Mosul Tells

stories from reconnecting communities



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This book has been developed within the framework of the project "Mosul Tells: restoring community links through arts and culture". The project is implemented by elbarlament and Paia Agency and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and Art+.

Elbarlament is a peacebuilding and democracy support organisation, with a special focus on empowering women and youth. It implements democracy support and peacebuilding projects in four thematic fields: Arts & Culture, Civic Education, Environment, Climate Change, Women, Peace and Security.

Paia Agency is a consulting agency based in Sulimania, Iraq that supports cultural, educational and creative organisations in the planning and management of cultural projects. It was established to develop creative projects and advise the creative industry inside Iraq to build partnerships and links between activists in the field.

More information can be found on www.elbarlament.org and www.paiaculture.com
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Mosul tells
stories from reconnecting communities

Mosul, the second largest city of Iraq, has a lot to tell. Join us on a journey through the rich and diverse (hi)stories it inhabits.

It looks back on thousands of years of history as it emerged on the grounds of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh – once the largest city in the world.

Mosul, the city of two springs, and its surrounding Ninawa region, have always been a melting pot of cultures: Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen, Kakai, Jews and Yezidis have all lived here.

In recent years, Mosul has gained notoriety when the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) declared the city the capital of its Caliphate. From Mosul, ISIS spread scenes of destruction, violence, murder and expulsion around the world. During this time, cultural expression was forbidden. Thousands of Yezidi and other underrepresented groups were either murdered or forced into slavery. The destruction of a Lamassu sculpture by ISIS with a hammer drill, and the burning down of the Central Library of Mosul in 2015, symbolised the decay of civilisation. According to UNESCO, 80% of the city's cultural heritage was destroyed under ISIS rule.

The wounds and fractions of the communities in Ninawa remain deep. Since its liberation in 2017, Mosul has been slowly recovering from the dark days of its past. The residents are going outdoors again and reconstruction has begun. Mosul, once known as the green city, is blossoming and cultural life is gradually returning. Restoring community links and healing wounds has become an important pillar of rebuilding the city.

The diverse face of the city and its surrounding area is the subject of this graphic novel. The book has been developed within the framework of the project Mosul Tells, a project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. It strives to restore community links through arts and culture and foster social cohesion in Mosul and the Ninawa region. Through storytelling and puppet theatre, the project strengthens ties among the people living there. It creates a space to reconnect with the multiple (hi)stories of the city of Mosul.

The narratives in the book come from personal experiences, conversations and folk tales collected by a group of young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 from

Ninawa who participated in oral history workshops with us in 2023. Coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, they all researched and interviewed in their respective communities and collected stories. Some of the stories are made accessible through a puppet theatre play, some through animation films and others through this graphic novel. The collected stories range from the history of the Grand al-Tahira Church in Ninawa, to the cultural tradition4 of tattoos and a cross-religious project to fix the Hadba minaret of the Great Mosque of Al-Nuri in Mosul.

elbarlament and our partner organisation Paia would like to particularly thank all participants for always being curious, committed and for sharing their stories with us. A special thanks to the German Federal Foreign Office for funding the project Mosul Tells and to Art+ for making the printing of this book possible. Last but not least, we would like to thank Bahrooz for illustrating the stories in such a colourful and engaging manner and all editors, translators and designers for their dedication.

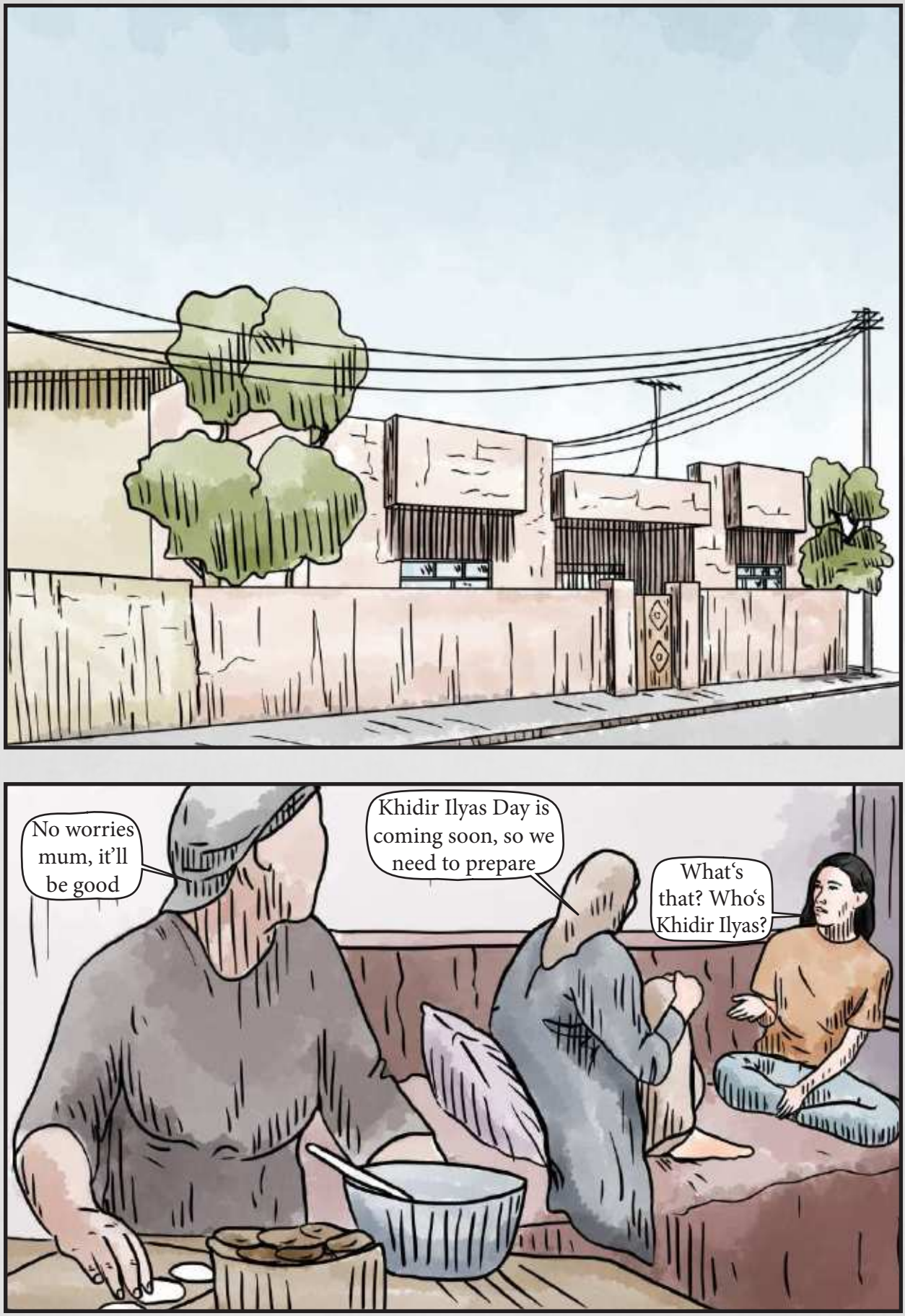
We hope you will enjoy taking a walk with us through the streets of Mosul to discover the diversity of the city and the surrounding area of Ninawa.

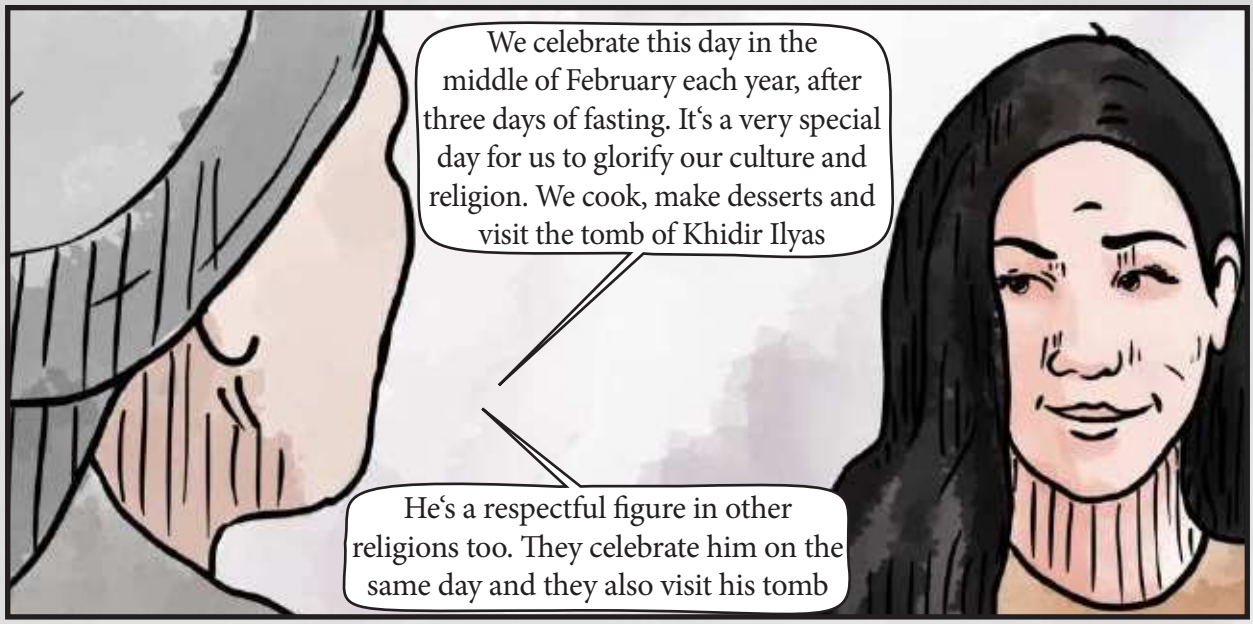
Berlin and Sulaimaniya
Alisha Molter and Shirwan Can

Khidir Ilyas

Khidir Ilyas is one of the well-known religious figures in the city of Mosul in Iraq. He's immortal and shows up to help people when they're in need. Khidir Ilyas also represents the idea of good deeds, which earns him respect from all religions and beliefs in Iraq. They all celebrate Khidir Ilyas Day together. The story of this religious figure is an example of what different religions have in common: like Khidir Ilyas, they all believe in the power of good deeds.




No worries mum, it'll be good
Khidir Ilyas Day is coming soon, so we need to prepare
What's that? Who's Khidir Ilyas?

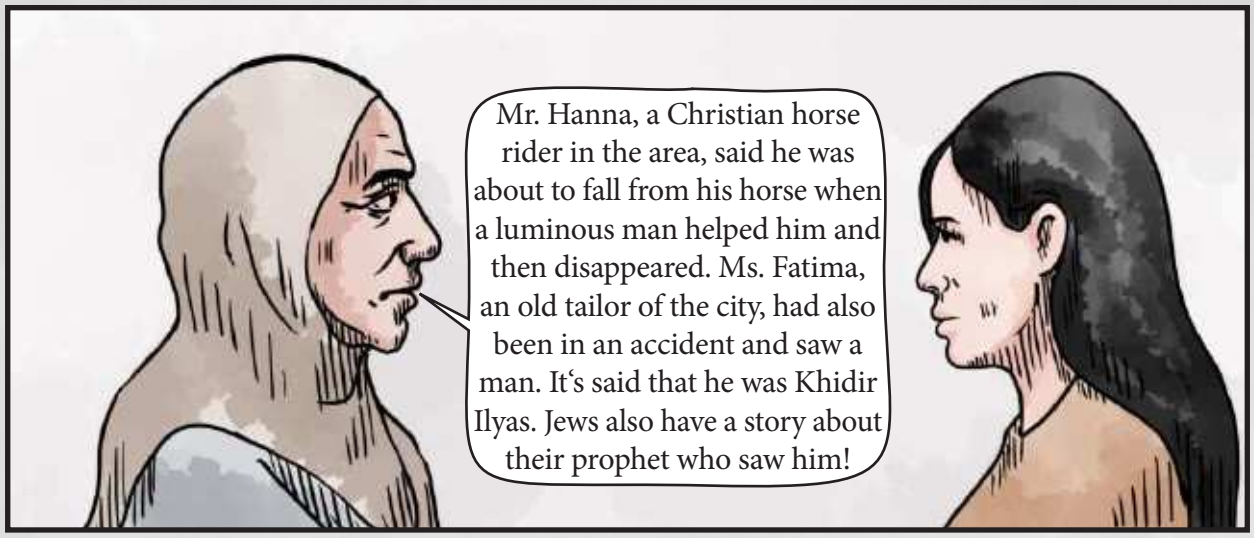

We celebrate this day in the middle of February each year, after three days of fasting. It's a very special day for us to glorify our culture and religion. We cook, make desserts and visit the tomb of Khidir Ilyas
He's a respectful figure in other religions too. They celebrate him on the same day and they also visit his tomb

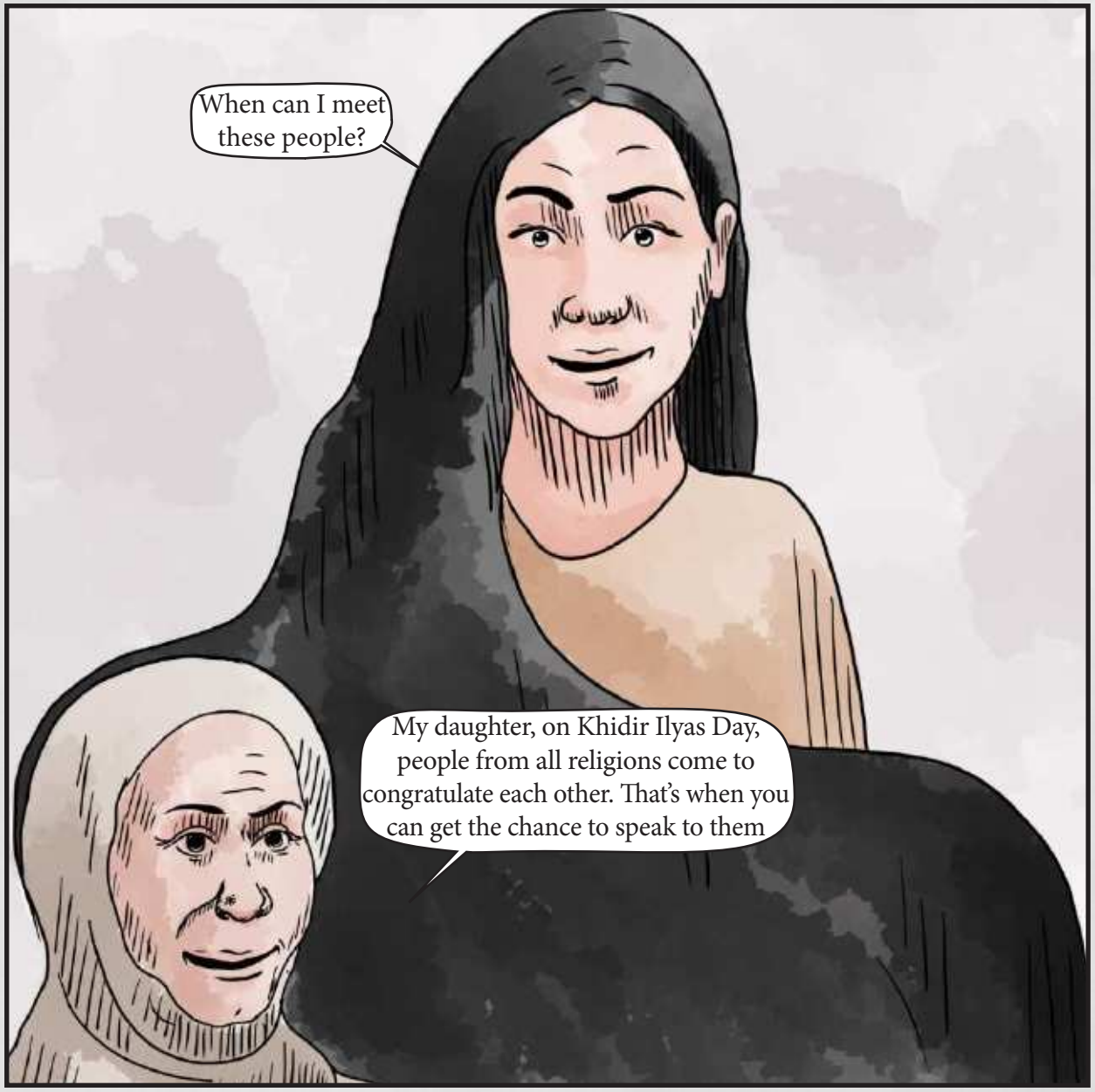

When did he die?
So, has anyone seen him?
It's said that he's not dead and he usually shows up for good people. He helps them with their problems, and then disappears again


My father saw him when he and my mother were trying for a baby for a few years. One day, he met a shiny white-clothed man, and told my father "you'll have a boy soon". He turned back, and I didn't see him after that


After a few weeks, he figured out that my mother was pregnant. My mother said that this happened because of Khidir Ilyas


There are other stories shared by people from different religions
Who tells these stories? I really want to hear more of them

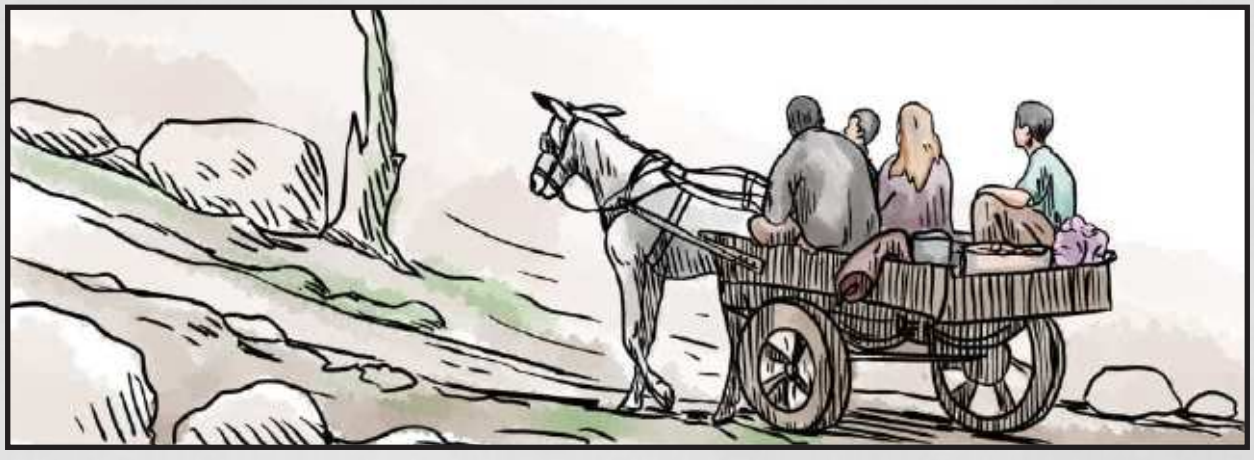

Mr. Hanna, a Christian horse rider in the area, said he was about to fall from his horse when a luminous man helped him and then disappeared. Ms. Fatima, an old tailor of the city, had also been in an accident and saw a man. It's said that he was Khidir Ilyas. Jews also have a story about their prophet who saw him!

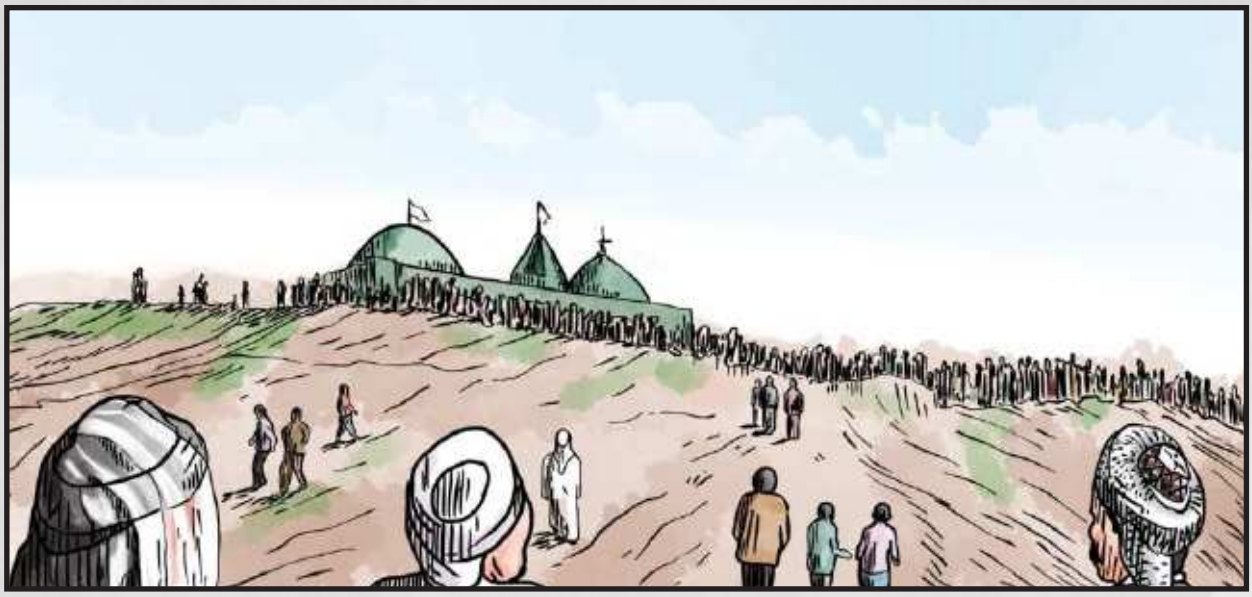

When can I meet these people?
My daughter, on Khidir Ilyas Day, people from all religions come to congratulate each other. That's when you can get the chance to speak to them


The people from Tal Afar, all from different religious backgrounds, prepare themselves for the first day of the holiday
Let's go, it's late


TAXI











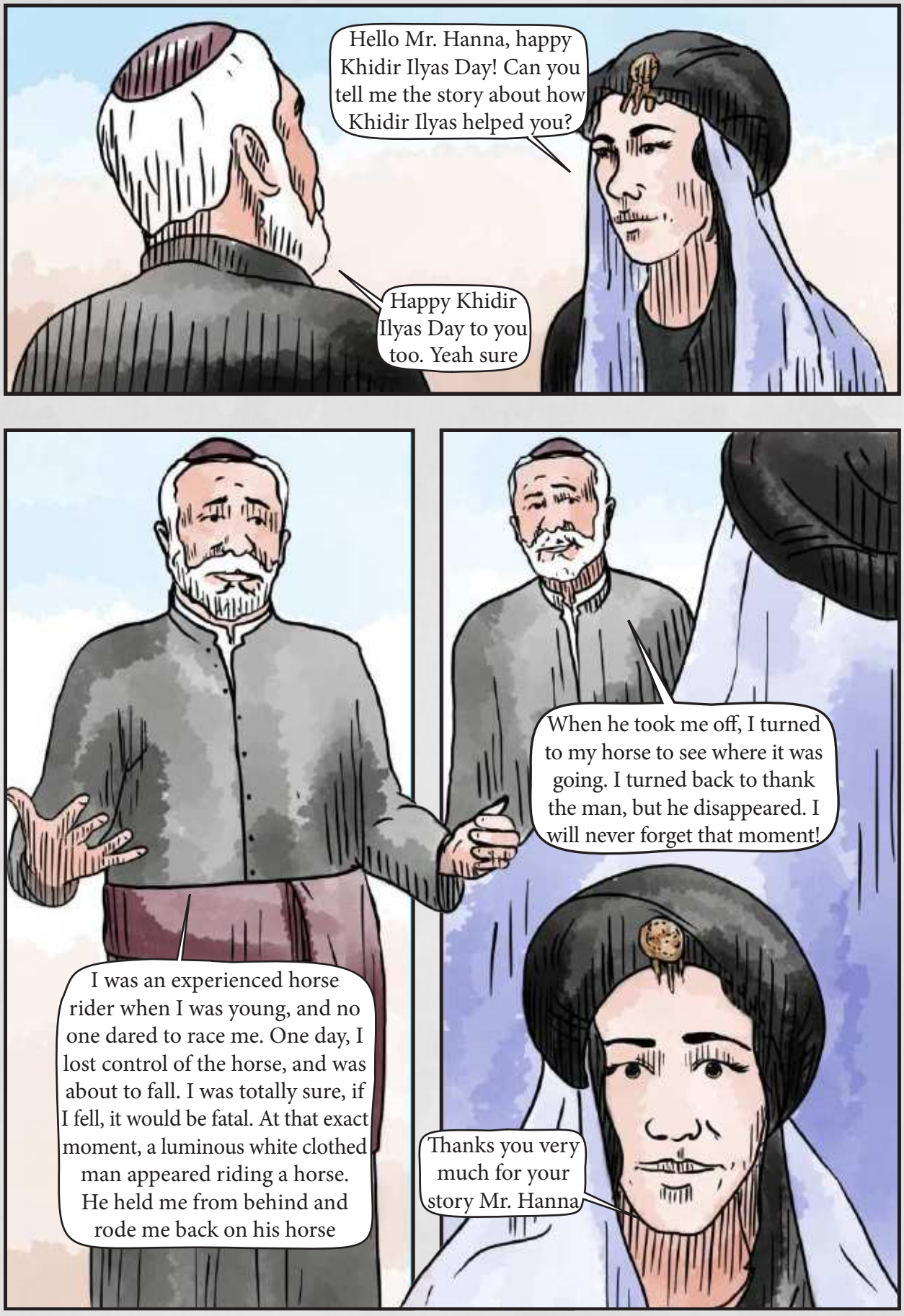




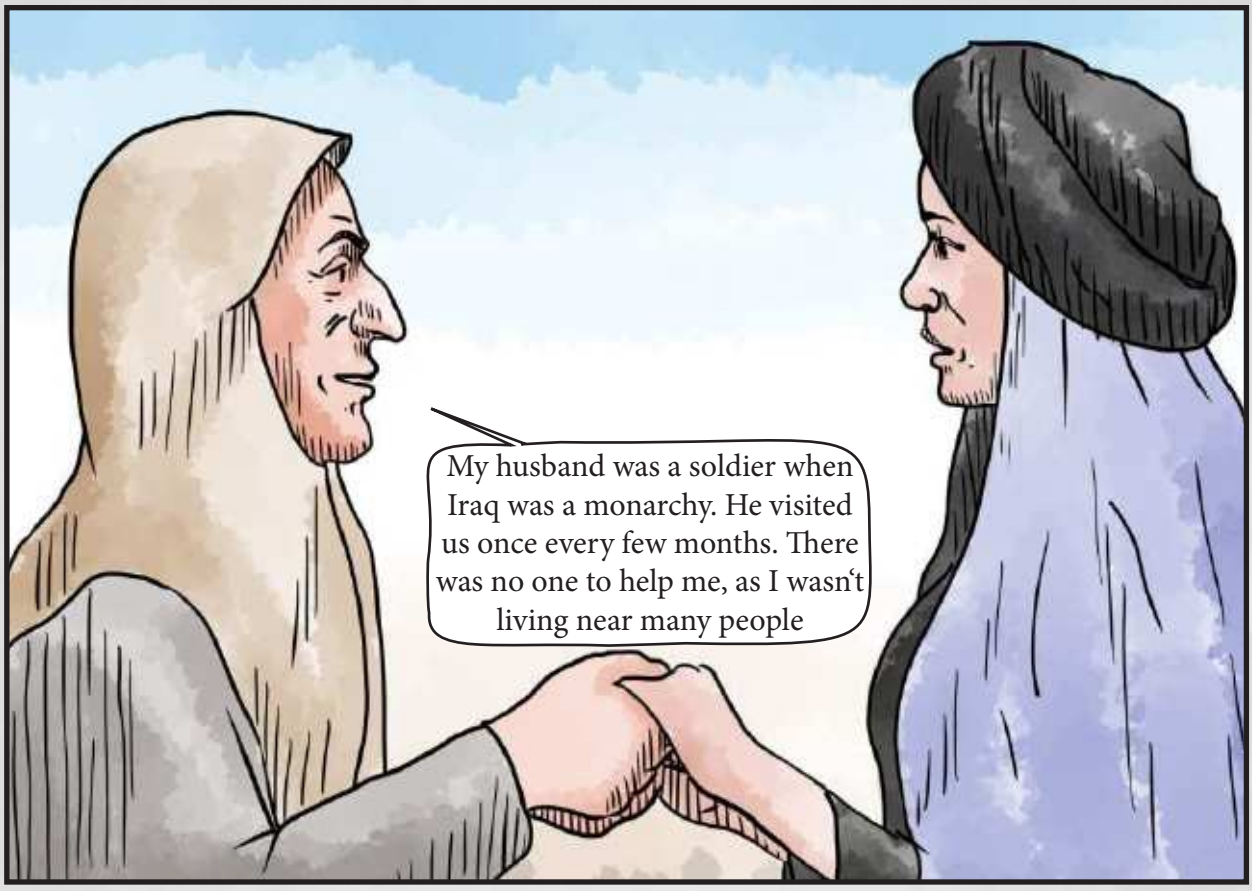






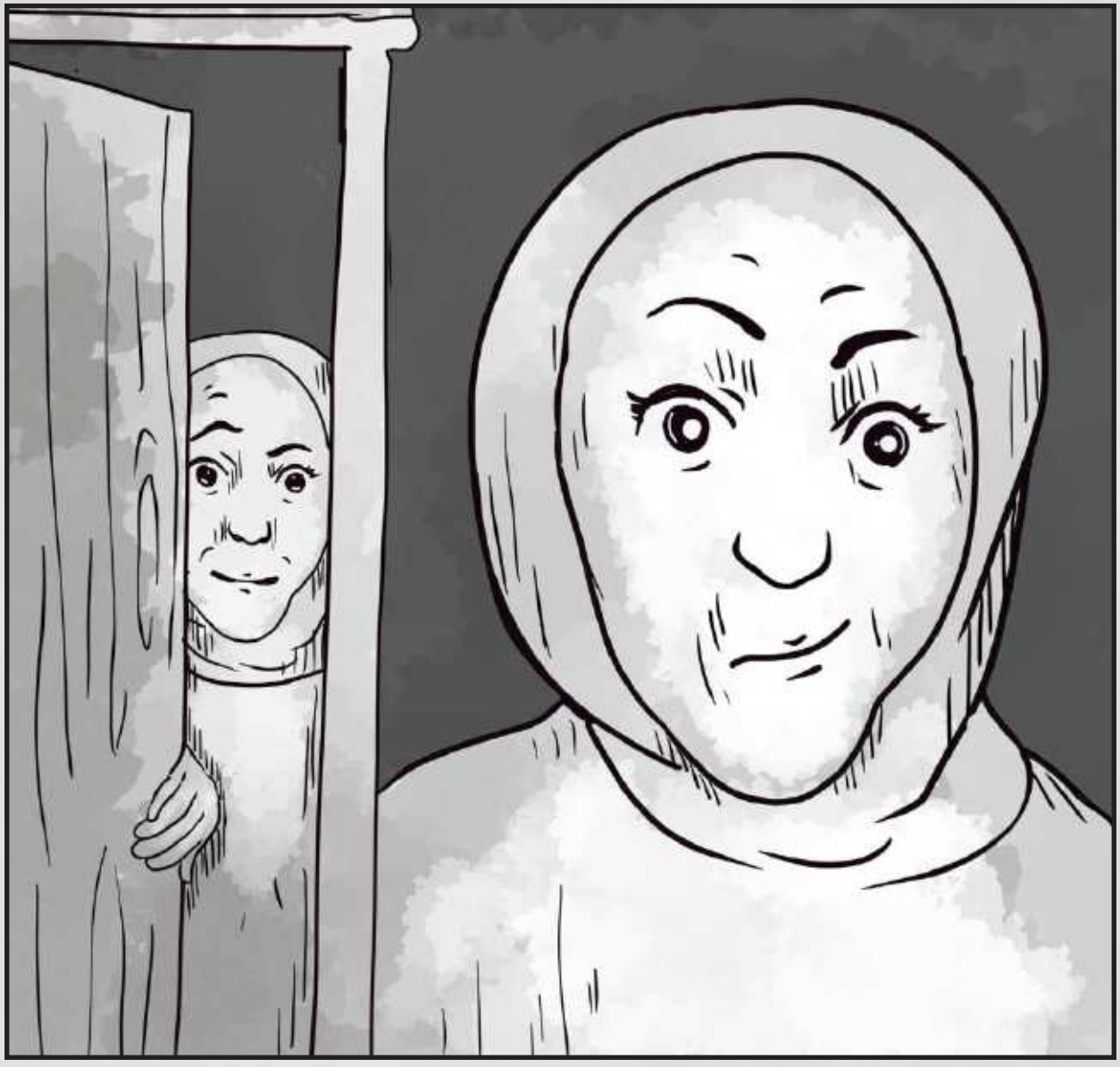

Hello Mr. Hanna, happy Khidir Ilyas Day! Can you tell me the story about how Khidir Ilyas helped you?
Happy Khidir Ilyas Day to you too. Yeah sure
I was an experienced horse rider when I was young, and no one dared to race me. One day, I lost control of the horse, and was about to fall. I was totally sure, if I fell, it would be fatal. At that exact moment, a luminous white clothed man appeared riding a horse. He held me from behind and rode me back on his horse
When he took me off, I turned to my horse to see where it was going. I turned back to thank the man, but he disappeared. I will never forget that moment!
Thanks you very much for your story Mr. Hanna


Hello, Mister. Are you the son of Ms. Fatima?
Hello, miss. Yes, I am. How can I help you?
My mother often narrates that story and I myself would like to hear it again
I've heard the story of your mother with Khidir Ilyas. I want to meet her and hear the story
She's a Muslim Turkman and an experienced tailor in the city, who now lives with us
Mum, this lady came to see you and wants to hear the story of Khidir Ilyas
Ms. Fatima, could you please share the story about when you met Khidir Ilyas?


My husband was a soldier when Iraq was a monarchy. He visited us once every few months. There was no one to help me, as I wasn't living near many people







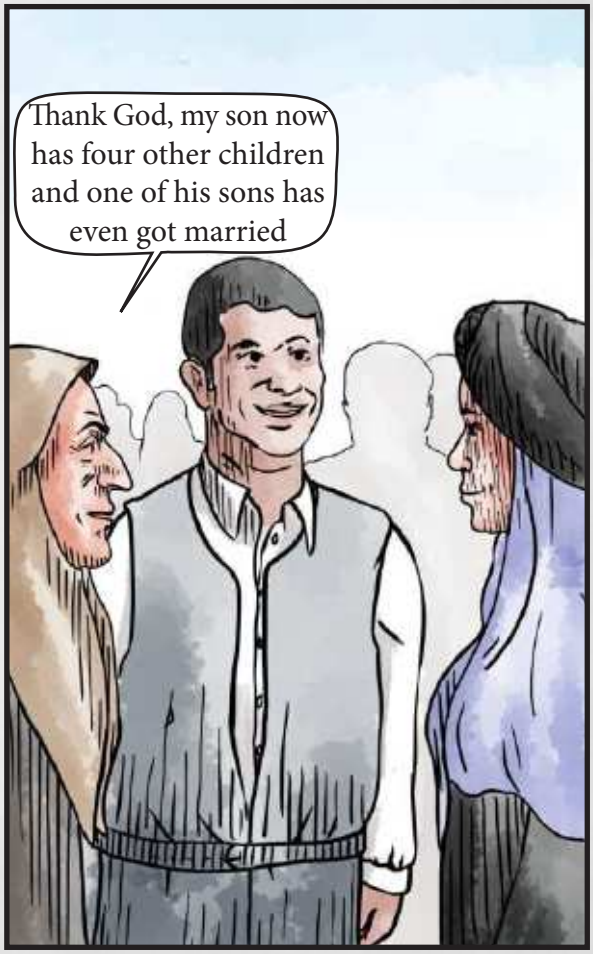

Hello, I've had a long journey and I'm really thirsty. Could I please have glass of water?


Why are you so stressed?

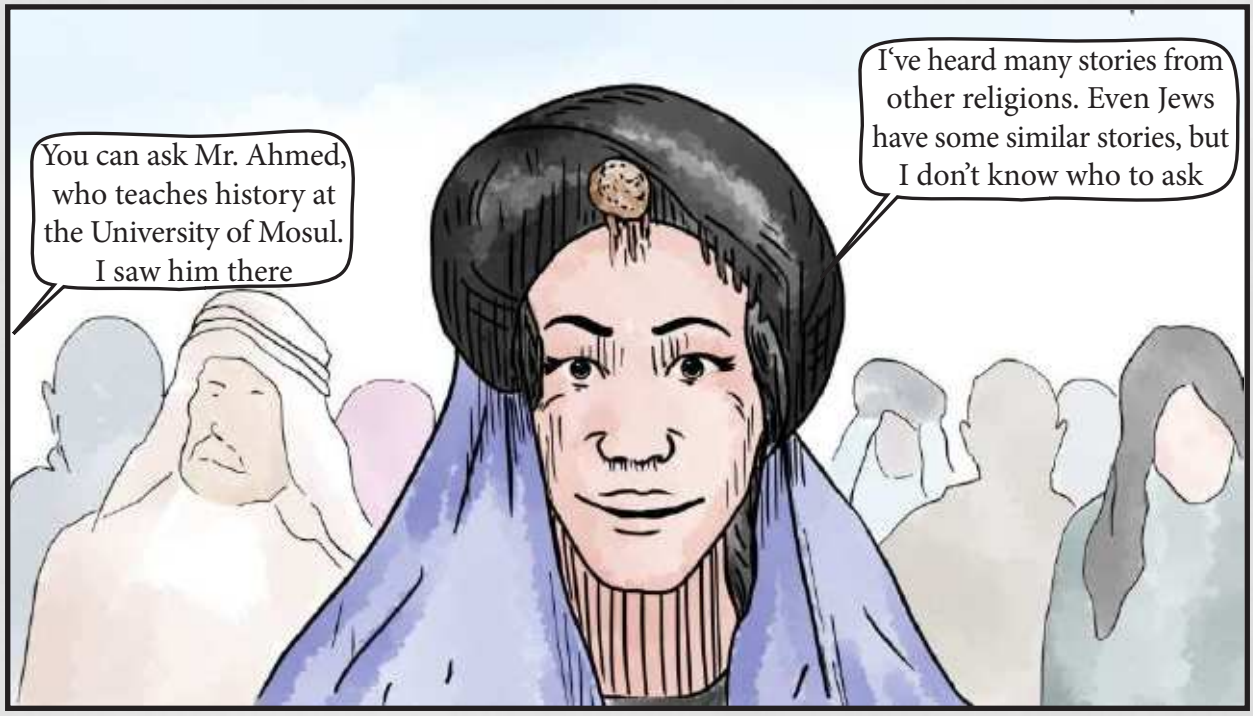

My child is sick but I can't take him to the doctor, as I can't leave the other children
I learned to make this medicine from my father. I've used it many times, and I'm giving it to you in return for a favour. I'm sure it'll help


That night, I couldn't sleep, but in the morning my son's fever got better. After two days, my son was healthy again!


I was still afraid of what happened until my husband came back and I told him the story. He thanked God and said that the man I spoke to was the immortal Khidir Ilyas


Thank God, my son now has four other children and one of his sons has even got married

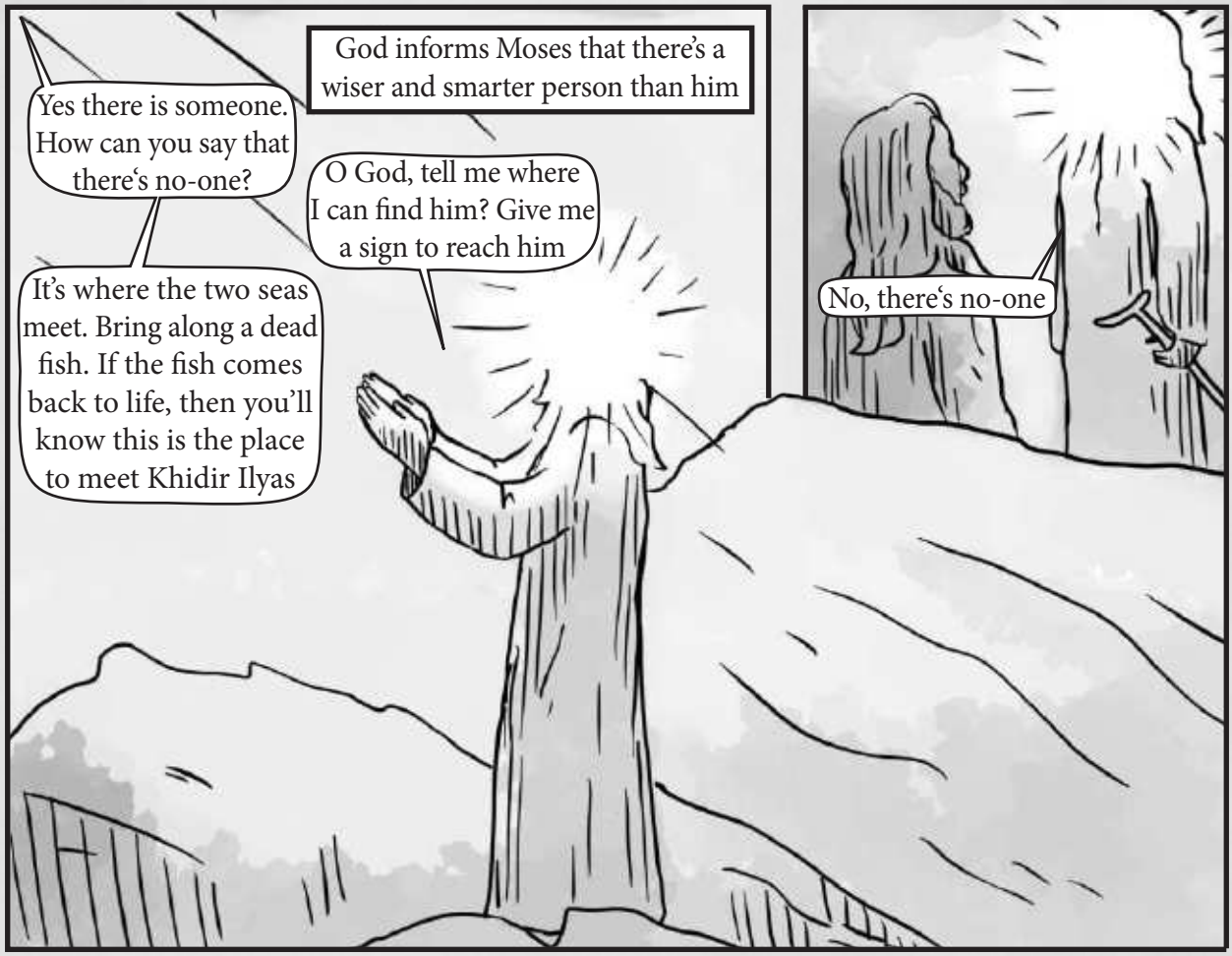

I'll go to the market
I'll come with you

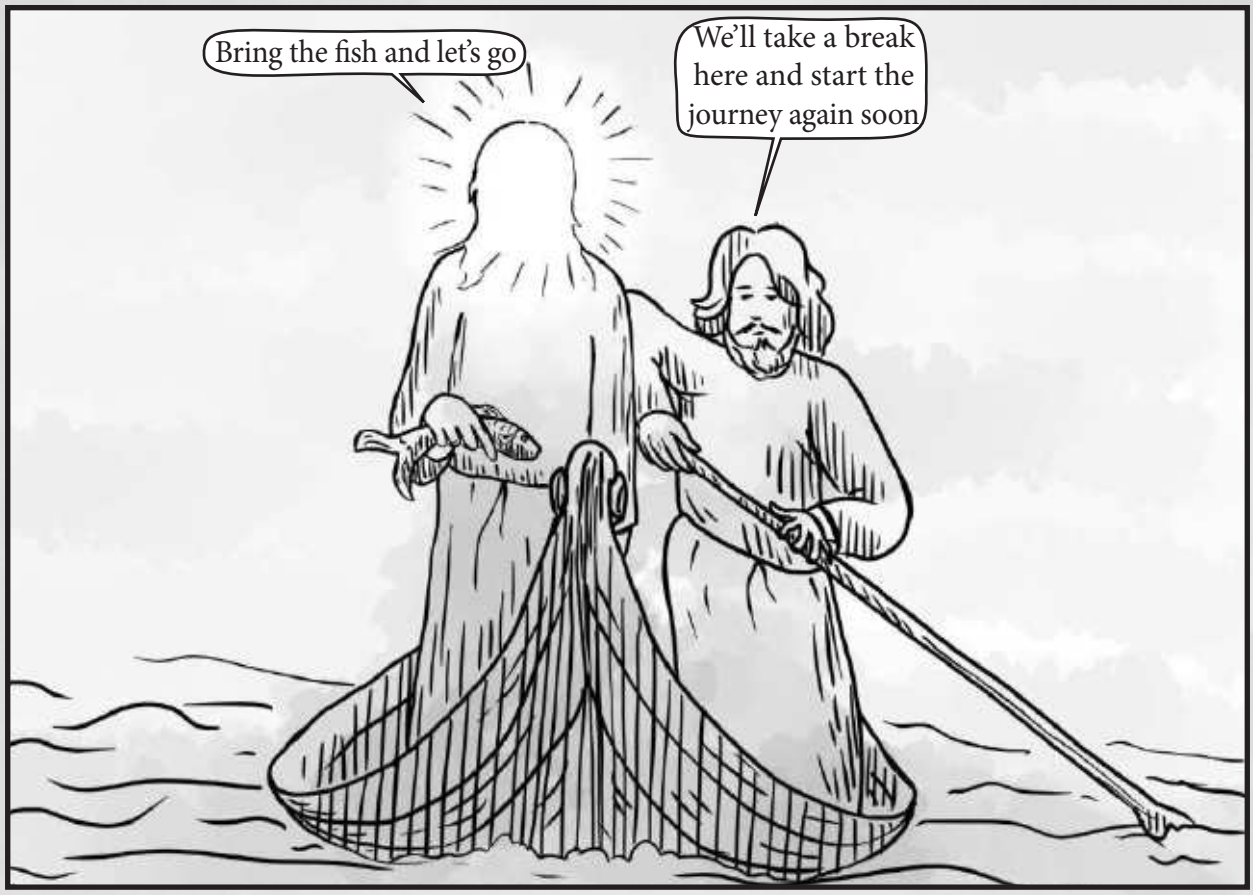

I've heard many stories from other religions. Even Jews have some similar stories, but I don't know who to ask
You can ask Mr. Ahmed, who teaches history at the University of Mosul. I saw him there


Hello Mr. Ahmed, this is Fenar and he wants to know more about the immortal Khidir Ilyas
I'm very happy there's someone who wants to find out more about him


Thanks Mr. Ahmed, I want to hear the Jewish story about the immortal Khidir Ilyas


Prophet Moses was preaching to his people and advising them. He leaves and someone asks him
O Moses, is there anyone more knowledgeable than you?


God informs Moses that there's a wiser and smarter person than him
Yes there is someone. How can you say that there's no-one?
O God, tell me where I can find him? Give me a sign to reach him
It's where the two seas meet. Bring along a dead fish. If the fish comes back to life, then you'll know this is the place to meet Khidir Ilyas
No, there's no-one


Bring the fish and let's go
We'll take a break here and start the journey again soon





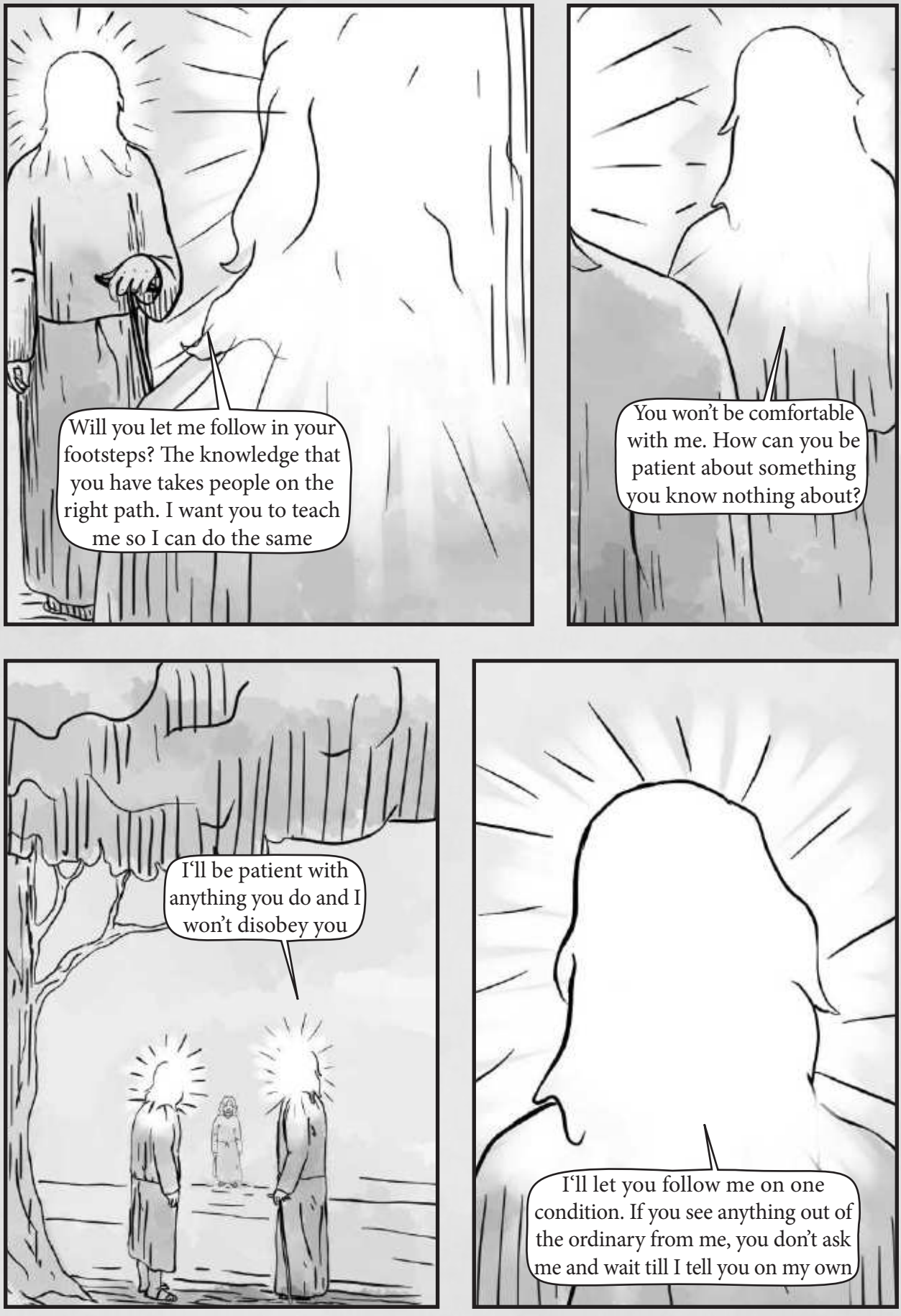



The fish has disappeared...

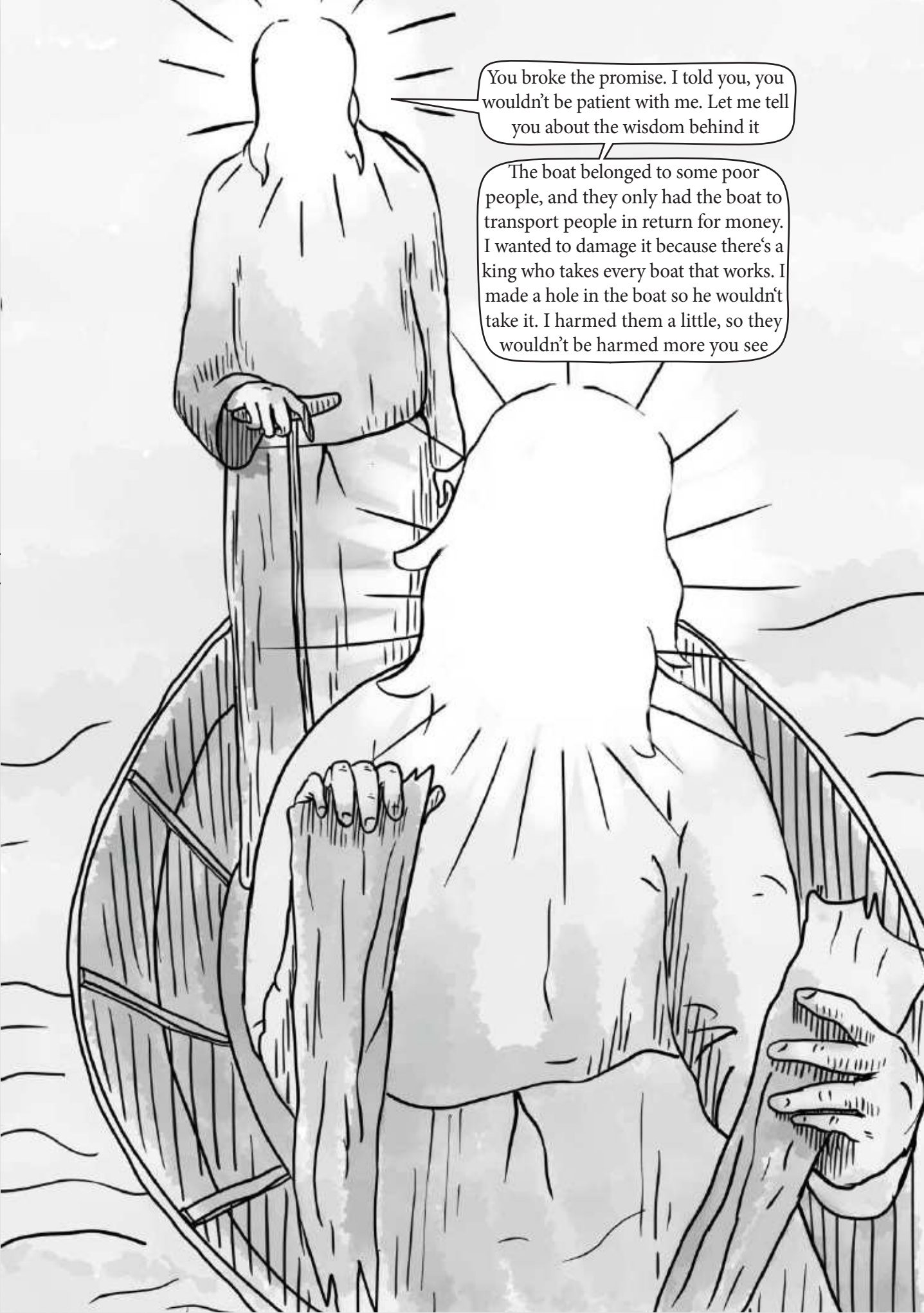






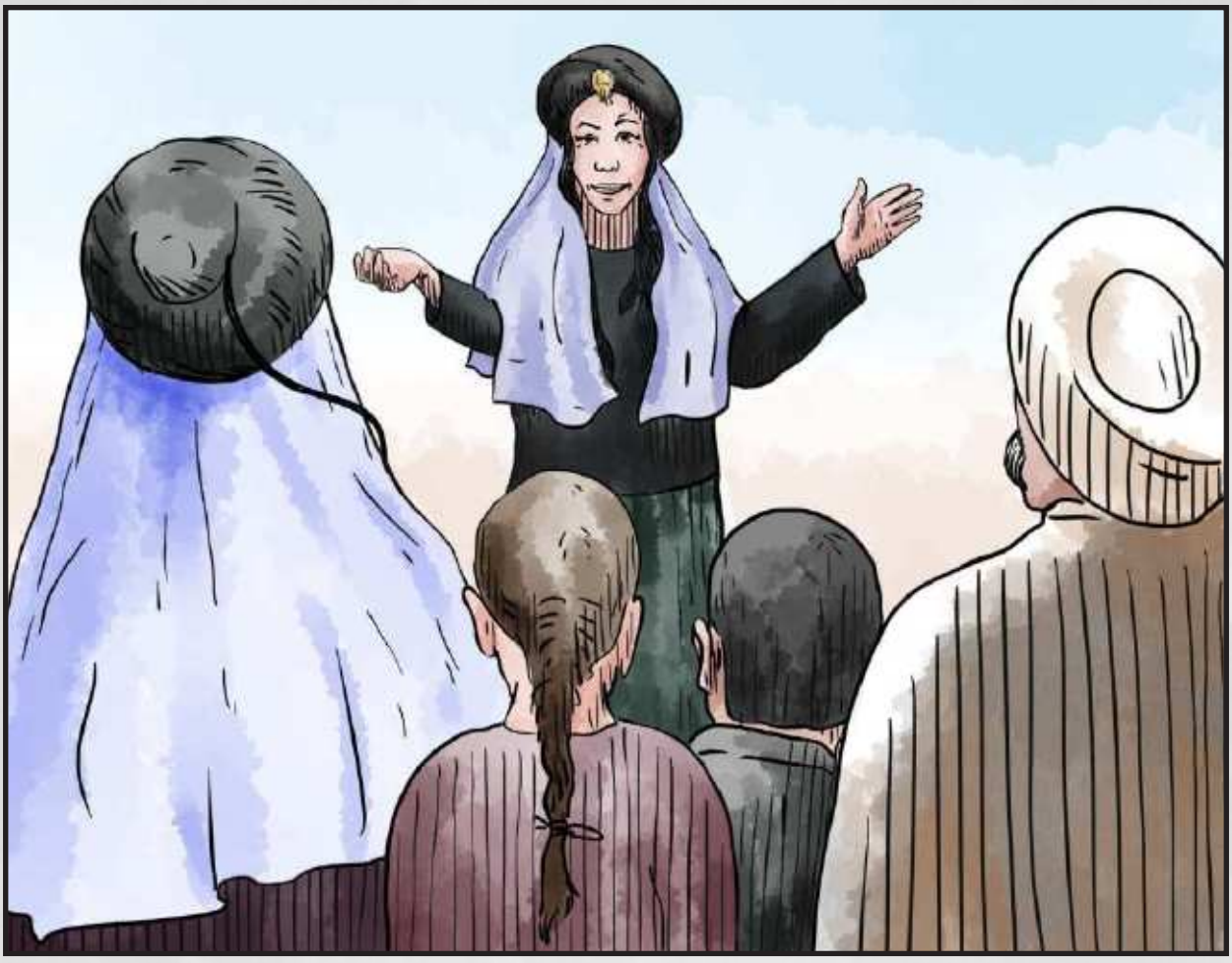

Will you let me follow in your footsteps? The knowledge that you have takes people on the right path. I want you to teach me so I can do the same
You won't be comfortable with me. How can you be patient about something you know nothing about?
I'll be patient with anything you do and I won't disobey you
I'll let you follow me on one condition. If you see anything out of the ordinary from me, you don't ask me and wait till I tell you on my own

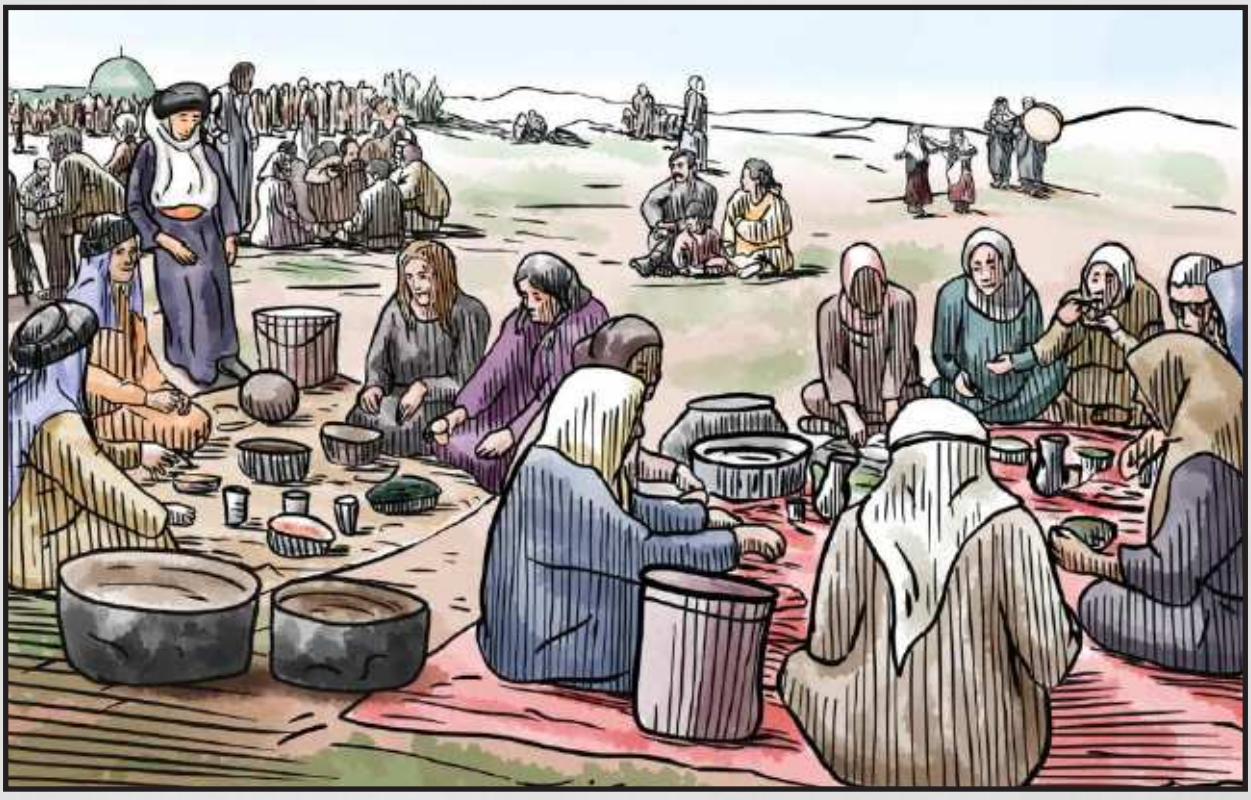

You made a hole in the boat so it would sink and the people would die. They did us a favour, but you did something bad to them


You broke the promise. I told you, you wouldn't be patient with me. Let me tell you about the wisdom behind it
The boat belonged to some poor people, and they only had the boat to transport people in return for money. I wanted to damage it because there's a king who takes every boat that works. I made a hole in the boat so he wouldn't take it. I harmed them a little, so they wouldn't be harmed more you see


So the king was taking it for himself
Yes, that's why you should never fall for appearances
This is the story of the immortal Khidir Ilyas and the prophet Moses. Khidir Ilyas wants to tell Moses that whatever you think you know, isn't necessarily the truth

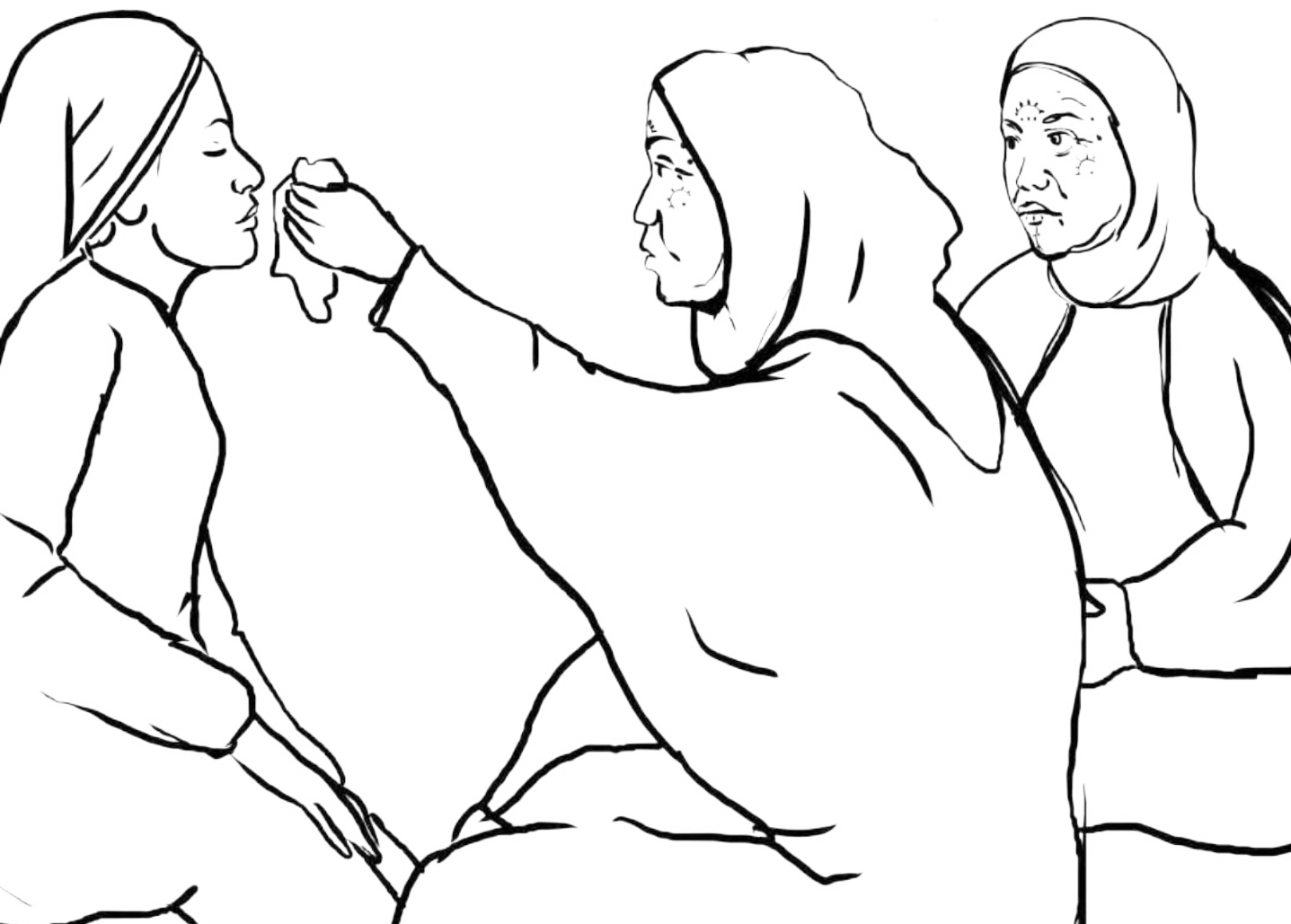

Thank you very much for sharing this story
Now that I know the story it's time I go to my family. I haven't seen them in a while and I can celebrate the day with them

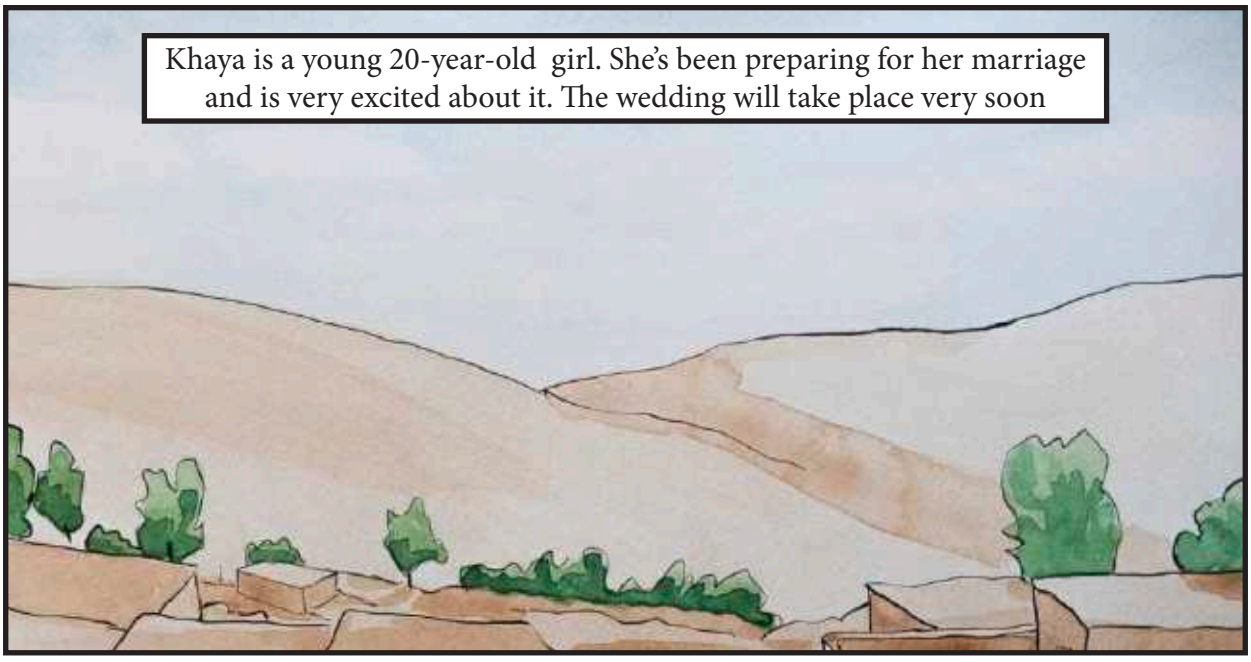




BEAUTIFUL WISDOM

Tattooing is one of the ancient cultural characteristics among the many underrepresented groups of various ethnicities and religious backgrounds in the Mosul area. Khaya, a 20-year-old Christian girl, plans to arrange her wedding day with her fiancé. After an unexpected accident, her skin was terribly burnt and their dream of getting married was put at risk. But some Muslim female tattooists try to help them using their skills so they can make the couples dream come true.




