

er comm... on this subject should
to
er Secretary of State for India,
Department,
India Office,
London, S.W. 1.
The reference should be made to
0-6058/25

1730A

INDIA OFFICE,

WHITEHALL,

LONDON, S.W. 1.



14th September, 1933.



Seafarers' Stories

With reference to your letter of 4th August,



Spencer

Secretary,
Economic and Overseas Department.

er Secretary of State,
Home Office,
S.W. 1.

Seafarers' Stories

Text and illustrations
© the artists and The National Archives

Chapter break illustrations and cover illustration
by Serena Katt (serenakatt.co.uk) and
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Introduction

For a week in August 2021, a group of five young people connected online to take part in a project using archive documents to inspire a graphic novel.

Documents at The National Archives tell the stories of seafarers from Mirpur, Bengal and the Panjab, who travelled to Britain working on board merchant ships in the 1920s-30s.

The project explored themes of identity, journeys and racial discrimination in the context of the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seaman's) Order 1925. This legislation required seamen from the empire to carry documentary proof of their status as British.

Historian Laura Tabili describes it as 'the first instance of state-sanctioned race discrimination inside Britain to come to widespread notice'.¹ The documents reveal the challenges of obtaining this proof, and the men's stories are surprising and poignant.

In creative workshops led by acclaimed illustrator Serena Katt, the young people learned how to script and illustrate a graphic story, conveying their interpretations of the seafarer's lives. They learned about the historical context of the period from pioneering historian Rozina Visram, whose book *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* covers the legal and social implications of the Order.

The project was inspired by the work of Iqbal Singh, Regional Community Partnerships Manager at The National Archives, whose creative projects have consistently aimed to bring lesser known histories to a wider audience. His detailed research and knowledge of the seafarers' records was essential.

Seafarers' Stories is the result of the talented young people's hard work, enthusiasm and empathy for the men's stories they interpreted. Although their work is rooted in The National Archives' collection, these young illustrators have creatively imagined the gaps between the official records and the seafarers' personal worlds. We hope that you enjoy reading the e-book and that it makes you want to learn more about this important period in British history.

For accompanying teaching resources visit [this webpage](#).

Emily Morris and Hannah Carter
The National Archives, February 2022

Further communication on this subject should be sent to—
The Under Secretary of State for India,
Economic & Overseas Department,
India Office,
London, S.W. 1,
Following reference quoted:—
No. 0.6053/33



INDIA OFFICE,
WHITEHALL,
LONDON, S.W. 1.

1760a
myth September, 1933

Reference:—
Whitehall S140. LO. Ext. No. _____
Trans:—
Memorandum, London

Sir,

With reference to your letter of 4th August, regarding the case of Ghulam Rasul, I am directed by the Secretary to inform you that in view of the fact that the ground is genuine and J. Gilmour is prepared to agree to this view, he should act as indicated in the last paragraph of your letter.

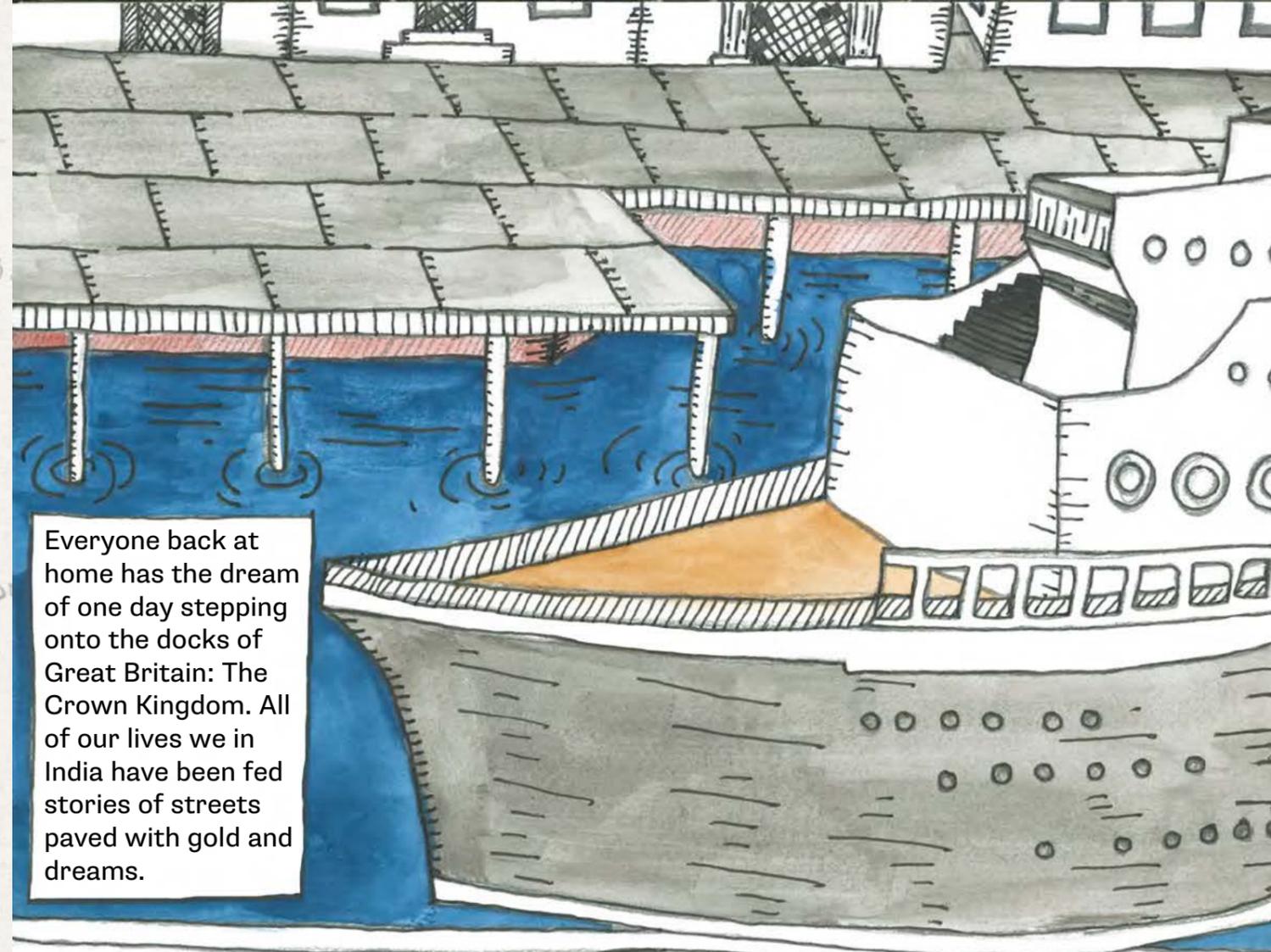
Ghulam Rasul
A good character

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

E. Turner
Secretary,
Economic and Overseas Department.

by Adelka D.

Under Secretary of State,
Home Office,
S.W. 1.



Everyone back at home has the dream of one day stepping onto the docks of Great Britain: The Crown Kingdom. All of our lives we in India have been fed stories of streets paved with gold and dreams.



But as I feel the rain-sodden stone beneath my half-patched shoe, as I stand in the famous 'heart of the world' - all I feel is coldness.

The sensation is as overbearing as the buildings all around, as unwelcoming as the mass of lowered faces bustling like ants in the roads.

Pushing away memories of the heat of Bombay where I worked as a trimmer on a boat for five months, I make the resolution to make something of my life here. If only to pave the way for my sister and her children, back in Kashmir.



I know I have to hurry from these docks before the captain of the German ship I gained free passage on realises I am nothing but a stow-away...



Hey! Get back here!

Never trust an alien, Jim.

Seamstresses and imps, the dirty lot of them.

'Alien' is the word that follows me around for months, as persistent as a shadow but oh so much heavier to carry. When my cousin came to Britain he was a pedlar for a living: tramping the nation and selling wares. That is the path I have attempted to follow...



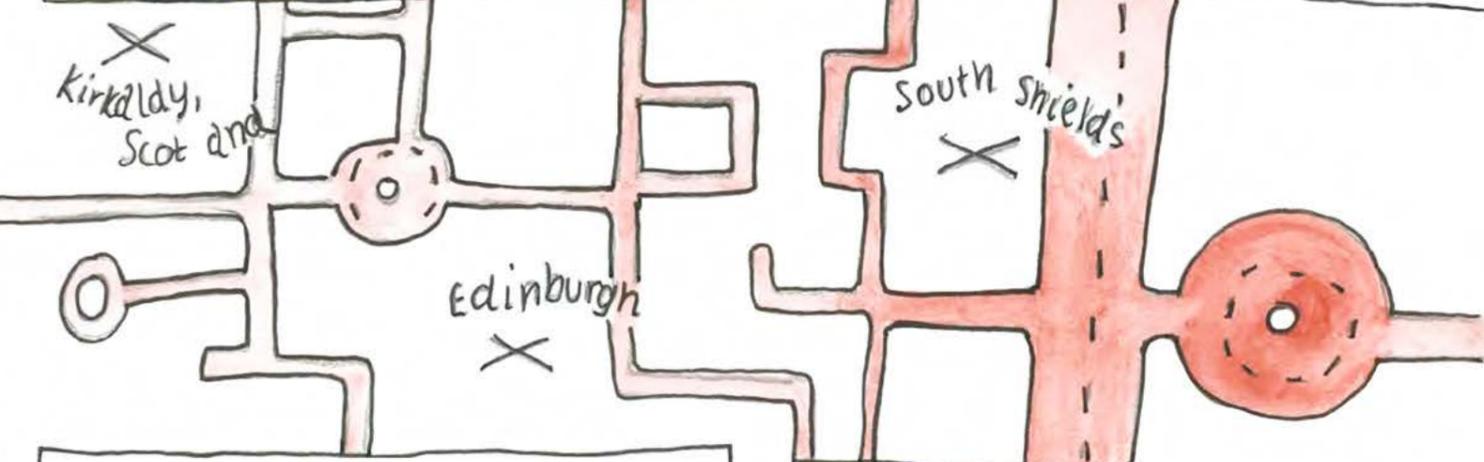
Needle and thread! Come and get your hands on some needle and thread, in the colours of India, Jewel of the Great Empire!



