

INVASION



By Yolanda Chetwynd

Dedications

To my Aunt Laurence and Uncle Robert, the Baroness and Baron de Bosmelet, for pouring themselves into their estate and, in so doing, honoring the life they have been given.

To my mother and father, Hélène and Tom Chetwynd, for being the embodiment of a bohemian love story.

To my beloved husband, Suresh Advani.

To my children, Madhu and Diana, that they might know where they come from.

Many thanks to Peggy Sacher for her valuable help.

Emmanuel Guibert's¹ reaction to 'INVASION' and translation by Robert de Bosmelet:

Yolanda, c'est quelqu'un. On sent une sensibilité frémissante, attentive, dans laquelle les événements vécus et les récits entendus se gravent en profondeur. Le titre de son récit peut être lu de plusieurs manières (les titres les plus simples sont souvent les mieux remplis). L'invasion allemande, bien sûr, l'invasion du souvenir, dans une vie, et l'invasion des générations précédentes, qui nous "occupent", à certains moments, avec tant de présence. L'invasion d'un style graphique, celui de Spiegelman, qui a marqué tellement de lecteurs, dont je suis. La page de l'accouchement, à l'encre sépia, avec ce minotaure obstétricien, est très étrange, très belle, pleine d'atmosphère. Dans chaque dessin du Bosmelet, on sent que c'est sa terre. Elle doit être sens dessus dessous, quand elle vient. Ça résonne dans ses yeux, dans son cœur, dans sa plante des pieds, et donc dans ses dessins. Ces pages sont un beau cadeau qu'elle s'est faite à elle-même et qu'elle fait aux siens. J'imagine bien, si tu me dis que ses relations avec sa mère ne sont pas des plus simples, qu'en "l'accouchant" ainsi, elle a mis, sinon de l'ordre, en tout cas un doux feu de cheminée dans ses sentiments. La dernière case de ma page préférée est, en ce sens, un modèle d'apaisement.
Pardon de ne pas avoir écrit tout ça en anglais, mais je voulais te dire les choses au plus juste de ce que j'ai ressenti et je suis bien loin d'être aussi poli de la glotte que toi. Tu lui en feras, si tu veux, un bref résumé en traduction, assorti de mes applaudissements confraternels.

Yolanda, now there's someone. You can feel the simmering - attentive - sensitivity where events lived and stories heard plough a deep furrow. The title can be read at different levels (the simplest titles are often the most pregnant). The German invasion, of course, invasion into the memory of a life but also that of previous generations, the ones that "occupy" us at different moments with such presence. The invasion of a graphic style -Spiegelman's² - who has marked so many readers including me.

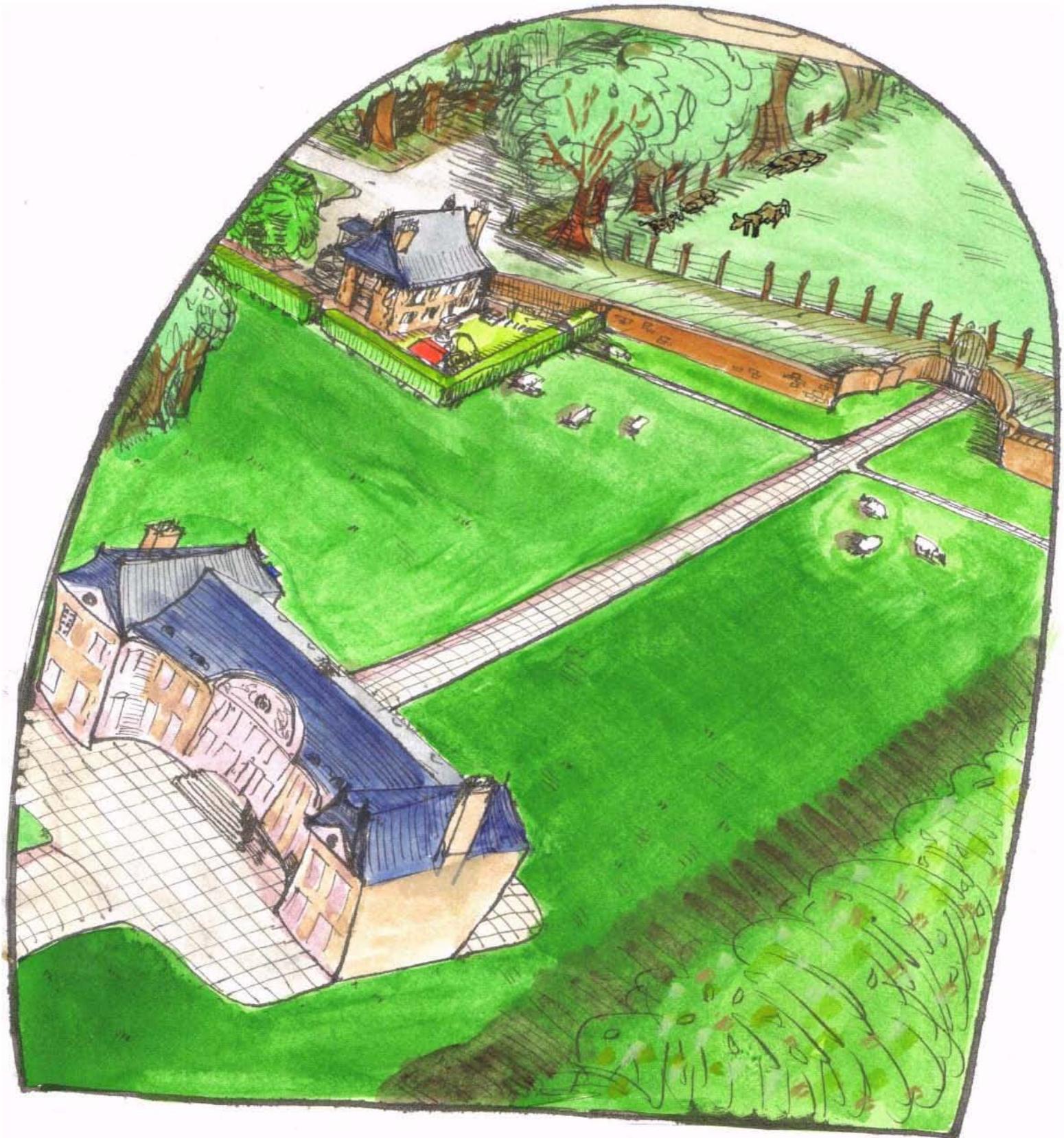
The page of childbirth, in sepia colors, with the Minotaur obstetrician, is very strange, very beautiful, and very atmospheric. In every drawing of Bosmelet, one feels it's her territory. She must be inside out when she visits. You feel the vibes in her eyes, in her heart, in the soles of her feet and consequently in her drawings.

These pages are a beautiful present to herself and to her family. I can well imagine, if you tell me that her relationship to her mother is not the simplest, that by giving birth to her in this way, even if it is not completely tidy-up, she has managed to put a warm kindle into the chimney of her sentiments. The last frame of my favorite page is a model of appeasement.

