

AN ANGEL SAVED ME:

THE LIFE OF EVA LEITMAN



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CONTEXT

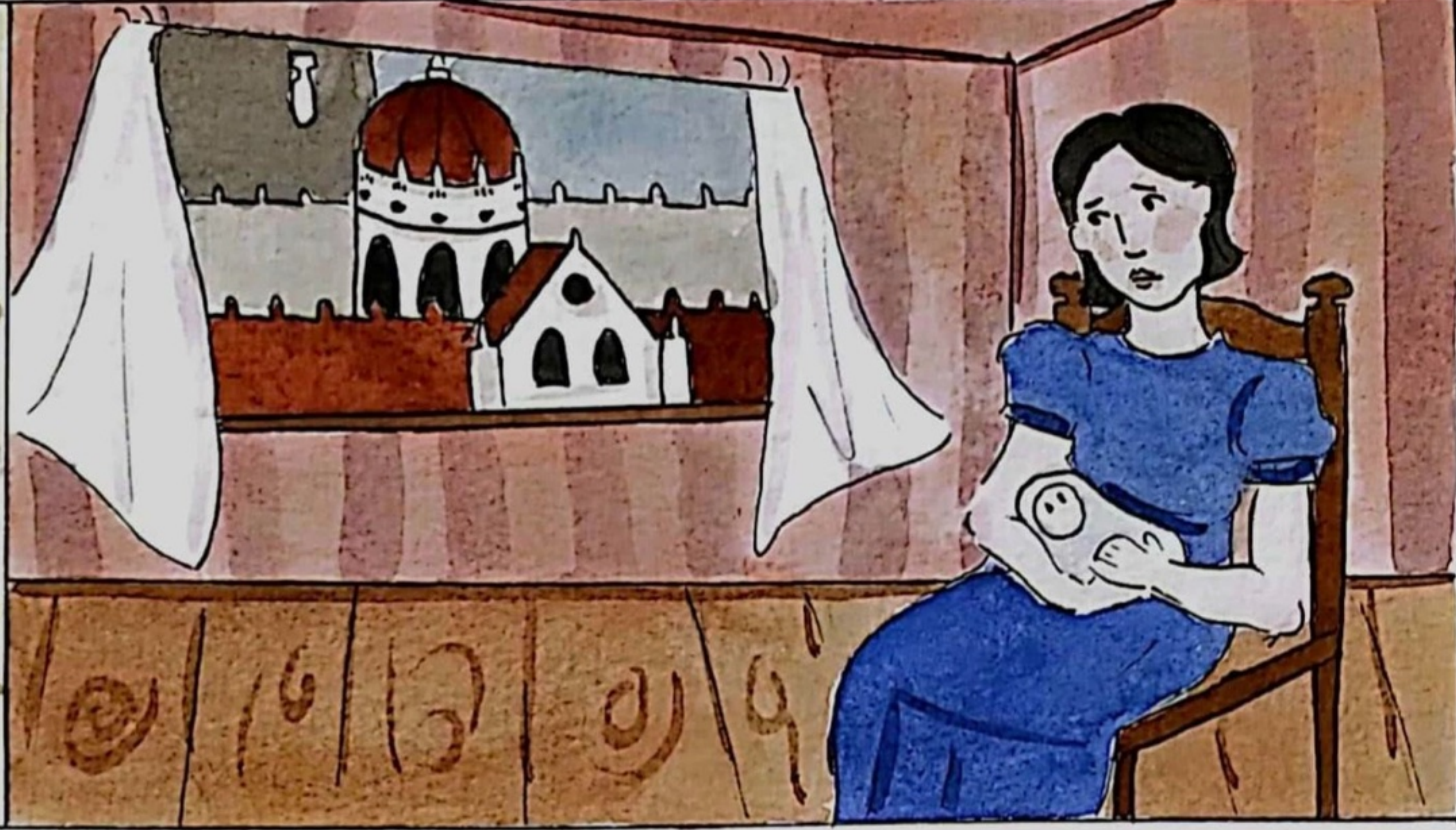
In June 1941, Hungary agreed to join Germany in its war against the Soviet Union. In December 1941, it accompanied the Axis in its war declaration on the United States.

However, after the German defeat at Stalingrad and other battles in which the Hungarian army suffered heavy casualties, Regent Miklos Horthy attempted to withdraw from the alliance. Hitler did not accept this decision and immediately invaded Hungary in March 1944.

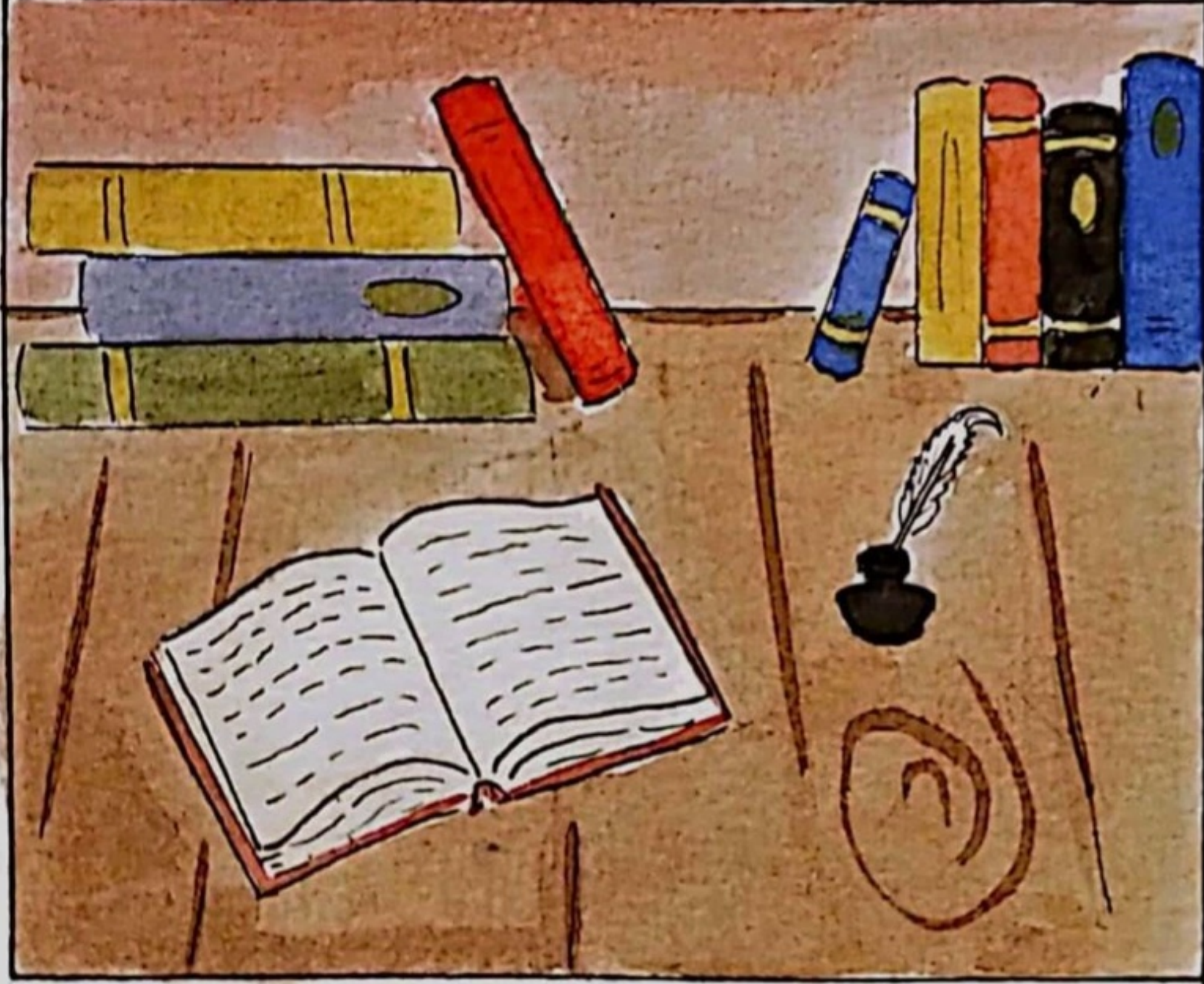
Adolf Eichmann would personally conduct the "Final Solution" in the entire Hungarian territory where around 800,000 Jews lived. The nightmare began for the Jewish population, who were deported massively to Auschwitz from March to October.

