

Antonio Paolotti · Casper Pasveer · Gavin Wallace

Mengeste



MENGESTE

antonio paoletti . casper pasveer . gavin wallace

- INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS -

AS A SOLDIER I WOULD OFTEN WRITE LETTERS
TO GET IN CONTACT WITH MY FAMILY.
WELL, I CAN'T WRITE MYSELF SO A COMRADE
WOULD HELP ME.

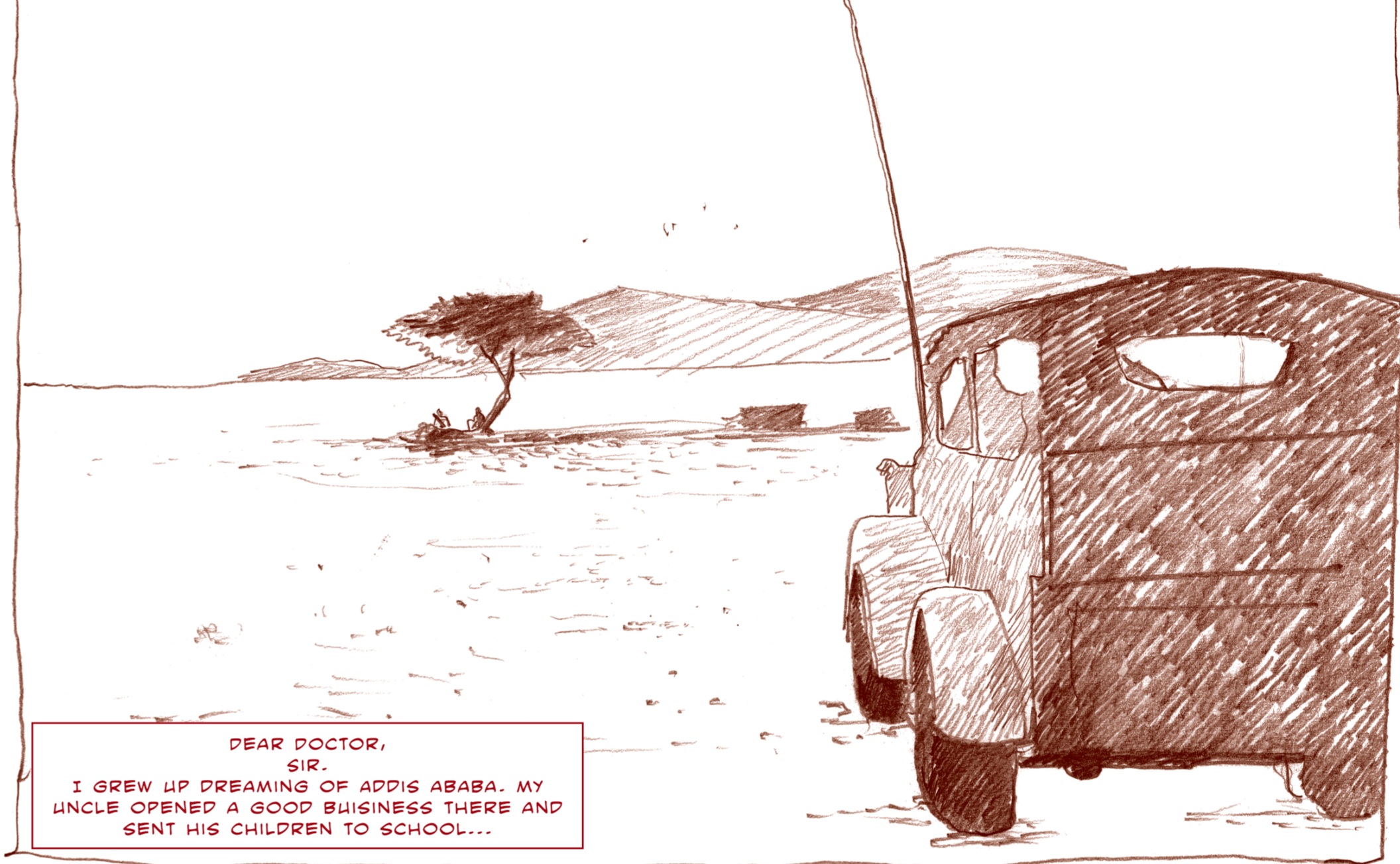
IT WAS SO HOT IN THAT DESERT,
BUT THERE WAS A TREE UNDER WHICH WE USED
TO MEET...

HOW COME THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO WRITE? I NEVER HAD THE CHANCE TO LEARN IT...

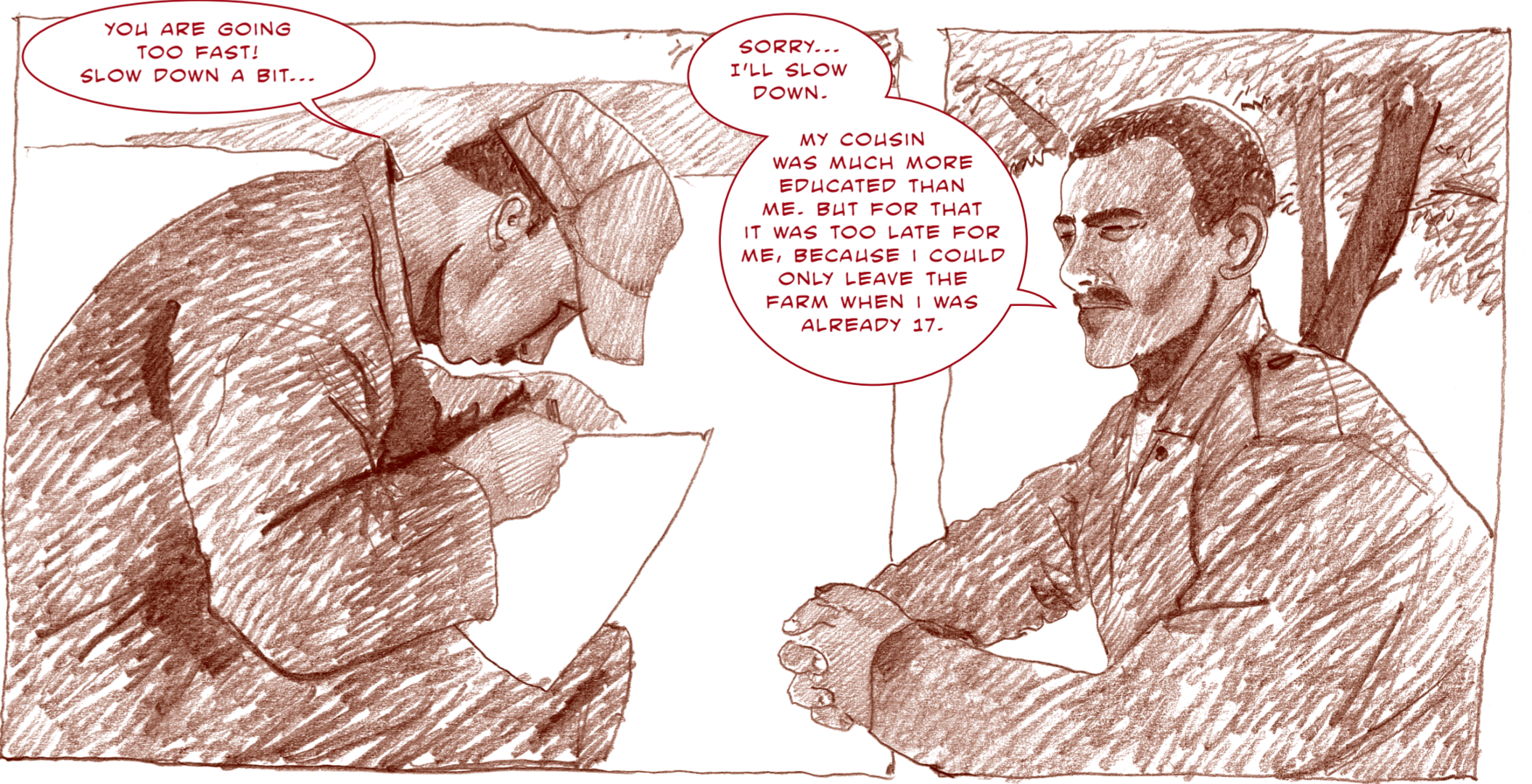
THERE WAS AN OLD DOCTOR IN MY VILLAGE WHO WAS HAPPY TO TEACH THE EAGER ONES...

LUCKY YOU...

SHOULD WE START?



DEAR DOCTOR,
SIR.
I GREW UP DREAMING OF ADDIS ABABA. MY UNCLE OPENED A GOOD BUSINESS THERE AND SENT HIS CHILDREN TO SCHOOL...



YOU ARE GOING TOO FAST! SLOW DOWN A BIT...