Khaya is a young 20-year-old girl. She's been preparing for her marriage and is very excited about it. The wedding will take place very soon





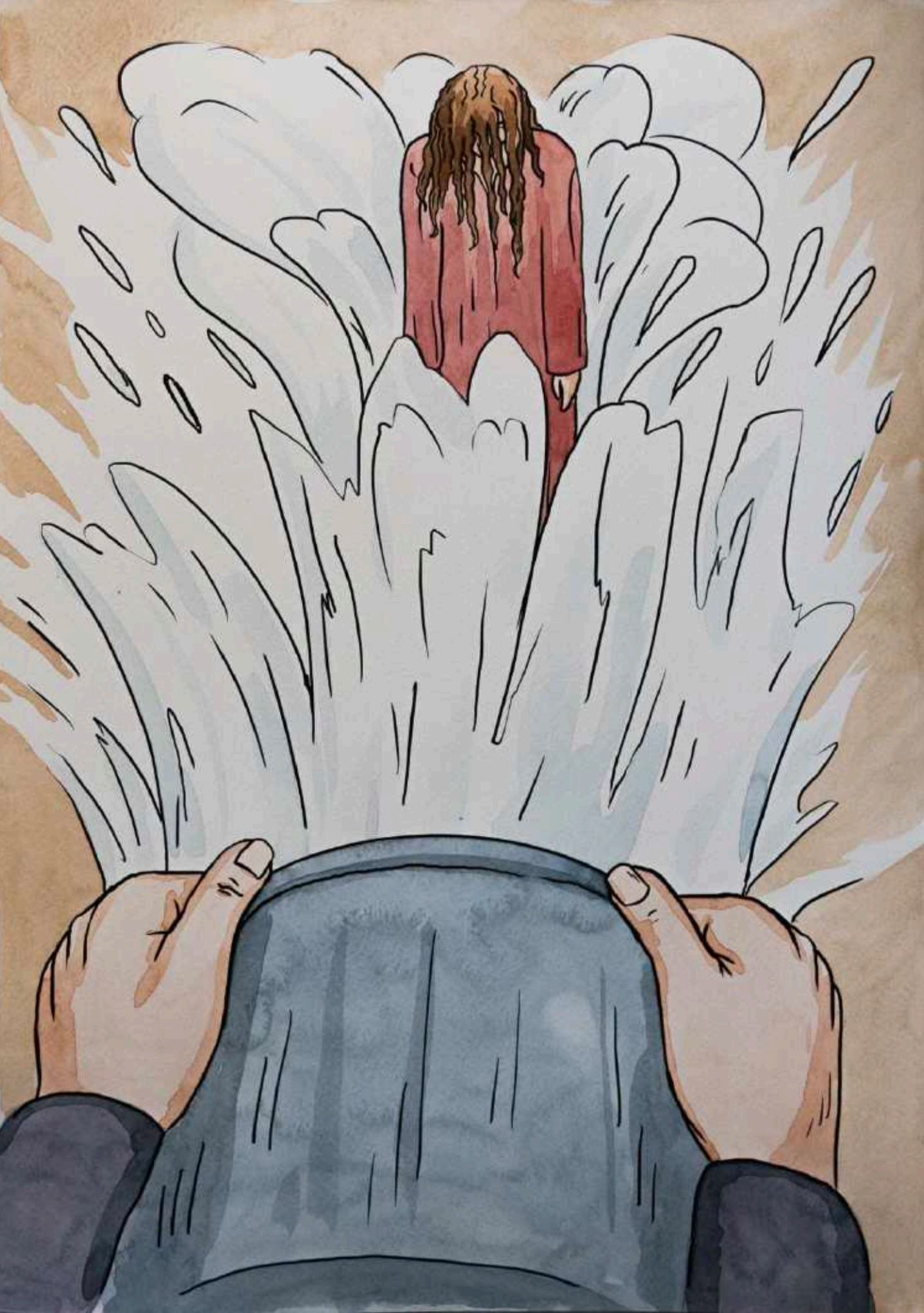





I'm very proud of you,
my beloved daughter



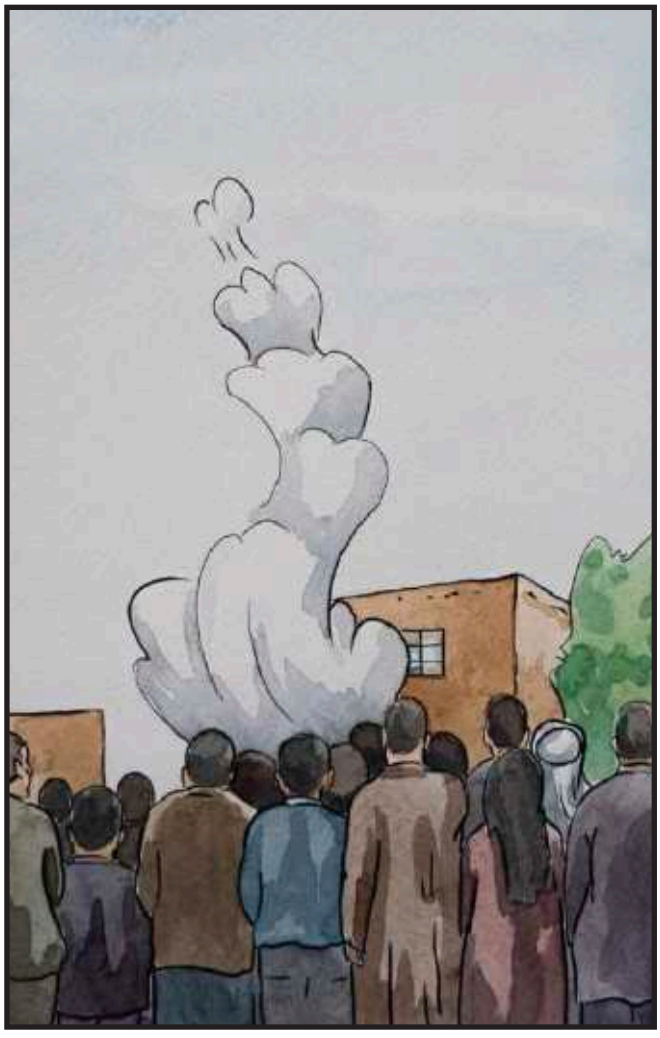

Khaya, what just happened?

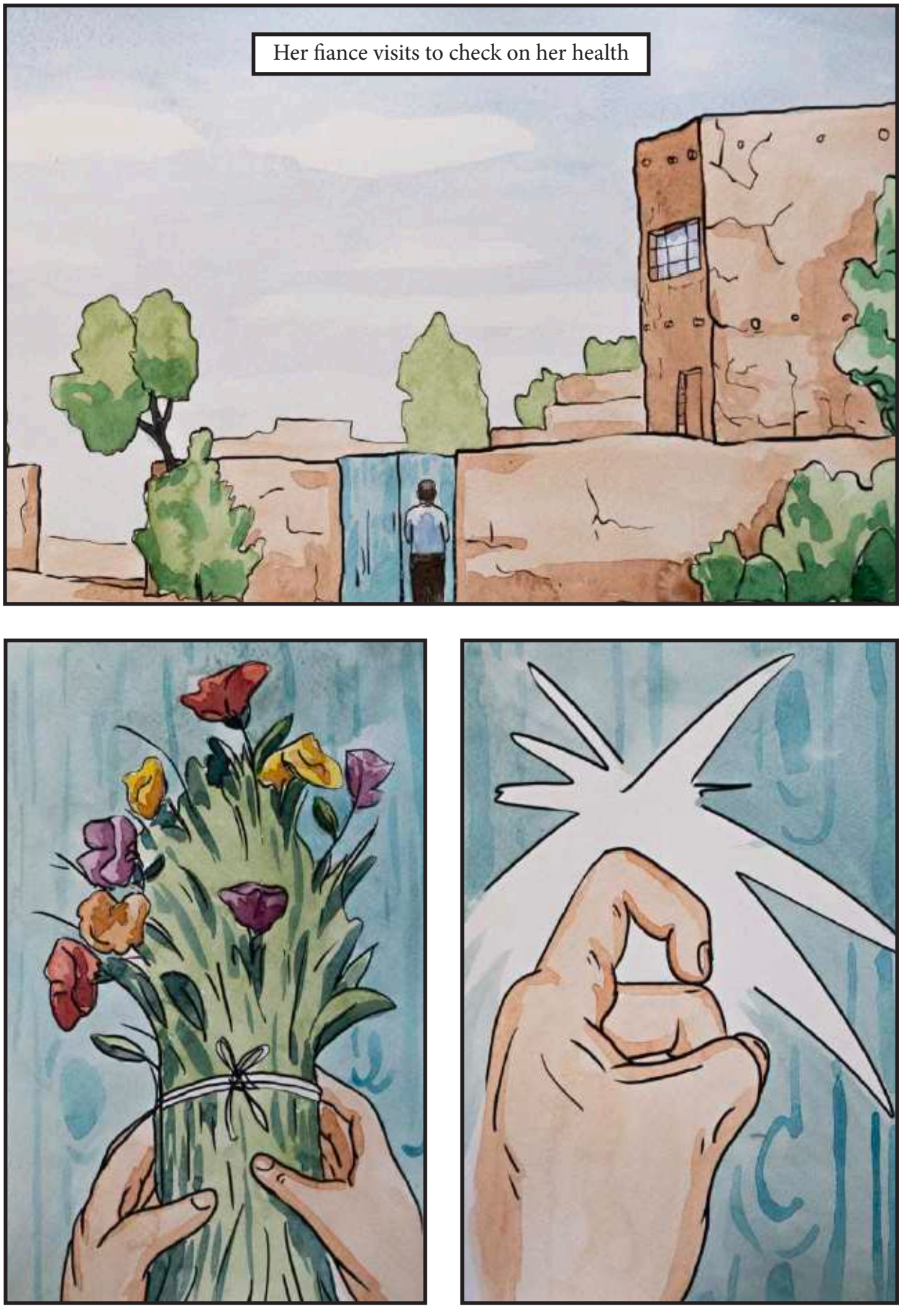











Her fiance visits to check on her health




I'm very worried about Khaya, I hope she's doing okay
Welcome George

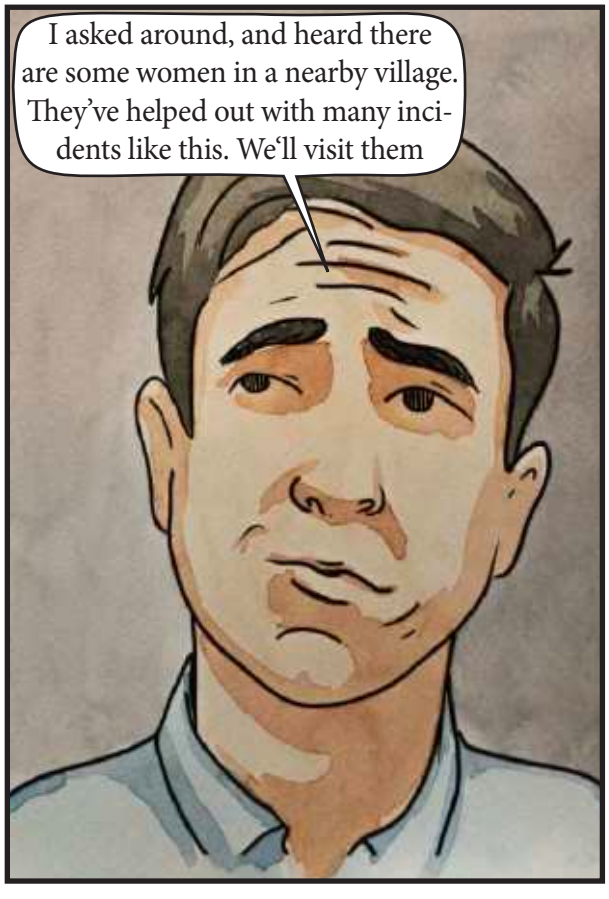


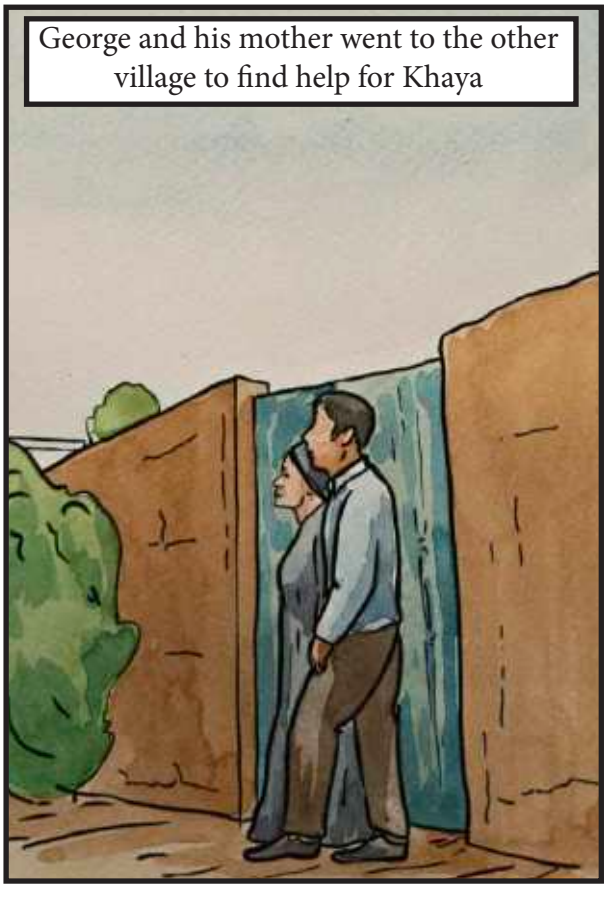

Khaya, I hope you're okay, I came as soon as I'd heard the news


My appearance is ruined, I don't want to show you my face


My dear Khaya, don't worry, we'll figure it out. Don't give up hope



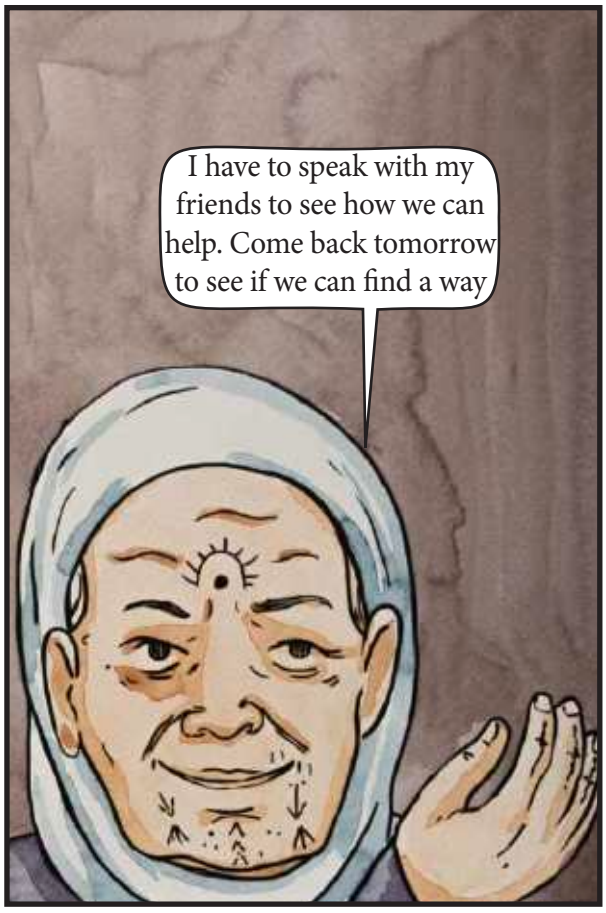

I asked around, and heard there are some women in a nearby village. They've helped out with many incidents like this. We'll visit them


George and his mother went to the other village to find help for Khaya


I hope they have a cure for Khaya
Let's be hopeful. It's important that we figure this out before we come back


daughter's going to get married very soon but she's burnt her face. Now she's too embarrassed to show it
Welcome, how can I help?


That's very sad to hear but we may be able to help her

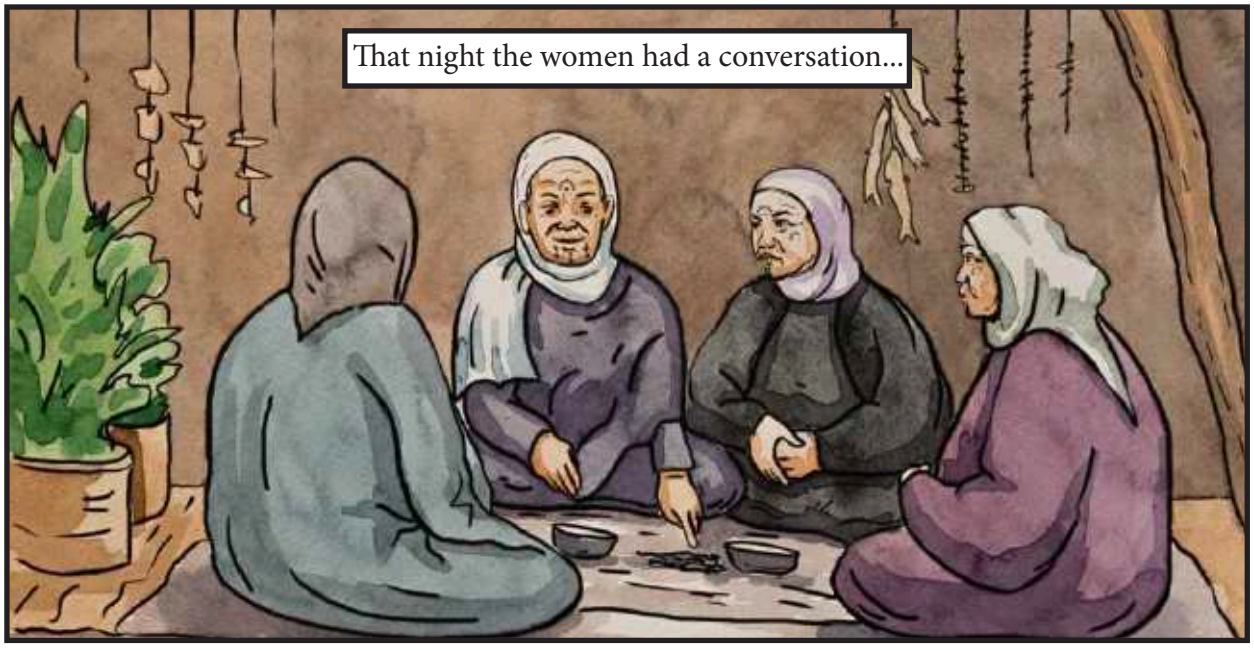

I have to speak with my friends to see how we can help. Come back tomorrow to see if we can find a way


You're our only hope


I know you won't disappoint us






That night the women had a conversation...


We should tattoo over the burnt spots to cover them

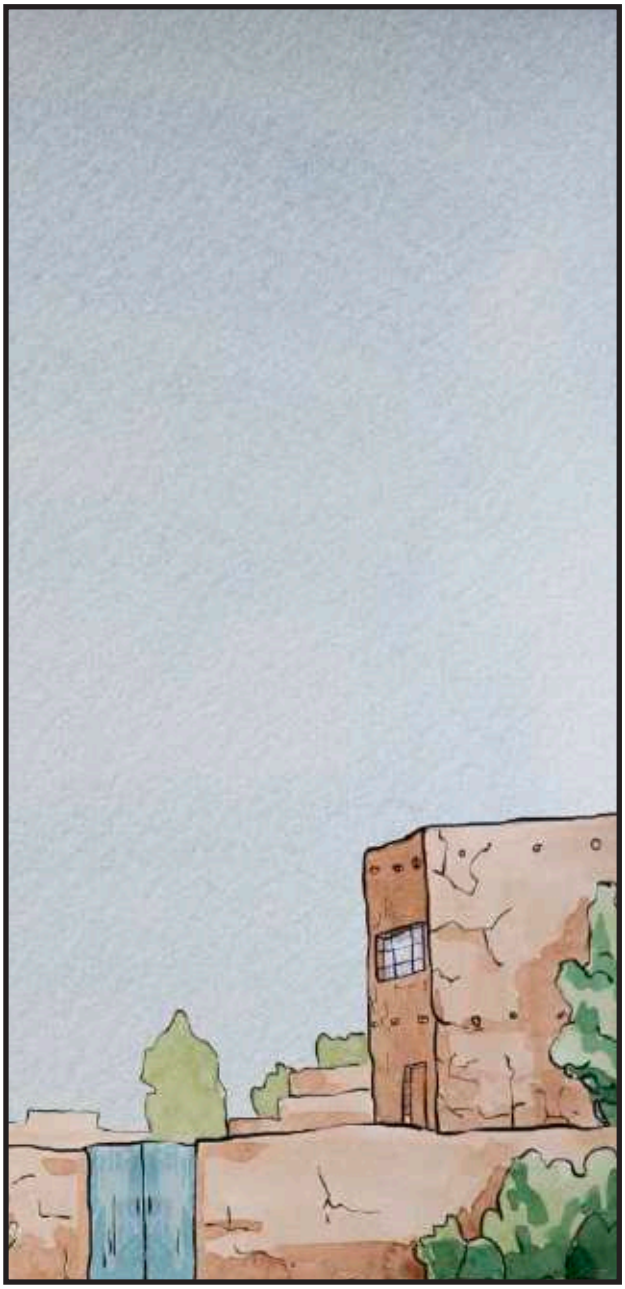

Yes, but we have to pick a suitable colour


The women, George and Khaya's mother head home


We can help to cover the burnt spots with a nice coloured special tattoo




We assure you that her face will be very beautiful




Wake up Khaya, these women are from the other village, and have a way to help you



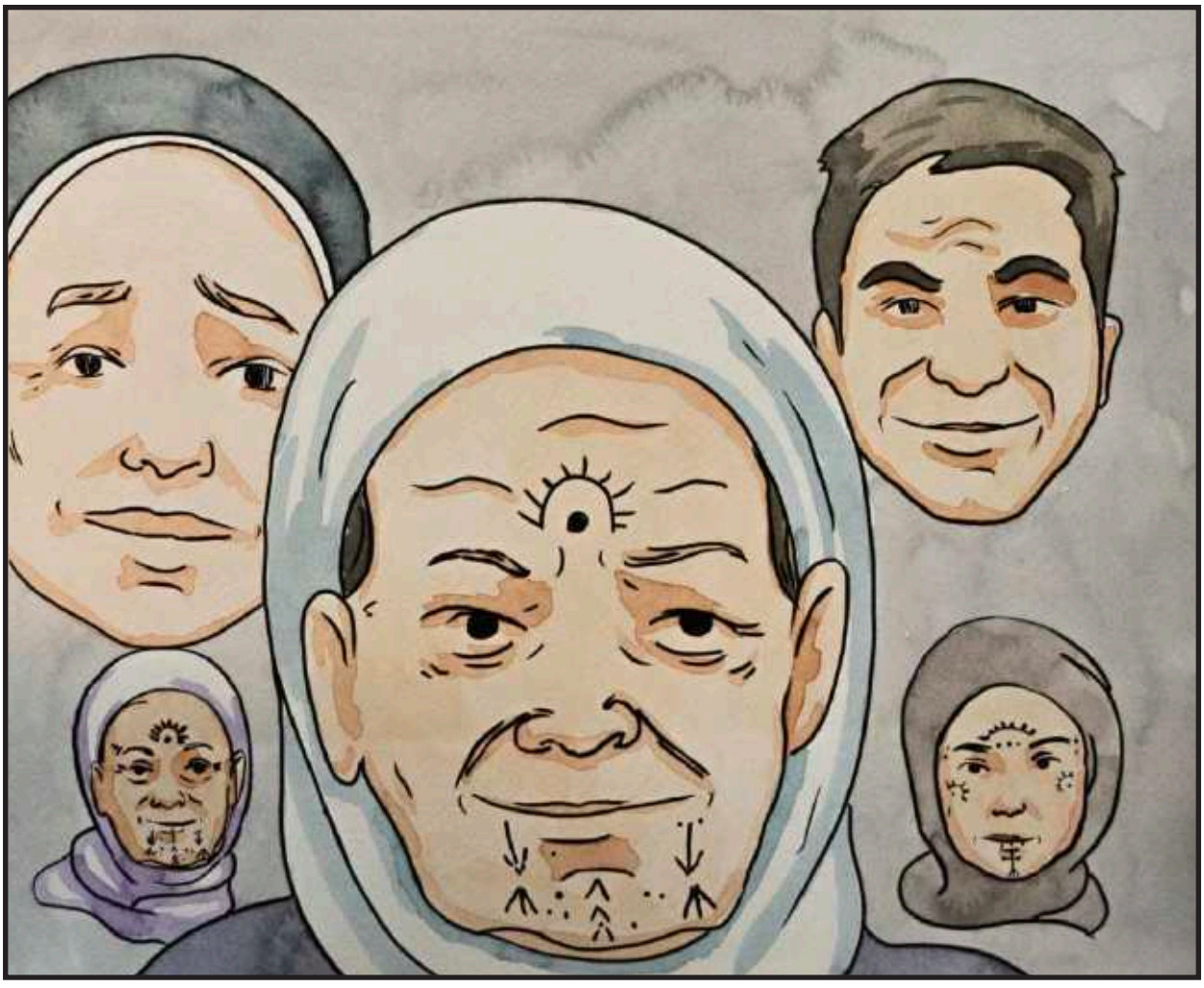

Don't worriy, my daughter
I'm hopeless






The women assure Khaya that they will restore her beauty with tattoos





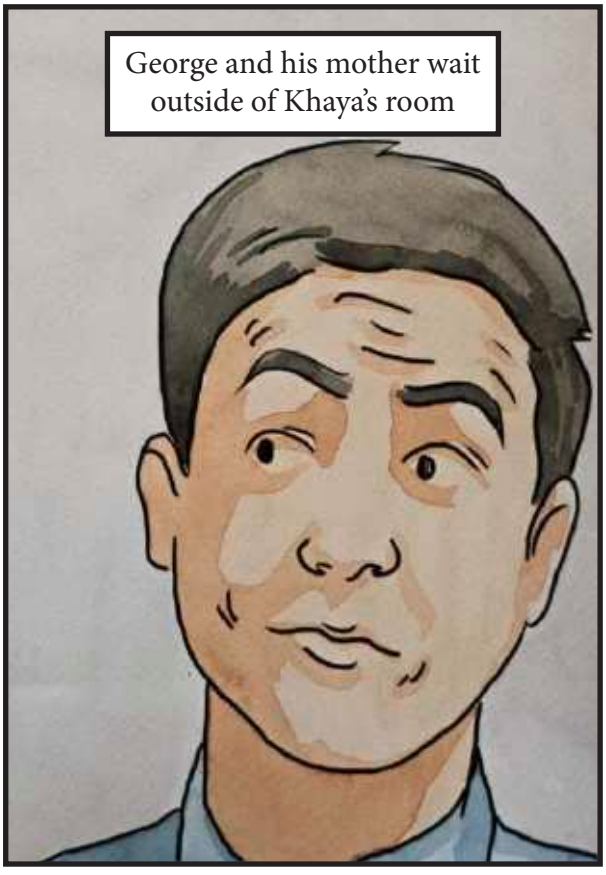



On the same night, they
prepared a miraculous colour



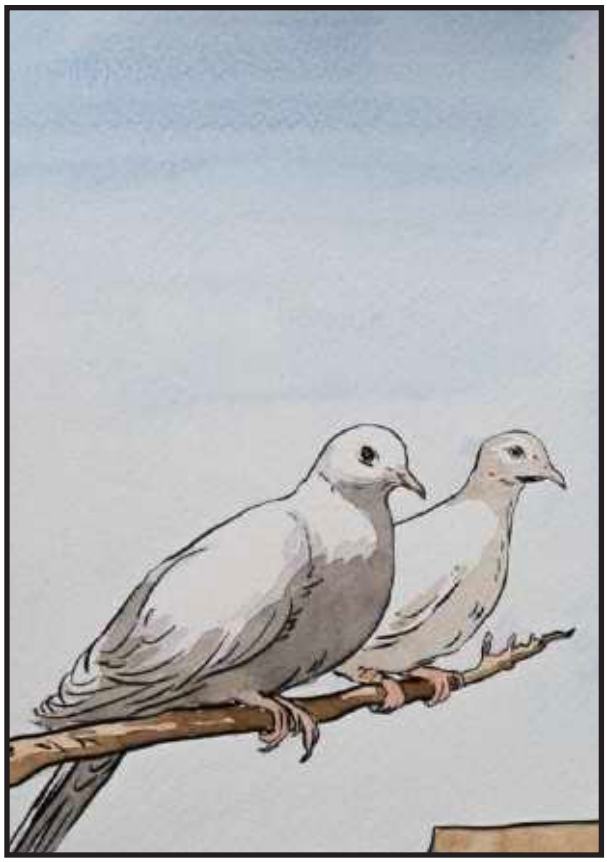

The women start tattooing




George and his mother wait outside of Khaya's room





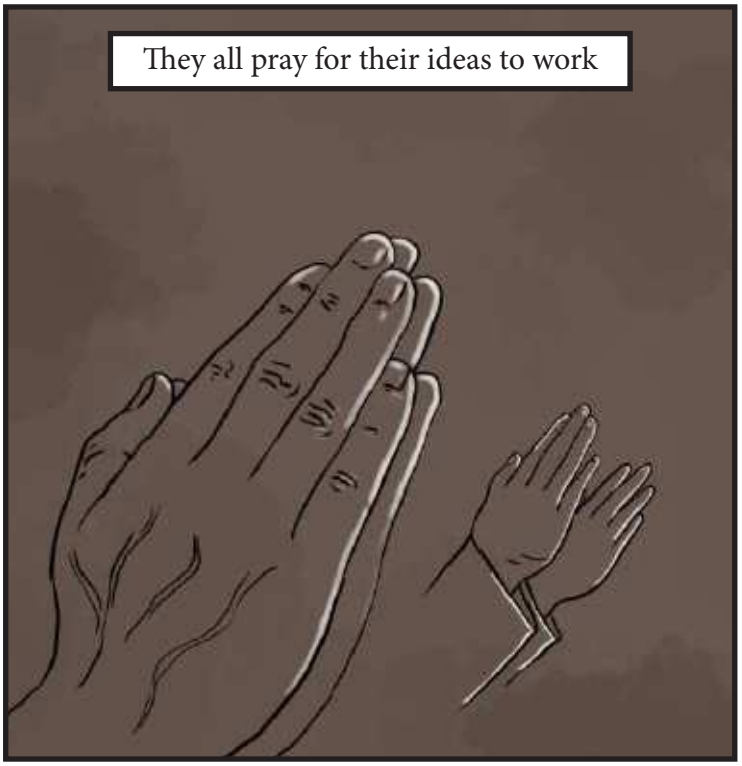




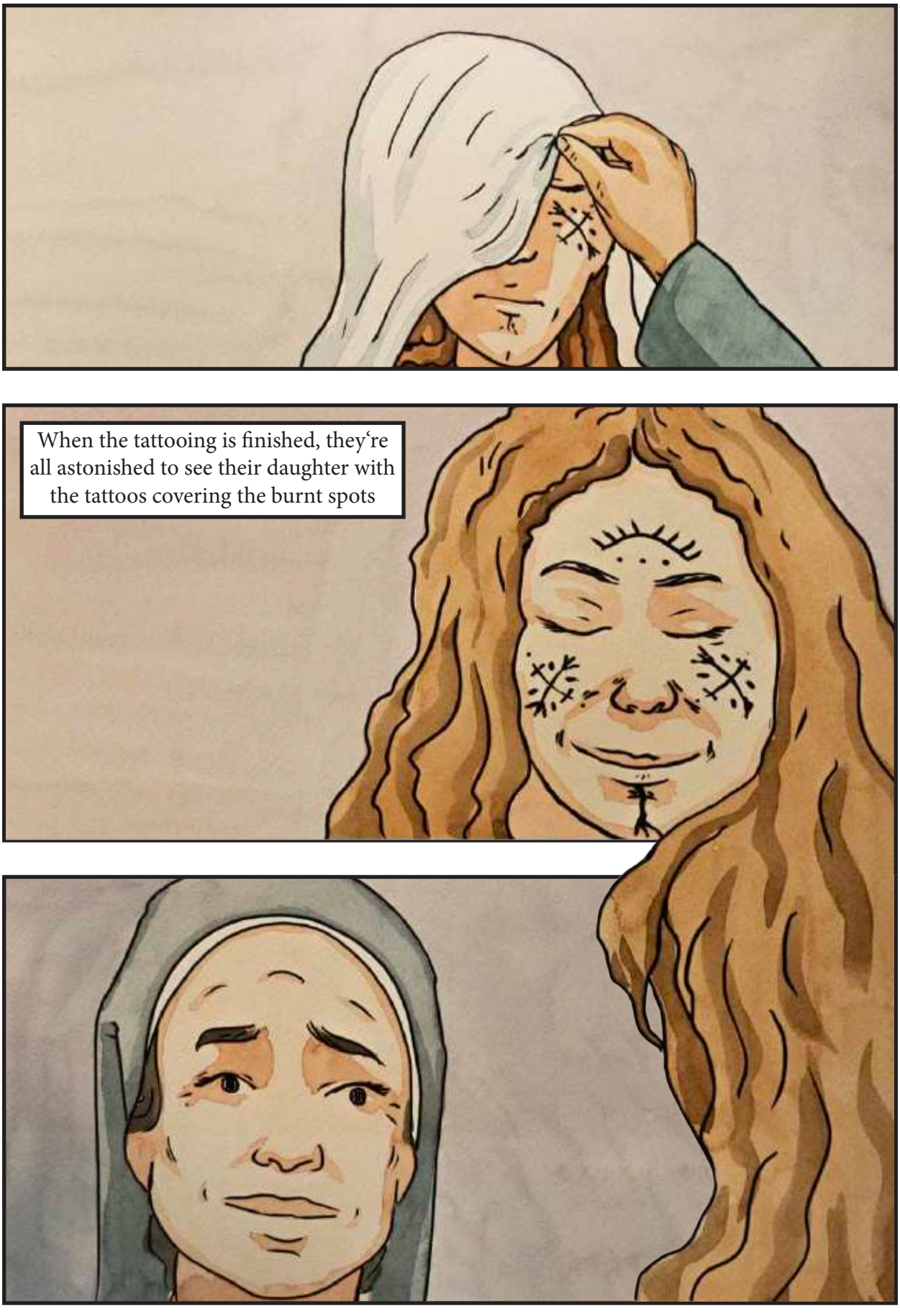







They all pray for their ideas to work




When the tattooing is finished, they‘re all astonished to see their daughter with the tattoos covering the burnt spots




When Khaya sees her face, she's so happy and thanks the women


Khaya and everyone attending the wedding was full of joy and enjoyed a great celebration

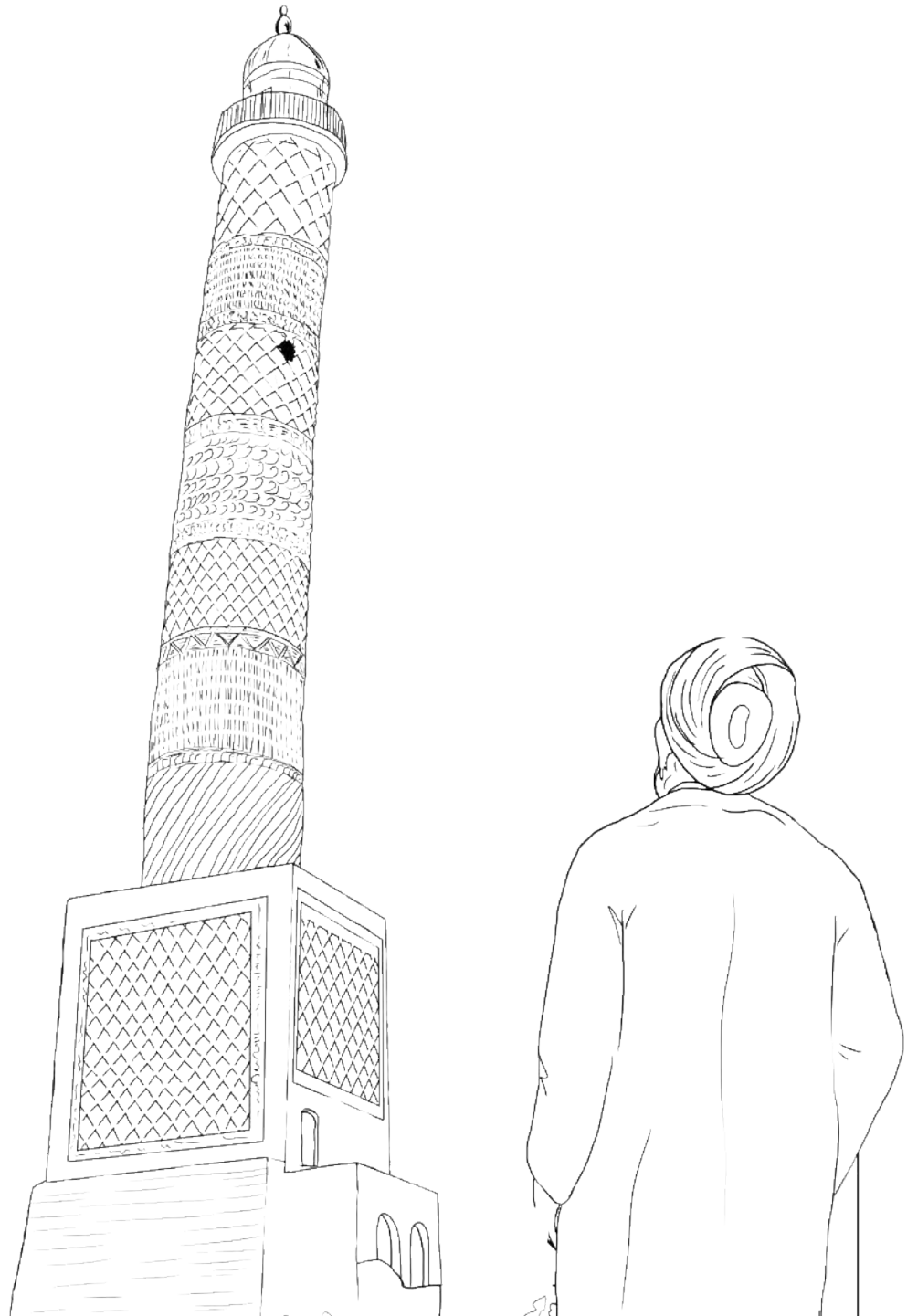


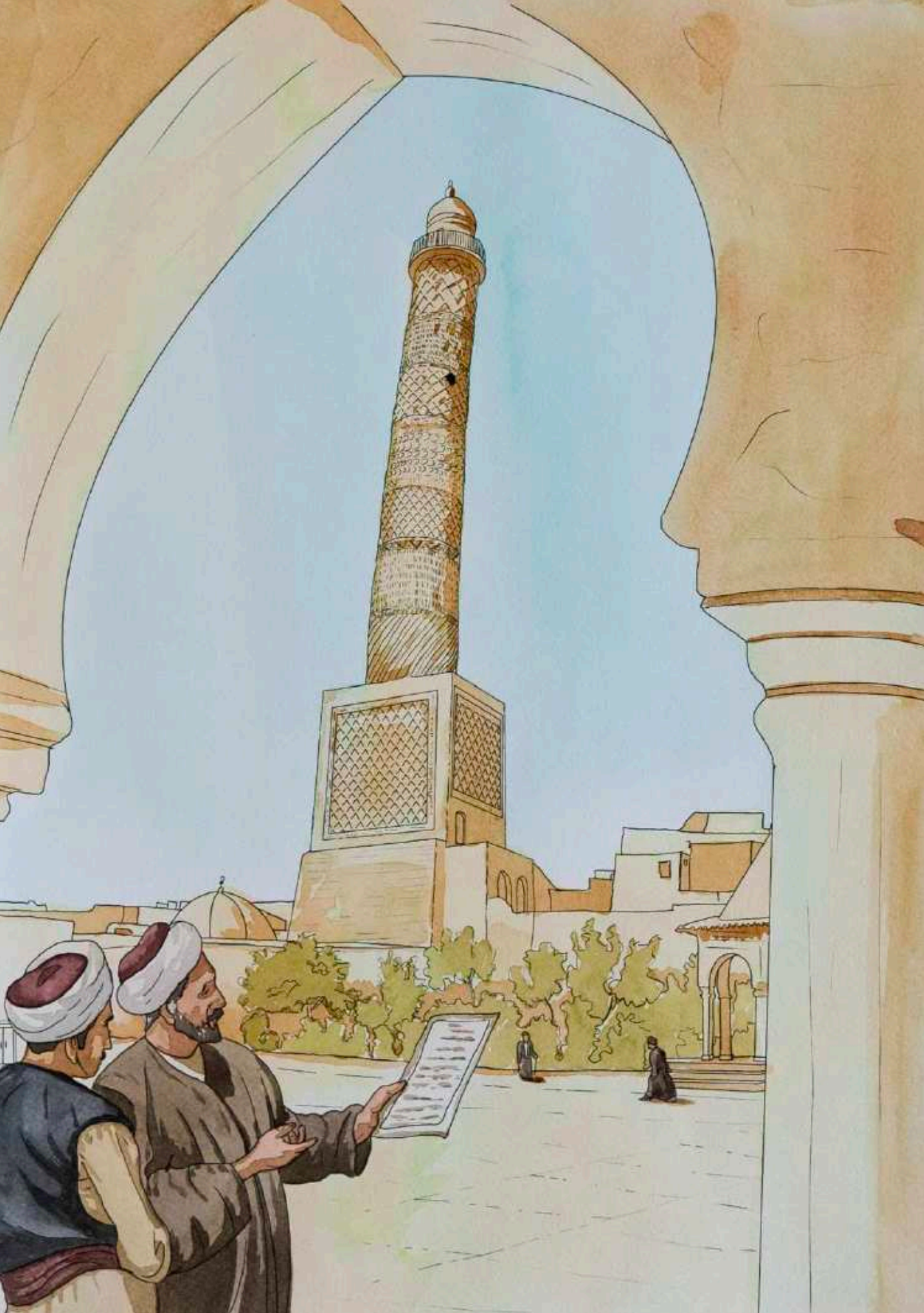




Abudi Tanburji

The Hadba minaret at the Great Mosque of Al-Nuri is seen as one of the main Islamic architectural heritages of the city of Mosul in Iraq. It dates back to the 11th century A.D. Abudi Tanburji is a well-known Christian bricklayer in Mosul. In the 1940s, a hole appeared in the Hadba minaret. The only one capable of fixing it was Abudi the Bricklayer. This story shows how well communities with different religions and beliefs in Mosul got along, where they helped each other despite their differences.






The Great Mosque of Al-Nuri was built in the 11th century
and is one of Mosul's main historical and cultural sites



The mosque was an important educational, religious and scientific centre

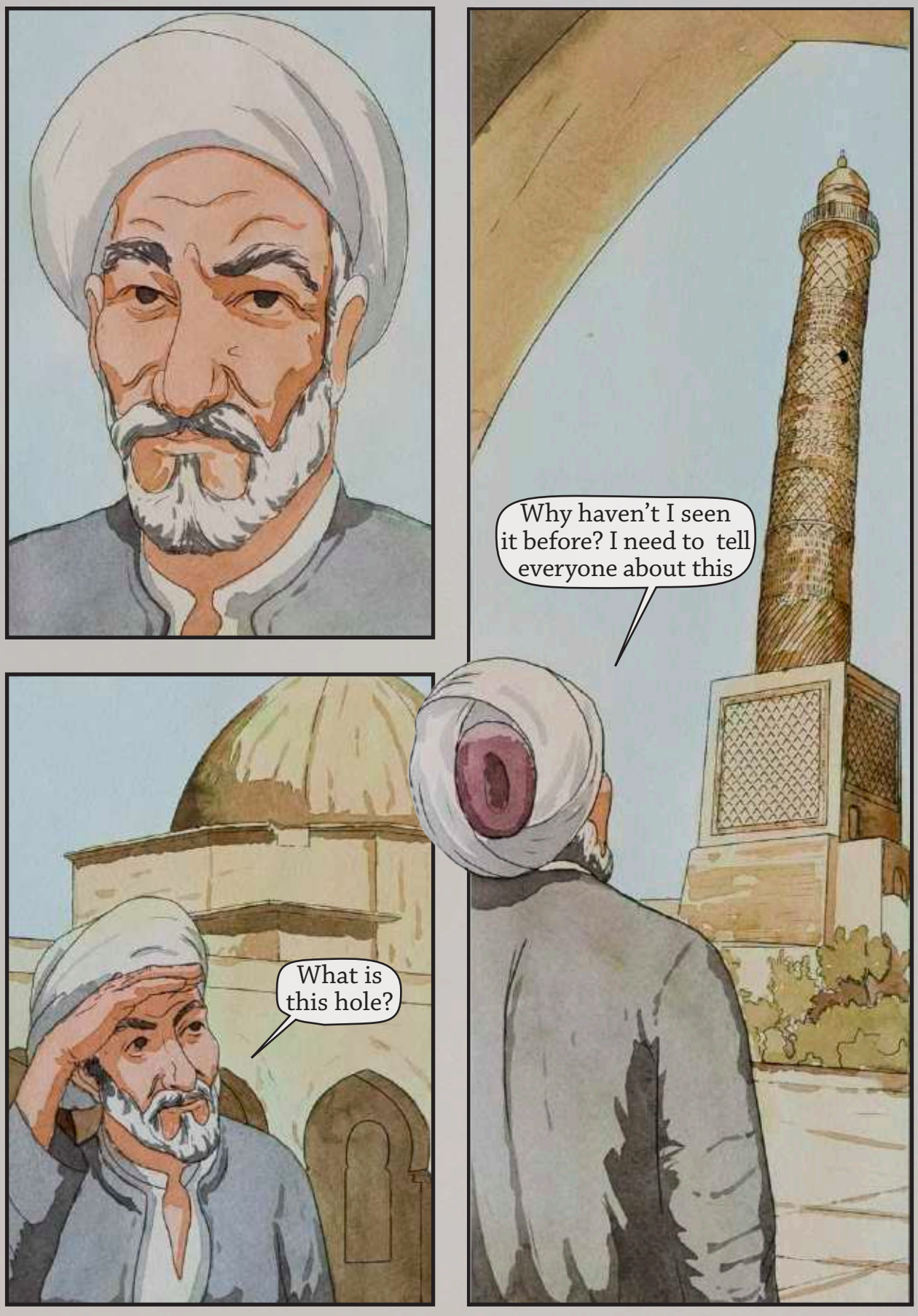


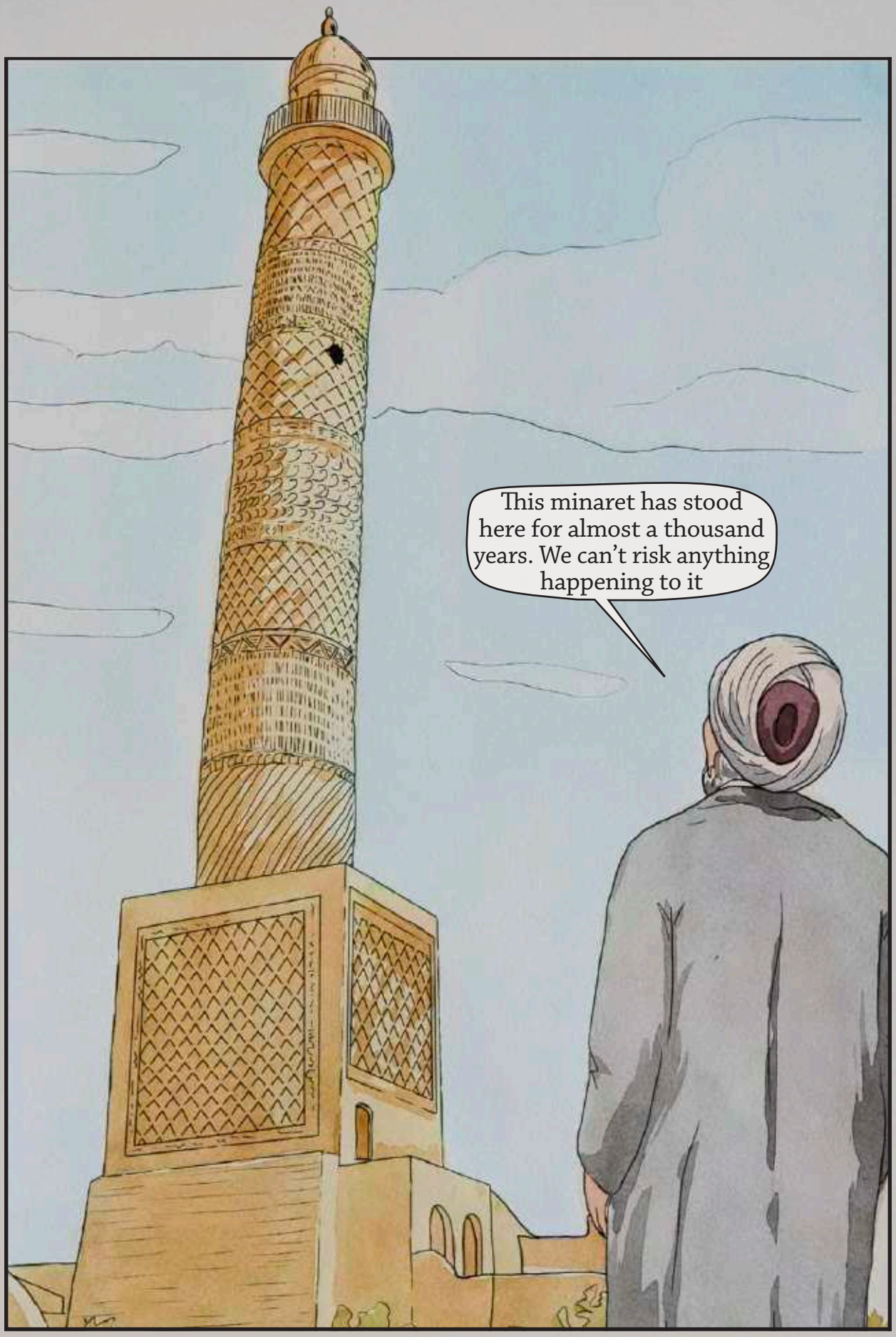


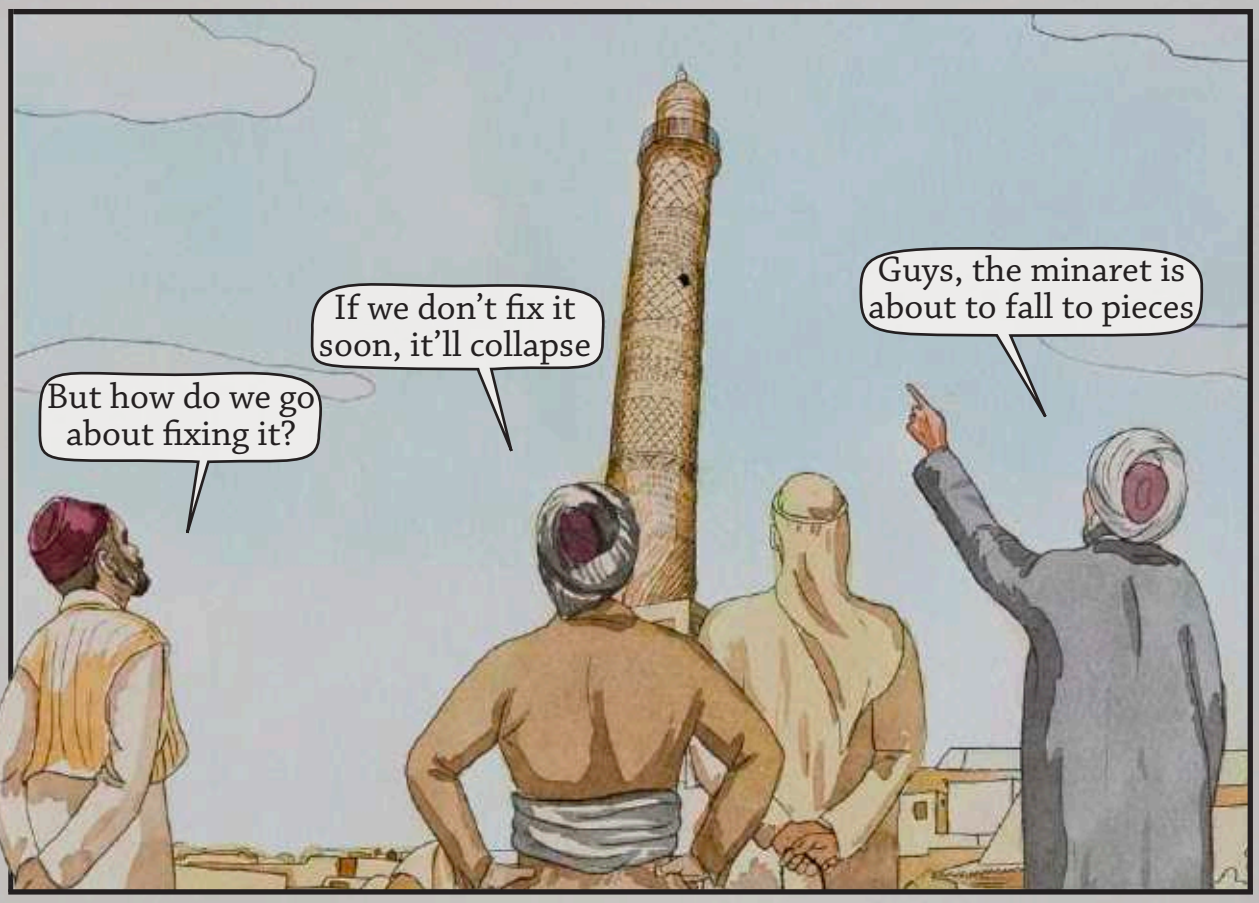




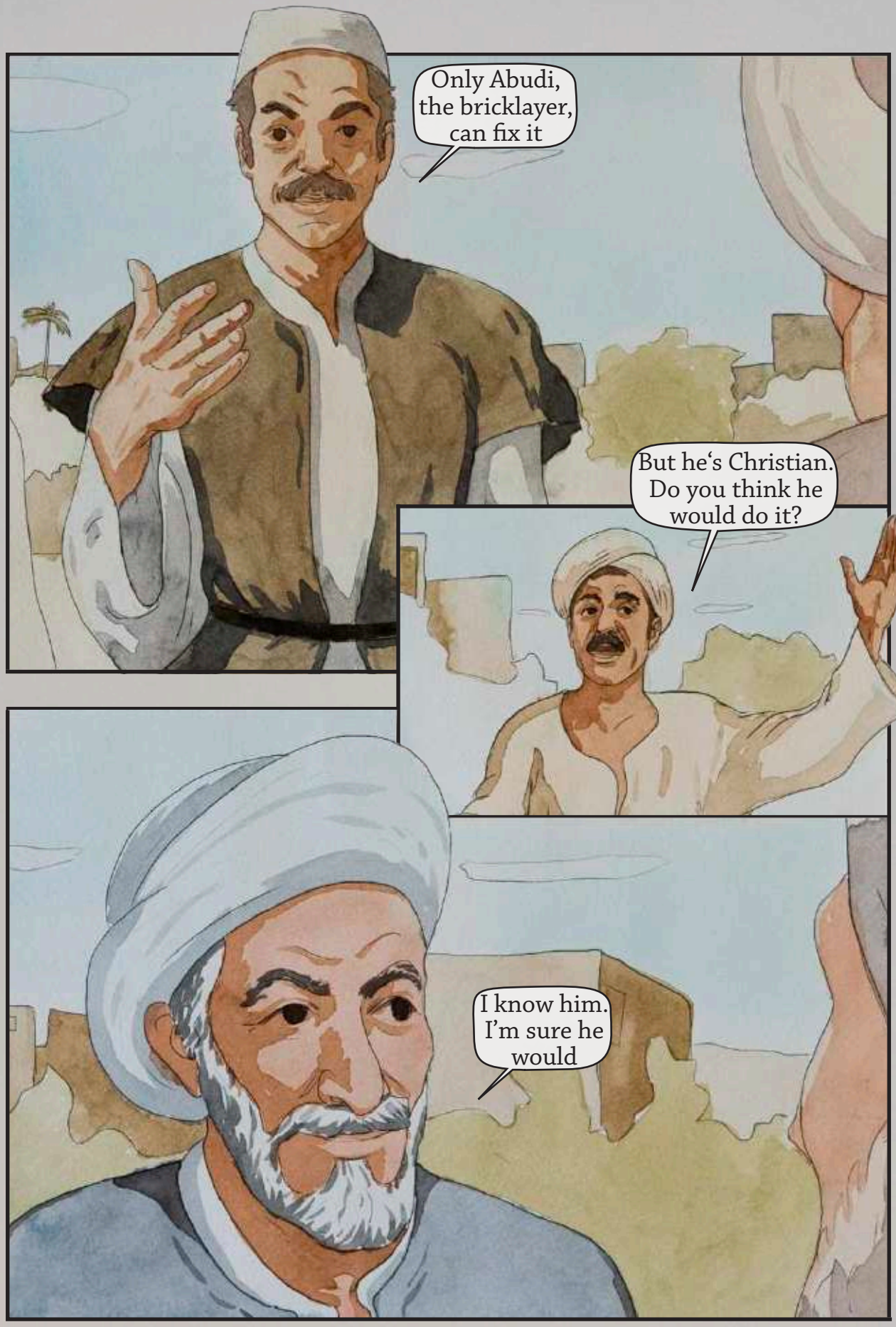


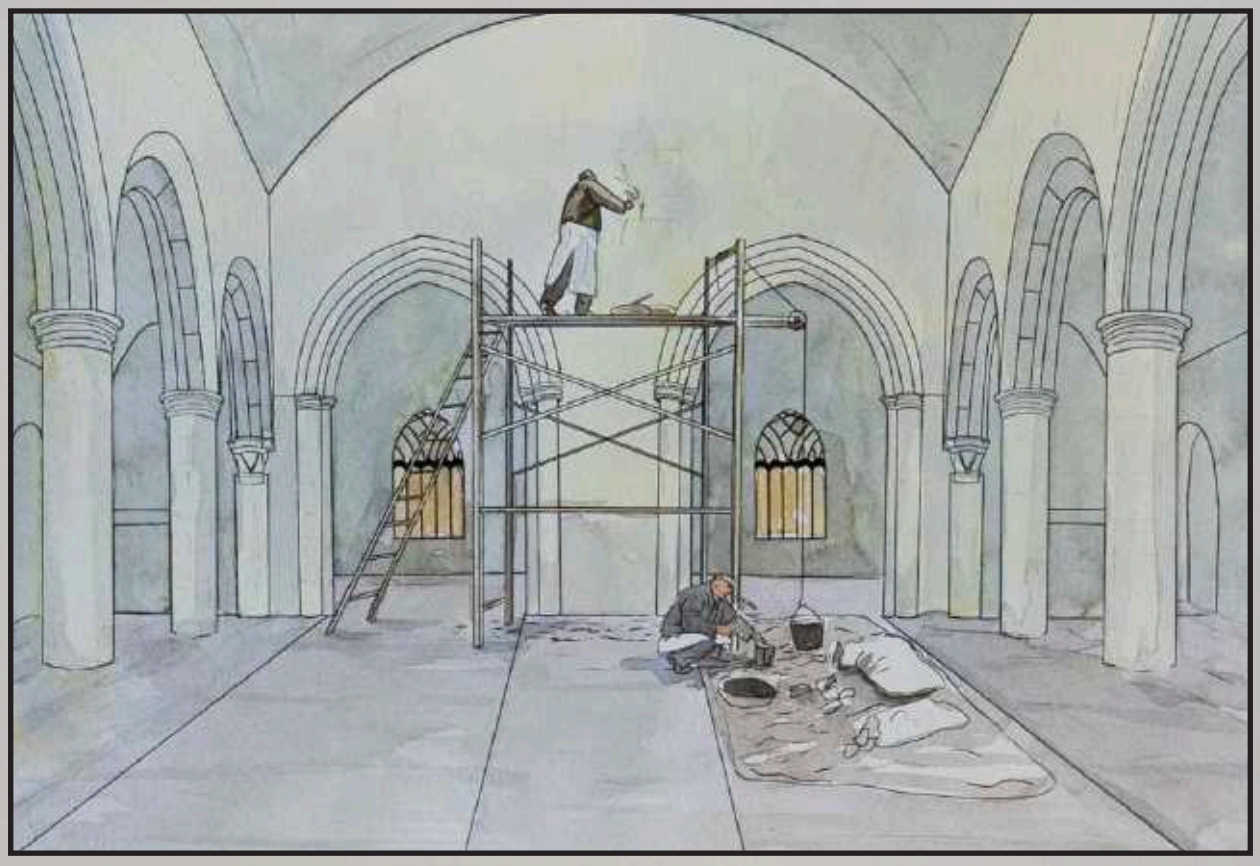

Why haven't I seen it before? I need to tell everyone about this
What is this hole?


