

ABROAD

A year in Ottawa



ILJA SENN



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Text and illustration by Ilja Senn

Thank you all for the support:
Nora, Shawn, Alberto, Simon, Gian,
Arun, Anastasia, Matt and my family




Let's go now. You don't want to be late, do you?





Phew!,
that was a close call!



This plane is flying
to Canada. I wish
you all a pleasant
journey and a safe
flight!



So, an exchange year. I wonder how it will be.

...
A year is a long time...
I wonder if I will be able to connect to the people there,
...maybe find a girlfriend?

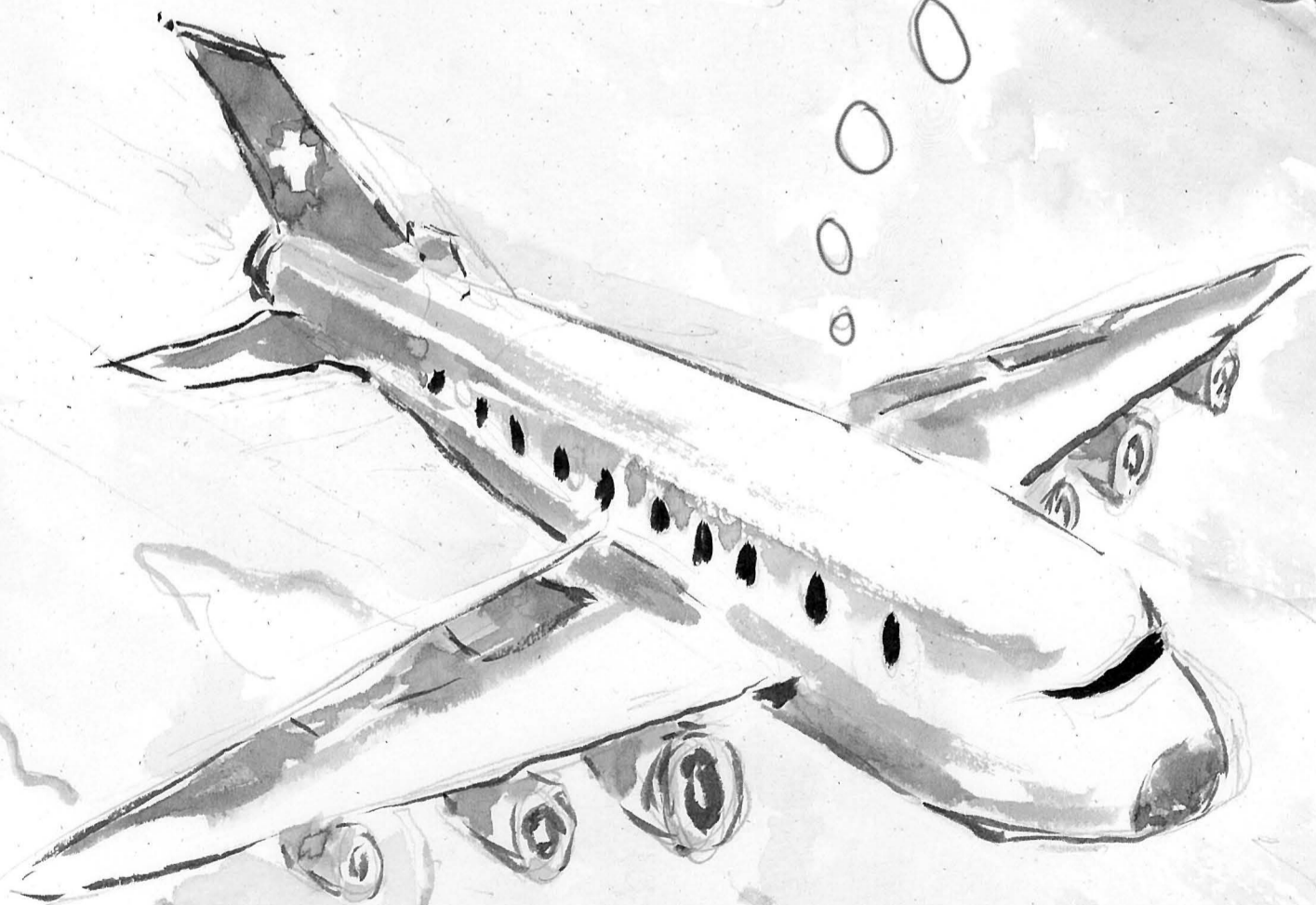
...
Is it true that Canadians are all nice?
That's probably just a stereotype.

...
I hope life there is fun. But I guess I also have
to be open to new things, huh?
Will there be parties as well? I mean, I've watched
American TV-shows, but I guess those are not the most
reliable sources...



I wonder how it feels to be away
from my family for a year...
I've never been homesick, but
the longest time I spent apart from
my family, was also only
about two weeks.

...
I guess we'll see soon.



We have now arrived at Montréal!
Please wait until the light goes
off before unbuckling your
seatbelt and... it is about
30 degrees outside. I wish
you a pleasant stay.



Nice view!



Finally here!

Damn, it's hot!
Why did I even bring all
those jackets?

It's 30
degrees.

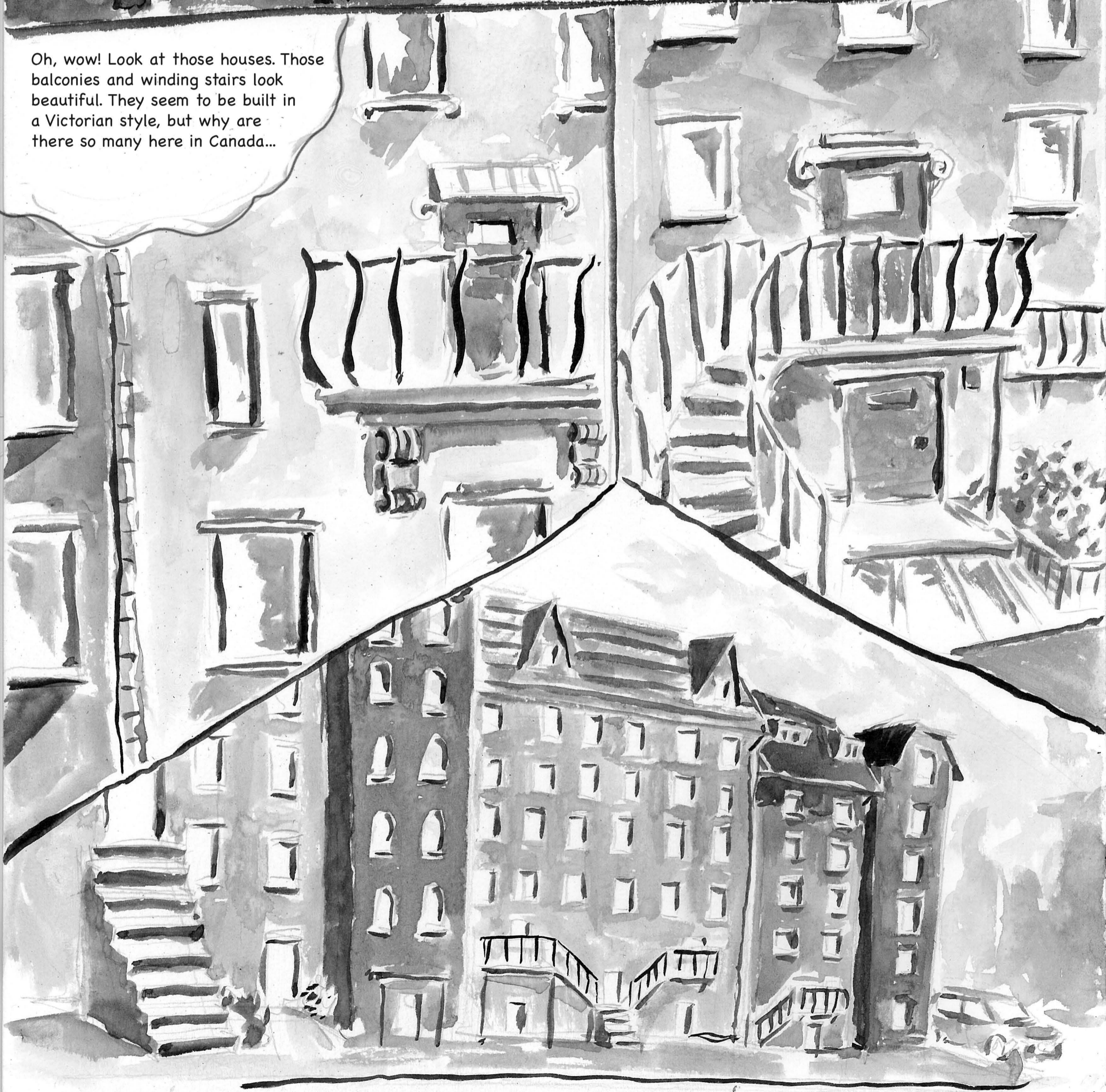
TAXI!

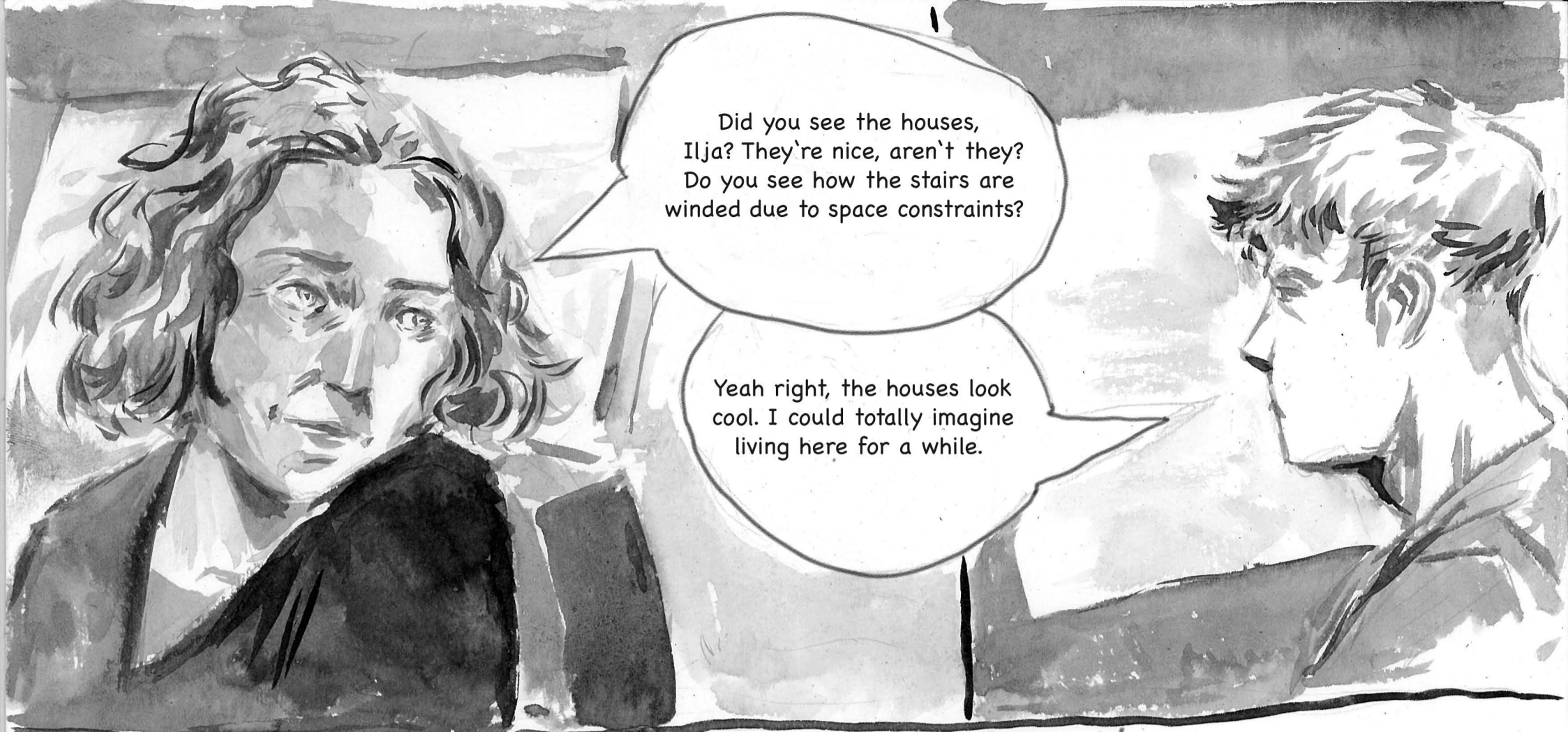


At the airport, we took a cab to our Airbnb. As the driver sped through the city, I got to see the unique architecture of Montréal.