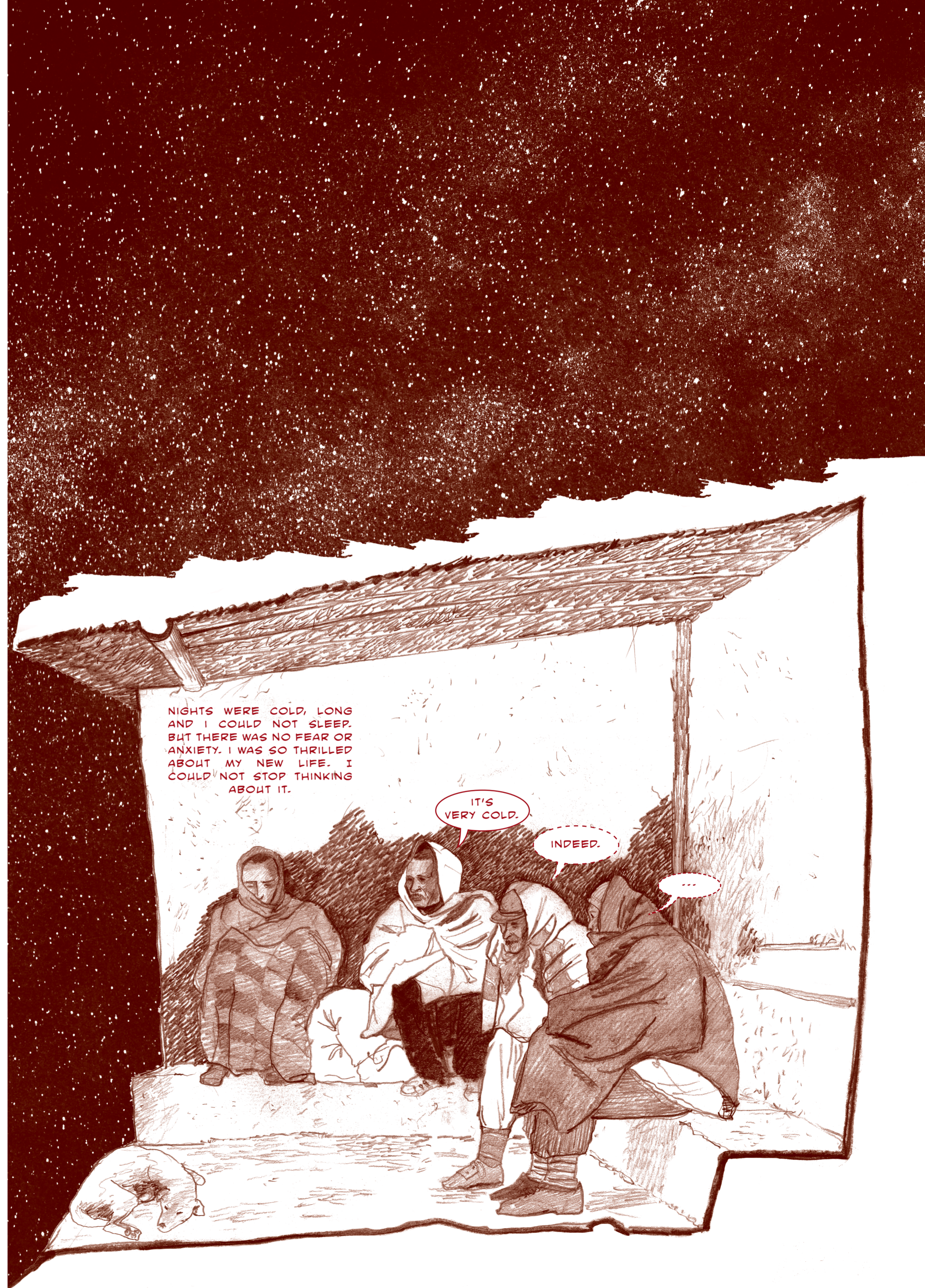
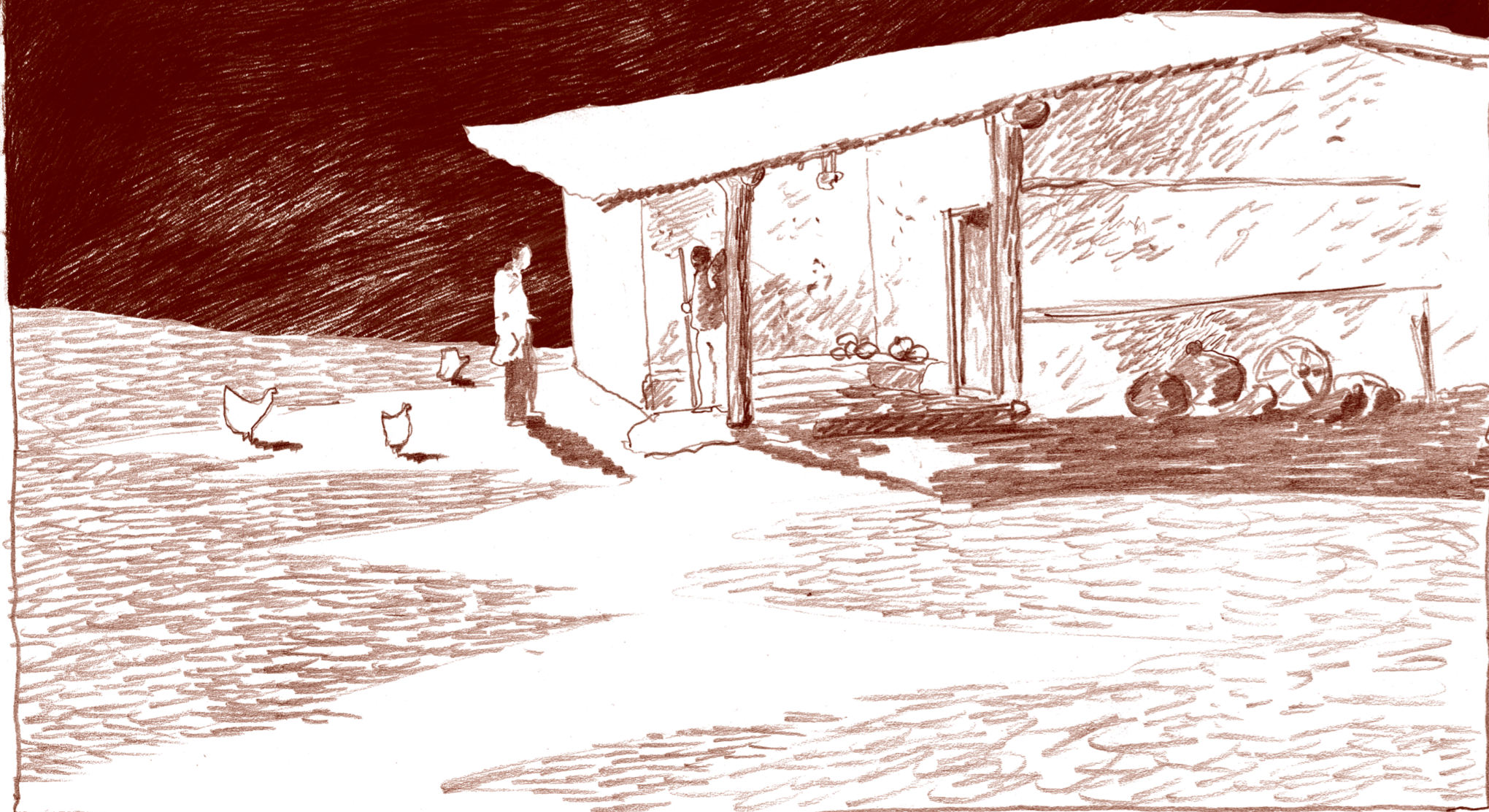
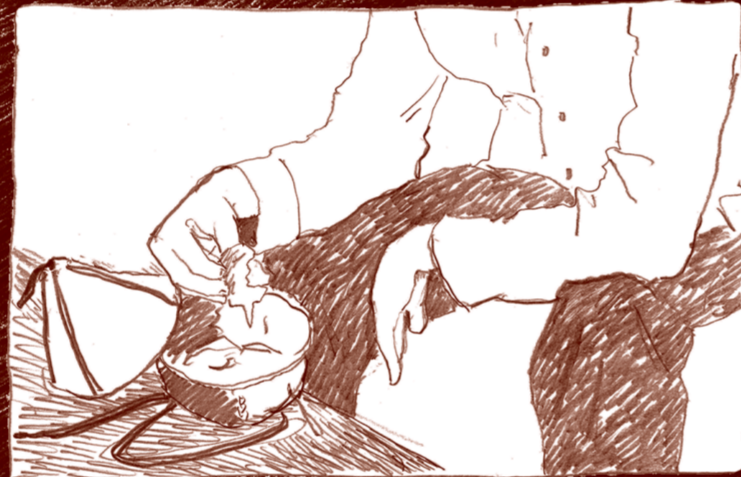
SORRY... I'LL SLOW DOWN.

MY COUSIN WAS MUCH MORE EDUCATED THAN ME. BUT FOR THAT IT WAS TOO LATE FOR ME, BECAUSE I COULD ONLY LEAVE THE FARM WHEN I WAS ALREADY 17.



...I LEFT WITHOUT TELLING MY PARENTS, THEY WOULD HAVE NEVER LET ME GO. THEY WANTED FOR ME TO BE A FARMER LIKE THEM. BUT I HAD OTHER PLANS...

THERE WAS A BUS TO ADDIS. IT WAS A THREE DAYS WALK. I HAD NOWHERE TO GO, BUT PEOPLE WERE NICE AND LET ME SPEND THE NIGHT IN THEIR VERANDAS. IF I WAS LUCKY I COULD EVEN GET SOME FOOD AND WATER. IN ANY CASE, I HAD MY LUNCH BASKET WITH INJERA.



NIGHTS WERE COLD, LONG AND I COULD NOT SLEEP. BUT THERE WAS NO FEAR OR ANXIETY. I WAS SO THRILLED ABOUT MY NEW LIFE. I COULD NOT STOP THINKING ABOUT IT.