This minaret has stood here for almost a thousand years. We can't risk anything happening to it


Guys, the minaret is about to fall to pieces
If we don't fix it soon, it'll collapse
But how do we go about fixing it?


We need to find a master craftsman because working at that height isn't easy
It would be a disaster for Mosul if it was gone


Only Abudi, the bricklayer, can fix it
But he's Christian. Do you think he would do it?
I know him. I'm sure he would



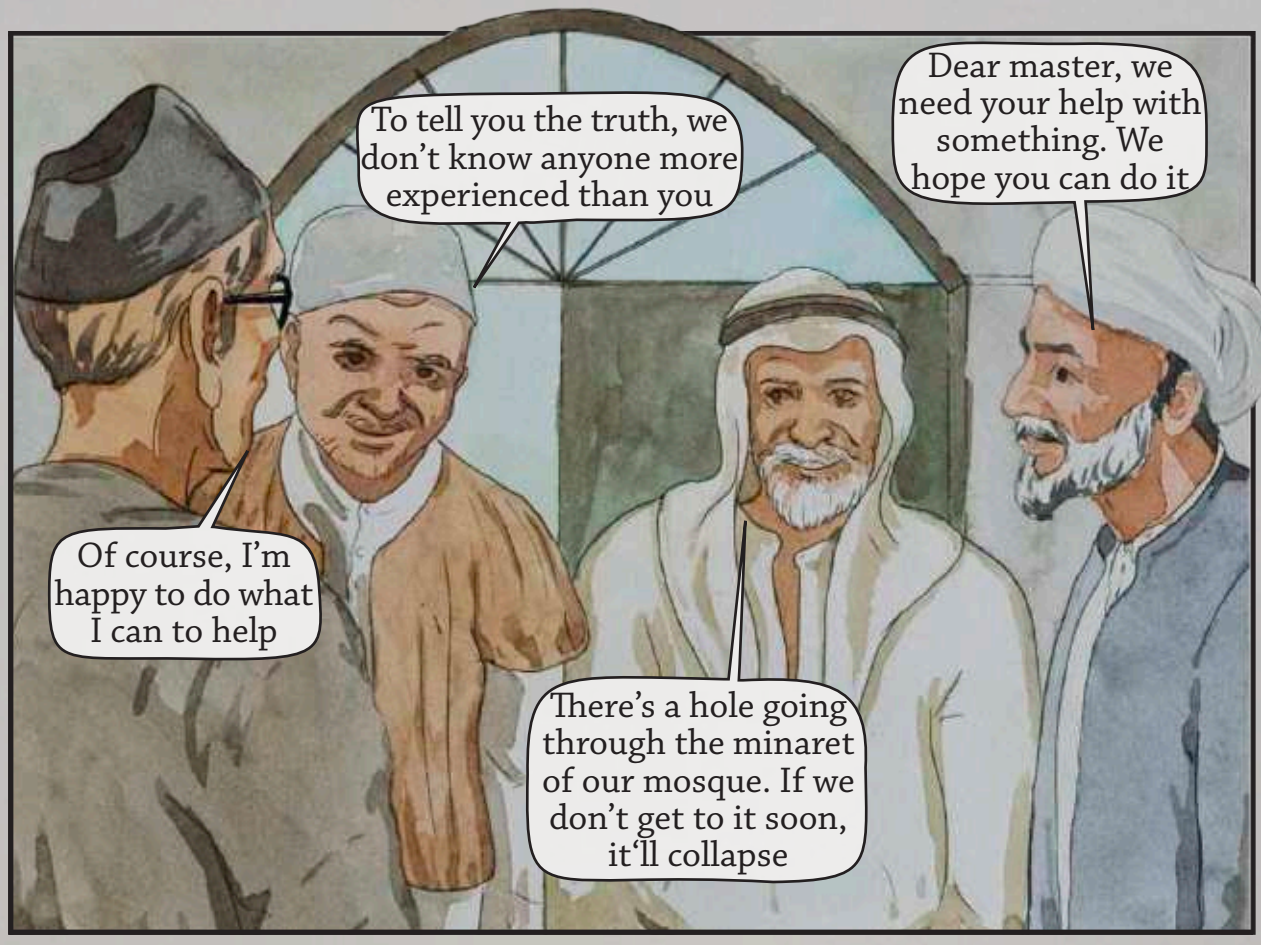


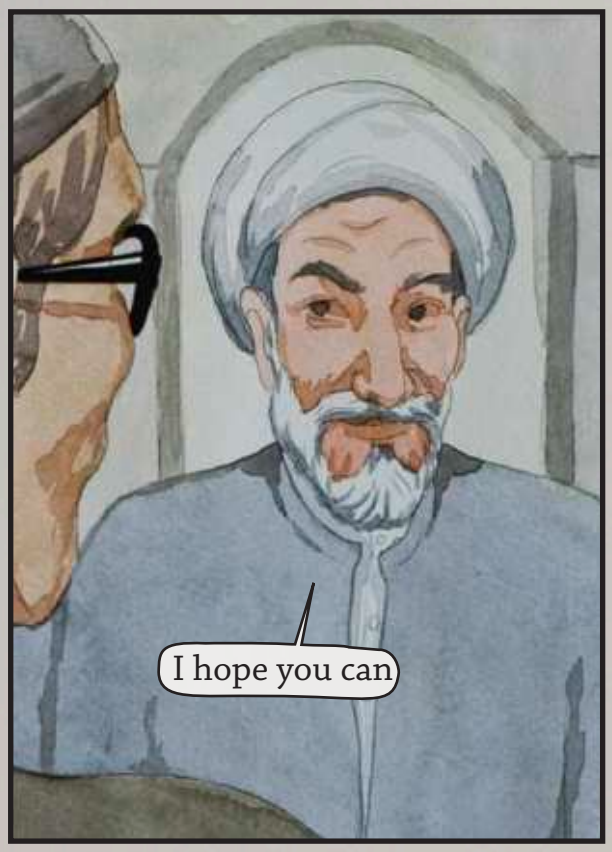


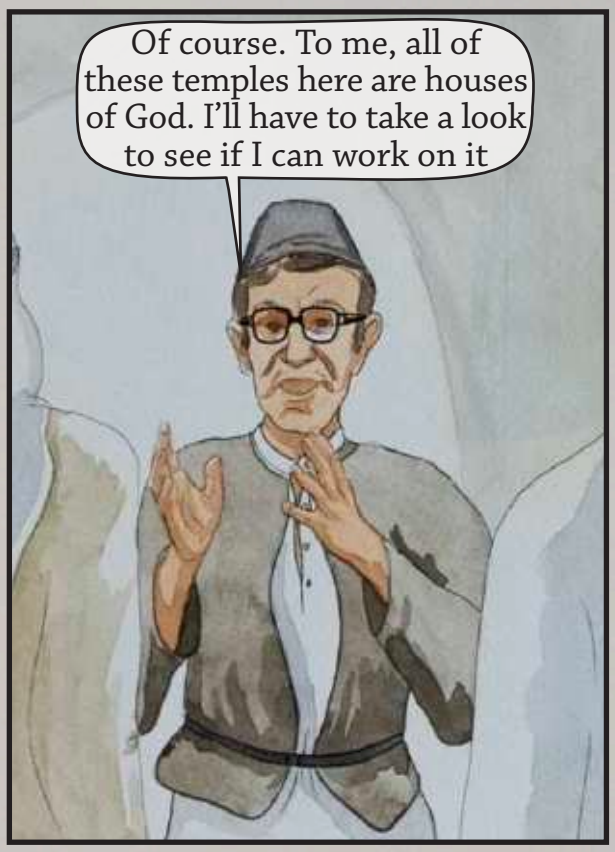

May God give you strength, master
Salamu Alaykum


Alaykuma Salam

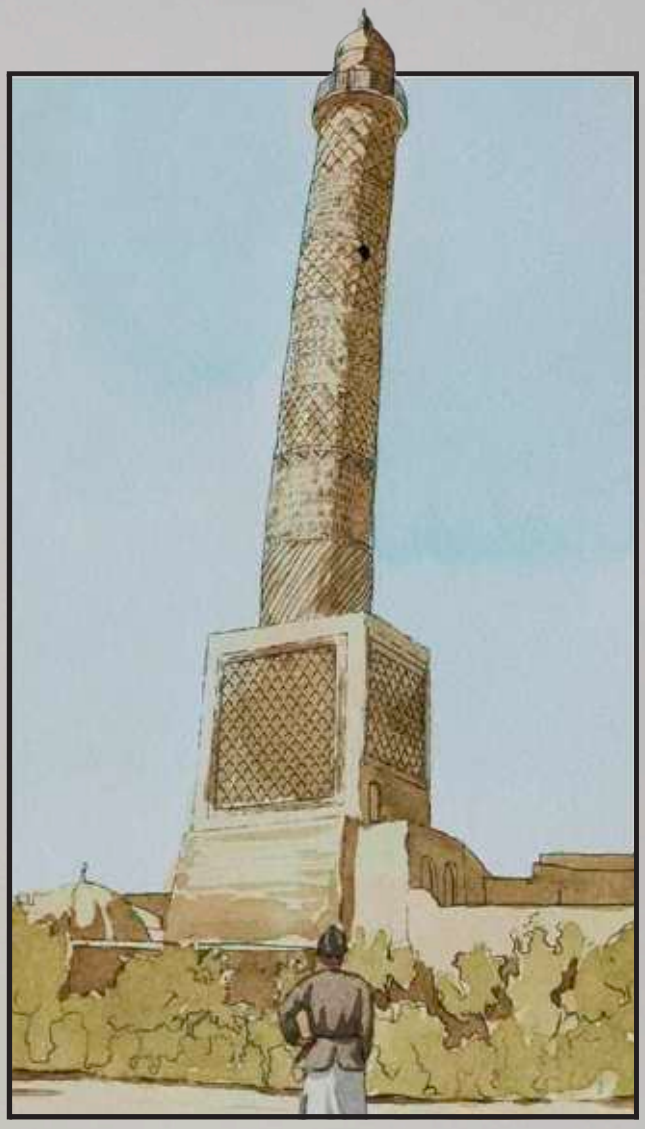


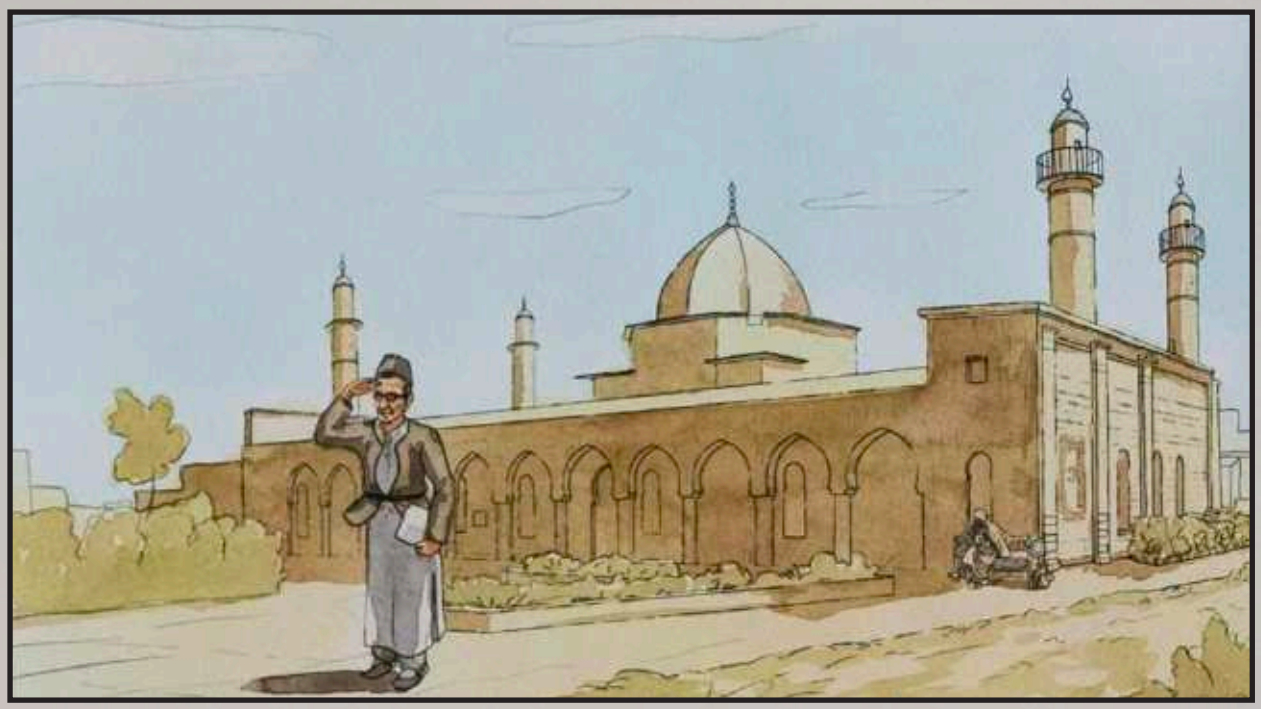

Dear master, we need your help with something. We hope you can do it
To tell you the truth, we don't know anyone more experienced than you
Of course, I'm happy to do what I can to help
There's a hole going through the minaret of our mosque. If we don't get to it soon, it'll collapse

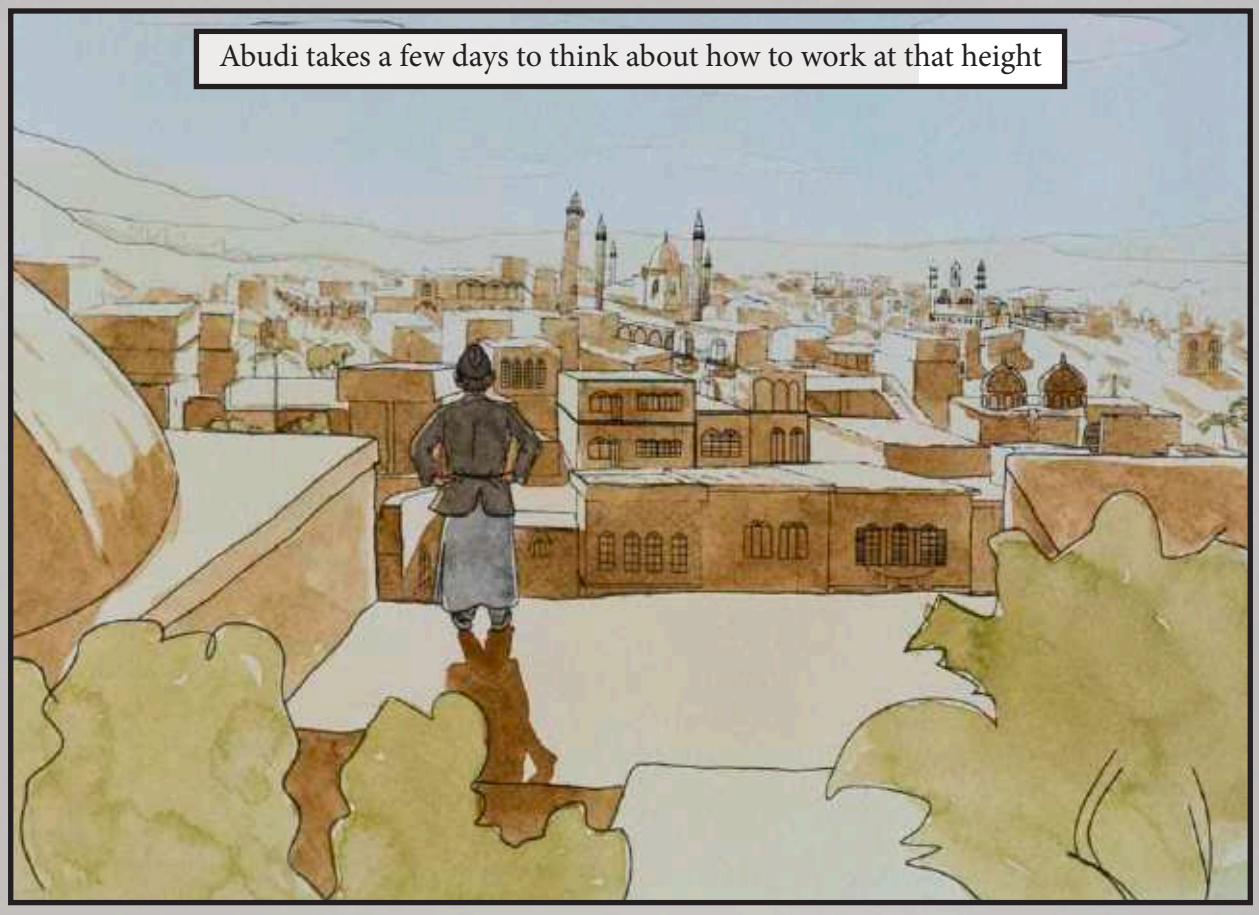

I hope you can

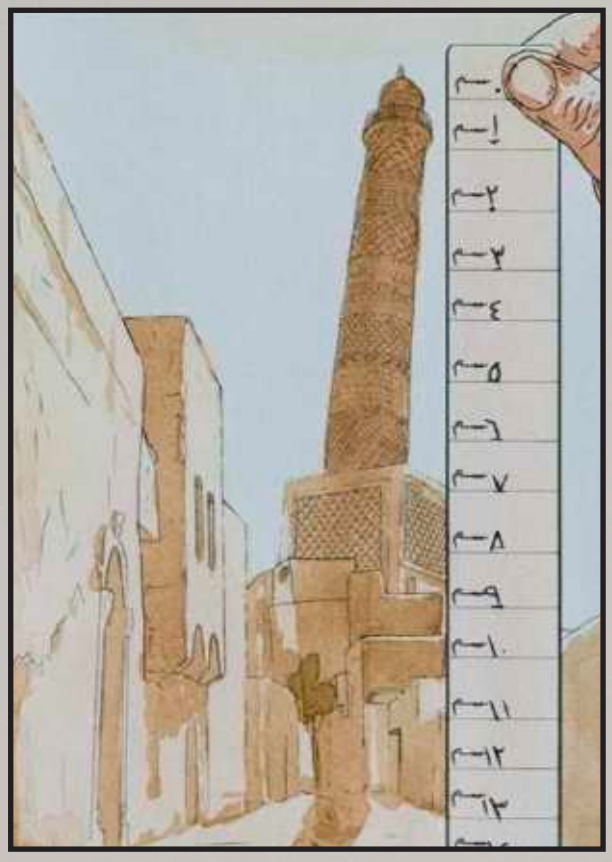

Of course. To me, all of these temples here are houses of God. I'll have to take a look to see if I can work on it



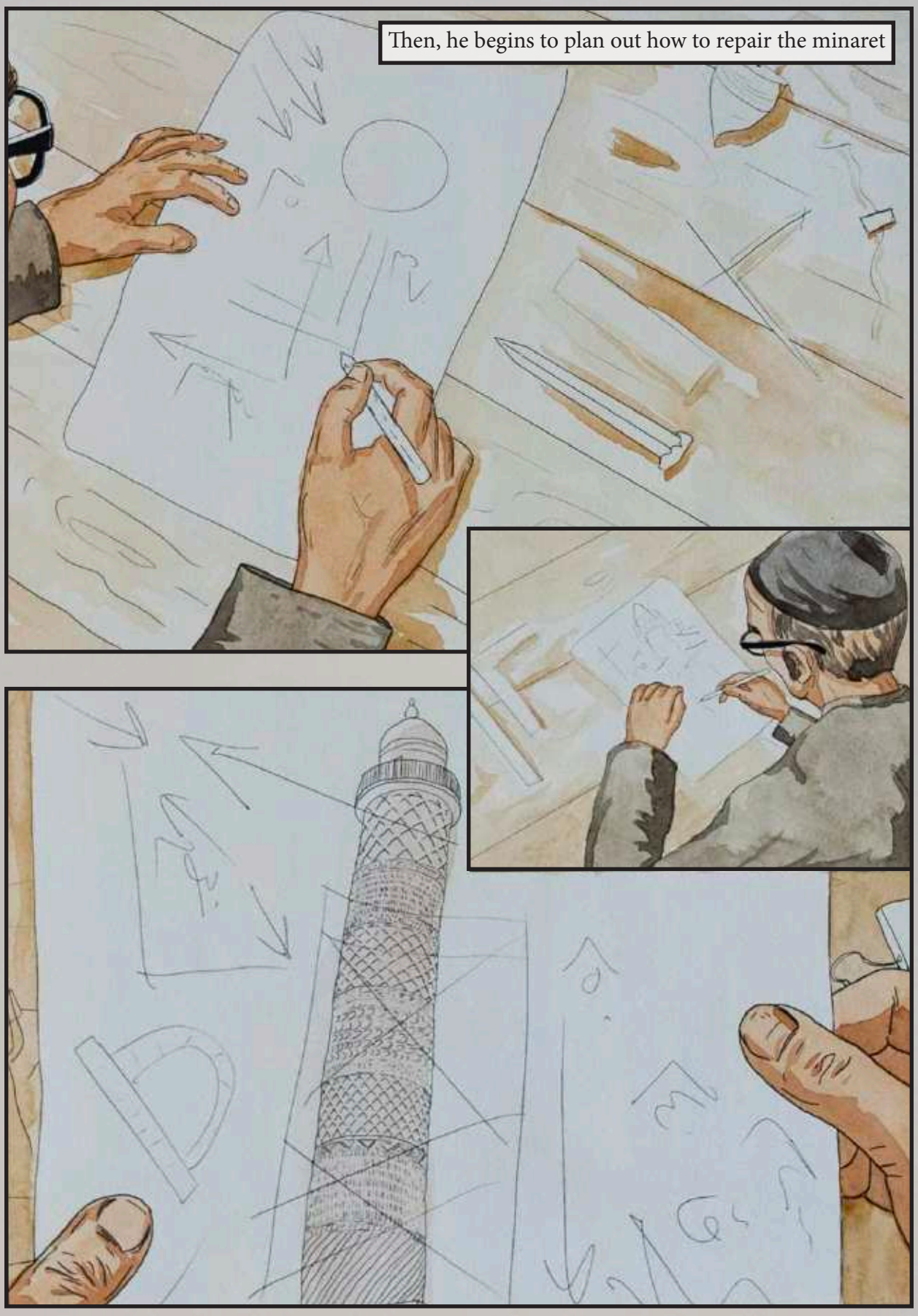




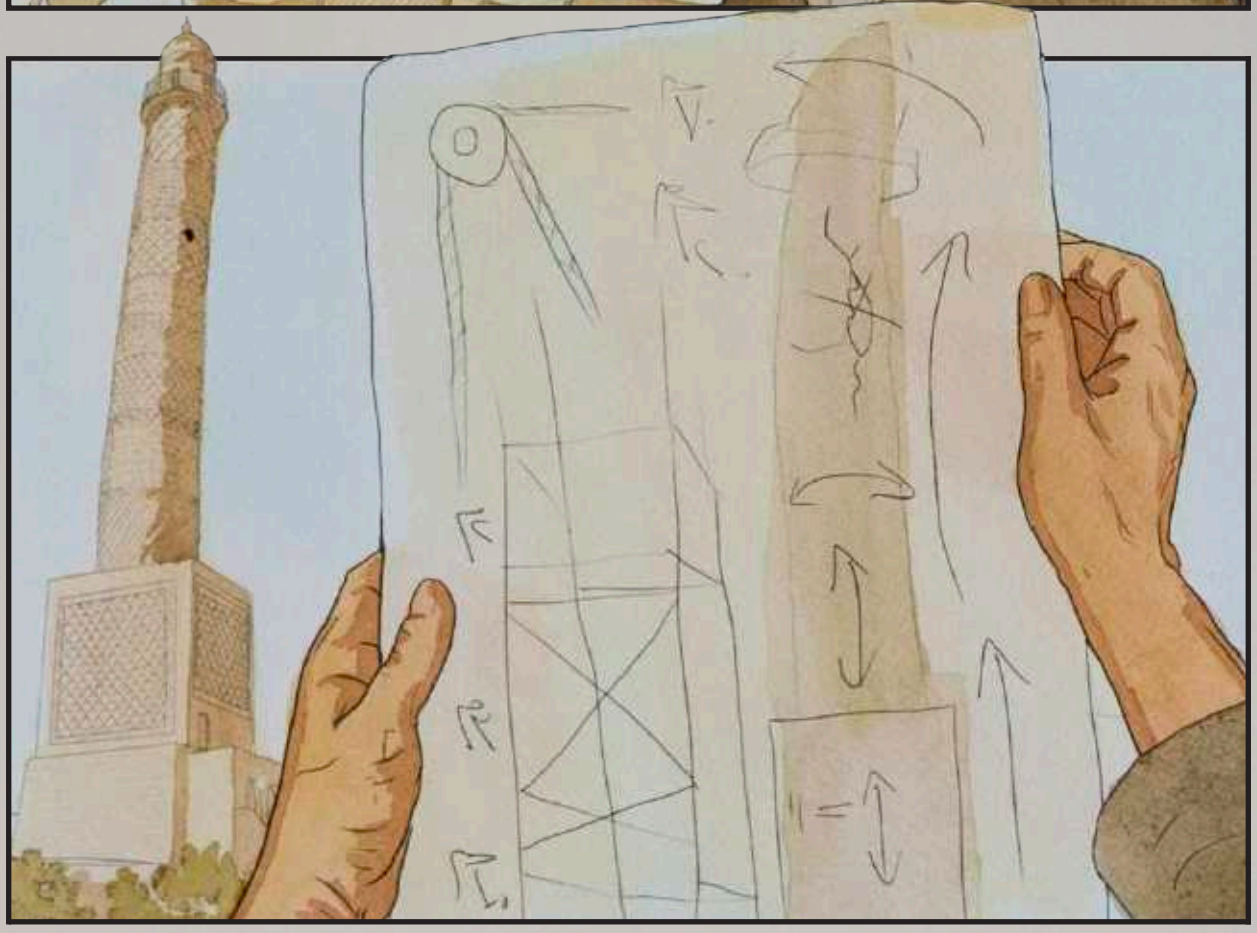

Abudi takes a few days to think about how to work at that height






Then, he begins to plan out how to repair the minaret





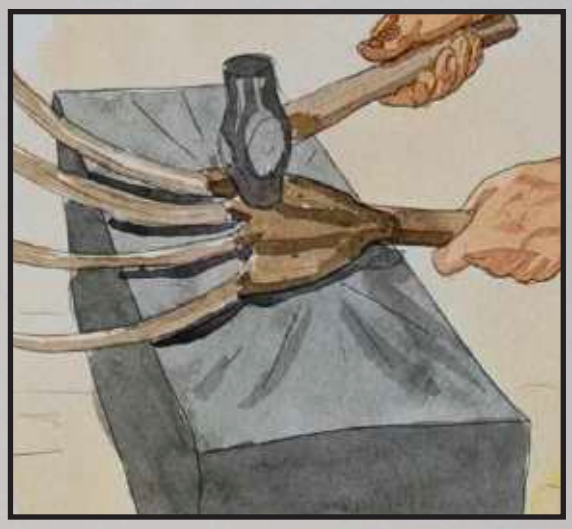


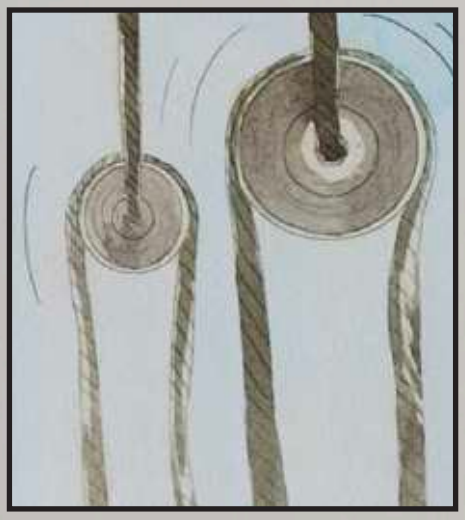

Abudi builds a wooden box to enter and lowers it down with a rope to the level of the hole



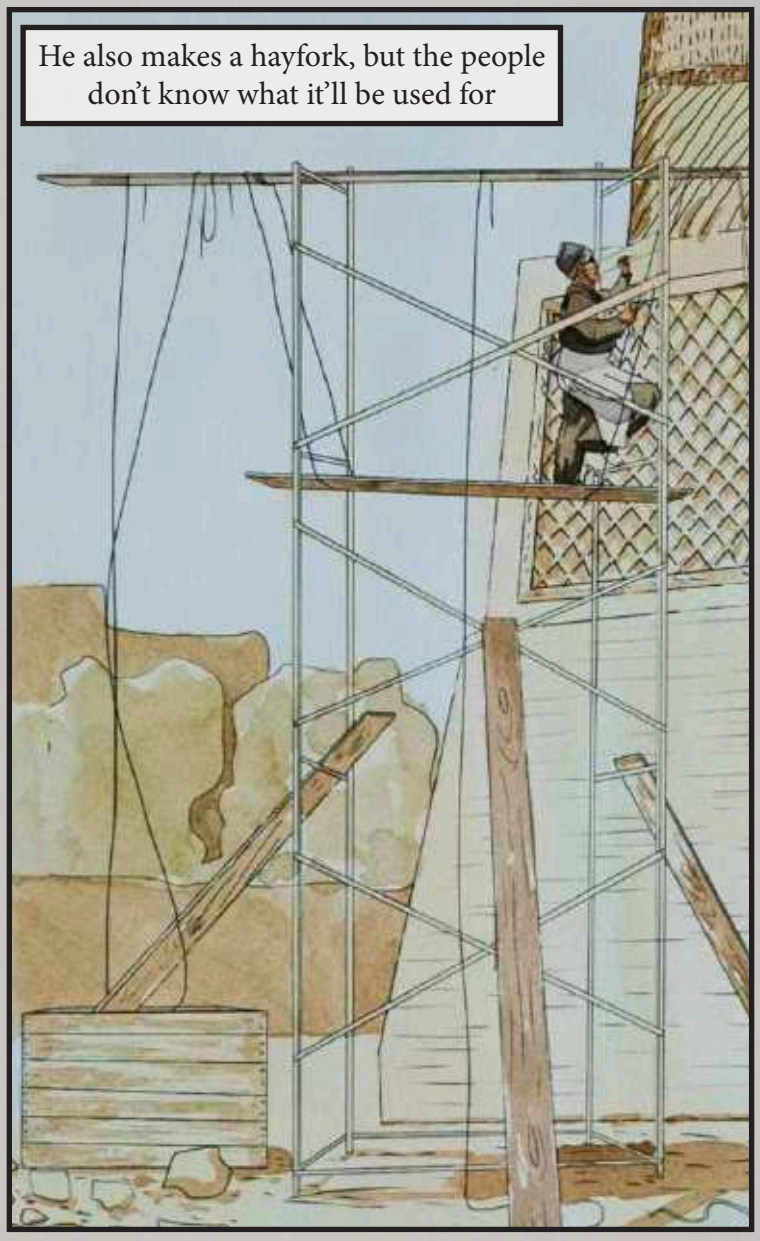


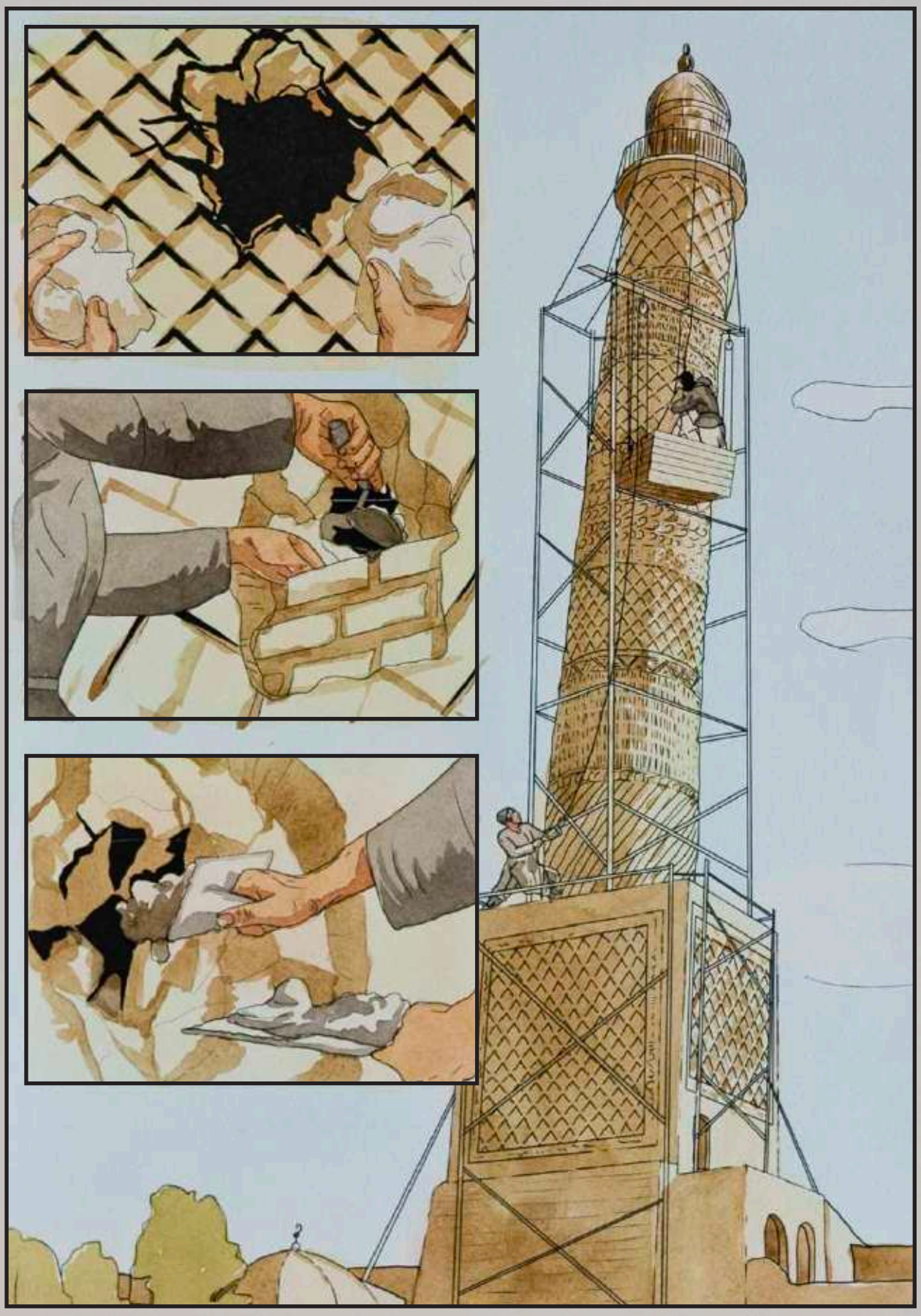


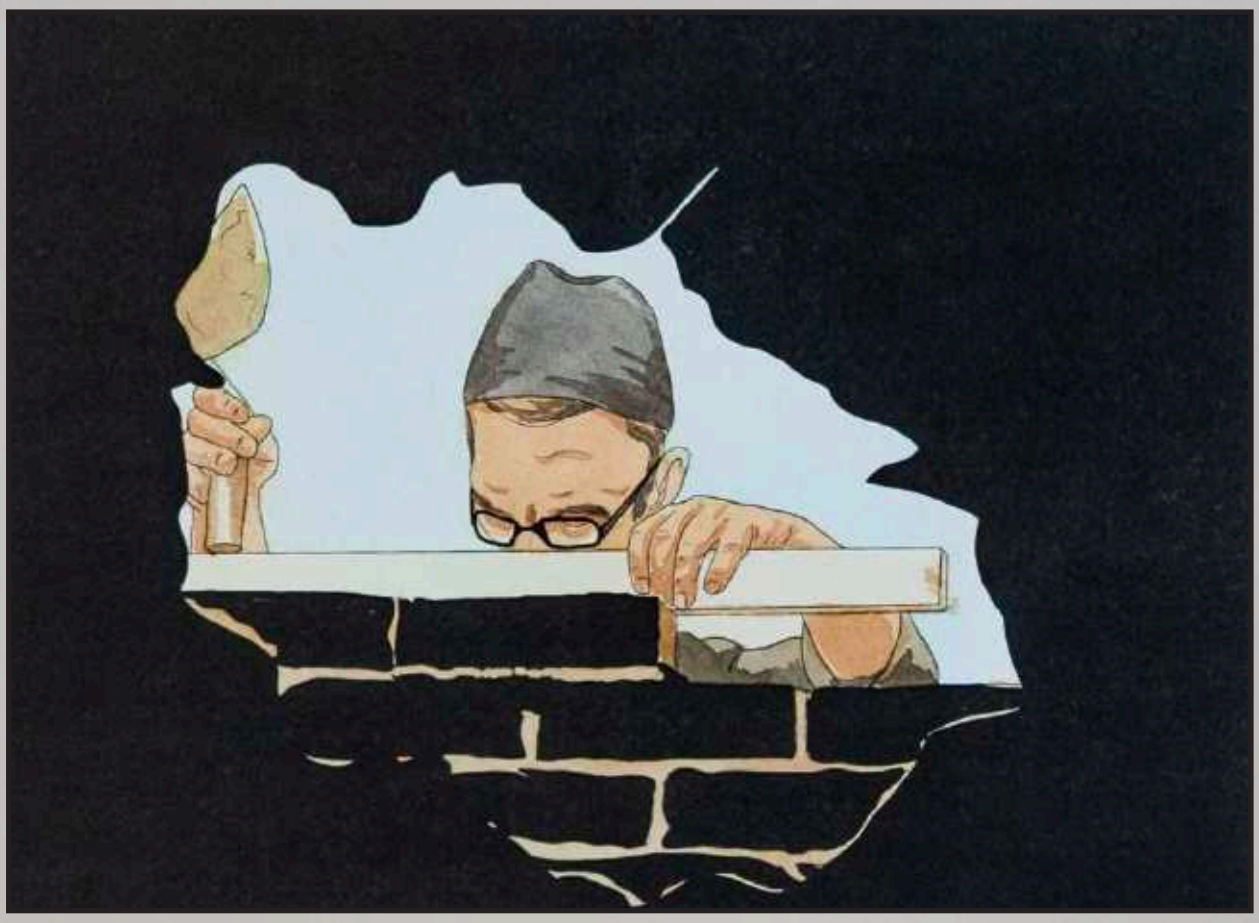




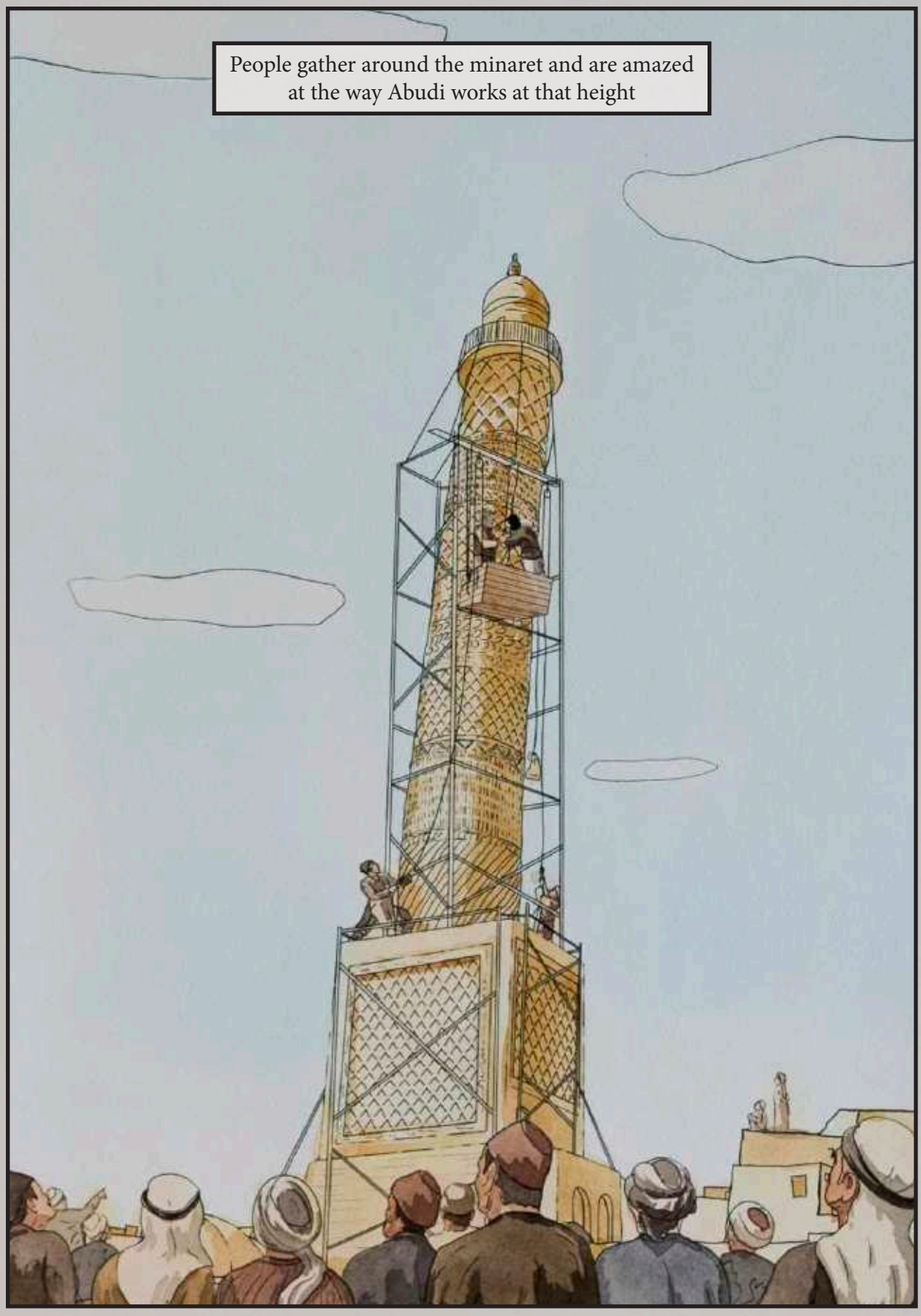



He also makes a hayfork, but the people don't know what it'll be used for

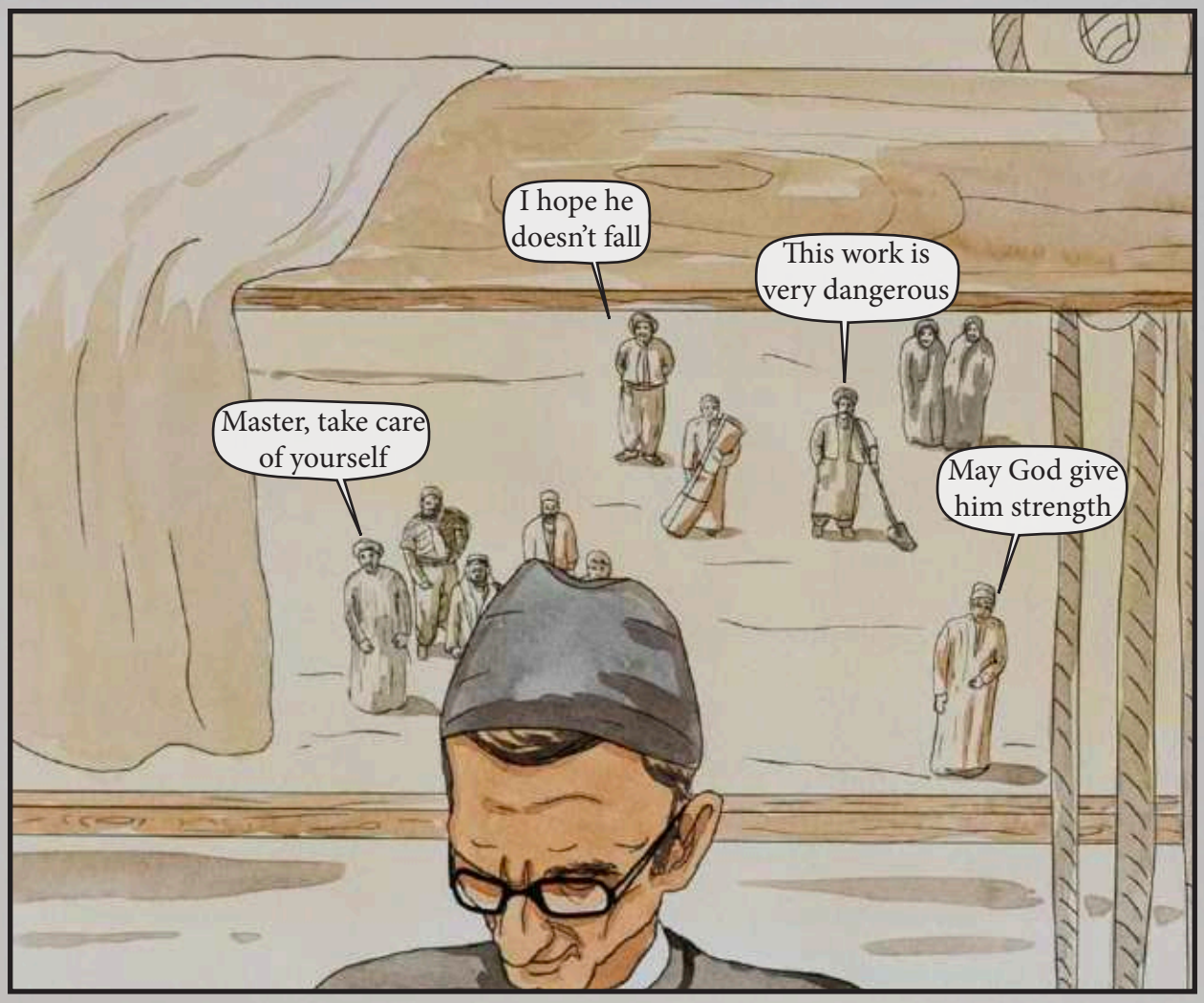


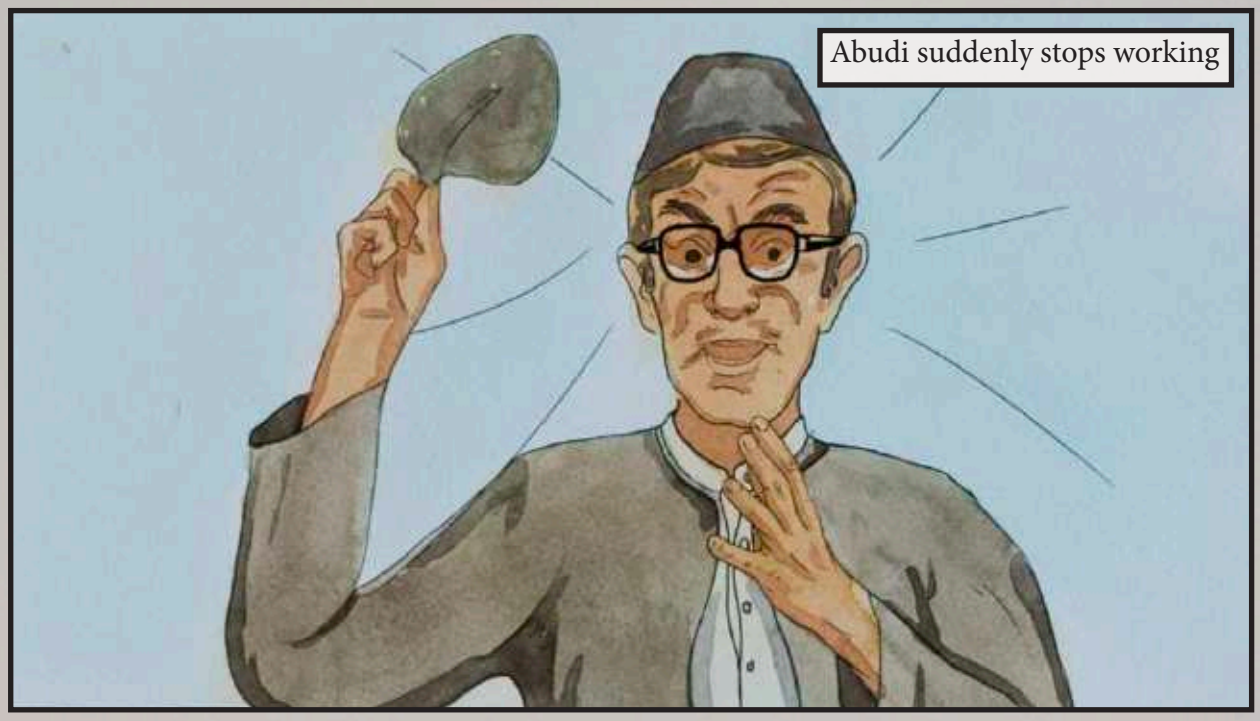


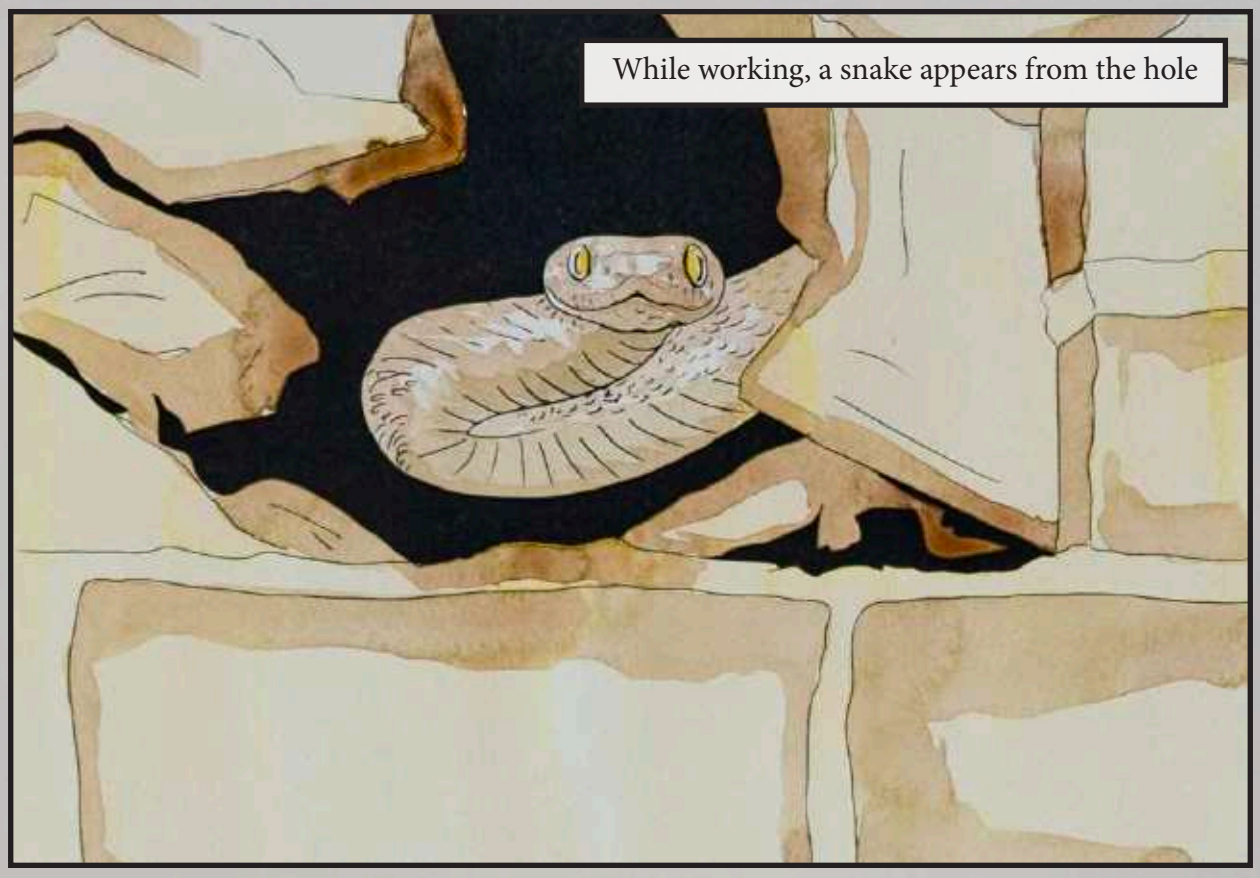



People gather around the minaret and are amazed at the way Abudi works at that height