Like Eva says, "I was born on 29 June 1944, the worst day to come into this world..."

My name is Eva Leitman. I was born on 29 June 1944, in an old hospital in Budapest, during an Allied bombardment that was trying to end the Nazi occupation.



My mother, Katy Roth, was born in 1920 and grew up in a cultivated and refined environment: she studied in Switzerland and was a polyglot... She met my father in 1937.



My father, Arthur Leitman, had a knitting shop, which was remarkably successful. He was more orthodox and devout than my mother. He was drafted in 1938...



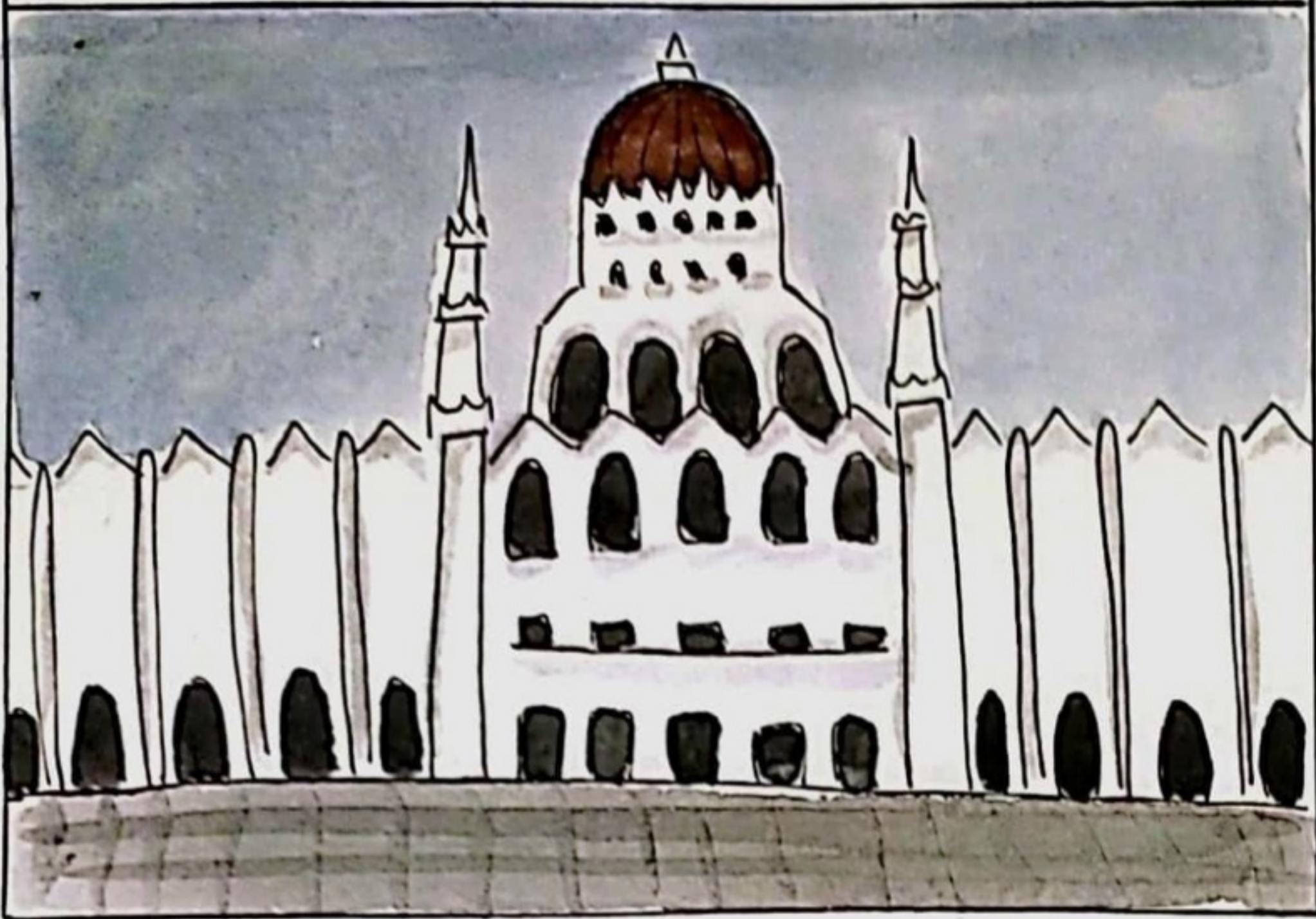
They got married the same year they met...



