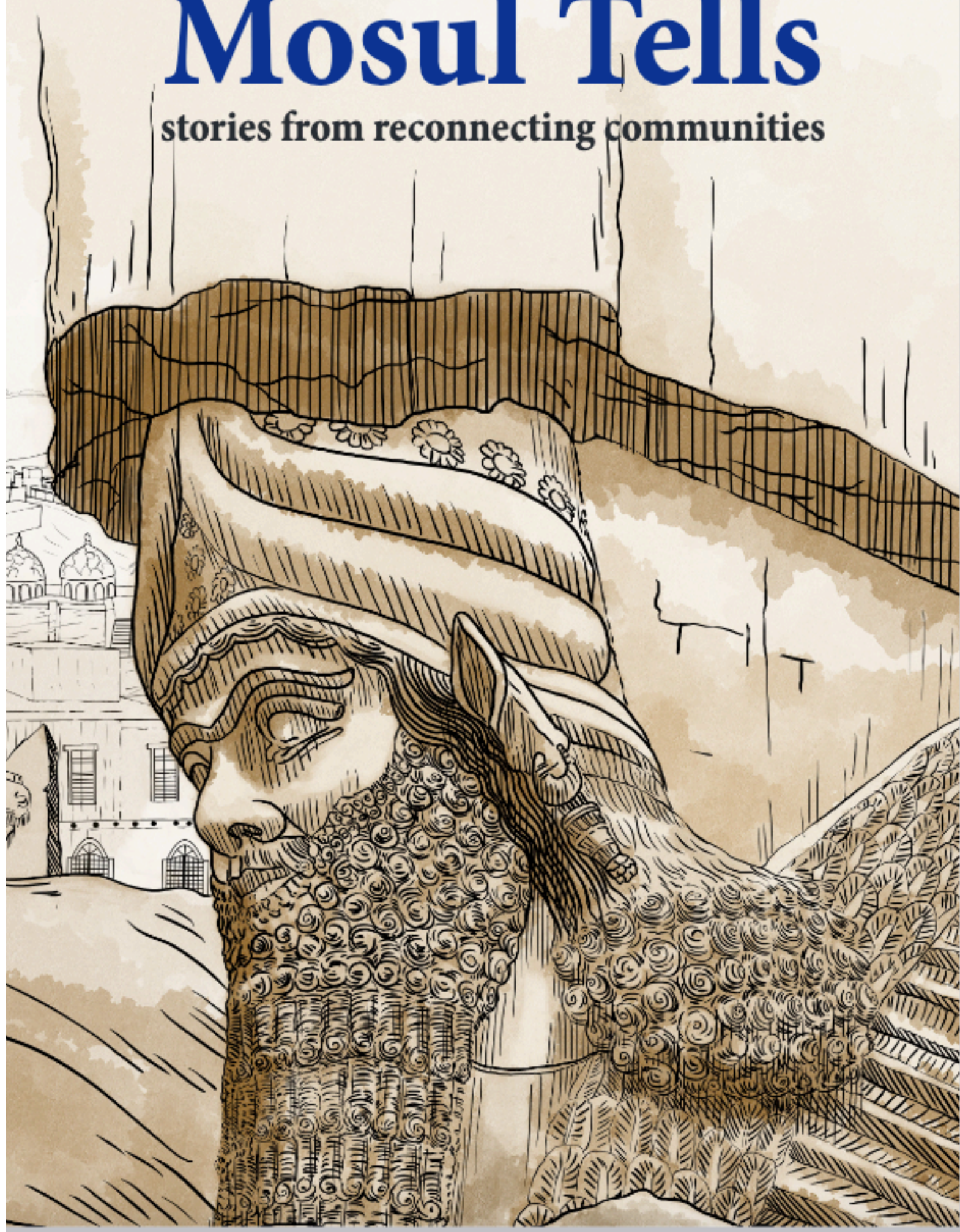


# Mosul Tells

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](http://www.elbarlament.org) and [www.paiaculture.com](http://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 tradition<sup>4</sup> 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

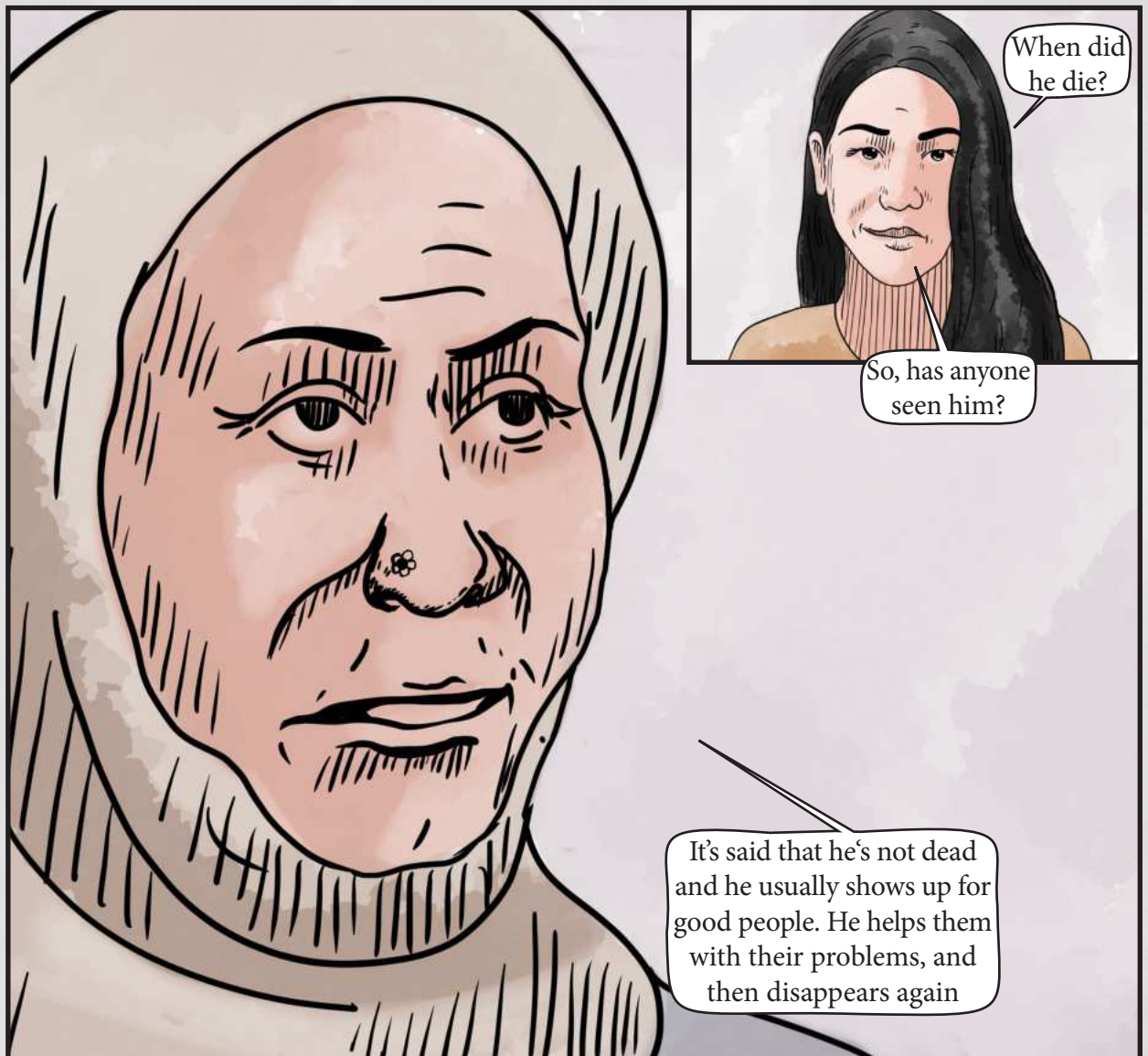
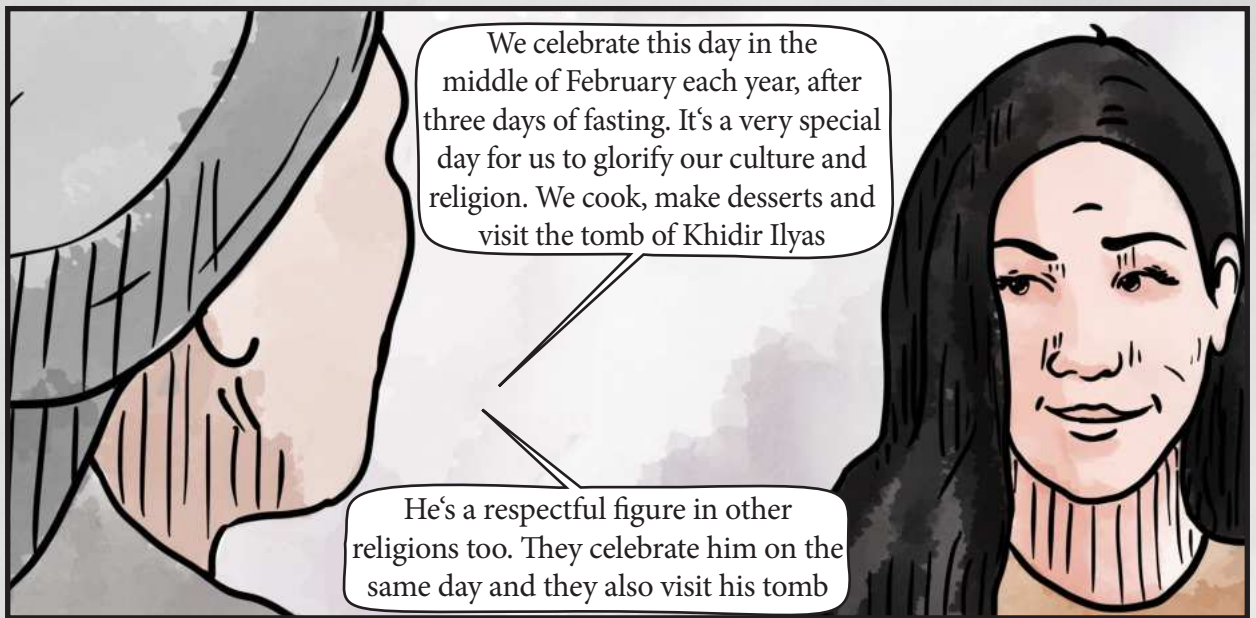
Khidir Ilyas is one of the well-known religious figures in the city of Mosul in Iraq. He's immortal and shows up to help people when they're in need. Khidir Ilyas also represents the idea of good deeds, which earns him respect from all religions and beliefs in Iraq. They all celebrate Khidir Ilyas Day 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.



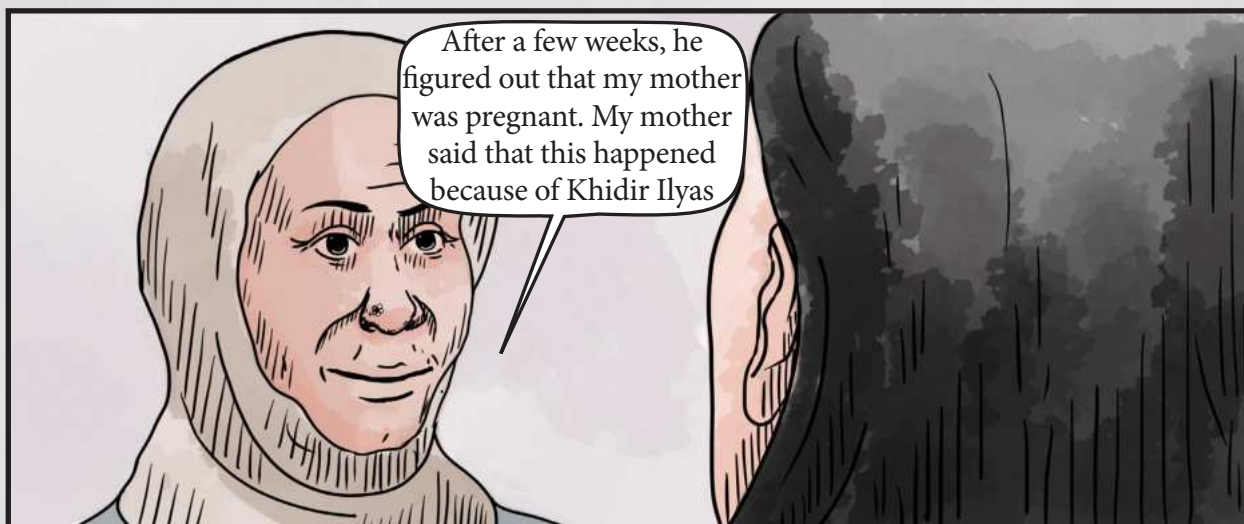


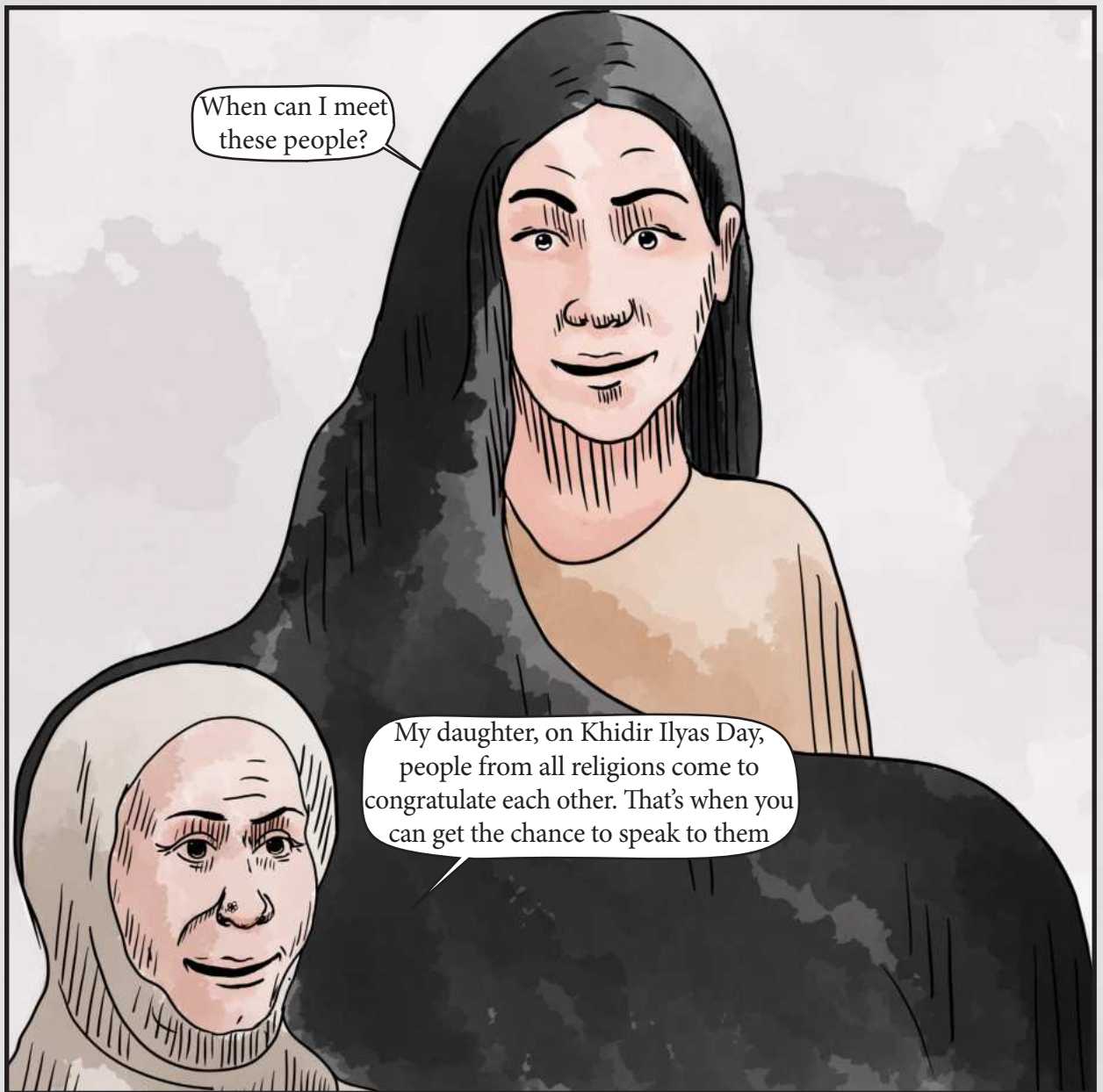
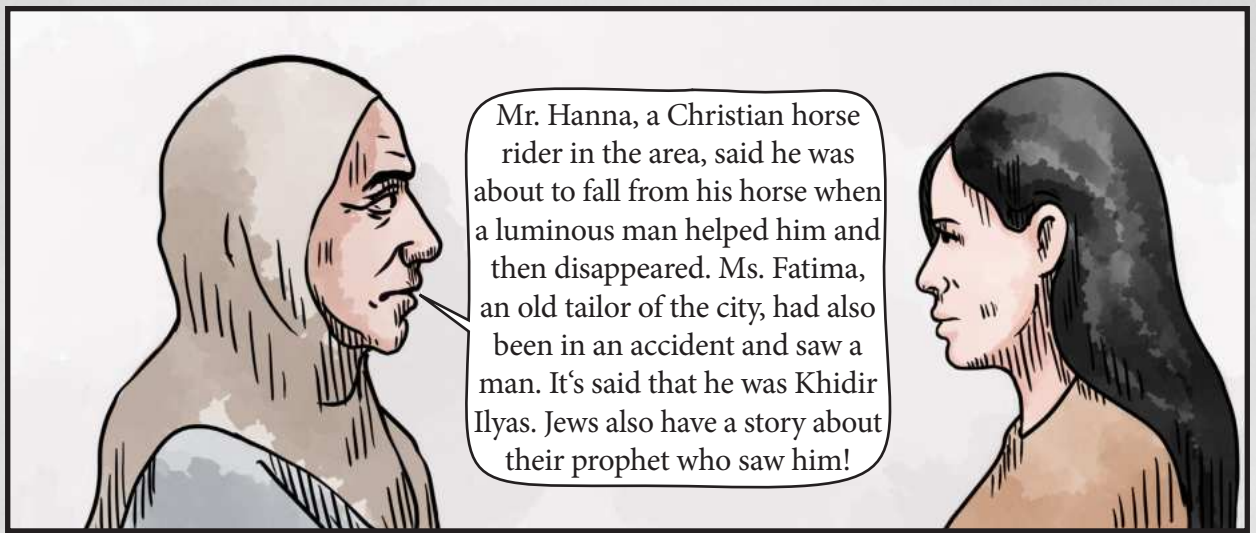














The people from Tal Afar, all from different religious backgrounds, prepare themselves for the first day of the holiday







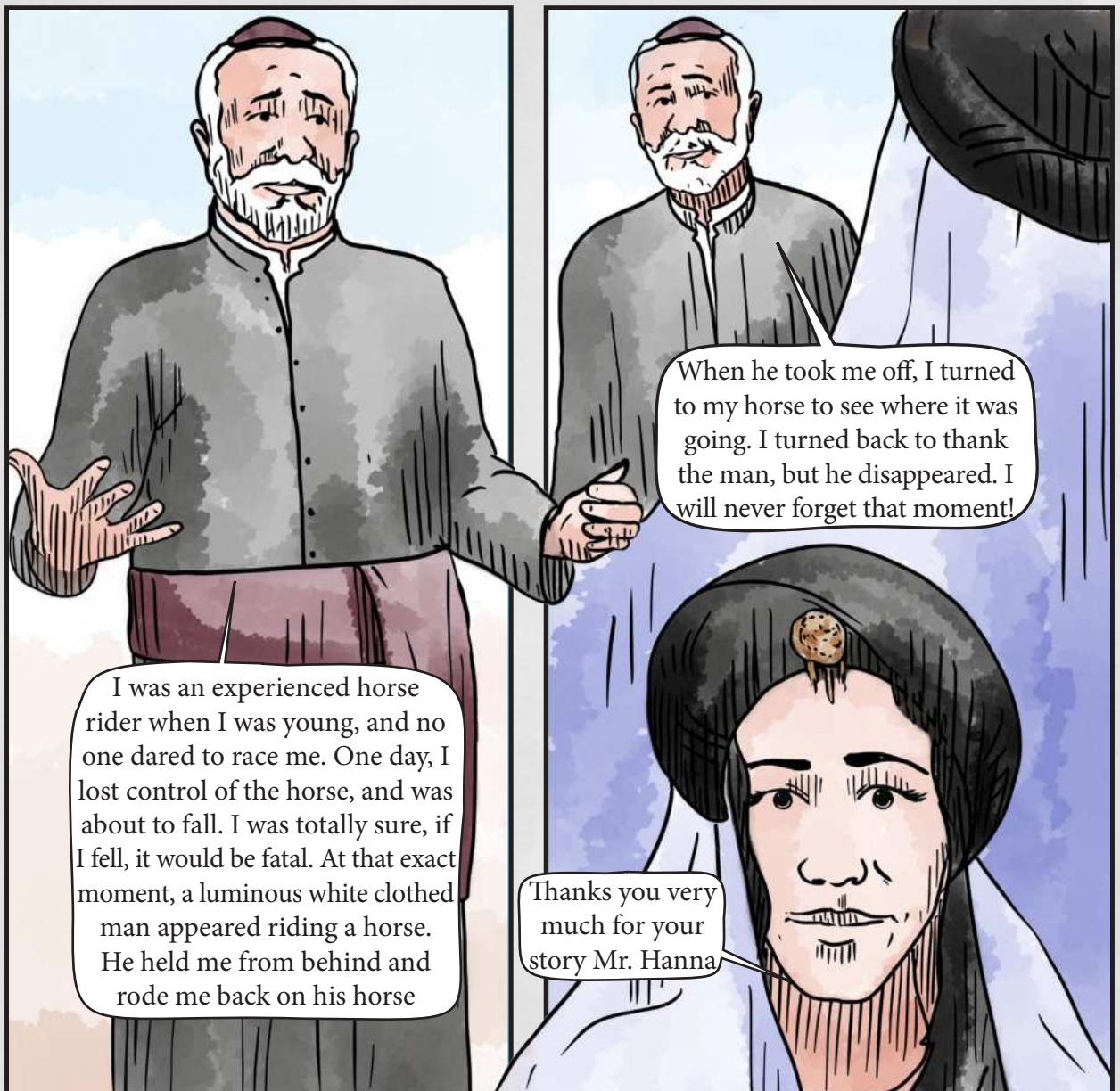
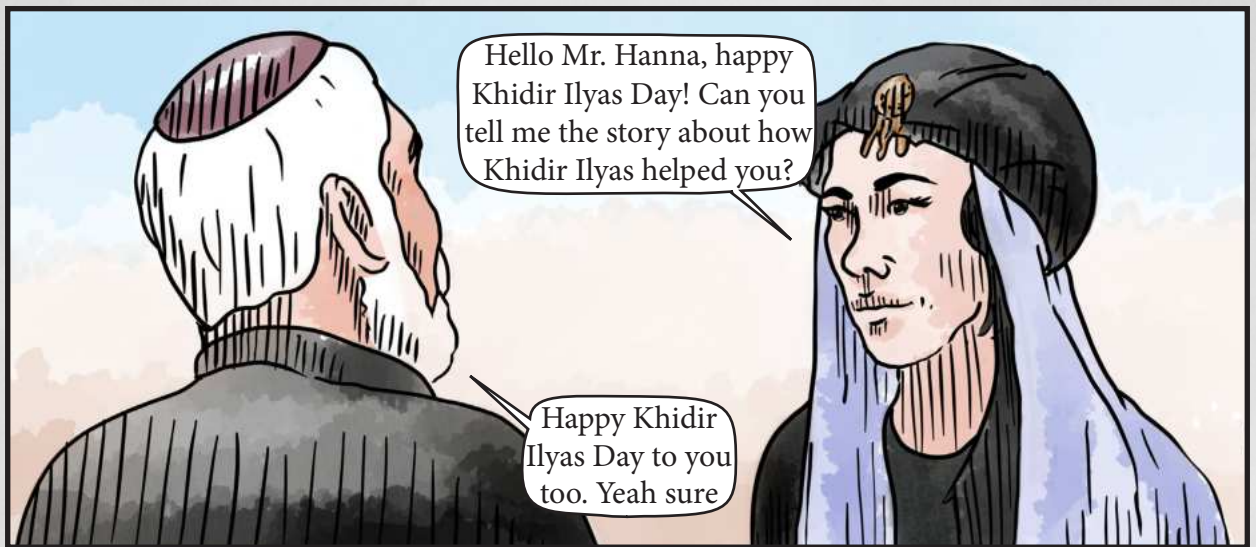






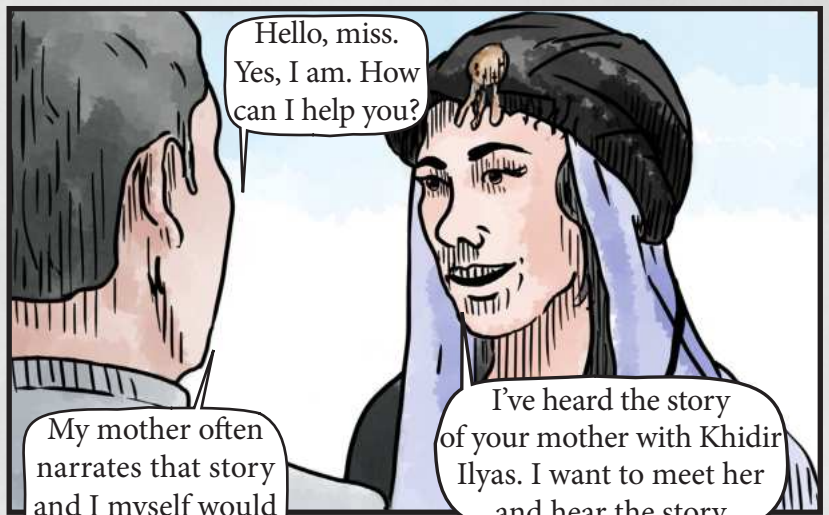








Hello, Mister.  
Are you the son  
of Ms. Fatima?



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



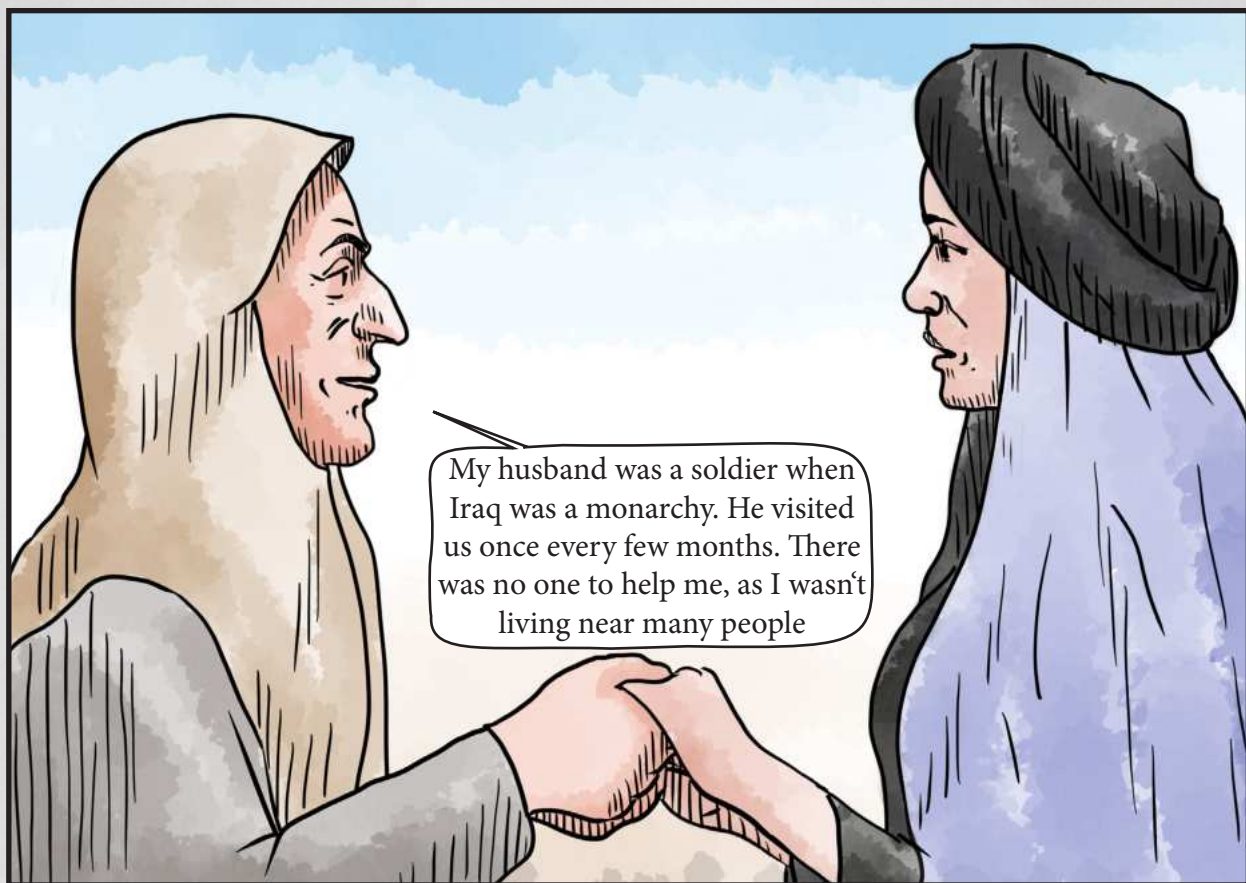
She's a Muslim Turkman  
and an experienced tailor in  
the city, who now lives with us



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?

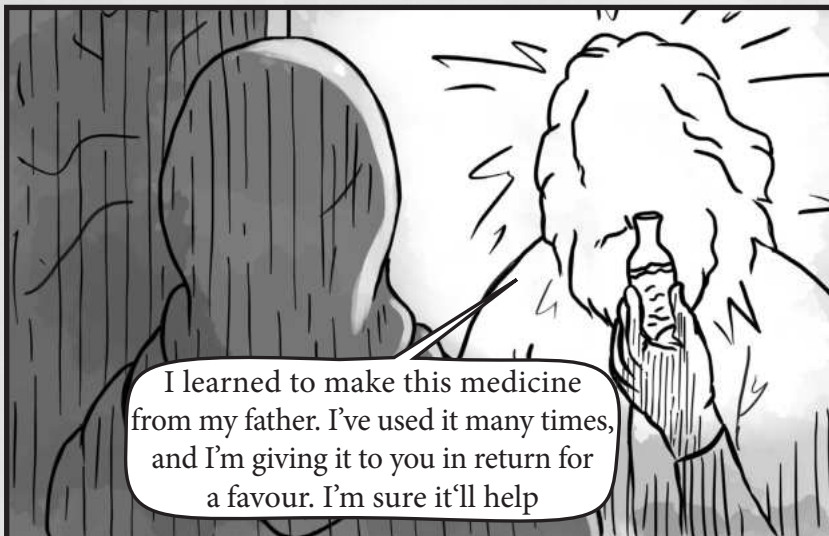




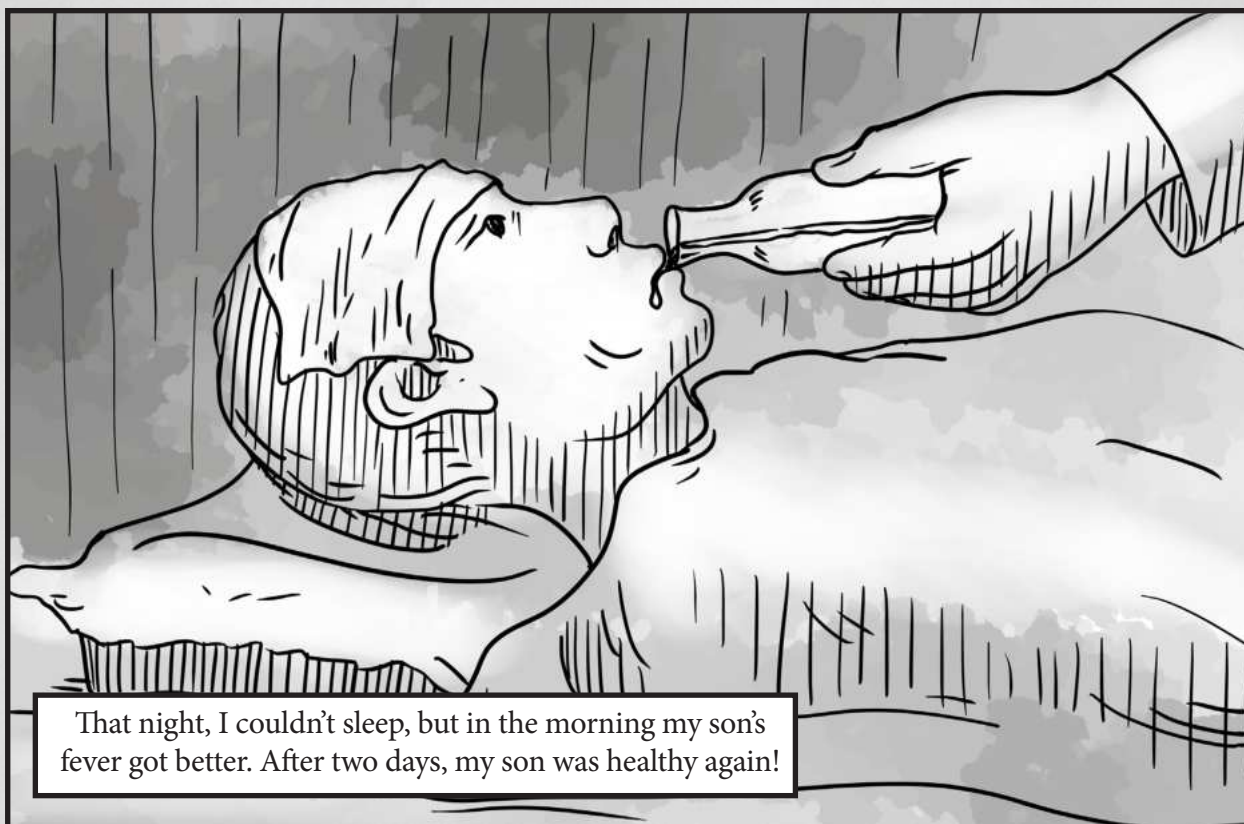












That night, I couldn't sleep, but in the morning my son's fever got better. After two days, my son was healthy again!



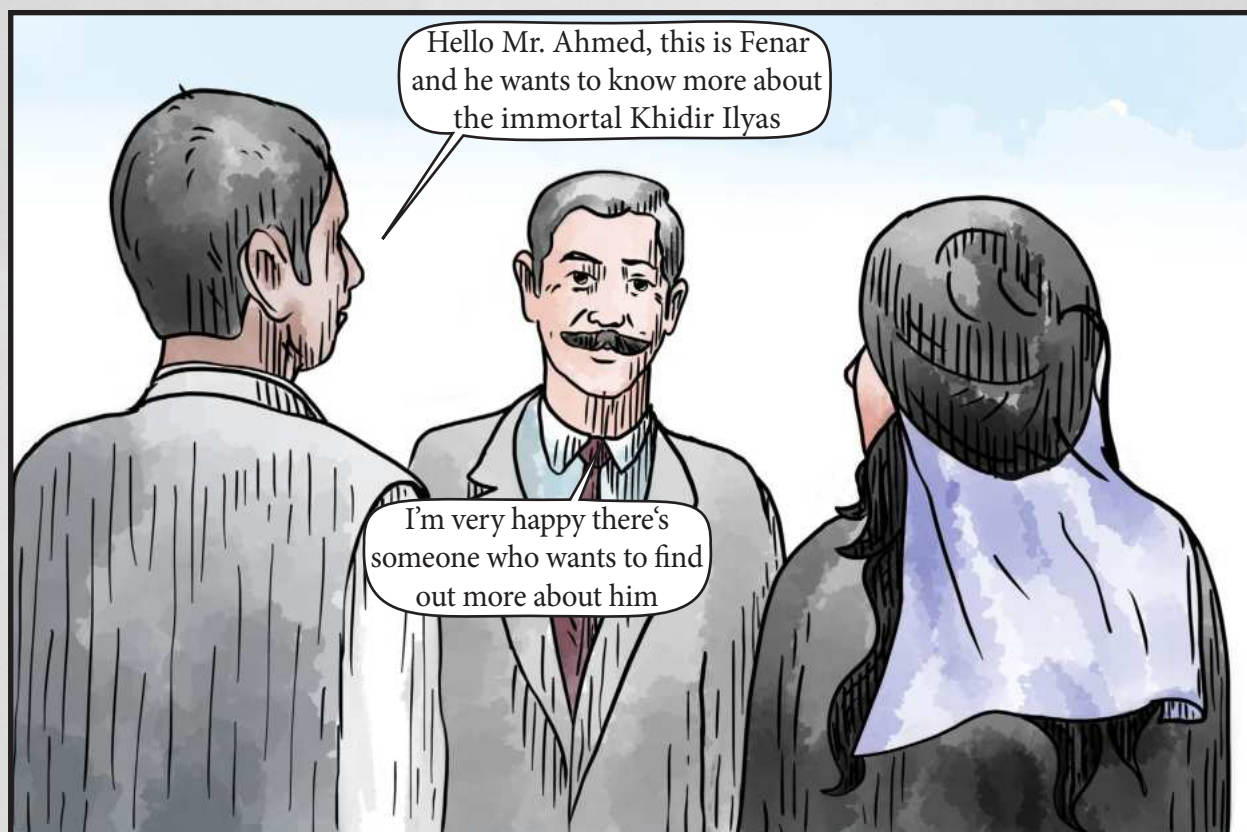
I was still afraid of what happened until my husband came back and I told him the story. He thanked God and said that the man I spoke to was the immortal Khidir Ilyas



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



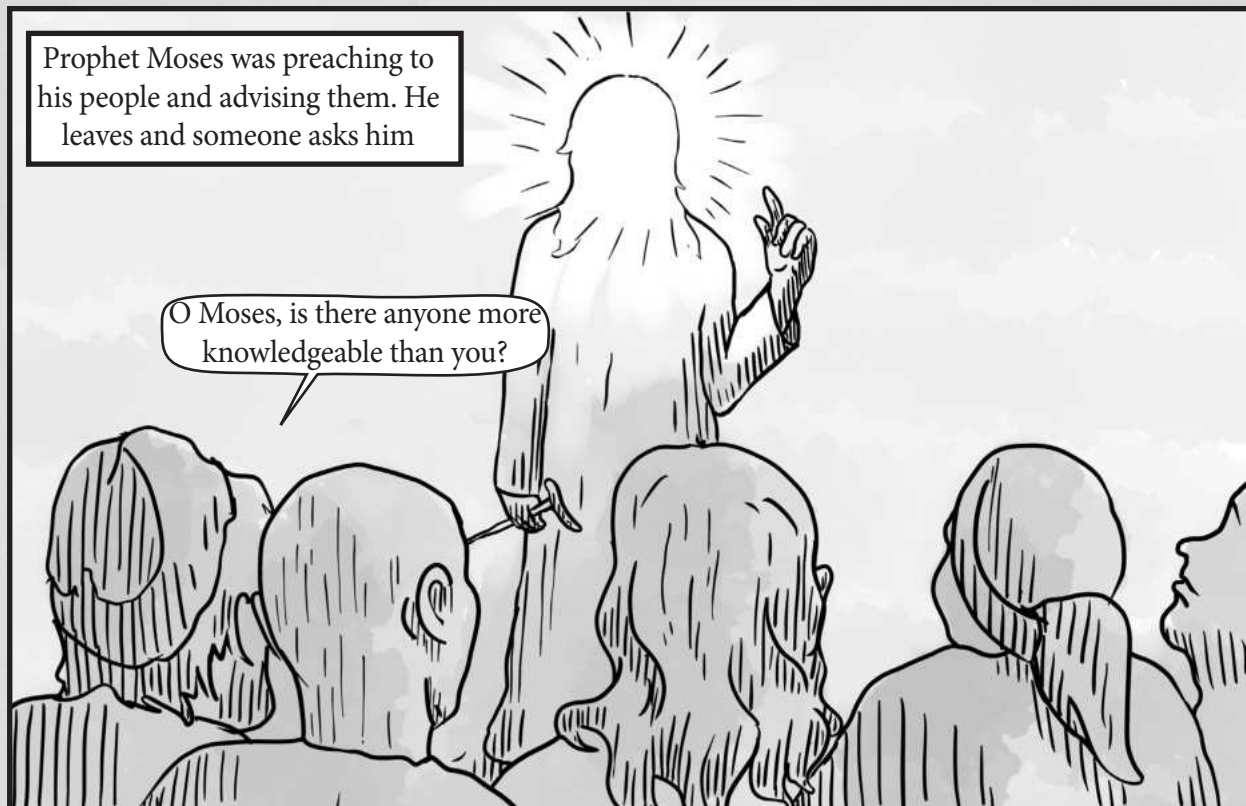






Prophet Moses was preaching to his people and advising them. He leaves and someone asks him

O Moses, is there anyone more knowledgeable than you?



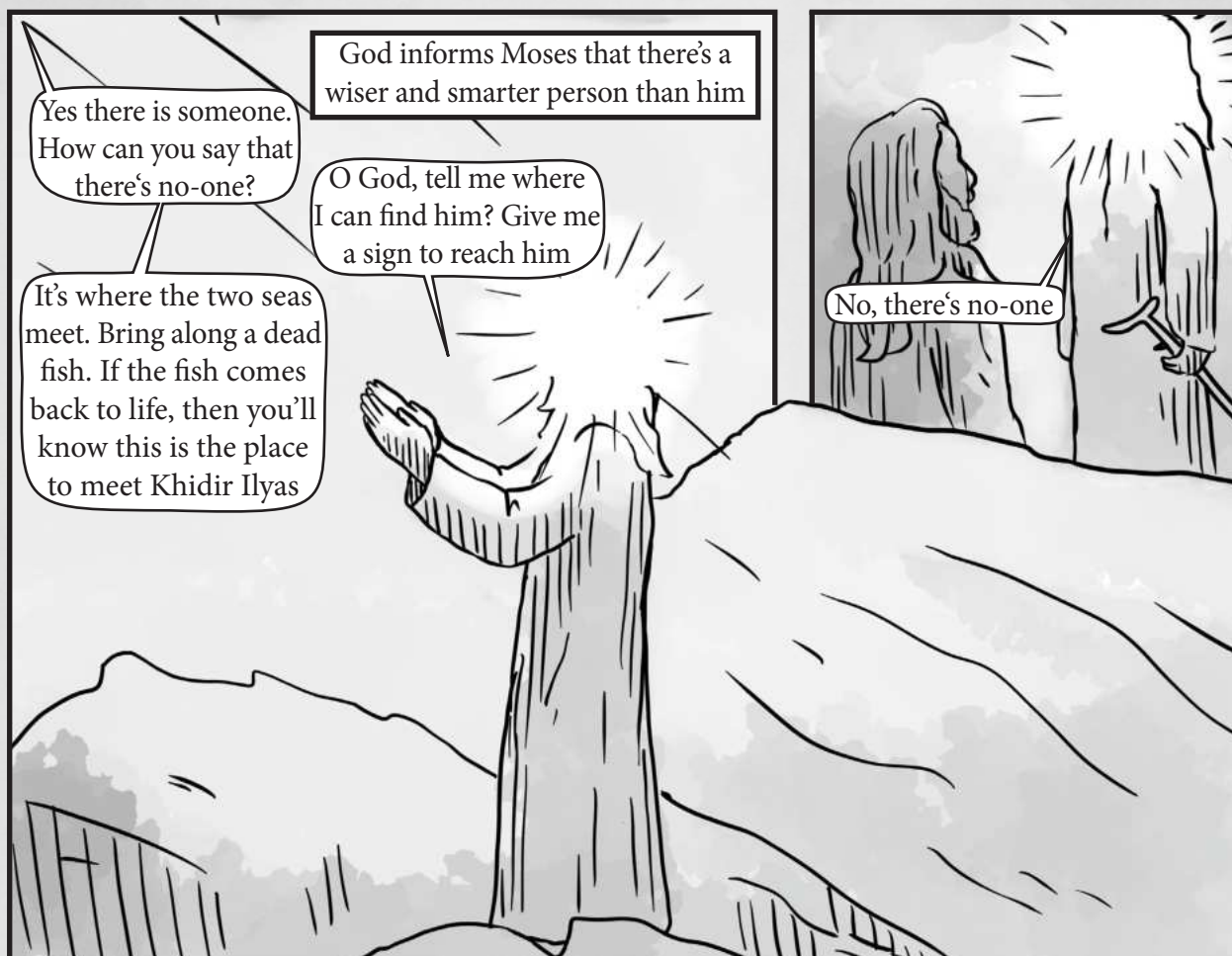
God informs Moses that there's a wiser and smarter person than him

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

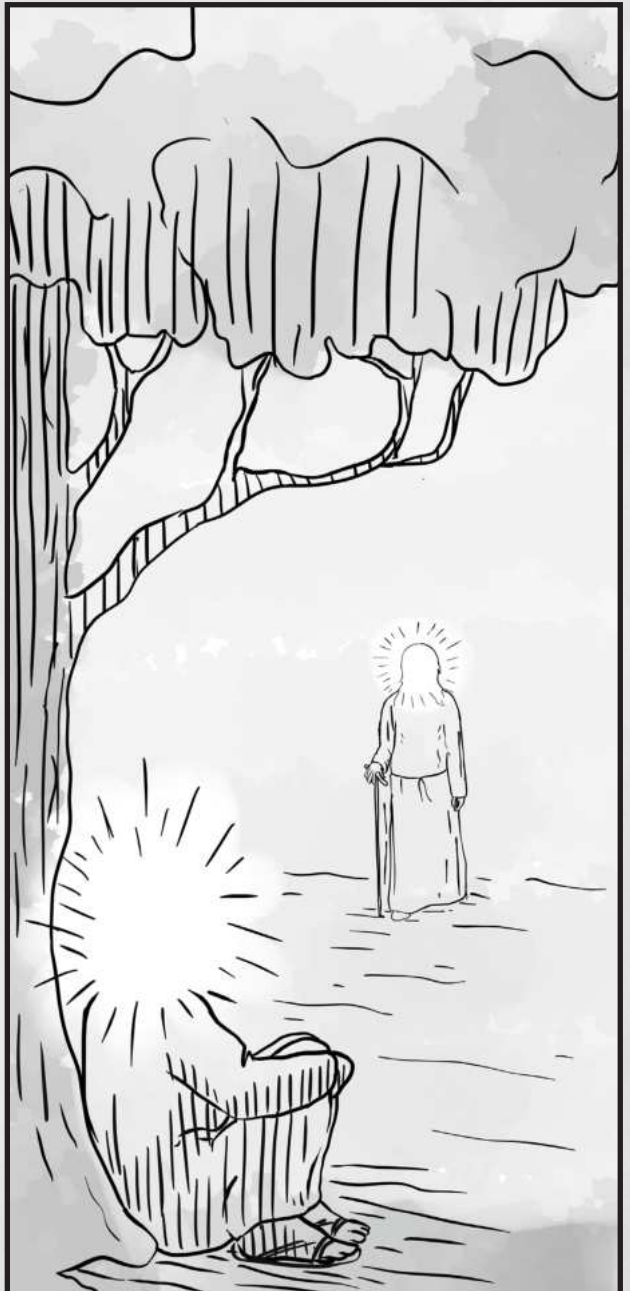
It's where the two seas meet. Bring along a dead fish. If the fish comes back to life, then you'll know this is the place to meet Khidir Ilyas

No, there's no-one

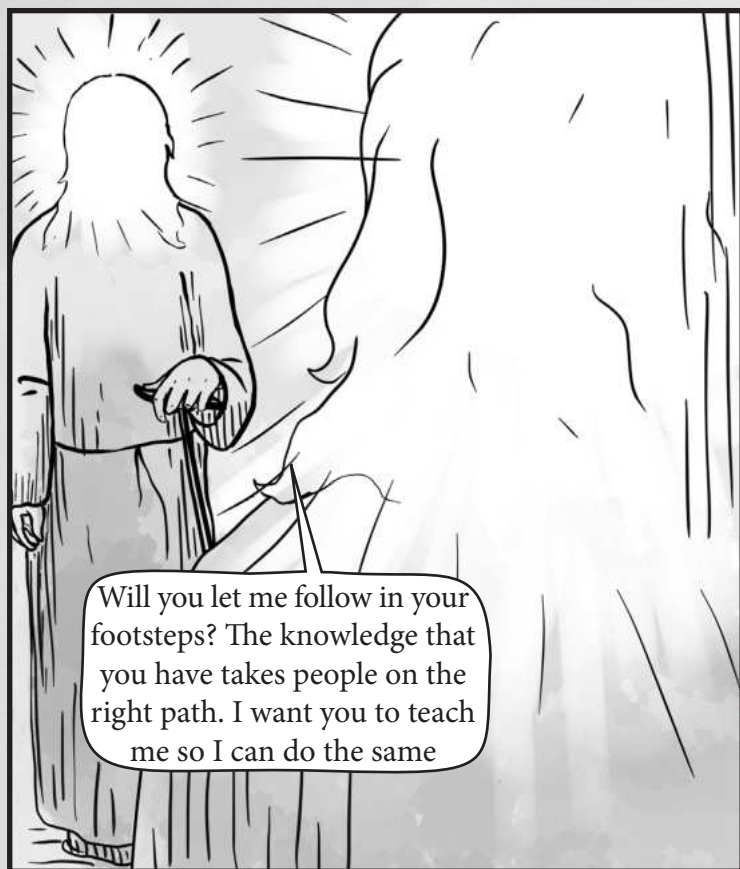


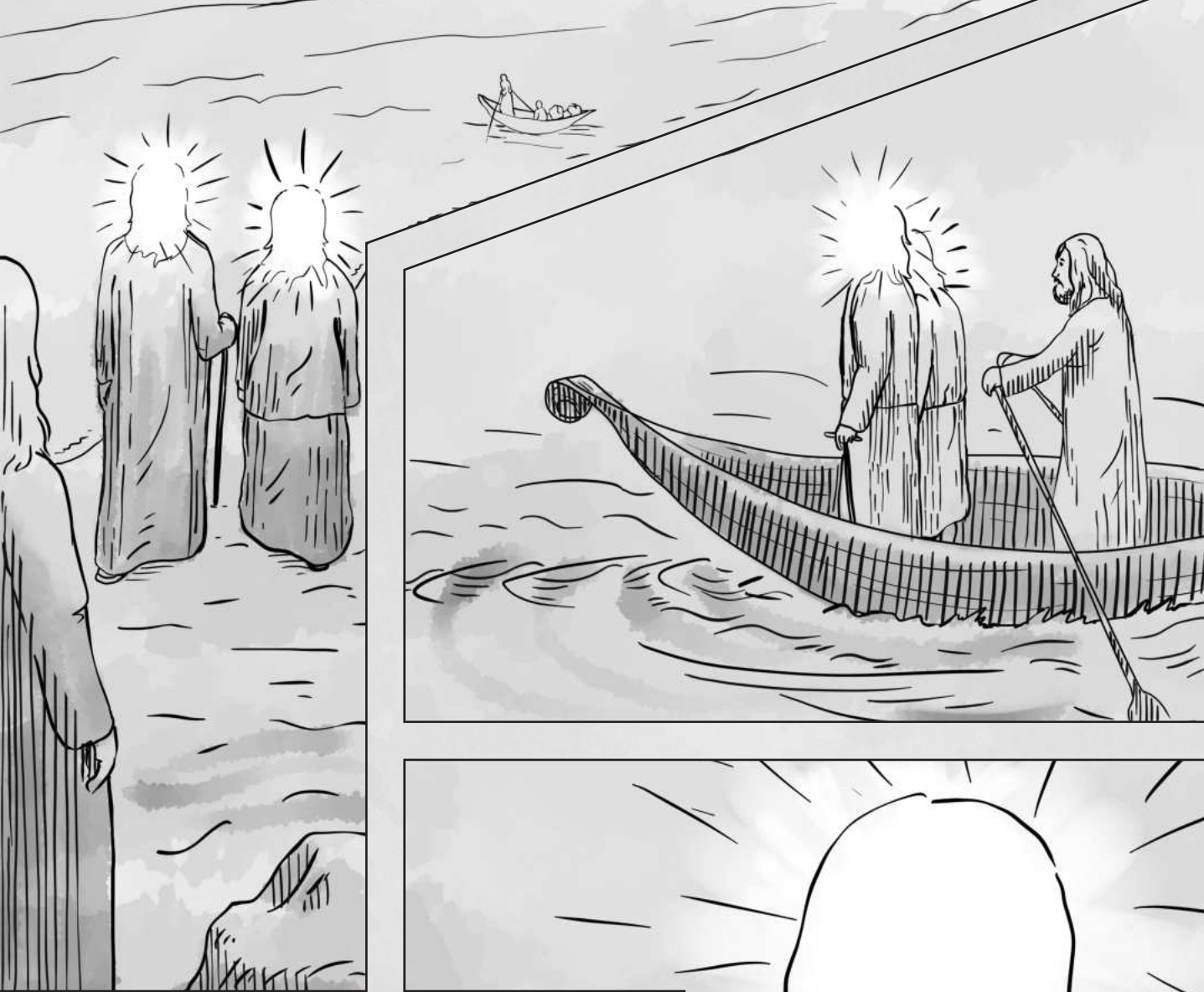






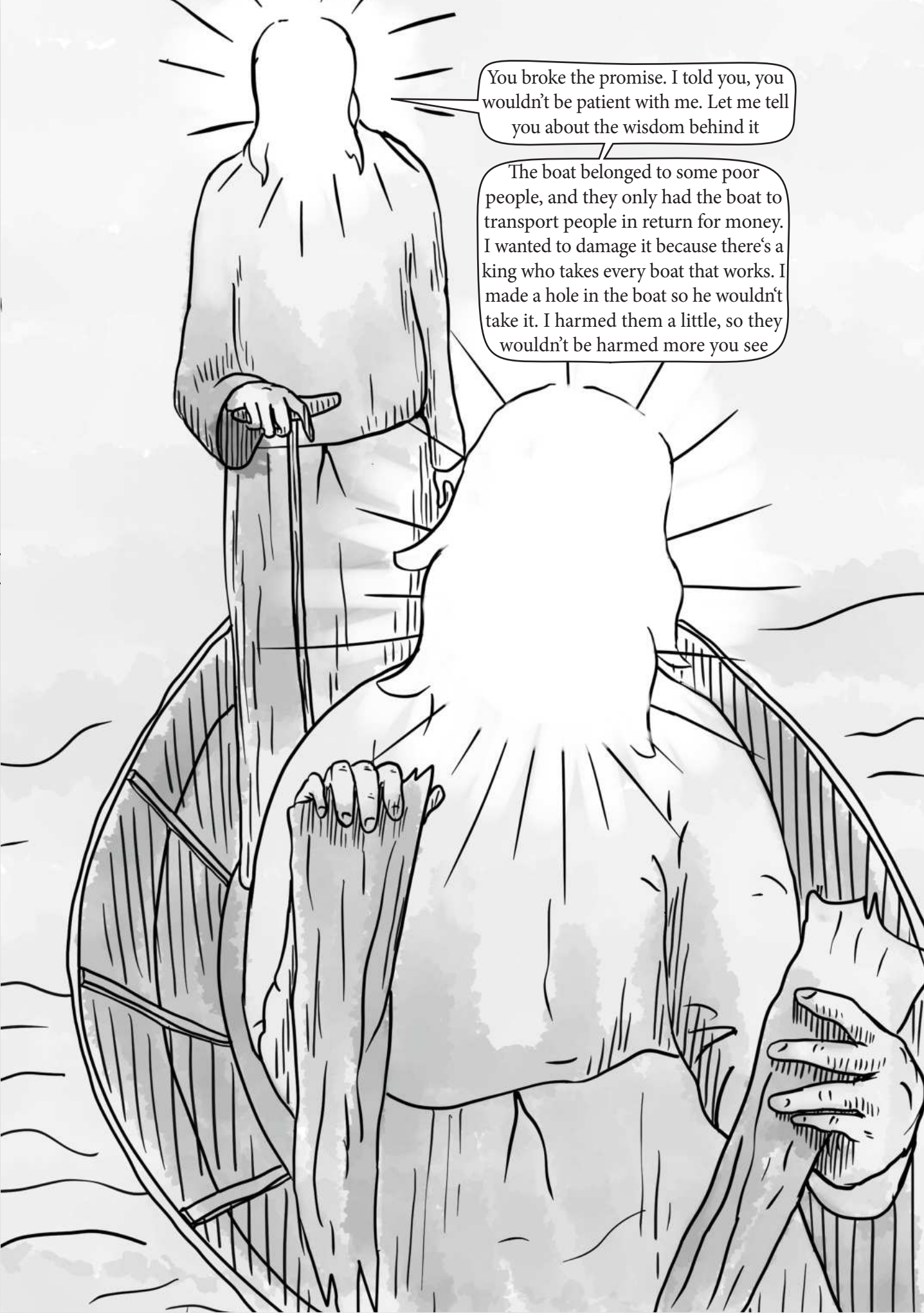






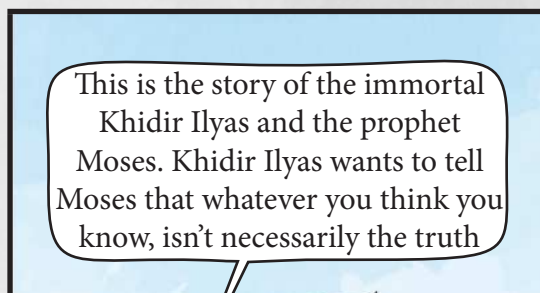
You made a hole in the boat so it would sink and the people would die. They did us a favour, but you did something bad to them





You broke the promise. I told you, you wouldn't be patient with me. Let me tell you about the wisdom behind it

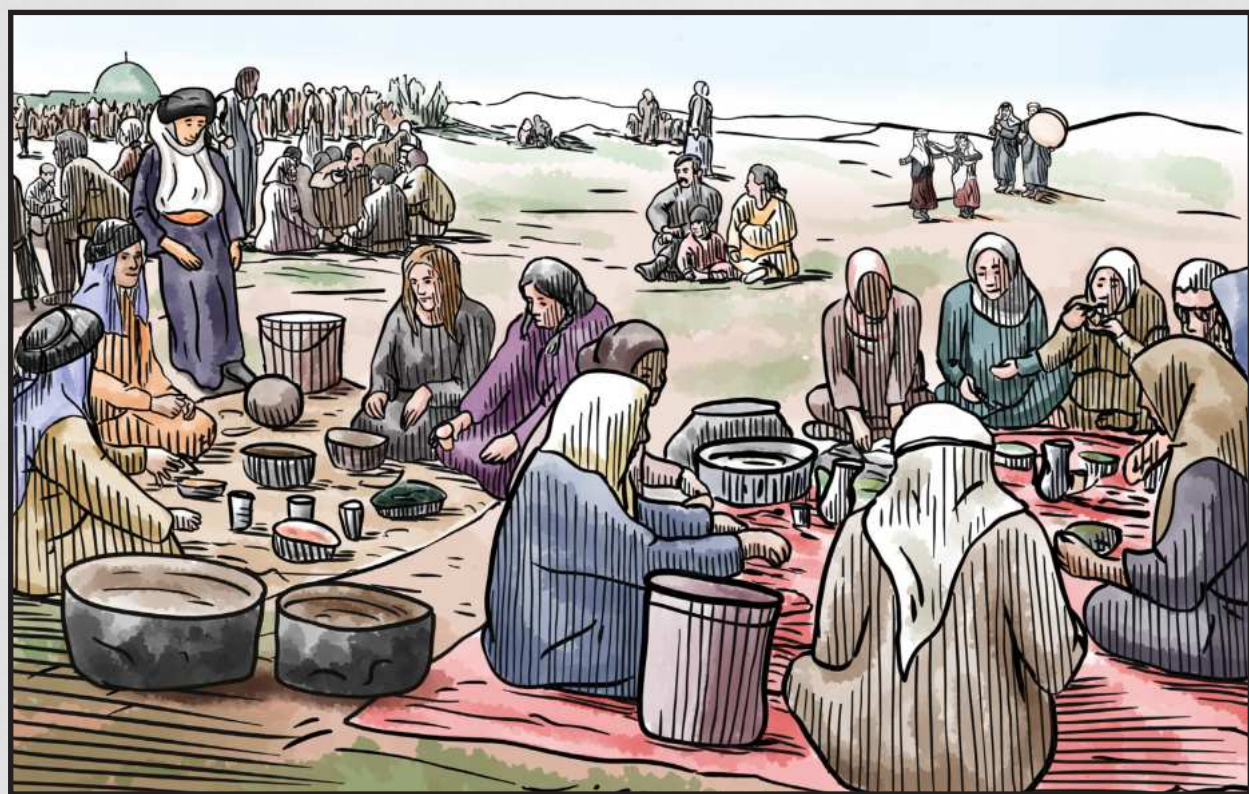
The boat belonged to some poor people, and they only had the boat to transport people in return for money. I wanted to damage it because there's a king who takes every boat that works. I made a hole in the boat so he wouldn't take it. I harmed them a little, so they wouldn't be harmed more you see







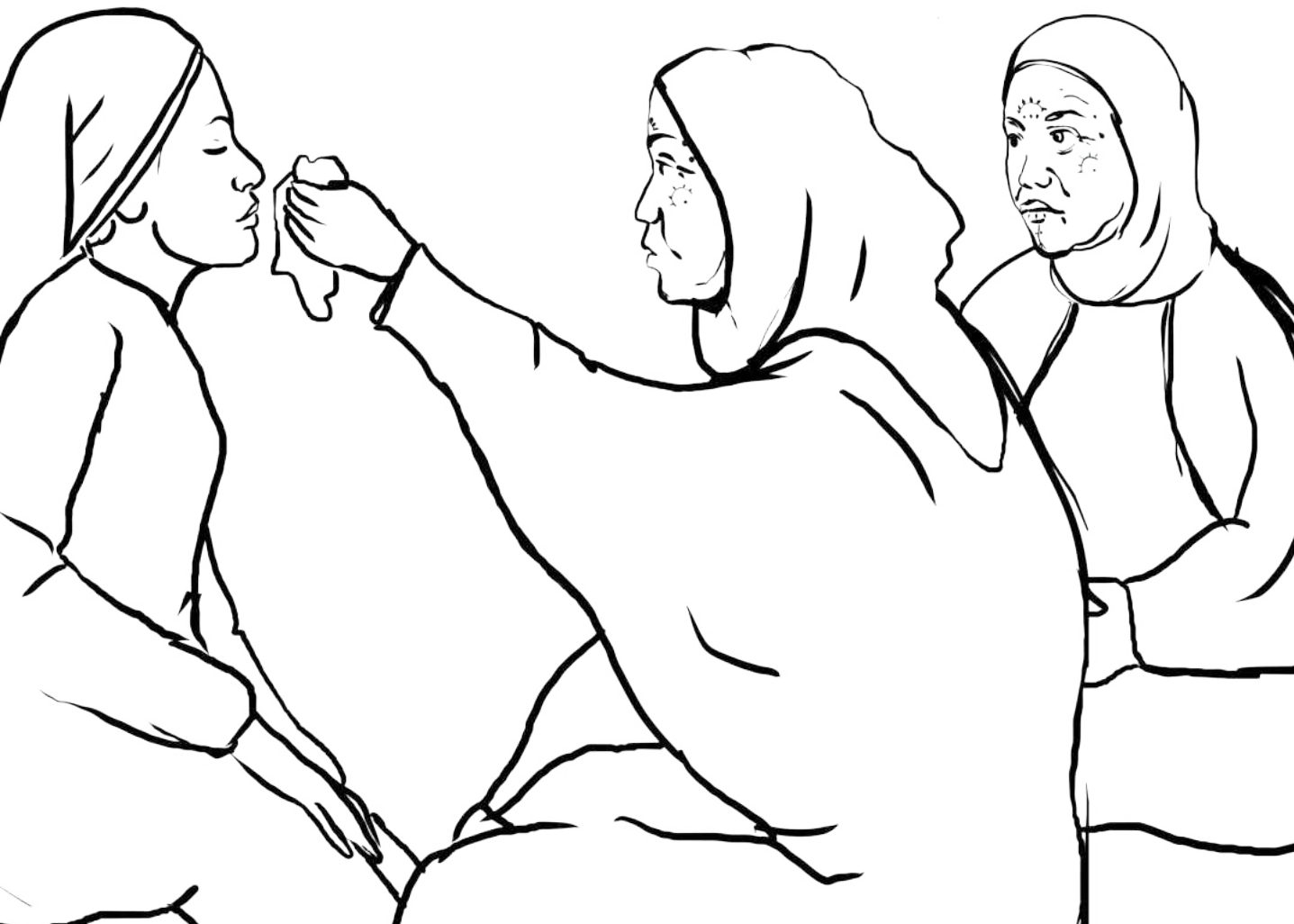






## BEAUTIFUL WISDOM

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.



