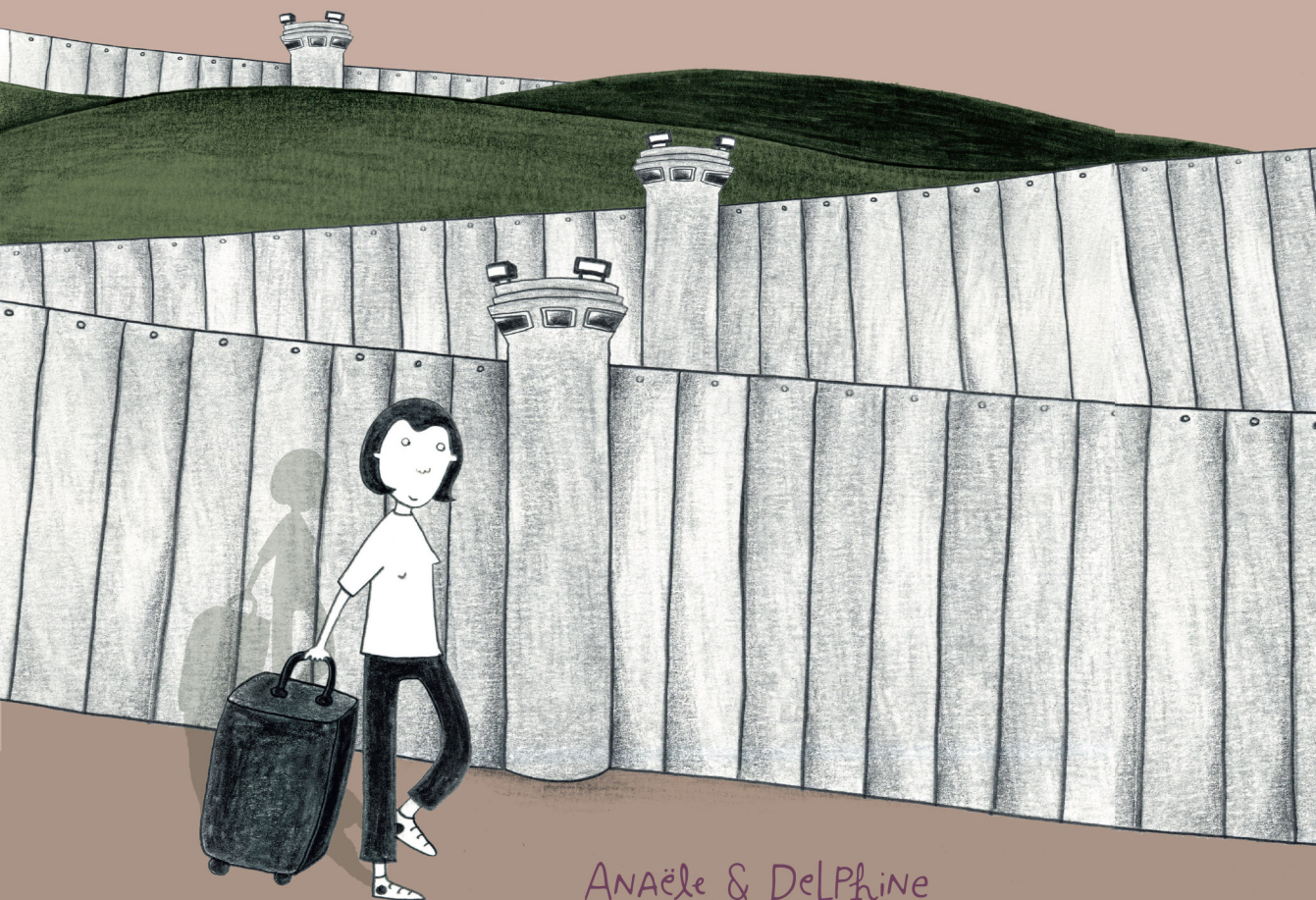


GREEN ALMONDS

Letters from Palestine



ANAëLE & DELPHINE
HERMANS

ANAële & Delphine
HERmans

GREEN ALMONDS

Letters from Palestine

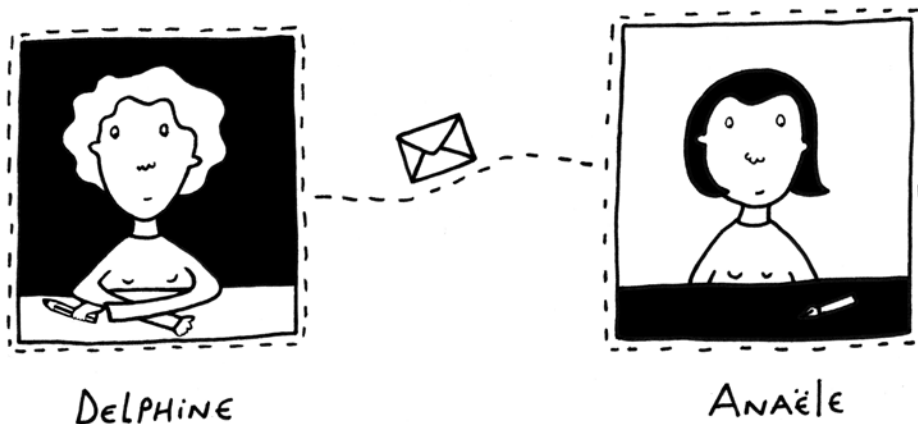


ISBN: 978-1-941302-89-7

Library of congress control number: 2018931351

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



This is a story about two sisters, one who lives in Liège, in Belgium, and the other who leaves to live and work in Palestine for ten months.

I'm the one who lives in Liège: Delphine.
I spend my time drawing.
Anaëlle, who's leaving, likes to write.

From our sides of the world, we exchanged letters. The idea came to us to make a comic that told the story of what she experienced during the ten months we spent living so far from each other, from March to December 2008.

This book is a personal look into a complex reality, through the lens of an intimate exchange.

Liège



Hey, Nan,

You're leaving soon... when I told people "My sister's leaving for Bethlehem," it seemed so far away. But now, it's so real.

How do you pack for ten months in Palestine? Tell me that you'll take care of yourself?

Delphine



Anaële Hermans

290, Chaussée de Wavre

1040 Bruxelles

BETHLEHEM, MARCH 10

HEY, DELPHINE,
I FINALLY ARRIVED IN BETHLEHEM.
I'M GOING TO BE LIVING HERE FOR
A FEW MONTHS...



I MET ELIAS, THE COMPANY'S
ACCOUNTANT, JUST AFTER PASSING
THROUGH THE SECURITY CHECKPOINT.



AHLAN WA SAHLAN!
WELCOME! SORRY
I COULDN'T COME
PICK YOU UP IN
JERUSALEM!

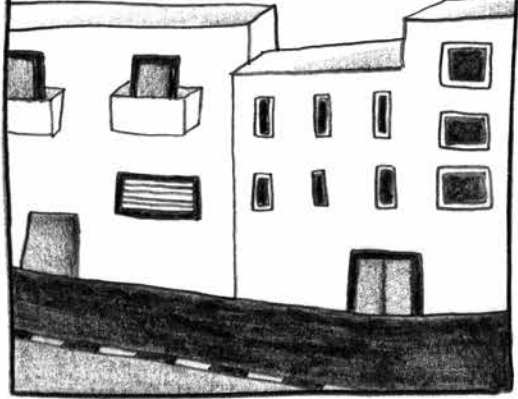
WE'RE NOT ALLOWED
TO GO WITHOUT A
PERMIT...



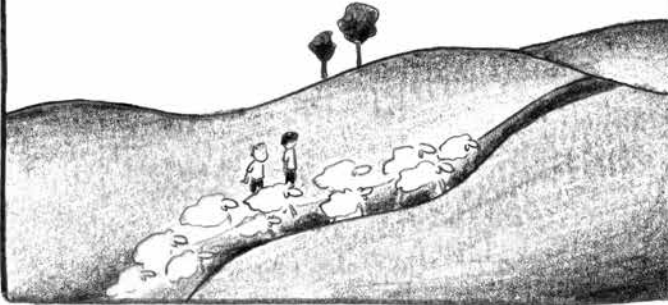
HE BROUGHT ME TO MEET MY COLLEAGUES, THEN OUT TO EAT, AND THEN TO THE GROCERY STORE.



AND NOW I'M FINALLY IN FRONT OF MY APARTMENT...



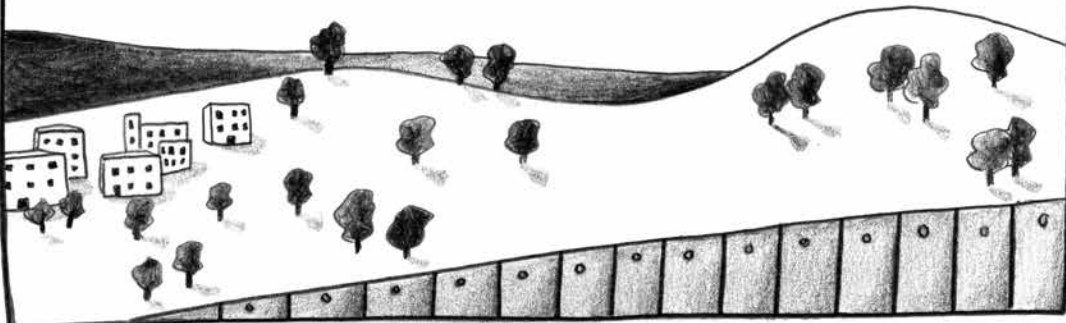
I'LL BE STARTING WORK TOMORROW, BUT RIGHT NOW, I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO. OUTSIDE, SHEPHERDS ARE LEADING THEIR FLOCKS UP THE HILLS.



INSIDE, IT'S JUST ME. SO HERE I AM, WRITING TO YOU.



I'M RELIEVED TO BE HERE. IT WAS A STRESSFUL TRIP, ESPECIALLY WHEN I HAD TO GO THROUGH THE AIRPORT IN TEL AVIV.



I WAS IN THE LINE FOR "NON-ISRAELIS," GETTING MY STORY READY. IF THEY DISCOVERED THAT I WAS HEADING TO PALESTINE, THEY COULD'VE KEPT ME FROM ENTERING THE COUNTRY.



WHAT AM I HERE TO DO? TOURISM AND SEE FRIENDS IN TEL AVIV...

HOW LONG WOULD YOU LIKE A VISA FOR?



UH...SIX MONTHS, IF POSSIBLE.



WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO FOR SIX MONTHS?

TOURISM...

AND?

I'M CHRISTIAN, SO I WANT TO GO VISIT SOME OF THE SACRED SITES...

AND?

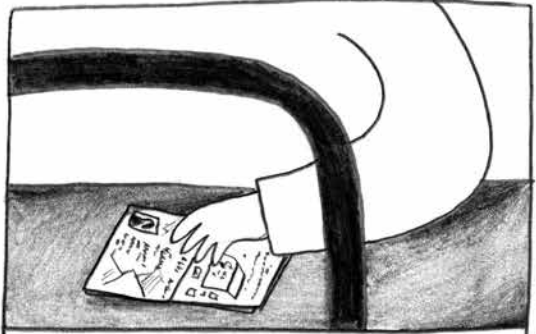


...AND MAYBE A LITTLE VOLUNTEER WORK.



OH? FOR WHAT ORGANIZATION? DO YOU HAVE A CONTACT?

I WAS ALWAYS A TERRIBLE LIAR.



I FELT SO SMALL, STANDING ACROSS FROM THIS WOMAN IN HER BOOTH.

UH...IN JERUSALEM OR MAYBE BETHLEHEM?

I NEED TO MAKE A CALL.

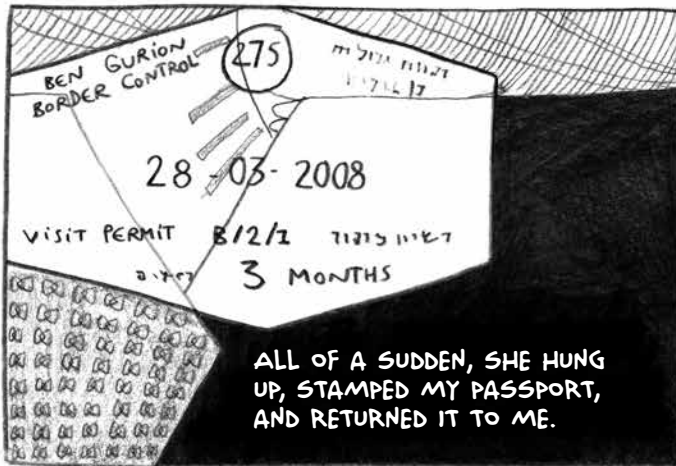


SHE MADE ONE CALL, AND THEN ANOTHER. IT TOOK A WHILE.



ALL AROUND ME, PEOPLE JUST SHOWED THEIR PASSPORTS AND PASSED STRAIGHT THROUGH CUSTOMS. I WAITED WHILE THE LADY CALLED ANOTHER PERSON.





ALL OF A SUDDEN, SHE HUNG UP, STAMPED MY PASSPORT, AND RETURNED IT TO ME.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT, I MADE IT THROUGH! HAHA! SO EASY!

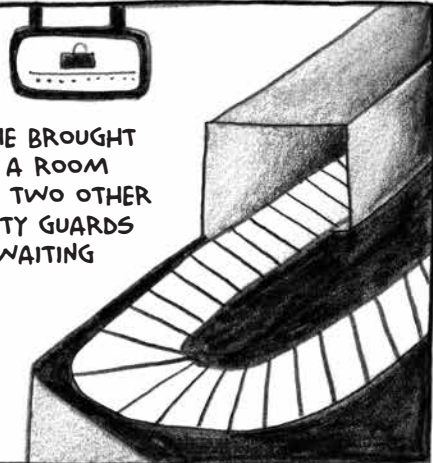


A FEW METERS DOWN THE WAY, A SECURITY GUARD STOPPED ME AND TOOK MY PASSPORT.

GET YOUR SUITCASE AND RETURN HERE.



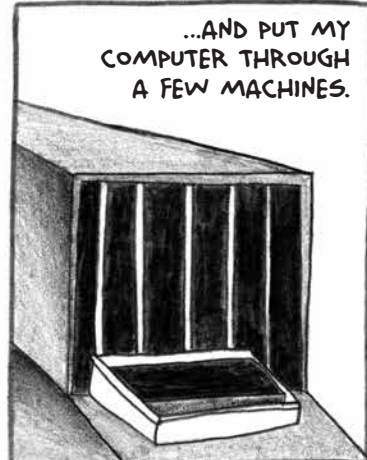
THEN HE BROUGHT ME TO A ROOM WHERE TWO OTHER SECURITY GUARDS WERE WAITING INSIDE.

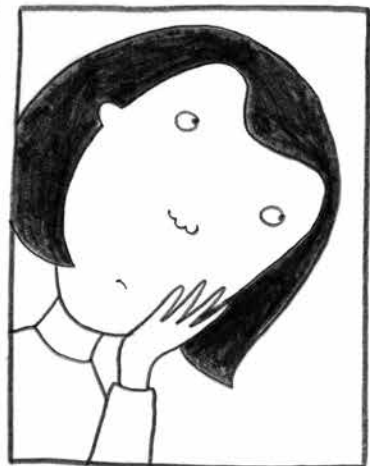
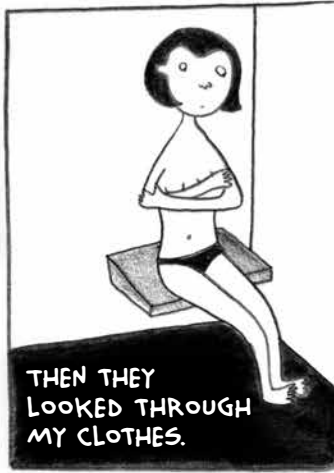


THEY SEARCHED MY BAGS.

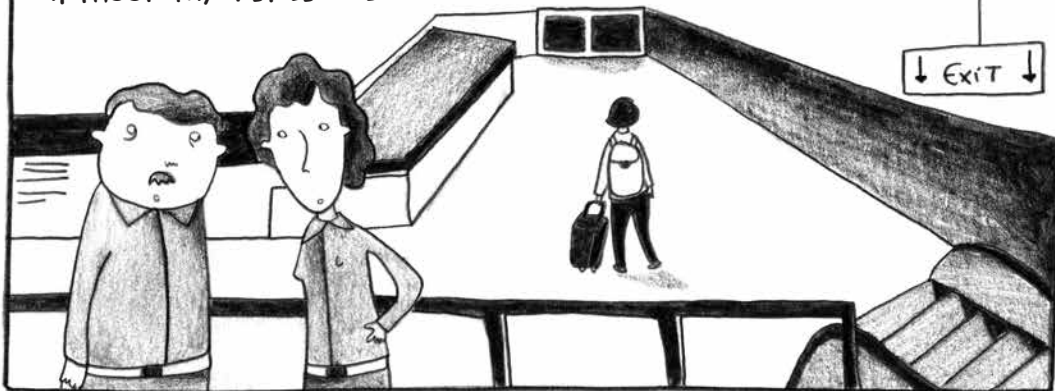


...AND PUT MY COMPUTER THROUGH A FEW MACHINES.





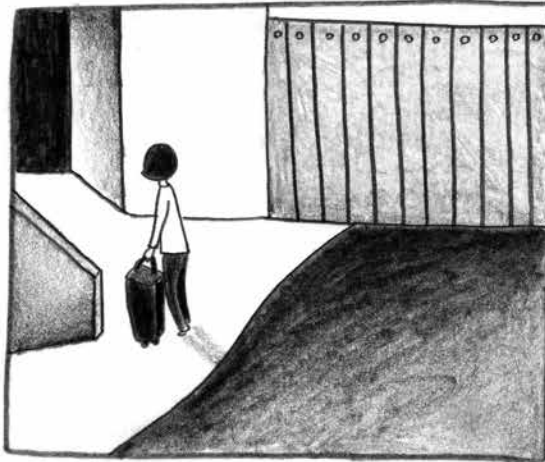
AND JUST WHEN I THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER RETURN MY BAGS OR MY PASSPORT, THEY LET ME OUT.



THE TAXI DRIVER TRIED TO CONVINCE ME NOT TO TRY AND CROSS THE CHECKPOINT BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND BETHLEHEM.



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO GO THERE FOR? I KNOW SOME GREAT HOTELS IN TOWN.



AND I MADE IT
TO PALESTINE!

I'M SO EXCITED!

BUT AT THE SAME
TIME, I'M SCARED...
AND I'M REALLY
ALL ALONE IN THIS
APARTMENT.

I FINISHED THIS
LETTER...AND NOW?

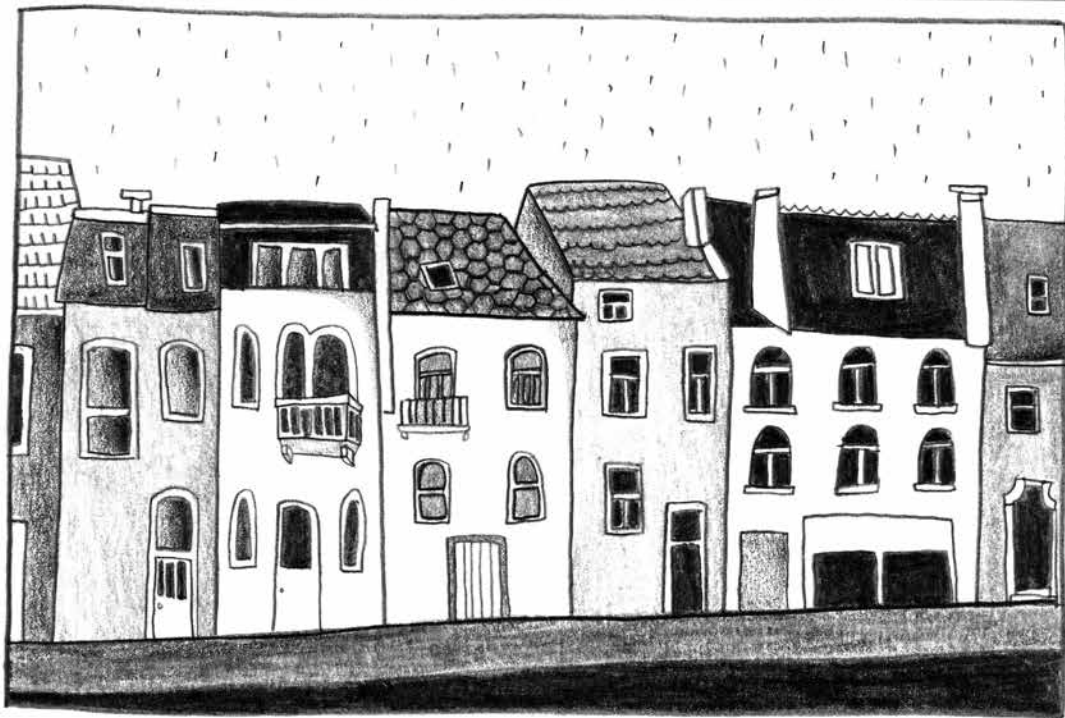


I NEED TO MAKE MY
BED AND PUT AWAY
MY CLOTHES.



BUT I'M IN PALESTINE!
I HAVE A WHOLE COUNTRY TO DISCOVER!
ADVENTURES TO GO ON!





Dear Nan,

So, you made it?
In reading your letter, I could
picture everything. I tried
to draw you there.

But, as always, I have a hard time
with your nose. It's just got such a
unique shape.

When I think that I won't see it
again for all this time, I can feel a
small hole in the pit of my stomach.
Tell me how you've been!

Love, Delphine



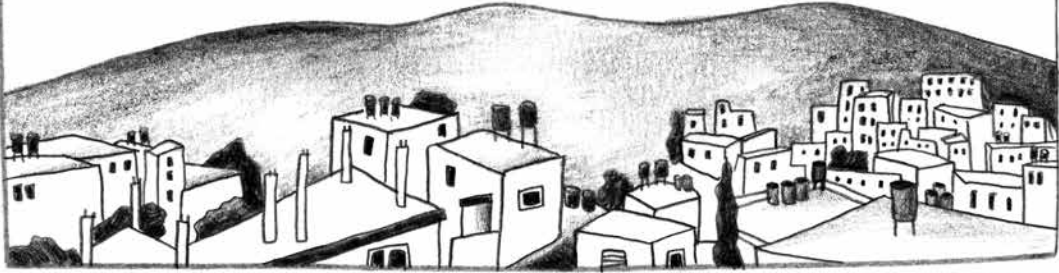
Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethlehem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, MARCH 31

HEY, BIG SIS,

HOW ARE YOU?

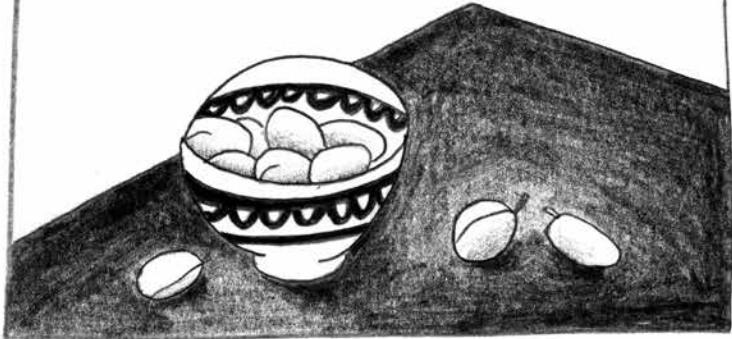
BELGIUM AND ITS CLOUDY SKIES SEEM SO FAR AWAY RIGHT NOW. HERE, THE SUN SEEMS RIGHT AT HOME. (SPEAKING OF, I ACTUALLY GOT A REALLY BAD SUNBURN ON MY NOSE, IN CASE THAT HELPS YOU DRAW IT.)



IT MADE THE LARGE GREEN ALMONDS ON THE HILLS OF BETHLEHEM RIPEN.



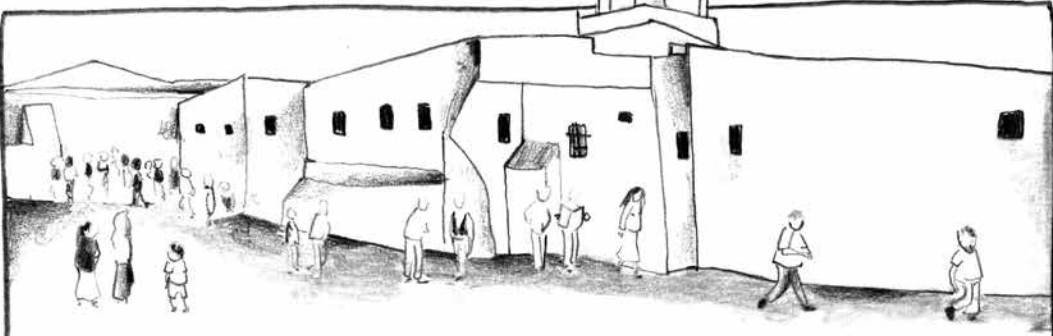
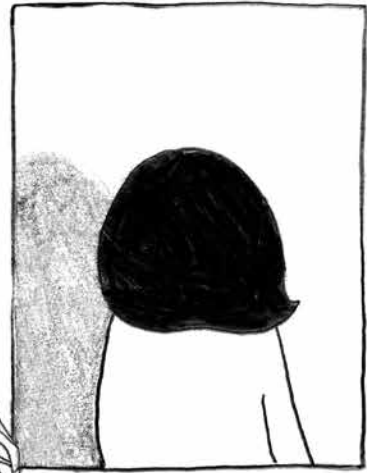
WE PICK THEM AND PUT THEM IN A BOWL WITH SOME SALT. THEN WE EAT THEM WHOLE WITH THE SHELL.



IT'S SO DELICIOUS AND REFRESHING. IT'LL MAKE A GOOD REPLACEMENT FOR THE WHITE LEMON BEERS I LOVE SIPPING SO MUCH WHILE SITTING OUT ON A TERRACE IN BRUSSELS.



I GO ON WALKS TO TRY AND SEE MORE OF THE TOWN. EVERYTHING IS STILL SO NEW.



CAN YOU BELIEVE I'M IN THE TOWN WHERE JESUS WAS BORN? IT REMINDS ME OF OUR CATECHISM CLASSES.



ACTUALLY, THE HISTORY SEEMS TO BRING A LOT OF TOURISTS HERE. I SEE THEM AROUND TOWN.

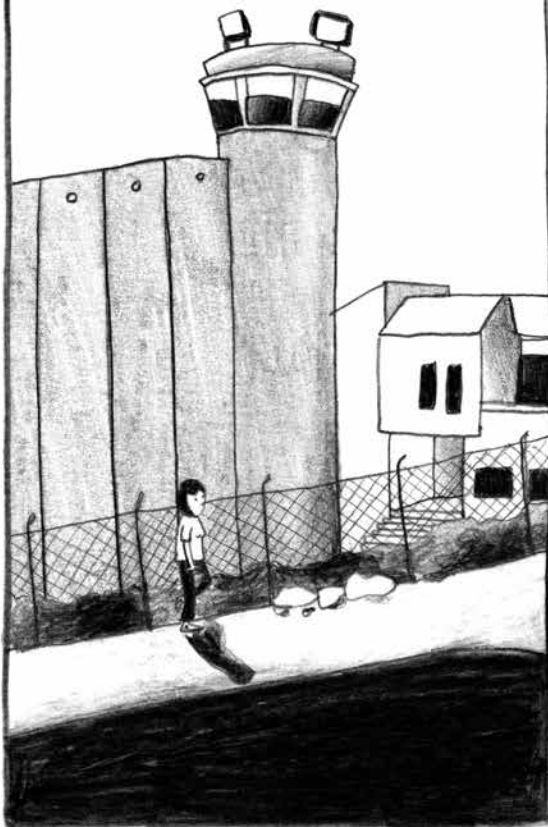
YESTERDAY WAS LAND DAY. THERE WERE PROTESTS EVERYWHERE. PEOPLE WERE SHOUTING CHANTS I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL.



LAND DAY STARTED ON MARCH 30 IN 1976. THAT DAY, PALESTINIANS TOOK TO THE STREETS TO PROTEST THE ANNEXATION OF THEIR LAND. THE ISRAELI ARMY OPENED FIRE AND MULTIPLE PROTESTERS WERE KILLED.



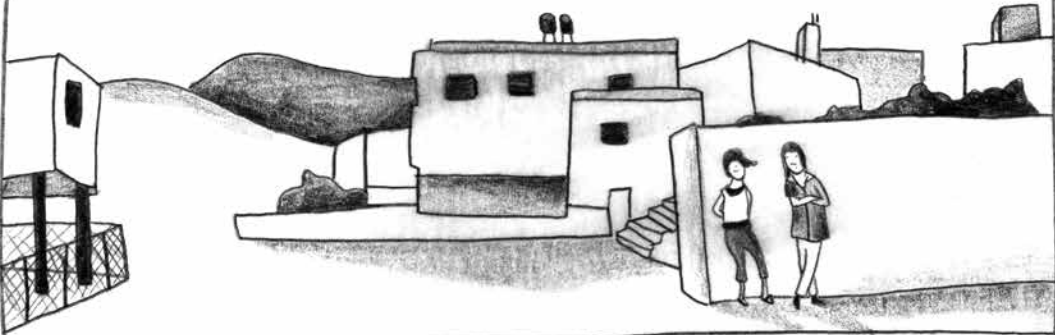
IN HONOR OF THE DAY, A GROUP OF WOMEN GATHERED AT MY ORGANIZATION.



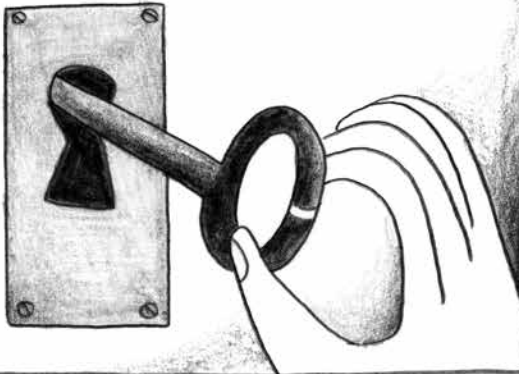
THEY ALL HAD STORIES TO TELL RELATING TO THE LAND.



THE VILLAGERS HAD THEIR FARMLAND CONFISCATED AND HAD TO FIND ANOTHER SOURCE OF REVENUE. PLUS, ISRAELI LAW DOESN'T ALLOW THEM TO DO ANY CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, OR EVEN HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL.

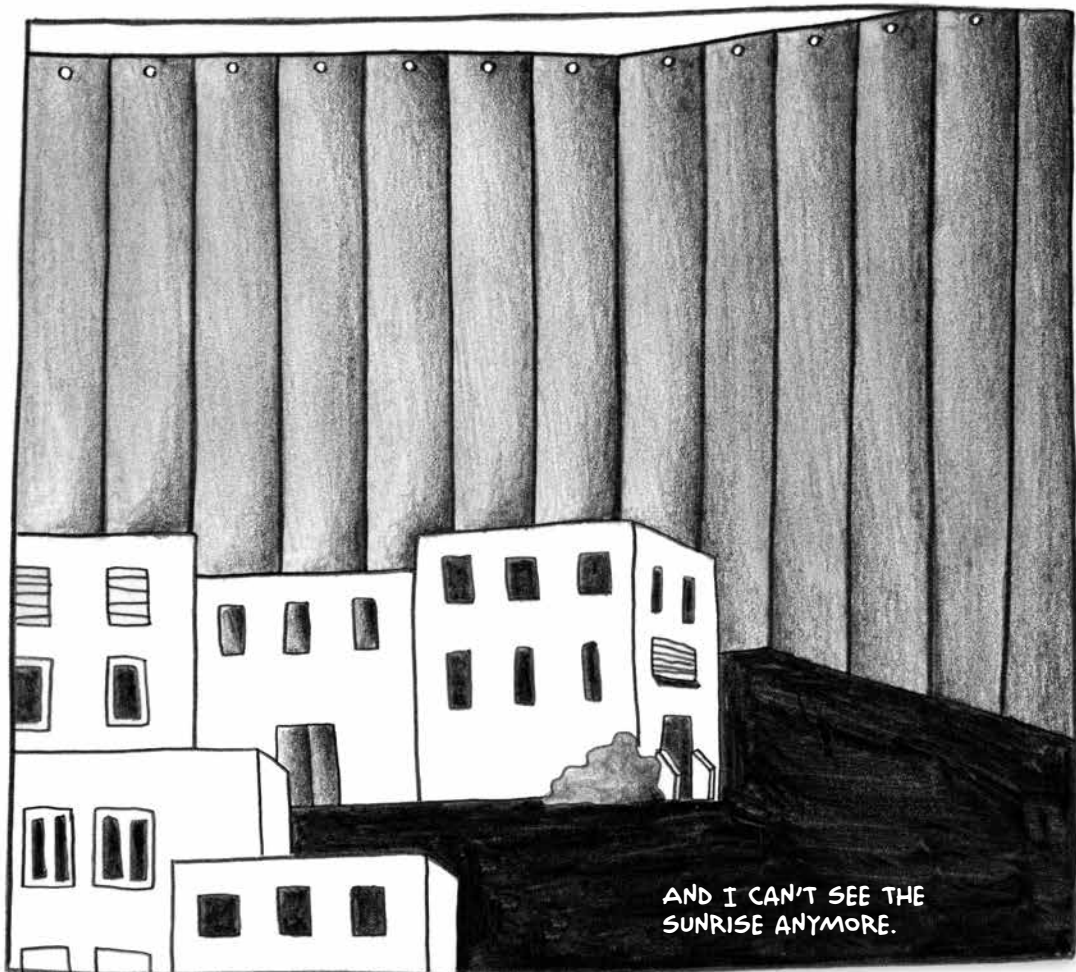


LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE HOUSES ARE GETTING OLDER, AND THE PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO MOVE.



EVER SINCE THE WALL WAS BUILT IN BETHLEHEM, I LOST MY GROVE OF OLIVE TREES.





AND I CAN'T SEE THE
SUNRISE ANYMORE.



MY BROTHER, WHO LIVES IN JERUSALEM,
SAW HIS HOUSE CRUSHED BY AN ISRAELI
BULLDOZER...



...AND HIS LAND
CONFISCATED.

WE WERE CHASED OUT OF OUR
VILLAGE. I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO
GO BACK SINCE.

WE KEPT THE HOUSE KEY.



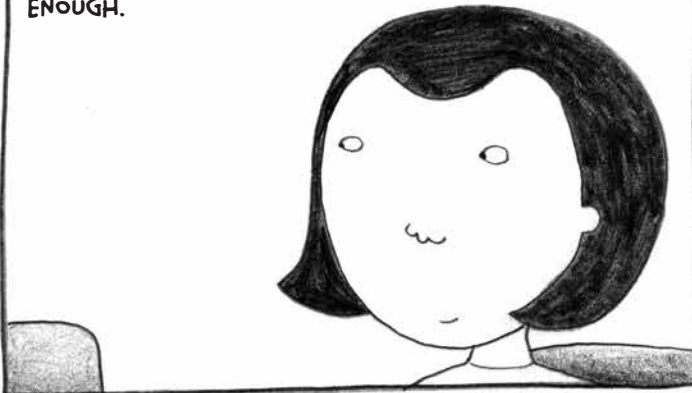
THAT DAY, EVERY WOMAN WANTED TO SPEAK ABOUT THE LOVE THEY HOLD
FOR THEIR LAND, AND THE PAIN THEY FEEL IN SEEING IT TAKEN FROM THEM,
SEPARATED BY WALLS, FENCES, AND CHECKPOINTS.



THEY TALKED, AND THEY TALKED, AND SOON, IT WAS JUST A LOUD MESS.
EVERY ONE OF THEM WANTED TO TELL THEIR STORY FIRST. WHERE THEY TALKED
IN ENGLISH BEFORE, THEY BEGAN SPEAKING IN ARABIC MORE AND MORE.



I COULDN'T FOLLOW THE CONVERSATION. SO, I JUST SMILED AND NODDED ALONG. IT SEEMED TO BE ENOUGH.



I LIKE GOING TO WOMEN'S GROUPS.



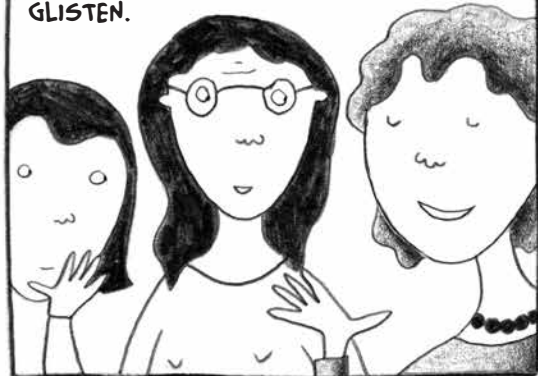
USUALLY, THE PEOPLE I MEET HERE ARE MEN. IT'S HARD TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH GIRLS MY AGE SINCE THEY'RE ALWAYS TRAVELING IN GROUPS OF THEIR OWN.



BUT WHENEVER I GET THE CHANCE, I JOIN THEM.



THEY TAKE OFF THEIR HITABS, SPEAK FREELY, AND THEIR EYES START TO GLISTEN.



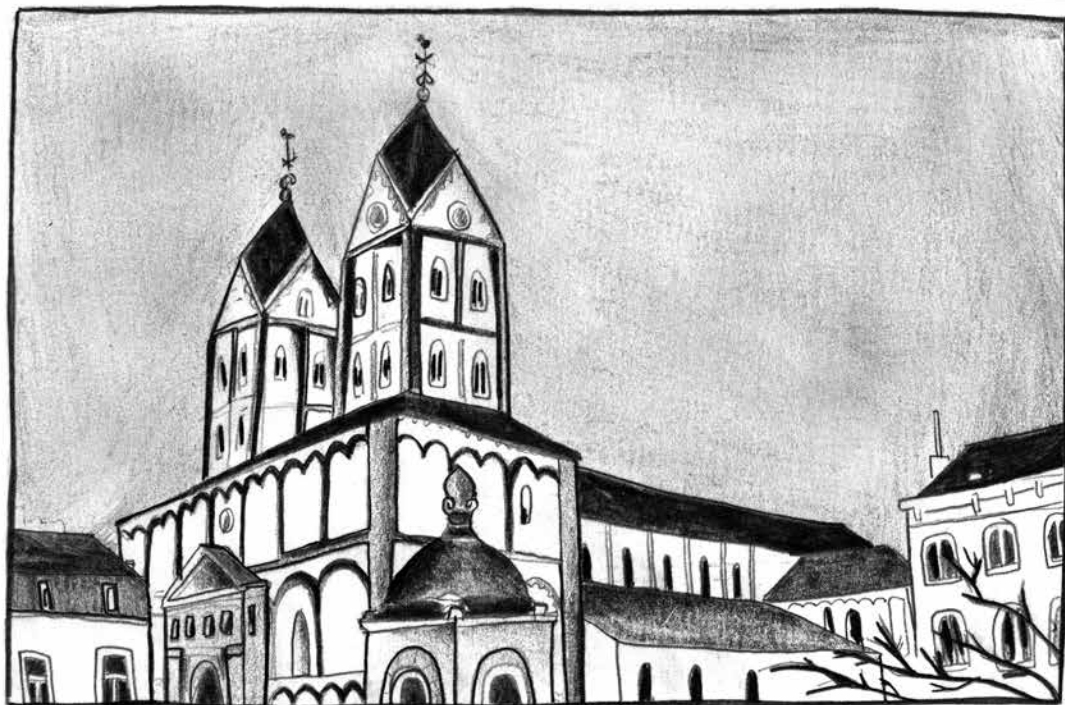
THEY TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING AND NOTHING,
AND ASK ME A LOT OF QUESTIONS.



IT'S HARD TO RECONCILE THESE FUNNY, TALKATIVE PALESTINIAN WOMEN WITH THE
WOMEN I MEET IN THE STREET.

THOUGH THIS IS CLEARLY NOT MY WORLD, IT'S SO CHARMING, SO WELCOMING,
THAT I CAN'T HELP BUT ENJOY IT.





Hey, Sis,

For the moment, I've been putting plants on my terrace.

Sauthier's making fun of me. He says I don't have a green thumb, and that they're going to die right away! (We'll see!)

Isn't it hard living in the middle of that mess? The situation over there just seems so complicated...

Here, Spring is finally returning. (It's about time!)

