

The background of the entire page is a dense, chaotic network of white lines of varying thicknesses and lengths, creating a complex, abstract pattern against a solid black background. The lines are mostly curved and looped, with some straight segments interspersed.

THE LINE

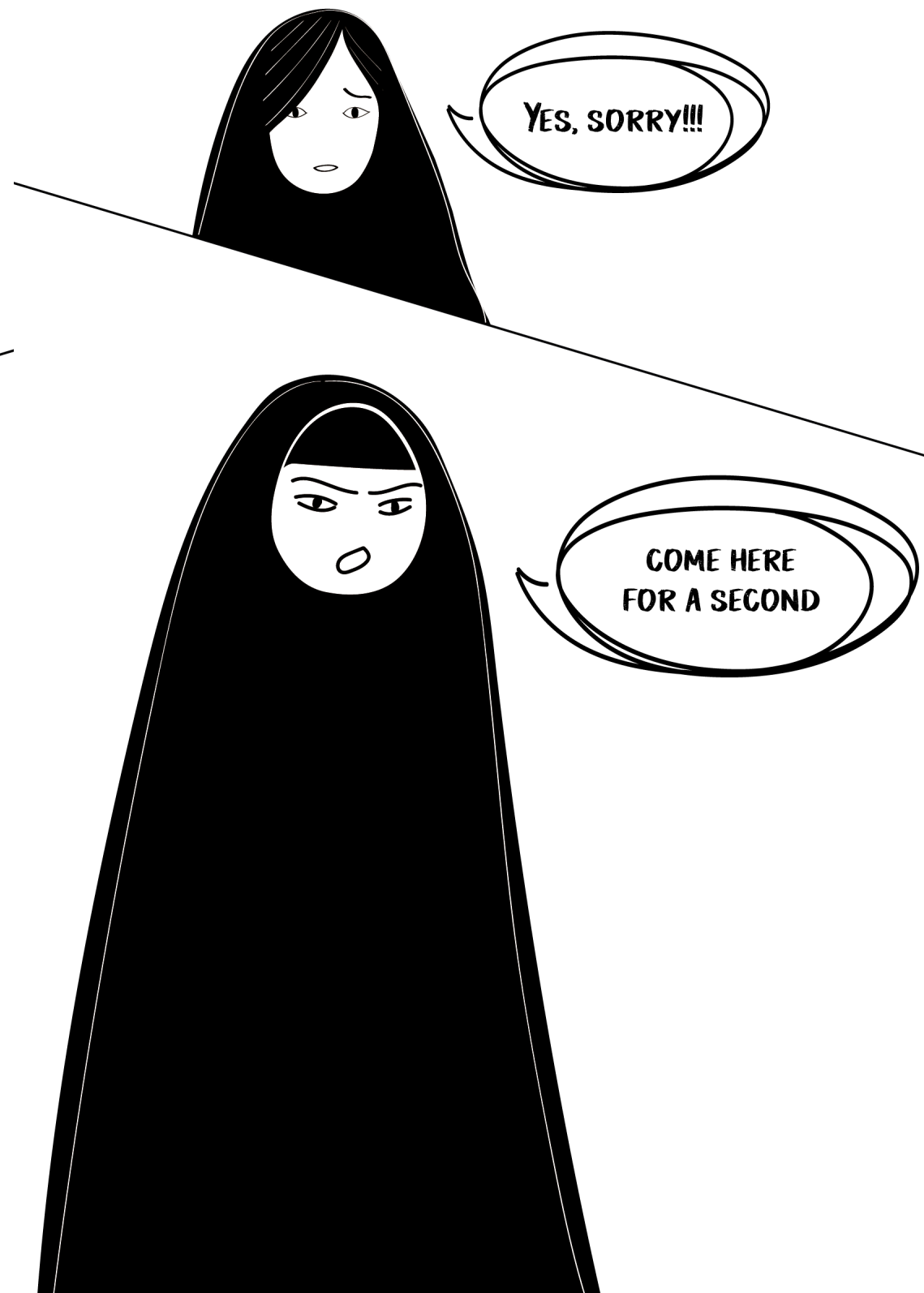
Written and Illustrated
by
Elham Soleimani



BYE MUM!

ARGHHH!!!!!!

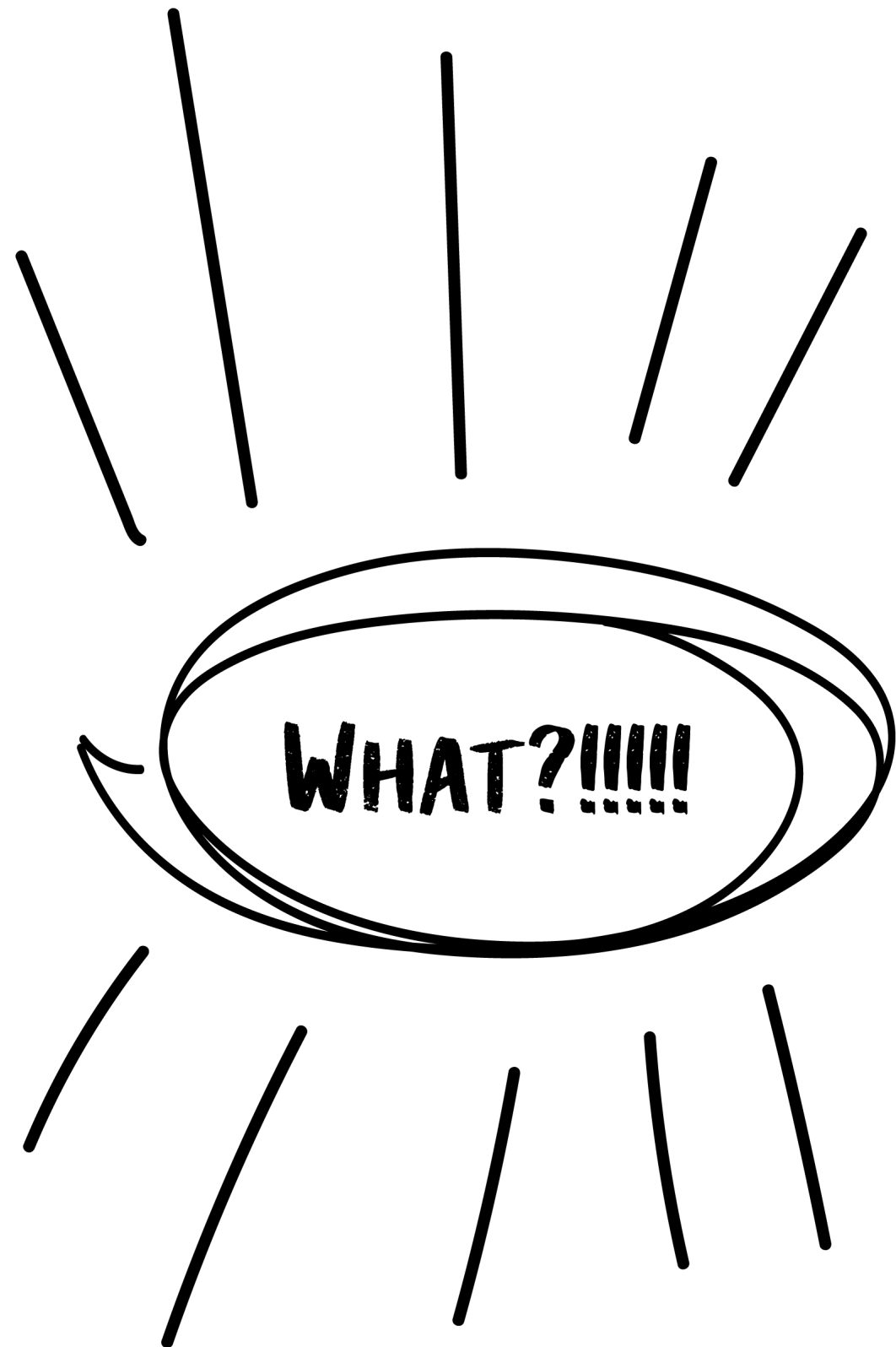
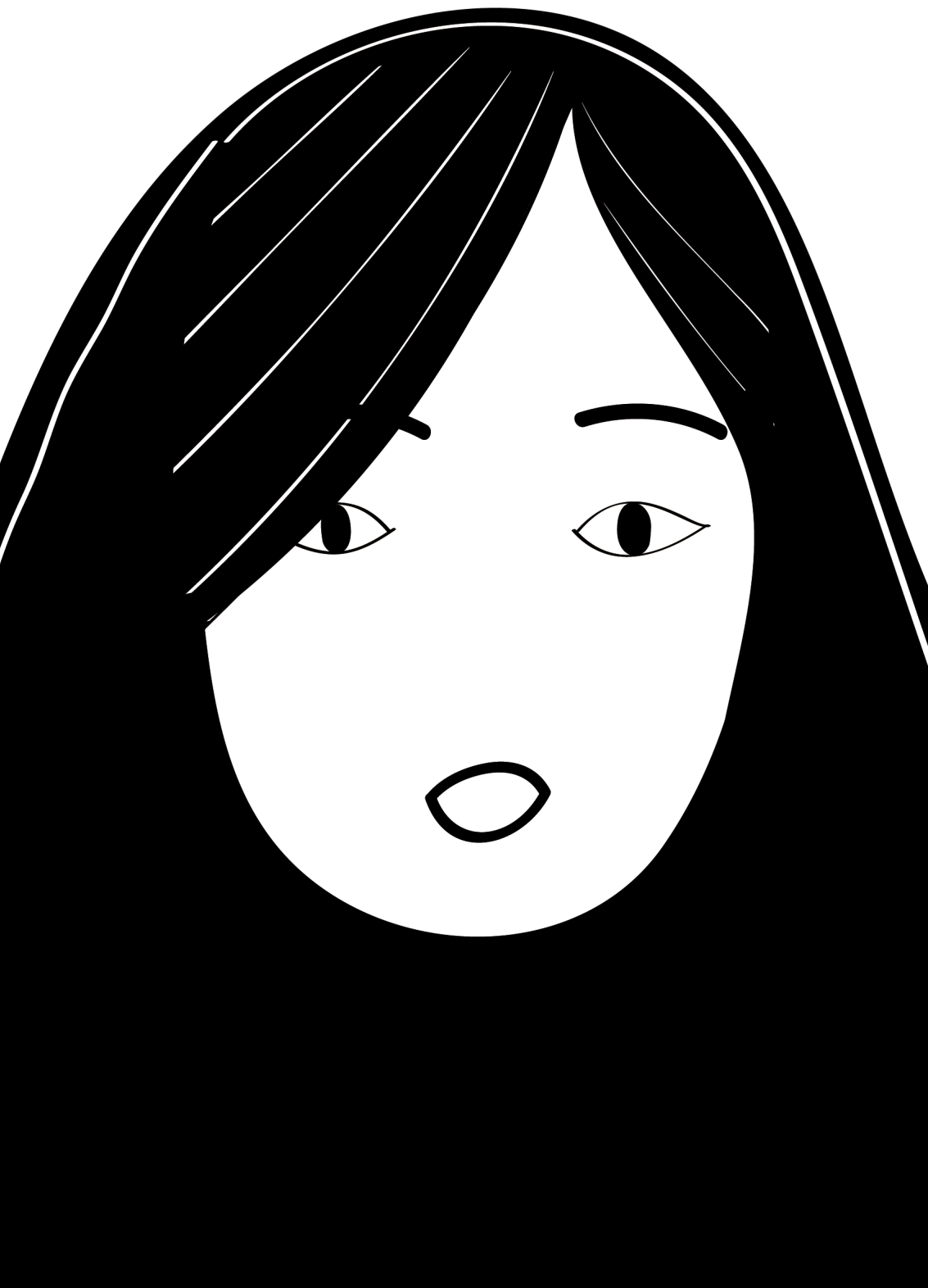








LET ME LOOK AT YOU.
ARE YOU WEARING
EYE MAKE UP?



I ASKED IF YOU'RE WEARING
EYE MAKE UP? YOU KNOW IT'S
FORBIDDEN. YOU SHOULD
BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF!

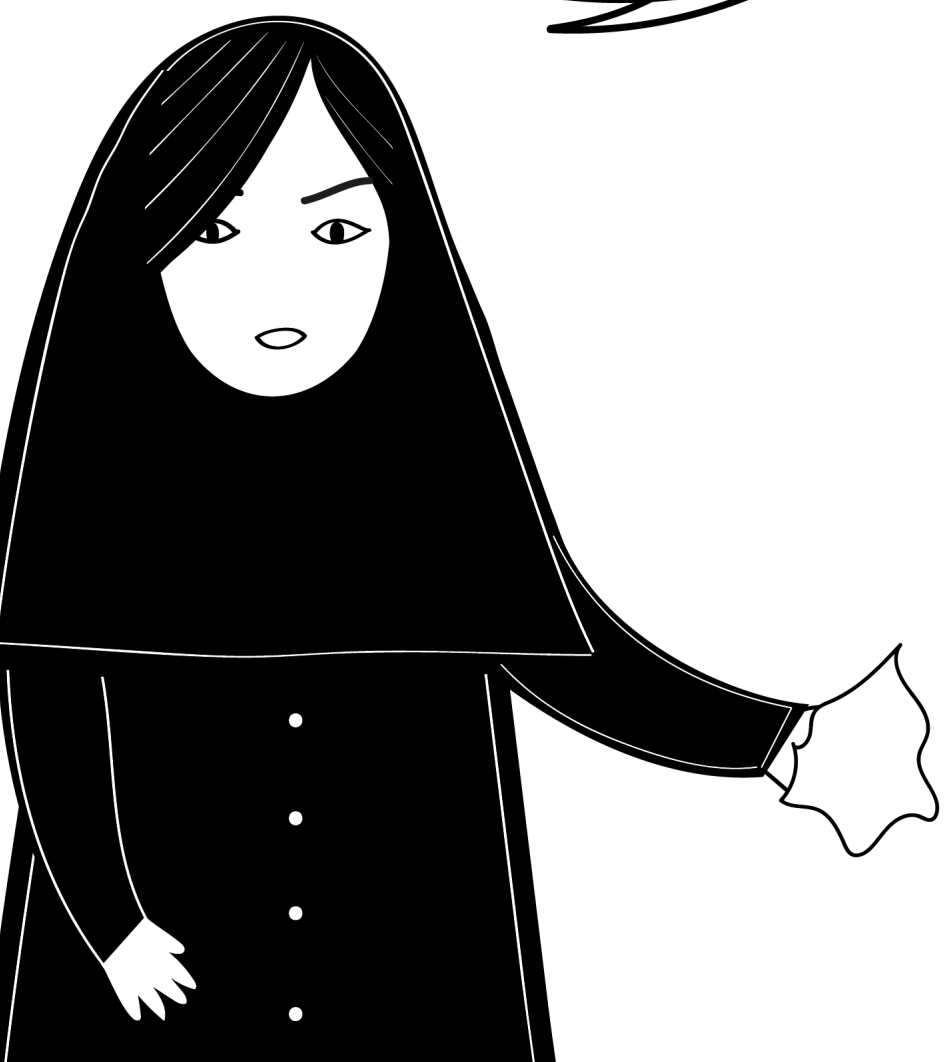




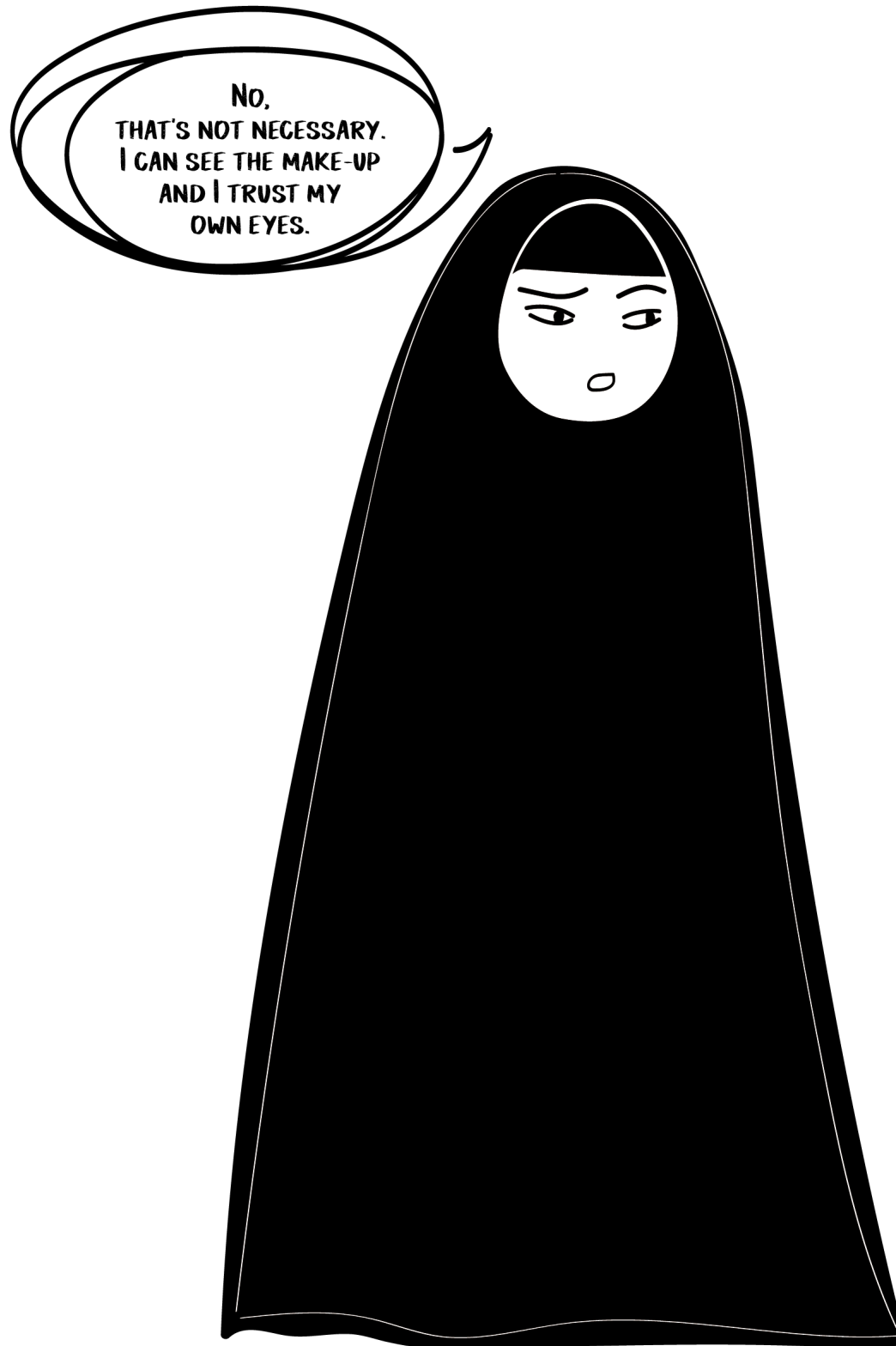
MRS BAHRANI, THE REASON
I'M LATE IS BECAUSE I OVERSLEPT THIS
MORNING, NOT BECAUSE I WAS PUTTING
ON MAKE-UP – I BARELY HAD TIME TO WASH
MY FACE AND BRUSH MY TEETH AND I
HAVEN'T EVEN HAD ANY BREAKFAST.

OH, I SEE. YOU WERE
SO LATE YOU DIDN'T HAVE
ANY BREAKFAST, BUT STILL
HAD TIME TO PUT
ON EYE MAKE-UP.



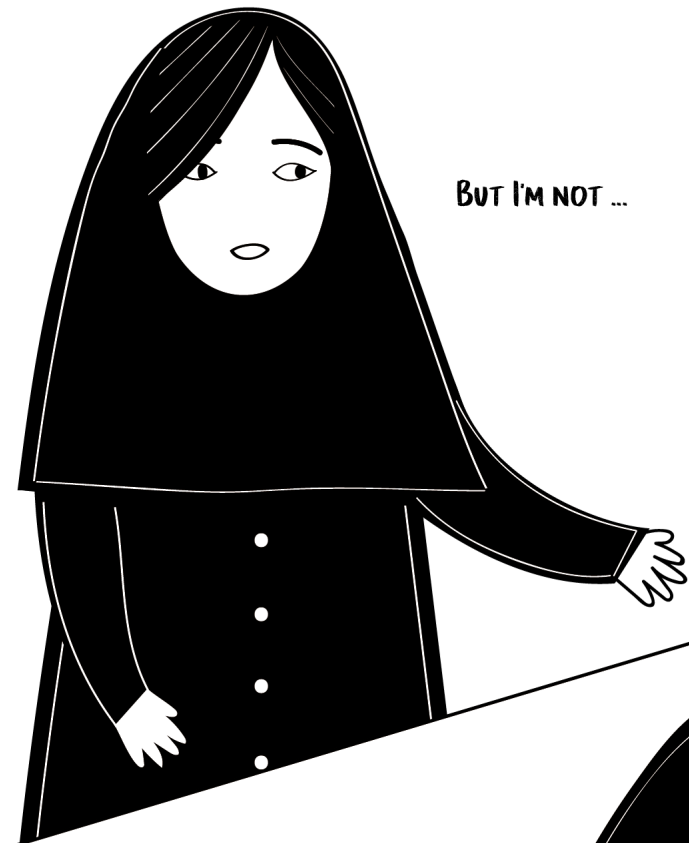
A black and white line drawing of a woman wearing a black hijab and a black uniform with white buttons. She has a slightly annoyed or exasperated expression. A large speech bubble is positioned above her head.

ARE YOU NOT LISTENING TO ME??!
I ONLY HAD TIME TO WASH MY FACE, BRUSH
MY TEETH AND PUT ON MY UNIFORM! IF YOU
DON'T BELIEVE YOU, WIPE MY EYES WITH THIS
PIECE OF TISSUE TO SEE IF IT
LEAVES ANY TRACES.

A black and white line drawing of a woman wearing a black hijab. She has a neutral to slightly skeptical expression. A speech bubble is positioned above her head.

NO,
THAT'S NOT NECESSARY.
I CAN SEE THE MAKE-UP
AND I TRUST MY
OWN EYES.

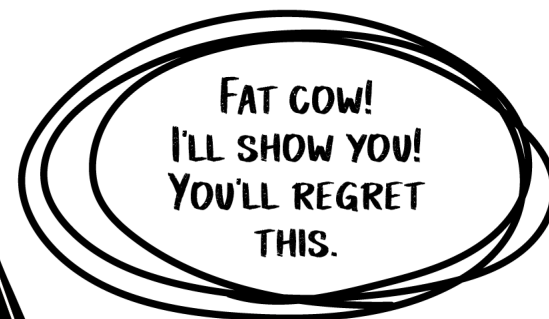
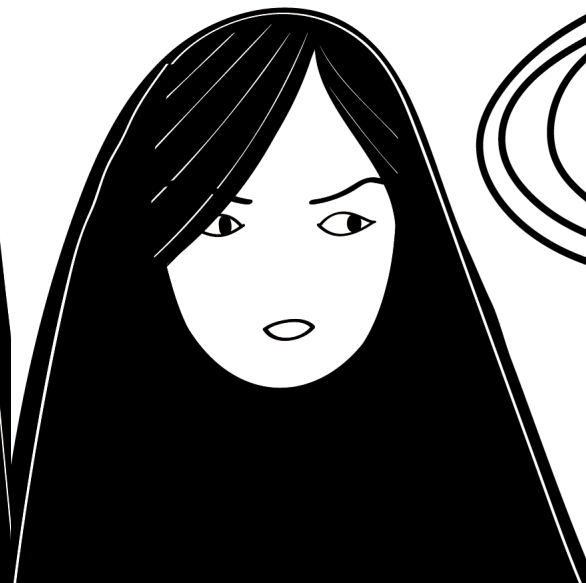
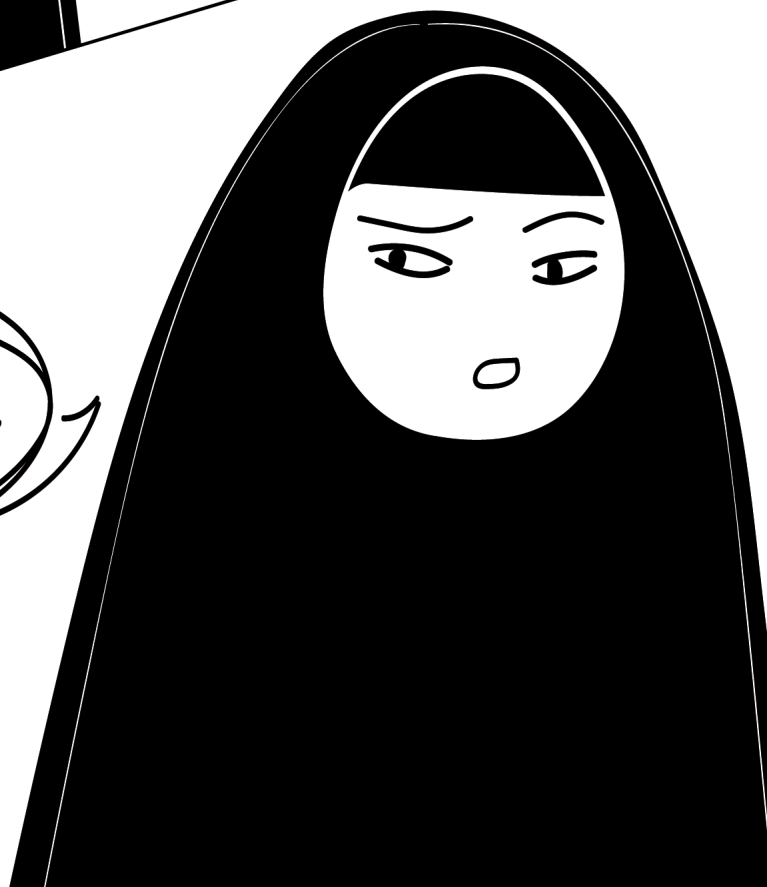




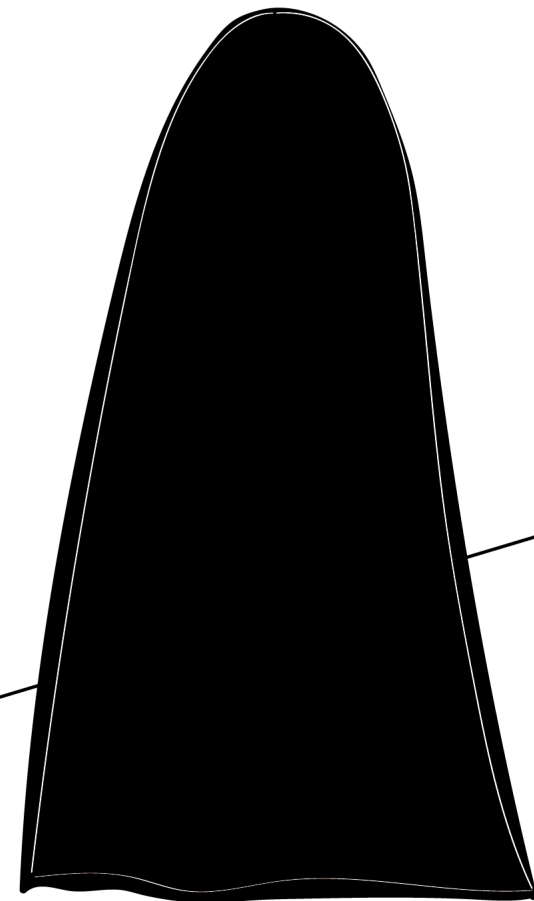
BUT I'M NOT ...

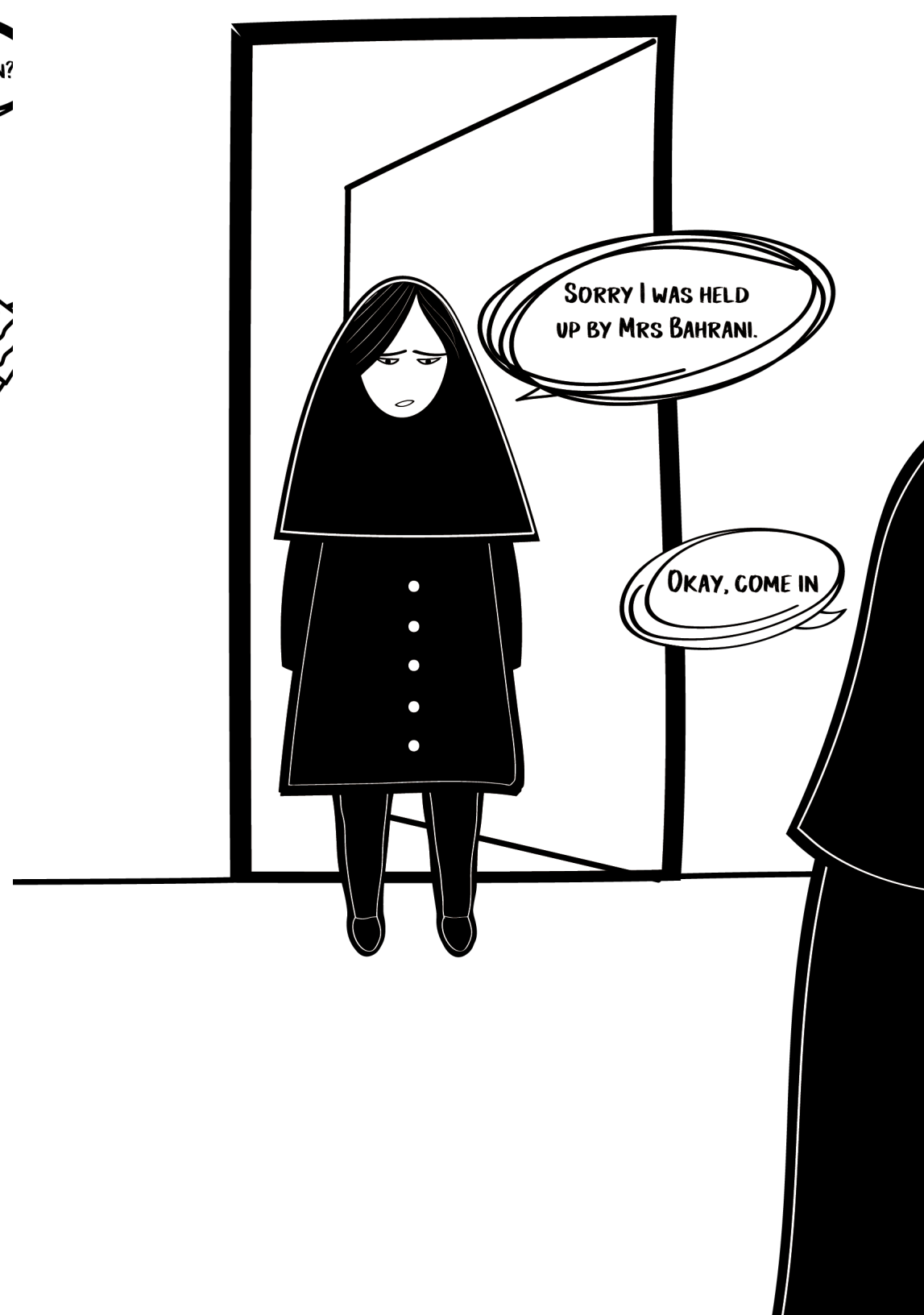


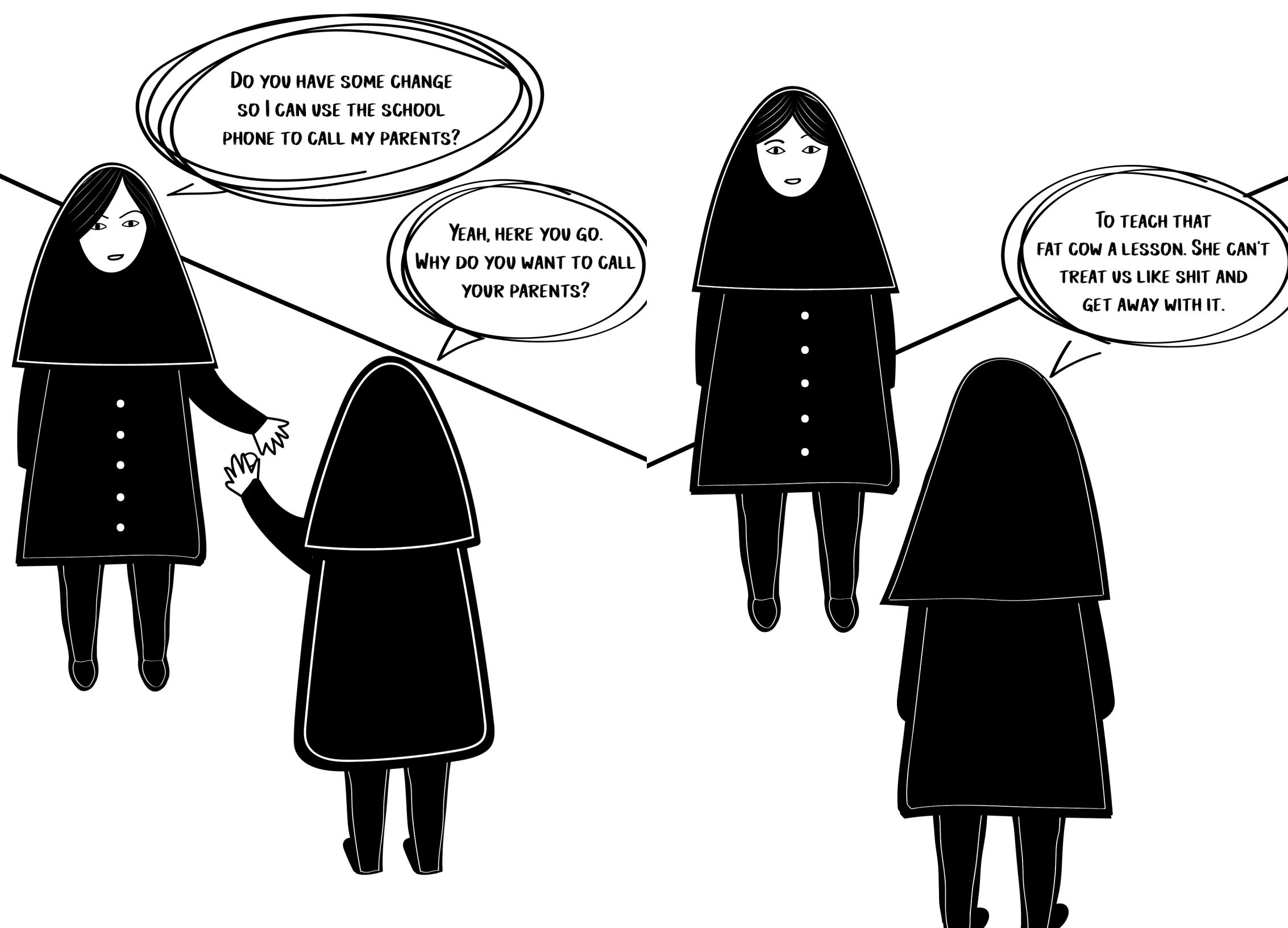
I SAID GO BACK,
NOW!



