

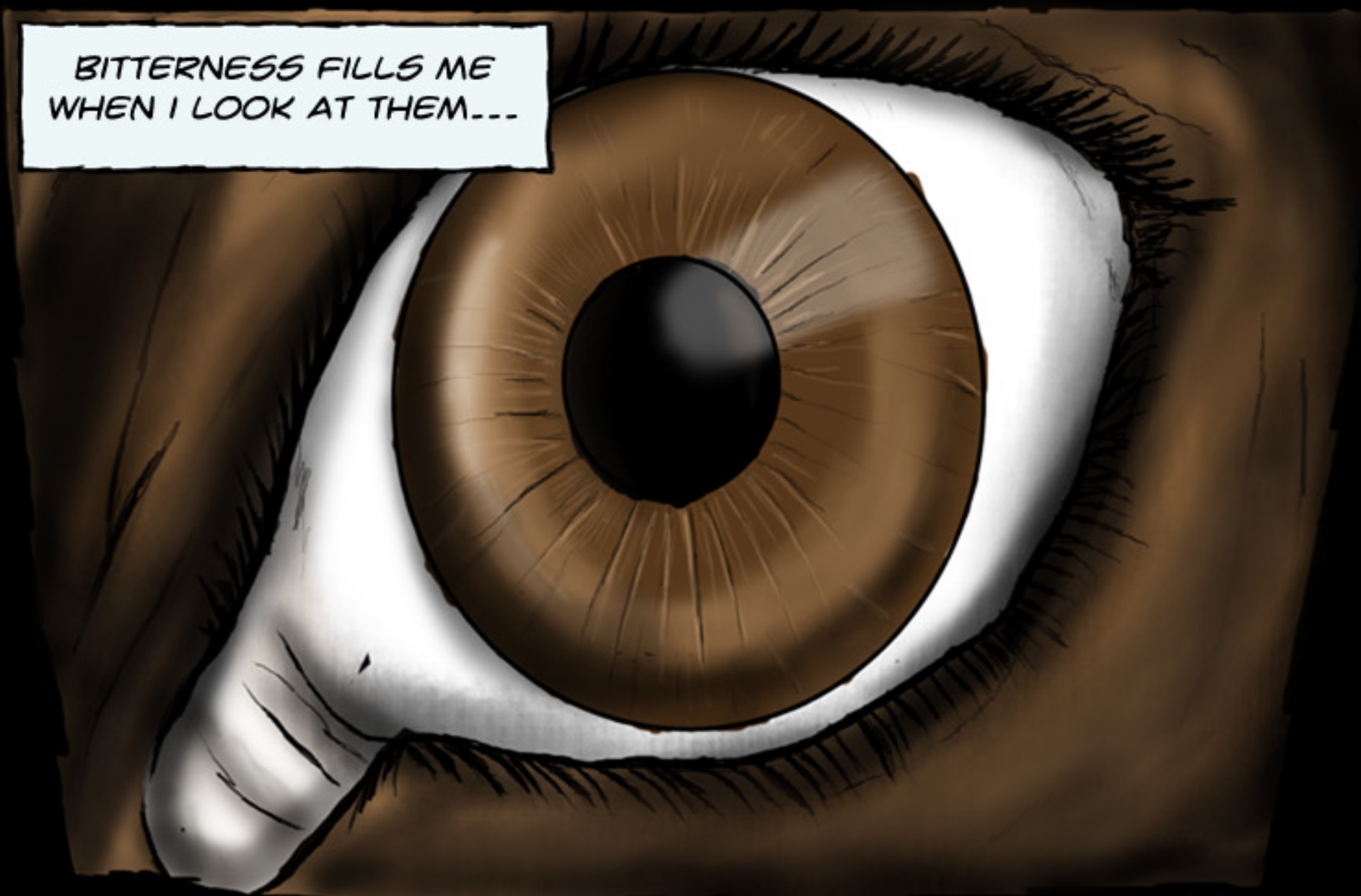
CASH COW

A young girl with short dark hair, wearing a brown t-shirt, stands in the foreground looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She is in a muddy, dark brown field. In the background, several cows are visible; one is white with horns, and others are brown and grey. The scene is outdoors with some trees and foliage in the distance.

MARC ELLISON
SCRIPT / PHOTOS / VIDEO

CHRISTIAN MUGARURA
ILLUSTRATIONS

BITTERNESS FILLS ME
WHEN I LOOK AT THEM...



EVERY DAY THESE COWS
REMIND ME MY PARENTS
SOLD ME TO A MAN TO
BE HIS WIFE...

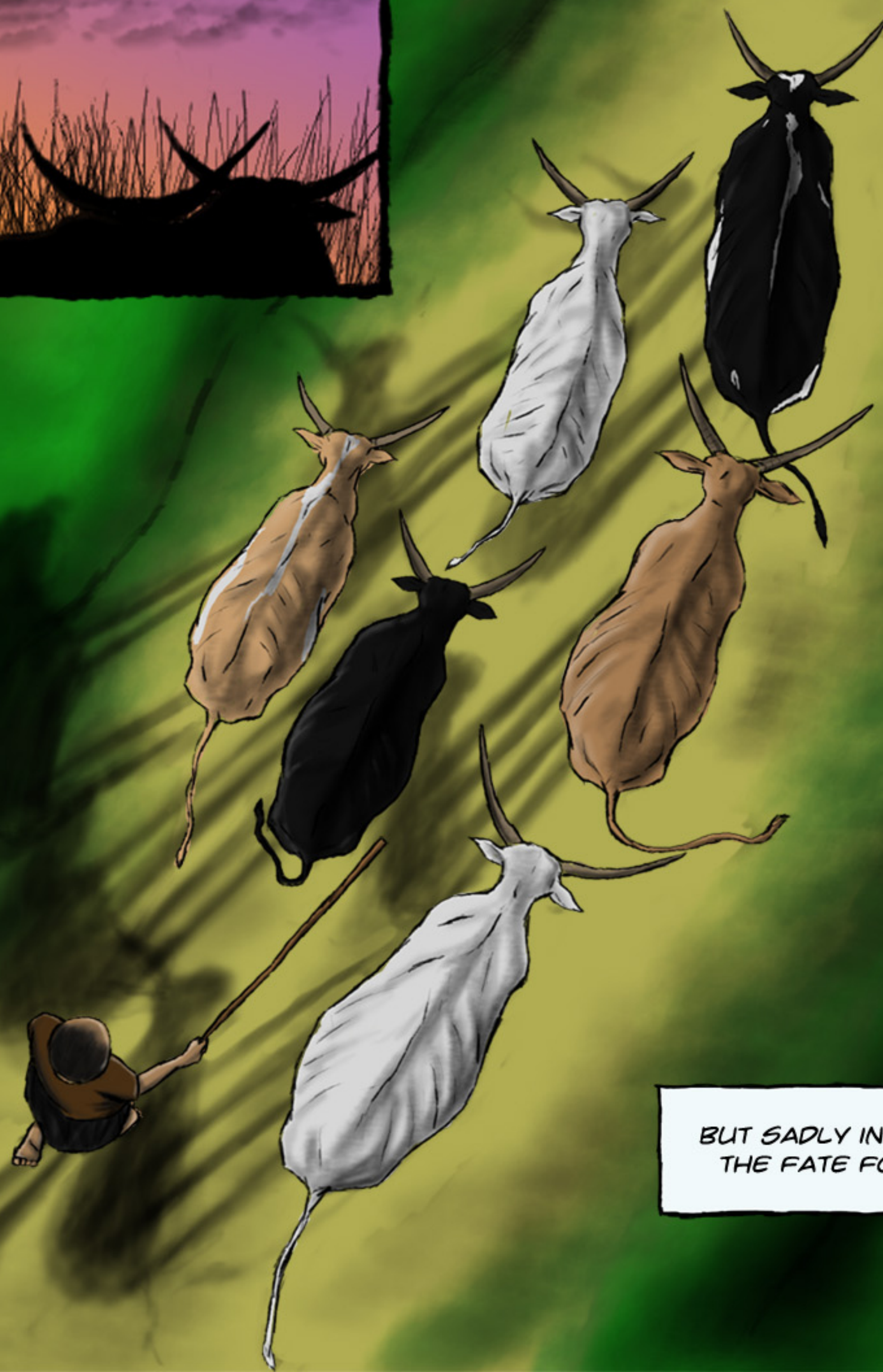
I WAS ONLY 14...





I WAS TREATED LIKE
CATTLE -A COMMODITY TO
BE BOUGHT AND SOLD

ALTHOUGH GIVEN WHAT I WENT
THROUGH I SOMETIMES WISH I
HAD BEEN BORN A COW.