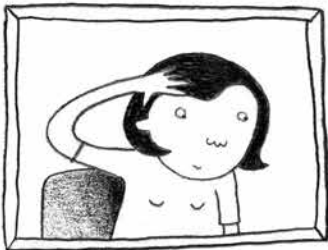
Love, L9



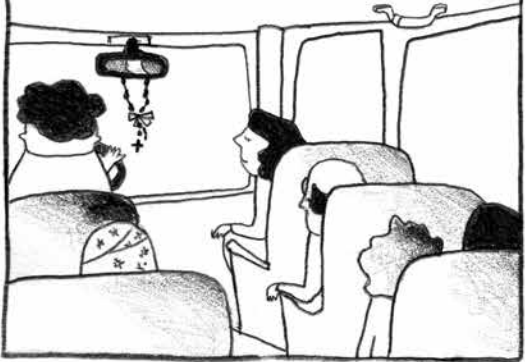
Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethleem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, APRIL 19

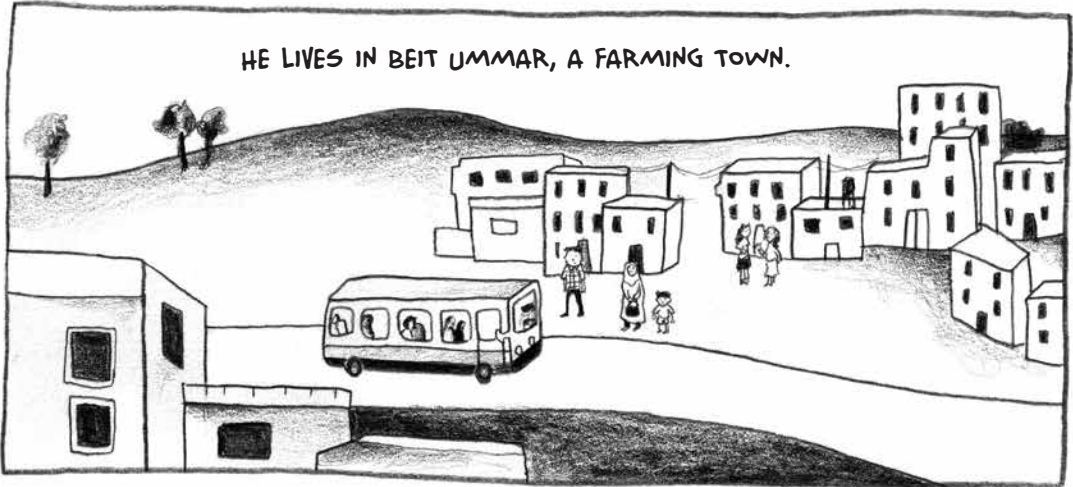
HEY, DELPHINE,
YES, IT'S A MESS, BUT THAT'S
PART OF WHAT I LIKE ABOUT IT.



TODAY, I VISITED MOUSA.



HE LIVES IN BEIT UMMAR, A FARMING TOWN.

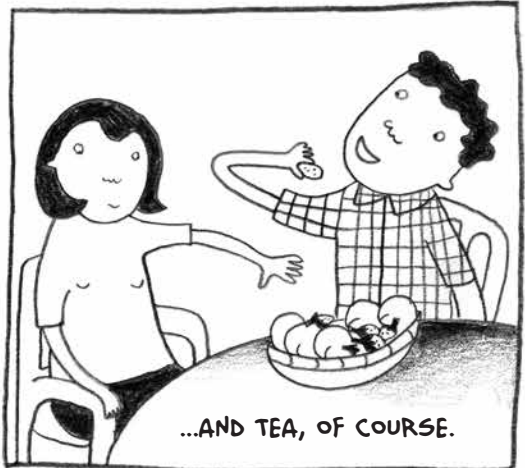


AS SOON AS I ARRIVED, HIS
MOTHER BROUGHT US A
BASKET OF FRUITS.



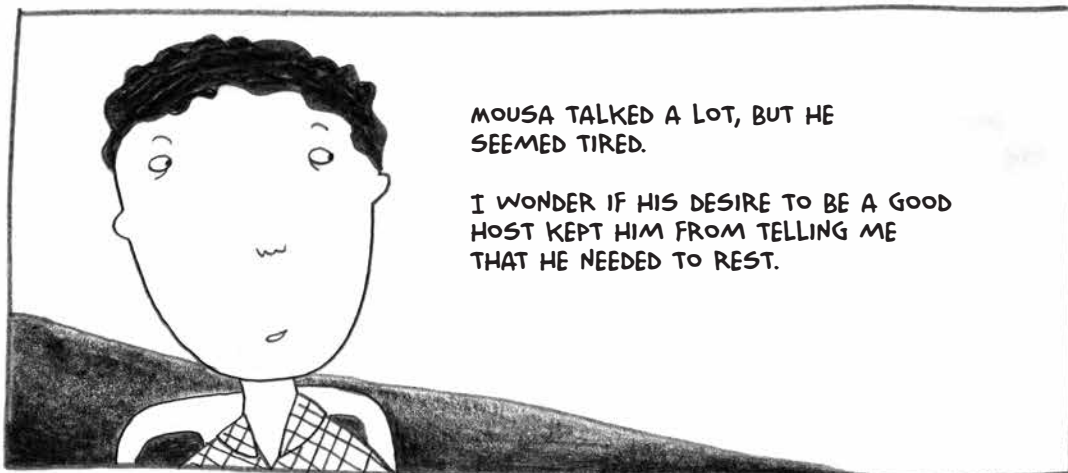
AHLAN WA
SAHLAN.

...AND TEA, OF COURSE.





WE ATE WITH MOUSA'S AUNT, WHO'S TWENTY-FIVE YEARS YOUNGER THAN HIM. HIS GRANDFATHER JOINED US, WITH HIS TWO WIVES.

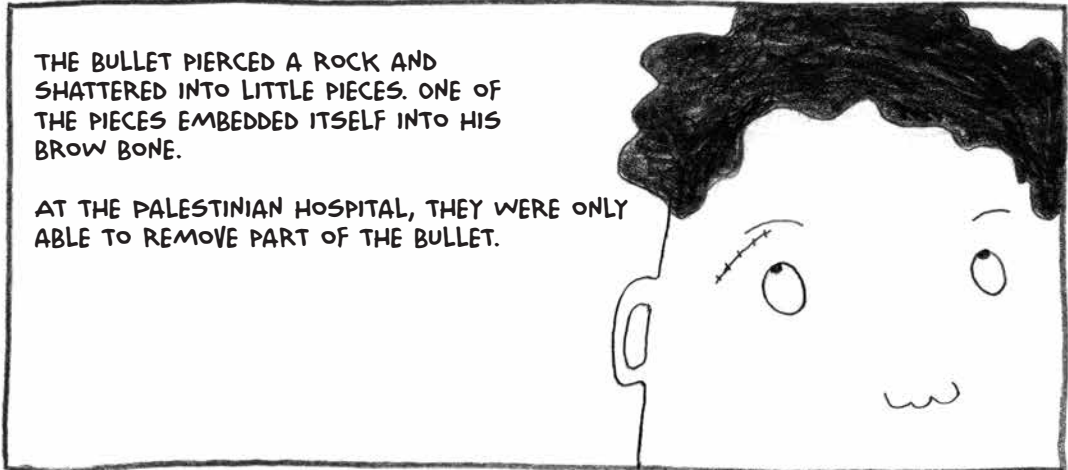
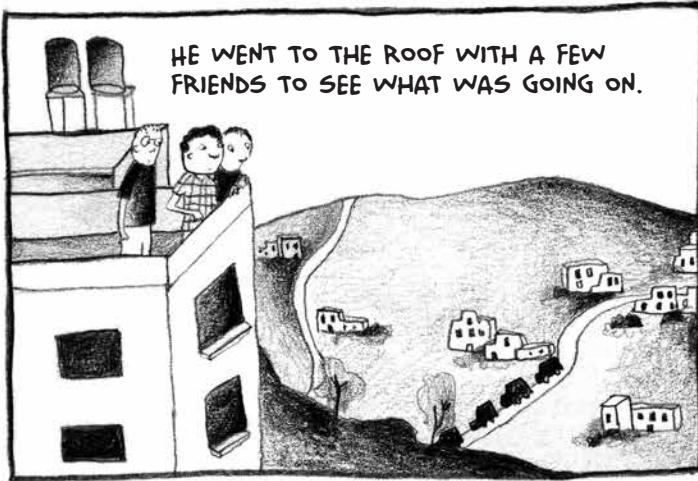


MOUSA TALKED A LOT, BUT HE SEEMED TIRED.


I WONDER IF HIS DESIRE TO BE A GOOD HOST KEPT HIM FROM TELLING ME THAT HE NEEDED TO REST.



A FEW WEEKS AGO, ISRAELI SOLDIERS CAME TO THE VILLAGE.




SO, HE STILL HAS A PIECE OF THE BULLET IN HIS HEAD. HE TAKES ASPIRIN WHEN IT HURTS, AND HE CONTINUES TO WORK ON PLENTY OF PROJECTS.


A black and white illustration of two people standing on a grassy hill. The person on the right, wearing a plaid shirt, is gesturing with both hands raised towards the sky. The person on the left, wearing a white t-shirt, is looking in the same direction.

HERE, WE'RE GOING TO CREATE
A HOUSE OF PEACE, WITH
LESSONS FOR KIDS.

YOU COULD WORK THERE!

A black and white illustration showing the backs of two people standing on a hill, looking out over a landscape. The person on the left has short dark hair and is wearing a white t-shirt. The person on the right has curly dark hair and is wearing a plaid shirt.

THE PROJECT IS EXCITING. IT WOULD
ALLOW ME TO FULFILL
MY VOLUNTEER WORK AND SEE
MOUSA REGULARLY.

A black and white illustration of a dense, sprawling refugee camp. The camp is composed of many small, rectangular buildings packed closely together. In the foreground, a few small figures of people are visible walking through the camp. The background shows more buildings and a clear sky.

NEXT, I VISITED THE DHEISHEH
REFUGEE CAMP, JUST OUTSIDE OF
BETHLEHEM.

CLOSE TO 13,000 PEOPLE LIVE THERE
ON 1.5 SQUARE KILOMETERS.

THEY'RE THE DESCENDANTS OF PALESTINIANS WHO FLED THEIR VILLAGES IN 1948.



IN DHEISHEH, I MET A MAN NAMED MAJDI, A DIRECTOR FOR A YOUTH CENTER.



HE SENT ME ON A TOUR OF THE CAMP WITH ONE OF THE KIDS, MAHMOUD. HE'S TALL, WEARS GLASSES, AND TAKES HIS JOB VERY SERIOUSLY.



DHEISHEH LOOKS LIKE ALL THE CAMPS ON THE WEST BANK: A LABYRINTH OF NARROW STREETS, HOUSES MADE OF CONCRETE, JUST TALL ENOUGH TO BLOCK THE SUNLIGHT. THERE'S GRAFFITI, POSTERS OF MARTYRS, AND PEOPLE WHO SPEND THEIR LIVES HERE, LIVING IN AREAS DESIGNED TO BE TEMPORARY.



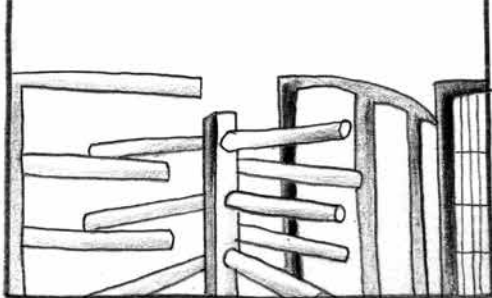
MAHMOUD BROUGHT ME BACK TO MAJDI.



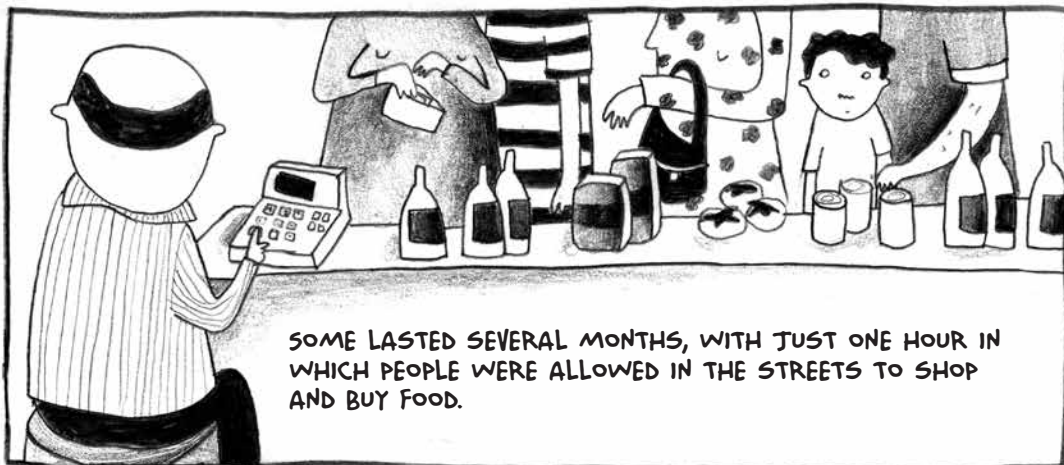
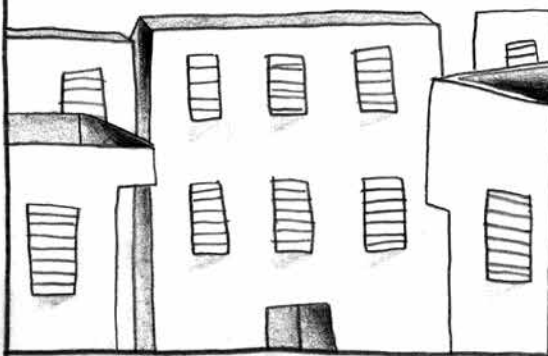
DHEISHEH IS KNOWN IN ALL THE WEST BANK BECAUSE MOST OF THE RESISTANCE AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE '90S CAME FROM HERE. THAT BROUGHT ON A VIOLENT RESPONSE FROM THE ISRAELI ARMY.

HE LIT HIS CIGARETTE WITH ANOTHER CIGARETTE.

MATDI TOLD ME ABOUT THE METAL FENCE THAT SURROUNDS THE CAMP, WITH JUST A FEW TURNSTILES AS EXITS, THAT THE ARMY CAN CLOSE WHENEVER THEY WANT.



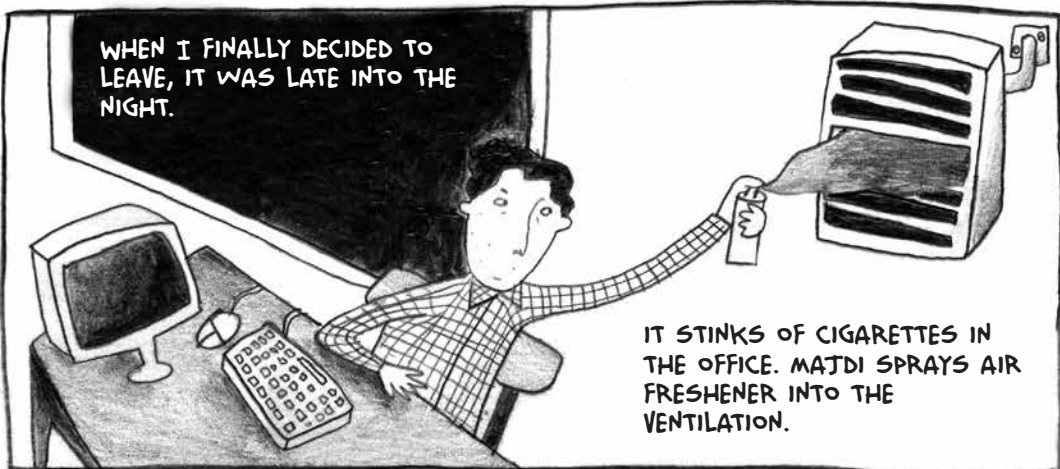
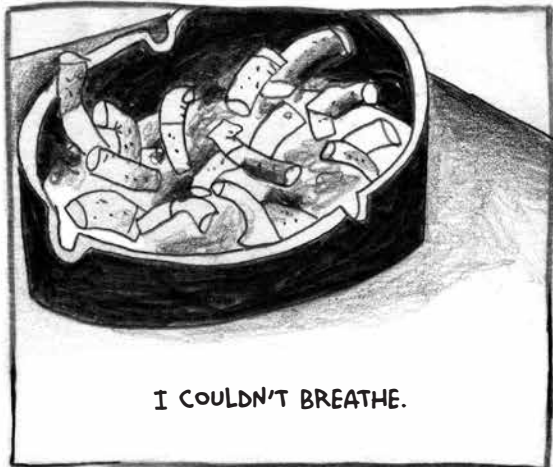
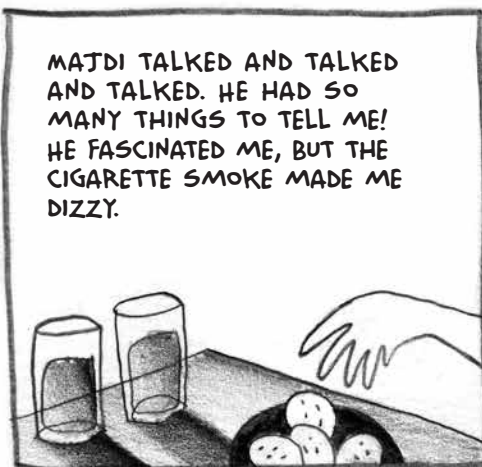
THE CEASE-FIRES DURING WHICH NO ONE WAS ALLOWED TO GO OUTSIDE OR APPEAR AT THE WINDOW.

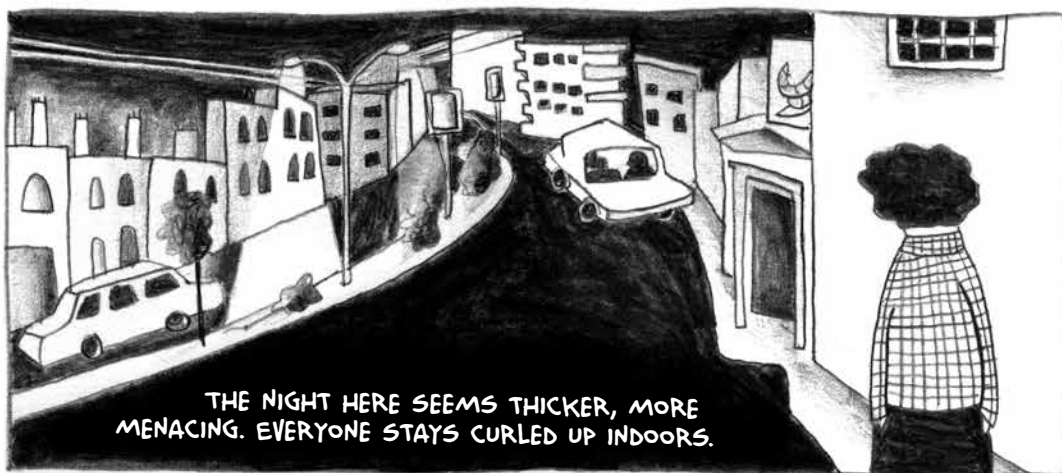


SOME LASTED SEVERAL MONTHS, WITH JUST ONE HOUR IN WHICH PEOPLE WERE ALLOWED IN THE STREETS TO SHOP AND BUY FOOD.



NOWADAYS, THE ISRAELI ARMY STILL ENTERS THE CAMP REGULARLY, USUALLY AT NIGHT.





THE NIGHT HERE SEEMS THICKER, MORE
MENACING. EVERYONE STAYS CURLED UP INDOORS.



THE WILD CATS AND DOGS TAKE OVER THE STREETS.
THEY SCARE ME WITH THEIR EYES THAT SHINE IN THE NIGHT.



AND HERE I AM,
BACK IN MY CALM
LITTLE APARTMENT IN
BETHLEHEM, A LITTLE
OVERWHELMED BY
ALL THE PEOPLE
I'VE MET.



Hello, Nan!

I have a hard time reading
your letters... How do you relax?

Here, the sun's only starting to
poke out. Everybody is already
outside trying to take in the
first rays of sunshine.

Last night I dreamed of you.
You were running in a labyrinth
that looked like the wall that
surrounds the West Bank.

(Did you know that I still
sleepwalk? This morning I found
all the doors and windows in my
apartment open...)

I miss you.

Your Sister



Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethlehem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, MAY 3

HELLO, DELPHINE. WHAT DO I DO TO RELAX? SAME AS IN BELGIUM,
I GO DRINKING WITH A FEW FRIENDS OR SMOKE SOME HOOKAH.
I COULD GO FOR SOME RIGHT NOW, ACTUALLY...



THIS MORNING, MOUSA'S
BROTHER CALLED ME.

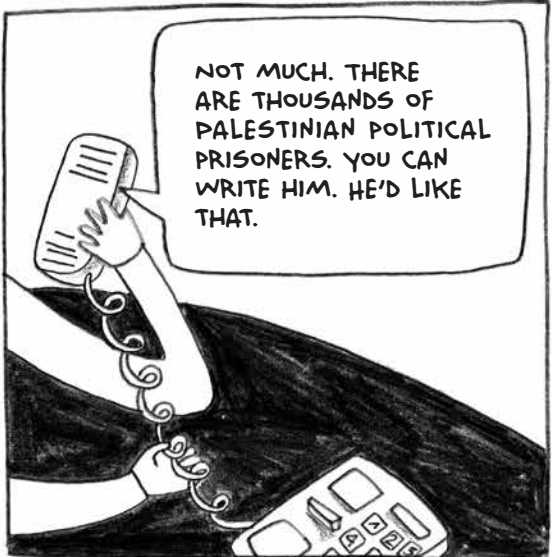
SOLDIERS CAME DURING
THE NIGHT AND TOOK
MOUSA. DON'T COME TO
BEIT UMMAR TODAY.



IS THERE ANYTHING
I CAN DO?



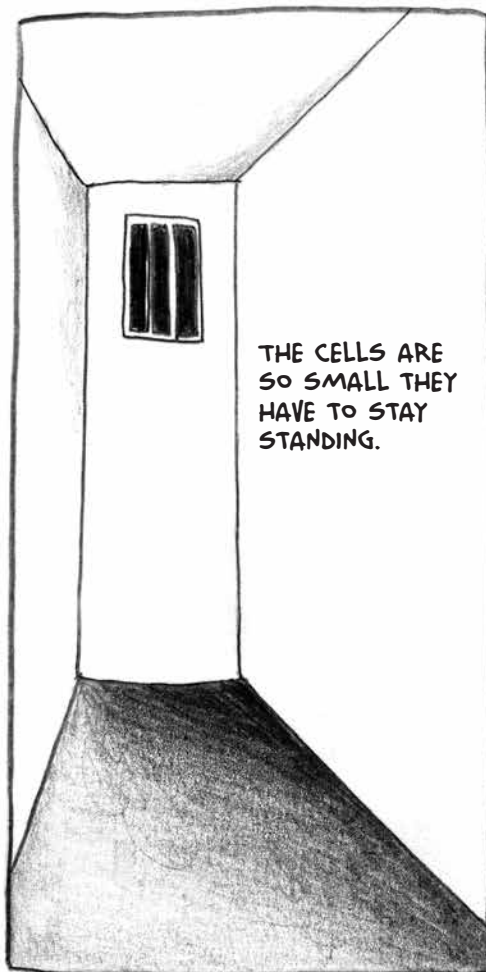
NOT MUCH. THERE
ARE THOUSANDS OF
PALESTINIAN POLITICAL
PRISONERS. YOU CAN
WRITE HIM. HE'D LIKE
THAT.



I'M SCARED FOR MOUSA. HE ALREADY TOLD ME ABOUT PRISON.



THE THREATS, THE BEATINGS.
THE SLEEP DEPRIVATION.

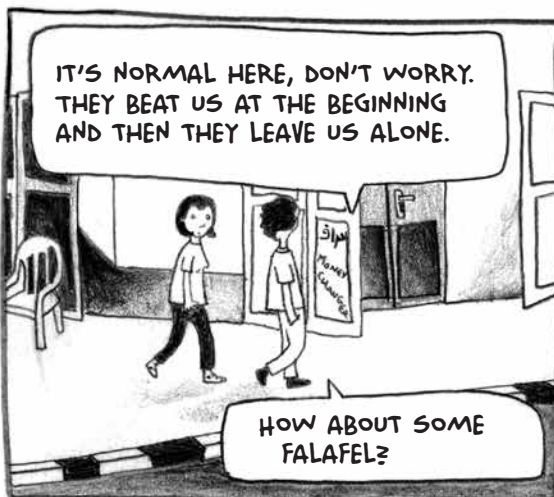


THE CELLS ARE
SO SMALL THEY
HAVE TO STAY
STANDING.

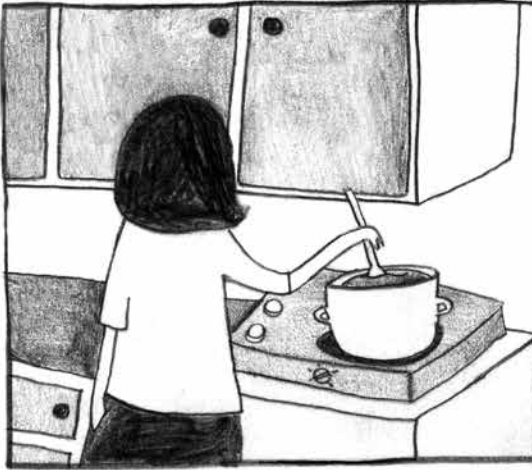
I THOUGHT ABOUT MOUSA ALL DAY.
I ENDED UP TALKING WITH MY FRIEND
AKRAM.



IT'S NORMAL HERE, DON'T WORRY.
THEY BEAT US AT THE BEGINNING
AND THEN THEY LEAVE US ALONE.



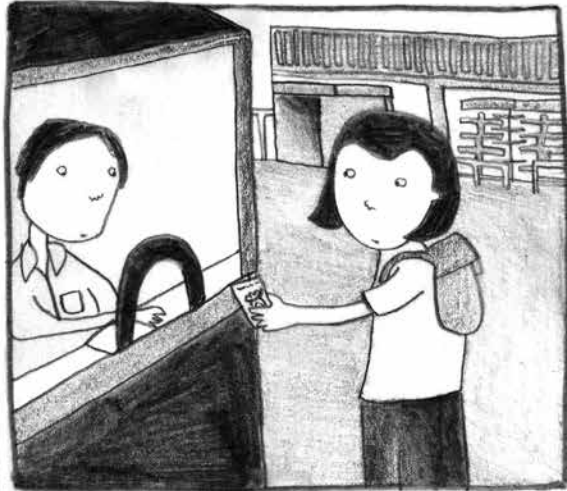
HOW ABOUT SOME
FALAFEL?



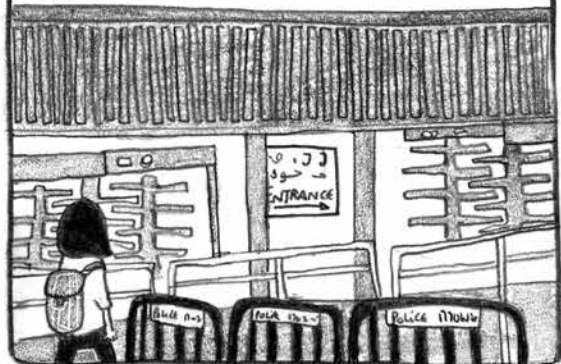
BUT IT'S NOT NORMAL FOR ME! I'M SCARED, DISGUSTED, AND I FEEL POWERLESS.

MY ISRAELI FRIENDS DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT.

THIS WEEKEND, I WENT TO VISIT HIM. FIRST, I HAD TO CROSS THE CHECKPOINT.



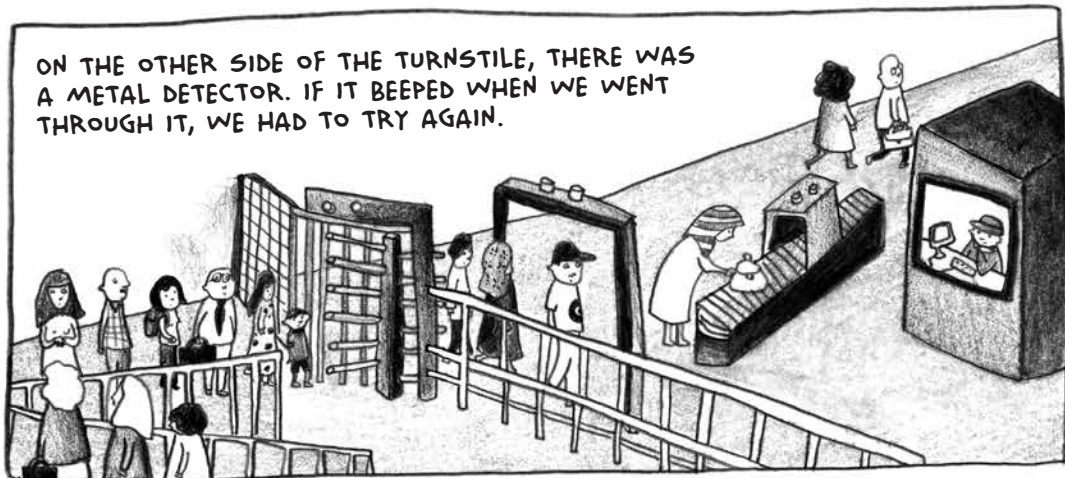
IT FELT LIKE I WAS GOING INSIDE THE BELLY OF THE BEAST.



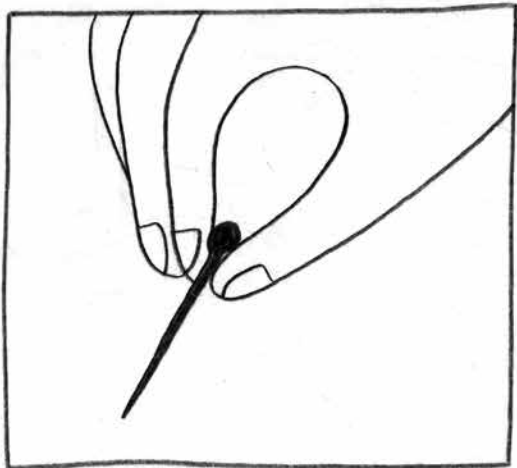
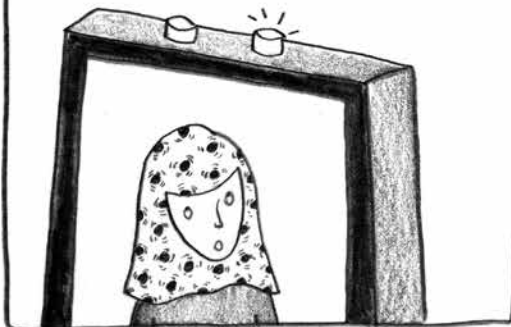
AFTER SHOWING MY PASSPORT AND WALKING DOWN MANY HALLWAYS, I ARRIVED IN A LARGE HANGAR. I WAITED IN LINE AND EVERY TIME THE LIGHT TURNED GREEN, THREE PEOPLE PASSED.



ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TURNSTILE, THERE WAS A METAL DETECTOR. IF IT BEEPED WHEN WE WENT THROUGH IT, WE HAD TO TRY AGAIN.



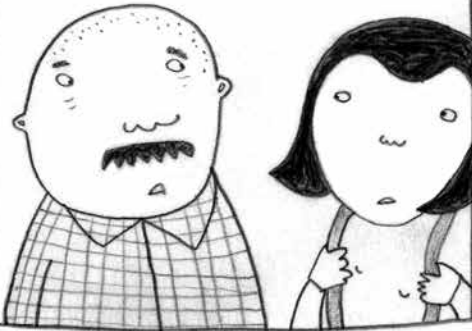
IT BEEPED WHEN A WOMAN PASSED THROUGH. SHE HAD TO TAKE OUT THE PINS FROM HER HITAB.



IT'S ONE OF THE MOST
RIDICULOUS PLACES IN
THE WORLD.

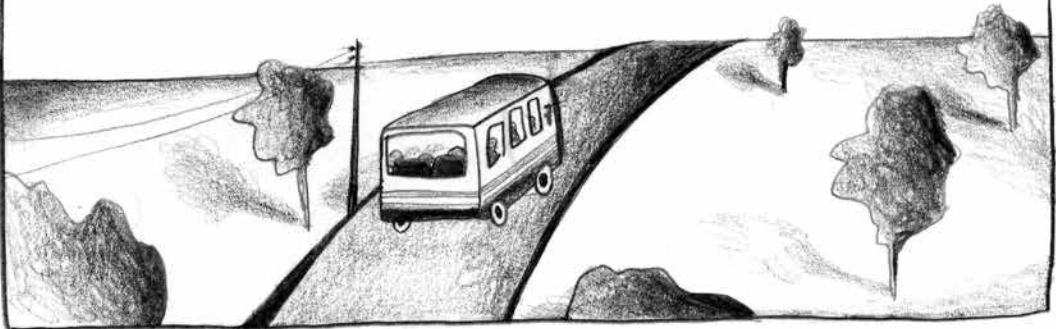
YES, IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE
ANYTHING MORE ABSURD...

COME BACK IN A FEW
YEARS AND YOU WON'T HAVE
TO WAIT IN LINE. YOU WON'T
BE ABLE TO SEE ANYONE
HERE AT ALL. EVERYONE'S
LEAVING THE COUNTRY, LITTLE
BY LITTLE.



AFTER THE METAL DETECTORS, I
WALKED THROUGH A LARGE HALL AND
WENT THROUGH ANOTHER TURNSTILE
AFTER SHOWING MY PASSPORT TO A
YOUNG, BORED-LOOKING ISRAELI.

ON THE OTHER SIDE, THERE'S A FIELD OF OLIVE TREES AND A ROAD THAT
LEADS TO JERUSALEM. ONE TOWN ON THE LEFT, ANOTHER ON THE RIGHT. IN
TOTAL, IT TOOK ME TWO HOURS TO CROSS THE TEN KILOMETERS BETWEEN
THE TWO.





AFTER ALL THAT, I'M NOT AS
EXCITED TO GO TO ISRAEL.

BUT I ENDED UP
HAVING A REALLY
GREAT NIGHT.

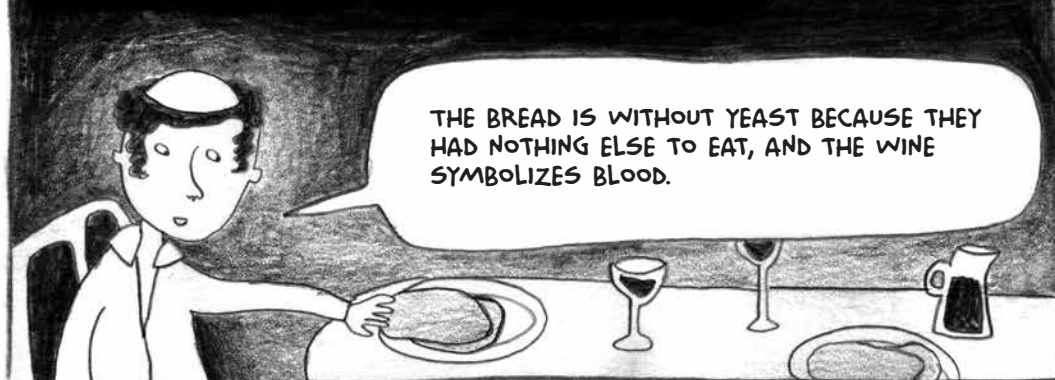
WE CELEBRATED PESACH WITH AN ISRAELI FAMILY. MY FRIEND, URI,
MANAGED TO GET PERMITS FOR HIS PALESTINIAN FRIENDS.

TODAY'S A DAY WHERE JEWS NEED TO
REMEMBER THAT THEY SUFFERED AND THAT
THEY SHOULDN'T MAKE OTHERS SUFFER...

...THAT'S SOMETHING WE
FORGET ALL TOO EASILY.

WE COMMEMORATED THE DAY MOSES CROSSED THE RED SEA.

URI'S BROTHER IS ORTHODOX. HE WEARS A KIPPAH, A WHITE DRESS SHIRT, AND A RED STRING AROUND HIS WRIST.



THE BREAD IS WITHOUT YEAST BECAUSE THEY HAD NOTHING ELSE TO EAT, AND THE WINE SYMBOLIZES BLOOD.

WE SANG IN HEBREW, AND THEN ARABIC, AND THEN IN ENGLISH. THE GRANDMOTHER SANG IN HUNGARIAN WITH A SHAKY VOICE.

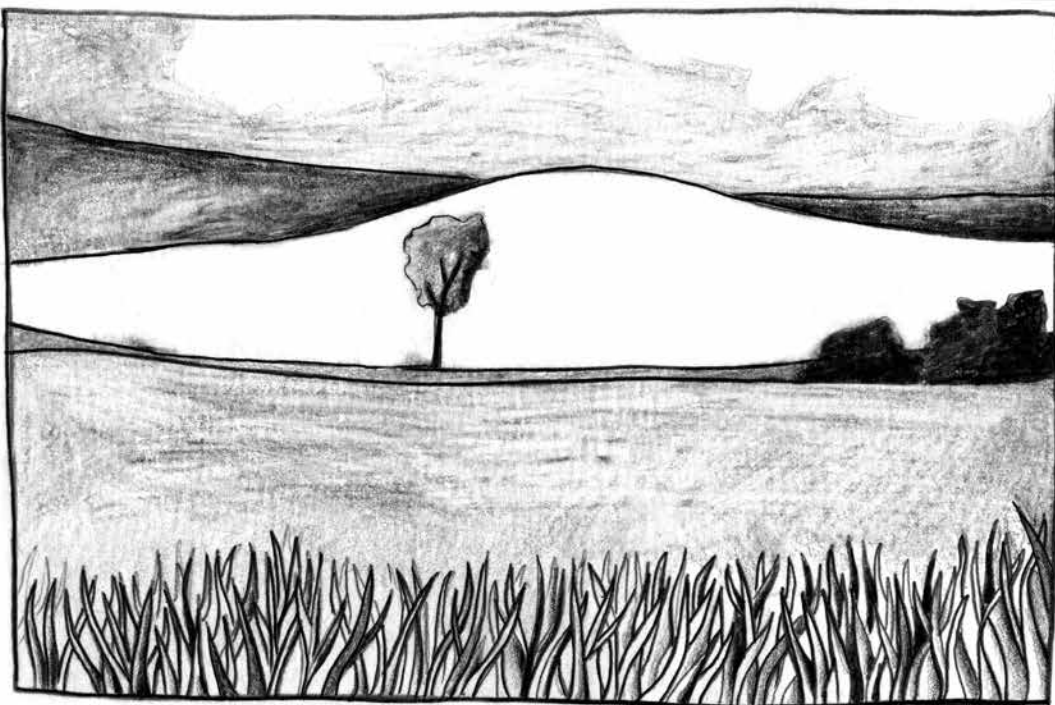


I'M SO GLAD YOU ALL MET! THIS IS THE BEST PESACH WE'VE HAD. YOU YOUNG PEOPLE GIVE US HOPE!



AFTER THAT WE WENT OUT TO A FEW BARS WITH THE COUSINS LIKE IN EUROPE. WE DRANK, WE DANCED...JUST A NORMAL NIGHT IN ISRAEL.

LOVE, ANAËLE.



Hello, Nan!

I'd love to come visit you.
Everything's well here; I'm
working with kids now. They're
drawing giant hopscotch courts.

Do the kids there do the
same thing?

Our parents are doing well.
They're proud of you, their
brave little girl, as they say!
I visit them from time to
time. Take care of yourself.

(I miss you.)

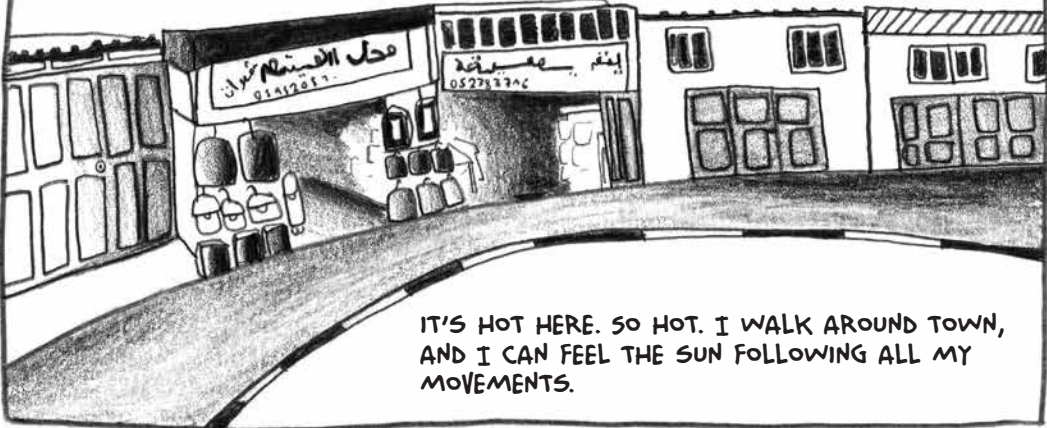
Delphine



Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethlehem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, MAY 20TH

HEY, BIG SIS, HOW ARE YOU? AND WHAT ABOUT GAUTHIER?



IT'S HOT HERE. SO HOT. I WALK AROUND TOWN,
AND I CAN FEEL THE SUN FOLLOWING ALL MY
MOVEMENTS.

IN THE STREETS, I CAN SMELL
JASMINE EVERYWHERE...



...EVEN IN THE GREETINGS.



*HELLO.

