

# I CHOOSE

A BETTER  
FUTURE

GOOD  
ENOUGH

COMPLIANCE

THE ONE

FAMILY  
HONOUR

LET'S TALK ABOUT FORCED MARRIAGE





Choose: Let's Talk About Forced Marriage

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## Introduction

In the UK, adults have the right to marry from the age of 18. They can decide when and who they want to marry, if they want to get married at all.<sup>1</sup>

A forced marriage is where people don't get to choose. Someone might be pressured to get married even though they don't want to. Or they don't fully understand what a marriage is, for example because of a learning disability. And if one of the people getting married is under the age of 18, it's a forced marriage even if there is no pressure and the parents agree.<sup>2</sup>

And that is why forced marriage is different from arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, the people who are getting married agree to have their marriage arranged, and they agree who they're going to marry and when. They also have the freedom and choice to end the arrangement at any point.<sup>3</sup> In a forced marriage, people don't have that choice. One or both of them are pressured to get married and do not give free and full consent.

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK. It is a crime and people can go to prison for it.<sup>4</sup> A forced marriage protection order can protect a person threatened with or in a forced marriage.<sup>5</sup>

But forced marriage still happens. In 2022, around 300 people asked the UK Forced Marriage Unit for advice. Approximately 30% of the cases involved children.<sup>6</sup> The International Labour Organisation, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration estimated that at least 22 million people were in a forced marriage worldwide in 2021. 41% of them were children and 87% of all children who were forced into marriage were girls.<sup>7</sup>

It is common for there to be multiple perpetrators involved in a forced marriage. They can be male and female family members, friends and members of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule 1, Article 12, [Human Rights Act 1998](#).

<sup>2</sup> Article 121, [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#).

<sup>3</sup> Childline, '[What if you're being forced into marriage](#)'.

<sup>4</sup> Article 121, [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#).

<sup>5</sup> Part 4A, [Family Law Act 1996](#).

<sup>6</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Home Office, '[Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2022](#)' (20 June 2023).

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organisation, Walk Free and International Organisation for Migration, '[Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#)' (2022).

Even though forced marriages are more common in some communities than others, they happen to people of any colour, ethnicity, culture, religion, and nationality. For example, people at risk of forced marriage can come from Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Romania and Somalia. They can be Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh.<sup>8</sup> But not every member of those communities experiences forced marriage and all major religions are against the practice.

Forced marriages can happen for many reasons, for example because people are worried about family reputation and honour. Many people also still try to justify forced marriage as part of their traditions and beliefs and think that it is their obligation to comply. And forced marriages can happen because people want to pay off a family debt or ensure what they consider to be a better future for their children; because they don't want their children to have relationships or sex before marriage; or because they don't approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.<sup>9</sup>

Forced marriage doesn't have to lead to unhealthy and abusive relationships. But they can have a negative effect on people's physical and mental health and well-being, on their education and career, and on their social life.<sup>10</sup> When a person is sold to their future spouse, forced marriage can be an institution or practise similar to slavery. Forced marriage can be a form of modern slavery when a person cannot refuse or leave the marriage, for example because of violence, coercion, threats, and/ or abuse of power.<sup>11</sup>

To protect human rights, we are all responsible to learn about forced marriage and to challenge it. And that is why we made this comic. We want the comic to be used to educate young teenagers about forced marriage and to empower them to become allies of those at risk or already

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<sup>8</sup> Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, '[Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2021](#)' (28 July 2022); Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Home Office, '[Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2022](#)' (20 June 2023); Keziah Ridley and others, '["Honour"-Based Abuse: A Descriptive Study of Survivor, Perpetrator, and Abuse Characteristics](#)' (2022) 20(1) Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 19.

<sup>9</sup> Keziah Ridley and others, '["Honour"-Based Abuse: A Descriptive Study of Survivor, Perpetrator, and Abuse Characteristics](#)' (2022) 20(1) Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 19.

<sup>10</sup> Khatidja Chantler, 'Forced Marriage' in Parveen Ali and Michaela M Rogers (eds) [Gender-Based Violence: A Comprehensive Guide](#) (Springer 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Article 1(c), [Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery](#) (07 September 1956); Helen McCabe, Wendy Stickle and Hannah Baumeister, '[Forced Marriage and Modern Slavery: Analysing Marriage as a "Choiceless Choice"](#)' (2022) 7 Journal of Modern Slavery 33; Helen McCabe and Lauren Eglén, '["I Bought You. You are my Wife": "Modern Slavery" and Forced Marriage](#)' (2022) Journal of Human Trafficking 1.

experiencing forced marriage. We hope that it helps to build communities where people who care about each other look out for their loved ones.

The stories in this comic show examples of different types, causes and consequences of forced marriage and focus on possibilities for resistance and intervention. They are informed by true stories, academic research, and the expertise of Hannah Baumeister (Lecturer in Law), Alex Carabine (Research Assistant), Helen McCabe (Associate Professor in Political Theory), Catherine Kirk (Relationship and Sex Education Consultant), Karma Nirvana (especially Rowena Fletcher and the Survivor Ambassadors), Savera UK (especially Afrah Qassim), and Savera UK Youth. Ruth Gangneux and PSHE Ambassadors of Nottingham Girls' Academy (Zeeneth Araf, Aliyah Bahkressa, Dakota Berry, Yasmin Duri, Mansi Hirani, Sidrah Hussain, Mialouise Nunn, and Sabiyah Rani), and Anja Koermer and students from Childwall Sports and Science Academy (Sonny Aiken, Mia Bradshaw, Michael Danson, and Valentina Getchevski) also helped to create the comic. The comic is the artistic creation of Emma Brown from Touch the Sun. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Project Reference: AH/X004325/1).<sup>12</sup> More information about it can be found at <https://drawingon.blog/>.