Hush, Oscar.

Mother, why is that man talking like that? He speaks funny.

...but days are often a gamble of whether I will face one of three attitudes from the citizens of the Crown Kingdom: pity, clueless curiosity, or scorn.



The cities that I once dreamed of in technicolour blur into an endless line of black and grey; of rain and ice, both in the skies and in the faces of those I meet. Here, I huddle from the rain of Kirkcaldy. Here, I keep my head bowed in Edinburgh. Here, I shelter from the storms of South Shields.



There are times that I barely feel like a man, but a shadow of one. I touch the world as an echo of myself, rather than with solid hands. I want to cry: can you see me? to the world... Do I exist to you Englishfolk? should I?

It takes being robbed by a gang of South Shield troublemakers for me to realise that the Crown Kingdom dream that was sold to me was always a lie.



You aren't welcome here!

Get back to where you came from!

We don't want an alien man working with us...

But we don't want him either! Give him another job!

Sir,
In reply to letter of the 14th inst. as stated by you as been named above named is receipt of the app. returned herewith with RASUL state news passage from India to Lerman ship 1925, and

Dated 5 a kot, the 3rd February 1933
Sir,
With reference to your letter No 4 186 - 2/160 12th Aug st

INDIA OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON
SW-1.
4th August 1933
14th Sept

10th October, 1933

607,696/16

Sir,

with reference to this man's request to receive a license as a seaman, I am directed by secretary Sir J. Gilmour to say, for the information of secretary Sir Samuel Hoare, that this man has now registered under the special restriction (coloured alien seamen) order, 1925. Ghulam Rasul is officially a Seaman.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant

K.N. NOOPER



letter of the 4th August, regarding Ghulam Rasul, I am directed by the Secretary of State for India to inform you that in this year, in his view there appears to be

BURGH POLICE
27th Sept. 1933

It seems that there are no loopholes.

(Sgd) P. E. Inspector

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant

He's persistent, let's give him that.

Umm

S.W.L

British army.
I respectfully suggest that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, London, SW1.

R. J. Hetherington

7E JUN 25
B

No. _____

This Form must be accompanied by two sm
and any dependents accompany
prescribed fee (fees cannot be

Jan Mohamed the Applicant
together with

Application for a Document
obtain

The adventures of Jan Mohamed

Surname (in printed letters) Jan
Christian Names Jan
Address 38 Cotton St
Sex Ma
5' ft. 7 in. Eyes blue Hair black



District _____ { Number of Registration Certificate _____ }
The Applicant is not registered as an alien this line should be left blank)
Nationality British
British Married or Single Married
United Kingdom 16 years _____ months.
and children, if any Gobam Fadyma (wife)

Whether wife and/or children are accompanying applicant No

Destination and object of journey India. Holidays.

Have you previously had a Home Office Document of Identity? Yes
If so, when? _____

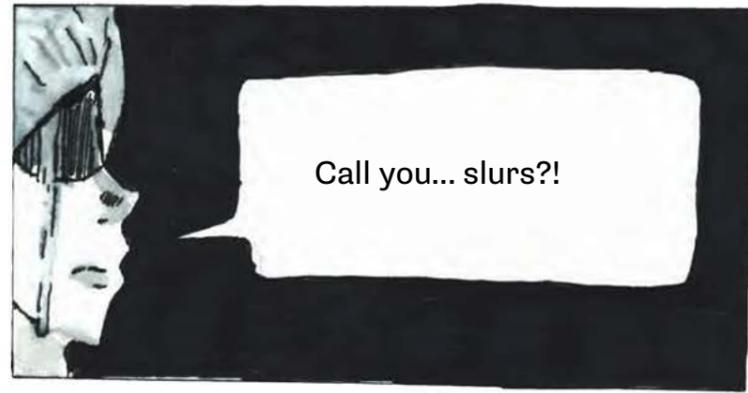
Do you intend to return to the United Kingdom, and if so when? Yes

Port of departure London Date of sailing Immigrants
Date 22 Jan 1980 Signature [Signature]

Remarks by Examiner (for official use only):-

by Micah N.



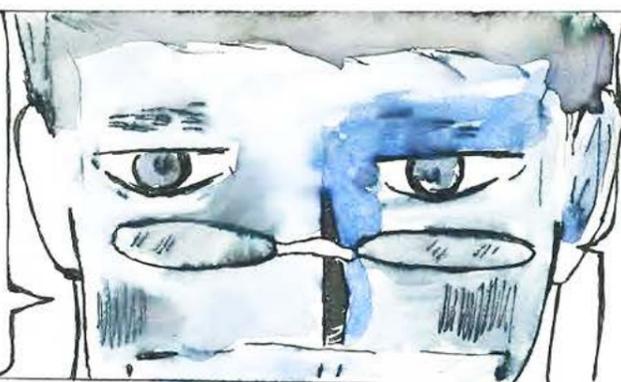


Antwerp 1925





Mr Mohamed, we have no intention or obligation to aid you financially.



Furthermore, you were refused leave to land under the 1920 Alien Seaman's Order.



Wow Jan, I can't believe you stood up to them! That's really impressive!



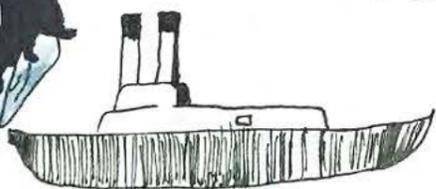
Strange, out of all the Alien seamen I have encountered, Mr Mohamed is definitely the most courageous.



When that man entered the Consulate, was somewhat enamoured by his mysterious aura. That fascination soon turned to disgust when he lowered his hood and revealed himself to be a Coloured Alien Seaman. No matter, I must report this incident for further reference.

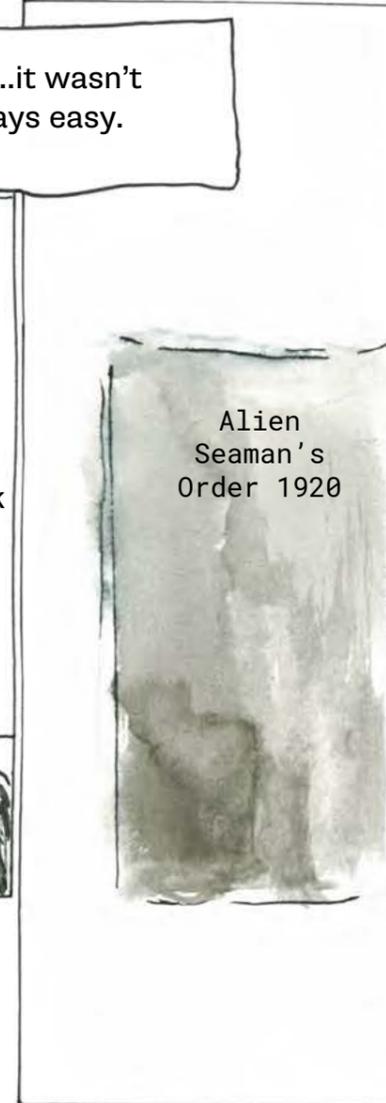


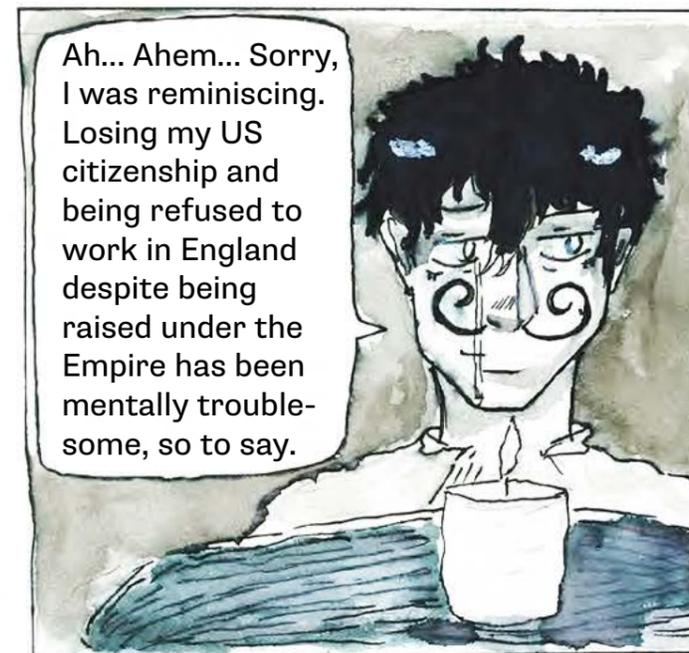
After that I stowed away on a ship and arrived here, in Leith.



But...it wasn't always easy.

Thank you!





