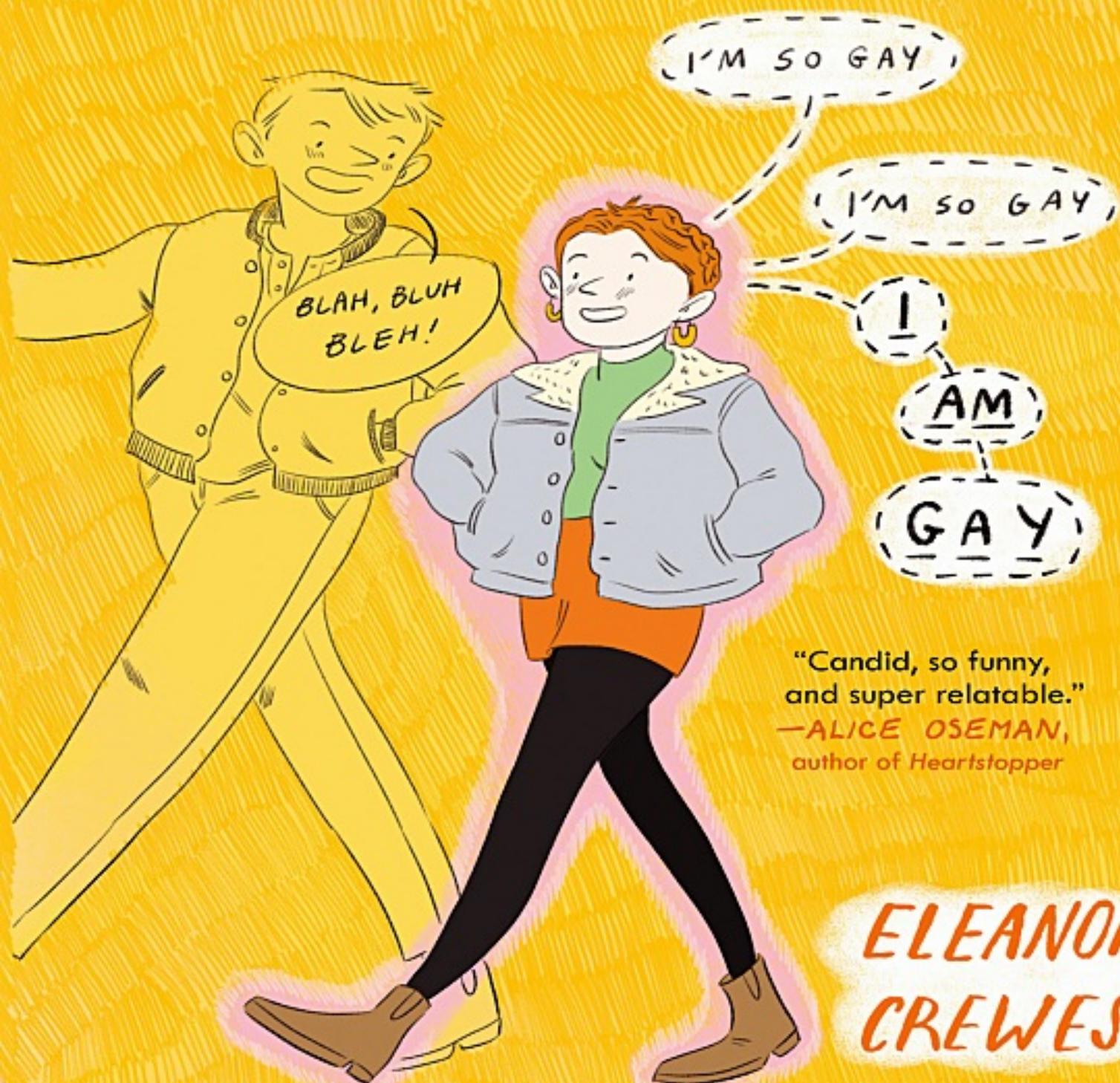


# THE TIMES I KNEW I WAS GAY



"Candid, so funny,  
and super relatable."  
—ALICE OSEMAN,  
author of *Heartstopper*

ELEANOR  
CREWES





the times I knew I was gay  
by  
Eleanor Crewes

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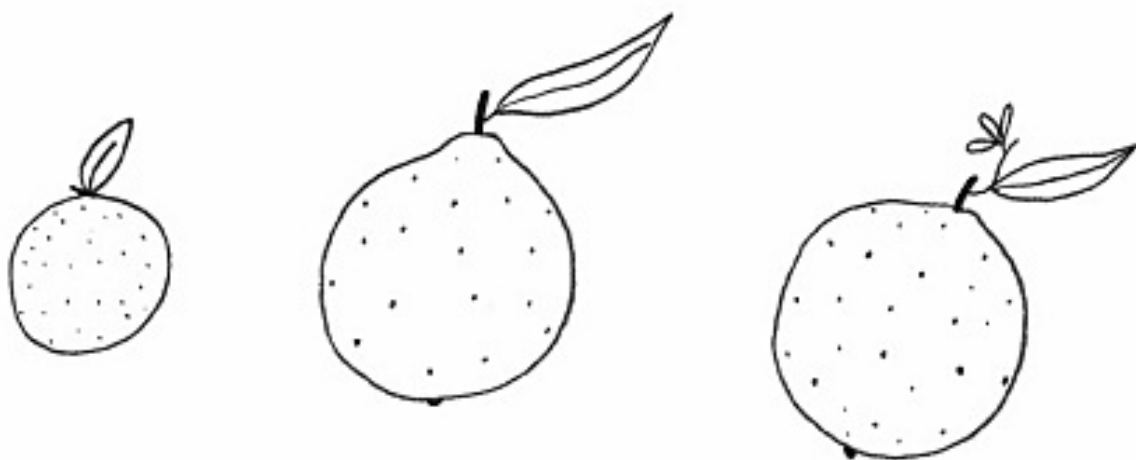
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Lyrics on page 309 from “Weird Cool” by Lazy Day, written by  
Tilly Scantlebury, reprinted by kind permission of the artist.





*We form ourselves within the vocabularies that we did not choose, and sometimes we have to reject those vocabularies, or actively develop new ones.*

*— Judith Butler, 2015*

*"People," the doctor said sadly, "are always so anxious to get things out in the open where they can put a name to them."*

*— Shirley Jackson, The Haunting of Hill House*

*She scissored the curls away, and ... it was not like she was cutting hair, it was as if I had a pair of wings beneath my shoulder-blades, that the flesh had all grown over, and she was slicing free ...*

*— Sarah Waters, Tipping the Velvet*











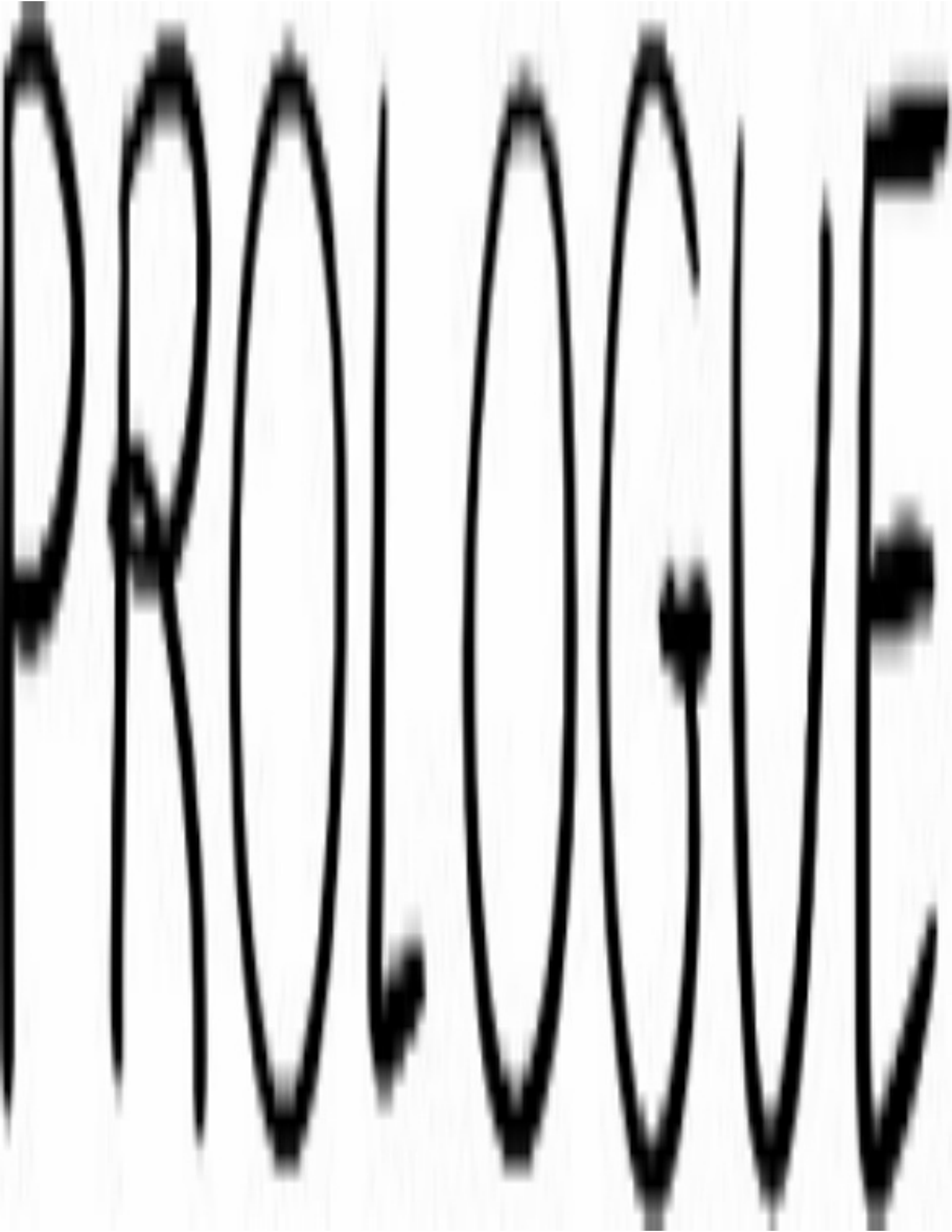
## FOREWORD

*THE TIMES I KNEW I WAS GAY* WAS AN IDEA THAT SPRANG INTO MY HEAD JUST AFTER I CAME OUT. WHAT STARTED AS A SECRET PROJECT TURNED INTO A TEN-PAGE ZINE. LIKE MY OWN PERSONAL COURIER, I BIKED ACROSS LONDON TO DELIVER MY ZINES TO COMIC SHOPS, AND POSTED THEM AS CLOSE AS BRIGHTON AND AS FAR AS GLASGOW. ALTHOUGH THE SCALE OF THE OPERATION WAS MODEST, IT QUITE QUICKLY TURNED INTO A TALE THAT I KNEW WAS MUCH BIGGER THAN SOMETHING I COULD FIT INTO THOSE HAND-STITCHED COMICS.

THIS IS NOT A HANDBOOK FOR COMING OUT, OR FOR BEING GAY. BUT I LIKE TO THINK THAT IF I HAD FOUND THIS BOOK AS A CHILD, OR A TEENAGER, OR A YOUNG ADULT, I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN A LITTLE MORE ABOUT MYSELF A LITTLE SOONER.







Growing up, I felt like I had a secret deep inside me.  
It was as though someone had handed me a letter  
that I had to keep very safe, but wasn't allowed to  
open until the time was right.


I carried it around for years,  
waiting for a sign that would tell me:  
"It's now, you're ready."

Until that moment, I needed to be  
the best version of myself at all times.  
I needed to deserve my letter because, in my mind,  
it held the secret to happiness.





ONE



MY GOD

SHE LOOKS  
LIKE GREAT-AUNTIE  
IRMA...

I THOUGHT IT WAS  
GOING TO BE A BICYCLE.

GROWING UP,  
I LOVED BEING DIFFERENT.



UNLIKE MOST OF THE GIRLS IN MY CLASS,  
I LIKED GOTHs, ROCK MUSIC, AND ANYTHING SPOOKY.



I INSISTED ON WEARING TROUSERS TO  
MY FIRST HOLY COMMUNION CEREMONY.  
(THIS DIDN'T GET A GREAT RECEPTION.)





# HAPPY BIRTHDAY



BUT I ALWAYS HAD MY BEST FRIENDS,  
CAT, DAN, AND CECILIA, TO UNDERSTAND ME.

WHEN WE WERE TEN, CECILIA SHOWED ME  
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER.

HI - I'M WILLOW!



I WAS HOOKED.



ANY MOMENT I COULD SNATCH  
TO CHAT TO CECILIA ABOUT IT,  
I WOULD.

WILLOW AND XANDER ARE BEST FRIENDS  
BUT XANDER LOVES BUFFY AND THAT  
MAKES THINGS HARD FOR WILLOW  
BECAUSE SHE LOVES XANDER.

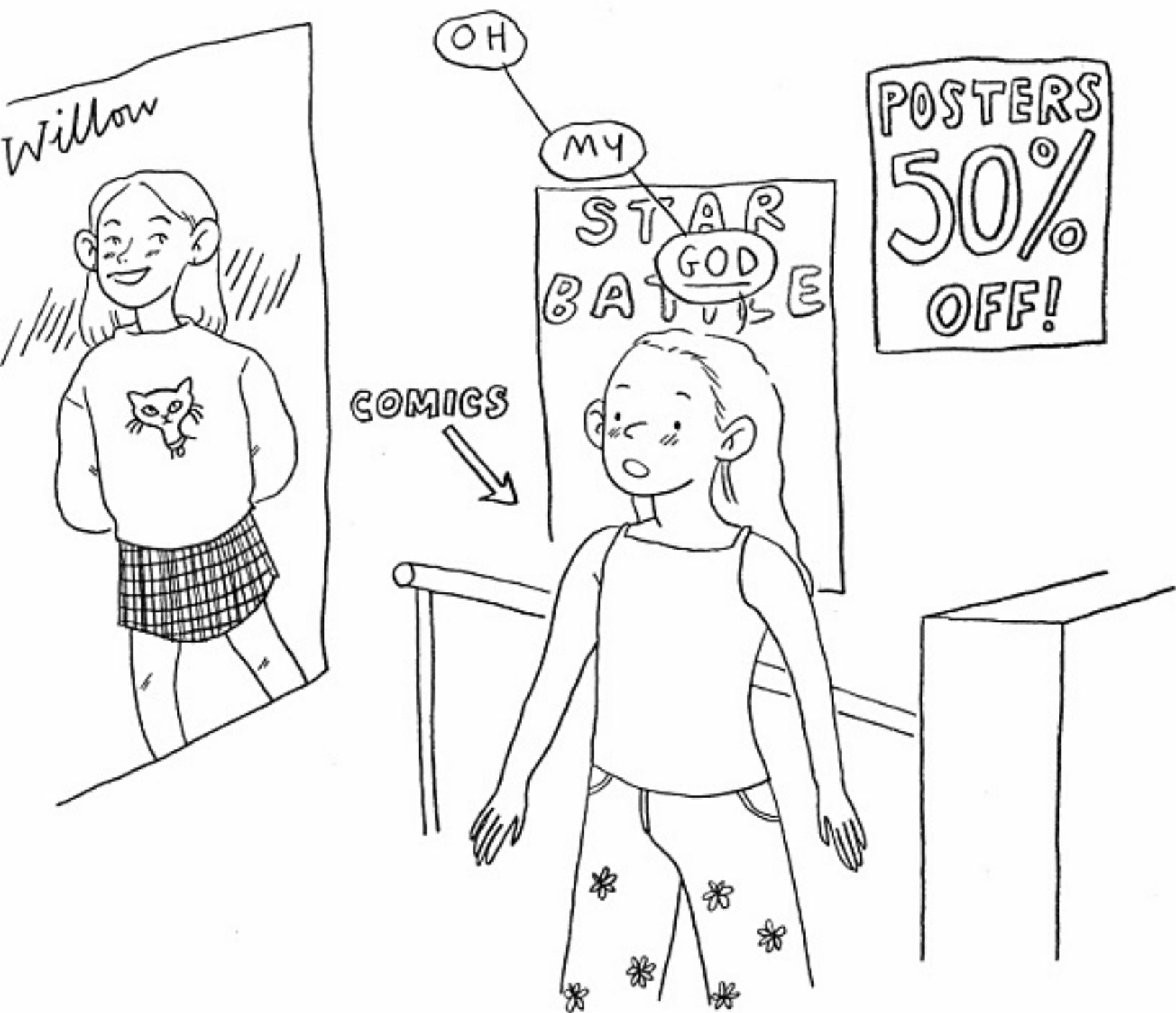


WHAT ARE  
THEY TALKING  
ABOUT?

BUFFY,

AGAIN.

# FORBIDDEN PLANET



I QUICKLY BECAME OBSESSED WITH THE  
SPELL-CASTING, RED-HAIRED WILLOW ROSENBERG.



WILLOW BEGAN TO PLAY A ROLE  
IN MOST PARTS OF MY LIFE.  
PLAYING MAKE-BELIEVE AT SCHOOL,  
I WOULD ALWAYS CHOOSE TO BE  
CALLED "WILLOW" AND I HAD MY LONG  
RED HAIR CHOPPED TO MY SHOULDERS  
EXACTLY LIKE HERS  
(THINK SEASON THREE,  
EPISODE SIXTEEN,  
"DOPPELGANGLAND").



SHE'S NOT ACTUALLY  
A VAMPIRE, BUT THIS  
IS A DOUBLE FROM  
ANOTHER DIMENSION.





IN SEASON FOUR, WILLOW CAME OUT AND BEGAN A RELATIONSHIP WITH TARA. WHEN I WATCHED THIS WITH MY FAMILY, WE DIDN'T TOTALLY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR RELATIONSHIP BEYOND THE CONFINES OF MY TELEVISION.





ALTHOUGH I DID SIT IN MY ROOM AND  
DRAW A LOT OF COMICS ABOUT THEM...



TWO





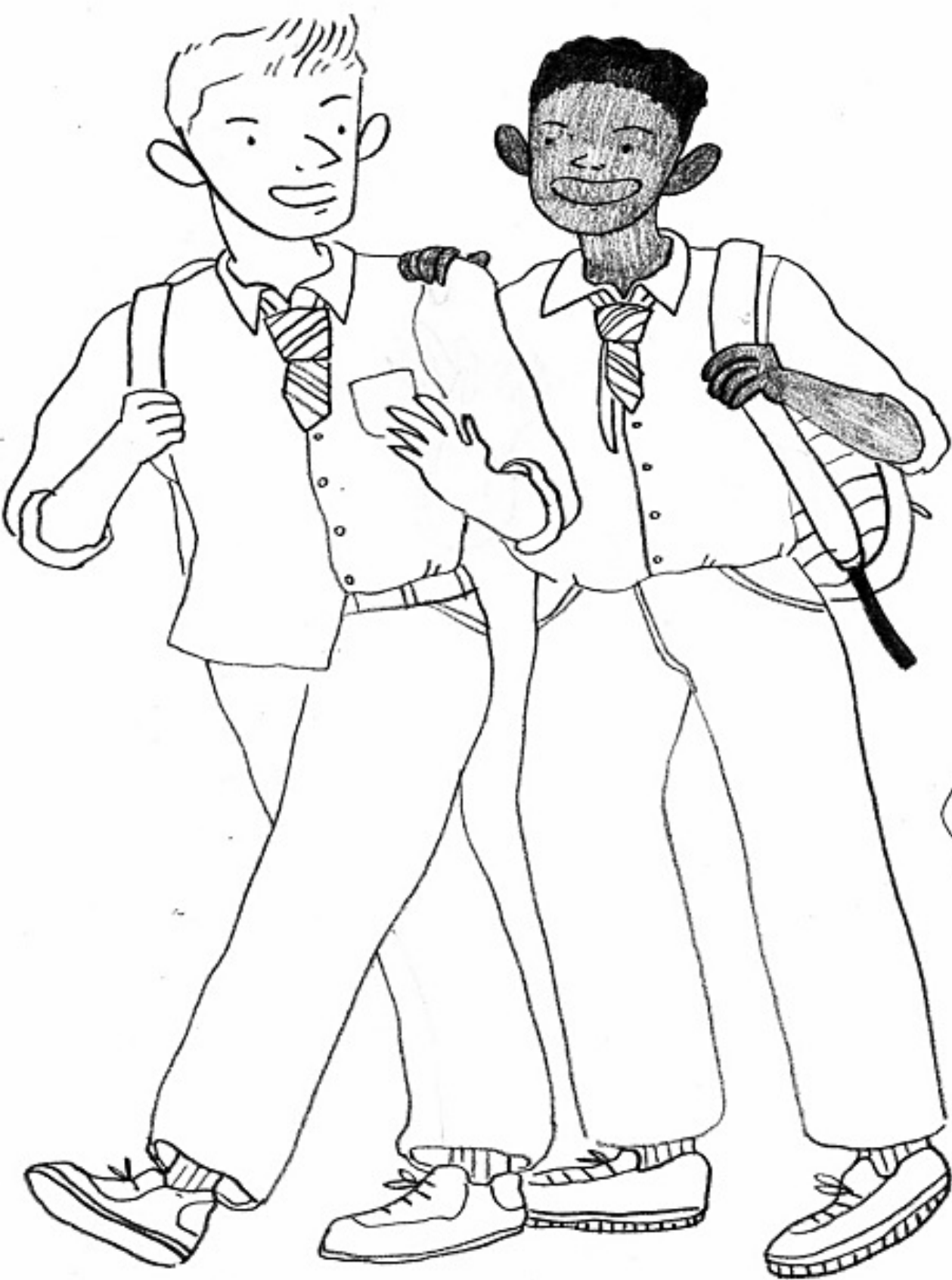
WHEN I WAS ELEVEN, I MOVED FROM MY SMALL,  
ROSY-CHEEKED, CATHOLIC PRIMARY  
SCHOOL TO A VERY LARGE,  
VERY NOISY SECONDARY SCHOOL.

ARE YOU SURE YOU  
DON'T WANT ME  
TO WALK YOU  
ALL THE WAY?

YEAH, IT'S OKAY.



I WAS CATAPULTED FROM BEING IN THE OLDEST  
CLASS TO BEING IN THE YOUNGEST,  
AND I FELT VERY YOUNG.



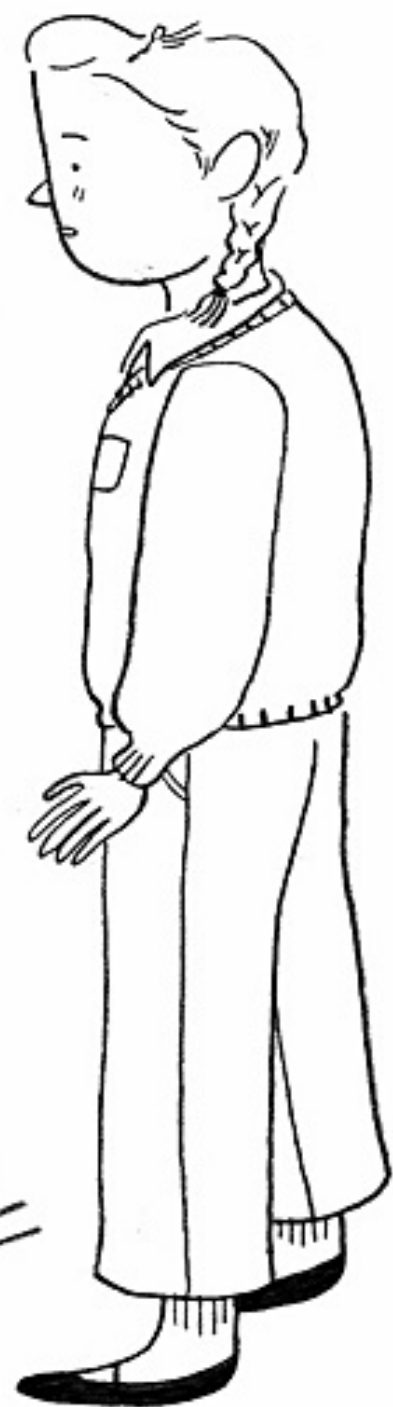
I'M ONLY  
A MOUSE!



AT MY OLD SCHOOL I HAD THOUGHT I WAS COOL,  
SO IN CHARGE. BUT SUDDENLY ALL THE THINGS  
I LIKED, OTHER PEOPLE MADE FUN OF.



I DIDN'T LIKE BEING JUDGED, SO I TRIED TO  
SHOW OFF A TOUGH EXTERIOR,  
A BARRIER THAT SAID,  
"DON'T MESS WITH ME!"









BUT THAT TOUGH PERSONA BROKE DOWN WHEN I WAS TEASED. LIKE WHEN I WORE THE TRAINING BRA I'D BEEN SO PROUD OF.



I HAD FELT REALLY COOL WHEN MY OLD FRIENDS HAD SEEN IT.

SUDDENLY MY BRA SEEMED SO CHILDISH,  
SO SMALL AND SILLY.



I CLEARLY WASN'T VERY GOOD AT BEING GROWN UP!





WAS PRETTY SCARED OF BEING REJECTED, SO I TOOK  
MY FEARS OUT ON MY FRIENDS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE PEOPLE THINK  
TROUSER BRACES ARE COOL.

I KNOW

THEY'RE  
SO WEIRD.

BRACES  
ARE  
SO  
OVER.



IT MADE ME FEEL TERRIBLE.

SCHOOL HAD BECOME SUCH A CONFUSING PLACE THAT, COME SUMMER, I COULDN'T WAIT TO HEAD OFF TO MY FAMILY IN ITALY AND FORGET ABOUT IT ALL FOR A FEW MONTHS.



IN ITALY I COULD TOTALLY RELAX INTO MYSELF. THERE WERE NO FRIENDS OR PEERS OBSERVING ME, ONLY MY FAMILY.