If you want to talk about forced marriage or need help, contact:

- Childline (if you are a young person): call 0800 1111
- Forced Marriage Unit: call 020 7008 0151, email [fmufcdo.gov.uk](mailto:fmufcdo.gov.uk)
- Karma Nirvana: call 0800 5999 247, Monday - Friday 9 am - 5 pm; email [support@karmanirvana.org.uk](mailto:support@karmanirvana.org.uk)
- The police: call 999 in an emergency situation; call 101 if it is not an emergency
- Savera UK: call 0800 107 0726, Monday - Friday 10 am – 4 pm

The Government's guidance on forced marriage for heads of safeguarding organisations and front-line professionals can be found here: HM Government, '[The Right to Choose](#)' (April 2023).



<sup>12</sup> UK Research and Innovation, '[Drawing on Forced Marriage: Teaching Tough Topics Through Comics](#)'.



I'D LIKE TO MEET SOMEONE WHO IS TALL, SMART AND FUNNY

SOMEONE I CAN TRUST

SOMEONE WHO GETS ME

**SABS**

I WANT TO FIND MY SOULMATE, AUNTY

SOMEBODY WHO'S KIND

SOMEBODY WHO'S CARING

**ROMAN**

I'LL FIND THE RIGHT PERSON FOR YOU

**THE MATCHMAKER**





SHE'S THE ONE!

DO NOT BRING SHAME UPON US

YOU MUST MARRY HER

SUCH A FUSSY GIRL

YOU'VE SAID NO THREE TIMES NOW. YOU HAVE TO SAY YES TO SOMEONE

SPIN THE WHEEL

I WILL DO AS YOU WISH

NO, NOT THAT ONE

I GUESS SHE'LL DO

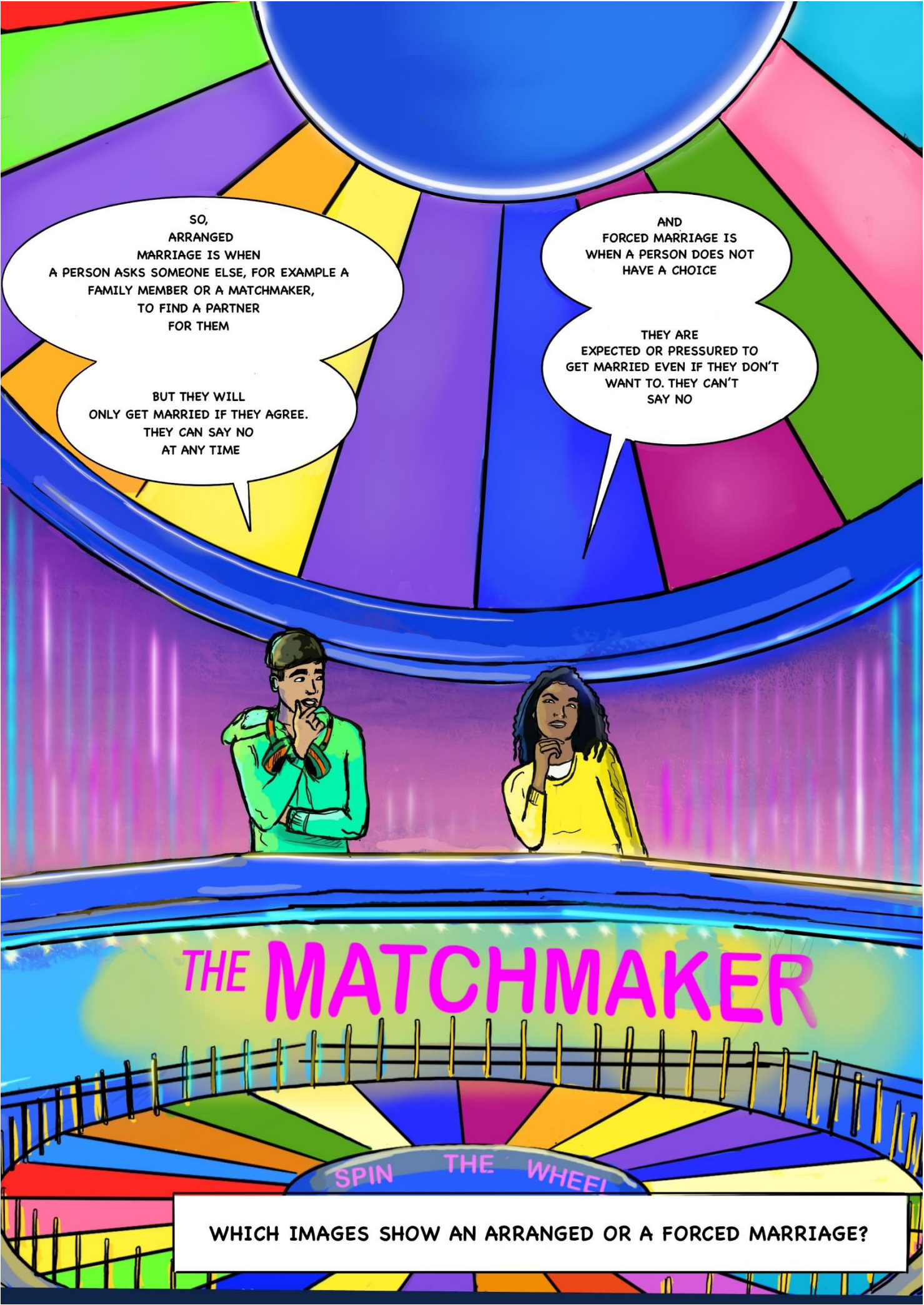
HE IS EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED IN A PARTNER, AND MORE

I'M GETTING BAD VIBES FROM HER, AUNTY

WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?