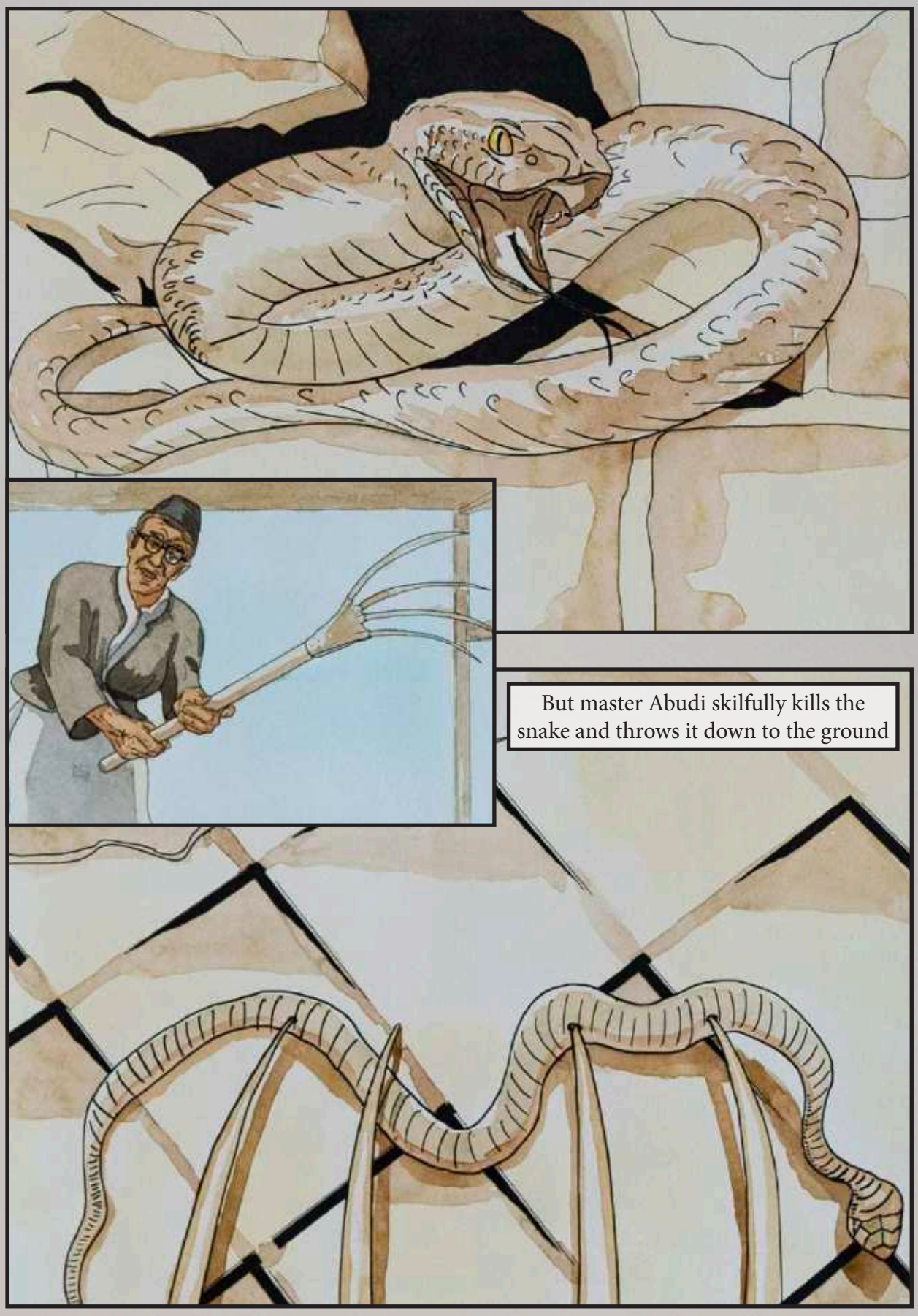

But he knows what he's doing

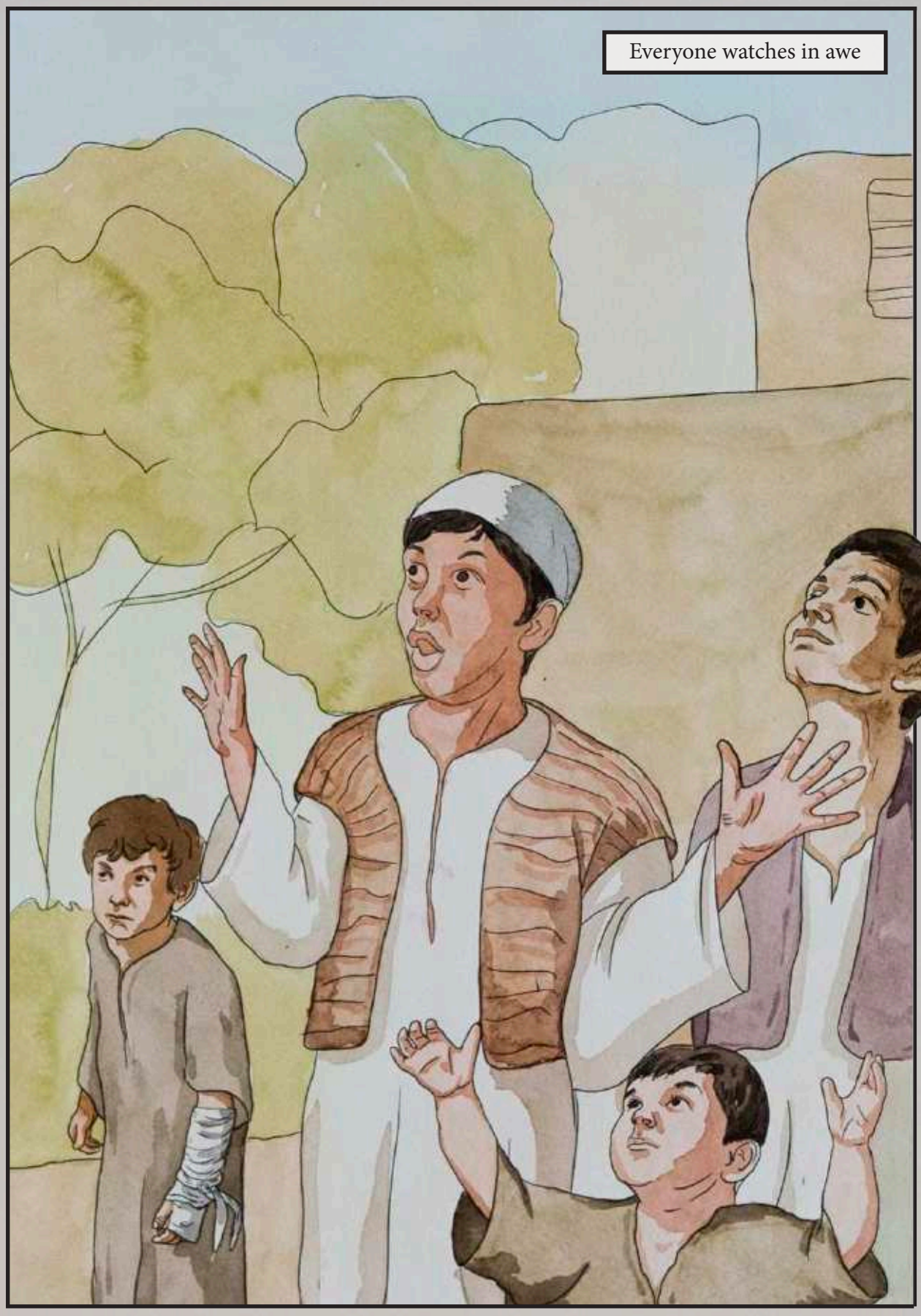

I hope he doesn't fall
This work is very dangerous
Master, take care of yourself
May God give him strength


Abudi suddenly stops working


While working, a snake appears from the hole




But master Abudi skilfully kills the snake and throws it down to the ground

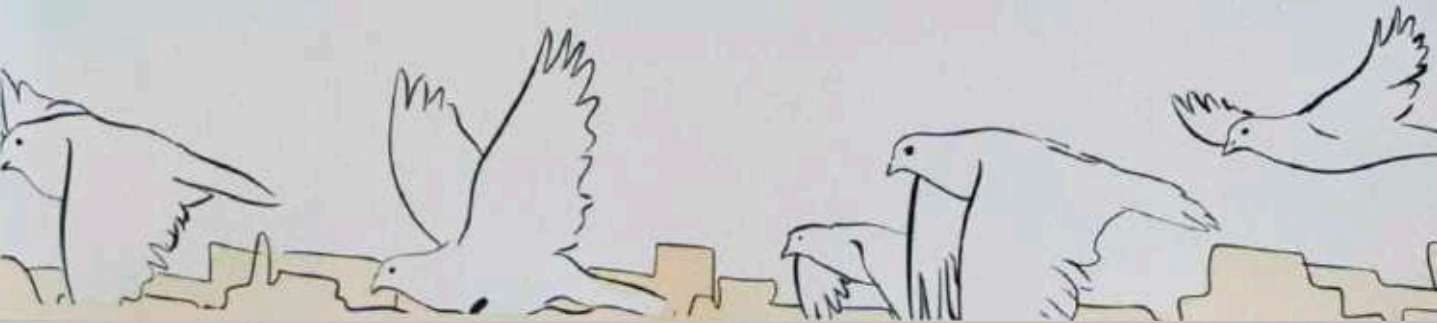

Everyone watches in awe









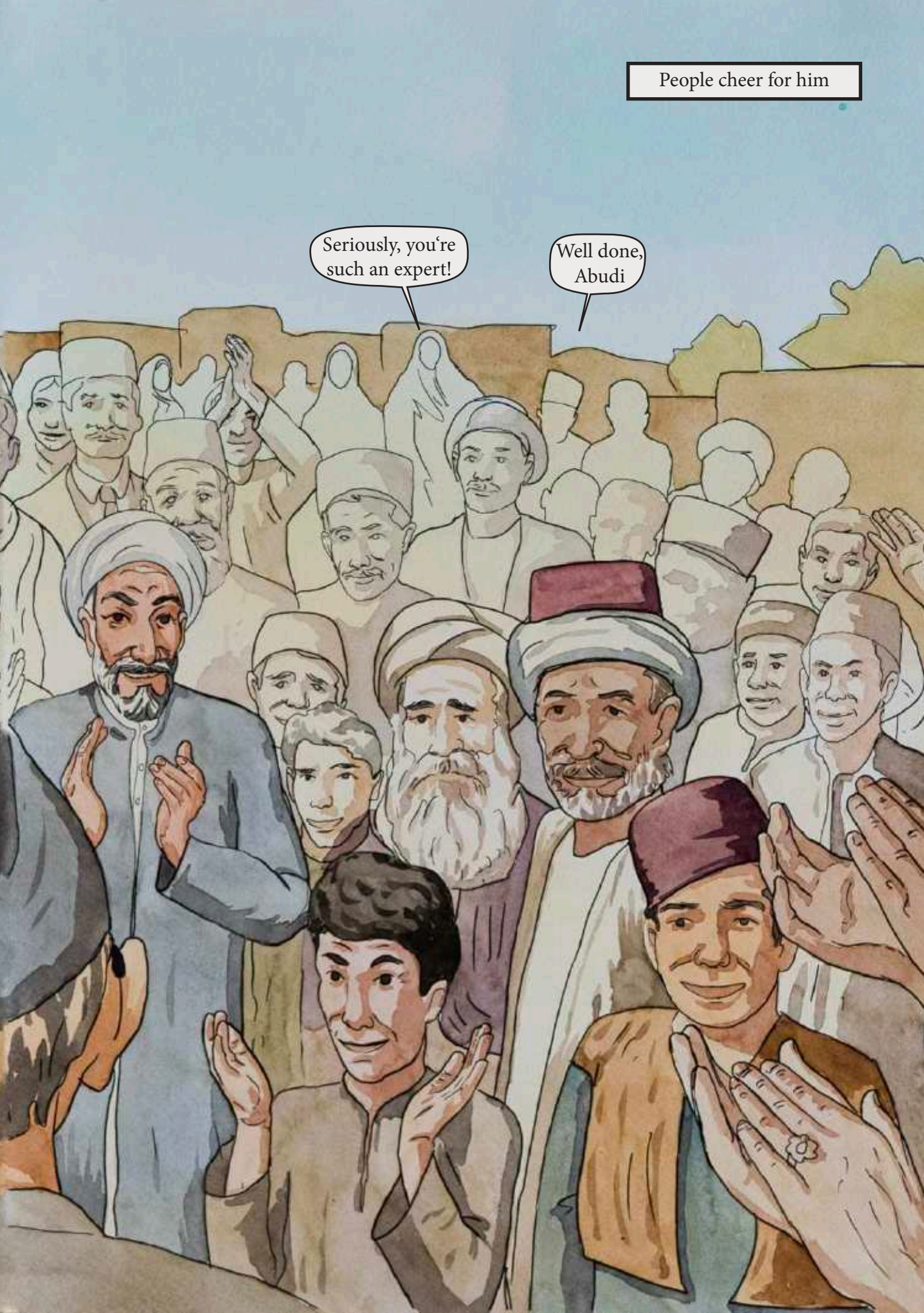


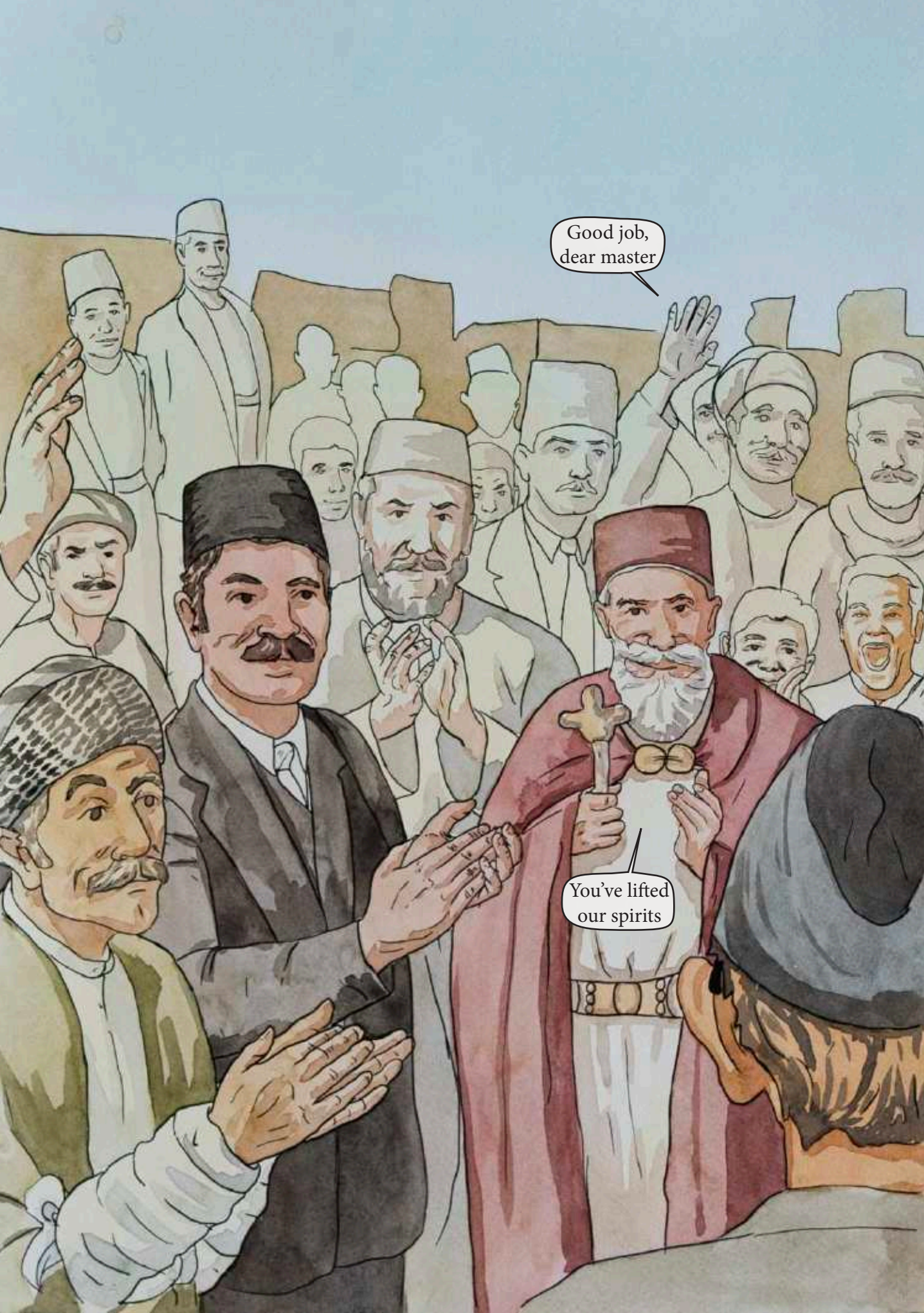


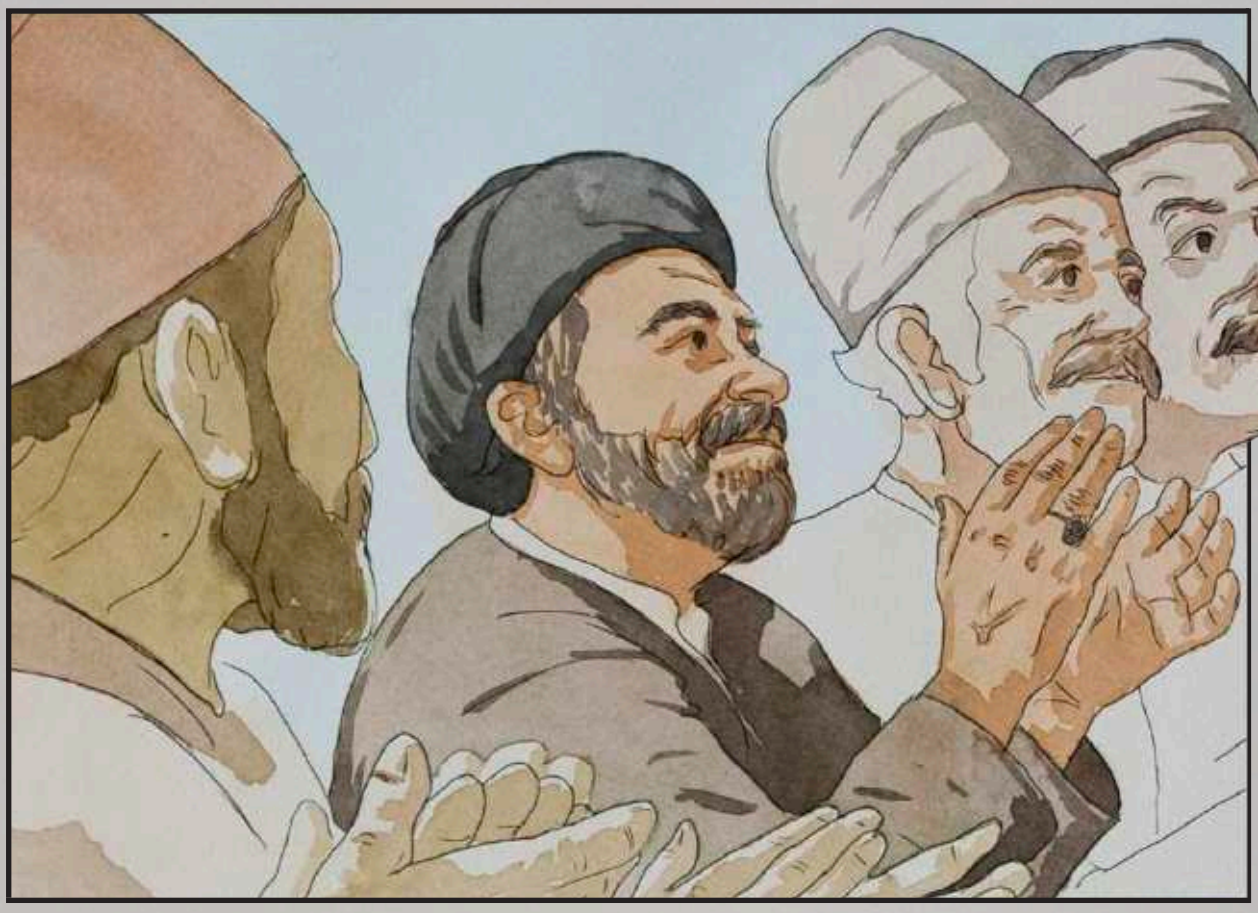

After a long time working, Abudi finishes very late and brings himself back down






People cheer for him
Seriously, you're such an expert!
Well done, Abudi


Good job, dear master
You've lifted our spirits

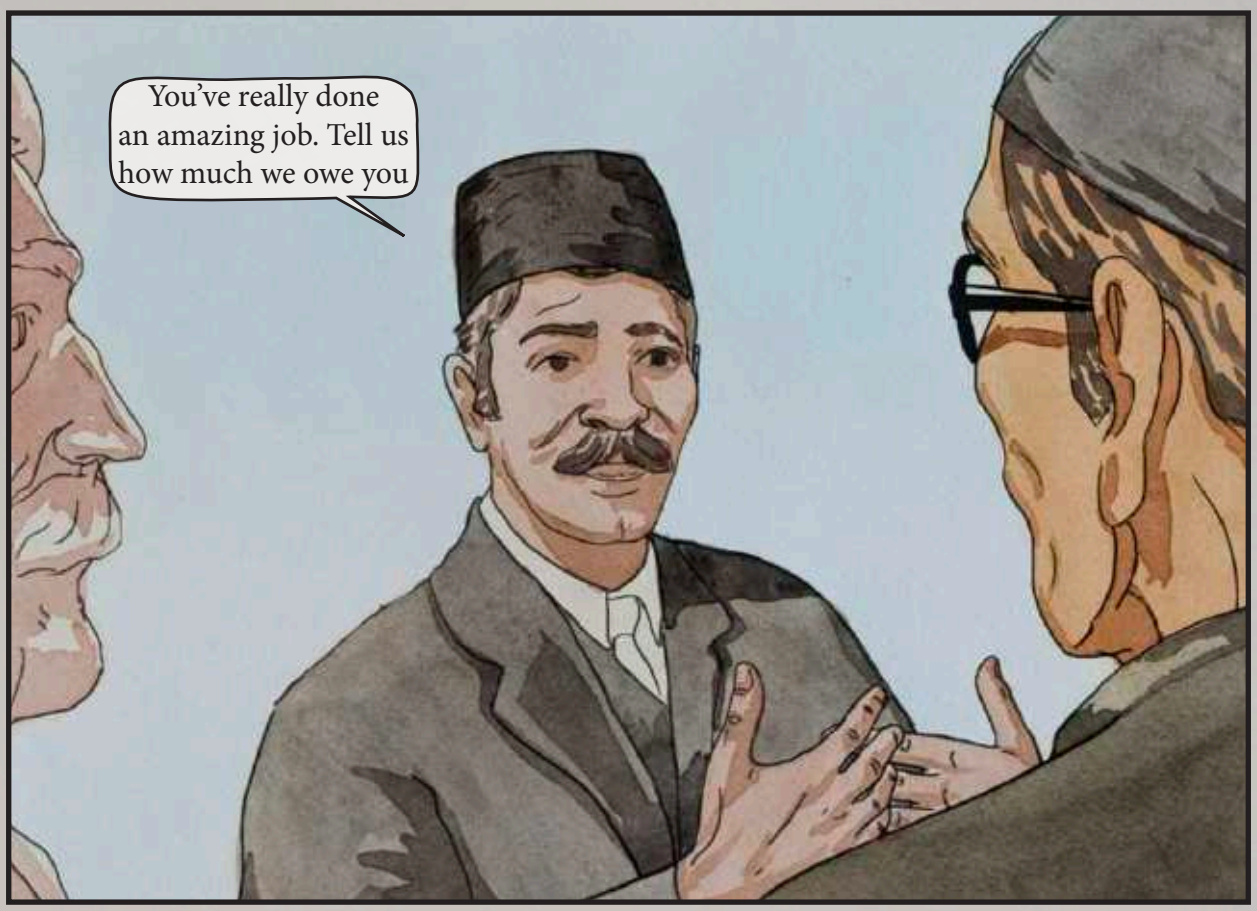


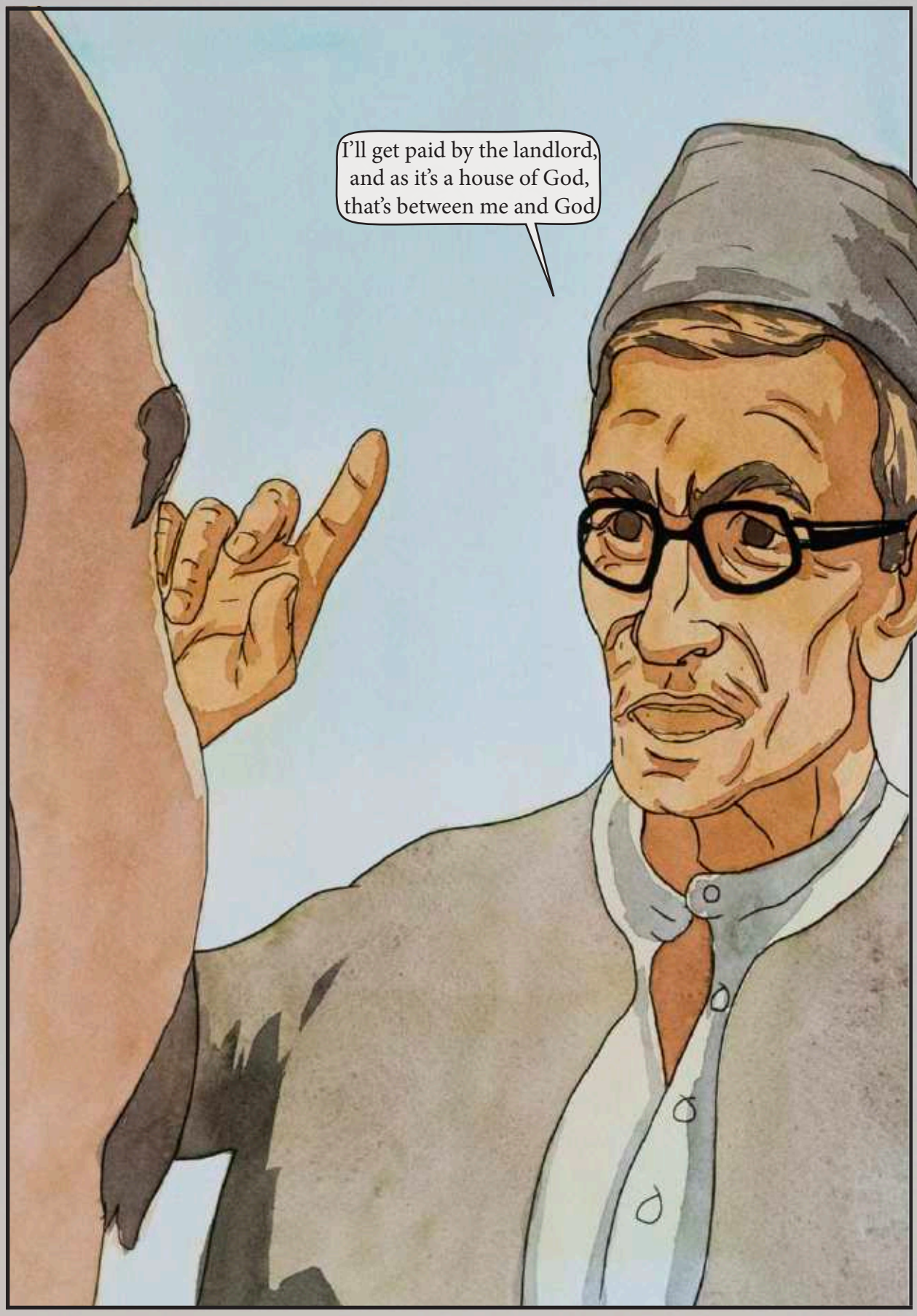

Master, we'll never forget this favour


I've just done my job and I'm honoured to work at this holy place


Master Abudi, you're truly talented
I couldn't do it without your support




You've really done an amazing job. Tell us how much we owe you


I'll get paid by the landlord, and as it's a house of God, that's between me and God

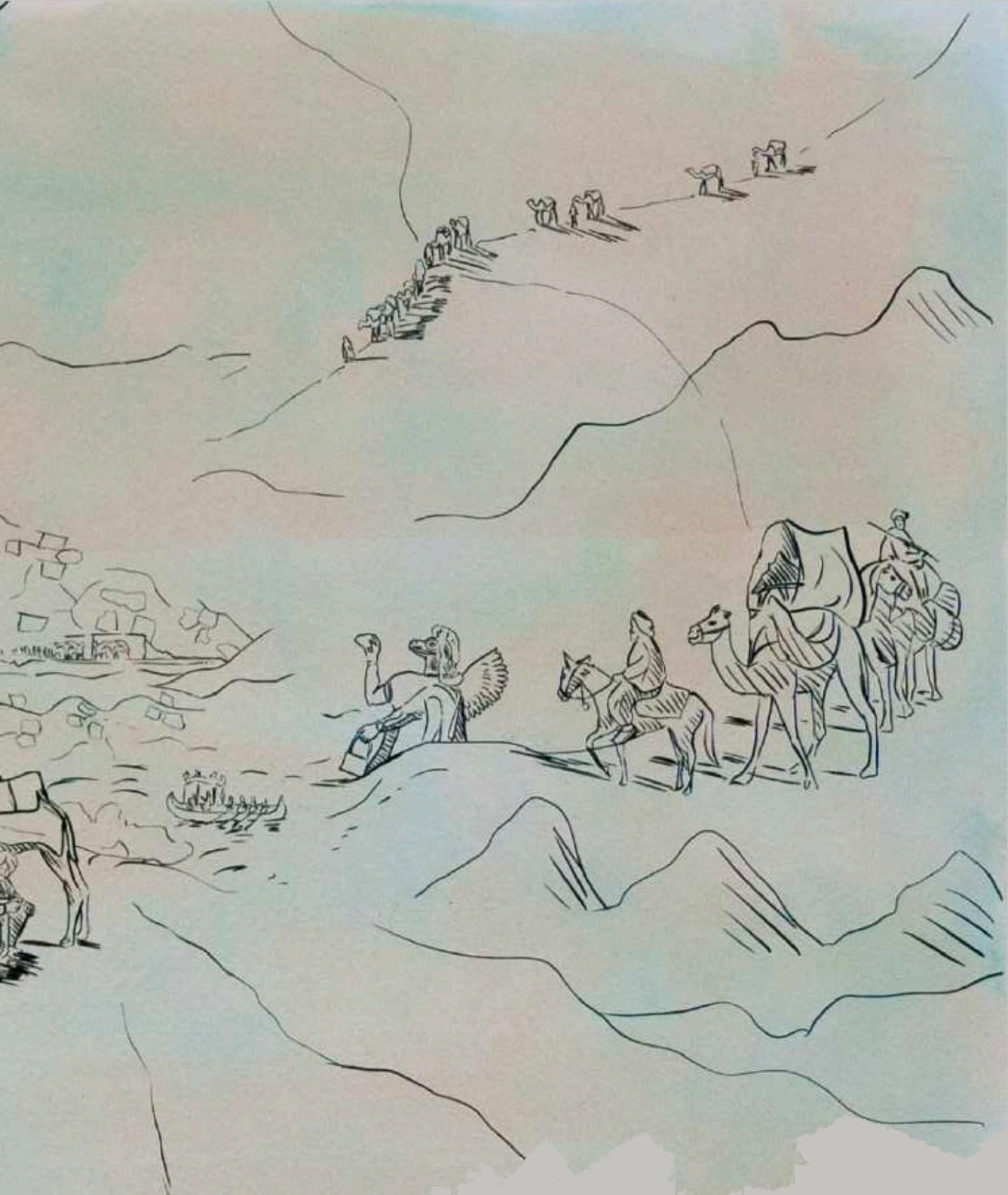


The Immaculate Church of Ninawa
(The Grand al-Tahira Church)

The Immaculate Church of Ninawa is one of the most ancient churches in Iraq. It was built in the first century A.D. and was the centre of Assyrian civilisation. Despite its institutional role for religion, education, and science, it was also a centre of philosophy and literary translation. It had faced destruction multiple times, including being burned down by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but it has been rebuilt due to its value and importance. Even in the most difficult times, people would show up to keep it running.

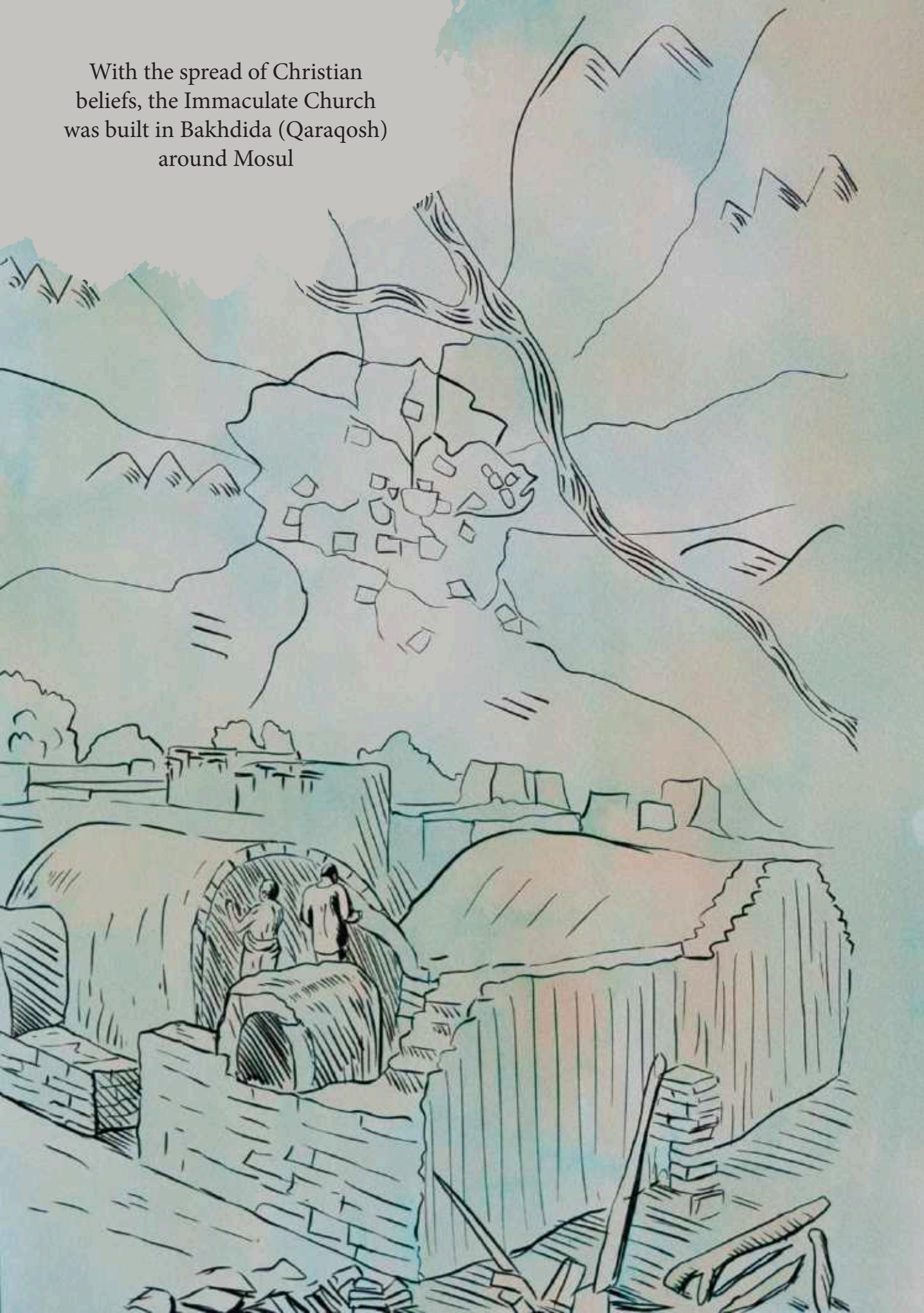




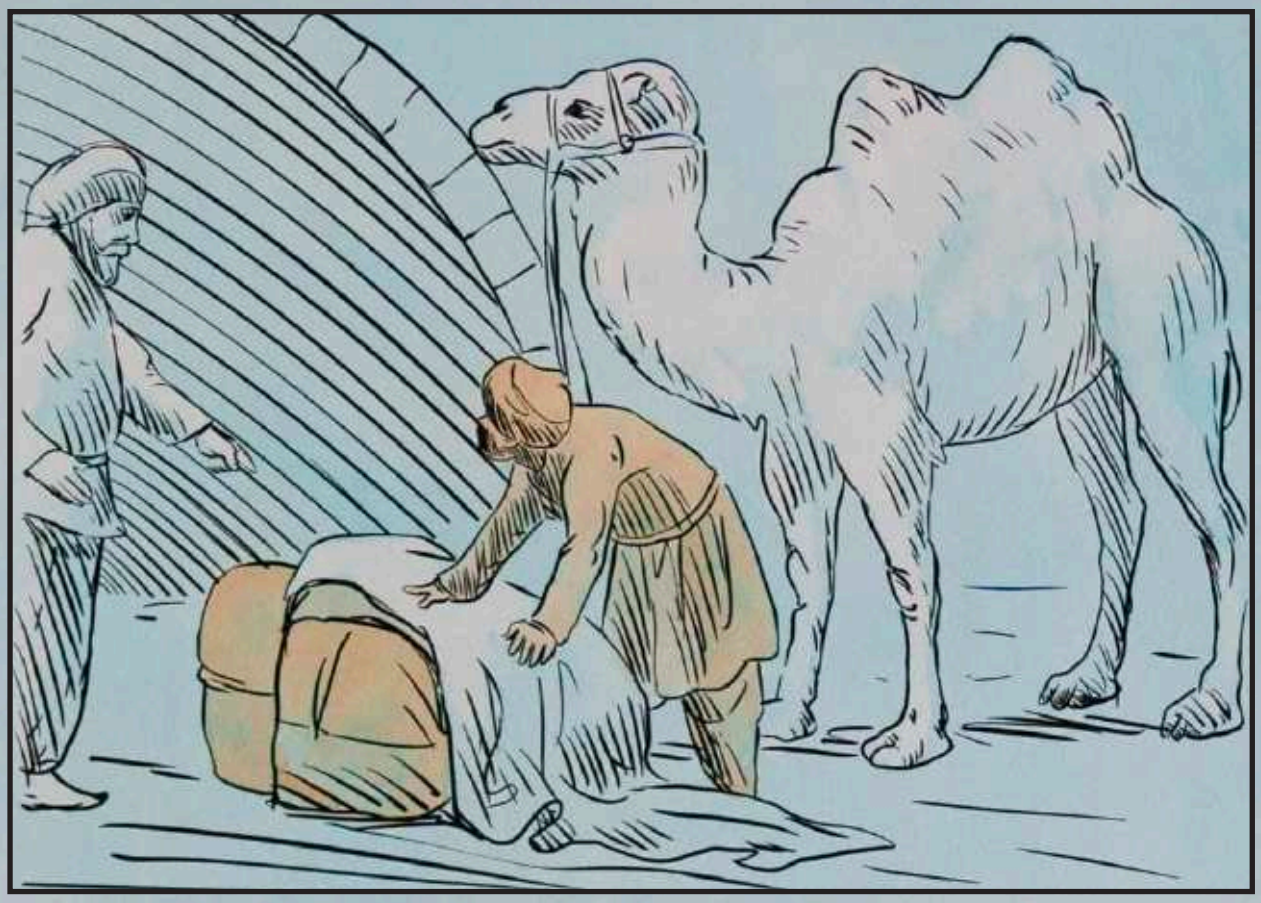


Christianity spread in Ninawa during the first century A.D., which was an important area during the Assyrian Civilization.
This area continues to be home to many different ethnicities and beliefs

With the spread of Christian beliefs, the Immaculate Church was built in Bakhdida (Qaraqosh) around Mosul

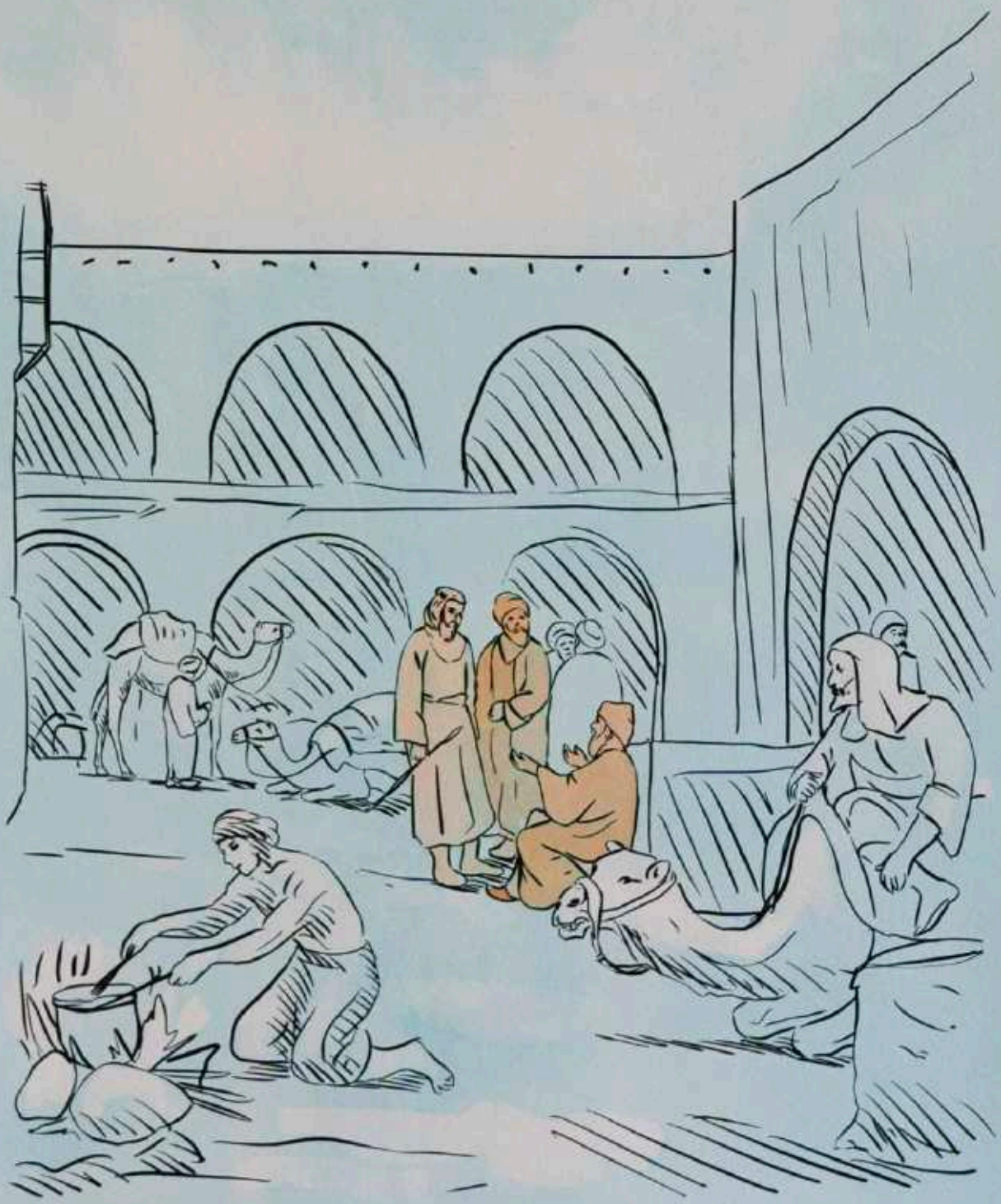






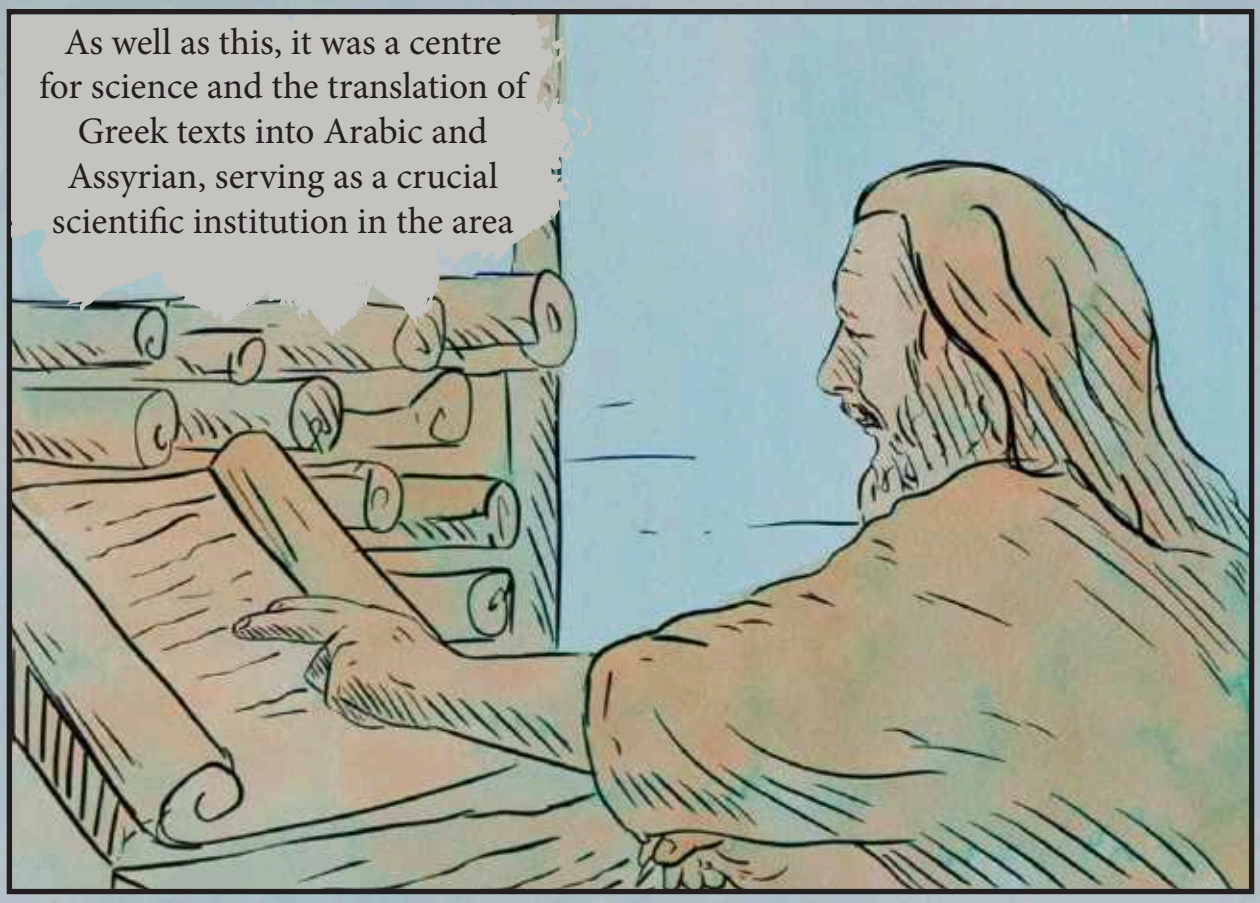


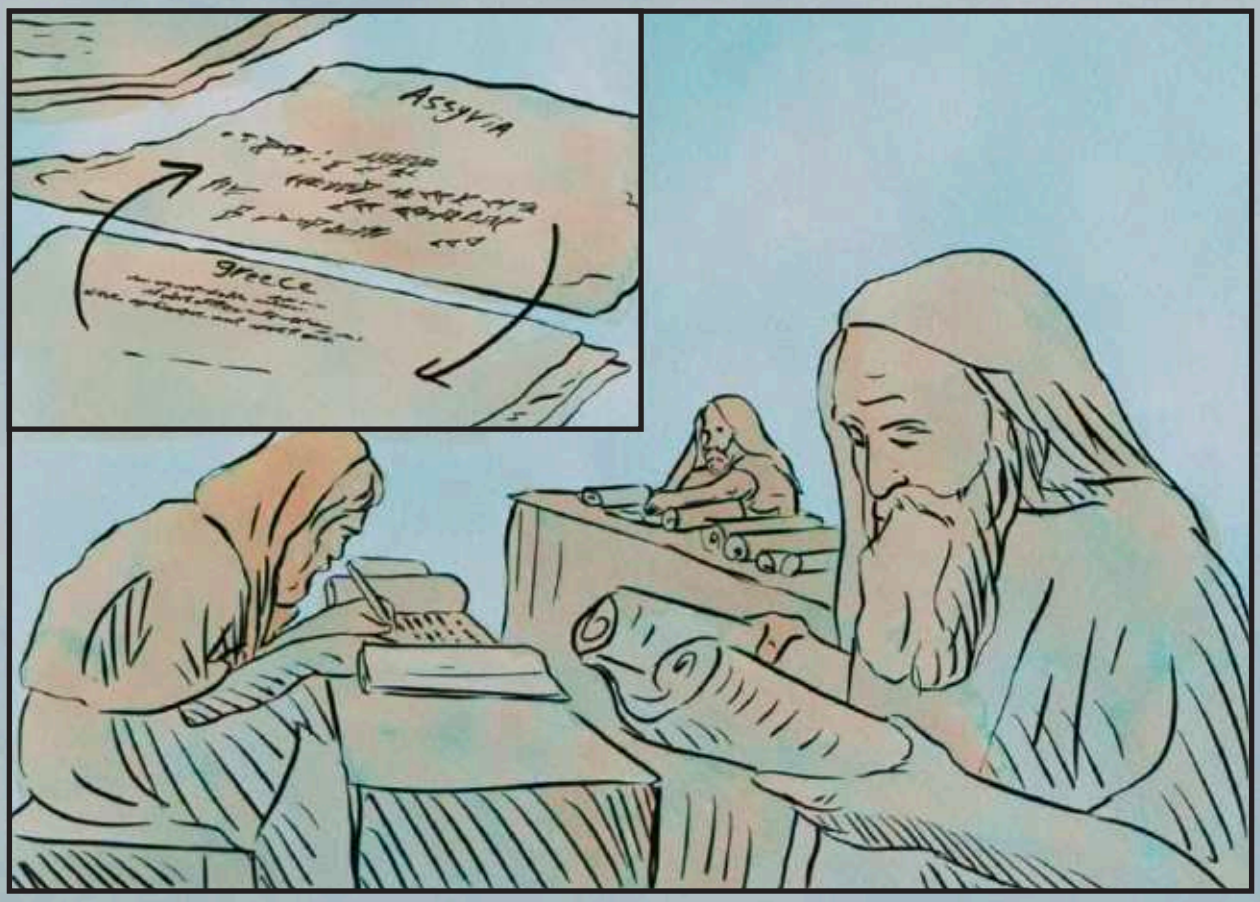
Right after it was built, it influenced the spread of Christianity there. It became a trade centre between Ninawa and other parts of Iraq back then. The church also became a spot for travellers and traders to rest





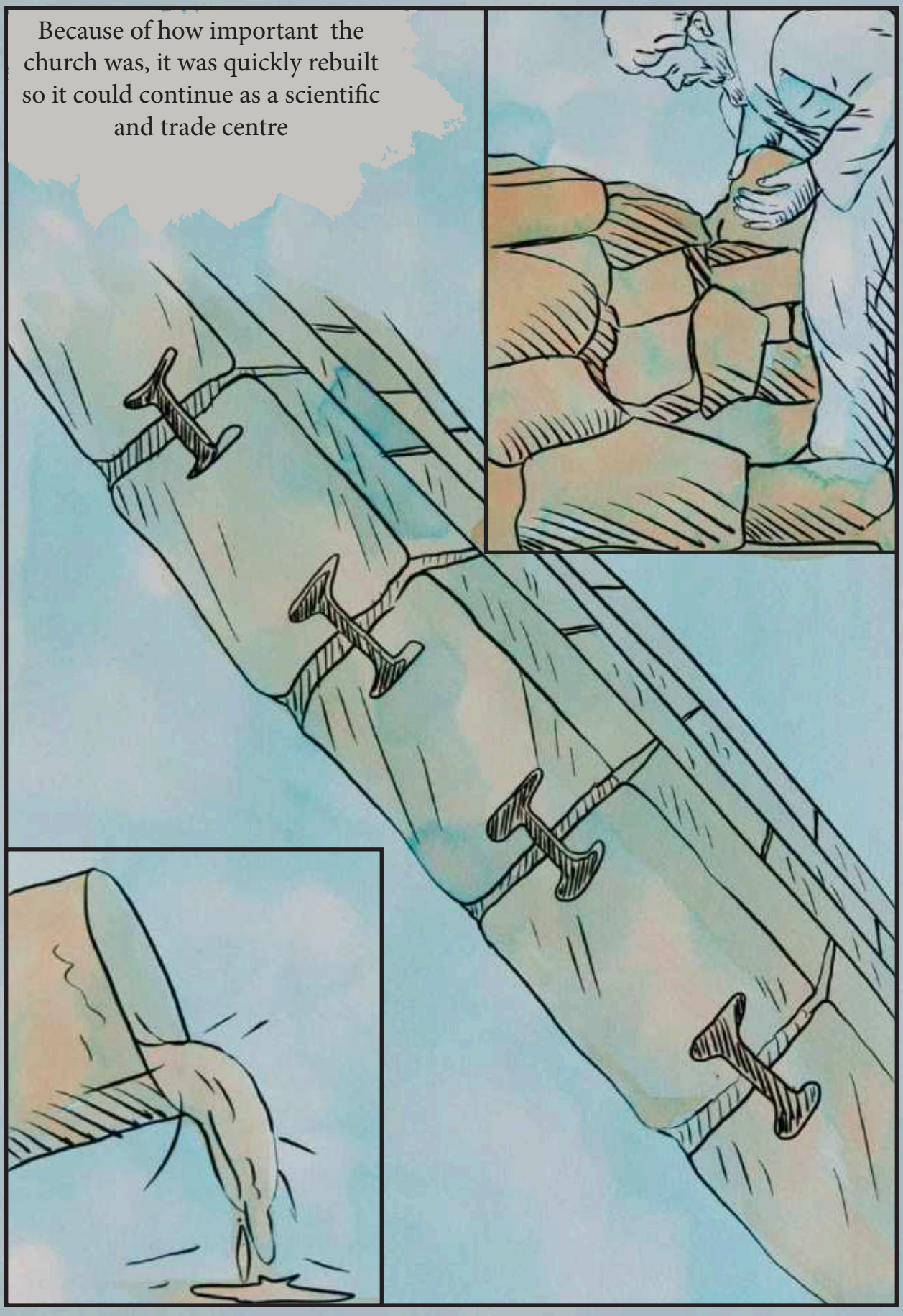



As well as this, it was a centre for science and the translation of Greek texts into Arabic and Assyrian, serving as a crucial scientific institution in the area


Assyria
Greece



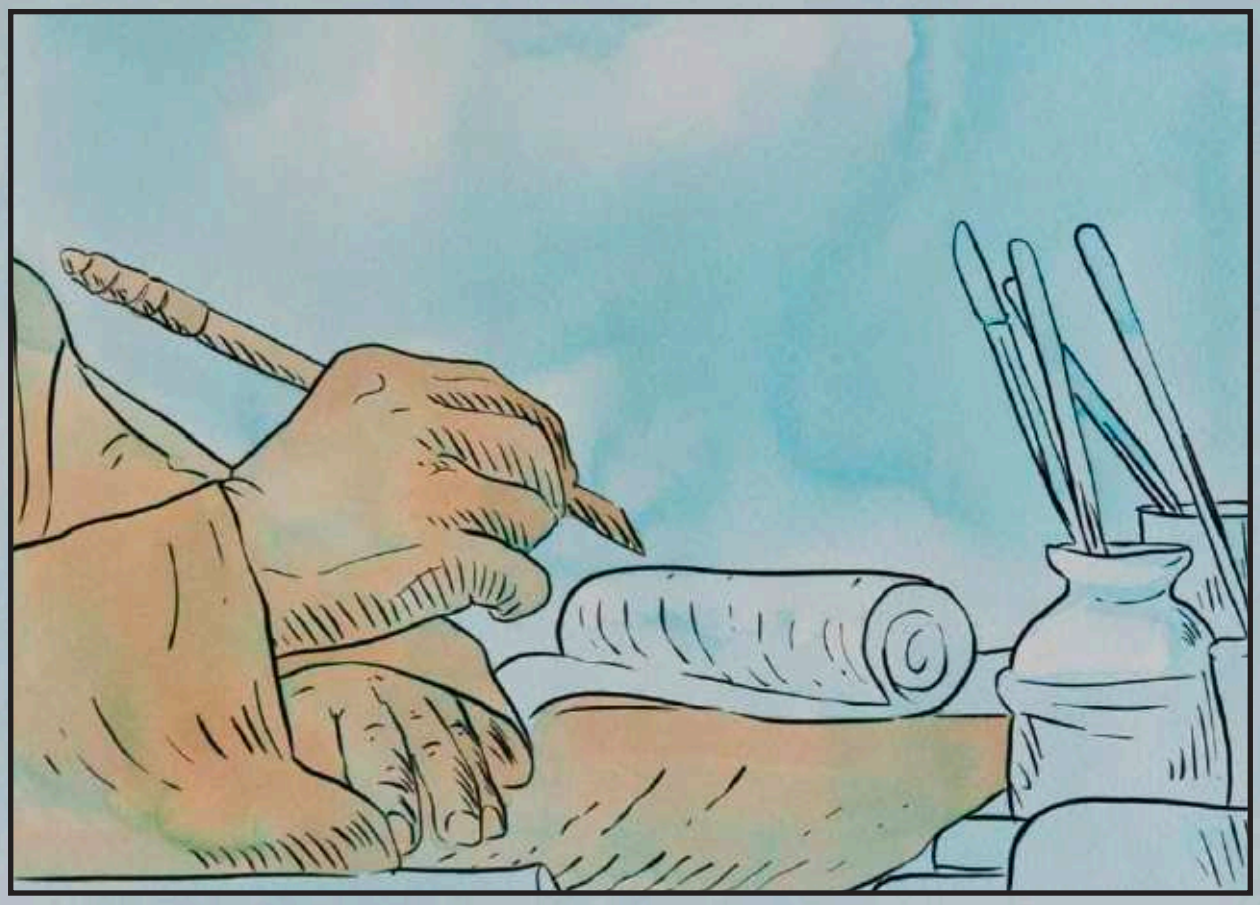



Because of how important the church was, it was quickly rebuilt so it could continue as a scientific and trade centre