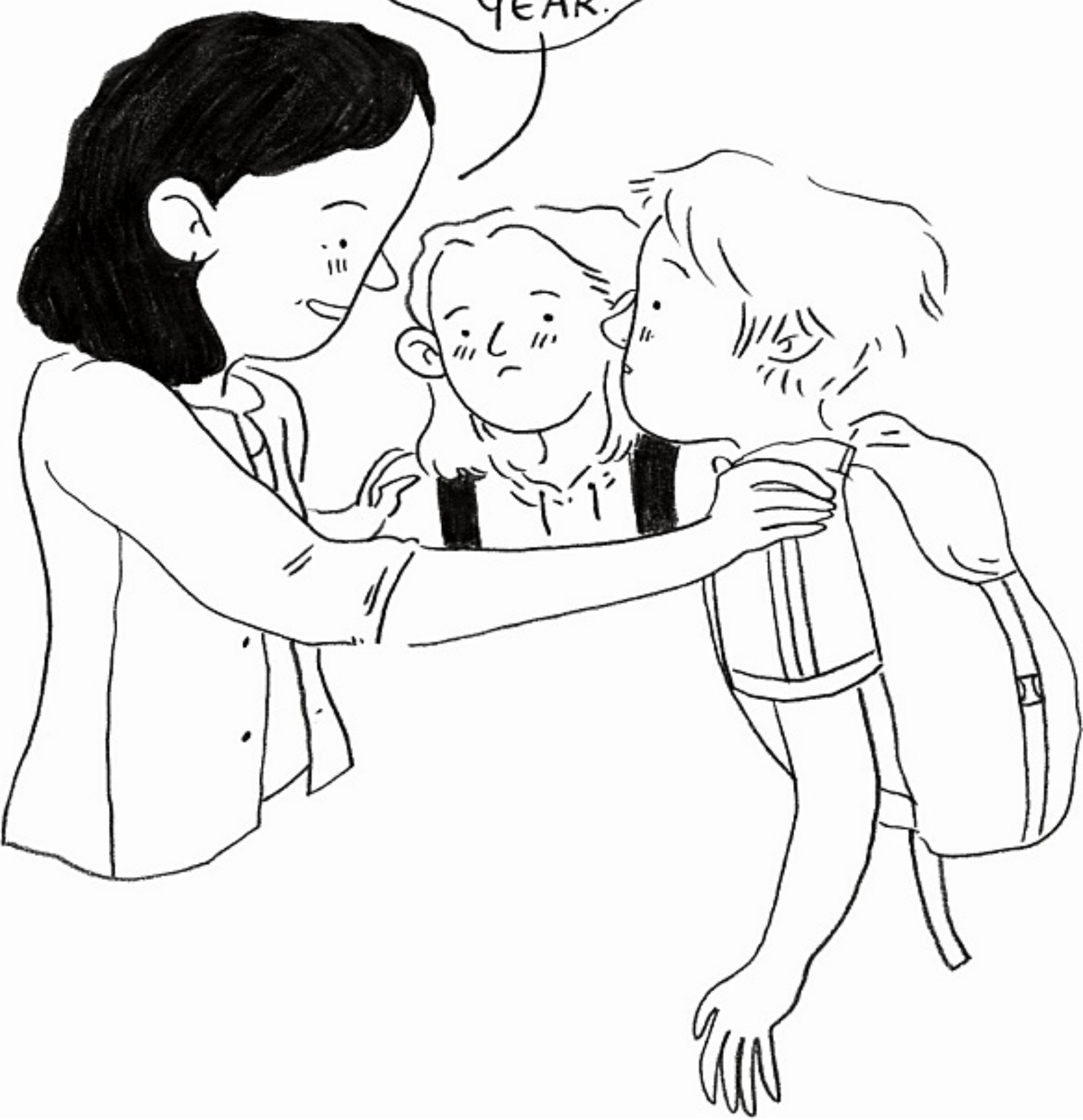
AWAY FROM TEENAGE COMPETITIVENESS,  
ITALY WAS A PLACE WHERE MY BROTHER AND I  
COULD JUST BE KIDS.





DON'T WORRY,  
YOU GUYS.

YOU'LL COME  
BACK NEXT  
YEAR.



BACK IN LONDON, SCHOOL STILL HUNG OVER ME LIKE A HEAVY CLOUD, TO THE POINT WHERE I STARTED BEGGING NOT TO HAVE TO GO BACK.




AS I GOT OLDER I STILL STRUGGLED  
TO HOLD ON TO WHO I WAS  
WHILE AT SCHOOL.



I FELT AS THOUGH I HAD TWO SELVES:  
ONE WAS THE PERSON I NEEDED TO BE  
WITH MY NEW FRIENDS,  
AND THE OTHER WAS WHO I HAD ALWAYS BEEN  
WITH MY OLD FRIENDS AND MY FAMILY.





THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T  
FEEL RIGHT, BUT I CHOSE  
TO IGNORE IT.





I WAS TERRIFIED OF BULLIES,  
THE WAY THEY SEEMED TO READ YOUR MIND,  
OR SEE YOU MORE CLEARLY THAN YOU  
SAW YOURSELF.



BUT HOW DO THEY  
KNOW??

I DON'T KNOW.

SOMEONE MUST  
HAVE TOLD THEM?



AND THAT WAS REALLY SCARY.

BUT WHO TOLD  
THEM??!



AT MY SCHOOL THERE WAS ONE BOY IN PARTICULAR,  
WHO WAS ALWAYS PICKED ON FOR BEING GAY.





I QUICKLY TURNED FROM AN UNWOMANLY

AND THIS TERRIFIED ME THE MOST.



EVERYONE SEEMED SO HUNGRY TO KNOW  
EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU.





BUT I DIDN'T EVEN SEEM TO KNOW MYSELF ANYMORE.

I HID AWAY IN THE LIBRARY.

WHAT'S SHE  
READING THIS  
WEEK?

LOOKS LIKE  
ANOTHER GHOST  
STORY TO ME.



WHATEVER ANYONE FOUND OUT ABOUT ME,  
AT LEAST I HAD MY FRIENDS TO TALK TO.



1102





MUM, CAN I GET  
SOME STRAIGHTENERS?

PLEASE!

AS CAT, AISLING, AND I GOT OLDER, IT  
SUDDENLY SEEMED LIKE EVERYONE  
HAD BOYFRIENDS.





FROM THE AGE OF FOUR UNTIL I WAS TEN,  
I HAD LOVED THE SAME BOY. BUT I HADN'T REALLY  
FANCIED ANYONE. A WHOLE NEW WORLD WAS  
OPENING UP BEFORE ME AND I DIDN'T KNOW  
WHETHER TO DIVE IN OR RUN FOR THE HILLS.



THE FLIRTING

TECHNIQUES

OF A

(UNBEKNOWNST TO HER)

CLOSETED

LESBIAN.

## STEP ONE :

BECOME THE BOY – MAKE A NOTE OF HIS HAIRCUT, SNEAKERS, RUCKSACK, HOW MANY WRISTBANDS HE WEARS / WHAT COLOR THEY ARE. DOES HE HAVE A NECKLACE? IS IT ONE OF THOSE WOODEN BEADED ONES FROM TOPMAN? YES? GOOD – THEY'RE CHEAP AND EASILY ATTAINABLE.





## STEP TWO:

WHAT TV SHOWS DOES HE WATCH? ARE THEY AT BLOCKBUSTER? CAN I WATCH AN ENTIRE SERIES IN ONE WEEKEND AND THEREFORE BE ABLE TO MAKE CONVERSATION ON MONDAY IN HISTORY?



AM I VERGING ON BECOMING A STALKER? NO!  
I'M FLIRTING, SOWING THE SEED, GETTING A FEEL FOR  
THE LAY OF THE LAND.

## STEP THREE:

AS SOON AS I KNOW THAT THEY FANCY ME BACK, DECIDE THAT IT'S TOO STRESSFUL AND WHAT YOU'VE NOW BUILT AS FRIENDSHIP IS TOO VALUABLE TO LOSE.

PHEW!



THE FIRST BOY I SAID I FANCIED\* WAS IN YEAR 8,  
WHEN I WAS TWELVE. WE BOTH LIKED READING  
MANGA AND WATCHING ANIME AND  
WOULD TALK OBSESSIVELY  
ABOUT OUR FAVORITE  
STORY LINES.



\*WHEN I SAY "FANCY,"  
IT MEANT MORE  
BECAUSE THEY LIKED  
THE SAME THINGS AS ME.  
I THOUGHT THAT THE  
PHYSICAL ATTRACTION  
WOULD COME LATER ON.

WHEN ARE YOUR  
NARUTO HEADBANDS  
ARRIVING?

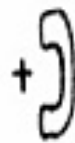
MONDAY!



HE TOOK ME ON MY FIRST EVER DATE TO WATCH  
STARDUST AT THE ODEON CINEMA.  
WE DIDN'T SPEAK THE WHOLE TIME BUT THAT  
DIDN'T STOP ME FROM ASKING HIM TO BE  
MY BOYFRIEND VIA MSN INSTANT MESSENGER.







Me:

Will u b my boyfriend?

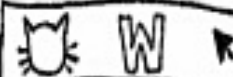
Alex:

Yeah ♡

Me:



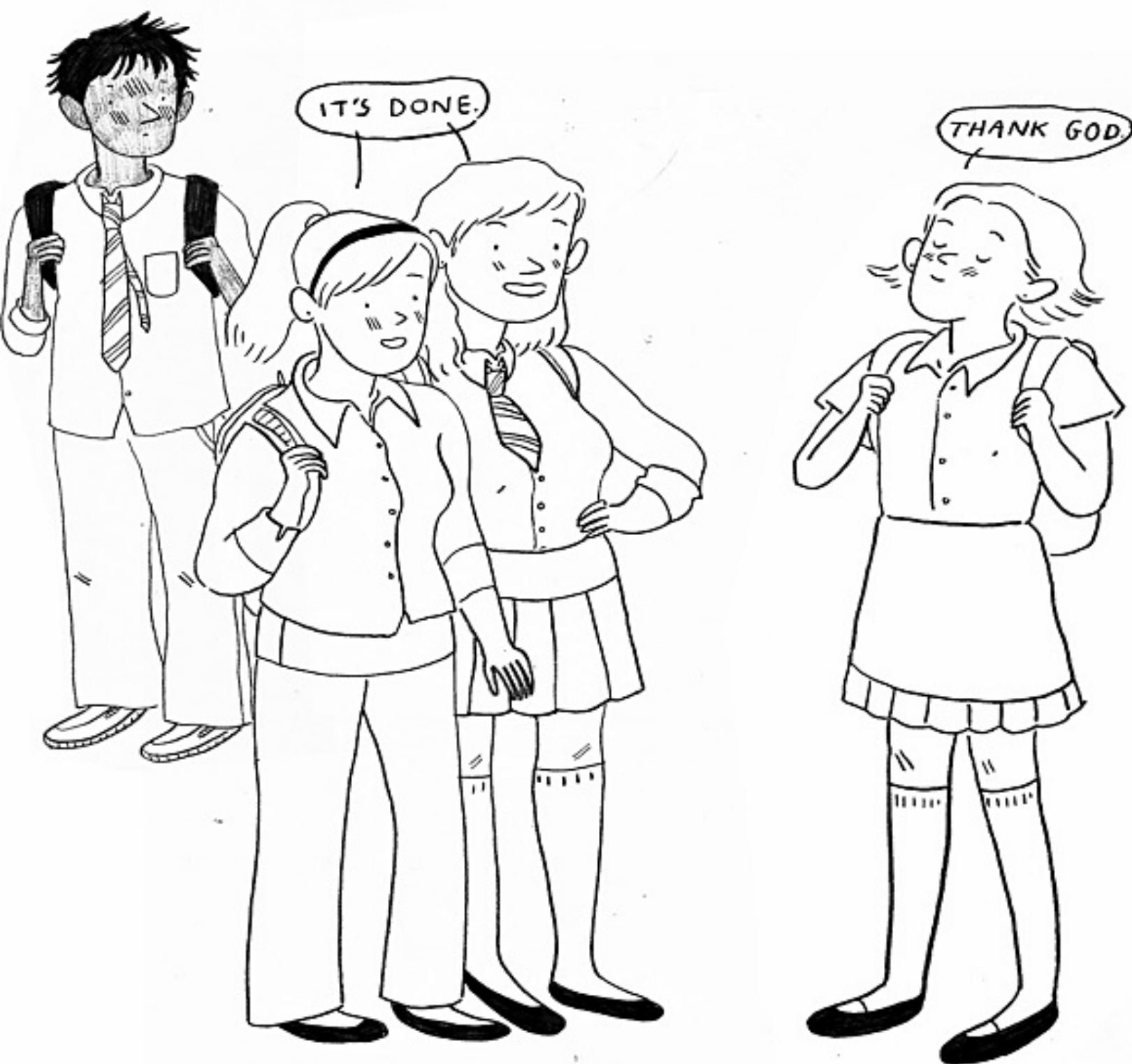
Alex:



SEND



WE DIDN'T SPEAK AFTER THAT, EITHER.  
AFTER TWO WEEKS OF BEING A "COUPLE,"  
CAT AND AISLING BROKE UP WITH HIM FOR ME.



THE SECOND BOY I REALLY FANCIED WENT TO A  
DIFFERENT SCHOOL.



HE WAS SMART – COOL!  
HE WAS JEWISH – COOL!  
AND HE FANCIED ME BACK – MEGA COOL!

I HAD MY FIRST KISS WITH HIM WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN AT  
THE CINEMA (THE SAME ONE I'D WATCHED STARDUST  
AT TWO YEARS EARLIER). I WAS SO AWARE OF HIM FROM  
THE MOMENT WE SAT DOWN IN FRONT OF THE SCREEN.

AS THE FILM PLAYED WE MOVED  
CLOSER AND CLOSER TOGETHER.

AS WE KISSED I FELT SO MANY THINGS!

WHAT'S THE PERSON NEXT  
TO US THINKING? CAN CAT AND  
CECILIA SEE US? IS THIS NICE??!

WHEN DO WE STOP?!





WE DATED FOR TWO MONTHS AFTER THIS.





WE TEXT

ALL DAY

BUT HE NEVER  
INVITES ME OUT ON  
OUR OWN!

OKAY, LADIES!

IT'S TIME FOR  
DODGEBALL!



IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE  
THE RIGHT TIME.



THE CLOSER WE GOT, THE MORE STRESSED  
OUT I BECAME, UNTIL I FINALLY  
DUMPED HIM OVER MSN.



BRB+++



WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN, I GOT INTO MY FIRST  
REAL RELATIONSHIP. NOT SOME SILENT EXCHANGE  
OF MANGA, OR COVERT KISSING IN THE CINEMA,  
BUT A PROPER RELATIONSHIP.  
TALKS ABOUT *EMOTIONS*. DINNERS WITH  
PARENTS. *SLEEPOVERS*. IN THE SAME BED.





BUT FOR ALL THE "REALNESS" I THOUGHT THIS  
RELATIONSHIP HAD, WE WERE STILL JUST TWO  
SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS FIGURING THINGS OUT.



I LIKED TALKING ABOUT SEX WITH CAT AND AISLING,  
WHEN WE SPOKE IT FELT SO ATTAINABLE,  
SO NORMAL AND EXCITING.





NO MATTER HOW MUCH TIME HE AND I SPENT  
KISSING AND FUMBLING THROUGH  
OUR TEENAGE HORMONES, I COULDN'T  
HAVE SEX WITH HIM.



I FELT SO ISOLATED.  
I KNEW PEOPLE WHO HADN'T HAD SEX, BUT  
THAT WAS BECAUSE THEY HADN'T GOTTEN  
BOYFRIENDS YET. IT SEEMED THAT NO ONE  
WHO HAD A BOYFRIEND WAS STILL A VIRGIN.



IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE I WAS SO  
DISTRESSED AND CONFUSED I SPOKE TO MY  
MUM ABOUT IT.

MAYBE YOU NEED  
TO EXPERIMENT...

ON YOUR OWN?

OKAY!







BUT WHEN IT CAME DOWN TO IT, MY BODY JUST  
WOULDN'T LET IT HAPPEN.

MAYBE NEXT  
TIME.

FINE.









MAYBE THESE  
WILL WORK.





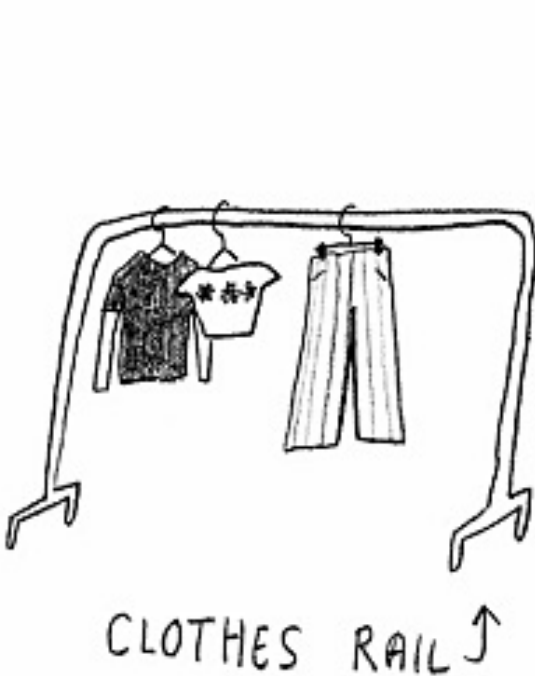
WE BROKE UP AFTER A YEAR.  
I SPENT ABOUT A WEEK AVOIDING HIM AT SCHOOL,  
CRYING IN THE STALLS WHEN I NEEDED TO  
AND THEN I GOT OVER IT.



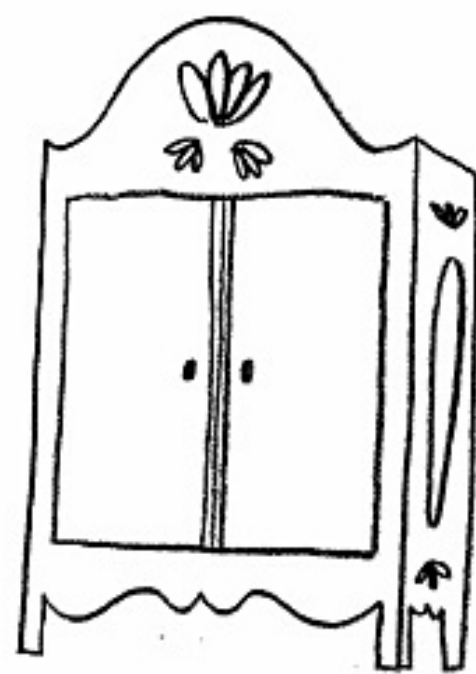
THE ONLY THING LEFT WAS TO FIND MYSELF AGAIN.  
WHEN WE'D BEEN TOGETHER I'D CHANGED  
SO MUCH.



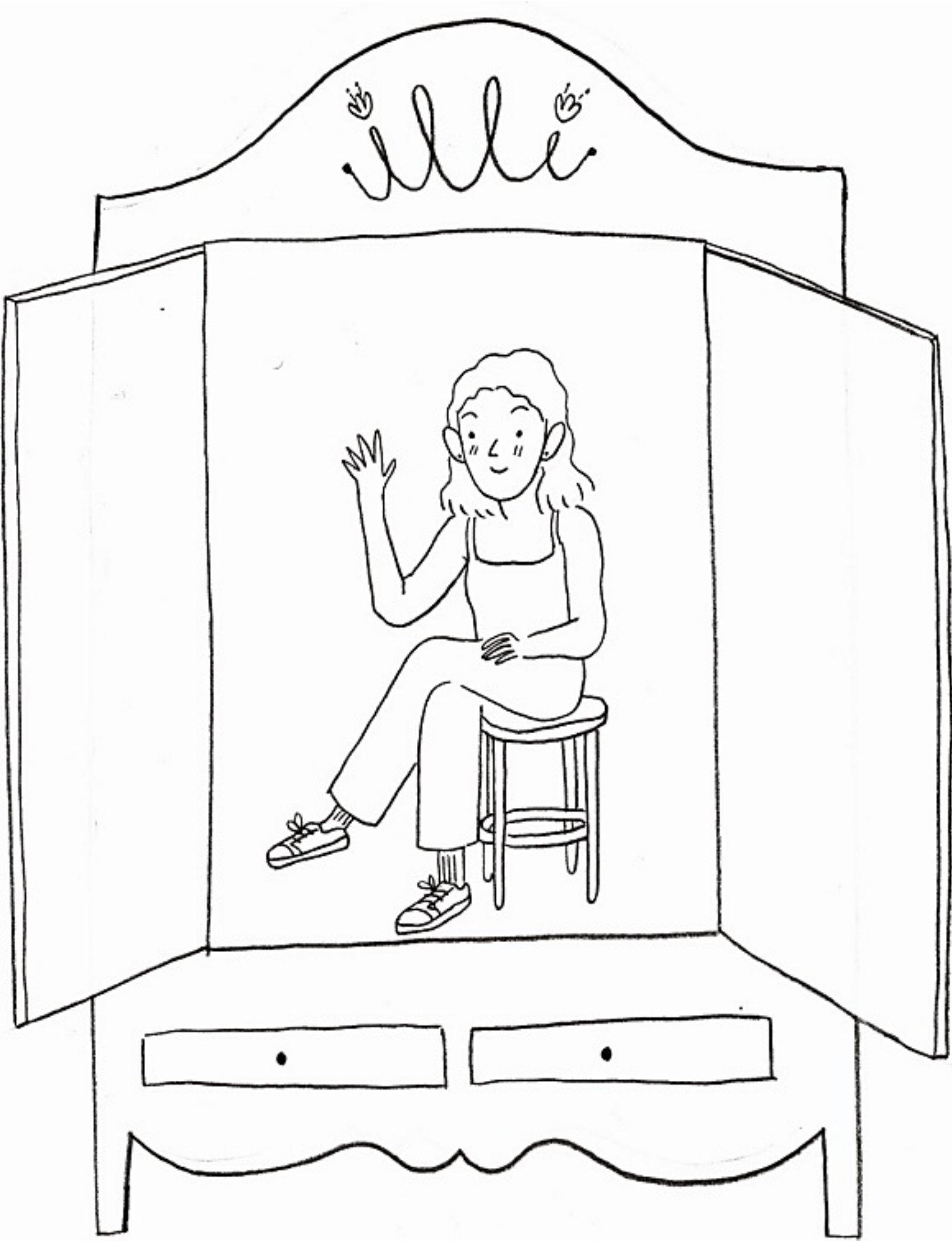
BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL HERE: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES ARE HARD BECAUSE IT MEANS LOOKING BACK AND TRYING TO FIGURE STUFF OUT – I KNOW WHO I AM NOW, BUT WHO WAS I THEN? AND QUEER MEMOIR IS PARTICULARLY HARD!



CLOSED CLOSET →



PEOPLE MIGHT THINK THAT EVERYONE STARTS OUT IN A CLOSET UNTIL THEY'RE READY TO "COME OUT." THE CLOSET COULD BE DARK AND SCARY OR QUITE ROOMY AND RESEMBLE MORE OF A CLOTHES RAIL. BUT WHAT'S FUNNY FOR ME IS THAT I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT THERE WAS A CLOSET – OR THAT I WAS VERY MUCH STUCK INSIDE IT.

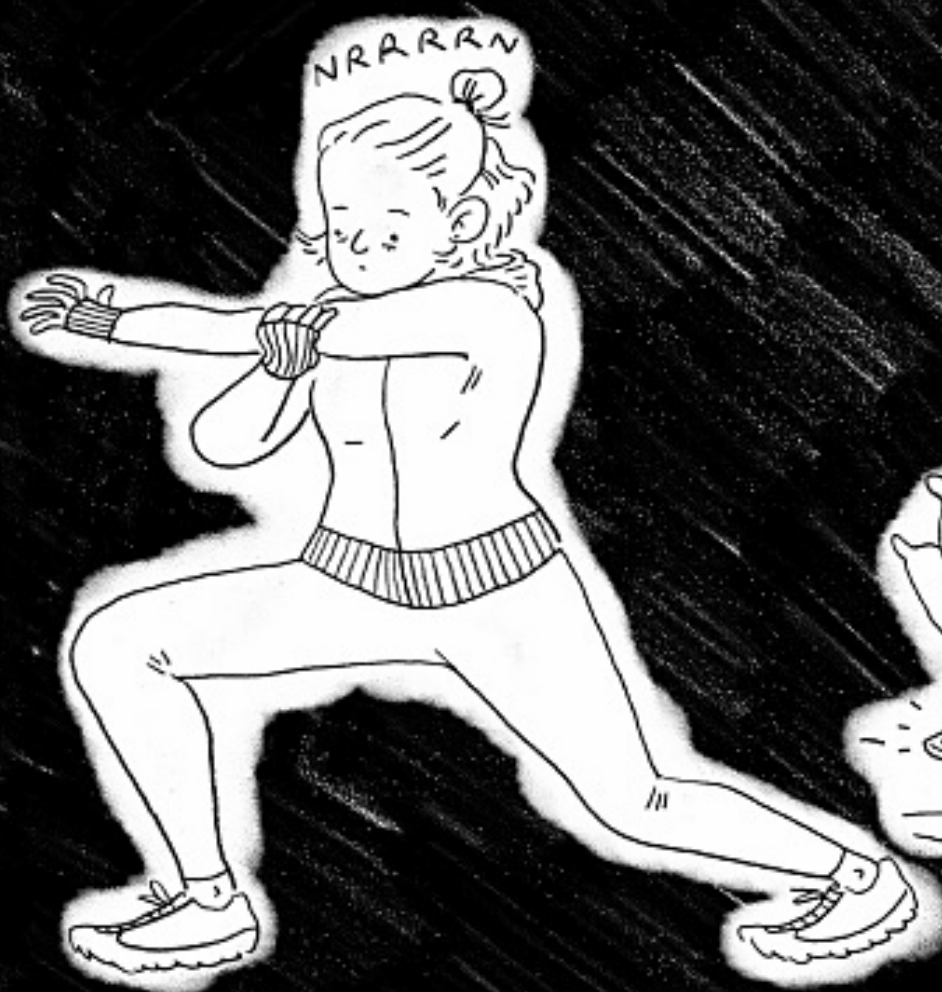


FOR





IT STARTED WITH RUNNING.





