



AT THE NEXT STOP, TCHOPAN INSISTS ON TAKING A PICTURE OF ME. I MIME TWO OR THREE INSTRUCTIONS AND LET HIM HAVE A GO. WE'LL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT.



JOHN'S OPERATION MIGHT NOT HAVE KILLED ME, BUT IT HASN'T KILLED THE BOIL ON MY ARM EITHER. IT ISN'T LOOKING GOOD. I CHANGE MY BANDAGE.



SWEAT AND FRICTION HAVE CORRODED THE SHEATH ON THE TEMPLES OF MY GLASSES. THE METAL IS CHAFING MY EARS AND CAUSING AN INFECTION. I TRY TO FIX UP A PROTECTIVE LAYER USING GAUZE.



MY GUMS ARE INFLAMED, TOO. EVEN THOUGH I'M NOT REALLY FEELING THE EXHAUSTION, I'M STARTING TO SHOW SIGNS OF WEAR PHYSICALLY.



THE NEXT DAY, WE LOAD UP
THE HORSE AND LEAVE IN
THE EARLY MORNING.



LFORD

HP5



WE APPROACH MAIDAN, THE
LAPIS LAZULI MINE. TWO
SHEPHERDS ARE LEADING
THEIR FLOCK ACROSS A
RIVER. I COVER THE EVENT.



LFORD

HP5





THE DOG COMES LAST. AFGHAN DOGS—AND I DON'T MEAN AFGHAN HOUNDS, JUST THE MUTTS WE PASS ON THE ROAD—DON'T HAVE A LOFTY PLACE IN THE SOCIAL ORDER. I MUST SAY, THEY'RE VERY UGLY AND OFTEN UNFRIENDLY.



WE'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. I'M BACK ON THE NARROW, DIZZYING PATHS WHERE I LOST MY CAMERA'S SUN COVER. I STILL HAVEN'T GOTTEN OVER IT AND I CATCH MYSELF LOOKING FOR IT OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE.



THE NIGHT AHEAD OF US WILL BE A NIGHT OF MARCHING, BECAUSE WE'RE APPROACHING THE SOVIET POSITION OF SKAZAR. MY GUYS KNOW THAT AND ARE UNEASY.



ANXIETY HAS A MIRACULOUS EFFECT AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, I SEE THEM TAKE AN INITIATIVE. THEY NEGOTIATE OUR JOINING ANOTHER CARAVAN.



WE GET THROUGH WITHOUT INCIDENT, RUSHING FORWARD AS FAST AS THE MOONLIGHT ALLOWS.



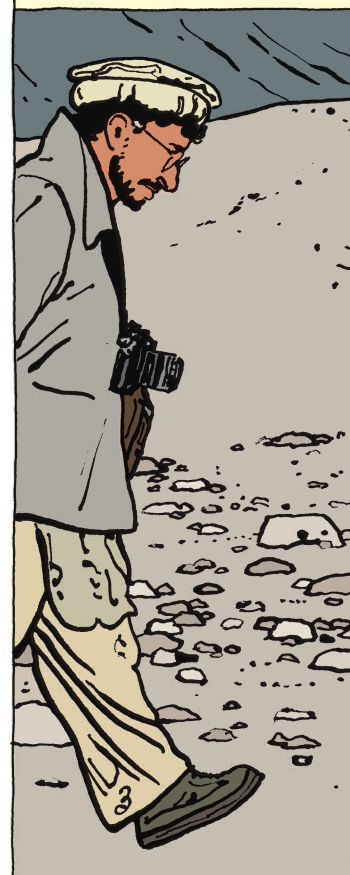
THE EFFORT TAXES THEM. DESPITE A GENEROUS BREAK IN THE MORNING, THEY DALLY MORE THAN EVER. OUR EXCHANGES GROW HEATED IN THE AFTERNOON.



I'M ON EDGE. I'M AWARE THAT THE NEXT DAY, AFTER THE REST STOP IN ANJOMAN, THE REAL HARDSHIP WILL BEGIN. WE'LL HAVE TO GET THROUGH THE KALOTAC PASS, THE FAMOUS FORK BETWEEN BADAKHSHAN AND PANJSHIR, ONE OF THE TOUGHEST OF THE ENTIRE TRIP. THERE COULD BE BOMBING, THERE COULD BE SNOW, AND IT'S EASY TO GET LOST, LIKE THAT DONKEY MINDER WE FOUND AGAINST ALL ODDS, ON THE WAY OVER.



I WALK ANGRILY, IN A LEADEN MOOD, AND I DON'T TAKE ANY PICTURES.



AFTER WE GET TO ANJOMAN, I REALIZE MY HORSE HAS LOST A HORSESHOE.



THAT'S BAD NEWS. I'VE OFTEN SEEN HORSES LOSE THEIR SHOES. I KNOW YOU HAVE TO SHOE THEM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO PREVENT THEIR GETTING INJURED.



LUCKILY, I HAVE THE HORSESHOES THAT THE MUJ' FROM YAF TAL-E-PAYAN GAVE ME. I HAND ONE TO MY GUYS.

ASP... NAAL JAANESHIN SHODAN.



JAANESHIN SHODAN.



این کار را به من بده

به من بده



NAAL JAANESHIN SHODAN!



قدرت کین!

HA HA!

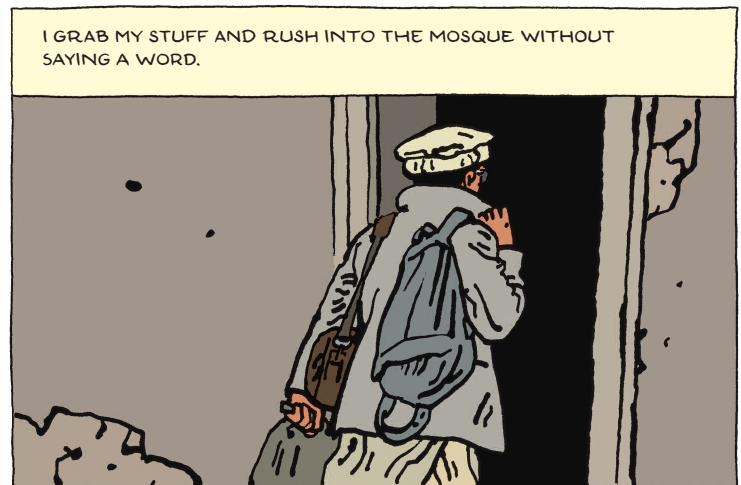
HAHAHA!



I FLY INTO A RAGE.

WHAT THE FUCK IS YOUR PROBLEM?!





I SPEND THE NIGHT OUTSIDE PATHETICALLY EMPTYING MYSELF OUT.



BY MORNING I'M DRAINED AND FROZEN. I HAVEN'T HAD EVEN A MINUTE OF SLEEP.



WE STILL SET OFF. WE HAVE TO REACH A HUT ON THE SIDE OF A LAKE. WE'LL GET THERE BY NOON AND WILL STAY THERE UNTIL THE EVENING, BEFORE CROSSING THE KALOTAC PASS BY NIGHT.



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR TRIP, I BRING UP THE REAR. MY EYES ARE BURNING, MY BELLY IS A PAINFUL JUMBLE, AND MY LEGS WOBBLE.

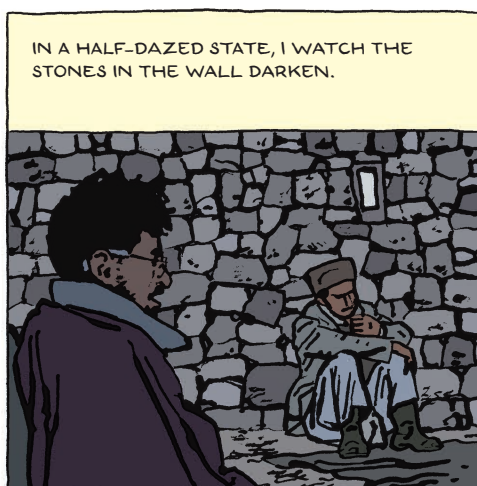
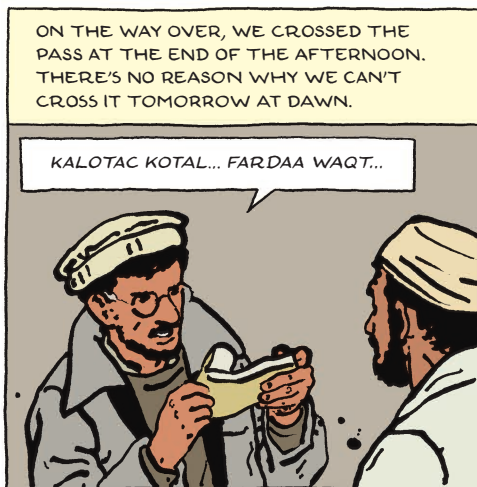
TO AVOID THINKING OF ANYTHING, I START COUNTING MY STEPS.



AT LAST, WE REACH THE LAKE. I'M EXHAUSTED.



I SAY TO THE FOUR: "I'M NOT FEELING WELL. I NEED TO REST. WE AREN'T LEAVING TONIGHT, WE'LL GO TOMORROW MORNING."





THEY LEFT ME THE HORSE,
MY BAGGAGE, AND SOME
BREAD, WHICH I EAT. I SLEPT
WELL AND I FEEL BETTER.



I DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE.
I SURE DON'T WANT TO GO
BACK. I COULD STAY HERE,
BUT FOR WHAT? WAIT FOR
ANOTHER CARAVAN TO COME
THROUGH? THERE'S NO
GUARANTEE THAT THERE'LL
BE ONE GOING WHERE I'M
HEADED, EITHER TODAY OR
IN THE NEXT DAYS.

NO, THE ONLY THING TO DO IS TO KEEP
GOING.



I CURSE MYSELF FOR NEVER HAVING
LEARNED TO SADDLE THIS HORSE
PROPERLY.



I REMOVE HIS NIGHT BLANKET, PUT
ON HIS PACKSADDLE. NONE OF THE
MOTIONS COME NATURALLY.



THEN I LOAD HIM UP.



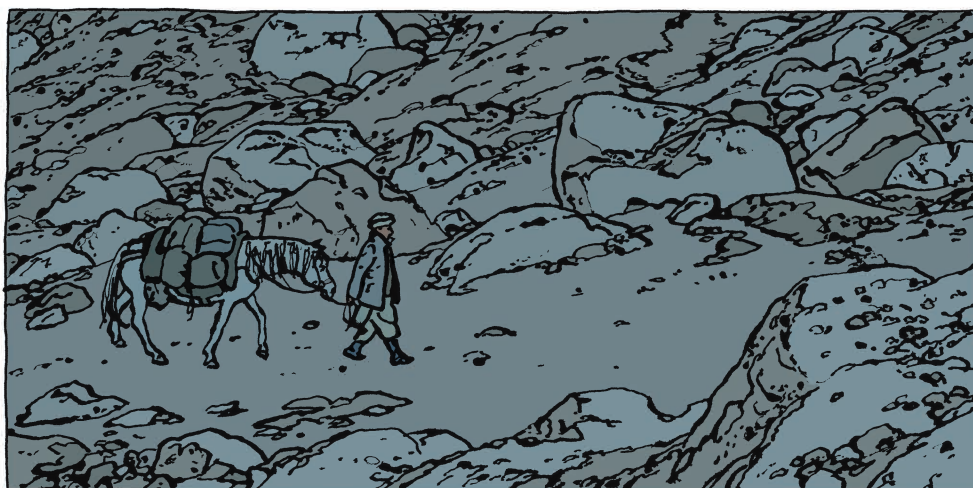
THERE ARE ROPES EVERYWHERE. I
CROSS THEM, TANGLE THEM UP, TIE THEM
TOGETHER WITHOUT MUCH LOGIC. I TRY
AS BEST I CAN TO IMITATE WHAT I'VE SEEN.



IT SEEMS TO HOLD UP. I SLIP THE BRIDLE
ON HIM.



HE'S DOCILE.



THE ASCENT BEGINS IN THE EARLY MORNING. MY WATCH SHOWS 5:10 AM. THE WEATHER IS GRAY, THE ROCKS ARE SLIPPERY. IT'S DRIZZLING. TO AVOID GIVING IN TO ANXIETY, I CAST MY MIND AROUND FOR REASONS TO BE GLAD. DON'T REALLY FIND ANY.



EACH STEP THE HORSE TAKES CAUSES MY POORLY TIED BAGGAGE TO SWAY, AND LOOSENS THE ROPES.



IT'S BARELY A QUARTER TO SIX WHEN I HAVE TO COMPLETELY UNLOAD AND RELOAD THE HORSE.



I START OVER AGAIN TWENTY MINUTES LATER.



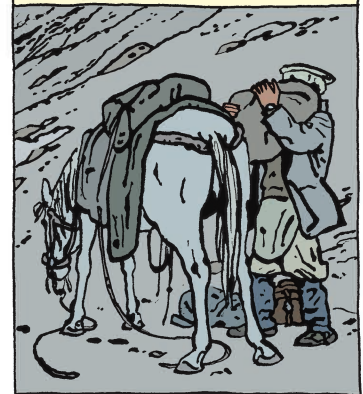
I START OVER AGAIN FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER.



I START OVER AGAIN TWENTY MINUTES LATER.



I START OVER AGAIN THIRTY MINUTES LATER.



AND AGAIN.



AND AGAIN.



AND AGAIN.



AND AGAIN. WITHOUT EVER GETTING THE KNACK OF IT AND GETTING IT TO HOLD IN PLACE.



I PASS A CARAVAN THAT I TRIED TO INTEREST IN MY PREDICAMENT. THEY GREET ME POLITELY BUT DON'T STOP.



SAME THING A FEW HUNDRED YARDS FARTHER UP.



IT'S NOW 3 PM, NEARLY NIGHTFALL. I'M FAR FROM THE SUMMIT, AND I'M STARTING TO GET SERIOUSLY WORRIED.



I'M EXHAUSTED, AND FRUSTRATED BY THE RELOADING. MY HORSE IS PANTING, TOO. HE HAS SORES. I WON'T BE ABLE TO CROSS THE PASS BEFORE NIGHTFALL. IT'S TAKEN ME TEN HOURS TO GET TO THIS POINT—THERE'S NO POINT TRYING TO TURN AROUND TO GO BACK DOWN.

FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, I UNLOAD AND RELOAD MY STUFF.



I STEADY MYSELF BY CLIMBING ONTO A LARGE ROCK, AND GIVE THE ROPES A SHARP TUG WITH ALL MY STRENGTH.



AH!





FUCK.



MY LEG IS BUSTED, I'M SURE—CAUGHT BETWEEN THE HORSE AND THE BIG ROCK.



HE GETS UP. MY LEG HURTS LIKE HELL.



IT HURTS, BUT THE BONE IS INTACT—JUST A BIG BRUISE. I MASSAGE MY CALF.



THE FALL CAUSED THE BAGGAGE TO SLIP YET AGAIN.



I ADJUST IT ONCE MORE AND WE HEAD OFF.



IT'S THE LAST STAGE OF THE CLIMB UP THE KALOTAC. WE'RE OVER 16,000 FEET HIGH. IT STARTS SNOWING.