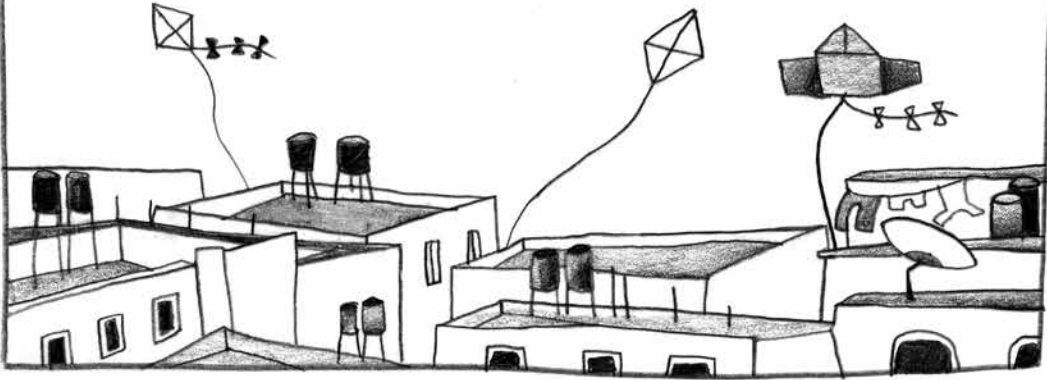
**I WISH YOU A DAY FULL OF JASMINE.

THERE'S ALSO "SABAH EL WARDA." (I WISH YOU A DAY FULL OF FLOWERS.)

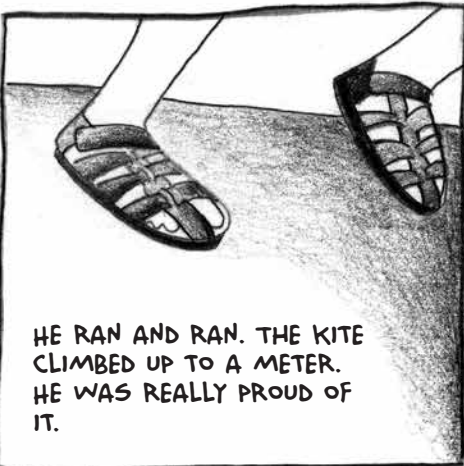
"SABAH EL NOUR."
(I WISH YOU A
LUMINOUS DAY.)

OR EVEN "SABAH EL LOON."
(I WISH YOU A COLORFUL DAY.)

IT'S ALSO KITE SEASON HERE. THE KIDS PREFER IT TO HOPSCOTCH.



ON MY STREET, ONE KID BUILT
A KITE OUT OF PLASTIC BAGS,
SCOTCH TAPE, AND STICKS.



HE RAN AND RAN. THE KITE
CLIMBED UP TO A METER.
HE WAS REALLY PROUD OF
IT.

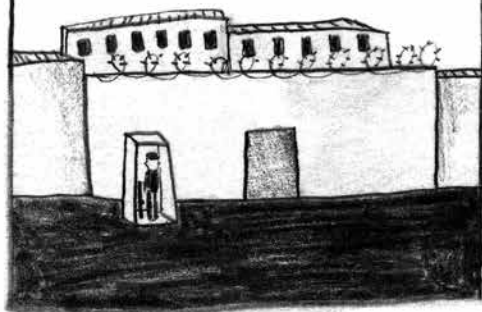


DESPITE THE HEAT, I'M KEEPING
ACTIVE. LAST WEEKEND, I WENT
TO NABLUS WITH NINA, A FRIEND
OF MINE FROM THE NETHERLANDS,
WHO'S HERE WITH A VOLUNTEER
PROGRAM LIKE ME.

WE WERE WELCOMED BY THE DARNA ASSOCIATION.
IT WAS STARTED BY THREE MEN WHO GREW UP IN
THE ASKAR REFUGEE CAMP:

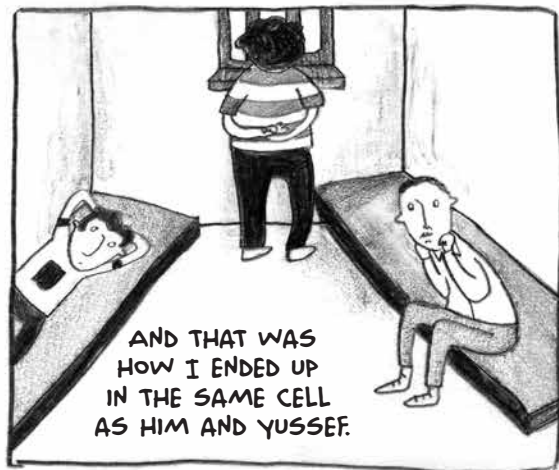


THEN, WE WERE TRANSFERRED TO
A PRISON FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

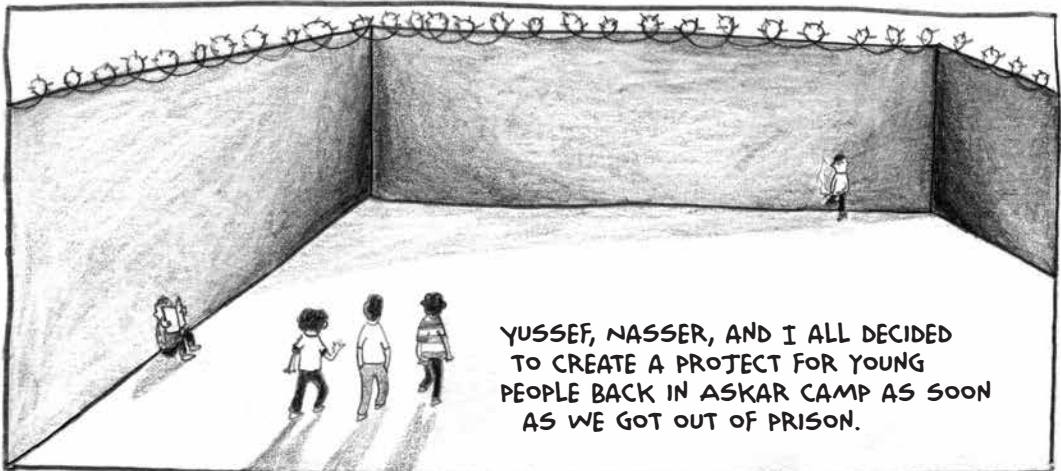
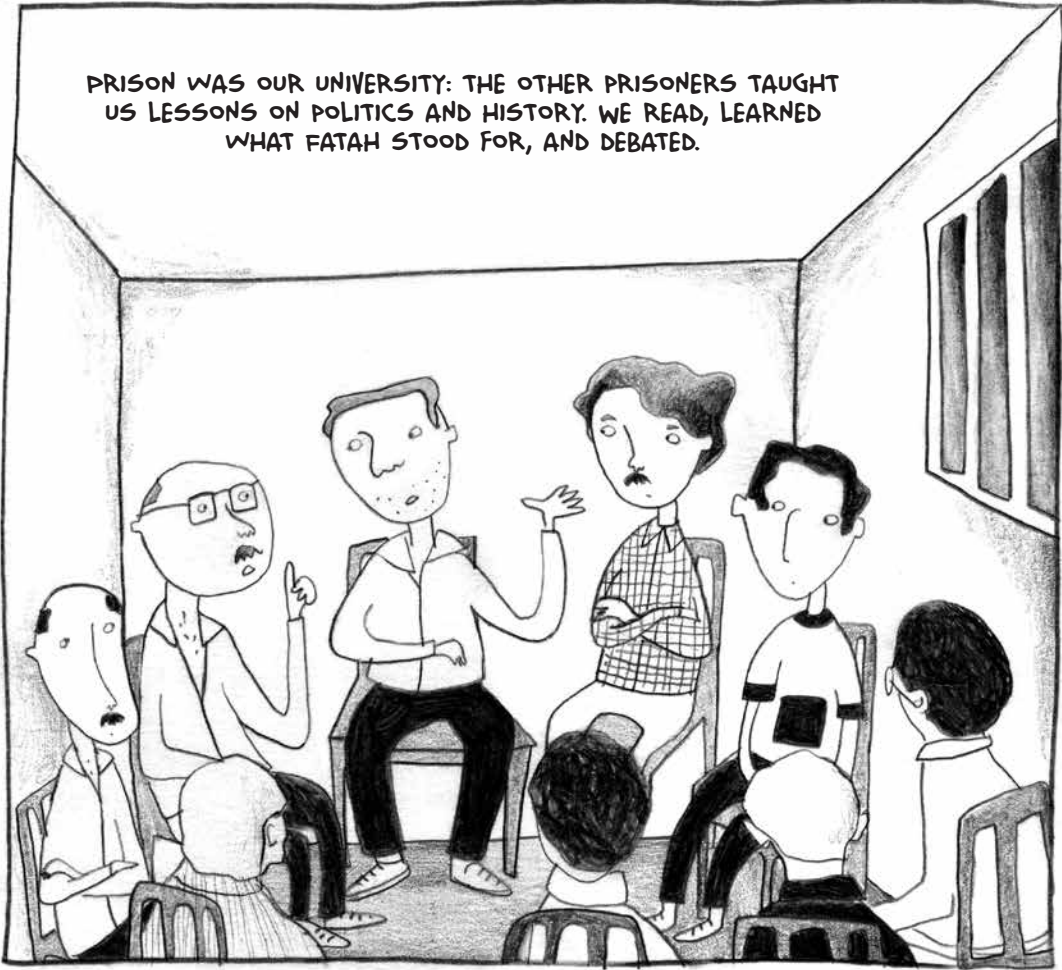


IN PRISON, THE ISRAELIS
LET US ORGANIZE.



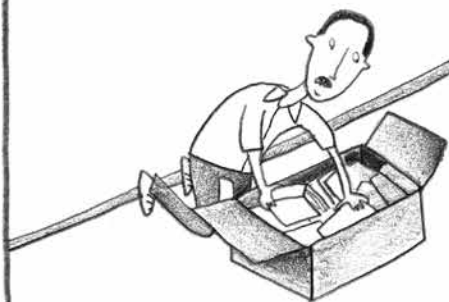


PRISON WAS OUR UNIVERSITY: THE OTHER PRISONERS TAUGHT US LESSONS ON POLITICS AND HISTORY. WE READ, LEARNED WHAT FATAH STOOD FOR, AND DEBATED.



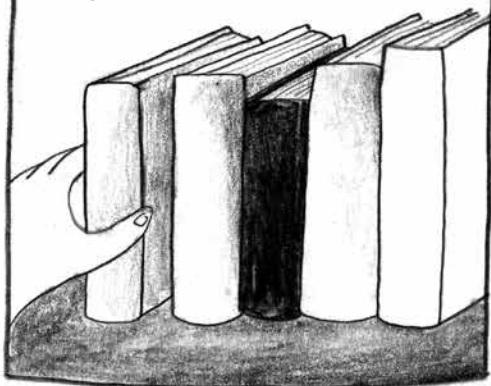
YUSSEF, NASSER, AND I ALL DECIDED TO CREATE A PROJECT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BACK IN ASKAR CAMP AS SOON AS WE GOT OUT OF PRISON.

AND WE STARTED AS SOON
AS WE COULD, FROM A TINY
OFFICE BUILDING.



WE WERE PROUD AS PEACOCKS, BUT
PEOPLE IN THE CAMP WERE SKEPTICAL.

THEY'RE NOT TOO USED
TO BOOKS...



BUT LITTLE BY LITTLE,
THEY STARTED TO BRING US
THEIR KIDS, AND THE
PROGRAM GREW.

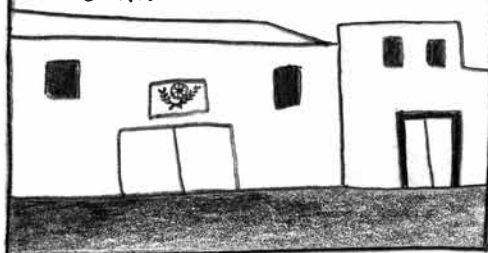


WE TOURED THE CAMP AND ITS
STREETS WITH NASSER.

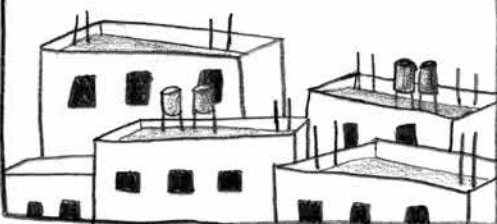


IT FELT JUST LIKE THE OTHER
PALESTINIAN CAMPS.

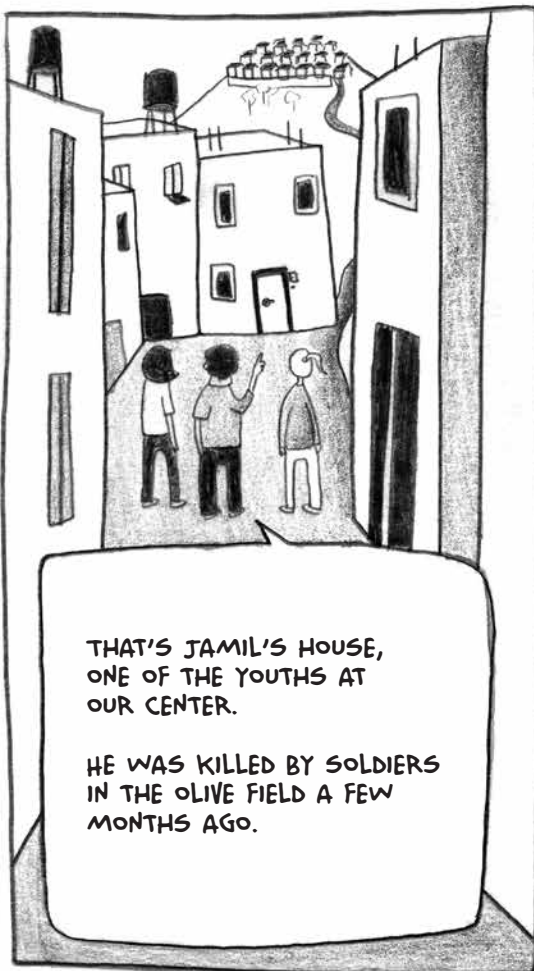
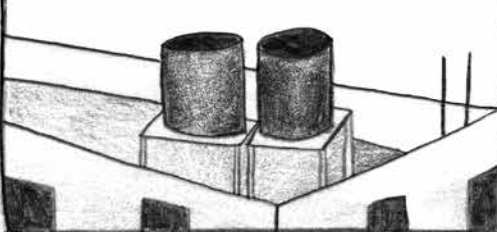
THE UNRWA SCHOOL.



THE BUILDINGS READY TO EXPAND
RIGHT ALONGSIDE THE FAMILIES.

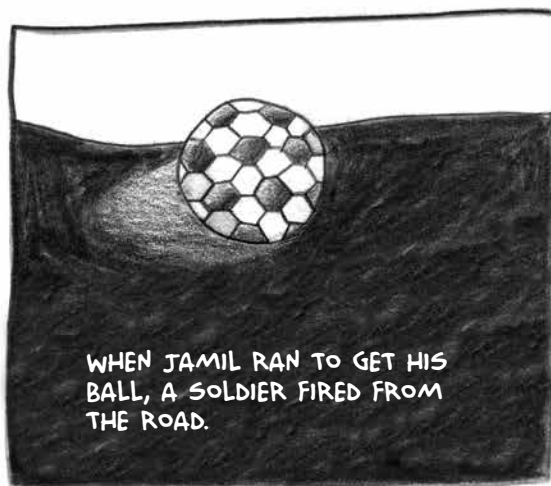
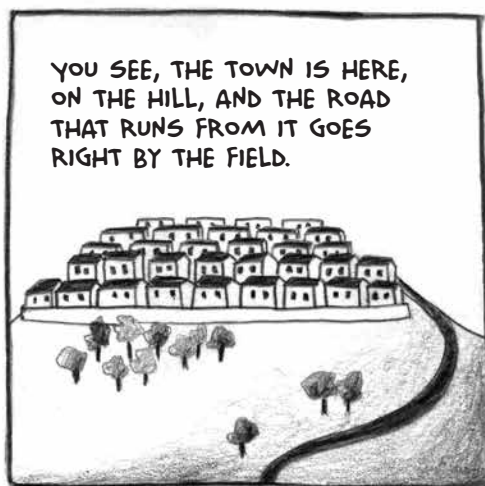
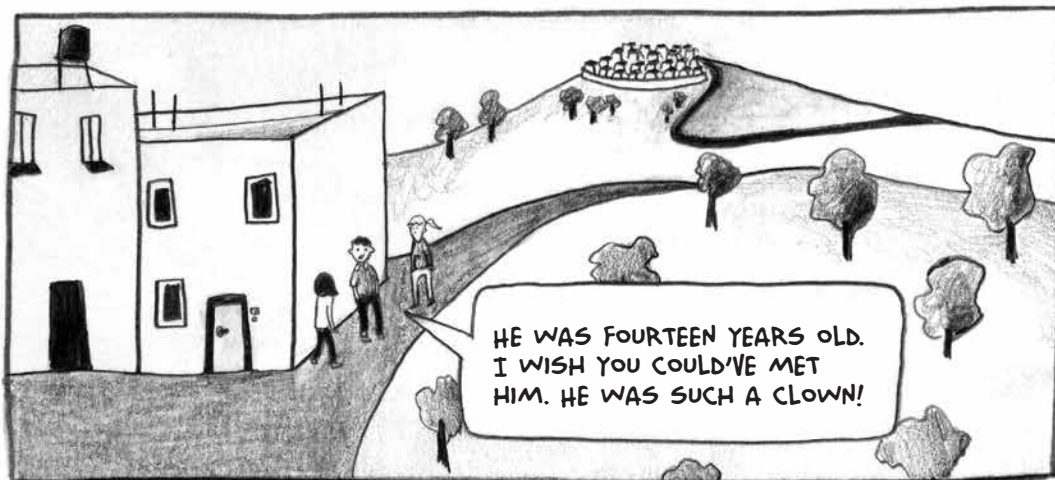


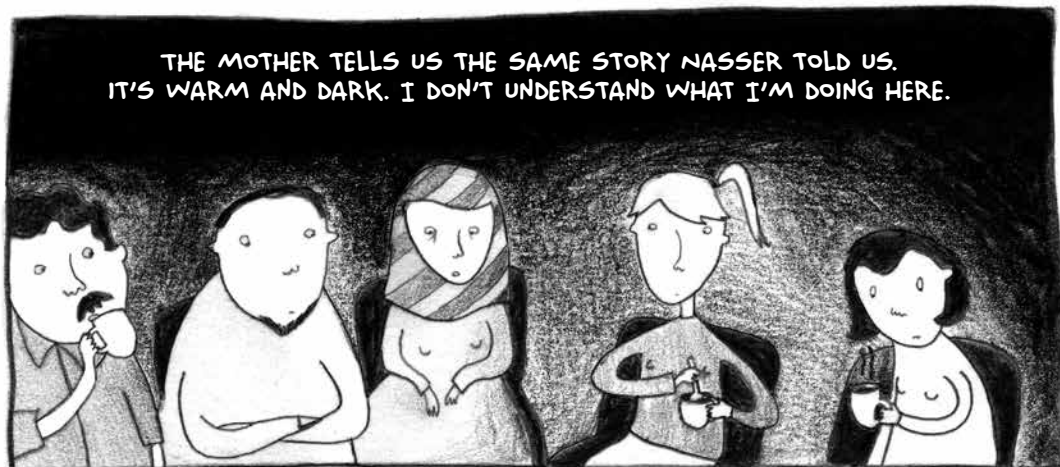
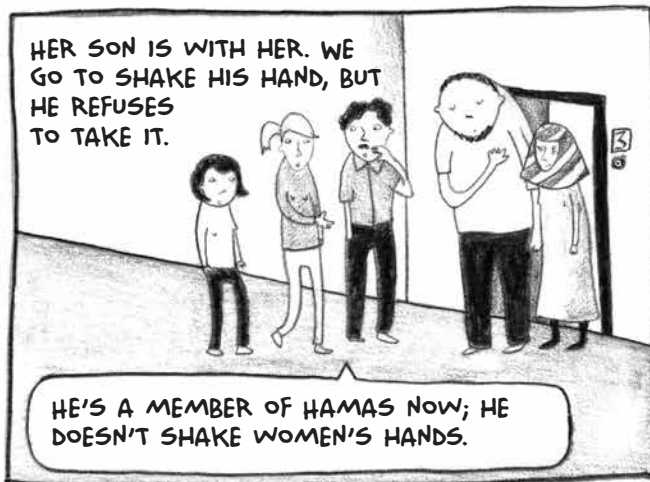
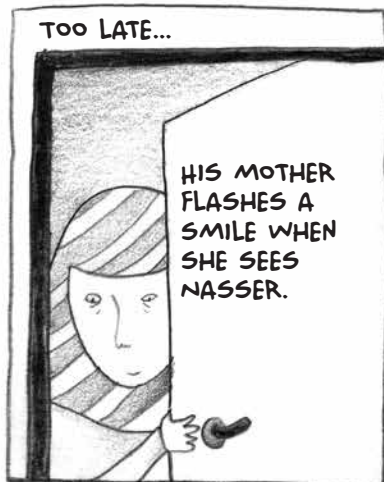
THE WATER RESERVOIRS ON THE
ROOFS.

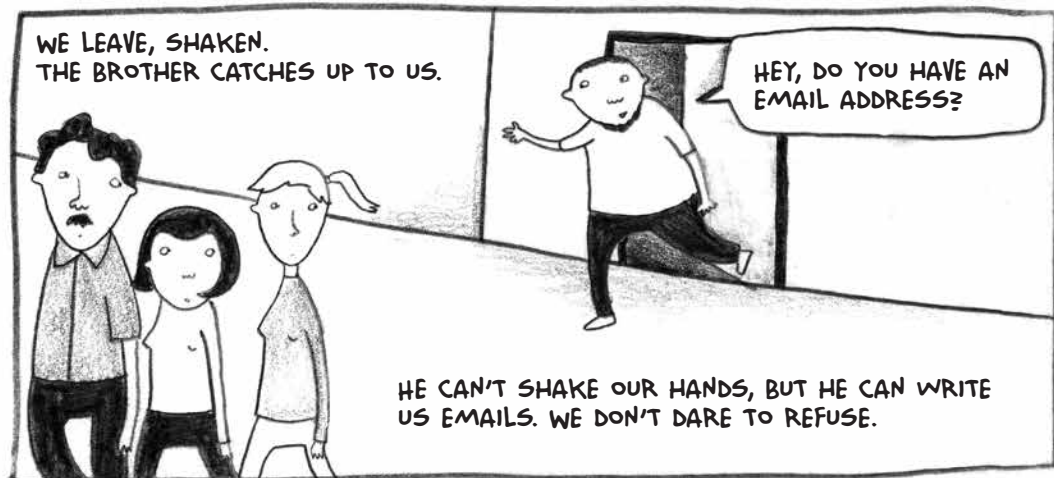
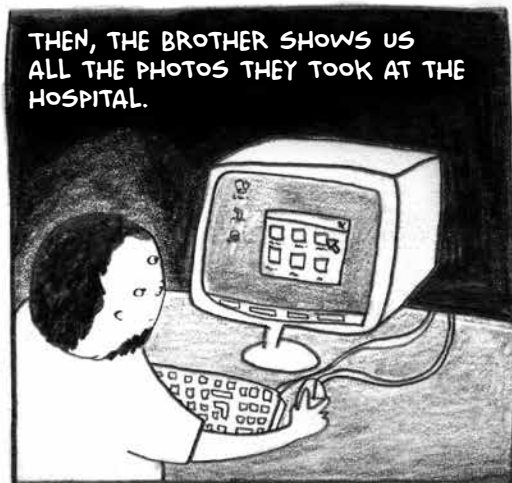


THAT'S JAMIL'S HOUSE,
ONE OF THE YOUTHS AT
OUR CENTER.

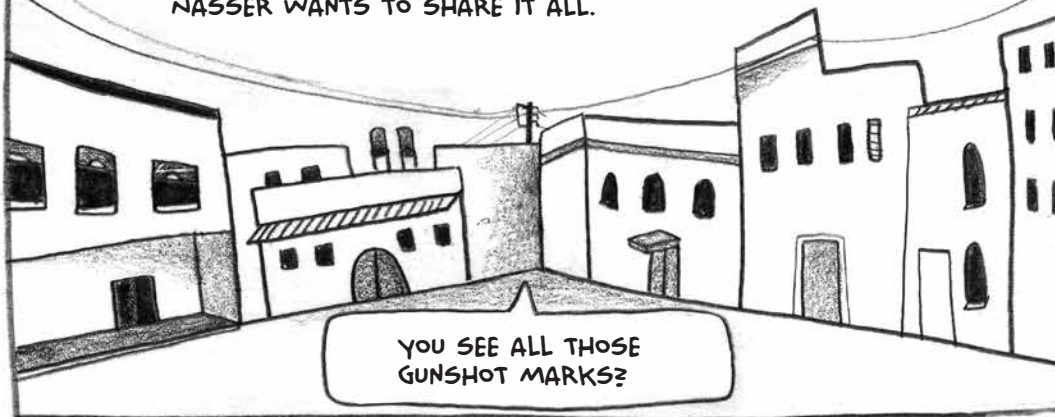
HE WAS KILLED BY SOLDIERS
IN THE OLIVE FIELD A FEW
MONTHS AGO.







WE CONTINUED OUR VISIT. EVERY STREET HAS ITS OWN HISTORY.
NASSER WANTS TO SHARE IT ALL.

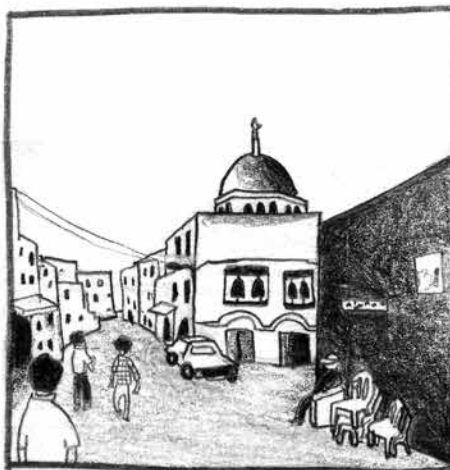


YOU SEE ALL THOSE
GUNSHOT MARKS?



THE SUN WEIGHS MORE AND
MORE. I FEEL HEAVY, READY TO
MELT AND DISAPPEAR INTO THIS
DRY LAND.

NASSER FINISHES BY TURNING US OVER
TO YUSSEF. WE GO VISIT THE OLD TOWN.



POLITICS TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER TOURISM.

THERE ARE PICTURES OF MARTYRS ON ALL THE WALLS: YOUNG, OLD, CHILDREN, BEARDED, BALD, SMILING, SCOWLING, MEN, AND WOMEN...



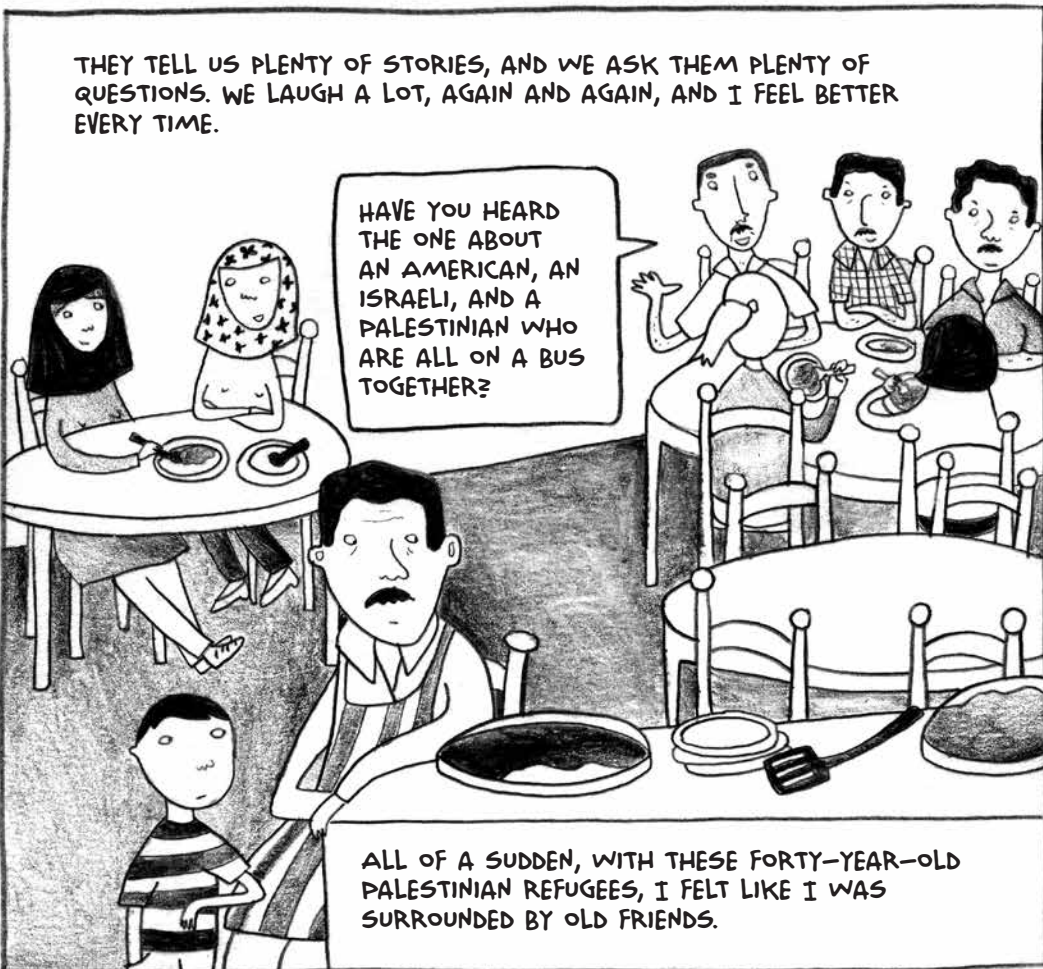
AT EVERY CORNER
THERE'S A PLAQUE
ENGRAVED WITH THE
LIST OF MARTYRS
KILLED AT THAT
PRECISE LOCATION.

NABLUS IS A TOWN
ENTIRELY OF MARTYRS.





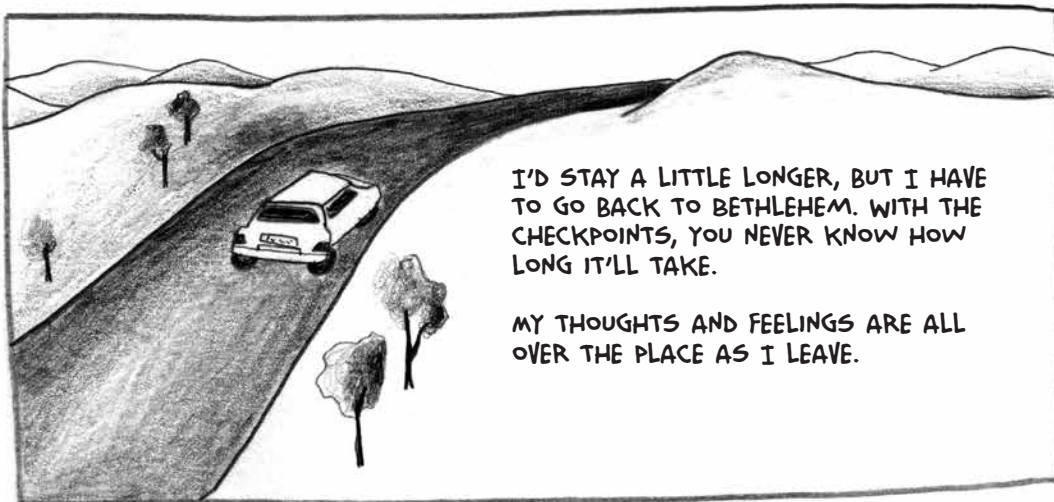
WE STOP TO EAT KANAFEH, THE FAMOUS CAKES BATHED IN SYRUP. AMTAD AND NASSER JOIN US.



THEY TELL US PLENTY OF STORIES, AND WE ASK THEM PLENTY OF QUESTIONS. WE LAUGH A LOT, AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND I FEEL BETTER EVERY TIME.

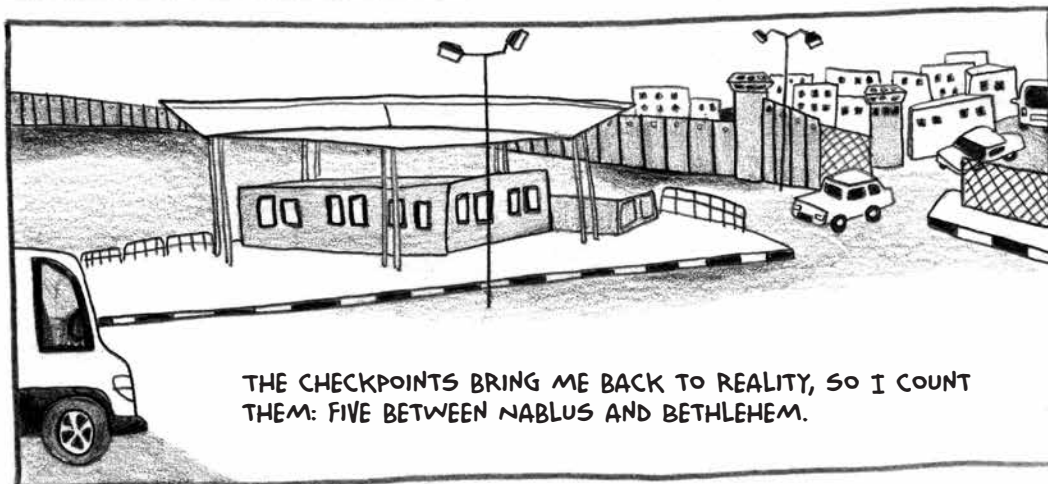
HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT AN AMERICAN, AN ISRAELI, AND A PALESTINIAN WHO ARE ALL ON A BUS TOGETHER?

ALL OF A SUDDEN, WITH THESE FORTY-YEAR-OLD PALESTINIAN REFUGEES, I FELT LIKE I WAS SURROUNDED BY OLD FRIENDS.



I'D STAY A LITTLE LONGER, BUT I HAVE TO GO BACK TO BETHLEHEM. WITH THE CHECKPOINTS, YOU NEVER KNOW HOW LONG IT'LL TAKE.

MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ARE ALL OVER THE PLACE AS I LEAVE.

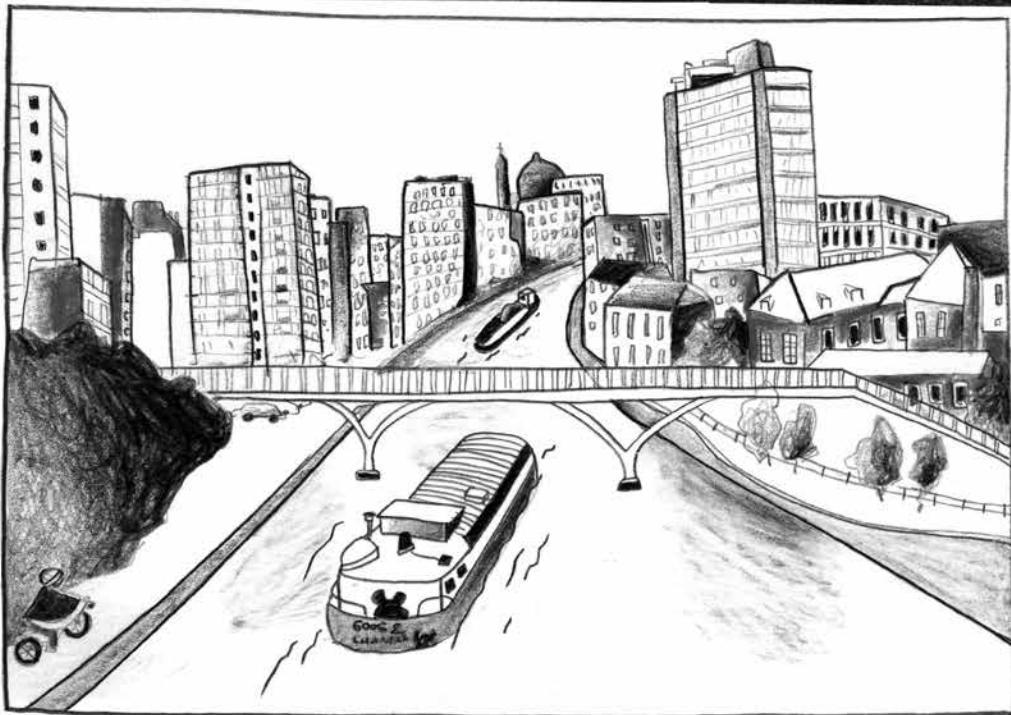


THE CHECKPOINTS BRING ME BACK TO REALITY, SO I COUNT THEM: FIVE BETWEEN NABLUS AND BETHLEHEM.



I SAY GOODBYE TO NINA. WE DON'T NEED TO TALK TO KNOW THAT WE BOTH FEEL THE EXACT SAME WAY.

LOVE, ANAËLE.



Hello!

I started biking. I like by the Meuse every morning to go to work. I stop on the dam bridge and I watch the barges go by. I have all the gear now: helmet, fluorescent vest, and rain pants.

If only you could see me!

All that to say, everything's good here. What about you? Your trip sounds challenging...

Love, Delphine



Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethleem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, JUNE 15

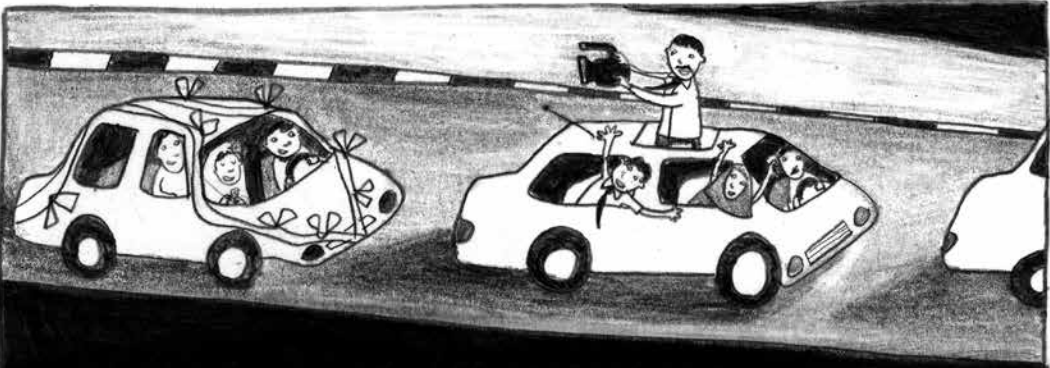


HEY, DELPHINE,

ACTUALLY,
A LOT OF THINGS
HAVE BEEN GETTING
TO ME HERE, BUT I'VE
ALSO HAD SO MANY
SIMPLE AND BEAUTIFUL
MOMENTS:

MEETING PEOPLE, LAUGHING
AT THEIR JOKES ABOUT
PEOPLE FROM HEBRON,

EATING DELICIOUS
MAQLUBA MADE BY
THEIR MOMS...

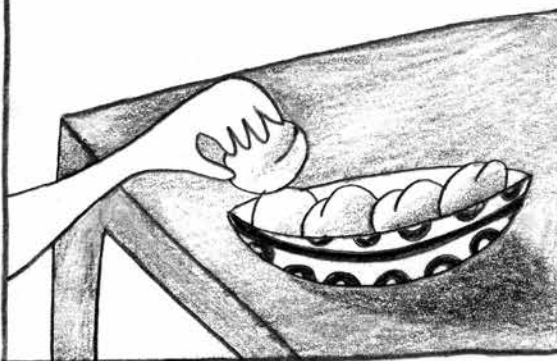


...SEEING WEDDINGS DRIVE BY: THEY HONK, AND FILM, AND SING, AND DANCE...

...GATHERING APRICOTS. HERE,
WE CALL THEM MICHMICH.
ONE THING I'LL NEVER GET
USED TO IS PEOPLE SAYING,
"TOMORROW IN THE APRICOT."
WHO KNOWS WHY...



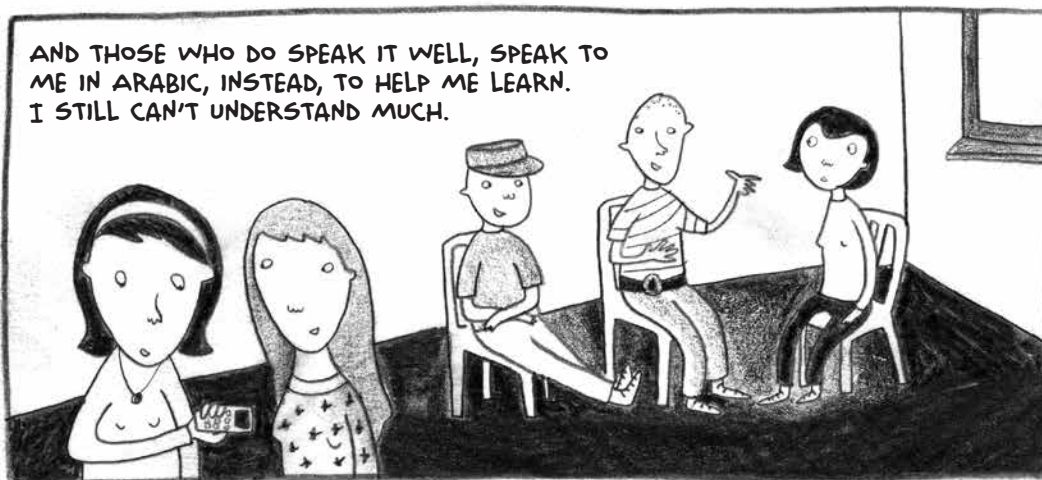
...AND AT WORK THE KIDS ARE
SLOWLY GETTING USED TO ME.