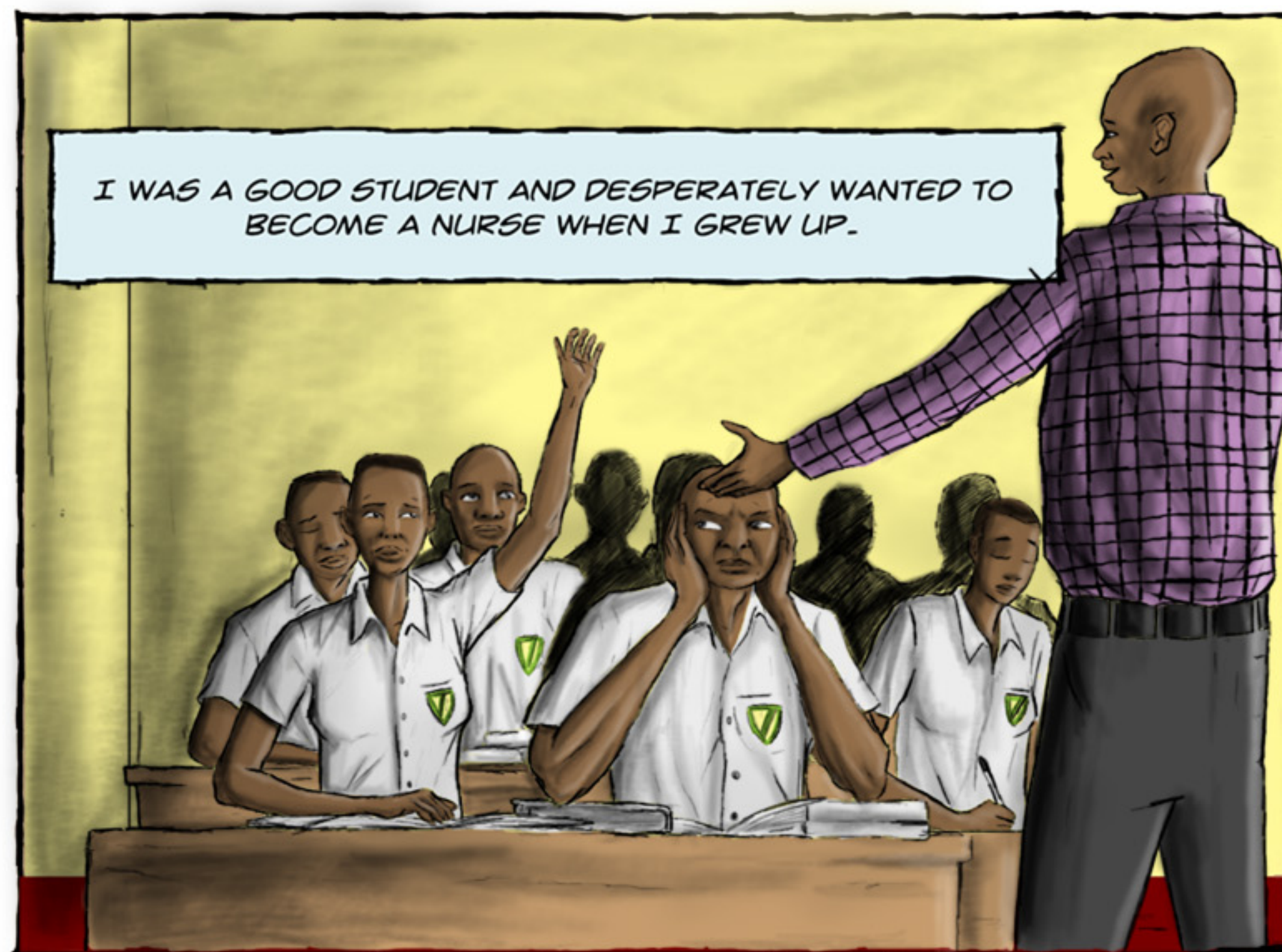
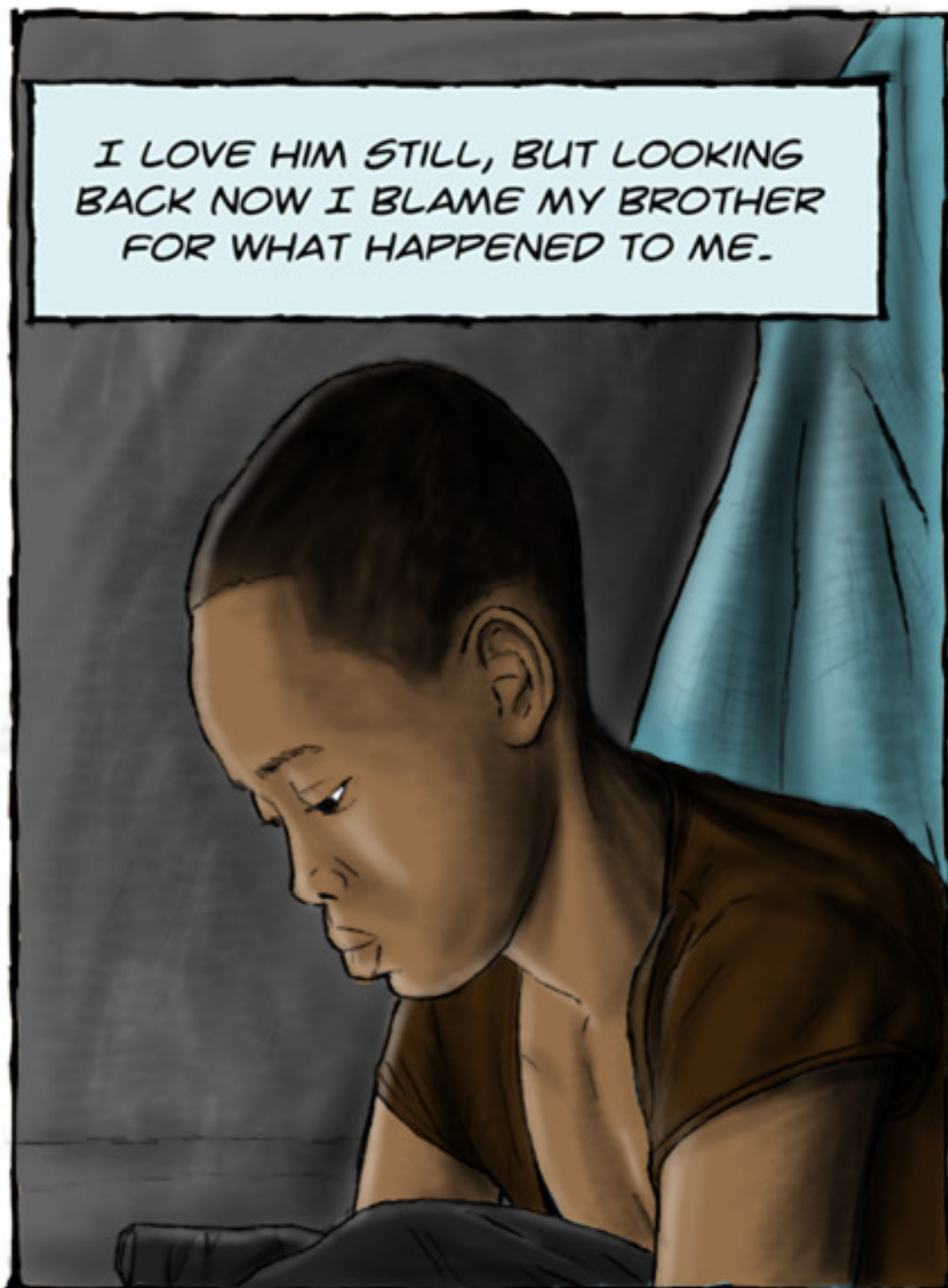
BUT SADLY IN OUR SUKUMA TRIBE SUCH IS
THE FATE FOR YOUNG GIRLS LIKE ME...

A young woman with dark skin is lying in a tent at night. She is wearing a brown tank top and a blue headscarf. She is looking up and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The tent is made of a light blue mesh material. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a large rock. There is some white chalk-like writing on the wall behind her. A pink cloth is draped over a wooden frame to the left of the woman. A colorful patterned cloth is also visible near her feet.

HERE IN THE SHINYANGA REGION OF TANZANIA, WHEN A
GIRL DEVELOPS BREASTS AND STARTS TO MENSTRUATE,
SHE IS EXPECTED TO MARRY

WE ARE THE CASH COWS
THAT CAN ALLEVIATE THE
POVERTY OF OUR FAMILIES

MY NAME IS GRACE MASANJA
AND THIS IS MY STORY...



IN RETURN MY PARENTS MADE MY LIFE A MISERY.



WHEN I CAME HOME THEY MADE SURE THERE WAS NO DINNER LEFT FOR ME...



I OFTEN WENT TO BED HUNGRY.



AND SOME DAYS MY FATHER MADE ME GO WITH HIM TO THE FIELDS TO DIG, FORCING ME TO MISS SO MANY CLASSES



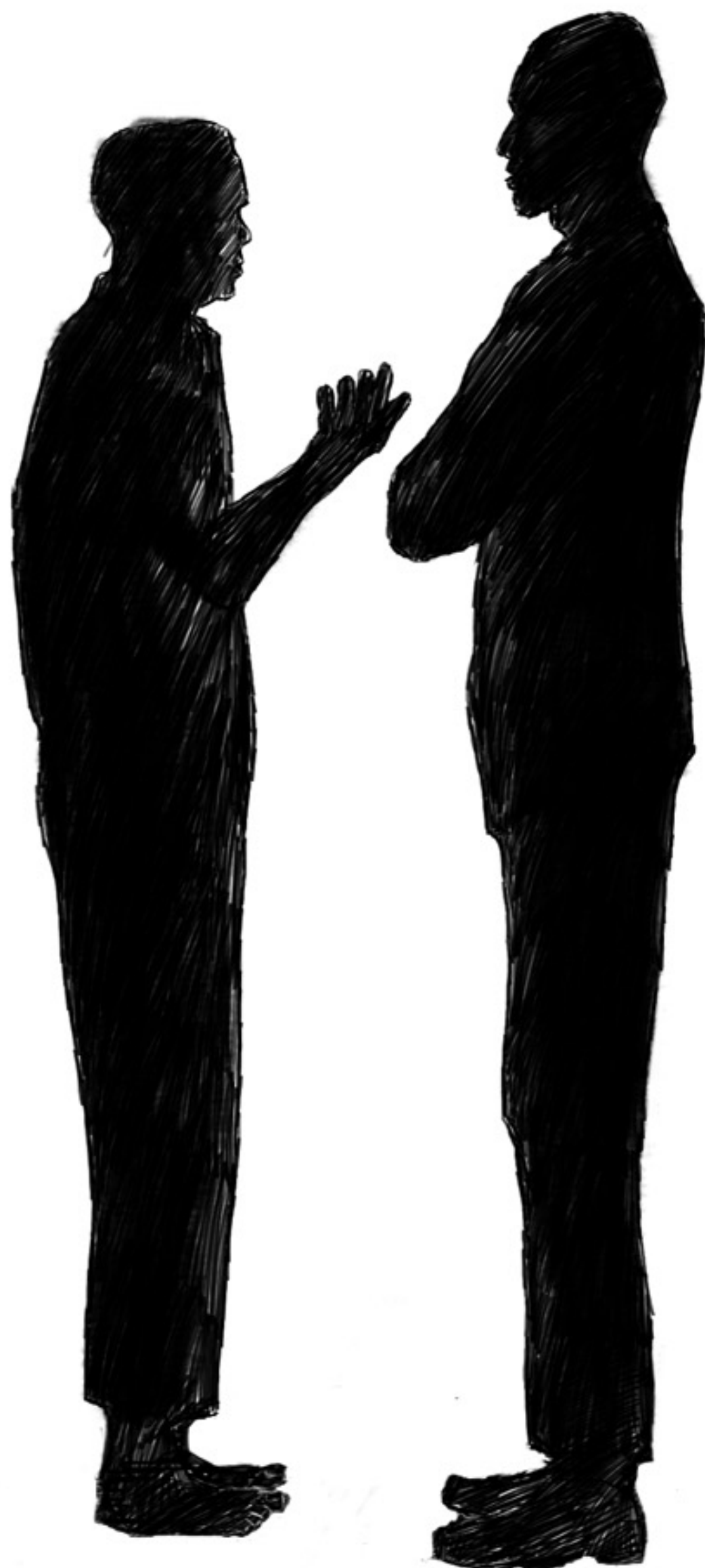
IT WAS SUCH A STRESSFUL TIME...

