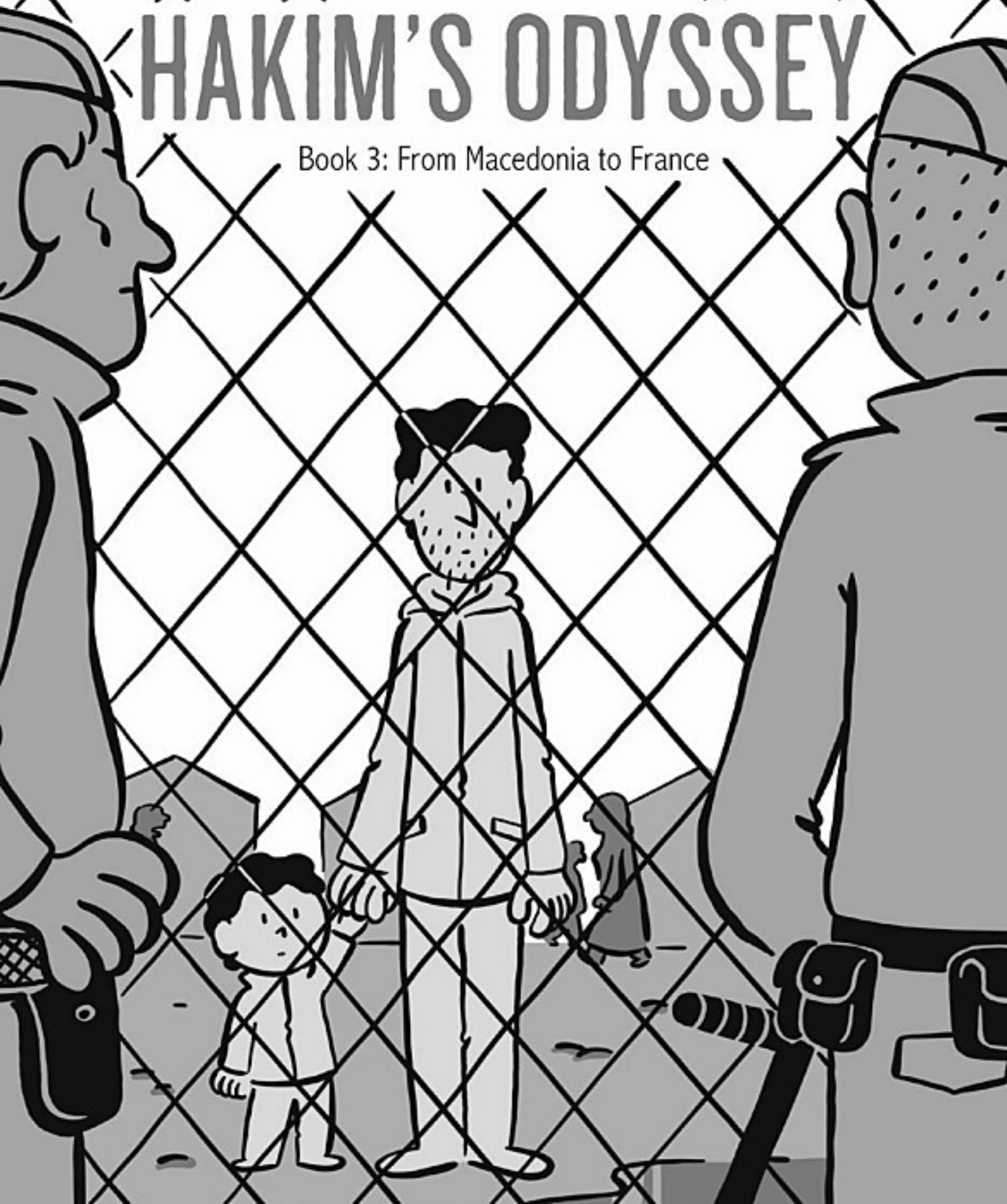
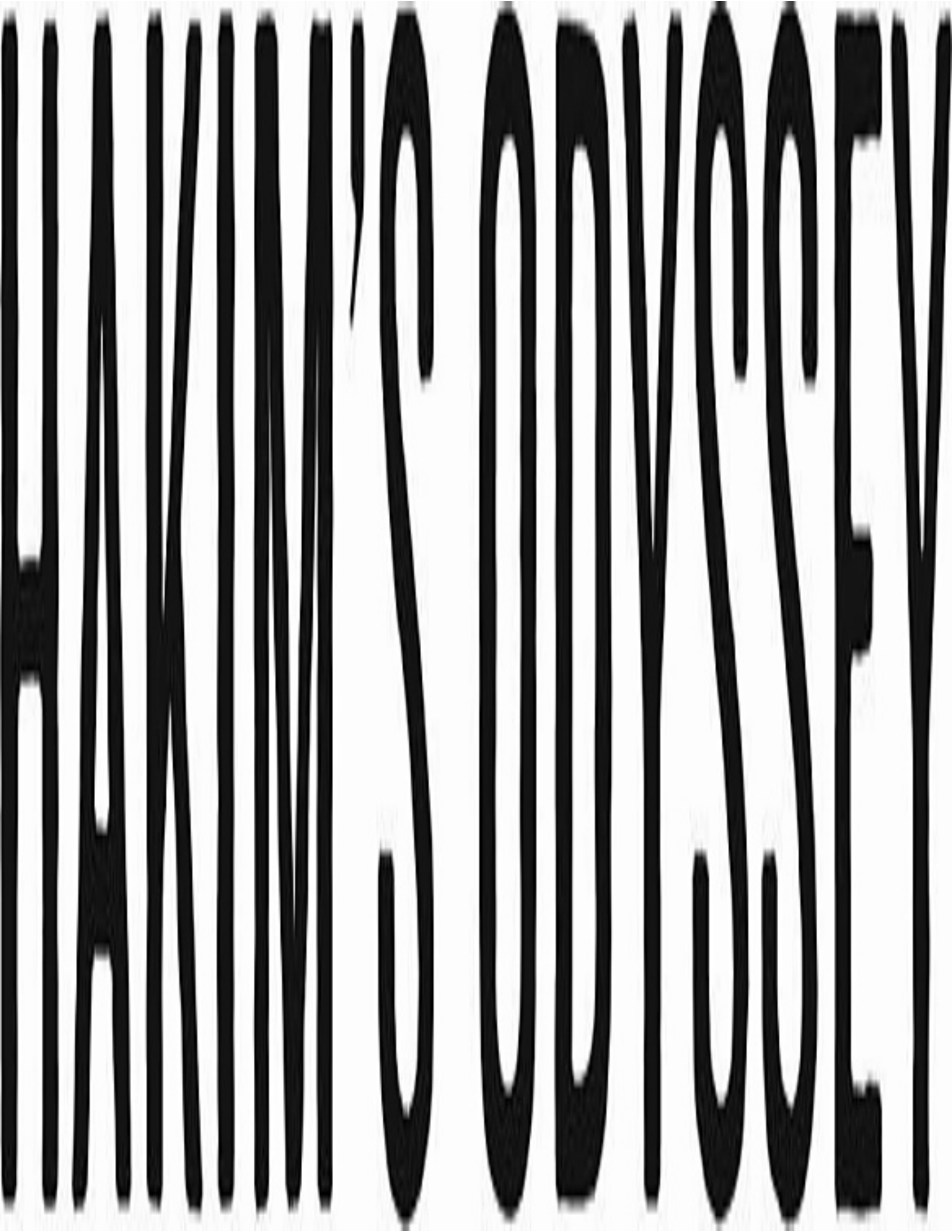


FABIEN TOULMÉ

HAKIM'S ODYSSEY

Book 3: From Macedonia to France





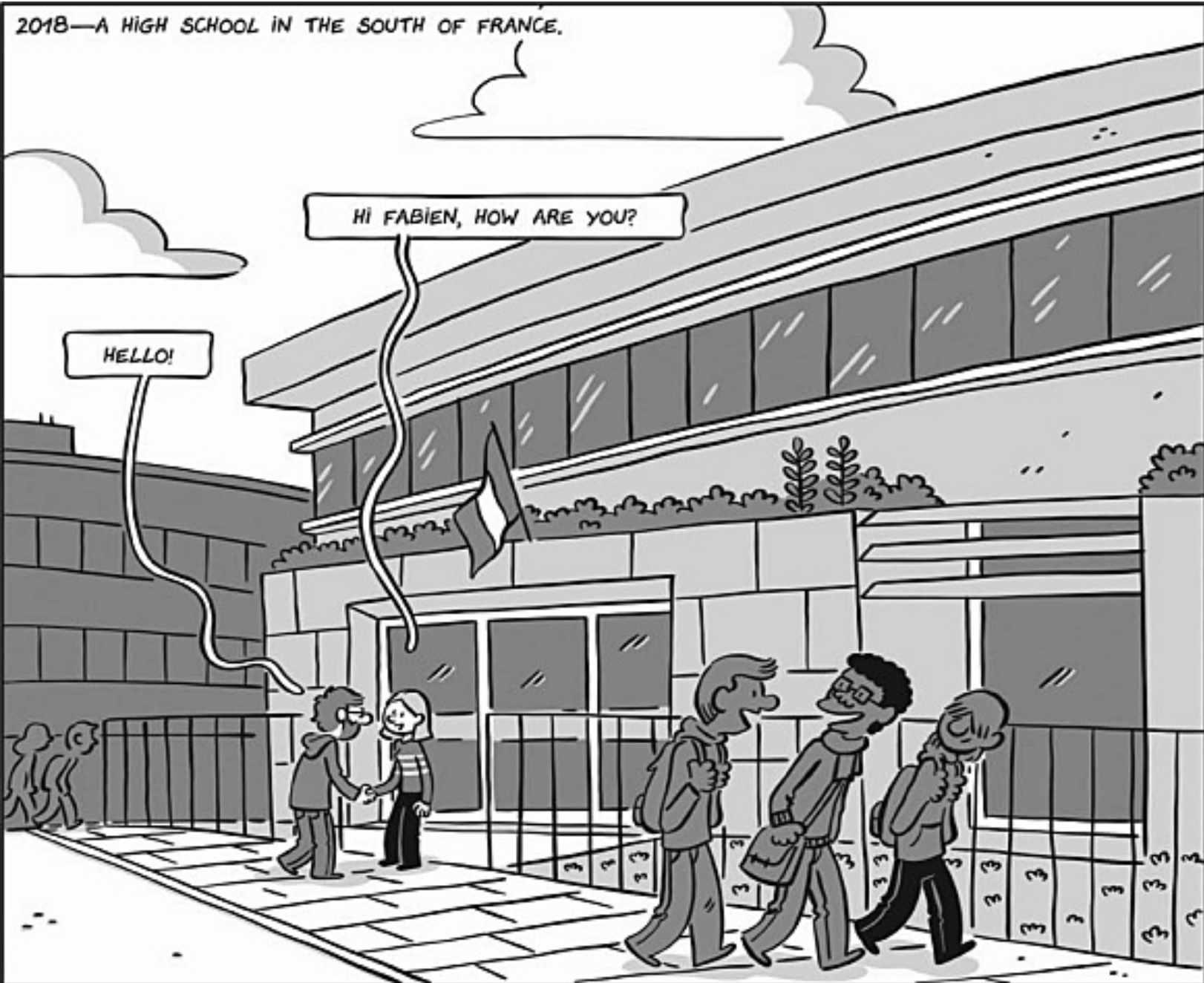
FABIEN TOULMÉ

HAKIM'S ODYSSEY

Book 3: From Macedonia to France



graphic mundi







GETTING BACK TO HAKIM, HE DIDN'T START OUT HAVING ANY REASON TO LEAVE SYRIA: HE'D STARTED A NURSERY THAT WAS DOING WELL, HE'D JUST BOUGHT AN APARTMENT, HE WAS SURROUNDED BY HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

HE WAS HAPPY IN HIS COUNTRY.



THEN, IN 2011, PROTESTS BROKE OUT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THE SUBSEQUENT CRACKDOWN WAS BLOODY, AND HAKIM WAS ARRESTED AND TORTURED FOR HELPING WOUNDED PROTESTERS.



WHEN HE GOT OUT OF PRISON, THE COUNTRY WAS SINKING DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO CIVIL WAR: HIS BUSINESS HAD BEEN SEIZED BY THE ARMY AND HIS APARTMENT WAS DESTROYED IN THE BOMBINGS.



A FEW WEEKS LATER, ONE OF HIS BROTHERS (JAWAD) WAS ARRESTED AT A PROTEST AND IS STILL MISSING TO THIS DAY.

FEARING FOR HIS SAFETY, HAKIM DECIDED TO LEAVE SYRIA, ALONE, UNTIL THINGS CALMED DOWN. HIS PLAN WAS JUST TO GET AWAY FOR A WHILE FROM A PLACE WHERE HIS LIFE WAS AT RISK. HE WASN'T PLANNING TO COME TO EUROPE.



FIRST HE TRIED MOVING TO LEBANON, A COUNTRY NEIGHBORING SYRIA, BUT THERE THEY WERE EXPERIENCING AN INFLUX OF REFUGEES FROM SYRIA, AND IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO FIND A JOB SO HE COULD STAY THERE.



SO HE LEFT FOR JORDAN, WHERE HE RAN INTO THE SAME PROBLEMS.

SO HE DECIDED TO GO STAY WITH A FRIEND IN TURKEY, IN THE SOUTHERN CITY OF ANTALYA, WHERE HE HOPED THAT THINGS WOULD BE BETTER.

DON'T WORRY, IT'S DIFFERENT HERE.
IF YOU KEEP TRYING, YOU'LL MANAGE IT.



WHILE HE STILL COULDN'T FIND WORK THERE, HE DID MEET NAJMEH, A YOUNG SYRIAN WOMAN WHO'D BEEN LIVING IN TURKEY WITH HER FAMILY SINCE THE WAR STARTED.



NAJMEH'S PARENTS WERE ALSO STRUGGLING TO FIND WORK, SO THEY ALL DECIDED TO MOVE TO ISTANBUL, A CITY THAT SEEMED TO OFFER MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAN ANTALYA.



AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS THEY GOT MARRIED, AND IN AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS, NAJMEH BECAME PREGNANT. GIVEN THE COUPLE'S PRECARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS REALLY COMPLICATED THINGS.



IT WAS IN ISTANBUL THAT HADI, NAJMEH AND HAKIM'S SON, WAS BORN.



BUT THIS MOMENT OF JOY WAS BRIEF.

UNFORTUNATELY, CONDITIONS THERE FOR REFUGEES WERE HARDLY BETTER THAN IN ANTALYA, AND NAJMEH'S FATHER, WITH NO OTHER WAY TO KEEP HIS FAMILY ALIVE, DECIDED TO TRAVEL ILLEGALLY (BY PLANE) TO FRANCE, A COUNTRY HE'D VISITED WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER AND WHOSE LANGUAGE HE SPOKE.



WHEN HE ARRIVED, HE WAS GRANTED REFUGEE STATUS AND HE WAS ABLE TO GO THROUGH A FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS, MEANING HIS FAMILY COULD LEGALLY JOIN HIM.

...EXCEPT FOR HAKIM AND HADI, FOR WHOM THE PROCESS WAS MORE COMPLEX.

SO THE TWO OF THEM STAYED IN ISTANBUL FOR MONTHS WHILE THEY WAITED FOR THEIR CASE TO BE RESOLVED, BUT A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCES DASHED ANY HOPE OF THEM BEING ABLE TO GET A FRENCH VISA.



STUCK IN AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION, HAKIM MADE THE CHOICE, DESPITE THE RISKS INVOLVED, TO COME TO FRANCE WITH HIS SON.

THEY WENT TO IZMİR, IN TURKEY, WHERE THEY TOOK OFF IN AN INFLATABLE BOAT FOR THE GREEK ISLAND OF SAMOS.



THEY NEARLY DROWNED DURING THE CROSSING, BUT THEY EVENTUALLY MADE IT.

FROM SAMOS, THEY GOT TO ATHENS, WHERE THEY TOOK A BUS HEADED FOR MACEDONIA.



AND THAT'S WHERE BOOK 2 LEAVES OFF.







ARE A LOT OF THEM
COMING TO FRANCE?



I'LL TALK ABOUT "ASYLUM SEEKERS"
RATHER THAN "MIGRANTS," SINCE IT'S
HARDER TO GET RELIABLE
STATISTICS ON THEM.



IN ANY CASE,
MIGRANTS
WHO PLAN TO
STAY IN AN AREA
LONG TERM WILL
TYPICALLY APPLY
FOR ASYLUM.

*MEANING "MIGRANTS" WHO GO THROUGH THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO OBTAIN "REFUGEE" STATUS, THOUGH I'M PURPOSEFULLY SIMPLIFYING THINGS SINCE THERE ARE ALSO STATUSES SUCH AS "SUBSIDIARY PROTECTION" AND "STATELESS."

IN 2017, FRANCE PROCESSED A
LITTLE OVER 100,000 APPLICATIONS
FOR ASYLUM.* THAT PUTS IT BEHIND
ITALY AND GERMANY WITH THE THIRD
MOST APPLICATIONS IN EUROPE.



OF THESE APPLICATIONS, 1 IN 4 WAS
APPROVED,* SO THAT'S ABOUT 25,000
PEOPLE RECEIVING AUTHORIZATION
TO REMAIN IN FRANCE IN 2017.



*SOURCE: FRENCH OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF REFUGEES AND STATELESS PERSONS (OFPRA)

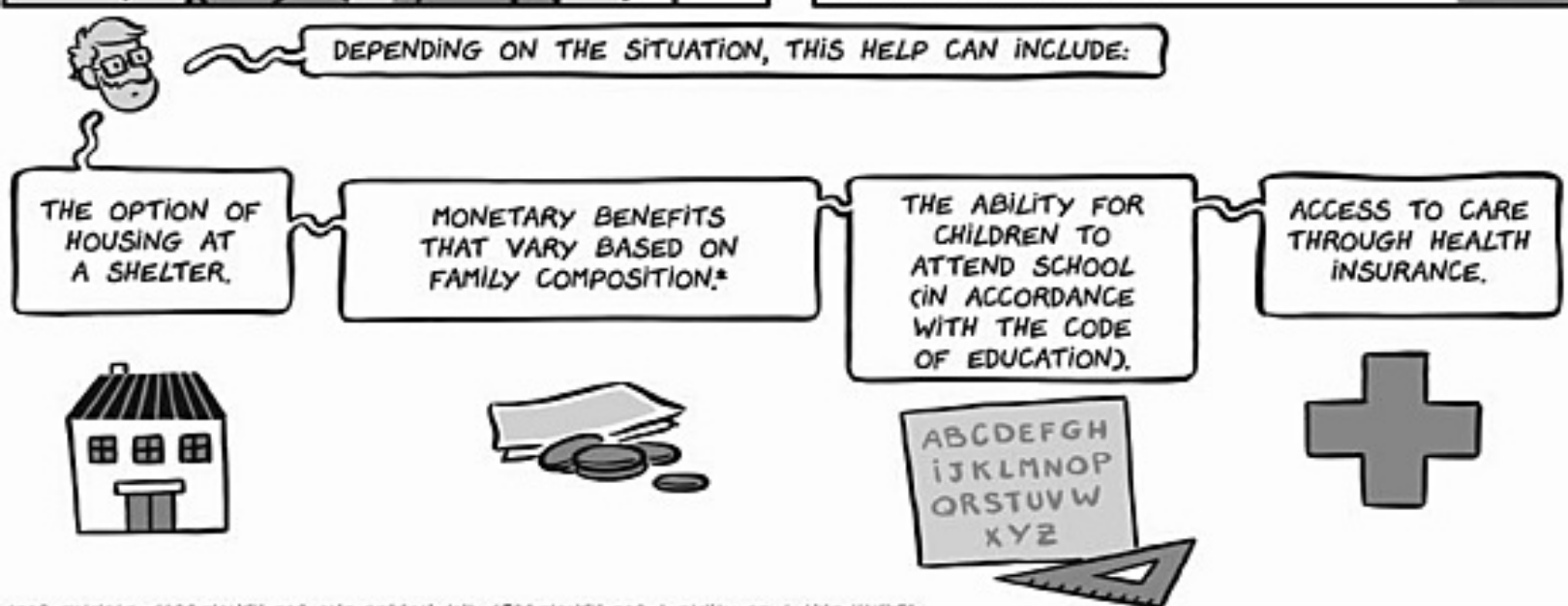
THE EUROPEAN COUNTRY
THAT RECEIVES THE MOST
APPLICATIONS IS GERMANY.