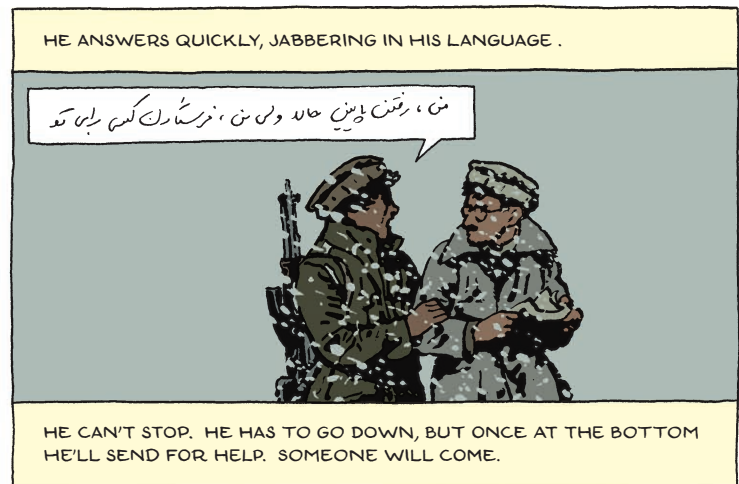
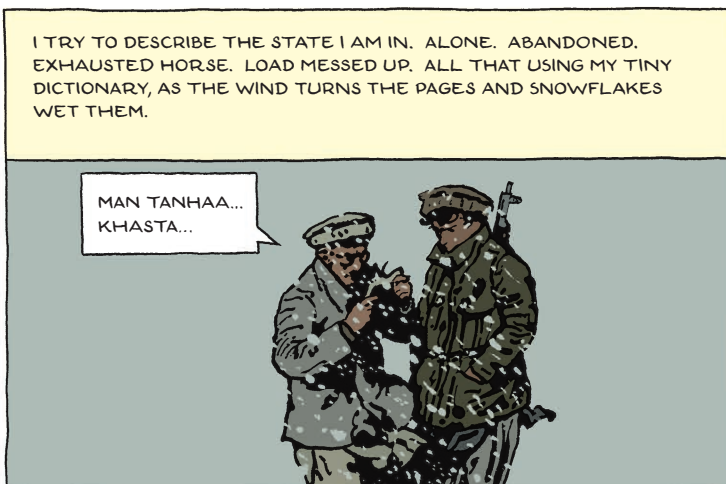
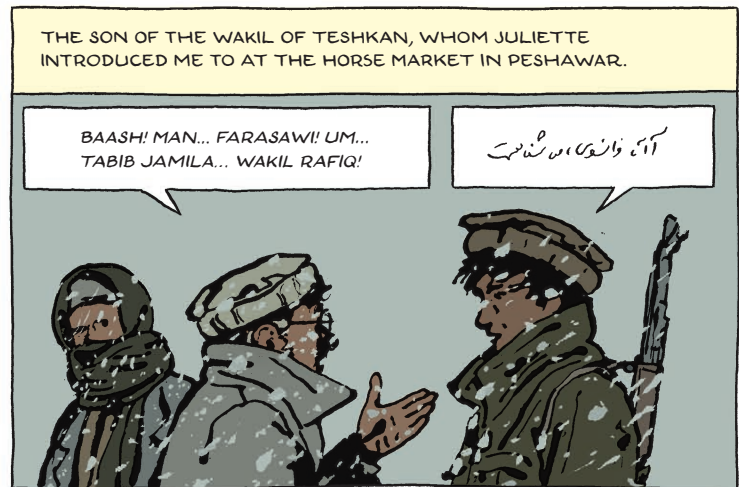


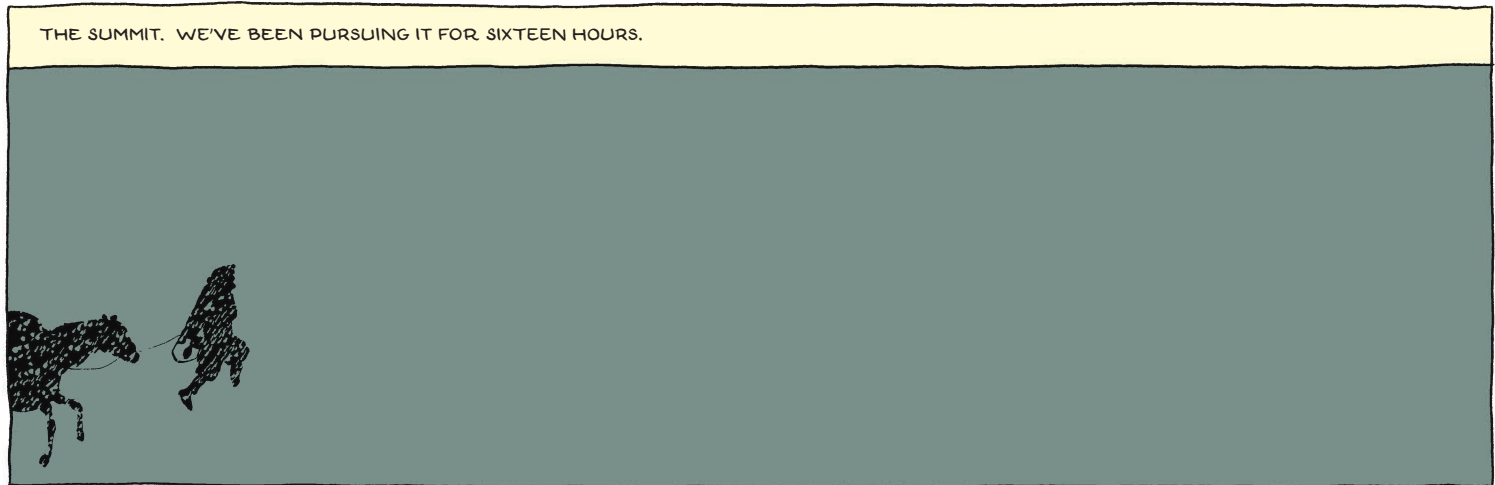
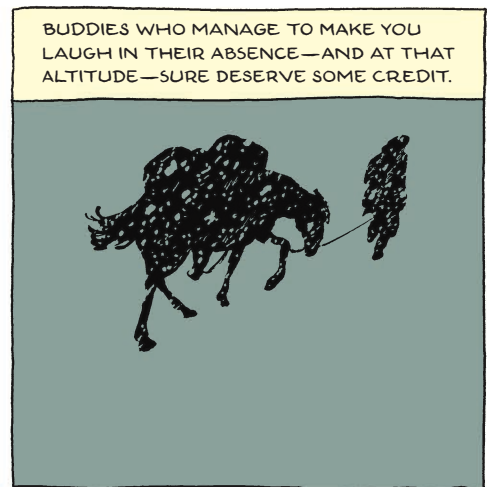
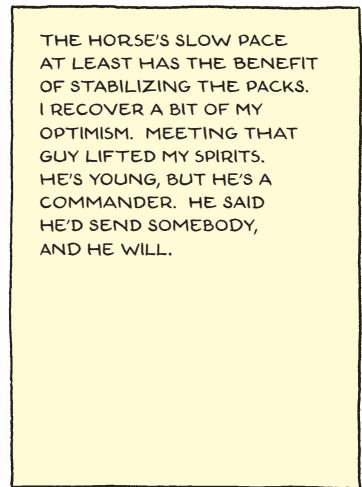
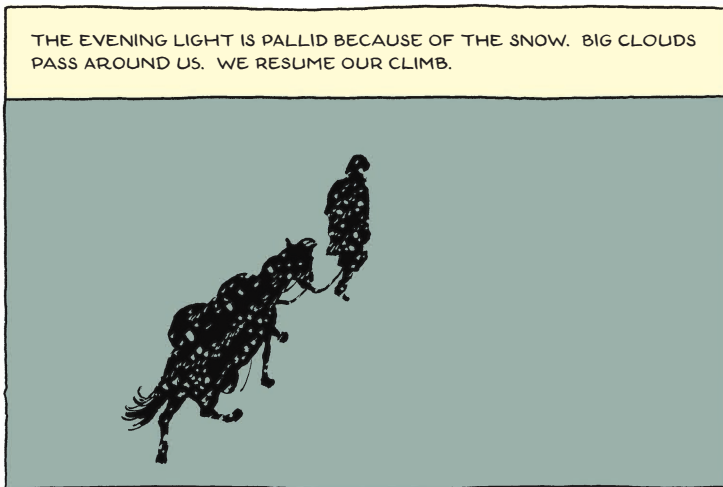
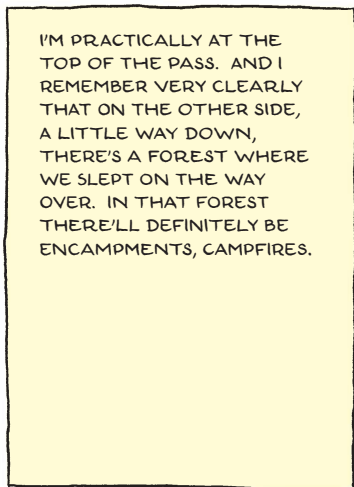
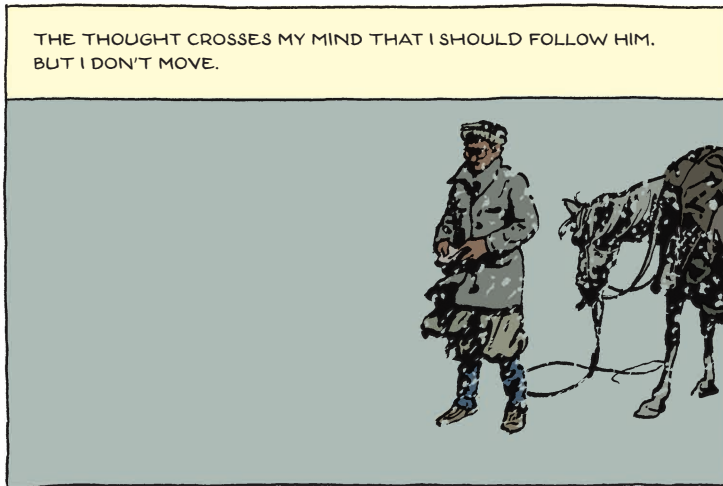
THE AIR IS THIN. THE HORSE PAUSES EVERY THREE STEPS TO CATCH ITS BREATH. WE CAN'T GO ANY FARTHER.



SUDDENLY, IN FRONT OF ME, A CARAVAN APPEARS OUT OF THE CURTAIN OF SNOW.

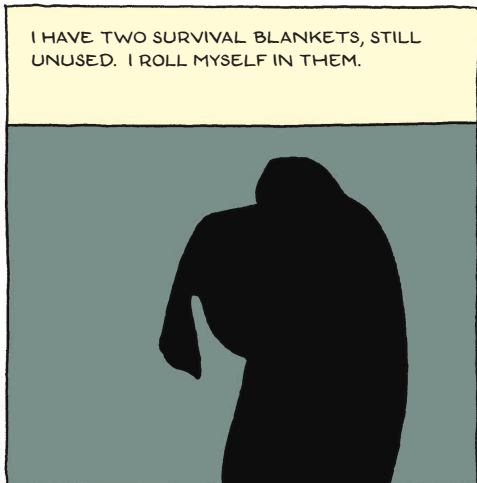
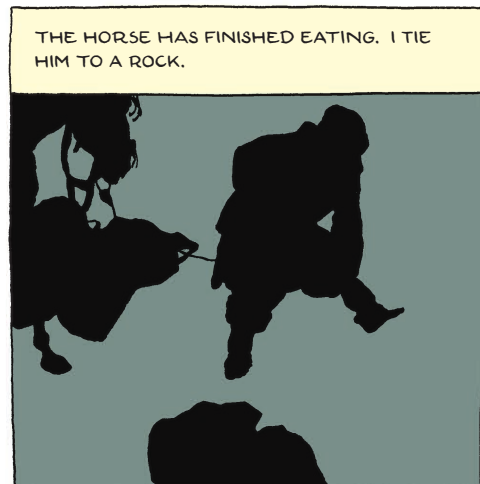
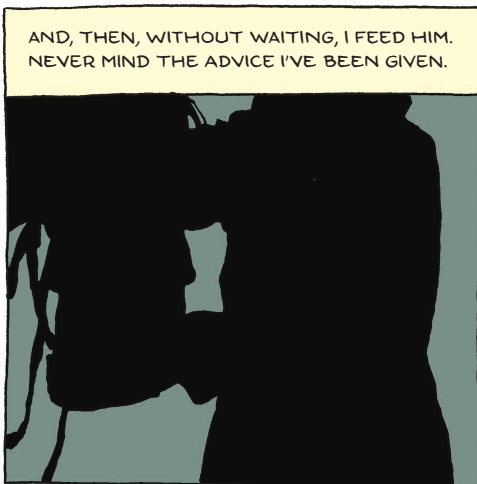
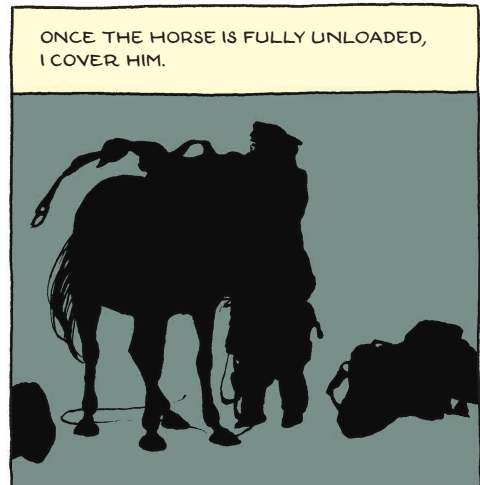












I STAY ON THE PATH BECAUSE OF MINES. RUSSIAN PLANES DUMP ANTIPERSONNEL MINES, WHICH ARM UPON HITTING THE GROUND. THEY LOOK LIKE LARGE BUTTERFLIES. STRATEGIC PLACES LIKE THIS PASS ARE FILLED WITH THEM. CARAVANS DO THEIR BEST TO CLEAR THE PATH BY EXPLODING THE MINES THEY SPOT. BUT YOU CAN'T STRAY FROM THE PATH. THERE ARE BOUND TO BE SOME MINES JUST A FEW YARDS AWAY.



IT GETS LIGHTER OR DARKER AS CLOUDS PASS BY OVERHEAD. I'M HUNGRY AND THIRSTY. I HAVEN'T EATEN ANYTHING ALL DAY, OBSESSED AS I WAS WITH THE WALK. MY CANTEEN IS EMPTY. I FISH SOME DRIED FRUITS OUT OF THE BOTTOMS OF MY POCKETS. THAT'S ALL I HAVE. THEY MAKE ME EVEN THIRSTIER.

I PACK SNOW INTO MY CANTEEN AND PUT IT INSIDE MY SLEEPING BAG. WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES, I'LL HAVE WATER.



I'M DUMBSTRUCK BY MY EPISODE OF INSANITY. I CAN STILL FEEL THE IMPACT OF MY FISTS ON THE HORSE'S NECK. HE HASN'T BUDGED. A HORSE'S NECK IS REALLY TOUGH, REALLY MUSCULAR.



IN ALL MY LIFE I'VE NEVER FELT SUCH FEAR. IT LEFT ME AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD COME, BUT IN THE MEANTIME I COMPLETELY LOST MY MIND. I HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG IT LASTED.



I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT THE LOOK ON THE FACE OF THE GUY WHO GOT LOST IN THE SAME PLACE ON THE TRIP OVER AND CAUGHT UP WITH US IN ANJOMAN—THE EXPRESSION OF TERROR ON HIS FACE AND, ESPECIALLY, WHAT THE AFGHANS HAD BEEN SAYING BEFORE HE WAS RECOVERED: "HE'S DONE FOR. YOU CAN'T SURVIVE ALONE UP THERE FOR A WHOLE NIGHT."



I TAKE OUT ONE OF MY CAMERAS. I CHOOSE A 20MM LENS, A VERY WIDE ANGLE, AND SHOOT FROM THE GROUND.



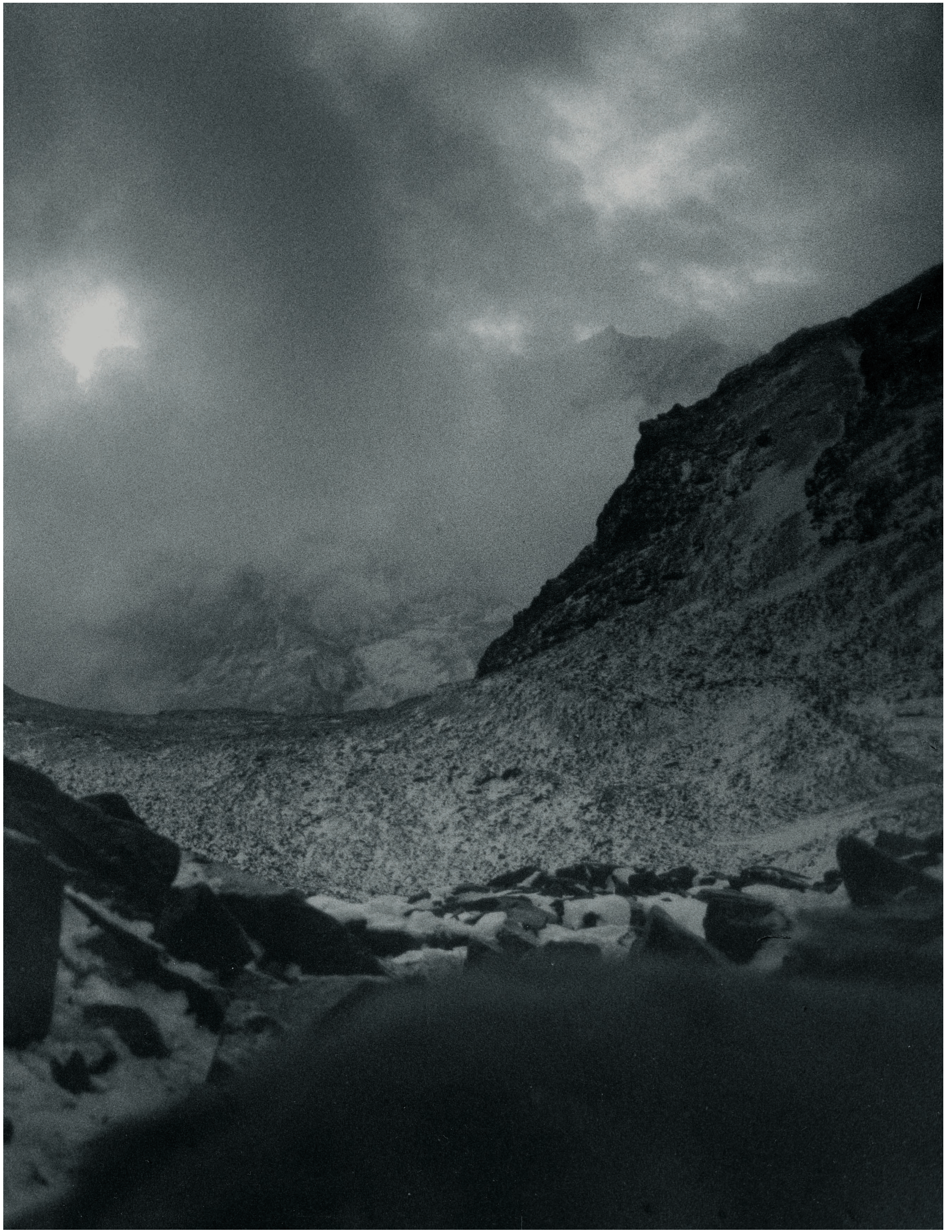
TO LET PEOPLE KNOW WHERE I DIED.

