

THEIR BACKS SMELLED SO GOOD

ÅSA GRENVALL



Their backs smelled so good

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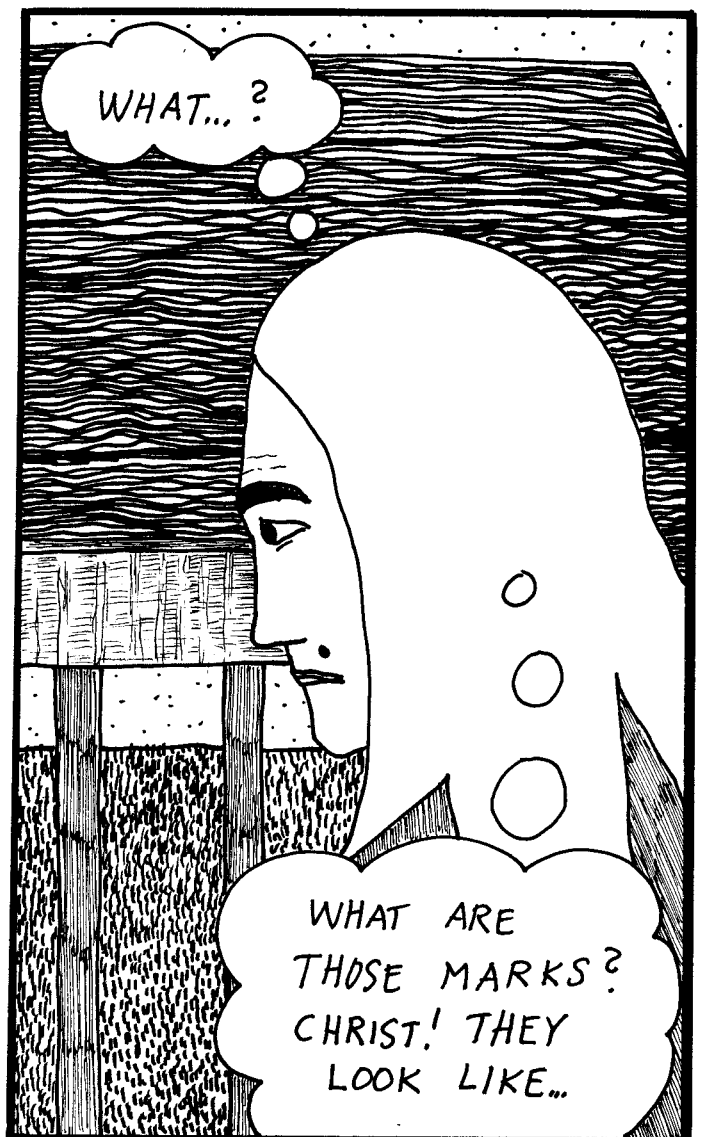
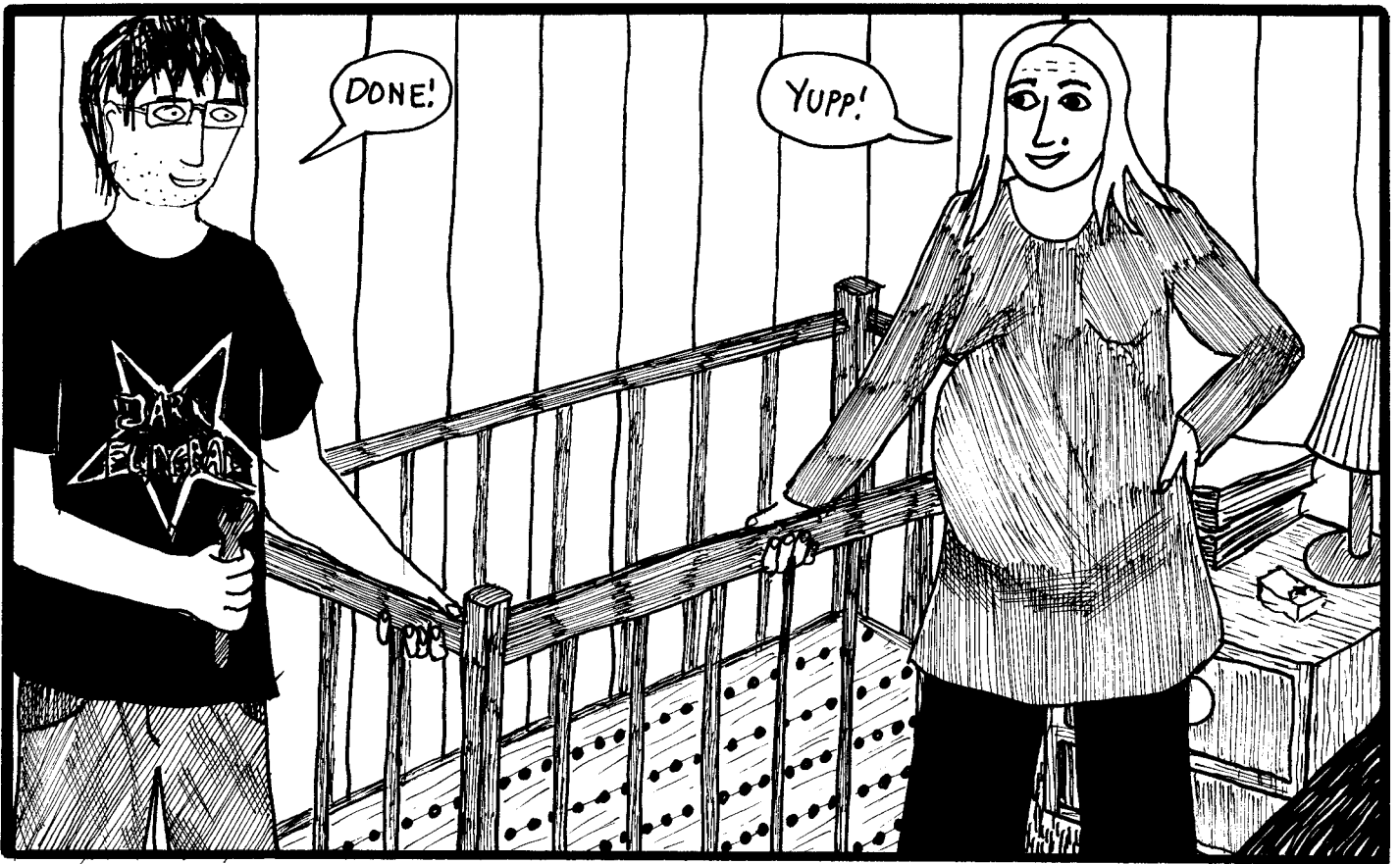
English translation by Meg Barjami

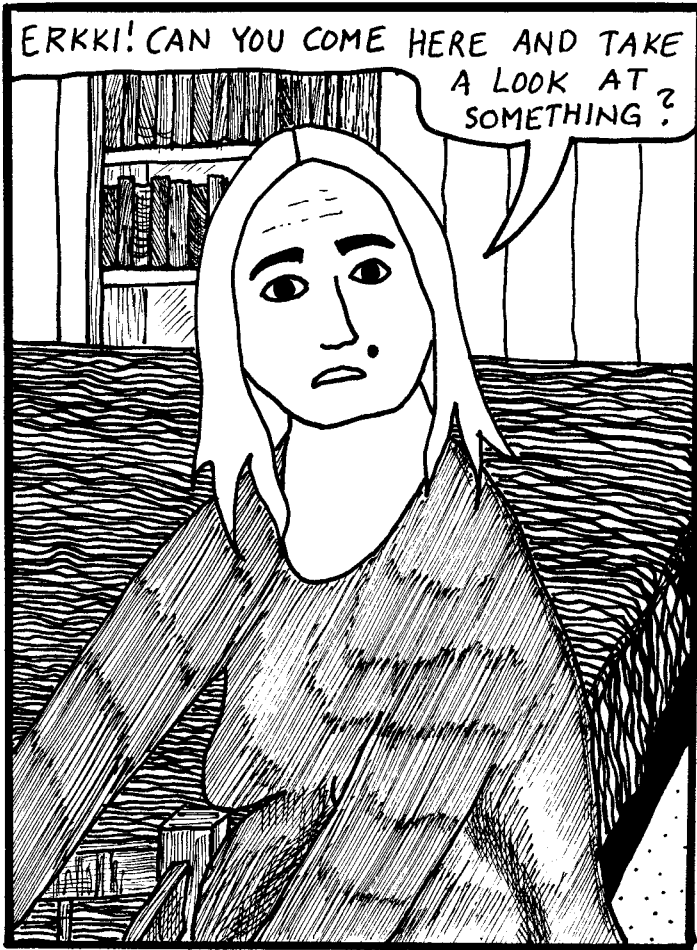
IT ALL STARTED...

WHEN I WAS EXPECTING MY FIRST BABY, ERKKI AND I WERE PUTTING TOGETHER THE COT I USED TO SLEEP IN AS A CHILD. WE'D FETCHED IT DOWN FROM THE ATTIC IN MY CHILDHOOD HOME.



IT WAS A SEVENTIES DARK GREEN AND IT FELT QUITE RETRO, BUT IN A GENUINE WAY.







IT ALL STARTED...

ONCE THE BABY WAS BORN AND PEOPLE STARTED COMING OUT WITH ABSURD SUGGESTIONS, LIKE THE TIME WE WENT TO THE CHILD HEALTHCARE CENTRE.



IT ALL STARTED...

WHEN I BEGAN TO NOTICE THAT FRIENDS WHO'D HAD KIDS AT AROUND THE SAME TIME AS US SOMETIMES ACTED REALLY WEIRDLY.

THIS WEEKEND WAS SO GREAT, MY MOTHER CAME FOR A VISIT, AND SHE TOOK CARE OF ALICE ALL MORNING UNTIL LUNCH TIME. SO WE GOT TO SLEEP LATE.

WHAT DID HE SAY? DID HIS MUM GET UP IN THE MORNING TO LOOK AFTER THE BABY?

UH UH! IT'S HOT!

Eh!



AND IN A FORTNIGHT, ALICE IS GOING TO STAY WITH MY PARENTS FOR TWO NIGHTS OVER THE WEEKEND IT'S GOING TO BE BRILLIANT TO HAVE A CHANCE TO GET SOME REST AND TAKE IT EASY FOR A WHOLE WEEKEND! I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE DID THAT!

THEY'RE GOING TO LEAVE THEIR KID WITH HER PARENTS!? SHE'S GOING TO SLEEP OVER THERE!? ON HER OWN!? ARE THEY OUT OF THEIR MINDS?

I MEAN, THAT'S APPALLING! HOW CAN THEY DO IT?! ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN!

THEY MUST BE DESPERATE TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT!

IS IT EVEN LEGAL? SHOULDN'T THEY BE REPORTED OR SOMETHING?

IT ALL STARTED...

WHEN I NOTICED THAT MY FRIENDS WERE GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR PARENTS GETTING OLD.

... SO HIS TEST RESULTS WEREN'T GREAT, AND HE'S GOT TO HAVE SURGERY. IT MAKES YOU REALISE THEY'RE NOT GOING TO BE AROUND FOREVER, AND THAT'S A TERRIFYING PROSPECT, ISN'T IT!?

EH...
YEAH... I MEAN,
WELL, EVERYONE
DIES SOONER
OR LATER, DON'T
THEY? EVEN IF
IT'S USUALLY
LATER RATHER
THAN SOONER.

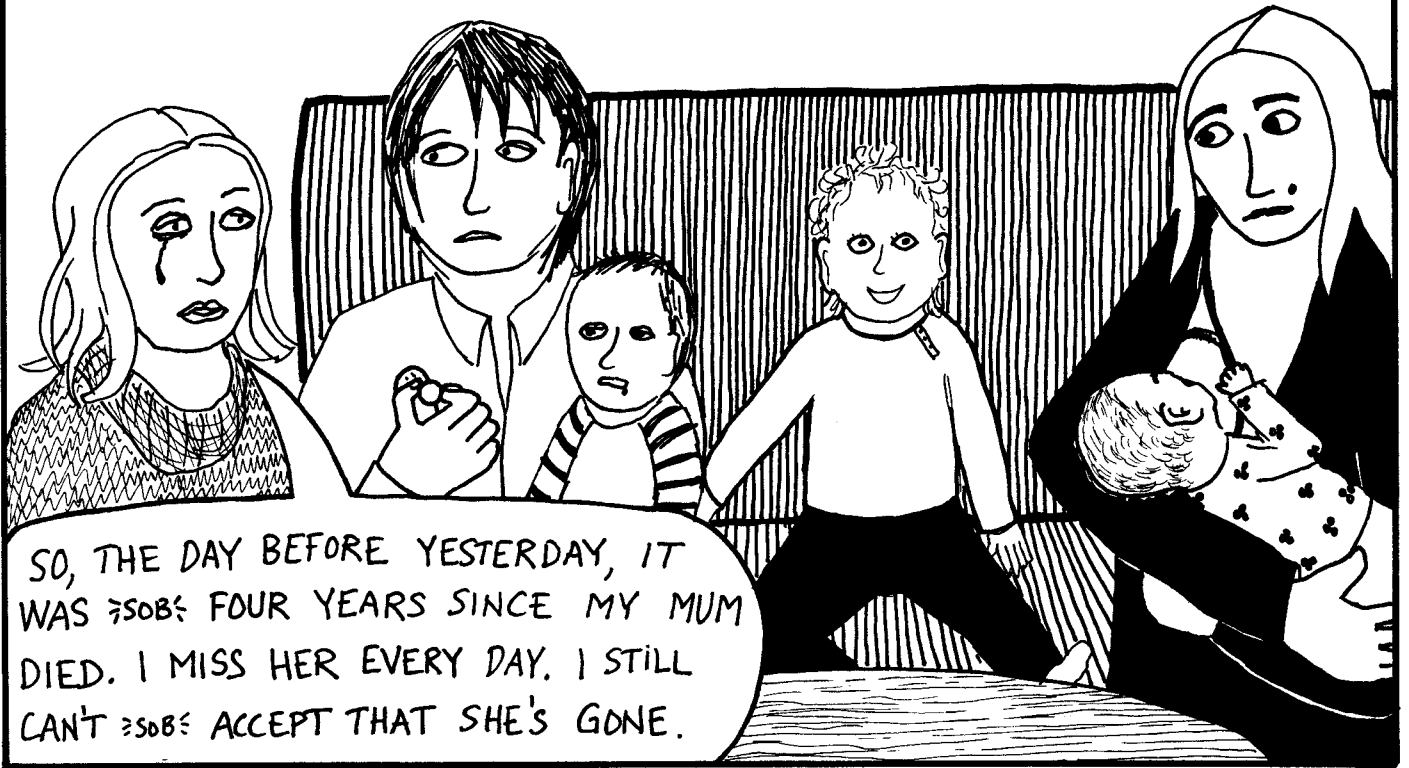
MUMMY!

YES, BUT WE'RE
TALKING ABOUT OUR
PARENT HERE! YOU KIND
OF TAKE IT FOR GRANTED
THEY'LL ALWAYS BE
THERE FOR YOU,

BE THERE?
WHERE?
WHAT THE FUCK IS
HE TALKING ABOUT?!

IT ALL STARTED...

WHEN I NOTICED THAT I LOST MY TEMPER WITH PEOPLE WHO REALLY DESERVED PITY, NOT ANGER.





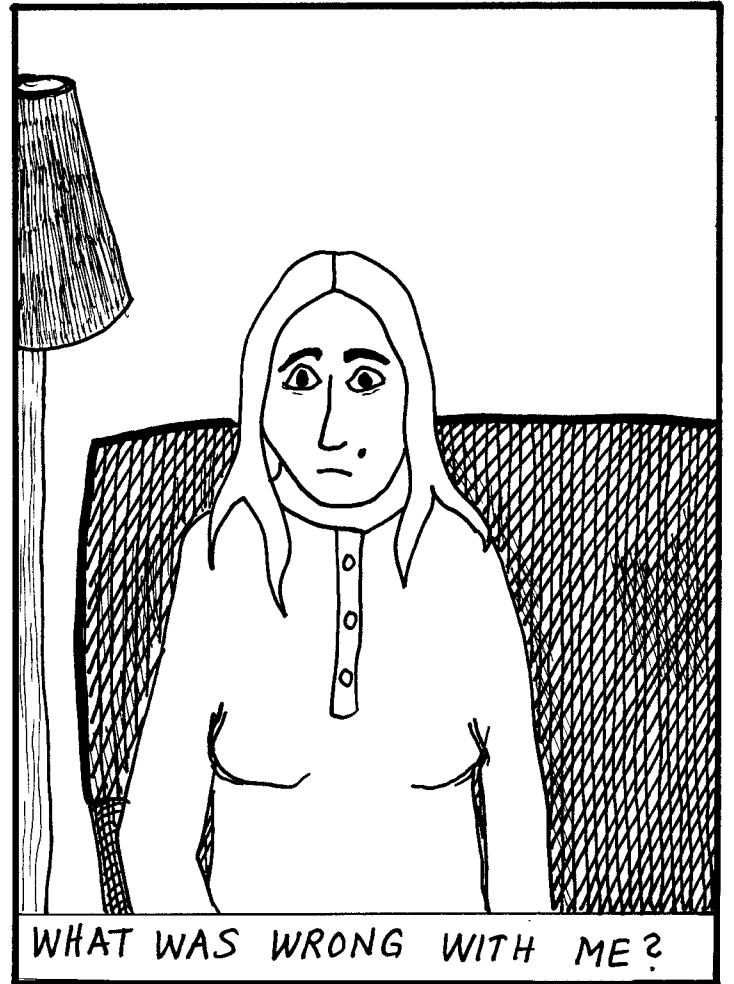
IT ALL STARTED...

WHEN I FOUND MYSELF MASSIVELY DEPRESSED, I COULD HARDLY GET OUT OF BED. EVEN THOUGH THERE WASN'T A SINGLE THING ABOUT MY LIFE THAT I WANTED TO CHANGE, THERE WAS SOMETHING DESPERATELY DARK AND PAINFUL INSIDE ME THAT JUST WOULDN'T BUDGE.



EVEN THOUGH I NOW HAD MORE TO LIVE FOR THAN EVER BEFORE, ALL I LONGED FOR WAS DEATH.

THERE WAS THIS MASS OF ANXIETY INSIDE ME AND IT HAD SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO TELL ME. AND IT CLEARLY WASN'T GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL I TOOK IT SERIOUSLY.

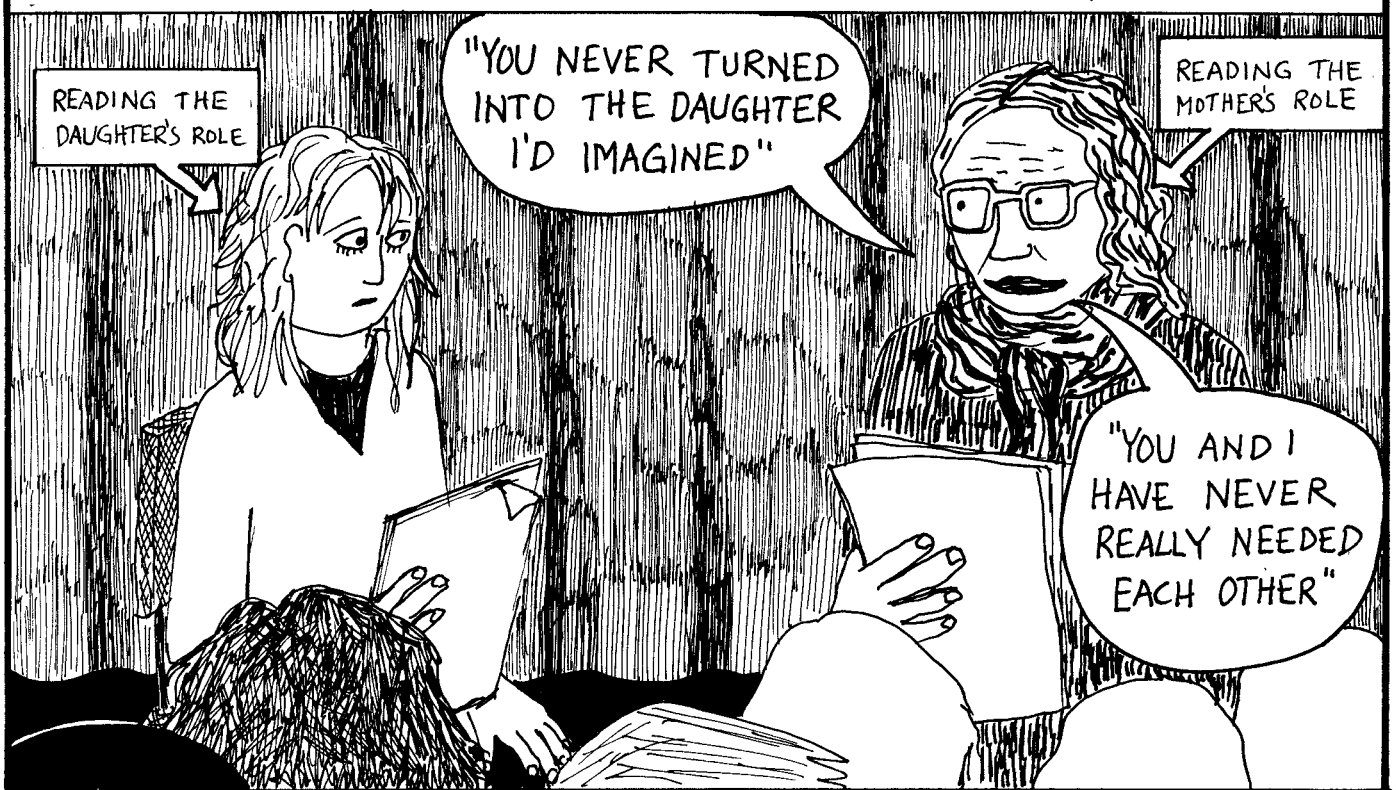


DRAMA

A "READING" ONE EVENING. IT WAS FOR A SMALL AUDIENCE OF THEATRE ENTHUSIASTS AND TWO ACTORS WERE GOING TO READ ALOUD FROM A TEXT THAT I'D WRITTEN. AFTERWARDS, THERE WAS TO BE A DISCUSSION.



THE TEXT WAS BASED ON THINGS THAT HAD ACTUALLY HAPPENED TO ME SO IT WAS TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE AND REPORTED IN A NEUTRAL DOCUMENTARY STYLE.



AFTERWARDS, IT WAS TIME FOR THE AUDIENCE'S REACTIONS. AT FIRST THEY WERE TENTATIVE BUT RELATIVELY PLEASANT



BUT THEN...



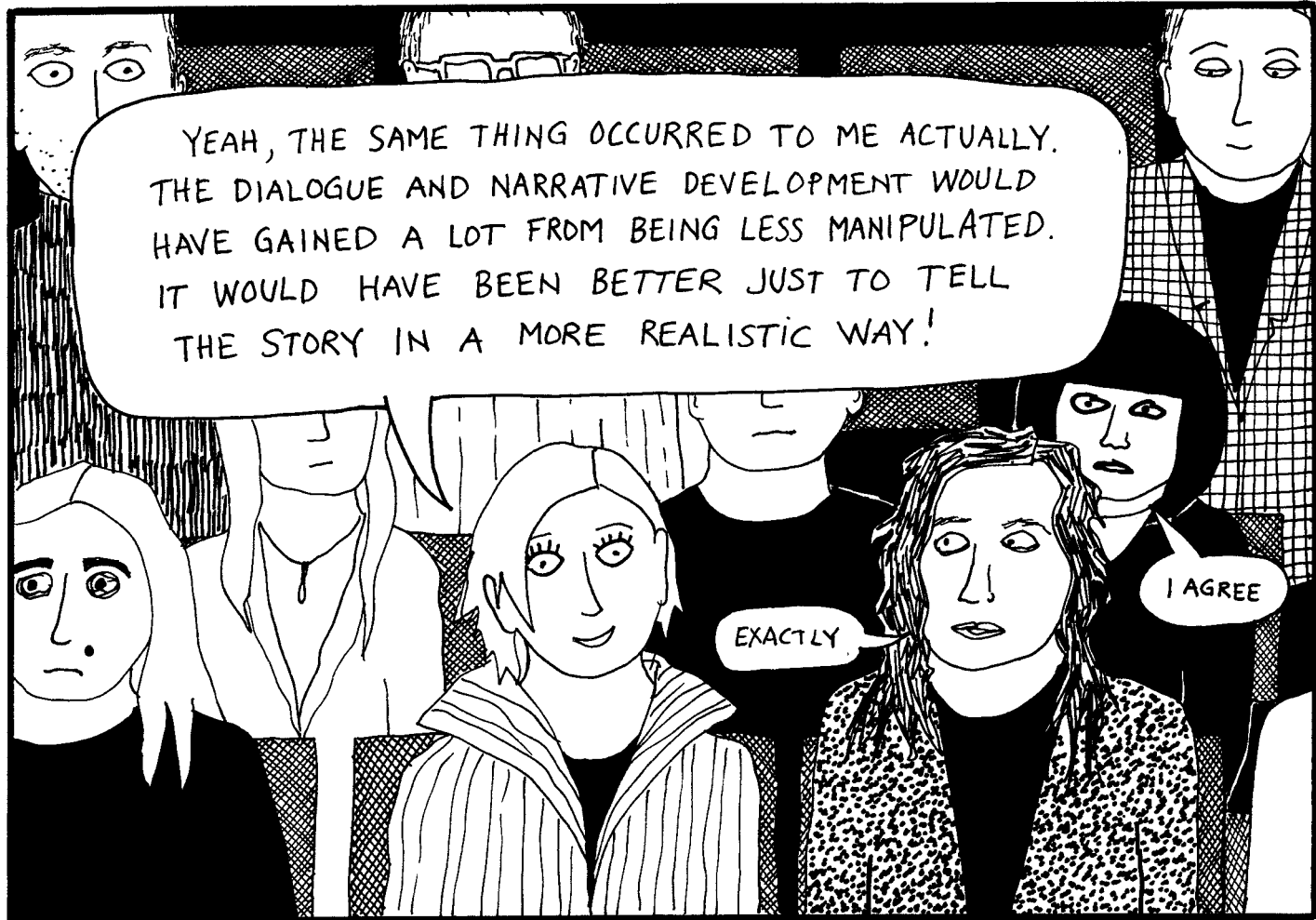


AND THAT BIT WHERE THE MOTHER BURNS ALL HER DAUGHTER'S LETTERS, I MEAN, NO MOTHER DOES THAT, NOT IN REAL LIFE.

HM...

HM, YES, WELL, NOW YOU MENTION IT...

AND THAT STUFF ABOUT THE MOTHER BEING IN LOVE WITH A MAN WHO INTERFERED WITH HER DAUGHTER? IT'S RIDICULOUS! THAT KIND OF DRAMATIC DEVICE JUST DOESN'T WORK IF YOU WANT THE STORY TO BE CREDIBLE!



YEAH, THE SAME THING OCCURRED TO ME ACTUALLY. THE DIALOGUE AND NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT WOULD HAVE GAINED A LOT FROM BEING LESS MANIPULATED. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER JUST TO TELL THE STORY IN A MORE REALISTIC WAY!

EXACTLY

I AGREE



WELL, WE HAVE THE AUTHOR HERE WITH US. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT? DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO ADD?

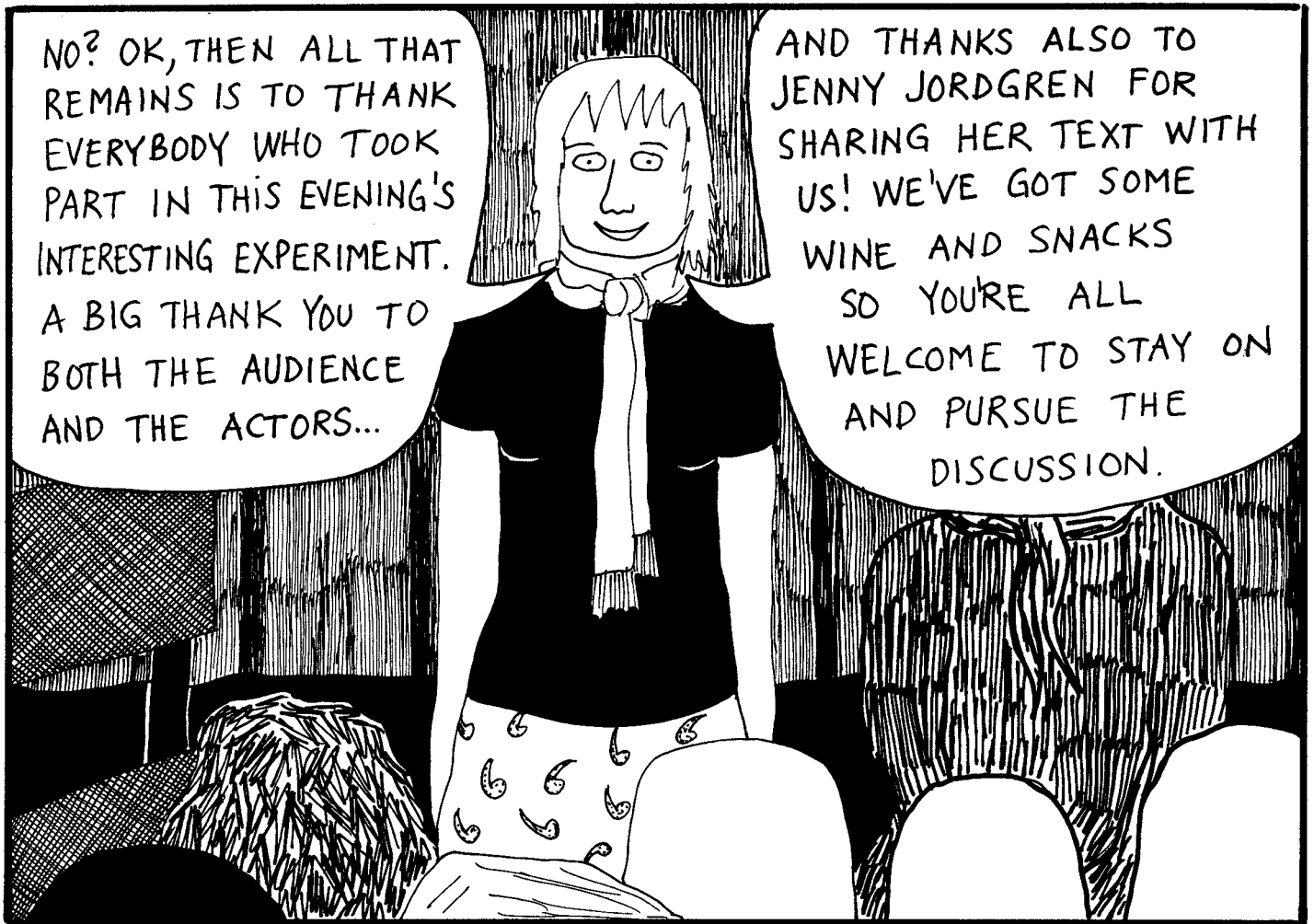
NO NO!!

HEART BEATING WILDLY



DOES ANYONE ELSE HAVE ANYTHING MORE TO SAY?

WHAT ABOUT THE ACTORS?





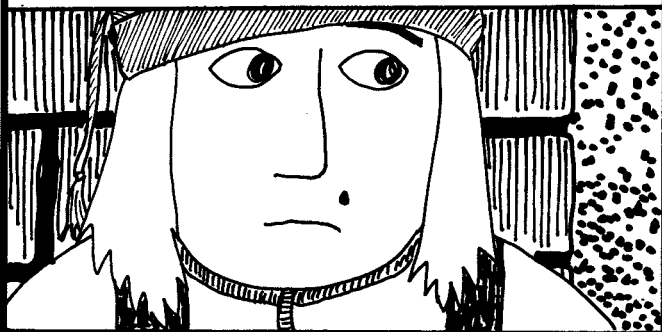
TALK TO AN ADULT

ARE CHILDREN NATURALLY CURIOUS?



PERSONALLY, I CAN'T REMEMBER EVER BEING CURIOUS AS A CHILD.

FOR ME, LIFE WAS ALL ABOUT SURVIVING, STEELING MYSELF, AND WORKING OUT HOW TO BEHAVE IN THE DIFFERENT SITUATIONS I WAS THROWN INTO. NEVER RELAX. ALWAYS BE ON YOUR GUARD.

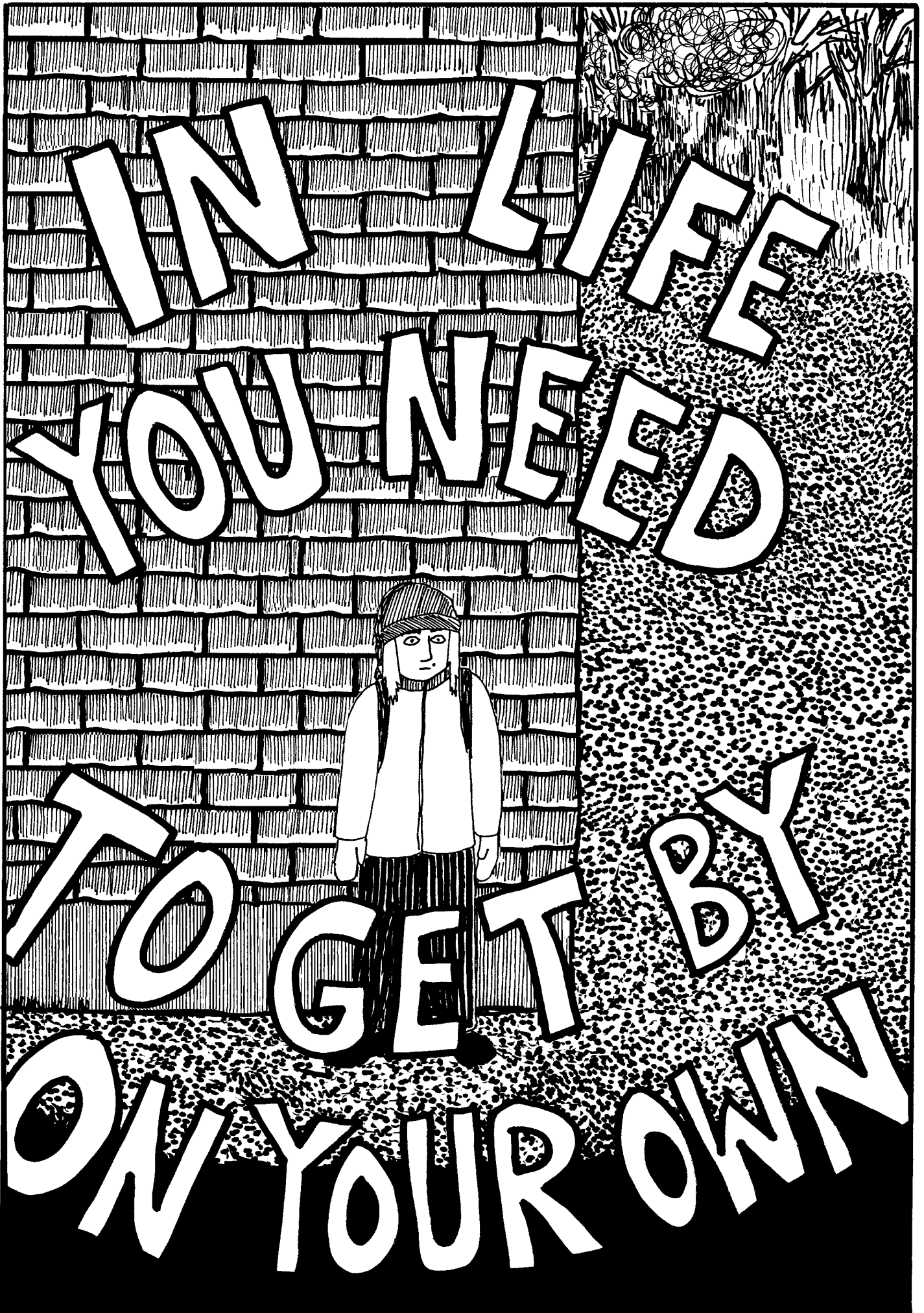


I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FED, CLOTHED AND HOUSED, SO COMPARED WITH MOST OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, I HAVE OF COURSE LED A CHARMED LIFE OF RELATIVE LUXURY.

BUT CURIOSITY WAS NEVER A LUXURY I COULD AFFORD.



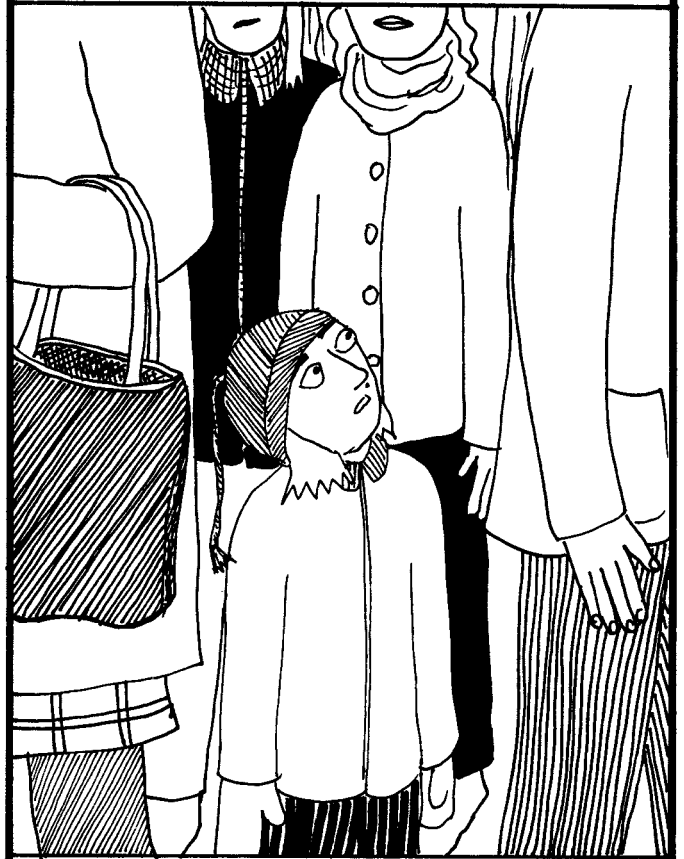
AS FAR BACK AS I CAN REMEMBER, MY FOCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN:



I WAS FACED WITH CERTAIN PROBLEMS AND DILEMMAS...



...THINGS YOU HAD TO LEARN

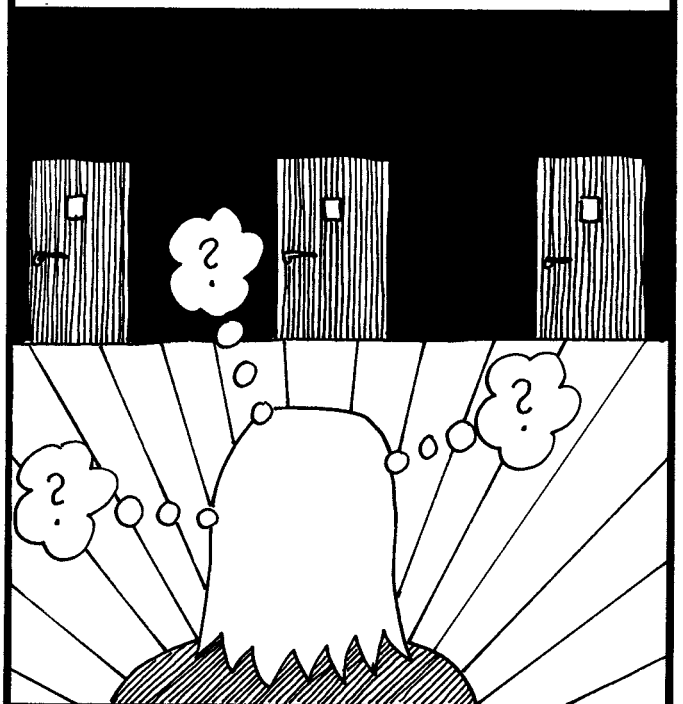


...THINGS YOU HAD TO UNDERSTAND

... MIXED MESSAGES



MY JOB WAS TO WORK OUT WHAT TO DO.

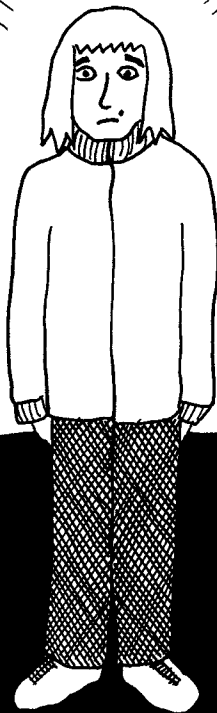


I KNEW THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT RULES:

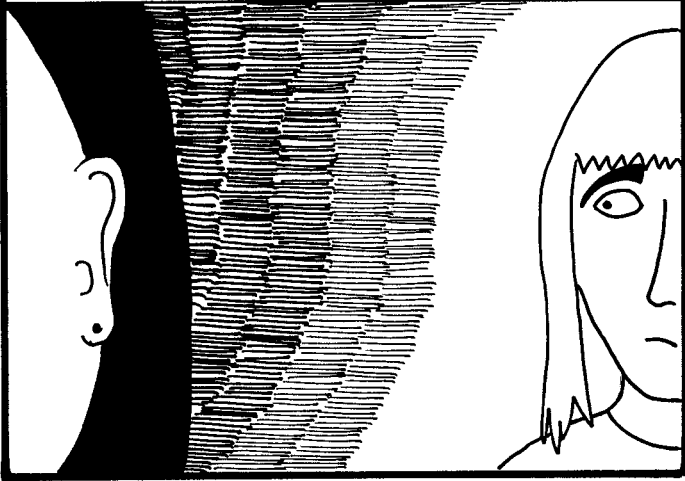


1. NEVER ASK
FOR HELP

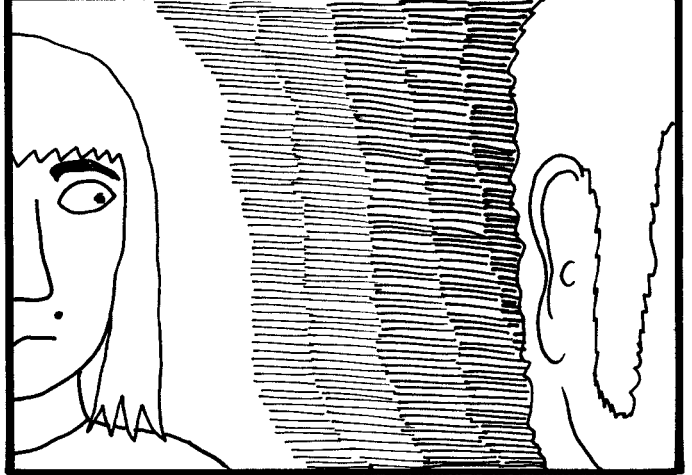
2. NEVER BE A
NUISANCE



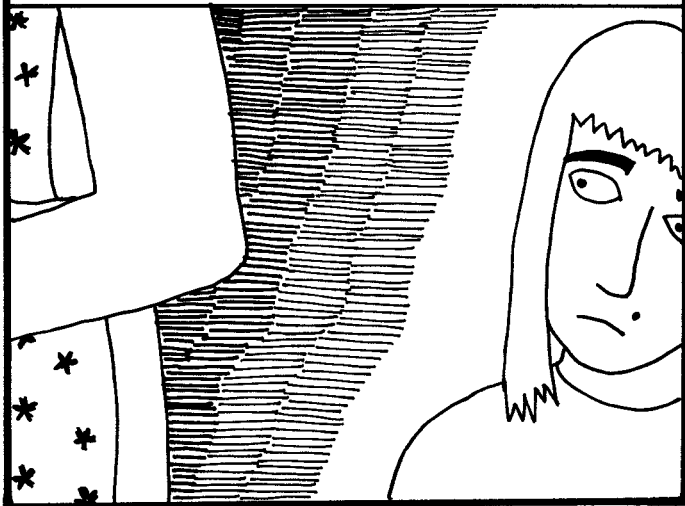
I LEARNED TO GUESS FROM TINY HINTS IN MY PARENT'S FACES...



... WHETHER I'D DONE THE RIGHT THING OR THE WRONG THING IN A GIVEN SITUATION.



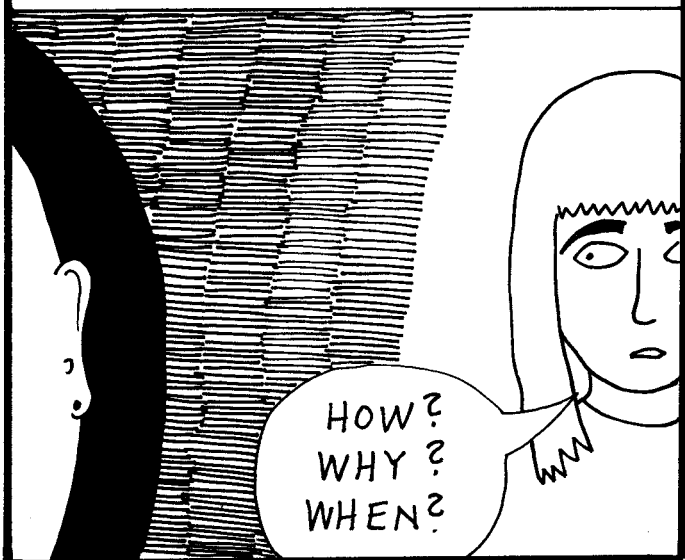
I EVEN GOT CLUES FROM THE WAYS THEY USED BODY LANGUAGE.



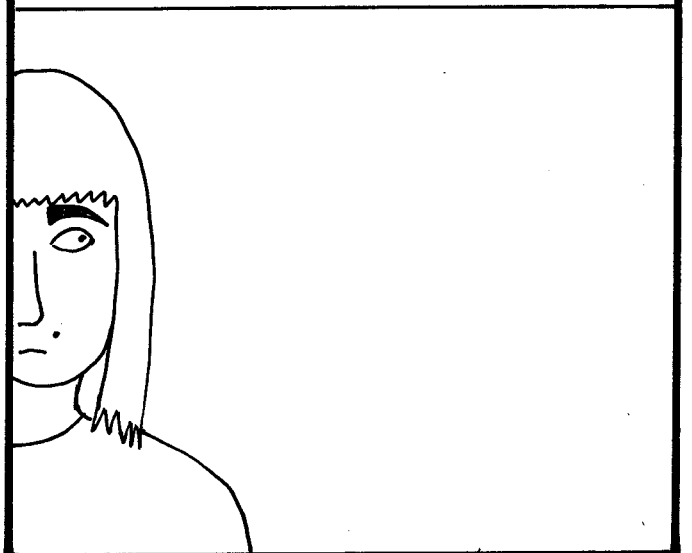
BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE WAS THIS:

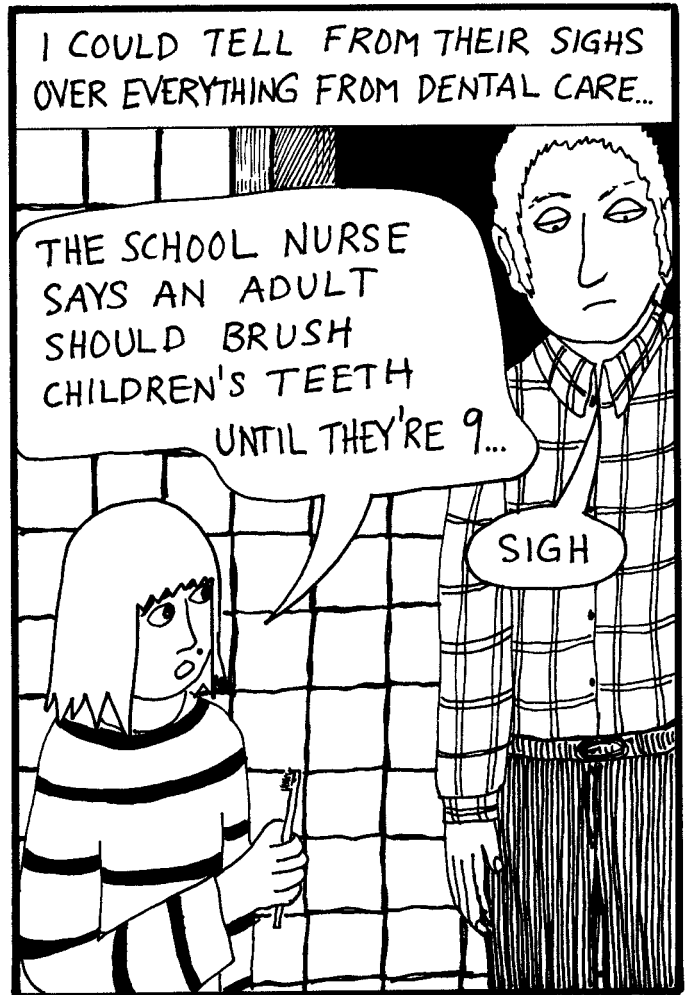


NEVER ASK QUESTIONS!



BECAUSE IF YOU DID, THEY VANISHED RIGHT OUT OF THE PICTURE.



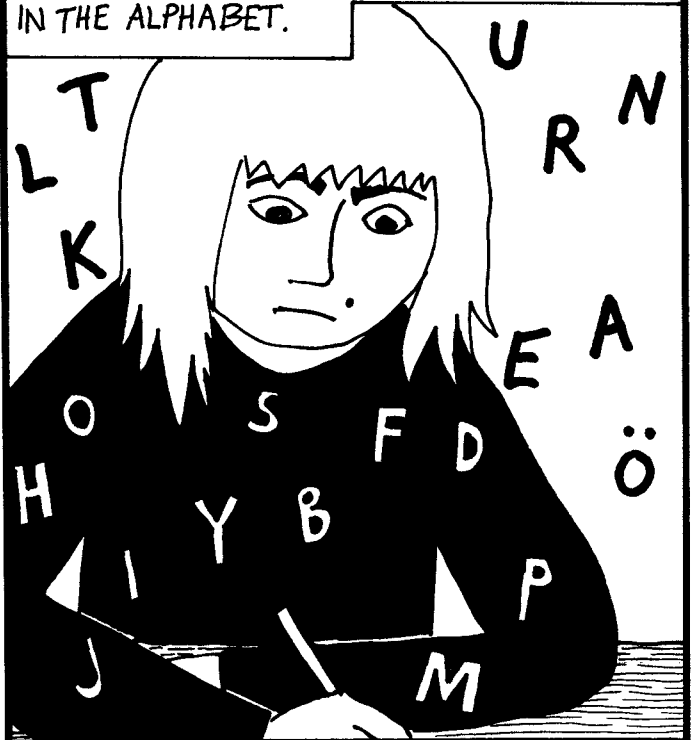


BIT BY BIT I ARRIVED AT A DECISION

I'M GOING TO LEARN EVERYTHING IN THE WHOLE WORLD ON MY OWN!

I AM NEVER, EVER GOING TO ASK ANYBODY ABOUT ANYTHING!

SO I WRESTLED WITH ALL LETTERS IN THE ALPHABET.



I WAS NEVER EVER GOING TO ASK ANYONE TO READ ME ANYTHING AGAIN, OR HELP ME TO WRITE ANYTHING.

I STRUGGLED WITH SHOELACES.

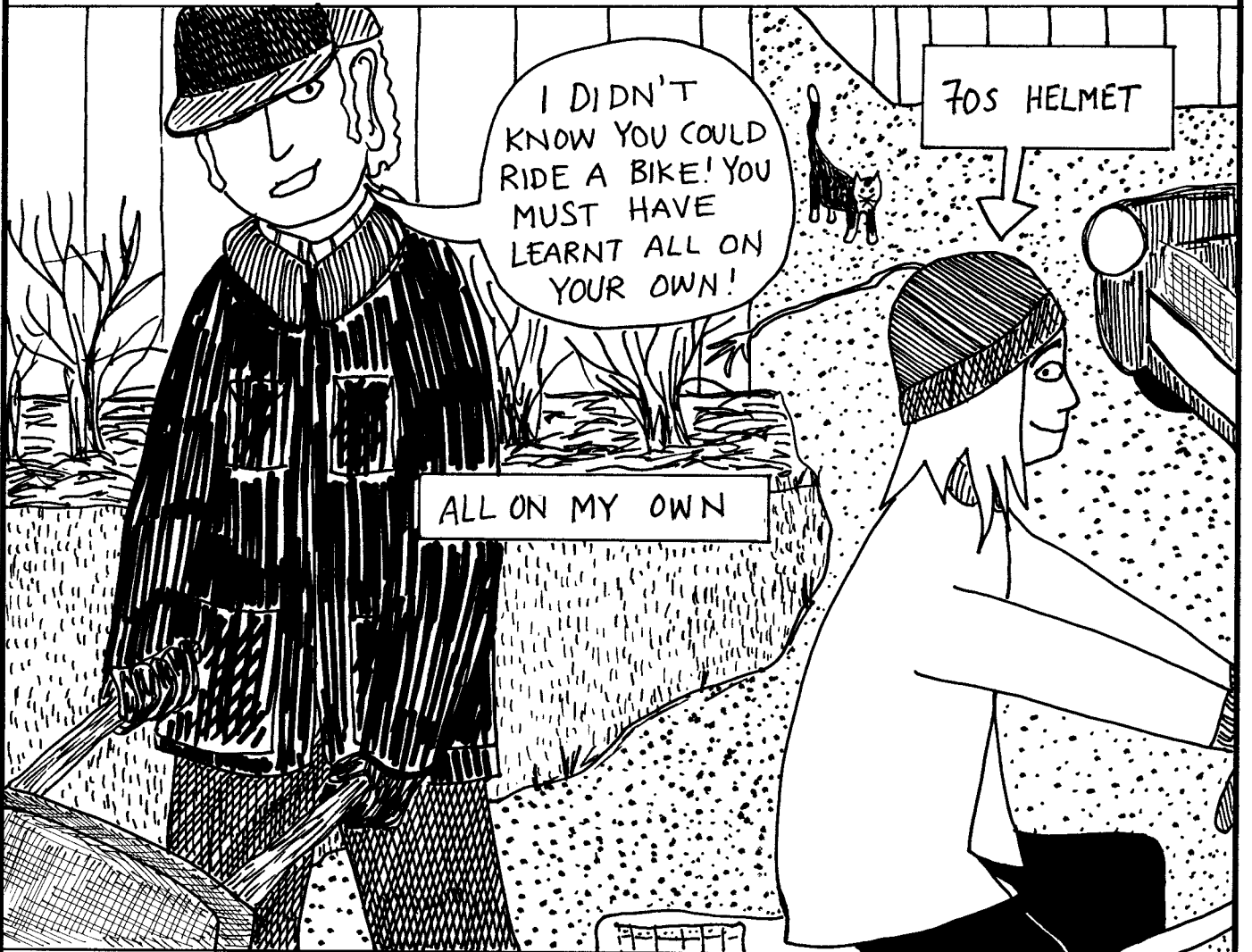
I'M NOT GOING TO ASK ANYONE TO SHOW ME HOW TO DO THIS! I HAVE TO DO IT MYSELF!

I LEARNED TO RIDE A BIKE WITHOUT ANYONE TO TEACH ME.

DON'T ASK FOR HELP.



AND SINCE I WAS DETERMINED NEVER TO BE A BURDEN TO ANYONE, I FINALLY LEARNED TO RIDE THE BIKE ON MY OWN.



I MADE A MENTAL NOTE OF HOW MUCH MY PARENTS APPRECIATED IT WHEN I DID THINGS ON MY OWN.



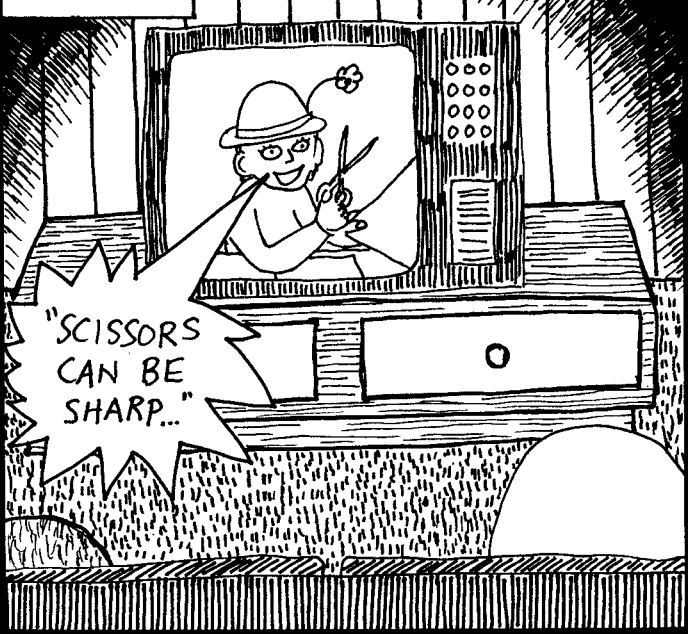
THIS AFTERNOON
I SAW JENNY ON
HER BIKE. SHE MUST
HAVE LEARNT TO RIDE
IT ALL ON HER OWN!

HA HA HA! YES, SHE'S
ALWAYS SAID: "I CAN DO IT
ON MY OWN." THAT'S THE
WAY SHE IS! WE NEVER
GET TO HELP HER
WITH ANYTHING!



I HAD DISCOVERED THE SECRET! AND GOD
KNOWS I YEARNED FOR THEIR APPRECIATION.

I GREW UP ON A FARM. MY MOTHER WAS ALWAYS AT HOME, SO I BARELY HAD ANY CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD BEFORE I STARTED SCHOOL IN TOWN. THE TELLY BECAME A WINDOW ON THE WORLD.

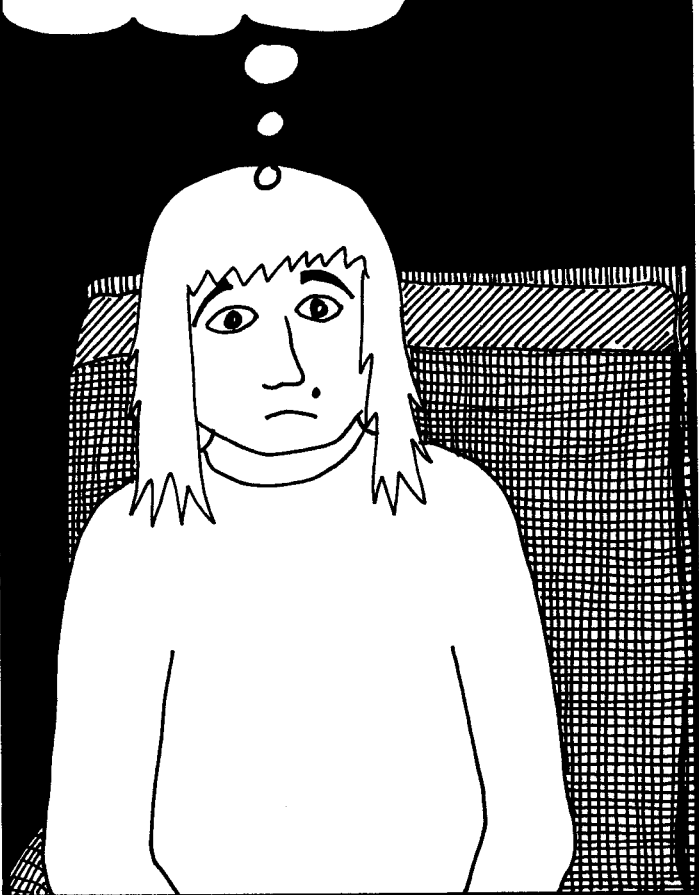


ON CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES THEY OFTEN SAID THINGS LIKE:

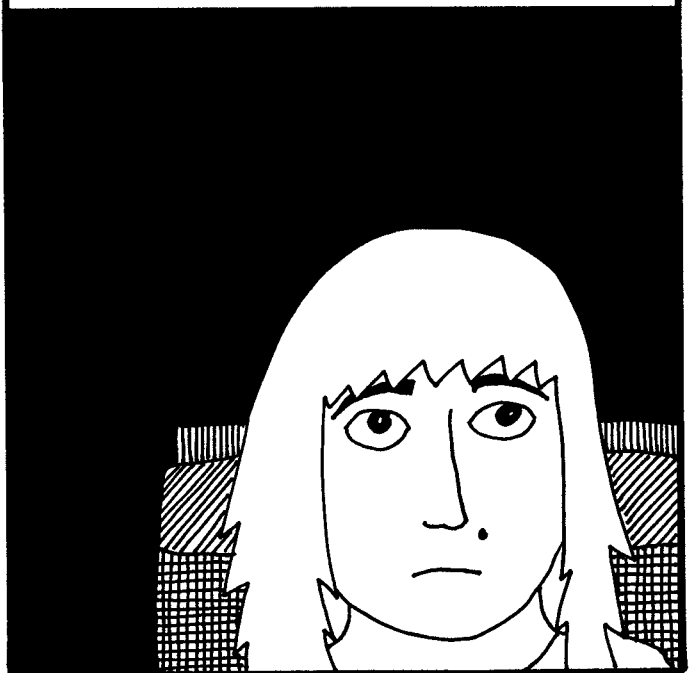
"SO IF YOU WANT TO TRY THIS AT HOME, YOU SHOULD ASK AN ADULT FOR HELP"



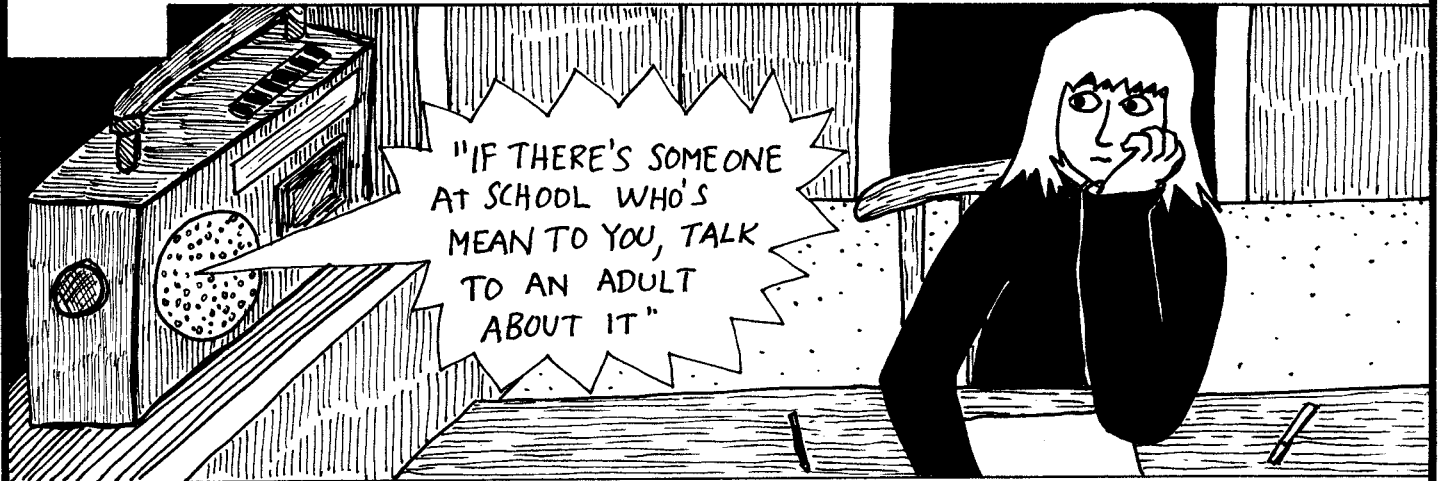
OH NO! THAT MEANS I CAN'T TRY IT!



AT SOME POINT, OF COURSE, I BEGAN TO REALISE THAT IF THEY SAID THINGS LIKE THAT ON TELLY, THERE MUST BE CHILDREN WHO REALLY COULD ASK THEIR PARENTS FOR HELP.



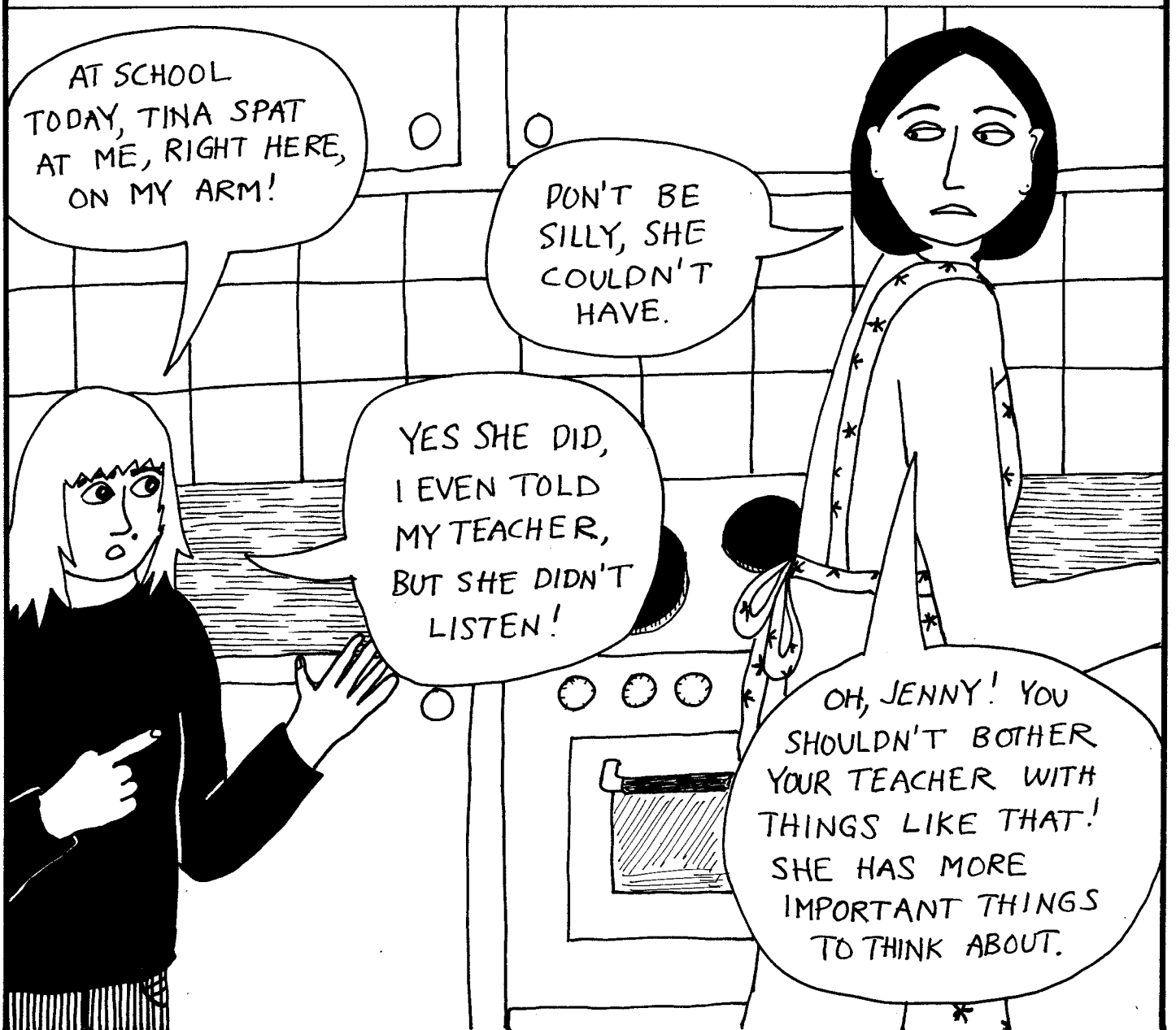
I ALSO LISTENED A LOT TO RADIO PROGRAMMES FOR KIDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE. THERE TOO THEY MENTIONED TALKING TO ADULTS.