THE MATCHMAKER

SPIN THE WHEEL



SO,  
ARRANGED  
MARRIAGE IS WHEN  
A PERSON ASKS SOMEONE ELSE, FOR EXAMPLE A  
FAMILY MEMBER OR A MATCHMAKER,  
TO FIND A PARTNER  
FOR THEM

BUT THEY WILL  
ONLY GET MARRIED IF THEY AGREE.  
THEY CAN SAY NO  
AT ANY TIME

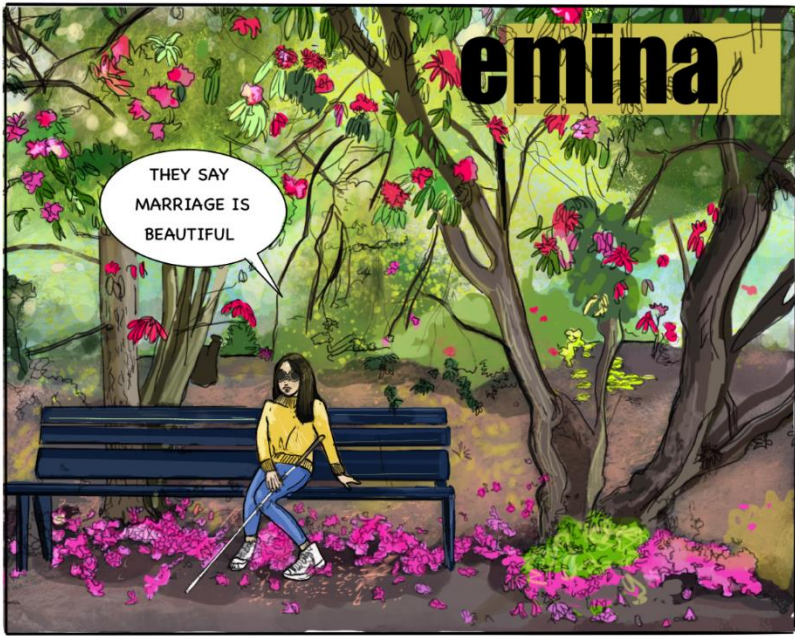
AND  
FORCED MARRIAGE IS  
WHEN A PERSON DOES NOT  
HAVE A CHOICE