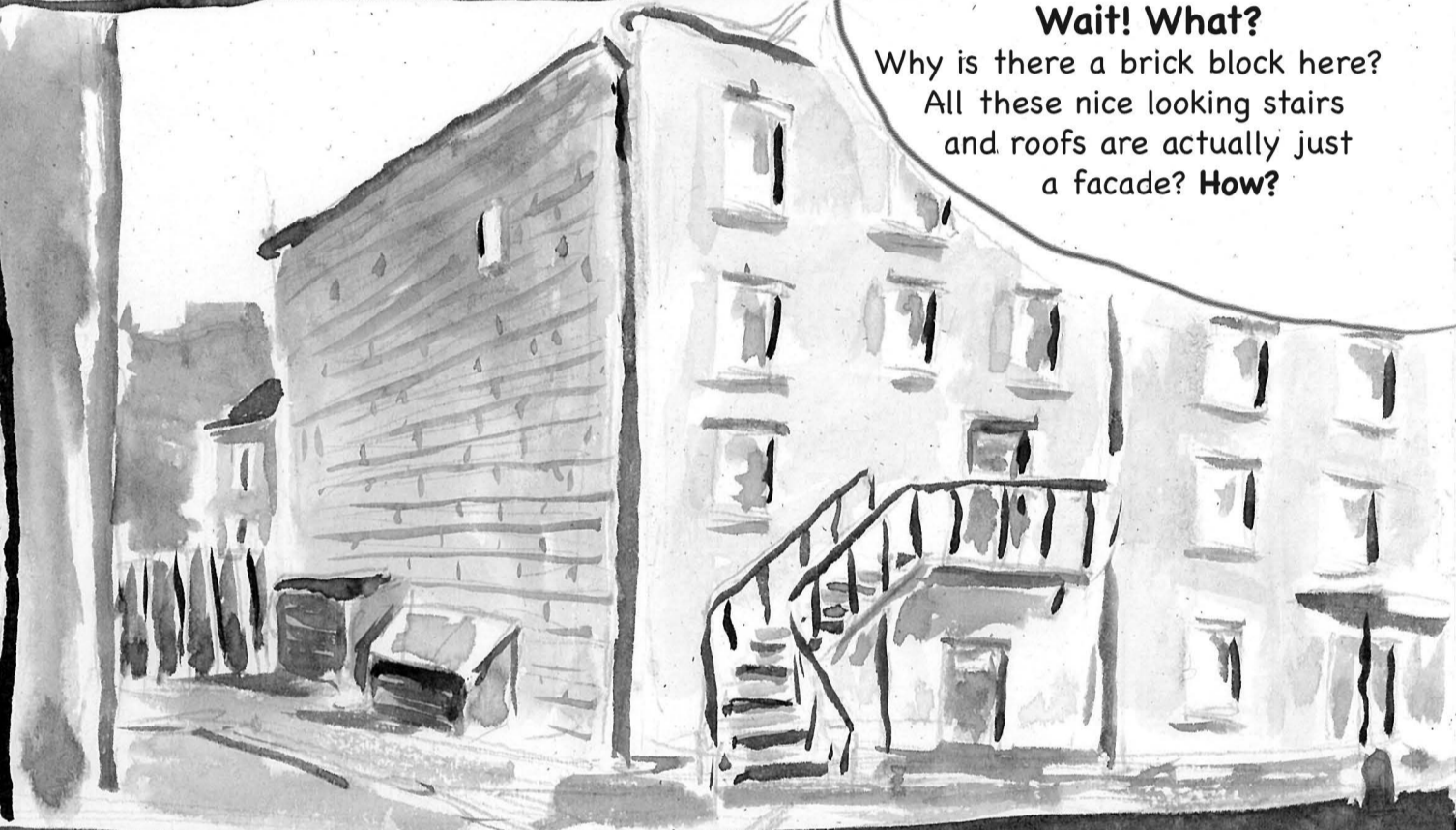
Oh, wow! Look at those houses. Those balconies and winding stairs look beautiful. They seem to be built in a Victorian style, but why are there so many here in Canada...





Did you see the houses, Ilja? They're nice, aren't they? Do you see how the stairs are winded due to space constraints?

Yeah right, the houses look cool. I could totally imagine living here for a while.



Wait! What?
Why is there a brick block here? All these nice looking stairs and roofs are actually just a facade? **How?**



I can't believe those were all facades. I'm just tired...



Brother, you've got to wake up. We arrived at our Airbnb.

...
Come on!

Uhh, already?



Umm..
Guys, has anyone
seen my phone?

Didn't you
have it
on you?

Wait, does
that mean you
lost your
phone?

Are you
serious?!

I think I
still had it
during
the flight.

It must've
slipped out
during
the ride.

Our family holiday got off
to a great start with my
brother leaving his
phone in the taxi.

After 12 hours of
"jetlag-sleep", we went
to explore the city
of Montréal. We rented
bikes and my mother
planned our route.



Ok, so the plan is to go
along the river and make a
circle. We'll end up
here again.

Ok, this looks
reasonable.


After about 4 hours of cycling,
we were all on our last breath.
It wasn't the idyllic view that
took our breath away.




Ugh... how long
will it take?!
My ass hurts!

I'll look at
the map.


it says that
we just finished
the first tenth of
our route...
Wait!



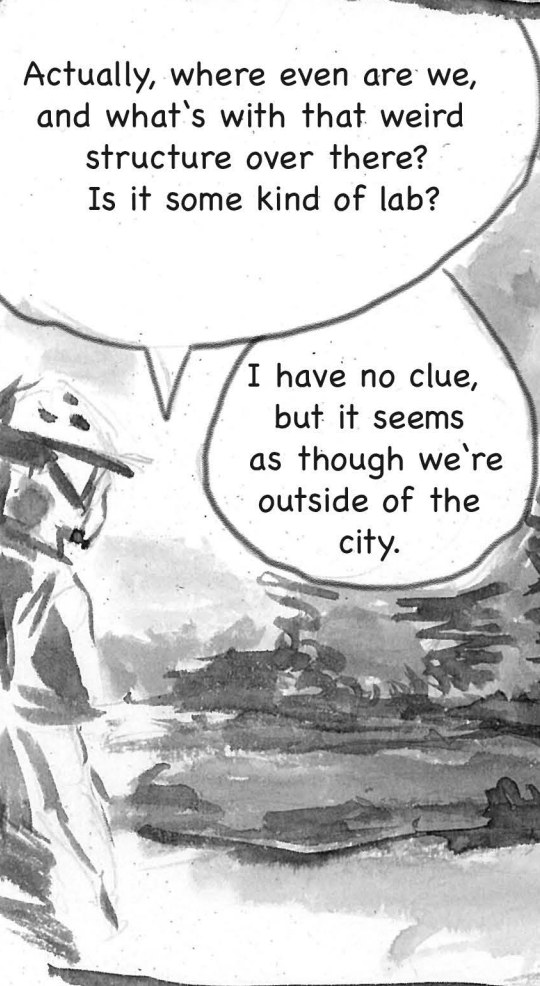
Uhh... I guess I underestimated the city's size. I guess I applied swiss norms... Let's just turn around here.



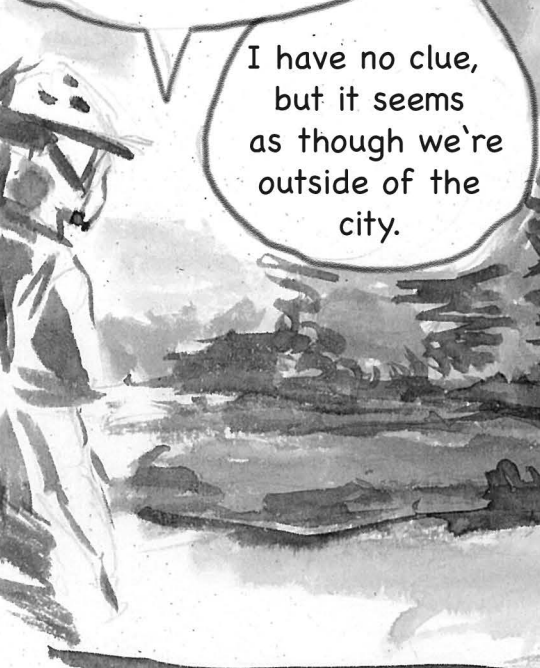
Yeah, it's probably for the best...



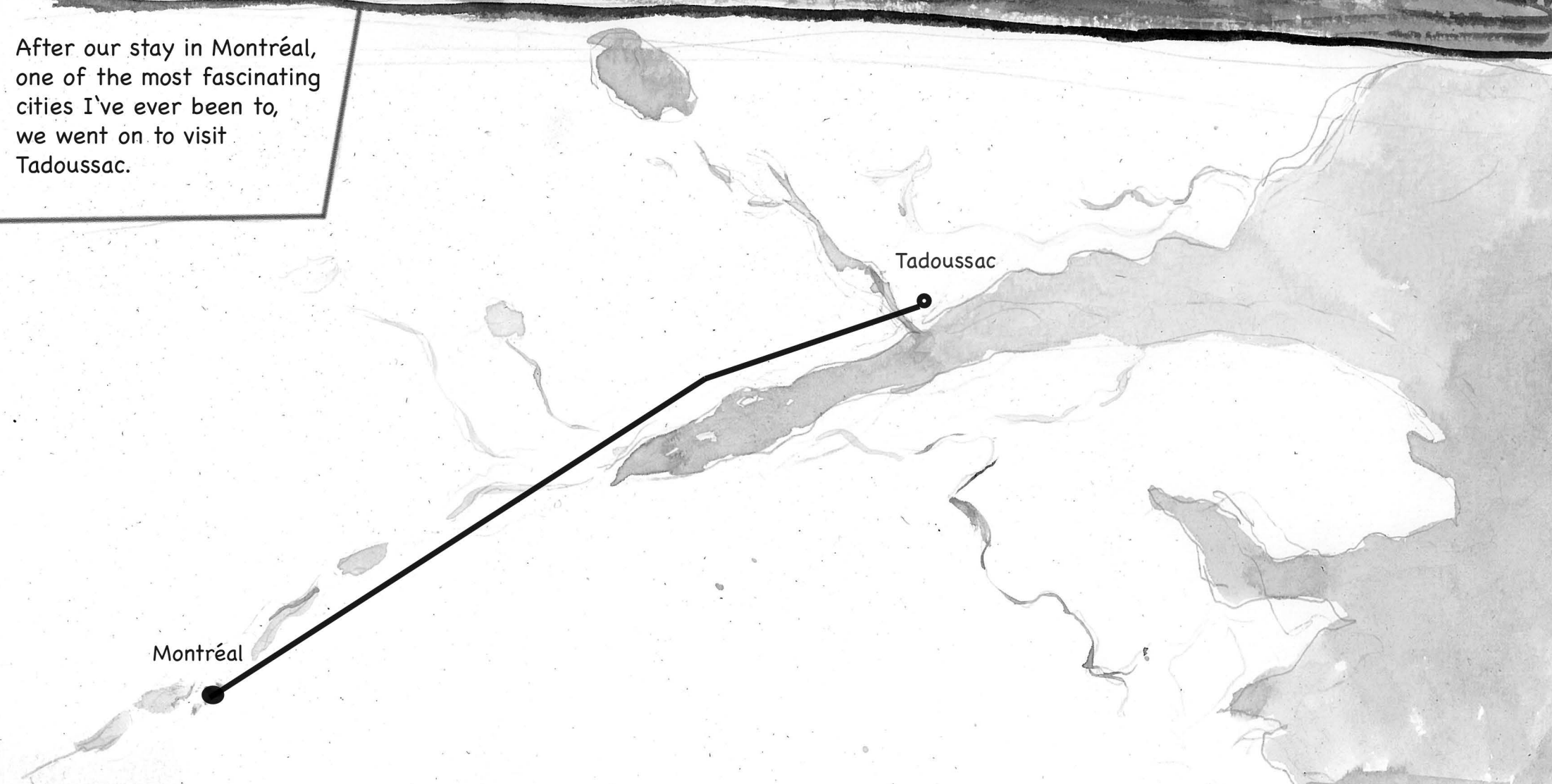
Our water bottles are empty, too.



Actually, where even are we, and what's with that weird structure over there? Is it some kind of lab?



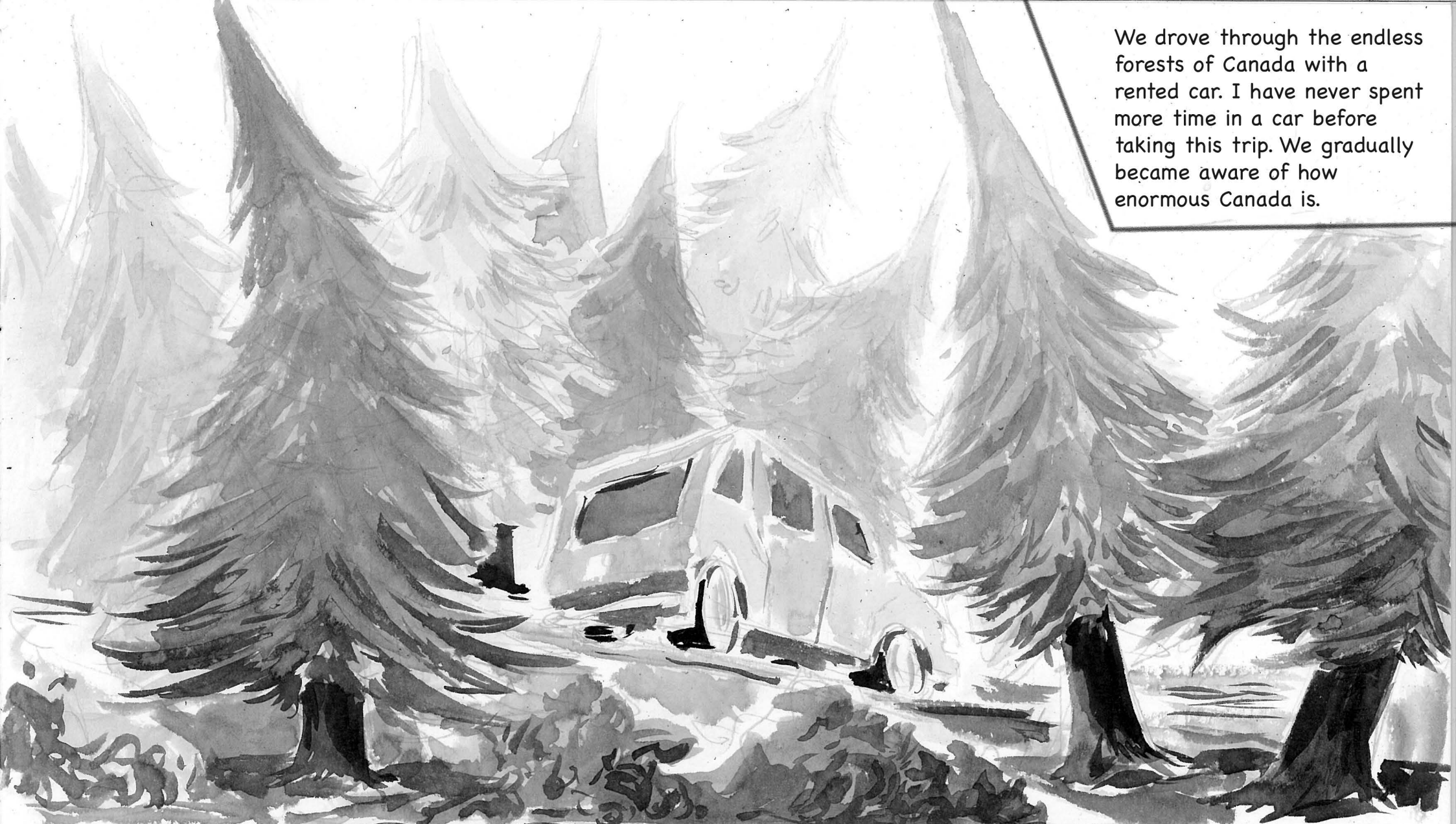
I have no clue, but it seems as though we're outside of the city.