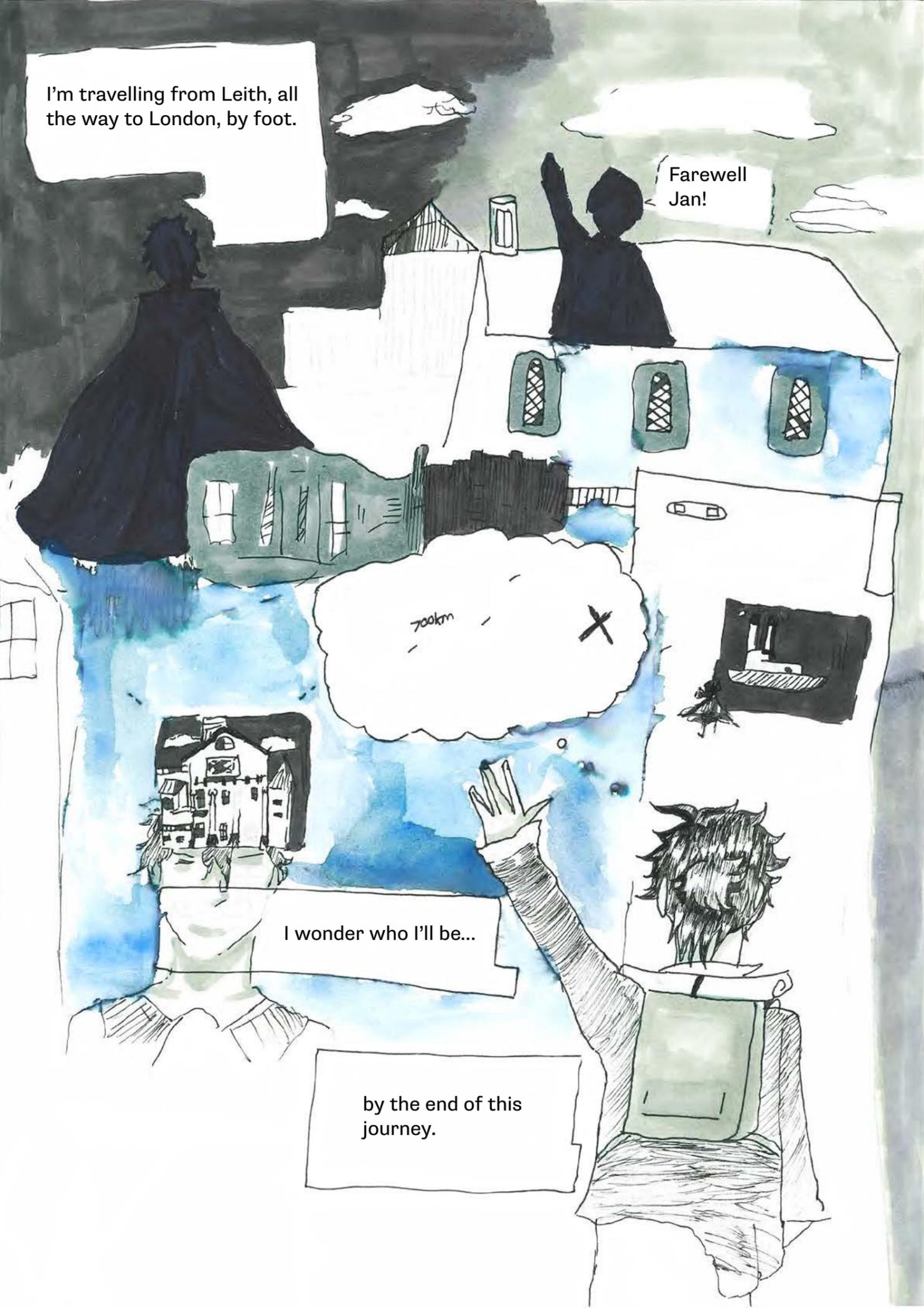
I'm travelling from Leith, all the way to London, by foot.

Farewell Jan!

700km X

I wonder who I'll be...

by the end of this journey.



C12822



MERCANTILE MARINE DEPARTMENT,
BOARD OF TRADE,
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

11th March, 1932.

Dear

Paku Miah

of

Refusing fate

Paku

raised in your le
Indian seaman nam
"nanda", I am

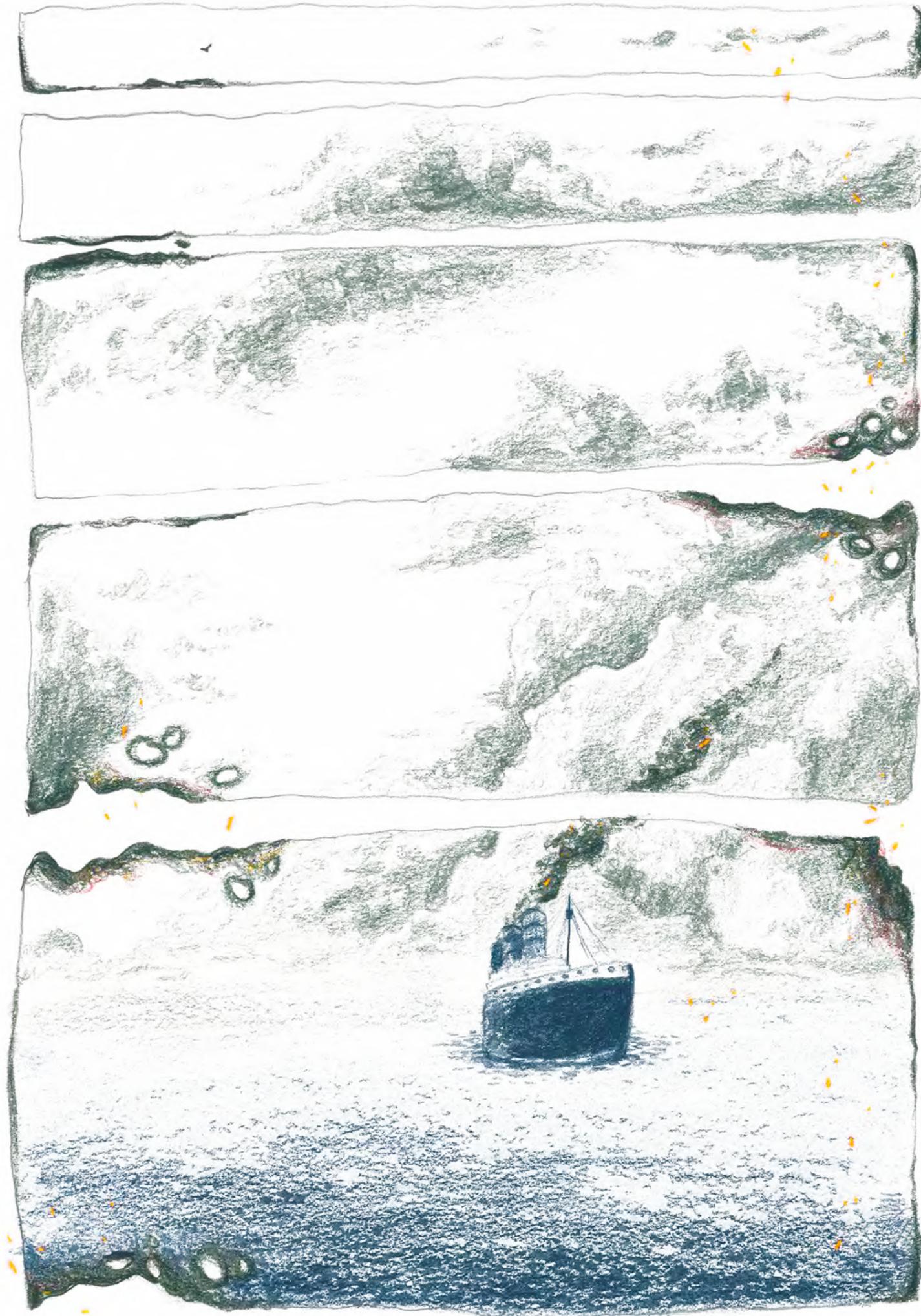
afraid we cannot suggest any means of compelling this
to return to sea or of sending him back to India again
his will. The legal position seems to be stated
correctly in the letter dated 28th January from the
Shipping Federation to Messrs. T. & J. Harrison.

I am writing in the absence of Harker, who is on sick leave.
Yours sincerely,

J. Baker

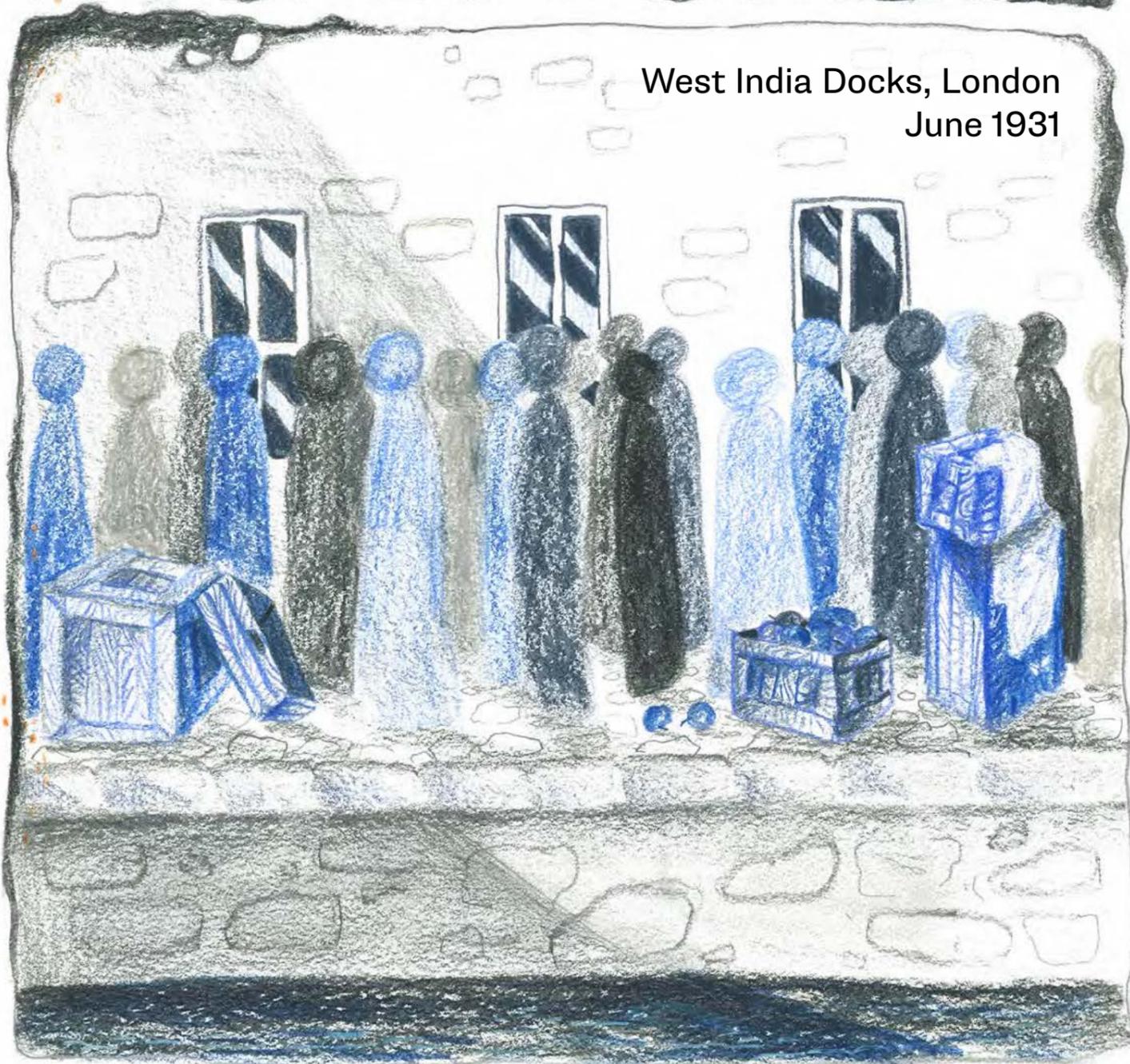
by Maia D.