"IF THERE'S SOMEONE AT SCHOOL WHO'S MEAN TO YOU, TALK TO AN ADULT ABOUT IT"

MY PROBLEM WAS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WHO THE ADULTS I SHOULD TALK TO MIGHT BE.

OF COURSE I KNEW, IN THEORY, THAT MY MUM WAS AN ADULT. SO I MADE A FEW ATTEMPTS TO TALK TO HER.

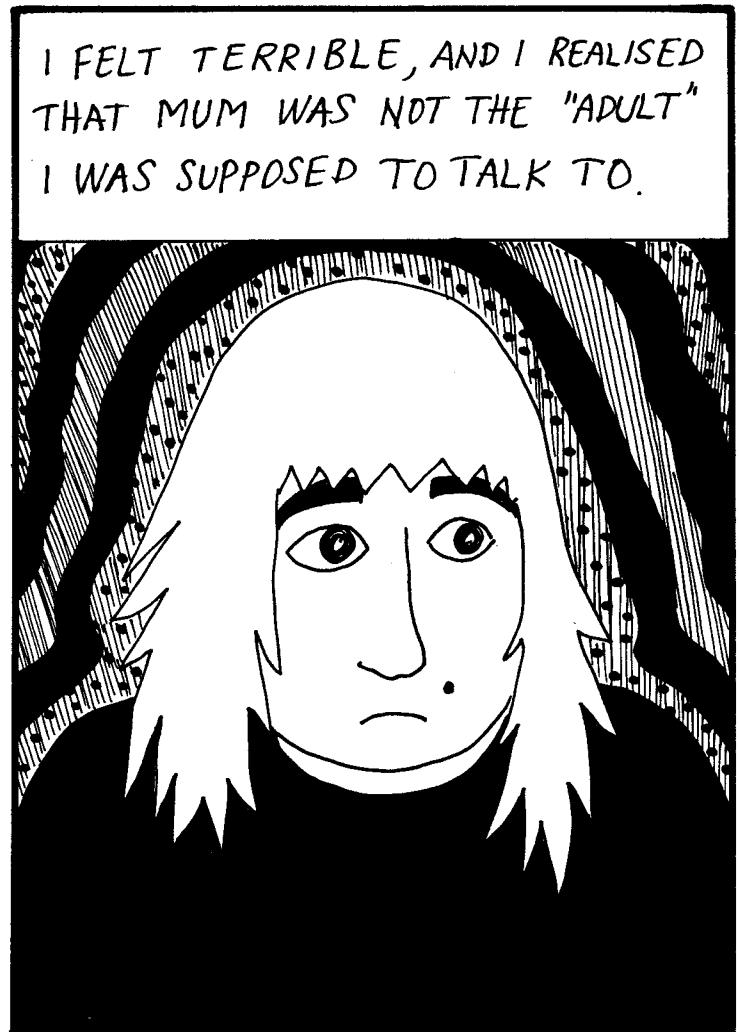
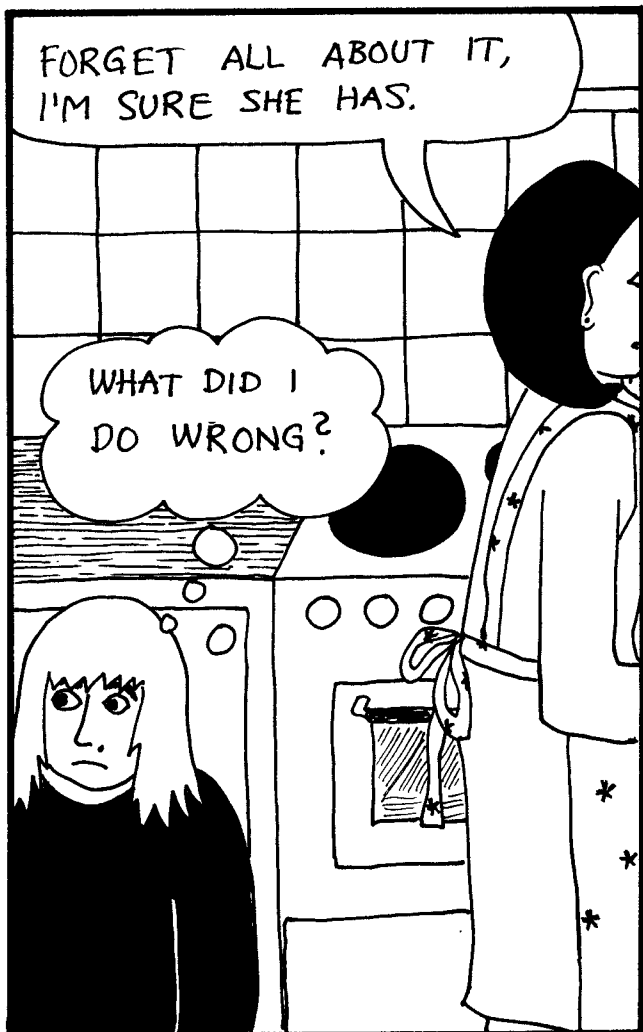
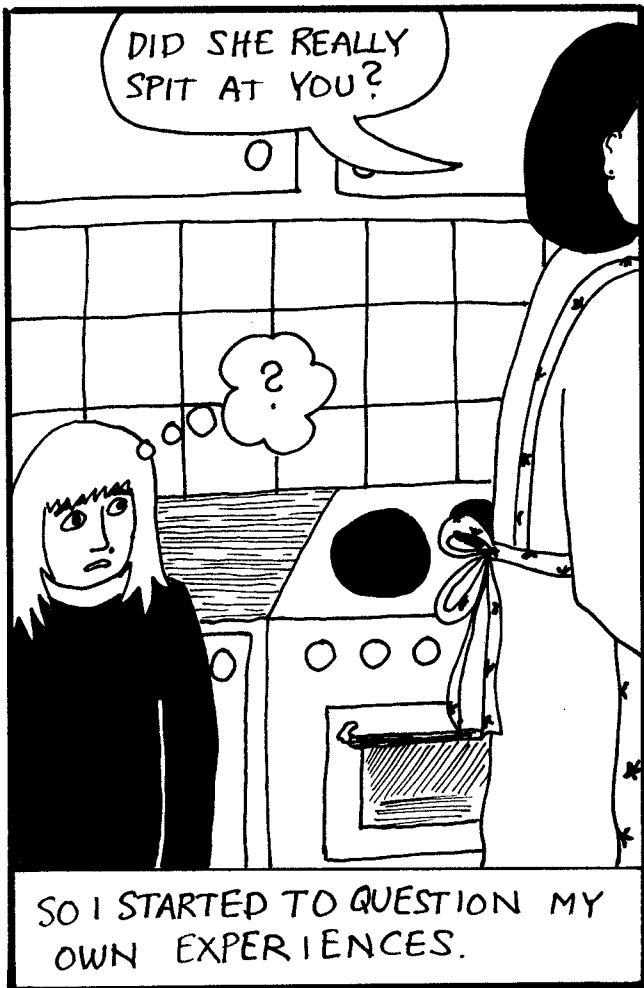


AT SCHOOL TODAY, TINA SPAT AT ME, RIGHT HERE, ON MY ARM!

DON'T BE SILLY, SHE COULDN'T HAVE.

YES SHE DID, I EVEN TOLD MY TEACHER, BUT SHE DIDN'T LISTEN!

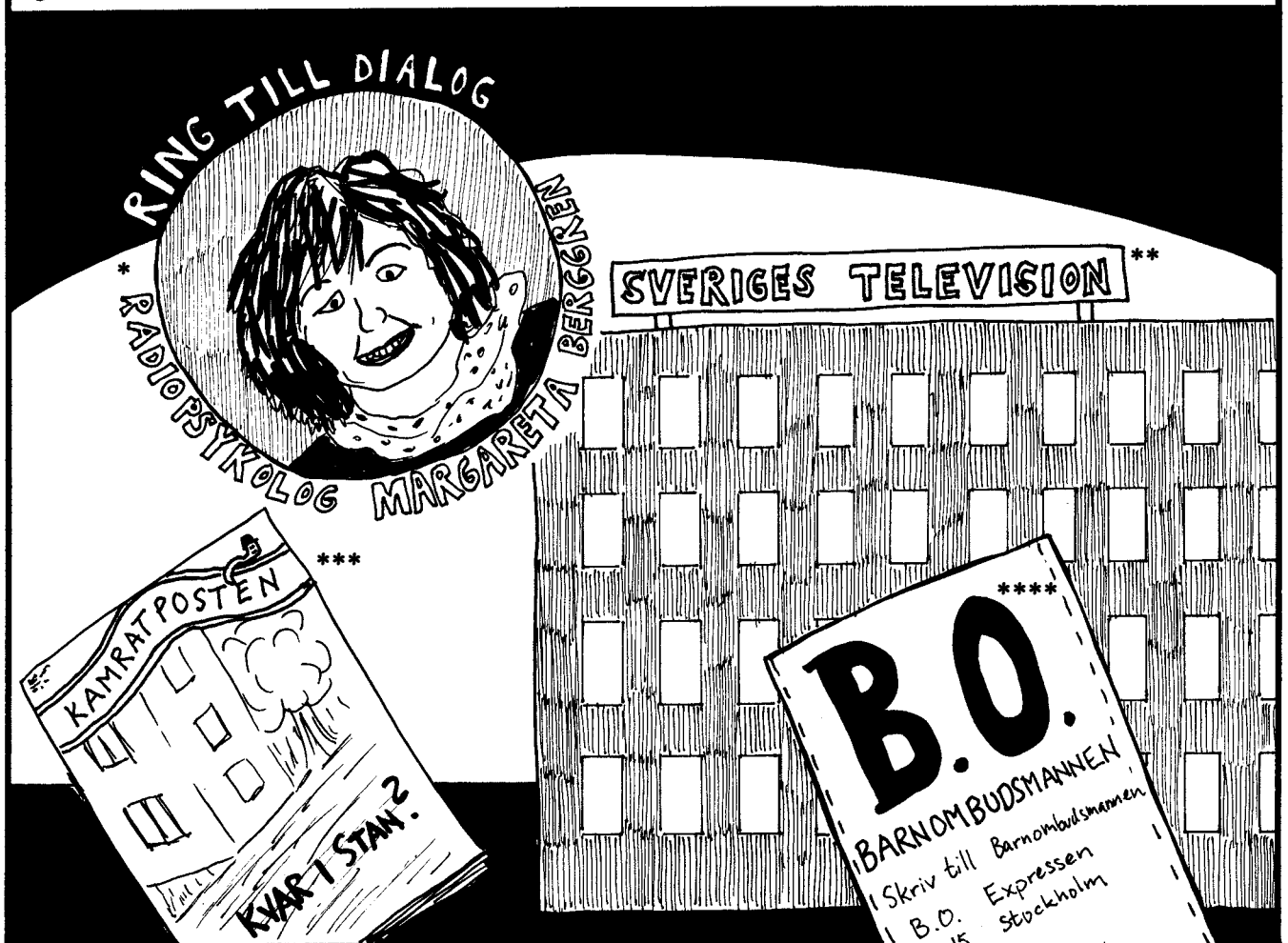
OH, JENNY! YOU SHOULDN'T BOTHER YOUR TEACHER WITH THINGS LIKE THAT! SHE HAS MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO THINK ABOUT.



I WONDERED WHERE TO FIND THESE ADULTS YOU WERE MEANT TO TALK TO. I KNEW I SHOULDN'T TALK TO MY MUM, AND SHE'D TOLD ME NOT TO TALK TO MY TEACHER. SO WHO WERE THEY? DID THEY EVEN EXIST?



IF THEY EXISTED AT ALL, I WAS PRETTY SURE THEY MUST BE IN STOCKHOLM



* CALL IN TO TALK TO OUR RADIO PSYCHOLOGIST MARGARETA BERGGREN. ** SWEDISH TELEVISION. *** KAMRATPOSTEN IS A WELL-KNOWN MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SWEDEN AND SOMETHING OF AN INSTITUTION THAT MANY SWEDES HAVE GROWN UP WITH. **** "THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN" WAS A NEWSPAPER COLUMN FOR CHILDREN TO WRITE TO.

SNAKE IN THE GRASS

I HAD A FRIEND CALLED SARA. WE LIVED QUITE CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, BUT HER HOUSE WAS RIGHT BY THE MOUNTAIN.



WE OFTEN SPENT TIME PLAYING ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE.

ONE AFTERNOON, WE HEARD HER MOTHER CALLING US AS USUAL TO COME DOWN.



WE STARTED RUNNING DOWN TOWARDS THE HOUSE.



SARA ALWAYS RAN FASTER THAN ME.

SUDDENLY SARA STARTED TO SCREAM AND RUN EVEN FASTER.



AAR
RGGGH
HH!

I WAS RUNNING PRETTY FAST, BUT I MANAGED TO SEE...

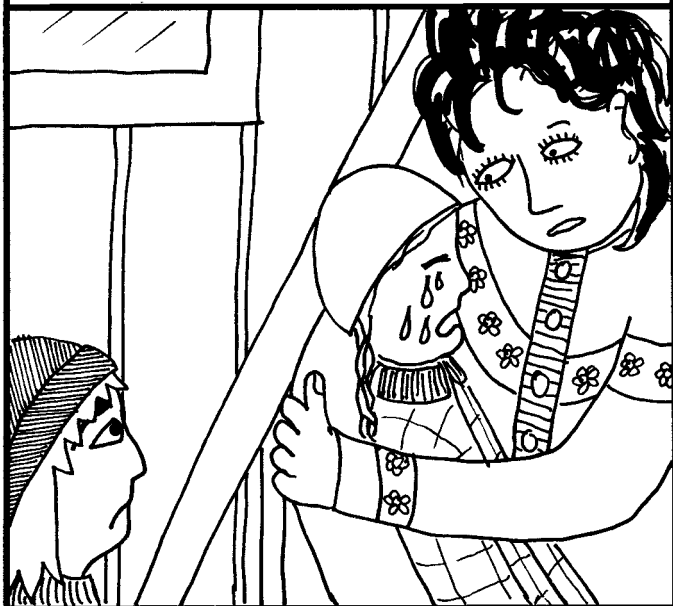


... A SNAKE COILED UP IN THE GRASS AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS.



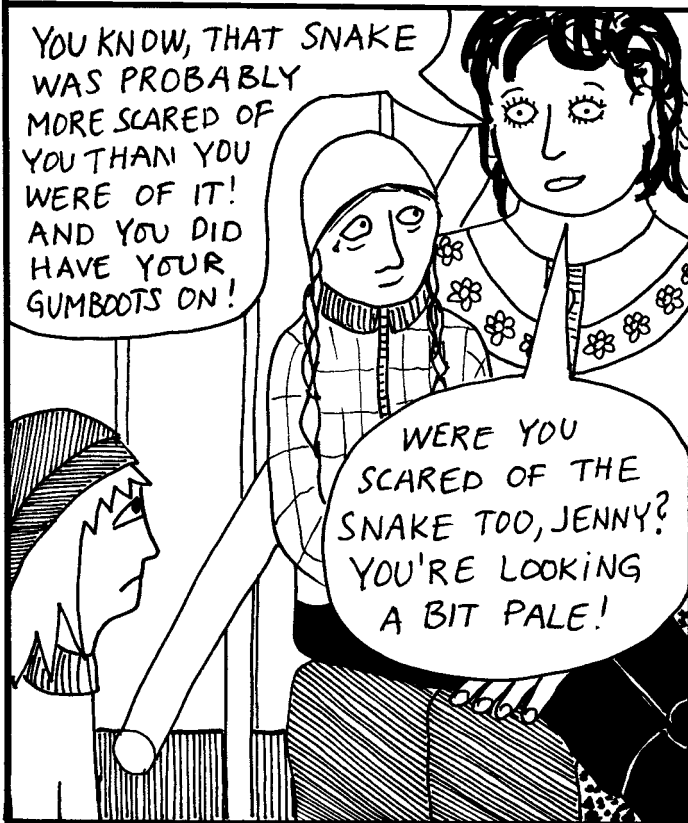


SARA WAS CLINGING TO HER MOTHER WHO HELD HER IN HER ARMS. SHE'D GIVEN IN TO HER FEAR AND LET HERSELF GO COMPLETELY, HER TEARS FLOWING LIKE THERE WAS NO TOMORROW.



I'D NEVER SEEN BEHAVIOUR LIKE THAT BEFORE. HER MOTHER JUST HELD HER FOR THE LONGEST TIME.

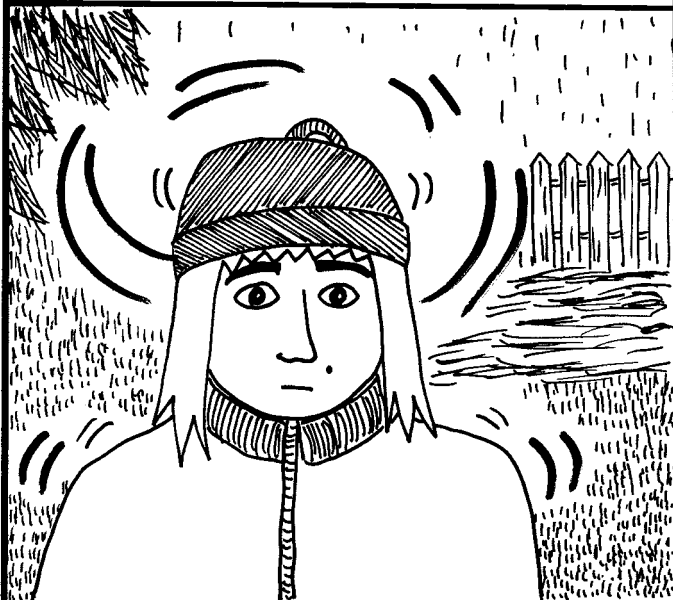
AFTER AN ETERNITY THAT LASTED LONGER THAN ANYTHING ELSE I'D EVER EXPERIENCED, SARA'S TEARS FINALLY STOPPED.



YOU KNOW, THAT SNAKE WAS PROBABLY MORE SCARED OF YOU THAN YOU WERE OF IT! AND YOU DID HAVE YOUR GUMBOOTS ON!

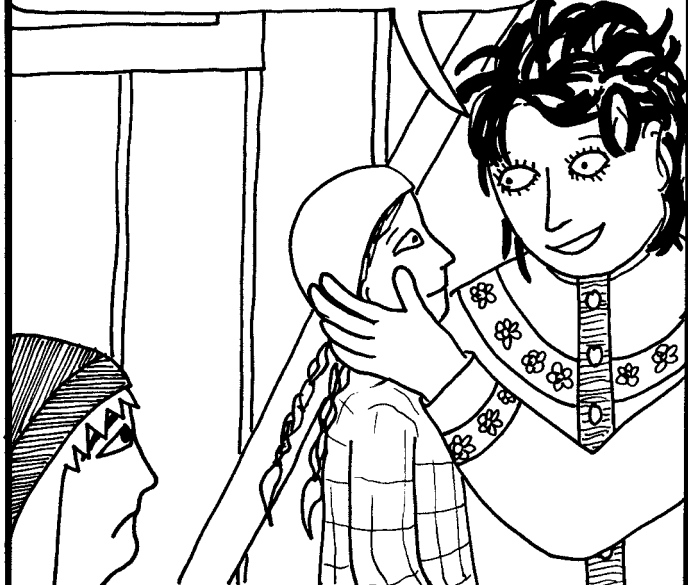
WERE YOU SCARED OF THE SNAKE TOO, JENNY? YOU'RE LOOKING A BIT PALE!

I SHOOK MY HEAD.



IT WAS WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS THAT WAS THE DIFFICULT PART FOR ME, SEEING SARA IN HER MUM'S ARMS CRYING HER EYES OUT, AND HER MUM SEEMING TO THINK THIS WAS PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR.

FEELING BETTER NOW?



I WAS SHOCKED THAT THERE WERE PARENTS WHO BEHAVED THIS WAY. BUT I ALSO UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS WAS SOMETHING I COULD NEVER HAVE. THIS MEANT SARA DESERVING THAN ME, I JUST COULDN'T WORK IT OUT.



PERHAPS IT WAS BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE MADE ME SAD TO CATCH A GLIPSE OF SOMETHING I WANTED BUT KNEW I COULD NEVER HAVE. SUPPER AT A KITCHEN TABLE TOGETHER WITH AN ADULT WHO ASKED YOU HOW YOU WERE AND WHAT YOU'D BEEN UP TO THAT DAY.

IT WAS THE BIGGEST SNAKE I'VE EVER SEEN!

OOOHHH!

AT SARA'S HOUSE, IT WAS EVEN OK TO TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT WEREN'T ALWAYS NICE.

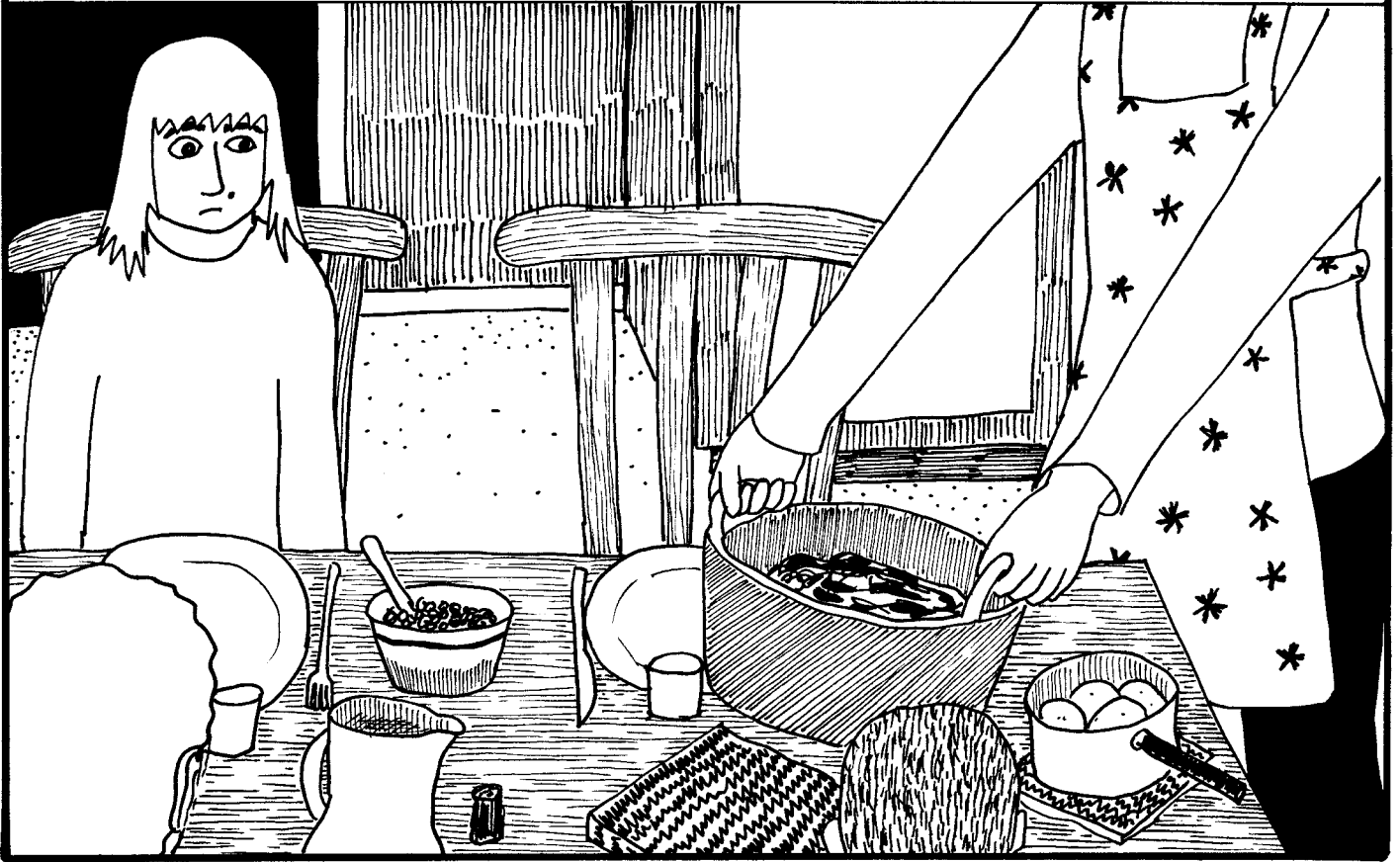
OCCASIONALLY, THERE MIGHT EVEN BE AN ARGUMENT, SARA'S MUM SOMETIMES GOT ANGRY WITH HER OLDER BROTHER, FOR EXAMPLE.

JUST BEHAVE YOURSELF NOW, PLEASE.

WHY THE HELL SHOULD I?

THEY ALL GOT TO SHOW THEIR FEELINGS QUITE OPENLY TO ME, THIS WAS LIKE MAGIC.

BUT I WENT BACK HOME INSTEAD. IN OUR HOUSE, THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMEONE AT HOME, BUT IT WAS EMPTY AND SILENT ANYWAY.



OF COURSE, I DIDN'T MENTION THE SNAKE.



IN OUR HOUSE YOU COULD ONLY TALK ABOUT "NICE" THINGS. ANYTHING THAT WAS IN ANY UNPLEASANT HAD TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.

LIFTS WITH INGER

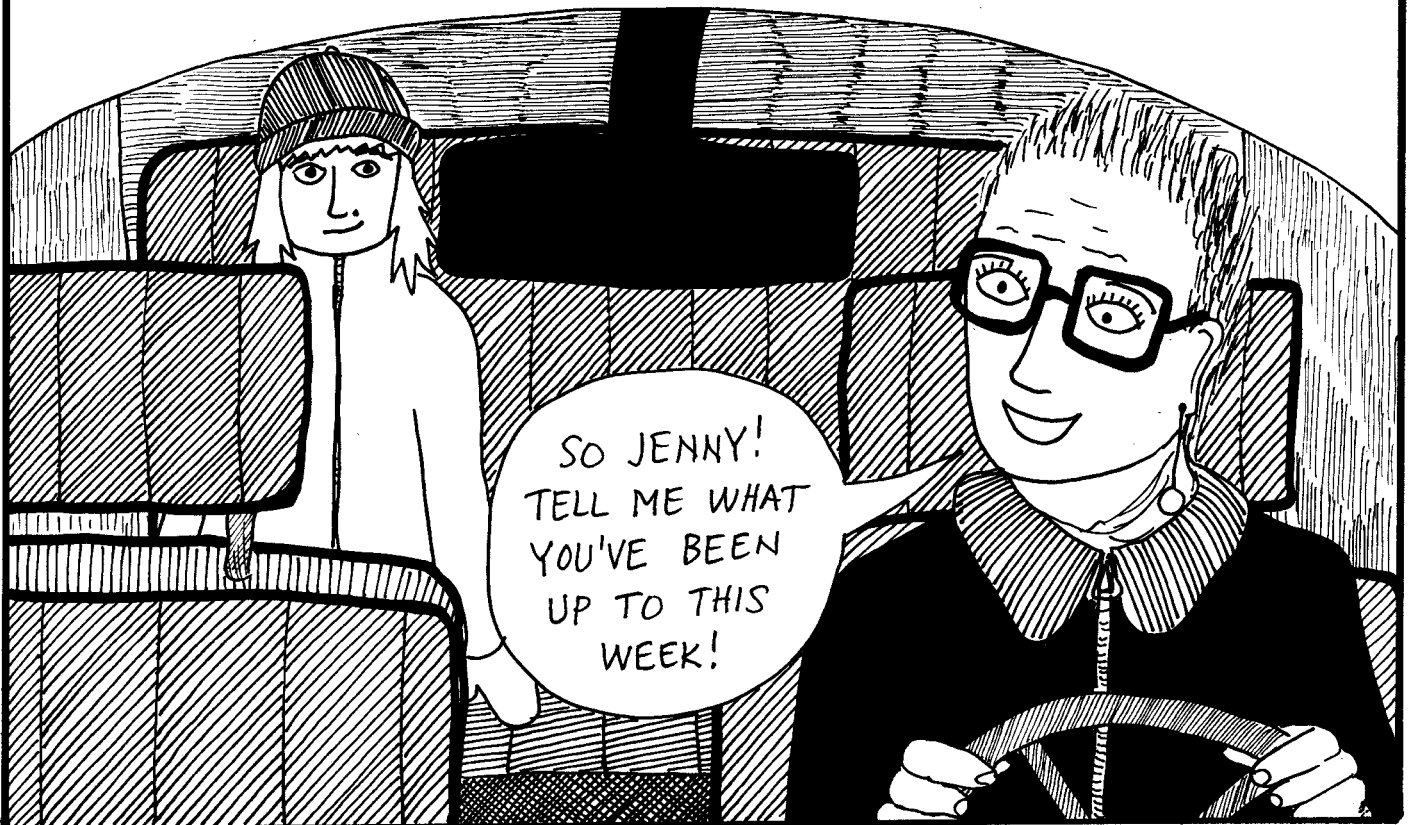
WHEN I WAS 5, I WAS ALLOWED TO GO INTO TOWN EVERY TUESDAY MORNING TO THE CHILDREN'S HOUR AT THE CHURCH.



ONE OF THE CHURCH PEOPLE THERE WAS CALLED INGER AND SHE LIVED IN A VILLAGE THAT WAS EVEN FURTHER FROM TOWN THAN OURS, SO SHE USED TO GIVE ME A LIFT.



TUESDAY MORNINGS - I LIVED FOR THOSE LIFTS.



AT ASSEMBLY DURING CHILDREN'S HOUR, WE GOT TO TELL THE OTHERS ABOUT THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO US DURING THE WEEK, THIS WAS MY SAFETY VALVE. WHENEVER ANYTHING HAPPENED IN MY LIFE, I THOUGHT:

I'LL TELL HER ABOUT THIS ON TUESDAY

THIS'LL MAKE A GOOD STORY FOR TUESDAY.

CROAK!

THIS'LL GIVE ME SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT ON TUESDAY

I'LL HAVE TO TELL HER THIS ON TUESDAY

NEW SHOES

SOME WEEKS, SO MANY THINGS HAPPENED THAT I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT THAT I'D HAVE TO SORT THROUGH THEM AND COME UP WITH ALTERNATIVES.

IF I TELL THEM **THAT** ON TUESDAY, THEN I CAN KEEP THE OTHER STORY FOR THE CAR TRIP INTO TOWN.

AND THEN MAYBE I CAN TALK ABOUT THE THIRD THING IN THE CAR ON THE WAY BACK.

I STARTED TO RUN EVENTS TOGETHER SO THAT I COULD TALK ABOUT SEVERAL THINGS IN THE SAME STORY.

I COULD SAY THAT I SAW THE FROG AND THEN FELL OVER AND HURT MY HAND. THAT MAKES IT ONE STORY INSTEAD OF TWO.

I GOT THE DISTINCT FEELING THAT INGER ENJOYED LISTENING TO ME WHEN I TOLD HER THINGS, THAT SHE FOUND WHAT I SAID INTERESTING.

... AND THEN WE SAW A SNAKE!!

OOHHH! A SNAKE! WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?

IT WAS ALL BLACK, AND YELLOW, AND REALLY BIG!

70s FLASHBACK: NO SAFETY BELTS IN THE BACK SEAT.

JUST BY ASKING ME TO TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO ME, SHE MADE ME FEEL REAL, AS IF I COUNTED.

Jesus loves us all

OK, NOW IT'S JENNY'S TURN TO TELL US SOMETHING.

ONE DAY WHEN IT WAS RAINING REALLY HARD,...

NEVER BEFORE HAD I FELT THAT I WAS EITHER IMPORTANT OR INTERESTING TO ANYONE ELSE.

A VISIT TO THE CINEMA

ON SUNDAYS, THE CINEMA IN TOWN SHOWED CHILDREN'S MATINEES AND ONE DAY, SARA'S MOTHER ASKED IF I WANTED TO GO.



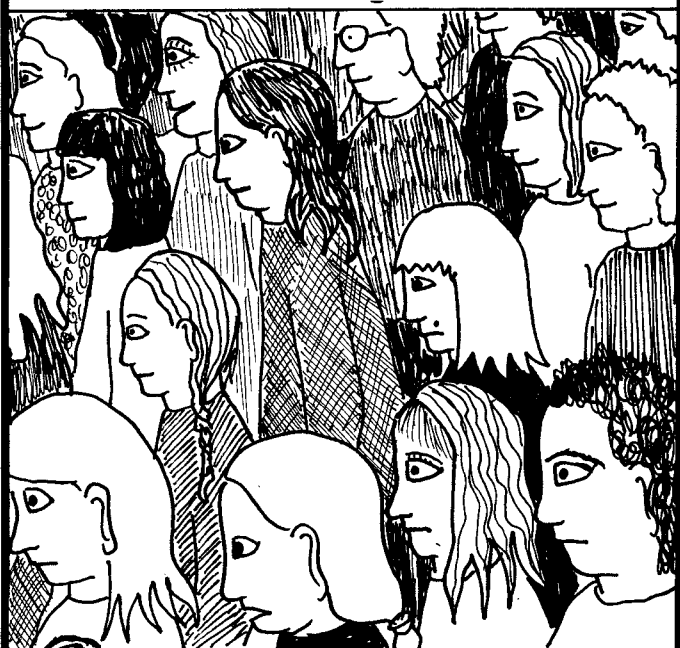
I'LL DRIVE THEM THERE AND PICK THEM UP AFTERWARDS.

SO IT WAS DECIDED THAT I COULD GO, EVEN THOUGH DAD THOUGHT IT WAS UNNECESSARY.



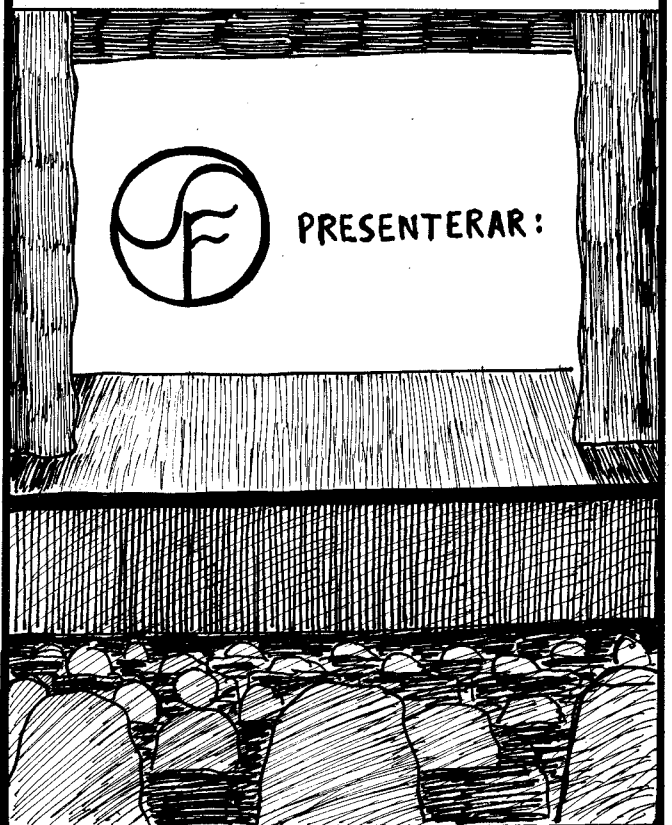
THEY ALWAYS SHOW THOSE FILMS ON TELLY, SOONER OR LATER.

I WAS NERVOUS. THE OTHER CHILDREN THERE WERE MOSTLY OLDER AND HAD ALREADY STARTED SCHOOL.

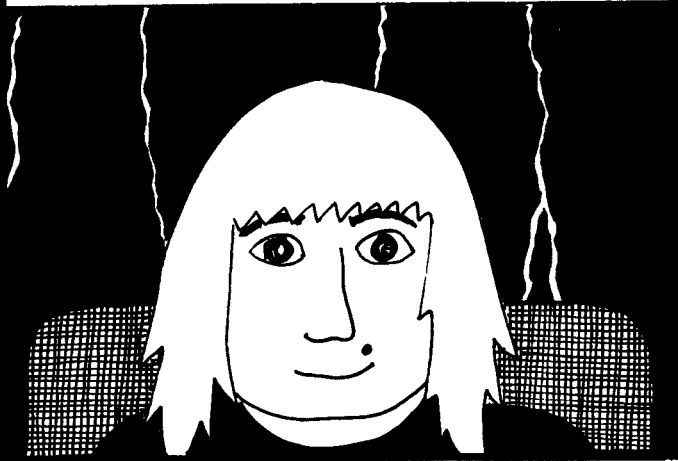


WE GOT OUR TICKETS AND I FOLLOWED THE OTHERS INSIDE.

THE LIGHTS WENT DOWN AND THE FILM STARTED.



THIS IS WHERE I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO SAY SOMETHING BERGMAN-LIKE ABOUT THAT FILM BEING MY FIRST REAL ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE AND A TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE. THAT I DISCOVERED THE WORLD OF FILM, TO WHICH I WAS THEN ABLE TO ESCAPE WHENEVER I NEEDED TO.

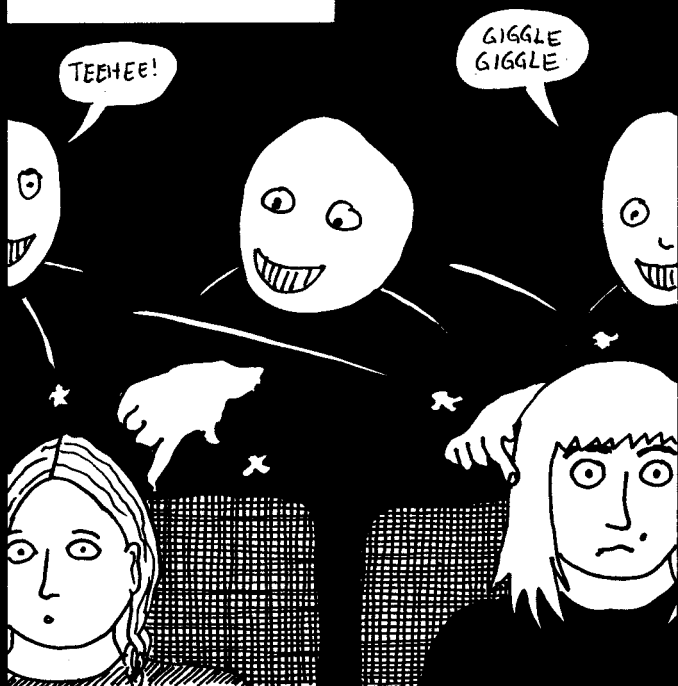


SADLY, THOUGH, THE EXPERIENCE WAS NOTHING BUT TORTURE FROM BEGINNING TO END.



SEATED BEHIND US WERE SOME BOYS OF AROUND 10.

THEY POKED AND PINCHED AND THREW THINGS AT ME AND SARA ALL THROUGH THE FILM.



SARA DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING EITHER, SHE WAS PROBABLY JUST AS PARALYSED AS I WAS.

I TRIED TO IGNORE THEM AND CONCENTRATE ON THE MOVIE, BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE FILM WAS ABOUT.



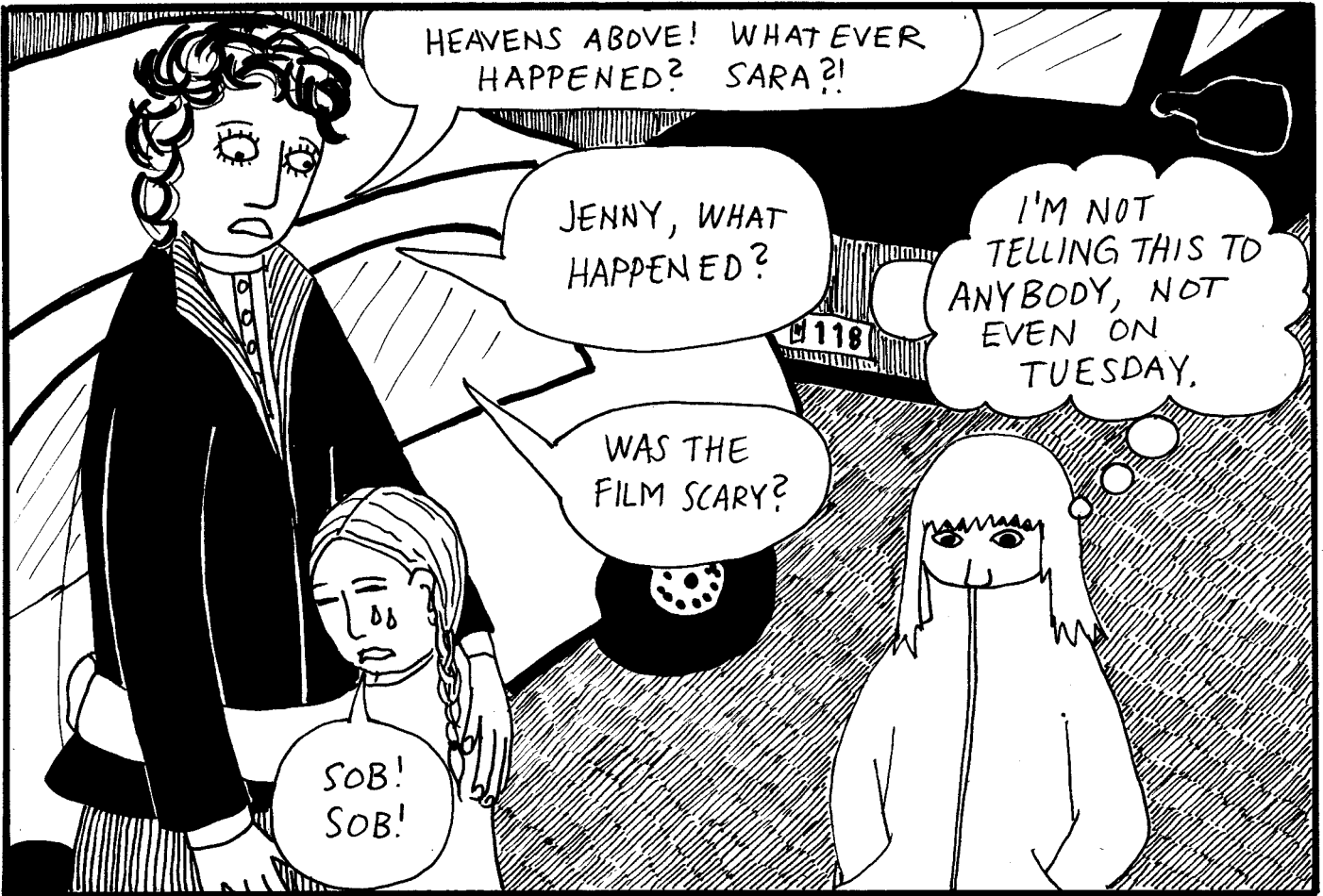
I FELT LIKE A TRAPPED ANIMAL THERE IN THE DARK. I DIDN'T DARE LEAVE, EVEN THOUGH SITTING THROUGH I WAS UNBEARABLE. SO I FOCUSED ON NOT CRYING.

FINALLY THE FILM WAS OVER AND THE LIGHTS WENT UP.



GET A MOVE ON THEN!

SARA AND I HURRIED OUT TO LOOK FOR SARA'S MOTHER'S CAR.



HEAVENS ABOVE! WHAT EVER HAPPENED? SARA?!

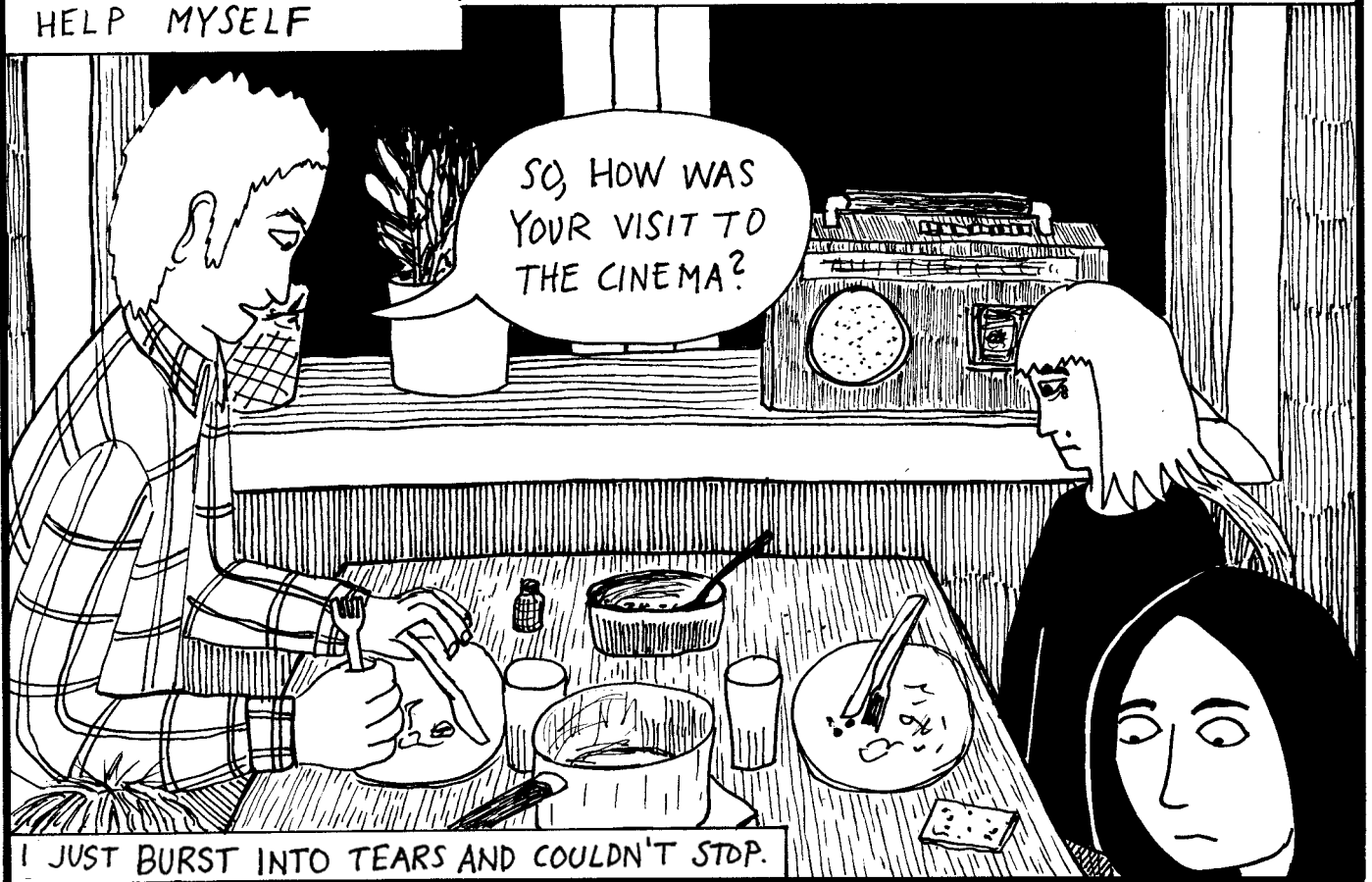
JENNY, WHAT HAPPENED?

WAS THE FILM SCARY?

SOB!
SOB!

I'M NOT TELLING THIS TO ANYBODY, NOT EVEN ON TUESDAY.

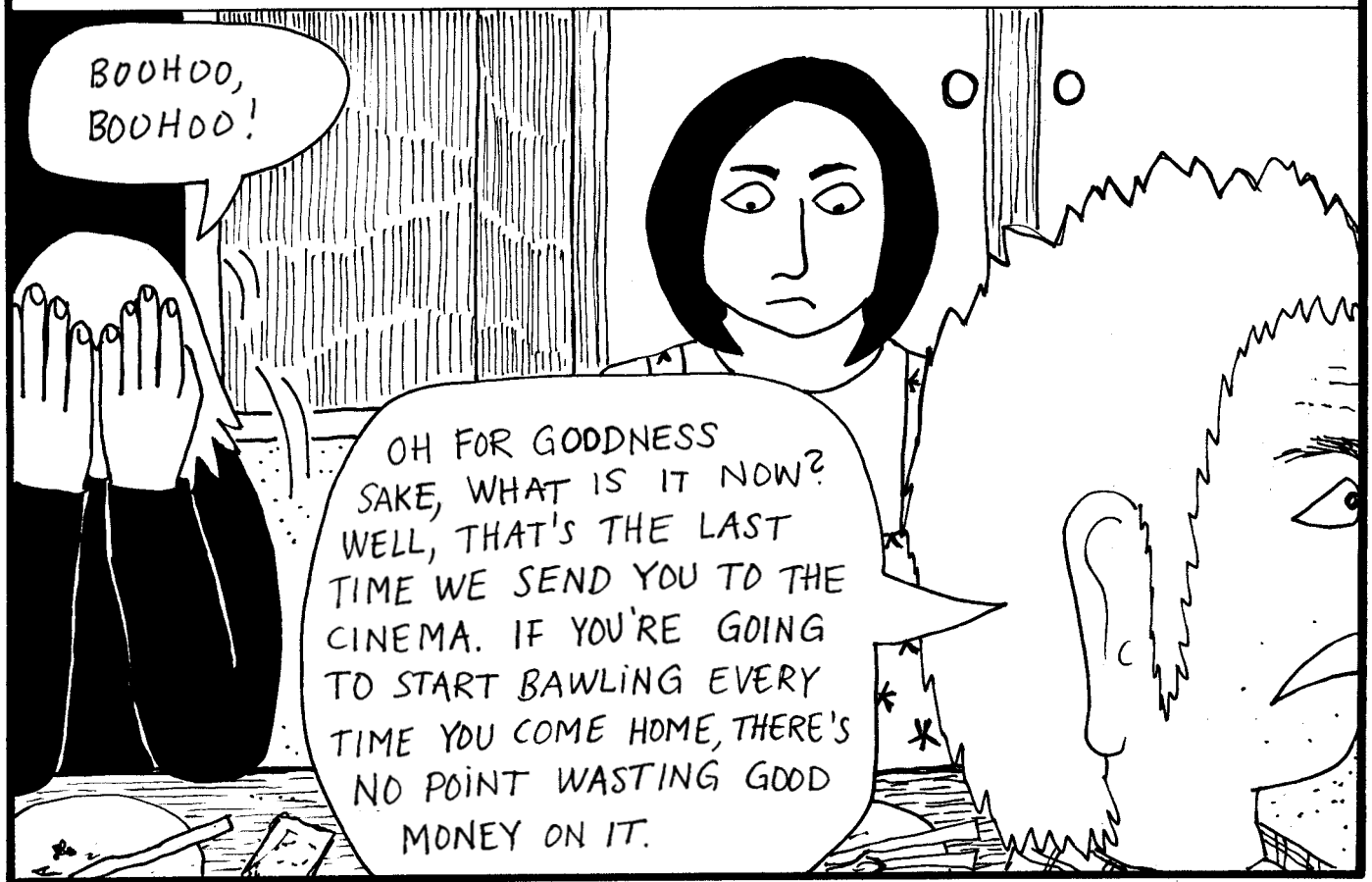
BUT WHEN I GOT HOME, IT WAS AS IF I JUST COULDN'T HELP MYSELF



SO, HOW WAS YOUR VISIT TO THE CINEMA?

I JUST BURST INTO TEARS AND COULDN'T STOP.

AND AS ALWAYS WHENEVER I CRIED, DAD GOT STRESSED OUT AND LEFT THE ROOM.



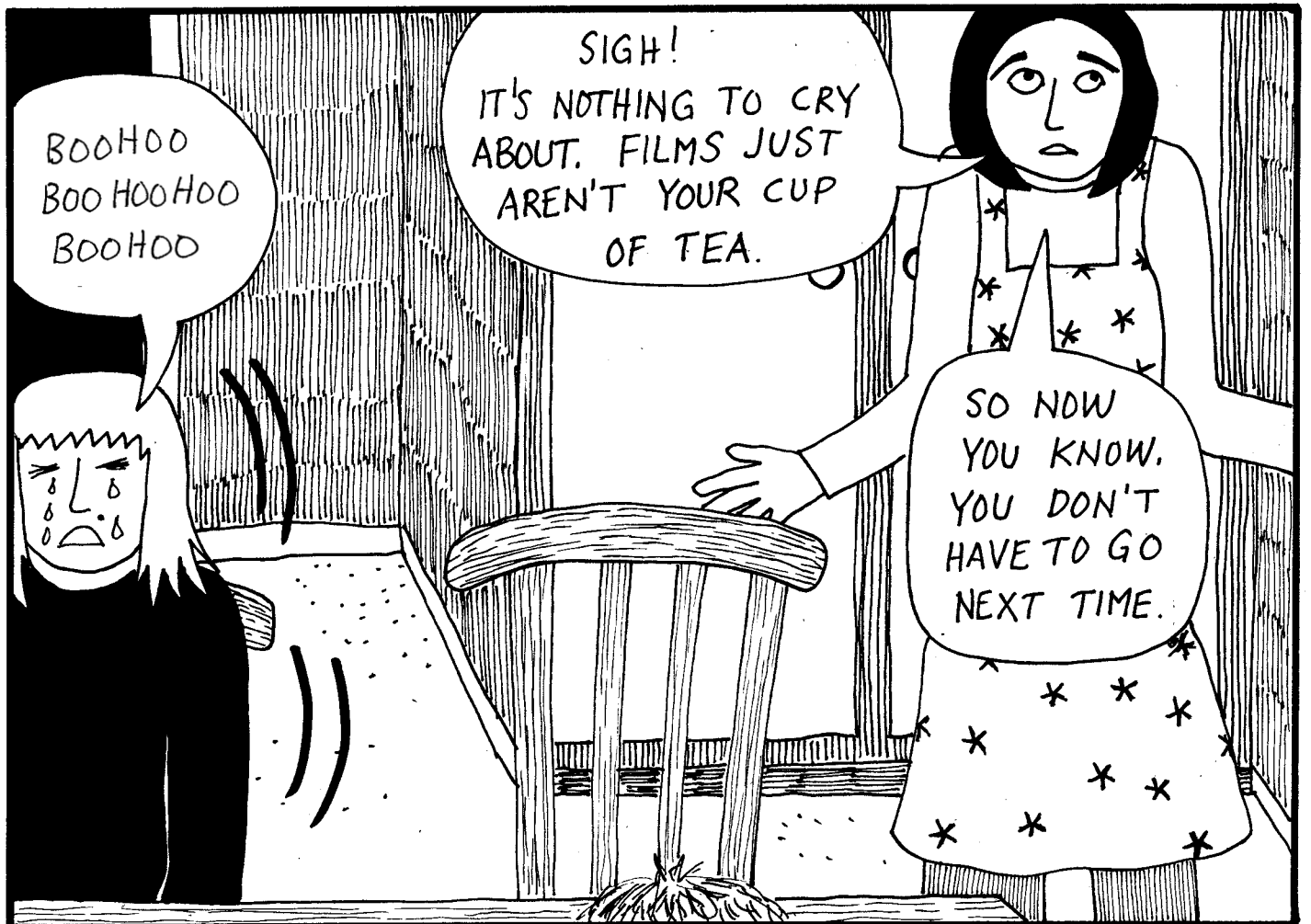
BOOHOO, BOOHOO!

OH FOR GODDNESS SAKE, WHAT IS IT NOW? WELL, THAT'S THE LAST TIME WE SEND YOU TO THE CINEMA. IF YOU'RE GOING TO START BAWLING EVERY TIME YOU COME HOME, THERE'S NO POINT WASTING GOOD MONEY ON IT.



WELL, NOW YOU'LL KNOW NEXT TIME. NO MORE TRIPS TO THE CINEMA FOR YOU.

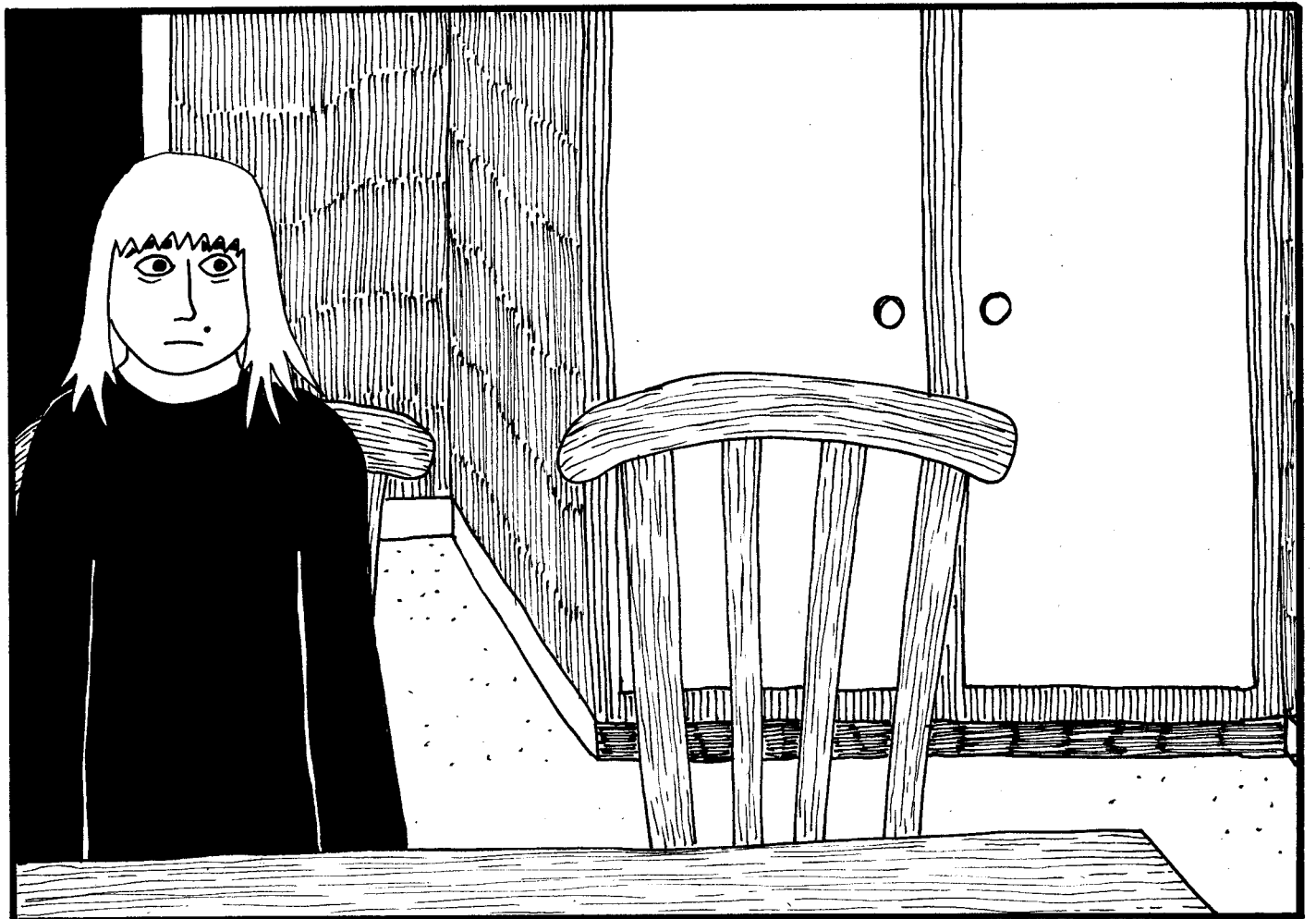
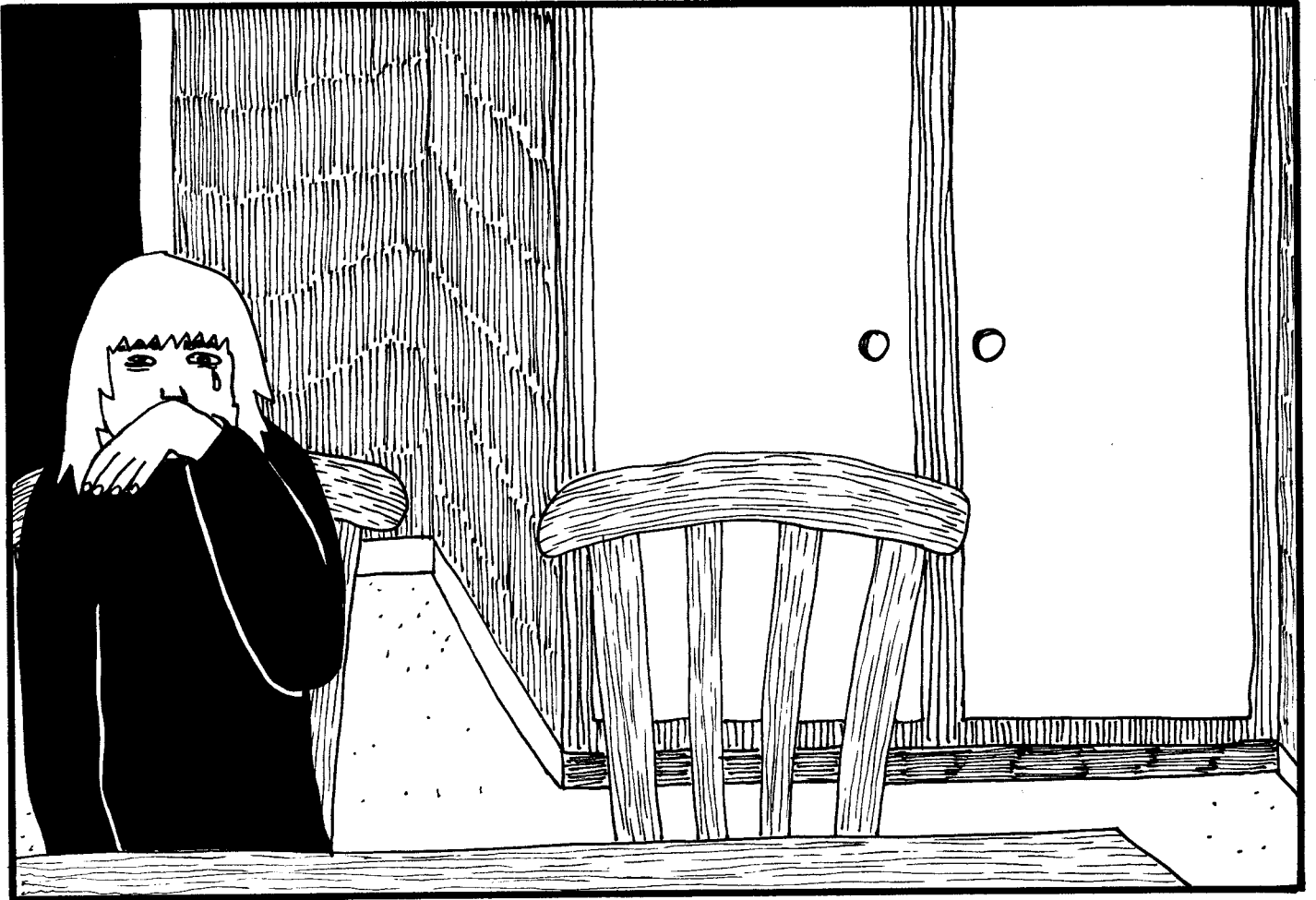
BUT... BUT... IT WASN'T THE CINEMA, IT WAS...



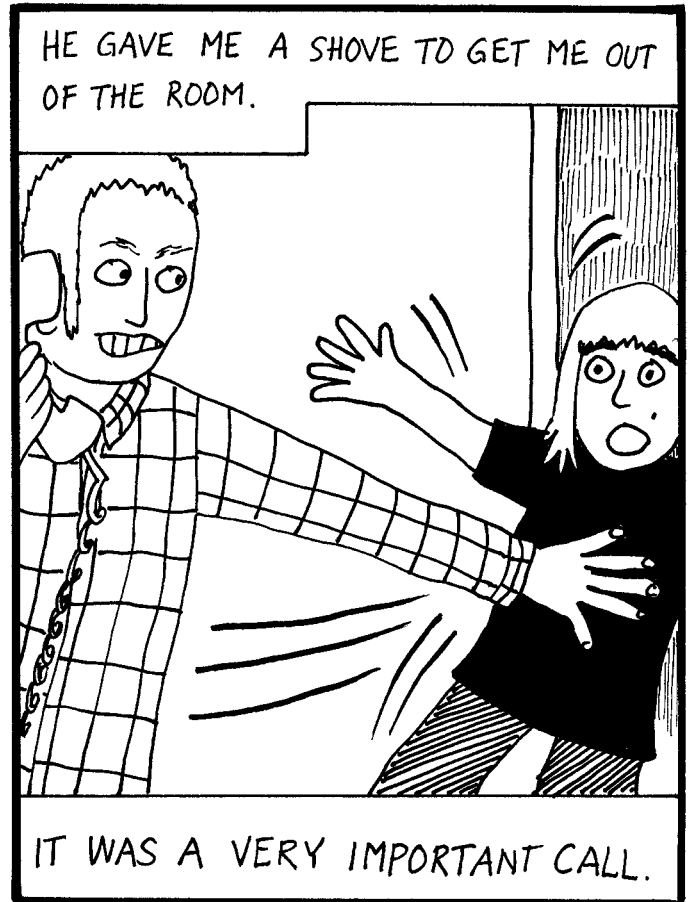
SIGH!
IT'S NOTHING TO CRY ABOUT. FILMS JUST AREN'T YOUR CUP OF TEA.

