

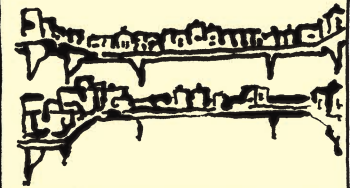
THE COMMUTE BETWEEN THE HOSPITAL AND THE HOUSE WILL BE MANAGEABLE. WE'LL BE LIVING JUST UP THE HILL, IN THIS FIVE-STAR HOTEL. IT'S PRETTY SPARTAN, BUT WE ARE SPARTANS.



THIS IS THE BED WHERE ALL SEVEN OF US WILL BE SLEEPING, LINED UP IN ROWS. IN AFGHANISTAN, FATIGUE GENERALLY MAKES UP FOR THE LACK OF COMFORT AND YOU SLEEP WELL.



AFTER HAVING PUT DOWN OUR BAGS, WE HEAD BACK DOWN TO SET UP THE HOSPITAL. THE SORT OF LAUNDRY ROOM AT THE END OF THE PORCH WILL BE THE INFIRMARY. WE LINE UP INSTRUMENTS AND MEDICINES ON THE SHELVES.



THE PORCH WILL BE THE CONSULTATION ROOM AND OPERATING THEATER. THE COURTYARD WILL SERVE AS A WAITING ROOM.



HEY, LOOK, GUYS!

I'VE FOUND THE TRUSTY OLD TABLE FROM PREVIOUS MISSIONS.*



MSF: LA OÙ LES AUTRES NE VONT PAS
LE DOCTEUR A TOUJOURS RAISON
MIEUX VAUT ÊTRE RICHE ET EN BONNE SANTÉ QUE PAUVRE ET MALADE *

THE FIRST NIGHT PASSES. IN THE MORNING A FAMILY BRINGS US CHORCHOY FOR BREAKFAST.



SINCE THE DAY BEFORE, WORD OF MOUTH HAS SPREAD THE NEWS OF THE HOSPITAL OPENING. THE WAITING ROOM IS FULL. AN AFGHAN MAN, WHO LEARNED RUDIMENTS OF MEDICINE DURING PREVIOUS MSF MISSIONS, IS IN CHARGE OF SORTING PATIENTS ACCORDING TO HOW SEVERE THEIR CONDITION IS. MAHMAD, AS ALWAYS, IS INTERPRETING.



درومان کنه: بهمن دارو بهبه.

HE'S MAKING A HELL OF A RACKET! WHAT DOES HE WANT?



HE'S SAYING HE'S SICK AND NEEDS TO BE TREATED. HE SAID BEFORE HE WAS ALWAYS THE FIRST TO REACH THE TOP OF MOUNTAIN PASSES BUT NOW HE ONLY COMES IN SECOND OR THIRD.

YES, BUT HOW OLD IS HE?



THE FIRST REAL PATIENT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WAR. IT'S A LITTLE BOY WHO HAS BADLY BURNED HIS FOOT BY FALLING INTO A BREAD OVEN. THIS IS A COMMON TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD ACCIDENT IN AFGHANISTAN. HIS FATHER AND SISTER ARE WITH HIM.



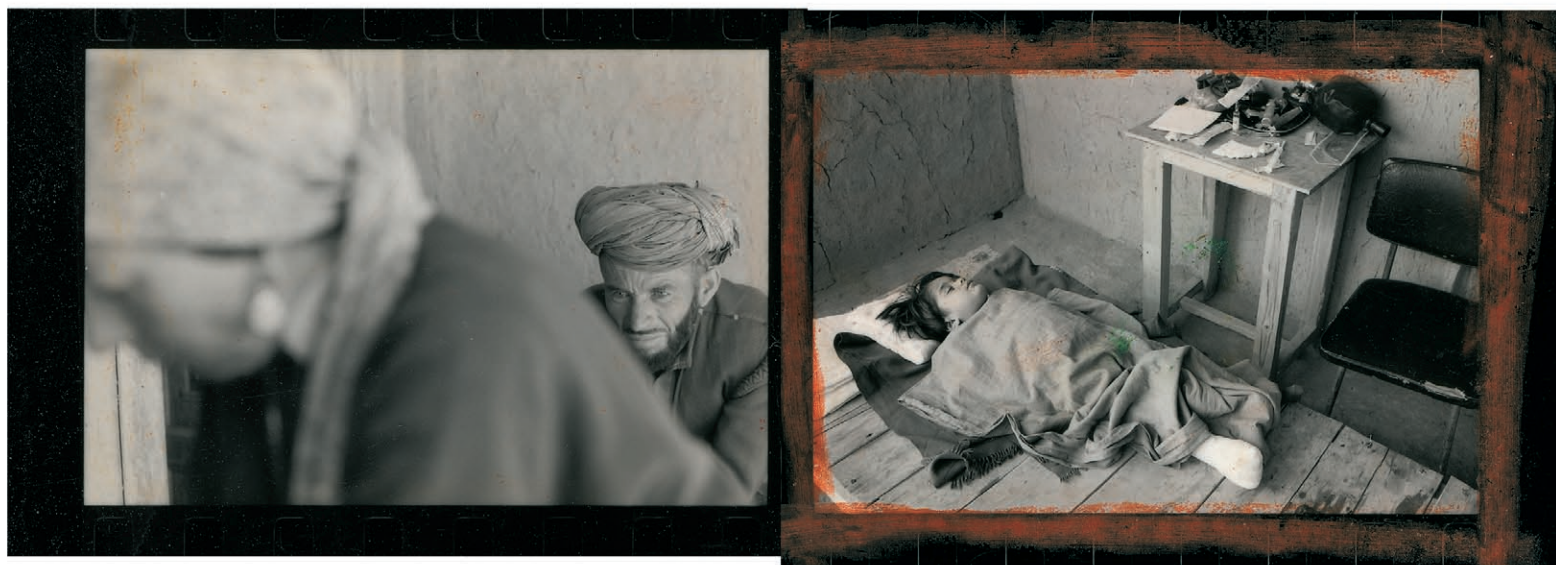
WHILE RÉGIS PREPARES THE ANESTHETIC FOR THE BOY, ROBERT EXAMINES HIS SISTER. HE HAS TO MANAGE THROUGH HER CLOTHING BECAUSE, AS FOR ALL WOMEN, LITTLE GIRLS CANNOT BE UNCLOTHED IN FRONT OF THE DOCTOR.



RÉGIS, ASSISTED BY EVELYNE, A NURSE, AND THE FATHER, GIVES THE BOY AN INJECTION IN THE BUTTOCKS. IF THESE PICTURES HAD SOUND, IT WOULD BE IN THE HIGH NOTES.



THEY CAREFULLY MONITOR THE BOY'S INCREASING DROWSINESS. ONCE HE'S ASLEEP, ROBERT GETS TO WORK.



ALL GOES WELL. HE IS SENT TO THE ICU, MEANING THE COURTYARD, UNDER THE TREES.



RÉGIS DOESN'T STOP WATCHING OVER HIM UNTIL HE WAKES UP, AT WHICH TIME HE IS BROUGHT BACK ONTO THE PORCH.



THEN HE IS GIVEN THE YOGURT OF VICTORY. HE'LL HAVE TO RETURN TOMORROW FOR FOLLOW-UP CARE.



14

14A



15

15A



16

16A

WITH HIS FOOT REPAIRED, THE LITTLE BOY WOULD DO WELL TO KEEP IT AWAY FROM THE LANDMINES THAT THE COUNTRY IS LITTERED WITH.



18

18A



19

19A



20

20A

EVELYNE WAS THE ONE ASSISTING ROBERT AND RÉGIS WITH THE OPERATION. I'D SAY THAT EVELYNE IS THE BRAVEST AMONG US, BECAUSE SHE'S ABSOLUTELY NOT CUT OUT FOR THE FEATS SHE IS ACCOMPLISHING. SHE'S A NORMAL WOMAN AND NOT A PARTICULARLY ATHLETIC PERSON. EVERYTHING SHE ACHIEVES IS THE RESULT OF SHEER WILLPOWER AND DETERMINATION.



RÉGIS OFTEN TELLS HER:

EVELYNE, YOU'RE A SAINT.

YES, RÉGIS.



THE TWO CHARACTERS THAT SHOW UP NEXT ARE OUR FIRST WAR WOUNDED.

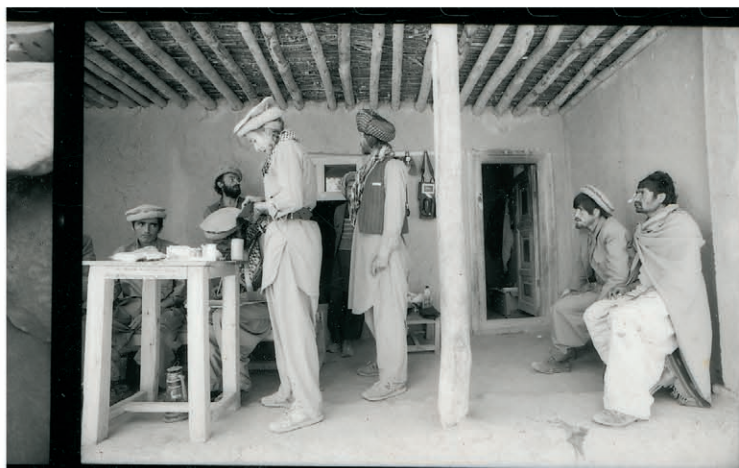


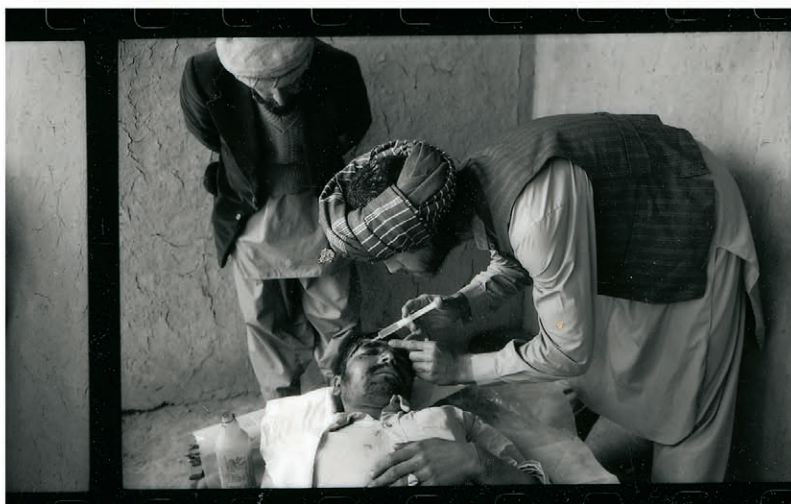
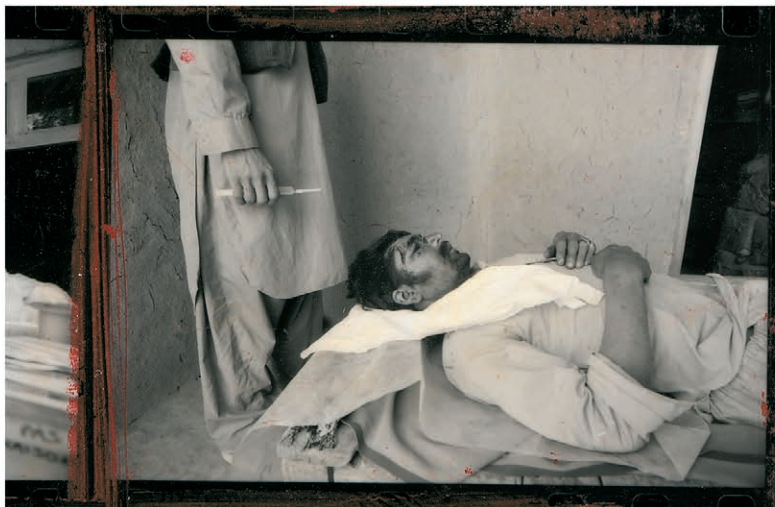
IF I UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY, THE ONE ON THE RIGHT, WITH THE BIG BANDAGE, HAD HIS TEMPLE NICKED BY A BULLET FROM AN AK-47. EACH IMPACT OF THESE BULLETS CAUSES THEM TO CHANGE COURSE. THAT'S WHY THEY CAUSE SO MUCH DAMAGE IN THE BODIES THEY HIT: THEY RICOCHET INSIDE. HE WAS LUCKY, IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING.

AFTER HAVING HIT HIS TEMPLE, THE BULLET WENT THROUGH HIS SHOULDER ABOVE THE LUNG AND WENT ON TO LODGE ITSELF, AT A MUCH SLOWER SPEED, IN THE CHEST OF HIS BUDDY, WHO FELL AND GOT HIMSELF A NICE BRUISE. IT CRACKS THEM UP. AFGHANS OFTEN LAUGH ABOUT SUCH THINGS.



THE OPERATING TABLE, INSTRUMENTS, AND SURGICAL SUPPLIES ARE PREPARED, AND THE TEAM SETS THE PATIENT DOWN. JOHN WILL BE IN CHARGE. I'M STRUCK BY A DETAIL: THE DEPTH OF THE WOUND. I HAD NO IDEA THAT IN THAT AREA OF THE TEMPLE THERE WAS SUCH A THICKNESS OF FLESH ABOVE THE CRANIAL BONE.

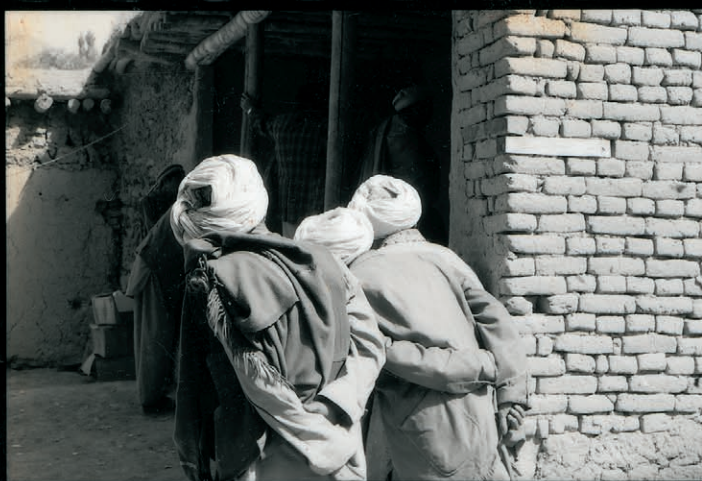




RÉGIS PROVIDES A RUNNING COMMENTARY ON THE OPERATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF A FEW AFGHAN TRAINEES WHO WANT TO BE ABLE TO PERFORM IT WHEN THE MSF PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER THERE. AND SOME BABAS LOOK ON WITH SYMPATHY.



SAFETY



THAT EVENING WE PICK UP RADIO FRANCE INTERNATIONALE. GET SOME NEWS FROM THE WORLD. ONLY ONE STORY STRIKES ME: JACQUES-HENRI LARTIGUE IS DEAD.



IF I WERE ASKED TO NAME MY FAVORITE PHOTOGRAPHER, I WOULDN'T SAY LARTIGUE. BUT I LIKE HIM.



I FEEL THE NEED TO LOOK AT SOME PICTURES. IN MY BAG I HAVE A BOOK FROM A FRENCH PAPERBACK COLLECTION ON PHOTOGRAPHERS. IT'S THE ONE ON JOSEF KOUDELKA.



REACHING FOR IT, I PULL OUT ANOTHER BOOK.



I'D COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN ABOUT STEVENSON. VERY NAUGHTY OF ME, BUT I HAVE SOME EXCUSES. I SCAN THE FIRST LINES. THEY BRING ME BACK TO GERMSHESMA, BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE. A CENTURY AGO, IT SEEMS.



I FEEL PRETTY SURE I'LL BE TOTALLY INCAPABLE OF READING THIS LITTLE BOOK BY THE END OF THE TRIP. MY MIND IS ELSEWHERE. BUT I'M HAPPY TO HAVE IT WITH ME, TO GIVE IT SOME FRESH MOUNTAIN AIR.



WE GO TO SLEEP AT SEVEN O'CLOCK.



A RUMBLING AND A JOLT WAKE US UP. OR, RATHER, IT'S REALLY MAHMAD WHO WAKES US. HE CATAPULTS HIMSELF OUT OF THE HOUSE.

EVERYBODY OUT, QUICK! EARTHQUAKE! GET OUT!



TREMORS ARE VERY BRIEF, BUT THAT ISN'T THE IMPRESSION YOU GET. THEY FEEL LIKE THEY LAST A LONG TIME. TONIGHT, THERE'S ONLY ONE. NO DAMAGE. WE WAIT A BIT, THEN CRAWL BACK INTO OUR SLEEPING BAGS.



THE NEXT DAY THERE'S A CROWD IN THE WAITING ROOM. OUR AFGHAN RECEPTIONIST IS DOING HIS JOB OF SORTING AND CLASSIFYING PATIENTS.



TOWARD THE END OF THE DAY A MUJ' SHOWS UP. HE TALKS AT LENGTH WITH THE TEAM. EVIDENTLY HE HAS COME TO GET THE DOCTORS AND WANTS THEM TO FOLLOW HIM.



JULIETTE AND ROBERT FALL INTO STEP BEHIND HIM AND I TAG ALONG.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WE HAVE NO IDEA.



WE'RE SUPPOSEDLY GOING TO SEE A GUY WITH A HEAD WOUND, IN A VILLAGE THAT'S A HALF-HOUR'S WALK FROM HERE.

YOU HAVE TO WATCH OUT FOR AFGHAN HALF HOURS. FOR THEM, EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS "NAZDIK," NOT FAR.



SO THE VILLAGE COULD BE THIRTY MILES FROM HERE.

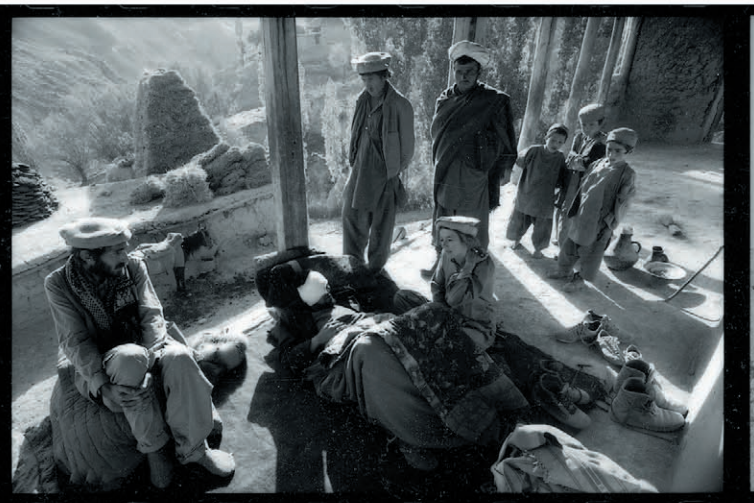
AND THE GUY WOUNDED IN THE KNEE.



TWO HOURS LATER, AS NIGHT FALLS, WE ENTER THE VILLAGE. THE WOUNDED MUJ' IS LYING IN THE MOSQUE. A FEW FARMERS ARE WATCHING OVER HIM.



AN INITIAL EXAMINATION SHOWS A HOLE IN THE RIGHT EYE. WE SPEND THE NIGHT BY HIS SIDE. IN THE MORNING, HE IS TAKEN OUTSIDE TO BETTER ASSESS HIS CONDITION AND ASK HIM QUESTIONS.





SO?

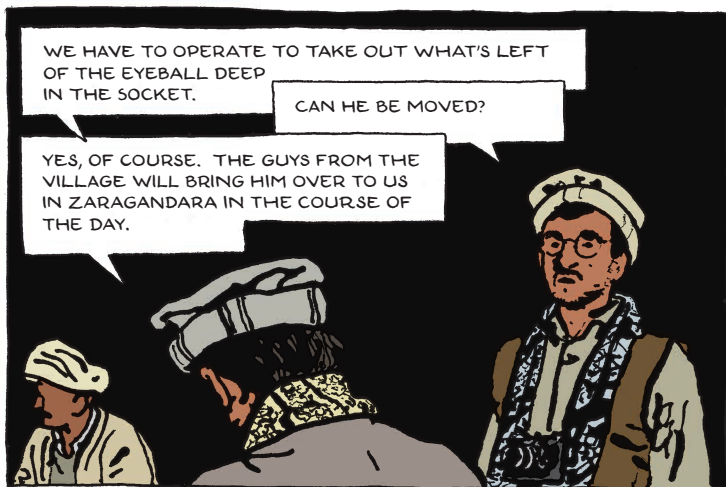
HIS EYE IS LOST. THE EYEBALL WAS PUNCTURED.



HOW'D IT HAPPEN?

HE DID IT TO HIMSELF. HE WAS RUNNING DURING A FIREFIGHT, WEAPON IN HAND, AND HE FELL HEAD FIRST ONTO THE BARREL OF HIS RIFLE.

GEEZ!



WE HAVE TO OPERATE TO TAKE OUT WHAT'S LEFT OF THE EYEBALL DEEP IN THE SOCKET.

CAN HE BE MOVED?

YES, OF COURSE. THE GUYS FROM THE VILLAGE WILL BRING HIM OVER TO US IN ZARAGANDARA IN THE COURSE OF THE DAY.



HE INSISTED THAT WE NOTIFY HIS FATHER, WHO'S IN ANOTHER VILLAGE.

AND WHAT DID HE SAY ABOUT HIS PUNCTURED EYE?

THAT IT WAS THE WILL OF ALLAH.



THAT'S AFGHAN FATALISM FOR YOU. EVERYTHING HAPPENS BY THE WILL OF GOD, SO WHATEVER HAPPENS TO YOU HAD TO HAPPEN.

POOR GUY! BLINDING HIMSELF WITH THE BARREL OF HIS OWN RIFLE!

I'VE SEEN EVEN BETTER, YOU KNOW.



IN THE LAST MISSION, I SAW A GUY COME IN WITH A HOLE WHERE HIS NOSE SHOULD'VE BEEN, A HOLE UNDER THE CHIN, AND A HOLE IN EACH HAND. ALL THAT DONE WITH ONE BULLET.

HANG ON—SAY THAT AGAIN, I DIDN'T GET IT.



ONE HOLE HERE. ONE HOLE THERE.

YES.



AND ONE HOLE IN EACH HAND. ALL WITH ONE BULLET. WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED?

NO IDEA.

WELL, WHAT HAPPENED IS THAT THE GUY WAS SITTING LIKE THIS, WITH HIS CHIN AND BOTH HANDS RESTING ON THE MUZZLE OF HIS RIFLE. THERE WAS A BULLET IN THE BARREL.



AND HIS THREE-YEAR-OLD KID, WHO WAS PLAYING AT HIS FEET, PULLED THE TRIGGER.



WE RETURN TO ZARAGANDARA BY THE END OF THE MORNING. THE WOUNDED MAN, THOUGH, IS ONLY BROUGHT IN LATE IN THE EVENING. THE OPERATION WILL TAKE PLACE AT NIGHT.



JOHN, ROBERT, AND RÉGIS PUT ON MINER'S LAMPS. RÉGIS PUTS THE PATIENT TO SLEEP USING KETALAR, A DRUG MADE FROM KETAMINE, A POWERFUL ANESTHETIC.