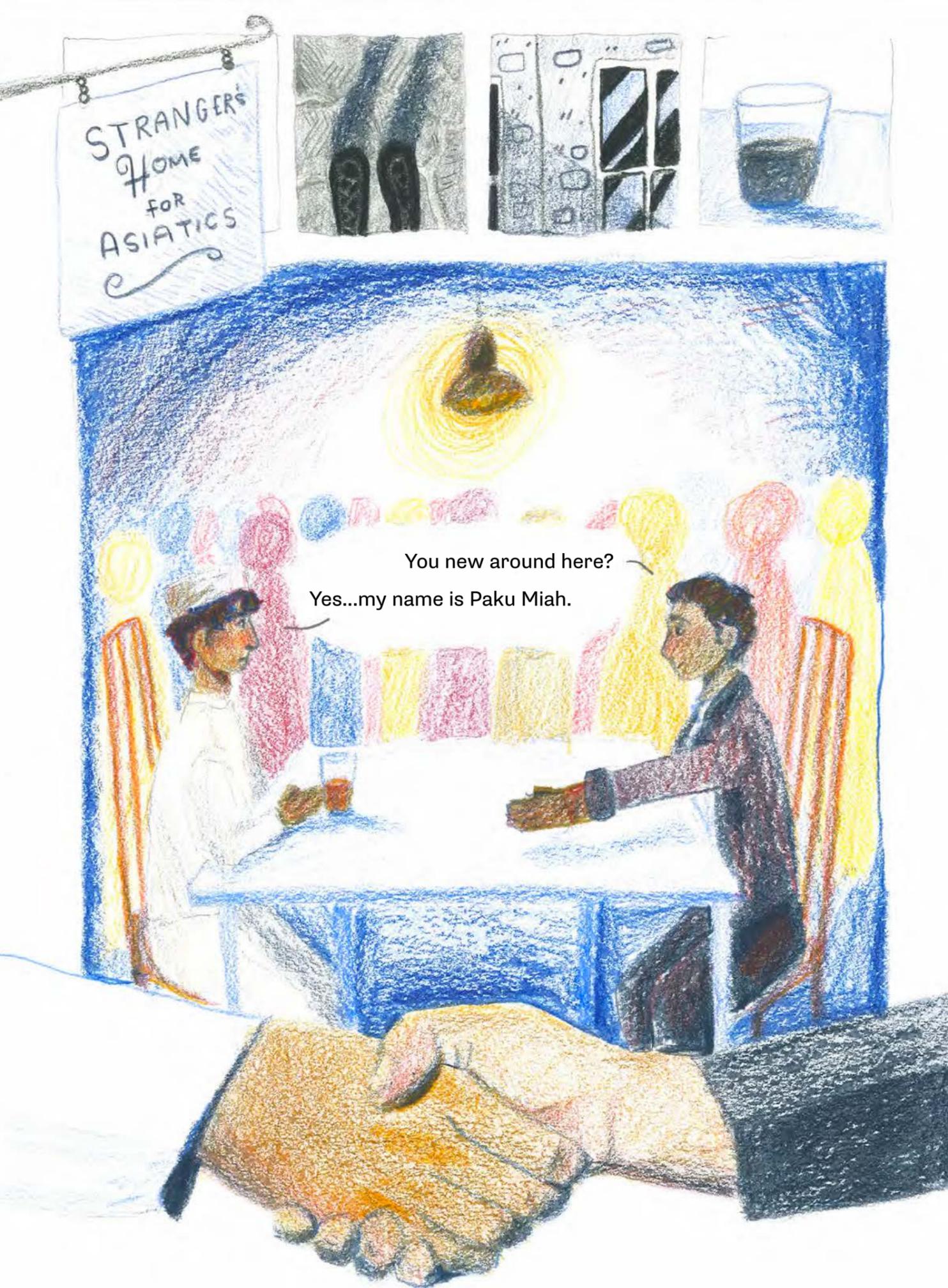
, Esq.



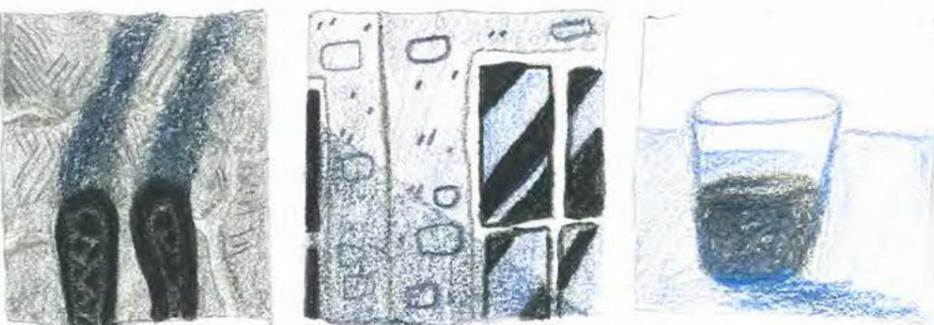


West India Docks, London
June 1931





STRANGERS HOME FOR ASIATICS



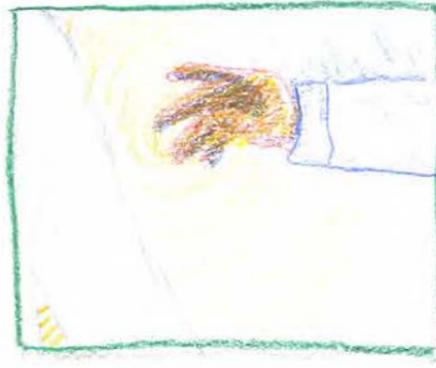
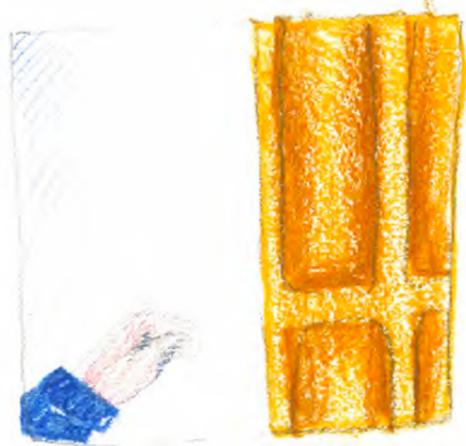
You new around here?
Yes...my name is Paku Miah.



I haven't seen him since the Asiatics Home

Gentlemen,
I was glad to see you when
you were in the ship that
deserted from your ship
if he is not returned to India
you must be approached to you
and returned to the ship.
India
Security
Control
Department

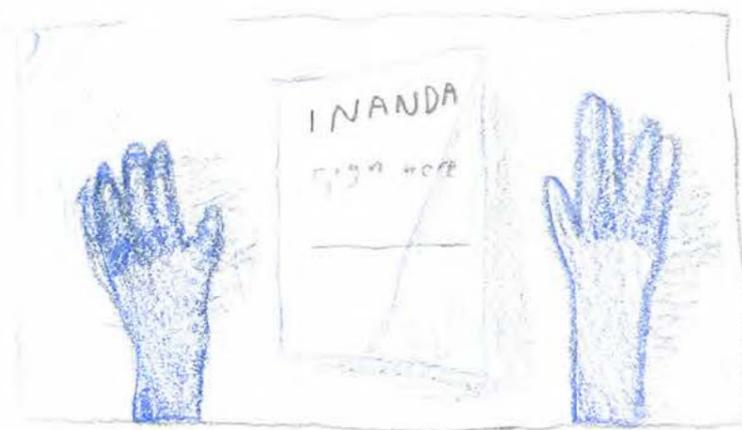
I heard he was staying with
someone in Shoreditch