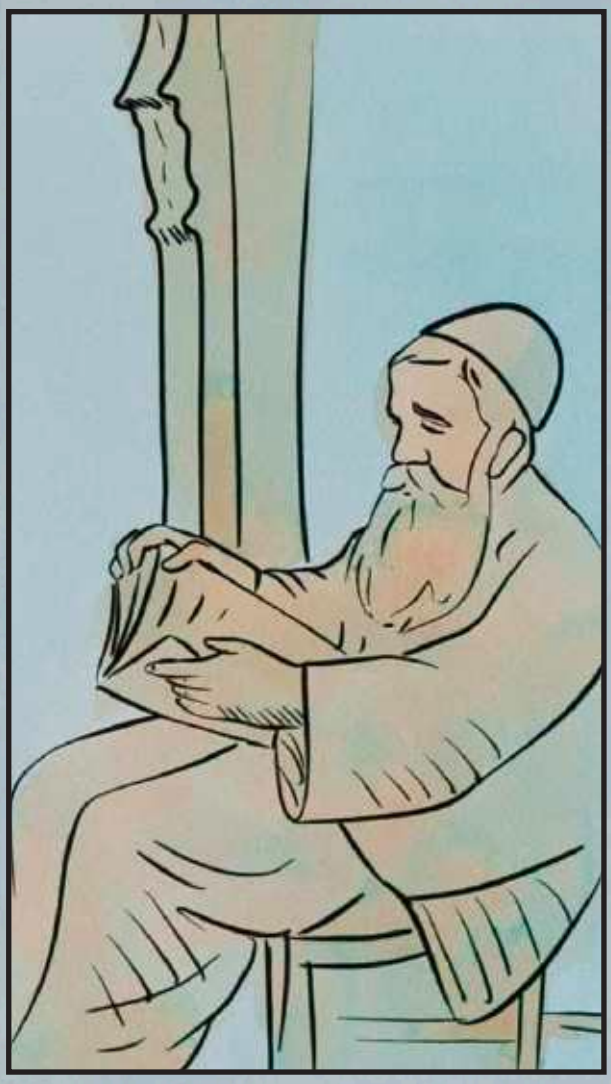


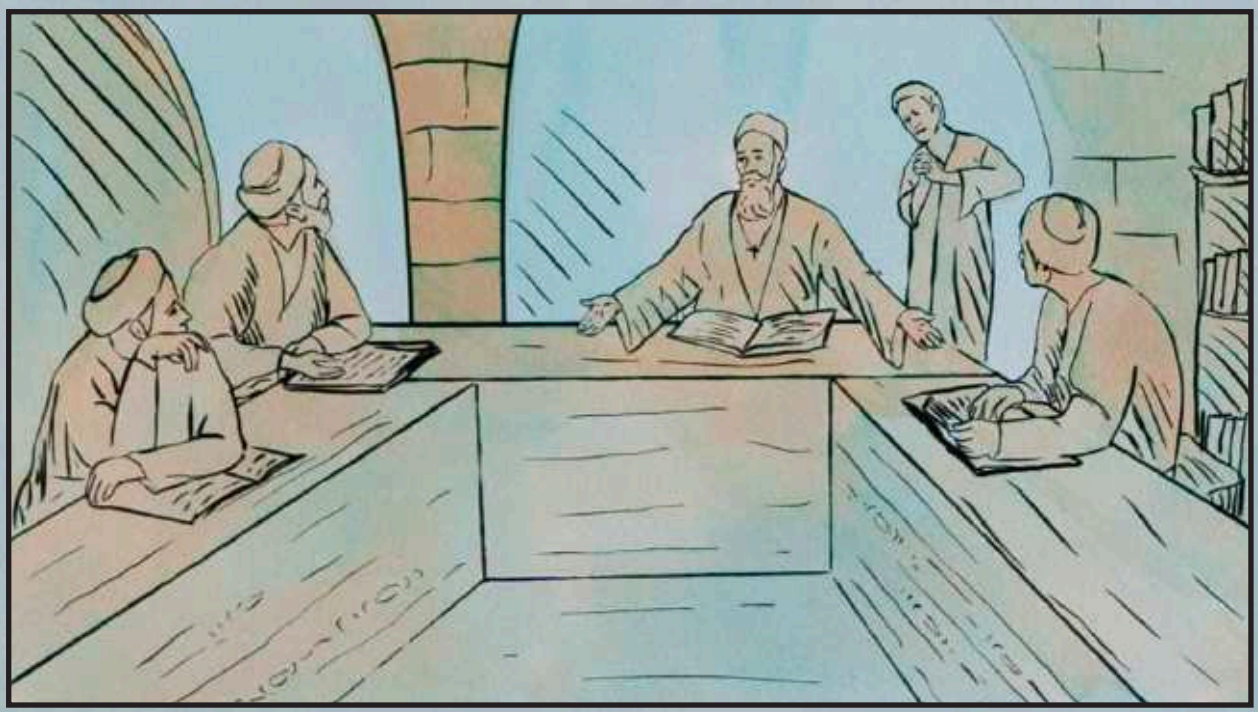


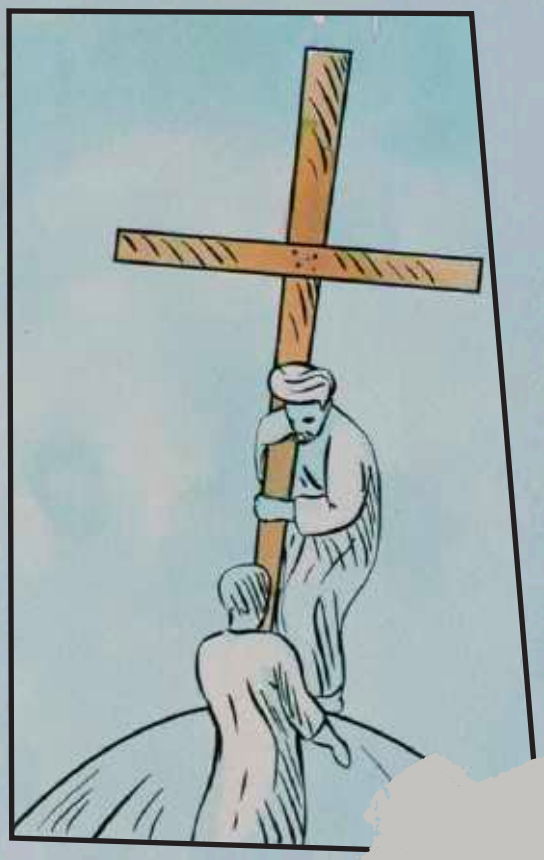


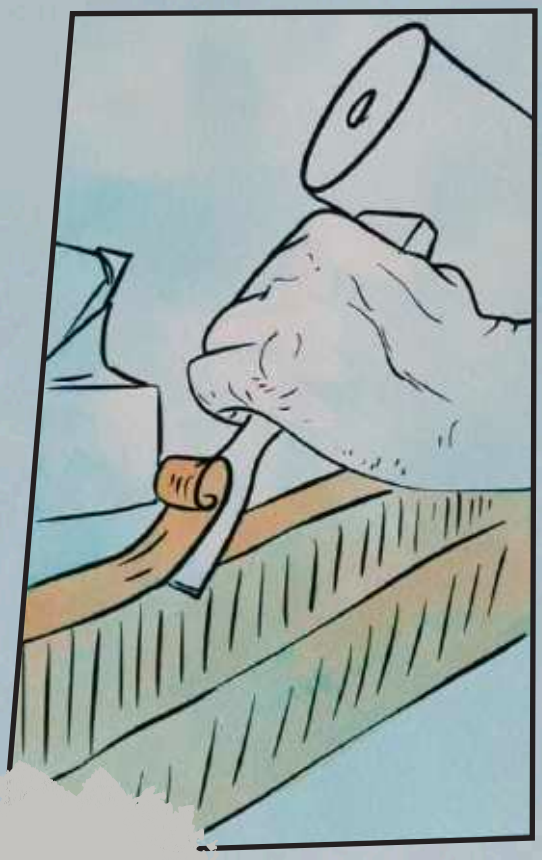






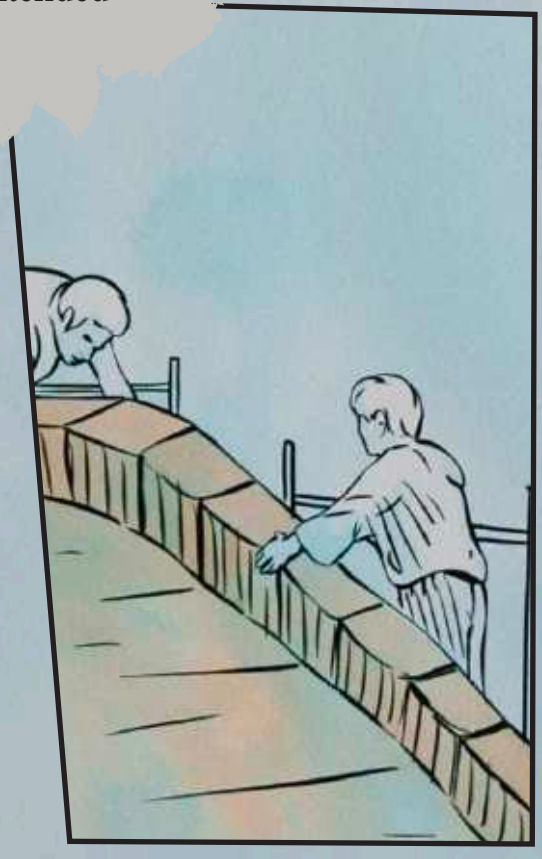






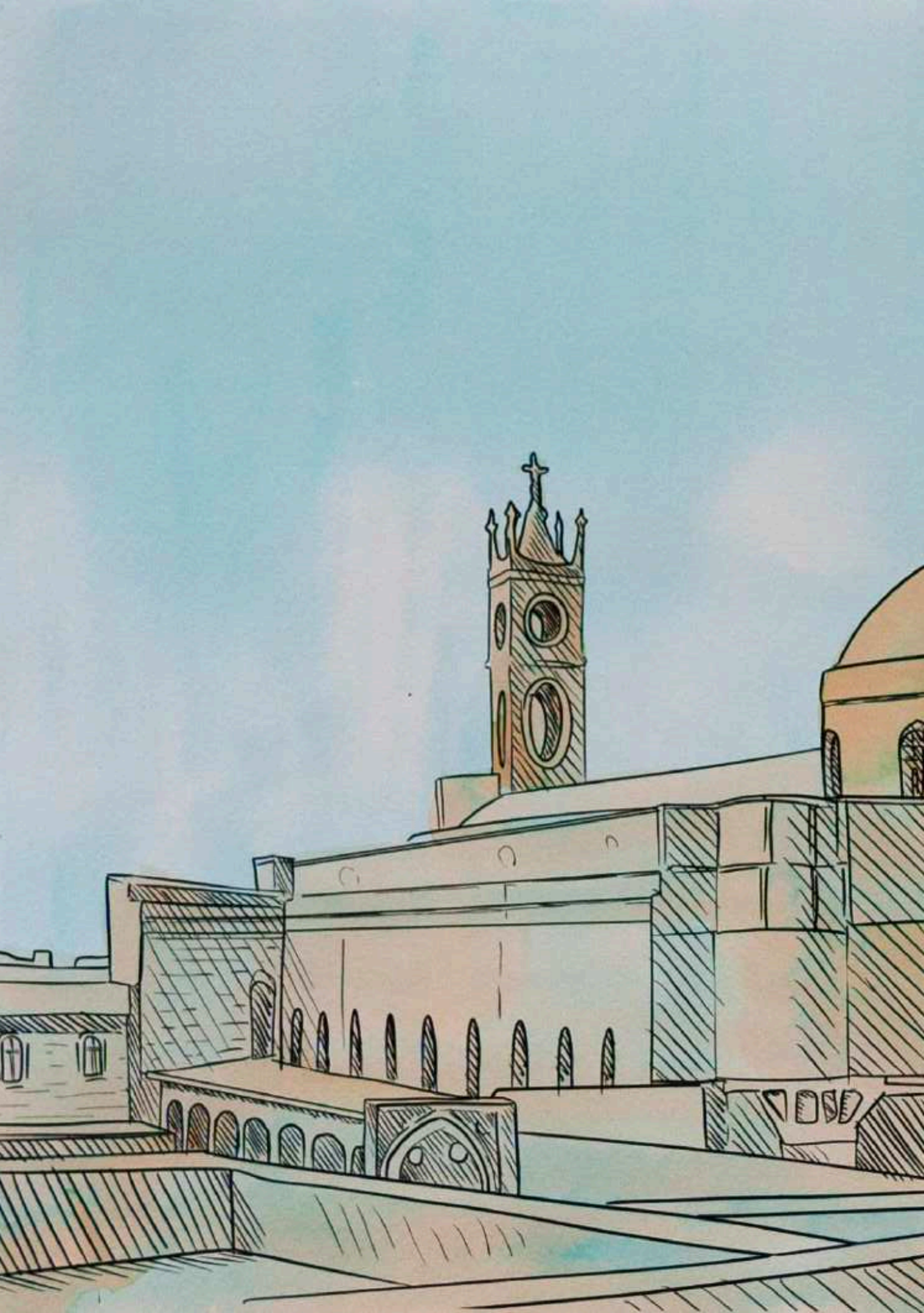
During the Ottoman Empire,
in 1744, the church was rebuilt
once again and extended

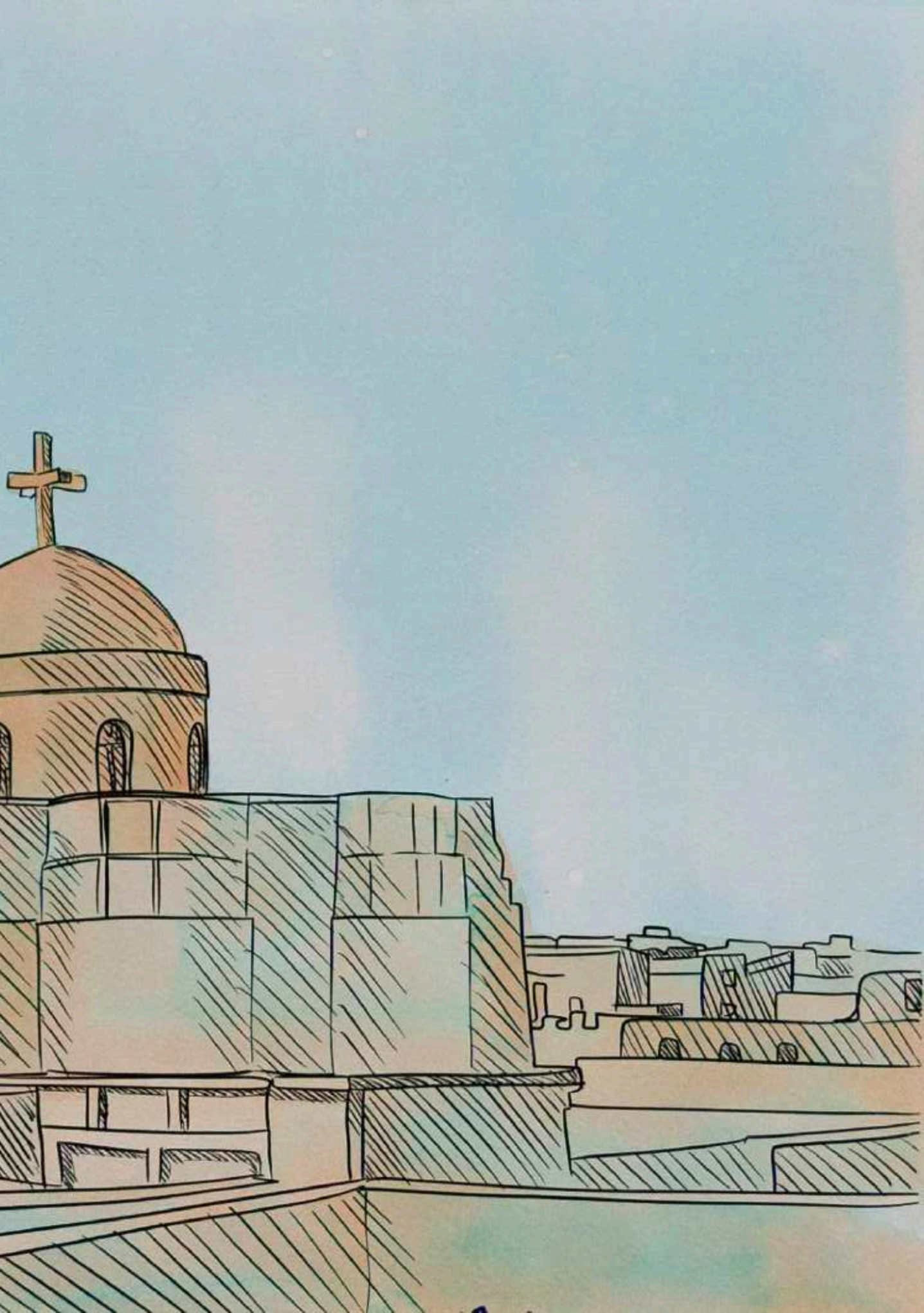




With its extension, the areas around saw wealth and prosperity. This was because of the church's importance









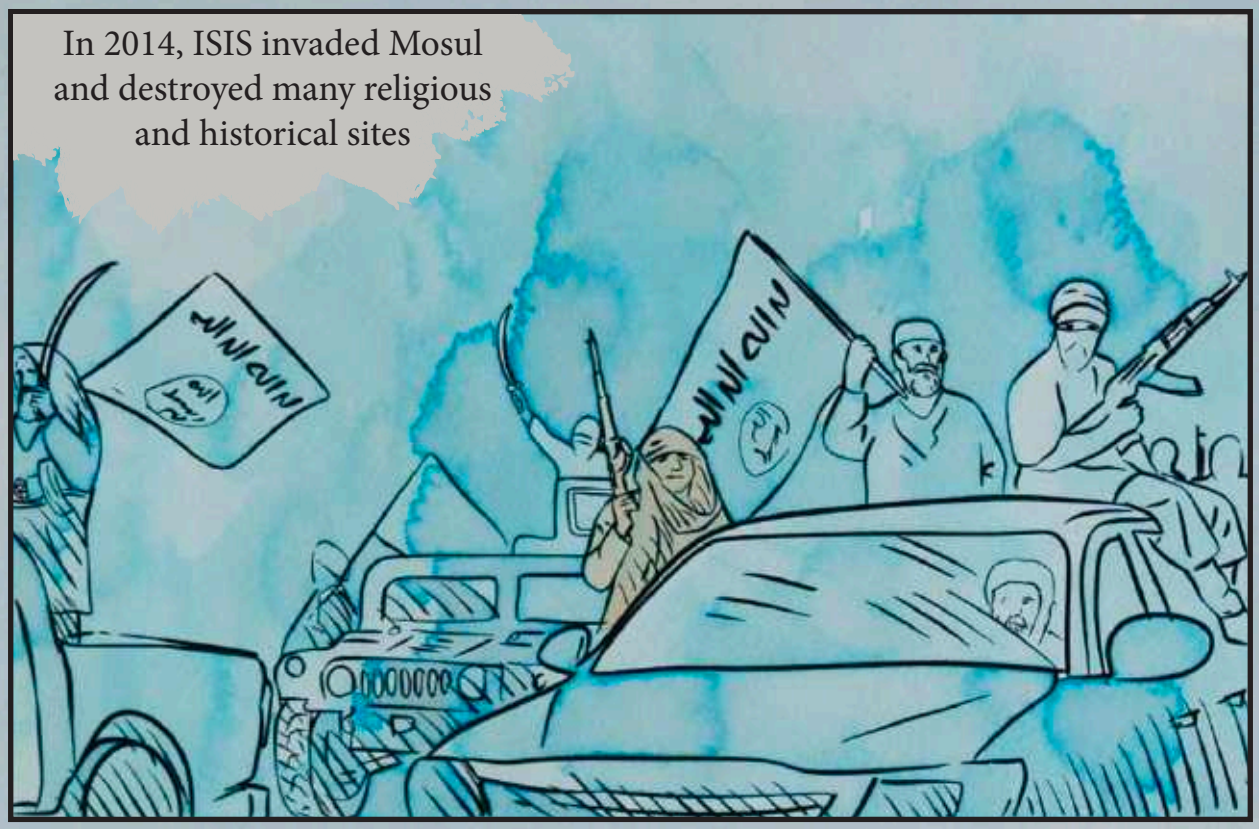











In 2014, ISIS invaded Mosul and destroyed many religious and historical sites

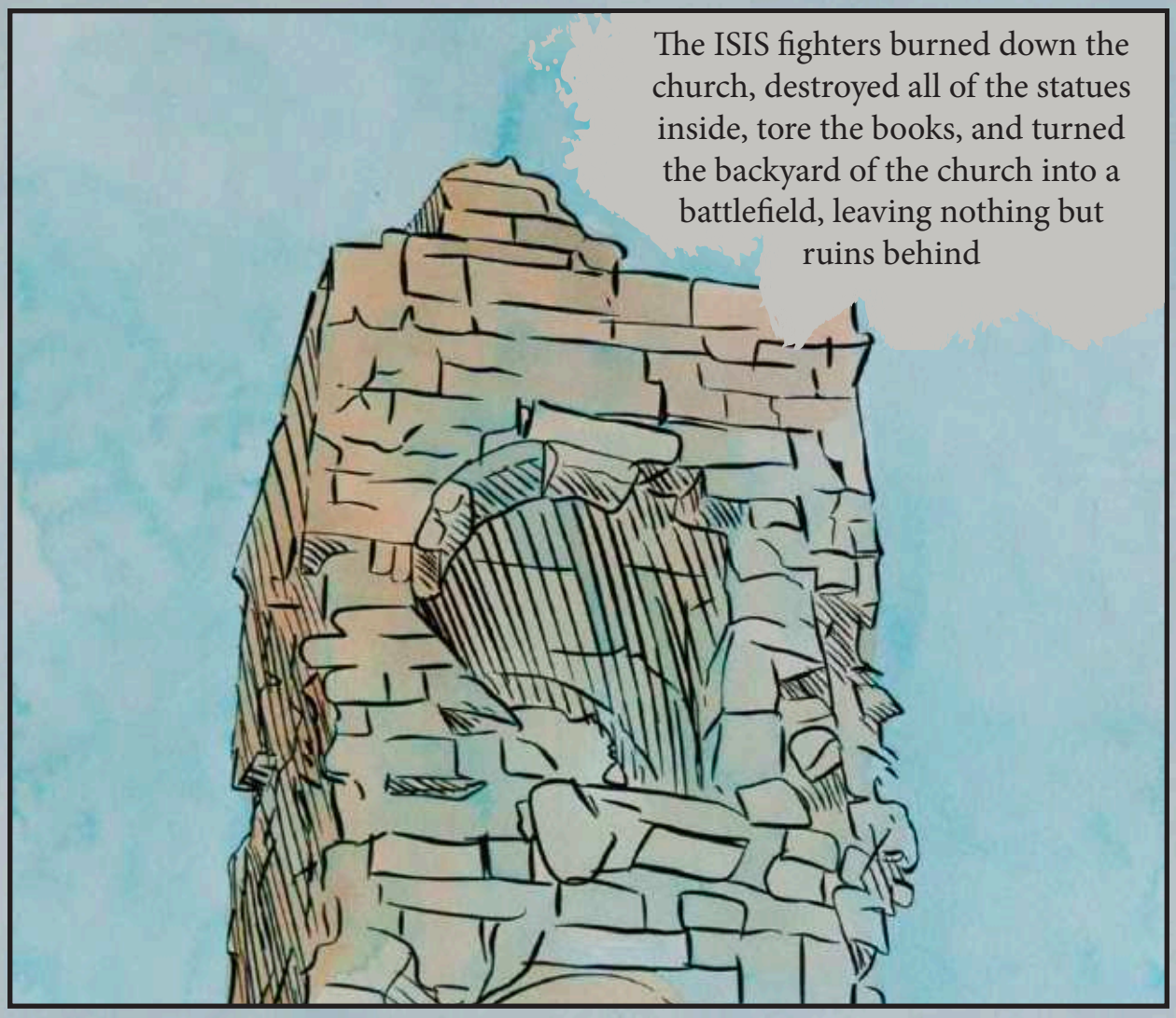







Bomb



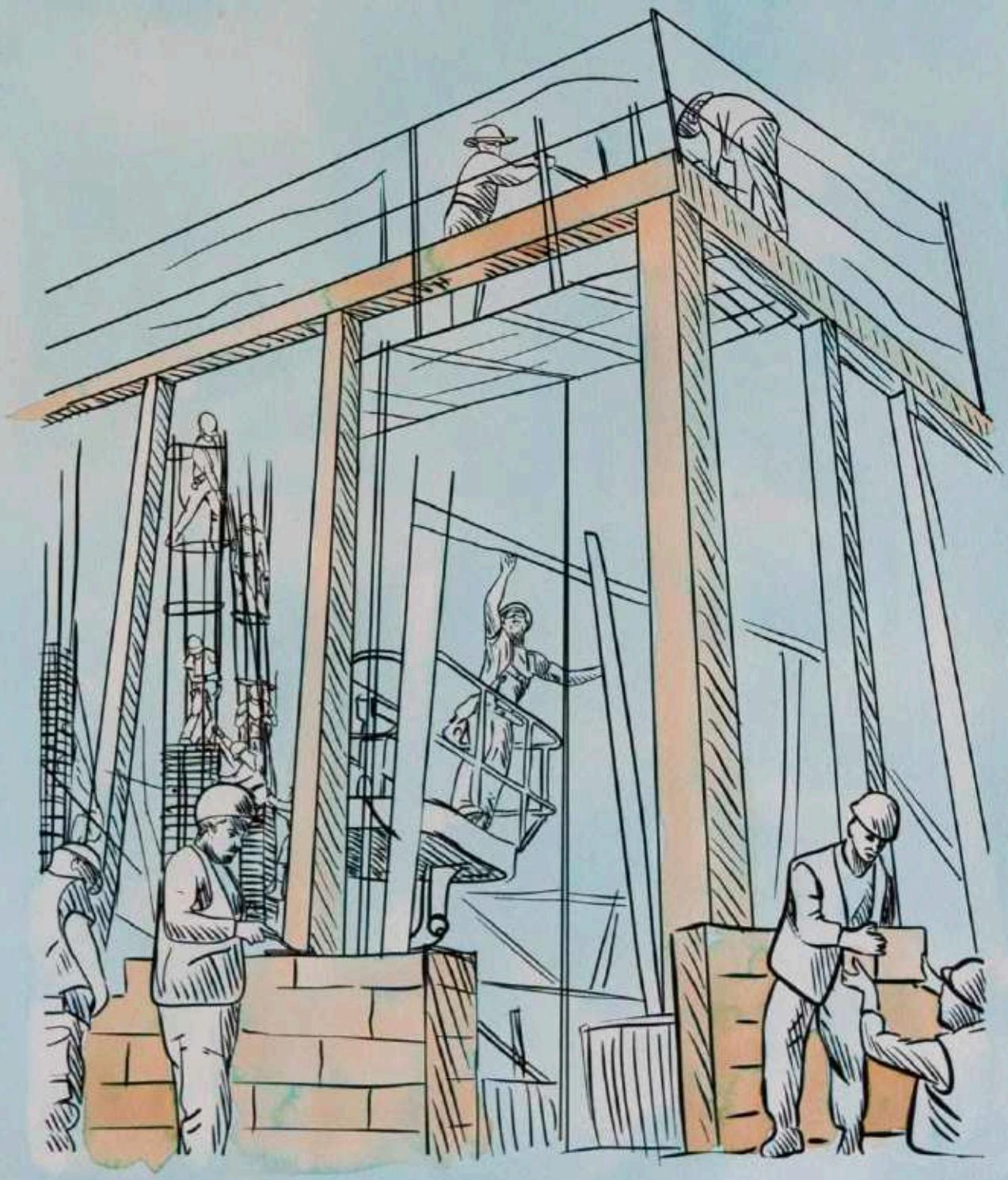

The ISIS fighters burned down the church, destroyed all of the statues inside, tore the books, and turned the backyard of the church into a battlefield, leaving nothing but ruins behind

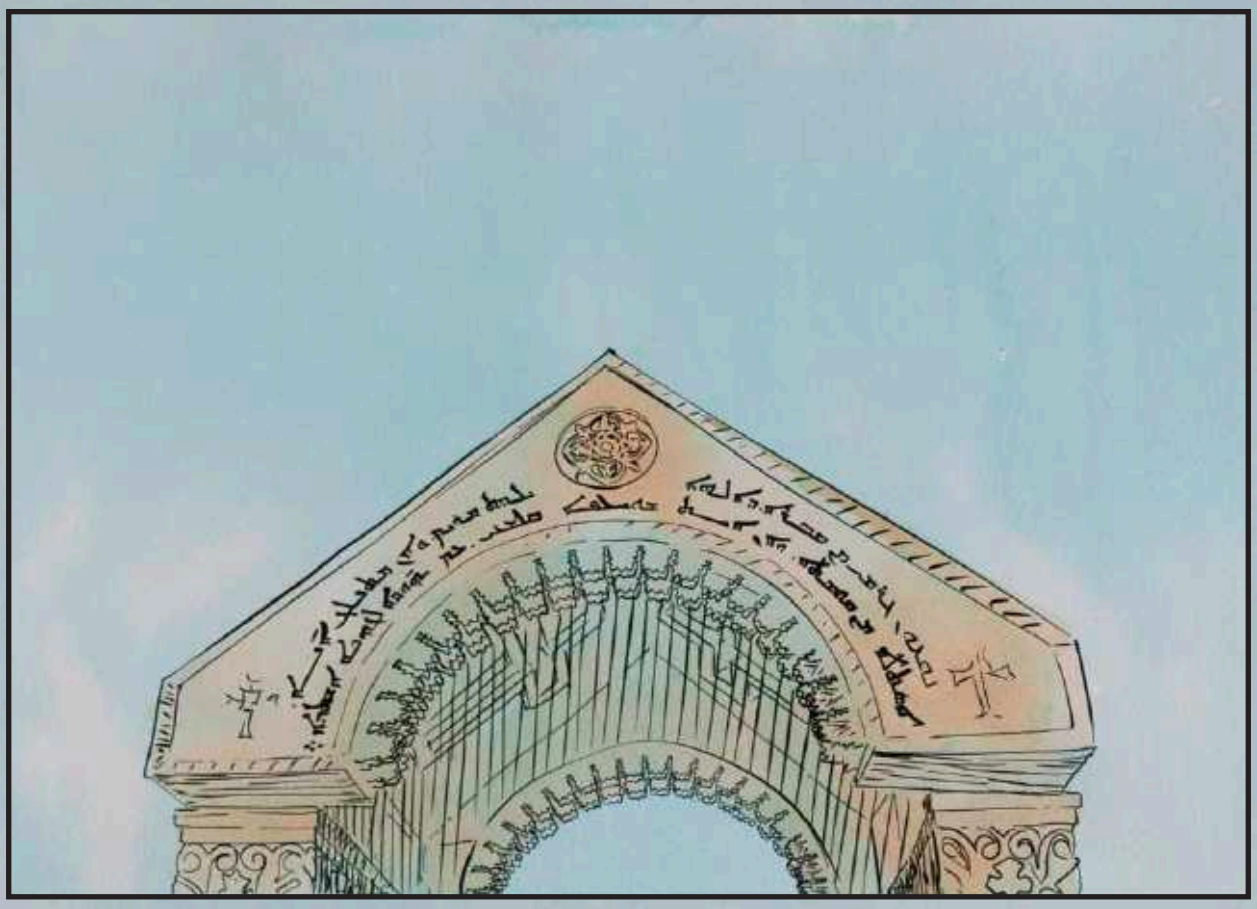






After the liberation of Mosul in 2017, the church was rebuilt thanks to the efforts of people, charities, and Non-Governmental Organisations. This took four years to complete

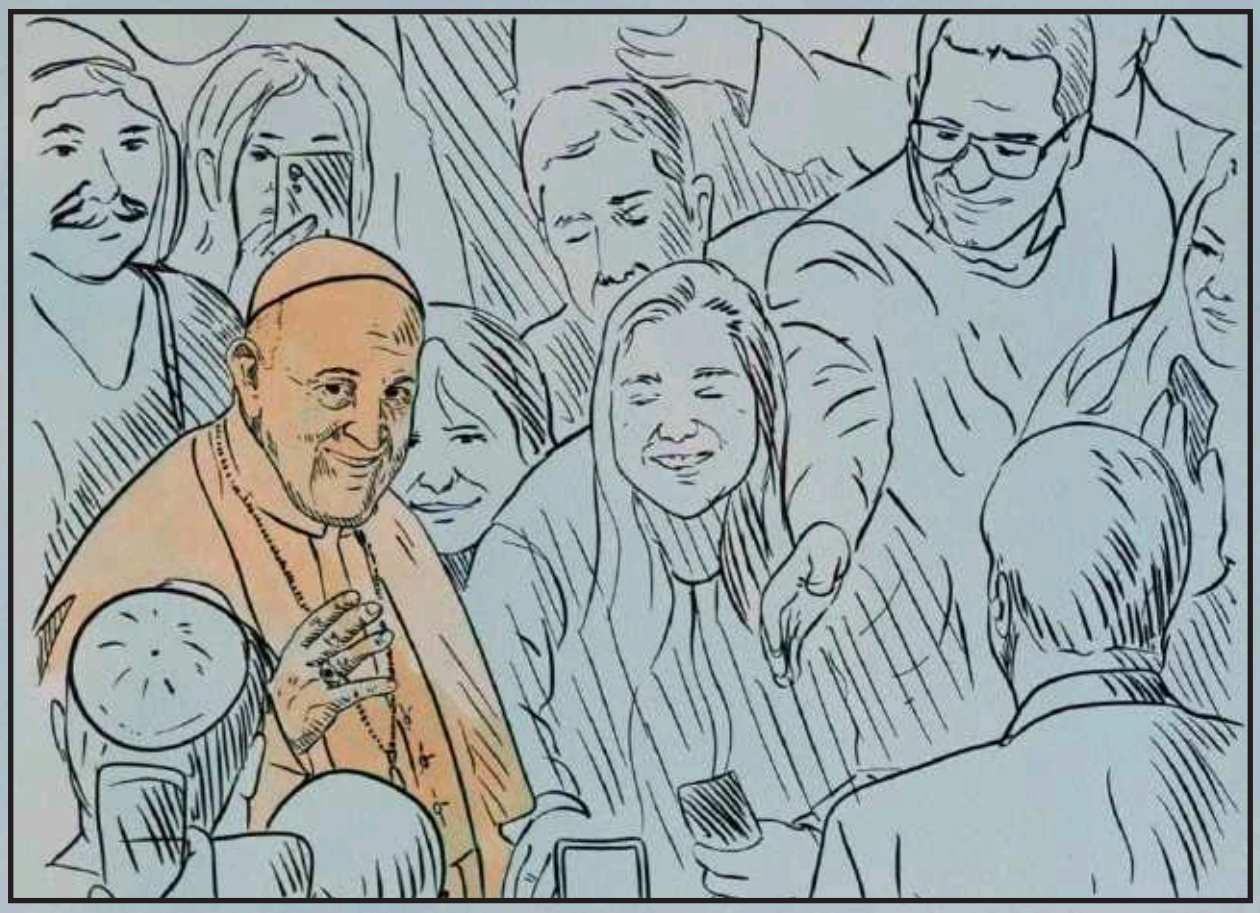


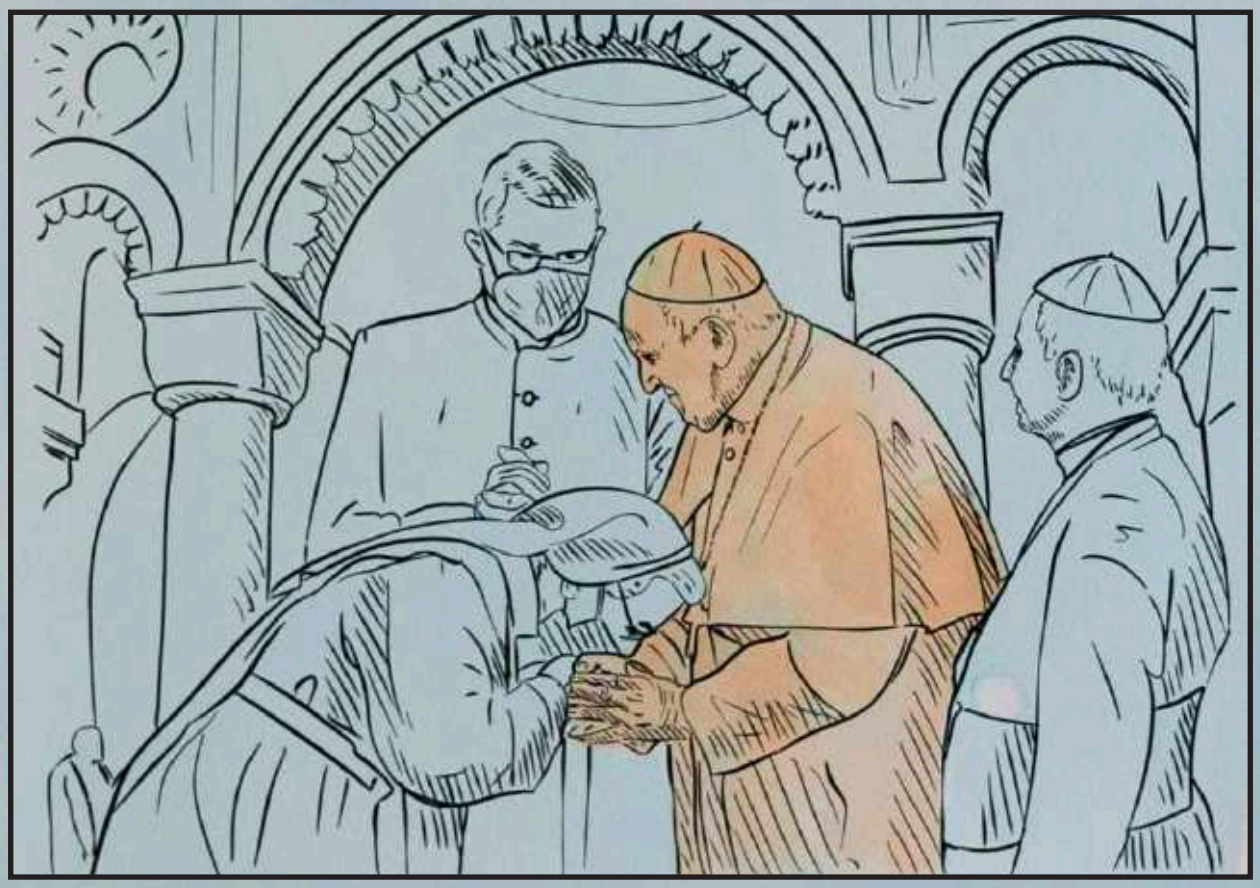




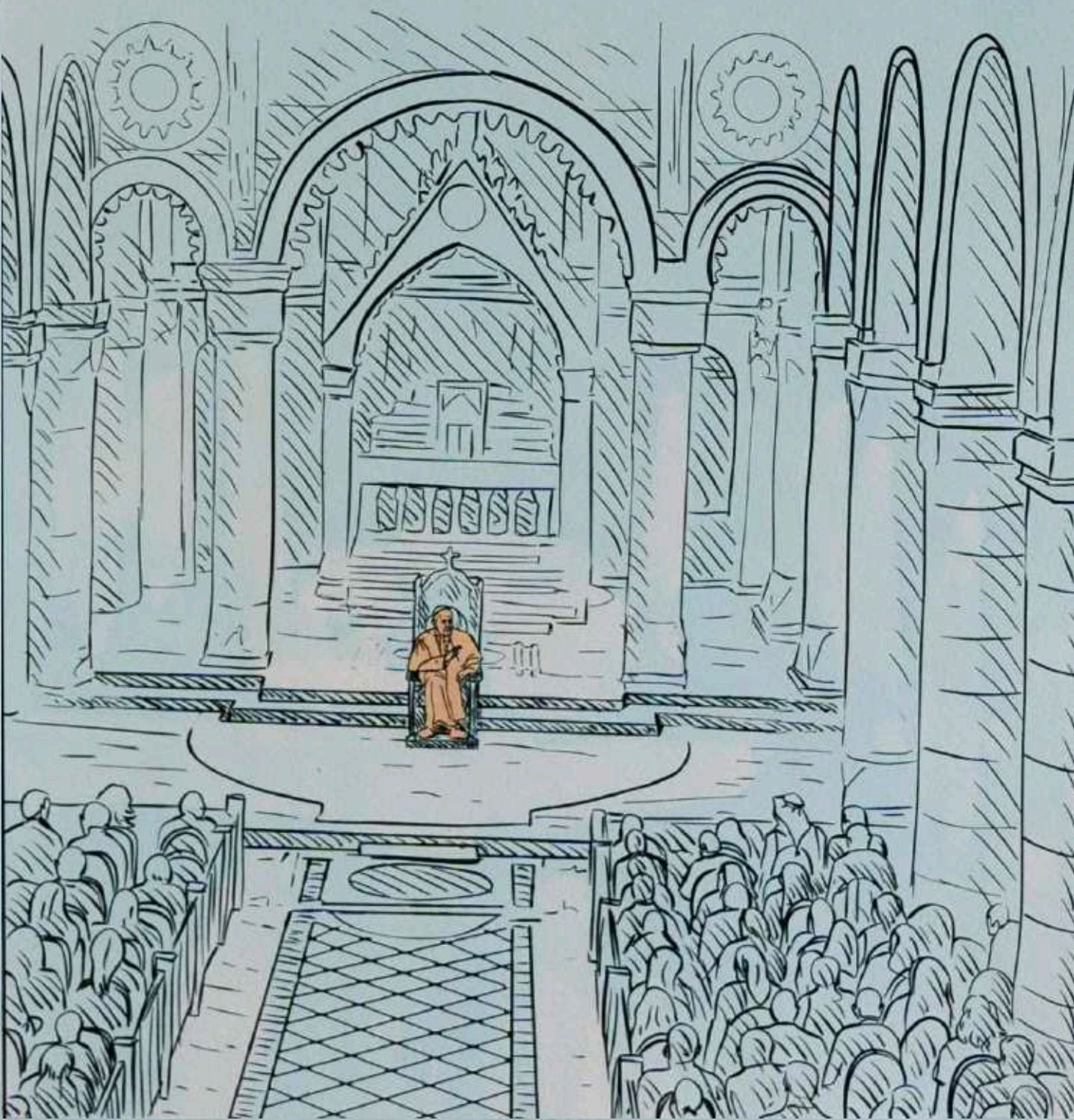






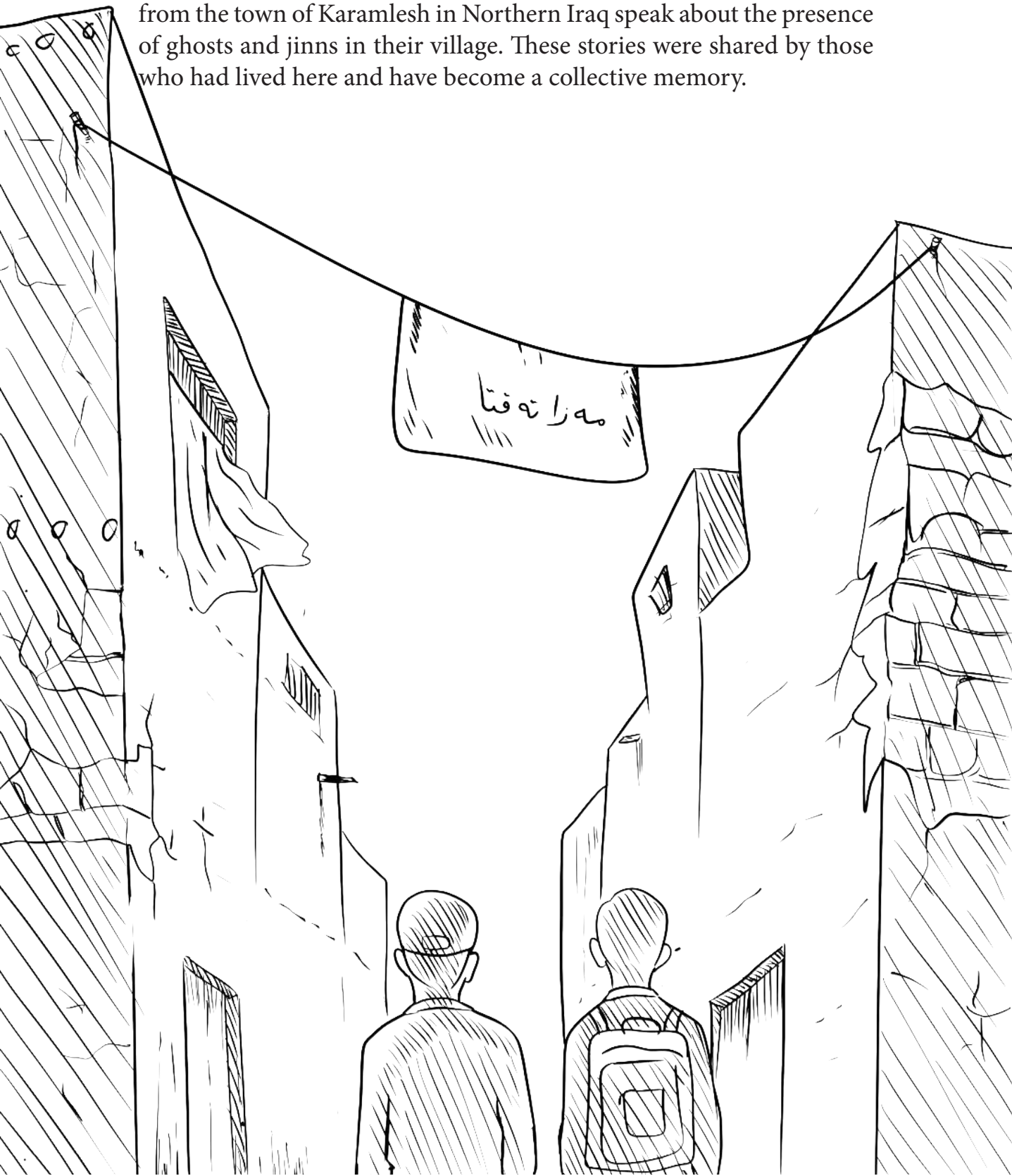


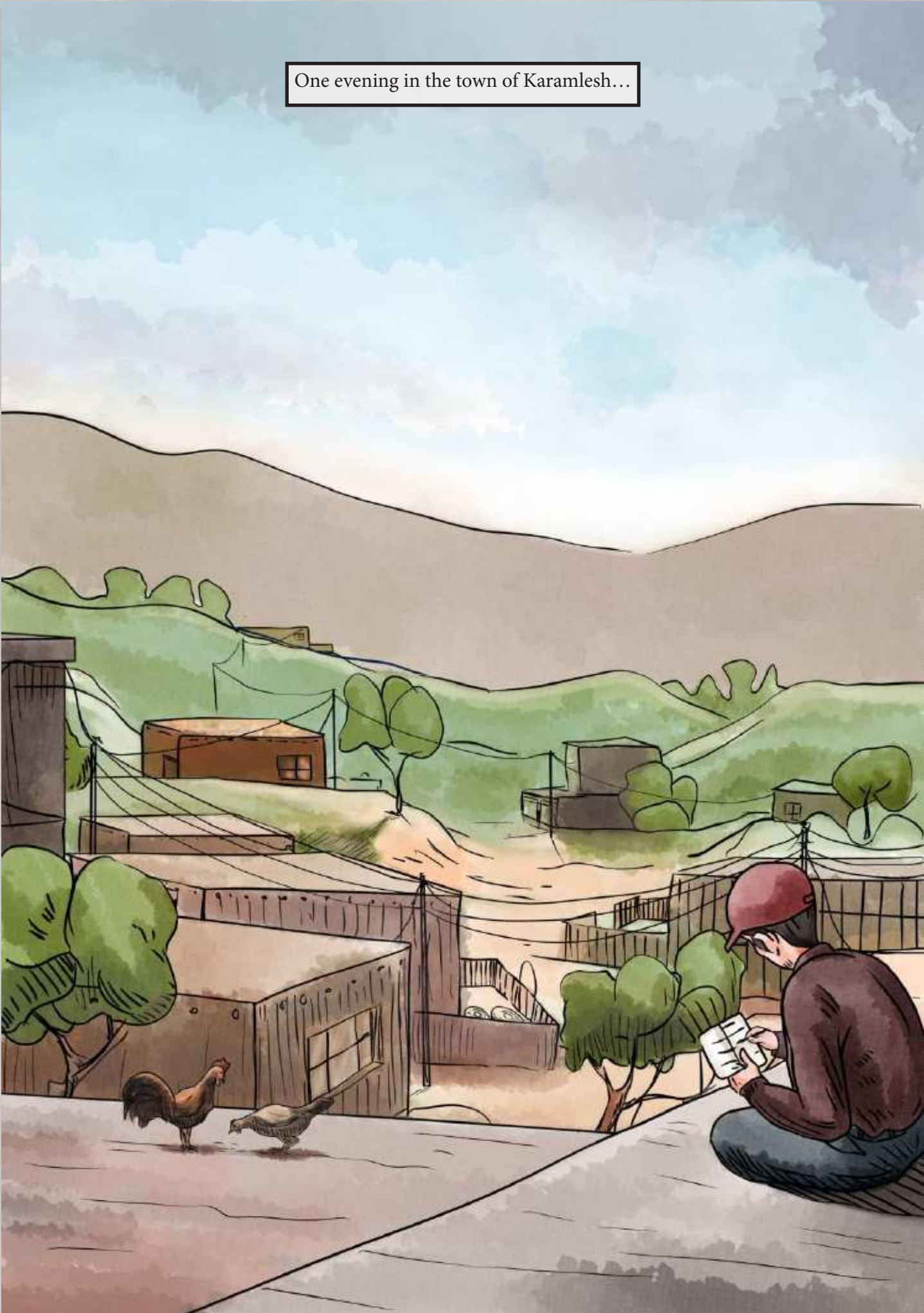
In 2021, Pope Francis visited Bakhdida (Qaraqosh)
and prayed with the Christians living nearby.
He also led a peace and tolerance prayer
with the community there



THE FORBIDDEN DESCENT

Some places in the Mosul and Ninawa region are known to be the birthplace of oral stories. Through generations, these stories have travelled and adapted creating different emerging narratives. Residents from the town of Karamlesh in Northern Iraq speak about the presence of ghosts and jinns in their village. These stories were shared by those who had lived here and have become a collective memory.




One evening in the town of Karamlesh…


We have fresh fruits and vegetables!


What are you doing here alone?


I'm too frightened
Don't ever do that to me again
I wish you'd seen your face



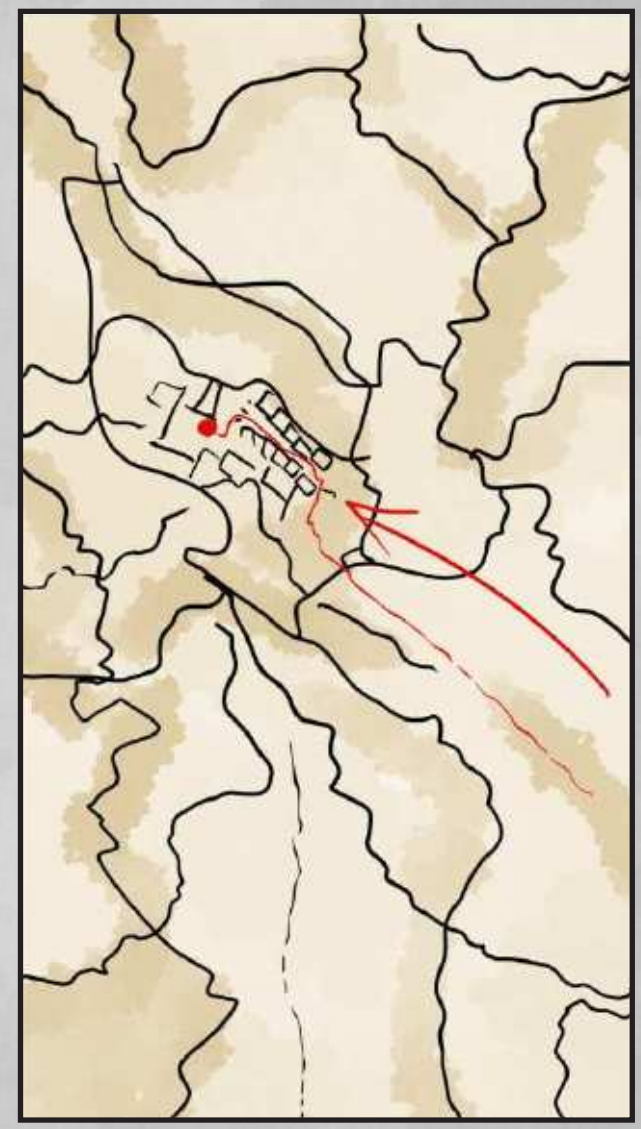

Your pen fell into the vendor's wagon




I won't forget this!




What's that paper in your hand, let me see
What is this? Where is this map of?




Ashur, I heard there's treasures in the abandoned houses
Treasures? You seriously believe in those old stories?


I can't believe it, you're still thinking about that old village. There's nothing but spirits and jinns
Careful, I put a lot of effort into that


Ashur brings out a small flashlight from his backpack


Ok, but we've got to be careful
I want to see it with my own eyes. I won't go in the night though. That's when scary things happen in the stories


مەزارتەفتا


Be careful, Ashur, no one knows what's inside...









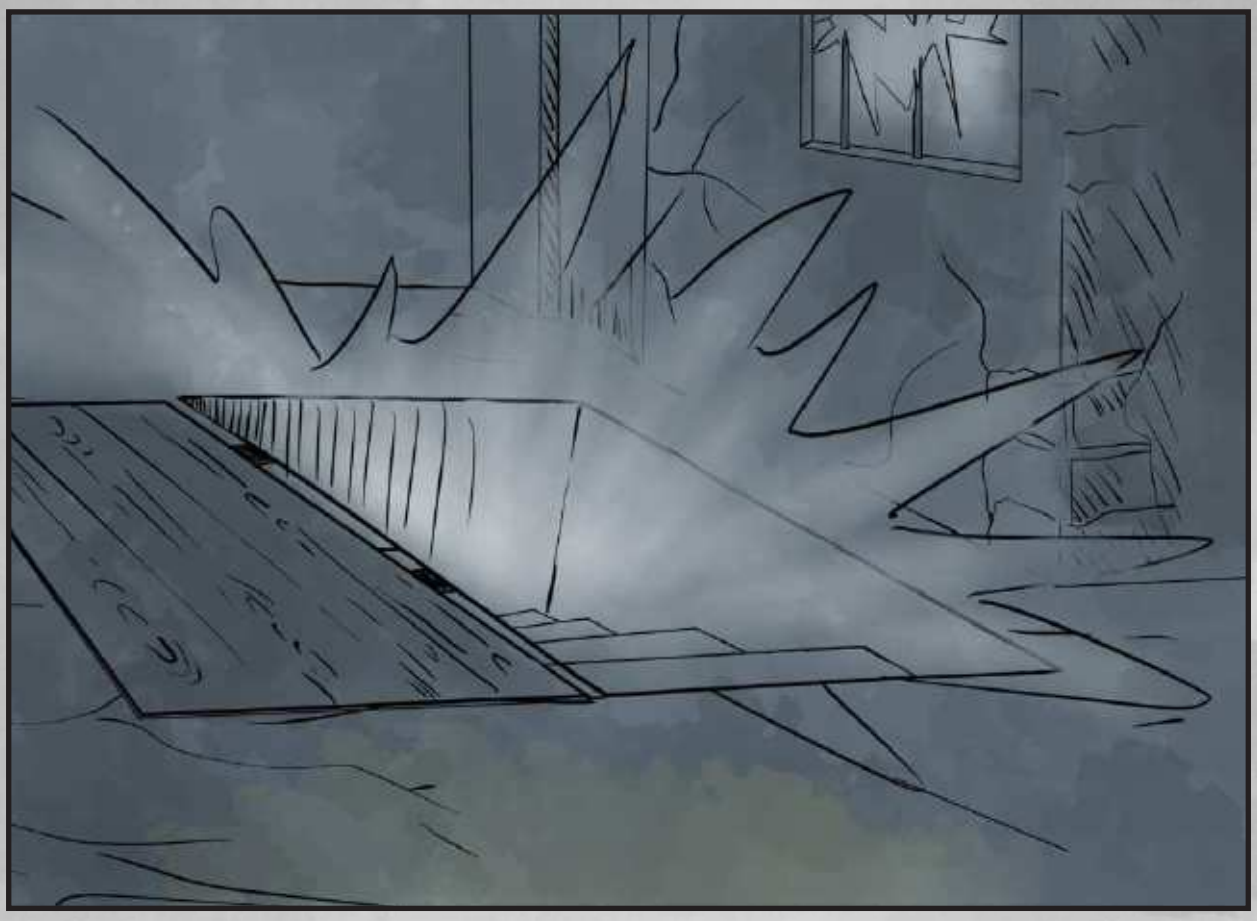

Have you found anything interesting?
Not really, just some rusty coins


What do you think about going downstairs?
I don't know, I'm too scared to go there. I'm afraid of being there alone


Come, I think I've found something!
What's that?
It's real! We found treasure!
I don't know, let's get out of here!


Open the door!
I can't, it's stuck!
Hurry up, Ashur!
What's that?


We need to get out now!
What's going on?!




Seriously, what was that?
No idea, but we should get out before something worse happens




The door won't open, what do we do?


We need to get out from the other room
We have to try to get out at all costs


What's that box?
I wish we had something to open it
What's that? It opened itself


Where's this wind coming from?




Who has dared to come to my territory?
Whhh… Who are you?
I'm the jinn of this house. You crossed the line and came to my house
Please, we didn't mean to hurt you. We just came to look around


You crossed the line and you must be punished
What sort of punishment?


The windows are closed, how do we get out now?
You two knew that you weren't allowed to come here but you still came
We promise!
We apologise. Please let us go, we'll never come back


You humans never learn from your mistakes. I'll have to eat some of your sheep


It was your idea that got us here
Daniel, I have an idea!


Look! you see our field there?
We can make an agreement with the jinn
Hey! I'm talking to you
Me? Never!

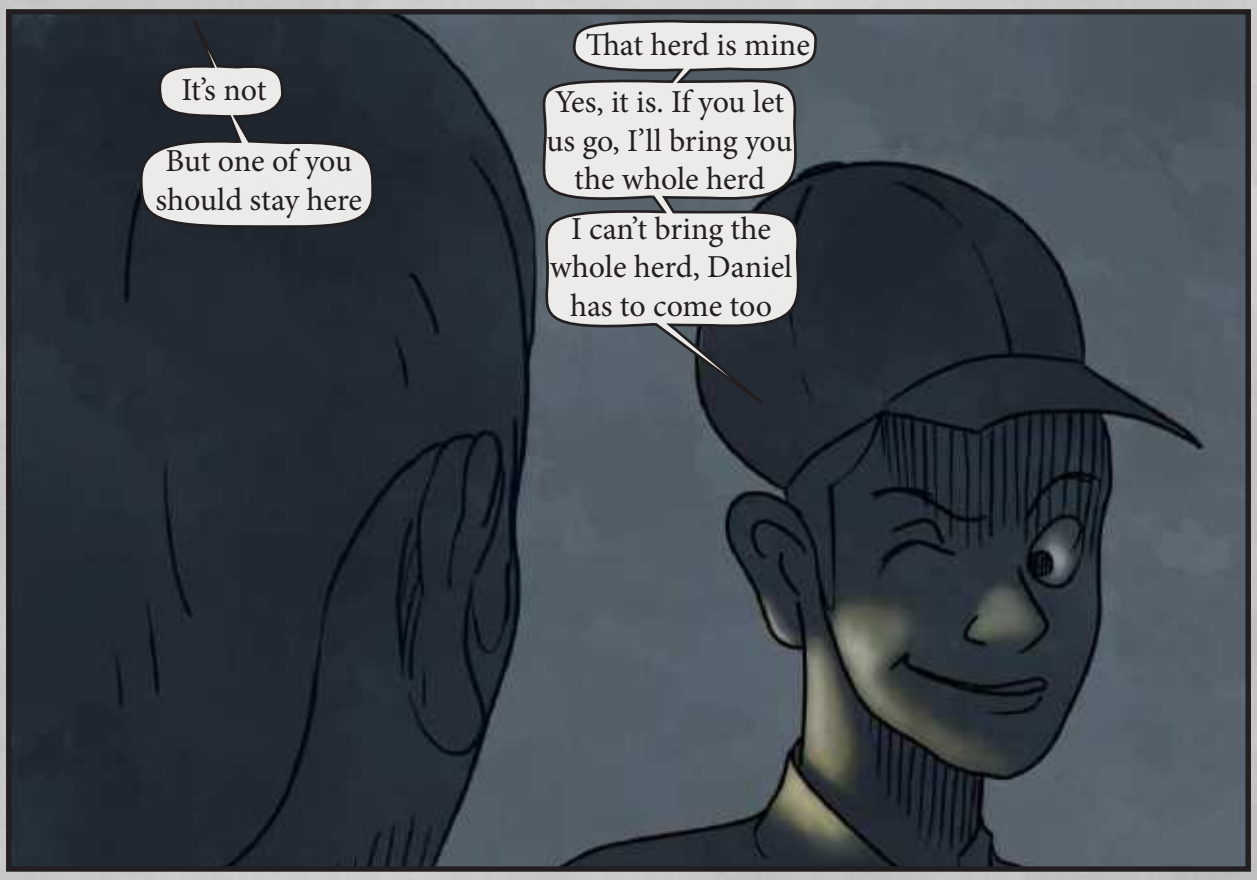

Are you here?

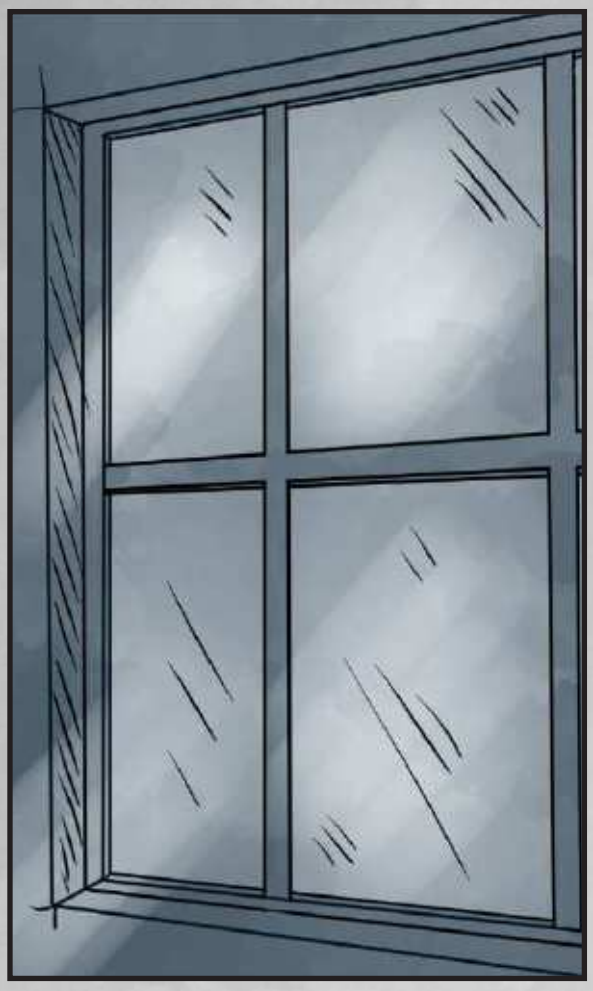

Are you crazy?!


We want to make a pact with you


Speak, I'm listening
I do, and?
Do you see that herd of sheep?