After our stay in Montréal, one of the most fascinating cities I've ever been to, we went on to visit Tadoussac.

Montréal


Tadoussac



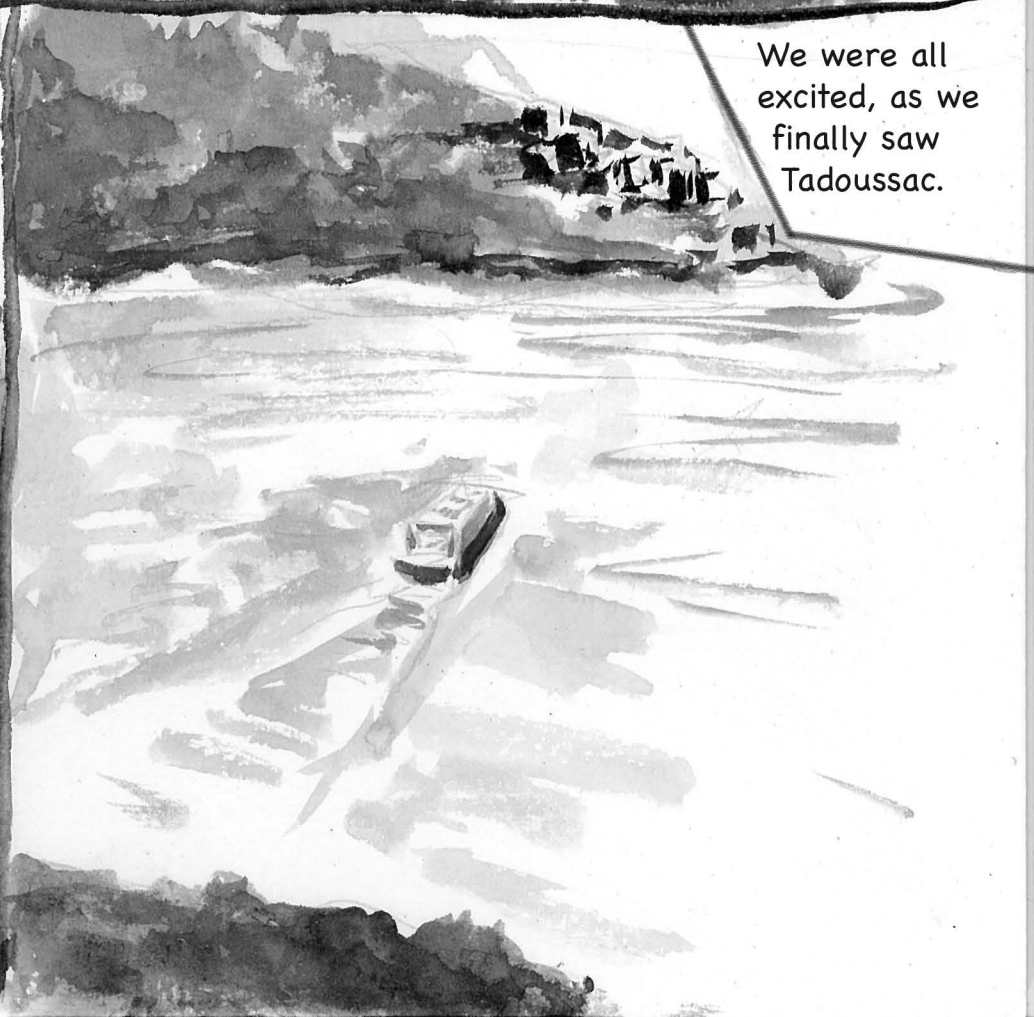
We drove through the endless forests of Canada with a rented car. I have never spent more time in a car before taking this trip. We gradually became aware of how enormous Canada is.



To kill the time, I listened to a lot of music and read books.

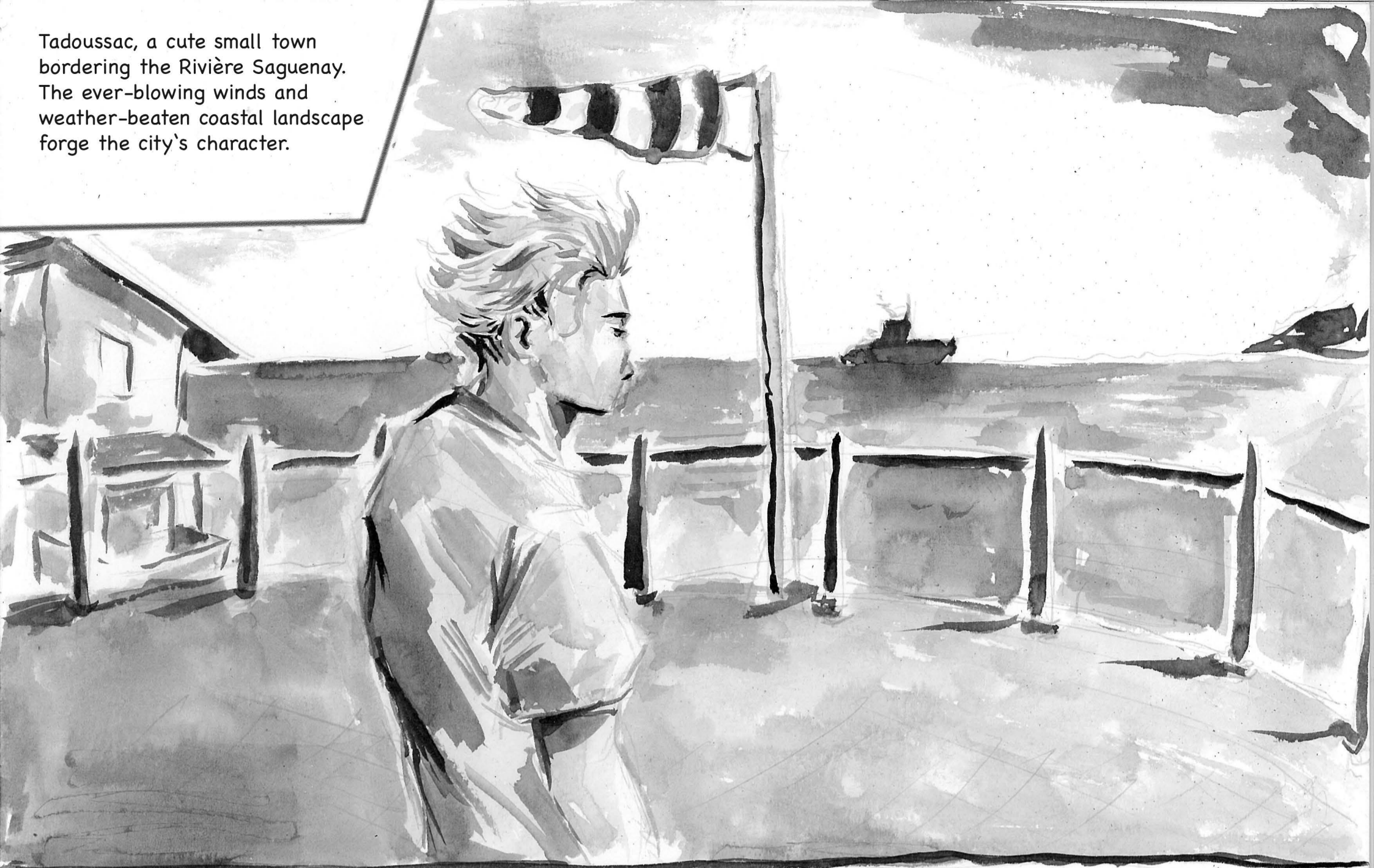


...Took a ferry.



We were all excited, as we finally saw Tadoussac.

Tadoussac, a cute small town bordering the Rivière Saguenay. The ever-blowing winds and weather-beaten coastal landscape forge the city's character.



I love the feeling of the sea. I can't describe it, every time I breathe in the salty air...



You always say this when we're near the sea, Mom.



Is this the port where we'll go whale watching?



Awesome! Are they giving us full fledged sailor equipment?
Man, I hope the whale tour won't be too rough...



Hahaha. The clothes fit you, Dad. You could try to pose as the captain.



Along with the other tourists, we went to sea. There we were told to look out for whales.





Hey, guys, isn't that a whale?



Actually?



Where is the whale?

just over there.

Thanks.



Attention! Please stay on your side of the ship! The ship is off balance. I repeat...



After our stop in Tadoussac, my family and I finally drove to Ottawa. The city, my host family lives in.

Tadoussac

Ottawa



In Ottawa, I finally got to meet my host family. They weren't complete strangers. I already knew them from Switzerland. Arun and I went to the same class back then. Later on, they moved to Canda, and here we are...

Arun

Matt

Welcome! you must be tired from all the driving...

Hey, you've grown. I almost couldn't recognize you.

Anastasja

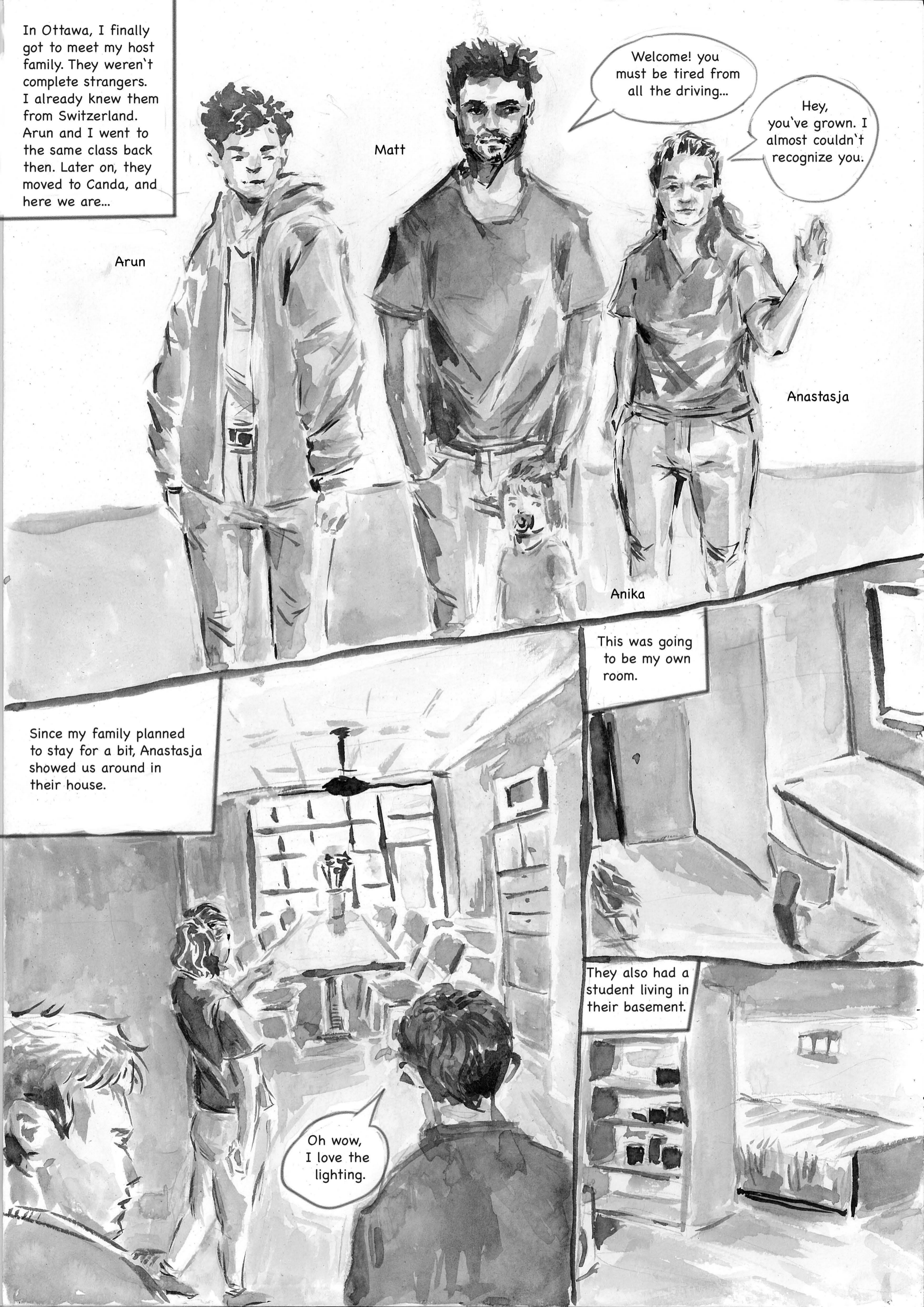
Anika

Since my family planned to stay for a bit, Anastasja showed us around in their house.

This was going to be my own room.

They also had a student living in their basement.

Oh wow, I love the lighting.



The same evening we did some games -- a situation that got heated fairly quickly.



Okay, so the word that we are searching for starts with B, the synonym for aggressive...



It's belligerent!
Haha take that, you have to try a bit harder if you want to win against me.



The tension starts to build up...

Look here, you guys are really making it boring for me. Anyways, who's in for another round?



Ugh, Dad, why are you so competitive?

We went on to play until midnight...



Me, I'm in!