HMPH





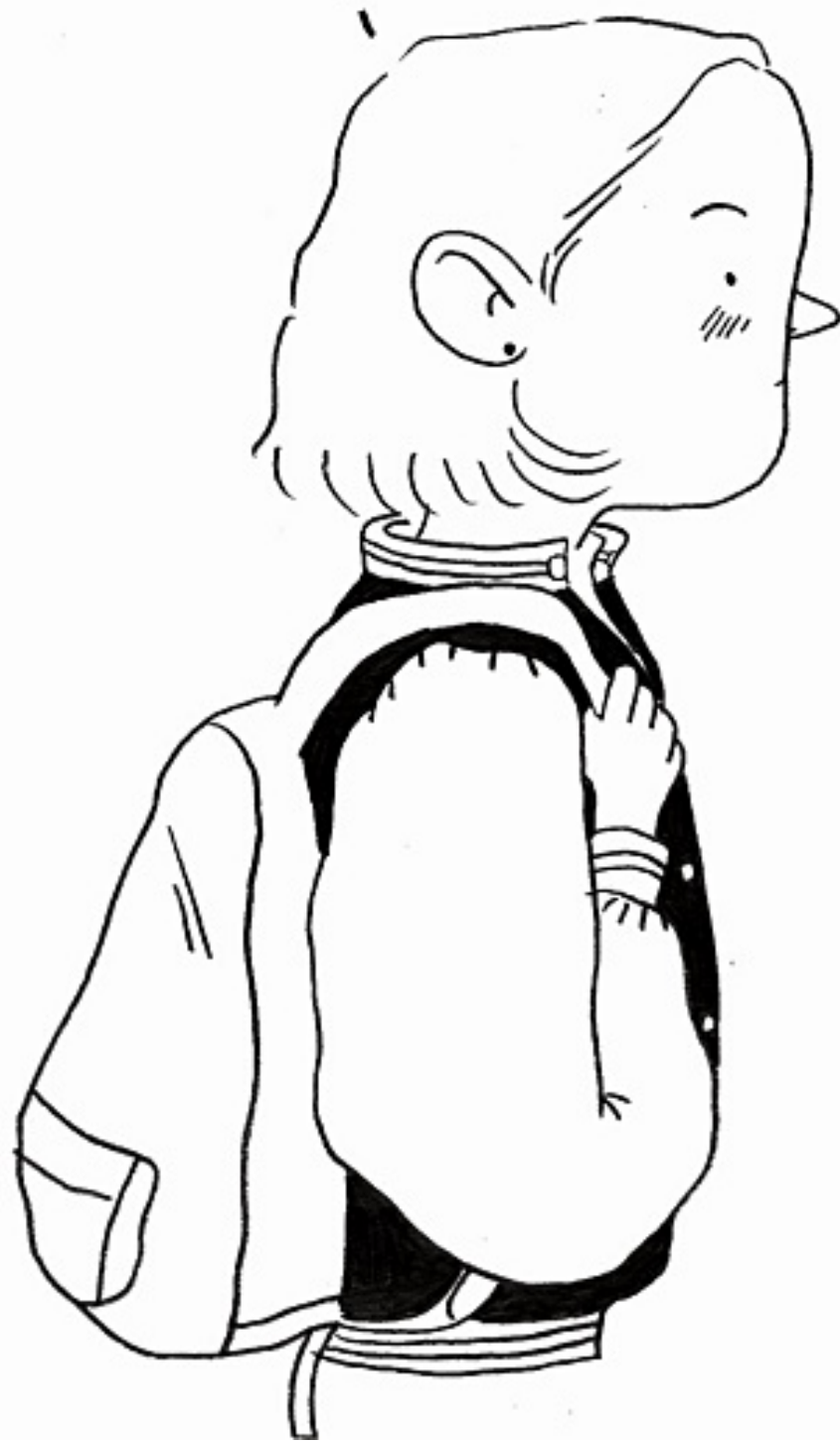
I'M BETTER OFF  
WITHOUT HIM.







I DON'T NEED SOMEONE ELSE TO MAKE ME  
FEEL GOOD. I WANT TO COME TO  
TERMS WITH MYSELF, UNDERSTAND  
WHAT I NEED. THEN I CAN ENJOY MY  
NEXT RELATIONSHIP.

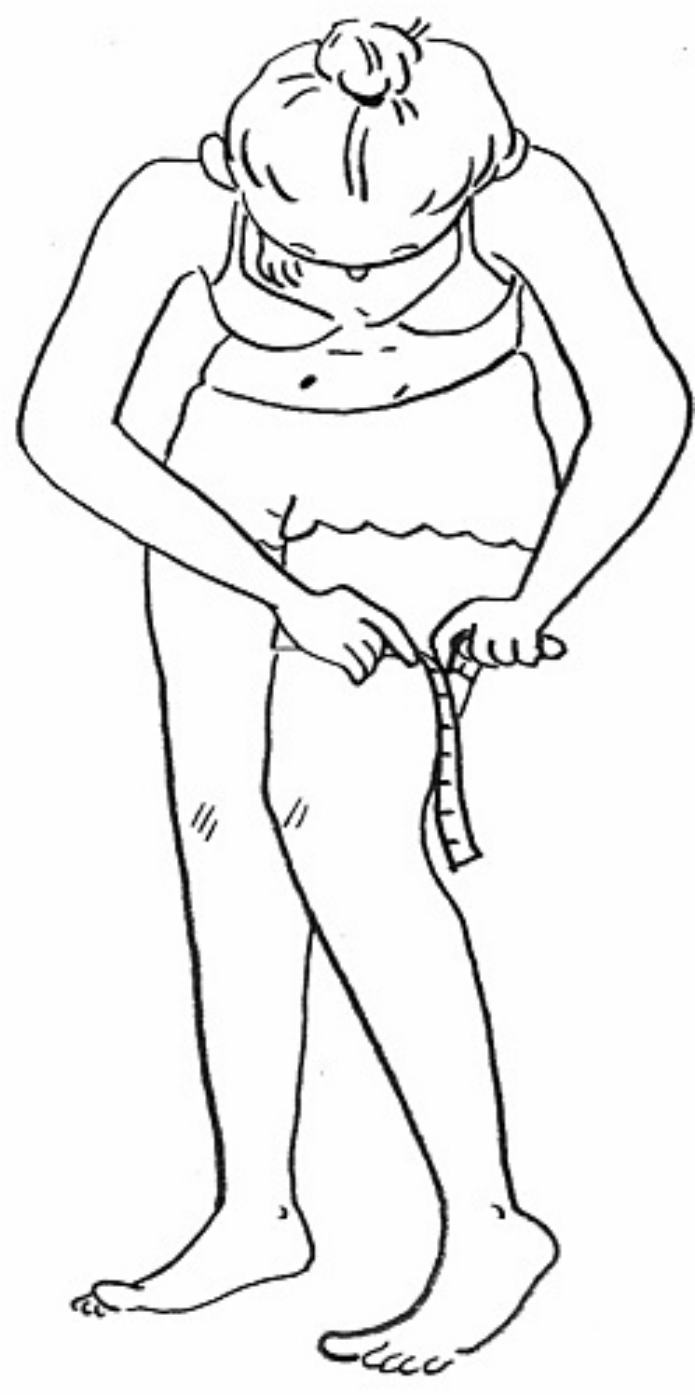
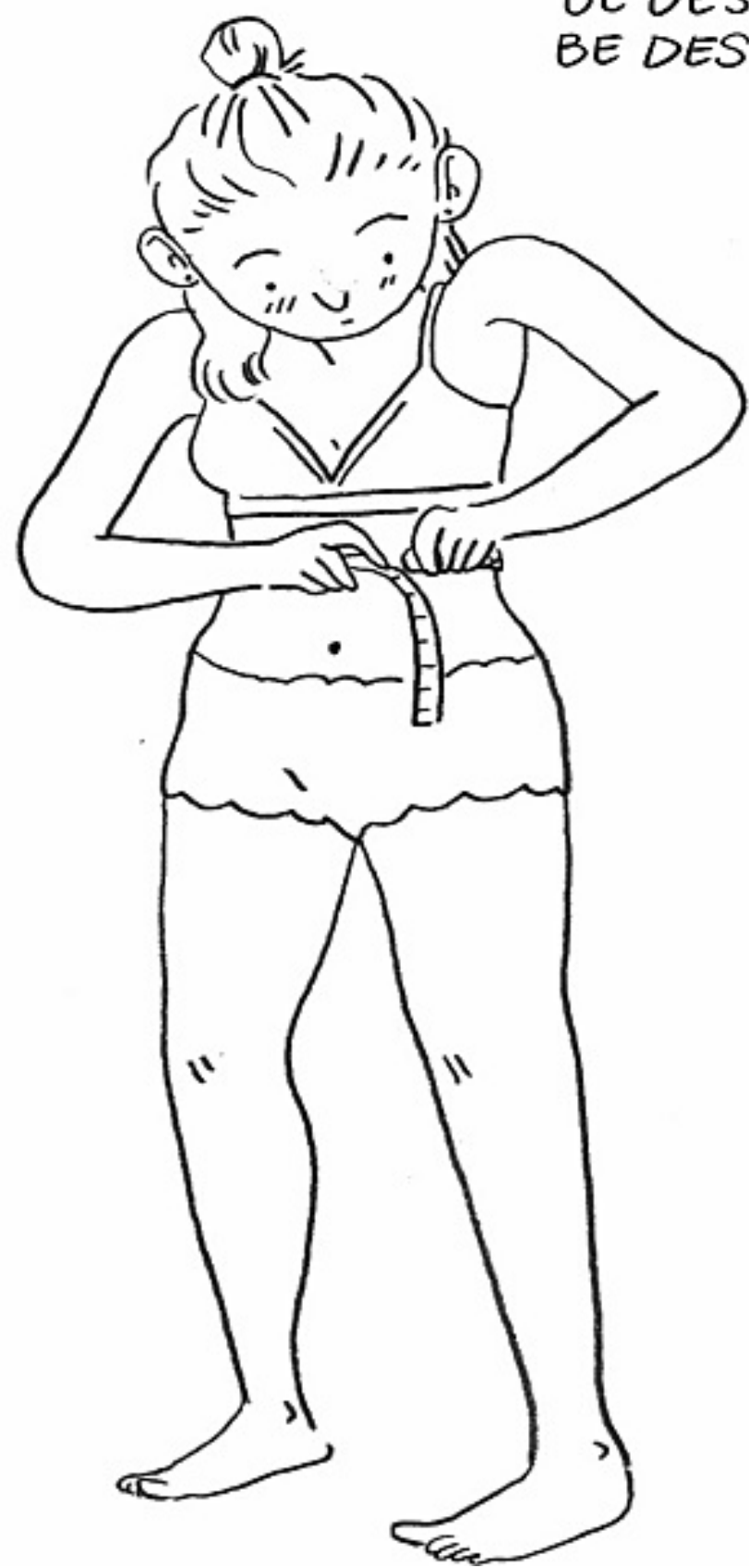


I WANTED TO REINVENT MYSELF.



BUT THAT DESIRE LED ME DOWN SOME DARK PATHS.

A DETERMINATION TO  
GO FURTHER,  
EAT LESS,  
GET THINNER,  
BE BETTER,  
LOOK SEXIER,  
BE DESIRABLE,  
BE DESERVING.





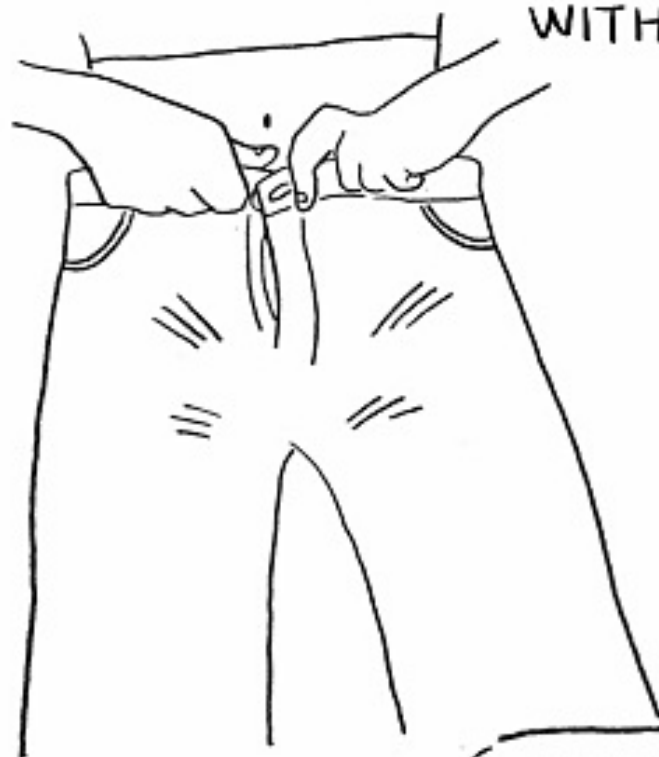
ALTHOUGH I ONLY STARTED EXERCISING SERIOUSLY  
WHEN I WAS SEVENTEEN, I'D BEEN STUDYING MY  
BODY FOR YEARS.

I LOVE JEANS.





I LOVE THEM HIGH-WAISTED, I LOVE THEM FLARED,  
WITH A STRAIGHT LEG — OR A KICK!  
I LOVE MEN'S JEANS PULLED TIGHT  
WITH A BIG BELT.



I THINK I CAN SEE  
MY PUBES.

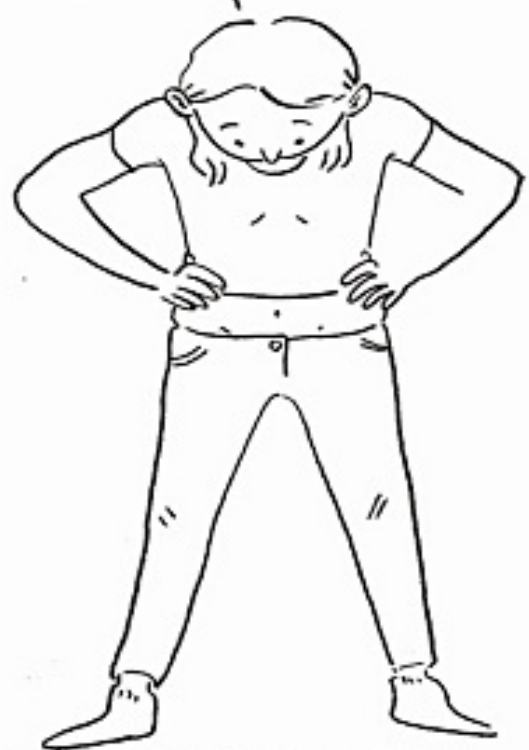
OR JUST PLAIN OLD JEANS  
WITH A BIG RIP IN  
THE BUTT THAT YOU  
NEVER THROW AWAY.



FROM THE AGE OF FOURTEEN UNTIL I WAS ABOUT TWENTY, I WAS HOLDING IN MY STOMACH.



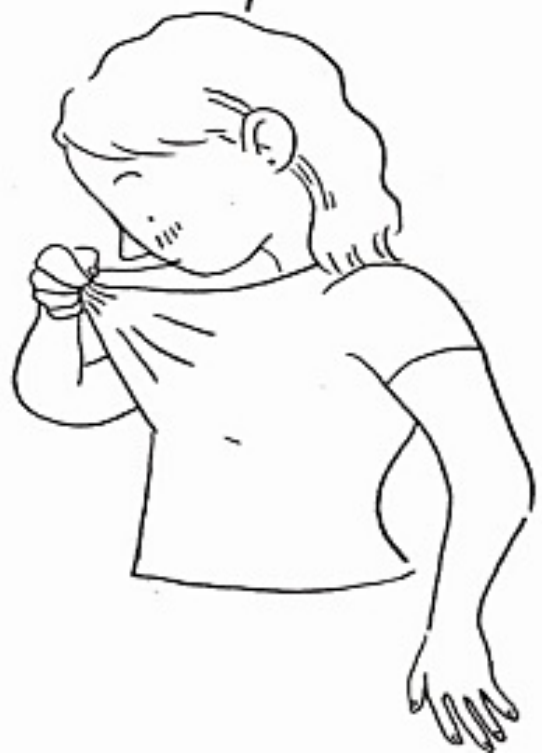
WHY DON'T THEY COME UP  
ANY FURTHER??



LOOK AT THIS BELLY.



IS THERE MEANT  
TO BE HAIR COMING  
ALL THE WAY UP FROM  
DOWN THERE?



WITHOUT REALIZING, I WAS  
STARTING TO CONTROL  
EVERYTHING ABOUT  
MY APPEARANCE,  
IDENTITY, AND  
LOVE LIFE.

THERE HE IS.

HE'S SO CUTE.

BUT I'M NOT READY.

MY HAIR WILL BE LONGER IN A FEW  
MONTHS, SO I'LL SAVE MY DATING  
FOR WHEN I GET TO UNIVERSITY.





I JUST RAN  
SIX MILES.

HUH  
HUH HUH  
HUH



I WANTED TO MAKE SURE I ARRIVED AT UNIVERSITY AS  
A REAL ADULT. I WAS SO DETERMINED  
TO BE OLDER, SKINNIER, COOLER!











MY STRUGGLE WITH FOOD WAS A  
SUBCONSCIOUS WAY TO REDIRECT MYSELF  
FROM THE FACT THAT I WAS GAY.

I CREATED A PROBLEM TO DISTRACT MY BRAIN  
FROM MY BODY, A PASTIME FUELED WITH ANXIETY,  
BUT ONE THAT WAS EASIER TO RECKON WITH THAN  
ANY OF MY DEEPER, TRUER FEELINGS.





FIVE

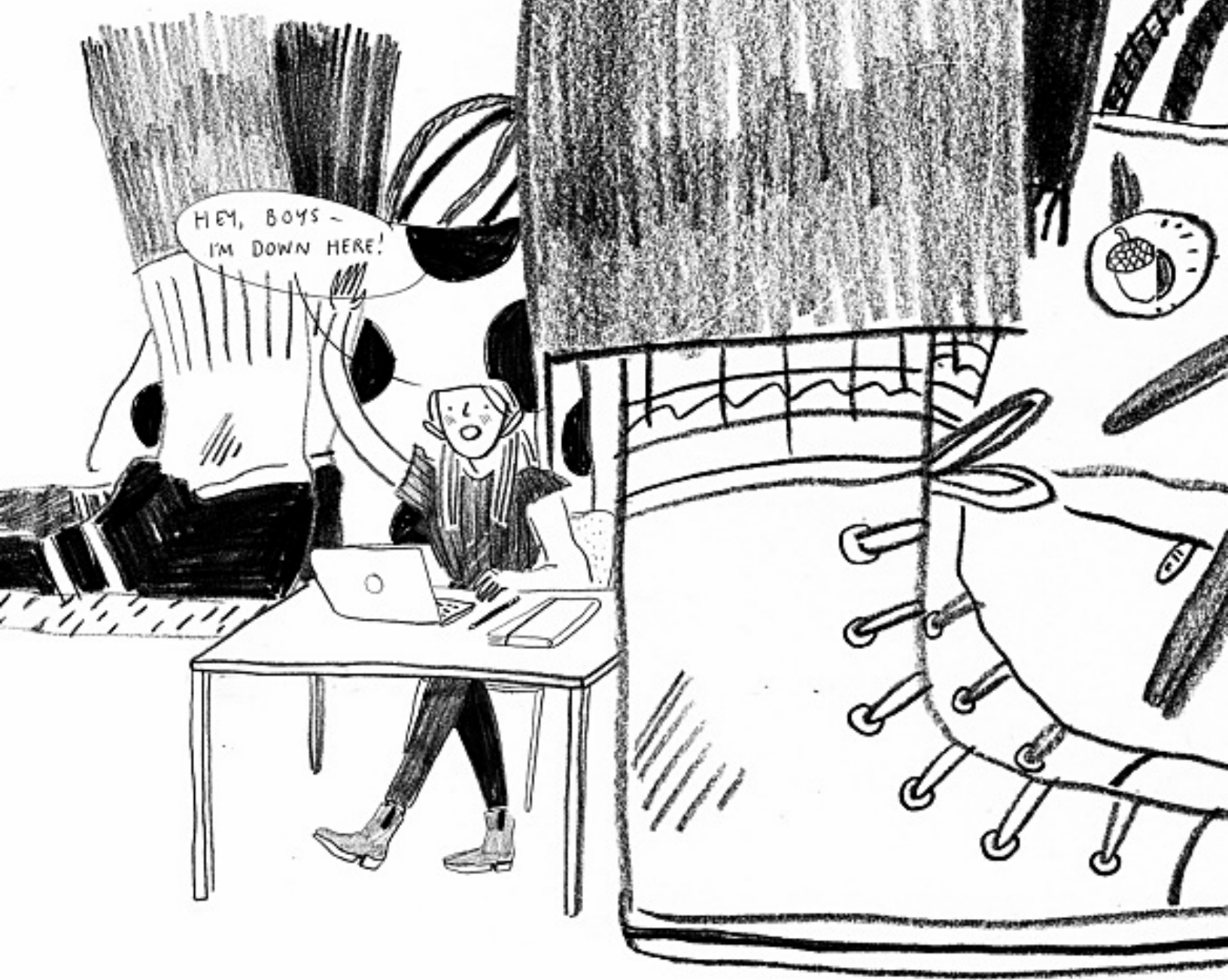


WHEN I ARRIVED AT UNIVERSITY I FELT SO COOL.





BUT AS THE  
DAYS WENT BY  
I JUST SEEMED  
TO SHRINK.







I JUST COULDN'T HOLD ON TO THE PERSON I'D SPENT  
SO MANY MONTHS PREPARING MYSELF TO BE.

IN MY HEAD I THOUGHT THAT BEING AT  
UNIVERSITY WOULD LIFT AWAY THE THINGS THAT  
HAD HELD ME BACK WHEN I WAS YOUNGER.  
I WAS GOING TO STUDY ART, SOMETHING I'D  
BEEN DREAMING OF FOR YEARS.

I WAS MEANT TO BE HERE.  
THIS MEANT I'D BE A SOCIAL QUEEN,  
I'D GO ON LOADS OF DATES,  
AND MOST IMPORTANTLY —  
I'D GET A BOYFRIEND.

MY FRIENDS AND I WOULD FRANTICALLY SCAN  
FACEBOOK, TRYING TO FIND THE HOTTEST BOYS  
IN OUR COURSE:



AND EVEN THOUGH I JOINED IN ON THIS MANIC HUNT,  
I WAS ALWAYS DISAPPOINTED. THE PIXELATED AND  
CROPPED FACES FROM THE BACKLIGHT OF MY  
LAPTOP DID NOTHING FOR ME.



I JUST DIDN'T CARE.



I WANTED TO BE KISSED,  
JUST NOT BY ANY OF THEM!

I WAS NERVOUS.

IF I DIDN'T MEET SOMEONE AT UNIVERSITY,  
WHERE THE HELL WOULD I?

AND IF I WASN'T MEETING SOMEONE I LIKED,  
WHAT ABOUT SEX?





SEX WAS QUICKLY BECOMING MORE  
AND MORE TERRIFYING THE CLEARER IT  
BECAME THAT I DIDN'T LIKE ANY  
OF THE BOYS ENOUGH.

BEING AT SCHOOL HAD  
PROTECTED ME SOMEWHAT.  
BUT AT UNIVERSITY I WAS AN ADULT,  
AND ADULTS HAVE SEX.



THAT SUMMER  
I BEGAN WORKING AS A KITCHEN  
RUNNER AT A BAR IN SOHO.

THIS IS WHERE  
YOU'LL BE.

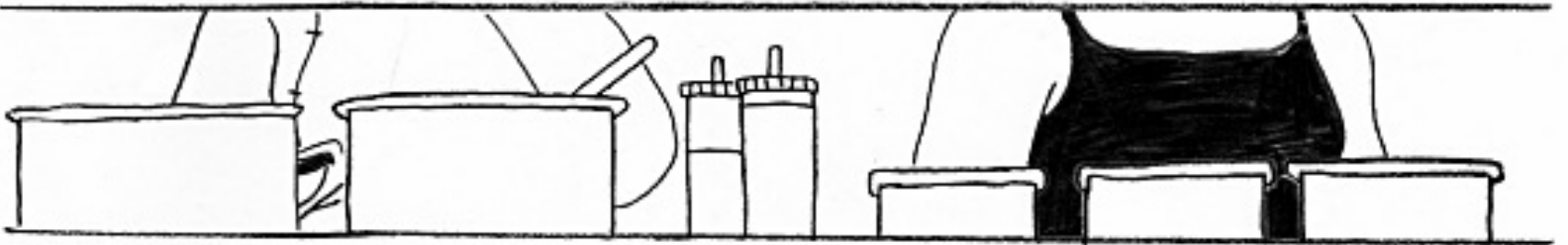
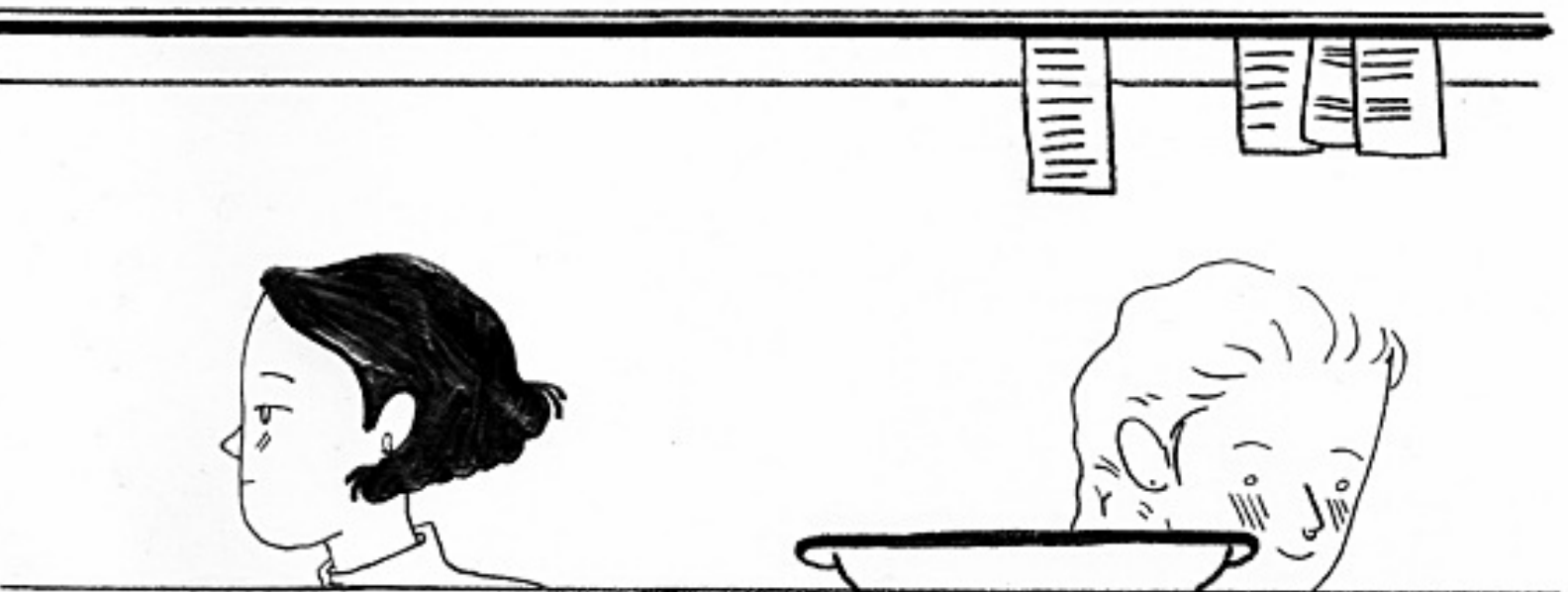
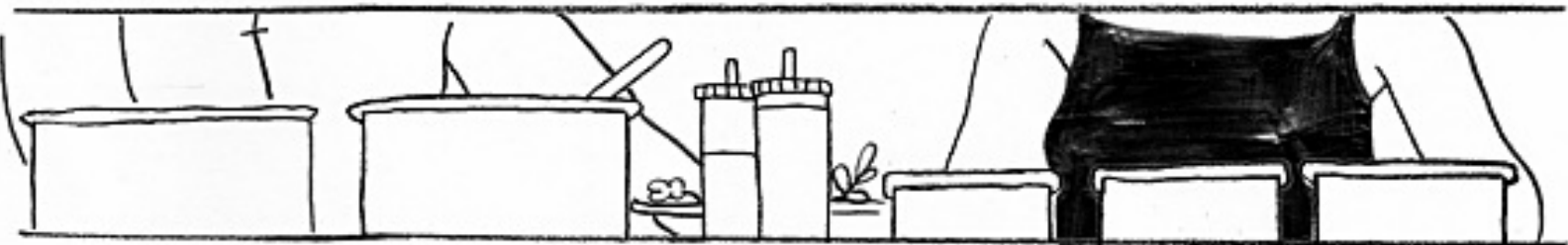


I PRETTY MUCH HATED WORKING THERE.