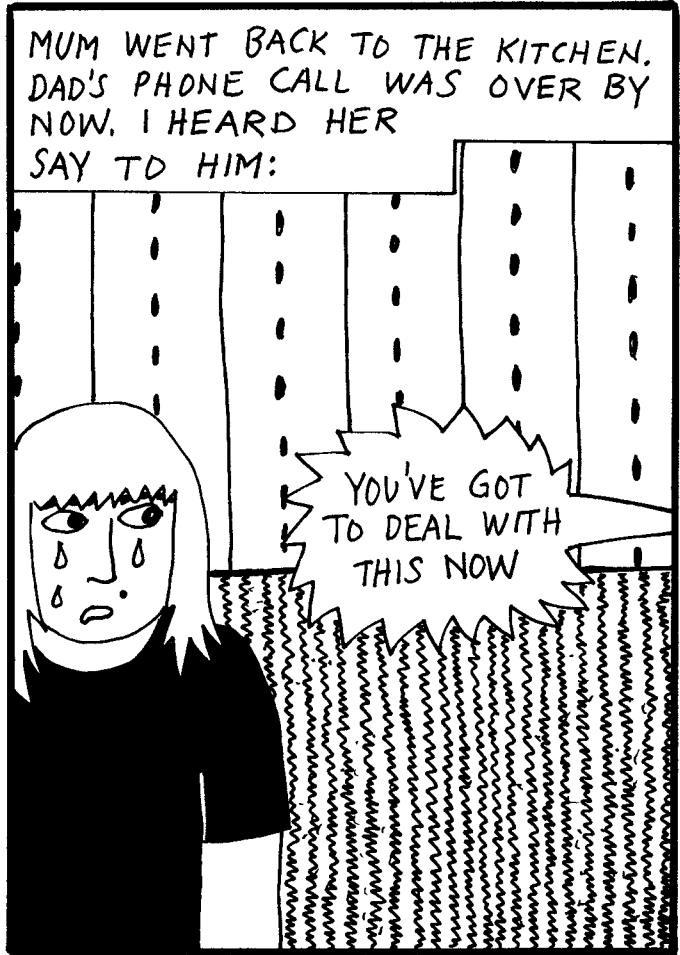
BOOHOO
BOOHOOHOO
BOOHOO

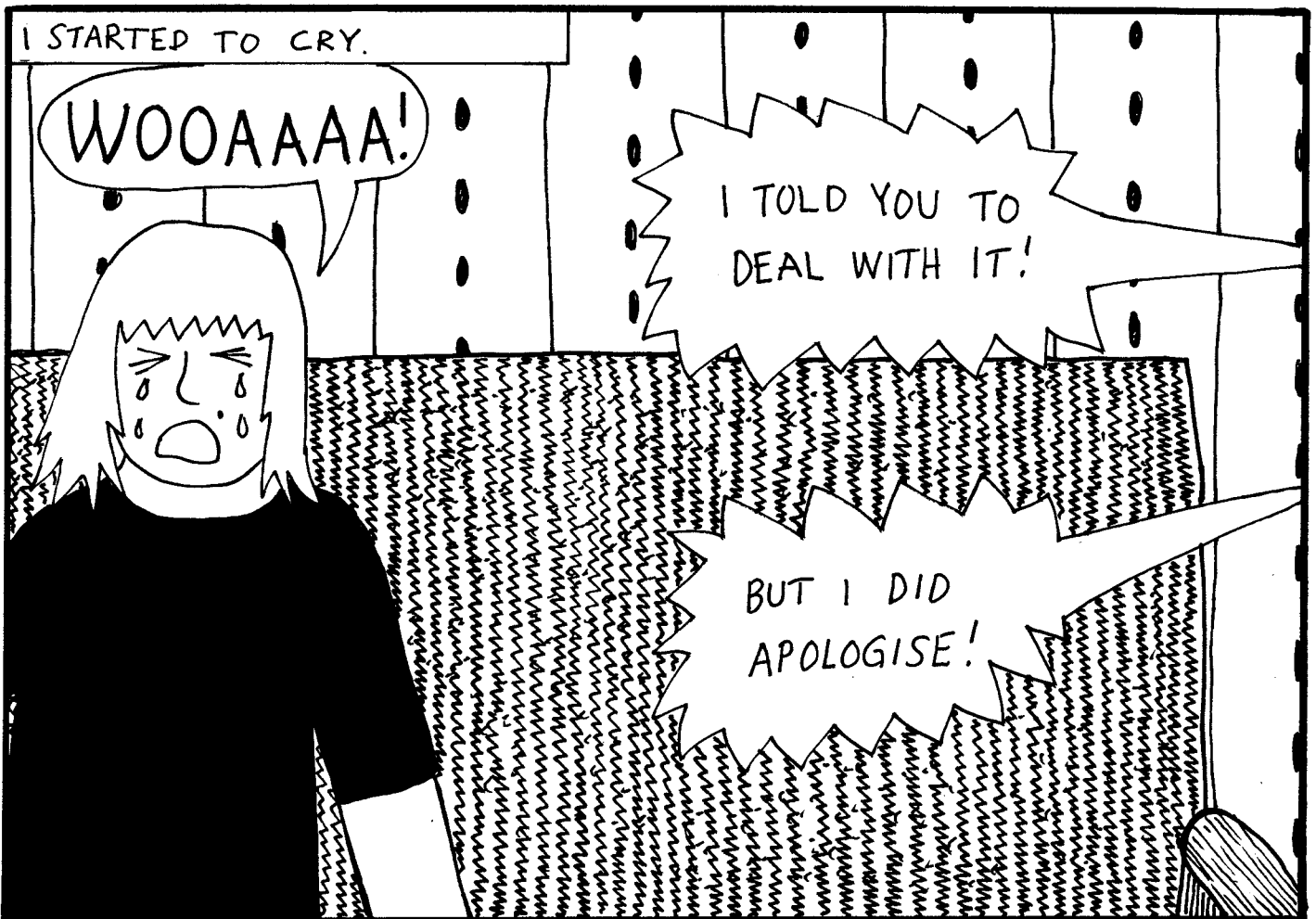
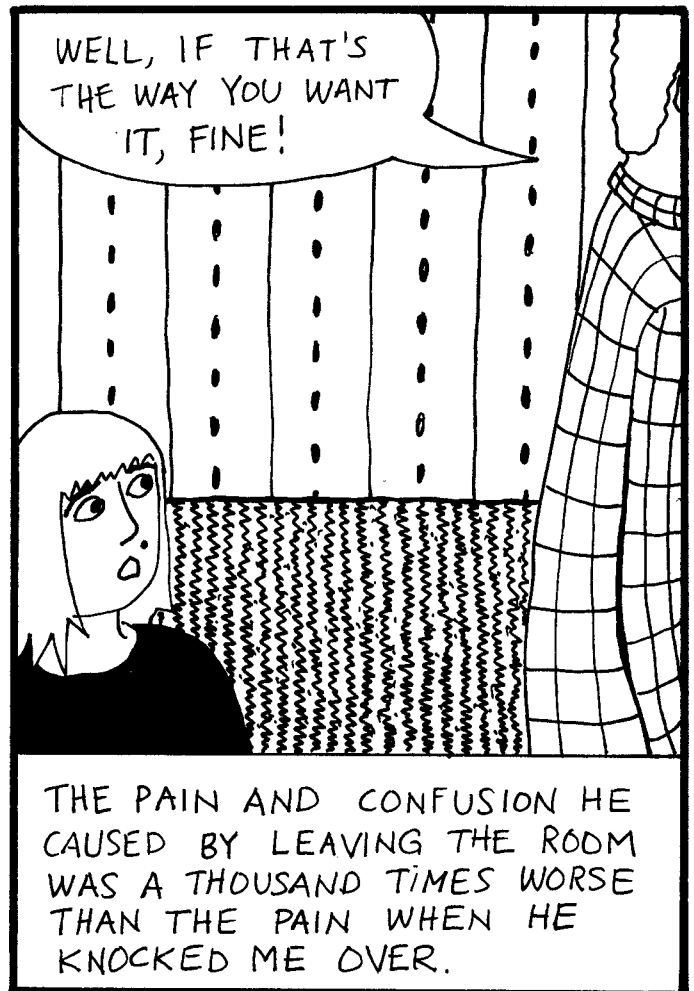
SO NOW YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO NEXT TIME.



THREATENING CLOUD







MUM ONLY EVER HIT ME ONCE.



IT FELT GOOD.

I WAS 6 AND I'D COME INSIDE WITH DIRTY SHOES AND TRAMPLED MUD ON HER NEWLY SCRUBBED FLOORS. SHE THREW ME OUT ON THE DOORSTEP AND GAVE ME A SLAP.



IT DIDN'T HURT.

BUT I STARTED TO CRY, MOSTLY BECAUSE I KNEW I WAS ENTITLED TO. THIS WAS 1979, AND THE LAW AGAINST CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN HAD JUST BEEN PASSED. I KNEW ALL ABOUT IT AND I ALSO KNEW THAT MY MUM HAD DONE SOMETHING ILLEGAL.



SO I CRIED AND CRIED, AS IF THIS WERE MY ONLY CHANCE TO GET SOME CRYING DONE. THE SLAP HAD GIVEN ME THE RIGHT TO SHOW MY FEELINGS.

MY MUM IS INCAPABLE OF SAYING SORRY, OR ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS, OR EVEN GIVING ME A HUG.

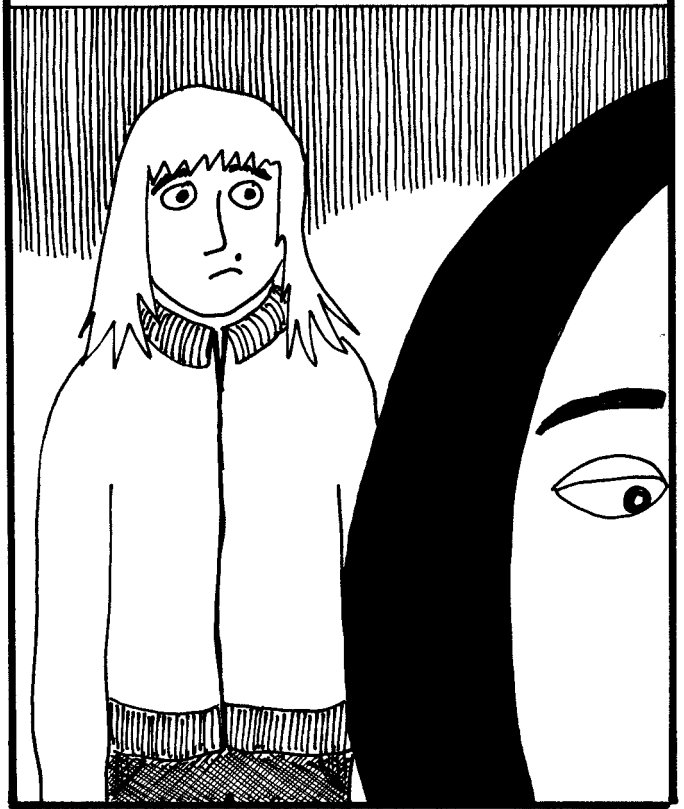


BUT SHE DID ADMIT SHE'D BEEN WRONG AND THAT WAS A MAJOR VICTORY FOR ME.

SHE NEVER HIT ME AGAIN, WHICH WAS A PITY. A SLAP WOULD HAVE BEEN AN EXPRESSION OF FEELING ON HER PART. SHE WOULD HAVE SHOWN ME SOMETHING, WEIRD AS IT MAY SEEM, A SLAP FROM HER WOULD HAVE FELT TANGIBLE AND SAFE.



INSTEAD, THINGS JUST WENT BACK TO THE WAY THEY'D ALWAYS BEEN - SILENCE, AVOIDANCE, GUESSWORK AND CONFUSION.

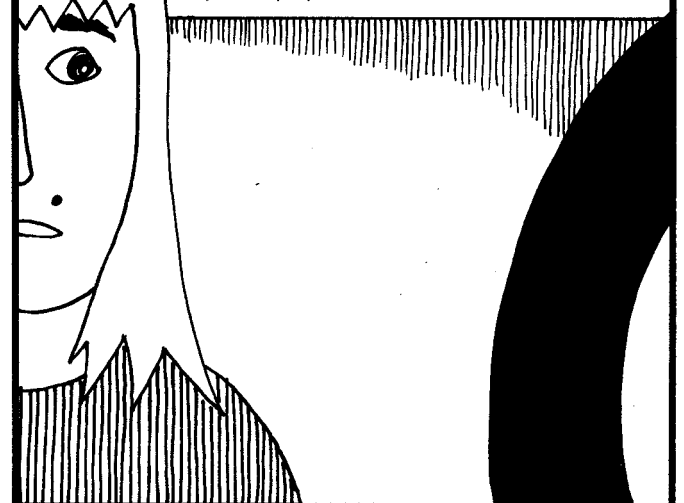


I DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER WHAT I DID WAS RIGHT OR WRONG.



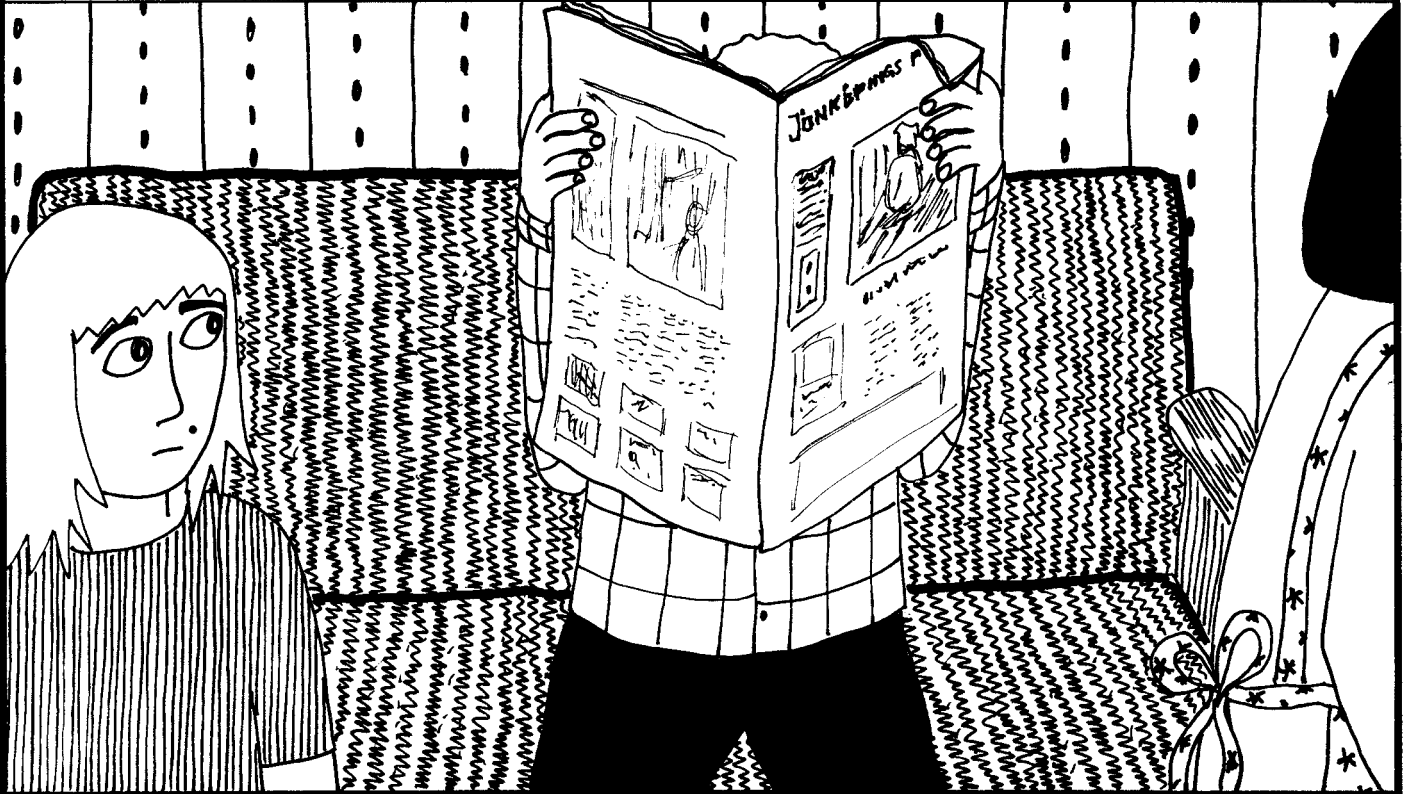
ALL I KNEW WAS THAT MY PARENTS WEREN'T DOING ANYTHING CRIMINAL OR ILLEGAL.

AFTER THE LAW CHANGED, THERE WAS LOTS OF TALK ON THE RADIO ABOUT SMACKING CHILDREN AND ABOUT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT. SO I KNEW THAT THERE WERE CHILDREN WHO WERE BEATEN AND ABUSED IN OTHER WAYS BY THEIR PARENTS.



I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE PARENTS WHO WEREN'T LIKE THAT, AND I KNEW IT.

I HAVE NEVER FELT AFRAID OF MY PARENTS. AND I'VE NEVER FELT THREATENED BY THEM.



QUITE THE OPPOSITE, IN FACT. THEY'RE THE ONES WHO ARE AFRAID OF ME.

I FEEL SO...



ROOMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VACATED IMMEDIATELY WHENEVER I'VE SO MUCH AS MENTIONED MY FEELINGS, FOR FEAR OF HAVING TO DEAL WITH ANYTHING UNPLEASANT.

MY PARENTS ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE WAITING FOR ME TO BE HAPPY.

SHE'LL JUST HAVE TO DEAL WITH THAT HERSELF.

I CAN'T COPE WITH THAT SORT OF THING.

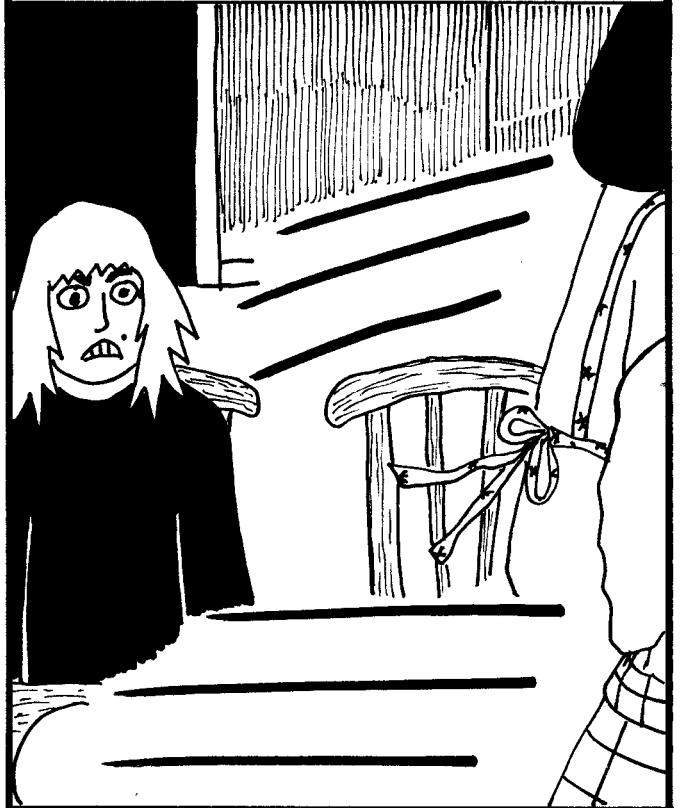


THEY SUFFERED FROM A NAMELESS TERROR OF HAVING TO DEAL WITH SOMEONE ELSE'S EMOTIONS.

AS TIME PASSED, I BEGAN TO REALISE THAT I COULD USE MY FEELINGS AS A WEAPON. ALL I NEEDED TO DO WAS HAVE A SMALL FIT...

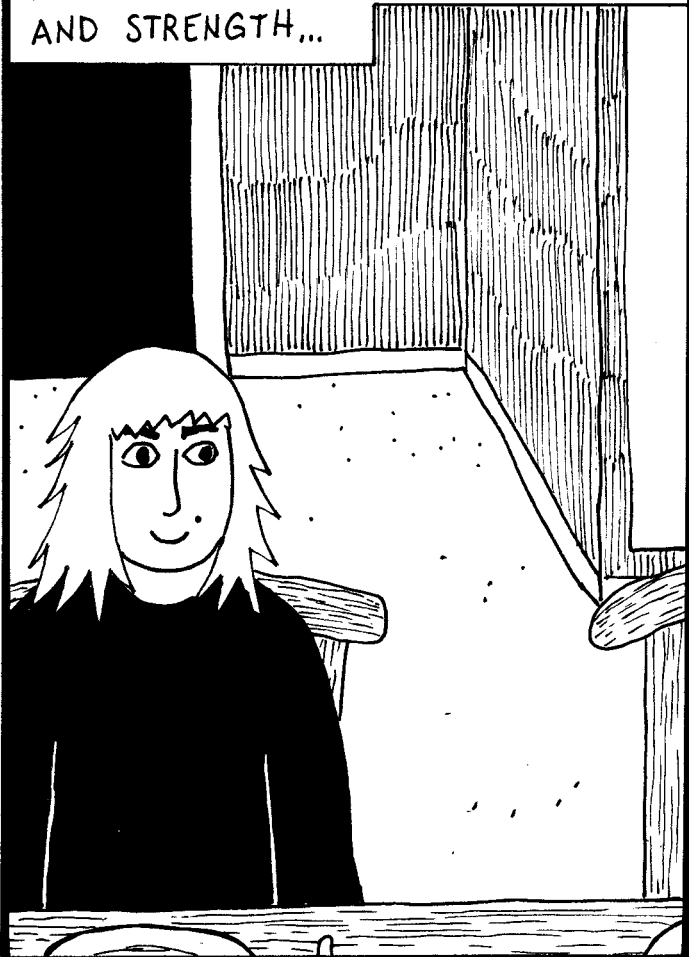


... AND THEY LEFT ME IN PEACE AT ONCE,

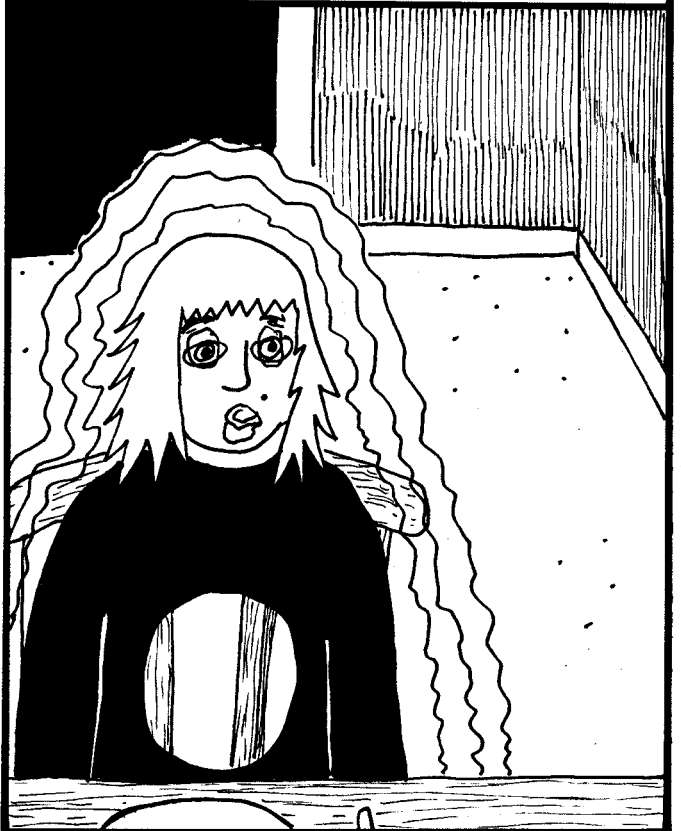


I WAS IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

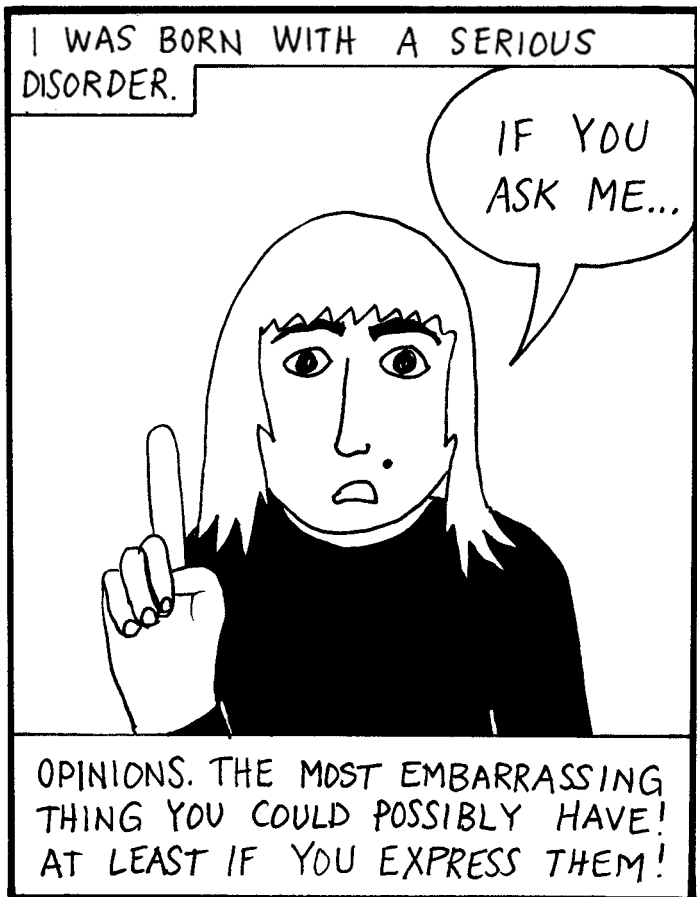
THIS GAVE ME A FEELING OF TRIUMPH AND STRENGTH...

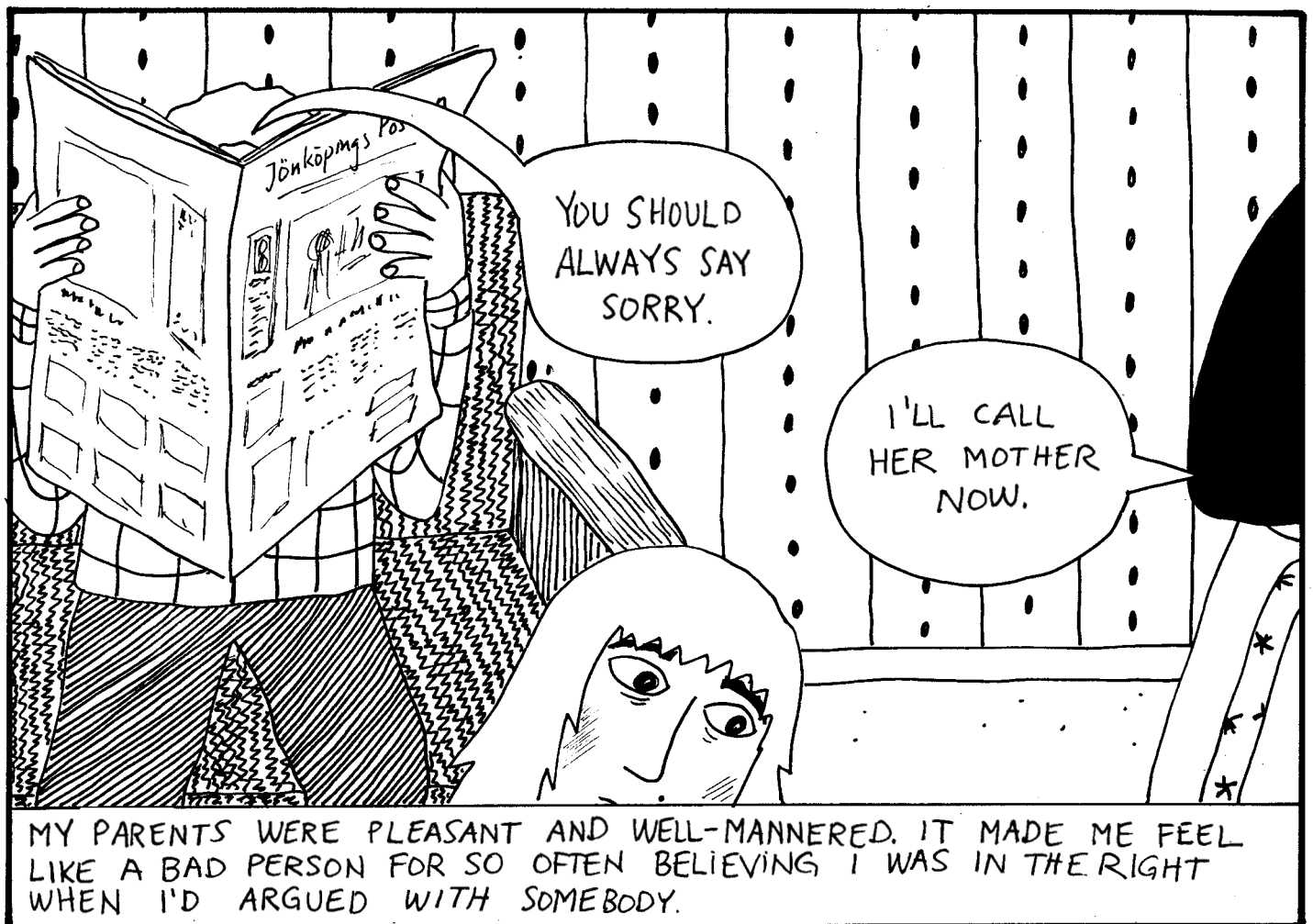


... ALONGSIDE A SENSE OF BOTTOMLESS EMPTINESS AND PANIC AT BEING LEFT ABANDONED AND ALONE.



OPINIONS







BUT THE WORST THING WAS WHEN I EMBARRASSED THEM IN FRONT OF OTHER ADULTS.

WHAT ARE THEY THINKING, LANDING US WITH A BLOODY REFUGEE CAMP?



ACTUALLY, WHERE THEY COME FROM, THERE'S A WAR ON! AND SWEDEN HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP THEM!



WHEN SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED, MY DAD COULD IGNORE MY EXISTENCE FOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTERWARDS TO MAKE ME REALISE HOW UNACCEPTABLE MY BEHAVIOUR HAD BEEN.



DAYS LIKE THAT WERE LIKE NIGHTMARES. TO HIM, I SIMPLY DIDN'T EXIST.

I'LL JUST HAVE TO GIVE UP HAVING OPINIONS! STOP SAYING WHAT I THINK!



BUT I COULDN'T. IT WAS AS THOUGH IT WAS SOMETHING IN MY BLOOD.

MY SOLUTION TO THIS SHAMEFUL
NEED TO EXPRESS OPINIONS WAS
TO WRITE IN TO
KAMRATPOSTEN.



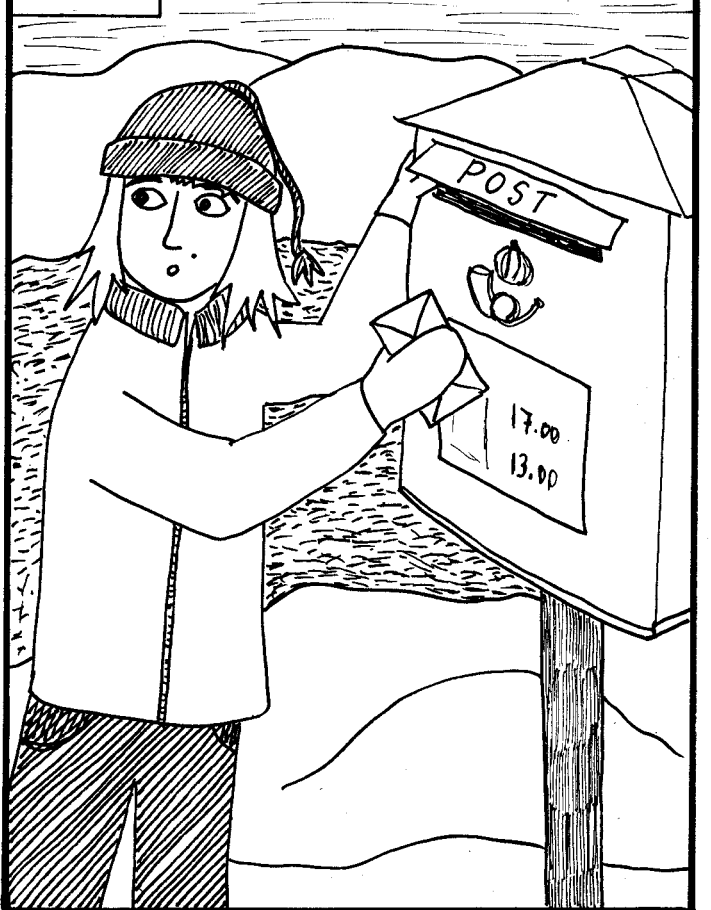
MY DREAM WAS TO BE PUBLISHED,
MAYBE EVEN TO HAVE MY TEXT
ILLUSTRATED BY CECILIA TORUDD,
PETER CSIHAS, GUNNA GRÄHS *
OR ONE OF THEIR OTHER
ILLUSTRATORS.



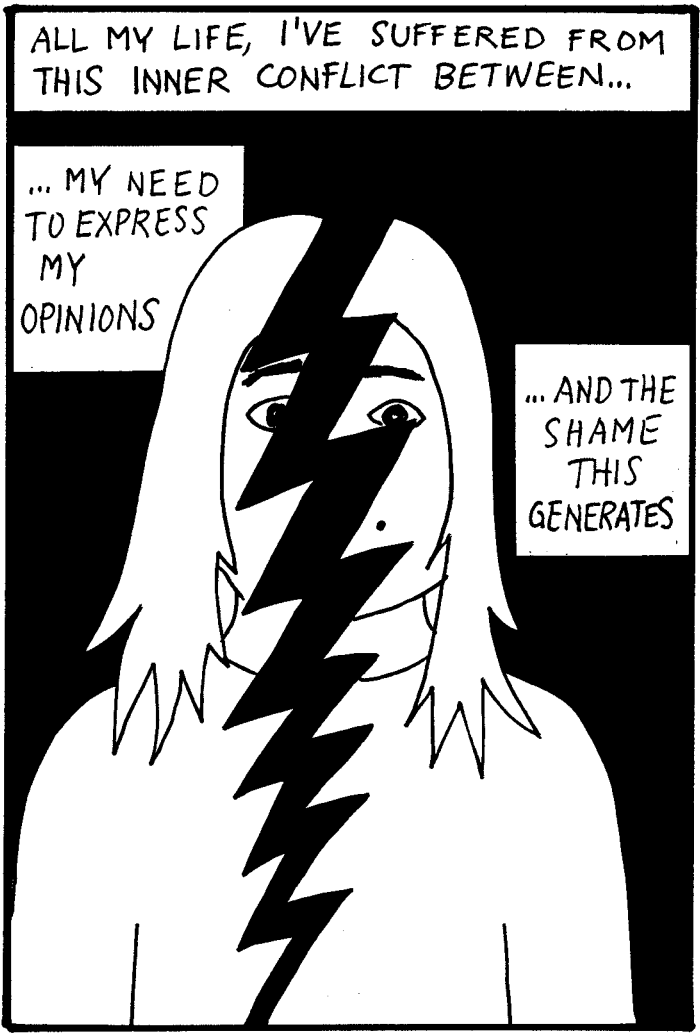
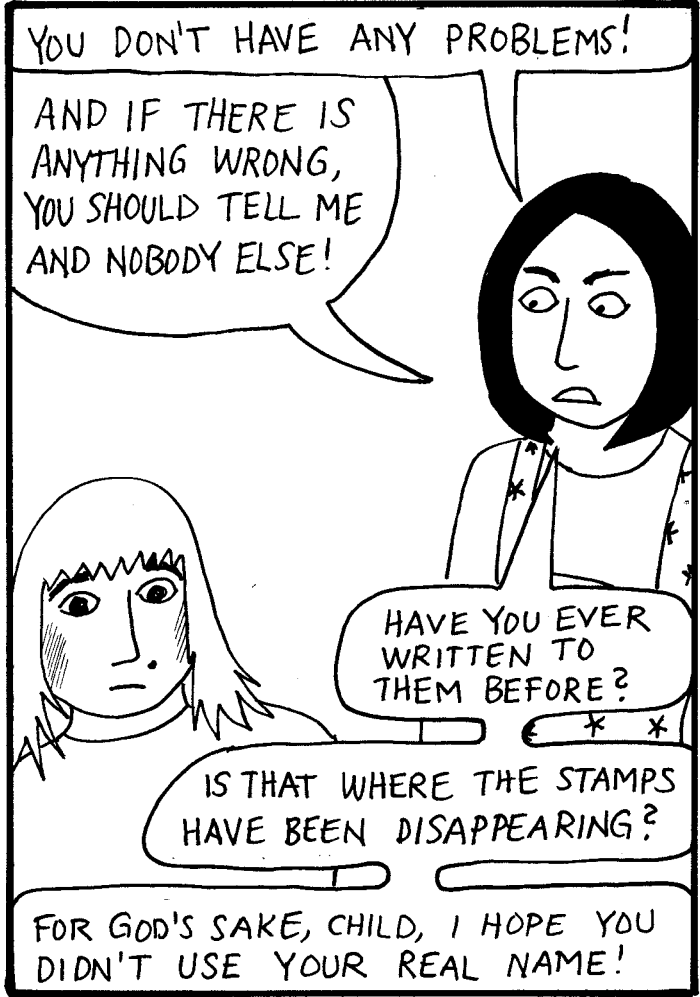
I STOLE STAMPS FROM THE
CUPBOARD IN THE KITCHEN...



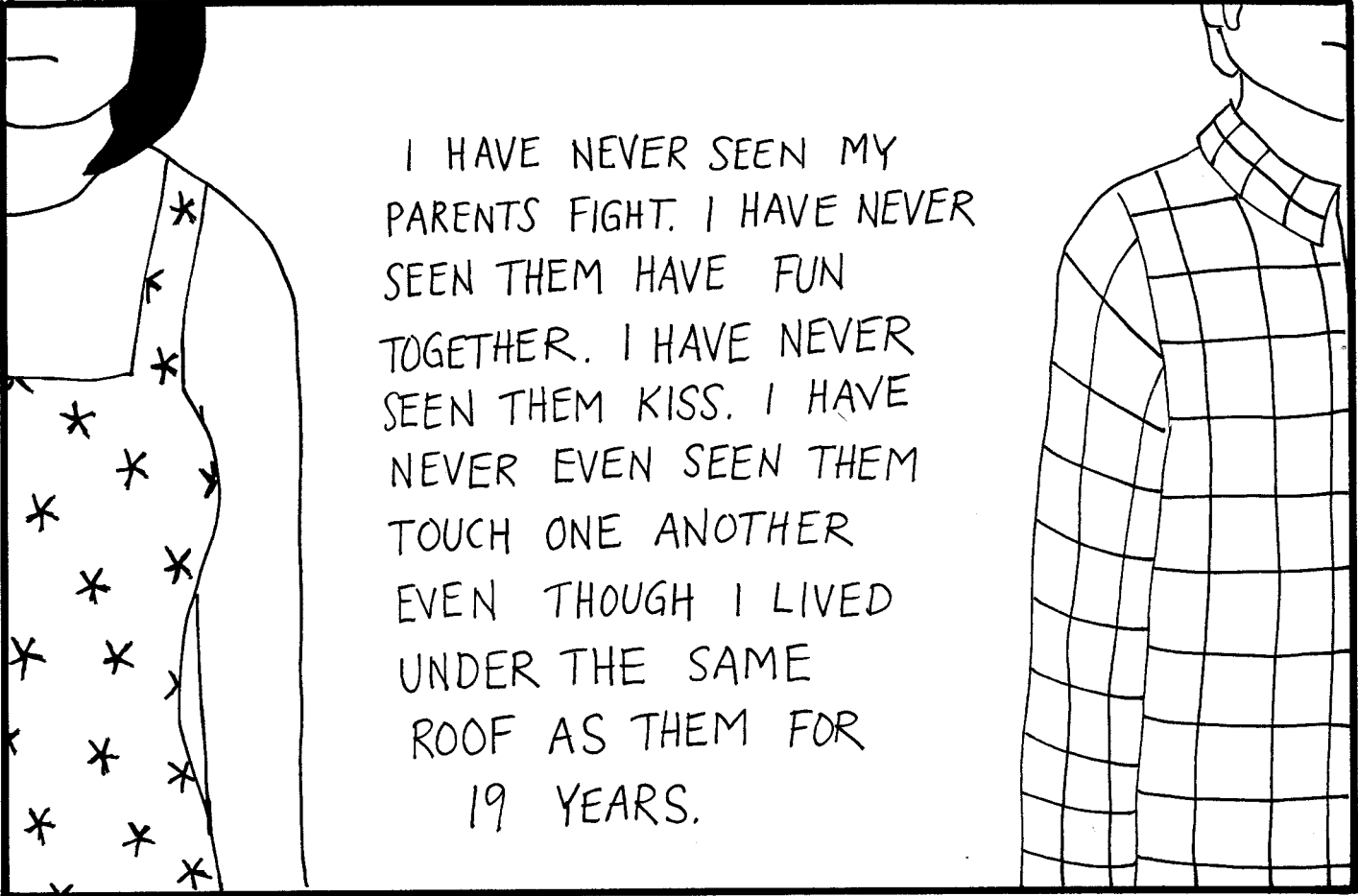
...AND POSTED THE LETTERS WHEN NOBODY WAS
LOOKING.



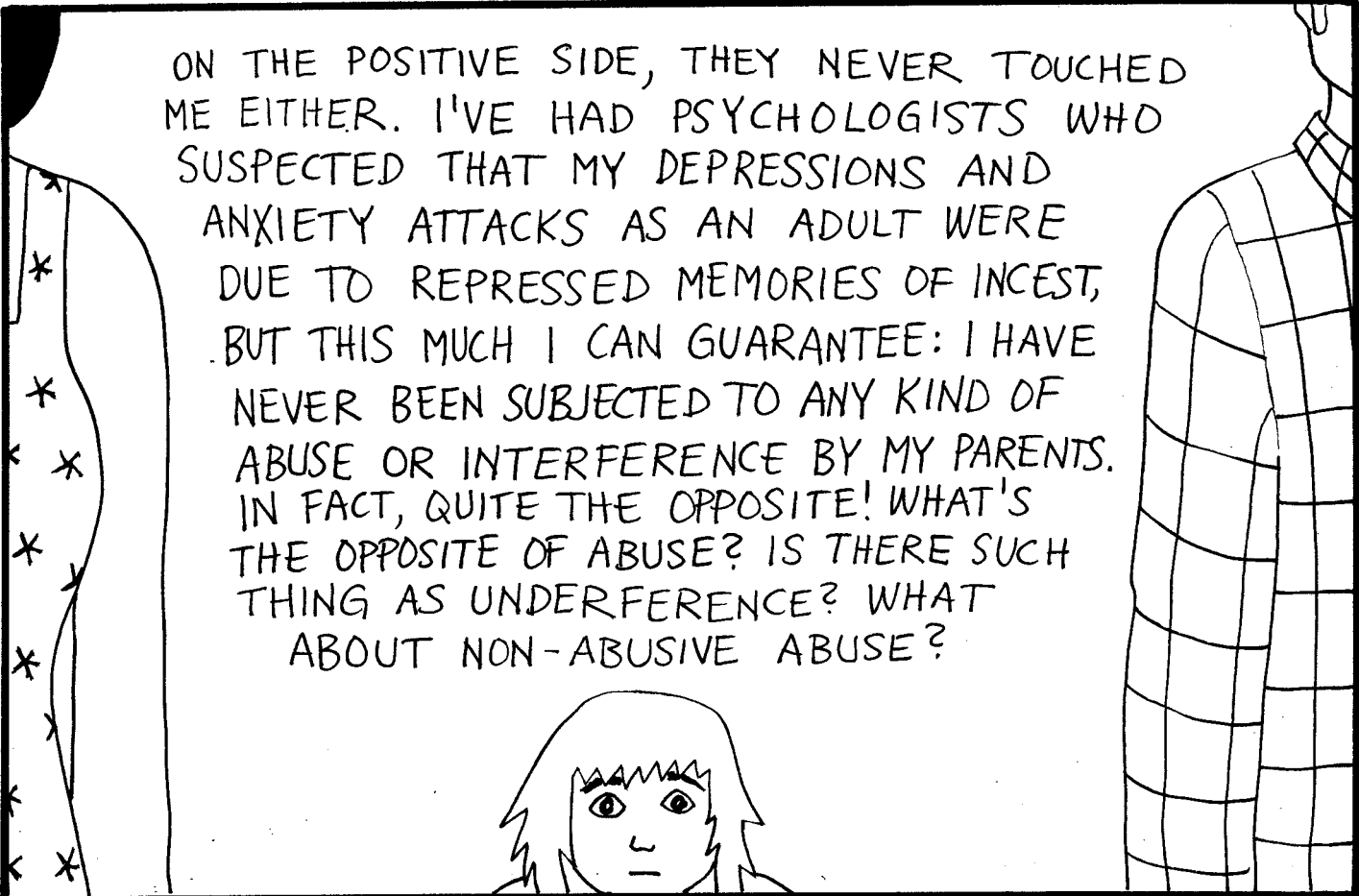
* WELL-KNOWN SWEDISH ILLUSTRATORS WHO ALL WORKED FOR KAMRATPOSTEN AT ONE TIME.



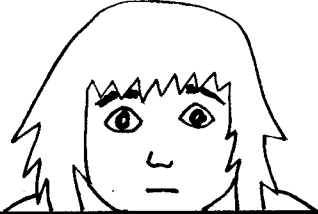
CLOSENESS



I HAVE NEVER SEEN MY PARENTS FIGHT. I HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM HAVE FUN TOGETHER. I HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM KISS. I HAVE NEVER EVEN SEEN THEM TOUCH ONE ANOTHER EVEN THOUGH I LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF AS THEM FOR 19 YEARS.



ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THEY NEVER TOUCHED ME EITHER. I'VE HAD PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO SUSPECTED THAT MY DEPRESSIONS AND ANXIETY ATTACKS AS AN ADULT WERE DUE TO REPRESSED MEMORIES OF INCEST, BUT THIS MUCH I CAN GUARANTEE: I HAVE NEVER BEEN SUBJECTED TO ANY KIND OF ABUSE OR INTERFERENCE BY MY PARENTS. IN FACT, QUITE THE OPPOSITE! WHAT'S THE OPPOSITE OF ABUSE? IS THERE SUCH THING AS UNDERFERENCE? WHAT ABOUT NON-ABUSIVE ABUSE?



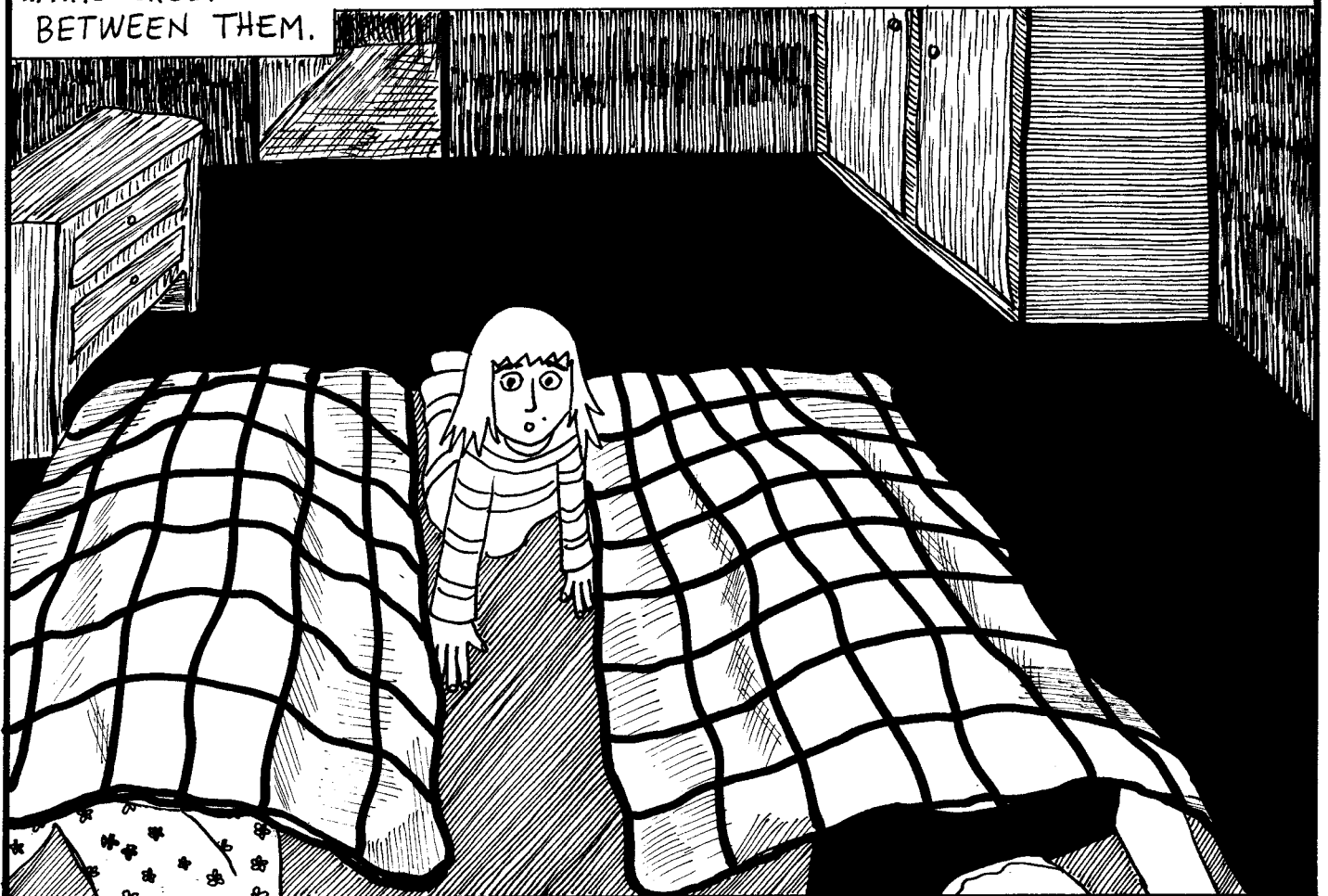
MY CURSE IS THAT I'VE ALWAYS NEEDED TO FEEL CLOSE TO OTHER PEOPLE.



IF I WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND KNEW THAT MUM AND DAD WERE ASLEEP, I'D GET UP VERY QUIETLY



... AND CREEP INTO THEIR BEDROOM AND LIE DOWN BETWEEN THEM.



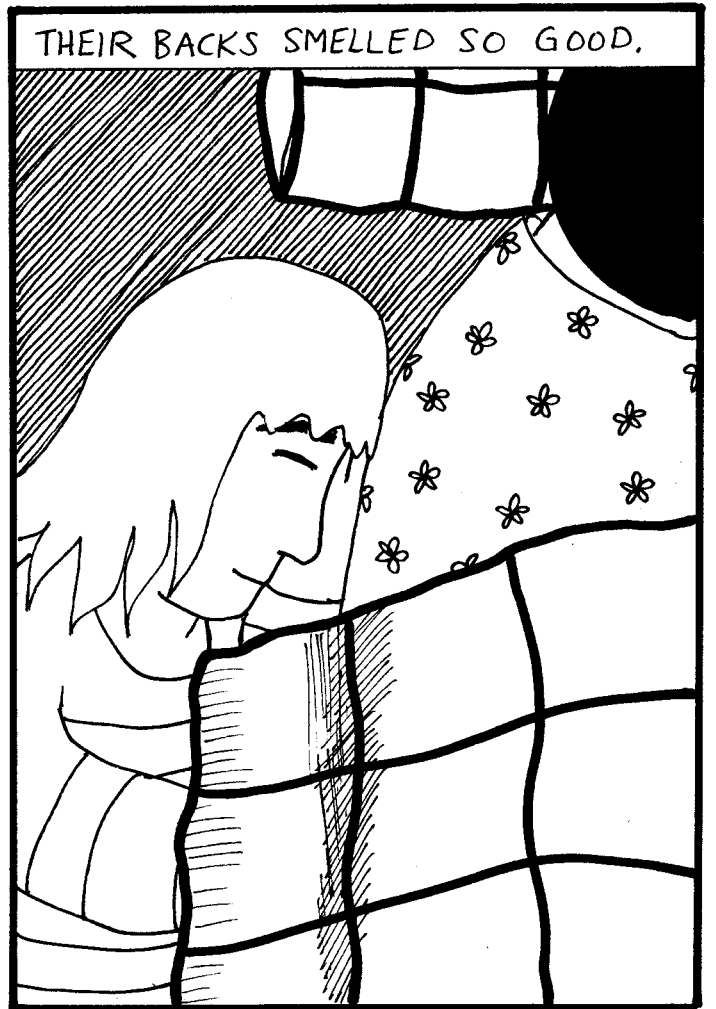
THERE I LAY FEEDING MY OWN NEED FOR CLOSENESS,
AS THOUGH RECHARGING MY BATTERIES.

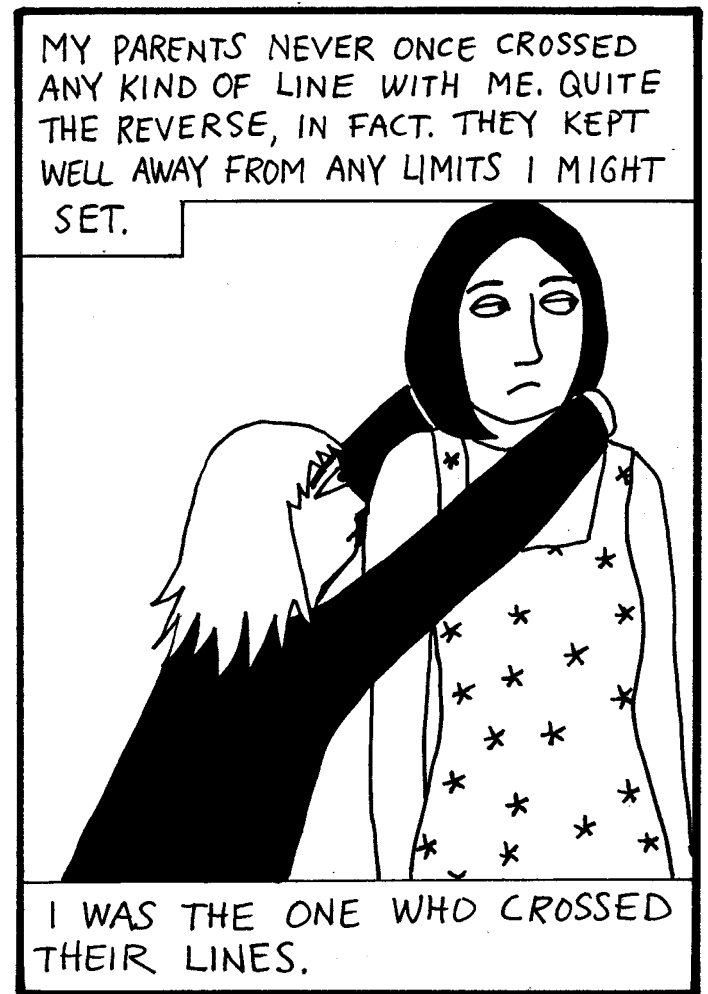
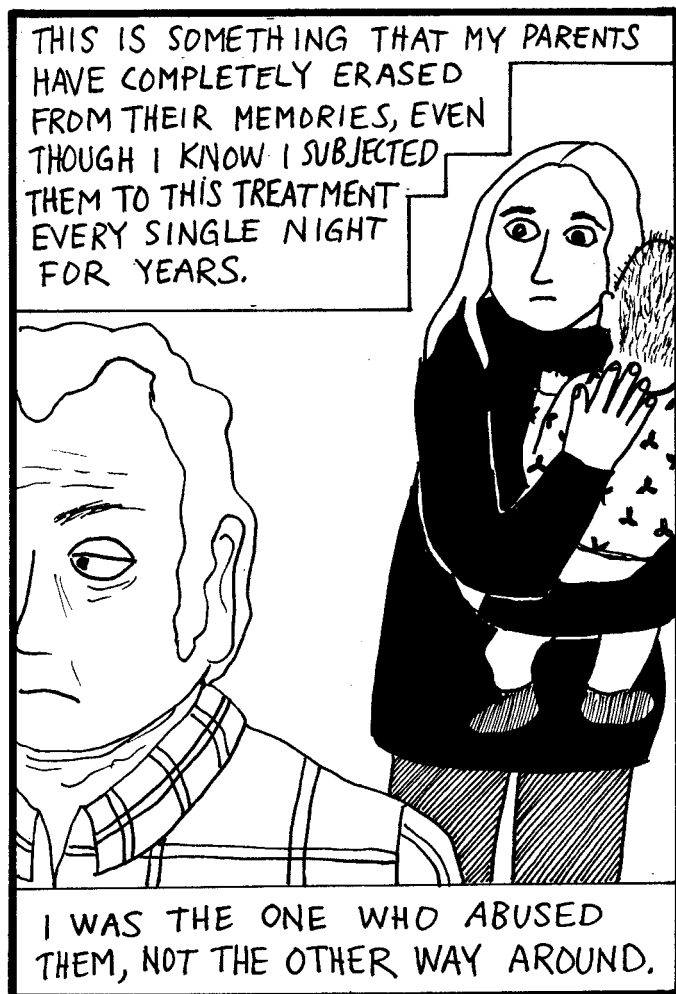


I REPEATED THIS PROCEDURE
ALMOST EVERY NIGHT FOR
YEARS.



THEIR BACKS SMELLED SO GOOD.





BLOOD



THIS WAS ONE OF MY MUM'S MANY BAPTISMS BY FIRE. THEY HAVE MADE ME INDEPENDENT, STRONG, BRAVE, INSECURE, TERRIFIED AND COMPLETELY INCAPABLE OF ASKING ANYONE FOR HELP.

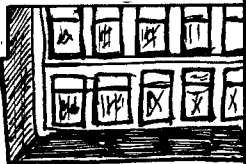


THE SHAME AND EMBARRASSMENT OF HAVING TO BUY SANITARY TOWELS ON MY OWN AT THE AGE OF 10!

KASSA 21

WHAT IF I'VE BOUGHT THE WRONG KIND?

WHAT IF SOMEONE FROM MY CLASS COMES IN TO THE SHOP?



LUCKY IT WASN'T HELENA'S MOTHER AT THE CASH DESK!

OXF

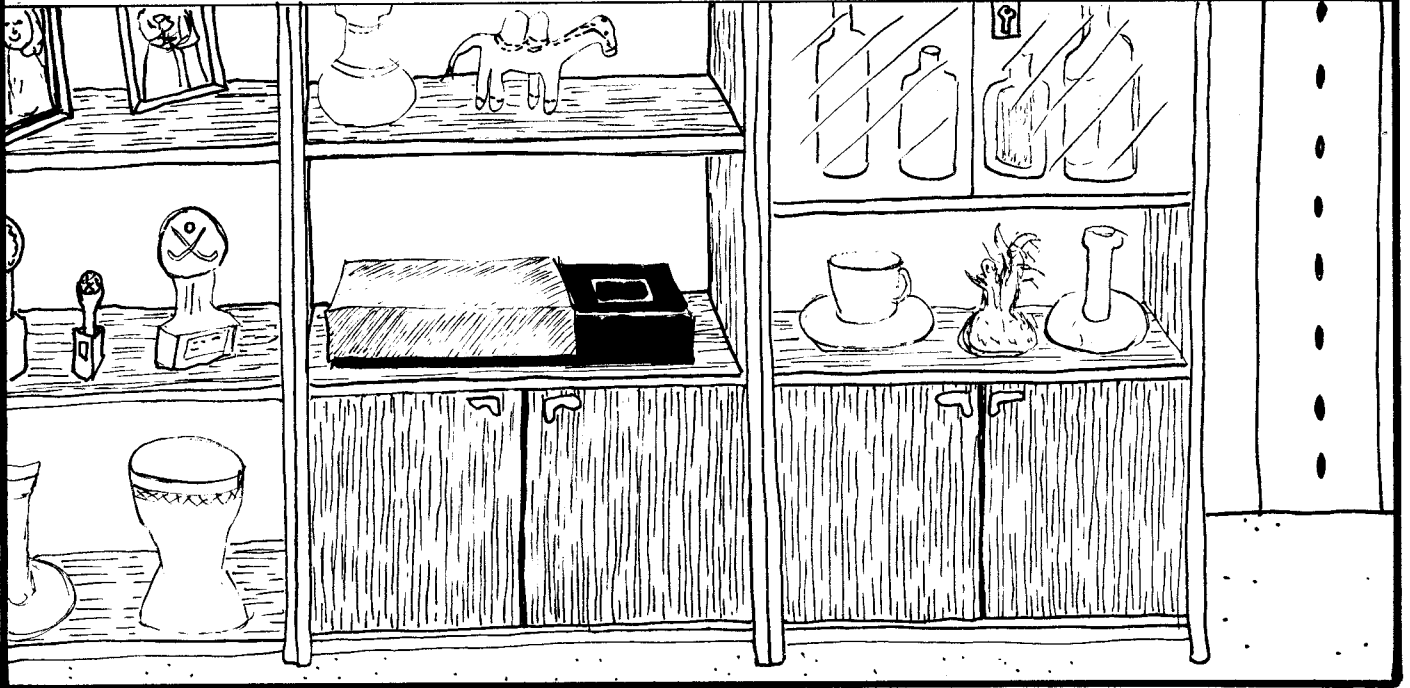
29:

STILL, I HAVE TO LEARN! I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DO THIS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

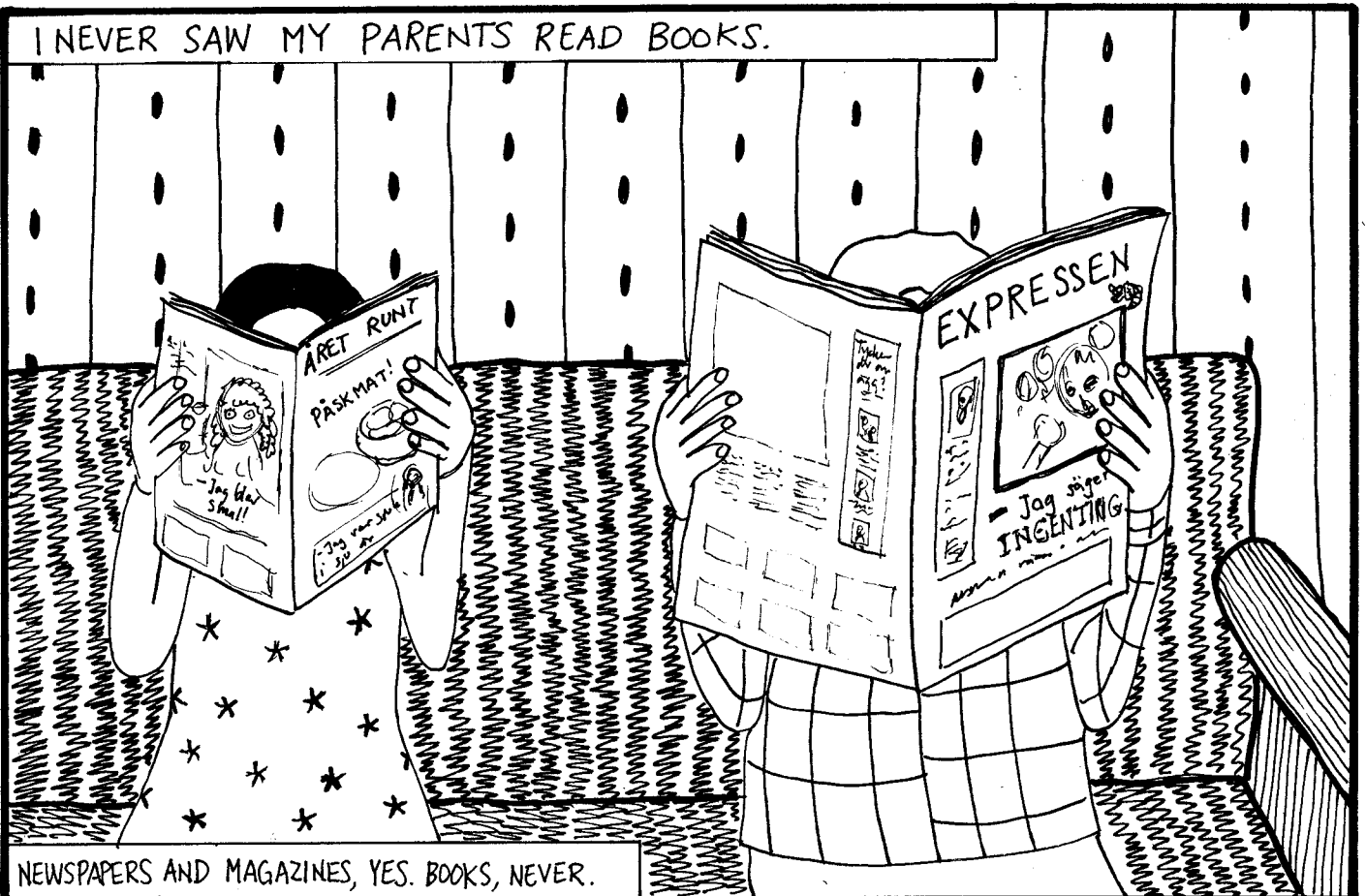
THERE WAS NOTHING ABOUT MENOPAUSE IN THE SCHOOL BIOLOGY BOOK.