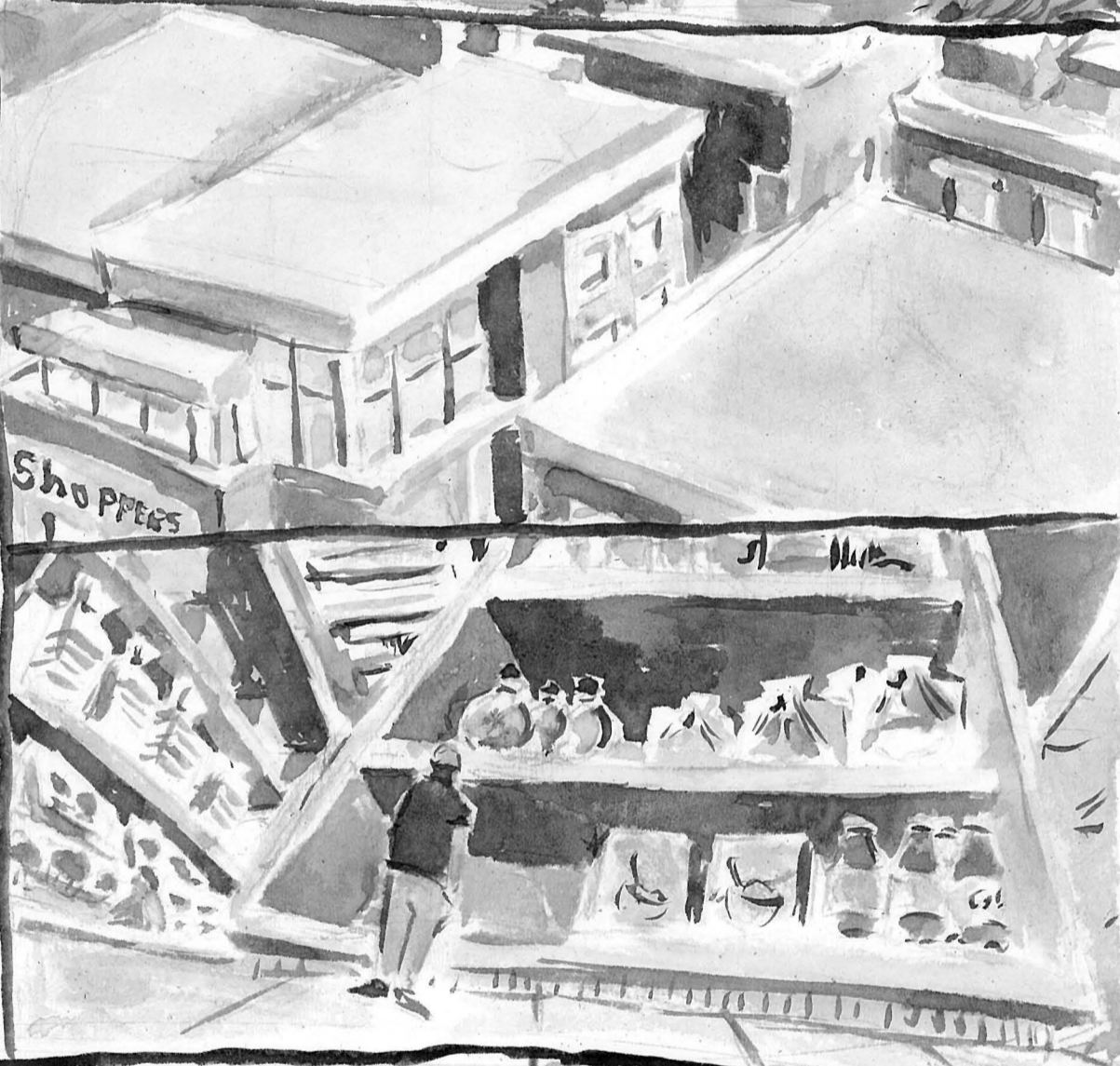
Spending time like this, sitting in the garden, talking and laughing, really helped me settle in.



Thanks.



Even though I felt at home at my host parents house, there were some things in Canada that seemed truly strange to me. One of them was the street network, which had the form of a grid. Another one was Costco.



Finally, the day of departure arrived. My family left Canada without me.



As I watched them leave, I felt as if the year had started for real.



I spent the last two weeks of my holidays having fun. We often went swimming in a nearby river.



We also played a lot of basketball...



ate Ice cream...



and had barbecues in the evening.



I started the habit of drawing important experiences in my sketchbook.



A canvas... oh and those two pens. Oh, what's this poster about?

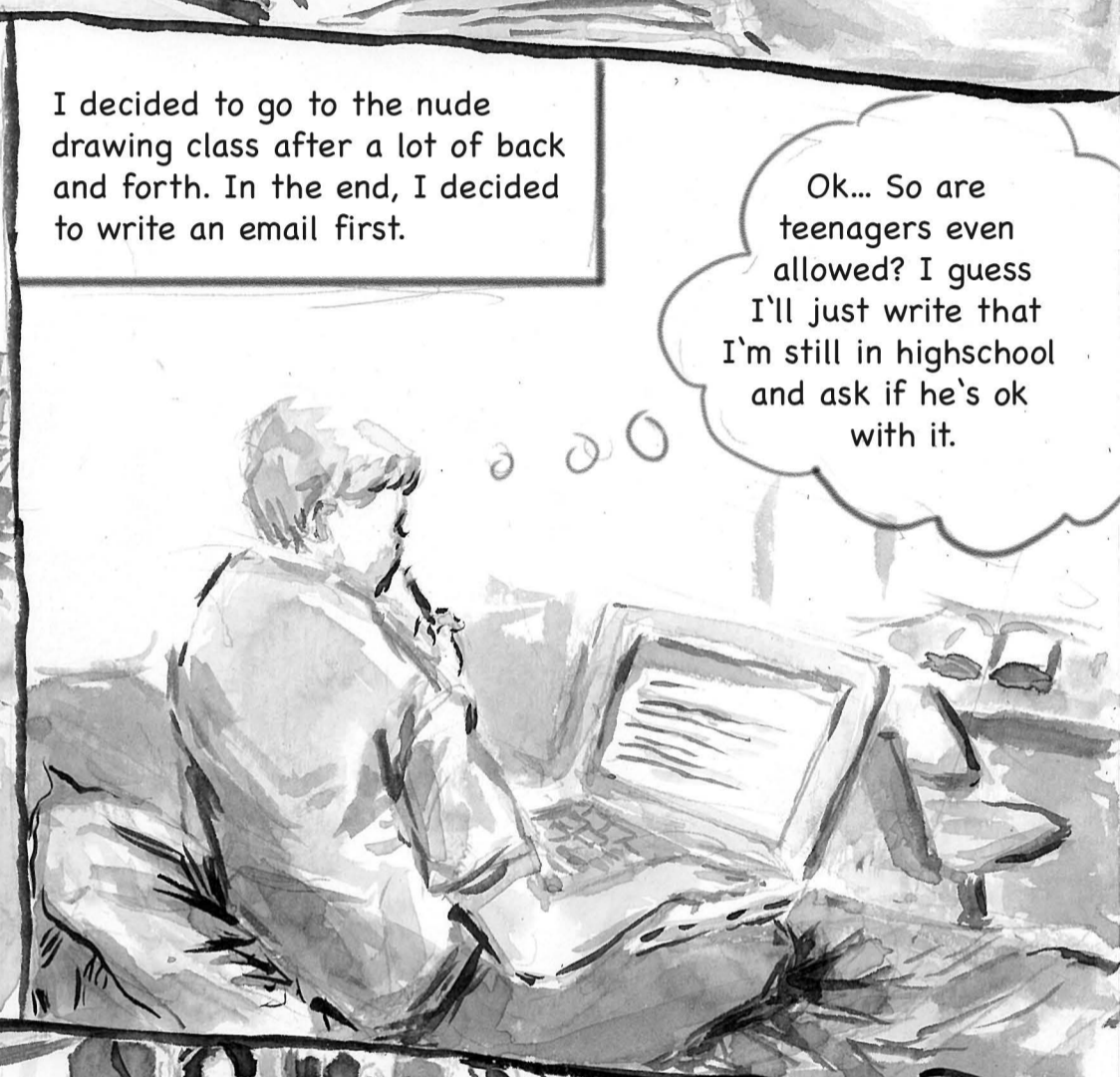
That's 15.60.

... nude drawing.



I decided to go to the nude drawing class after a lot of back and forth. In the end, I decided to write an email first.

Ok... So are teenagers even allowed? I guess I'll just write that I'm still in highschool and ask if he's ok with it.



I arrived a couple of minutes late.





Due to my late arrival, I was greeted with silence upon entering.

Uh... Hello?



Damn that was awkward, especially in the presence of a naked person.



Luckily, the awkward feelings vanished as soon as I started drawing.



I really like the drawing on the bottom right. I love the exaggerated shapes and expression. The one next to it is nice, too. The geometrical lines certainly add more structure to the drawing. It gives off the vibe of a "70s-designer-drawing style".

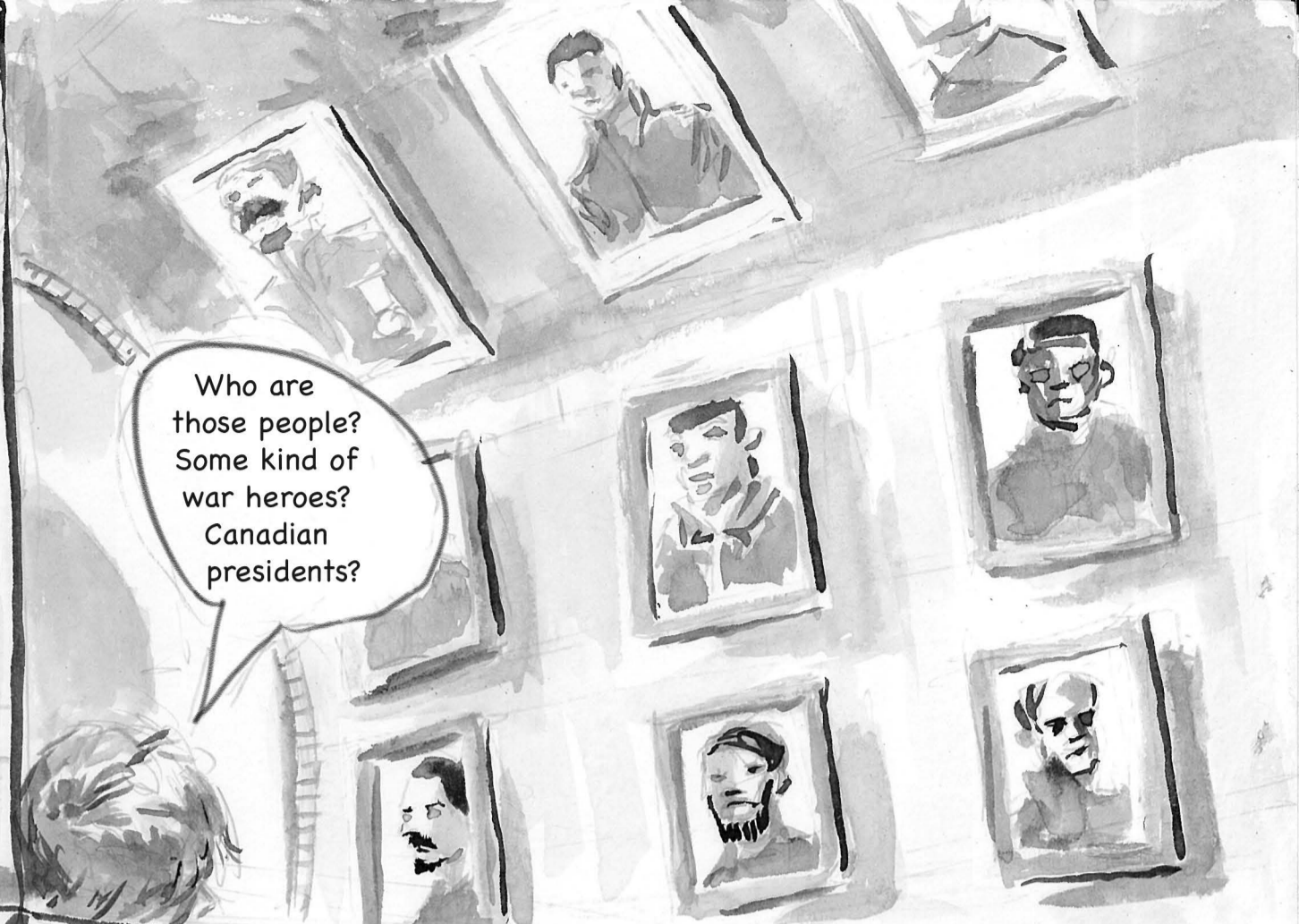
Well, for me, the middle one is definitely my favourite. You can see the use of line weight in the sketches. This creates so much movement and energy... The page as a whole fits together well too. Also, have you seen the one with the geometrical shapes in the background? Those look amazing.





On my first day of school, Arun showed me the way to the Glebe school building.