¹ Emmanuel Guibert is the author of the graphic novel ALAN's WAR: The memories of G.I. Alan Cope

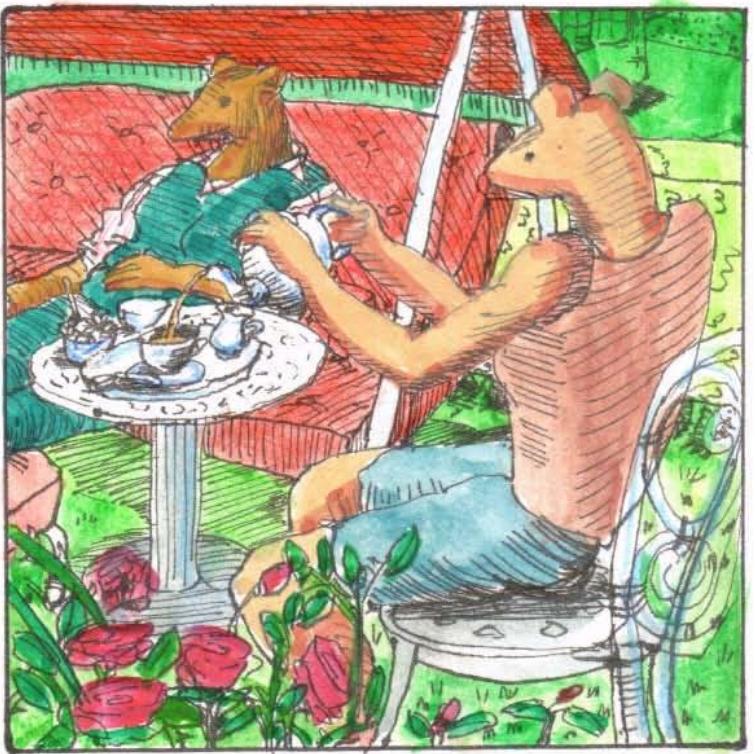
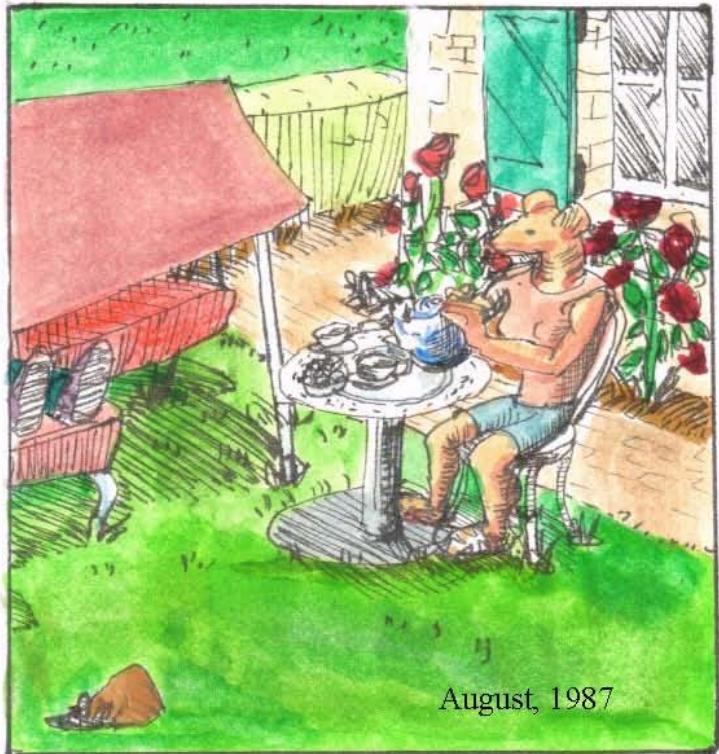
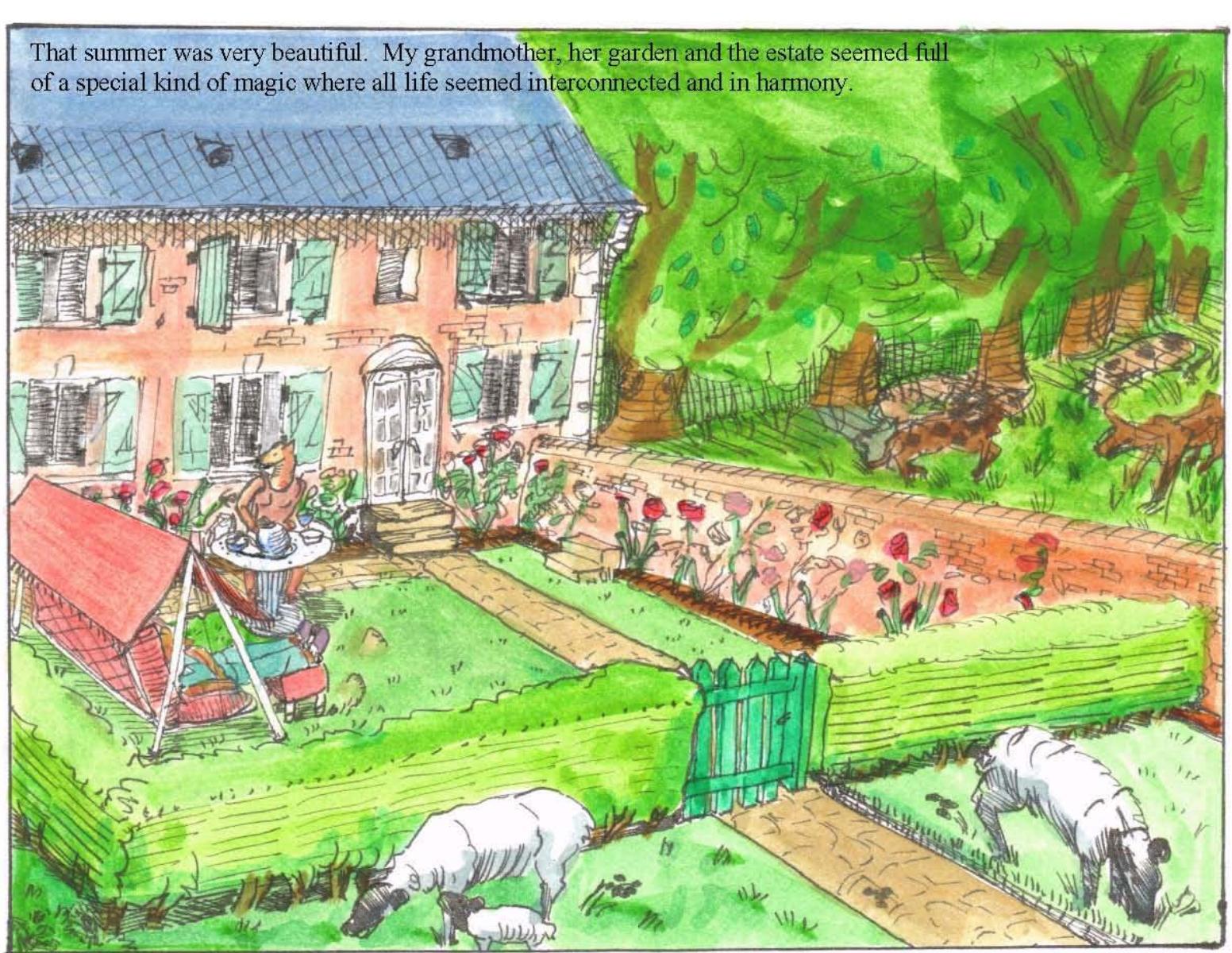
² It was in reading the book, Maus by Art Spiegelman that I found a format to tell my family story. I am indebted to this book in which I found clever and more interesting ways to tell this story.

Twenty-one summers ago, I was about to embark on a new life in America with my fiancé Suresh Advani when I heard that my grandmother had been diagnosed with lung cancer.



Because she and I were very close, I was happy to spend three weeks with her.

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.