FAT COW!
I'LL SHOW YOU!
YOU'LL REGRET
THIS.



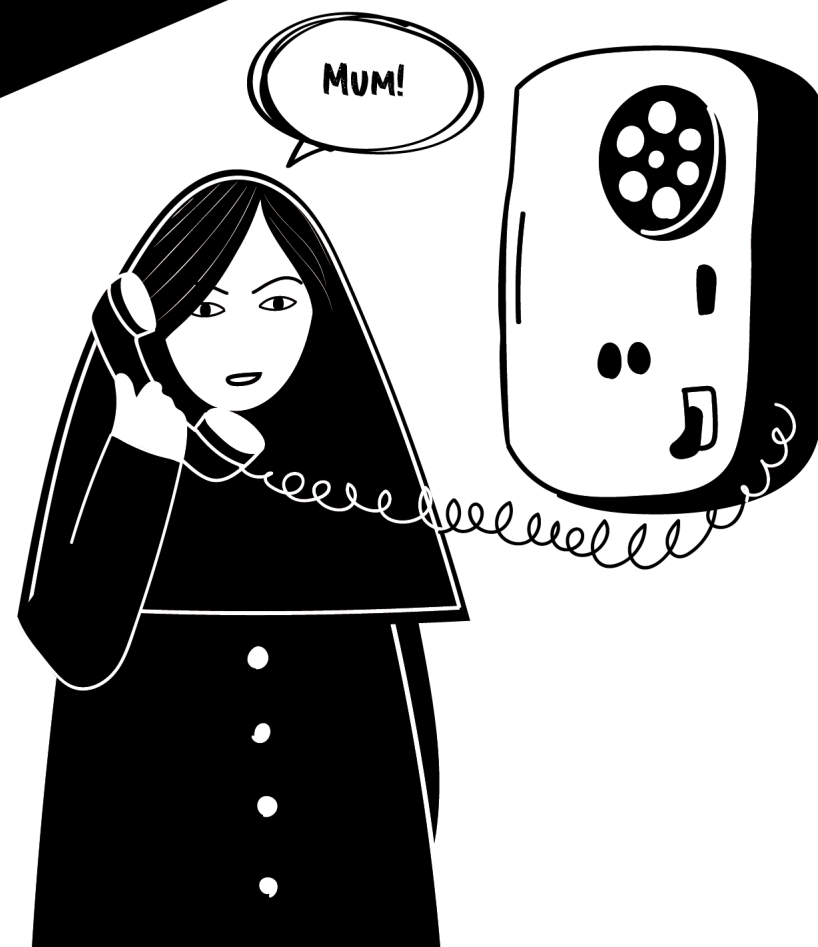





DO YOU HAVE SOME CHANGE
SO I CAN USE THE SCHOOL
PHONE TO CALL MY PARENTS?


YEAH, HERE YOU GO.
WHY DO YOU WANT TO CALL
YOUR PARENTS?

TO TEACH THAT
FAT COW A LESSON. SHE CAN'T
TREAT US LIKE SHIT AND
GET AWAY WITH IT.






ELHAM? WHERE ARE YOU?
WHAT'S HAPPENED?



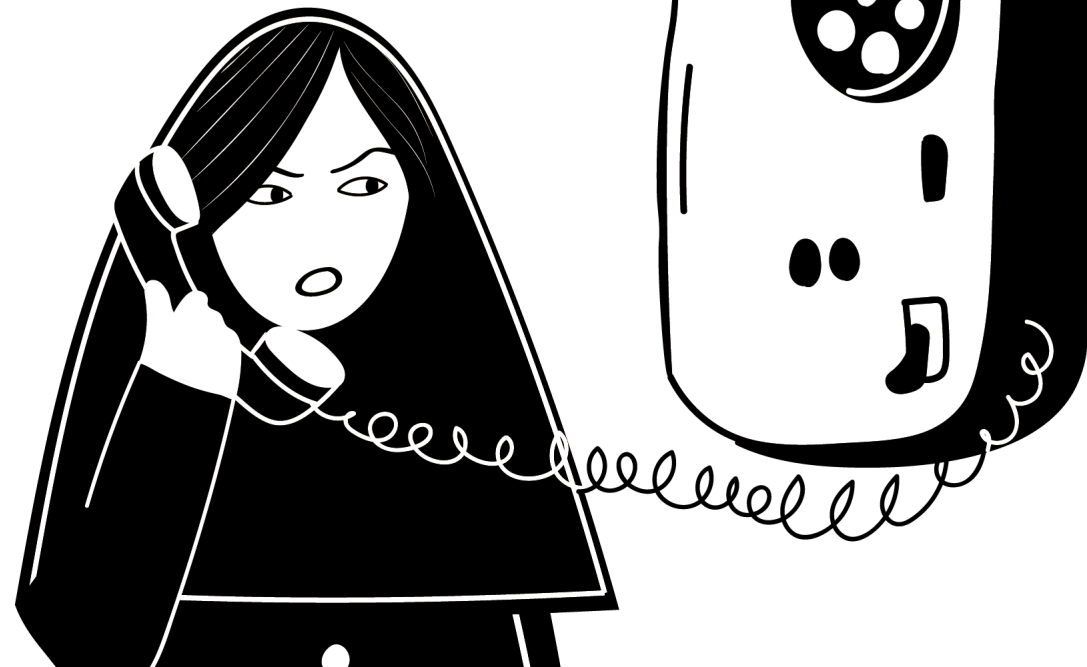
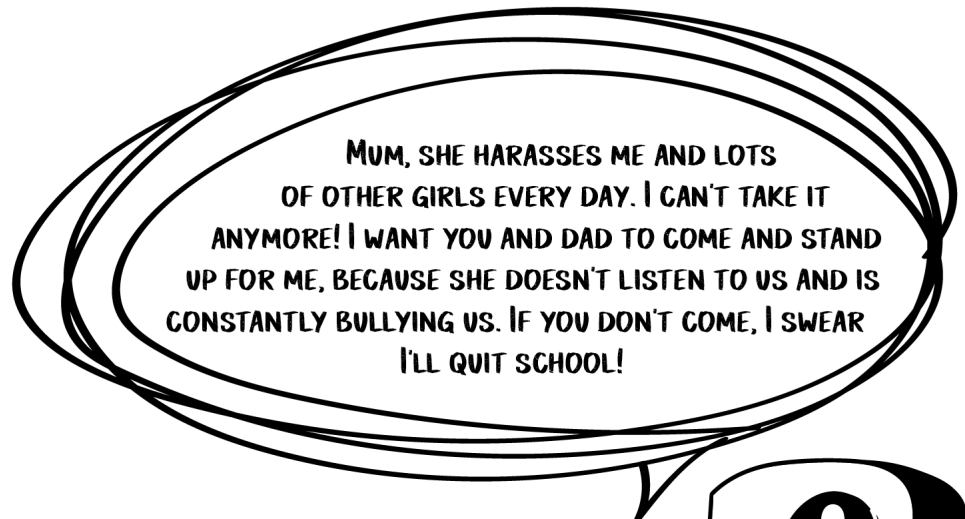
WHAT'S HAPPENED?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

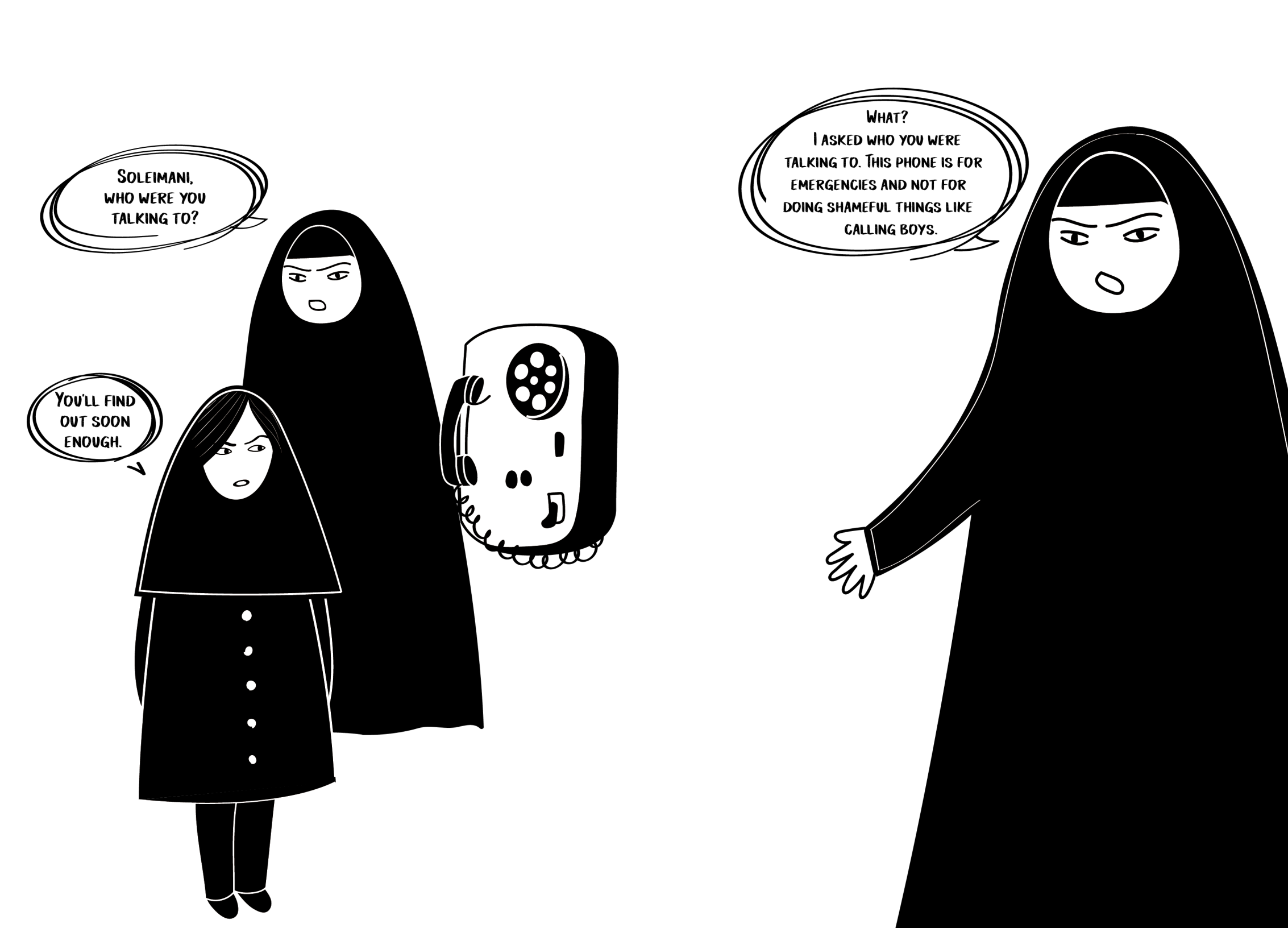


MUM, PLEASE COME TO THE
SCHOOL WITH DAD RIGHT NOW.
I'VE HAD ENOUGH!



THIS MORNING
MRS BAHRANI ACCUSED ME OF
WEARING EYE MAKE-UP AND
LYING ABOUT IT

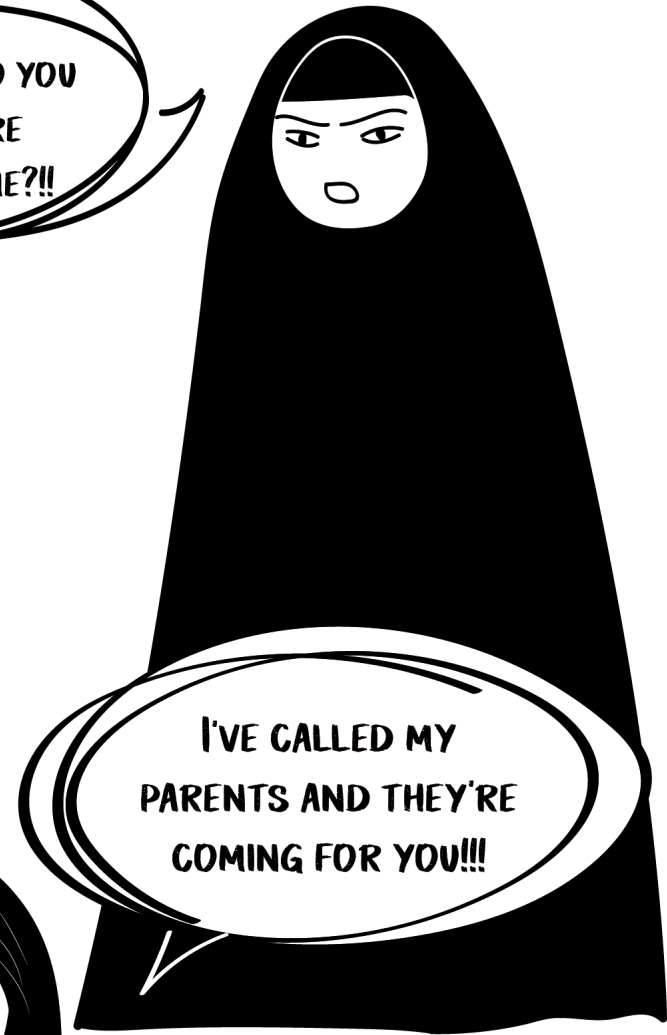
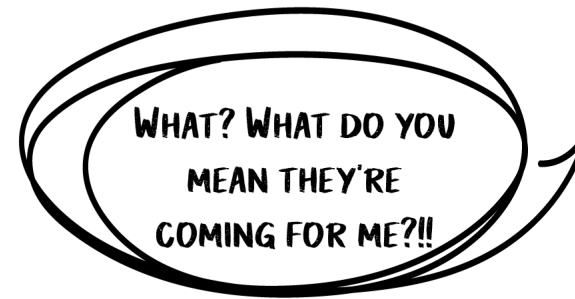
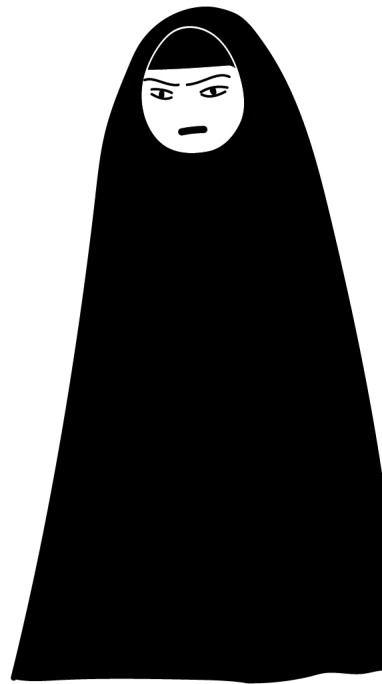


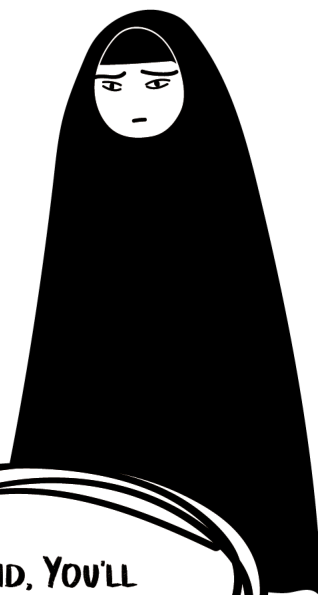
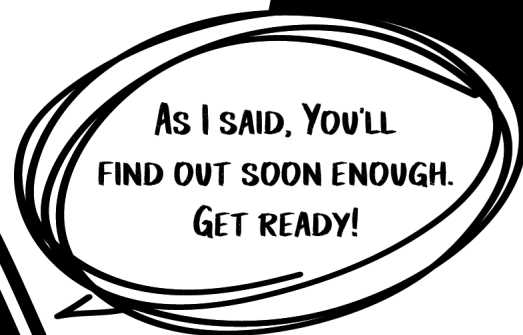


SOLEIMANI,
WHO WERE YOU
TALKING TO?

YOU'LL FIND
OUT SOON
ENOUGH.


WHAT?
I ASKED WHO YOU WERE
TALKING TO. THIS PHONE IS FOR
EMERGENCIES AND NOT FOR
DOING SHAMEFUL THINGS LIKE
CALLING BOYS.





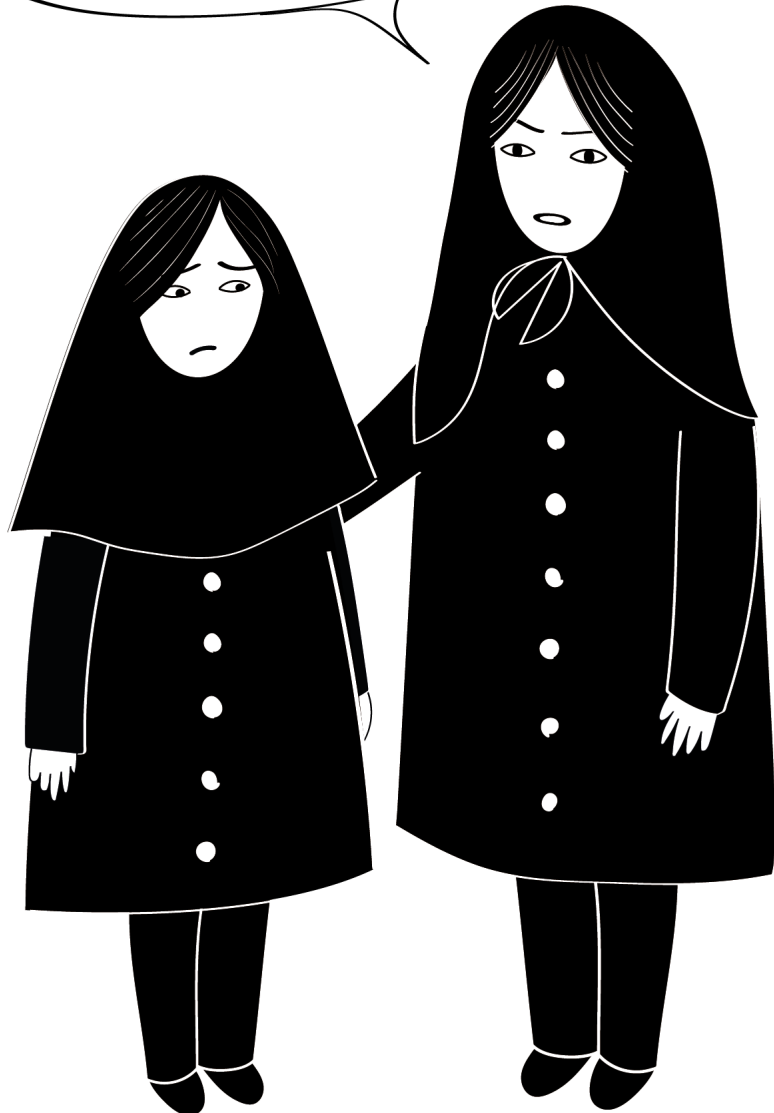


ELHAM, ELHAM!
OVER HERE.



MUM, THANK GOD
YOU CAME. SHE'S IN THE MAIN OFFICE. PLEASE
MUM, FOR ONCE STAND UP FOR ME. IT'S JUST SO
UNFAIR AND I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE. SHE DOES
THAT TO EVERYONE, NO ONE DARES
TELL HER OFF.

DON'T WORRY, I'M NOT SCARED OF HER.
SHE HAS NO RIGHT TREATING YOU THIS WAY. I'LL DO
MY BEST TO PUT AN END TO IT AND IF I CAN'T, YOUR DAD
IS WAITING OUTSIDE.
HE'LL COME IN IF I CALL HIM.




YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S LIKE
WHEN IT COMES TO YOU!

OH, GOD HELP HER!






HELLO MRS SOLEIMANI,
WHAT'S BROUGHT YOU IN?



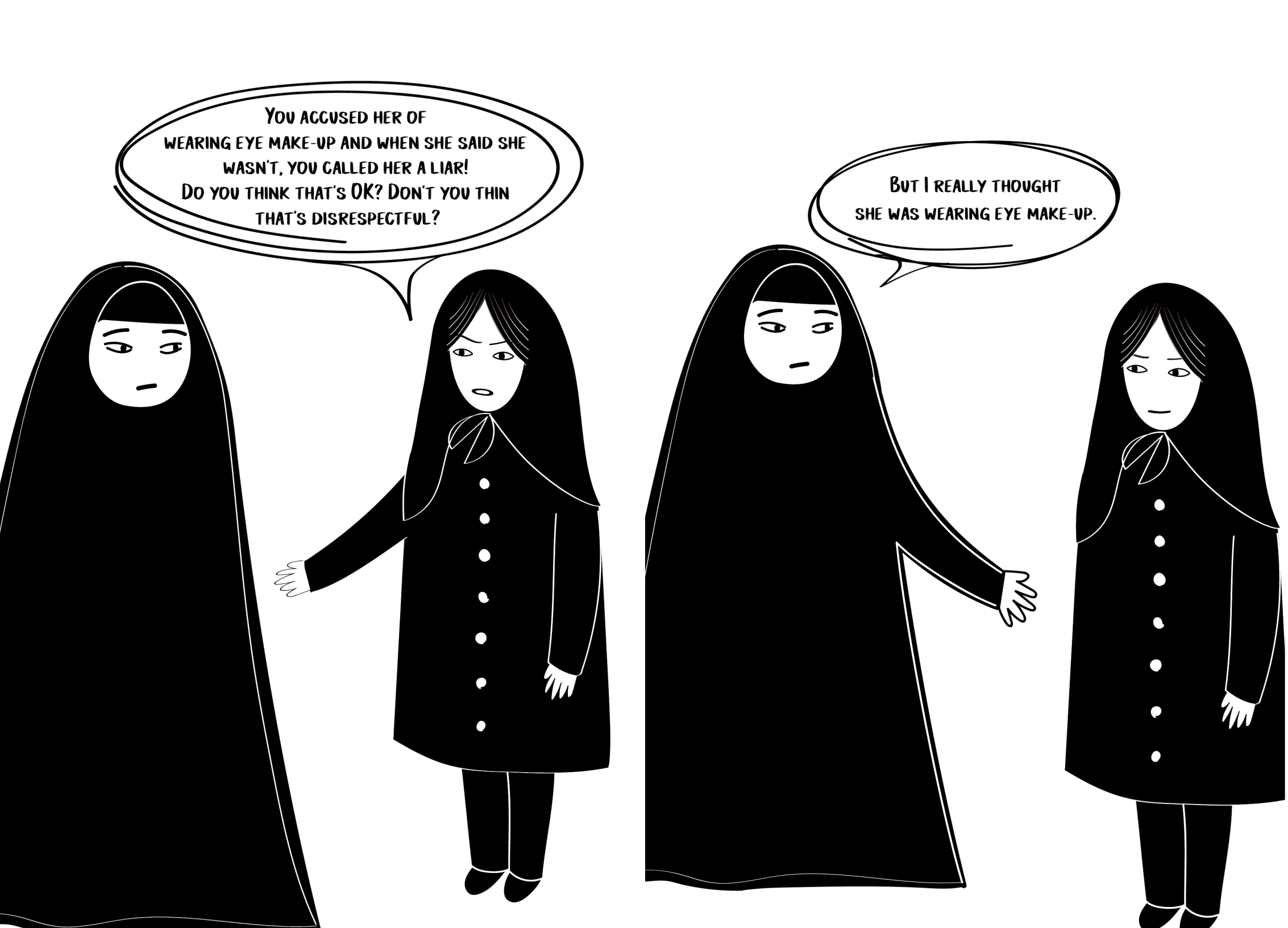
ELHAM CALLED ME AND I
THOUGHT I SHOULD COME IN.



OH OK,
HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

HELLO MRS BAHRANI.





YOU ACCUSED HER OF
WEARING EYE MAKE-UP AND WHEN SHE SAID SHE
WASN'T, YOU CALLED HER A LIAR!
DO YOU THINK THAT'S OK? DON'T YOU THIN
THAT'S DISRESPECTFUL?

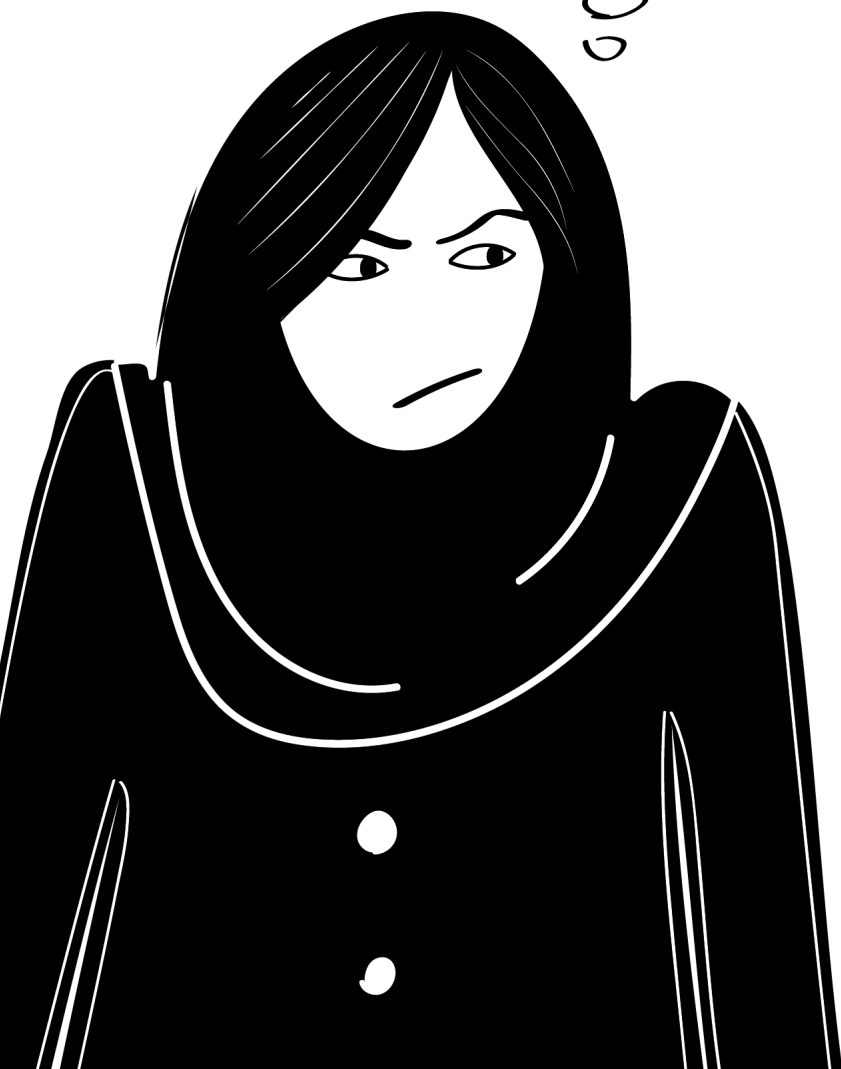
BUT I REALLY THOUGHT
SHE WAS WEARING EYE MAKE-UP.

EXACTLY,
YOU'RE SAYING YOU THOUGHT SHE WAS
WEARING MAKE-UP BUT YOU COULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURE.
SHE ASKED YOU TO WIPE HER EYES AND YOU DIDN'T,
BUT INSTEAD YOU ACCUSE
HER OF LYING.



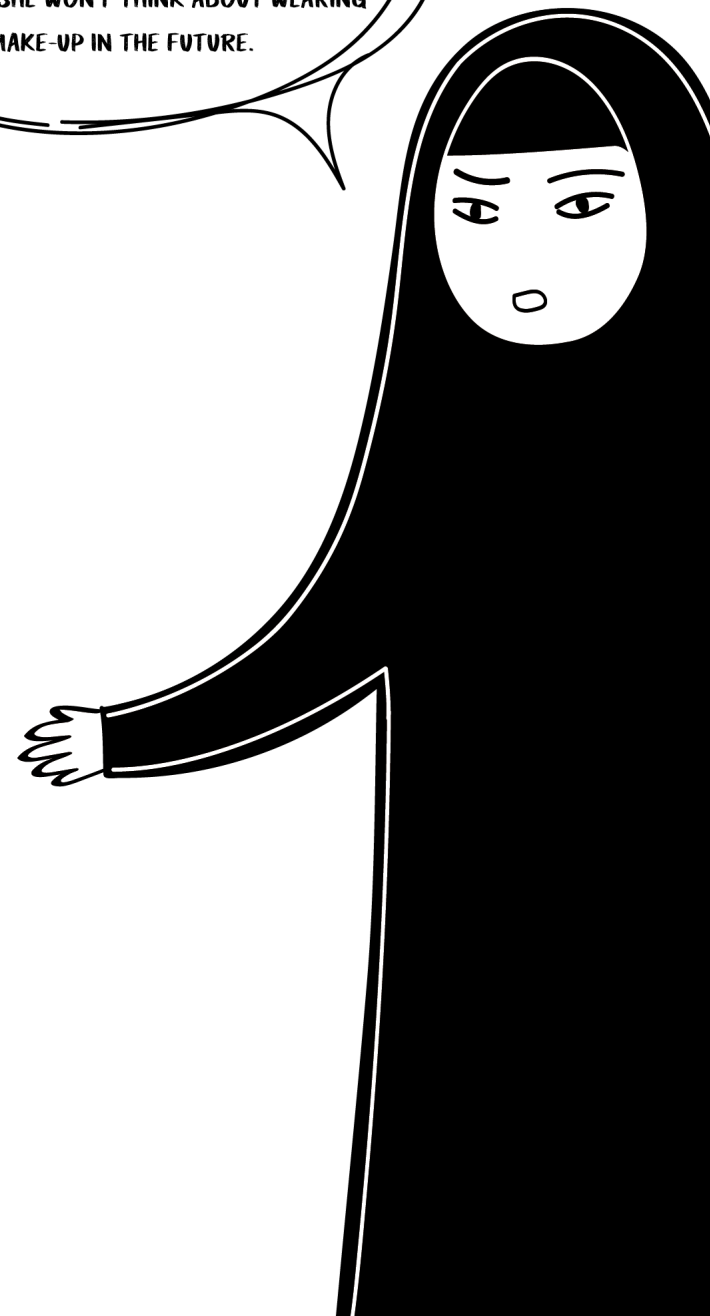
I KNOW, BUT SHE HAS
VERY BEAUTIFUL EYES. THAT'S PROBABLY
WHY I THOUGHT SHE WAS
WEARING EYE MAKE-UP

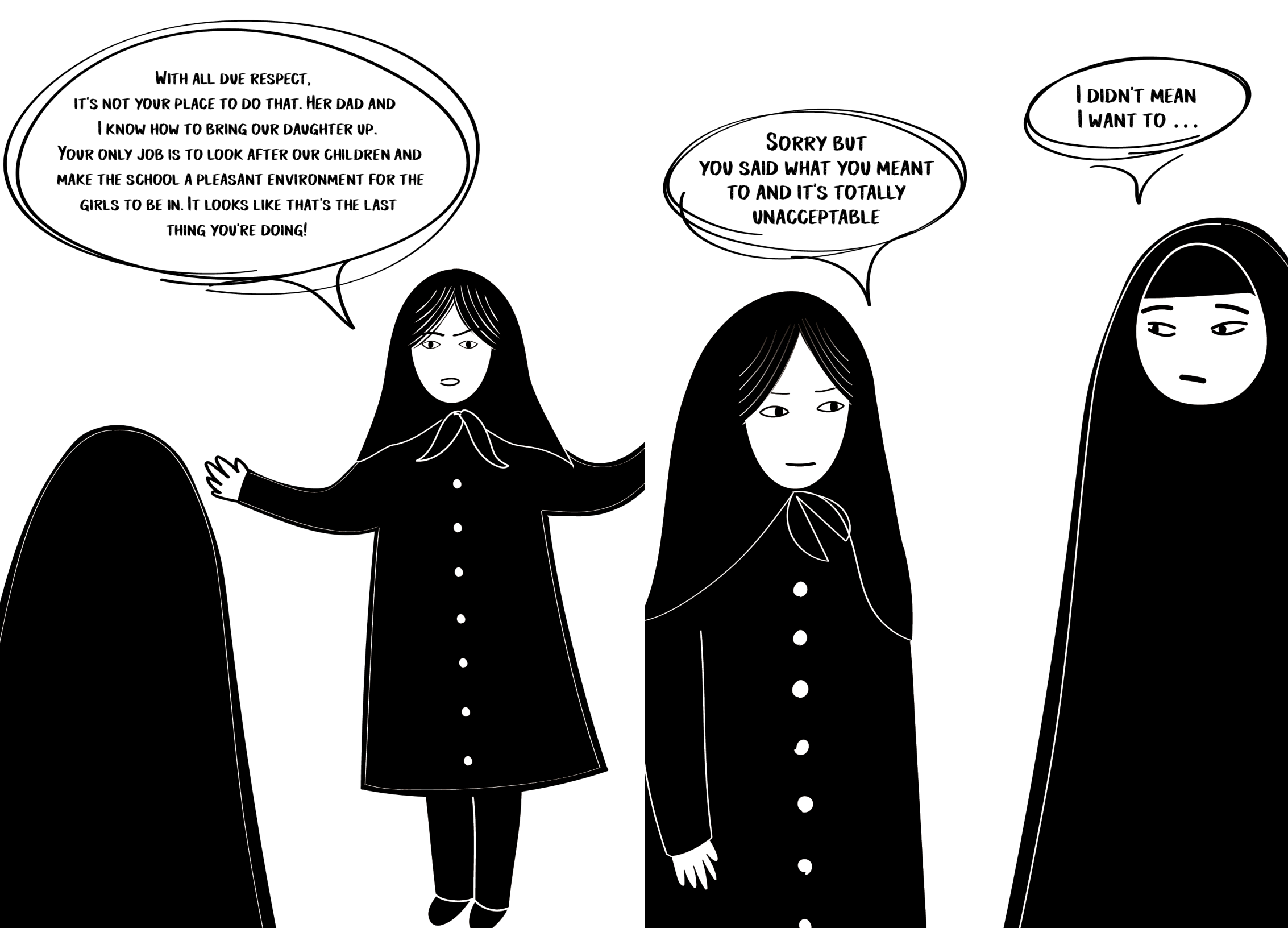




WHAT A LIAR!
I JUST FEEL SO SORRY FOR HER.