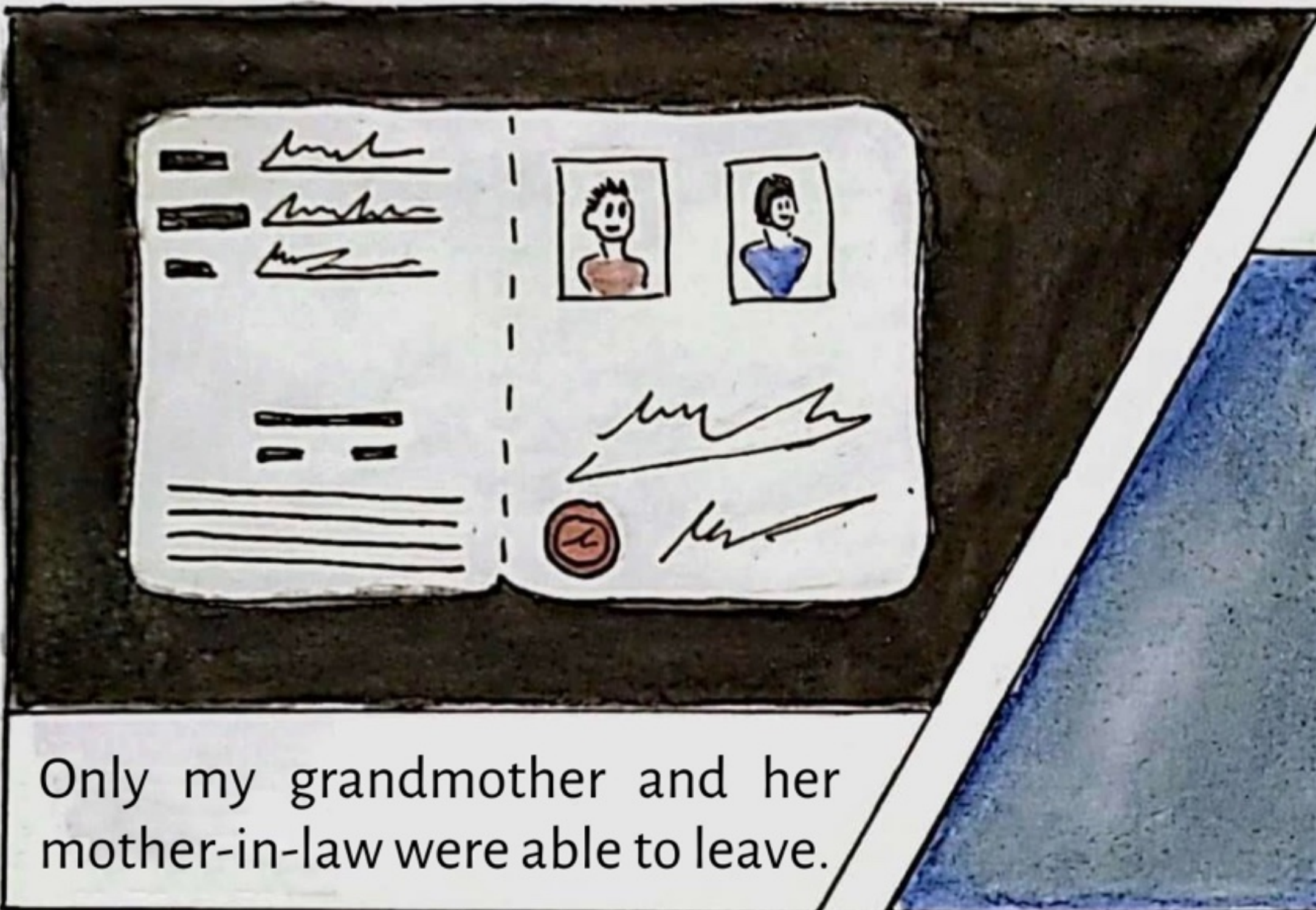
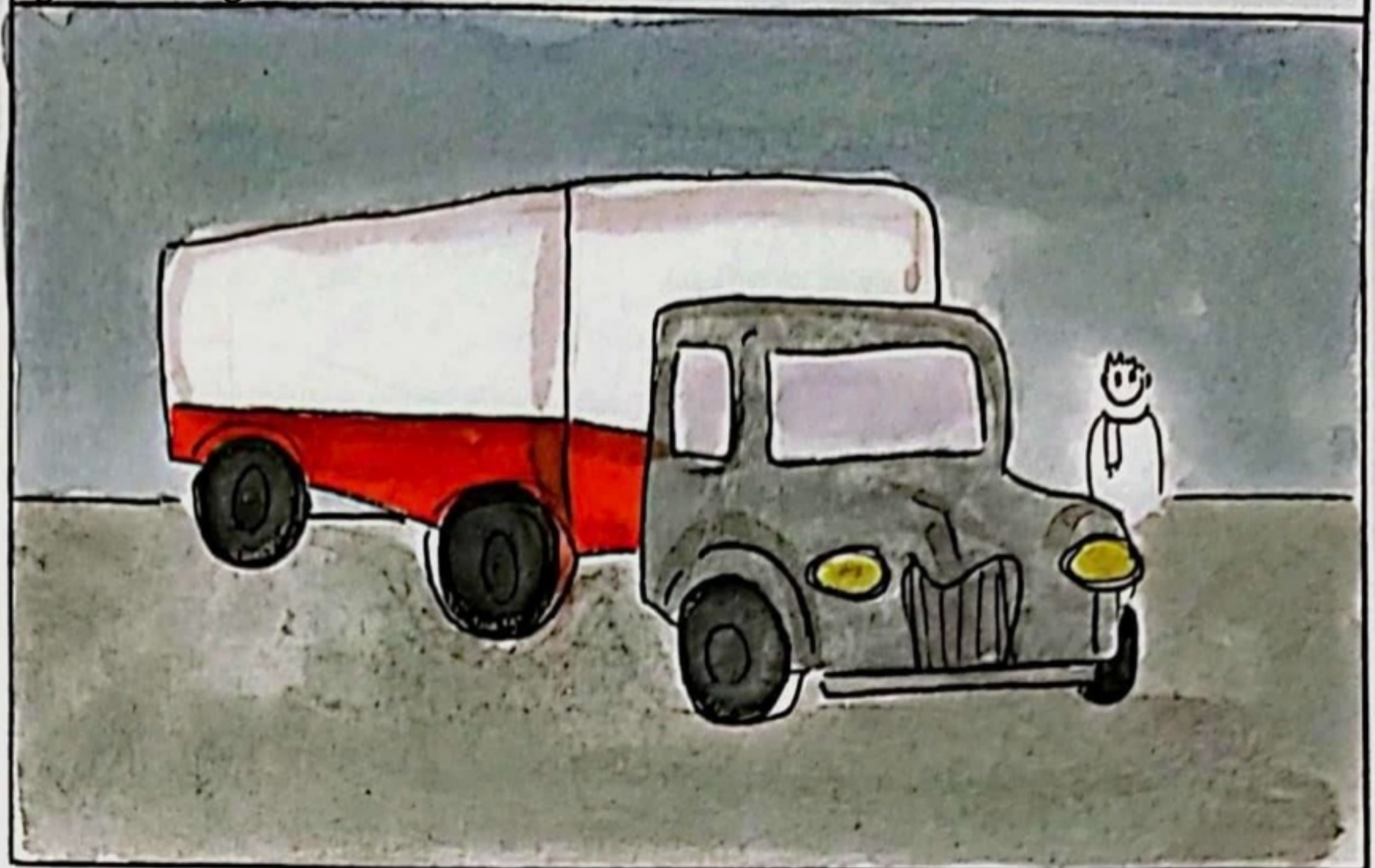
... and, within a year, she was pregnant with my older brother, Thomas.



Hungary's political situation was getting worse, and my family was afraid.



My maternal grandfather, Jeno Roth, who had a successful trucking business, managed to buy a visa for the whole family to go to Tangier, but it turned out to be a fraud.