SOMETHING MORE

OUR HOUSE HAD BOOKSHELVES. THEY WERE USED FOR KEEPING DECORATIVE CHINA AND GLASS, SPORTING AWARDS, LIQUOR BOTTLES, FRAMED PHOTOS OF WEDDINGS AND RELATIVES, SOUVENIRS, AND CANDLESTICKS THAT WERE TOO GOOD TO USE. THERE WASN'T A SINGLE BOOK ON THEM.

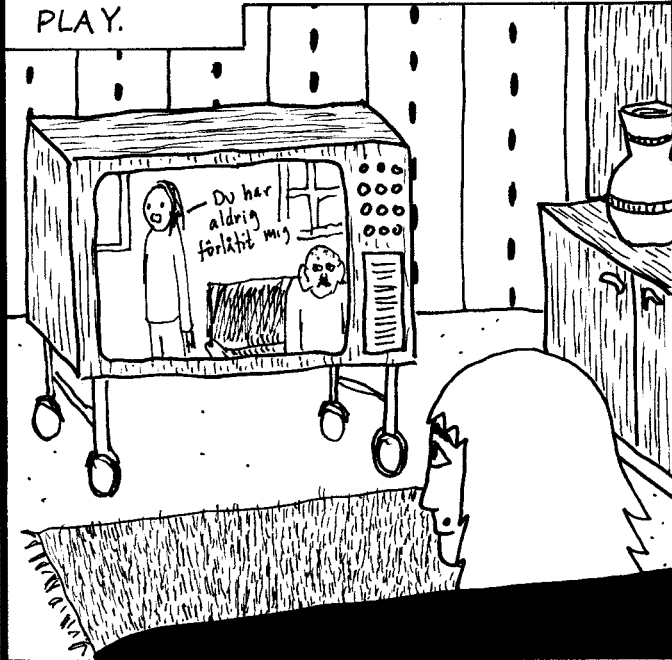


I NEVER SAW MY PARENTS READ BOOKS.



NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES, YES. BOOKS, NEVER.

I LOVED WATCHED TELEVISION. IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER WHAT WAS ON. SOME AFTERNOONS, I WOULD SIT THERE SPELL BOUND, WATCHING A RERUN OF A SWEDISH TELEVISION PLAY.



I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MUCH, BUT I LOVED WATCHING ANYWAY.

I ALWAYS GOT EMBARRASSED IF MUM OR DAD CAUGHT ME.

WHAT KIND OF CRAP IS THAT YOU'RE WATCHING?!

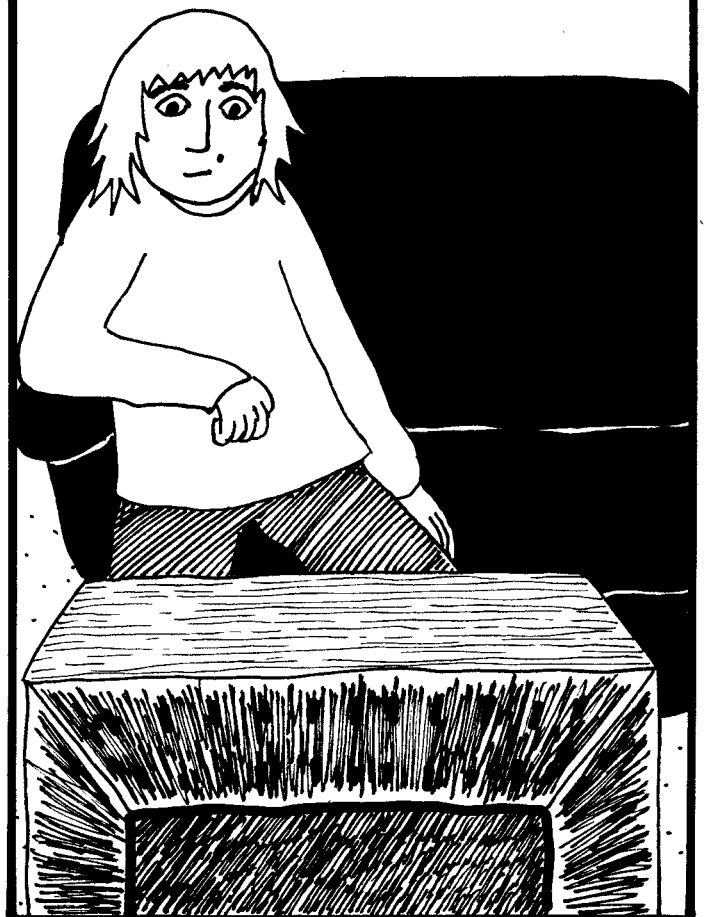
NOTHING!

PEOPLE WITH NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN SHOUT AT EACH OTHER. GET OUT IN THE FRESH AIR INSTEAD!

THIS WAS THE EIGHTIES, SO NO REMOTE.



SOMETIMES I'D TRY TO WATCH THEM ON THE SLY.



THEY'RE SHOWING ANOTHER DAFT FILM ON TELLY THIS EVENING. IF A MOVIE GETS FIVE STARS, YOU KNOW IT'S NOT WORTH SEEING.

ALL MOVIES WITH ANY KIND OF MESSAGE OR ARTISTIC AMBITION WERE KNOWN BY MY DAD AS "DAFT FILMS". GOD! HOW I LONGED TO SEE ONE OF THOSE DAFT FILMS!



BUT USUALLY I GOT CAUGHT.

WHAT IN GOD'S NAME ARE YOU WATCHING NOW?

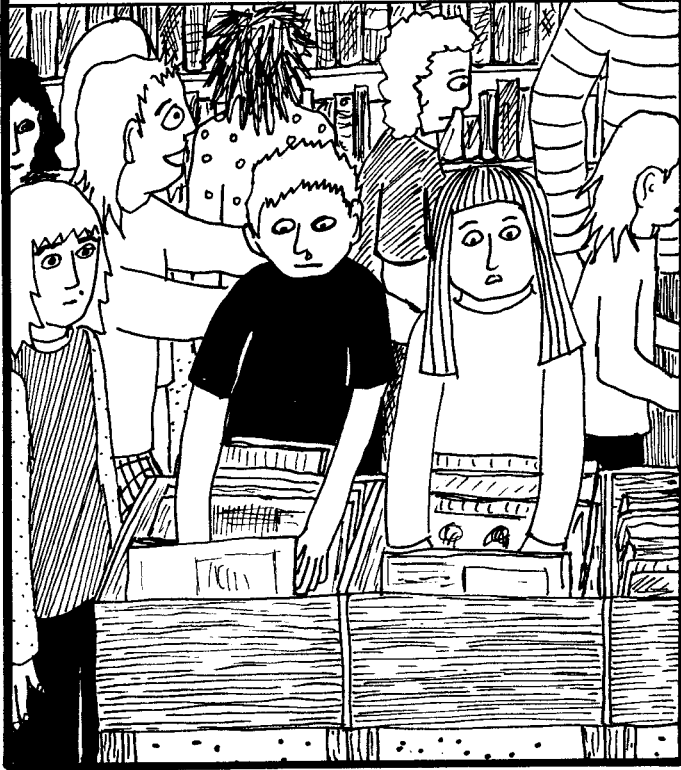
NOTHING!

MY PARENTS WERE DISGUSTED BY MY INTEREST IN SO CALLED CULTURE. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LESS SHAMEFUL IF THEY'D CAUGHT ME WATCHING A PORN FILM.

HOW DOES SUCH AN ANTI-CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE DEVELOP? AND WHY? HOW DO YOU CREATE FEAR OF SOMETHING YOU DON'T EVEN REALLY UNDERSTAND? AN UNREASONING FEAR... OF SOMETHING MORE.



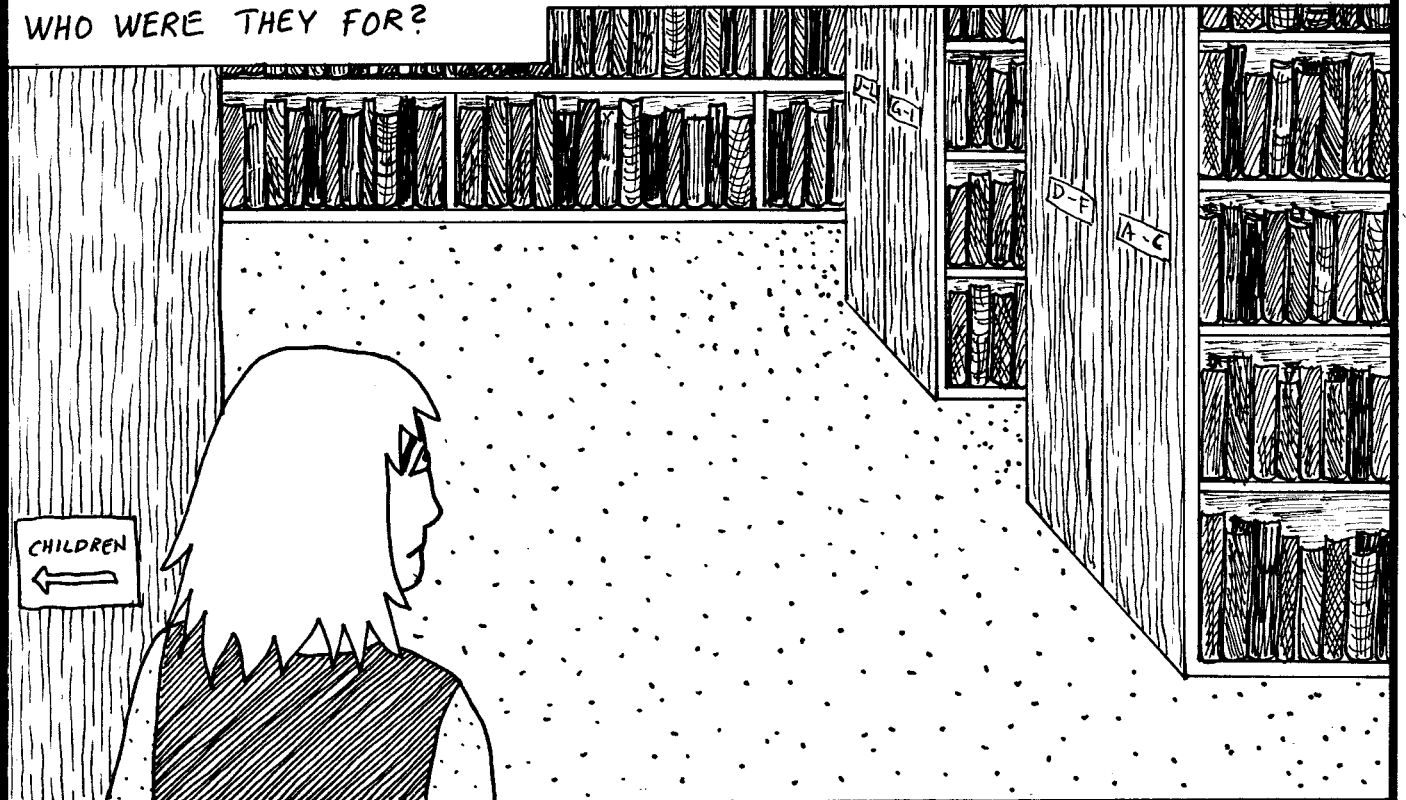
WHEN WE WENT TO THE LIBRARY WITH SCHOOL, WE HAD TO STAY IN THE CHILDREN'S SECTION, WHICH WAS RIGHT BY THE ENTRANCE.



I USED TO STEAL GLIMPSES OF WHAT THEY CALLED THE ADULT SECTION.

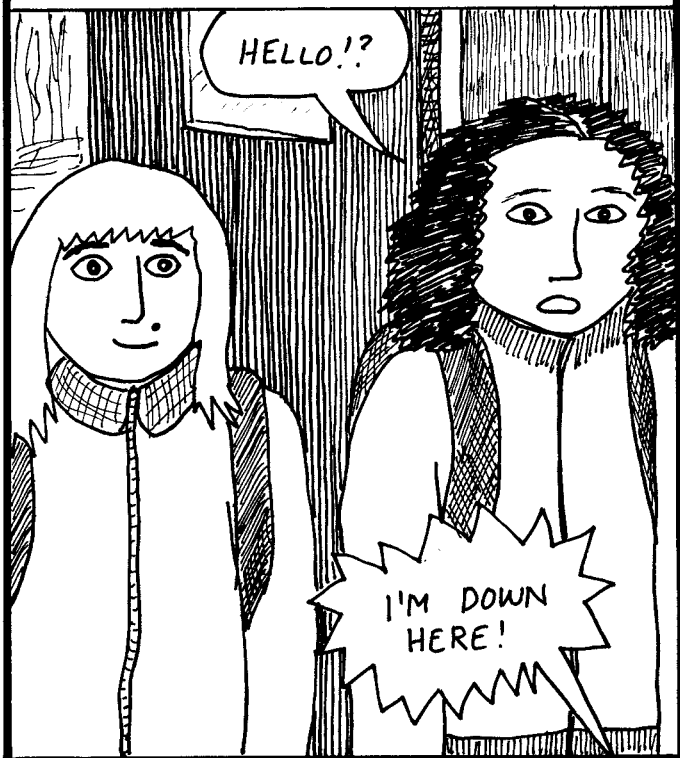


IT WAS COMPLETELY DESERTED. I NEVER SAW A SINGLE PERSON THERE. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT ALL THOSE BOOKS WERE FOR. WHO WERE THEY FOR?



I TOOK IT FOR GRANTED THAT THE BUSINESS OF READING BOOKS WAS SOMETHING YOU GREW OUT OF WHEN YOU BECAME AN ADULT, JUST AS YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO GROW OUT OF PLAYING.

WHEN I STARTED FOURTH GRADE, I MADE A NEW FRIEND WHOSE NAME WAS KARIN. I SOMETIMES WENT HOME WITH HER AFTER SCHOOL.

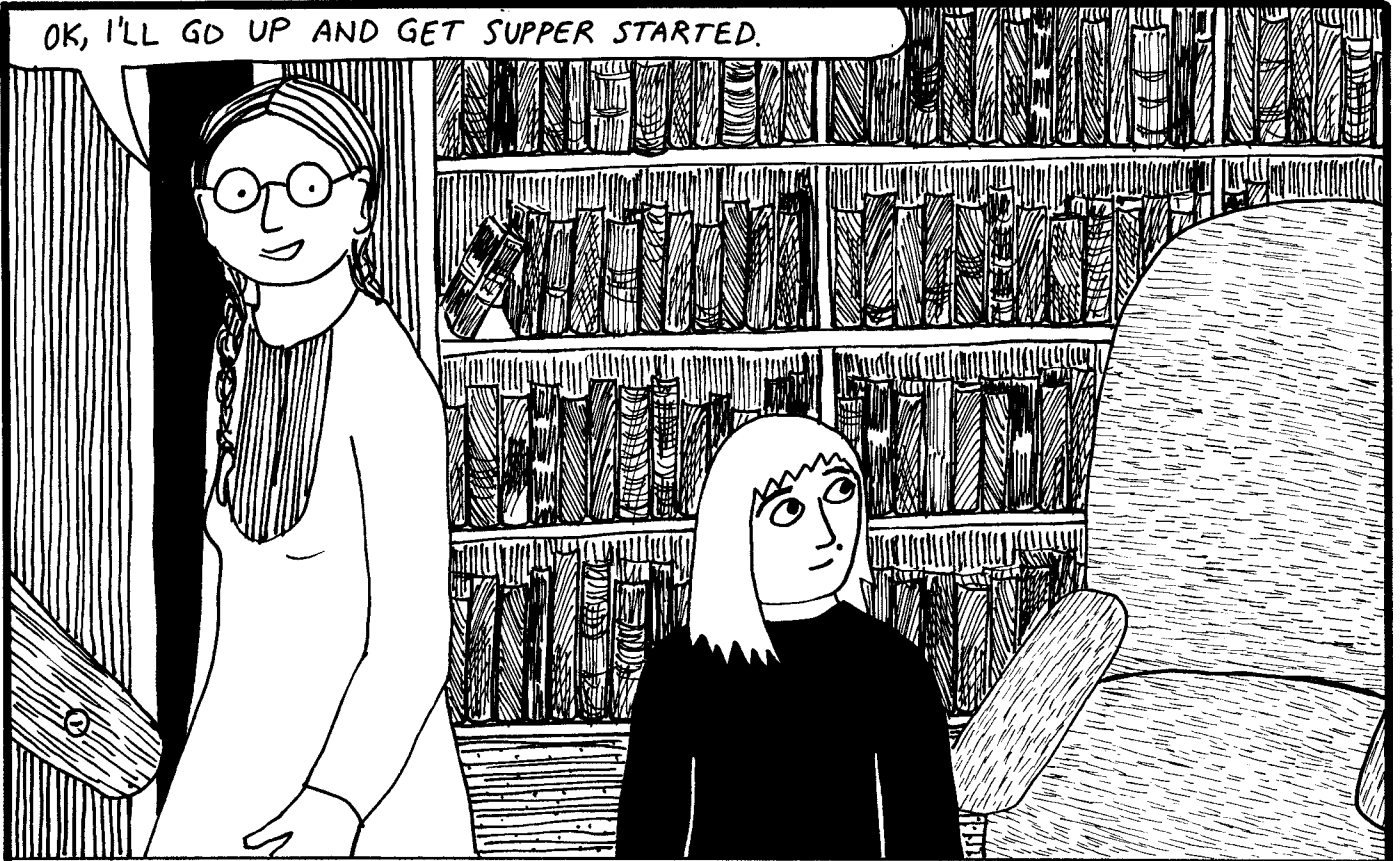


HER MOTHER WOULD BE SITTING DOWNSTAIRS IN THEIR DEN, DEEPLY ABSORBED IN SOME BOOK.

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D SEEN AN ADULT READ A BOOK IN THE WAY I THOUGHT ONLY CHILDREN COULD.



OK, I'LL GO UP AND GET SUPPER STARTED.



THE WALLS WERE ALMOST COMPLETELY COVERED IN BOOKSHELVES FILLED WITH BOOKS, JUST LIKE THE ADULT SECTION AT THE LIBRARY, ONLY THIS TIME THERE WERE PEOPLE THERE TOO.

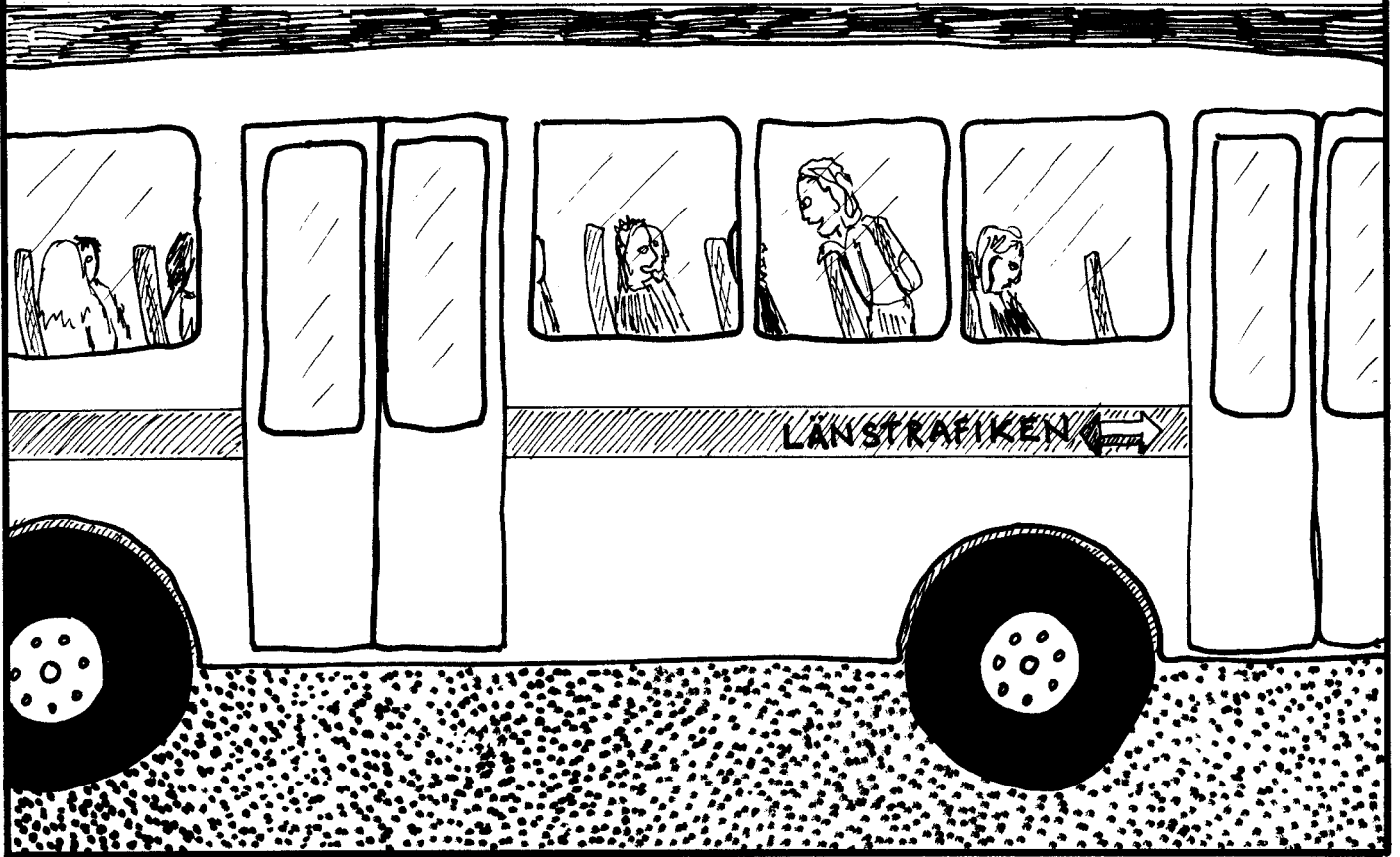


ALL THE SONGS ON THIS ONE ARE SOOOO BRILLIANT!

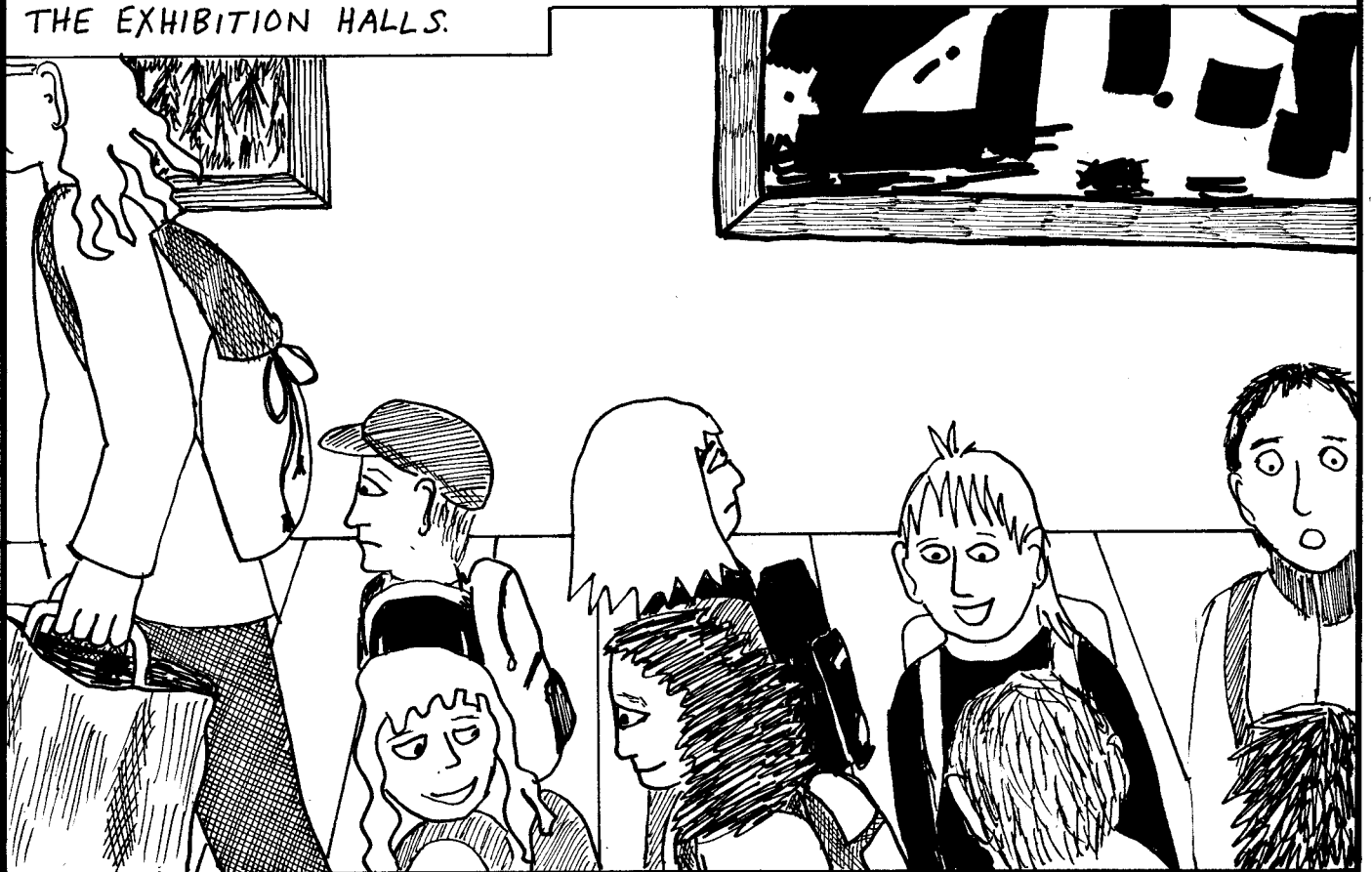
*I your'e my heart,
your'e my soul*

THIS IS WHAT MY HOUSE IS GOING TO LOOK LIKE WHEN I GROW UP.

NOW THAT WE WERE A BIT OLDER, OUR CLASS SOMETIMES GOT TO TAKE THE BUS IN TO THE COUNTY LIBRARY IN THE BIG CITY.



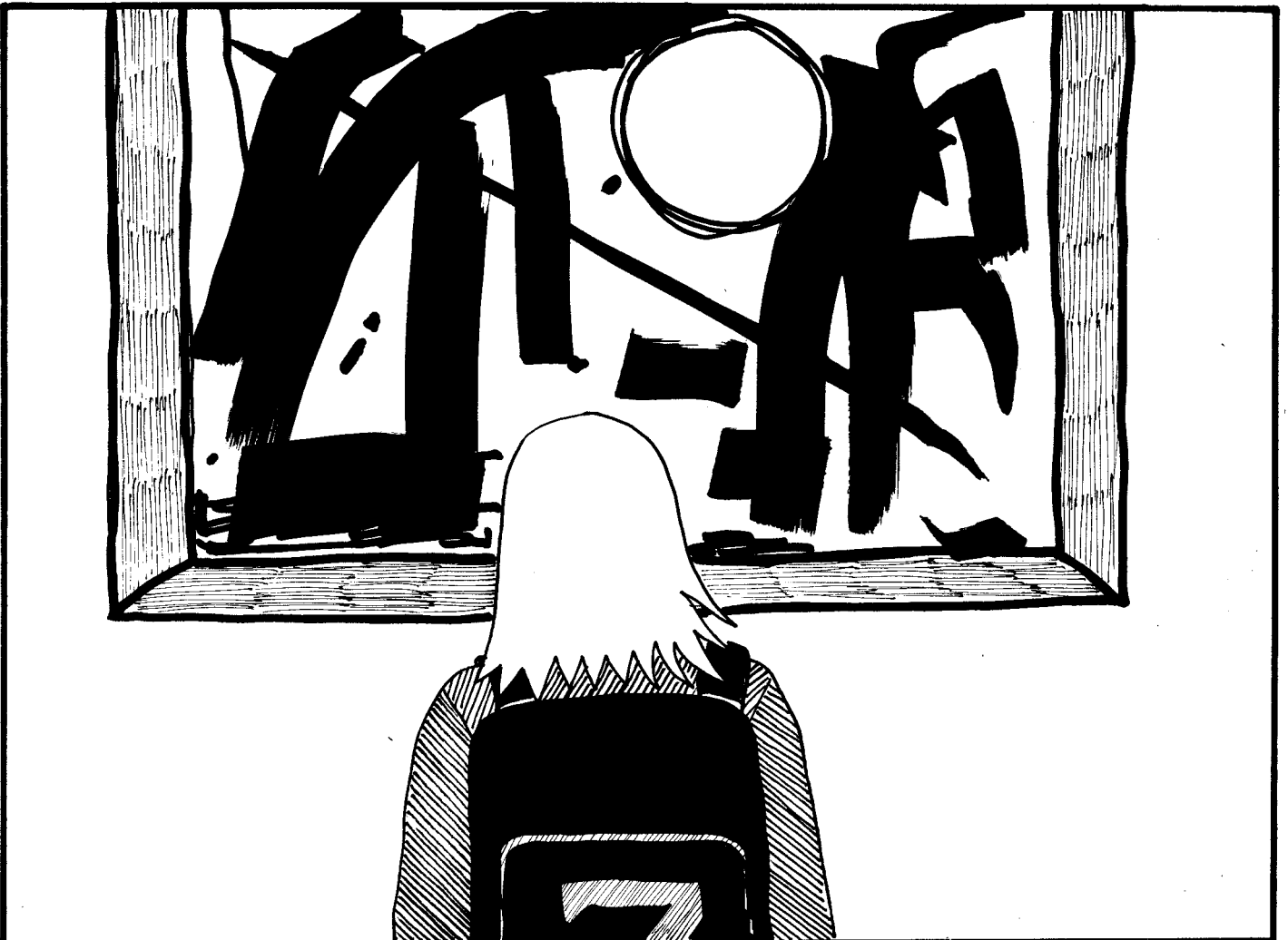
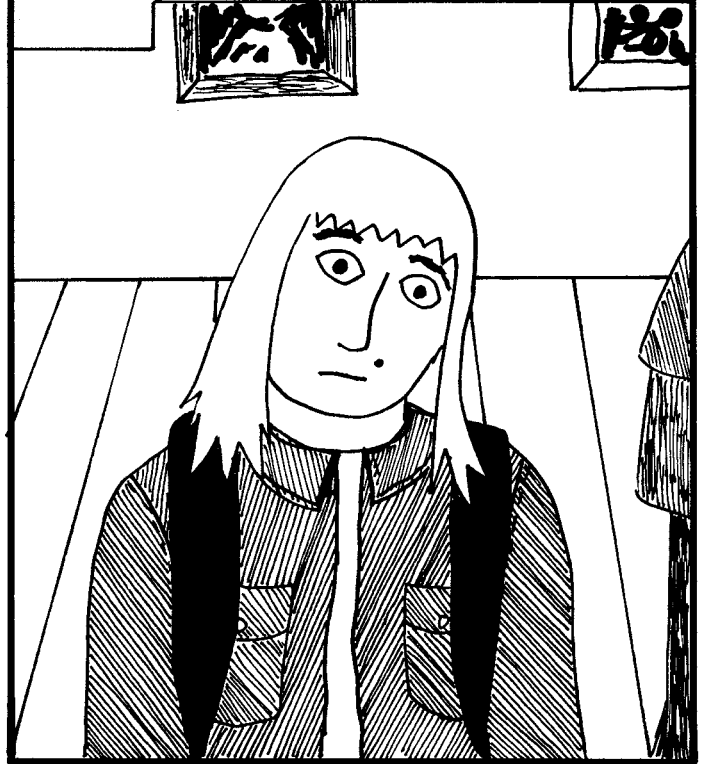
THE SAME BUILDING ALSO HOUSED THE COUNTY MUSEUM. TO GET TO THE CHILDREN'S SECTION OF THE LIBRARY, WE HAD TO PASS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION HALLS.



I OFTEN FOUND MYSELF FASCINATED BY SOME PAINTING I'D SEEN.

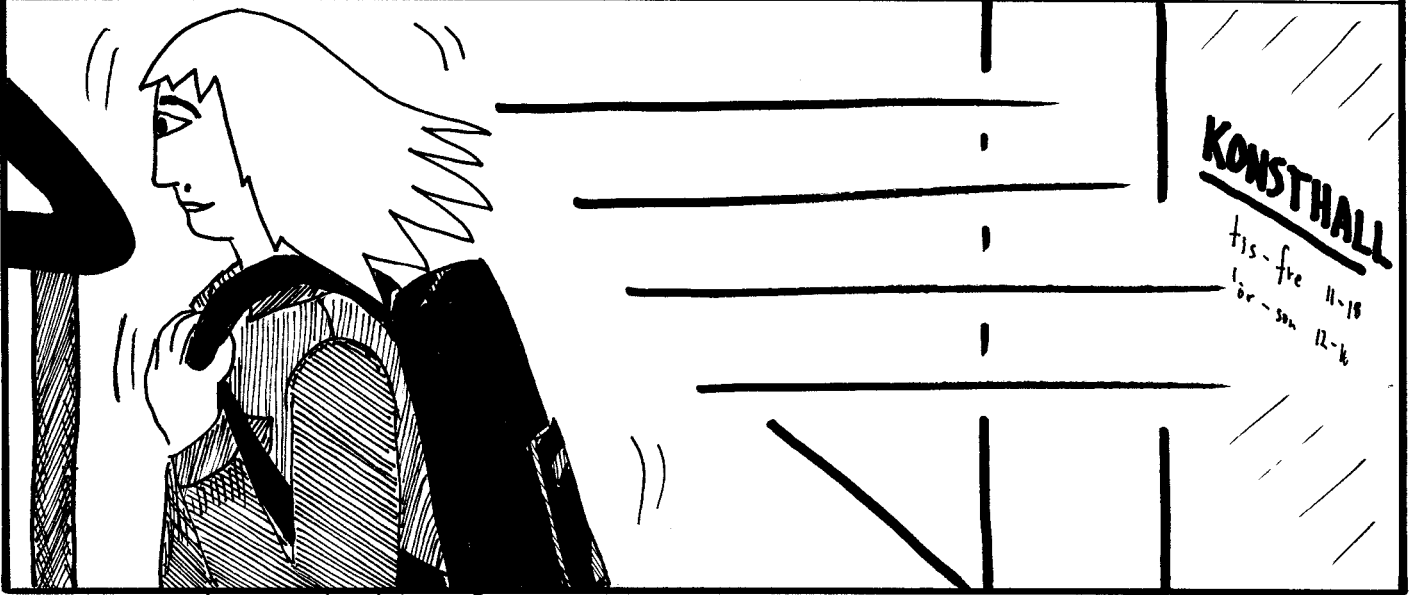


I JUST STOOD THERE AND STARED.

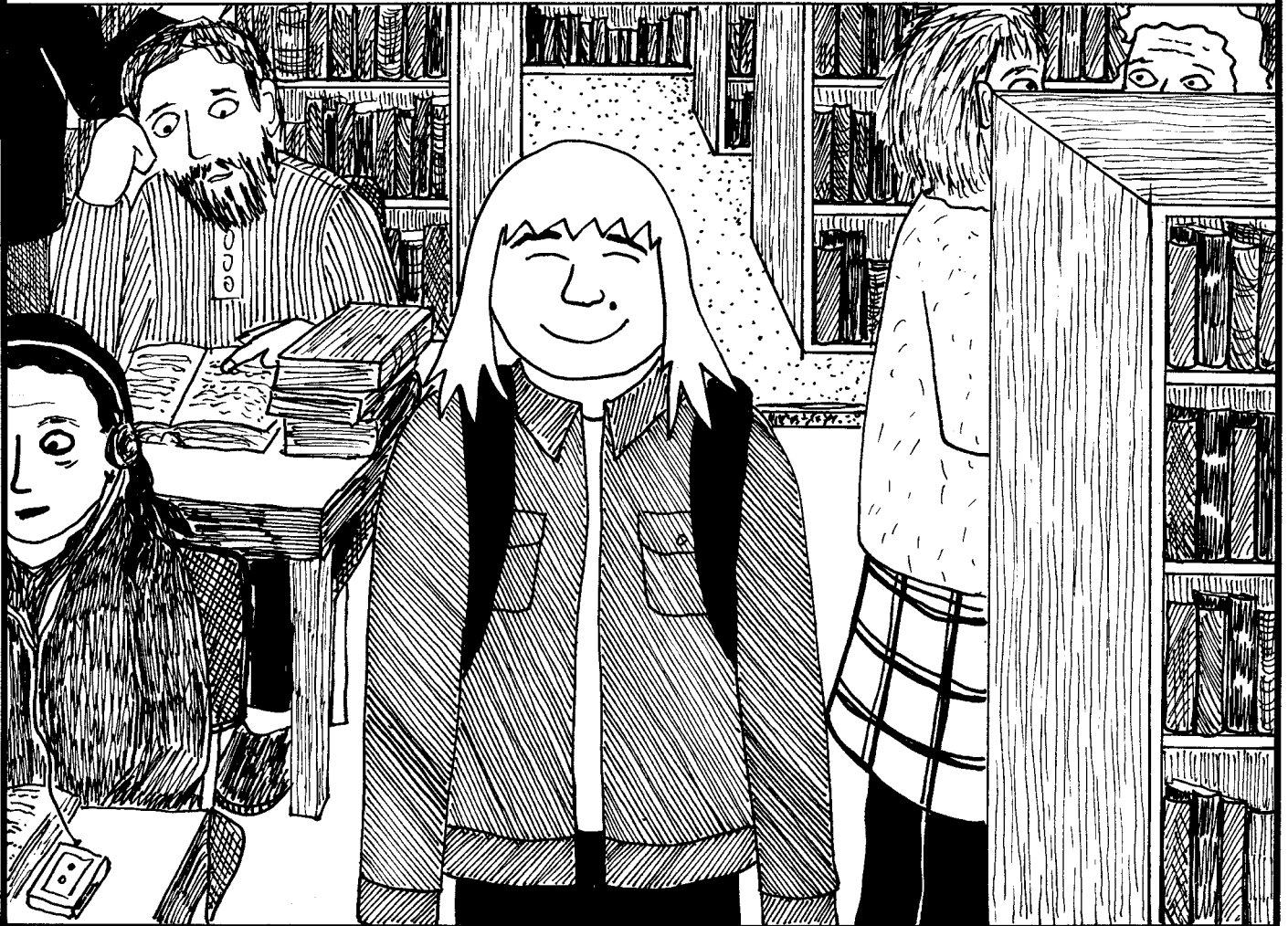


IT WAS SOMETHING I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, BUT I LOVED THAT FEELING. I FELT FREE THERE.

TO CATCH UP WITH THE REST OF THE CLASS, I KNEW A SHORTCUT THROUGH THE ADULT SECTION OF THE LIBRARY.



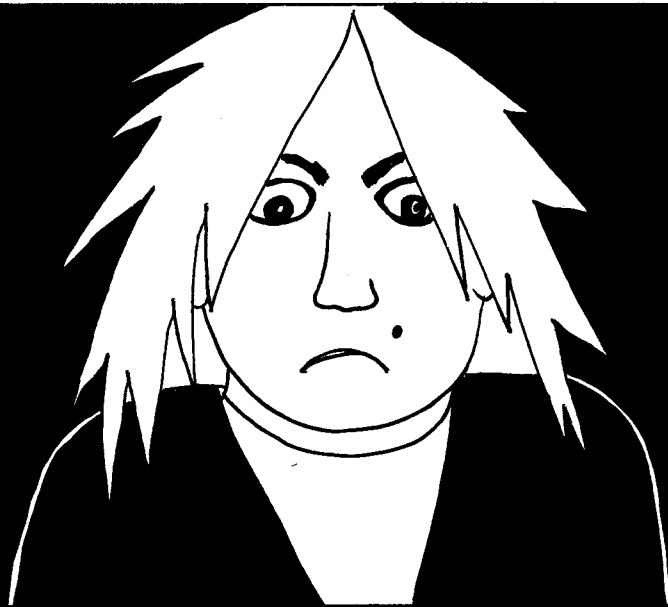
THE ADULT SECTION WASN'T EMPTY HERE. THERE WERE LOADS OF ADULTS SITTING THERE, READING OR STUDYING. THEY LOOKED FOR BOOKS, OR ASKED THE LIBRARIANS FOR HELP.



THE AIR HERE WAS EASIER TO BREATHE. AND I WAS ABLE TO CATCH A WHIFF OF SOMETHING DIFFERENT, SOMETHING MORE.

TRICKY TEENS

I WAS A DIFFICULT TEENAGER, AT ANY RATE, THAT'S THE EASY EXPLANATION FOR THE CLAUSTROPHOBIC VICIOUS CIRCLE THAT STARTED UP WHEN I REACHED MY TEENS.



FOR 4 YEARS OR SO, THE SAME SCENE WAS PLAYED OUT ALMOST EVERY DAY AT THE SUPPER TABLE.



THE LINES EACH PERSON SPOKE MIGHT VARY, BUT THE ESSENTIAL DRAMA NEVER CHANGED. IT WENT LIKE THIS:

I TRY TO MAKE CONTACT BY EXPRESSING AN OPINION OR A FEELING.



I ENCOUNTER COMPACT SILENCE.



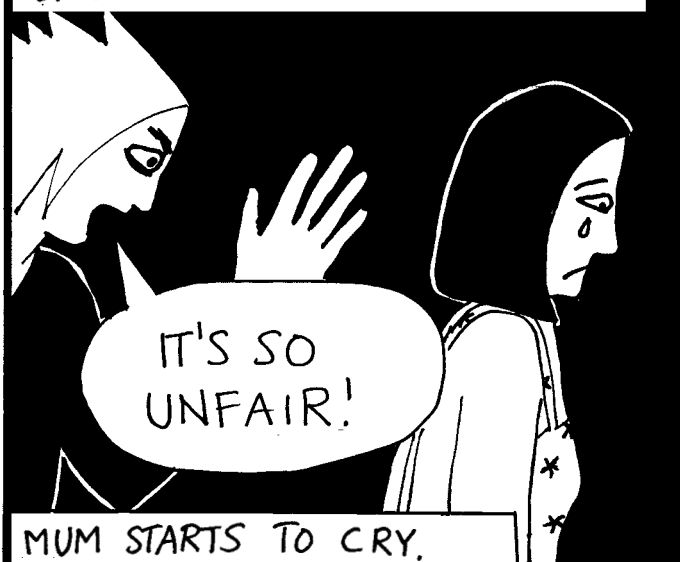
I START TO GET DESPERATE AND REITERATE MY PREVIOUS STATEMENT BUT MAKE IT EVEN STRONGER THIS TIME.



MY DAD AND YOUNGER BROTHER LEAVE THE KITCHEN. MUM GOES AND STANDS BY THE SINK.



I ATTACK MUM WITH EVEN STRONGER WORDING THIS TIME.

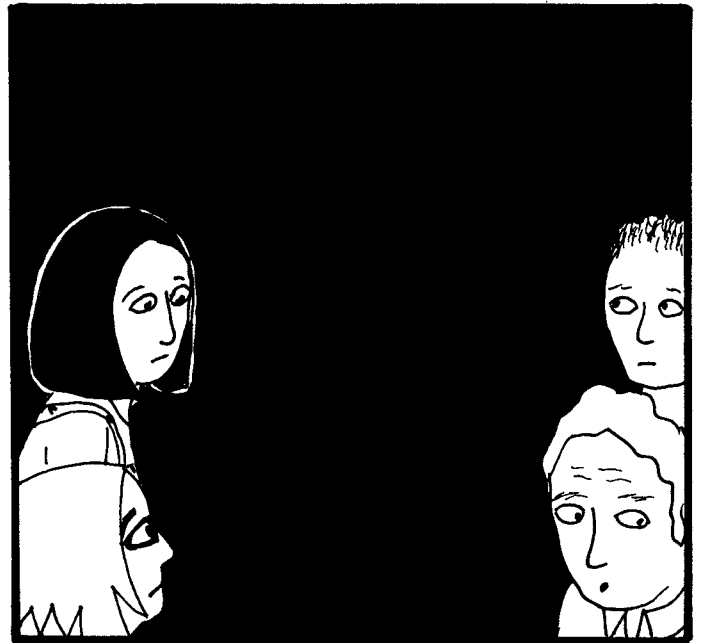


SORRY!
I'M SORRY!

I'M THE ONE WHO DOES MOST HOUSEWORK OF ALL OF US...



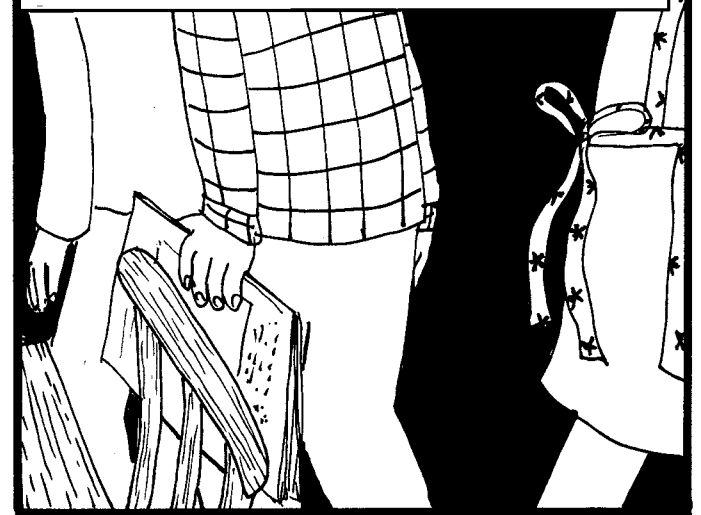
WE REPEATED THIS PROCEDURE, DAY AFTER DAY, YEAR AFTER YEAR.



I WISH NOW I'D BEEN MATURE ENOUGH TO BREAK OUT OF THE CIRCLE, FOR EXAMPLE AT THIS STAGE, BY FALLING SILENT INSTEAD OF ACTING OUT IN DESPERATION.



I WISH I'D TRIED TALKING TO OTHER PEOPLE INSTEAD OF TO THOSE I HAPPENED TO LIVE WITH.



BUT I WAS STUCK IN MY WAYS AND I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER.



HOW MANY TIMES DID I SAY I WAS SORRY?



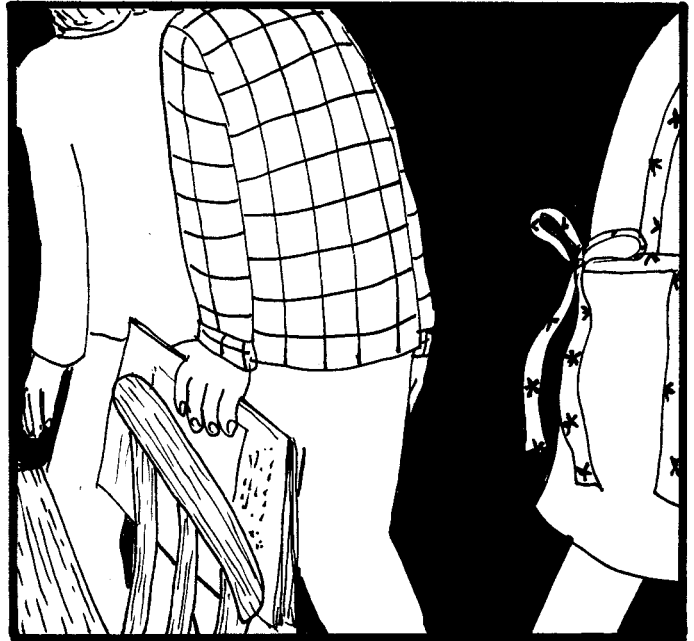
THE PROCEDURE WASN'T REPEATED EVERY SINGLE DAY.



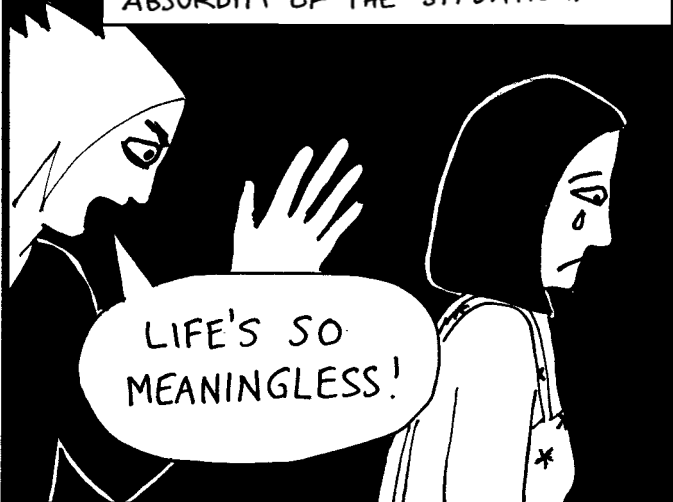
BUT IF WE SAY IT HAPPENED ON 250 OF THE YEAR'S 365 DAYS.



THAT'S $250 \times 4 = 1000$ TIMES.



THIS IS WHERE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HANDY TO HAVE AN ADULT IN THE PICTURE WHO COULD HAVE POINTED OUT THE ABSURDITY OF THE SITUATION.



BUT THERE WERE NO ADULTS IN MY FAMILY...

JUST A FRUSTRATED TEENAGER AND THREE FRIGHTENED CHILDREN.



HOWEVER STRANGE IT MAY SEEM...

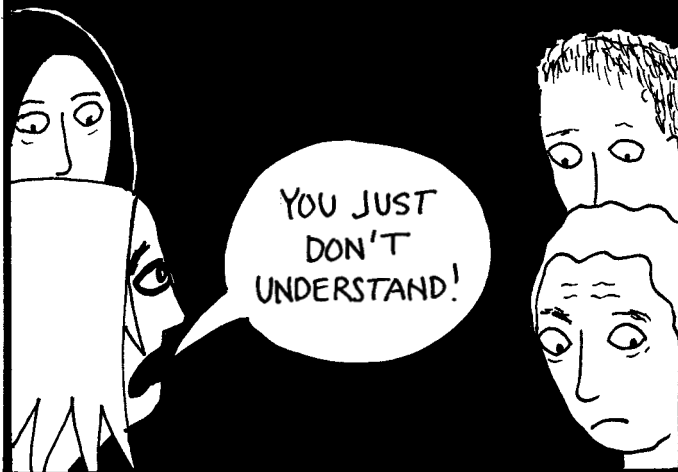


I'M
JUST SO
MISERABLE!

... EVERYONE GOT SOMETHING OUT
OF THIS EXHAUSTING DRAMA.

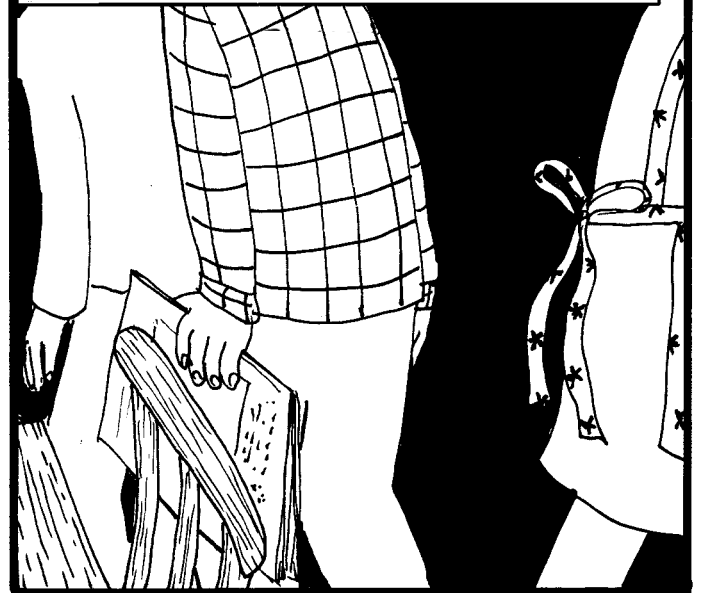


I GOT TO TAKE OUT MY
AGGRESSIONS.



YOU JUST
DON'T
UNDERSTAND!

MY DAD AND BROTHER GOT TO ESCAPE.



AND MY MUM FINALLY GOT A
CHANCE TO CRY HER EYES OUT.



WHY DON'T YOU
EVER LISTEN TO
WHAT I SAY?

OF COURSE, I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THIS AT THE TIME...

BUT NOW I REALISE THAT SHE WAS
ACTUALLY LOOKING FOR CONSOLATION
FOR SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING
THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.



SORRY!
I'M SORRY!

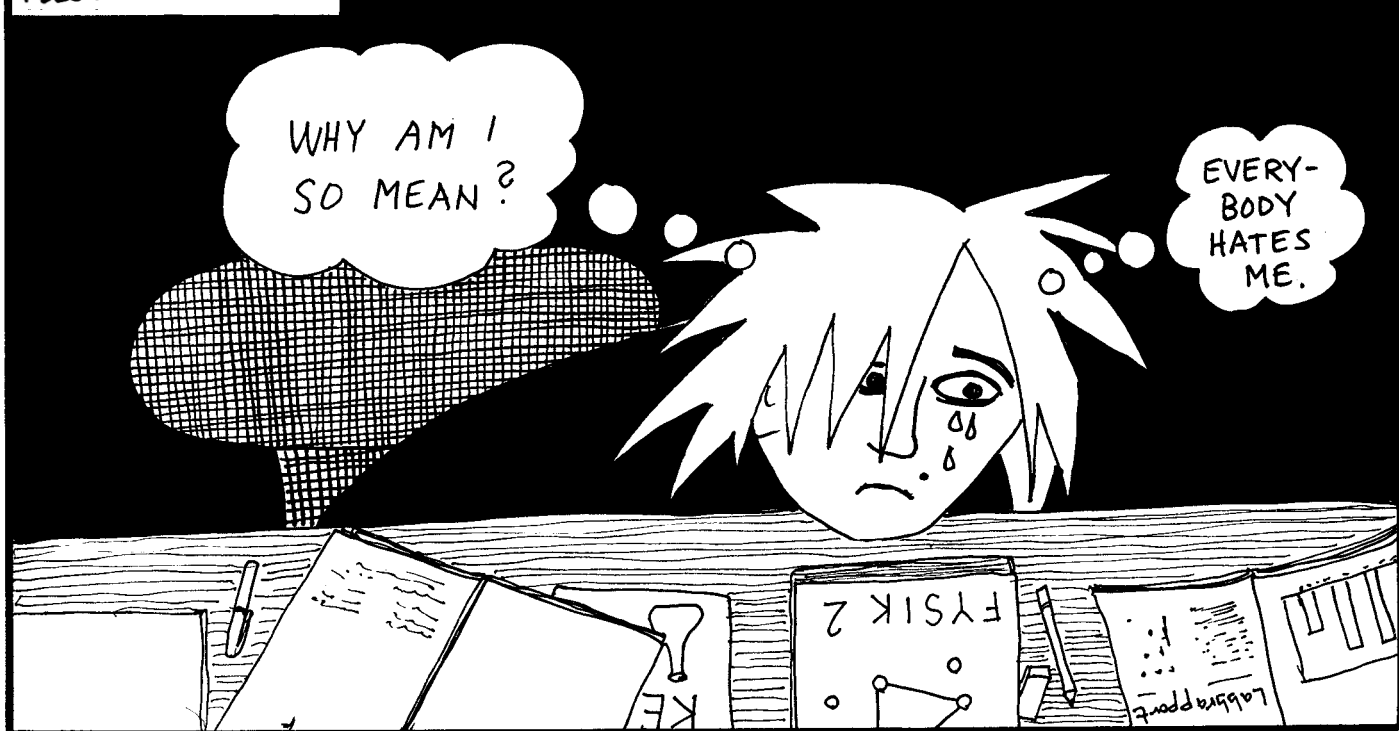
WHY ARE
YOU ALWAYS SO
MEAN TO ME?

I PROVIDED HER WITH THE OPPORTUNITY SHE'D PROBABLY NEVER HAD TO SOB AWAY TO HER HEART'S CONTENT.



I HATE THE FACT THAT SHE SUBJECTED ME TO THIS AGAIN AND AGAIN, BUT AT THE SAME I NOW UNDERSTAND WHY SHE DID IT. AND SHE HERSELF HAD NO IDEA THAT SHE WAS DOING IT.

THE SITUATION GENERATED MORE AND MORE DESTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS INSIDE ME.



FINALLY, I DECIDED TO TRY GETTING THROUGH TO THEM IN A DIFFERENT WAY.



SINCE TALKING OR SHOUTING DIDN'T WORK, I THOUGHT I'D TRY WRITING THEM A LETTER INSTEAD.

I WROTE DOWN MY FEELINGS, I DESCRIBED THE THINGS I FOUND HARDEST TO PUT UP WITH, AND I MADE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW WE MIGHT MAKE CHANGES.



I GAVE THEM THE LETTER AND ASKED THEM TO READ IT.



READ THIS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D EXPECTED.

PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING EXCEPT THIS, AT ANY RATE.



THEY MADE FUN OF ME AND RIDICULED WHAT I'D WRITTEN.



I FELT PANIC RISING WITHIN ME. IT WAS LIKE A NIGHTMARE THAT I COULDN'T WAKE UP FROM. I KNEW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO FEEL SHUT OUT BY MY PARENTS, BUT I'D NEVER BEEN BULLIED LIKE THIS.

IN THE END, I JUST STOOD THERE AND SCREAMED.

STOP! STOP!
STOP!

STOP? NOW, YOU JUST LISTEN TO ME, YOUNG LADY! YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SHOULD STOP! STOP THIS RIDICULOUS BEHAVIOUR, RIGHT NOW.

SEE? NOW YOU'RE GETTING ANGRY WITH US AGAIN!

WE WON'T STAND FOR THIS KIND OF NONSENSE.

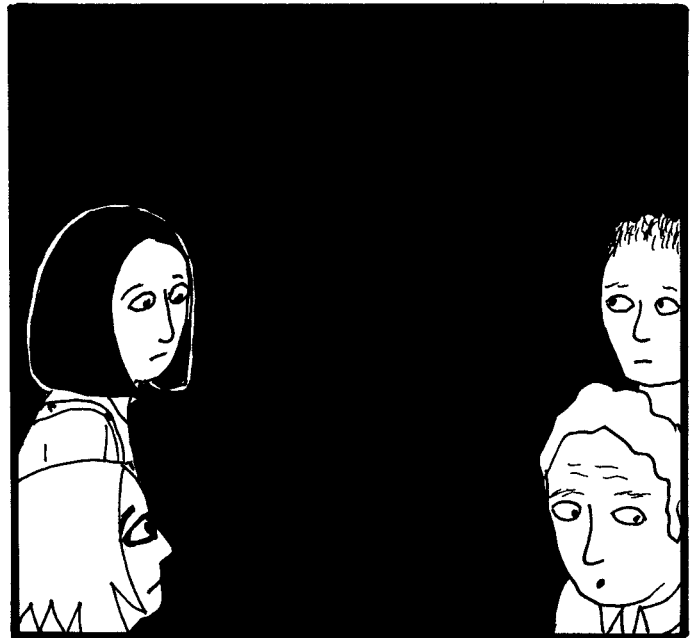
GIVE ME BACK MY LETTER!!!

AFTER THAT, MY LIFE GOT EVEN MORE TWISTED AND DARK. I DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAD HAPPENED. I WASN'T EVEN SURE WHETHER MY EXPERIENCE WAS REAL.

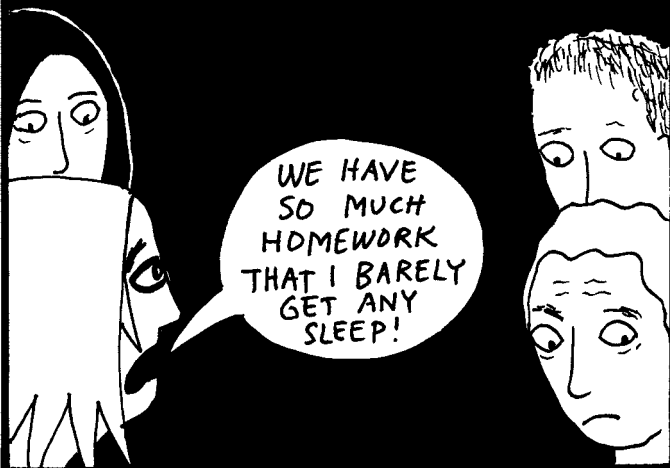


I FOLDED THE LETTER AND KEPT IT. PERHAPS AS PROOF I MIGHT NEED IN THE FUTURE.

AND SO IT WENT ON.



EVERYONE WAS SECURE
IN THEIR ROLES.



AGGRESSION



GUILT



I SHOULD HAVE REALISED THAT I OUGHT TO SHUT UP AT THIS POINT



NOBODY EVER LISTENS TO ME!

I SHOULD HAVE SEALED MYSELF OFF INTO MY OWN LITTLE WORLD, JUST LIKE THE OTHERS.

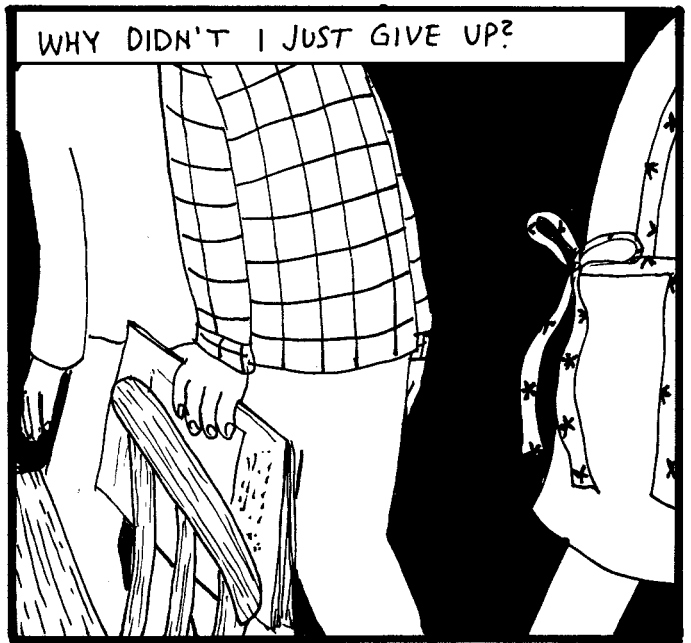


WHY DID I GO ON, DAY AFTER DAY, TRYING TO GET THROUGH TO THESE PEOPLE?

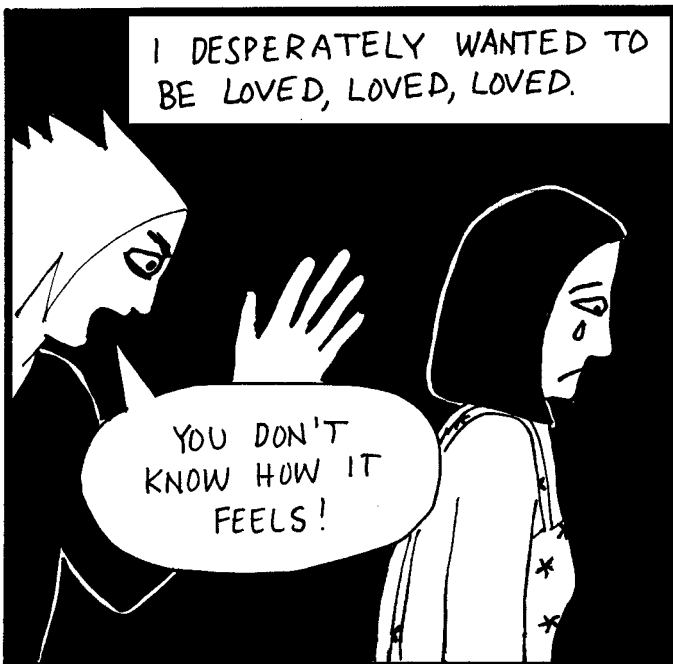


HELLO!?! CAN YOU EVEN HEAR WHAT I SAY?

WHY DIDN'T I JUST GIVE UP?



I DESPERATELY WANTED TO BE LOVED, LOVED, LOVED.



YOU DON'T KNOW HOW IT FEELS!



SORRY! I'M SORRY!

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR ME?

I THOUGHT THIS WAS LOVE.

MUM USED TO READ MY DIARY REGULARLY.



I ACTUALLY FOUND THIS QUITE PRACTICAL IN SOME WAYS.

I COULD WRITE THINGS IN MY DIARY THAT I WANTED TO TELL HER



IT WAS MY ONLY WAY OF GETTING THROUGH TO HER.

I ALWAYS KNEW WHEN SHE'D READ MY DIARY BECAUSE SHE OFTEN GAVE HERSELF AWAY DURING OUR ROWS.



SORRY!
I'M SORRY!

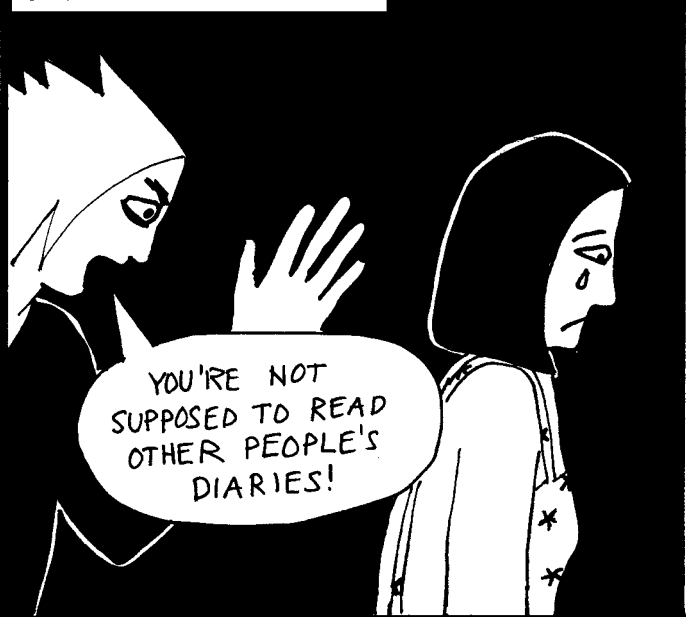
I JUST WANT
YOU TO WEAR
CLOTHES WITHOUT
HOLES IN THEM

I COULD ALSO USE IT AS AN EXCUSE TO START A ROW.



WHO'S BEEN
READING MY
DIARY?