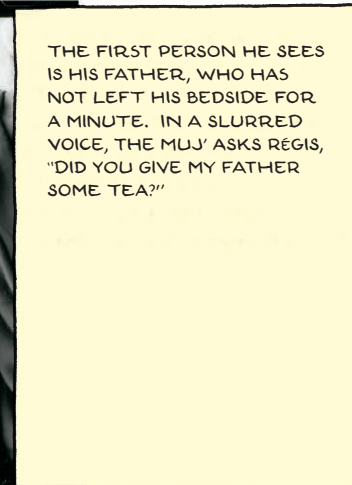
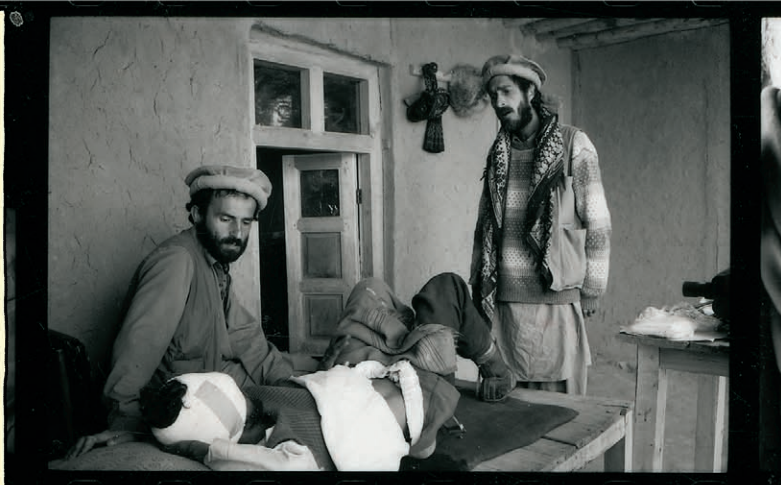
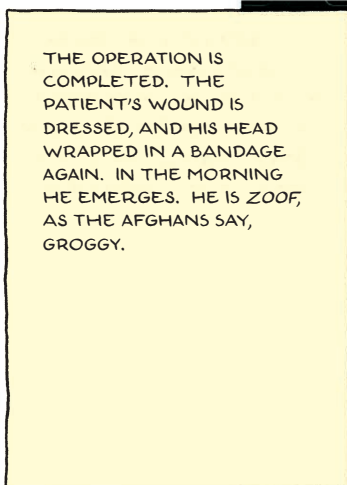
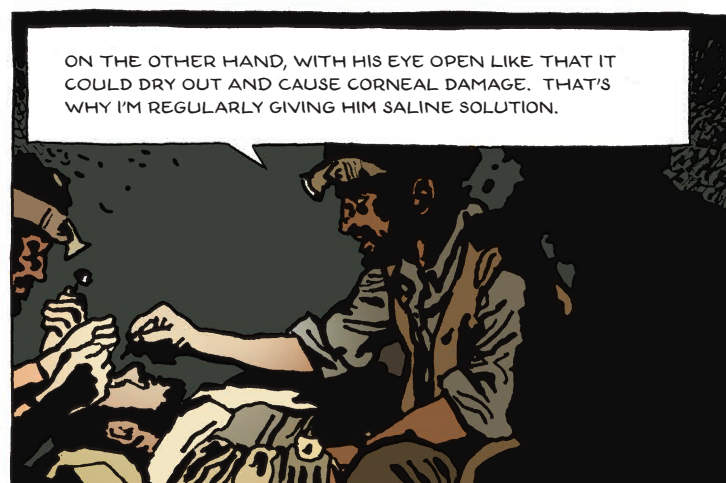
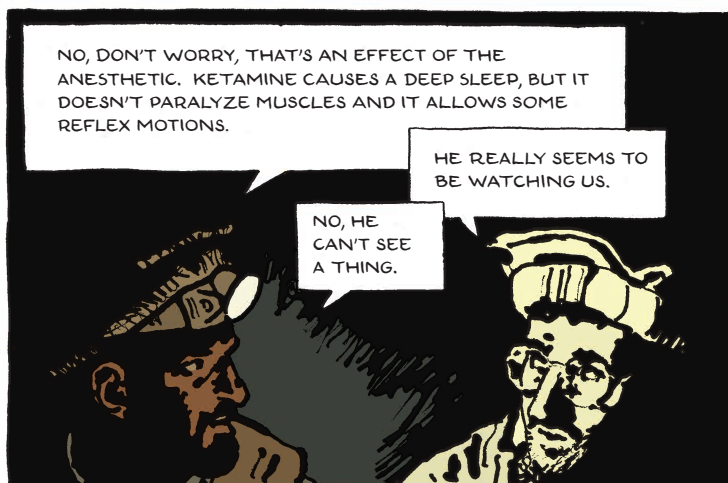
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OPERATION, THE FATHER SHOWS UP. HE'S UTTERLY FRANTIC, AS YOU'D IMAGINE. MAHMAD REASSURES HIM, AND HE'S OFFERED SOMETHING TO EAT AND DRINK AND GIVEN A SEAT IN THE CORNER OF THE PORCH, WITH INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO MOVE.



SUDDENLY, A VISION OF HORROR: THE PATIENT'S LEFT EYE, THE GOOD ONE, OPENS AND STARTS LOOKING IN ALL DIRECTIONS.



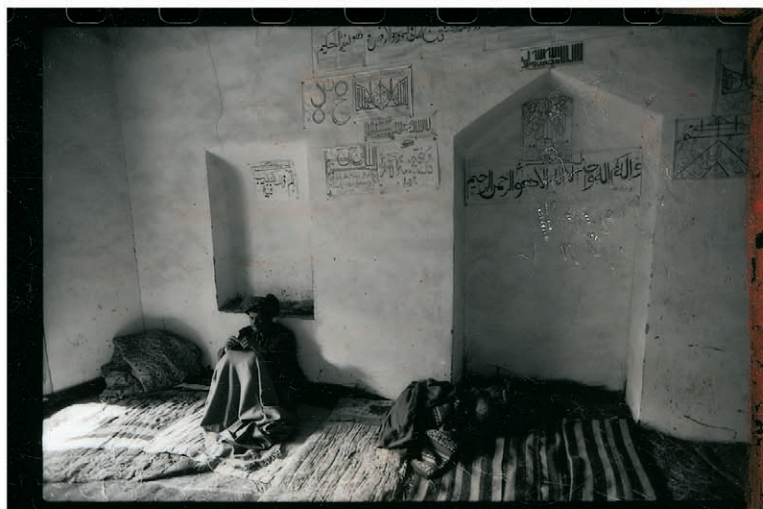
IS HE WAKING UP?



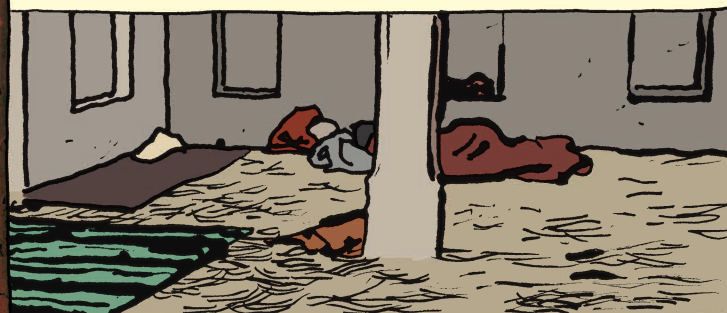
AND THE SECOND THING HE ASKS FOR, WHEN HE HAS AWAKENED A BIT MORE, IS TO HAVE HIS RIFLE BROUGHT TO HIM. HE WANTS TO CHECK THAT HE CAN AIM WITH HIS LEFT EYE.



HE UTTERS A THIRD AND FINAL SENTENCE AS HE GETS UP: "I'LL HAVE A HARD TIME FINDING A WIFE AND GETTING MARRIED." THAT'S IT. LATER, WHILE CONVALESCING IN THE ZARAGANDARA MOSQUE, HE PROUDLY INVITES ME TO DO A PORTRAIT OF HIM.



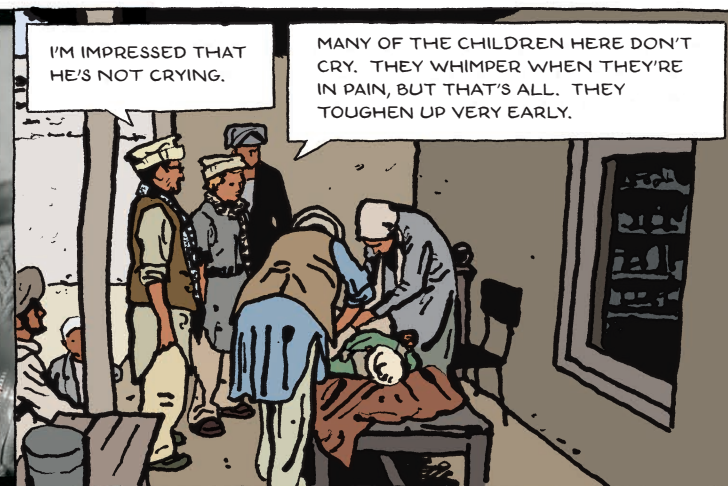
THE MOSQUE IS USED AS AN ANNEX TO THE HOSPITAL FOR RECOVERING PATIENTS OR THOSE AWAITING TREATMENT. IT COULDN'T BE MORE BASIC: A DOOR, A CENTRAL WOODEN PILLAR, A FEW RECESSES IN THE WALLS, SOME CALLIGRAPHIES, AND STRAW AND CARPETS ON THE FLOOR. IT SERVES AS THE VILLAGE HALL.



A LITTLE BOY ARRIVES. HE LIFTS UP THE SLEEVE OF HIS SWEATER. A BULLET HAS GONE THROUGH HIS FOREARM.



ILFORD





EACH DAY BRINGS ITS SHARE OF WAR WOUNDED, BUT A GOOD PART OF THE WORK REMAINS DAY-TO-DAY HEALTH CARE—ILLNESSES, BIRTHS, HOUSEHOLD ACCIDENTS.



ONE DAY I FIND ROBERT AND RÉGIS ABSORBED IN LOOKING AT AN OBJECT THAT I HARDLY RECOGNIZE BECAUSE ITS PRESENCE SEEMS SO INCONGRUOUS.



WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? AN X-RAY.



BUT WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

FROM FEYZABAD. IT'S THE RUSSIANS THAT SENT IT TO US.



I CAN'T BELIEVE MY EARS.

YOU'RE IN TOUCH WITH THE RUSSIANS?

IT CAN HAPPEN.



WHEN WE GET SOMEONE WHO NEEDS AN X-RAY, OR SOME TREATMENT WE CAN'T PROVIDE, WE SEND HIM TO THE FEYZABAD HOSPITAL, ON A DONKEY, ACCOMPANIED BY AN OLD MAN. I WRITE A LETTER IN ENGLISH FOR THE RUSSIAN DOCTOR: "DEAR COLLEAGUE, I AM SENDING YOU THIS PATIENT," AND SO ON.



IN FEYZABAD, THEY DO THE X-RAY AND THE OLD MAN BRINGS IT BACK TO ME, OFTEN WITH A RESPONSE FROM THE RUSSIAN DOCTOR. HERE, HAVE A LOOK.

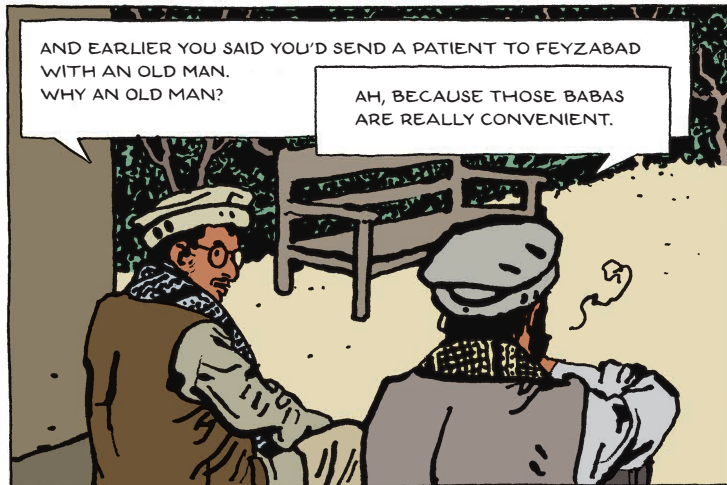
UNBELIEVABLE.



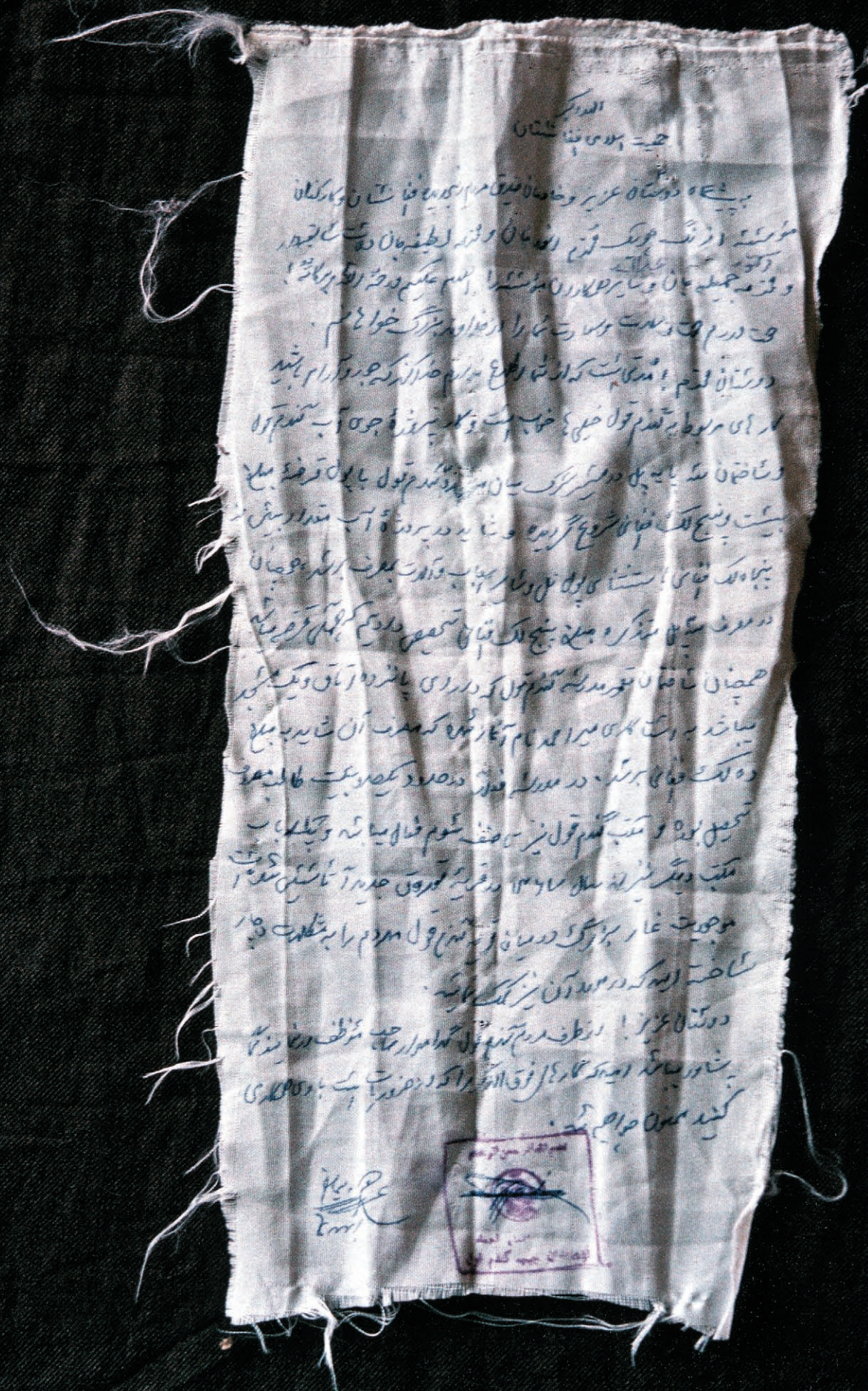
BUT DON'T YOU RISK GETTING DISCOVERED?

INCH' ALLAH! UP TO NOW WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY PROBLEMS!





THIS IS ONE SUCH SECRET MESSAGE. BEING ABLE TO READ IT WOULDN'T DO ME MUCH GOOD; IT'S CODED. MAHMAD TRANSLATED IT FOR ME AND ALL IT TALKS ABOUT IS CROPS AND IRRIGATION.



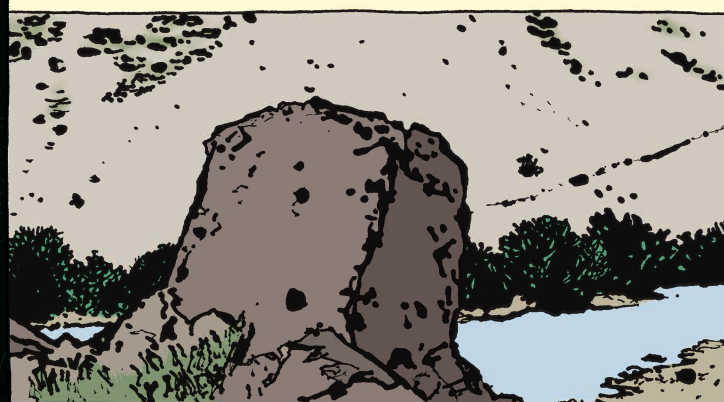
A HIKE MORE THAN THREE HOURS LONG BRINGS US—JULIETTE, RÉGIS, ME, AND A FEW LOCALS—TO PALANDARA.



THAT'S THE FUTURE HOSPITAL WHERE THE LOCAL TEAMS WE'RE CURRENTLY TRAINING WILL WORK, AND WHERE THE NEXT MSF MISSIONS WILL JOIN THEM.



ON THE WAY BACK WE STOP FOR A MOMENT. RÉGIS AND I ARE SITTING SIDE BY SIDE, CHATTING. WE SEE THIS ROCK IN FRONT OF US.



YOU KNOW, THAT ROCK, THERE...

YEAH?

I'VE BEEN WATCHING IT FOR A WHILE.

ME TOO.



DOESN'T IT REMIND YOU OF SOMETHING?

AH, YES.

WHAT?

A SUCHARD ROCHER.



THAT'S WILD! WE HAD EXACTLY THE SAME THOUGHT AT THE SAME TIME!

IT'S ALL THERE: THE MILK CHOCOLATE, THE HAZELNUT CHIPS... WE SHOULD OPEN IT UP TO SEE IF THE PRALINE'S INSIDE.



YOU KNOW WHAT? IF IT WERE A REAL ONE, THAT SIZE, I'D EAT IT IN NO TIME.

IT'S TRUE THAT THAT'S KIND OF MISSING AROUND HERE.



WE EXPOUND FOR HOURS ON OUR SUCHARD CHOCOLATE ROCHER AND HAVE A GOOD LAUGH.

THE NEXT DAY, THE MUJ' BRING IN AMRULLAH ON A STRETCHER. AMRULLAH, 16, HAD THE LOWER PART OF HIS FACE TORN OFF BY SHRAPNEL FROM AN ARTILLERY SHELL.



HE'S IN A HALF-COMA AND IS BETTER OFF THAT WAY. HIS WOUND IS HORRIFYING. EVERYONE IS PETRIFIED AT THE SIGHT OF IT, EXCEPT THE DOCTORS, WHO IMMEDIATELY START TREATING HIM.

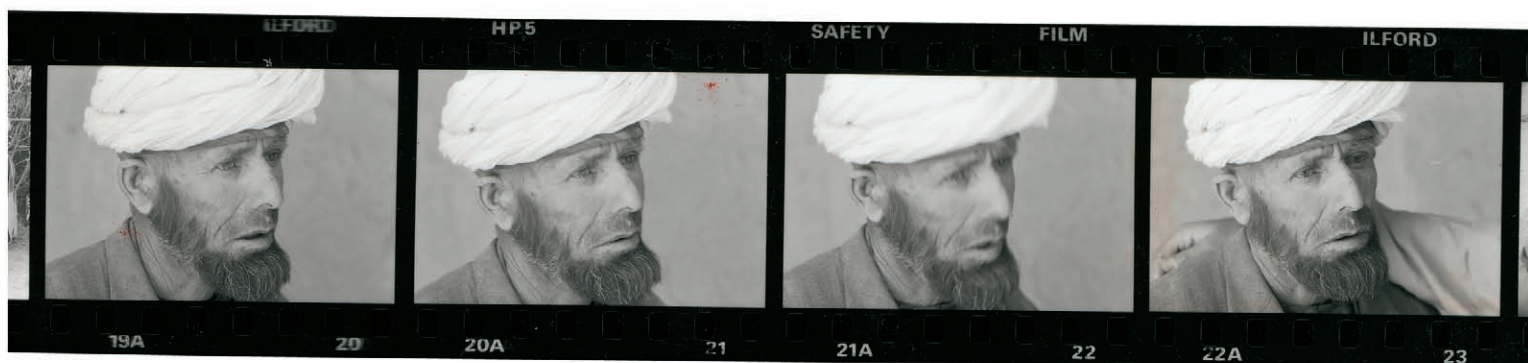


AMRULLAH IS TRANSFERRED FROM THE STRETCHER TO THE "OPERATING ROOM," ON THE TERRACE.



DO THE DOCTORS BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN REPAIR SUCH A DISASTER? THEY CERTAINLY INSPIRE THAT BELIEF IN US. AGAINST ALL ODDS, DESPITE THE DUST, THE LACK OF SPACE, THE BARREN CONDITIONS, WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN THEM.





THE OPERATION CONTINUES LATE INTO THE NIGHT. I PHOTOGRAPH IT AT LENGTH, DOING MY BEST TO MAKE MY PRESENCE INCONSPICUOUS. WITHOUT THE DOCTORS' INTERVENTION, AMRULLAH MIGHT HAVE BEEN DEAD BY NOW. BUT HE ISN'T. HE IS RESTING.



I GO TO DO THE SAME. OUR ROOM SEEMS LARGER THAN USUAL, BECAUSE RÉGIS AND EVELYNE ARE WATCHING OVER AMRULLAH. EVERY DAY, I FEEL LIKE TELLING THEM HOW MUCH I ADMIRE THEM. I KNEW THEY'D JUST LAUGH AT ME FOR SAYING IT, BUT WHAT THEY'RE DOING IS PRETTY DAMN IMPRESSIVE.



SO, HAVING MADE SURE EVERYONE IS ASLEEP AND NOBODY CAN HEAR ME, I SAY OUT LOUD:



AND FALL ASLEEP.

BRAVO.

WHEN I LOOK UP FROM
THE OPERATING TABLE,
THIS IS WHAT I SEE.



THIS MAGNIFICENT AND
UNCHANGING LANDSCAPE
DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN
ABOUT WAR.



BACK TO WORK. THIS MAN CAME TO BRING US HIS LEFT FOOT.



HE WAS OPERATED ON IN 1982, BUT HE REFUSED TO HAVE HIS FOOT AMPUTATED. SO, PREDICTABLY ENOUGH, IT ROTTED THROUGH SO BADLY THAT HE TORE IT OFF HIMSELF YESTERDAY.



AND NOW HE'S BACK, SAYING, "CAN'T YOU PUT IT BACK FOR ME?"

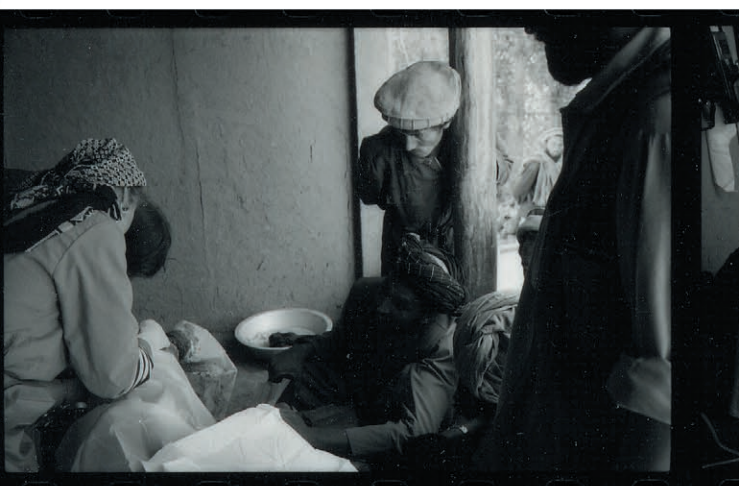
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.



RÉGIS GIVES AN UMPTEENTH PRACTICAL SEMINAR, WITH THE INDISPENSABLE MAHMAD TRANSLATING. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, YOU HAVE TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE UNDERSTOOD PERFECTLY.



THEN HE ANESTHETIZES HIS PATIENT AND JOHN PERFORMS AN AMPUTATION HIGHER UP, SO HE CAN CLEAN OUT THE WOUND.



RÉGIS AND I LIKE TO TALK ABOUT OUR JOBS AND WE'RE CURIOUS ABOUT ONE ANOTHER. HE QUIZZES ME ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY, AND I FIRE QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICINE AT HIM.

YOU ANESTHETIZED ONLY THE LOWER BODY ON THAT GUY WITH THE ROTTED FOOT?

YES, I DID WHAT'S CALLED A SPINAL ANESTHESIA.

IT INVOLVES INSERTING A SMALL NEEDLE BETWEEN TWO LUMBAR VERTEBRAE TO INJECT THE ANESTHETIC INTO THE NERVE ROOTS OF THE SPINAL CORD. THAT WAY WE GET A SENSORY BLOCK, MEANING THAT WE NEUTRALIZE THE PAIN.