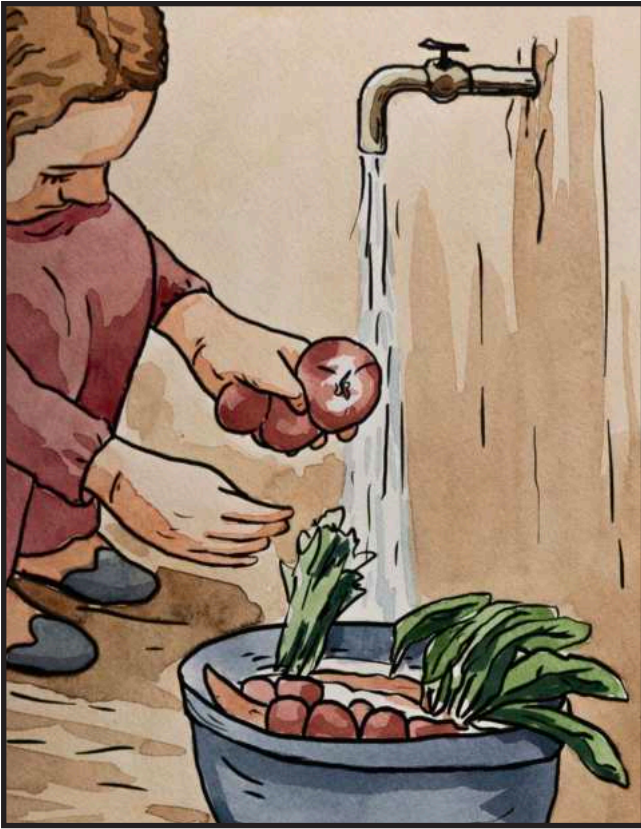




Khaya is a young 20-year-old girl. She's been preparing for her marriage and is very excited about it. The wedding will take place very soon





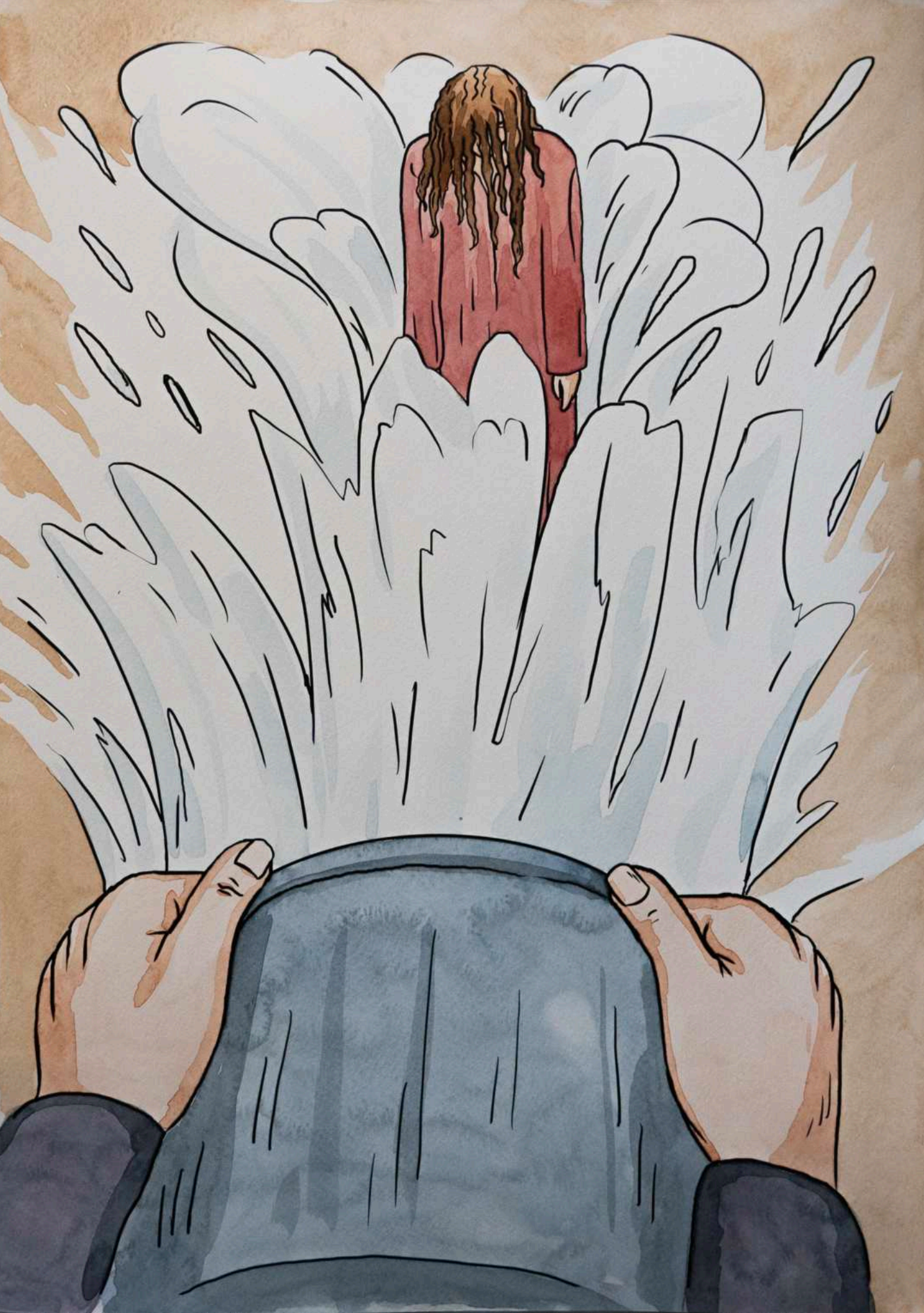




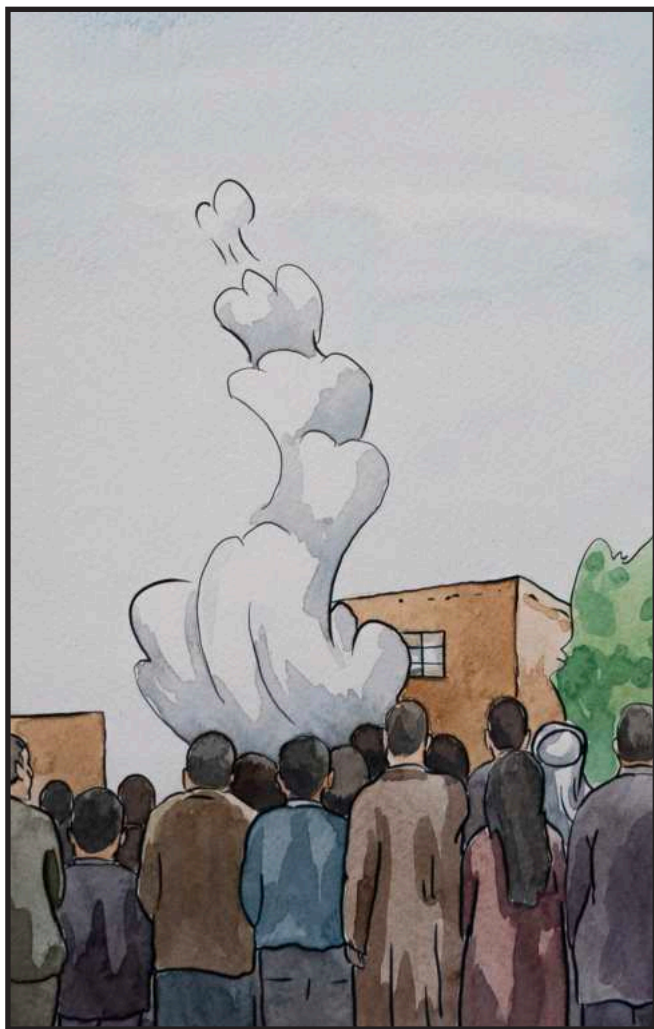
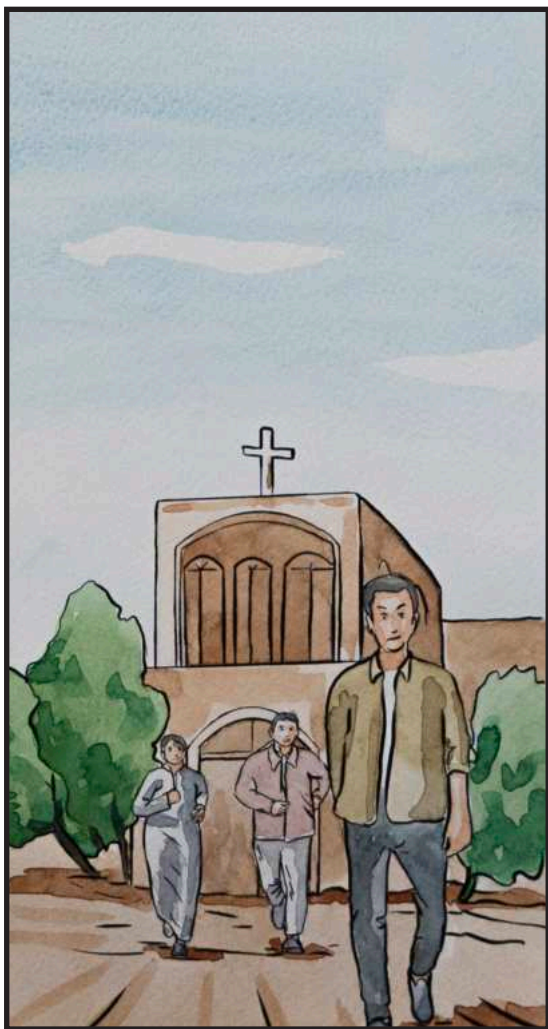
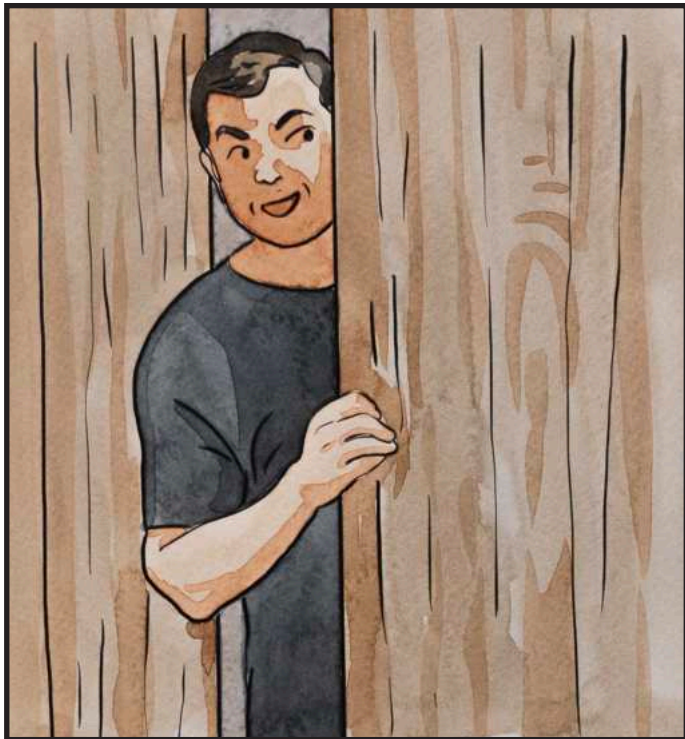


Khaya, what  
just happened?



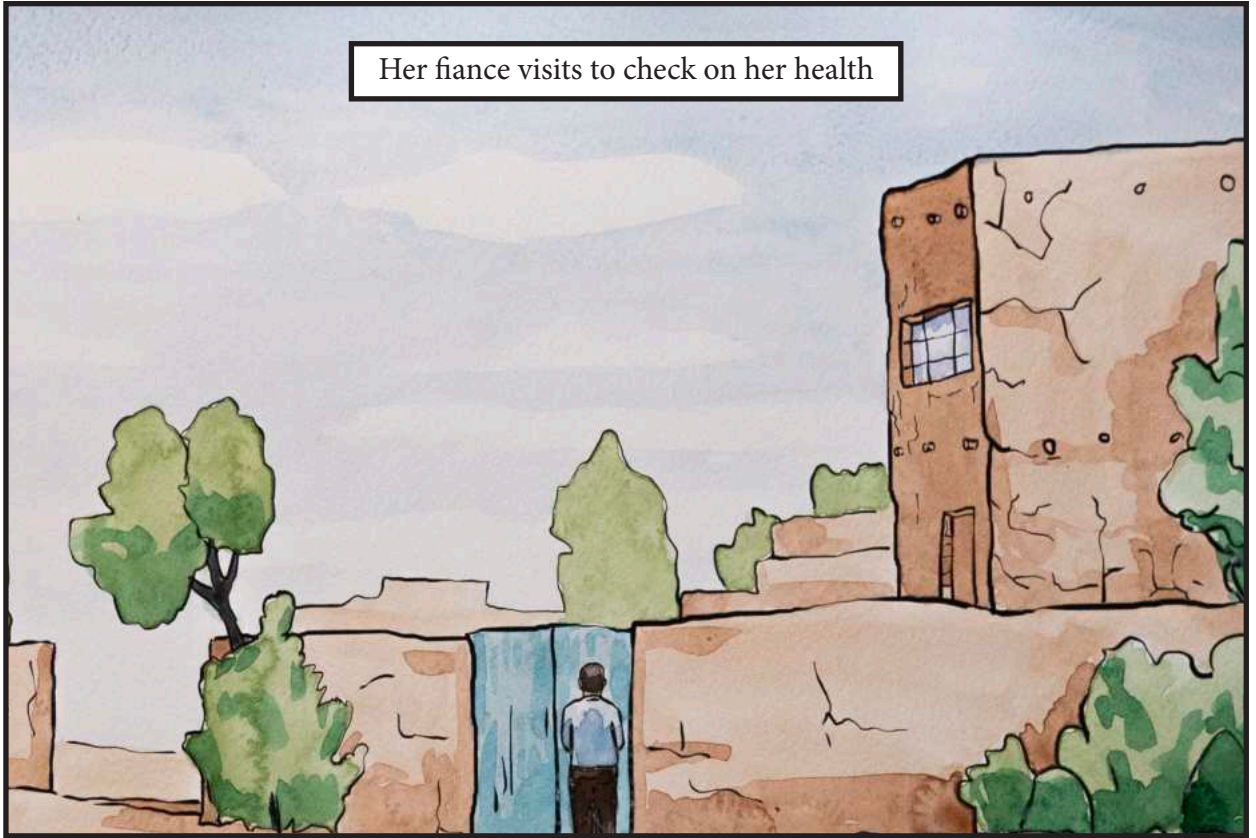








Her fiance visits to check on her health



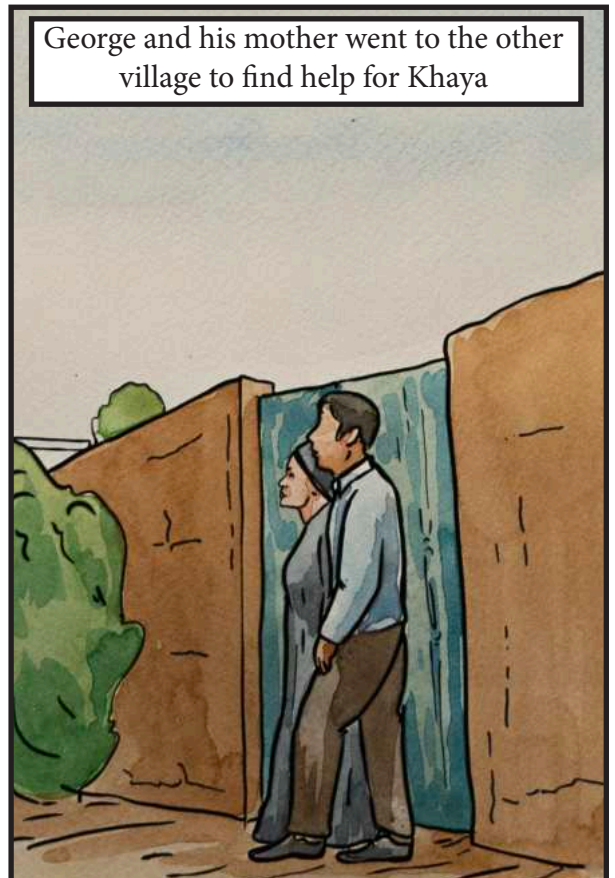
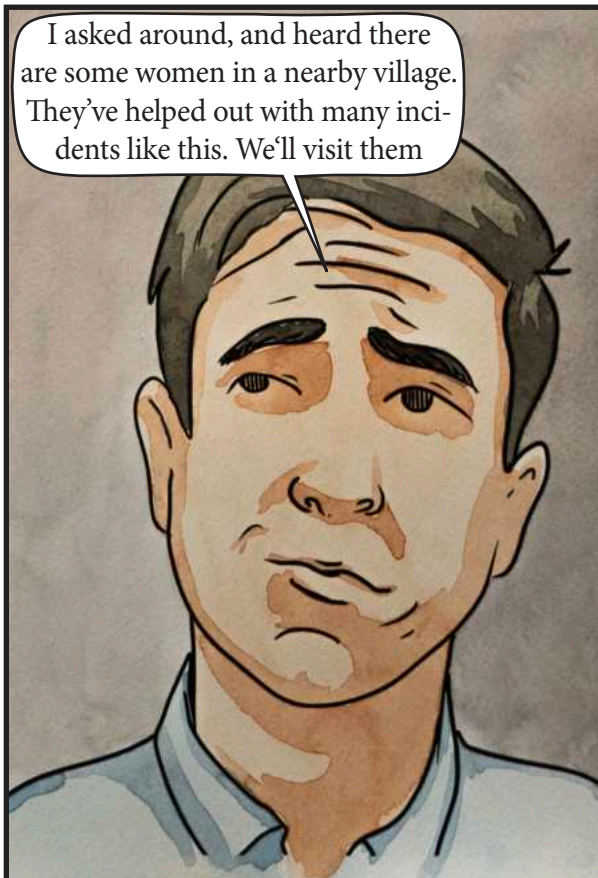








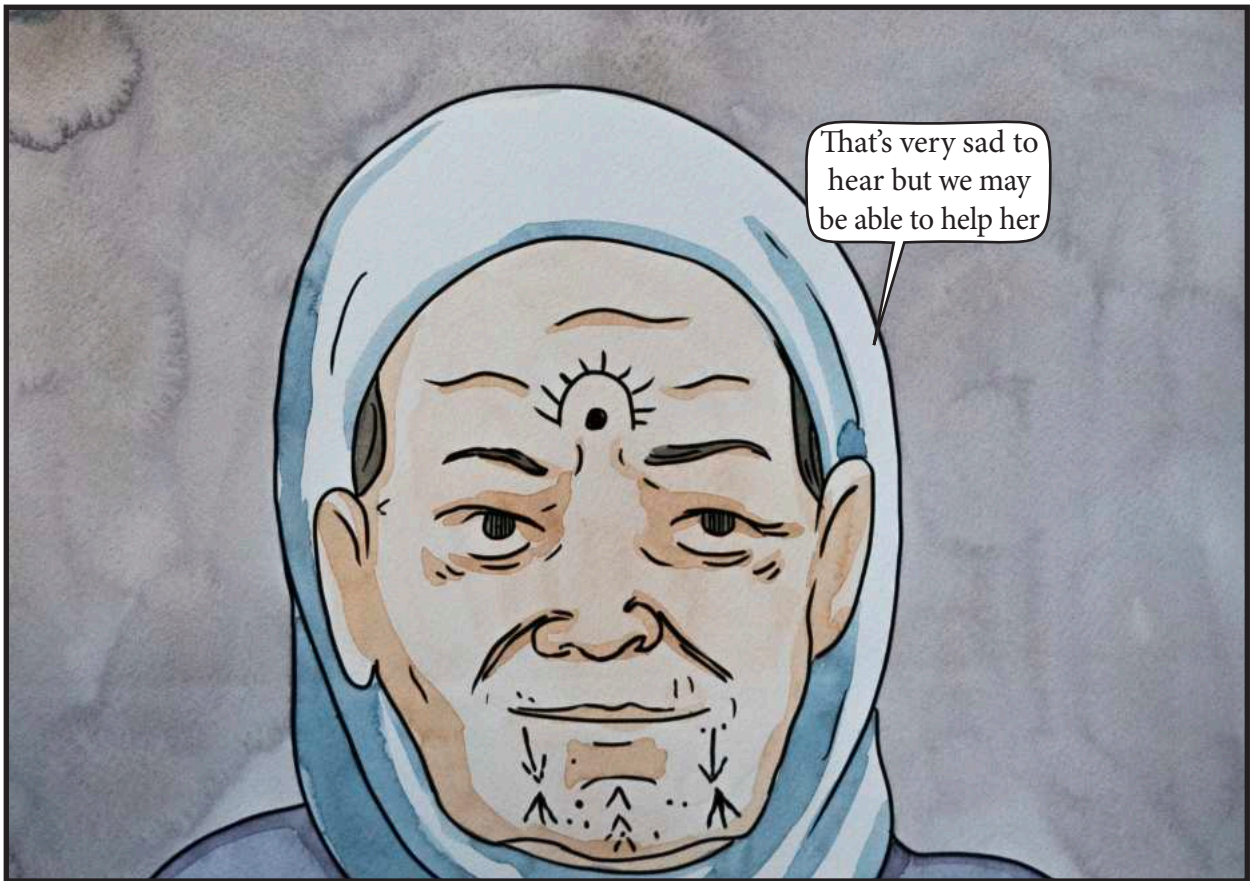




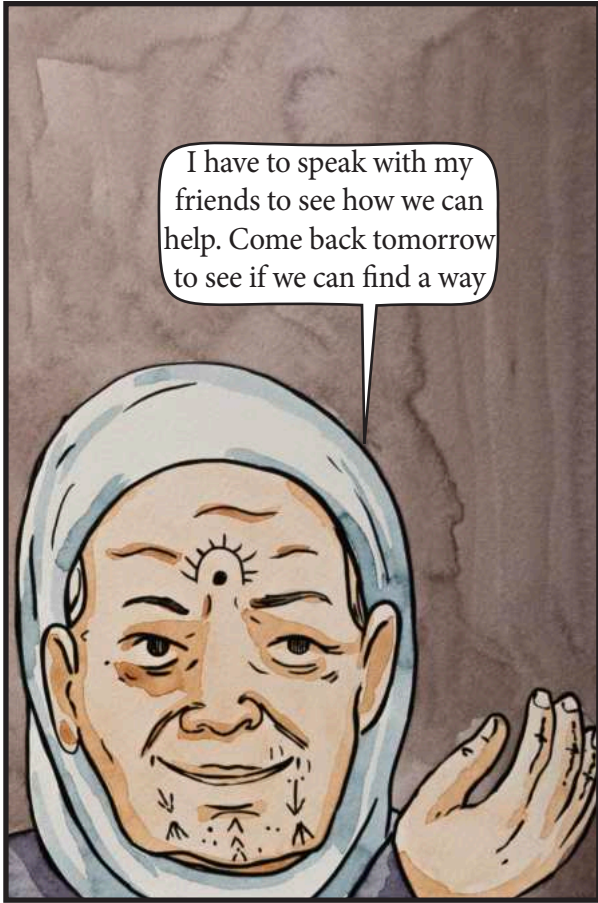




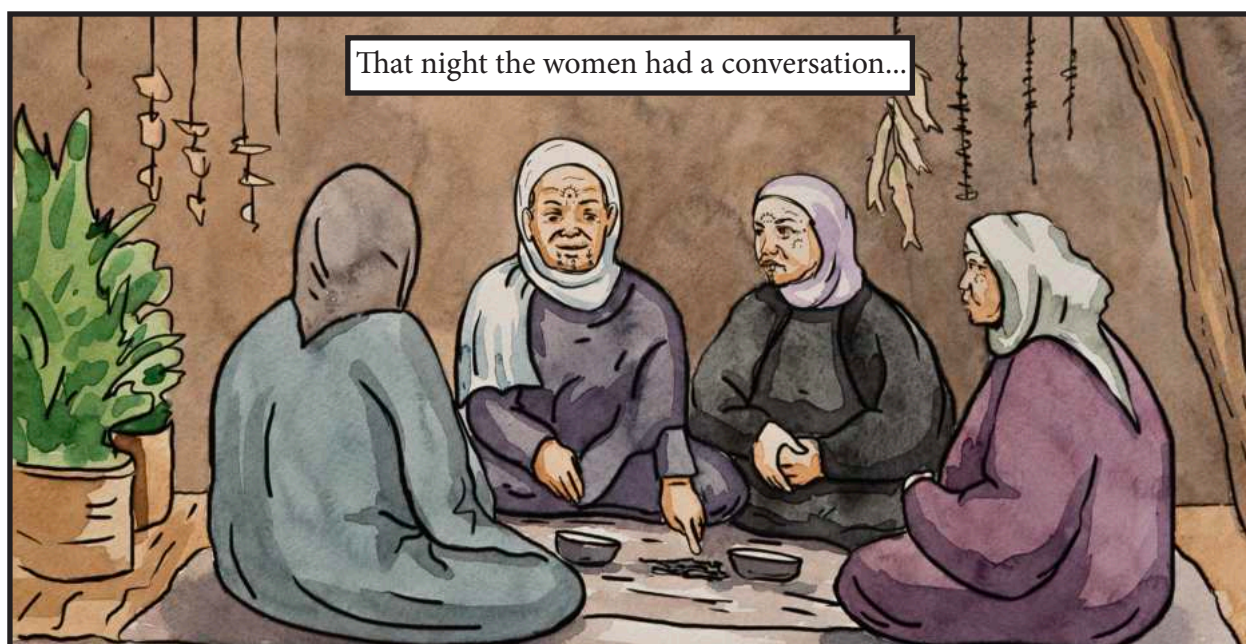










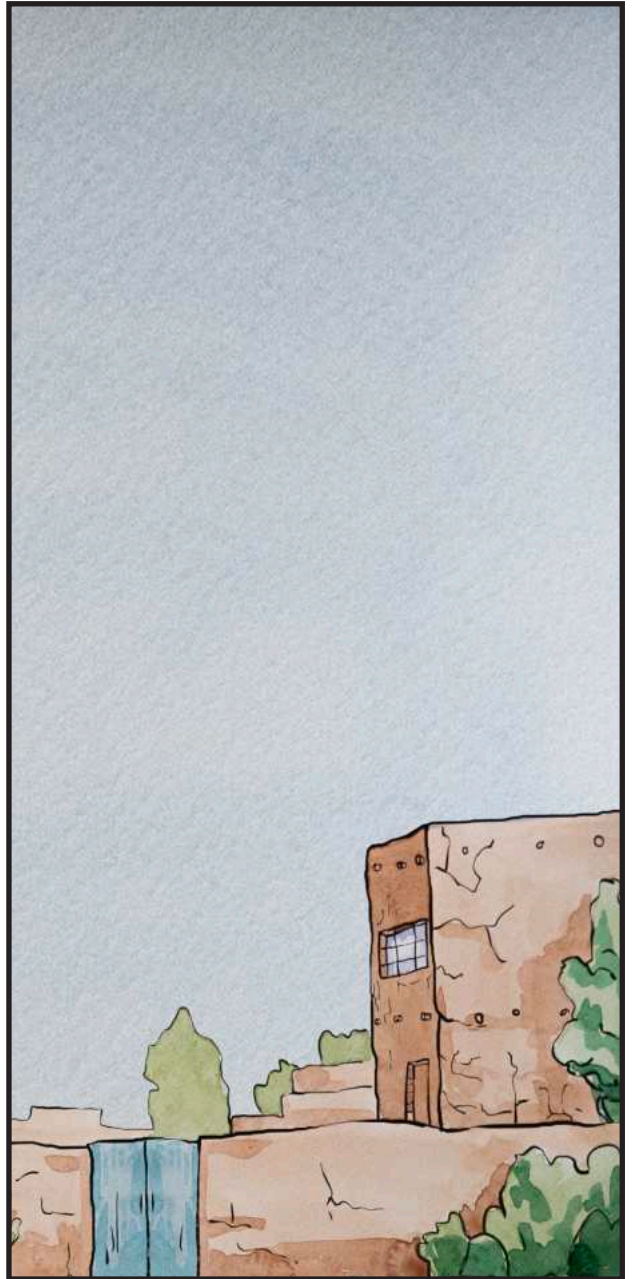




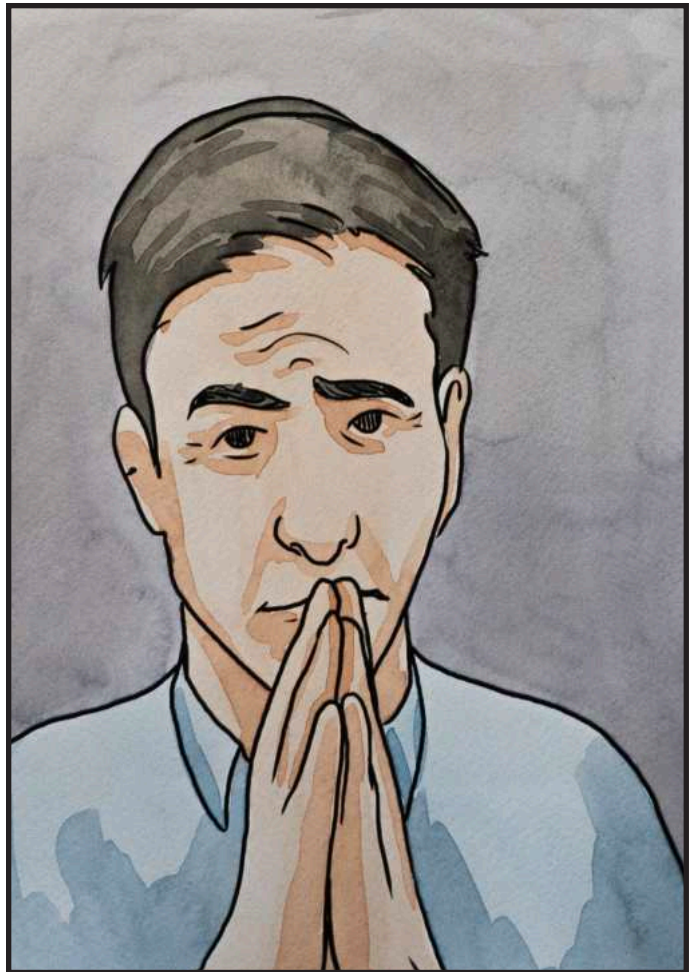
The women, George and Khaya's mother head home



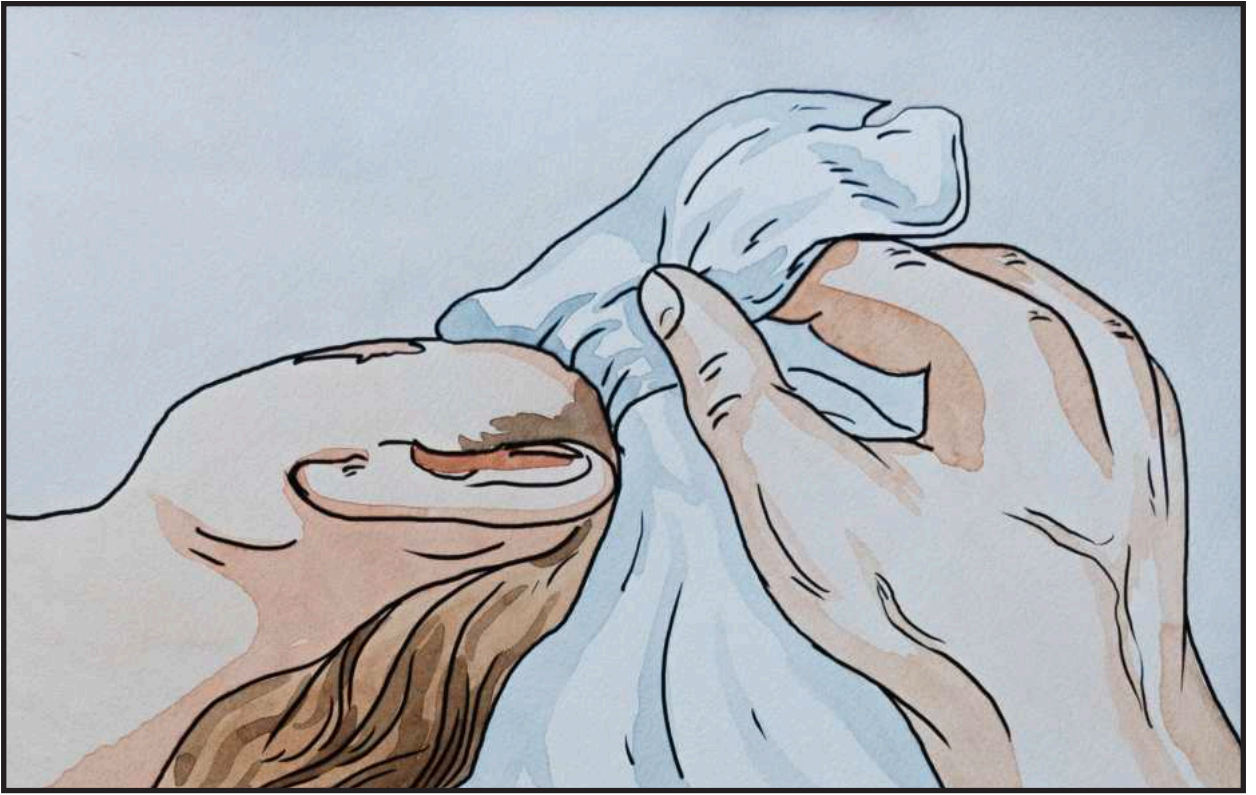






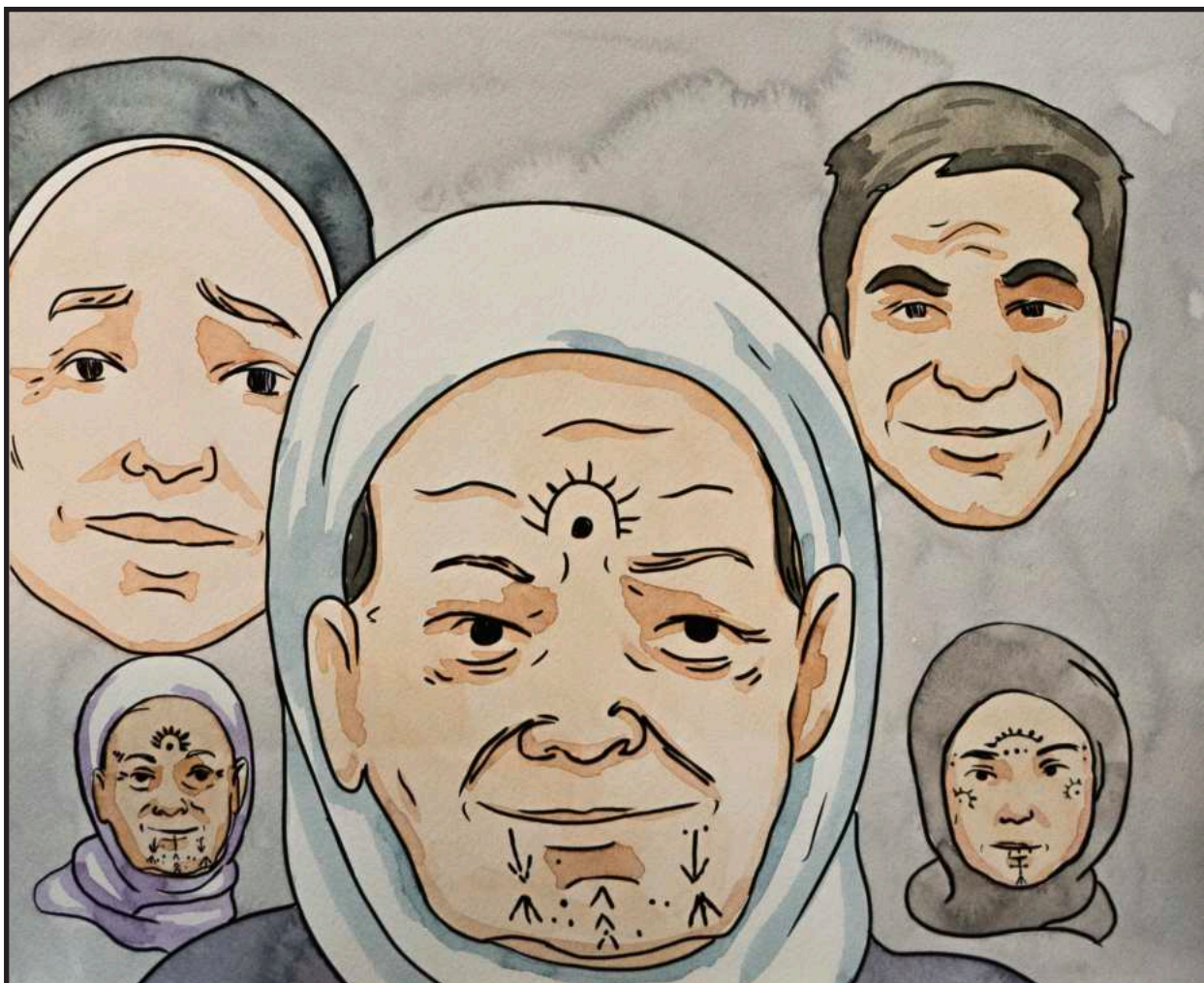








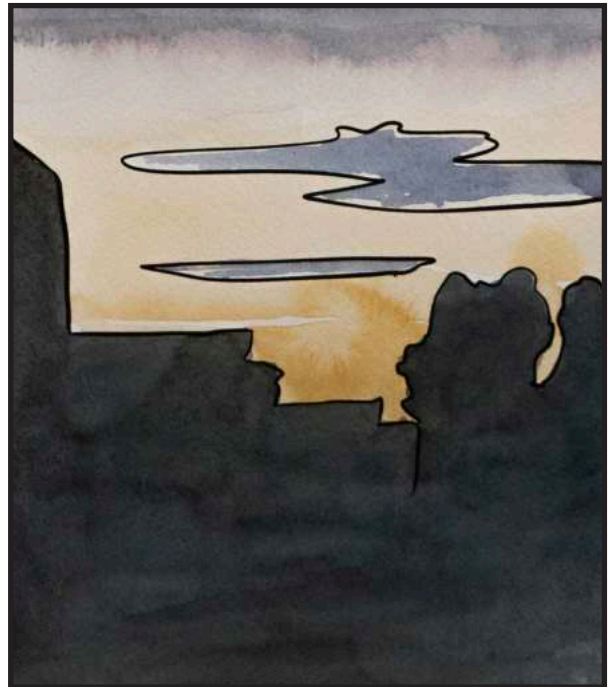
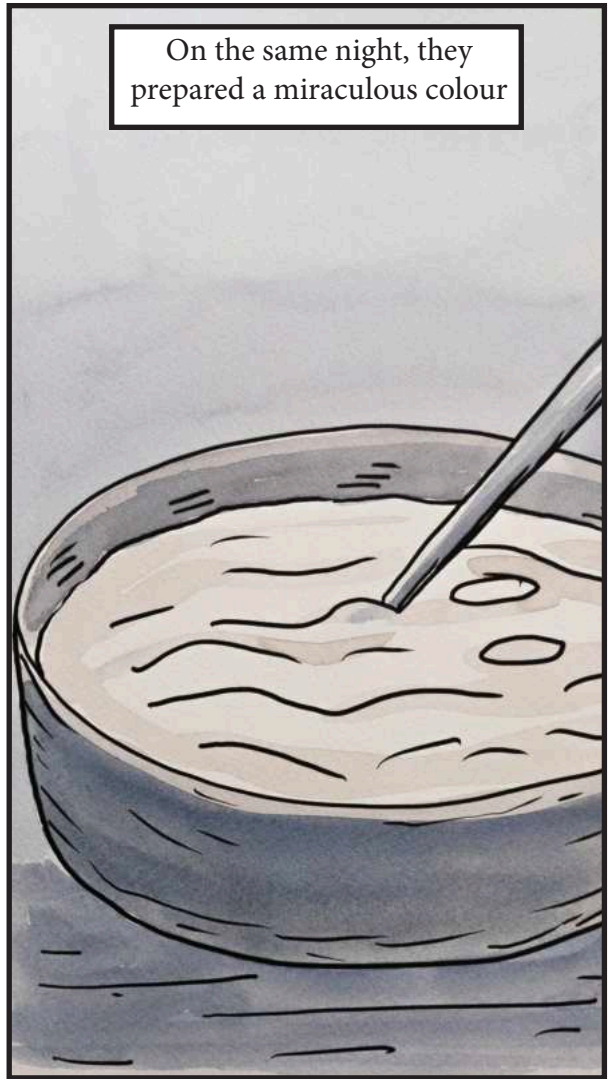
The women assure Khaya that they will restore her beauty with tattoos





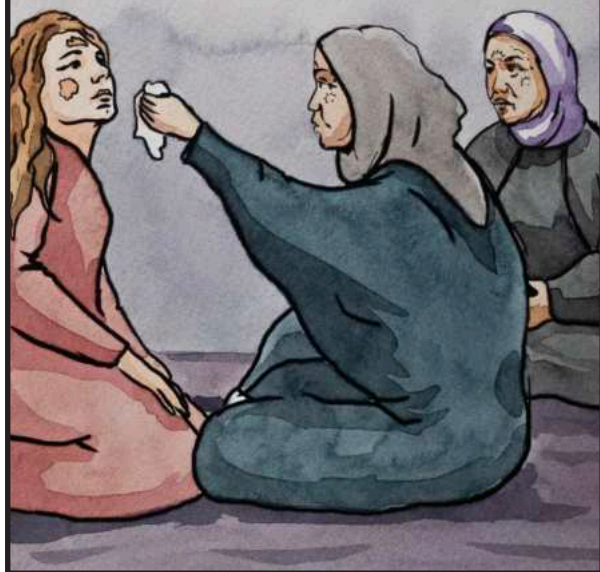


On the same night, they  
prepared a miraculous colour





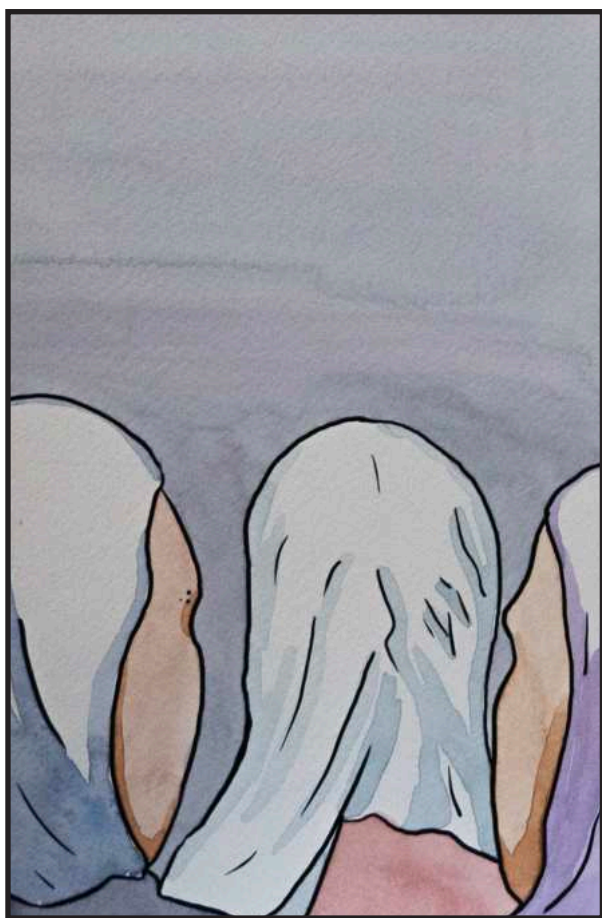
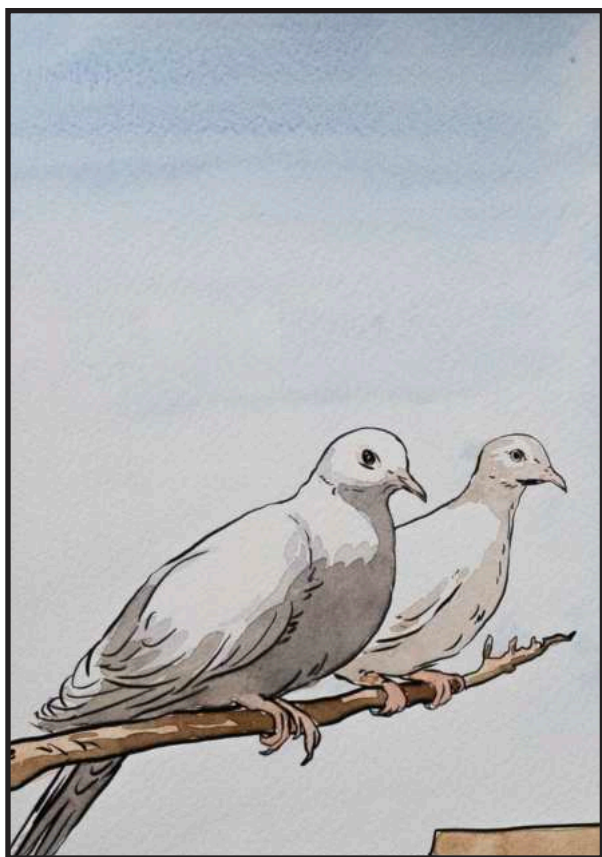
The women start tattooing

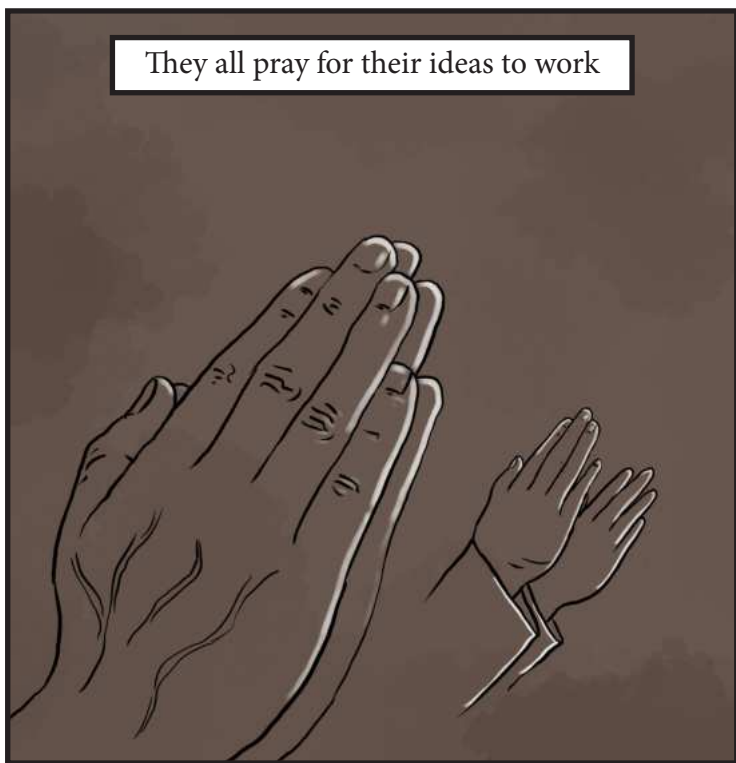


George and his mother wait  
outside of Khaya's room

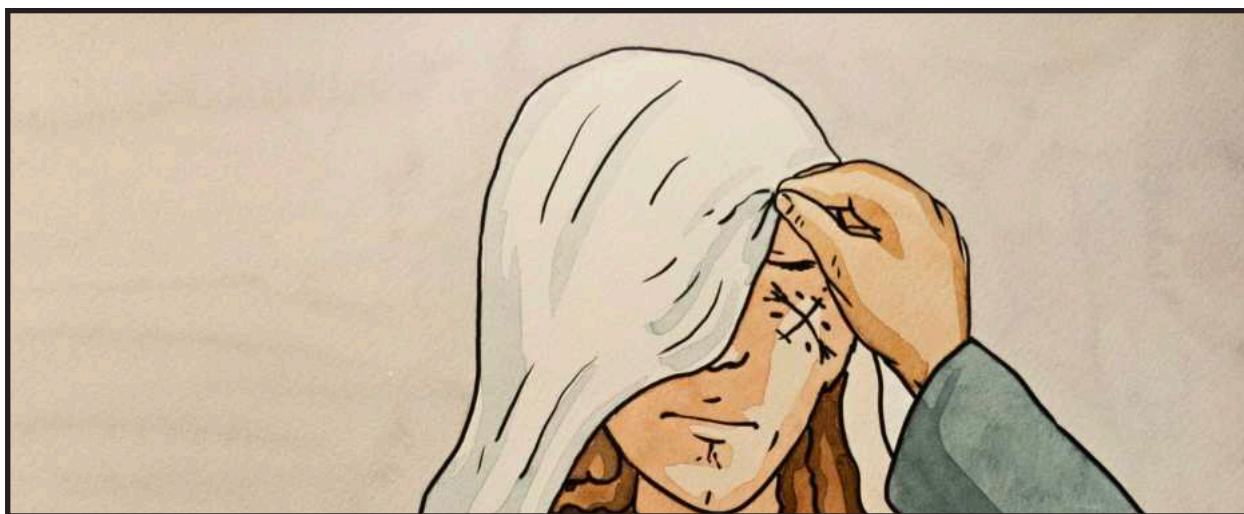








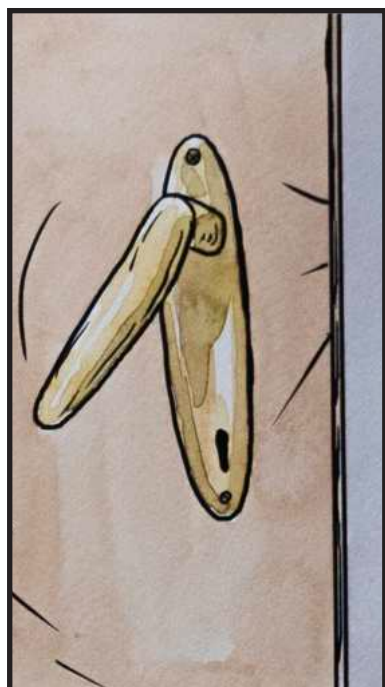




When the tattooing is finished, they're all astonished to see their daughter with the tattoos covering the burnt spots









