

LIKE JOE

A story for boys turning into young men



LIKE JOE

FIRST EDITION, JUNE 2021.

This storybook is for youth 10 -16 years old in West- and Central- Africa. Editions in French are available. The book is accompanied by a Facilitation and Activity Guide, including a number of Fact sheets.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 I am Joe and this is my story	1
CHAPTER 2 Joe's first day at secondary school	7
CHAPTER 3 Can a woman become a doctor?	15
CHAPTER 4 Wet dreams	19
CHAPTER 5 What do girls like?	25
CHAPTER 6 Did you do it yet?	31
CHAPTER 7 Another poor harvest	37
CHAPTER 8 My first beer	44
CHAPTER 9 One for the road	49
CHAPTER 10 We need to talk	55
CHAPTER 11 What makes a real man?	61
CHAPTER 12 My work as a nurse	67
CHAPTER 13 EPILOGUE	73

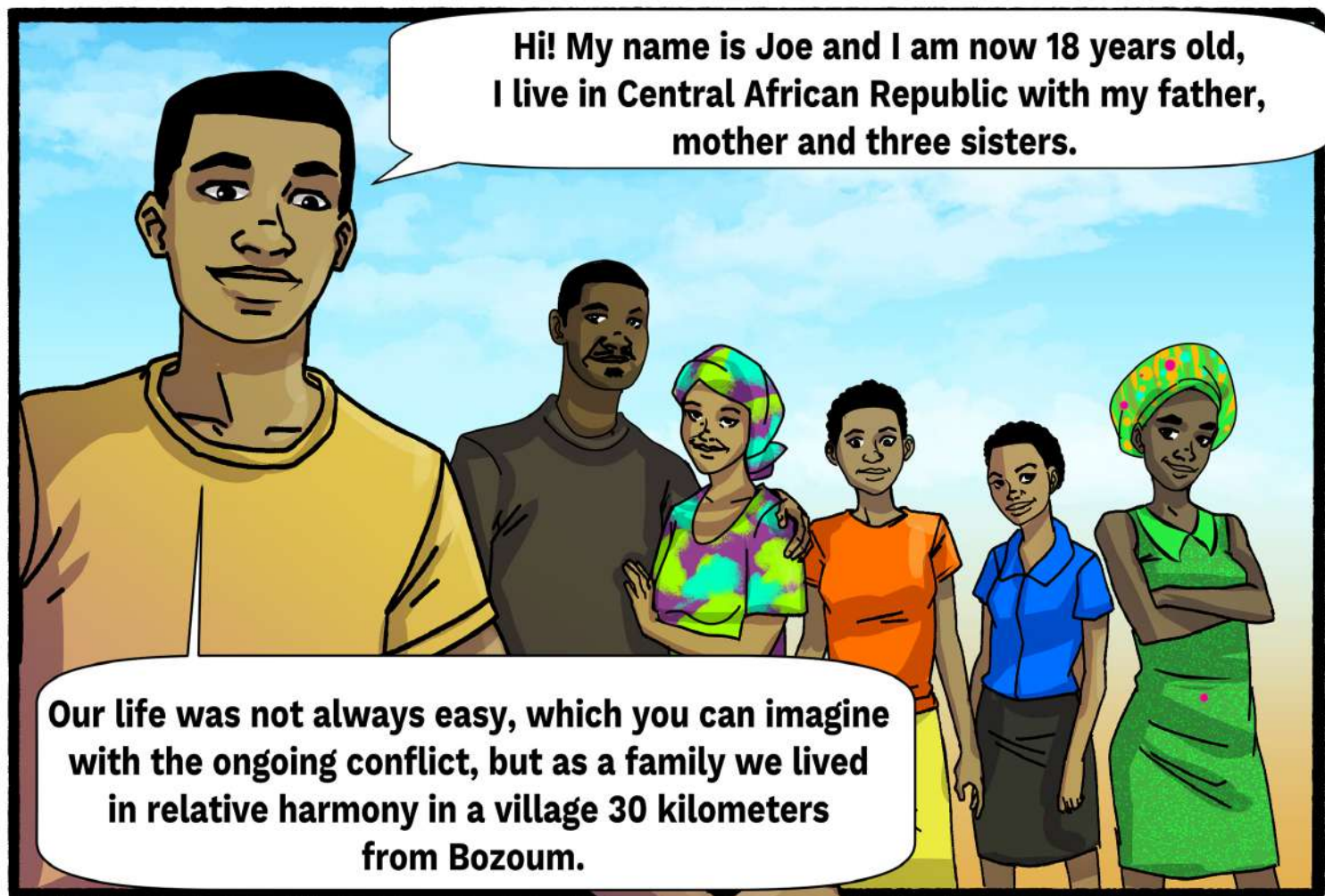


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CHAPTER ONE



"I am Joe and this is my story"





Only me and my sister Sarah were able to go to school, my other sister helped at home. I was always afraid they would tell me one day it was over and I had to help my father on the land. I was especially anxious for what would happen after primary school. You can imagine my excitement when my father told me he had enrolled me to secondary school; I was so happy and motivated!



I knew I wanted to become a medical doctor, because I saw so many people, especially women and children around me, suffering because of a lack of health centers and doctors. My parents lost three children before these reached the age of 5 years.

I remember very well that one night, when rain was pouring down, our neighbor gave birth to a baby. She was alone with her oldest daughter and without any medical assistance – as due to the rain she had not the option to go to the health center, nor could any midwife get to her.

The next morning my mother told me the baby had died just a few hours after it was born. It was after this night, that I decided I would become a medical doctor.



Although I started very determined at secondary school, soon I got very distracted.



My puberty started, I had challenges to make new friends and I fell in love for the first time. Even though I considered myself a grown up, I still had so much to learn.



Honestly, it was this period, that I made a lot of mistakes, that could have affected the rest of my life, if I had not received the support I did.



I thank God for staying with me during this period and to help me get my goals in life clear again. I learned that despite challenges along the way, you should never get distracted from your bigger plans.



I want to share my story with you – because through my experiences I have learned some important things – which I think might help you to know while you are growing up from a boy into a man.

CHAPTER 1: I AM JOE AND THIS IS MY STORY

QUESTIONS

- 1. Is the story Joe tells so far realistic? Could a young man like Joe live in our community?**
- 2. Are you curious to learn more about what Joe has to tell in his story? Why?**
- 3. What do you hope to learn from reading his story as a group coming weeks?**



CHAPTER TWO

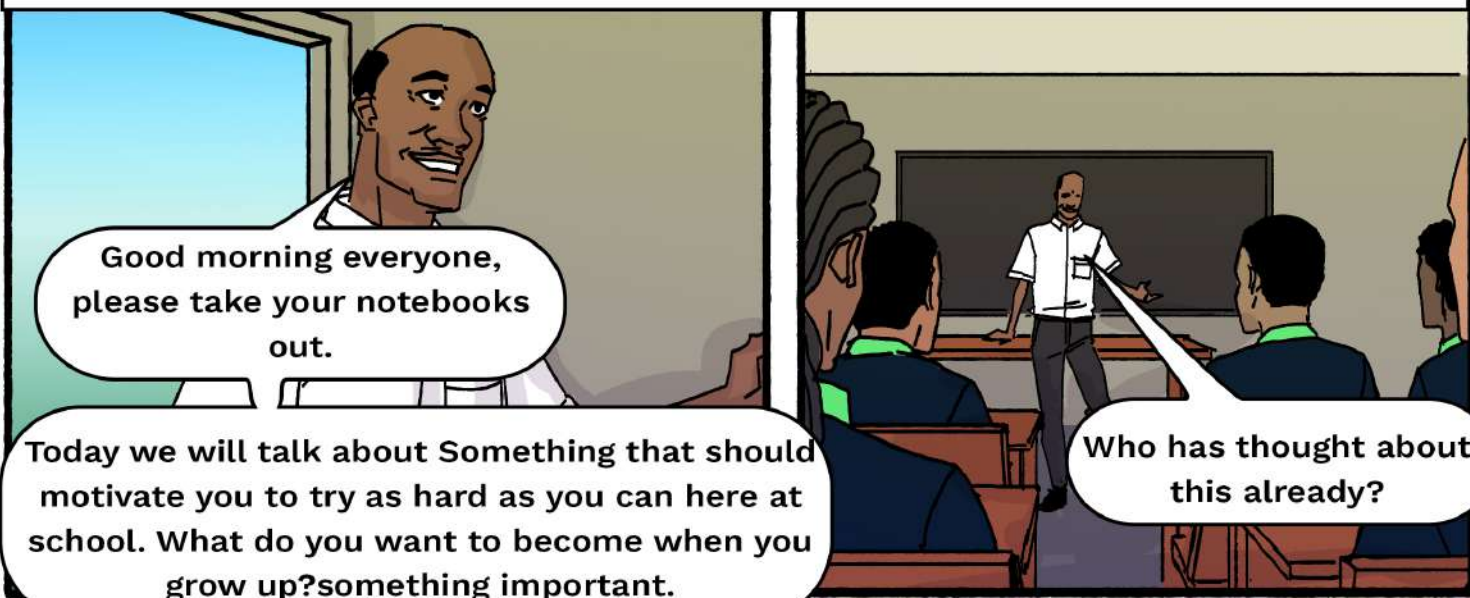


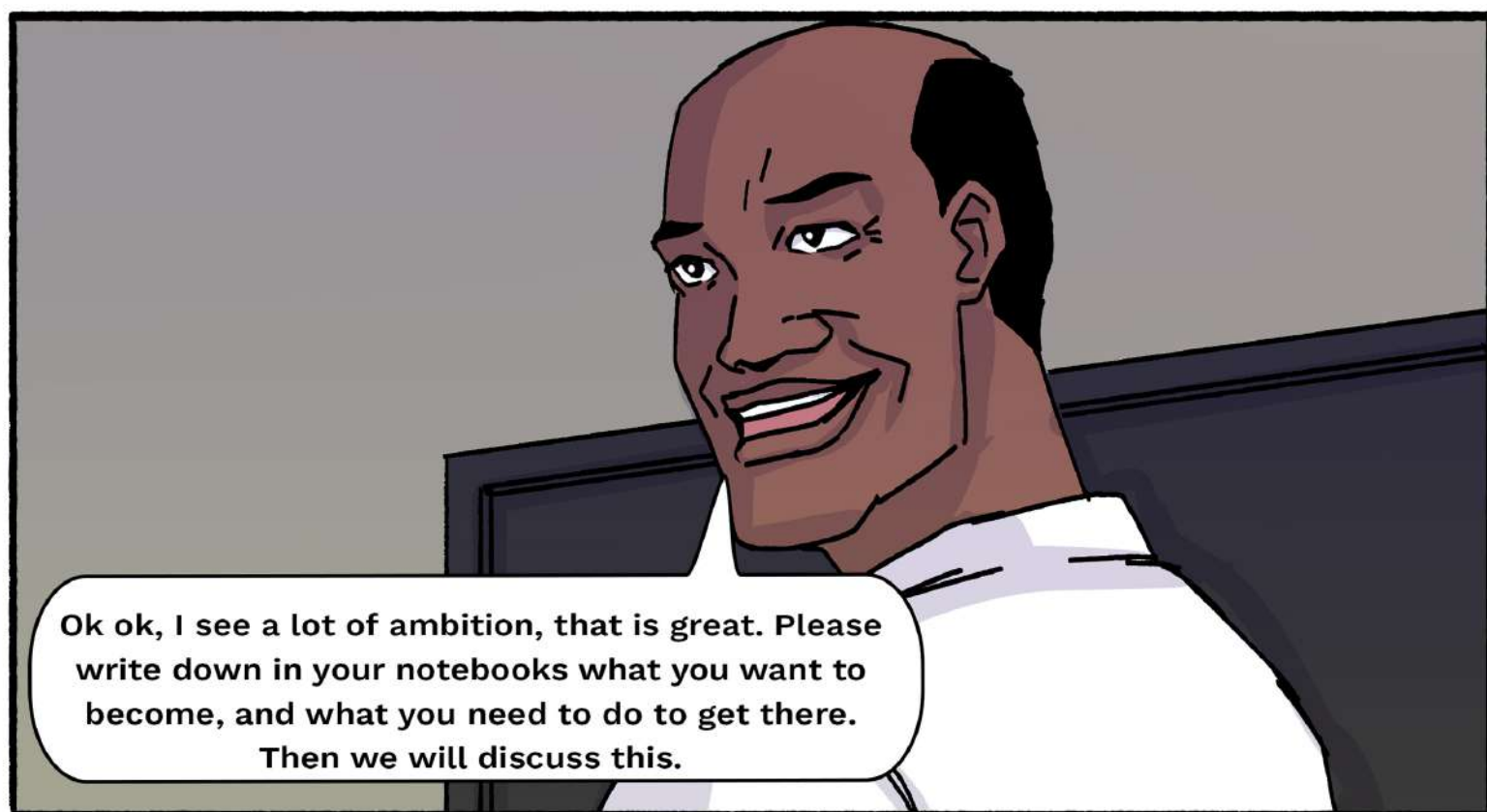
"Joe's first day at secondary school"



I was very excited to be able to continue school and motivated to get the best marks. I also hoped the other boys would like me and I could make some new friends. However, the first days I was standing alone a lot and did not interact much with other students.

One morning, we had a class about “What do you want to become when you grow up?”. I was excited about this theme and I wanted to share my story about my desire to become a medical doctor.





All of a sudden I got discouraged about sharing my story of becoming a medical doctor. Maybe the other students would think it is not cool? I don't think doctors become very rich in our country...



... I decided to stay quiet in this class. I decided after class to speak with the boys who want to become professional football players, maybe I could join them in their trainings. I used to play a lot of football.





They were actually impressed with how I played, so that is how I made my first new friends!

CHAPTER 2: AT JOE'S NEW SCHOOL

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about Joe's school realistic? Why (not)?
2. Why did Joe not share he wanted to become medical doctor? What was he afraid of?
3. What do you think of the behavior of Dennis and John?
4. What activity do you like to do with your friends?

CHAPTER THREE



"Can a woman become a doctor?"

When I came back from playing football with Dennis and John, I found one of my sisters cooking lunch.



Hi sis, is lunch not ready yet? I am hungry!