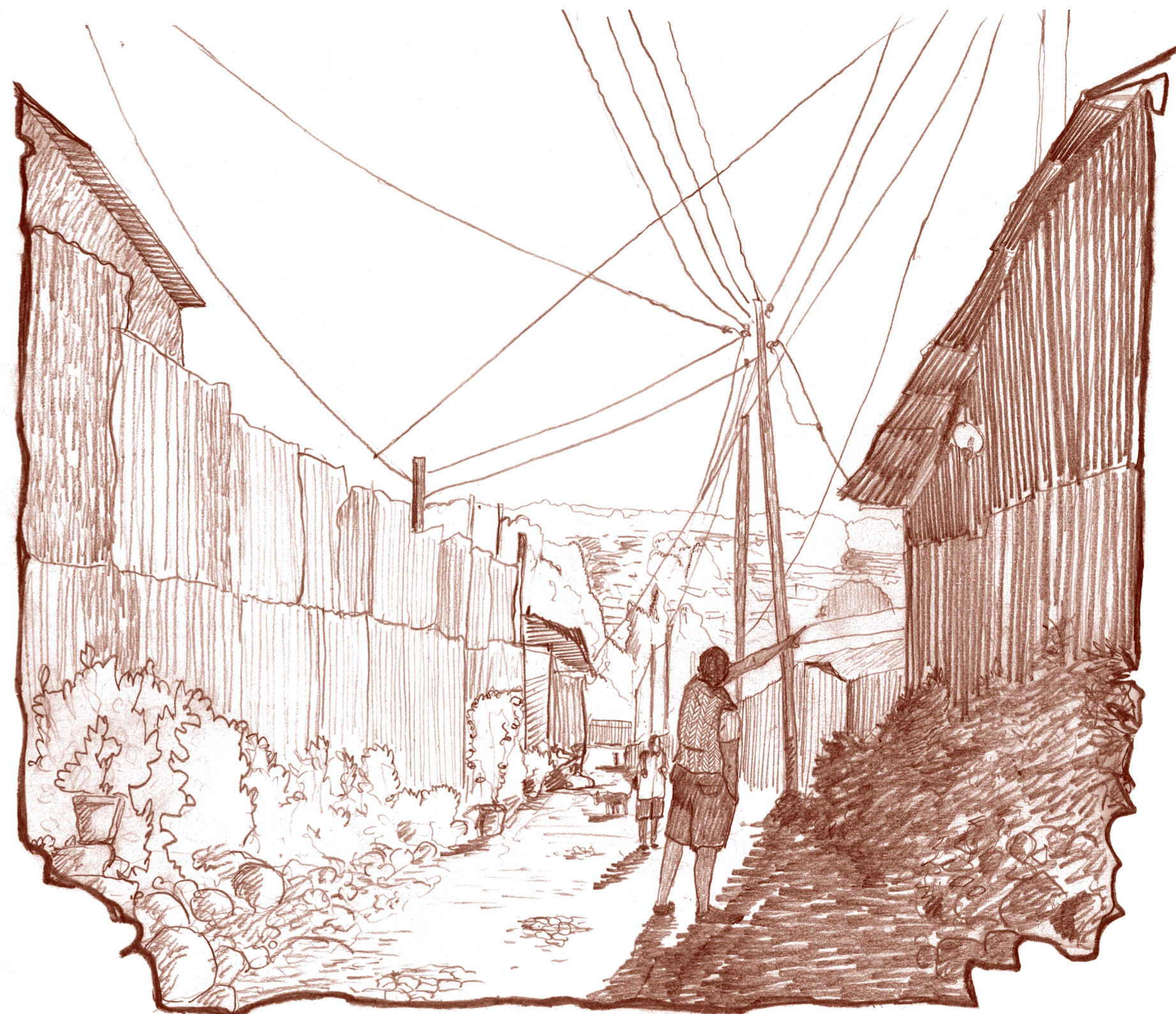
IT'S VERY COLD.

INDEED.

NOW, DEAR SIR, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU HAVE EVER TRAVELLED IN OUR COUNTRY BY BUS, BUT I CAN TELL YOU THAT IT IS QUITE THE EXPERIENCE. I STILL REMEMBER THAT PACKED BUS TO THIS DAY.



IT WAS EASY TO FIND KECHENE, EVERYBODY WAS HAPPY TO HELP ME. AND EVEN EASIER TO GET DIRECTIONS TO THE COMPOUND WHERE MY RELATIVES WERE LIVING. IN KECHENE, EVERYBODY KNOWS EACH OTHER.



MOREOVER, IT SEEMS THAT ETHIOPIAN STOMACHS ARE REALLY NOT MEANT FOR TRAVELLING OUR HILLS IN THAT WAY!



I WAS SO FOOLISH, SIR, TO THINK THAT ADDIS ABABA WAS SIMILAR TO THIS TOWN OF OURS. JUST BIGGER. LIKE A CALF RESEMBLES ITS MOTHER, COMPARING SMALL WITH BIG. BUT ADDIS WAS REALLY SOMETHING ELSE.



AFTER GOING HOUSE BY HOUSE, I FINALLY FOUND THE ONE OF MY AUNT AND UNCLE. I COULD NOT EVEN REMEMBER THEM EVEN IF WE KEPT ON WRITING LETTERS TO EACH OTHERS.



OH WHAT AM I SAYING!? YOU'RE A MAN NOW!



AND SO IT HAPPENED THAT KECHENE BECAME MY NEW HOME.

MY UNCLE WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE TO BUILD A HOUSE IN KECHENE. AT FIRST IT WAS VERY SMALL. ALMOST LIKE A HUT. BUT WHEN I ARRIVED THERE IT WAS ALREADY LARGER. YOU COULD STILL SEE SOME TRACES OF THE FIRST HOUSE.

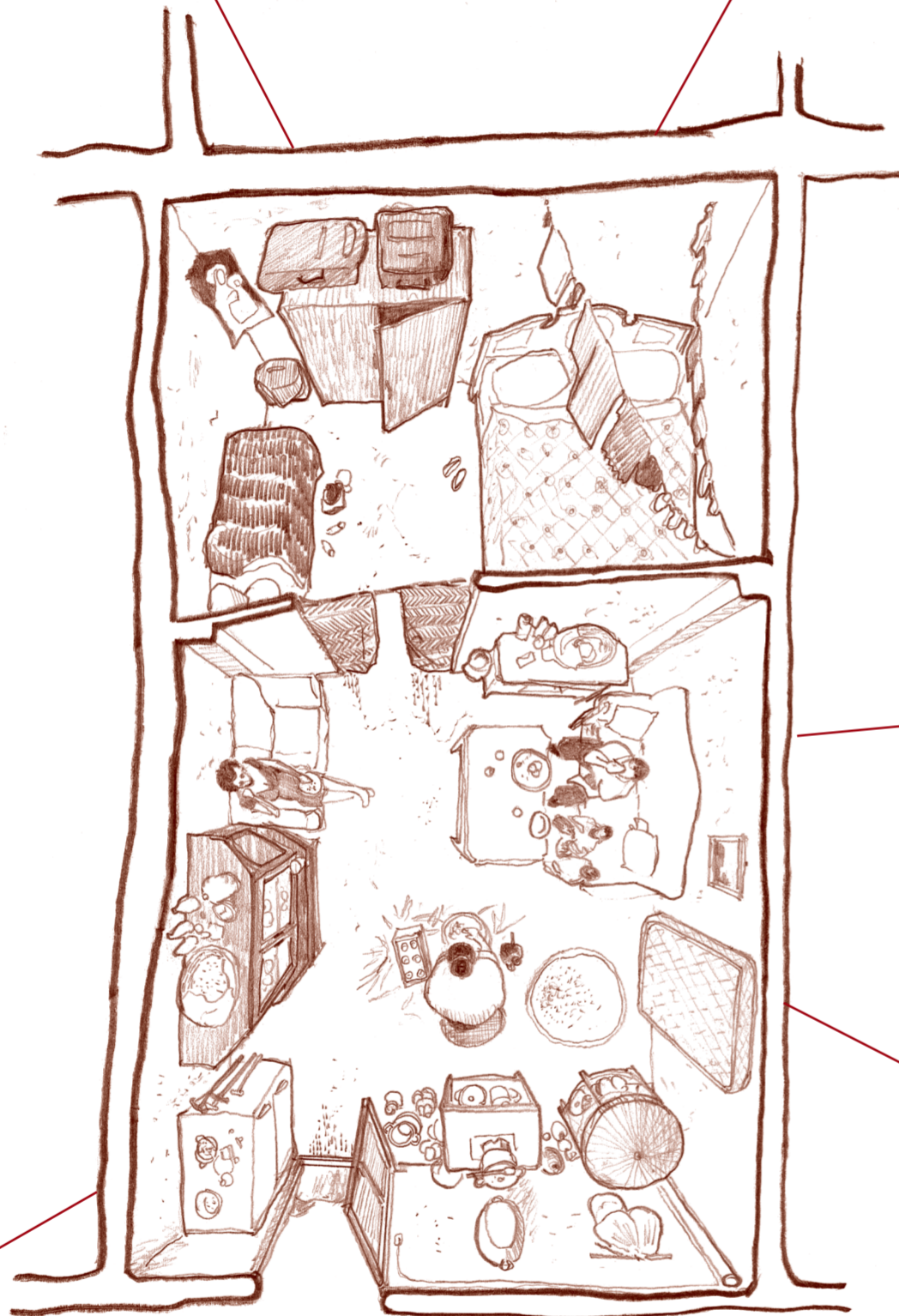
WE WERE AROUND 6 PEOPLE LIVING IN THAT HOUSE. I SAY 'AROUND' BECAUSE OFTEN SOME RELATIVES WERE STAYING FOR A WHILE WITH US.

LET ME TELL YOU A BIT MORE ABOUT IT...

LIKE MANY OTHERS IN KECHENE, ON THE TOP OF THE CLOSETS, WE USED TO HAVE SEVERAL SUITCASES. SOMETIMES A RELATIVE WORKING SOMEWHERE ELSE WAS VISITING US, SOMETIMES WE WERE VISITING THEM. WE ARE ALWAYS ON THE MOVE!

SMALL PIECES OF WHITE CLOTHES WERE OFTEN HANGING ABOVE THE BED OF MY AUNT AND UNCLE.

HOWEVER, BY NIGHT THEY WERE HOPEFULLY DRY AND STORED SOMEPLACE ELSE.