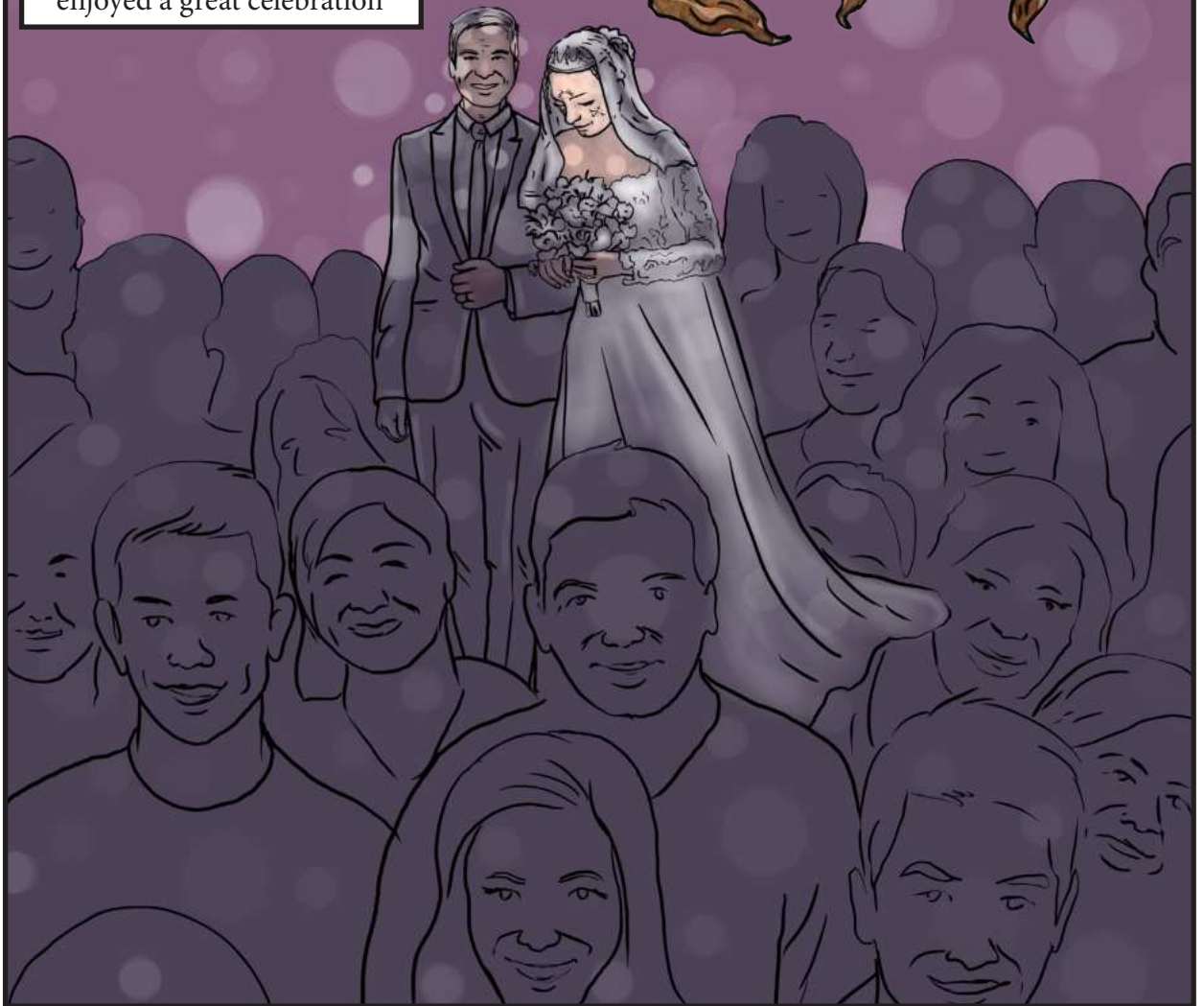
When Khaya sees her face, she's so happy and thanks the women







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







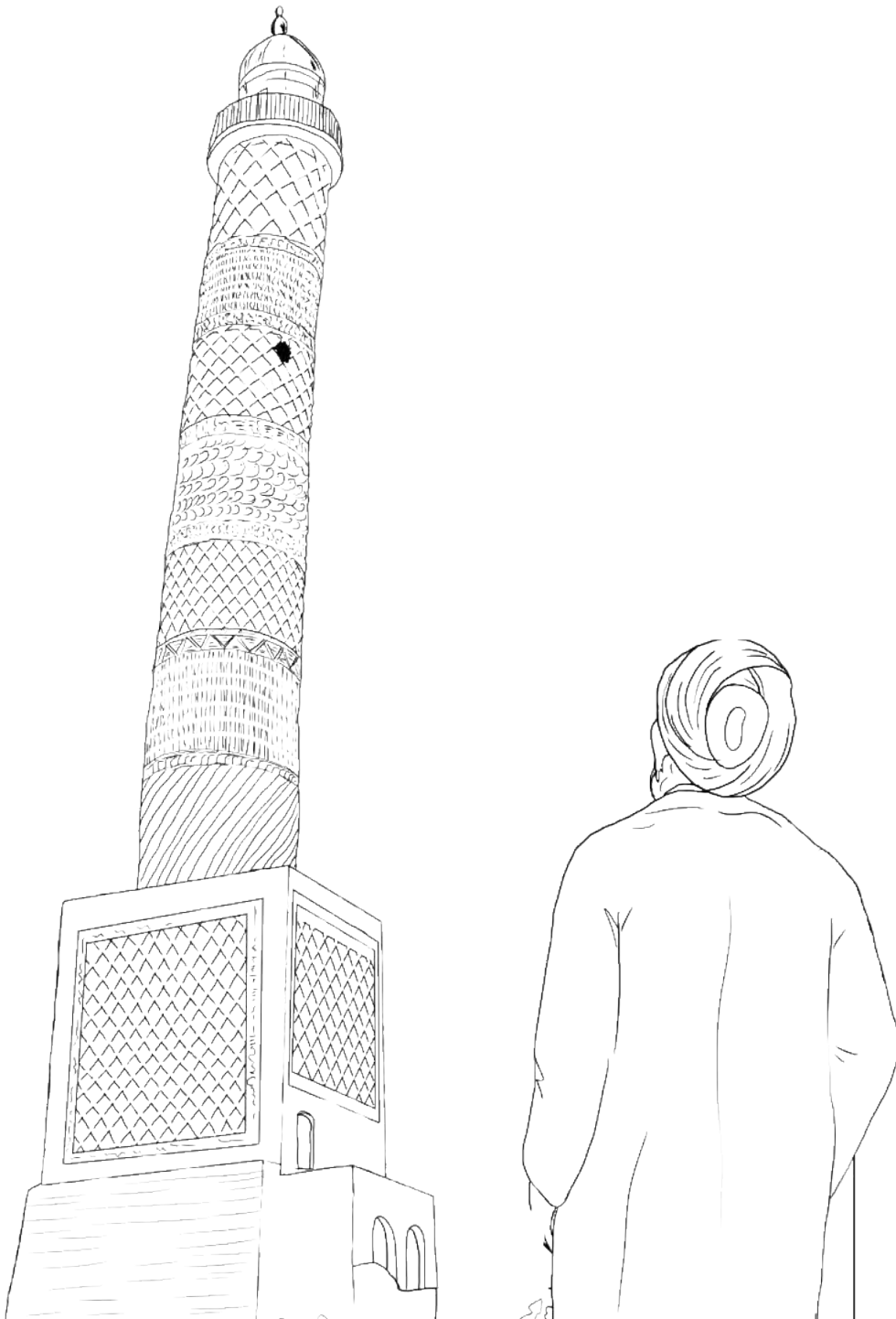






## Abudi Tanburji

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

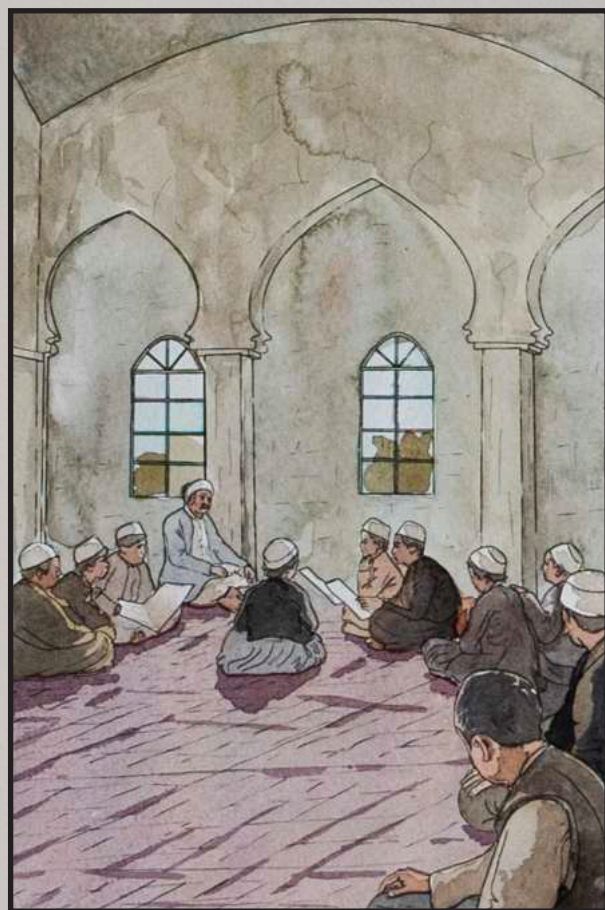
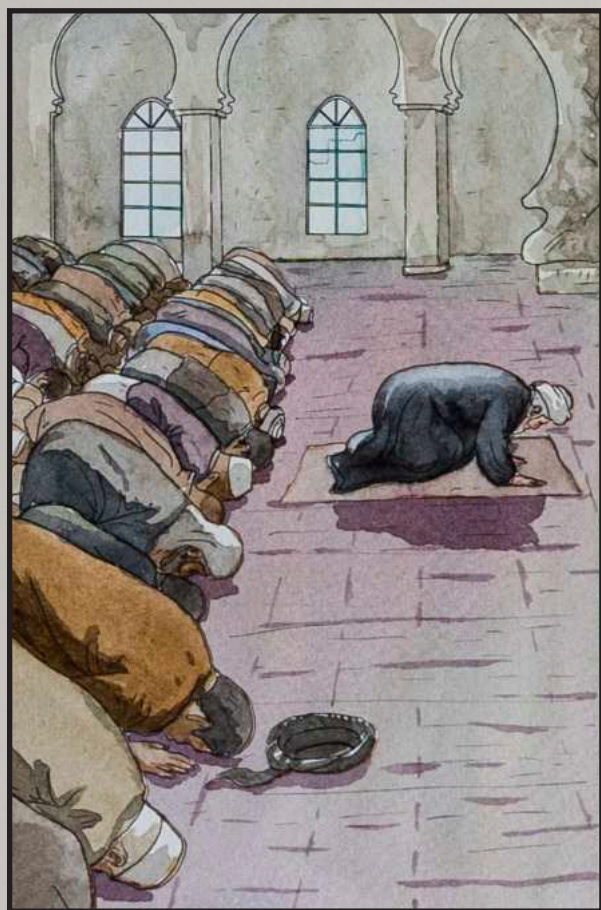
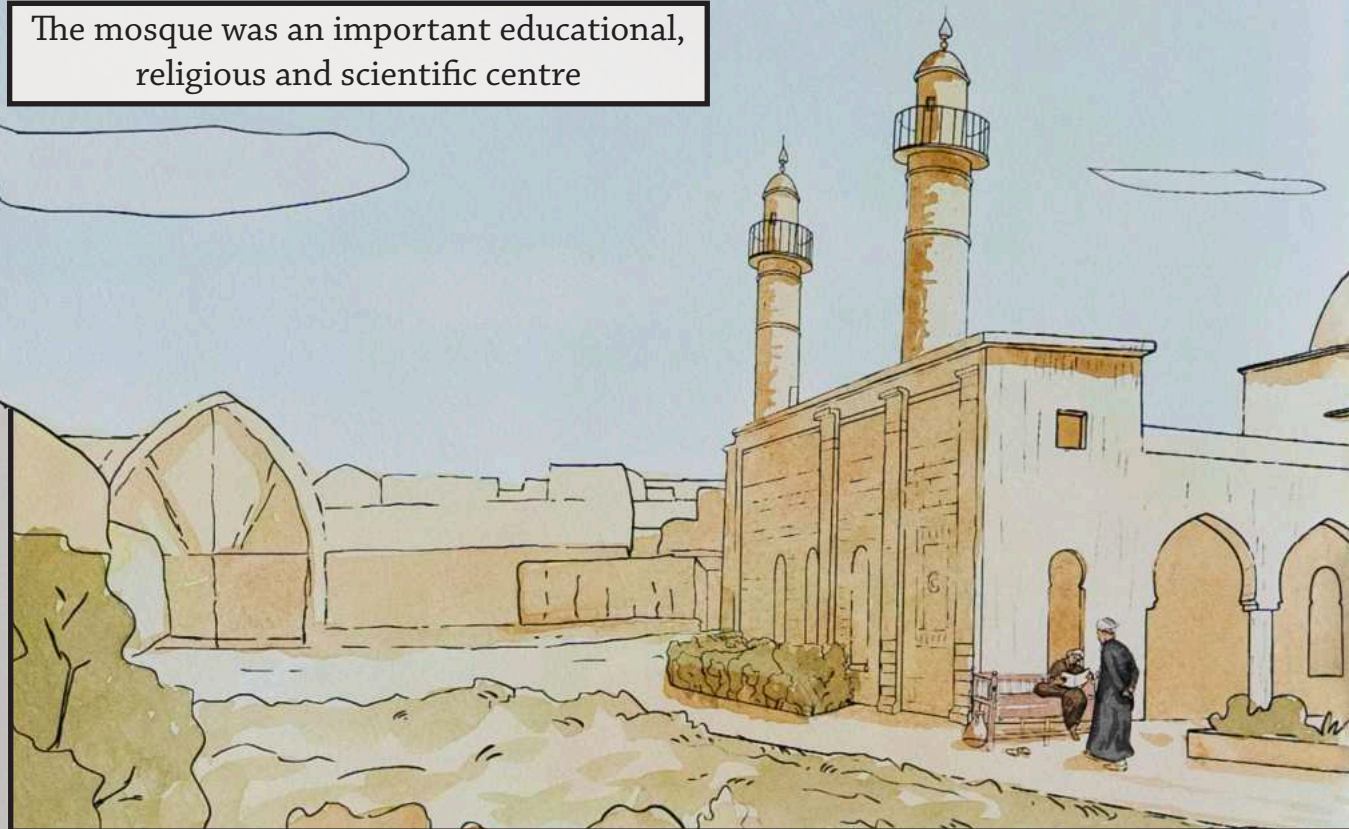








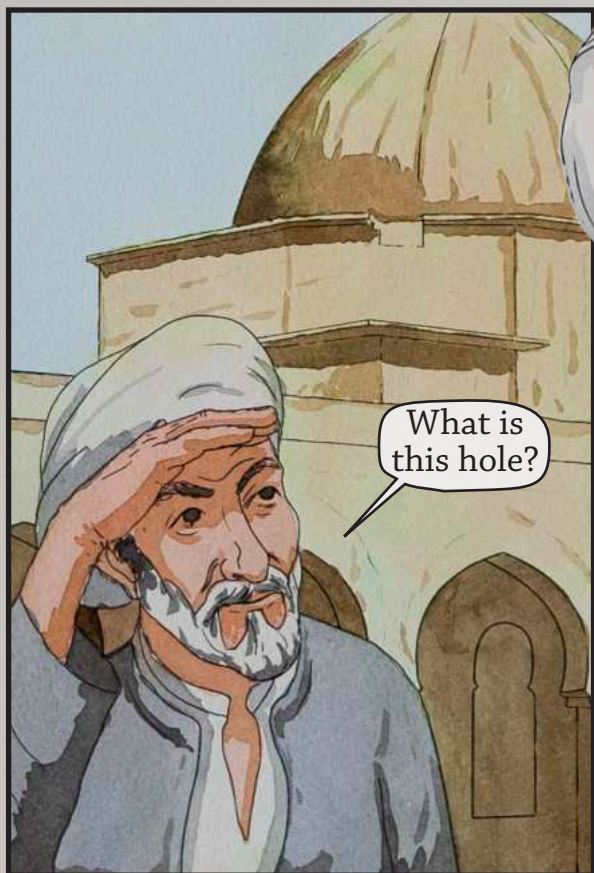
The mosque was an important educational,  
religious and scientific centre



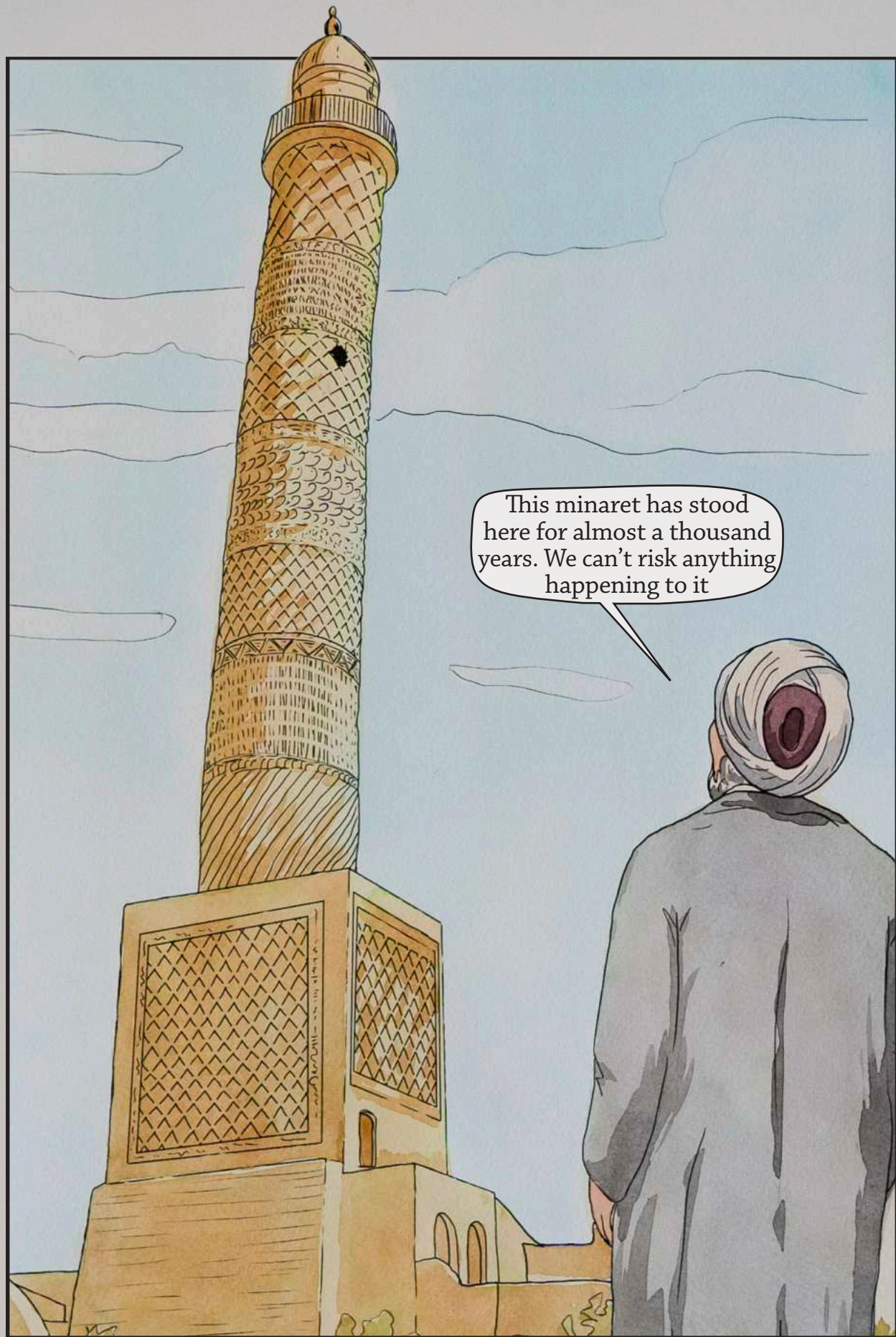








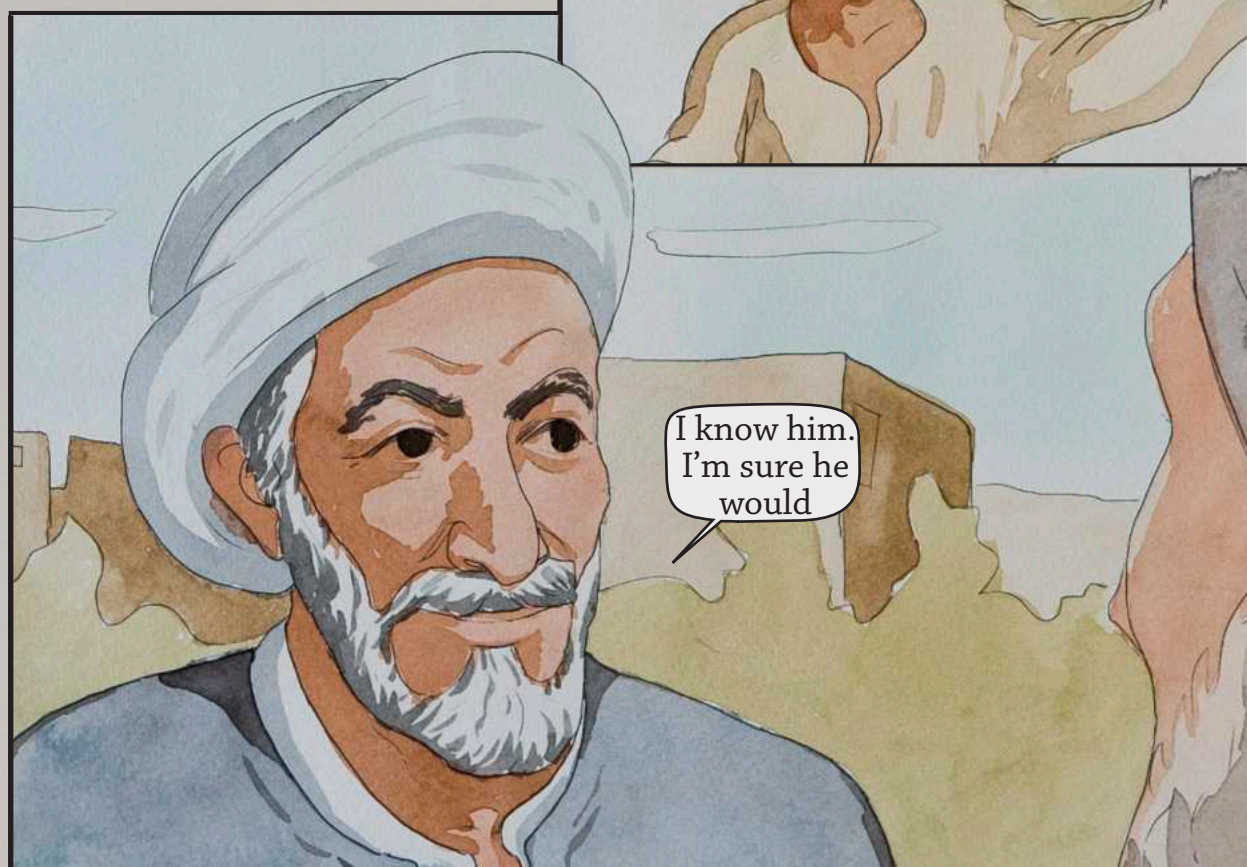
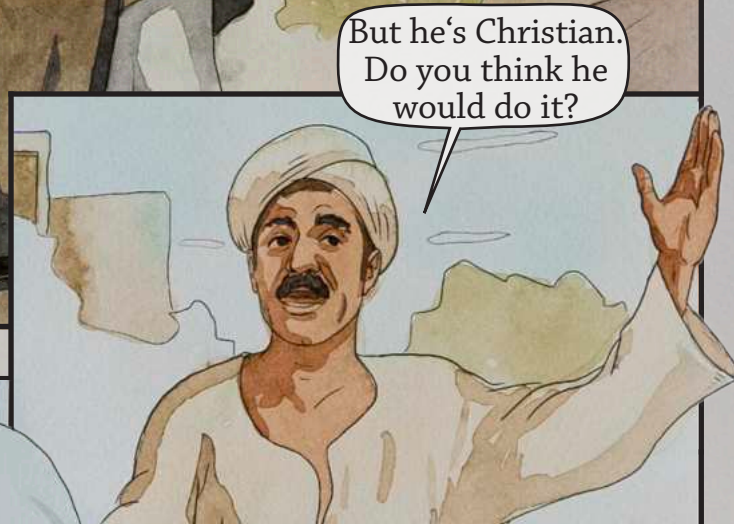
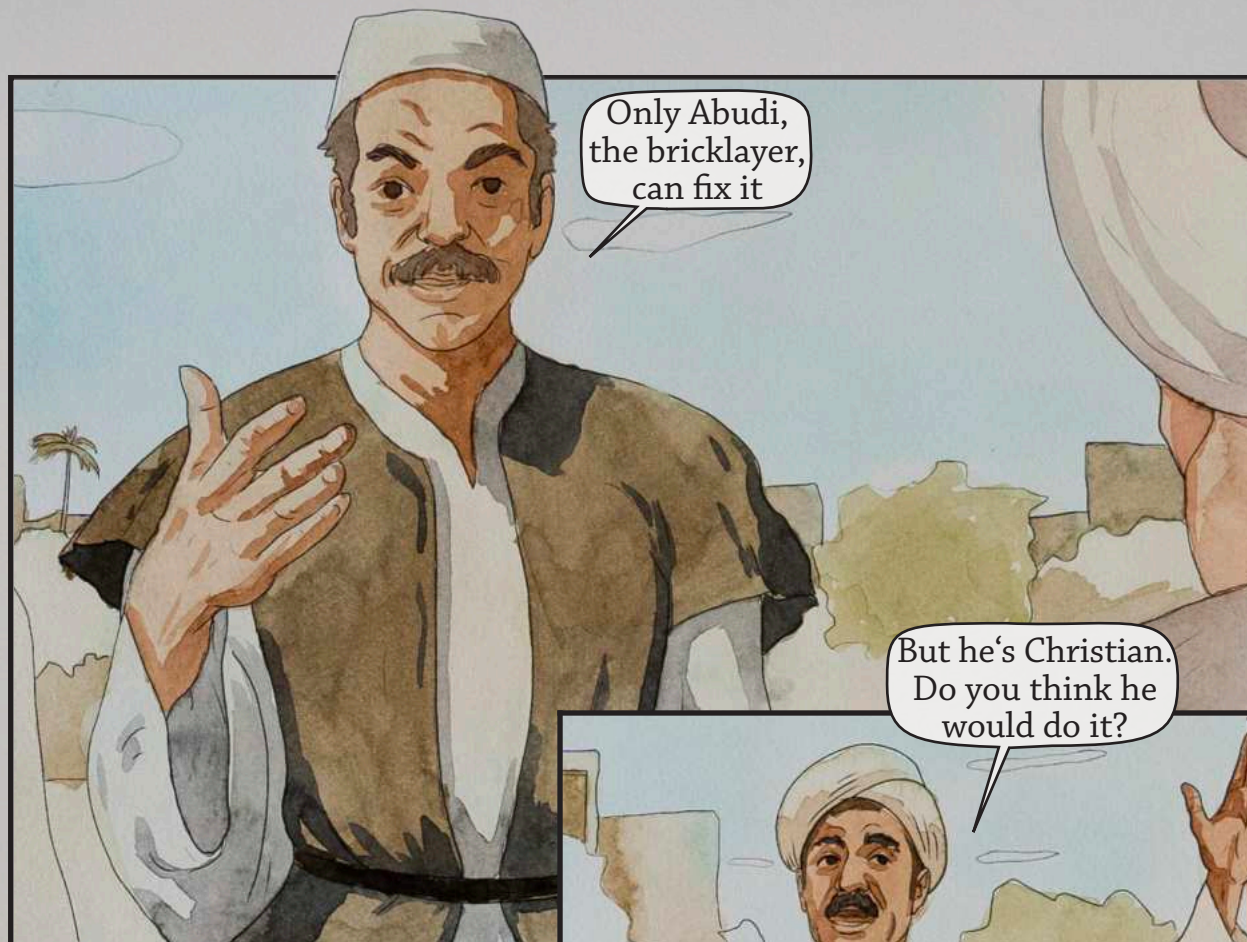




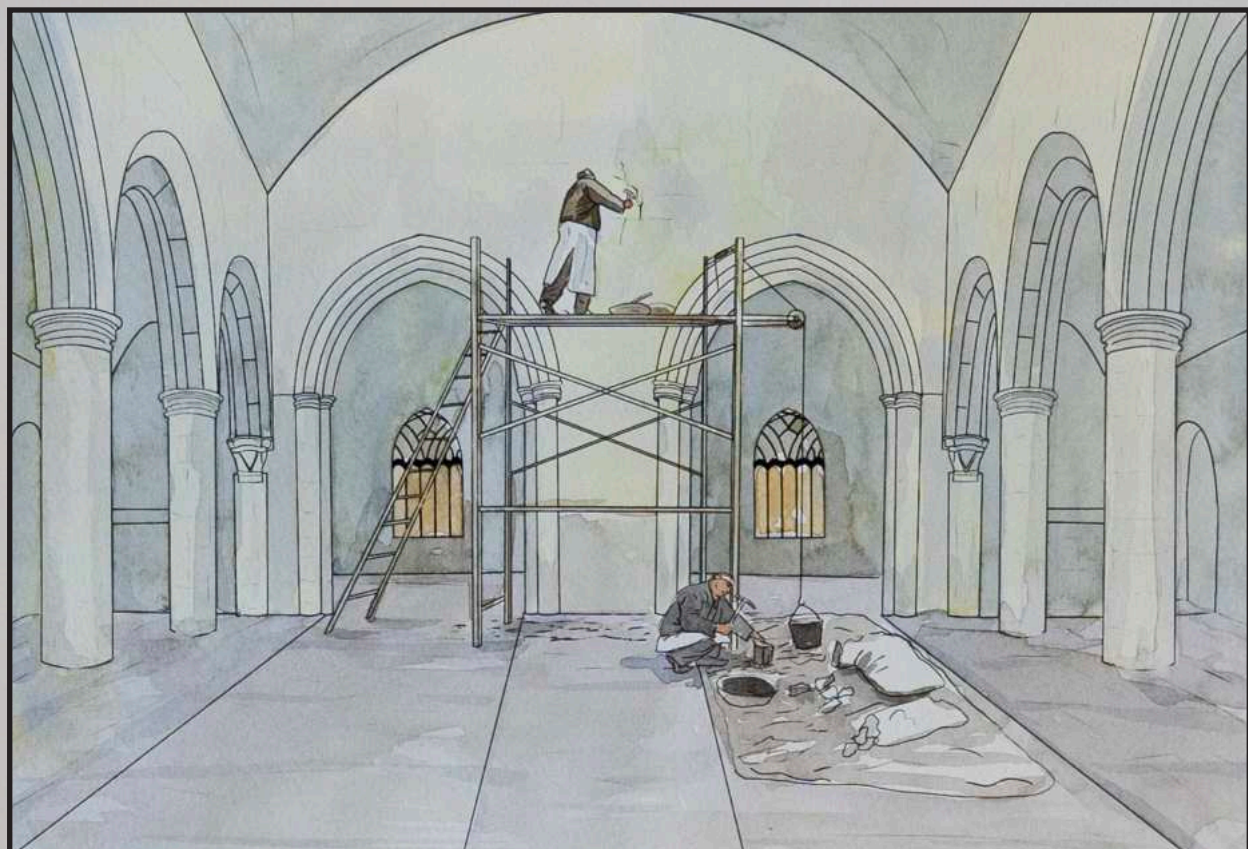




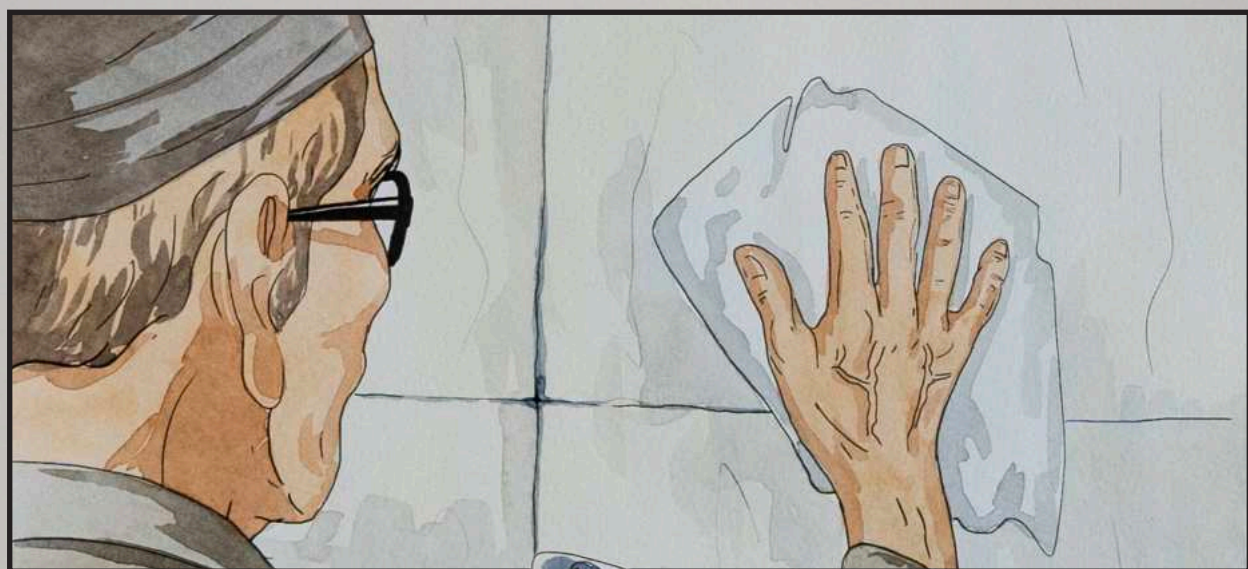




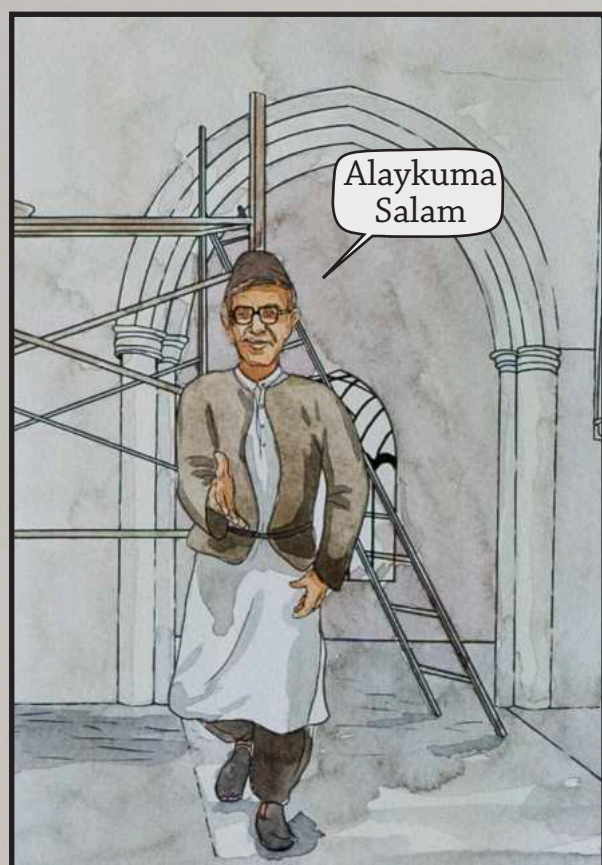




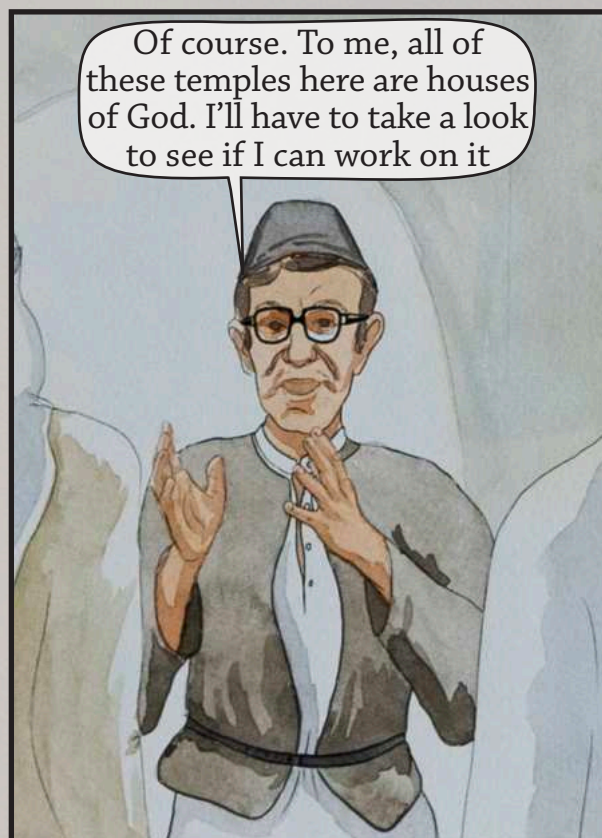
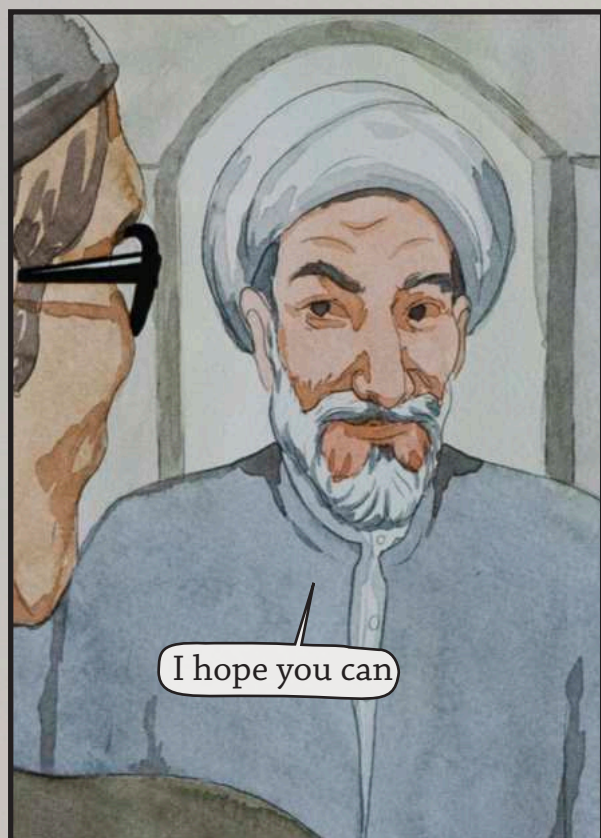
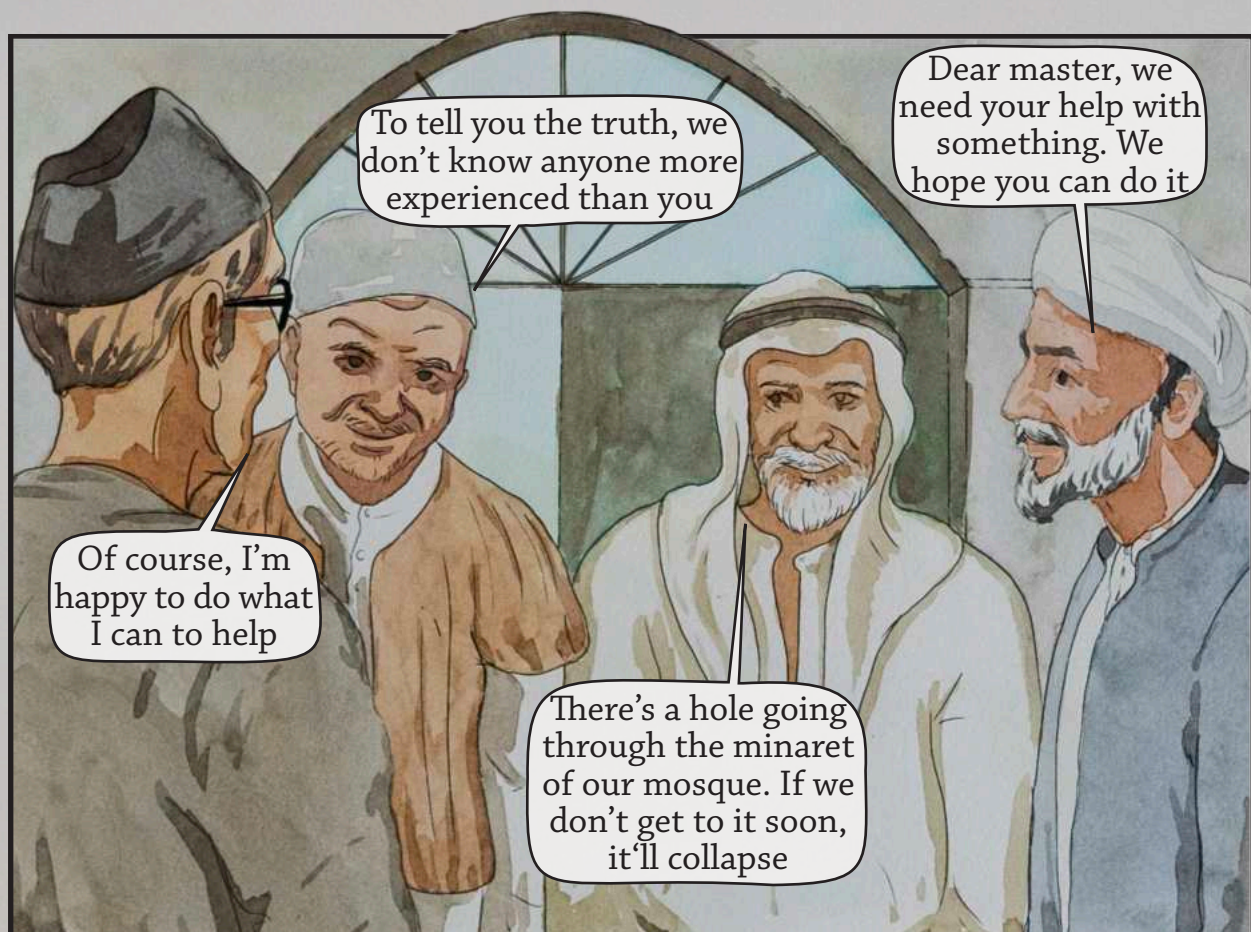




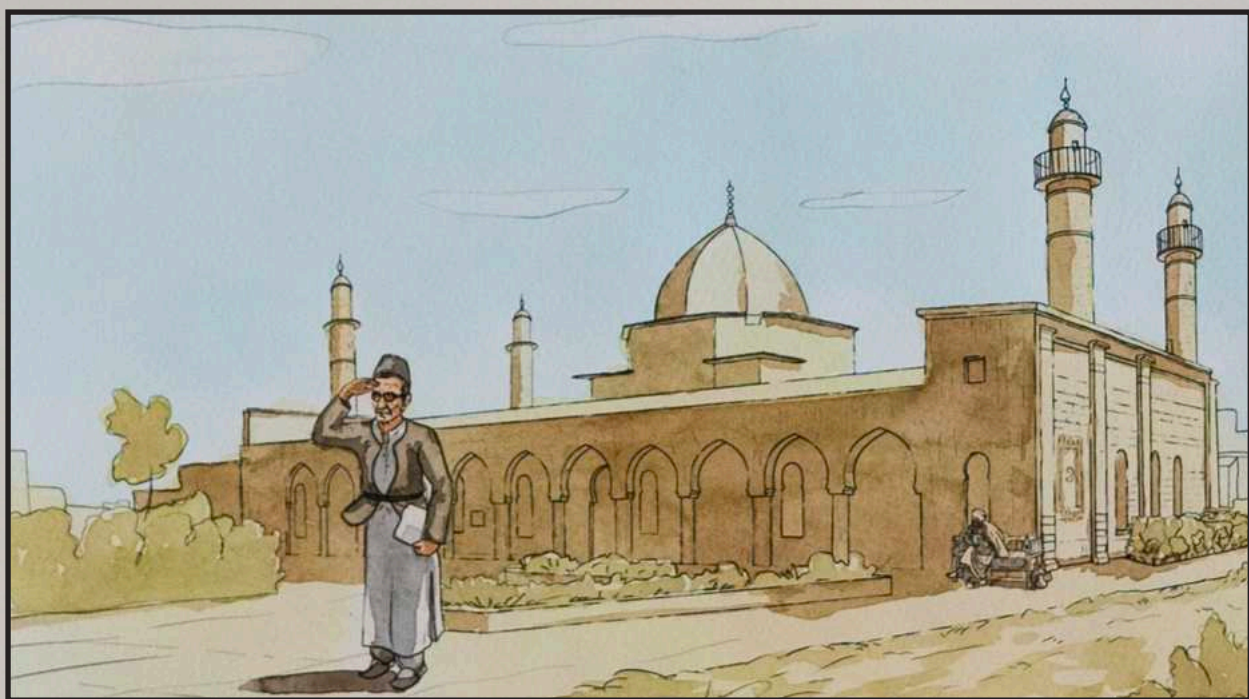
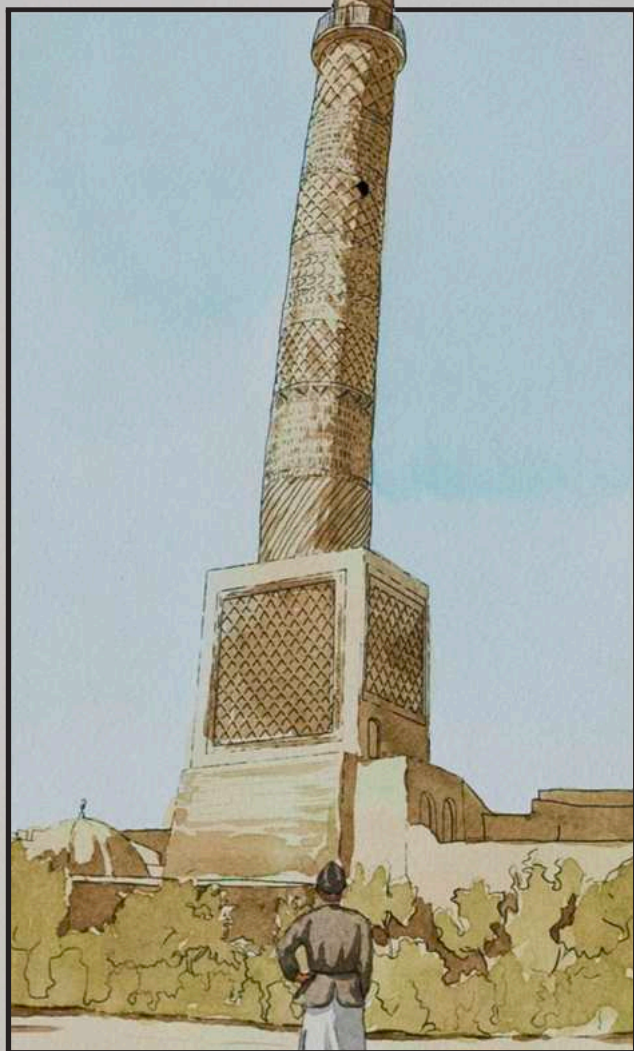
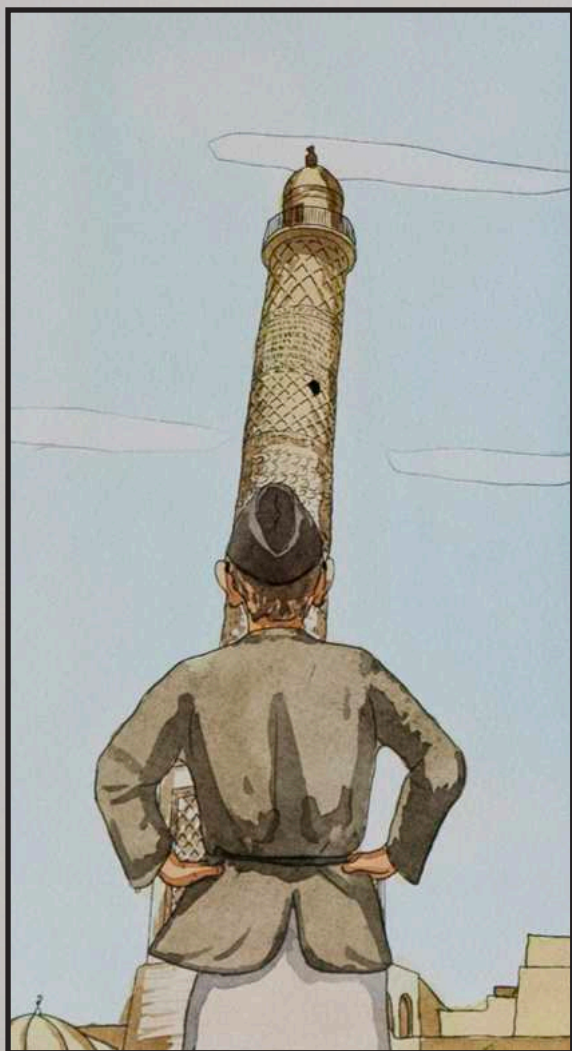






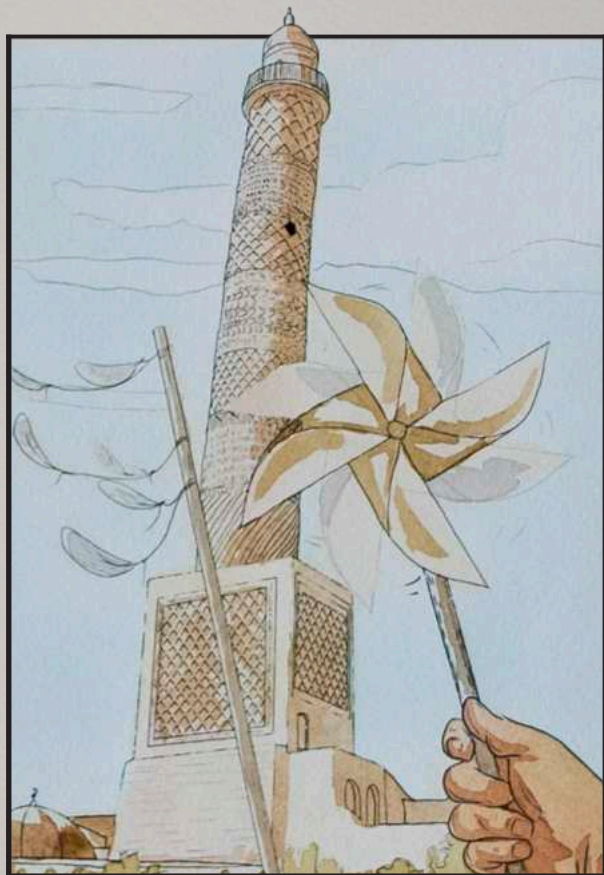
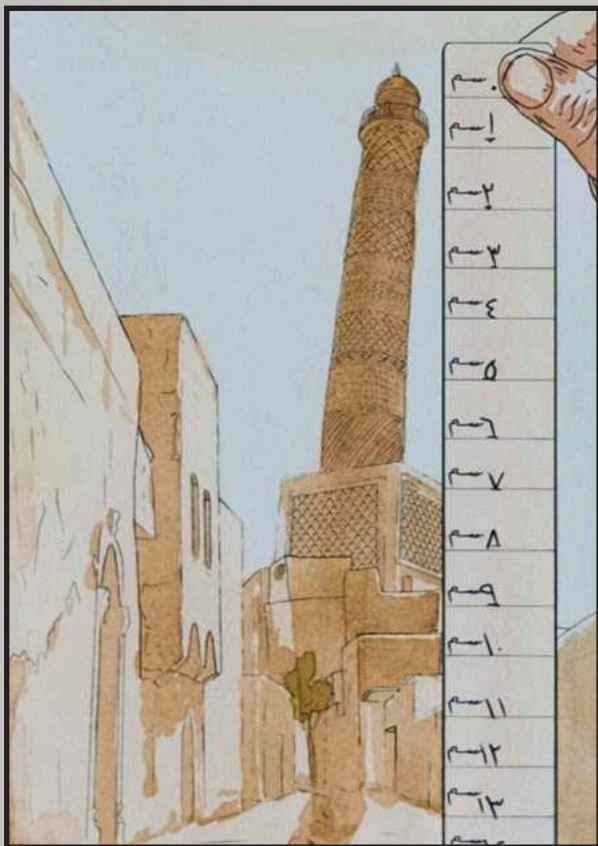
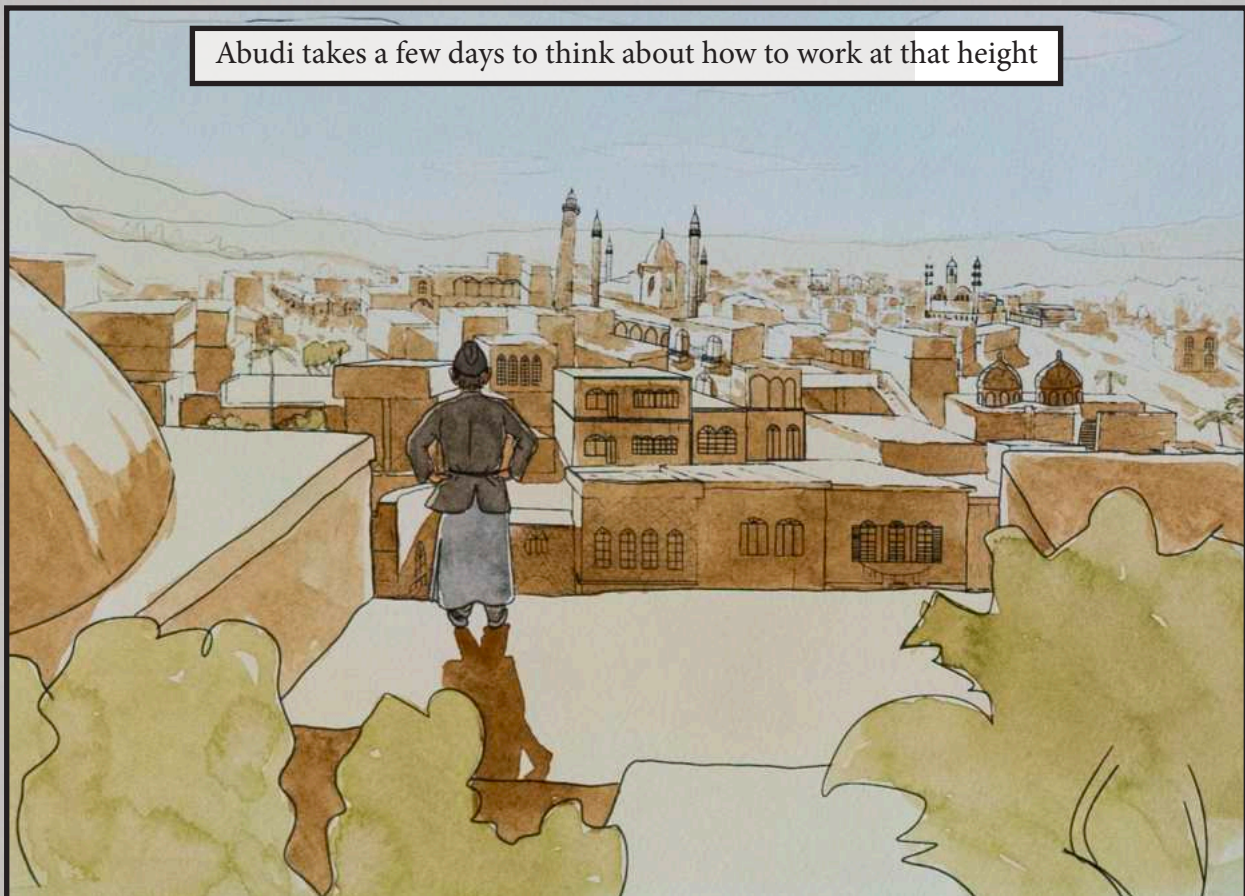