YOU SAW HOW WE SAT THE GUY DOWN AND GOT HIM TO BEND HIS BACK WITH HIS CHIN TO HIS CHEST? THAT WAY THE SPINE RELAXES, THE INTERVERTEBRAL SPACE OPENS AND WE CAN DO THE INJECTION.

ISN'T THAT THE SHOT THEY GIVE TO WOMEN DURING LABOR?

NO, FOR WOMEN IN LABOR WE USE EPIDURAL ANALGESIA. SAME PRINCIPLE, BUT MORE SOPHISTICATED. IT ALLOWS YOU TO PLACE A CATHETER, REINJECT ANESTHETIC DURING THE COURSE OF THE PROCEDURE, AND SO ON. WE CAN'T DO THAT HERE BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE THE HIGHLY SANITARY CONDITIONS THAT IT REQUIRES.

THAT'S WHY I FIND WHAT YOU GUYS ARE DOING MIND-BOGGLING. I'VE SEEN OPERATING ROOMS BEFORE, IN FRANCE, WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART EQUIPMENT, WHOLE TEAMS OF PEOPLE, AN ULTRA-CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, THE WORKS. AND SEEING YOU HERE, IT'S SUCH A DIFFERENT WORLD!

IT'S THE SAME WORLD, THOUGH.

THE BASIS OF MEDICINE, WHETHER HERE OR IN FRANCE, IS ALWAYS THE SAME: IT'S CLINICAL OBSERVATION, THE STUDY OF SYMPTOMS. IT'S THE SCIENCE OF READING SIGNS. AND YOU WON'T FIND A BETTER SCHOOL FOR THAT THAN PRACTICING MEDICINE IN A SANITARY WASTELAND, LIKE WHAT WE DO HERE.

OPERATING IS NOT THAT COMPLICATED, YOU KNOW? AFGHAN PEASANTS CAN LEARN THAT. WHAT'S COMPLICATED IS KNOWING WHAT TO OPERATE ON, IT'S DIAGNOSIS.

I REALLY LIKE TECHNOLOGY. THANK GOD FOR CT SCANS AND SUPPLEMENTARY TESTS. BUT WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE THEM, YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO DO WITHOUT. AND THEN YOU RE-LEARN HOW TO PAY ATTENTION, HOW TO LISTEN TO A BODY, HOW TO INTERPRET A COLD SWEAT OR A TOENAIL THAT'S TURNING BLUE. YOU RE-LEARN THE ESSENCE OF THE JOB.

AT THE HOSPITAL OF SAINTE-FOY-LA-GRANDE, WHERE I USED TO WORK, I CAME INTO CONTACT WITH SOME EXCELLENT DOCTORS WHO HELPED PREPARE ME FOR THIS. JO DUBICQ WAS ONE OF THEM. HE WAS ONE OF THOSE DOCTORS WHO DON'T LET THEIR TEAM CARVE OUT A COMFORTABLE NICHE FOR THEMSELVES. HE CHALLENGED PEOPLE'S SKILLS, THEIR INTELLIGENCE, THEIR CURIOSITY.



I ALSO WORKED WITH A TRUE GENERAL SURGEON, SOMETHING THAT'S HARDER AND HARDER TO FIND NOWADAYS. HIS NAME WAS GUY LASSALLE. WELL, THIS GUY LASSALLE MADE ME PARTICIPATE IN WHAT HE WAS DOING, HE EXPLAINED THINGS TO ME, ADVISED ME. HE'S SOMEONE WHO'D DO AN AMAZING JOB HERE. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY TIMES A DAY I THINK ABOUT HIM AS I'M CARRYING OUT A PROCEDURE.



I CAN ALSO TELL YOU ABOUT A LEADING AUTHORITY IN HIS FIELD, PROFESSOR CHEVAIS, WHO WAS A PIONEER OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE IN BORDEAUX. HE'S DEAD NOW, UNFORTUNATELY.



SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH, HE WAS VERY ILL, BUT HE'D STILL COME TO THE HOSPITAL UNOFFICIALLY, PUT ON HIS SCRUBS, AND DO THE ROUNDS OF PATIENTS.



ONE DAY, I WAS LOOKING AFTER MY PATIENTS, AND WE'D JUST HAD WHAT WE CALL THE GRAND MASS—KNOW WHAT THAT IS?

IT'S WHEN THE HEAD DOCTOR AND HIS RESIDENTS DO THE ROUNDS AND THE BIG BOSS COMMENTS ON EACH PATIENT.

NO.



SO, ANYWAY, THEY'D JUST COME THROUGH, AND I SAW CHEVAIS COME INTO THE ROOM. HE LEANED OVER ONE PATIENT AND CALLED ME OVER. HE ASKED ME, "DID THEY SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PATIENT'S FEVER?" I ANSWERED, "NO." THE GUY HAD A FEVER OF ABOUT 101.3°F.

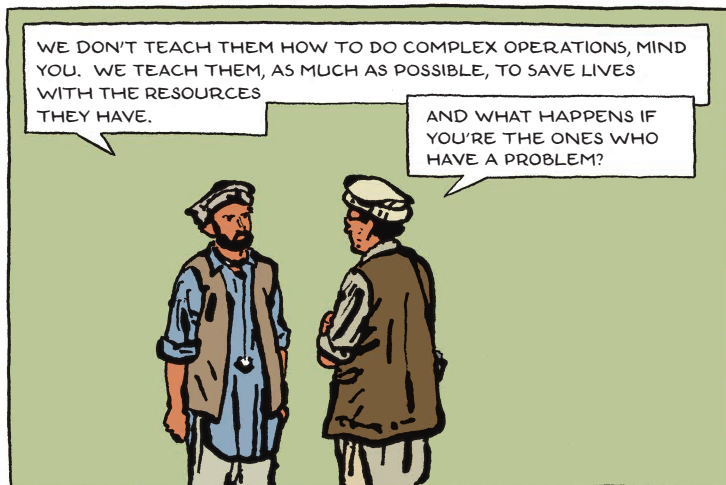
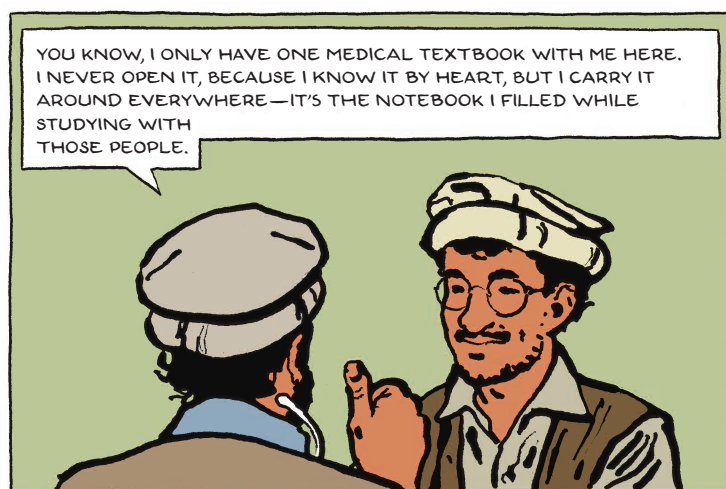


SO CHEVAIS SAID TO ME, "WATCH AND LISTEN." HE REMOVED THE PATIENT'S SHEET—WE WERE ALONE WITH HIM—AND SAID, "FIRST, YOU GET AN OVERVIEW OF THE PATIENT. NEXT, WE EXAMINE HIM FROM HEAD TO TOE."



AND THAT'S WHAT HE DID. IN A FEW MINUTES OF OBSERVATION, HE FOUND TEN POSSIBLE CAUSES FOR THE FEVER: A BLOCKAGE IN A PROBE, A BADLY PLACED CATHETER CAUSING AN INFLAMMATION, ETC.





THE DAYS PASS AND
ALONG COME THE
WOUNDED...



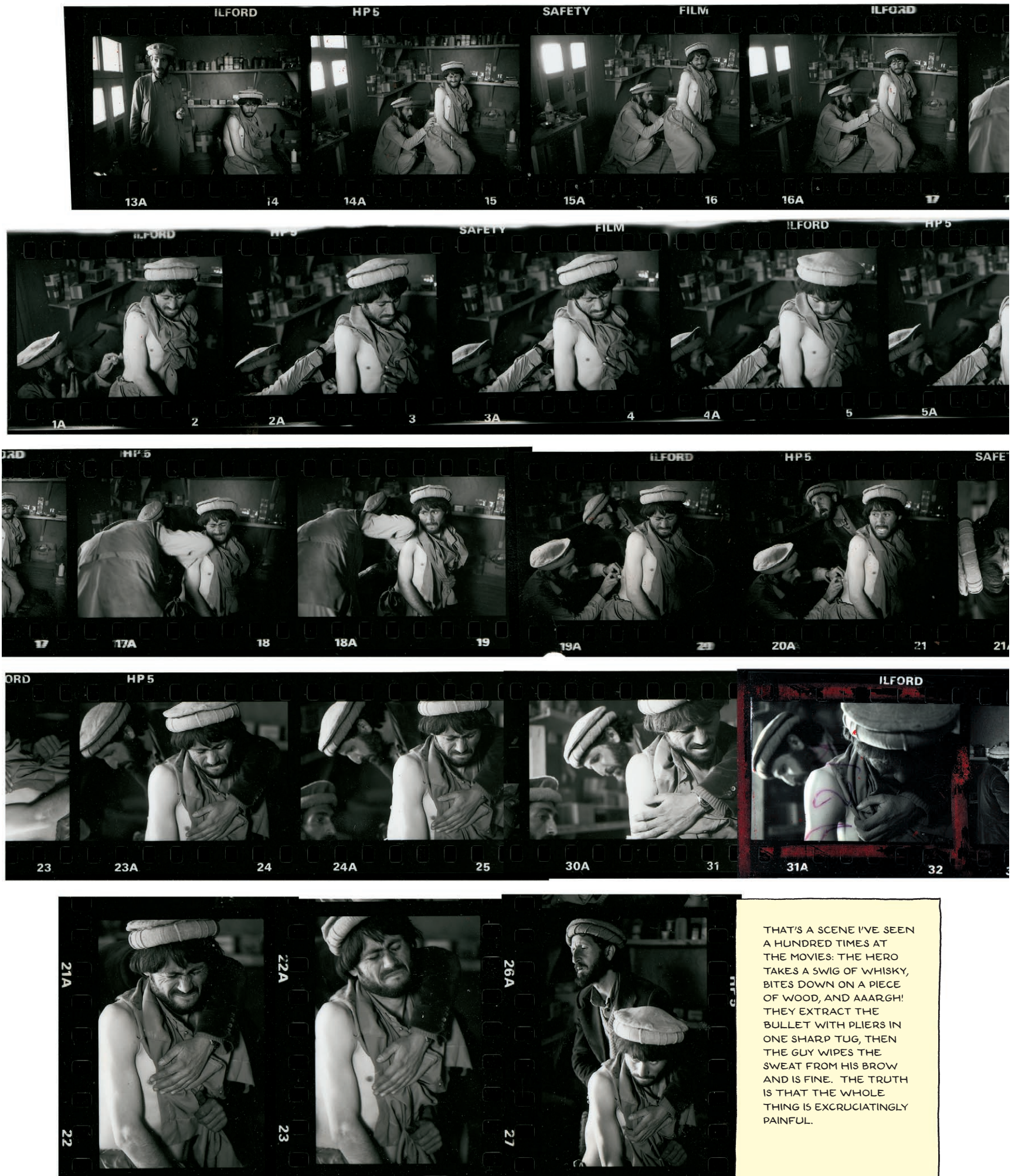
FOLLOWED BY MORE
WOUNDED, AND MORE, AND
STILL MORE WOUNDED.



I WATCH ROBERT TREAT
A MAN WITH A BULLET
WOUND.



THAT MAN HAS WHAT
YOU'D USUALLY REFER
TO AS A "MINOR WOUND."
IT'S USEFUL TO WITNESS
WHAT A PERSON WITH A
MINOR WOUND HAS TO
GO THROUGH.



ON THE EVE OF SEPTEMBER 23RD, WE HEAR A MASSIVE BOMBING CLOSE BY.



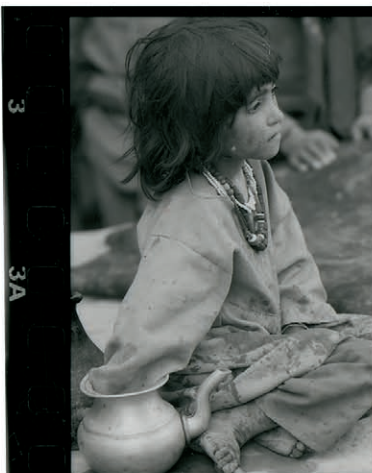
SIX HOURS LATER, WE ENTER P ST K, GUIDED BY THE EMISSARIES WHO CAME TO GET US. THE WOUNDED HAVE BEEN SEPARATED FROM THE DEAD AND COLLECTED INTO A PART OF THE VILLAGE THAT HAS BEEN SPARED BY THE BOMBS.



THIS LITTLE GIRL HAD HER HAND BURNED.



JOHN FILLS A TEAPOT WITH AN ANTISEPTIC SOLUTION AND THE CHILD DIPS HER HAND IN IT. THEN SHE IS TREATED.







OTHER WOUNDED PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LAID DOWN IN A LARGE, DARK ROOM WITH ONE SKYLIGHT. IT'S THE VILLAGE BAKERY. IT'S FULL OF PEOPLE AND WHISPERS. JOHN, JULIETTE, AND I MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH.



SEVERAL WOMEN ARE THERE, SOME OF THEM WITH THEIR FACES UNCOVERED.

ASK THEM IF I CAN TAKE PICTURES.



I'M ALLOWED TO DO SO.

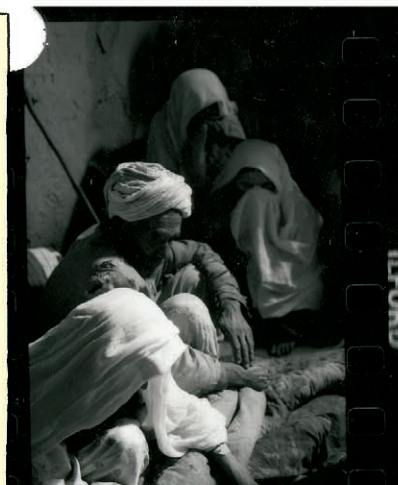
IN A CORNER, A WOMAN WITH A WHITE HEADSCARF IS WATCHING OVER TWO OF HER CHILDREN, A TEENAGE GIRL AND A BABY, BOTH BLOODIED. THE LITTLE BOY IS MAYBE TWO OR THREE. HE HARDLY MOVES BUT FROM TIME TO TIME LETS OUT A LITTLE WAIL OF "AOH."



"AOH."



"AOH."





INVITED BY THE FATHER, JOHN AND I ENTER A HOUSE.



IT'S TOO DARK TO TAKE PICTURES. IN ANY CASE, I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT. I SIT DOWN ON THE FLOOR.



THE LITTLE GIRL IS LYING IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM. JOHN WHISPERS SOME SOOTHING WORDS AND STARTS EXAMINING HER.



THERE'S NO APPARENT WOUND. NO BLOOD, NO TEARS. JOHN HANDLES HER CAREFULLY.



HE TRIES TO PICK HER UP.



SHE FALLS.



HE TRIES AGAIN.



SHE FALLS AGAIN.



STILL TALKING TO HER, HE CAREFULLY SHIFTS HER ONTO HER BELLY.

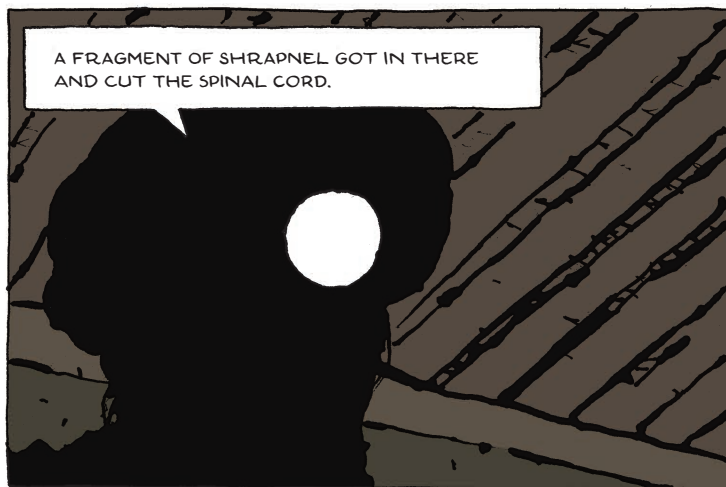
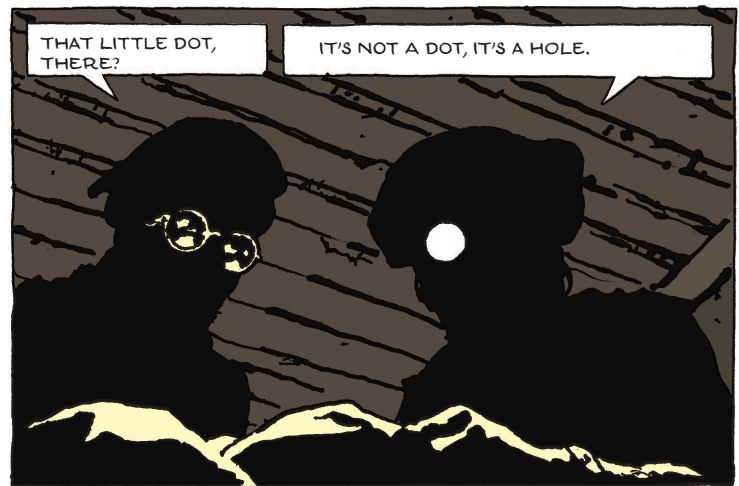


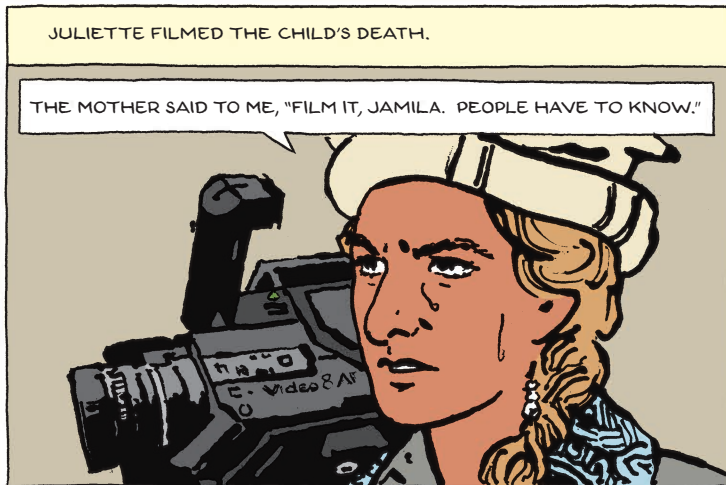
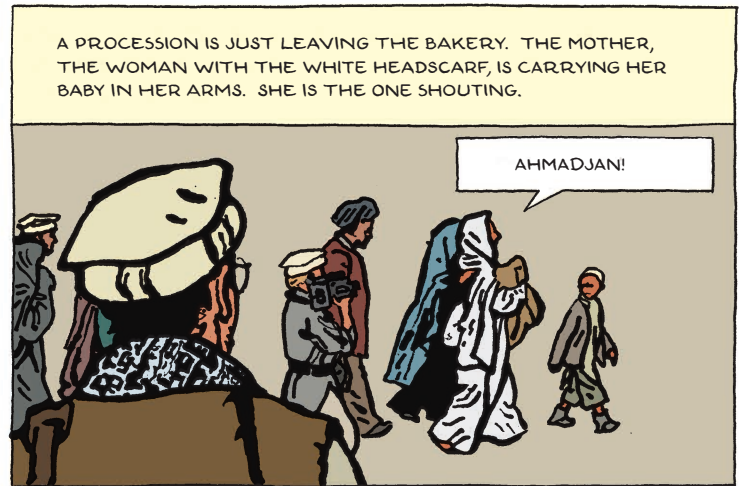
HE CAREFULLY PUSHES ASIDE HER CLOTHING AND SCRUTINIZES HER BACK.

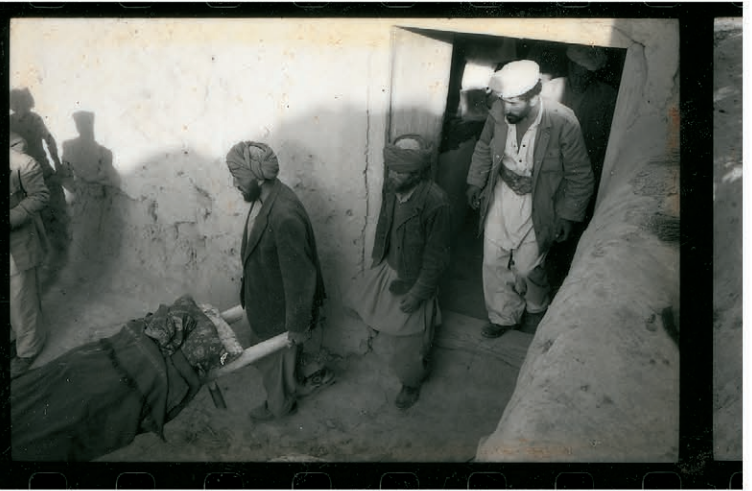
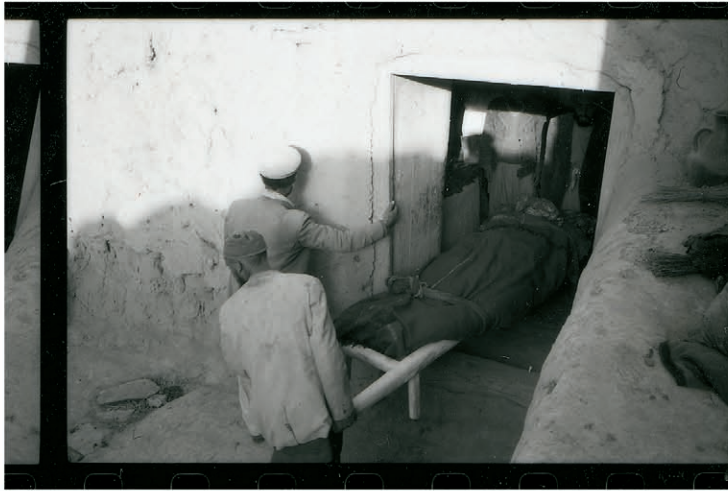


COME AND SEE.









THEN ON HORSEBACK,
ON A DONKEY'S BACK,
ON A MAN'S BACK, OR
CARRIED ON STRETCHERS,
THE WOUNDED START
OUT ON THE LONG AND
ARDUOUS ROAD UPHILL
TO ZARAGANDARA.



13

13A





WE GET BACK. THE TEAM DEALS WITH THE INFLUX OF WOUNDED. WHILE THE MOST SERIOUSLY INJURED ARE TREATED BEHIND BLANKETS, THE OTHERS WAIT.



32A

33



HP5



THE BROTHER OF A GUY WITH A WOUNDED KNEE RAISES A RUCKUS. HE DEMANDS THAT THE LOCAL BONESETTER TAKE CARE OF HIS BROTHER. RÉGIS IS ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO IT.

THAT'S COMPLETELY MORONIC!



THIS GUY DOESN'T HAVE A BONE OUT OF JOINT, HE HAS AN OPEN WOUND. IF HE TRIES TO RE-SET THE KNEE HE'S GOING TO DESTROY IT!



THE BONESETTER ARRIVES. RÉGIS BARS HIS WAY.

مداخله من را نکنم. بگذارید این آقا را درمان کنیم.

ما داریم بیکار می‌کنیم.



THE BROTHER INSISTS. THINGS TURN NASTY.

بدرستی خواهد آورد. ما فراموش کردیم برادر را درمان کنیم.



IN THE END RÉGIS IS FORCED TO LET THE BONESETTER GO OVER TO THE PATIENT.