THEY ARE  
EXPECTED OR PRESSURED TO  
GET MARRIED EVEN IF THEY DON'T  
WANT TO. THEY CAN'T  
SAY NO

# THE MATCHMAKER

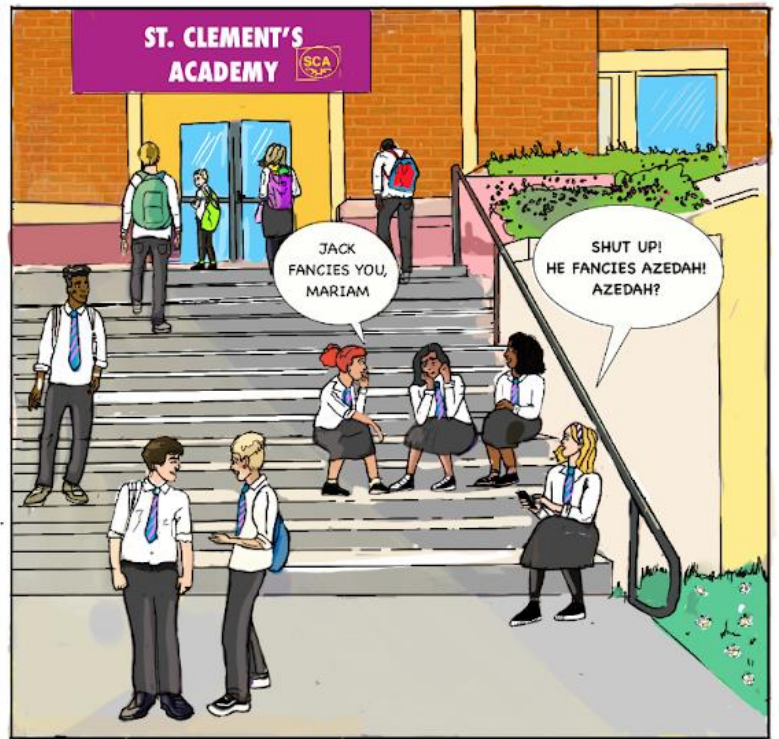
SPIN THE WHEEL

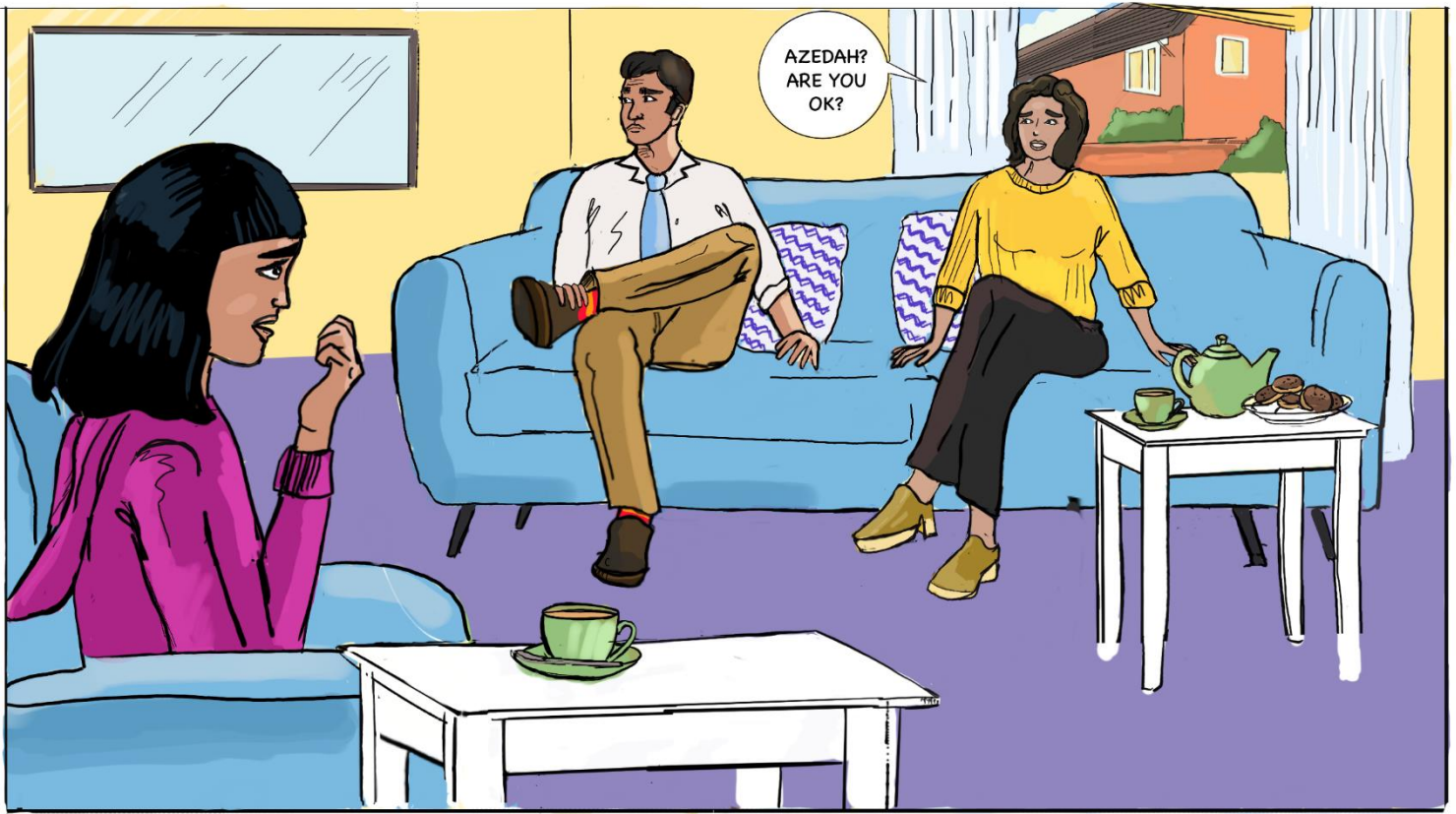
WHICH IMAGES SHOW AN ARRANGED OR A FORCED MARRIAGE?