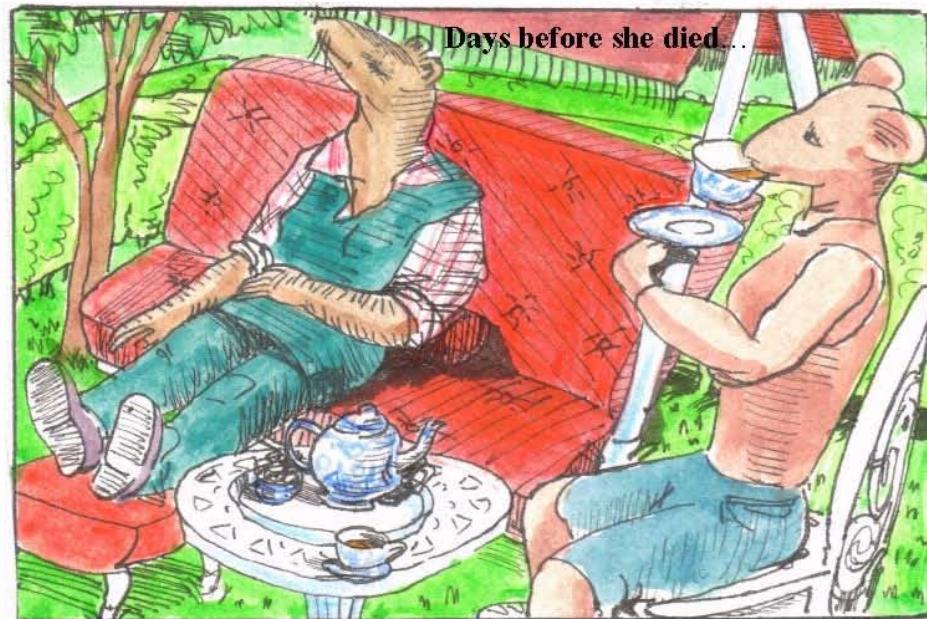


A perfect summer afternoon

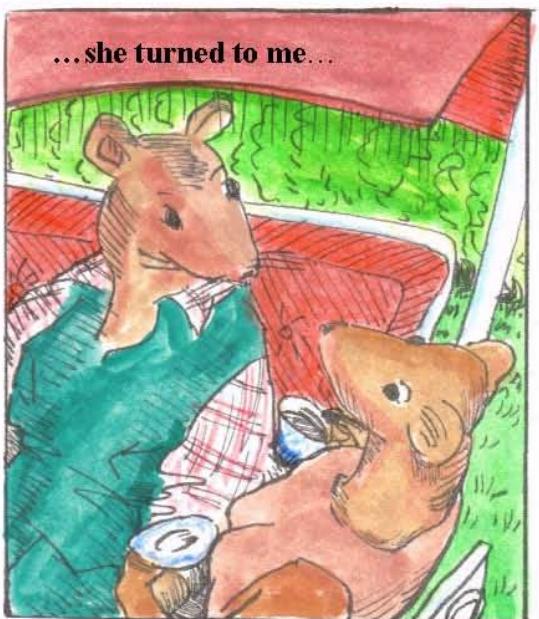


Chateau de Bosmelet
Normandy, France

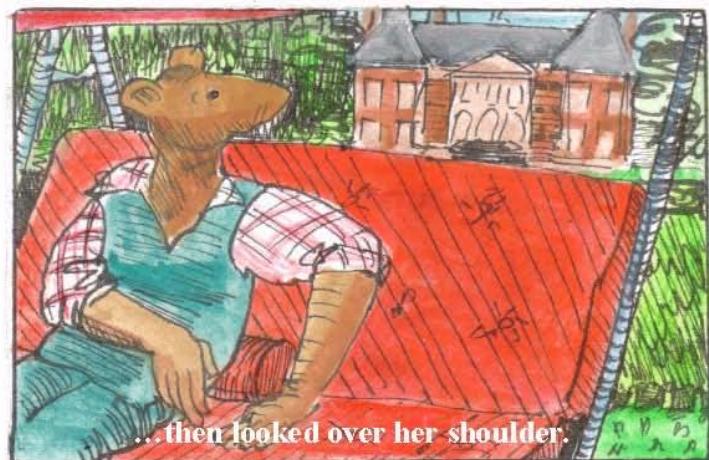
Days before she died...



...she turned to me...



...then looked over her shoulder.



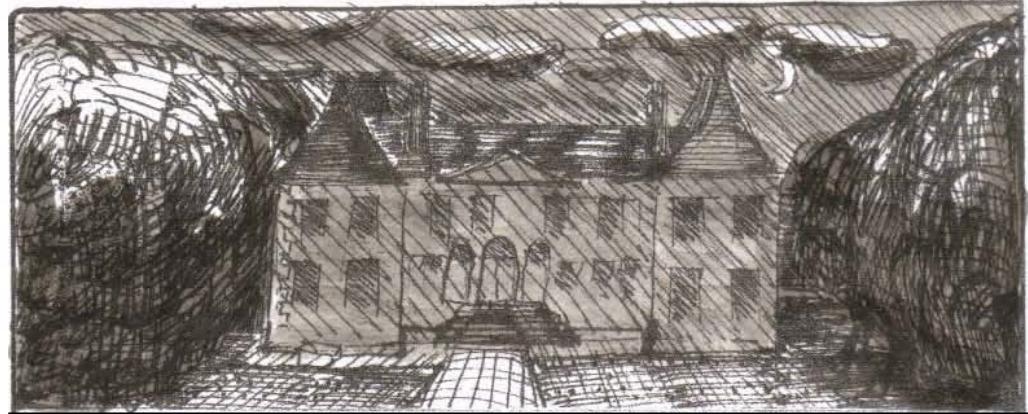
I was wondering where in the world your children will be born.¹ A penny for your thoughts, Granny?

¹The script denotes my interpretation of my grandmother's written and spoken aristocratic voice.

My grandmother then told me the story of my mother's birth forty-seven years and six months earlier.

January 1, 1940

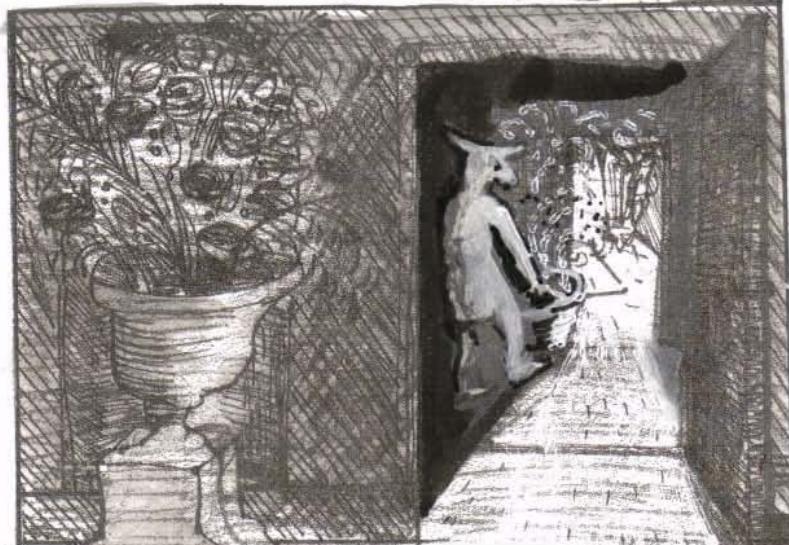
A cold winter night



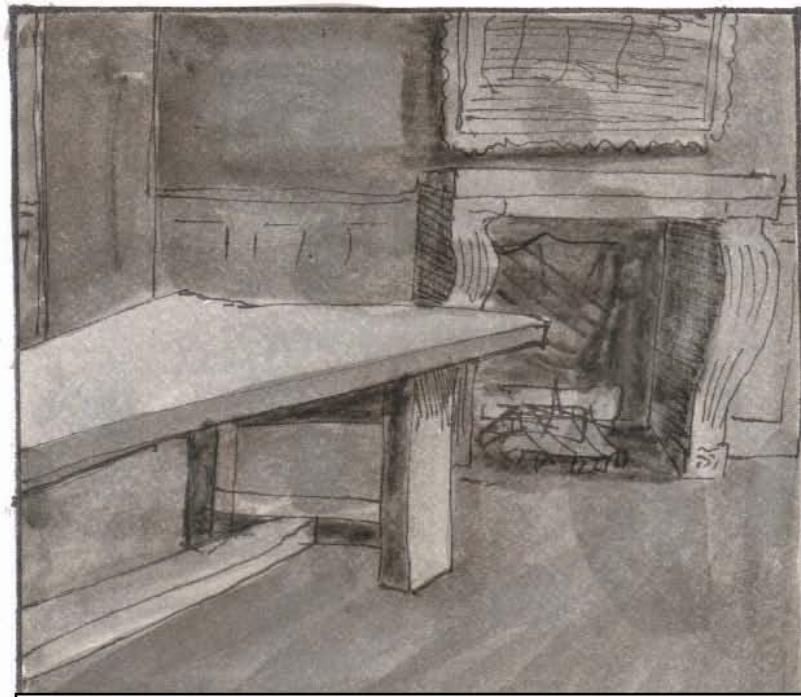
Your mother was the last Bosmelet to be born in the chateau.