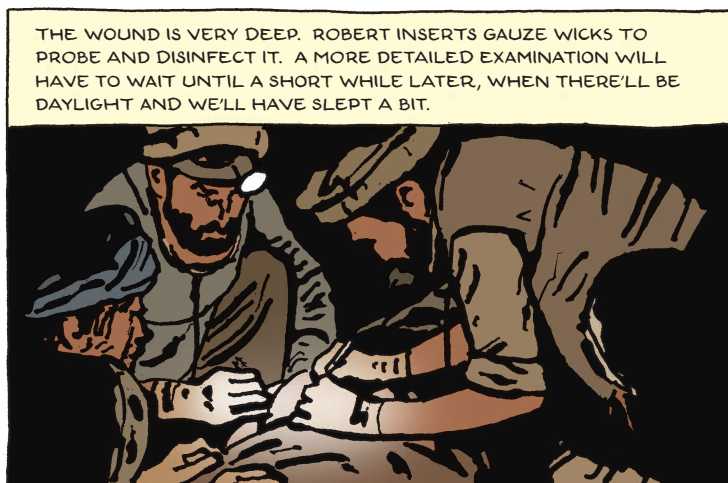
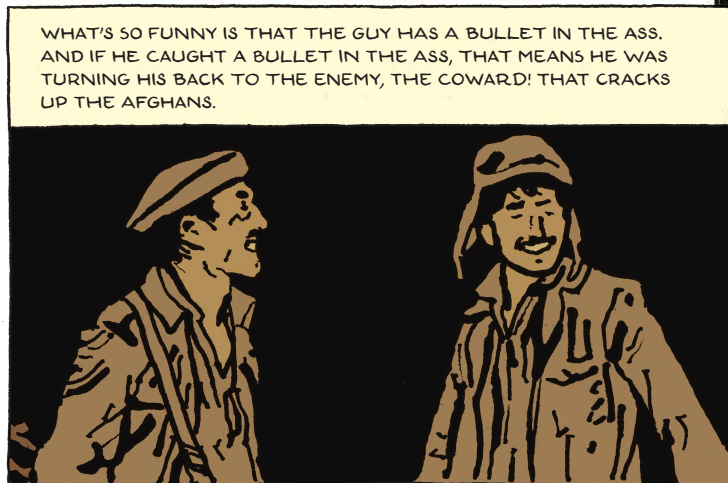
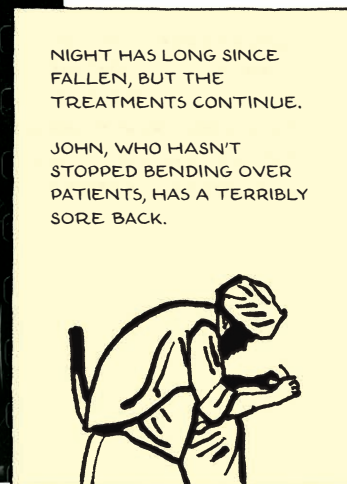
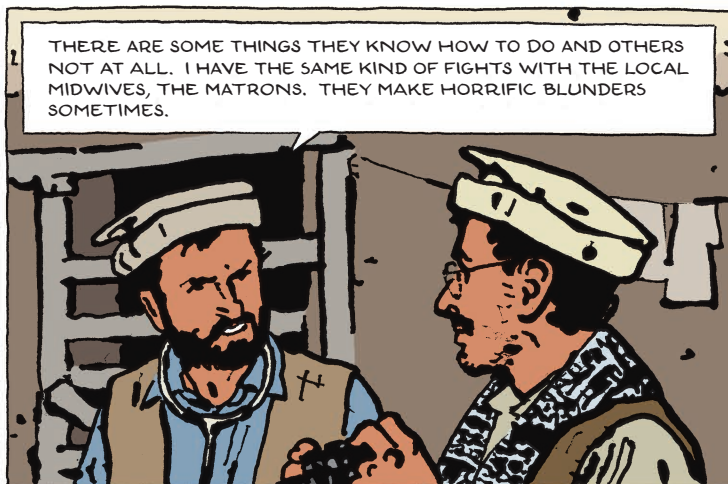
AND IN NO TIME FLAT, THE BONESETTER HAS CAUSED IRREPARABLE DAMAGE.



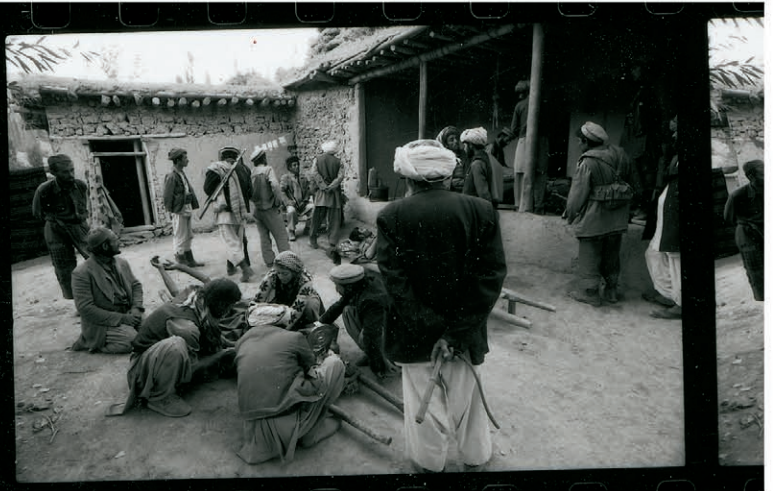
THE POOR GUY'S KNEE HAS LITERALLY EXPLODED.

PERFECT! I HOPE YOU'RE PROUD OF YOURSELVES!





IN THE MORNING, THE MUJ' WITH THE PIERCED POSTERIOR IS THOROUGHLY EXAMINED. IT TURNS OUT THAT THE HOLE IN HIS BUTTOCK WAS AN EXIT WOUND. THE BULLET ENTERED THROUGH HIS GROIN—SO, FROM THE FRONT—WITHOUT TOUCHING ANY VITAL ORGAN. HE WAS SLANDERED AND IS NOW REDEEMED.



THE DAY'S EMERGENCIES ADD TO THOSE OF PREVIOUS DAYS. THE COURTYARD AND THE MOSQUE ARE CONSTANTLY FULL.



AND THE OLDER CUSTOMERS AREN'T FORGOTTEN. THE STITCHES HAVE TO COME OFF THE EYELID OF THE MAN WHOSE EYE HAS BEEN ENUCLEATED; THE SCAR ON THE MUJ' WITH THE NICKED TEMPLE NEEDS TO BE CHECKED; AND SO ON AND ON. IT'S ENDLESS.

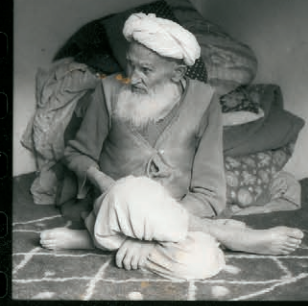


THE PEOPLE'S GRATITUDE IS TOUCHING. THEY ARE CONSTANTLY SEEING TO THE WELL-BEING AND COMPENSATION OF THE TEAM. WE ARE GIVEN WALNUTS, NECKLACES OF ALMONDS AND PISTACHIOS, DRIED APPLES AND APRICOTS, WATERMELONS, MELONS, EMBROIDERED HANDKERCHIEFS.

AT MY LAST MISSION HERE, I WAS EVEN OFFERED A BIG BRICK OF OPIUM!



BESIDES THE BREAKFAST CHORCHOY, WHICH IS SERVED TO US AT HOME EVERY MORNING, WE ARE REGULARLY INVITED BY ONE VILLAGER OR ANOTHER TO SHARE IN A MEAL. THIS OLD GENTLEMAN, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS US OVER FOR LUNCH.



JULIETTE IS INVITED TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN A NEIGHBORING VILLAGE, WITH A YOUNG COUPLE SHE MET HERE FOUR YEARS EARLIER. WHEN SHE RETURNS, SHE TELLS ME ABOUT IT.

THEY REALLY MARRIED FOR LOVE.

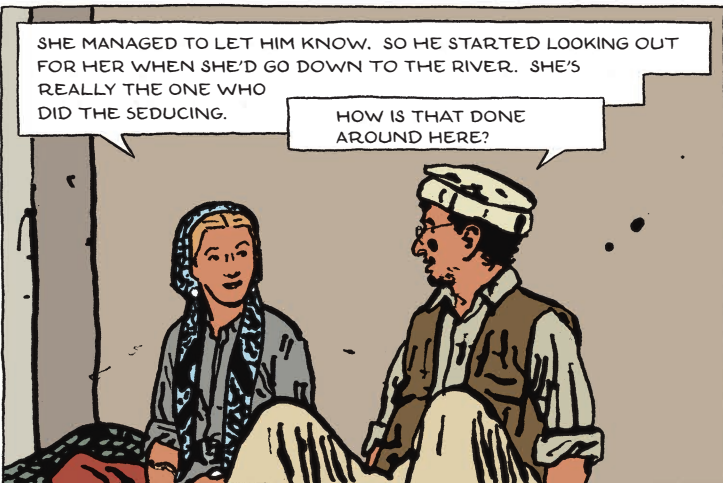


IT'S THE WOMAN WHO CHOSE THE MAN. ALL THE GUYS IN THE VILLAGE WERE PLAYING A BIG BUZKASHI GAME. THE WOMEN WERE WATCHING FROM THE ROOFTOPS. FOR HER, IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.



SHE MANAGED TO LET HIM KNOW. SO HE STARTED LOOKING OUT FOR HER WHEN SHE'D GO DOWN TO THE RIVER. SHE'S REALLY THE ONE WHO DID THE SEDUCING.

HOW IS THAT DONE AROUND HERE?



WELL, YOU WIGGLE A BIT, YOU SHOW YOUR ANKLES, YOU MOVE YOUR SHAWLS ASIDE—PRETENDING THAT IT'S TO AVOID GETTING THEM WET, BUT CASTING A FEW GLANCES AT THE SAME TIME. THAT KIND OF THING.

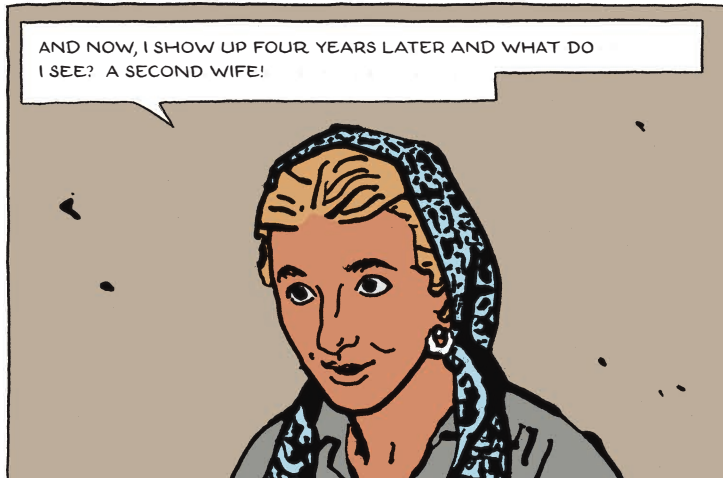
I SEE. THAT'S GOOD.

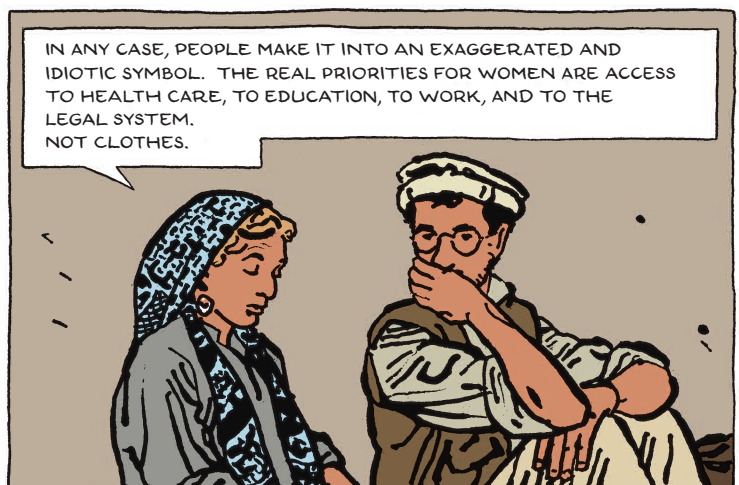
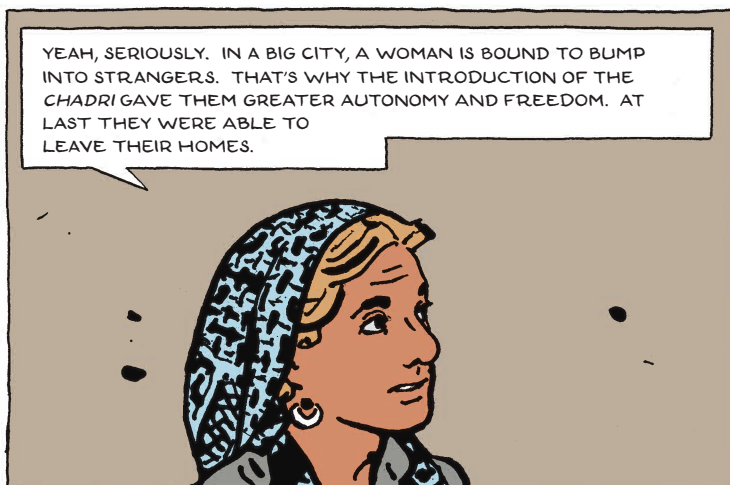
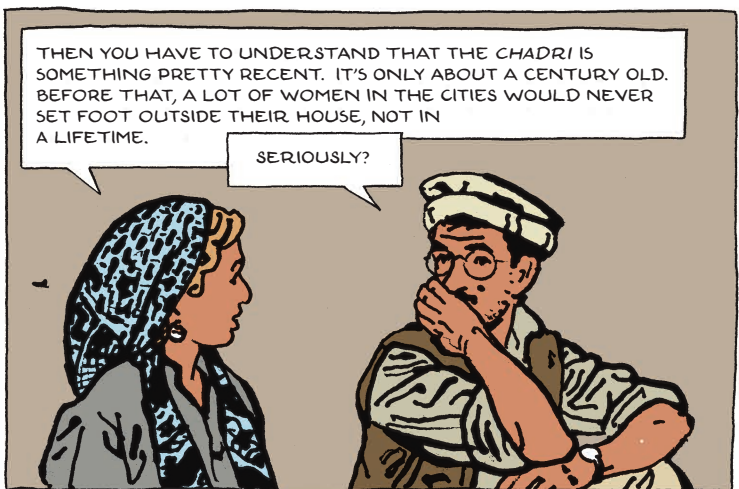
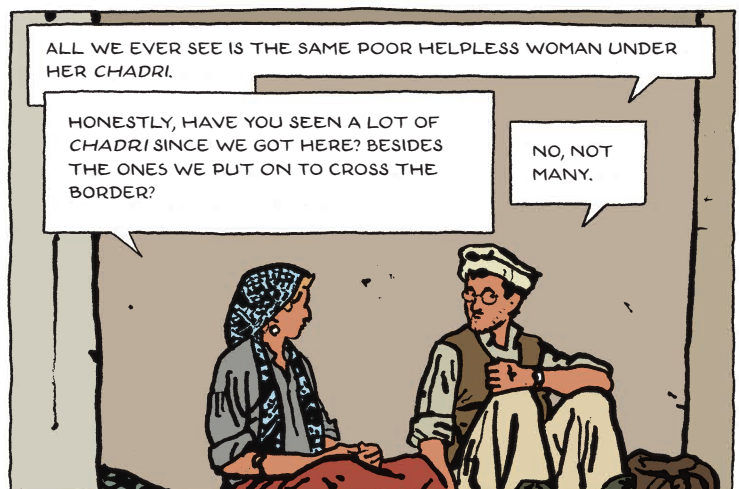
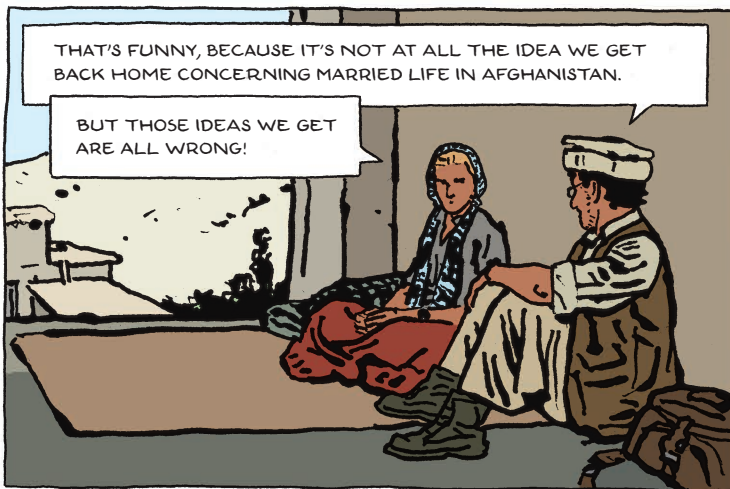
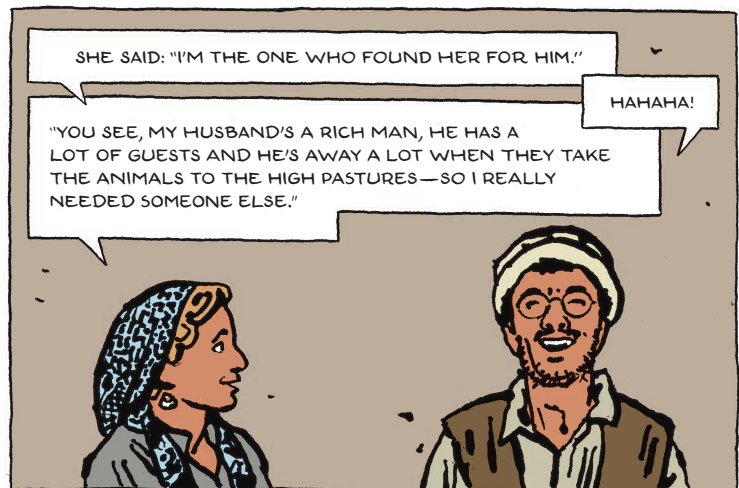
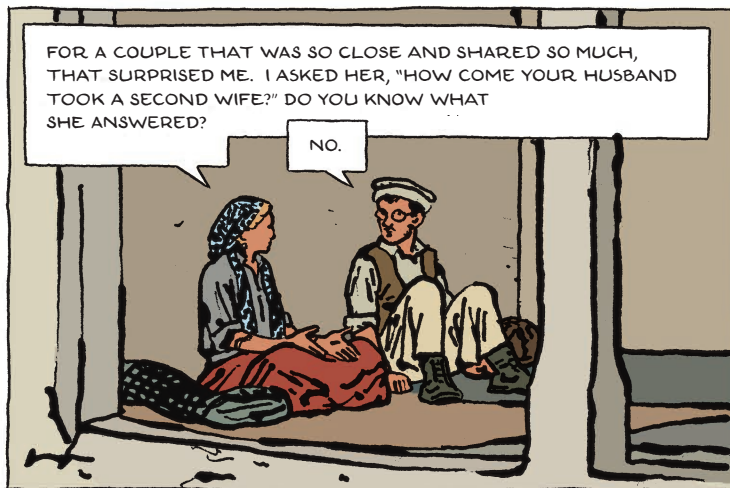


I MET THEM SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, WHEN THEY WERE NEWLYWEDS. IT WAS A JOY TO SHARE THEIR HOUSE, BECAUSE THEY WERE REALLY IN LOVE. ALL DAY LONG, HE'D KISS HER IN THE NECK, HE'D CUDDLE HER IN CORNERS, HE'D TICKLE HER WHILE SHE WAS MAKING BREAD. THEY LAUGHED ALL THE TIME.



AND NOW, I SHOW UP FOUR YEARS LATER AND WHAT DO I SEE? A SECOND WIFE!



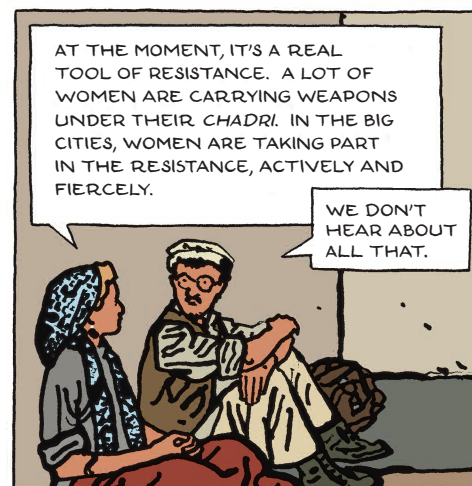




LET ME TELL YOU A FUNNY STORY. WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER IN KABUL, MY BEST FRIEND WAS AN AFGHAN GIRL FROM AN ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY THAT WAS REALLY WESTERNIZED. NO WAY WOULD YOU FIND A CHADRI IN THEIR HOME.

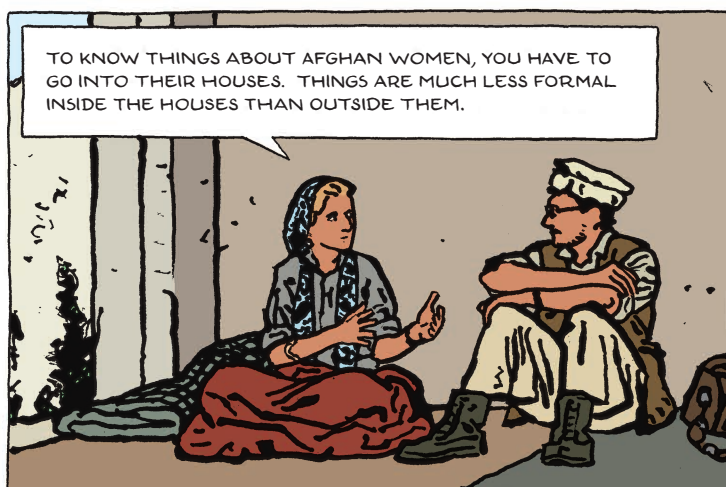


BUT SHE'D BOUGHT A CHADRI HERSELF SO SHE COULD GO MEET HER BOYFRIEND WITHOUT ANYONE FINDING OUT.



AT THE MOMENT, IT'S A REAL TOOL OF RESISTANCE. A LOT OF WOMEN ARE CARRYING WEAPONS UNDER THEIR CHADRI. IN THE BIG CITIES, WOMEN ARE TAKING PART IN THE RESISTANCE, ACTIVELY AND FIERCELY.

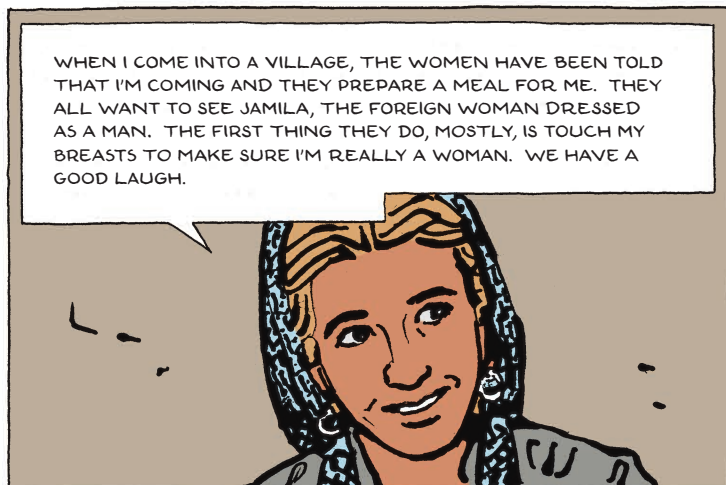
WE DON'T HEAR ABOUT ALL THAT.



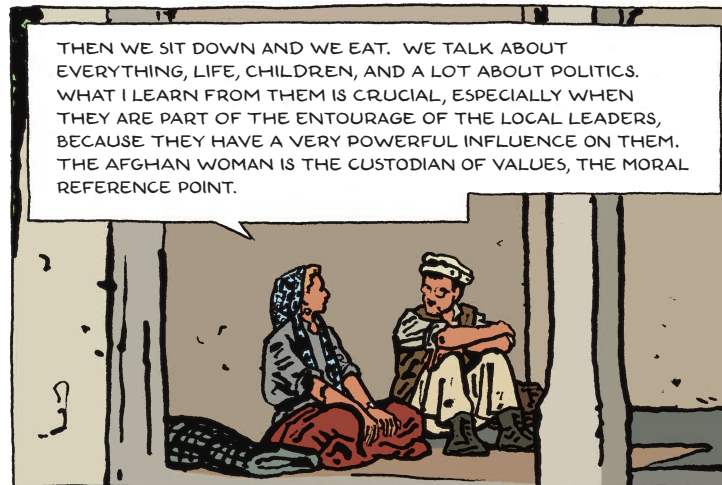
TO KNOW THINGS ABOUT AFGHAN WOMEN, YOU HAVE TO GO INTO THEIR HOUSES. THINGS ARE MUCH LESS FORMAL INSIDE THE HOUSES THAN OUTSIDE THEM.