EVEN THE ONES WHO DON'T SPEAK
MUCH ENGLISH ARE MAKING AN EFFORT.



AND THOSE WHO DO SPEAK IT WELL, SPEAK TO
ME IN ARABIC, INSTEAD, TO HELP ME LEARN.
I STILL CAN'T UNDERSTAND MUCH.



OUTSIDE OF MY ACTIVITIES AT THE YOUTH CENTER, I CONTINUE TO EXPLORE PALESTINE. YESTERDAY, I WENT TO HEBRON.



I MET UP WITH MY FRIEND BASSAM AT HIS UNIVERSITY, JUST AFTER HIS TEST.

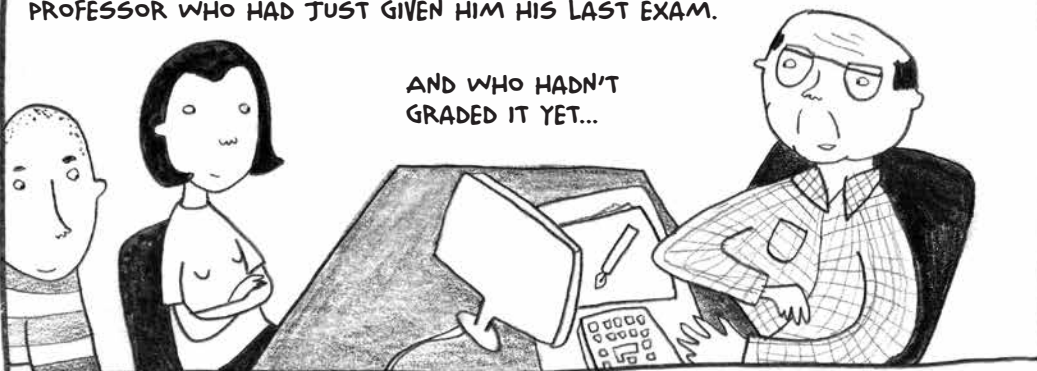


ANAËLE!
WELCOME.



HE INTRODUCED ME TO ALL HIS PROFESSORS, TO SHOW THEM HE HAD A EUROPEAN FRIEND.

HE TOOK ME FROM ONE OFFICE TO THE NEXT, AND OF COURSE WE ENDED UP IN THE OFFICE OF THE PROFESSOR WHO HAD JUST GIVEN HIM HIS LAST EXAM.

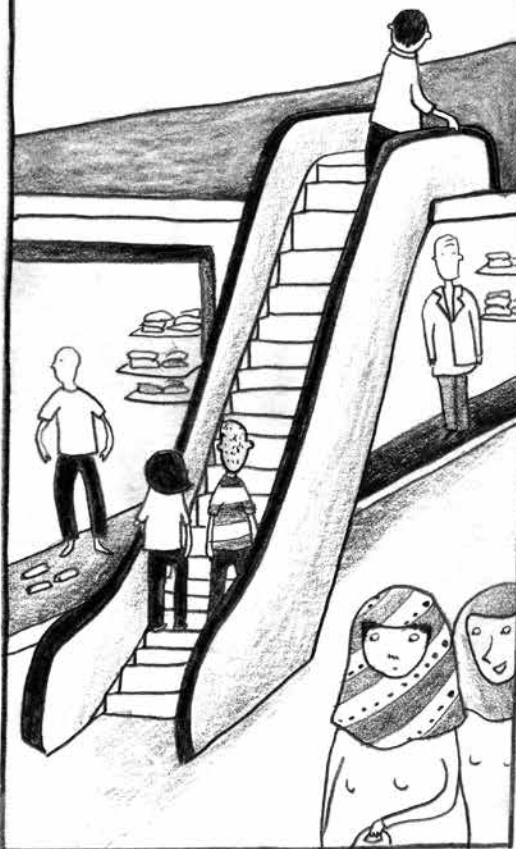


AND WHO HADN'T
GRADED IT YET...

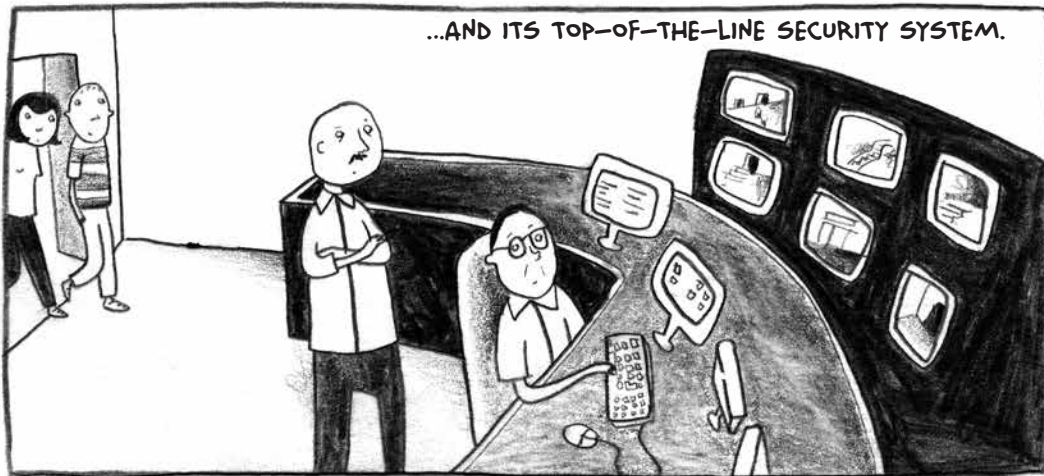
THEN, WE WENT INTO HEBRON
PROPER. THIS TOWN IS CRAZY.
THERE'S A MODERN SIDE TO
HEBRON THAT'S LIVELY AND
COMMERCIALIZED.

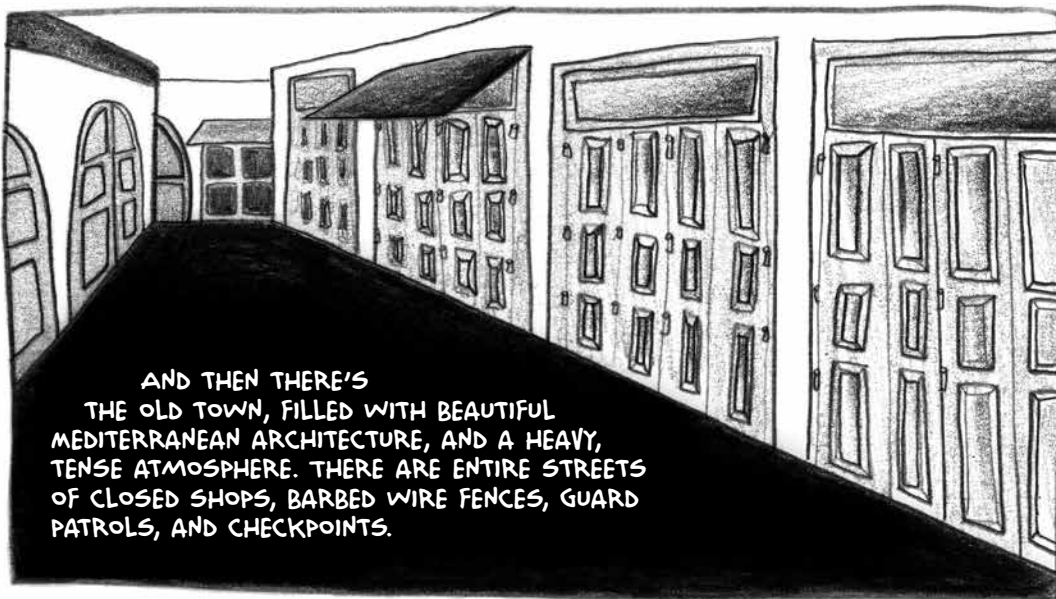


WE MADE SURE TO VISIT
THE BRAND-NEW SHOPPING
CENTER, TOO...

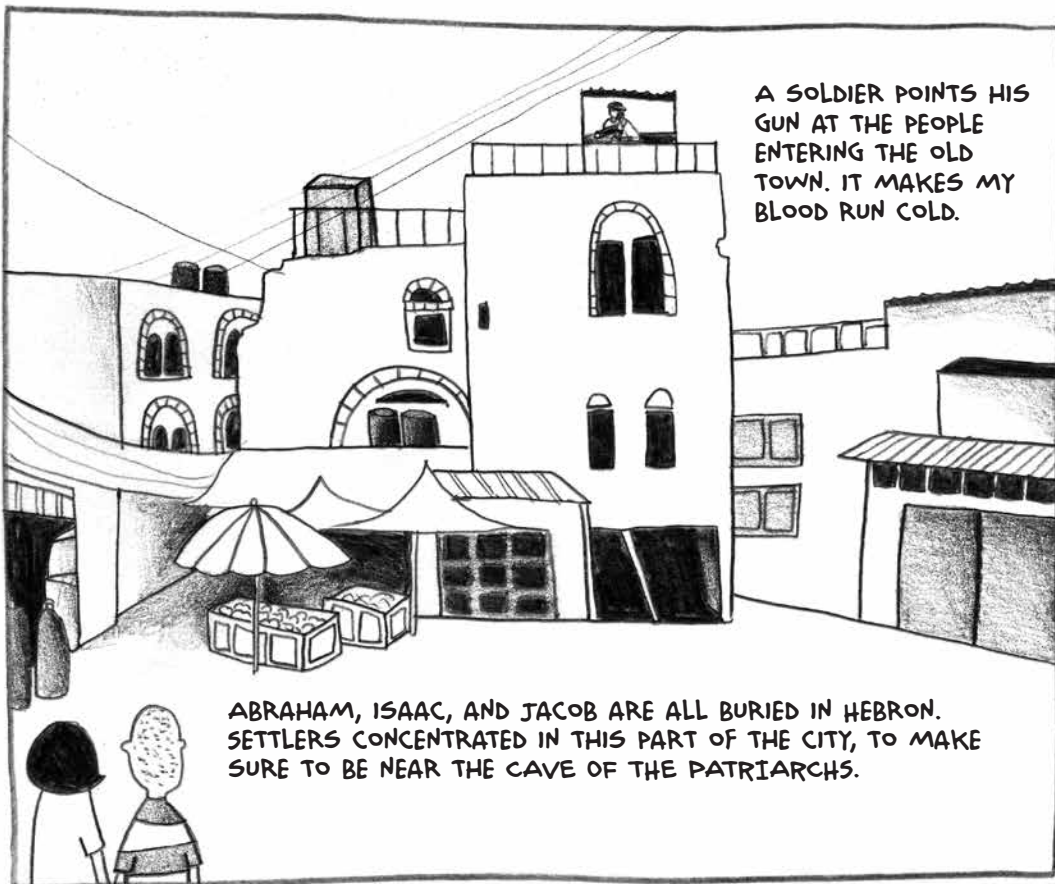


...AND ITS TOP-OF-THE-LINE SECURITY SYSTEM.





AND THEN THERE'S
THE OLD TOWN, FILLED WITH BEAUTIFUL
MEDITERRANEAN ARCHITECTURE, AND A HEAVY,
TENSE ATMOSPHERE. THERE ARE ENTIRE STREETS
OF CLOSED SHOPS, BARBED WIRE FENCES, GUARD
PATROLS, AND CHECKPOINTS.



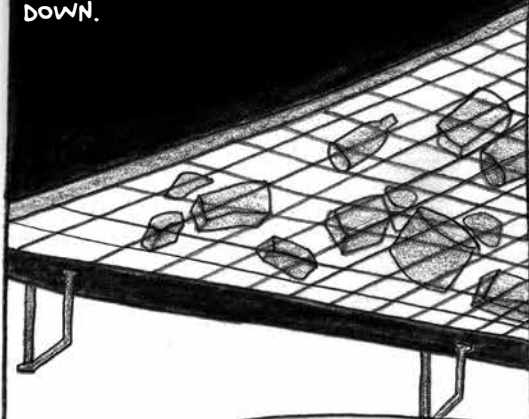
A SOLDIER POINTS HIS
GUN AT THE PEOPLE
ENTERING THE OLD
TOWN. IT MAKES MY
BLOOD RUN COLD.

ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB ARE ALL BURIED IN HEBRON.
SETTLERS CONCENTRATED IN THIS PART OF THE CITY, TO MAKE
SURE TO BE NEAR THE CAVE OF THE PATRIARCHS.

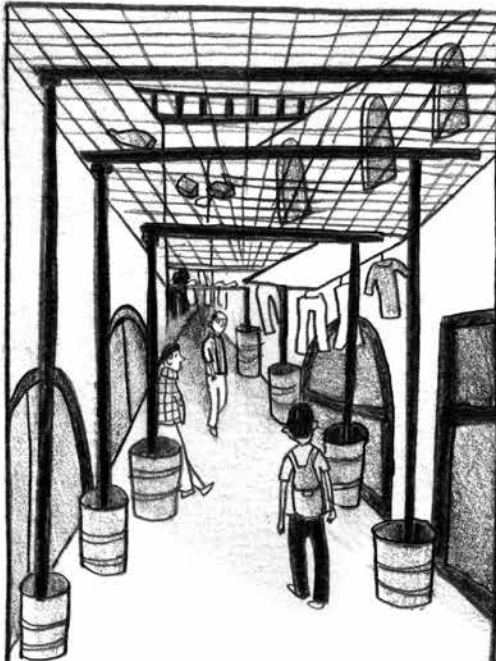
THEY ANNEXED PALESTINIAN HOUSES AND BUILT MODERN BUILDINGS AT THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY.



THE PALESTINIANS WHO DO BUSINESS ON THE GROUND FLOOR PUT UP A FENCE ABOVE THEIR HEADS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM THE OBJECTS THAT WOULD GET THROWN DOWN.



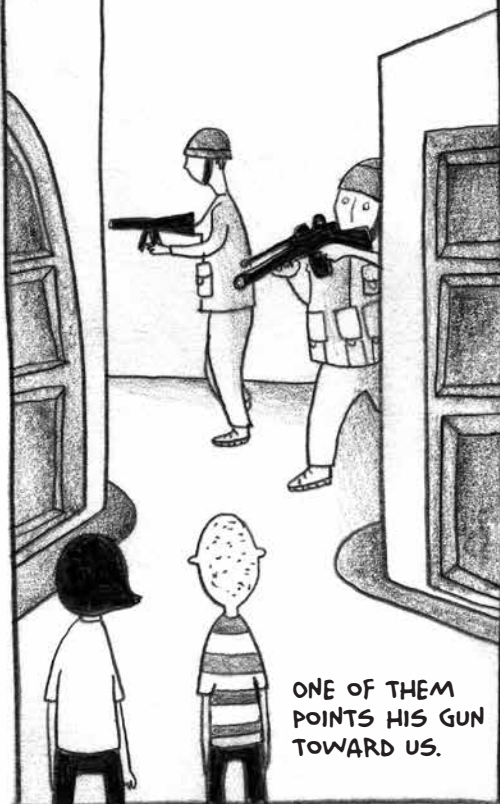
THE MOST IMPRESSIVE IS THE OLD SOUK: THE NEW SETTLERS LIVE IN THE HOMES ON THE FLOORS ABOVE, AND THEY BUILT BRIDGES TO GO FROM ONE SIDE OF THE STREET TO THE OTHER.



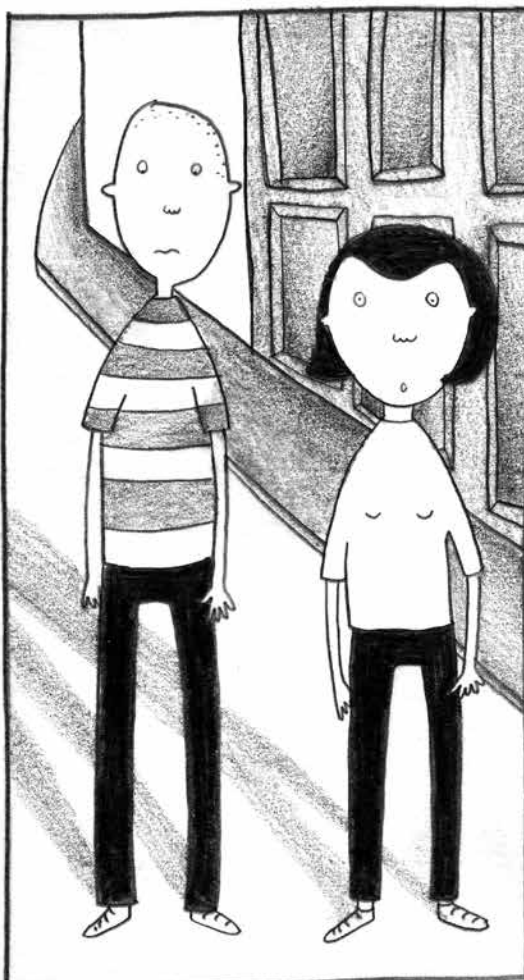
TOURISTS ALWAYS TAKE PICTURES HERE.



WHEN I TURNED MY HEAD
DOWN ONE STREET, I SAW
A GROUP OF SOLDIERS
LOOKING AT US.



ONE OF THEM
POINTS HIS GUN
TOWARD US.

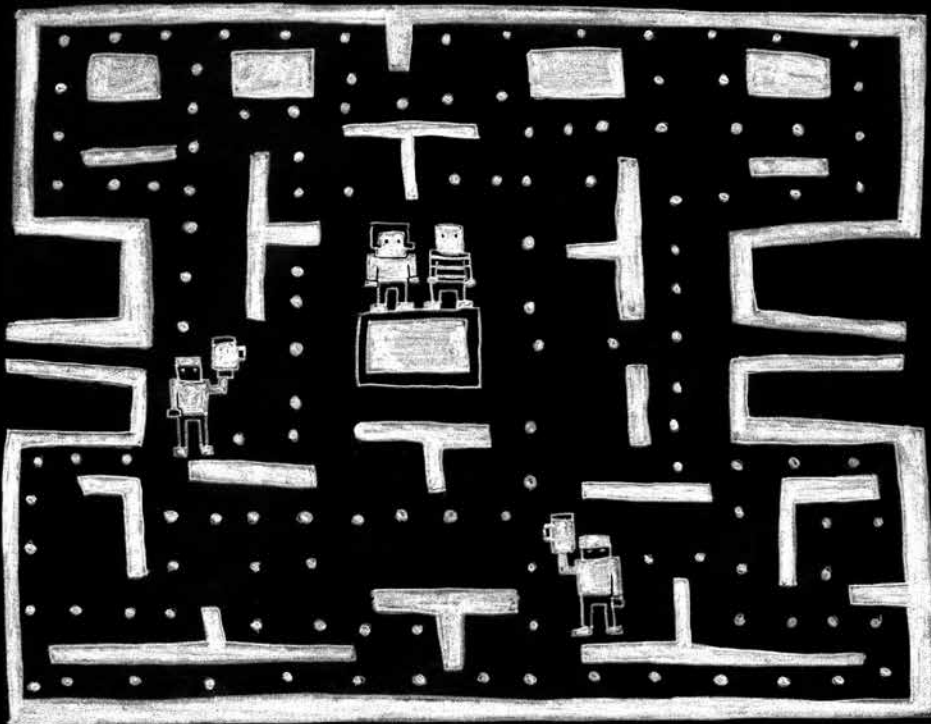


IT'S THE FIRST TIME THAT I FIND
MYSELF WITH A GUN POINTED AT ME.
SUDDENLY, I'M DISCONNECTED FROM
REALITY.

I FEEL LIKE I'M IN A VIDEO GAME:

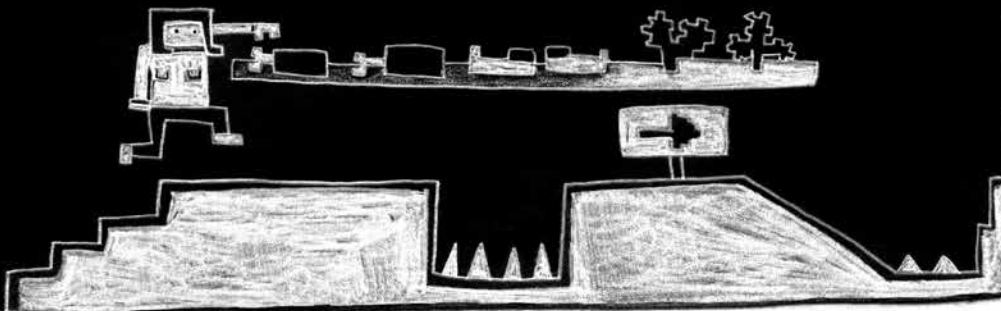
LEVEL 1

THE LABYRINTHINE STREETS, THE MERCHANTS WHO STOP US TO SELL THEIR TEA. IT'S NICE OF THEM, BUT ALSO INTRUSIVE ALL THE SAME...



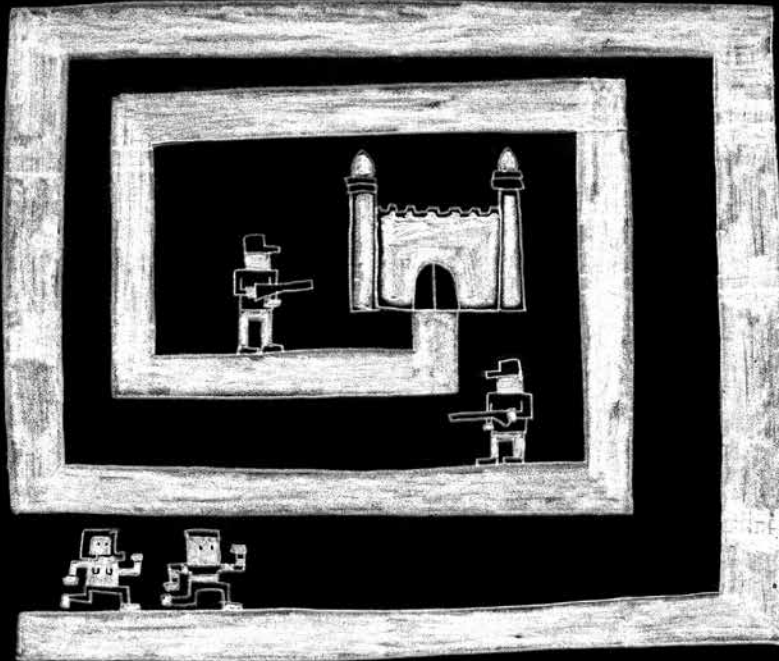
LEVEL 2

ALONG THE WAY, I PASS ALL SORTS OF EXOTIC THINGS: TRIPE HANGING IN THE AIR, SEQUINED SLIPPERS, CAULIFLOWER MARINATING IN ROSE FLOWER VINEGAR.



LEVEL 3

SOLDIERS, WATCHTOWERS...AND BASSAM AND I IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL. OUR GOAL: ABRAHAM'S TOMB.

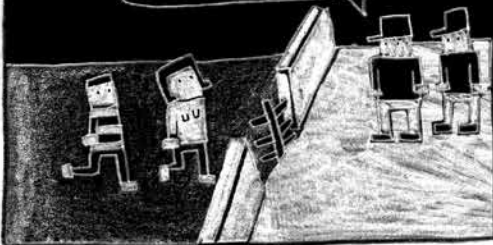


BUT THERE ARE STILL A LOT OF OBSTACLES IN BETWEEN:
OTHER PUSHY MERCHANTS TO AVOID...

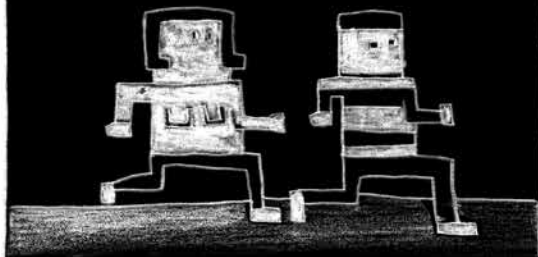
LEVEL 15

...CHECKPOINTS TO GET PAST...

WHY DOES SHE SPEAK
ARABIC? SHE'S NO
TOURIST.



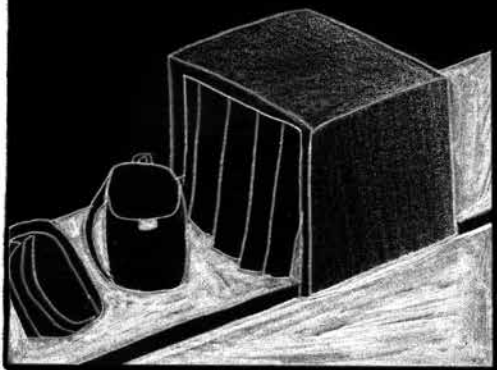
LEVEL 263



...AND STREETS TO CROSS.
IT'S LONG AND TIRESOME.

LEVEL 656

AT THE ENTRANCE, OUR BAGS PASS THROUGH THE METAL DETECTOR.



MISSION COMPLETE

AND WE ARRIVE IN THE MOSQUE, WHERE I HAVE TO PUT ON A DARK HITAB IN ORDER TO ENTER.



AND FINALLY, WE PASS THROUGH THE DOOR WE'VE WORKED SO HARD TO GET TO. FAMILIES ARE SITTING DOWN, PEOPLE ARE PRAYING AND CLEANSING THEMSELVES, AND THERE ARE SOME GIRLS TAKING PICTURES.



WE SIT DOWN.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL AND CALMING.

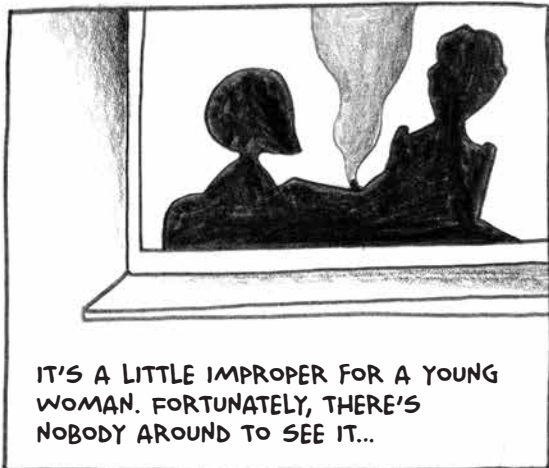
ON THE WAY HOME, I STOP BY DHEISHEH TO SEE MATDI AT HIS YOUTH CENTER. I TELL HIM ABOUT HOW I'M FEELING.



HE NODS ALONG AND SERVES ME A GLASS OF FLUORESCENT JUICE THAT'S FAR TOO SWEET.



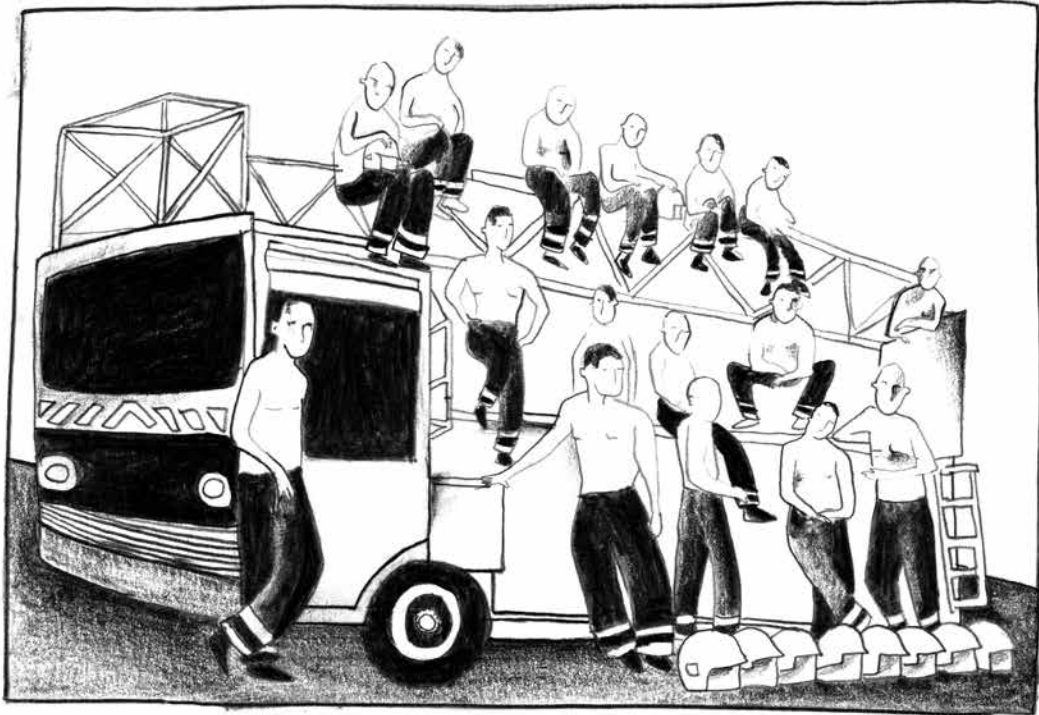
I FEEL AT HOME. WE TALK LATE INTO THE NIGHT.



IT'S A LITTLE IMPROPER FOR A YOUNG WOMAN. FORTUNATELY, THERE'S NOBODY AROUND TO SEE IT...



...BESIDES THE TAXI DRIVER, WHO BRINGS ME BACK HOME. (BUT HE'S ONE OF MATDI'S FRIENDS.)
GOOD NIGHT! ANAËLE.



Hello Nan,

I moved into an apartment next to the fire station. I caught a virus and have been stuck at home all week. So, I've been watching them go about their day from my balcony.

When it's nice out, they have water fights or put on barbecues that they light up with their gas tanks.

Some of them spend their time flirting with the women that pass by. I imagine it's probably very different from how relationships happen in Palestine?

Speaking of, you have quite a lot to say about Majdi, don't you?

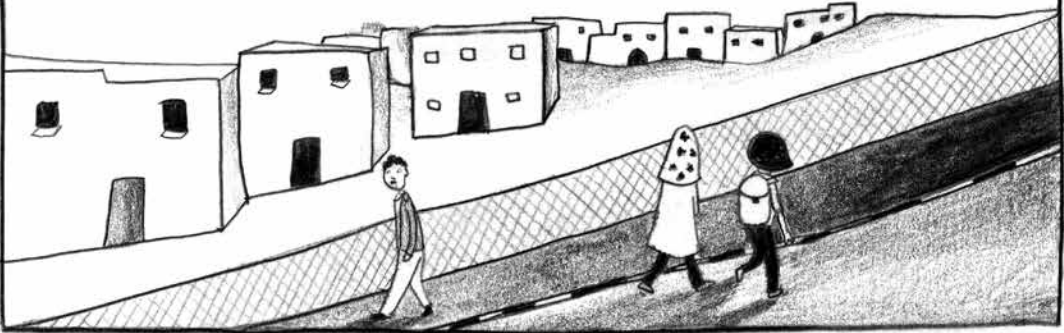


Anaële Hermans
 P.O. Box 258
 Bethlehem
 Palestine

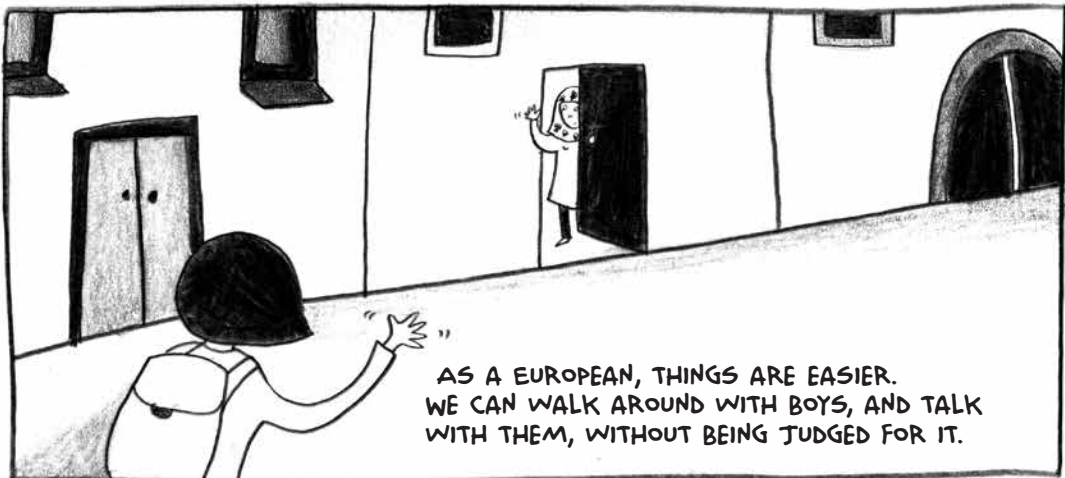
BETHLEHEM, JUNE 30

HEY, DELPHINE,

THE MOST IMPORTANT PART ABOUT FLIRTING IN PALESTINE
IS THAT IT STAYS SECRET.



LOUBNA EXPLAINED TO ME THAT MOST OF IT HAPPENS ON FACEBOOK CHAT.





IN ANY CASE, HERE,
EVERYONE THINKS
THAT EUROPEAN
GIRLS ARE EASY.



A PALESTINIAN WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO
GO TO MATDI'S HOUSE TWO OR THREE
TIMES A WEEK AND SPEND HOURS
ALONE WITH HIM IN HIS OFFICE.

IT SEEMS YOU WERE
RIGHT AGAIN, DELPHINE:
I THINK I'M FALLING
FOR HIM.



AND I FEEL LIKE THE MOST PRECIOUS OF TREASURES, COMFORTABLY
ENJOYING ALL THE COMPLIMENTS MATDI GIVES ME.

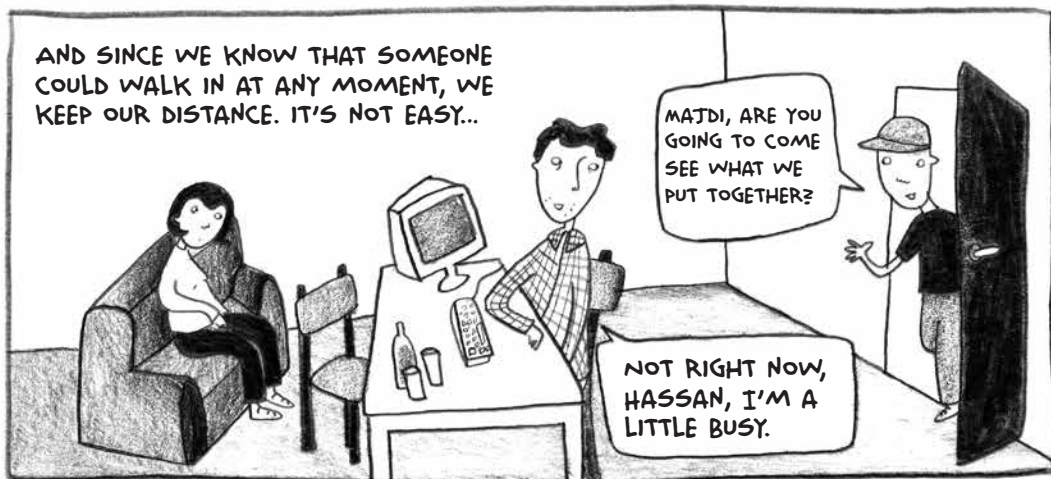


THE ROMANTICISM THAT WOULD ANNOY ME
IN EUROPE FINALLY SEEMS NORMAL HERE.

SINCE WE HAVE TO KEEP IT SECRET, I
ONLY SEE HIM IN HIS OFFICE.



AND SINCE WE KNOW THAT SOMEONE
COULD WALK IN AT ANY MOMENT, WE
KEEP OUR DISTANCE. IT'S NOT EASY...



THERE ARE OTHER COMPLICATIONS...



I JUST MOVED INTO A SMALL LITTLE
HOUSE THAT MY ORGANIZATION USES
AS AN OFFICE.



SUDDENLY, I'M OFFICIALLY REPRESENTING THE ORGANIZATION, AND I CAN'T INVITE TOO MANY PEOPLE OVER.

ESPECIALLY IF THEY'RE BOYS.

YOU UNDERSTAND, IT'S THE REPUTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION THAT'S AT STAKE HERE.

AS DIRECTOR, I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF IT.

YES, YES.
I UNDERSTAND.

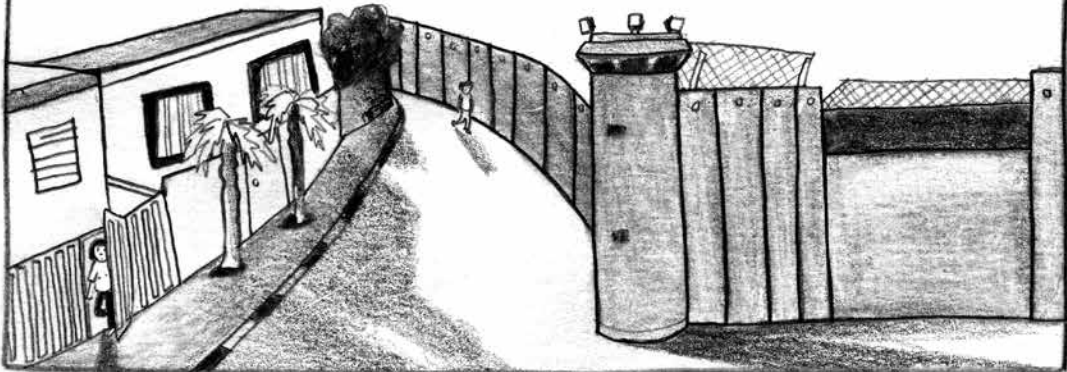


I'M ALSO STARTING TO UNDERSTAND THAT I'M NOT AT HOME HERE, AND I NEVER WILL BE...

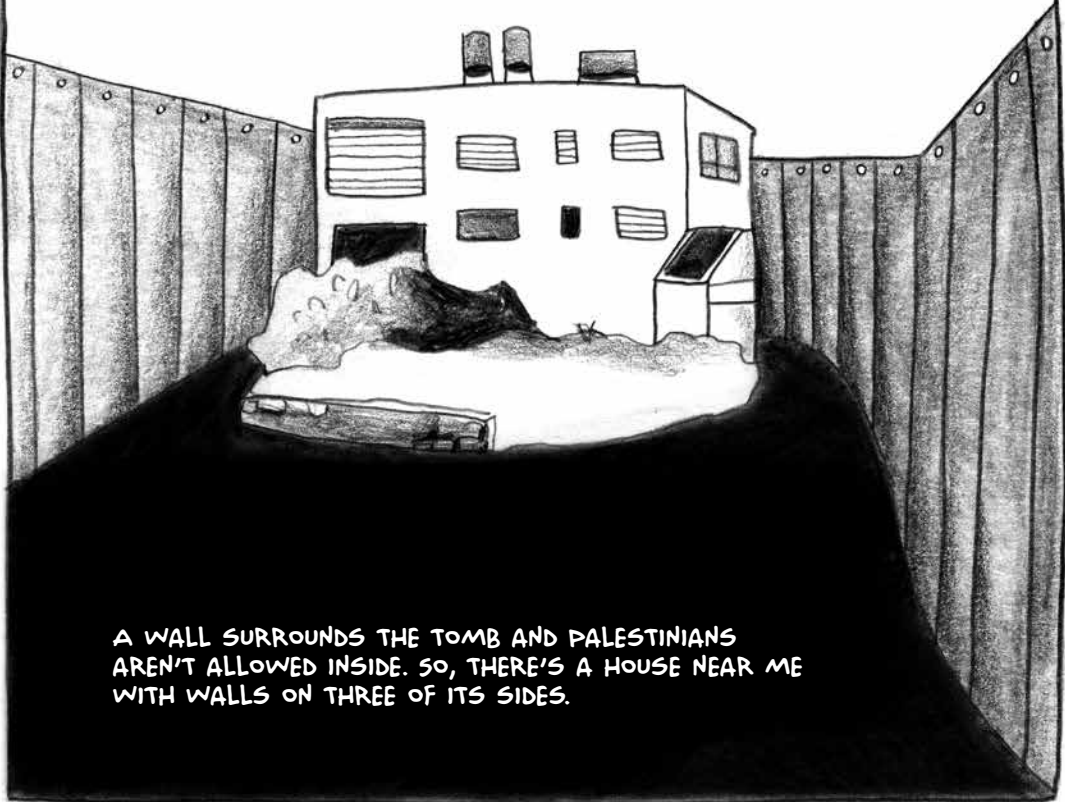


...BUT I LIKE MY NEW HOUSE; I HAVE A GARDEN AND AN ORANGE TREE.

MY NEIGHBORHOOD IS A LITTLE PARTICULAR; IT'S NEAR RACHEL'S TOMB.



THE ISRAELIS DECIDED TO ANNEX THE TOMB AND
BUILD A MILITARY BASE OUT OF IT.