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



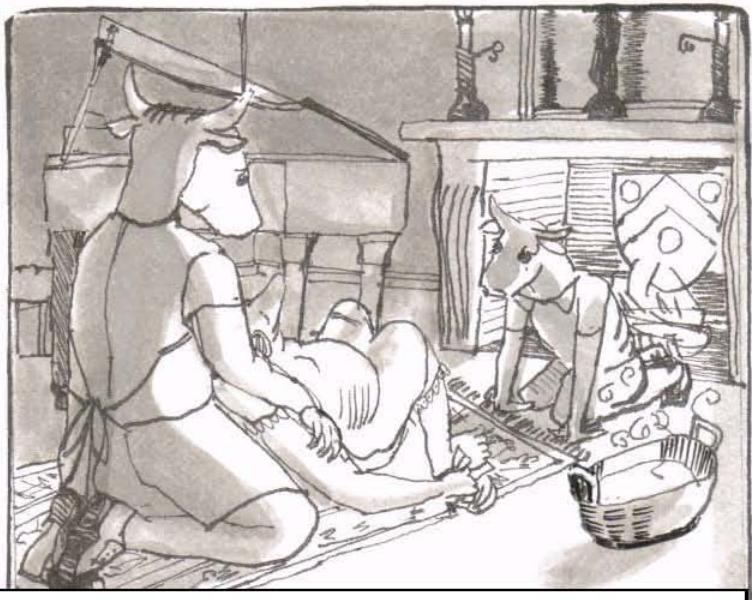
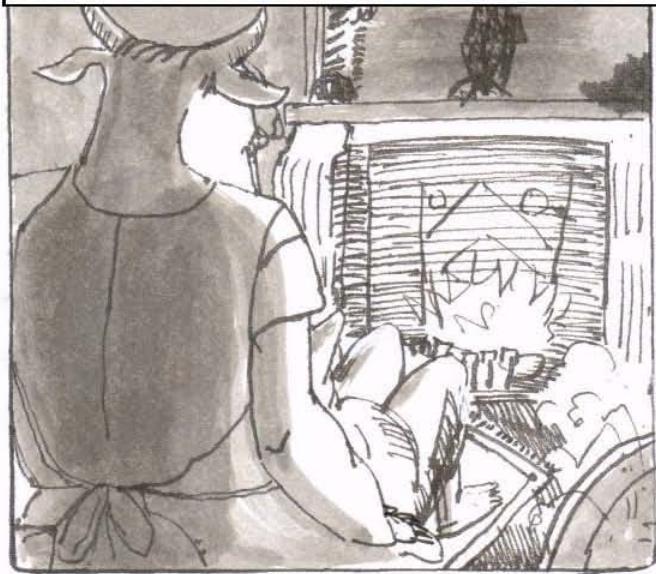
...because we were afraid of German air raids. For my labour, my midwife confined me to the downstairs music room ...



...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.



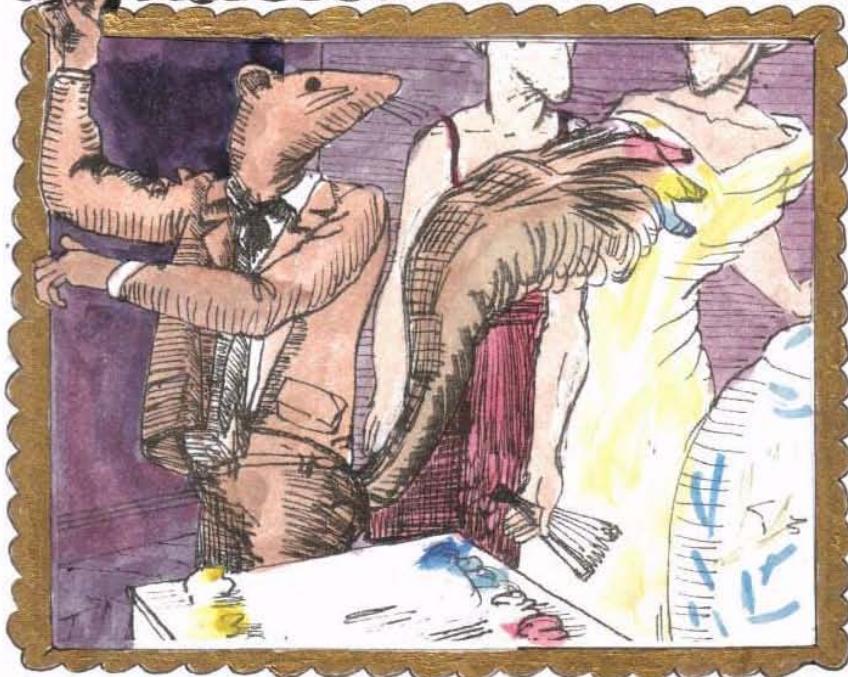
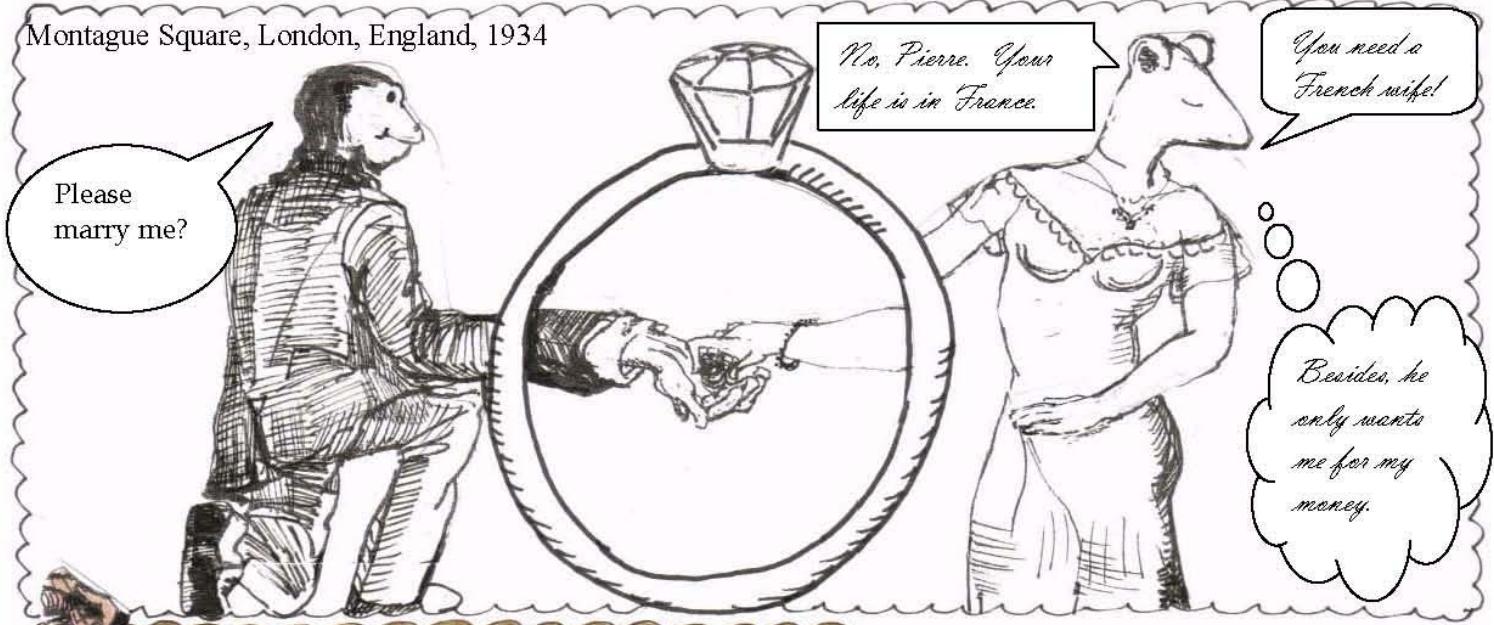
Our beautiful son, Gentien, ...