I'M LUCKY TO BE ABLE TO GO EVERYWHERE. AS THE LEADER OF THE MISSION I'M ABLE TO GO AMONG THE MEN, AND AS A WOMAN I'M ABLE TO JOIN THE WOMEN. AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT OUR DEALINGS ARE PERFECTLY NATURAL AND SPONTANEOUS.



WHEN I COME INTO A VILLAGE, THE WOMEN HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT I'M COMING AND THEY PREPARE A MEAL FOR ME. THEY ALL WANT TO SEE JAMILA, THE FOREIGN WOMAN DRESSED AS A MAN. THE FIRST THING THEY DO, MOSTLY, IS TOUCH MY BREASTS TO MAKE SURE I'M REALLY A WOMAN. WE HAVE A GOOD LAUGH.



THEN WE SIT DOWN AND WE EAT. WE TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING, LIFE, CHILDREN, AND A LOT ABOUT POLITICS. WHAT I LEARN FROM THEM IS CRUCIAL, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARE PART OF THE ENTOURAGE OF THE LOCAL LEADERS, BECAUSE THEY HAVE A VERY POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON THEM. THE AFGHAN WOMAN IS THE CUSTODIAN OF VALUES, THE MORAL REFERENCE POINT.



I'M MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE IN MY DEALINGS WITH THE MEN AS A RESULT OF HAVING MET THE WOMEN AND OBTAINED SOME INSIDE INFORMATION.

YES, I UNDERSTAND.

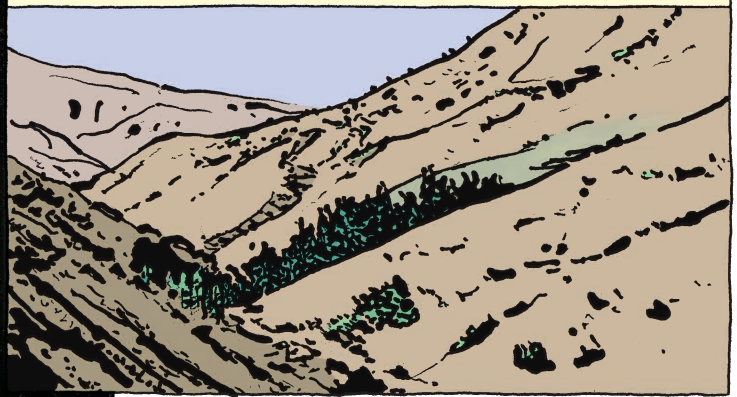


AND THEY'RE FUNNY. YOU SHOULD HEAR THEM GOSSIPING ABOUT THE MEN, YOU'D SPLIT YOUR SIDES LAUGHING.

I'M GOING TO GROW SOME BOOBS SO I CAN COME WITH YOU NEXT TIME.

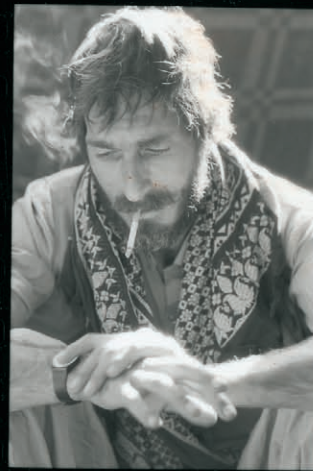


WE'VE BEEN IN ZARAGANDARA FOR NEARLY A MONTH. WE'RE STARTING TO TALK ABOUT OUR DEPARTURE, WHICH HAS TO TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE FIRST SNOWFALL.



ROBERT AND EVELYNE ARE STAYING. THE TWO OF THEM ARE GOING TO RUN THE HOSPITAL TOGETHER, AND ANOTHER MISSION WILL TAKE OVER NEXT SUMMER.

SO, ROBERT, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SPENDING A YEAR HERE?



SAFETY
FILM

"I FEEL GREAT."

"YOU KNOW, I'M GLAD TO BE HAVING THIS ADVENTURE AS A PART OF A TEAM, BUT ONCE YOU GUYS HAVE TAKEN OFF AND WE'RE STUCK HERE, TOTALLY LOST—I HAVE THE FEELING THAT THAT'S WHEN THINGS WILL REALLY BEGIN."



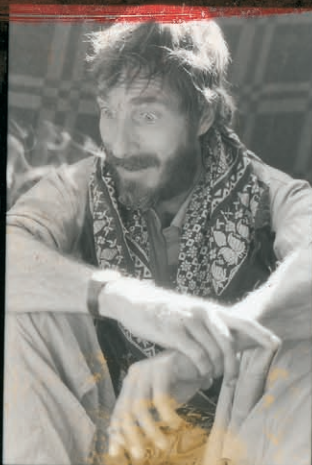
ILFORD

"I ALREADY STAYED OVER ONE WINTER IN THE PREVIOUS MISSION, WITH SYLVIE. THE CONDITIONS WERE THE SAME, EXCEPT THAT THE TRIP OVER WAS WAY WORSE THAN THIS TIME. FOR STARTERS, TWO MONTHS IN PRISON AT THE PESHAWAR FORT, BECAUSE WE'D GOTTEN NABBED AT THE BORDER."

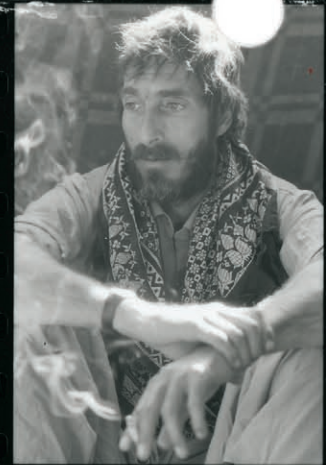


HP5

"THEN A THREE-MONTH TRIP, INCLUDING BEING HELD PRISONER FOR TWO WEEKS BY A COMMANDER (DON'T EVER ASK ME TO SHAKE HANDS WITH THAT CREEP), RACKETEERED EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, ABANDONED BY OUR ESCORT TWO PASSES BEFORE OUR DESTINATION... NOTHING BUT JOY, BASICALLY."



"THAT WINTER I HAD THE BEGINNINGS OF APPENDICITIS. I WAS INCHES AWAY FROM TURNING MYSELF OVER TO THE RUSSIANS. I DIDN'T TAKE ANY PAINKILLERS, SO I COULD GAUGE MY LEVEL OF PAIN, AND I STUFFED MYSELF WITH ANTIBIOTICS. IT PASSED, EVENTUALLY."



ILFORD

"THERE WERE WOLVES. YOU COULDN'T GO OUT AT NIGHT TO TAKE A PISS BECAUSE OF THE WOLVES. IN THE MORNING YOU'D SEE THEIR PAWPRINTS IN THE SNOW, AROUND THE HOUSES. AT THE END OF THE WINTER, WE HAD NOTHING LEFT TO EAT. WE'D BOIL A FEW TREE LEAVES AND EAT THEM LIKE SPINACH."



SO WHAT MADE YOU COME BACK?—

"THE PEOPLE."

"I'LL TELL YOU A STORY, TO GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF THE GENEROSITY OF THESE PEOPLE. EVERY DAY, THEY'D BRING US BREAD. AS TIME WENT ON, THAT BREAD BECAME MORE AND MORE DISGUSTING. BY THE END, THERE WAS MORE SOIL THAN BREAD IN IT."

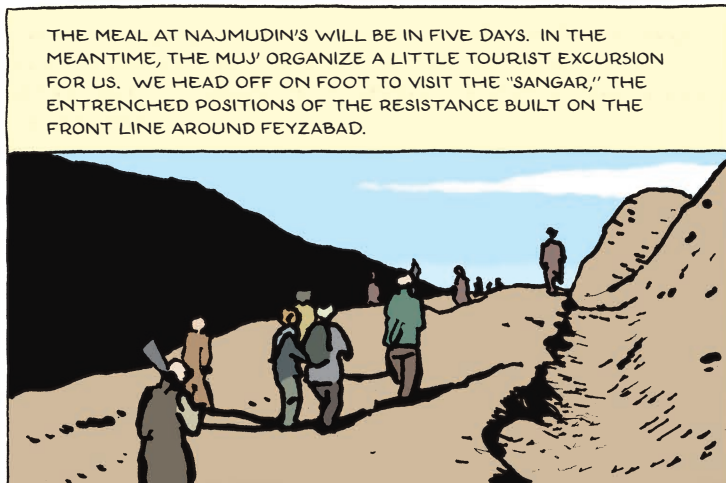


"ONE DAY WE TOLD THE BAKER, PRETTY TACTLESSLY, THAT WE DIDN'T WANT ANY MORE, THAT WE WERE GOING TO THROW IT OUT. HE LOOKED AT US A BIT SHEEPISHLY AND ASKED US NOT TO THROW IT OUT BUT TO GIVE IT BACK TO HIM."

"THAT AFTERNOON WE FOUND OUT THAT, FOR THE PREVIOUS MONTH, NOBODY IN THE AREA HAD BEEN EATING BREAD. ALL THE FAMILIES HAD SCRAPED THE BOTTOM OF THEIR WHEAT STORES SO THAT SYLVIE AND I COULD CONTINUE TO HAVE SOME."

SO, NATURALLY, ONCE YOU'VE LIVED THROUGH SOMETHING LIKE THAT, YOU COME BACK AND YOU DO IT AGAIN.





A WEEK!



I FEEL AS IF THE WHOLE HIMALAYAN RANGE HAS BEEN DROPPED ON MY SHOULDERS.



I SUDDENLY REALIZE HOW FED UP I AM WITH BEING IN A GROUP, WITH ALWAYS TAGGING ALONG.



I DON'T WANT TO GO TO KESHEM. I WANT TO GO BACK TO FRANCE.



MY SUPPLY OF FILM IS DWINDLING, SO I'LL HAVE TO START RATIONING MYSELF—SOMETHING I HATE TO DO. THE WORST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO ME WOULD BE TO FIND MYSELF UNABLE TO TAKE PICTURES. THAT WOULD KILL OFF ANY REMAINING DESIRE TO BE HERE.



WE COME UP TO THE FAMOUS "SANGAR," IN THE DISTANCE YOU CAN MAKE OUT THE FEYZABAD AIRPORT, HELD BY THE SOVIET FORCES. REGIS TAKES PICTURES OF IT.



SINCE THAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF OUR LITTLE WALK, WE EAT A FEW WATERMELONS AND HEAD BACK.



TELL ME SOMETHING, HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE ONE OF THOSE SMALL CARAVANS THAT HEAD BACK EMPTY TO PAKISTAN TO MAKE THE TRIP?

IT DEPENDS.



LESS TIME THAN ON THE WAY OVER HERE?

OH YEAH, MUCH LESS. IF ALL GOES WELL, IT TAKES ROUGHLY TWO WEEKS.



WHY DO YOU ASK?

JUST CURIOUS.





BY THE TIME WE GET BACK, I'VE MADE MY DECISION. JULIETTE CERTAINLY ISN'T GOING TO LIKE IT. TO AVOID SPOILING THE PARTY, I'M PLANNING TO TELL HER ONLY AFTER THE MEAL AT NAJMUDIN'S.



THE DAY OF THE MEAL COMES QUICKLY. AFTER A FEW HOURS' WALK, WE'RE HUGGING NAJMUDIN AND HIS COMPANIONS.



THEY'VE REALLY GONE TO TOWN ON THE MEAL. AT BASSIR KHAN'S, A MONTH AGO, WE SHARED THE SUMPTUOUS DAILY FARE OF A POWERFUL LEADER. BUT THERE'S NOTHING DAY-TO-DAY ABOUT THIS EVENT. IT'S A REAL COUNTRYSIDE BANQUET FOR A SPECIAL OCCASION, SOMETHING COUNTRY PEOPLE DON'T HAVE TOO OFTEN. AND NEITHER DO WE.

MAN, THIS IS SO DELICIOUS!

THIS TOO! HAVE YOU TRIED IT?



NAJMUDIN PRESIDES OVER THE MEAL.



WE CAN TELL HE IS HAPPY TO HAVE BROUGHT US TOGETHER AND SADDENED TO SEE US LEAVE.



WHEN THE TIME COMES TO HEAD BACK, THE HUGS ARE VERY MOVING. I HEAR THE EXPRESSIONS MAHMAD TAUGHT ME: MAY PEACE BE WITH YOU, MAY YOU STAY HEALTHY, MAY YOU STAY ALIVE. THEY SOUND PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE.



I WALKED ALONGSIDE JULIETTE FOR A LONG WHILE AND NEITHER OF US SPEAKS.

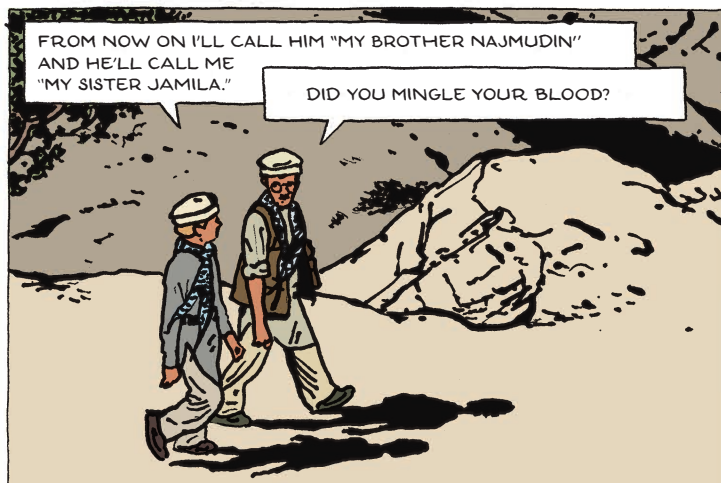


I WANT TO TELL YOU... NAJMUDDIN AND I ARE NOW BROTHER AND SISTER BEFORE THE KORAN.



FROM NOW ON I'LL CALL HIM "MY BROTHER NAJMUDDIN" AND HE'LL CALL ME "MY SISTER JAMILA."

DID YOU MINGLE YOUR BLOOD?



ALMOST. HE ASKED ME, "ARE WE GOING TO SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN?" I TOLD HIM THAT YES, I'D BE BACK AND THAT MY HEART BELONGS TO THIS COUNTRY.



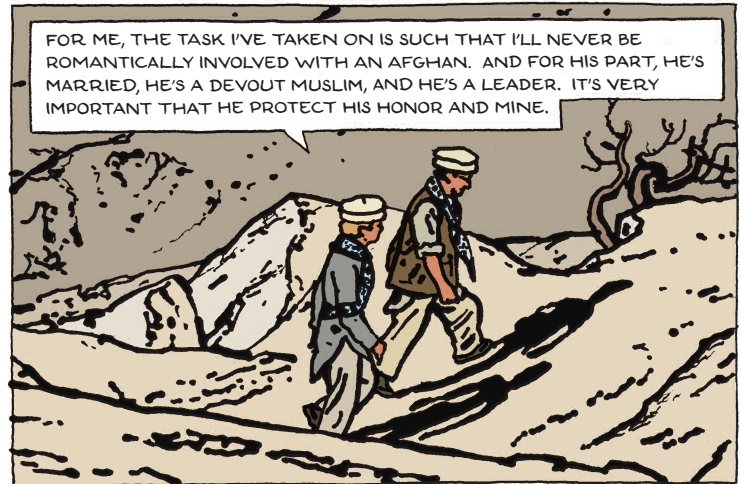
SO HE TOOK OUT HIS POCKET KORAN, WRAPPED IN AN EMBROIDERED CLOTH, AND WE SWORE TO BE BROTHER AND SISTER TO EACH OTHER.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?





THERE'S A VERY STRONG FEELING BETWEEN US, YOU KNOW. BUT IT'S A FEELING THAT WE HAD TO CLARIFY TO OURSELVES AND TO OTHERS, TO MAKE IT VIABLE.



FOR ME, THE TASK I'VE TAKEN ON IS SUCH THAT I'LL NEVER BE ROMANTICALLY INVOLVED WITH AN AFGHAN. AND FOR HIS PART, HE'S MARRIED, HE'S A DEVOUT MUSLIM, AND HE'S A LEADER. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT HE PROTECT HIS HONOR AND MINE.

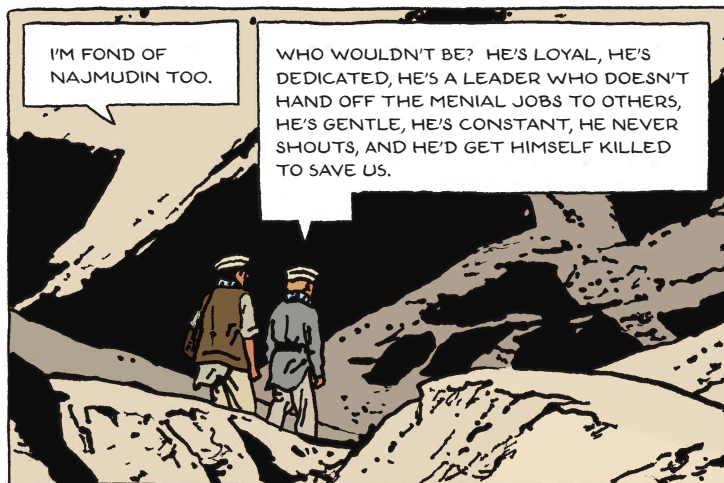


BROTHER-AND-SISTER-HOOD BEFORE THE KORAN SETTLES EVERYTHING. WE CAN TOUCH EACH OTHER, SHAKE HANDS, OR HUG, WITHOUT SPARKING GOSSIP. IT'S OFFICIAL, IF YOU LIKE. I'VE REALLY BECOME HIS SISTER.



TOO BAD.

HAHAHA! THAT'S LIFE!



I'M FOND OF NAJMUDIN TOO.

WHO WOULDN'T BE? HE'S LOYAL, HE'S DEDICATED, HE'S A LEADER WHO DOESN'T HAND OFF THE MENIAL JOBS TO OTHERS, HE'S GENTLE, HE'S CONSTANT, HE NEVER SHOUTS, AND HE'D GET HIMSELF KILLED TO SAVE US.



HE TAKES AFTER HIS SISTER.

THANKS. I WISH.

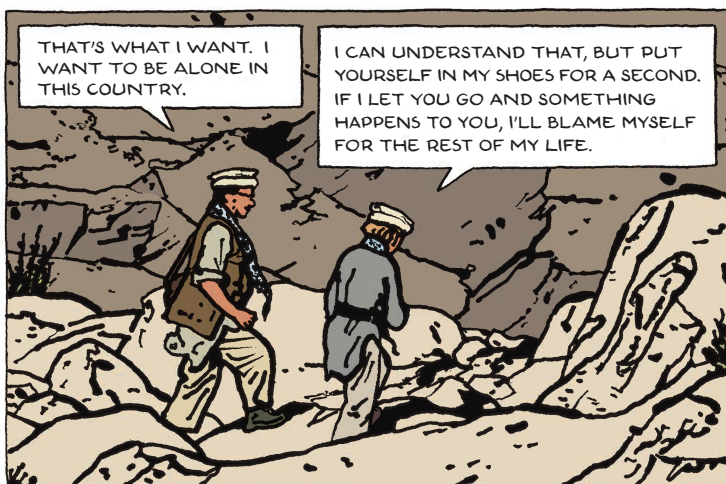
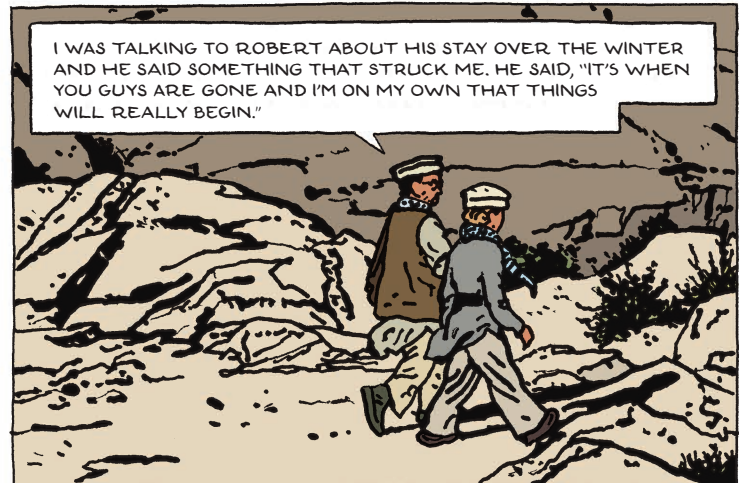
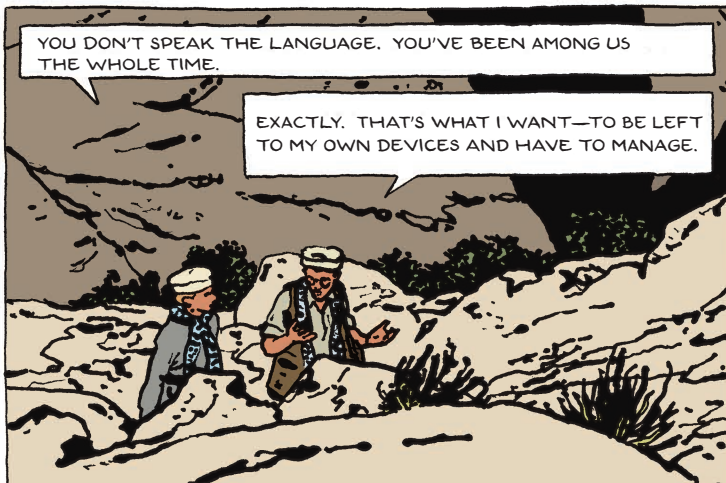
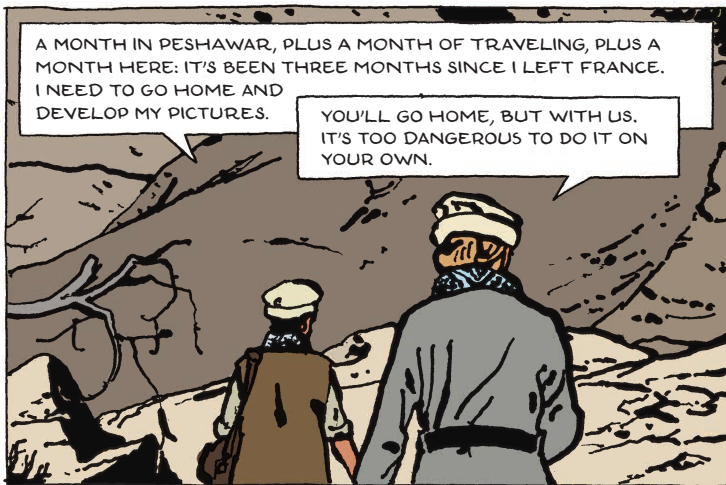
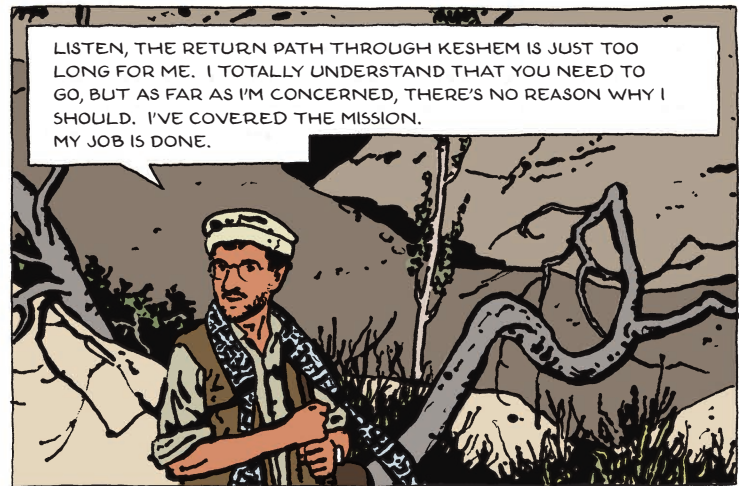


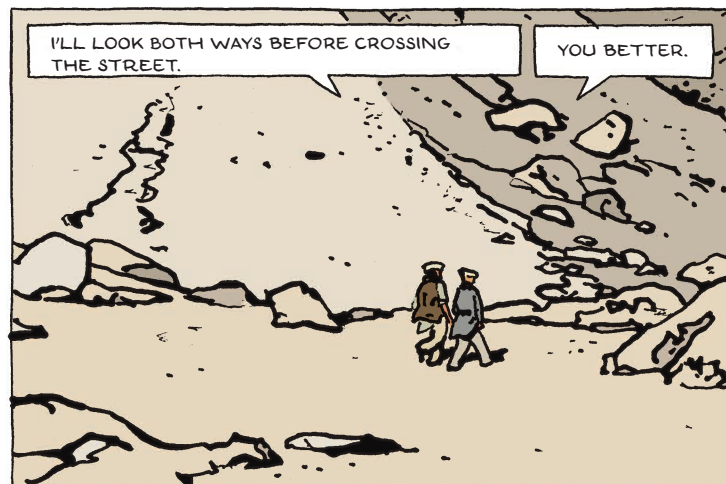
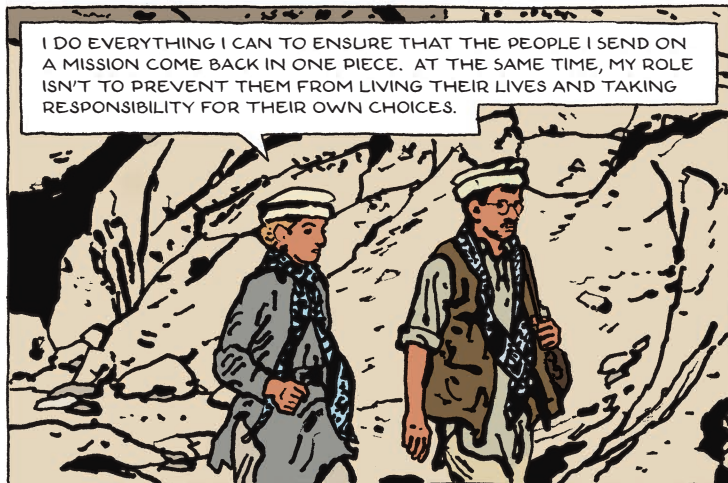
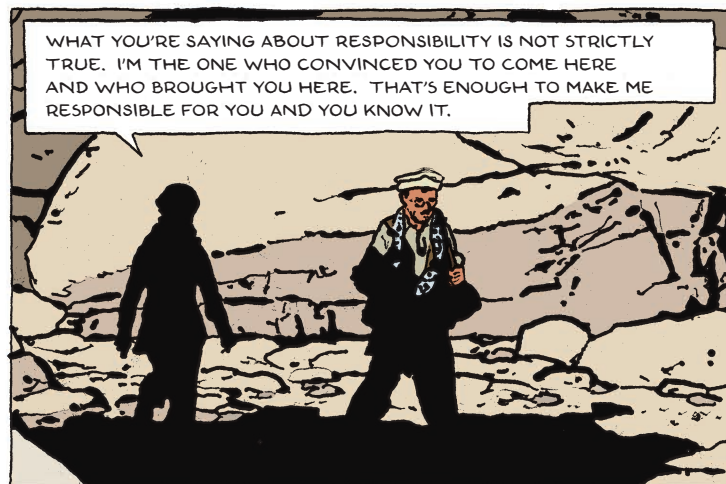
I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU, TOO.