OR AS EXTRA AMMUNITION



YOU'RE NOT
SUPPOSED TO READ
OTHER PEOPLE'S
DIARIES!

AT THE SAME TIME I FELT SORRY FOR HER BECAUSE SHE WAS SO GUILTESS AND STUPID THAT SHE DIDN'T REALISE THAT SHE KEPT GIVING HERSELF AWAY BY WHAT SHE SAID.



SORRY!
I'M SORRY!

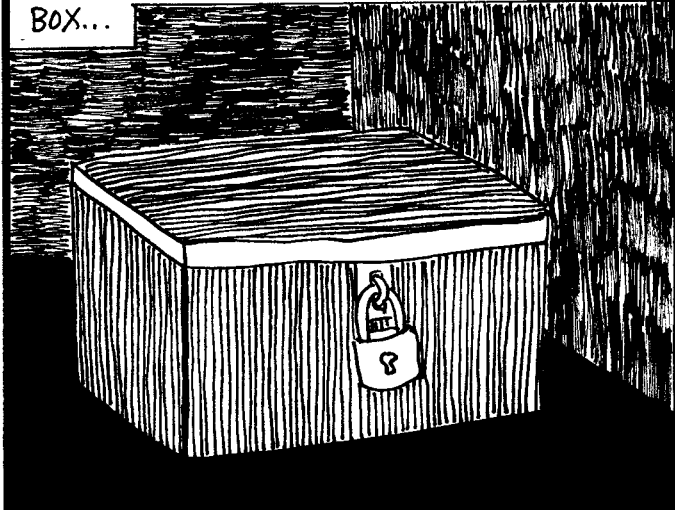
WHY DO
YOU ALWAYS
ACCUSE ME OF
THINGS?

MY REAL SECRETS DIDN'T FIND THEIR WAY INTO MY DIARY



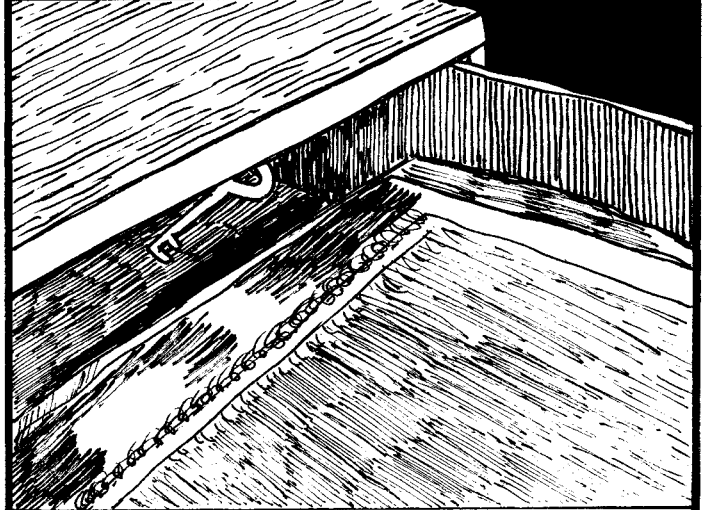
I WROTE THEM ON SECRET SCRAPS OF PAPER...

... THAT I THEN LOCKED UP IN A SECRET BOX...



... WITH A SECRET LOCK...

... AND A SECRET KEY...



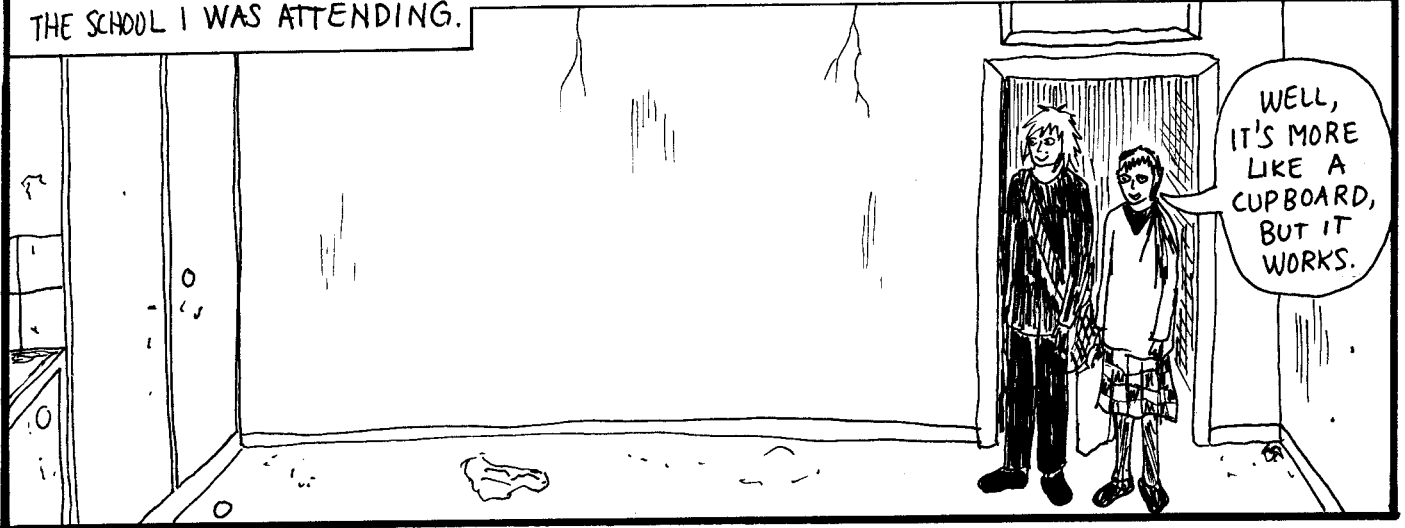
... THAT WAS HIDDEN IN A SECRET PLACE..

... WHILE THE BOX WAS HIDDEN...



... IN THE DARKEST CORNER I COULD FIND.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF ROWS CONTINUED. I MADE ONE MORE ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THINGS BY DECIDING TO MOVE OUT. THROUGH A FRIEND, I FOUND A ROOM TO RENT RIGHT NEAR THE SCHOOL I WAS ATTENDING.



WELL, IT'S MORE LIKE A CUPBOARD, BUT IT WORKS.

I DID ALL THE MATHS...



... AND WITH A BIT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM MY PARENTS, I RECKONED I COULD MANAGE.

MAYBE THERE WAS SOME HOPE AFTER ALL.



I PUT THE PROPOSAL TO MY PARENTS.

... SO I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST FOR ALL OF US.



WE ARGUE EVERY DAY.

BUT IF I COULD HAVE A LITTLE ROOM OF MY OWN IN TOWN...

MY PARENTS WERE SILENT FOR A LONG TIME.



HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MANAGE THIS FINANCIALLY? YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO AFFORD A PHONE, AND YOU TALK ON THE PHONE THE WHOLE TIME. AND WE'RE NOT PAYING YOUR PHONE BILLS, YOU KNOW.

DO YOU REALISE HOW MUCH IT COSTS TO GET A PHONE? AND FOOD. DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH FOOD COSTS? DON'T THINK YOU CAN COME HERE AND EAT WITH US ANY TIME YOU LIKE ONES YOU'VE MOVED OUT.

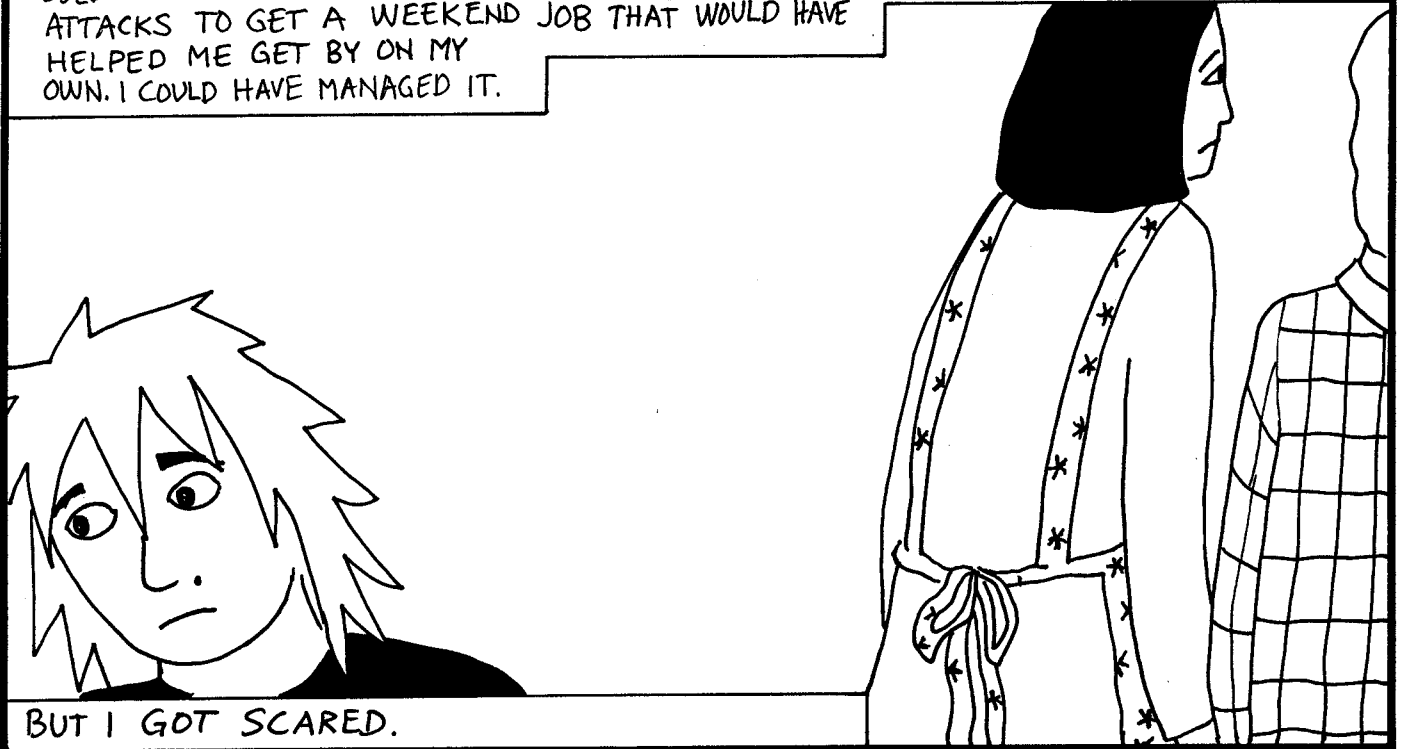
AND WHAT ABOUT THE CAR? YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO BORROW THE CAR WHENEVER YOU FEEL LIKE IT, JUST SO YOU KNOW.

OF COURSE, YOU DO AS YOU PLEASE, BUT DON'T COUNT ON US HELPING YOU OUT WITH ANYTHING.

AND FURNITURE? HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GET FURNITURE? YOU CAN'T TAKE ANYTHING FROM HERE, LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT THAT. ALL THE FURNITURE IN THIS HOUSE BELONGS TO US. AND DO YOU KNOW HOW HIGH ELECTRICITY BILLS CAN BE?

ANYWAY, IT'S YOUR DECISION. WE CAN'T STOP YOU, BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO HELP YOU EITHER. STILL, YOU ALWAYS SEEM TO GET BY ON YOUR OWN.

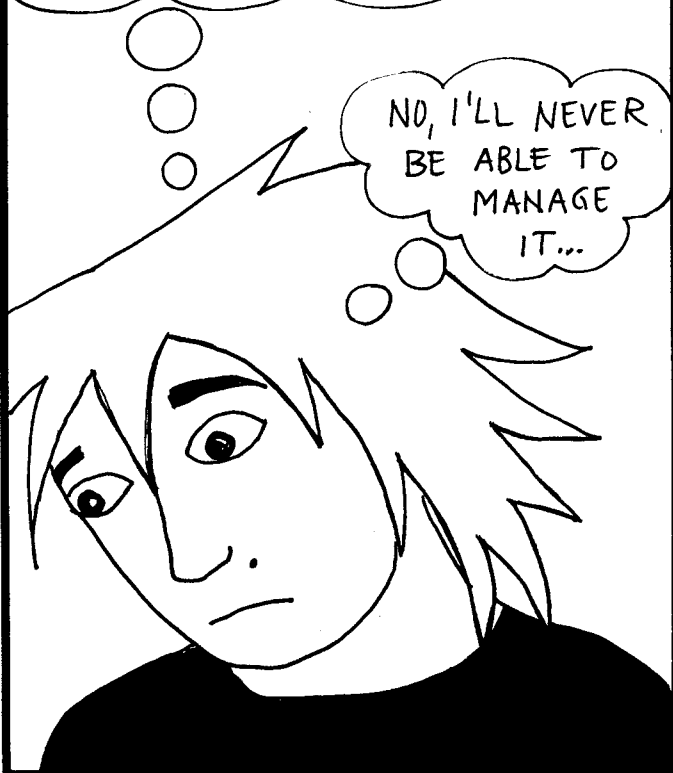
AND THIS IS WHERE I MADE THE BIGGEST MISTAKE OF MY LIFE. RIGHT HERE IS WHERE I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MY CHANCE TO CUT FREE FROM THE TWO OF THEM I SHOULD HAVE TRUSTED IN MY OWN ABILITIES, MY OWN STRENGTH AND WILLPOWER, AND BROKEN FREE RIGHT THERE SO THAT I COULD START TO GROW UP. I COULD HAVE USED ALL THE ENERGY THAT I PUT INTO THE ROWS, THE COMFORTING AND THE ANXIETY ATTACKS TO GET A WEEKEND JOB THAT WOULD HAVE HELPED ME GET BY ON MY OWN. I COULD HAVE MANAGED IT.



BUT I GOT SCARED.

NO, I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO DO IT. I HADN'T EVEN THOUGHT OF THE ELECTRICITY BILL. AND WHERE WOULD I GET FURNITURE?

NO, I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO MANAGE IT...



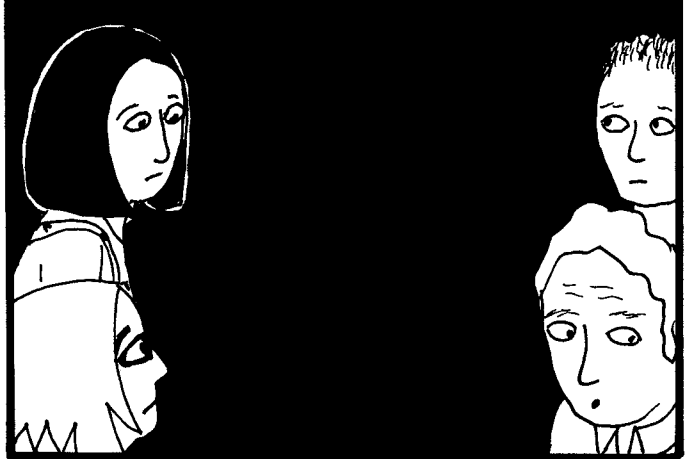
SO I STAYED PUT FOR THE SAKE OF FINANCIAL SECURITY.

AND SO THE CYCLE CONTINUED.



IT'S NOT FAIR THAT I SHOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR PETROL FOR THE CAR.

SINCE THEN I'VE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT WHY THEY DIDN'T JUST HELP ME TO MOVE OUT.

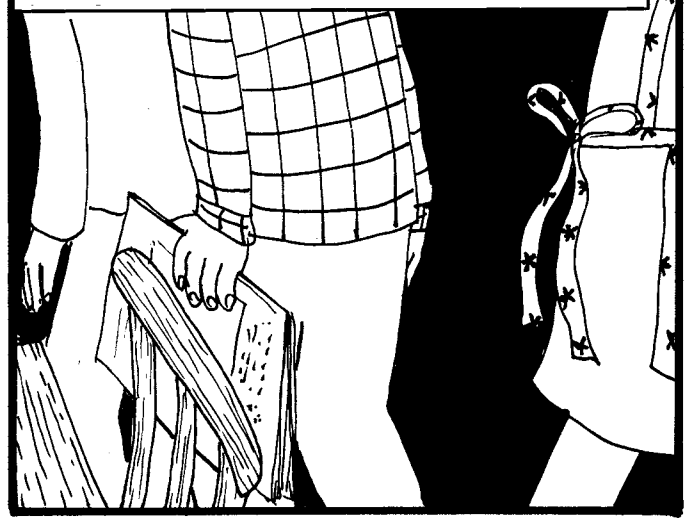


ALL THOSE ENDLESS ARGUMENTS THAT WE WOULDN'T HAVE HAD, OR AT LEAST NOT AS OFTEN.

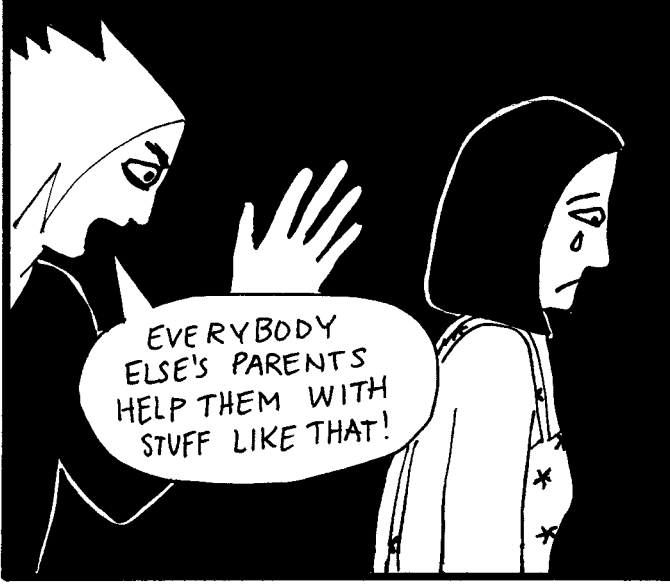


IF YOU'D JUST HELP ME WITH THE RENT FOR A ROOM IN TOWN, I WOULDN'T NEED TO BORROW THE CAR.

BUT WHO WOULD HAVE TAKEN MY PLACE IF I'D MOVED OUT? WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN LEFT IN THE ROOM?



WHO WOULD HAVE COMFORTED MUM?



EVERYBODY ELSE'S PARENTS HELP THEM WITH STUFF LIKE THAT!

WHEN I FINALLY MOVED OUT A FEW YEARS LATER, MUM MET A NEW MAN WHO TOOK ON MY ROLE. SHE DIVORCED DAD AND MOVED IN WITH HIM.



SORRY! I'M SORRY!

IS IT SO TERRIBLE, LIVING AT HOME WITH US?

AND IN SOME WAYS, MY HOME LIFE WITH MY PARENTS WASN'T THAT BAD. I SAW FOR EXAMPLE, HOW SOME OF MY FRIENDS HAD TO SMUGGLE LIQUOR AND CIGARETTES INTO THEIR OWN HOUSES.

HIDE THE BAG!
HIDE THE BAG!
DAD'S COMING!

WE CAN TAKE
THE LIQUOR BACK
TO MY HOUSE,
IF YOU WANT.

IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS MY MUM READ MY DIARY "BEHIND MY BACK", I WOULD SNEAK ALCOHOL FROM MY PARENT'S DRINKS CABINET BEHIND THEIRS.



THEY MUST HAVE NOTICED HOW BOTTLES OF WINE JUST DISAPPEARED BUT THEY NEVER SAID ANYTHING.

I COULD LIGHT UP A CIGARETTE IN FRONT OF MY MOTHER'S NOSE.



SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

DOES YOUR MOTHER KNOW YOU SMOKE?

OH, I DON'T KNOW.

I'D NEVER DARE TO LIGHT UP IN FRONT OF MY MOTHER LIKE THAT! SHE'D GO CRAZY! YOUR MUM'S SO COOL!

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT WAS THEIR FEAR OF CONFLICT OR A GENUINE LACK OF INTEREST IN MY HEALTH THAT LED THEM NOT TO CARE ABOUT HOW MUCH I DRANK



GOT ANOTHER BOTTLE, JENNY?

I SUPPOSE LIQUOR TURNED ME INTO A NORMAL TEENAGER IN THEIR EYES, A TEENAGER JUST LIKE ANY OTHER.



OH DEAR! LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE HAD A LITTLE TOO MUCH TO DRINK TONIGHT.

LIQUOR TURNED ME INTO SOMETHING THEY UNDERSTOOD. AND COULD COPE WITH.

IT'S OK, THESE THINGS HAPPEN TO EVERYONE WHO HASN'T HAD A FEW TOO MANY IN THEIR DAY?



IT'S A GOOD THING YOU COME HOME WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK.

WHAT I MEAN IS, IT'S GOOD YOU COME HOME, SO YOU'RE NOT LYING IN A DITCH SOMEWHERE, NOT DARING TO COME HOME BECAUSE YOU'RE DRUNK.

MUM AND DAD NEVER WORRIED ABOUT ME, EVEN IF I DRANK MYSELF UNCONSCIOUS. BIZARRELY, IT SEEMED TO MAKE THEM FEEL MORE SECURE.

ONCE, WHEN I WAS OVER AT KARIN'S PLACE, LISTENING TO MUSIC...

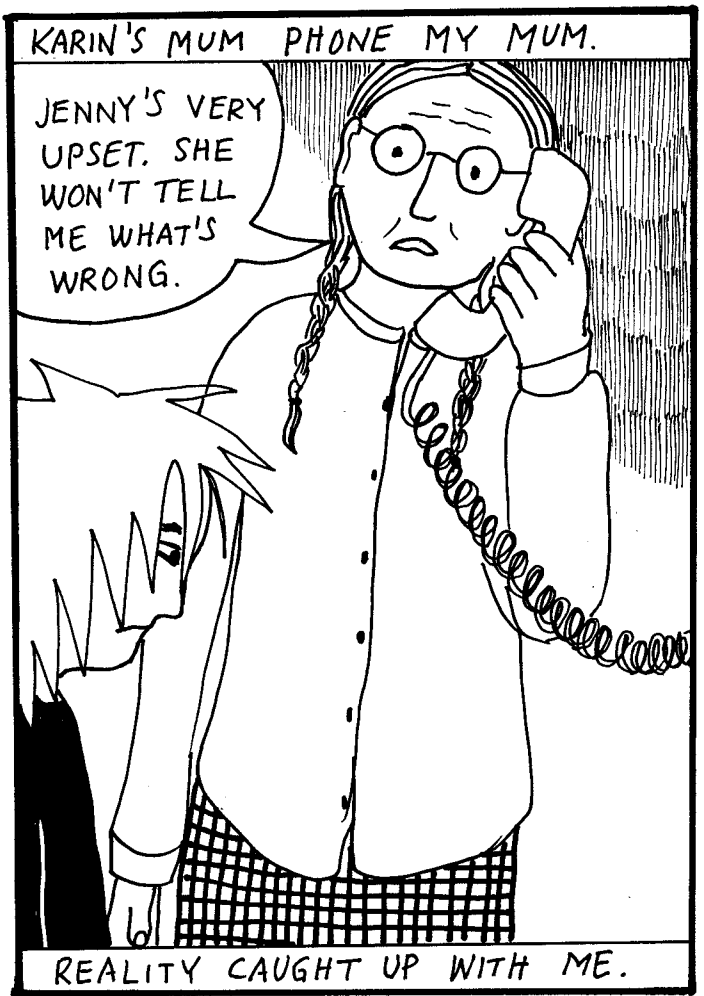


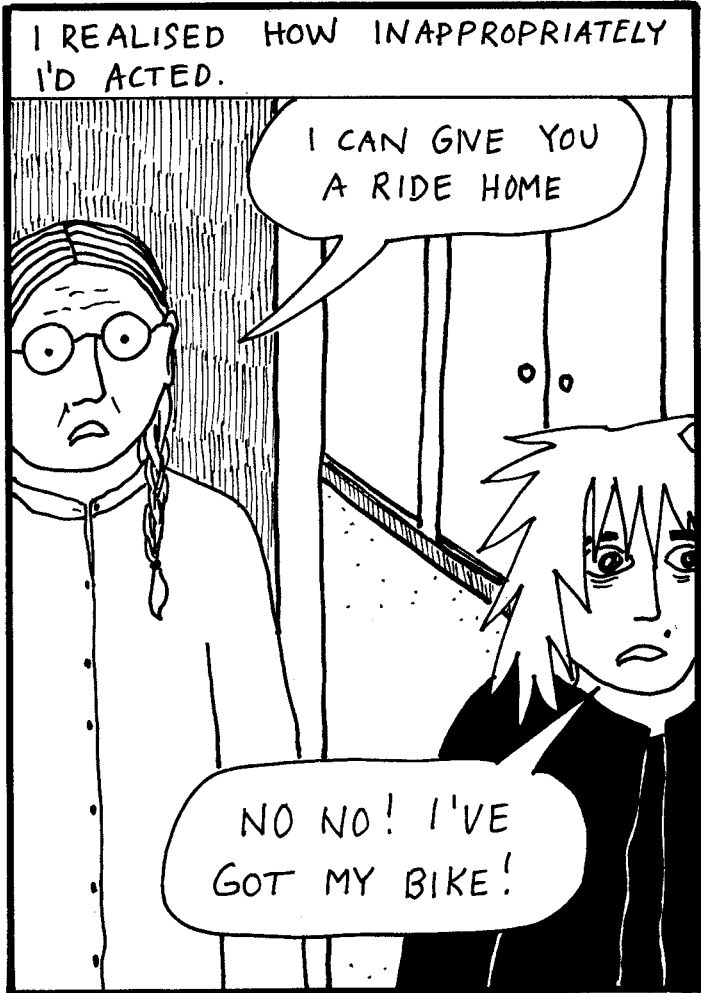
... I STARTED TO CRY, FOR NO REASON AT ALL.



I COULDN'T STOP. IT WAS AS IF I'D SPRUNG A LEAK.







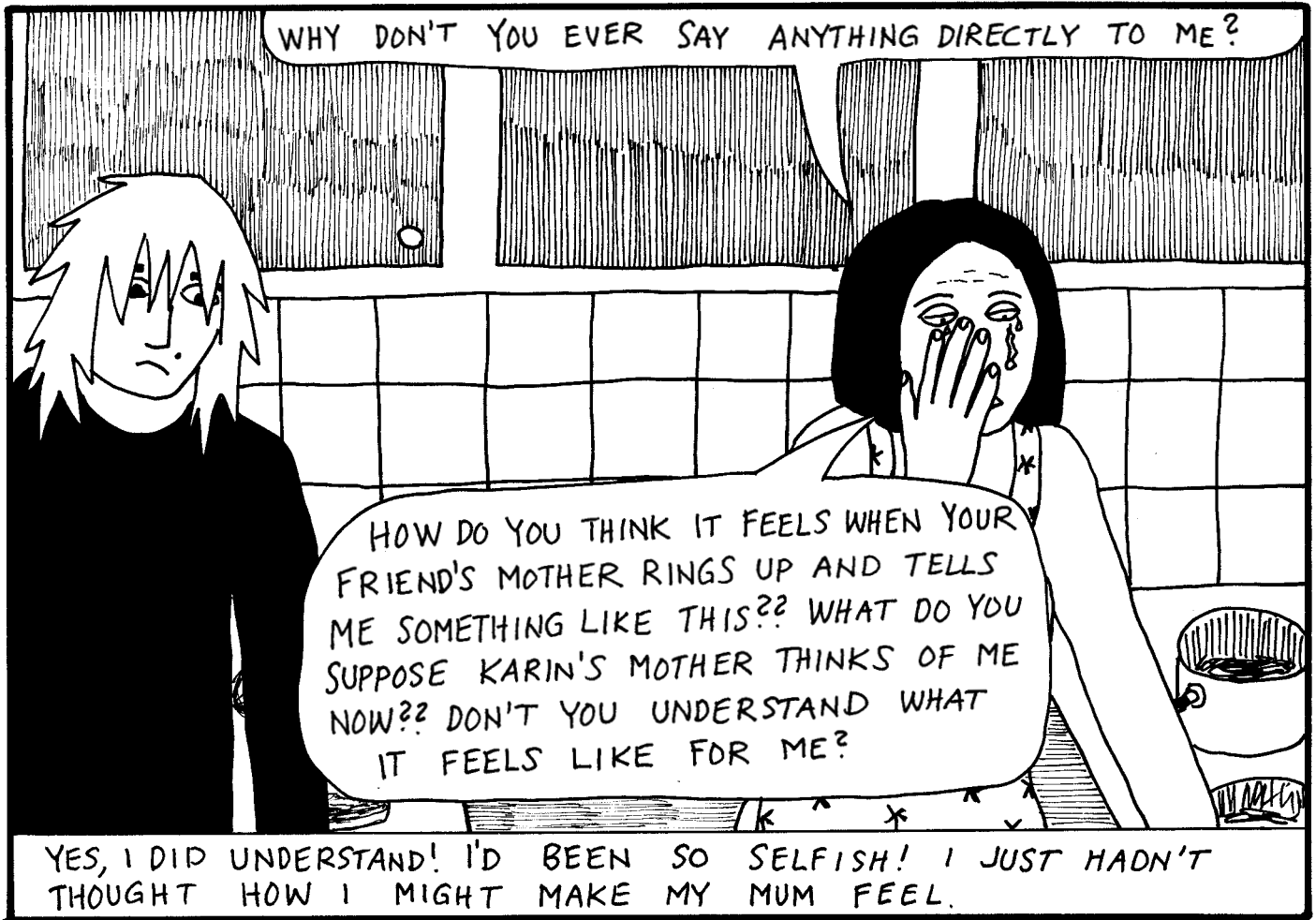
AT HOME, THE ATMOSPHERE WAS ICY. NOBODY SAID A WORD TO ME.



I DIDN'T START AN ARGUMENT AT THE SUPPER TABLE THAT EVENING. I KNEW I'D ALREADY DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE.

WHEN MY BROTHER AND MY DAD LEFT THE ROOM, MY MUM STARTED BLUBBERING AT THE SINK.

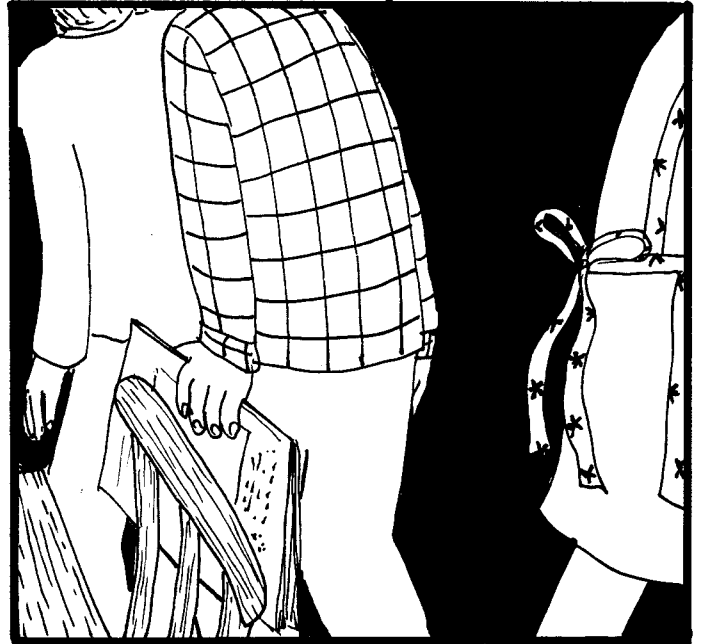




BUT I NEVER SUCCEEDED
IN KEEPING MY PROMISE.



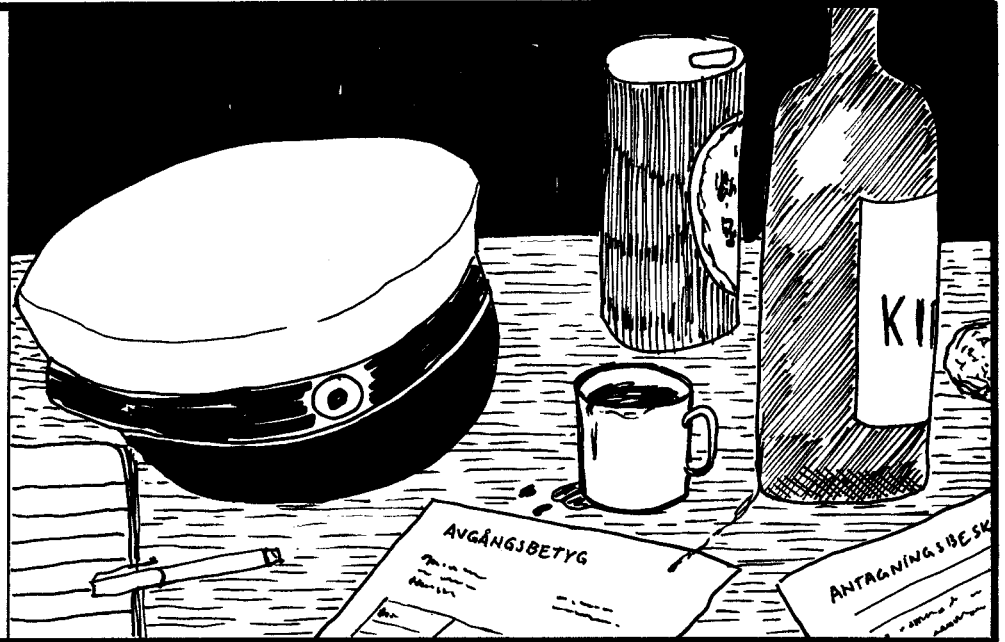
IN FACT, I JUST KEPT FAILING
OVER AND OVER.



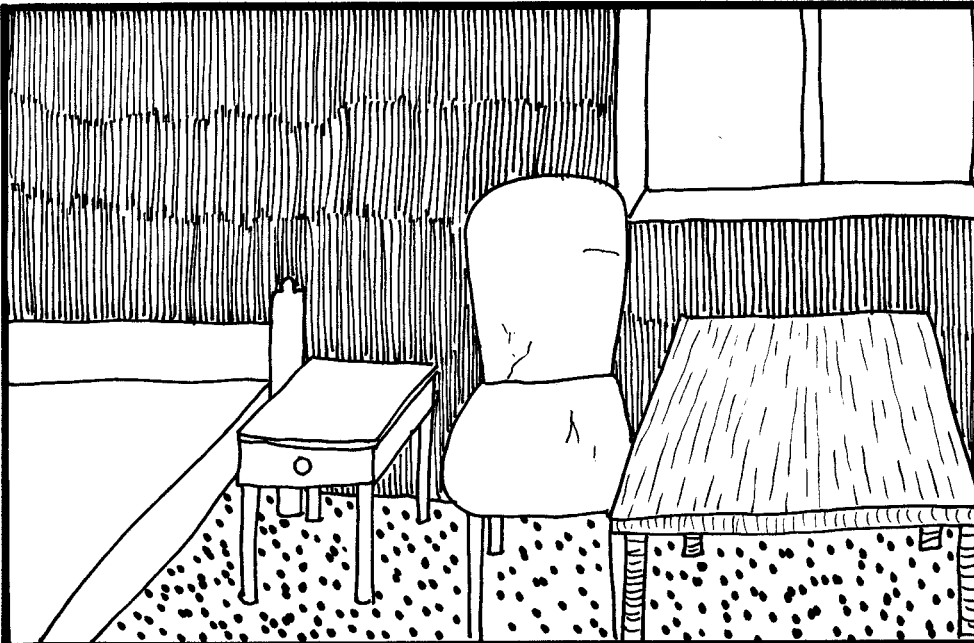
THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME.



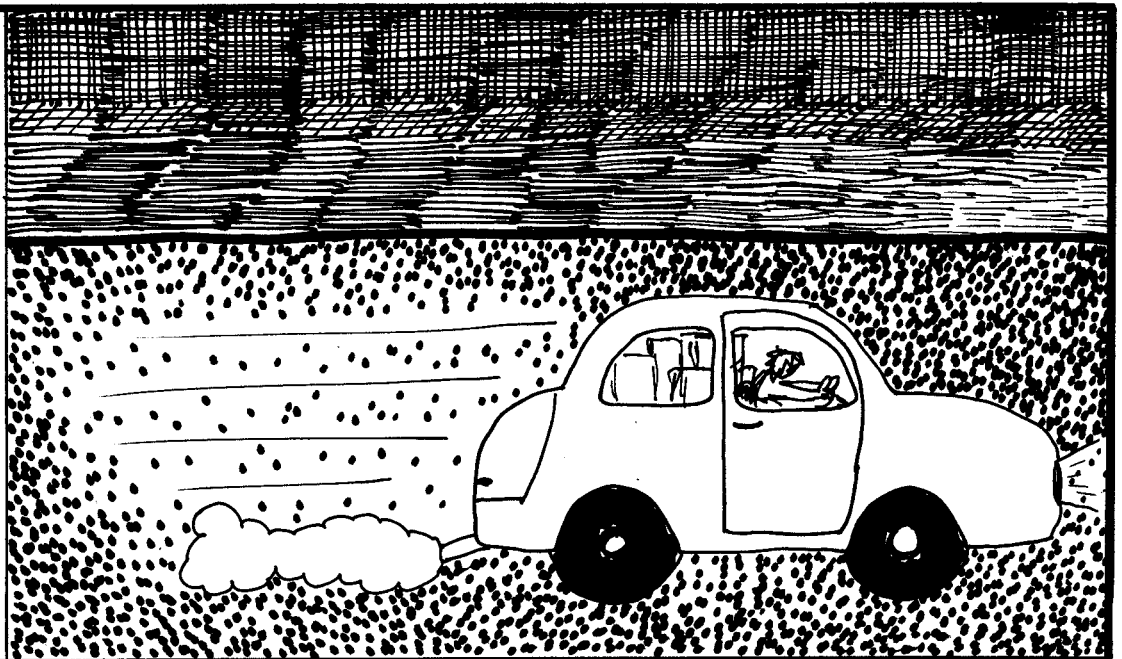
WHEN I WAS 19, I
MANAGED TO GRADUATE.
SO NOW I'D FINALLY
BE ABLE TO MOVE
OUT. I WAS GOING
TO START STUDYING
IN THE BIG CITY,
400 KM AWAY FROM
MY CHILDHOOD HOME.



THROUGH AN AD IN
THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER,
I'D GOT MYSELF A
SUBLEASE CONTRACT
ON A SMALL FURNISHED
APARTMENT. I COULD
JUST MANAGE IT ON
MY STUDENT GRANT
IF I KEPT TO A
STRICT BUDGET.



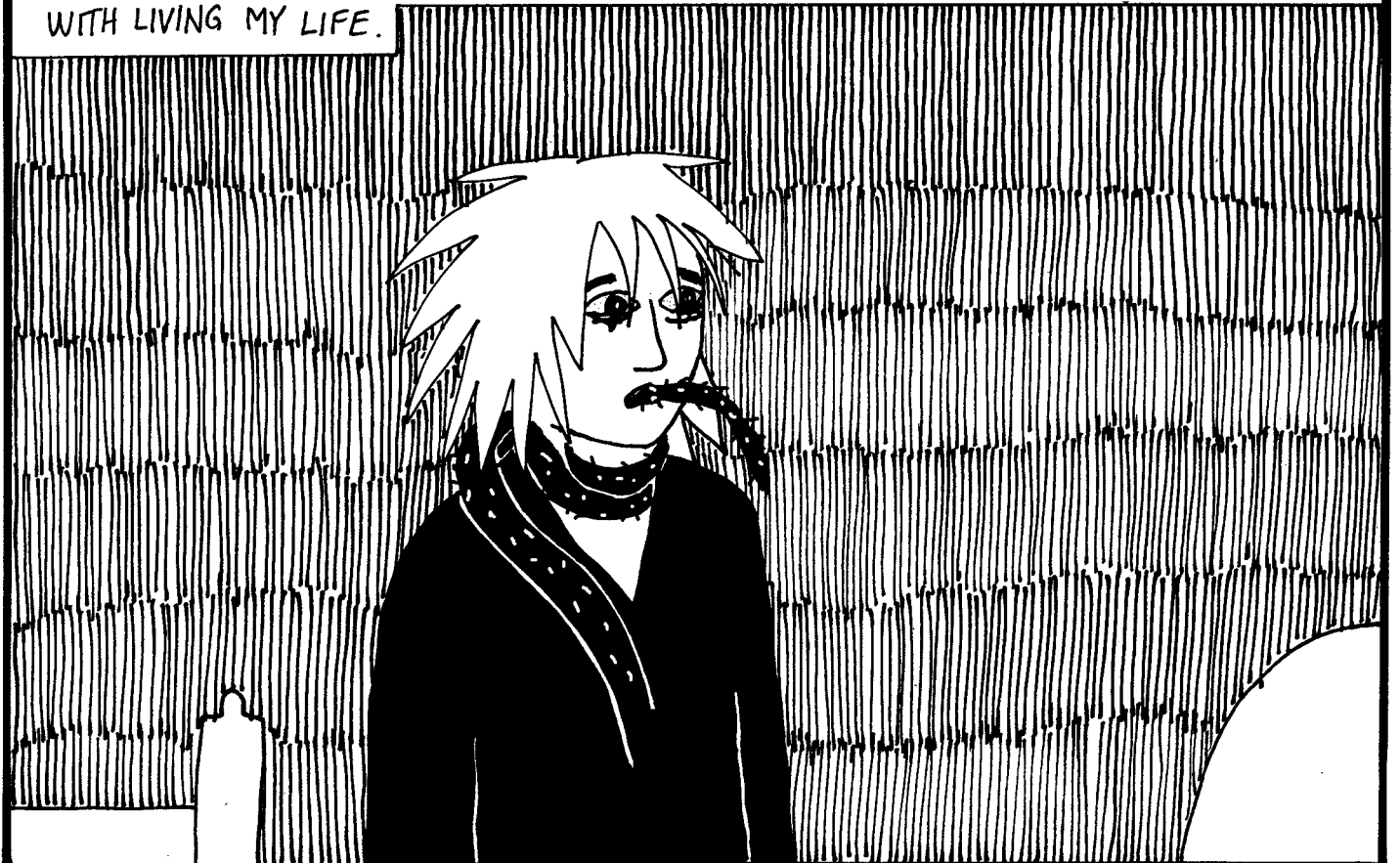
I GOT TO
BORROW
MUM'S CAR
AND TOOK
ALL MY
STUFF WITH
ME IN ONE
TRIP.



I HAD SUCH HIGH EXPECTATIONS! I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FANTASTIC NOW THAT I FINALLY HAD A PLACE OF MY OWN.



BUT THE FANTASTIC FEELING NEVER MATERIALISED. ANXIETY HAD GROWN DEEP ROOTS INSIDE ME AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, AND I WAS UNABLE TO GET ON WITH LIVING MY LIFE.



INSTEAD, I DRANK. WHEN I WAS AT HOME...



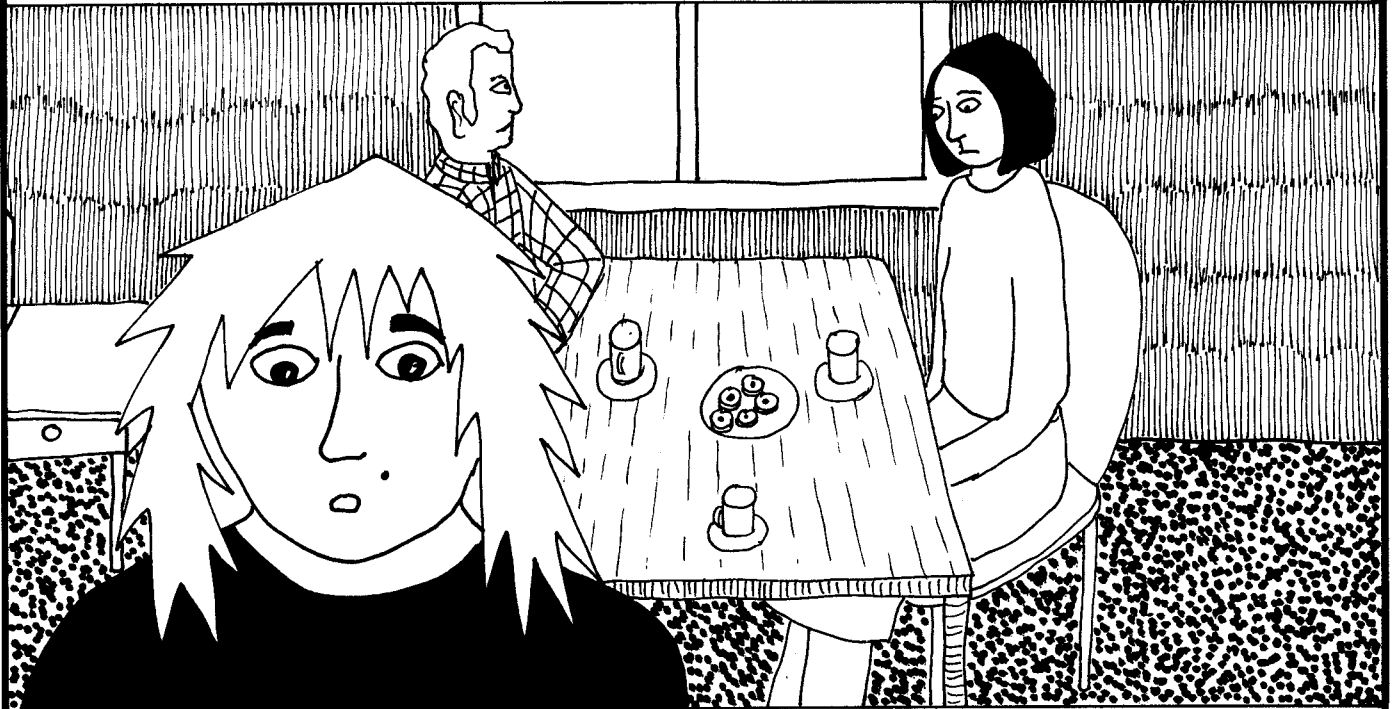
AND WHEN I WAS OUT.



I LIVED 5 MINUTES AWAY FROM THE COUNTY LIBRARY AND THE EXHIBITION HALLS THAT HAD BEEN SO IMPORTANT TO ME BETWEEN FOURTH AND NINTH GRADE. BUT NOW IT WAS AS IF I DIDN'T DARE GO THERE ANY MORE.



I LIVED IN THAT APARTMENT FOR 2 YEARS. IN ALL THAT TIME, MY DAD CAME TO VISIT ONCE AND MY MUM CAME TWICE. THE FIRST TIME THEY CAME TOGETHER.



I WAS SO NERVOUS I FORGOT TO COUNT THE SCOOPS WHEN I MADE THE COFFEE.

THE COFFEE I MADE WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH



HE NEVER CAME BACK AGAIN.



THE SECOND AND LAST TIME MY MUM CAME TO VISIT, SHE BROUGHT ME SOMETHING THAT I NOW SEE WAS A FAREWELL PRESENT.



YOU'RE SUCH A CLEVER GIRL AND YOU'VE NEVER NEEDED TO ASK ME ABOUT ANYTHING YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE EVERYTHING ON YOUR OWN I'VE NEVER HAD TO WORRY ABOUT YOU!



SHE WANTED TO FEEL SURE THAT THE DECISION SHE WAS ABOUT TO MAKE WAS THE RIGHT ONE.

WE'VE NEVER REALLY NEEDED EACH OTHER.



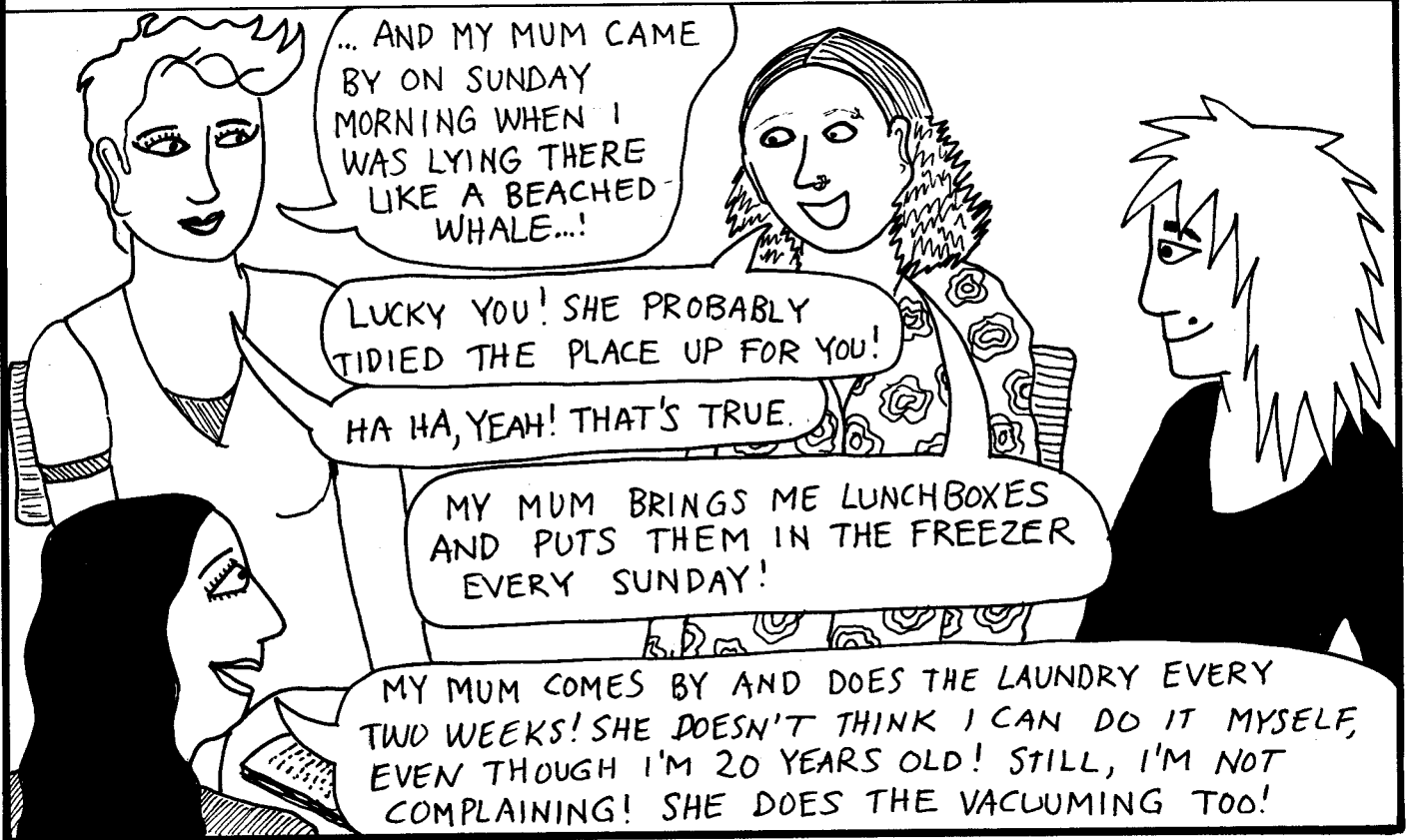
I'D NEVER SEEN HER SO HAPPY BEFORE.

SHE DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT HER SECRET WAS. BUT EVEN THOUGH SHE PRETENDED OTHERWISE, SHE MUST HAVE REALISED EVEN THEN THAT HER DECISION WOULD SPELL THE END OF OUR RELATIONSHIP.



STILL, ON THIS OCCASION, I WAS JUST GLAD TO SEE HER SO HAPPY. IT SEEMED THAT THE FACT THAT SHE NO LONGER HAD TO LIVE WITH ME HAD DONE HER GOOD.

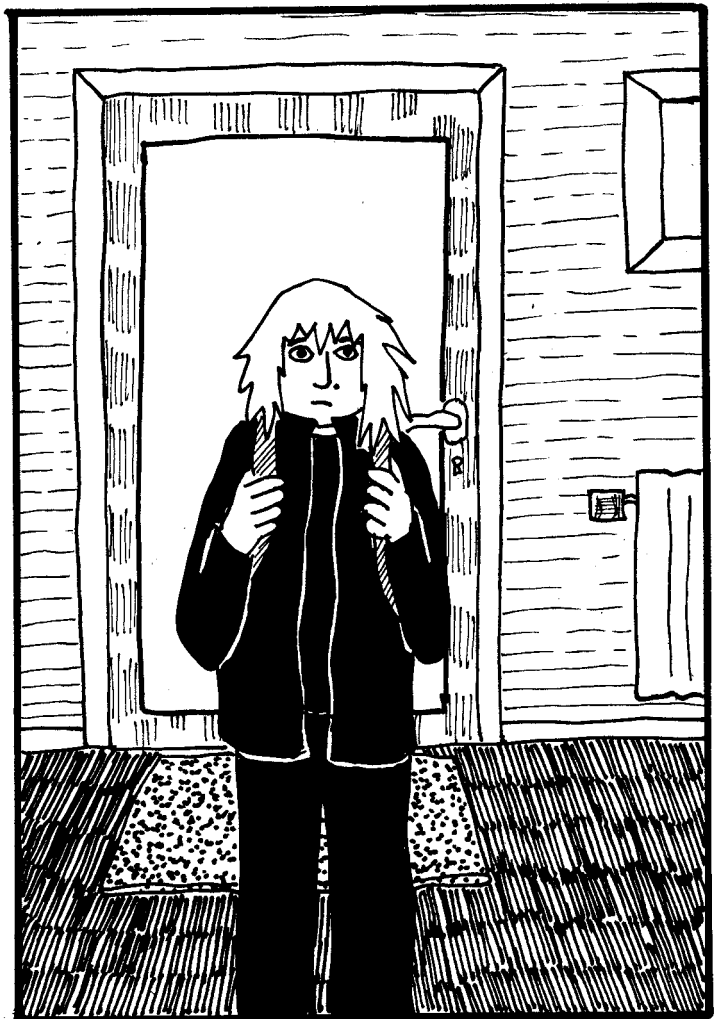
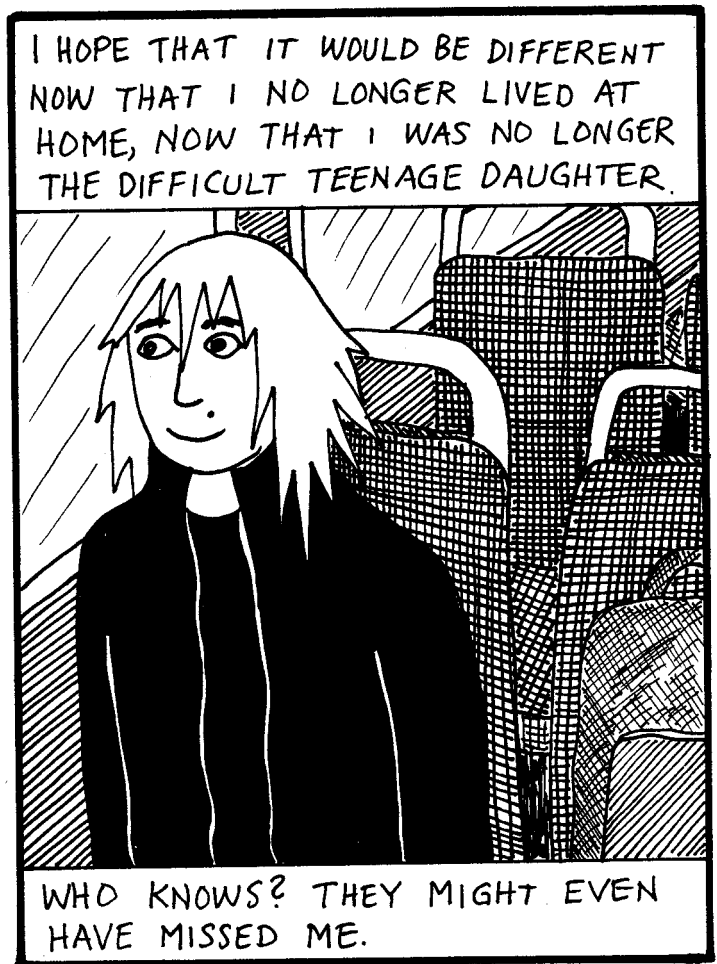
MY NEW CLASSMATES, WHO HAD ALSO JUST MOVED OUT, WERE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT HOW DIFFICULT OR "BRILLIANT" IT WAS WHEN THEIR MUMS CAME TO VISIT THEM.



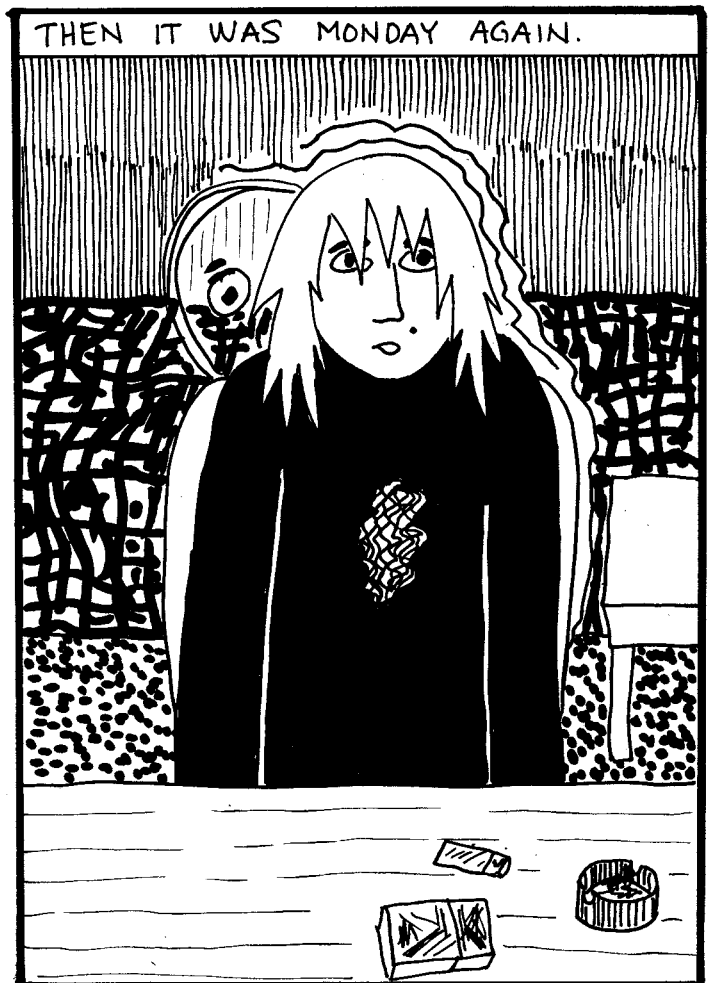
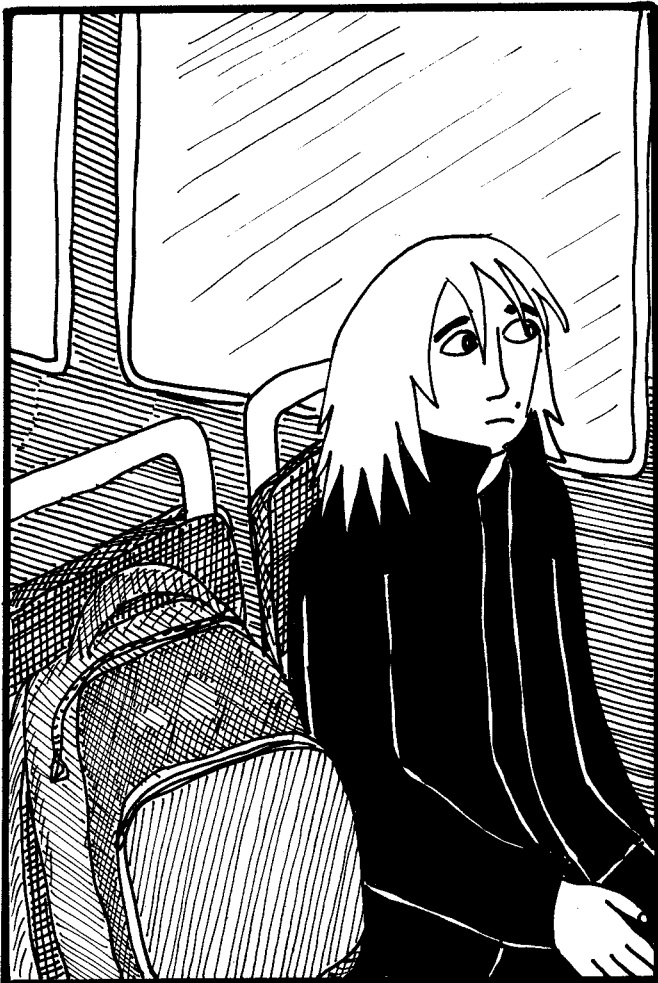
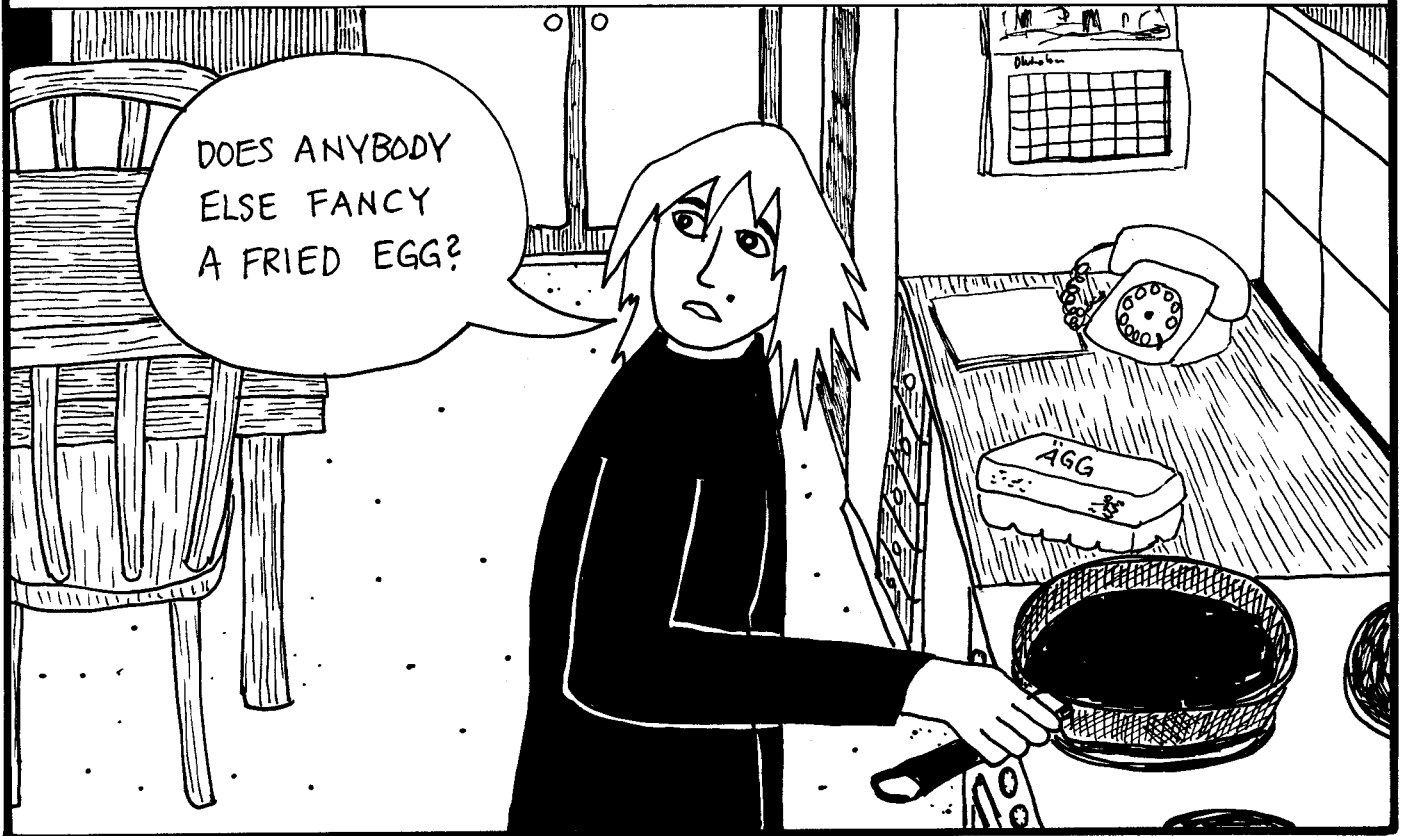
SOMETIMES THEY TALKED ABOUT GOING HOME TO VISIT THEIR PARENTS JUST FOR A BREAK.



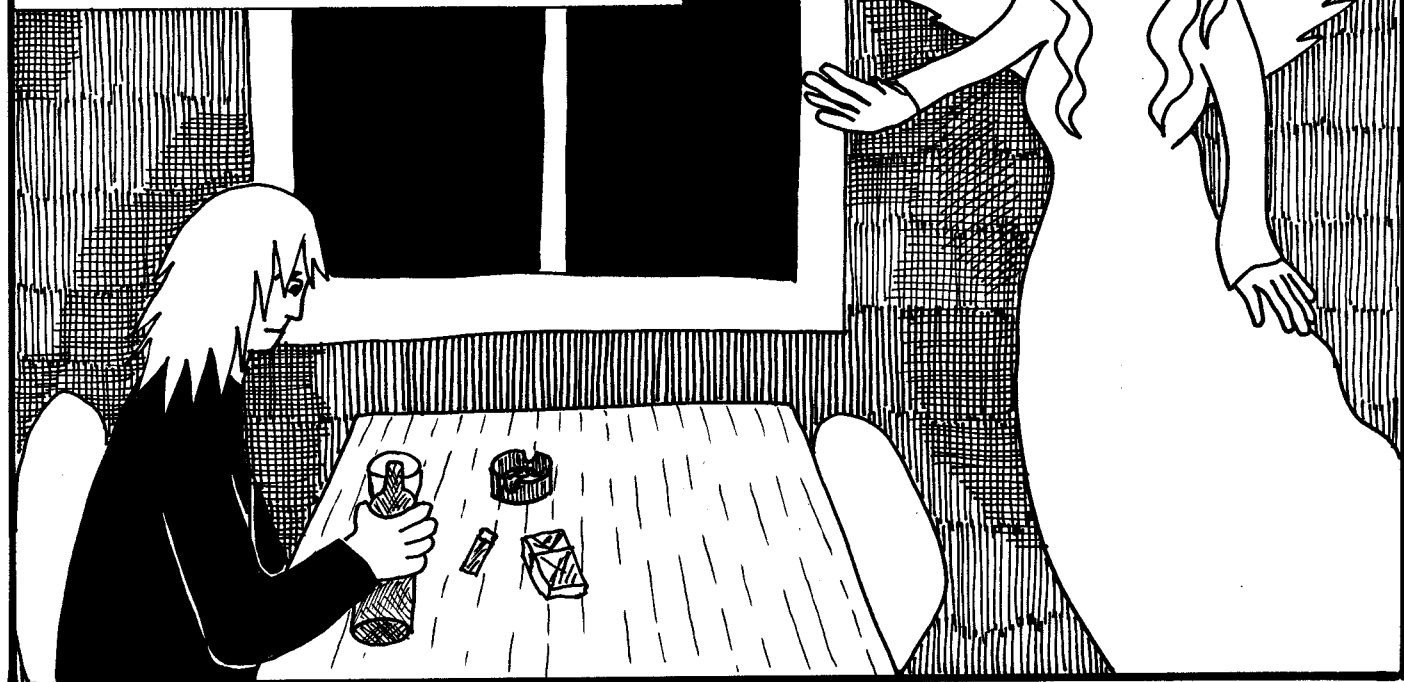
IT SOUNDED LIKE THE MOST NATURAL THING IN THE WORLD, SO COSY AND NORMAL AND SAFE.