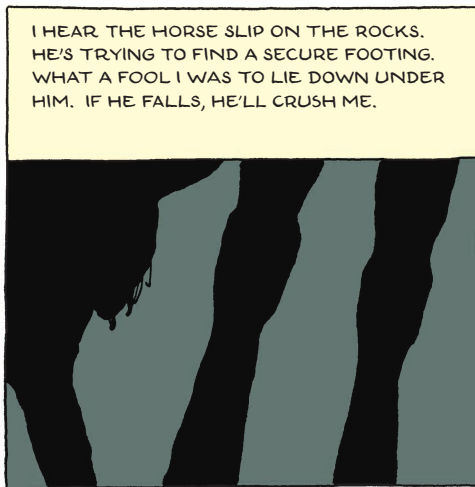












I WRITE DOMINIQUE'S ADDRESS IN BIG LETTERS IN THE FLYLEAF. I PACK UP THE NOTEBOOK AND SHOVE MY FREEZING HANDS INTO MY ARMPITS.

IT STARTS SNOWING AGAIN.

SEVERAL TIMES THE HORSE SKIDDING JOLTS ME ABRUPTLY OUT OF MY DROWSINESS.

EACH TIME, I TUCK MY HEAD IN, MY HEART POUNDING. NOTHING HAPPENS.

MY HEART RATE SLOWS. I GROW DROWSY AGAIN AND DOZE.

UNTIL THE HORSE SKIDS AGAIN.

STILL, I DON'T COME OUT OF THE SLEEPING BAG. THE COLD WOULD CLOBBER ME.

MY MIND HAD BEEN SET ON THE IDEA OF GOING HOME. NOW I ONLY HAVE THE THOUGHT OF DYING.

A GROUP COMES THROUGH, HALF TRAMPLING ME.

DOESN'T EVEN STOP.

THEN ANOTHER.

SAME THING.



A CARAVAN.
A WOLF-FACED MAN, WHO
SEEMS TO BE THE LEADER.
I COME OUT OF MY SLEEPING
BAG, INTO THE FROSTY
DAWN.
I TRY TO CONTROL MY
SHAKING TO TAKE A
PICTURE.



HE SAYS "COME" AND
MOTIONS THAT I SHOULD
GATHER MY THINGS.



I MAKE CLEAR TO HIM THAT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LOAD UP MY
HORSE. HE ANSWERS IN CRUDE ENGLISH THAT HE'LL TAKE CARE
OF IT AND TAKE ME WITH HIM. BUT FIRST I HAVE TO PAY.



HOW MUCH WOULD HE CHARGE?



20,000 AFGHANI.

I HAVE MONEY ON ME—QUITE
A BIT, IN FACT. ABOUT 300
DOLLARS AND 250,000
AFGHANI, IN THICK WADS. I
CAN'T MANAGE TO TAKE
OUT THE 20,000 WITHOUT
HIS SEEING THE REST. IT'S
EMBARRASSING.

INCH ALLAH. DON'T HAVE
MUCH CHOICE.



THEY LOAD UP MY HORSE, WHO SETS OFF
AGAIN WITH A TAP.



AND OFF WE GO.



WE HEAD DOWN. I FOLLOW THEM, FEELING STIFF, SORE, DIZZY.



LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT I WAS TWO HOURS' WALK AWAY FROM THE FOREST. WE WALK FOR NEARLY FIVE HOURS BEFORE REACHING IT. AND THOSE AREN'T FIVE HOURS AT THE PACE OF MY FORMER ESCORT. I'VE FOUND SOME REAL MUJ, AND THEY EAT UP THE MILES.



I BARELY RECOGNIZE THE FOREST I'D SEEN ON THE WAY OVER. OBVIOUSLY, AUTUMN HAS TAKEN ITS TOLL.



AT LAST, WE TAKE A BREAK.



THEY START A FIRE, MAKE TEA, AND PASS AROUND A THICK, SWEET CAKE.



IN A MIXTURE OF PERSIAN, ENGLISH, AND SIGN LANGUAGE I EXPLAIN TO THE WOLF WHO I AM AND WHAT I'M DOING THERE: THE MSF MISSION, THE PHOTOS, THE RETURN ALONE, BASSIR'S GUYS ABANDONING ME. THE WOLF LISTENS.



AFTER I'VE FINISHED, THE WOLF TELLS ME I'M LUCKY HE PICKED ME UP, BECAUSE THE KALOTAC PASS IS CRAWLING WITH WOLVES. REAL ONES.





WE WALK WITHOUT A MOMENT'S REST UNTIL THE EVENING STOP.
I INSTANTLY SLEEP LIKE A STONE.



GETTING UP IS TOUGH, AT ONE AM. I FEEL AWFUL, LIKE I'VE
BARELY SLEPT. WHERE WILL I FIND THE STRENGTH TO KEEP UP
WITH THEM?



EVEN AS I ASK MYSELF THE QUESTION, I'M ALREADY ON MY WAY.



I HAVE TO SHAKE OFF A HUGE RELUCTANCE TO TAKE PICTURES.
BUNDLES OF INTERESTING SCENES AND PANORAMAS SLIDE BY
UNCAPTURED. I CAN'T CONVINCE MYSELF TO SHOOT THEM.



I MANAGE TO WITH THAT CRIPPLED BABA. IT'S A KIND OF SELF-PORTRAIT. THAT'S HOW I FEEL.



IN THE EVENING I REDISCOVER THE FEELING OF HAVING NO PRIVACY. WHEN I OPEN A BAG THEY'LL COME SEE WHAT'S INSIDE. IF I TAKE MY CASE OF TOILETRIES WITH ME TO WASH UP AT THE RIVER, TWO OR THREE GUYS WILL FOLLOW ME.



I CAN'T STAND IT ANY MORE.

CAN'T YOU GIVE ME A SINGLE FUCKING BREAK?



I LOOK FORWARD TO ONLY ONE MOMENT: WHEN I CAN SLIP INTO MY SLEEPING BAG.



AS NIGHT FALLS IT RUBS AWAY MY SURROUNDINGS. THE HALO OF MY FOREHEAD LAMP CREATES A LITTLE INTANGIBLE HOUSE.



I WRITE FOR A SHORT WHILE, THEN CURL UP.



THIS UGLY, DIRTY, UNCOMFORTABLE CORNER BECOMES MY HOME, AND I FEEL MY ONLY MOMENT OF WELL-BEING OF THE DAY.



ONE AM. WE HIT THE ROAD AGAIN.



THE DAWN REVEALS TO MY EYES WHAT MY LEGS HAVE ALREADY OBSERVED: THE PRESENCE OF THE POJOL PASS, WHICH WE'VE ALREADY STARTED CLIMBING.



I'M STRUGGLING. THE HORSE TOO.



SHORTLY BEFORE THE SUMMIT, WE PASS AN ARMED CARAVAN.



A BIT LATER, AT THE TOP, MY GROUP STOPS. SINCE I'M BRINGING UP THE REAR, I THINK THEY'RE WAITING FOR ME. BUT THAT ISN'T IT.

THE WOLF COMES TOWARD ME AND SAYS:

MORE MONEY.



AH, THE SON OF A BITCH. GOOD TIMING.



I'D BEEN EXPECTING IT AND HAD PUT A CERTAIN AMOUNT IN A POCKET, TO AVOID HAVING TO TAKE OUT EVERYTHING I HAVE. FIVE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AFGHANIS. I HAND THEM OVER.



I'M STARTING TO WONDER HOW THESE GUYS ARE PLANNING TO FINISH ME OFF.



A FEW HUNDRED YARDS LATER, MY HORSE COLLAPSES.



HE STAYS THERE, LYING BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.



NO WAY. I CAN'T ACCEPT THAT.



THE WOLF IS RIGHT. HE'S DYING.



I WANT TO END HIS AGONY, BUT I'M IN A CARAVAN GOING FROM AFGHANISTAN TO PAKISTAN. WITHOUT FIREARMS.



THE WOLF AND THE OTHERS ARE ALREADY UNTYING MY THREE LARGE BAGS.



THEY SET THEM DOWN AT THEIR FEET AND THE WOLF SAYS:





OFTEN, AT THE BACK OF CARAVANS YOU CAN SEE A SHEEP TROTTING ALONG.
IT'S BEEN BOUGHT AT THE PREVIOUS REST STOP AND WILL BE SACRIFICED AT THE NEXT BIVOUAC.
I HAVE A FEELING THAT I'M THAT SHEEP.
PARANOIA COMES OVER ME IN WAVES.
I TELL MYSELF, YOU'RE IN A TRAP.
YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON GUYS WHO WANT TO TAKE IT FROM YOU.
YOU'RE RUNNING TO CATCH UP WITH YOUR EXECUTIONERS.
AND WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT? NOTHING.
I'M SURE THEY'RE WEARING ME OUT DELIBERATELY.
THOSE BRUTAL AWAKENINGS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT,
THOSE UNBEARABLE MARCHES UNTIL 7:00 IN THE EVENING ARE GOING TO MAKE ME KEEL OVER.
ONCE I'VE KEELED OVER, ALL THEY'LL HAVE TO DO IS PICK UP MY MONEY AND LET ME DIE IN A CORNER.
UNLESS THEY KILL ME BEFORE THAT.



THIS EVENING, THERE'S NONE OF THE FLEETING HAPPINESS I EXPERIENCED LAST NIGHT AS I SLIPPED INTO MY SLEEPING BAG. TOO MUCH ANGUISH.



I'M AFRAID THEY'RE GOING TO BUMP ME OFF DURING MY SLEEP. I'M IN SUCH A NERVOUS STATE THAT I CAN'T SLEEP. I WRITE.



AS I WRITE, I'M ALERT TO EVERY SOUND. I WRITE SO THAT MY MURDERERS WILL SEE I'M BUSY AND POSTPONE MY KILLING. I WRITE TO CONFIRM IN WRITING THAT I'M GOING INSANE.



MY HANDWRITING IS TERRIBLE. IT STRIKES ME, BECAUSE I USUALLY WRITE NEATLY. NOW, IT'S FAT AND FORMLESS, LURCHING FORWARD.



ONE AM. WE'RE OFF AGAIN.



WE GO THROUGH KANTIWA. IN THE AFTERNOON, THEY PUT MY BAGS DOWN.



MORE MONEY.

FIVE THOUSAND AFGHANIS.

I PAY FOR EVERYONE'S DINNER. ANOTHER SLEEPLESS NIGHT SPENT EXPECTING TO HAVE MY HEAD SMASHED IN WITH A ROCK.



THE NEXT DAY IT'S PORUNS.



YOU GIVE MONEY.

EIGHT THOUSAND AFGHANIS.

IT'S OCTOBER 22, AND AT THE END OF THE DAY WE REACH A CHAYRANA THAT'S RUN BY A GIANT.



IT'S THE FIRST TIME SINCE I'VE GROWN TO MY ADULT HEIGHT THAT I'VE MET A MAN SO TALL THAT I ONLY REACH THE HEIGHT OF HIS WAIST.



THE MAN TERRIFIES ME. HE'S AN OGRE. HE HAS A FEW SHEEP, WHICH LOOK LIKE TOY POODLES AROUND HIM.



THE OTHERS SEE HOW SCARED I AM. THEY WANT ME TO TAKE A PICTURE OF THE OGRE. BUT FIRST THE WOLF TAKES ONE OF ME.



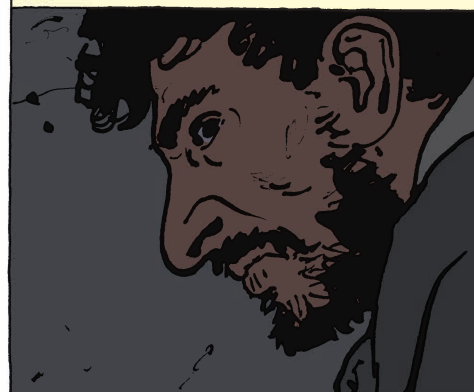
AND THEN NIGHT FALLS AND THERE I AM, LIKE A CHILD, SLEEPING BETWEEN THE WOLF AND THE OGRE.



BUT THAT'S PUTTING IT TOO MILDLY. A CHILD WOULD LISTEN TO HIS FEAR AND FLEE. NO, I'M DEFINITELY A SHEEP. I STAY THERE, STUCK IN A STUPOR, WAITING TO HAVE MY THROAT SLIT.



AND WHEN A HAND FALLS ON MY SHOULDER, I UNDERSTAND THE MOMENT HAS COME.



ONE AM. WE SAY GOOD-BYE TO THE OGRE AND LEAVE.



SEEING THE SUN AGAIN AFTER THAT TERRIFYING NIGHT FILLS ME WITH A KIND OF GRATITUDE. I EXPRESS IT BY SHOOTING PICTURES OF THE WOLF AND HIS MEN DURING A PRAYER BREAK BY THE SIDE OF A STREAM.



THEN WE TAKE ON THE PAPROK PASS.



I'VE TALKED A LOT ABOUT RELIGION OVER THE PAST DAYS, DISPLAYING A FAITH THAT IN FACT I DON'T HAVE MUCH OF.



BUT I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT, ASCENDING THIS PASS, I PRAY WITH THE DEEPEST FERVOR THAT I'LL MAKE IT TO THE TOP.



AND ONCE I'VE REACHED THE TOP OF CALVARY, NEXT COMES THE CRUCIFIXION.



I DON'T EVEN YELL ANY MORE. NOT ENOUGH AIR IN MY LUNGS. HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT?

THIRTY THOUSAND.



THIRTY THOUSAND.

GOLLY. THIRTY THOUSAND. GO FOR THIRTY THOUSAND.

TWENTY...
TWENTY-FIVE...



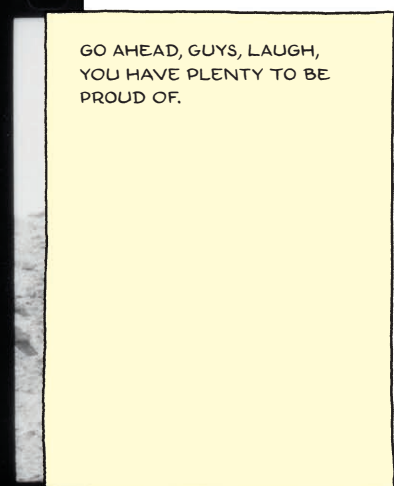
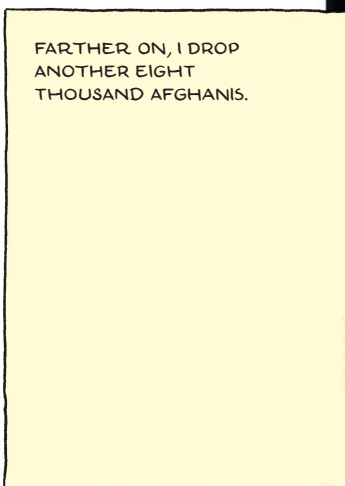
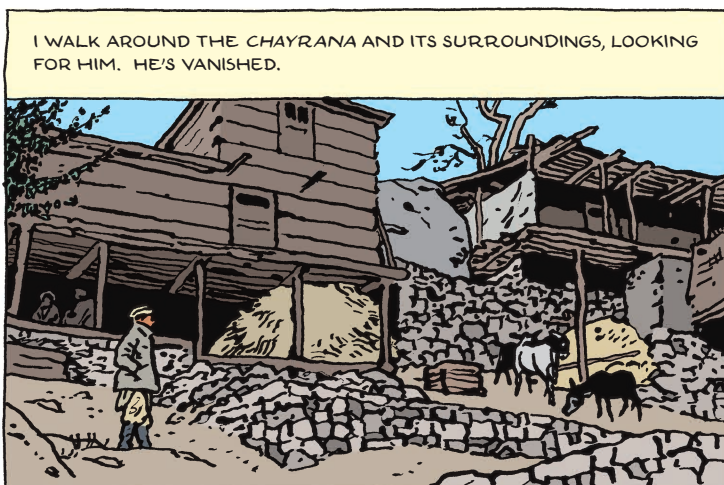
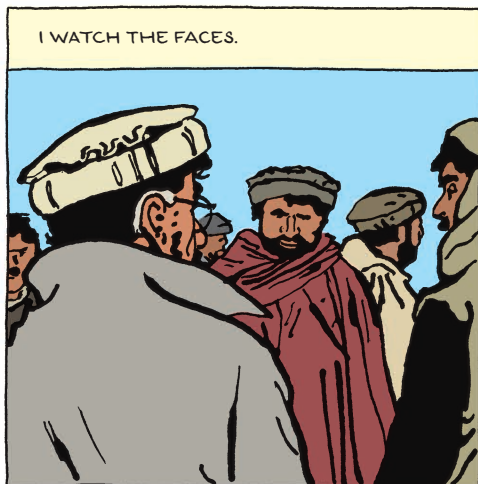
MY NEST EGG IS VANISHING AT AN ALARMING SPEED.