OKAY.



I WANT TO LEAVE NOW AND GO BACK TO PAKISTAN ALONE.







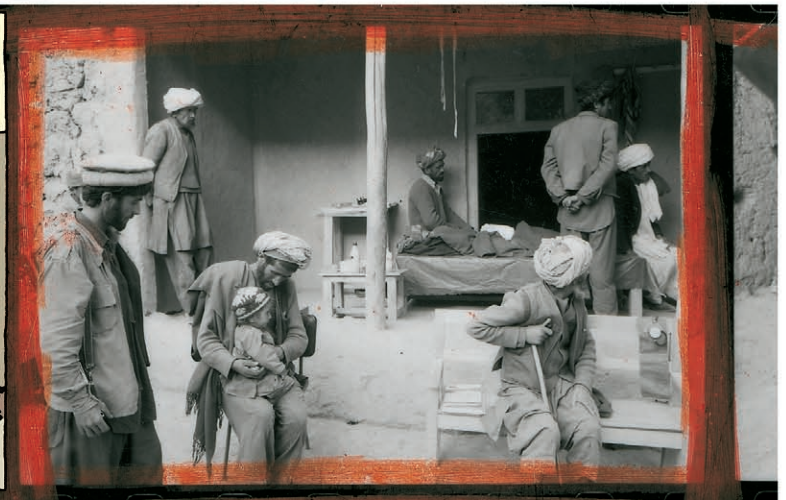
SO THAT'S IT. BASSIR AGREED TO ORGANIZE A SMALL CARAVAN FOR ME. HE ALSO WANTS TO GIVE ME A GIFT. I CLIMB THE HILL TO THE TAILOR'S HOUSE.

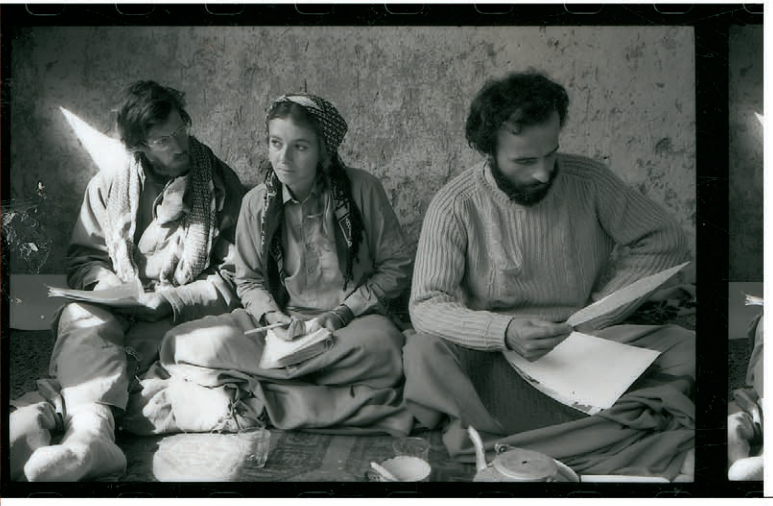


THE GIFT IS AN OVERCOAT. MY MEASUREMENTS ARE DULY NOTED AND I'M PROMISED, FOR THREE DAYS LATER, A WOOLEN COAT WITH A BELT, BUTTONS AND A REEFER-STYLE COLLAR.



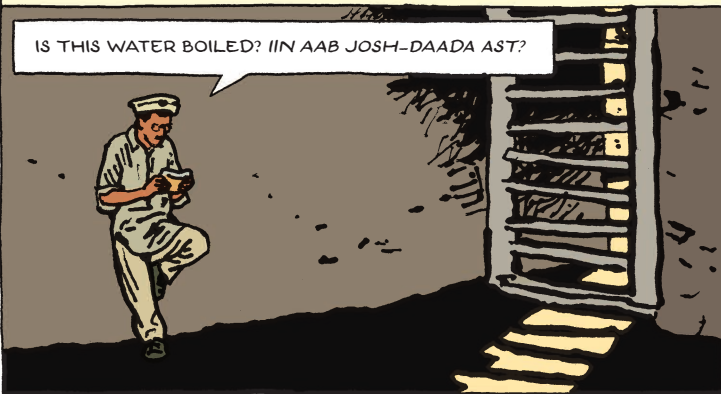
I'M IN A SUSPENDED STATE, JUST LIKE HOW I USED TO FEEL AS A KID IN THE LAST DAYS OF SCHOOL BEFORE THE SUMMER BREAK. I TAKE SOME PICTURES TO SAY GOOD-BYE TO ZARAGANDARA, BUT MY MIND IS ALREADY WANDERING IN THE MOUNTAINS.



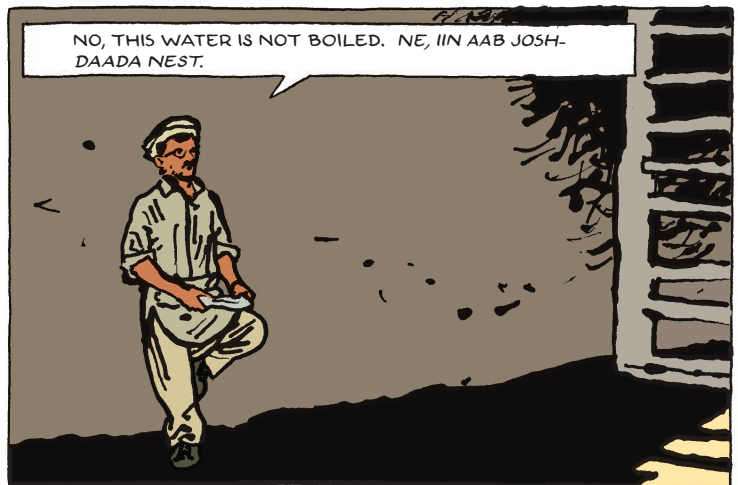


JULIETTE GIVES ME A USEFUL LITTLE ENGLISH-PERSIAN DICTIONARY THAT I LEARN TO HANDLE AS QUICKLY AS MY CAMERAS.

IS THIS WATER BOILED? IIN AAB JOSH-DAADA AST?



NO, THIS WATER IS NOT BOILED. NE, IIN AAB JOSH-DAADA NEST.

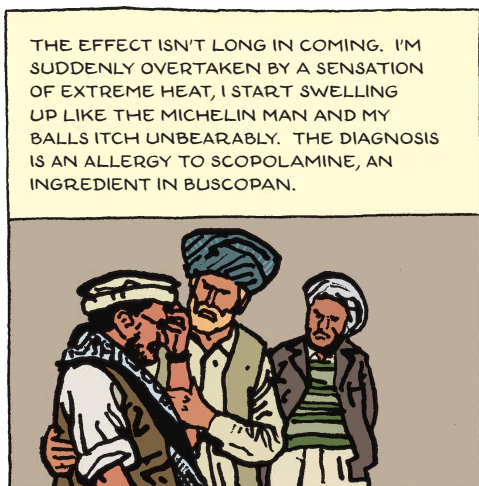
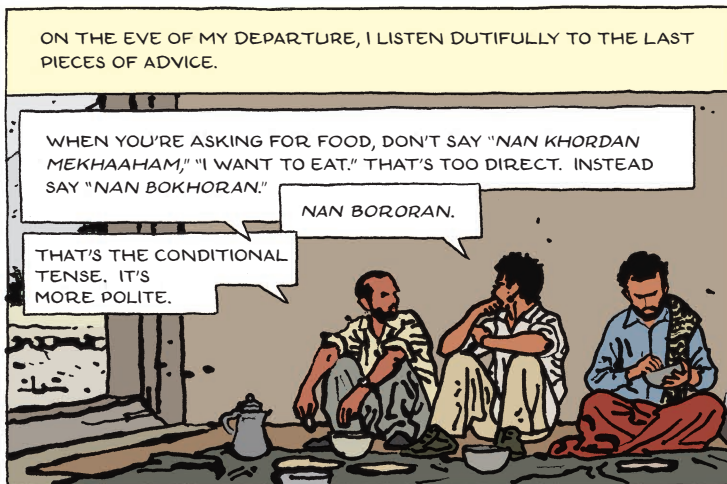


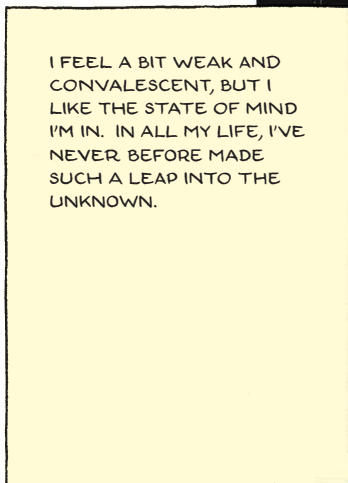
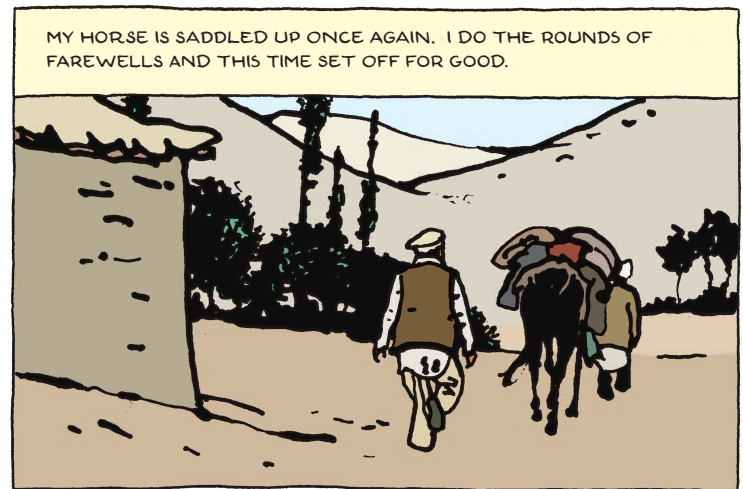
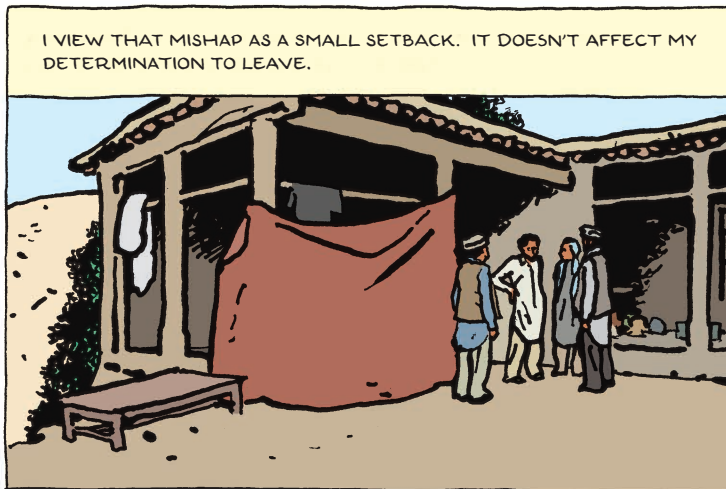
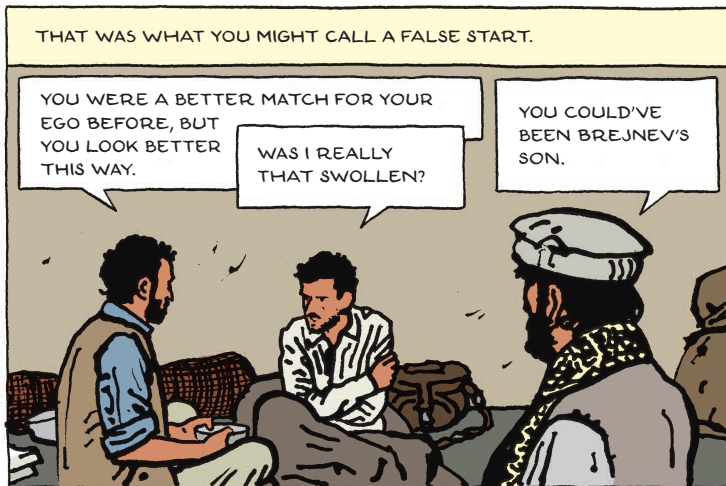
IT'S SUPPLEMENTED WITH A SMALL MEDICAL GLOSSARY DRAFTED BY MSF FOR INTERVIEWING PATIENTS, UNDERSTANDING THEIR ANSWERS, AND PRESCRIBING TREATMENT.



I HOPE I WON'T NEED IT.

Are you ill?	: Mariz asti?
I am ill	: Mariz astam
Where does it hurt?	: Koudja dard mekona?
It hurts here	: Indja dard mekona
I have a headache	: Sar'm (= sar e man) dard mekona
My feet hurt	: Paah'm dard mekona (= my foot is hurting me)
	NB: Wherever possible, plurals are expressed with a collective singular
My heart hurts	: Qalb'm dard mekona
Do your kidneys hurt?	: Gorda dard mekona?
Do you have diarrhea?	: Pitch asti? (or: pitch shodi?)
Are you vomiting?	: Estefroq mekoni? (I'm vomiting: estefroq mekonam)
Are you coughing?	: Sulfa mekoni? (I'm coughing: sulfa mekonam)]











Part 3

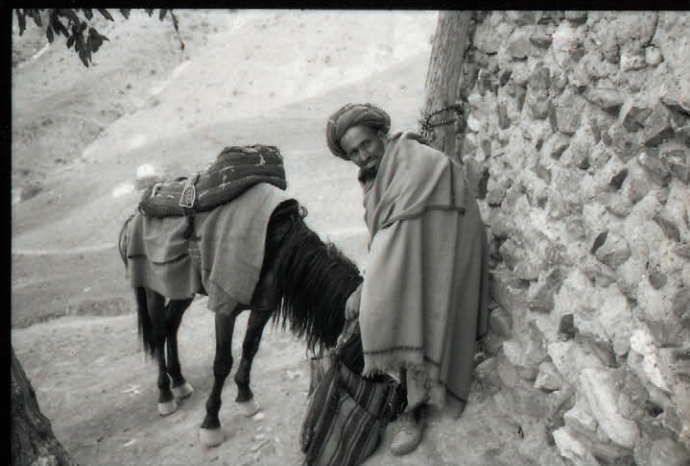






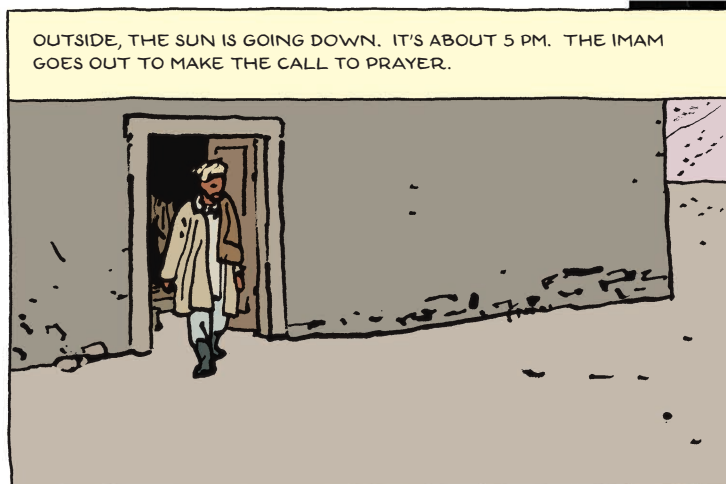
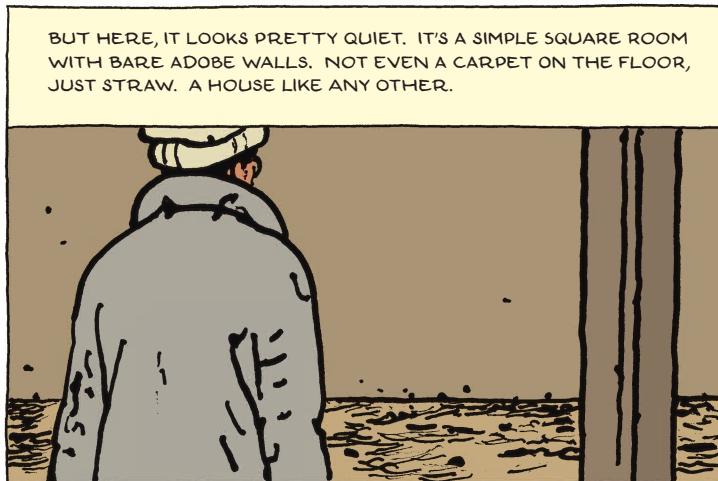
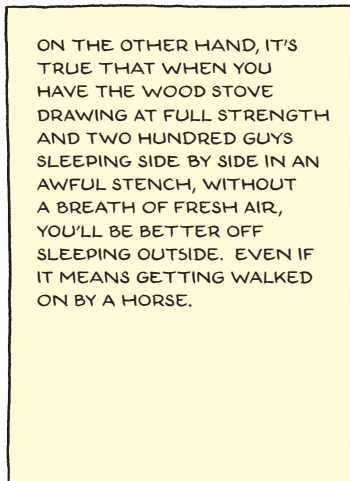
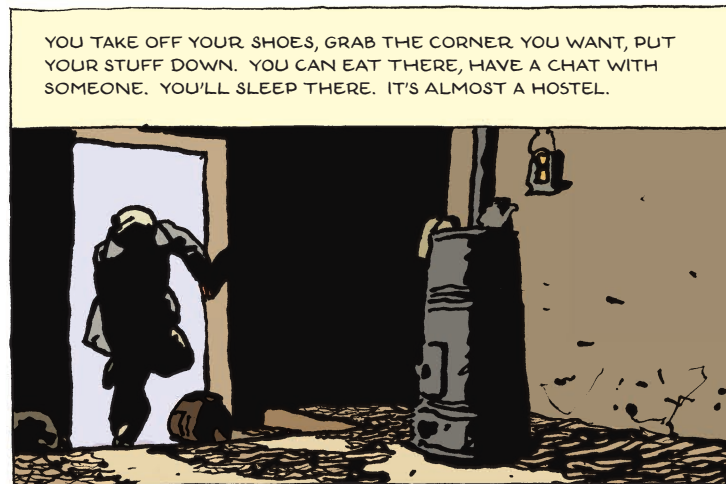
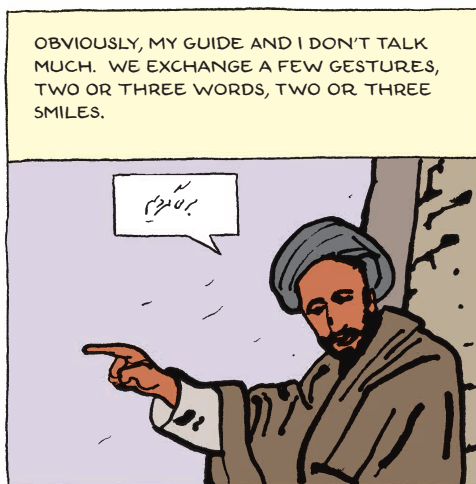






THERE. MY FIRST EVENING ALONE.
A LITTLE VILLAGE, HIGH UP, NICE SCENERY. NO COMPLICATIONS.
I FEEL A RUSH OF HAPPINESS.
WE'VE DONE A GOOD DAY'S WALK.
I'M LEAN AS A BROOMSTICK BUT I FEEL GREAT.
THEORETICALLY, IN TWO WEEKS' TIME I'LL BE IN PAKISTAN, PHONING HOME.
I HAVE THE PLEASANT SENSATION OF BEING IN CONTROL OF MY TRIP.





THAT CALL IS ONE OF THE MOST MAJESTIC THINGS I'VE EVER EXPERIENCED. HE FACES THE MOUNTAINS, CUPS HIS HANDS AROUND HIS MOUTH, AND SINGS OUT THE CALL.



I HEARD IT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DJIBOUTI FIVE YEARS AGO. I WAS STAYING IN AN APARTMENT ON A PLAZA. AT 4 AM THE MUEZZIN WOULD MAKE THE CALL TO PRAYER. AT FIRST IT WAS IRRITATING BECAUSE IT WOKE ME UP. THEN IT BECAME ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOMENTS IN THE DAY. NEVER COULD REMEMBER THE PHRASE THEY SING, THOUGH.

IN BIG CITIES LIKE CAIRO OR KHARTOUM THE CALL IS PRE-RECORDED WITH FANCY VOCAL EFFECTS. HERE IT'S RAUCOUS, BARE, AND IT BOUNCES OFF THE PEAKS, ON AND ON.



OVERCOME WITH EMOTION, I START WRITING A FEW WORDS TO DOMINIQUE, MY GIRLFRIEND. I DESCRIBE THIS MOMENT TO HER, THE DAY'S WALK, THE TWO ADOLESCENT MUJ' WE ENCOUNTERED, WHO POSED WITH THEIR WEAPONS.



LITTLE BY LITTLE THE FAITHFUL START TO ARRIVE.



I GO IN WITH THEM. THE MOSQUE IS FILLING UP.