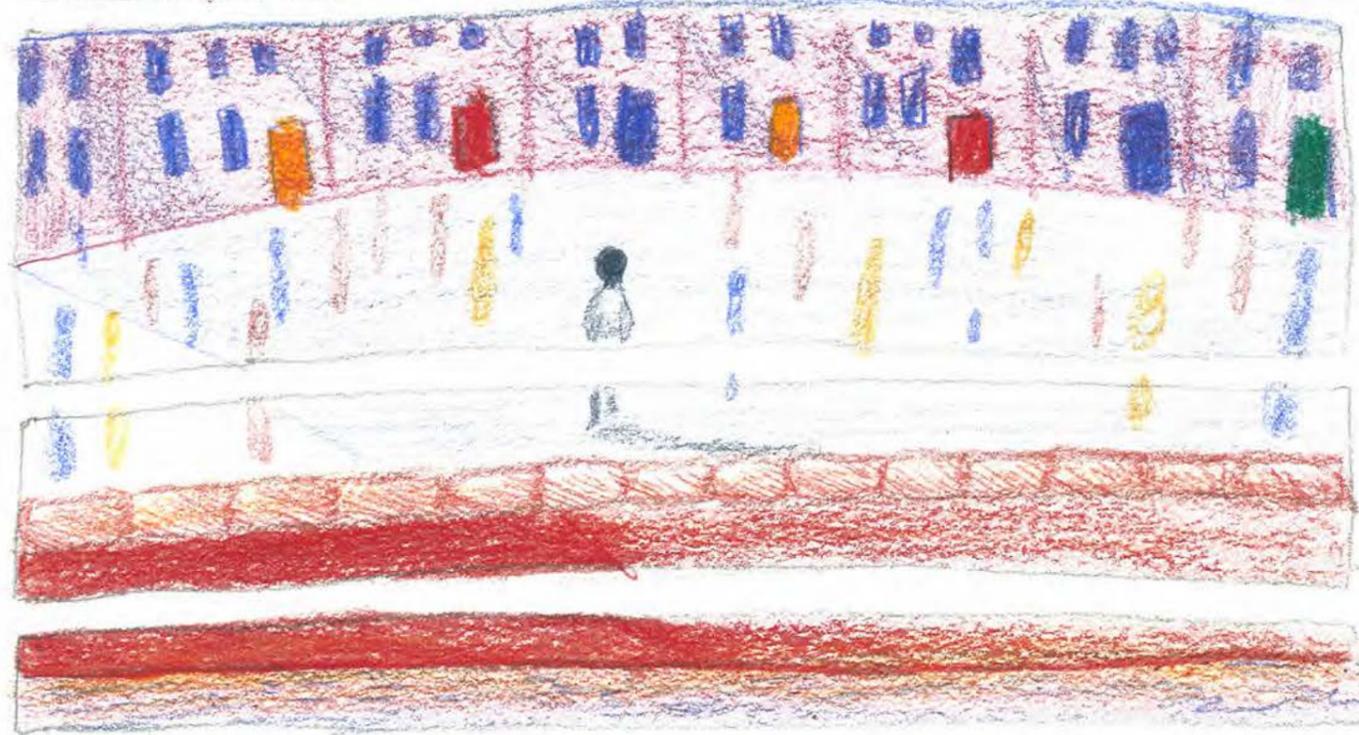


Sir, we're going to need you to come with us...

You can't make me. I won't.

You've been found guilty. You have to leave.







FOR P.R.O.

664623

CLOSED UNTIL 2 1985

Hassan Khan

COMMISSIONER

H.O.45/ 15863

A dream to return to sea

to the applicant.

by Jasleen S.

MINUTES.

Before the Board... it was the view... of the Board...

to be... to be... to be...

22 2 37

[Signature]

23 FEB 1934

see report of...

Brown

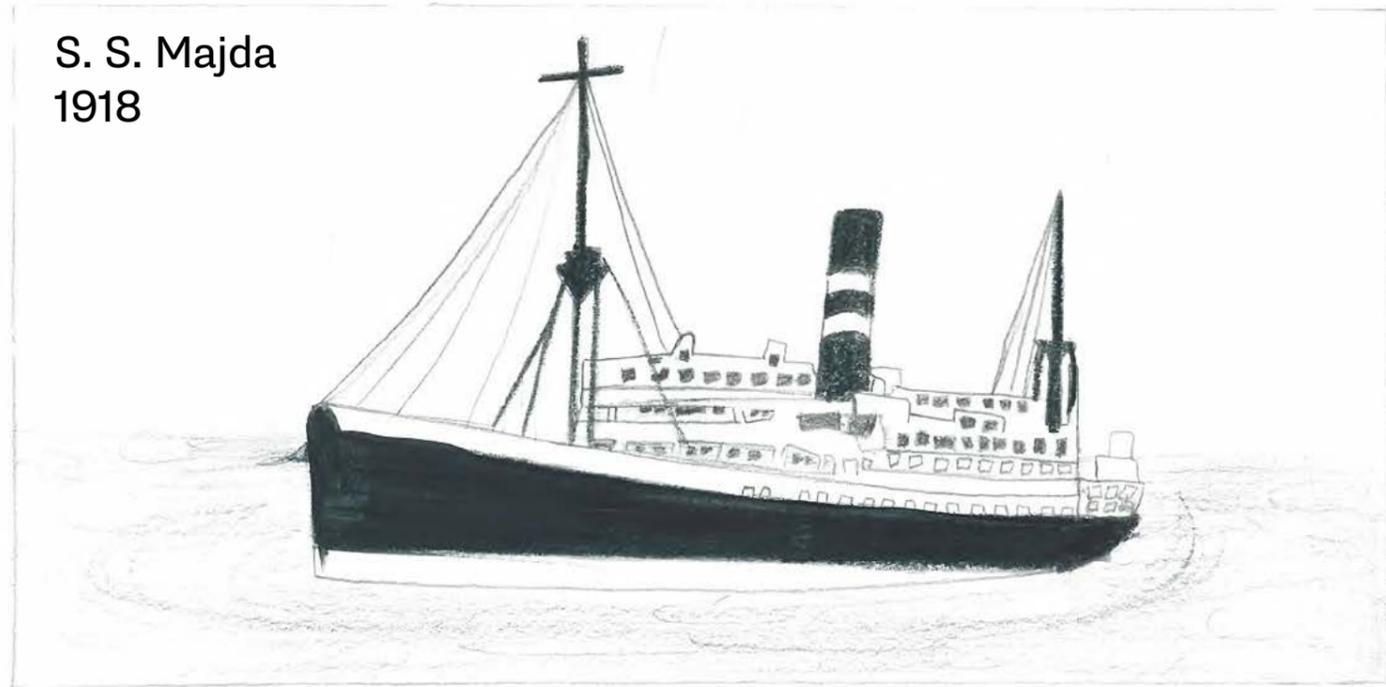
[Signature]

28 FEB 1934

If in view... the Board... the Board...

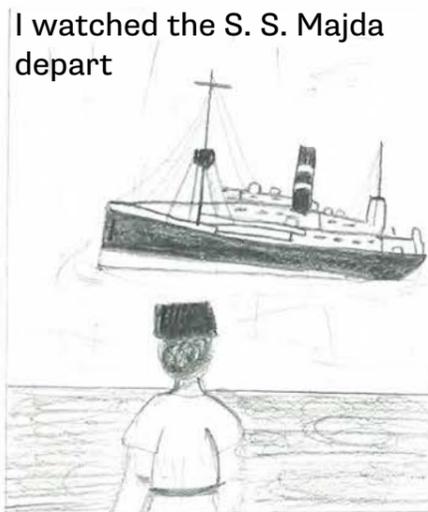
[Signature]

S. S. Majda 1918



As I stepped off the ship, the contrast of the heat of the boat compared to the cool cascade of rainfall hit me like a punch.

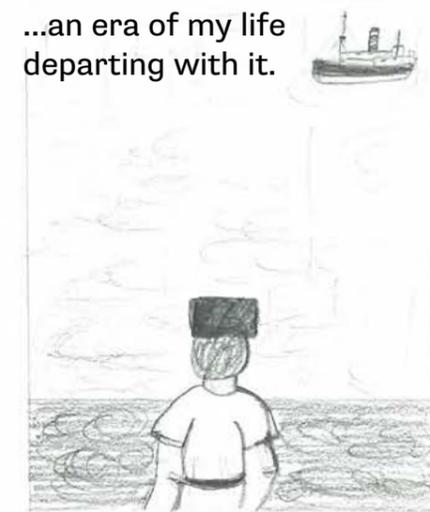
I watched the S. S. Majda depart



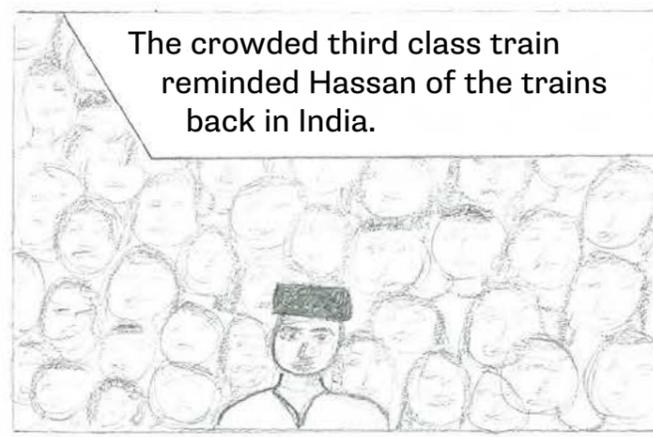
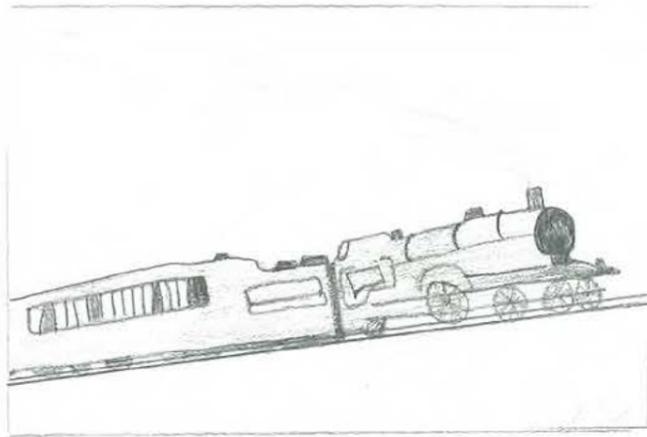
without me...



