CHEN

CHEN AND DANIEL ARE INSEPARABLE

MY STOP’S NEXT, I’LL TEXT YOU LATER, YEAH?

CHEN, IS THAT YOU HOME?

HAVE YOU FINISHED PACKING? WE HAVE TO LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT IN TWO HOURS.

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MADE SURE YOU PACK SOME NEAT CLOTHING.

WE’LL BE VISITING SOME OF DANNY’S FRIENDS AND WANT TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION.

DO YOU THINK THAT WE’RE DOING THE RIGHT THING?

I’M SURE WE’LL GROW OUT OF IT.

IT’S ALL GOOD, FOR HIM IT’S JUST THE WAY IT’S DONE. THAT’S THE WAY WE MET, REMEMBER?

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Let’s talk about Chen: Discussion question and key points
Chen’s story shows that boys and men can be forced into marriage as well. It highlights homosexuality and ethnically mixed relationships as risk factors. Chen’s parents are also motivated by tradition, which can be another cause of forced marriage. The story demonstrates that not only male but also female family members can be the driving force behind a forced marriage. The empty panel on the first page offers an opportunity to discuss possibilities for resistance and intervention. The story’s ending allows for a discussion of different forms of consensual relationships, what commitment can look like, and why people might want to be in committed relationships.

1. Why is Chen forced to marry?
Explain that people can be forced into a marriage for many reasons. People force their children to get married because they are worried about the family’s 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 ensure what they consider to be a better and safe future for their children; to pay off a family debt; because they do not want their children to have relationships or sex; or because they do not approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The latter seems to be the motivation for Chen’s parents to force him into a marriage, together with him being in a relationship with someone from a different community and Chen’s mother’s wish to follow tradition. We can tell that Chen does not want to leave Daniel and be introduced to his grandfather’s friends from the shocked expression on his face when he overhears his parents’ conversation. He literally had to sit down when he heard his parents’ plan. He might be wringing his hands anxiously, unable to focus on his packing, or unwilling to continue with it. The story also highlights that men and boys can be forced into a marriage as well. It does not only affect women and girls.

2. What happens in panel 6?
Discuss possible interventions. Chen could take out his phone and message Daniel or another person he trusts. He could also reach out to the Forced Marriage Unit. Because Chen’s family is preparing to go abroad and get Chen married there, the Forced Marriage Unit can contact the relevant embassy. Chen could also contact organisations that work to end forced marriage, like Karma Nirvana and Savera UK, or the police.

3. Did Chen have to marry Daniel?
Same-sex marriage is legal in the UK and same-sex married couples have the same rights and obligations as heterosexual spouses.\(^1\) However, emphasise that marriage is not the only way people can be in a committed relationship. Instead, people could enter a civil partnership. People could cohabit without being married or partnered, or they might live apart and still be in a committed long-term relationship. You might want to discuss what commitment can look like in a relationship. For example commitment can mean spending quality time together; regular open and honest communication; treating their partner with respect; building trust; fostering emotional intimacy; offering unwavering support and encouragement; mutual growth and compromise; and planning for the future. You might also want to discuss why people get into committed relationships. Some of the

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\(^1\) Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.
reasons are that people might seek emotional connection, love, affection, companionship, support, intimacy, and/or long-term stability. When discussing different forms of committed relationships, it is important to remember that marriage can be an important part of religion and culture and people may want to follow this tenet. But again, this should also be a matter of choice and not forced. Both Chen and Daniel are smiling and happy in the final image of the comic. They are holding hands, and their bodies are turned towards each other. This indicates they have consented joyfully to their marriage, and that they have a close and affectionate bond. If students challenge the idea of same-sex relationships, remind them of the ground rules which are likely to include respect and being non-judgemental. Emphasise that the point of this exercise is not to discuss sexuality as such, or what we think is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The purpose is to look at the comic and analyse its story. You might want to refer back to the UK’s legal position that allows homosexuality.