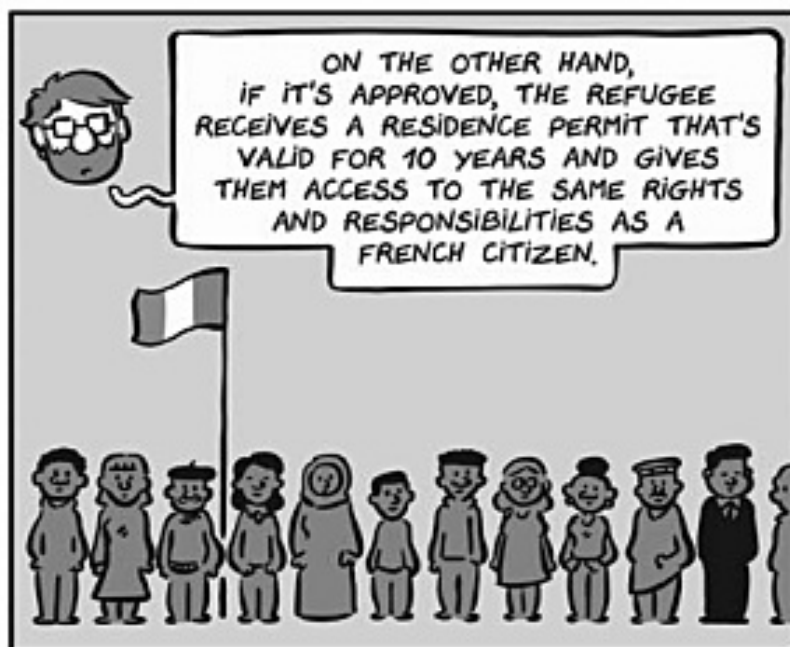
FOR COMPARISON, IN 2017, THEY
PROCESSED 500,000 APPLICATIONS,
WITH AN APPROVAL RATE
OF ONE IN TWO, SO THAT'S
ABOUT 250,000 PEOPLE BEING
AUTHORIZED TO REMAIN THERE.



THAT'S 10 TIMES THE NUMBER IN FRANCE.



*FOR EXAMPLE, €200/MONTH FOR ONE PERSON AND €500/MONTH FOR A FAMILY OF 4 LIKE HAKITS



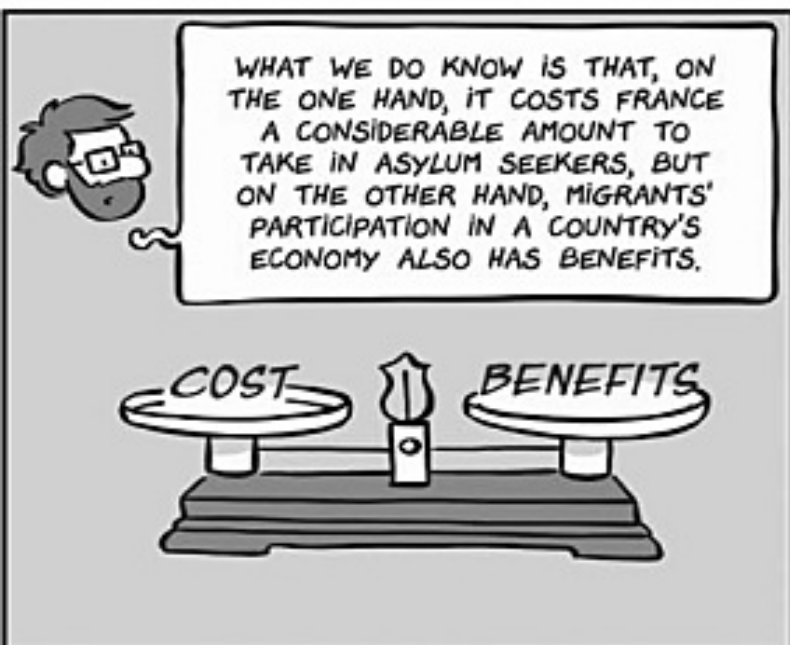
MY DAD SAYS IT'S REALLY EXPENSIVE FOR FRANCE AND THERE'S A RISK THEY'LL TAKE JOBS FROM THE FRENCH. IS THAT TRUE?



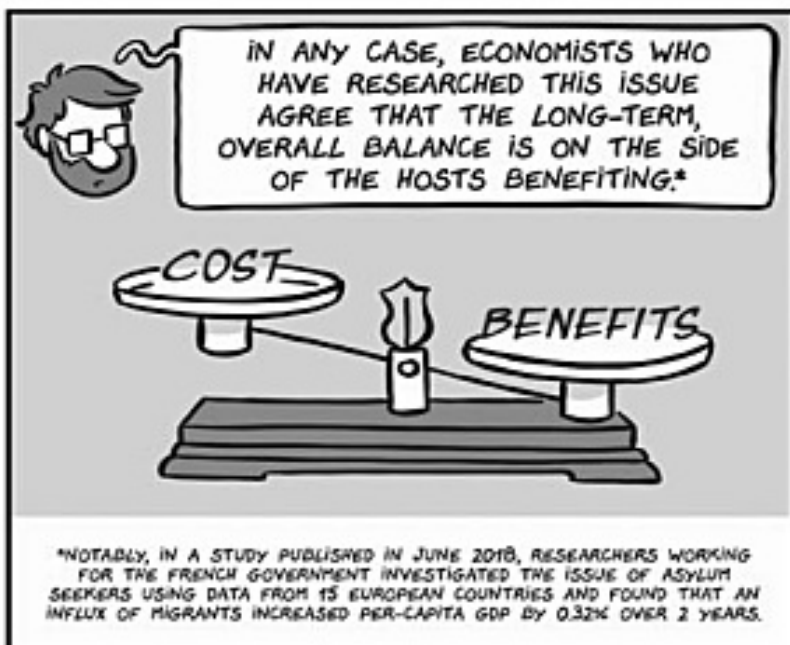
IT'S A TOUGH QUESTION, I'M NOT SURE I'M REALLY QUALIFIED TO ANSWER IT.



WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THAT, ON THE ONE HAND, IT COSTS FRANCE A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT TO TAKE IN ASYLUM SEEKERS, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, MIGRANTS' PARTICIPATION IN A COUNTRY'S ECONOMY ALSO HAS BENEFITS.



IN ANY CASE, ECONOMISTS WHO HAVE RESEARCHED THIS ISSUE AGREE THAT THE LONG-TERM, OVERALL BALANCE IS ON THE SIDE OF THE HOSTS BENEFITING.*



*NOTABLY, IN A STUDY PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2018, RESEARCHERS WORKING FOR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATED THE ISSUE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS USING DATA FROM 15 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND FOUND THAT AN INFLUX OF MIGRANTS INCREASED PER-CAPITA GDP BY 0.32% OVER 2 YEARS.

IN TERMS OF THESE "JOBS THEY'LL TAKE FROM THE FRENCH," IT'S OFTEN BEEN SHOWN THAT MIGRANTS FILL LABOR SHORTAGES IN PARTICULAR SECTORS THAT ARE NOT REALLY APPEALING TO CITIZENS OF THE HOST COUNTRY (CONSTRUCTION, HUMAN SERVICES...)*



*ACCORDING TO ANTHONY DO KA RESEARCHER AT CEPIL, THE CENTER FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION, "IN THE LONG TERM, STUDIES AGREE THAT IMMIGRATION DOES NOT HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON EMPLOYMENT."

THERE, I HOPE MY EXPLANATIONS WERE CLEAR ENOUGH.

LET'S HAVE ONE LAST QUESTION?







Chapter 12: Macedonia and Serbia (September 2015)



"IF WE STAY HERE, WE'LL FREEZE TO DEATH."

I'D NOW BEEN MEETING WITH HAKIM FOR A YEAR AND A HALF TO LISTEN TO HIM TALK ABOUT HIS JOURNEY FROM SYRIA.







THE BUS DROVE NORTH FOR SIX HOURS...



THEN IT STOPPED AT A SERVICE AREA.













INDEED, WE WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES.



IT WAS A PARADE OF MIGRANTS,
NOT REALLY HIDDEN OR DISCREET.

THERE WERE PEOPLE SELLING VARIOUS ITEMS
ALONG THE ROAD (CIGARETTES, COOKIES, FRUIT...) AT 3 TIMES THEIR NORMAL PRICE.



WE ALSO ENCOUNTERED REFUGEE AID ASSOCIATIONS,
FROM WHOM I WAS ABLE TO GET MORE DIAPERS.



THERE WERE EVEN POLICE!



DON'T
WORRY!

WE'RE HERE TO ENSURE
YOUR SAFETY UNTIL YOU
REACH THE BORDER.



SOMETIMES
THIEVES ATTACK
AND ROB MIGRANTS.

THEY KNOW
YOU CARRY CASH.



IF YOU WANT, THIS AFTERNOON,
THERE'S A BUS THAT CAN TAKE YOU
UP TO THE BORDER.



AFTER ALL WE'D BEEN THROUGH TO THIS
POINT, IT WAS REALLY SURPRISING TO
SEE PEOPLE ORGANIZING TO HELP US.

I GUESS THEY REALLY WANTED TO MAKE SURE
WE MADE IT THROUGH THEIR COUNTRY.



I THINK THE STORY OF LITTLE ALAN KURDI
WAS STARTING TO DRAW SOME ATTENTION
AND THERE WAS A GROWING AWARENESS
AMONG THE AUTHORITIES.



OF COURSE, THIS DIDN'T LAST, UNFORTUNATELY...

WELL?



NO, WE'LL KEEP MOVING
FORWARD SO WE DON'T
LOSE ANY TIME.

ESPECIALLY IF THE
BORDER ISN'T FAR.



AS YOU WISH.



IN ANY CASE, BE SURE
TO STAY IN GROUPS.

AND MAKE SURE YOU STAY
ON THE PATH, ALRIGHT?

IN 2 OR 3 KILOMETERS,
YOU'LL SEE TRAIN TRACKS.



FOLLOW THEM NORTH, AND
YOU'LL BE IN MACEDONIA.

THANKS!



GOOD LUCK!



WE STARTED WALKING AGAIN IN THE MIDDLE
OF A PROCESSION OF MIGRANTS.

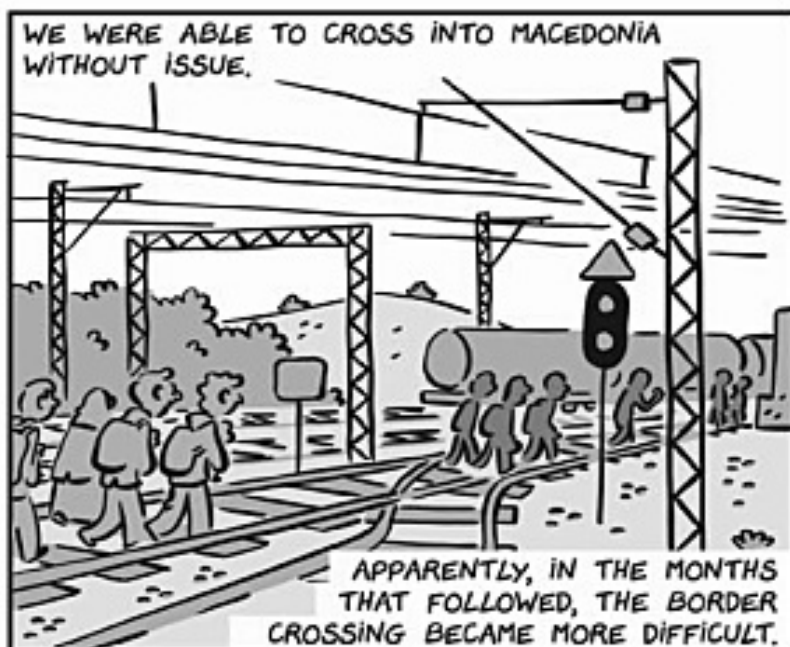


I THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A
CHECKPOINT, A BORDER POST, BUT NO.



IT SEEMED SO SIMPLE.

WE WERE ABLE TO CROSS INTO MACEDONIA
WITHOUT ISSUE.



APPARENTLY, IN THE MONTHS
THAT FOLLOWED, THE BORDER
CROSSING BECAME MORE DIFFICULT.

FOLLOWING THE TRACKS, WE REACHED A TRAIN STATION.



GEVGELIJA STATION

THERE WERE SEVERAL THOUSAND MIGRANTS WAITING TO TAKE A TRAIN TO SERBIA.



IT WAS CLEAR THE WAIT COULD BE VERY LONG.



AND THE STATION HAD BECOME A CAMP.





THERE MUST HAVE BEEN 6 OR 7 GROUPS OF 100 PEOPLE.



I REALIZED THAT I WAS NO LONGER WITH NIHAD'S FAMILY.



I WAS DISAPPOINTED TO LOSE MY TRAVELING COMPANIONS, BUT I WASN'T SAD.



I WAS DIRTY, TIRED, AND HUNGRY. AND ABOVE ALL I WAS THINKING ABOUT MY ULTIMATE GOAL: FRANCE.

AFTER A WHILE, SOMEONE CAME BY TO ASK US FOR MONEY FOR OUR TICKETS AND TO GIVE US OUR PASSES.



AND THEN WE WAITED THERE FOR A FEW HOURS, JUST SITTING BY THE TRACKS.



FINALLY, A TRAIN ARRIVED AND TWO GROUPS GOT ON IT.



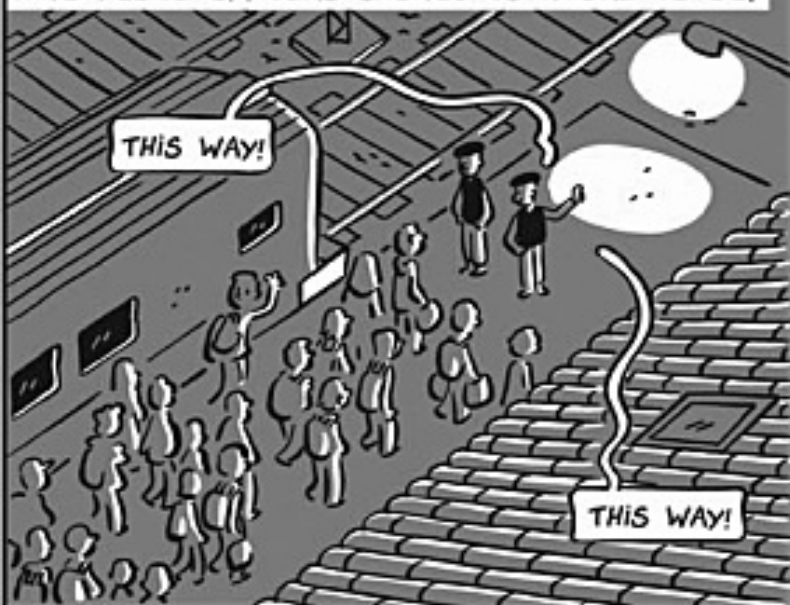
THEN ANOTHER TRAIN AND TWO MORE GROUPS.



THE TRAIN ARRIVED A LITTLE BEFORE MIDNIGHT AT A SMALL STATION IN NORTHERN MACEDONIA.



TWO POLICE OFFICERS SHOWED US WHERE TO GO.



I WAS ON MY LAST LEGS.



I HAD BLISTERS ON MY FEET FROM MY NEW SHOES.



MY BACK HURT (I'D BEEN CARRYING HADI FOR SEVERAL HOURS).



AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF THAT I COULDN'T KEEP WALKING FOR LONG.



BUT IT SEEMS THAT DESPAIR GIVES YOU STRENGTH THAT YOU'D NEVER KNOW YOU HAD OTHERWISE.



I KEPT GOING FOR 4 MORE HOURS.

IT WAS AN EXHAUSTING WALK IN THE PITCH DARK.



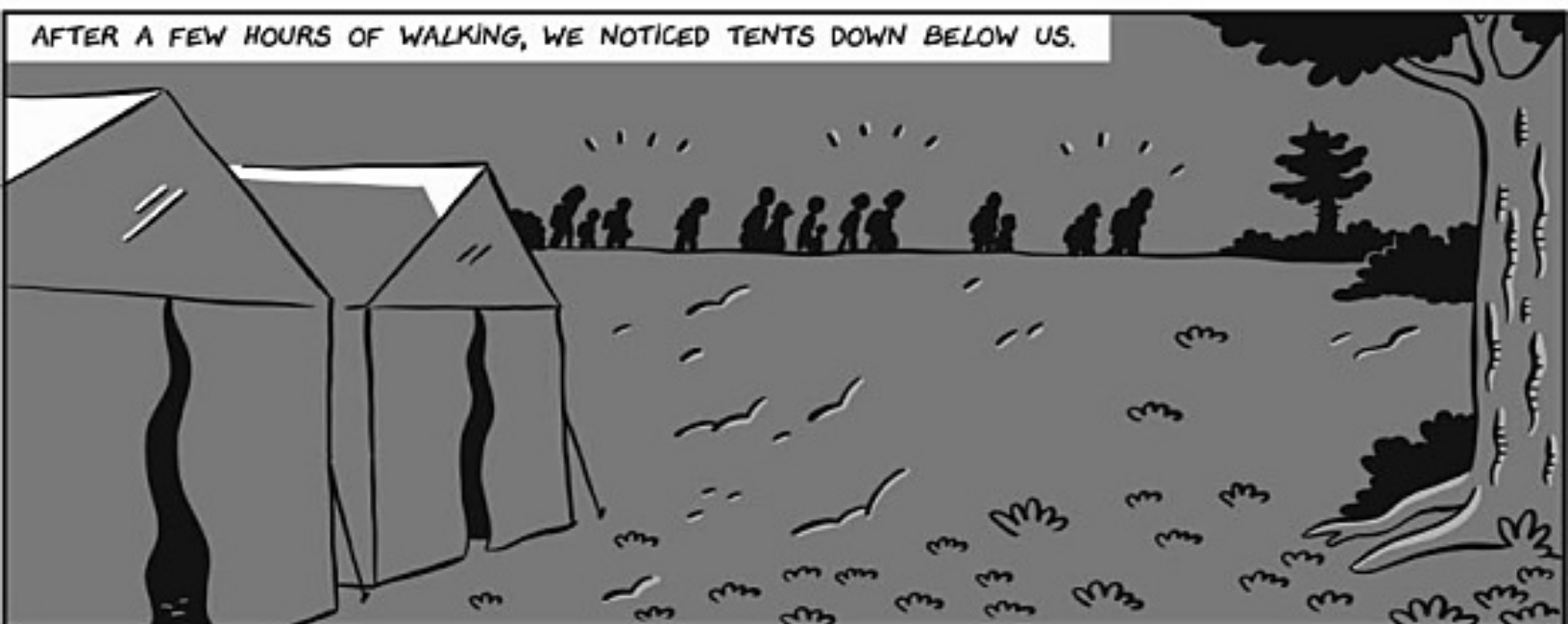
THE ROAD WAS ROUGH AND YOU COULDN'T STOP, BECAUSE YOU HAD TO MAKE SURE YOU DIDN'T GET LEFT BY YOURSELF.

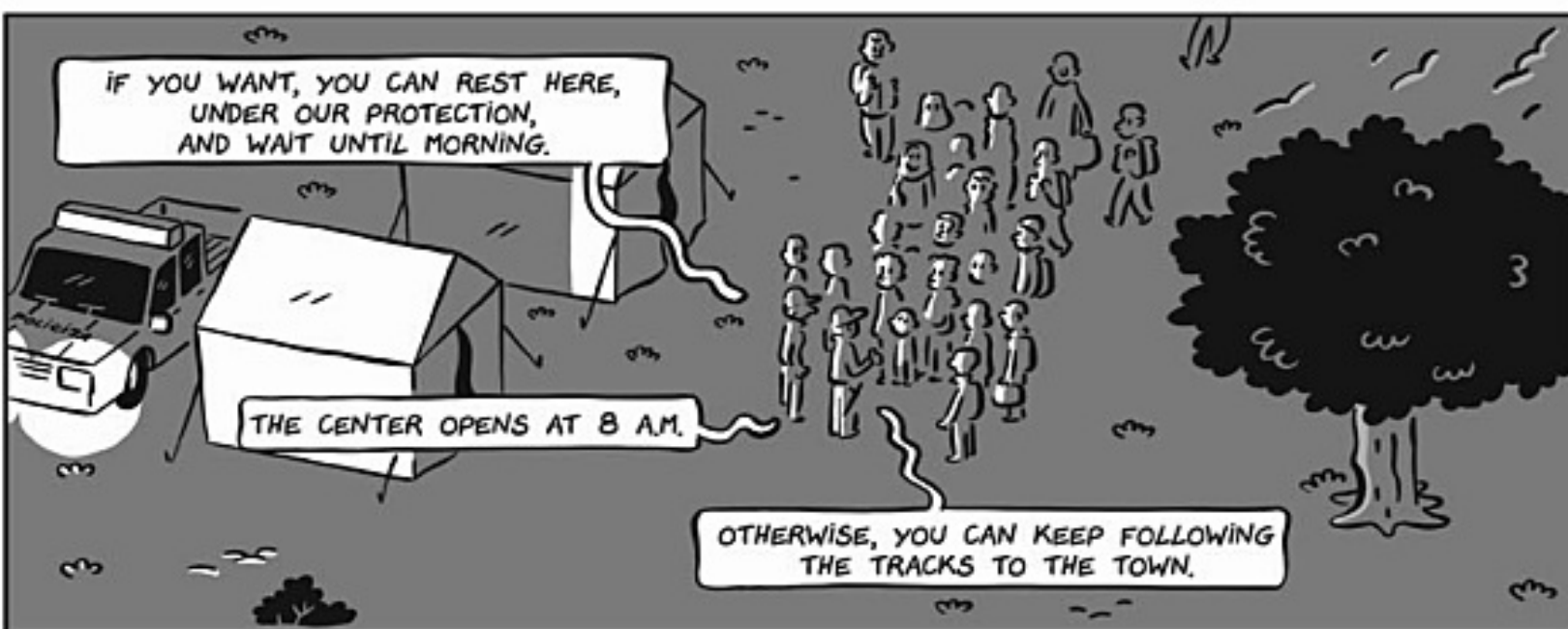


NO ONE SPOKE, EACH OF US IN OUR OWN THOUGHTS, FIGHTING OUR OWN BATTLE.