WORKING AT THIS BAR, I MET A WOMAN

CALLED ROSE.





DURING THE FIRST SHIFT I HAD WITH HER,  
A MUCH OLDER CHEF LEANED OVER  
THE COUNTER TO ME AND, NODDING  
HIS HEAD TOWARDS ROSE,  
BEGAN JAMMING HIS FINGERS  
TOGETHER IN A SCISSORING  
MOTION.



THE MEN IN THE KITCHEN WOULD  
OFTEN MAKE ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.



ROSE NEVER SEEMED TO PAY ANY MIND TO  
THESE WORDS OR GESTURES.  
SHE BARELY LIFTED HER HEAD  
IN RESPONSE.





AND I ALSO NEVER SPOKE OUT.

THE OTHER CHEFS' LANGUAGE WOULD  
PARALYZE ME, LEAVE MY MIND FLIPPING.  
I FELT SO ANGRY FOR HER BUT ALSO SO WORRIED  
THAT IT MIGHT REVEAL SOMETHING ABOUT  
ME IF I DEFENDED HER.





IT WAS AS THOUGH I BLACKED OUT AT EVERY  
MENTION OF THE WORD "GAY" OR "LESBIAN."  
MY MIND SIMPLY COULDN'T HANDLE IT.



A WEEK OR SO BEFORE I LEFT THAT JOB,  
ROSE ALSO LEFT.

SHE ANNOUNCED IT QUITE SUDDENLY.

AT THE TIME, I WAS SO SAD,

I COULDN'T IMAGINE NOT HAVING HER  
DOWNSTAIRS WITH ME, SHOWING ME HOW TO  
SNAP THE WATERCRESS SO IT SAT ON THE  
PLATE NEATLY, TALKING ME THROUGH THE WAY  
THE FRIDGE WAS ARRANGED.

AFTER SHE LEFT, THE FRIDGE BECAME A SHORT  
ESCAPE FOR ME DURING THOSE SHIFTS.

A MOMENT TO DULL OUT THE SOUND OF THE  
REGISTER SENDING DOWN ORDERS,  
A MOMENT TO COLLECT MY THOUGHTS AND  
NOT HAVE TO BE IN A ROOM  
FULL OF MEN.



THESE WERE OLDER MEN WHO WILL NEVER KNOW  
BETTER. IT WAS SIMPLY THE FIRST TIME I HAD  
EXPERIENCED MEN (NOT TEENAGE BOYS) TAKING  
SOMETHING FROM ME THAT THEY'D ALREADY  
DECIDED WAS THEIRS TO TAKE.







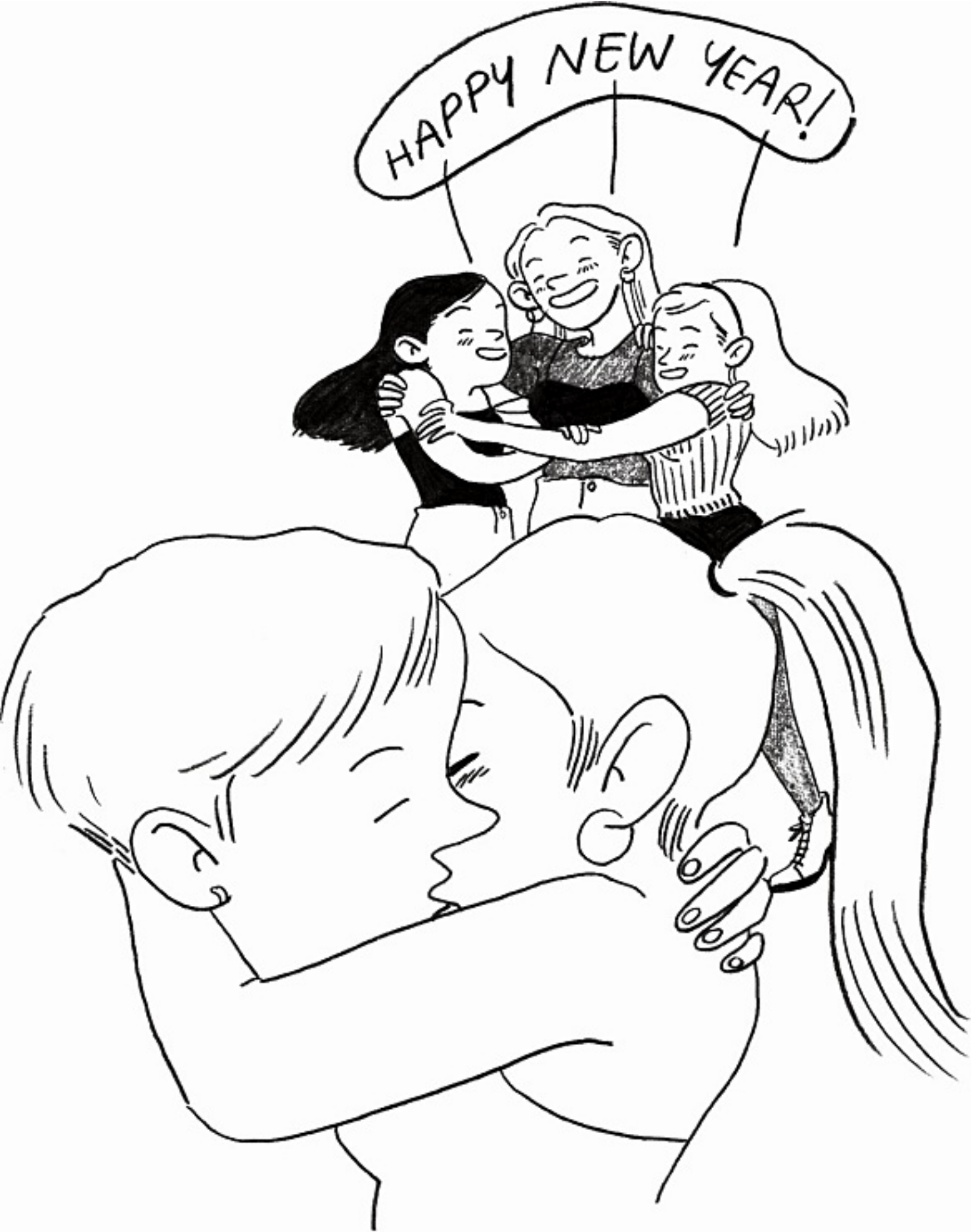
SIX



# NEW YEAR'S EVE 2013

CECILIA, CAT, AND I WENT TO A FRIEND'S NEW  
YEAR'S EVE PARTY IN SOUTH LONDON.  
IT WAS A STRANGE MIXTURE OF PEOPLE  
I KNEW FROM SCHOOL, UP TO  
THOSE I'D MET AT UNIVERSITY.





SCENARIO:

I'M ABOUT TO COME OUT FOR THE

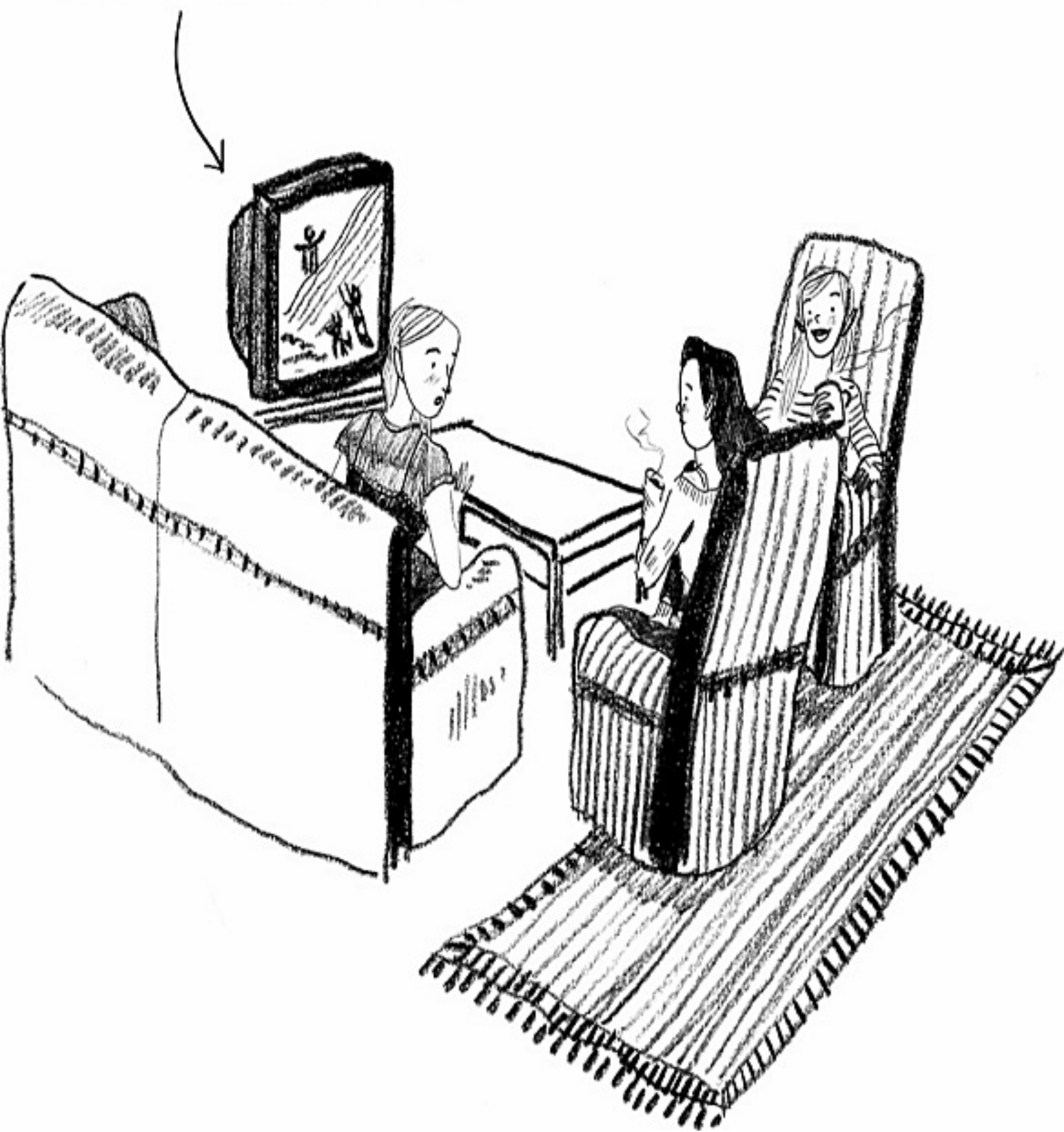
FIRST TIME.

DATE: 01/01/2014

TIME: 1:30 A.M.



WE WERE WATCHING  
DONNY OSMOND'S  
JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING  
TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT.





I THINK I'M

G - A - Y .



Ellie!

I'M SO EXCITED  
FOR YOU!

OH MY GOD  
ETS!

YOU'RE FINALLY  
WILLOW!

I WENT TO SLEEP THAT NIGHT FEELING SO CONTENT,  
SO CALM FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE.

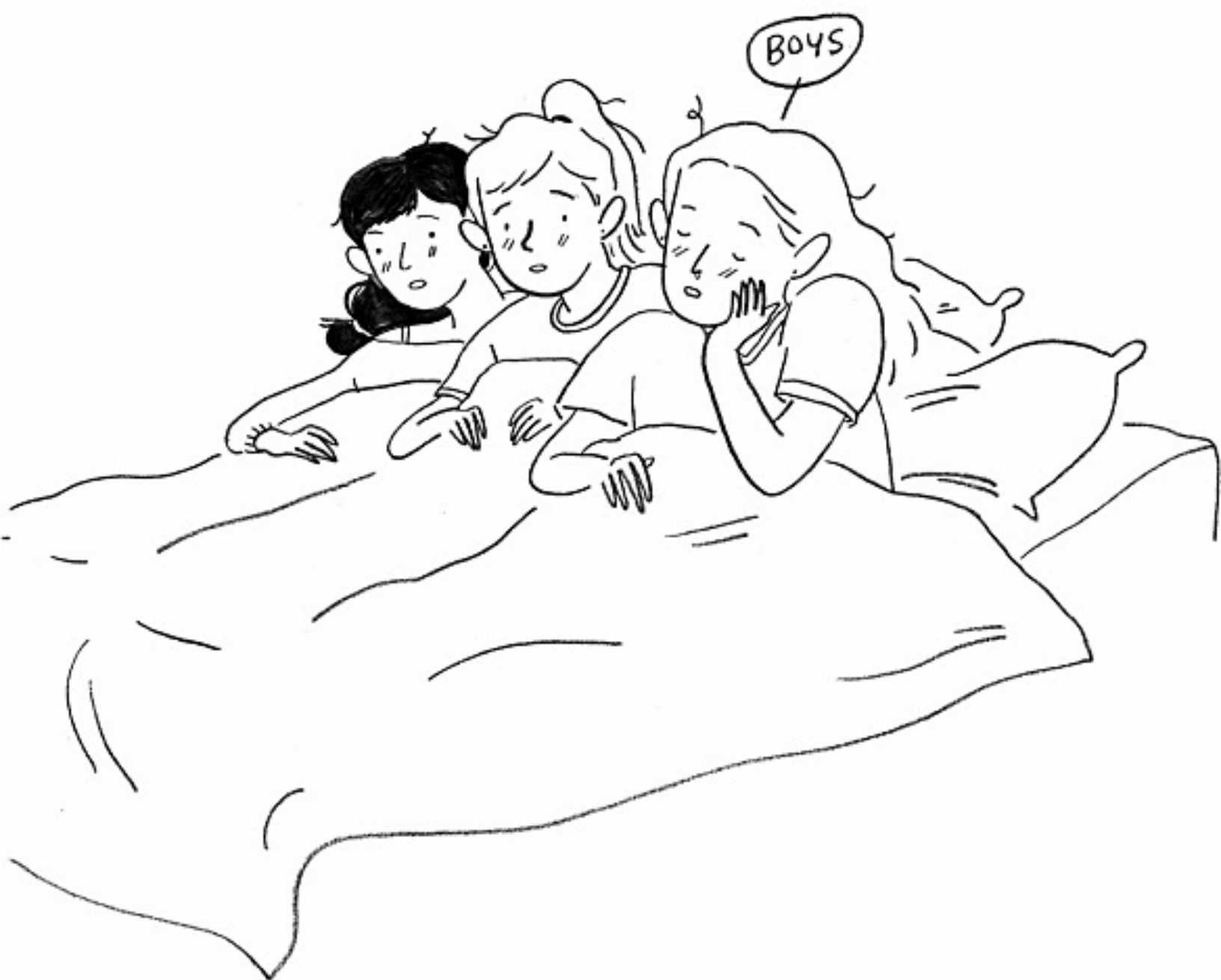
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED DURING THAT  
DAY TO HAVE BROUGHT THIS REALIZATION INTO MY MIND.

ALL I CAN PUT IT DOWN TO WAS THAT AFTER  
YEARS OF TIRING MYSELF OUT WITH RULES  
AND REGULATIONS, AN EVENING WITH MY  
BEST FRIENDS MADE ME FEEL SO HAPPY AND  
COMFORTABLE I FINALLY LET SOMETHING GO  
AND THE TRUTH CAME OUT.






WHATEVER HAD CAUSED THIS TO HAPPEN,  
IT COULDN'T LAST.



THE NEXT MORNING I AWOKE TO ANOTHER DAY  
OF HETERONORMATIVITY.





DID I SAY I'VE  
GOT A DATE NEXT  
WEEK - WITH A GUY?

OH REALLY?

YOU SEEMED  
SO HAPPY LAST  
NIGHT...

DIDN'T COME OUT AGAIN FOR A LONG

TIME AFTER THAT.





EXCUSE US, MA'AM.



STORIES YOU HEAR ABOUT PEOPLE COMING OUT ARE  
OFTEN TOLD AS ONE BIG MOMENT. EVEN IF THE  
BUILD-UP HAS BEEN LONG AND PAINFUL —  
“COMING OUT” IS FREQUENTLY  
DESCRIBED AS A DEFINITIVE  
AND SINGULAR THING.

BUT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN LIKE THAT FOR ME.

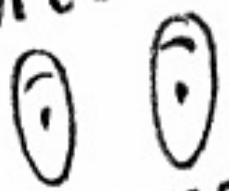
MY COMING OUT WASN'T JUST A ONE-TIME THING,  
IT DIDN'T HAPPEN SO NEATLY.

AFTER THIS FIRST COMING OUT IN FRONT  
OF *DONNY OSMOND AND HIS TECHNICOLOR  
DREAMCOAT*, IT TOOK ME TWO WHOLE  
YEARS TO COME OUT AGAIN.

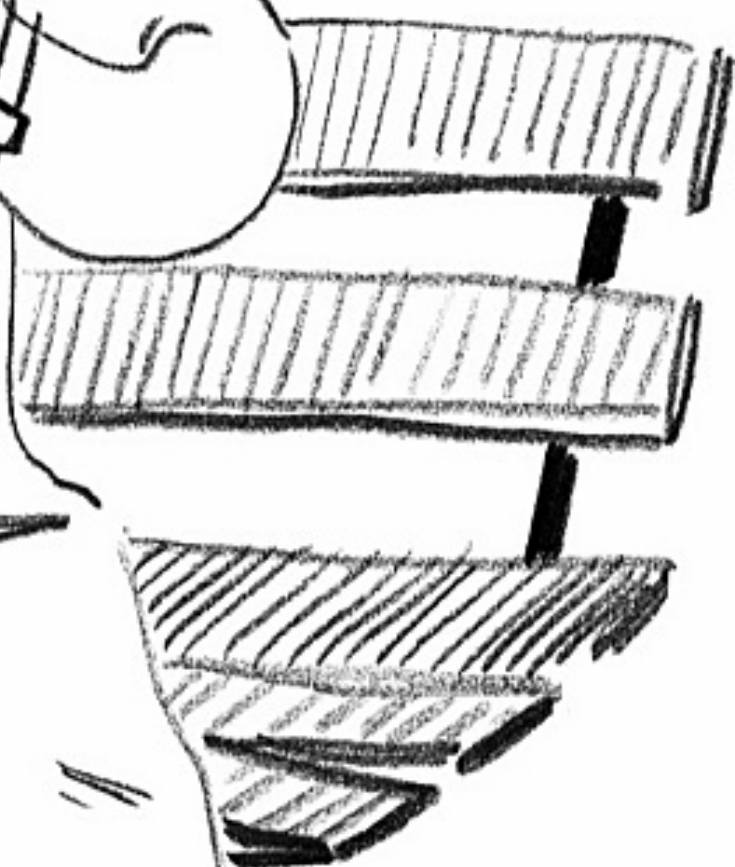
IN 2015, I CAME OUT ANOTHER FOUR TIMES,  
WHICH WOULD MAKE IT A GRAND  
TOTAL OF FIVE.

LGBTQ+ TIMES DAILY

# WOMAN COMES OUT OF CLOSET



Below the headline, there are several lines of placeholder text represented by horizontal lines. To the right of the text is a small rectangular box containing a simple line drawing of a person's head and shoulders, facing right.







I HAD SEX LAST NIGHT

WITH A BOY

I FEEL WEIRD BUT ALSO  
EXACTLY THE SAME

WHAT?



WHEN I WAS NINETEEN I HAD SEX.



WE MET AT A DINNER  
AND HE WAS REALLY NICE.

IN BED HE TOLD ME I WAS SEXY AND BEAUTIFUL  
AND I SAID NOTHING.



AFTERWARD HE GAVE ME HIS LAST CHOCOLATE  
BISCUIT BAR.

MAYBE WE COULD DO THIS  
AGAIN SOMETIME?

IT WAS A  
"PENGUIN"



THE NEXT DAY I FELT TWO THINGS:

ONE WAS THAT I COULDN'T WAIT TO TELL MY  
FRIEND IN THE ROOM DOWN THE HALL.



AND TWO WAS THAT I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING  
ROMANTIC TOWARDS HIM ANYMORE.

AT THE TIME, I PUT MY CHANGE OF HEART DOWN TO  
THE FACT THAT I SAW HIM IN SOCKS AND  
FLIP-FLOPS.



IT WAS PRETTY COMMON FOR ME TO FIND SMALL,  
SHALLOW REASONS NOT TO  
HAVE THE HOTS FOR  
A GUY ANYMORE.

IT COULD BE HIS NEW HAIRCUT,





OR THE WASH OF HIS JEANS,



OR THE FUZZY BEARD HE WAS TRYING TO GROW.





IN THE MOMENT, THESE REASONS FELT  
EXTREMELY VALID.

I'M JUST GONNA STEP IN HERE FOR  
A SECOND AND SAY I'M WELL AWARE  
I WAS DELUDING MYSELF.



I'D COME OUT AS GAY ABOUT TWO MONTHS BEFORE HAVING SEX WITH A GUY AND THEN CONTINUED TO DATE MEN AFTER THAT.

I CLEARLY WASN'T READY TO BE HONEST.





SEVEN



A PANIC ATTACK STARTS WITH SHORTNESS  
OF BREATH.



OR AT LEAST IT DID FOR ME.

MY VISION BEGAN TO TUNNEL  
AND MY BREATHING QUICKENED.



IT WAS LIKE SEEING RED —  
NOT THE RED OF ANGER  
BUT THE RED OF EMERGENCY,  
FLASHING SIRENS  
TELLING EVERYONE TO  
“GET OUT OF THE WAY!”

I HADN'T SAVED MY COURSEWORK PROPERLY.

THANKS SO  
MUCH FOR PRINTING  
THIS FOR ME.

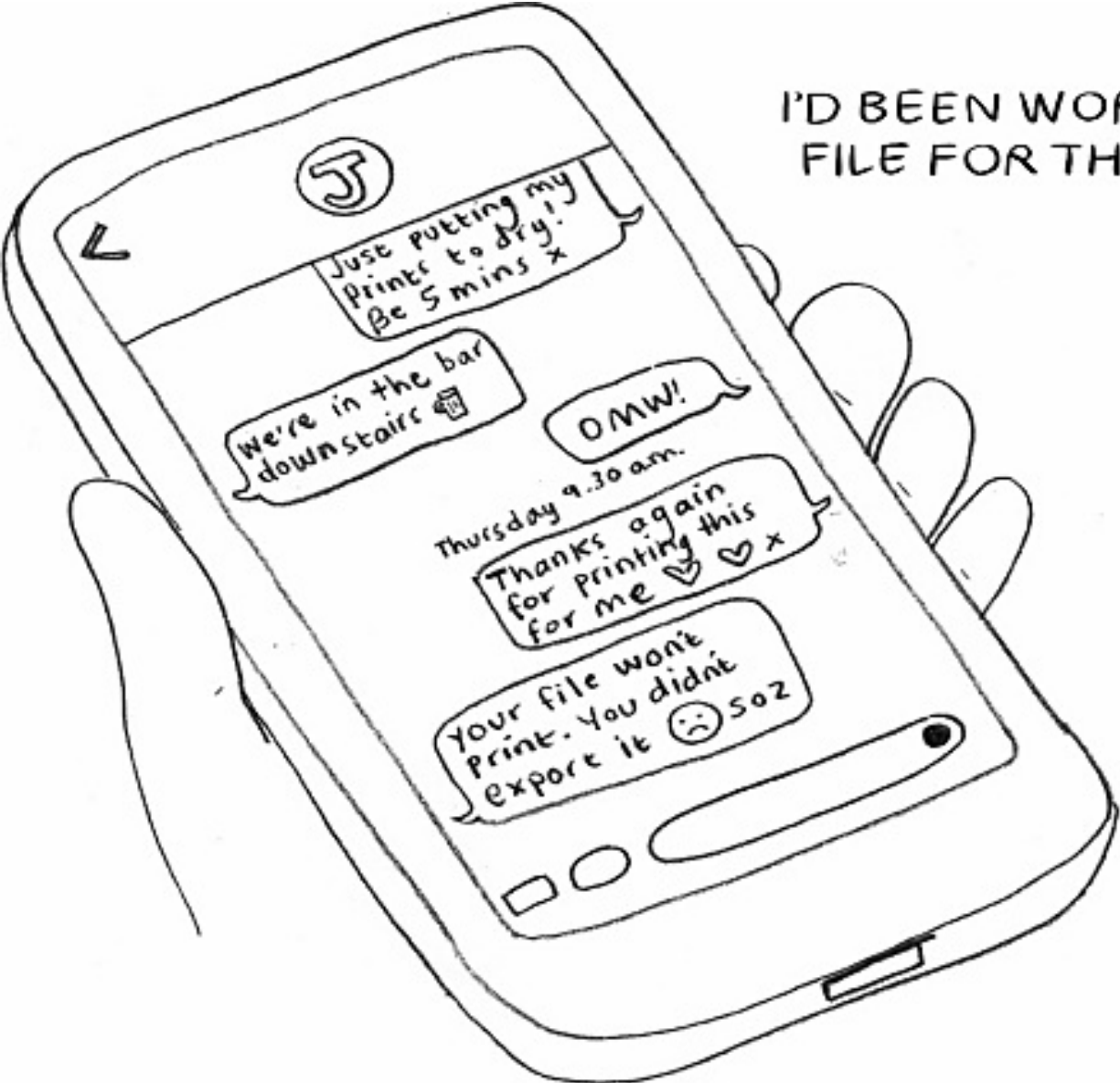
IT'S SO STUPID  
THAT THEY'VE GIVEN  
ME CLASS THE DAY  
BEFORE HAND-IN.