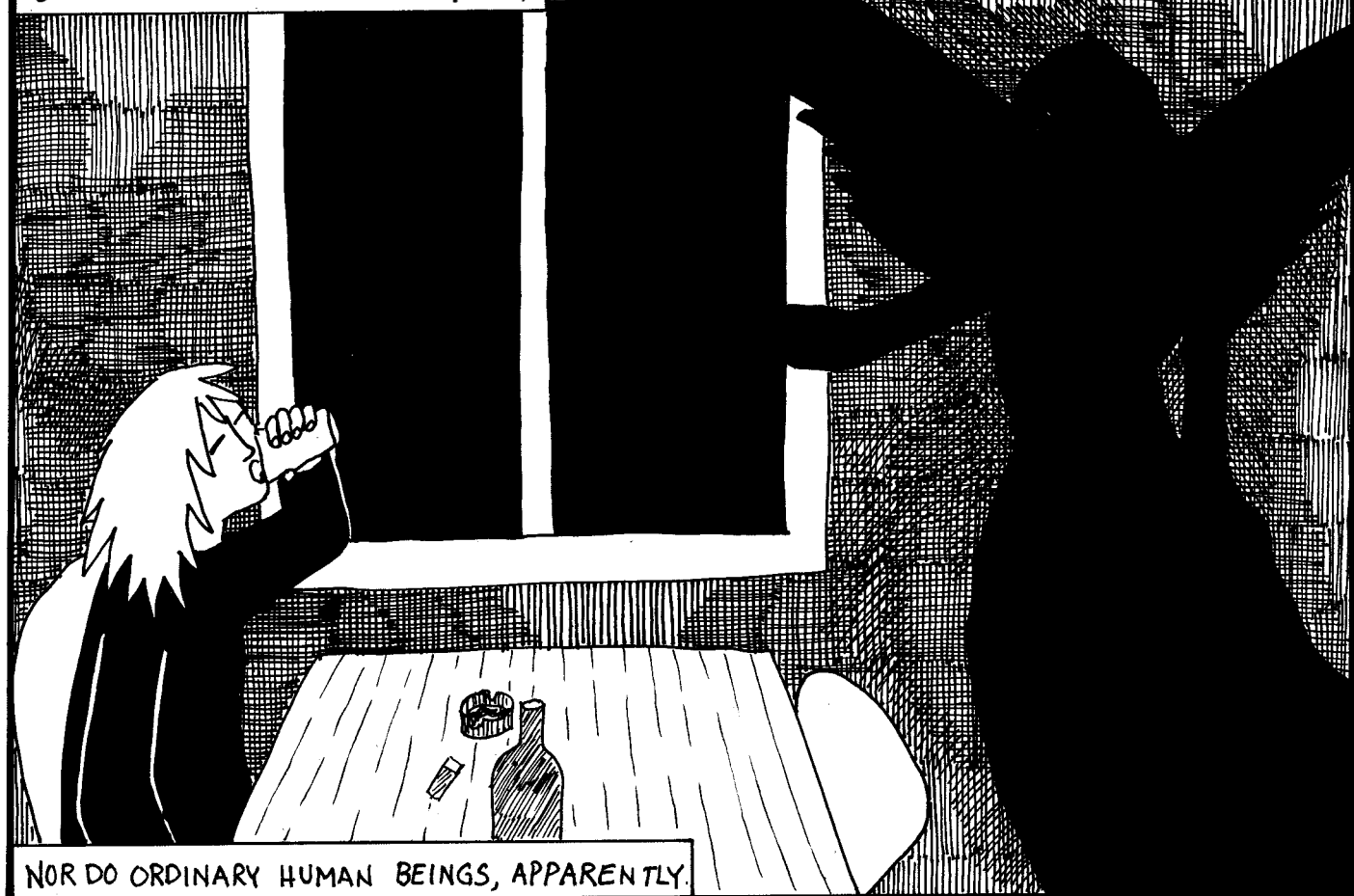
THEY BARELY SEEMED TO NOTICE I WAS THERE. NOBODY WAS PLEASED TO SEE ME, OR SAD, FOR THAT MATTER. THERE WAS NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT IT AT ALL. AND WHY WOULD THERE BE, REALLY?



I WISH THAT A GUARDIAN ANGEL HAD APPEARED AT THIS POINT, OR PERHAPS JUST AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING, SOMEONE WHO MIGHT HAVE SHOWN A BIT OF CONCERN ABOUT ME. SOMEONE WHO MIGHT HAVE TOLD ME, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH ME AND EVERYTHING WRONG WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING ME.

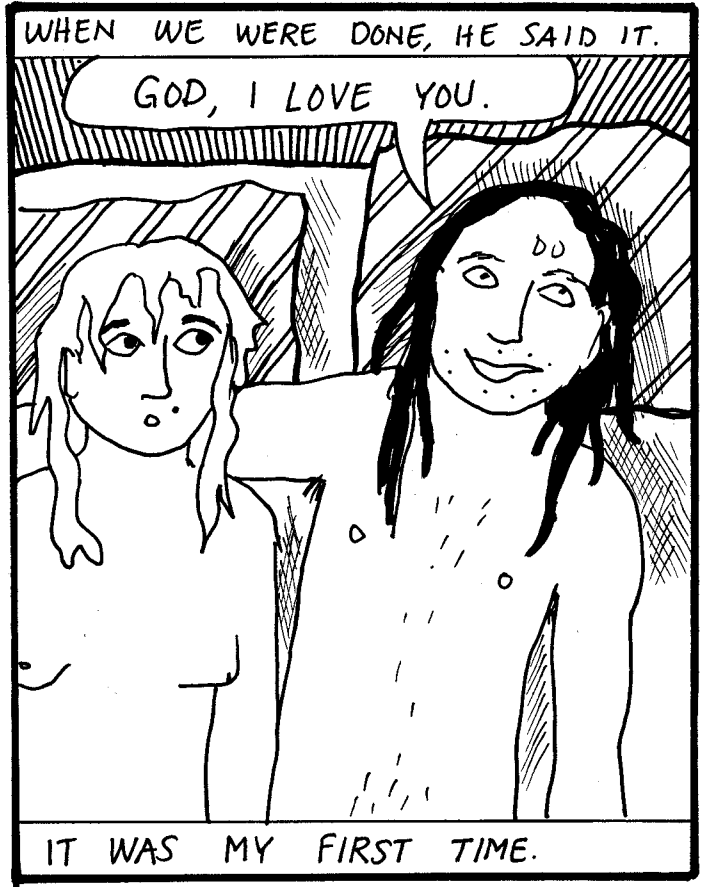
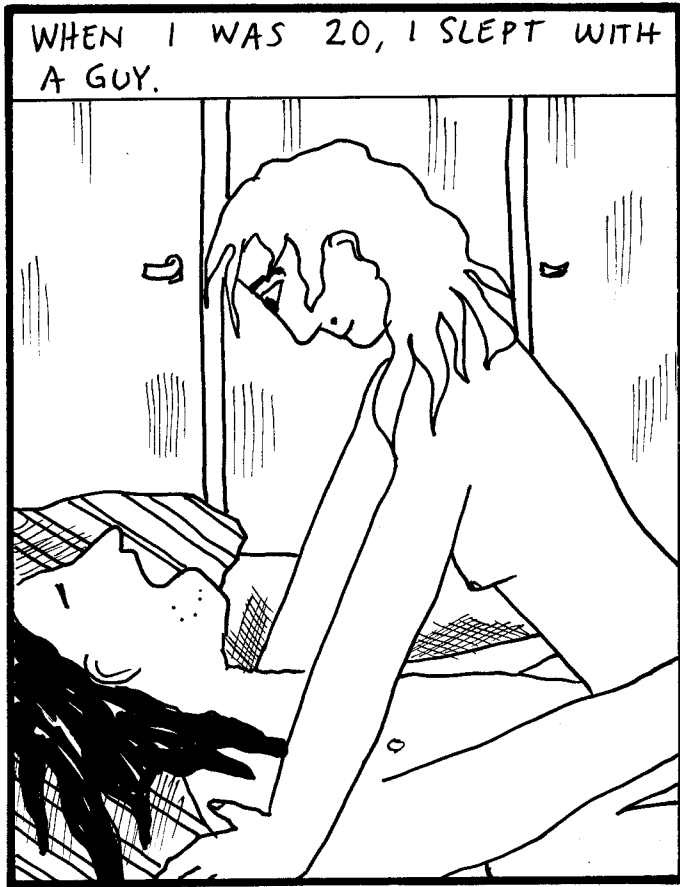


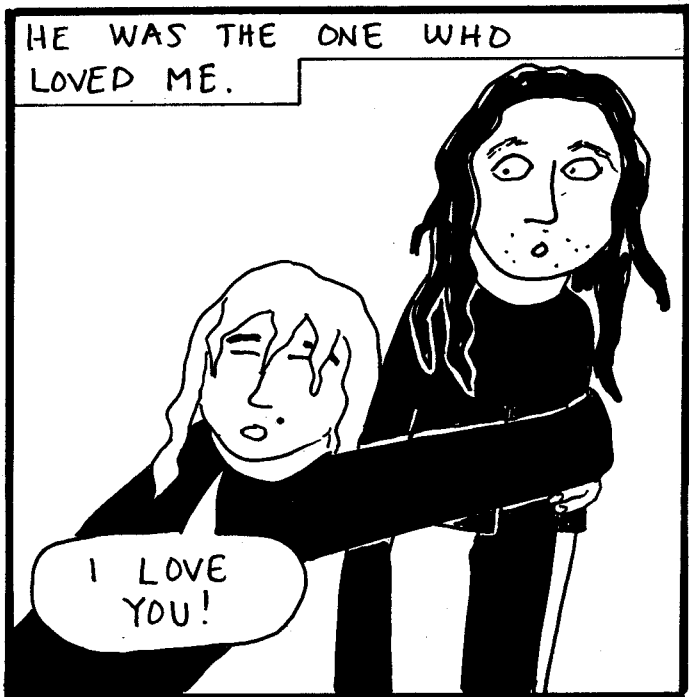
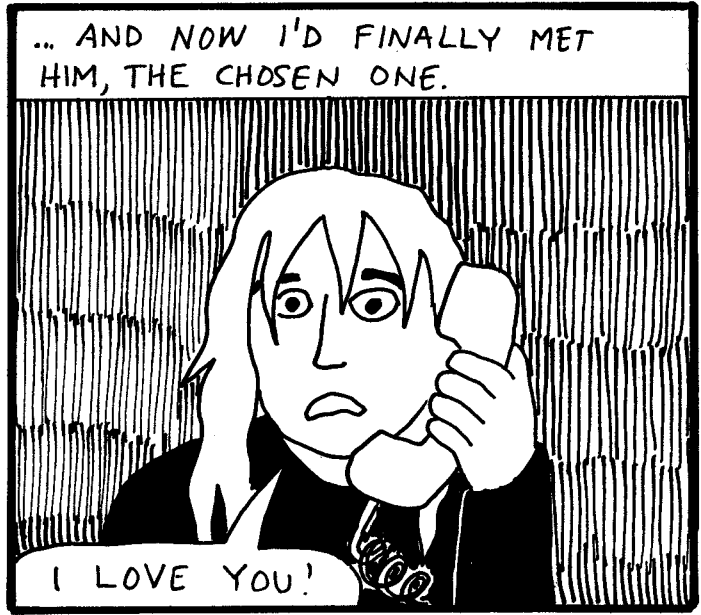
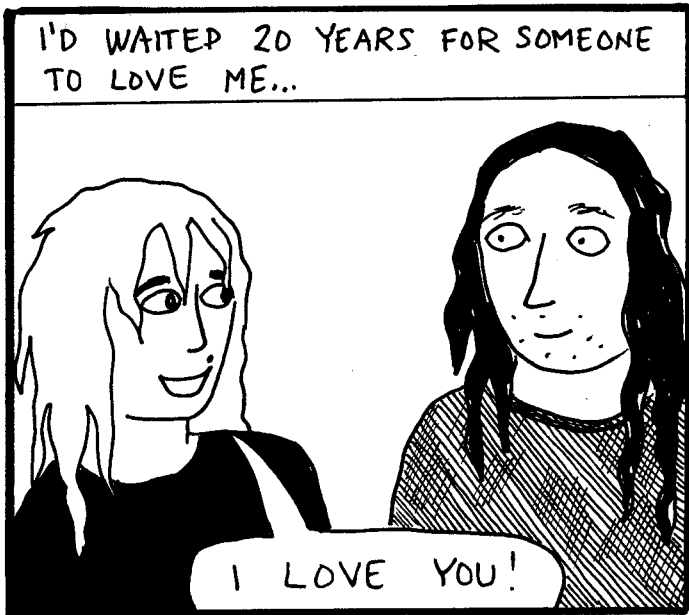
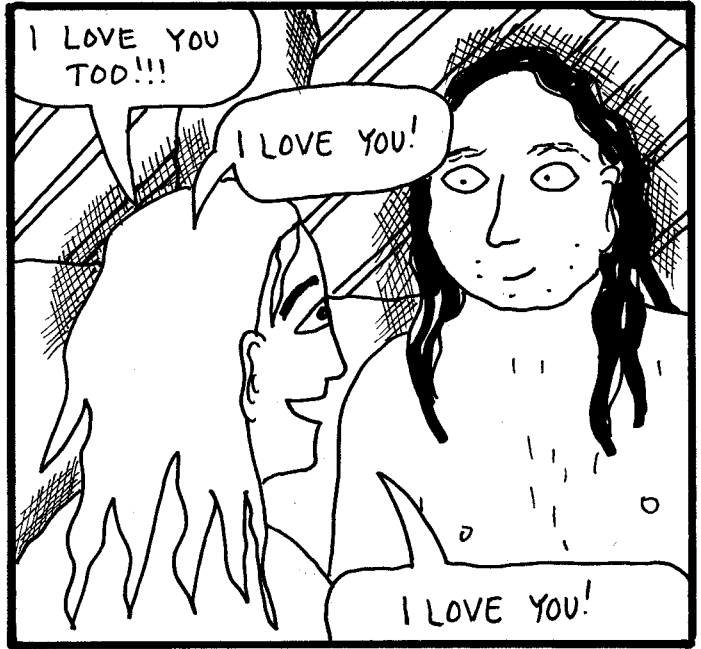
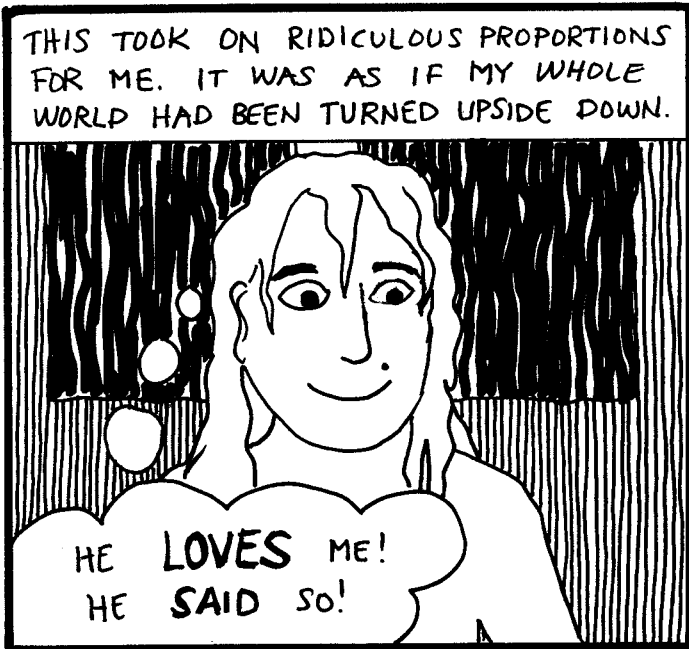
BUT GUARDIAN ANGELS DON'T EXIST.



NOR DO ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS, APPARENTLY.

THE FIRST TIME

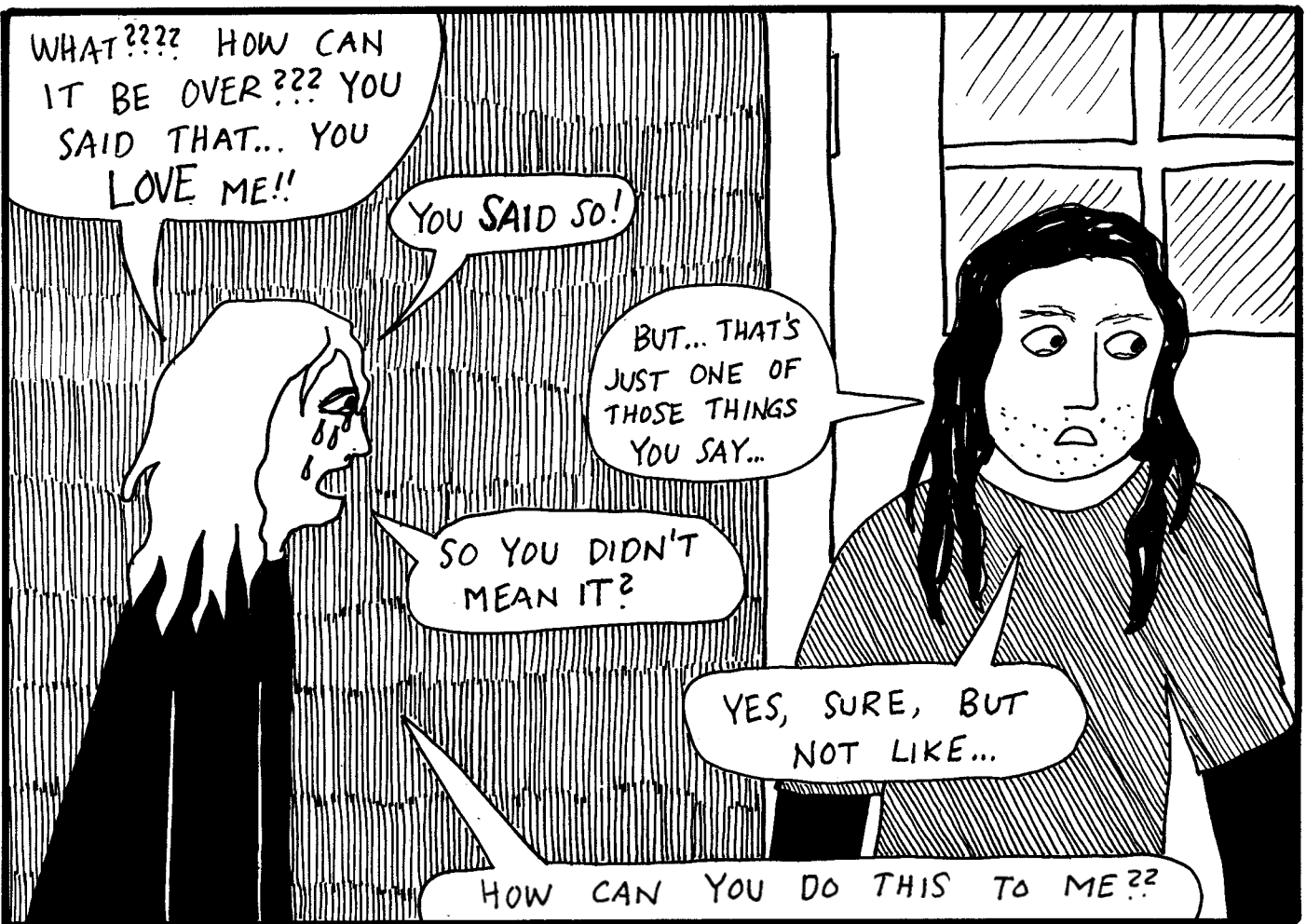




THE THING WAS THAT HE WAS JUST A GUY WHO LOVED MOST THINGS. HE LOVED ME, HE LOVED HIS MUM, HE LOVED HIS SISTER, HE LOVED HIS BAND, HE LOVED HIS RECORD COLLECTION, HE LOVED KEBAB-PIZZA WITH BEARNAISE SAUCE. HE EVEN LOVED HIS JOB, AND SOMETIMES EVEN HIS DAD.



OF COURSE IT ALL CAME TO A BAD END JUST A FEW WEEKS LATER.



I WAS GUTTED

HE DOESN'T LOVE ME.

NOBODY LOVES ME NOW.



IN MOST CASES, WHEN SOMEBODY FEELS THIS WAY, AFTER A BREAK-UP WITH A BOYFRIEND OR SOMETHING, IT'S NOT REALLY TRUE, IT'S JUST A FEELING. BUT IN MY CASE, SADLY, IT WAS A FACT.

GENERALLY, PEOPLE IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION HAVE SOMETHING TO FALL BACK ON.

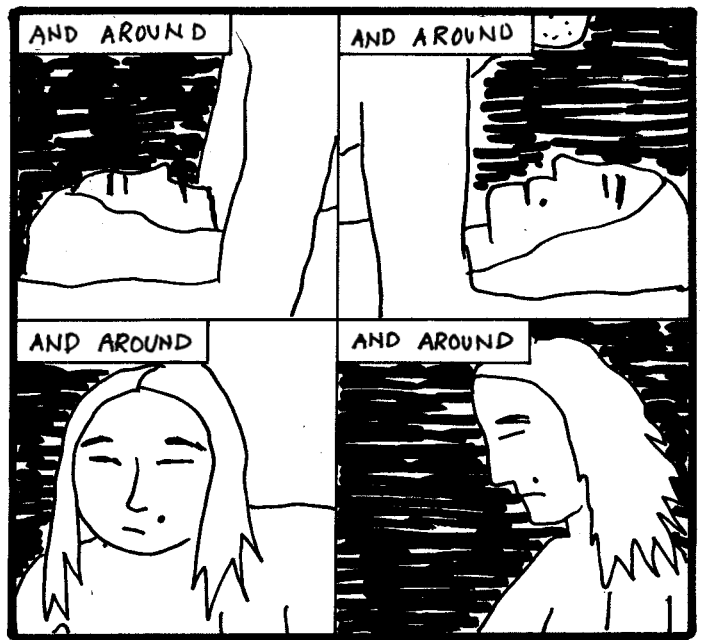


WE'LL ALWAYS BE HERE TO HELP WHENEVER THINGS ARE ROUGH FOR YOU.

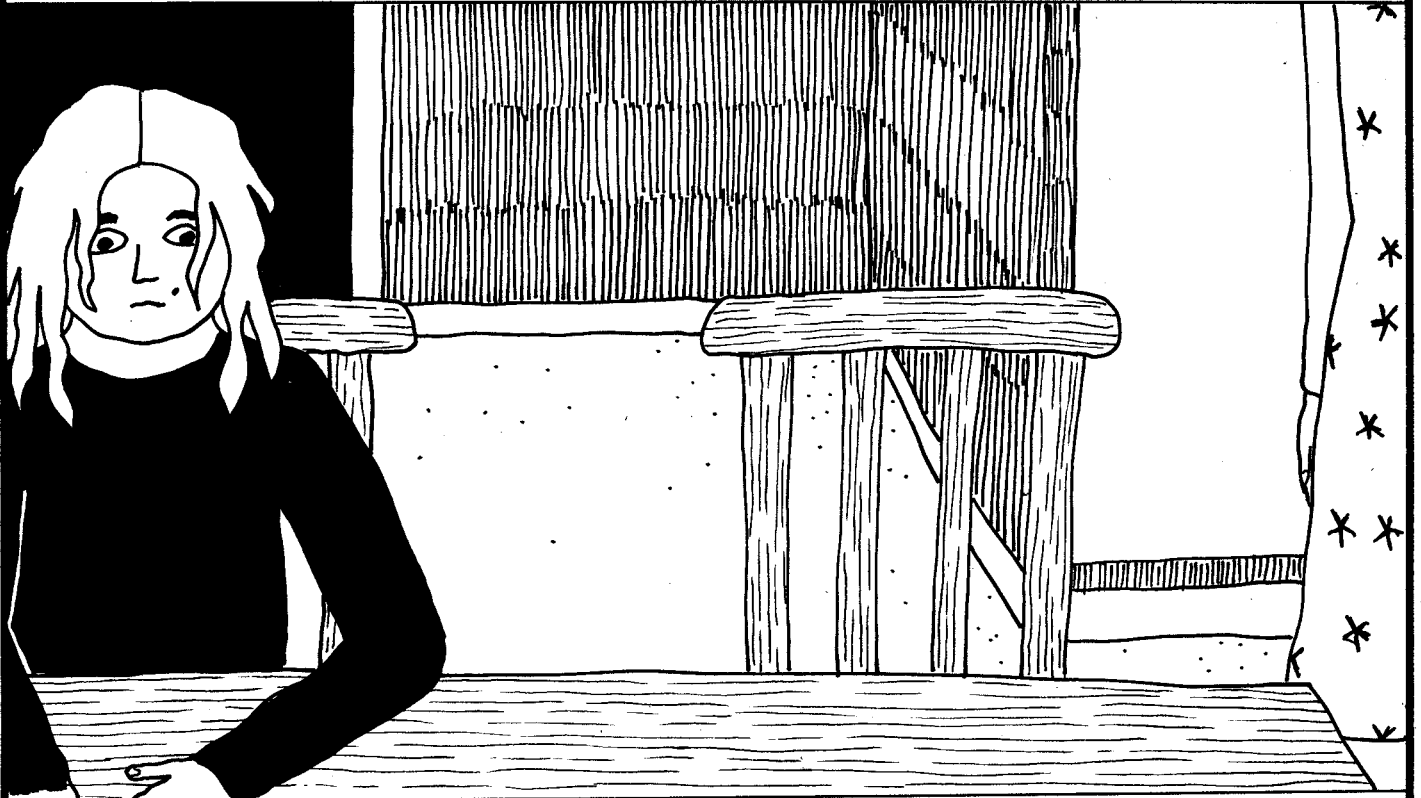
FOR ME, THE SITUATION IS KIND OF REVERSED.



WE'LL ALWAYS BE HERE, BUT WHEN THINGS ARE ROUGH FOR YOU, WE WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP YOU.

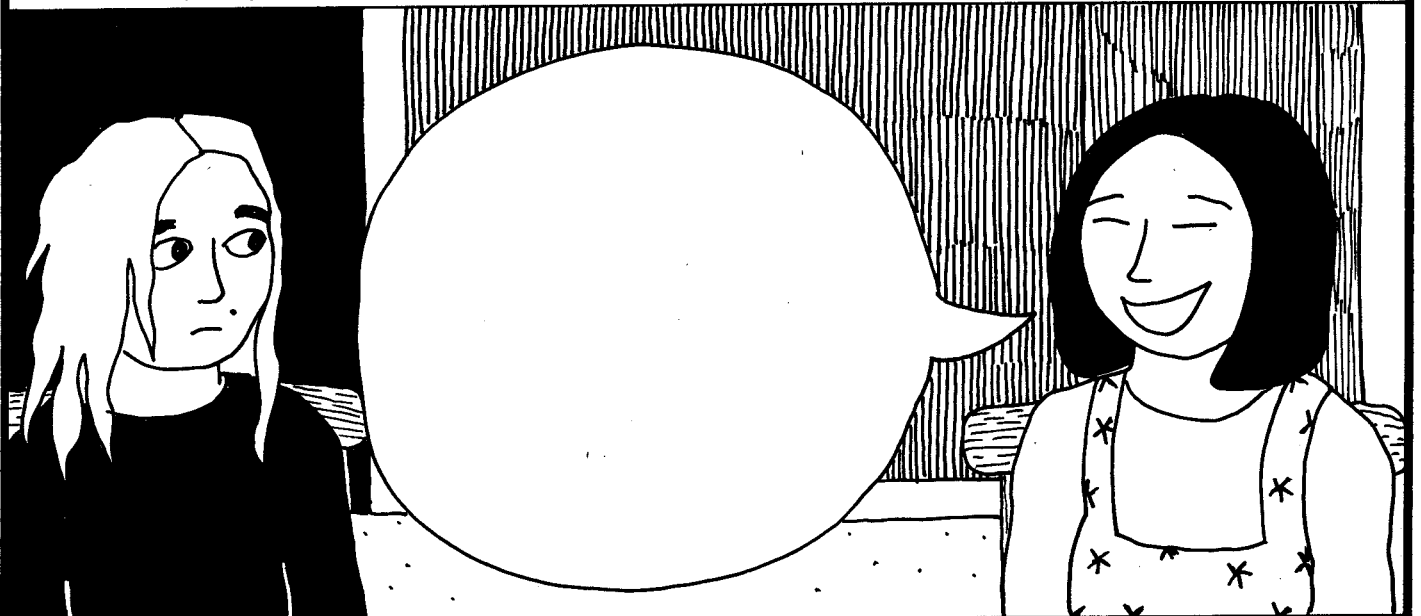


I WAS IN A VERY DARK PLACE, AND THEN SOMETHING HAPPENED THAT MADE THIS PLACE EVEN DARKER.



I WAS IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING APARTMENTS AND HAD TO STAY AT MY PARENTS' HOUSE FOR A FEW DAYS.

MUM CAME AND SAT DOWN BESIDE ME AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, THIS IN ITSELF WAS A REMARKABLE EVENT, THEN SHE TOLD ME.



NO, NO. THERE'S NO WAY I'M EVER TELLING WHAT SHE SAID. I'VE DONE THAT SO MANY TIMES ALREADY AND NOBODY EVER BELIEVES ME. WHAT SHE TOLD ME WAS UNBELIEVABLE, IT WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND. SO I'M KEEPING IT TO MYSELF, TO ALLOW THIS STORY TO RETAIN SOME CREDIBILITY.

So...

THE ONLY THING I COULD THINK WAS:

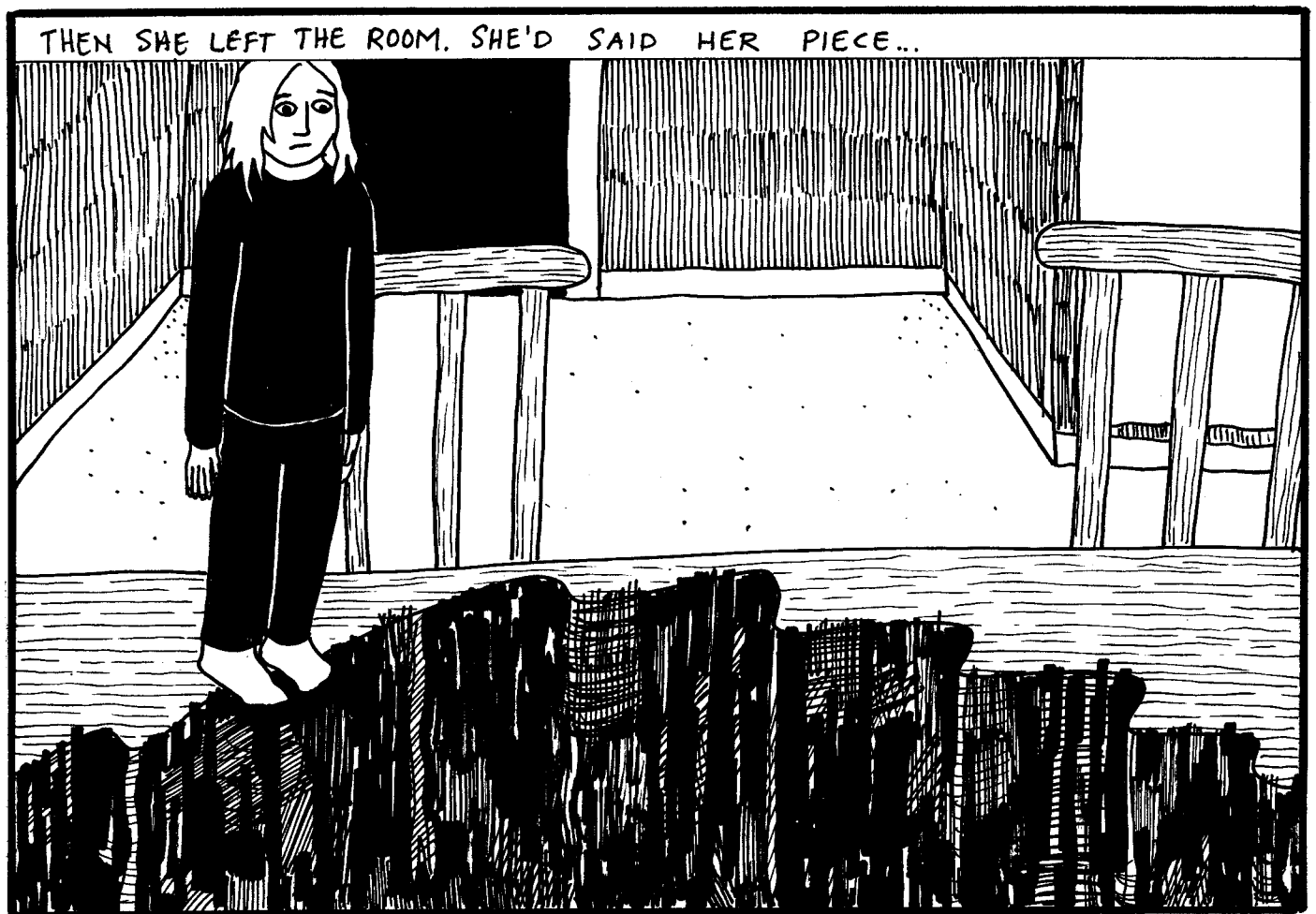
DOES SHE REALLY HATE ME THAT MUCH?



A HUGE CHASM OPENED UP IN FRONT OF ME.

SO...
THAT'S
HOW IT IS.





...AND I DIVED RIGHT IN.



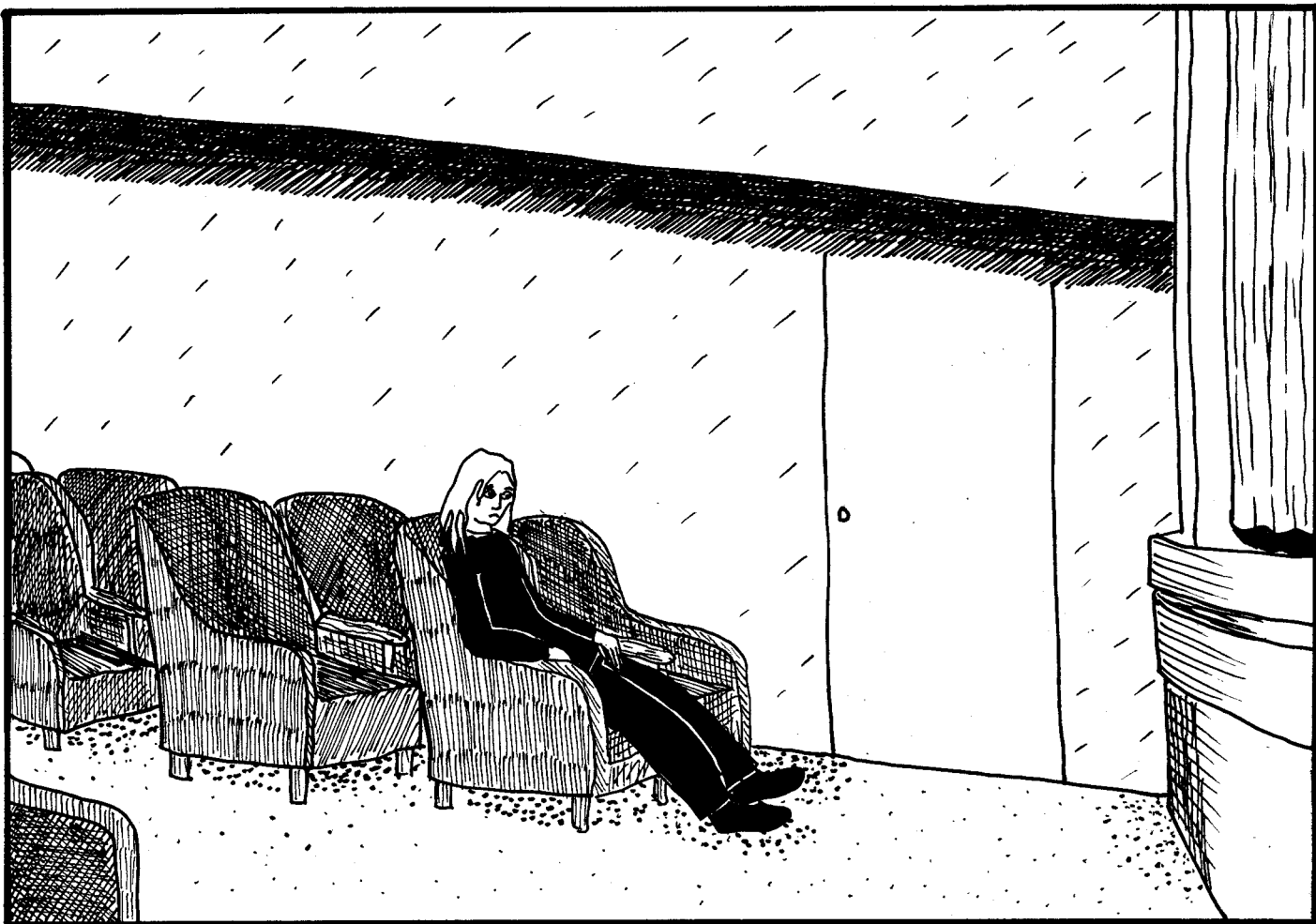
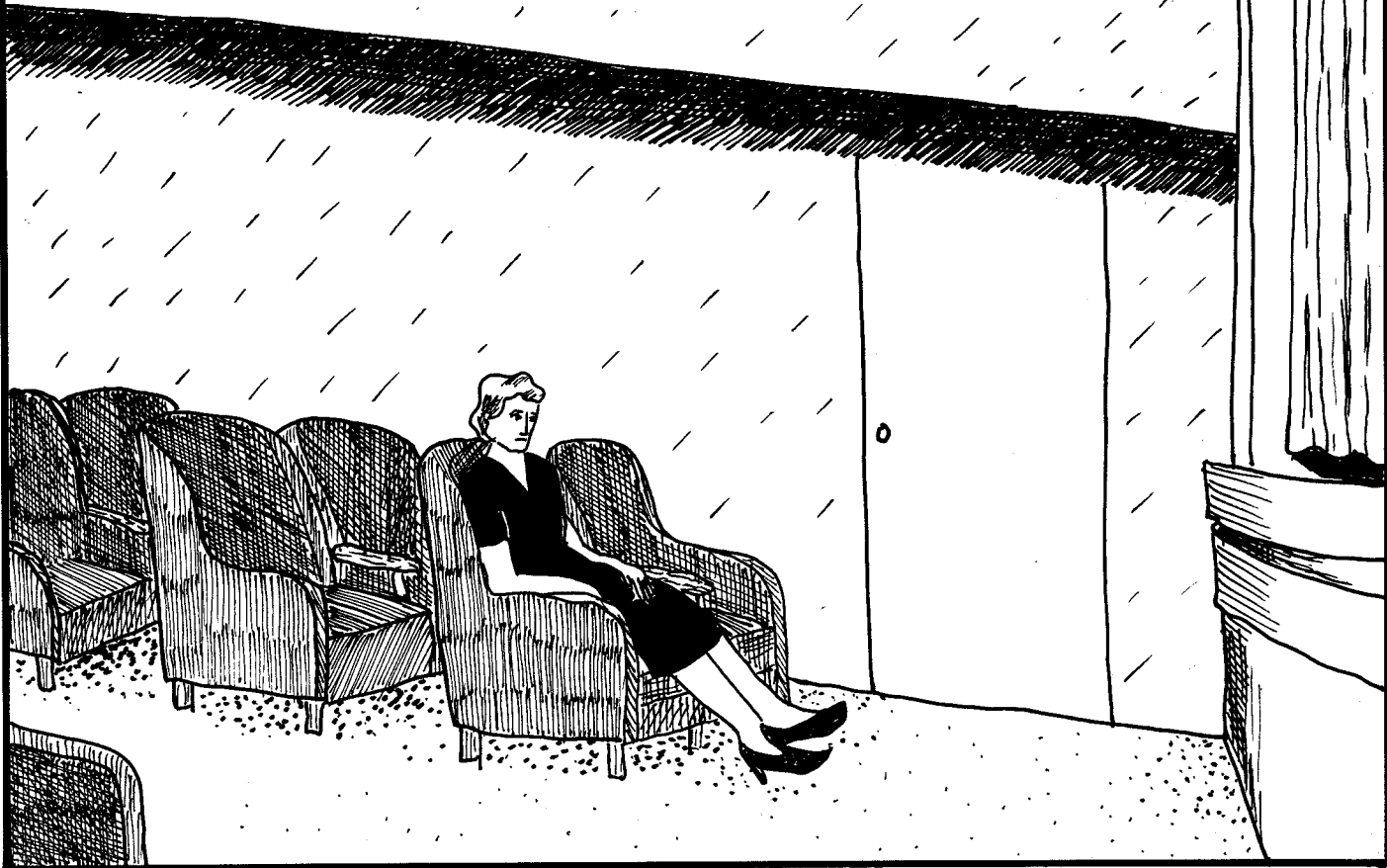
MY DESTRUCTIVENESS ESCALATED. I CLEARLY DIDN'T DESERVE ANY BETTER THAN THIS.



I ALLOWED MYSELF TO BE SUBJECTED TO ABUSE AFTER ABUSE. AND I APOLOGISED THE WHOLE TIME.

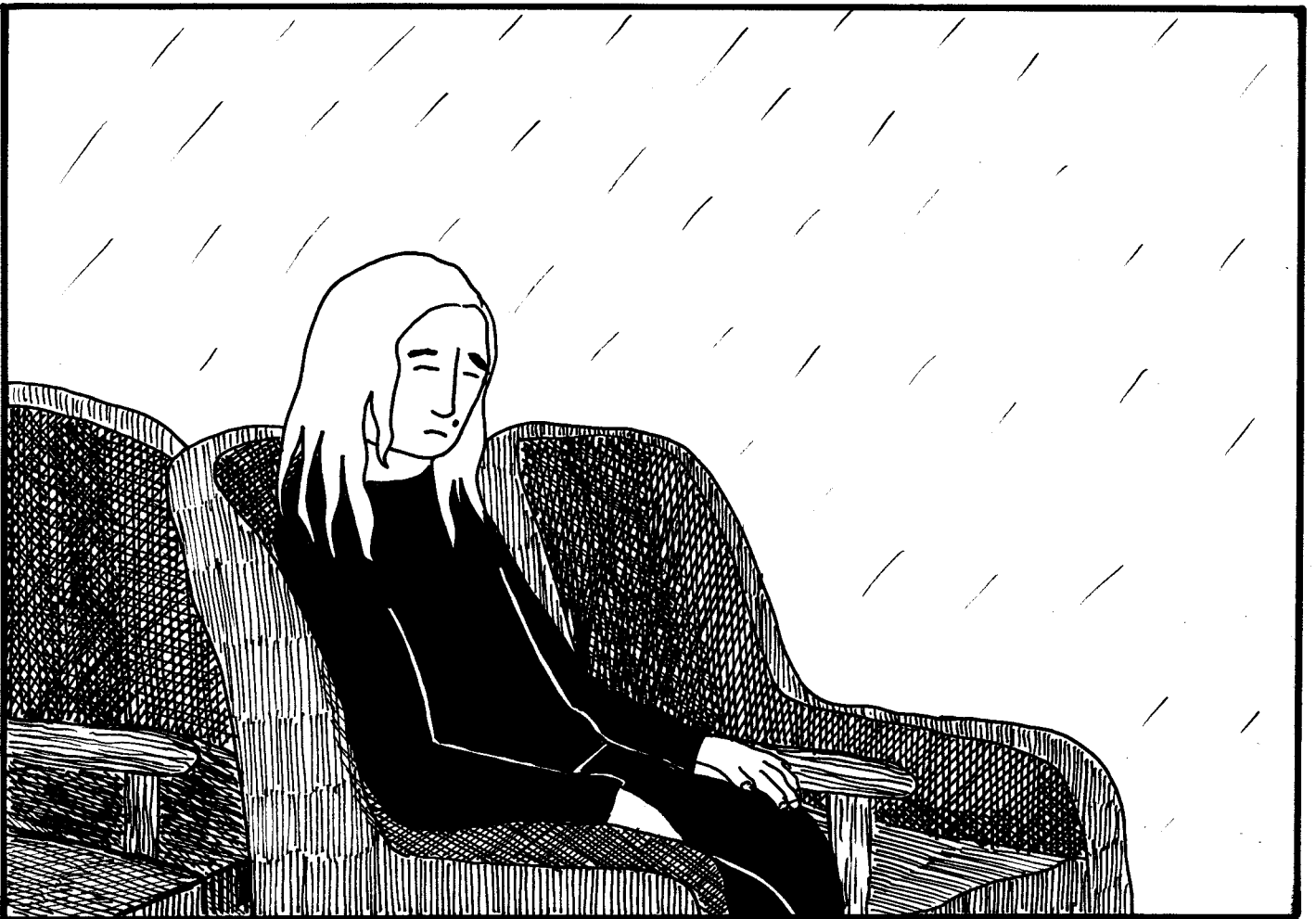
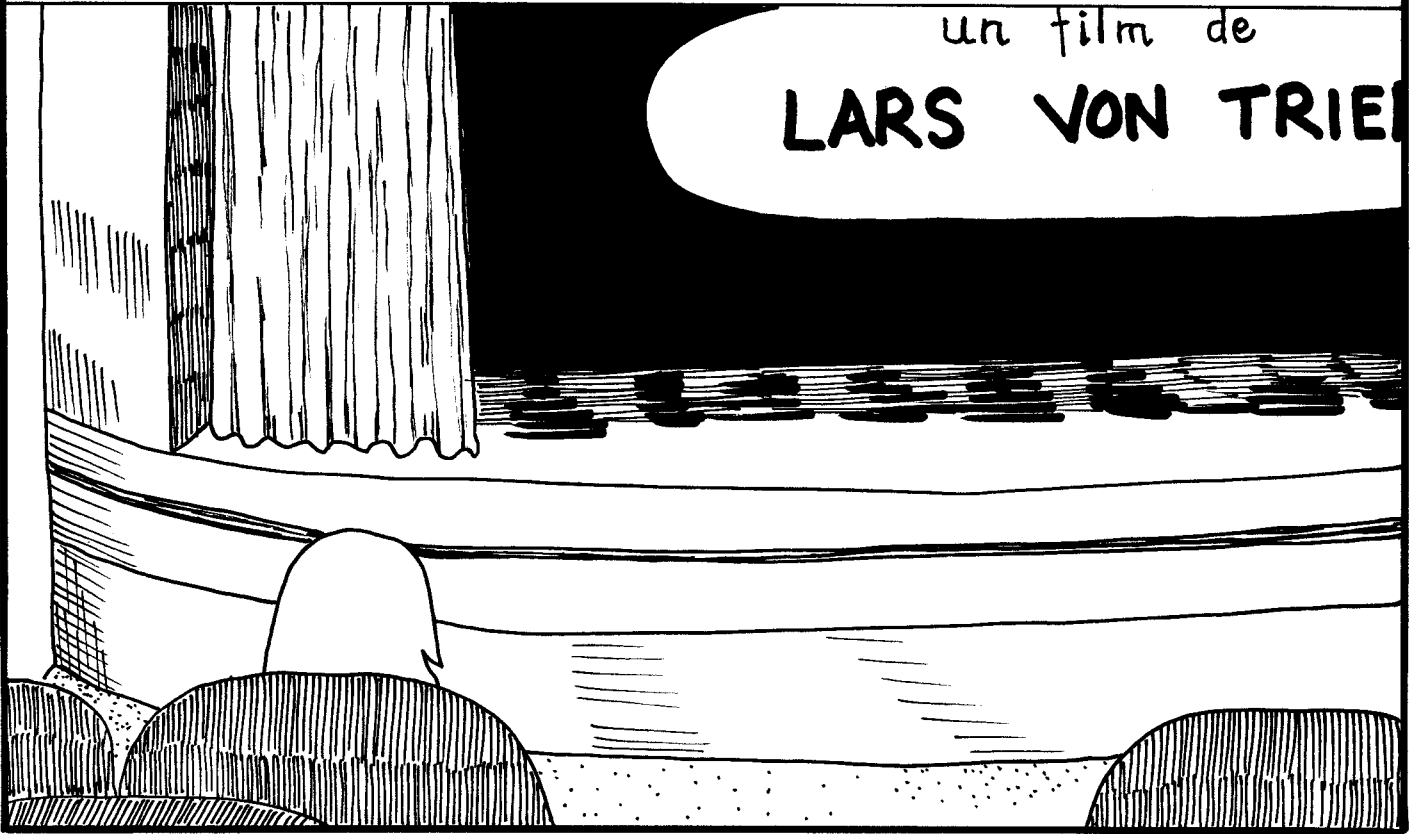


THIS WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO
TAKE A BREAK FOR A WHILE.



THERE FOLLOW A COUPLE OF YEARS OF THE ALL TOO FAMILIAR "TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF A YOUNG WOMAN IN TROUBLE". TO GET SOME IDEA OF WHAT WENT ON, YOU COULD GO AND SEE ANY FILM MADE BY ANY OF THE "GENIUS MALE DIRECTORS" WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN VOGUE...

un film de
LARS VON TRIE



ONE QUESTION I'VE BEEN ASKED MORE THAN ONCE IS:

DO YOU THINK YOU'VE SUFFERED MORE THAN OTHER WOMEN?

NO, NO. I THINK OTHER PEOPLE HAS SUFFERED JUST AS MUCH AS ME. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT I'M WILLING TO TALK ABOUT IT.

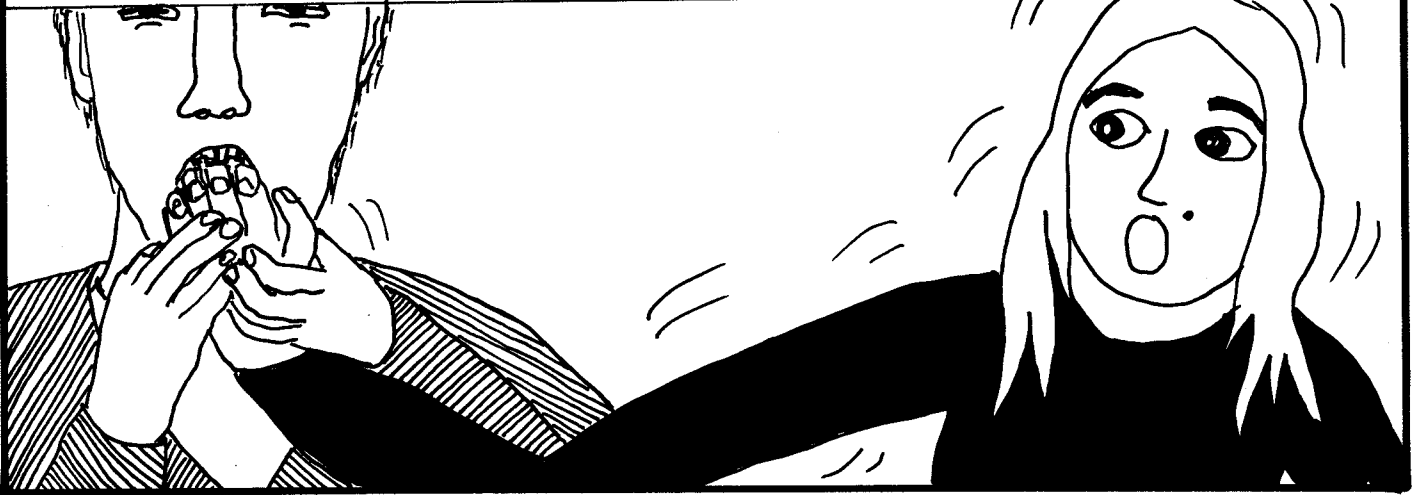
JESUS, WHAT A LIAR.

TRUE, MOST PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TREATED BADLY AT SOME TIME OR OTHER, BUT MOST PEOPLE ALSO HAVE LIMITS TO HOW MUCH THEY'RE PREPARED TO TAKE. MOST PEOPLE HAVE A BASIC SELF-ESTEEM, A VOICE THAT SAYS: STOP! I WON'T BE TREATED THIS WAY!

LIES STOP?
INFIDELITY STOP?
EXPLOITATION STOP?
HARASSMENT STOP?
RAPE STOP?
ABUSE STOP?

BUT I HAD NOTHING. I'D NEVER LEARNT ABOUT LIMITS, AND SO I HAD NO IDEA HOW MUCH I SHOULD BE PREPARED TO PUT UP WITH IN ORDER TO BE LOVED.

IT TURNED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN I HAD LIMITS OF A KIND. ONE MAN I LIVED WITH ONCE GOT SO ANGRY THAT HE BIT THE SKIN OFF THE KNUCKLES OF MY RIGHT HAND.



AND AS I SAT THERE, WITH MY HAND BLEEDING PROFUSELY, OPPOSITE A MAN WHO WAS CHEWING BITS OF MY SKIN THAT HAD CAUGHT IN HIS TEETH, SOMETHING INSIDE ME FINALLY SAID: STOP.



IT'S NOT OK TO BE TREATED LIKE THIS. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO PUT UP WITH BEING EATEN ALIVE.



MY LONG CLIMB OUT OF THAT DARK PIT HAD BEGUN.



ISOLATION

ONE OF THE MANY PSYCHOLOGISTS I'VE BEEN TO OVER THE YEARS ONCE ASKED ME TO DRAW A GRAPH THAT WOULD REPRESENT MY LIFE

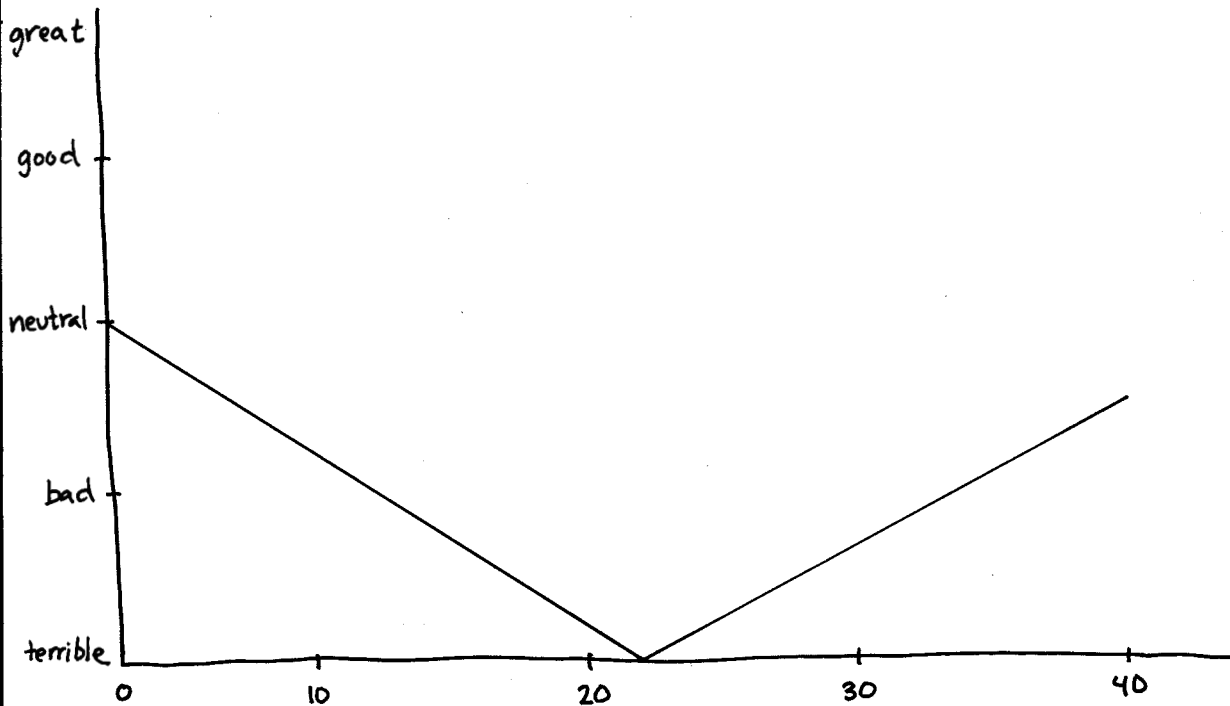
IF THE VERTICAL AXIS SHOWS HOW GOOD YOU FEEL AND THE HORIZONTAL ONE REPRESENTS THE YEARS OF YOUR LIFE.

WELL... UHM...

... FOR ME IT'S ALWAYS BEEN UP AND DOWN.

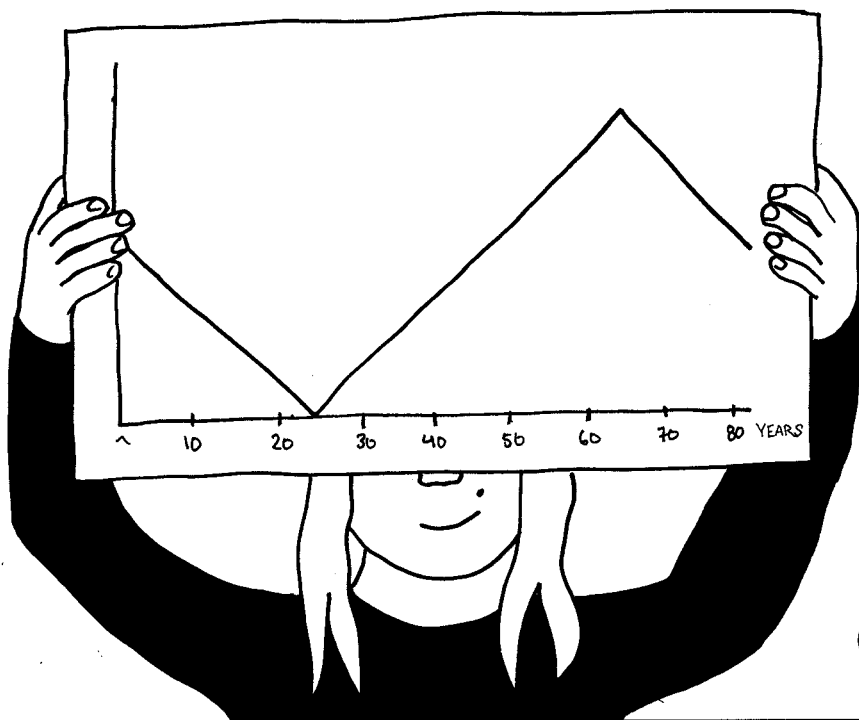
CHRIST, HOW I LIED.

IT WOULD BE CLOSER TO THE TRUTH TO SAY THIS: ASSUMING MY MOOD WAS NEUTRAL WHEN I WAS BORN, THINGS WENT DOWN SLOWLY FROM THERE. BY THE TIME I WAS 22 I HAD HIT ROCK BOTTOM.

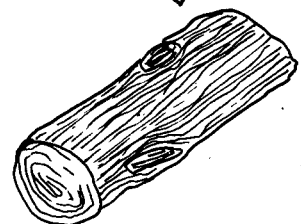


I HAVE SINCE HAD TO CLAMBER MY WAY BACK UP FOR ABOUT AS LONG AS IT TOOK ME TO GET TO THE BOTTOM. I AM NOW 40. I RECKON I'LL HAVE REACHED A LEVEL THAT IS ABOVE OK BY THE TIME I'M 44.

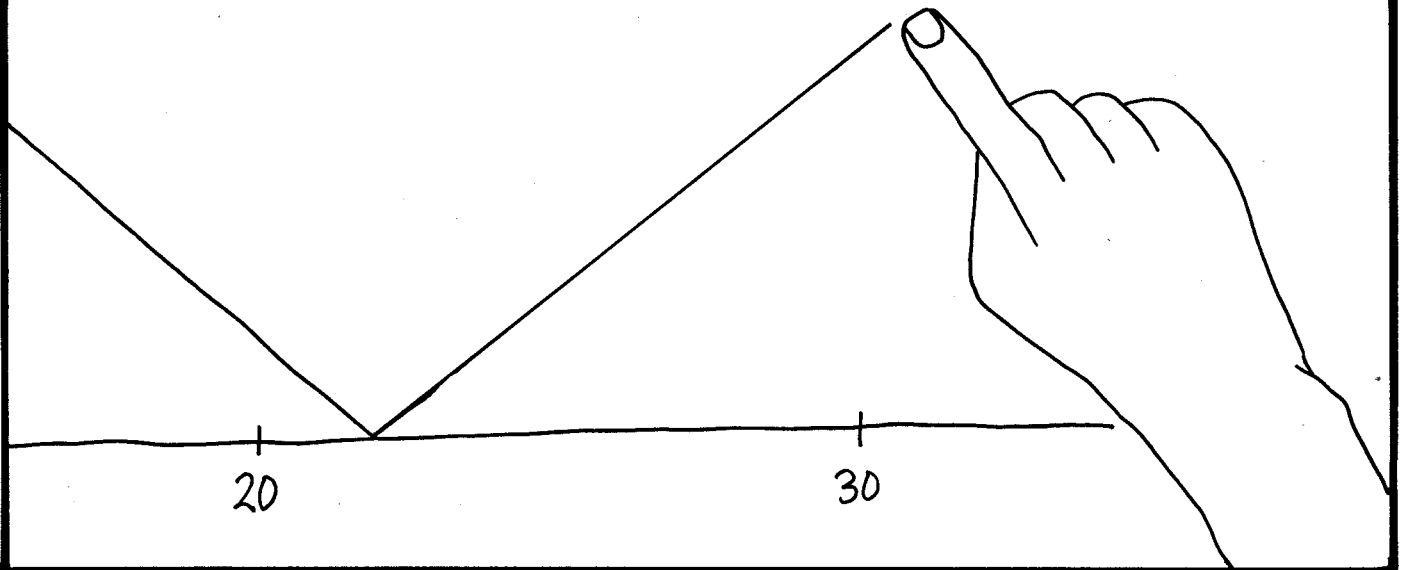
SO FAR, I'VE NEVER KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FEEL GOOD. THIS MAY SOUND TRAGIC, BUT TO ME, IT ACTUALLY FEELS HOPEFUL. I BELIEVE THAT THE GRAPH WILL KEEP MOVING UPWARDS. ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, I SHOULD HAVE REACHED MY PEAK AT THE AGE OF 66.



TOUCH WOOD



THE FOLLOWING EPISODE TAKES PLACE SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE ON THE TIMELINE.

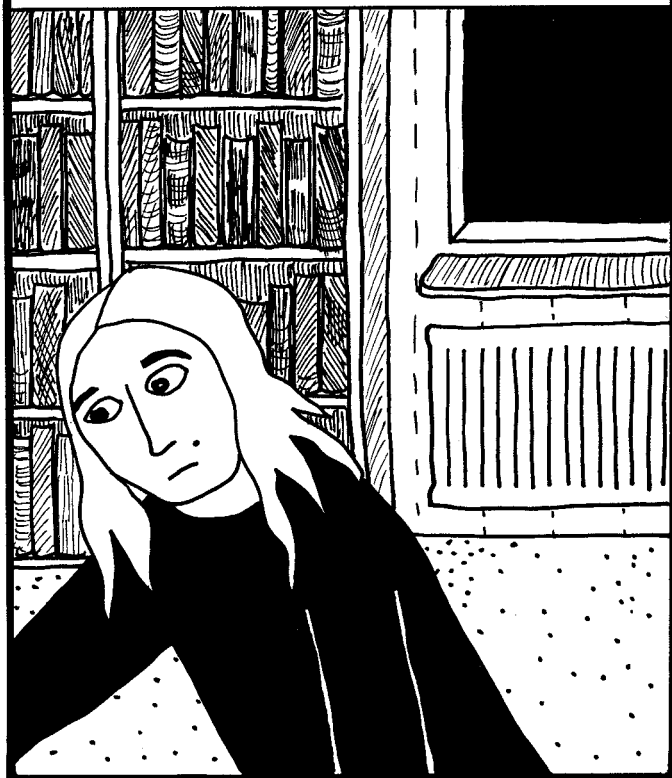


THINGS WERE NOT BRILLIANT BUT I'D WORKED MY WAY THROUGH THE WORST OF IT. THE DREADFUL NINETIES WERE OVER AND I FELT AS IF I WAS ON RELATIVELY FIRM GROUND. AFTER HAVING MOVED AROUND FROM ONE ADDRESS TO ANOTHER FOR 10 YEARS, I FINALLY HAD AN APARTMENT OF MY OWN.