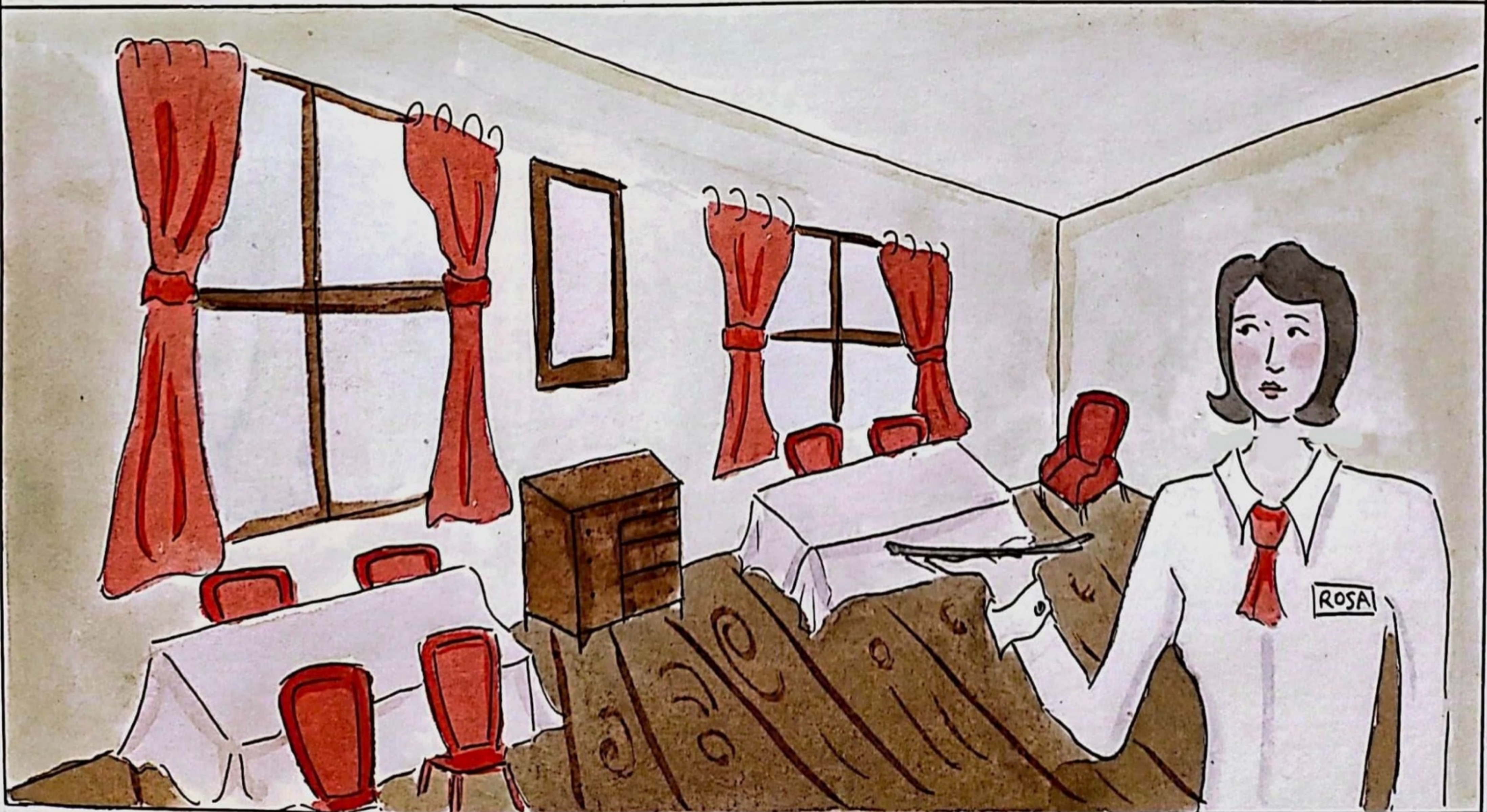
Only my grandmother and her mother-in-law were able to leave.

My mother and Thomas stayed in Budapest...

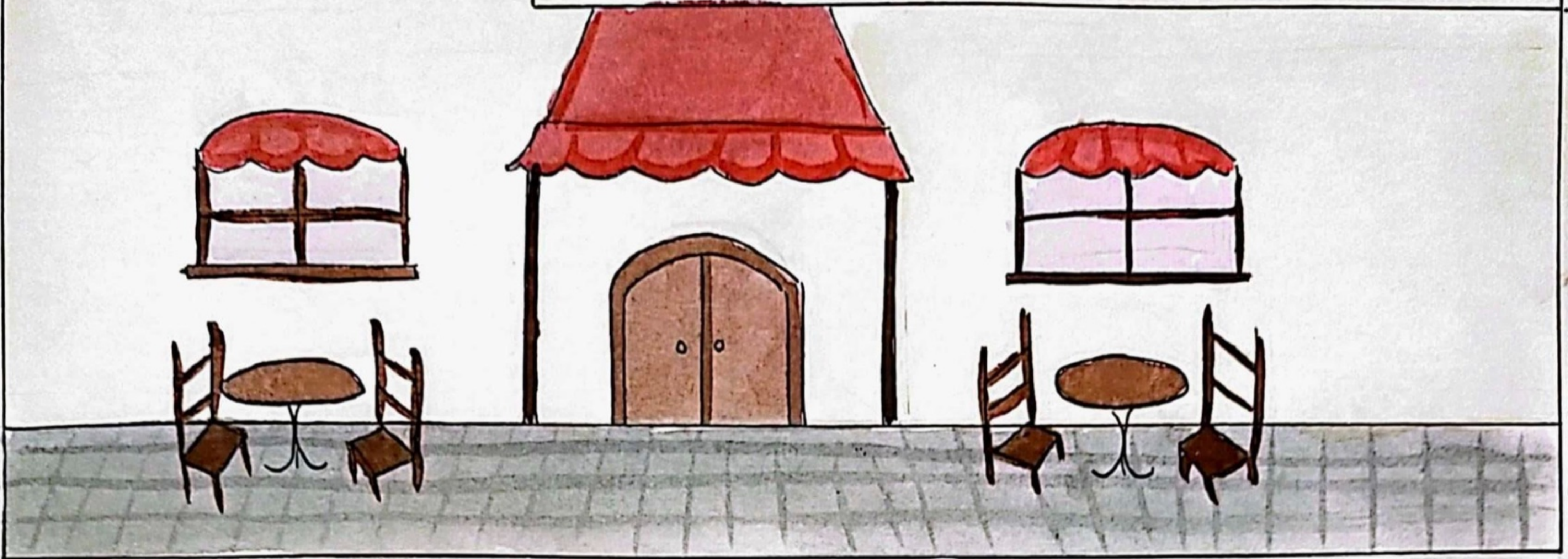


...because she did not want to leave without my father...

My maternal grandmother, Rosa Rosenthal, went to Tangier with my paternal aunt. Tangier was an oasis, a refuge. My grandmother set up a restaurant there and, after it succeeded, a hotel.



I do not quite know how, but Grandma Rosa's whereabouts led her to Madrid, Spain, where she set up another restaurant.