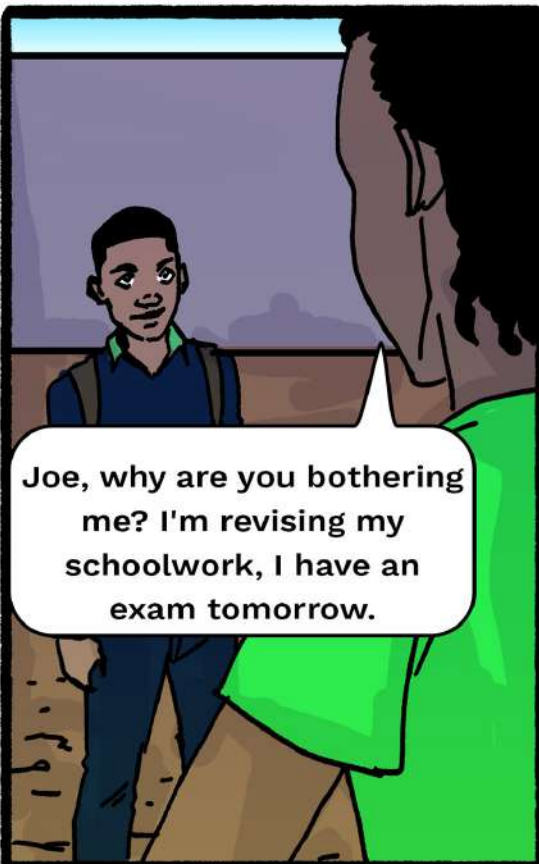
Well, if you want it to be finished quicker you better help me.



What? I am a man, I cannot cook! Where is Sarah? She should be helping you.



Sarah!



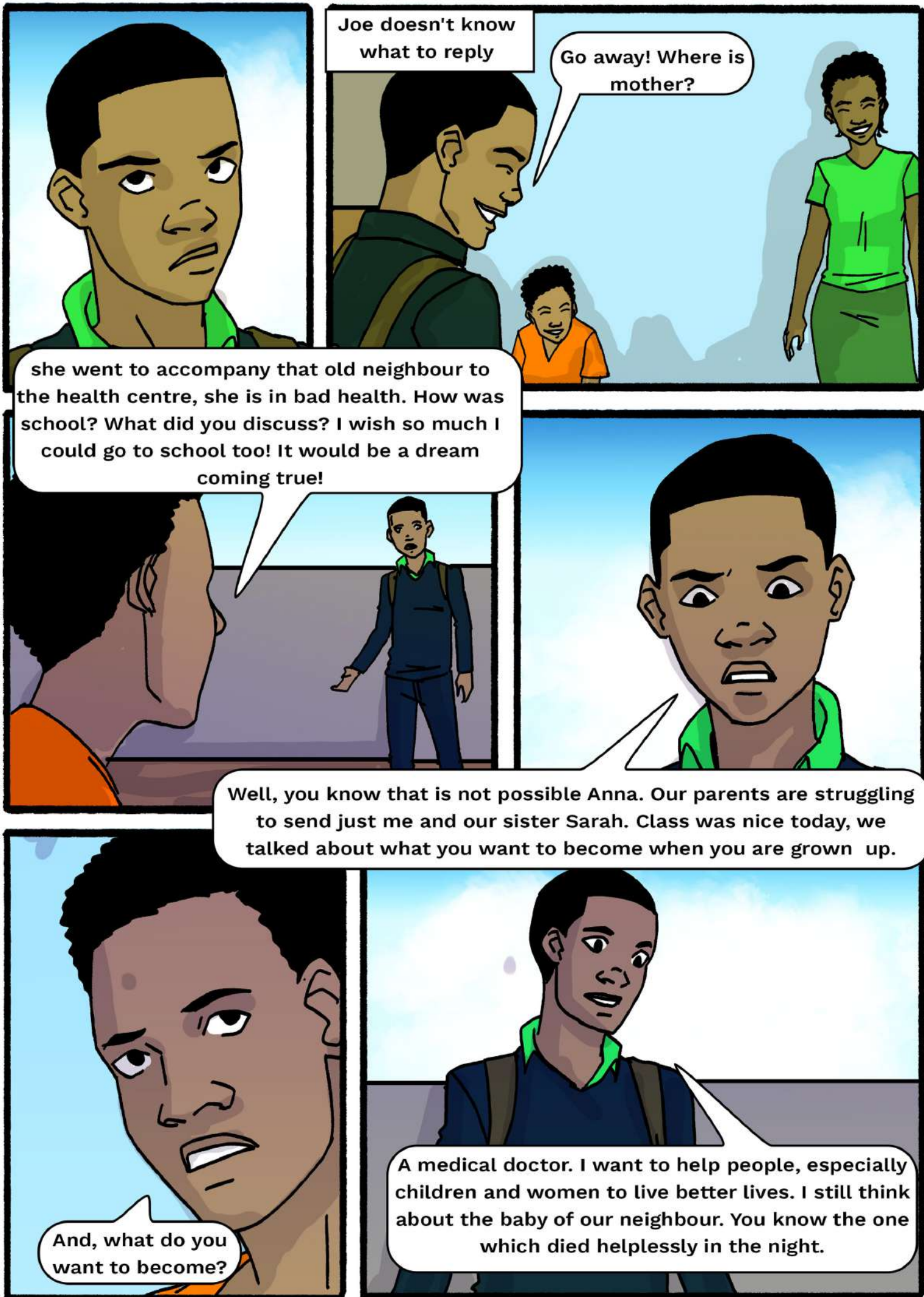
Joe, why are you bothering me? I'm revising my schoolwork, I have an exam tomorrow.

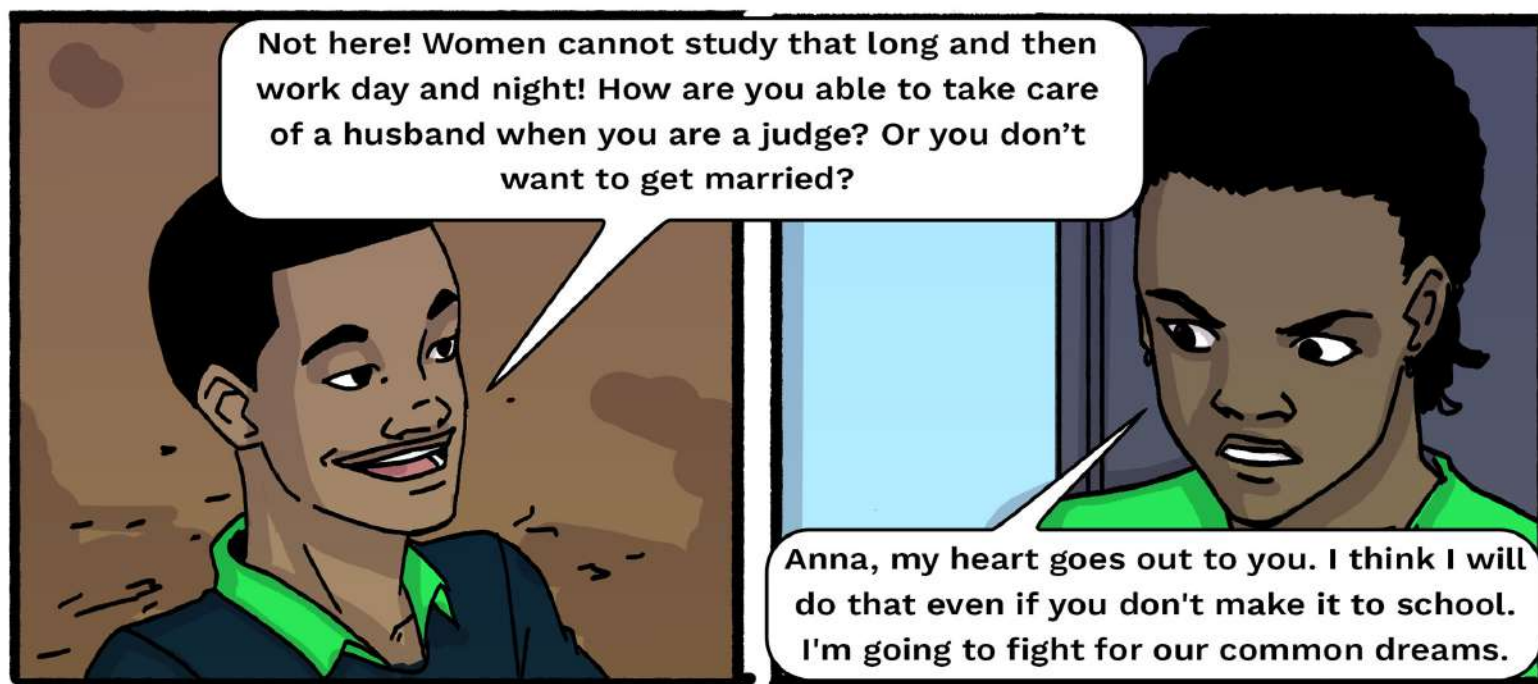


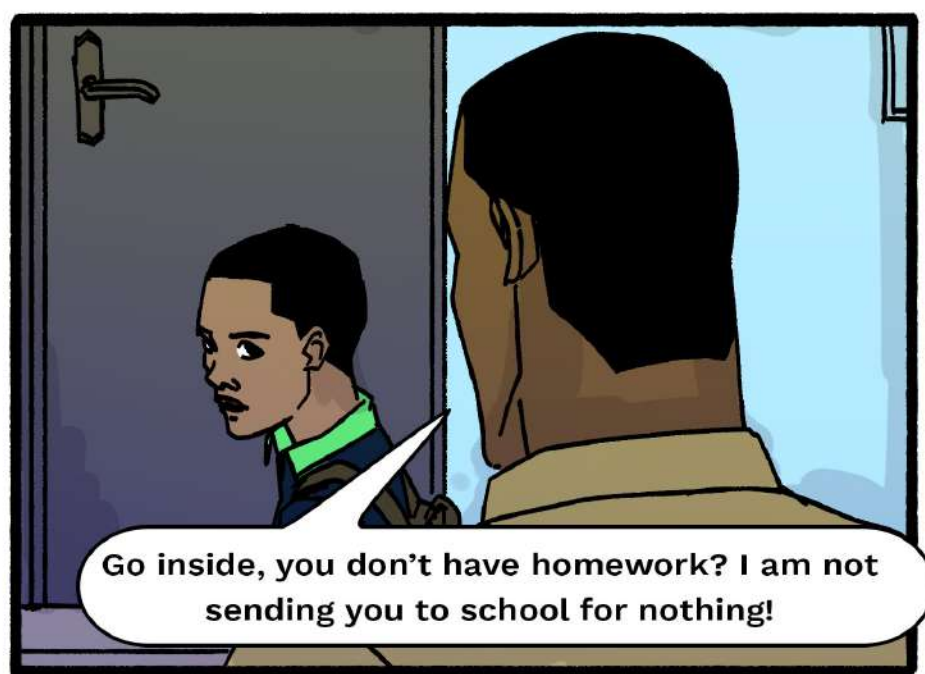
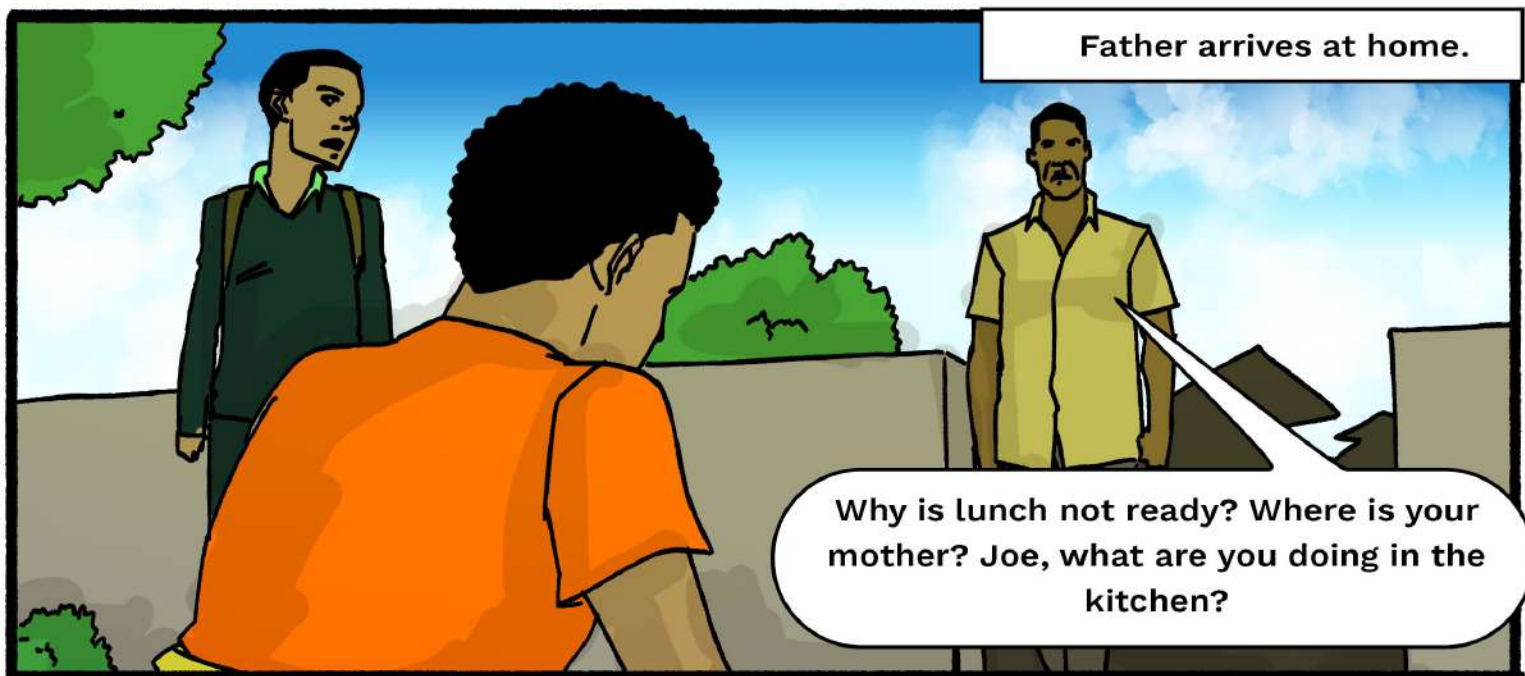
Sarah, go on with learning your homework, who does Joe think he is? If he is hungry he should help me in the kitchen instead of bothering you.



o Joe, why don't you help her? You have two hands that could perfectly fine cut an onion, haven't you?