THAT'S  
OKAY.





I'D BEEN WORKING ON THE  
FILE FOR THREE MONTHS.



THE COURSEWORK WAS A  
PROGRAM FOR AN OPERA.

A DVOŘÁK OPERA ABOUT A WOMAN.



A WOMAN SO DESPERATE FOR THE LOVE  
OF A MAN SHE'S WILLING TO BE THE  
DEATH OF HIM.

I'M GOING TO FAIL.

I'M GOING TO FAIL MY DEGREE  
AND IF I FAIL I HAVE TO CONFRONT  
WHY I FAILED AND IF I CONFRONT  
MY FAILURE I'LL UNDERSTAND WHY  
I'VE FOUGHT SO HARD NOT TO FAIL.

IN THOSE THIRTY SECONDS  
OF RED, THE CONTROL I HAD  
FORCED INTO MY MIND, MY  
BODY, AND UNDER MY SKIN  
FINALLY BROKE.







THE DAY AFTER MY PANIC ATTACK,  
I MADE THE DECISION TO SEE  
A COUNSELOR.

SHE SINGS ABOUT FILLING  
HER POCKETS WITH STONES  
AND ONLY HEARING WAVES.



THAT'S HOW I FEEL.

LIKE THERE'S WATER  
POUNDING OVER MY HEAD.

OH MY  
DARLING.



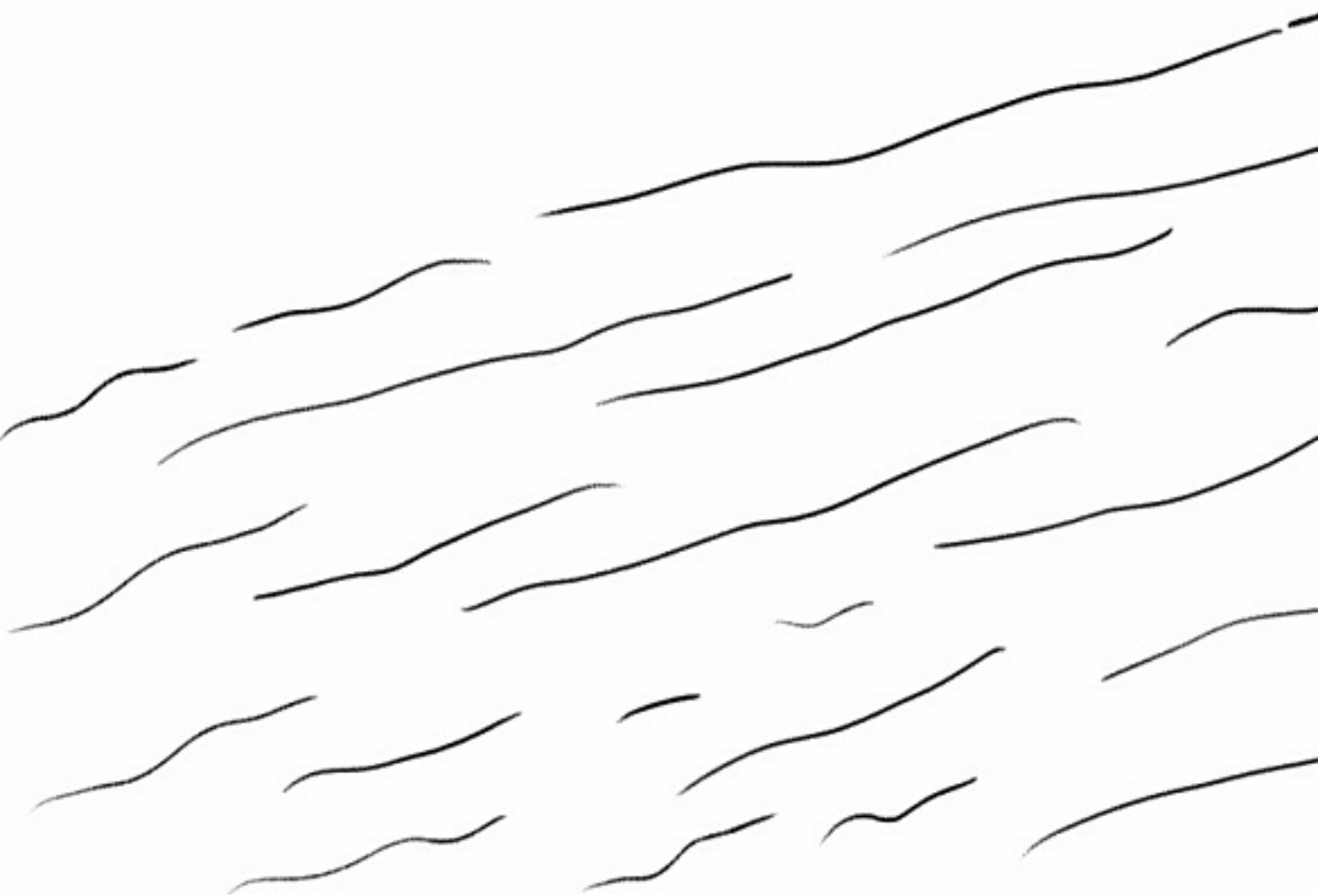
THE NIGHT BEFORE MY FIRST SESSION  
I TOOK A SMALL NOTEPAD FROM MY DESK  
AND WROTE AT THE TOP OF A PAGE:  
"THE WAVES ARE CRASHING AND CALLING."



THE WAVES ARE  
CRASHING AND CALLING.



SEEING MY COUNSELOR PULLED THOSE  
WAVES BACK OUT TO SEA.





I JUST FEEL SO  
OVERWHELMED.



WE SPOKE ABOUT MY WORK AT UNIVERSITY,  
MY FAMILY, THE WAY I FELT ABOUT MY BODY.  
BUT I NEVER TOLD HER ABOUT THE FACT THAT  
I HAD COME OUT AS GAY ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.

I DIDN'T TALK TO ANYONE ELSE ABOUT SEX, EITHER.  
SLEEPING WITH THAT GUY HADN'T OPENED UP THE  
WORLD OF SEX TO ME IN THE WAY I HAD EXPECTED.  
I WAS STILL VERY UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN  
CONFRONTED BY THE TOPIC.

MY GOD, HE TOOK  
AN HOUR TO FINISH!



MMM!



HE HE



AND SHE SAID - "YOU LOOK  
LIKE YOU HAD A LOOOONG  
NIGHT!" AHAHA!!



I DID SPEAK TO THE COUNSELOR ABOUT BOYS, THOUGH.

I TOLD HER ABOUT GUYS THAT I THOUGHT WERE  
NICE, BOYS THAT I FANCIED. BUT EVERY TIME SHE  
ASKED ME HOW I REALLY FELT ABOUT IT ALL,  
I'D BE HONEST AND SAY I DIDN'T REALLY CARE.







104



AT THE END OF MY FIRST YEAR, I MOVED INTO  
A FLAT WITH MY FRIENDS. IT WAS HERE THAT I  
STARTED TO REALIZE AGAIN THAT I WAS GAY. I'D  
BECOME MORE SETTLED AT ART SCHOOL AND BEEN  
EXPOSED TO A LOT MORE QUEER  
CULTURE THAN BEFORE.



AT THAT TIME, I MET SOMEONE WHO WAS  
ALSO GOING THROUGH THE SAME PROCESS.  
WE BECAME GOOD FRIENDS.



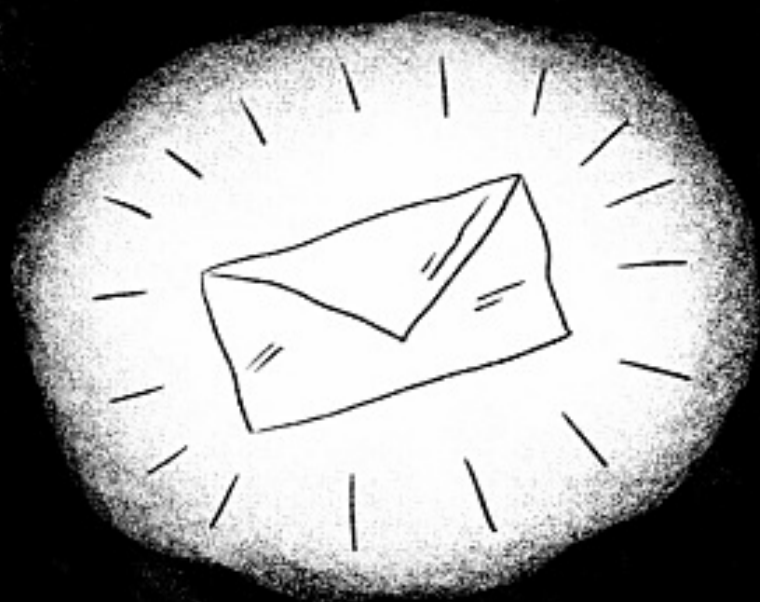
SHE HAD A BOYFRIEND, BUT WE'D OFTEN TALK ABOUT  
THE GIRLS THAT SHE LIKED.





WE'D SOMETIMES HOLD HANDS. I'D MEET  
HER AFTER CLASS AND WE'D SPEND OUR  
EVENINGS TOGETHER.





I DIDN'T THINK  
I COULD MEET  
ANYONE LIKE  
YOU.



ONCE AGAIN,  
I FELT LIKE I HAD TWO SELVES: THE PERSON I WAS  
WHEN I WAS AT UNIVERSITY, AND THE PERSON I WAS  
WHEN I WAS WITH HER.

AT UNIVERSITY I'D TALK TO GIRLS IN MY CLASS  
ABOUT BOYS, SCROLL THROUGH TINDER,  
AND SET UP DATES.





WHEN WE WERE ALONE, IT FELT LIKE WE CREATED OUR OWN BUBBLE. WE CLOSED THE DOOR ON ANYONE WHO COULD POSSIBLY INTERFERE AND SPOKE ONLY ABOUT EACH OTHER AND WHAT WE COULD BE.



EVEN WITH THIS FRIENDSHIP HAPPENING IN THE  
SIDELINES OF MY LIFE, I STILL NEVER SAID THAT I WAS  
GAY TO ANYONE ELSE. I THINK I WAS HOPING, MAYBE  
WAITING FOR HER TO BE READY TO SAY IT WITH ME.  
TOGETHER.

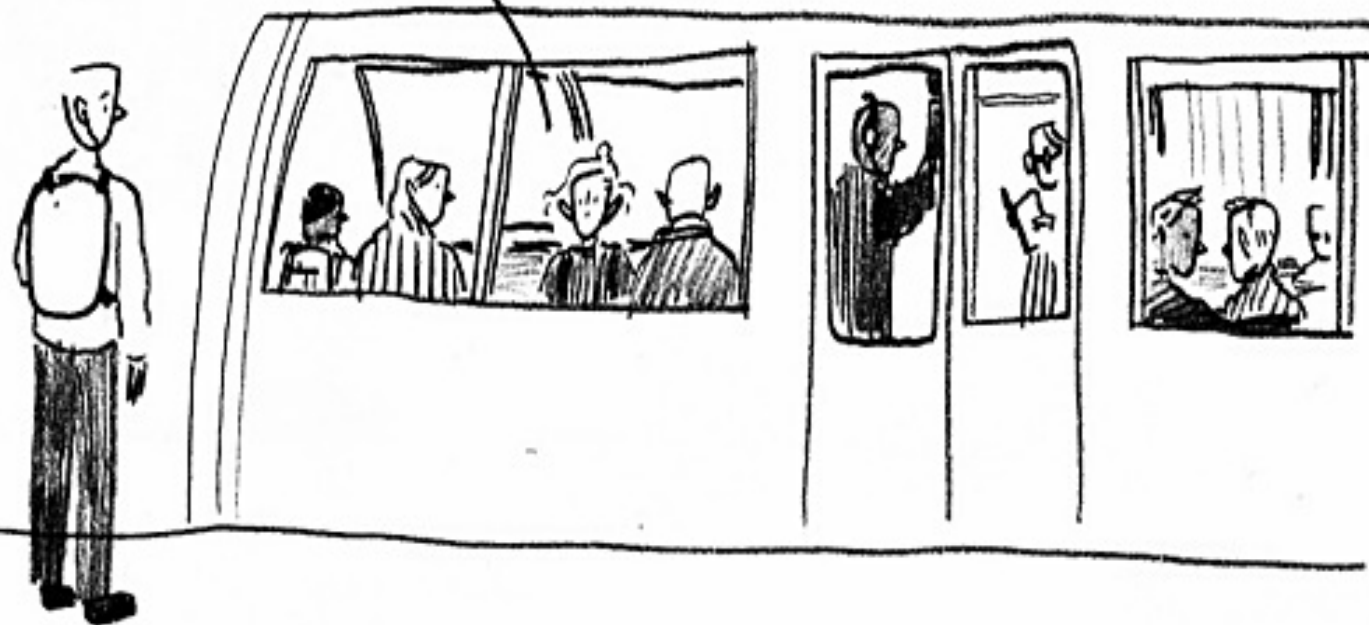
BUT SHE CHOSE TO STAY WITH HER BOYFRIEND  
AND I HAD TO COME OUT ALONE.



THE KNOWLEDGE BEGAN TO SOLIDIFY IN MY MIND  
AND IT WOULD COME TO ME IN PRIVATE MOMENTS.



I'M - SO - GAY.



IT WASN'T SUCH AN EPIPHANY AS LAST TIME  
WITH CAT AND CELI, IT WAS MORE LIKE

SMALL MOMENTS OF CLARITY,

LIKE I HAD TO TEST THE WORDS,  
ALLOW THEM TO SETTLE INSIDE ME  
BEFORE SPEAKING THEM ALOUD TO ANYONE ELSE.



ONE AFTERNOON, NEAR THE END OF SUMMER, MY  
BROTHER CAME BY TO HELP ME START MOVING  
MY THINGS OUT OF MY ROOM.

OUR LEASE WAS ALMOST UP AND I WANTED TO MOVE  
BACK HOME.





AT THE SUPERMARKET WHILE BUYING OUR LUNCH,  
I FELT READY,  
FINALLY.





\*MY BROTHER CALLS ME BIRD, BABY BIRD, BIRDUS, E-BIRD, B-BIRD, UCCELLINA (THAT'S ITALIAN FOR BABY GIRL BIRD).

TELLING HIM TURNED OUT TO BE EASIER

THAN TELLING MYSELF.

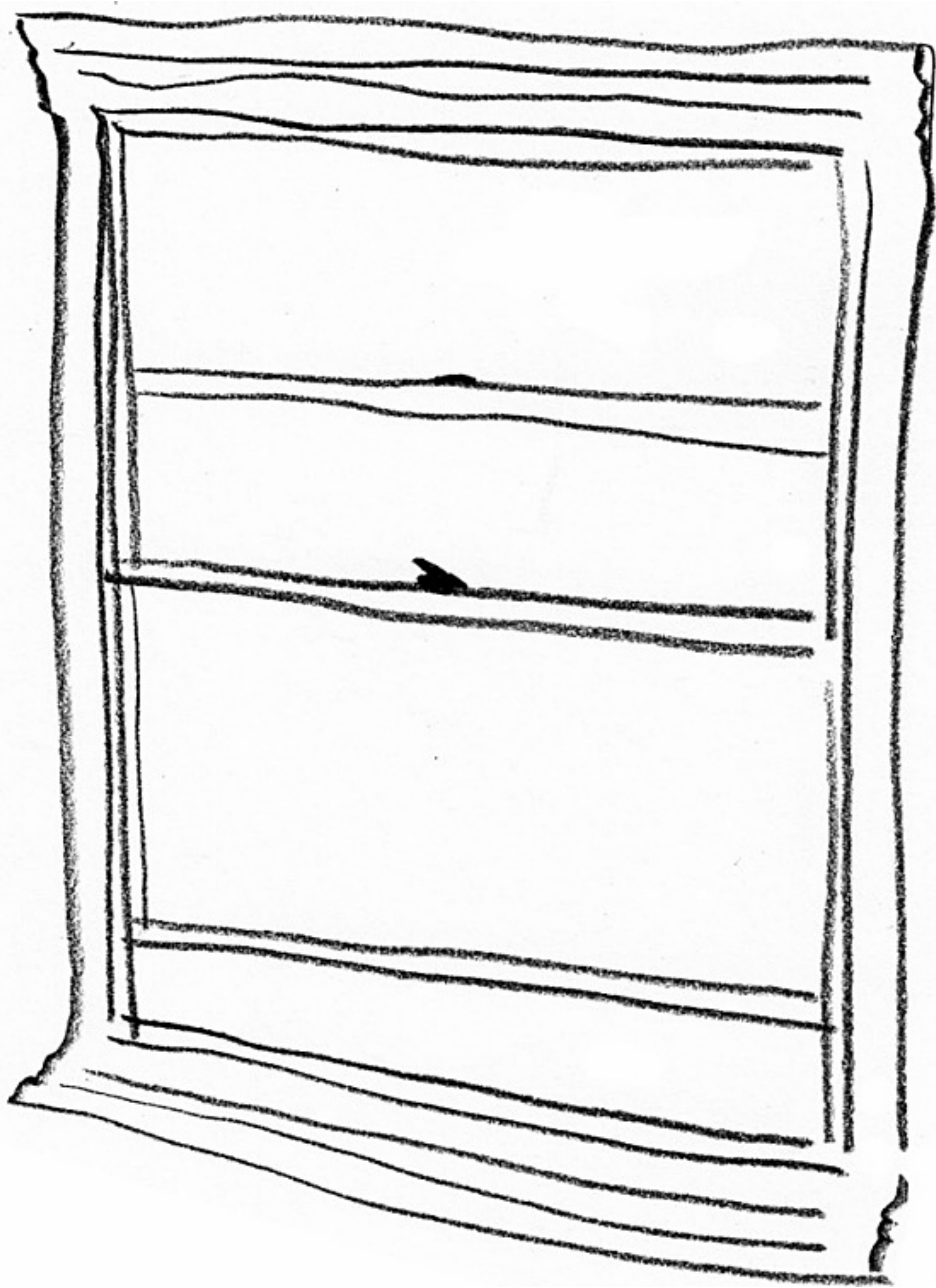
BUT FOR ALL MY EFFORTS, I STILL FOUGHT

AGAINST IT.



OH, HE'S  
KINDA CUTE.





I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER...

AM I ATTRACTED TO WOMEN OR  
HAVE I JUST NOT FOUND MY MR. BIG?



NOT LONG AFTER THIS  
I SWIPED RIGHT ON MY "MR. BIG."



HE WAS TALL!  
HE WAS OLDER THAN ME!  
HE ROCK CLIMBED!  
HE HIKE!  
HE COOKED!  
HE HAD A JOB!

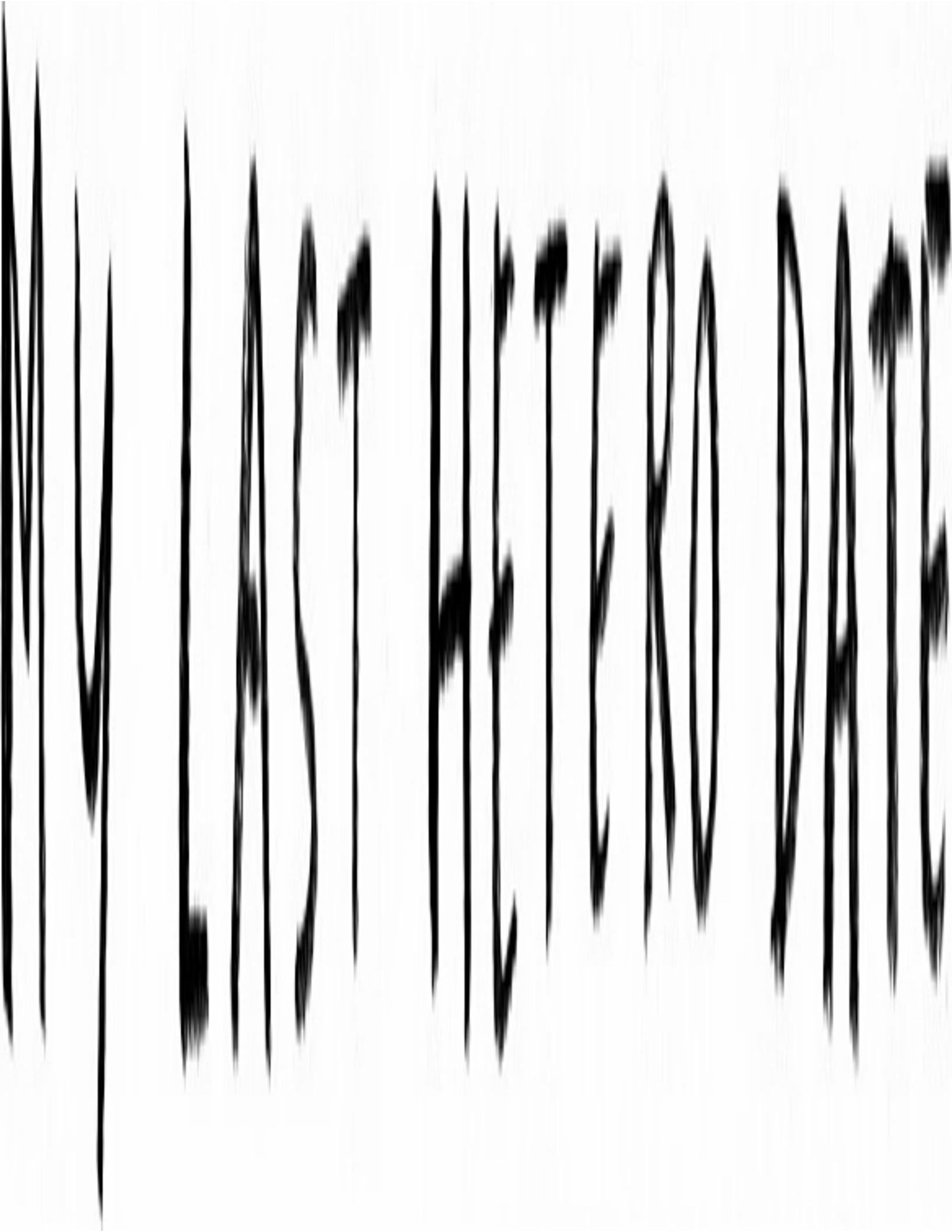
HE WAS EVERYTHING I HAD  
EVER SAID I WANTED IN A  
BOYFRIEND, SO I  
COULDN'T NOT GIVE  
IT A GO.



BUT I HAD A PLAN.  
IF OUR DATE DIDN'T GO WELL, THEN I WOULD  
BE CERTAIN THAT I WAS  
GAY.







BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, BLAH!



I'M SO GAY

I'M SO GAY

BLAH, BLUH,  
BLEH!

I'M SO GAY

I  
AM

GAY



NE





I REMEMBER THE MORNING AFTER THAT DATE  
AND THE FEELING OF FINALLY KNOWING.  
A DIFFERENT KNOWING THAN BEFORE. A DEFINITIVE  
KNOWING, LIKE THIS IS IT.

MY PARENTS WERE AWAY AND THE HOUSE WAS QUIET,  
MY BROTHER WAS STILL SLEEPING IN THE ROOM  
NEXT DOOR, SO I WENT FOR IT.

"I'M GAY."

IT WAS NEVER SOMETHING I'D SAID IN *MY HOUSE* – I'D  
ALWAYS BEEN SOMEWHERE ELSE: AT CECILIA'S, IN MY  
FLAT, ON THE TUBE, ON THE STREET! I THREW THE  
WORDS AROUND MY ROOM, A PLACE WHERE I HAD SLEPT  
SINCE I WAS A BABY. THE WALLPAPER, DECORATIONS, AND  
BEDDING HAD CHANGED OVER THE YEARS BUT THIS  
ROOM WAS *MINE*. IT HAD HOUSED ME DURING ALL THIS  
TIME, SO IT FELT RIGHT THAT IT WAS THE FIRST TO KNOW.

I LAY IN BED AND IMAGINED THE WORDS SQUEEZING OUT  
FROM UNDER MY DOOR, FINDING THEMSELVES IN THE  
HALLWAY AND SPLITTING OFF – SOME RAN INTO THE  
BATHROOM AND LAID AGAINST THE COOL OF THE TILES,  
OTHERS SLIPPED DOWNSTAIRS, SPILLING OVER THE  
BANISTER AND SPLASHING UP THE WALLS OF MY  
KITCHEN – THEY SPED INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND  
PULLED OPEN THE BOOKS, TORE OUT THE WORDS AND  
REPLACED THEM WITH ME. MY HOUSE AND I WERE  
ROARING INTO NEW LIFE WHILE ALSO STAYING  
EXACTLY THE SAME –  
"I'M GAY."









I'M GAAAAAY!

TELLING MY HOUSE WASN'T SCARY,  
IT COULDN'T TALK BACK.

I WAS NERVOUS ABOUT TELLING MY PARENTS, THOUGH.  
IT WASN'T SOMETHING I'D EVER HAD TO PREPARE FOR  
BECAUSE I'D NEVER HAD ANYTHING SOLID ENOUGH TO  
TELL THEM. MY FEARS GREW FROM THE FEELING THAT  
GAY WASN'T IN MY PARENTS' VOCABULARY. NOT BECAUSE  
THEY WERE AGAINST IT BUT BECAUSE THEY'D NEVER  
LIVED WITH IT. GAY, QUEER, LGBT+ WAS NOT A PART OF  
THEIR DAILY LIVES AND SO THEY HAD RAISED ME IN AN  
UNCONSCIOUSLY HETEROSEXUAL ENVIRONMENT.