AFTER A FEW HOURS OF WALKING, WE NOTICED TENTS DOWN BELOW US.





SOME PEOPLE CHOSE TO STOP FOR A WHILE.



OTHERS PREFERRED TO KEEP GOING, TO GET TO THE REGISTRATION CENTER SOONER.

THAT'S WHAT I PICKED.



I COULDN'T TAKE MUCH MORE, BUT I WANTED THIS PART TO BE OVER.



WE FINALLY GOT TO THE TOWN AROUND 4 OR 5 A.M.



IT WAS FREEZING COLD AND WE WEREN'T DRESSED FOR IT.



LOOK, THAT MUST BE THE REGISTRATION CENTER.











AT 8 A.M., THE CENTER OPENED.





AND...



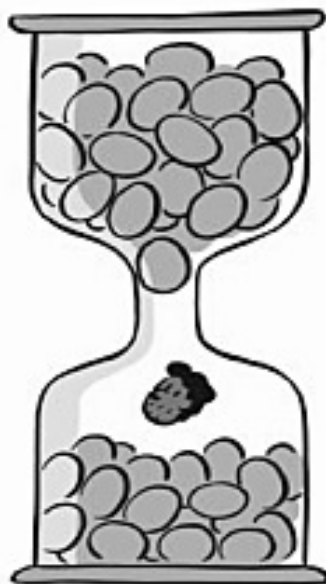
TIME...



WENT...



By...





IF ANYONE STOPPED ME, I'D FIGURE SOMETHING OUT.



FOLLOWING SOME OTHER REFUGEES, I CAME TO A BUS STATION.



DO YOU KNOW WHERE THIS BUS IS GOING?

BELGRADE.



I WAS LUCKY; THAT'S WHERE I NEEDED TO GO.



A LITTLE REST BEFORE THE NEXT BIT...



THE TRIP TOOK 4 HOURS.



THE BUS DROPPED US OFF AROUND 11 P.M. RIGHT IN DOWNTOWN, IN FRONT OF A BIG PARK.




PARK LUKA ČELOVIĆ


THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF OTHER REFUGEES.







WHAT'S GOING ON
IN HUNGARY?



YOU DIDN'T HEAR WHAT'S
BEEN HAPPENING THERE
THE PAST FEW WEEKS?


NO.



THE GOVERNMENT'S DOING EVERYTHING
IT CAN TO STOP MIGRANTS FROM COMING IN.

AND IF THEY DO, THE
POLICE ARREST THEM.


APPARENTLY, THEY'RE
PUTTING UP BARBED WIRE
ALONG THEIR BORDER.




THE PRESIDENT SAYS WE'RE INVADERS.

THEY TAKE ALL OF
US FOR TERRORISTS.

SO THE POLICE ARE
REALLY CRACKING DOWN.



A FEW DAYS AGO,
THEY USED TEAR GAS AND WATER
CANNONS TO DISPERSE SOME
MIGRANTS AT THE BORDER.



THEY EVEN BROUGHT IN MILITARY
VEHICLES. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

THEY ARRESTED MORE THAN 300
PEOPLE AND THE NEWSPAPERS SAY
THEY COULD GET 3 YEARS IN PRISON.

PLUS, THANKS TO THE DUBLIN CONVENTION, IF THE HUNGARIAN POLICE ARREST YOU, YOU LOSE EVERYTHING.

WHAT??

ON THE EU LEVEL, THEY HAVE A DATABASE OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS.

THAT MEANS YOU CAN'T APPLY IN MULTIPLE COUNTRIES.

IN PRACTICE, IT MEANS THAT IF THEY ARREST YOU IN HUNGARY, YOU'RE REGISTERED AS AN ASYLUM SEEKER THERE, AND HUNGARY PROCESSES YOUR APPLICATION.

YOU'RE STUCK WITH THEM.

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO GOT "REGISTERED" IN HUNGARY.

WHEN HE GOT TO THE NETHERLANDS TO FILE HIS APPLICATION THERE, THEY SENT HIM BACK TO HUNGARY.

AND NO ONE WANTS TO LINGER IN HUNGARY.

THEIR REFUGEE CAMPS ARE AWFUL.

HERE, LOOK.

IT'S A VIDEO THAT'S
GOING AROUND THE
INTERNET RIGHT NOW.
IT WAS FILMED BY A
VOLUNTEER AT THE CAMP.



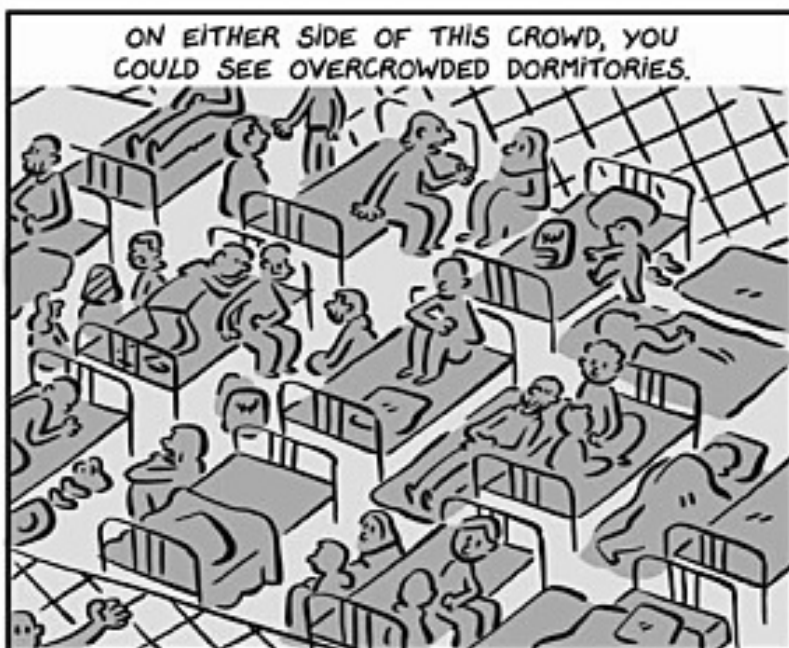
THE VIDEO SHOWED A HUNDRED MIGRANTS,
INCLUDING CHILDREN, CROWDED BEHIND
FENCES IN A HUGE ROOM.



THE POLICE, GROUPED TOGETHER IN FRONT OF
THEM AND WEARING MASKS, THREW A FEW
SANDWICHES TO THEM.



ON EITHER SIDE OF THIS CROWD, YOU
COULD SEE OVERCROWDED DORMITORIES.



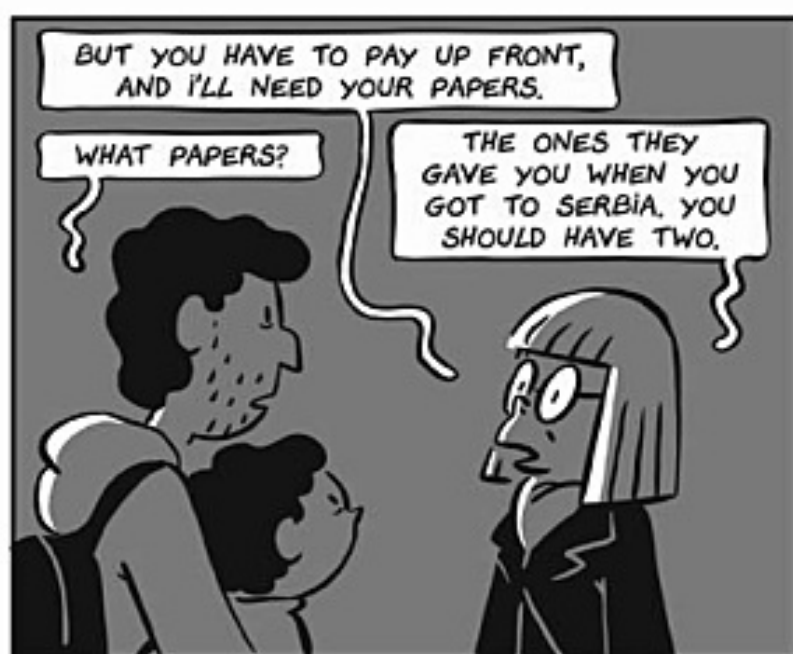
SO THAT'S WHY WE'RE THINKING OF
GOING THROUGH CROATIA INSTEAD.



ESPECIALLY WITH YOUR KID,
I'D DEFINITELY SAY YOU
SHOULD AVOID HUNGARY.











I SPENT ALMOST AN HOUR IN THE BATH WITH HADI.



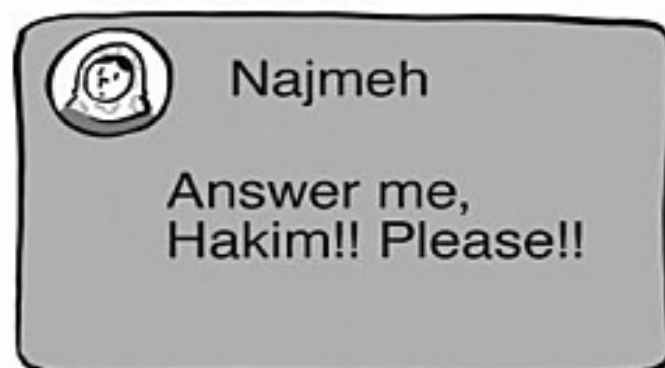
IT WAS SO NICE, I FELT LIKE IT HAD BEEN FOREVER SINCE I'D LAST BATHED.



HADI WENT TO SLEEP AND I CONNECTED TO THE WIFI.



AND AMONG ALL MY MESSAGES:



I CALLED HER RIGHT AWAY, DESPITE HOW LATE IT WAS.





AFTER NAJMEH, I CALLED MY FAMILY IN SYRIA.



THEN WHEN I HUNG UP, GLANCING THROUGH MY MESSAGES:



I ANSWERED RIGHT AWAY.







HADI WOKE UP AT 10 A.M., HE WAS HUNGRY.



I MADE HIM A BOTTLE AND NIHAD'S FAMILY CAME AND JOINED US.

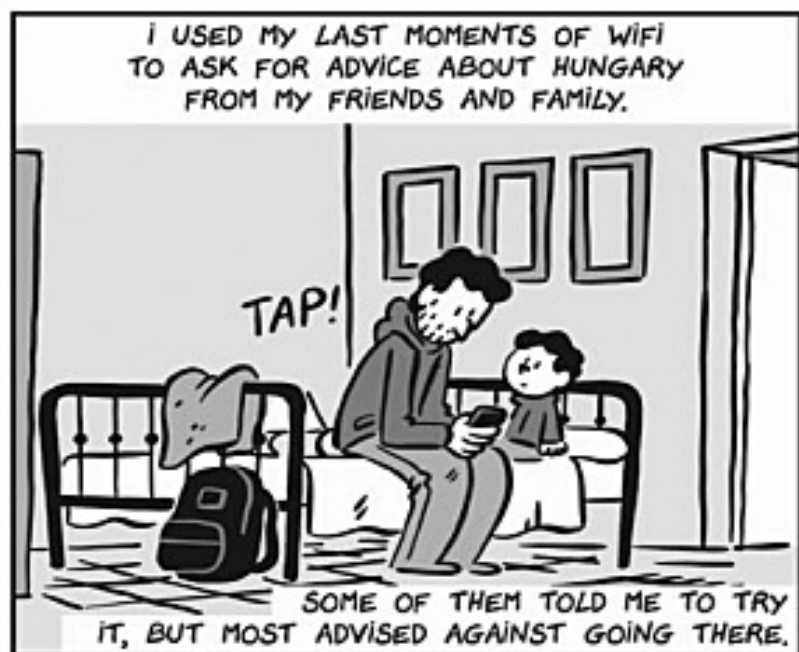


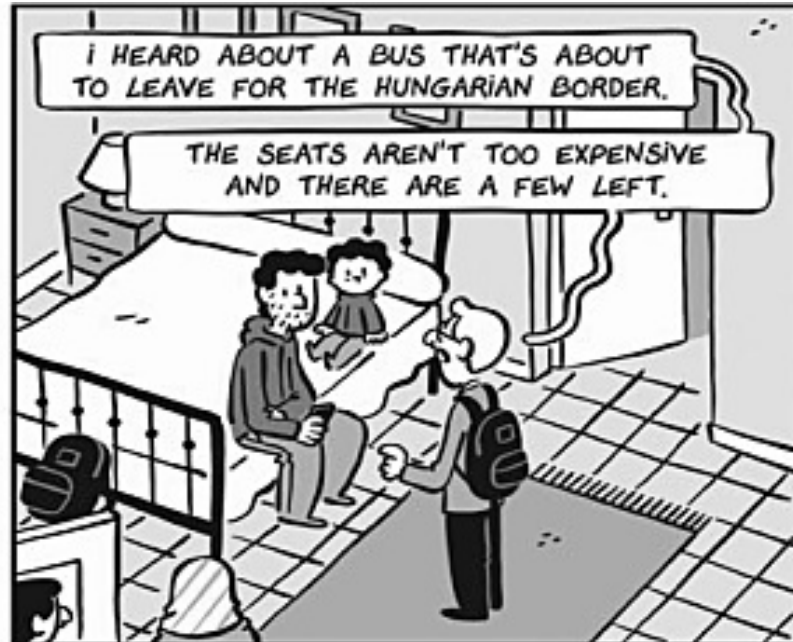
WE WERE ALL GROGGY WITH FATIGUE.



IT WAS SUNDAY. NOTHING WAS OPEN.
EKKAN **SAMSUN**







I PAID FOR ANOTHER NIGHT IN OUR ROOM AND WENT OUTSIDE TO GET HAD!
SOME FRESH AIR.



HE GOT UPSET AND STARTED CRYING.





*WHAT'S YOUR NAME?





*SLIDE, WAIT FOR ME!

IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, WE WENT BACK TO OUR ROOM.



I STILL COULDN'T DECIDE WHERE TO GO NEXT ON MY JOURNEY.



WHAT TO DO?



BY THE TIME I WENT TO BED, I STILL HADN'T DECIDED.



AND IN THE MORNING I WAS STILL UNSURE.



I WENT BACK TO THE PARK FROM THE FIRST NIGHT TO SEE IF I COULD GET ANY "FRESH" INFORMATION ON HUNGARY.



I HAVE A FRIEND WHO WENT THERE 3 DAYS AGO AND HE HASN'T RUN INTO ANY REAL TROUBLE YET.



IT WAS ALREADY 11:30. I HAD TO MAKE A DECISION.



HUNGARY?

WE'RE GOING TO GO THAT WAY.



OK.

THANKS...

NO PROBLEM.



I COULDN'T STAY HERE FOREVER. IT WAS A NEEDLESS WASTE OF MONEY.



I WENT BACK TO THE PARK, LOOKING FOR A SMUGGLER.



HELLO, I'M TRYING TO GET TO HUNGARY.



IT'S €800.



THAT'S WAY TOO MUCH.

BUT NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO YOU WITH US.



NO RISK OF THE POLICE CATCHING YOU.

SORRY, I CAN'T AFFORD IT.



WAIT!

€500?

TOO MUCH.



I ASKED 3 OR 4 SMUGGLERS THE SAME THING.
THE PRICES WERE OUTRAGEOUS,
SO I WENT TO FIND A CAB DRIVER.

HELLO, HOW MUCH TO GO
TO HUNGARY?

THAT'LL BE
€200.

BUT SO YOU'RE AWARE, I'LL
DROP YOU 2 KILOMETERS BEFORE
THE BORDER INTO HUNGARY.

WAIT, YOU CAN MAKE
THE SAME TRIP ON A
BUS FOR JUST €50.

YEAH BUT IT
TAKES FOREVER
AND IT'S RISKIER.

THE POLICE OFTEN
CHECK THE BUSES.

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

GO WITH GOD,
BROTHER!



THE DRIVER STUCK TO BACK ROADS.

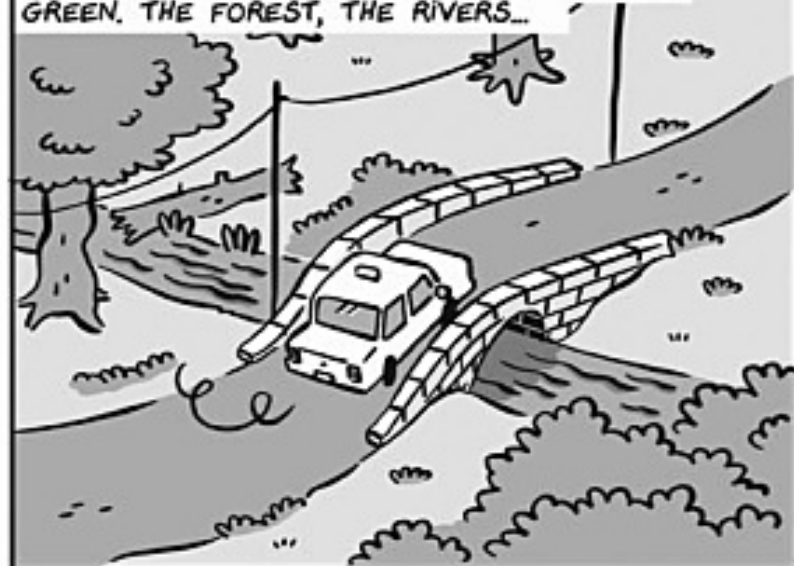


DOUBTLESS TO AVOID THE CHECKPOINTS.

AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T NOTICE THIS TYPE OF THING...



...BUT NOW, LOOKING BACK ON IT, ALL THE LANDSCAPES WERE VERY PRETTY AND VERY GREEN. THE FOREST, THE RIVERS...



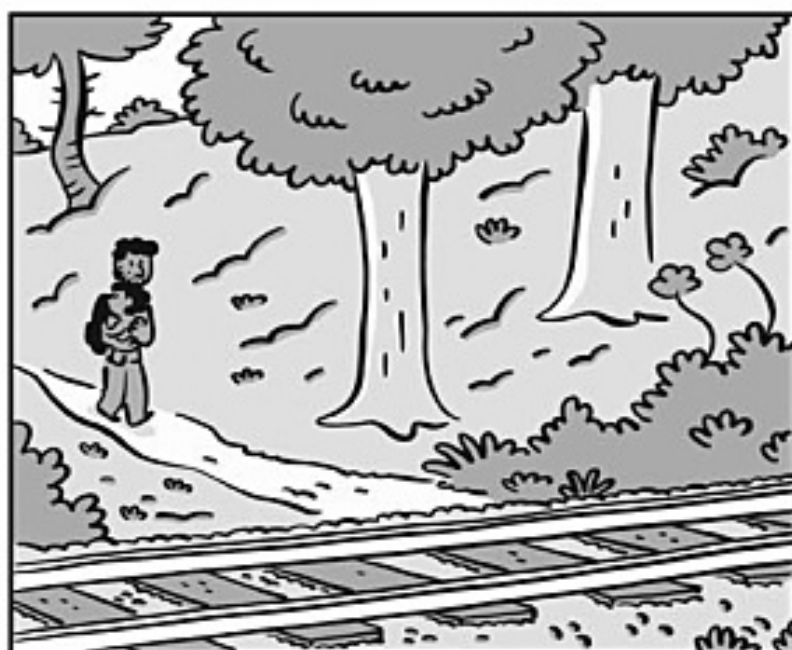
AFTER 2 HOURS OF DRIVING, THE TAXI STOPPED IN A DESERTED VILLAGE.



FOLLOW THE ROAD, THEN AS YOU'RE LEAVING TOWN, YOU'LL SEE A TRAIL GOING THROUGH THE TREES.



THE VILLAGE WAS SILENT.



A LITTLE WAYS AWAY,
A DOZEN MIGRANTS WERE
SITTING IN AN ORCHARD.

HERE!



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

SIT DOWN AND DON'T
MAKE MUCH NOISE!

WE'RE WAITING FOR
NIGHT TO CROSS
INTO HUNGARY.

OH? I THOUGHT I WAS
ALREADY THERE.

NO, NOT QUITE YET.

SEE THAT ROAD?

THAT'S
HUNGARY.



AFTER A WHILE, A POLICE CAR
STOPPED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.







THE ATMOSPHERE WAS REALLY WEIRD.



THE SHOP WAS FULL OF PEOPLE BUT IT WAS VERY QUIET.



PEOPLE FROM MY GROUP WALKED AROUND WITHOUT MAKING EYE CONTACT.



THE HUNGARIANS WATCHED US, SUSPICIOUS.



THERE WAS A SENSE OF FEAR.



A FEELING THAT
WE WERE REALLY NOT WELCOME.



CAN I SIT DOWN?