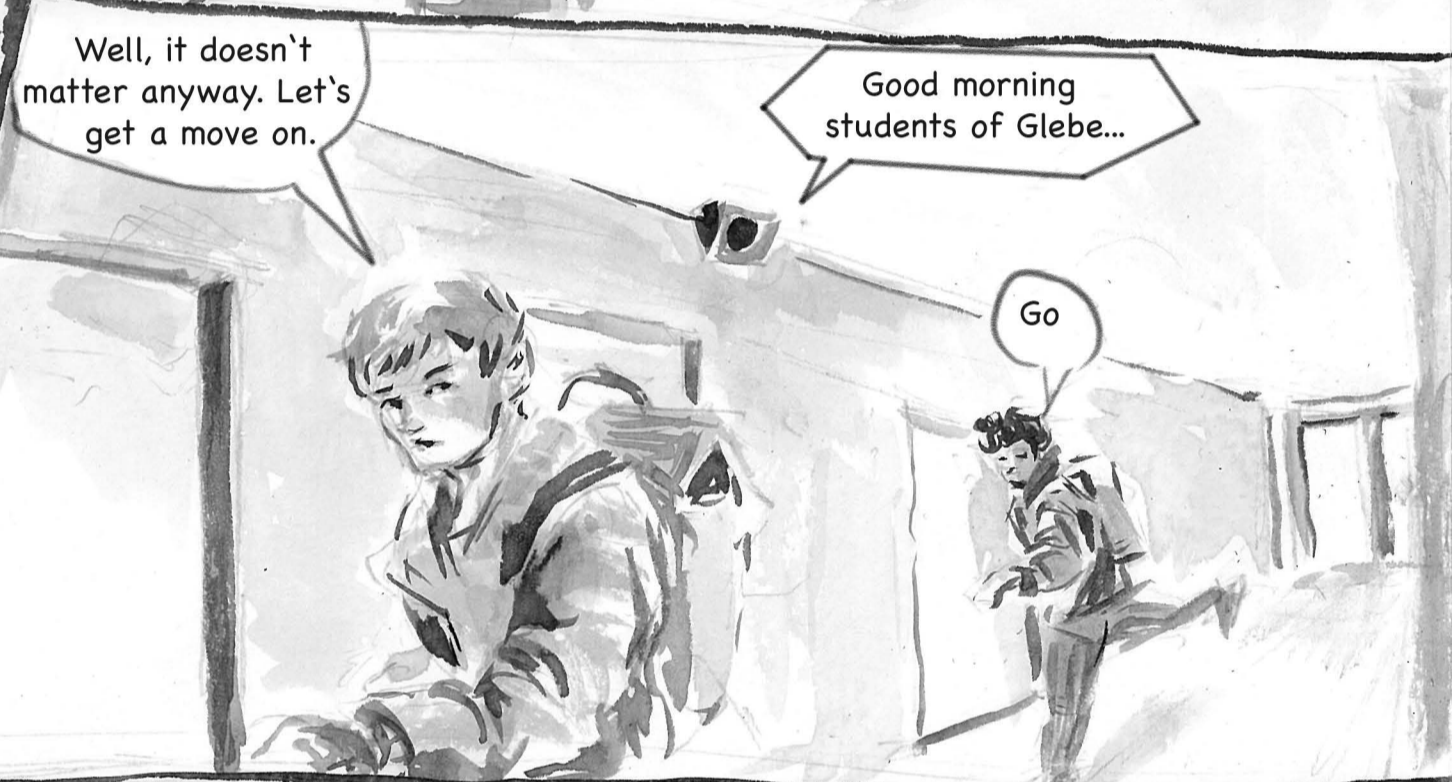


Who are those people?
Some kind of war heroes?
Canadian presidents?



Nah, those were our former school deans...

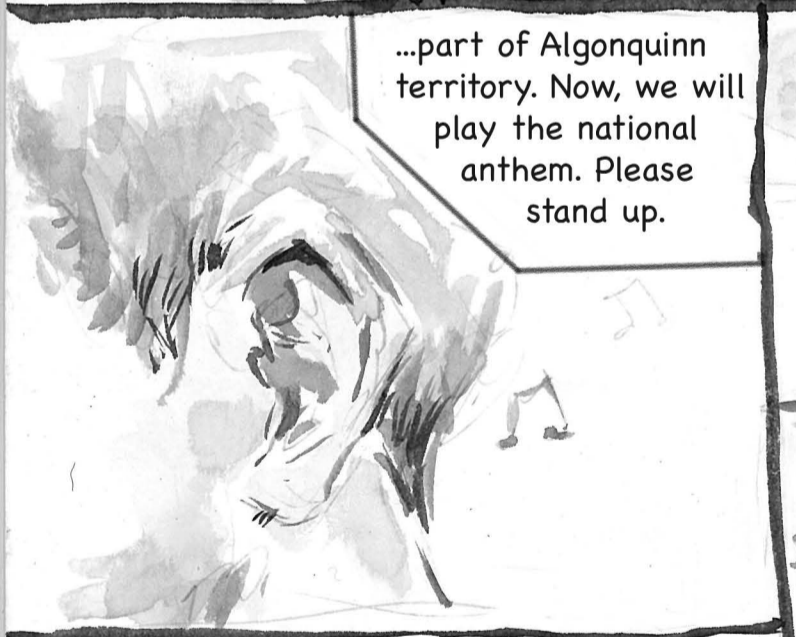
Ok? why honor them?



Well, it doesn't matter anyway. Let's get a move on.

Good morning students of Glebe...

Go



...part of Algonquinn territory. Now, we will play the national anthem. Please stand up.



Yes. In addition, you have to stay still during the anthem.

Are you kidding me? We are late. Whatever. I don't want to be late, so... bye!



You guys actually have to listen to this every morning?

Why would he stay still... Let's see. My room is number 105... 103... 104



Halt!

You two, stay still. Go back to the spot you were before!
Don't you know that you cannot move during the anthem?



what is going on?

Me too?



Look here. You will now tell me your name, so if I ever see you walk during the anthem again, you'll be in trouble.



Sorry, but what did I do wrong? I mean... I was just walking...



You know exactly what you did.



What was that? Why would he be so upset?

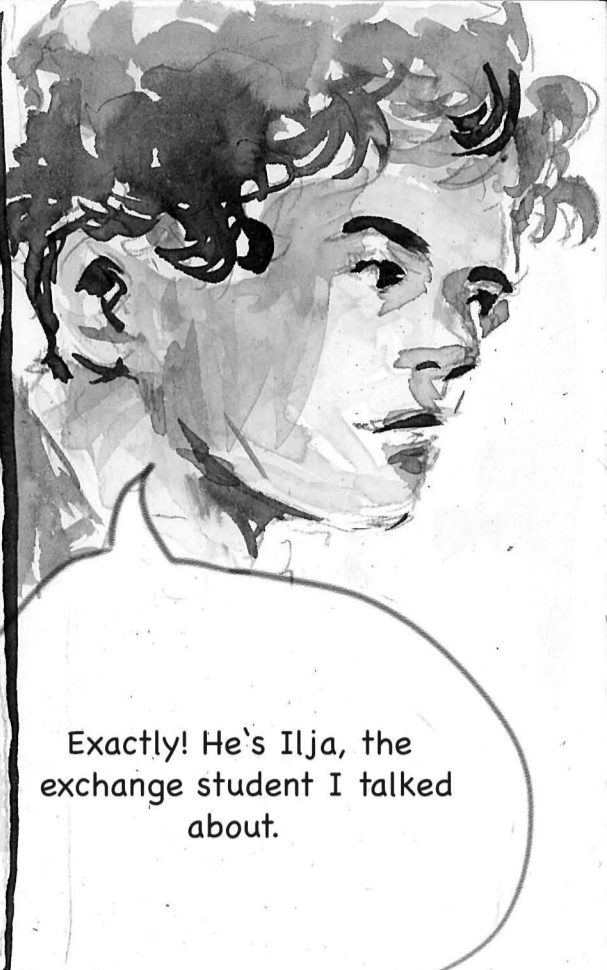
It's just kind of a rule here...



After my math and art class, Arun introduced me to his friends, with whom we also went to eat lunch.



Hey Arun and ... oh are you the exchange student?



Exactly! He's Ilja, the exchange student I talked about.

Oh hey, take a seat.

Thanks ...



Lets see what I have for lunch.



That afternoon...



I really like the drawing on the bottom right. I love the exaggerated shapes and expression. The one next to it is nice, too. The geometrical lines certainly add more structure to the drawing. It gives off the vibe of a "70s-designer-drawing style".

Well, for me, the middle one is definitely my favourite. You can see the use of line weight in the sketches. This creates so much movement and energy... The page as a whole fits together well too. Also, have you seen the one with the geometrical shapes in the background? Those look amazing.





I was rather excited for the upcoming party. Especially since I never went to one before.



In the evening, Arun and I walked over to his house.

I think that's the one...

You sure? Getting it wrong would be embarrassing.

Oh hey, guys! Nice that you made it!

Come inside!



Since he had a hot tub, we changed into our bathing suits.

Looking in the mirror...

Luckily, I just shaved. It would have been awkward if not. I can still remember what happened back then...



Back in Switzerland,
at the public bath
next to the river.

Did you see that
guy? He didnt shave
his armpits... that's
so gross.



Dude, What do you guys think
about guys with shaved armpits?

...
I mean personally, I think that
men shaving their armpits
is gay as hell.

Yeah, man, I feel you.
Like, why would you
shave as a man?
But, you know, in some
countries, it's actually
common.

I don't know... I feel
like men should do
whatever they want

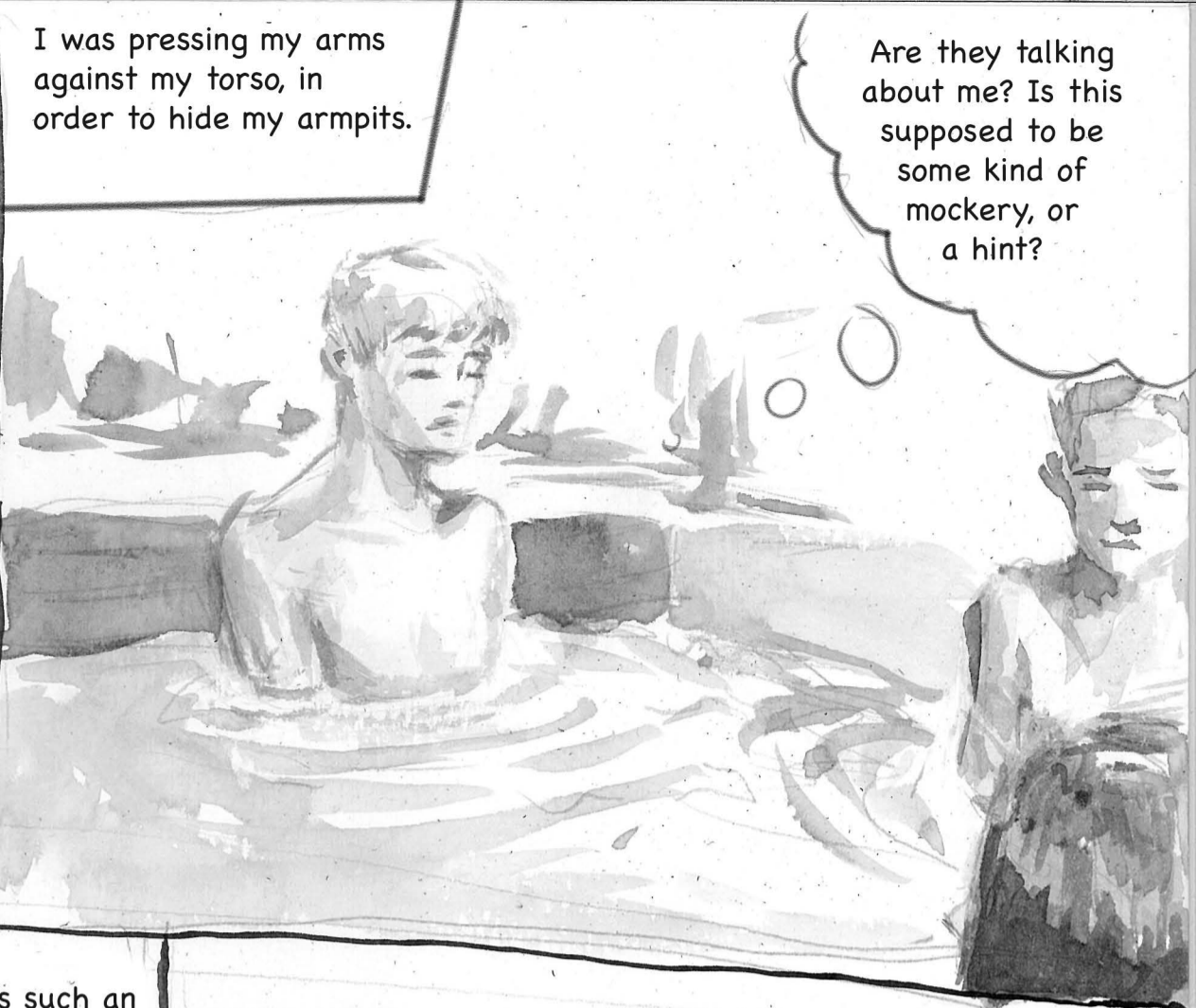
...
in this regard,
naturally.





I was pressing my arms against my torso, in order to hide my armpits.

Are they talking about me? Is this supposed to be some kind of mockery, or a hint?



...Yeah and then...
...

This is such an uncomfortable situation... I want to be invisible right now.



In the end, I enjoyed the party either way.

So the drinking age is 16 in Switzerland? I'll be moving soon, I guess...

For beverages like beer and wine at least...



During autumn break, Arun and I went on a trip to the US with his father. My host-father is actually his stepfather...

What are you drawing?

His father is a very free-spirited person.