IS IT ANY WONDER I FAILED MY END OF YEAR EXAMS?



WHILE MY FRIENDS WENT BACK TO SCHOOL, MY FUTURE WAS SEALED IN THE FIELDS

A FEW MONTHS LATER A MAN CAME TO OUR HOUSE AND ASKED TO SPEAK TO MY FATHER.



WHEN I RETURNED FROM THE BORE-HOLE MY MOTHER CALLED ME OVER TO MEET THE MAN.



MY NAME IS SAMWELL...

I LOVE YOU...

I WANT TO MARRY YOU.



HE TOLD ME THIS AND YET I HAD NEVER MET HIM BEFORE.

I FOUND OUT HE HAD OFFERED MY FATHER A DOWRY OF A DOZEN COWS FOR ME...

BUT OUR TEACHERS HAD TOLD US WE WERE TOO YOUNG TO BE MARRIED LEGALLY.

ALL YOU DO IS EAT OUR FOOD. YOU'VE DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL - WHAT ELSE ARE YOU GOING TO DO?



A photograph of a young woman sitting on a concrete floor, looking down with a somber expression. She is wearing a brown t-shirt and a dark blue skirt. Her hands are clasped over her knees. In the background, a man in a white shirt is sitting at a wooden table, looking towards the camera. The setting appears to be a simple, dimly lit room with a green bucket and some other items visible in the background.

BUT I REFUSED...AND MY HUSBAND-
TO-BE LOOKED ON WHILE MY FATHER
TRIED TO BEAT RESPECT INTO ME.

MY FATHER DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MY DREAM WAS TO FIRST GET
AN EDUCATION, AND THEN GET MARRIED.

BIRTH, MARRIAGE AND DEATH ARE THE THREE MILESTONES THAT MARK A
PERSON'S LIFE - BUT ONLY REALLY ONE IS A MATTER OF CHOICE.

EACH DAY WHEN MY FATHER CAME HOME FROM THE FIELDS HE'D ASK ME THE SAME QUESTION...

HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND TODAY?

AND EACH DAY MY RESPONSE REMAINED THE SAME.

NO

IT WAS A GOOD DAY WHEN THE BEATING ONLY LASTED FIVE MINUTES.

WHACK!!

HE'D USE HIS BELT, A STICK, HIS FEET AND FISTS.

EVEN WHEN I FELL DOWN, HE WOULDN'T STOP.



THOSE WERE TO BE THE LAST WORDS HE SPOKE TO ME FOR OVER A YEAR.



MY FATHER AND SAMWELL HAD PLANNED THINGS WELL---

AT THAT TIME THERE WAS NO ONE TO HEAR ME
BECAUSE OUR NEIGHBOURS WERE OUT FARMING

MAMA! MAMA!---



5

6

7

SAMWELL SAT ME BETWEEN HIM AND HIS FRIEND SO THAT I COULDN'T ESCAPE.



I STARTED TO CRY.



LET ME GO, I DON'T WANT TO GO!



5

36 → 5A

6

37 → 6A

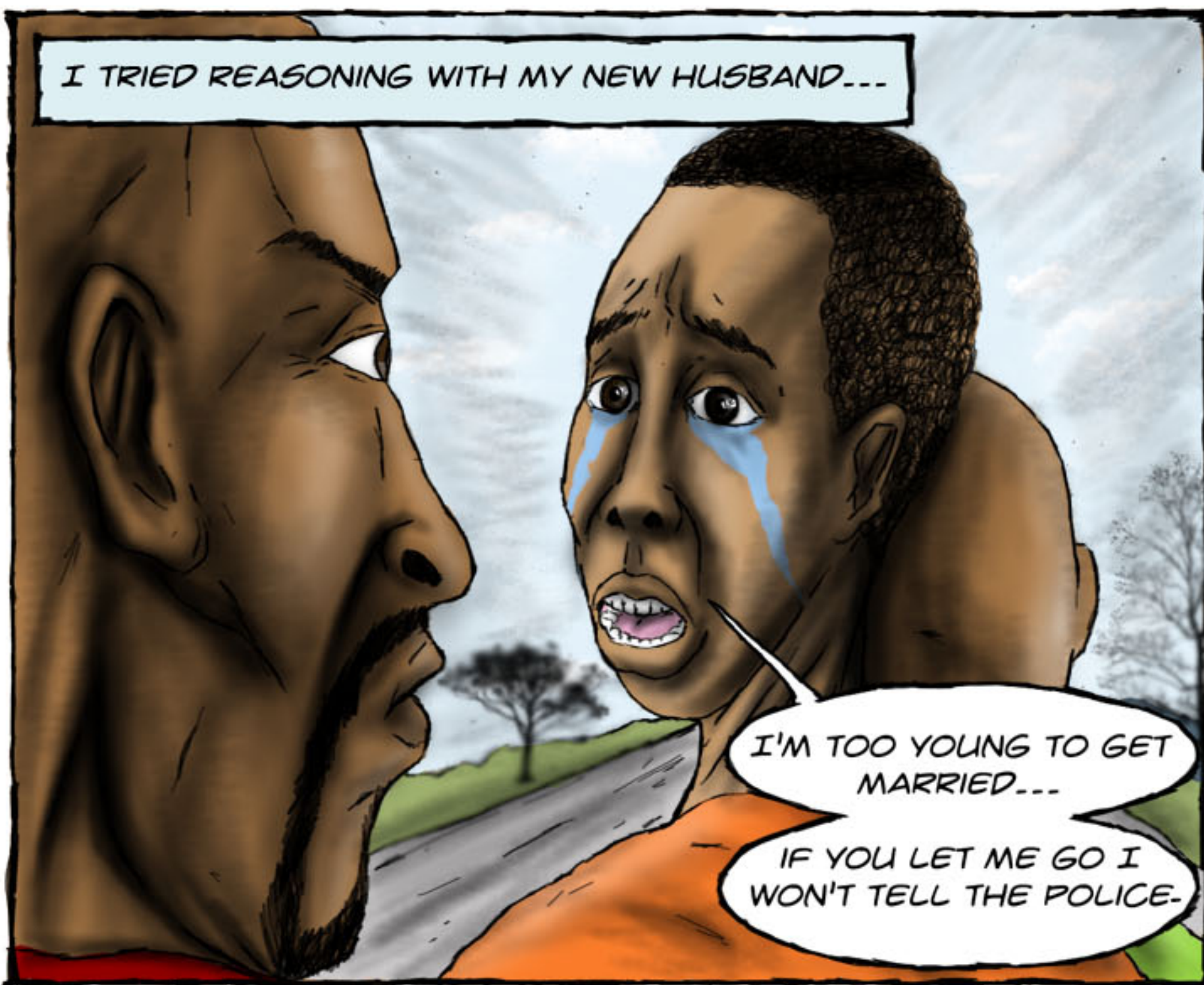
7

38 → 7A

I TRIED TO WRIGGLE FREE, BUT MY ARMS WERE PINNED TIGHTLY BY SAMWELL.



I TRIED REASONING WITH MY NEW HUSBAND...



I'M TOO YOUNG TO GET MARRIED...