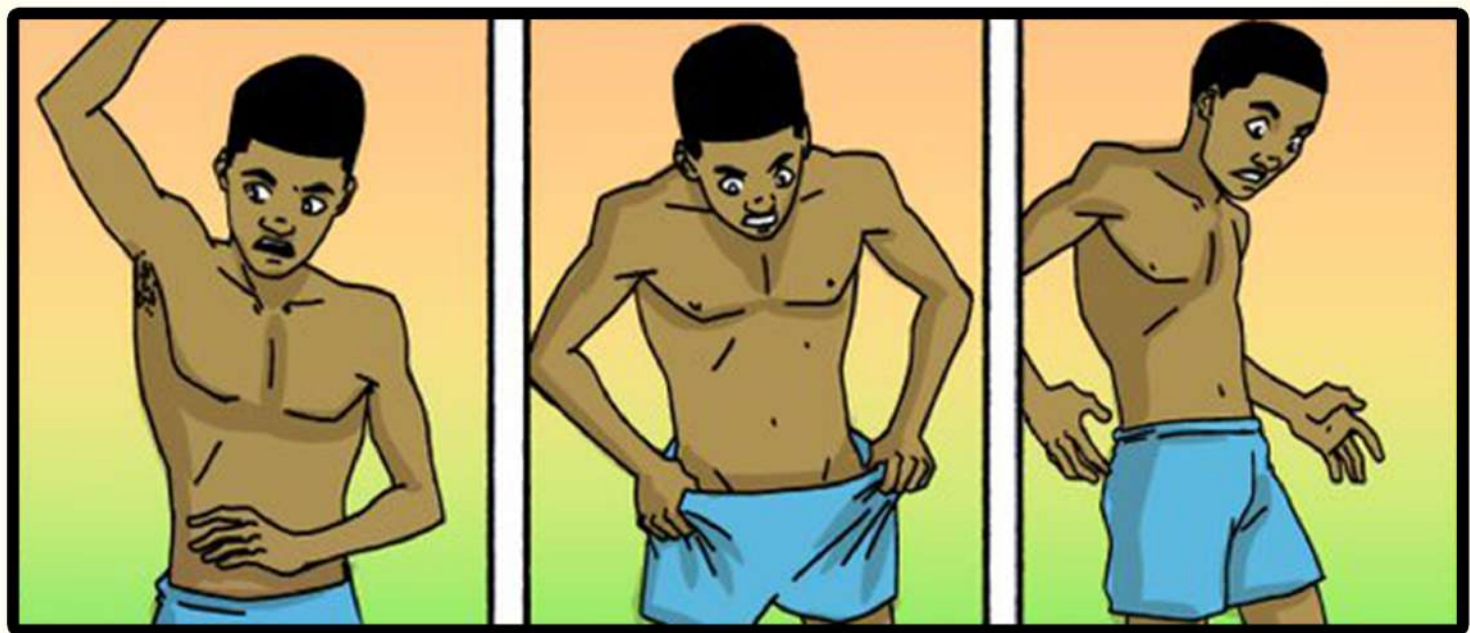
CHAPTER 3: CAN A WOMAN BECOME A DOCTOR?

QUESTIONS

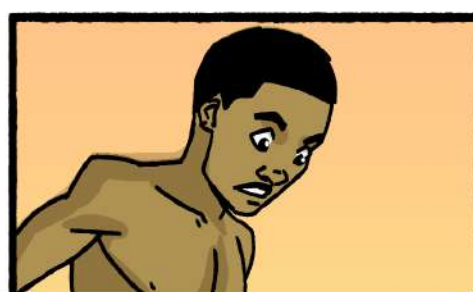
1. Is the story about Joe's situation at home realistic? Why (not)?
2. Do you think men can cook?
3. And could a woman from your community ever become a doctor?
4. What do you yourself want to become when you are grown up?



CHAPTER FOUR



"Wet dreams"



I was now fourteen years old and started to note some changes in my body. I got hair under my arms and around my penis. I knew this was normal for adult men and did not bother too much. What was more confusing is that sometimes I would wake up in the morning and felt in my pants something wet.



The first time I thought it was pee, but I discovered it was something else coming from my penis. Could it be sperm? Why would it come out like that? I decided to ask John and Dennis at school.



Hi Dennis, hi John,
what's up?



We are cool Joe, and
what about you?

Want to play football after class?

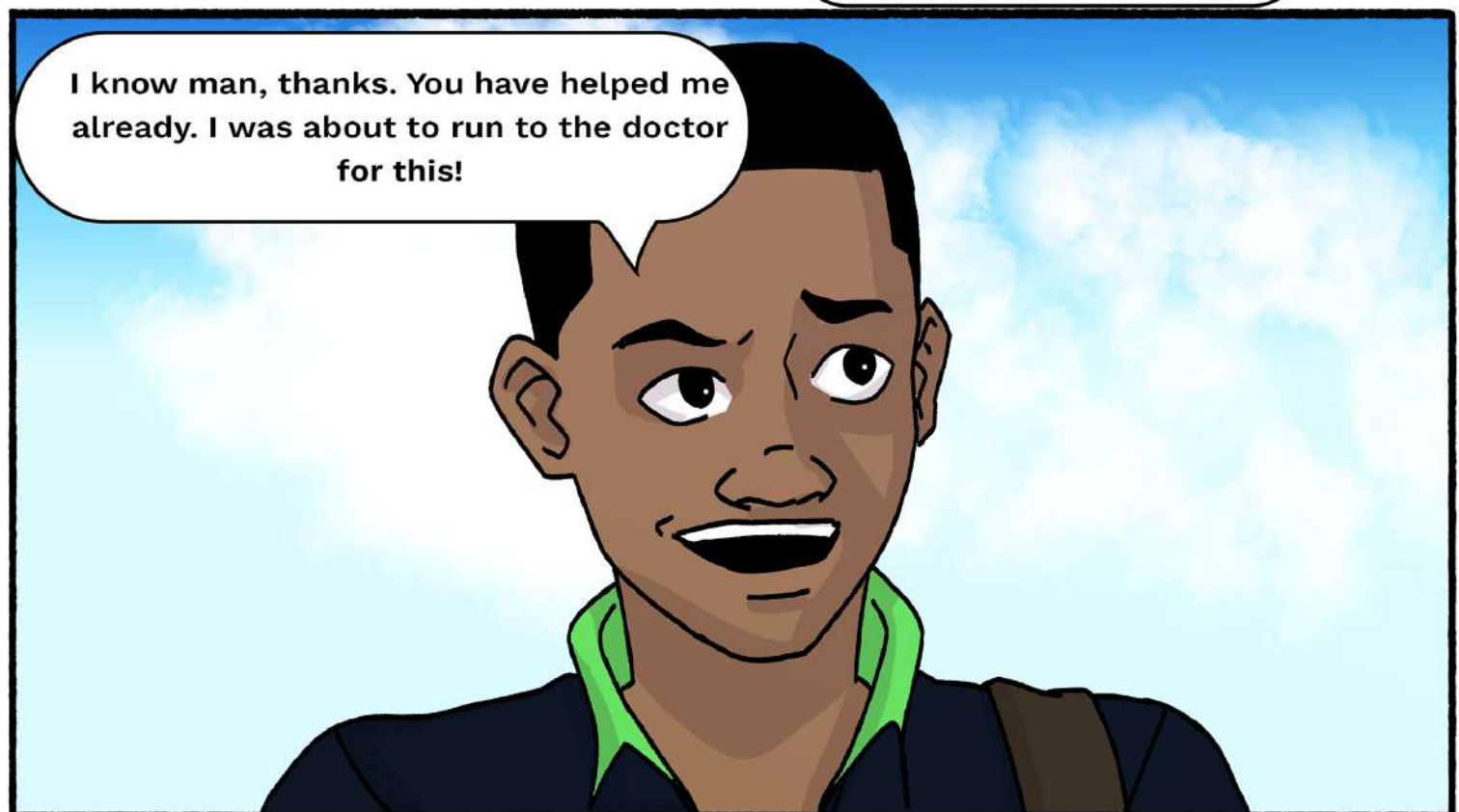


Well not sure yet, it depends on how much home work we have. My father is banging on about first doing my homework before anything else. The old man is driving me crazy!

Haha, tell me about it. My father is the same, but I just don't tell him about our homework. Or about my marks.

Ha, you are clever! But guys, serious now, I wanted to ask you something personal... It is bothering me since a few weeks. Some mornings I wake up and there is this wet liquid in my pants, but it is not pee. Is this sperm? Why would it come out like that?







Haha, no man, don't worry. But do think about starting to have sex. If you ignore this need, you might end up at the doctor anyway. It is not good to keep all this sexual energy to your own.



No, your balls will get too heavy. And you will end up at the doctor after all. Haha!



Thanks, thanks, let me think about this.

We look forward to hearing about your next moves, Joe. The girls better get prepared, Joe is coming! Haha!



I felt relieved that what I had is normal, but also kind of nervous about the idea of having to start with sex. There was this girl I liked at school, Esther, but I had been thinking to just go and talk with her. Maybe go for a walk and I could buy her a Fanta. It did not occur to me yet to have sex with her...

CHAPTER 4: WET DREAMS

QUESTIONS

- 1. Is the story about Joe's conversation with his friends realistic? Why (not)?**
- 2. Was it a good idea of Joe to ask his friends for advice? Why (not)?**
- 3: Are the answers that Dennis and John give to Joe correct?**
- 4: What is a place to go / who would you go to for accurate information about puberty?**

CHAPTER FIVE



"What do girls like?"

Even though I remained unsure on whether I should have sex with Esther already, the idea of the possibility excited me.



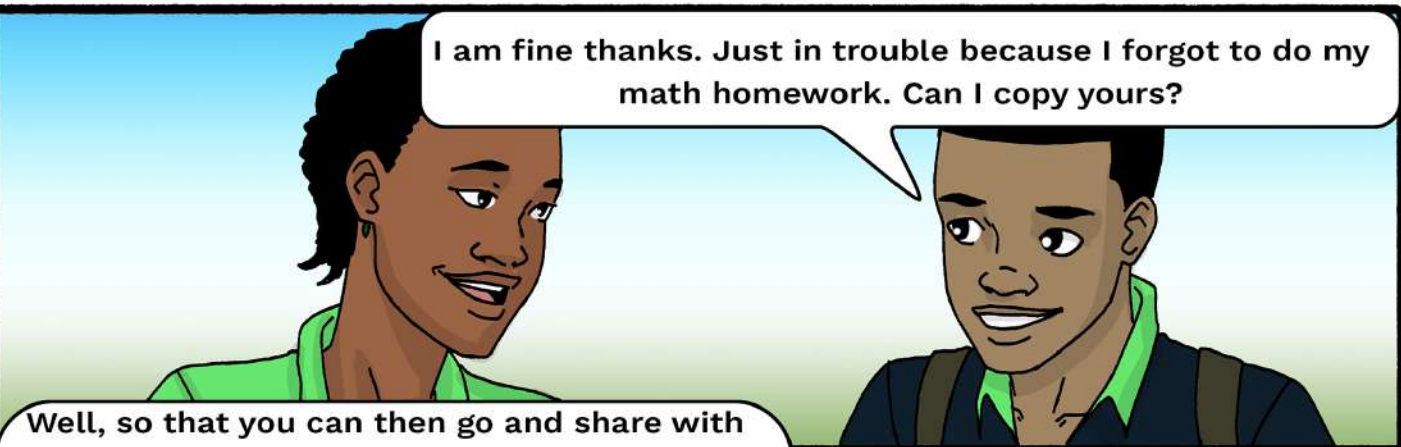
I was sometimes day dreaming of how we would be married when older and she would be carrying my child. I decided I should at least try to speak with her and thought of some excuse to talk with her.

Hi Esther, h-h how [Joe stutters] are you?



I am very well, thanks Joe. And you?

I am fine thanks. Just in trouble because I forgot to do my math homework. Can I copy yours?



Well, so that you can then go and share with all your friends and you guys are all benefiting from my work? I don't think so Joe.



No no, it is just for me. Just for this one day. And I- I [Joe is trying hard to find something nice to say] and then next time you copy mine?



No, no, come on man, we were just talking about homework.
I did not have sex with her. Take it easy. Give me a break.



Look Joe, [pointing at the screen] this is how you seduce a lady and then...Oh la la,
you see how he is going straight for his goal. Don't give the girl too much time to
think, she might tell you "no"!



