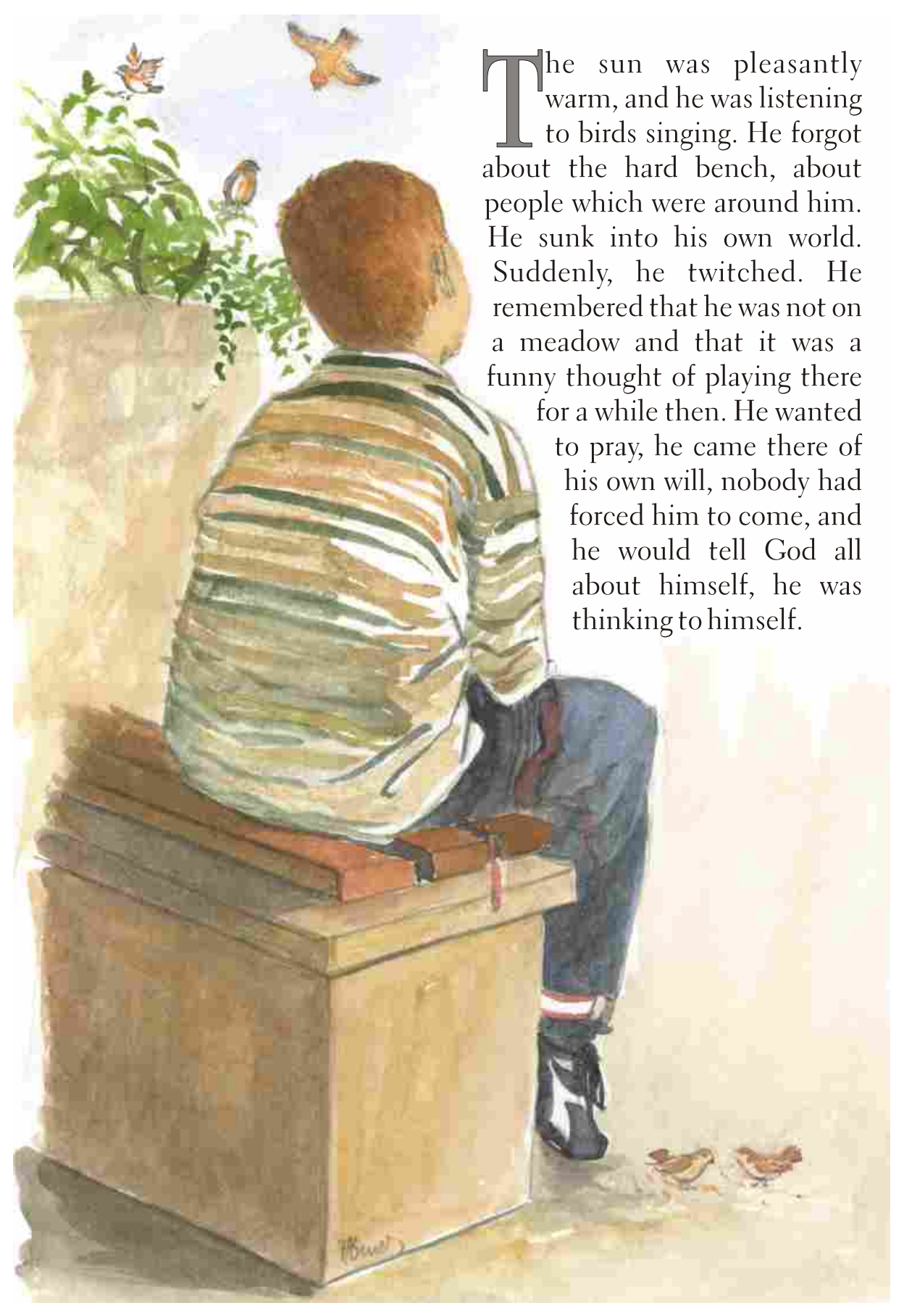




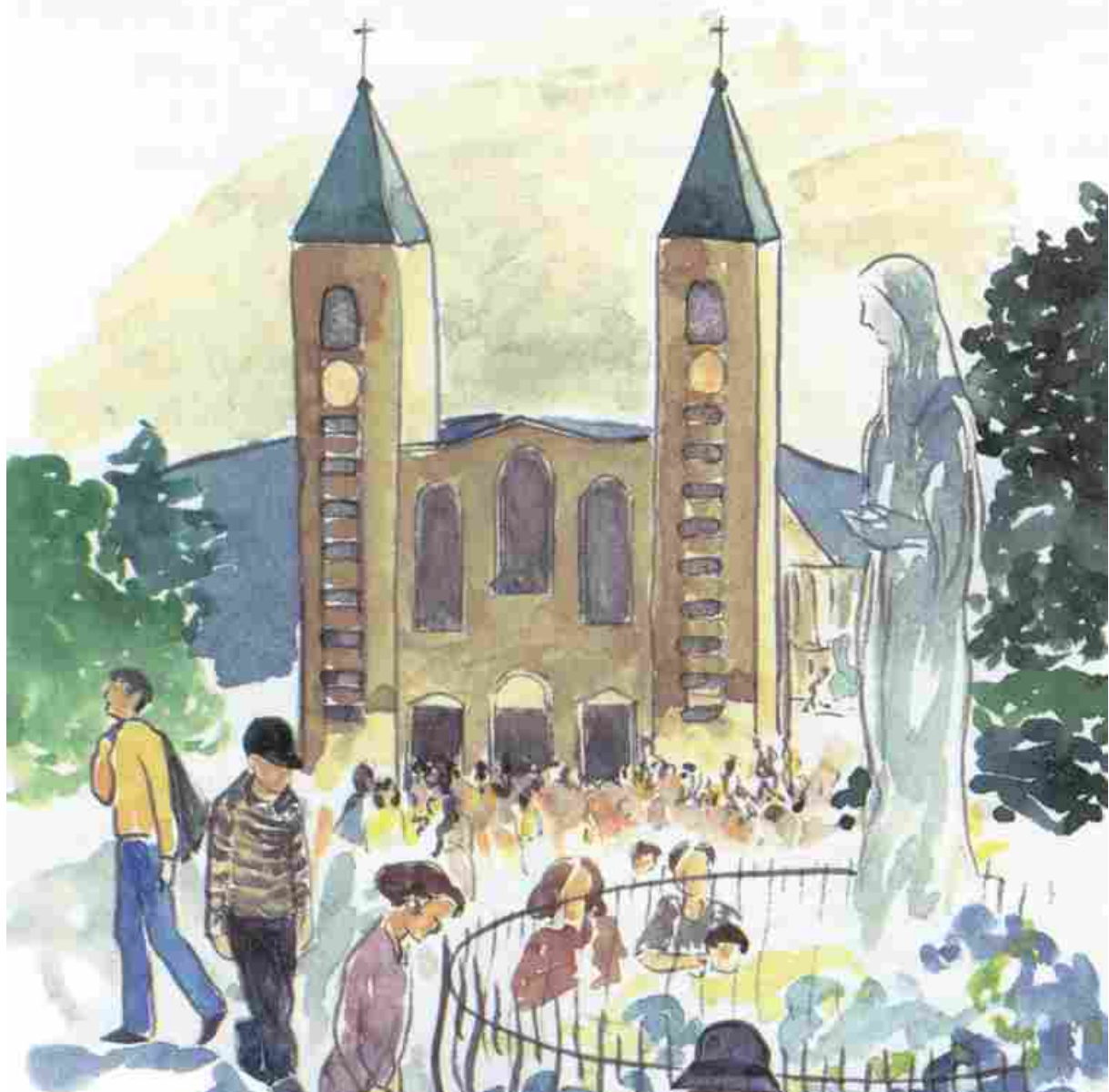
————— Miljenko Stojić —————

# JOHN UNDER THE CROSS

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The sun was pleasantly warm, and he was listening to birds singing. He forgot about the hard bench, about people which were around him. He sunk into his own world. Suddenly, he twitched. He remembered that he was not on a meadow and that it was a funny thought of playing there for a while then. He wanted to pray, he came there of his own will, nobody had forced him to come, and he would tell God all about himself, he was thinking to himself.



