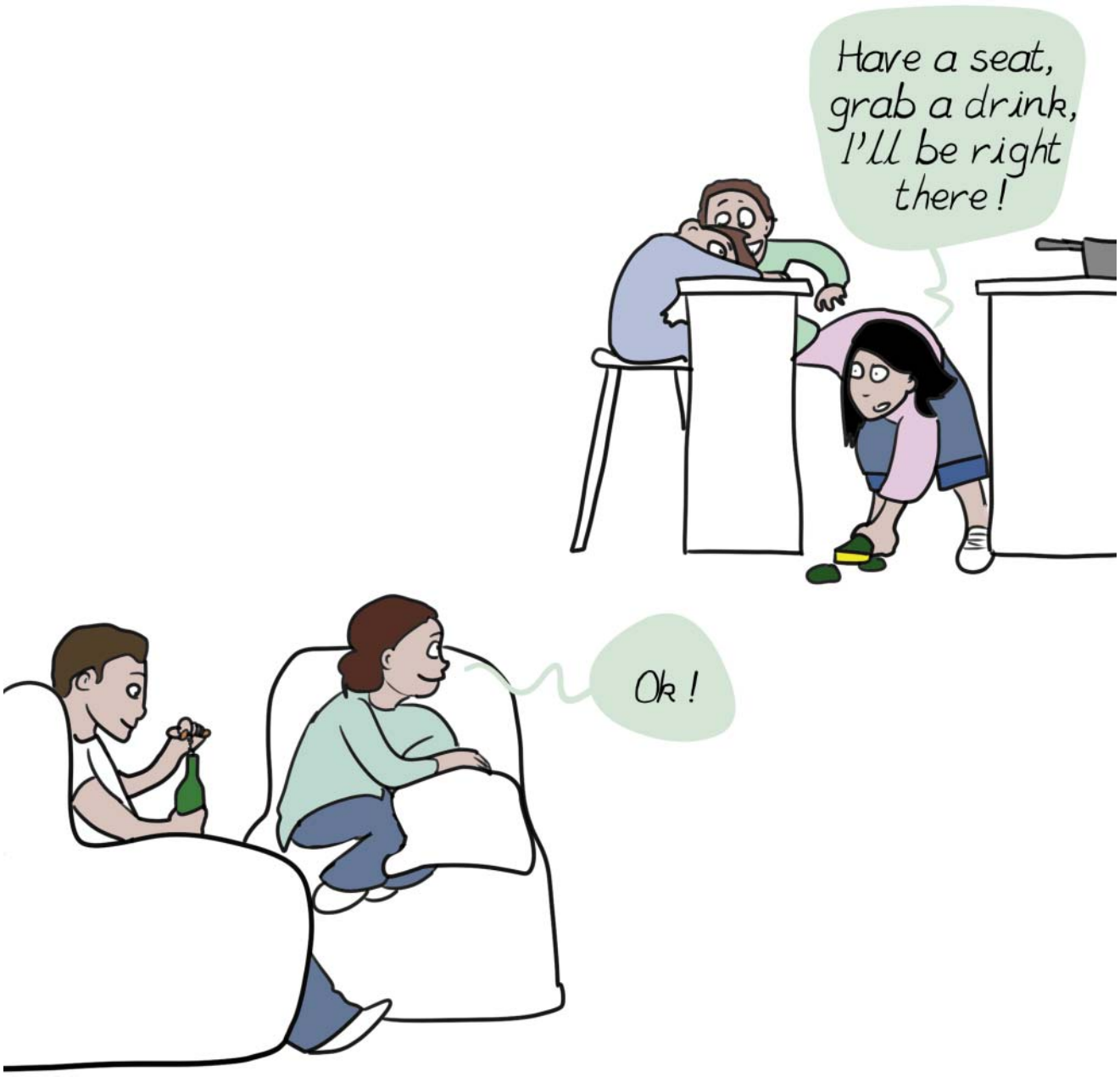
You should've asked

Back when I was in my first job, a colleague invited me over for dinner.

When I got there, she was trying to feed her kids while preparing our meal.