I DON'T REMEMBER WHO SAID, "GOING UP IS TIRING, GOING DOWN IS PAINFUL." BUT IT'S TRUE.



ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PAPROK PASS, WE STOP IN A CHAYRANA THAT'S PACKED WITH TRAVELERS.





WE REACH A VILLAGE THAT I RECOGNIZE: BARG-E-MATAL.



I REMEMBER THAT THE LOCAL CHIEF IS THE CHUBBY, BEARDED DRUG DEALER WHO WAS JULIETTE'S POINT MAN IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. I EVEN RECALL HIS NAME.

AIDER SHAH.



I ASK TO SEE HIM.

PLEASE, LET HIM BE THERE! I'M FEVERISH WITH HOPE AND ANGUISH WHILE I WAIT FOR HIM. I NERVOUSLY BONE UP ON MY DICTIONARY'S PHRASES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO SAY TO HIM.

PAISA... DOZDI KARDAN...



THERE HE IS. HE OPENS HIS ARMS AND DROWNS ME IN HIS HUGE BEARD.



HE RECOGNIZES ME. HE KNOWS I WAS PART OF JAMILA'S CREW. AS BEST I CAN, I TELL HIM THAT I'M ON MY WAY TO PAKISTAN, THAT I'M SICK, THAT THE MEN WHO ARE WITH ME ARE NOT GOOD PEOPLE AND THEY'VE TAKEN MY MONEY.

HIS REACTION IS INSTANT: HE FIRES MY ESCORT, MAKING SURE THEY RETURN MY LUGGAGE TO ME, THEN HE INTRODUCES ME TO HIS NEPHEW AND GIVES HIM INSTRUCTIONS.



THE NEPHEW LEADS ME TO A WOODEN HOUSE, ON THE EDGE OF A STREAM.



IN THAT HOUSE, A ROOM.



I COLLAPSE ONTO THE BED.



I FALL ASLEEP.



WHEN I WAKE UP, THE NEPHEW BRINGS ME A MEAL.



A KIND OF RAVIOLI WITH VEGETABLES, IN A RED SAUCE WITH AN EGG YOLK ON TOP. AND SOME TEA.



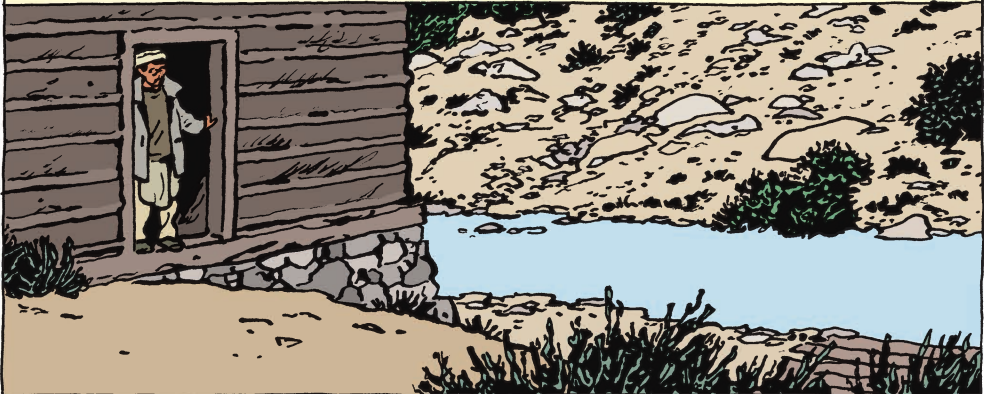
I FALL BACK ASLEEP WITH THOSE FLAVORS IN MY MOUTH.



I GO THROUGH THE SAME SEQUENCE SEVERAL TIMES: WAKING UP, EATING, SLEEPING, WAKING UP, EATING, SLEEPING...



UNTIL I EMERGE FROM THE FOG FOR GOOD AND REALIZE THAT I'VE SLEPT FOR A GOOD FORTY HOURS.



IT'S OCTOBER 25TH, AROUND NOON. A COOL AND SUNNY DAY.



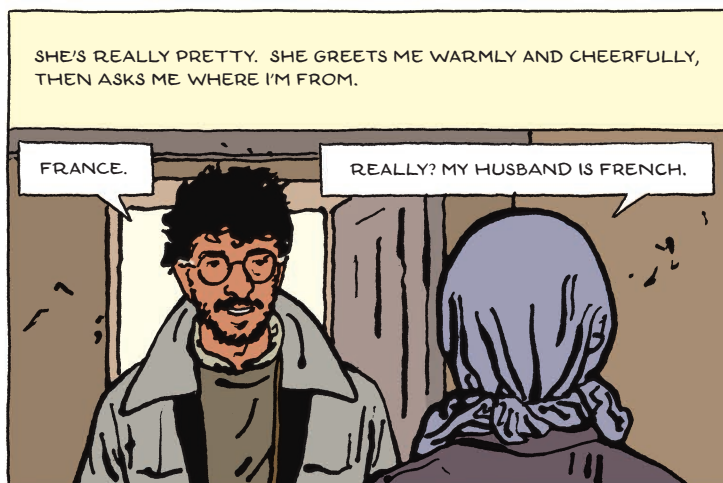
AIDER SHAH SAVED MY HIDE.
 IN ONE MINUTE, WITH AUTHORITY AND GENEROSITY HE HAS PULLED ME OUT OF
 A THREE-WEEK-LONG NIGHTMARE.
 I TELL HIM HOW GRATEFUL I AM.
 HERE IS A TRULY KIND GUY—A STRONG AND PATERNAL FIGURE.
 ON THE WAY OVER, I HAD BEEN ON MY GUARD WHILE CROSSING NURISTAN,
 BECAUSE OF THE BAD RAP THE PEOPLE FROM BADAKHSHAN GIVE THE NURISTANI.
 AND HERE IT IS THAT IN NURISTAN I AM HOUSED,
 FED, PROTECTED, PUT BACK ON MY FEET.
 PRACTICALLY ADOPTED.
 TRUTH BE TOLD, THEY ARE PRETTY CRAFTY.
 WHAT I EAT DURING MY STAY IN BARG-E-MATAL IS NOTHING LIKE
 THE FOUL GRUB SERVED IN THEIR CHAYRANAS.
 I DEVELOPS A PASSION FOR THEIR RAVIOLI-LIKE THINGIES.



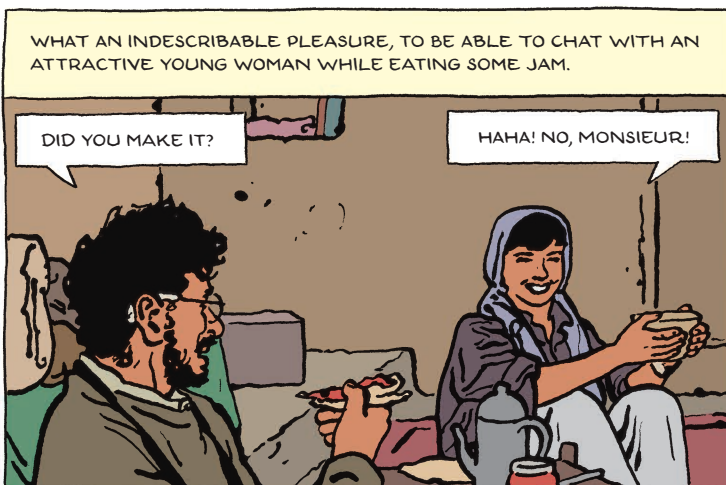
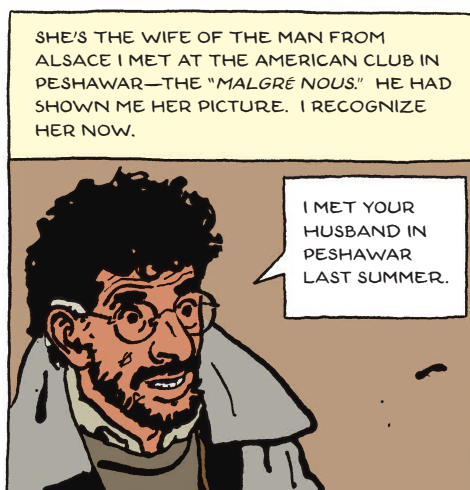
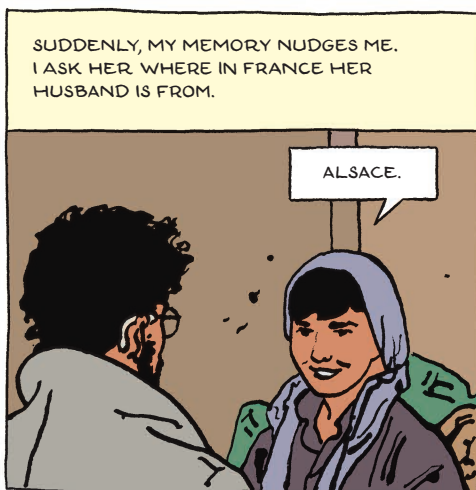
AIDER SHAH TELLS ME THAT
 A YOUNG AMERICAN WOMAN
 IS STAYING IN BARG-E-MATAL.
 A DOCTOR, IF I UNDERSTAND
 CORRECTLY. SHE KNOWS
 ABOUT ME. I CAN GO SEE
 HER, IN THAT HOUSE,
 OVER THERE.



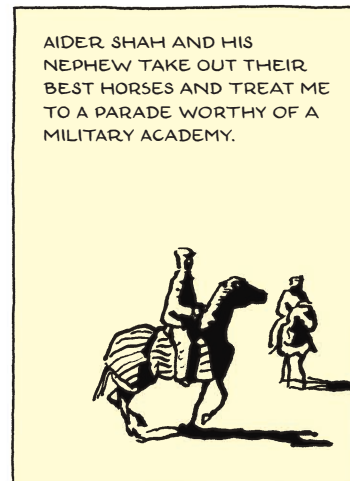
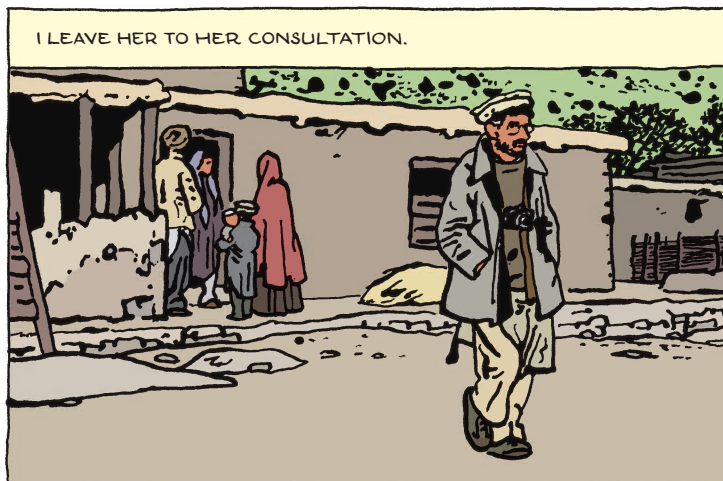
HELLO?

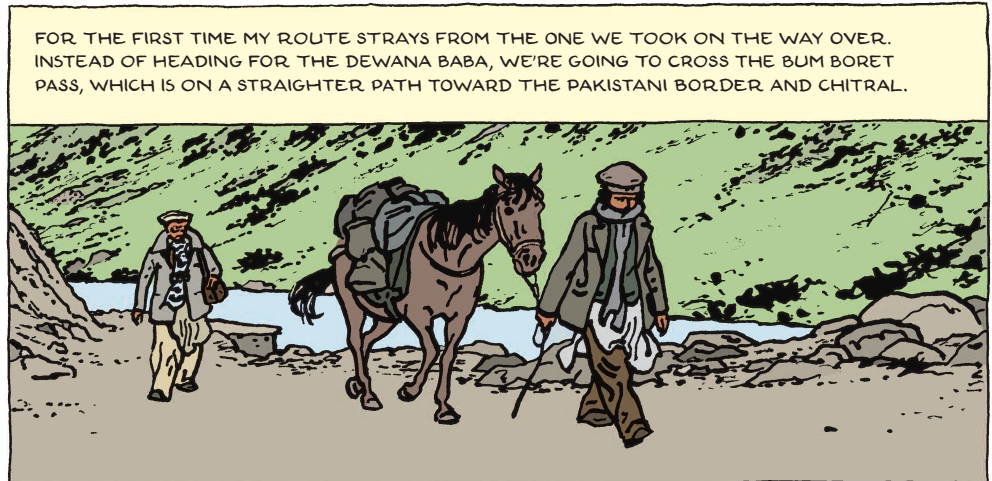
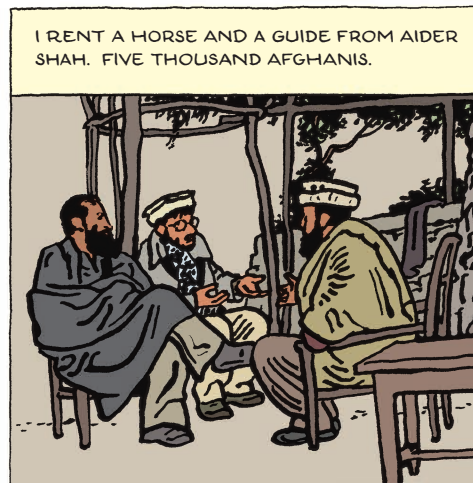
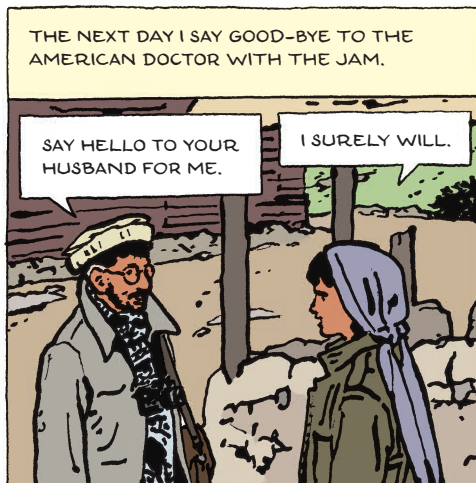
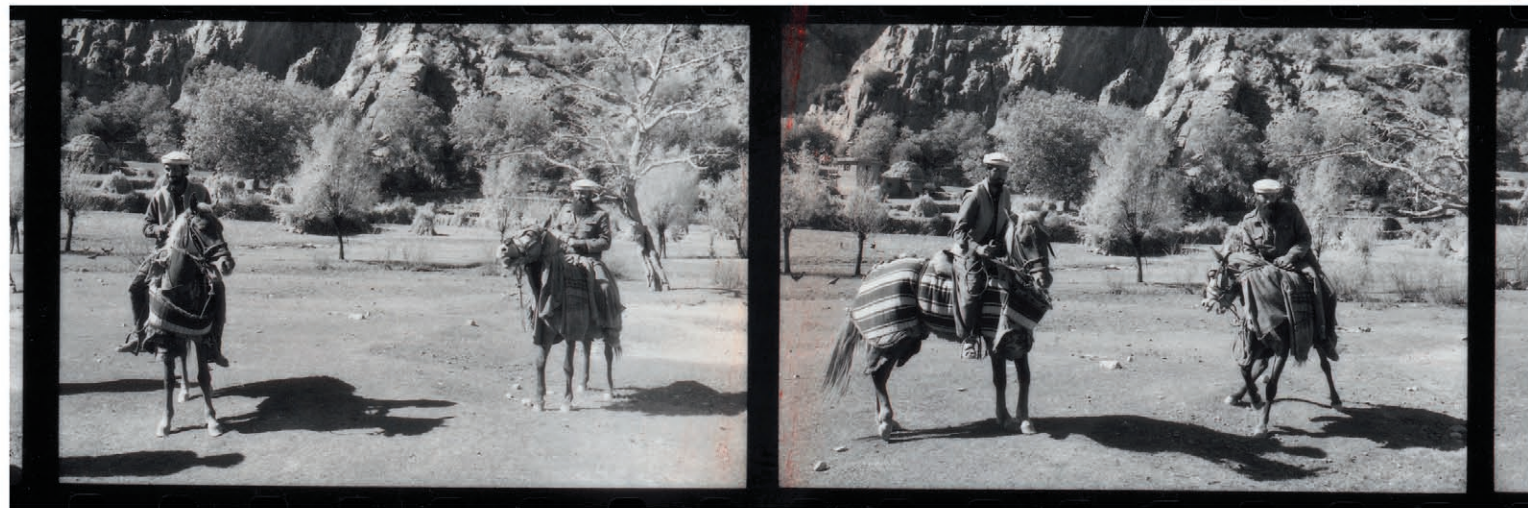


SHE'S MARRIED TO A FRENCH JOURNALIST, WHO IS COVERING A STORY IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY. THIS IS THEIR RENDEZVOUS POINT. SHE'S WAITING FOR HIM AND TREATING THE LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE MEANTIME. IN THE PAST, SHE WORKED FOR UNICEF.