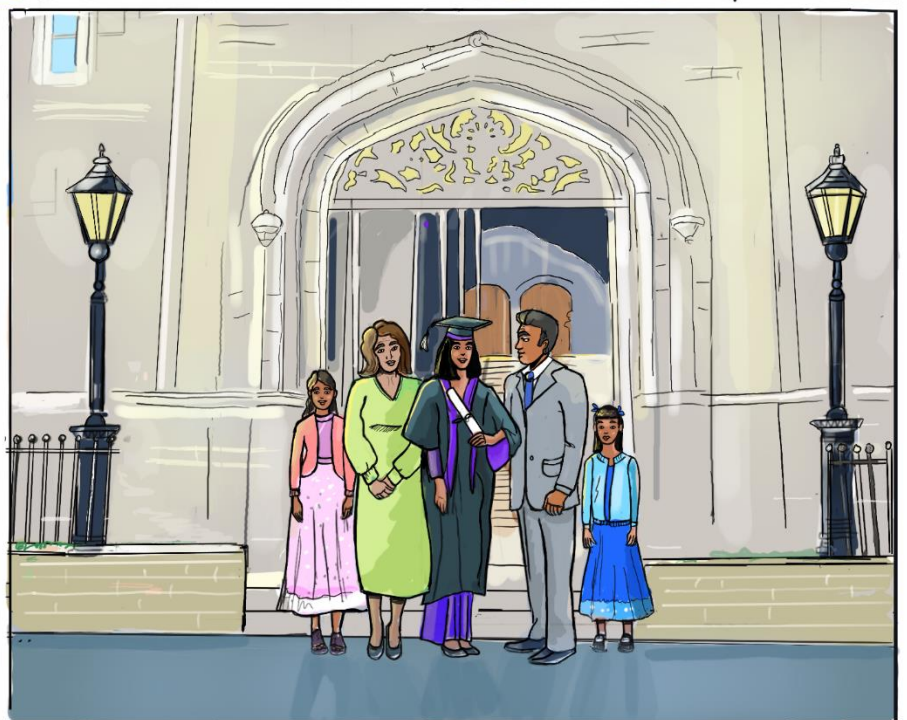
# azedah















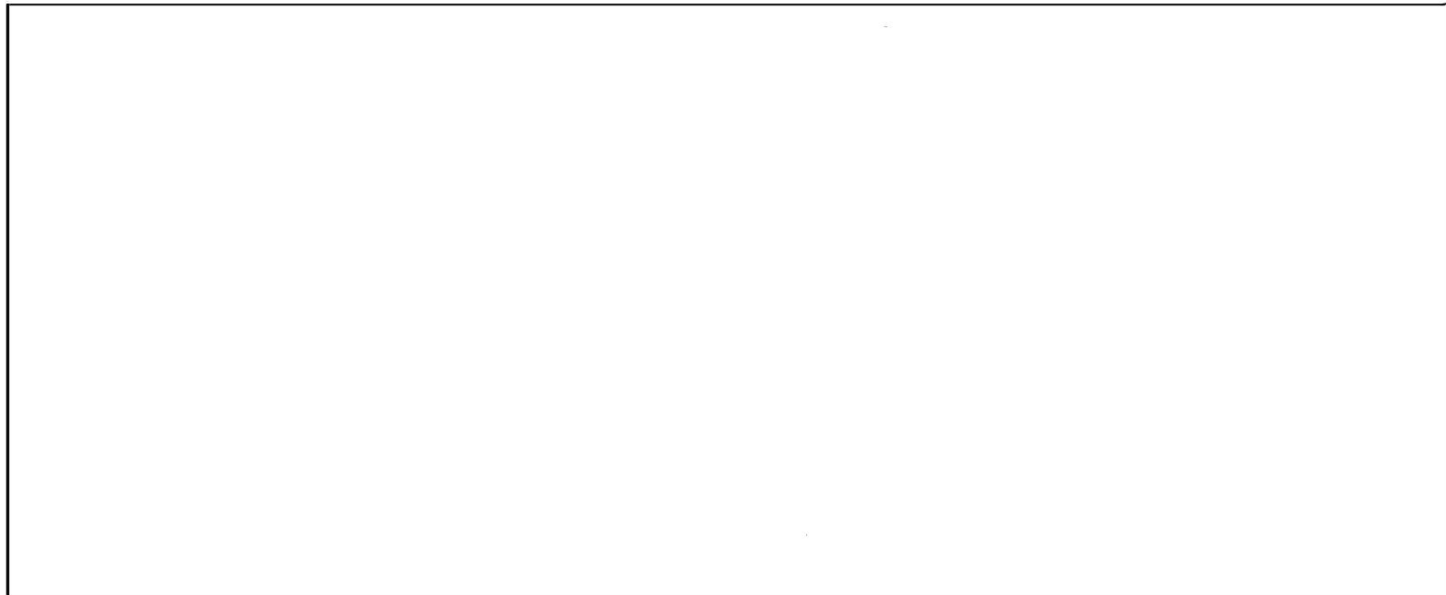


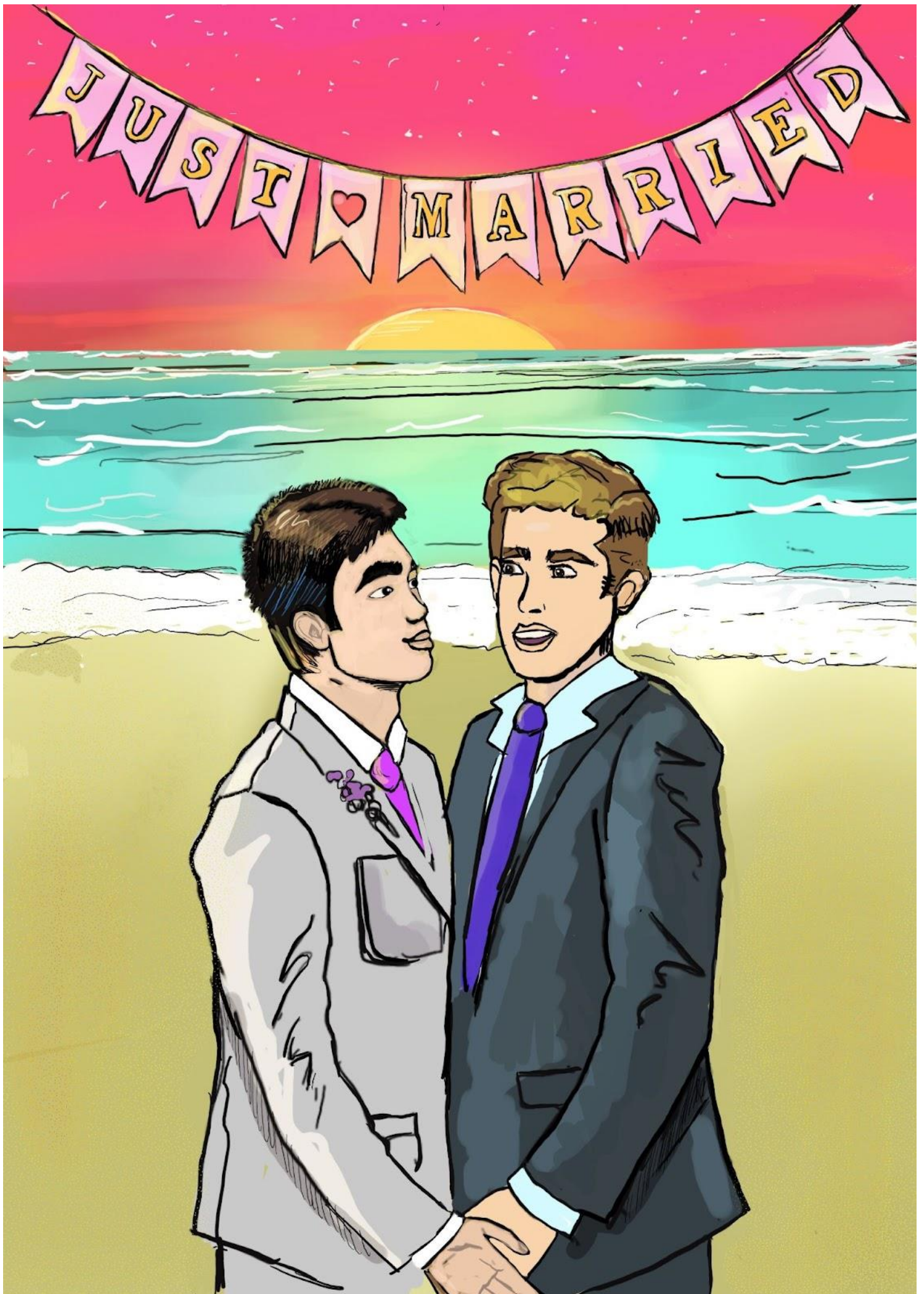


# CHEN

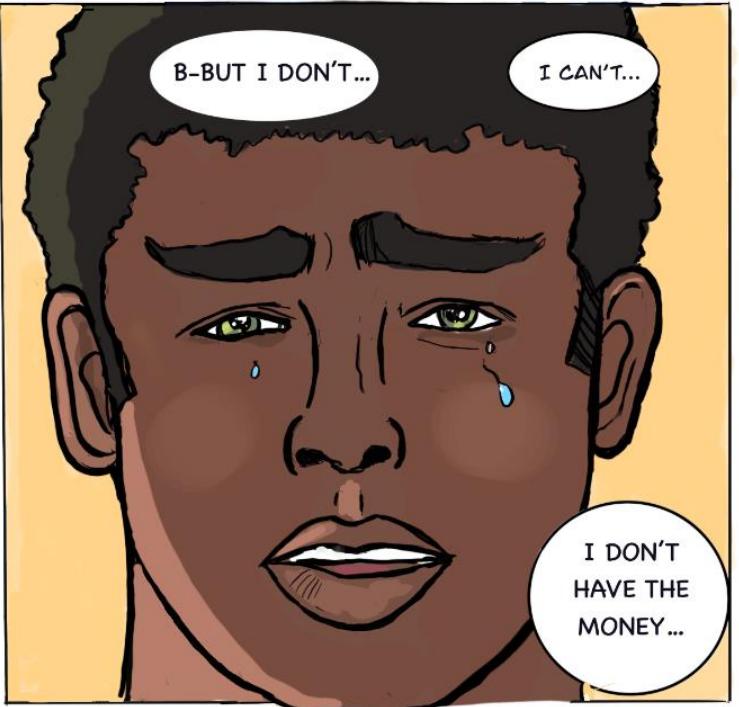


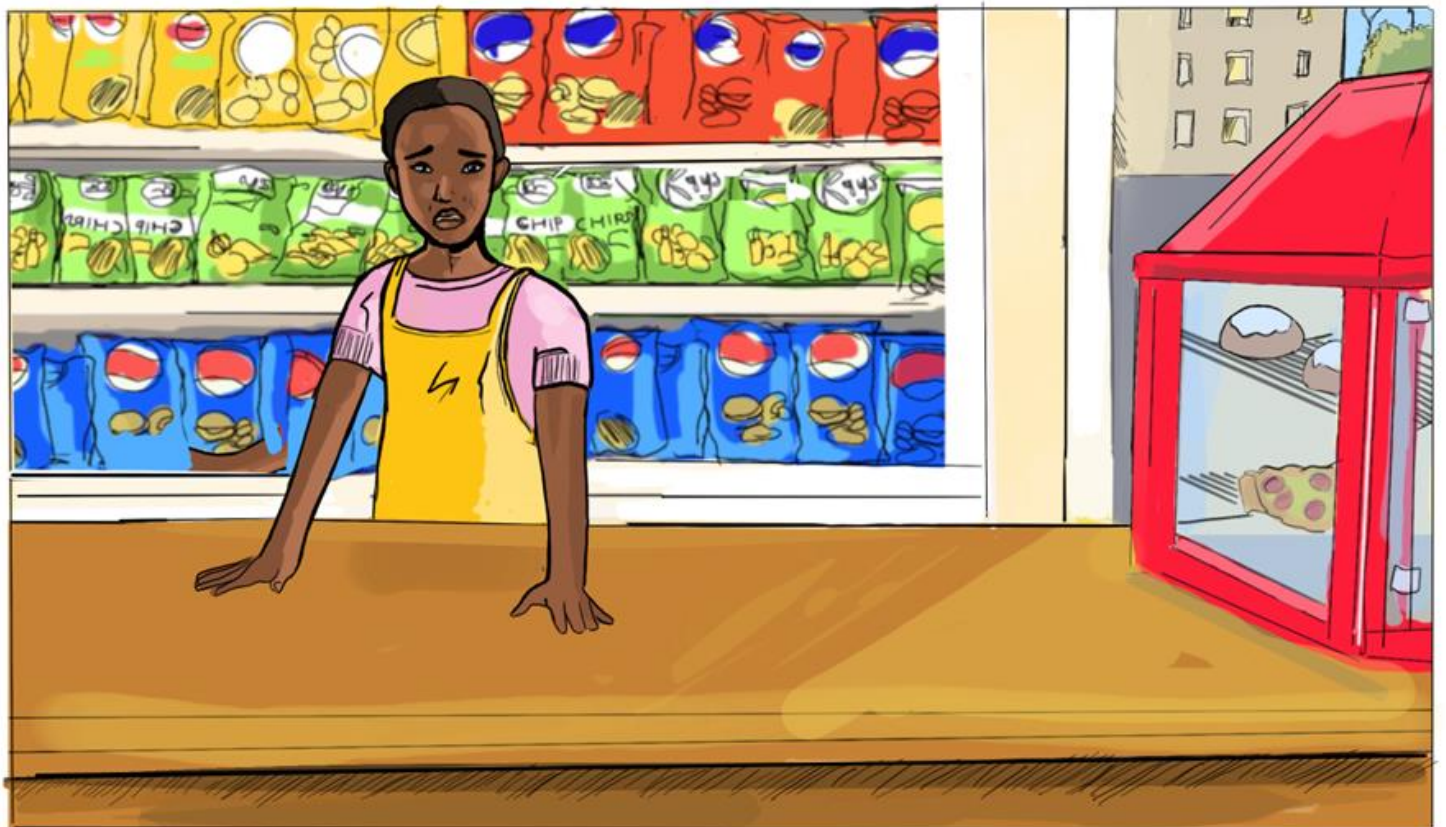
CHEN AND DANIEL ARE INSEPARABLE

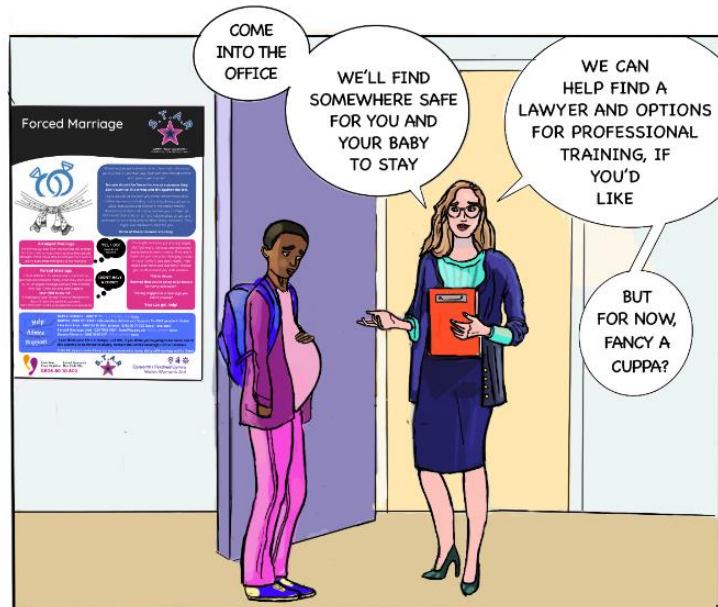




# BECCA











# THE FRIEND

FORCED MARRIAGE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANYTIME, REGARDLESS OF THEIR GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ETHNICITY. IT'S THEREFORE REALLY IMPORTANT THAT EVERYONE IS FAMILIAR WITH THE SIGNS OF FORCED MARRIAGE, SO THAT WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT OURSELVES AND OUR FRIENDS