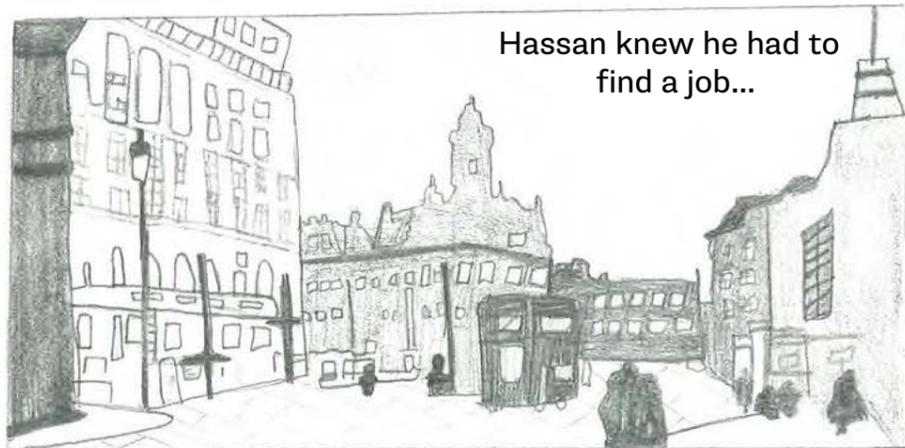
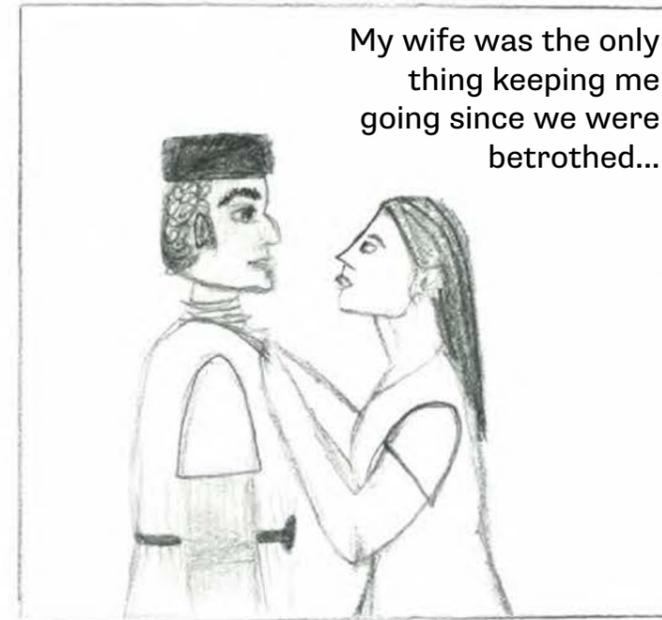
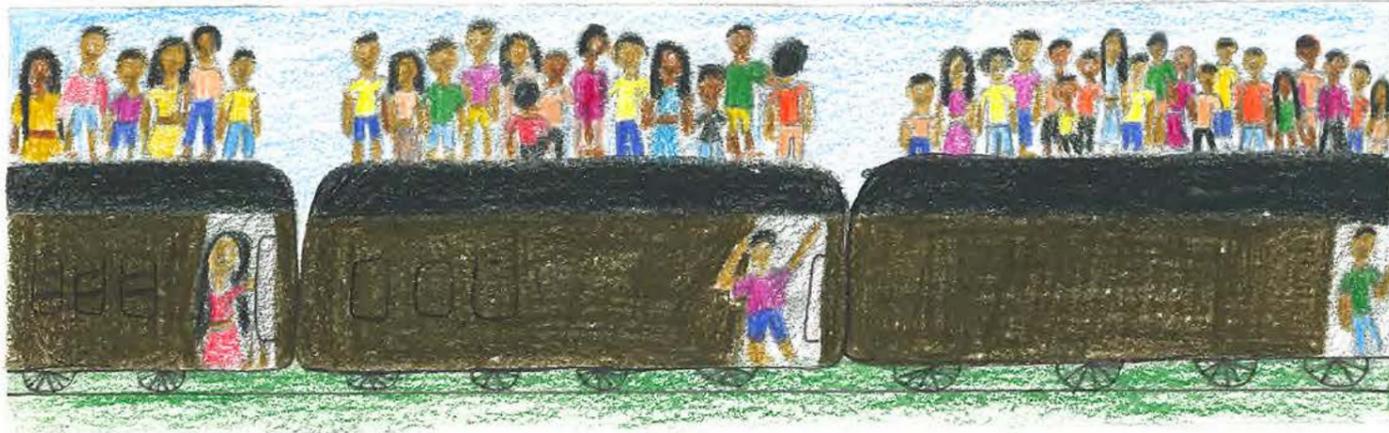
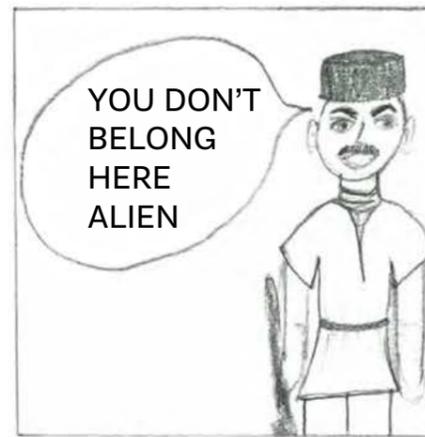
...an era of my life departing with it.



7 FEB 1934
23 FEB 1934

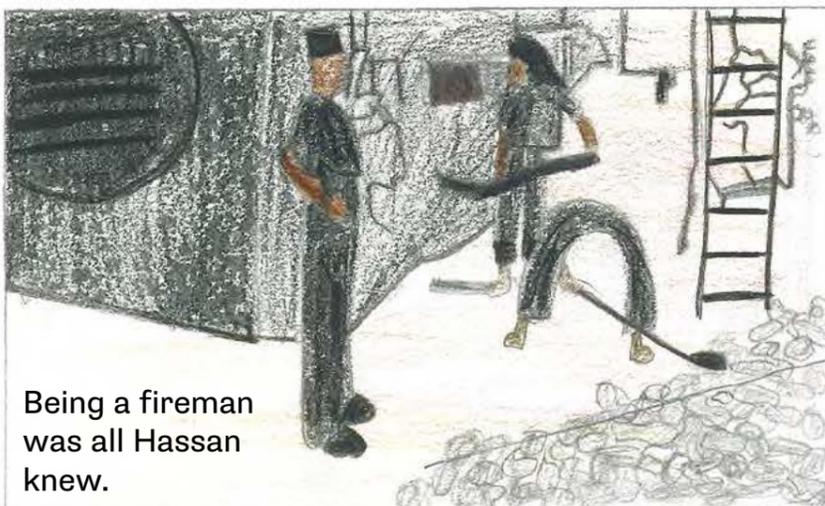


The crowded third class train reminded Hassan of the trains back in India.

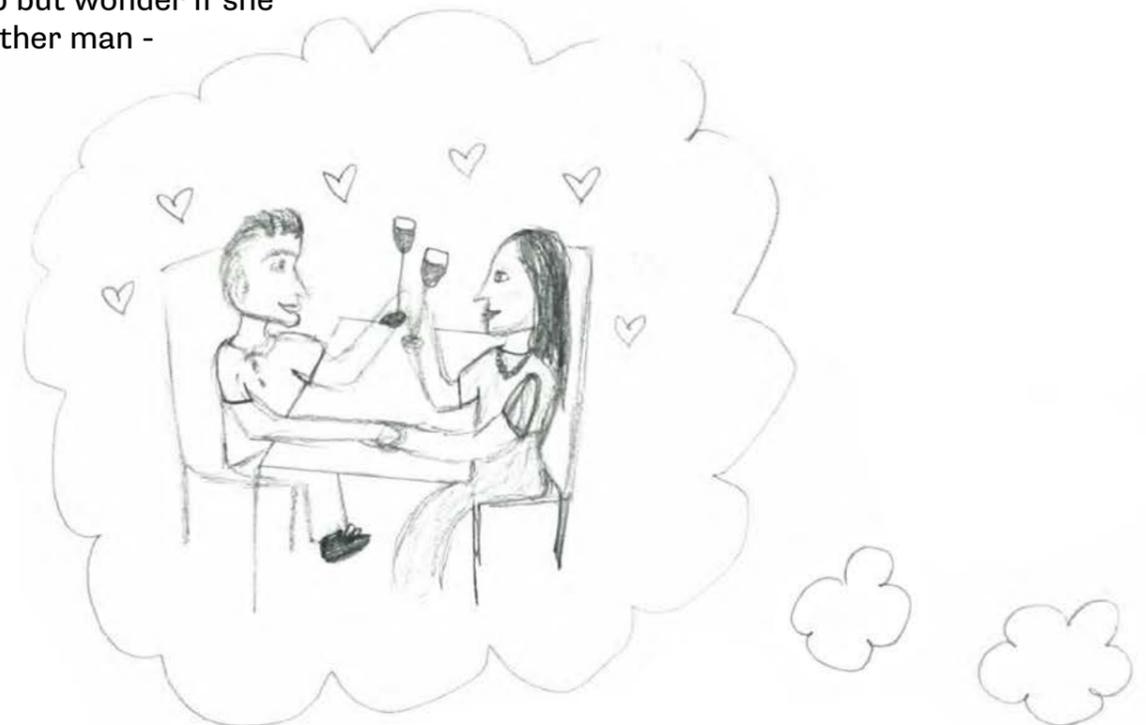


Hassan knew he had to find a job...