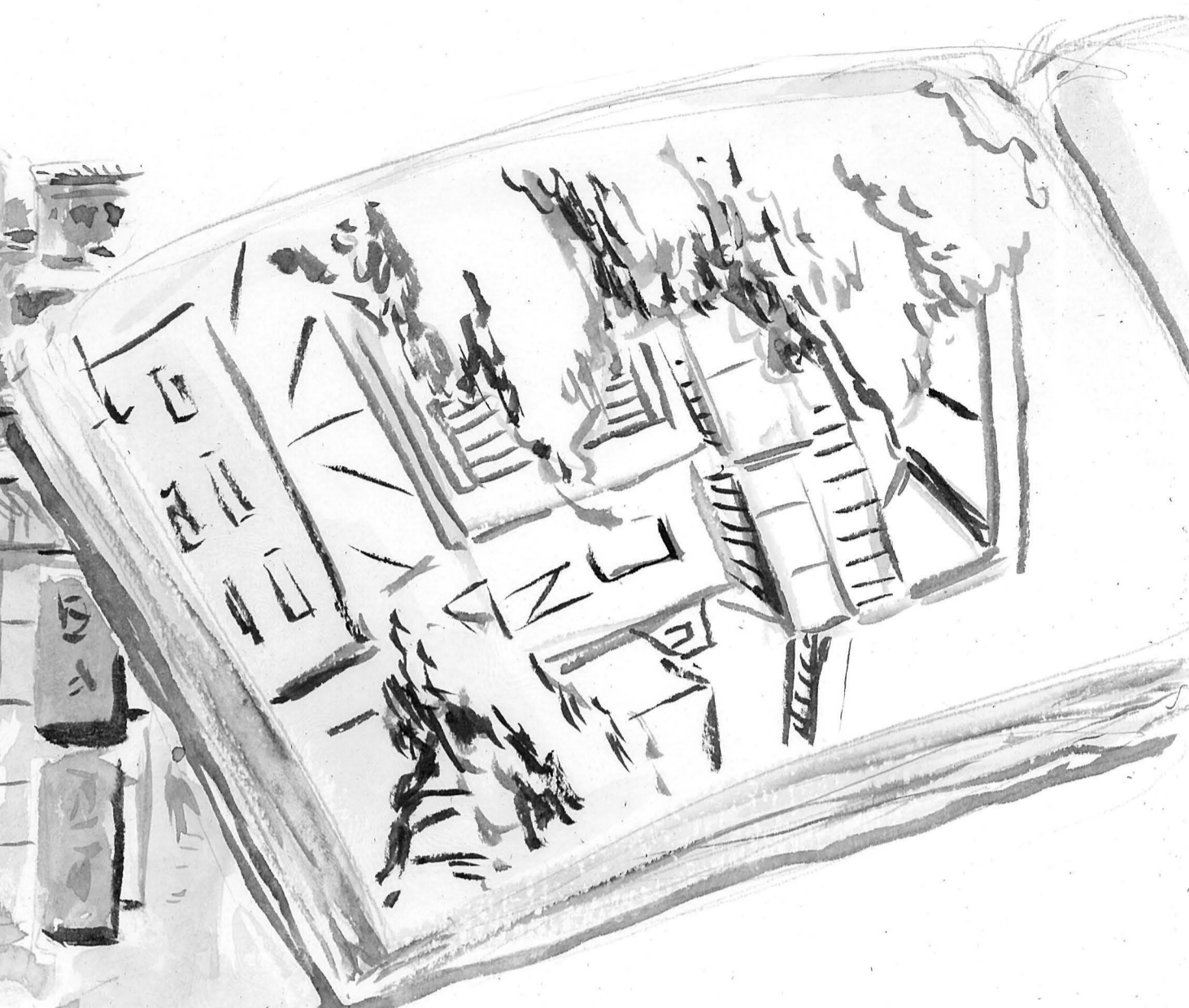
We rented a car and spent our first couple of days in San Francisco.



San Francisco has become one of my favourite cities.



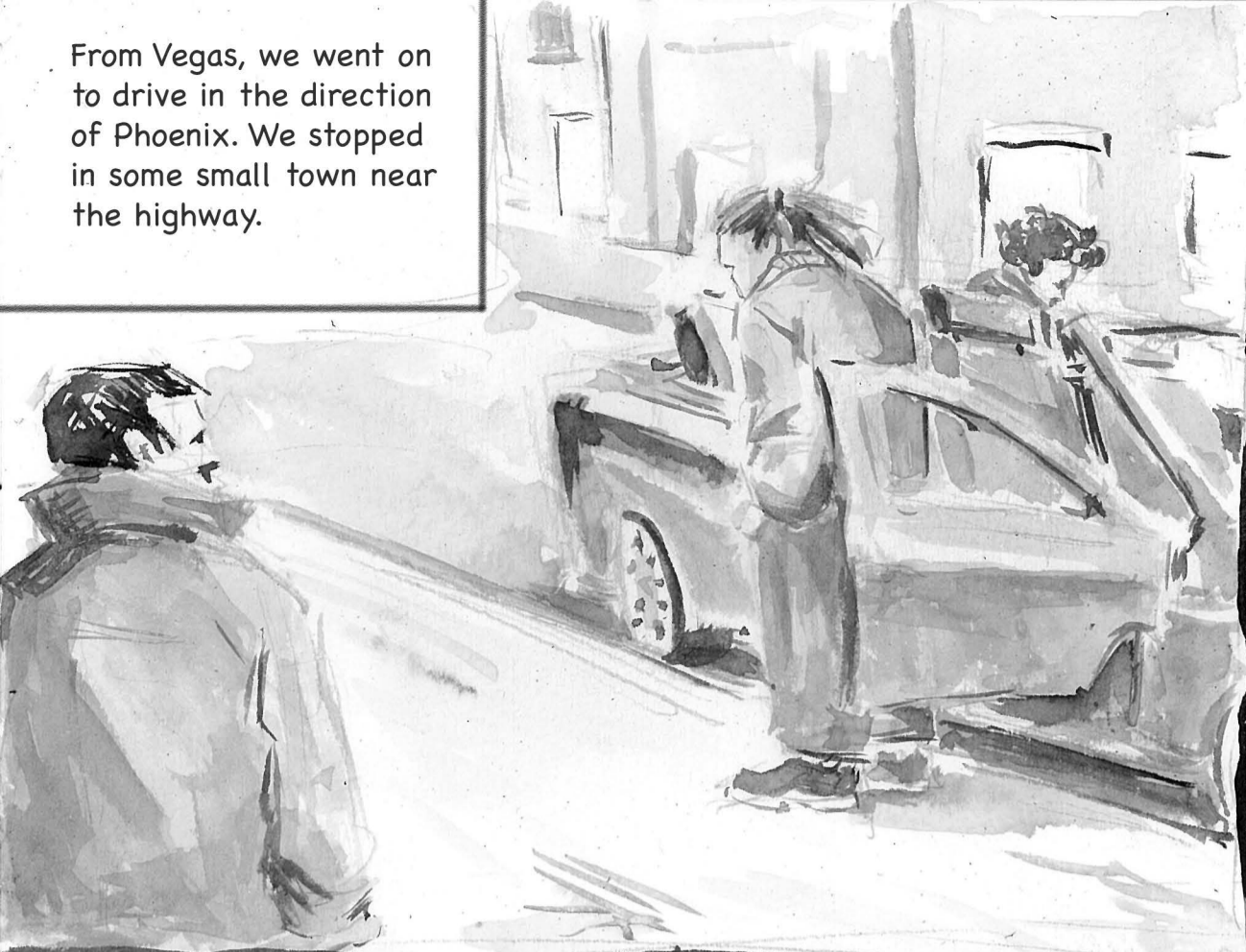
San Francisco impressed me mainly with its picturesque streets and beautiful Chinatown. There seemed to be a lively atmosphere throughout the city.



Following our stay in San Francisco, we took a plane to Las Vegas. I enjoyed the time there, despite disliking the city. All the flickering lights and noises tired me out quickly.



From Vegas, we went on to drive in the direction of Phoenix. We stopped in some small town near the highway.



So what mask do you guys want?

I'll take the chicken mask...

I choose the unicorn.



Our plan was to get into one of the bars there. We wanted to partake in the Hallowe'en festivities, due to it being a big thing in America.

Welcome to the Mars Bar. Before you enter, please show your ID... We are 21+.

Umm, that would be my ID. My two friends, the ones with their mask on, unfortunately forgot theirs,

Sorry, sir. I really need to check the age of everyone here,

No exception? No?

...



During a year abroad, romance would naturally be a big topic. I, for one, had a bit of a crush on a friend, Nora.

...artists...
...Group of Seven...



We often talked during class and shared an interest in art among other things.

Psst,
What did you think of the party last Saturday? Also, regarding the presentation, want to team up?



After school, with a friend of hers.

What do you think about Nora?

...
I like her, I guess?

...Yes, what am I feeling for her, is it love or just a deep connection in a friendship kind of way?
No, I think I do love her...

Hey, Do you...uhh...
I wanted to ask if you'd like to go on a date with me?

Yes!
I'd love to.
I was actually waiting for you to say this.

Later on, we got into the habit of watching bad movies, so that it wouldn't hurt to disrupt them..

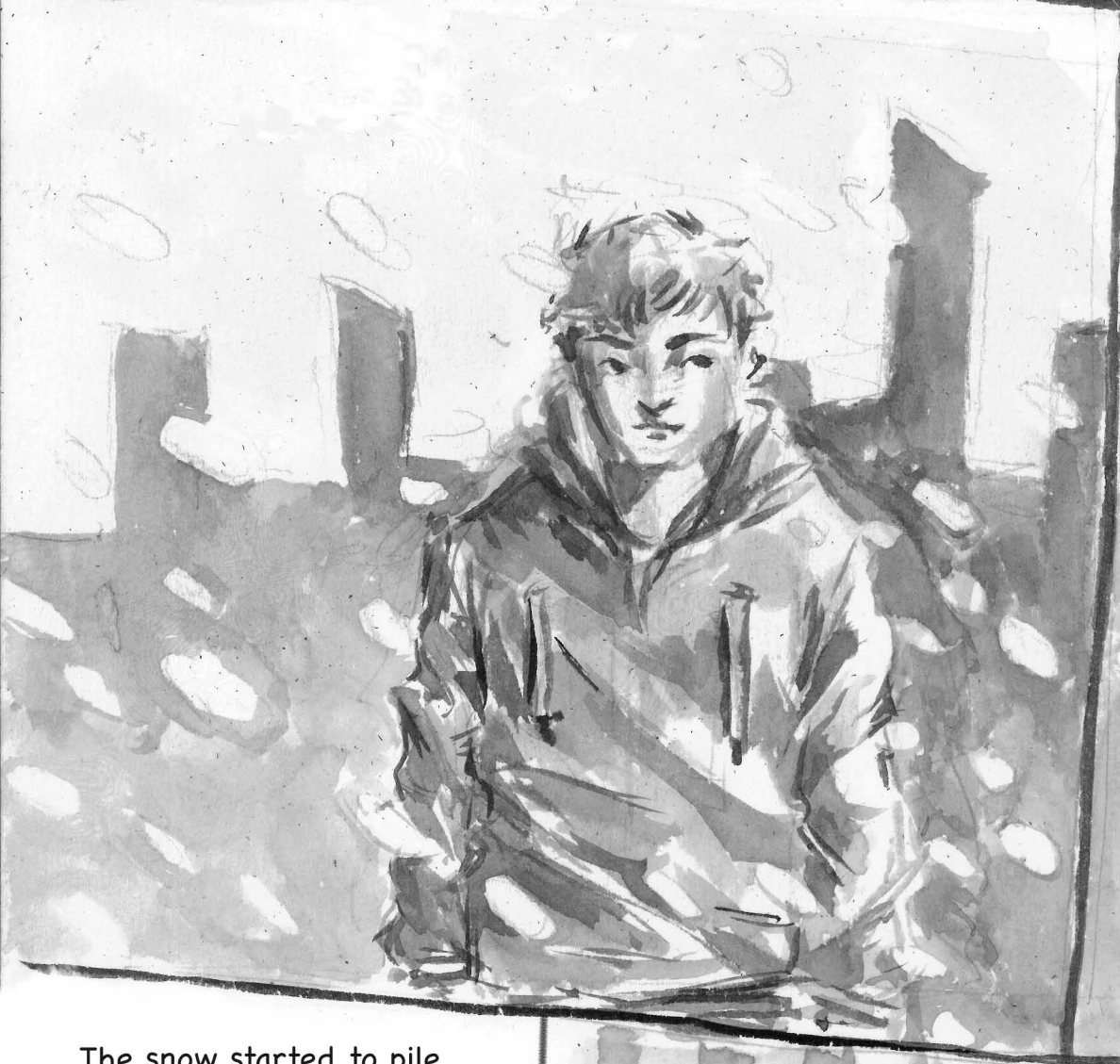
Man, this movie is really boring...
let's do something else.



Winter was coming, and it was coming fast. The temperatures sank from 20 to 0 and then to -20 degrees extremely fast.

Yeah.

The river is slowly freezing. It is only November.



The snow started to pile up on the pavement at a rapid pace.



One of the few attractions that Ottawa had to offer during the winter was the frozen river. Each year, the citizens would go to skate on it.

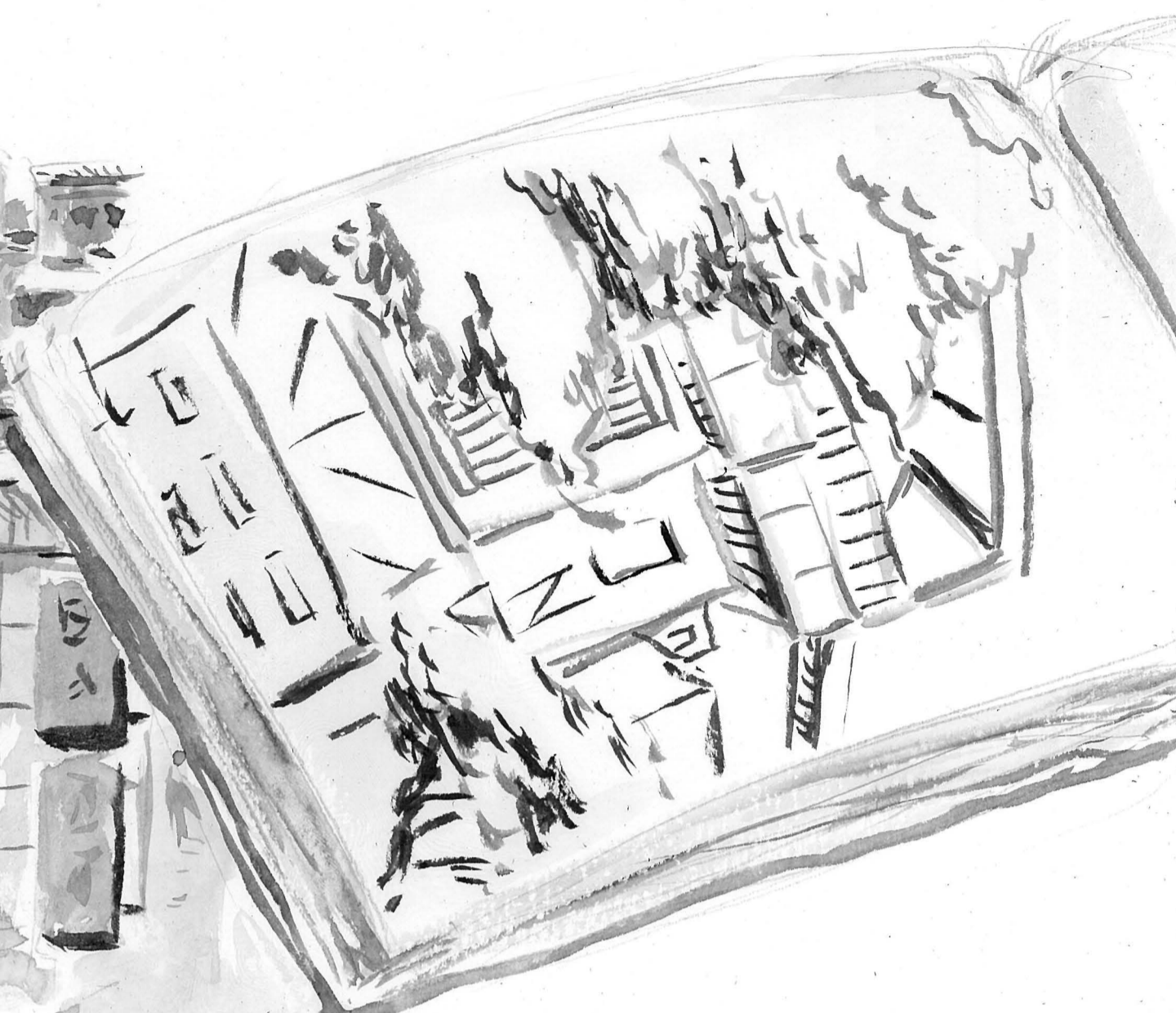


Anika, don't walk too far.