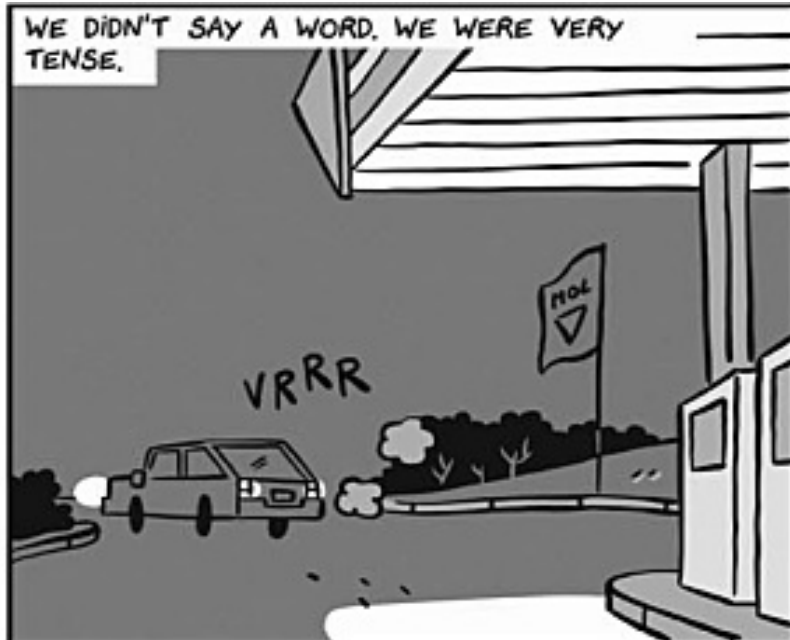
AFTER A LONG NEGOTIATION, WE MANAGED TO AGREE TO €800 TOTAL (€400 FOR THE OTHER MIGRANT AND €400 FOR ME).



WE MET UP AGAIN AT HIS CAR.



WE DIDN'T SAY A WORD. WE WERE VERY TENSE.



WE DROVE FOR ABOUT FIFTY KILOMETERS.



THEN WE CAME TO A TOWN...





AFTER CHECKING OUR PAPERS, ONE OFFICER SAID:

YOU, THE DRIVER, YOU STAY
HERE WITH MY COLLEAGUE.



AND YOU, THE "FRIENDS,"
YOU COME WITH ME.



GET IN!



THE BUS WAS FILLED WITH MIGRANTS.



AND IT TOOK OFF AS SOON AS WE'D SAT DOWN.



IT WAS MAKTUB...



Chapter 13: Hungary (September 2015)



"IT'S WHAT I CALL 'HUNGARIAN HOSPITALITY.'"

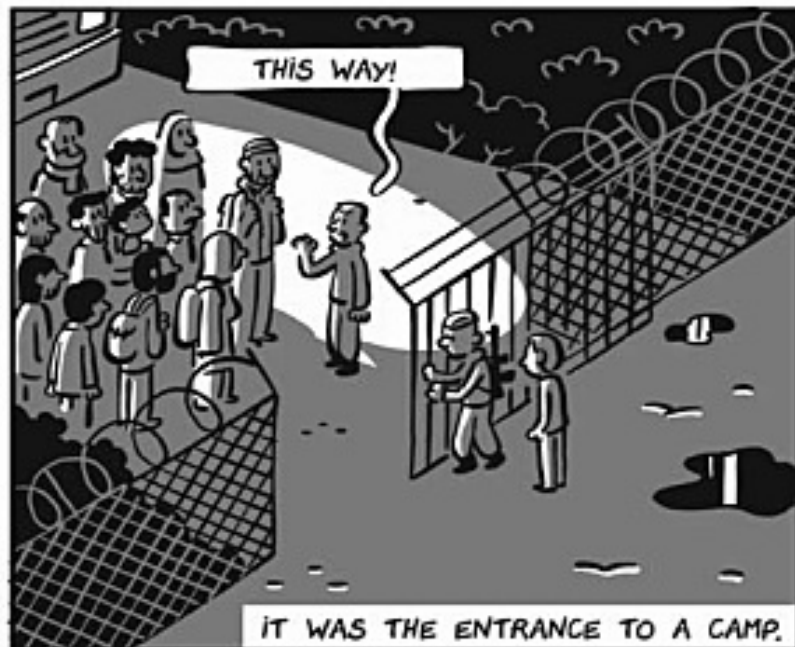
THE BUS DROVE FOR ABOUT 15 MINUTES.



THEN STOPPED,
SEEMINGLY AT RANDOM.



WE WEREN'T REALLY IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.



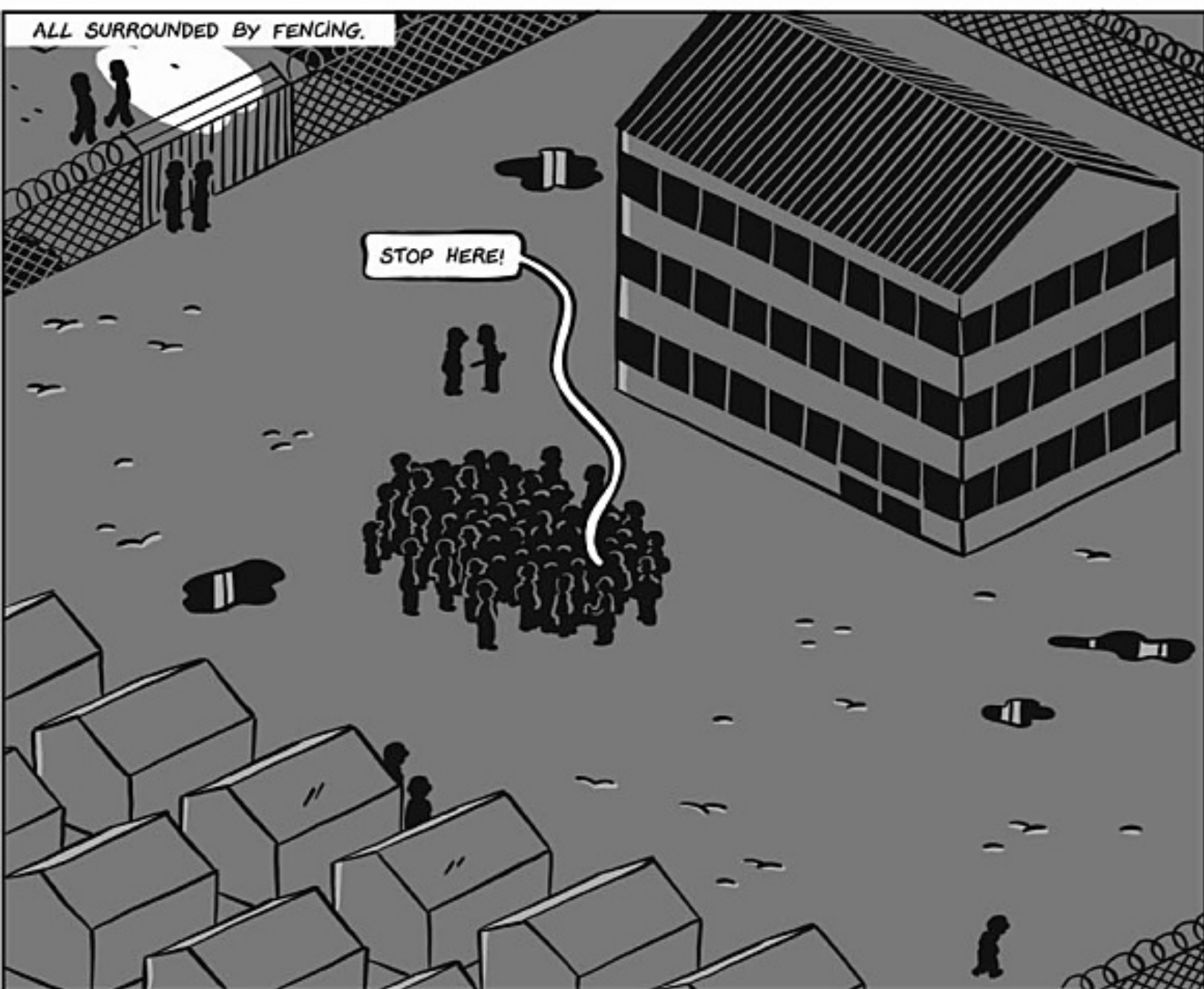
IT WAS THE ENTRANCE TO A CAMP.

ON ONE SIDE THERE WAS SOME SORT OF OFFICE BUILDING.



ON THE OTHER, TENTS.

ALL SURROUNDED BY FENCING.



A GUY IN CIVILIAN DRESS—MAYBE FROM THE UN, I'M NOT SURE—STARTED TALKING TO US.



BY ABOUT MIDNIGHT WE WERE ALL REGISTERED.

GREAT!

NOW YOU CAN
GO AND REST.



YOU'LL NEED
TO DIVIDE UP
AND GO INTO
THE TENTS.

YOU CAN TAKE
ANY BED THAT'S
CURRENTLY OPEN.



NNNN!



LEAVE IT ON, HADI.

THE MAN
SAID IT WAS
IMPORTANT.



I STILL REMEMBER
OUR NUMBERS.

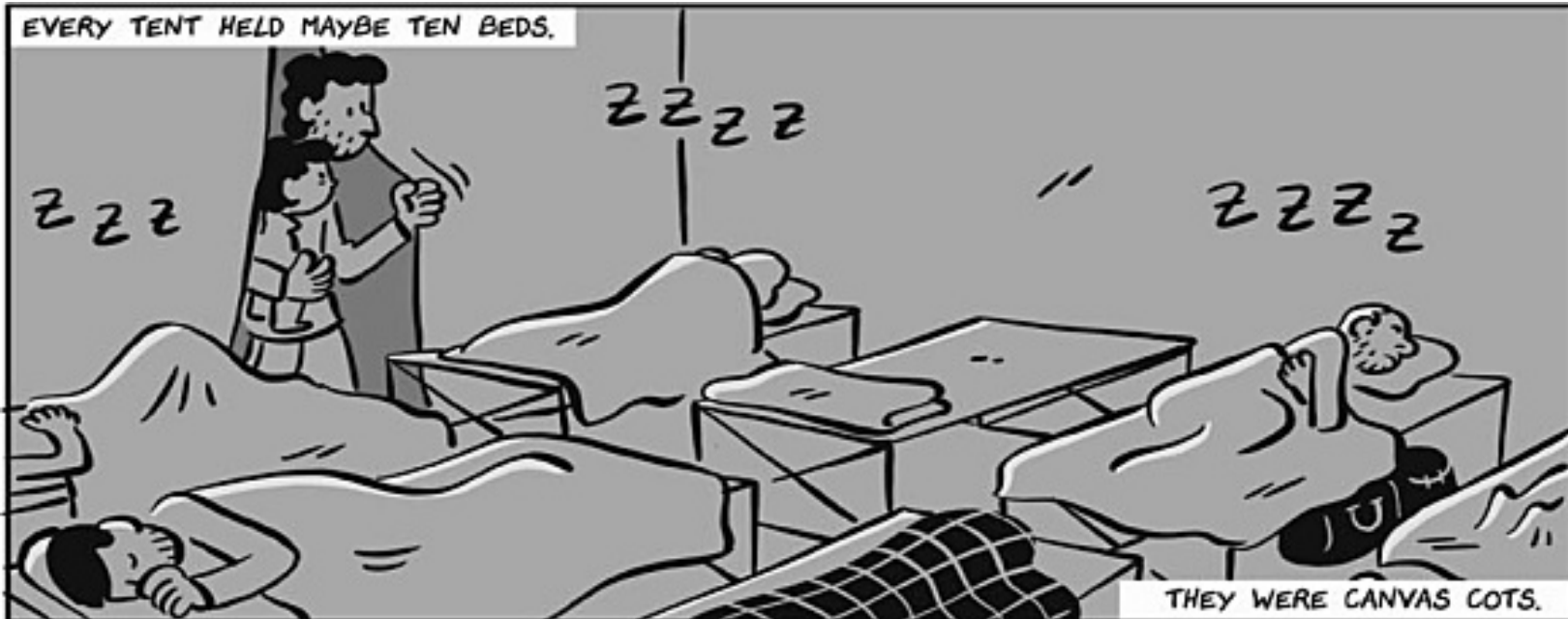


AND I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING WHAT THEY WERE FOR...



THEY MADE ME THINK OF INMATE NUMBERS.

EVERY TENT HELD MAYBE TEN BEDS.



HOW LONG WERE THEY GOING TO KEEP US HERE?

WOULD THEY TAKE HADI AWAY?

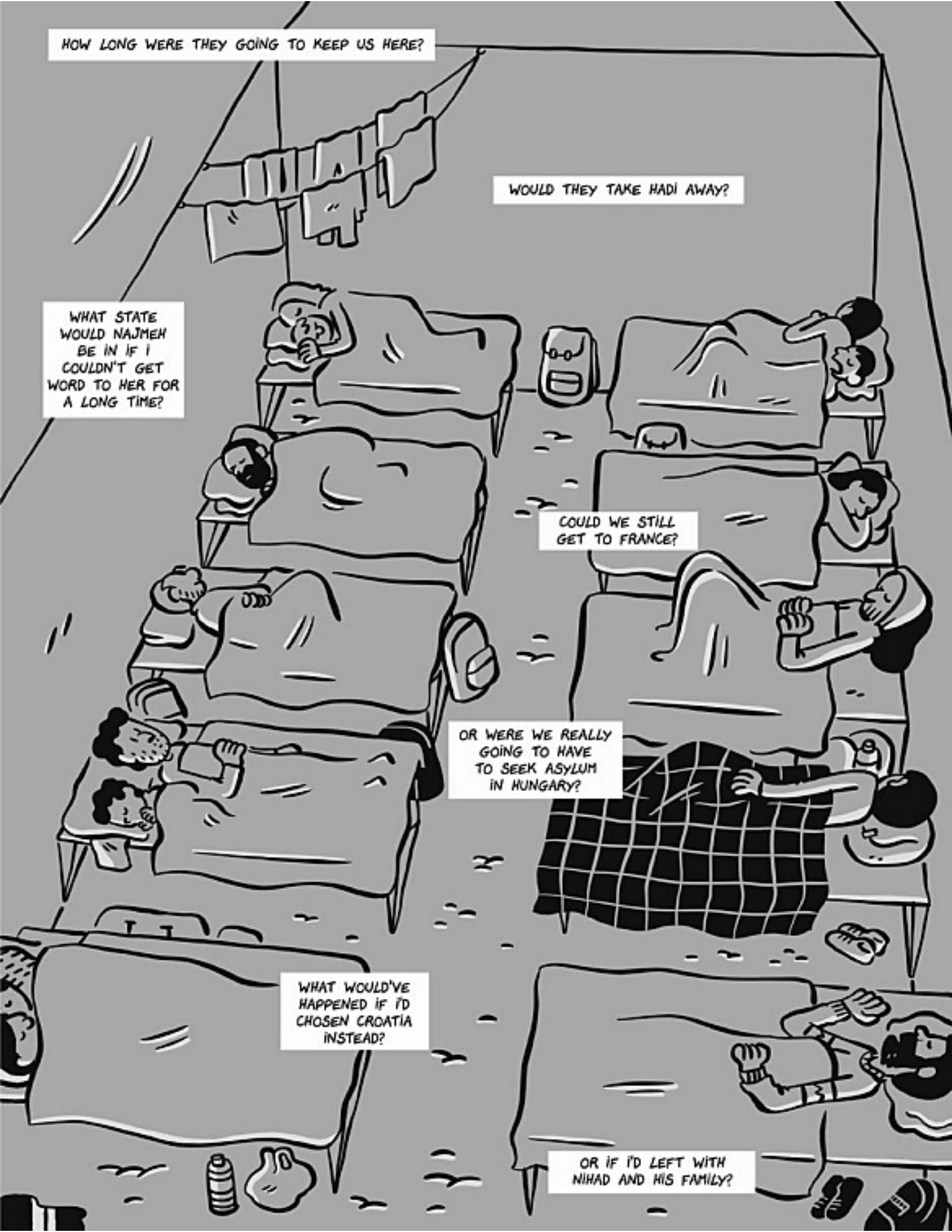
WHAT STATE
WOULD NAJMEH
BE IN IF I
COULDN'T GET
WORD TO HER FOR
A LONG TIME?

COULD WE STILL
GET TO FRANCE?

OR WERE WE REALLY
GOING TO HAVE
TO SEEK ASYLUM
IN HUNGARY?

WHAT WOULD'VE
HAPPENED IF I'D
CHOSEN CROATIA
INSTEAD?

OR IF I'D LEFT WITH
NIHAD AND HIS FAMILY?





THROUGH THE FOG, I SAW ABOUT FIFTY PEOPLE WHO SEEMED TO BE WAITING FOR SOMETHING.







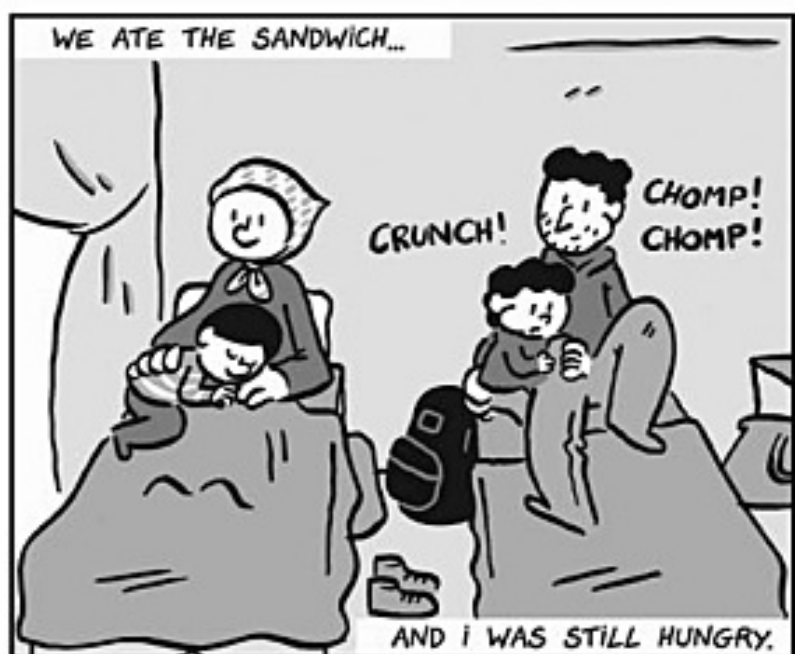


AND I WAS STARTING TO FEEL DIZZY.

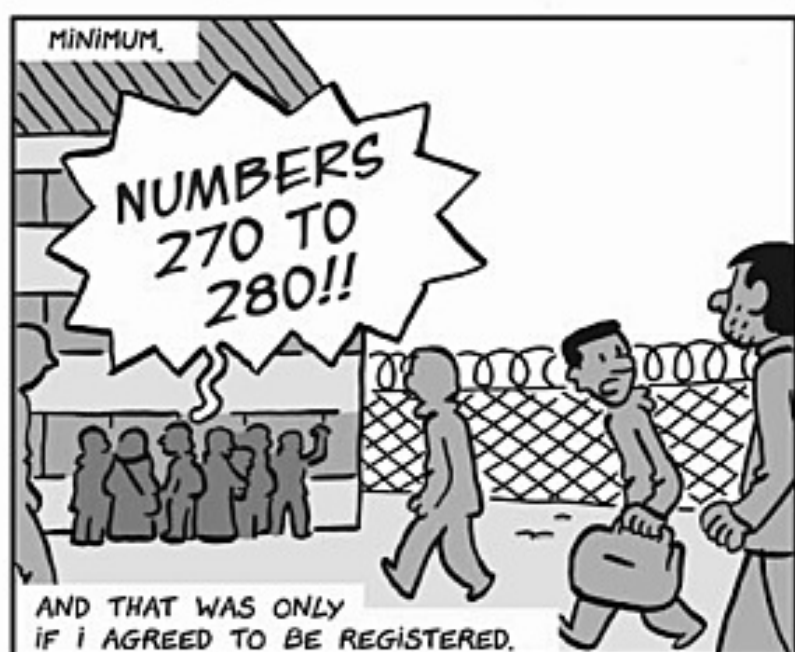












IT WAS A HARD THING TO PROCESS, BUT I TOLD MYSELF AT LEAST I'D HAVE TIME TO THINK.



FOR THE MOMENT, THERE WERE MORE PRESSING NEEDS TO TAKE CARE OF.



I DIDN'T FIND ANY MILK, AND FOR 3 DAYS...



HADI HAD TO EAT BOLOGNA SANDWICHES...



AND HE ENDED UP GETTING SICK.



WHICH WAS TRICKY, SINCE I DIDN'T HAVE ANY DIAPERS LEFT.



AND THERE WAS ALWAYS A LINE FOR THE BATHROOMS.



THERE WAS NO WAY TO WASH HIM EITHER.



SO I IMPROVISED USING A CLOTH DAMPENED WITH ICE-COLD WATER.



I FINALLY TOOK HADI TO SEE THE CAMP DOCTOR.



JUST LIKE EVERYWHERE ELSE, THERE WAS A LINE.



WITH THE COLD, EVERYONE WAS GETTING SICK.



IN FRONT OF ME, THERE WAS A YOUNG BOY WITH A FEVER. HIS MOTHER WAS IN TEARS.



YOU OK?

I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE, I'VE BEEN HERE 15 DAYS, AND I DON'T WANT TO GET REGISTERED.



I WANT TO JOIN MY HUSBAND IN DENMARK.

I TRIED TO COMFORT HER, BUT I FELT AS HELPLESS AS SHE DID.

IT'S ALRIGHT, IT'LL WORK OUT, MA'AM.



THERE WAS ALSO A YOUNG SYRIAN, MAYBE 20 YEARS OLD.

THESE ARE MY NEPHEWS.



THEIR PARENTS ARE DEAD AND I'M BRINGING THEM WITH ME TO GERMANY.



THE YOUNGER ONE HAS STOMACH CRAMPS.



IN THIS CAMP, AND ALL THROUGHOUT MY JOURNEY, I MET SO MANY PEOPLE WHO'D BEEN THROUGH TERRIBLE THINGS IN LIFE.