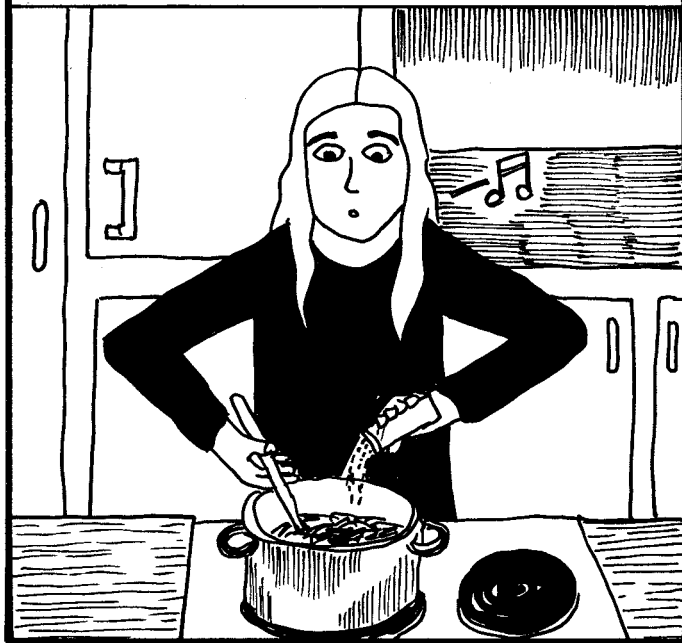


I MADE TWO IMPORTANT DECISIONS: 1. TO GIVE UP ALCOHOL 2. TO GIVE UP SEX. WITHOUT EXERTING TOO MUCH BRAINPOWER, I'D REALISED THAT THESE WERE THE TWO THINGS THAT HAD MADE ME MOST DESTRUCTIVE, THE THINGS I'D USED AS A FORM OF ANESTHETIC, AS WELL AS SELF-HARM.

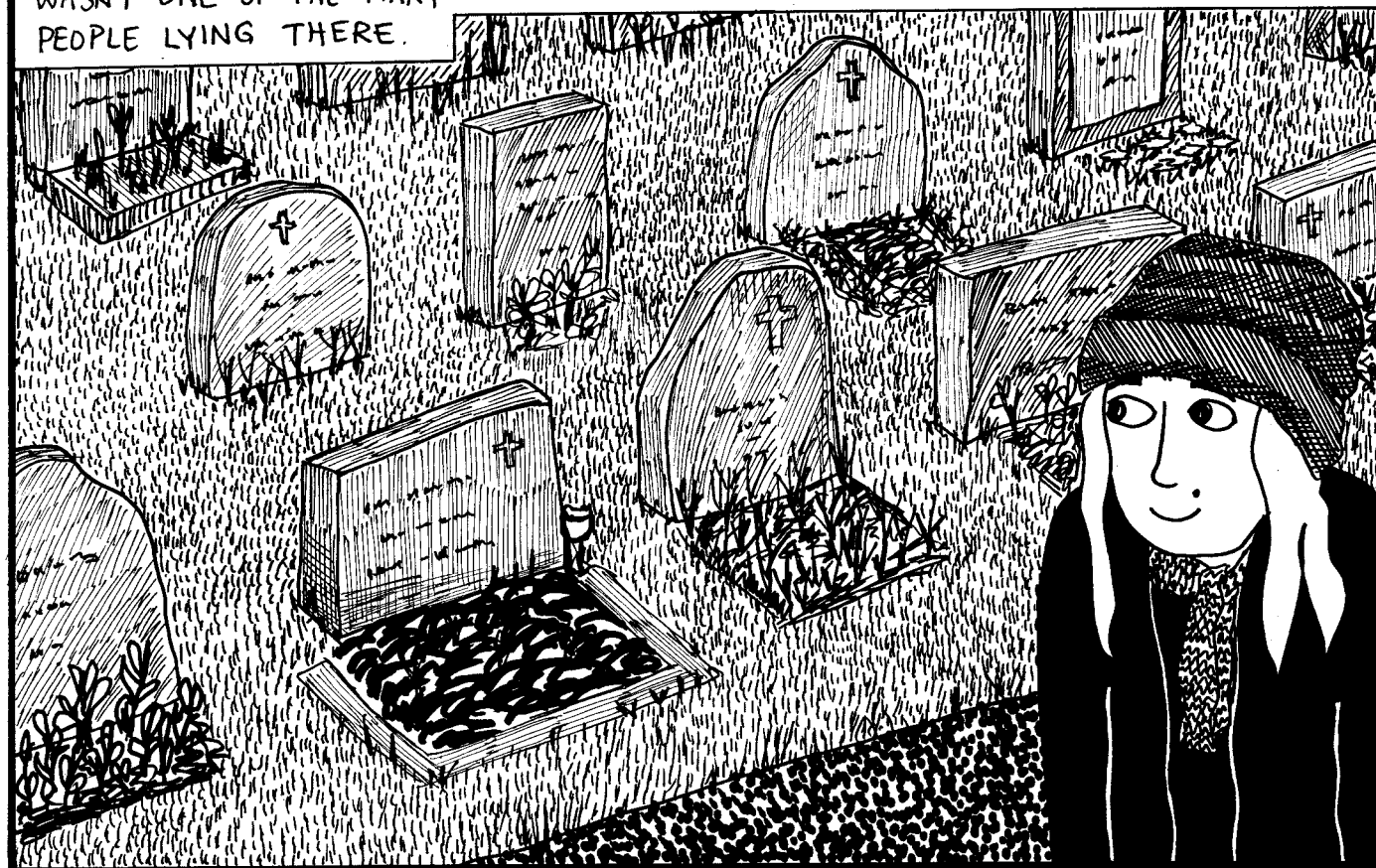
BUT THESE TWO DECISIONS ALSO LED ME TO ISOLATE MYSELF COMPLETELY I HAD NO SOCIAL CONTACTS UNLESS EITHER ALCOHOL OR SEX WERE INVOLVED.



THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT ENJOYED THIS ISOLATION. I READ, I WENT TO MOVIES, I WATCHED TV. I WENT FOOD SHOPPING, I COOKED, I ATE. I FOCUSED ON MY LONELY INDEPENDENT JOB, WHICH I LOVED.



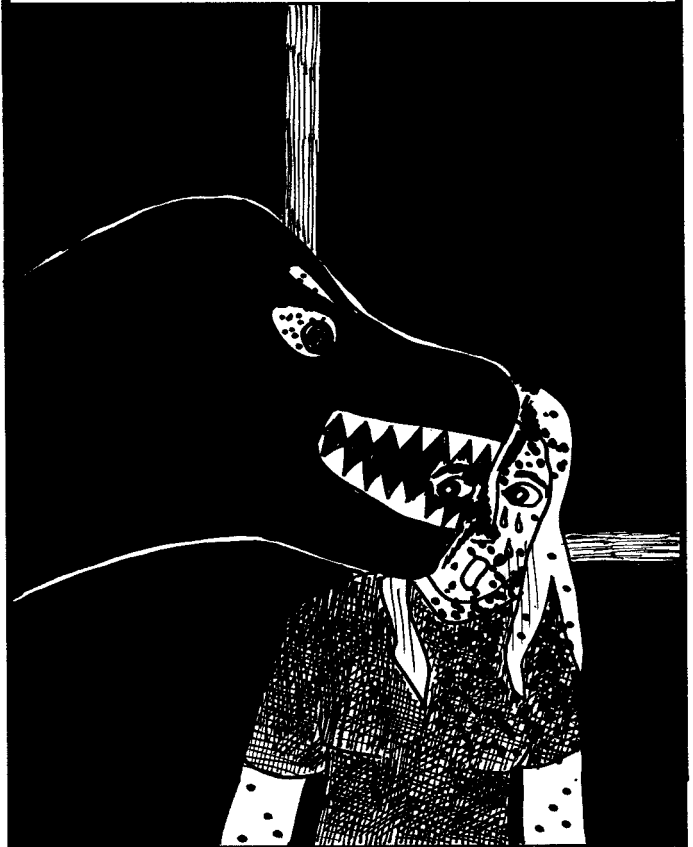
I LISTENED TO MUSIC. I LISTENED TO MYSELF. I WENT FOR LONG WALKS. EVERY DAY I PASSED A CEMETERY AND FELT HAPPY THAT I WASN'T ONE OF THE MANY PEOPLE LYING THERE.



I LIKED GETTING THROUGH EACH DAY WITH THE HELP OF MY ROUTINES. I ENJOYED QUIET EVENINGS AT HOME AND HANGOVER-FREE SUNDAYS.



BUT SOME NIGHTS WERE JUST TOO AWFUL.



THE LONELINESS ENGULFED ME.

SO I HAD RELAPSES



GHASTLY ONE-NIGHT STAND



SOMETIMES, WHEN I WAS FEELING GOOD, I CALLED MY DAD. JUST TO KEEP IN TOUCH. IT WAS MY RESPONSIBILITY



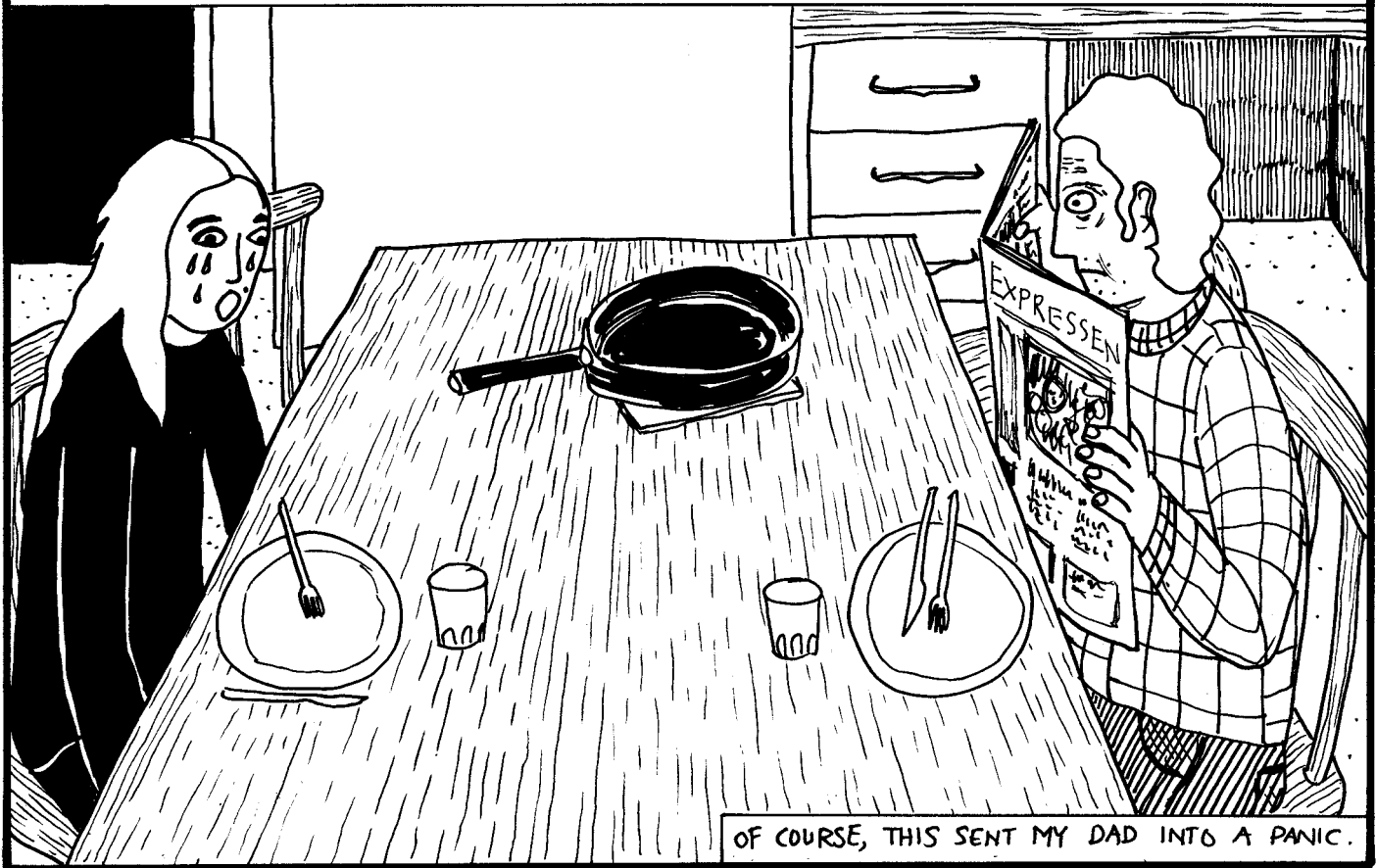
YES, EVERYTHING IS FINE.

ONCE I WENT TO SEE HIM. I WANTED EVERYTHING TO BE NORMAL BETWEEN US.

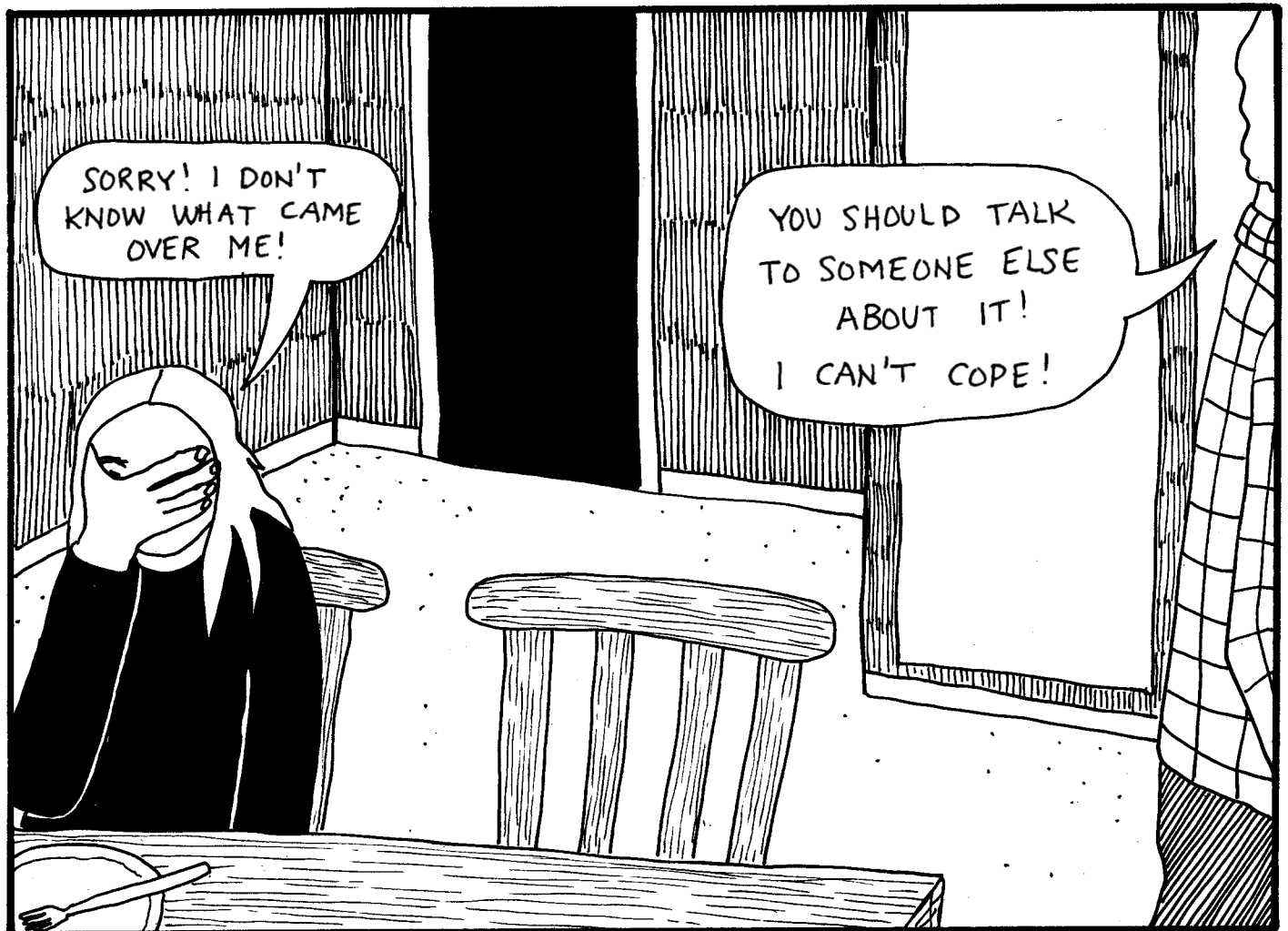
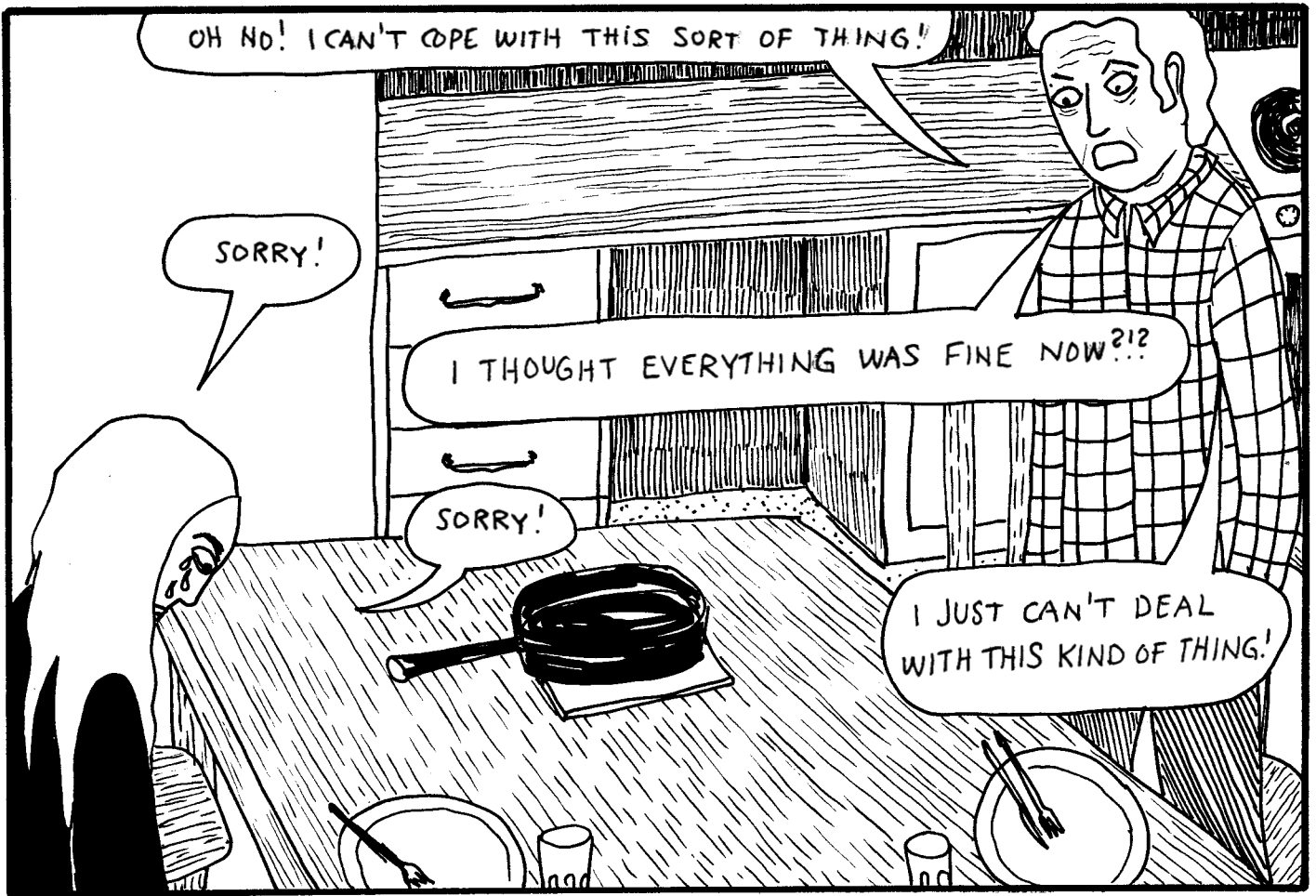


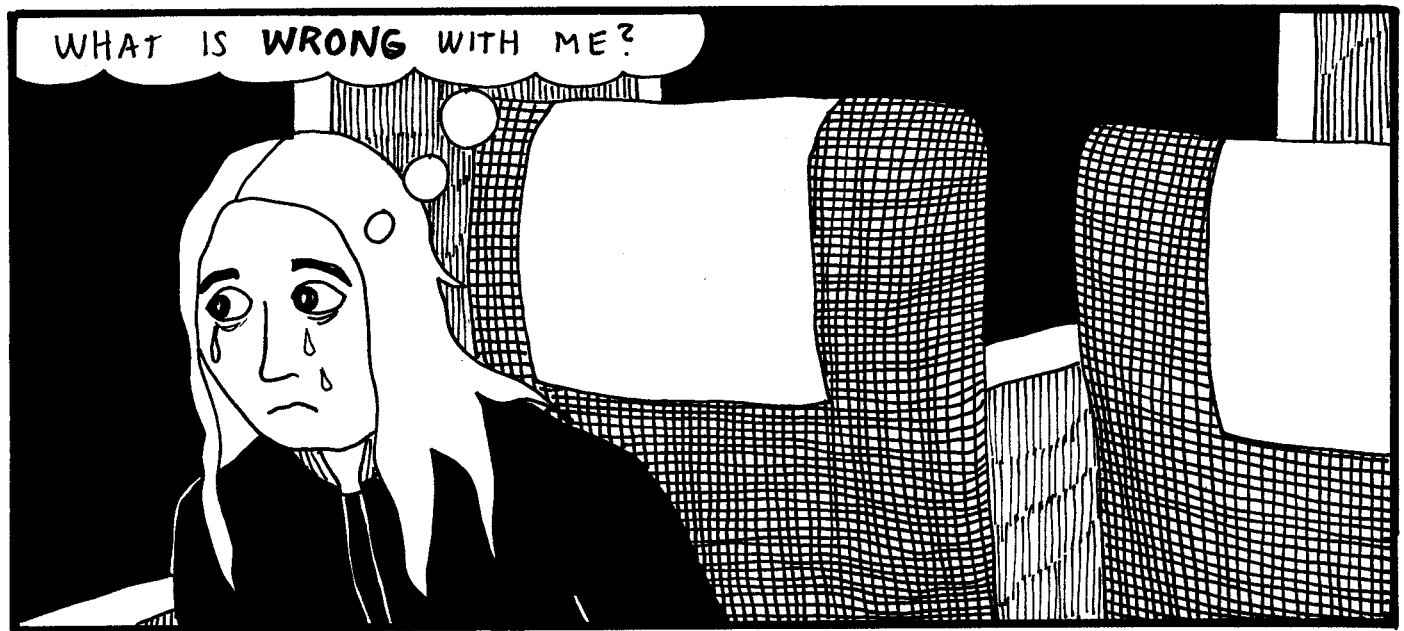
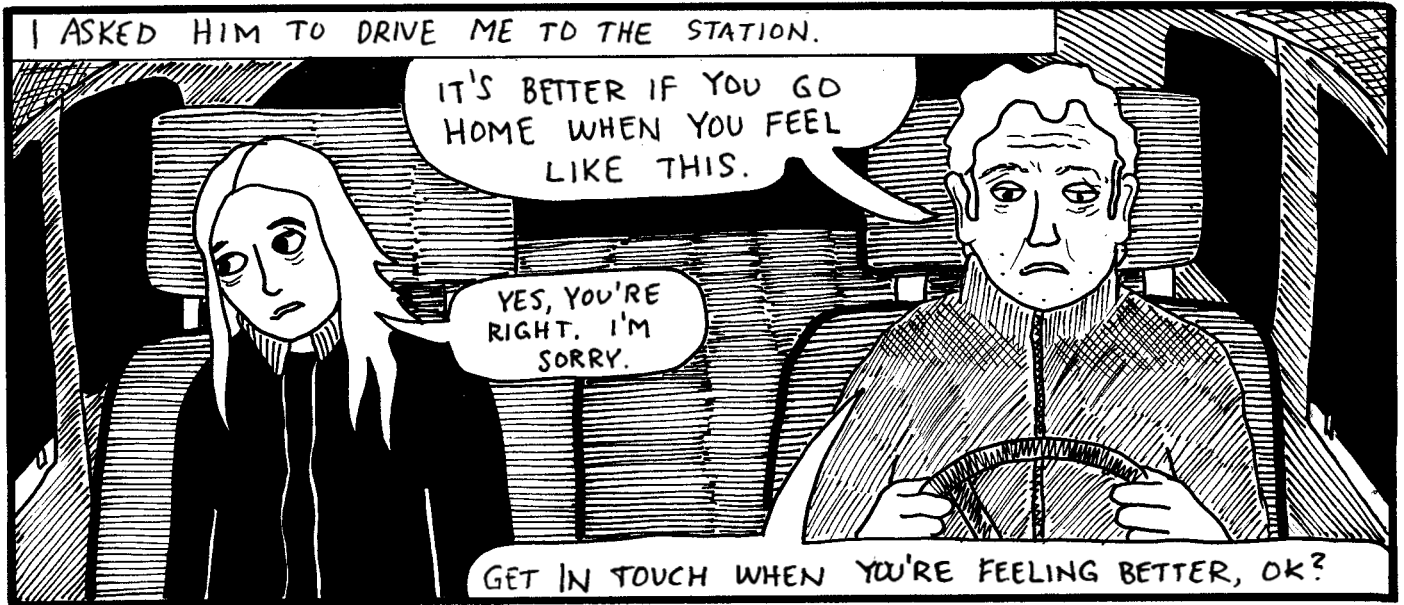
I WANTED TO BE A PERSON WHO HAS CONTACT WITH HER PARENTS.

BUT THAT EVENING I HAD A CRYING FIT AT THAT BLOODY KITCHEN TABLE. I JUST COULDN'T HELP IT.

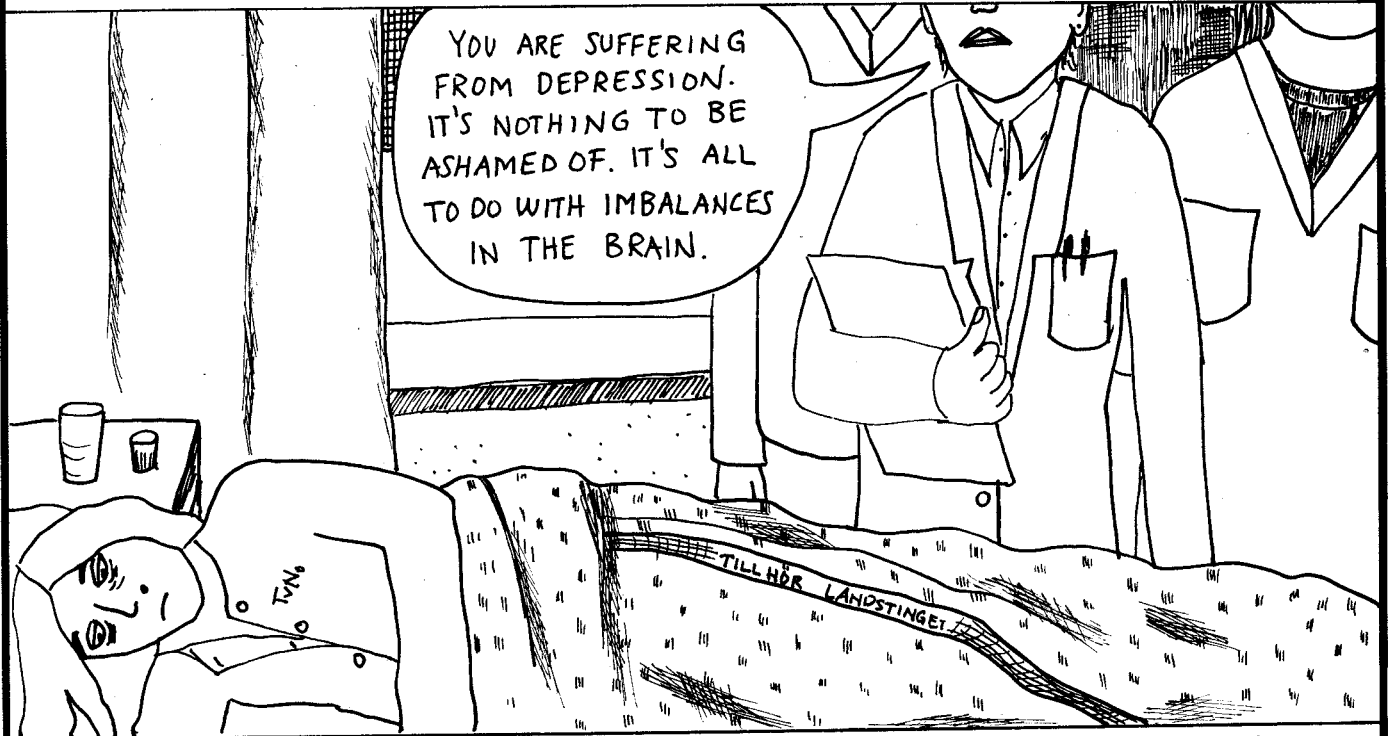


OF COURSE, THIS SENT MY DAD INTO A PANIC.



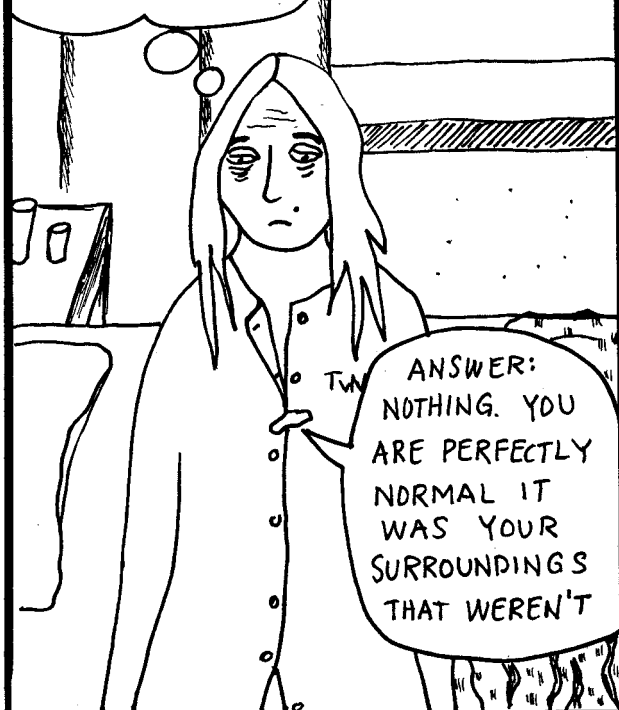


ANY NUMBER OF DOCTORS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND HOBBY-PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE GIVEN ME ANY NUMBER OF DIAGNOSES FOR MY MANY DISORDERS OVER THE YEARS. AND THEY'VE ALL TAKEN IT FOR GRANTED THAT THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME.



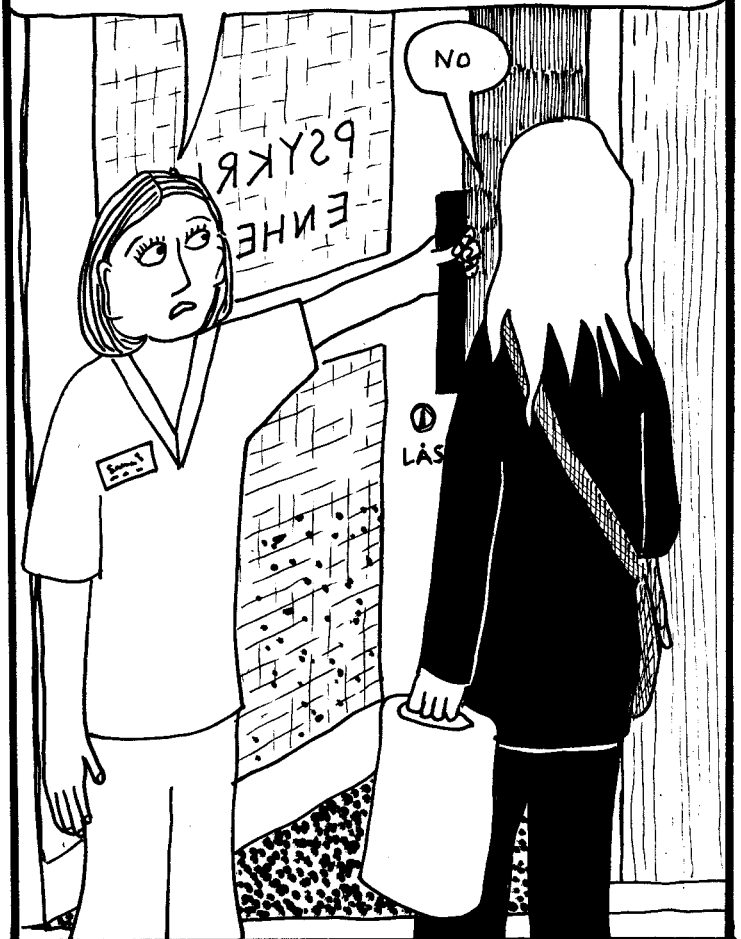
THE THING THAT KEPT ME SANE WAS THAT I NURTURED A TINY BUT FIRM CONVICTION THAT I AM IN FACT HEALTHY, AND THAT IT WAS MY ENVIRONMENT THAT WAS SICK.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME? WHAT IS WRONG WITH MY BRAIN?



A TINY BUT FIRM CONVICTION SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE ME HAS ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT I AM HEALTHY. THIS CONVICTION HAS KEPT ME ALIVE.

ISN'T THERE ANYONE TO COME AND PICK YOU UP?



ANOTHER THING THAT BECAME QUITE CLEAR TO ME WAS THAT THE OLD CLICHE "YOU'RE NEVER ALONE" JUST DIDN'T APPLY TO ME. TO PROVE IT, I DECIDED ON AN EXPERIMENT.



A FEW DAYS PASSED. I WAS RATHER ENJOYING IT.

I'D BE LYING THERE NOW, STIFF AS A BOARD.



THE DAYS TURNED INTO WEEKS.



NO TELEPHONE CALLS, NO LETTERS OTHER THAN BILLS, NO E-MAILS OTHER THAN INVITATIONS TO PARTIES I DIDN'T WANT TO GO TO.

AFTER THREE WEEKS, I STARTED TO WORRY.

I WENT OUT SOMETIMES, FOR WALKS, OR TO DO THE SHOPPING.



PEOPLE SAW ME, ANONYMOUS JOGGERS OR CASHIERS. BUT AS FAR AS THEY WERE CONCERNED, I MIGHT JUST ALL WELL BE LYING DEAD AT HOME, ROTTING ON THE FLOOR.

WHEN ALMOST TWO MONTHS HAD GONE BY, IT STARTED TO GET INTERESTING.

BY NOW, THE NEIGHBOURS WOULD HAVE STARTED TO COMPLAIN OF THE STENCH



AND DEMANDS FOR PAYMENT WOULD HAVE STARTED PILING UP.

AFTER 10 WEEKS, I CALLED MY BROTHER IN SHEER DESPERATION. HE ANSWERED AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

IT'S JENNY.

HI. HOW ARE YOU?

GOOD

GASP

THE EXPERIMENT PROVED JUST HOW ALONE I REALLY WAS.

LOADS OF QUESTIONS CROSSED MY MIND.

WHY DOES NOBODY CARE IF I LIVE OR DIE?

DO I WANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE WHO CARE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE?

HOW DO I MEET PEOPLE WHO CARE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE?

DO I WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH PEOPLE WHO DON'T EVER CARE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE?

IS THERE ANYONE IN THE WORLD WHO MIGHT CARE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE?

BUT ONE THING WAS CLEAR. IF I WAS GOING TO HAVE ANY CONTACT AT ALL WITH HUMANITY, THEN IT WAS ENTIRELY UP TO ME. I ALONE WAS RESPONSIBLE. BUT WHAT AVENUES WERE OPEN TO ME IF I WASN'T INTERESTED IN DRINKING OR SCREWING?



THAT JUST LEFT PEOPLE MY OWN AGE WHO LIVED WITH THEIR PARTNERS IN EXPENSIVE APARTMENTS AND WHOSE CHIEF PROBLEM IN LIFE WAS WHETHER OR NOT TO HAVE KIDS.



I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I WANT KIDS, OR RATHER, YES, OF COURSE I WANT THEM. WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER FOR 12 YEARS NOW, AND...

STILL, PERHAPS WE SHOULD GET A DOG FIRST AND SEE HOW IT FEELS... A KID IS SO...



ANYWAY, WE'LL SEE. HE SAYS HE WANTS KIDS, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF HE MEANS IT, OR RATHER, YES, OF COURSE HE WANTS THEM, BUT...

OH SHUT UP, YOU SPOILT FUCK-WITS. JUST GET ON WITH IT AND HAVE A BABY WHILE YOU'VE GOT THE CHANCE!



SOMEWHERE INSIDE ME, I'D BEGUN TO FEEL A LONGING TO HAVE KIDS. BUT HOW COULD I POSSIBLY DO THAT? ADOPTING AS A SINGLE MOTHER IN MY SITUATION, WITH AN ALL BUT NON-EXISTENT INCOME AND A SERIOUSLY LIMITED SOCIAL NETWORK, WOULD BE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE IDEA WAS RIDICULOUS. SO SHOULD I GO TO DENMARK AND TRY ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION USING SOME ANONYMOUS SPERM DONOR?

SHOULD I GO OUT ON THE PULL WHEN I WAS OVULATING AND HOPE TO PICK UP SOMEONE WHO WASN'T SOBER AT A PUB? THAT WOULD MAKE GETTING PREGNANT INTO A FORM OF SELF-HARM! SO THAT WAS OUT!

BUT HOW WAS I EVER GOING TO MEET SOMEONE TO HAVE KIDS WITH WHEN I LIVED IN COMPLETE ISOLATION?



I EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO REGISTER ON AN INTERNET DATING SITE.

BUT THAT DIDN'T LAST MORE THAN A FEW HOURS, THEN I COULDN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER.

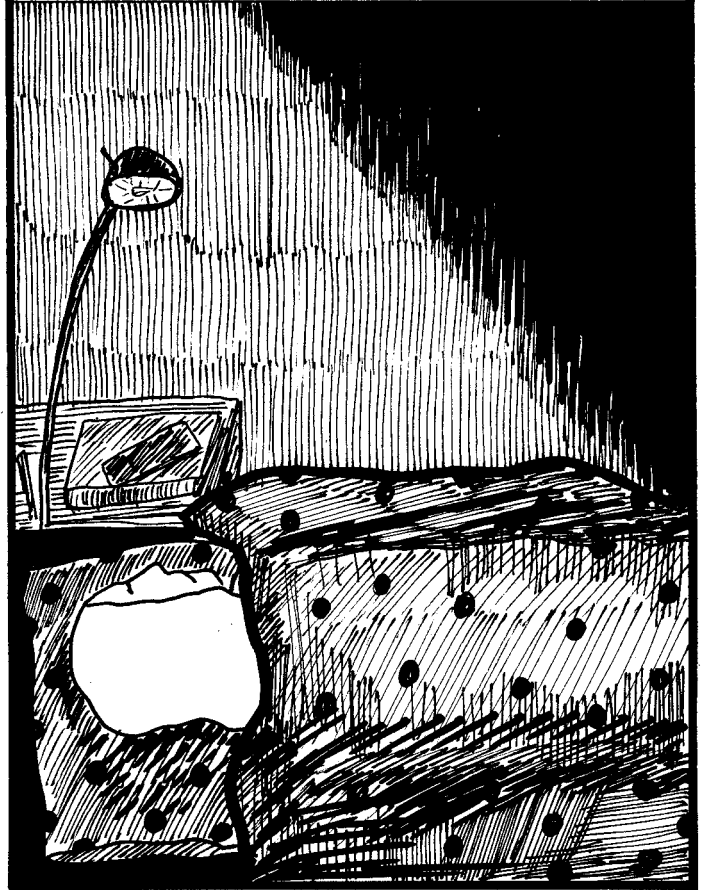


I DON'T WANT TO SHARE AS MUCH AS A MILLIMETRE OF MYSELF WITH ANY OF THOSE PEOPLE!

SO I DID MY COOKING AND I ATE MY MEALS, WITH THE TV FOR COMPANY.



I TOOK MY TABLET. I SLEPT THROUGH THE NIGHTS.



I DID MY WORK.



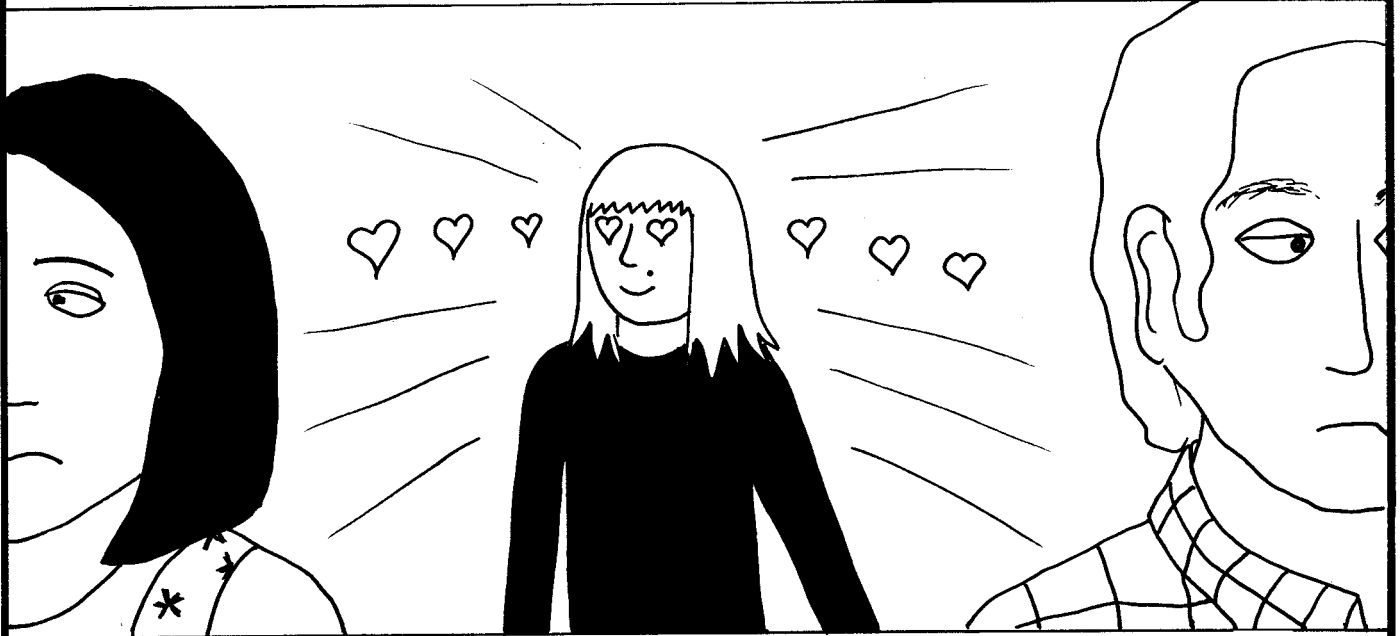
I HAD MY BIRTHDAYS.



AND WITH EVERY DAY THAT PASSED, I CAME CLOSER EITHER TO A BETTER LIFE OR TO DEATH. BOTH PROSPECTS SEEMED EQUALLY ATTRACTIVE.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

MY PARENTS, CHRIST! HOW I'VE LOVED THOSE TWO PEOPLE! I FELL DEEPLY IN LOVE WITH BOTH OF THEM AS SOON AS I WAS BORN.



AND I'VE SPENT FAR TOO LONG TRYING TO GET THEM TO LOVE ME BACK, BUT MY LOVE HAS NEVER BEEN RETURNED.

EVEN WHEN THEY SAID STUFF LIKE:

THE TRUTH IS, YOU WERE NEVER THE DAUGHTER I'D IMAGINED



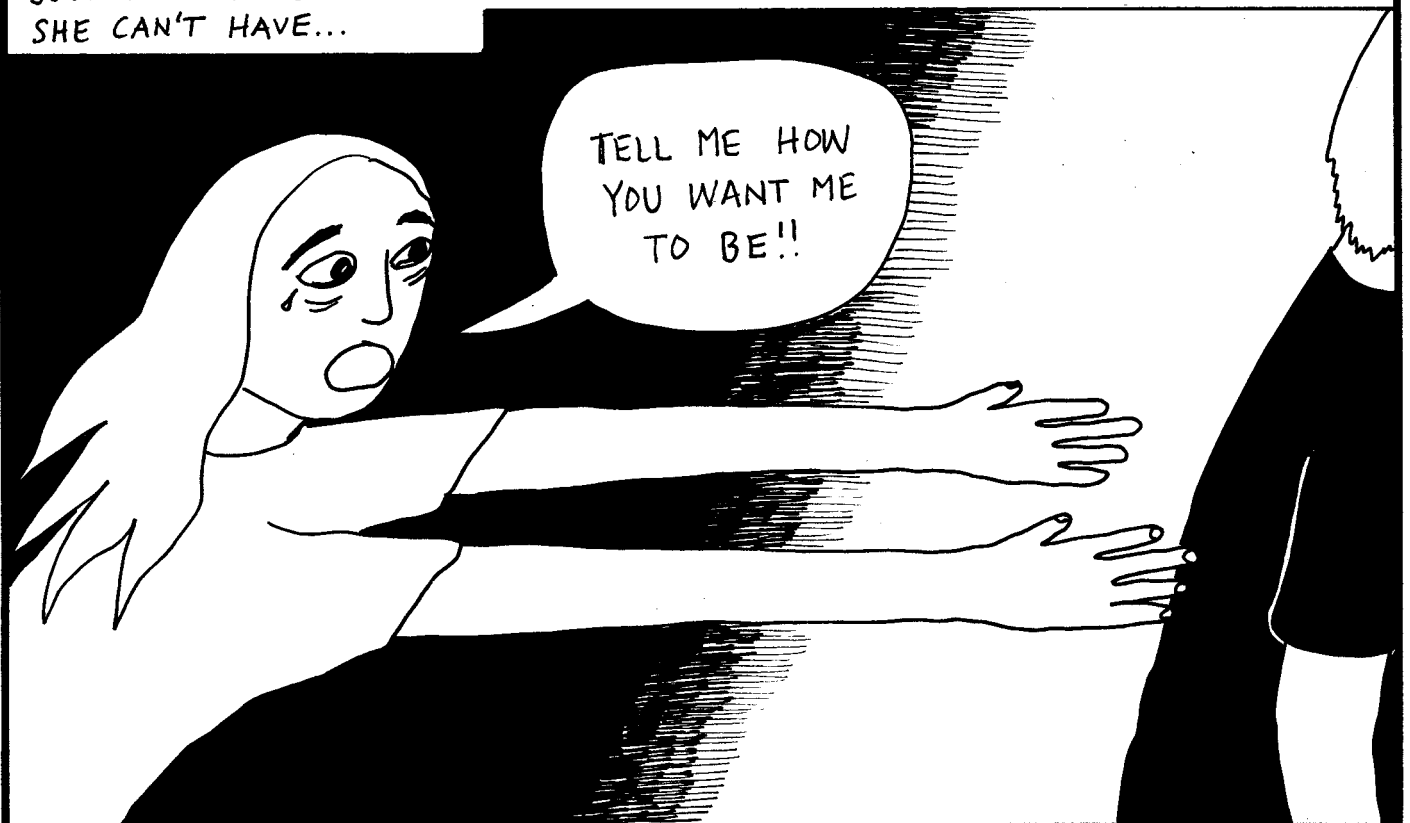
OR:

ACCTUALLY, I NEVER BELIEVED YOU'D SUCCEED AT THAT STUFF YOU DO FOR A LIVING.



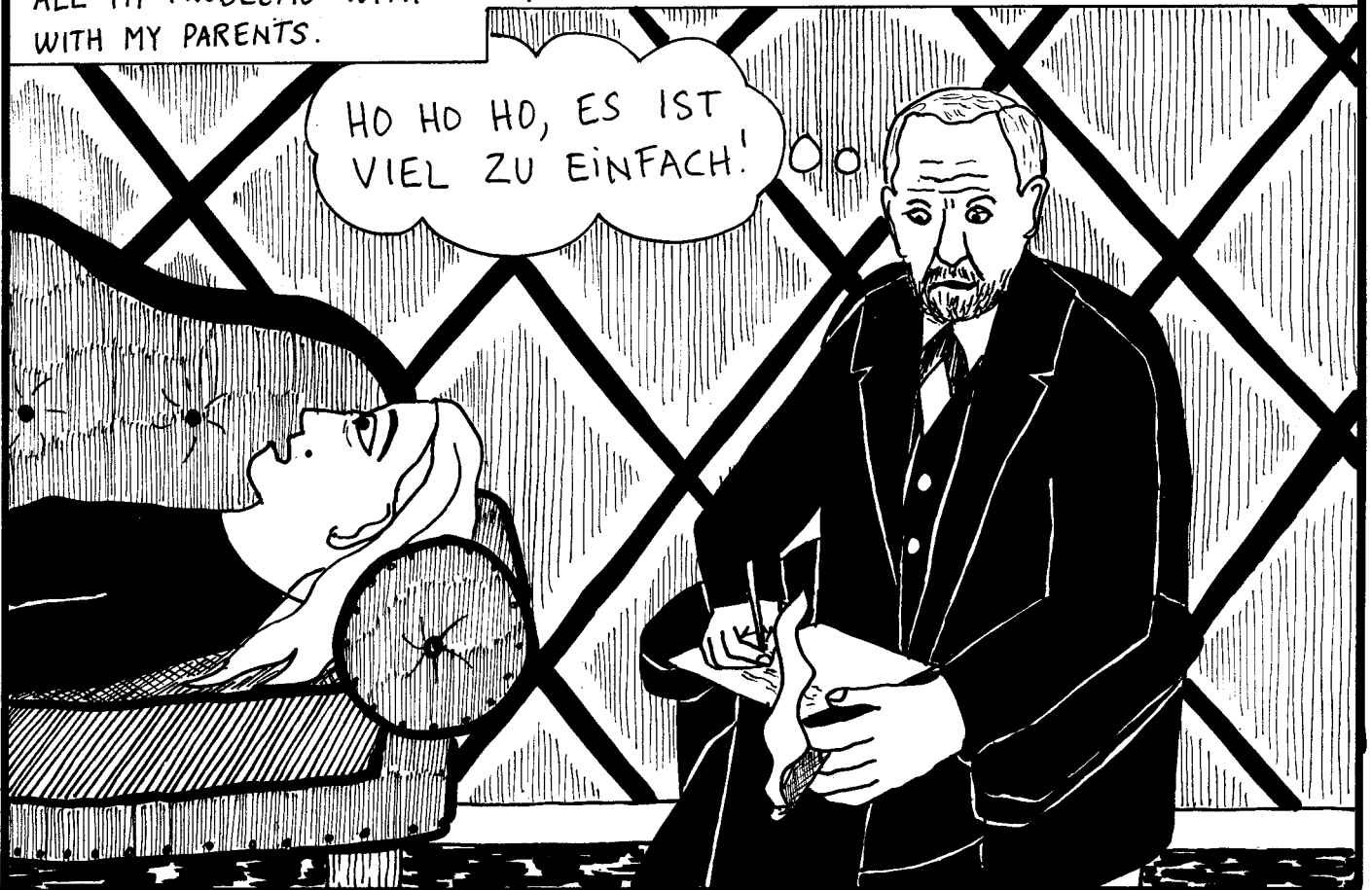
... I STILL COULDN'T TAKE THE HINT.

JUST LIKE SOME DESPERATE GIRL CLINGING ON TO THE GUY SHE KNOWS SHE CAN'T HAVE...



... I HAVE HOPED AND HOPED AND HOPED THAT SOME DAY THEY WOULD WANT ME.

IT'S ALMOST ABSURDLY OBVIOUS NOW WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT, BUT I CAN TRACE ALL MY PROBLEMS WITH ADULT RELATIONSHIPS BACK TO MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENTS.



THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN AND MY DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY PARENTS LIES IN THE REACTIONS OF THOSE AROUND ME. WHENEVER SOME MAN HAS MISTREATED ME AND I'VE LEFT HIM, I'VE ALWAYS RECEIVED SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

I'M NEVER GOING TO SPEAK TO HIM AGAIN!

GOOD FOR YOU!

LEAVE HIM BEHIND FOREVER!

HE'S NOT WORTH IT!

NOBODY SHOULD TREAT YOU LIKE THAT!

BUT WHEN IT'S MY PARENTS WHO'VE TREATED ME BADLY, THE REACTION IS DIFFERENT.

I'M NEVER GOING TO SPEAK TO HER AGAIN!

BUT SURELY THERE MUST BE SOME SOLUTION!

YOU HAVE TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND HER POSITION TOO.

SHOULDN'T YOU TRY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HER?

THE SAME WAS TRUE WHEN I WANTED TO GO BACK TO SOME MAN WHO'D ABUSED ME. THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FRIENDS, AND EVEN ONCE A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION, TO WARN ME AGAINST IT.

I THINK I'LL TRY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HER AGAIN.

JUST REMEMBER WHAT HE DID TO YOU LAST TIME, AND THE TIME BEFORE THAT.

HE'S GOING TO TREAT YOU THE SAME WAY NOW AS HE DID THEN.

DON'T DO THIS TO YOURSELF! YOU DESERVE BETTER THAN THAT!

I COULD HAVE DONE WITH SIMILAR WARNINGS WHEN IT WAS MY MOTHER WE WERE TALKING ABOUT. INSTEAD THAT WAS ANOTHER STORY ALTOGETHER.

I THINK I'LL TRY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HER AGAIN.

GREAT IDEA! YOU REALLY SHOULD! IT'S BEEN A WHILE NOW, AND THIS TIME IT'S BOUND TO WORK OUT.

IT SHOWS HOW STRONG YOU ARE THAT YOU'RE PREPARED TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP!

TIME AND AGAIN, I'VE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO GO BACK TO A RELATIONSHIP THAT DOES NOTHING BUT DESTROY ME.

OVER THE YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN A CHORUS OF CONVENTIONS CONSTANTLY SINGING IN MY EARS.

WHY DON'T YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH YOUR PARENTS?

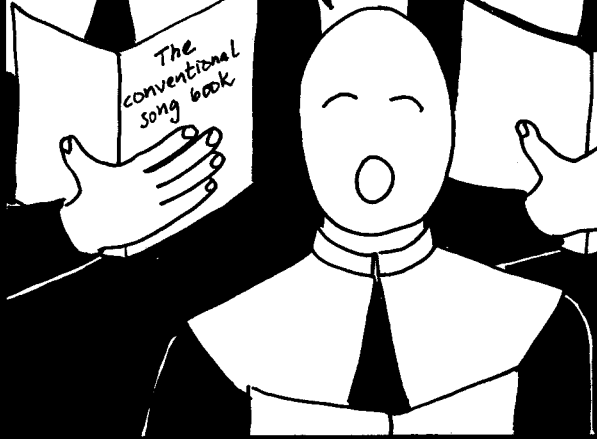
DO YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THEM NOW?

I FEEL SO SORRY FOR YOUR PARENTS!

I HAVE PROBLEMS WITH MY PARENTS TOO, BUT I STAY IN TOUCH ANYWAY.

IT'S NORMAL TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR PARENTS.

ALL PARENTS LOVE THEIR CHILDREN.



IN MY FRUSTRATION, I'VE SOMETIMES TRIED TO EXPLAIN MYSELF TO MEMBERS OF THIS CHORUS.

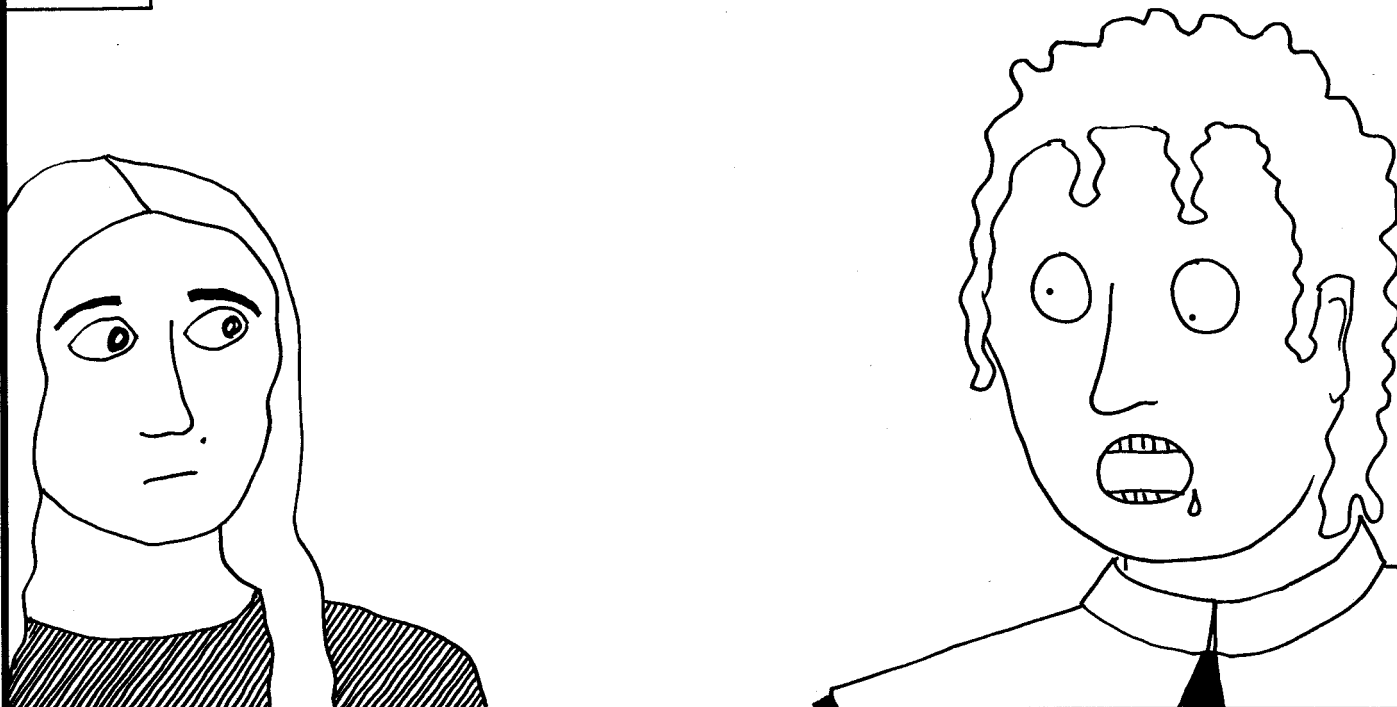
WHY DO YOU HAVE NO CONTACT WITH YOUR PARENTS?



WELL, IT'S LIKE THIS. WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER, I WAS ABUSED BY AN OLDER MAN WHO WAS A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY. I TOLD MY PARENTS EVERYTHING BUT THEY CHOSE TO IGNORE IT. THEN MY MUM WENT AND FELL IN LOVE WITH HIM, THE SAME MAN WHO ABUSED ME, AND SHE STILL LIVES WITH HIM. MY PARENTS HAVE NEVER STOOD UP FOR ME OR TAKEN MY SIDE. WHENEVER I'M GOING THROUGH ROUGH TIMES, THEY WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME. I'M ONLY WELCOME TO CONTACT THEM WHEN I'M FEELING GOOD, AND ONLY AS LONG AS I DON'T TALK ABOUT THE PAST. SO YEAH, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH IT.



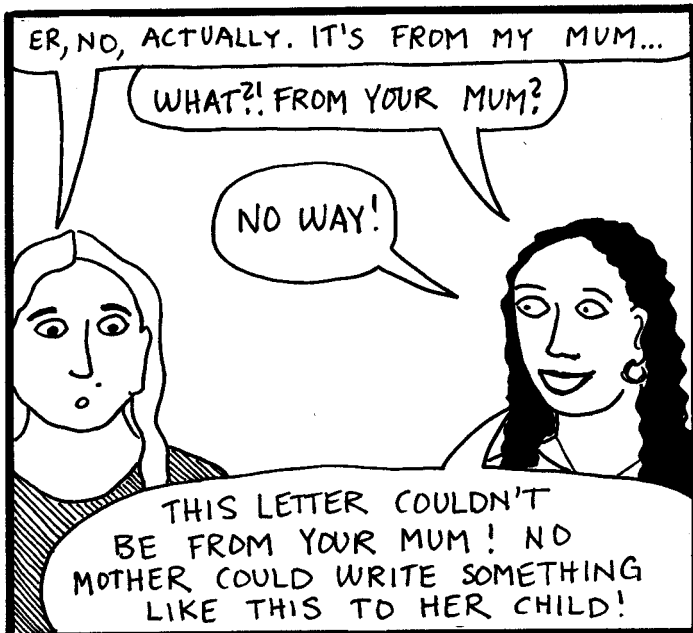
BUT IT'S AS THOUGH THE INFORMATION I GIVE THEM JUST DOESN'T SINK IN. AS THOUGH WHAT I'M TELLING THEM IS TOO INCREDIBLE, TOO ABSTRACT FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND.



IN THEORY THEY HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING, BUT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO GET THEIR HEADS AROUND WHAT I TELL THEM.

SO NEXT TIME I MEET THE SAME PERSON, IT'S THE SAME OLD STORY.





MEMBERS OF THE CONVENTION CHORUS OFTEN TELL ME:

BUT OF COURSE YOUR PARENTS LOVE YOU! THEY JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO SHOW IT!

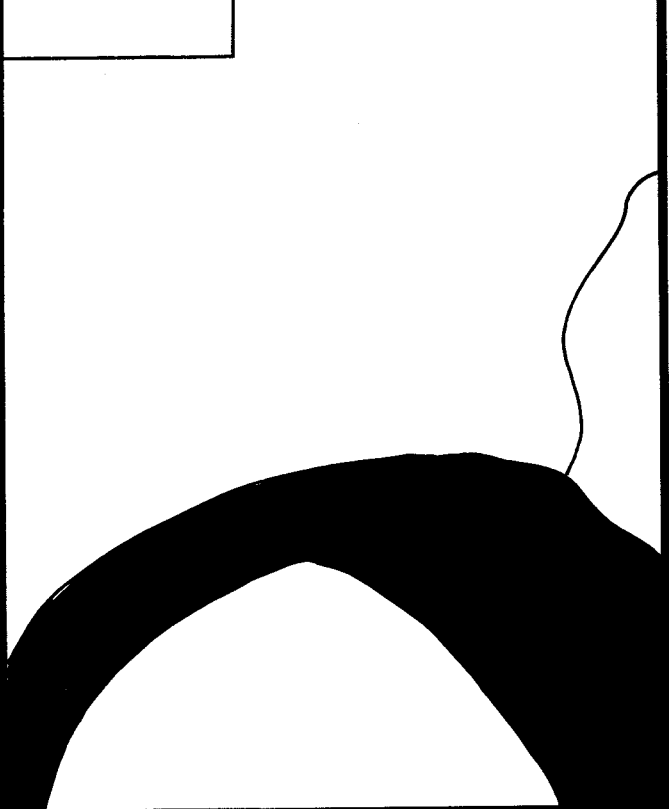


BUT IS IT REALLY LOVE IF IT CAN'T BE SHOWN? IS IT REALLY LOVE IF THE PERSON ON THE RECEIVING END JUST FEELS REJECTED?

I NO LONGER HAVE THE ENERGY TO INVEST IN TRYING TO GET PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND. I'M TIRED, TIRED OF EXPLAINING.



THERE ARE REASONS WHY MY PARENTS DO WHAT THEY DO AND DID WHAT THEY DID.

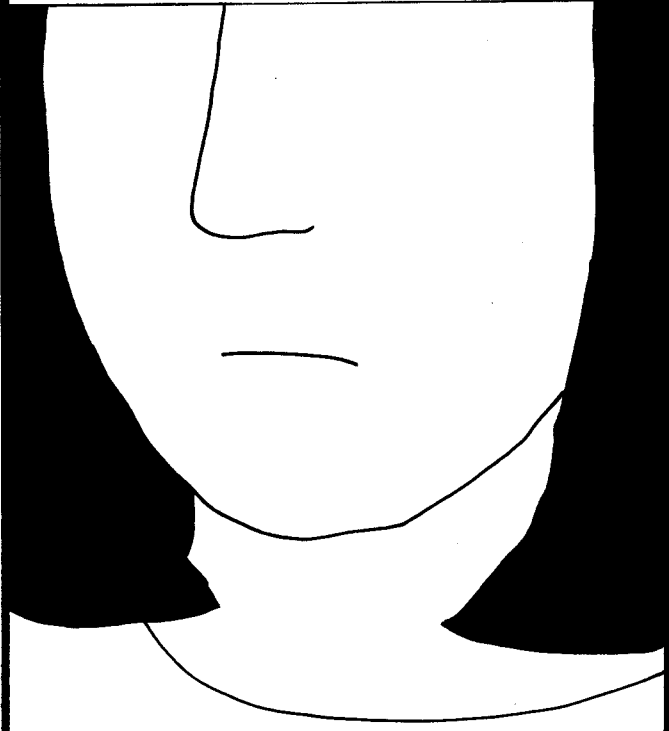


REASONS THAT I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE.

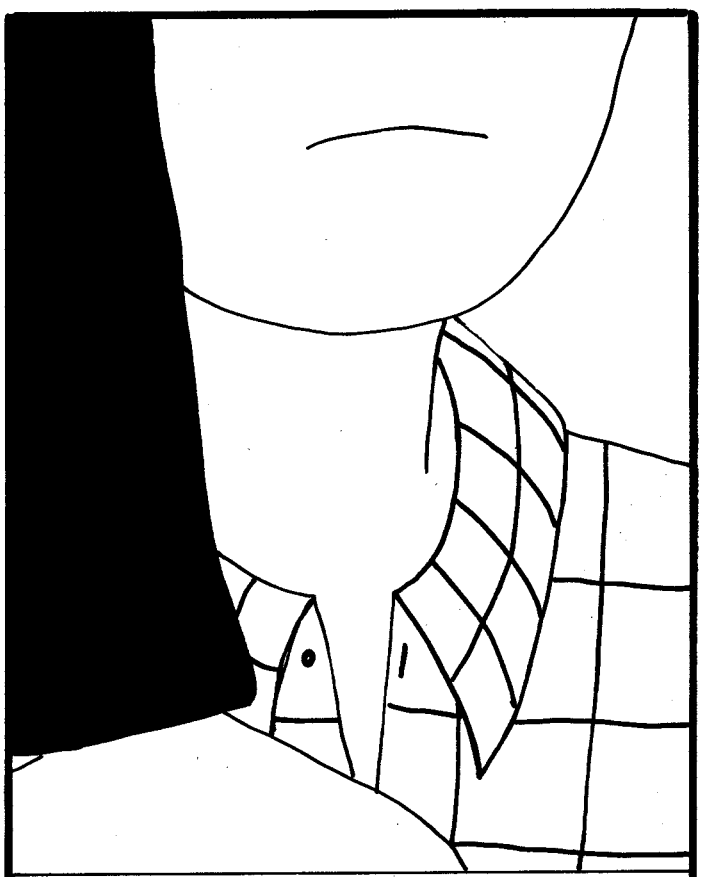


REASONS THEY CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE.