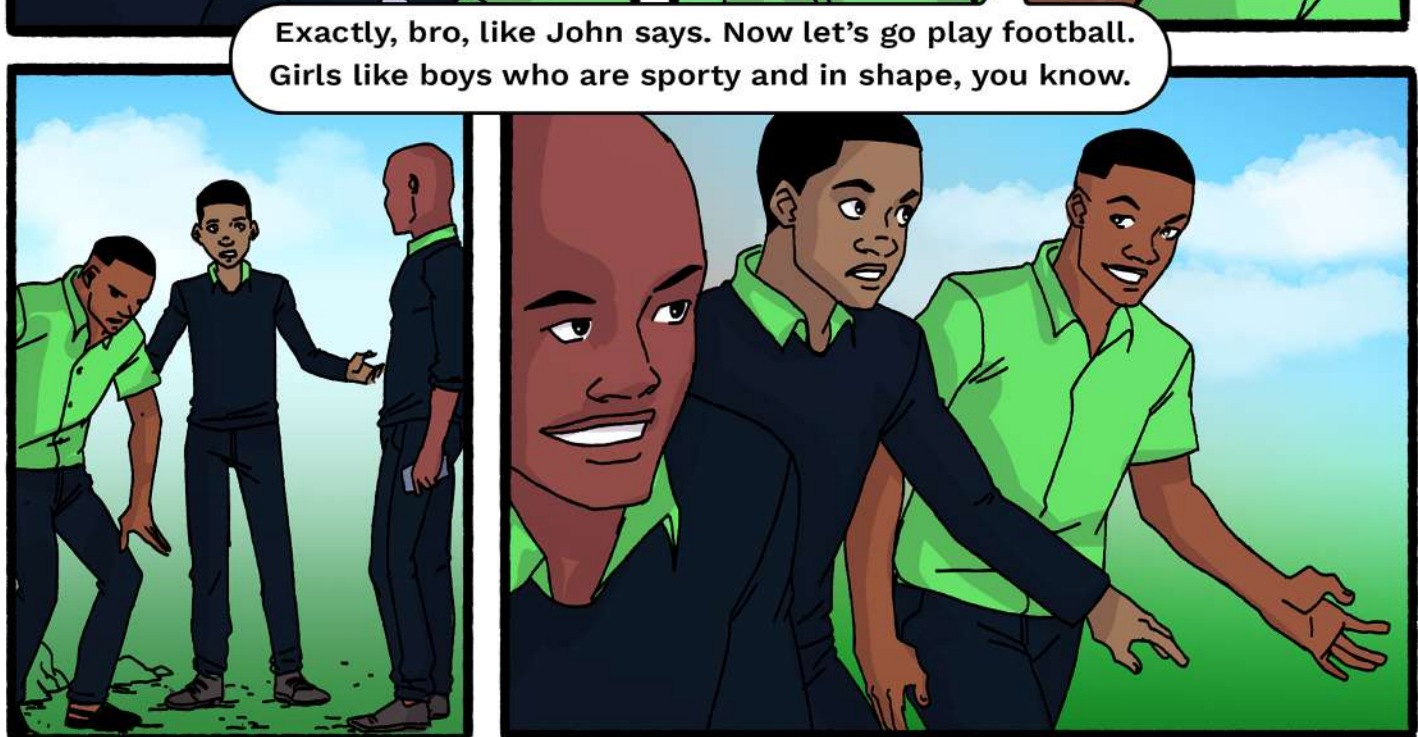
Haha! Exactly, overwhelm her and make it something she will never forget. You see
how the guy grabs her? That is how it is done my friend.



Ha, I see yes. This is a great
movie?



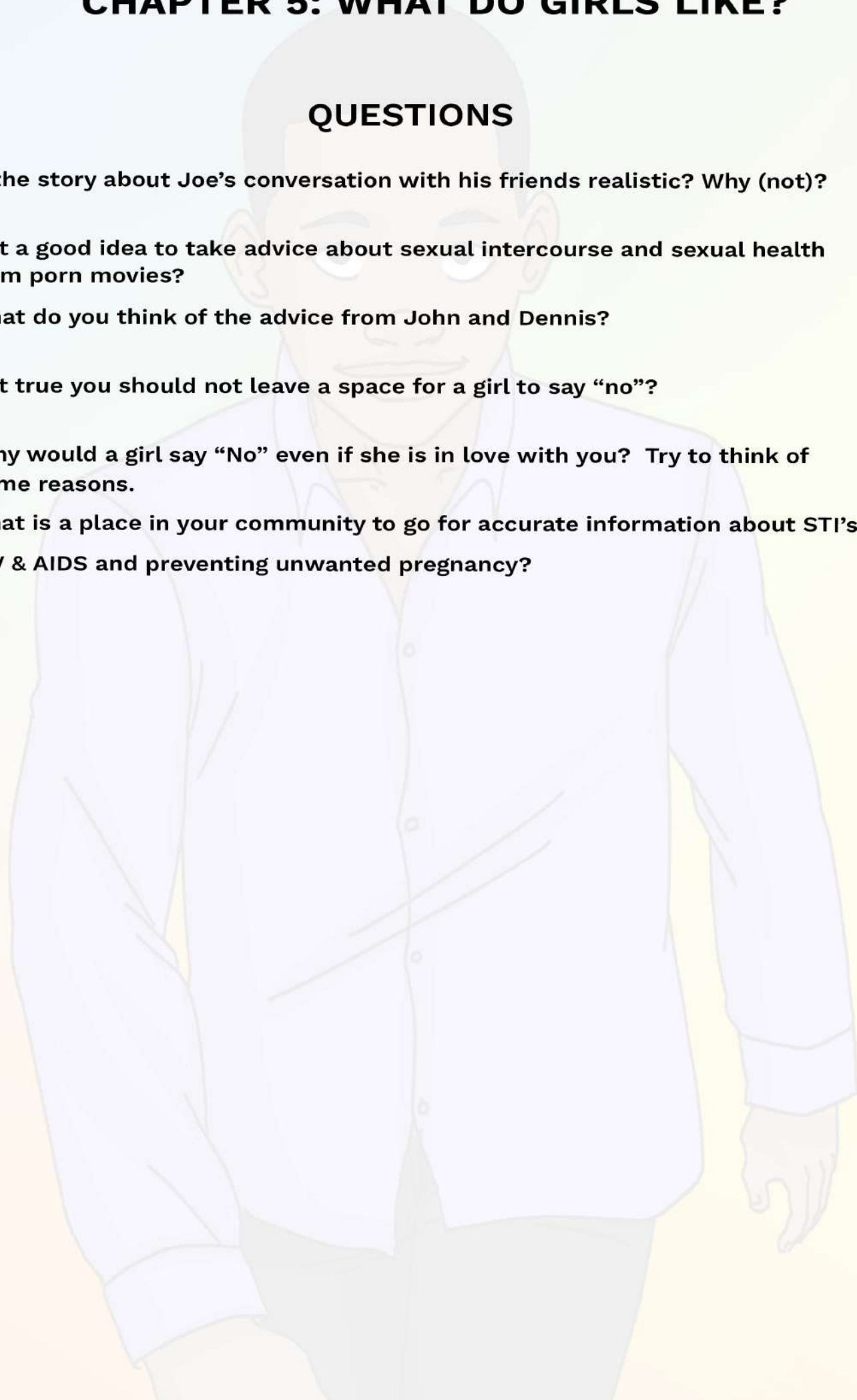
However, just a rumour. I also
heard it is good to go to the
health clinic for information
and precautions. Because with
having sex there are also many
diseases you can get. Like
AIDS?



CHAPTER 5: WHAT DO GIRLS LIKE?

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about Joe's conversation with his friends realistic? Why (not)?
2. Is it a good idea to take advice about sexual intercourse and sexual health from porn movies?
3. What do you think of the advice from John and Dennis?
4. Is it true you should not leave a space for a girl to say "no"?
5. Why would a girl say "No" even if she is in love with you? Try to think of some reasons.
6. What is a place in your community to go for accurate information about STI's, HIV & AIDS and preventing unwanted pregnancy?



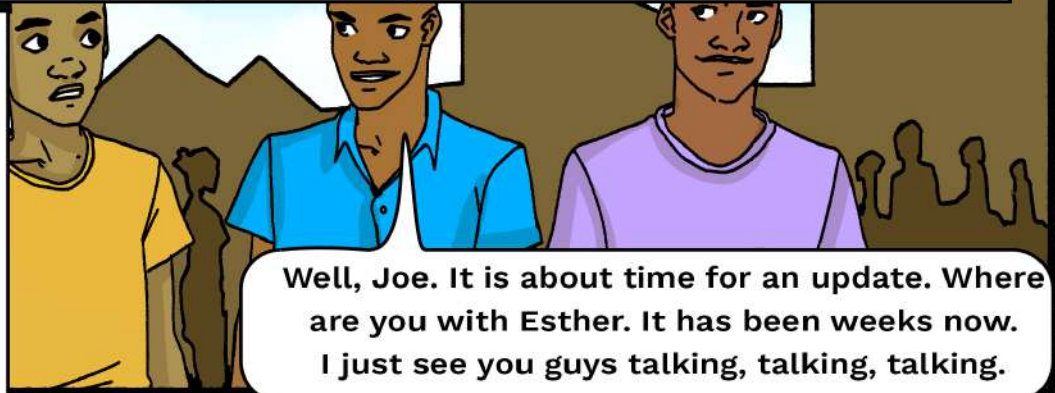
CHAPTER SIX



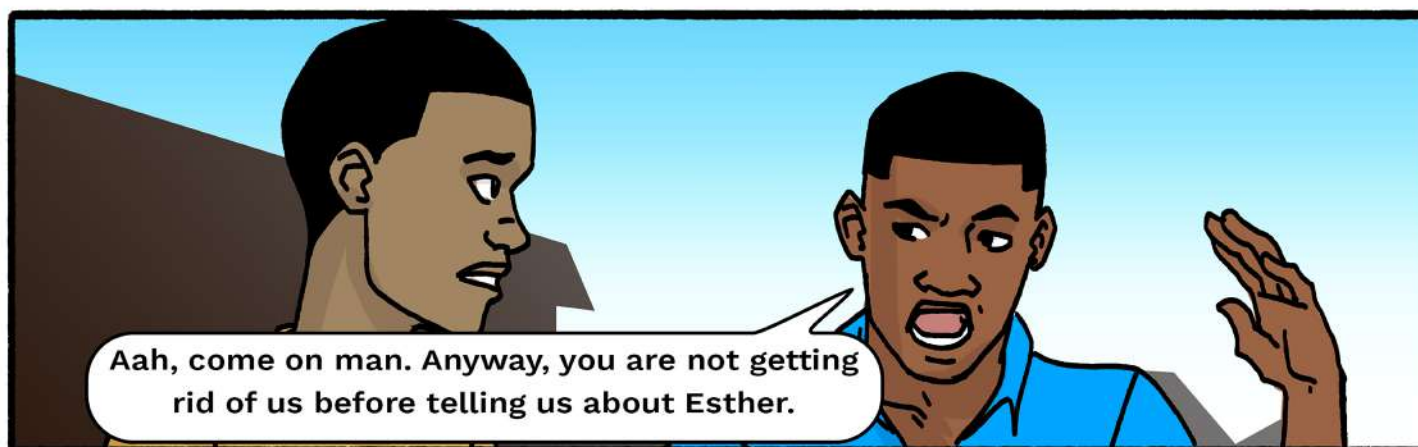
"Did you do it yet?"

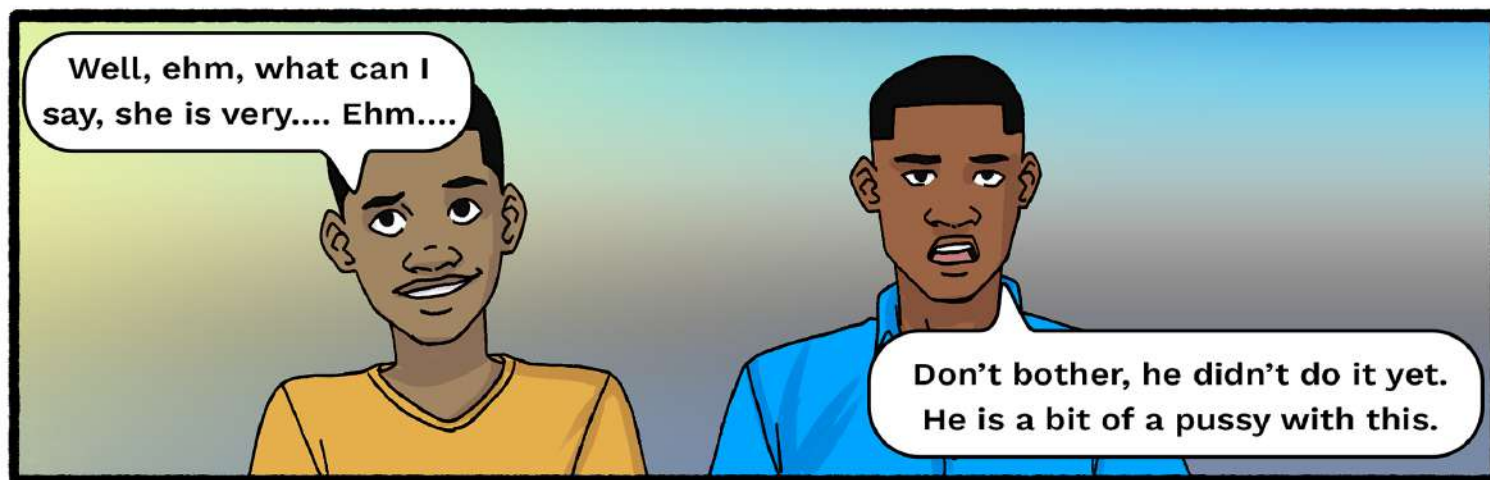
Since that first day I spoke with Esther, we continued to speak almost every day. Mostly the conversation would start about homework, but then we would talk about many more things.

She wanted to become a teacher she told me. I really enjoyed speaking with her. I was thinking about what my next move should be. However, my friends pressured me and teased me.