... was now nearly 3 years old.



Montague Square, London, England, 1934



Our family was rich, so rich that my mother's side of the family had been painted by John Singer Sargent. My grandfather, Asher Wertheimer, donated all the family paintings to the Tate Gallery in 1908.



My father, Robert Mathias, was a successful businessman and nephew of Dr. Ludwig Mandl, the chemist whose son founded Imperial Chemical Industries in 1926.

Darling girl, refusing him is the right thing.



Yes, Diana, he is very handsome but.

Pierre did marry a very rich French lady. They had daughters named Monique and Beatrice. Their marriage did not last. He could not forget me.



Diana, I have always loved you and I always will.

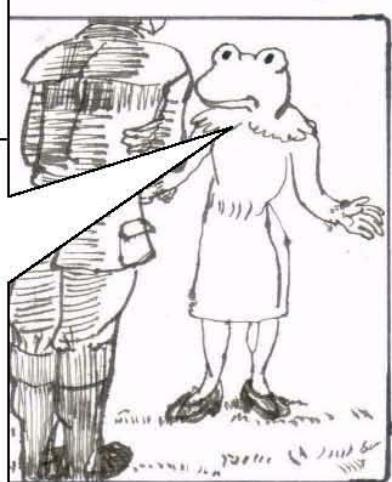
June, 1937



We settled into country life at Rosmelet. My two step-daughters visited often.

The only person not completely happy was Pierre's mother, Henriette Soyer de Rosmelet.

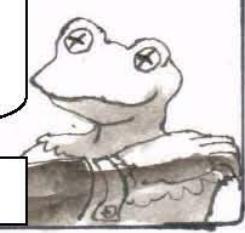
Son, why did you divorce your French wife? She was perfect for you. What about your daughters? Besides, your new wife is Jewish. What will the villagers think? This is not Paris, you know. As the Baron you must set a good example. And why are you drinking so much? You know, that woman spends all her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



My husband would just laugh and appease his mother.

Mama, the garden has never looked so good. She is teaching the gardeners a thing or two. You love the new roses as much as anyone.

So for the most part we were happy.

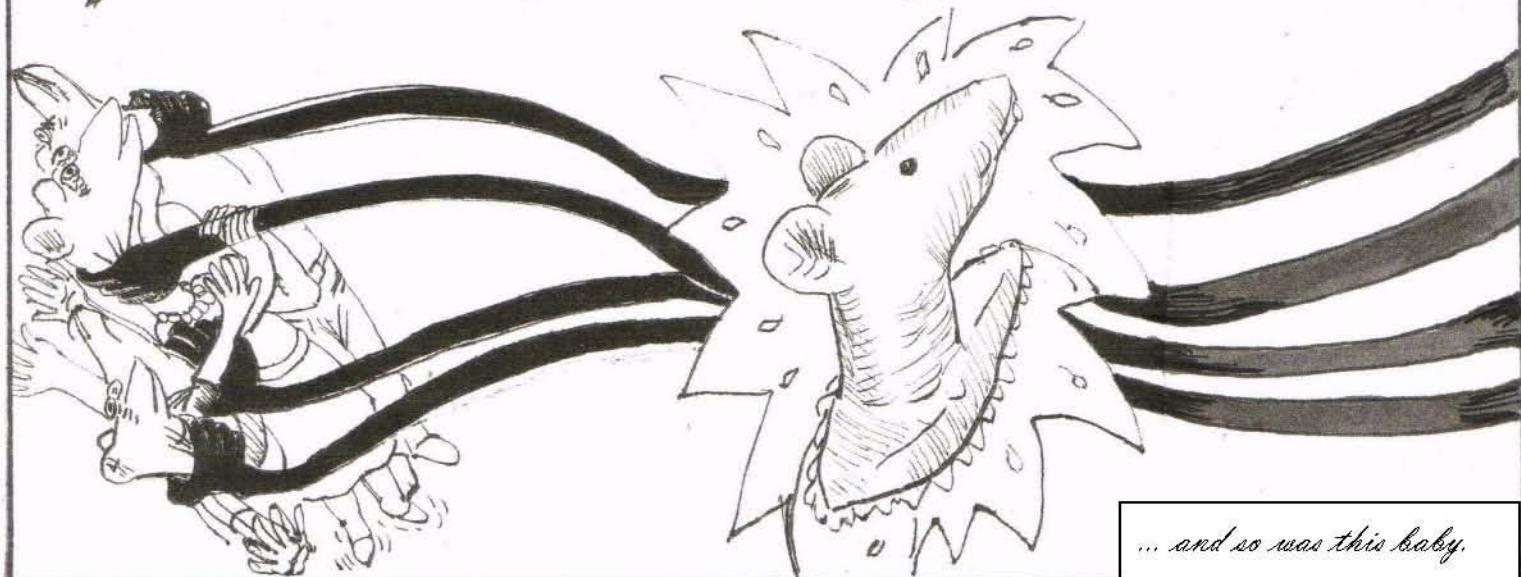
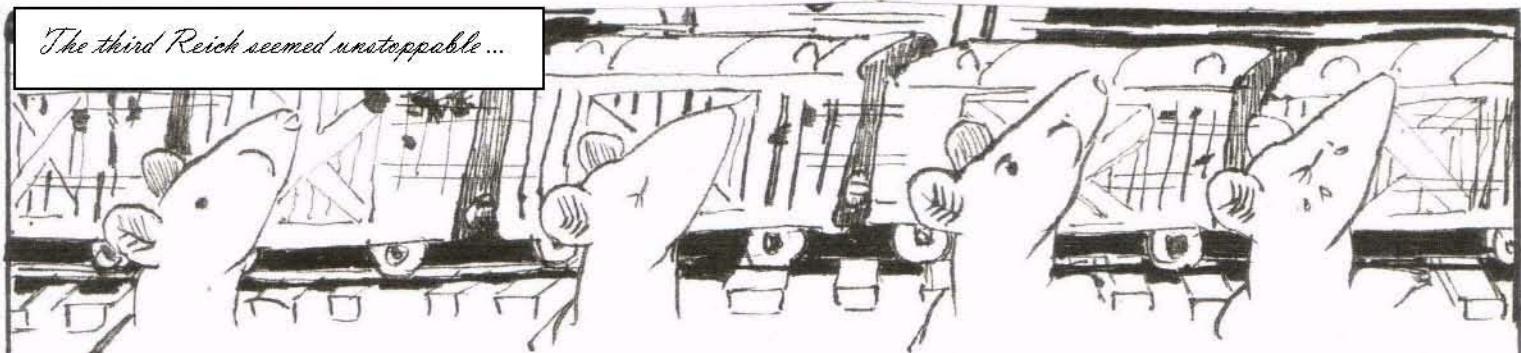




The German army was marching across Europe.



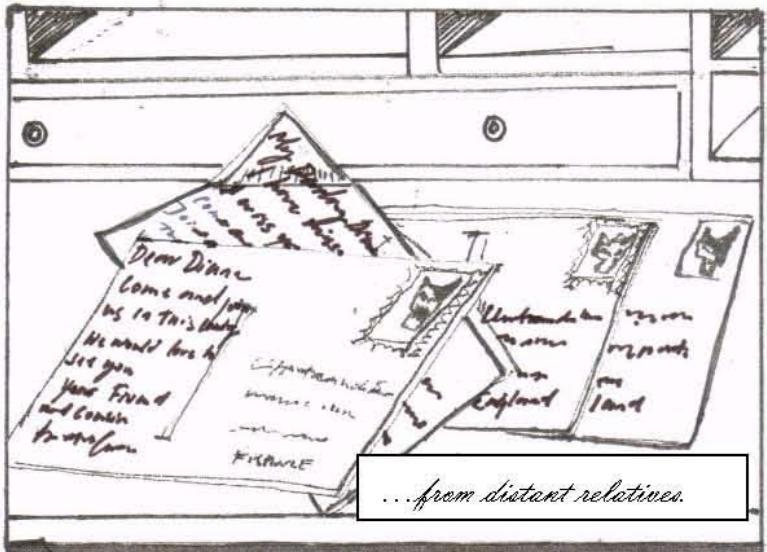
The third Reich seemed unstoppable ...