Don't mock me, Ilja. It has been some time since I last skated.



San Francisco impressed me mainly with its picturesque streets and beautiful Chinatown. There seemed to be a lively atmosphere throughout the city.



Following our stay in San Francisco, we took a plane to Las Vegas. I enjoyed the time there, despite disliking the city. All the flickering lights and noises tired me out quickly.



Later that week, we visited Matt's friend, Mike.

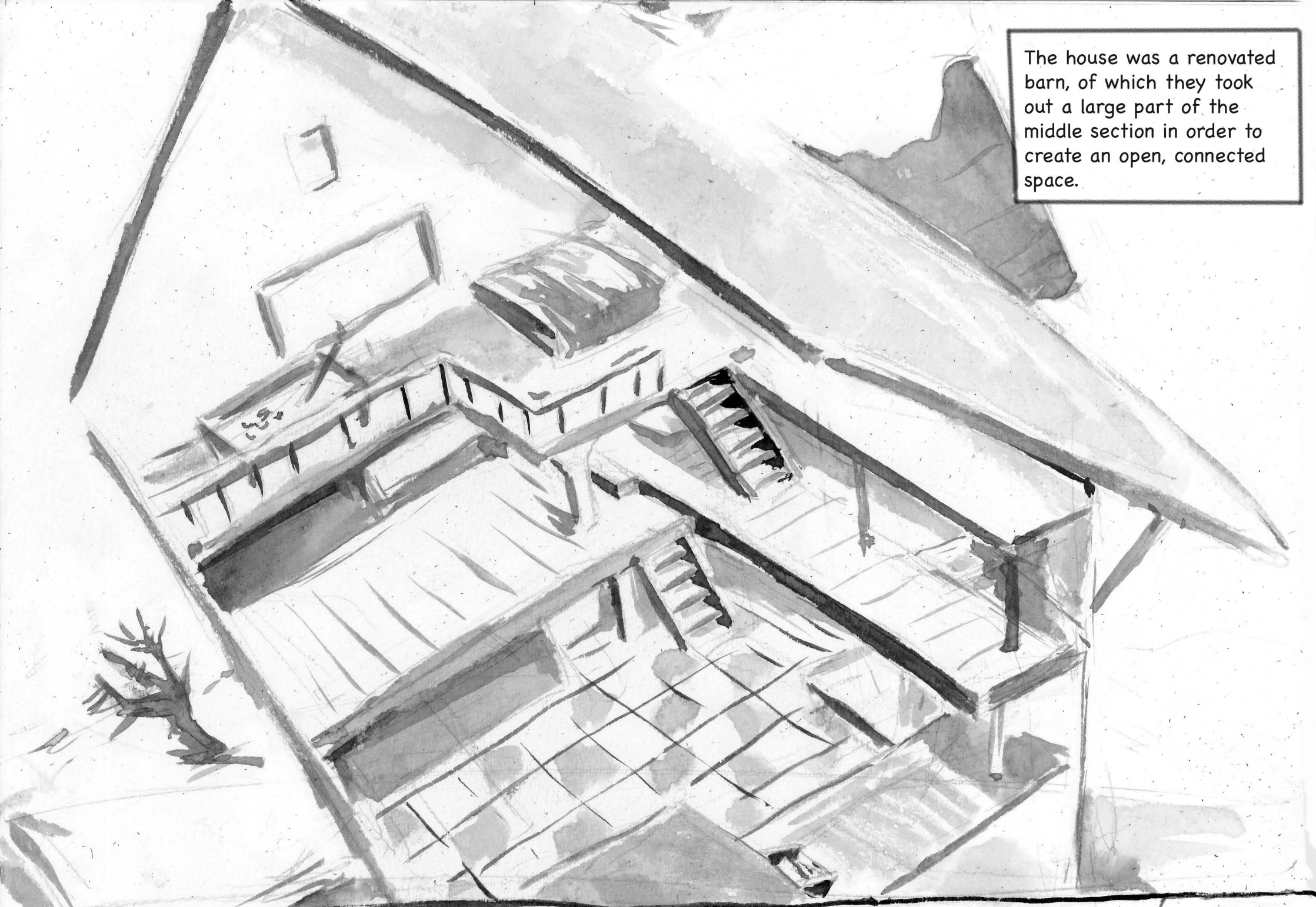


We are here!



Hello!

The house was a renovated barn, of which they took out a large part of the middle section in order to create an open, connected space.



Hey, long time no see.



It has been quite some time.



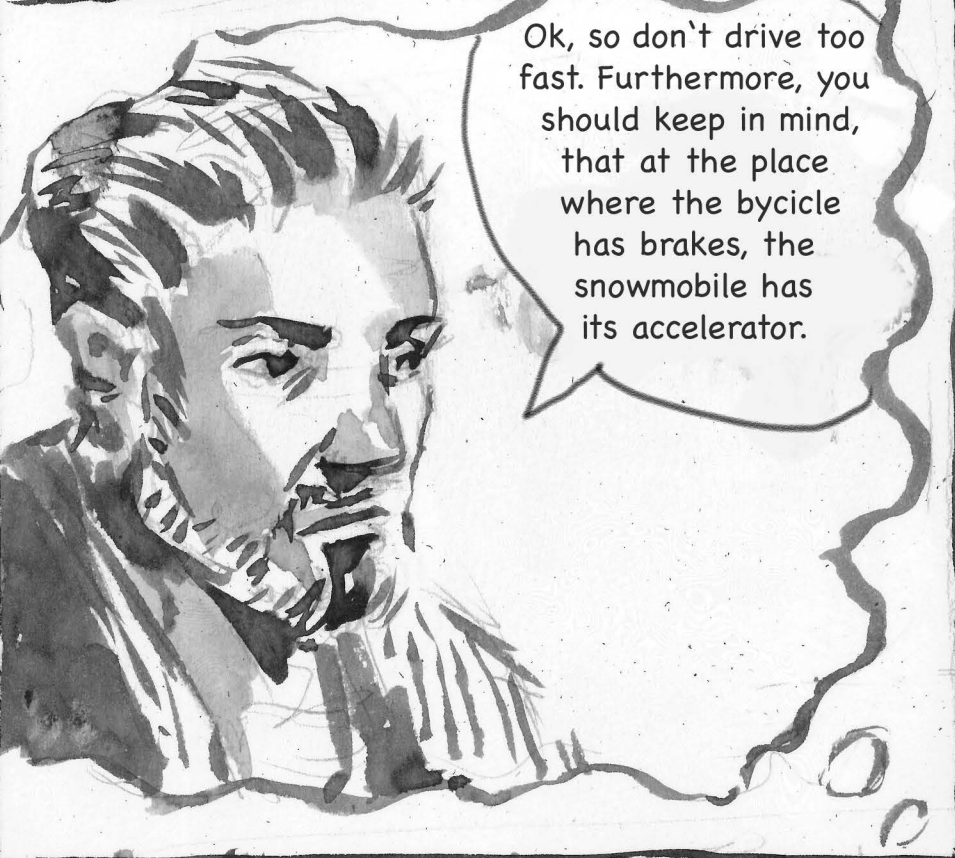
Allow me to introduce Mike. He is a friend from highschool.

Nice to meet you. By the way, I have a snowmobile here, if you want, you can go for a ride afterwards.



That would be awesome!

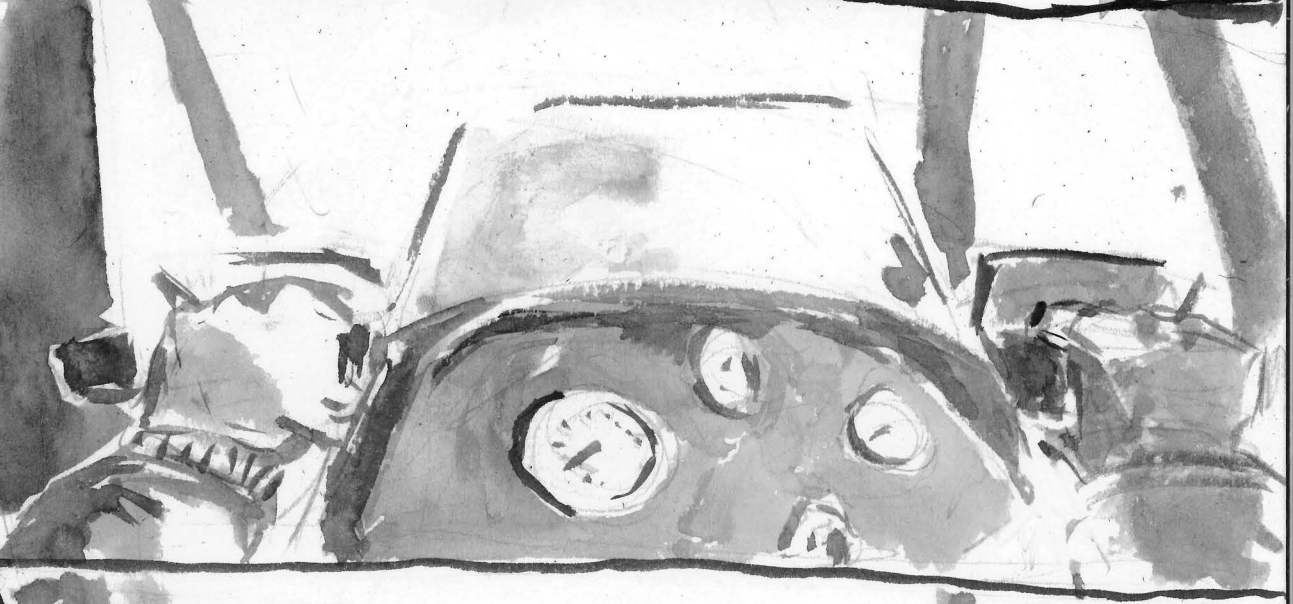




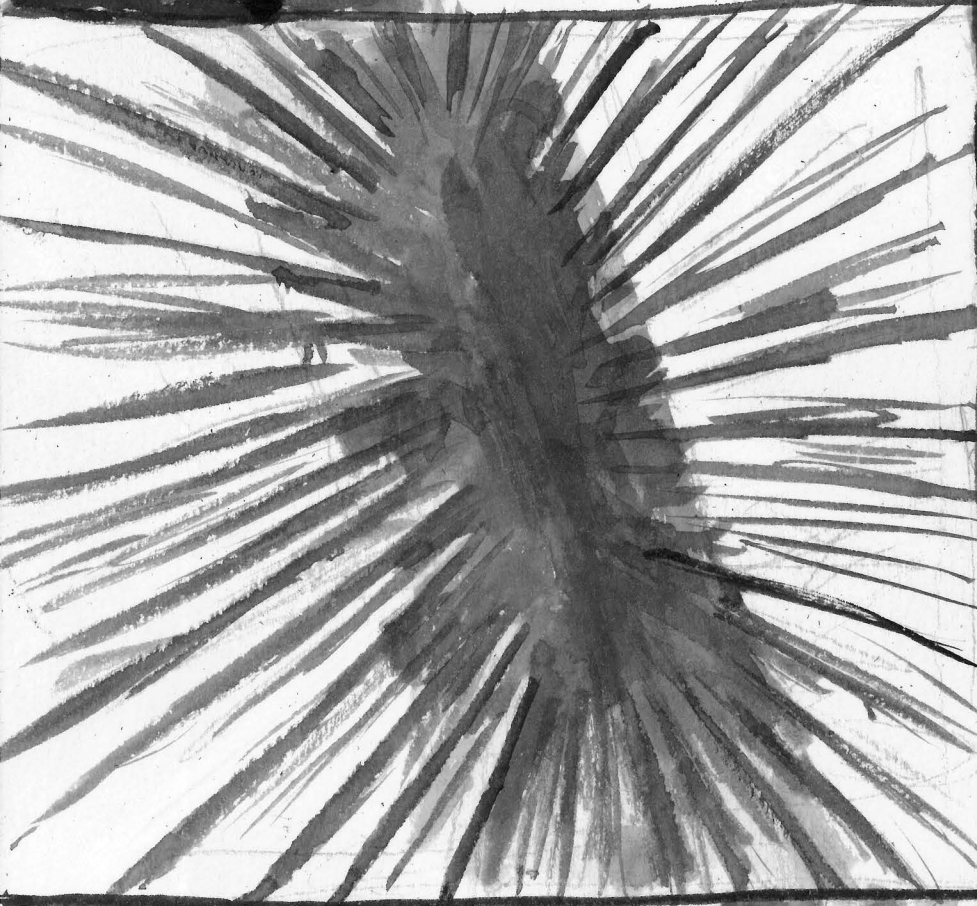
Ok, so don't drive too fast. Furthermore, you should keep in mind, that at the place where the bicycle has brakes, the snowmobile has its accelerator.



