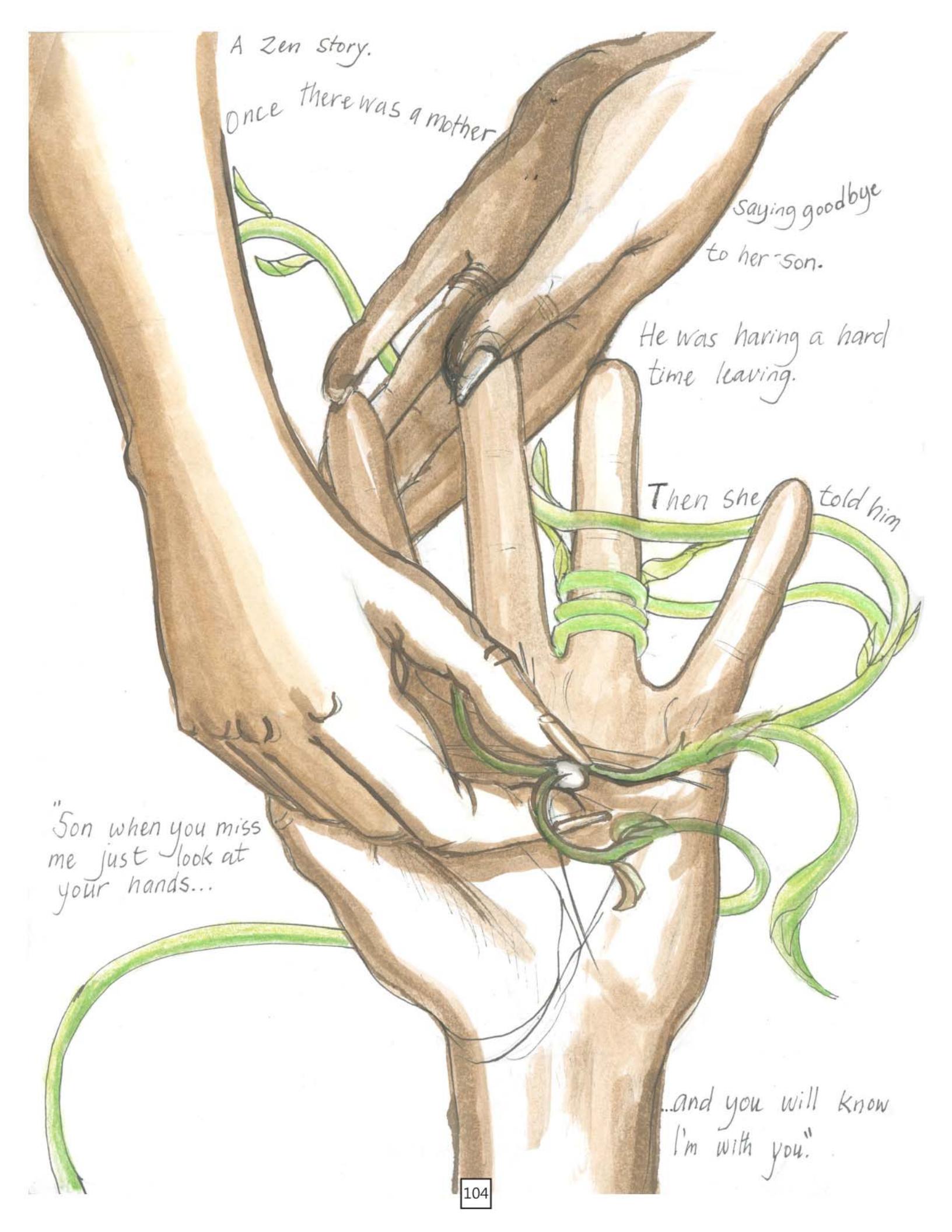
One time around the mid-1980's, Diana and I were walking down New Bond Street in London and Diana stepped into the Browse and Darby Gallery, one of the best established galleries on Bond Street. My grandmother called for the owner and he came out to meet her. Maybe she knew the owner from her grandfather's time.

Asher Wertheimer, Diana's grandfather, had been a famous art dealer and perhaps he introduced his granddaughter to the gallery. Perhaps Diana had been introduced by her mother, Ena Mathias. Ena Mathias had opened a store nearby in Brook Street called "Poulain," and sold children dresses inspired by the Russian Ballet. This venture was not a commercial success, as Ena was no business woman, but it was a popular shop. Later, she turned the shop into an art gallery opposite Claridge's called "Claridge's Gallery."

When my grandmother introduced me to the owner of Browse and Darby, she told him what a talented artist I was. She told him that I was doing graduate work at the Slade like her mother and sister, and she insisted that I would be famous one day. The owner teasingly said, "Watch out, she may become more famous than you and you may be known as the grandmother of the famous Yolanda Chetwynd." Diana replied, "If she does, I will rejoice."

With that we said our goodbyes and took our leave.



A Zen story illustration. A large, textured hand holds a brown wooden branch. A green vine with small leaves is wrapped around the branch and the fingers of the hand. The background is plain white.

A Zen story.

Once there was a mother

saying goodbye
to her son.

He was having a hard
time leaving.

Then she told him

"Son when you miss
me just look at
your hands..."

...and you will know
I'm with you."