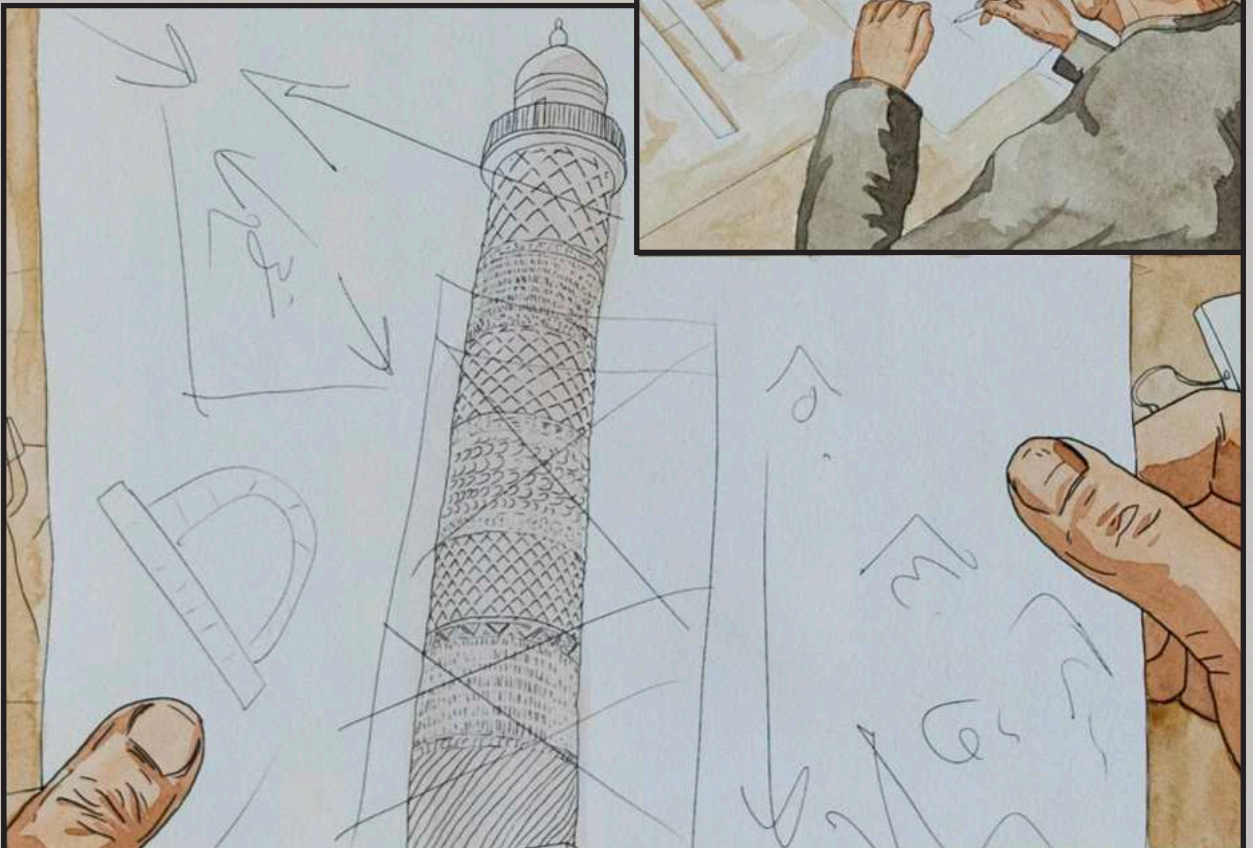
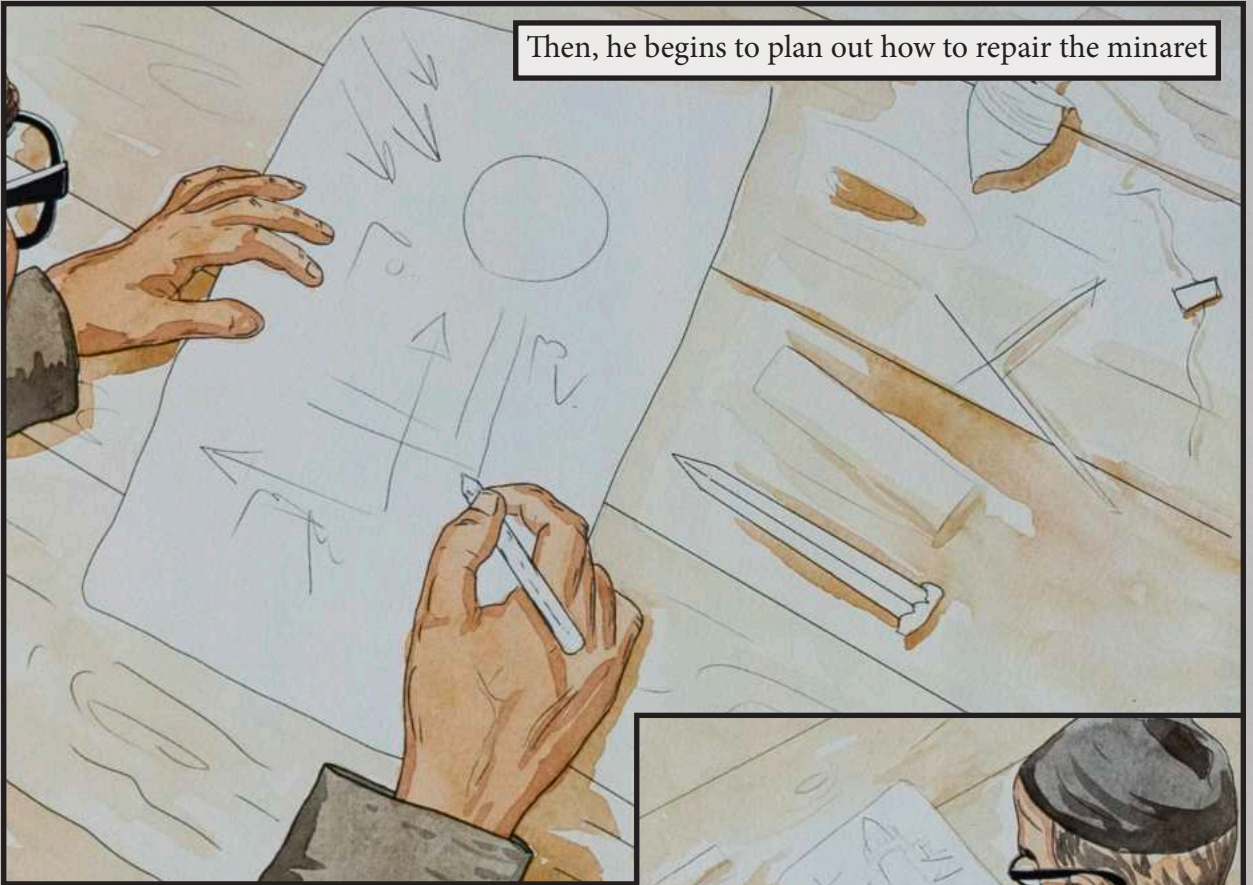


Abudi takes a few days to think about how to work at that height

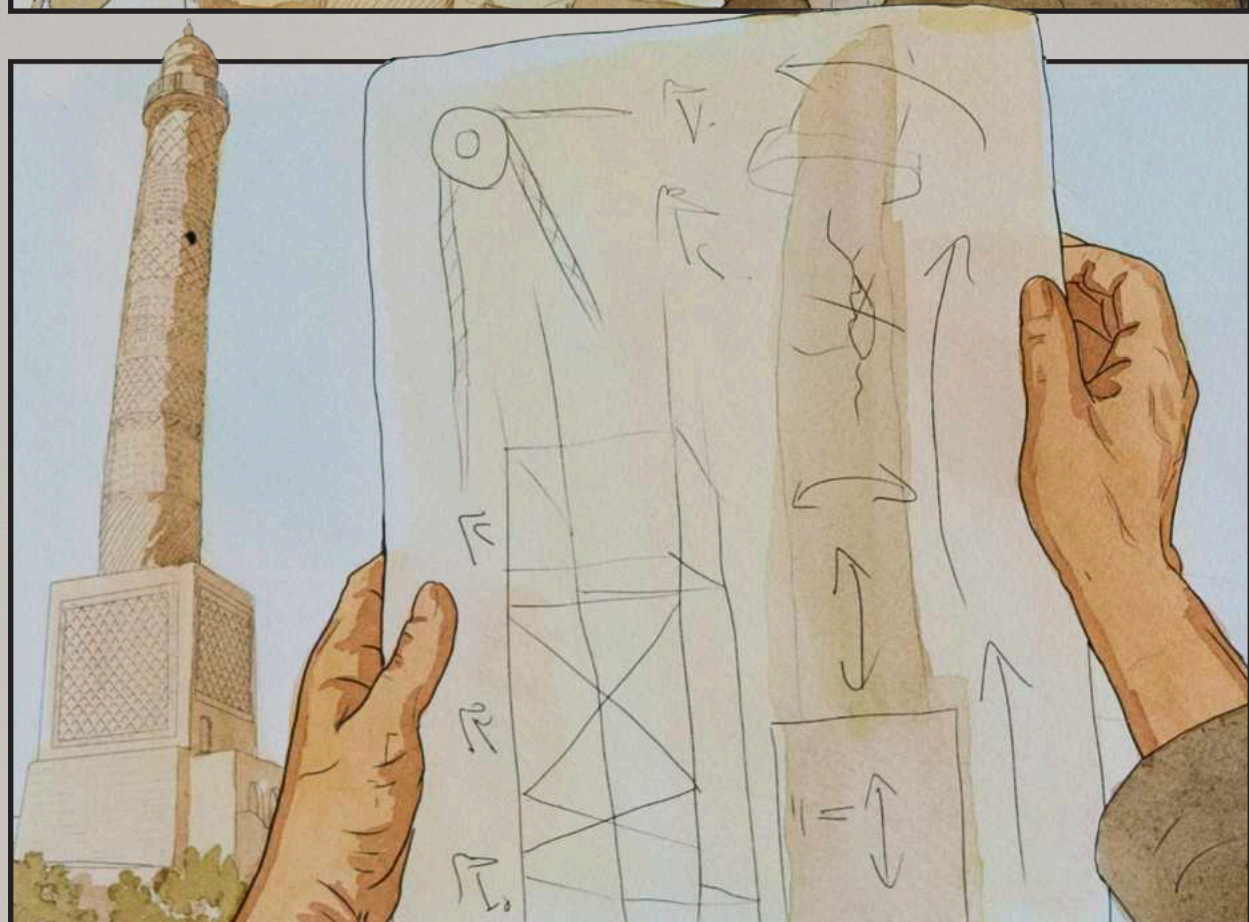




Then, he begins to plan out how to repair the minaret







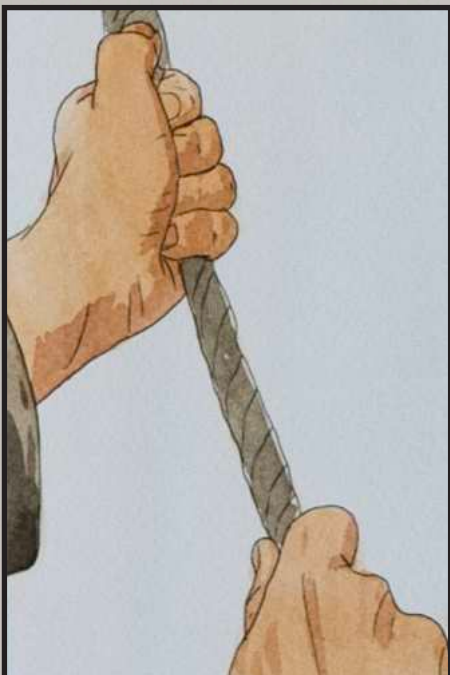
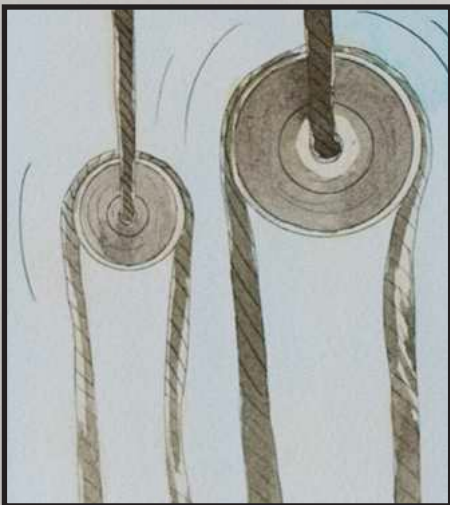
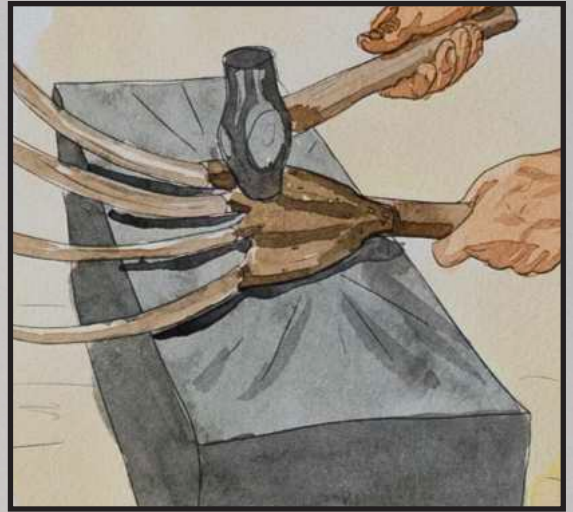




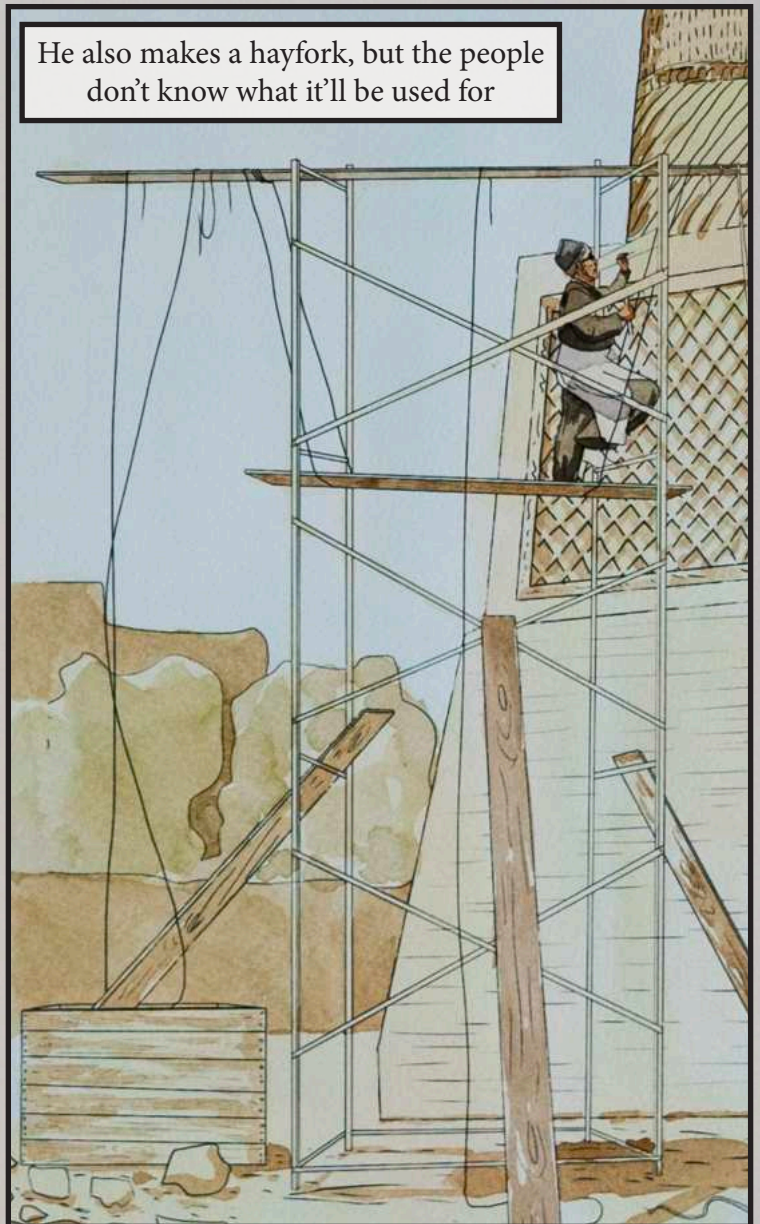
Abudi builds a wooden box to enter and lowers it down with a rope to the level of the hole



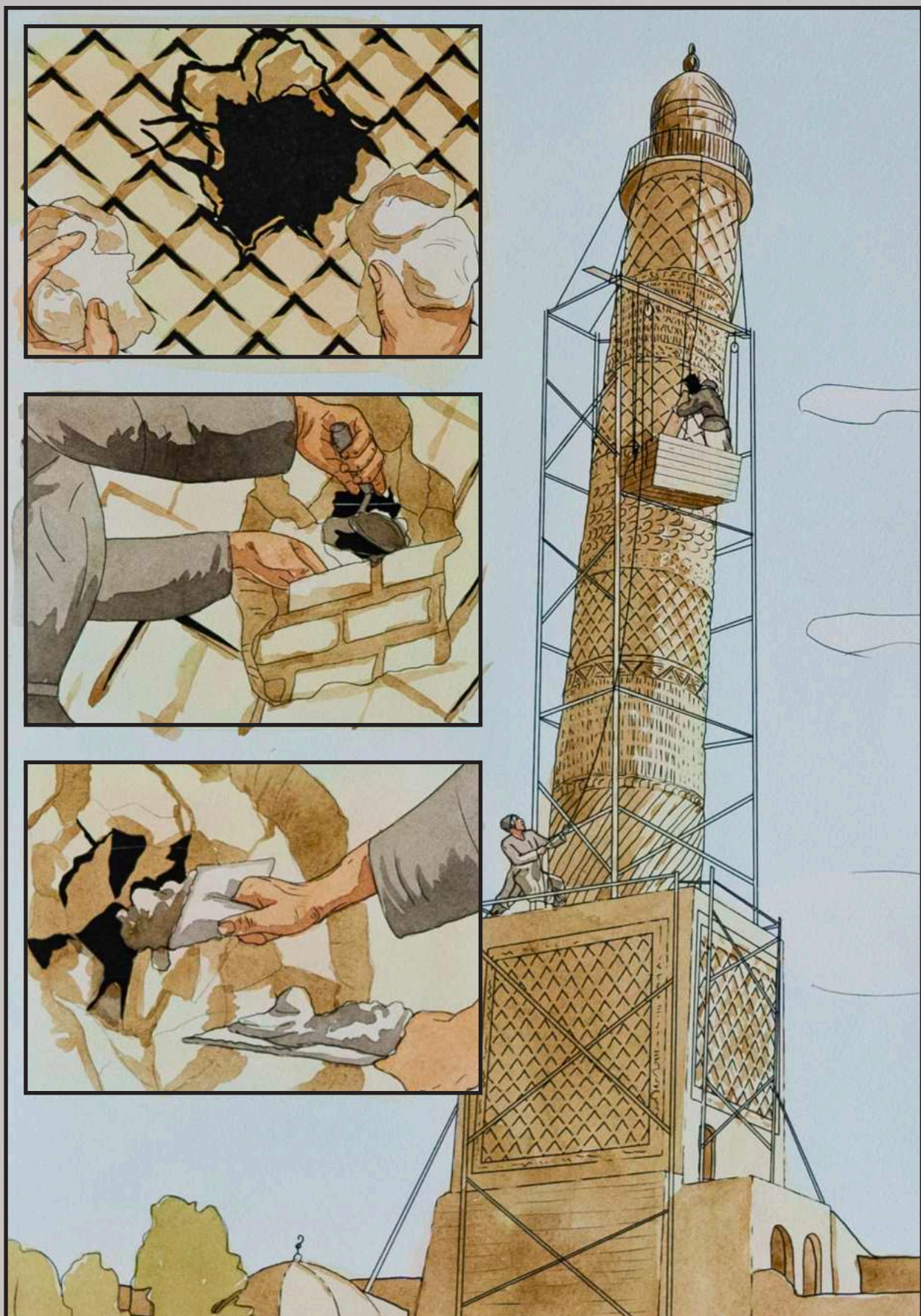




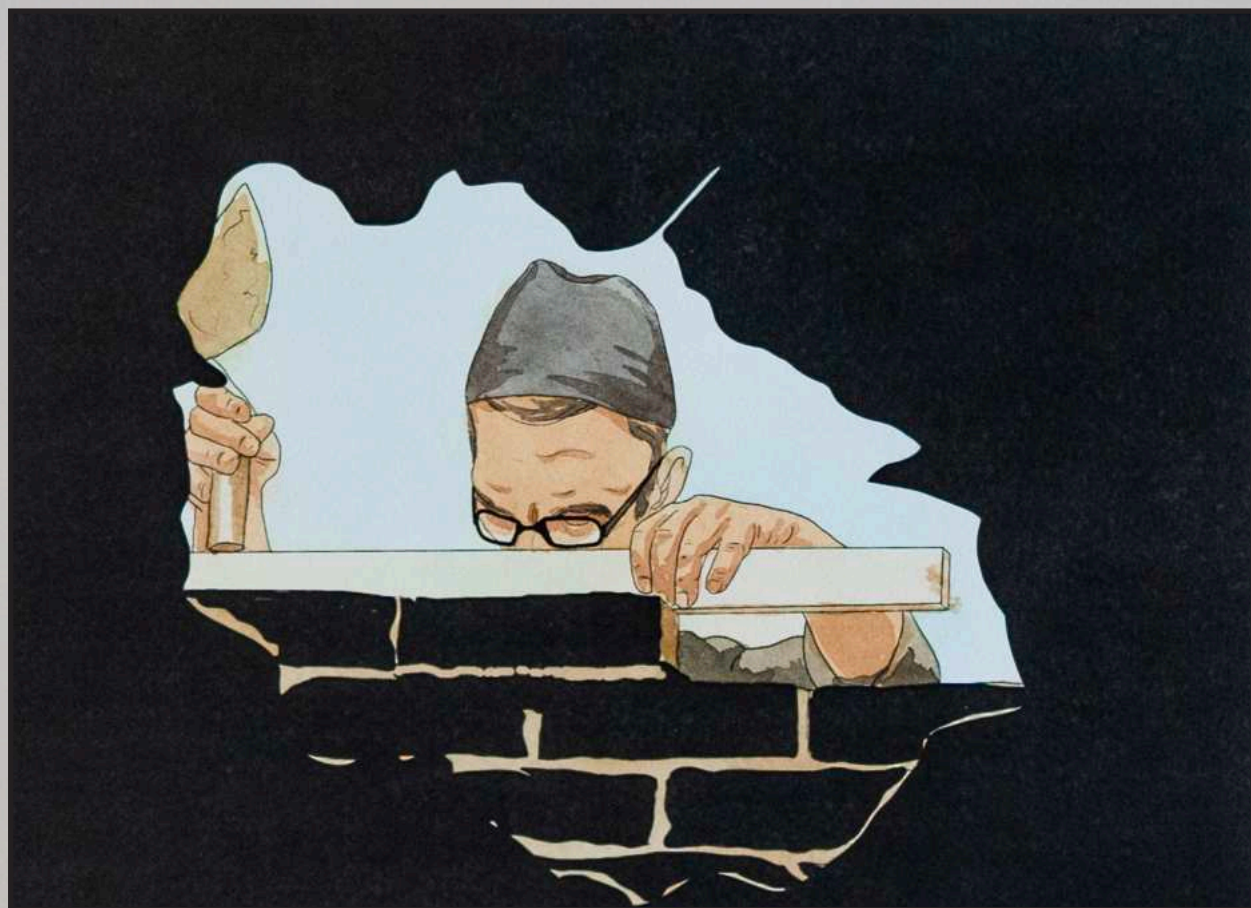
He also makes a hayfork, but the people don't know what it'll be used for





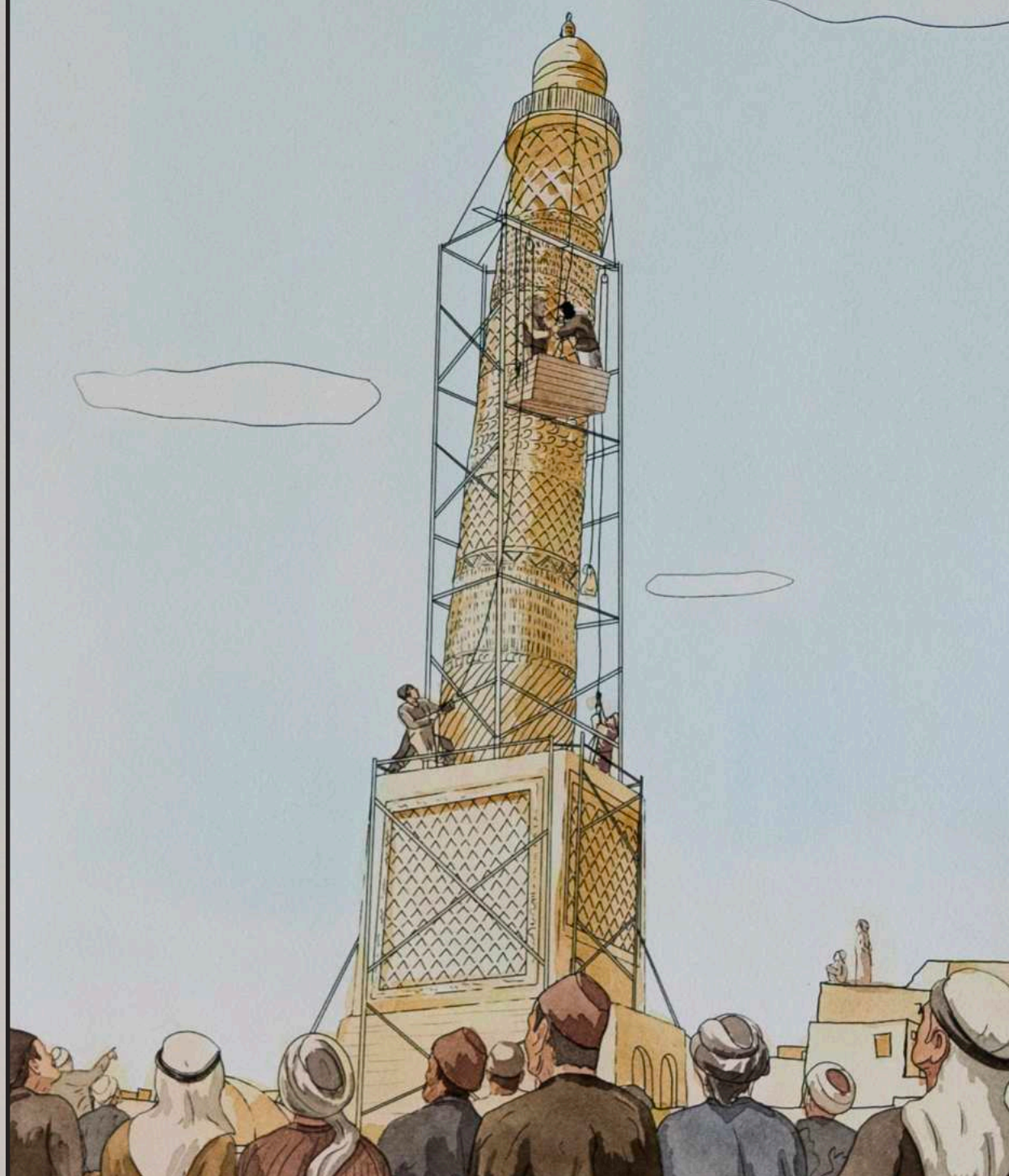








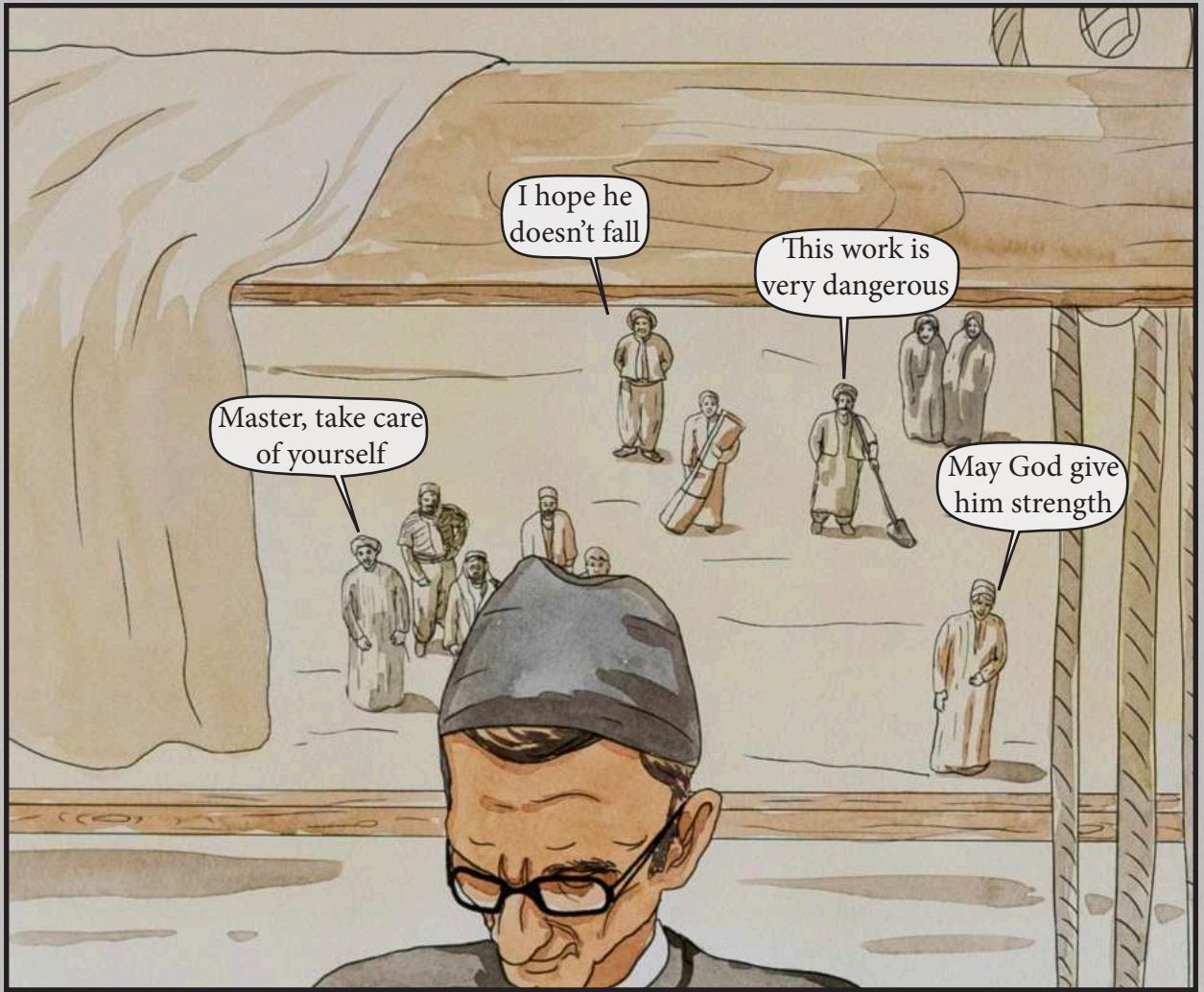
People gather around the minaret and are amazed  
at the way Abudi works at that height





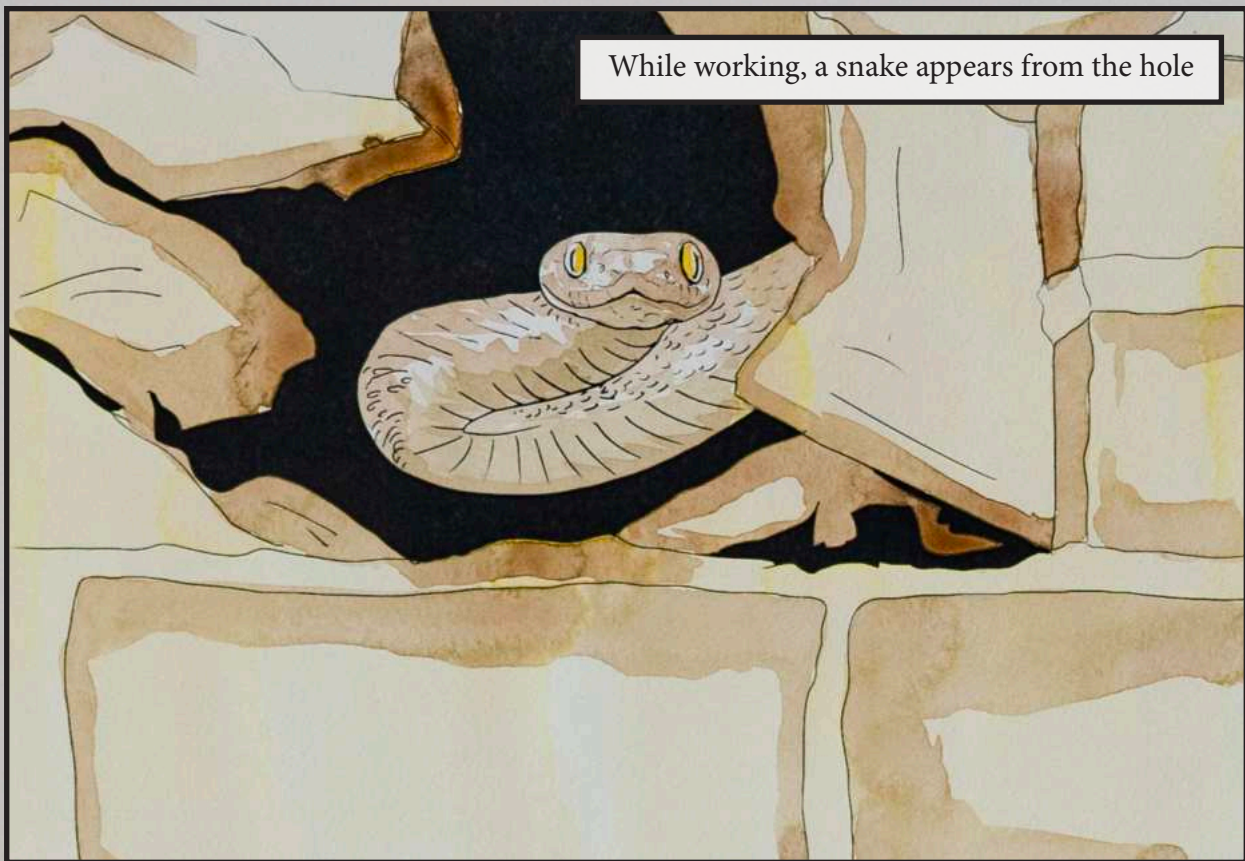








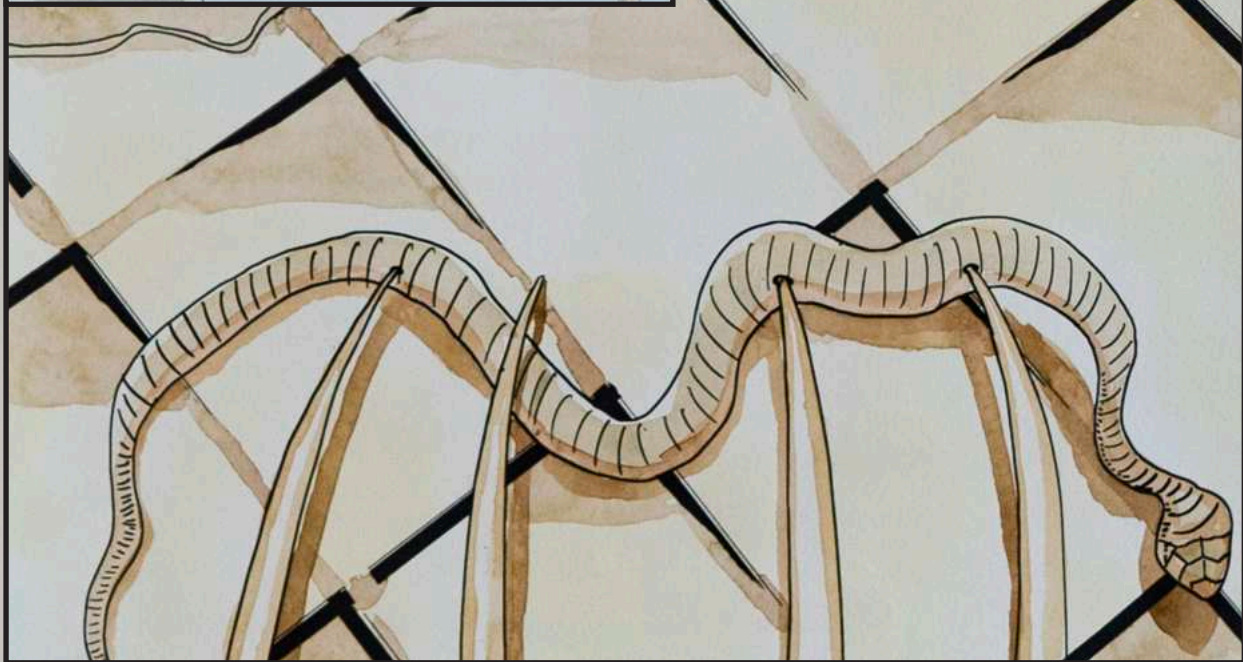
While working, a snake appears from the hole





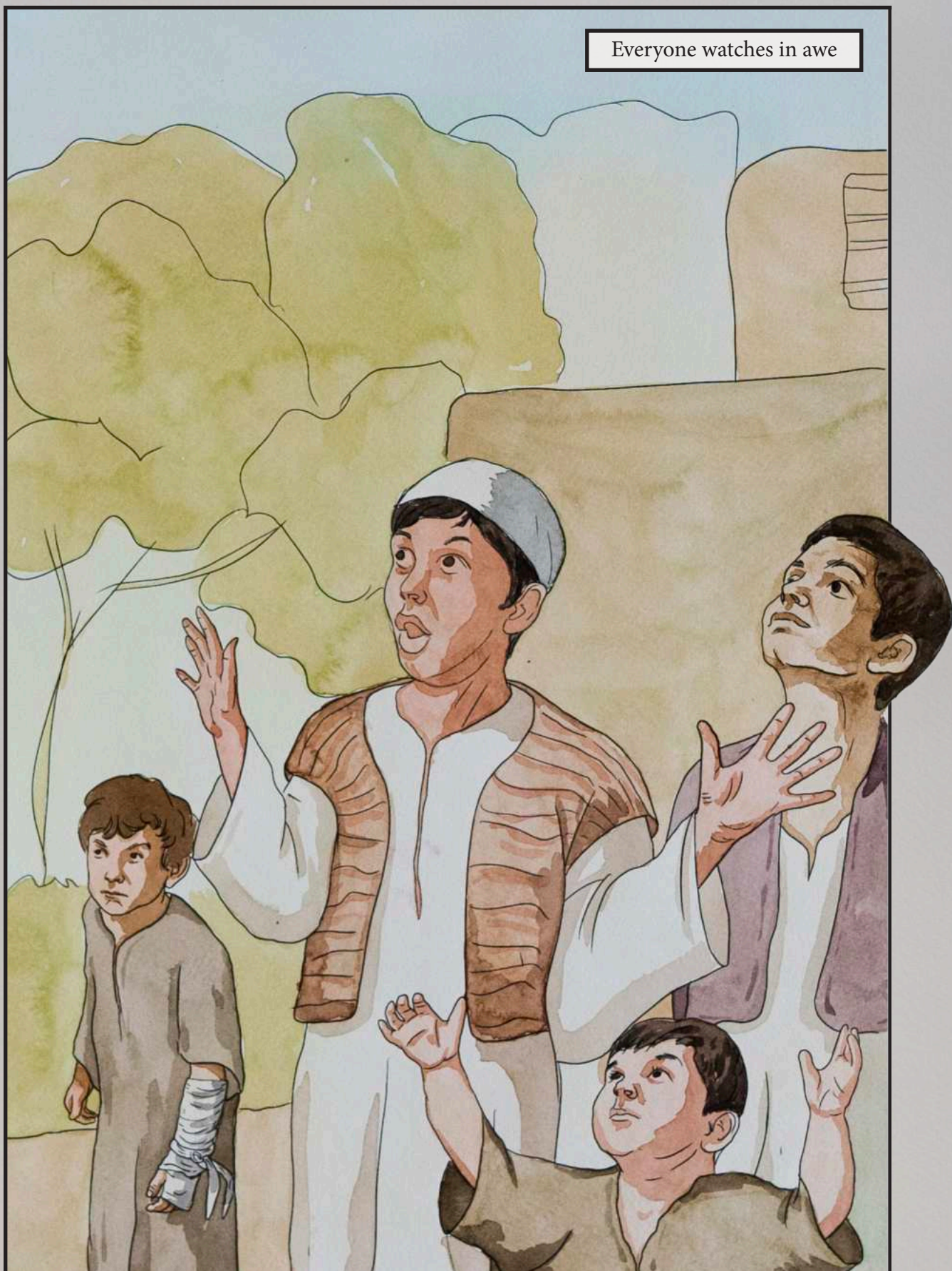


But master Abudi skilfully kills the snake and throws it down to the ground

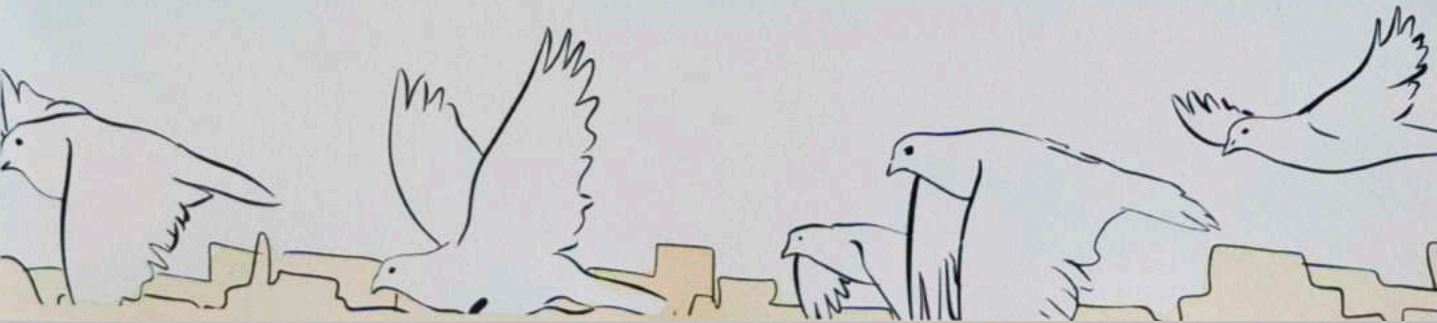
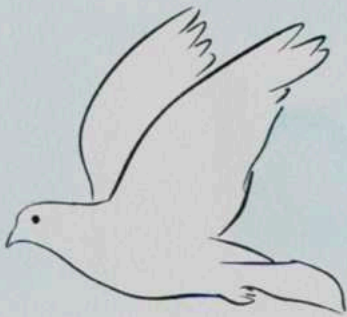
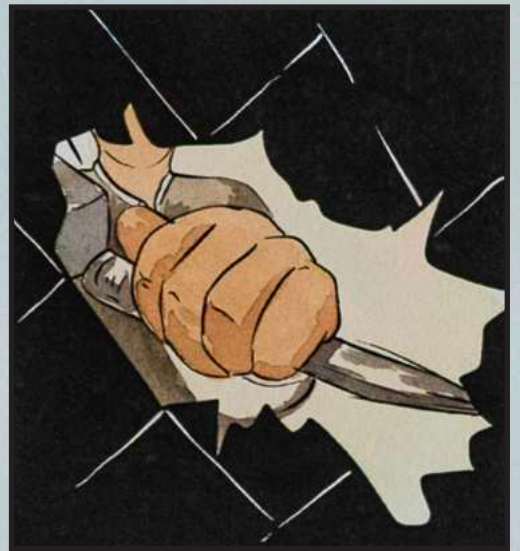




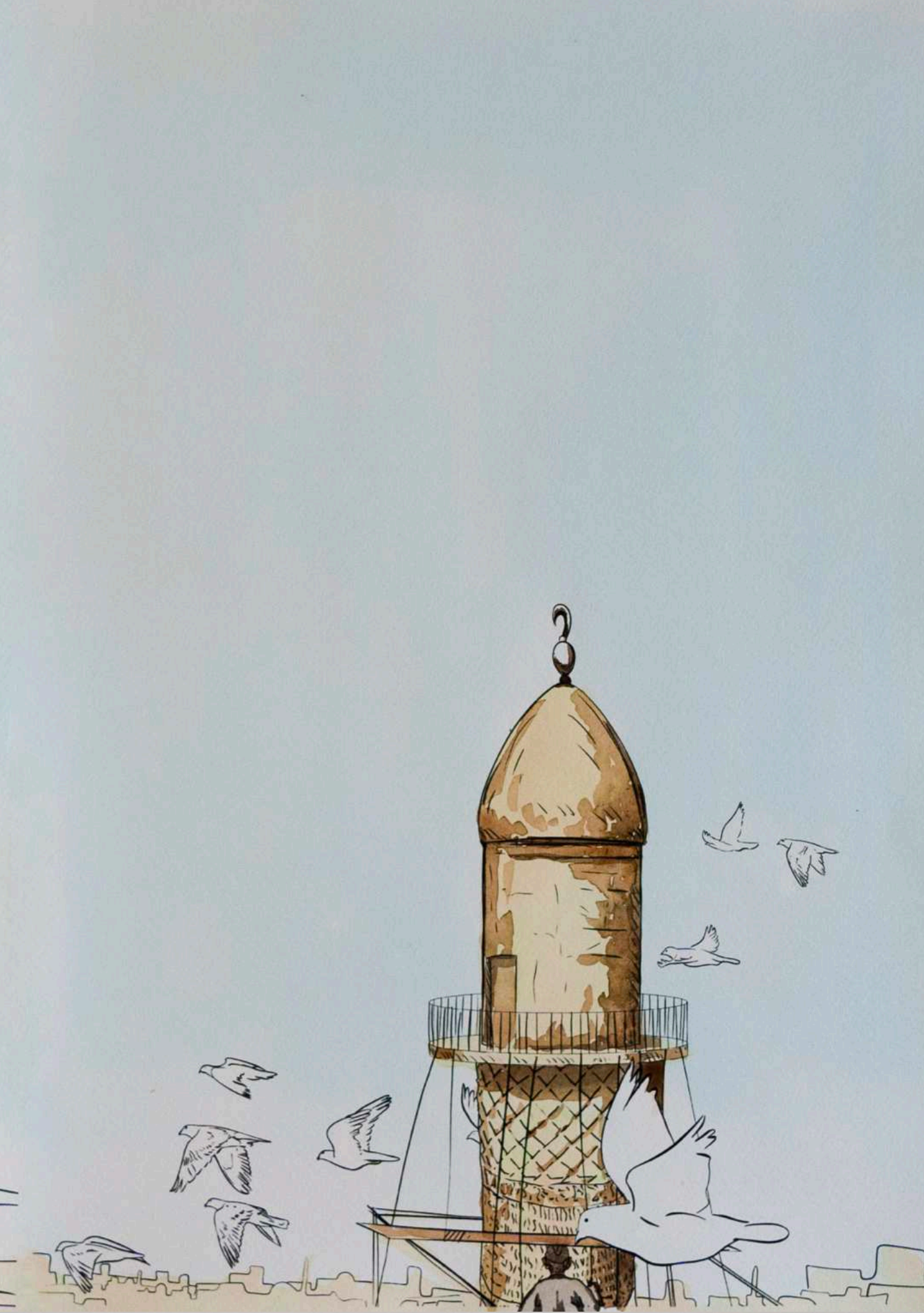
Everyone watches in awe



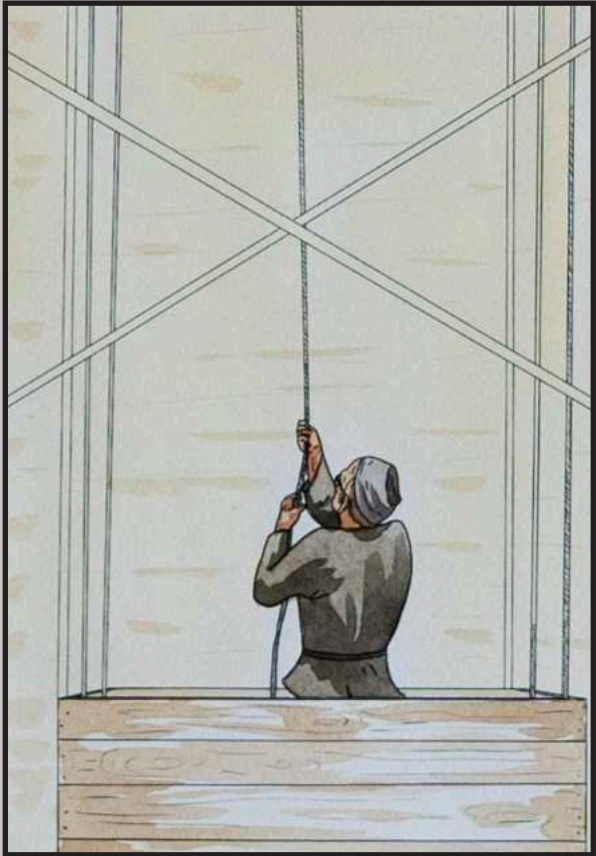
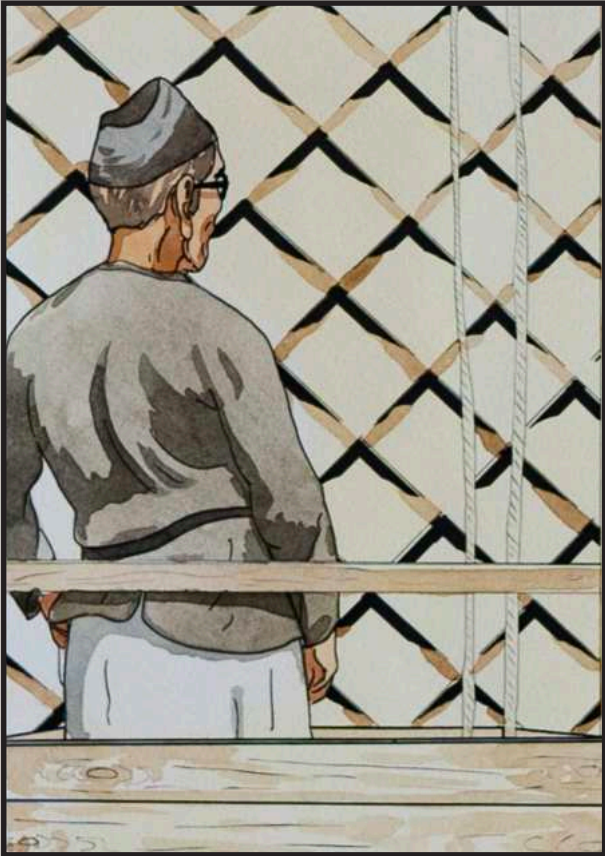
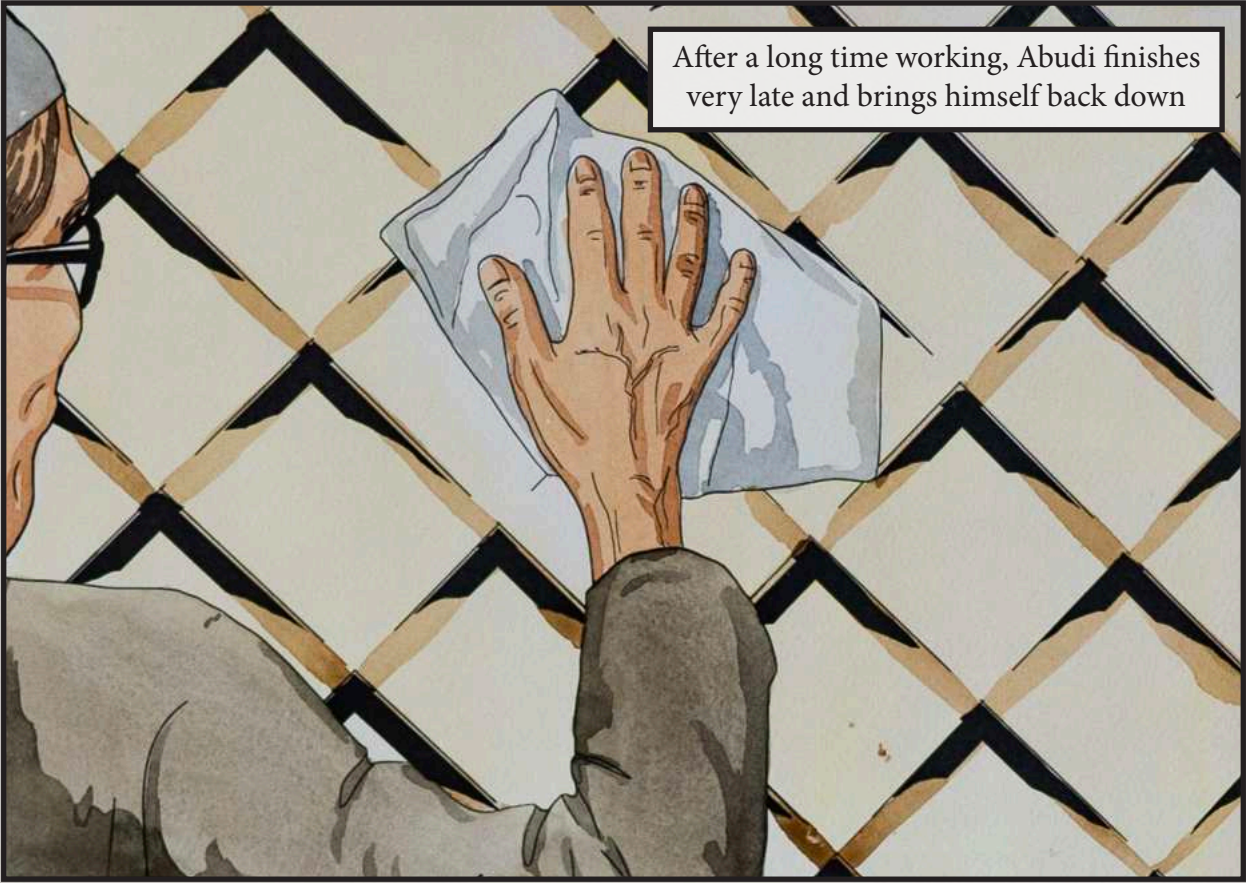














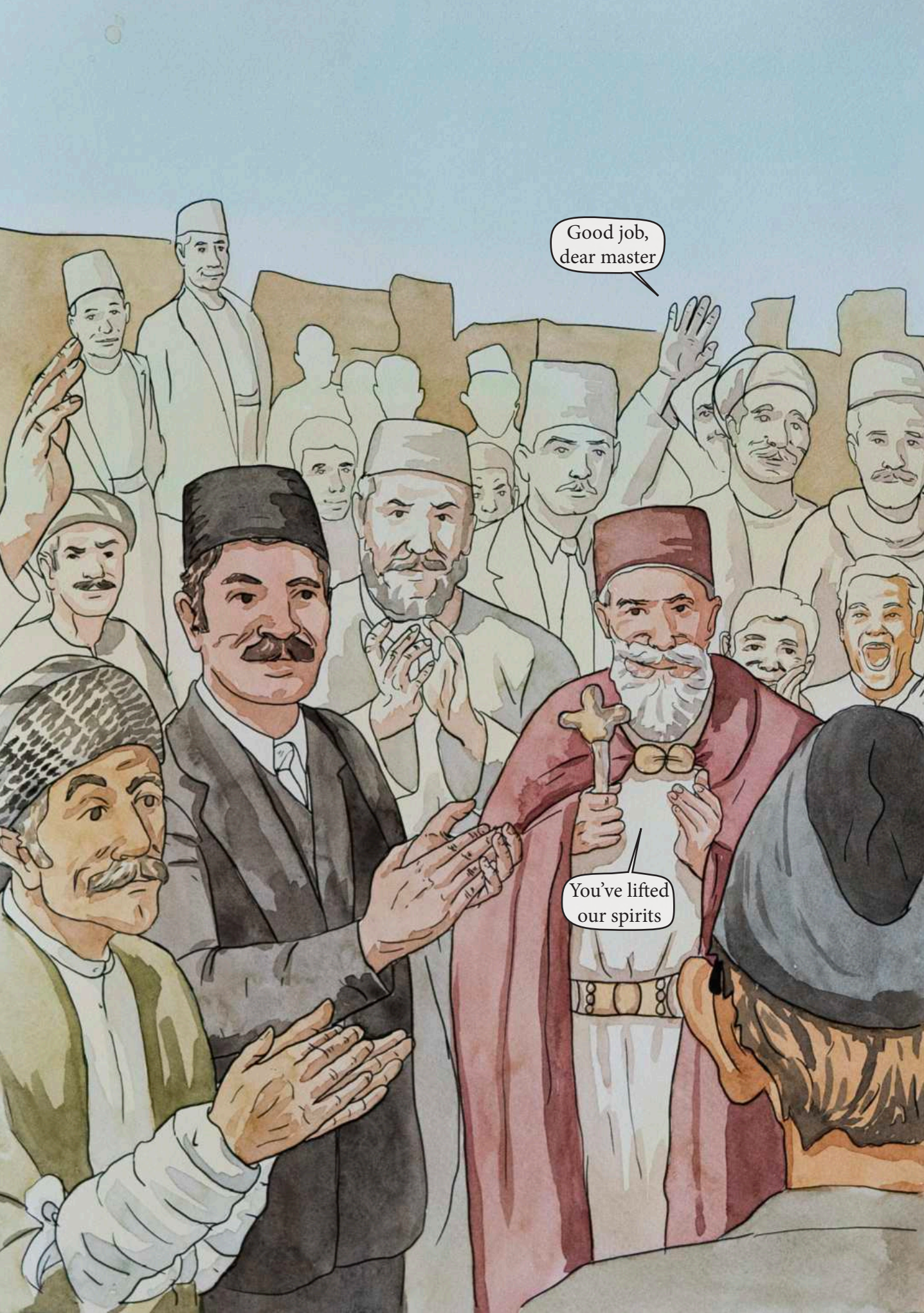
People cheer for him

Seriously, you're  
such an expert!