That herd is mine
Yes, it is. If you let us go, I'll bring you the whole herd
I can't bring the whole herd, Daniel has to come too
It's not
But one of you should stay here

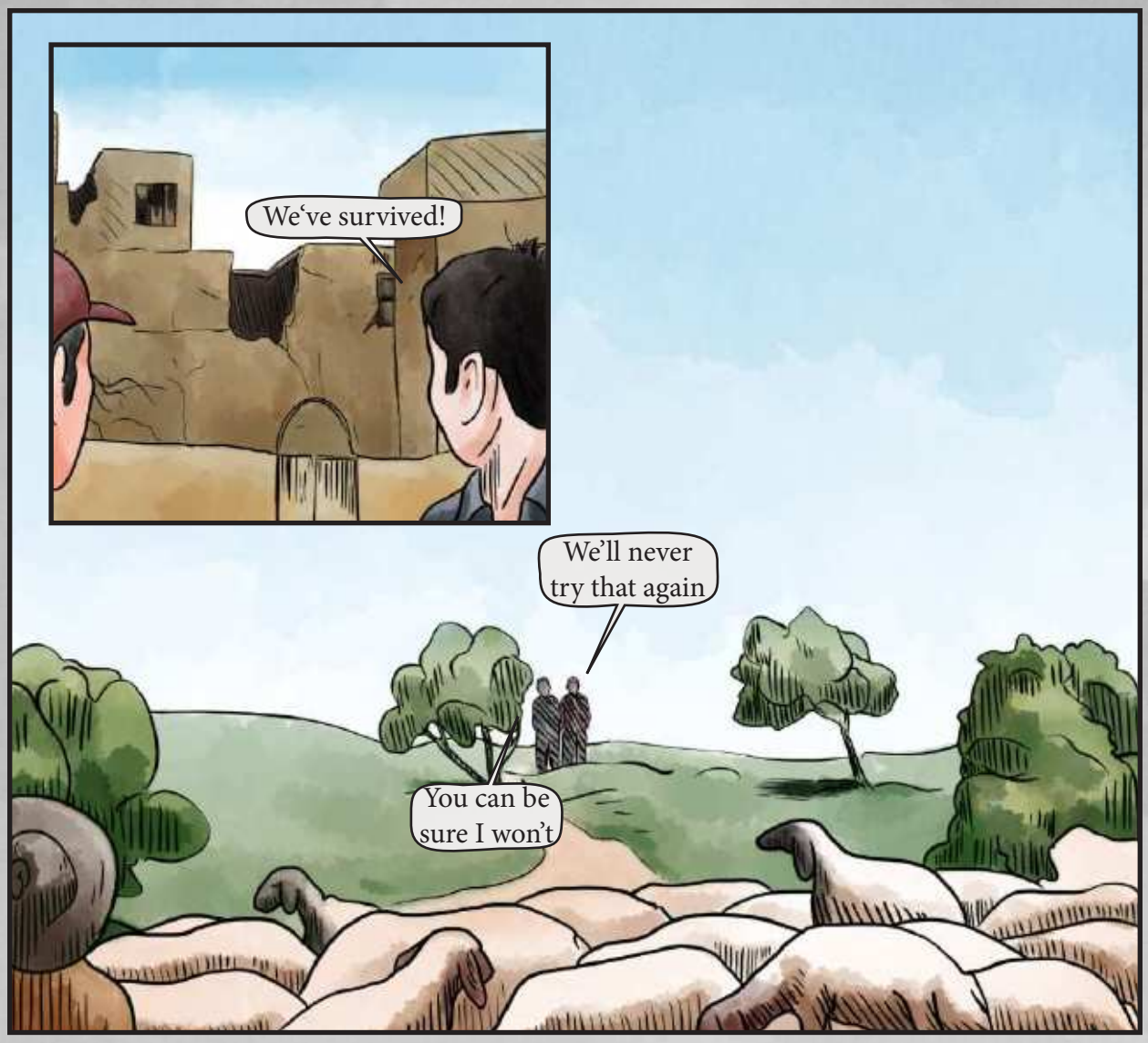









We'll come back with your sheep as soon as possible
Quick! Let's go


We've survived!
We'll never try that again
You can be sure I won't


Look, I brought these


I can't believe you


That's the vegetable seller

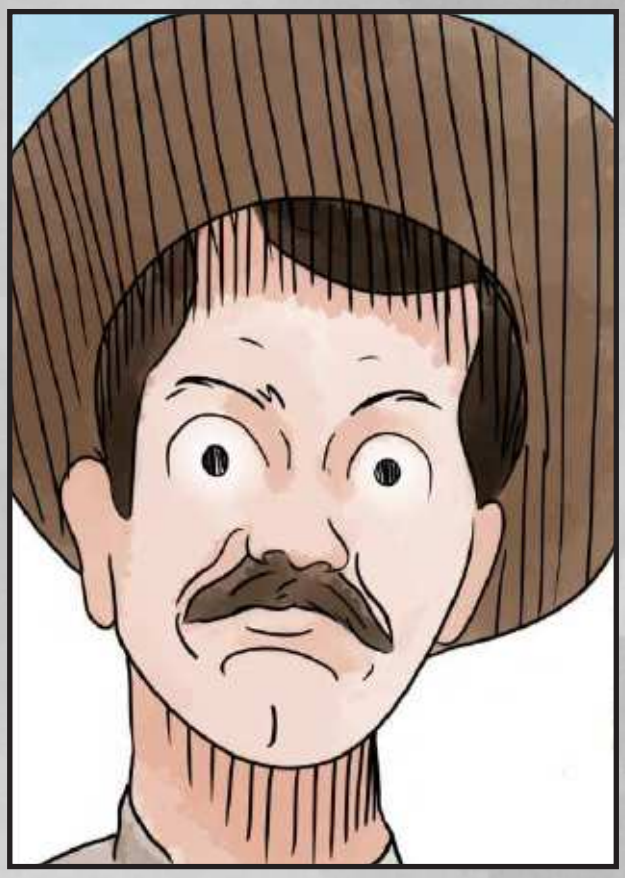

We made you really angry!
We apologise for yesterday, Uncle


We want to buy all of your vegetables. All of them
Do you think I was born yesterday?


I told you that we want to buy all of your vegetables









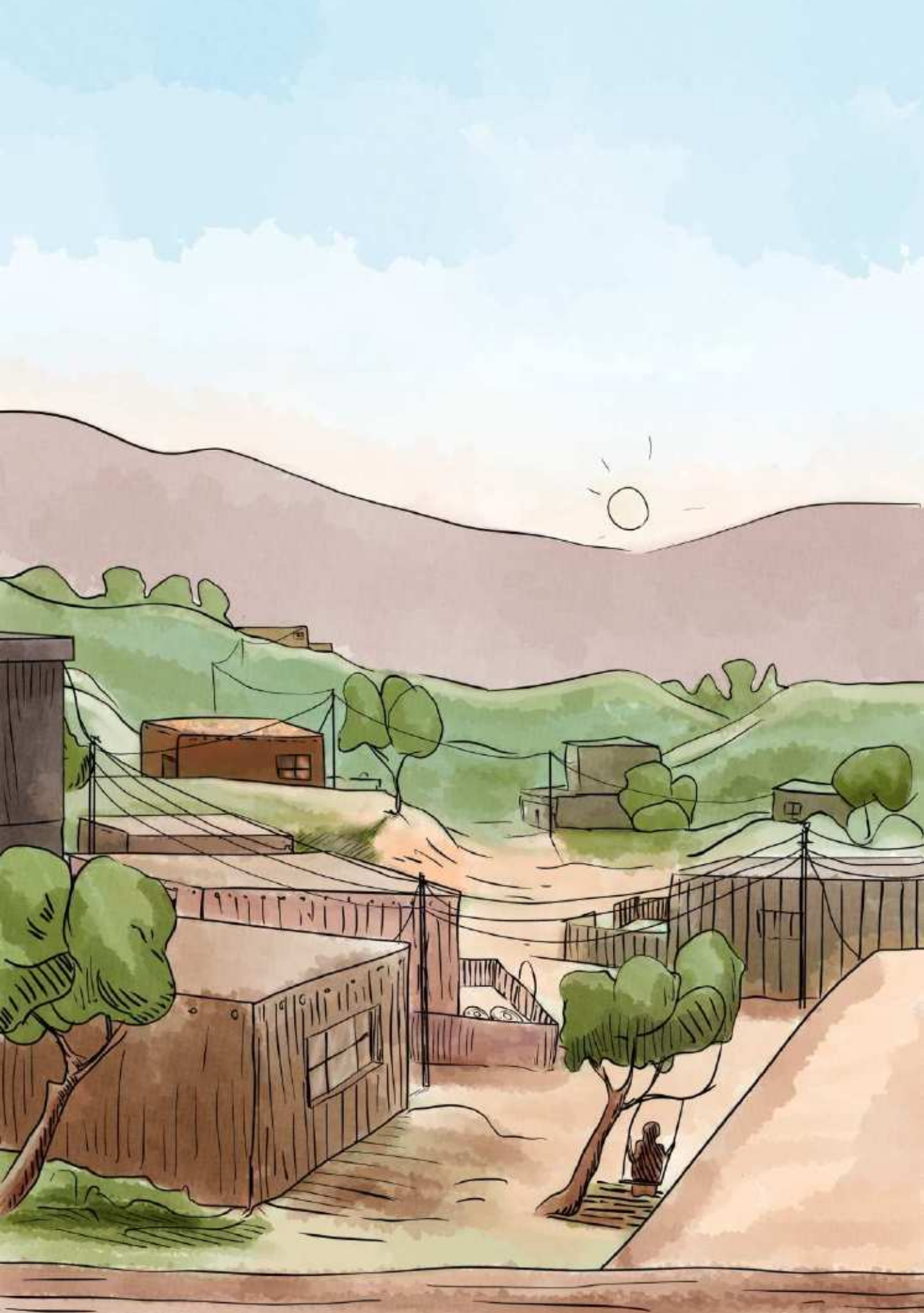



You've given too much money. I owe you some change
Keep it for yourself




Ashur, why did you bring a piece of gold?


It's been a while since the jinn was taking our herds. It's not happening anymore!



Alaa's blessing

Yezidis have a special ceremony for circumcision where they bring a man from another culture as a second father to hold the baby, making him a symbolic father. This ancient tradition educated the youth about the need to have social connections with other families and ethnicities. It's one of those traditions that promoted social and religious peace in the area.

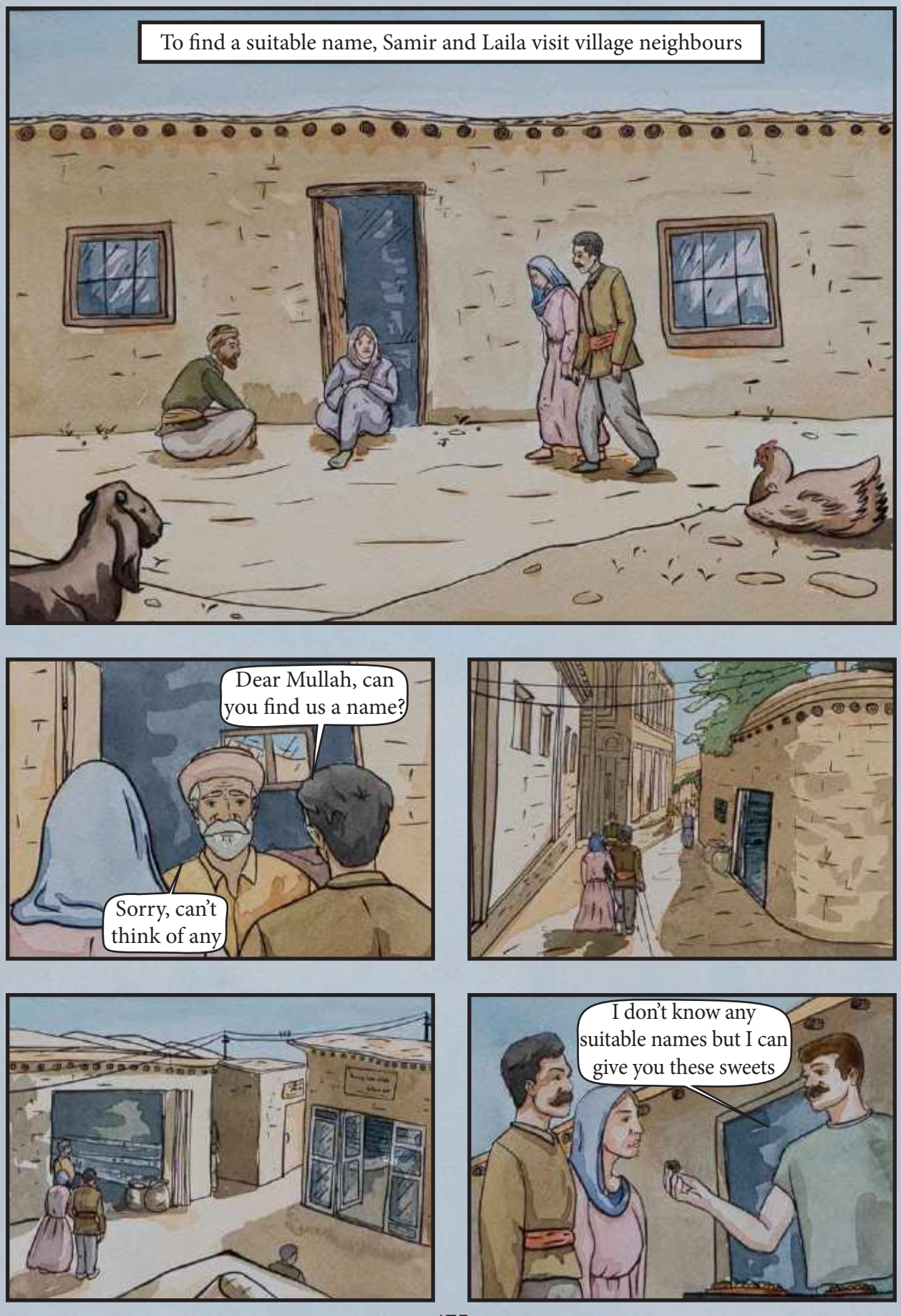



A Yezidi village at the bottom of Shingal Mountain


Our son is very cute, I can see both of us in him


The most important thing for him is to be good


Let's find him a name

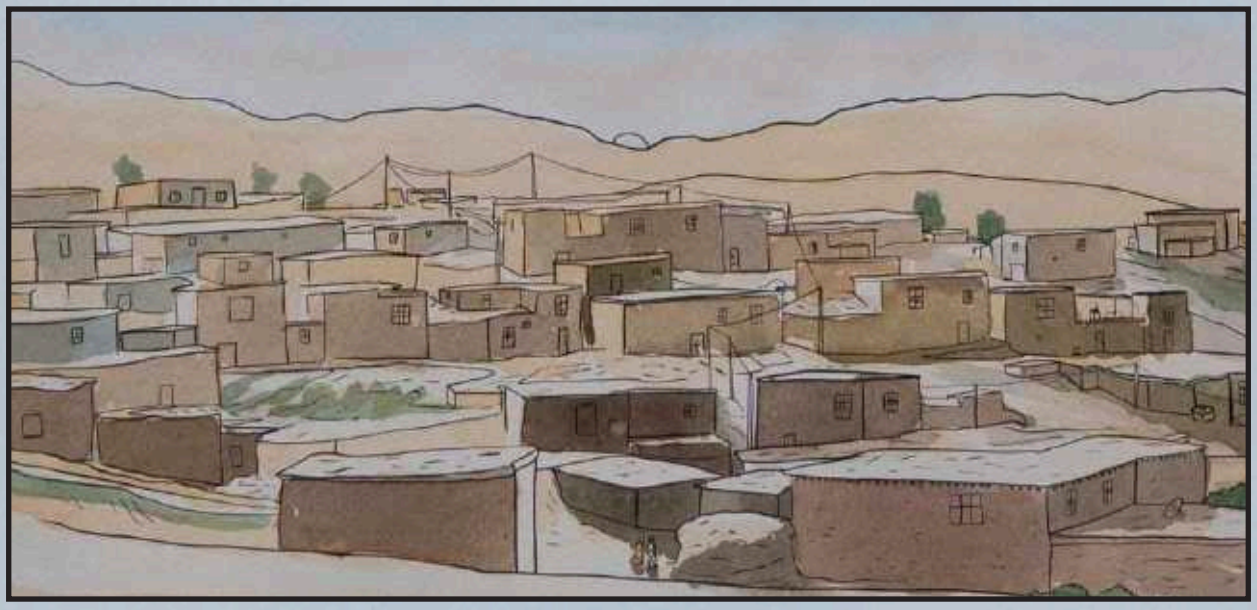

To find a suitable name, Samir and Laila visit village neighbours
Dear Mullah, can you find us a name?
Sorry, can't think of any
I don't know any suitable names but I can give you these sweets

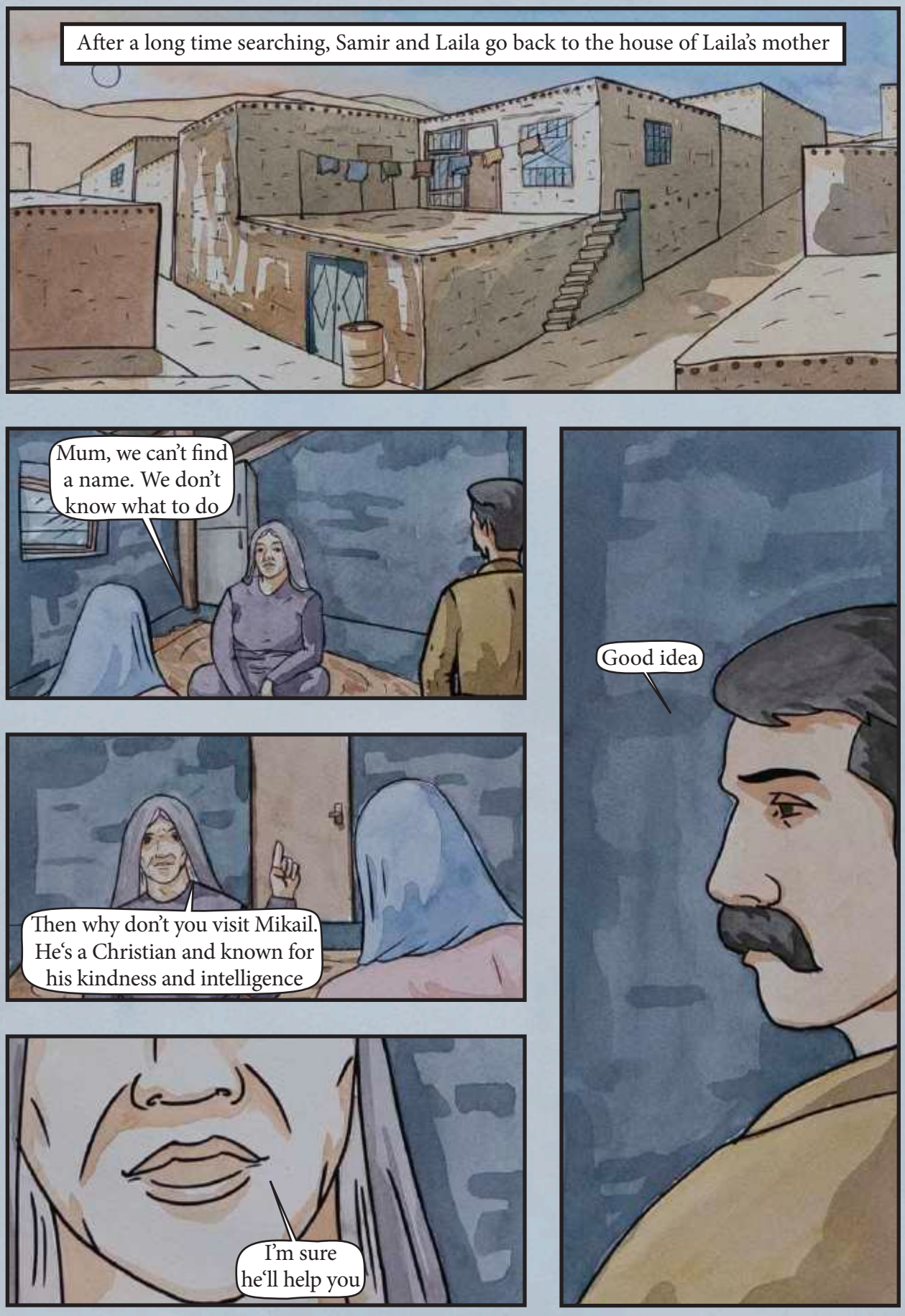


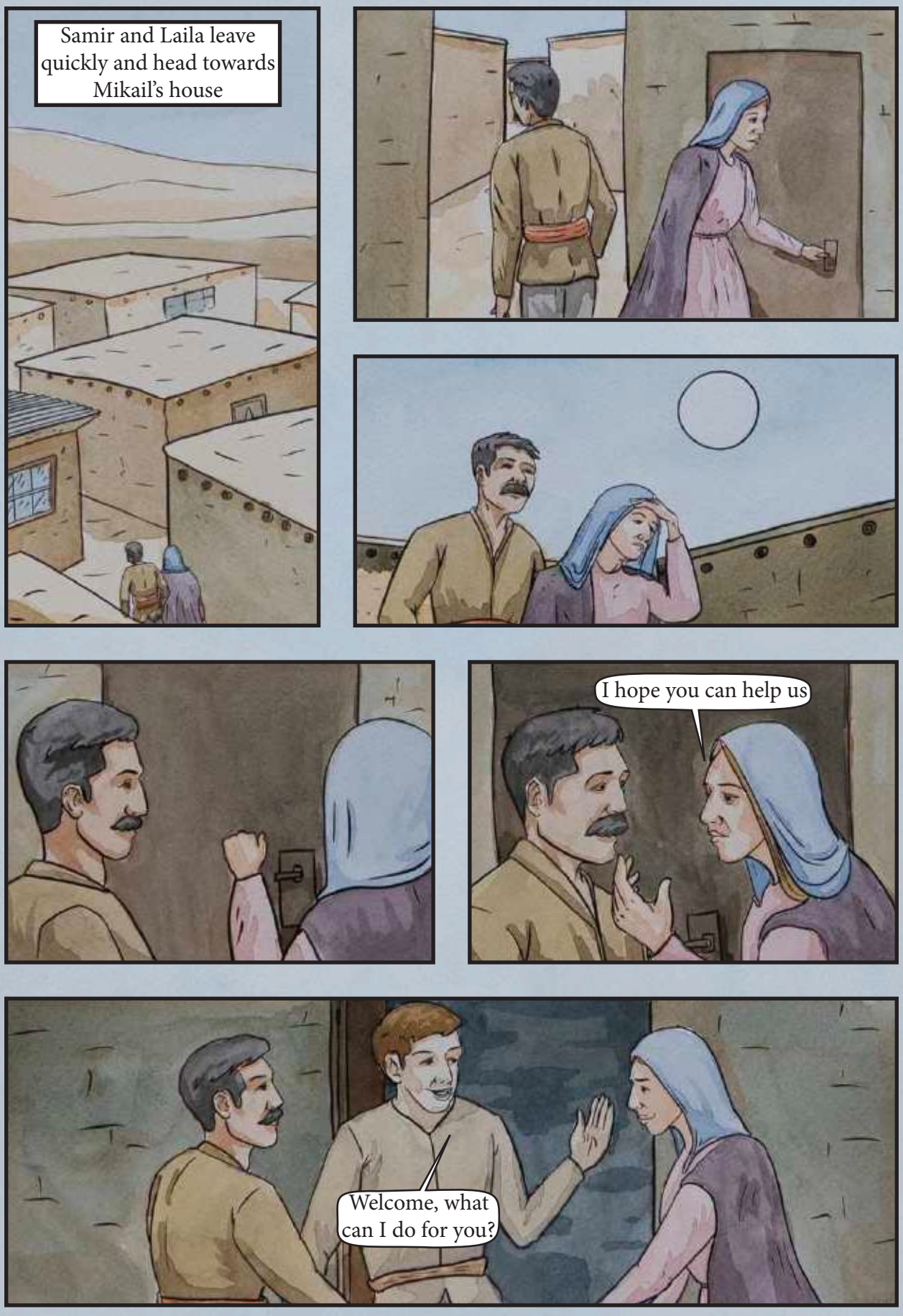

Welcome


We're searching for a suitable name for our son. Do you have one in mind?


Unfortunately, I'm not that good thinking of names




After a long time searching, Samir and Laila go back to the house of Laila's mother
Mum, we can't find a name. We don't know what to do
Then why don't you visit Mikail. He's a Christian and known for his kindness and intelligence
I'm sure he'll help you
Good idea


Samir and Laila leave quickly and head towards Mikail's house
I hope you can help us
Welcome, what can I do for you?

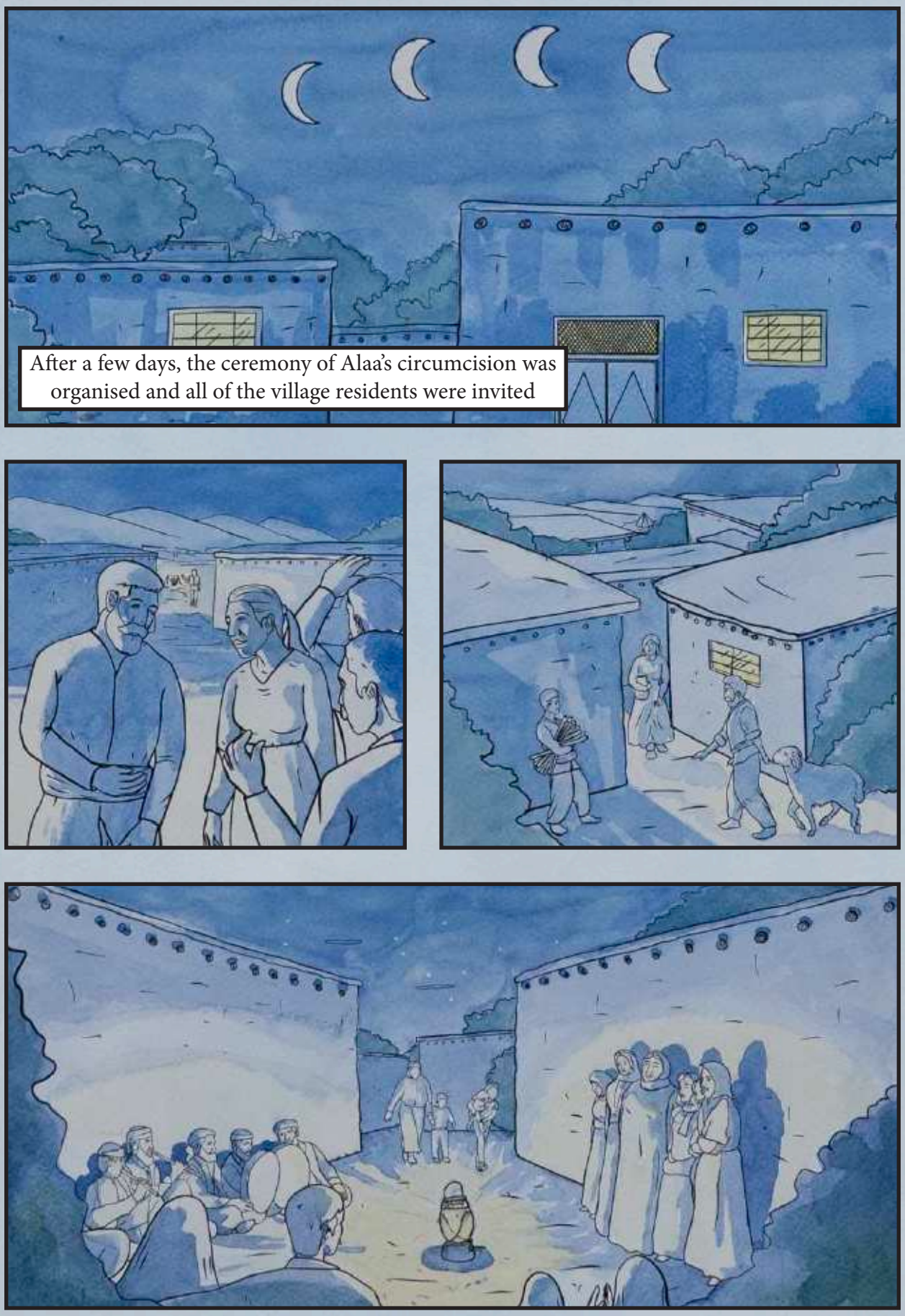

We came to find a suitable name for our newborn son




Then can't you name him Alaa? It means the best and royal in Arabic

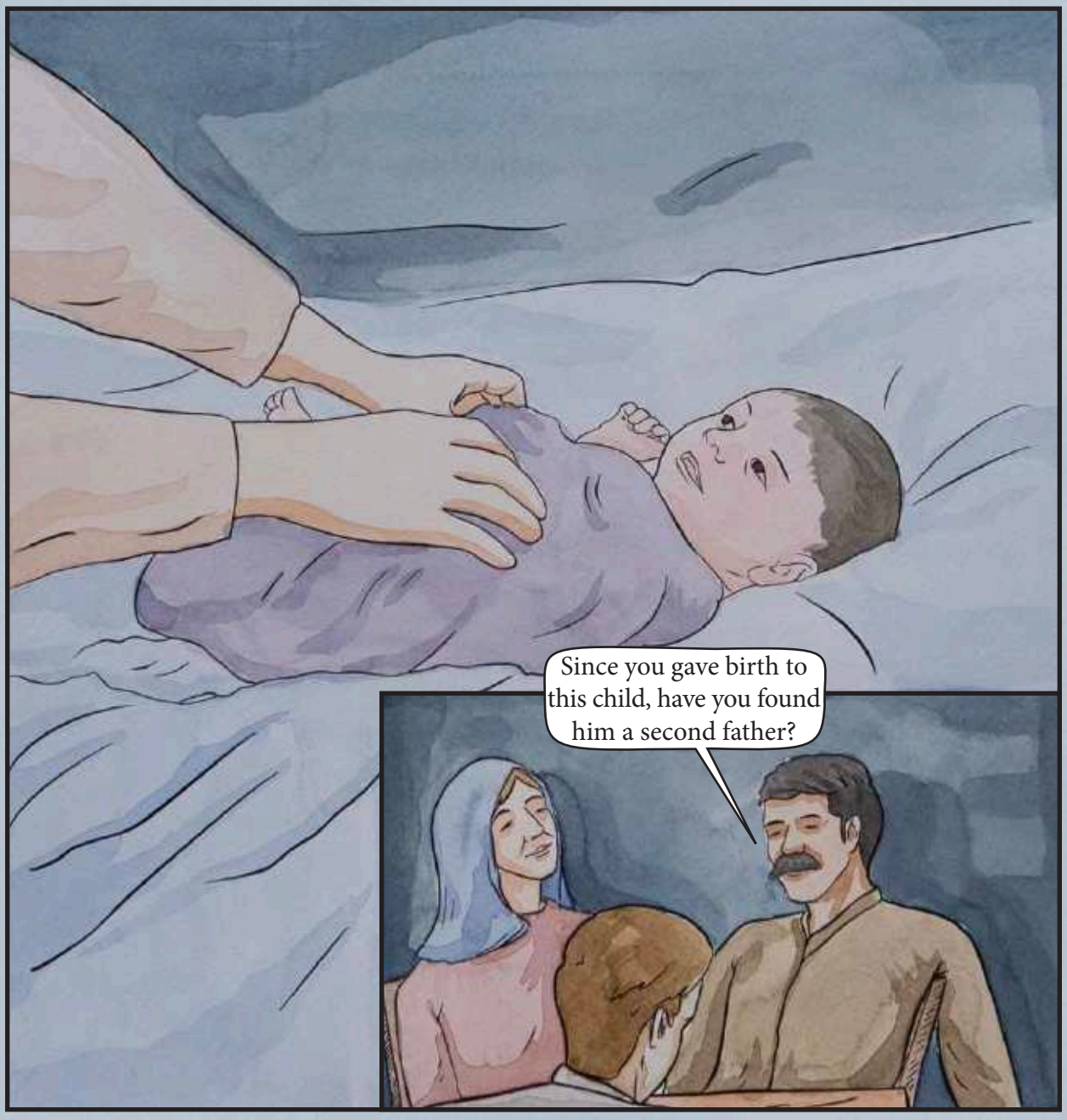

What a wonderful and meaningful name!

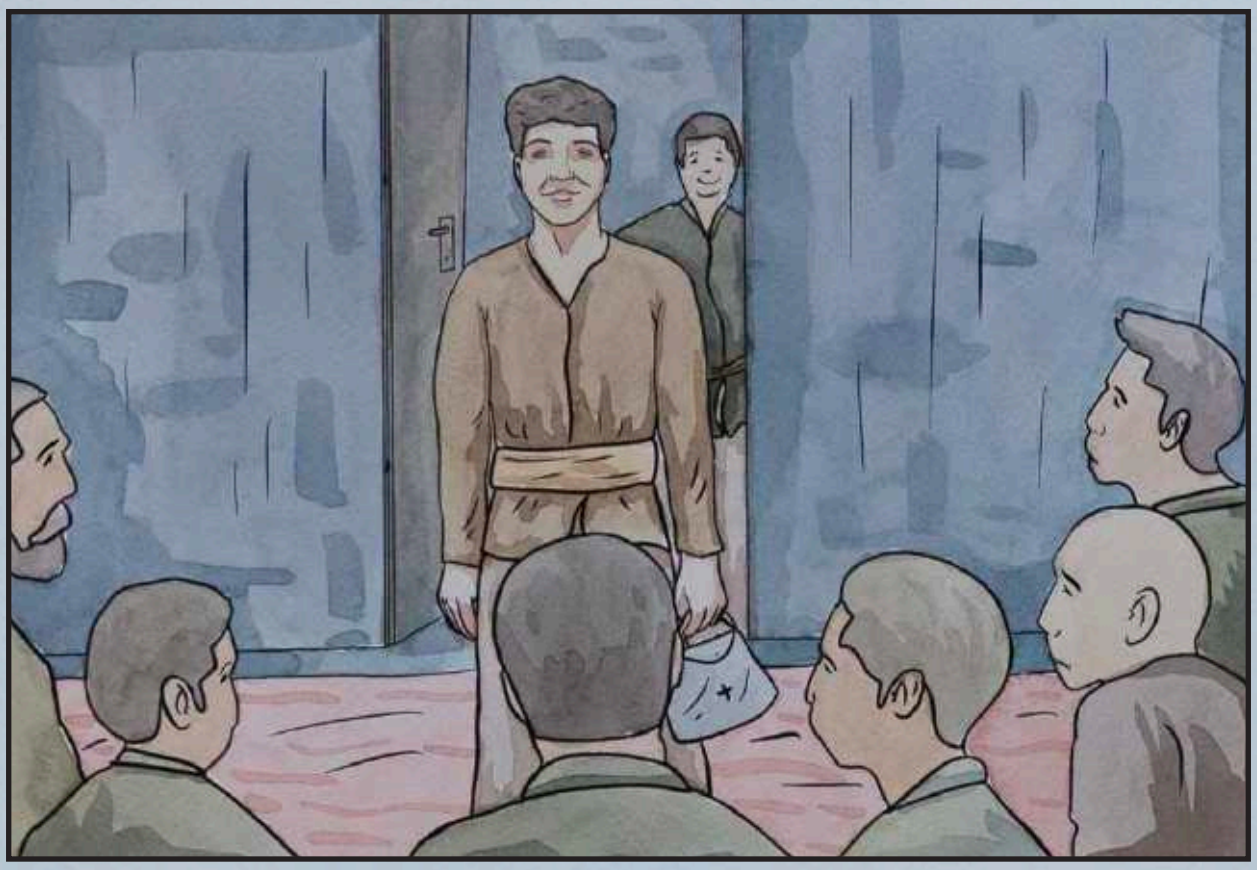

In that case, you can also become Alaa's spiritual father
I'd happily do that, it would be an honour
Then let's eat these sweets to celebrate


After a few days, the ceremony of Alaa's circumcision was organised and all of the village residents were invited




Welcome Mr. Mikail, I hope this ceremony brings our families closer


Since you gave birth to this child, have you found him a second father?

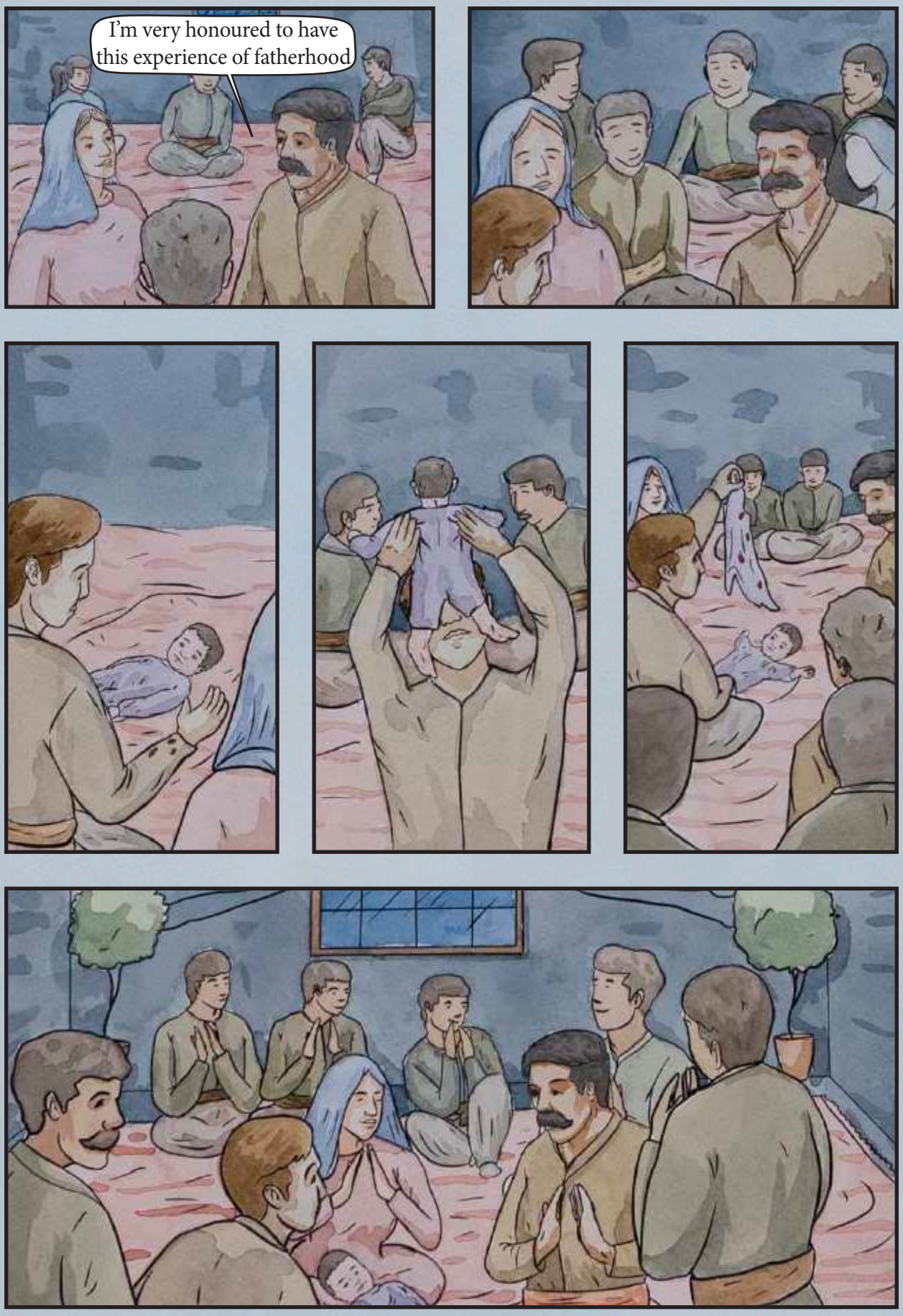











I'm very honoured to have this experience of fatherhood




I'm very happy that the ceremony went well


My daughter, congratulations and I hope you always find happiness

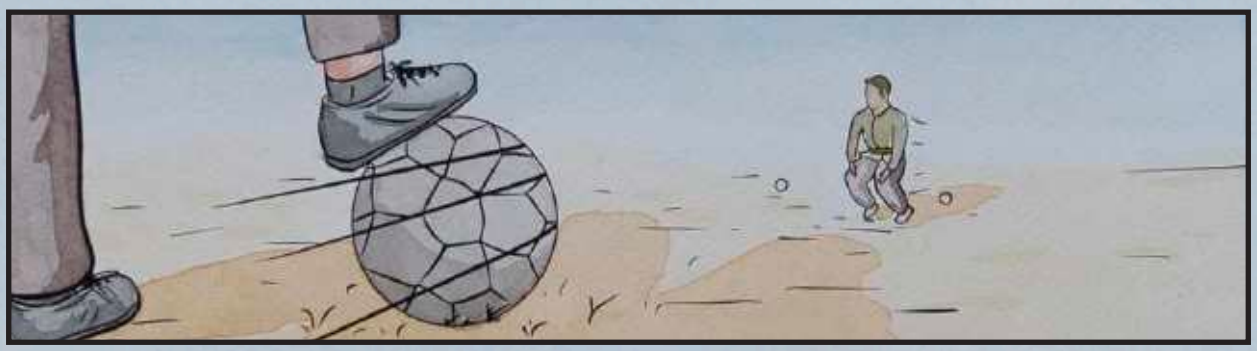


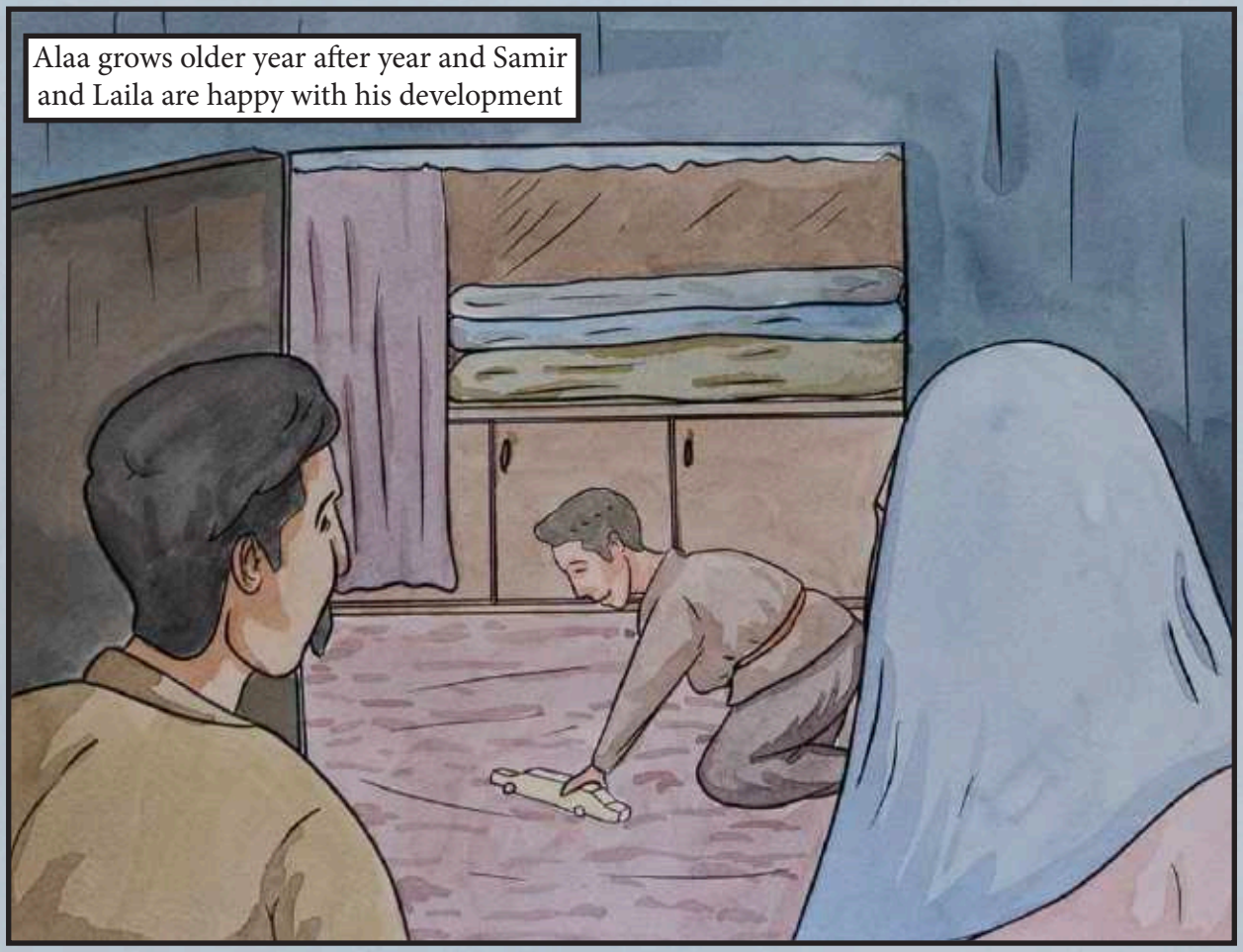


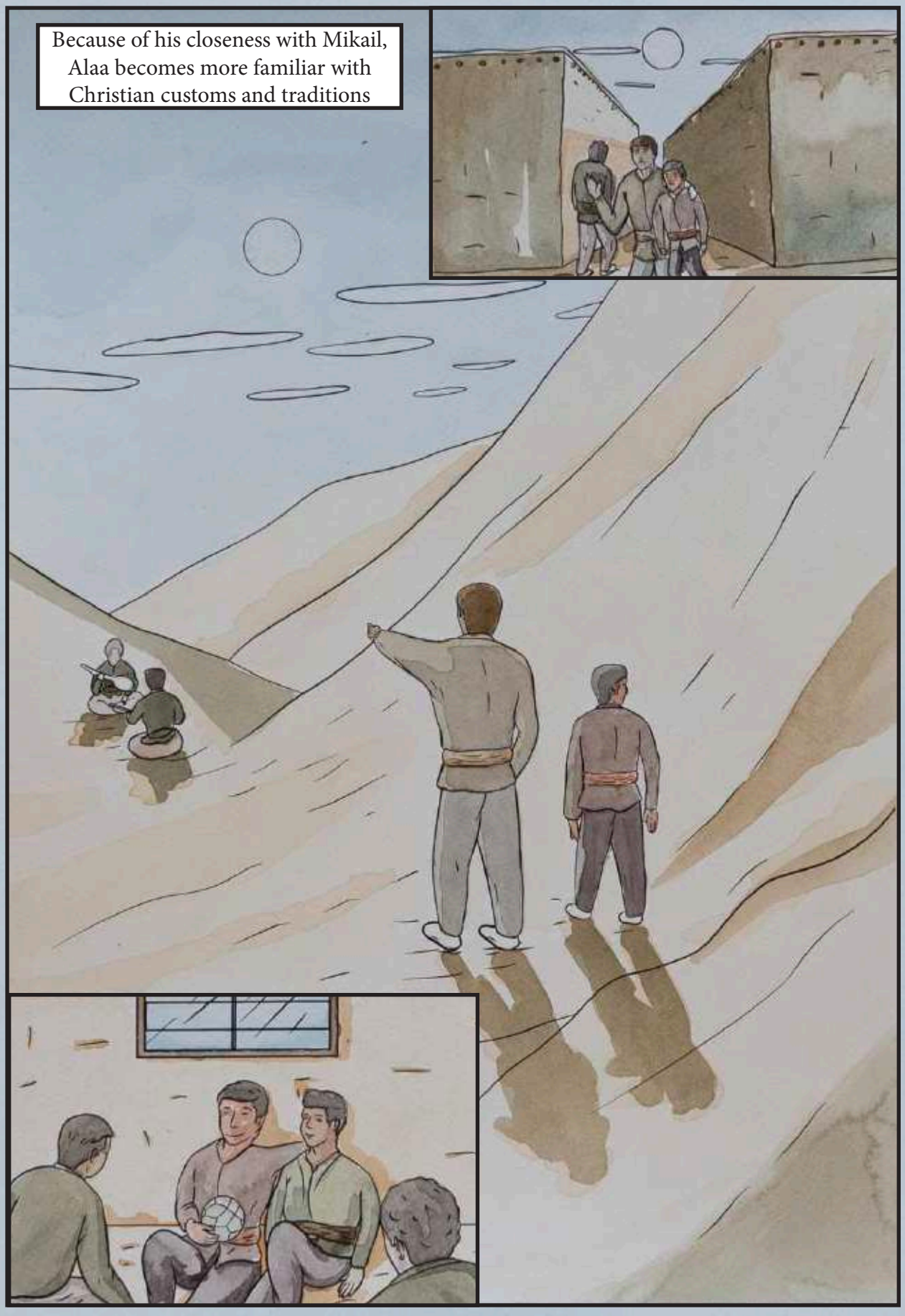


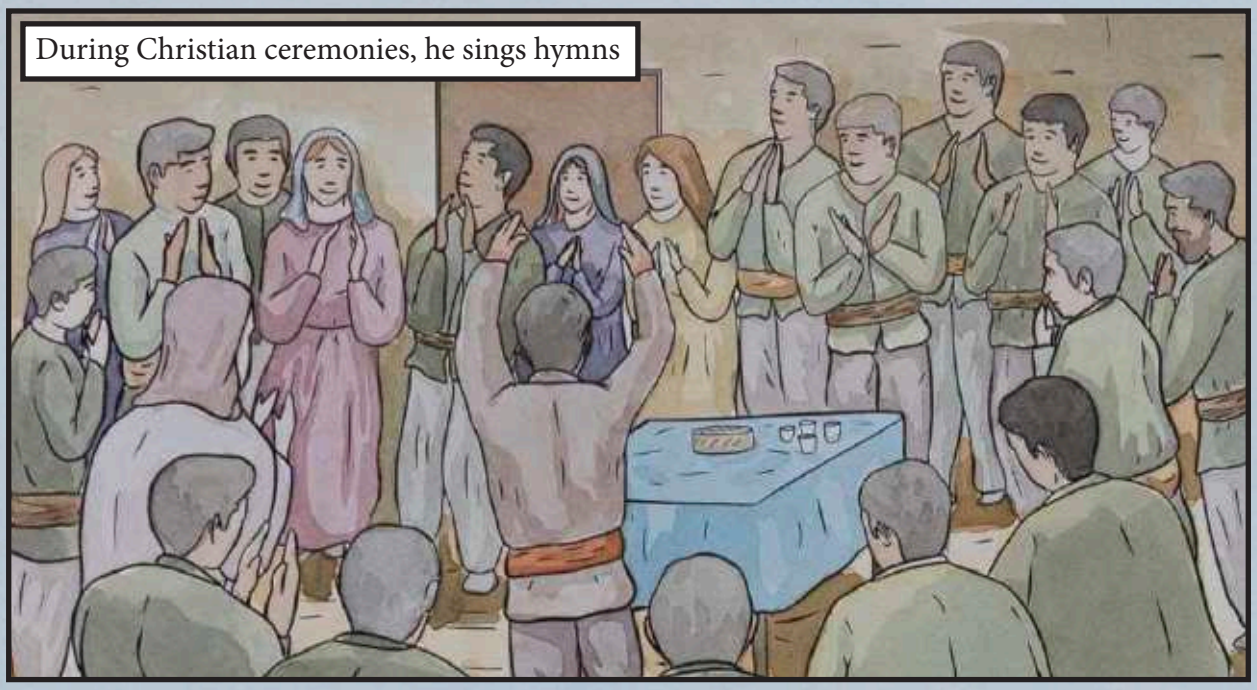







Alaa grows older year after year and Samir and Laila are happy with his development


Because of his closeness with Mikail, Alaa becomes more familiar with Christian customs and traditions


During Christian ceremonies, he sings hymns

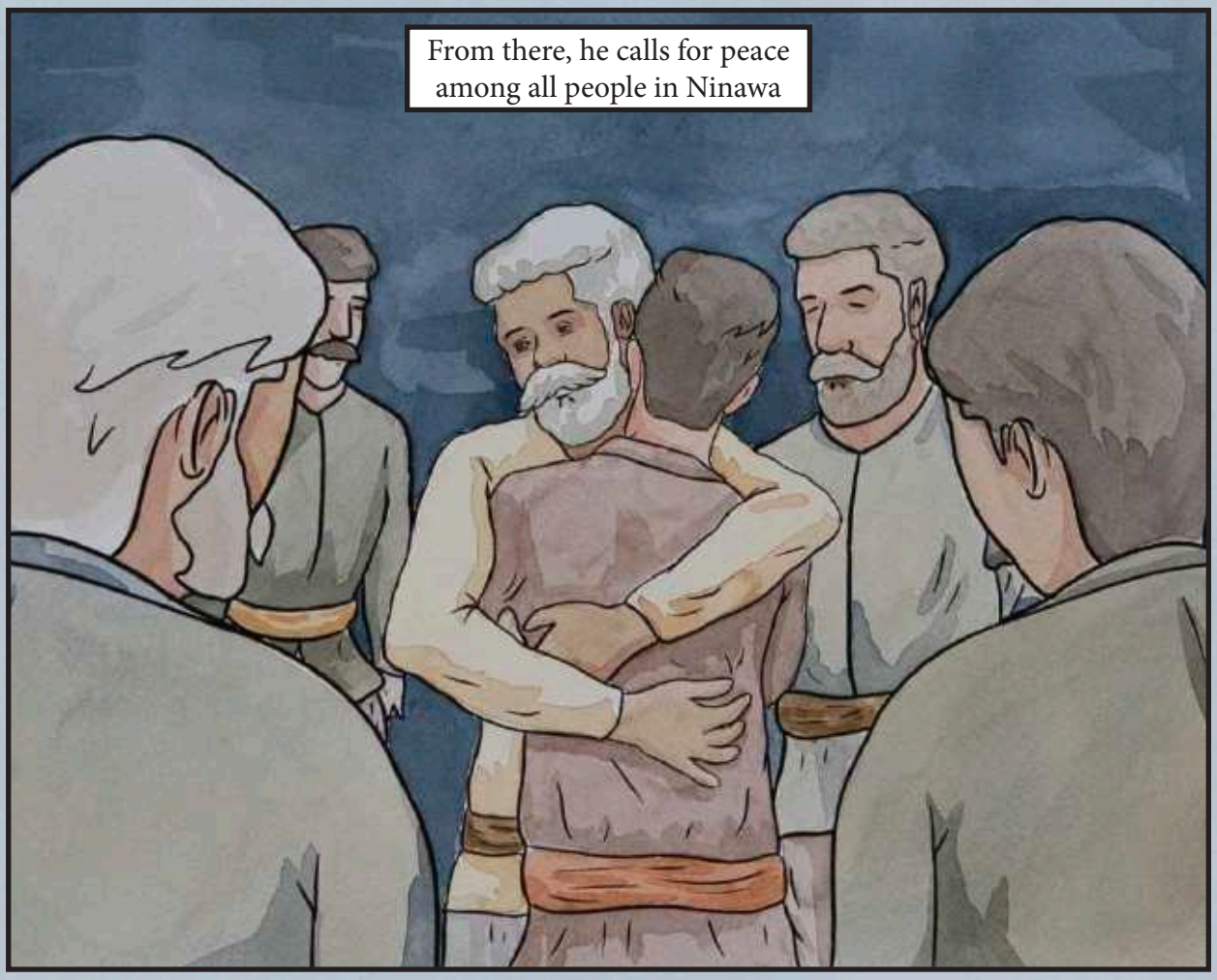


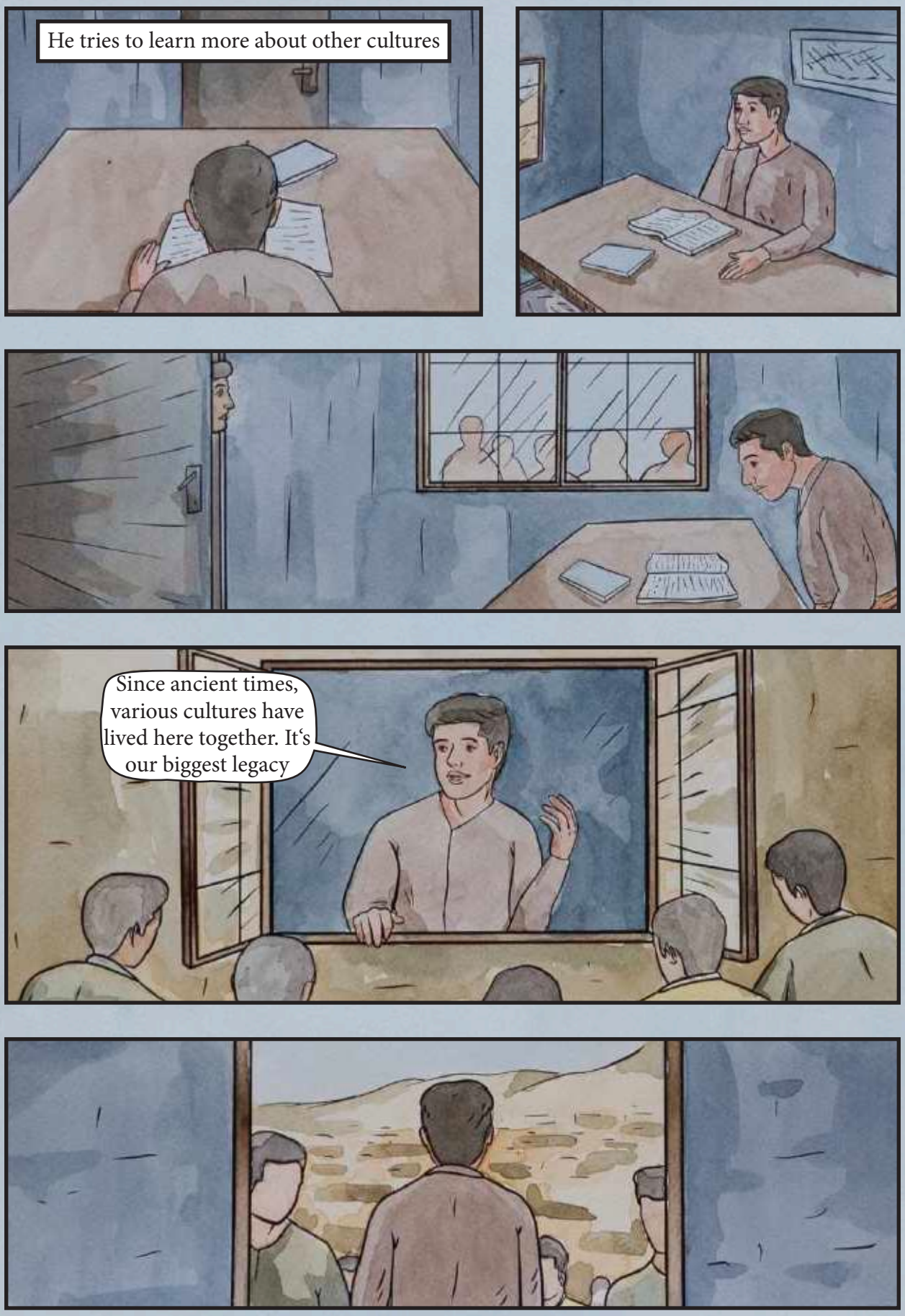

In the market, he's friendly with people from other cultures




In school, Alaa becomes friends with people from other cultures

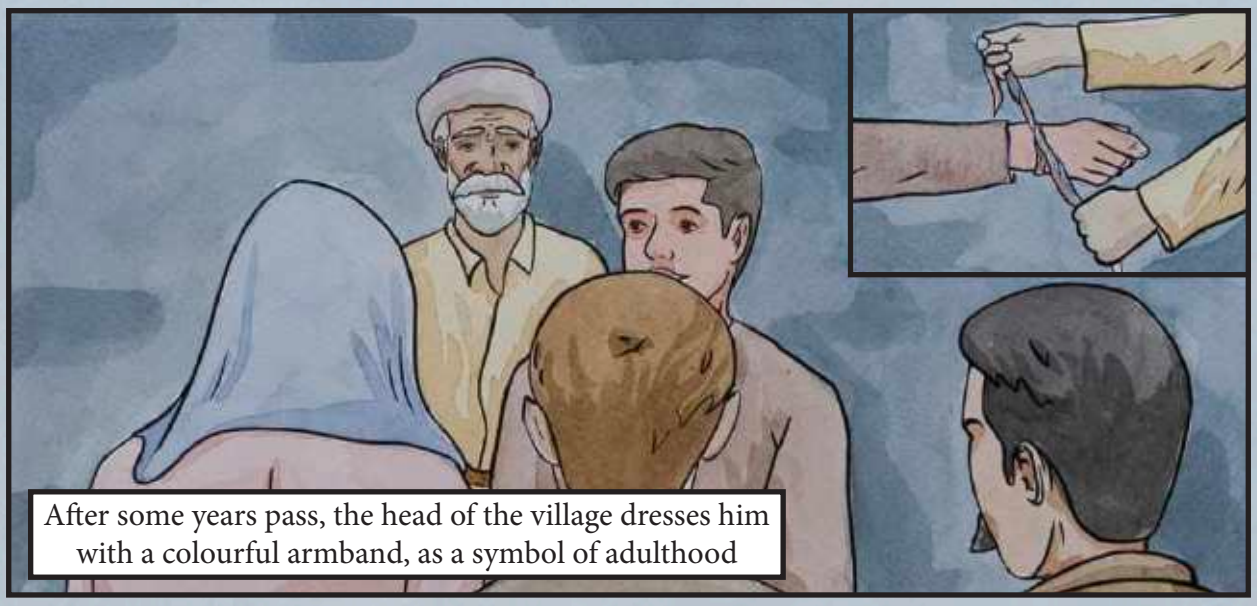



From there, he calls for peace among all people in Ninawa


He tries to learn more about other cultures
Since ancient times, various cultures have lived here together. It's our biggest legacy

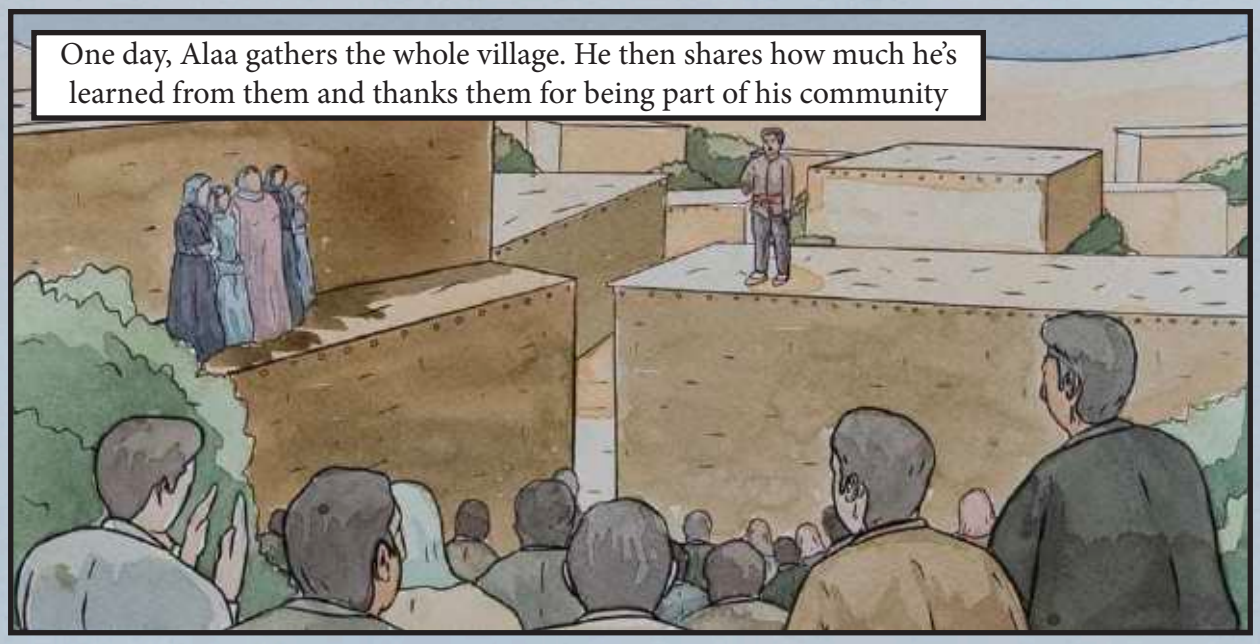

Alaa's parents are very happy about how intelligent their son is. People love this quality about him