Damn, the road is narrow!



Wha..what is happening? I'm losing control.



Fuck!



Come on, please work... please work.





I can't lift it...
what should
I do?



Actually, what just
happened? Did I really
just have an accident
on a snowmobile?



Umm... uh, your
snowmobile...



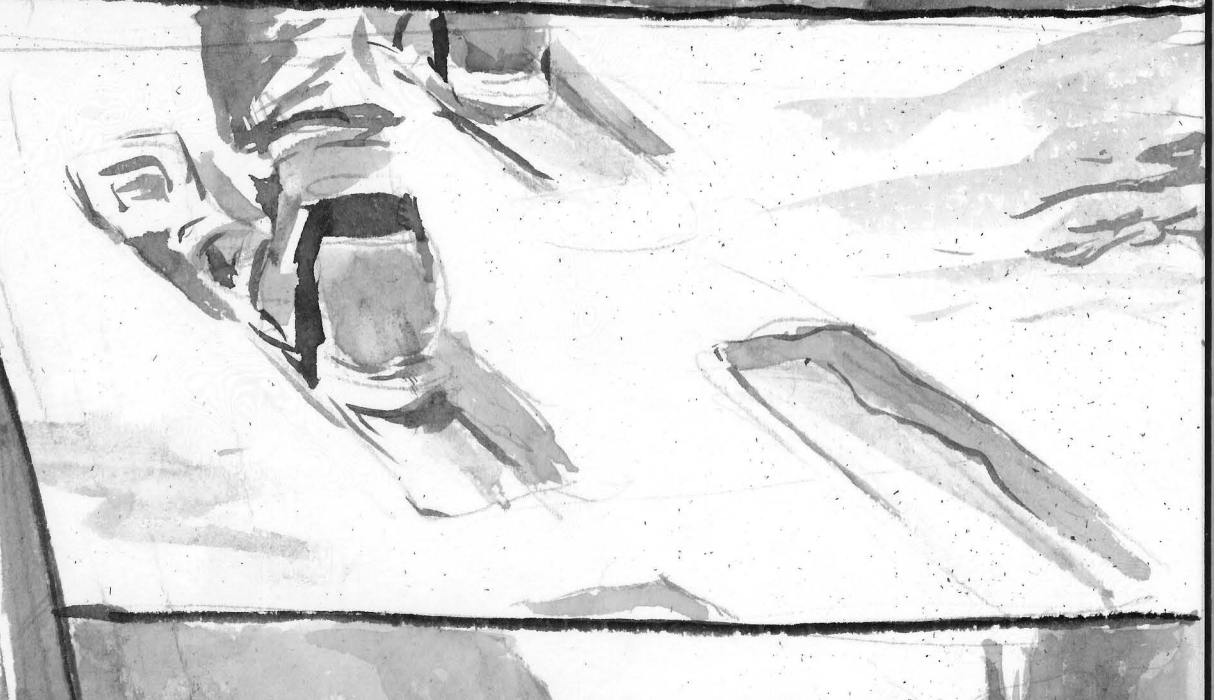
Every time Mike
visited, I felt
extremely
guilty...



...the vehicle
still hasn't
been fixed...



Let me fill you in. Today we're going snowshoeing.



It feels as if the snow suffocated the noise. The silence is unsettling...

True!



Phew! I'm slowly getting tired...



Wait..., why are there footprints here?

Shit!

You don't think they are...





Fuck!
shit...shit...shit!
We'll be stuck forever
if we are truly lost.



Why,
...why.

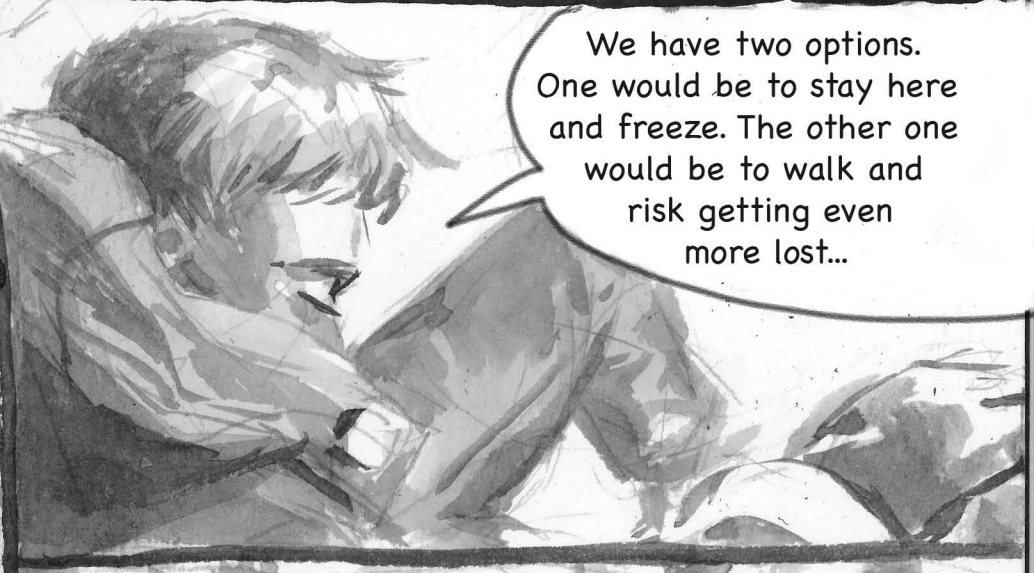


I can't
believe this.



Ouch!

My phone has got
no battery left...



We have two options.
One would be to stay here
and freeze. The other one
would be to walk and
risk getting even
more lost...



Mine is empty too.
I don't know what
to do...



Oh, wait,
isn't the street
just there?

In the end, we only spent about two
hours in the forest, despite us thinking
that an eternity passed there.

As spring finally arrived, my host family went on a trip to New York.

The traffic is crazy... we're three hours late.

Bye. Don't come back too late!

We're going now. See you later.

Well, he did my cousins haircut, it was rather bad, though...

So, you said you know a barber here. Are his cuts good?

Then, why... Whatever.





Sit here. Just wait until I'm ready.



Please shorten the sides. Leave the top longer.



Don't talk to me...

It doesn't even look that bad...



The next day,
we visited
"The Shed",
a museum.

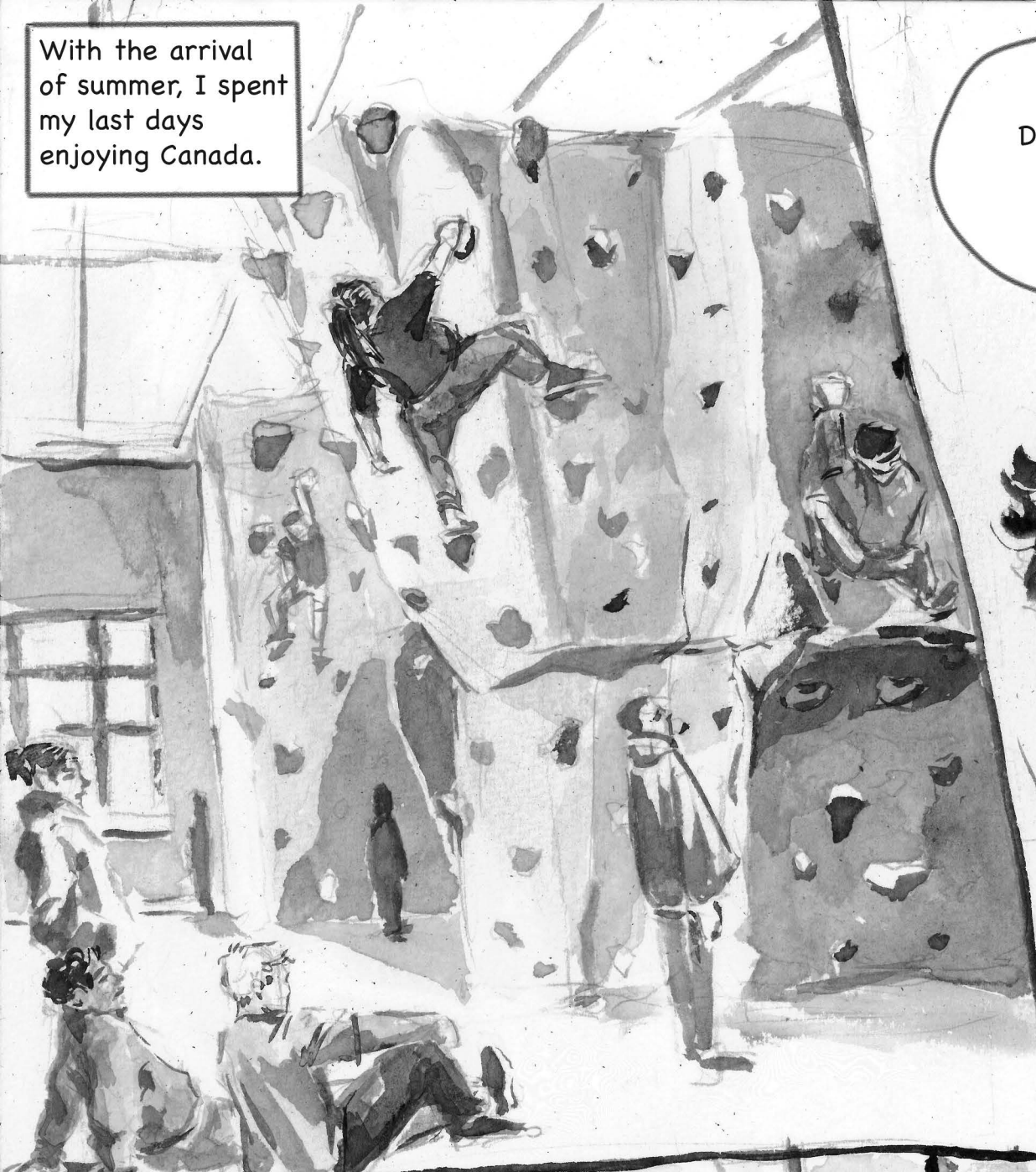
We watched a
performance
by Gerhard
Richter and
two composers.

I like the
architecture

Halleluha... Aus dem
Bot... Halleluja... der...

I love the
carpets.

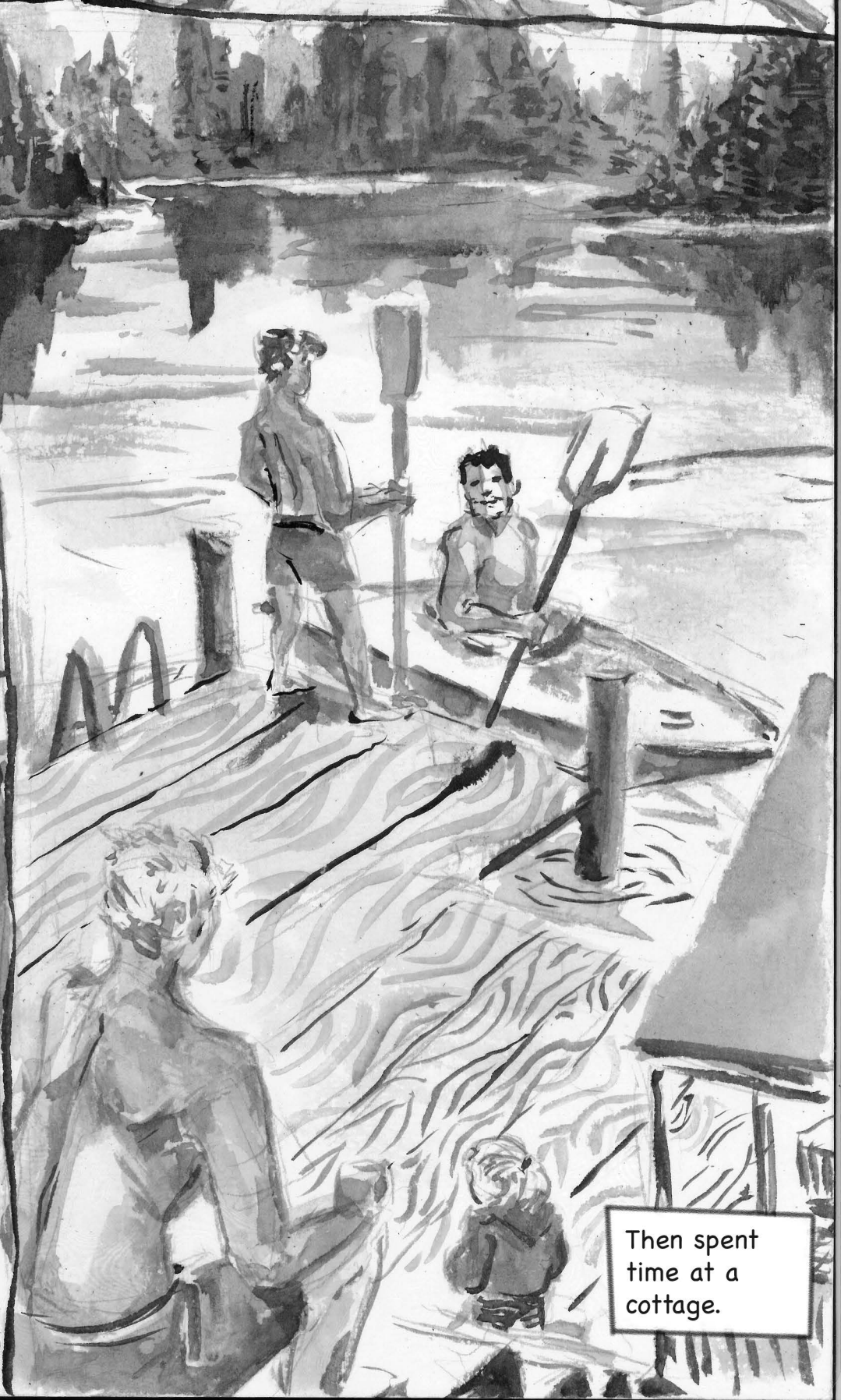
With the arrival of summer, I spent my last days enjoying Canada.



Did you guys take all the food? I told you to leave some of it..



I visited Montréal with Nora.



Then spent time at a cottage.