IT WAS LIKE WHEN WE WATCHED *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* – MY PARENTS AND I LOVED WILLOW AND TARA'S RELATIONSHIP. *BUFFY* WAS A COOL FANTASY WORLD THAT WE DIPPED INTO WEEKLY. THE CHARACTERS WERE ACTION FIGURES, POSTERS, STICKERS, TRADING CARDS, AND PEOPLE I WOULD DRAW FOR MY OWN CHILDISH COMICS. BUT ONCE THE EPISODE WAS OVER, WE LEFT THE WORLD OF *BUFFY* AND WENT BACK TO "NORMAL LIFE."

WILLOW AND TARA WERE A PART OF THAT FICTIONAL WORLD, AND SO WAS THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

SO THOUGH I WAS DESPERATELY FINDING MYSELF IN EVERY ASPECT OF WILLOW, I NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED THAT THE BIGGEST PART OF HER CHARACTER – HER SEXUALITY – WAS THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL THING WE SHARED.

THAT WAS A GREAT EPISODE.

WOOOOW

TIME FOR BED,  
ELLIE.





I LIVED MY LIFE  
IN SHADOW.


NEVER THE SUN  
ON MY FACE.






IT TURNED OUT THAT TELLING MY PARENTS WAS VERY EASY.





A man with short hair, wearing a dark, vertically striped sweater, is sitting in a wooden chair at a desk. He is looking towards the right. On the desk in front of him is a computer mouse with a cord and some papers. A speech bubble is coming from him.

OH YEAH?  
WHAT'S THAT,  
LILLA?



A woman with short, curly hair, wearing a dark, horizontally striped dress, is sitting on a tall wooden stool. She is looking towards the left. A speech bubble is coming from her.

I'M GAY.

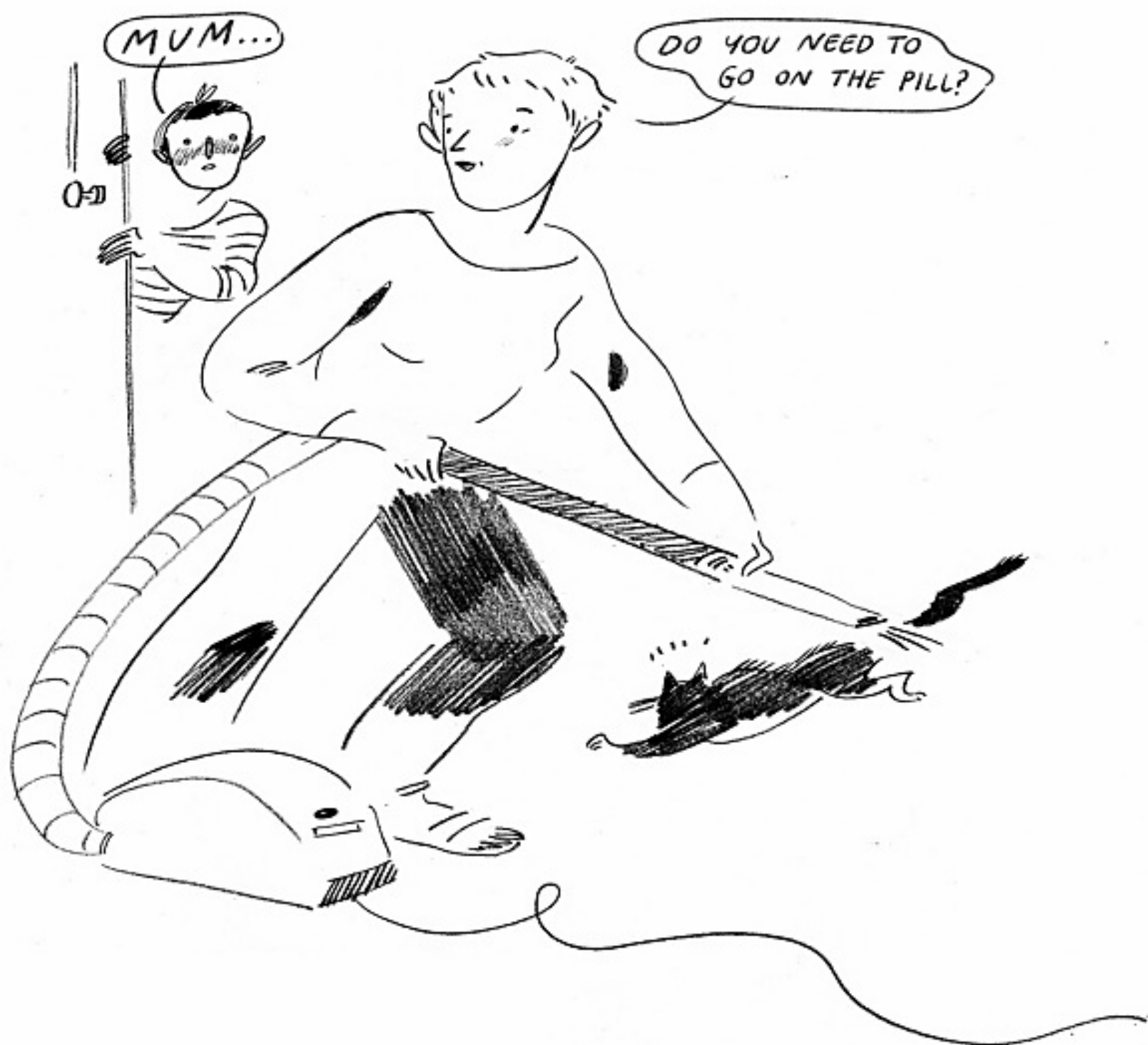


The woman is now sitting on the floor, leaning against the desk, and hugging the man from behind. She is wearing the same striped dress. The man is still sitting in his chair, looking back at her. A speech bubble is coming from the woman.

OH, SWEETIE!

MY MUM AND I HAVE ALWAYS HAD A VERY TELEPATHIC RELATIONSHIP. IT'S FUNNY, BUT AT MOMENTS WHERE I'VE REALLY NEEDED HER, SHE'S READ MY MIND BEFORE I'VE EVEN SAID WHAT THE PROBLEM IS.

LIKE THAT TIME WHEN I WAS AN EMBARRASSED SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD (PRE-EMPTIVE IN MY CONTRACEPTIVE REQUIREMENTS).





OR THAT TIME I HIT A  
ROAD BUMP AT HIGH SPEED,  
FLINGING MYSELF OFF  
THE BIKE AND BREAKING  
MY WRIST. IT LOOKED  
LIKE A POTATO.

AND THIS TIME WAS NO DIFFERENT.



AFTER THAT, TELLING THE REST OF MY

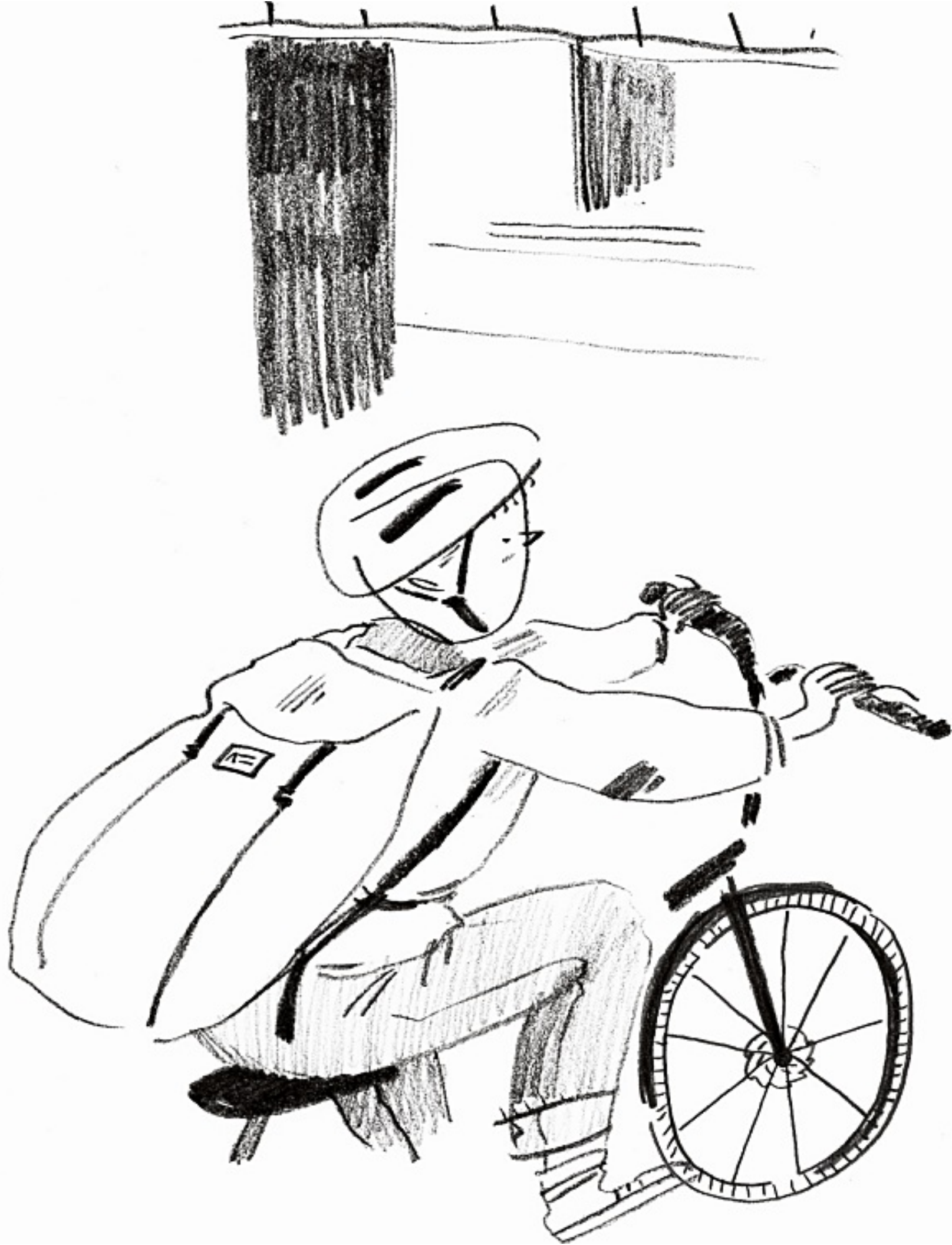
FAMILY WAS SIMPLE.

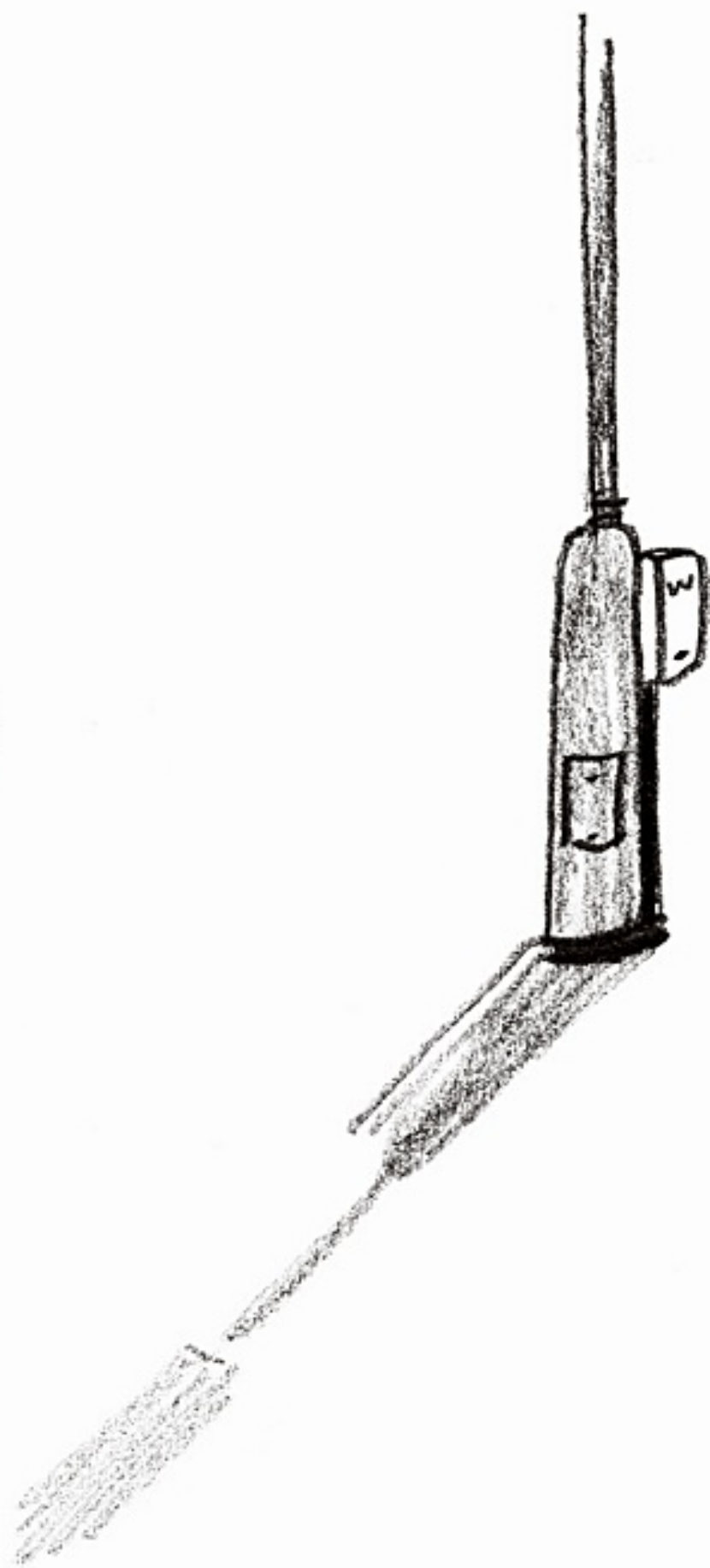
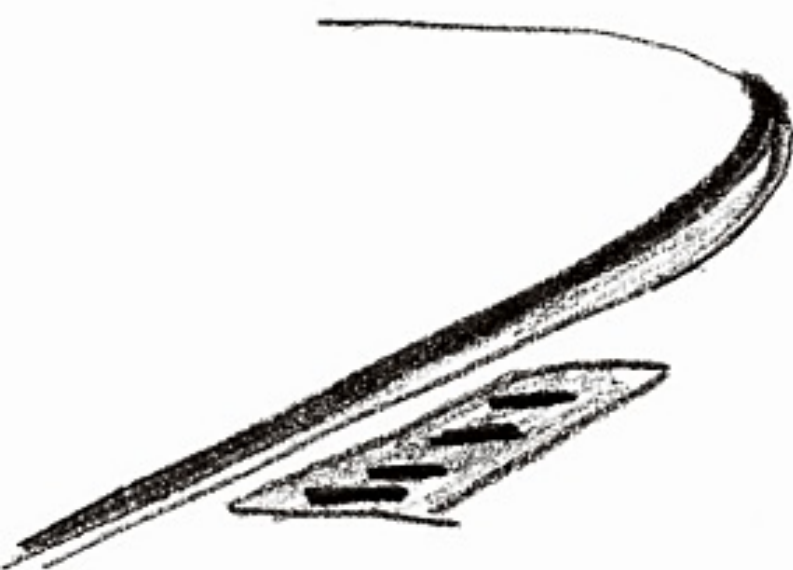


OH, MADONNA!

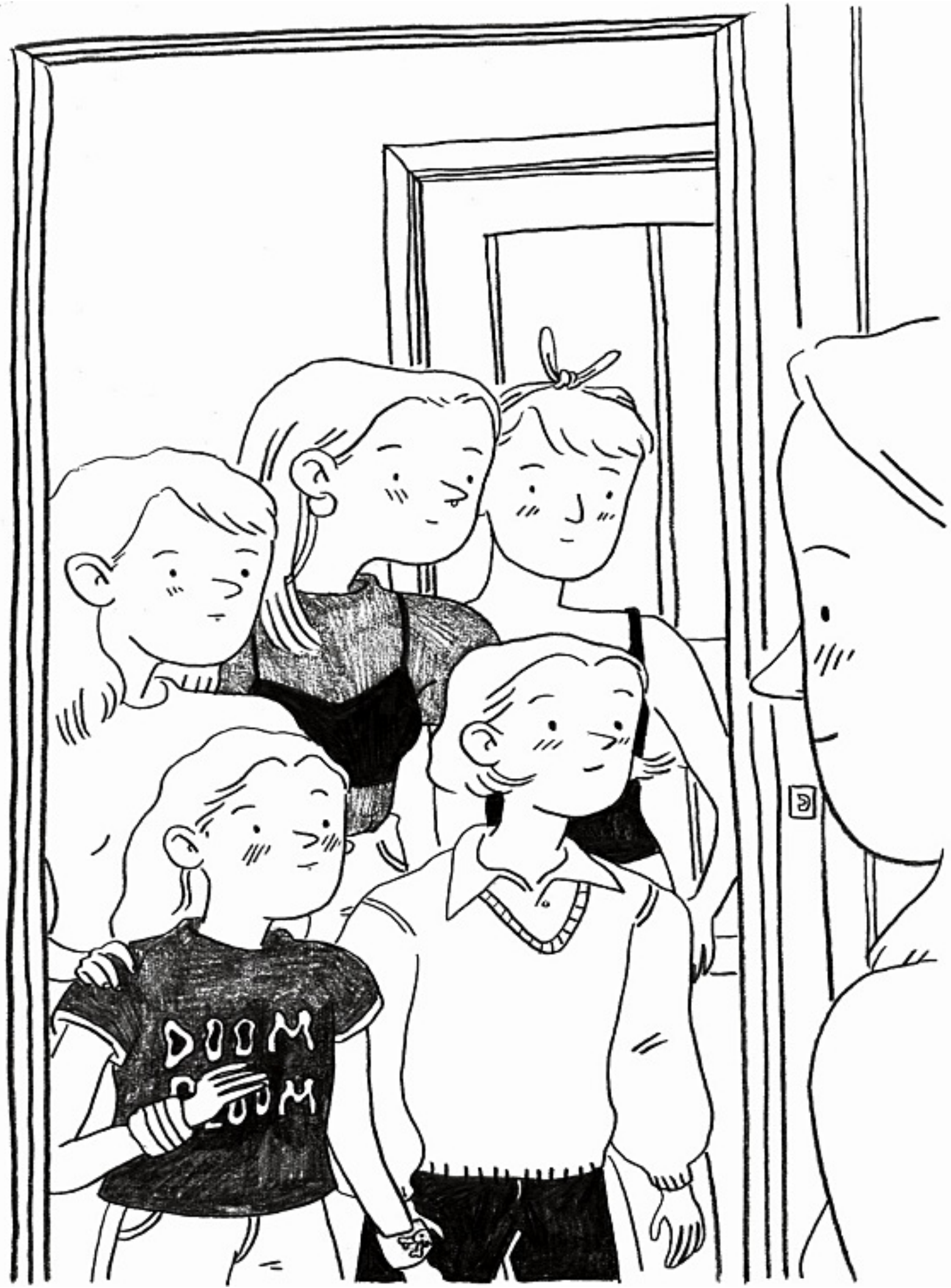
I THOUGHT YOU  
WERE GOING TO SAY  
YOU'RE PREGNANT!











I FELT LIKE MY BODY WAS IN SHOCK.

ALL THE WAYS I HAD TRIED TO EXPRESS MYSELF

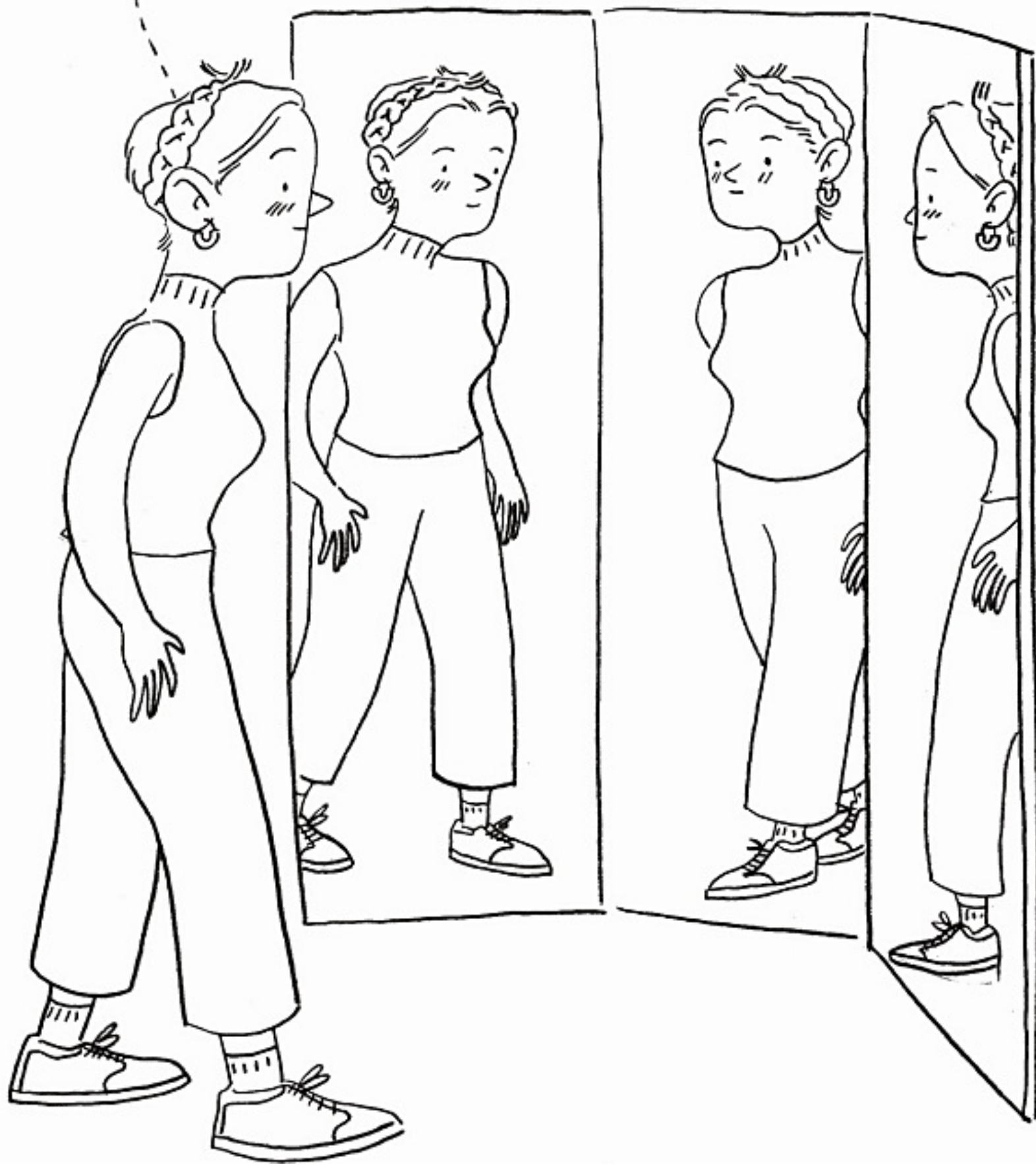
AND CONTROL MY IMAGE FELL AWAY BECAUSE

I HAD FINALLY TOLD THE TRUTH.





IT'S SO AMAZING AND WEIRD  
TO BE SHOPPING AND NOT  
WORRY ABOUT WHAT A MAN MIGHT  
THINK OF MY OUTFIT.



I'M GOING TO  
HAVE MY HAIR  
CUT SHORT.



MUCH BETTER

FEELS LIKE IT  
WAS ALWAYS MEANT  
TO BE THIS LENGTH.



I SUDDENLY HAD THIS NEW BURST OF LIFE.  
I WAS TWENTY-ONE WITH TWENTY-ONE YEARS OF  
QUEER CULTURE TO CATCH UP ON – OH BABY!





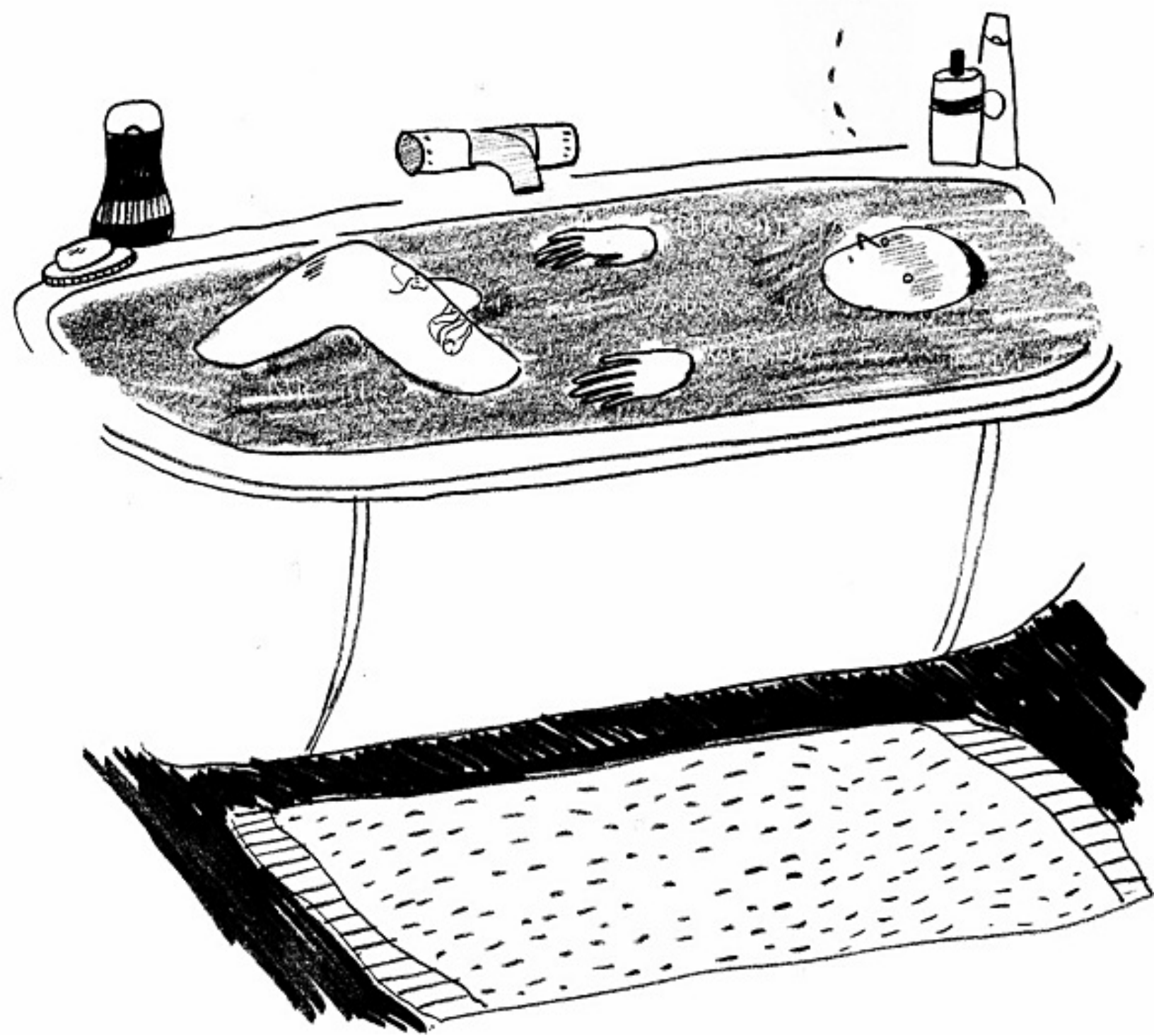


I GOT TO LOOK AT MYSELF IN THIS WHOLE OTHER LIGHT.  
THE ONE QUESTION I HAD SEARCHED AND TORN  
MYSELF UP OVER WAS ANSWERED!