## SIGNS OF FORCED MARRIAGE

- \* DOMESTIC ABUSE
- \* BROTHERS OR SISTERS WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED WHEN THEY WERE REALLY YOUNG
- \* HAS TO STAY HOME AND IS NOT ALLOWED TO SPEAK TO OTHER PEOPLE
- \* NO (FINANCIAL) INDEPENDANCE
- \* STOPS COMING TO SCHOOL
- \* FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CONSTANTLY CHECK UP ON THEM
- \* POOR GRADES
- \* DECLINE IN BEHAVIOUR
- \* SEEMS WORRIED, DOWN, NOT INTERESTED IN ANYTHING
- \* DOES NOT REALLY WANT TO TALK
- \* GOING MISSING
- \* DISAPPEARS FROM OR DOESN'T UPDATE SOCIAL MEDIA



## HELP AND SUPPORT



IT CAN BE SCARY IF A FRIEND FINDS THEMSELVES IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION, ESPECIALLY IF IT'S THEIR FAMILY WHO IS CAUSING THEM DISTRESS. UNDERSTANDIBLY, YOU WILL WANT TO HELP YOUR FRIEND, BUT IT'S ALSO REALLY IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP YOURSELF SAFE, TOO. THAT'S WHY WE'VE PUT TOGETHER THIS LIST OF ADVICE FOR HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO IS AT RISK OF FORCED MARRIAGE. WE'VE ALSO DIVIDED IT INTO THREE SECTIONS. THE FIRST IS THE SIMPLEST AND MOST ACCESSIBLE, THE SECOND IS IF YOU ARE ABLE TO OFFER A BIT MORE HELP, AND THE THIRD IS IF YOUR FRIEND MIGHT BE IN IMMEDIATE TROUBLE. WE KNOW THAT IT CAN BE OVERWHELMING, BUT WE WANT TO GIVE YOU LOTS OF CHOICES SO THAT YOU'RE EMPOWERED TO MAKE THE BEST DECISION FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR FRIEND.