AS I WAS SAYING, I HAD GOOD
INTENTIONS. I JUST WANTED TO SCARE
HER SO SHE WON'T THINK ABOUT WEARING
MAKE-UP IN THE FUTURE.






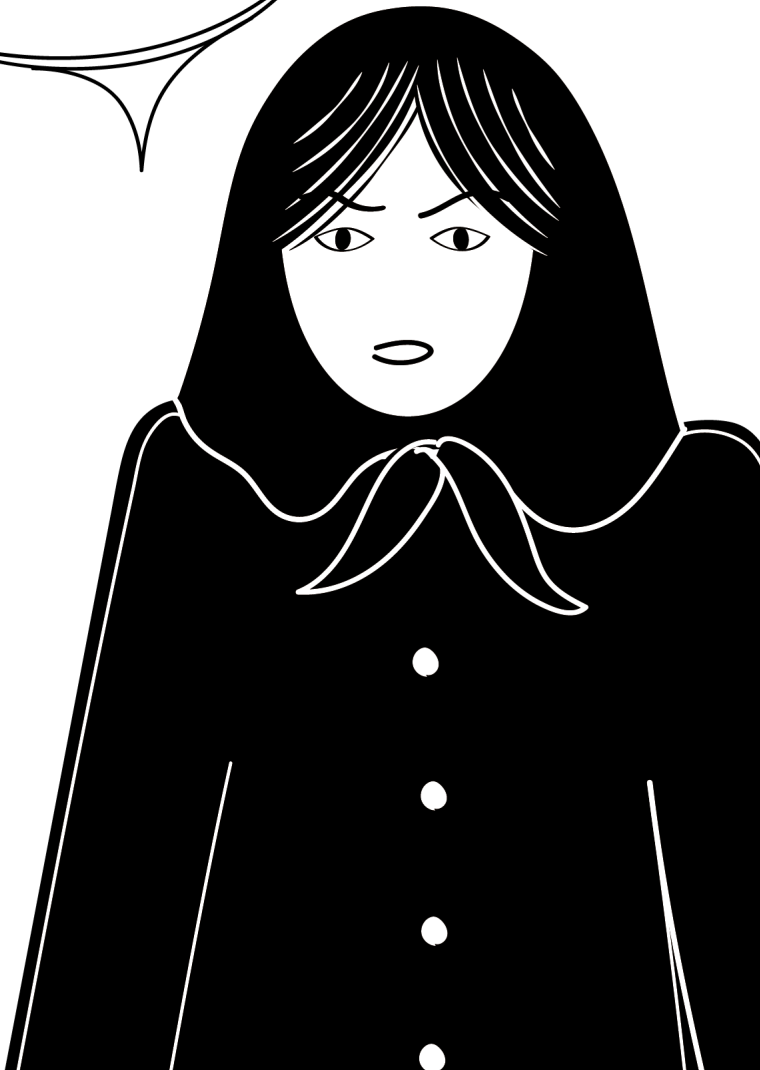
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT,
IT'S NOT YOUR PLACE TO DO THAT. HER DAD AND
I KNOW HOW TO BRING OUR DAUGHTER UP.
YOUR ONLY JOB IS TO LOOK AFTER OUR CHILDREN AND
MAKE THE SCHOOL A PLEASANT ENVIRONMENT FOR THE
GIRLS TO BE IN. IT LOOKS LIKE THAT'S THE LAST
THING YOU'RE DOING!

SORRY BUT
YOU SAID WHAT YOU MEANT
TO AND IT'S TOTALLY
UNACCEPTABLE

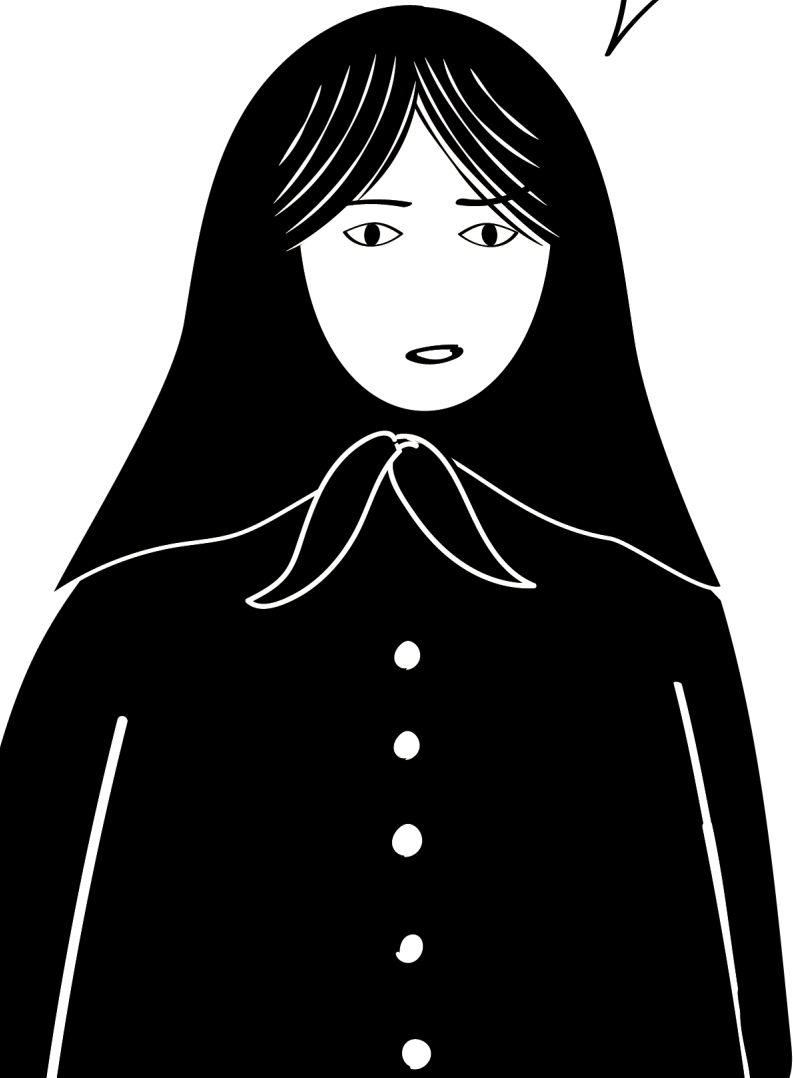
I DIDN'T MEAN
I WANT TO ...



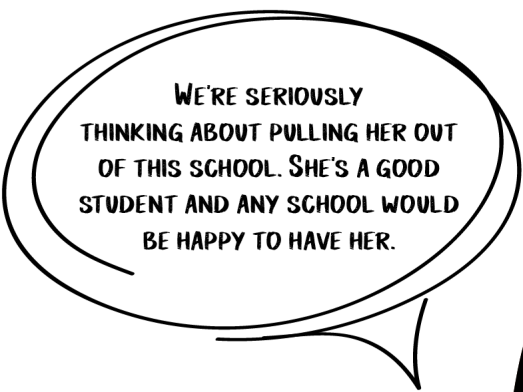
HONESTLY,
IF I'M HERE IT'S NOT JUST FOR MY OWN DAUGHTER.
I KEEP HEARING FROM HER FRIENDS THAT YOU
ALWAYS DISRESPECT STUDENTS AND BELITTLE
THEM WHEN THEY'RE RUNNING, LAUGHING, PLAYING
SPORTS OR,
GOD FORBID, DANCING!



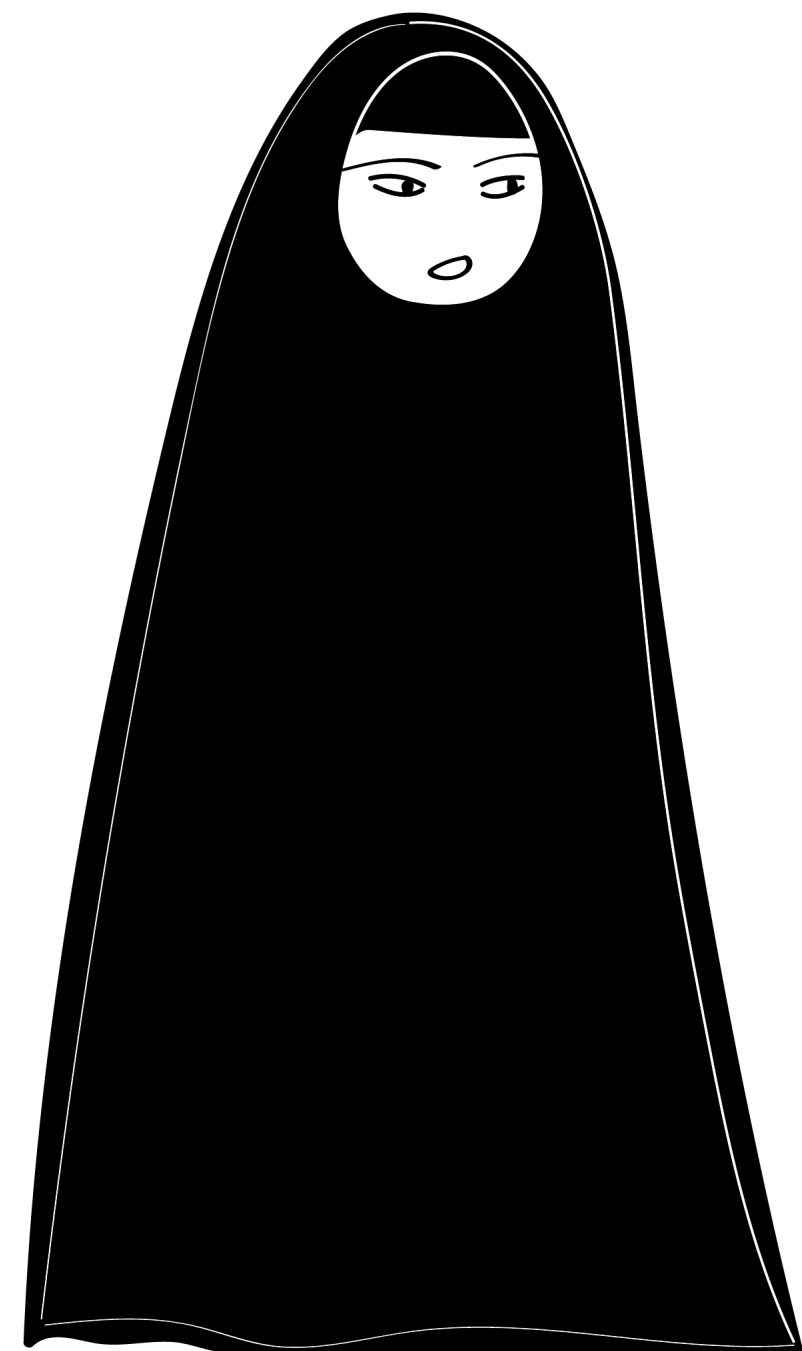
IT'S NOT LIKE
WE HAVE MIXED SCHOOLS IN THIS
COUNTRY. ALL THE STUDENTS HERE ARE
GIRLS AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT
YOUR PROBLEM IS. IT'S NOT LIKE IF
THEY DANCE OR LAUGH, THEY'RE GOING
TO PROVOKE ANYONE!

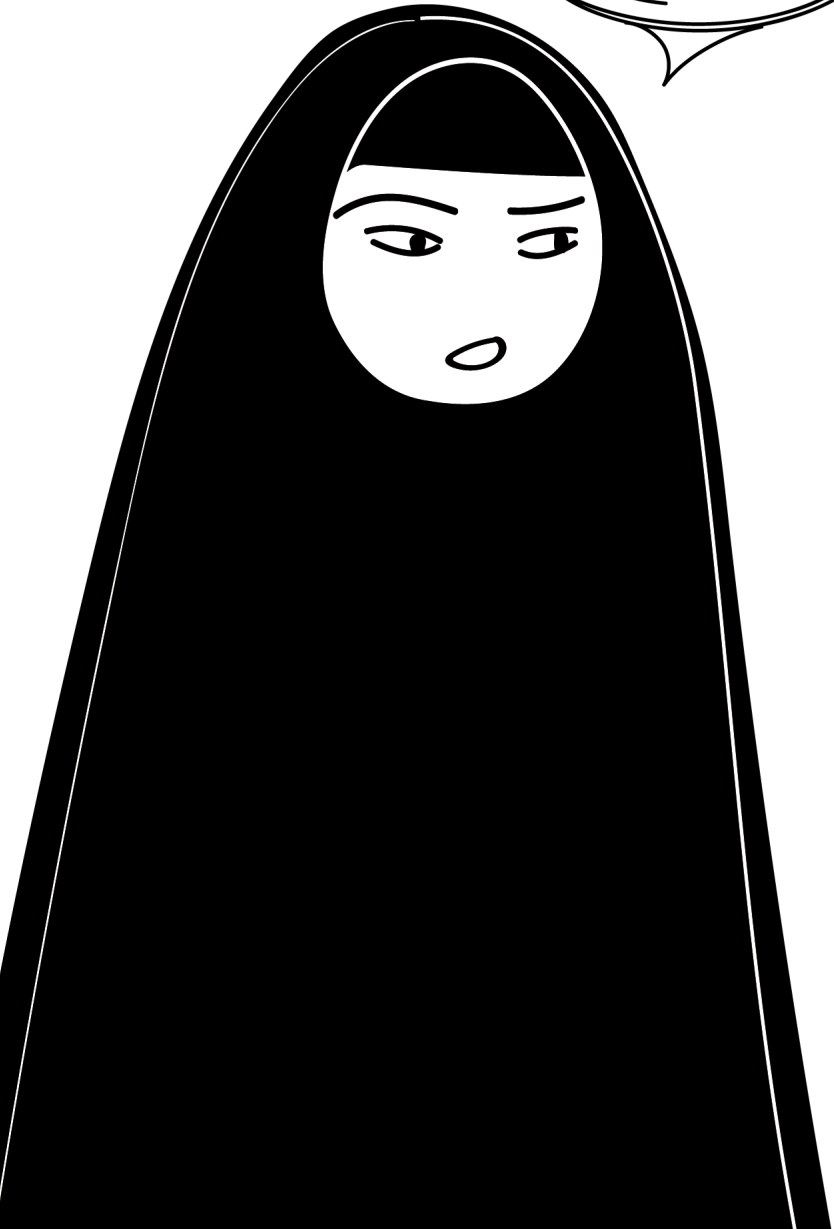


I'M ASHAMED THAT I MUST BE SO
DIRECT, BUT YOU'VE LEFT ME NO CHOICE.
YOU MUST SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO
OUR CHILDREN HERE.

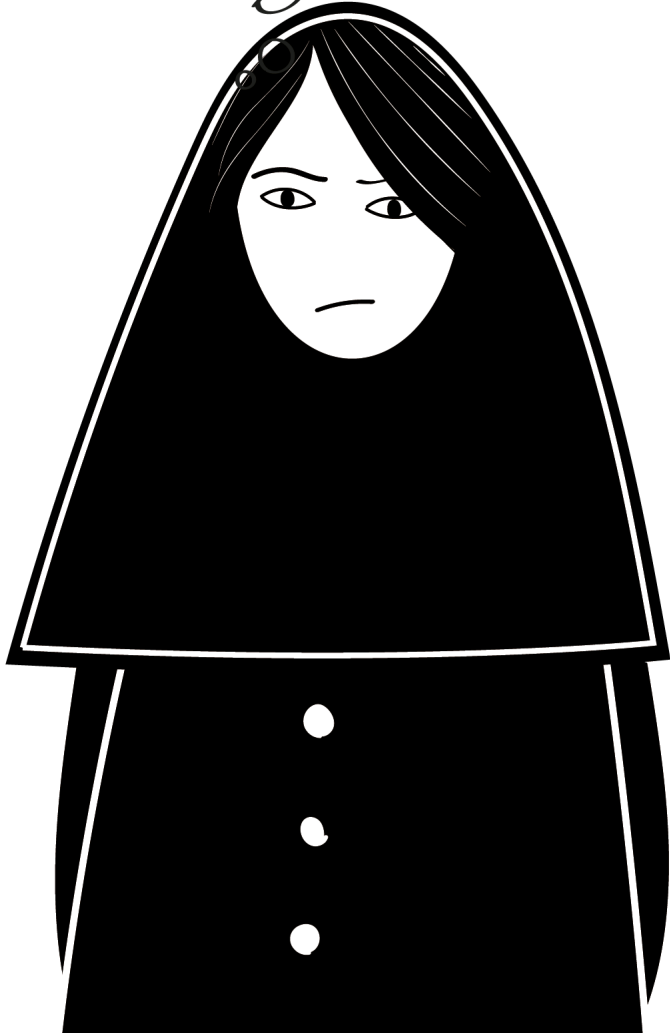


WE'RE SERIOUSLY
THINKING ABOUT PULLING HER OUT
OF THIS SCHOOL. SHE'S A GOOD
STUDENT AND ANY SCHOOL WOULD
BE HAPPY TO HAVE HER.

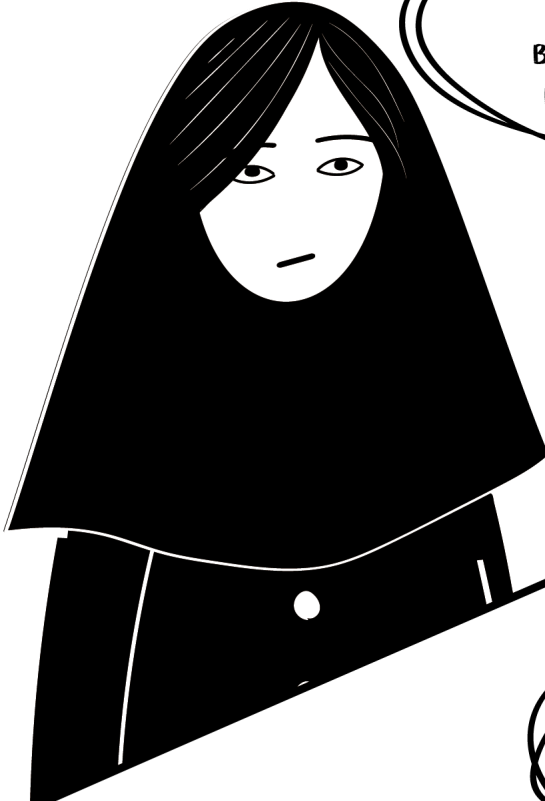





OK, OK.
ELHAM, I'M SORRY.



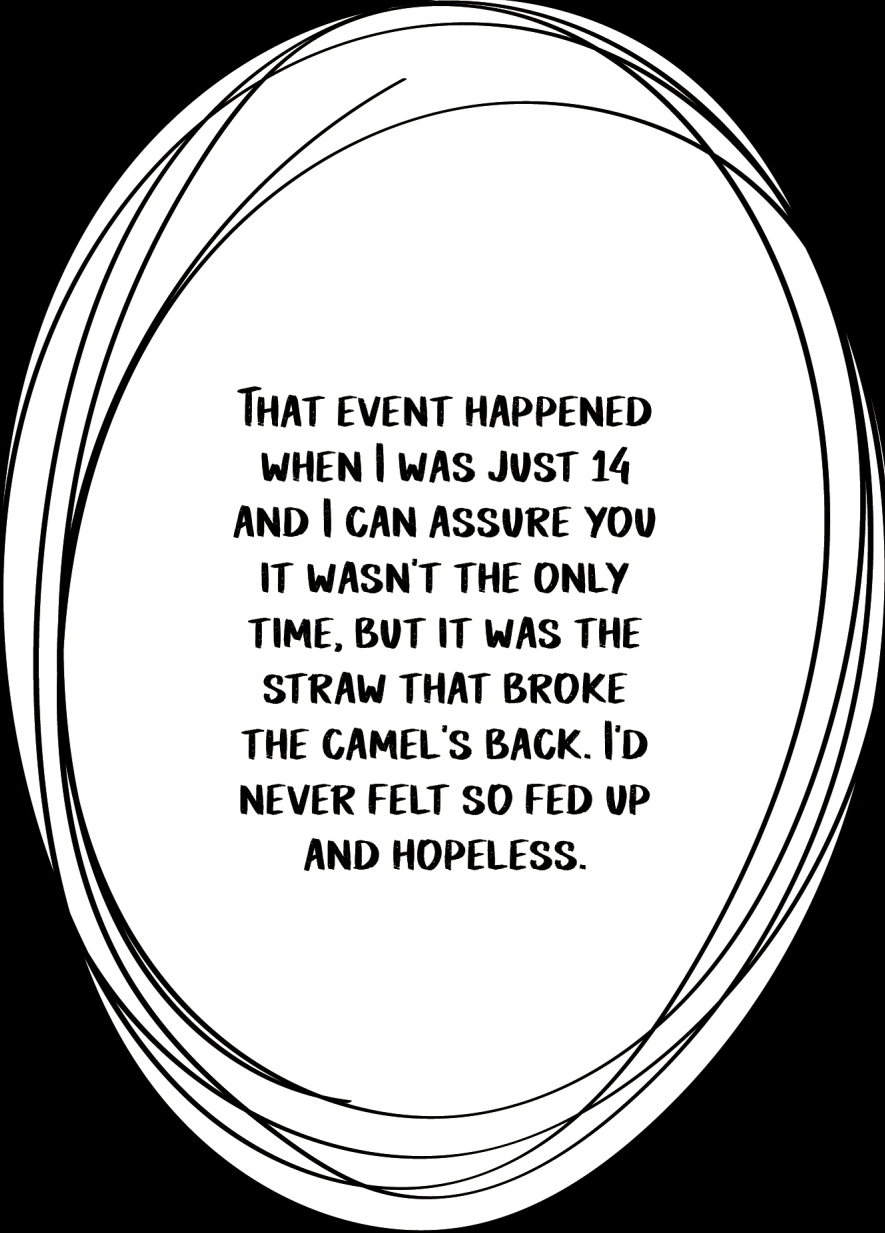
EVEN THOUGH THAT APOLOGY
WASN'T SINCERE, I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.
I KNEW SHE WASN'T SORRY AND SHE
ACTUALLY BELIEVED SHE WAS IN THE RIGHT,
BUT THAT SHE WAS ALSO AFRAID MY PARENTS
WOULD ESCALATE THE CASE.



FROM THAT DAY, SHE NEVER SAID
ANYTHING ELSE TO ME,
BUT SHE ALSO DIDN'T STOP
HARASSING OTHER GIRLS.



I'M NOT SURE IF THEY WERE
INFORMING THEIR PARENTS OF WHAT
WAS GOING ON (LIKE ME) OR THEY
WERE JUST PUTTING UP WITH IT.

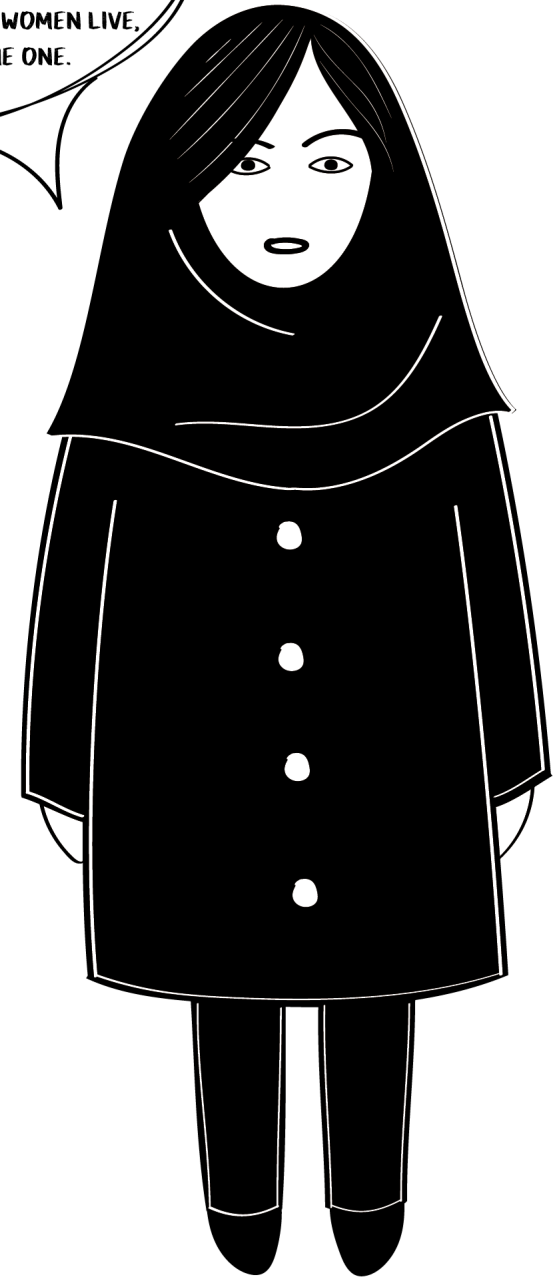


THAT EVENT HAPPENED
WHEN I WAS JUST 14
AND I CAN ASSURE YOU
IT WASN'T THE ONLY
TIME, BUT IT WAS THE
STRAW THAT BROKE
THE CAMEL'S BACK. I'D
NEVER FELT SO FED UP
AND HOPELESS.

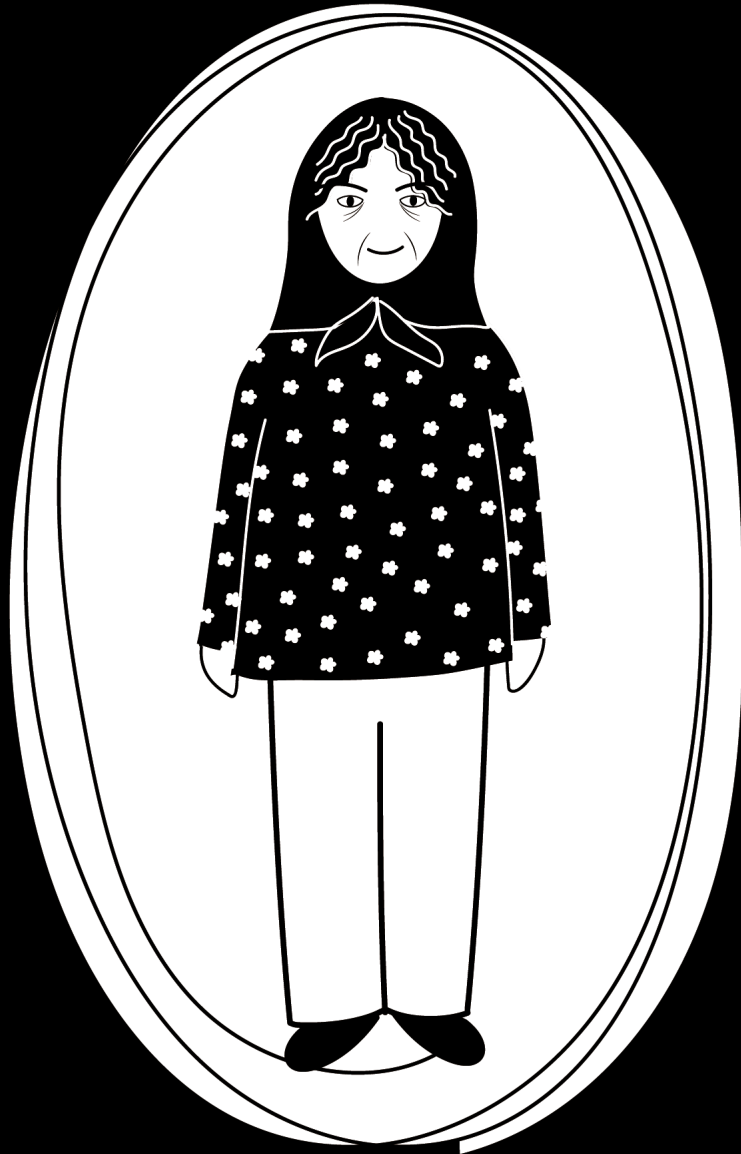
AT THE TIME, SCHOOL WAS JUST
A MICRO VERSION OF OUR SOCIETY, IN WHICH I
LATER FOUND MYSELF IN SIMILAR AND, AT TIMES,
MUCH WORSE SITUATIONS. I NOW KNOW THEY WERE
PREPARING US FOR THE REAL WORLD AS WOMEN, WHERE IT'S
COMPLETELY NORMAL TO BE TOLD WHAT TO DO, ESPECIALLY
WHAT TO WEAR AND HOW YOU NEED TO REPRESENT
YOURSELF IN SOCIETY. AND TO BE HONEST IT WORKED...
WELL FOR MANY OF US.



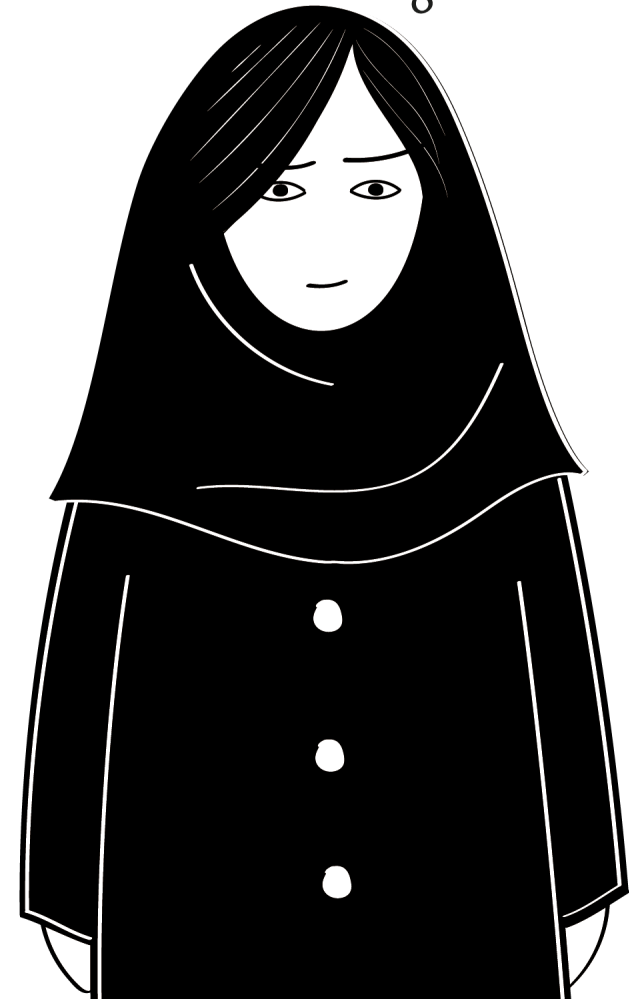
AT THE BEGINNING
AS A YOUNG GIRL, I THOUGHT MAYBE IT WAS
A SIGN THAT I WAS GROWING UP AND I
WASN'T A KID ANYMORE. SO IT WAS EVEN
EXCITING, BUT THEN AFTER A WHILE I
THOUGHT THAT IF THAT IS HOW WOMEN LIVE,
I DIDN'T WANT TO BECOME ONE.



I REMEMBER MY GRANDMOTHER ALWAYS HAD A HEADSCARF ON, ALTHOUGH SHE WAS NEVER RELIGIOUS. WHEN I WAS QUITE YOUNG, I ASKED HER MANY TIMES WHY SHE DIDN'T TAKE HER HEADSCARF OFF AND EACH TIME SHE SAID SHE LIKED TO HAVE IT ON, BECAUSE IT COMFORTED HER, BUT I NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW!