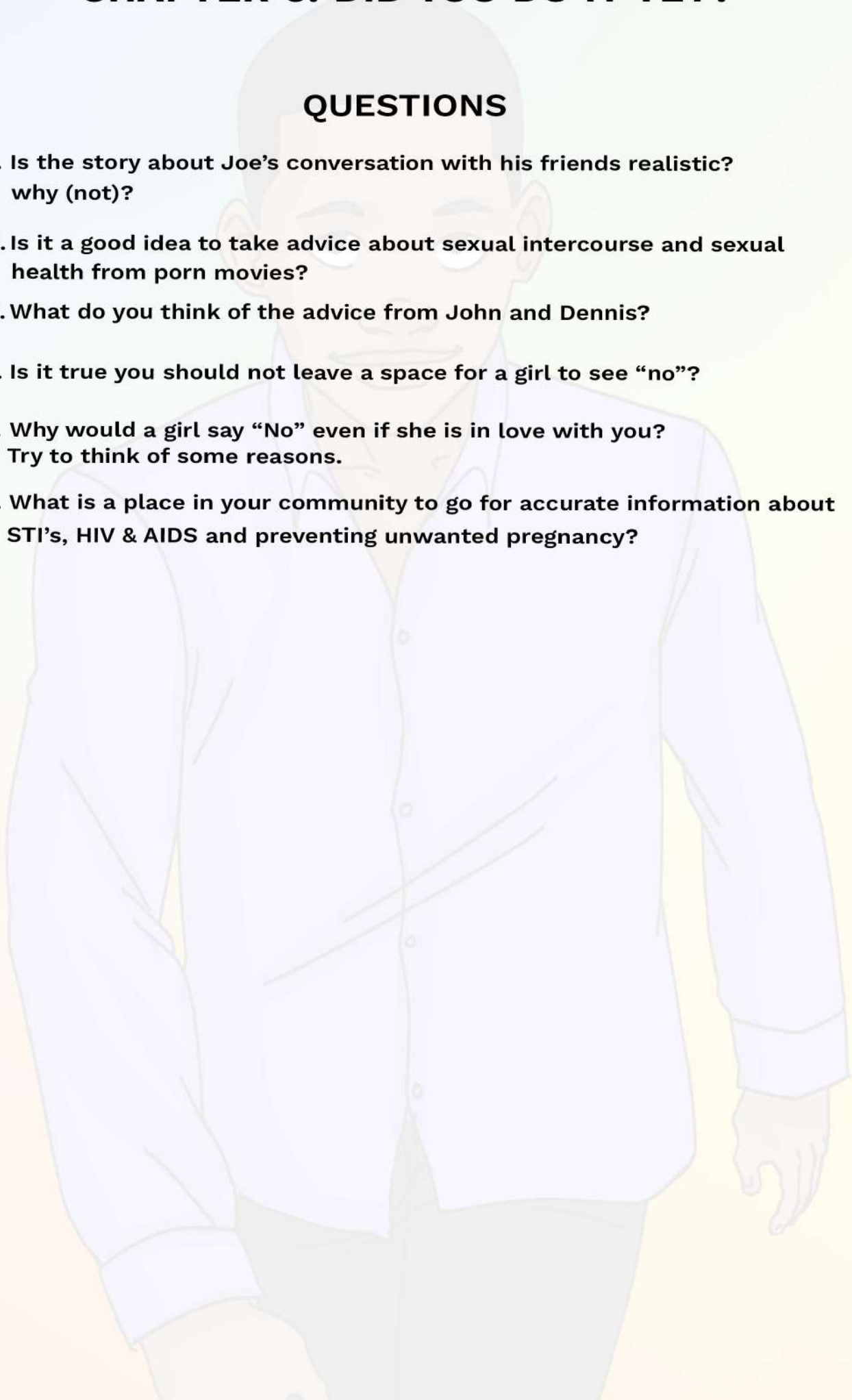




CHAPTER 6: DID YOU DO IT YET?

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about Joe's conversation with his friends realistic?
why (not)?
2. Is it a good idea to take advice about sexual intercourse and sexual health from porn movies?
3. What do you think of the advice from John and Dennis?
4. Is it true you should not leave a space for a girl to see "no"?
5. Why would a girl say "No" even if she is in love with you?
Try to think of some reasons.
6. What is a place in your community to go for accurate information about STI's, HIV & AIDS and preventing unwanted pregnancy?



CHAPTER SEVEN



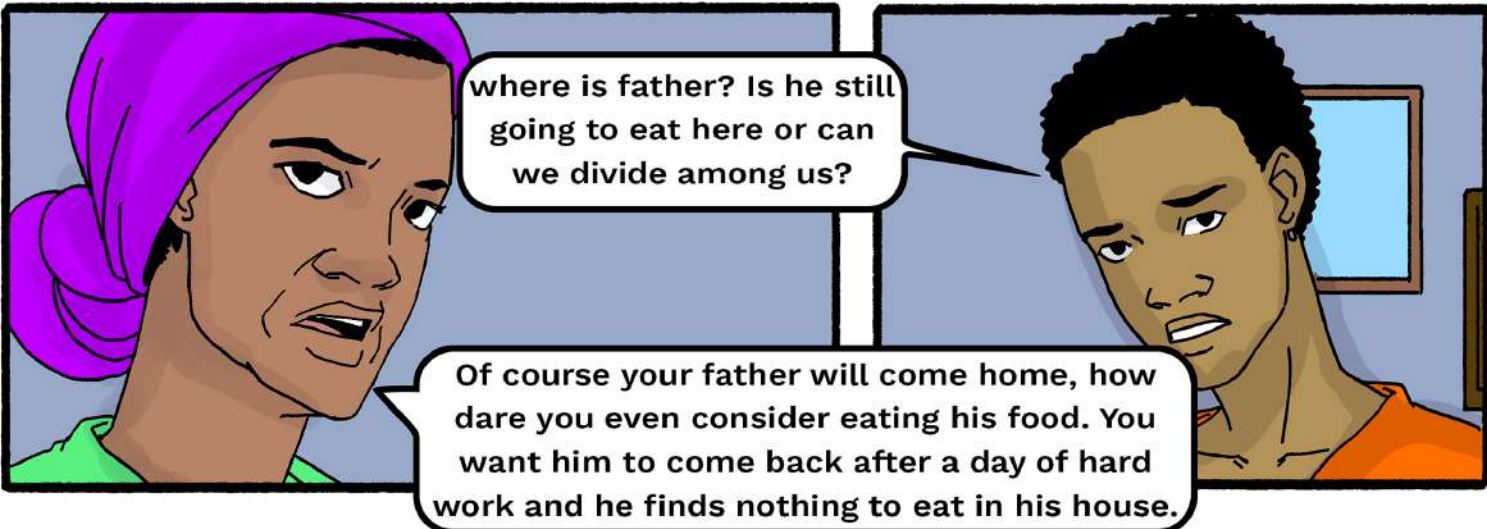
"Another poor harvest"

While I was busy worrying about Esther and how to deal with my friends, my father had more serious trouble on his mind. For a second year, the harvest was poor due to the droughts.



Often at night I heard my parents talking about money. I started to worry I would continue to be able to go to school? My father said he would look for some extra work, to have more income, which made him often come home later.

Then, one night, my father did not come home in the evening at all.



where is father? Is he still going to eat here or can we divide among us?

Of course your father will come home, how dare you even consider eating his food. You want him to come back after a day of hard work and he finds nothing to eat in his house.



Well sorry, I just thought that...

Whatever you thought, forget it. Keep his food covered and let's go to sleep. It is late.

All the family goes to sleep and they wake up at 4 AM with noises of someone entering the house. Joe and his sister overhear the conversation between their parents.









CHAPTER 7: ANOTHER POOR HARVEST

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about what happens in Joe's house realistic?
2. What do you think of the behavior of father?
3. What do you think of the behavior of mother?
4. Is it okay for a husband to slap his wife? Why not?
5. What was an alternative for Joe's father instead of beating his wife?

CHAPTER EIGHT



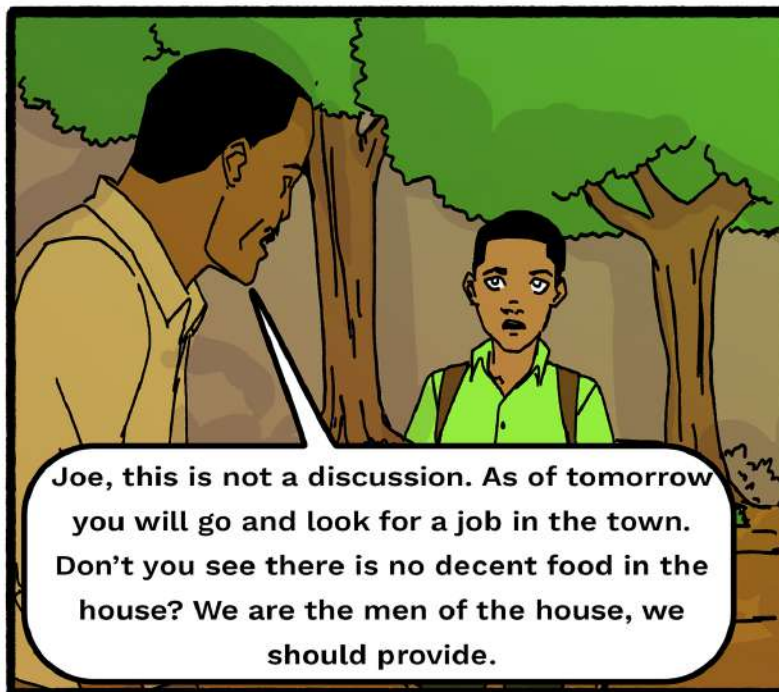
"My first beer"

From this moment onwards, that my father had beaten my mother, all the house was tense every day. My father still came home late, but my mother didn't say anything anymore. There were days we had almost nothing to eat; just some rice with a bit of oil.

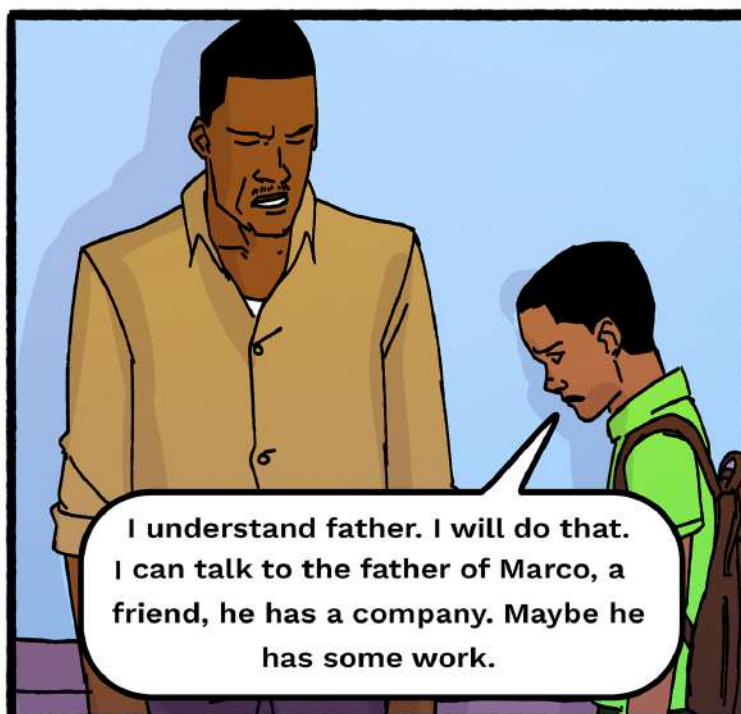
One day when I came back from school, I found my father home and he called me to talk to him.

But father, I...

Joe, son, you know that life is difficult at the moment. Therefore, I have no means to have you continue school this year. It is too expensive, and I need you to support me to make some money.



I was so disappointed but decided as a real man that I would have to do as my father told me and support him.



That is more like it, thank you son. I count on you. Don't disappoint me.





I went to the market now every day, sometimes the father of Marco had some work for me, sometimes not. One day, I met my friends while I was walking around looking for some work.



Hi Joe, man! So this is where you are now?



Yes, bro... Life is hard. I need to help my father to provide.



I feel bad for you my friend. Maybe you should relax a bit this afternoon?



Yeah, also enjoy a bit
the money you made!



Just take a little for yourself and give the rest to your father.
Your parents won't notice. You should join us at The Corner!



Did I hear you guys are going to The
Corner? What are we waiting for?
Let's go!



I decided to join my friends. I felt I had nothing to lose anymore. I made 600 CFA that day, of which I could buy a drink and then give the rest to my father tonight. However, my first beer made me light in the head and I felt too weak to walk



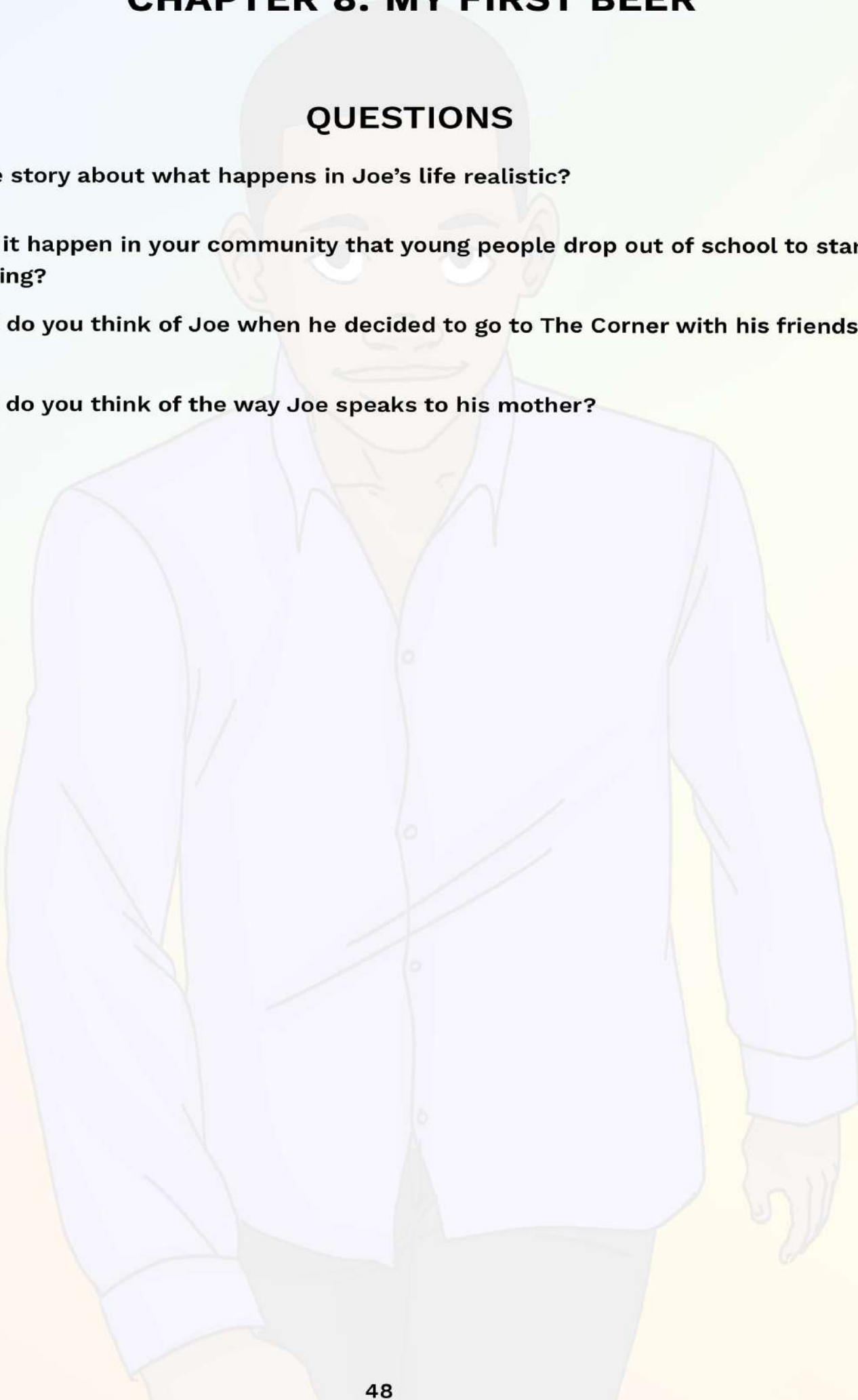
So I stayed for a second, a third... until it was late and we all left. When I came home, my mother looked worried.