REASONS THAT NOBODY CAN BEGIN TO IMAGINE.

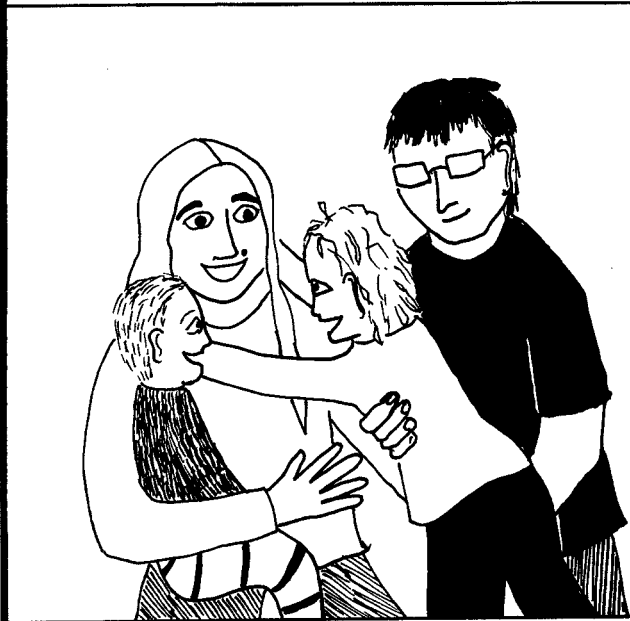


REASONS I'LL NEVER KNOW.
REASONS THEY'LL NEVER KNOW.



AND THERE ARE REASONS WHY WE'LL NEVER KNOW THE REASONS.

BUT THE REASON WHY I FINALLY MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE DESTRUCTIVE PARENTAL QUICKSANDS I'D GOT STUCK IN WAS THAT I FELL HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE WITH A NEW BUNCH OF PEOPLE.



I WAS FINALLY LUCKY ENOUGH TO MEET ERKKI AND WITHOUT HESITATING, WE HAD TWO KIDS IN RAPID SUCCESSION.

AND EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SOMETIMES HEAVY GOING HAVING TWO SMALL KIDS, I WAS ABLE TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT IT WAS OK TO FEEL THAT WAY, AND COULD ENJOY THE FACT THAT WE STILL HAD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP.

THE CHORUS OF CONVENTIONS STARTED SINGING AGAIN:

♪ EVERYTHING WILL CHANGE NOW THEY HAVE GRANDCHILDREN! ♪



BUT MY PARENTS REMAINED SURPRISINGLY UNINTERESTED IN ME, EVEN THOUGH I NOW HAD TWO LOVELY CHILDREN TO ENTICE THEM.



NO, SORRY. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO COME AND VISIT THIS SUMMER AND I'LL BE BUSY ALL THROUGH THE AUTUMN, WITH OUTINGS TO THE WOODS AND HUNTING, YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. THEN I'M OFF TO THAILAND, AND A GOLFING TRIP TO PORTUGAL. MAYBE ROUND CHRISTMAS.

ALONGSIDE MY JOY AT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY KIDS, THERE WAS SOMETHING INSIDE ME THAT WAS CAUSING ME MORE AND MORE PAIN. IT WAS AS THOUGH I HAD A SMALL AND BADLY TREATED CHILD INSIDE ME, SCREAMING

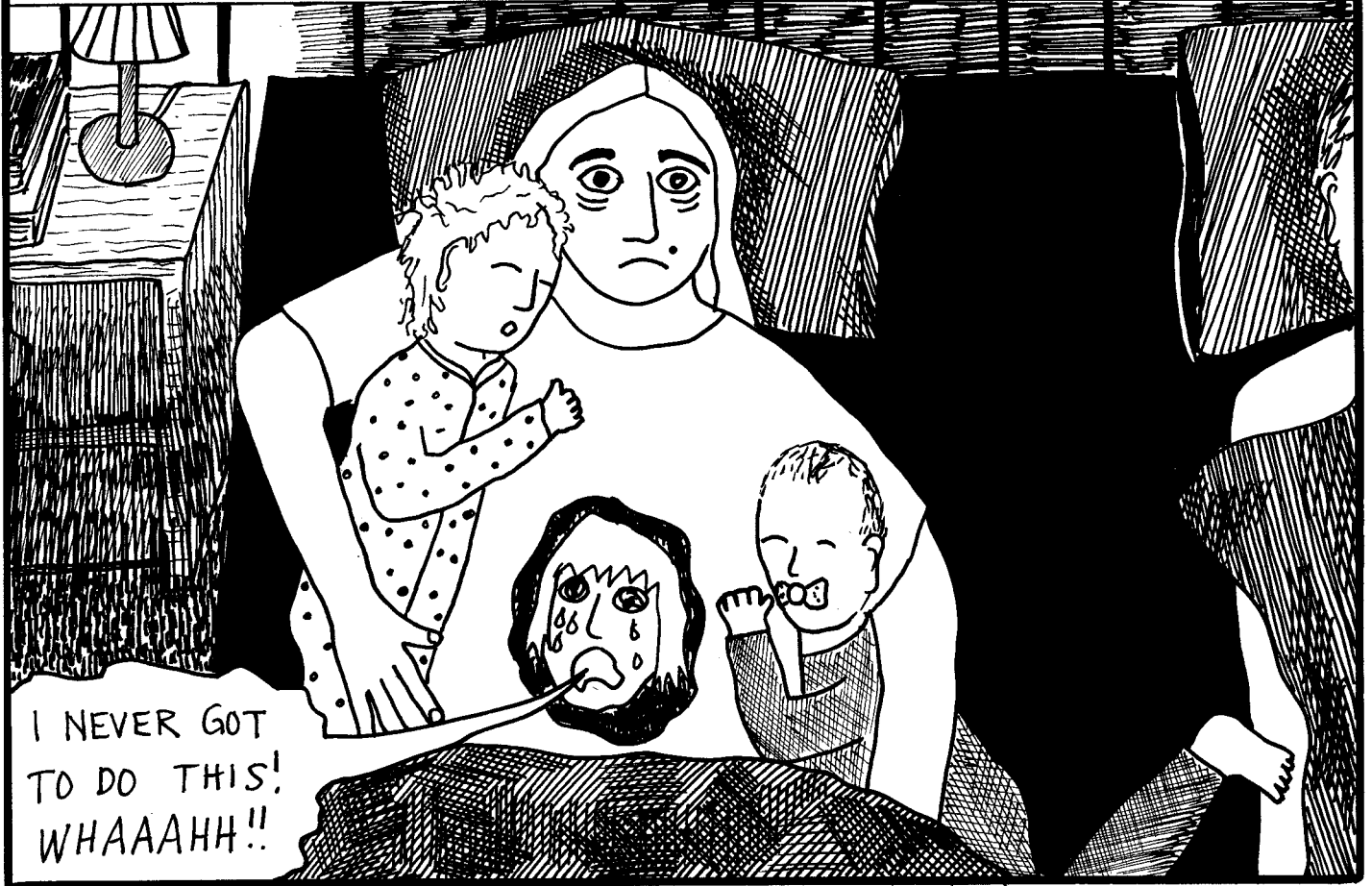


EVERY DAY I SPENT WITH MY KIDS, I WAS REMINDED OF EVERYTHING I HADN'T HAD.



IT WAS AS IF MY WOUNDS WERE HEALING AND OPENING UP AT THE SAME TIME.

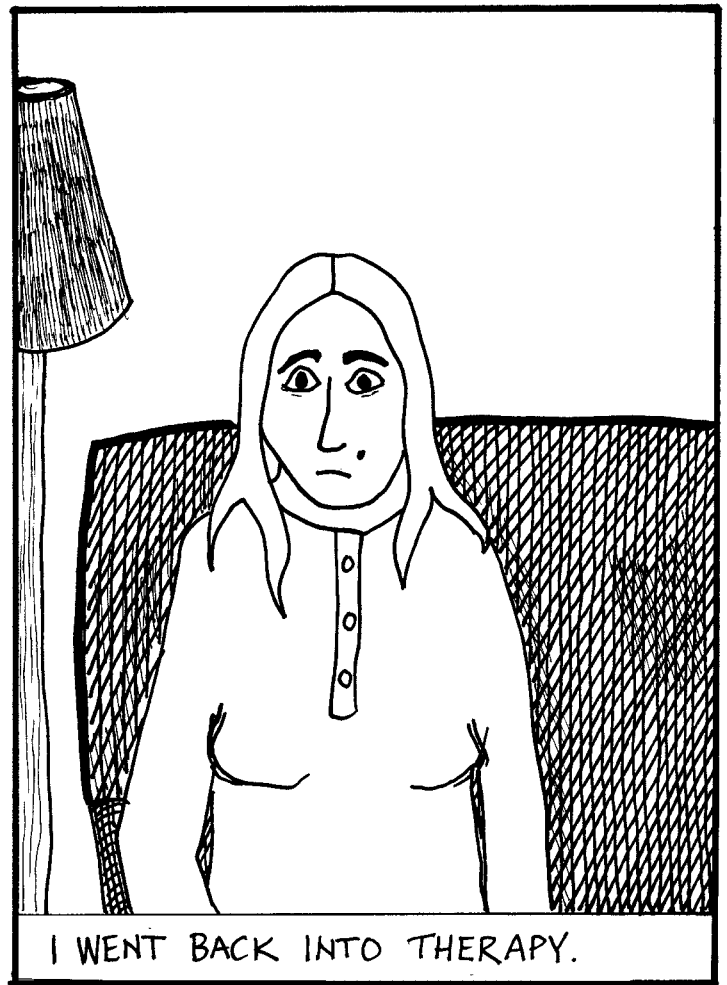
THE SCREAMING CHILD INSIDE ME BEGAN TO TAKE OVER MORE AND MORE.



I NEVER GOT TO DO THIS! WHAAAHH!!

I ENDED UP DEEPLY DEPRESSED.

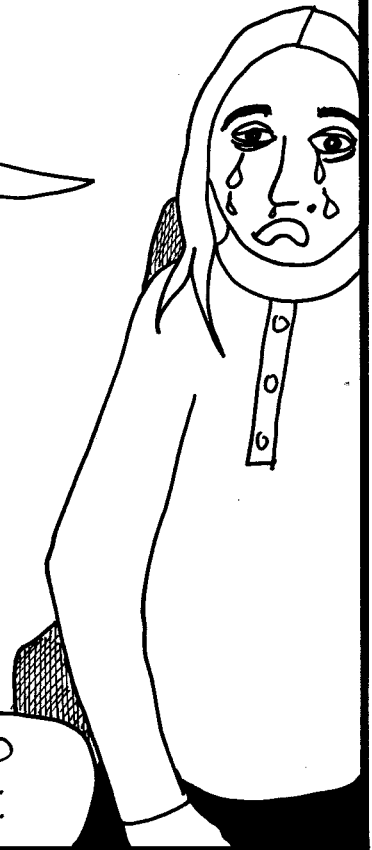




I TOOK IT FOR GRANTED THAT I WOULD TALK TO YET ANOTHER THERAPIST WHO WOULD TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS WRONG WITH ME.



BLA BLA BLA,
SO YOU SEE, THERE
MUST BE SOMETHING
WRONG WITH
ME.



INSTEAD I MET A THERAPIST
WHO PUT HER FINGER RIGHT
ON MY PROBLEM.

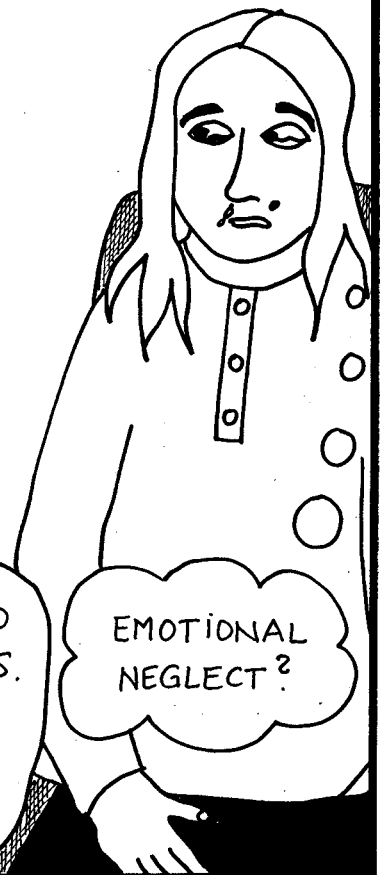
IT SOUNDS TO ME AS THOUGH YOU'VE BEEN SUBJECTED
TO A TRAUMA KNOWN AS EMOTIONAL NEGLECT.

AS A CHILD, YOU HAD NOBODY WHO WAS ABLE TO SEE AND MEET YOUR NEEDS..

YOU SUFFERED FROM DEPRIVATION, EVEN
THOUGH ON THE SURFACE, YOU APPEARED TO
BE LIVING IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT.



THIS HAS CAUSED ALL THE ANXIETY
AND WORRY THAT YOU'RE LIVED WITH
ALL YOUR LIFE. BUT THE DAMAGE CAN
BE REPAIRED. YOU CAN LEARN TO VIEW
YOUR LIFE AND YOURSELF FROM A
GROWN-UP PERSPECTIVE.



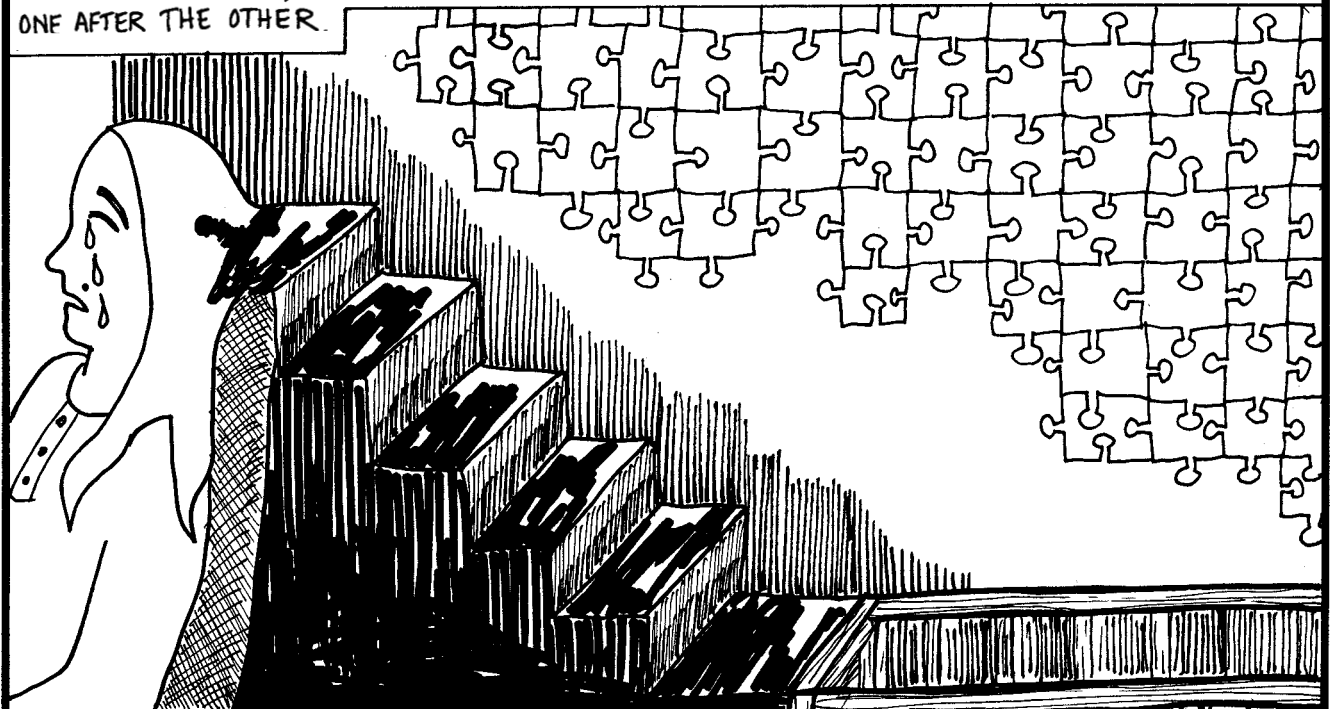
EMOTIONAL
NEGLECT?

I SUGGEST WE MEET ONCE A WEEK FOR 20 SESSIONS TO
START WITH, AND THEN WE'LL EVALUATE OUR PROGRESS.
AFTER THAT WE MIGHT CONTINUE FOR 20 MORE
SESSIONS, DEPENDING ON HOW FAR WE'VE COME IN
THE HEALING PROCESS. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

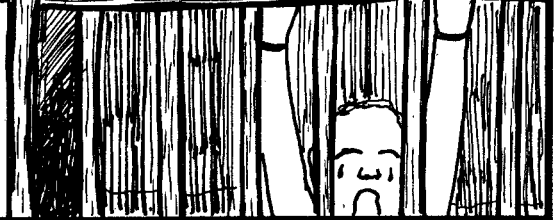
EMOTIONAL NEGLECT. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D EVER HEARD OF IT. I PLOUGHED THROUGH ALL THE INFORMATION I COULD FIND ON THE SUBJECT. I RECOGNISED MYSELF IN ALMOST EVERY WORD I READ ABOUT IT.



WITH THE HELP OF THE THERAPIST AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH ME, I STARTED TO SEE THE PIECES OF THE JIGSAW FALL INTO PLACE ONE AFTER THE OTHER.



I JOURNEYED BACK THROUGH MY LIFE, BUT NOW I COULD SEE IT ALL FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. EVEN THE SCRATCH MARKS INSIDE MY COT FOUND THEIR LOGICAL IF HORRIFYING EXPLANATION.



I KNOW THAT MY PARENTS NEVER CONSCIOUSLY MEANT TO HARM ME. ONE OF THE REASONS THAT EMOTIONAL NEGLECT IS SO HARD TO DIAGNOSE IS THAT THE PERPETRATOR IS ALMOST ALWAYS COMPLETELY UNAWARE OF THE DEPRIVATION HE OR SHE IS SUBJECTING THE VICTIM TO. THE PERPETRATORS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS "JUST DOING THEIR BEST".



SO THERE IS NOTHING TO FORGIVE. AND NOBODY TO APOLOGISE TO ME. BUT I DON'T WANT TO PURSUE THEM ANY MORE, NOR DO I HAVE THE ENERGY FOR IT.

FOR A LONG, LONG TIME, FAR TOO LONG, IT WAS AS IF I WAS STANDING ON THE SHORE LOOKING OUT OVER A DARKENED SEASCAPE, AS FAMILY MEMBERS DO AFTER AN ACCIDENT AT SEA. I DIDN'T WANT IT TO BE OVER. IN SPITE OF ALL THE EVIDENCE, AND ALL THE FAILED RESCUE ATTEMPTS, I COULDN'T GIVE UP HOPE. I COULDN'T ACCEPT THAT IT WAS OVER UNTIL I'D SEEN THE BODIES BROUGHT TO SHORE.



MY LIBERATION CAME WHEN I FINALLY STOPPED HOPING.



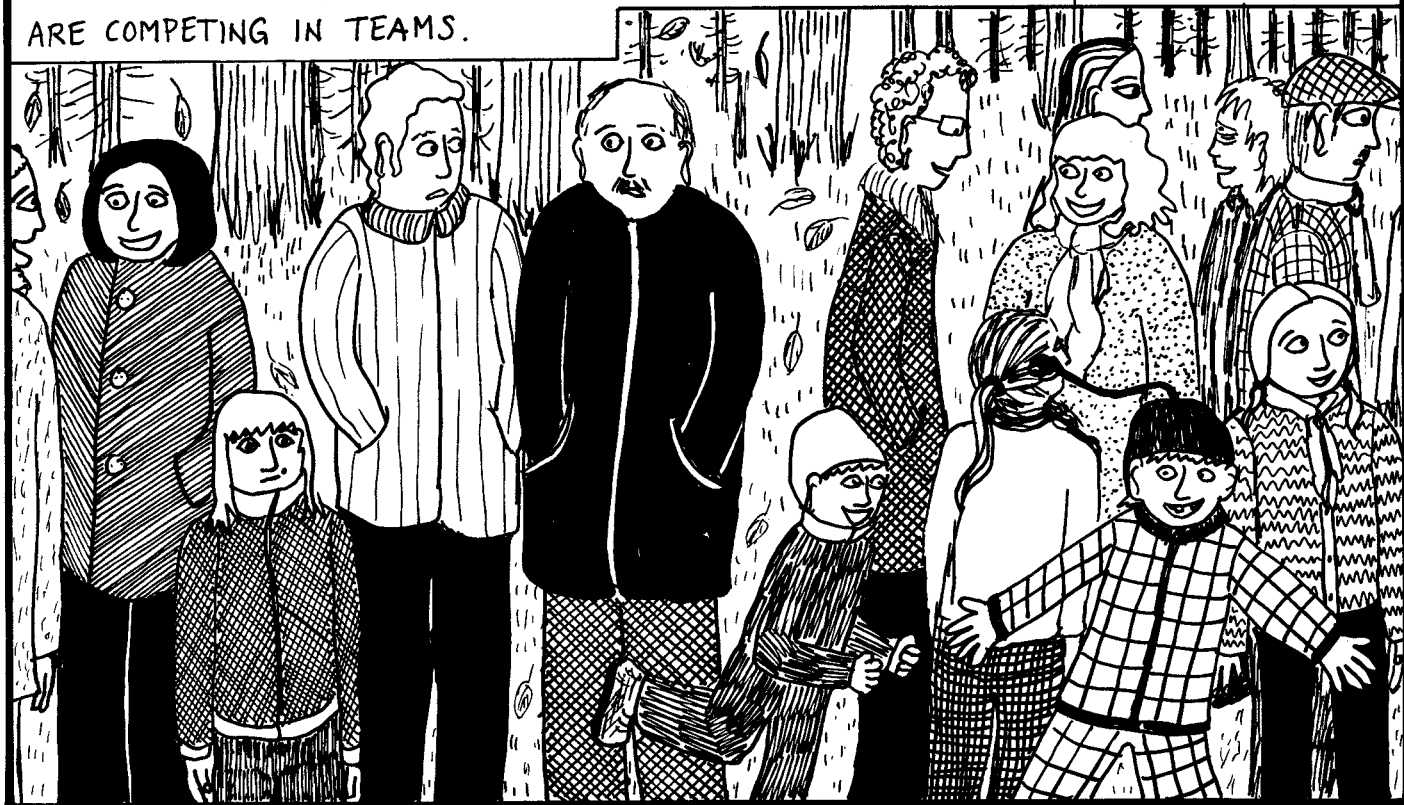
I ACCEPTED THE ACCIDENT AND EVERYTHING THAT HAD BEEN LOST IN IT.

IT WAS ONLY THEN I COULD FULLY ENJOY EVERYTHING I'D GAINED.



A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

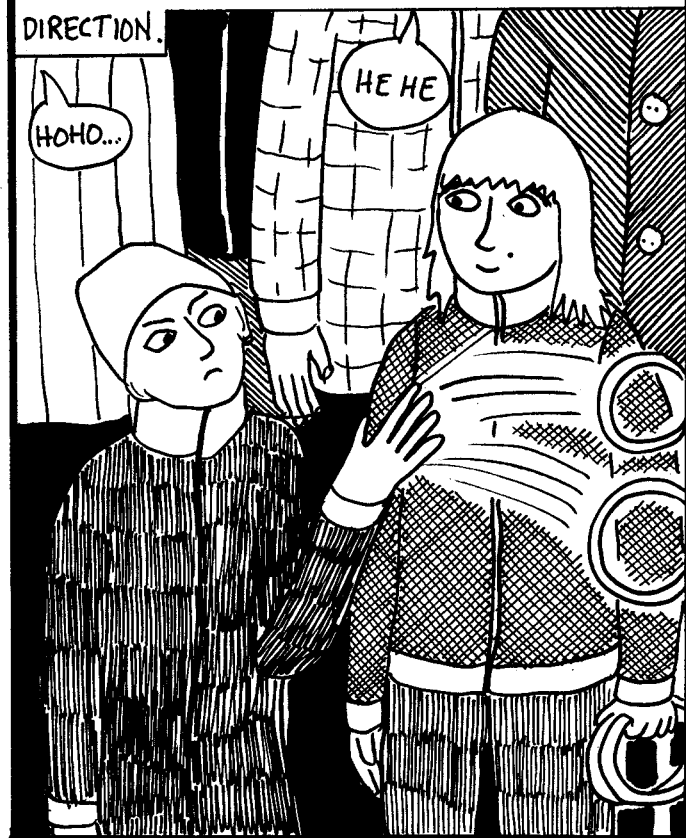
I AM AROUND 6 YEARS OLD. I'M WITH MY FAMILY ON SOME OUTING WHERE THERE ARE COMPETITIONS, A BARBECUE, TEAM GAMES, AND SO ON. ALL THE FAMILIES ARE COMPETING IN TEAMS.

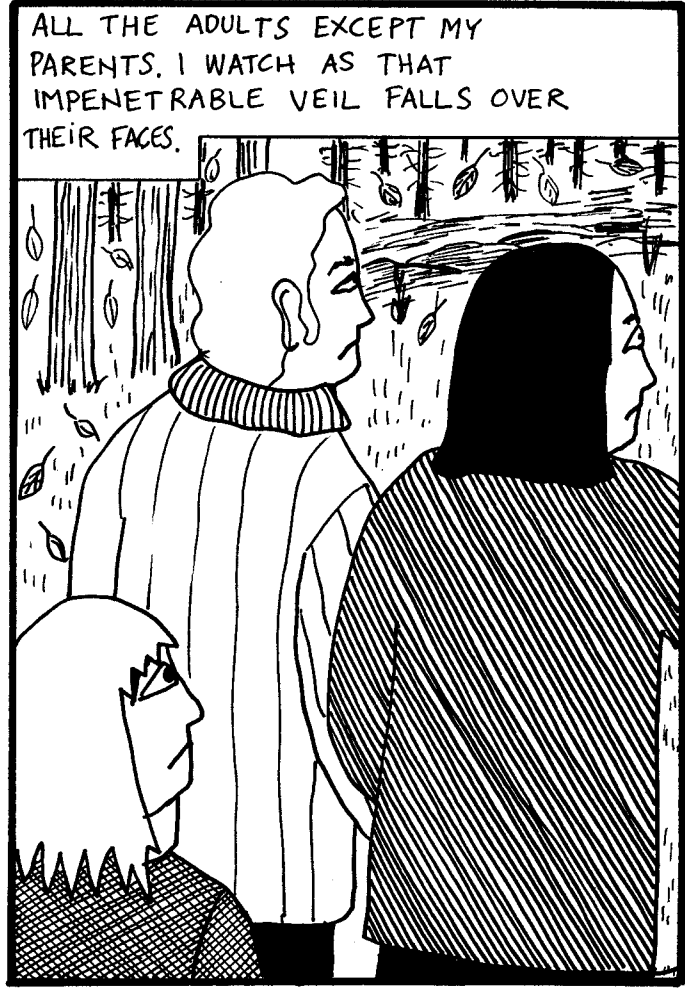
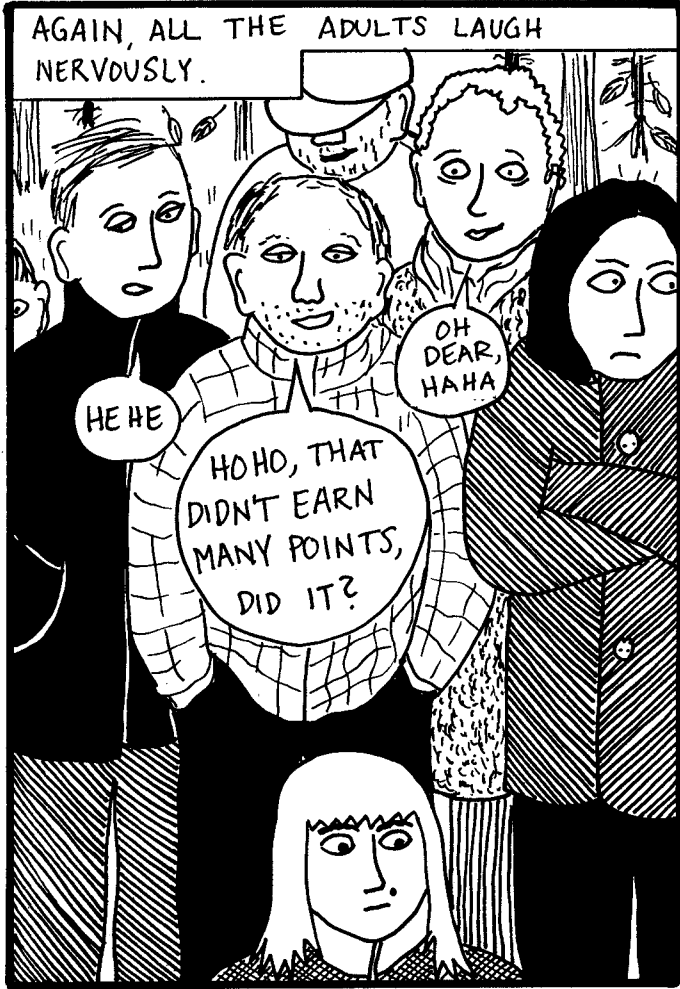
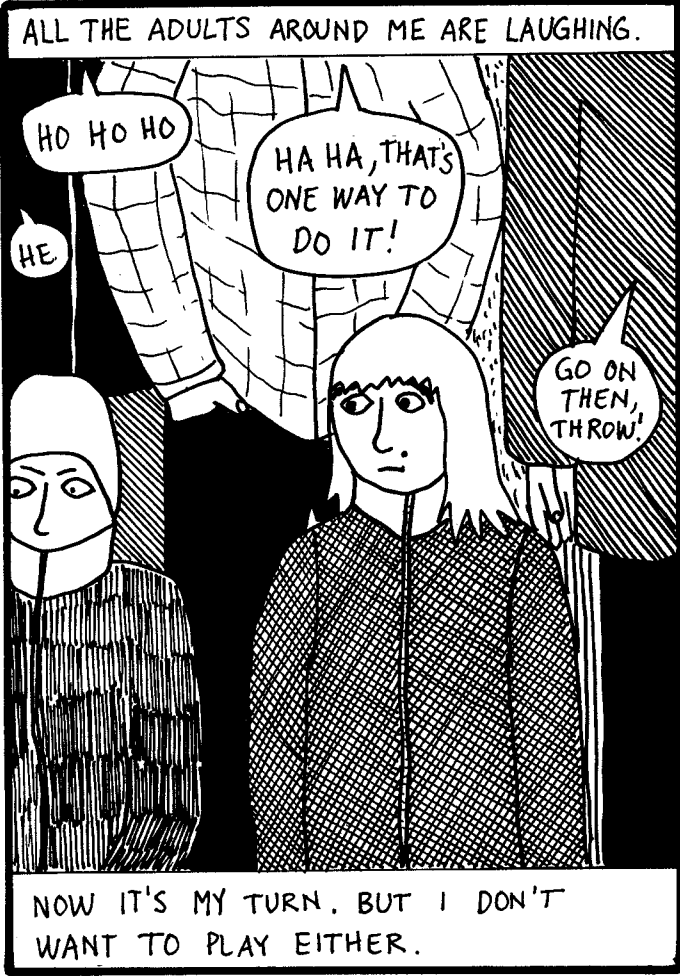


SUDDENLY MY BROTHER AND I ARE EXPECTED TO THROW RUBBER RINGS ON TO STICKS TO EARN POINTS FOR OUR TEAM.

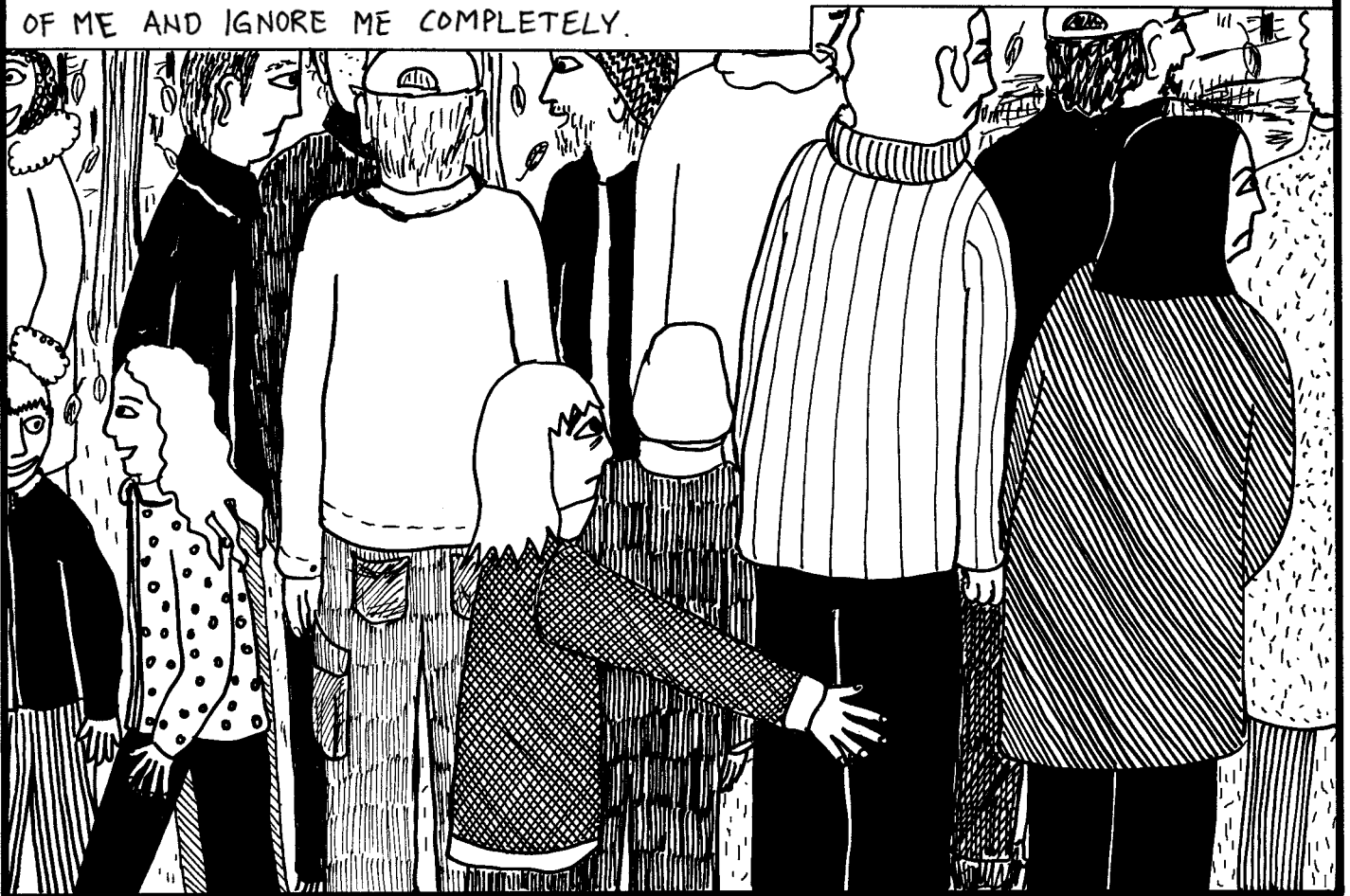


MY BROTHER REFUSES AND THROWS ALL THE RINGS IN THE OTHER DIRECTION.

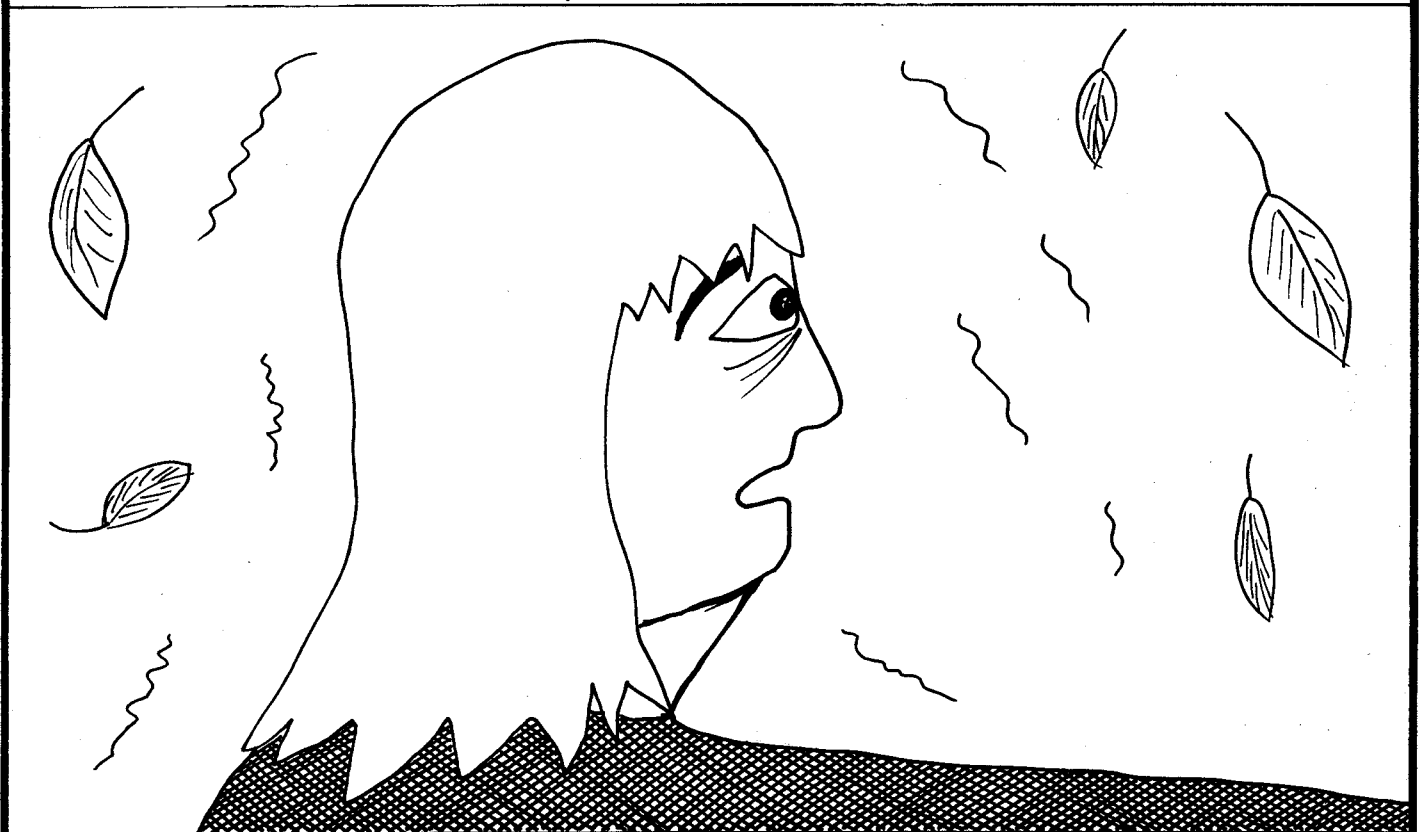




THE REST OF THE OUTING TURNS INTO A NIGHTMARE. MY PARENTS ARE ASHAMED OF ME AND IGNORE ME COMPLETELY.



EVERYTHING IN ME IS DYING JUST TO HUG SOMEONE AND MAYBE EVEN HAVE A LITTLE CRY, BUT IT ALL HAS TO BE SEALED IN, CONTROLLED.



OTHERWISE I'LL JUST DISGRACE MYSELF EVEN MORE!

IN THE CAR ON THE WAY HOME, I CAN'T HOLD BACK ANY LONGER.



COMPLETE SILENCE. THE ONLY SOUND IS THAT OF THE ENGINE AND THE PANIC IN MY EARS.

EVEN THOUGH I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT I'VE DONE WRONG, I FINALLY JUST START SHOUTING:

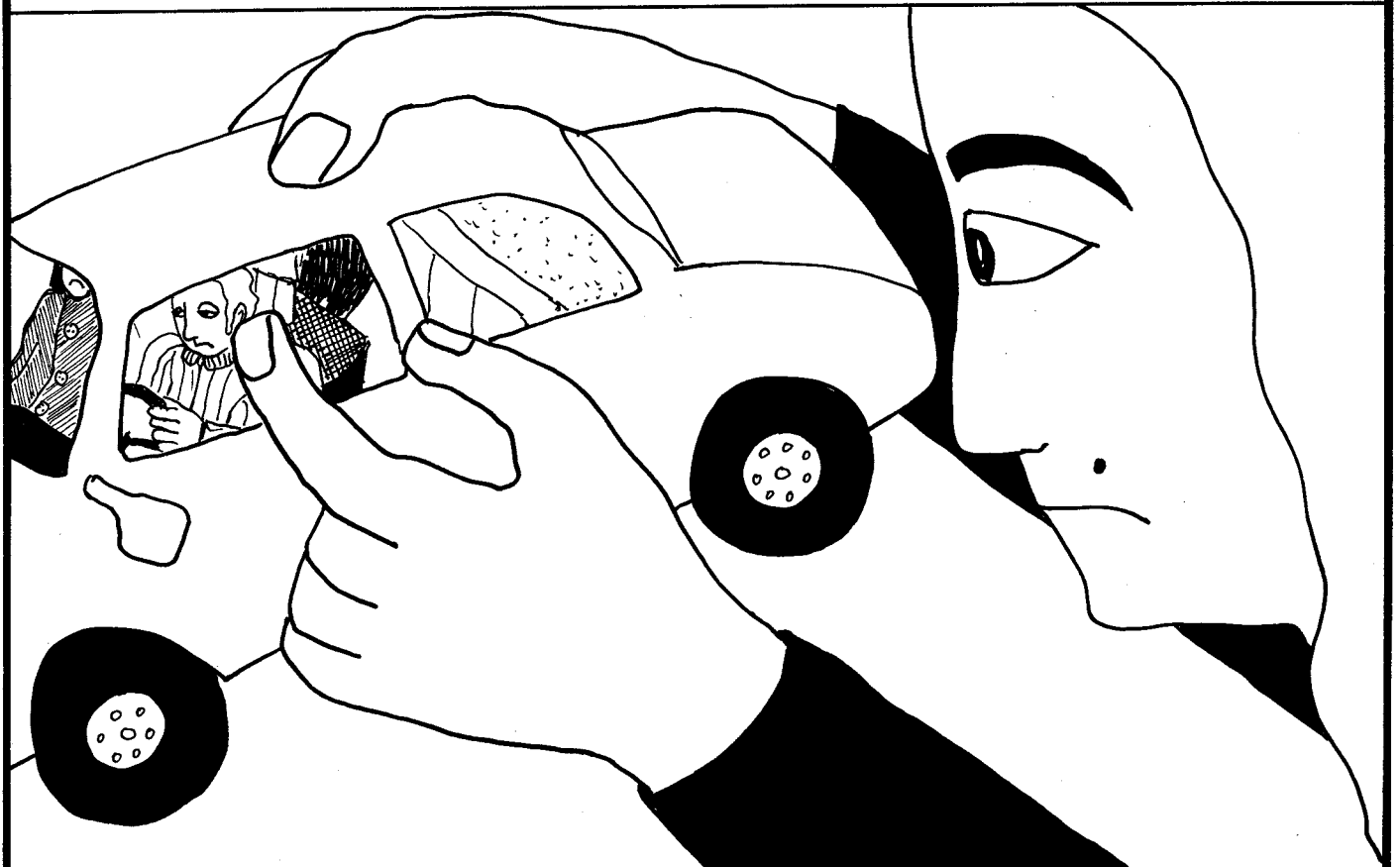


NO REACTION. I HAVE HURT MY PARENTS. NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT FOR ME IS TO WAIT FOR DEATH.

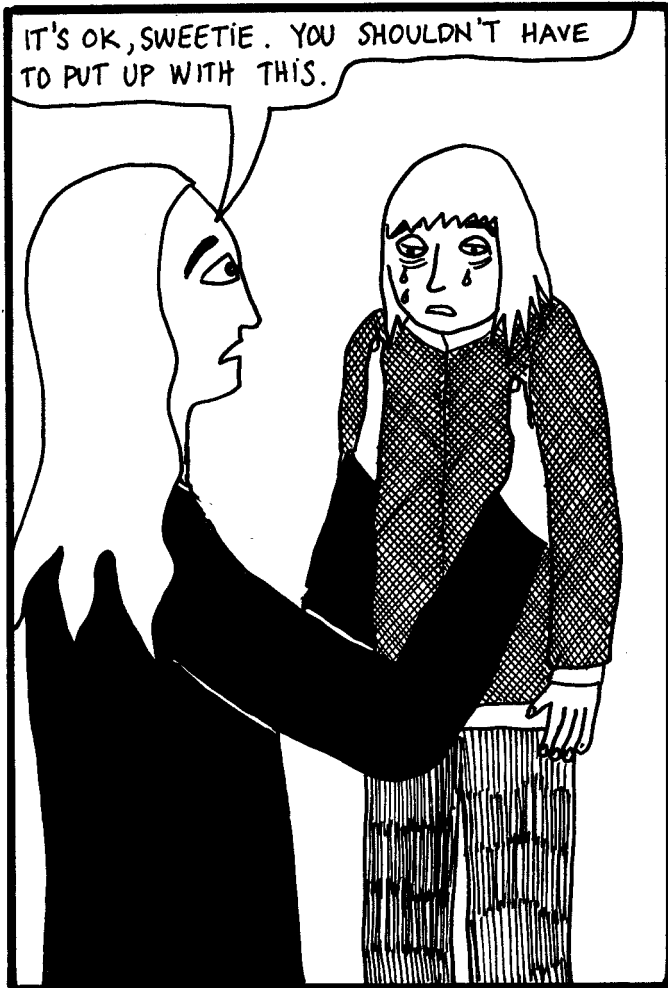
THIS CAR JOURNEY IS SYMBOLIC OF THE RELATIONSHIP I'VE HAD WITH MY PARENTS ALL MY LIFE.



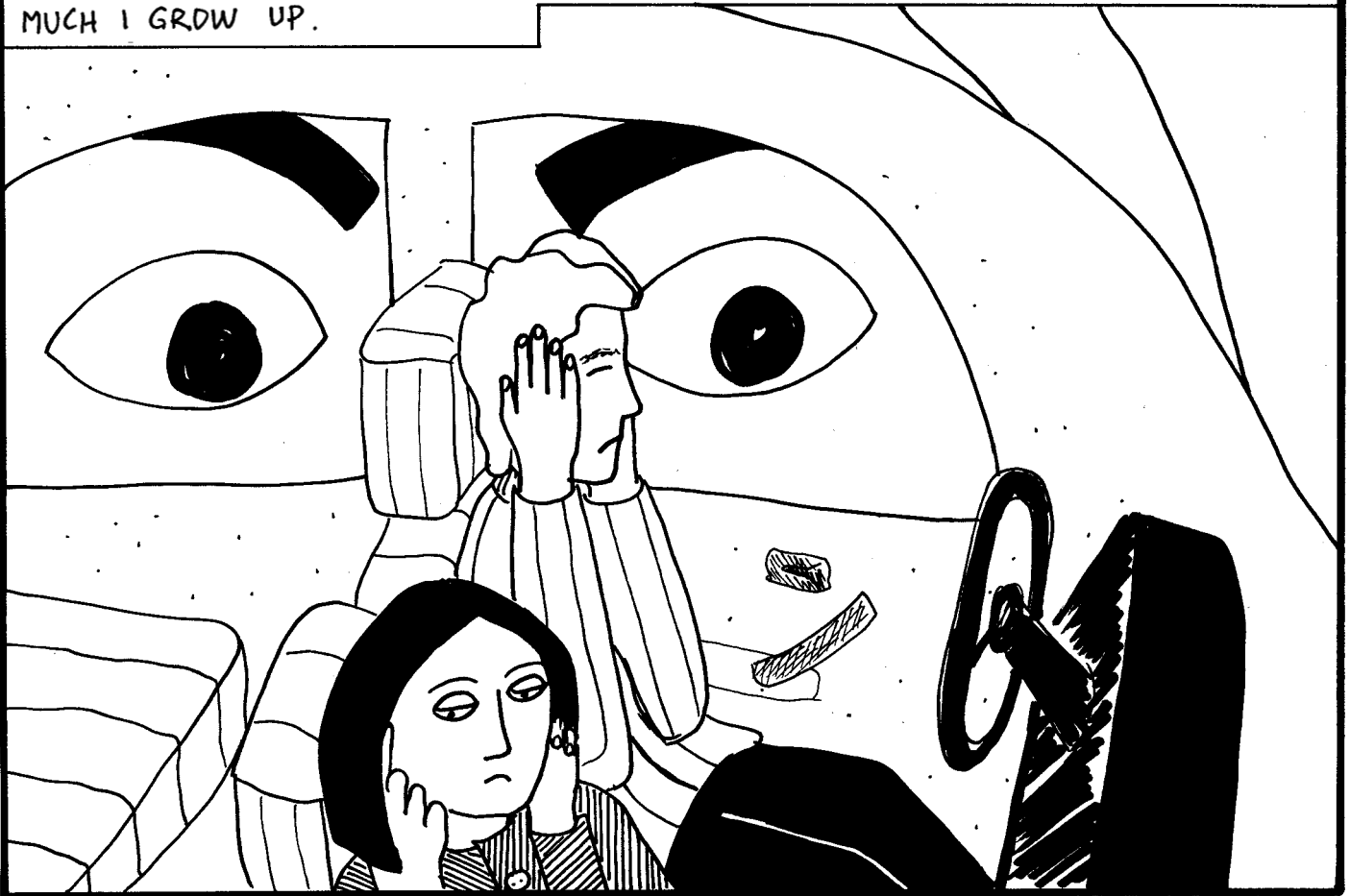
AND I HAD TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.



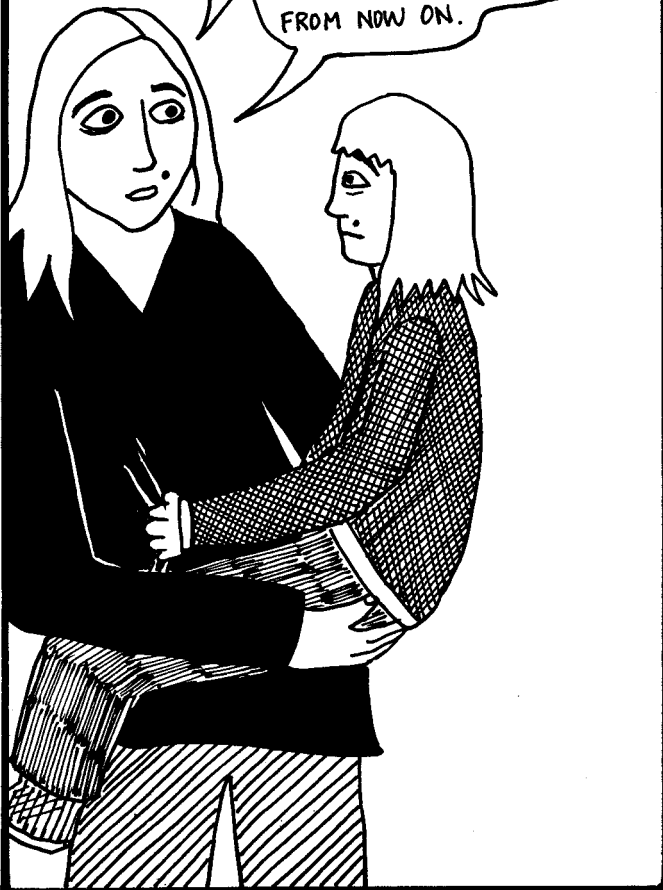
SO I SUCCEEDED IN GETTING THE LITTLE GIRL OUT OF THAT CAR.



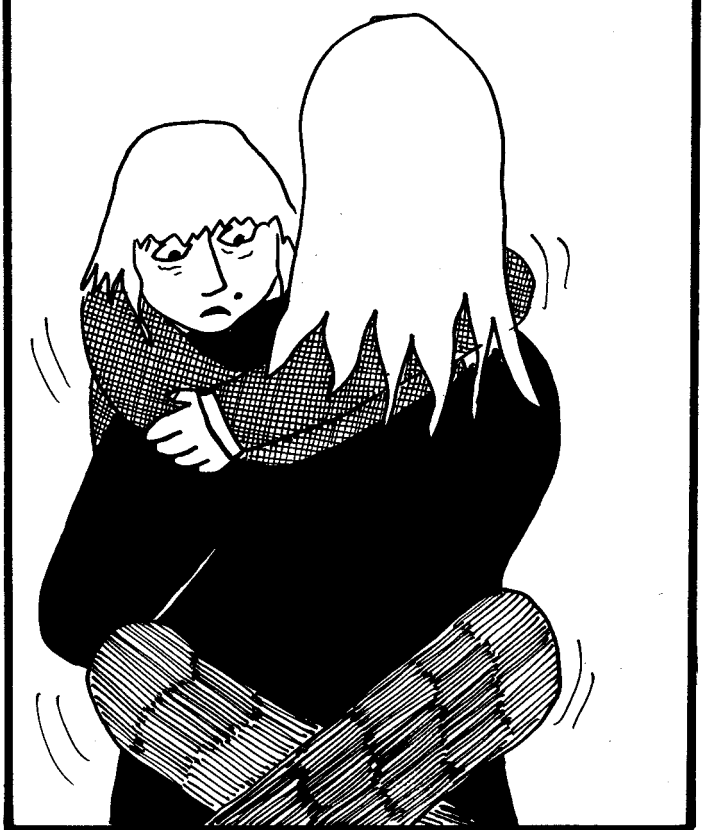
BUT THEY'RE NEVER GOING TO LISTEN TO WHAT I HAVE TO SAY, HOWEVER MUCH I GROW UP.



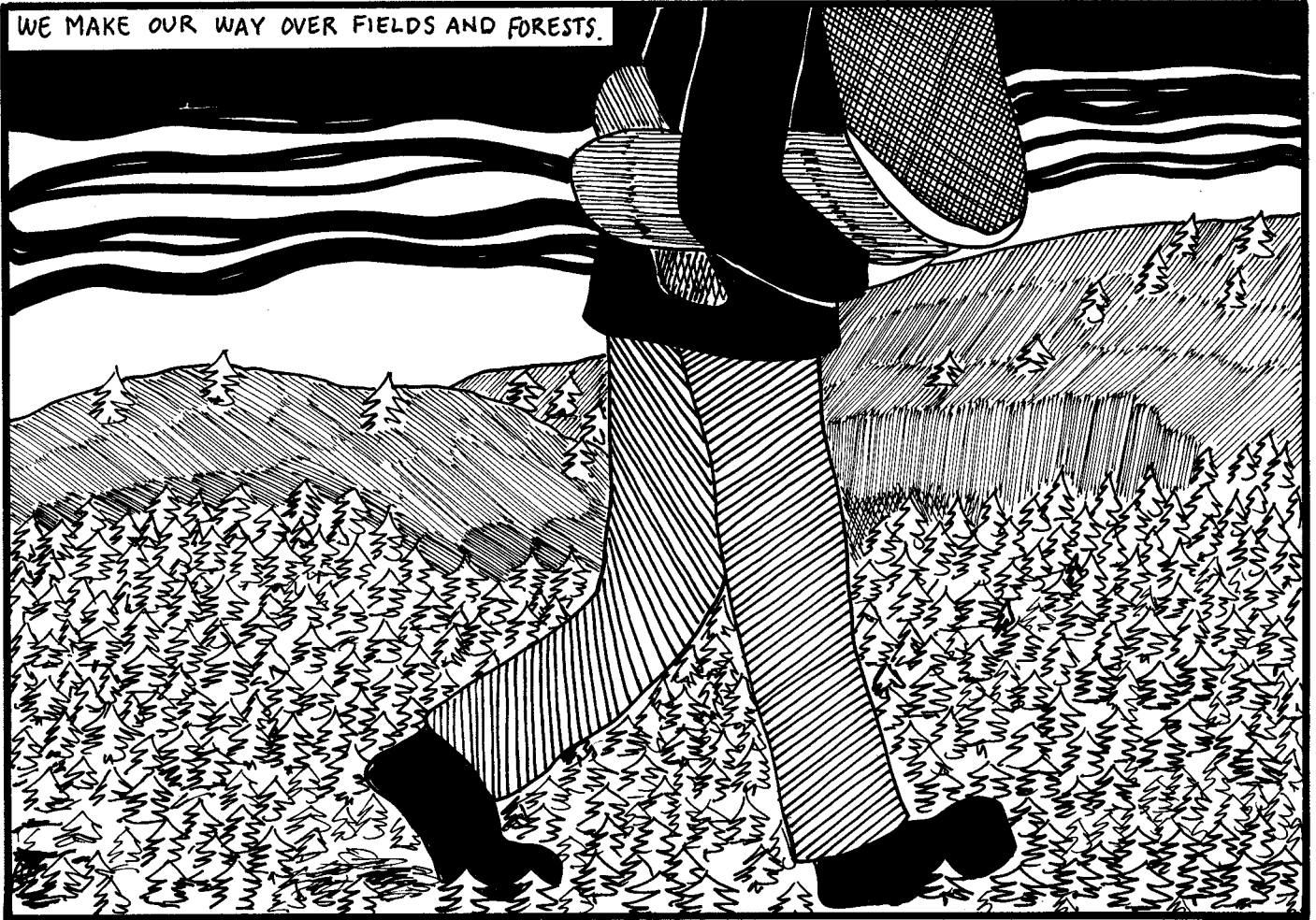
LET'S FORGET ABOUT THEM.
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME
FROM NOW ON.



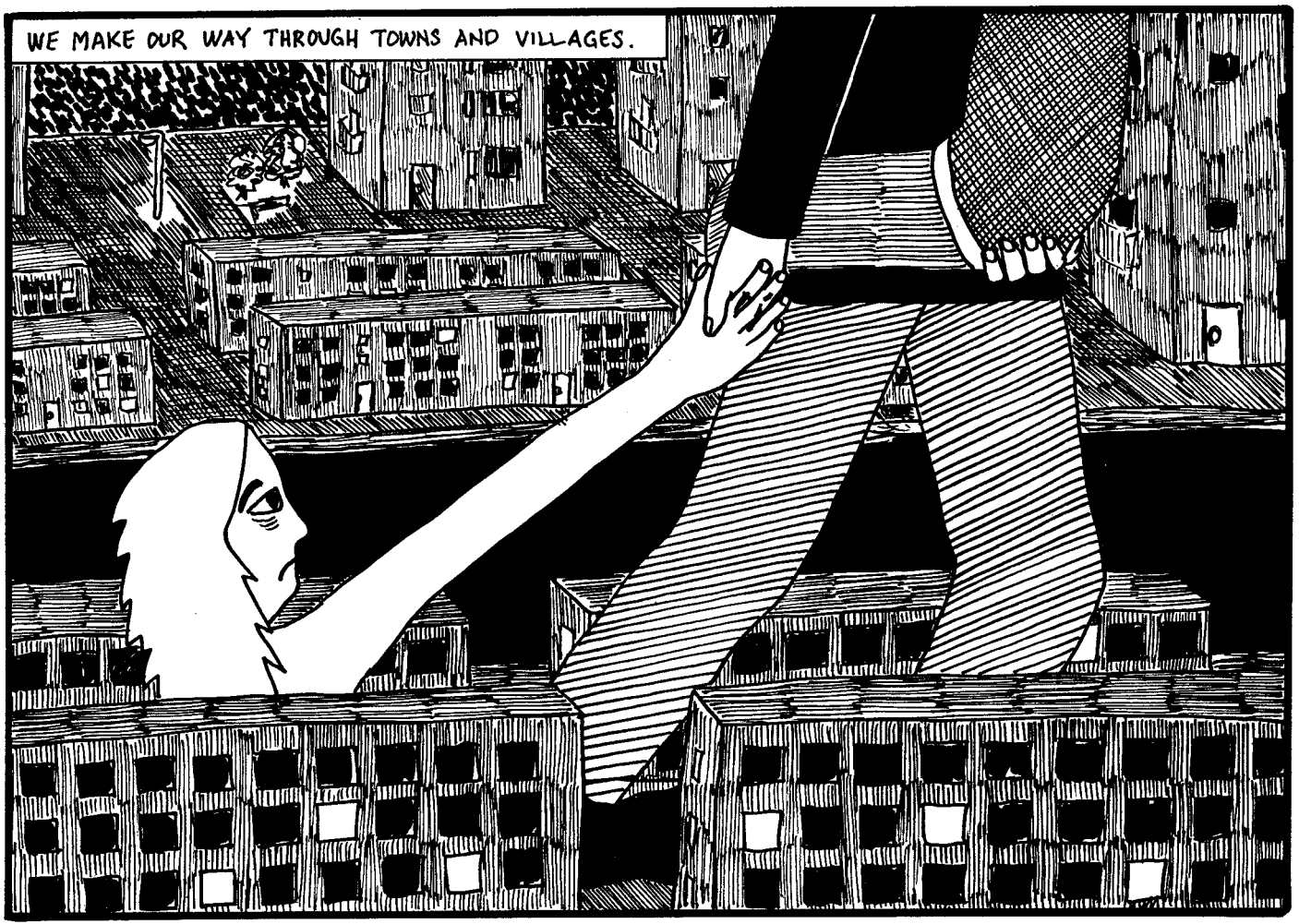
AND I CARRY LITTLE JENNY OFF WITH
ME. SHE CLINGS TO ME AS IF SHE
WERE A PART OF ME.



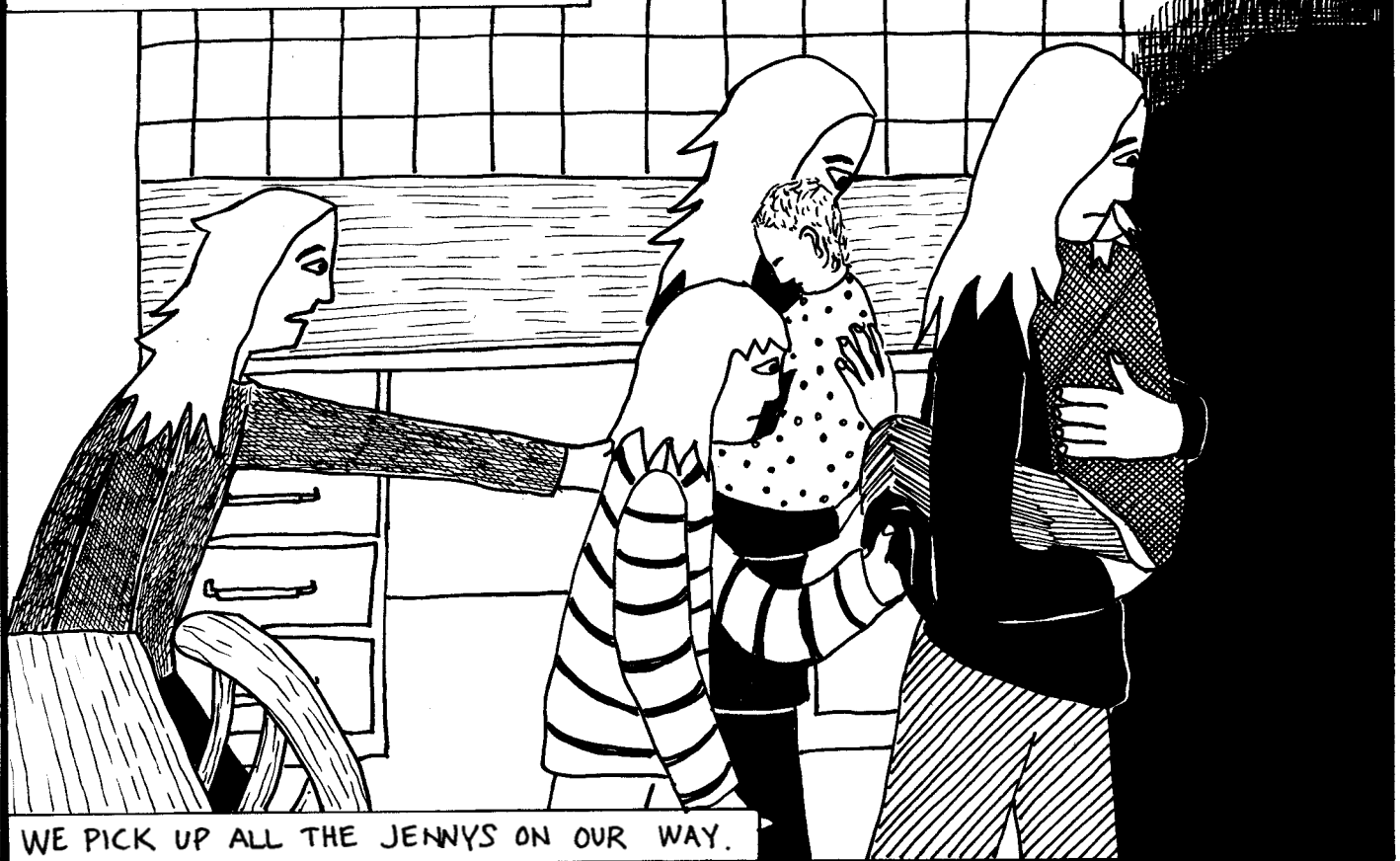
WE MAKE OUR WAY OVER FIELDS AND FORESTS.



WE MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH TOWNS AND VILLAGES.



WE PASS THROUGH HOUSES, SCHOOLS, BY KITCHEN TABLES, THROUGH APARTMENTS, BEDS, HOSPITALS, VIOLENCE, INJURY AND ISOLATION.



WE PICK UP ALL THE JENNYS ON OUR WAY.

FINALLY WE GET FAR ENOUGH AWAY.



THEY'RE WITH ME NOW. WE ARE US. WE ARE ME. I AM ME.

NOW ALL I WANT TO DO IS REST.



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