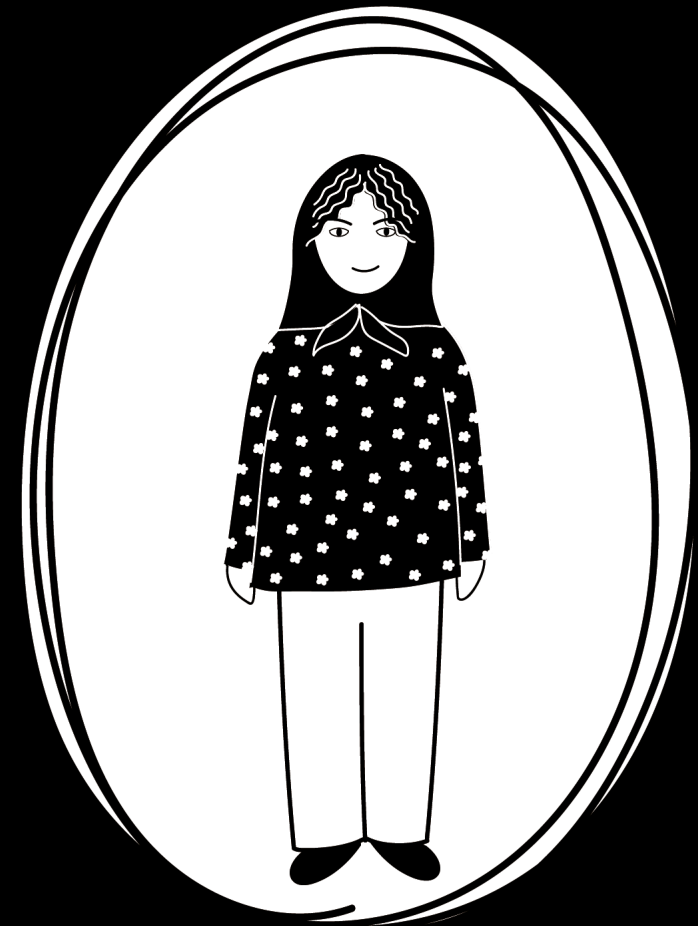


BUT NOW THAT I THINK BACK, IF YOU'RE SO USED TO WEARING SOMETHING FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, IT MUST BE QUITE DIFFICULT TO STOP, AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT MY GRANDMOTHER MEANT WHEN SHE SAID IT COMFORTED HER. BUT I COULD NEVER IMAGINE FEELING THAT WAY ABOUT WEARING A HEADSCARF. FOR ME, AS FAR AS I REMEMBER, WHEN IT CAME TO THE HIJAB AND WEARING A HEADSCARF, I ALWAYS WORE THEM FOR OTHERS, NOT MYSELF.



AS A YOUNG GIRL, WHEN SHE WAS ABOUT 8 OR 9, SHE
STARTED WEARING A HEADSCARF WITHOUT EVEN
BEING TOLD. SHE JUST SAW OTHER GIRLS DO IT AND
COPIED THEM, SO IT WAS A MATTER OF TRADITION.

I WAS SO AMAZED WHEN SHE EXPLAINED
THAT SHE HAD GONE THROUGH THREE
DIFFERENT ERAS WITH THE HIJAB.



AND THEN SHE TALKED ABOUT HOW SHE HAD BEEN
FORCED TO TAKE IT OFF DURING THE REIGN OF REZA
SHAH WHEN SHE WAS A TEENAGER



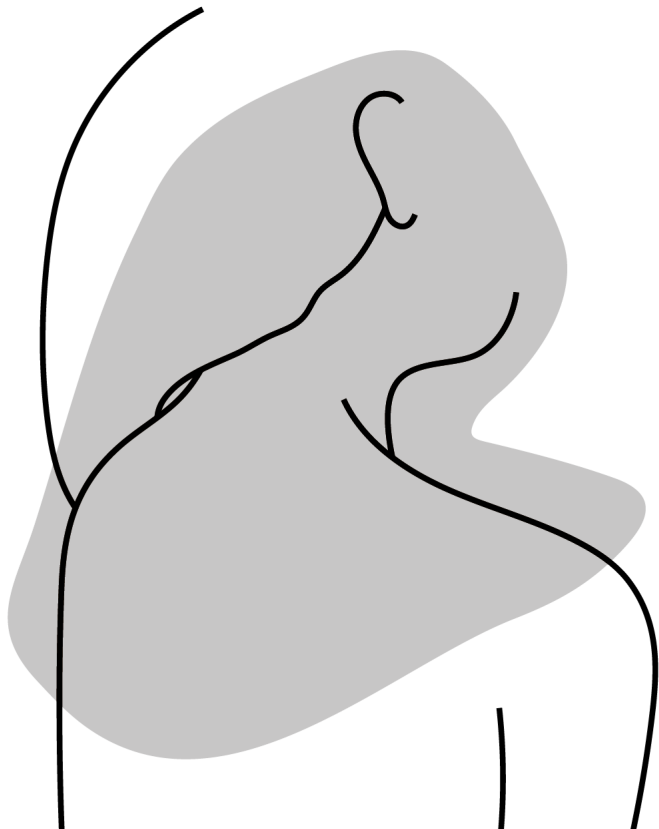
LATER, SHE WAS FORCED TO COVER UP AFTER THE
ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN MARCH 1983.



I STARTED TO THINK HOW THESE DRAMATIC CHANGES
MUST HAVE AFFECTED WOMEN MENTALLY,
EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY.

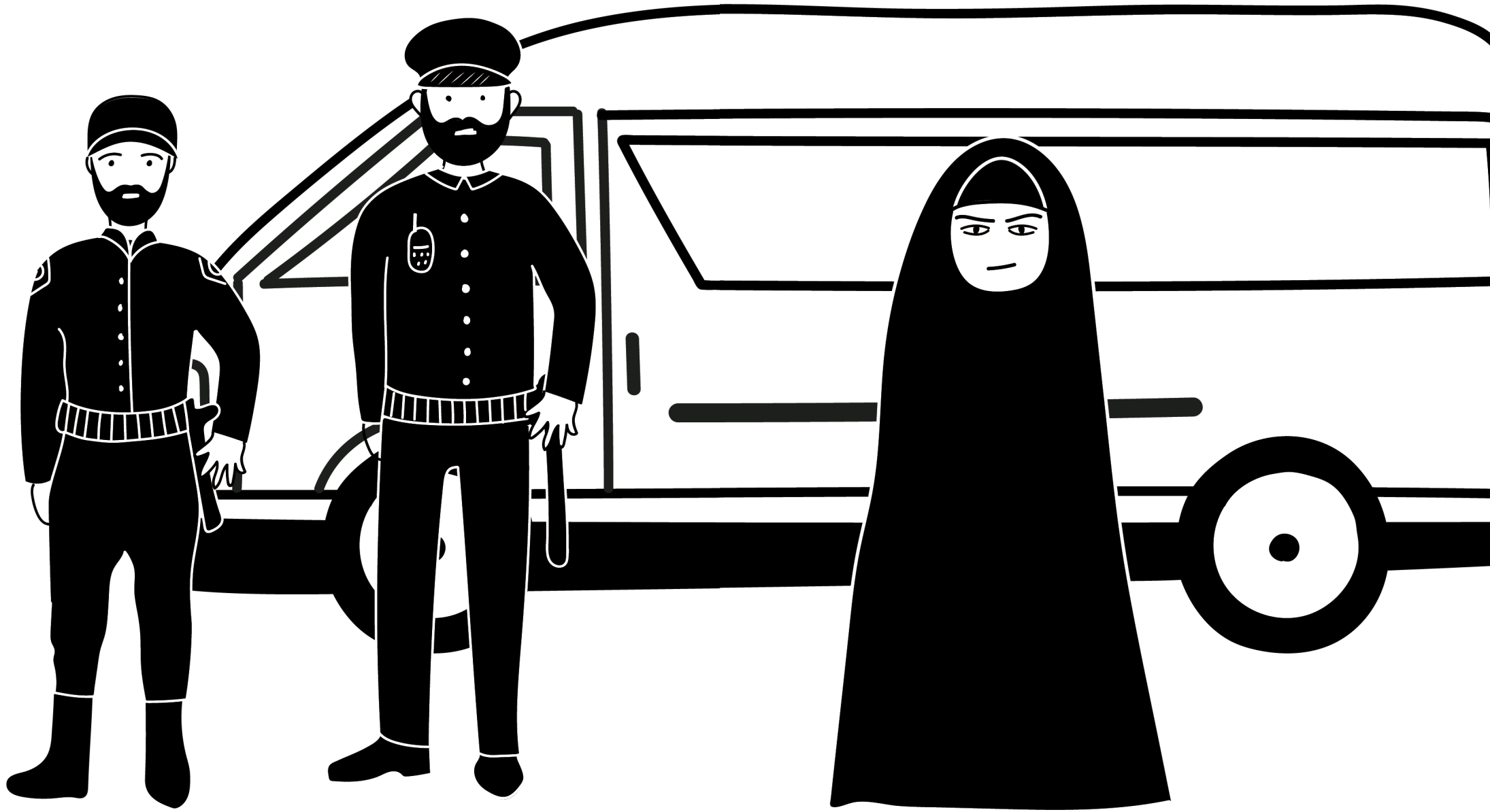
BUT

ALSO WHY THE FEMALE BODY HAS BEEN SO
IMPORTANT IN MY COUNTRY. SO MUCH SO THAT
DURING DIFFERENT PERIODS OF TIME, NO MATTER
WHO HAS BEEN IN POWER, THEY HAVE ALWAYS MADE
SURE FEMALE REPRESENTATION WAS IMPACTED.



AND EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS THAT THE SUBJECT OF THE
HIJAB AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION HAVE BEEN THE
CENTRE OF ATTENTION, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN CLEAR
GUIDANCE REGARDING WHAT'S ACCEPTABLE AND WHAT'S NOT,
WHICH IS ONE THE MAIN FACTORS THAT MAKES THE LAW
AROUND THE HIJAB IN IRAN SUCH A COMPELLING SUBJECT.

EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION, AND
WHEN I SAY EVERYONE, THAT INCLUDES THE MORALITY
POLICE, OR KOMITEH, AS WELL.



THE KOMITEH WAS INVENTED AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION BY THE GOVERNMENT TO MONITOR PEOPLE'S DAILY ACTIVITIES AND ENSURE THEY FOLLOWED THE NEW RULES, WHICH BANNED ALCOHOL, ORGANISING AND ATTENDING MIXED-SEX PARTIES, MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE NOT RELATED FROM SOCIALISING AND, ABOVE ALL, ARRESTING WOMEN THEY CONSIDERED TO BE DRESSED INAPPROPRIATELY. IN OTHER WORDS, INVADING PEOPLE'S PRIVACY AT EVERY LEVEL.



YET, THERE WASN'T ANY CLEAR GUIDELINES FOR THEM TO FOLLOW AND TO INDICATE TO WHAT EXTENT THEY COULD INTERROGATE PEOPLE, WHICH GRANTED THEM A HUGE AMOUNT OF POWER OVER ORDINARY CITIZENS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN. SOON THEIR JOB BECAME PRIMARILY ABOUT OVERSEEING AND INSTRUCTING WOMEN HOW TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY IN PUBLIC, WHICH THEY CARRIED OUT BY HARASSING AND DISRESPECTING THEM.



THERE WAS NO CLEAR RULES FOR WOMEN TO FOLLOW ON HOW TO PRESENT THEMSELVES IN PUBLIC, APART FROM WEARING COVERING THEIR HAIR AND BODY APPROPRIATELY, WHICH WAS VERY VAGUE AND WAS LEFT OPEN TO INTERPRETATION BY EVERYONE.

AS A RESULT OF THAT, DEALING WITH LOTS OF UNCERTAINTY BECAME A DAILY PART OF WOMEN'S LIVES. SINCE THE DEFINITION OF THE HIJAB HAD BECOME SUBJECTIVE, GETTING DRESSED AND THINKING ABOUT WHAT WOULD PUT A WOMAN AT RISK OF GETTING ARRESTED BECAME A DAILY DILEMMA FOR WOMEN.



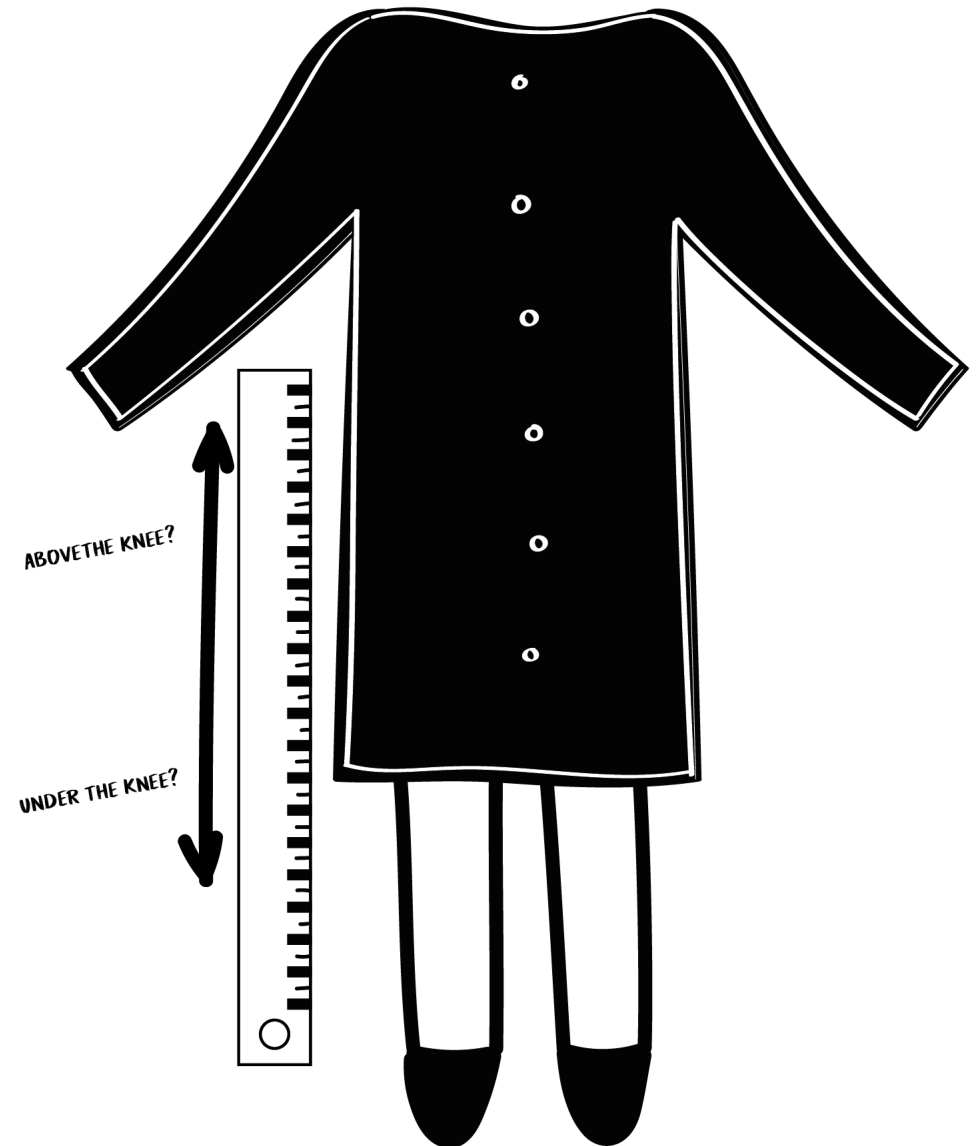
FROM MY OWN FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE, IT WAS ANXIETY
INDUCING NOT KNOWING WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN I
STEPPED OUT OF THE HOUSE. IT ONLY TOOK ONLY ONE OF
THOSE OFFICERS NOT TO LIKE THE WAY I WAS DRESSED
AND I'D BE IN A BIG TROUBLE.



FOR INSTANCE, THE

LENGTH

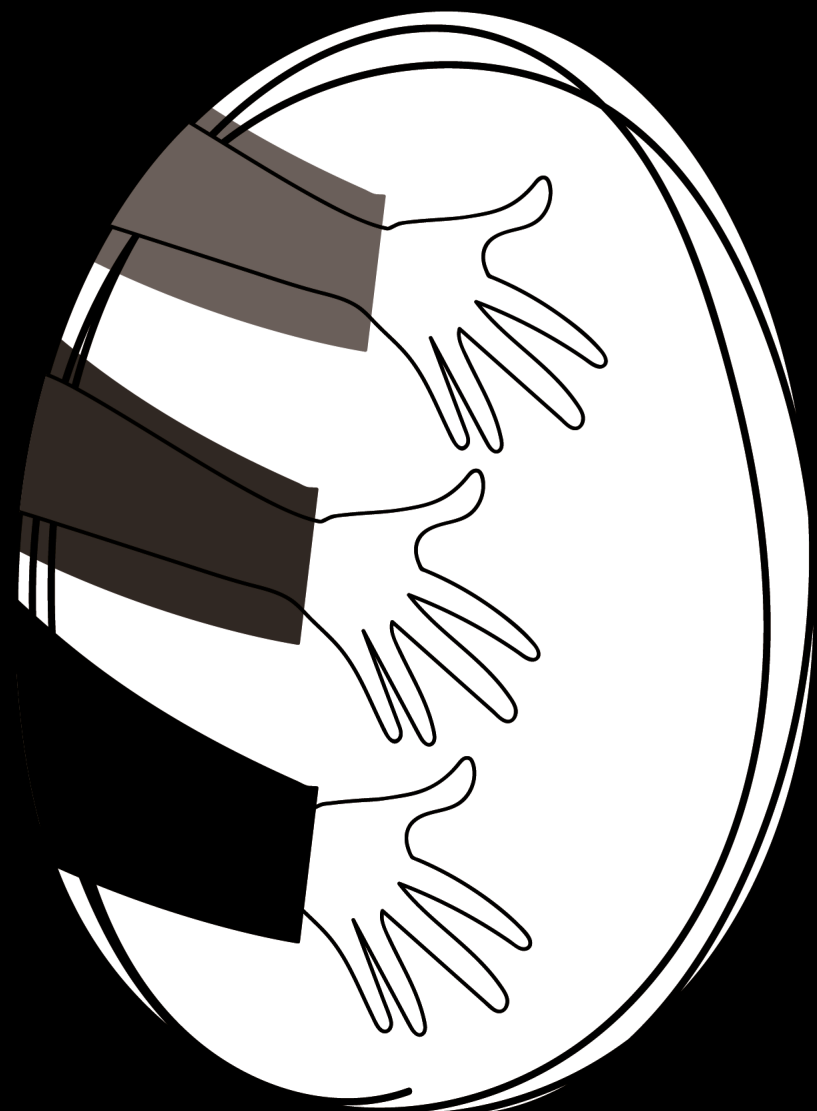
OF THE OUTFIT



THE
LENGTH
OF THE SLEEVES



THICKNESS




COLOURS



**AND
TIGHTNESS**





WHICH COULD BE FINE FROM ONE
PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE, BUT COMPLETELY
UNACCEPTABLE FROM ANOTHER PERSON'S
POINT OF VIEW, WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY
PROBLEMATIC...

WHERE DO YOU
DRAW THE LINE?

THEREFORE, DUE TO THESE AMBIGUITIES IN THE HIJAB LAW, IRANIAN WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VERY CREATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR REPRESENTATION IN PUBLIC. THEY TRY TO BE AS FASHIONABLE AS POSSIBLE – AND EVEN FOLLOW WESTERN FASHION TRENDS – BY CONSTANTLY REDRAWING THE LINE, SO THE LINE ISN'T CROSSED.

THEREFORE, A NEW NOTION OF THE HIJAB HAS BEEN SHAPED AND DEFINED OVER TIME. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE HIJAB AND ITEMS OF CLOTHING THAT ARE SUPPOSED TO COVER UP WOMEN'S HAIR AND BODY ARE TREATED AS ACCESSORIES AND USED IN FASHIONABLE WAYS RATHER THAN SEEN AS A TRADITIONAL OR RELIGIOUS SYMBOL.



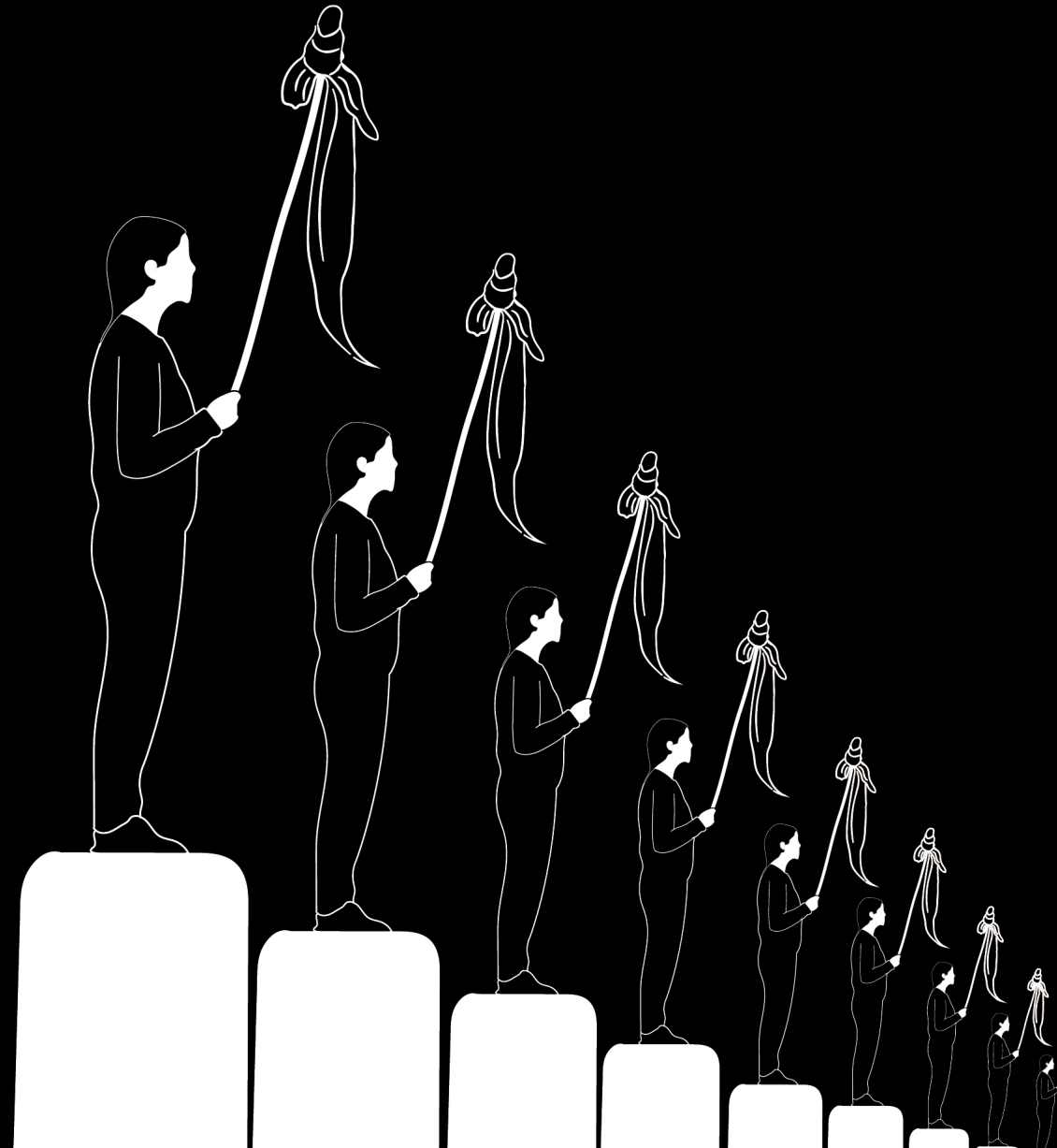
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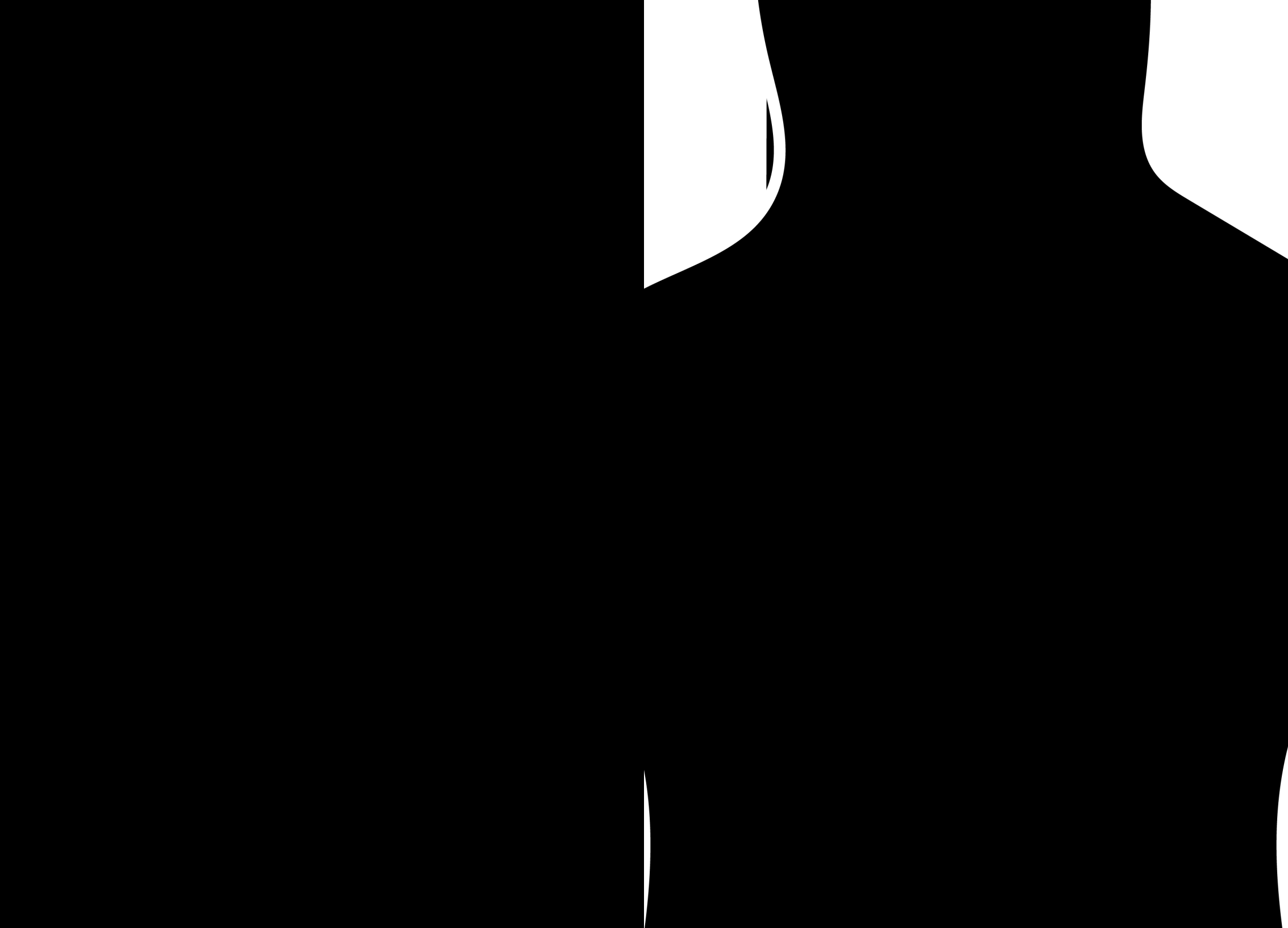
IN OTHER WORDS,
THEIR SOLE PURPOSE, WHICH
WAS TO CONCEAL A WOMAN'S
BODY AND PROTECT HER
MODESTY, HAS CHANGED.
THEY ARE NOW SEEN AS
PIECES OF CLOTHING THAT
ARE USED TO DECORATE A
WOMAN'S BODY AND SHOW
OFF HER STYLE.

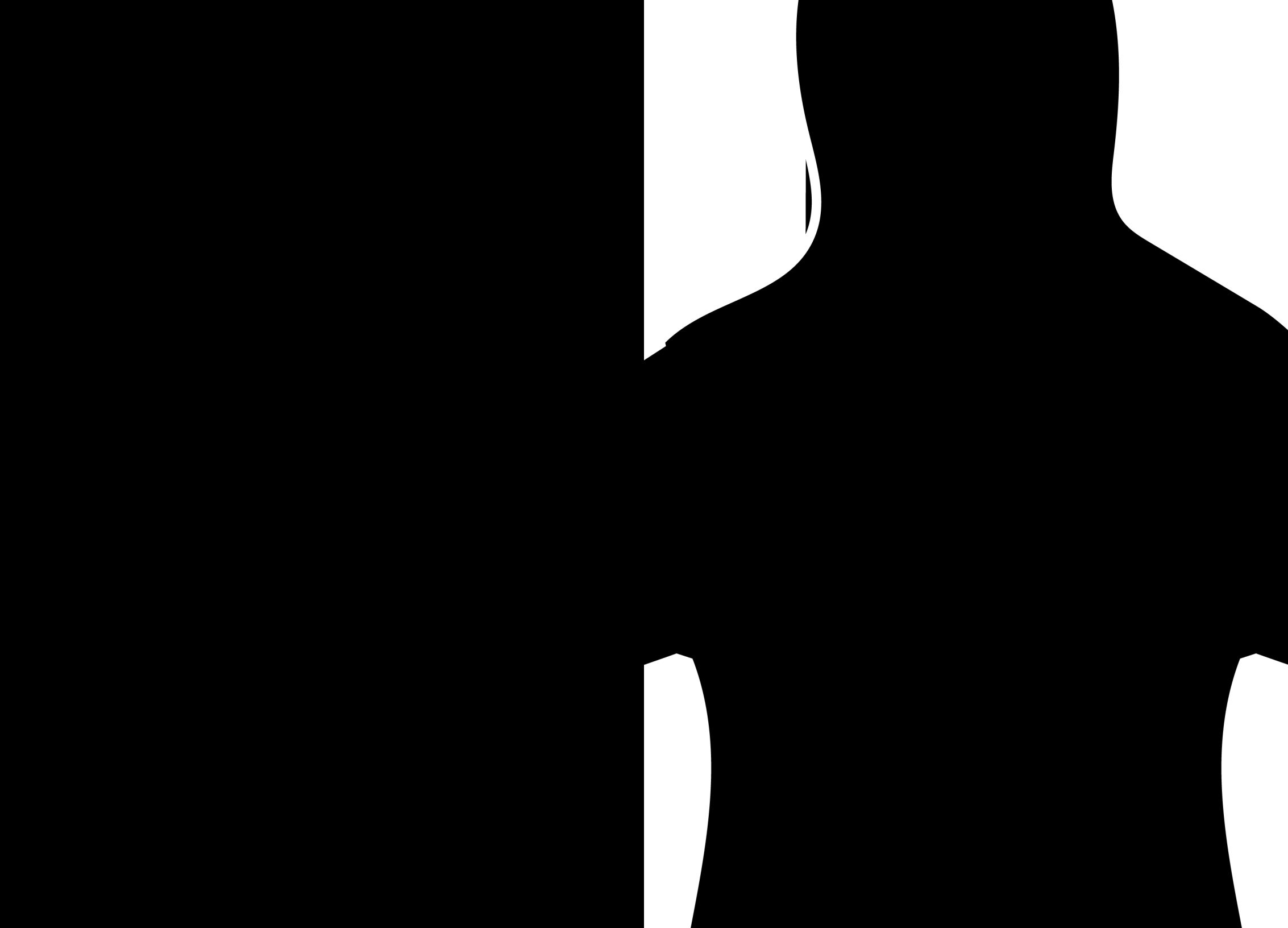
WOMEN HAVE COME A LONG WAY, GRADUALLY
REDRAWING THE LINE IN A PLACE THAT FEELS
MORE FLEXIBLE. YET, THIS HASN'T BEEN ACHIEVED
WITHOUT SACRIFICE AND SUFFERING.

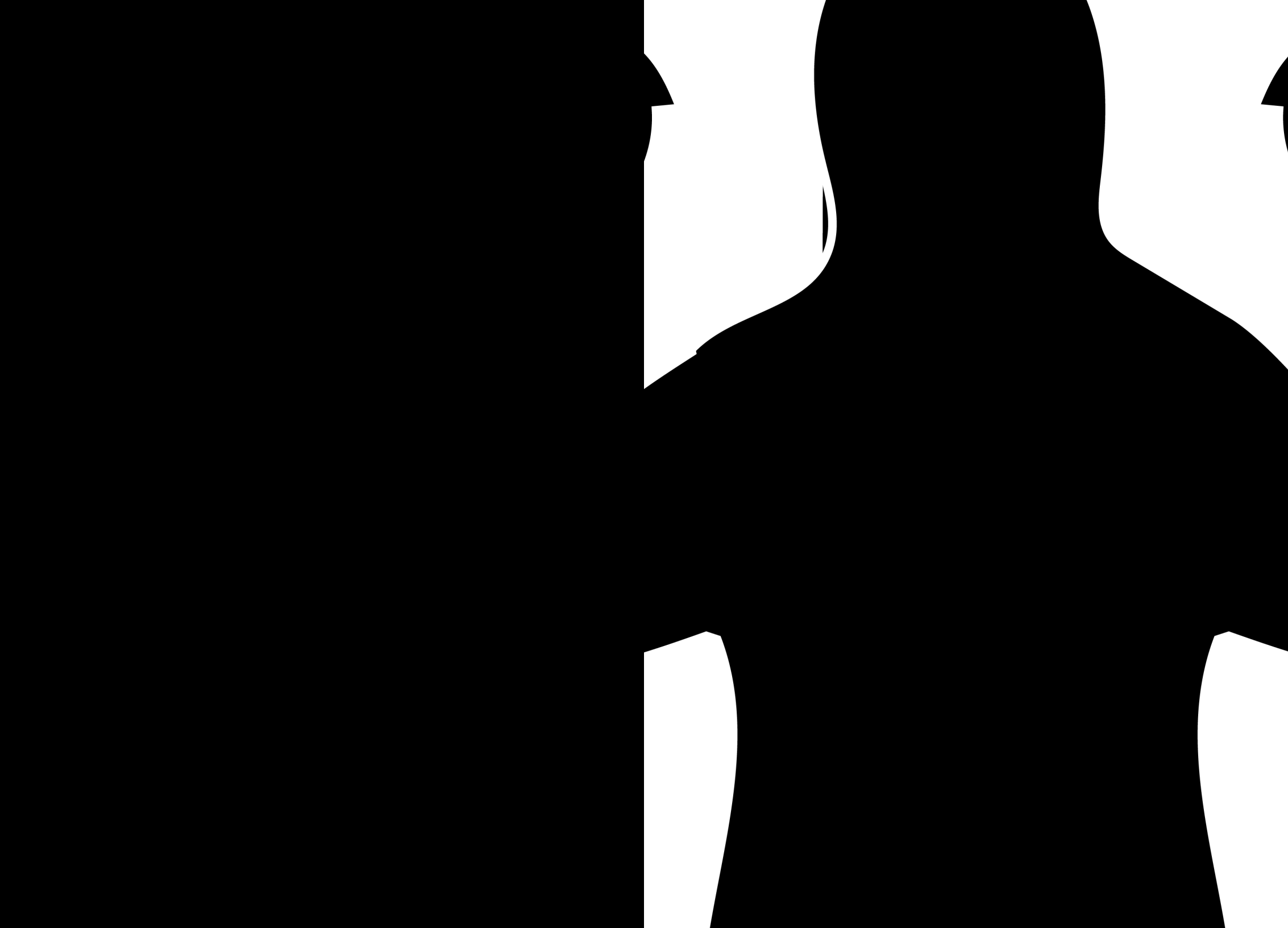


ON JANUARY 29, SEVERAL WOMEN IN TEHRAN AND ONE WOMAN IN ISFAHAN SHARED IMAGES OF THEMSELVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA REPEATING MOVAHEDI'S PEACEFUL PROTEST. AT LEAST 32 WOMEN HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN IRAN SINCE 2018 AND FOUR WOMEN, INCLUDING MOVAHEDI, HAVE BEEN PROSECUTED FOR PROTESTING AGAINST IRAN'S HIJAB LAW.