# FIRST SECTION : ACCESSIBLE

- \* ASK YOUR FRIEND IF THEY'RE FEELING OK, OR IF THERE'S ANYTHING WORRYING THEM AT THE MOMENT
- \* IF YOUR FRIEND IS WORRIED, TAKE IT SERIOUSLY
- \* LISTEN CAREFULLY AND ALLOW THEM TO SPEAK FREELY
- \* REASSURE THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, SAY: "IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT"
- \* DO NOT QUIZ THEM
- \* DO NOT MAKE ASSUMPTIONS OR JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS
- \* ASK THEM WHAT THEY WANT TO DO NEXT AND WHO THEY WANT TO ASK FOR HELP, FOR EXAMPLE, A TEACHER OR ANOTHER ADULT THEY TRUST, OR KARMA NIRVANA (0800 5999 247), SAVERA UK (0800 107 0726), OR THE POLICE.
- \* DON'T SPEAK TO THEIR FAMILY OR COMMUNITY, THOUGH.



PASSPORT NUMBER



# SECOND SECTION : MEDIUM

- \* AGREE TO A SECRET CODE SO THAT YOU KNOW IT'S YOUR FRIEND MESSAGING AND NOT SOMEONE ELSE WHO USES THEIR PHONE AND SOCIAL MEDIA. FOR EXAMPLE, CHOOSE A SECRET NICKNAME OR A SPECIAL WAY TO SAY HI.
- \* AGREE TO A SAFE WORD OR PHRASE THAT YOUR FRIEND WILL USE IF THEY NEED HELP, BUT THAT WILL SOUND NORMAL IF THEY'RE OVERHEARD, FOR EXAMPLE, "WHAT'S UP WITH AGGIE?". YOU MIGHT ALSO CHOOSE AN IMAGE THEY COULD SHARE TO THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA THAT WOULD ACT AS A SIGNAL FOR HELP.
- \* TELL YOUR FRIEND TO KEEP THEIR PHONE CHARGED AT ALL TIMES IN CASE THEY NEED TO CALL FOR HELP.
- \* SUGGEST THAT YOUR FRIEND SWITCHES OFF THEIR MOBILE PHONE LOCATION SETTINGS AND THE "FIND MY PHONE" FEATURE.
- \* SUGGEST YOUR FRIEND CHANGE THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA PASSWORDS

# THIRD SECTION : IF YOUR FRIEND IS IN IMMEDIATE TROUBLE

- \* ALWAYS ASK AN ADULT FOR HELP.
- \* THIS ADVICE IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT IF YOUR FRIEND'S FAMILY IS PLANNING A HOLIDAY ABROAD.
- \* FIND OUT THE DATE THEY'RE SCHEDULED TO RETURN HOME. IF THEY'RE NOT BACK BY THIS DATE, AGREE ON A PERSON YOU COULD TELL (A TEACHER, YOUR PARENTS, OR THE POLICE)
- \* TRY TO GET THE NAME AND ADDRESS OF WHERE YOUR FRIEND WILL BE STAYING.
- \* TRY TO MAKE A COPY OF THEIR PASSPORT NUMBER, OR TAKE A CLEAR PHOTO OF THEIR PASSPORT.
- \* TAKE A PICTURE OF YOUR FRIEND WITH YOUR PHONE
- \* ASK THEM TO MEMORISE YOUR PHONE NUMBER, AS WELL AS THE PHONE NUMBER OF THE FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT (0044(0) 20 7008 0151)



WE KNOW IT CAN BE A REALLY SCARY SITUATION, FOR YOU AS WELL AS YOUR FRIEND. THAT'S WHY WE WANT TO REASSURE YOU THAT ANY HELP YOU CAN OFFER IS VALUABLE AND WORTH WHILE, EVEN IF IT FEELS AS SIMPLE AS ASKING YOUR FRIEND IF THEY'RE OK, AND THEN FINDING SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP THEM.



# THE BIGGER PICTURE

- \* THREATS AND INTIMIDATION
- \* PRESSURE
- \* MONITORING
- \* STALKING
- \* ABDUCTION
- \* KIDNAPPING
- \* HUMAN TRAFFICKING
- \* PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND ECONOMIC ABUSE
- \* FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
- \* VIRGINITY TESTING
- \* BREAST IRONING/CHEST BINDING
- \* SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS ABUSE
- \* 'HONOUR' KILLING
- \* FALSE IMPRISONMENT



- \* RIGHT TO MARRY
- \* RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT
- \* RIGHT TO HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES
- \* RIGHT TO EDUCATION
- \* RIGHT TO ACCESS OF INFORMATION FROM THE MEDIA
- \* RIGHT TO LEISURE, PLAY AND CULTURE
- \* FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
- \* PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION
- \* PROHIBITION OF TORTURE OR INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT
- \* PROHIBITION OF SLAVERY, FORCED LABOUR, AND CHILD LABOUR
- \* PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND NEGLECT