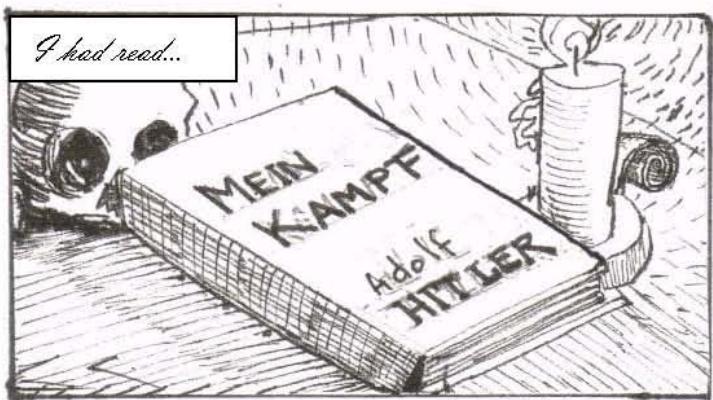
... and so was this baby.



I had received many ominous postcards ...



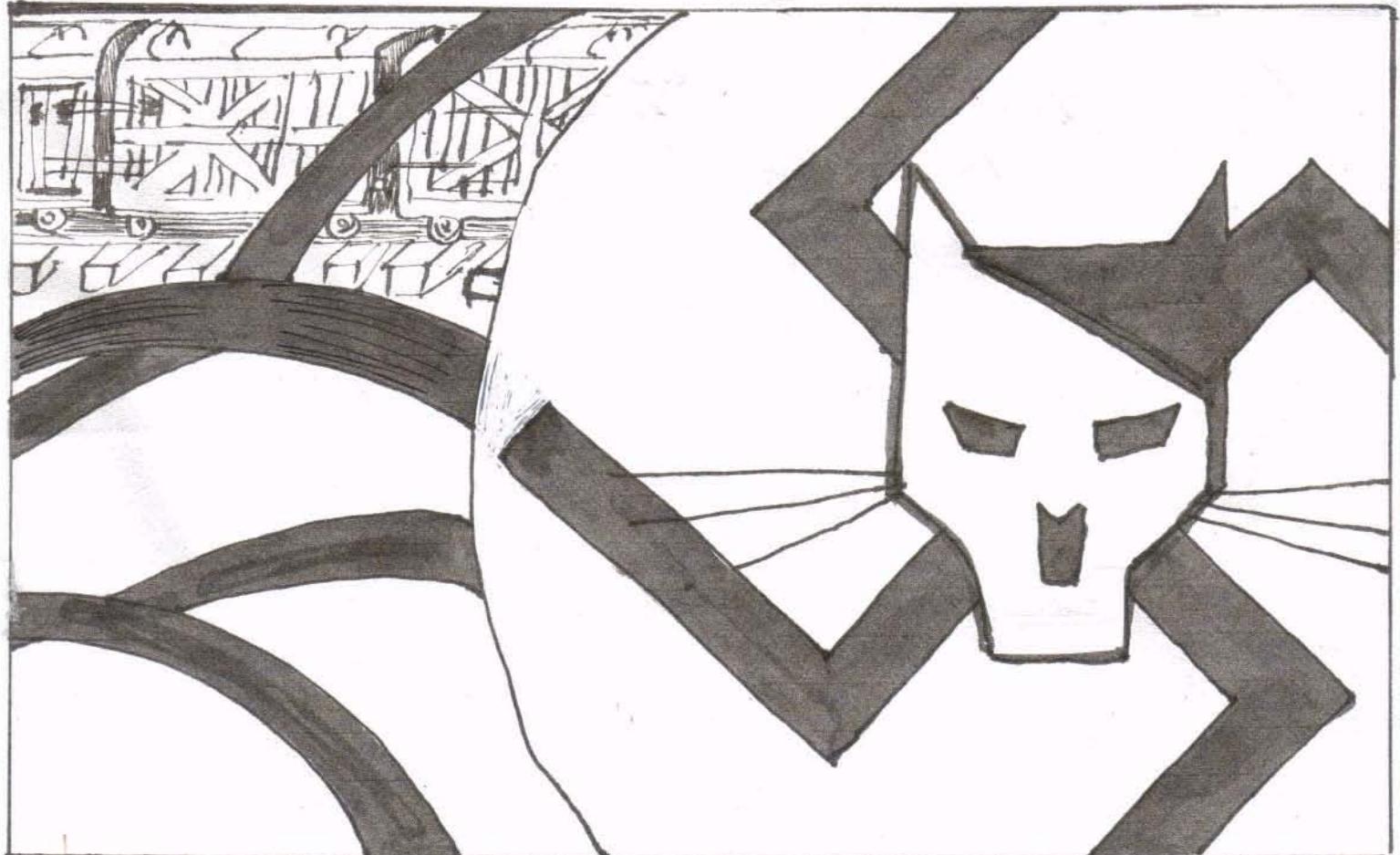
... from distant relatives.



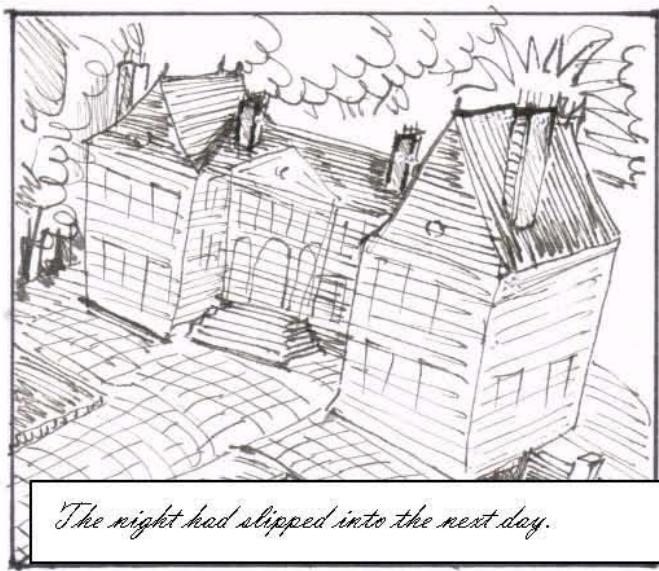
I had read...



So I prayed
to the God
I had never
believed in
to save me
and mine.