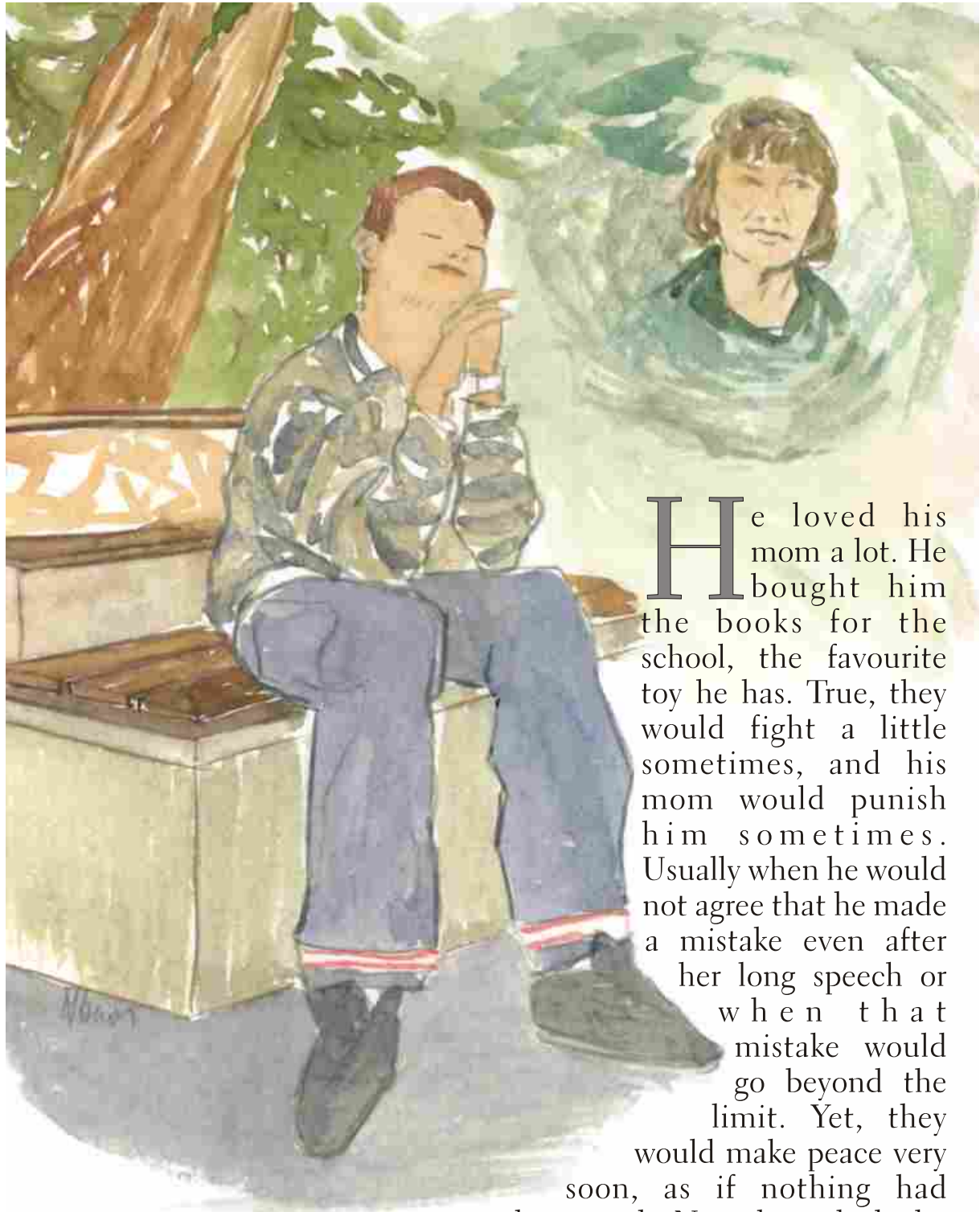
**H**is parents christened him John. His grandfather and grandmother told him that, and he learned at religious instruction lessons that that was how a person got a name. Now the school was out, and he came to the Sanctuary of the Queen of Peace in Medjugorje with his class and the class-mistress. While everybody ran off to buy something as a souvenir, he felt a wish to pray under the Cross.