After some years pass, the head of the village dresses him with a colourful armband, as a symbol of adulthood



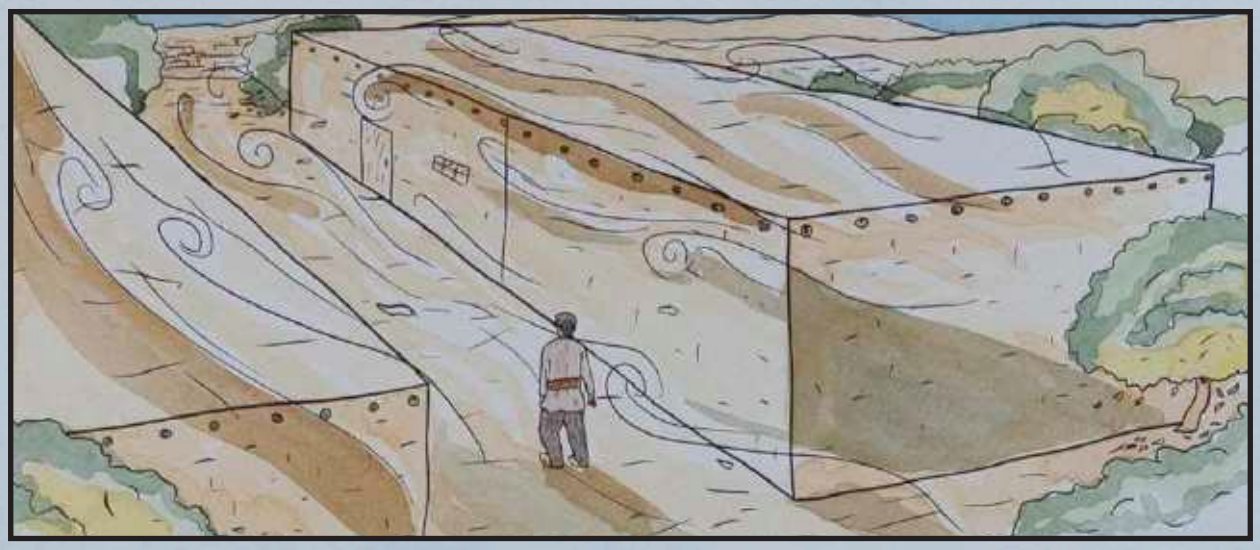


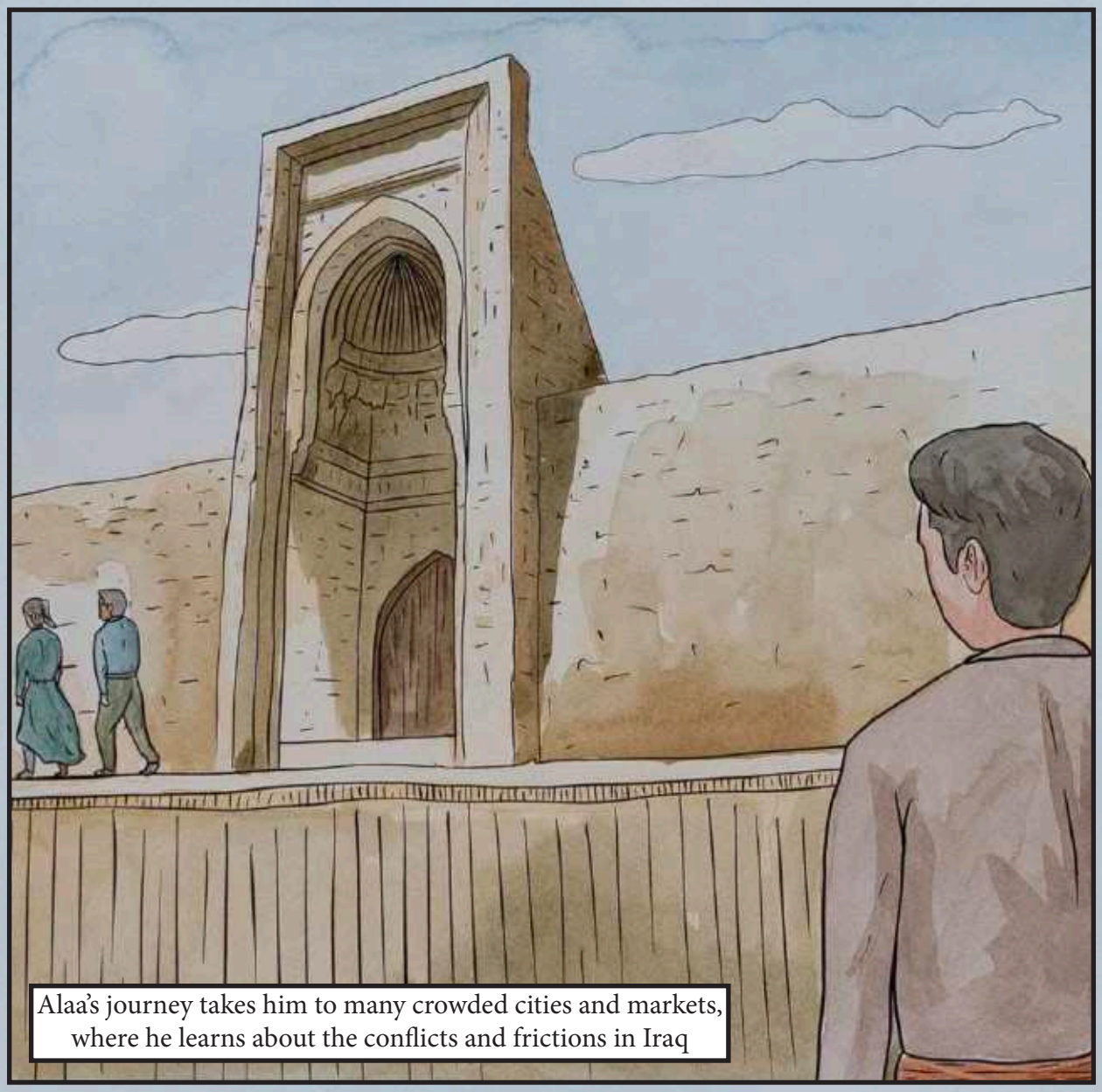

One day, Alaa gathers the whole village. He then shares how much he's learned from them and thanks them for being part of his community




He then says his goodbyes as he wants to go on a journey to learn more about other cultures



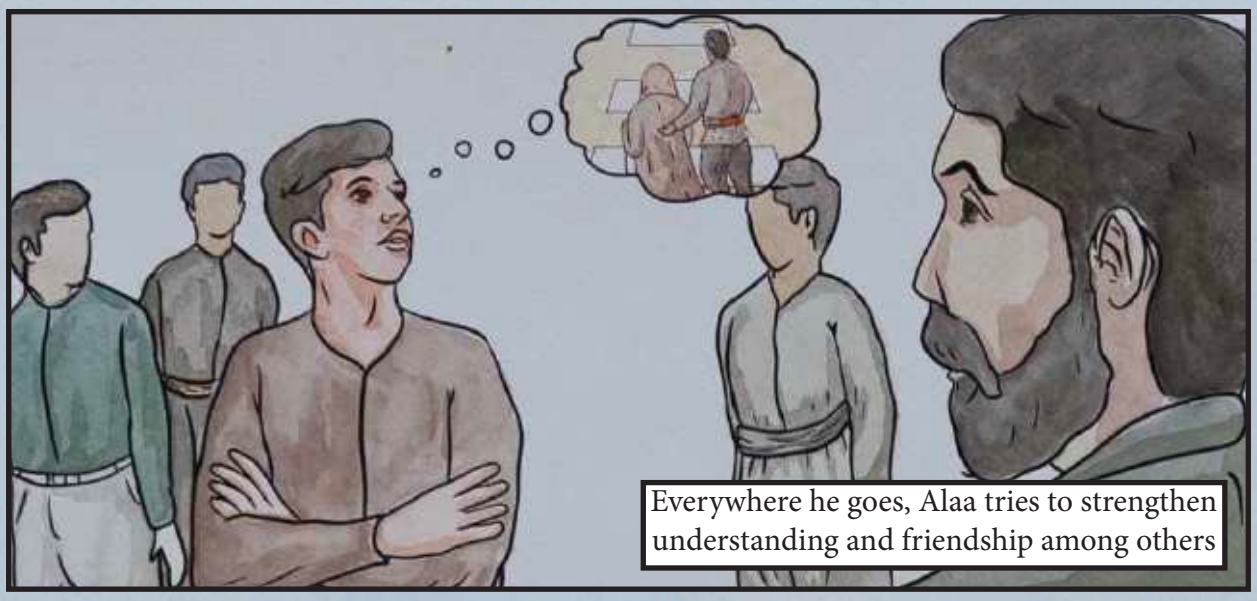



Alaa's journey takes him to many crowded cities and markets, where he learns about the conflicts and frictions in Iraq








Everywhere he goes, Alaa tries to strengthen understanding and friendship among others



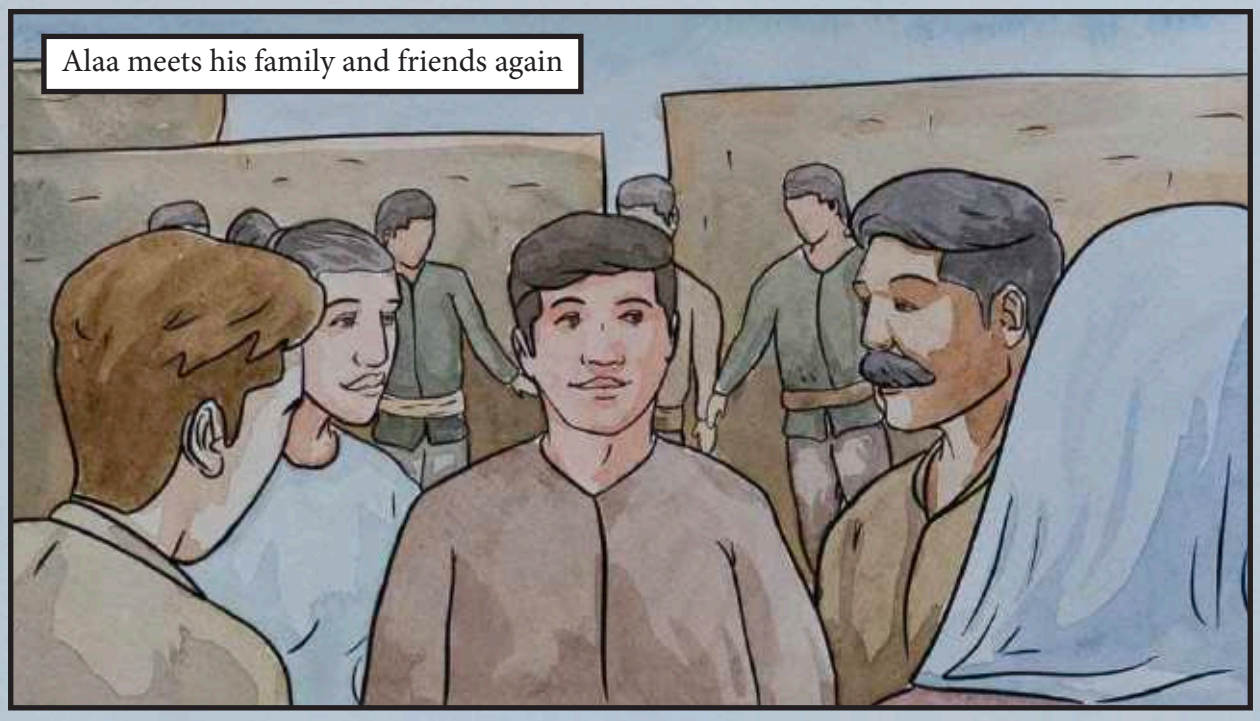





After a few months, he receives a letter from his village. They ask him to visit his neighbour's circumcision ceremony






Alaa meets his family and friends again



He shares his stories with the village residents



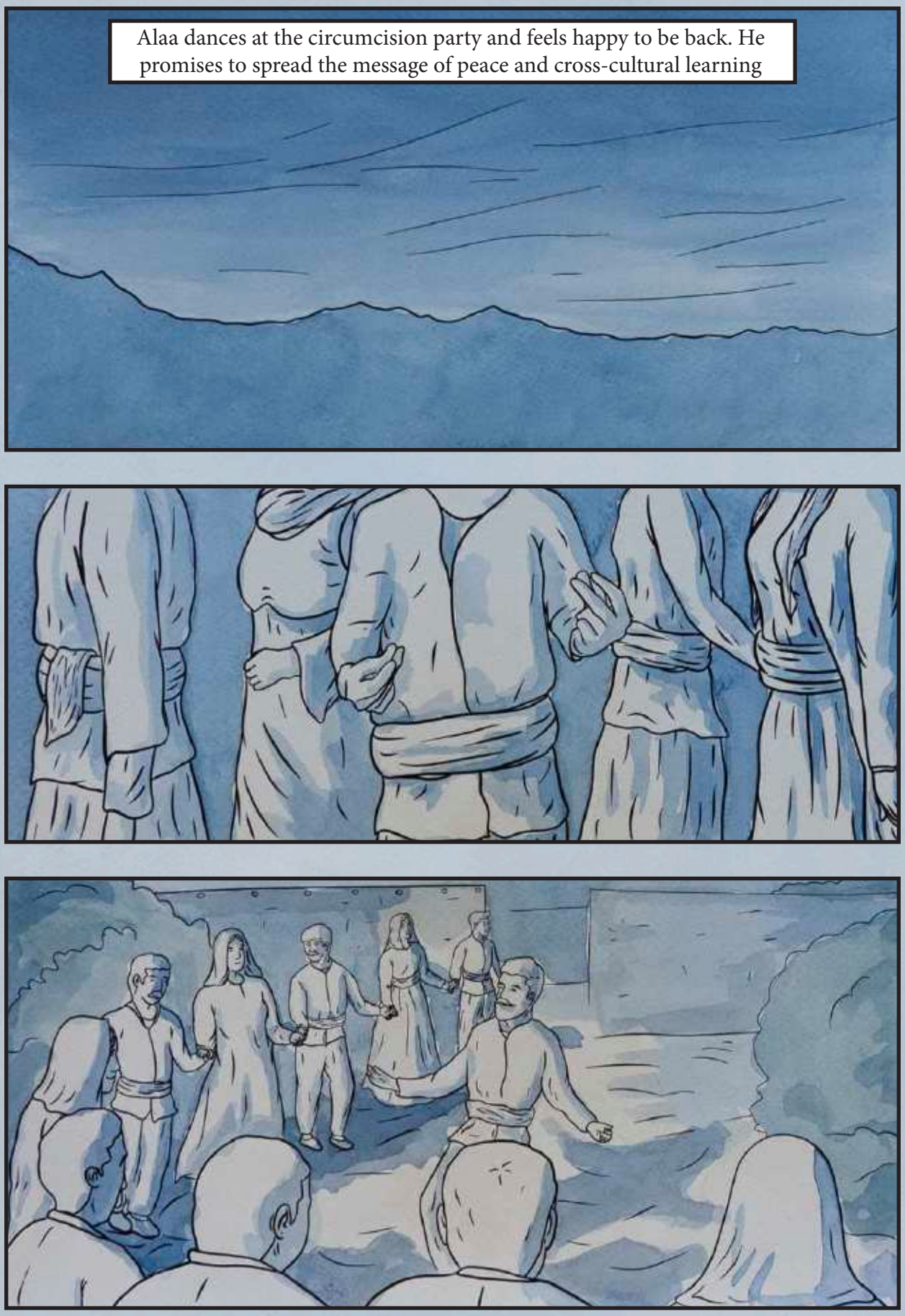




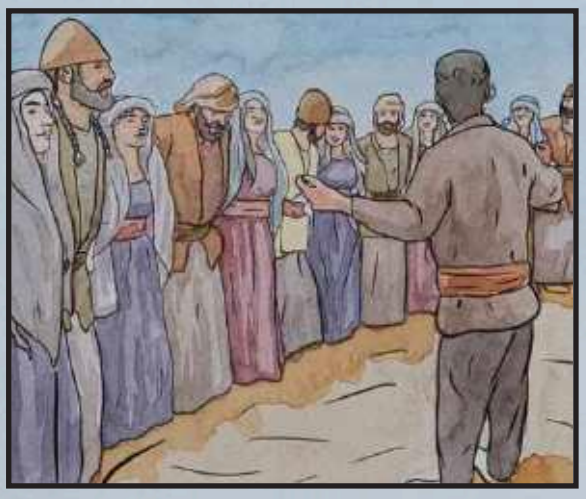







Alaa dances at the circumcision party and feels happy to be back. He promises to spread the message of peace and cross-cultural learning









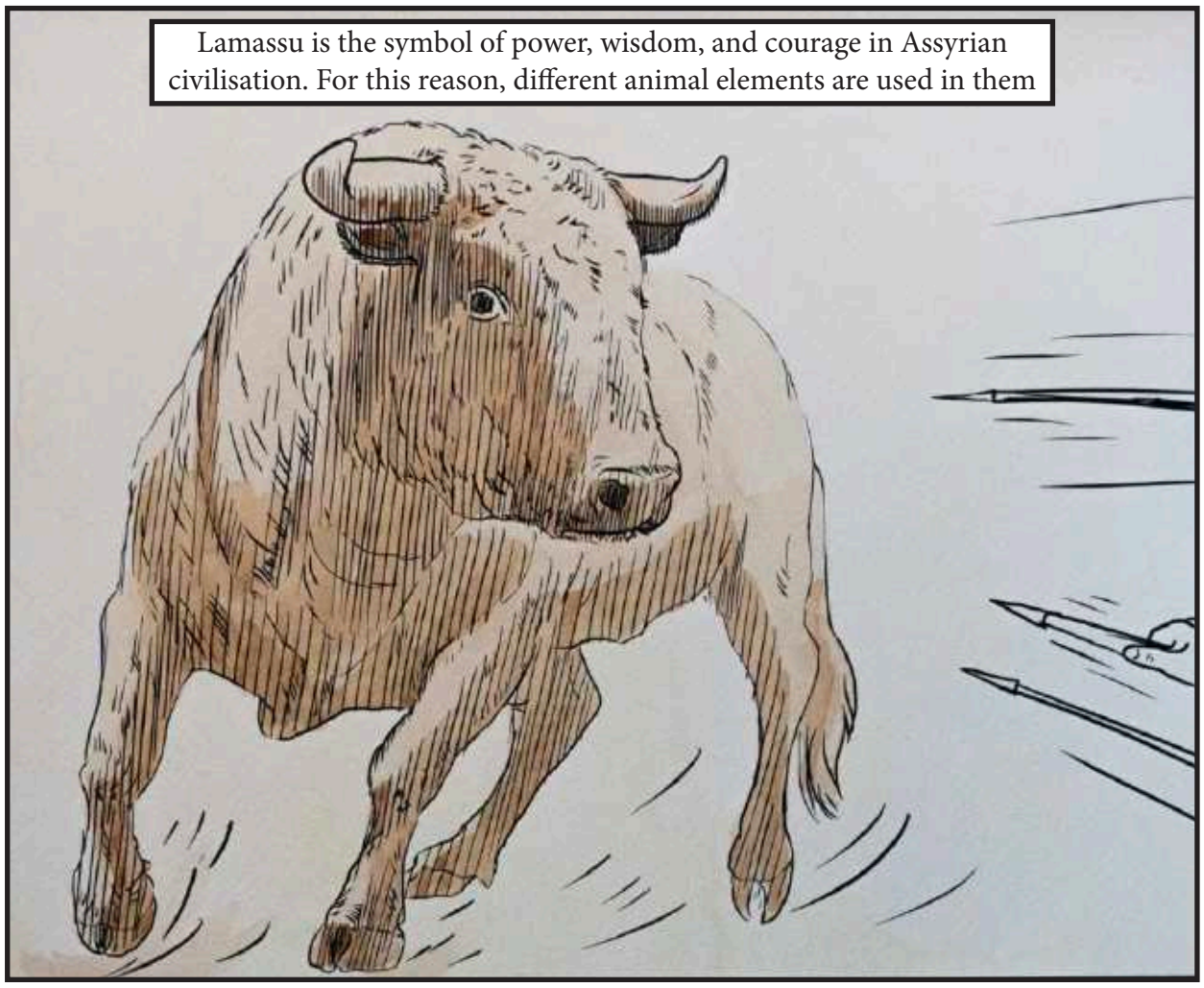


Lamassu

Lamassu statues are one of the cultural and historical sites in Mosul, dating back to the Mesopotamian civilisation. After the fall of this civilisation and the ancient city of Nineveh, they were buried and forgotten. In the 20th century, western archaeologists found and transported some of them to museums in western countries. After Mosul was invaded by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), some of the remaining statues faced destruction. But since the city's liberation, the statues are being restored.



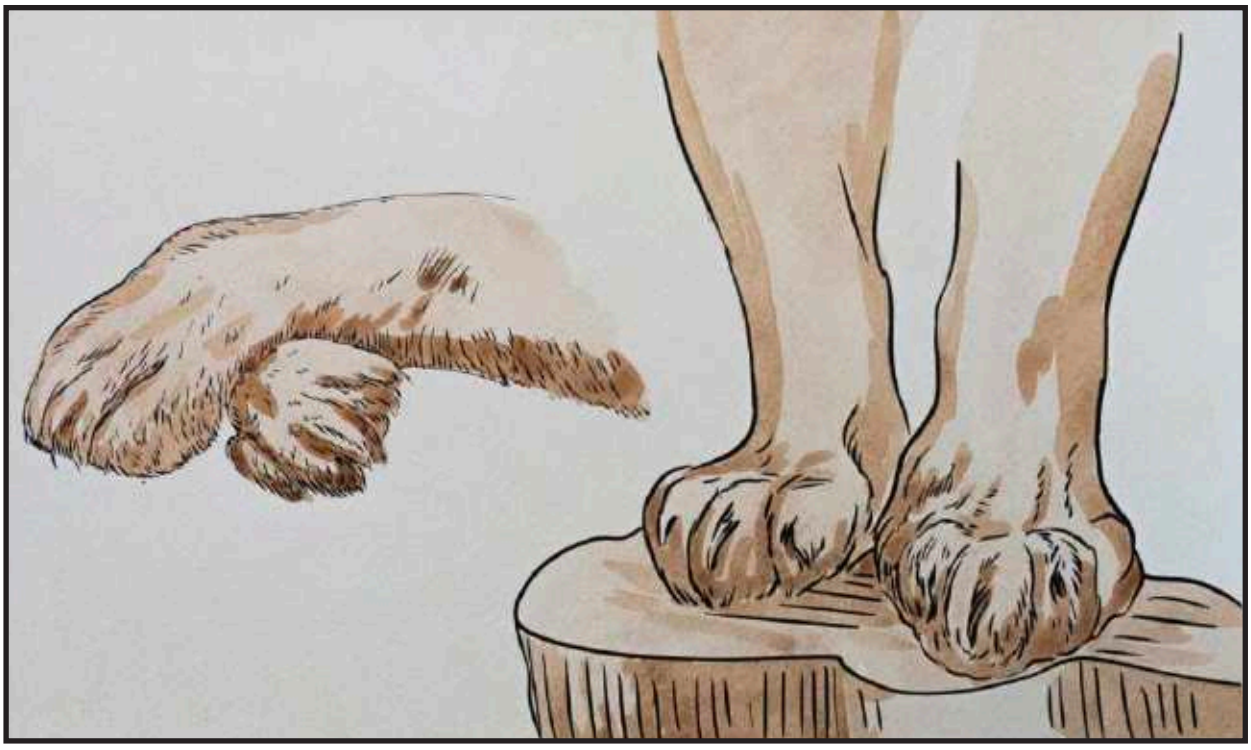

Lamassu statues are symbolic of the Assyrian civilization, particularly in the Ninawa area. They are seen as a spirit protecting the cities and buildings

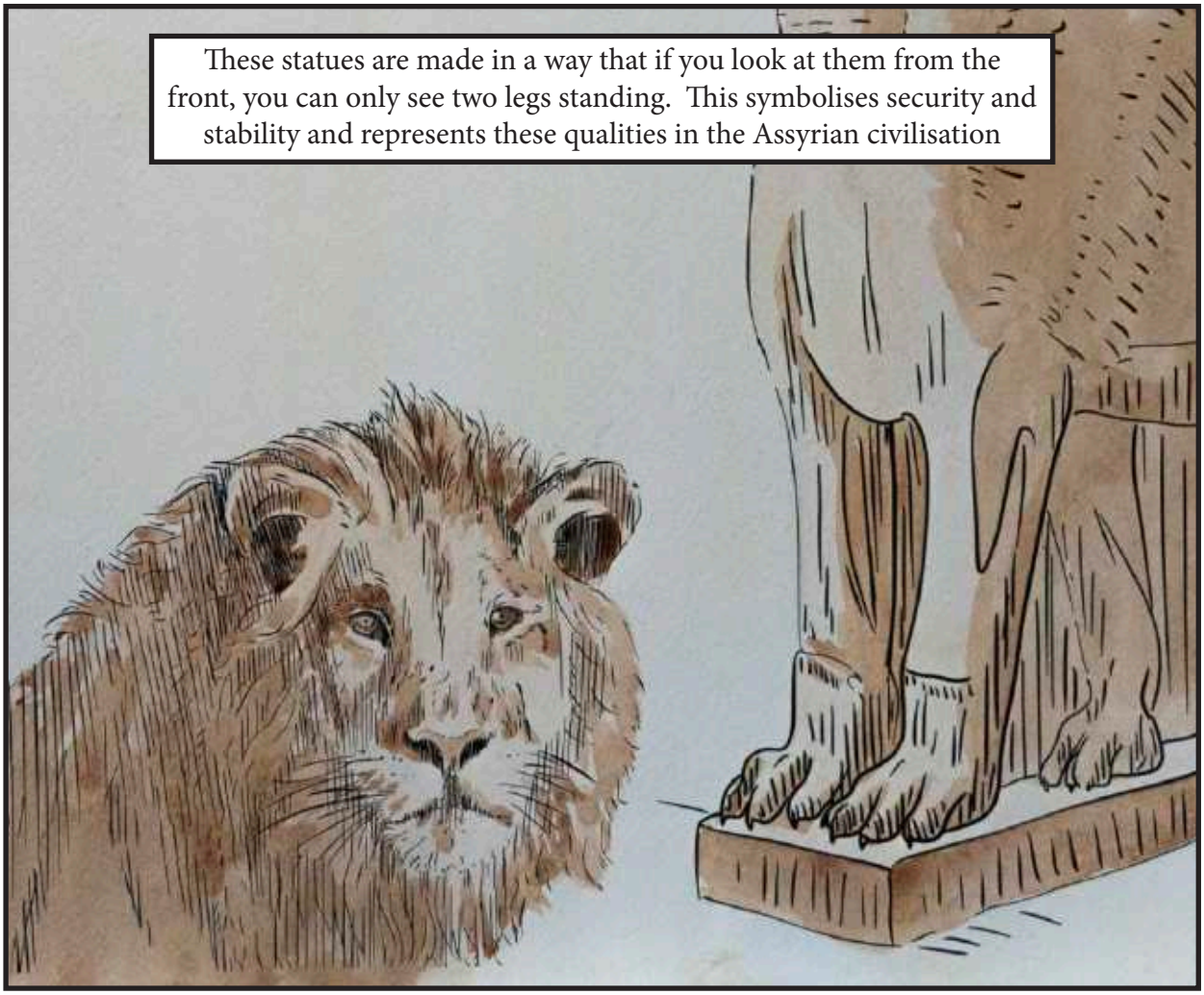

Lamassu is the symbol of power, wisdom, and courage in Assyrian civilisation. For this reason, different animal elements are used in them

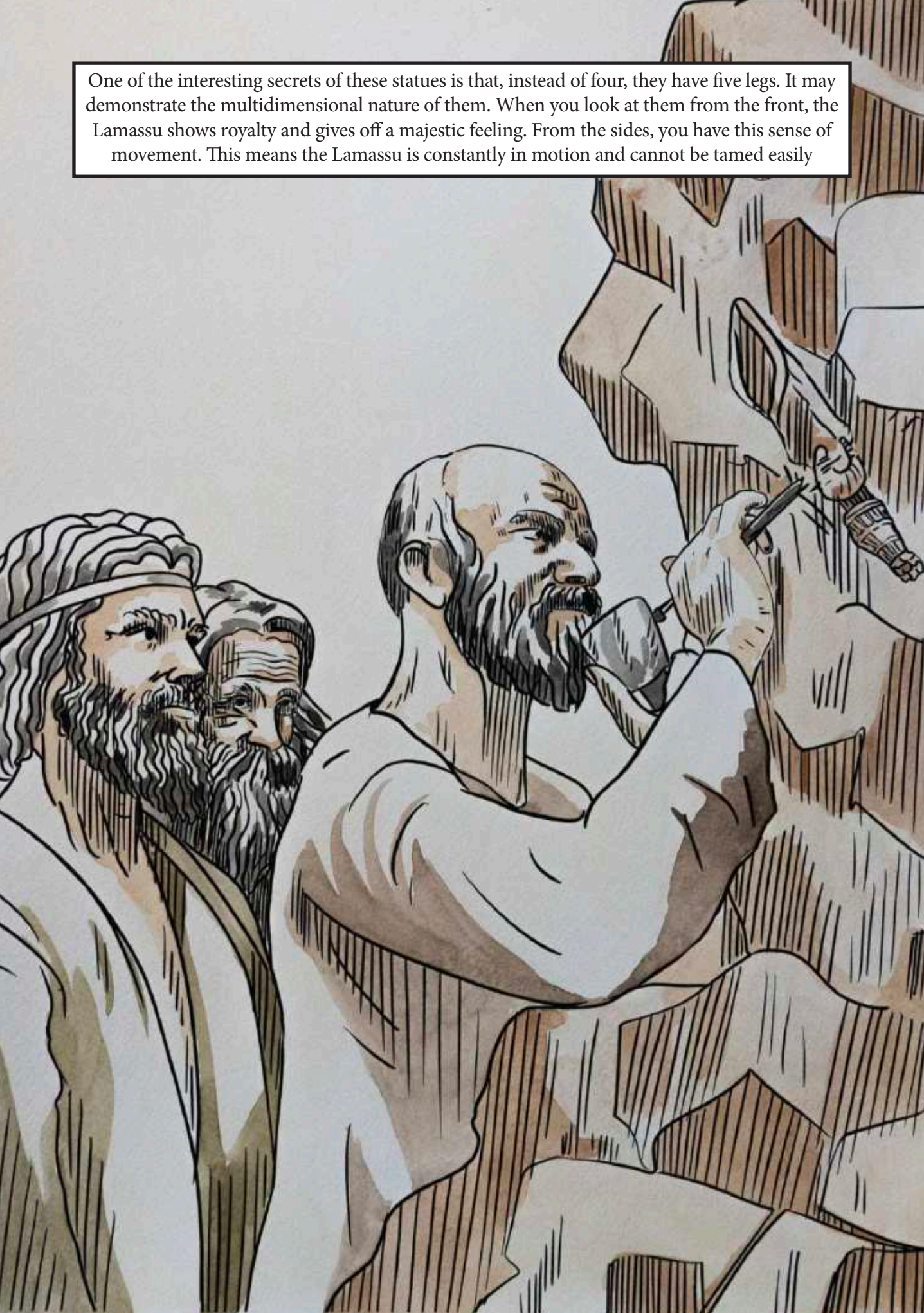


A bull refers to strength, an eagle refers to royalty and a human refers to wisdom. The metamorphosis of the three gives the Lamassu his power

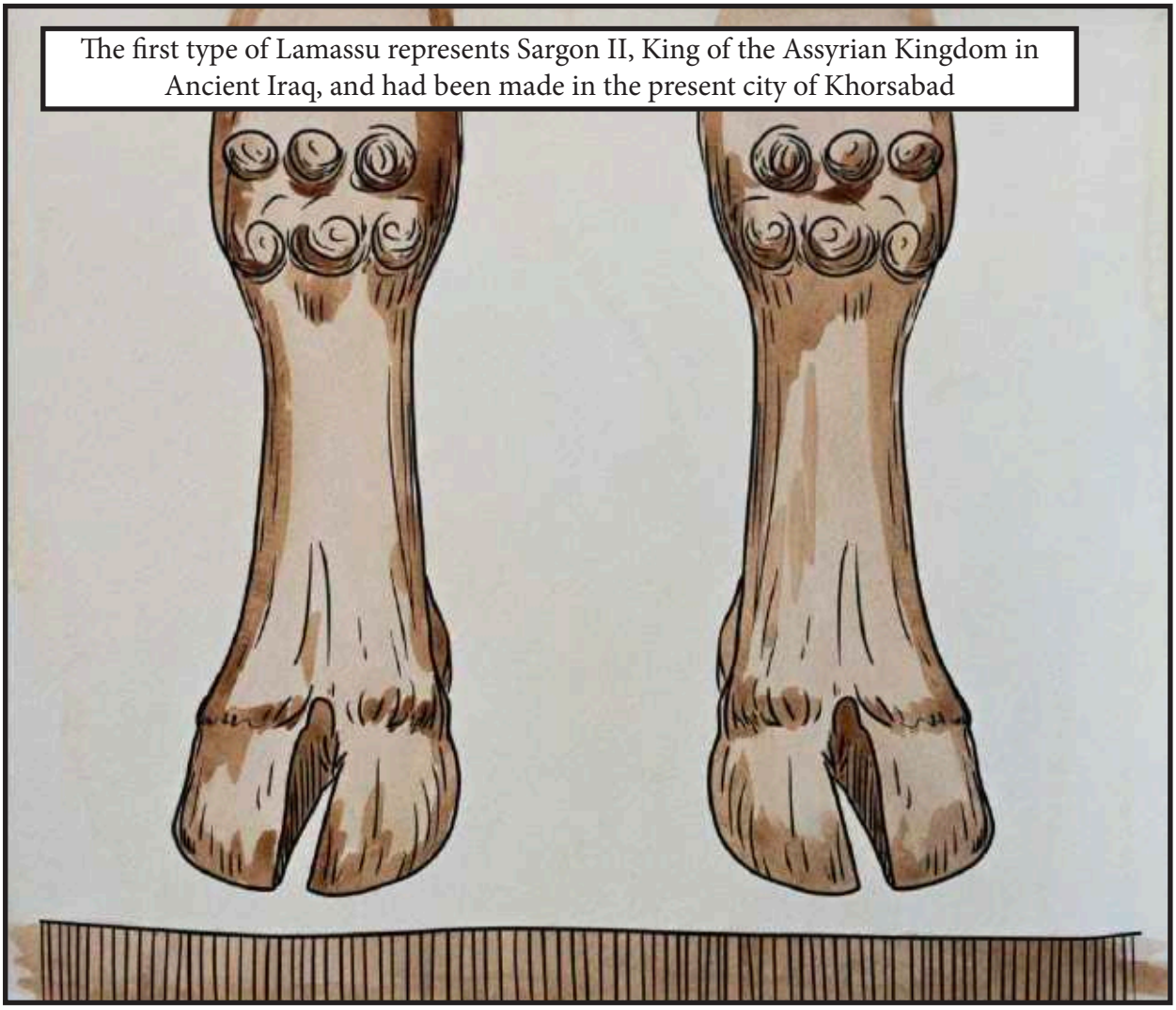


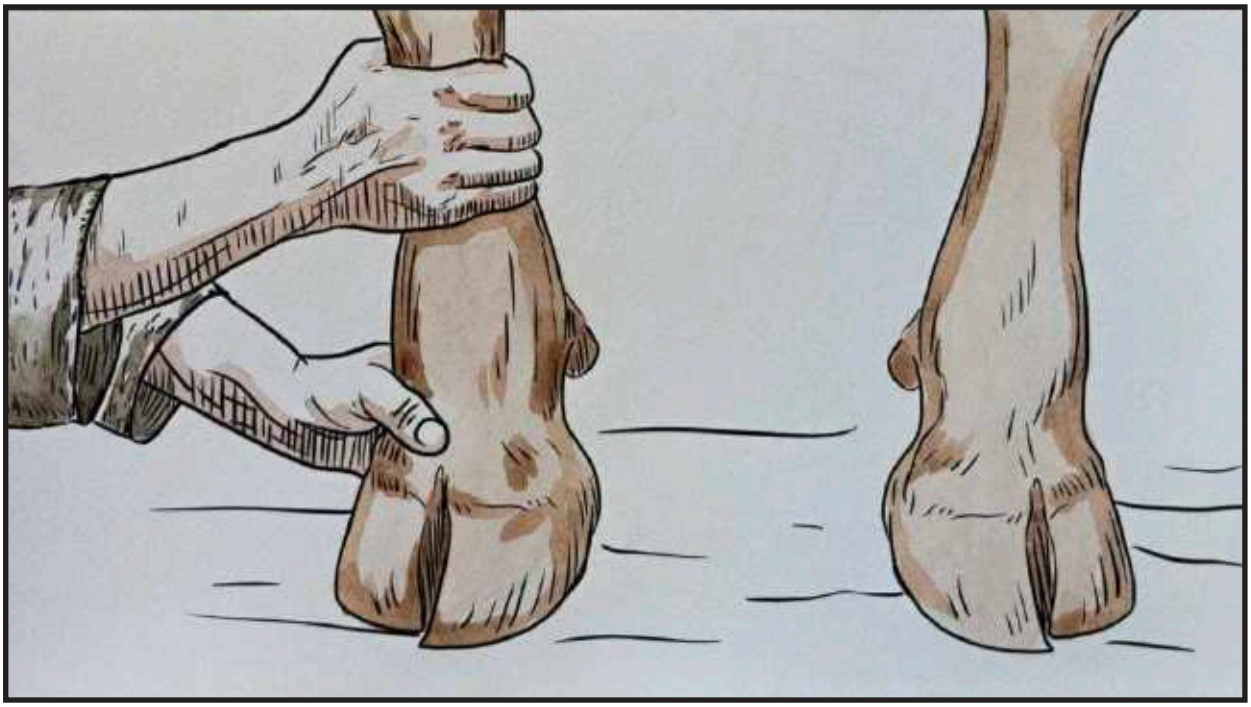



These statues are made in a way that if you look at them from the front, you can only see two legs standing. This symbolises security and stability and represents these qualities in the Assyrian civilisation

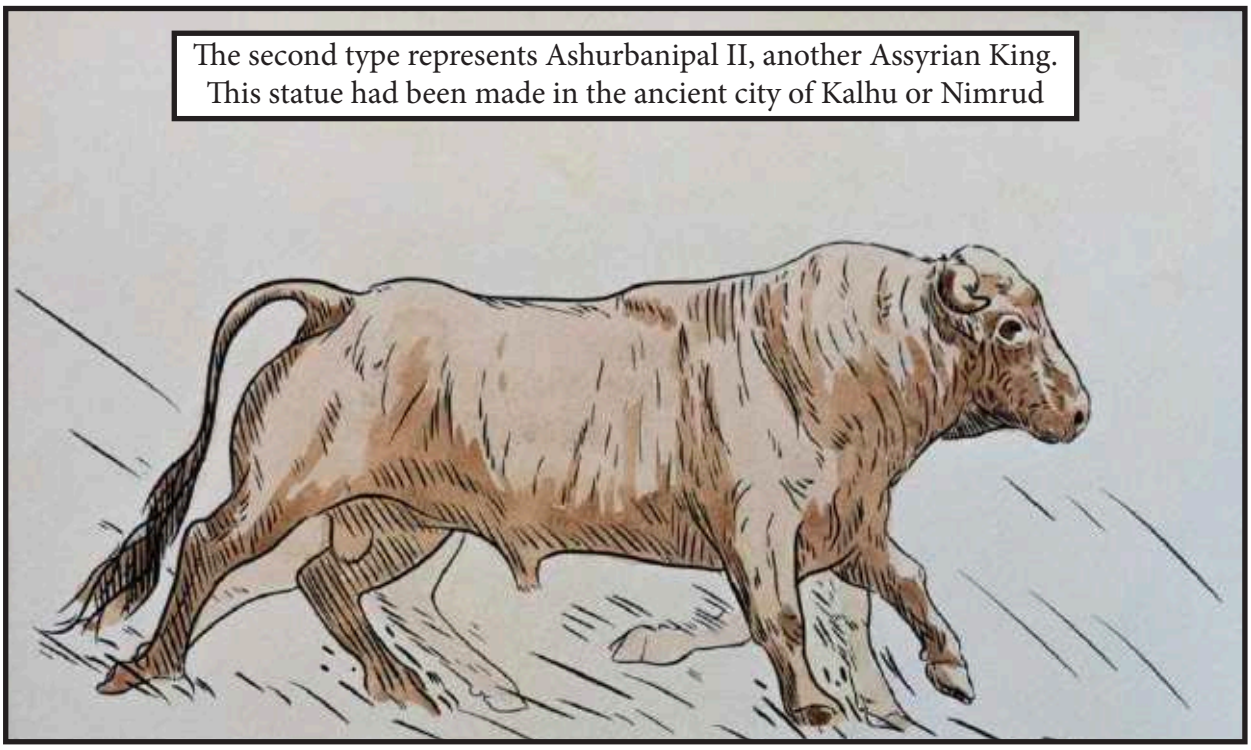

One of the interesting secrets of these statues is that, instead of four, they have five legs. It may demonstrate the multidimensional nature of them. When you look at them from the front, the Lamassu shows royalty and gives off a majestic feeling. From the sides, you have this sense of movement. This means the Lamassu is constantly in motion and cannot be tamed easily

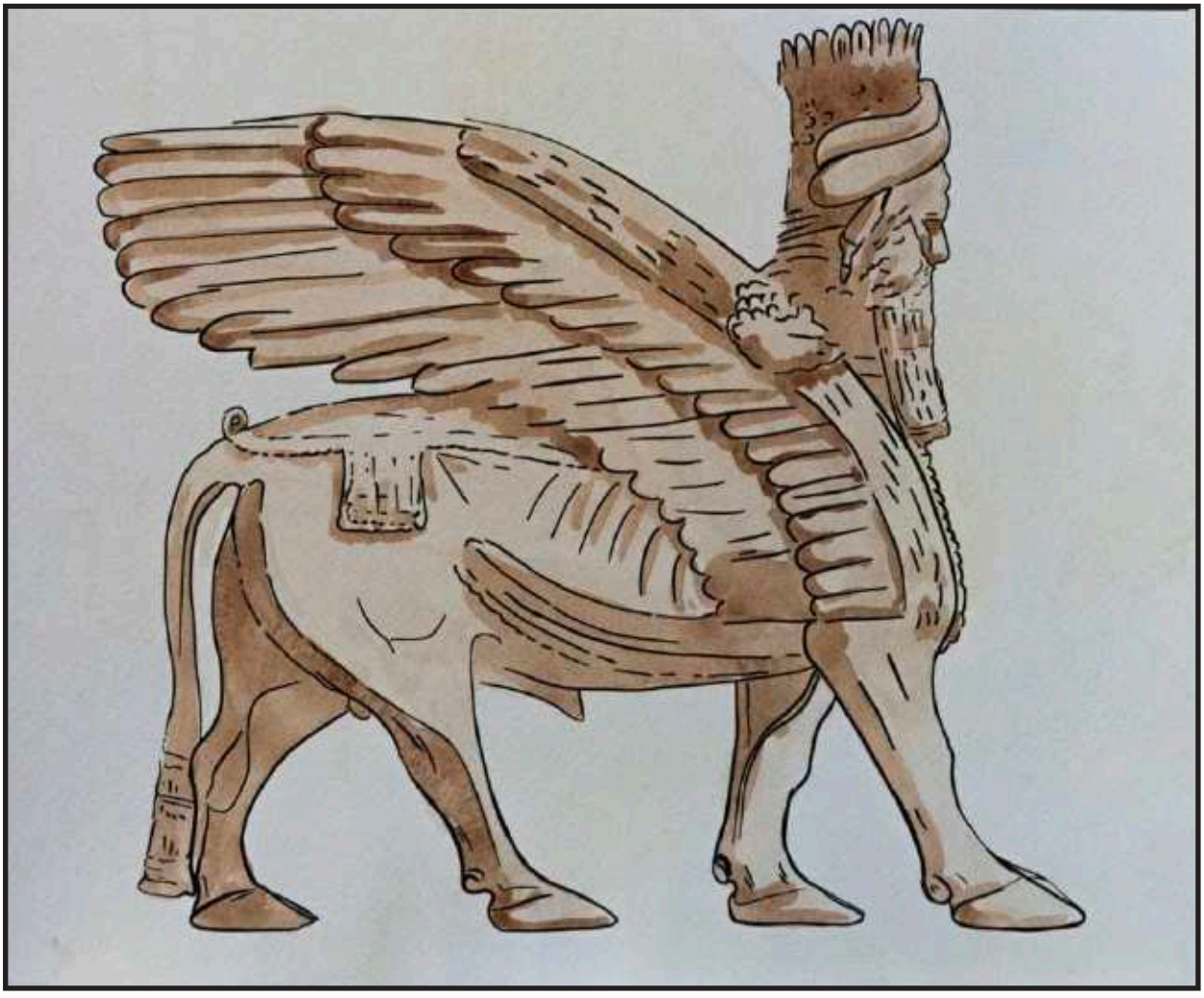
The first type of Lamassu represents Sargon II, King of the Assyrian Kingdom in Ancient Iraq, and had been made in the present city of Khorsabad

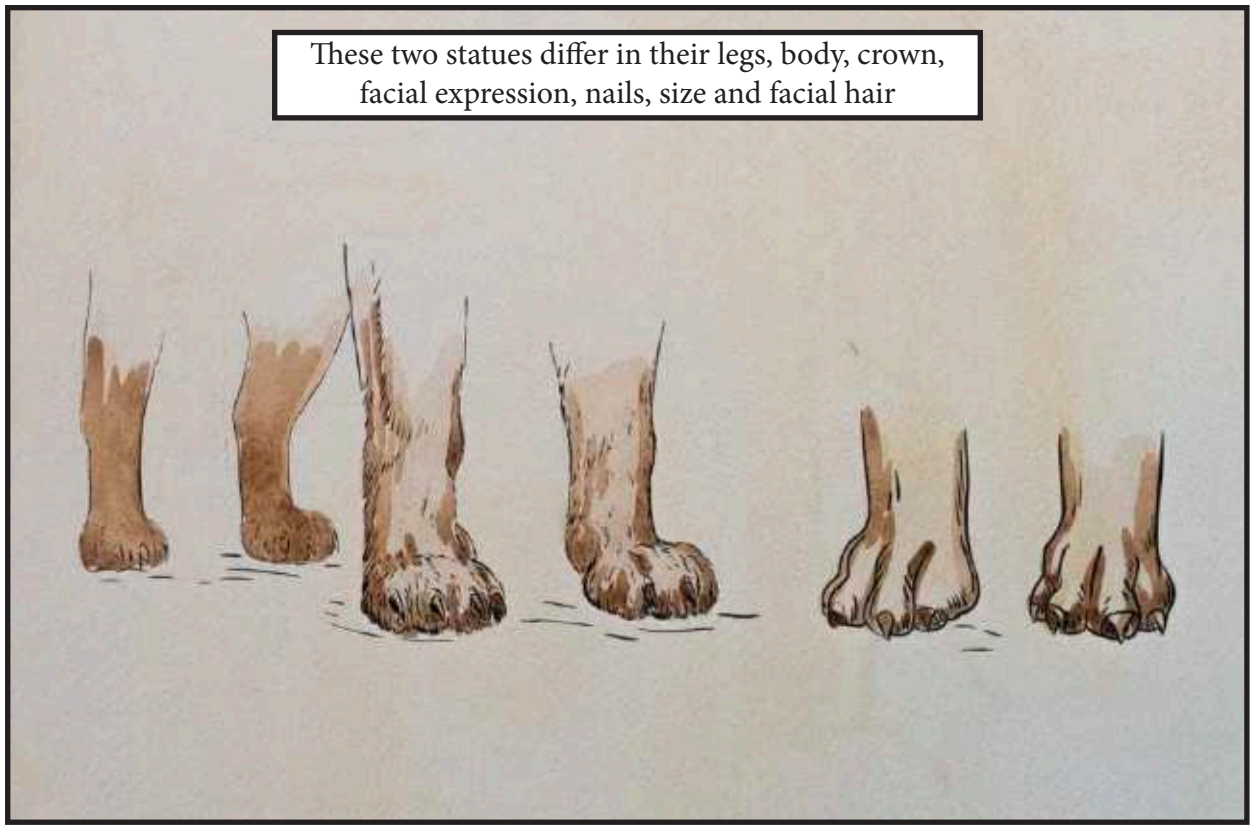


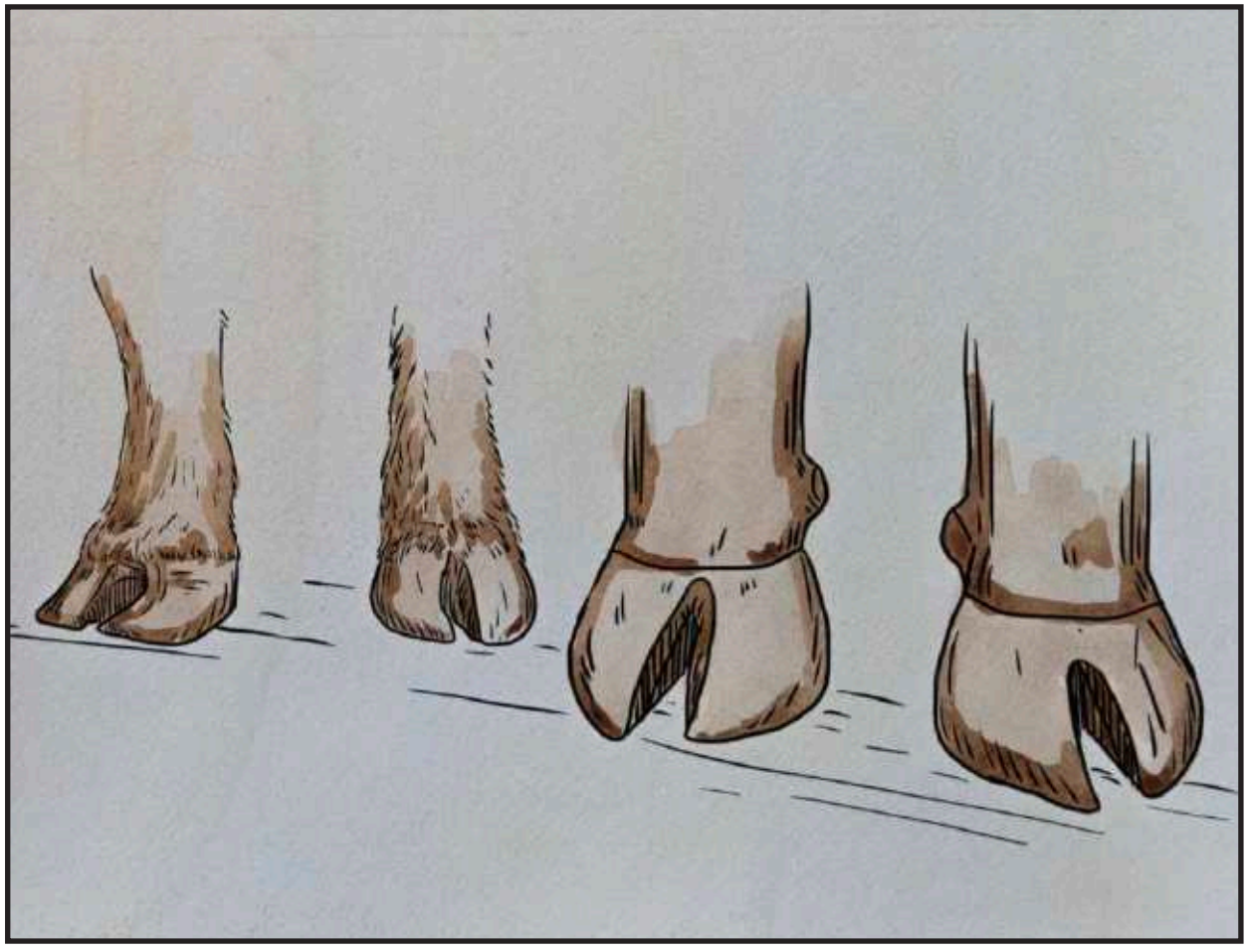


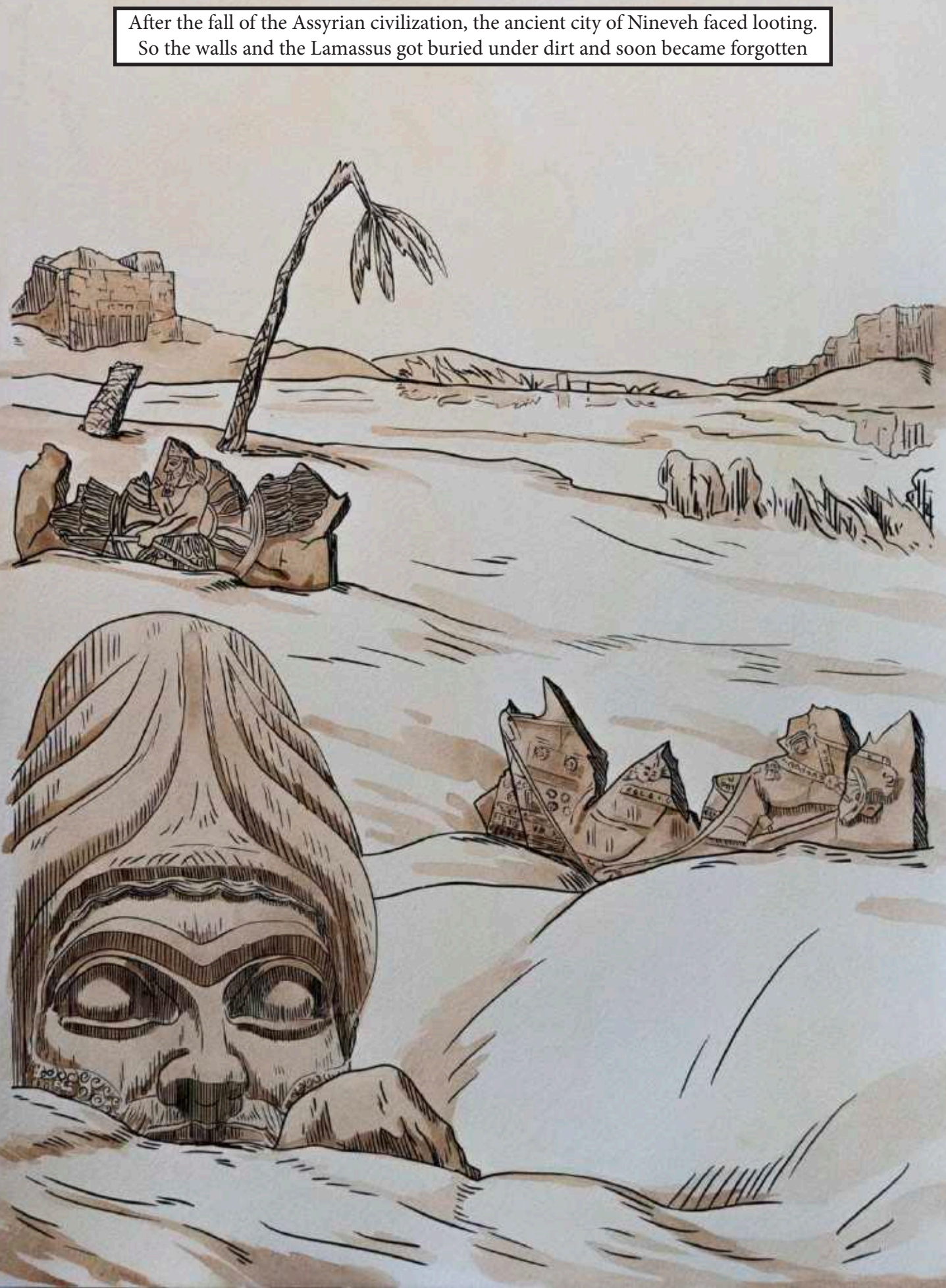
The second type represents Ashurbanipal II, another Assyrian King. This statue had been made in the ancient city of Kalhu or Nimrud

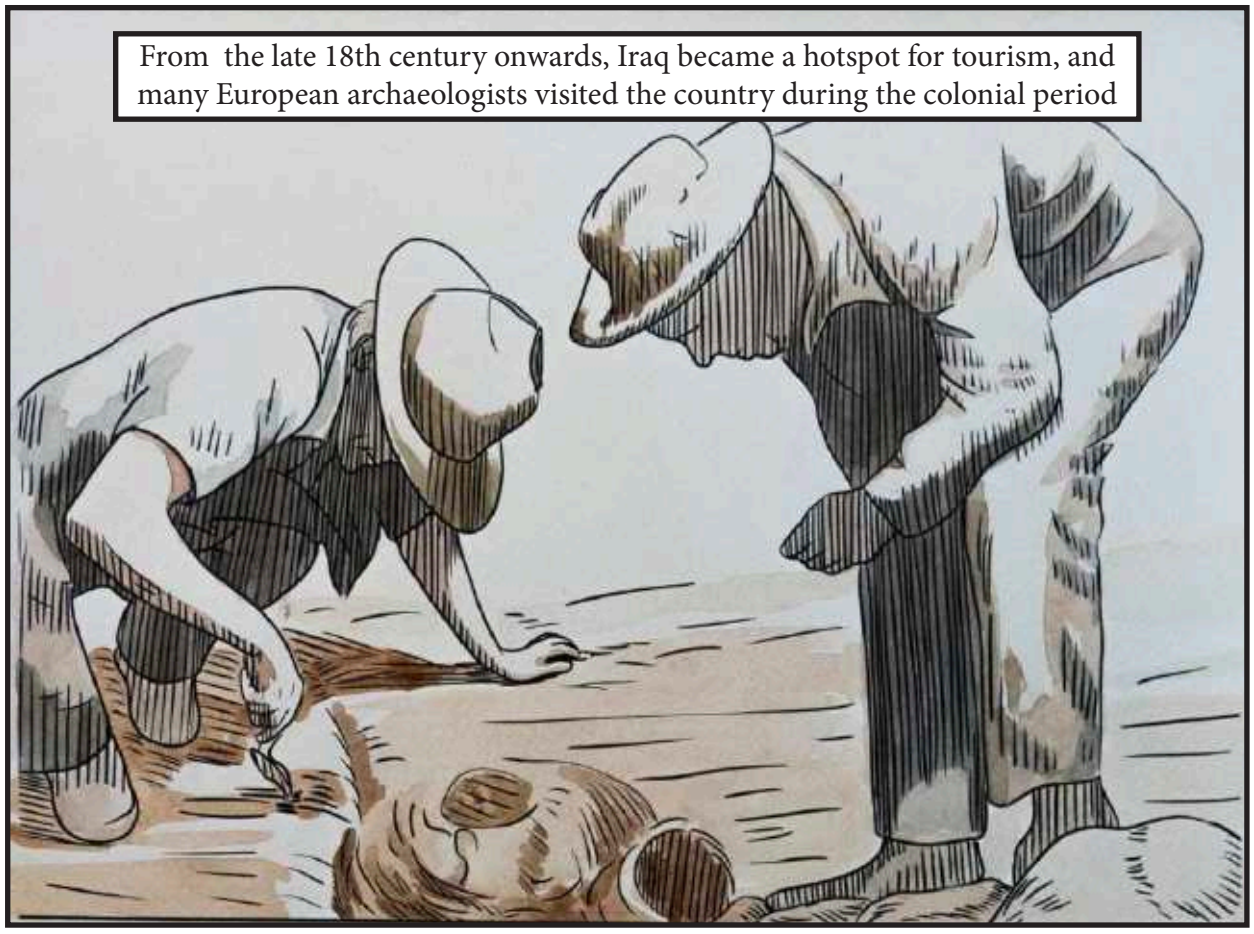


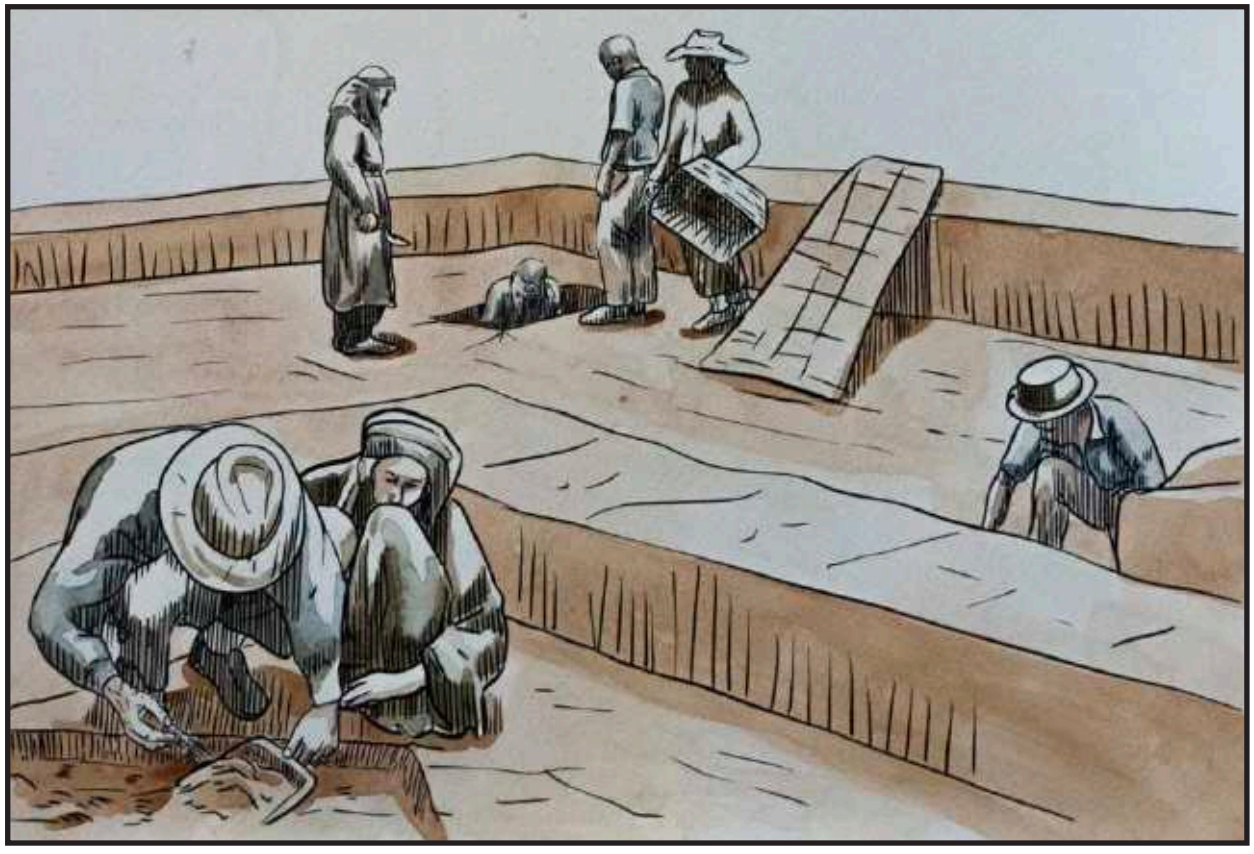



These two statues differ in their legs, body, crown, facial expression, nails, size and facial hair