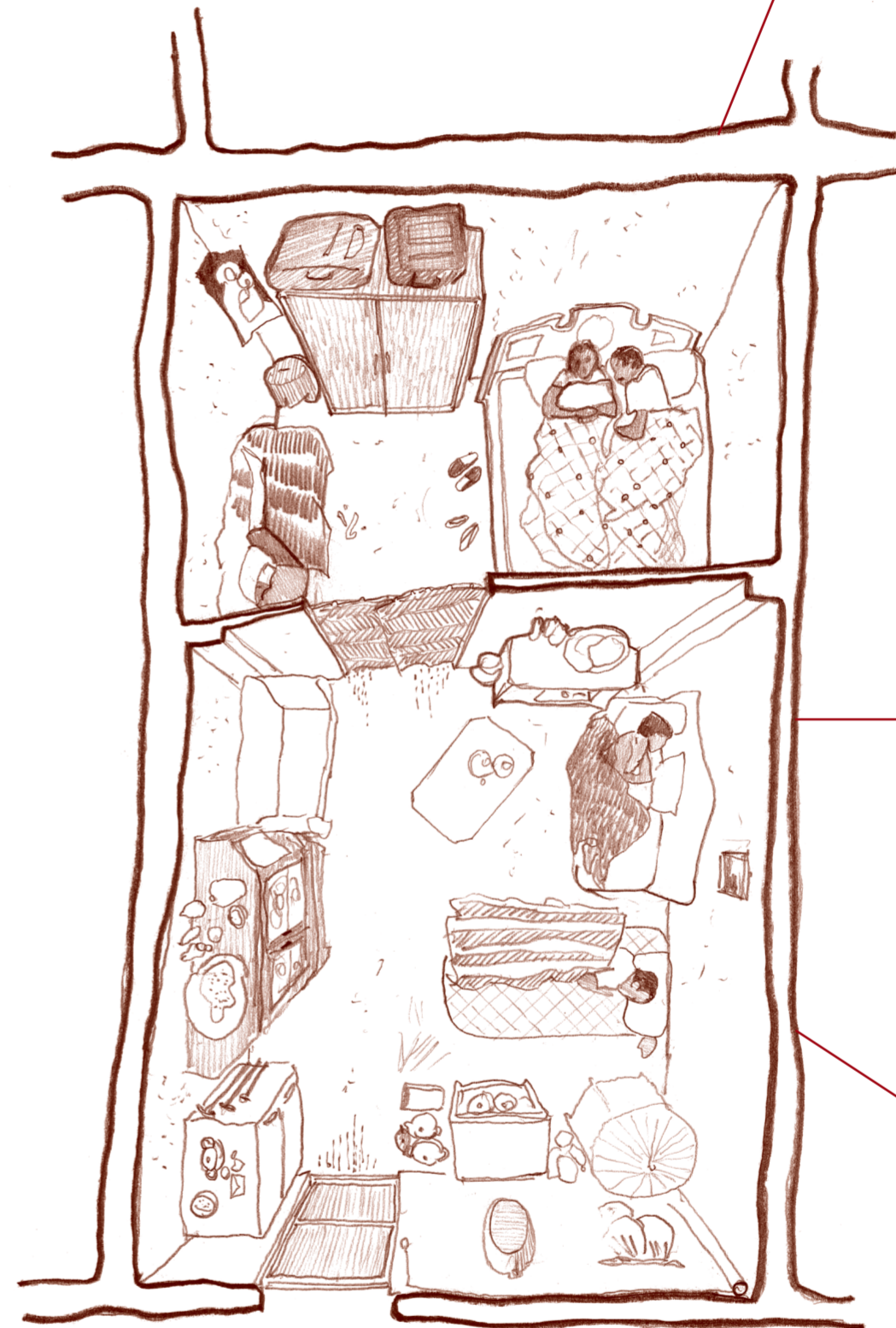
IN THE LEFT CORNER, THE FRIDGE... WAIT, THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE! IF MEMORY SERVES, IN THAT CORNER THERE WAS NOTHING YET.

THAT CENTRAL SPACE IS ALWAYS THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE IN THE HOUSE- EVEN IN THE COURTSIDE WHERE I COME FROM, YOU CAN FIND SIMILAR ARRANGEMENTS OF THE FURNITURE TO SIT ALL TOGETHER.

MY PLACE TO SLEEP IN MY UNCLE'S HOUSE WAS A MATTRES LEANING AGAINST THE WALL BY DAY...

IN A CORNER OF THE HOUSE MY AUNT USED TO HAVE THE KITCHEN EQUIPMENT.

HANGING ON THE WALL THERE WAS A BASIN THAT SHE USED TO CLEAN THE KITCHENWARE.



OUR SOFA DID NOT HAVE THE SIDES, SO THAT YOU COULD SLEEP THERE COMFORTABLY.

...AND LAYING ON THE FLOOR BY NIGHT.

AND IT WAS IN THE SAME NEIGHBOURHOOD THAT I MET MY WIFE. BUT BEFORE WE MARRIED WE HAD BEEN FRIENDS FOR A LONG TIME. I REMEMBER IT AS THE DAY OF IT YESTERDAY WHEN I FIRST MET HER. IT WAS IN THE KECHENE MEDHANE ALEM CHURCH.



I THINK I MADE SOME BAD JOKE JUST TO GET HER ATTENTION...



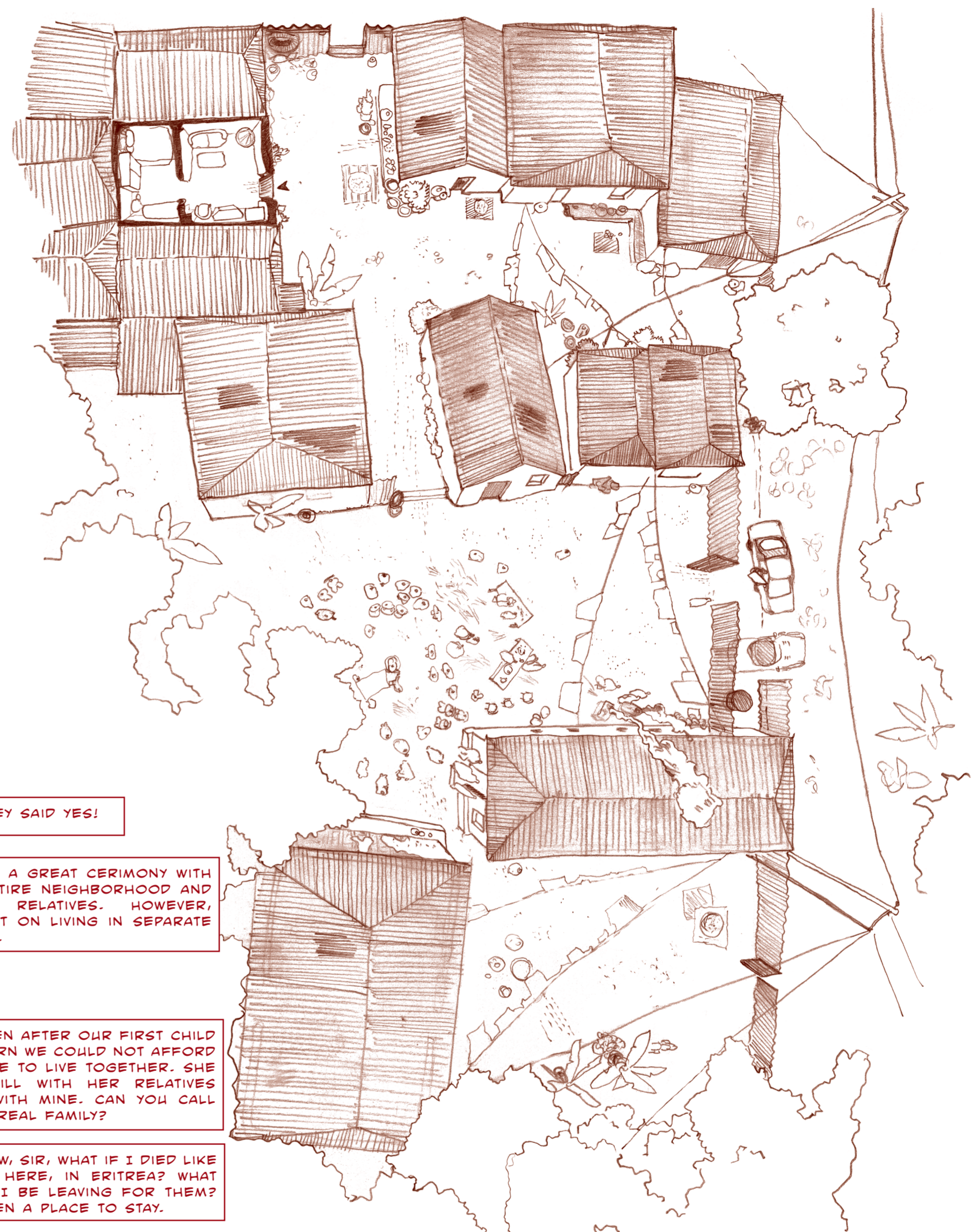
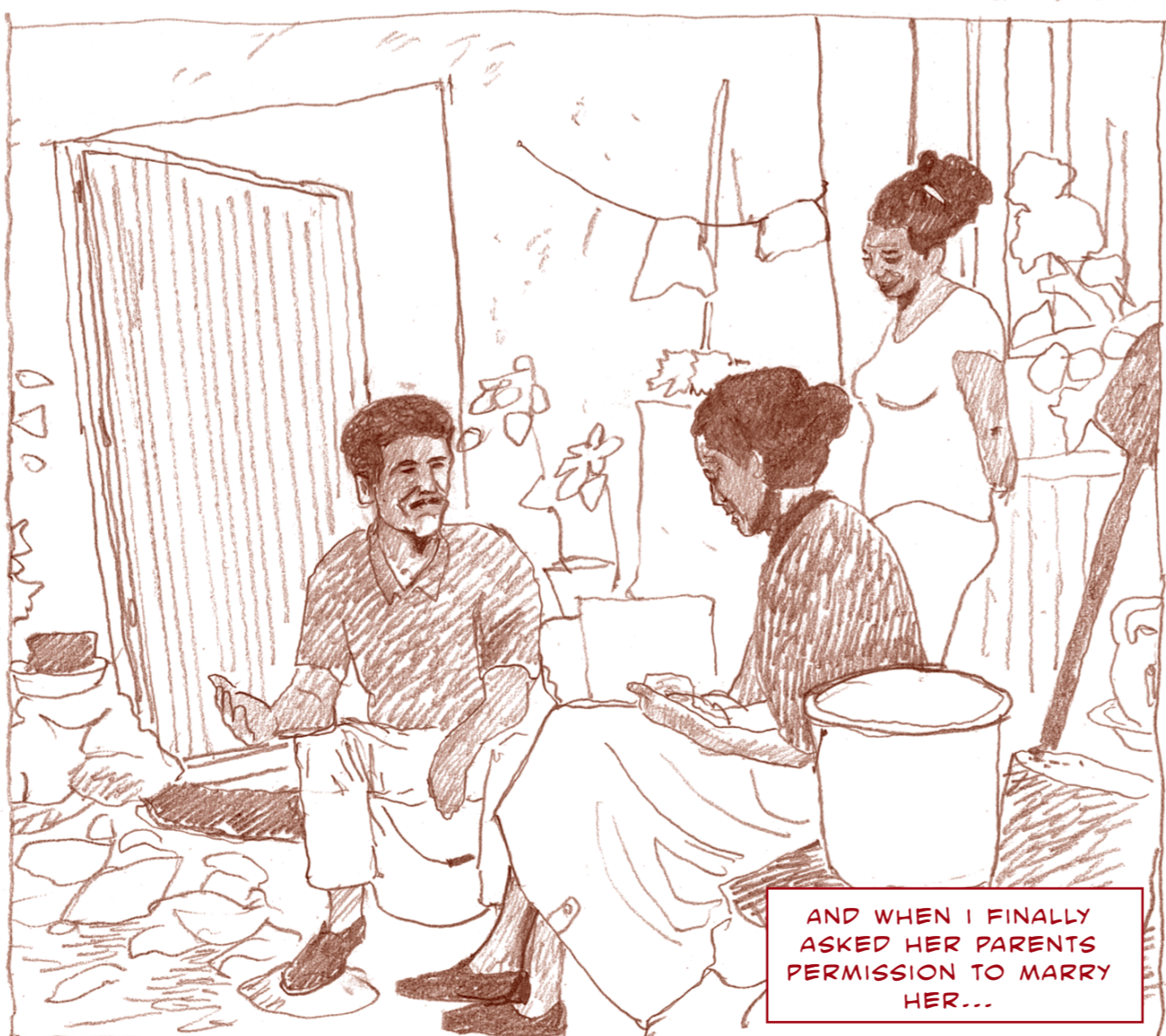
BUT HER LAUGH, SIR... SHE WAS LIKE NO OTHER!



