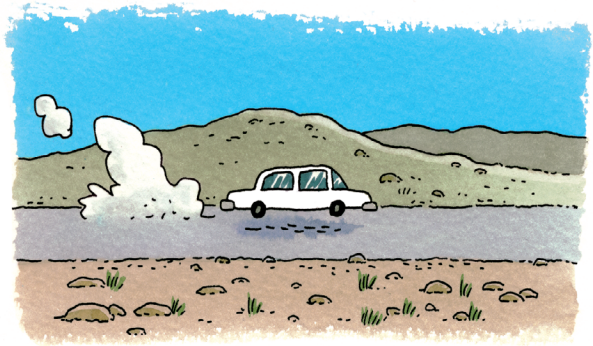
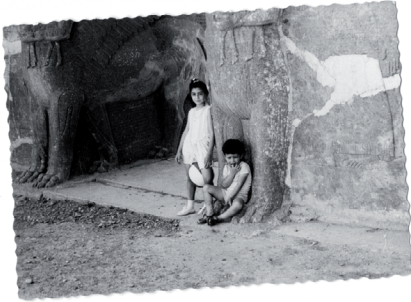
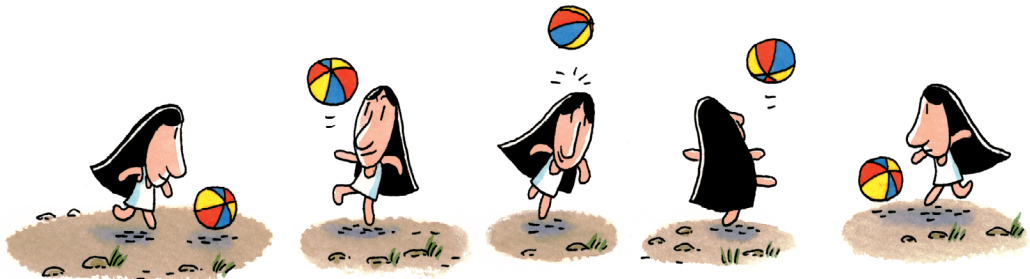


Every Friday we
would head out for a
picnic around Mosul.



Often we'd go to
the archaeological
site of Nimrud.

I'd play ball and climb
on anything I could.



If my father had known that those
winged lions would be destroyed
one day, I'm sure he would have
framed the shot differently.



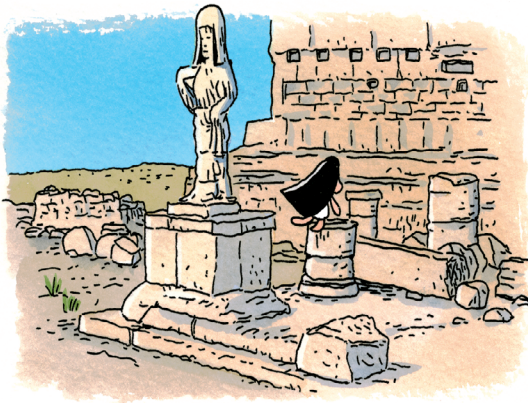
On March 7, 2015, the site of Hatra was levelled with dynamite and bulldozers.



Because it's 130 km from Mosul, we picnicked there less often.



It was the perfect spot for climbing around on ancient stones.



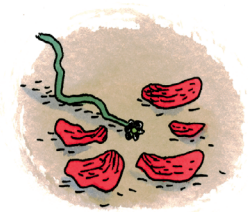
And for picking poppies.



But taking stones was strictly forbidden.



Cars were searched on their way out to preserve the site forever.



In 1947, my father,
Matti, left Iraq to study
dentistry in France.



One of his brothers,
Jacques, had studied
architecture there.



Another brother,
Behnam, got his engineering
degree in India.



And a last
brother, Salem, studied
medicine in Syria.



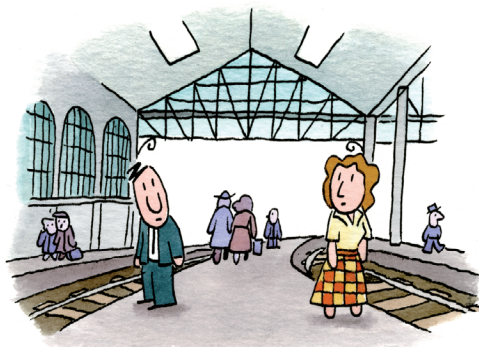
Thirty years later, Iraqi uni-
versities offered training in all
fields, and their degrees were
recognized worldwide.



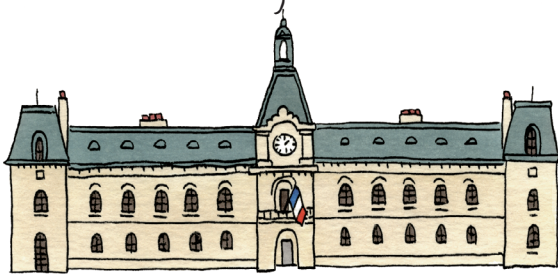
Parents didn't have
to send their children
abroad anymore.



But then my father wouldn't have
met my mother on a platform at
the St. Lazare station.