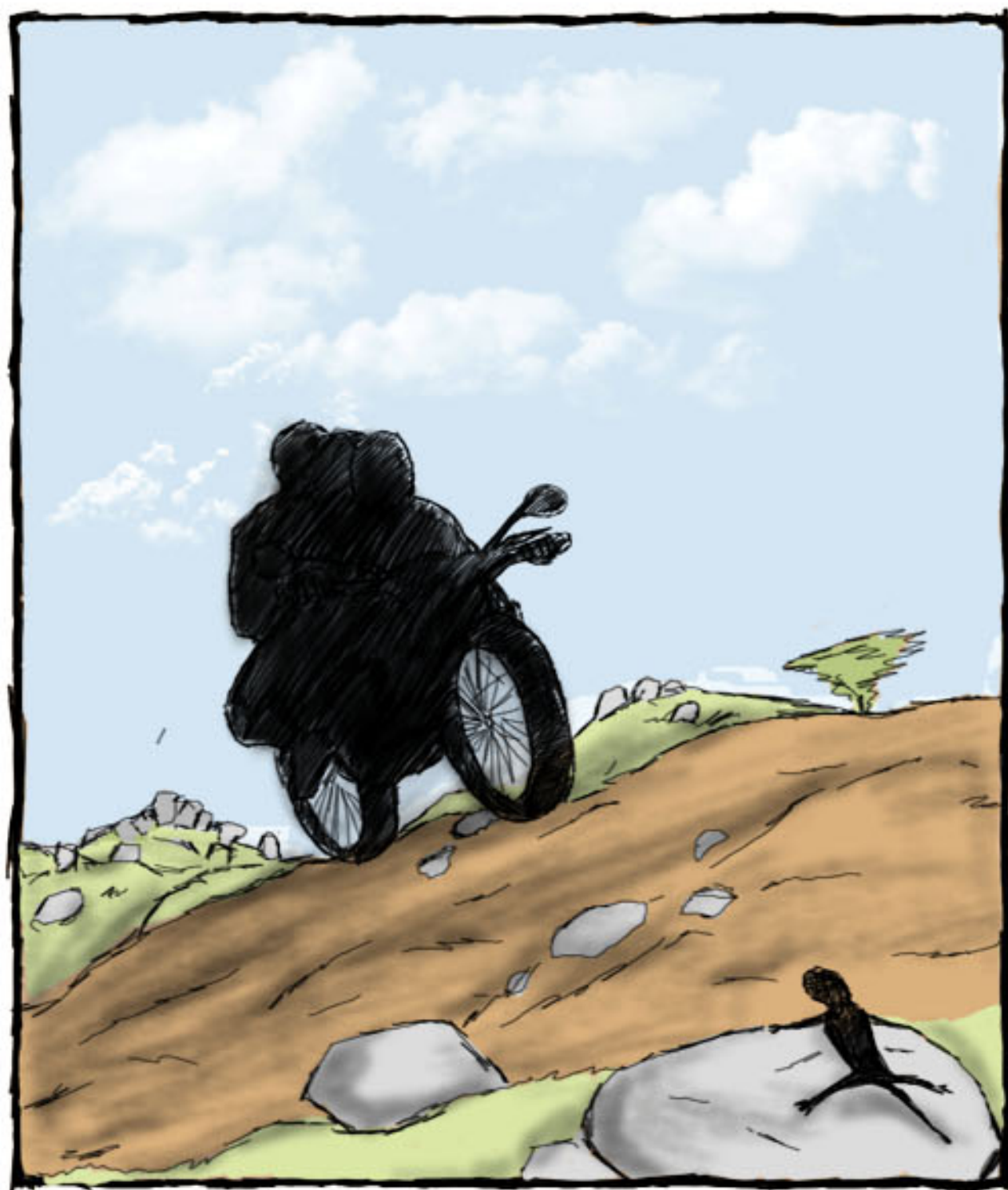
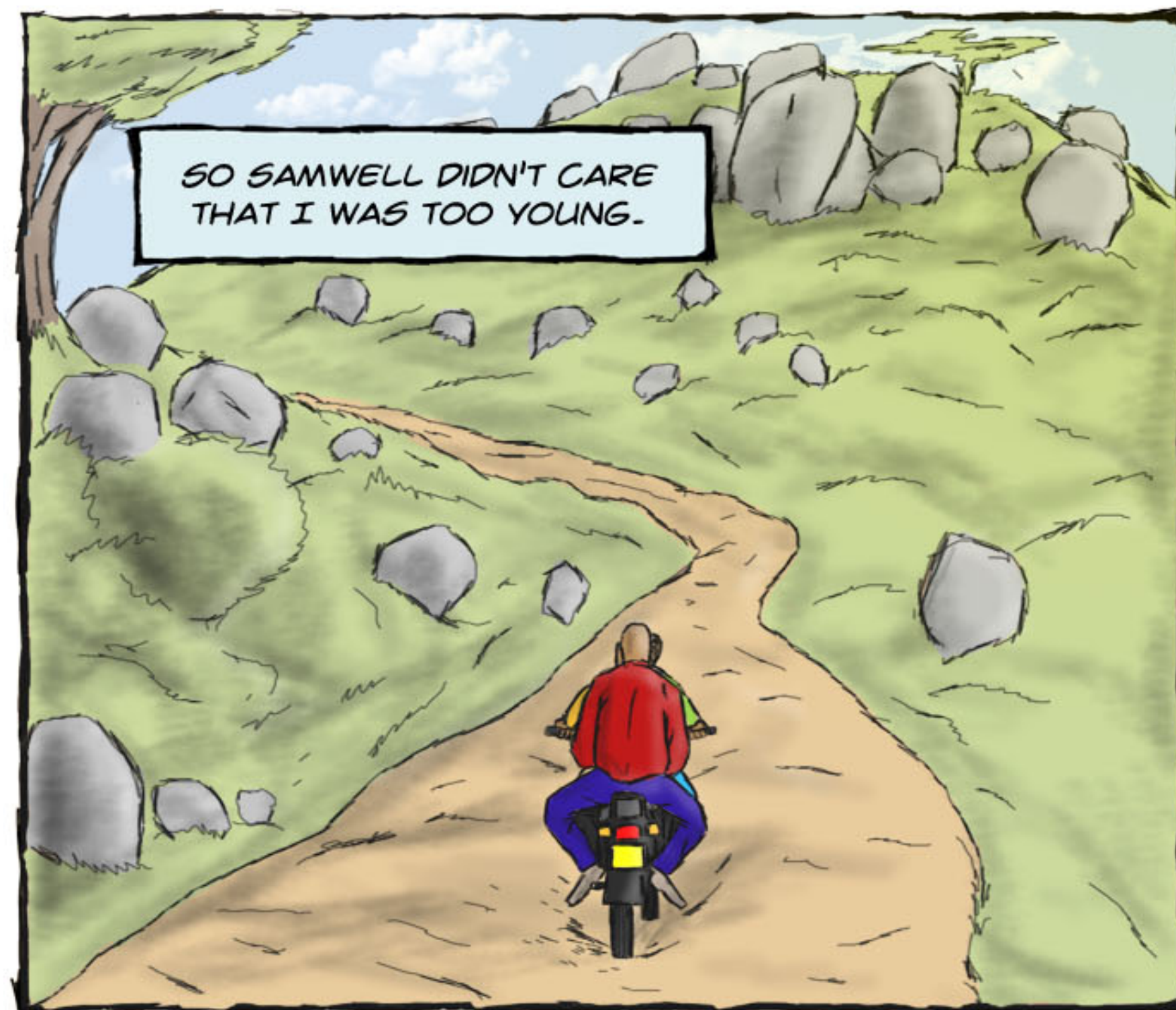
IF YOU LET ME GO I WON'T TELL THE POLICE.

BUT IN SHINYANGA, SUKUMA MEN HAVE A MOTTO-

ALCOHOL,
MEAT,
AND
VAGINA

THEY BELIEVE TO BE A REAL MAN AND TO LIVE A DECENT LIFE YOU NEED, AND ARE ENTITLED TO, THESE THREE THINGS.

SO SAMWELL DIDN'T CARE THAT I WAS TOO YOUNG.



WE DROVE FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE HOURS AND ALL I COULD THINK WAS WHY ARE MY PARENTS DOING THIS TO ME?

I FELT LIKE MY LIFE HAD ENDED...



IT FELT LIKE THE END OF EVERYTHING.



I WAS CRYING AND STILL HE WOULDN'T STOP...



THAT WAS HOW I LOST MY VIRGINITY.



AND THAT WAS WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE FOR THE NEXT 11 MONTHS.

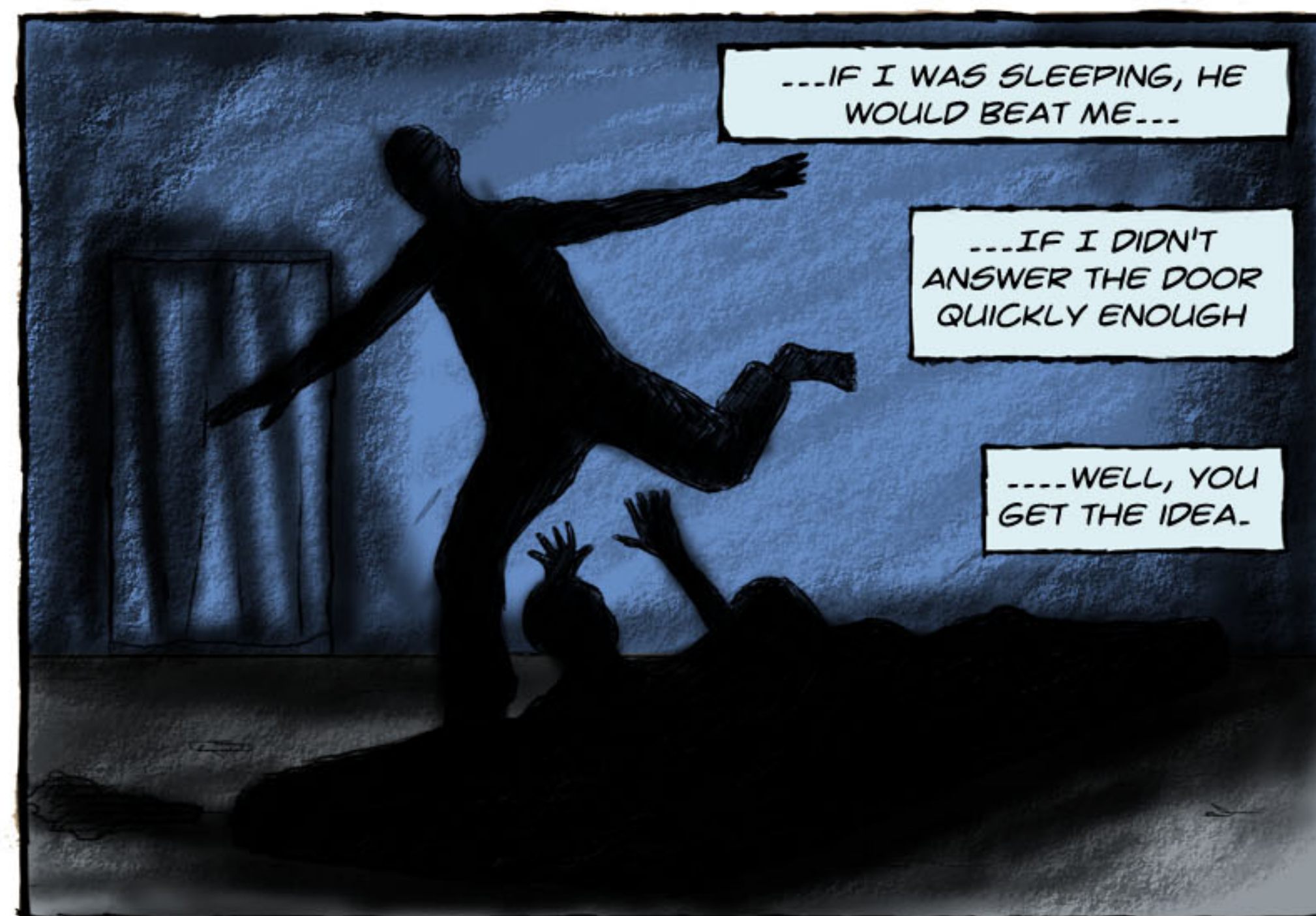
I WAS LUCKY IF A DAY PASSED THAT HE DID NOT WANT SEX.

HE WOULD COME HOME DRUNK MOST DAYS...



IF DINNER WASN'T READY, HE WOULD BEAT ME...