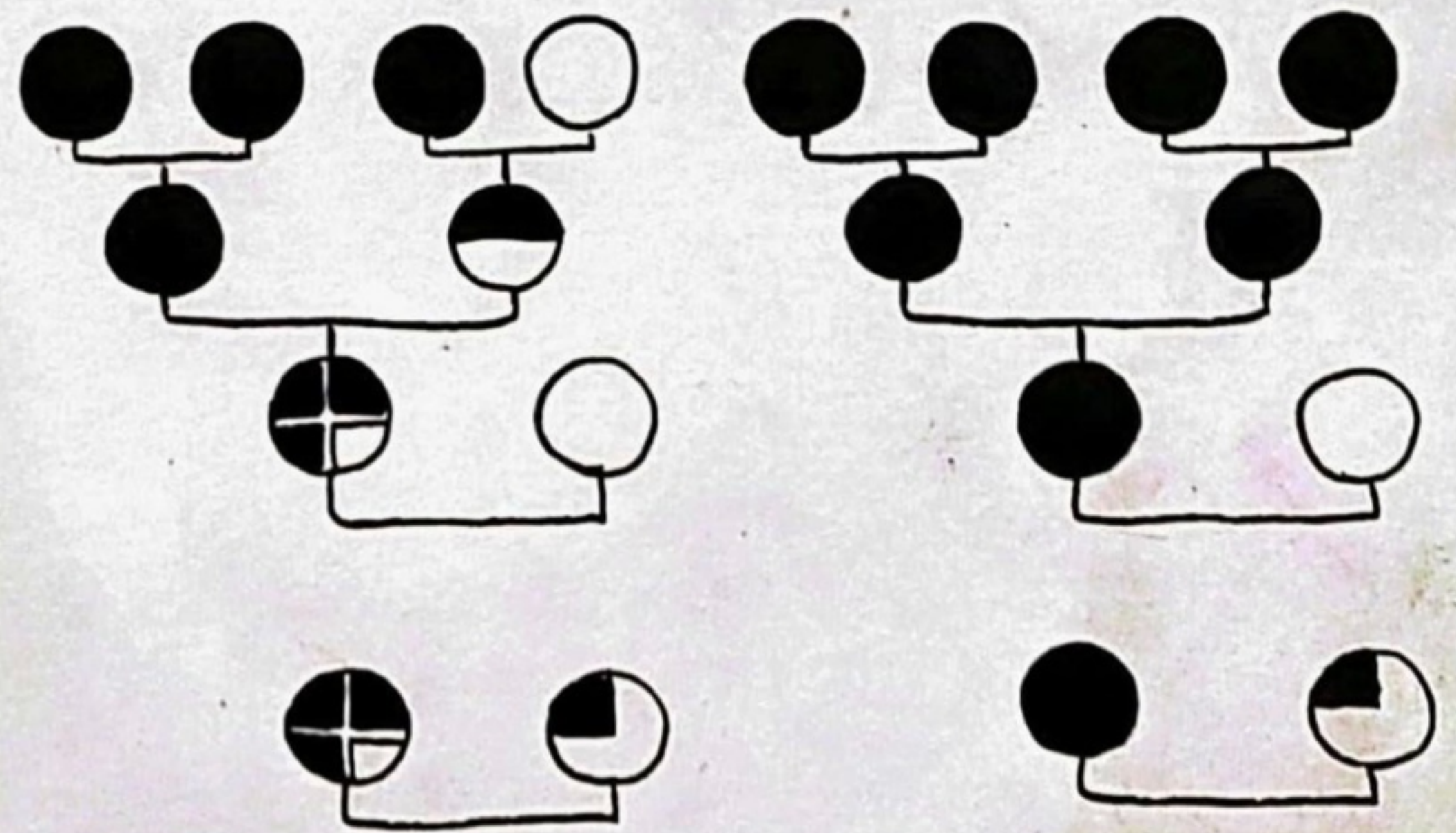
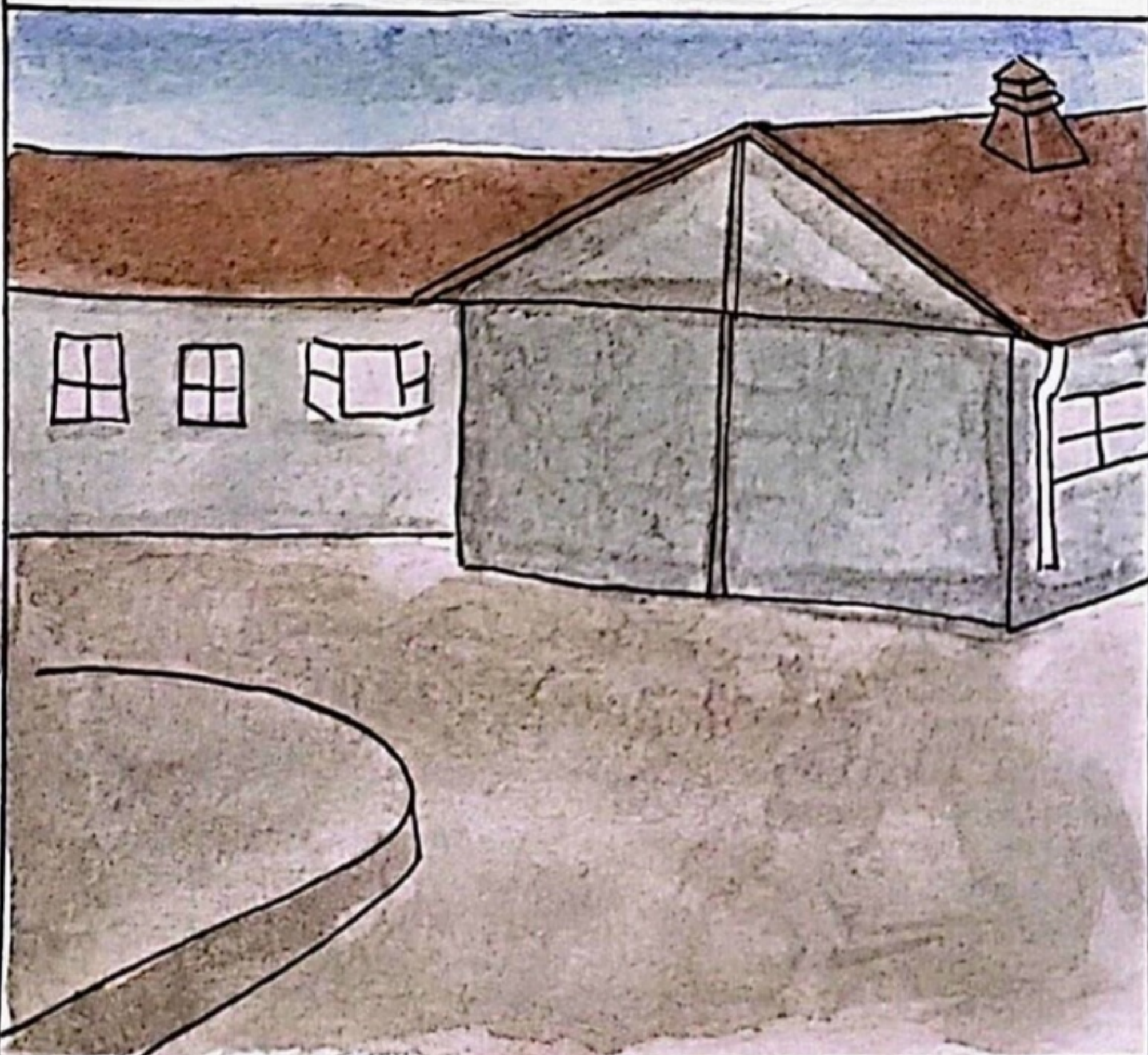


She used to say that she was dedicated to cooking because it was all she knew to do.



From Madrid, she wrote us letters.

In Budapest, the Jewish community was particularly important, mainly composed of intellectuals. Around 1942 and 1943, they began to be deported, or called up for forced labour and military service, as was the case with my father.