CHAPTER 8: MY FIRST BEER

QUESTIONS

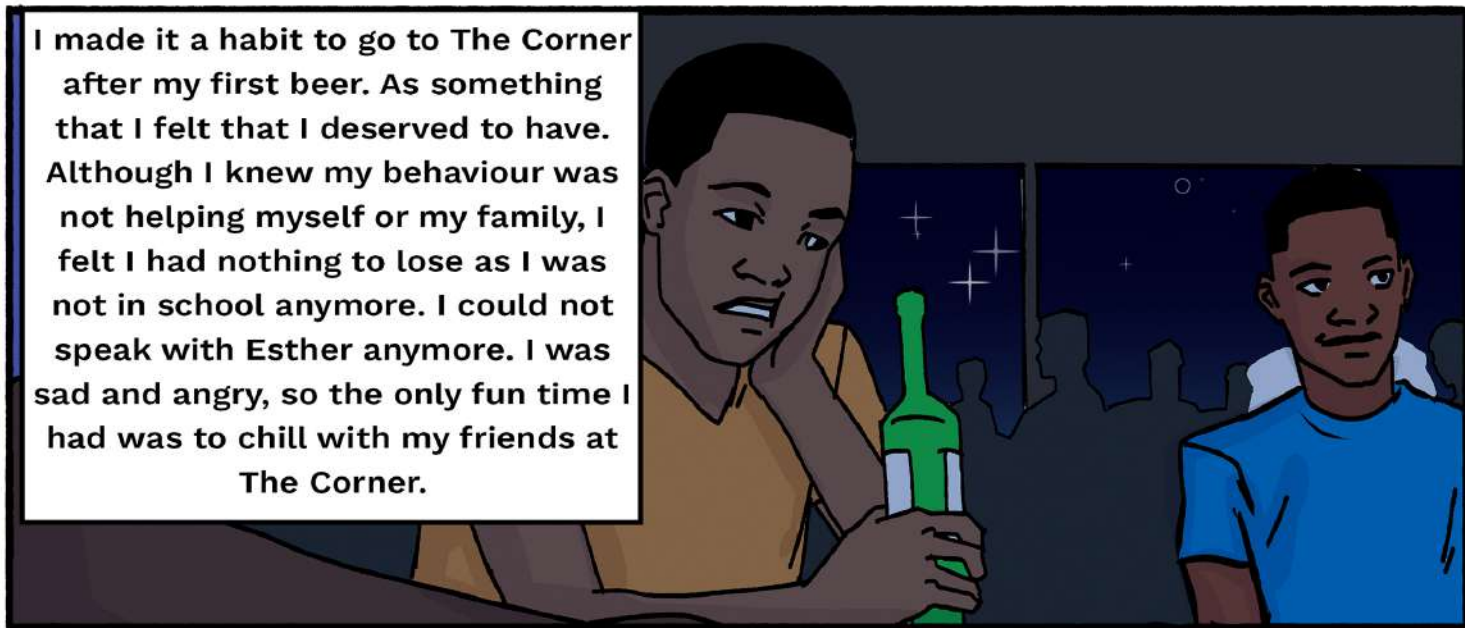
1. Is the story about what happens in Joe's life realistic?
2. Does it happen in your community that young people drop out of school to start working?
3. What do you think of Joe when he decided to go to The Corner with his friends?
4. What do you think of the way Joe speaks to his mother?



CHAPTER NINE



"One for the road"







First I did not pay too much attention to Aisa, I was too troubled with my situation at home, not seeing Esther, and my friends teasing me because I lied about having slept with Esther.



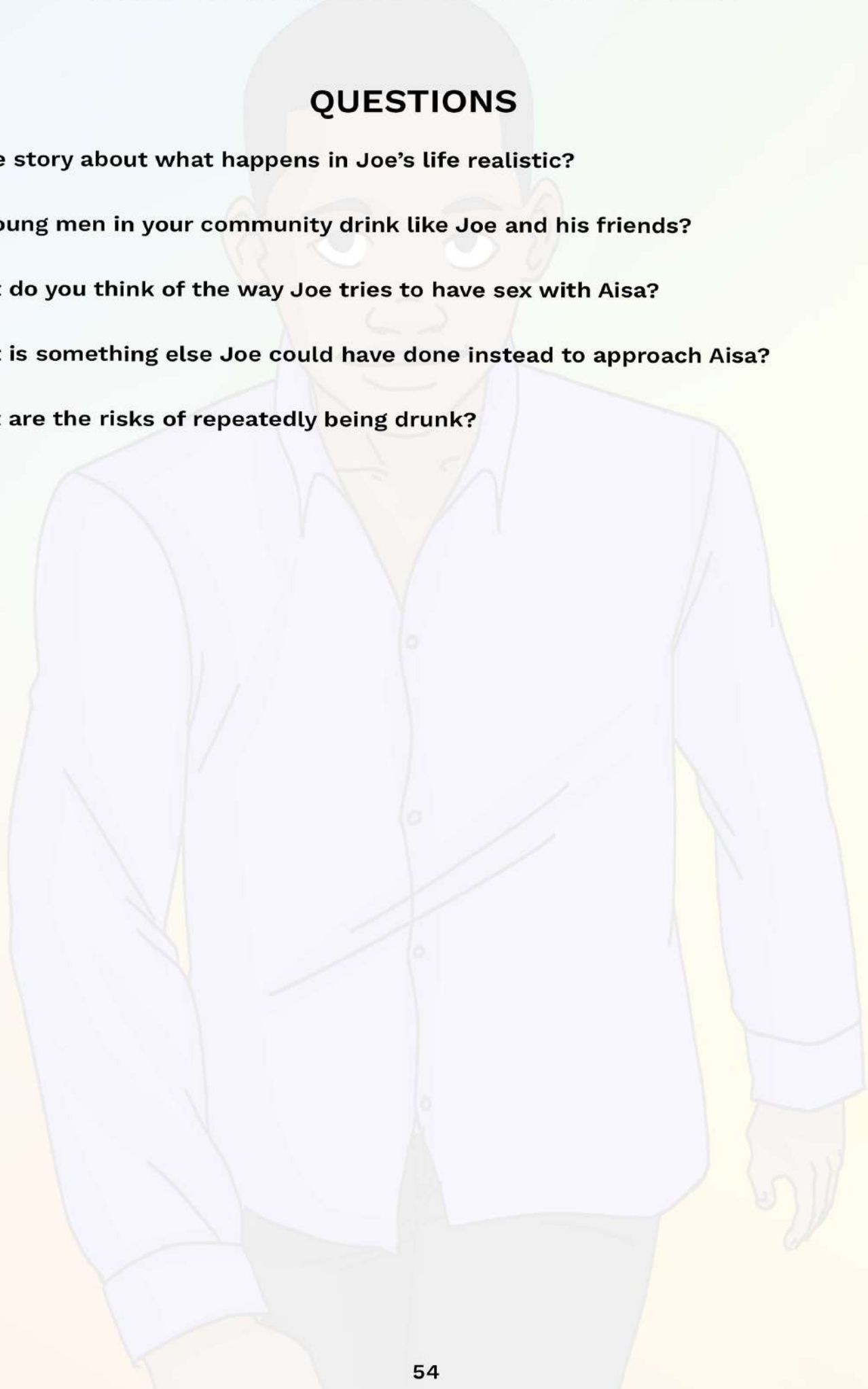
Then, I suddenly realised this Aisa could solve at least part of my problems. I would not be a virgin anymore if I did it with Aisa! I tried to remember what I had seen in John's movies. When we walked through a bushy area, I made my move.



CHAPTER 9: ONE FOR THE ROAD

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about what happens in Joe's life realistic?
2. Do young men in your community drink like Joe and his friends?
3. What do you think of the way Joe tries to have sex with Aisa?
4. What is something else Joe could have done instead to approach Aisa?
5. What are the risks of repeatedly being drunk?



CHAPTER TEN



"We need to talk"

I was lucky enough that someone of our neighbourhood (Mister Malo) found me there lying under the tree early in the morning.



He woke me up and helped me to get home. At home my parents were waiting for me, both looked at me very worried!



Good morning, Roger. I found your son sleeping outside. I guess he is not well.



Joe, son! What have you done? Are you an idiot?



Thank you neighbour, God bless you.



We really need
to talk Joe



What do you want to talk about?
This boy is lost! My Lord, what have I
done to get me such a useless boy?