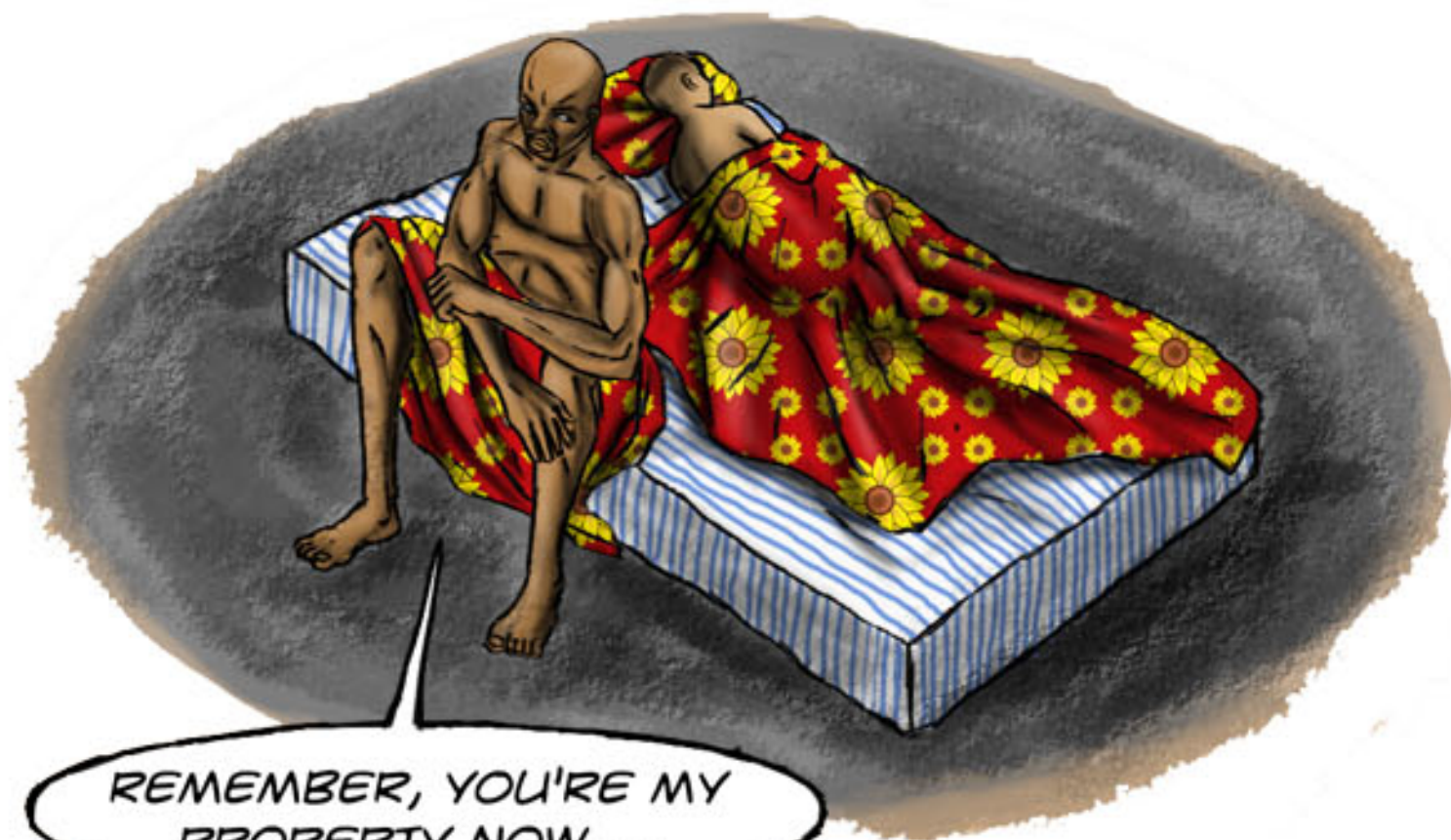
...IF I WAS SLEEPING, HE WOULD BEAT ME...



...IF I DIDN'T ANSWER THE DOOR QUICKLY ENOUGH

....WELL, YOU GET THE IDEA.

AFTER EVERY BEATING, HE WOULD RAPE ME...



REMEMBER, YOU'RE MY PROPERTY NOW...

I PAID YOUR FATHER A DOZEN COWS SO I CAN DO WHAT I LIKE TO YOU.

I WOULD LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT AND WONDER WHY MY PARENTS HADN'T COME TO VISIT ME?

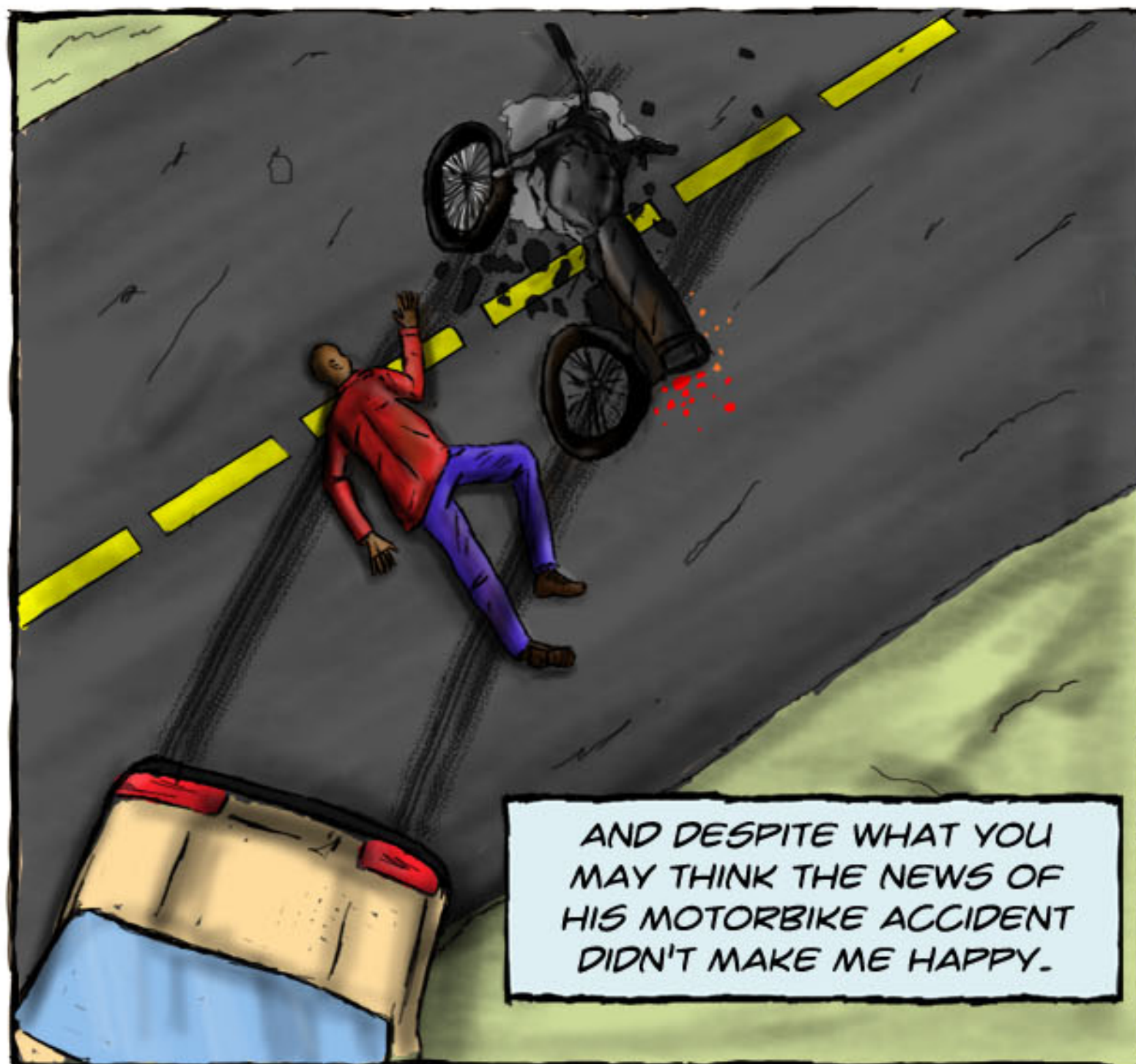


AND WE LIVED IN SUCH A REMOTE AREA I DIDN'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO RUN, WHICH WAY I MIGHT FIND THE POLICE...



...ALTHOUGH I'D ALSO HEARD TALES OF CORRUPT POLICE TURNING A BLIND EYE TO THE EVIL THAT MEN DO.