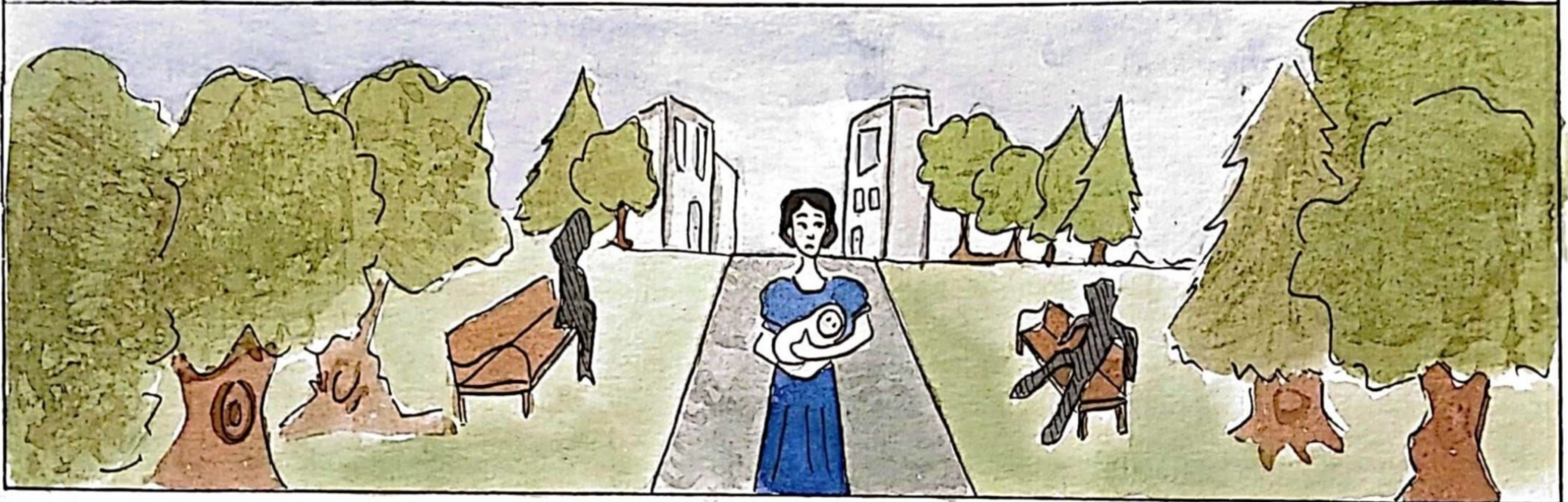


The situation gradually deteriorated, and the Nuremberg Laws were applied... My mother then got pregnant. My family was violently expelled from the house. My grandfather sold the trucks he owned, and my relatives sought refuge.

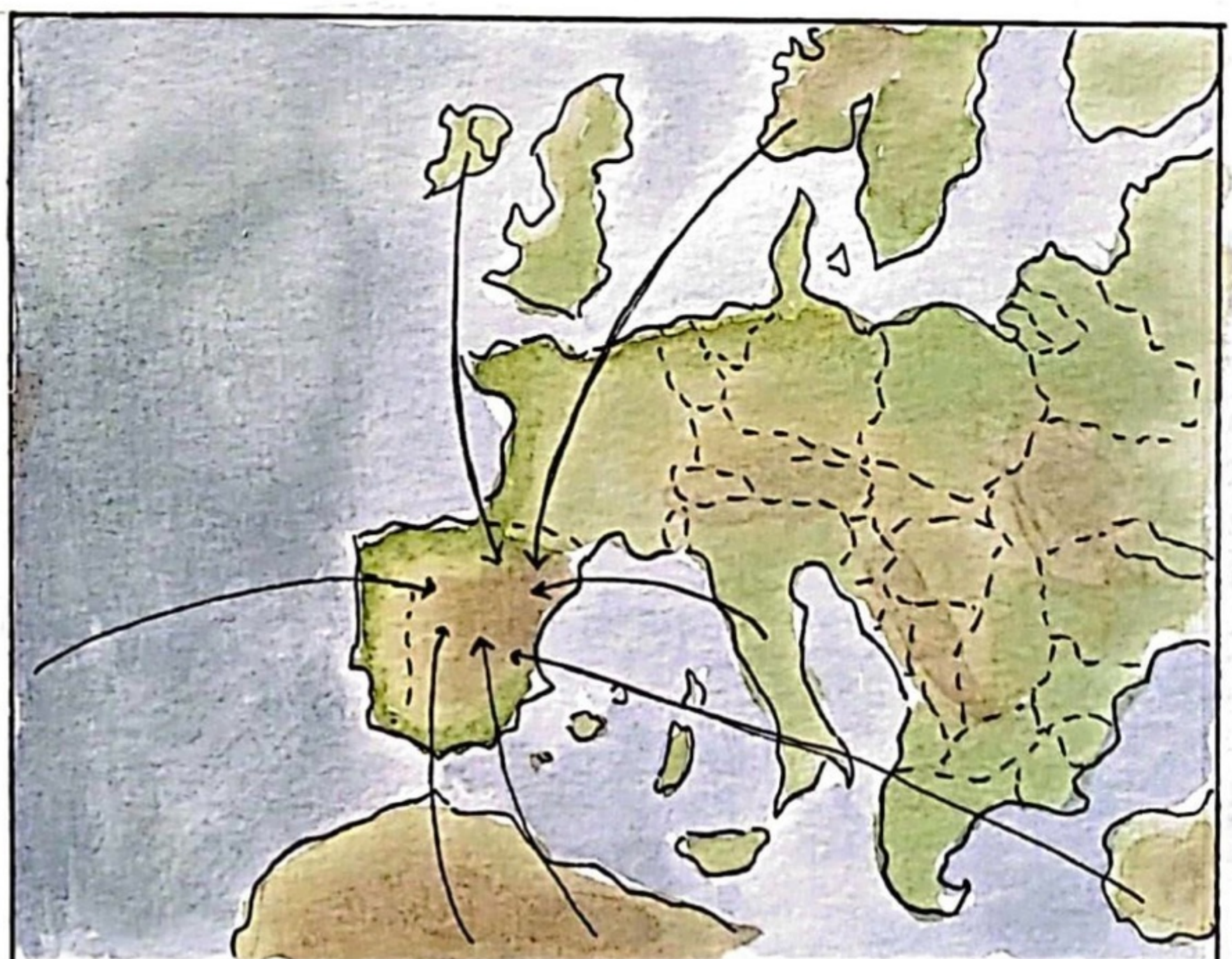
Nazi troops entered Budapest in 1944. My pregnant mother and Thomas were taken prisoner, but my grandfather managed to get them released.



That was when I was born. The streets were full of people dying from hunger, cold and the violence of the Nazi troops.



Faced with the deportation of a large part of the Jewish population, the diplomatic corps in Budapest got together and appointed the Spaniard Ángel Sanz Briz to run the Spanish embassy in Hungary.



He implemented an old law of Primo de Rivera, which allowed Sephardic Jews to return to Spain

In this way, he issued two hundred passports to welcome Jewish families from Europe to Spain.