He was for the first time in the Sanctuary today, but he remembered well what his household members and neighbours had told him about everything that was going on here. He was thinking about it as he was watching the cross set next to the church of Sv. Jakov (St. Jacob), and, beyond it, Križevac hill and the cross set up there. He did not remember when exactly had that cross been set up. But he knew that it had been before the World War II. He remembered that well, because he did not like war.



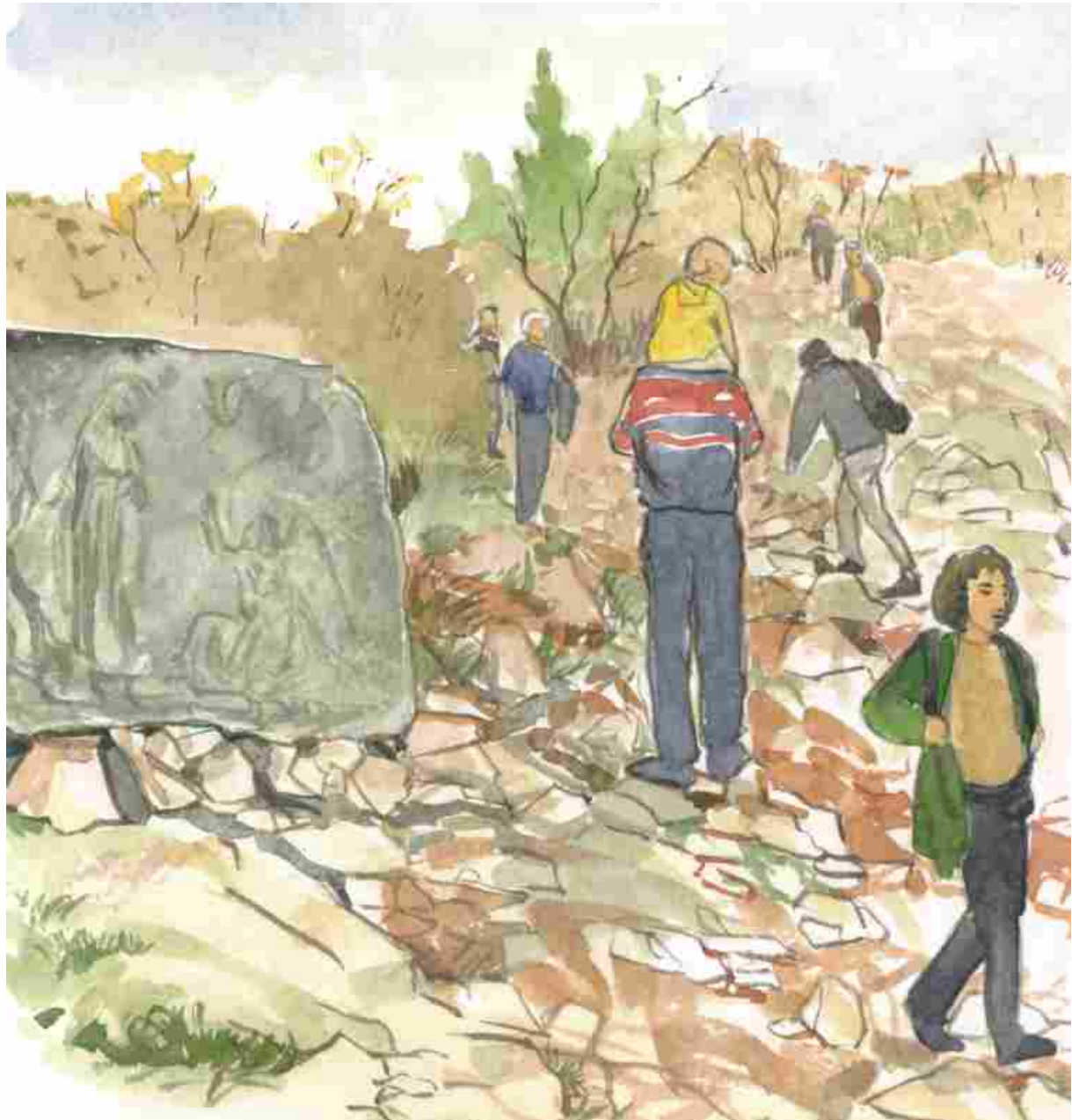
**H**e has always liked the cross because of something. He did not know what, but they told him that he had learned to cross himself and to say the Lord's Prayer very early, as well as the prayer to Guardian Angel. After that, his mother told him that everybody had and carried his own cross. He did not understand her, but it seemed to him now that he was slowly beginning to understand what that could have meant.