Well done,  
Abudi







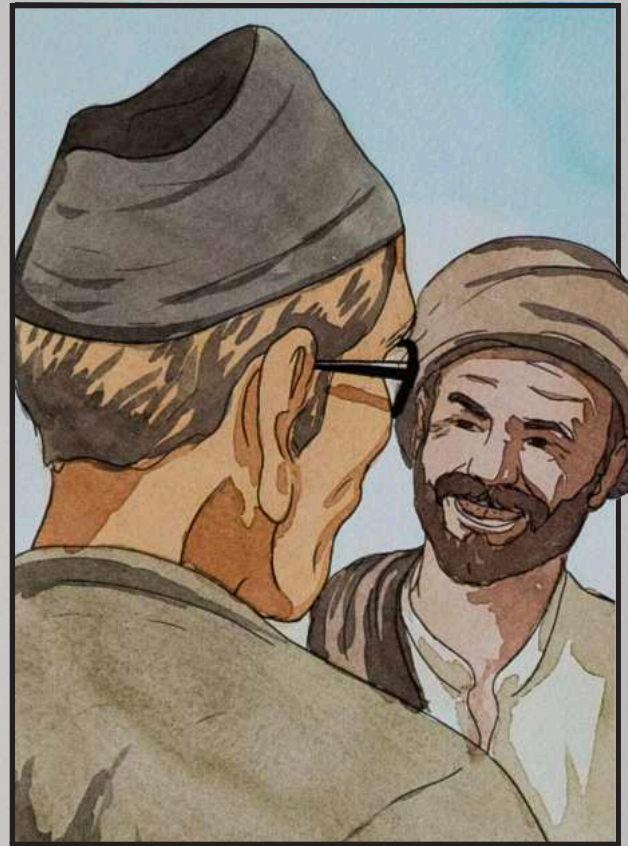
Good job,  
dear master

You've lifted  
our spirits

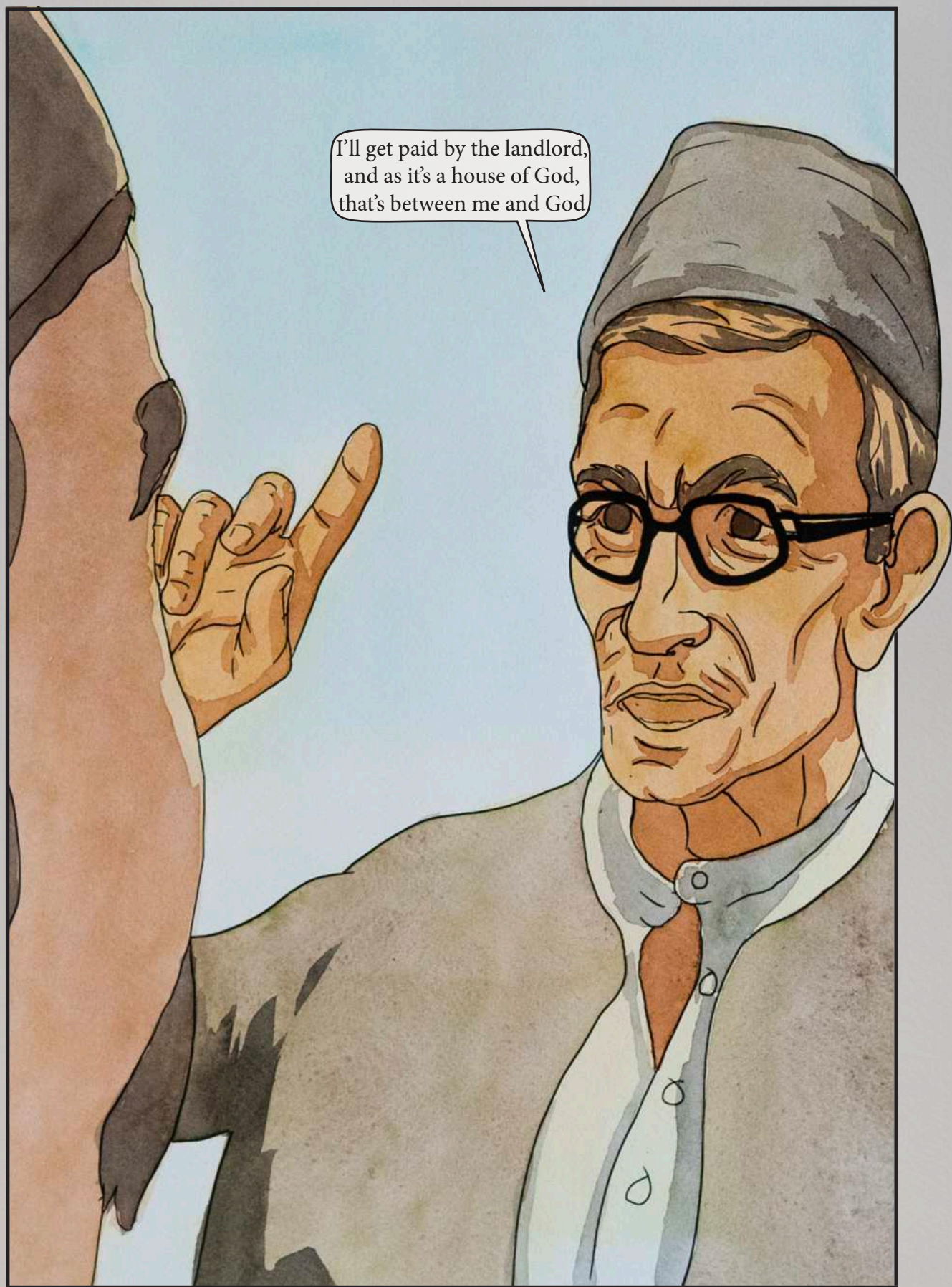


















## **The Immaculate Church of Ninawa (The Grand al-Tahira Church)**

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.











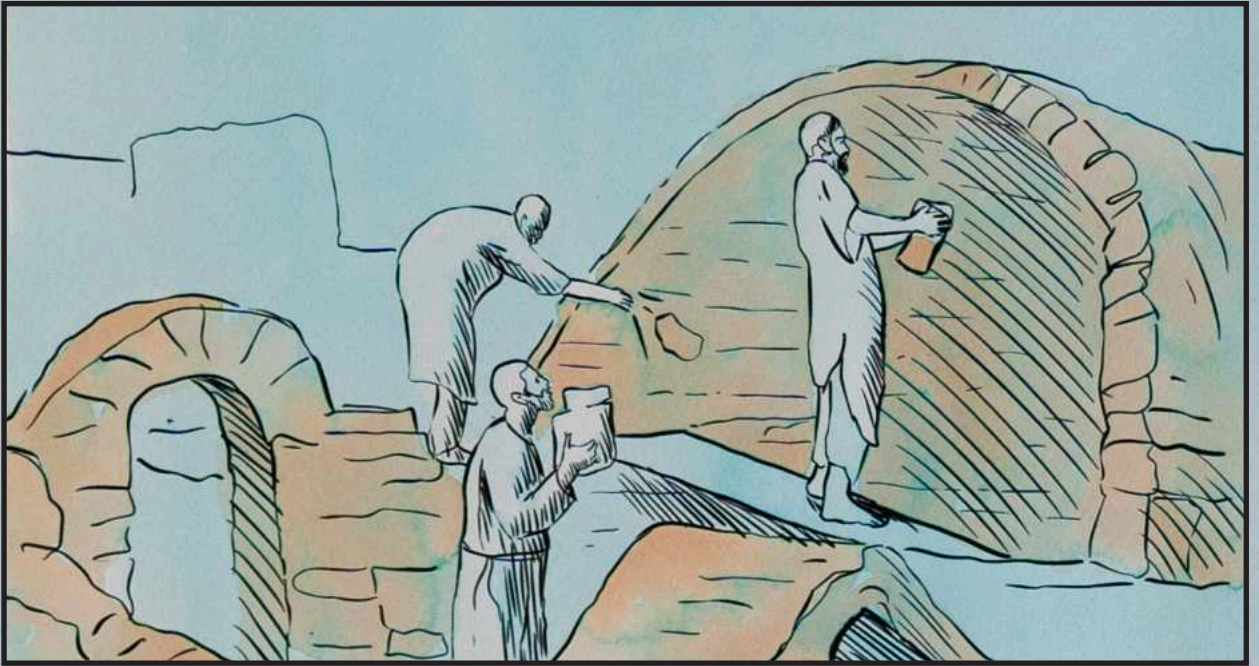
Christianity spread in Ninawa during the first century A.D., which was an important area during the Assyrian Civilization. This area continues to be home to many different ethnicities and beliefs



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





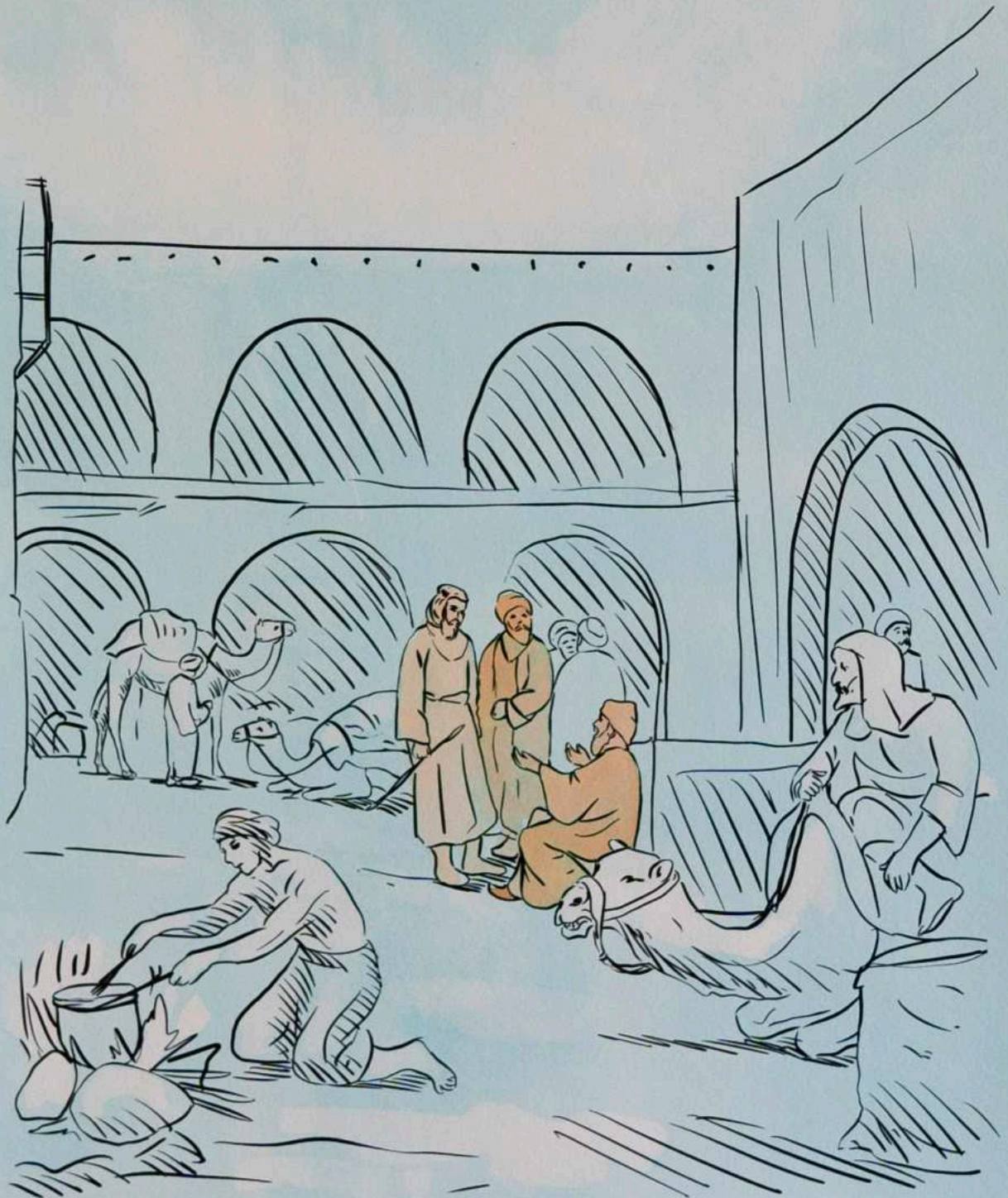








Right after it was built, it influenced the spread of Christianity there. It became a trade centre between Ninawa and other parts of Iraq back then. The church also became a spot for travellers and traders to rest

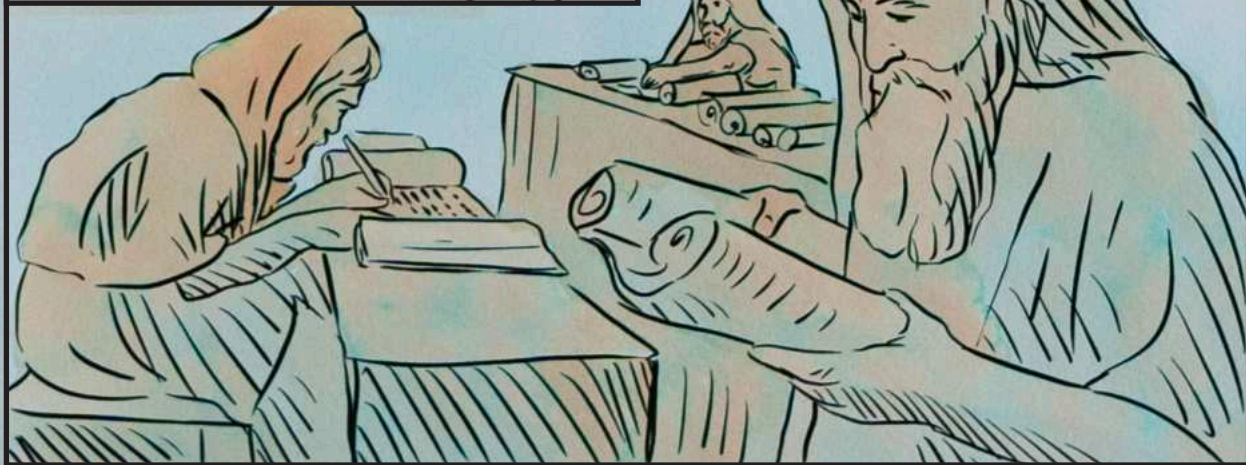
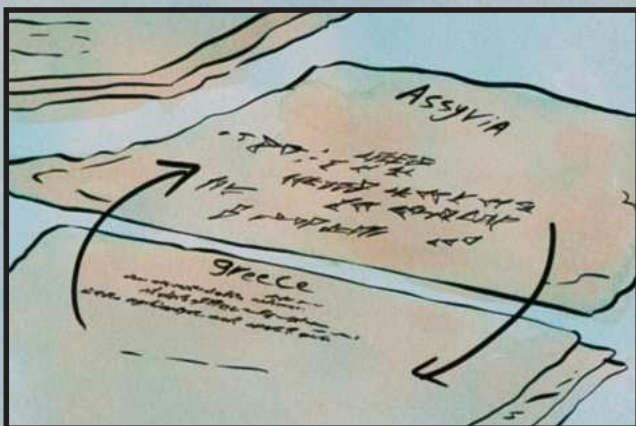
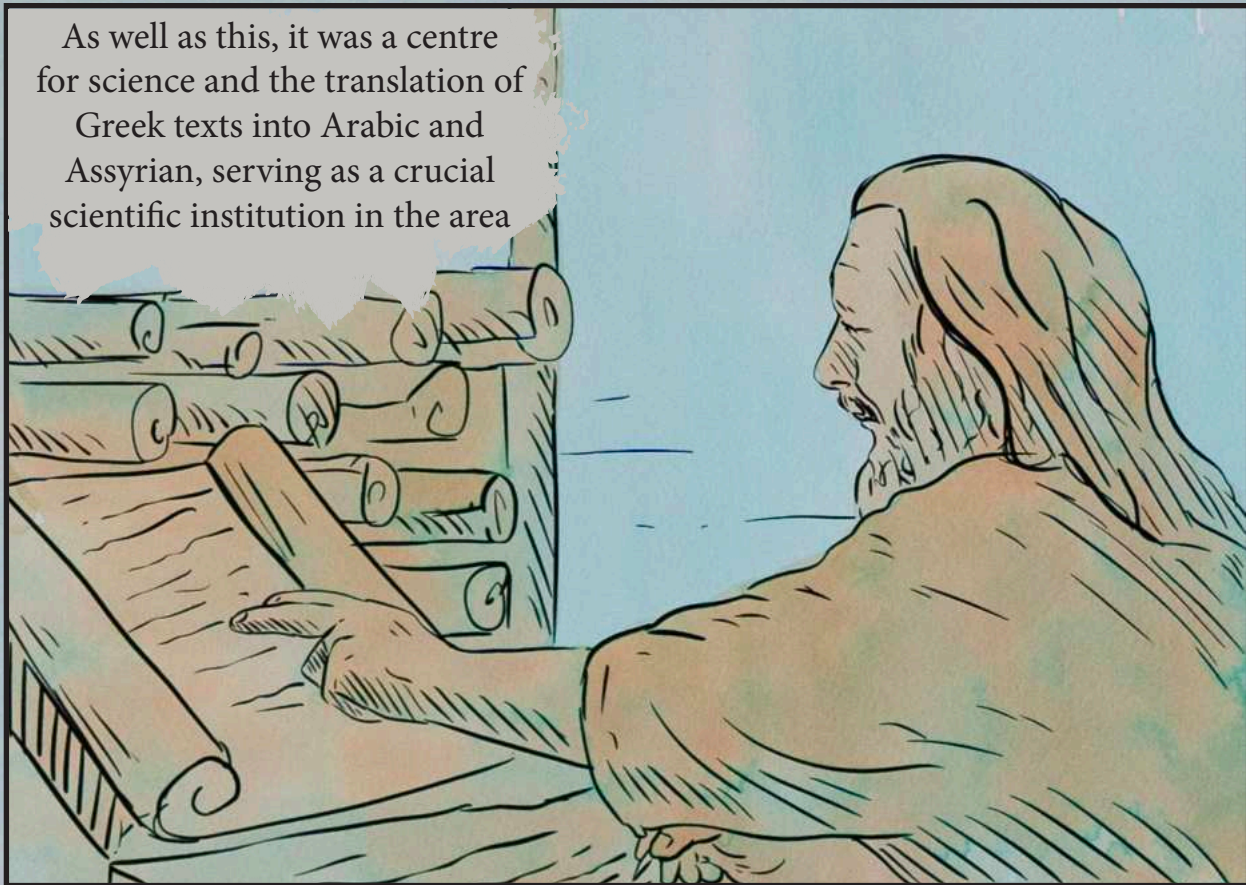








As well as this, it was a centre for science and the translation of Greek texts into Arabic and Assyrian, serving as a crucial scientific institution in the area





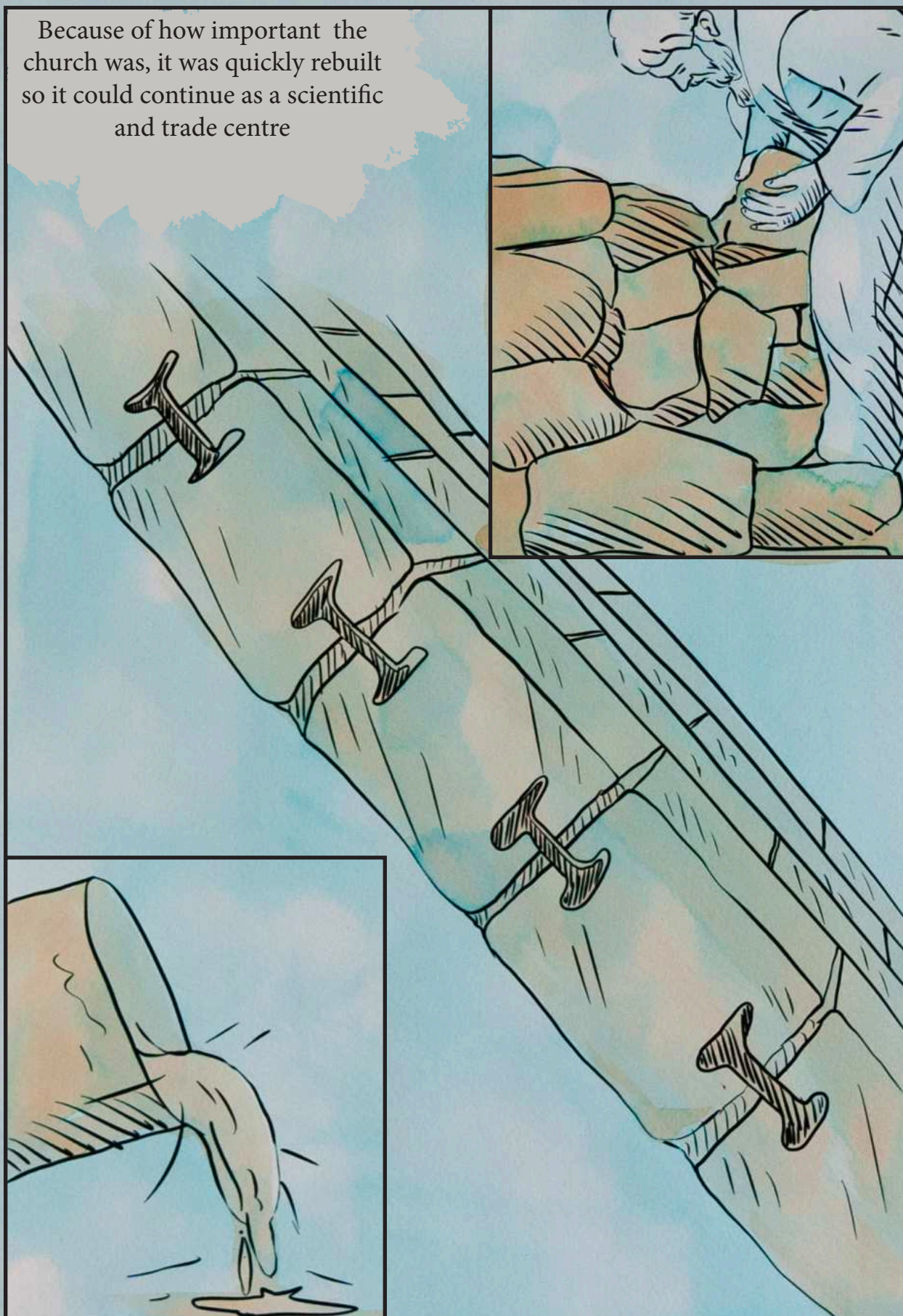




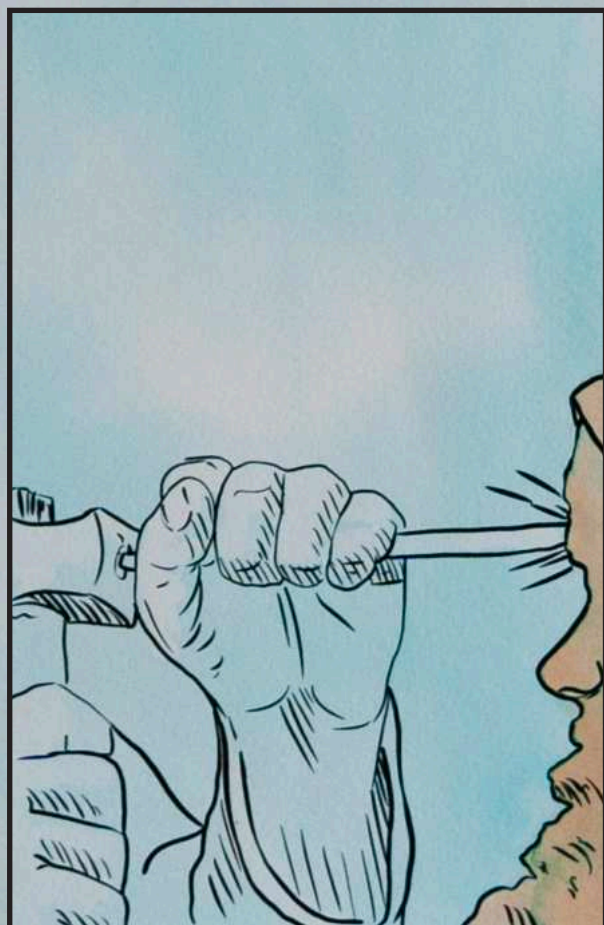




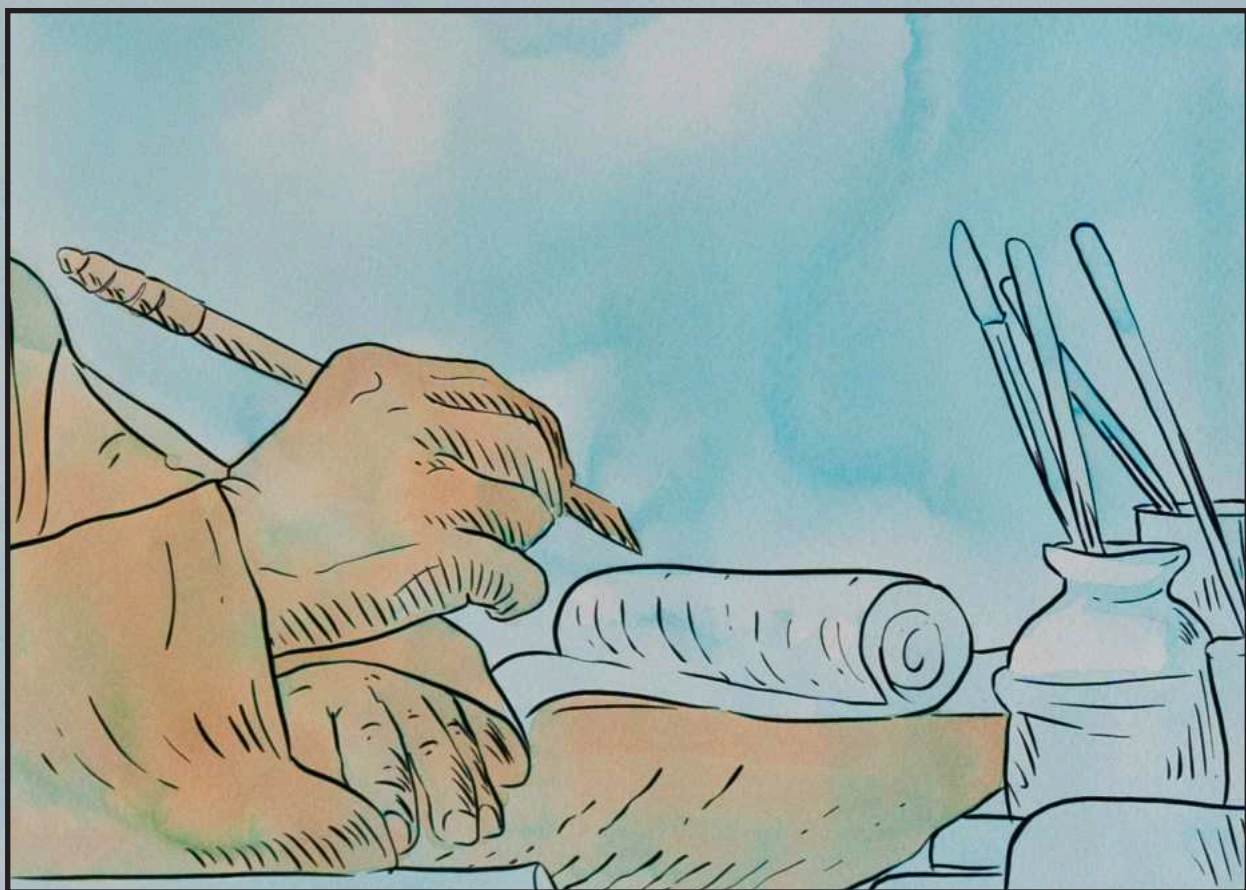
Because of how important the church was, it was quickly rebuilt so it could continue as a scientific and trade centre



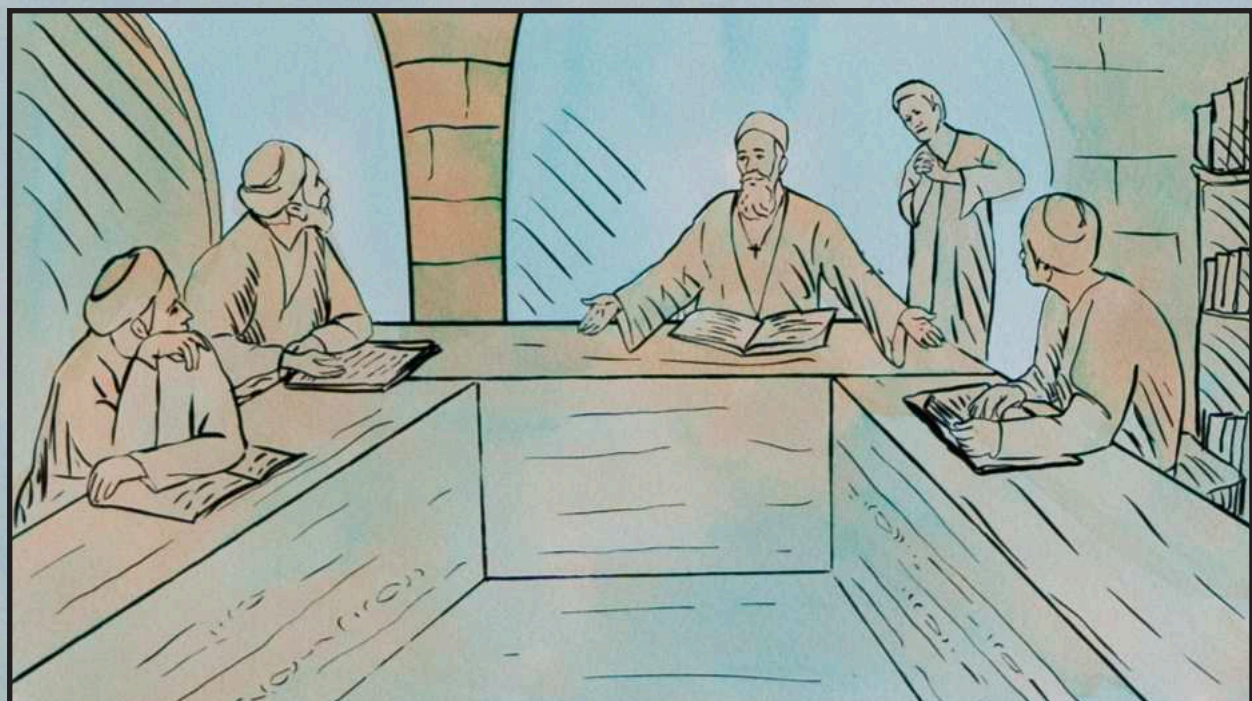
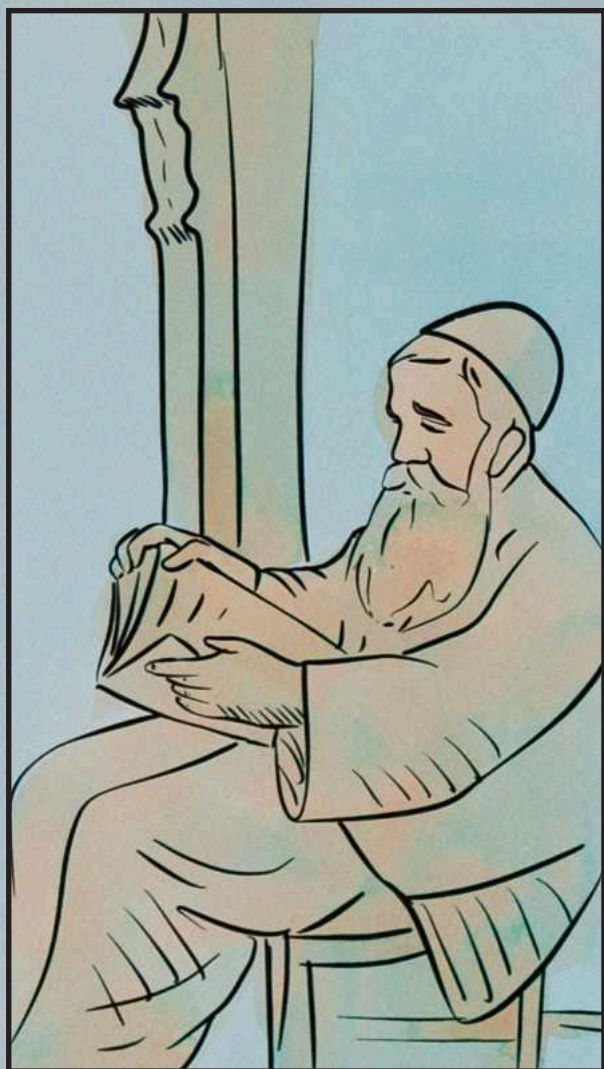




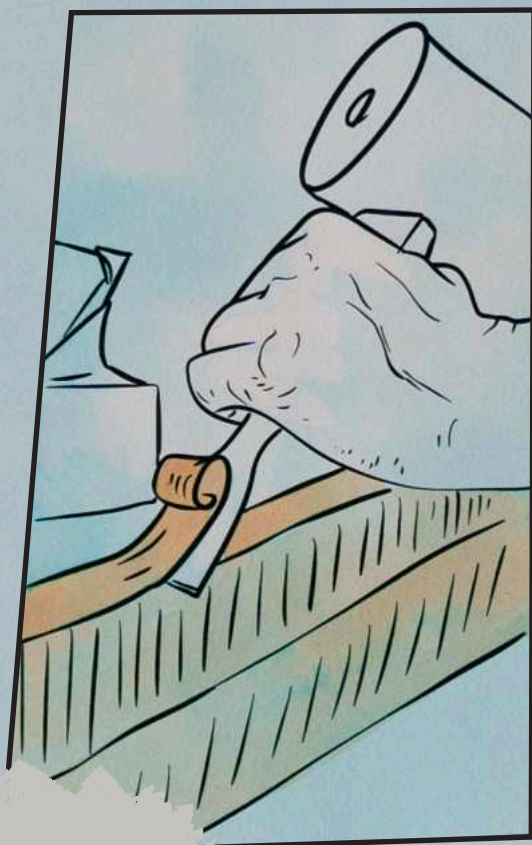
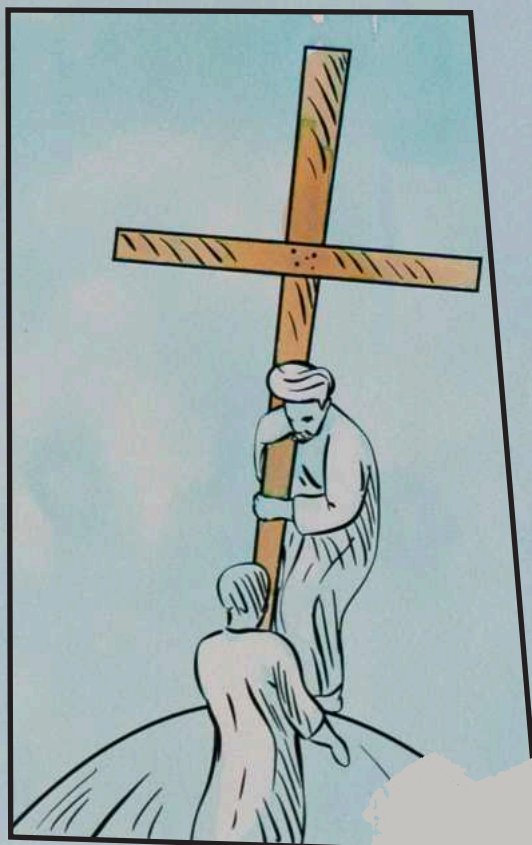




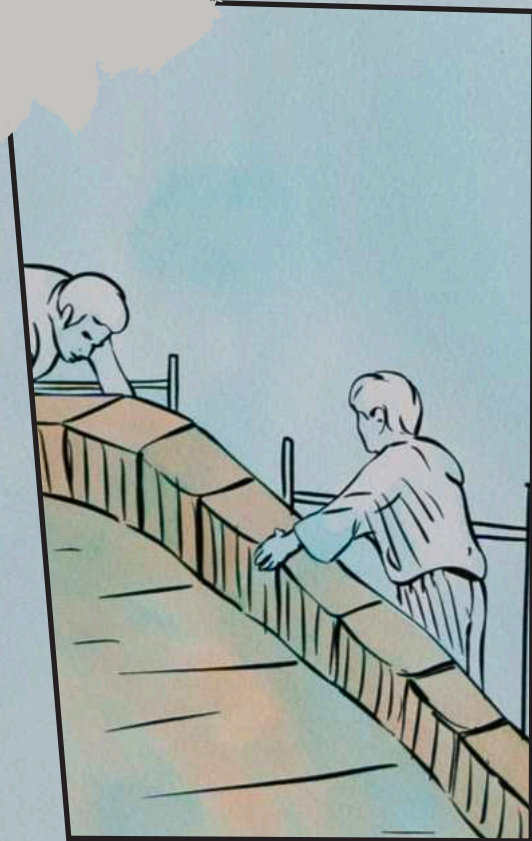








During the Ottoman Empire,  
in 1744, the church was rebuilt  
once again and extended





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

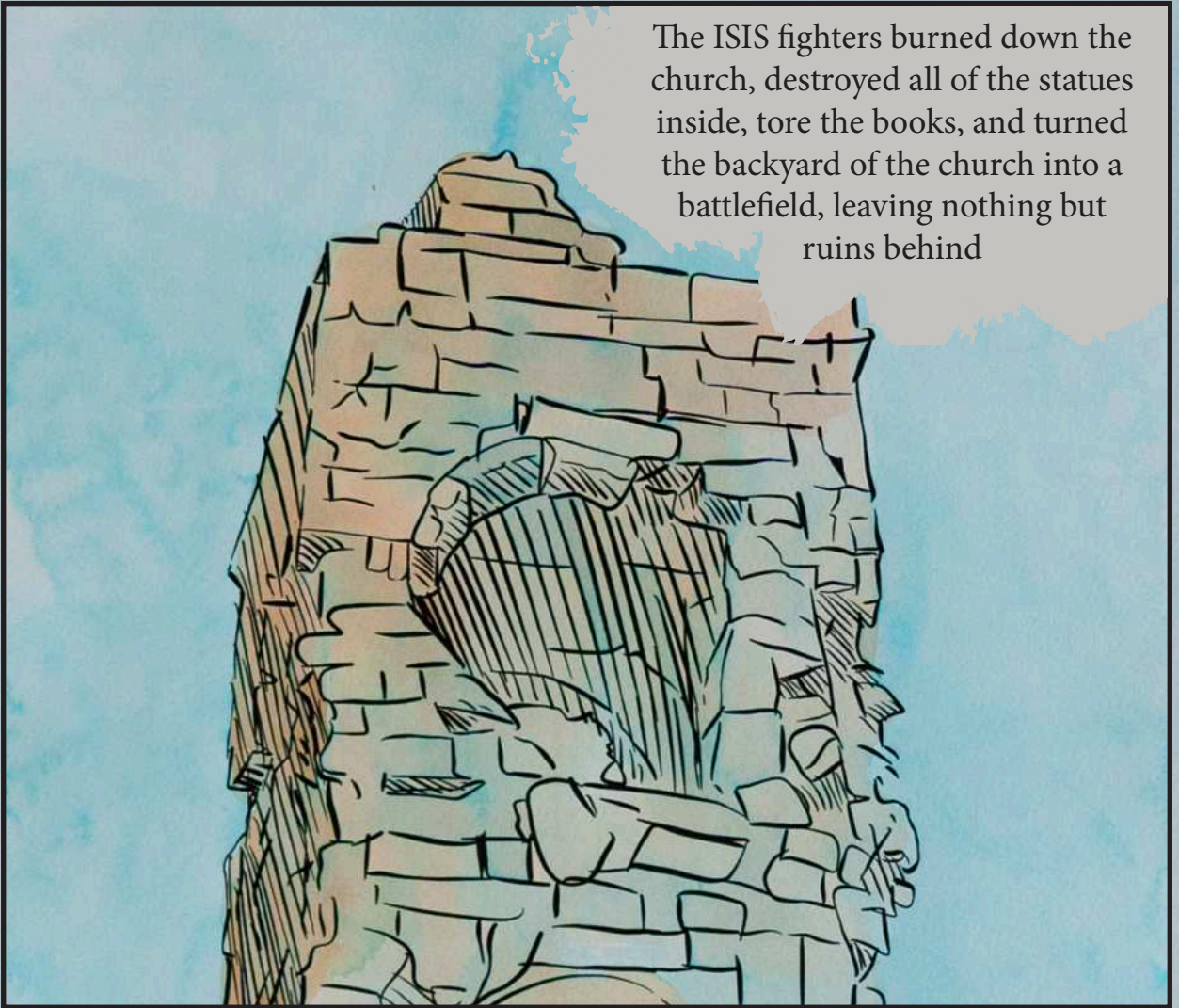








The ISIS fighters burned down the church, destroyed all of the statues inside, tore the books, and turned the backyard of the church into a battlefield, leaving nothing but ruins behind









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







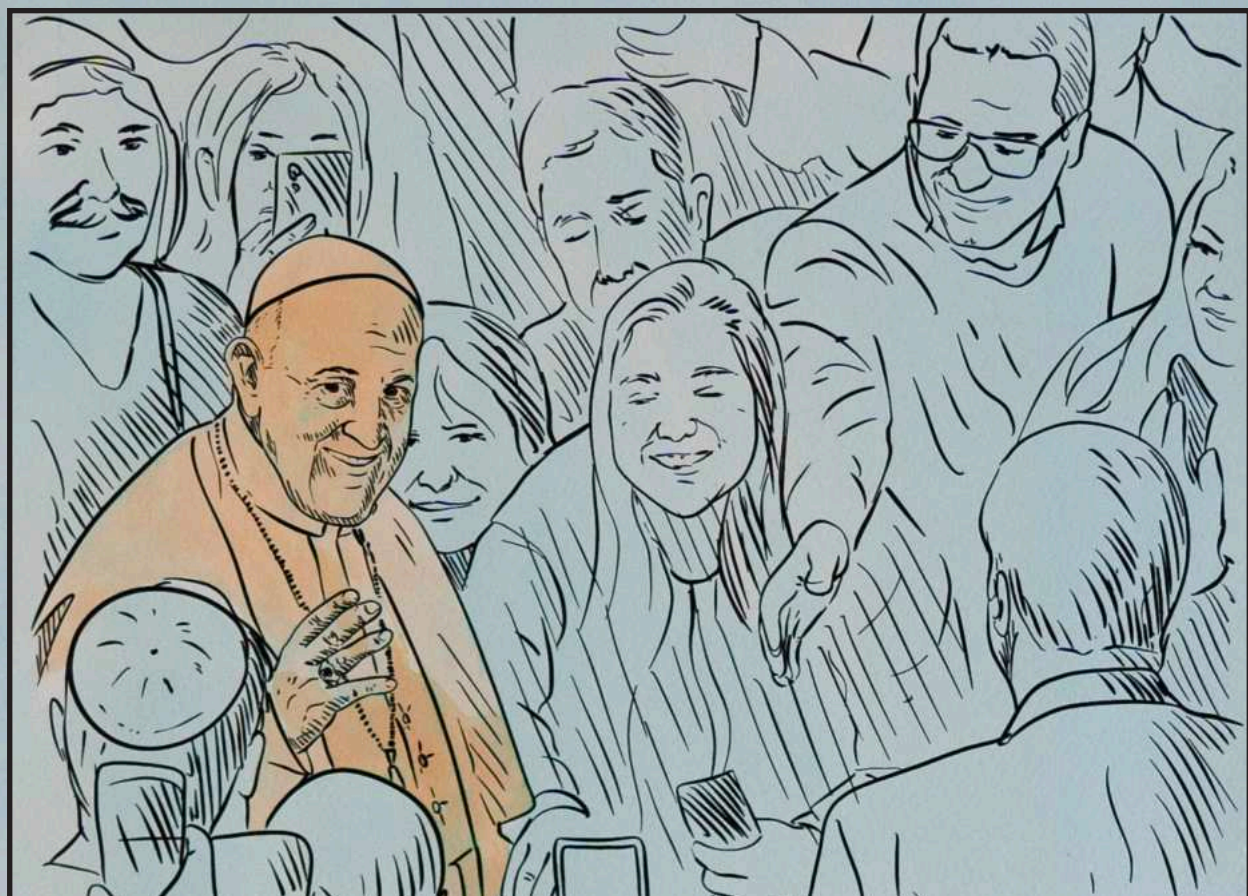






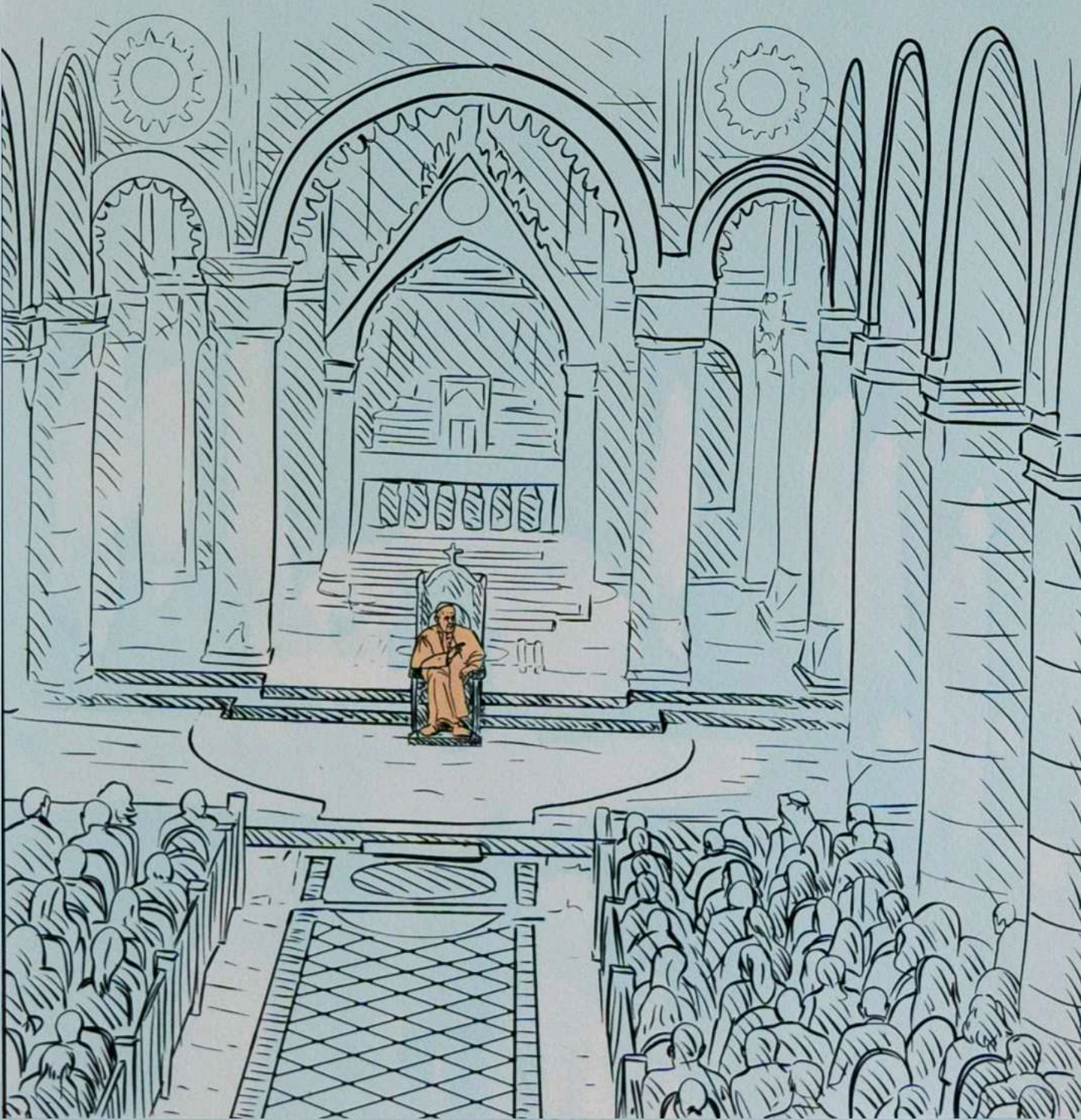








In 2021, Pope Francis visited Bakhdida (Qaraqosh)  
and prayed with the Christians living nearby.  
He also led a peace and tolerance prayer  
with the community there









## 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...







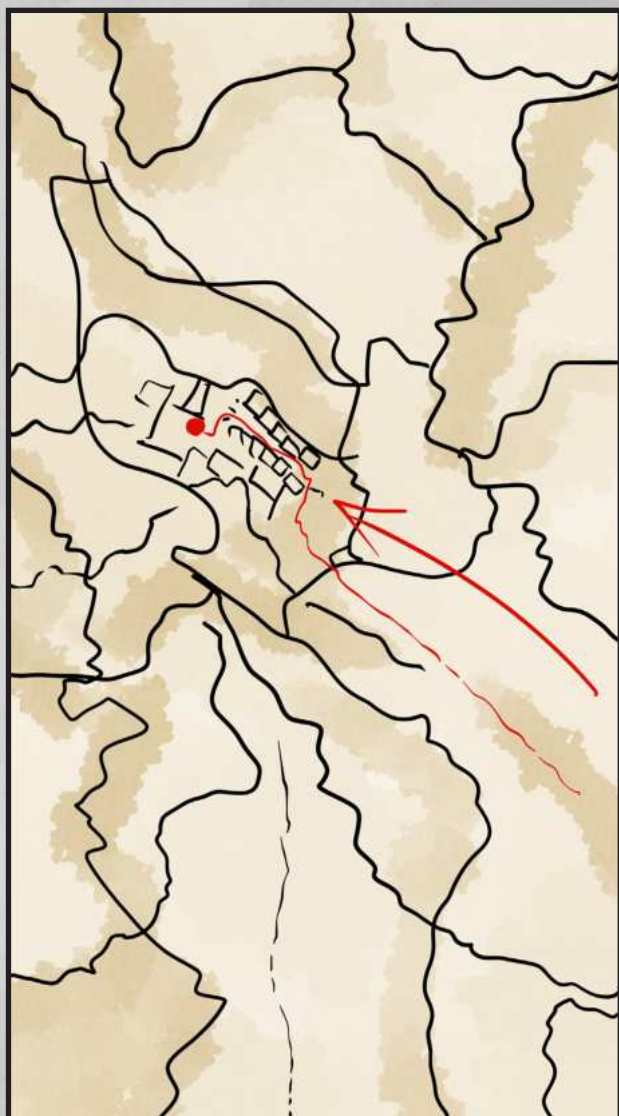




























Have you found anything interesting?

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









Open the door!



I can't, it's stuck!

Hurry up, Ashur!

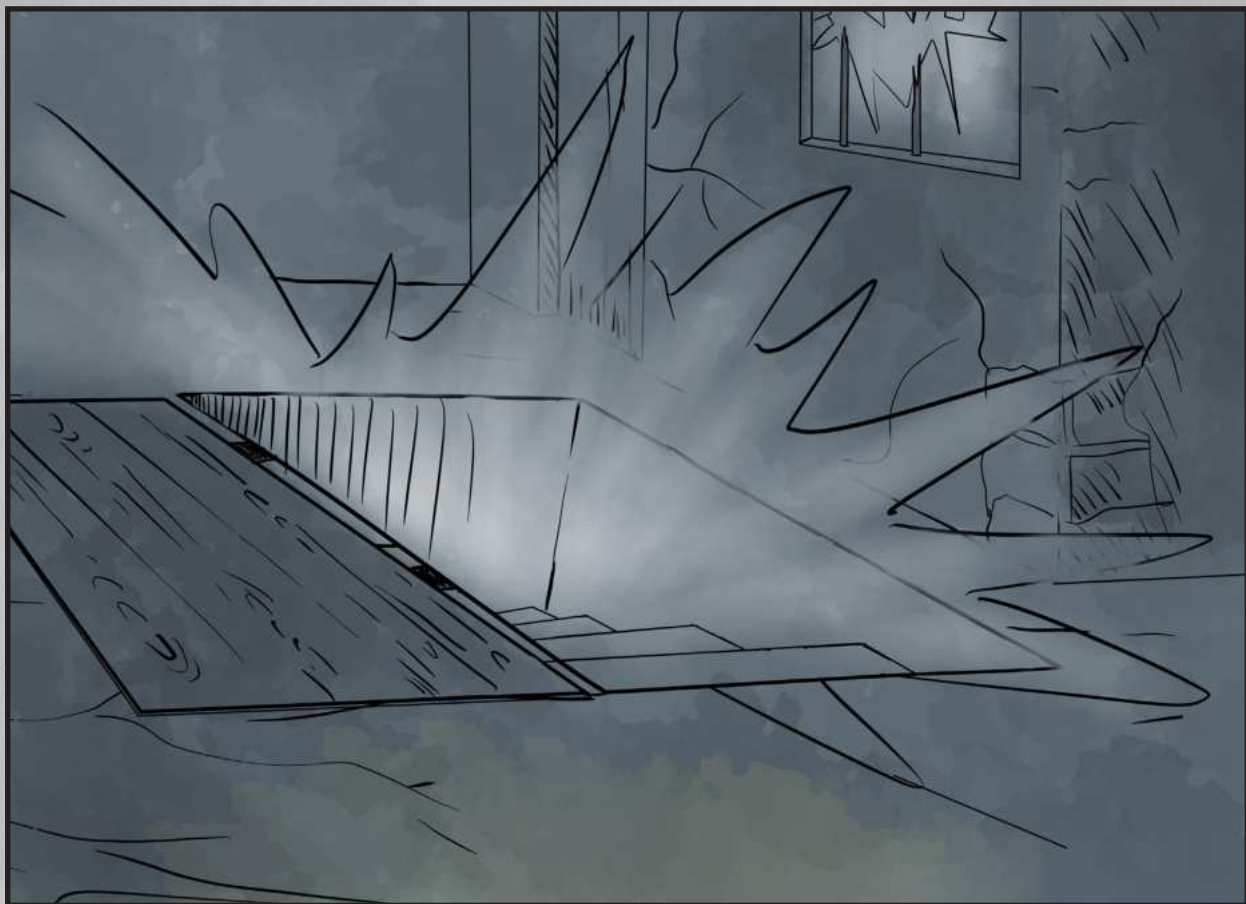


What's that?





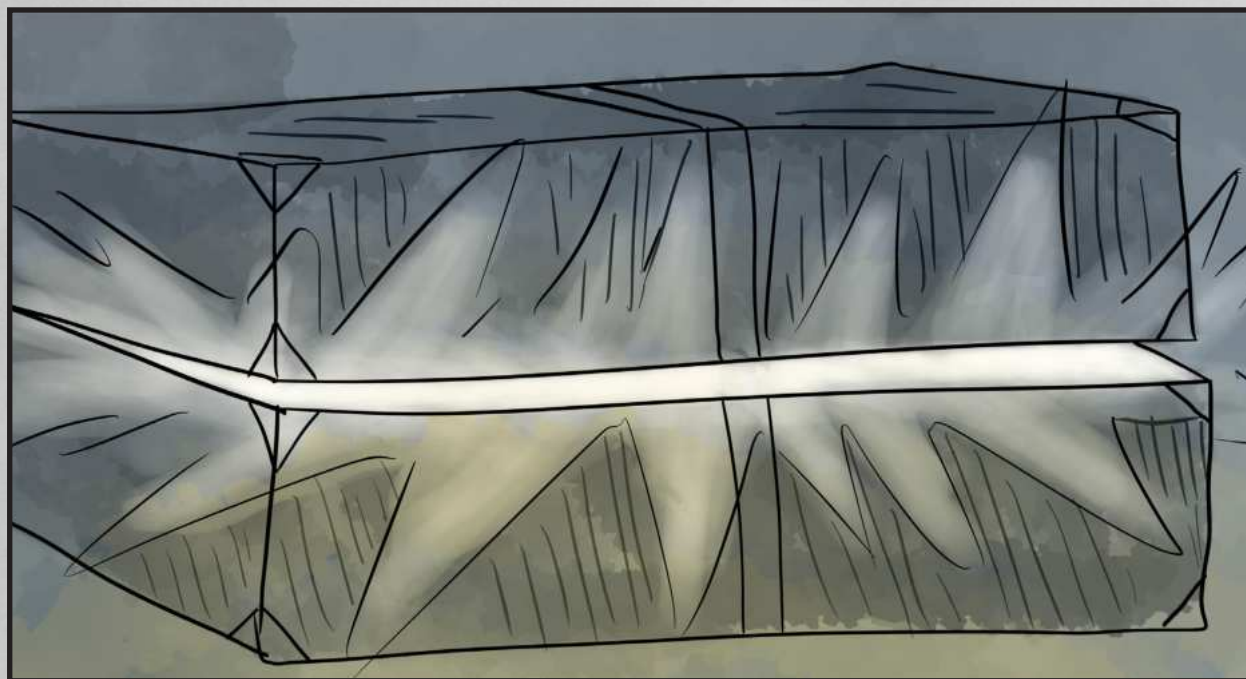










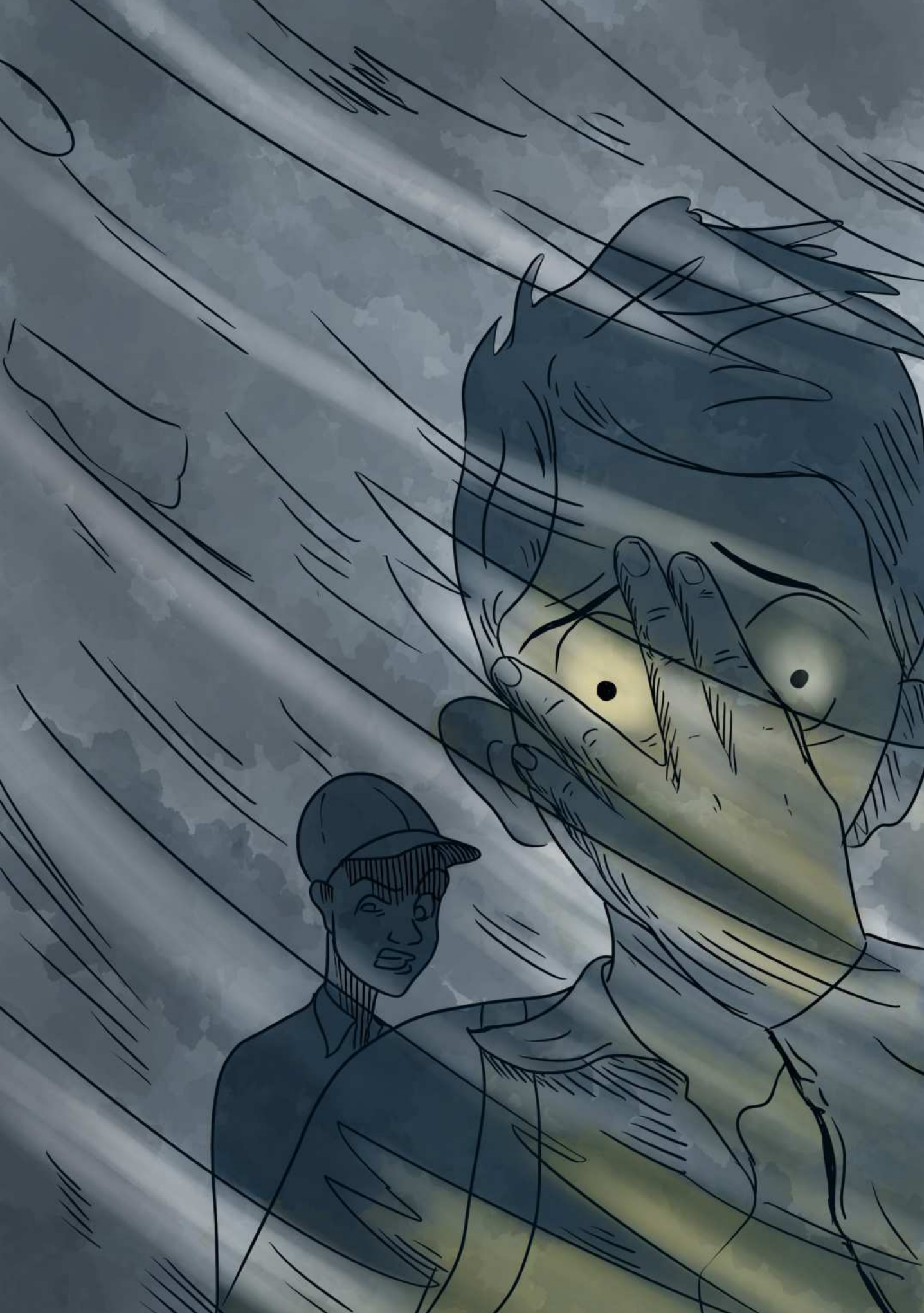






Where's this wind coming from?