I cannot help but wonder if she has met another man - a white man



Being a fireman was all Hassan knew.



Hassan's colleagues never stopped their racist comments. But enough was enough. No more.

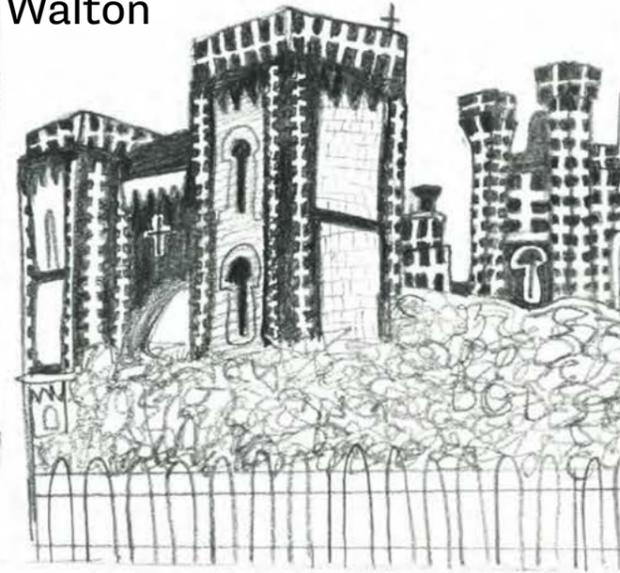


Suddenly the shovel began to look different...

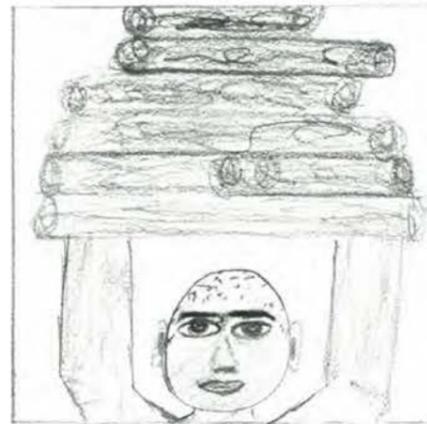
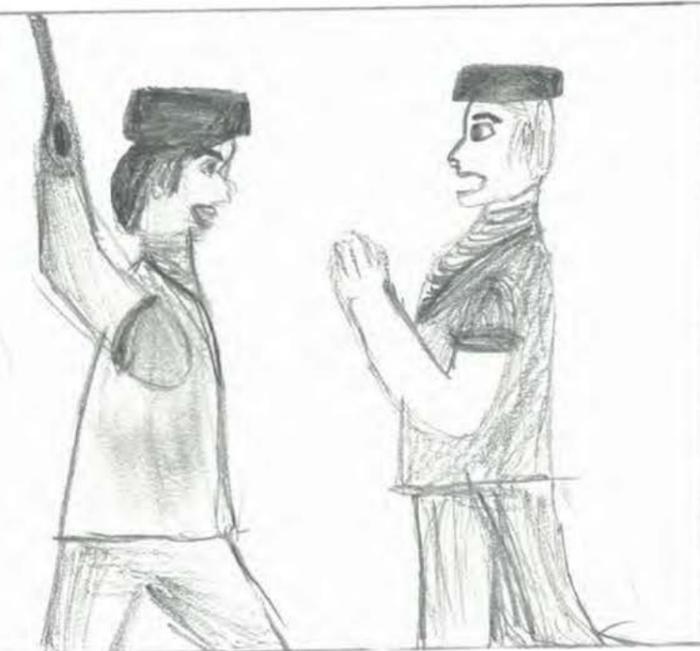
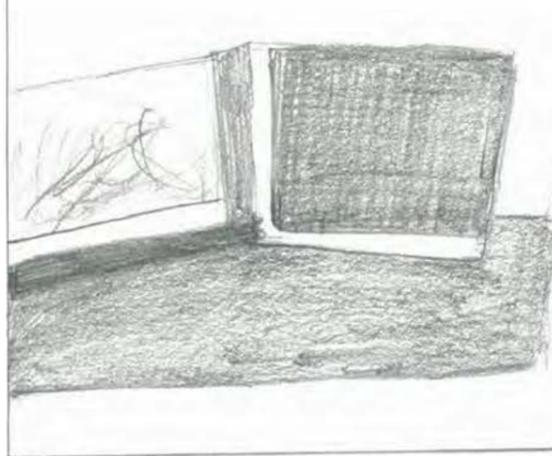


...perhaps even menacing

HM Prison Walton



Hassan knew he shouldn't. But his arms were not obeying his head. So he slammed the shovel down onto the man with every bit of force he had.



AGAIN...



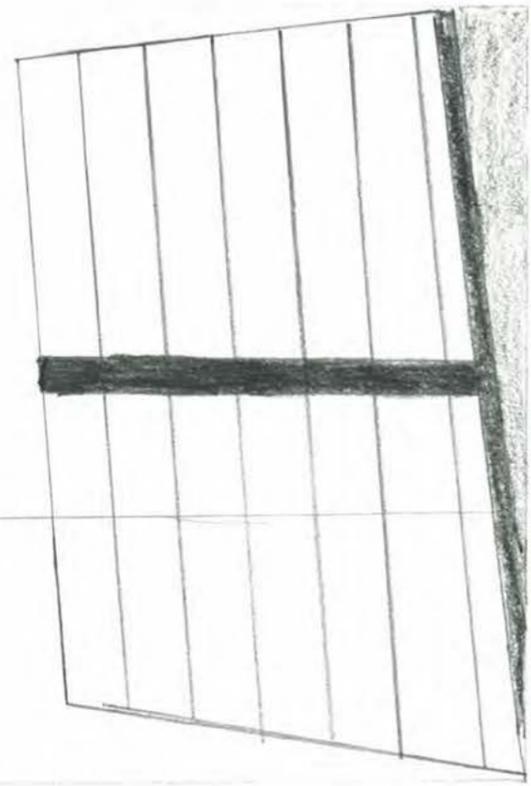
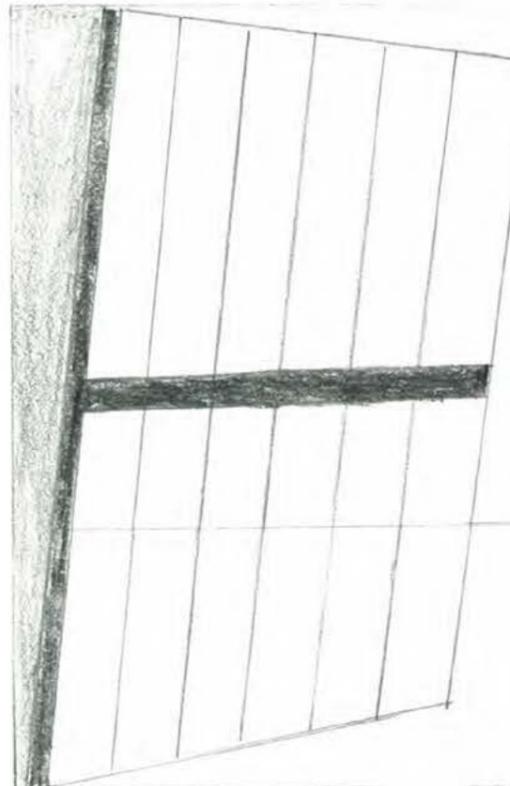
...AND AGAIN



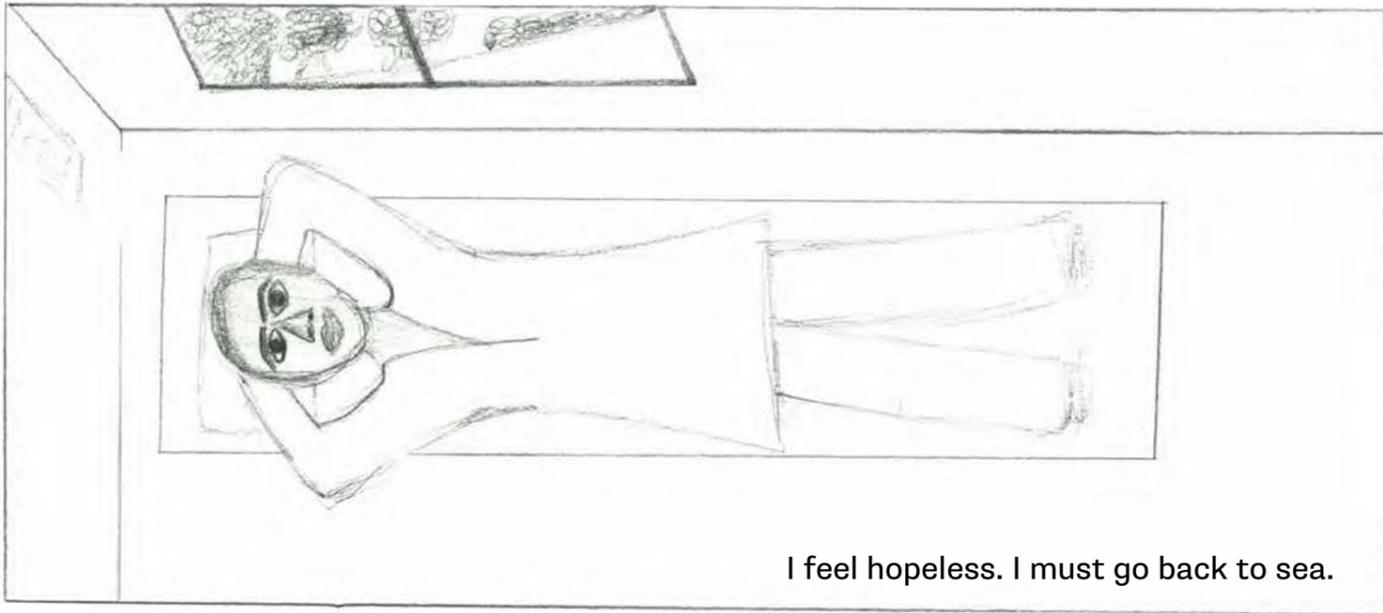
...AND AGAIN



I was finally released. But no one was waiting for me.