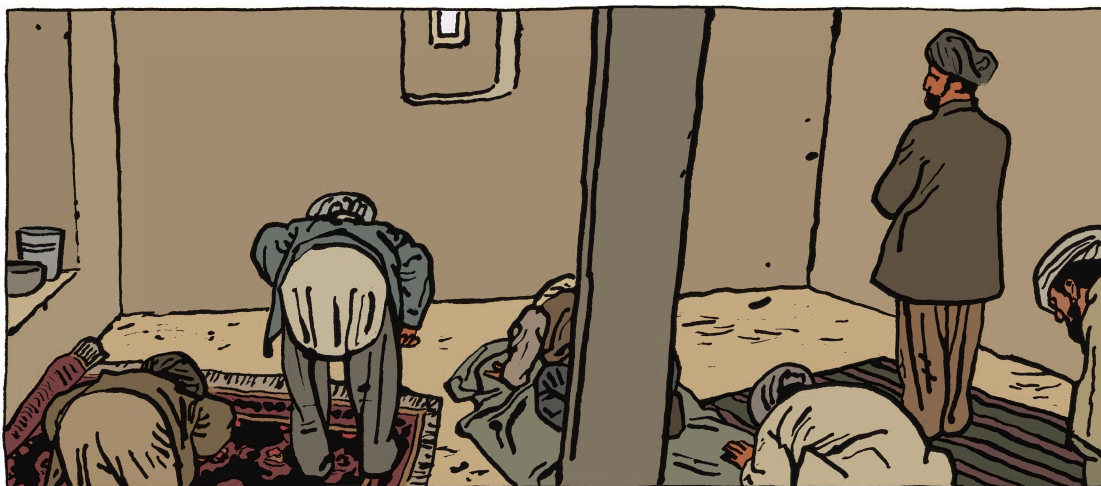


THEY LOOK AT ME WITH CURIOSITY. USUALLY ANY TRAVELER THEY SEE WILL BE AN AFGHAN, WHO'LL PRAY WITH THEM. THIS EVENING, WORD GETS AROUND THAT THIS GUY IN THE CORNER, THERE, IS A FOREIGNER WHO WON'T BE PRAYING WITH THEM.



THE PRAYING BEGINS. WHAT I LIKE IS THAT THEY AREN'T ALL VERY DILIGENT. SOME OF THEM ARE CASTING LOOKS IN MY DIRECTION AND FALLING BEHIND THE OTHERS.

I DON'T DARE TAKE PICTURES.



AS SOON AS IT'S DONE, A FEW OF THEM COME OVER, SIT DOWN, AND START ASKING ME QUESTIONS.



THUMBING THROUGH MY LITTLE DICTIONARY AS FAST AS I CAN, I TRY TO INTRODUCE MYSELF AND FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY'RE ASKING ME.



AHMADJAN...
AKS GREFTAN...
UM...
FARASAWI...

I HEAR "MUSSULMAN? MUSSULMAN?" APPARENTLY, IT'S MY RELIGION THAT THEY'RE INTERESTED IN HEARING ABOUT FIRST.



ISAWI.

I'M ISAWI, CHRISTIAN.

ISAWI IS OKAY. IT PASSES MUSTER. I CERTAINLY CAN'T SAY THAT I'M NON-PRACTICING. THAT WOULD BE WORSE THAN A BLUNDER.



MOST OF THEM HAVE NEVER SEEN A FOREIGNER. THEY THINK THERE'S NO OTHER LANGUAGE THAN THEIR OWN AND FIGURE THAT THE REASON I DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM IS THAT I MUST BE DEAF. THEY REPEAT THEIR QUESTIONS, YELLING LOUDER AND LOUDER.

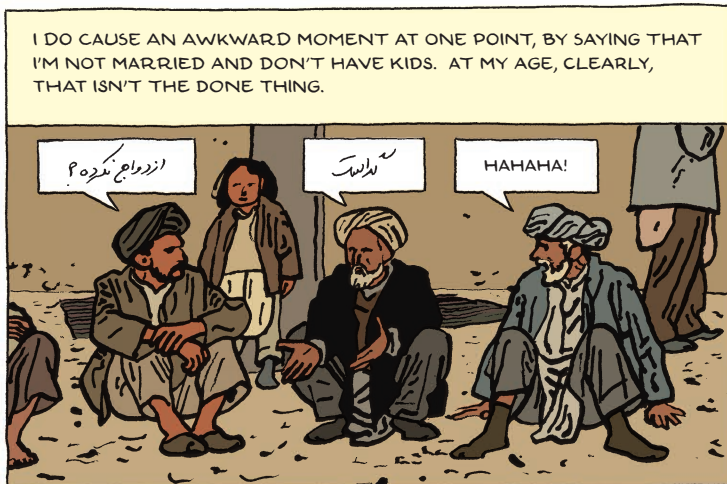


نورس خندان؟

THERE'S NO HOSTILITY, THOUGH. I FEEL STUPID, AS YOU DO WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND A THING AND CAN'T SAY A WORD, BUT NOT AT ALL UNCOMFORTABLE.



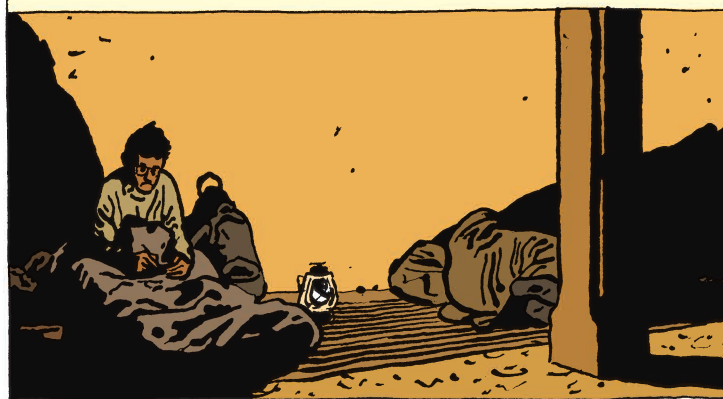
KALISAA... UM... NAM...
NAMAAS KHAANDAN.



AO GARM MEANS HOT WATER. THAT THOUGHT SAVED ME. WHILE HE GOES TO GET ME SOME I HAVE TIME TO MEDITATE ON THIS AFGHAN PARADOX: YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE MINUTE ALONE IN SUCH A SPARSELY POPULATED COUNTRY.



AFTERWARDS I CONTINUE TO WRITE IN MY NOTEBOOK, UNTIL I'M COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED.

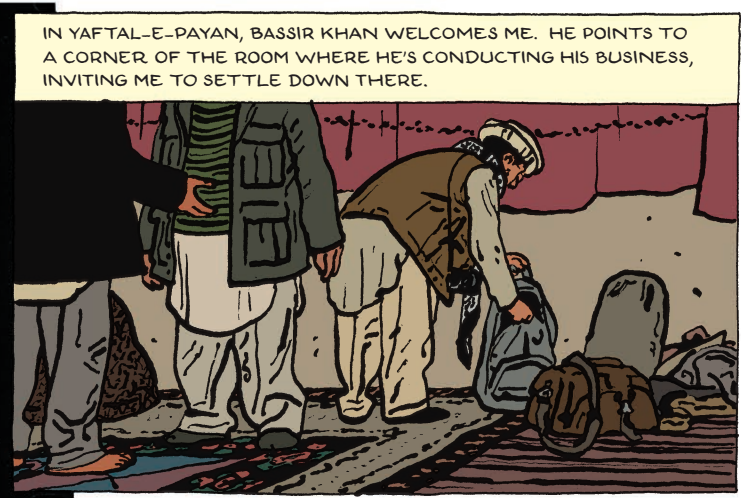
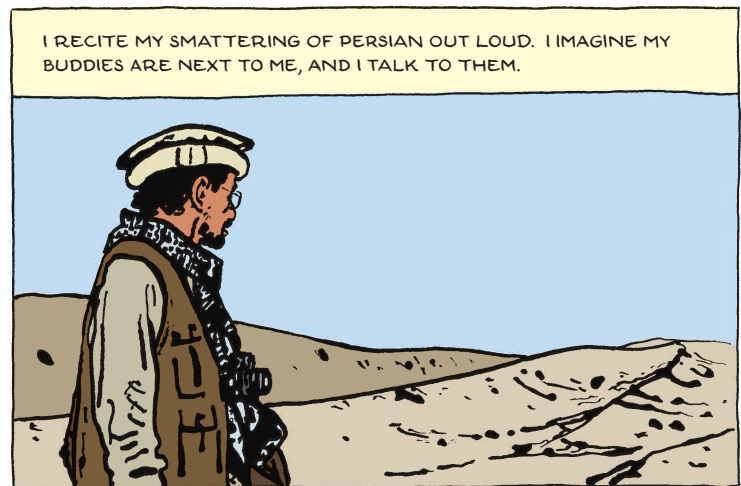
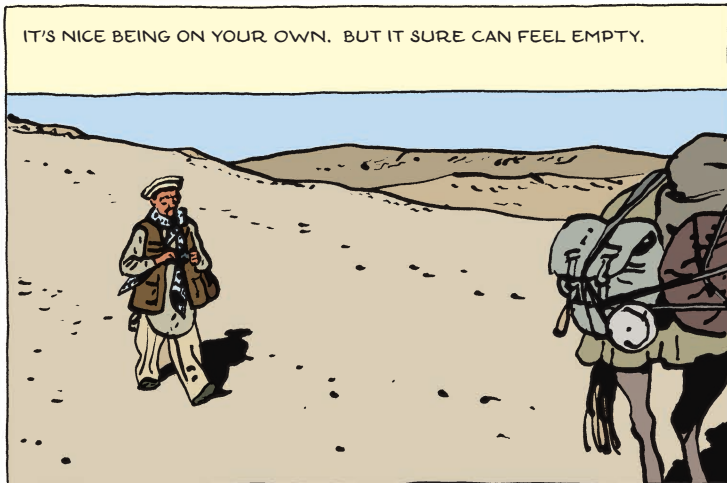


THE NEXT MORNING, AFTER THE HOSPITABLE IMAM HAS TREATED US TO A TASTY BREAKFAST, MY GUIDE LOADS UP THE HORSE AND WE LEAVE FOR YAFTAL-E-PAYAN.



I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT FEW HOURS, FEELING OPTIMISTIC. THAT EVENING I'LL REACH BASSIR'S PLACE, HE'LL LAVISH ON ME ONE OF THOSE FEASTS THAT NO ONE DOES BETTER, HE'LL ASSIGN ME AN ESCORT, AND I'LL BE ON THE ROAD BY DAYBREAK, WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT.





AND VOILÀ.



WITH NO APPARENT EFFORT.

HE PUTS IT DOWN BETWEEN US, AS IF TO SAY: YOUR TURN NOW.



THE OTHERS WATCH ME MOCKINGLY. AN IDEA CROSSES MY MIND



IT WORKS.

THAT GETS THE EVENING STARTED. I'M TREATED, LIKE YESTERDAY, TO A FULL PRESS CONFERENCE. THE PRIOR TRAINING HELPS AND I MANAGE BETTER, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE QUESTIONS ARE THE SAME ONES.



ISAWI.

I DON'T REPEAT THE GAFFE OF BEING A BACHELOR. THIS EVENING I'M MARRIED AND HAVE A FIVE-YEAR-OLD SON.



YAK BATCHA
PANJ SAAL.

نہ، کی

وہی تا کی دارہ؟

I HANDLE MY DICTIONARY PRETTY SMOOTHLY.
 AS A RESULT, AT TIMES THERE ARE THE MODEST BEGINNINGS OF A REAL CONVERSATION.
 BUT IT'S A VICIOUS CIRCLE: THE MORE I ANSWER, THE MORE QUESTIONS SPRING UP.
 THEY TAKE TURNS. THEIR CURIOSITY IS ENDLESS.
 DOES A CHRISTIAN HAVE TO DO PRAYERS? HOW MANY TIMES A DAY?
 I GIVE A SIMPLE ANSWER: A CHRISTIAN PRAYS ONCE A WEEK IN CHURCH
 (LIKE THEY DO ON FRIDAY AT THE MOSQUE) BUT, WHEN TRAVELING WHERE THERE ARE NO CHURCHES,
 HE ISN'T REQUIRED TO PRAY.
 THAT CONFIRMS THAT BEING CHRISTIAN IS NOT AS GOOD AS BEING MUSLIM.
 I GO WITH THE FLOW. THAT'S THE SMART THING TO DO.
 THE GOAL HERE IS TO RETURN TO PAKISTAN, NOT TO STIR UP TROUBLE.
 THE WORST THING TO SAY WOULD BE THAT I'M A NON-BELIEVER AND THAT NONE OF THIS MATTERS TO ME.
 FOR EXAMPLE, EXPLAINING THAT I WAS BAPTIZED AS A CATHOLIC BUT THAT I DIDN'T HAVE MY CHILD BAPTIZED
 WOULD MEAN BIG TROUBLE, WITH A BULLET IN THE HEAD AS THE LIKELY OUTCOME.



AT SEVEN THIRTY, THE EQUIVALENT OF WHAT WOULD BE WELL
 PAST MIDNIGHT IN FRANCE, THEY FINALLY LEAVE ME ALONE.



I DOZE OFF IN A CORNER OF THE LARGE ROOM, WHILE BASSIR, AT
 THE OTHER END, HAS HIS LEGS MASSAGED.



THE NEXT DAY BRINGS A LETDOWN: NO HORSE, AND NO ESCORT. I SPEND THE WHOLE MORNING TRYING TO ASK WHY NOT.

MAN KHAASTAM... ASP?

لم یکن



AS FAR AS I CAN MAKE OUT, THE ANSWERS ARE ALL THE SAME: DON'T WORRY, WE KNOW YOU WANT A HORSE, IT'S COMING, YOU'LL GET IT.

بهران ندری

لېت اوبه فلهيم دار



BUT NOTHING COMES. IN THE AFTERNOON, TO UNWIND MY NERVES, I WALK AROUND THE VILLAGE (WHICH I'M NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE) AND TAKE SOME PICTURES.



I'M IN A FOUL MOOD. NA VELY, I HAD THOUGHT A HORSE WOULD BE WAITING FOR ME AND THAT ALL I'D HAVE TO DO WOULD BE TO PACK IT UP AND HEAD OFF. BUT THAT'S HOW IT WORKS WHEN YOU GO PICK UP A PARCEL SOMEWHERE IN PARIS. THINGS DON'T WORK THAT WAY IN AFGHANISTAN. TIME IS THE LEAST OF THEIR CONCERNS.



LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE PICTURES PRODUCE THEIR CALMING EFFECT AND I COOL DOWN.



I TRY TO SEE THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THINGS: AT LEAST I'M EATING LIKE A KING AND RECOVERING MY STRENGTH. ALL IN ALL, THIS IS DOING ME SOME GOOD.



I SPEND THE END OF THE DAY WITH BASSIR. HE RECEIVES VISITS FROM SOME MUJ, FROM FARMERS BRINGING HIM GRAPES, FROM EMISSARIES, CLERGYMEN, TRAVELERS FROM KABUL. HE IS PROUD TO SHOW ME ALL THOSE COMINGS AND GOINGS.



HE ALSO ENJOYS SHOWING OFF MY PRESENCE BY HIS SIDE, AS IF THE WEST HAD PUT A PHOTOGRAPHER AT HIS SERVICE. I FEEL LIKE I'M STARTING TO PUT DOWN ROOTS.

SO MUCH SO THAT I START BUDDING LIKE A TREE. DURING THE NIGHT, A BOIL DRILLS INTO MY RIGHT ARM, JUST BELOW THE TRICEPS. IT UNNERVES ME.



IN THE MORNING, THERE'S NO MORE TALK OF A HORSE THAN THE DAY BEFORE.



ONCE AGAIN, I WANDER AIMLESSLY THROUGH THE VILLAGE.



I PASS A GROUP OF ARMED TEENAGERS. THEY WANT ME TO TAKE PICTURES OF THEM. SOME OF THEM ASK TO LOOK THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER OF MY CAMERA.



I FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE MIDST OF THOSE KIDS, WHO POINT THEIR GUNS AS IF THEY WERE TOYS.

THIS ONE IS HAVING FUN WITH THE BARREL OF A SMALL RUSSIAN AUTOMATIC PISTOL. I'VE SEEN THE MSF DOCTORS TREAT PEOPLE WHO WERE ACCIDENTALLY WOUNDED BY THAT SORT OF THING.



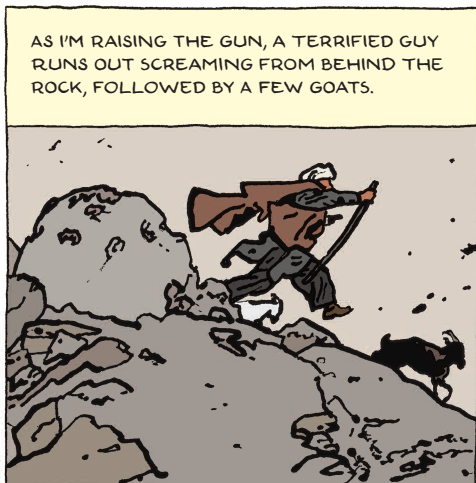
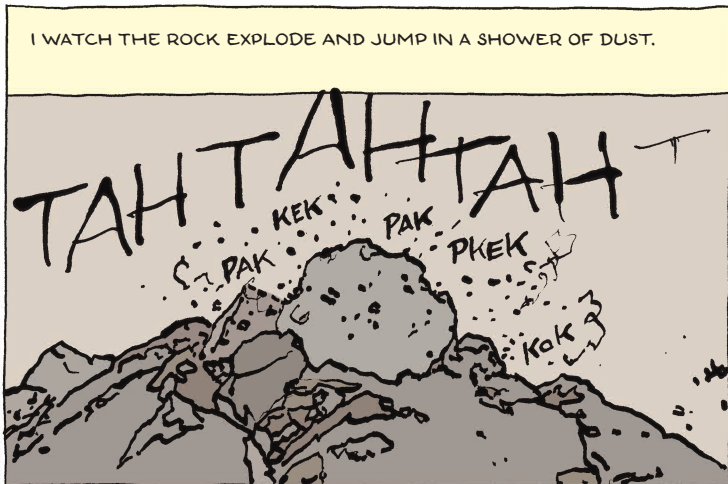
OF COURSE THERE HAS TO BE A SHOOTING CONTEST.



NO WAY OF DUCKING OUT.

ONE OF THEM SHOWS ME A SMALL BOULDER A GOOD DISTANCE AWAY, AND AIMS AT IT.





I WRITE, I READ. I REOPEN MY STEVENSON BOOK AND, ALTHOUGH I'M NOT MAKING ANY HEADWAY IN BADAKHSHAN, AT LEAST I'M ADVANCING THROUGH THE CEVENNES MOUNTAINS.



AND, FOLLOWING A NOW-ESTABLISHED RITUAL, I ATTEND BASSIR'S AUDIENCES AND ANSWER THE INVARIABLE EVENING QUESTIONS.



AT NIGHT, THE BOIL THAT'S THRIVING ON MY ARM CONTINUES TO DOG MY SLEEP.



THE THIRD DAY AT BASSIR'S FLOWS AT A SNAIL'S PACE. I NO LONGER ASK ANY QUESTIONS. I'M GETTING BOGGED DOWN.



AT THE END OF THE FOURTH DAY, JULIETTE AND JOHN, WHO ARE RETURNING TO PAKISTAN VIA ANOTHER ROUTE BUT HAVE THIS PORTION OF THE JOURNEY IN COMMON WITH MINE, ARRIVE IN YAFTAL-E-PAYAN. I'M AS RELIEVED AS THEY ARE SURPRISED.



I HAVE NO IDEA. BASSIR'S HOLDING ME HERE. CAN'T SEEM TO GET MY HORSE AND MY ESCORT.

CAREFUL WITH MY ARM. I HAVE A BOIL.



JULIETTE ARRANGES IT FOR ME. AT LAST BASSIR APPOINTS ME AN ESCORT OF FOUR GUYS AND A GRAY HORSE. I'LL LEAVE THE NEXT MORNING.

HE WASN'T HOLDING YOU BACK ON PURPOSE, BUT HE HAS A STAFFING PROBLEM. IT'S LATE IN THE SEASON AND MOST CARAVANS HAVE GONE ALREADY. HE DOESN'T HAVE A LOT OF PEOPLE LEFT.

I'M INTRODUCED TO MY GUIDES, WHO LOOK NONE TOO IMPRESSIVE. STILL, ONE OF THEM HAS A FRIENDLY FACE. I ASK HIM WHAT HE DOES FOR A LIVING.

"TCHOPAN": SHEPHERD.

I RECOVER MY OPTIMISM, WHICH IS FORTUNATE, BECAUSE IT COMES IN HANDY RIGHT AWAY.

SO, SHOW ME THIS BOIL.

IT'S HERE.

YOU'RE GONNA OPEN IT?

YEAH.

WITH YOUR SWISS ARMY KNIFE?

YEAH.

BUT AREN'T YOU GOING TO STERILIZE IT?

IF YOU WISH.

JOHN WIPES THE KNIFE'S BLADE ON HIS SLEEVE.

THERE. STERILE ENOUGH FOR YOU?

UGH!

DON'T MOVE.

HE INCISES IT. I HAVE A GREAT TIME.

CAN'T PROMISE YOU ANYTHING, 'CAUSE THAT BUMP WASN'T VERY RIPE. BUT YOU SHOULD BE OKAY.

THANKS.

OVER DINNER, MAKING THE MOST OF MY EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST FEW DAYS, I ASK JULIETTE FOR SOME CLARIFICATION.

HOW DO YOU SAY, FOR EXAMPLE, "LEAVE ME ALONE, I WANT TO TAKE A LEAK"?

THE NEXT DAY, WHILE MY FOUR GUYS LOAD UP THE HORSE, BASSIR GATHERS HIS MEN TO SALUTE OUR DEPARTURE.



ONE OF THE MUJ' HANDS ME SOME HORSESHOES, WHICH I POCKET.



SO, FROM NOW ON WE WON'T BE THERE TO BAIL YOU OUT, YOU KNOW?

YEAH, BUT I'LL BE FINE, REALLY, THANKS.



FOR THE LAST TIME, ARE YOU REALLY SURE YOU WANT TO GO ALONE?

ABSOLUTELY SURE.



SO, SEE YOU IN PESHAWAR. AND WATCH OUT FOR LANDMINES. NEVER LEAVE THE PATH.

SEE YOU IN PESHAWAR. CAREFUL—MY BOIL.



SAY HI TO EVERYONE IN TESHKAN!

I WILL!





WE DON'T HAVE ANY WEAPONS. CARAVANS GOING TO PAKISTAN NEVER CARRY ANY. IT'S JUST AS WELL.



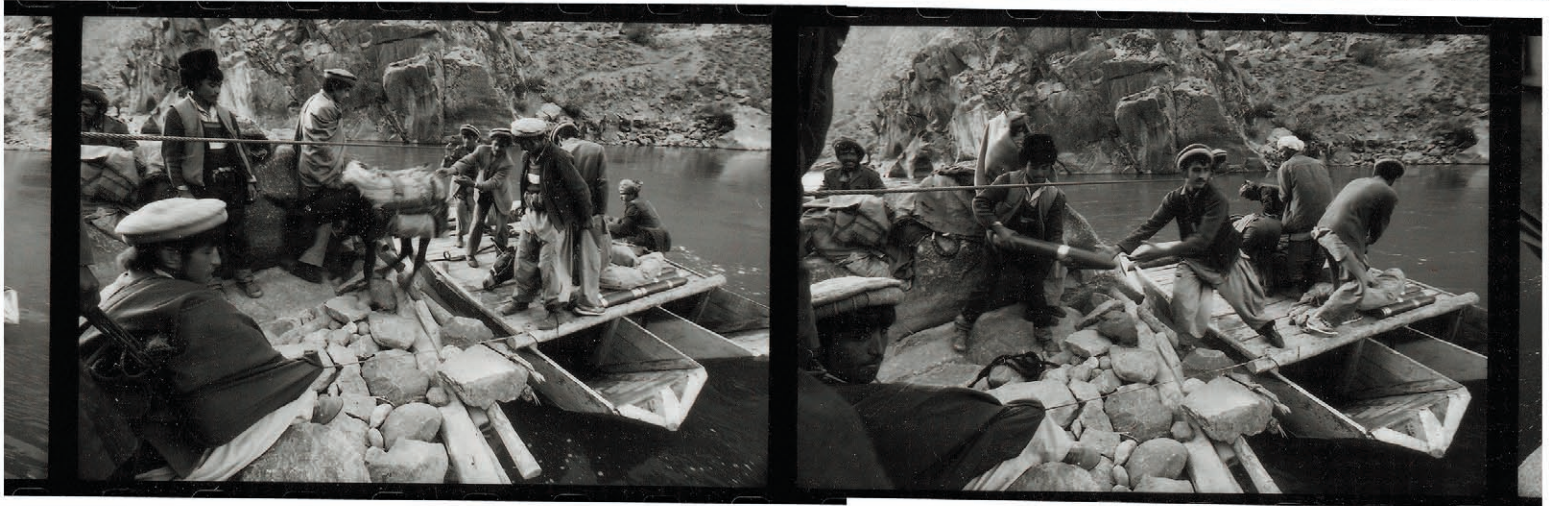
MY FOUR GUYS SEEM KIND OF STRANGE. THEY AMBLE CASUALLY ALONG. I WAS EXPECTING TO HAVE TO RUN AFTER THEM BUT I FIND MYSELF ALMOST WAITING FOR THEM.