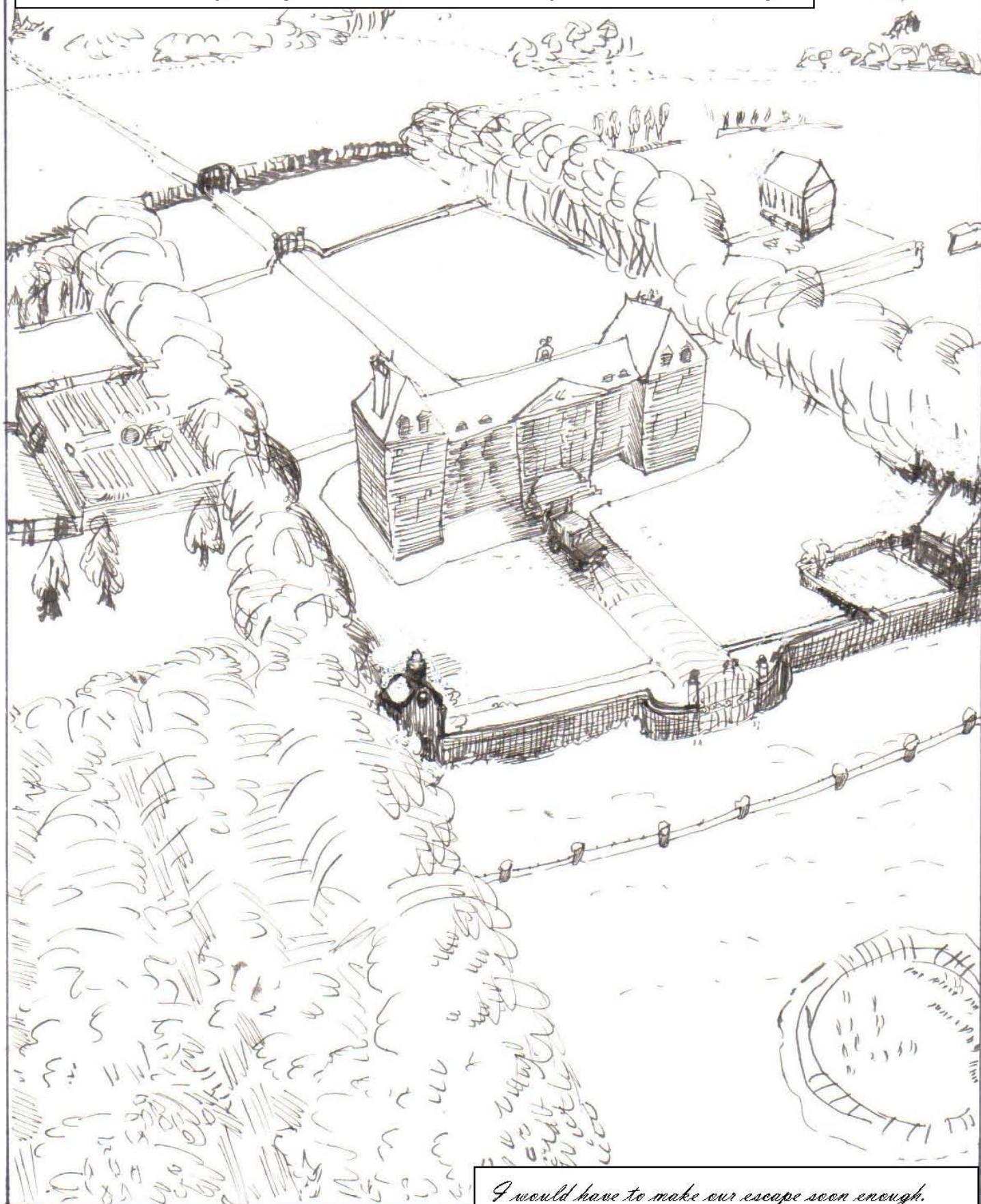
It's a girl, a beautiful girl.



The night had slipped into the next day.

I could rest for now.

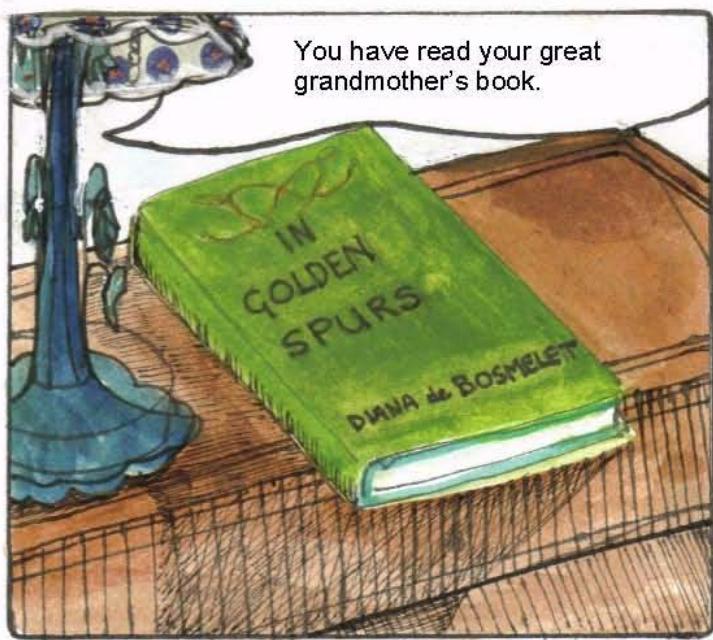
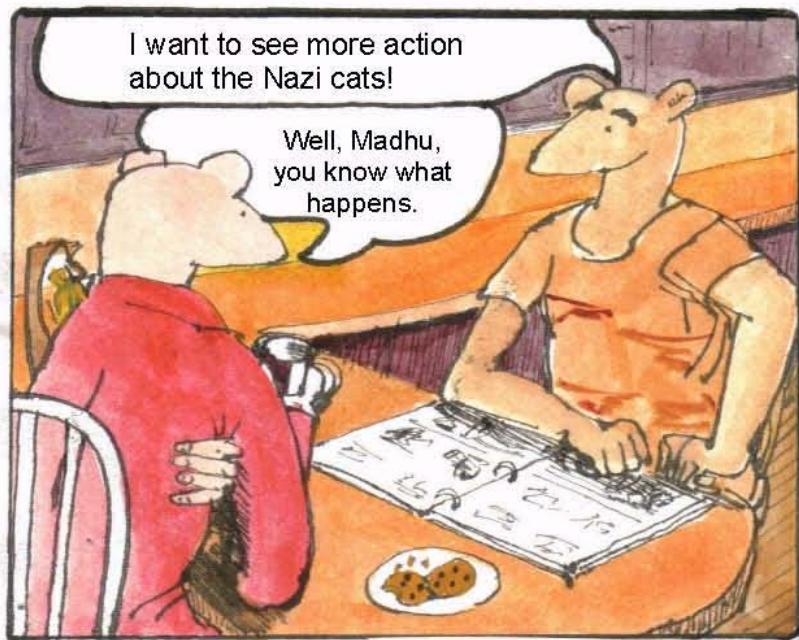
I could recover my strength. I would need it to face what was coming.

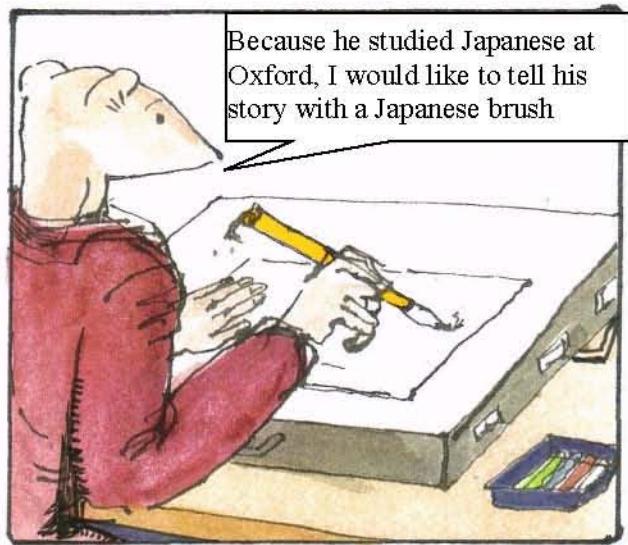
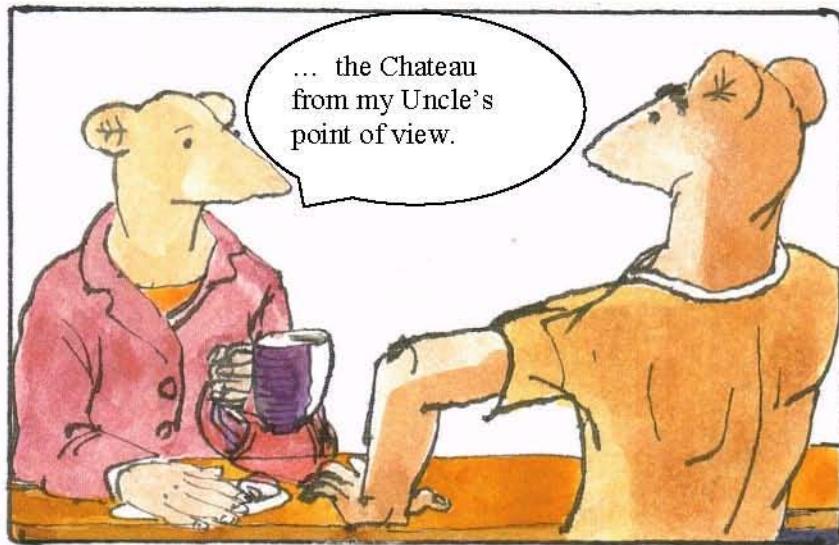


I would have to make our escape soon enough.