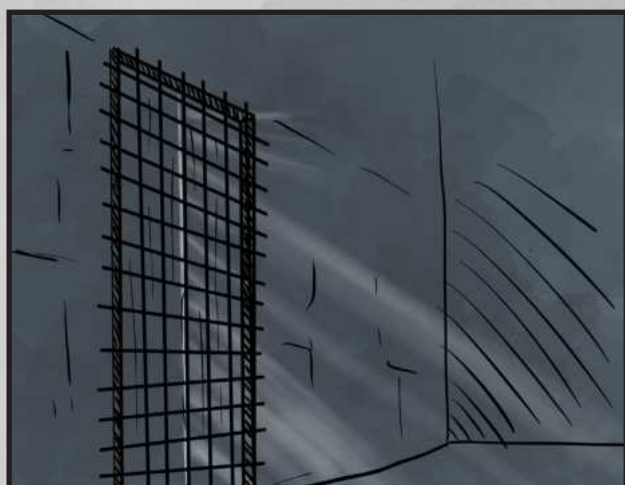






























We want to make  
a pact with you

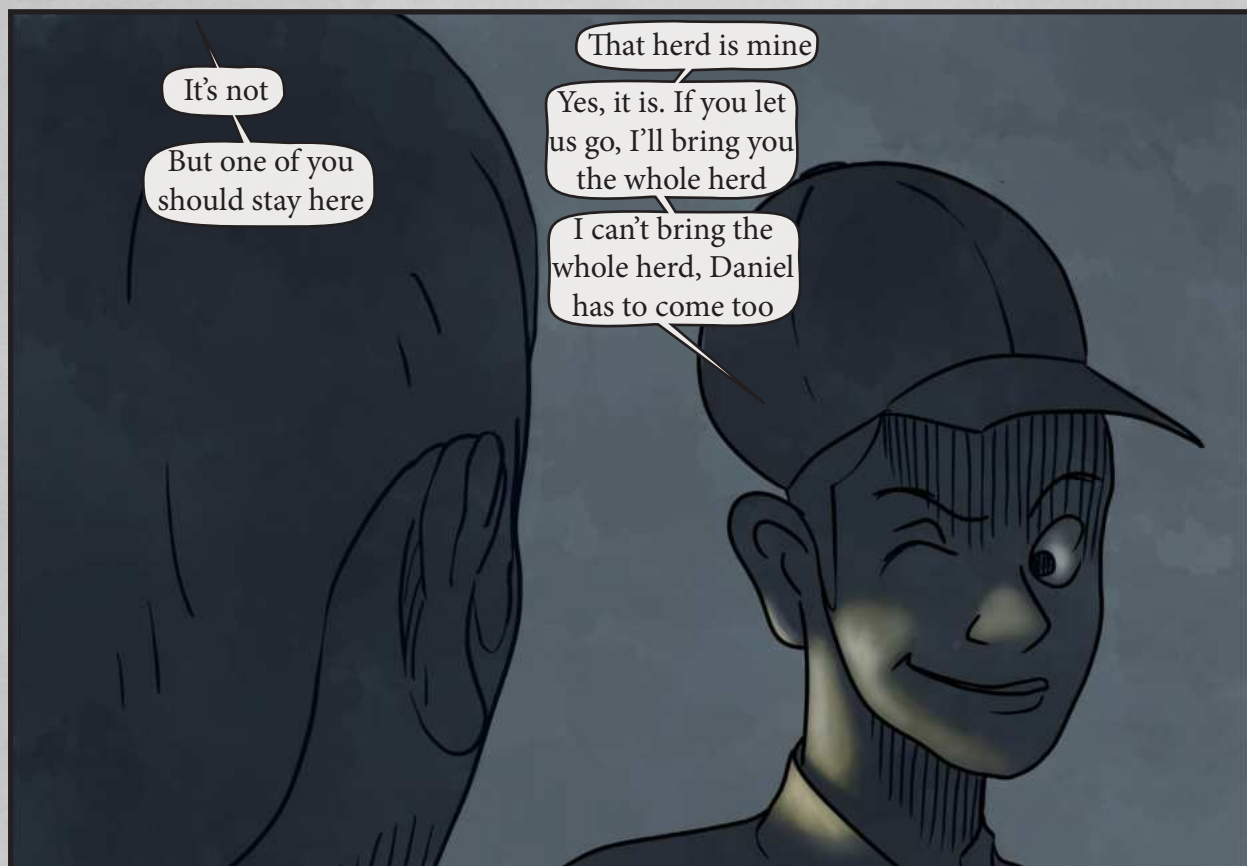


Speak, I'm listening

I do, and?

Do you see that  
herd of sheep?










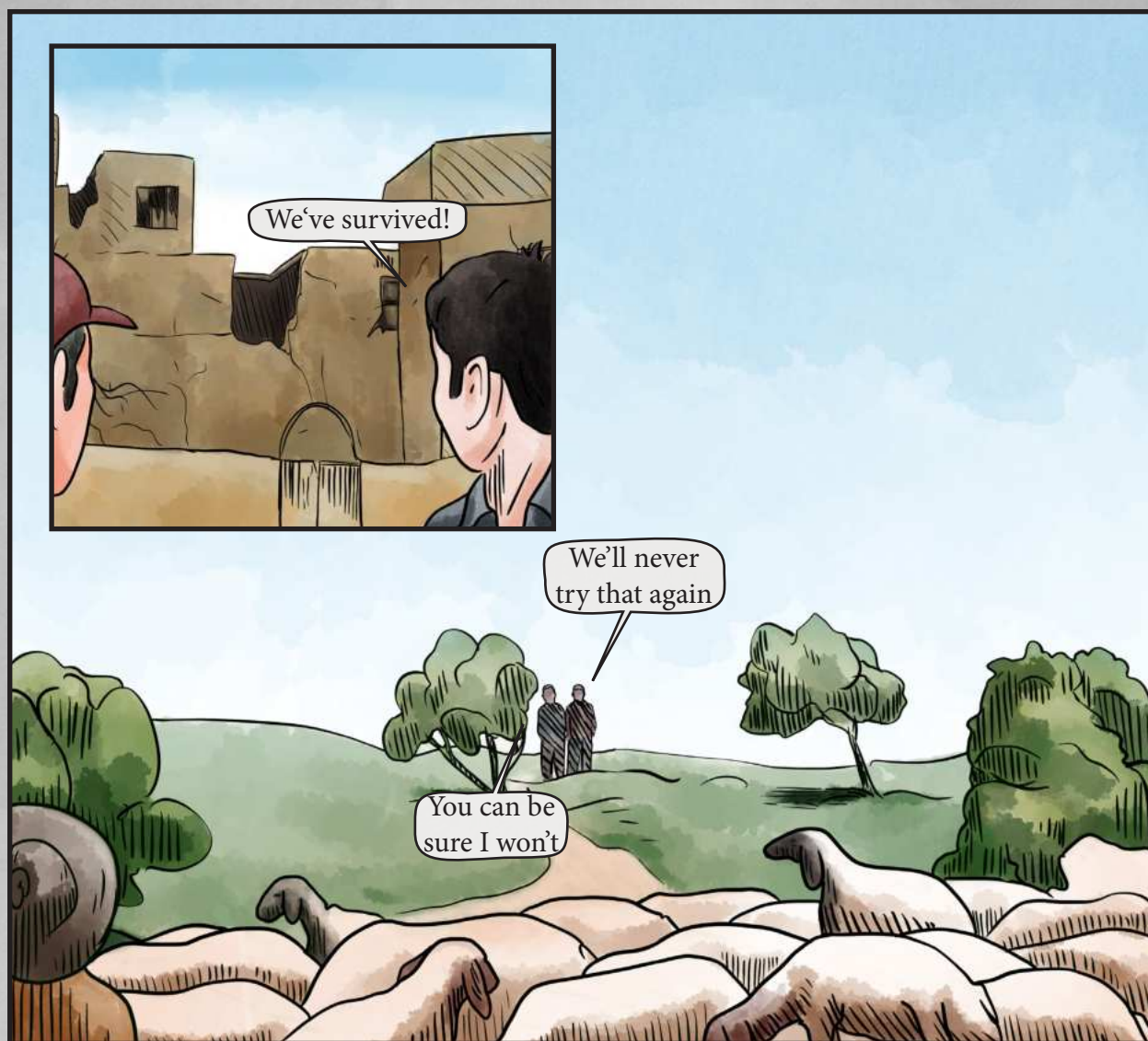




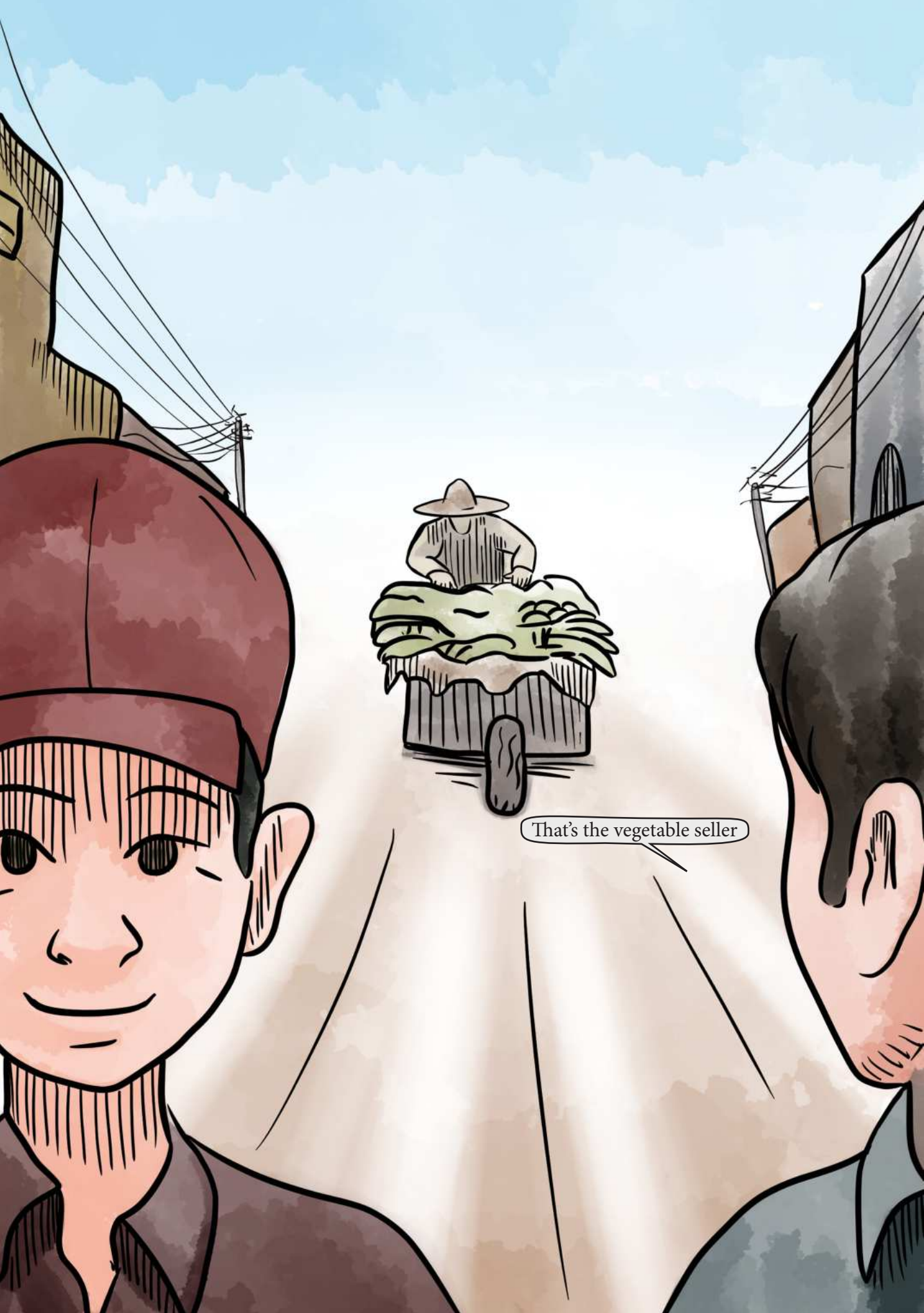
We'll come  
back with your sheep  
as soon as possible

Quick! Let's go









That's the vegetable seller













You've given too much money. I owe you some change

Keep it for yourself



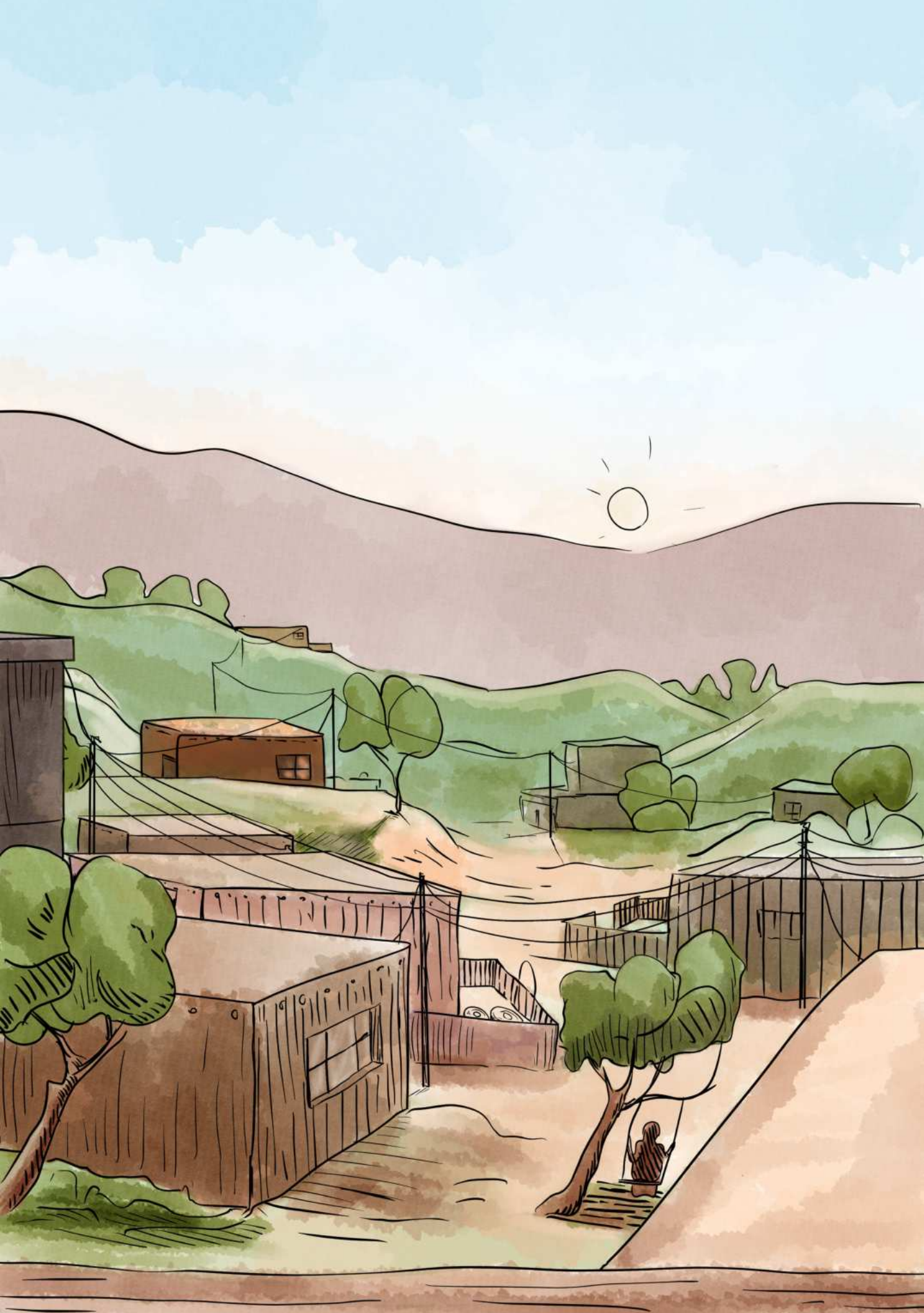


















## Alaa's blessing

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.





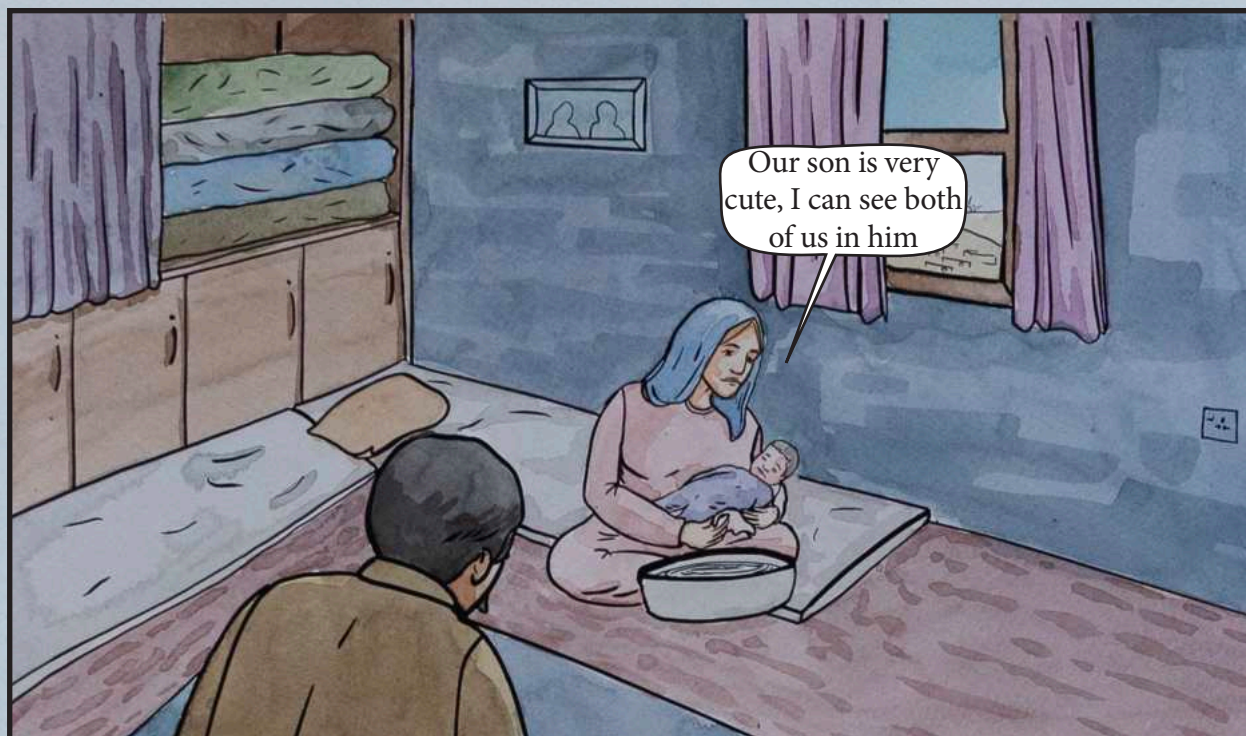




A Yezidi village at the bottom of Shingal Mountain

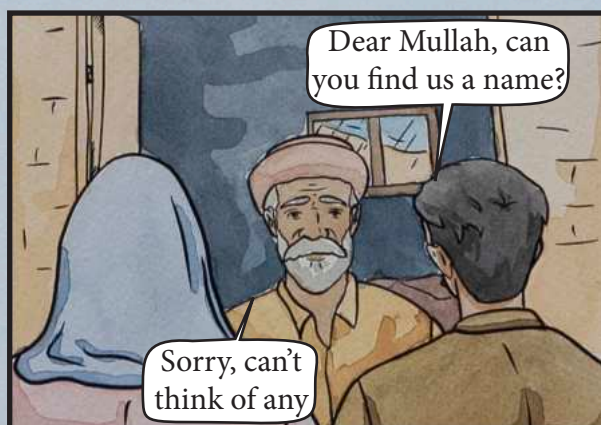
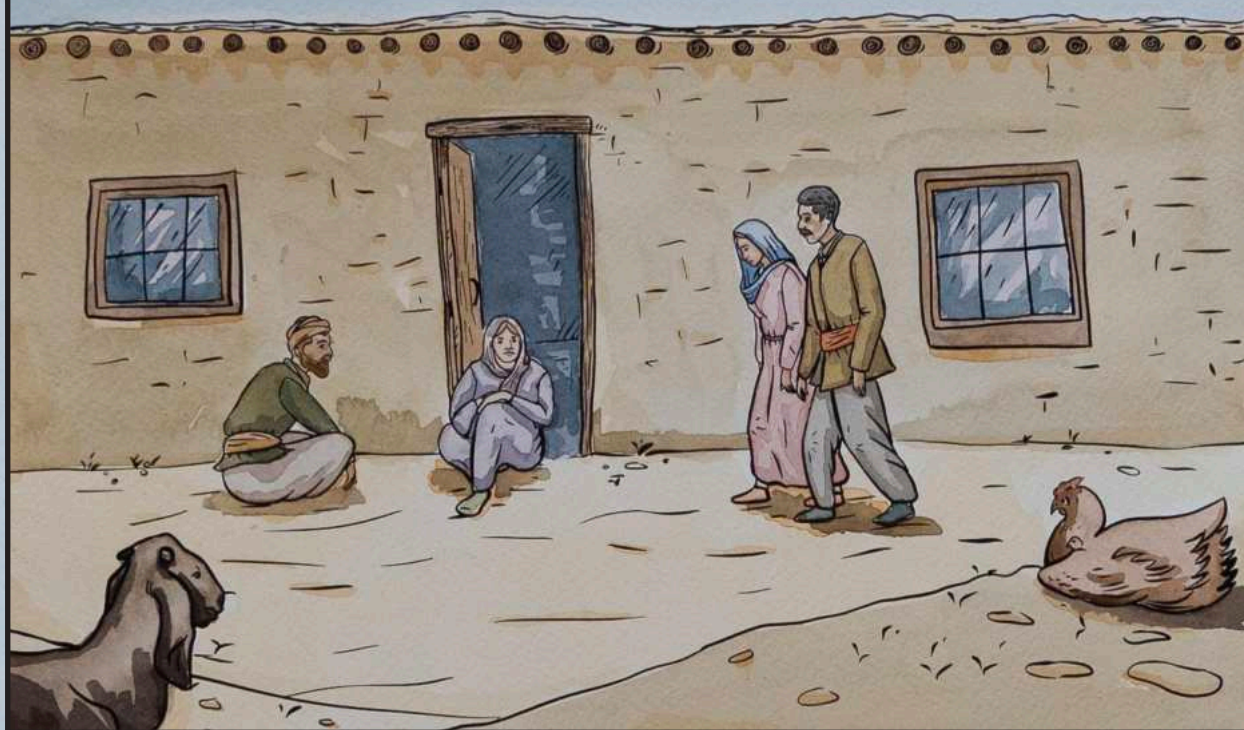




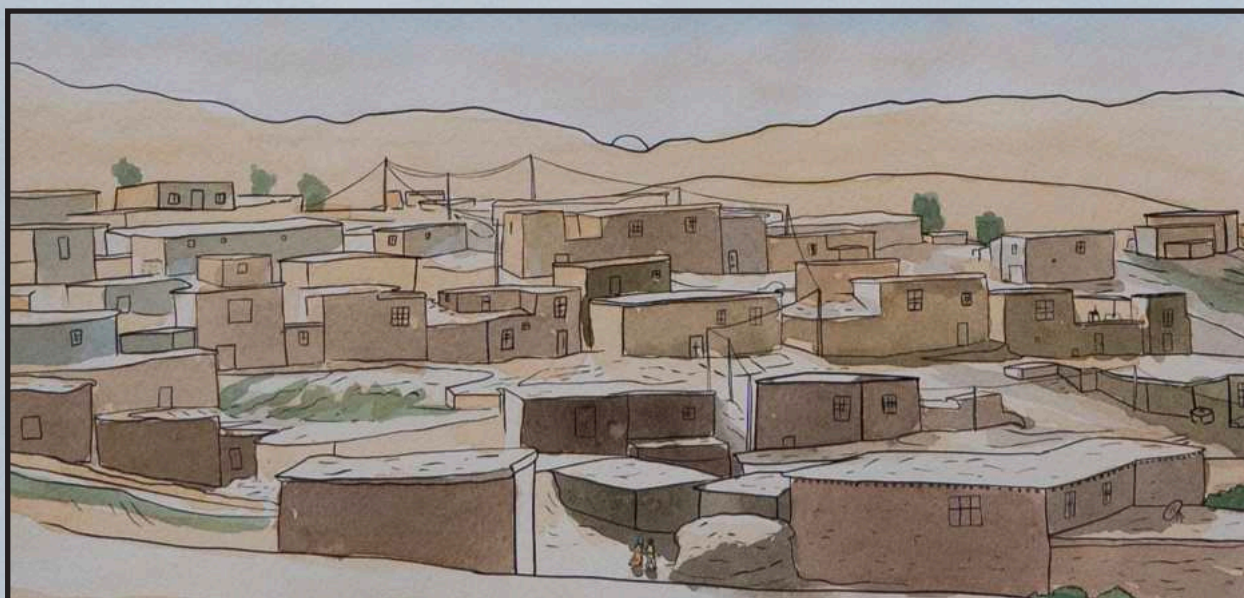




To find a suitable name, Samir and Laila visit village neighbours







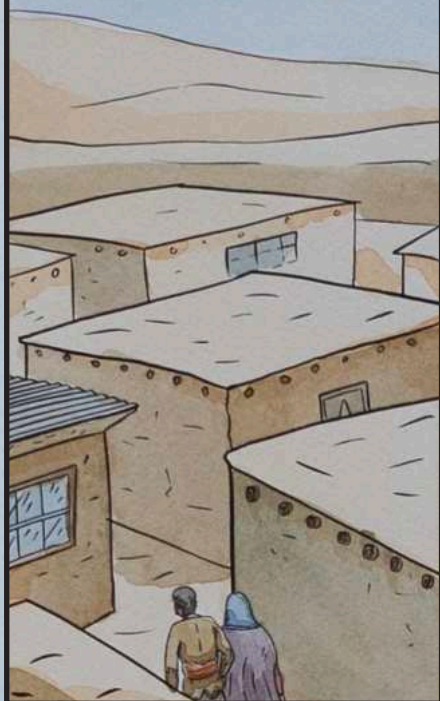


After a long time searching, Samir and Laila go back to the house of Laila's mother





Samir and Laila leave quickly and head towards Mikail's house



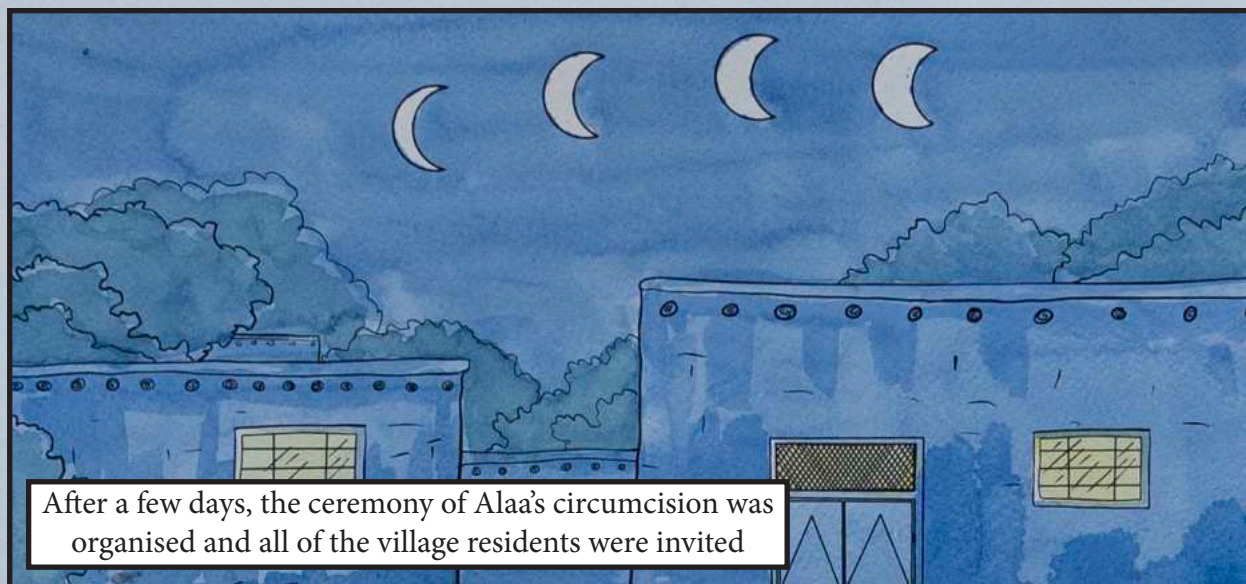




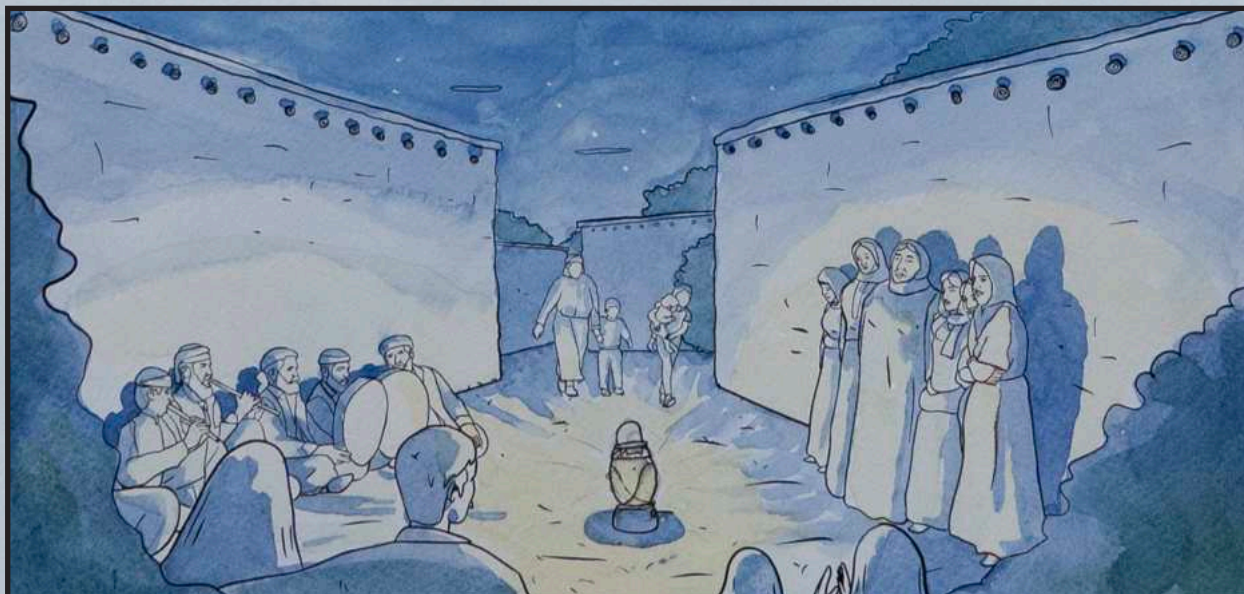




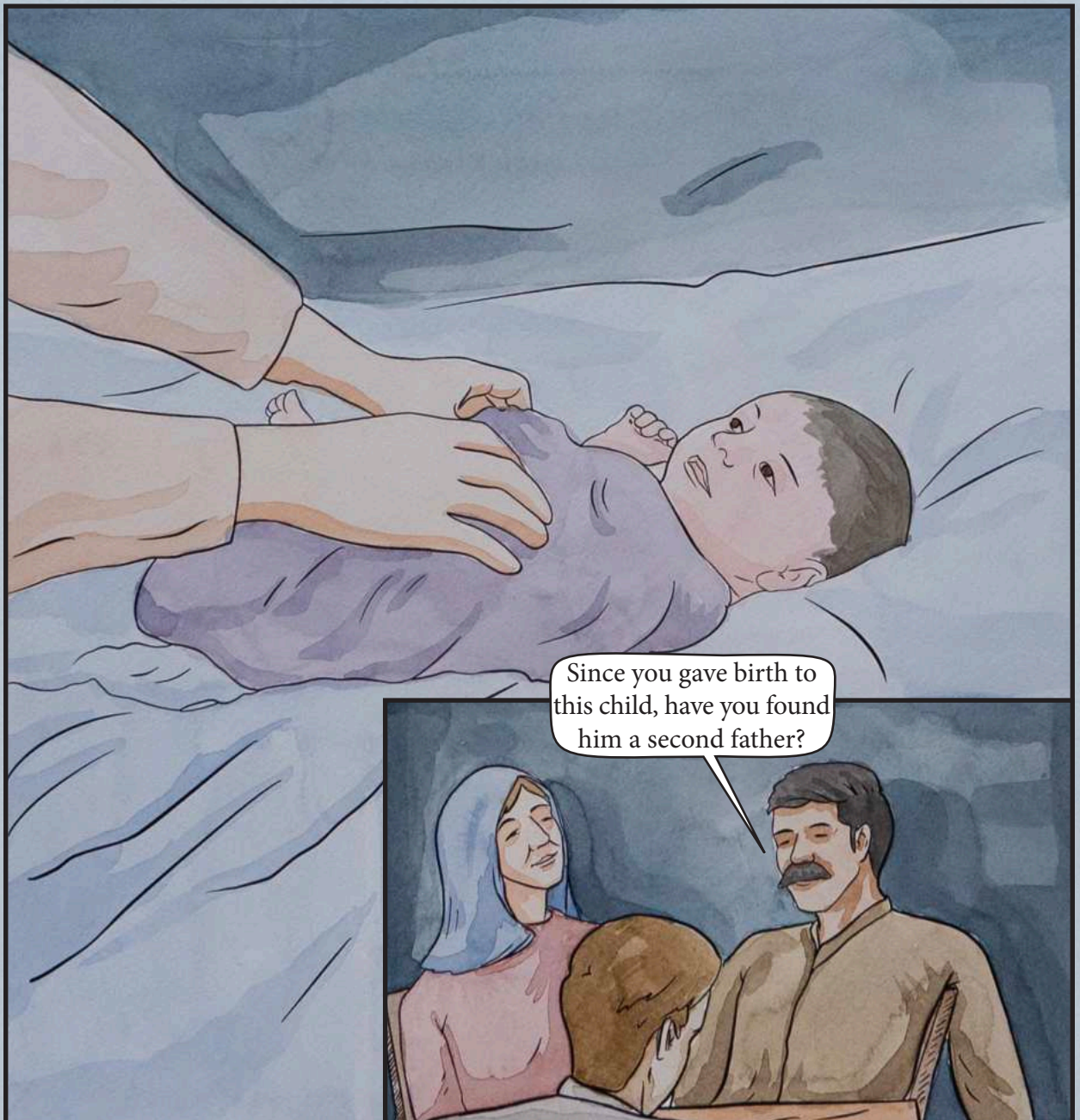




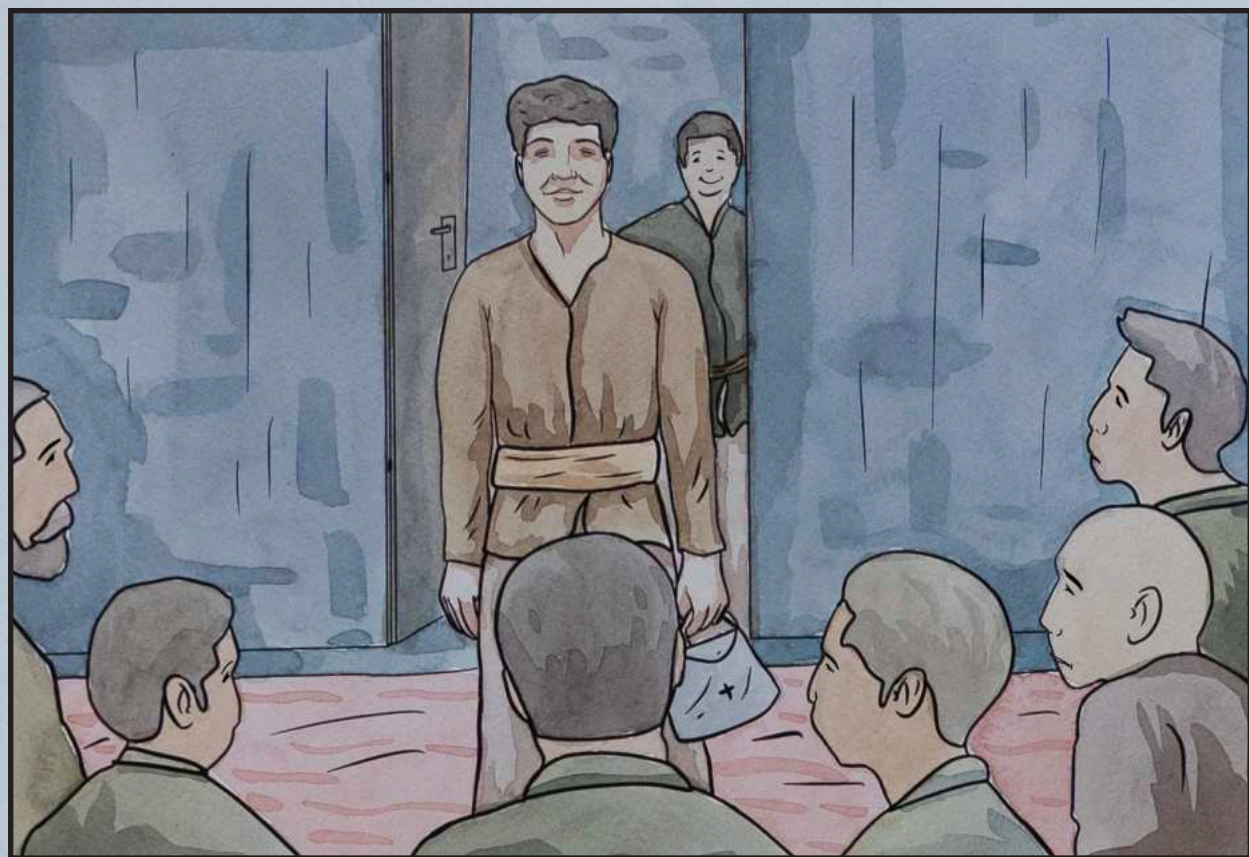
After a few days, the ceremony of Alaa's circumcision was organised and all of the village residents were invited



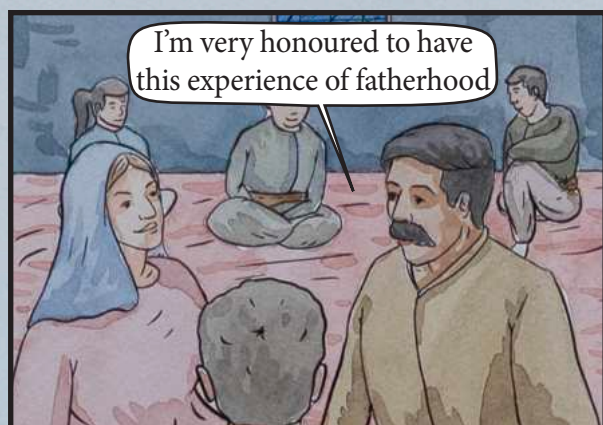












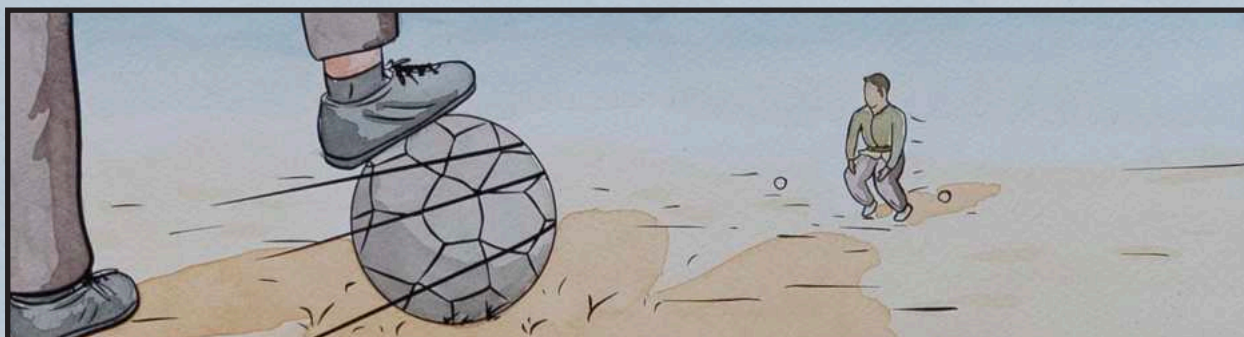




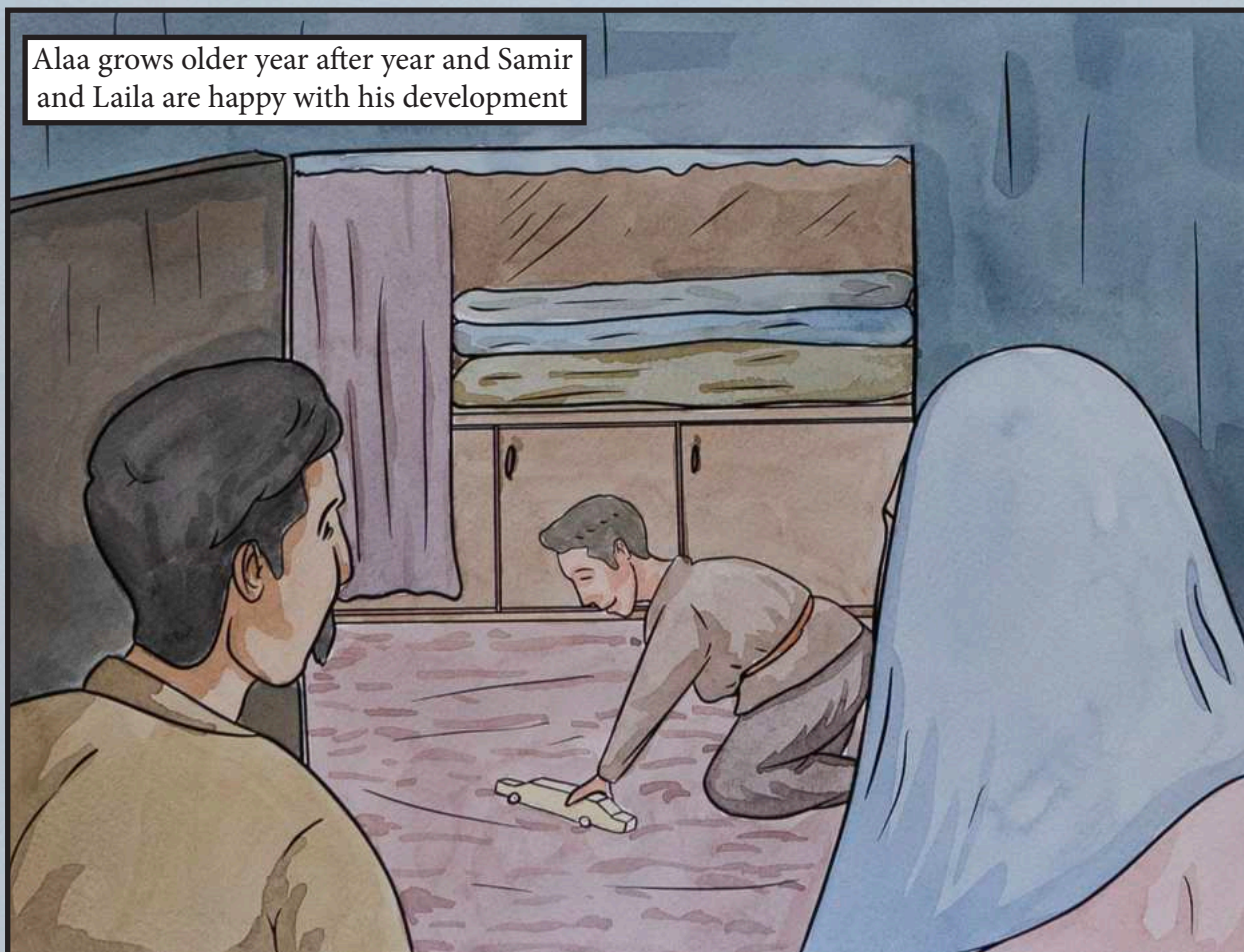






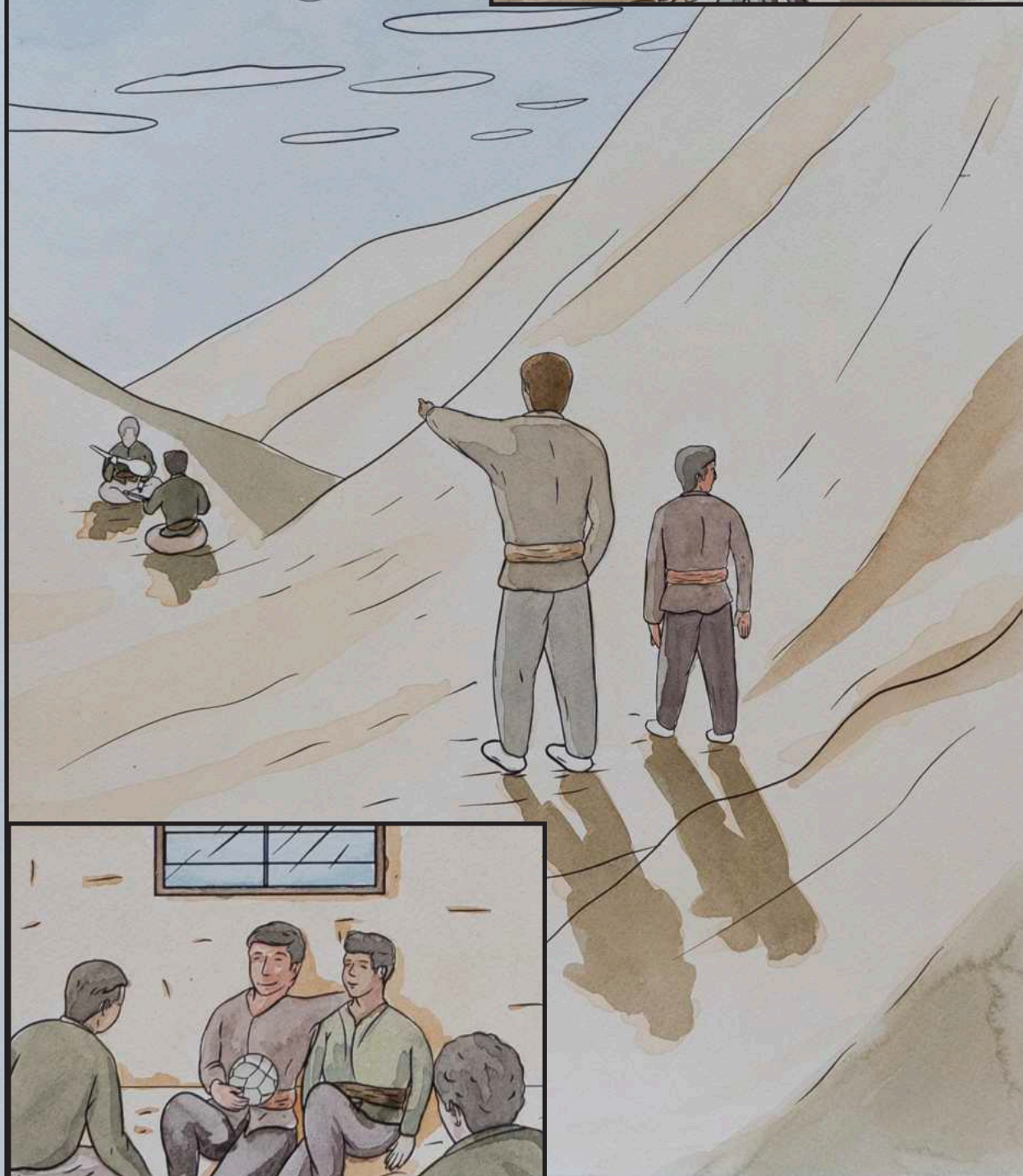
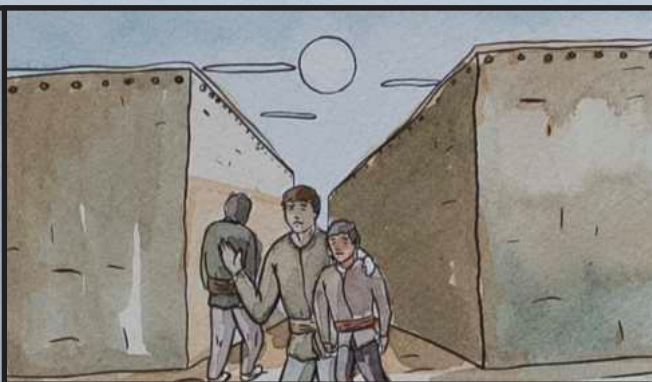


Alaa grows older year after year and Samir and Laila are happy with his development



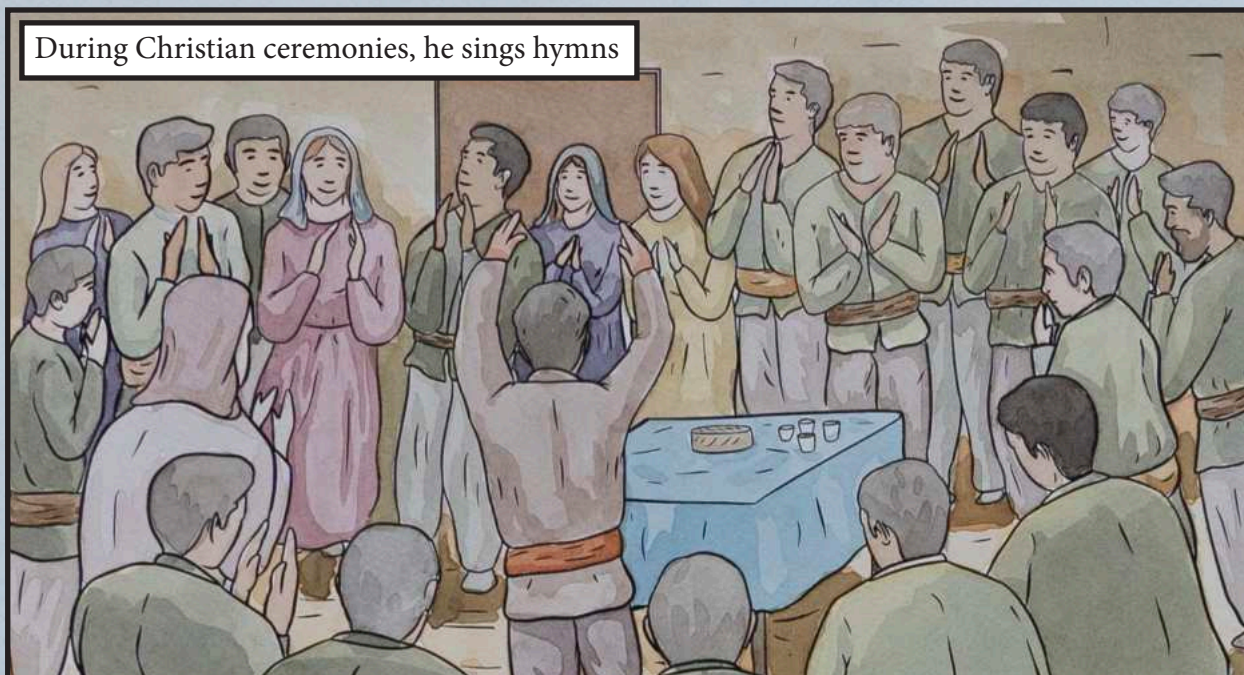


Because of his closeness with Mikail,  
Alaa becomes more familiar with  
Christian customs and traditions