AS WE WERE GROWING UP TOGETHER I NEVER LOST THAT FEELING: WE WERE IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER.



AND WHEN I FINALLY ASKED HER PARENTS PERMISSION TO MARRY HER...



...THEY SAID YES!

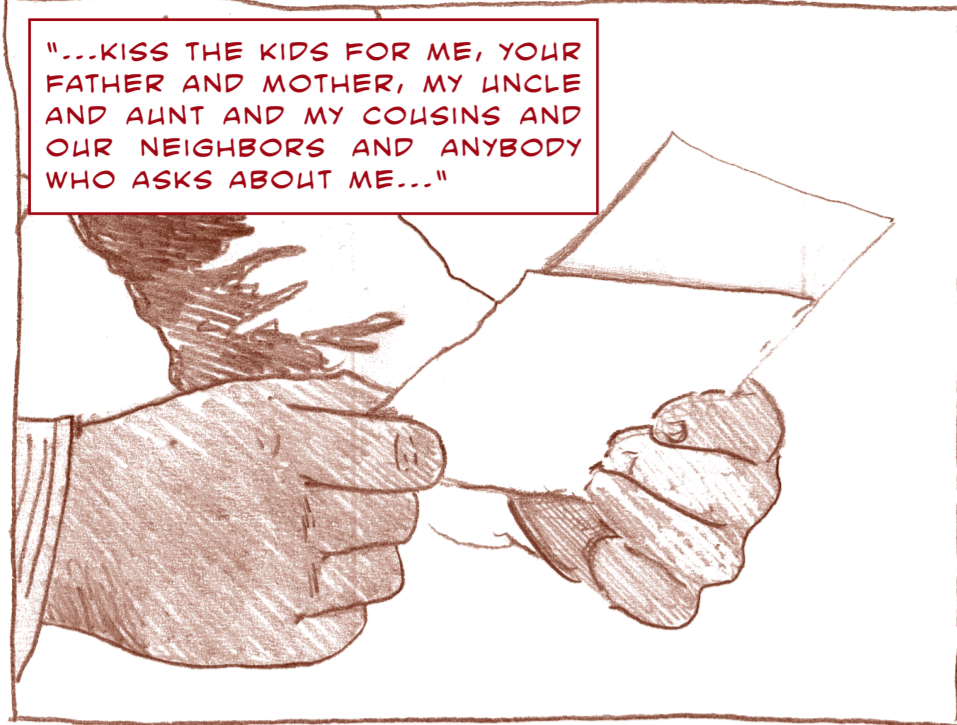
WE HAD A GREAT CERIMONY WITH THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD AND OTHER RELATIVES. HOWEVER, WE KEPT ON LIVING IN SEPARATE PLACES.

AND EVEN AFTER OUR FIRST CHILD WAS BORN WE COULD NOT AFFORD A HOUSE TO LIVE TOGETHER. SHE WAS STILL WITH HER RELATIVES AND I WITH MINE. CAN YOU CALL THAT A REAL FAMILY?

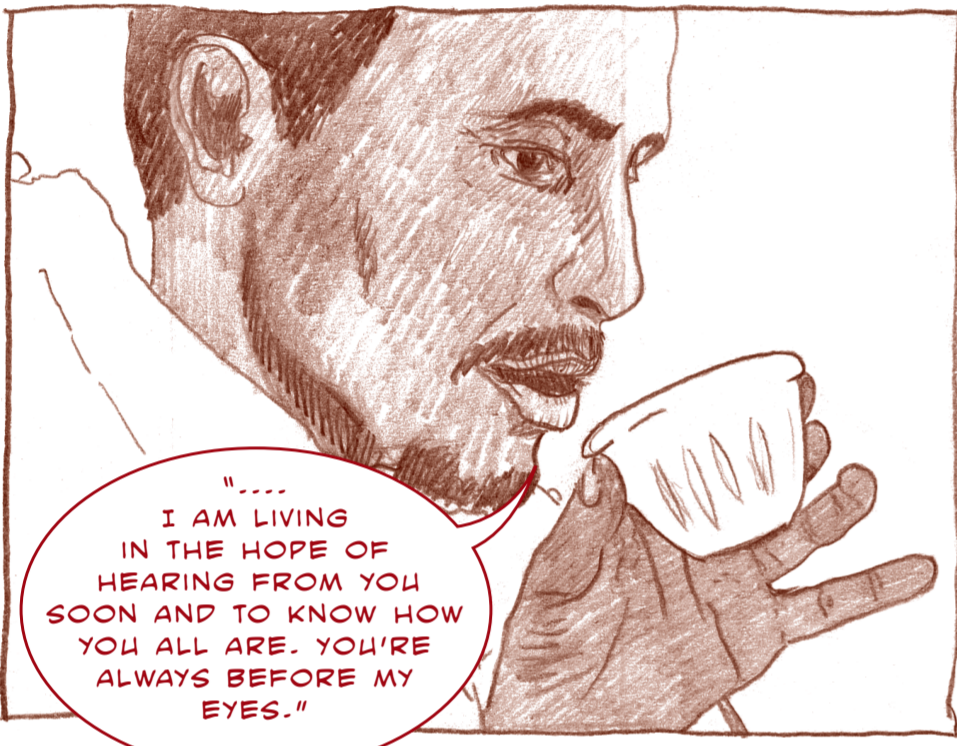
AND NOW, SIR, WHAT IF I DIED LIKE A DOG HERE, IN ERITREA? WHAT WOULD I BE LEAVING FOR THEM? NOT EVEN A PLACE TO STAY.

I AM SORRY THAT I HAD TO GO ON WITH THIS ENTIRE STORY, SIR, BUT I WANT THIS DELICATE SITUATION TO BE CLEAR. I BELIEVE THAT IS MY RIGHT AS A SOLDIER, A SERVICEMAN GIVING HIS LIFE FOR THE COUNTRY, TO HAVE A PLACE TO LEAVE TO MY FAMILY.

YOURS SINCERELY,
MENGESTE BOGALE.



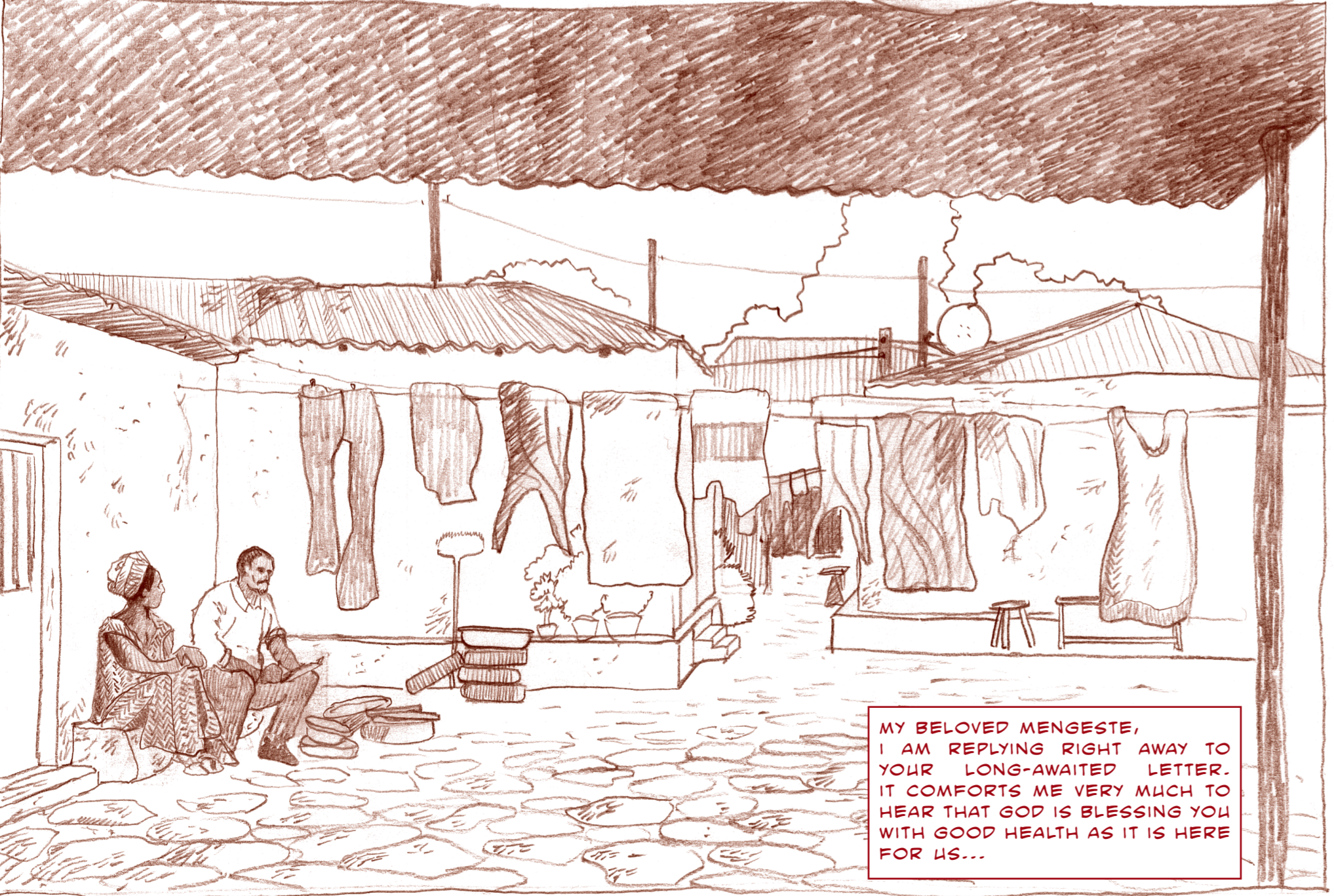
"...KISS THE KIDS FOR ME, YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER, MY UNCLE AND AUNT AND MY COUSINS AND OUR NEIGHBORS AND ANYBODY WHO ASKS ABOUT ME..."