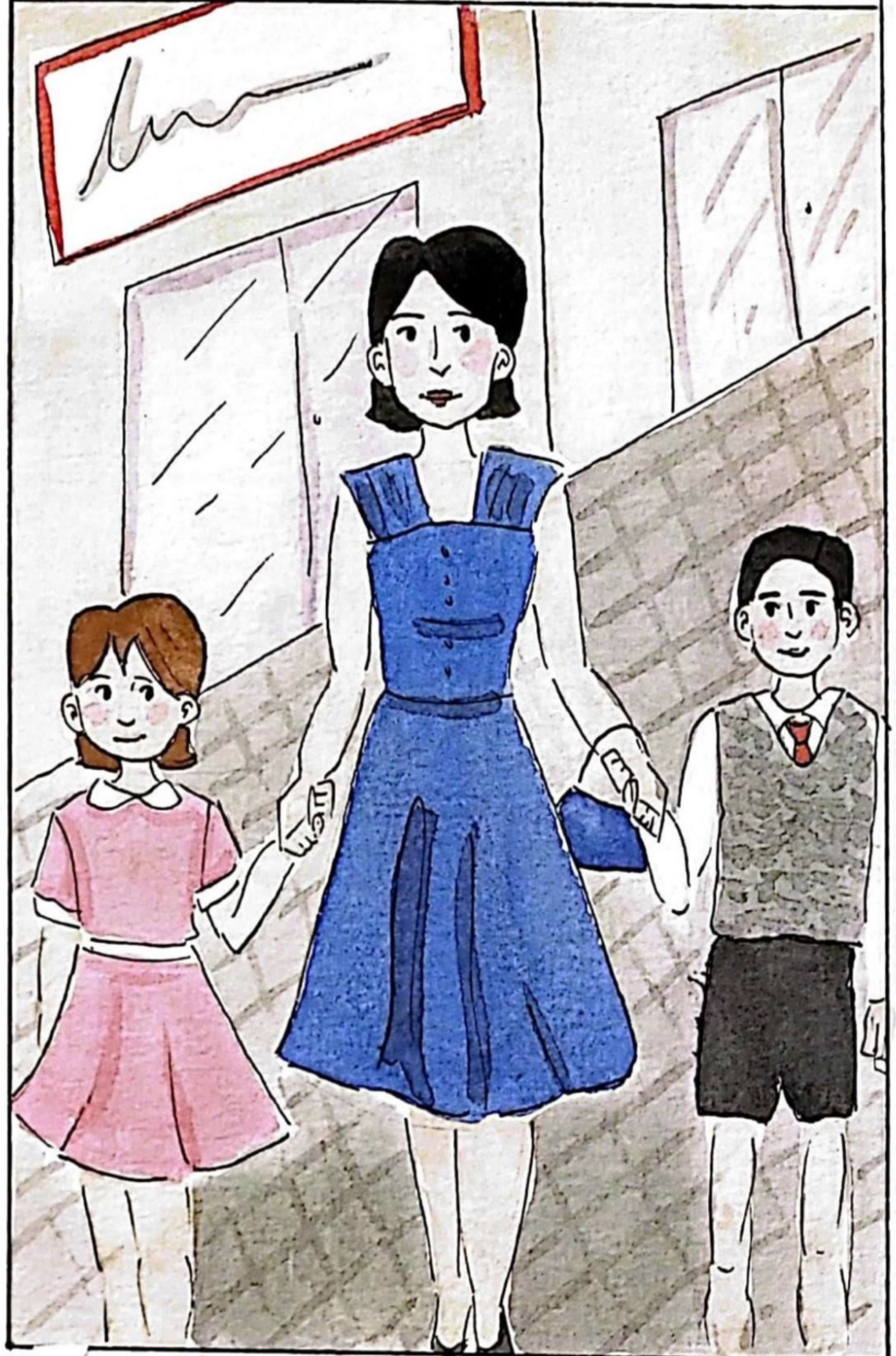
It was already the end of the war, and Hungary was liberated.



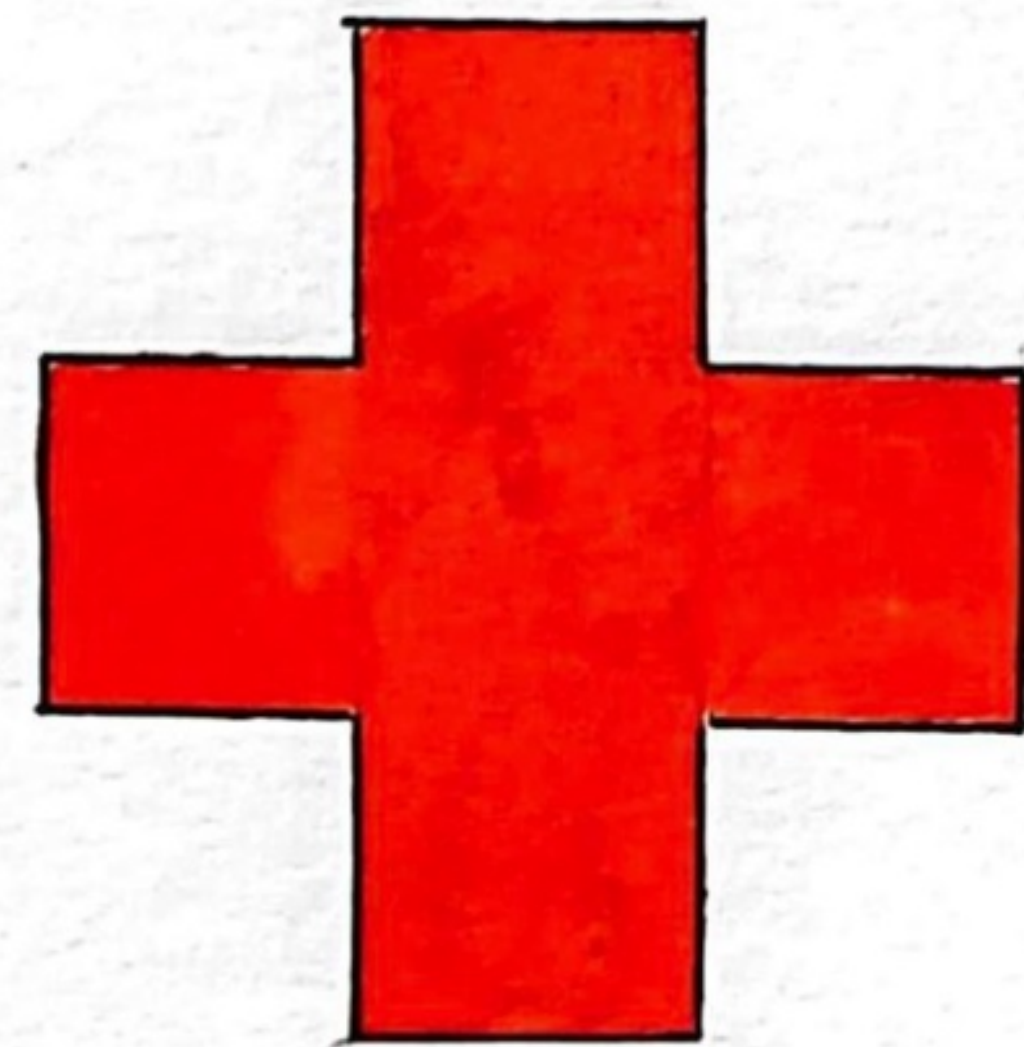
My grandmother returned to Tangier with her sister-in-law, where she set up a hotel overlooking the sea.



As my grandmother was in Madrid and her letters proved that we had a connection to Spain, my mother, my brother, and I were taken in. We were saved.



My grandmother donated money to the Red Cross, so it was sent to us. We had lost our Hungarian passport.