During Christian ceremonies, he sings hymns

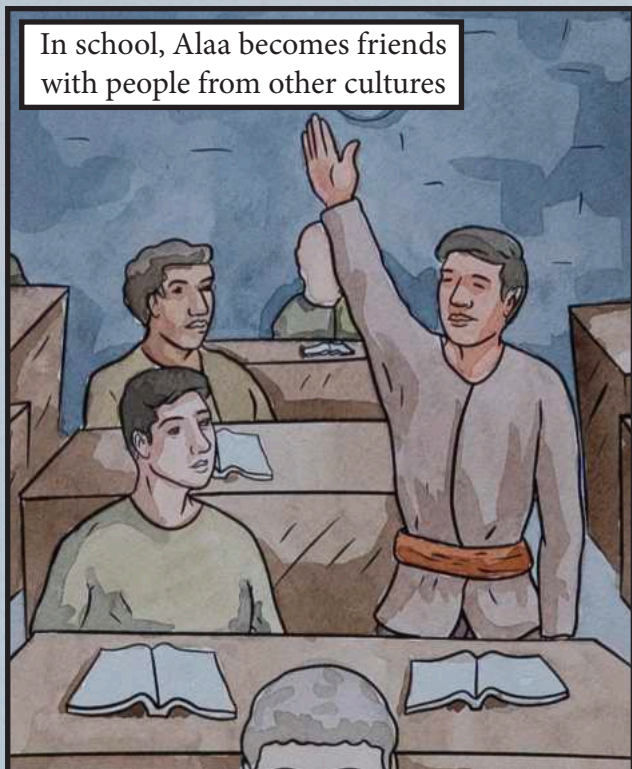


In the market, he's friendly with people from other cultures

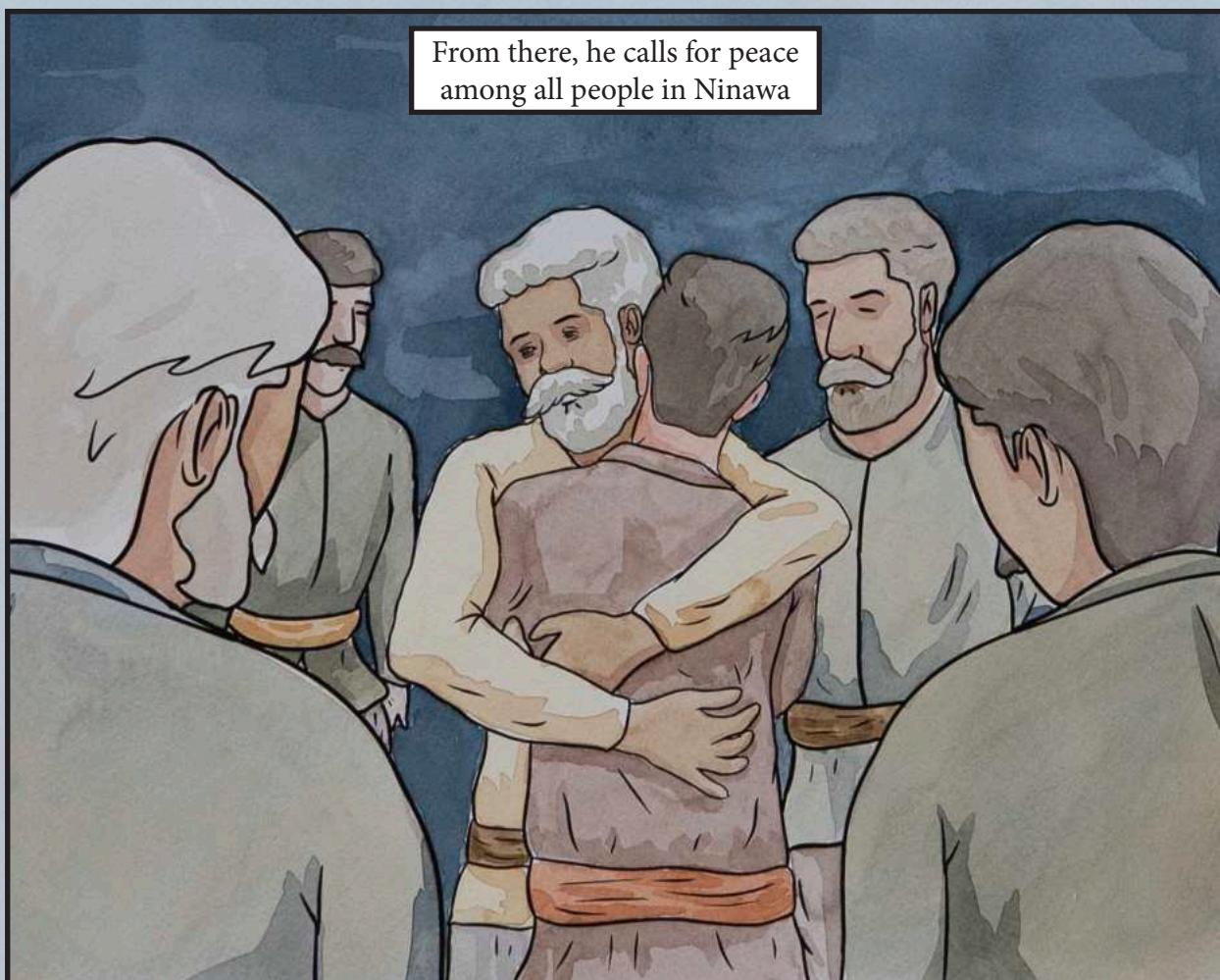




In school, Alaa becomes friends with people from other cultures

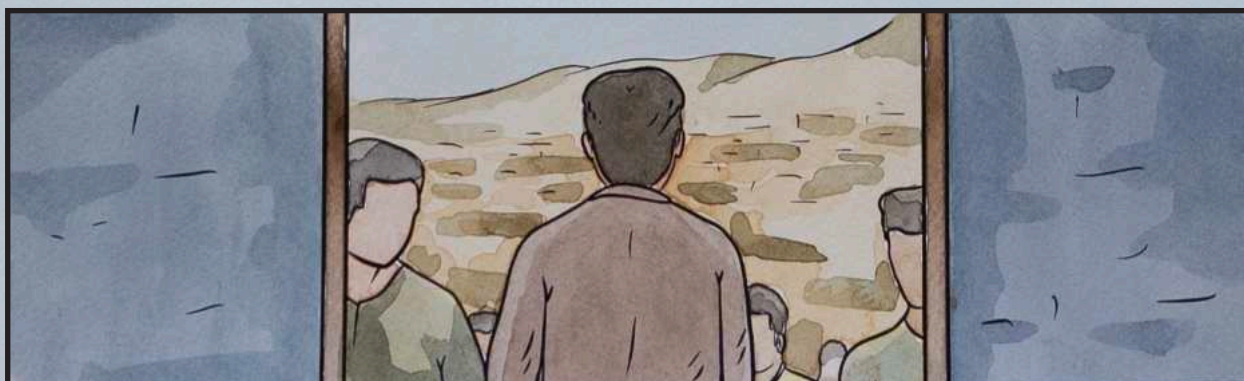
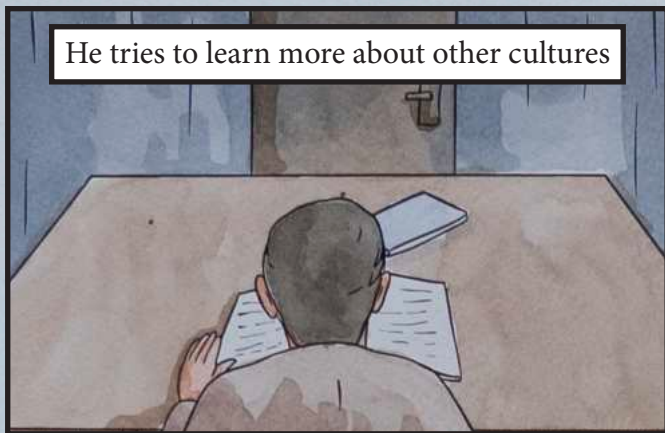


From there, he calls for peace among all people in Ninawa





He tries to learn more about other cultures

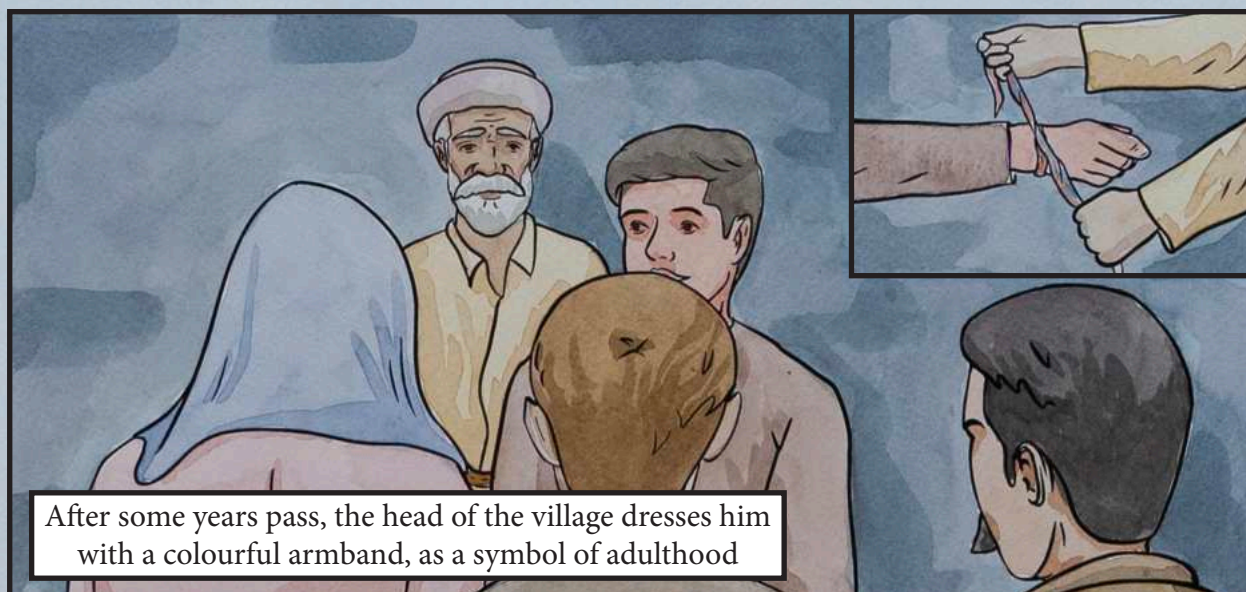




Alaa's parents are very happy about how intelligent  
their son is. People love this quality about him

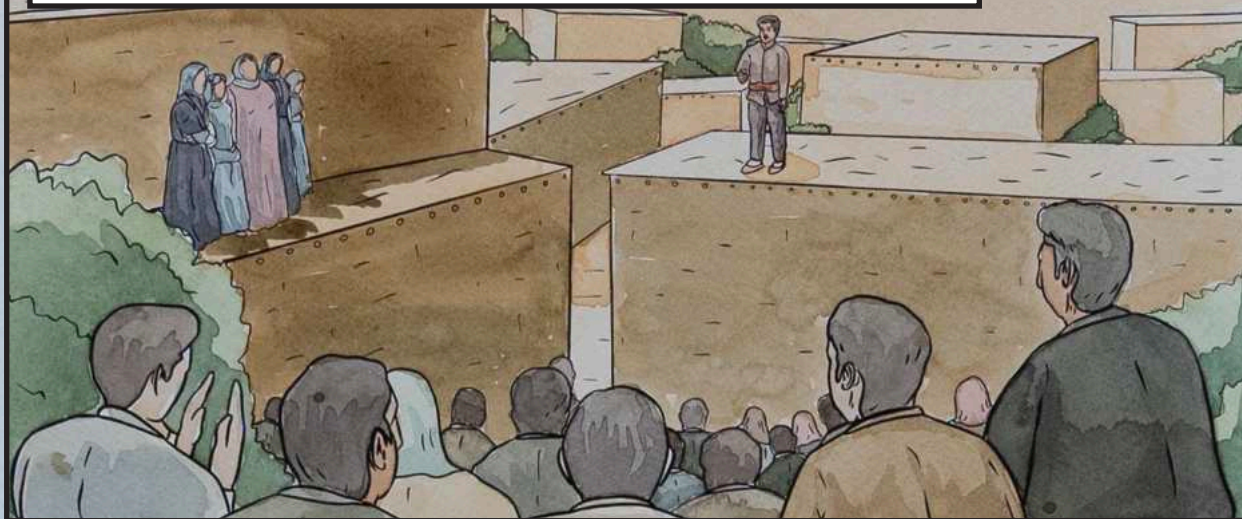




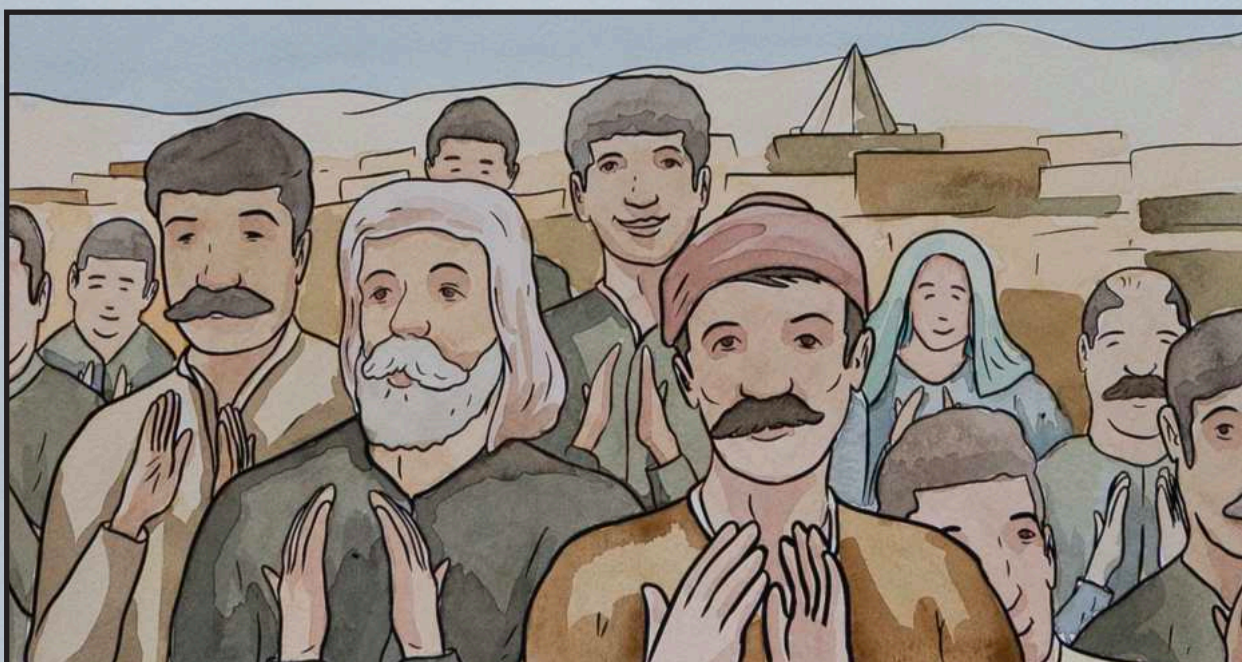




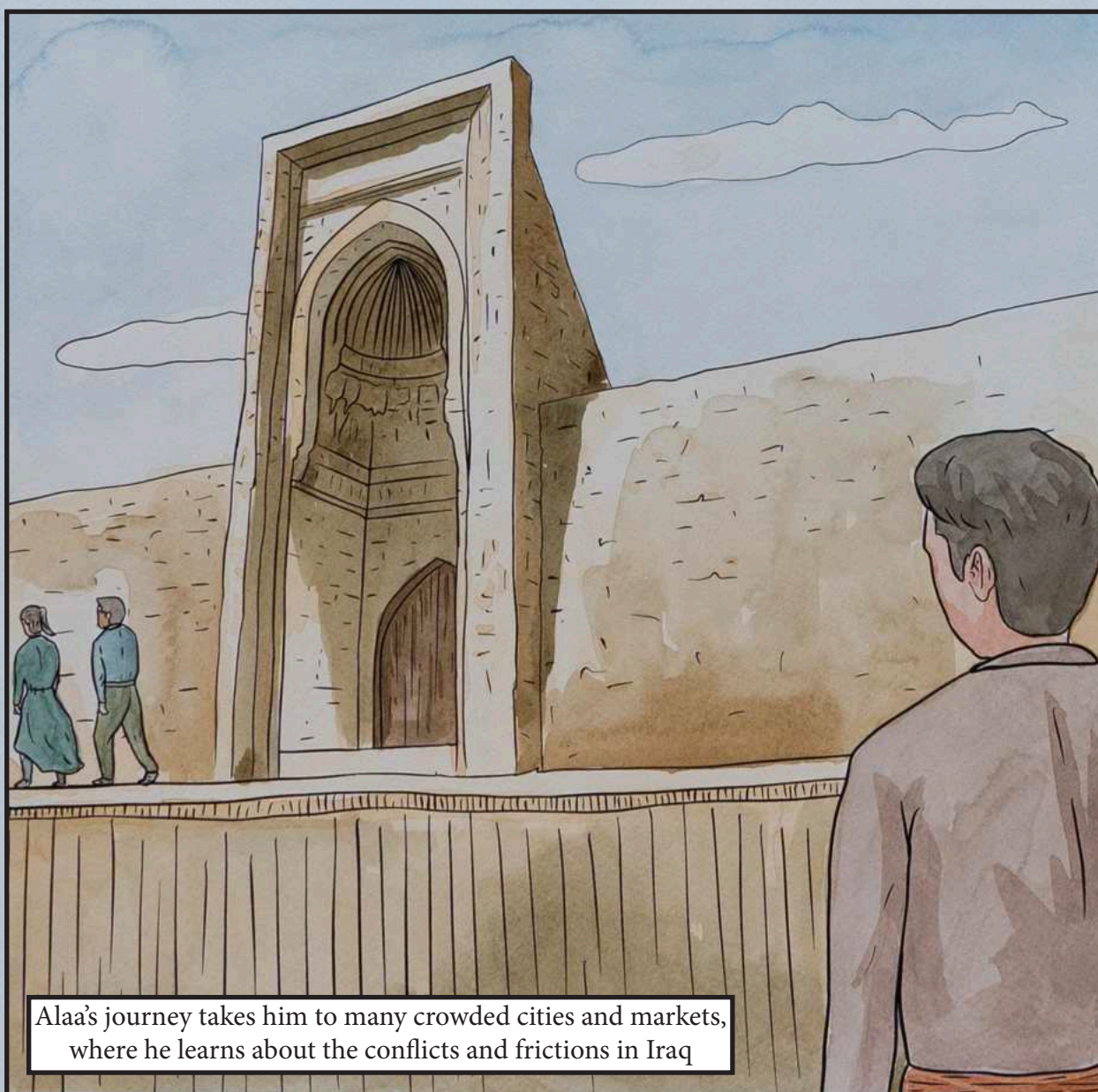
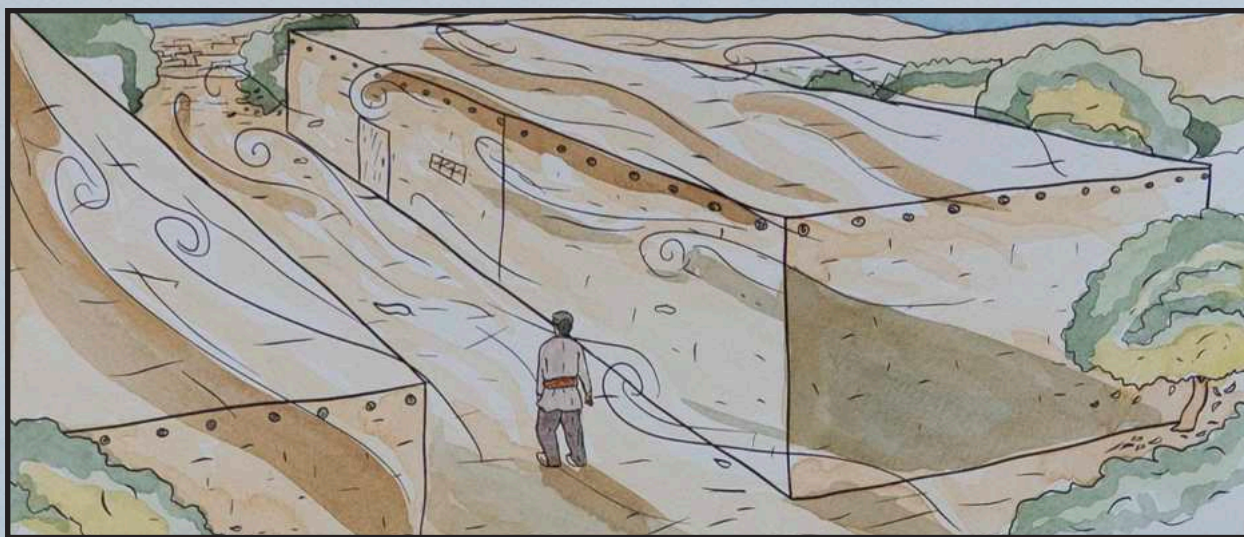
One day, Alaa gathers the whole village. He then shares how much he's learned from them and thanks them for being part of his community



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

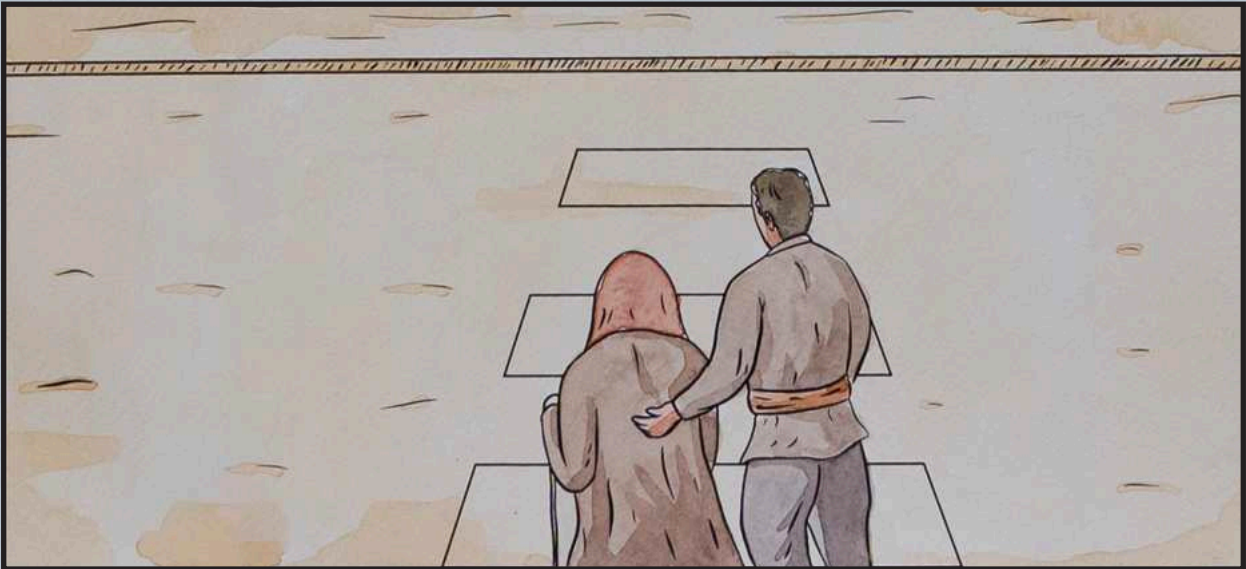




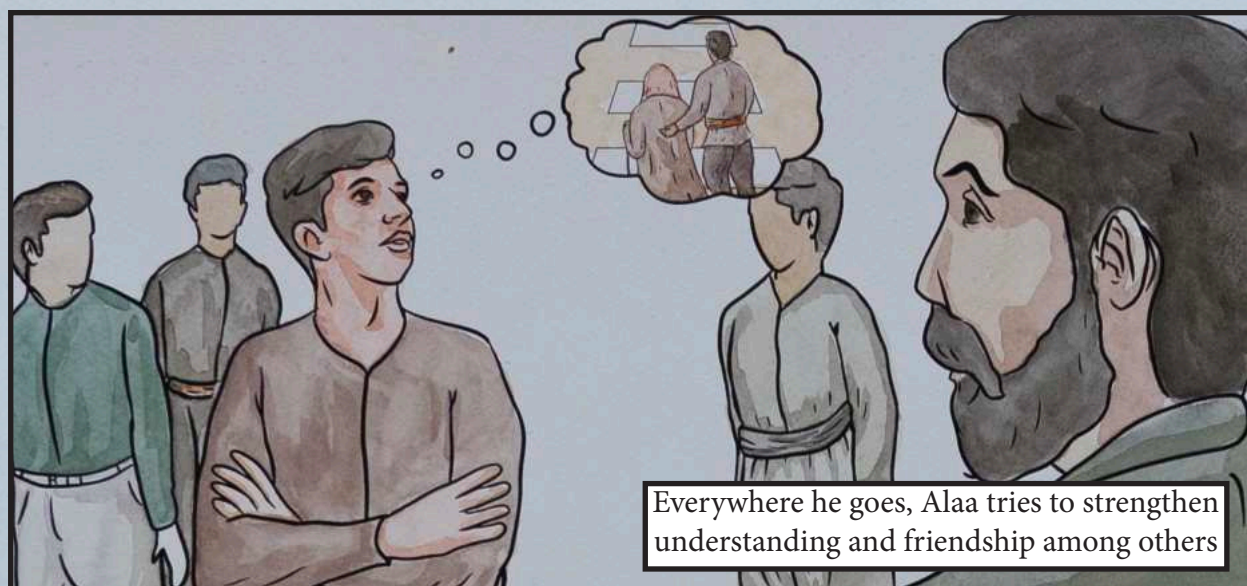


Alaa's journey takes him to many crowded cities and markets, where he learns about the conflicts and frictions in Iraq











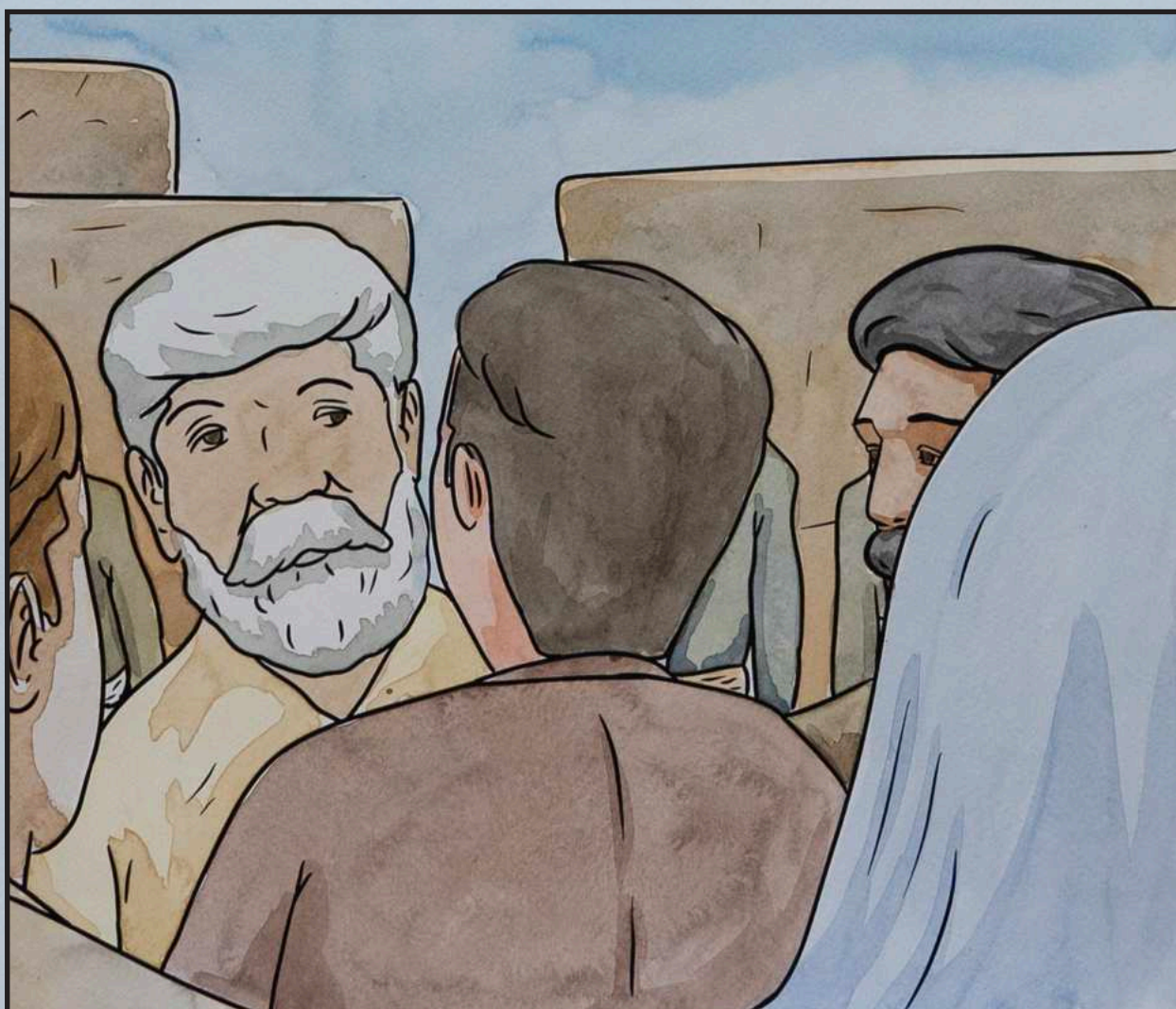
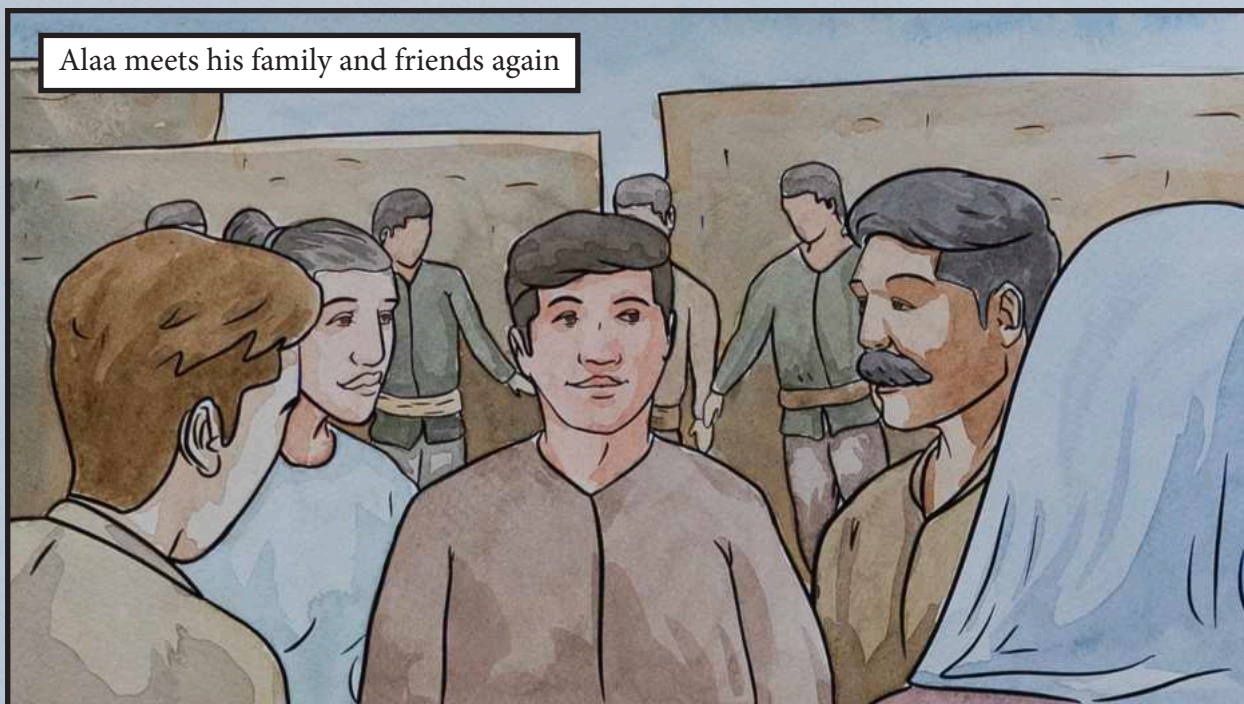


After a few months, he receives a letter from his village. They ask him to visit his neighbour's circumcision ceremony





Alaa meets his family and friends again





He shares his stories with the village residents









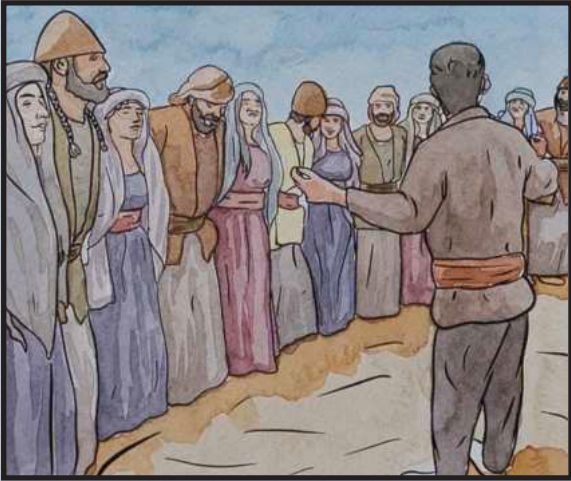




Alaa dances at the circumcision party and feels happy to be back. He promises to spread the message of peace and cross-cultural learning









## 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.







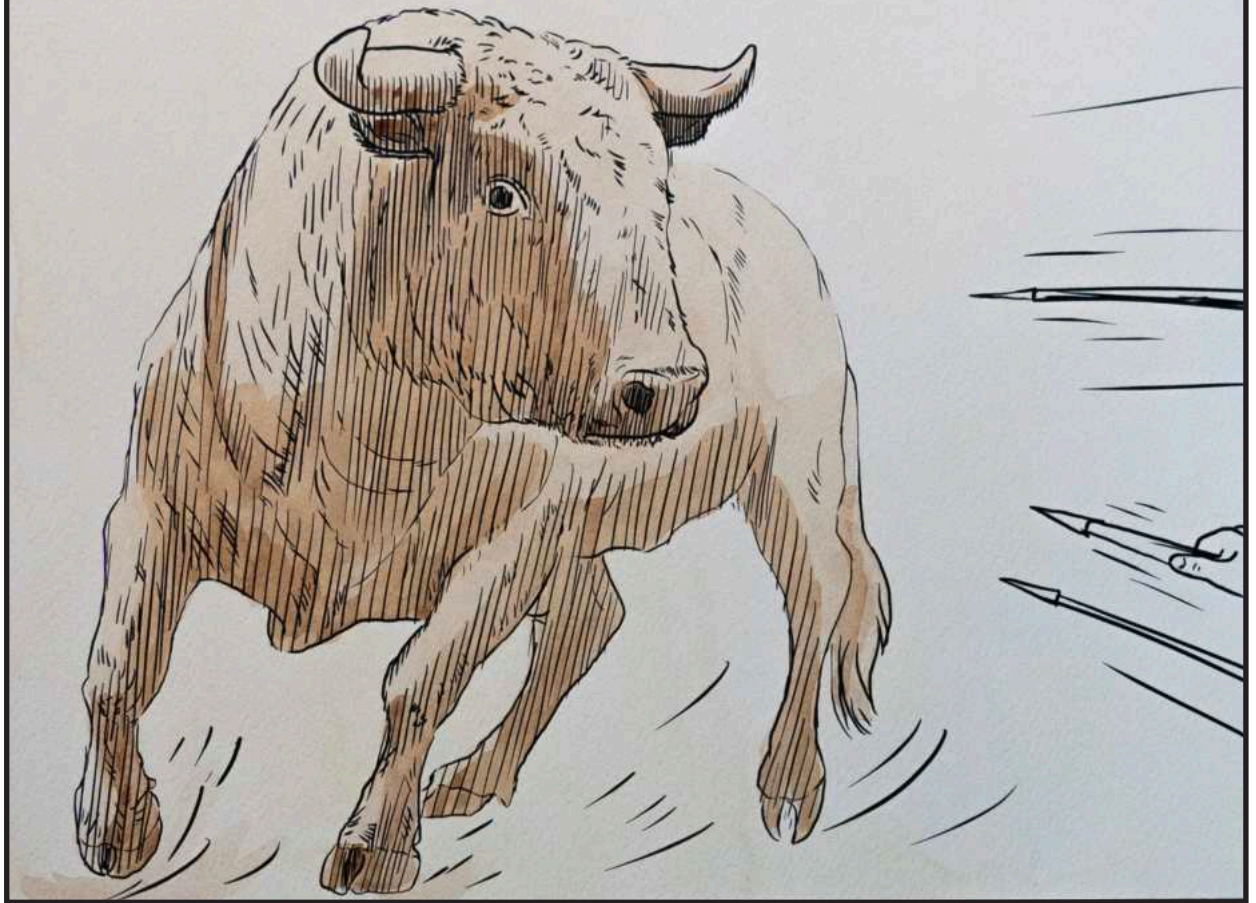


Lamassu statues are symbolic of the Assyrian civilization, particularly in the Ninawa area. They are seen as a spirit protecting the cities and buildings





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

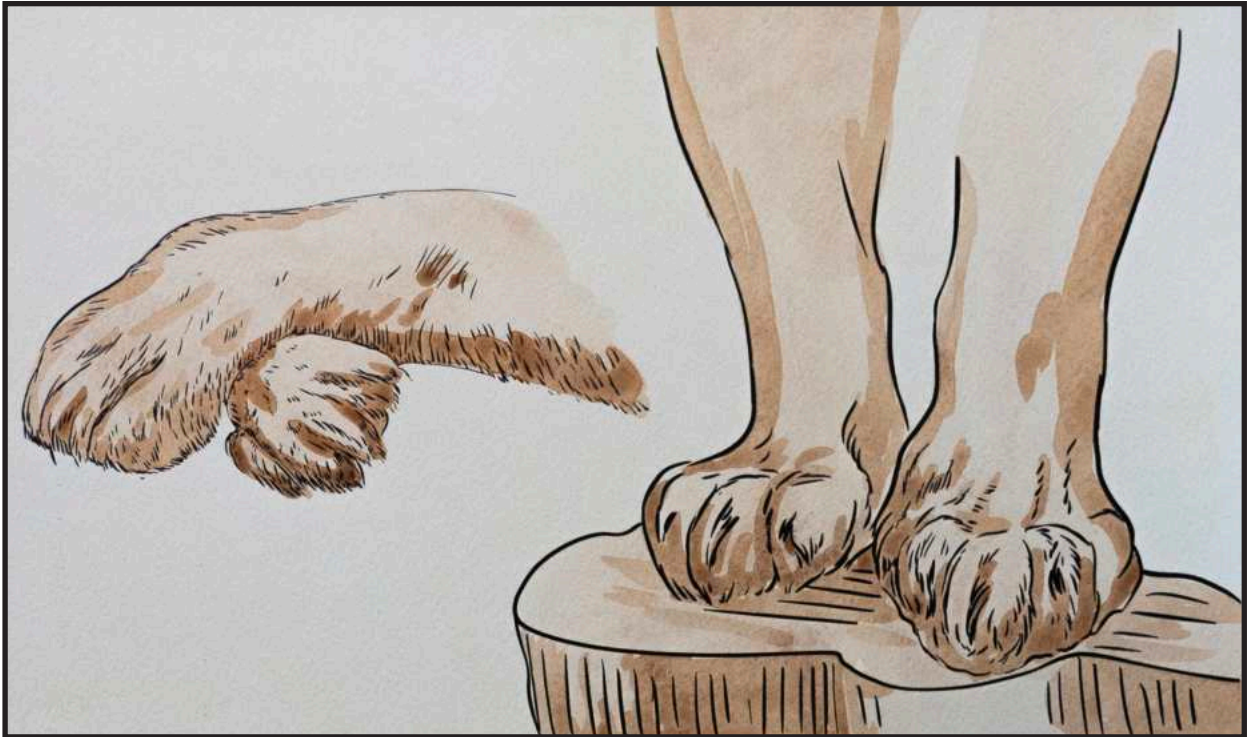




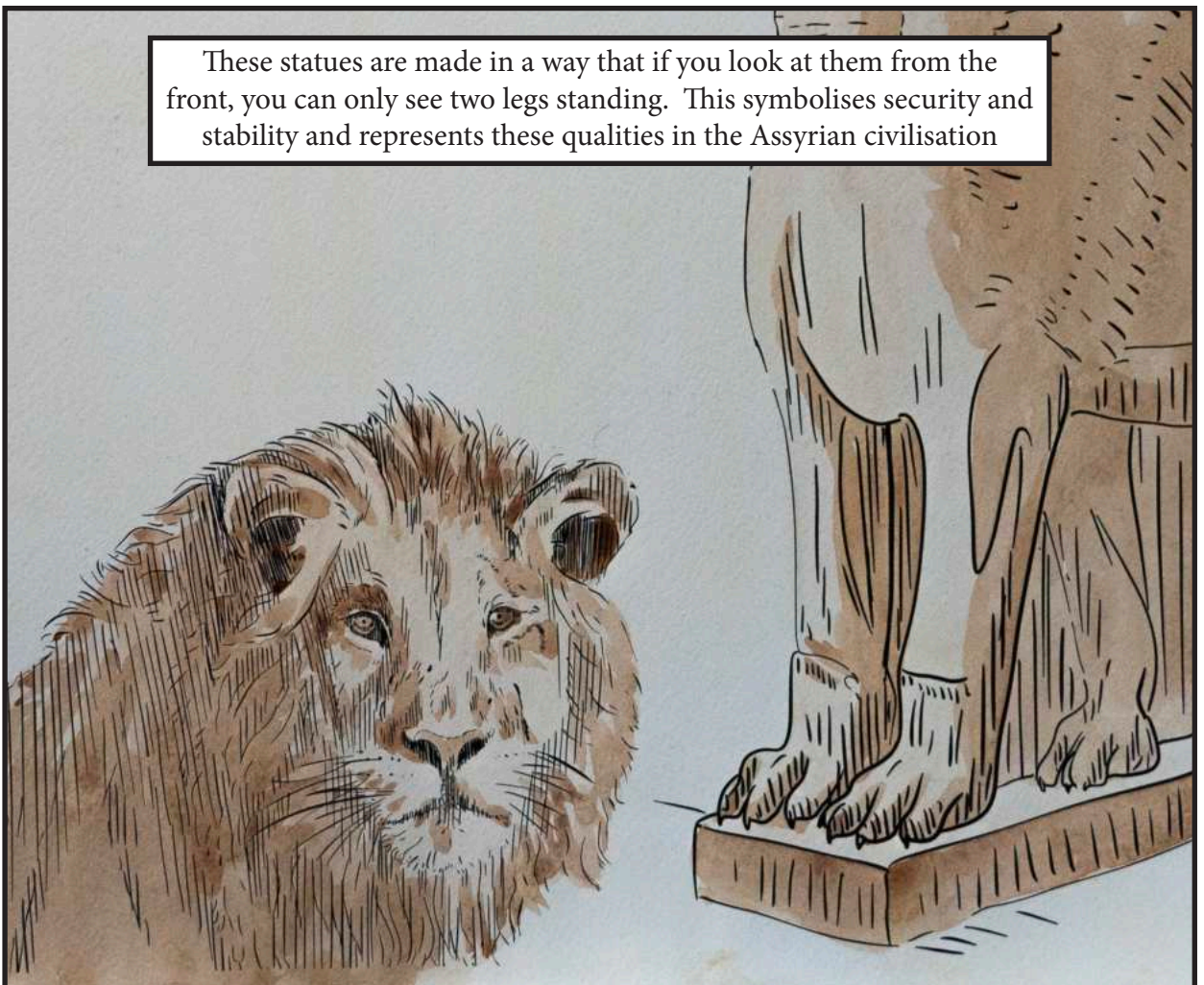
A bull refers to strength, an eagle refers to royalty and a human refers to wisdom. The metamorphosis of the three gives the Lamassu his power







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



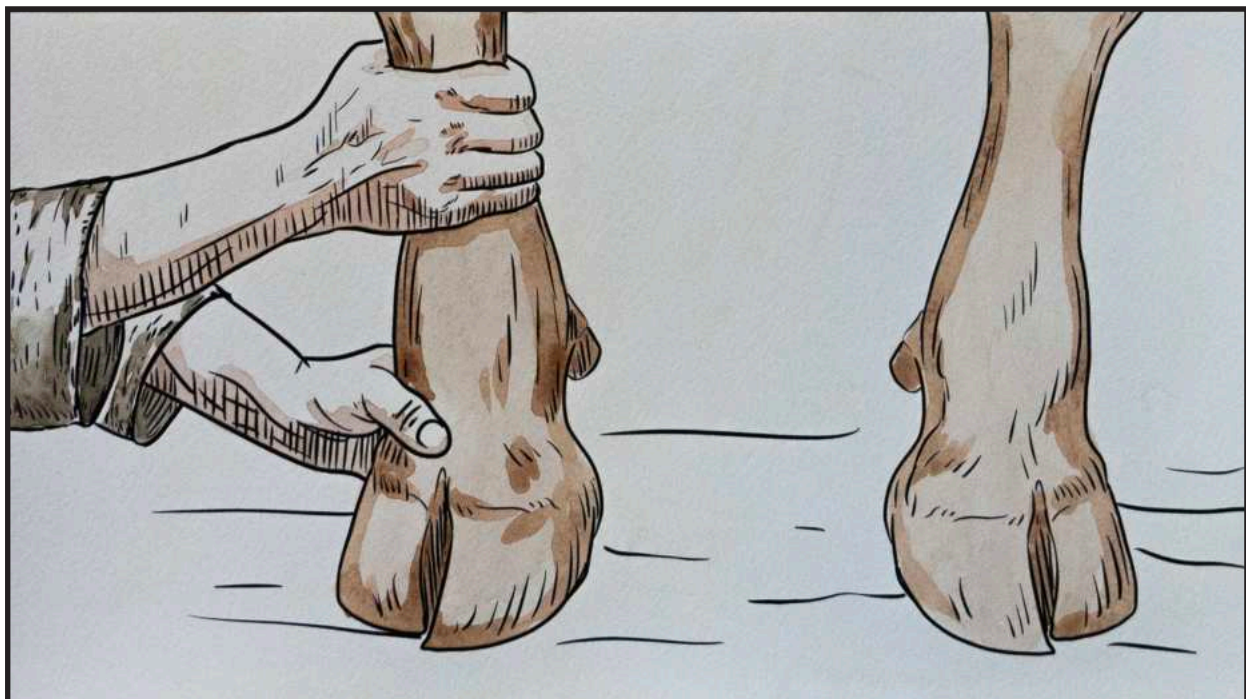
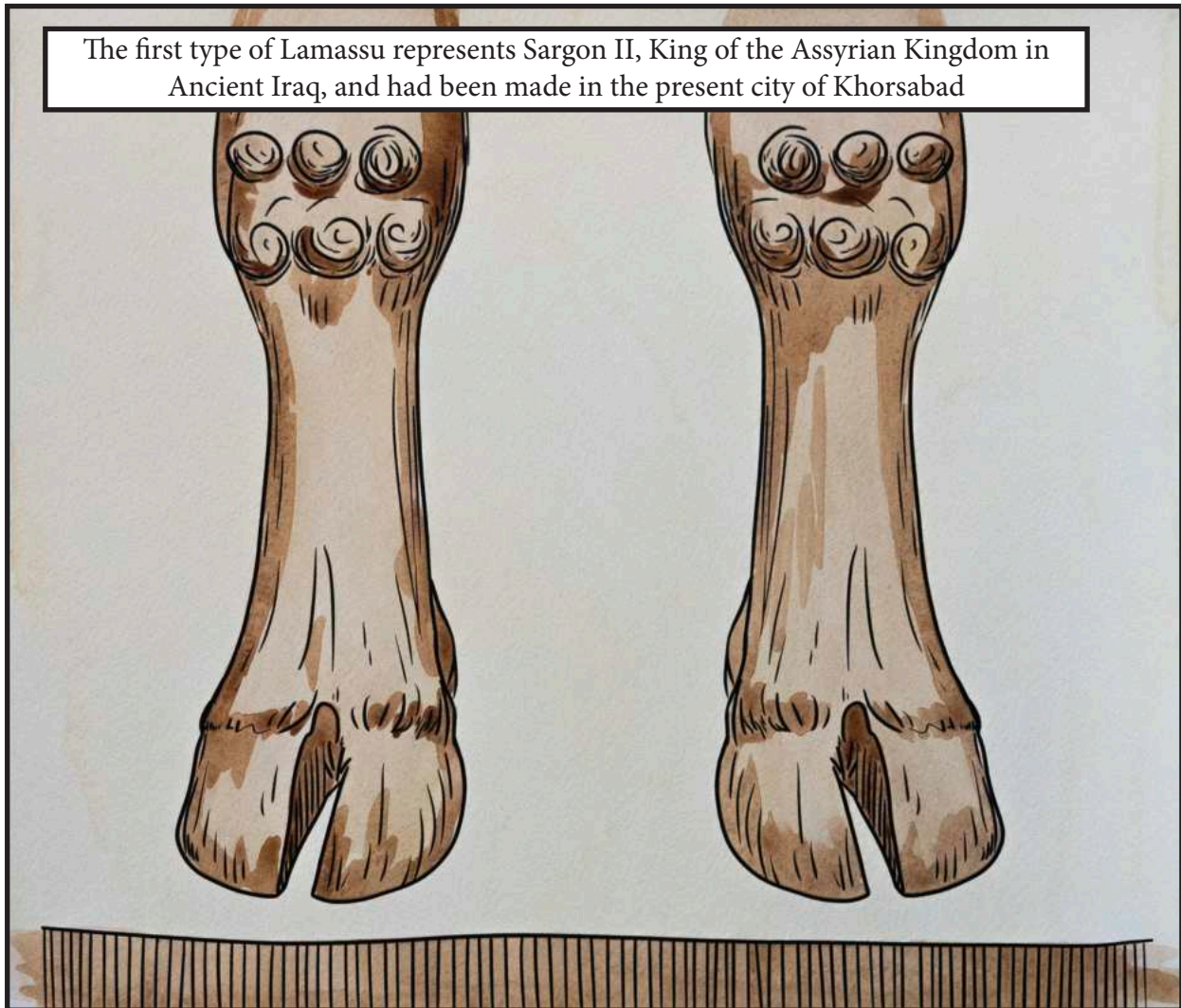


One of the interesting secrets of these statues is that, instead of four, they have five legs. It may demonstrate the multidimensional nature of them. When you look at them from the front, the Lamassu shows royalty and gives off a majestic feeling. From the sides, you have this sense of movement. This 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



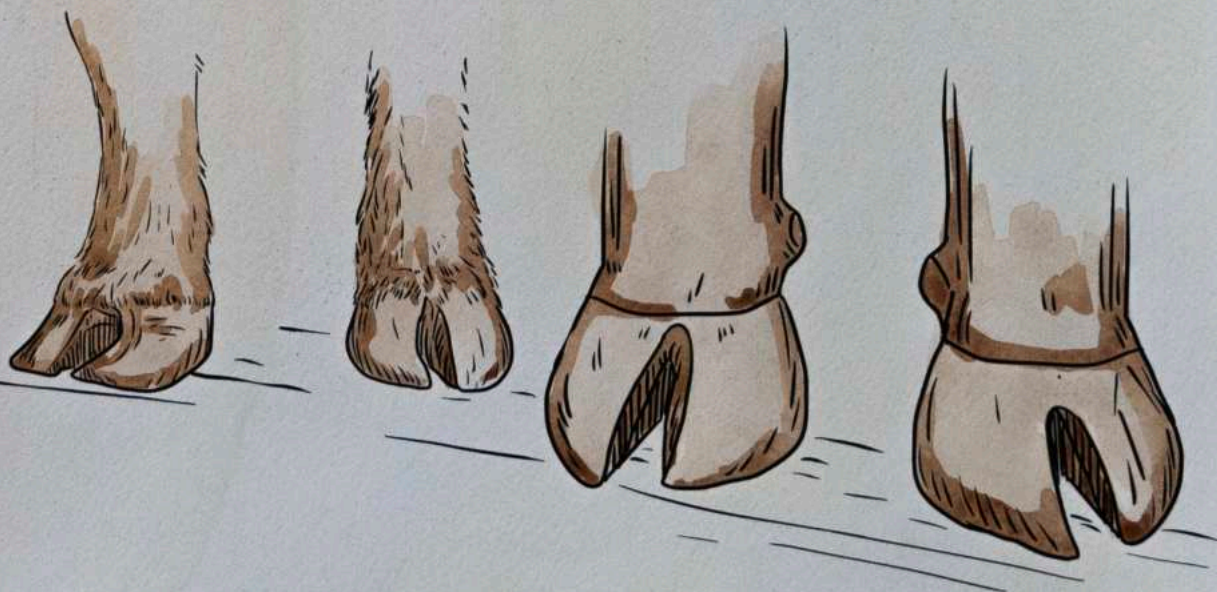


The second type represents Ashurbanipal II, another Assyrian King.  
This statue had been made in the ancient city of Kalhu or Nimrud



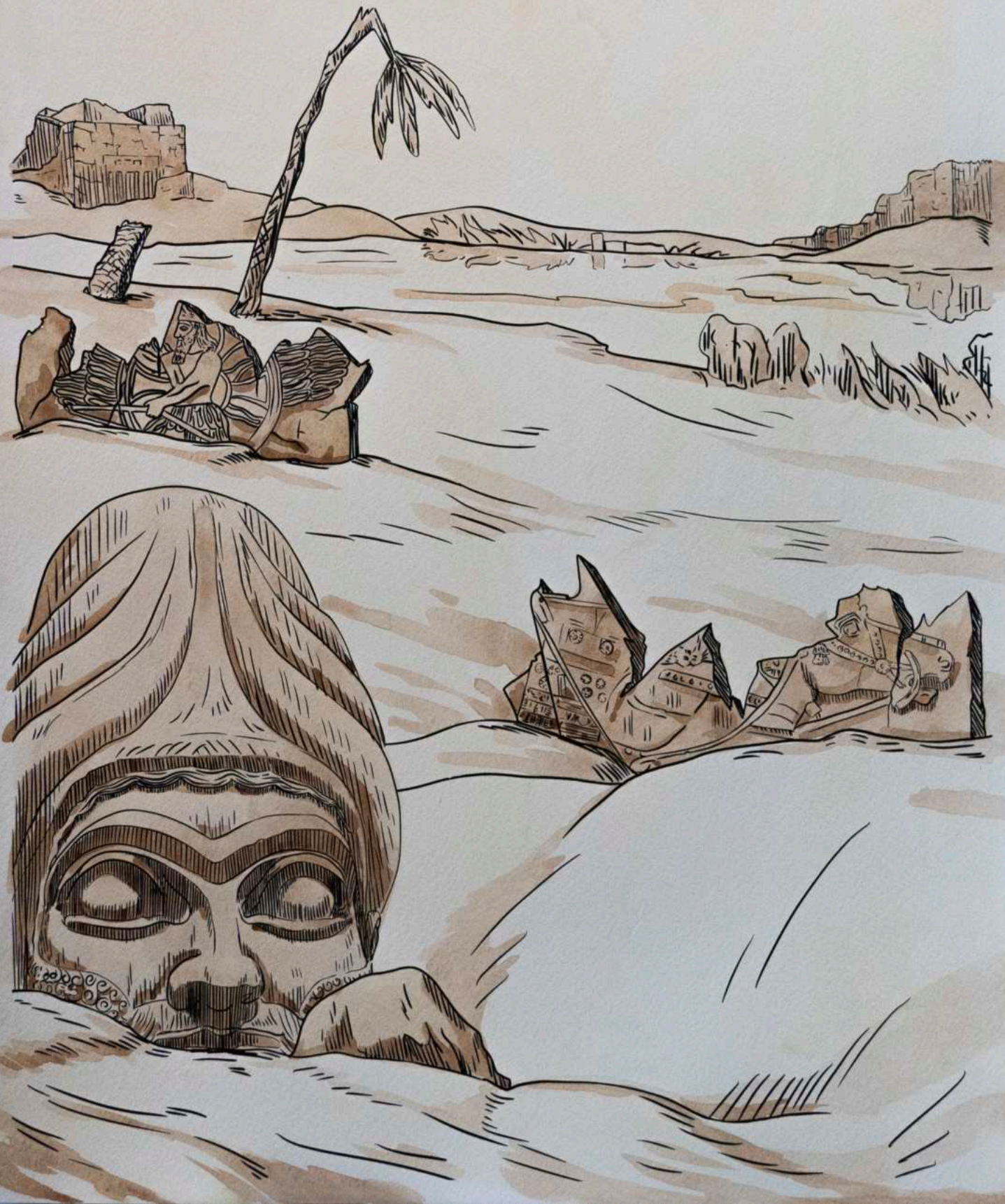


These two statues differ in their legs, body, crown, facial expression, nails, size and facial hair



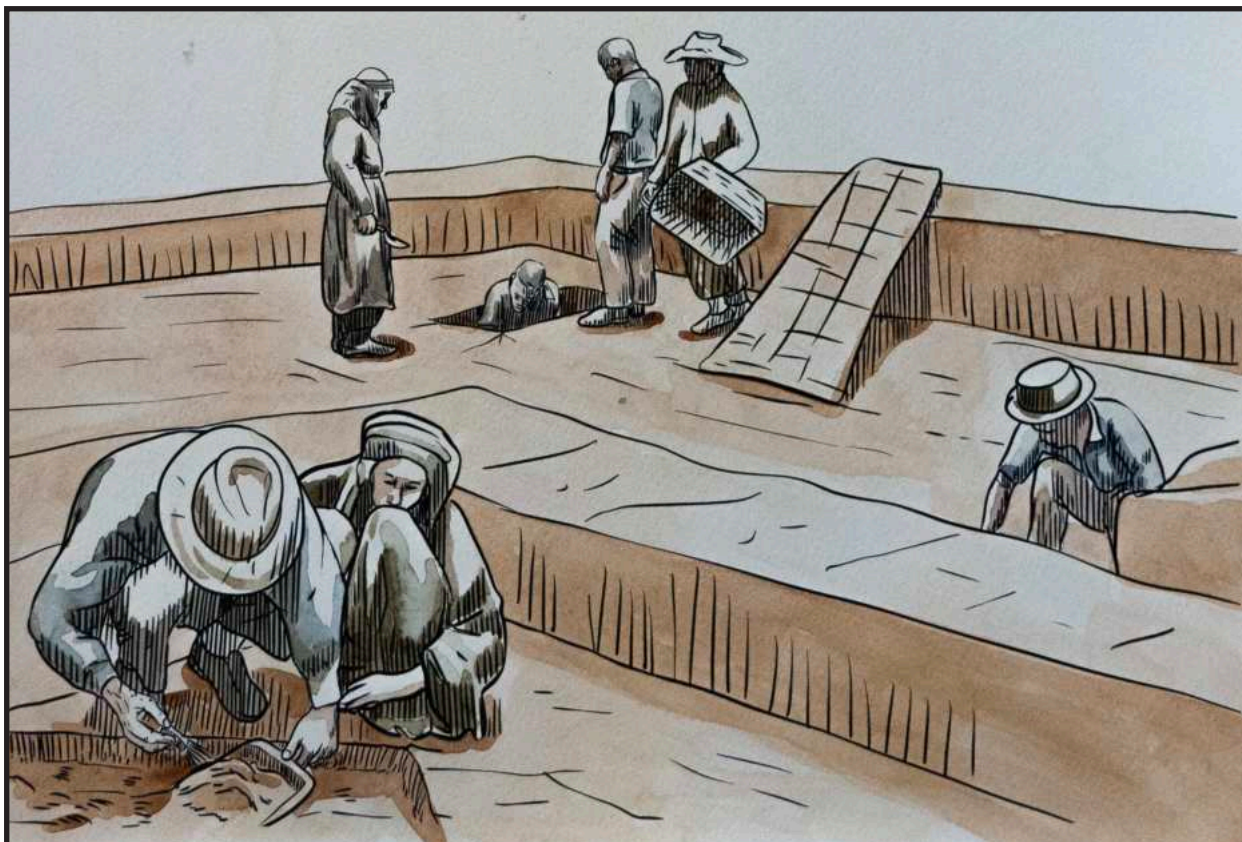


After the fall of the Assyrian civilization, the ancient city of Nineveh faced looting. So the walls and the Lamassus got buried under dirt and soon became forgotten