I STILL FLIPPED AROUND A LOT FROM MOMENTS  
OF RELIEF TO FEELINGS OF

WHAT HAVE I MISSED?





IT WAS VERY STRANGE TO KNOW THAT UNTIL THEN I HAD LIVED MY LIFE AS A DIFFERENT PERSON, WITH THOUGHTS TAKEN UP BY BOYS AND FOOD AND HOW TO BE. I FEARED I HAD MISSED OUT ON WHO I COULD HAVE BEEN HAD I KNOWN EARLIER.





BUT SCREW THAT!



I DELETED TINDER - THANK GOD!

I STARTED DATING AGAIN — HELLO, LONDON!



ALL THINGS GAY AND BEAUTIFUL WERE SPILLING  
INTO MY LIFE AND CHANGING MY HAIR, MY CLOTHES,  
THE BOOKS I READ, AND THE WAY I WORKED.  
MY EXCITEMENT AND INSPIRATION DIMINISHED  
ANY FEARS I HELD ABOUT WHAT I HAD LOST IN THOSE  
LONG YEARS OF FALSE HETERO HELL.

SO BASICALLY, THE TRIPTYCH WILL PORTRAY THE SUBTLE YET DISTINCTLY QUEER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NELL AND THEO IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*, AND HOW THAT RELATIONSHIP REALLY SEEMS TO PAIR WITH NELL'S MENTAL POSSESSION FROM THE HOUSE, WHICH IS, IN AND OF ITSELF, A MALEVOLENT SPIRIT. WAS IT A SOCIAL COMMENT AT THE TIME REGARDING THE DISBELIEF AND THEREFORE ERASURE OF QUEER WOMEN THAT URGED JACKSON TO LEAD OUR ANTI-HERO NELL TO SEEMINGLY COMMIT SUICIDE RATHER THAN LEAVE HILL HOUSE FOR GOOD, WHEN THE READER THEMSELF KNOWS IT WAS THE HOUSE THAT WAS CONTROLLING HER THE WHOLE TIME?

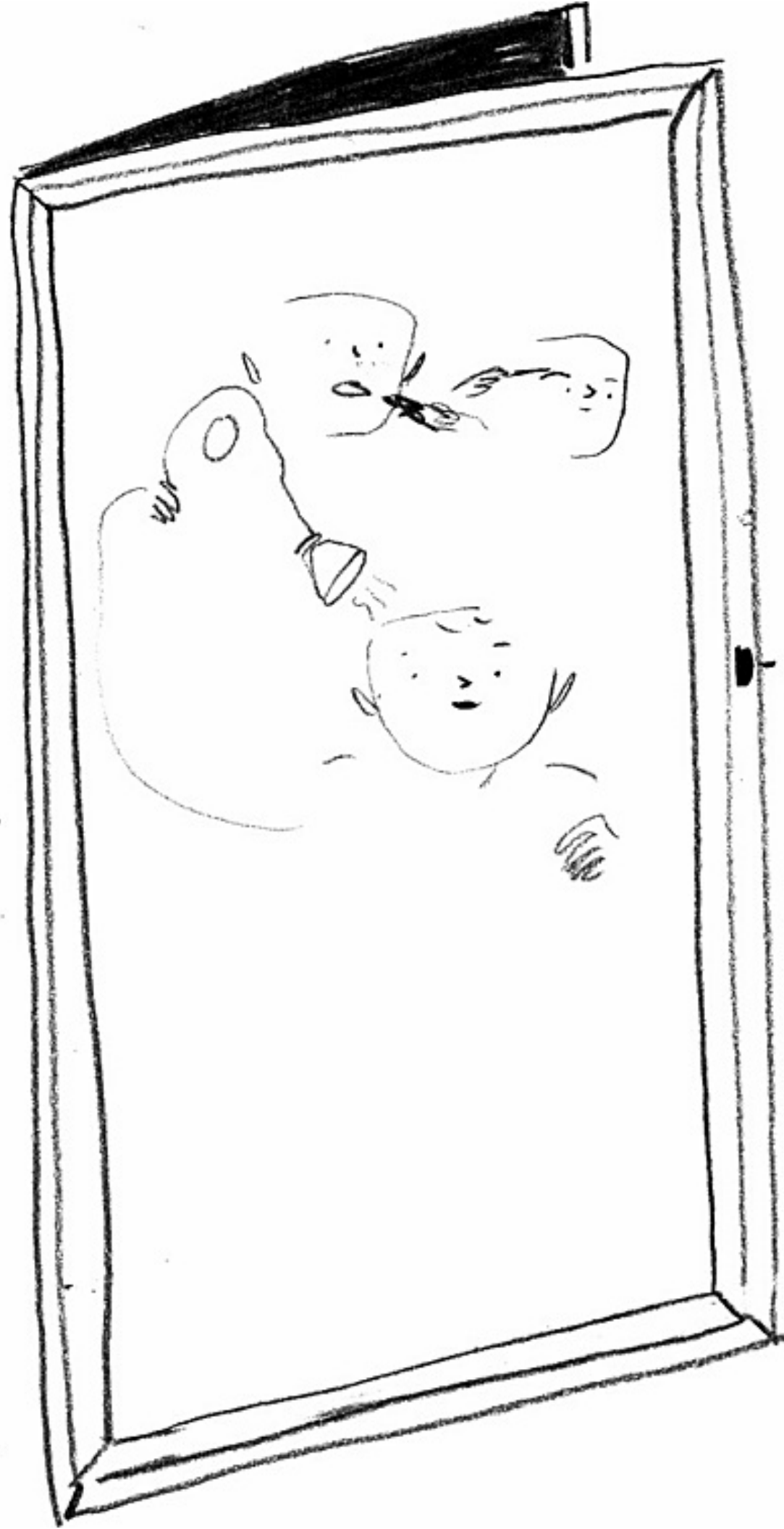


I RETURNED TO MY UNIVERSITY FOR THE THIRD AND FINAL  
YEAR OF MY DEGREE AND IT WAS LIKE I'D STARTED  
OVER AGAIN. RATHER THAN SIMPLY CATCHING UP  
ON SUMMER EVENTS WITH MY FRIENDS, I GOT TO  
REINTRODUCE MYSELF AS THE "REAL ME" BY COMING OUT.

IT FELT LIKE I'D BEEN WASHED CLEAN.









THE FIRST DATE I EVER HAD WITH A WOMAN WENT LIKE THIS:

WE AGREED TO MEET AT A PING-PONG BAR AND I WORE MY NEW SHOES.



WHEN I ARRIVED WE GOT A PINT AND SHE TOLD ME THAT I HAD SO MANY DIFFERENT HAIRSTYLES IN MY PROFILE PHOTOS, SHE WASN'T SURE WHAT I ACTUALLY LOOKED LIKE.





WE HAD A FEW MORE DRINKS, ATE SOME PIZZA,  
AND WALKED TO THE STATION.



SHE TEXTED ME TWO DAYS LATER SAYING THAT  
WE WEREN'T "LOOKING FOR THE SAME THINGS."



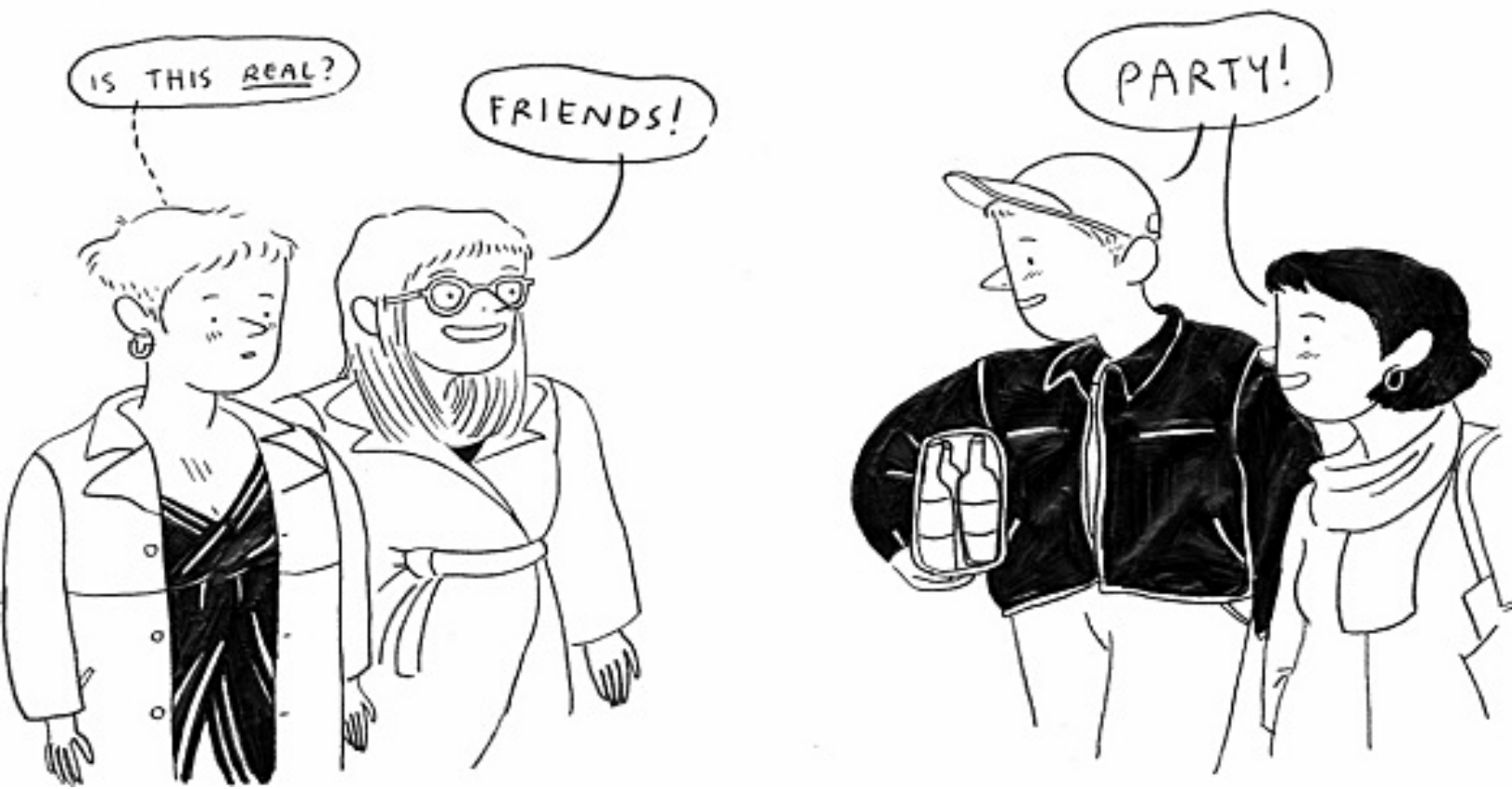
BUT IT ONLY GOT  
WORSE WITH THE  
SECOND DATE ...



WE MET AT A WINE BAR AND SHE CALLED ME  
A "BABY GAY" WHEN SHE REALIZED  
I'D ONLY COME OUT RECENTLY.



SHE THEN ORDERED US A LONG AND EXPENSIVE TAXI  
ACROSS LONDON TO A DIFFERENT BAR, WHERE WE RAN  
INTO HER FRIENDS WHO WERE GOING TO A PARTY.



AFTER SOME MORE DRINKS, SHE  
DECIDED SHE WAS GOING TO GO TO  
THAT PARTY AND THAT I SHOULDN'T  
COME WITH HER, AS HER  
EX-GIRLFRIEND WOULD  
BE THERE AND  
SHE WANTED  
TO SCOPE IT  
OUT FIRST.



I THREW UP WHEN I GOT HOME.



I WON'T LIE, I WAS SHOCKED.  
I'D BEEN SO EXCITED ABOUT COMING OUT THAT I HAD  
FORGOTTEN THAT THIS WOULDN'T MAKE DATING  
SUDDENLY EASIER. I STILL HAD TO CONNECT WITH THE  
PEOPLE I MET.



MY DATING EXPERIENCE HAD CONSISTED OF ME  
FORCING OR MISJUDGING CONNECTIONS AS  
ROMANTIC. I'D HAD NO EXPERIENCE OF A GENUINE  
SPARK OF ATTRACTION.

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO FLIRT!



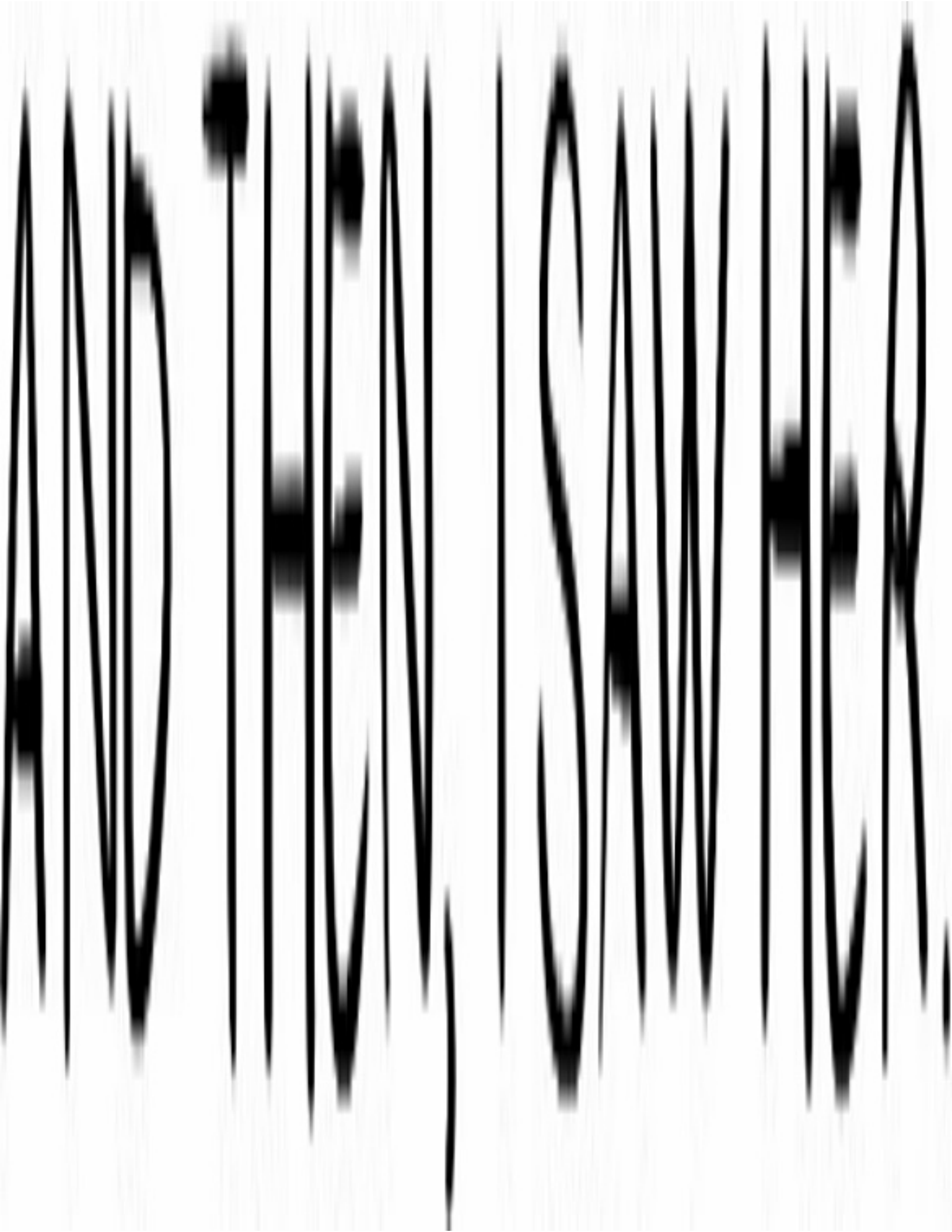
HOWEVER HARD IT WOULD GET,  
I DECIDED THIS TIME I WOULD MAKE NO PLANS,  
NO RULES OR REGULATIONS.  
I WAS JUST GOING TO ENJOY MYSELF  
AND KEEP TRYING.



I'M GONNA  
MAKE MINE  
INTO A BOOB!

ME TOO!



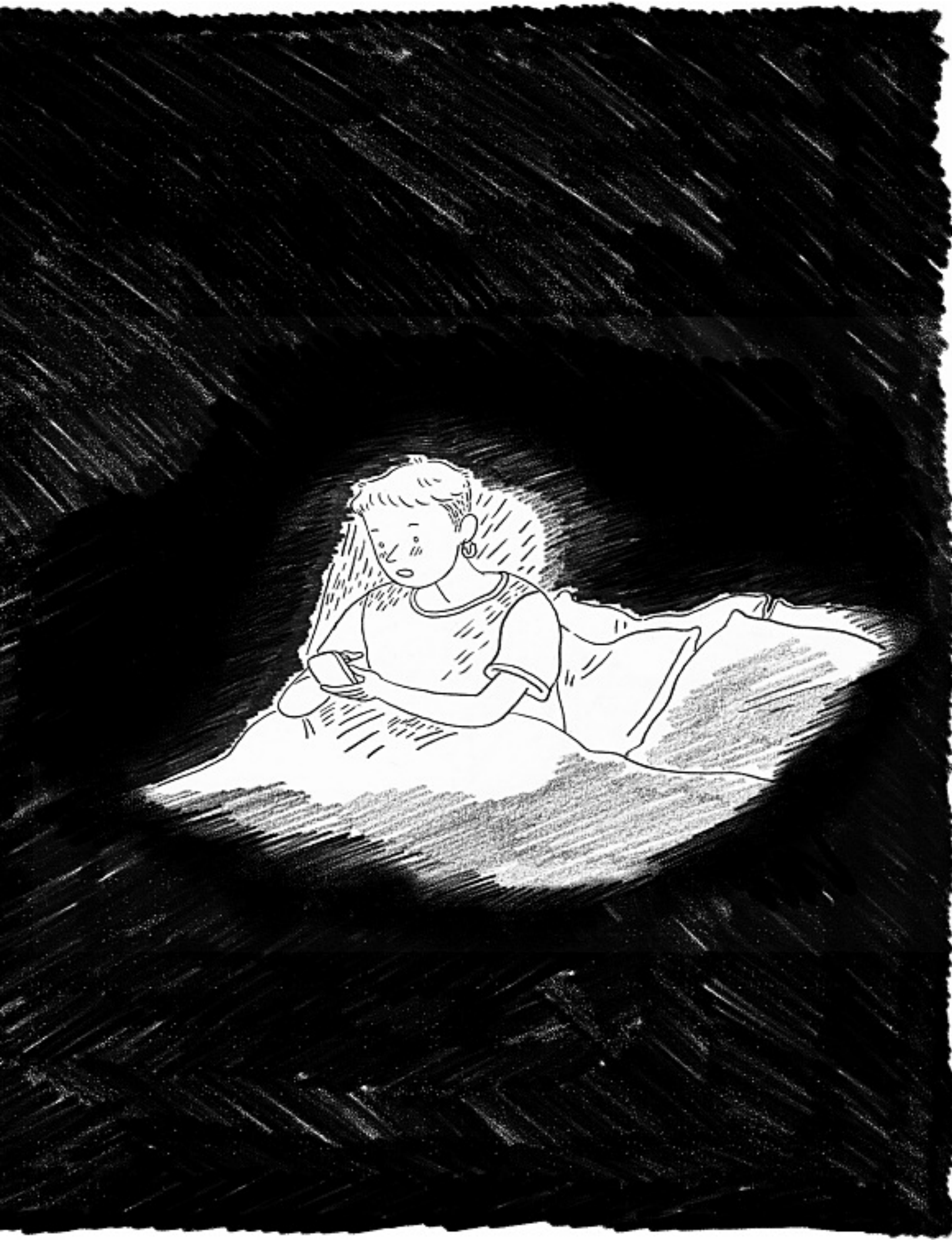


IF SHE DOESN'T LIKE  
ME BACK, I'M DELETING  
THIS APP.





TWELVE





I MET T AT A PUB IN NORTH LONDON.



WE SPOKE NONSTOP FOR FOUR HOURS,  
AND AS THE PUB CLOSED SHE WALKED ME  
TO MY BUS STOP AND WE TALKED ABOUT  
OUR FAMILIES.


AS MY BUS ARRIVED TO GO HOME, SHE HOPPED ON TO  
HER BIKE AND PEDALED AWAY, CALLING GOODBYE  
OVER HER SHOULDER.



WE HAD SPOKEN ABOUT A BOOK WE WERE BOTH  
READING AND THE WRITER WAS GIVING A TALK  
IN A FEW WEEKS' TIME.

WE AGREED TO GO TOGETHER AS OUR SECOND DATE.





ISN'T SHE GREAT?

YEAH, SHE IS.



IT'S ABOUT A WOMAN WHO  
GOES MAD IN HER BEDROOM.  
SHE WATCHES A WOMAN  
TRAPPED IN THE WALLPAPER  
OF HER ROOM.

WHOA - THAT  
SOUNDS SCARY!





YOU'RE SO COOL.

YOU'RE SO COOL.

YOU'RE SO COOL.



AFTER ABOUT FIVE DATES I KNEW IT WAS TIME  
FOR US TO KISS, BUT I WAS SO SCARED!  
I HAD KISSED GIRLS BEFORE, BUT NEVER IN  
A ROMANTIC WAY. NEVER IN A WAY THAT WAS  
MEANT TO MAKE THEM WANT TO KISS ME AGAIN.  
AND I REALLY WANTED T TO KISS ME AGAIN!

CAT, I DON'T  
KNOW HOW TO  
DO IT!

HAHA

EL, YOU KNOW  
WHAT TO DO!





AS WE WALKED BACK TO MY BUS STOP AFTER  
OUR SIXTH DATE, I THINK WE BOTH KNEW IT WAS  
THE MOMENT.

THIS IS MY STOP.



YEAH.











I SMILED THE WHOLE WAY  
HOME THAT NIGHT.







AFTER THAT WE BEGAN TO SEE EACH OTHER REGULARLY EACH WEEK AND I STOPPED ASKING OTHER GIRLS OUT ON DATES. THIS WASN'T SOMETHING WE'D AGREED ON, IT JUST FELT RIGHT, AND IT TURNED OUT SHE HAD MADE THE SAME CHOICE.







IT'S SO GOOD TO  
FINALLY  
MEET YOU!

THANK YOU FOR  
HAVING ME.