WE DISCUSS HER HUSBAND'S INCREDIBLE LIFE—HIS WORK ON CHILD SOLDIERS, ECHOING HIS OWN ADOLESCENCE. SHE'S WORRIED ABOUT HIM, BECAUSE HE SHOULD ALREADY HAVE BEEN BACK SEVERAL DAYS AGO.





THE LAST PASS OF THE TRIP. I CAN'T BELIEVE MY LEGS. THEY'RE CLIMBING UP EFFORTLESSLY.



WE REACH A HUT WHERE WE SPEND THE NIGHT. A CARAVAN IS THERE, MADE UP OF BOTH MEN AND YOUNG BOYS.



THE NEXT MORNING, MY GUIDE AND I GO DOWN THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE PASS. WE PAUSE AT THE ENTRANCE TO A VALLEY.



IT'S THE KALASH VALLEY, ONE OF THE ENTRY POINTS INTO PAKISTAN. IF I WALK STRAIGHT IN THAT DIRECTION, I'LL REACH THE VILLAGE OF BUM BORET.



THERE'S A ROAD DOWN BELOW. ALL I'LL HAVE TO DO IS HITCH A RIDE TO CHITRAL.

MY GUIDE TAKES MY BAGS OFF THE HORSE AND I LOAD THEM UP. WE HUG AND GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS.



I LEAVE AFGHANISTAN AND ENTER PAKISTAN.



I'M CARRYING HEAVY BAGS, BUT I'M IN GOOD SHAPE. IN ANY CASE, THE ROAD ISN'T SUPPOSED BE TOO LONG.



I'VE READ SOME THINGS ABOUT THE KALASH PEOPLE. THEY'RE A VERY EXOTIC GROUP WITHIN PAKISTAN. THIS PLACE WAS A TOURIST DESTINATION BEFORE THE WAR. I READ THAT THERE WERE FLOWERS EVERYWHERE: IN THE VALLEY, ON WOMEN'S DRESSES, AT THE BALCONIES OF THE WOODEN HOUSES. A BIT LIKE BAVARIA.

THREE HOURS LATER, I COME INTO BUM BORET.



I FIND A KIND OF BACKPACKERS' LODGE. THE ONLY AVAILABLE ACCOMMODATION.

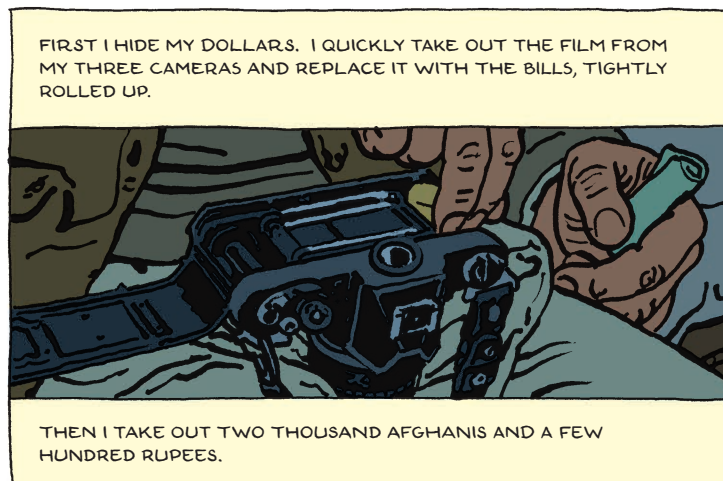
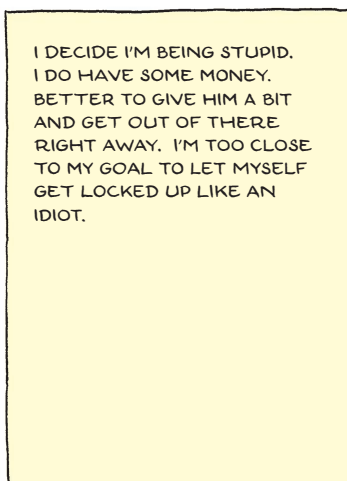


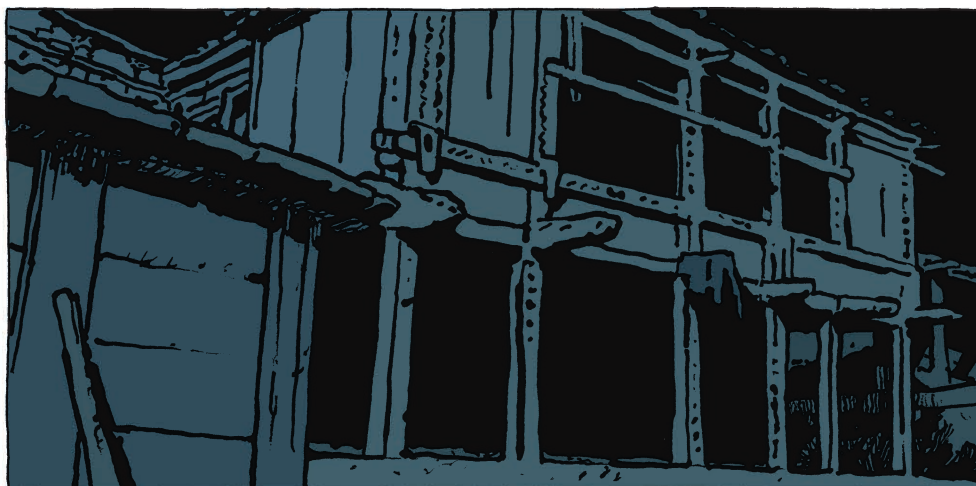
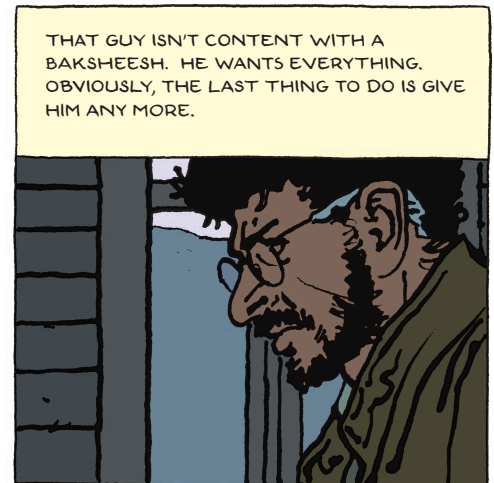
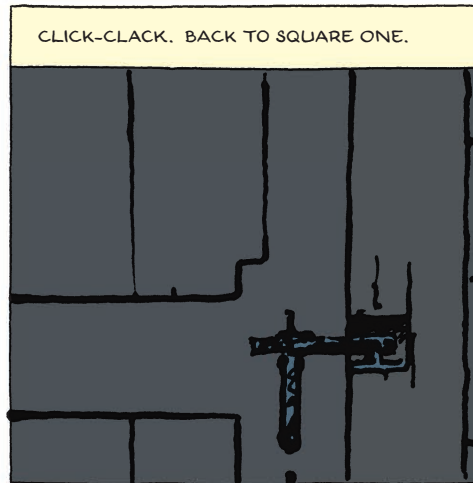
THE GUY RUNNING THE PLACE OFFERS ME A ROOM ON THE SECOND FLOOR, WITH A TABLE, A CHAIR, A BED. IT ISN'T EXACTLY LUXURIOUS, BUT AT LEAST IT'S FURNISHED.

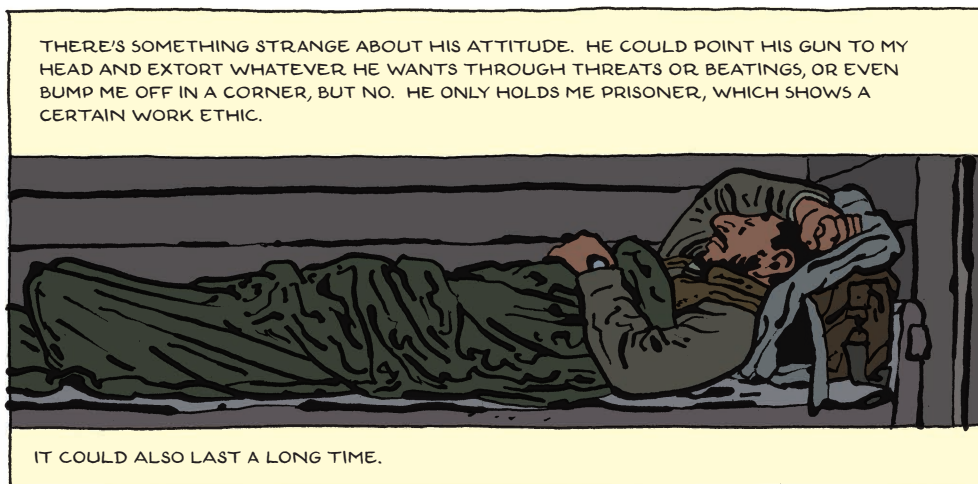
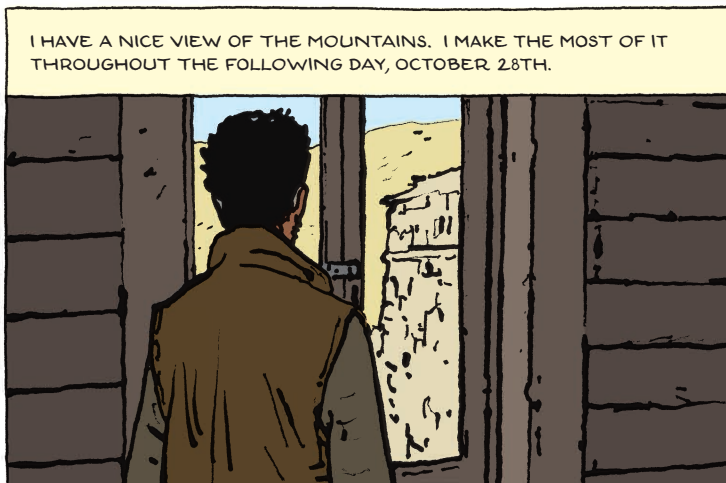
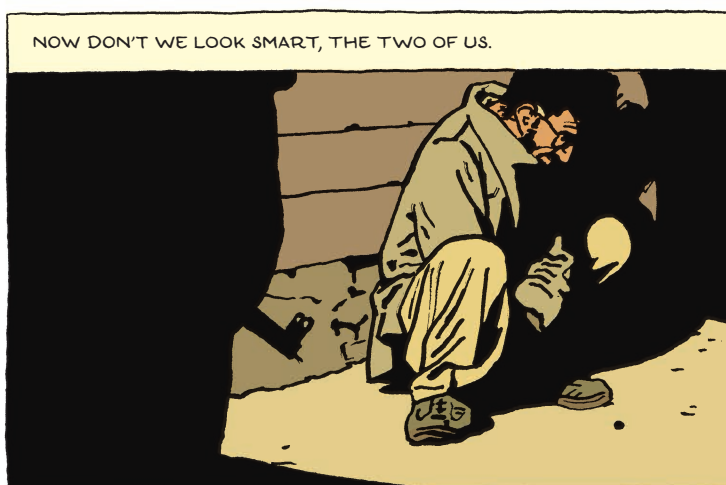


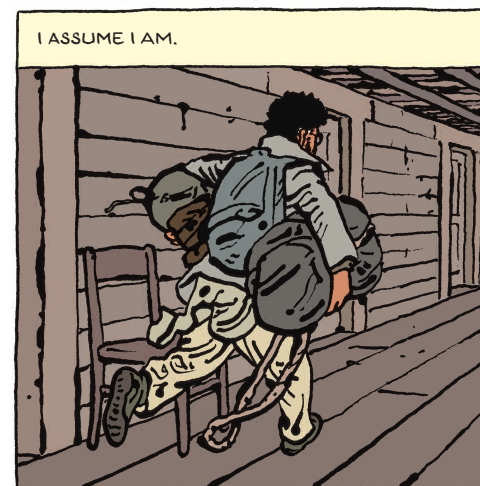
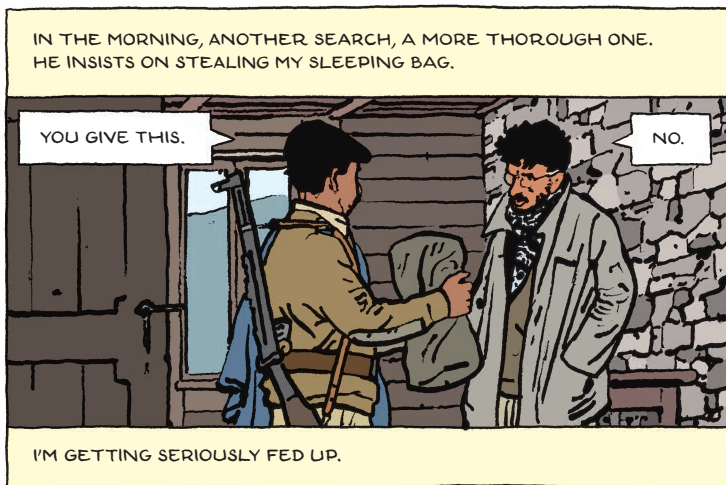
I EAT, DRINK, REST. AS NIGHT FALLS, THERE'S A KNOCK AT MY DOOR.