"..... I AM LIVING IN THE HOPE OF HEARING FROM YOU SOON AND TO KNOW HOW YOU ALL ARE. YOU'RE ALWAYS BEFORE MY EYES."



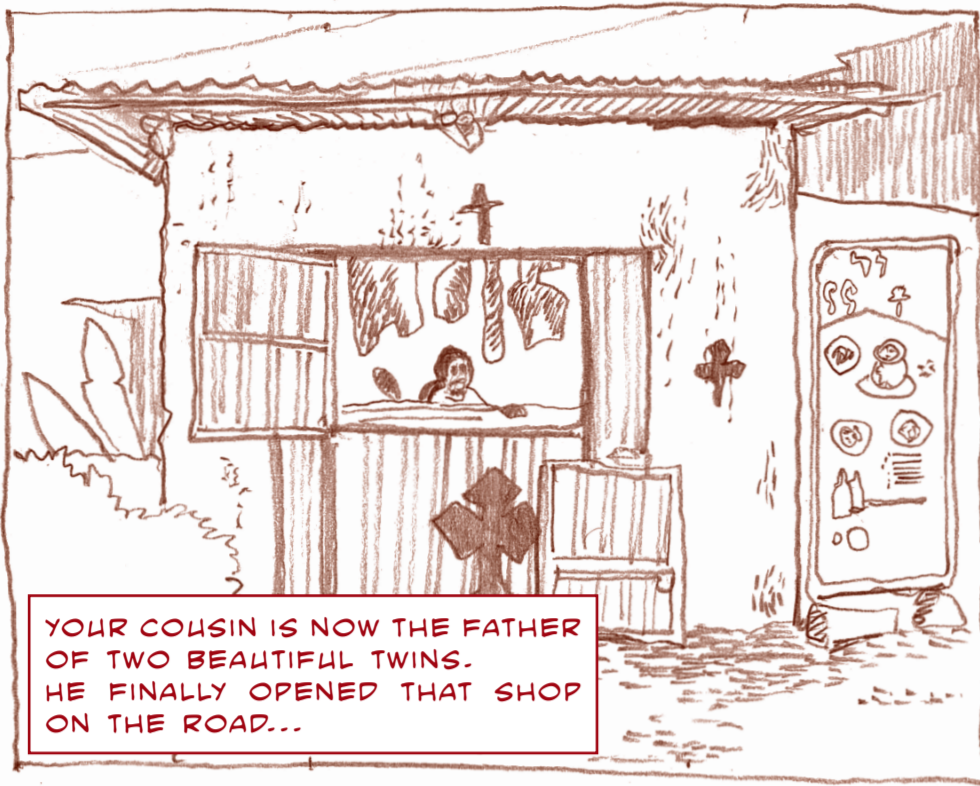
I WISH TO WRITE HIM BACK, DEAR TSEHAI. WOULD YOU HAVE THE TIME TO SIT WITH ME AND WRITE?



MY BELOVED MENGESTE, I AM REPLYING RIGHT AWAY TO YOUR LONG-AWAITED LETTER. IT COMFORTS ME VERY MUCH TO HEAR THAT GOD IS BLESSING YOU WITH GOOD HEALTH AS IT IS HERE FOR US...



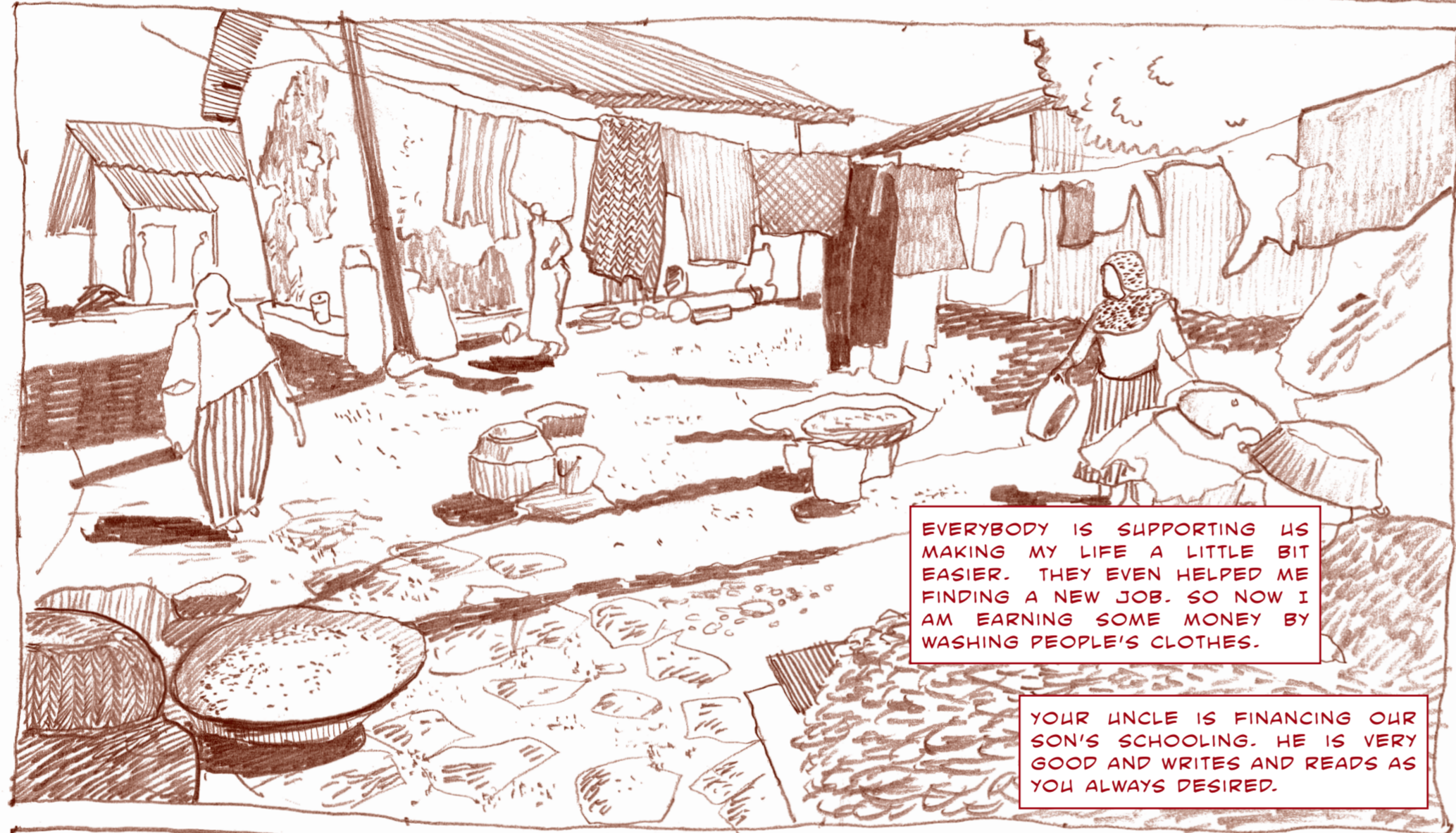
SO MANY THINGS CHANGED LATELY THAT IT WILL BE HARD FOR YOU TO RECOGNIZE KECHENE. MOST OF THE HOUSES ARE GROWING BIGGER AND MANY NEW FAMILIES ARRIVED IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



YOUR COUSIN IS NOW THE FATHER OF TWO BEAUTIFUL TWINS. HE FINALLY OPENED THAT SHOP ON THE ROAD...



...AS MANY OTHERS ARE DOING! NOW WE REALLY HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED SO CLOSE BY!