NEXT!



IF I WROTE BOOKS LIKE YOU, I COULD TELL 200 DIFFERENT STORIES, EACH ONE UNIQUE BUT AT THE SAME TIME SO SIMILAR IN TERMS OF THE DISTRESS, MISFORTUNE, AND MISERY THEY INCLUDE.

AFTER 2 HOURS IN LINE, THE DOCTOR BROUGHT US IN.



HE GAVE ME MILK, DIAPERS, AND MEDICINE FOR HADI.



HE STARTED IMPROVING...



EVEN AS I WAS FEELING WORSE.

REMEMBER, WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH OF ANYTHING, ESPECIALLY FOOD.



ALSO, THE POPULATION IN THE CAMP JUST KEPT INCREASING.



EVERY DAY, ABOUT 100-150 PEOPLE SHOWED UP.

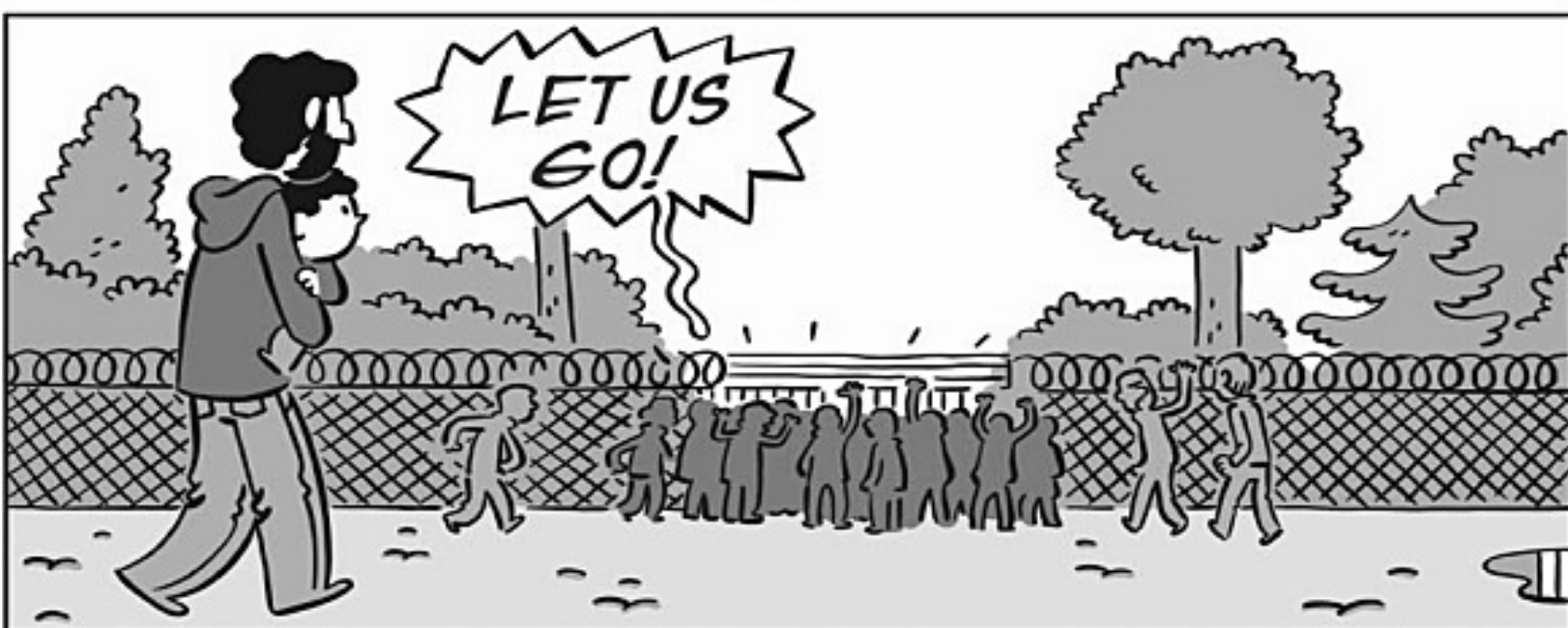


WHILE ONLY 50 OF US LEFT.

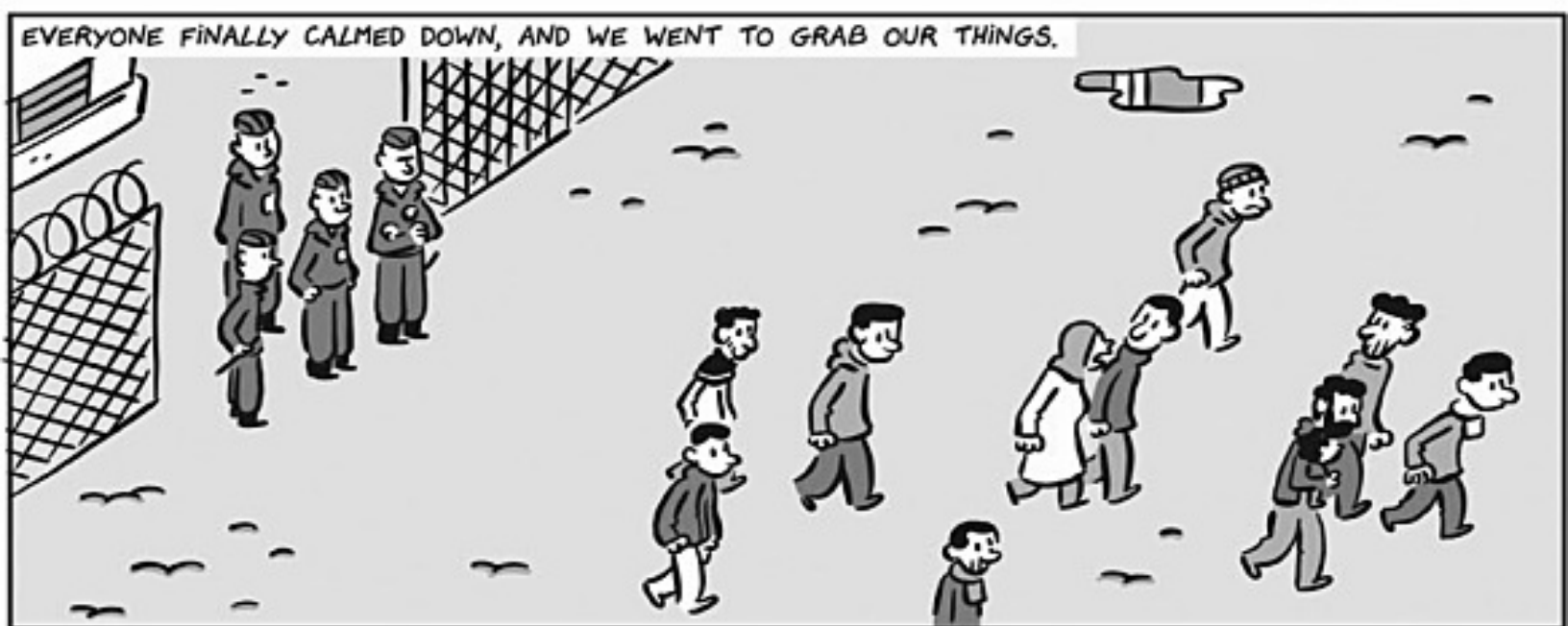
SO OUR LIVING CONDITIONS GOT WORSE AND WORSE.











WHEN I GOT BACK, THERE WERE THREE BUSES WAITING AT THE GATES.



IT WAS 10 A.M.



ON THE ONE HAND,
I FELT FREE.



WE GET TO TAKE OFF
OUR WRISTBANDS, HADI.

ON THE OTHER, THE
WHOLE THING SEEMED
STRANGE TO ME, AND I
WONDERED IF IT WAS
A TRAP.



NO, HADI, COME ON!

WE'RE NOT
KEEPING THEM...



AFTER A FEW MINUTES OF DRIVING, THE BUSES PARKED AT THE TRAIN STATION IN A NEARBY TOWN.



WE CROWDED INSIDE THE STATION.



WE'RE PUTTING YOU ON A TRAIN TO ANOTHER CAMP SO YOU CAN GET THE PAPERS WE TOLD YOU ABOUT.



THAT TRAIN IS LEAVING IN ONE HOUR.



WHILE WE WAIT, YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE THE STATION.

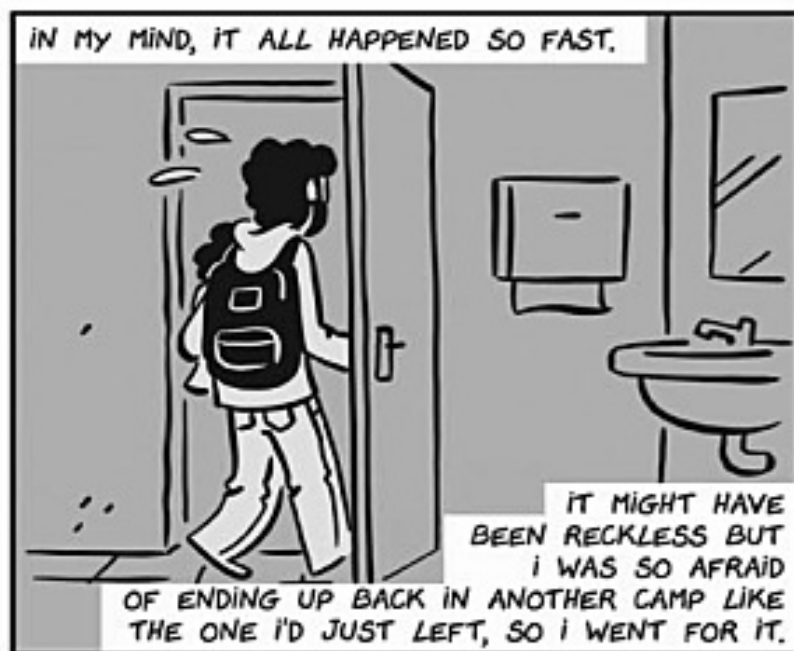


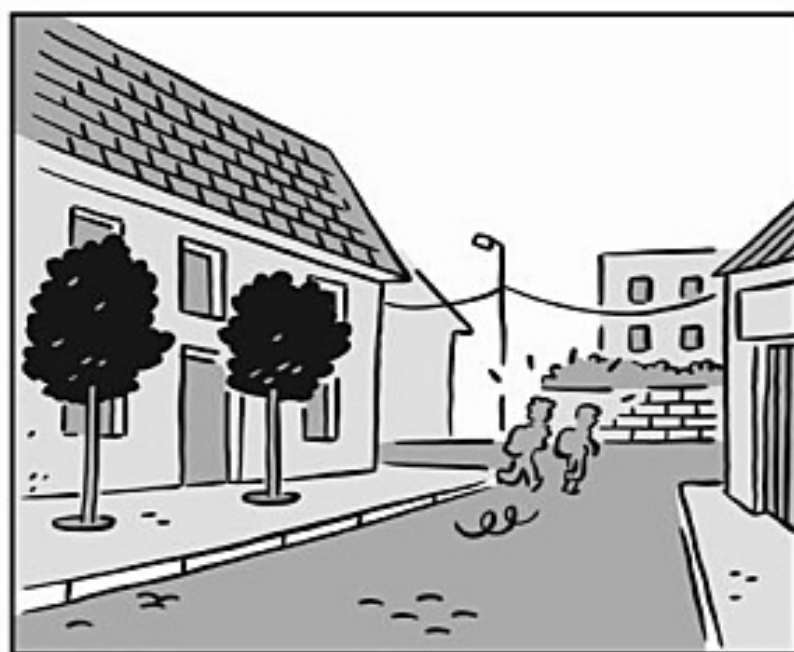
ANYWAY, IF YOU DO LEAVE, YOU WON'T HAVE PAPERS AND NO ONE WILL AGREE TO TRANSPORT YOU.

YOU'LL JUST END UP GETTING ARRESTED AND TAKEN BACK TO THE CAMP YOU CAME FROM.













AND THEN WE RAN INTO SOMEONE WHO,
TO THIS DAY, I THANK HEAVEN THAT WE MET.



I LEFT MY COUNTRY
10 YEARS AGO.



I WAS ALSO
PLANNING TO
GO TO FRANCE.

AND THEN I SETTLED
HERE IN HUNGARY.



I'M DOING WELL. I RECENTLY
GAINED NATIONALITY.



WHY DON'T YOU STAY HERE?

I HAVE TO GET TO MY GIRLFRIEND.



AND MY
WIFE.

WELL, IF IT'S FOR LOVE, I GUESS
IT'S WORTH IT!!



DO YOU
KNOW
WHERE WE
CAN FIND
A CAB?

WE WANT
TO GET TO
BUDAPEST.



A CAB?



IN YOUR
SITUATION,
IT'S TRICKY...

I HAVE A
FRIEND WHO'S
A DRIVER. I'LL
SEE WHAT
HE SAYS.



TAP!
TAP!





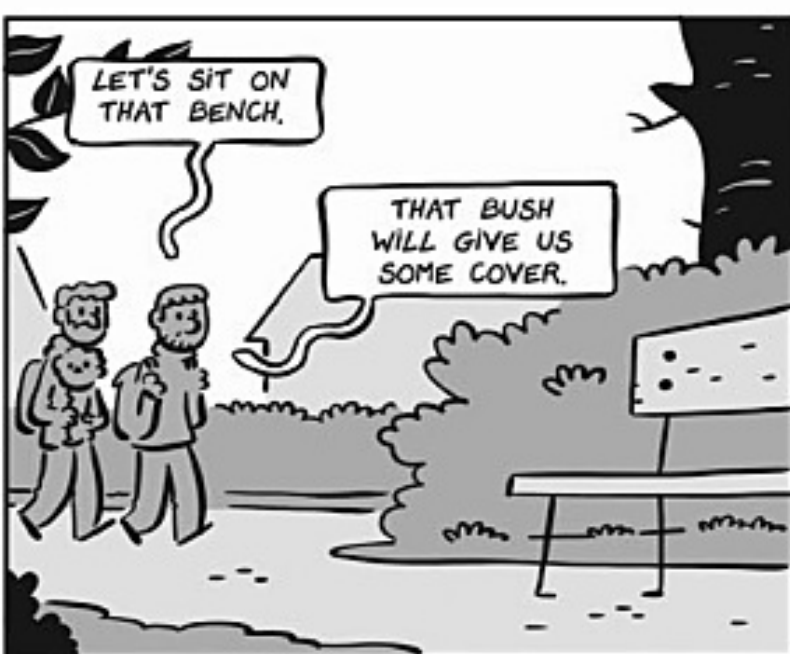
WE DROVE THROUGH TOWN.



AND THE DRIVER STOPPED IN FRONT OF A
PARK FAR FROM THE TOWN CENTER.



THERE WEREN'T MANY PEOPLE IN THE PARK.



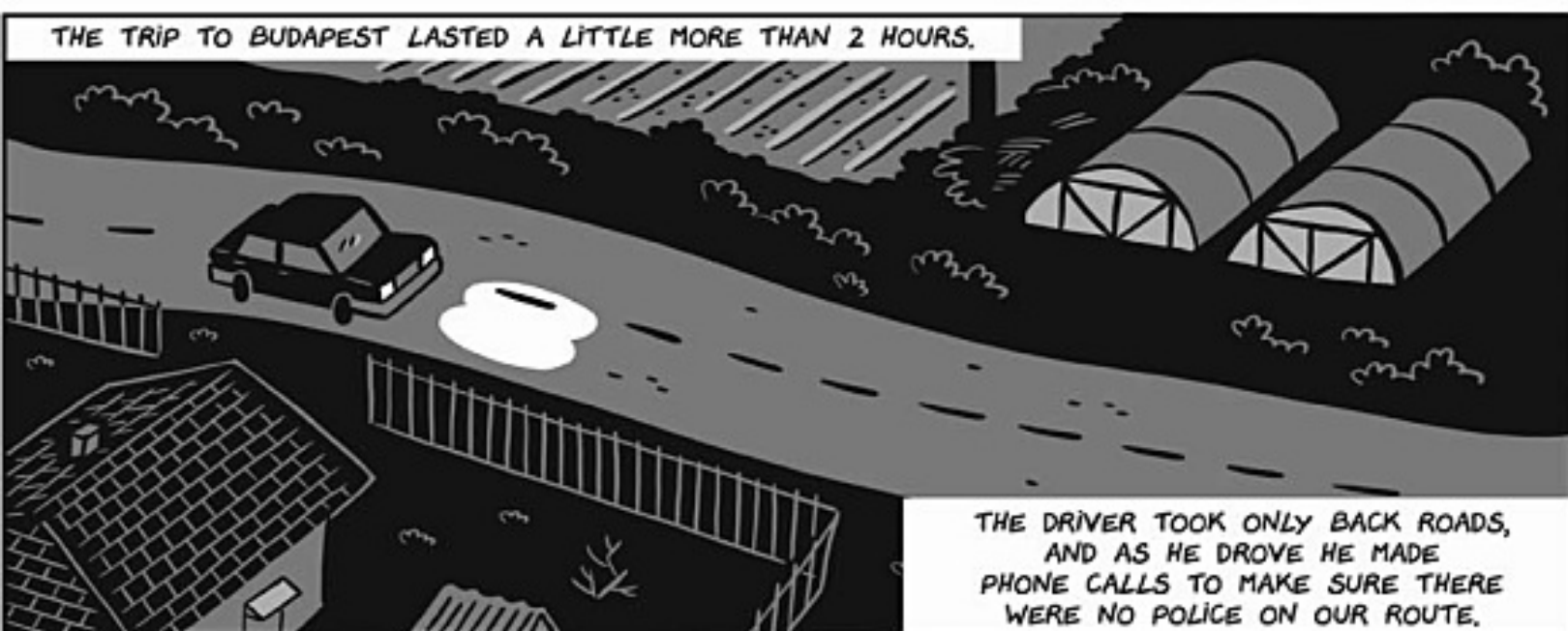
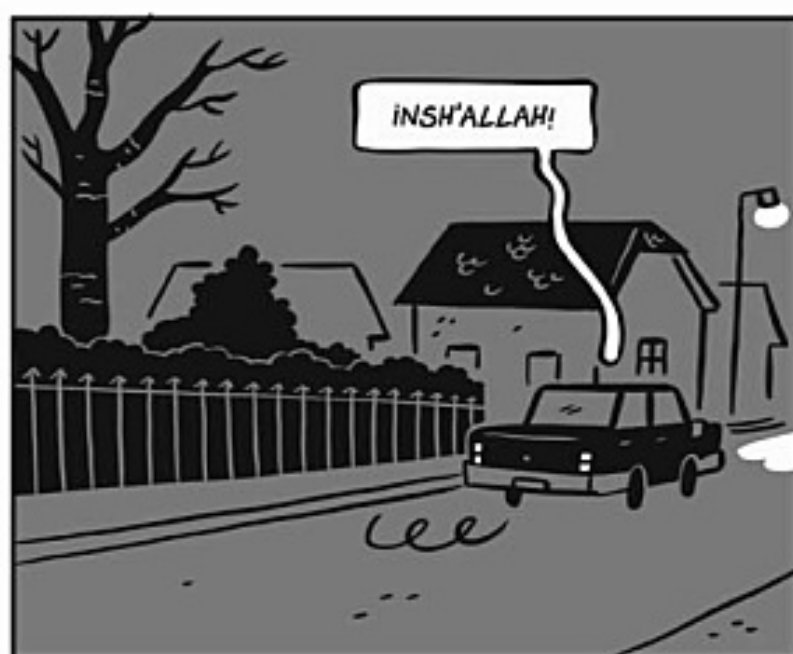


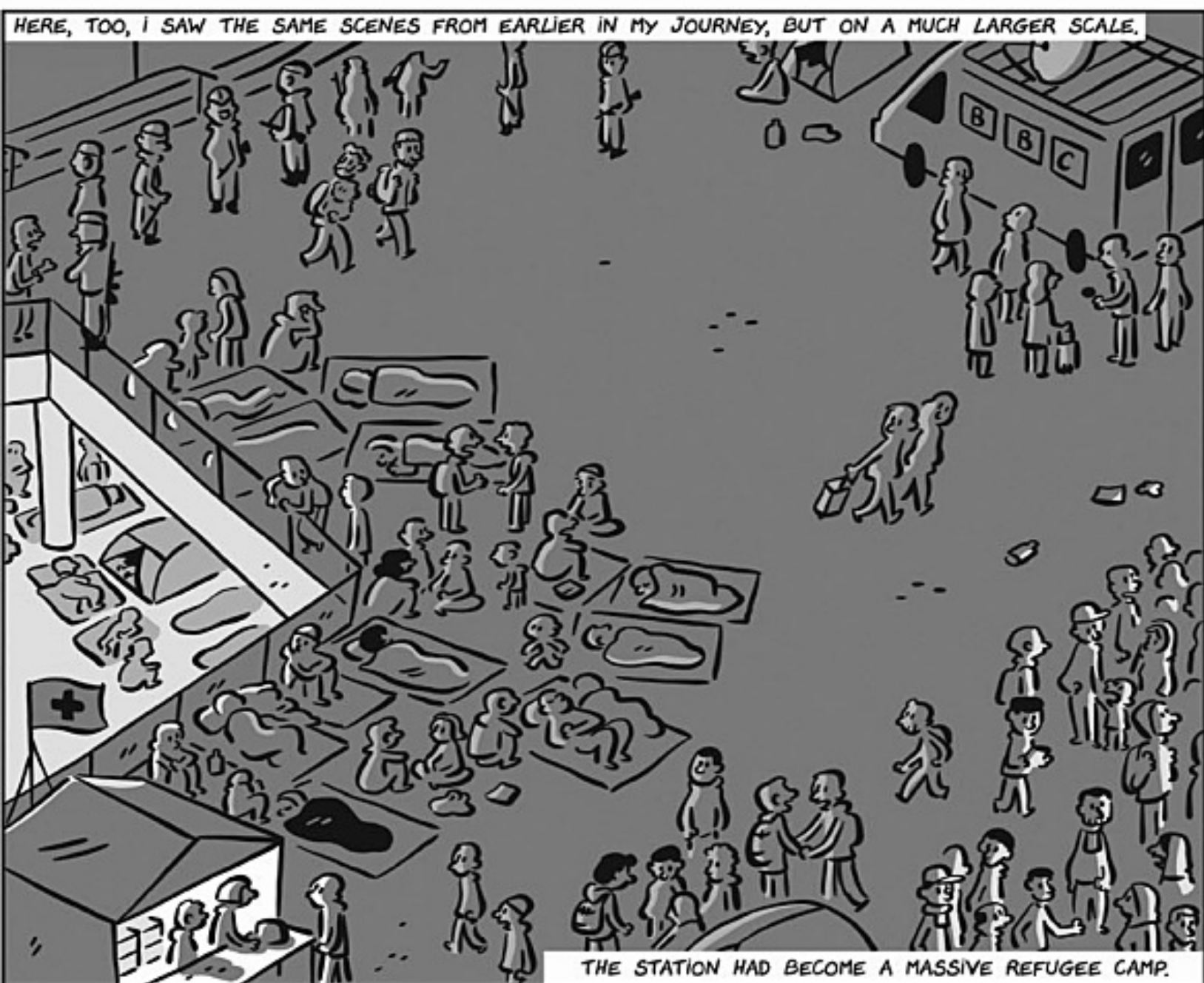
*A CITY IN NORTHERN SYRIA.