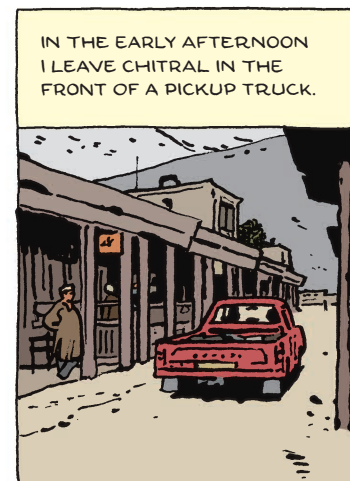
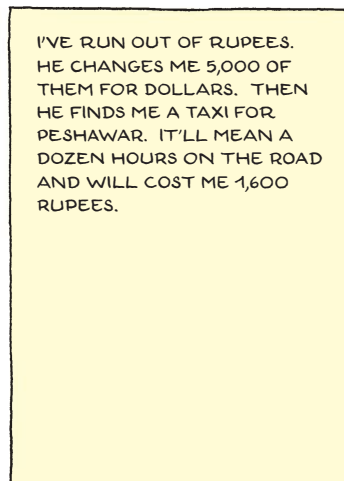
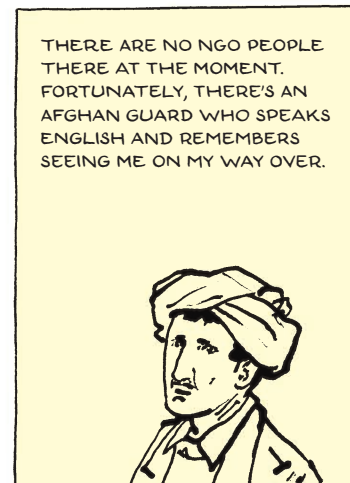
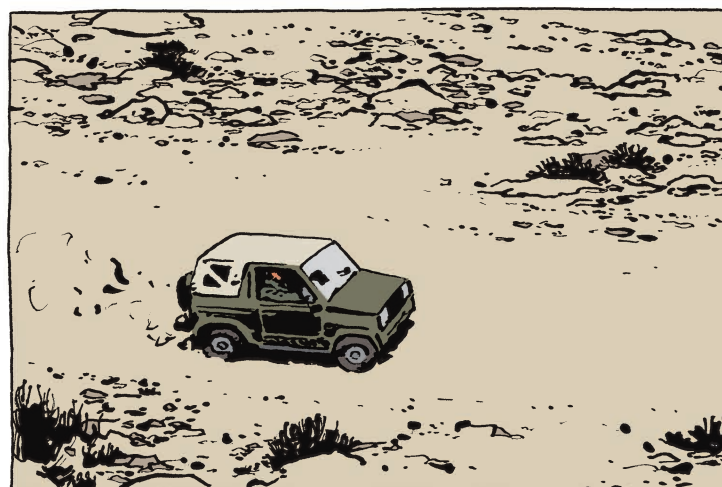
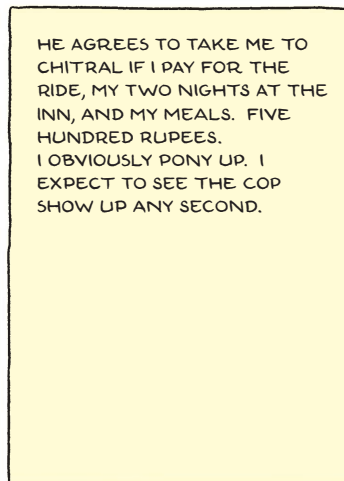
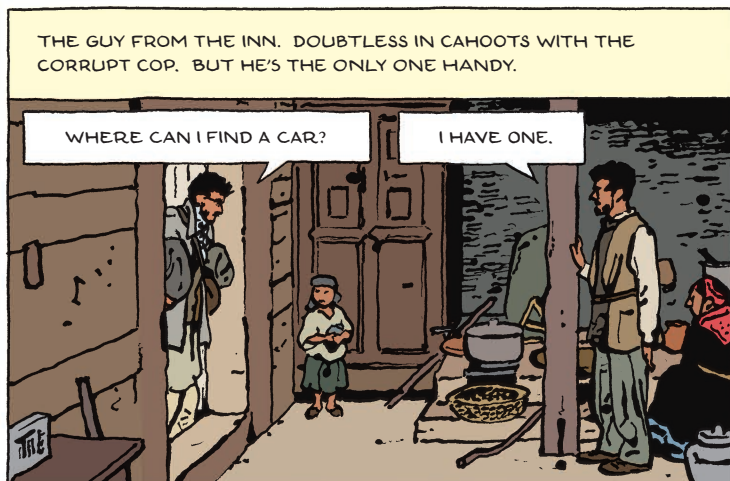




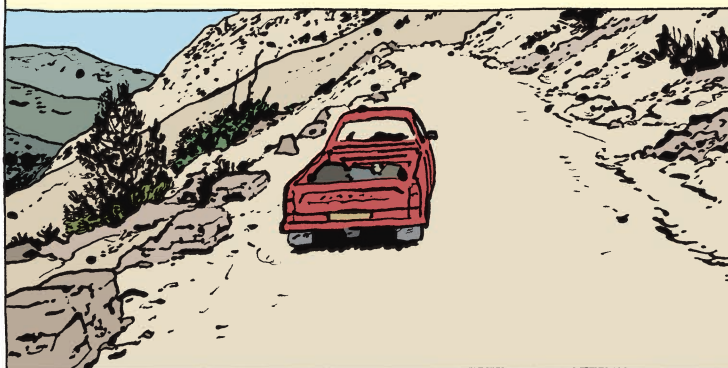








AS SOON AS WE LEAVE THE CITY WE HEAD UP A MOUNTAIN PASS. I SAVOR EVERY TURN OF THE WHEEL LEADING US TO THE TOP. IT'S GREAT BEING IN A CAR.



I SLEEP FOR THE REST OF THE TRIP. WE MAKE A FEW STOPS. EARLY THE NEXT MORNING WE GET TO PESHAWAR.



I'M BACK IN THE HEAT, THE BIG CITY, THE CROWDS, THE TRAFFIC. A WEIRD FEELING.



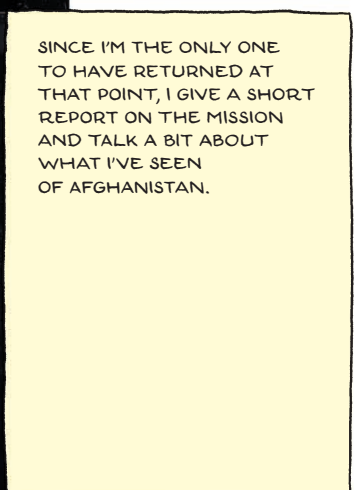
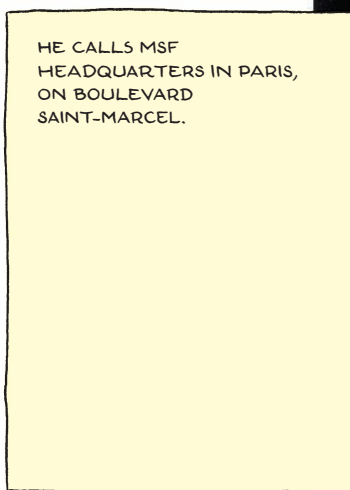
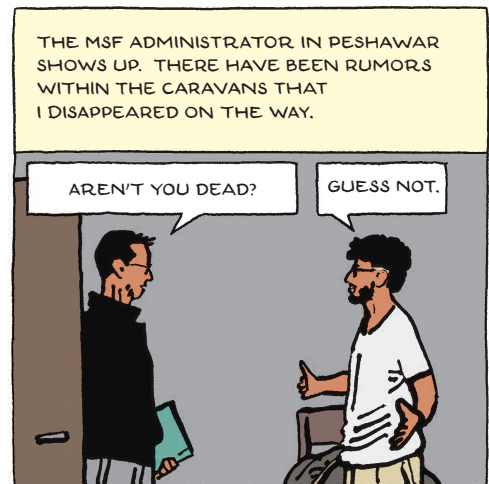
MSF HAS MOVED ITS DIGS FROM THE HOUSE I STAYED IN THAT SUMMER. THEY'RE NOW IN THE WHITE HOUSE, A LARGE COLONNADED MANSION IN A PARK, SHARED BY SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS. I HEAD THERE.



I'M GREETED BY A GUY FROM AFRANE, THE FRENCH-AFGHAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION, WHO SAYS STRAIGHT OUT:

MAN, YOU STINK OF HORSE. I CAN TELL THAT YOU JUST GOT BACK FROM AFGHANISTAN.





THERE. BEFORE GETTING MY PASSPORT BACK, I'M GETTING MY FACE BACK.



A BIT FARTHER, IN A KIND OF VARIETY STORE, I FIND THE AFTERSHAVE I USE IN FRANCE, "TABAC." I BUY A BOTTLE.

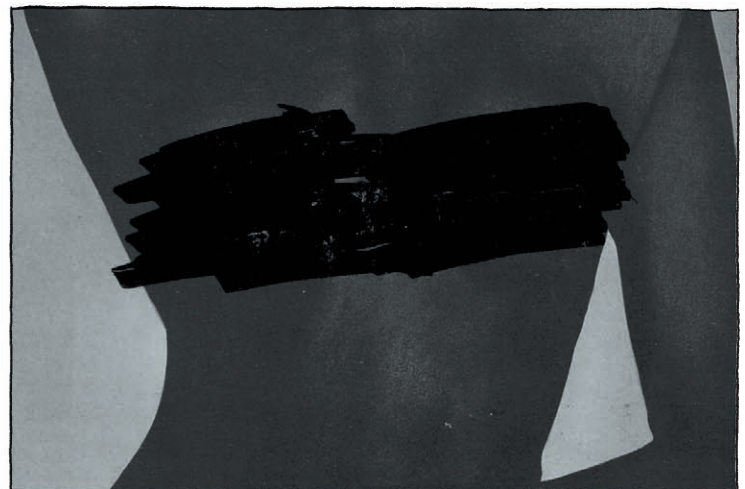


SIDE BY SIDE THERE ARE TWO INTERNATIONAL BOOKSHOPS, THE LONDON BOOK SHOP AND THE SAEED BOOK BANK. I HEAD IN.



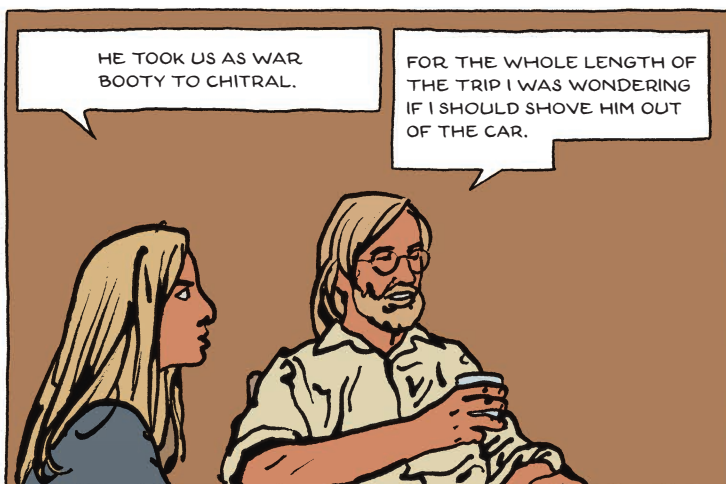
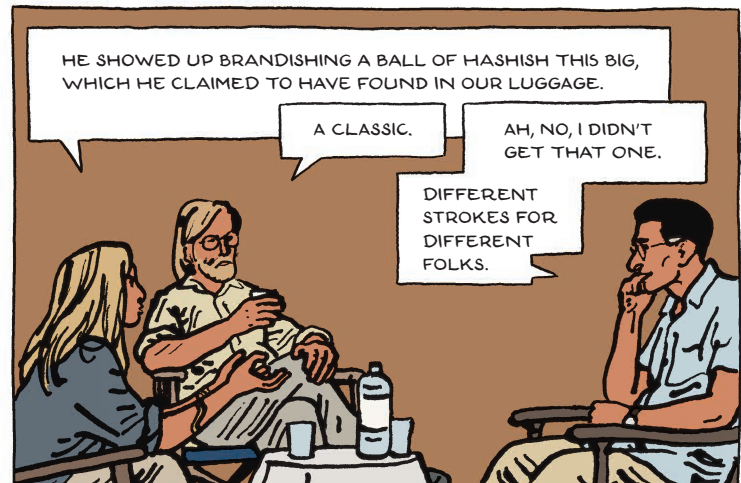
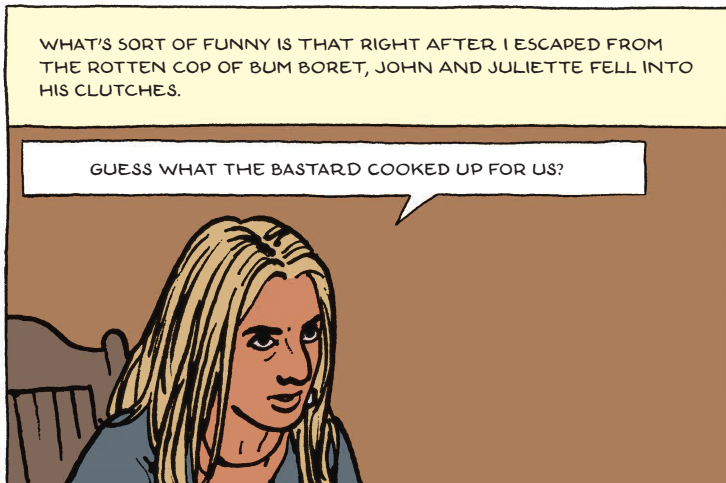
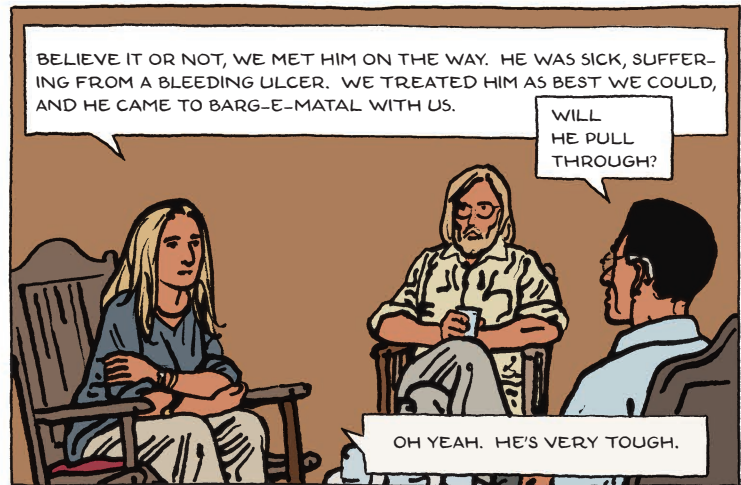
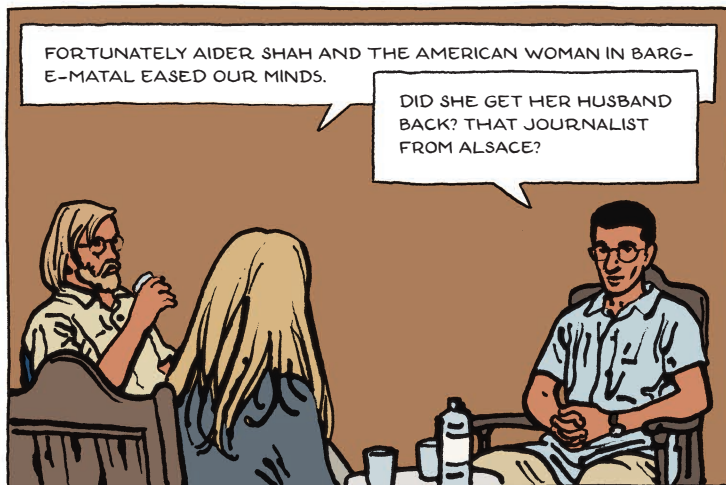
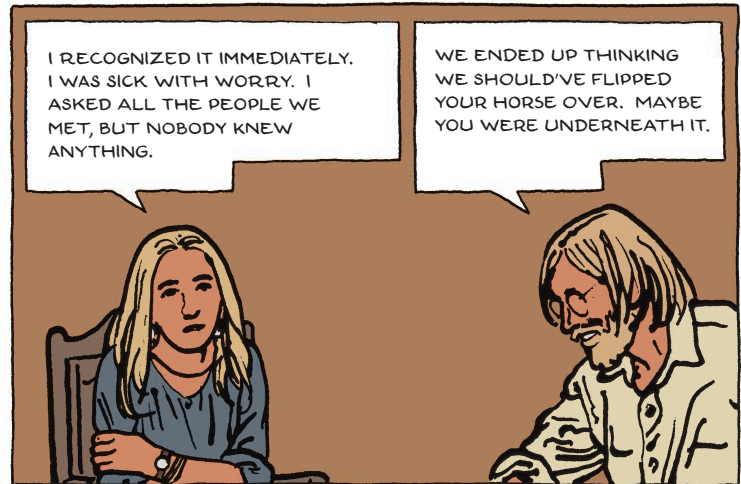
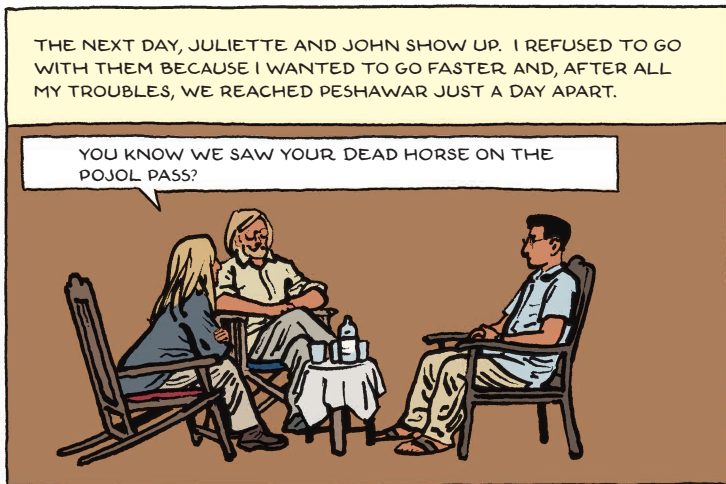
THEY HAVE PILES OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICS, AND SOME NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS MAGAZINES FROM FRANCE, BUT NOT RECENT ONES. THERE ARE ALSO SOME AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINES. SOME THINGS TO LEAF THROUGH.