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



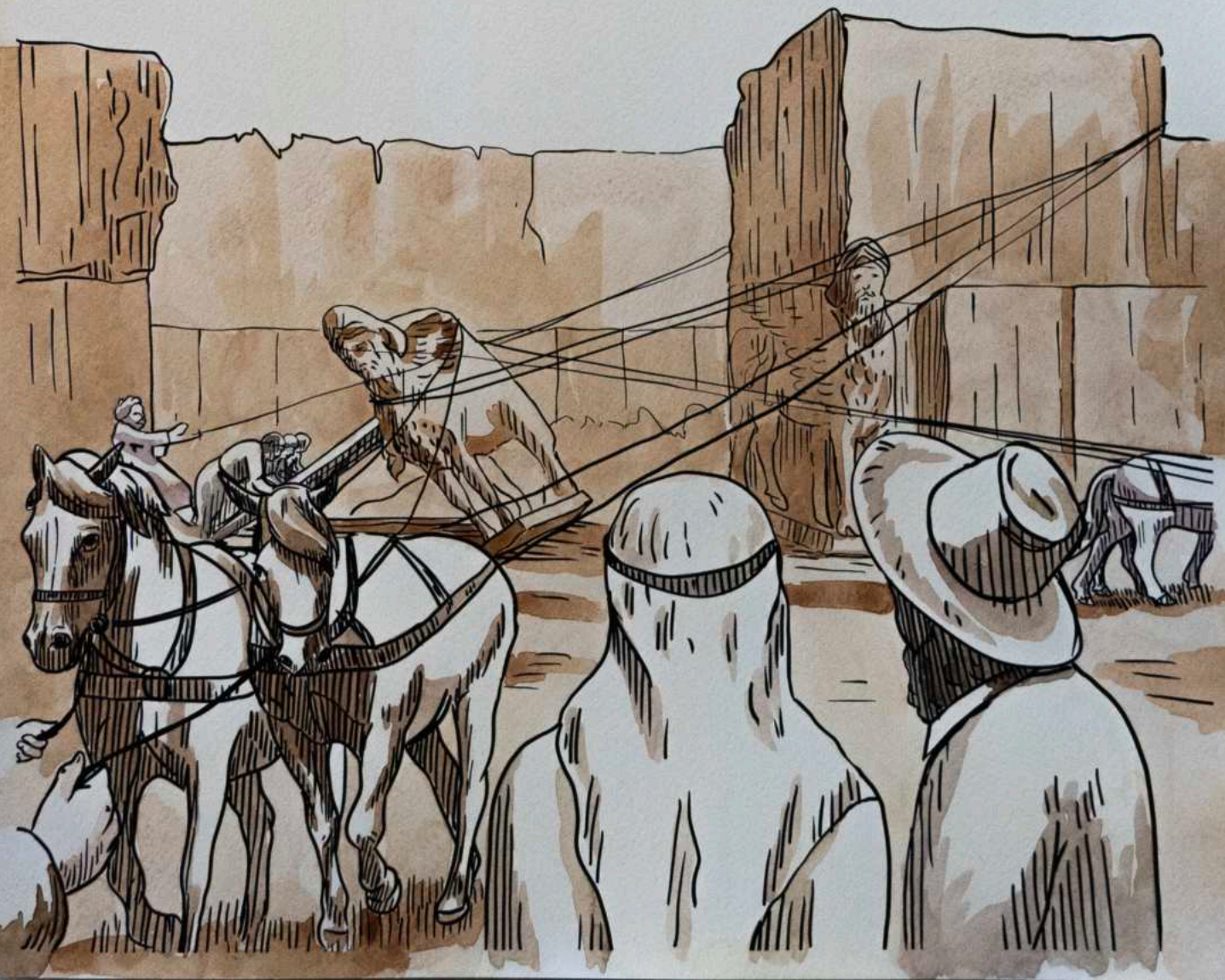


One of the well-known archaeologists is Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817 – 1894), who was an Assyriologist and cuneiformist expert in Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform script. He previously worked at the British Embassy in Istanbul and later led an archaeological mission in Mosul, organised by the British Museum





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





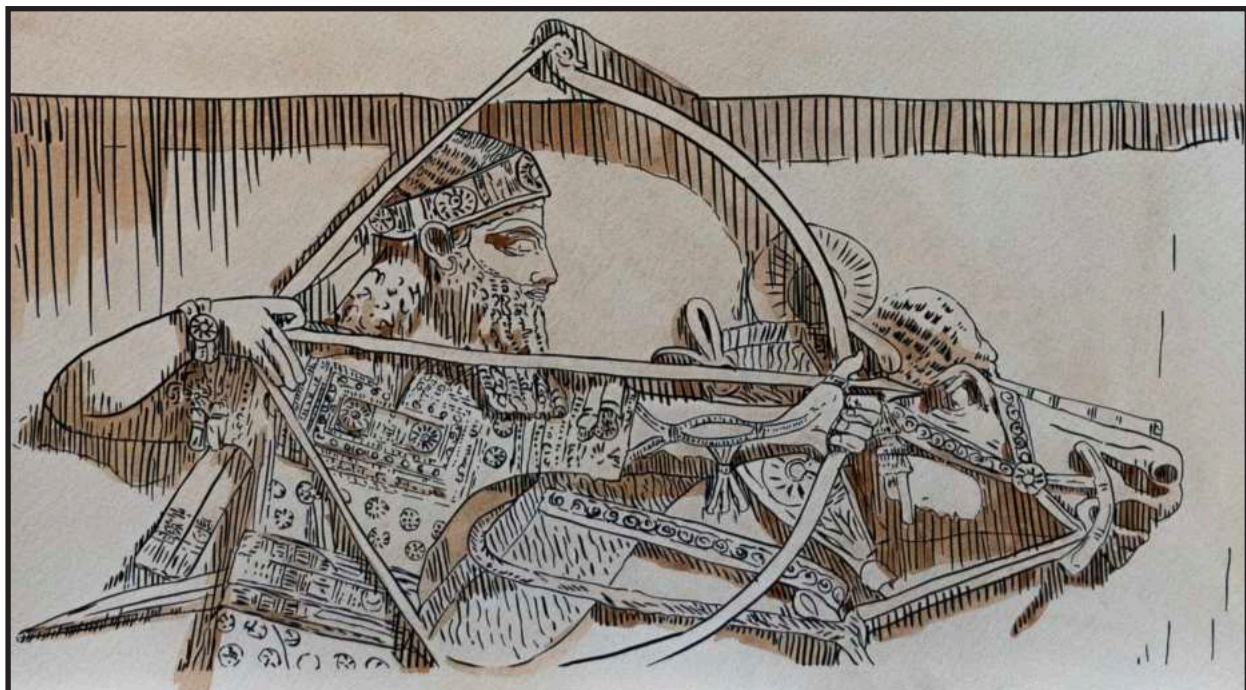
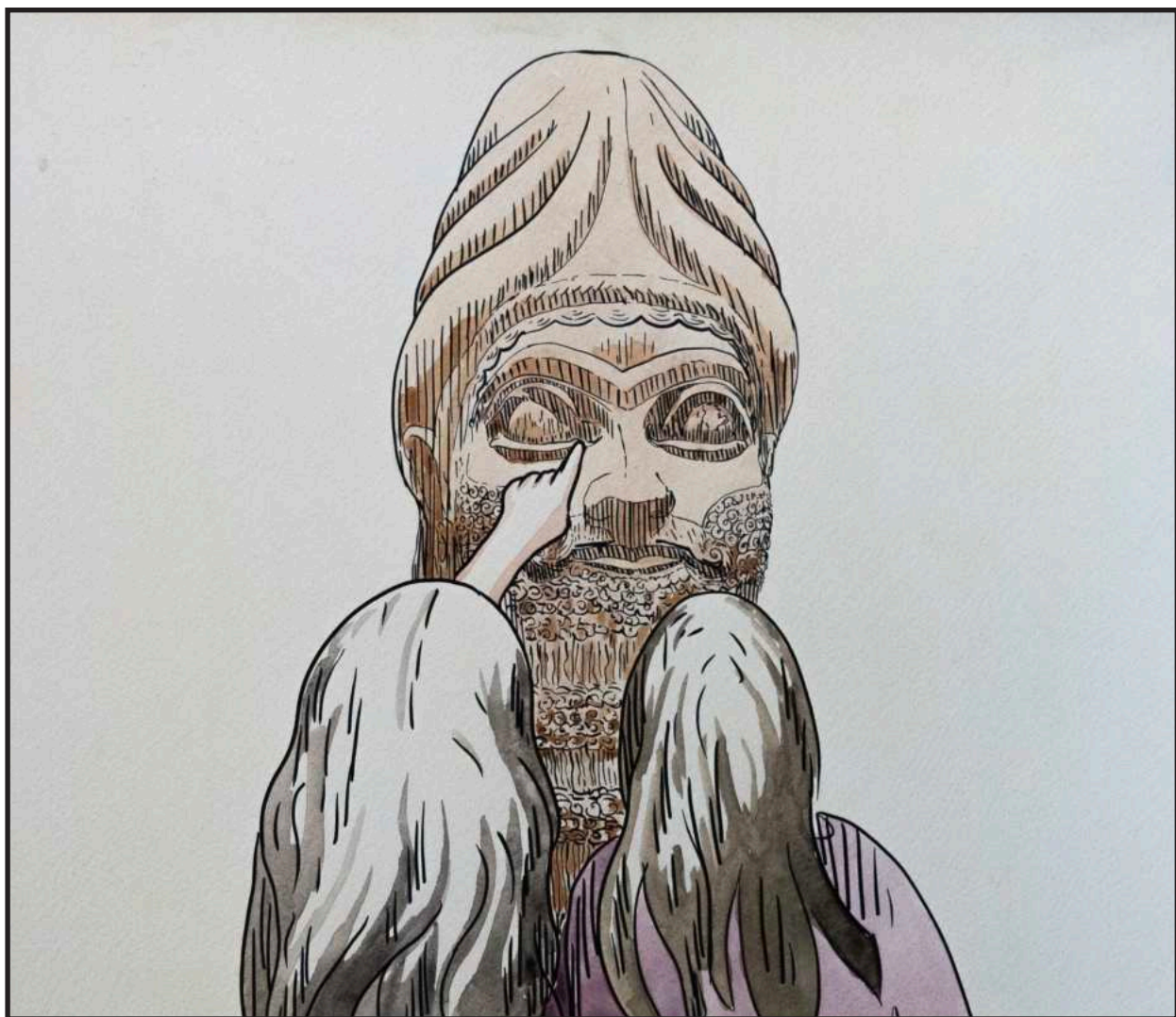


Layard transported the Lamassus that were found in Ninawa and other cities to London, where you can see some of them in the British Museum. Others are displayed in museums in Paris, New York and Chicago. Some are also housed in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad













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





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







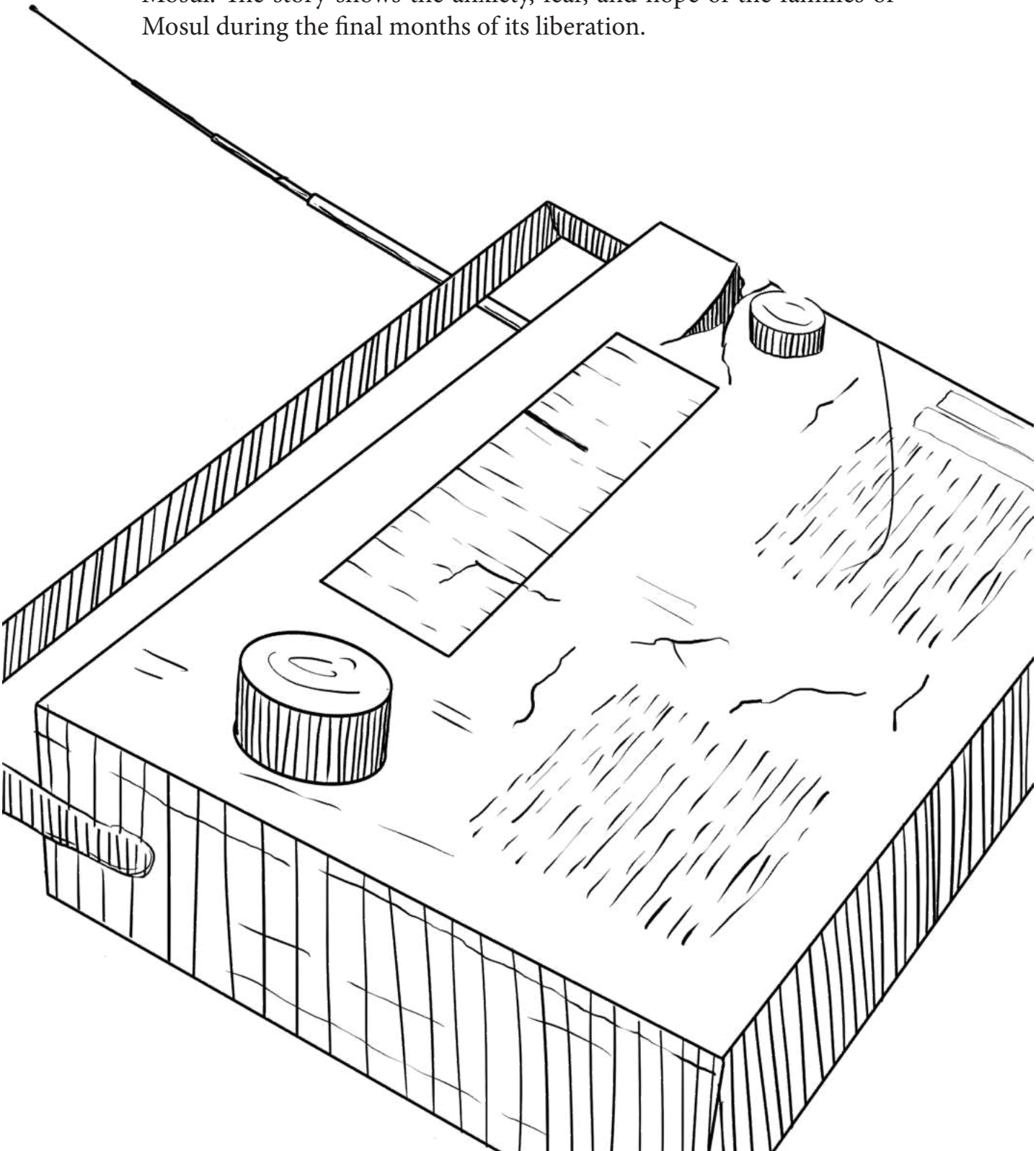






## Last Day

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.







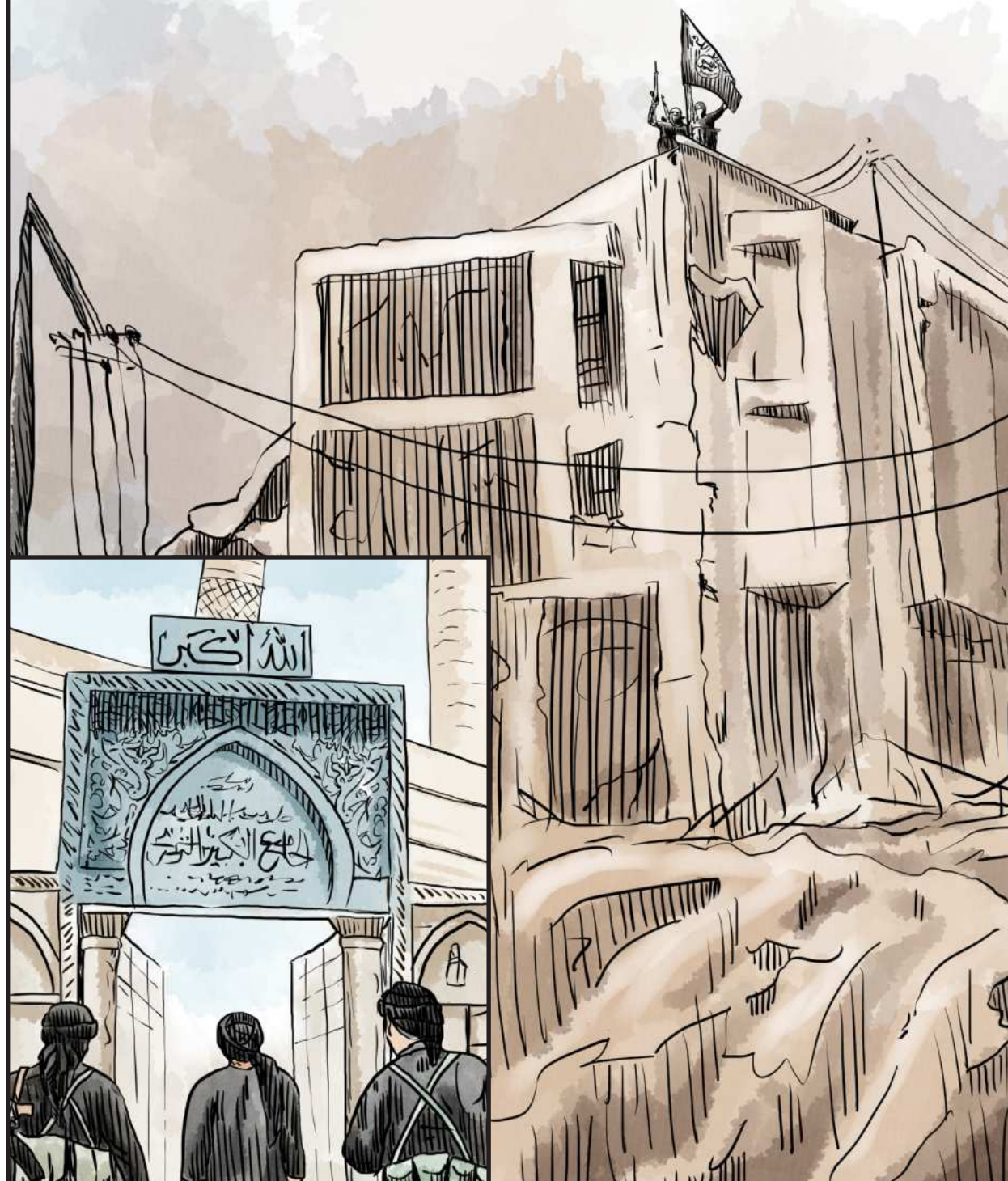


In 2014, ISIS invaded the city of Mosul

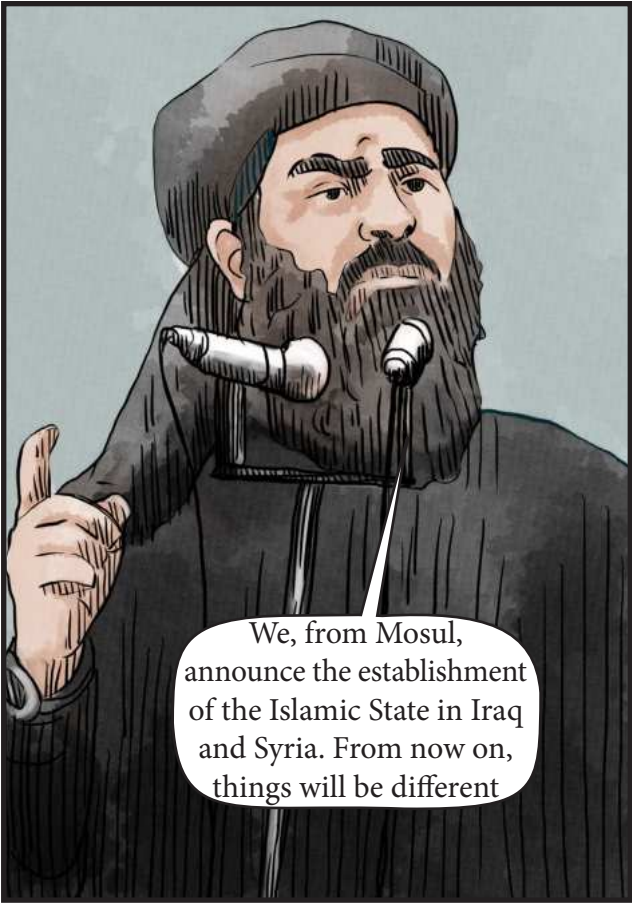




The invasion caused a number of groups of people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to be displaced and soldiers' families were forced to hide

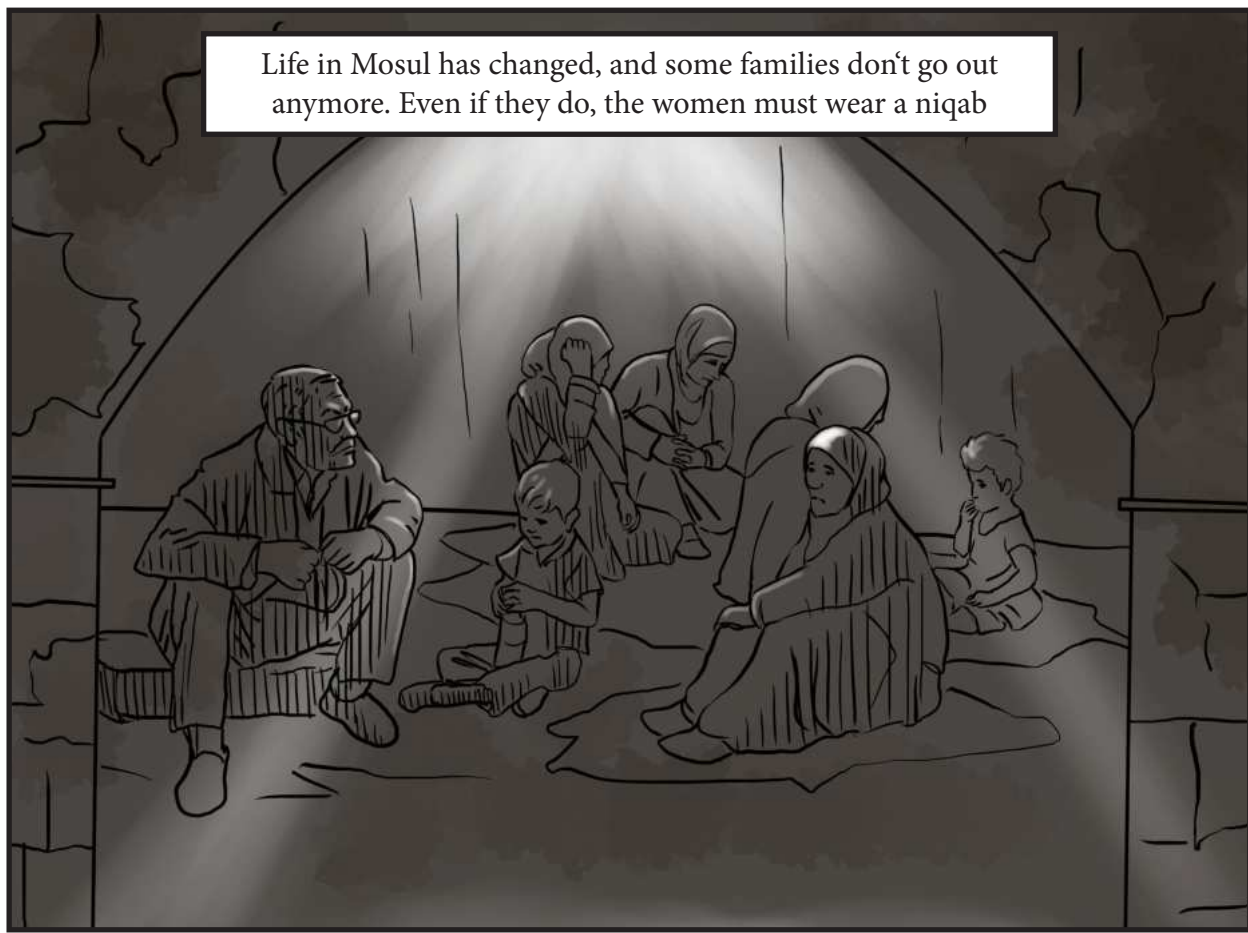








Life in Mosul has changed, and some families don't go out anymore. Even if they do, the women must wear a niqab





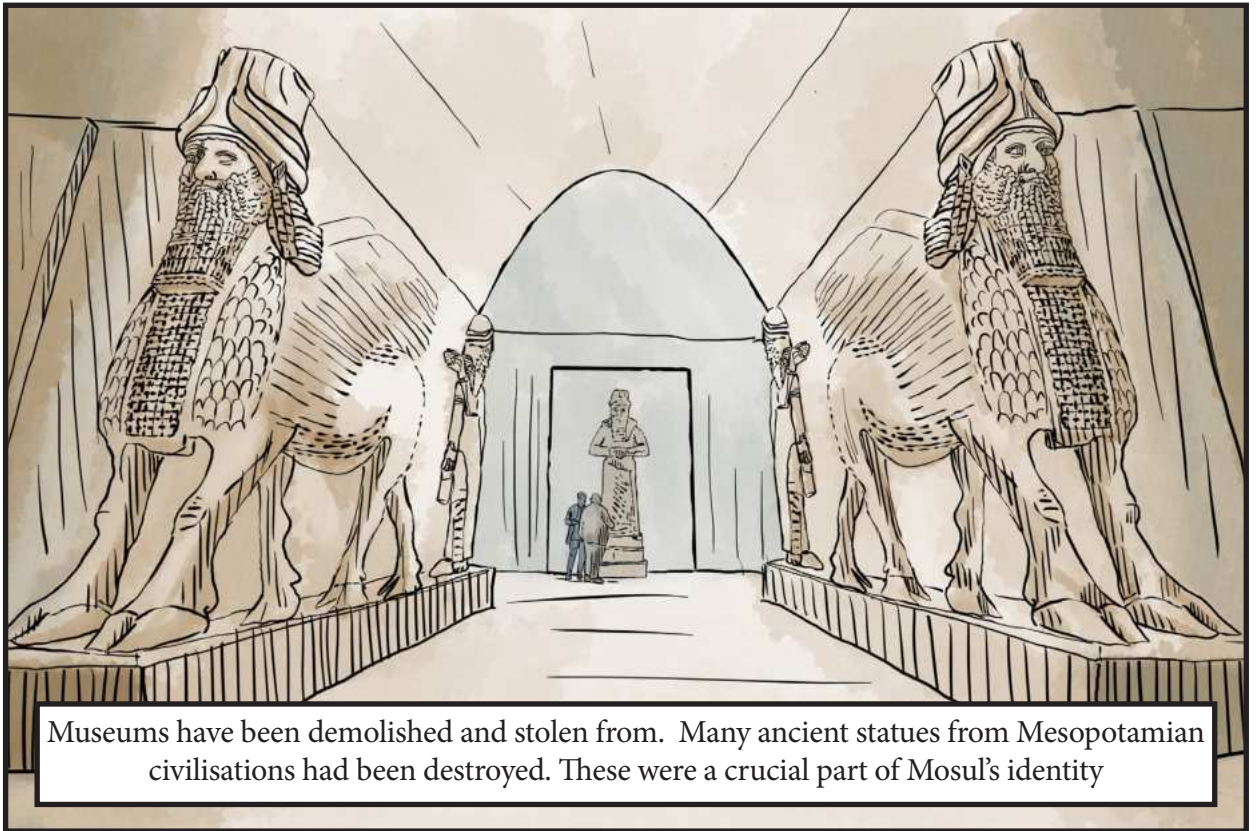




Many temples and historical sites have been wrecked







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

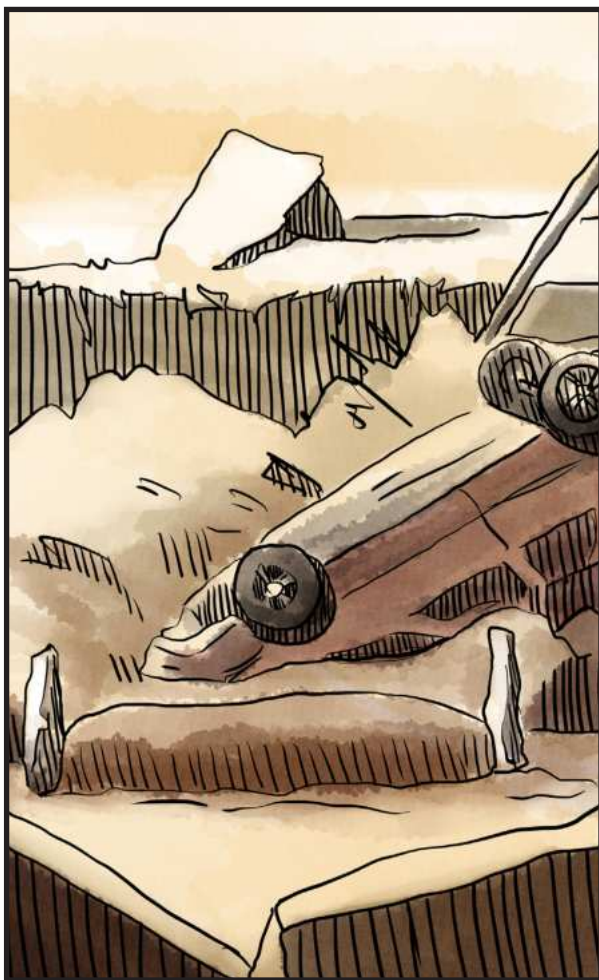
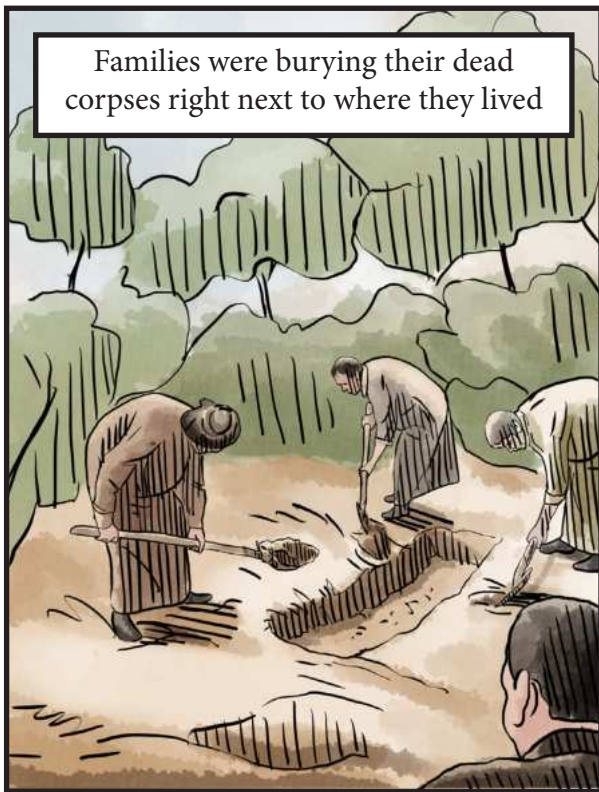




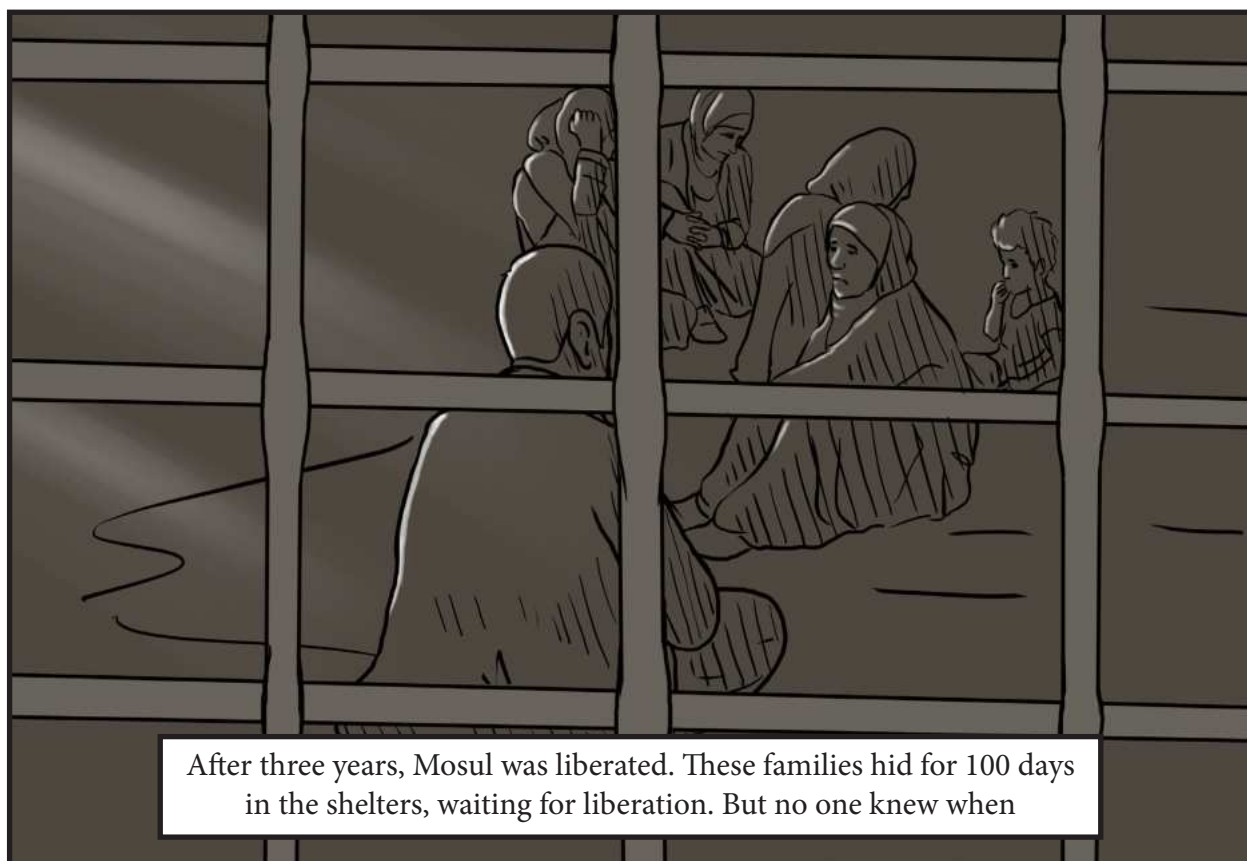




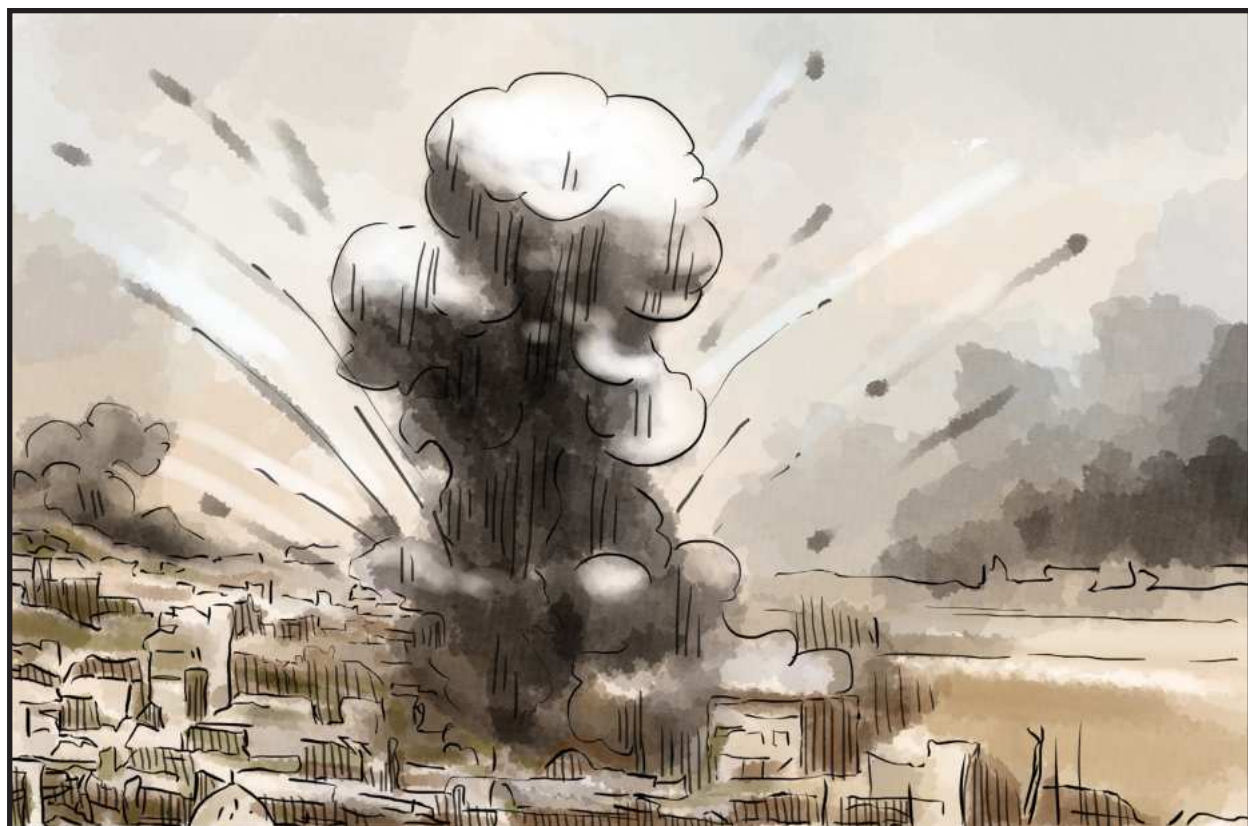
Families were burying their dead  
corpses right next to where they lived













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











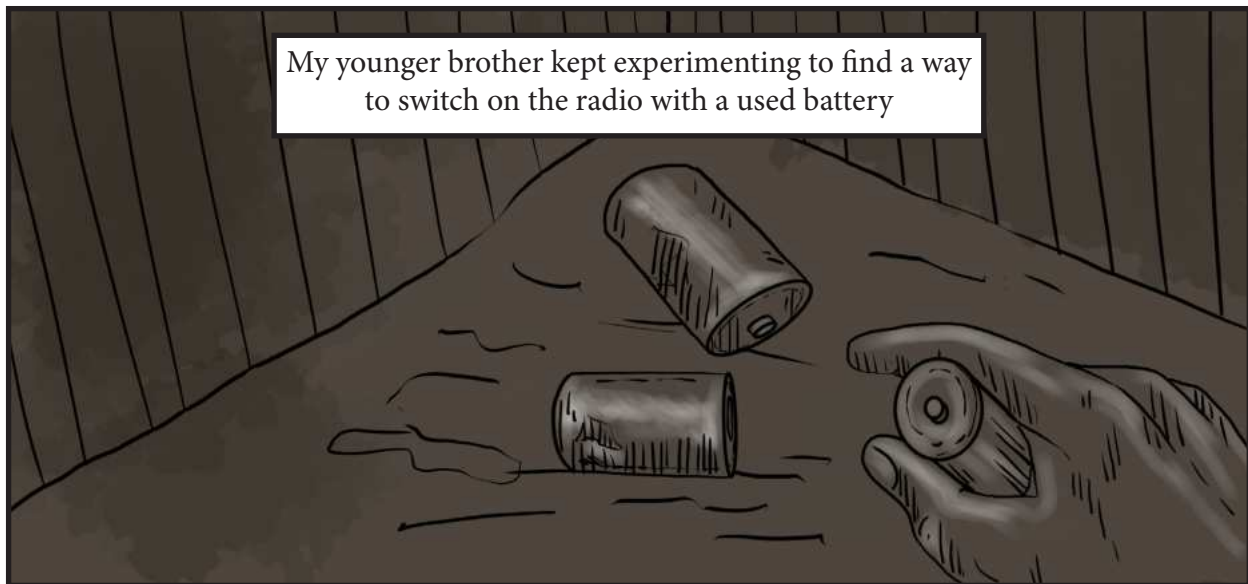


The radio battery died eventually,  
and we didn't have any others



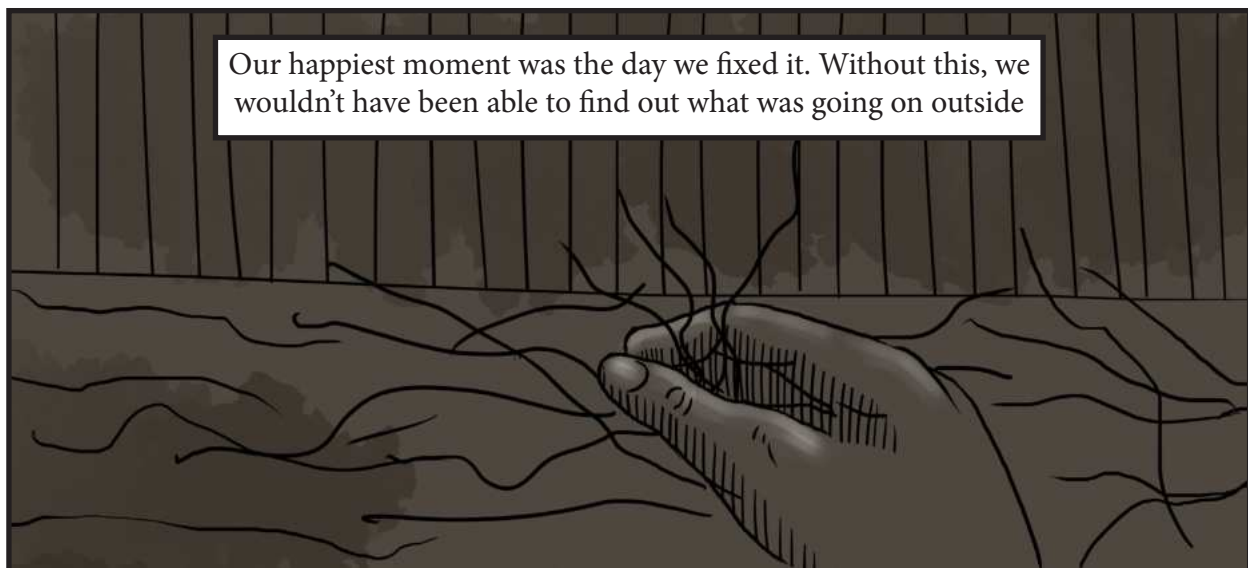


My younger brother kept experimenting to find a way to switch on the radio with a used battery

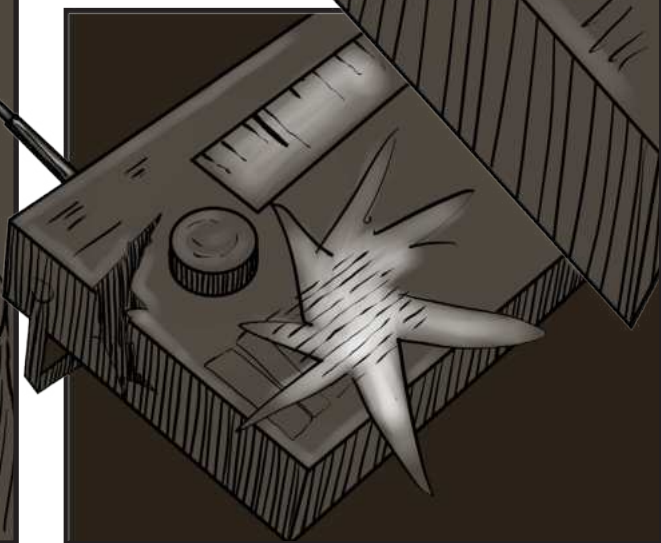




Our happiest moment was the day we fixed it. Without this, we wouldn't have been able to find out what was going on outside











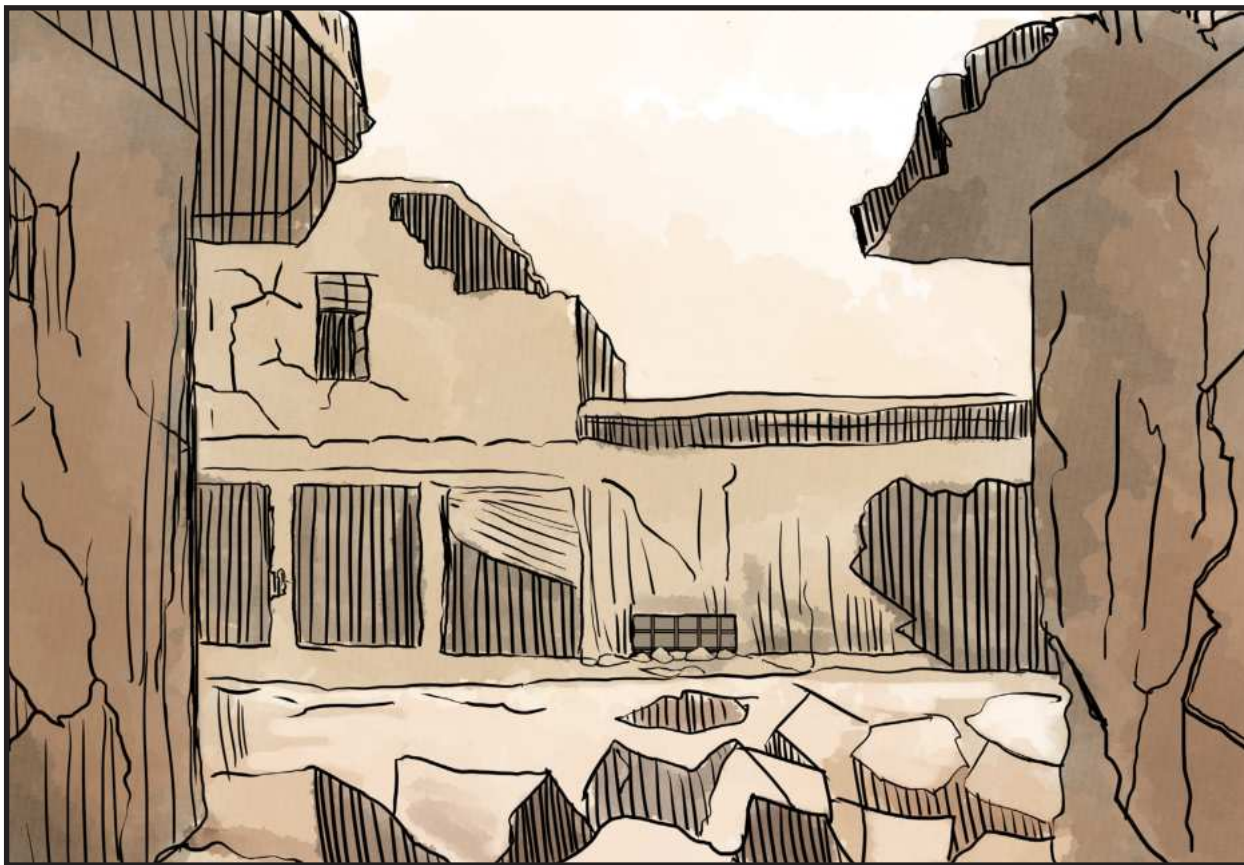
Liberation of  
the city is close!  
Hang in there and  
stay sheltered



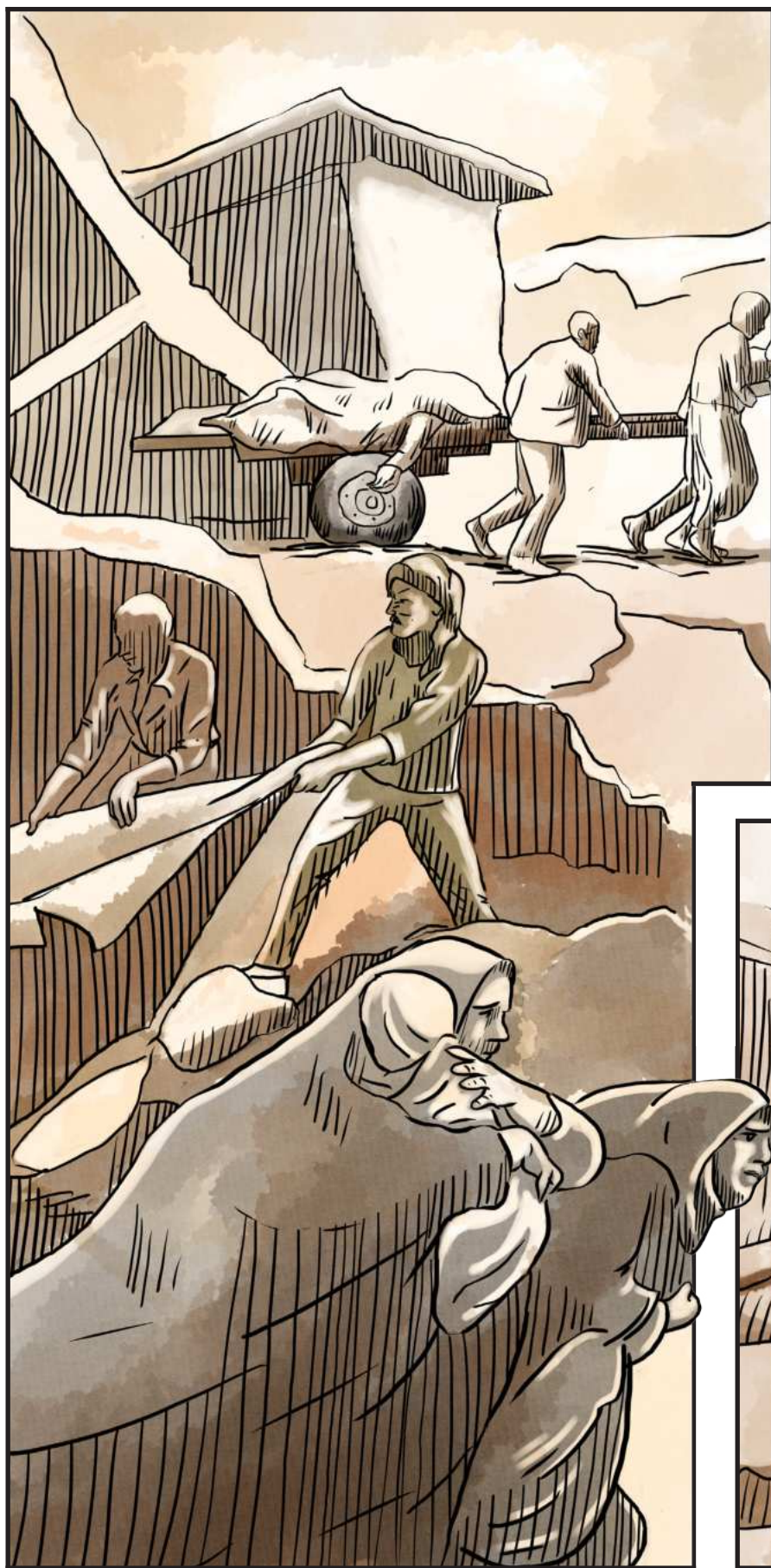




That night, we couldn't sleep. We were expecting a fierce battle till the next day. The battle cries were getting closer and closer

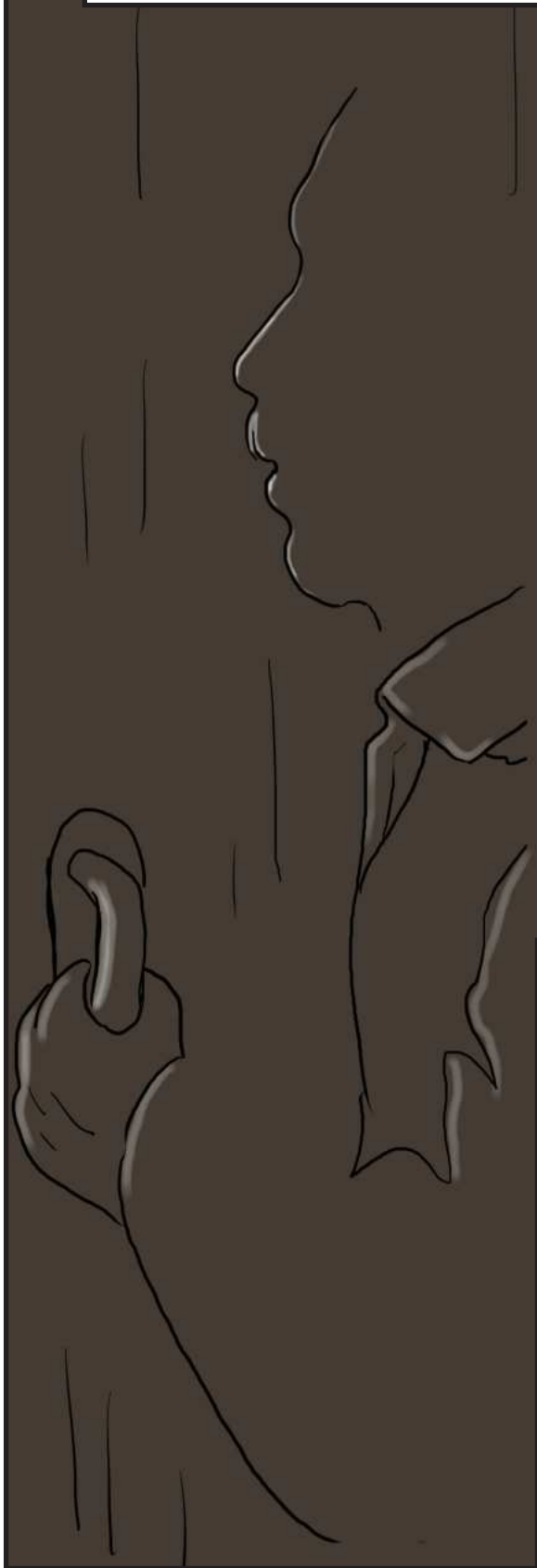








We still heard the gunshots the following morning.  
Full of fear, we looked outside our windows





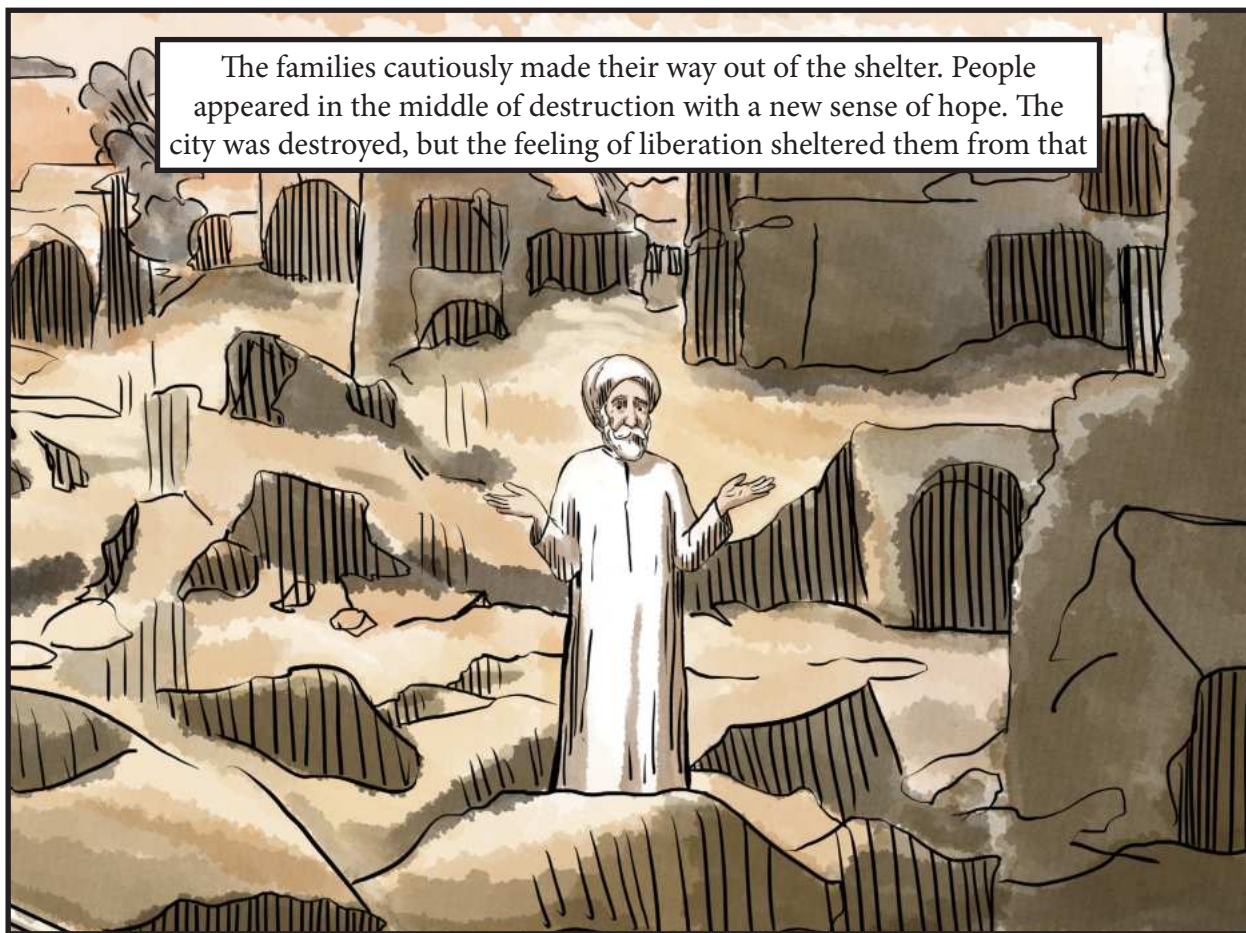








The families cautiously made their way out of the shelter. People appeared in the middle of destruction with a new sense of hope. The city was destroyed, but the feeling of liberation sheltered them from that



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