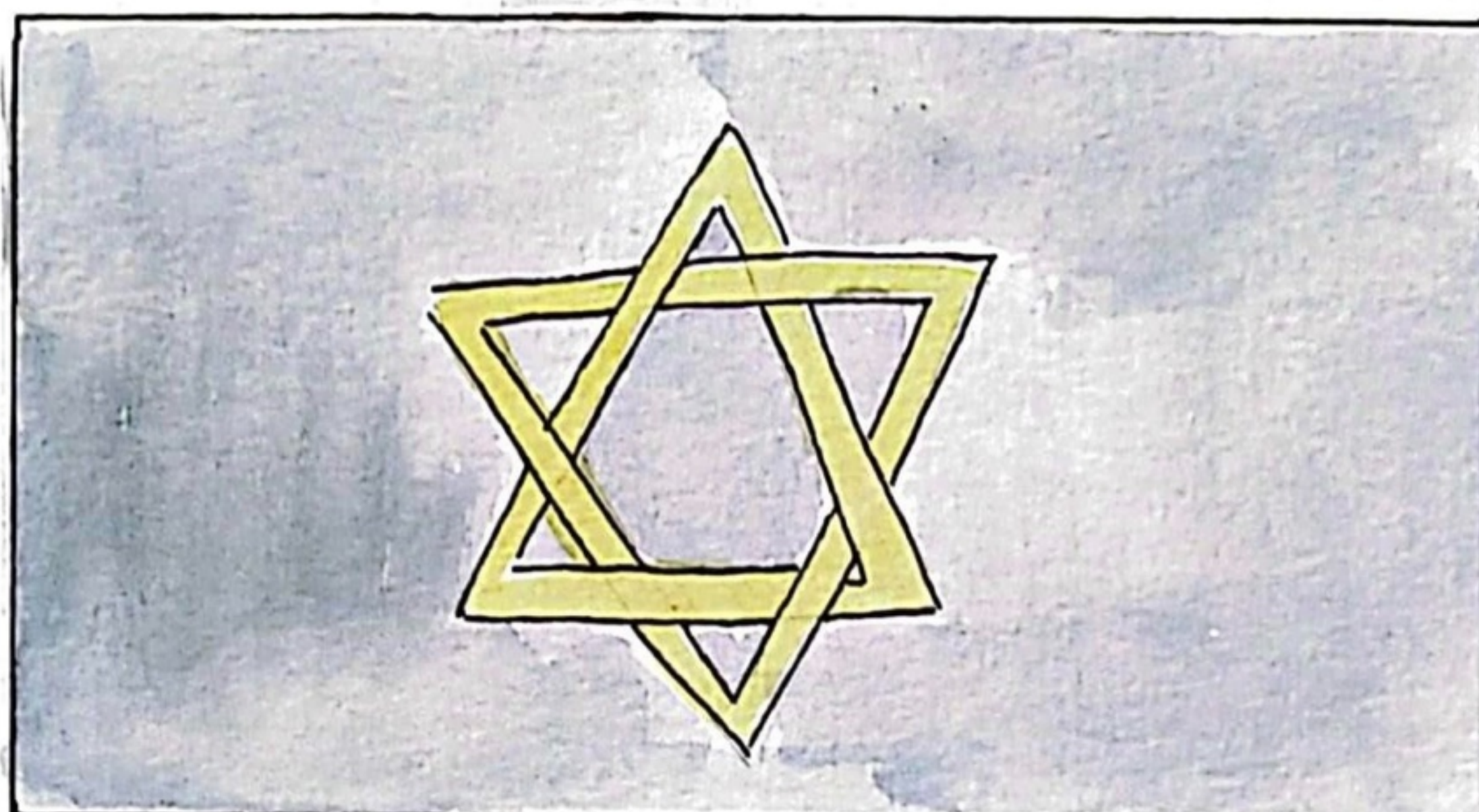
On one of our many moves, my mother met my future stepfather, Jozsi Bohrer, who had a son around my age.



Afterwards, we lived in Tangier for a few years. It was like coming out of the darkness.



After our stay there, my father was offered a job in Madrid, where we have lived since 1954.



My father was highly active on the board of the Jewish Community, and it was difficult to find a non-religious school.



Neither my mother nor my father told us what had happened years before. They did not want to give us any negative experiences.

We lived an ordinary life in Spain. Although we spoke Hungarian at home, we did not go to church, unlike other children, and did not eat the same food as them. I knew we were different.



When my father died nine years ago, I found in a safe the documents that revealed my family's history.

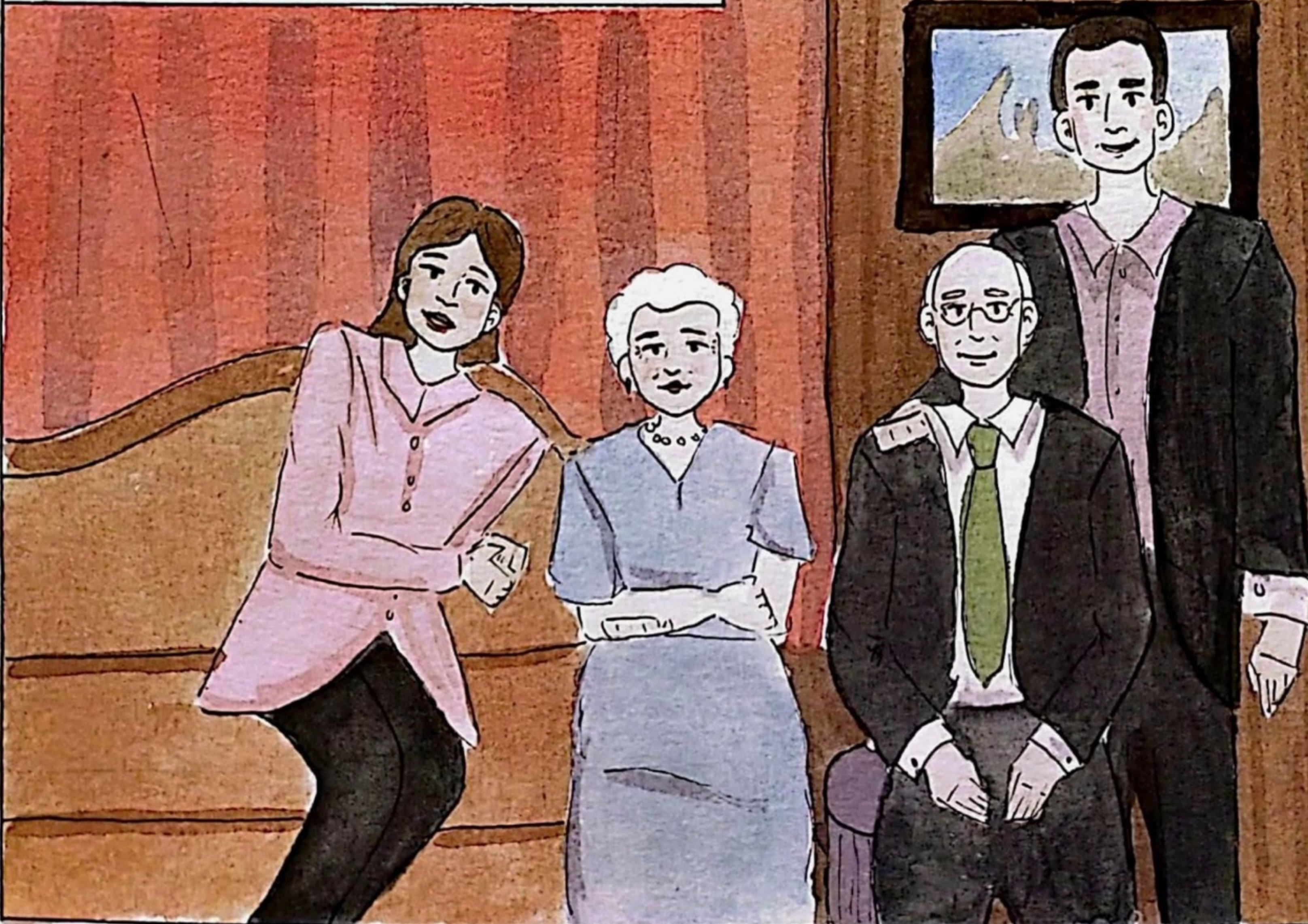
It was then that, with a friend who is a journalist, I collected them. As a result, I discovered the whereabouts of my grandparents...



..., learned about my mother's struggle, and found out that my biological father had died on a death march.



Since then, I have been able to reconstruct my family's history.



THE END