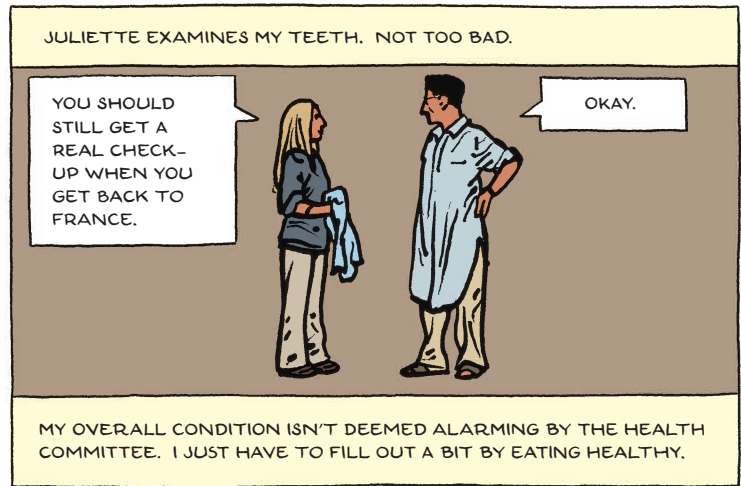
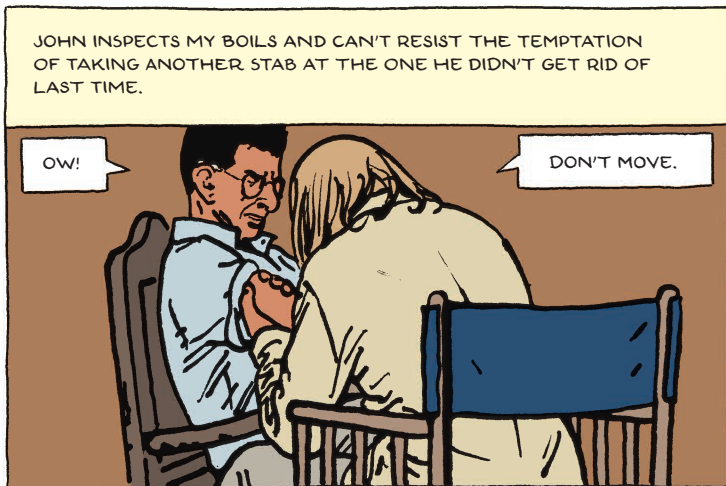
IN ALL THOSE PUBLICATIONS THERE ARE BIG BLACK MARKS MADE WITH A PERMANENT MARKER BY SOME CLERK FROM THE CENSORSHIP BUREAU, WHO WENT THROUGH EVERY PAGE OF EVERY ISSUE TO BLACK OUT REVEALING IMAGES OF WOMEN. A BIG JOB.



BACK AT THE WHITE HOUSE I EMPTY OUT MY BOTTLE OF "TABAC" IN THE SINK. I'VE BEEN GIVEN A COUNTERFEIT PRODUCT THAT STINKS OF GASOLINE.







THE MSF ADMINISTRATOR LIKES PHOTOGRAPHY. HE GOES INTO THE CITY WITH ME, WITH HIS CAMERA AROUND HIS NECK. HE TAKES MY PORTRAIT WITH ONE OF MINE, SO I'LL BE ON SOME OF MY FILM.



WE DISCOVER A SPECIAL PLACE: AN OVERGROWN BRITISH CEMETERY SURROUNDED BY MILITARY BARRACKS, ON THE WALLS OF WHICH NEAT ROWS OF SOCKS ARE HUNG OUT TO DRY. I FIND THAT CEMETERY VERY MOVING. I COME BACK IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS.

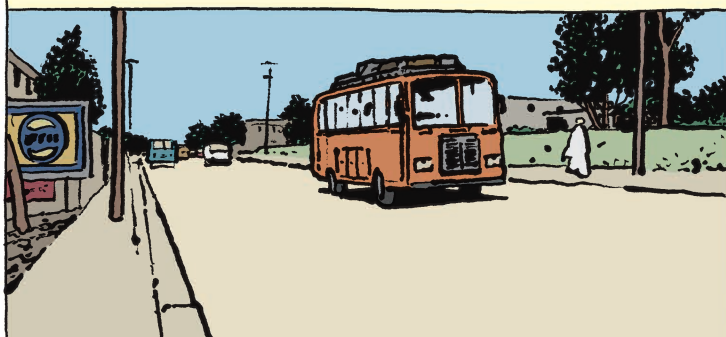




DAYDREAMING IN THAT PLACE, I THINK ABOUT THE BEST AND WORST OF WHAT I'VE JUST EXPERIENCED IN AFGHANISTAN. AND I REALIZE SOMETHING: I FEEL LIKE GOING BACK.



HERE I AM ON THE BUS FROM PESHAWAR TO ISLAMABAD, ON MY WAY TO PICKING UP MY PASSPORT. I HAVE MY HEADPHONES ON, LISTENING TO A WALKMAN THAT I LUGGED AROUND EVERYWHERE IN AFGHANISTAN AND NEVER USED. I'M LISTENING TO THE FRENCH JAZZ SINGER MICHEL JONASZ.



C'ÉTAIT LES VACANCES AU BORD DE LA MER AVEC MON PÈRE, MA SOEUR, MA MÈRE...



IT'S FRIDAY. THE FRENCH EMBASSY IS CLOSED. I HAVE TO GO TO THE HOME OF AN EMPLOYEE OF THE PAKISTANI INTERIOR MINISTRY, WHO WILL GIVE ME THE DOCUMENT INFORMALLY.



IT'S A SMALL HOUSE IN A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD. HIS YOUNG SON OPENS THE DOOR.



DAD'S UPSTAIRS, IN HIS BEDROOM. HE LEADS ME UP.



THE GUY IS ACTUALLY IN BED. MY PASSPORT IS THERE, ON THE NIGHTSTAND.



WEIRD.

THANK YOU.



BUT WHAT MATTERS IS THAT EVERYTHING IS DULY STAMPED.

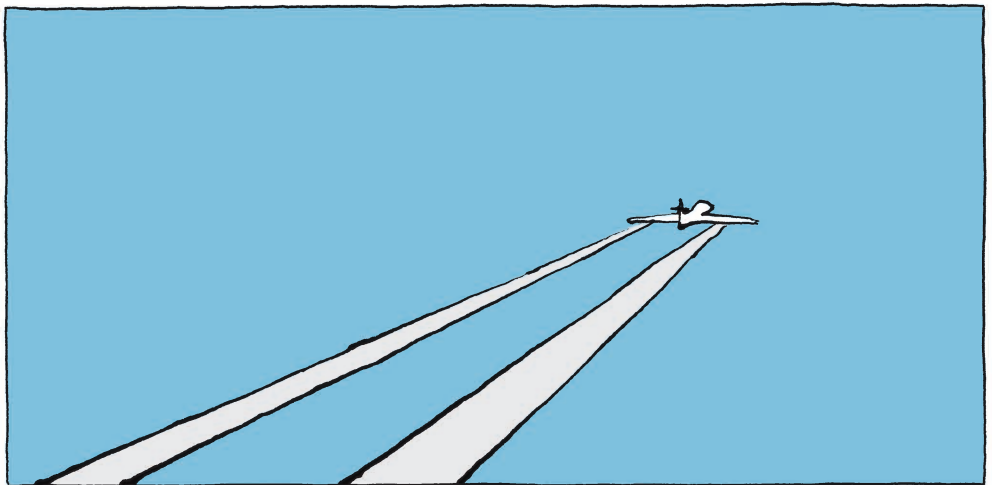
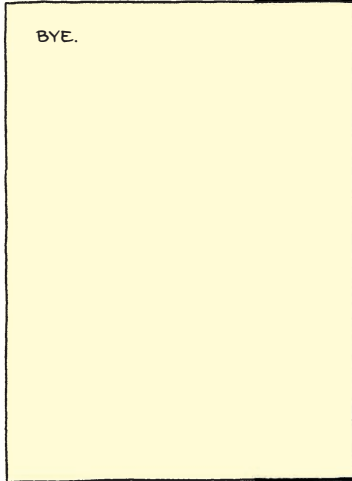


JOUEURS DE BLUES... ON EST LES JOUEURS DE BLUES...



I HAVE MY TWO PLANE TICKETS, PESHAWAR-KARACHI AND KARACHI-PARIS. I'M LEAVING THE NEXT DAY.





MY RETURN TRIP IS MADE FEVERISH BY A HUGE BOIL THROBBING ON MY NECK.



I'M GLAD TO GO HOME. OBSESSED BY THE THOUGHT OF GETTING MY FILM DEVELOPED. AND TO SEE THE RESULT, AT LONG LAST. ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY ROLLS OF FILM. A BUNCH OF MONEY. BUT I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE GREEN LIGHT FROM MSF BEFORE STARTING.



I GET TO PARIS ON THE EVE OF A WEEKEND. DOMINIQUE GETS MY TRAVEL DIARY. I PASS THROUGH MEAUX, VISITING SOME FRIENDS. THERE, I LINE UP MY ROLLS OF FILM LIKE HUNTING TROPHIES.



I HEAD FOR BLONVILLE, NORMANDY. I MEET UP WITH MY GRANDMA.



SEE BIENCHEN THE DOG.



AND MY MOM. SHE'S BEEN WORRIED.

COME WITH ME, IT'S TIME FOR HER WALK. AND YOU'LL TELL ME A BIT.

YES.



PLANCHE N° RÉF. AF 86. 129
 SUJET Mamah à Bonville. Retour d'Afghanistan.
 DATE nov 86. BOITIER leica.



Jidier J. Lefure Emmanuel Chibert Frédéric Lemerrier



Portraits



Mrs. Lefèvre had to wait twenty years to find out, in this book, the details of Didier's trip. That day, on the beach of Blonville, as they walked Bienchen the dog, he served her the usual bromides that sons give their mothers: "It was great, Mom, and nothing bad happened to me." With the passing of time, even that bald-faced lie came to be mostly true.

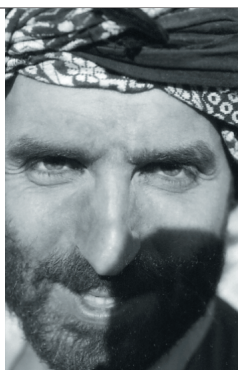


In the year that followed the mission, Didier suffered from chronic furunculosis and lost fourteen teeth. These were direct consequences of his dreadful return, with its attendant exhaustion, lack of hygiene, malnutrition, and stress. On December 27, 1986, the French newspaper Libération published six of his photographs in a two-page spread. Of the four thousand photos he brought back, getting six published seems like a dizzyingly small fraction. But it was a privilege: many of his subsequent remarkable photo stories were never published. And the tale of his experience of the mission was reserved for close friends who wanted to hear it. His buddy Emmanuel Guibert was one of them, and thirteen years later he suggested to Didier that they make a book of it together.

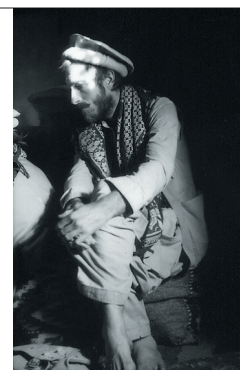
Didier dug out the contact sheets from the boxes where they'd been sleeping, and his memory, spurred by the pictures, threaded back together the story you have just read. In all, Didier made eight trips to Afghanistan between 1986 and 2006—all of them interesting, none of them easy. A beautiful book of his pictures, Voyages en Afghanistan, was published by Ouest-France in 2002. He collaborated with newspapers and magazines, either on his own or through agencies, at different times. He enjoyed returning to the same places periodically, seeing how things changed, meeting up with people again.

He produced remarkable photographic documentaries on the postwar situation in Kosovo, the AIDS epidemic in Malawi and Cambodia, farming in the countries of the

former Eastern bloc joining the European Union, and also the epic Paris-Roubaix cycling race, which he enjoyed covering each year in April. The success of The Photographer in the French-speaking world (about 250,000 copies have been sold to date), and a dawning international recognition thanks to several foreign translations, surprised and delighted Didier, as well as the other partners in this adventure. It provided an opportunity to gather together a good part of the team from 1986 and to share intense moments of friendship. In January 2007, Didier died of heart failure at home, at the age of 49, leaving behind his wife and two young children. His work and character, both of which were outstanding, remain mostly to be discovered.



Régis returned from this mission with Amrullah, the young mujahed who had been badly wounded in the face (see the entry about him below). In 1987, MSF sent him to Sri Lanka, where he met Constance, his future wife, an anesthesiologist. Later, in Herat, northern Afghanistan, they carried out “the most difficult and most beautiful mission in all of MSF’s work in the country” (as Juliette described it). Back in France, he was invited by Professor Philippe Dabadie to teach classes on “Medicine in a Sanitary Wasteland” at the University of Bordeaux II, as part of the program in Disaster Relief Medicine. In 1991, Régis worked in MSF’s Human Resources department in Paris and moved toward fulfilling his dream of following in his father’s footsteps by becoming a wine producer. In September 1991 he began to study oenology. A dilemma arose in 1992: he was offered a new Afghan mission when MSF began to return to the country, which was caught in the turmoil that followed the fall of the communist government, marked by rivalries among the mujahideen. His indecision did not last long, and Régis returned immediately to Afghanistan. He finally earned his oenology degree in 1994. In 2000, he bought a vineyard near Bergerac, which he looks after with the care that he used to lavish on his patients. To thank him, each year that vineyard gives him delicious Pécharmant wine. Régis had been a Gascon of Badakshan, and he is also an Afghan of the Périgord, who still chews naswar chewing tobacco and plays rugby with as much gusto as others do buzkashi. Whenever he and Didier used to meet, they would invariably exchange some Rocher Suchard chocolates, remembering a moment which may have struck readers too.



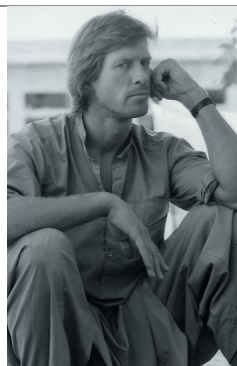
Robert’s mission lasted another year. He and Evelyne stayed at the Palandara hospital and weathered a particularly trying winter, during which he came down with dengue fever. Dengue is a viral infection that causes high fever, liver and kidney malfunction, and bouts of coma. Thanks to his strong constitution, to Evelyne’s daily care, and to a good dose of sheer luck, he pulled through and went back to work. His feet froze on the return journey. He lost all his toenails, but fortunately none of his toes. Robert took over from Juliette as manager of Afghan missions and remained in Afghanistan or Pakistan until the end of 1989. Back in France, he worked at the hospital of Chalon-sur-Saône. During the night of April 27 to 28, 1990, Frédéric Galland, an MSF logistician, was murdered in Palandara. It was a political crime, carried out by masked men. As a result, all MSF teams left Afghanistan for two years. Since that time, the Palandara hospital, which this book shows being built, has been abandoned. Robert himself went to retrieve the body of Frédéric Galland and brought him back to France. Ten years later, Robert closed down his private doctor’s practice in the city of Le Cheylard, near Lyon, and earned a baccalaureate degree in oenology in 2000. In 2004, he bought a vineyard next to the one owned by Régis, and the two friends teamed up to make wine. “It’s hard to describe all that the Afghans gave us,” Robert observed. “I reckon that thanks to them we’re just a bit less dumb than we would’ve been.”



At the end of 1988, **Juliette** left Afghanistan and Peshawar for the US. She joined John in Minneapolis, where they started a family and Juliette took a Master's degree in Public Health and Ethnomedicine. In 1989 she and Francis Charhon had the idea of starting a US arm of MSF. There were two births in 1991: Alexandra, the daughter of Juliette and John, and MSF-USA, of which Juliette was one of the four key players. MSF-USA recruits volunteers, educates the public as well as political and humanitarian leaders, collects private funding to preserve the organization's financial independence, and manages missions.

Juliette also became an associate professor of dental surgery at the University of Minnesota Hospital. In her spare time, she joined a team of animal biology researchers who tracked, on snowshoes, the hibernation patterns of polar bears in the forests of the far North. She left MSF-USA in 2002 and returned to France in 2003 to support her father during his illness and up to his death. Today, she has moved away from MSF, after having spent twenty-three years championing its cause. She is "her daughter's mother and her mother's daughter" and looks after both of them as she waits to see what new course suggests itself.

But whatever happens, each year in September she helps her buddies Robert and Régis harvest the grapes from their vineyards.



For a year in Peshawar, **John** helped draft a training manual for Afghan medical personnel with the five NGOs active on the ground at the time. At the end of 1988, he returned to the US and took up ER work again at a prestigious university hospital in Minneapolis, where was an assistant professor. He was also active within MSF-USA.

He no longer does much fishing, but he has become a keen rollerblader and he introduced his daughter Alexandra to the sport. Didier always told everyone around him that he wouldn't have hesitated one second before putting his life in John's hands.



Sylvie stayed in Afghanistan until September 1989, when she left to do a two and a half year mission in Zambia. She then ran a day-care centre in Lyon and was active with MSF's regional headquarters. She recently returned to fieldwork. She says she enjoyed rediscovering those familiar motions.



After her missions with MSF, **Evelyne** took a degree in pediatric nursing. She now works in Fontainebleau, near Paris, in a Maternal and Child Welfare center.