He loved his mom a lot. He bought him the books for the school, the favourite toy he has. True, they would fight a little sometimes, and his mom would punish him sometimes. Usually when he would not agree that he made a mistake even after her long speech or when that mistake would go beyond the limit. Yet, they would make peace very soon, as if nothing had happened. Now he asked the Queen of Peace to help him not to think of his father so much.

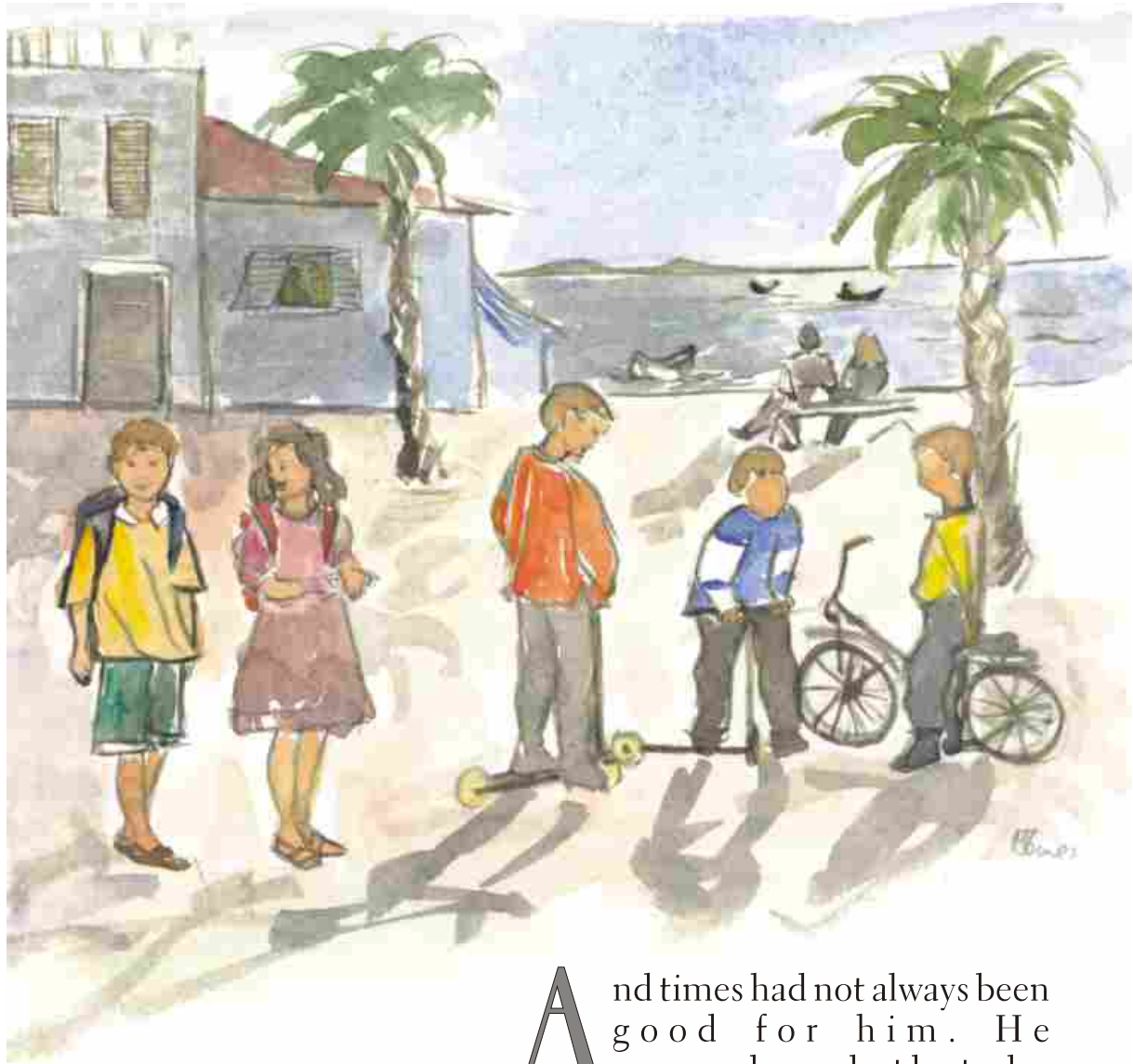


**Y**es, he would like his father were with him here, but he was gone. Not that he envied those who had one, but, it would be different with him. They would play together, make jokes, and he would not bring flowers to his grave with his mom instead. Namely, he had been killed on the front-line one day. They said that he was one of the best people in the place and that his burial was therefore magnificent. He did not remember that, but, when he enrolled in school, his mom gave him the Croatian flag with which his dad's coffin was covered and the medals he won in battles. He remembered that and he treasured all that as something most precious.