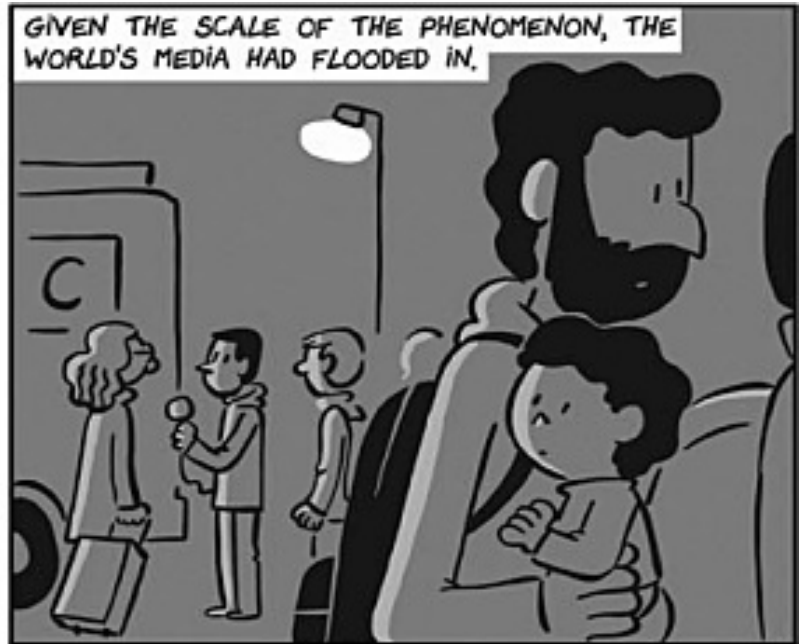




THERE WERE THOUSANDS.



GIVEN THE SCALE OF THE PHENOMENON, THE WORLD'S MEDIA HAD FLOODED IN.



I DON'T LIKE THESE PEOPLE. THEY'RE DIRTY, THEY STINK.*

PLUS, THEY TRAVEL FOR FREE, GET TAKEN CARE OF FOR FREE, SO US HUNGARIANS ARE FOOTING THE BILL.*



HAVE YOU TRIED TALKING WITH THEM TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THEM?

NO, AND I WOULDN'T WANT TO.*

I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY'RE FROM OR WHY THEY'RE HERE.*

I JUST WANT THEM TO LEAVE.



*QUOTES FROM RTL RADIO, 8/30/2015, PHILIPPE ROBUCHON & FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

THANK YOU, I'M BRICE DUGÉNIE WITH RTL.



INSIDE THE STATION, IT WAS EVEN WORSE.

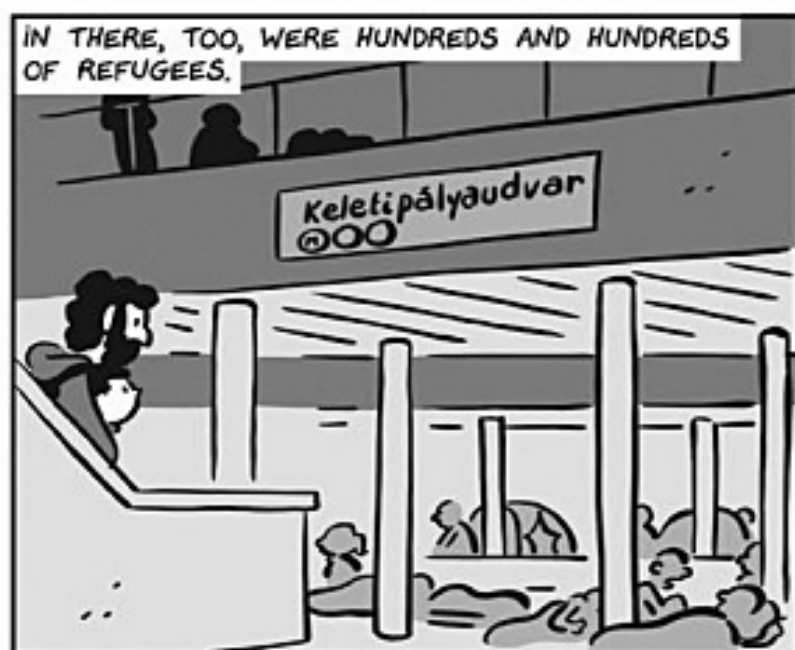


A HUGE CROWD OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WAS TRYING TO GET THROUGH THE LINE OF POLICE TO REACH THE PLATFORMS.













THAT NIGHT WAS REALLY HARD.



THE COLD, THE NOISE, THE LIGHT, THE STRESS.



AND THE THREATS...





WHEN WE CAME OUT OF THE SUBWAY, HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WERE RUNNING TOWARD THE DOORS TO THE STATION.



SO WE SET OFF
TO FIND OUR CAB.











THE BUS ARRIVED AROUND 3 P.M.



AND 30 MINUTES LATER...



WE REACHED OUR DESTINATION.



IT WAS A TINY LITTLE VILLAGE.





OH, OK! THAT'S FINE!

ANYWAY, IF YOU EVER DO WANT
TO HEAD THAT WAY, BE AWARE
THERE ARE POLICE ALL OVER.

IT'S CALMER
AROUND
9 P.M.
THOUGH.

THANKS.

BUT WHAT WOULD
WE DO WHILE
WE WAIT?

IS THERE ANOTHER
ROUTE?

THERE'S A LITTLE PARK OUTSIDE THE
VILLAGE. YOU'LL BE SAFE THERE.

I SUGGEST
YOU GO THERE
AND WAIT.

WE'RE HUNGRY. DO YOU KNOW WHERE
WE COULD GET SOMETHING TO EAT?





AFTER WE'D WALKED FOR 15 MINUTES, WE GOT TO THE LITTLE PARK THE MAN HAD TOLD US ABOUT.



IT WAS AN AREA AT THE EDGE OF A FOREST.



IT WAS MORE OF A FIELD THAN A PARK, REALLY.

THE PLACE WAS DESERTED, AND IT WAS VERY COLD.



AND HALF AN HOUR AFTER WE GOT THERE, NAWAL ARRIVED WITH THE MAN.



I GOT COOKIES, BREAD, AND WATER.

EXCELLENT.



AND YOU SHOULD CUT THROUGH THE FOREST, IT'S SAFER.

THERE ARE MORE POLICE THAN I EXPECTED IN THE VILLAGE.

I'D SUGGEST YOU LEAVE AT DAWN TOMORROW, NOT TONIGHT.









RESIGNED, WE HEADED INTO THE FOREST.



THE COLD WAS GLACIAL. IT WAS PITCH BLACK.



WE SAT DOWN AT THE BASE OF A TREE, HUDDLED TOGETHER TO GET THROUGH THE NIGHT.









WAAA

AAH!



OOOOOOOHHHH

SNIFF!
SNIFF!

THE WORST NIGHT OF MY JOURNEY, AS I SAID.





WE WALKED FOR A LITTLE OVER AN HOUR.

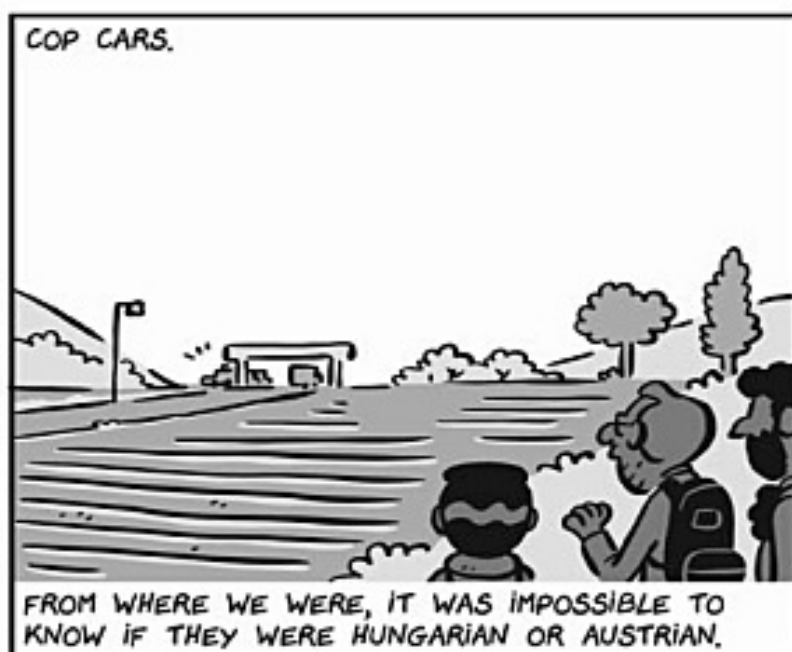
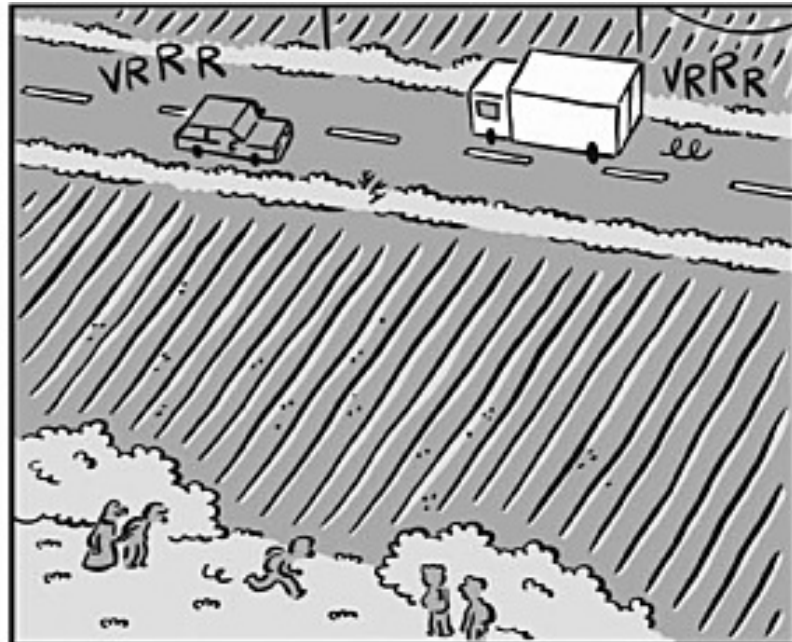


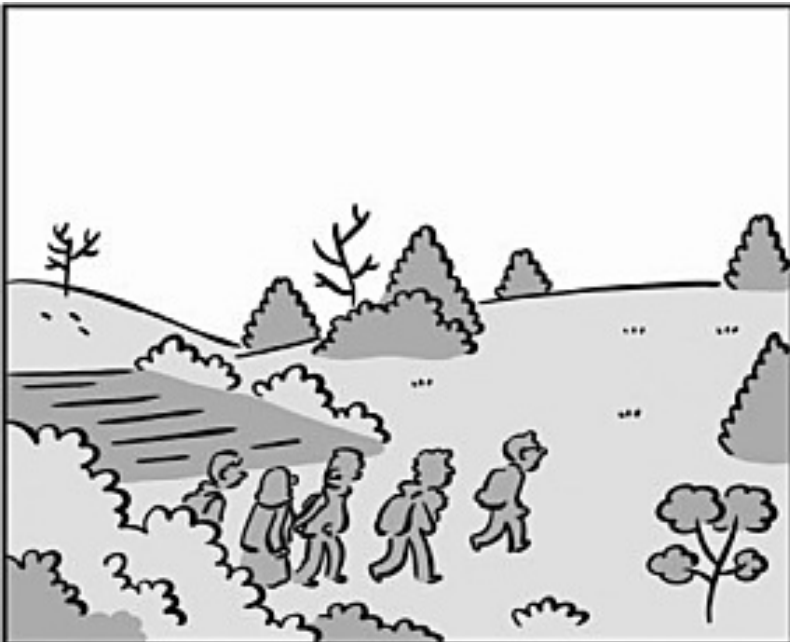


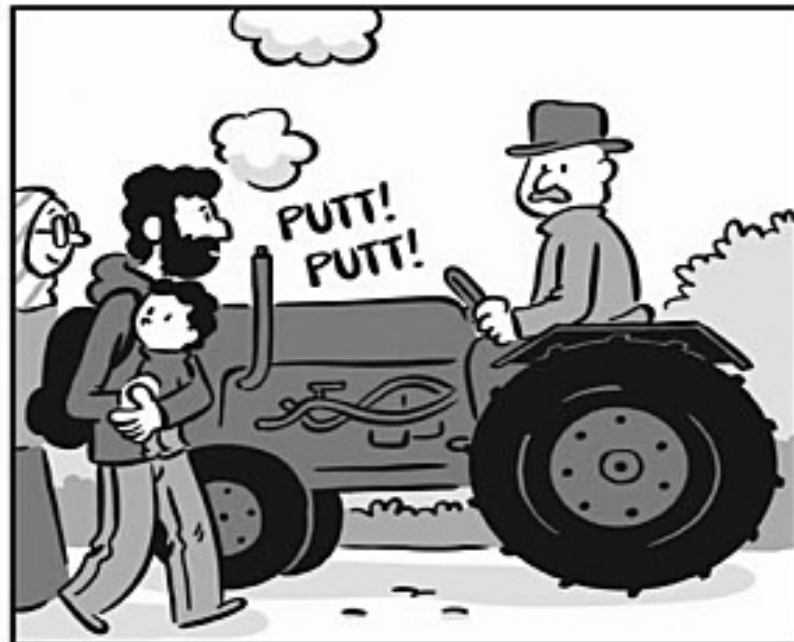


AND THEN WE SAW, OVER AT THE STATION, A TRUCK DRIVER WHO WAS WAVING AT US.

















Chapter 14: Austria and Switzerland (Late September 2015)



"I'M CALLING BECAUSE I'M IN VIENNA
AND I NEED YOUR HELP."

ON THE BUS, THE ATMOSPHERE AMONG THE REFUGEES WAS LIGHTEARTED.



PEOPLE WERE EVEN SMILING.



SOMETHING I'D RARELY SEEN SINCE LEAVING TURKEY.



EVERY PERSON ON THAT BUS HAD BEEN THROUGH DIFFICULT THINGS.



AND ALL OF US WERE RELIEVED TO HAVE MADE IT TO AUSTRIA.



I WAS SEATED NEXT TO A SYRIAN (HONESTLY, ALMOST ALL OF THE PASSENGERS WERE SYRIAN), AND WE TALKED A LITTLE BIT ABOUT OUR JOURNEYS.



ONE MORNING, AT THE BUDAPEST STATION, THEY CHARTERED TWO TRAINS.

ONE GOING TO GERMANY, THE OTHER AUSTRIA.

YES, I REMEMBER, I WAS THERE FOR THAT.

WHEN THEY MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT, IT WAS MAYHEM, EVERYONE WANTED ON, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY WERE TAKING PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T HAVE TICKETS.



I MANAGED TO GET ON BOARD.

I WAS RELIEVED.



THE TRAIN TRAVELED FOR A LITTLE WHILE, THEN STOPPED NEAR THE BORDER.



BUT STILL IN HUNGARY.

WHICH SEEMED STRANGE.

THEY REALLY JUST WANTED TO PUT US BACK IN CAMPS.

IT WAS ALL A TRICK TO CLEAR OUT THE STATION.



WE ALL PROTESTED AND THE POLICE WERE OVERWHELMED. THEY COULDN'T HOLD US.



I TOOK MY CHANCE AND RAN.

IT WAS LUCKY I'D GONE WITH NIHAD'S FAMILY.



AFTER A FEW MINUTES OF DRIVING,
THE BUS CAME TO A TOWN.



AND IT STOPPED IN FRONT OF A BIG WAREHOUSE.



IT LOOKED LIKE A UTILITY SERVICE SITE.



A YOUNG VOLUNTEER GREETED US IN ARABIC.



YOU'RE HERE SO
WE CAN REGISTER
YOU AND GIVE
YOU PAPERS TO
SHOW YOU'RE IN
GOOD STANDING.





TO THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE BEEN IN CAMPS IN HUNGARY, PLEASE DON'T WORRY.



THIS IS JUST TO GET YOUR STATUSES SORTED OUT.

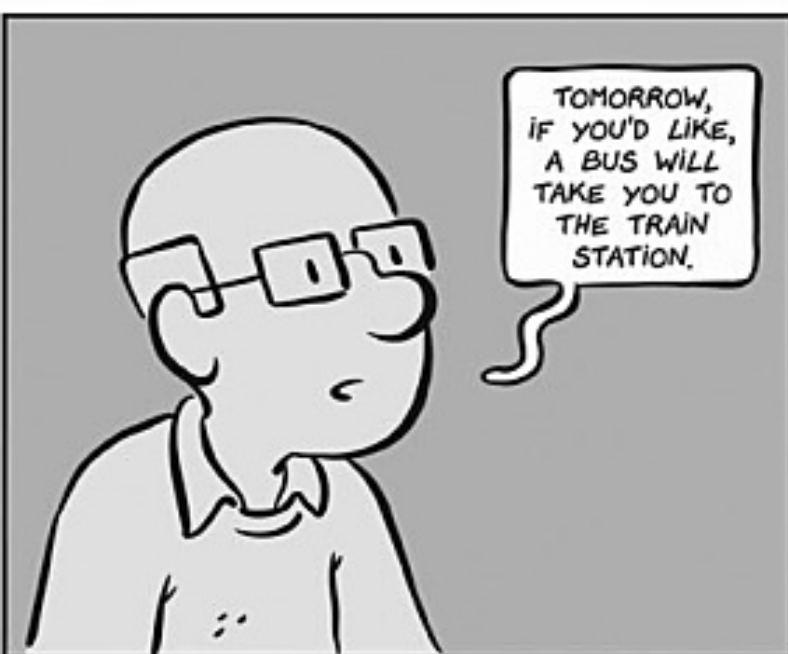


WHILE YOU WAIT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMAIN IN THE WAREHOUSE.





IN LATE AFTERNOON, A PERSON FROM IMMIGRATION SERVICES CAME TO REGISTER OUR REQUESTS.



WE WERE ALL IN GOOD SPIRITS, AND I TALKED WITH NIHAD AND HIS FAMILY UNTIL MIDNIGHT.

SO? WHERE EXACTLY IN GERMANY ARE YOU GOING?



DORTMUND.

A BIG CITY
IN THE NORTH.

THEY HAVE
A GREAT
SOCCER TEAM!



THAT'S NOT WHY WE PICKED IT.

HAHA!

IT'S MAINLY BECAUSE I HAVE
A COUSIN WHO LIVES THERE.



IF ALL GOES WELL, WE'LL
BE THERE IN 2 OR 3 DAYS.



AND YOU?

AIX-EN-
PROVENCE.



BUT THEY DON'T HAVE A SOCCER TEAM.

HAHA!

HAHA!



THAT NIGHT, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A VERY LONG WHILE, I WAS ABLE TO SLEEP DEEPLY AND PEACEFULLY.



WHEN I WOKE UP, IT WAS LATE.



THE WAREHOUSE WAS ALMOST EMPTY AND NEW MIGRANTS WERE COMING IN.



EVEN NIHAD AND HIS FAMILY HAD LEFT.



I WAS A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED, BUT AS I'VE SAID BEFORE, WE WERE TRAVEL COMPANIONS WHO SHARED A COMMON GOAL.



THOUGH, TO TELL THE TRUTH, A FEW DAYS LATER, NIHAD WROTE TO ME AND EXPLAINED THAT THEY'D LEFT ON THE FIRST BUS AROUND 4 A.M. AND HADN'T WANTED TO WAKE ME.