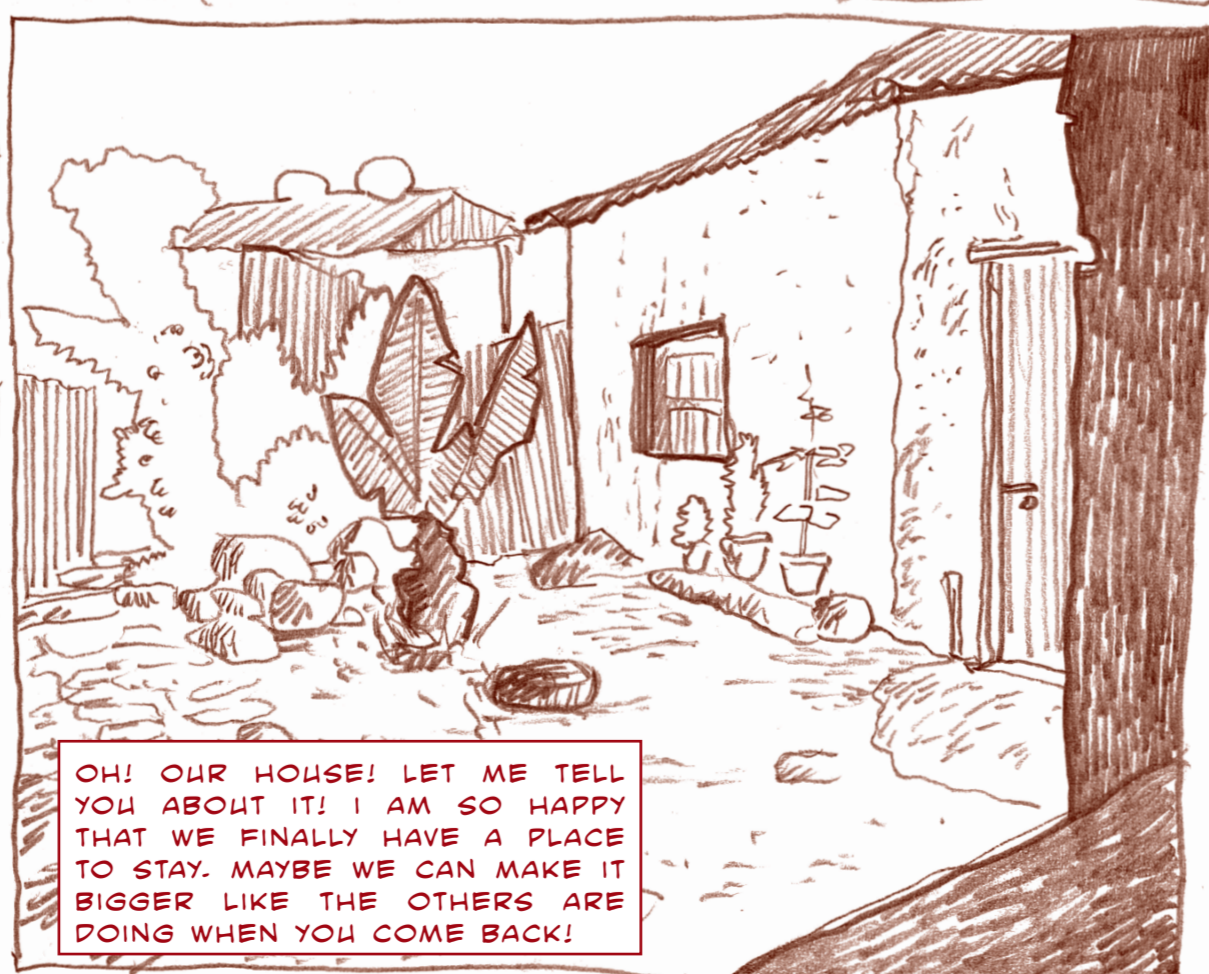


EVERYBODY IS SUPPORTING US MAKING MY LIFE A LITTLE BIT EASIER. THEY EVEN HELPED ME FINDING A NEW JOB. SO NOW I AM EARNING SOME MONEY BY WASHING PEOPLE'S CLOTHES.

YOUR UNCLE IS FINANCING OUR SON'S SCHOOLING. HE IS VERY GOOD AND WRITES AND READS AS YOU ALWAYS DESIRED.



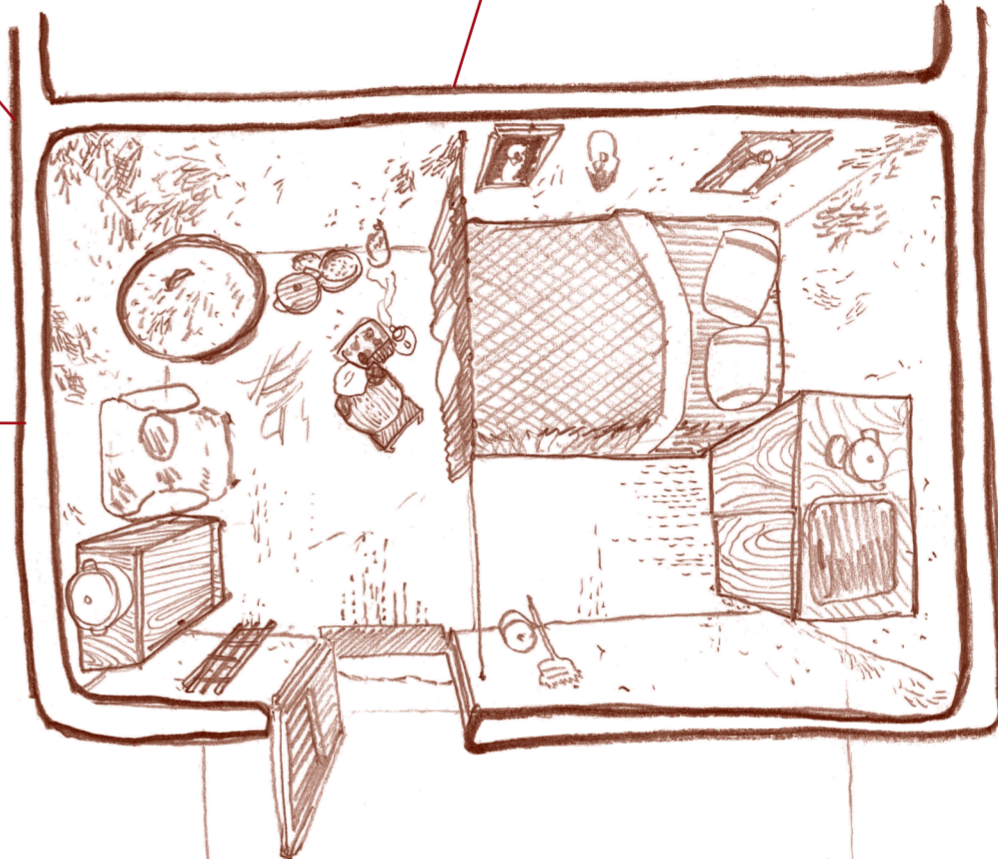
MANY SHARED TOILETS HAVE BEEN INSTALLED RECENTLY. TWO OF THEM ARE IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE...



OH! OUR HOUSE! LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT IT! I AM SO HAPPY THAT WE FINALLY HAVE A PLACE TO STAY. MAYBE WE CAN MAKE IT BIGGER LIKE THE OTHERS ARE DOING WHEN YOU COME BACK!

IN THE LEFT CORNER THERE IS THE HEARTH AND EVERYTHING THAT I NEED TO PREPARE GOOD FOOD FOR OUR CHILDREN.

I DON'T LIKE THAT FROM OUTSIDE YOU CAN LOOK AT MY BED. SO I PLACED A CURTAIN TO DIVIDE THE HOUSE.



I LIKE THE SPACE IN THE CENTRE OF THE HOUSE. I CAN PUT A CHAIR AND TALK TO A GUEST OR PREPARE FOOD OR COFFEE OR EAT THERE.

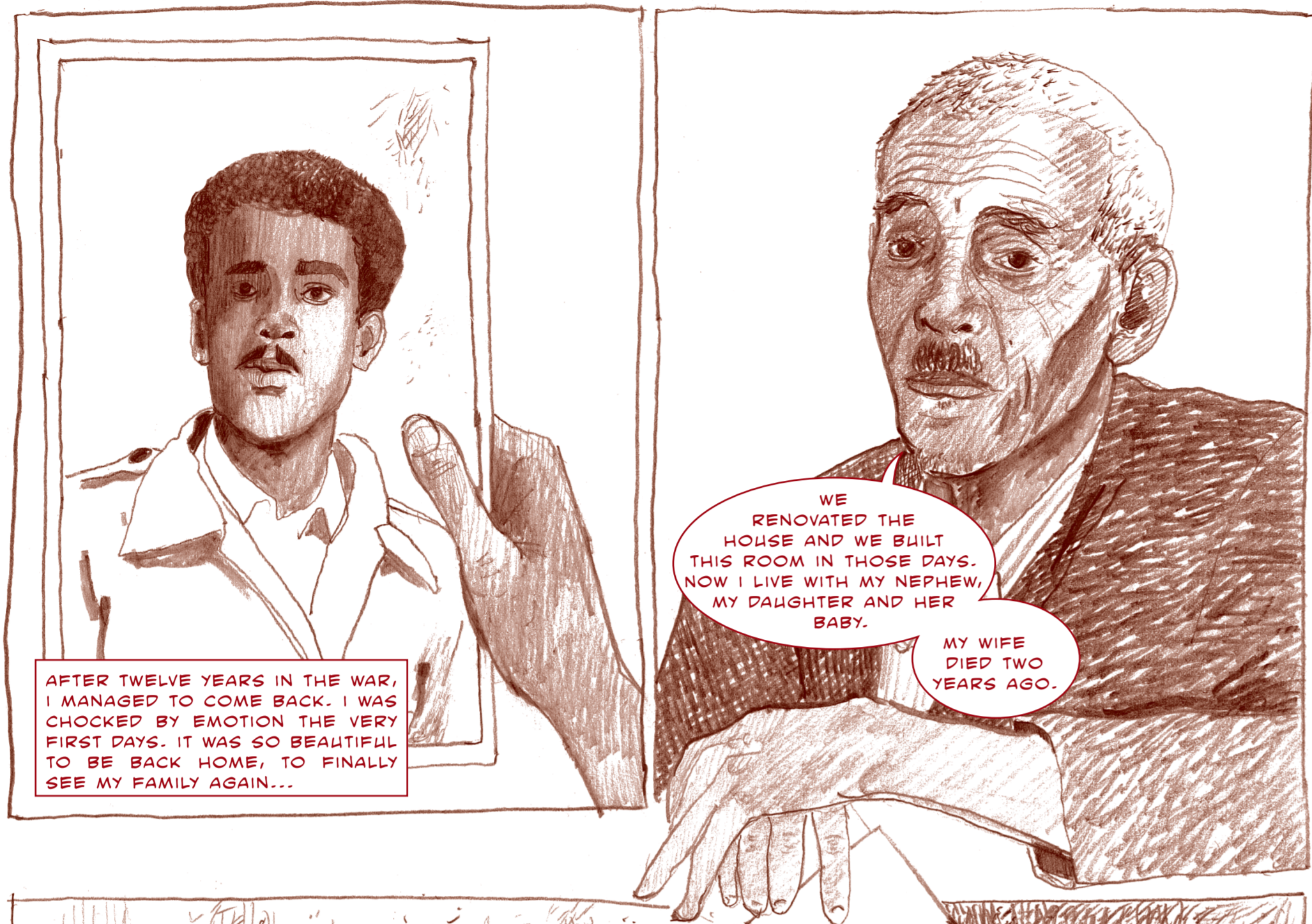
SOME WEEKS AGO I BOUGHT A MESOB IN MERKATO SO I CAN STORE SOME INJERA AND SELL IT FOR FEW BIRRS.