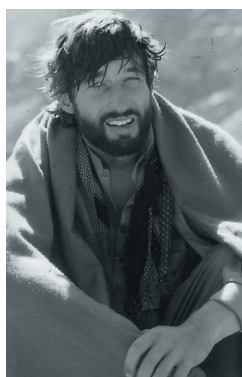
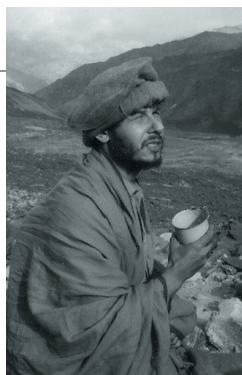
Odile took a seventeen-year break from her work as a nurse to raise her three children. She recently returned to work in a physical rehabilitation clinic near Aix-en-Provence.



Mahmad did not wish to have anything said about him. We'll just send a friendly thought his way and say he is fine.



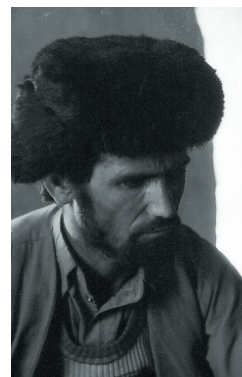
The **journalist from Alsace**, now in his early eighties, has continued on his unique path. As but one example, he covered the Taliban's retreat to southern Afghanistan under pressure from the advancing US forces in October 2001, living among them.



We hadn't been able to gather any news of **Michel** and **Ronald** by the time of publication. If they read this book, in English, French, or Dutch, they should know that the whole team is expecting to have them over for a feast of palao and chorchoy.



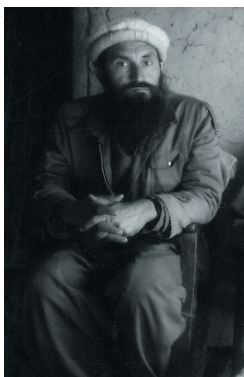
After the Red Army's withdrawal in 1989, **Palawan Iklil** made use of the experience he had gained with MSF. He borrowed some money to buy a few trucks and set up a transport and logistics network between Chitral and Badakhshan.



Najmudin often came to visit Robert and Evelyne during their stay in Palandara in the winter of 86-87. Later, when Robert was stationed in Peshawar, he saw Najmudin a few more times, finding him "always friendly, always glad to meet up again," but more aloof, less comfortable in the big city than in his home village. There hasn't been any news of him since the end of the 1980s.



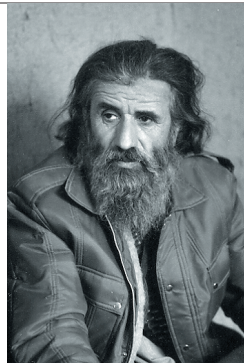
Robert also occasionally saw **Abdul Jabar** in Peshawar. The MSF staff's ties with him weren't as close as with Najmudin. We don't know what became of him.



Didier later met up again with **Aider Shah** in Barg-e-Matal, during a mission in October 1988. He showed the same fatherly hospitality. He hasn't been seen since that time.



Bassir Khan, a former schoolteacher, ruled the whole valley of Yaftal throughout the war against the Soviet Union and beyond, until the takeover by the Taliban. He was an ally of Ahmad Shah Massoud within the Jamiat-e-Islami party, but not without rivalry. He retired at the time of the establishment of the Northern Alliance and returned to Feyzabad, where he is believed to remain until now. He promoted the presence of the MSF teams and supported their work. That earned him the team's gratitude and even fondness. Régis describes him as a bon vivant. Didier had a harsher take on him. He remained angry with Bassir for having dumped an escort on him whose desertion nearly cost him his life. Apparently, Bassir had the four men of the escort punished with a severe beating upon their return to Yaftal.



The **Wakil**, or representative, of Teshkan, was described by several members of the team as a shrewd man, with whom you had to know precisely what you wanted and stick firmly to your positions. He ruled with a strong hand one of the poorest valleys in the area. He was also a hard-boiled fighter who, despite a withered arm that was horribly painful in the wintertime, didn't shy away from rough games of buzkashi. He was murdered in 1989, shot in the back by Afghan rivals as he prayed, at Massoud's headquarters in Takhar province.



Upon his father's death, **the Wakil's son** took over interim command of the valley for a brief period, but he didn't have the stature to handle such responsibility. Power passed to another commander during an administrative reorganization of valleys.



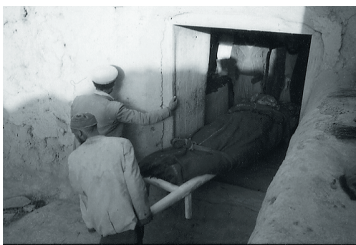
The story of **Amrullah** is truly extraordinary. After having suffered an awful face wound and undergone an operation in Zaragandara, led by John, Robert and Régis, he was sent to France through the efforts of an association started by an anesthesiologist and a surgeon in Alès, in southern France. Régis brought him to France and took him to Alès, where he was warmly welcomed and underwent several more operations on his jaw. Thanks to the remarkable work already done in Zaragandara, in the minimal conditions that we saw, no bone grafts were needed. After a few months, Amrullah, who had been adopted by the people of Alès as one of them, returned to Badakhshan and was welcomed back there by Robert. He brought with him some money that had been collected by the association to fund several schools. Robert recalls that Amrullah did not tell the people of his village about what his stay in France was like. He preferred not to say anything.



The little boy who was wounded during the bombing of Püstuk and died a few hours later was not called Ahmad Jan, as Didier thought he heard. His name was **Nazim Jan**. He was three years old.



Didier's relationship with Dominique did not withstand the test of time. Nor did Didier's **notebook**, his diary of his return from Afghanistan. It disappeared during a move. This graphic novel would have been different if the authors had been able to draw on that document. Too bad, or so much the better. Still, if a reader finds it in some corner of France, Emmanuel would be grateful to hear about it. One thing that did survive is a small red spiral-bound notebook in which Didier kept track of the monies spent over the course of the return, especially the amounts extorted by the "wolf" and his men. The English-Dari dictionary also made it, which isn't bad, considering all it went through.



Kandinissa, the girl who was wounded in the same bombing by shrapnel fragments that cut her spine, died six months later of septic shock. Living conditions in her village did not allow for the constant care that she needed. She was about ten years old.

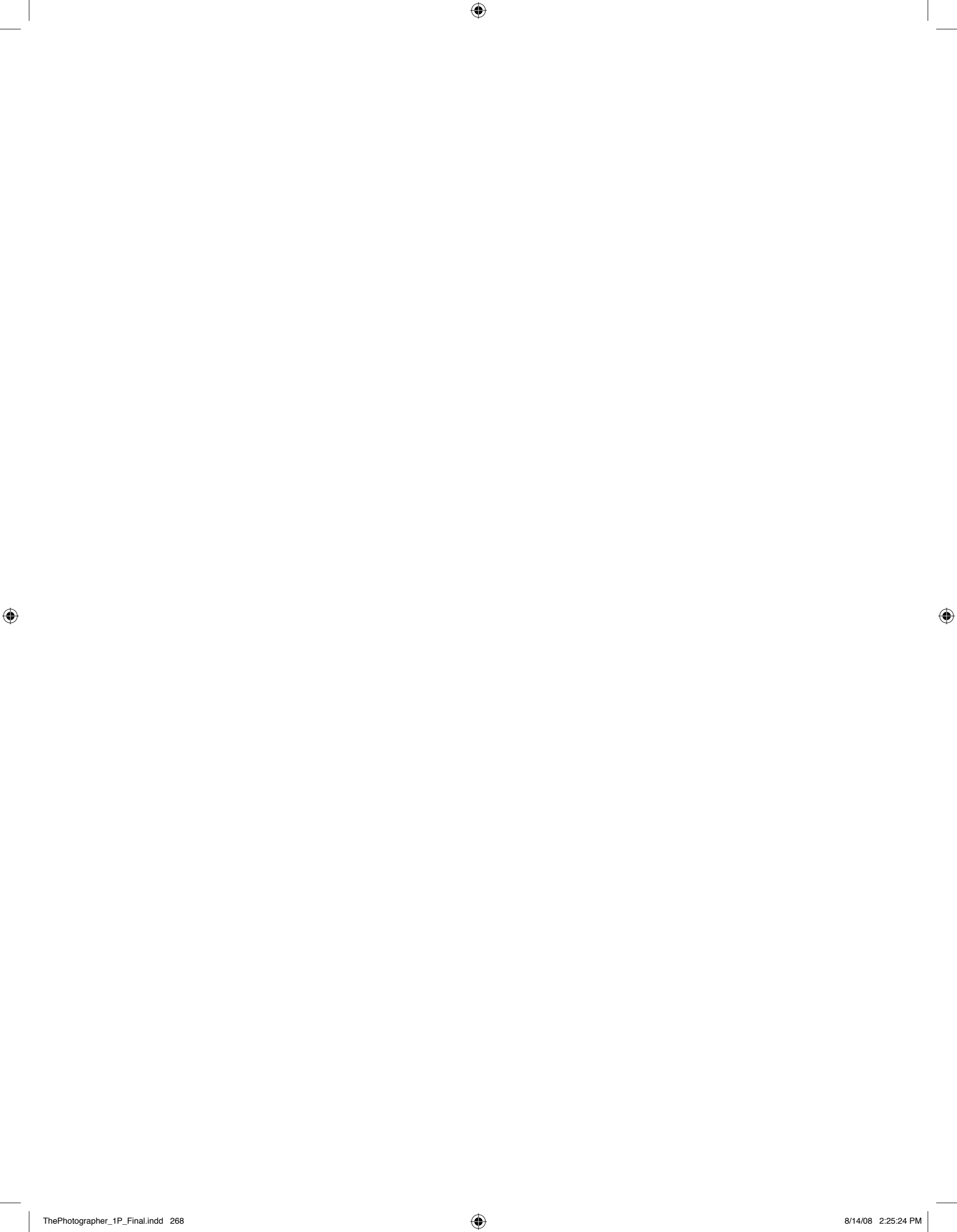


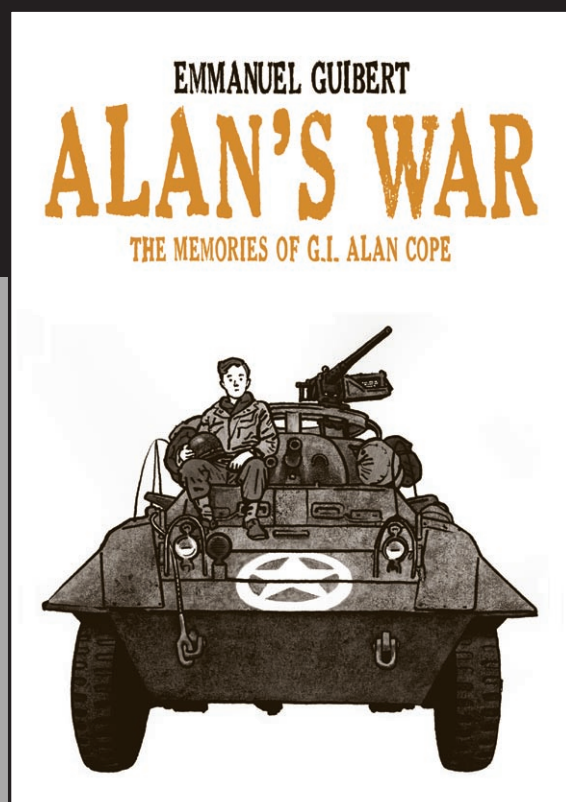
Despite the dressing-down he got from Juliette and his chiefs, the **corrupt cop** of Bum Boret continued to ply his little racketeering trade. Régis also fell into his clutches and Robert avoided him only narrowly a year later. So be warned.



Even though **Madeleine and Jacques Fournot** do not appear in this story, we could not conclude it without saluting them. It was thanks to them that their daughter Juliette came to know Afghanistan so deeply. The family settled there in the 1960s, a time of peace. Jacques, an engineer, worked on developing some of the rural regions of the country. His passionate interest in Afghanistan's arts and crafts, traditional industry, ways of life, and spirituality, in addition to his deep knowledge and fairness, won him the respect of many Afghans. Fifteen years later, in the midst of a war, just mentioning his name brought Juliette some crucial protections.

Most of the members of the MSF missions to Afghanistan met the Fournots either before leaving or upon their return, receiving wise advice, comforting talk, or a listening ear. "They gave us the keys to Afghanistan," explains Robert. All those who met this couple, and saw how they lived with their door and their hearts open to the world, felt that their lives were hugely enriched as a result. Our fond thoughts go to Jacques, who passed away in 2004, and we send our warm greetings to Madeleine.





Alan's War

by Emmanuel Guibert

★ **“This is one man’s war memories**, filled not with tales of larger-than-life heroism but with the chance encounters, tragic absurdities and small kindnesses experienced by a sheltered young soldier of uncommon intelligence, as recollected by an older man who has come to take stock of his life and reconsider the values by which he has lived it. He comes to question himself, his country and humanity in general, while retaining a humanitarian warmth and a deep appreciation for the arts. . . . This epic graphic memoir spans oceans and generations, with a narrative as engrossing as the artistry that illustrates it. . . . a volume that underscores the resonance and legacy of war.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ “Guibert writes and draws for American G.I. Alan Cope **in this poignant and frank graphic memoir of a young soldier** who was told to serve his country in WWII and how it changed him forever. . . . Together, Cope and Guibert forge a story that resonates with humanity. Guibert’s illustrations capture the time period vividly. While the subject matter is familiar from many wartime memoirs, Guibert’s fluid, simple but assured line-work captures the personalities of Cope and his friends, elevating the material to a far more affecting level.”

— *Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review



Notes for a War Story

by Gipi

“An inevitable story about a boy becoming a man under the most extreme conditions. Once [people] see themselves in Giuliano, they won’t likely forget his memories.”

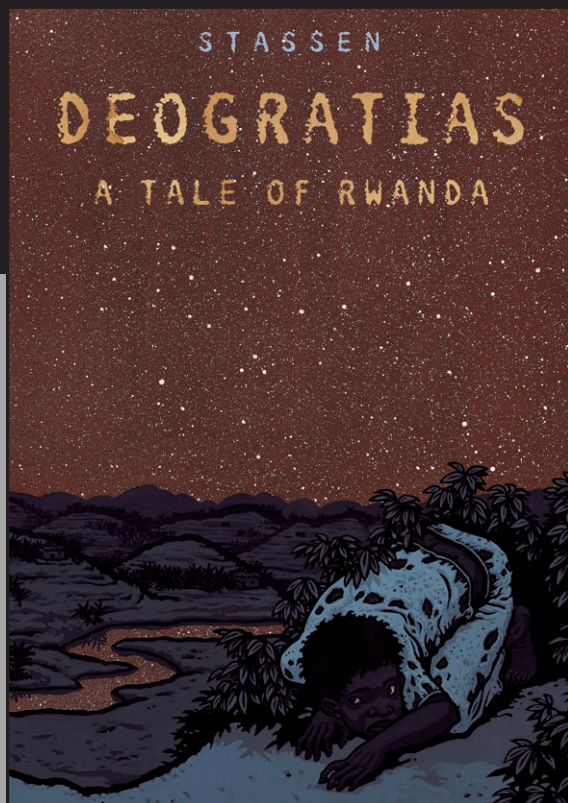
— *School Library Journal*

“Challenging and provocative.”

— *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

“In this powerful graphic novel. . . Gipi uses deceptively crude black-and-white panels to portray a world sliding into chaos. Young men are left adrift as society unravels.”

— VOYA



Deogratias

by J.P. Stassen

★ **“The heartbreaking power** of Deogratias is how it keeps the reader distant from the atrocities by showing the trivial cruelties of everyday life before and after the genocide. . . . There is no catharsis, only the realization that even justice turns its champion into a monster.”

— *Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

“The tragedy and international shame of the Rwandan genocide that took place in the 1990's is realized in this fictional and symbolism-studded parable.”

— *Booklist*

“One of the most intense, gripping graphic novels to date. . . a masterful work with vibrant, confident art, this book will stay with and haunt its readers.”

— *School Library Journal*

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Published by First Second

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a division of Holtzbrinck Publishing Holdings Limited Partnership
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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Distributed in Canada by H. B. Fenn and Company Ltd.

Distributed in the United Kingdom by Macmillan Children's Books, a division of Pan Macmillan.

Originally published in France under the titles *Le Phphotographe, tome 1* (2003),

Le Photographe, tome 2 (2004), and *Le Photographe, tome 3* (2006) by Dupuis.

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Colorist: Lemercier

Design of American Edition: Danica Novgorodoff

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59643-375-5

ISBN-10: 1-59643-375-2

First Second books are available for special promotions and premiums.
For details, contact: Director of Special Markets, Holtzbrinck Publishers.



First American Edition April 2009

Printed in China

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