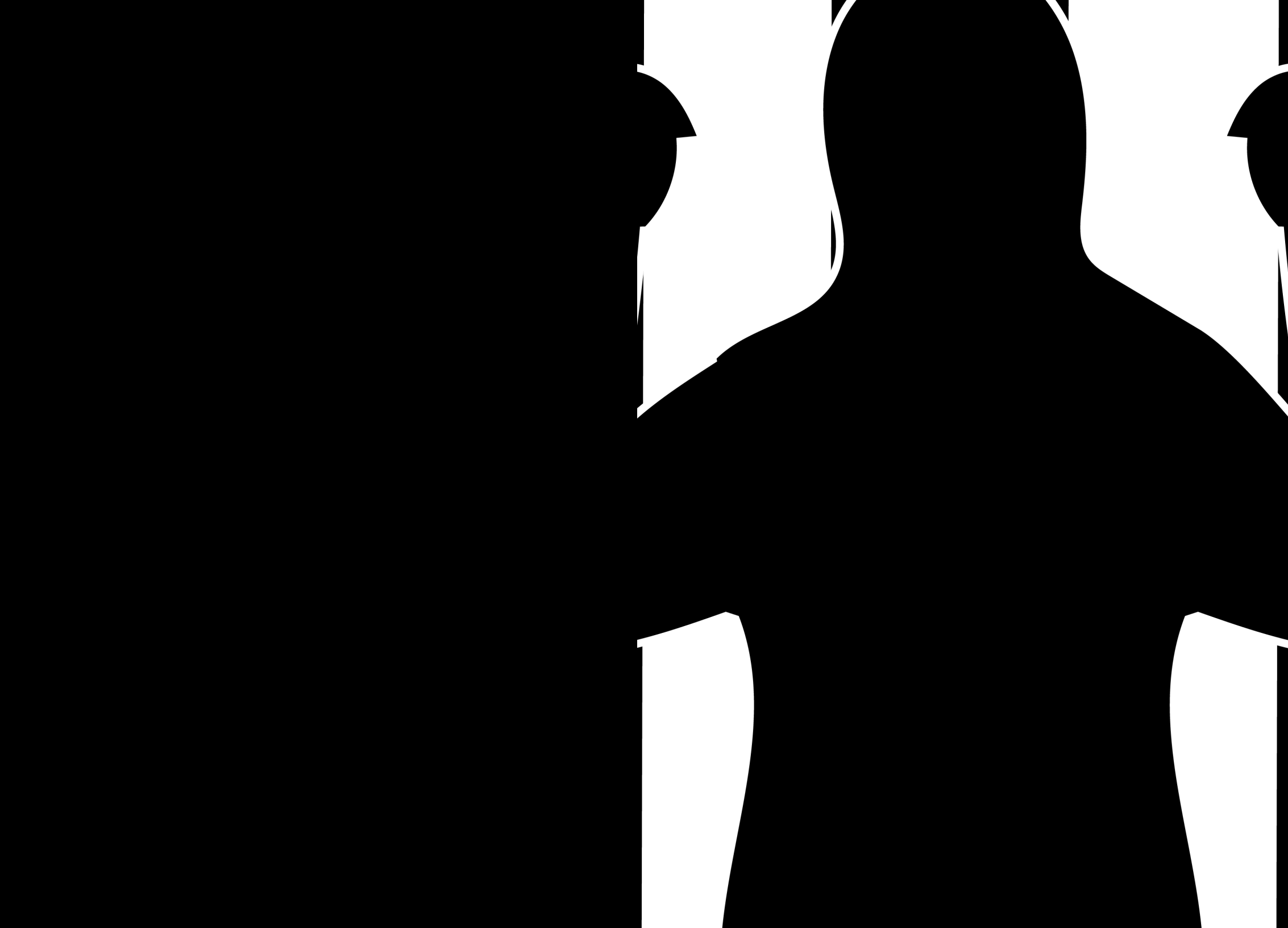




























































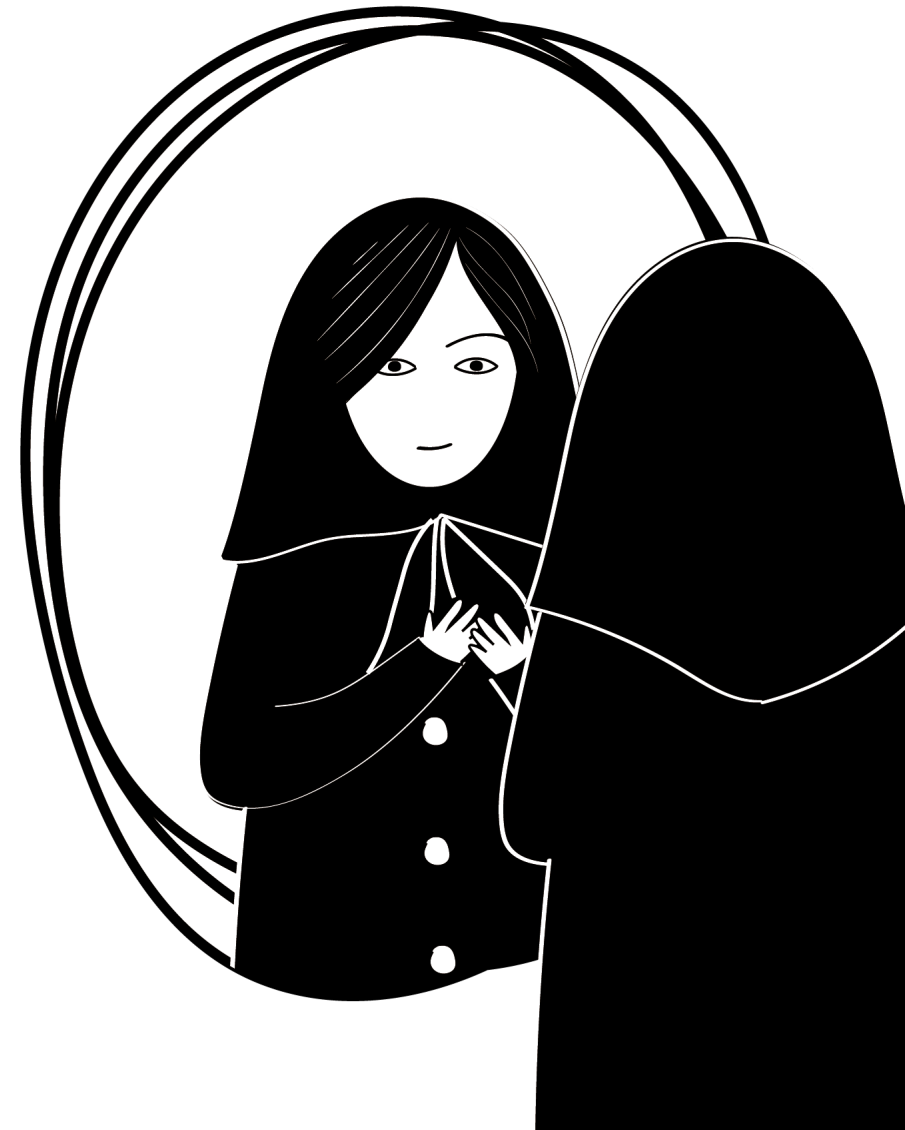




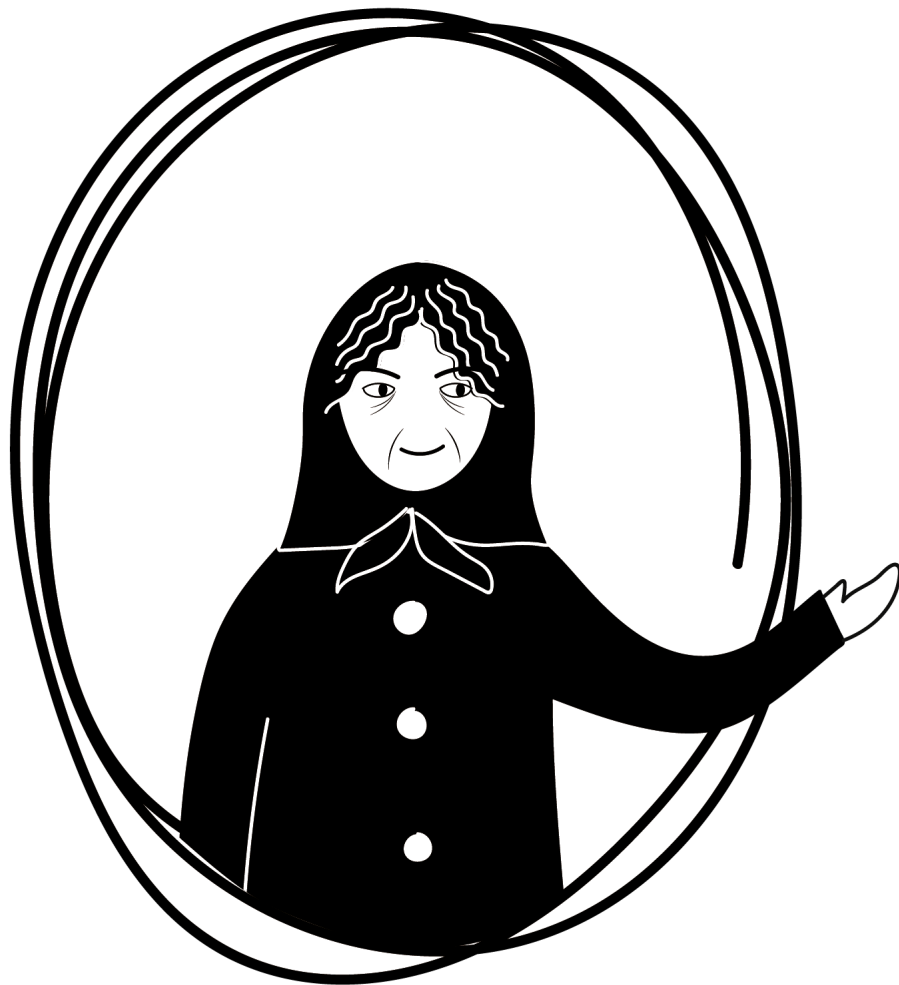
FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN I WAS ABOUT 13, I
HAD TO START WEARING A HEADSCARF
WHEN GOING OUT,



BECAUSE I WASN'T CONSIDERED A KID ANYMORE. IT
WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE
FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S POINT OF VIEW FOR ME TO
GO OUT UNCOVERED, TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY
WOULD HAVE EVEN TOLD MY PARENTS OFF FOR NOT
ENCOURAGING OR FORCING THEIR DAUGHTER TO
COVER UP!



MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME STORIES ABOUT GROWING UP
IN A DIFFERENT TIME IN IRAN. YET, EVEN THOUGH I KNOW IT
WAS DIFFERENT, IN MANY WAYS, IT WAS THE SAME. FOR
EXAMPLE, SHE TOLD ME SOMETHING ABOUT WOMEN MOSTLY
STAYING INDOORS OR IN THE PRIVATE SPACE OF THE HOUSE,
WHICH WAS USUALLY AT THE BACK OF THE HOUSE SO THAT IF
ANYONE CAME IN, THEY WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SEE THE
WOMEN, ESPECIALLY WHEN NOT COVERED UP.



IT MADE ME THINK THAT
EVEN TO THIS DAY, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC
SPACES STILL EXIST FOR WOMEN. OR, AT
LEAST, THE SYSTEM IS SOMEHOW
DESIGNED TO KEEP THEM PRIVATE. I
GRADUALLY LEARNED THAT 'PRIVATE' AND
'PUBLIC' SPACE IS A HUGE PART OF
WOMEN'S LIVES IN IRAN AND AS I GREW UP
IT GREW WITH ME TOO.



MY FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL WASN'T SPECIAL, WHICH
SOMETIMES MAKES ME SAD, BUT I CLEARLY
REMEMBER BEING DROPPED OFF BY MY PARENTS AT
THE ENTRANCE, AS MY MUM WAS A TEACHER AND HAD
TO GO AND WELCOME HER OWN STUDENTS. WHEN I
ASKED MY DAD TO COME WITH ME, HE SAID HE WAS
NOT ALLOWED TO COME IN, AS IT WAS A GIRLS'
SCHOOL!



AS I GREW UP,
I STARTED TO NOTICE THIS A LOT
MORE, LIKE WHEN WE WERE GOING TO
FAMILY PARTIES THAT WERE MIXED. THE
WOMEN DIDN'T COVER UP, BUT AS
SOON AS THEY WANTED TO LEAVE THE
HOUSE, THEY HAD
TO COVER UP.



IT ALMOST
FEELS LIKE LIVING A DOUBLE LIFE.
ONE WHICH IS IN YOUR PRIVATE
SPACE...

WHILE THE OTHER ONE HAPPENS IN
PUBLIC SPACES. TWO LIVES WHICH CAN
BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.



WE WERE NOT EVEN
ALLOWED TO TALK ABOUT THESE PARTIES AT
SCHOOL, BECAUSE THERE WAS A CHANCE THAT
SOMEONE WOULD REPORT THAT TO THE
HEADMASTER AND THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT
FAMILIES WOULD BE IN TROUBLE!

نزی تو مدرسه
تو میزبان واسه بقیه



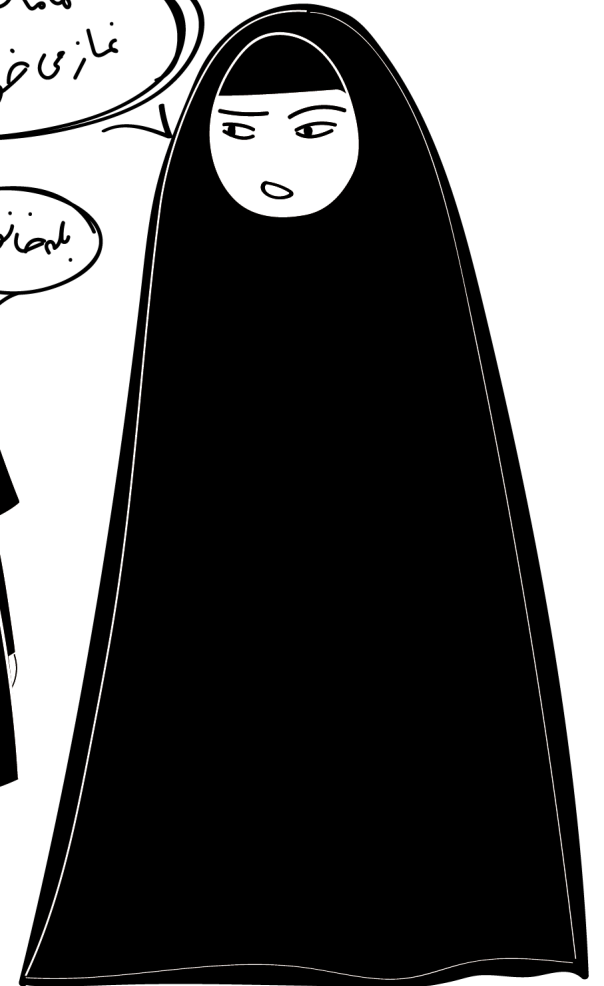
AS A GIRL, IT WAS QUITE HARD TO KEEP SO MANY SECRETS.

LIKE, MY PARENTS TOLD ME THAT IF ANYONE AT THE
SCHOOL ASKED WHETHER MY PARENTS PRAYED OR NOT, I
SHOULD SAY YES. AND IF THEY ASKED IF MY MUM WORE A
HEAD SCARF WHEN MY FRIENDS CAME AROUND, I SHOULD
SAY YES. AND IF THEY ASKED ME IF WE HAD SATELLITE AT
HOME, I SHOULD DEFINITELY SAY NO!

HONESTLY, AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL SO SILLY,
BUT NOW I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND THEIR CONCERNS.

مامان ببارت
غازی خون؟

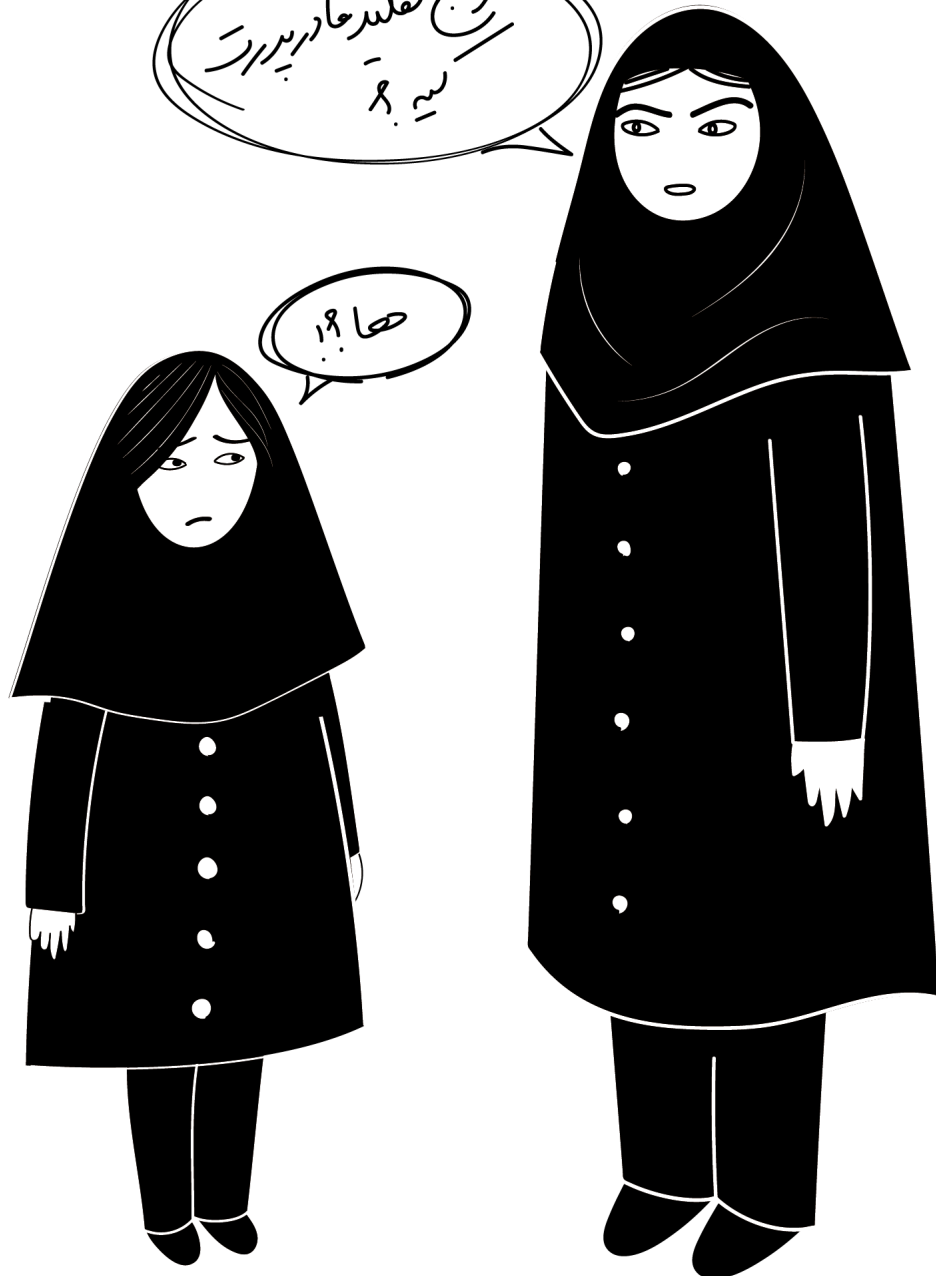
بله خانوم



I REMEMBER ONE DAY AT SCHOOL, ONE OF
MY TEACHERS ASKED ME:

مراجعة تقلد عادي بـ ١٨
سنة

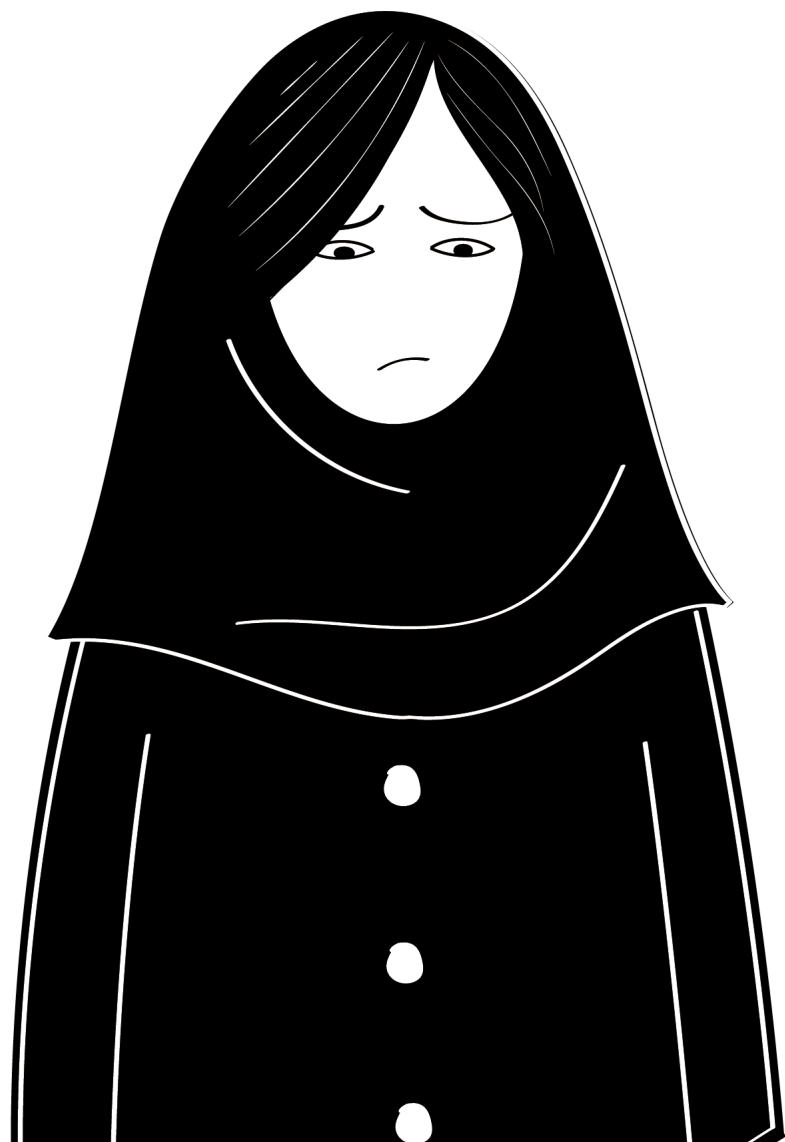
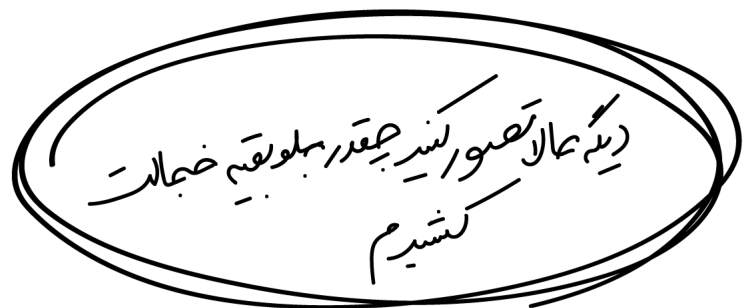
صا ١٨



AND SHE LOOKED AT ME WITH DISGUST AND SAID:

SO YOU MEAN TO SAY YOUR
FAMILY DOESN'T HAVE A RELIGIOUS
GUIDE??!! HOW IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE!?
I FEEL SO SORRY FOR THE KIDS
GROWING UP IN THESE FAMILIES!





SO, THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN IRAN, LIKE MY OWN FAMILY, HAD TO MAINTAIN A DOUBLE LIFE OR PRETEND TO BE SOMEONE THAT WE ARE NOT, JUST TO AVOID GETTING INTO TROUBLE. BUT SADLY, EVEN WHEN WE WERE TRYING TO DO THAT, THERE WAS NO GUARANTEE THAT WE WOULD BE SAFE.

IN THE WINTER OF 2005, MY FAMILY AND I
TRAVELLED TO ESFAHAN. THE WEATHER WAS SO
COLD AND I WAS MUCH YOUNGER AT THE TIME –
JUST 18 YEARS OLD.

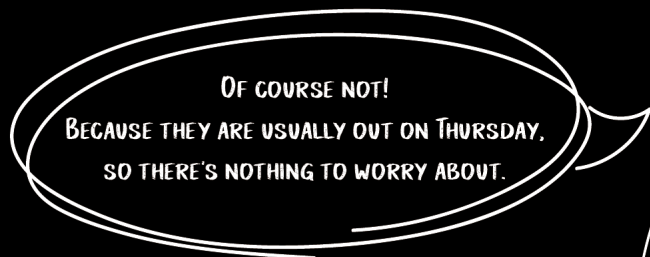


ONE EVENING, MY COUSIN AND I DECIDED, OUT OF BOREDOM, TO GO OUT AND HAVE A STROLL AROUND THE SHOPPING CENTRE. WE GOT READY QUICKLY AND, WITHIN AN HOUR, FOUND OURSELVES IN ONE OF THE BUSIEST STREETS IN SHIRAZ. HOWEVER, BEFORE LEAVING THE HOUSE, MY MUM HAD ASKED:





WILL THERE BE ANY POLICE
IN THE STREETS LOOKING
TO ARREST GIRLS?



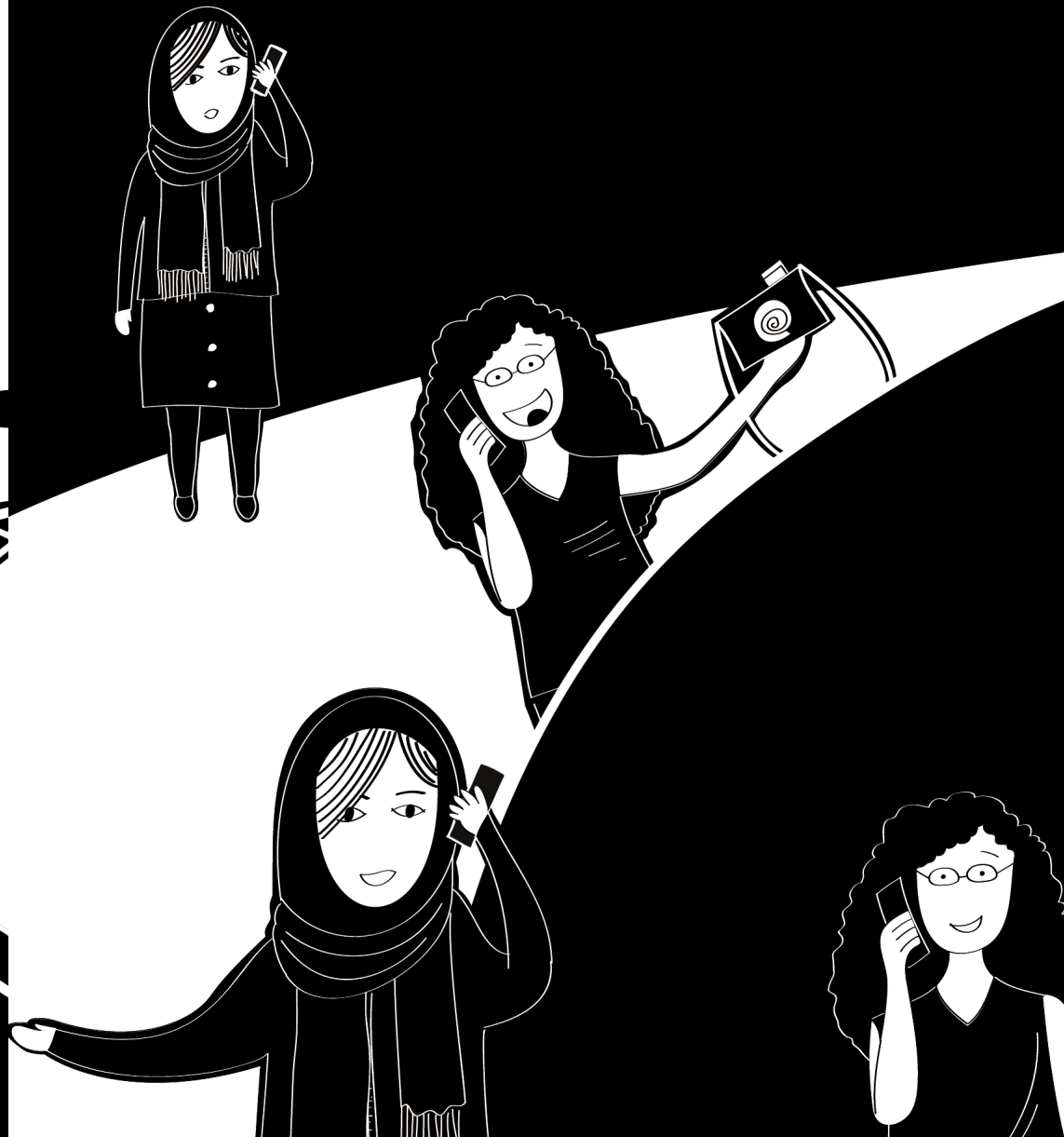
OF COURSE NOT!
BECAUSE THEY ARE USUALLY OUT ON THURSDAY,
SO THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE WRONG!