October, 2008, Newark, Delaware, USA

Sitting around the kitchen table, I show the story so far to my children Madhu and Diana. Madhu is 19, visiting from Cornell University for the weekend. Diana, 13, is in 8th grade but is home today from school because it is an in-service day.

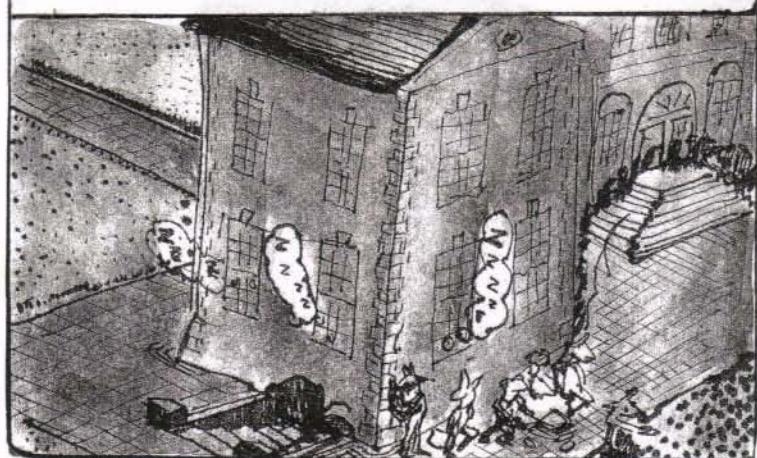




And then there is Remi, the farmer's war story as a boy of nine seeing the Germans for the first time.



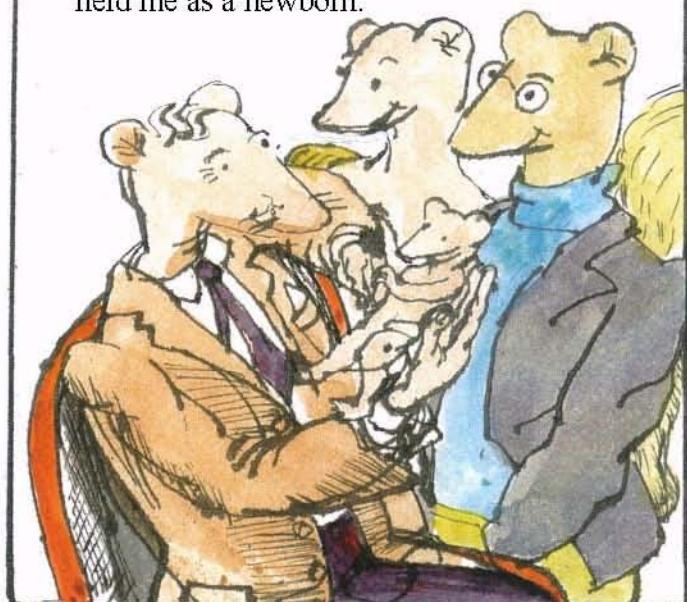
He and his family helped 150 refugees escape right under the noses of the Germans. The Nazis were camped at the Chateau building V1 launching pads to bomb London.

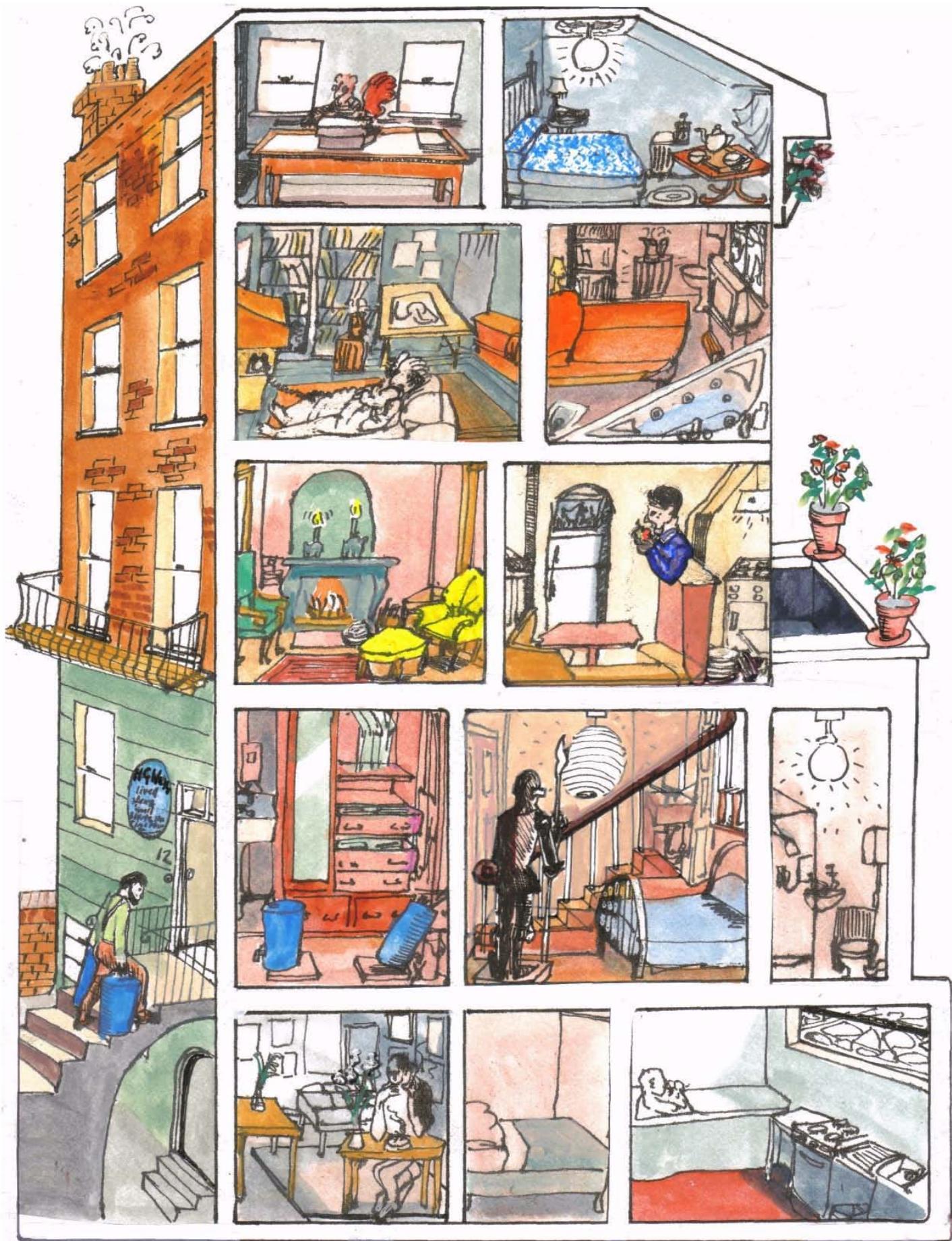


There is also the story of my great-grandfather who organized an escape route for his daughter and grandchildren.



In fact, my great-grandfather held me as a newborn.





And there are so many other stories to be told including those from my childhood home.