THAT PRAYER STICK THAT NOW IS IN THE CLOSET USE TO BE YOUR UNCLE'S.

THE CEILING IS QUITE HIGH. SO WE WERE ABLE TO BUILD A MEZZANINE WHERE WE CAN STORE THINGS. MAYBE EVEN SLEEP.

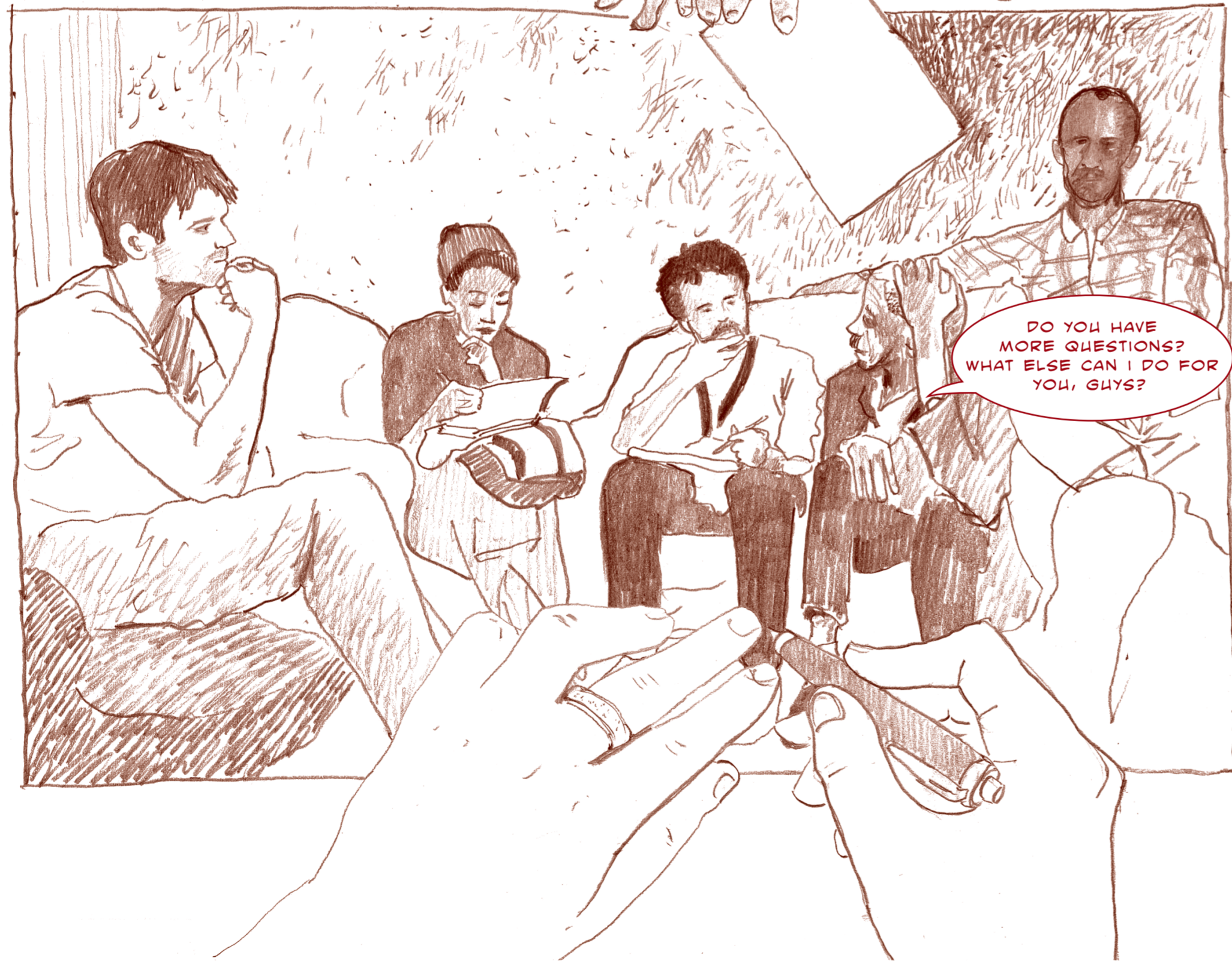
WHEN I USE MY GRANDMOTHER'S JEBENA I CAN SEE HER BEFORE MY EYES DURING A COFFEE CERIMONY, AND I CAN SEE MY GRANDFATHER AND MY COUSINS AS WE WERE EATING TOGETHER IN THE TUKUL.



AFTER TWELVE YEARS IN THE WAR, I MANAGED TO COME BACK. I WAS CHOKED BY EMOTION THE VERY FIRST DAYS. IT WAS SO BEAUTIFUL TO BE BACK HOME, TO FINALLY SEE MY FAMILY AGAIN...

WE RENOVATED THE HOUSE AND WE BUILT THIS ROOM IN THOSE DAYS. NOW I LIVE WITH MY NEPHEW, MY DAUGHTER AND HER BABY.

MY WIFE DIED TWO YEARS AGO.



DO YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS? WHAT ELSE CAN I DO FOR YOU, GUYS?

THE KITCHEN IS STILL IN THAT CORNER. MY DAUGHTER COOKS FOR ME AND THE OTHERS.

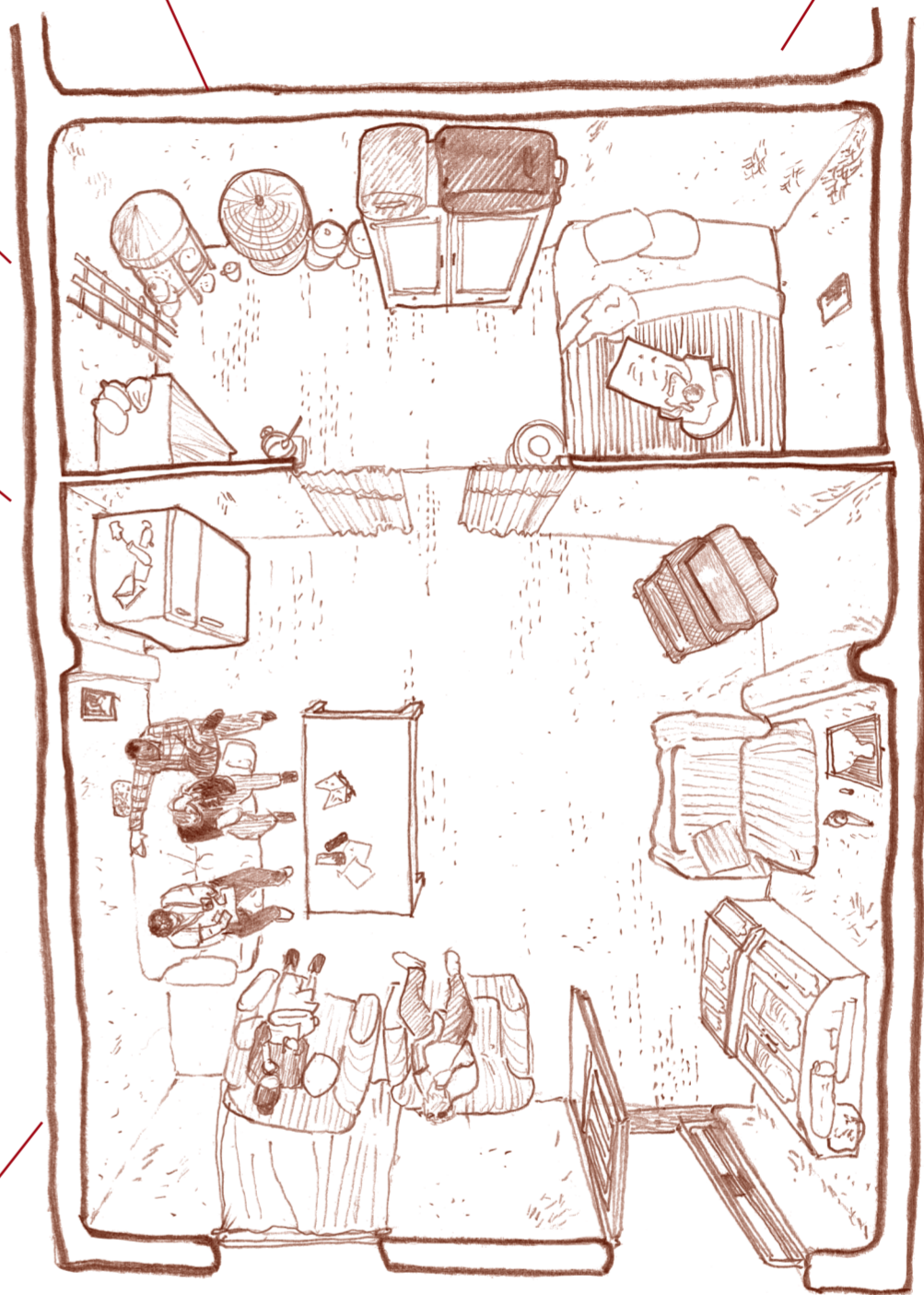
NOW THAT MY WIFE IS GONE, MY DAUGHTER SLEEPS HERE WITH HER NEWLY BORN CHILD.

IF YOU CLIMB THE LADDER THERE IS A MEZZANINE AS BIG AS THE HOUSE. IS DARK AND HOT. BUT AT NIGHT SOME RELATIVES SLEEP THERE. ESPECIALLY IF SOMEONE IS VISITING.

NOW, WE FINALLY OWN A FRIDGE FOR REAL.

OUR TELEVISION IS ALMOST ALWAYS ON. ESPECIALLY IN THE EVENING.

YOU CAN STILL SEE THE TRACES OF OUR OLD HOUSE.



THIS LARGE LIVING ROOM IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR US. IT IS VERY SPACIOUS AND BRIGHT ENOUGH. ABOVE ALL, NOW AT LEAST YOU DON'T STEP RIGHT AWAY IN ONE'S BEDROOM!