AN HOUR LATER

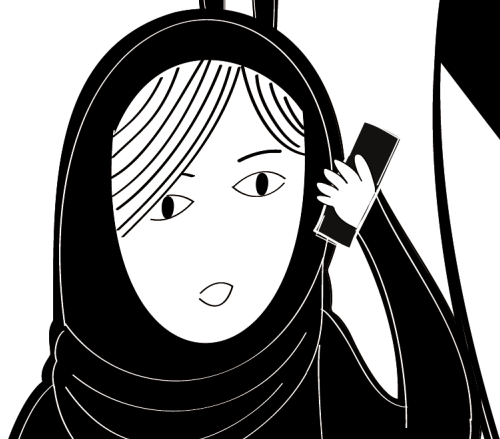
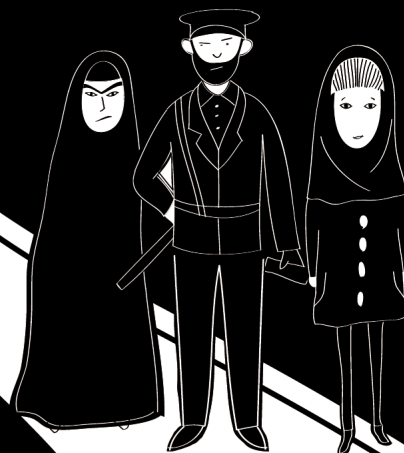


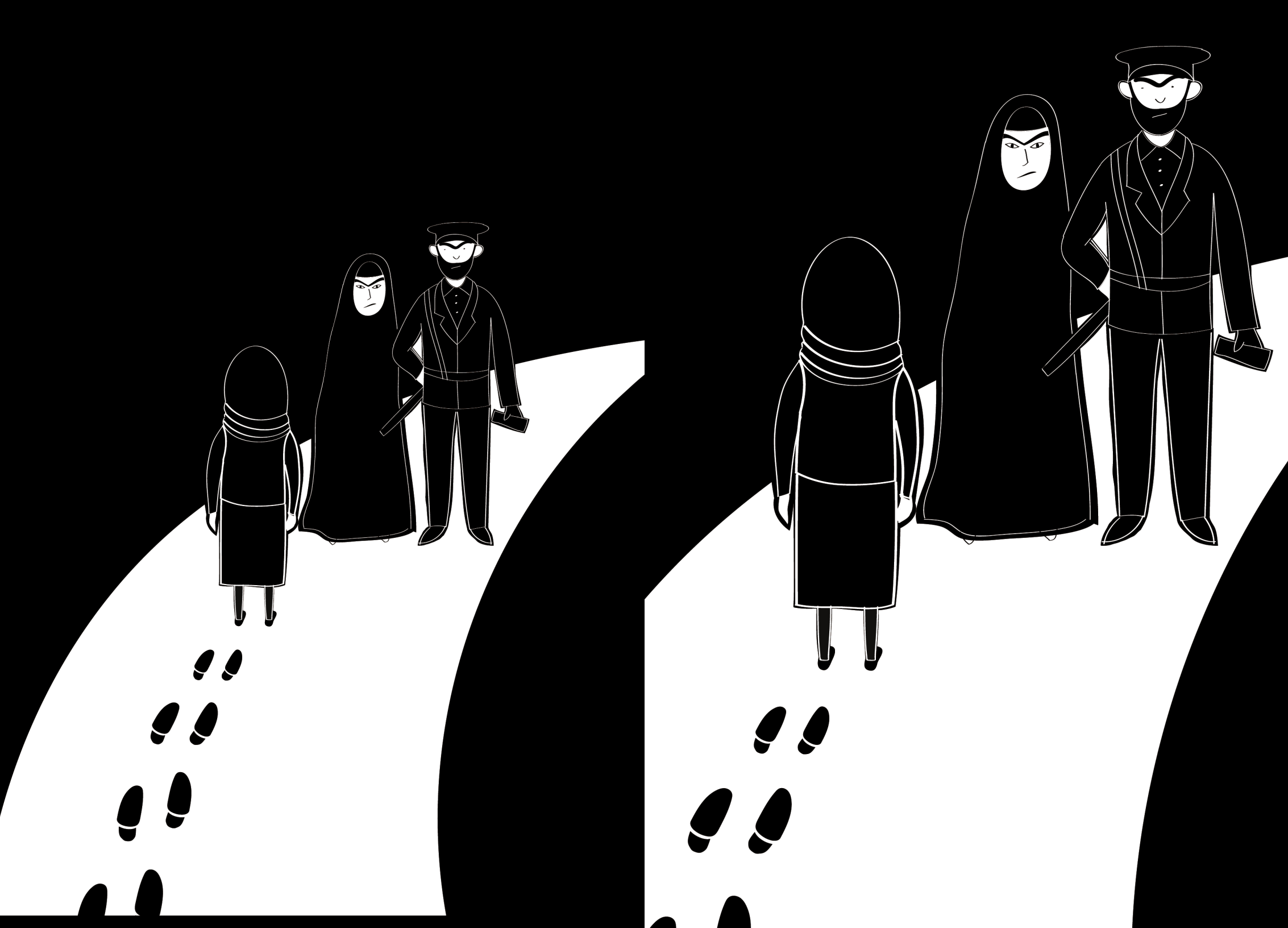
IT WAS MY FRIEND WHO WAS
SUPER EXCITED ABOUT HER NEW CAMERA

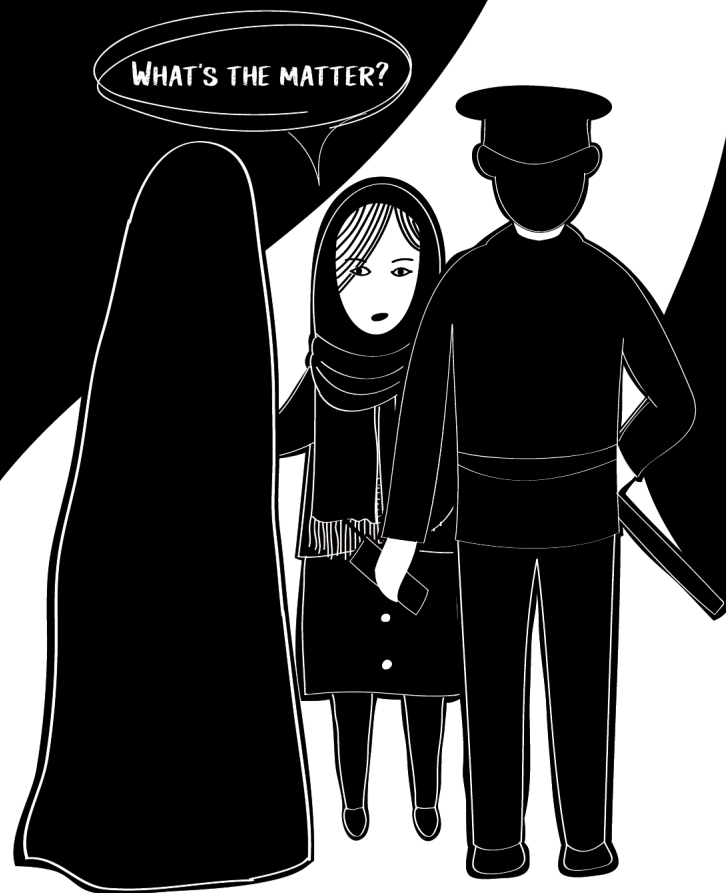




ELHAM COME HERE.
THEY WANT TO TALK TO YOU.



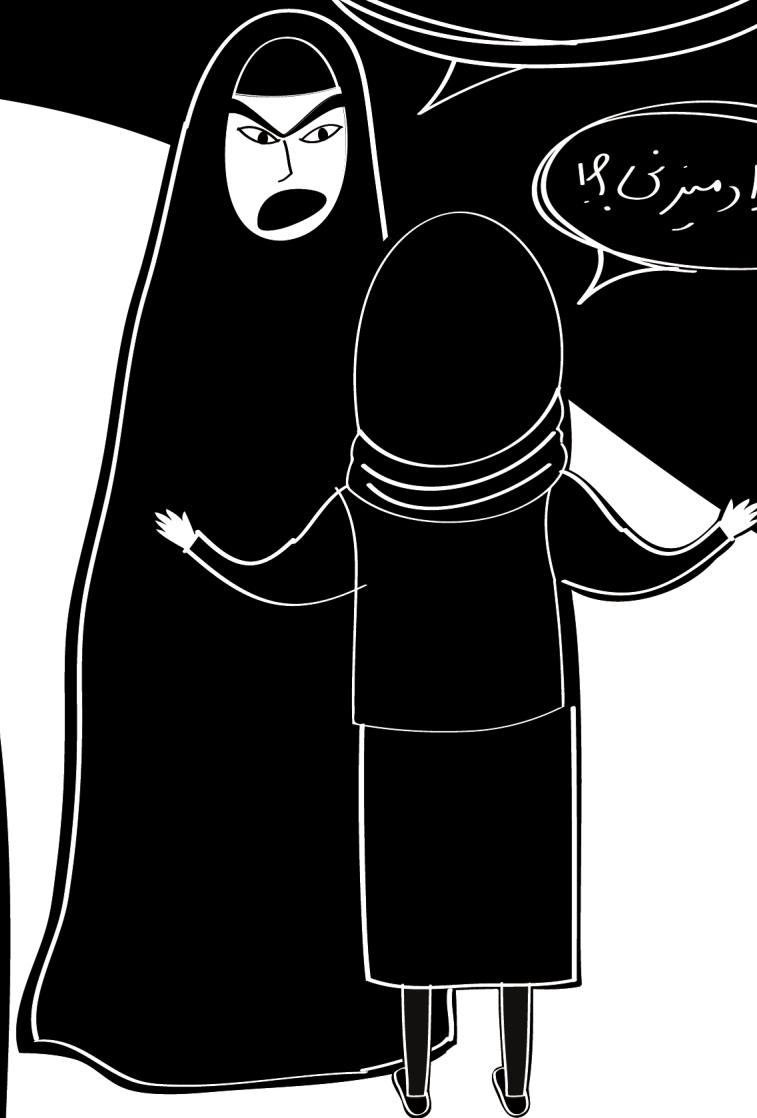




WHAT IS THE PROBLEM.

ARE YOU DEAF?
I SAID GET IN THE CAR.

I WON'T
UNLESS YOU TELL ME
WHAT'S WRONG!

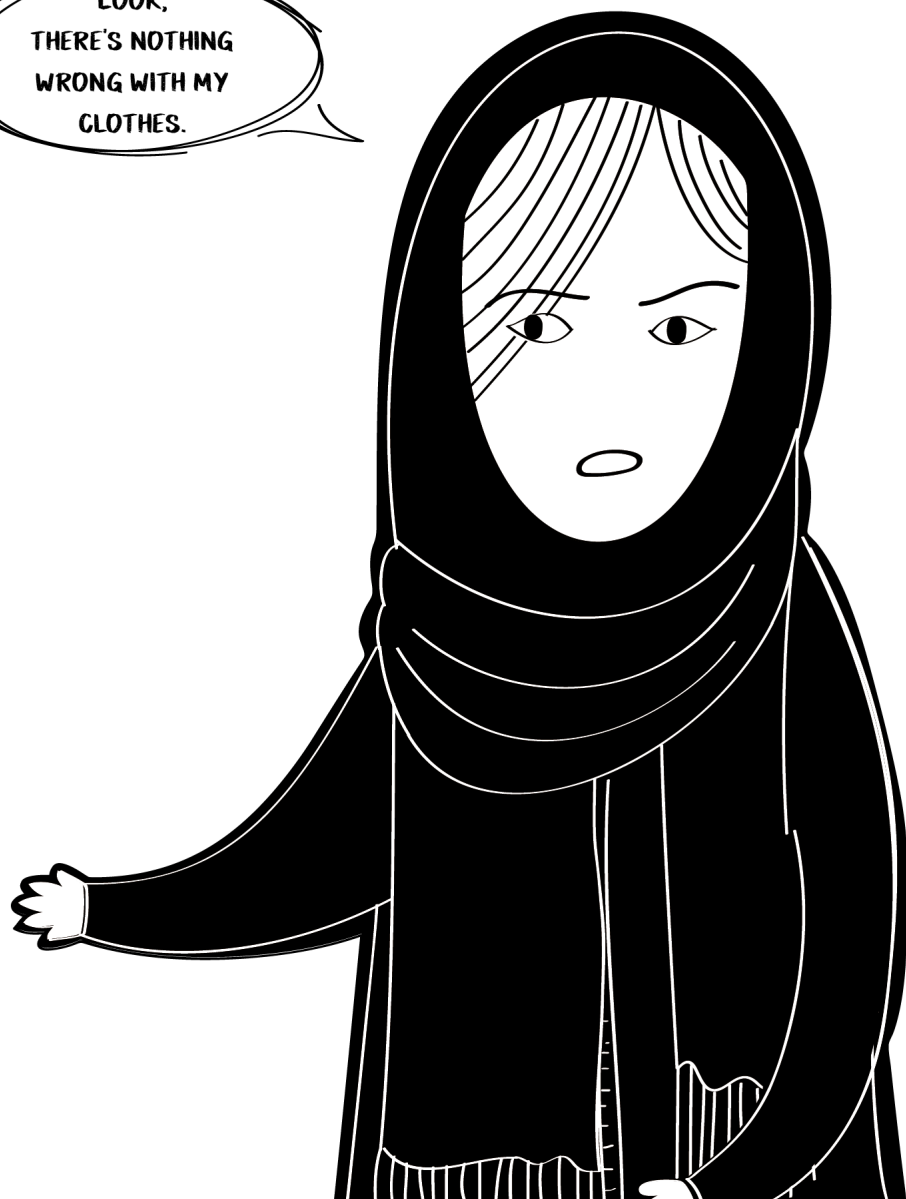


HAVEN'T YOU LOOKED AT
YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR TODAY?
WHAT KIND OF OUTFIT IS THAT YOU'RE WEARING?
IT'S EMBARRASSING! YOU SHOULD
BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF.

چرا دارم سرتی؟

BUT I WASN'T STUPID.
I KNEW AS SOON AS I GOT IN THE CAR,
THEY WOULD TAKE ME SOMEWHERE
I DIDN'T WANT TO GO, SO I DIDN'T GIVE IN!

LOOK,
THERE'S NOTHING
WRONG WITH MY
CLOTHES.



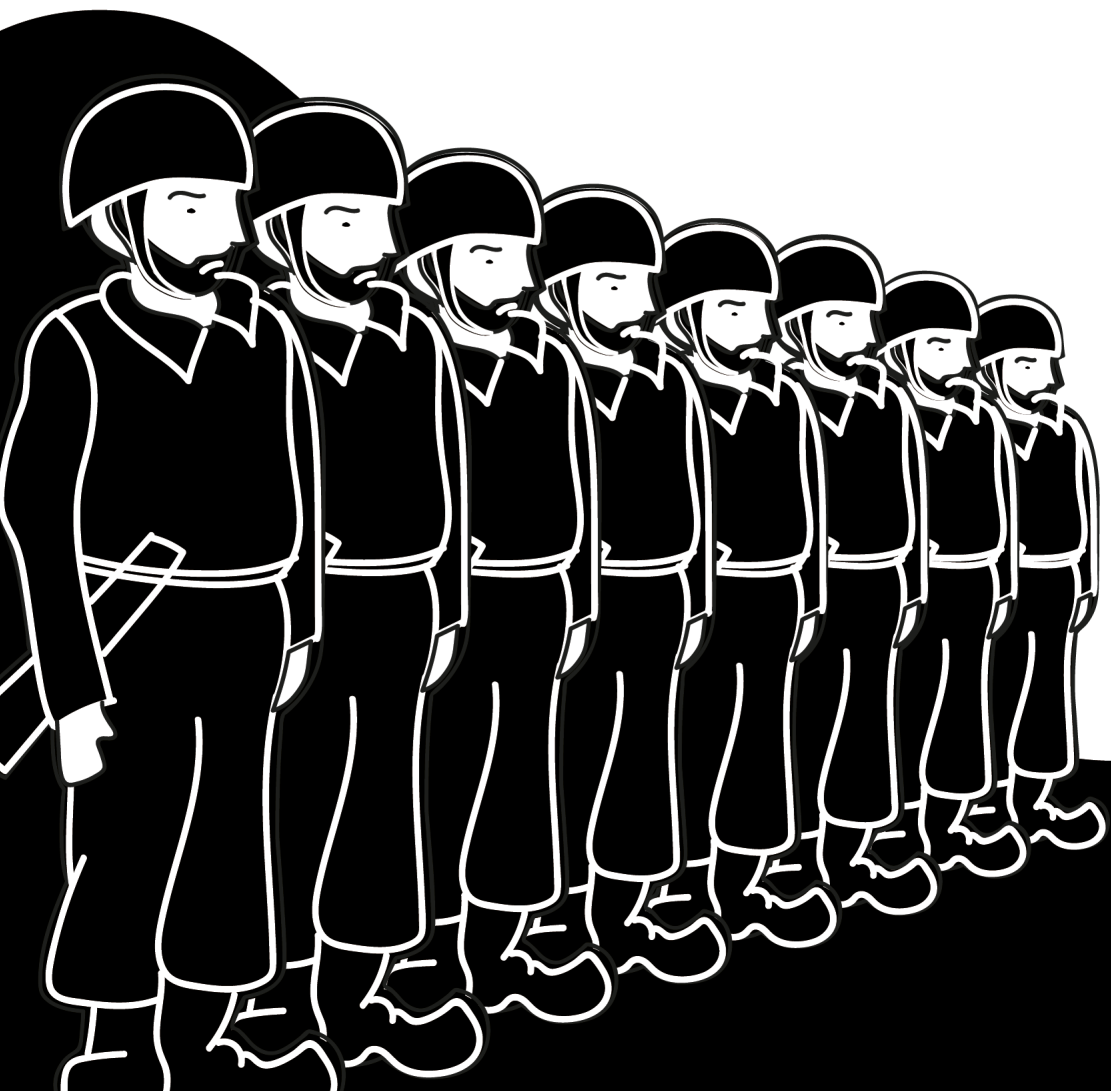
BUT, I COULDN'T CHANGE THEIR MINDS! FINALLY,
WHEN THEY SAW THAT I WASN'T
'CO-OPERATING' THEY DECIDED TO

TAKE

A

DIFFERENT

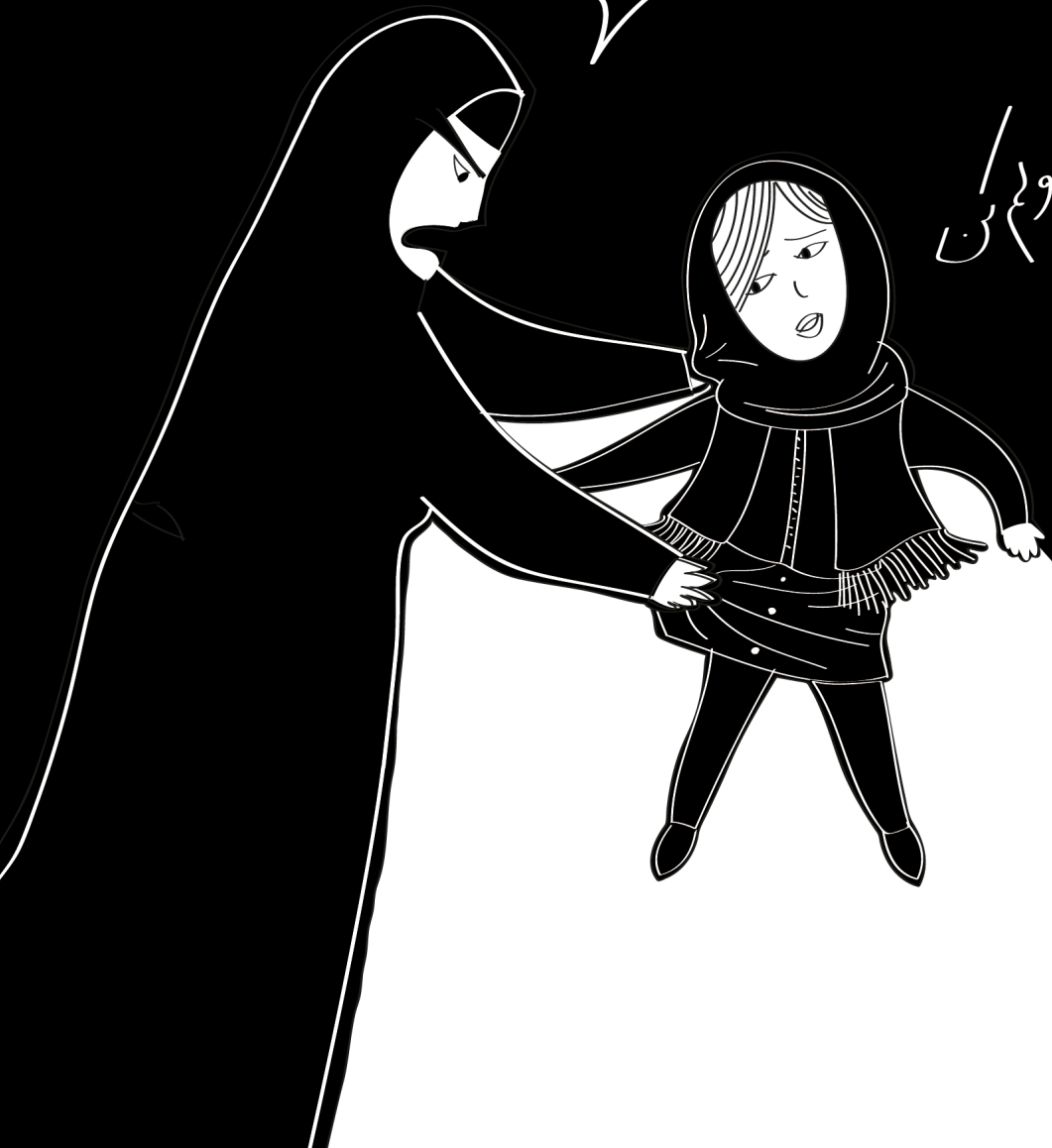
APPROACH.



WE NEED REINFORCEMENT.
WE NEED REINFORCEMENT.



OK, LET'S GET YOU
INTO THE CAR.



THE POLICEWOMAN, WHO WAS DRESSED IN BLACK
CHADOR, STARTED DRAGGING ME TOWARDS THE CAR,
BUT I DIDN'T GIVE IN. SHE PULLED AND PULLED AND
PULLED AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO, APART
FROM FIGHT WITH ALL MY MIGHT.



LUCKILY, I MANAGED TO REACH A TREE
TO HANG ON TO. PICTURING THE SCENE
NOW, IT ALL SEEMS SO RIDICULOUS.

AS I HELD ON TO THE TREE, SHE
PULLED AT ME EVEN HARDER, TO THE
POINT THAT ALL MY BUTTONS STARTED
FALLING OFF.



THAT WENT ON FOR A FEW MINUTES



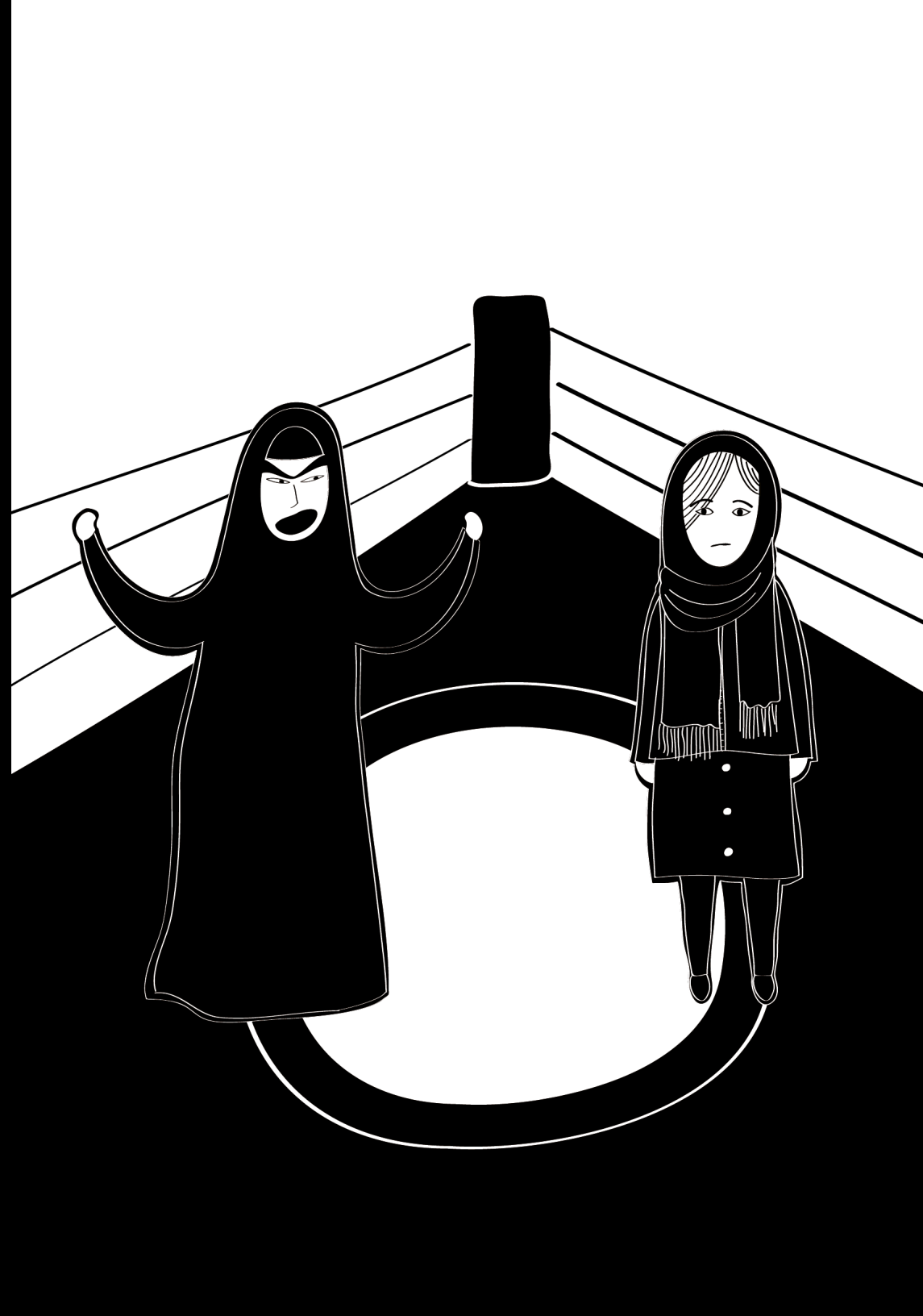


SUDDENLY, I REALISED THAT A HUGE
TRAFFIC JAM HAD FORMED, AS DRIVERS
HAD STOPPED TO WATCH THE SCENE. I
EVEN NOTICED A FEW PEOPLE WERE
RECORDING IT ON THEIR MOBILES, YET
NO ONE DARED SAY ANYTHING.

I WAS ALL BY MYSELF!



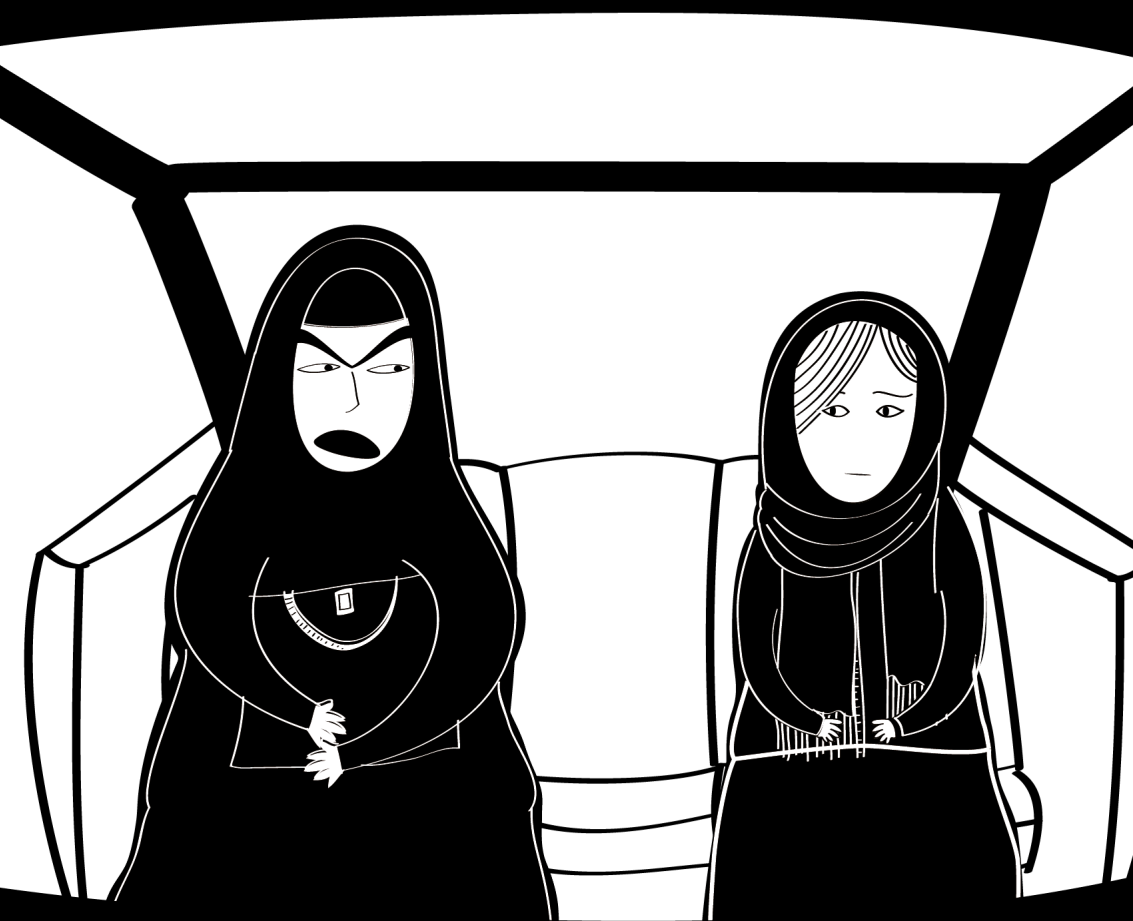
IT WAS AS IF THEY WANTED TO SEE WHO
WAS GOING TO BE VICTORIOUS, OR MAYBE
THEY FOUND IT QUITE ENTERTAINING,
WATCHING A POLICEWOMAN IN HER
CHADOR WRESTLING WITH A YOUNG GIRL.



EVENTUALLY, I REALISED THAT I HAD TO
GIVE UP AND GO WITH THEM, BECAUSE I
MIGHT END UP GETTING BEATEN UP.
THEY DEFINITELY WEREN'T GOING TO
LET ME GO, ESPECIALLY GIVEN A CROWD
WAS WATCHING THEM. IT WOULD BE TOO
EMBARRASSING FOR THEM TO LOSE TO
AN 18-YEAR-OLD GIRL, SO AFTER ALL
THAT, I GOT IN THE CAR.

AS SOON AS I SAT IN THE CAR, THE
POLICEWOMAN GRABBED HER BAG AND
PUT IT RIGHT BETWEEN HER LEGS. SHE
SCOWLED AT ME AND SAID:

OH, MY BAG! I HOPE YOU HAVEN'T
STOLEN ANYTHING FROM IT!



YOU AND GIRLS LIKE YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED
OF YOURSELVES. YOU'RE THE PROBLEM WITH
SOCIETY. I'M WONDERING IF YOU HAVE FAMILIES,
BECAUSE IF YOU HAD, THEY WOULD NEVER LET
YOU LEAVE HOME LIKE THIS.



I WAS SO TIRED OF ASKING WHAT WAS
WRONG WITH MY OUTFIT AND NOT
GETTING A CLEAR ANSWER. ALL I GOT
WAS DISRESPECT.



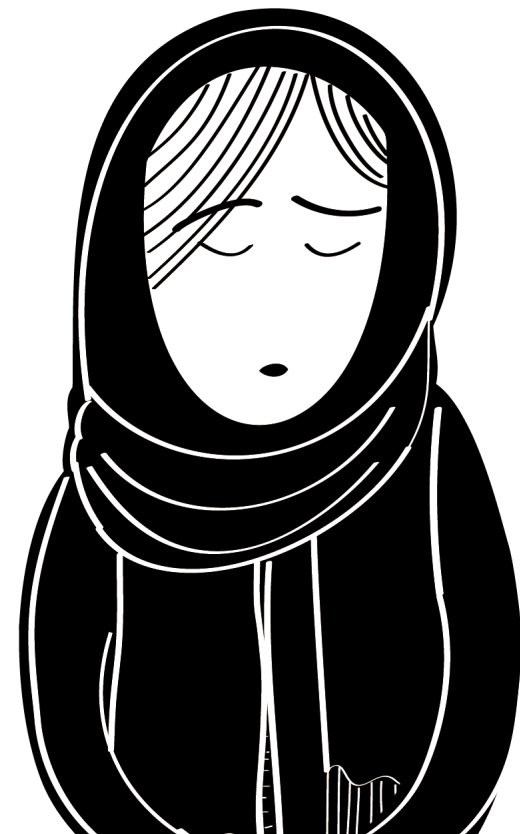


BUT I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THEY ALSO DIDN'T HAVE
A CLUE EITHER. ALL THEY HAD WAS POWER AND WEAPONS.

THAT WAS WHEN I REALISED WHAT HIS PROBLEM WAS! I
WAS IN TROUBLE FOR NOT PAYING HIM ATTENTION!
NOT ONLY HAD I, IN HIS EYES, DISRESPECTED THE
RELIGION, BUT I HAD IGNORED THIS POLICEMAN WHO
WAS LOOKING FOR ATTENTION FROM A YOUNG GIRL ON
THE STREET. INTERESTING!!!



IT HONESTLY MADE ME FEEL SO SICK.

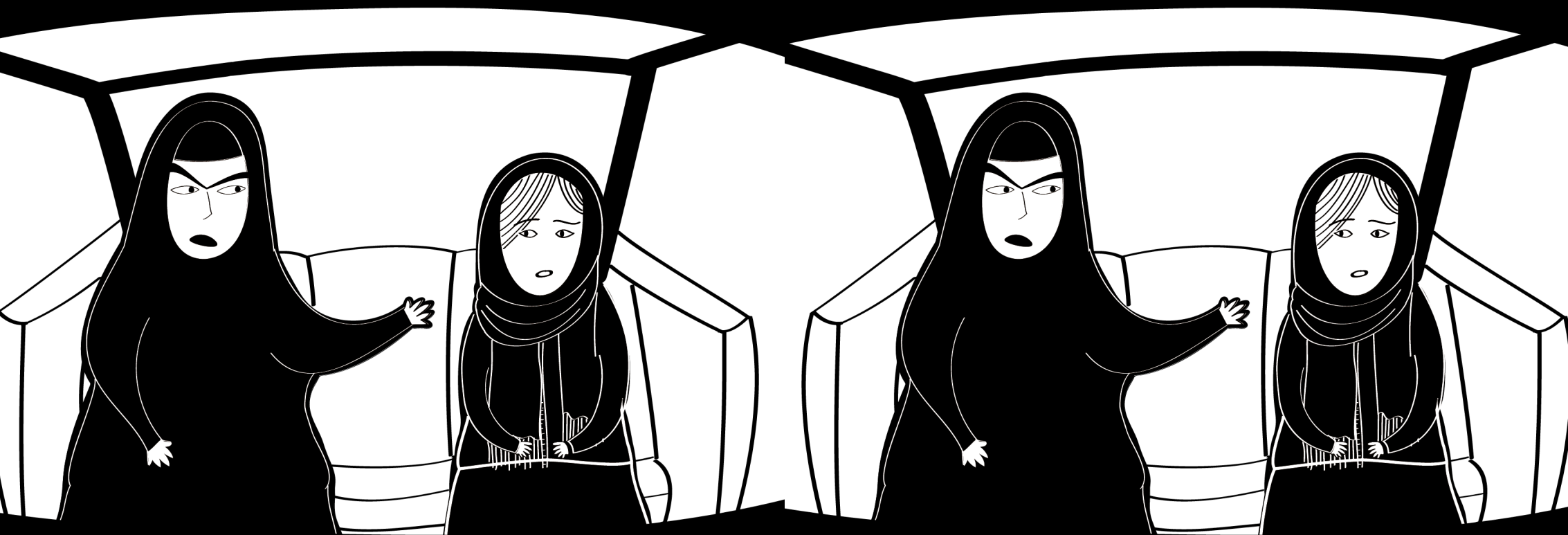


LOOK AT HER MAKEUP.
HOW LONG DID IT TAKE
YOU TO GET READY?

ONLY A COUPLE
OF MINUTES...

THERE YOU GO,
YOU'RE A PROFESSIONAL!