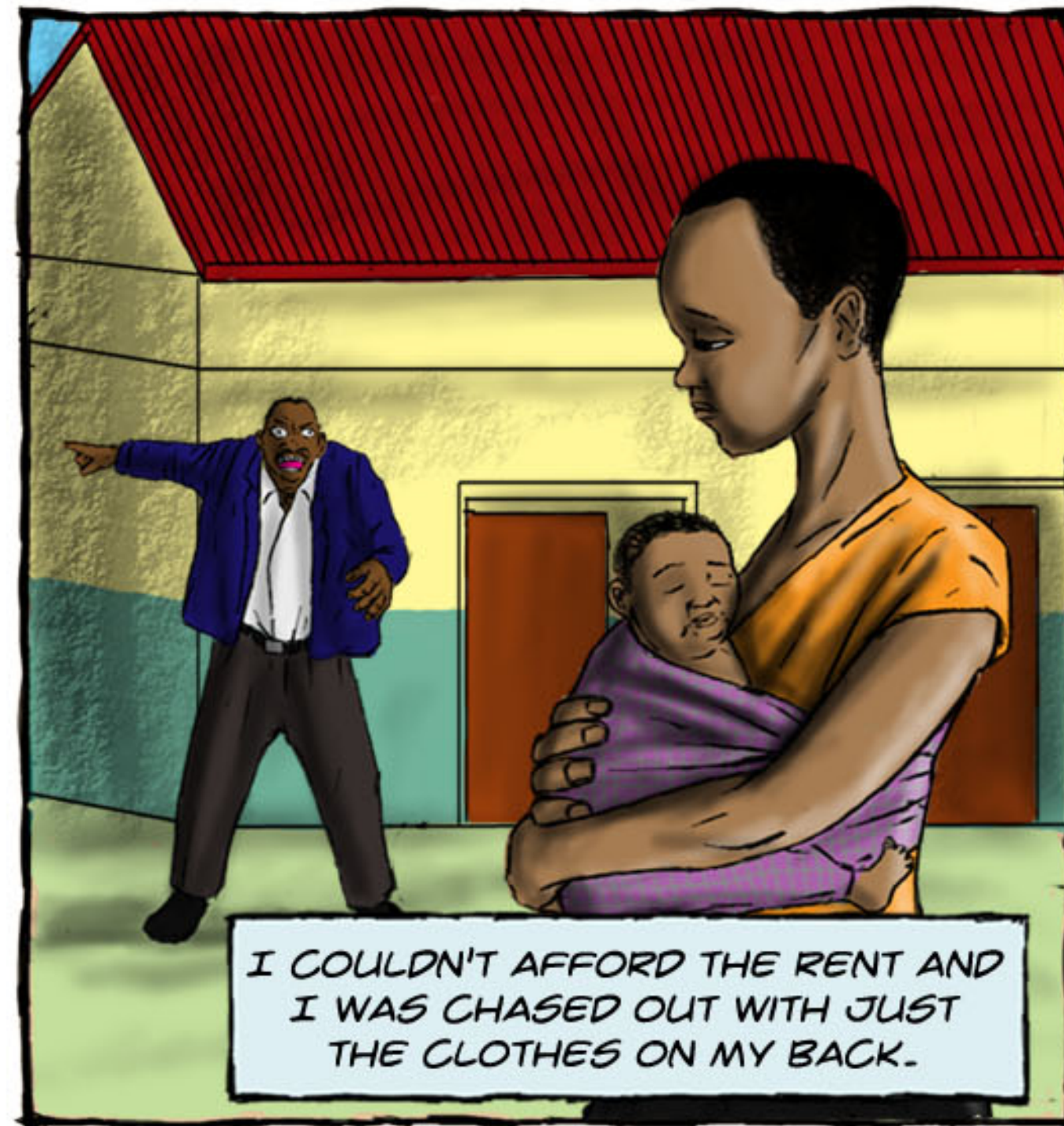
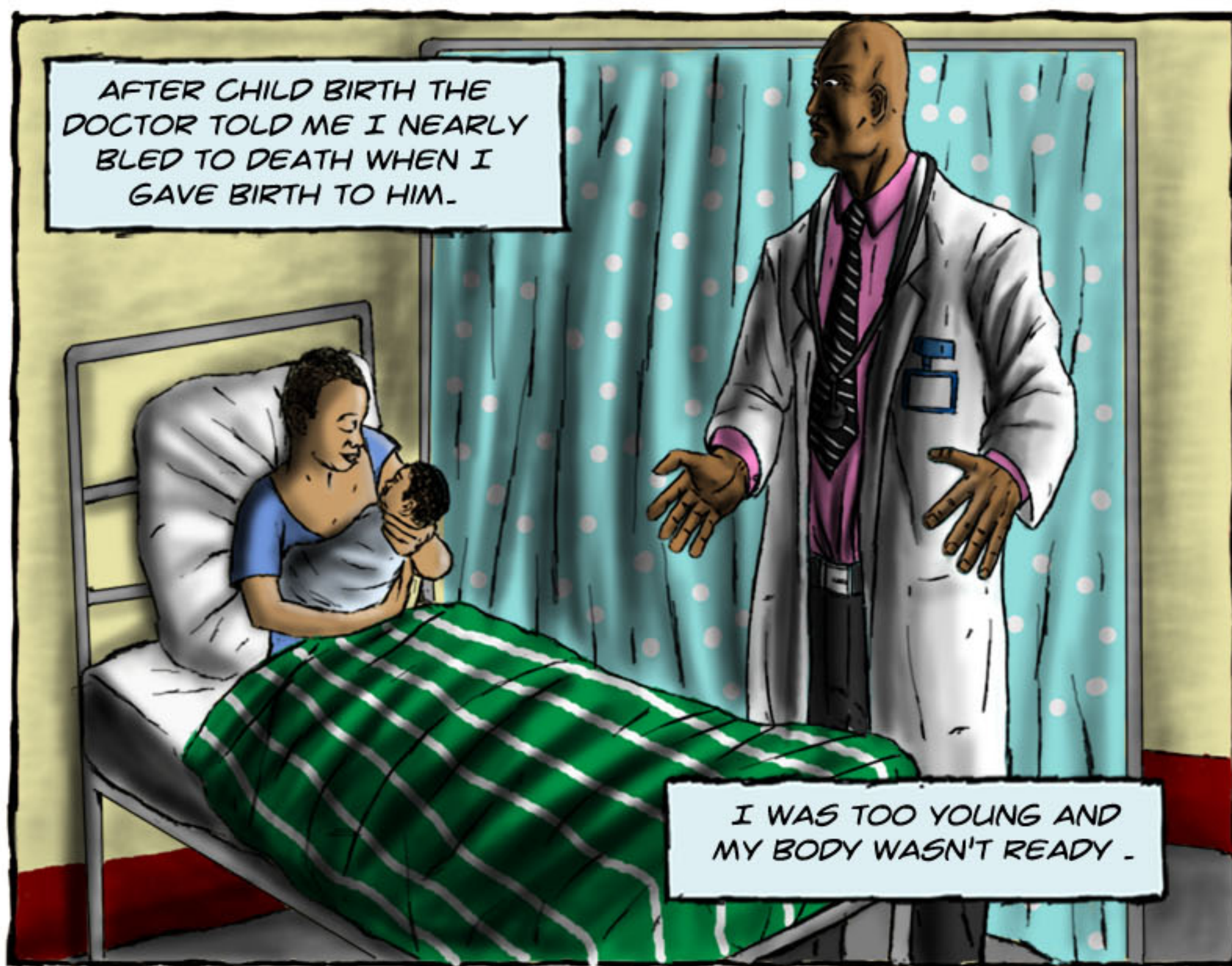
ONLY SAMWELL'S DEATH 11 MONTHS LATER BROUGHT THAT LIFE OF MINE TO AN END...



AND DESPITE WHAT YOU MAY THINK THE NEWS OF HIS MOTORBIKE ACCIDENT DIDN'T MAKE ME HAPPY.

BY THAT TIME I HAD MATHIAS TO THINK OF...OUR SON.





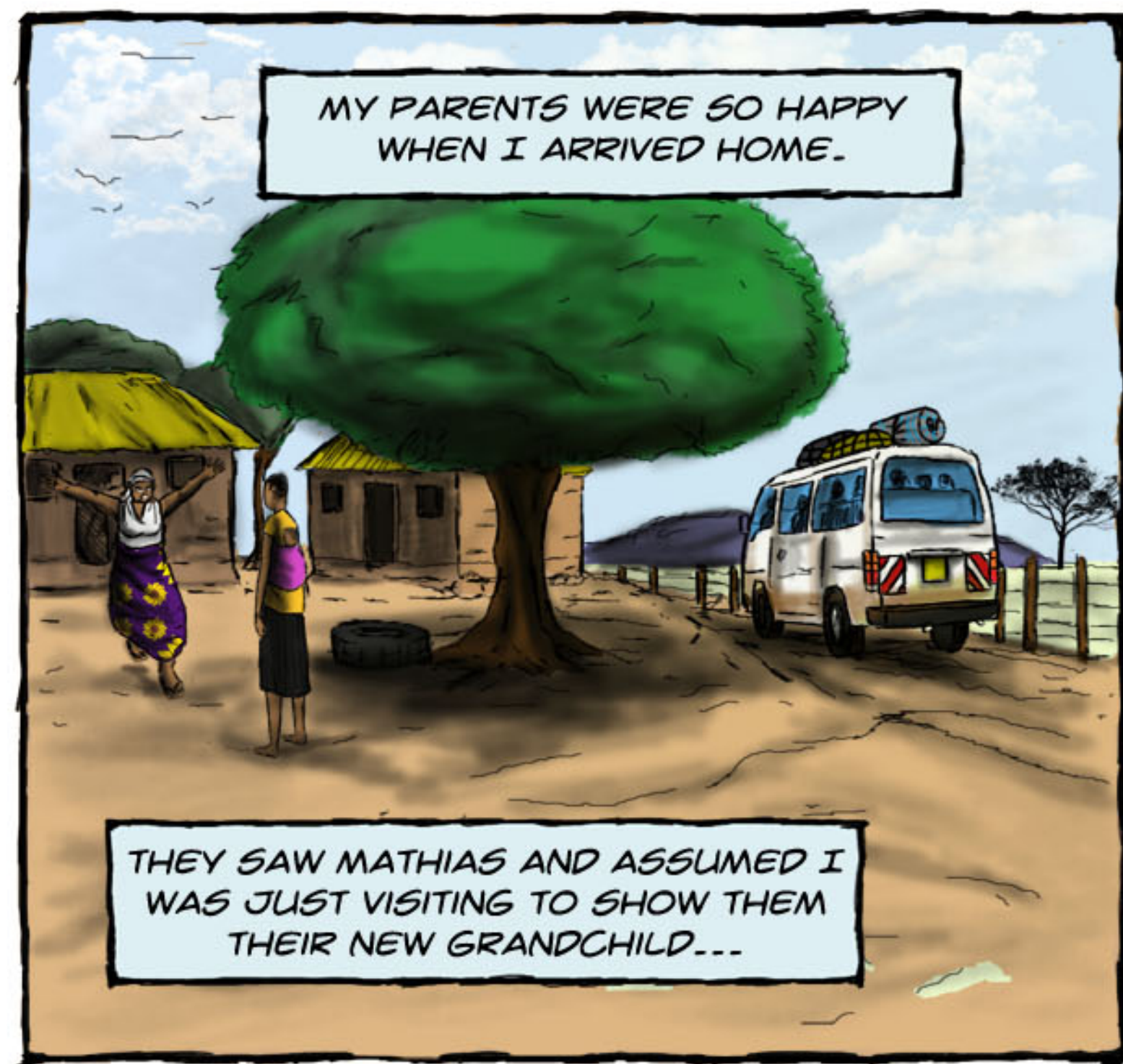
BY DAY I WENT FROM DOOR TO DOOR BEGGING FOR FOOD SCRAPS

...BEGGING FOR ENOUGH SHILLINGS TO PAY FOR A BUS TICKET BACK TO MY FAMILY HOME.