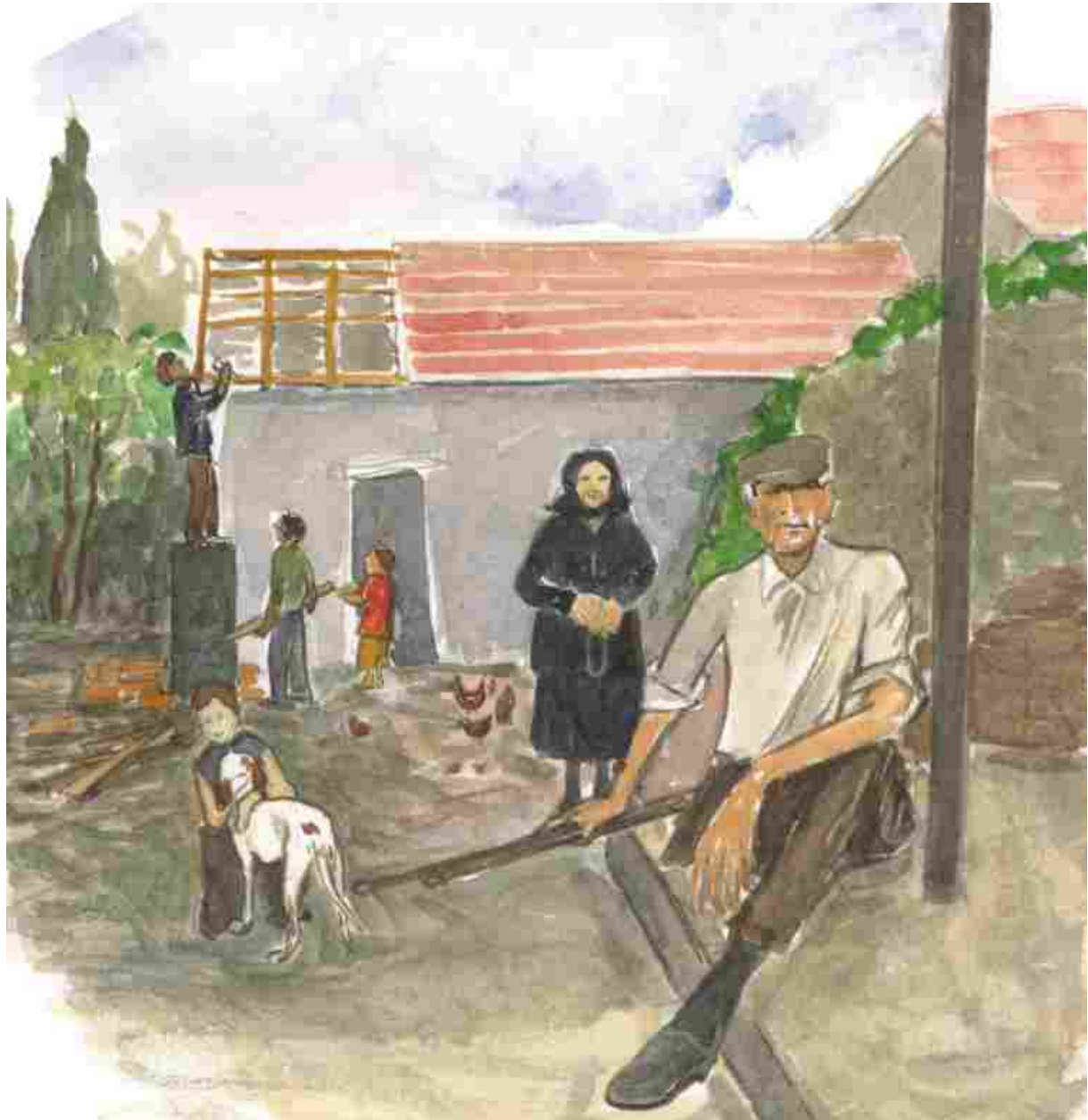


**H**e was sure that the Queen of Peace loved his dad and that he was in heaven with her now. That was why he wanted to go to the Hill of Appearance where she appeared on 24th June, 1981. How well he remembered that! Dad carried him on his shoulders there once. He saw that on a photo in mom's (and his) photograph album. That means that he was here at least for the second time, and not for the first time, as he was thinking a little while ago. Oh, well, it was important that he came and that he was happy. Just like in his house.