BUT I'M ONLY WEARING
MASCARA AND LIPSTICK.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?





I WAS ARGUING WITH HER WHEN
MY PHONE STARTED RINGING.
IT WAS MY DAD!

WHERE ARE YOU?
JUST TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE RIGHT NOW!

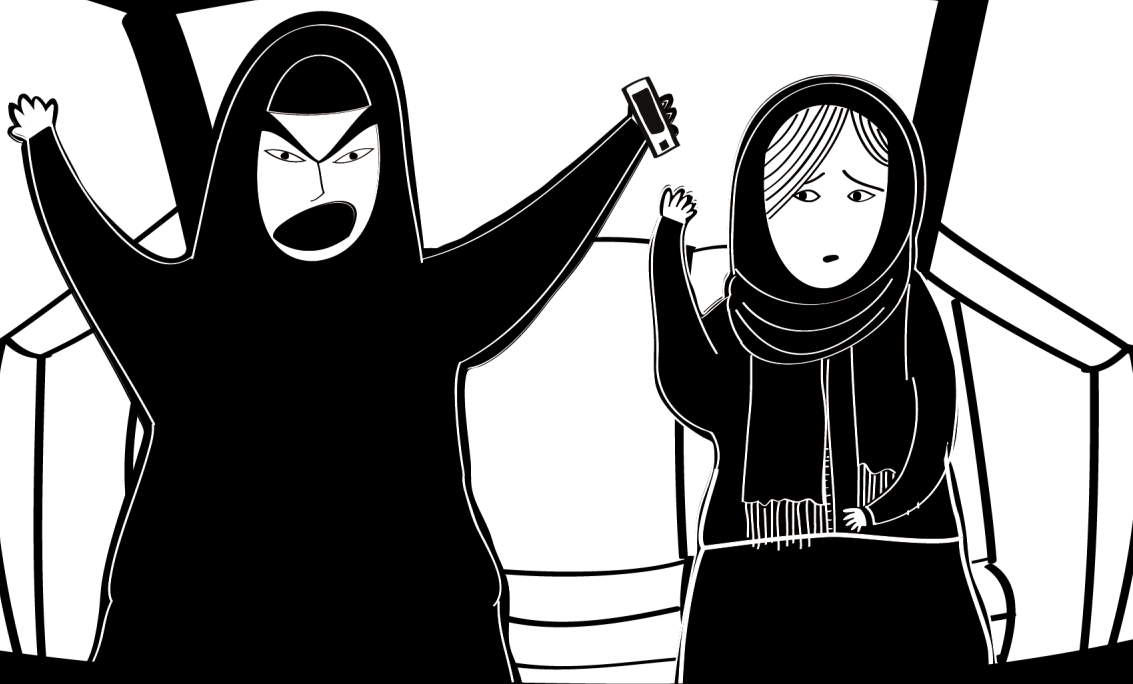


DAD, I DON'T KNOW,
SOMEWHERE IN TOWN.



WHO ARE THEY?
WHERE ARE THEY TAKING YOU?
ARE YOU SURE THEY ARE POLICE?

HANG UP! JUST HANG UP!
EVEN HER DAD HAS NO RESPECT FOR US. HE'S
SAYING WE'RE NOT EVEN REAL POLICE!!!



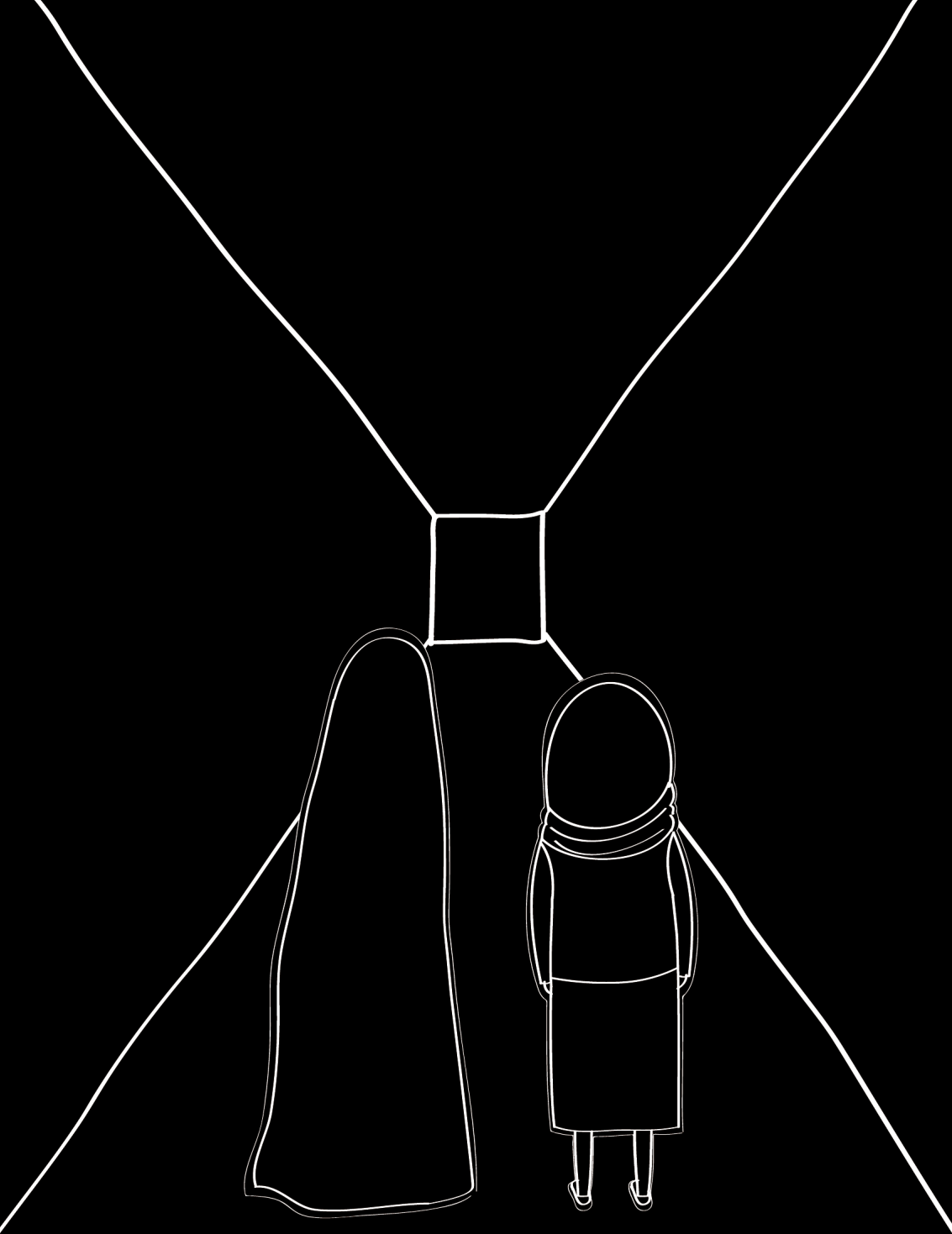


EVENTUALLY, WE GOT TO THE STATION. IT WAS
SO DARK AND SCARY, JUST LIKE A HAUNTED
HOUSE. I WAS TERRIFIED. A THOUSAND
THOUGHTS FLOODED MY MIND INSTANTLY.

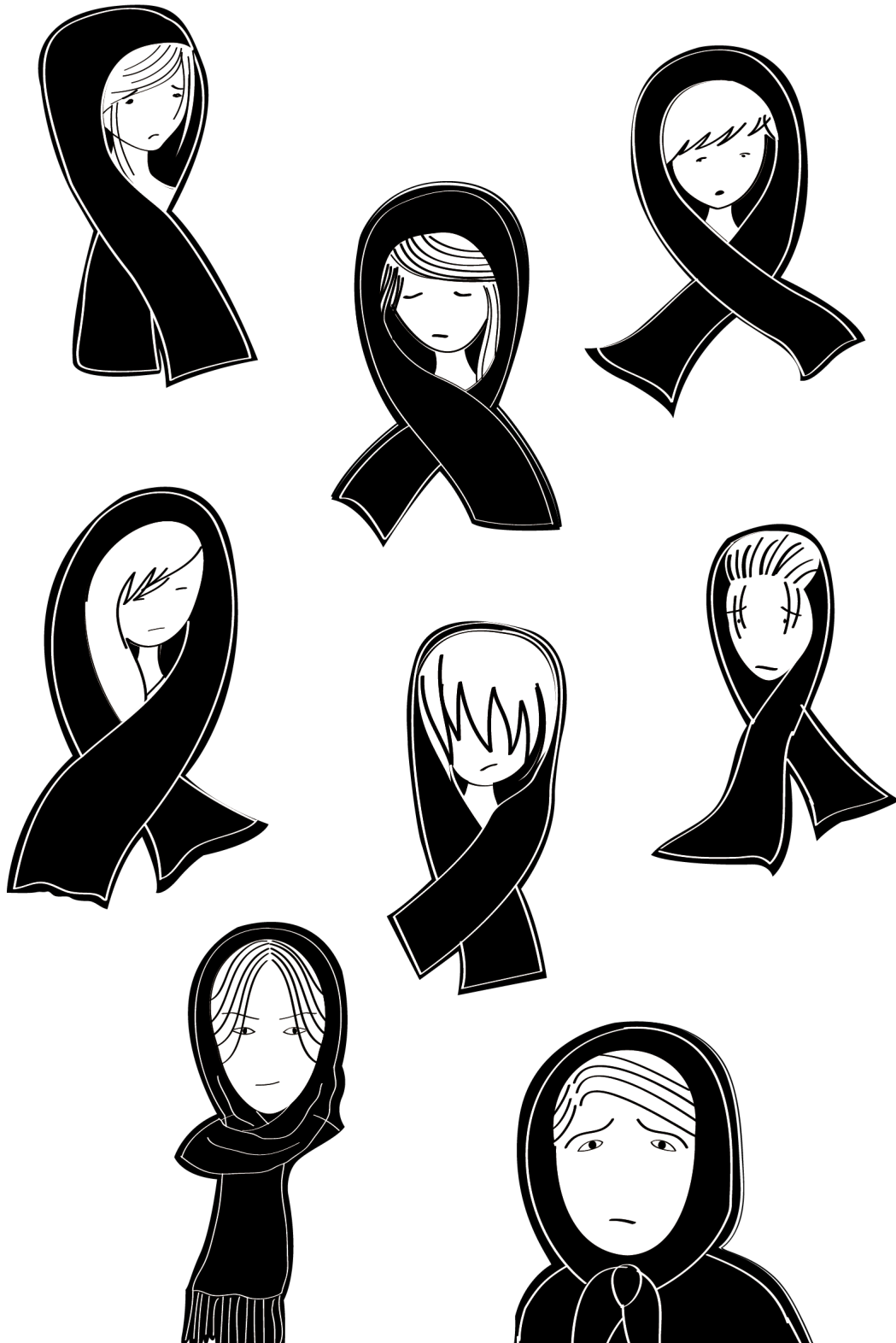


I THOUGHT "THAT'S IT! MY FAMILY WILL NEVER
FIND ME. I'LL BE RAPED AND THEN KILLED AND
BURIED IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, JUST LIKE
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO SO MANY GIRLS LIKE ME!"

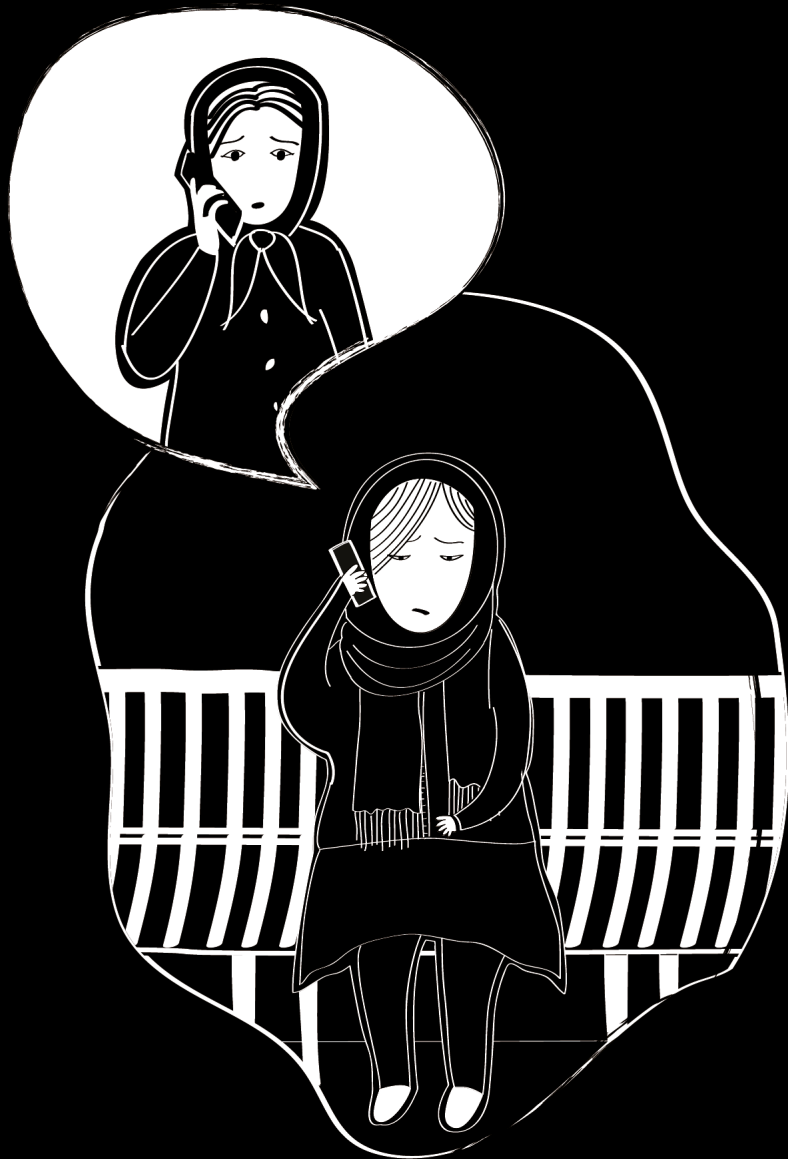




FOLLOW
ME.



I ENTERED THE ROOM. WELL, IT
WAS NOT REALLY A ROOM BUT A
VERY CROWDED HALL. IT
OCCURRED TO ME THAT THEY
MUST HAVE SOUNDPROOFED IT,
BECAUSE NO ONE COULD HEAR
ANYTHING FROM OUTSIDE THE
PLACE. I SAT ON A BENCH AND
WAS AMAZED TO SEE SO MANY
GIRLS THERE.



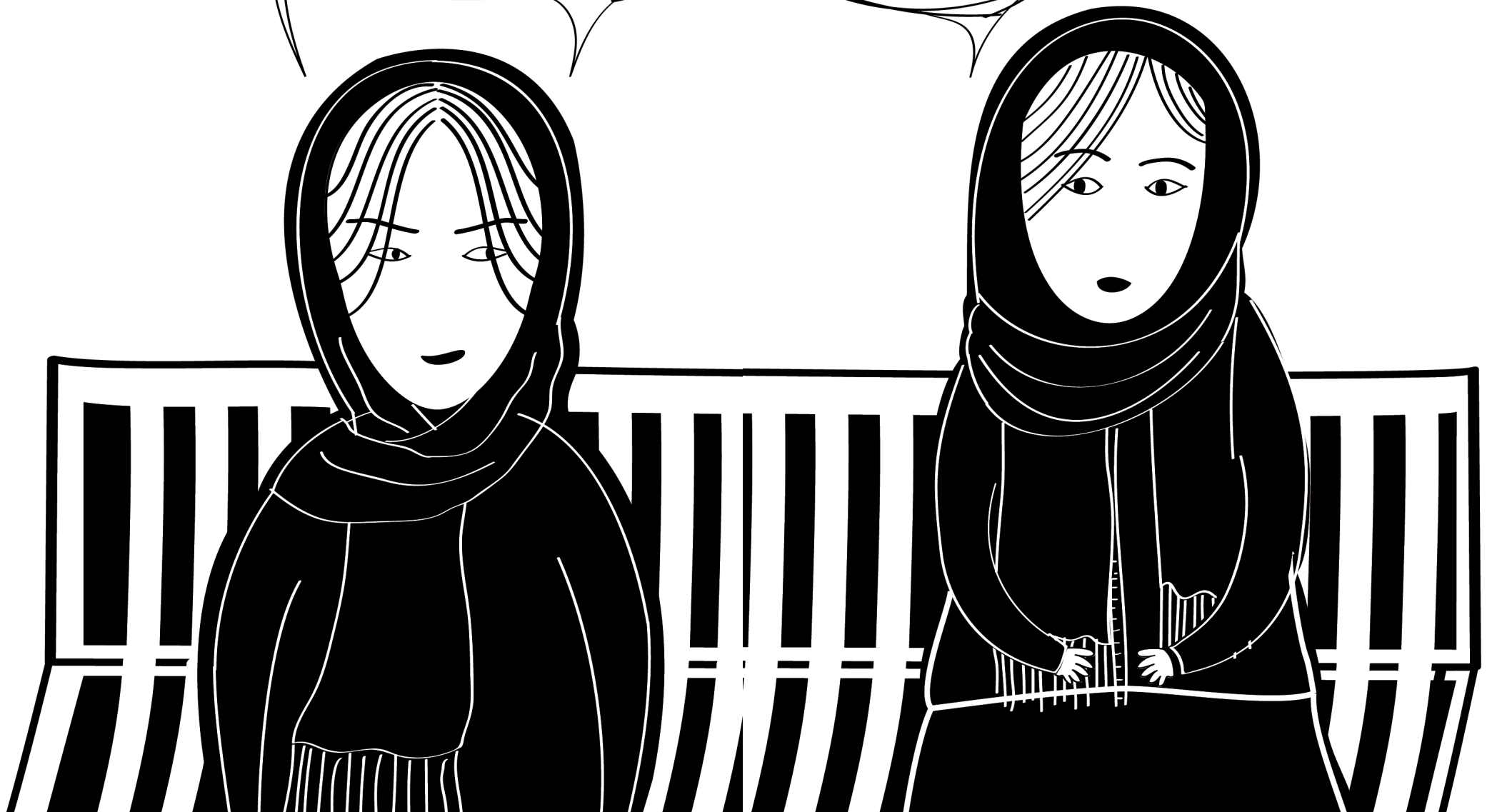
AFTER A WHILE, I GOT MY PHONE
BACK AND I ASKED THE GIRL WHERE
WE WERE SO I COULD CALL MY
PARENTS TO COME AND SAVE ME,
LITERALLY. MY PARENTS WERE SO
WORRIED THAT COULDN'T TALK
PROPERLY. I COULD HEAR MY MUM
CRYING, PETRIFIED AT THE THOUGHT
THAT SHE MIGHT NEVER BE ABLE TO
FIND ME.

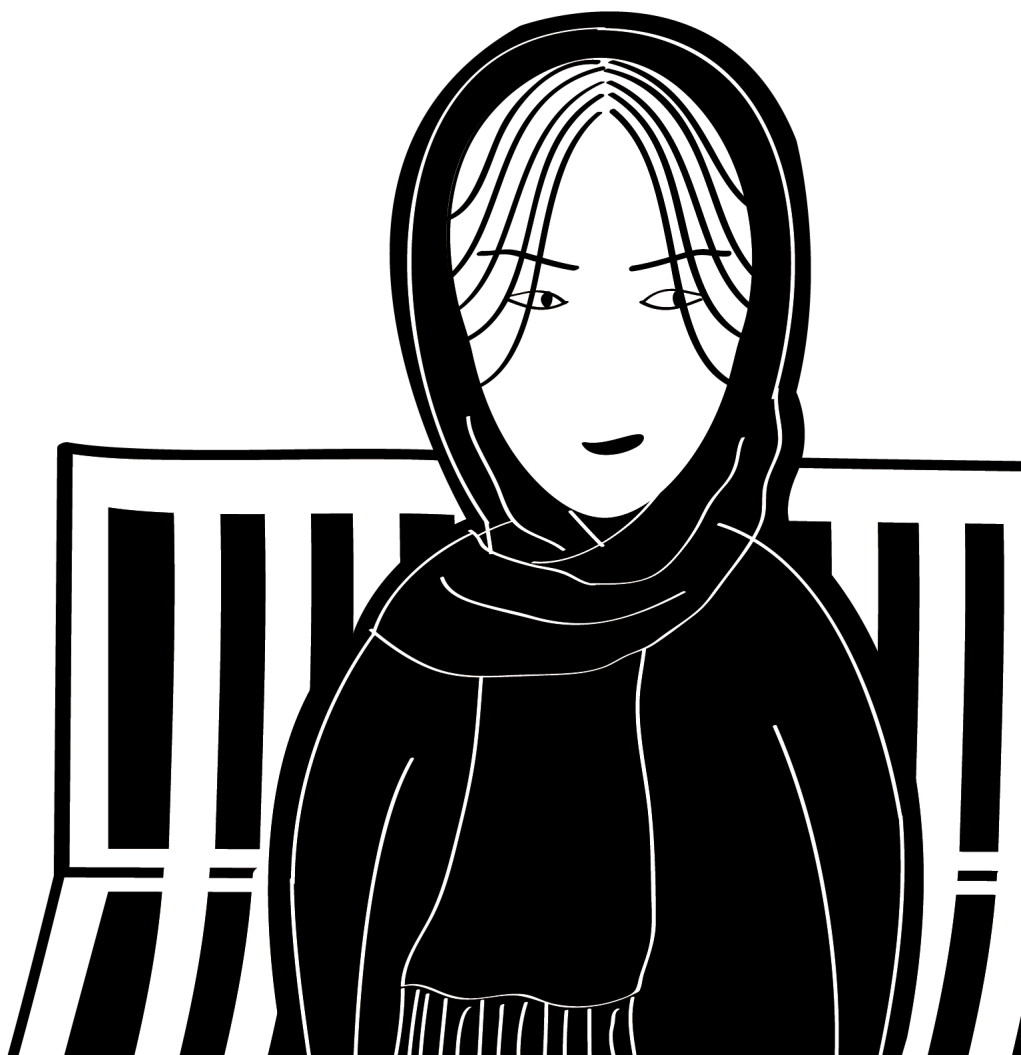
WHY ARE YOU HERE?

BECAUSE I'M DRESSED
'IMPROPERLY'.

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH WHAT
YOU'RE WEARING?

EXACTLY,
THAT'S MY QUESTION TOO.
WHY ARE YOU HERE?






I WAS IN A HOUSE WITH A GUY. HE PICKED ME UP
ON THE STREET AND THEN WE WENT TO HIS
PLACE. BUT APPARENTLY, HE DOES THAT LOT AND
THIS TIME ONE OF HIS NEIGHBOURS COULDN'T
STAND IT ANYMORE AND CALLED THE POLICE, BUT
SHHH! EVERYBODY HERE THINKS I WAS ARRESTED
BECAUSE OF MY APPEARANCE.



WHEN TWO POLICE OFFICERS WERE TRYING TO GET IN, I ESCAPED TO THE ROOF, BUT ONE OF THEM CAUGHT ME. HE TOLD ME IF I MADE OUT WITH HIM, HE WOULD STILL HAVE TO TAKE ME TO THE POLICE STATION, BUT HE WOULD INSTEAD REPORT THAT I WAS ARRESTED IN THE STREET DUE TO MY INAPPROPRIATE OUTFIT, WHICH IS MUCH BETTER THAN SAYING "WE CAUGHT HER IN SOME GUY'S HOUSE IN THE BEDROOM."



So, I AGREED TO THAT.



وای خدای من

I WAS STILL IN SHOCK WHEN THE
POLICEWOMAN CAME OVER WITH A
PIECE OF PAPER IN HER HAND.



FROM THE MOMENT I HAD SET
FOOT IN THAT PLACE, ONE GIRL
IN PARTICULAR HAD CAUGHT MY
ATTENTION, BECAUSE SHE HAD
NOT STOPPED CRYING.

AS SHE FOLLOWED THE
POLICEWOMAN LEAVING THE
HALL, I HEARD HER PLEAD . . .



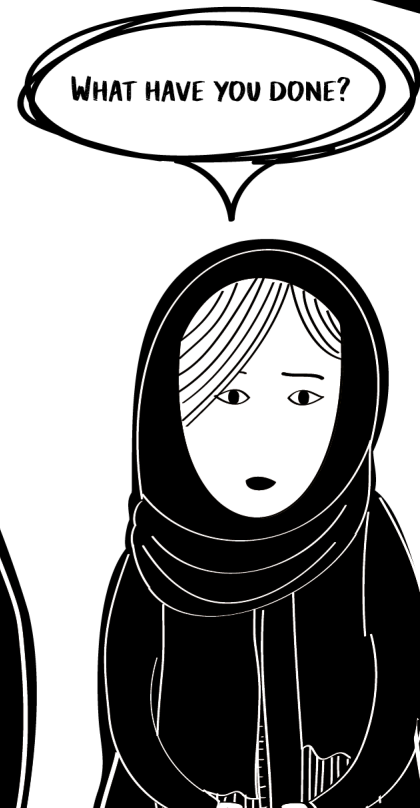
YOU SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT BEFORE YOU DID WHAT YOU DID!



I'M SO SORRY, PLEASE FORGIVE ME! PLEASE DON'T SEND ME TO PRISON! I'LL DIE THERE!!!



I DON'T WANT TO GO TO PRISON...



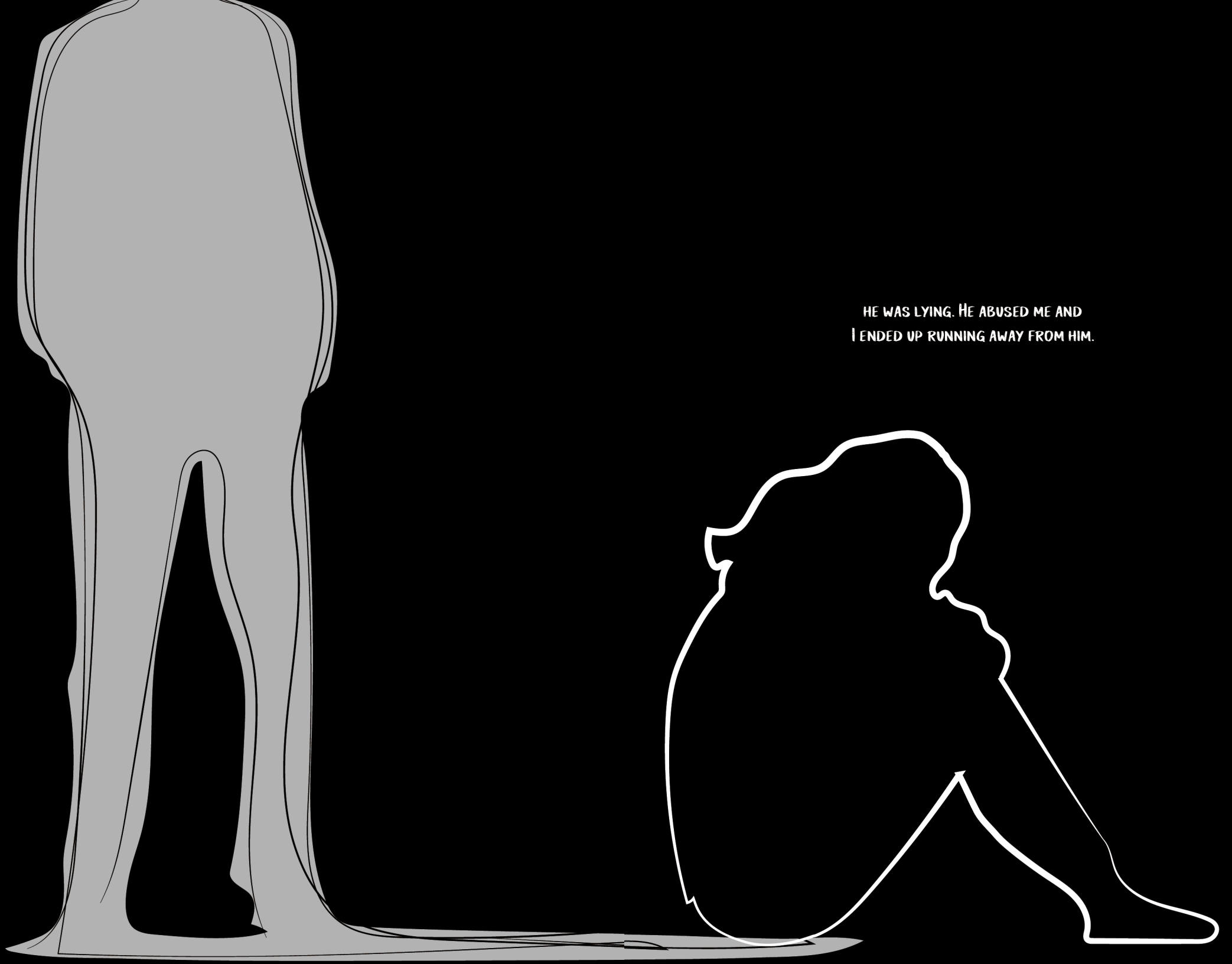
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

I FELL IN LOVE WITH A GUY. I TRUSTED HIM SO
MUCH THAT I RAN AWAY FROM HOME TO BE
WITH HIM. HE PROMISED HE'D MARRY ME.



BUT...

HE WAS LYING. HE ABUSED ME AND
I ENDED UP RUNNING AWAY FROM HIM.



I WENT BACK HOME,
BUT MY FAMILY BEAT ME...

AND



KICKED ME OUT.





THEY SAID THAT I'M NOT THEIR DAUGHTER
ANYMORE AND THEY ARE ASHAMED OF ME!

A black and white illustration of a park at night. In the center, a person is lying face down on a wooden park bench, appearing to be asleep. The bench is made of horizontal slats. The person is wearing a dark jacket and light-colored pants. The background features several trees with dark trunks and light-colored, stylized foliage. The ground is covered with fallen leaves, and there are some bushes in the foreground. The overall mood is somber and quiet.


I HAD NO MONEY AND NO PLACE
TO GO, SO I ENDED UP SLEEPING
IN PARKS.

IN THE END,
THE POLICE CAUGHT ME.





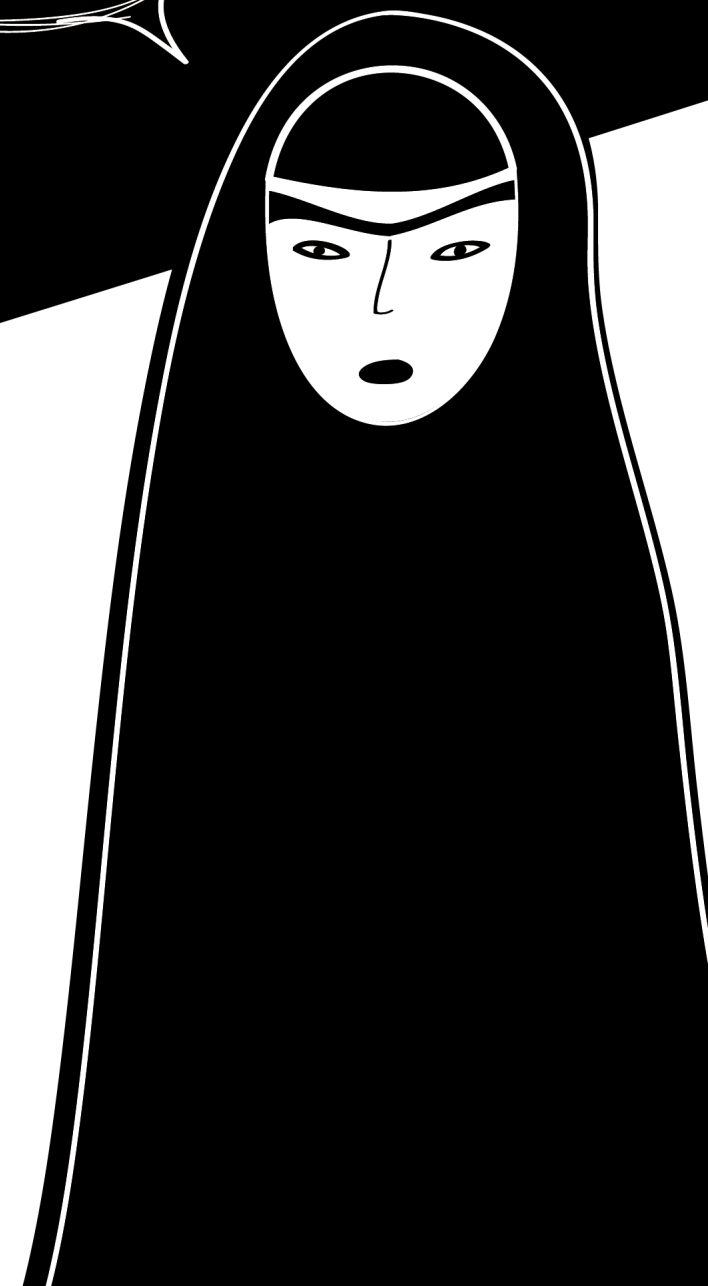
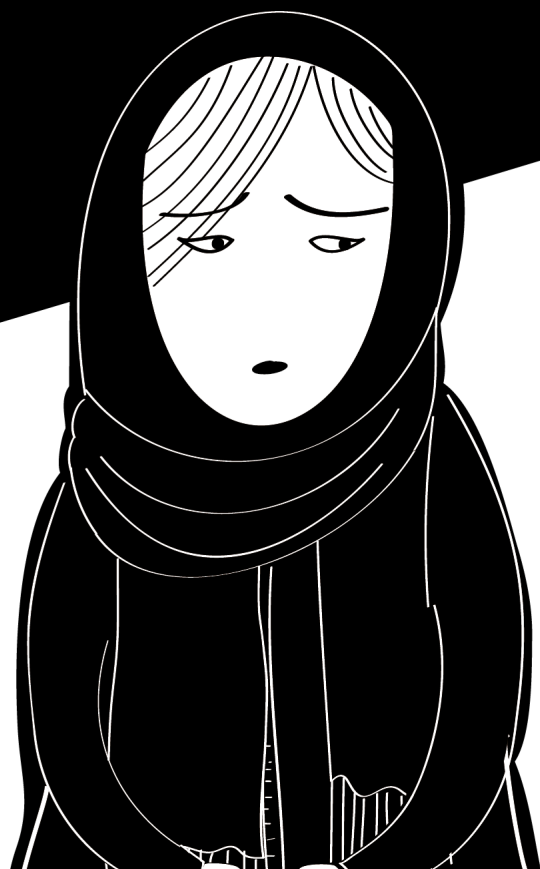
NOW THEY ARE SAYING THAT IF MY FAMILY DOESN'T COME
AND BAIL ME OUT, THEY WILL SEND ME TO PRISON, BECAUSE
THEY DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE ELSE TO SEND ME TO.