BY NIGHT WE SLEPT IN ABANDONED
OR HALF-FINISHED HOMES.



MY PARENTS WERE SO HAPPY
WHEN I ARRIVED HOME.

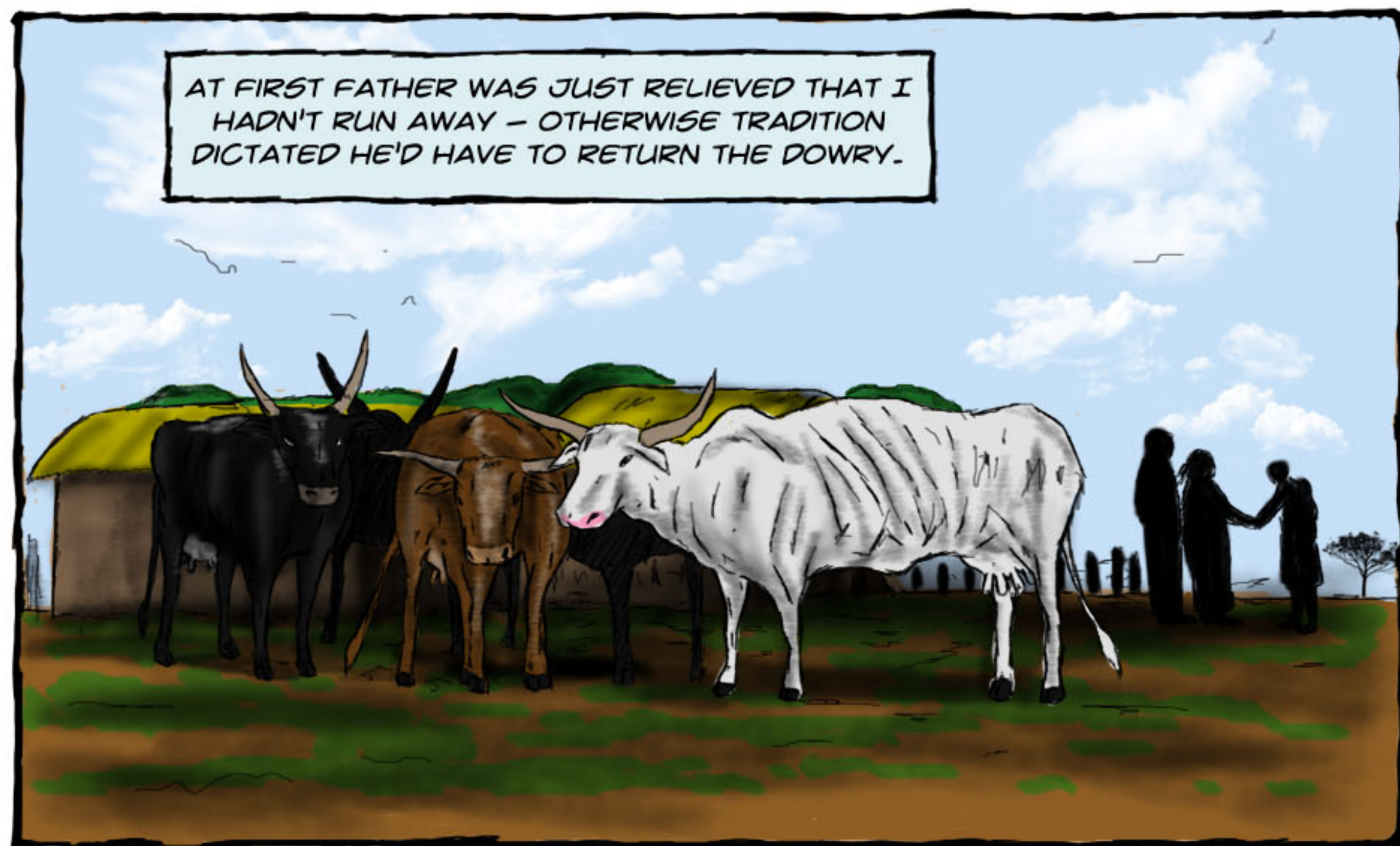


THEY SAW MATHIAS AND ASSUMED I
WAS JUST VISITING TO SHOW THEM
THEIR NEW GRANDCHILD...

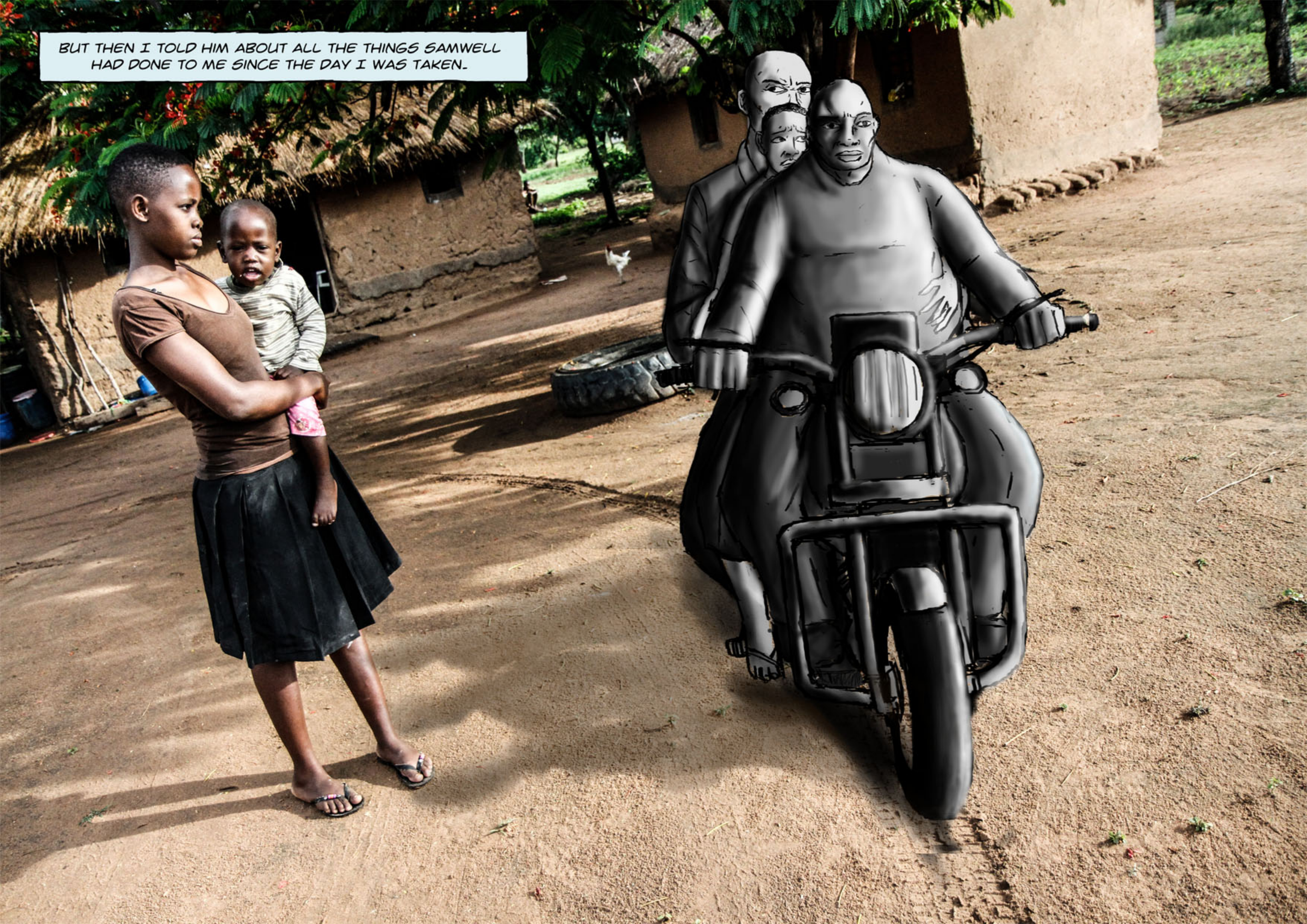


BUT THEN I BEGAN TO TELL
THEM WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

AT FIRST FATHER WAS JUST RELIEVED THAT I
HADN'T RUN AWAY - OTHERWISE TRADITION
DICTATED HE'D HAVE TO RETURN THE DOWRY.



BUT THEN I TOLD HIM ABOUT ALL THE THINGS SAMWELL
HAD DONE TO ME SINCE THE DAY I WAS TAKEN.