I yearned for the comfort of the sea.



I feel hopeless. I must go back to sea.

We want you to stop receiving our public funds. You can now leave Britain.



F.H.

35 SEP

G.I.D. HEADQUARTERS Station,
2nd September, 1931.

of Letter 22414/31.

Subject:-

Latiffor RAHAMAN

Finding home

Under
the 2
the 1

Rahaman, together with a woman believed to be his wife, resided in apartments at 108, Cecil Street, Greenhay, Manchester.

The parties stayed in the name of John and Alice Boardman, and upon leaving intimated an intention of proceeding to Wales, the actual place being unknown.

Up to the present enquiries have failed to trace the parties in this City.

Should Rahaman be located, however, the contents of the communication will be made known to him and Messrs. P. Henderson and Co. informed.

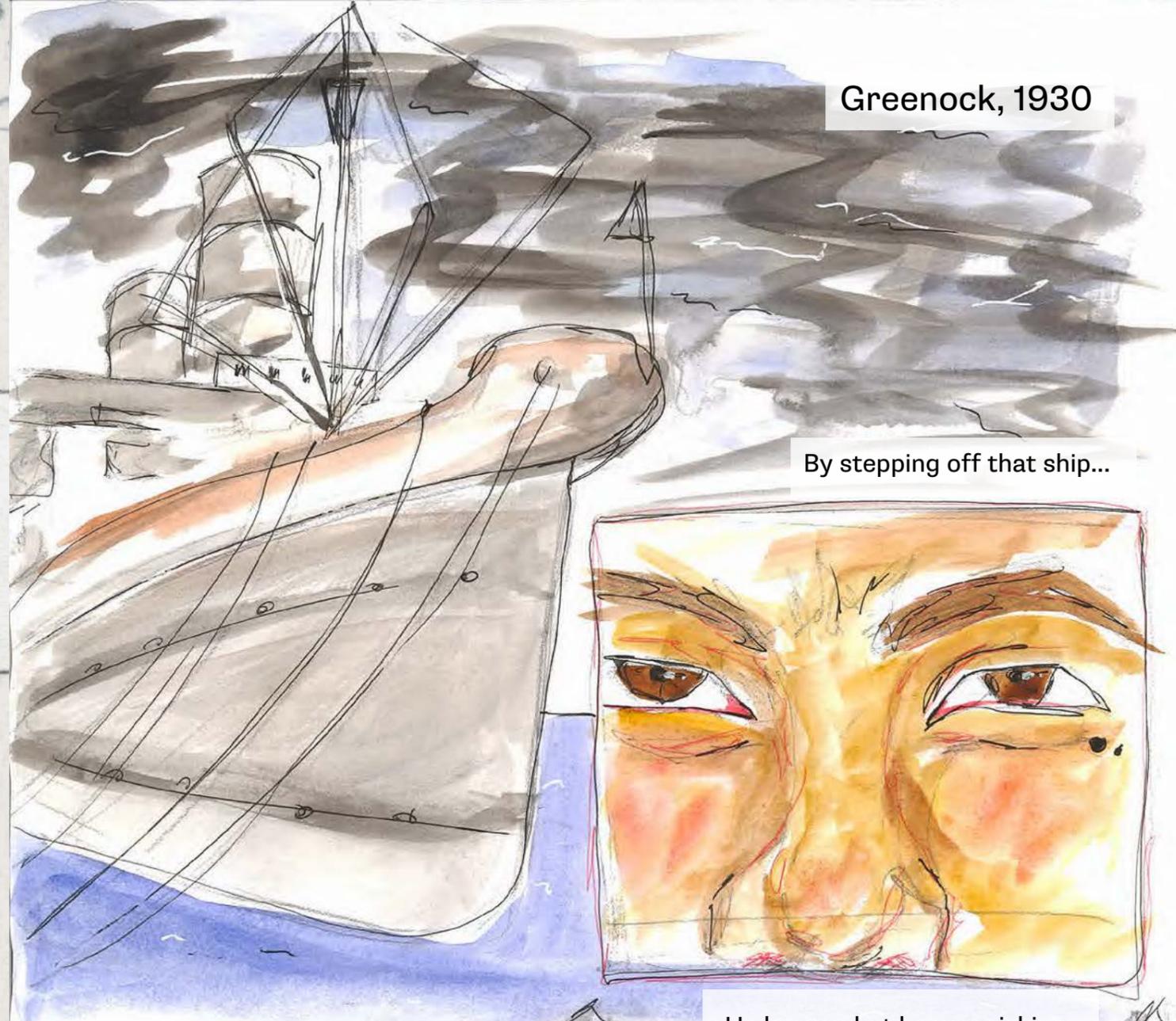
I respectfully suggest that a copy of this report be f
Office, Lon
of State, Home
in.

by Ioana L.

PIERPOINT,
Police Constable.

Submitted to:-
(signed) W. TOWNSEND,

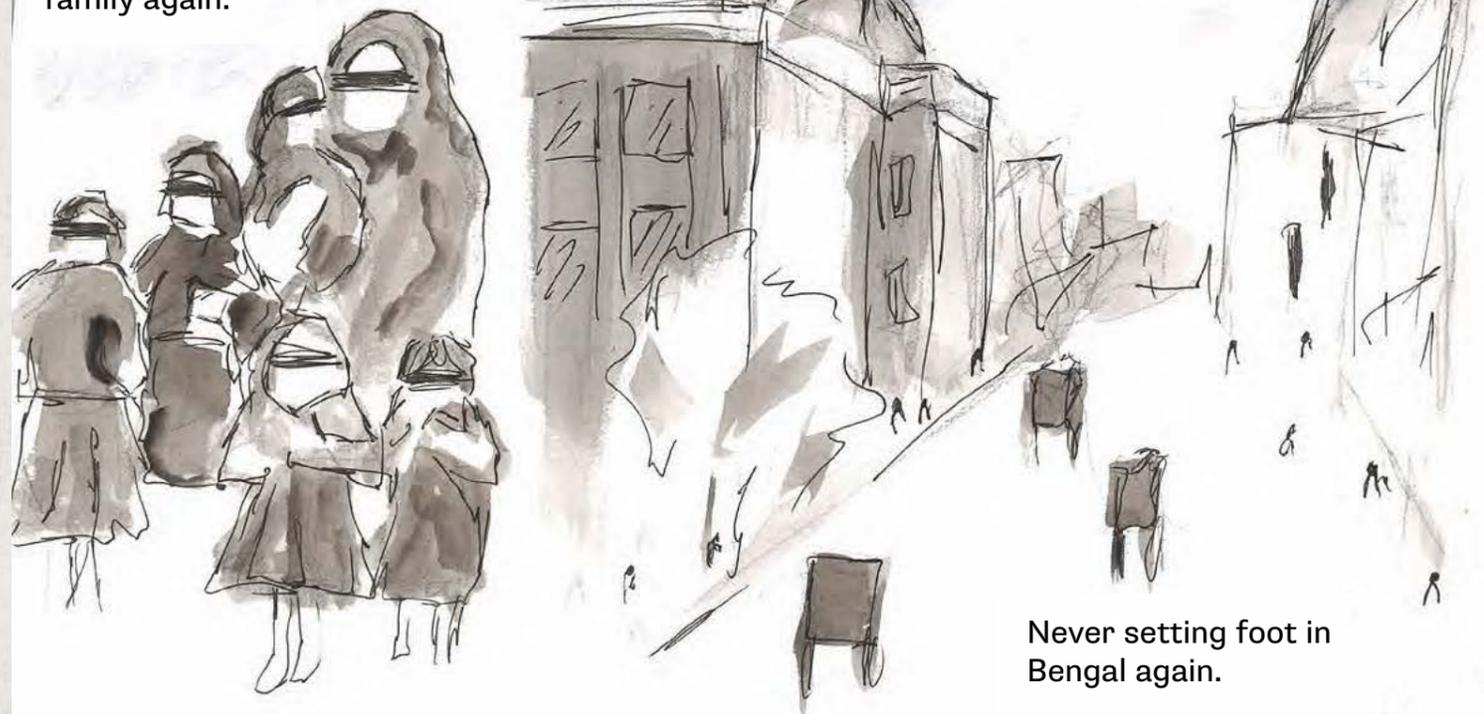
Greenock, 1930



By stepping off that ship...

He knew what he was risking.

Never seeing his family again.



Never setting foot in Bengal again.

Glasgow, 1930

WHY HAVEN'T YOU DONE SOMETHING WITH YOURSELF YET?

YOU'RE STILL YOUNG...

GO OUT THERE AND TRY YOUR LUCK.

Glasgow was never a home for me, so I kept on walking, door to door...

...until I reached Liverpool.

I met her in Liverpool.

She always wore a red necklace.

Just like someone I once knew.

She taught me how to sew...

...I taught her how to play the punji...

...We didn't talk much but we both wanted to get away.

Liverpool, 1931

Manchester, 1931

Manchester almost felt like home.



Alice was busy, sewing day and night.



Latiffor's charm was selling clothes like never before.



Everything was finally falling into place.



Until the police came knocking again...



...And they had to disappear again.