I DON'T WANT TO
GO TO PRISON ...

HOPEFULLY, IT'LL BE OK ...

YOU! COME ON,
LET'S GO!



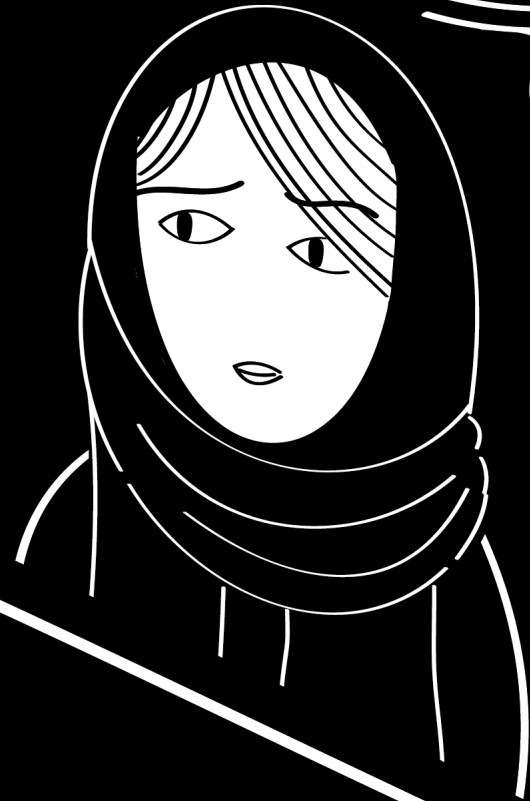


I FEEL SO SAD THAT YOU'RE THE
FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY!

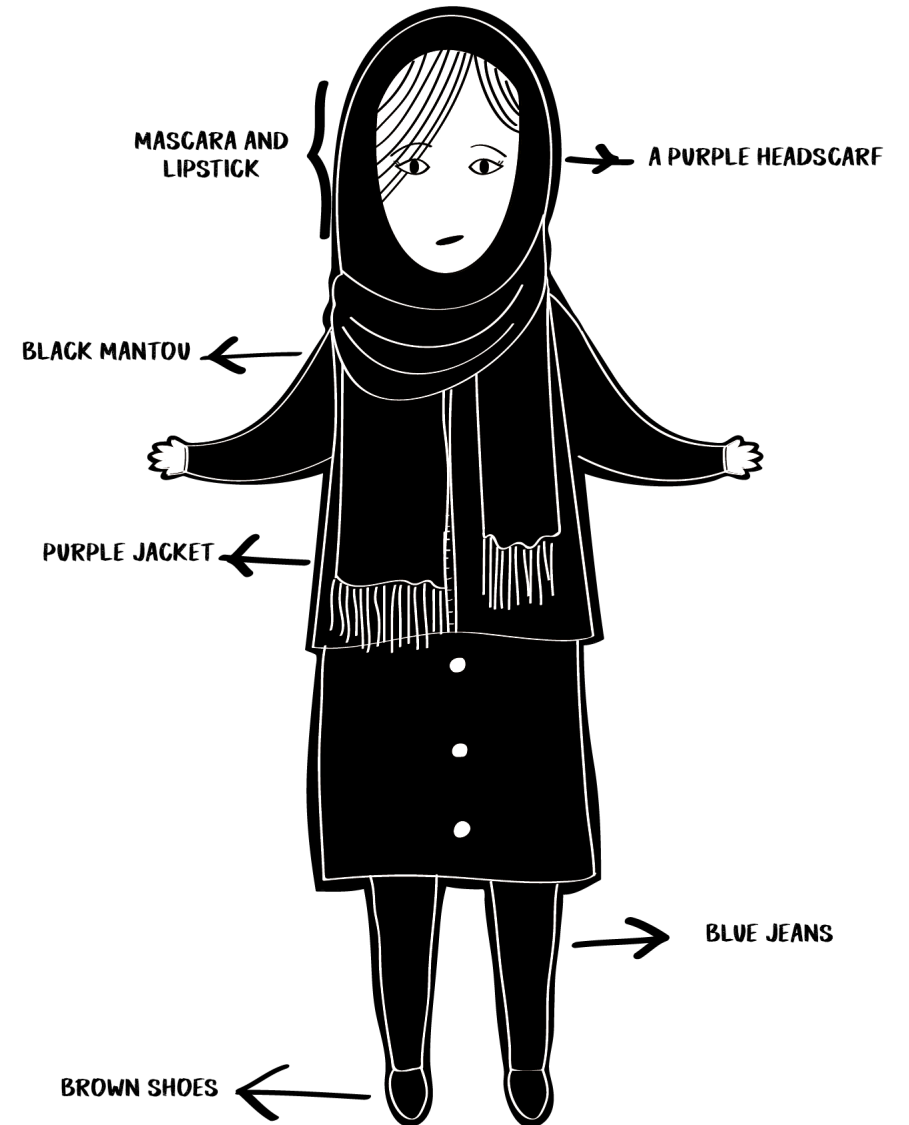
I'M A STUDENT.
I'M AT UNIVERSITY.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

SERIOUSLY, WHAT'S WRONG
WITH MY CLOTHES?



I'M WEARING



?

?

?

?

I HAVE GONE OUT LIKE THIS A HUNDRED
TIMES AND IT'S NEVER BEEN A PROBLEM! WHY,
ALL OF A SUDDEN, DID YOU THINK THAT WHAT
I'M WEARING IS SHAMEFUL
AND I SHOULD BE PUNISHED FOR IT?!!

WELL, THE WAY THAT YOU'RE WEARING
A MATCHING PURPLE JACKET AND
SCARF IS AN EXAMPLE.



SHE STARTED GIVING ME A LECTURE ON HOW
"GIRLS LIKE ME" SHOULD THINK ABOUT THE WAY
WE PRESENT OURSELVES IN SOCIETY, SO THAT
WE DON'T ENTICE MEN. ACCORDING TO HER, IF
SOMETHING EVER HAPPENS TO ME OR GIRLS
LIKE ME, IT'S OUR OWN FAULT AND WE HAVE NO
ONE TO BLAME BUT OURSELVES. I DIDN'T
BOTHR TO ARGUE, AS I KNEW THERE WAS
NOTHING I COULD SAY TO CHANGE HER OPINION
AND TRYING WOULD ONLY MAKE HER ANGRY.
SHE WAS STILL TALKING WHEN I HEARD
SOMEONE SHOUT FROM THE HALL "SOLEIMANI'S
PARENTS ARE HERE".

I CANNOT TELL YOU HOW RELIEVED I WAS TO
HEAR THOSE WORDS.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN LET THEM COME IN.

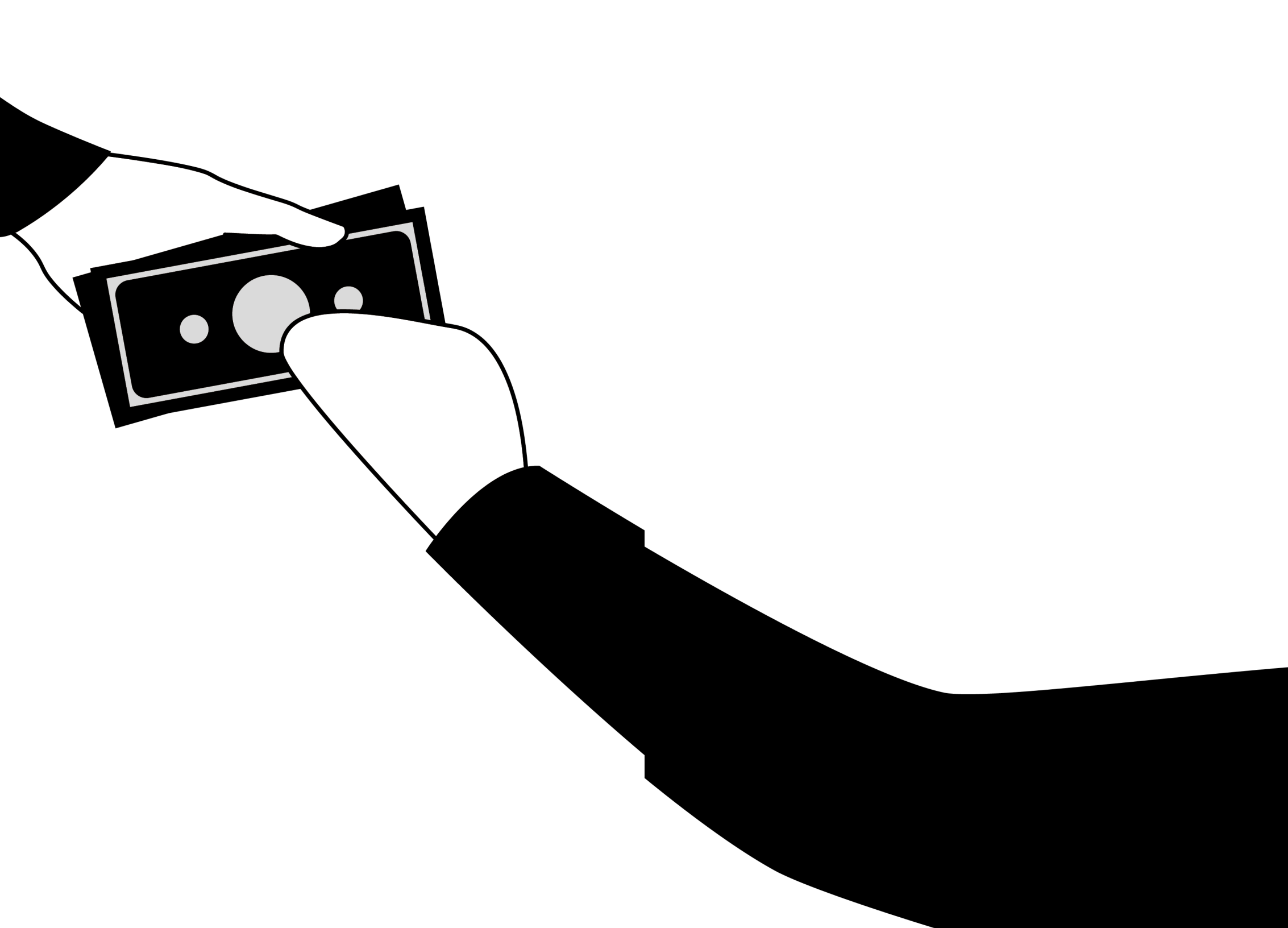




DID YOU BRING HER
ID AND SOME CASH?

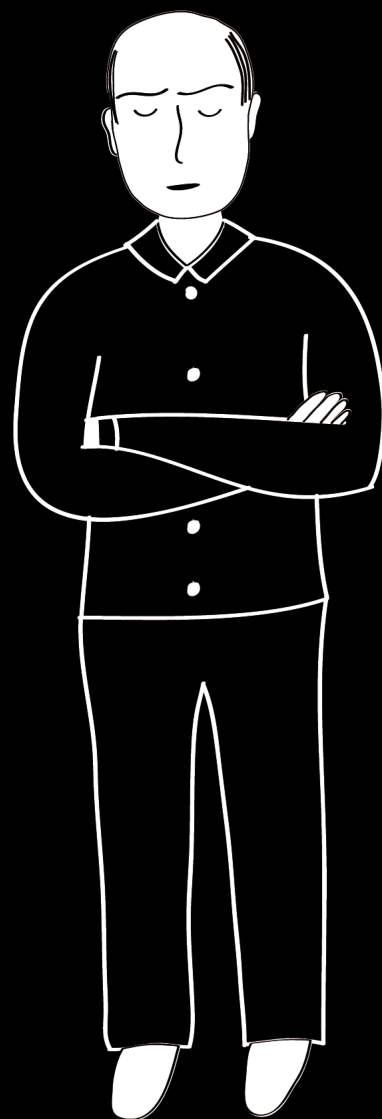


YES YES, WE HAVE BOTH.



AND AFTER ALL THAT STRESS AND HUMILIATION,
THAT WAS IT. MONEY WAS THE ONLY THING
THEY CARED ABOUT.

ONCE THEY'D GOT THE MONEY,
THEY LET ME OUT.





THAT NIGHT



WHEN I WENT TO BED, I CRIED A LOT. I HATED MYSELF BUT I DIDN'T
KNOW WHY. I KNEW THAT I HADN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG, BUT I
STILL FELT GUILTY. I FELT GUILTY THAT I HAD PUT MY PARENTS
THROUGH THAT. THEY HAD BEEN SO WORRIED AND I COULDN'T
FORGIVE MYSELF. I SPENT THE WHOLE NIGHT REPLAYING THE SCENES
OVER AND OVER AGAIN, EACH TIME IMAGINING MYSELF ANSWERING AND
DEFENDING MYSELF DIFFERENTLY. I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I COULDN'T
STOP THINKING ABOUT IT.

IT HAS BEEN 16 YEARS SINCE THAT DAY AND THE MEMORY STILL
HAUNTS ME. I STILL HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT IT. I STILL REMEMBER
THE FACES OF BOTH THE POLICEMAN AND POLICEWOMAN. I THINK OF
THEM FROM TIME TO TIME AND REMEMBER EVERY SINGLE UNPLEASANT
WORD THEY SAID. I IMAGINE MYSELF SEEING THEM AGAIN IN THE
STREET AND BEATING THEM TO DEATH AND TELLING THEM THEY'RE
NOTHING MORE THAN HEARTLESS CREATURES WHO DON'T DESERVE TO
BE CALLED HUMAN. I DON'T KNOW IF I WILL EVER FORGET WHAT
HAPPENED WITH THE POLICE, BUT I'M CERTAIN I WILL NEVER FORGET
SEEING MY DAD SO WORRIED AND QUIET, AND MY MUM WITH VERY
SWOLLEN, RED, TEAR-FILLED EYES.



AFTER THAT, THINGS WERE DIFFERENT. ESPECIALLY WHEN IT CAME TO GOING OUT. I WAS ALWAYS IN DILEMMA ABOUT WHAT TO WEAR, AS I COULD NEVER BE CONFIDENT THAT WHAT I WAS WEARING WOULDN'T GET ME INTO TROUBLE.



I FELT SO ANXIOUS WHEN I WAS OUT, CONSTANTLY WAITING
FOR SOMEONE TO COME UP TO ME AND SAY "HEY YOU! COME
WITH US". DAY AFTER DAY, I FOUND MYSELF FEELING MORE
AND MORE DEPRESSED AND ISOLATED.

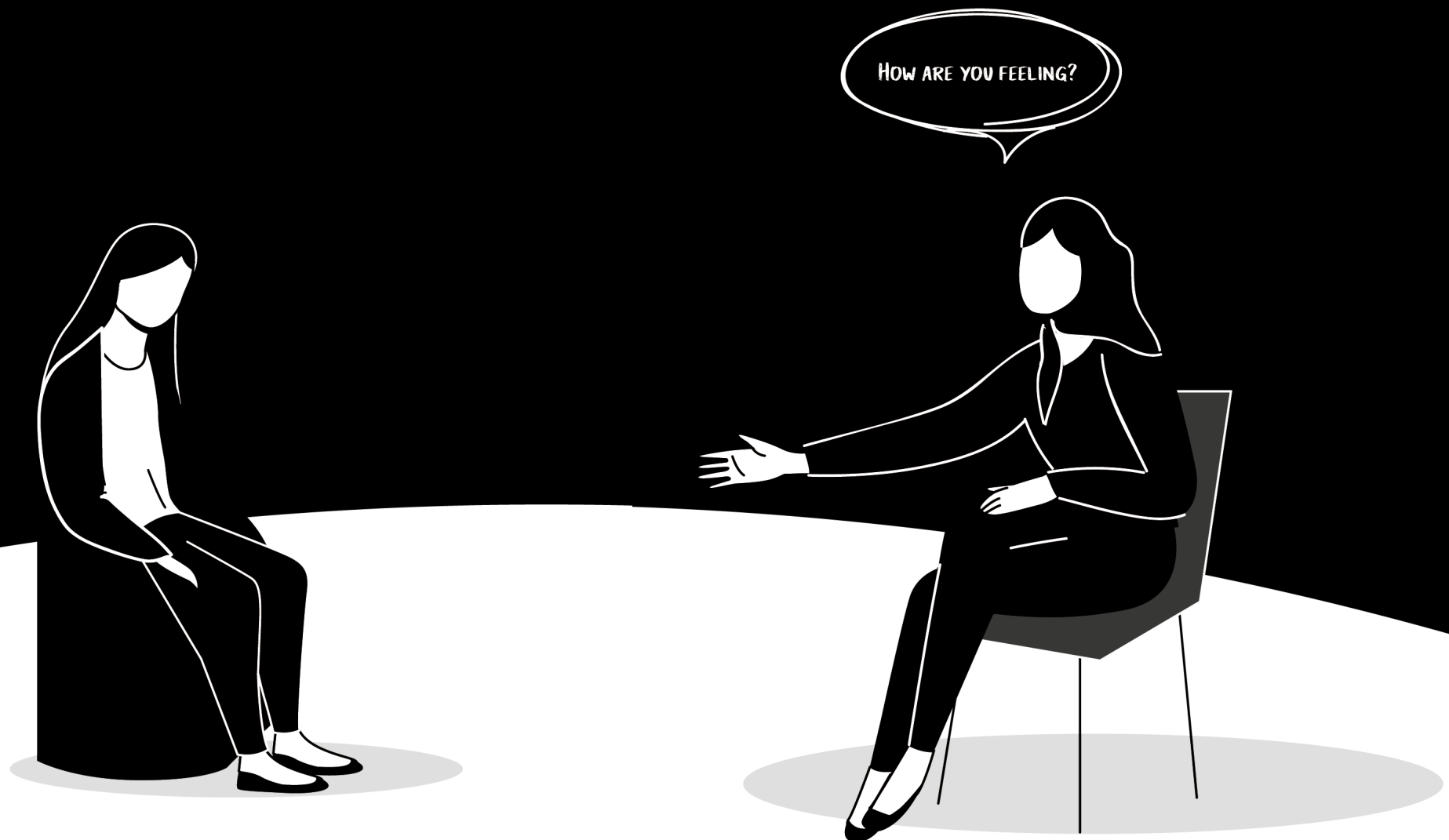


IT GOT TO THE POINT THAT I WAS BARELY LEAVING HOME, AS
THE ANXIETY WAS TOO MUCH TO HANDLE.



MY FAMILY WERE QUITE WORRIED ABOUT THE
WHOLE SITUATION, AND IT DIDN'T MATTER
HOW HARD THEY TRIED, IT DIDN'T HELP.

I HAD A CHAT WITH A COUNSELLOR AND
HER FIRST QUESTION WAS





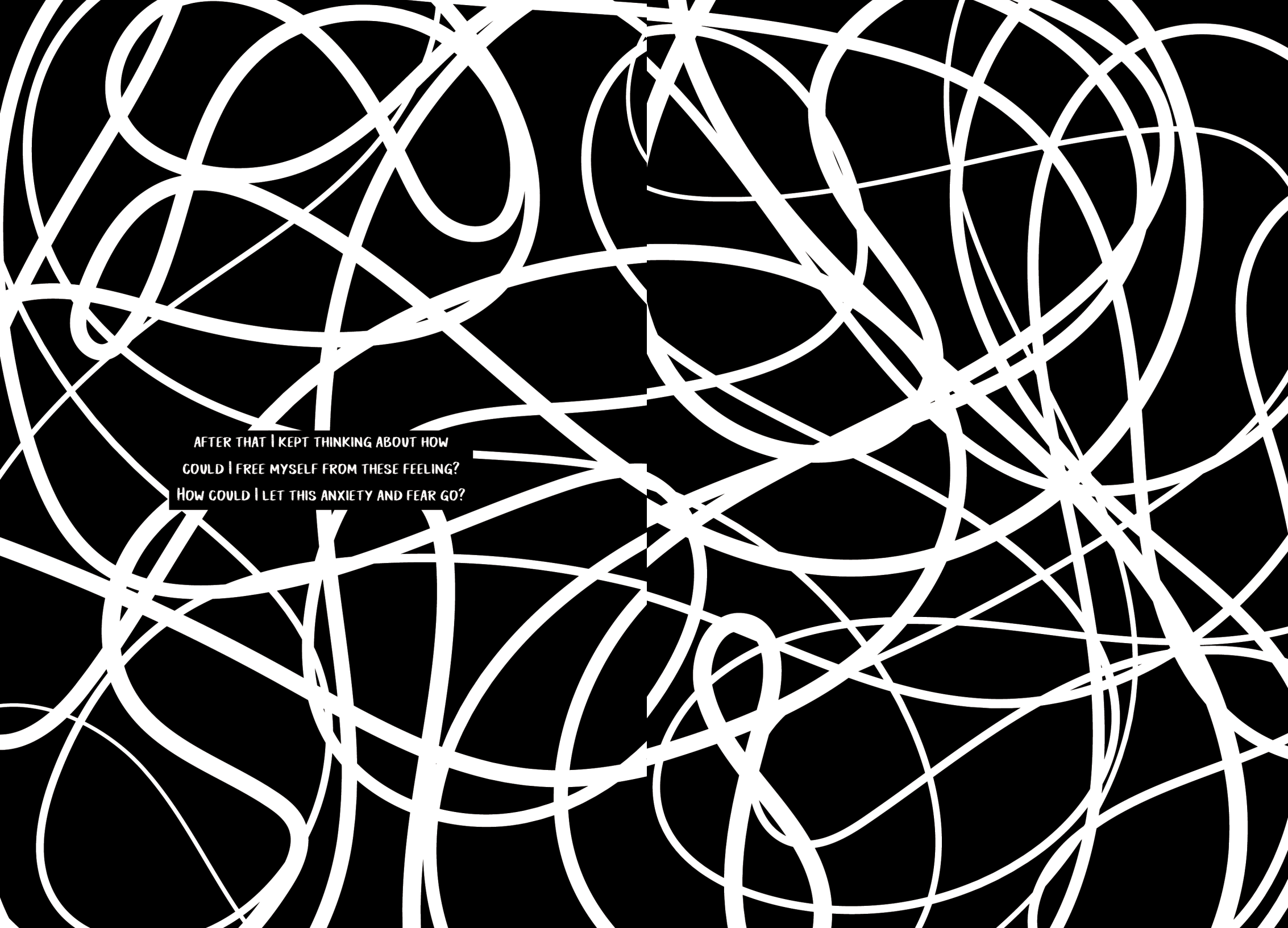
THAT WAS THE MAIN PROBLEM. I DIDN'T KNOW
EXACTLY HOW I WAS FEELING. SO, SHE
ENCOURAGED ME TO REALLY THINK ABOUT IT
AS THE STARTING POINT. EVENTUALLY, I
REALISED THAT APART FROM OBVIOUSLY
FEELING TRAUMATISED AND GUILTY, I FELT
BETRAYED!



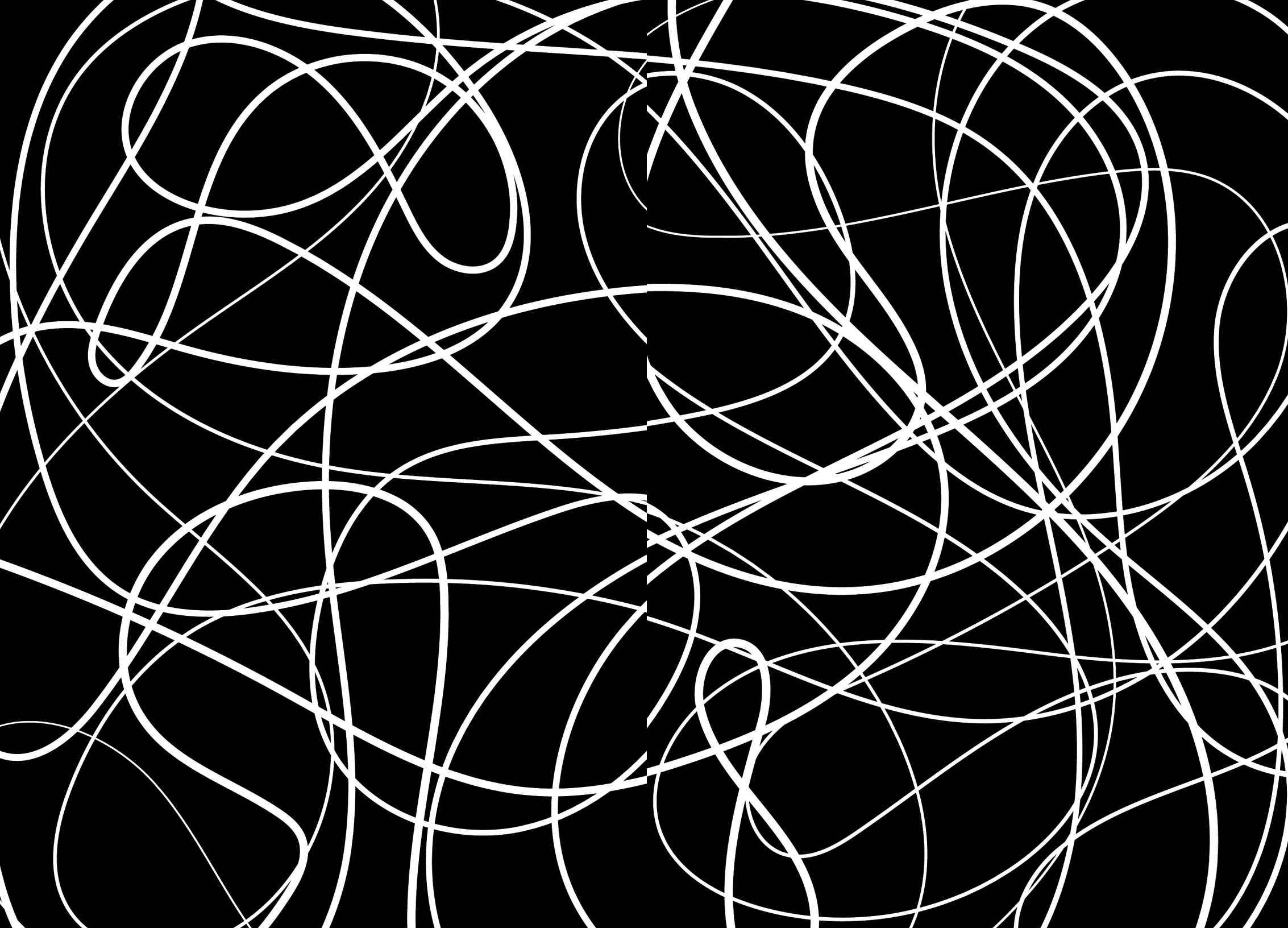
I HAD BETRAYED MYSELF AND MY OWN SENSE
OF JUDGMENT, FOR NOT KNOWING WHAT WAS
APPROPRIATE AND WHAT WAS
INAPPROPRIATE. I WAS THE REASON FOR MY
OWN SUFFERING, AS WELL AS MY PARENT'S. IT
WAS MY FAULT.

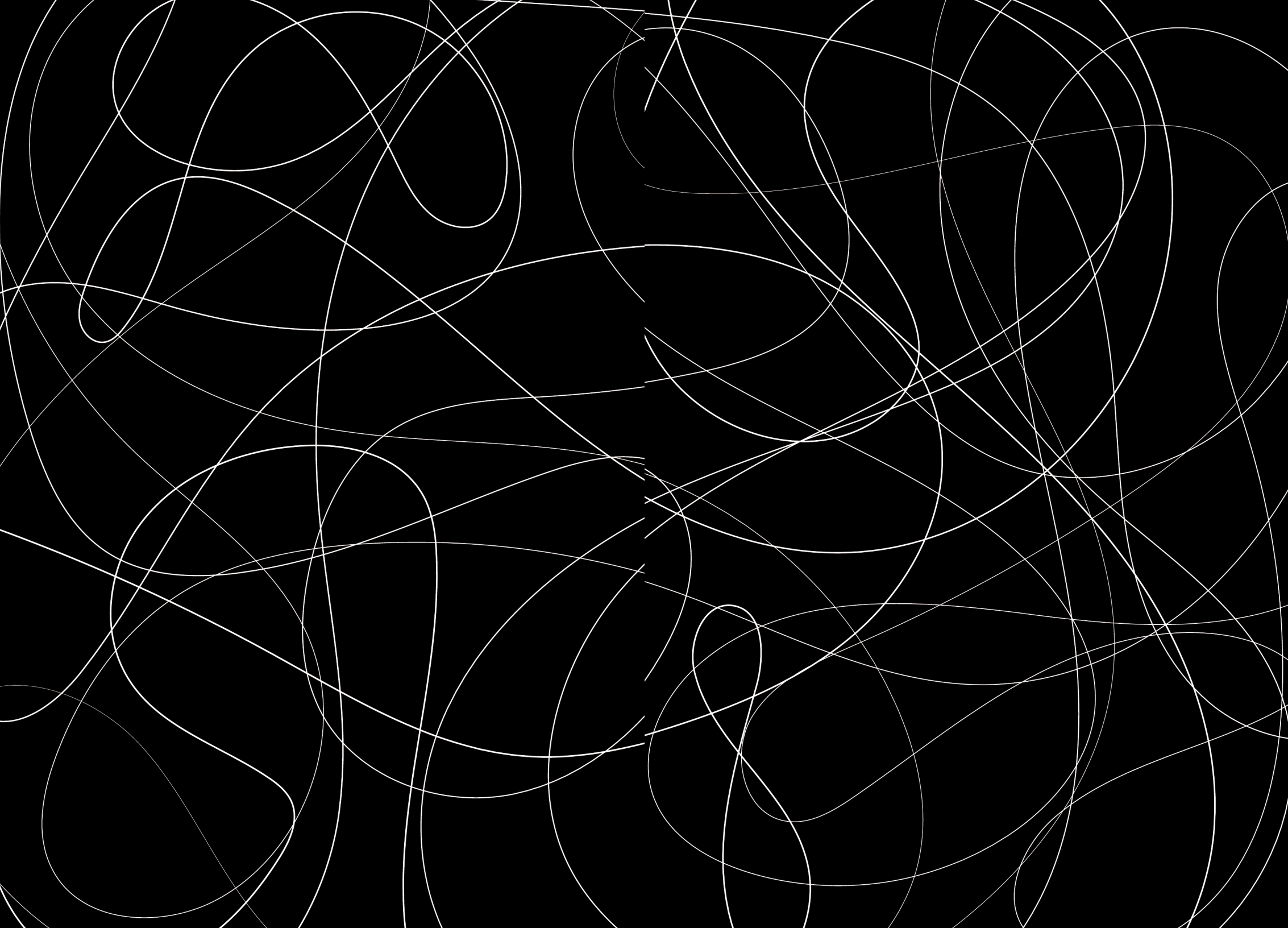


I JUST COULDN'T STOP BLAMING MYSELF.

The background of the entire image is a dense, chaotic pattern of white, hand-drawn scribbles on a solid black background. These scribbles consist of many overlapping, irregular loops and lines, creating a complex, textured effect that resembles a tangled web or a series of overlapping orbits. The lines vary in thickness and direction, contributing to a sense of movement and complexity.

AFTER THAT I KEPT THINKING ABOUT HOW
COULD I FREE MYSELF FROM THESE FEELING?
HOW COULD I LET THIS ANXIETY AND FEAR GO?





I HAD TO LEAVE, OR BETTER PUT,
ESCAPE!

I COULD NOT LIVE WITH THE CONSTANT FEAR,
STRESS AND ANXIETY FOR THE YEARS TO COME.

I COULD NOT LIVE IN CONSTANT FEAR, STRESS
AND ANXIETY FOR YEARS TO COME. THE FACT
THAT I FELT BETRAYED BY MY OWN COUNTRY,
THE PLACE THAT I CALLED HOME, MADE IT EASIER
TO MAKE THAT DECISION . I COULD NOT CALL A
PLACE A HOME WHEN I DIDN'T FEEL SAFE THERE. I
COULDN'T STAY SOMEWHERE WHERE BOTH THE
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES WERE NOT SAFE
AND I HAD TO PRETEND TO BE SOMEONE AND
DO THINGS THAT I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN ALMOST
EVERY DAY.

SO I LEFT WHEN I WAS JUST 22 YEARS OLD.





IT'S A SHAME I HAD TO LEAVE. MOST OF THE TIME, I
FEEL GUILTY THAT I WAS LUCKY TO LEAVE VERY
YOUNG, KNOWING THERE ARE STILL MILLIONS OF
GIRLS LIKE ME, LIVING THEIR LIVES LIKE I DID
BEFORE I LEFT.

BUT IT'S THE TRUTH, I CONSIDER MYSELF LUCKY
THAT I CAN NOW BE MYSELF WITHOUT FEELING
GUILTY OR BEING PUNISHED FOR IT.

I STILL HEAR ALL SORTS OF STORIES SIMILAR TO
MINE, AND EVERY TIME I HEAR THEM, I FEEL
RELIEVED, I'M NOT THERE AND DON'T HAVE TO PUT
UP WITH THAT ANYMORE.

BUT WHO KNOWS?!