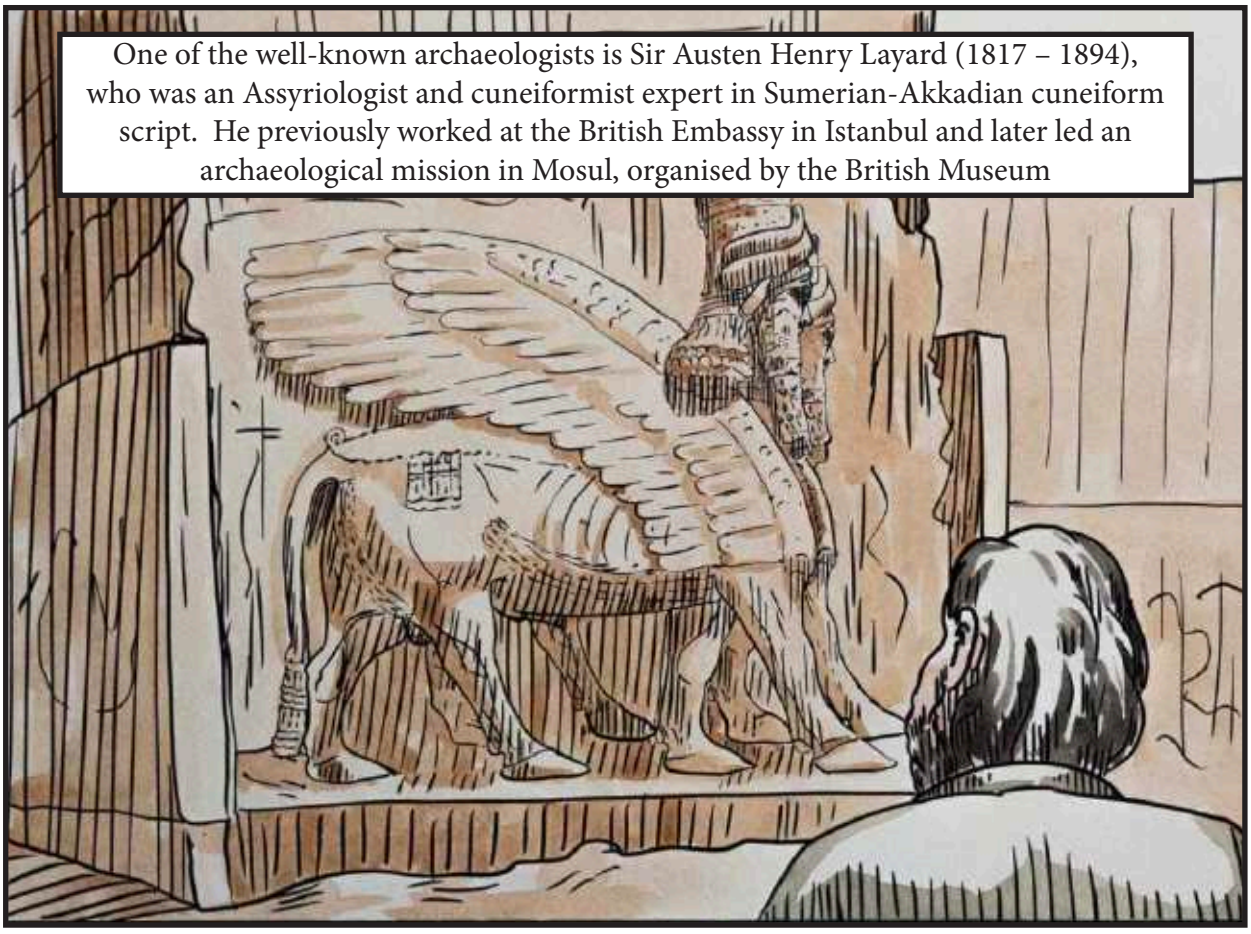



After the fall of the Assyrian civilization, the ancient city of Nineveh faced looting.
So the walls and the Lamassus got buried under dirt and soon became forgotten


From the late 18th century onwards, Iraq became a hotspot for tourism, and many European archaeologists visited the country during the colonial period

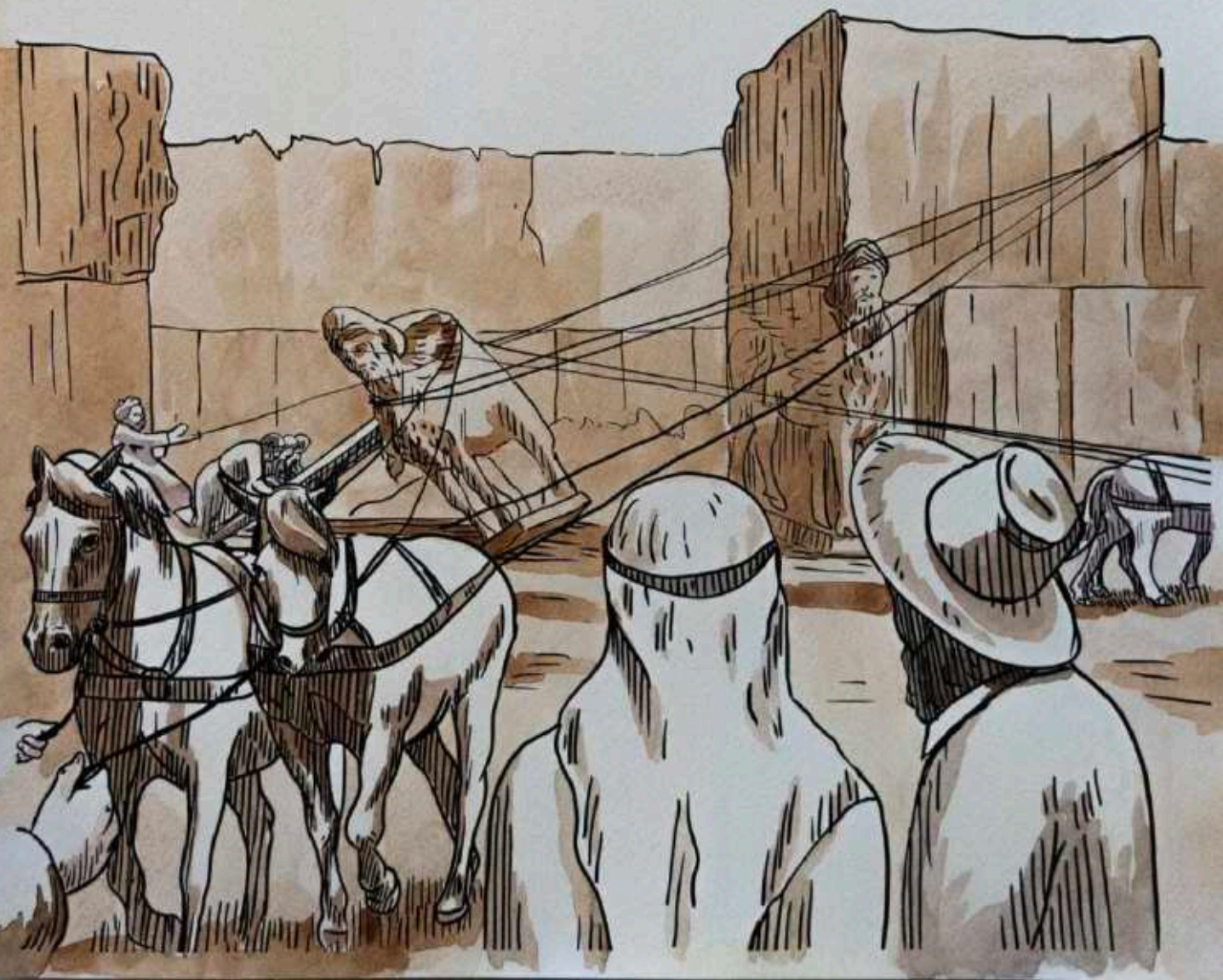



These archaeologists, as public employees, military officers, or even as traders, had been supported by universities, institutions, and museums to research and buy these historical sites to transport them to European museums
Van
ASSYRIA
Nineveh


One of the well-known archaeologists is Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817 – 1894), who was an Assyriologist and cuneiformist expert in Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform script. He previously worked at the British Embassy in Istanbul and later led an archaeological mission in Mosul, organised by the British Museum

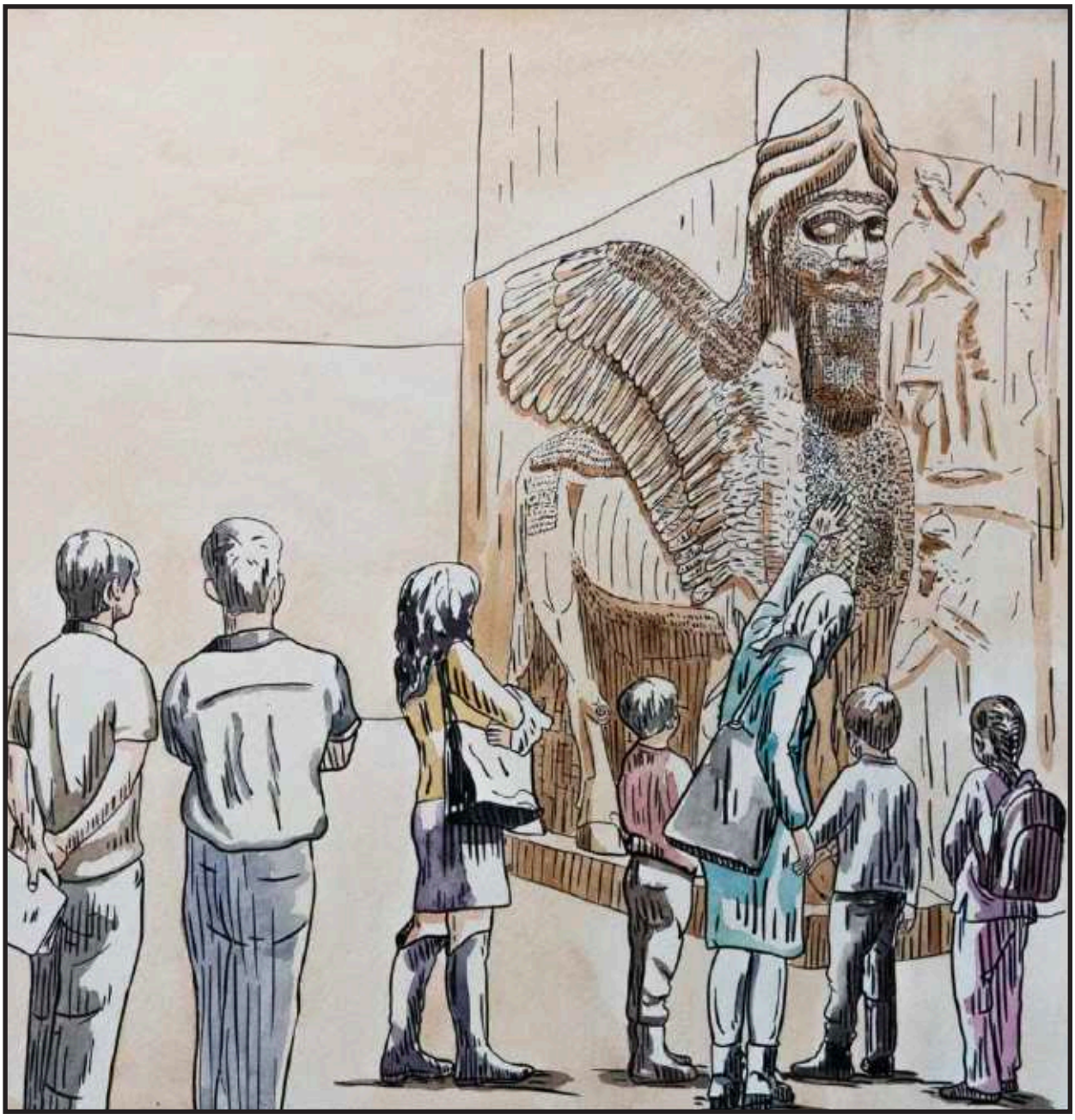


The first winged bull statue was discovered in 1886, followed by several others in Iraqi cities such as Nineveh, Sennacherib and other



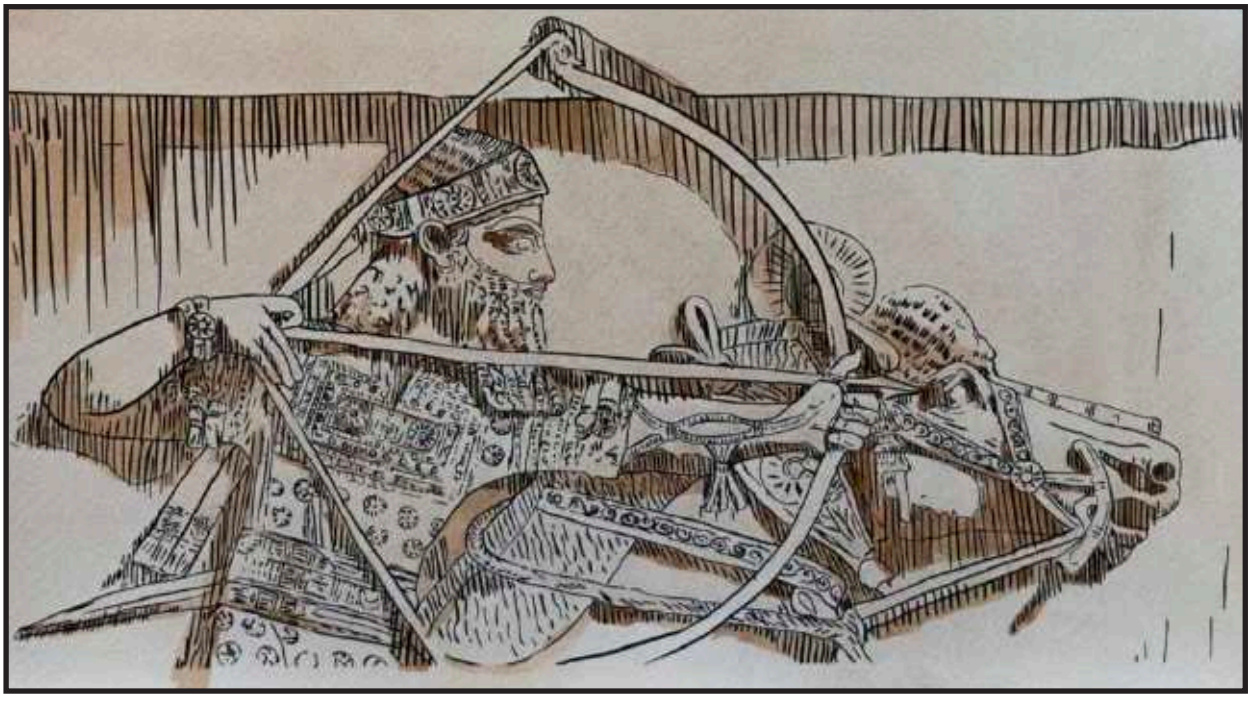


Layard transported the Lamassus that were found in Ninawa and other cities to London, where you can see some of them in the British Museum. Others are displayed in museums in Paris, New York and Chicago. Some are also housed in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad

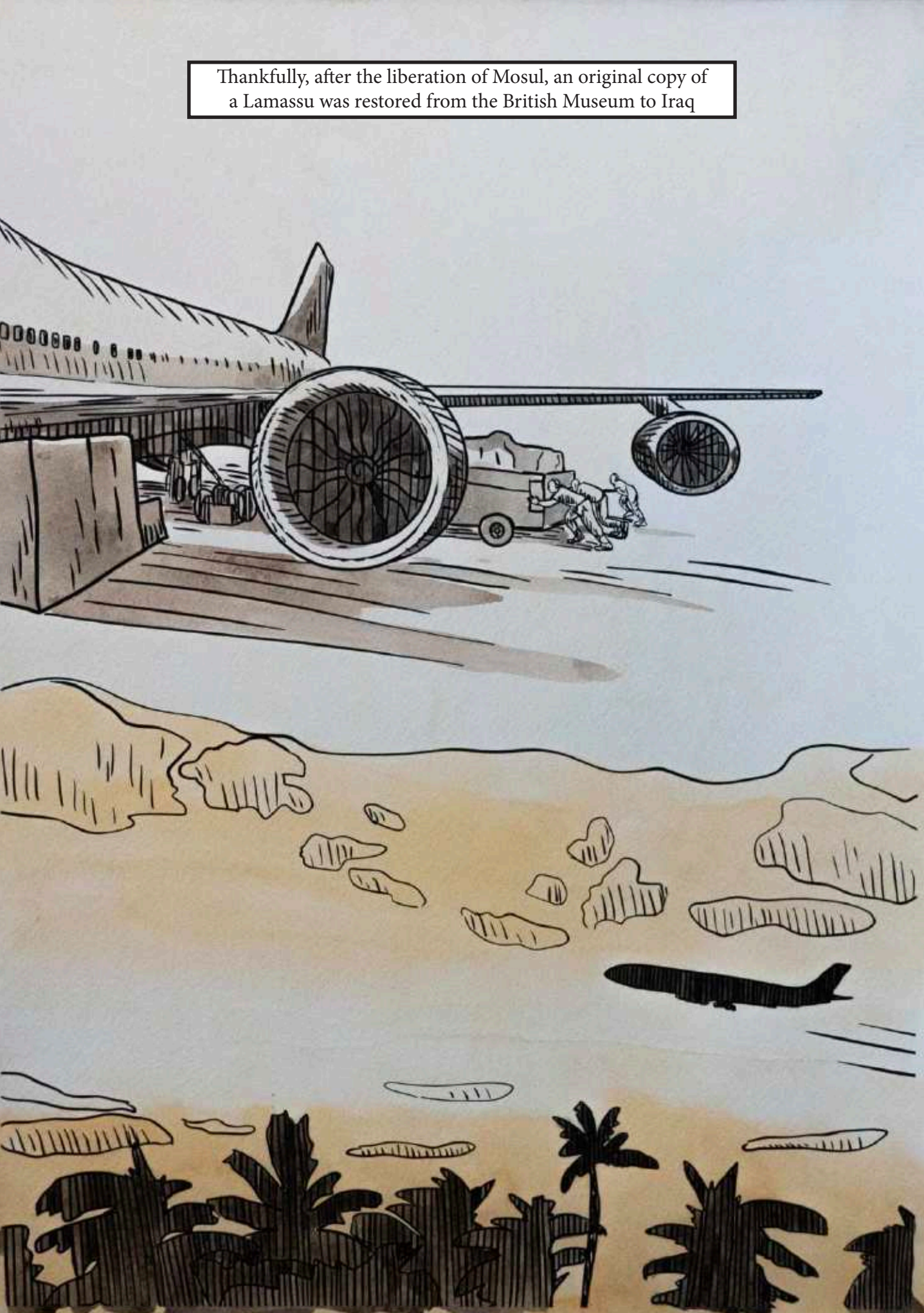








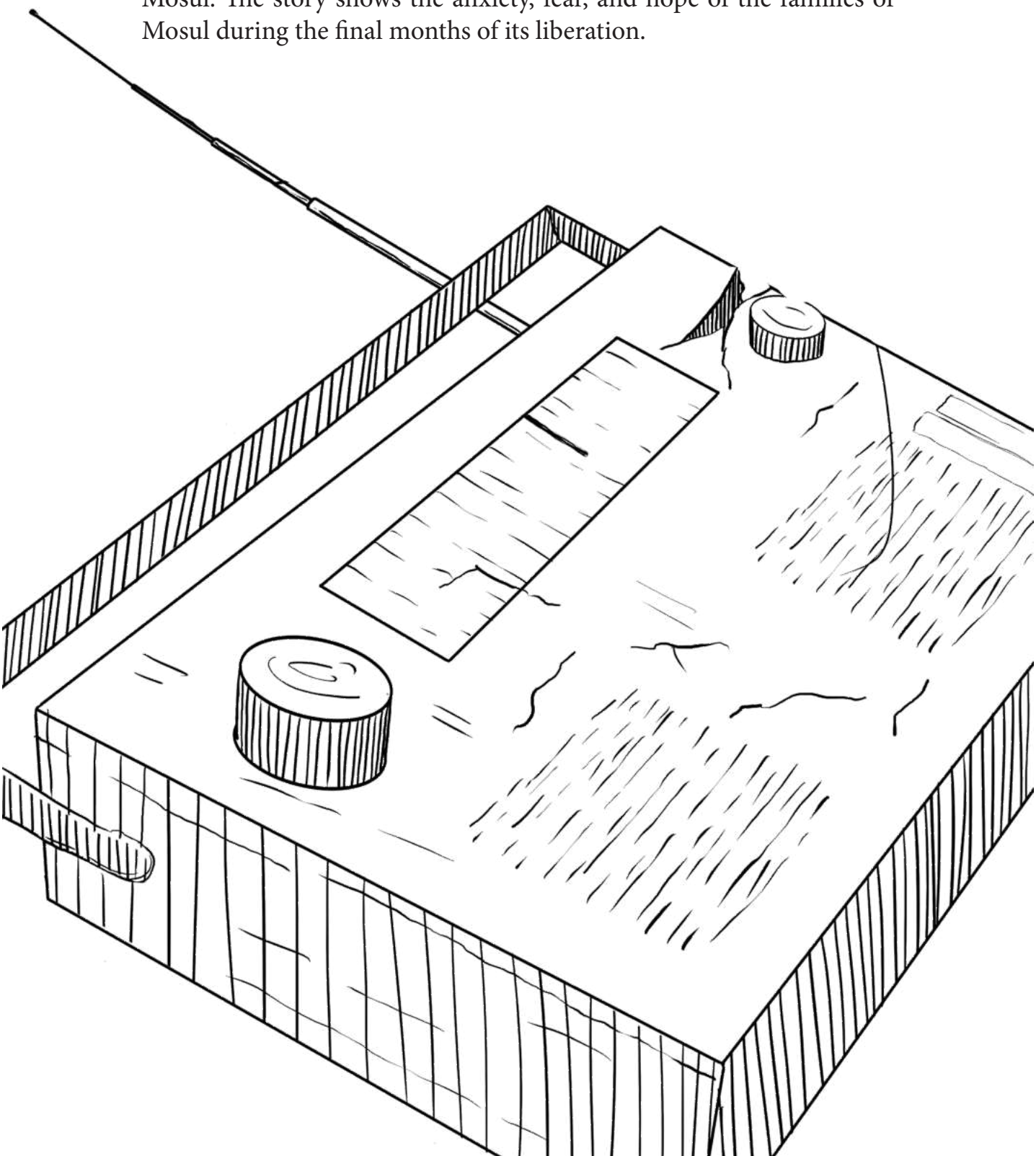

In 2014, Mosul was occupied by ISIS and these historical sites in Ninawa faced significant harm, including the Lamassu statues
لا إله إلا الله
الله
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محمد


Thankfully, after the liberation of Mosul, an original copy of a Lamassu was restored from the British Museum to Iraq

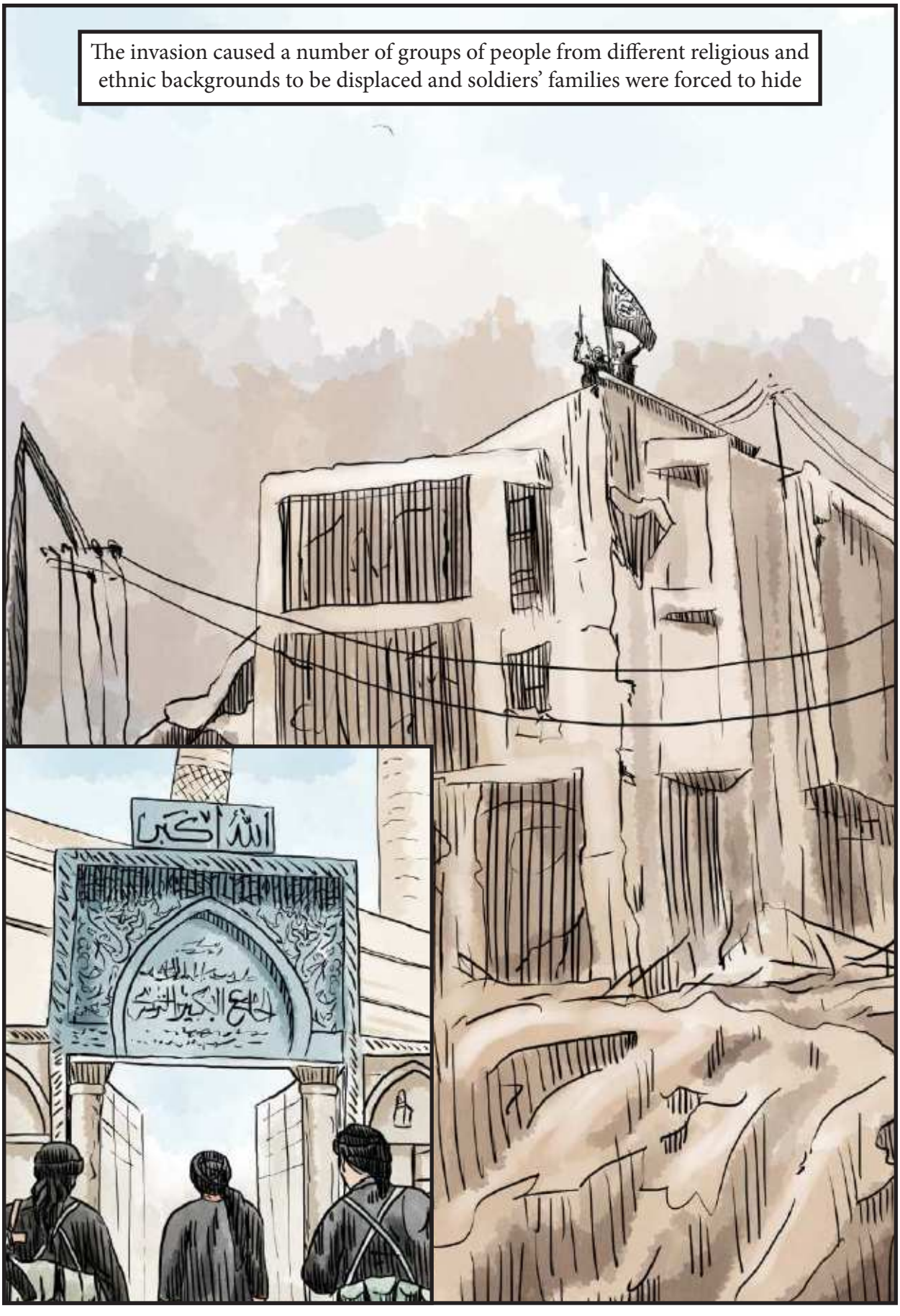


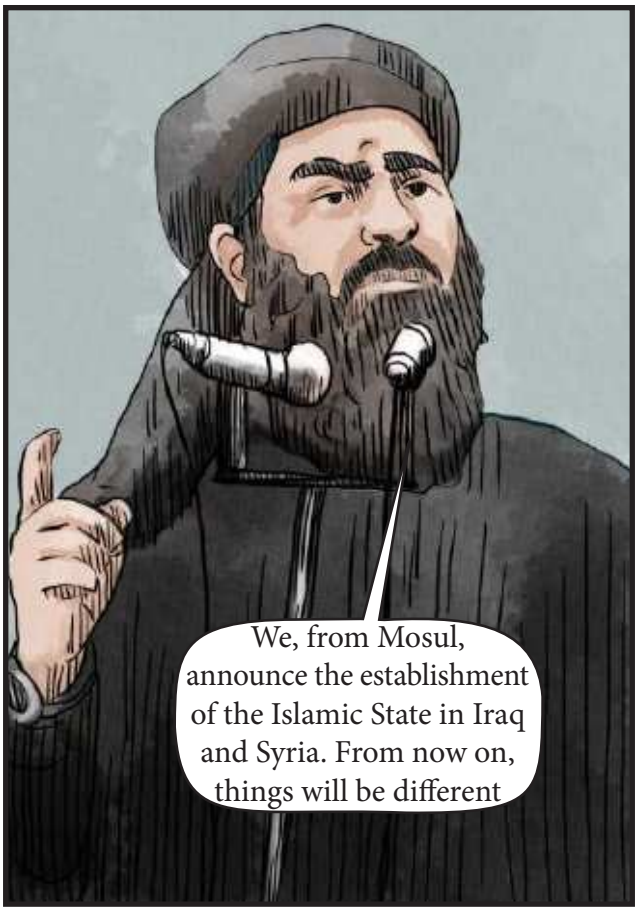
Last Day

When the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) invaded Mosul, and many families left the city, some people stayed and hid in shelters, not coming out for some time. This story narrates a hundred days in the life of a family that hid and protected themselves during the Battle of Mosul. The story shows the anxiety, fear, and hope of the families of Mosul during the final months of its liberation.




In 2014, ISIS invaded the city of Mosul

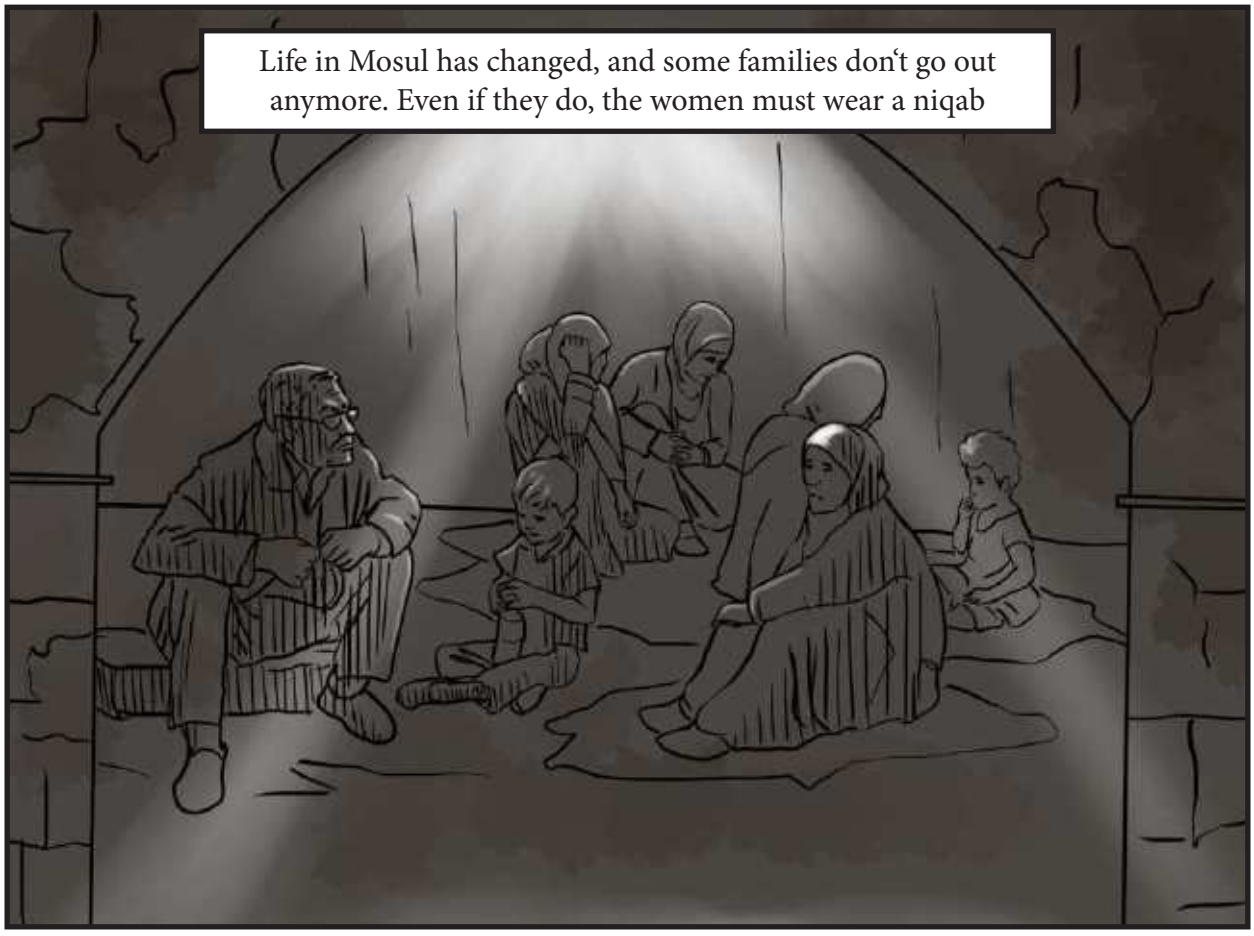

The invasion caused a number of groups of people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to be displaced and soldiers' families were forced to hide
الله أكبر


We, from Mosul, announce the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. From now on, things will be different





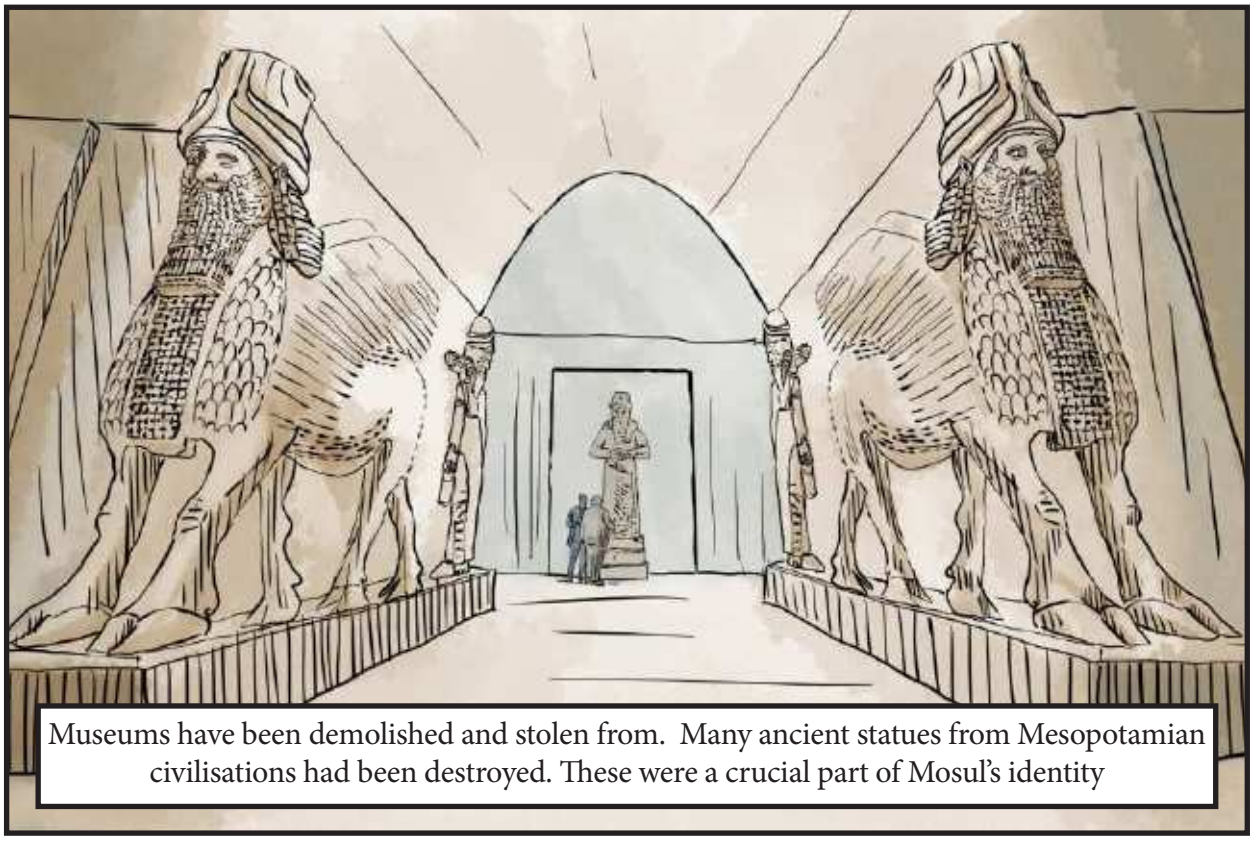



Life in Mosul has changed, and some families don't go out anymore. Even if they do, the women must wear a niqab



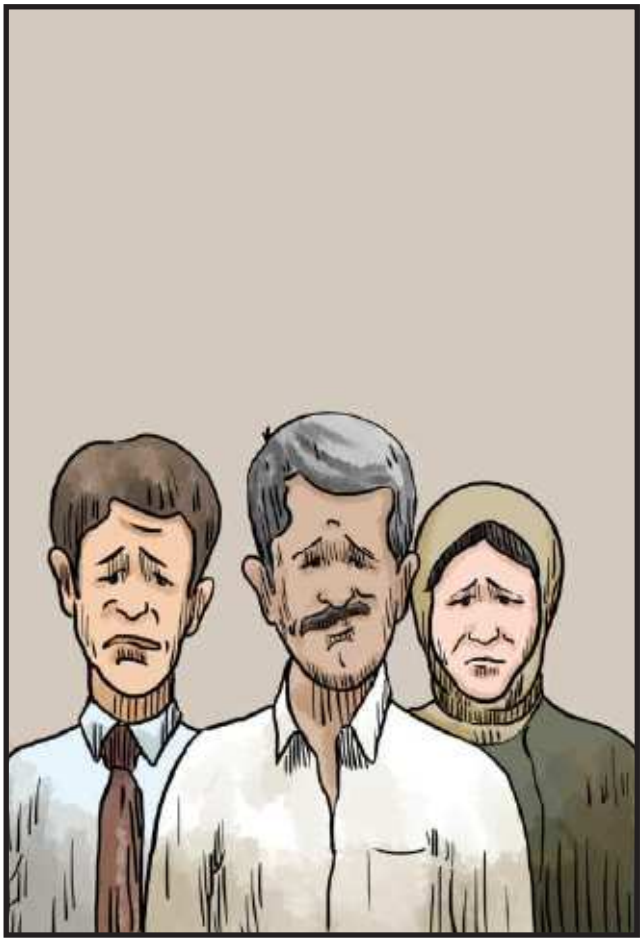

This should be destroyed because it's against our Caliphate


Many temples and historical sites have been wrecked



Museums have been demolished and stolen from. Many ancient statues from Mesopotamian civilisations had been destroyed. These were a crucial part of Mosul's identity










Families were burying their dead corpses right next to where they lived







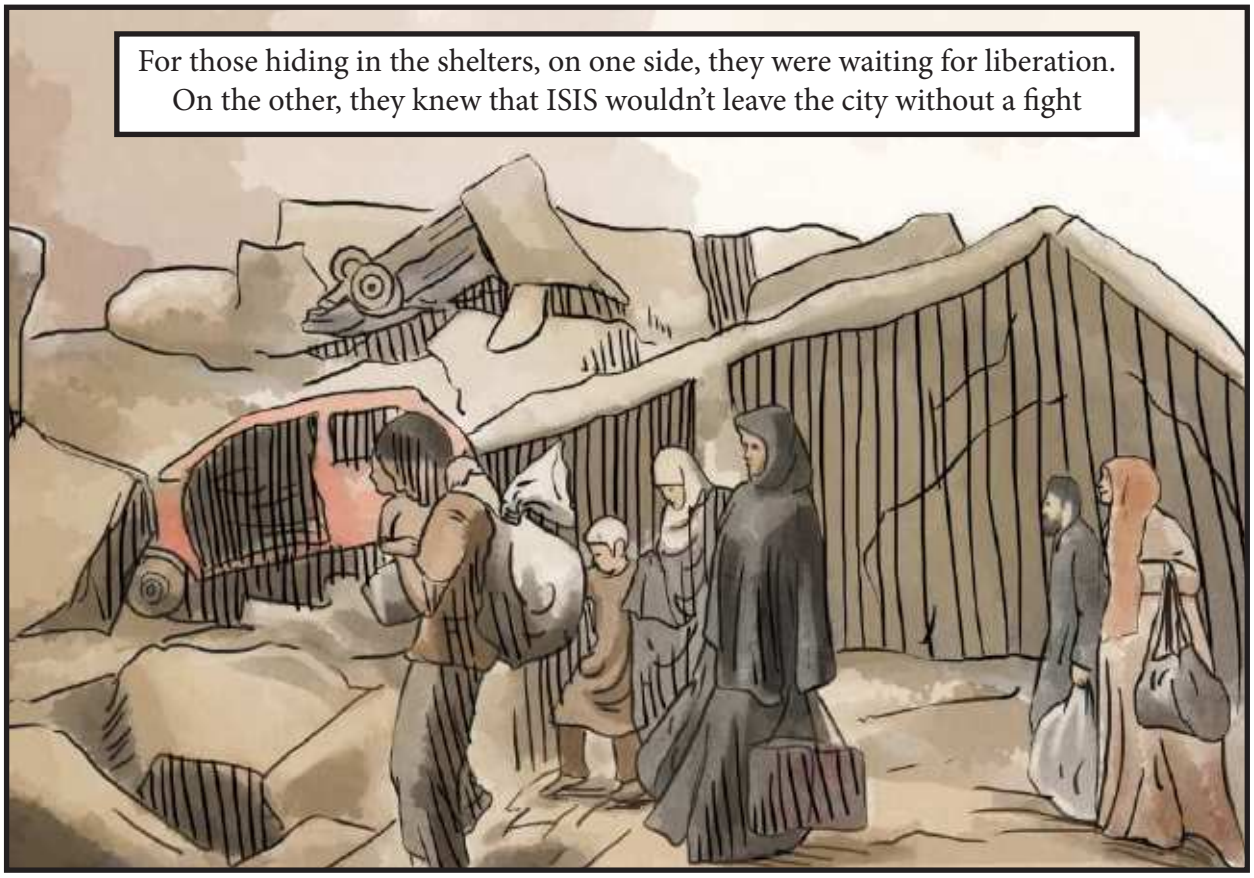

After three years, Mosul was liberated. These families hid for 100 days in the shelters, waiting for liberation. But no one knew when










For those hiding in the shelters, on one side, they were waiting for liberation.
On the other, they knew that ISIS wouldn't leave the city without a fight










The families weren't in contact with each other. The only way they heard the news of the liberation was through a radio





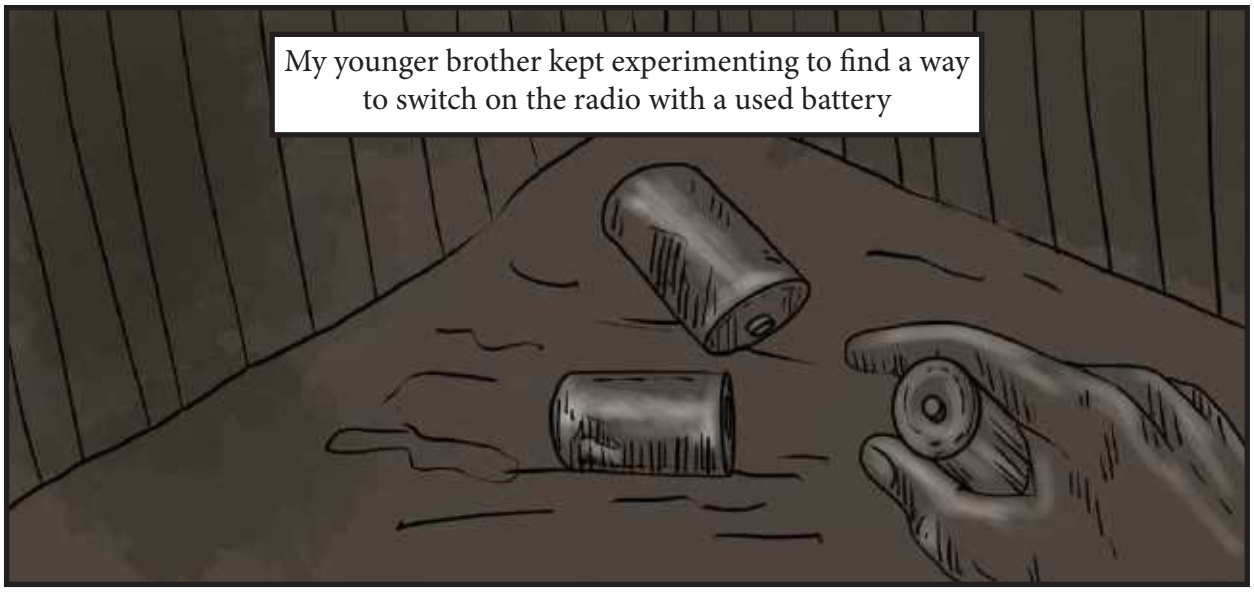









The radio battery died eventually, and we didn't have any others


My younger brother kept experimenting to find a way to switch on the radio with a used battery



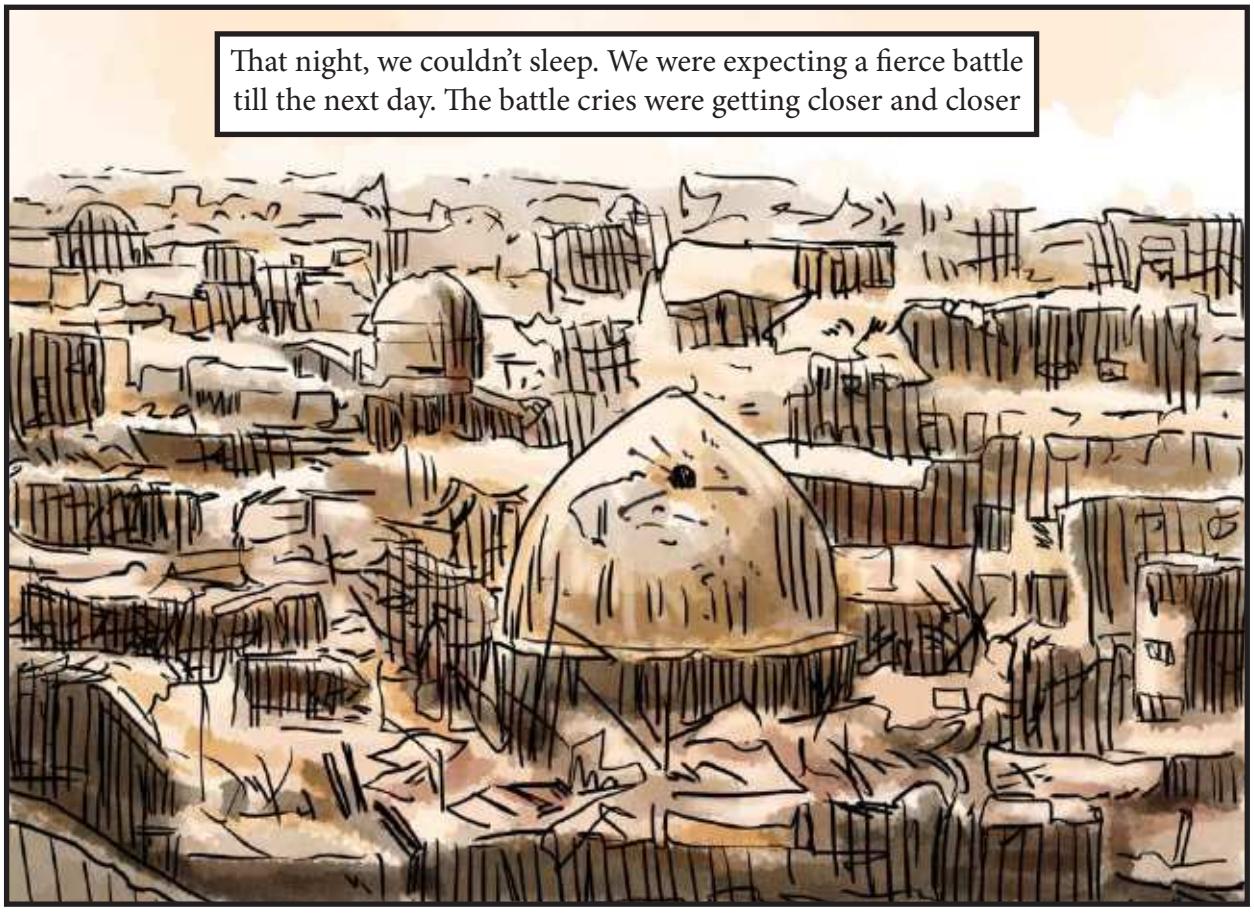



Our happiest moment was the day we fixed it. Without this, we wouldn't have been able to find out what was going on outside

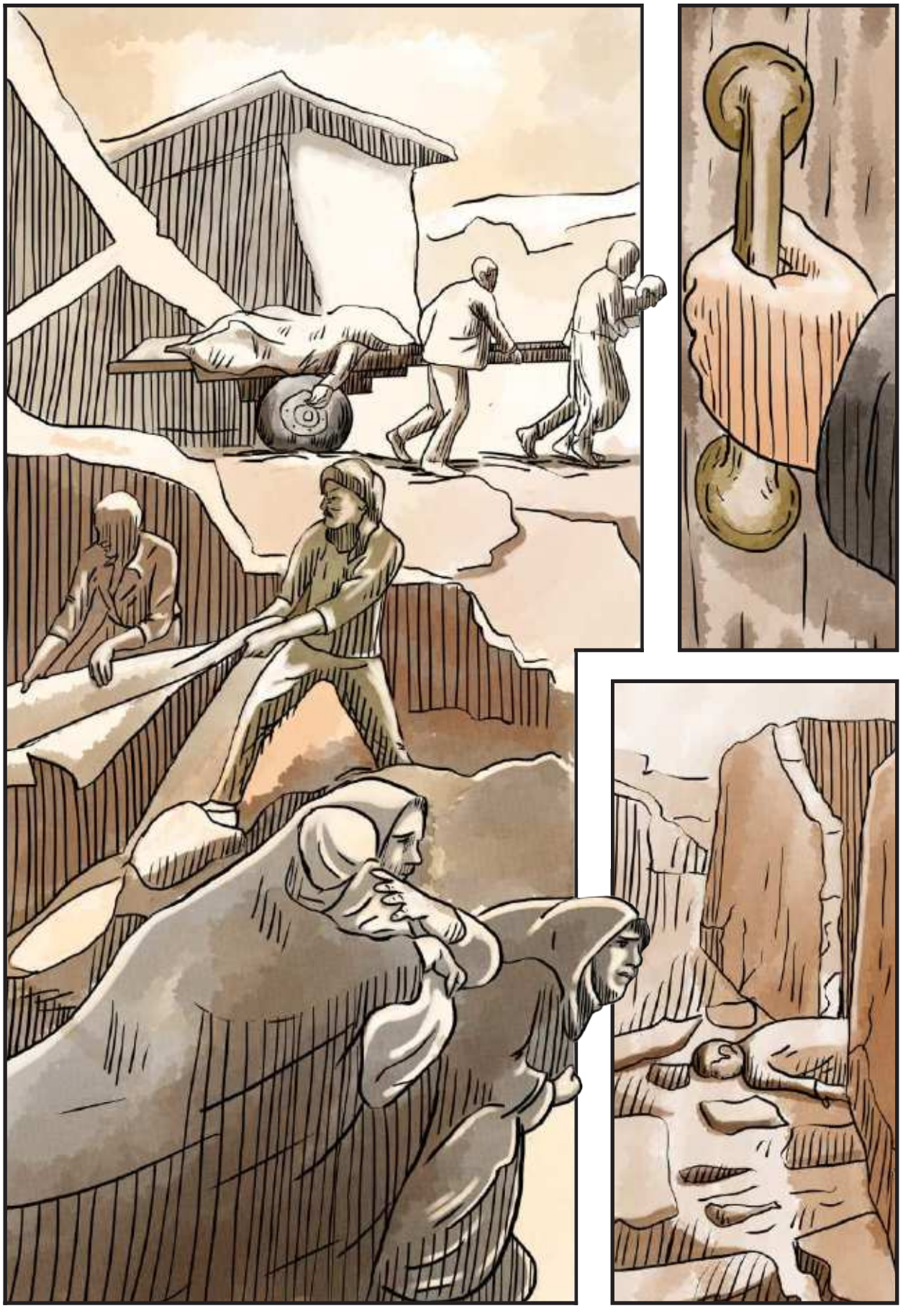



Liberation of the city is close! Hang in there and stay sheltered




That night, we couldn't sleep. We were expecting a fierce battle till the next day. The battle cries were getting closer and closer






We still heard the gunshots the following morning.
Full of fear, we looked outside our windows



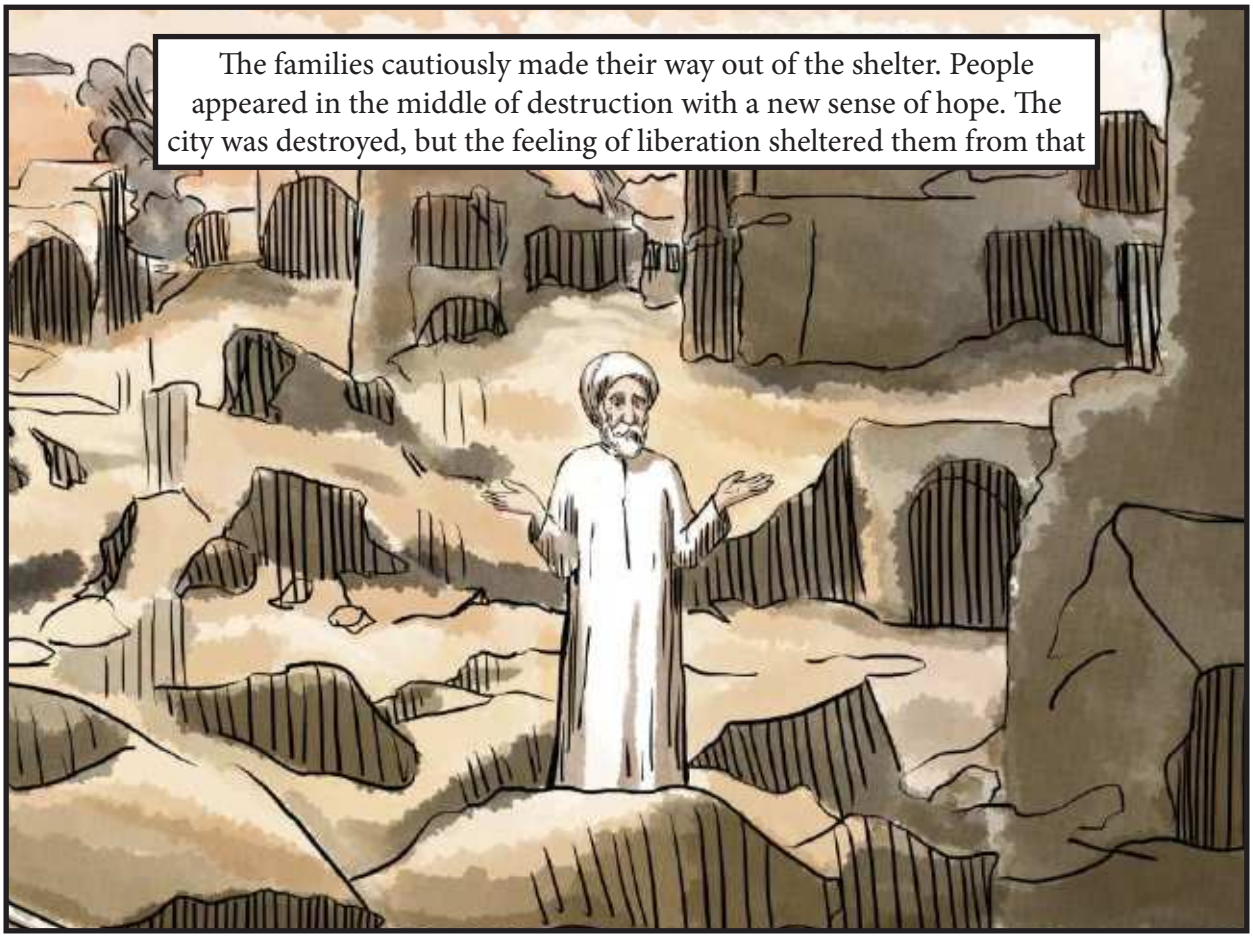

The families looked outside their windows and came out worried

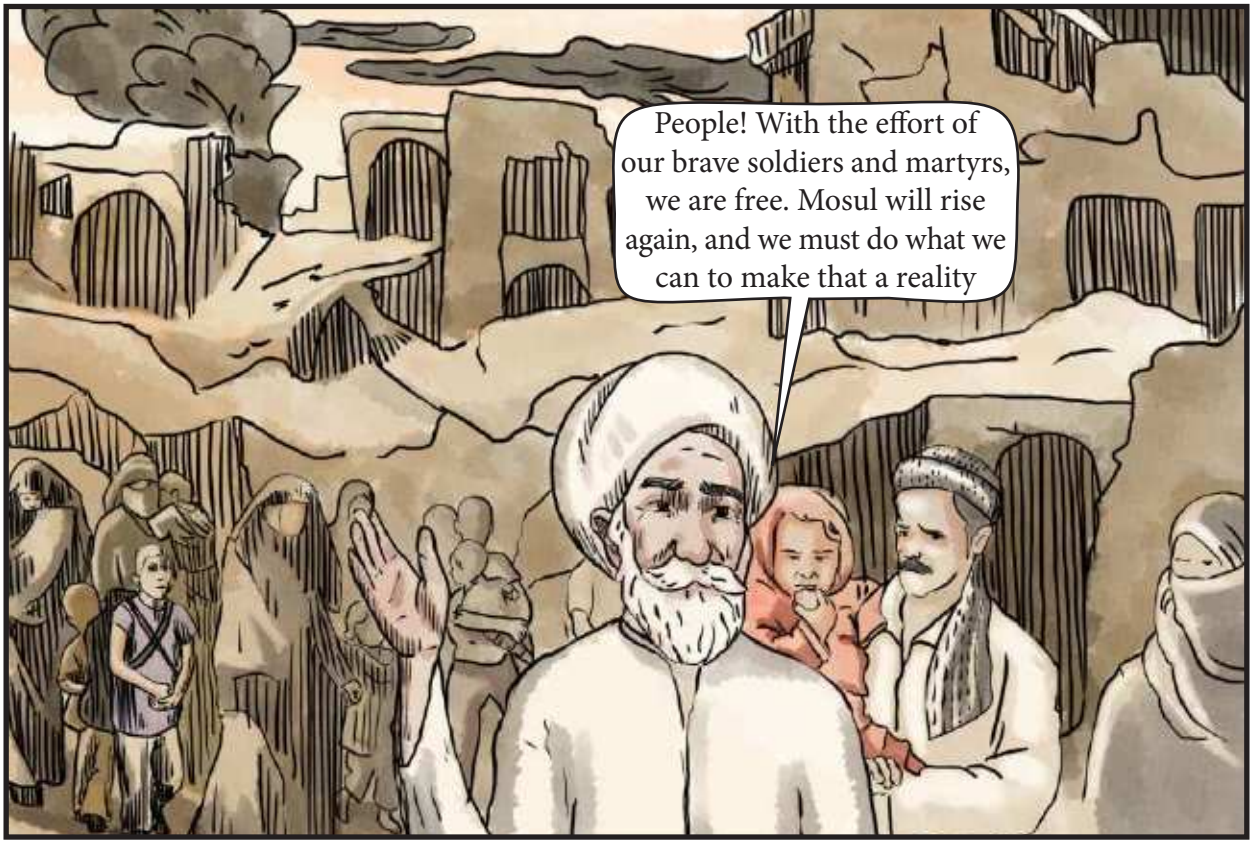









The families cautiously made their way out of the shelter. People appeared in the middle of destruction with a new sense of hope. The city was destroyed, but the feeling of liberation sheltered them from that


People! With the effort of our brave soldiers and martyrs, we are free. Mosul will rise again, and we must do what we can to make that a reality