THE KOKCHA RIVER COMES WITHIN VIEW. ON THE WAY OVER, WE TOOK THE FERRY LATE AT NIGHT AND I WASN'T ABLE TO TAKE PICTURES BECAUSE IT WAS TOO DARK.



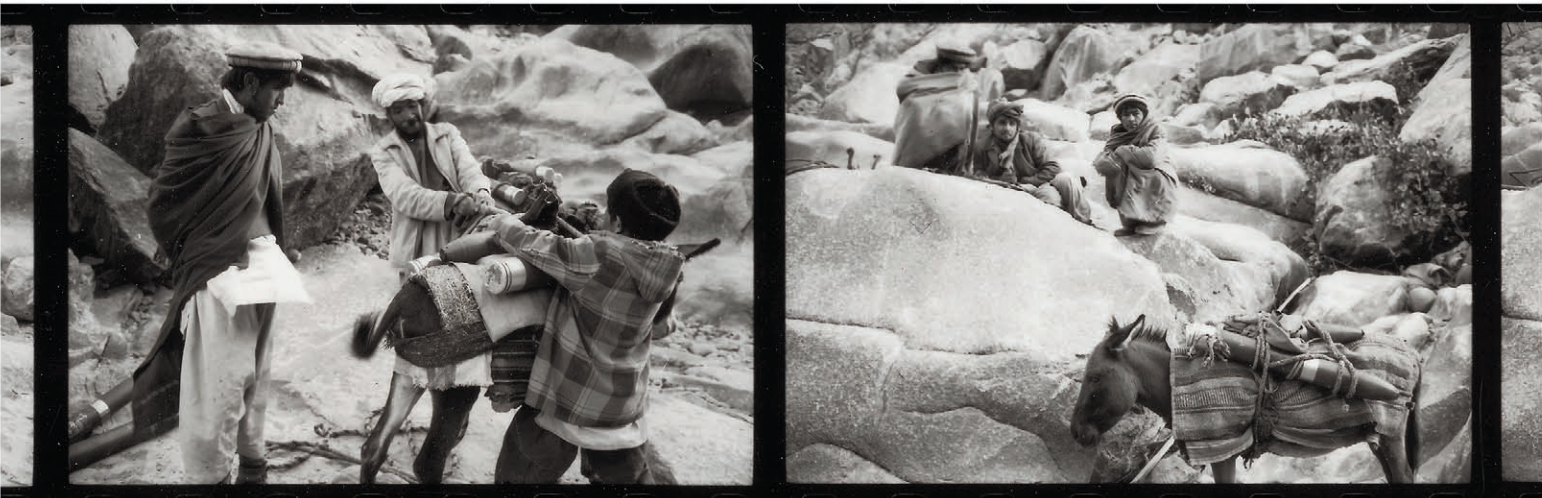
THE RIVER IS OVERLOOKED BY A ROAD USED BY SOVIET AND GOVERNMENTAL CONVOYS. THE CARAVANS OF MUJ' CROSSING IT POST LOOKOUTS EVERYWHERE, BUT YOU CAN'T DALLY. I LIKE THOSE MOMENTS WHEN EVERYBODY GETS BUSY. NOBODY PAYS ATTENTION TO ME.

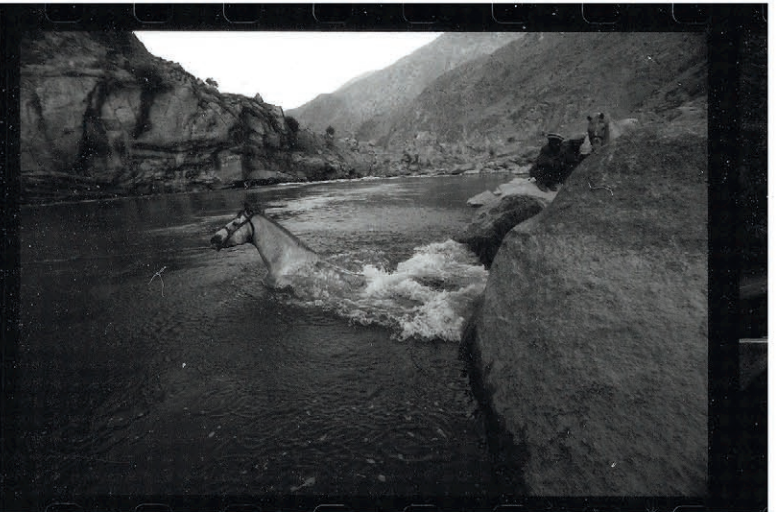
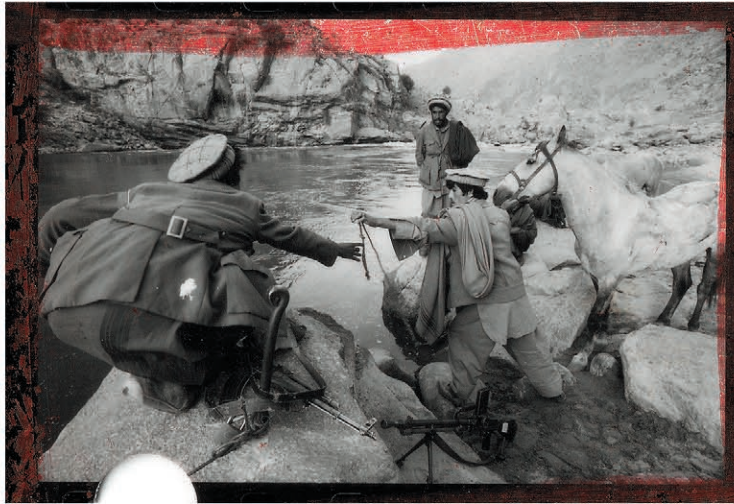


THE PEOPLE COMING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION ARE ARMED TO THE TEETH. THEY CARRY HEAVY ARTILLERY SHELLS. AS SOON AS THEY REACH LAND, THEY LOAD THEM BACK ONTO THEIR MULES, TWO OR THREE PER ANIMAL.



THE SOUND EFFECTS ARE PARTICULARLY RICH, WITH SCREAMS, WHINNYING, AND BRAYING REVERBERATING IN THE CANYON, THE SOUND OF WATER, ROCKS BANGING AGAINST EACH OTHER, THE SPLASHING OF HORSES THAT ARE SWIMMING ACROSS.







WE MAKE IT THROUGH. WE HAVE TO MAKE A STOP, AT A GOOD DISTANCE FROM THE ROAD, TO RUB DOWN THE HORSE AND TIE UP THE LOAD AGAIN.



THE MORE I OBSERVE MY ESCORT THE MORE CONVINCED I BECOME THAT THEY'RE INCREDIBLY LAZY.



AT LEAST THEY KNOW HOW TO LOAD UP THE PACKS ON THE HORSE, SOMETHING I'M COMPLETELY INCAPABLE OF DOING. I BARELY KNOW HOW TO MAKE MY BED. I GUESS THE PRINCIPLE'S THE SAME IN BOTH CASES—YOU HAVE TO TUCK THINGS IN PROPERLY IF YOU WANT THEM TO HOLD.



WHEN IT'S TIME TO HEAD OFF AGAIN, I'M THE ONE WHO HAS TO TELL THEM, "LET'S GO."

ARAKAT!



DARK THOUGHTS BREW IN MY HEAD.

WHO THE HELL ARE THESE GUYS?



THE DAY'S WALK ENDS AT A PACE I'M NOT ACCUSTOMED TO: A CRAWL. I DON'T SAY ANYTHING. IT'LL BE A LONG TRIP, I'LL HAVE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPLAIN.



DURING THAT NIGHT'S REST STOP, I FEED MY HORSE AND HE POSES FOR ME. AT THE VILLAGE, I BUY THE OATS THAT HE'LL CARRY AND EAT THE NEXT DAY.





DINNERTIME PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHAT WITH MY CLOWNS. AS BEFORE, TCHOPAN IS THE NICEST OF THE BUNCH. I GIVE THEM A DEMONSTRATION OF MY INCREASINGLY SKILLFUL DICTIONARY-THUMBING.

TCHOY GARM AST... NAN KHUB AST...

HA HA HA!



NONE OF THEM ARE MUJ'. WHY AM I NOT SURPRISED? THEY ARE JUST FOUR HILLBILLIES FROM YAFTAL, OF THE MOST BASIC SORT.



I EVEN PUSH MY LUCK TO TRYING TO DESCRIBE TO THEM WHAT FRANCE AND PARIS ARE LIKE: STREETS, CARS, BUILDINGS, DEPARTMENT STORES.

PARIS... QARYA
BISSIOR KALAN...



I END UP DREAMING ABOUT IT THAT NIGHT. I FIND MYSELF BRINGING MY HORSE TO GRAZE ON THE LAWN OF THE INVALIDES PLAZA. THEN I LEAVE HIM THERE AND VERY APPROPRIATELY GO OFF TO LIE DOWN IN A REAL BED, WHERE MY DREAM TAKES AN EROTIC TURN.



THE NEXT DAY WE SET OFF FOR TESHKAN, HOME OF THE WAKIL, WHERE HALF THE MSF TEAM HAS STAYED.





MY SURGE OF SYMPATHY FOR MY FOUR GUYS HAS DEFLATED. THEY'RE ALWAYS BEHIND; IT'S A PAIN. I START BAWLING THEM OUT.



AT NOON, WE STOP IN A CHAYRANA INN FOR LUNCH. THEY SULK VISIBLY AND START TALKING BEHIND MY BACK, EXCEPT TCHOPAN, WHO LOOKS EMBARRASSED.



AN HOUR LATER, THEY RUN OUT OF STEAM ON A FAIRLY STEEP SLOPE. THEY'RE HUNGRY AGAIN, THEY'RE TIRED, THEY WANT TO STOP YET ONCE MORE. ON TOP OF IT, I CAN TELL THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHERE WE ARE.



I YELL AT THEM. NO WAY ARE WE GOING TO STOP. WE HAVE TO GET TO TESHKAN.



I REALIZE AT THAT POINT THAT THE RETURN TRIP RESTS SQUARELY ON MY SHOULDERS. THERE'S NOTHING TO EXPECT FROM MY ESCORT. I WASN'T ASKING TO BE CARRIED IN A SEDAN CHAIR, JUST TO BE GUIDED AND ACCOMPANIED. INSTEAD I FIND MYSELF IN THE ABSURD POSITION OF GUIDING MY GUIDES.



IN TESHKAN, SITTING ON CARPETS, I'M REUNITED WITH SYLVIE, ODILE, TALL RONALD, AND THE WAKIL, WHO HAS ONE OF HIS ADJUTANTS BY HIS SIDE.



I HAVE A SIDE CONVERSATION WITH ODILE TO ASSESS THE SITUATION.

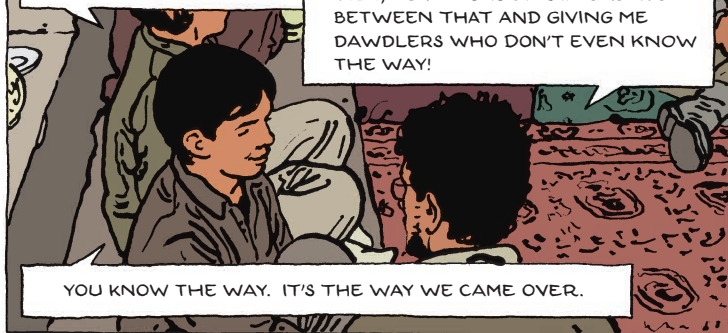
BASSIR GAVE ME A BUNCH OF USELESS CREEPS. YOU POOR THING!



I CAN'T REALLY BLAME HIM, THOUGH. HE CAN'T AFFORD TO ASSIGN FOUR MUJ' TO A GUY WHO'S GOING BACK ALONE. HE'S KEEPING HIS MUJ' FOR THE WINTER OR SENDING THEM WITH MAJOR CARAVANS.

OKAY, BUT THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THAT AND GIVING ME DAUJLERS WHO DON'T EVEN KNOW THE WAY!

YOU KNOW THE WAY. IT'S THE WAY WE CAME OVER.



IN ANY CASE, I'M GOING TO SKETCH THINGS OUT FOR YOU. AND I'M ALSO GOING TO ASK SOME GUYS FROM HERE TO GIVE A GOOD BRIEFING TO YOUR ESCORT ABOUT THE ITINERARY FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS. BECAUSE THERE'S THAT SOVIET GUARD POST IN SKAZAR THAT YOU HAVE TO WATCH OUT FOR.



A BIT LATER.

FROM TIME TO TIME, ABOUT ONCE A WEEK, I MAKE MYSELF AN IMAGINARY MEAL. I SUMMON UP A FEW FABULOUS DISHES AND SAVOR THEM, CHEWING SLOWLY.



DURING THE PREVIOUS MISSION, RÉGIS MADE ME A MAP OF THE WINES OF SOUTHWESTERN FRANCE. I KEPT IT AND I WASH DOWN MY MEAL WITH THE FINEST VINTAGES.

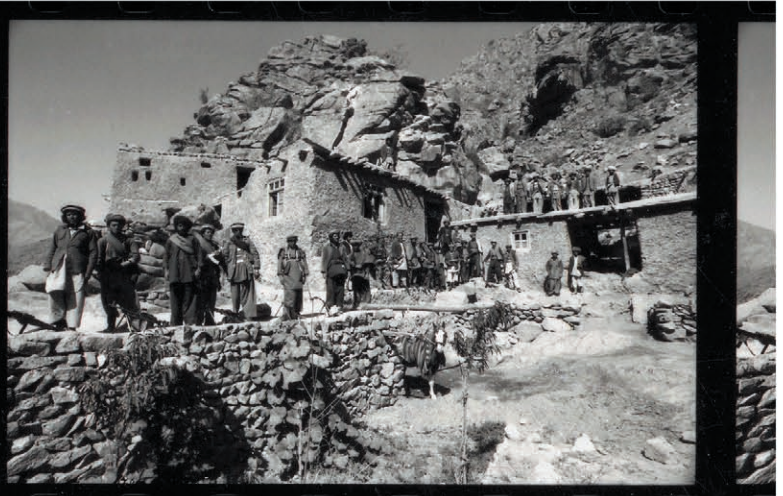
IT'S DELICIOUS.



THE NEXT MORNING,
THE WAKIL LINES UP ALL
HIS MEN IN FRONT OF
HIS BARRACKS, CALLED
A KOKHARGA, FOR A
MARTIAL PICTURE.



ALL THAT COMMOTION
FOR PICTURES THEY'LL
NEVER SEE.



OKAY, SEE YOU, LATIFA.
EAT AN IMAGINARY
MEAL TO MY HEALTH.

I'LL DO IT TONIGHT. PIKE
QUENELLES WITH A GLASS OF
DRY WHITE WINE. AND SWEET
FRITTERS FOR DESSERT.



WE LEAVE TESHKAN.



THIS GUY, WHO OVERTAKES US, CARVED HIS RIFLE OUT OF A TREE TRUNK.



SYLVIE'S RIGHT, I KNOW THE WAY. BESIDES, THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO GO: THE CARAVANS' ROUTE. AS LONG AS WE'RE MEETING SOME CARAVANS, WE'RE ON THE RIGHT PATH. THERE'S LITTLE CHANCE THAT I'LL GET LOST. THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT.



WHAT I WORRY ABOUT IS HAVING TO LEAD THIS TRIP. KNOWING WHEN TO SET OFF, WHEN TO STOP. CAREFULLY ASSESSING EACH STAGE, TO AVOID ENDING UP STUCK AT THE TOP OF A PASS, BLOCKED BY SNOW. GETTING THE TIMING RIGHT FOR GOING THROUGH THE PLACES THAT CAN GET BOMBED. BUYING THE RIGHT SUPPLIES.



ON THE WAY OVER, THE TEAM WAS PLANNING ALL THAT FOR ME. ALL I HAD TO WORRY ABOUT WERE MY CAMERAS AND MY FILM. I DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SURVIVING. AND I EXPECTED MY ESCORT TO HANDLE THAT NOW. BUT NO, NOT A CHANCE. IT ALL BRINGS HOME HOW POWERLESS AND VULNERABLE I AM.





I'M STUCK HAVING TO WAIT FOR THOSE FOUR GOONS.

GO AHEAD, GUYS, TAKE YOUR TIME.



IT ISN'T THAT I DON'T LIKE THEM. I CAN PUT MYSELF IN THEIR SHOES: THEY EXPECTED TO SPEND THE WINTER IN THEIR VILLAGE, AND THERE THEY ARE, HAVING TO TAG ALONG UP AND DOWN MOUNTAINS WITH SOME FRENCHMAN—MIGHT AS WELL SAY A MARTIAN—WHO, ON TOP OF IT, IS YELLING AT THEM. I'D BE GRUMBLING, TOO.



I DON'T MEAN THEM ANY HARM, BUT THEY'RE GETTING ON MY NERVES. THEY'RE SOFTIES, AND THE ROAD AHEAD IS TOUGH. AT LEAST EIGHT PASSES TO CROSS, NONE LOWER THAN 11,000 FEET. A CASUAL STROLL WON'T CUT IT.



OUR SLOW PACE COULD'VE BEEN PLEASANT IF IT WEREN'T SO IRRITATING, SO ALARMING. PUMPED UP WITH RED BLOOD CELLS AS I AM, I FEEL PRACTICALLY NO FATIGUE. AND THE MOUNTAINS ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS EVER. BUT I TRUNDLE ALONG WITH DOWNCAST EYES. I CONTINUE, ALMOST DESPITE MYSELF, TO SHOOT THE PICTURES OF A STORY I'VE ALREADY WRAPPED UP.







AT VILLAGE STOPS, OR WHEN WE PASS OTHER CARAVANS, THE BEHAVIOR OF MY GUYS BECOMES SUSPECT. THEY TALK TO THE AFGHANS WE MEET, POINTING AT ME WITH EXPRESSIONS OF SARCASM OR HOSTILITY. I START WONDERING IF THEY HAVE SOMETHING UP THEIR SLEEVES.

I SEE TCHOPAN AS A POTENTIAL ALLY IN CASE OF TROUBLE. HE ISN'T AS DECEITFUL AS THE OTHERS. I TRY TO PRESERVE A BOND OF TRUST WITH HIM.



I FIGURE HE WOULDN'T BETRAY ME. BUT I DOUBT HE'D HAVE THE STRENGTH OF CHARACTER TO PREVENT HIS BUDDIES FROM DOING SO.

THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT PASS IS THE ARASH PASS. WE START OUT WITH A TRAFFIC JAM. THE FLOCK STRETCHES ON ENDLESSLY. THE DUST WE'RE BREATHING IS FILLED WITH THE SOUR SMELL OF THE SHEEP. I DON'T EVEN REGISTER THE SMELL OF HORSES ANYMORE: IT HAS BECOME MY OWN.



AFTER THAT FLOCK I PRESS AHEAD A BIT. I'VE DECIDED TO CLIMB AT A STEADY CLIP, AND LET THE OTHERS FIND A WAY TO KEEP UP.



OF COURSE, AT THAT RATE, I QUICKLY LEAVE THEM BEHIND. I FIND MYSELF ALONE, TAKING ON A SLOPE THAT SEEMS MORE LIKE AN ENDLESS PILE OF CRUSHED STONES THAN A MOUNTAIN.



A FIGURE APPEARS.



A GUY WEARING A WHITE TURBAN. HE DOESN'T HAVE THE LOOK OF A MOUNTAIN-DWELLER, MORE LIKE A KIND OF SCHOLAR.



من چه دینم؟



HE GETS STRAIGHT DOWN TO BUSINESS: "WHAT RELIGION ARE YOU?"

IT'S A QUESTION I'M STARTING TO GET USED TO. PANTING, I ANSWER:

ISAWI.



HE SPEAKS TO ME AS TO A CHILD, WITH A LOT OF GESTURES.

کسی دین، سلامی بسیار دین



ISAWI, THAT'S KHUB, THAT'S GOOD. MUSLIM IS BISSIOR KHUB, MUCH BETTER. HE'LL GO TO HEAVEN AND I WON'T.

یهود، خراب



BUT I'D BETTER NOT BE YAHUD. YAHUD IS KHALOP, REALLY BAD. HE SAYS THAT WITH A FURROWED BROW.

AND WITH THAT, HE JUST WALKS OFF.



THE WHOLE THING LASTS EXACTLY THIRTY SECONDS.



JUST TO BE SURE, I CHECK IN MY DICTIONARY THAT I'VE UNDERSTOOD CORRECTLY: YAHUD DOES MEAN JEWISH.



WHAT DOES A GUY LIKE HIM THINK A JEW IS? WHATEVER HE KNOWS WAS PICKED UP FROM A DOCTRINE THAT, IN TURN, HE'S SPREADING ALONG THE HIGH ROADS. HOW MANY TRAVELING SALESMEN LIKE HIM ARE THERE IN AFGHANISTAN?



I REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON THE BATTLE OF RELIGIONS AS I WATCH MY FEET TRUDGING ALONG OVER THE STONES.



THE ISSUE TAKES ON THE APPEARANCE OF THE MOUNTAIN I'M CLIMBING: ARID, CRUSHING, ENDURING.



IN THE END, WHAT DEPRESSES ME IS THAT THIS GUY DIDN'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT WHAT I WAS DOING THERE OR WHERE I WAS GOING.





AT THE SUMMIT, I WALK IN THE CLOUDS, SHIVERING IN THE COLD FOG. COMING BACK DOWN, I COME ACROSS THE SUN AGAIN, AS IF HE WERE LIVING ON A LOWER FLOOR.



I SIT DOWN, SHELTERED FROM THE WIND, TO LET THE FOUR GUYS CATCH UP WITH ME. I'M IN A BETTER MOOD. I CLEARED THE PASS. I FEEL LIKE TAKING OUT MY NOTEBOOK AND DOING SOME WRITING.

I REALIZE THAT I HAVE TO GO EASY ON THOSE GUYS. WE'RE A KIND OF BROTHERHOOD. EVEN IF THEY GET ON MY NERVES, I HAVE TO SMOOTH MY ROUGH EDGES, LIKE IN A FAMILY. LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'RE GOING TO BE LIVING TOGETHER FOR A GOOD TEN DAYS.



I START NOTICING THE BEAUTY OF MY SURROUNDINGS AGAIN, AS IF MY CAPACITY TO BE MOVED WERE THAWING IN THE HEAT.



ANOTHER MAN WITH FUNKY GLASSES.



THE FOUR BOZOS ARRIVE. THEY TAKE A BREAK THAT I DON'T BEGRUDGE THEM. AT LAST, WE HEAD OFF AGAIN.



BARELY FORTY MINUTES LATER, AS BAD LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, WE COME ACROSS A STOPPED CARAVAN, WHOSE PEOPLE ARE PRAYING. THE OPPORTUNITY IS JUST TOO GOOD FOR MY RASCALS, AND THEY RUSH OVER TO KNEEL DOWN TOO.



INSTEAD OF CHAMPING AT THE BIT, I TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPEN AIR TO BREAK ONE OF MY LONG-STANDING TABOOS AND SHOOT A PRAYER FROM EVERY ANGLE.



LEAVING AS SOON AS THE PRAYER WAS OVER WOULD'VE BEEN TOO EASY. MUCH BETTER TO SPEND AN ENDLESS AMOUNT OF TIME TAKING GROUP PHOTOS, WHICH PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DELIGHTFUL JOKES, LIKE PUTTING AN AFGHAN CAP, THE PAKOL, ON MY HORSE.



THAT'S HOW IT ALWAYS GOES WITH THEM. I TRY TO BE UNDERSTANDING, BUT I JUST CAN'T HELP IT, THEY GRATE ON MY NERVES.