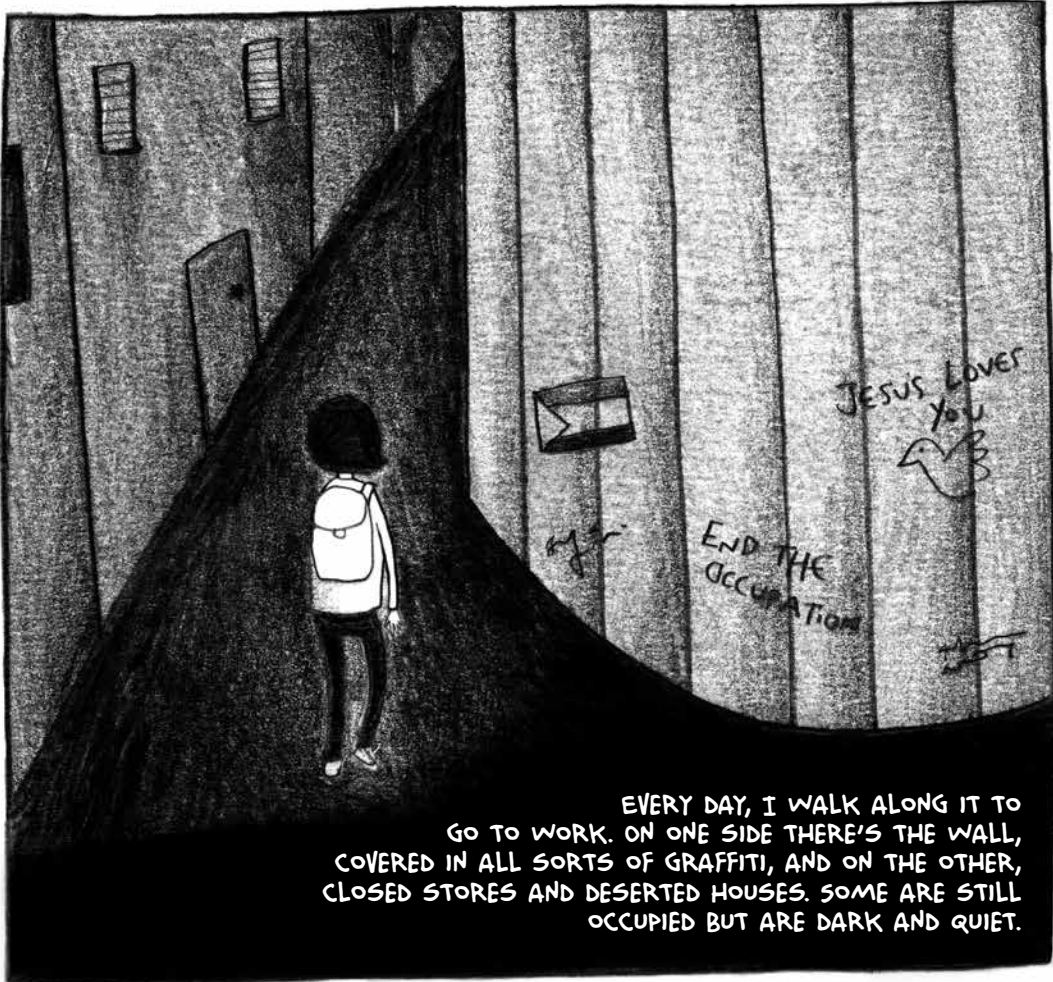
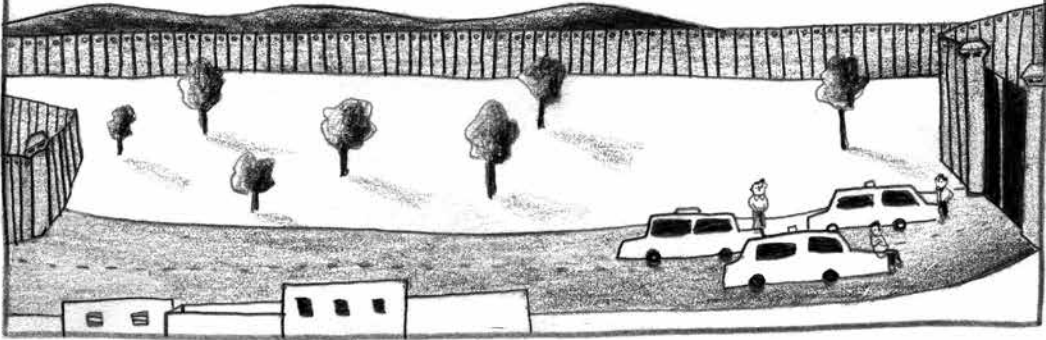


A WALL SURROUNDS THE TOMB AND PALESTINIANS
AREN'T ALLOWED INSIDE. SO, THERE'S A HOUSE NEAR ME
WITH WALLS ON THREE OF ITS SIDES.



BEFORE THE WALL BLOCKED IT, MY STREET WAS THE MAIN STREET OF
THE TOWN. IT CONNECTED BETHLEHEM TO JERUSALEM IN THE NORTH AND
HEBRON IN THE SOUTH.

TODAY, AS I GO OUTSIDE, I SEE THE ENORMOUS GILO CHECKPOINT ON MY RIGHT, THE WALL IN FRONT OF ME, AND THE WALL ON MY LEFT.



EVERY DAY, I WALK ALONG IT TO GO TO WORK. ON ONE SIDE THERE'S THE WALL, COVERED IN ALL SORTS OF GRAFFITI, AND ON THE OTHER, CLOSED STORES AND DESERTED HOUSES. SOME ARE STILL OCCUPIED BUT ARE DARK AND QUIET.



THE WALL IS HIGH, VERY HIGH.
IT MAKES ME FEEL SO SMALL.

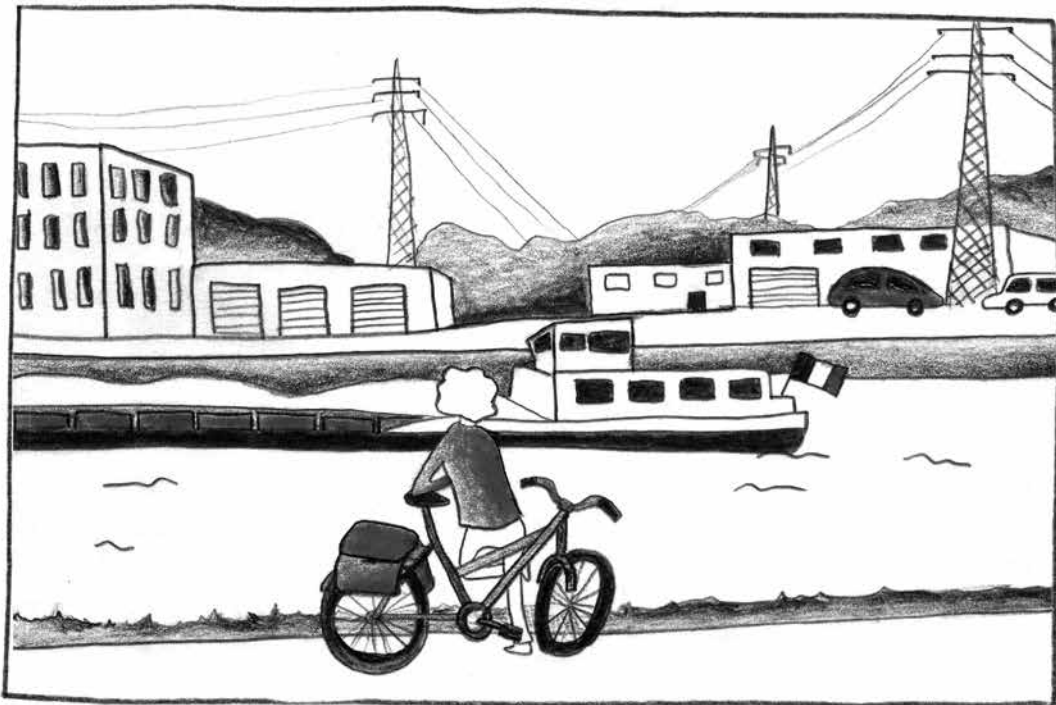
I CAN'T ALWAYS HANDLE SEEING ALL OF
THIS. YESTERDAY, AFTER THE PHONE CALL
FROM MOUSA, WHO'S STILL IN PRISON,
I STARTED CRYING.



THERE WAS NO REAL REASON, IT WAS JUST A BUILDUP OF EVERYTHING.

WELL, DON'T WORRY.
I'M STILL DOING OKAY.

ANAËLE.



You sly fox!

So, this Majdi, what's he like? You say so little about him that I have to guess at everything!

It's summer in Liège; everyone is on vacation. I have a hard time working a day when it's so nice out.

So, I took a day off to go to a park. I wrote to you with my feet in the grass.

Love,
Delphine



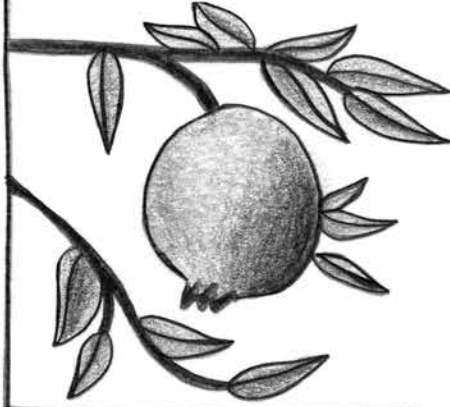
Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethleem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, JUNE 20

HEY, DELPHINE,
I JUST PICKED UP MY PEN, AND IT'S
ALREADY STICKING TO MY FINGERS.



IT'S BECAUSE OF THE POMEGRANATES;
THEY'RE IN FULL SEASON HERE.



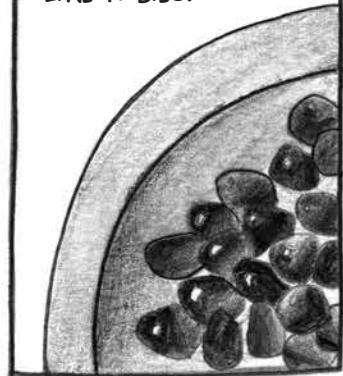
WE OPEN THEM WITH
OUR HANDS.



AND WE PUT ALL THE
SEEDS ONTO A PLATE.



THEY SHINE
LIKE RUBIES.

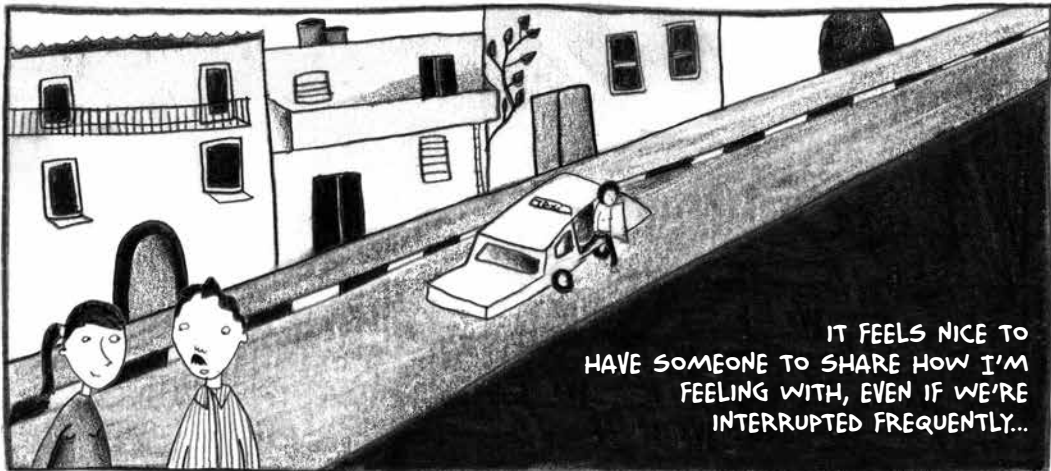
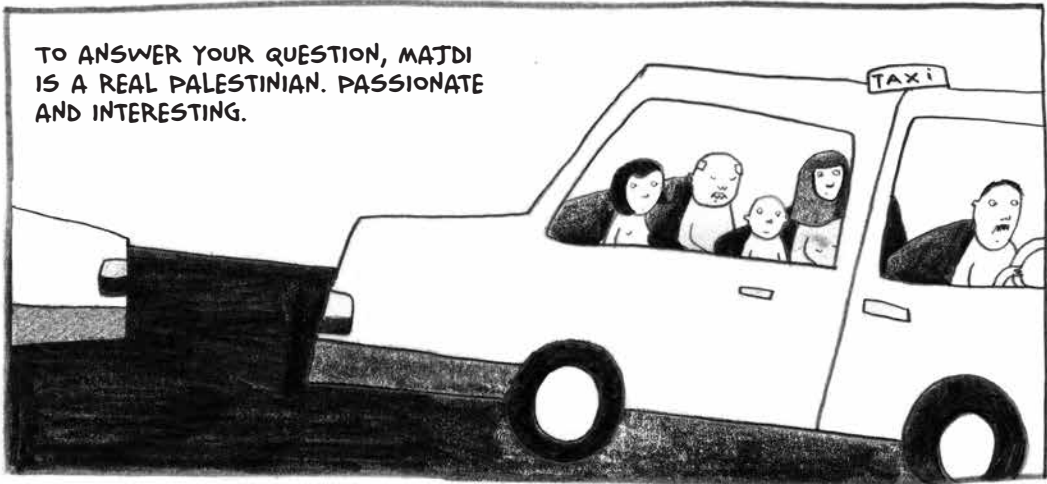


THERE'S AN ARAB TRADITION THAT SAYS THAT
IN EVERY POMEGRANATE, THERE'S ONE SEED
THAT COMES FROM HEAVEN.



OUT OF FEAR OF MISSING
THAT ONE, I EAT ALL OF THEM, AND THEN I SCOOP UP
THE JUICE WITH MY FINGERS. IT'S DELICIOUS AND STICKY.

TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, MATJDI
IS A REAL PALESTINIAN. PASSIONATE
AND INTERESTING.



IT FEELS NICE TO
HAVE SOMEONE TO SHARE HOW I'M
FEELING WITH, EVEN IF WE'RE
INTERRUPTED FREQUENTLY...



EARLIER TONIGHT,
I WANTED TO JUST
TALK WITH HIM ALONE.

AND THEN HIS BROTHER IMMEDIATELY
STEPPED INTO HIS OFFICE.



I ENDED UP HELPING HIS MOM, HIS SISTER, HIS NIECES, AND
HIS NEIGHBORS COOK A BIG MANSAF (OR, RATHER, PRETENDING TO HELP).



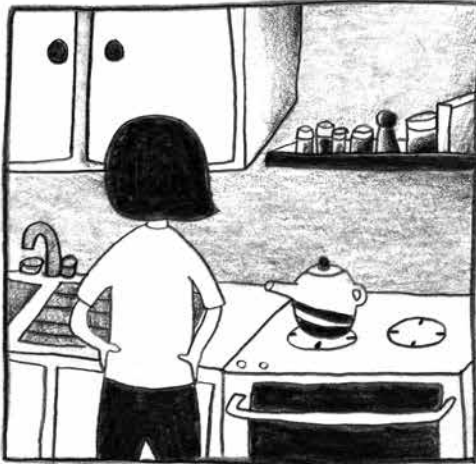
THEN WE ALL WENT TO THE MARRIAGE, A WHOLE PROCESSION OF WOMEN IN FRONT; MEN IN THE BACK.



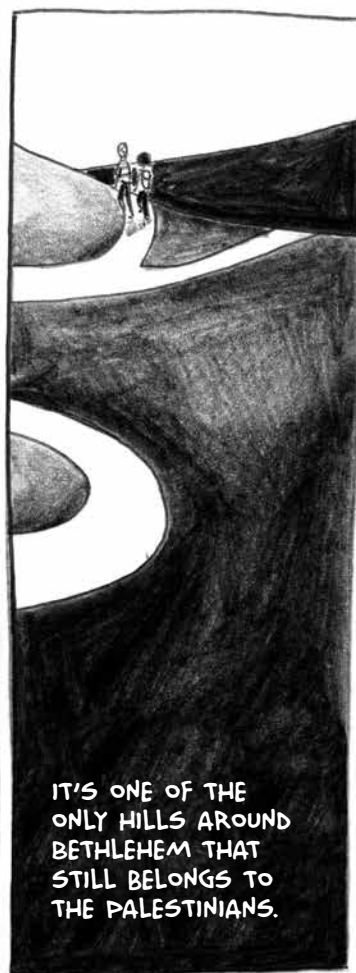
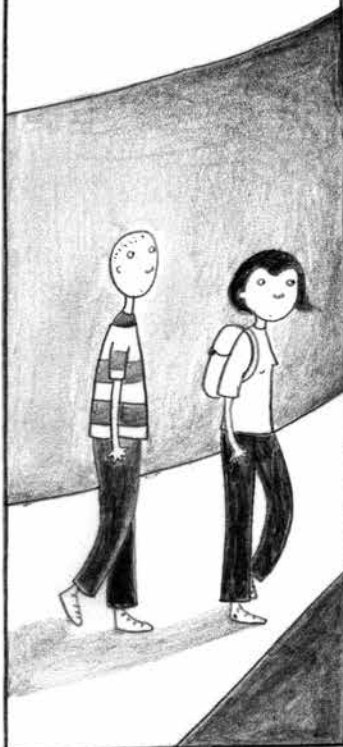
I FOLLOWED ALL THE WOMEN INTO THE WEDDING HALL WITH THE MARRIED COUPLE AND DANCED...



...WHILE THE MEN STAYED OUTSIDE.



YESTERDAY, I WENT
TO OUSH GRAB, A HILL
WHERE THE ISRAELIS
WANT TO BUILD A
TOWN.



IT'S ONE OF THE
ONLY HILLS AROUND
BETHLEHEM THAT
STILL BELONGS TO
THE PALESTINIANS.

OTHERWISE, EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, YOU CAN SEE THE
SETTLEMENTS BUILT ON TOP OF THE HILLS.



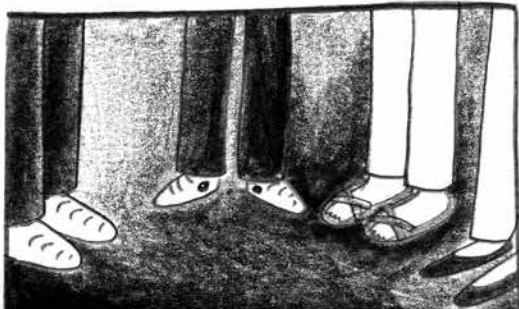
IT'S REALLY SOMETHING.
WHEN YOU TRAVEL THE WEST BANK,
IT'S WORSE THAN SWISS CHEESE.

DOUGH GRAB IS NOW THE
SETTLERS' NEW AMBITION.



FROM TIME TO TIME, THEY
SHOW UP WITH THESE WEIRD
HORNS THAT THEY BLOW.

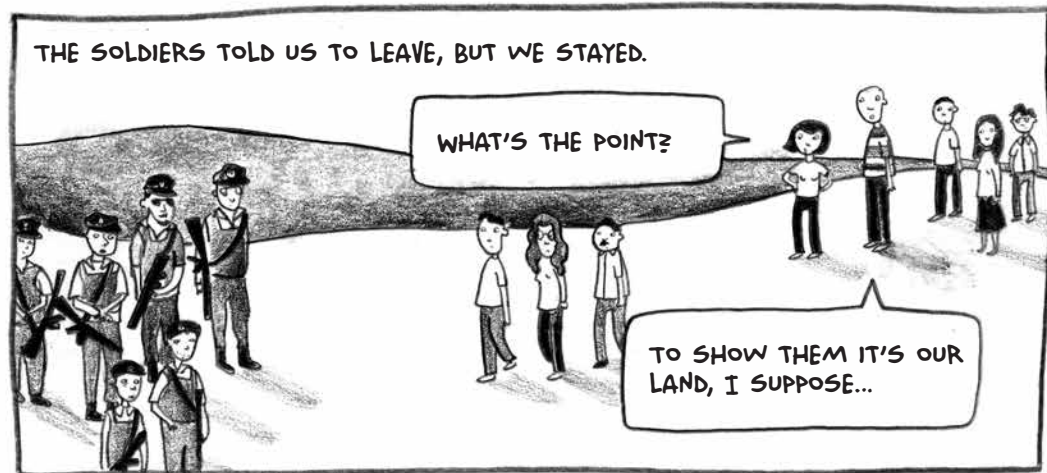
SO, THE PALESTINIANS GO TOO,
WITH FOREIGNERS AS WITNESSES.

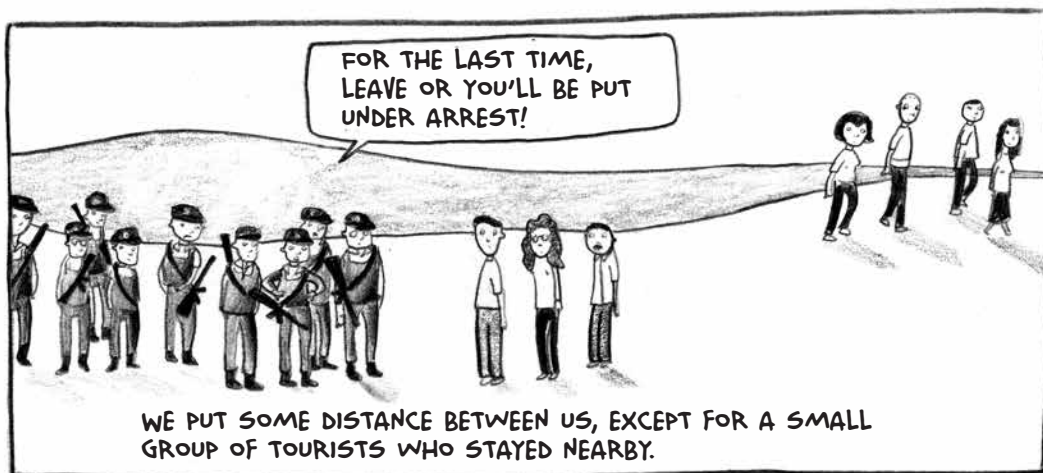
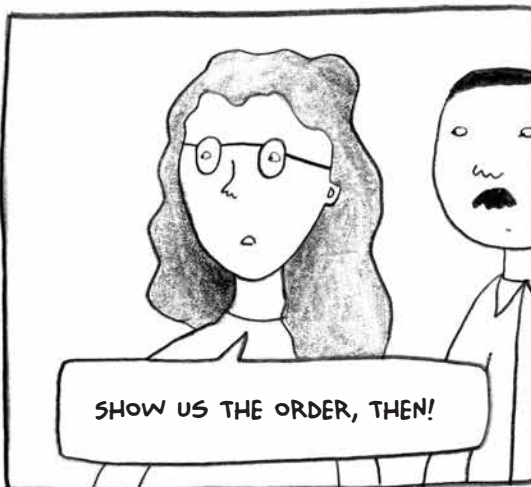


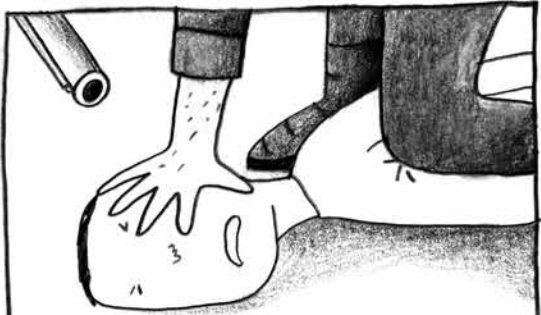
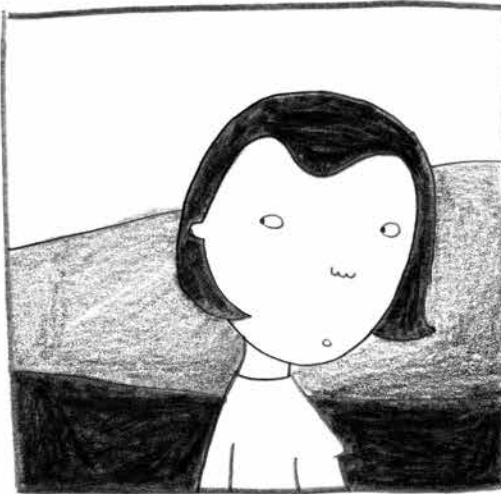
IT'S A BATTLE TO SEE WHO CAN SHOW
THAT THE LAND BELONGS TO THEM.

A BIT OF AN UNFAIR BATTLE, ANYWAYS, BECAUSE SOME OF THEM HAVE WEAPONS
AND ARE PROTECTED BY THE ISRAELI ARMY.



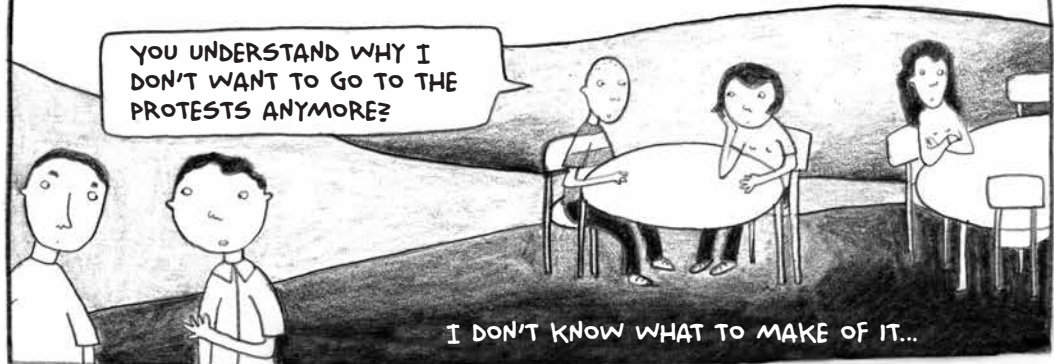






THE SOLDIERS PUSHED THEM ON THE GROUND AND ARRESTED THEM. IT WAS VIOLENT.

WE WENT TO THE BAR, DOWN THE HILL, STUNNED BY THE VIOLENCE AND THE ABSURDITY OF THE HILL.



YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE PROTESTS ANYMORE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF IT...



AFTER, BASSAM SUGGESTED THAT WE GO TO A MEETING BETWEEN YOUNG ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS NEAR BETHLEHEM.

THEY MEET EVERY MONTH TO TALK CALMLY ABOUT THE SITUATION.
IT WAS SO DIFFERENT FROM THE MORNING.



I'M TIRED AND JUST QUIETLY
FOLLOWING THE CONVERSATION.



THEY TALK ABOUT THE NAKBA,
STEREOTYPES, AND RELIGION.



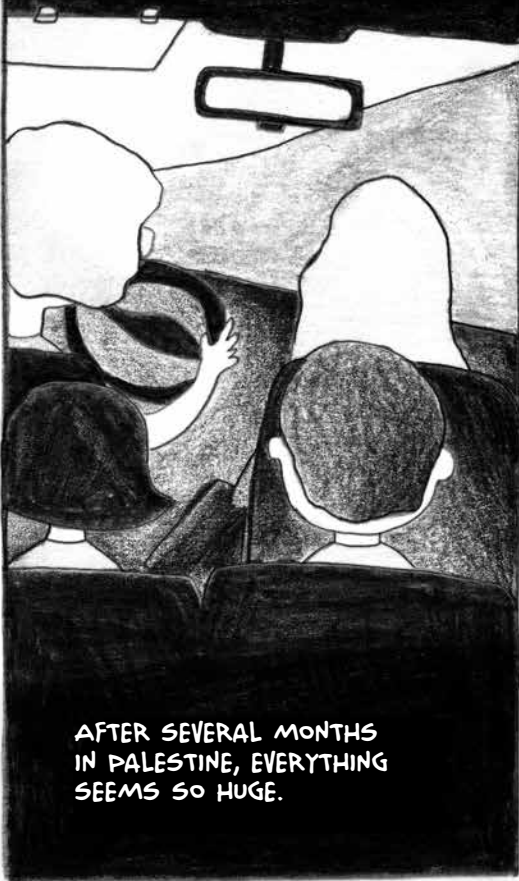
WE SHARE HUMMUS,
BREAD, AND FRUITS.



AND THEN EVERYONE
GOES HOME, ON ONE SIDE OF
THE WALL OR THE OTHER.

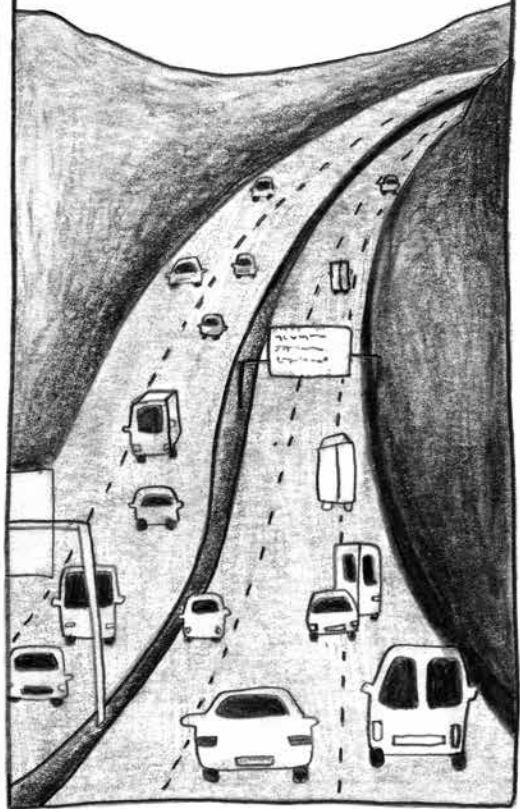


ME? I GO TO TEL AVIV WITH
A FEW ISRAELI FRIENDS.



AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS
IN PALESTINE, EVERYTHING
SEEMS SO HUGE.

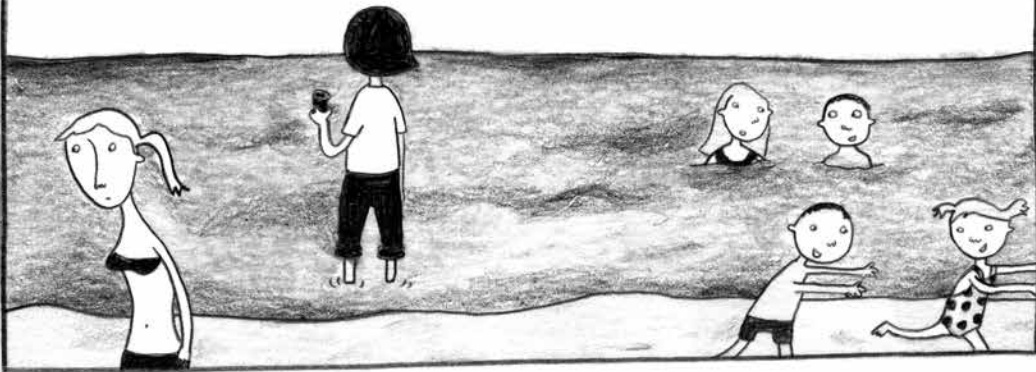
WE DRIVE ON STRAIGHT ROADS.
THERE ARE NO CHECKPOINTS
OR WALLS TO STOP US.



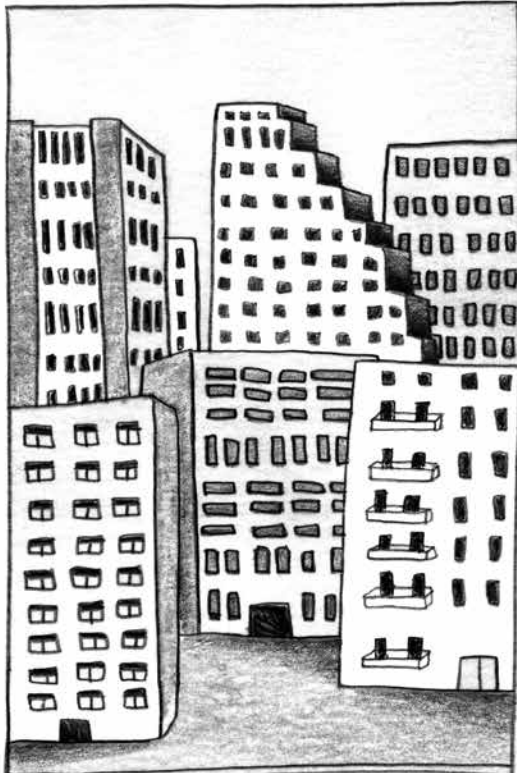
AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER AND I'M ON A BEACH WITH A
COLD BEER AND SOME VERY NICE PEOPLE.



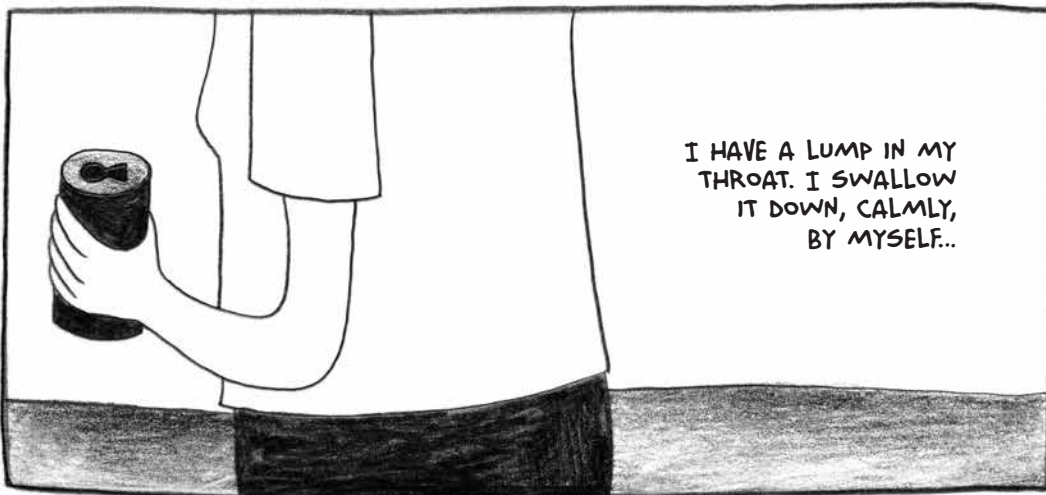
EVERYTHING SEEMS PERFECT. BUT WHEN I PUT MY FEET IN THE WATER
AND I LOOK AT THE HORIZON WHILE DRINKING MY BEER...



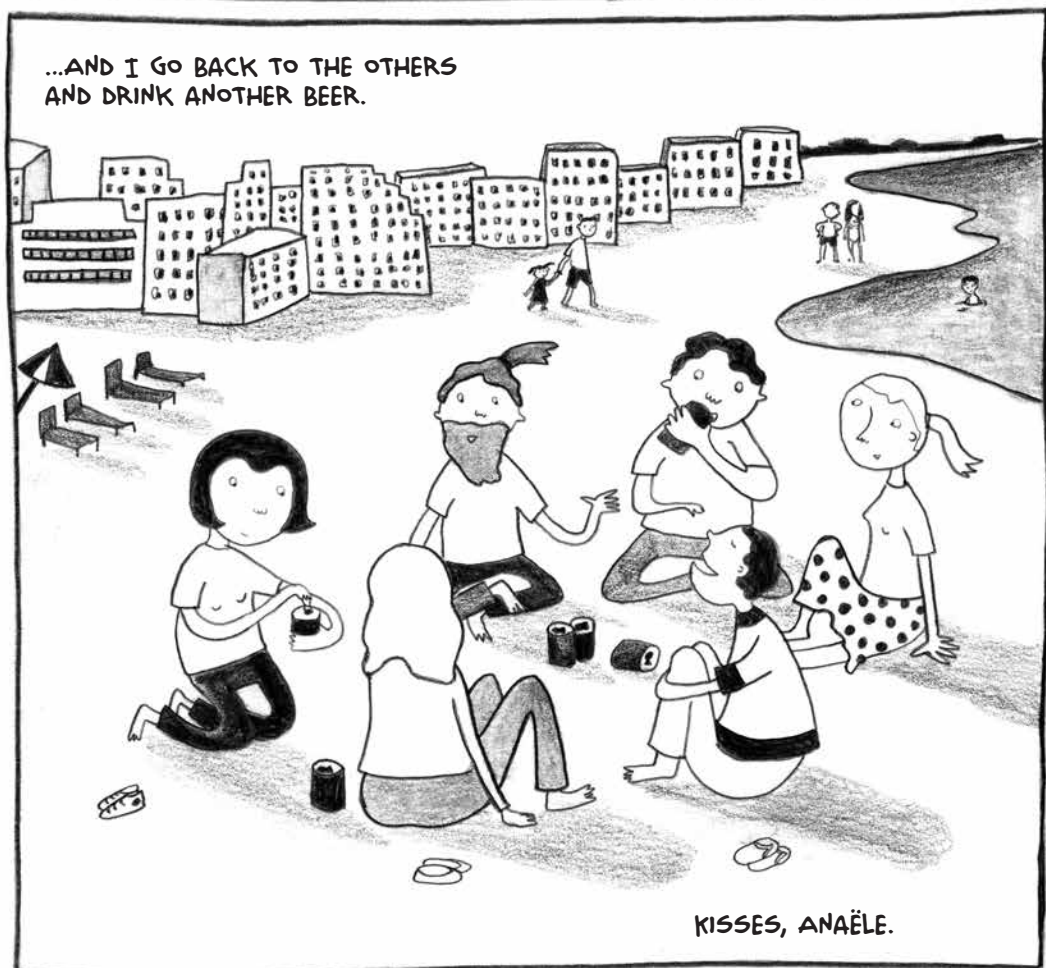
...AND THEN ALL THE BUILDINGS
OF TEL AVIV, BEHIND ME...



...I THINK ABOUT PALESTINE,
AND MY FRIENDS WHO CAN'T
VISIT THE SEA.



I HAVE A LUMP IN MY
THROAT. I SWALLOW
IT DOWN, CALMLY,
BY MYSELF...



...AND I GO BACK TO THE OTHERS
AND DRINK ANOTHER BEER.

KISSES, ANAËLE.

LE VERCORS

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Hey,

I'm using my vacation to get out of town for a little bit. We're in Vercors, and we're taking long hikes through the mountains. Sauthier got huge blisters. I hope it won't turn him off from hiking.

Say, do you ever think about anything else besides politics? And your stories about battles against the settlers, isn't it dangerous? You're scaring me a little...

I'm thinking of you.
Delphine



Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethlehem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, AUGUST 31

HEY, DELPHINE,
I'M WRITING TO YOU WITH
MY STOMACH FULL AFTER
EATING A HUGE MEAL FOR
RAMADAN WITH MAJDI'S
FAMILY.



RAMADAN IS REALLY WEIRD.
PEOPLE ARE SO RESERVED
DURING THE DAY.



WHEN I TALK ABOUT PROJECTS
AT WORK, ELIAS IS EVASIVE.



IN NABLUS, IT'S THE SAME. THE THREE GUYS WHO ARE USUALLY SO EXCITED ARE PRACTICALLY APATHETIC.

SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK, AMTAD?

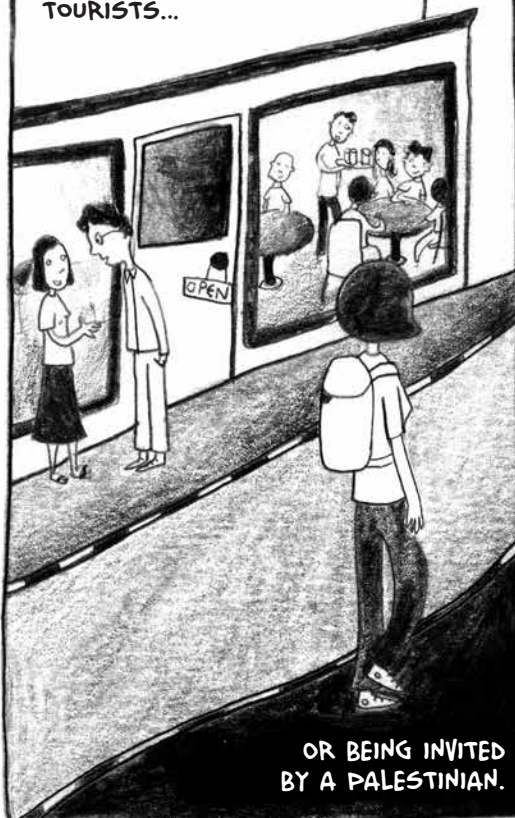
UH, WHAT DID YOU SAY?

I WAS SO EXCITED TO EXPERIENCE RAMADAN IN PALESTINE. AND NOW, I JUST WANT FOR THINGS TO GET BACK TO NORMAL.

YOU'D THINK THAT AT NIGHT, THE TOWN WOULD LIVEN UP.