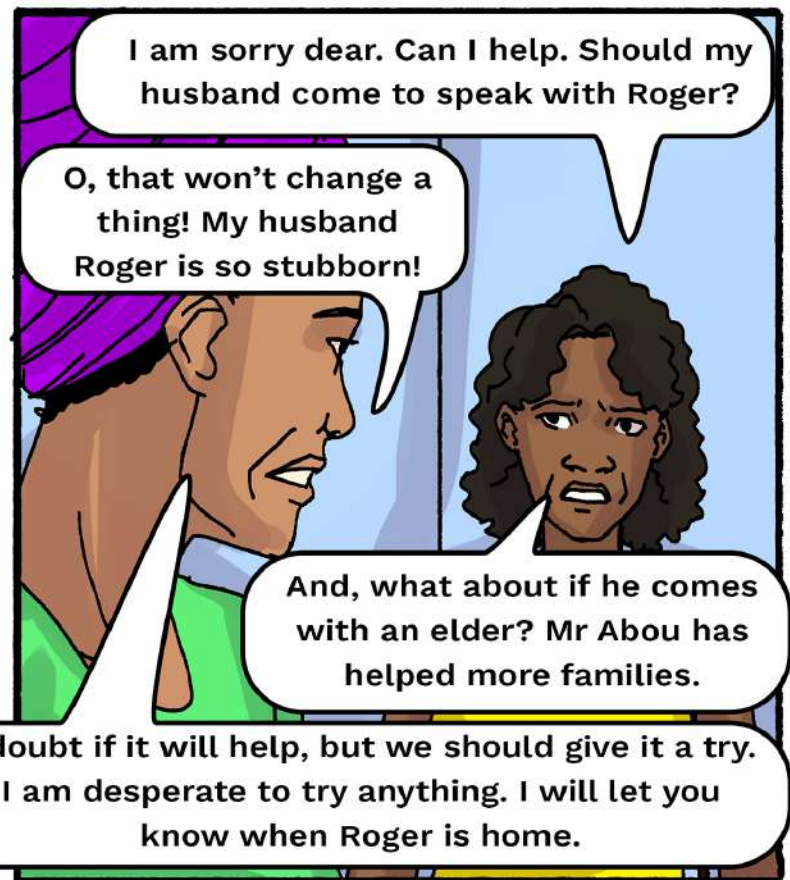


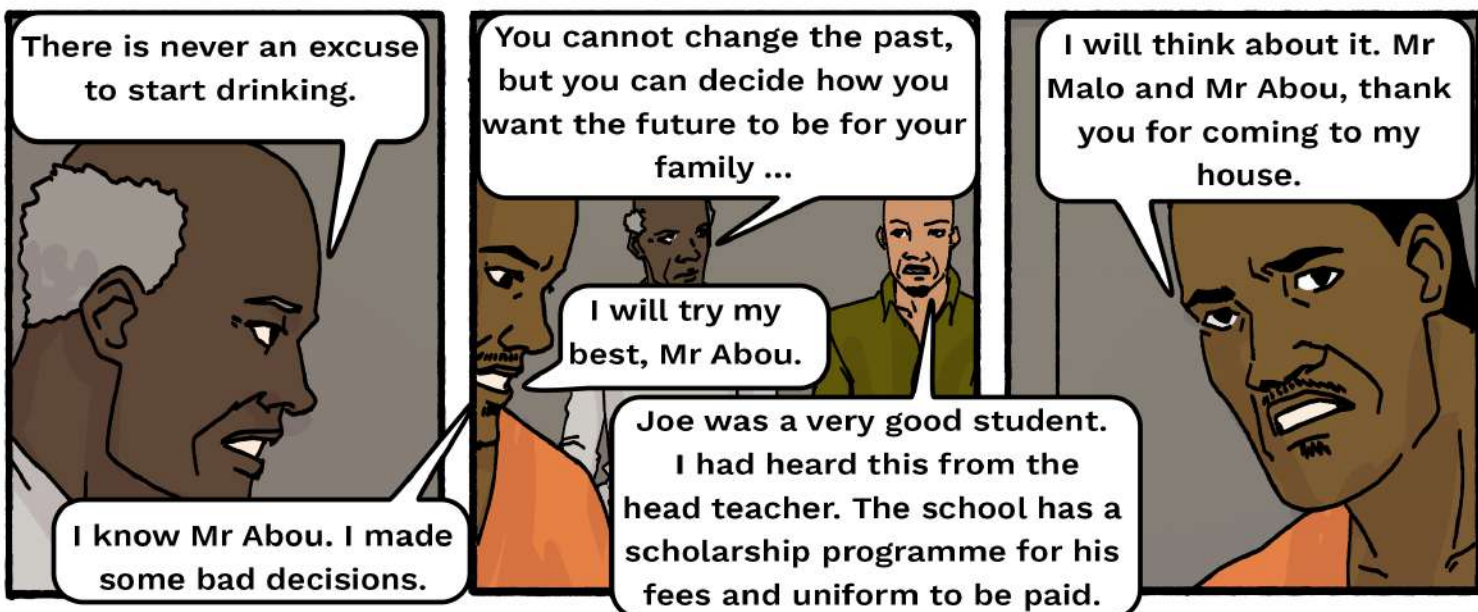
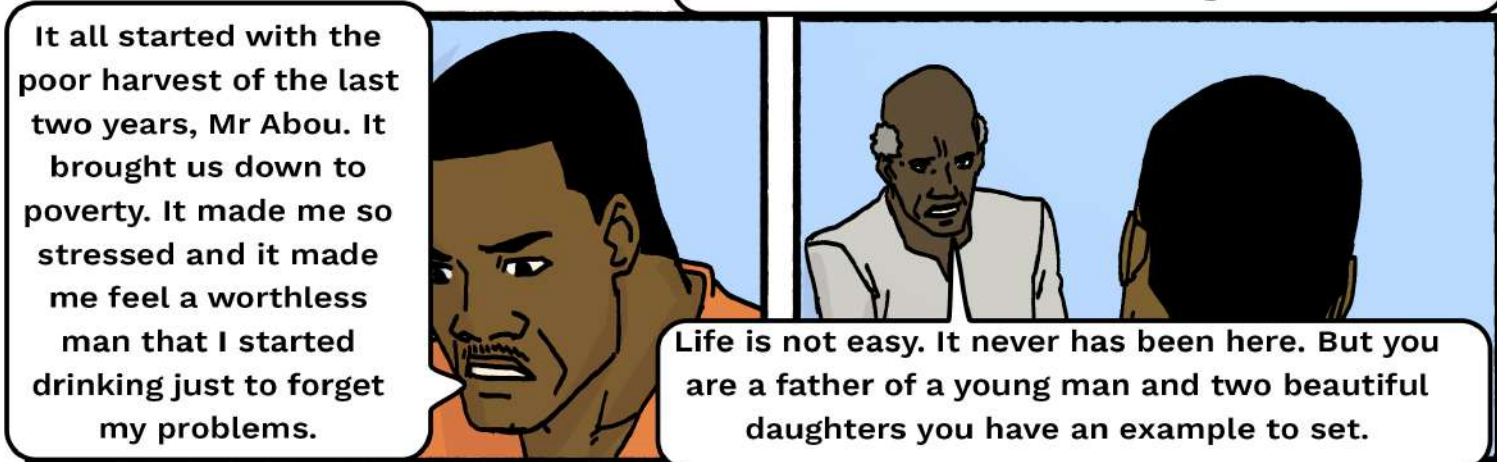
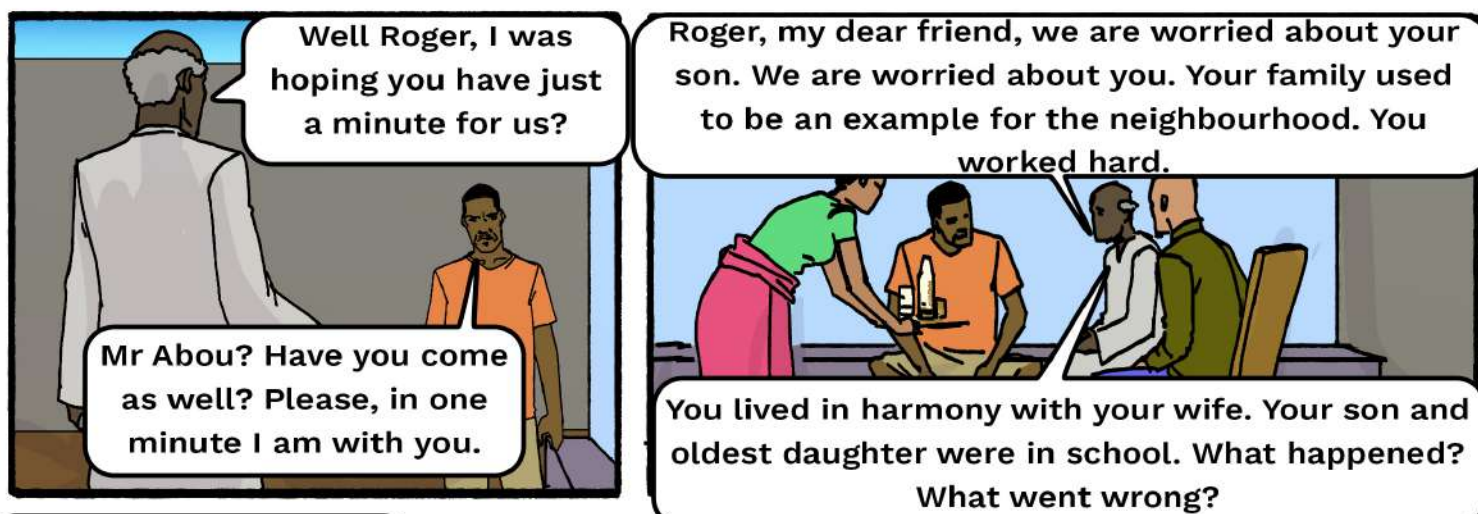
Well, Roger. Who sets
the example here?
Where does he see
this behaviour? You
are supposed to show
him how to behave!



Shut up, wife.
Or else...



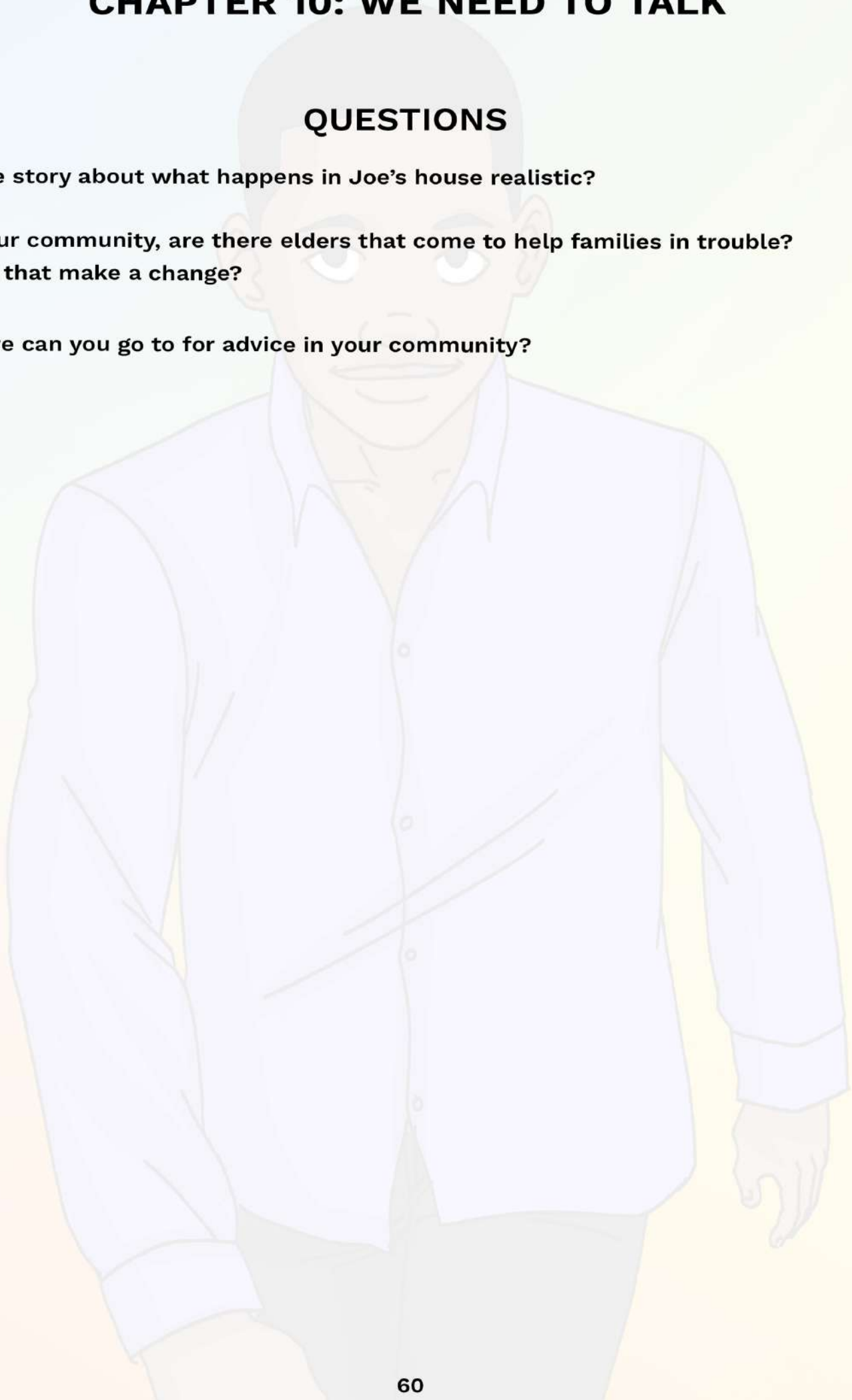




CHAPTER 10: WE NEED TO TALK

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about what happens in Joe's house realistic?
2. In your community, are there elders that come to help families in trouble?
Does that make a change?
3. Where can you go to for advice in your community?



CHAPTER ELEVEN



"What makes a real man ?"



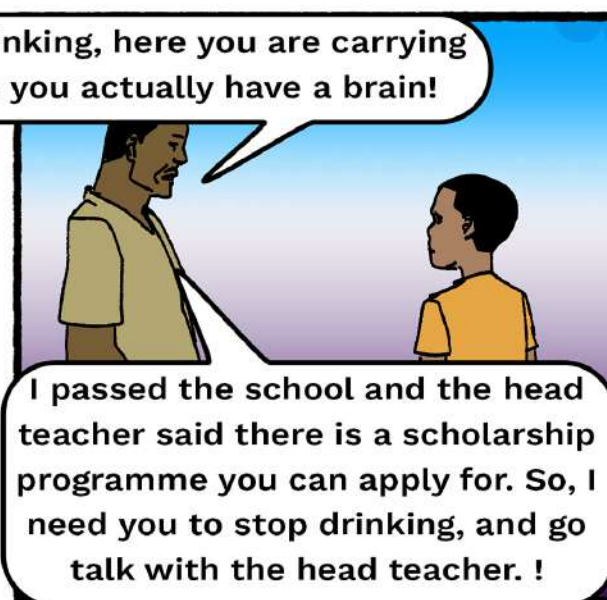
The day after I got home so drunk and stoned, I went off to the market early. I was just loading some wood for Marco's father in a van when I saw my father arriving. I was worried he would embarrass me in public by shouting at me for my behaviour



Joe, we have to talk for a minute.



Sure.



Joe, I have been thinking, here you are carrying heavy loads, while you actually have a brain!

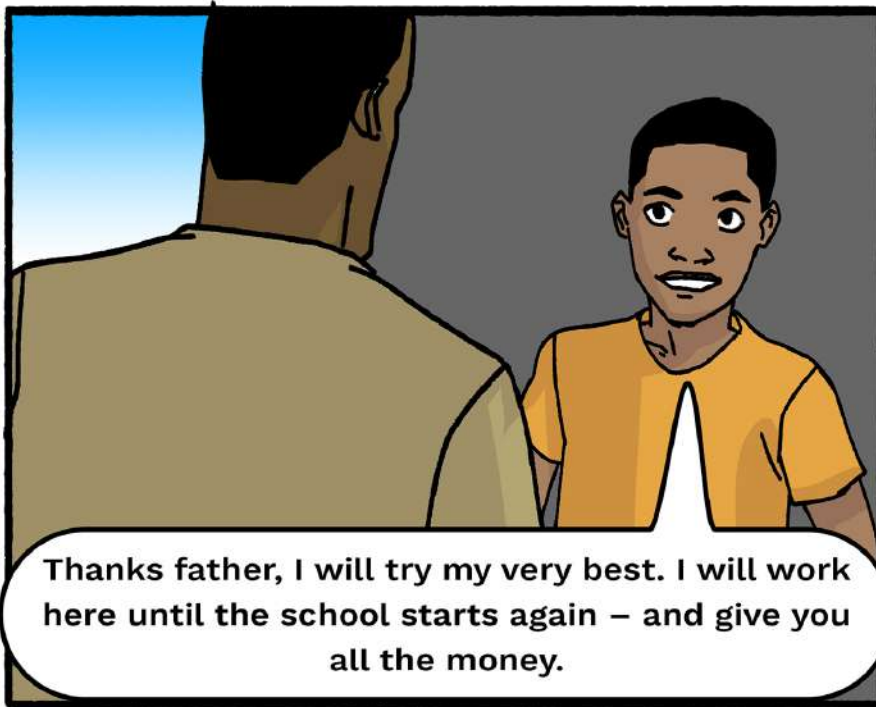
I passed the school and the head teacher said there is a scholarship programme you can apply for. So, I need you to stop drinking, and go talk with the head teacher. !



Wow, father. That would be all I want! Are you sure you don't need me to work anymore?

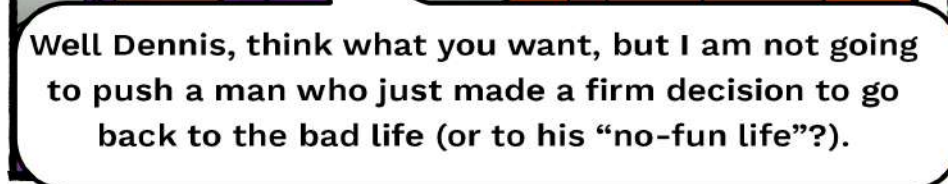


Yes, yes, I will improve a couple of things too in our household. So it won't be easy, but you can go to school.



I was so happy, that I could nearly cry. I suddenly saw my future again with a clear head. I continued to load the van with lots of energy. At the end of the afternoon, my friends came to pick me up and go to The Corner.







The boys walk away laughing. Joe goes home.



That day, for the first time in weeks, I came home at 5 PM. My mother's face looked so pleased, that I started to feel so guilty about what I had done to her. My father came home soon after me and looked equally pleased. After we ate, my father and me sat in front of our house sipping some tea.



Joe, let's be real men again. We don't drink. We take care of mother and your sisters. You will try your best at school



Yes, father, I will do that.

CHAPTER 11: WHAT MAKES A REAL MAN?

QUESTIONS

1. Is the story about what happens in Joe's life realistic?
2. What made Joe decide to stop drinking? Do you think he will succeed?
3. Will Joe and his father be considered real men in your community?
4. Do you think Joe will be able to go to school again?

CHAPTER TWELVE



"My work as a nurse"

This is almost the end of my story. The decision to stop drinking and smoking changed everything.



I went to the headteacher with my father. I passed the test for the scholarship programme and I could start again with school in January. As it was only October then, I had to be strong for a few more months.



Working at the market was full of temptations to go back to drinking and smoking. I needed to focus on my goal to go back to school all the time. I saw my old friends walking to The Corner every day.