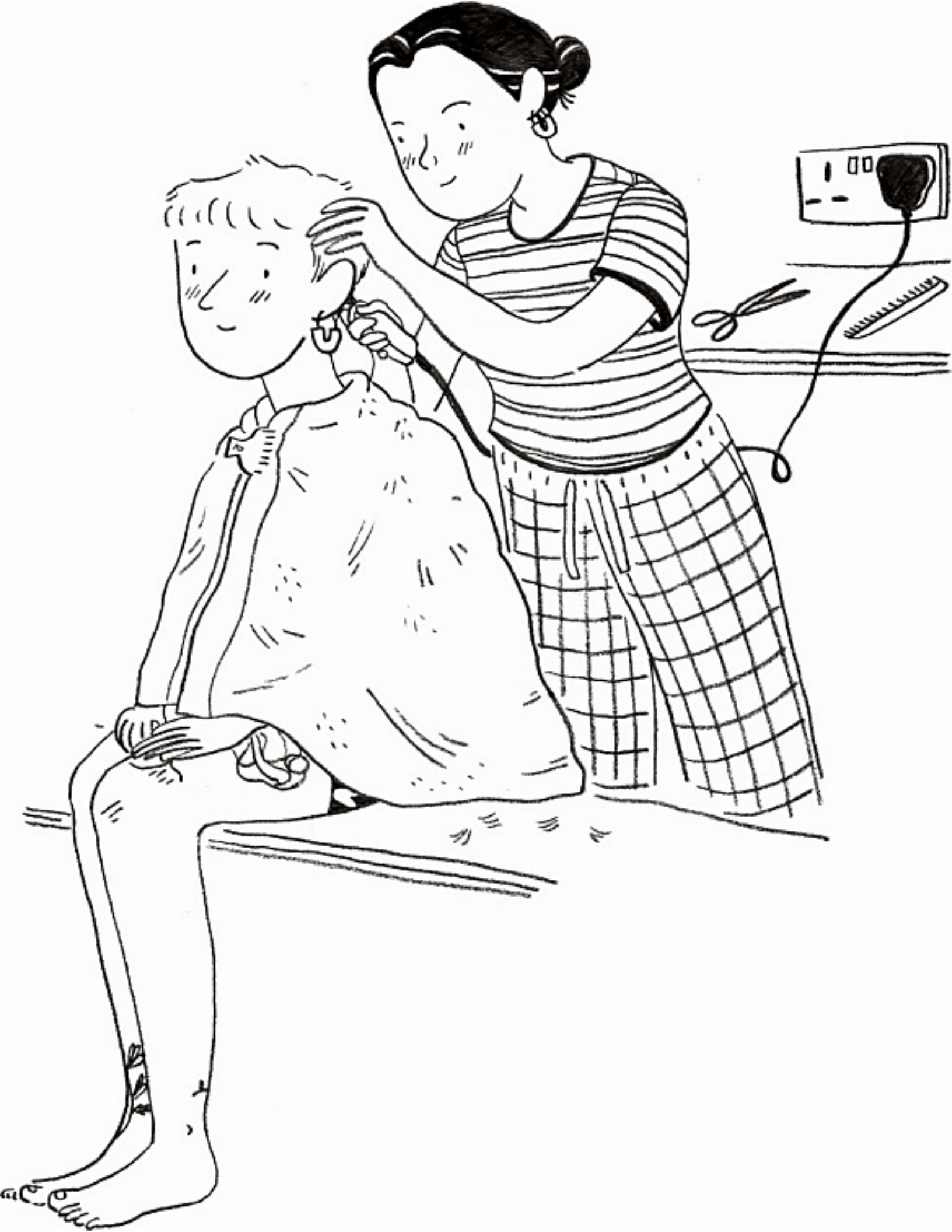








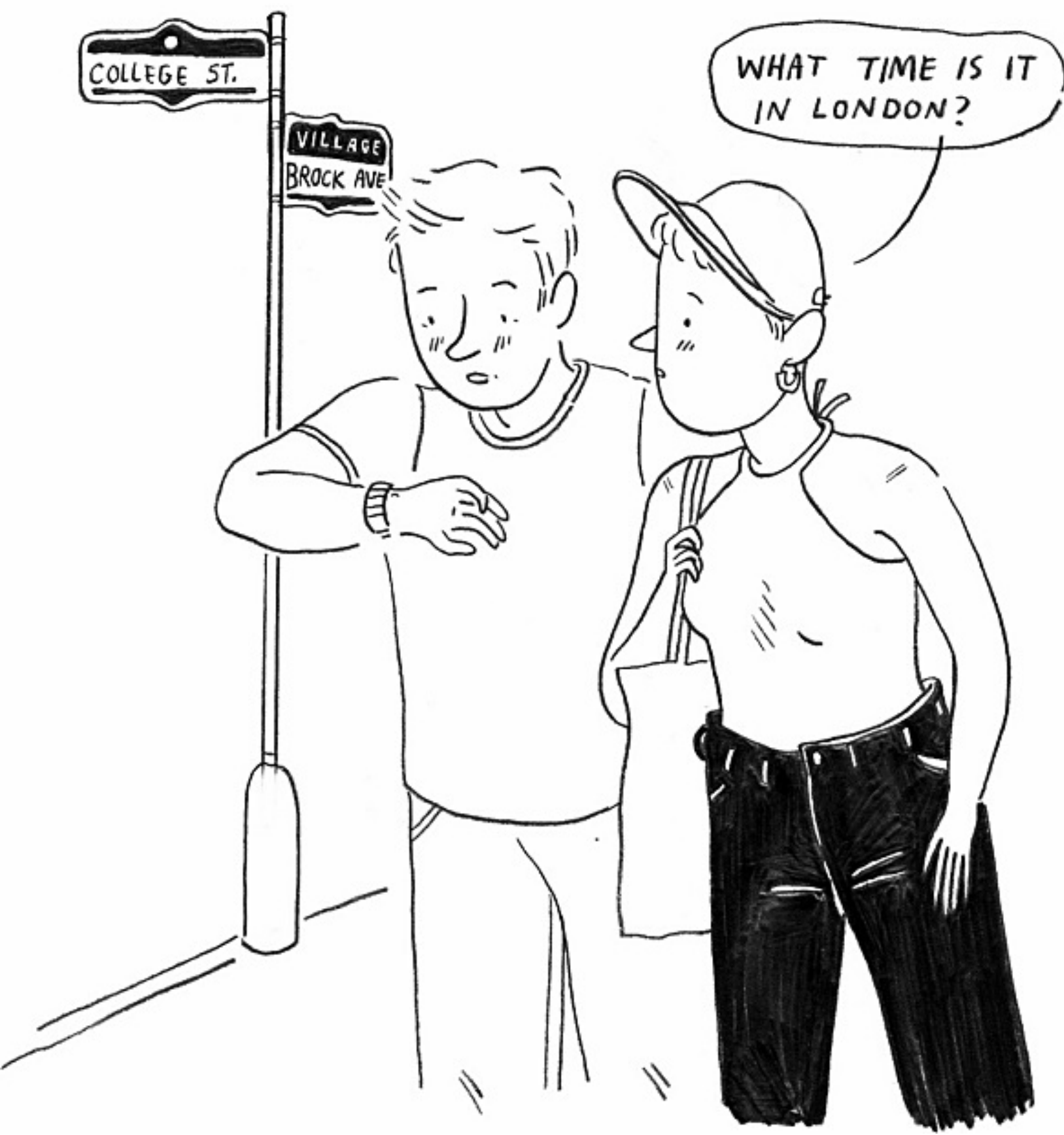




AFTER I GRADUATED FROM UNIVERSITY, I WENT TO TORONTO FOR TWO WEEKS WITH MY PARENTS. I'D ALWAYS WANTED TO VISIT CANADA, AND THIS WAS A TRIP I'D BEEN PLANNING FOR A LONG TIME.



BUT ONCE I WAS THERE I COULDN'T CONCENTRATE.









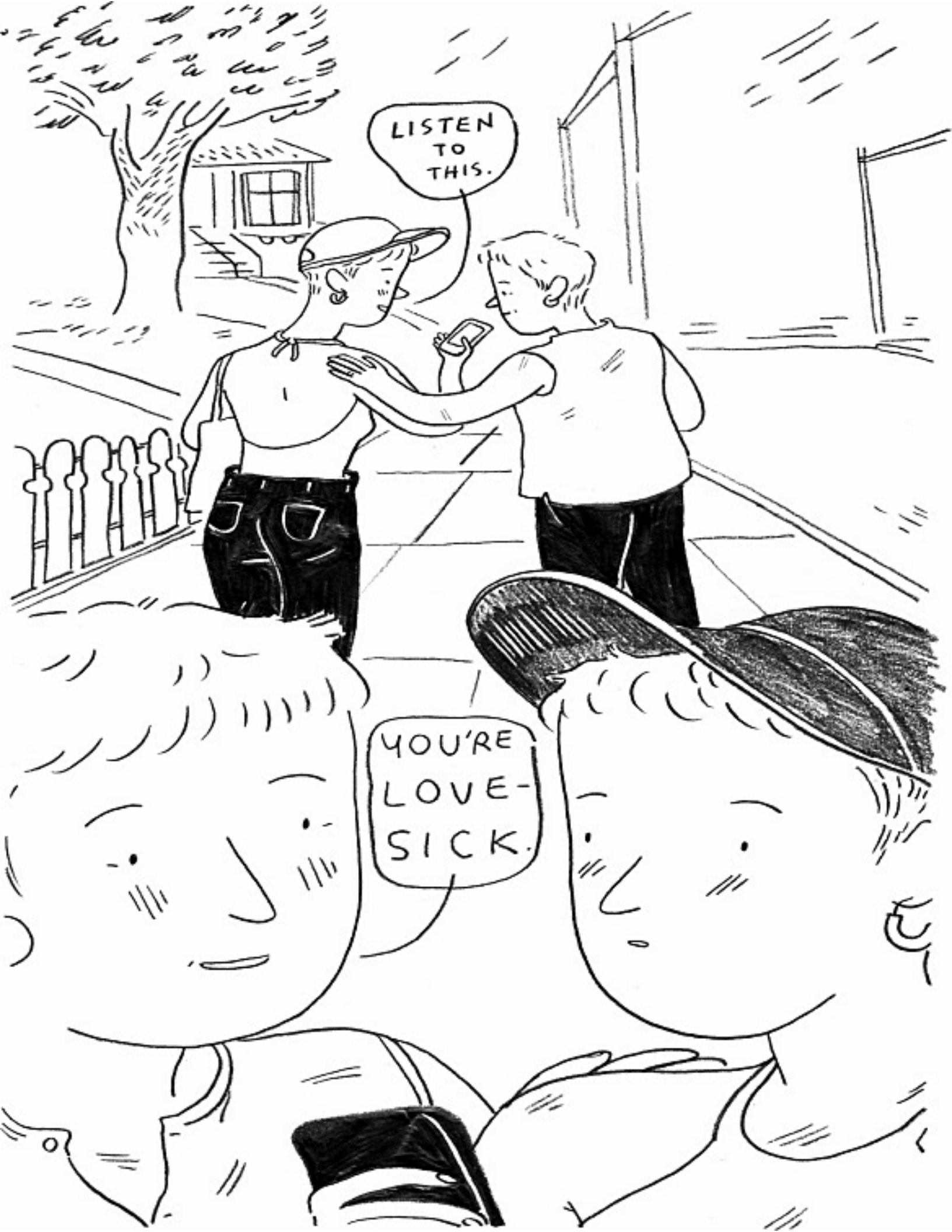
I MISSED T SO MUCH.

WE'D BEEN DATING FOR ALMOST NINE MONTHS

WITH HARDLY ANY TIME APART,

TWO WEEKS FELT LIKE A LIFETIME.

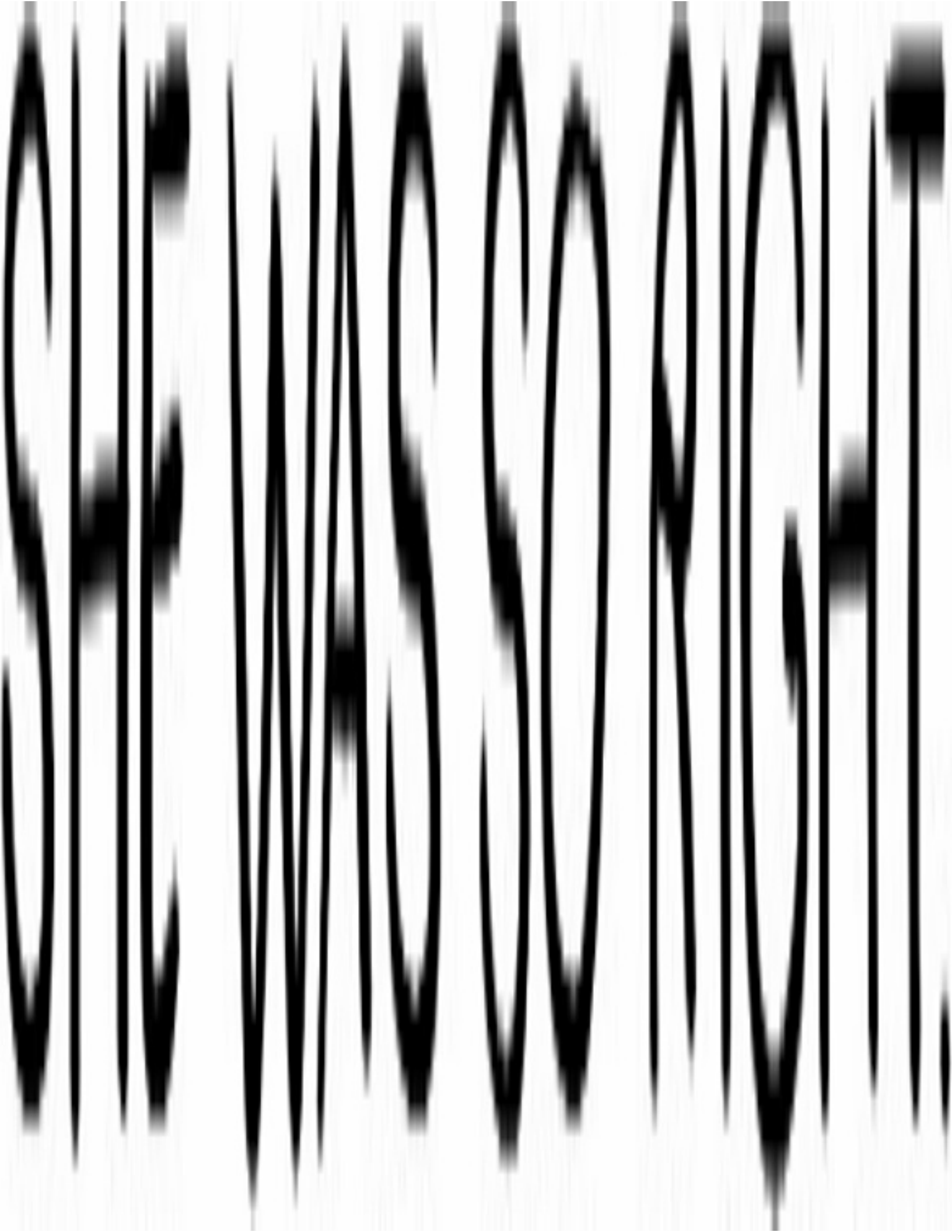
I REMEMBER WALKING DOWN THE STREET  
WITH MY MUM ONE AFTERNOON OF OUR TRIP  
WHEN I SENT ME A DEMO FOR HER SONG.



LISTEN  
TO  
THIS.

YOU'RE  
LOVE-  
SICK.







WE CALLED A FEW DAYS LATER AND BOOKED A TRIP  
TO BARCELONA. I ENJOYED THE REST OF MY  
HOLIDAY BUT WAS SECRETLY COUNTING  
DOWN THE DAYS.



THE MOMENT I GOT BACK TO MY  
HOUSE IN LONDON I THREW MY CLOTHES  
IN A BAG, GRABBED THE PRESENTS I'D  
BOUGHT FOR T, AND JUMPED  
IN A TAXI.



A FEW WEEKS LATER, WE SET OFF ON OUR FIRST HOLIDAY TOGETHER.







CAN YOU READ  
ME MORE, PLEASE?

ONE EVENING ON THAT TRIP, AFTER AN EVENTFUL DINNER WHERE THE FOOD WAS COLD AND I'D KNOCKED OVER A TABLE, SPILLING CHILLI SAUCE ACROSS THE FLOOR, T ASKED ME TO BE HER GIRLFRIEND.

YEAH, WE'D BEEN DATING FOR NEARLY A YEAR BUT WE'D AGREED TO TAKE THINGS AT OUR OWN PACE. IT FELT SO PERFECT AND RIGHT WHEN T ASKED ME THAT NIGHT. WE WALKED BACK HOME HOLDING HANDS, LAUGHING ABOUT THE DINNER AND SINGING.



WHEN I PUT ALL THAT  
LOVE IN YOU,  
SOMETHING GOOD COMES  
TO ME.









BEFORE I STARTED SEEING A COUNSELOR, I HAD TO COMPLETE AN ASSESSMENT TO DETERMINE WHAT I NEEDED. THE WOMAN WHO TOOK ME THROUGH IT WAS SCOTTISH, WITH FRECKLES AND FLUFFY BROWN HAIR.

I CAN'T REMEMBER EVERYTHING SHE ASKED ME, BUT ONE OF THE QUESTIONS ALWAYS STUCK IN MY MIND AFTERWARD.  
SHE SAID:



WHEN YOU THINK OF  
YOUR CHILDHOOD



WHAT DO YOU SEE?



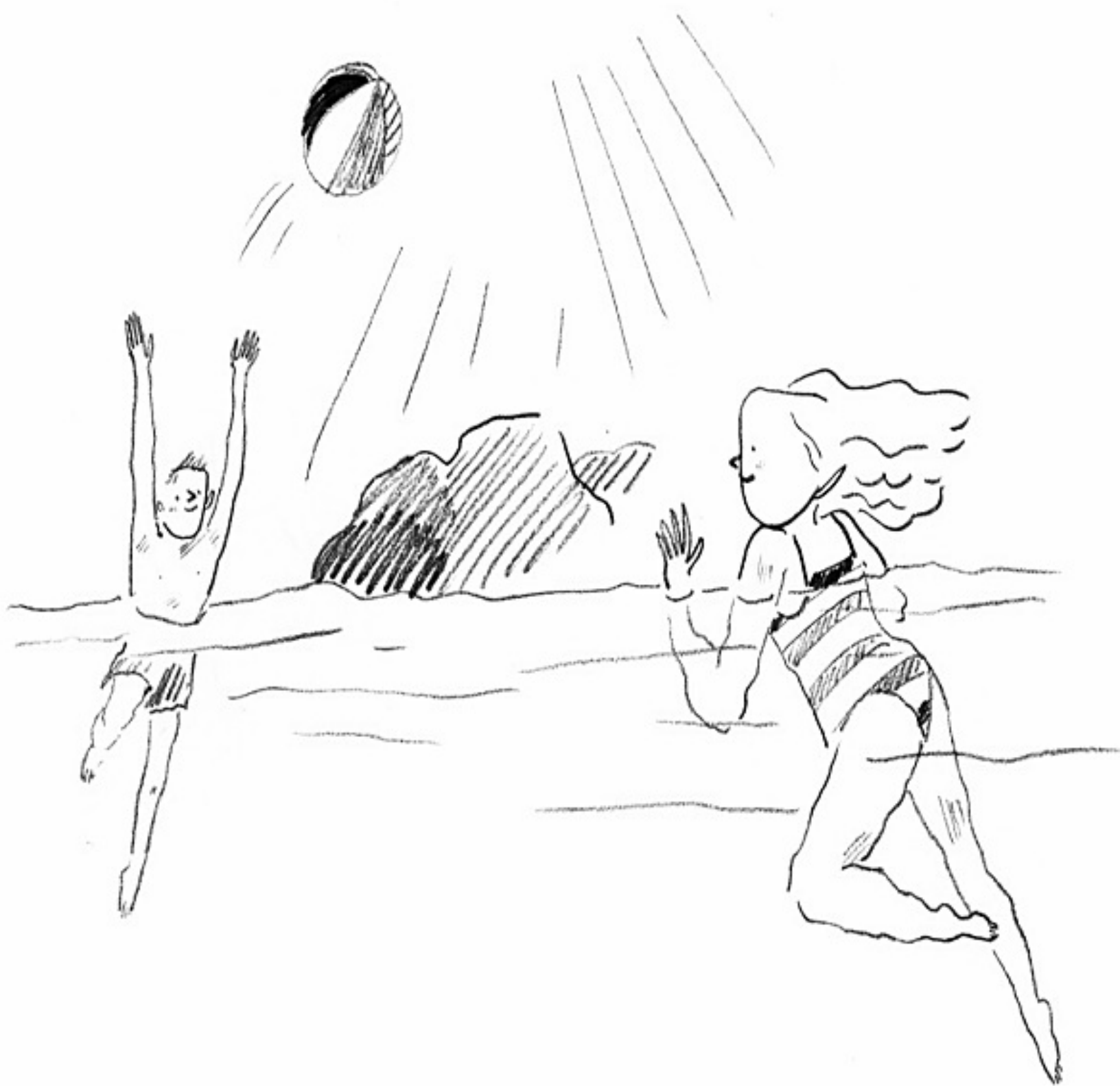
AND I SAID.







ORANGE LIKE MY HAIR – ORANGE LIKE THE SUN SEEN  
THROUGH CLOSED EYELIDS.





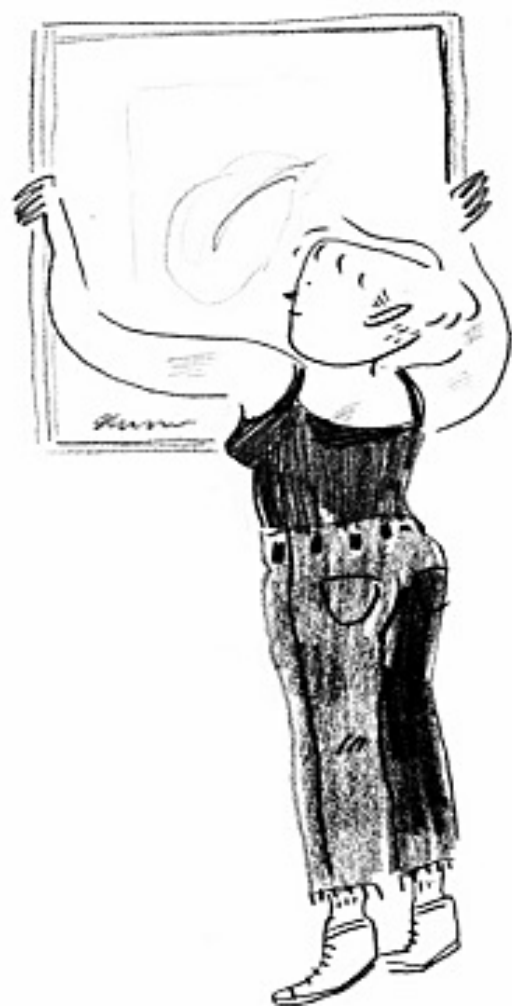
WHEN I CAME OUT THAT FINAL  
TIME IN MY ROOM, THE BIGGEST  
KNOT I HAVE EVER CARRIED  
IN MY LIFE CAME UNDONE.



OF COURSE, THERE  
HAVE SINCE BEEN  
— THERE ARE —  
AND THERE WILL BE  
OTHER KNOTS.

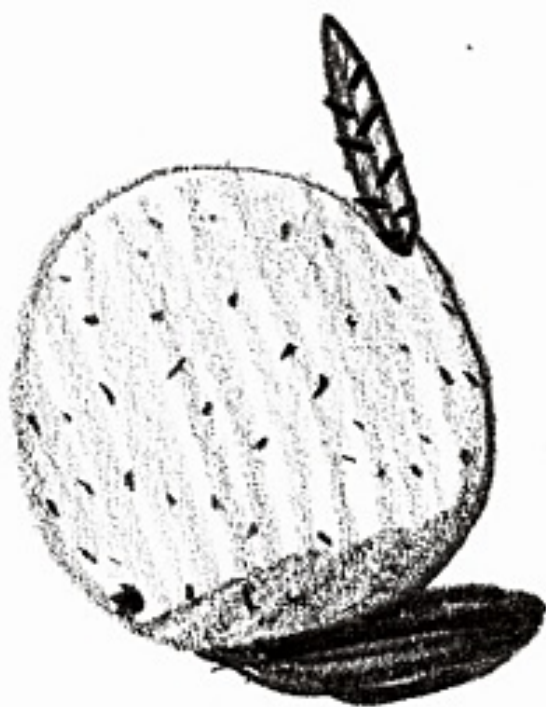


BUT WHEN I REALIZED HOW I NEEDED TO LIVE  
MY LIFE, I BECAME MORE FEARLESS ABOUT  
THEM ALL.









*Stemless*

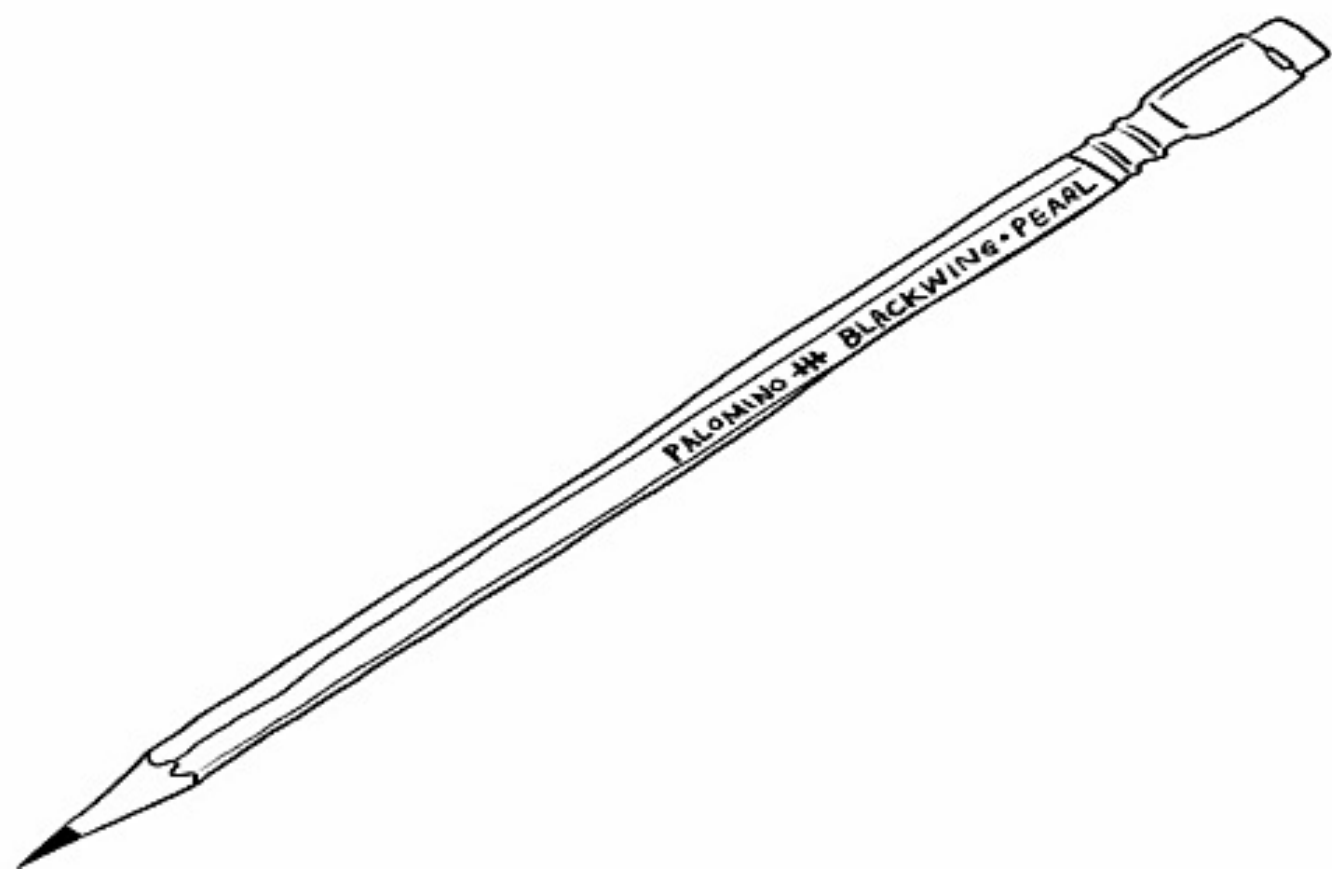
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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELEANOR CREWES IS A LONDON-BASED ILLUSTRATOR AND AUTHOR WHO GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON.

THE DRAWINGS IN THIS BOOK WERE RENDERED USING PALOMINO PEARL PENCILS.







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—SARAH WATERS, author of *The Paying Guests*



**ELEANOR CREWES** is a London-based illustrator. *The Times I Knew I Was Gay* originated in 2017 as a hand-stitched zine that she delivered by bike to comic shops across London. Good Comics then published it as a small book, which was exhibited at the Toronto Comic Arts Festival and Thought Bubble. This new and expanded graphic memoir represents her American debut.



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