THE STATION WAS HUGE.



I WANDERED AROUND,
WONDERING HOW TO FIND
A TRAIN TO FRANCE.



MY FIRST INSTINCT WAS TO BE
AFRAID EVEN THOUGH MY PAPERS WERE IN ORDER.



WHEN YOU'RE USED TO
HIDING FROM PEOPLE IN
UNIFORM, YOU DEVELOP A
KIND OF INTRINSIC FEAR.









HE WAS SURPRISED, AND WANTED TO COME RIGHT AWAY TO PICK ME UP AT THE STATION AND TAKE ME TO HIS HOUSE.





*AUNTIE.



THEY HAD 10 KIDS...



WE SPENT THE REST OF THE AFTERNOON TALKING
ABOUT MY JOURNEY, SYRIA, AND THEIR LIFE IN AUSTRIA.



I GOT TO SHAVE AND TAKE A SHOWER, AND IN THE EARLY EVENING HE TOOK ME BACK TO THE STATION.

SEE YOU, AMMTI.



GOODBYE, BOYS.

AND GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR STUDIES.

THANKS.



SAFE TRAVELS, HAKIM.

ONCE YOU'RE SETTLED IN FRANCE, COME BACK AND SEE US. WE'RE NOT FAR.

I WILL!



HERE, FOR YOUR TICKET.

THANKS, AMMTI.



ON THE WAY TO MY TRAIN, I LOOKED AT THE PEOPLE AROUND ME.



I THOUGHT ABOUT THEM GOING TO WORK, OR TO SEE FAMILY OR FRIENDS.



IN THAT MOMENT, I REALIZED THAT IT HAD BEEN MONTHS, YEARS EVEN, SINCE I'D LIVED IN THE SAME WORLD AS THEM.



I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS FEELING, BUT IT WAS LIKE I WAS IN A PARALLEL UNIVERSE.



AND I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET BACK TO REAL LIFE, TO BE ON MY WAY TO WORK, MY FAMILY, MY FRIENDS.

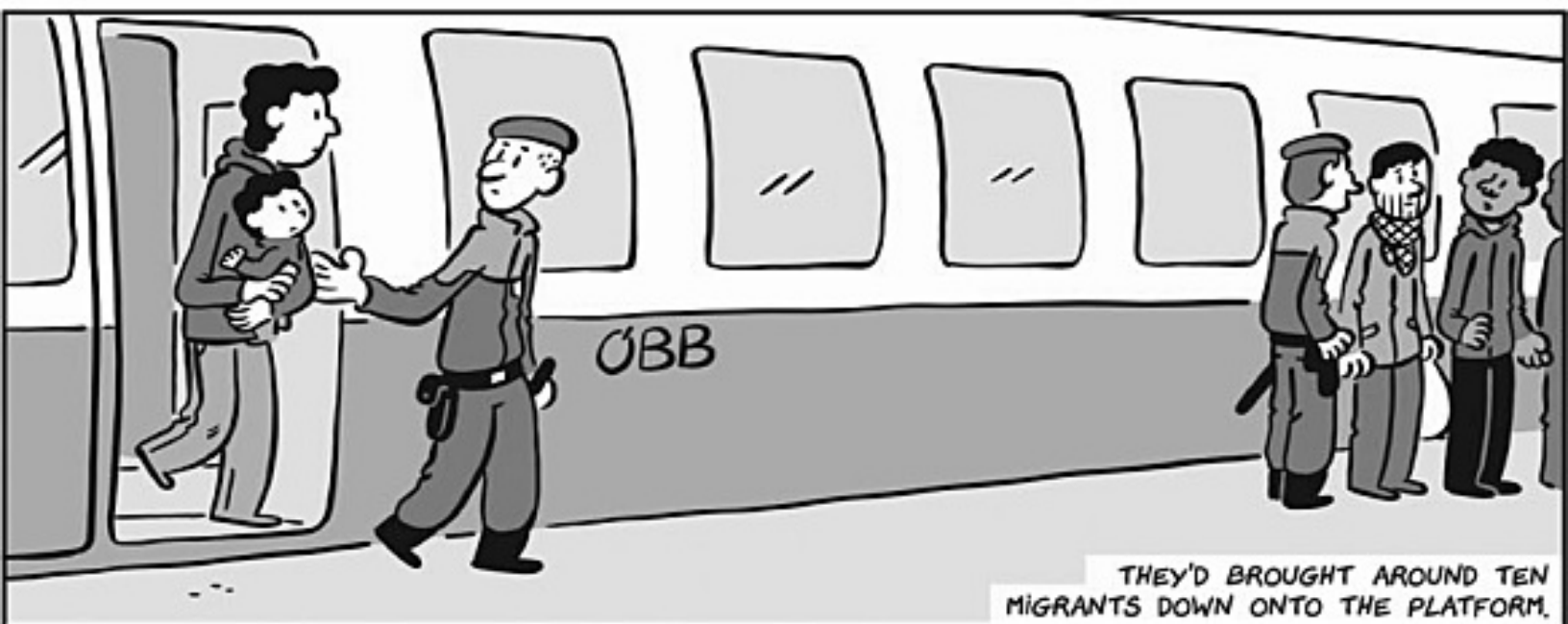


FOR TOO LONG I'D BEEN RUNNING AFTER SOMETHING THAT ELUDED ME.









THEY STARTED SEARCHING US.



IS THIS YOUR SON?



COME ON, SWEETIE, IT'S OK, CALM DOWN.



DESTINATION?

FRANCE.



WHY?

MY WIFE LIVES THERE.



WHERE'S YOUR FRENCH VISA?

I DON'T HAVE ONE.



BUT YOU SAID YOUR WIFE LIVES THERE.

YES, I'M JOINING HER.

AND SHE HAS A VISA?

YES.



YOU'RE COMING WITH US. YOU CAN'T STAY ON THIS TRAIN.

WE'LL GET THIS ALL CLEARED UP.



WAIT, LET ME GO, I'M BEGGING YOU!!

I HAVE TO GET TO MY WIFE!





TO THIS DAY, I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED.



I DON'T KNOW IF THEY FELT BAD.



OR IF MAYBE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO DEAL WITH A REFUGEE WITH A BABY.



ESPECIALLY WITH A DIAPER THAT SMELLED OF POOP, HAHA!



IN ANY CASE, I COULDN'T CHANGE HIM.



I WAS SO SHAKEN UP BY WHAT HAD JUST HAPPENED THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK AND FIND IT.



I SANK INTO THE FIRST OPEN SEAT THAT I FOUND.



AND I DIDN'T MOVE AGAIN UNTIL THE TRAIN ARRIVED.



AT THE STATION IN ZURICH, THERE WERE A LOT OF POLICE.



I HAD AN HOUR TO KILL BEFORE MY TRAIN LEFT FOR PARIS.



SO I WENT AND SAT IN A CORNER OF THE STATION, AND I DIDN'T MOVE AGAIN UNTIL IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE.



WHEN MY TRAIN ARRIVED, AS I WALKED TO THE PLATFORM, I PRAYED NOT TO RUN INTO ANY POLICE.



AND THERE I WAS!
GETTING ON THE TRAIN TO FRANCE!

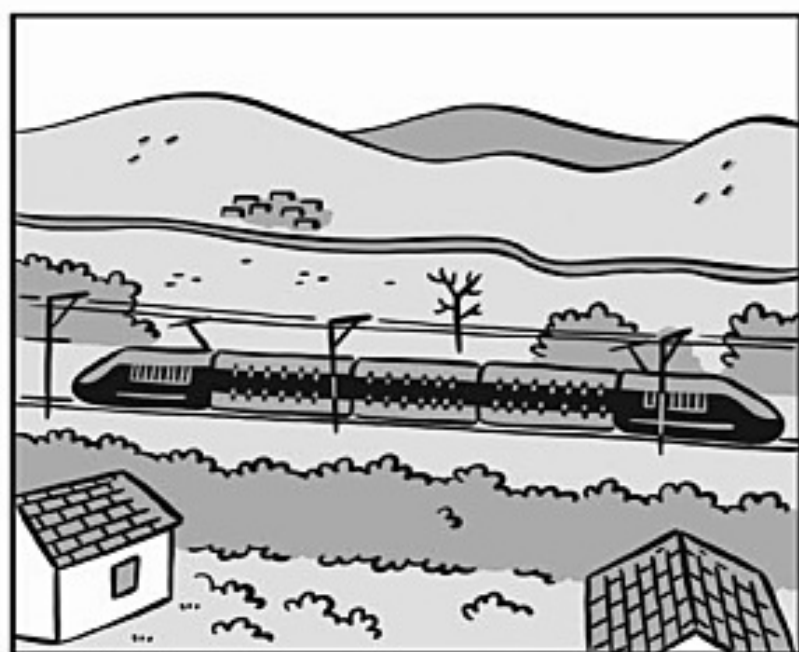
THE CAR WAS FULL
OF PEOPLE TRAVELING
FOR WORK.



WITH THEIR SUITS
AND LAPTOPS...



I STOOD OUT A LITTLE.



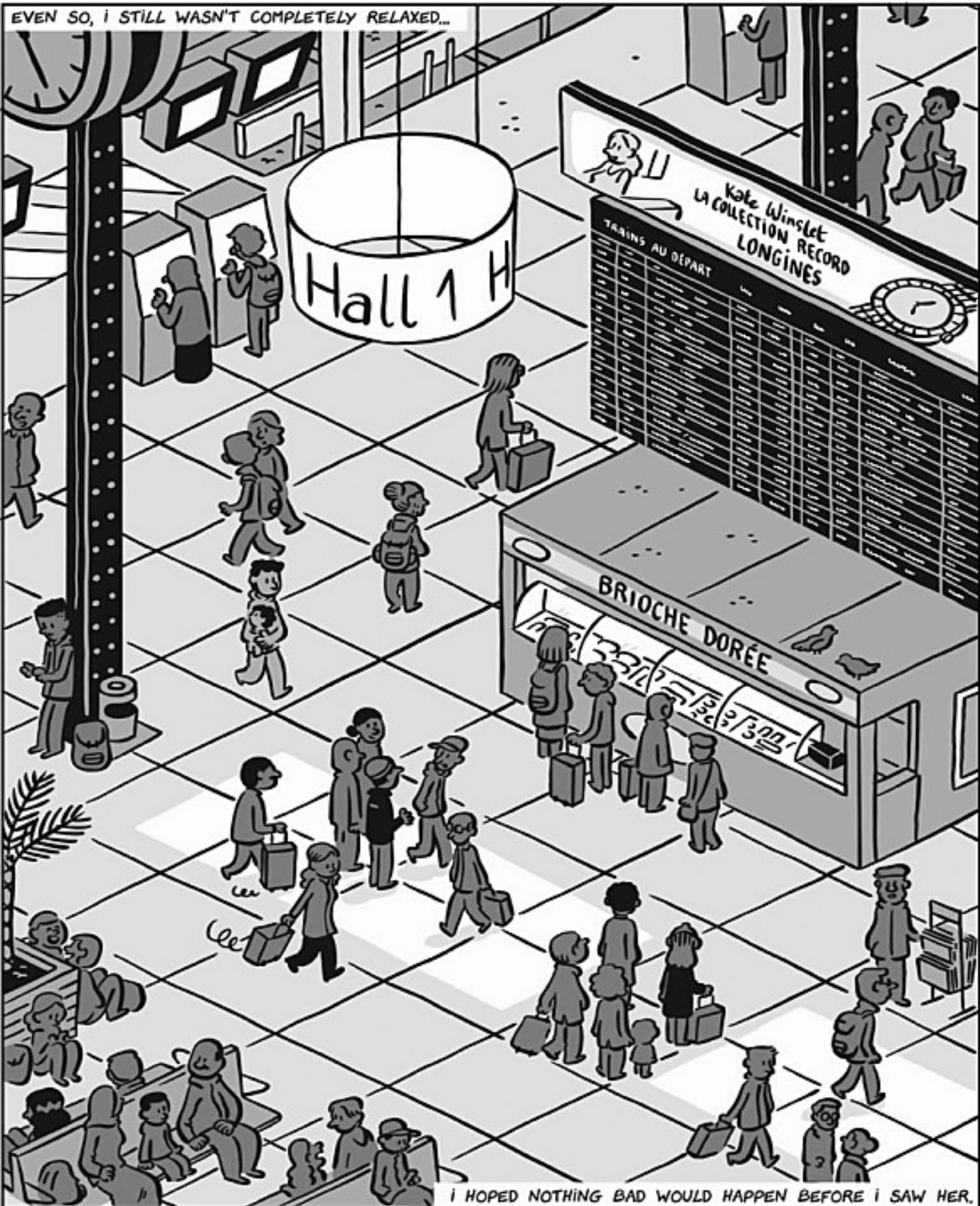
Chapter 15: France (Late September 2015)



"i LEFT HOME ALMOST 3 YEARS AGO."



EVEN SO, I STILL WASN'T COMPLETELY RELAXED...



I HOPED NOTHING BAD WOULD HAPPEN BEFORE I SAW HER.







EARLIEST POSSIBLE DEPARTURE?

YES.



GIVE ME
YOUR CARD.

MY
WHAT?

MY PASSPORT?



NO, A PAYMENT CARD.

A CREDIT
CARD.

I DON'T
HAVE ONE.



THEN HOW ARE YOU
GONNA PAY?

IT ONLY
TAKES CARDS.



CAN YOU PAY WITH
YOUR CARD AND I'LL
GIVE YOU THIS?

I THINK
IT'S
ENOUGH.



SURE, SINCE
YOU'VE TRAVELED
SO FAR TO
GET HERE.

THANKS!



THE TRAIN WAS IN 2 HOURS.



I HAD A LITTLE MONEY LEFT TO BUY DIAPERS AND COOKIES.



AND BEFORE WE SAW NAJMEH, I WANTED US TO BE PRESENTABLE, TO SMELL NICE.



FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WE'D LEFT, I NOTICED HOW MUCH WE'D BEEN PHYSICALLY AFFECTED.



UNTIL THAT POINT—FUELED BY FEAR, ADRENALINE, AND THE WILL TO SUCCEED—I HADN'T PAID THIS ANY ATTENTION.

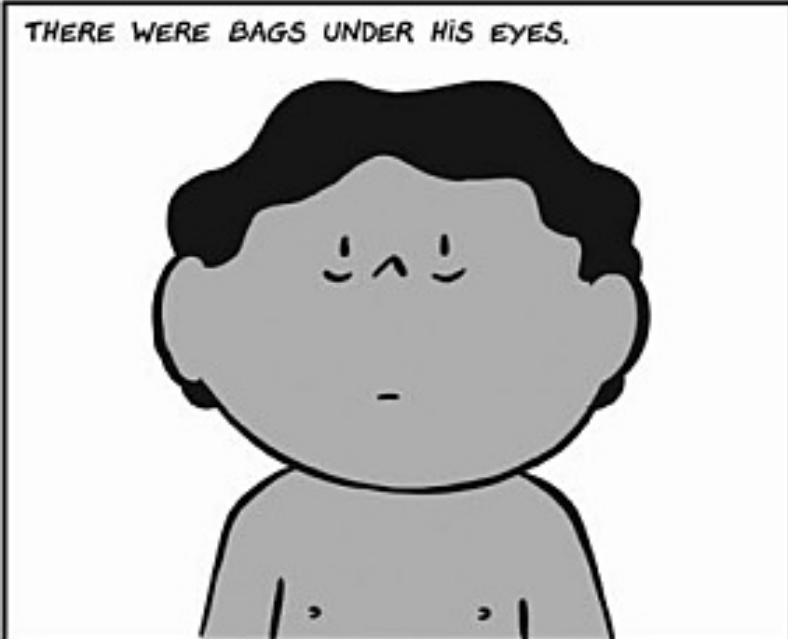
HADI'S LITTLE FEET WERE COVERED IN BLISTERS.

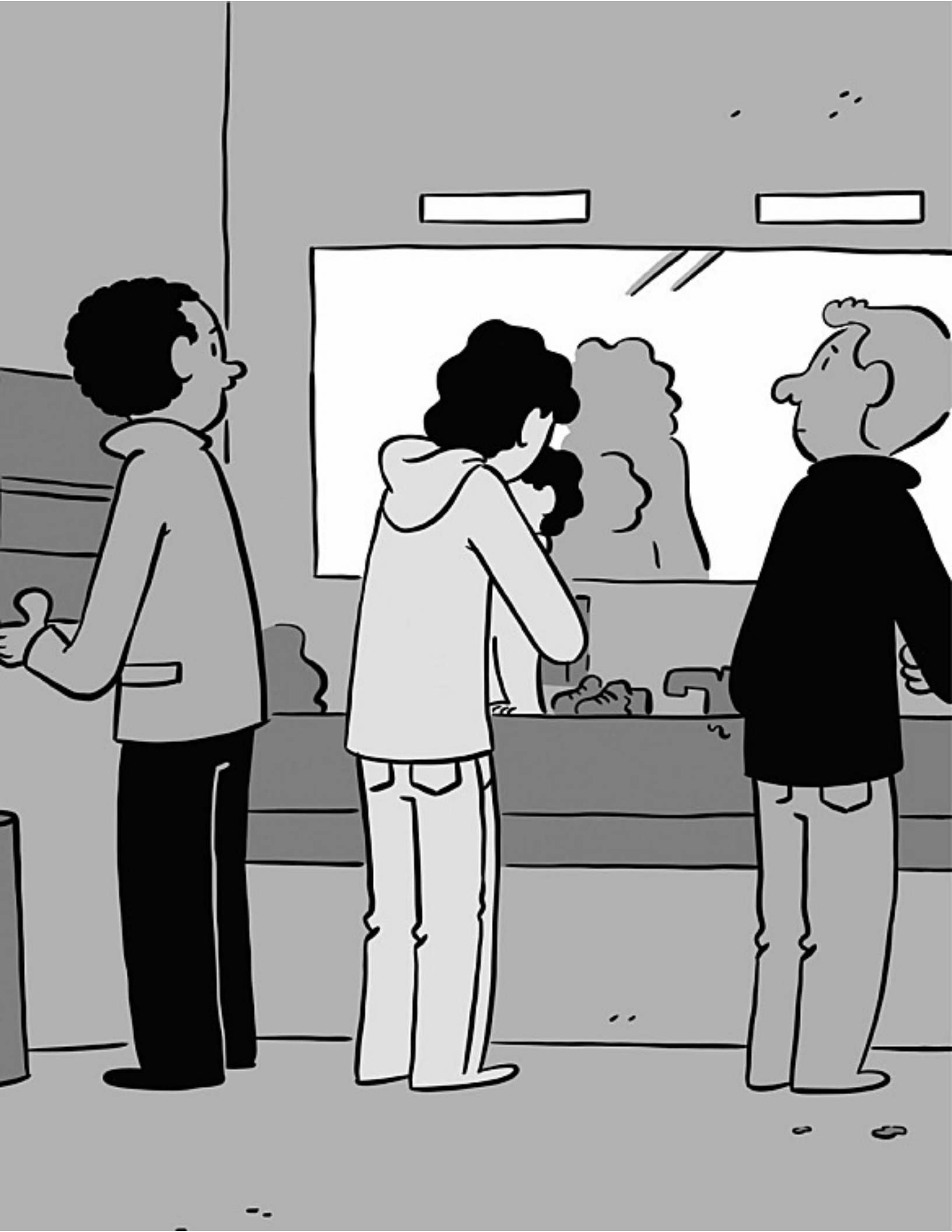


HE WAS VERY THIN.



THERE WERE BAGS UNDER HIS EYES.





THERE WAS STILL A LITTLE TIME LEFT BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE, SO I WENT OUTSIDE TO SMOKE.



AND TO GET A GOOD LOOK AT THE COUNTRY THAT I'D BEEN TRYING TO REACH FOR SO LONG.

I ALSO THOUGHT IT WAS BEAUTIFUL TO SEE THE ETHNIC MIXTURE THERE, UNLIKE ANY I'D SEEN.



I SAW A HIVE OF ACTIVITY: EVERYONE SEEMED TO BE IN A HURRY, RUNNING EVERY WHICH WAY WITHOUT TALKING OR LOOKING AT EACH OTHER BUT STILL MANAGING NOT TO RUN INTO EACH OTHER.

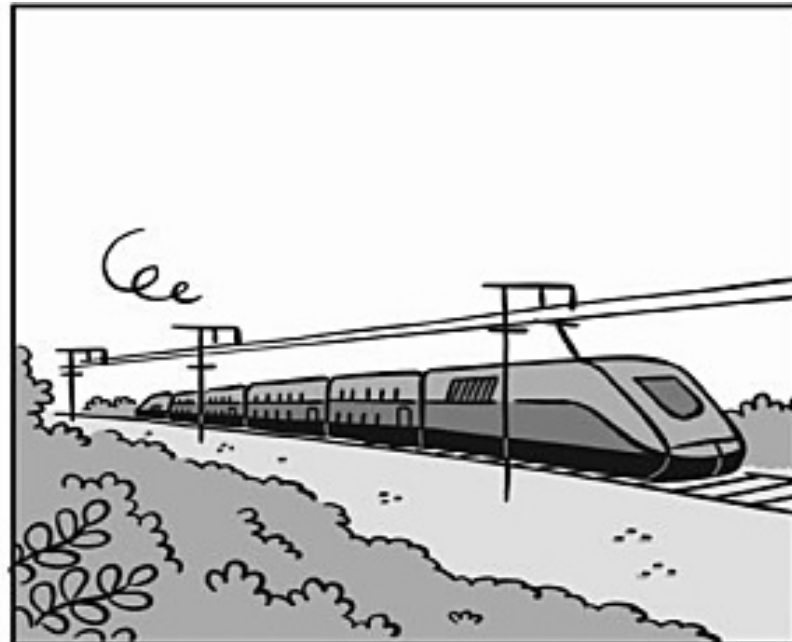


AND THEN I THOUGHT I SAW THE EIFFEL TOWER OVERLOOKING THE CITY, LIKE A MOUNTAIN, BUT I WAS WRONG, HAHA!