However, I tried to think of the smile on my mothers' face when I would come home at 5 PM. Also my father was a lot more relaxed, because now I brought home all the money I made per day.



My father also stopped drinking and tried to save up some money, for the time I would be in school again.

I successfully finished secondary school and I was in the top 5 of the class with my grades.



However, I had to give up on my dream to become a medical doctor.

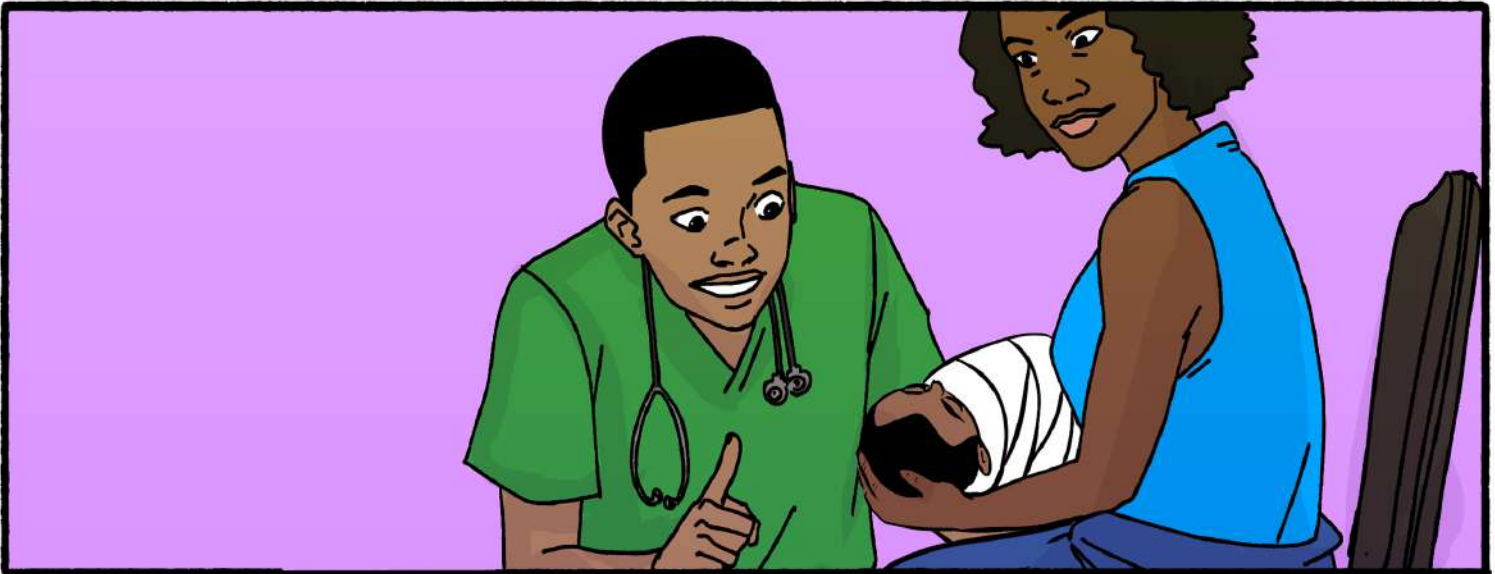


There was no way for my father to send me to university in another country. However, the headteacher pointed out an institute in Bangui to become a nurse.



My father found the means to send me there because the harvest was better again and I am now in my second year. As there is so much need for nurses in our town, I already started my internship and I support the health centre during my holidays.

I help at the consultations for babies, among other things.



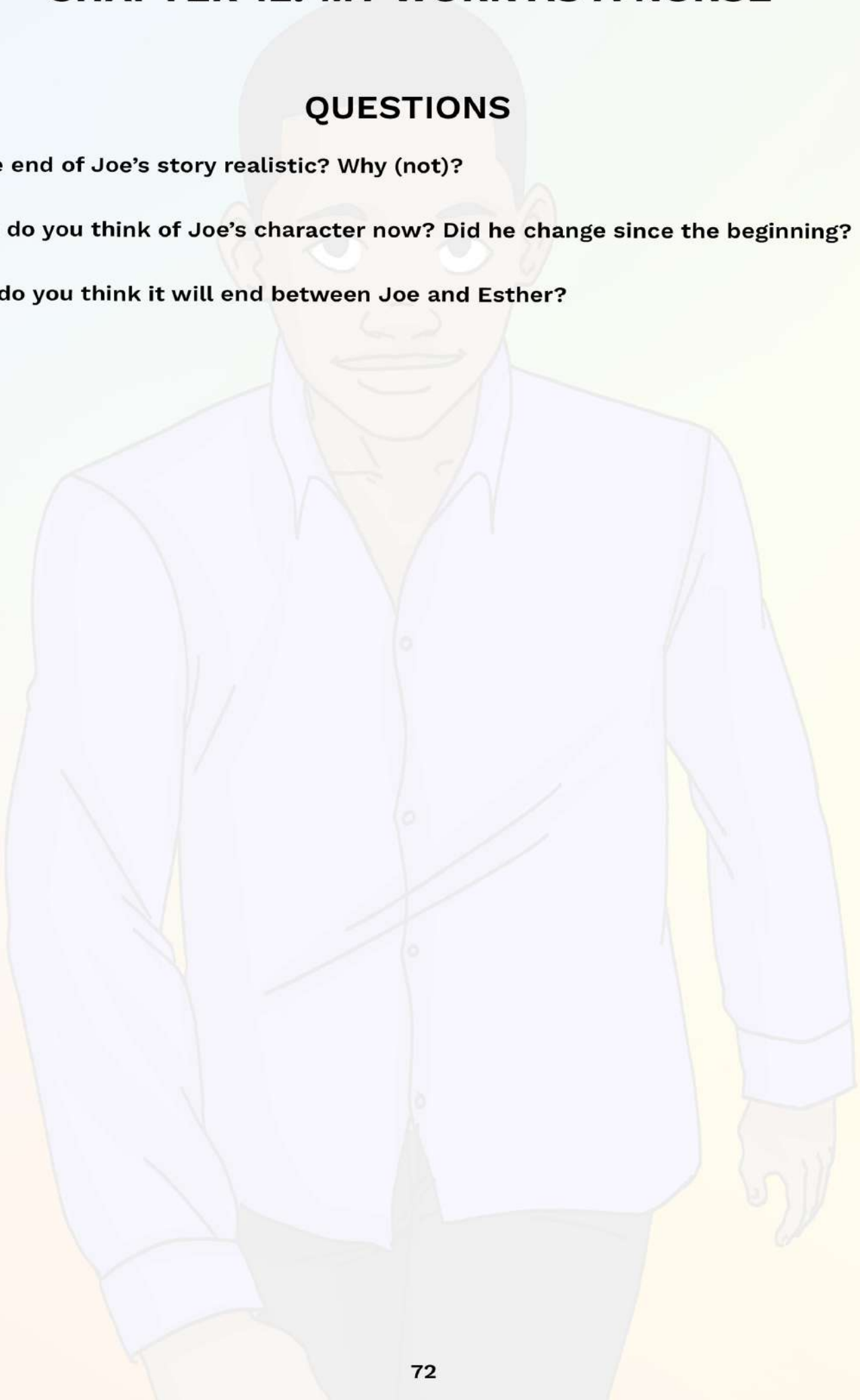
I am very proud of my decisions already – and will be even more proud when I graduate and officially become a nurse.



CHAPTER 12: MY WORK AS A NURSE

QUESTIONS

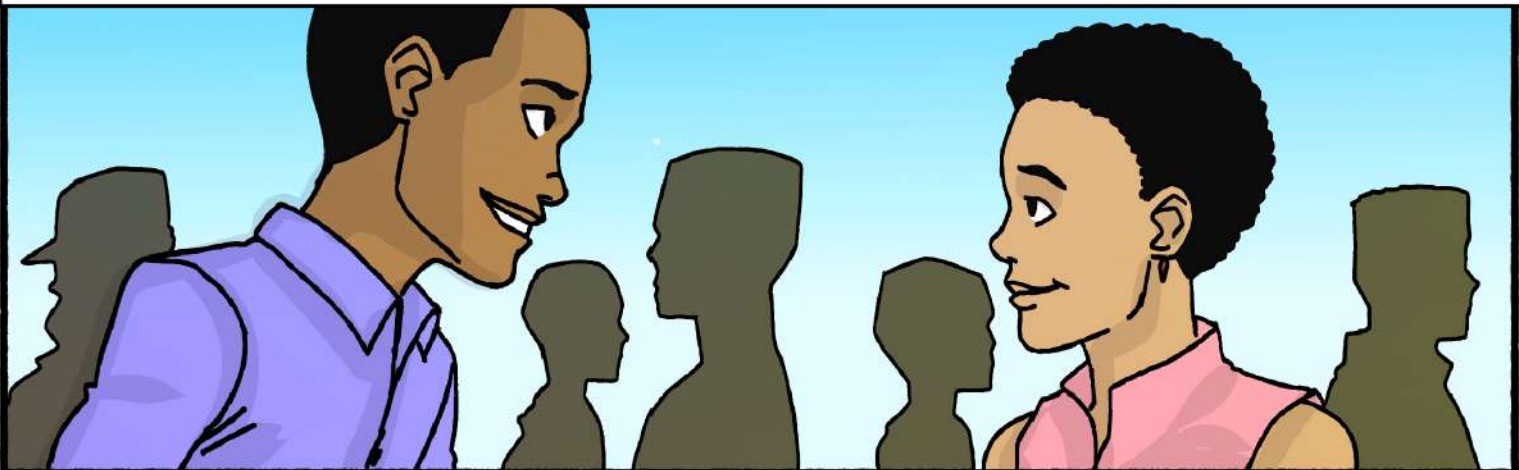
1. Is the end of Joe's story realistic? Why (not)?
2. What do you think of Joe's character now? Did he change since the beginning?
3. How do you think it will end between Joe and Esther?



EPILOGUE



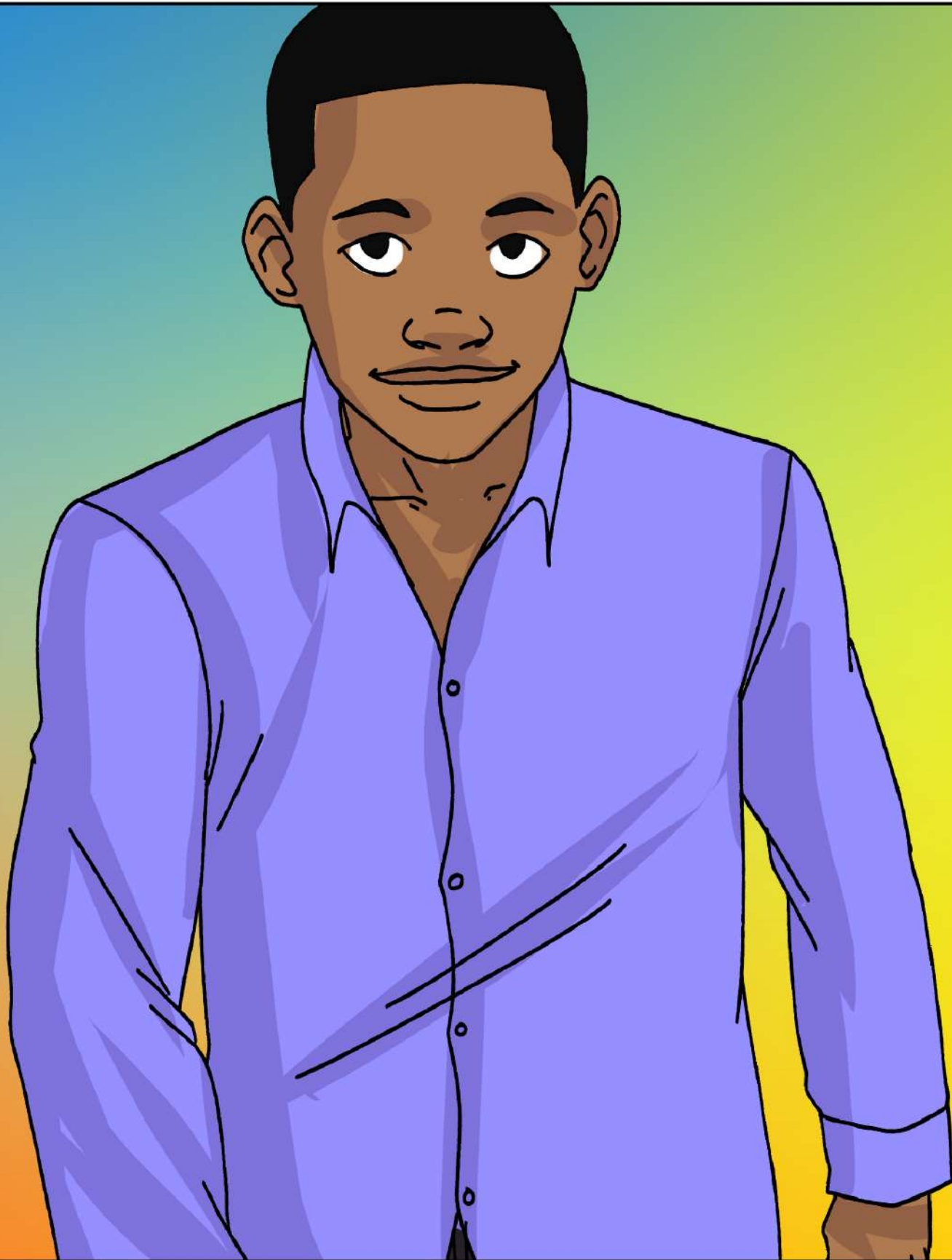
I saw Esther the other day, she was wearing beautiful clothes and was on her way to the bus station. She told me she would go to university in Senegal. I was so happy for her and told her "That is great news Esther, I wish you all the best of luck. But please do come back. Our community needs you. And I would be very pleased to see you again. Don't forget me."



She blushed and walked on. I don't know what she was thinking, but I felt happy either way that I had the courage to tell her that. I do hope she will think of me when she is in Senegal. Maybe, we can stay in touch with Facetime or otherwise see each other during her holidays



**I hope you learned something from my stories and it will help you in the future to make positive decisions, while you grow up to be “a real man”.
Stay focused on your life goal.**



Never forget that: “Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.”