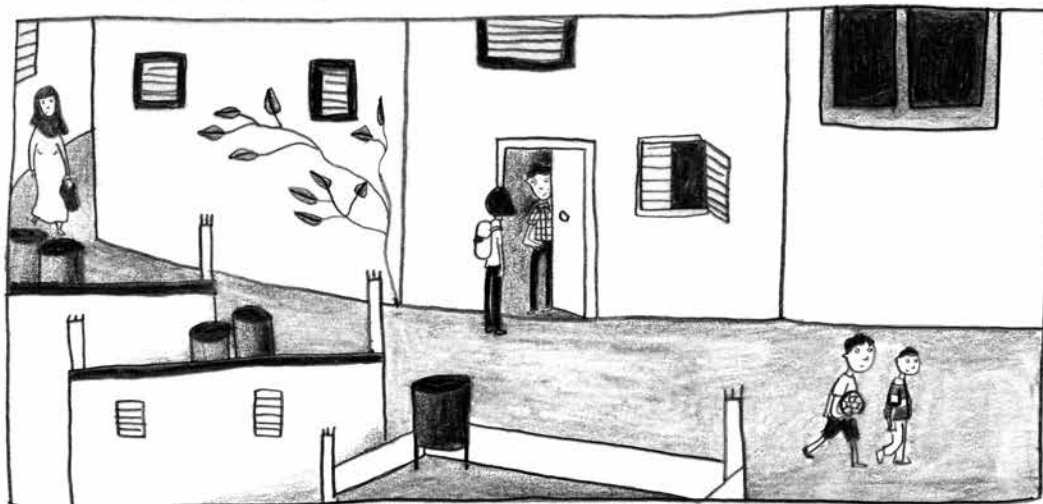
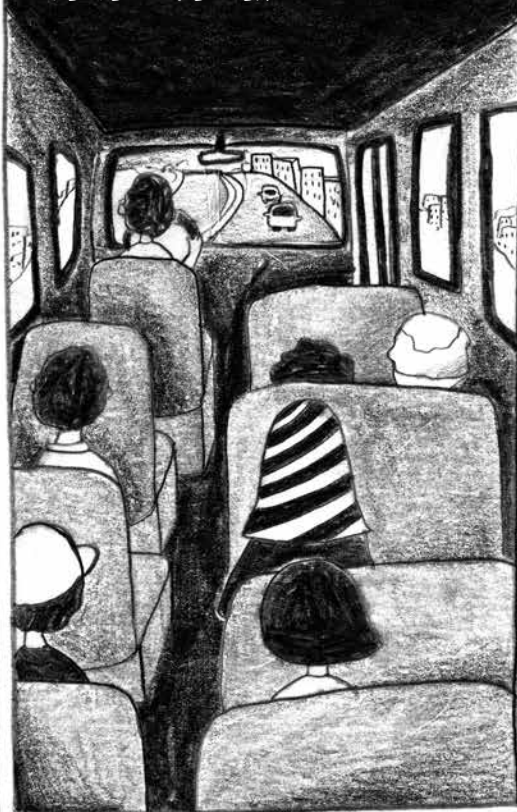
BUT YOU'D BE WRONG. EVERYBODY JUST STAYS IN WITH THEIR FAMILIES.

A TOURIST HAS TO CHOOSE
BETWEEN GOING INTO A
BAR FULL OF OTHER
TOURISTS...

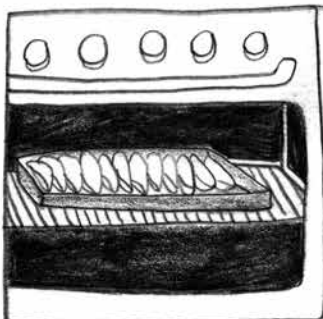
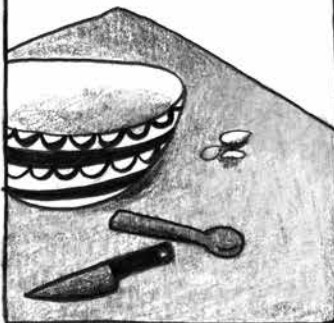


OR BEING INVITED
BY A PALESTINIAN.

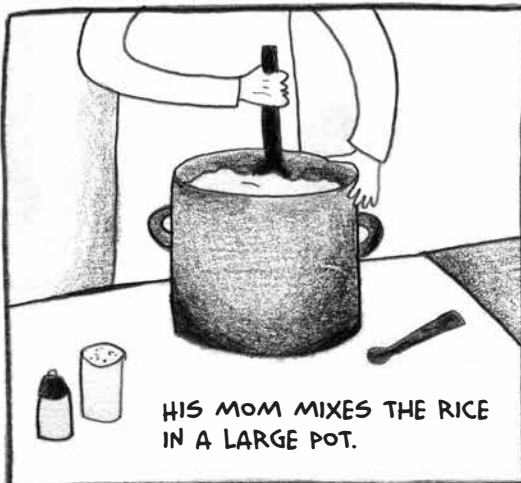
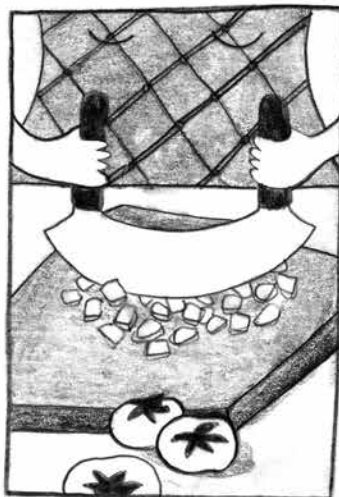
BUT IN THAT CASE, WE HAVE
TO FAST ALL DAY IN ORDER TO
RESPECT THE MEAL.



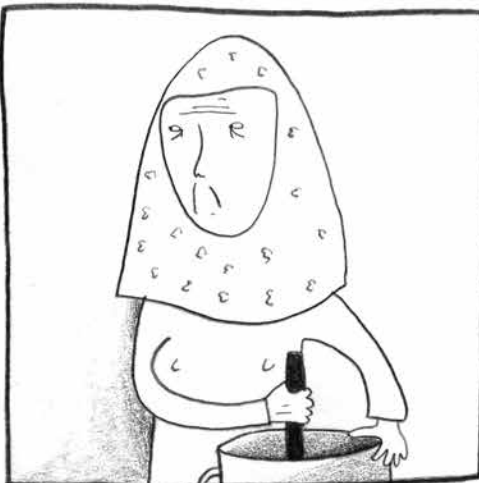
FOR TONIGHT, MATDI
PREPARED CHICKEN AND
ALMOND CREPES.



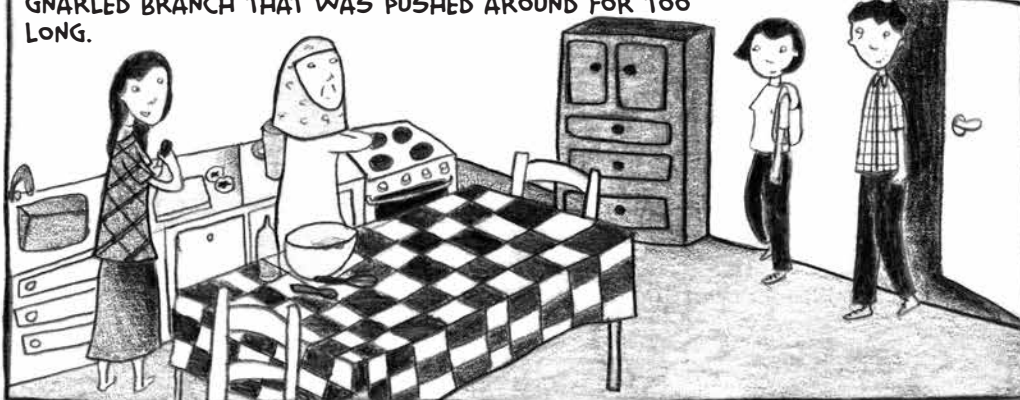
THEY REST IN THE
OVEN WHILE HIS SISTER
FINISHES THE SALAD.



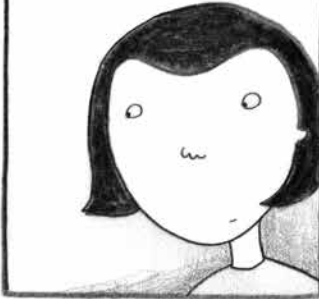
HIS MOM MIXES THE RICE
IN A LARGE POT.



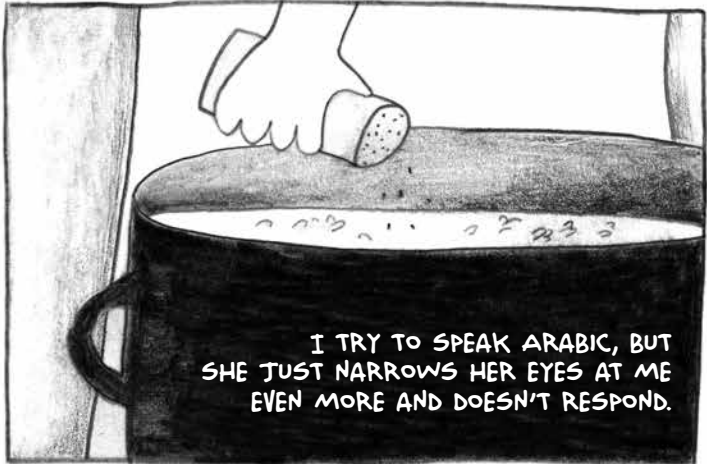
SHE DEFINITELY LEAVES AN IMPRESSION. SHE'S LIKE A
GNARLED BRANCH THAT WAS PUSHED AROUND FOR TOO
LONG.



SHE LOOKS AT ME
WITH HER SMALL,
PIERCING EYES. SHE'S
QUIET, WITHOUT A
SMILE ON HER FACE.

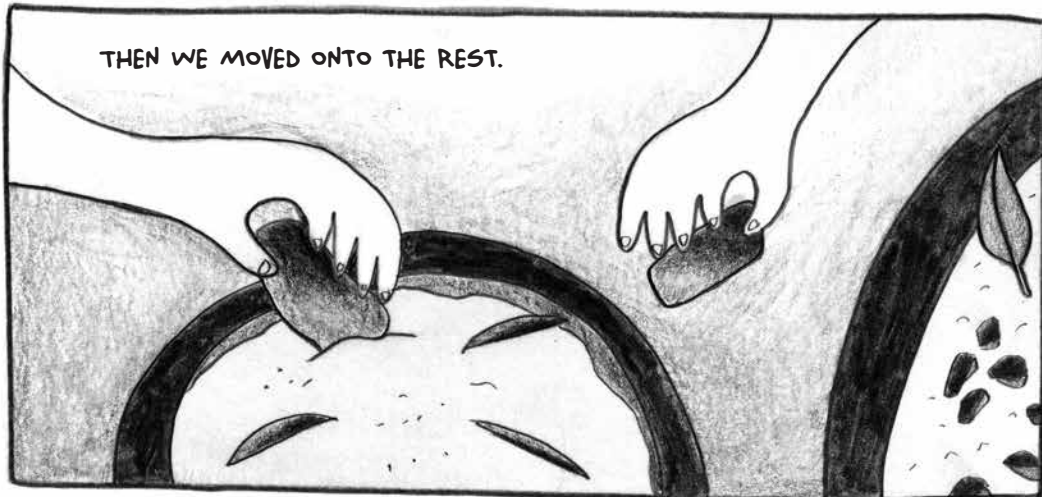


I TRY TO SPEAK ARABIC, BUT
SHE JUST NARROWS HER EYES AT ME
EVEN MORE AND DOESN'T RESPOND.



WE SAT TOGETHER AROUND A LARGE RUG ON THE GROUND.
AN IMAM ON THE TELEVISION TOLD US WE COULD BREAK THE
FAST, AND SO WE STARTED BY HAVING DATES AND YOGURT.

THEN WE MOVED ONTO THE REST.



MATDI'S MOTHER KEPT PASSING ME ONE DISH AFTER ANOTHER, AND PUSHING PIECES OF MEAT TOWARD ME.

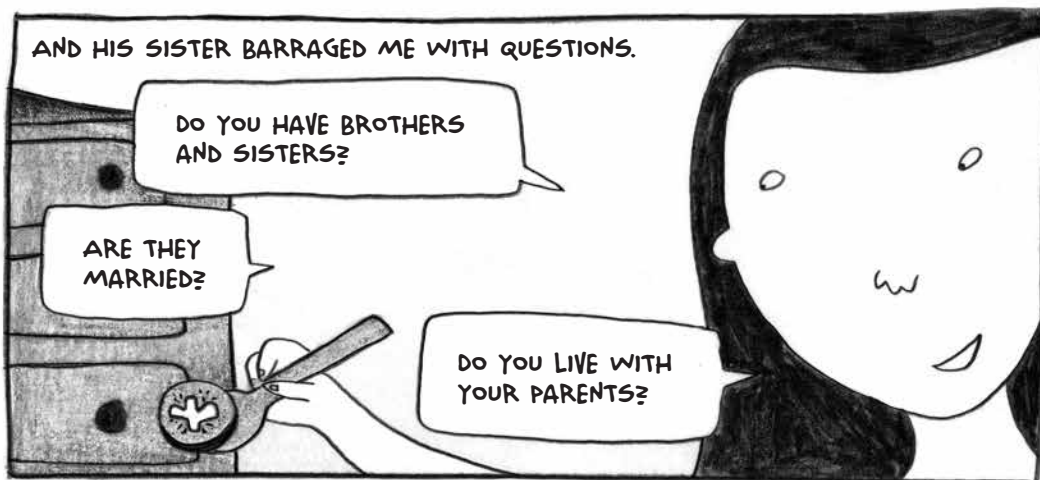


AND HIS SISTER BARRAGED ME WITH QUESTIONS.

DO YOU HAVE BROTHERS
AND SISTERS?

ARE THEY
MARRIED?

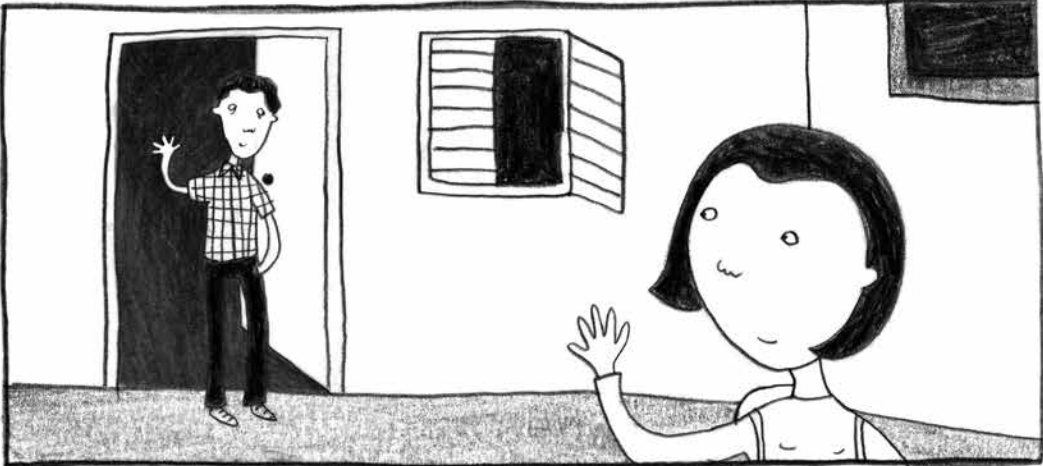
DO YOU LIVE WITH
YOUR PARENTS?



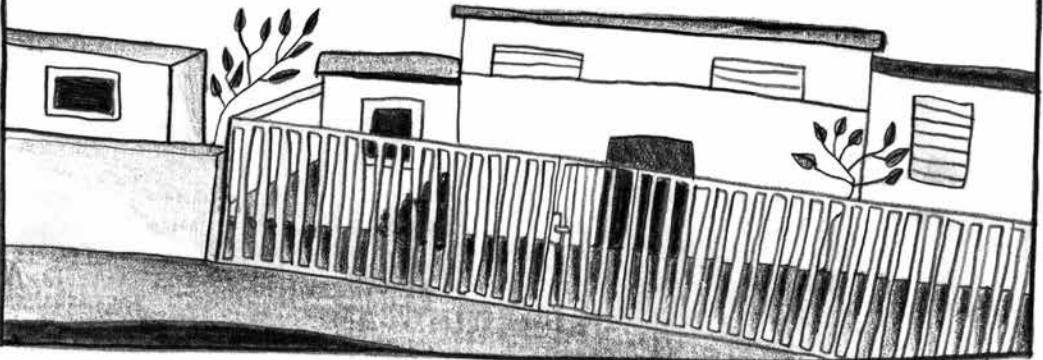
THEN, WE HAD DESSERT
WITH COFFEE.



AND, FINALLY,
HOOKAH.



AFTER ALL THAT, I WENT HOME, PUFFED UP LIKE THE MICHELIN MAN.
EVEN WRITING TAKES A LOT OF EFFORT RIGHT NOW.



DURING RAMADAN, YOU DON'T
DRINK EITHER...ALL DAY.



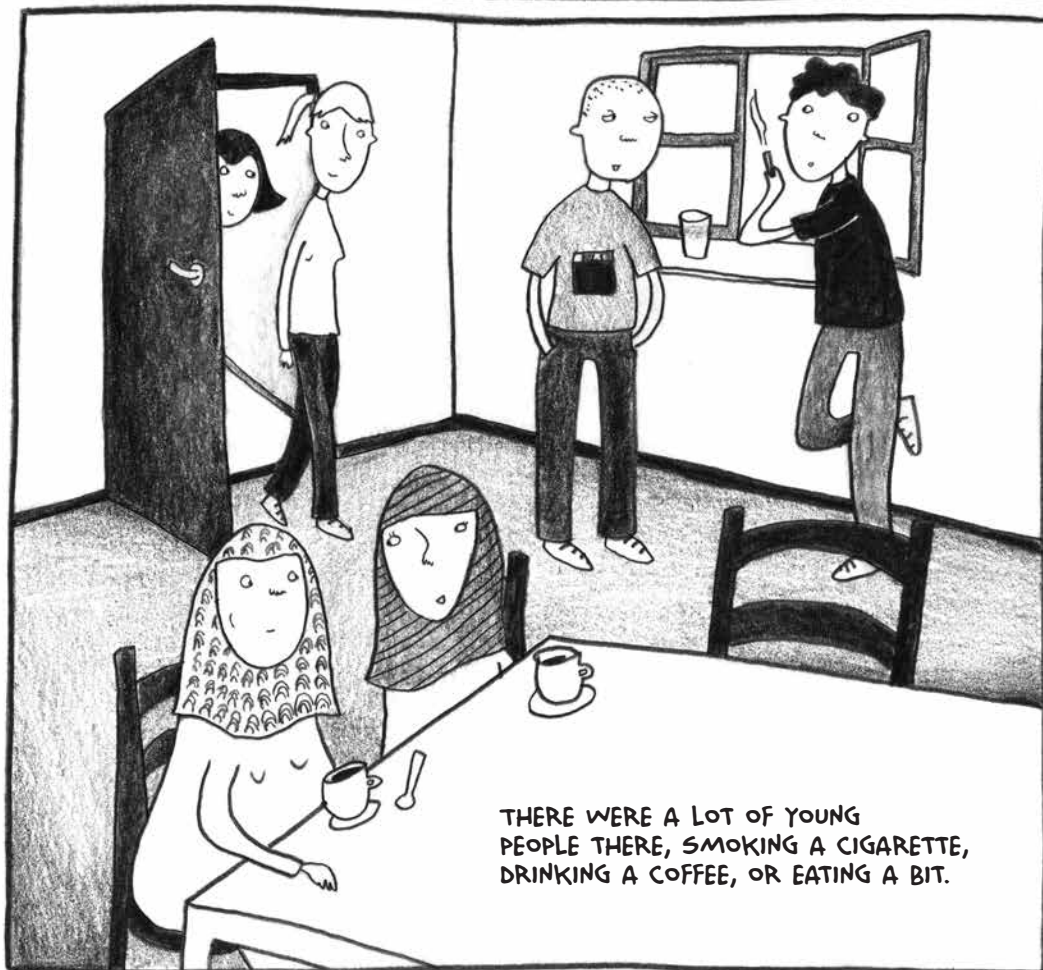
WHEN I CAN'T HANDLE IT ANYMORE,
I HIDE IN THE BATHROOM.



I'M FAR FROM THE
ONLY ONE...

PLENTY OF PALESTINIANS
DON'T FOLLOW THE FULL FAST.

IN NABLUS, NINA AND I WENT
TO THE APARTMENT ABOVE
THE ORGANIZATION'S OFFICES
TO DRINK AND EAT A SNACK.

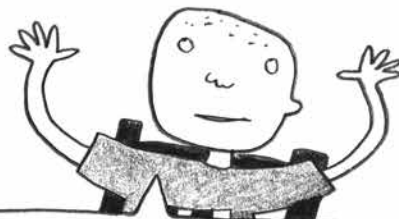


THERE WERE A LOT OF YOUNG
PEOPLE THERE, SMOKING A CIGARETTE,
DRINKING A COFFEE, OR EATING A BIT.

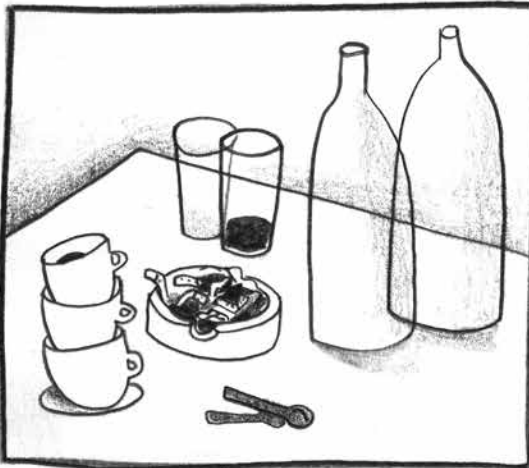
WE STAYED IN THE
APARTMENT FOR HOURS,
TOKING AROUND, WITH THE
SENSE OF EXCITEMENT THAT
COMES WITH BREAKING
THE RULES.



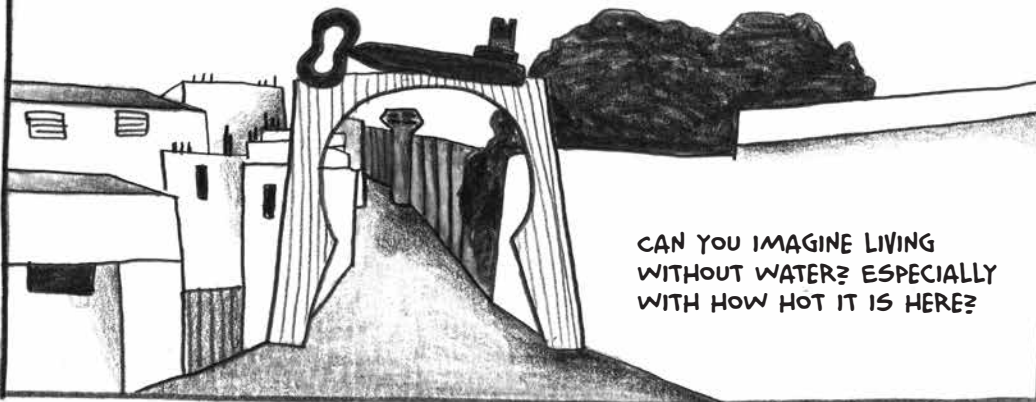
BA'A WAS ALL WORKED UP.



WE'RE ALL GOING TO GO TO HELL,
AND IT'LL BE GREAT. THERE'LL BE
A TON OF FUN PEOPLE AND ALL THE
SEXIEST SINGERS!

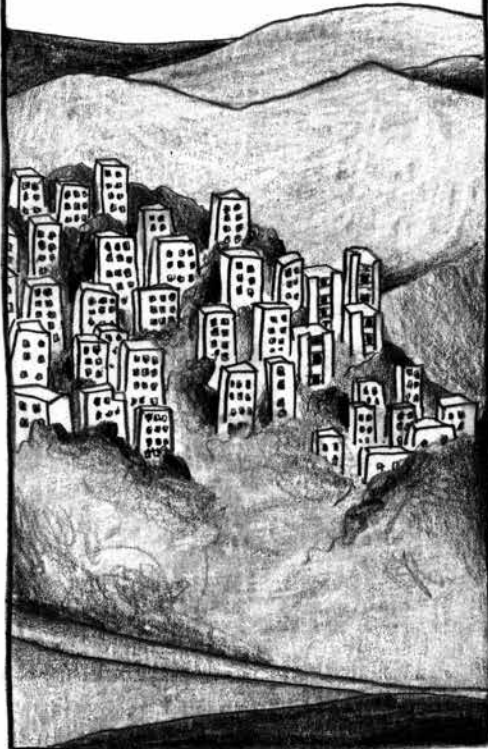


SPEAKING OF DRINKING, IN AIDA CAMP BY BETHLEHEM, THERE HASN'T
BEEN WATER FOR A MONTH.

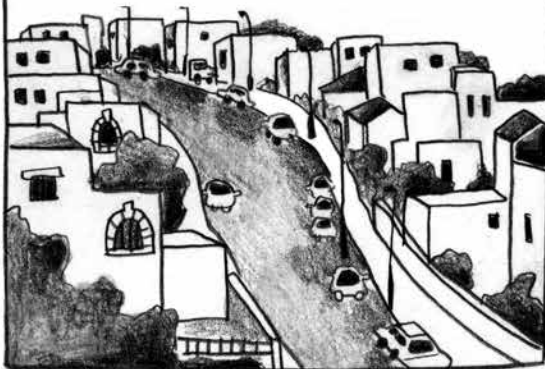


CAN YOU IMAGINE LIVING
WITHOUT WATER? ESPECIALLY
WITH HOW HOT IT IS HERE?

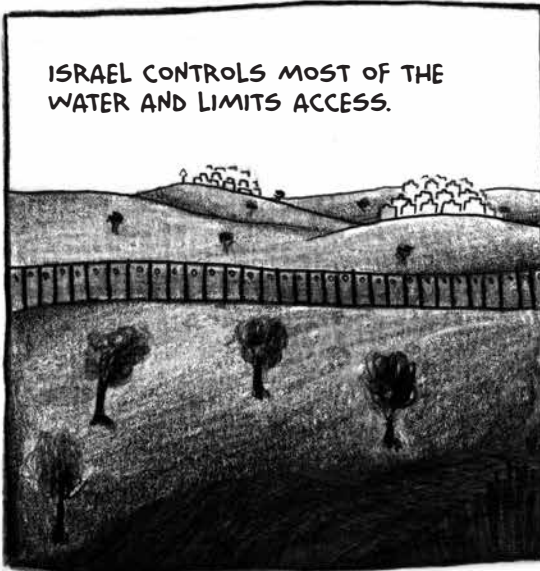
A FEW KILOMETERS AWAY,
WE CAN SEE THE TOWN OF
GILO SETTLEMENT, ALL GREEN
AT THE SUMMIT OF ONE OF
THE DESERT'S HILLS.



IT USES A LOT OF WATER.



ISRAEL CONTROLS MOST OF THE
WATER AND LIMITS ACCESS.



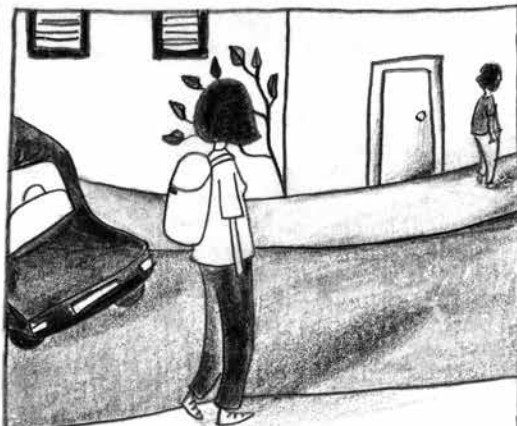
IN AIDA, THERE'S NO MONEY TO
BUY WATER FROM THE ISRAELIS.



AND NOW, THEY'VE BEEN GOING WITHOUT WATER FOR A LONG TIME. THINGS ARE ABOUT TO BOIL OVER...



YESTERDAY, THERE WAS A PRETTY VIOLENT RIOT, AND A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE INJURED.



THEY'RE JUST BEING PUSHED TO THE EDGE.

IT MAKES MATDI ANGRY TO SEE PEOPLE ACT OUT LIKE THAT.



MY ORGANIZATION'S
CALLED KARAMA, WHICH
MEANS DIGNITY...



PRECISELY BECAUSE THAT'S
WHAT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
CAN'T LOSE, NO MATTER WHAT!

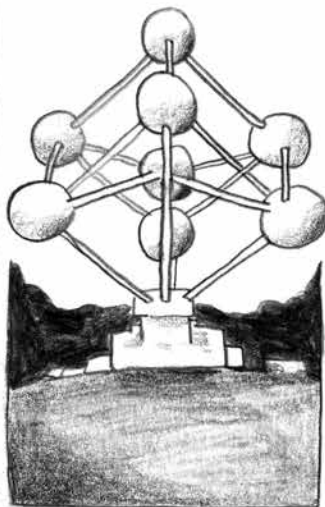


AND NOW WE'RE
FIGHTING OVER
SOME WATER.

I WANTED TO TELL HIM THAT ANYBODY IN THEIR SHOES
WOULD GO CRAZY FROM TIME TO TIME.



LOVE, ANAËLE.



BRUSSELS

Hello,

There's a buzz in the air at work with school starting up again, and we're very busy at the moment.

But now, it's the weekend.

I took the opportunity to go hang out in Brussels and see Antoine, Pierre's baby. It made me feel so old to see my friends start having kids!

Thinking of you,
Delphine



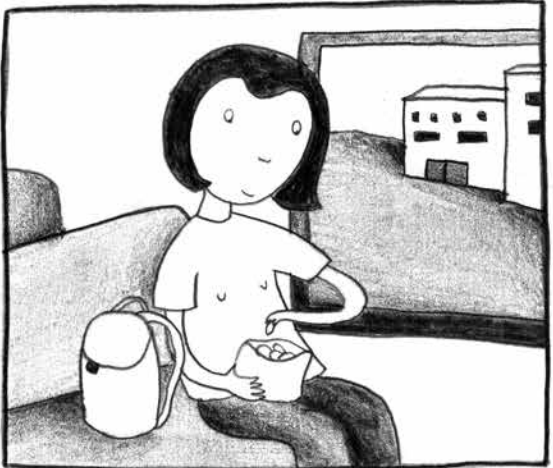
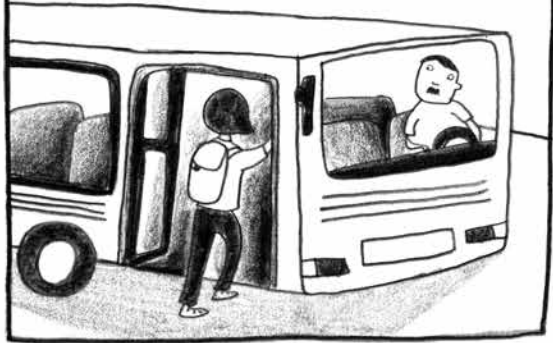
Anaële Hermans
P.O. Box 258
Bethlehem
Palestine

BETHLEHEM, SEPTEMBER 30

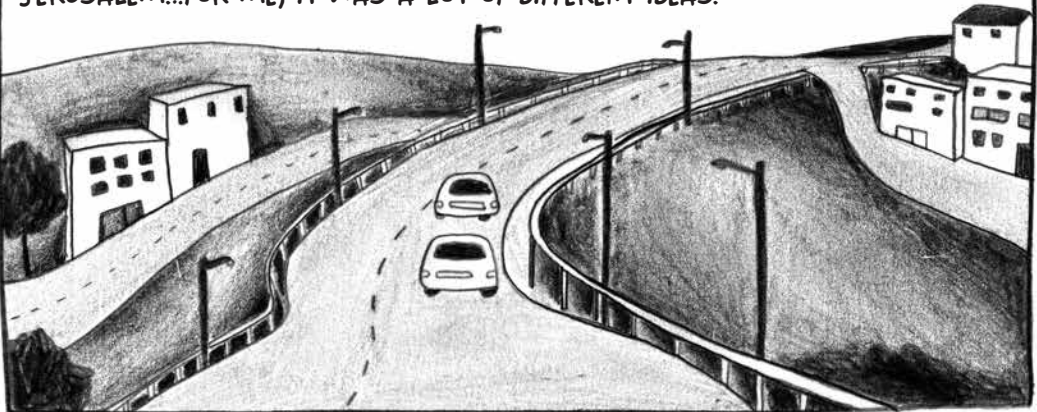
HEY, DELPHINE,
I'M COMING BACK FROM
JERUSALEM, AND I REALIZE
THAT I HAVEN'T WRITTEN
TO YOU ABOUT IT.



I THINK IT'S THE SEVENTH TIME I'VE
BEEN THERE, AND IT STILL SEEMS AS
CRAZY AS EVER THAT I'M HERE.



JERUSALEM...FOR ME, IT WAS A LOT OF DIFFERENT IDEAS.

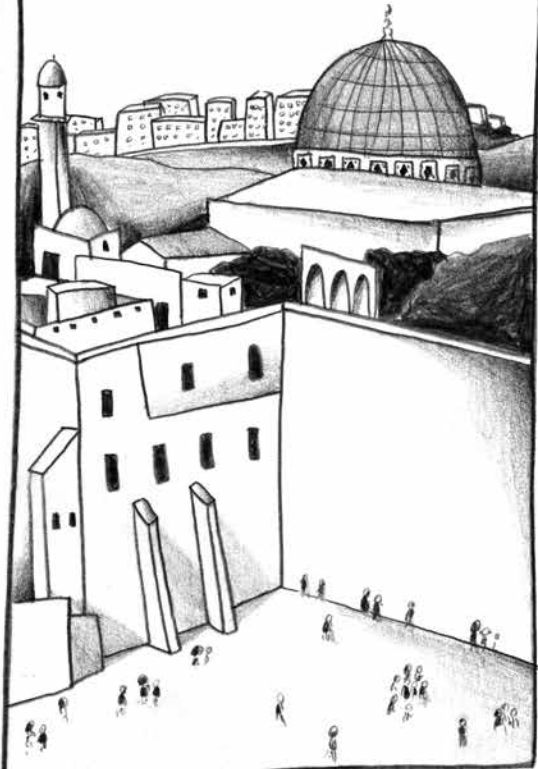


BUT NOTHING WAS QUITE
AS I IMAGINED IT...

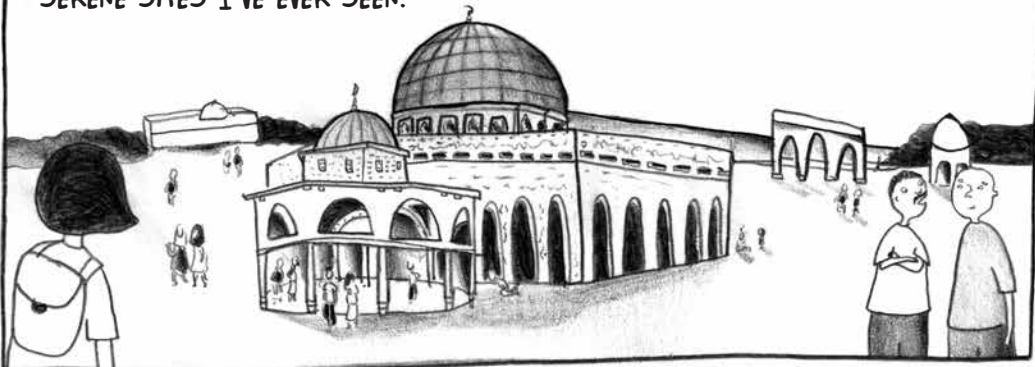


THE MOUNTAIN OF OLIVE TREES
IS A SMALL HILL OF TOMBS,
NOT TREES.

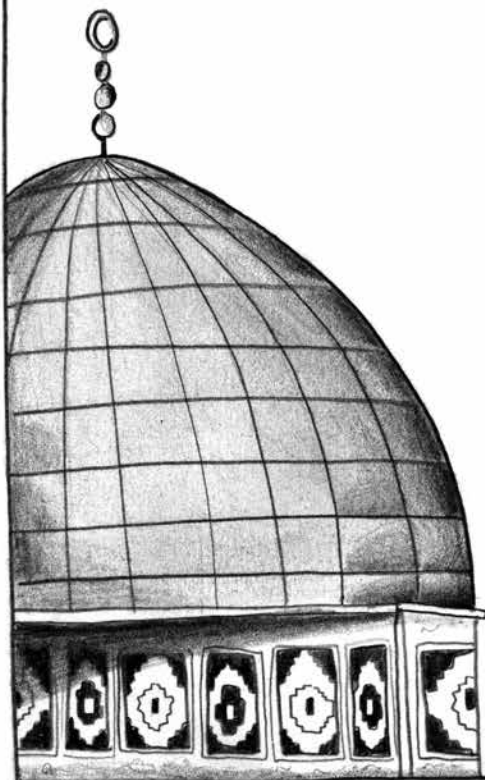
SOLOMON'S TEMPLE IS LIKE A WALL,
AND YOU HAVE TO PASS THROUGH A
HIDDEN, ULTRAMODERN METAL
DETECTOR TO STEP INSIDE.



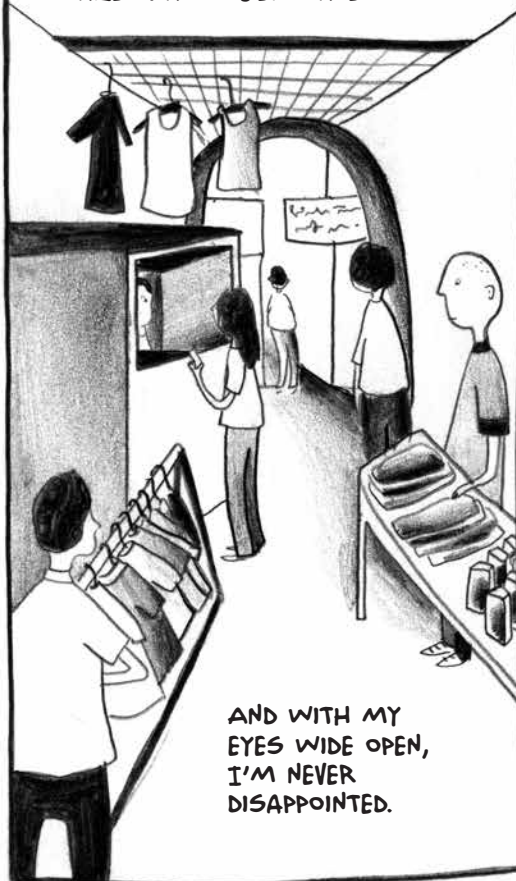
THE TEMPLE MOUNT, THE ONE WHERE ARIEL SHARON WENT WITH HIS
ARMY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SECOND INTIFADA, IS ONE OF THE MOST
SERENE SITES I'VE EVER SEEN.



AS FOR THE DOME OF THE
ROCK, WHERE MUHAMMAD
ASCENDED, YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED
INSIDE IF YOU'RE NOT MUSLIM.



EVERY VISIT, I GET LOST IN THE
MAZE THAT IS JERUSALEM.



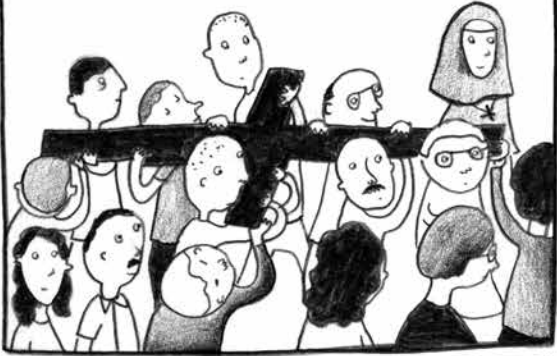
AND WITH MY
EYES WIDE OPEN,
I'M NEVER
DISAPPOINTED.



I PASS PEOPLE WALKING AROUND,
WEARING FUR HATS, EVEN IN THE
MIDDLE OF SUMMER.



OTHERS CARRY AN ENORMOUS WOODEN
CROSS AND SWEAT UNDER THE SUN.

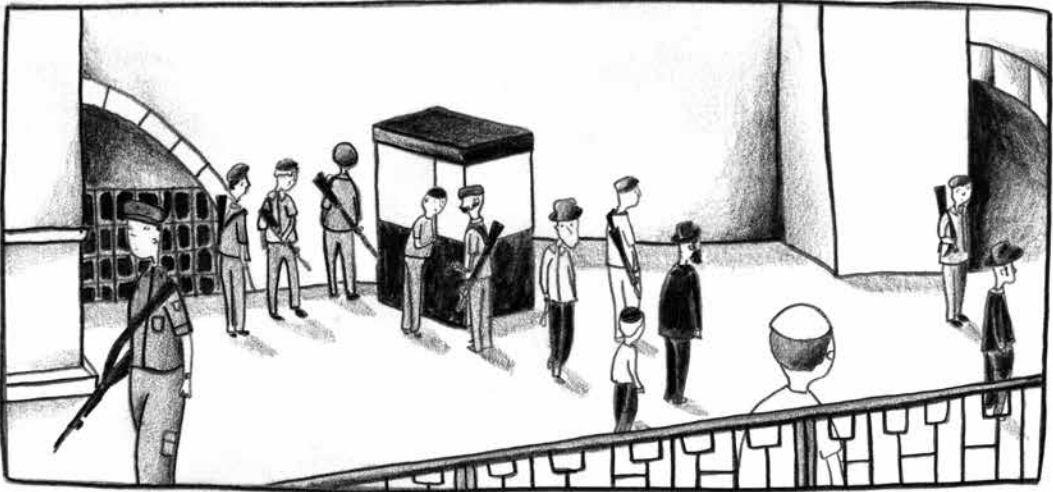


TOURISTS WHO BUY LITTLE KNICK-
KNACKS FOR LOTS OF MONEY.