MY EXCITEMENT AND STRESS GREW
AS WE GOT CLOSER.



WHEN THE TRAIN STOPPED, I RUSHED THROUGH
THE DOORS.



I WAS SO AFRAID THAT IT WOULD LEAVE BEFORE I
COULD GET OFF.



















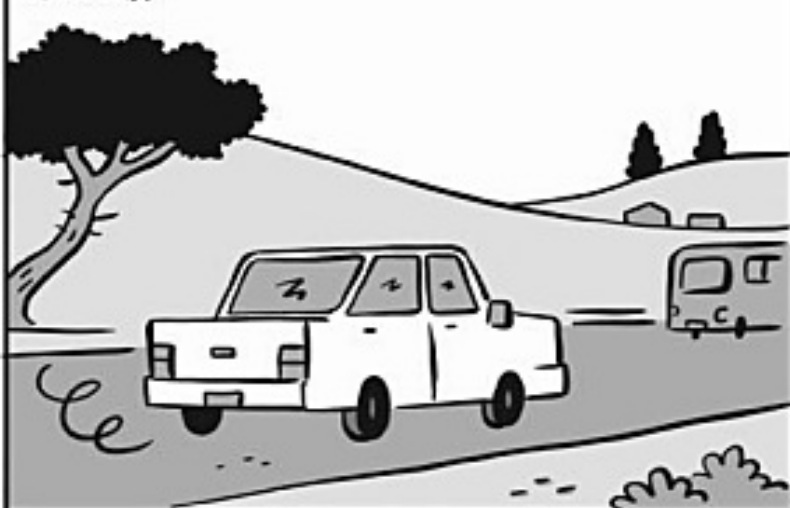
IT'S TRUE THAT IT MAKES FOR
A NICE ENDING TO A BOOK.



BUT THAT WOULD MEAN CONCEALING THE FACT
THAT, IN "REAL LIFE," HIS STORY DIDN'T END
WHEN HE GOT TO AIX-EN-PROVENCE.



ONCE THE JOY OF REUNIFICATION HAD PASSED,
HAKIM AND HIS FAMILY HAD TO FACE THE HARSH
REALITY OF INTEGRATION INTO THEIR NEW
COUNTRY.



FOR THOSE FIRST FEW DAYS, THEY MOVED INTO
THE FAMILY APARTMENT.



ACCOMMODATIONS WHERE A PORTION
OF THE RENT WAS HANDLED BY
A REFUGEE AID ASSOCIATION.



UNFORTUNATELY, AFTER 3 DAYS, THE ASSOCIATION
TOLD THEM THEY COULD NO LONGER
STAY THERE.



AND THEY WERE FORCED
TO LEAVE THE APARTMENT IMMEDIATELY.

FROM THE STREET, THEY IMMEDIATELY CALLED THE RED CROSS, WHO SENT THEM AN AMBULANCE.



SPEAKING ABOUT THIS, HAKIM TOLD ME:



"THE PASSERS-BY WATCHED US. I FELT ASHAMED, EMBARRASSED, HELPLESS."



"IN THE COURSE OF MY JOURNEY, I'D BEEN THROUGH TERRIBLE THINGS, BUT I THINK THAT MOMENT WAS WHEN I FELT IT MOST KEENLY."



"I WAS MADE FULLY AWARE OF MY DROP IN SOCIAL STATUS."



THE AMBULANCE TOOK THE LITTLE FAMILY TO A HOTEL IN MARSEILLE.



"NOT EXACTLY A 5-STAR PLACE," AS HAKIM TOLD ME WITH A LAUGH.



IT WASN'T AN IDEAL PLACE TO RAISE A CHILD, BUT AT LEAST THEY WEREN'T OUT ON THE STREET.



HAKIM KNEW THIS VERY WELL AND RECOGNIZED, EVEN IN THEIR SITUATION, HOW LUCKY THEY WERE.



STARTING THE NEXT DAY, HE BEGAN THE INITIAL STEPS TOWARD GAINING REFUGEE STATUS.



THE PROCESS PROVED LONG AND COMPLEX.



THIS PERIOD IN MARSEILLES WAS VERY HARD ON HAKIM AND HIS FAMILY.



THE ONLY INCOME THEY HAD AVAILABLE WAS THE €20 PER WEEK THAT NAJMEH'S PARENTS WERE LENDING THEM.

HAKIM TOLD ME THEY SKIPPED A LOT OF MEALS DURING THIS TIME.



AND THEIR DAYS WERE SPENT WAITING.



WITHOUT A PERMANENT ADDRESS, HAKIM HAD TO SPEND HOURS EACH DAY IN LINE, WAITING TO CHECK IF HE'D RECEIVED AN APPOINTMENT FROM THE PREFECTURE.



THIS WAS THE CRITICAL STEP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ASYLUM APPLICATION PROCESS.

AFTER TWO LONG MONTHS, THEY RECEIVED NOTICE OF THE LONG-AWAITED APPOINTMENT AND THINGS COULD MOVE FORWARD.



TO START, WHILE THE APPLICATION WAS BEING PROCESSED, THE FAMILY COULD RECEIVE AN ALLOWANCE AS ASYLUM SEEKERS.



IT WASN'T THE HEIGHT OF LUXURY, BUT IT MEANT THEY COULD EAT THEIR FILL AGAIN.

AND THEN THEY STARTED LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE TO STAY, AS LIVING CONDITIONS AT THE HOTEL WERE VERY DIFFICULT.



WITH THE HELP OF A REFUGEE AID ASSOCIATION, THEY FOUND A ROOM IN A WOMAN'S HOUSE.



HAKIM AND HIS FAMILY WERE BOTH HAPPY AND NERVOUS: THEY WOULD BE LIVING WITH SOMEONE THEY DIDN'T KNOW.



ALTHOUGH THE EARLY DAYS REQUIRED A BIT OF ADAPTING, THEY QUICKLY BECAME FRIENDS WITH CATHERINE.



THIS PERIOD WAS VERY REWARDING FOR THEM.



AS THE ASSOCIATION THAT MANAGES PLACEMENTS WITH HOST FAMILIES LIMITS STAYS TO ONE MONTH IN THE SAME PLACE,* THEY THEN HAD TO MOVE TO A NEW HOUSE.



*TO LIMIT THE BURDEN ON THE HOST FAMILIES.

THERE, TOO, THEY HAD TO MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS TO THEIR NEW WAY OF LIFE, BUT THINGS WENT VERY WELL AND FABIEN, TOO, BECAME A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.



THEY HANDLED A PORTION OF THE RENT, AND HAKIM AND NAJMEH CONTRIBUTED €200/MONTH.



THIS TIME, THEY WERE HOSTED BY FABIEN (A GREAT NAME!), A MAN IN HIS SIXTIES WHO FREQUENTLY TOOK IN REFUGEES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.



THEN, IN APRIL 2016, THE ASSOCIATION FOUND THEM A STUDIO APARTMENT IN TOWN.



THIS WAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT STEP IN THEIR LIVES. HAVING A PLACE TO LIVE MEANT STARTING TO PUT DOWN ROOTS.



AND IT WAS DURING THIS TIME THAT HAKIM AND HADI WERE GRANTED REFUGEE STATUS.



IT WAS LIKE THE SKY WAS STARTING TO CLEAR, EVEN THOUGH THEY STILL HAD A LOT TO DO.



THEY WERE ABLE TO START STUDYING FRENCH.



AND HADI WAS ABLE TO START SCHOOL IN LATE 2016.



HAKIM WAS FINALLY ABLE TO START GETTING ON WITH HIS LIFE, WITH HIS FAMILY.





EPILOGUE

A few weeks after our last interview, in February 2018, Hakim and his family were given a place in low-cost housing. This marked their crossing into one of the final stages of their odyssey.

However, they still have a ways to go. Learning French is arguably the most significant challenge. The language is the key to employment and integration . . .

Today, Hakim understands it quite well and speaks it capably. But despite the classes he's taken since his arrival, he doesn't speak it well enough to get a stable job at a company.

As he puts it: "When you've been through what I have, it's not like you're a 'typical' student. In order to learn, you have to feel well, and it took me a long time to really put myself back together after my journey."

A bit like he did during his journey, trying to stay ready for anything, Hakim decided to do what he could while waiting for something better to come along.

He's become a self-employed entrepreneur and divides his time between providing gardening services to individuals and going to markets to sell Syrian culinary specialties that he makes with Najmeh. They're not living in poverty, but by the end of the month things can get tough, which they illustrate with a laugh: "We know the prices of various items down to the penny—that says it all."



By the time we finished our interviews, the hardest thing for Hakim to deal with was not so much his drop in social status (which he had gotten used to) as it was his loneliness.

Today, two years later, he has managed to integrate a little further and has made a few French friends, though not enough. He's resigned to it and tells himself that, in any case, it will never be like it was in Syria. Here, again, he puts things in perspective: "Ultimately, the important thing is that we're safe."

If Hakim had to make this journey again, he'd do it without hesitation. Especially when he thinks of his children and their future.

And what about Hadi? You may be wondering how he's doing. How did he recover from his grand journey across Europe?

As of this writing, Hadi is six years old, and Hakim doesn't think he remembers their odyssey.

Or at least, he hasn't spoken to Hakim about it yet.

Hakim has decided to bring it up with him next year.

I should note that the journey has left its traces on him, psychologically speaking.

In Turkey, Hadi often went to the beach with his parents, and he loved it.

Since reaching France, he's been very afraid of water.

Following counseling with a therapist, he's started to open up, but for a very long time he didn't communicate with adults or with the children at school.

Today, he is in first grade, he has friends in his class, and everything is going well. "Hadi even gets invited to birthday parties," Hakim told me happily. "He's thrilled!"



Hakim has built a very strong relationship with his son: "Sometimes when I see him playing, I feel a wave of joy and sadness come over me—it's very strange."

"I hug him and tell him how much I love him and how happy I am to be here with him."

Hakim's second son, Sébastien (born in France during the time of our interviews), is now three years old and has started kindergarten.

"He's very good in class," Hakim told me proudly. "Like Hadi!" he added. "My sons are great students!"

I speak of Sébastien as his second son because the year 2020 saw the arrival of a third: Anwar. "Najmeh would love to have another, to try for a daughter, but I'm not sure I want more kids. And what if we have another boy, haha!"

Although integration is relatively difficult for Hakim, he feels that his children are becoming more French than Syrian.

"Hadi's always saying 'merci/de rien' . . . for everything!"

"Just this morning, I gave him some cake, he said 'merci' and then he scolded me because I didn't say 'de rien' back, haha! Which is very French!"

Hakim hopes that, despite everything, when it comes to their relationships with family and friends, his children will stay in touch with their Syrian side.

Among all of Hakim's siblings, two are now abroad (one brother is in Germany and another in Austria) and five have remained in Syria with his mother. They still live in his old neighborhood, which is almost completely destroyed and where the elderly, women, and children now make up 90% of the population.

They are safe for now, as the fighting has moved to other parts of Syria. But life is difficult there, because everything is very expensive; Hakim tries to help by sending them money when he can.

One of his sisters gave birth to a disabled child. He's paralyzed.

The doctors say it's because of the chemical weapons the regime used while his sister was pregnant.



Do you remember Jawad, Hakim's brother who disappeared after one of the protests (see Book 1)? Hakim told me that he was recently released after seven years in prison, during which time everyone thought he was dead.

"I talked to him recently on the phone. He's changed a lot because what he went through was very hard. He's afraid of everything. He's seeing a therapist to try to get better."

Hakim has also received updates from some of the people he met throughout his journey:



His cousin Mahmud, with whom he started his nursery, moved to Austria. He got married and had kids. He's doing well there and has even managed to start a new nursery.

Ghazi, the friend who hosted Hakim in Beirut, ended up leaving Lebanon. It was becoming difficult for Syrian nationals to live there, given the risk of arrest by Hezbollah. Today he lives in Norway. He's married to a Syrian woman and has a son.



Zahed, his friend from Antalya, ended up going back to Syria. He never managed to raise the money he needed to start the business he dreamed of, and he couldn't make enough to survive in Turkey. Today he lives in central Damascus, a relatively safe part of Syria.



His aunt and uncle who hosted him in Amman are still there.
They continue to live off odd jobs and are hoping that their lot will improve.



His cousin Omar, the Michael Jackson fan, seems to have finally figured out how to talk to girls, because he has a kid now!

As for the pharmacist Nihad and his family, who accompanied Hakim for a large portion of his journey, they are now in Germany, in Dortmund.
They've been granted refugee status and hope to resume their lives in this new country.



You may also be wondering what Hakim thinks of *Hakim's Odyssey*!

"It's good! It's good!" he told me in a very artificial tone.

Sensing my disappointment at his somewhat half-hearted response, he explained: "I tried to read it, but it's a little tricky with my level of French, haha! Anyway, a lot of my friends have bought it and they tell me it's great."

"And Najmeh and I also monitor comments online to see what people are saying about it.*"

"In any case, it's a great way to show people who we refugees really are."

Finally, I asked Hakim how he saw his future.

I'll leave him with the last word: "I miss my family and friends very much. My nursery too . . . I put so much energy into it, but hey, it's probably been destroyed by now, like a lot of things in Syria.

But at this point the idea of returning to live there seems impossible to me.

As long as Bashar al-Assad is in power, it's too risky for me.

So we're going to stay in France.

We've started putting down new roots here: it would be hard for the kids to go back to a country they don't know.

France has really made us feel welcome. The vast majority of the French are very nice, very friendly.

We've gotten a lot of support.

And I haven't really had bad experiences because of my background or my refugee status.

At some point I'd like to start a new nursery here and do the work that I love.

But there's still a long way to go to get there, because it takes a lot of money.

And before that I have to improve my French.

But the most important thing is that Hadi, Sébastien, and Anwar are happy and well, whether that's here or in Syria.

Because everything I did, I did for my children.

I'm so happy when I hear Hadi talking to me about school, and his friends . . .

Remember when we first met, I said I was telling you my story for Hadi, so he'll know where we come from, what we went through.

Eventually, when my children are old enough to understand, I will have them read your book.

And I hope they will be proud of us, and where they come from."

Bordeaux, January 2020

*So I would kindly ask that you leave only glowing comments, thank you (editor's note).

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)* believes that the refugee issue must be treated as a global concern, and Hakim's story reminds us that our attention must be focused on the things that really matter: dignity, rights, and humanity.

Many thanks to Hakim and his family for sharing their story of hardships and dangers, to Fabien Toulmé for putting all his talent into listening to this family, and to Delcourt for publishing this moving and hopeful story.

Let us never forget those who have lost their lives in exile, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, and all those who have had to leave everything behind in order to survive and who now triumph, every day, in the face of adversity.

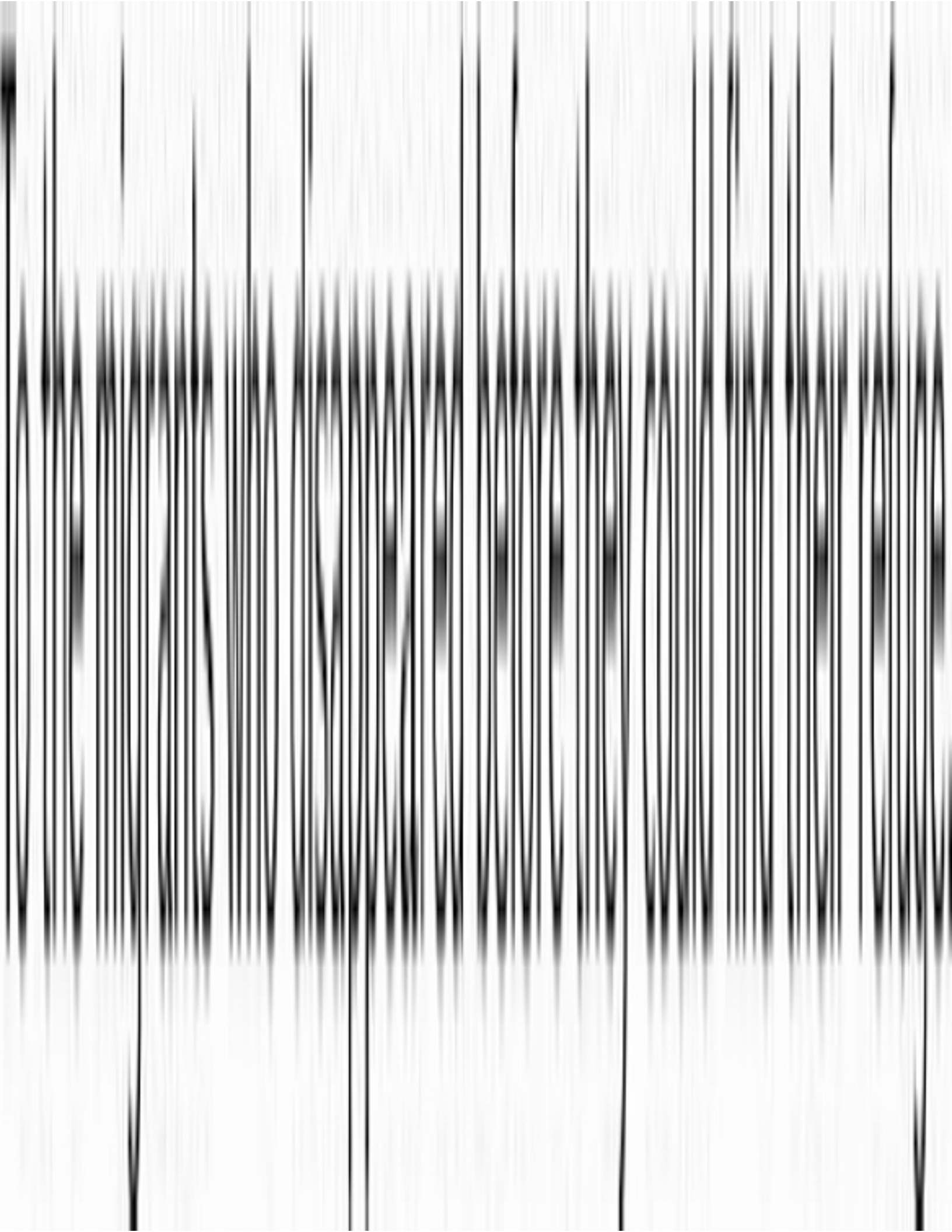
This essential account ties in with the ongoing commitment of UNHCR and its partners to provide help and lasting solutions to the most vulnerable.

The sheer number of people who have been forced to relocate is one of the greatest challenges of our time. We can face it, but only if we act together.

Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation

*More information at <https://www.unhcr.org>





Thanks to my editor, Yannick Lejeune, for his help and advice; thanks to Patricia Haessig-Crevel and Laura Crevel-Floyd for connecting me with Hakim and for their help when the project ran into issues; thanks to interpreters Manuel, Bouchra Petit, and Michel Nieto for their indispensable aid; thanks to Leslie Perreaut and Alberto Campi for the photo documentation; thanks to the teams at Delcourt who helped this book see the light of day; thanks to you, reader, for following this odyssey since the first book; and my heartfelt thanks to Hakim, Najmeh, Hadi, and Sébastien for their patience and generosity.

Names: Toulmé, Fabien, 1980— author. | Chute, Hannah, 1992— translator.

Title: Hakim's odyssey / Fabien Toulmé ; translated by Hannah Chute.

Other titles: Odyssée d'Hakim. English

Description: University Park, Pennsylvania : Graphic Mundi, [2022]— | "Originally published as L'Odyssée d'Hakim, volume 3 by Fabien Toulmé, Editions Delcourt, 2020."— Book 1. | Contents: Book 3. From Macedonia to France.

Summary: "An account, in graphic novel format, of a young Syrian refugee and how war forced him to leave everything behind, including his family, his friends, his home, and his business. This narrative follows his travels from Macedonia to France"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021017308 | ISBN 9781637790311 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Refugees—Syria—Comic books, strips, etc. | Forced migration—Syria—Comic books, strips, etc. | Syria—History—Civil War, 2011—Refugees—Comic books, strips, etc. | LCGFT: Graphic novels.

Classification: LCC PN6747.T68 O3913 2021 | DDC 741.5/944—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021017308>

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Printed in Lithuania by BALTO Print

Published by The Pennsylvania State University Press,
University Park, PA 16802–1003

Graphic Mundi is an imprint of The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Translated by Hannah Chute

Additional lettering and art reconstruction by Zen

Originally published as L'Odyssée d'Hakim, volume 3, by Fabien Toulmé

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The Pennsylvania State University Press is a member of the Association of University Presses.

It is the policy of The Pennsylvania State University Press to use acid-free paper. Publications on uncoated stock satisfy the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Material, ansi z39.48–1992.



MAGIC MAN