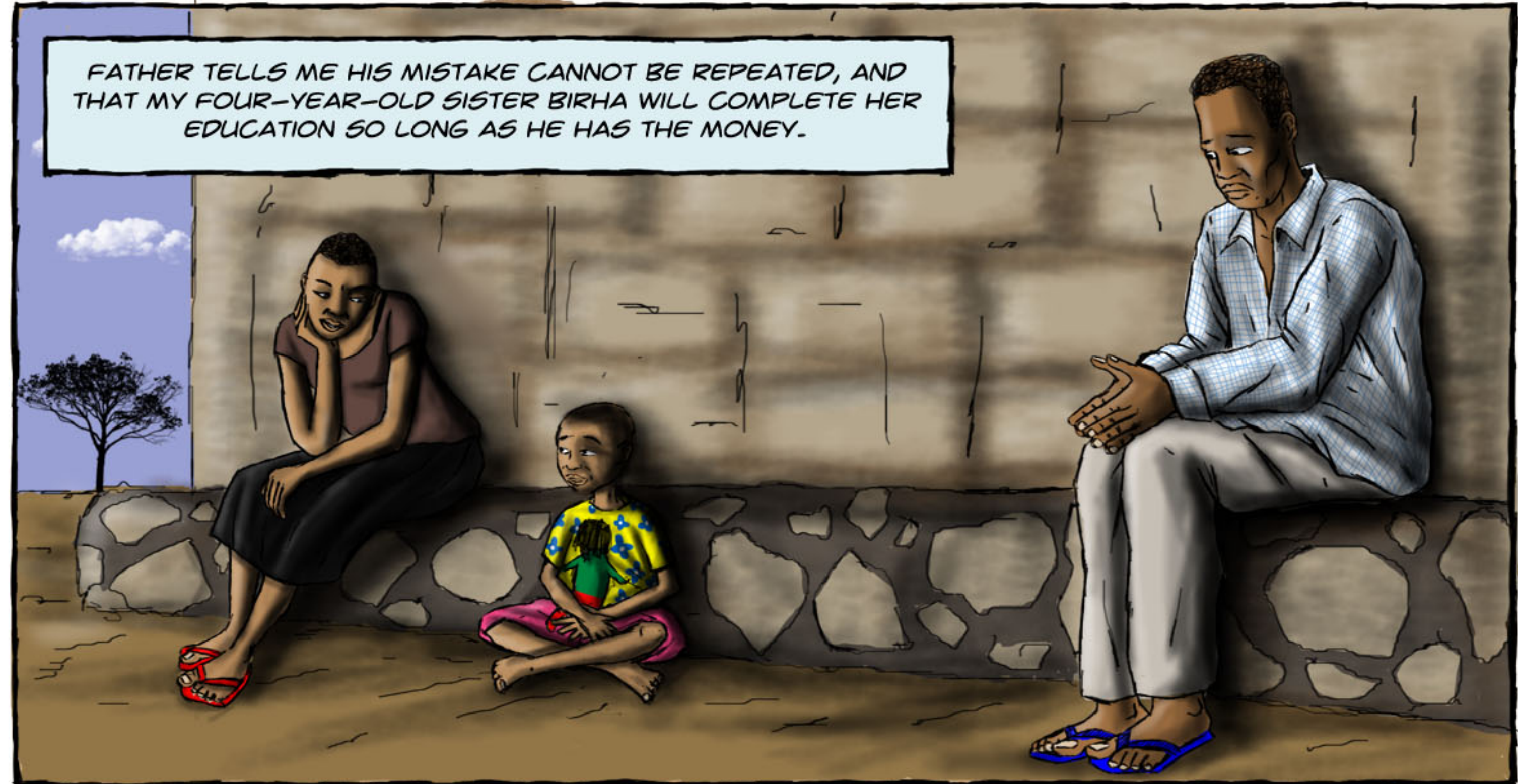




FATHER AT FIRST SAID OUR SUKUMA TRADITIONS
WERE TO BLAME, AND HE WOULD HAVE BEEN
STIGMATISED IN THE COMMUNITY IF HE HAD NOT
FOUND A HUSBAND FOR HIS YOUNG DAUGHTER.

OVER TIME HE'S COME TO ADMIT HE WAS
WRONG TO FORCE ME INTO MARRIAGE AND
HE HAS ASKED FOR MY FORGIVENESS...

SLOWLY WE'RE BECOMING
FATHER AND DAUGHTER AGAIN.



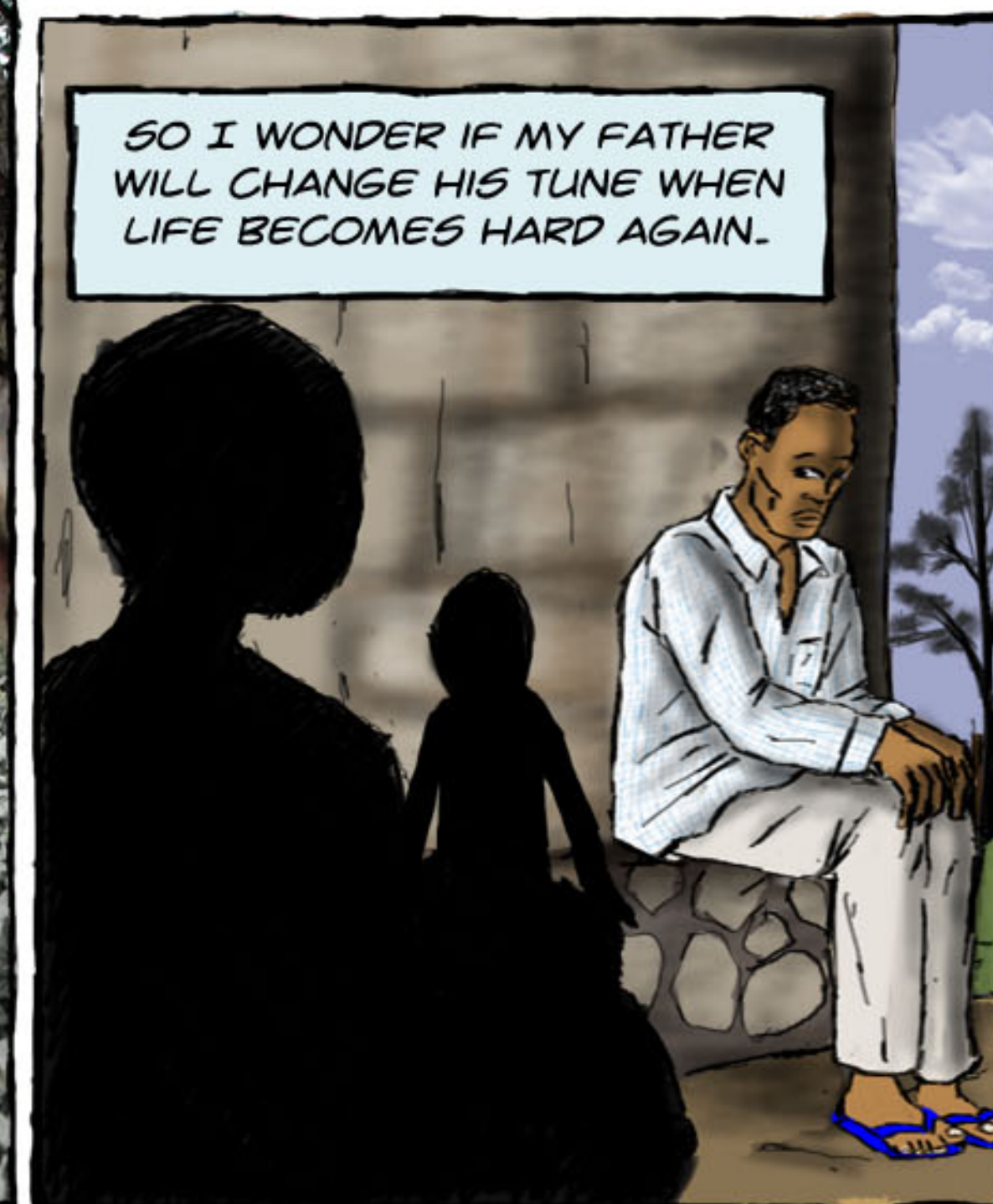
FATHER TELLS ME HIS MISTAKE CANNOT BE REPEATED, AND THAT MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD SISTER BIRHA WILL COMPLETE HER EDUCATION SO LONG AS HE HAS THE MONEY.



BUT IF I'M HONEST, I FEAR FOR HER.



AFTER BUILDING A SECOND HOME THERE ARE ONLY SIX OF THE DOZEN COWS LEFT.



SO I WONDER IF MY FATHER WILL CHANGE HIS TUNE WHEN LIFE BECOMES HARD AGAIN.



DESPITE EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED HE WAS
AGAINST THE IDEA OF ME GETTING FREE TRAINING
FROM A LOCAL NGO CALLED AGAPE.

THEY HELP GIRLS LIKE ME TO LEARN A TRADE LIKE TAILORING
SO THAT WE CAN BECOME BREADWINNERS IN OUR OWN RIGHT,
AND NOT BE FORCED INTO AN EARLY MARRIAGE.

AGAPE ALSO HOPES THE PROMISE OF
THIS EXTRA INCOME WILL LESSEN THE
APPEAL OF A DOWRY TO PARENTS.

WHILE MANY OF US HAVE CHOSEN TAILORING, MY FRIEND
NEEMA IS LEARNING HOW TO BECOME A WELDER.



A close-up photograph of a woman and a young boy. The woman, on the left, has short dark hair and is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The boy, on the right, is looking down and slightly to the left. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of trees and foliage. The lighting is natural, suggesting daylight.

SO I RESISTED FATHER AND ENROLLED
ON THE COURSE ANYWAY.

I'VE GRADUATED FROM THE TAILORING
COURSE NOW AND I WANT TO START A
BUSINESS OF MY OWN.

I WANT A NEW LIFE FOR ME AND MATHIAS.



SIX MONTHS ON, GRACE IS STILL LIVING WITH HER PARENTS IN THEIR SHINYANGA HOME. THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER PRESSURE FOR HER TO RE-MARRY. UNABLE TO RAISE THE FUNDS TO START HER OWN BUSINESS OR TO RENT HER OWN SEWING MACHINE, GRACE NOW WORKS PART-TIME FOR A LOCAL TAILOR. SHE MAKES JUST OVER \$1 A DAY.



'CA\$H COW' IS THE THIRD GRAPHIC NOVEL BY AWARD-WINNING PHOTOJOURNALIST MARC ELLISON. HE HAS WORKED EXTENSIVELY ACROSS AFRICA SINCE 2011, PRODUCING WORK FOR 60 MINUTES, AL JAZEERA, BBC, DIE ZEIT, THE GLOBE AND MAIL, THE GUARDIAN, THE TORONTO STAR, AND VICE. HIS FIRST ONLINE GRAPHIC NOVEL 'GRAPHIC MEMORIES', ABOUT FEMALE CHILD SOLDIERS, WON A WORLD PRESS PHOTO MULTIMEDIA AWARD IN APRIL 2016. HIS WORK CAN BE VIEWED AT WWW.MARCELLISON.COM.



CHRISTIAN MUGARURA IS AN AWARD-WINNING GRAPHIC NOVELIST BASED IN KAMPALA, UGANDA. HIS WORKS INCLUDE 'RAIN', 'JET', 'TEKKE 1&2', 'CHILDREN OF WAR' AND 'GRAPHIC MEMORIES'. CHRISTIAN HAS PRODUCED WORK FOR AL JAZEERA ENGLISH, DIE ZEIT AND THE TORONTO STAR. HIS PORTFOLIO CAN BE VIEWED AT CHRISTIANMAFIGIRI.COM. CHRISTIAN DEDICATES 'CA\$H COW' TO HIS NEWBORN SON ARI.