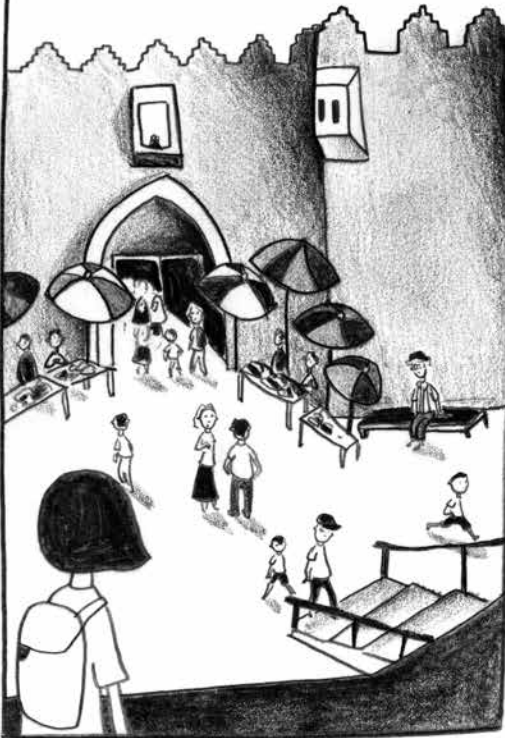


WOMEN, MORE OR LESS
COVERED IN CLOTH.



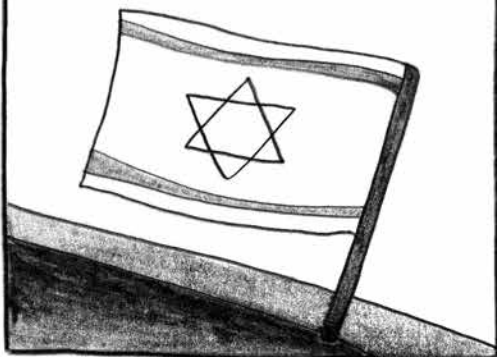


TODAY, I MET UP WITH MY FRIEND IBRAHIM. HE'S AN ARCHITECT AND KNOWS JERUSALEM LIKE THE BACK OF HIS HAND.

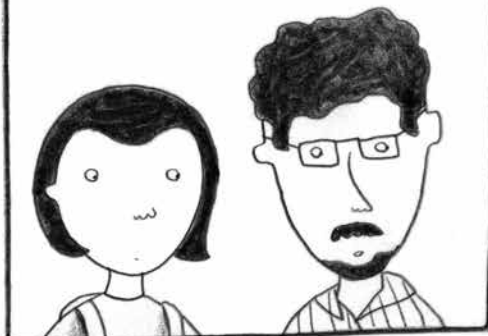


DO YOU SEE THIS HOUSE?
TWO MONTHS AGO, IT
STILL BELONGED TO A
PALESTINIAN FAMILY.

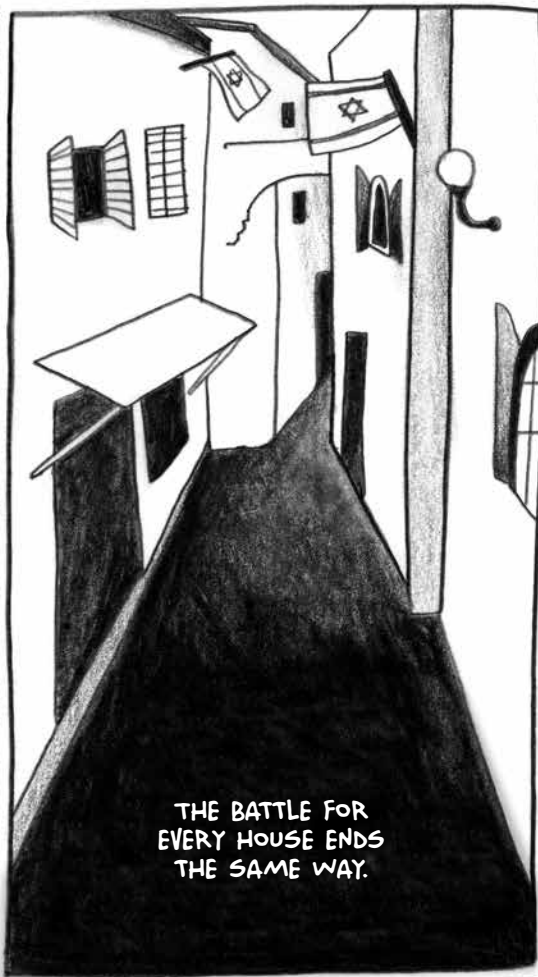
HERE, IT'S NOT STRATEGY
ANYMORE; IT'S A GAME OF RISK.



AND, JUST LIKE BEFORE, I FEEL
LIKE IT'S A GAME THAT'S
ALREADY BEEN LOST.

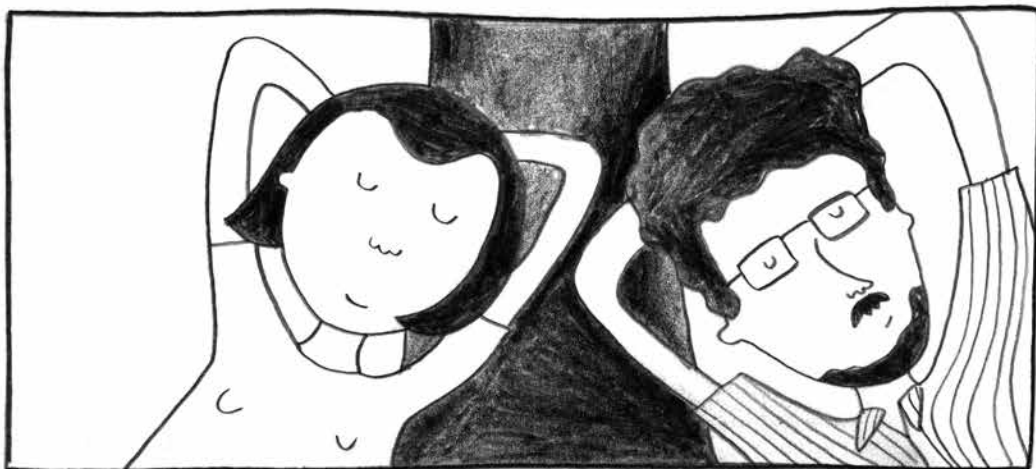
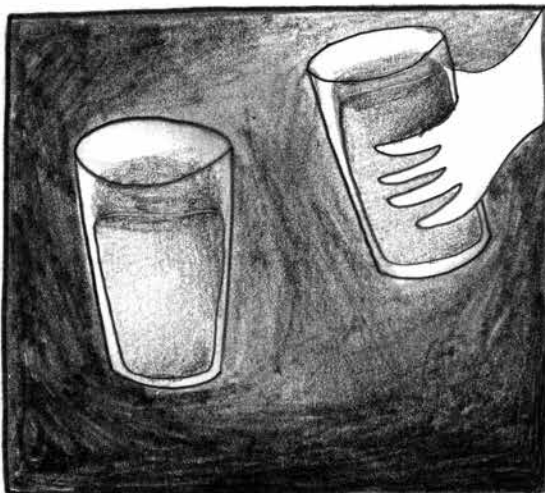


THE BATTLE FOR
EVERY HOUSE ENDS
THE SAME WAY.



IBRAHIM HAS SO MUCH TO SAY; WE COULD
WALK AROUND FOR HOURS.





MATDI CALLED ME THIS MORNING
TO CATCH UP.



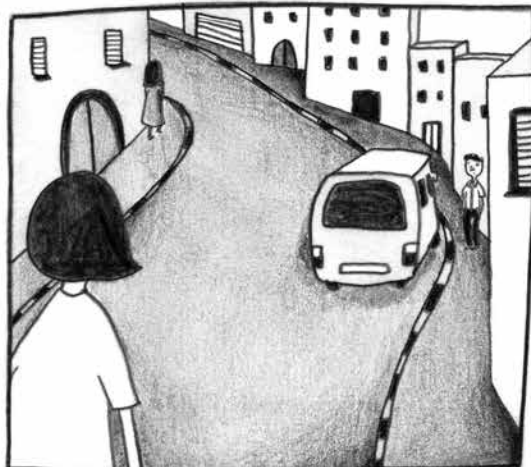
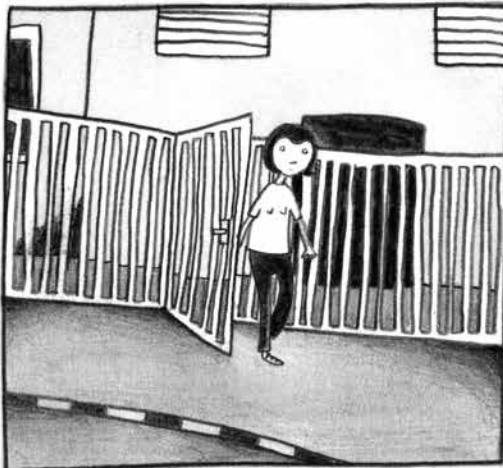
HE WASN'T SAYING ANYTHING.
HE'S DEPRESSED, AGAIN.

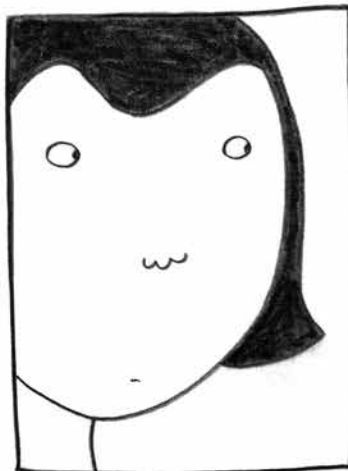
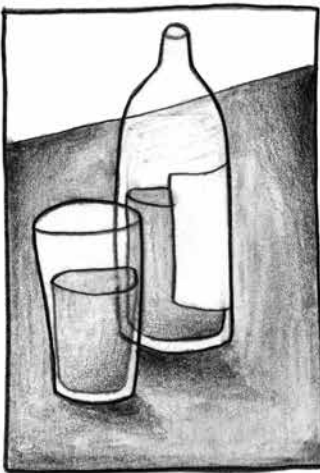
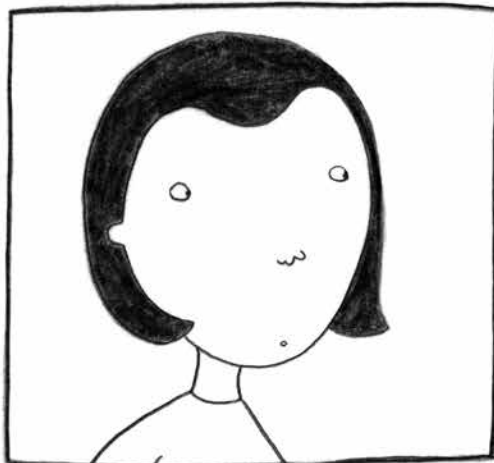
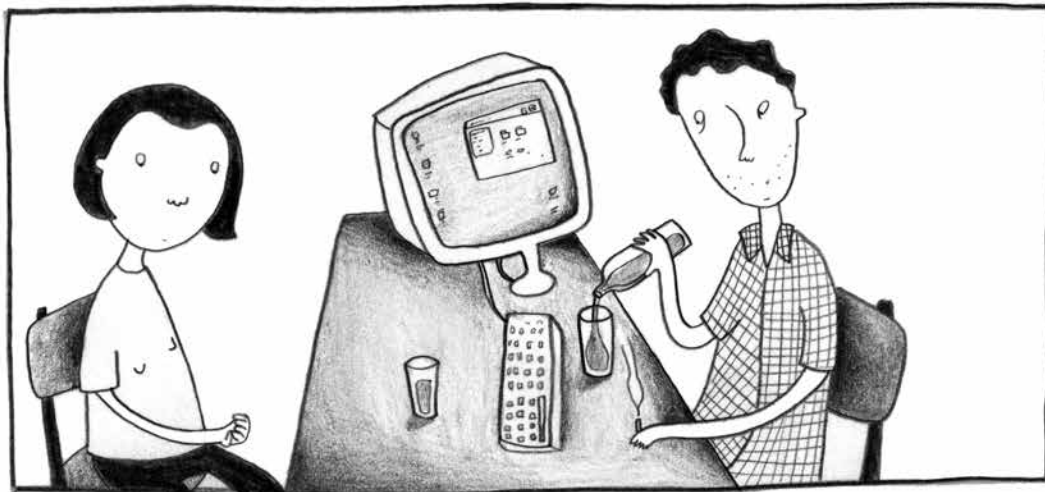


AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY TO HIM WHEN HE'S LIKE THAT.

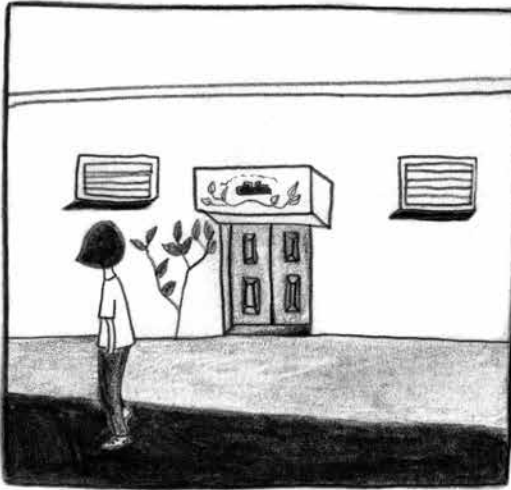


SO, I WENT TO SEE HIM.





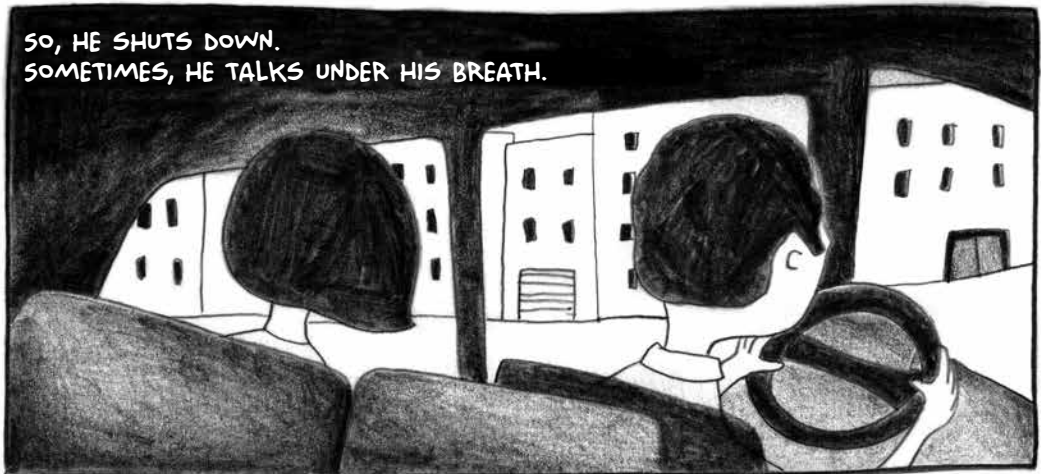




HE MAKES ME MAD WHEN
HE GETS LIKE THAT.

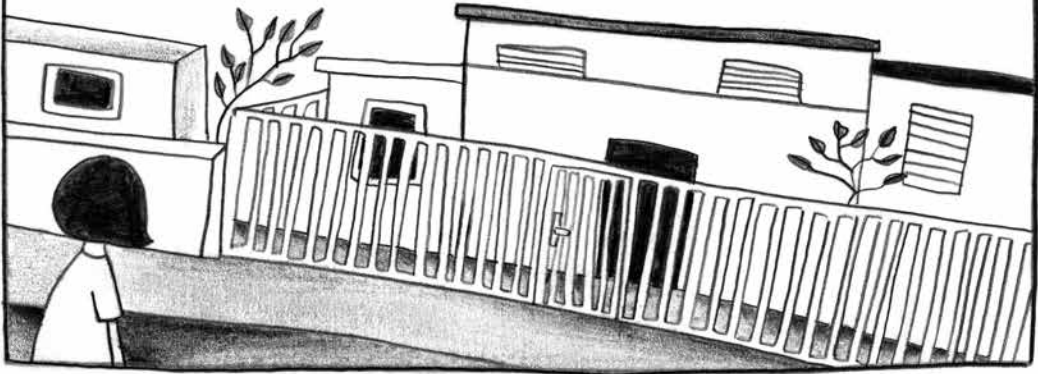


HE DOES HIS BEST TO
BEAR ALL THE SUFFERING HE'S SEEN
IN HIS LIFE, BUT SOMETIMES IT JUST
LEAVES HIM CHOKING FOR AIR.

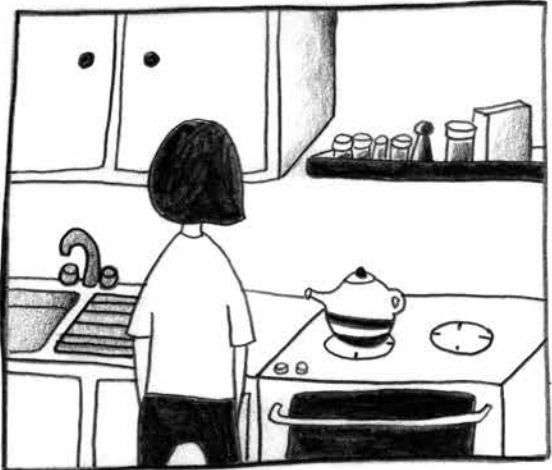
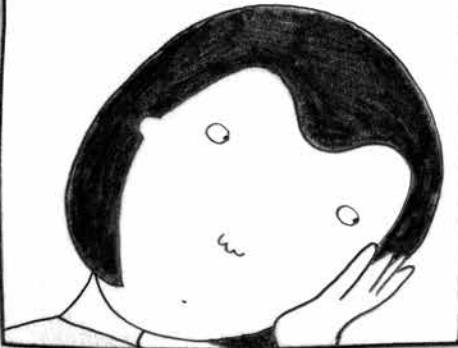


SO, HE SHUTS DOWN.
SOMETIMES, HE TALKS UNDER HIS BREATH.

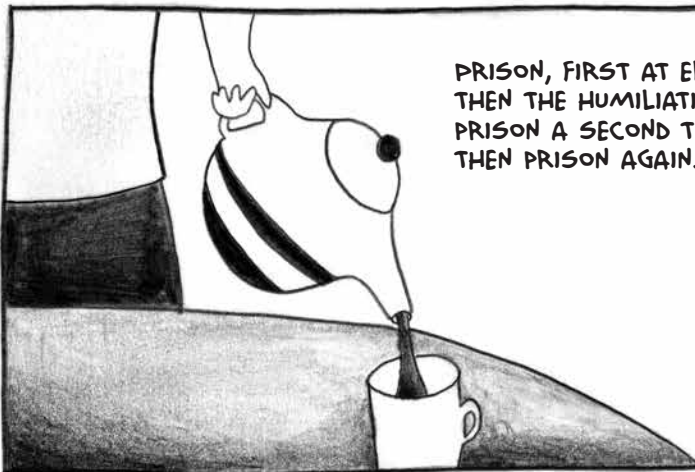
HIS DAD, WHO WENT TO JORDAN FOR BUSINESS, NEVER MADE IT
BACK TO PALESTINE AND DIED WITHOUT SEEING HIS FAMILY AGAIN.



IT'S EASIER TO UNDERSTAND
WHY HIS MOM IS A GNARLED
BRANCH.



PRISON, FIRST AT ELEVEN YEARS OLD,
THEN THE HUMILIATION, THE THREATS,
PRISON A SECOND TIME AT FOURTEEN,
THEN PRISON AGAIN...



THE ISRAELI ARMY'S ENDLESS
INCURSIONS INTO THE CAMP.

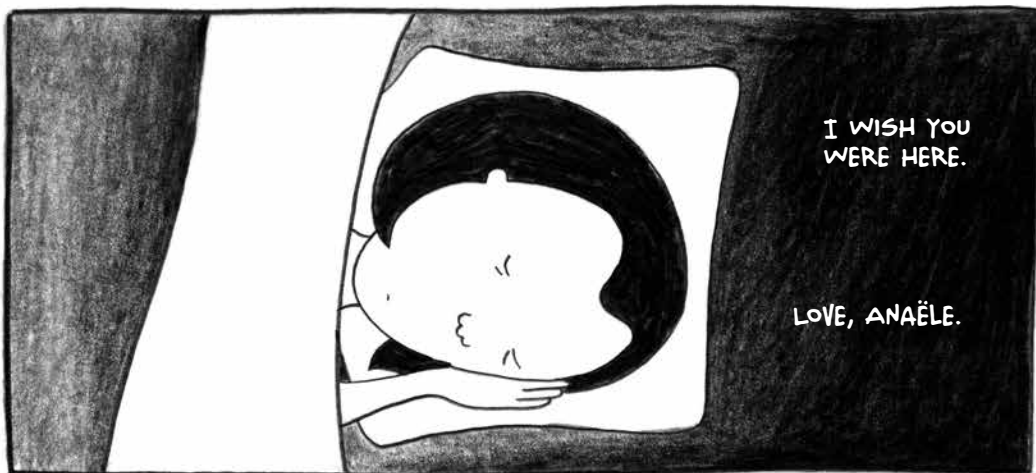


HE SAYS A FEW WORDS ABOUT IT
AND THEN HE GOES QUIET.



I MISS THE OLD MATDI.

WHY DID I EVEN COME TO
THIS DAMN COUNTRY?



I WISH YOU
WERE HERE.

LOVE, ANAËLE.



It smells like Fall.

*We went on a long walk.
I love when the forest is
orange. And Sauthier's feet
got used to walking...*

Happy Birthday!

*(Did you notice the nice
card I found you?)*

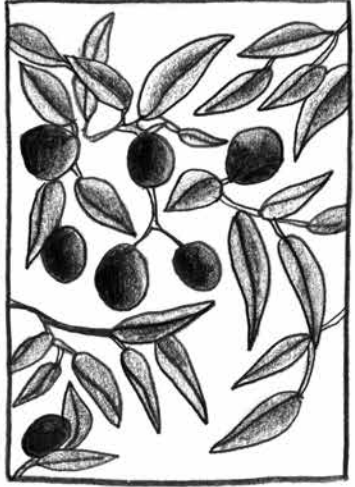
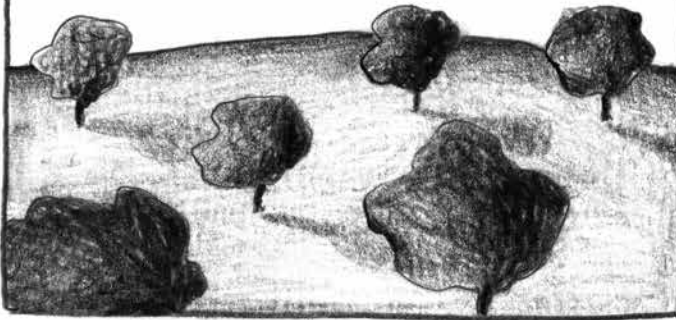
*Love,
Delphine*



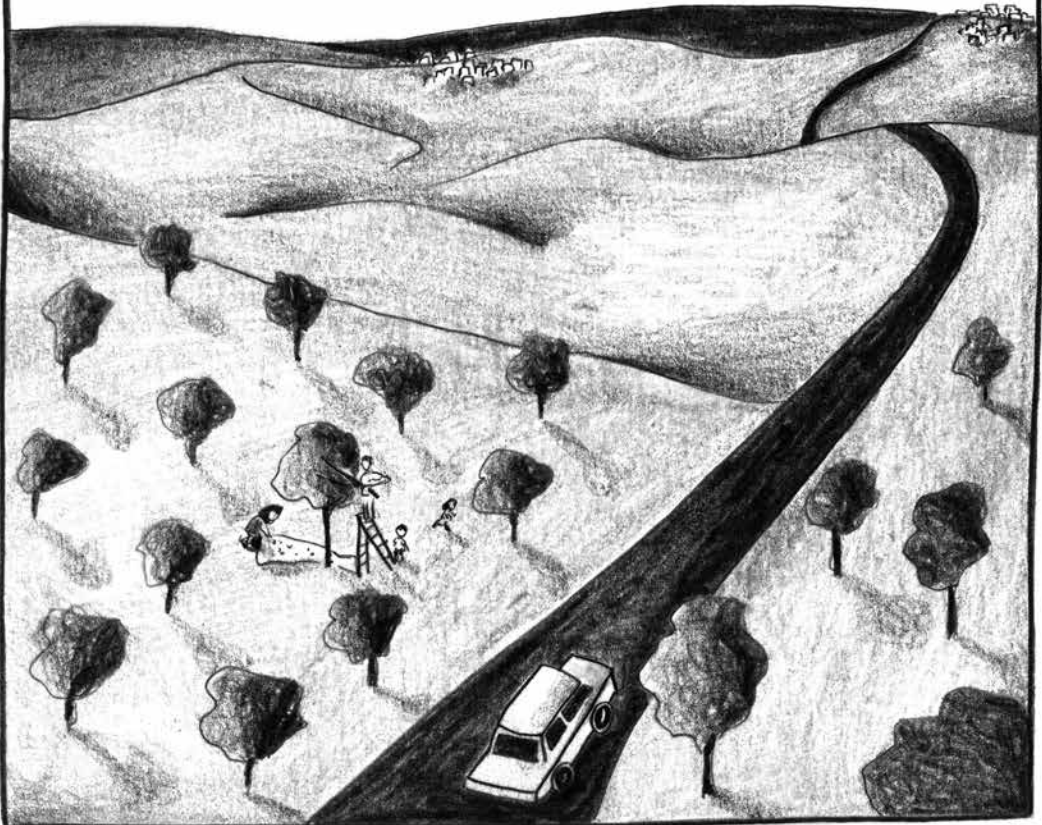
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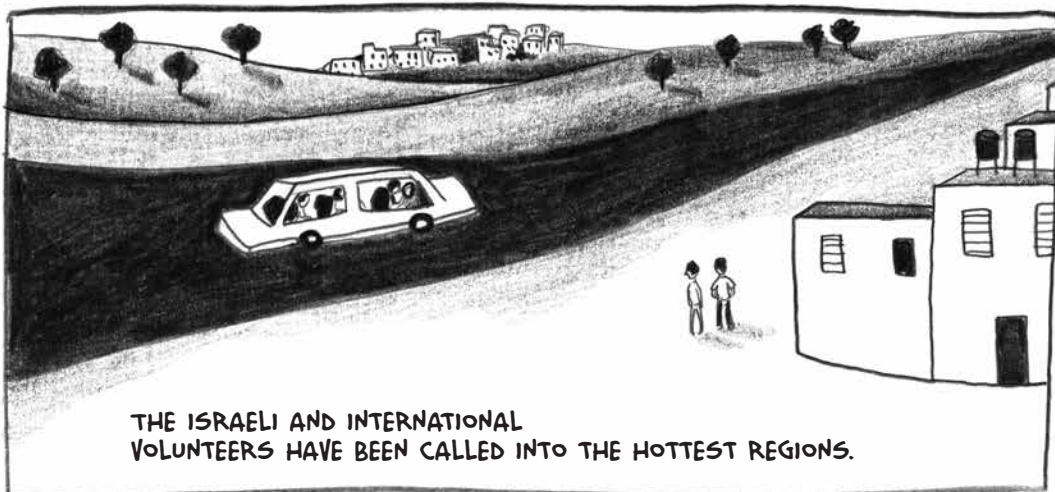
BETHLEHEM, OCTOBER 12

HEY, DELPHINE,
IN OCTOBER, ALL OF PALESTINE IS
BUSY BECAUSE OF THE OLIVE TREES.

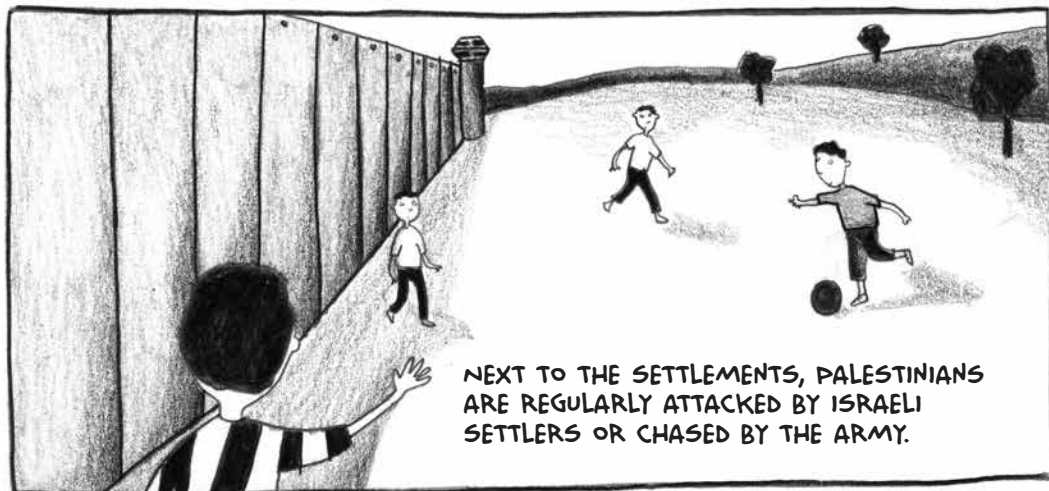


WHEN WE LEAVE THE TOWN ON THE ROADS THAT CUT ACROSS THE
HILLS, WE SEE FAMILIES HARD AT WORK ON EVERY BEND.





THE ISRAELI AND INTERNATIONAL
VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN CALLED INTO THE HOTTEST REGIONS.

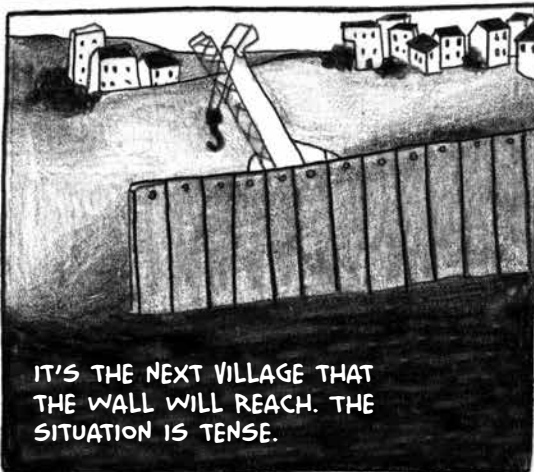


NEXT TO THE SETTLEMENTS, PALESTINIANS
ARE REGULARLY ATTACKED BY ISRAELI
SETTLERS OR CHASED BY THE ARMY.



NINA AND I DECIDED TO GO
GATHER OLIVES IN NI'LIN.

WE'RE GOING TO MEET
WITH MOHAMMED, ONE
OF THE KIDS FROM THE
VILLAGE.



IT'S THE NEXT VILLAGE THAT
THE WALL WILL REACH. THE
SITUATION IS TENSE.

I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT MY
MEMORIES OF THE PROTEST IN
OUSH GRAB MADE ME A LITTLE
HESITANT TO GO.



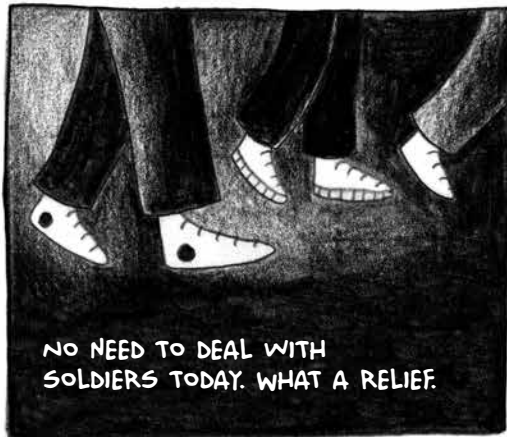
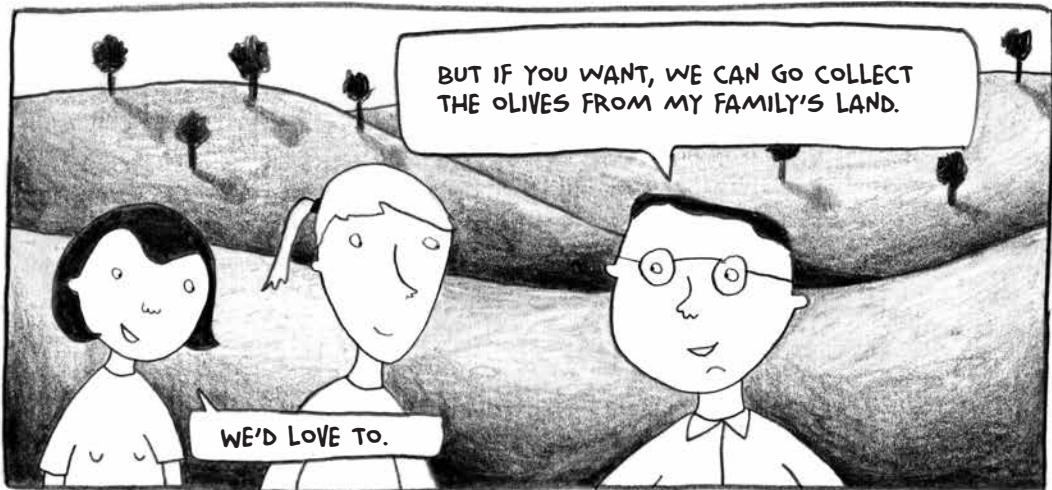
WHEN WE ARRIVED, ISRAELI ACTIVISTS
WERE ALREADY HEADED BACK
DOWN THE HILL!

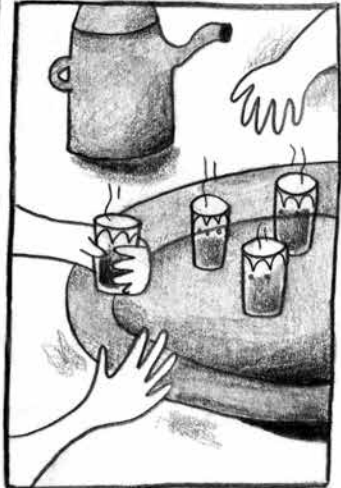


WELCOME TO NI'LIN!
I'M MOHAMMED.

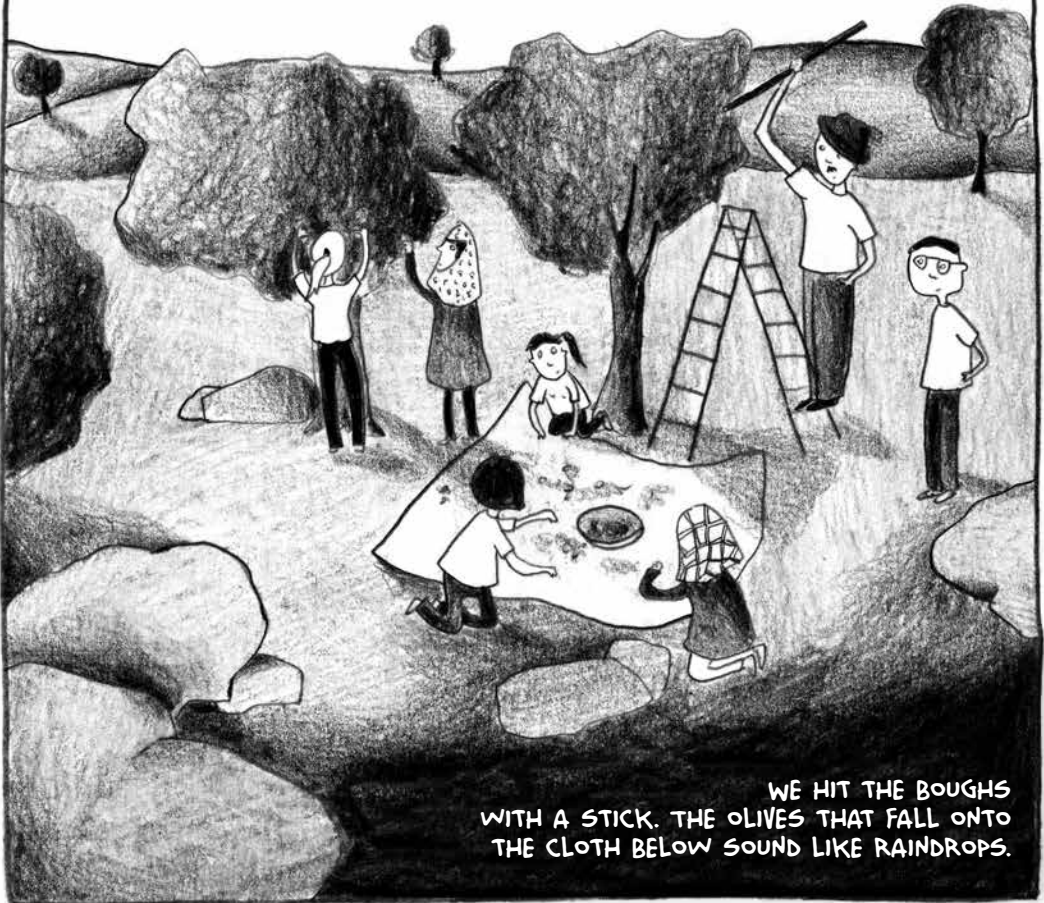


THE ISRAELIS WORKED LIKE DOGS,
AND YOU ARRIVED A LITTLE LATE...



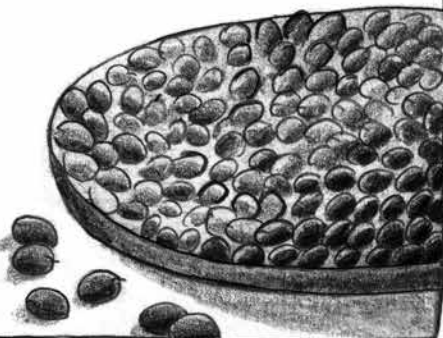


I ALLOW MYSELF TO ENJOY THE CALM AND SLOW PACE OF THE PEACEFUL DAY.

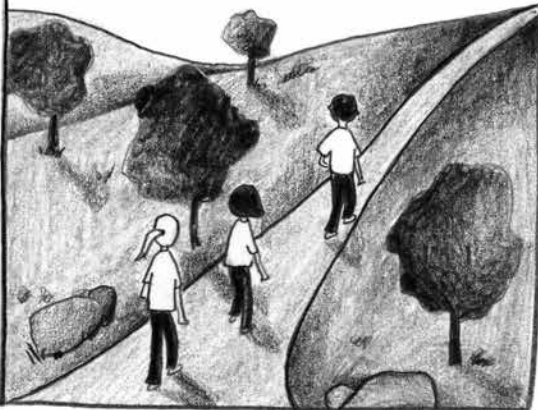


WE HIT THE BOUGHS
WITH A STICK. THE OLIVES THAT FALL ONTO
THE CLOTH BELOW SOUND LIKE RAINDROPS.

WHEN WE'RE DONE WITH A TREE,
WE HAVE SOME TEA. IT TASTES
LIKE FIRE AND SUGAR.



MOHAMMED BRINGS US TO
THE TOP OF THE HILL.

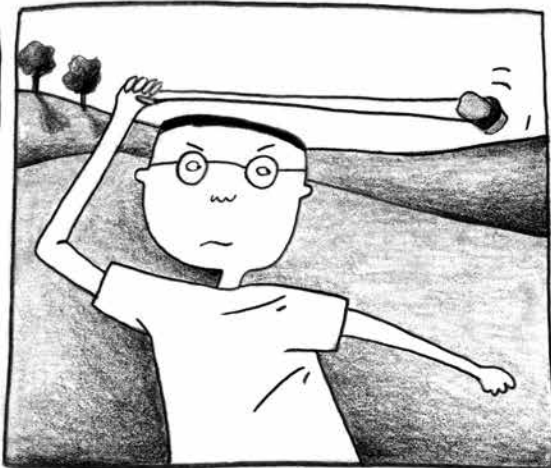
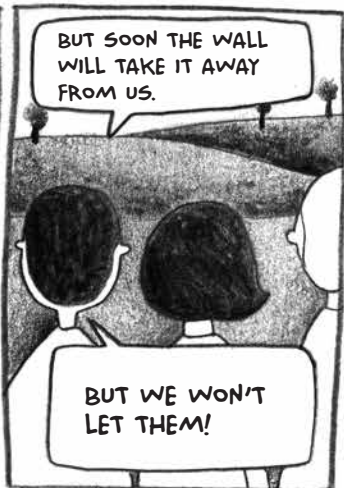


LET'S PICK THE ZA'ATAR!
IT'S GREAT FOR TEA.



THERE'S A GREAT VIEW FROM THE TOP. I'VE
RARELY FELT AS AT PEACE WITH THE COUNTRY.





AS WE LEAVE, I WANT TO GIVE
MOHAMMED A HUG...BUT I
SHAKE HIS HAND INSTEAD.

THANK
YOU!

MY
PLEASURE!

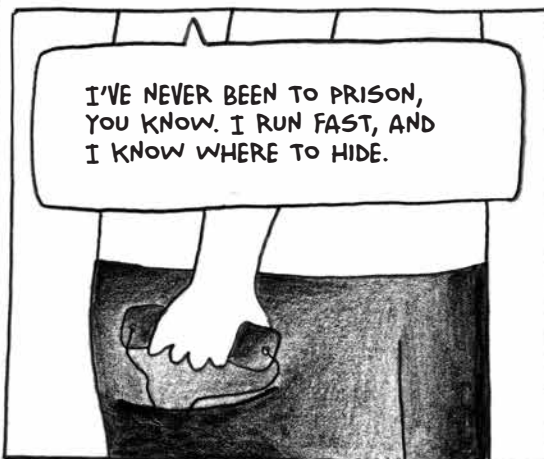


MOHAMMED,
BE CAREFUL...