My parents were married in Paris in 1950. My father returned to Iraq right after, just long enough to let the family know.



His mother had found him a fiancée in Baghdad.

For six months, he didn't dare say anything.



On the way back from a visit to the fiancée's family, he finally confessed to his mother that he'd already got married in France.

His mother never did give him the tailored suit she'd ordered for his wedding.

And my mother didn't exactly arrive on conquered ground.



But since she was from a country that had been through five years of war, she was nonetheless politely accepted.

To this day, some 95 percent of marriages in Iraq are arranged.

Skinnny, isn't she?

They have nothing to eat there...



Except that since the 1980s, with the heightened surveillance under Saddam Hussein, people have grown distrustful of each other and many marriages are between first cousins.



Since my father was Orthodox Christian,
I was baptized by an Orthodox priest.



And since my mother was
Catholic, I was baptized a second
time by a Catholic priest.



I went to a public
elementary school,
Abu Tammam...

Christians were
excused from
Koran lessons.

I found myself in the
playground while the others
stayed in class.



Feeling left out and rejected,
I cried bitterly. And I told
the whole story when I
got home.

My father went
to see the principal
and, after that, I
sat in on all Koran
lessons.

We memorized verses
from the Koran, without
much explanation.



When I got to sixth grade, my parents enrolled me in Oum Elmaouna, a school run by Syrian Catholic nuns, so I could receive my first communion.



I memorized prayers in Aramean that I didn't understand either.



None of which made me a believer.

I got a watch.

And I'm dressed like a bride.

Especially since I was switched to another public school the year after my communion.



It's funny, I don't remember the name of the school...

But my friend Nādwā who emigrated to San Diego five months ago would probably know.



Huh? Oh, wow ... It's Nādwā.



That still doesn't make me a believer.

It's just a coincidence.

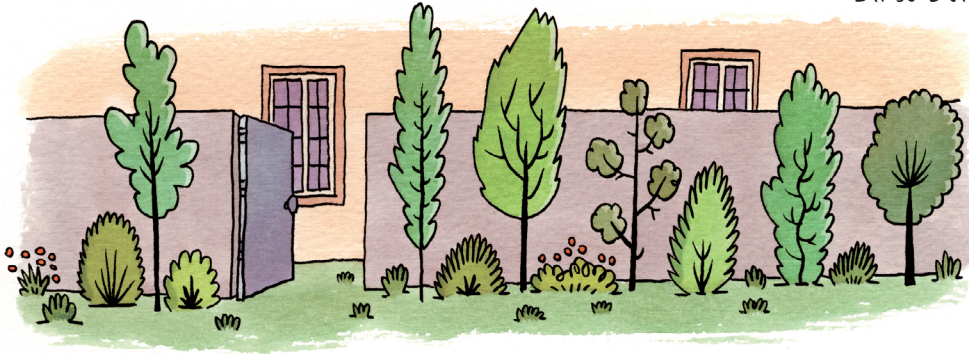


Nadwa was the daughter of our neighbors in Mosul.

A door led from one garden to the other... We spent a lot of time together.

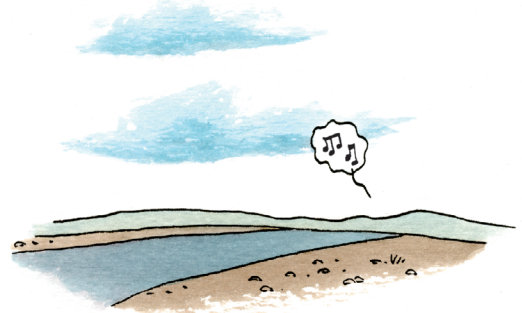
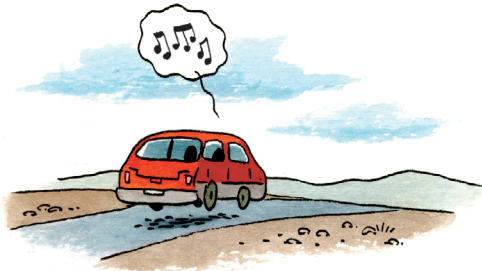
And since they were Muslim, I did my Koran homework with her mother.

The last time I saw Nadwa was 26 years ago, in 1989, before the First Gulf War.



In June 2014, she and her husband rented an apartment in Erbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan, for a two-week vacation.

They left without a worry, packed only for their trip.

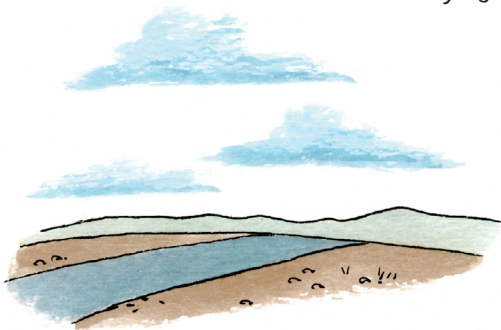


The next day, ISIS invaded Mosul.

Nadwa and her husband would never see their city again.

After their two weeks in Erbil, they couldn't re-rent the apartment.

Costs had sky-rocketed with the influx of refugees.



There's no loss without gain...