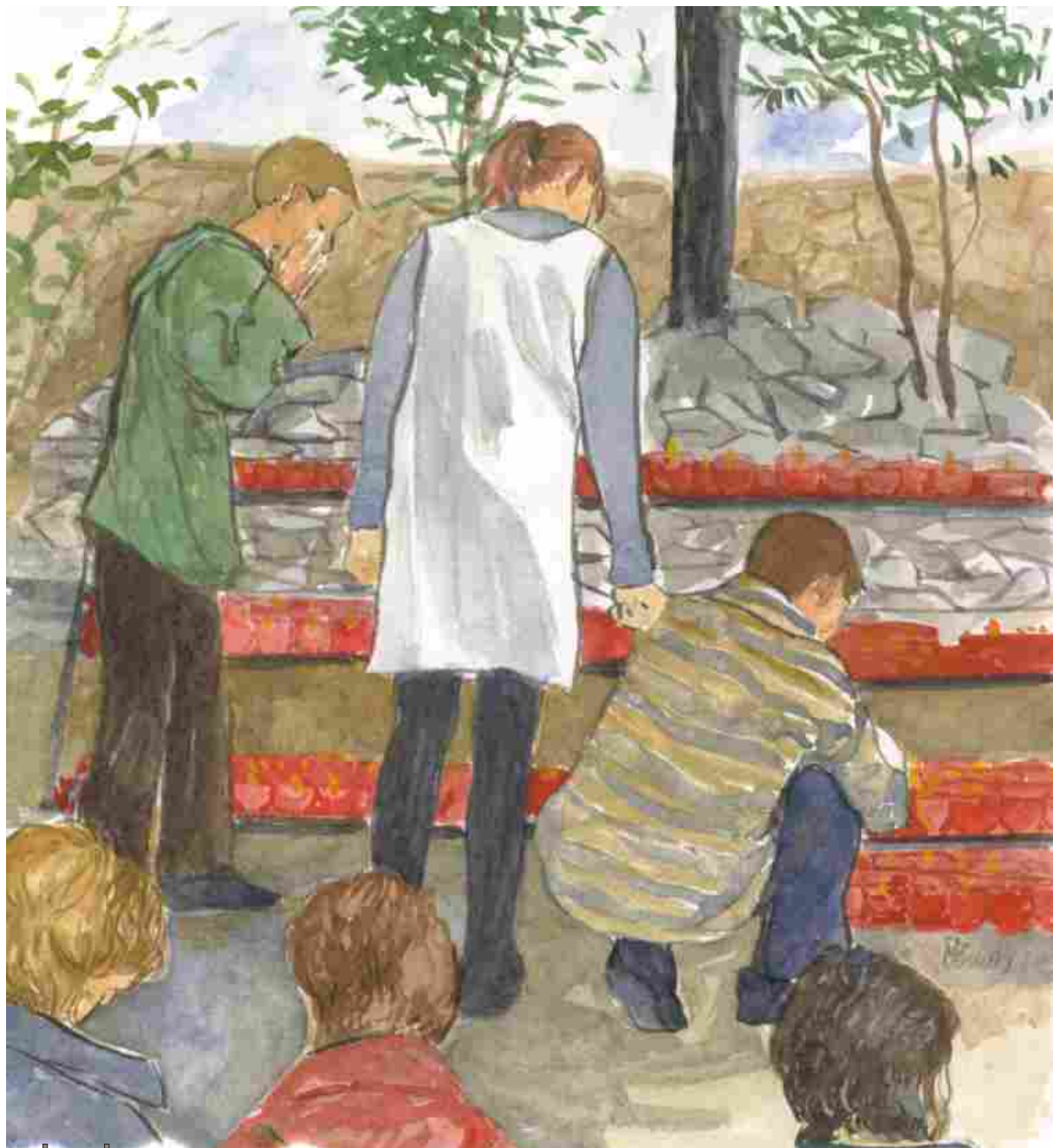




And times had not always been good for him. He remembered that he enrolled into the first class in a fisherman's place on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. He liked school and other children, but it was always bothering him that they were telling him he was an exile. He asked mom about all later, and she explained to him everything well. Still, it was hard for him to understand that one can be an exile in one's own homeland. "It did not matter where you live, only that you have your homeland", he thought.



One nice day, he returned to Bosnia. He still remembered passing through Herzegovina and how he liked those parts at first sight. But, he loved his Bosnia too. How nice it was to slide down a slope on a sledge in winter, or to drink cold water from a clear spring in summer. If only mom would manage to completely repair the house that had been damaged by evil people. Neighbours helped her with that, but they were poor too. When he grows up, mom and neighbours will be able to rely on him. He will grow into a respectful man, just like his dad, there is no other way.



Thoughts followed one another. "John, let's go", he suddenly heard roaring in his ears. That was his best friend Zlatko together with the friend Ivana. But how can he leave when he has not even said a prayer. Why, he has only been thinking. "I will come again, God", he said. "I know that you love this too and that you will take care about all, my mom, my grandmother, my grandfather, and... my dad, and also... me." He lit a candle and glanced towards Križevac one more time. And Križevac seems to have smiled back at him and waved him goodbye.



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