DON'T WORRY, I'LL BE FINE.

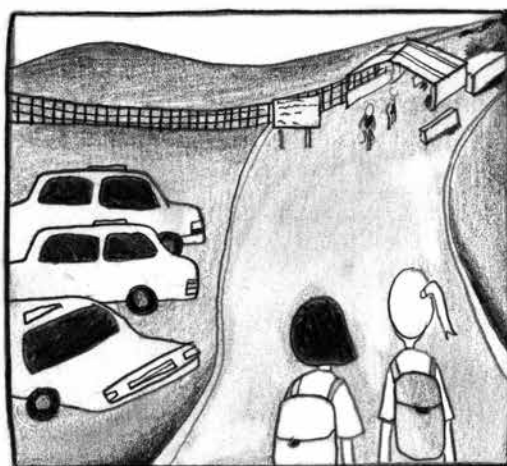


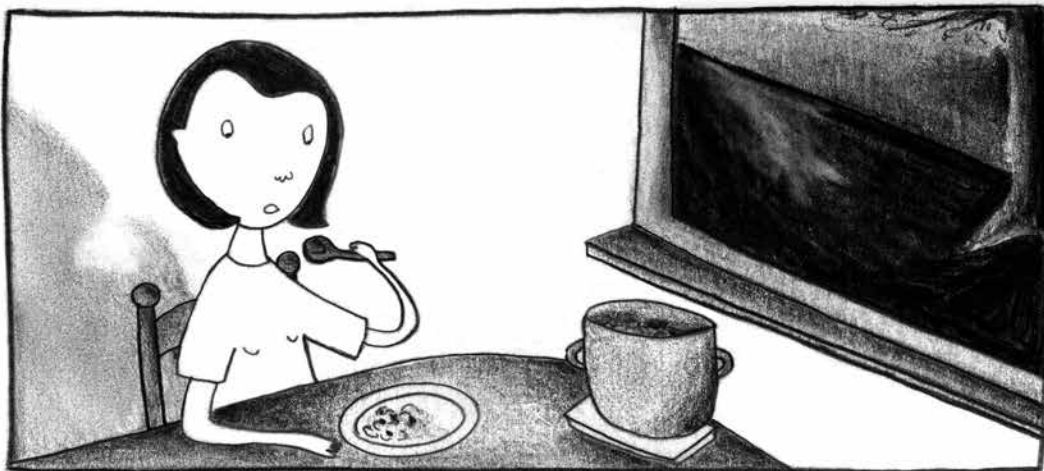
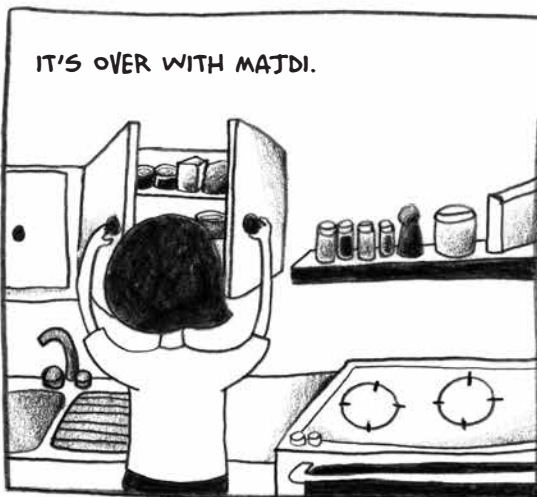
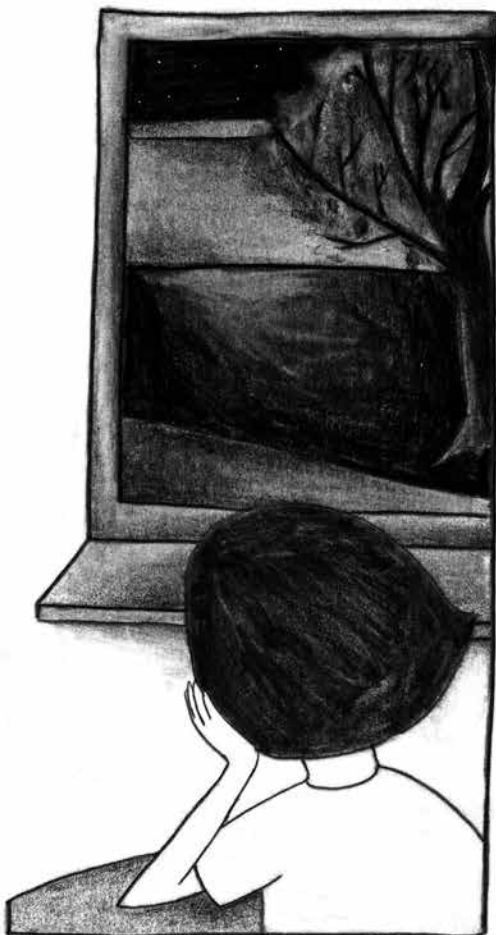
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO PRISON,
YOU KNOW. I RUN FAST, AND
I KNOW WHERE TO HIDE.

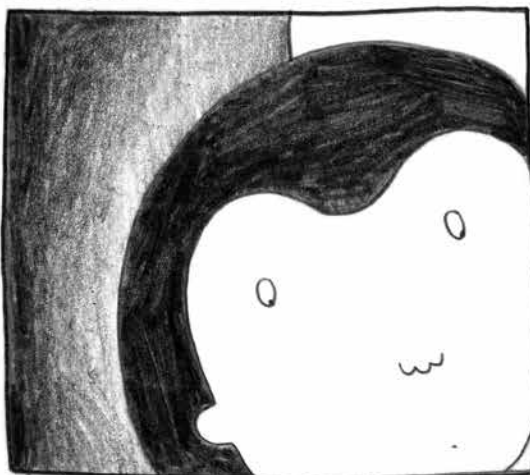


COME BACK WHENEVER YOU WANT.
YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME HERE.

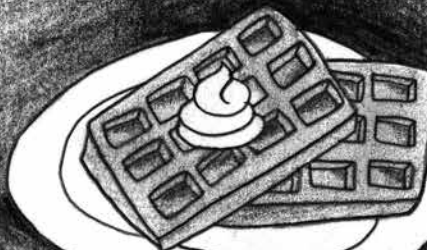
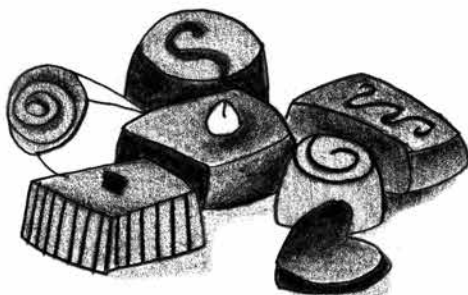
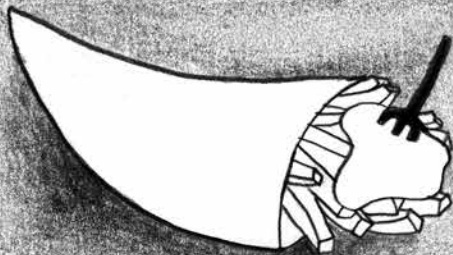








BELGIUM



Hey, Sis,

I'm sorry about Majdi. I wish I was there so I could give you a hug. Here, the days are already getting shorter. We're indulging in winter's small pleasures: the nights under the covers, the soups, and the smell of wood in the fireplace.

Don't you miss all that? Am I wrong, or won't it be hard to come home? Come back soon.

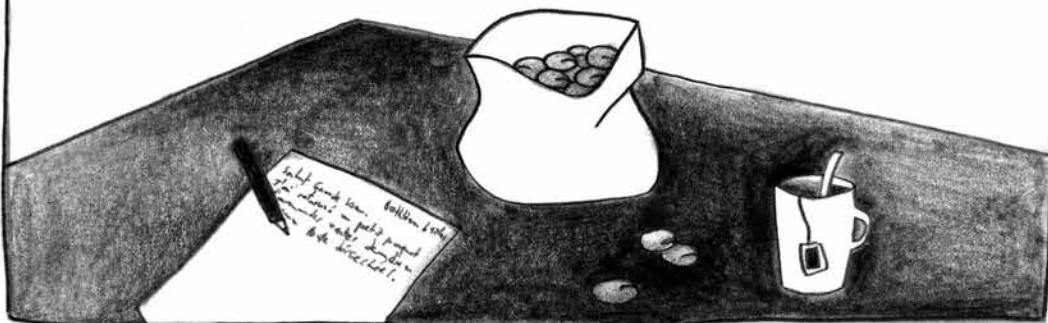
I miss you, too.



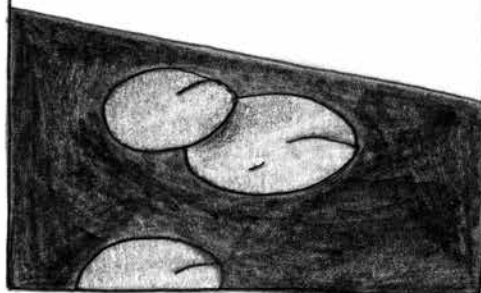
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Palestine

BETHLEHEM, NOVEMBER 13

HEY, BIG SIS,
I FOUND A BAG OF GREEN ALMONDS
BEHIND A CLOSET, ALL DRIED UP.



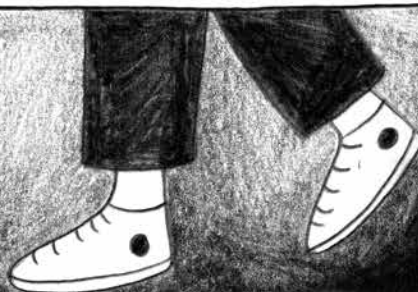
ALL OF A SUDDEN
I WANTED TO TREAT MYSELF
TO A BIG BOWL.



BUT I COULDN'T FIND ANY IN STORES.



I'VE ONLY GOT A FEW WEEKS LEFT, SO I'M TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE PLACES I HAVEN'T GOTTEN TO SEE YET.



I HAVE SO MUCH TO DISCOVER STILL. SO MANY PEOPLE TO MEET.

AND AT THE SAME TIME, I DON'T HAVE AS MUCH ENERGY AS I USED TO.

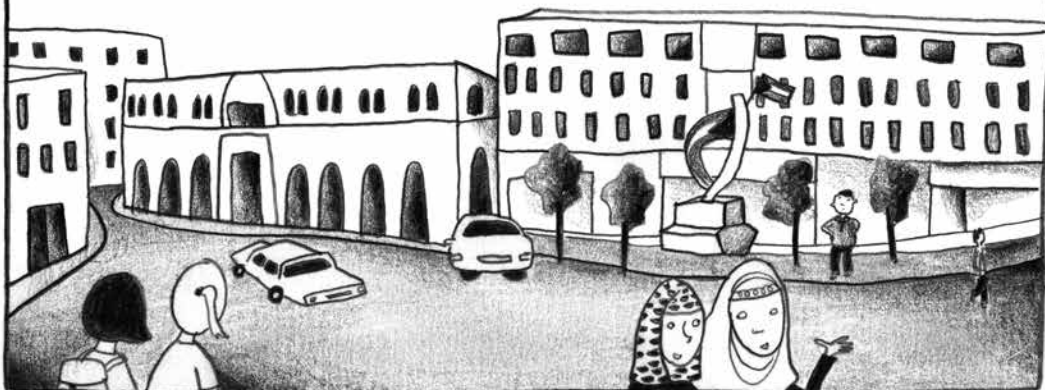


MAYBE BECAUSE I KNOW I WON'T BE HERE FOR MUCH LONGER?



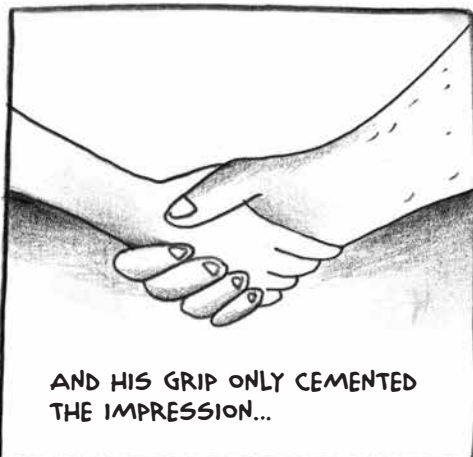
THIS WEEKEND, NINA AND I WENT TO QALQILYA.

SHE HAD TO MEET WITH A MAN NAMED MO'AYAD, WHO WORKS FOR THE CITY, FOR HER NGO.

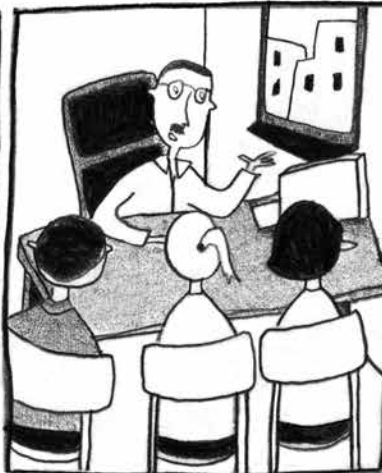


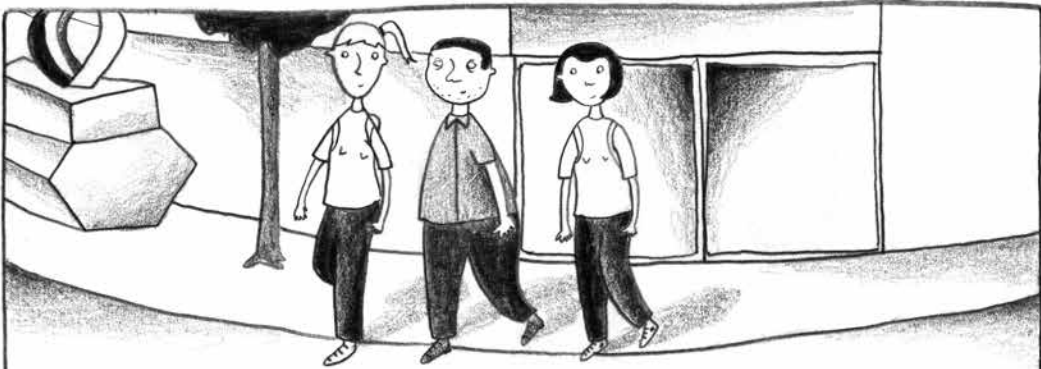
WITH HIS BELLY AND THE DARK CIRCLES UNDER HIS EYES, HE LOOKED LIKE A PANDA.

AHLAN WA
SAHLAN.



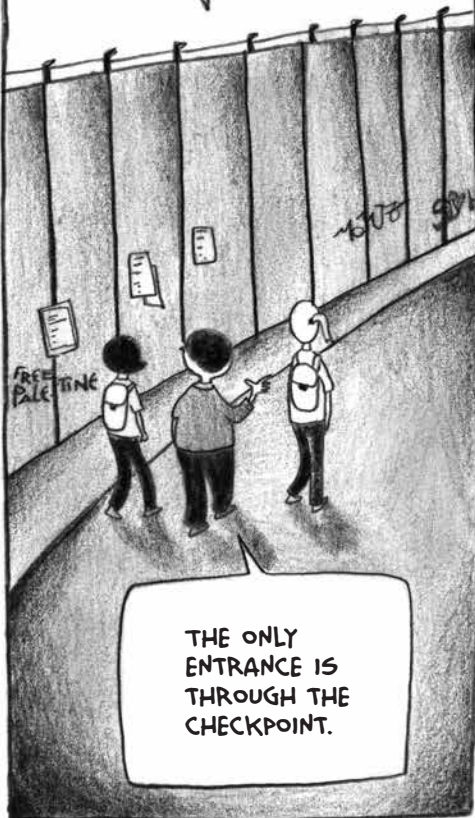
AND HIS GRIP ONLY CEMENTED
THE IMPRESSION...





AFTER A VISIT TO THE OFFICE OF EACH OF HIS BOSSES AND HAVING A COFFEE WITH EACH ONE, WE WERE EAGER TO VISIT THE TOWN.

QALQILYA IS SURROUNDED BY THE WALL.

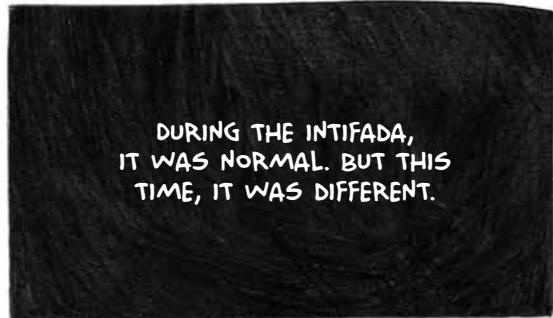


THE ONLY ENTRANCE IS THROUGH THE CHECKPOINT.

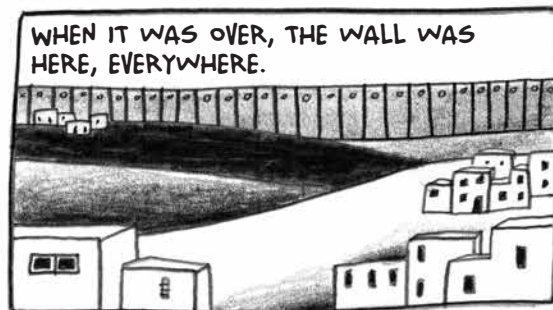
WE HAD A CEASE-FIRE FOR FORTY DAYS.

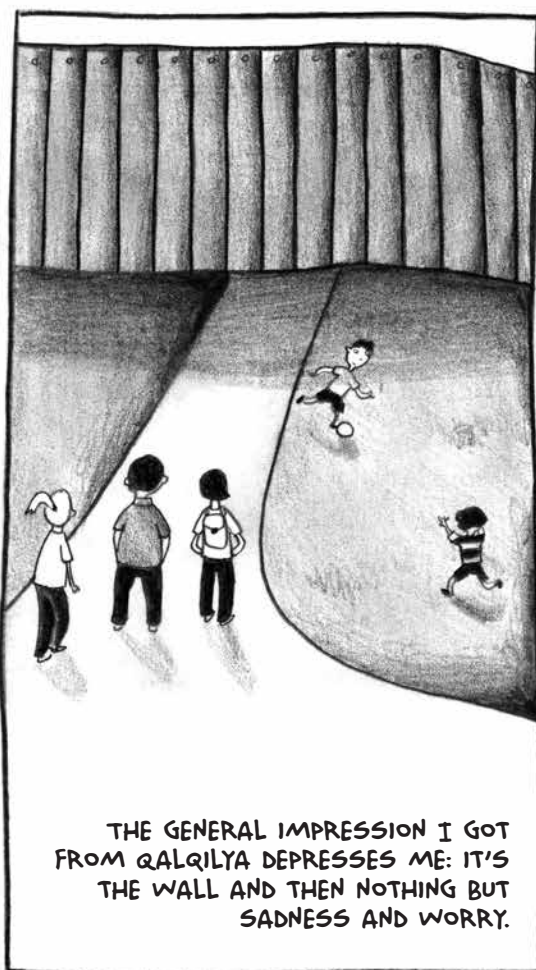


DURING THE INTIFADA, IT WAS NORMAL. BUT THIS TIME, IT WAS DIFFERENT.



WHEN IT WAS OVER, THE WALL WAS HERE, EVERYWHERE.





HIS WHOLE FAMILY COMES OVER, ALONG WITH HIS FRIENDS
AND NEIGHBORS. I DON'T KNOW ANYONE, BUT THAT DOESN'T
SEEM TO MATTER IN THE LEAST.

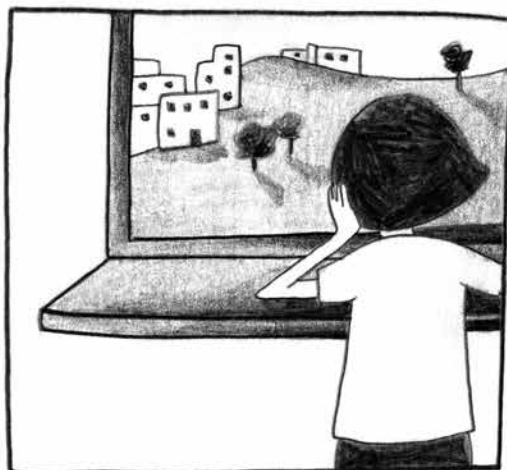
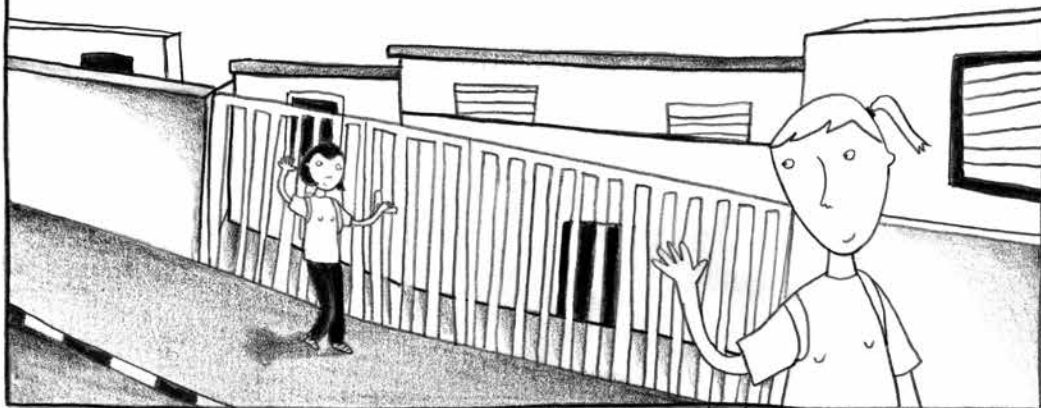


WE SING, WE LAUGH, WE TALK
UNTIL LATE INTO THE NIGHT.

BUT THE NEXT MORNING, I'M STILL GLAD
TO LEAVE QALQILYA...



...AND GRATEFUL TO RETURN BACK TO MY PLACE, IN BETHLEHEM.



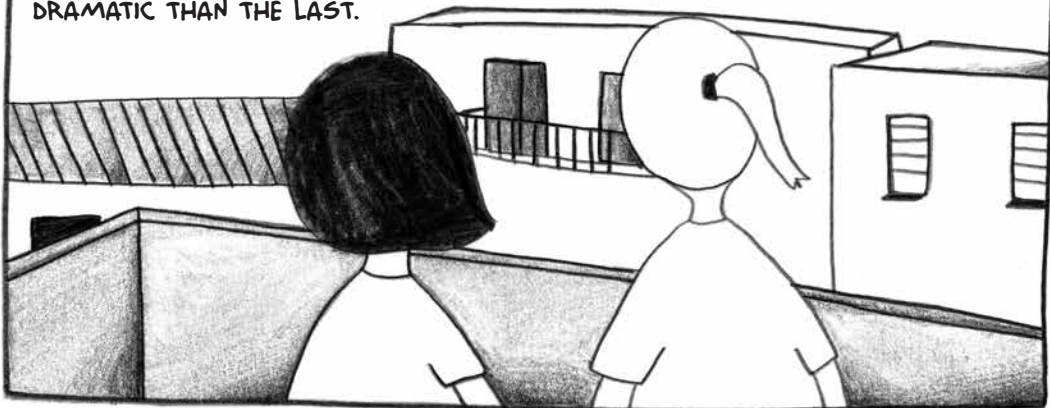
FOR A FEW DAYS, MY
EMOTIONS HAVE BEEN
ALL OVER THE PLACE.



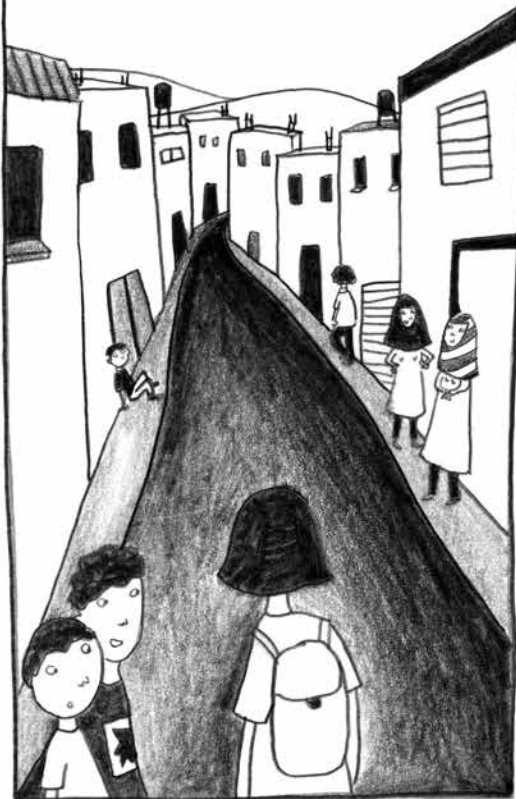
I TALK WITH EVERYONE AND JOKE AROUND.



AND THE NEXT MOMENT I FEEL EXHAUSTED
BY EVERYTHING, EACH STORY MORE
DRAMATIC THAN THE LAST.



I DON'T WANT TO WALK THROUGH
REFUGEE CAMPS WHERE EVERYONE
LOOKS AT ME EVERY DAY.

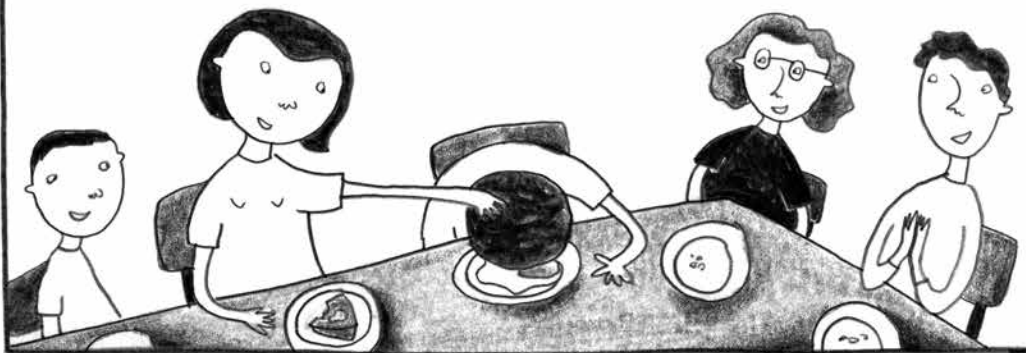


OR GIVE LESSONS TO LITTLE
GIRLS SO BUSY LOOKING AT
ME WITH HEARTS IN THEIR EYES
THAT THEY DON'T LISTEN TO ME.



BUT ELIAS AND MY COLLEAGUES
THROW ME A GREAT SURPRISE GOING-
AWAY PARTY WITH ALL THE KIDS.

I TEACH THEM THE BELGIAN TRADITION OF PIEING, TO AVOID MY STOMACH EXPLODING AFTER THE UMPTEENTH SLICE OF CAKE.



AFTER, I GO GET A DRINK WITH BASSAM AND WE SPEND THE NIGHT TALKING.

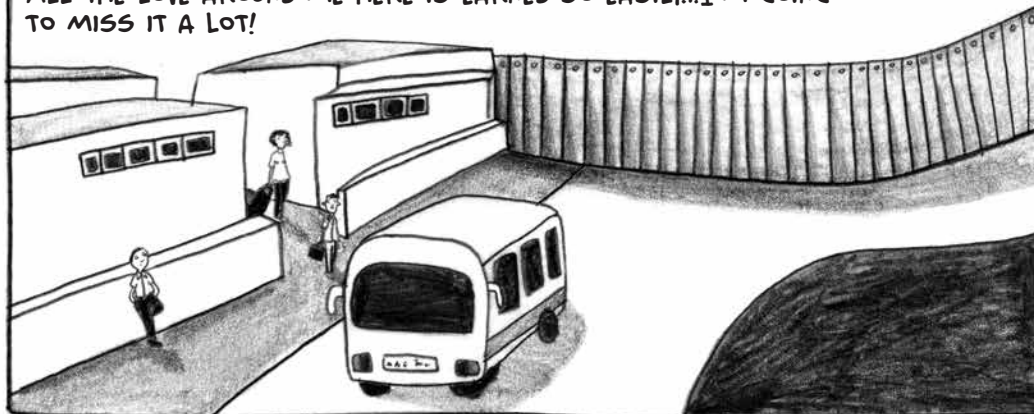


AND NOW I DON'T WANT
TO GO ANYMORE.



* DONE

ALL THE LOVE AROUND ME HERE IS EARNED SO EASILY...I'M GOING
TO MISS IT A LOT!

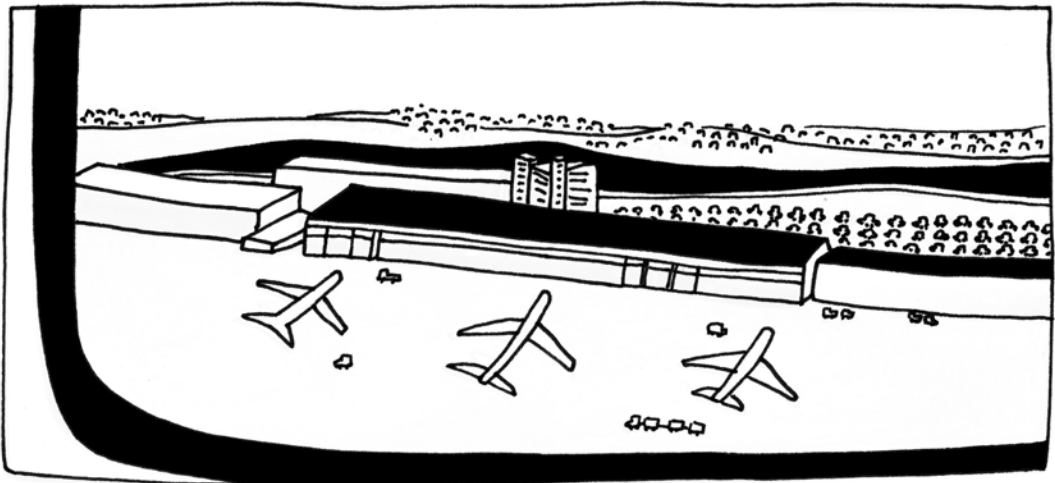
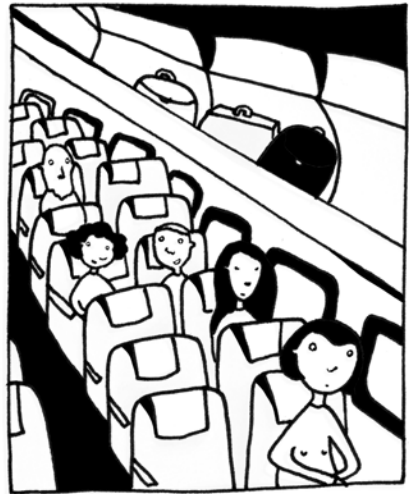
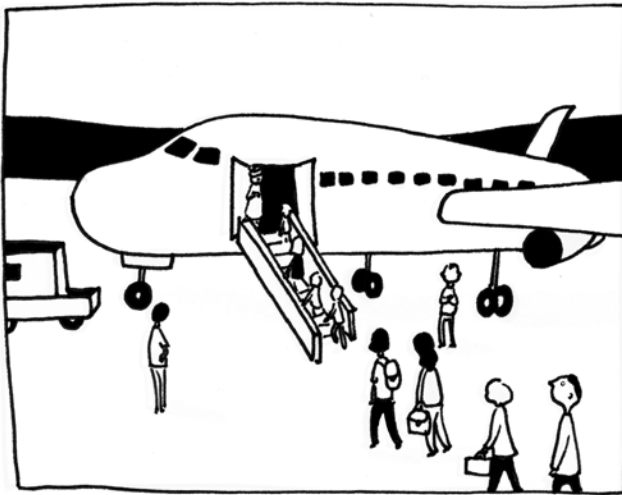


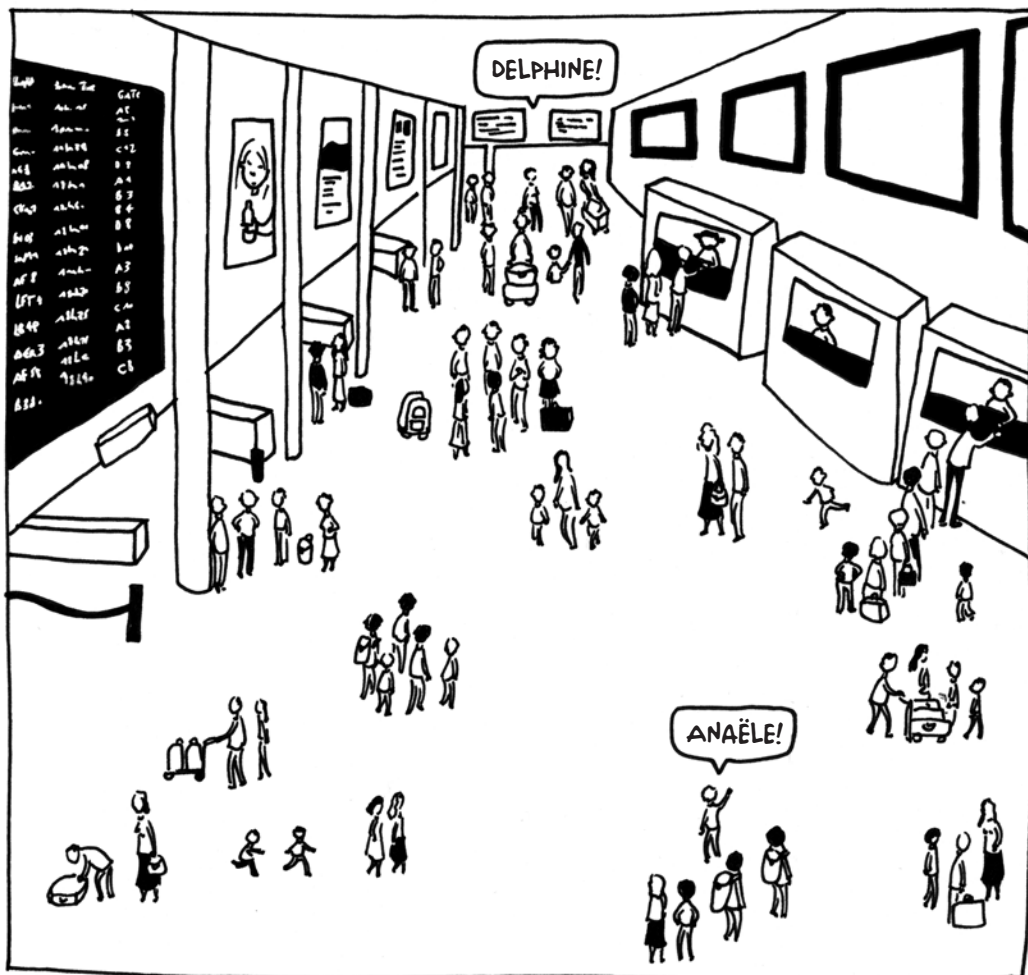
I'M SCARED TO GO HOME, DELPHINE.
I WANT TO, BUT I'M SCARED.

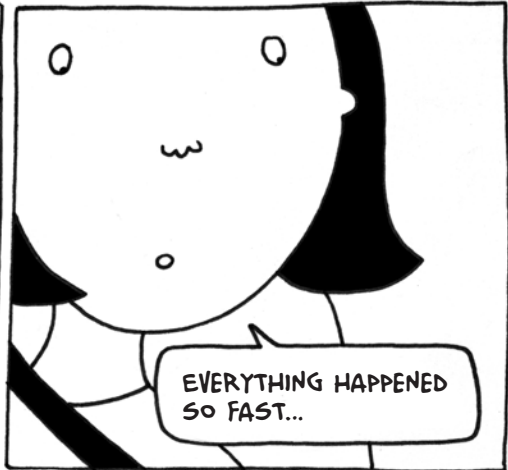
DEPARTURES				
TIME	DESTINATION	FLIGHT	BOARDING	GATE
10.30	FRANKFURT	AEA 9100	10.00	A8
10.30	NEW YORK	SAE 400	10.00	B2
10.45	MADRID	JKK 802	10.15	A7
10.45	OSLO	NOK 203	10.15	A2
10.50	TORONTO	CAN 018	DELAYED	C8
10.55	BRUSSELS	SNB 330	10h15	A1
11.00	SAN FRANCISCO	SAE 809	10h30	B3
11.00	PARIS	AFE 304	10h30	B5
11.00	LONDON	GKB 213	10h30	A4



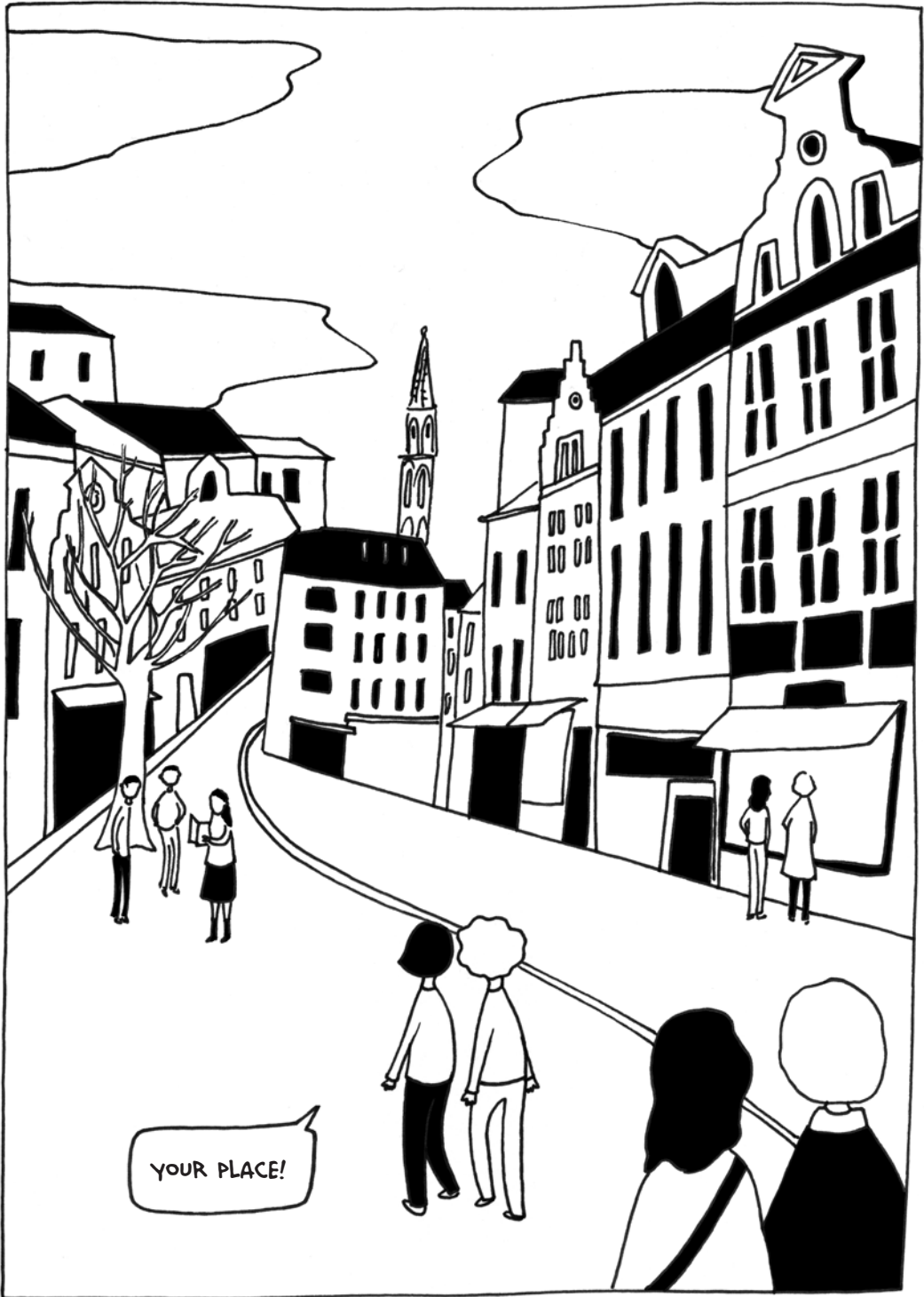
WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF ME?
LOVE, ANAËLE.











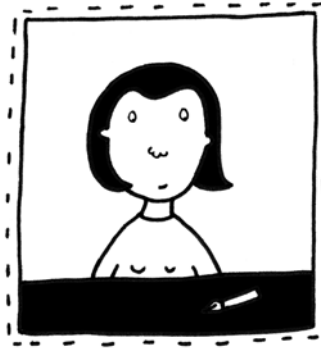
The End





DELPHINE

Delphine Hermans studied animation at the Animation cinema Department of the National Superior School "La Cambre" in Brussels. She is the animation workshop leader at camera-etc, a Belgian animation workshop where children, teenagers, and adults make animation shorts with the help of professionals. Her short animated film "L'enveloppe jaune" received the Artist-in-Residence Award at Tricky Women, a festival celebrating female animation filmmakers.



ANAËLE

Anaële Hermans lives in Belgium where she works as a sociocultural facilitator. After studying literature, she became a French language teacher. Since her return from Palestine, she has worked for the International Civil Service, an NGO that offers international volunteering projects in some 100 countries. She is also the author of the French prose novel *Bananes sauce gombos*.