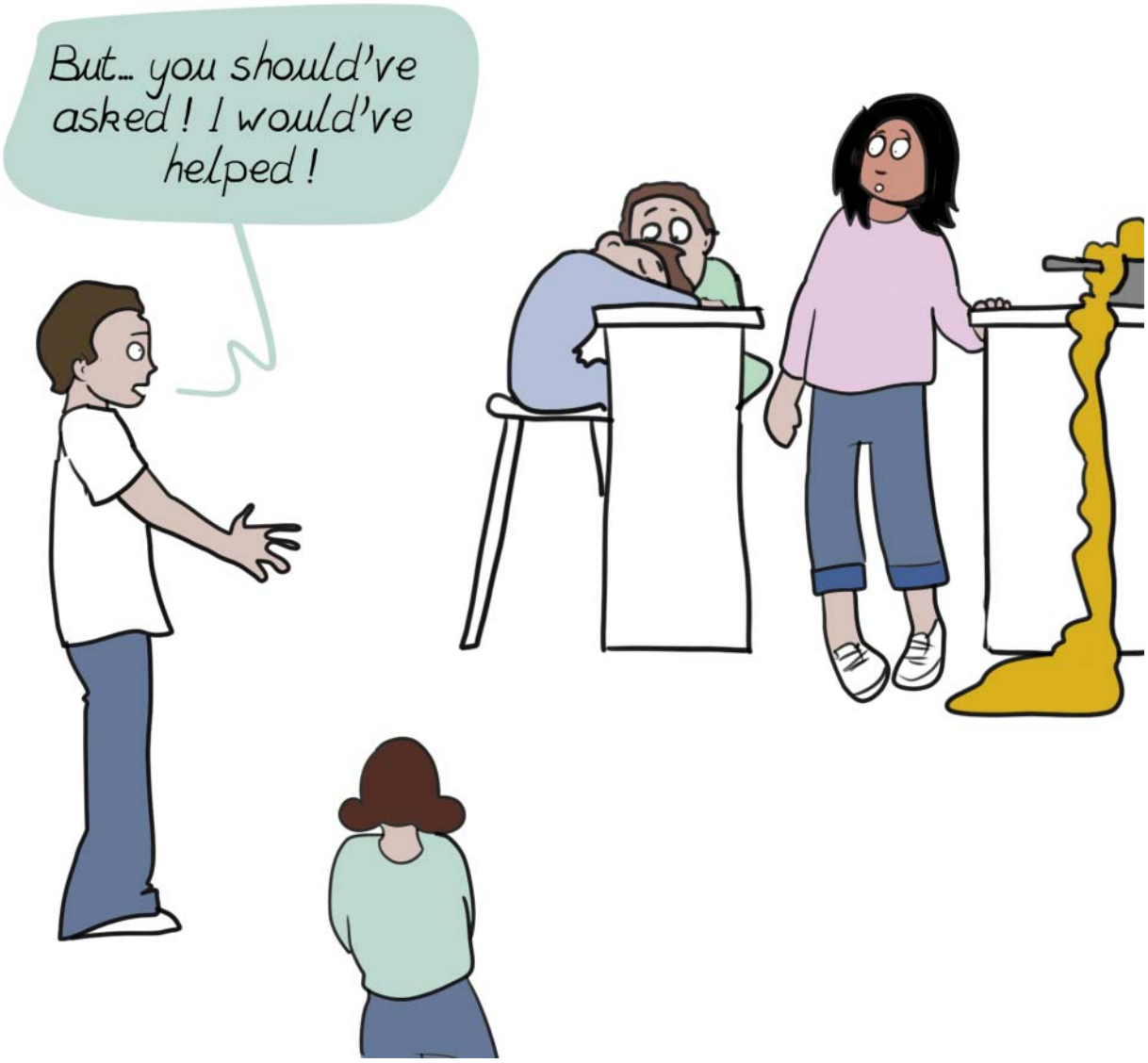

Have a seat, grab a drink, I'll be right there!
Ok!

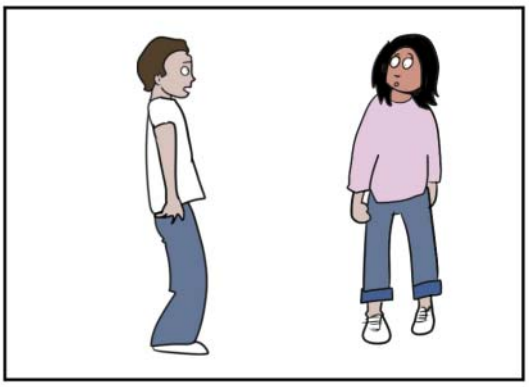
After a while, the pot started to overflow...

...and everything spilled onto the floor.

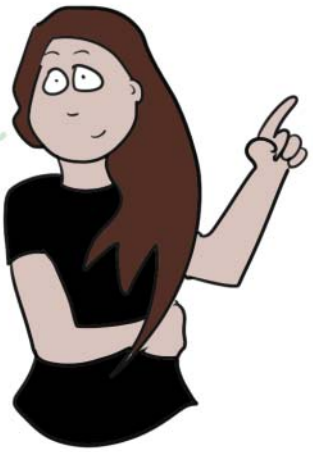
What a disaster!
What did you do?

What do you mean what did I do? I did EVERYTHING, that's what I did!


But... you should've asked ! I would've helped !

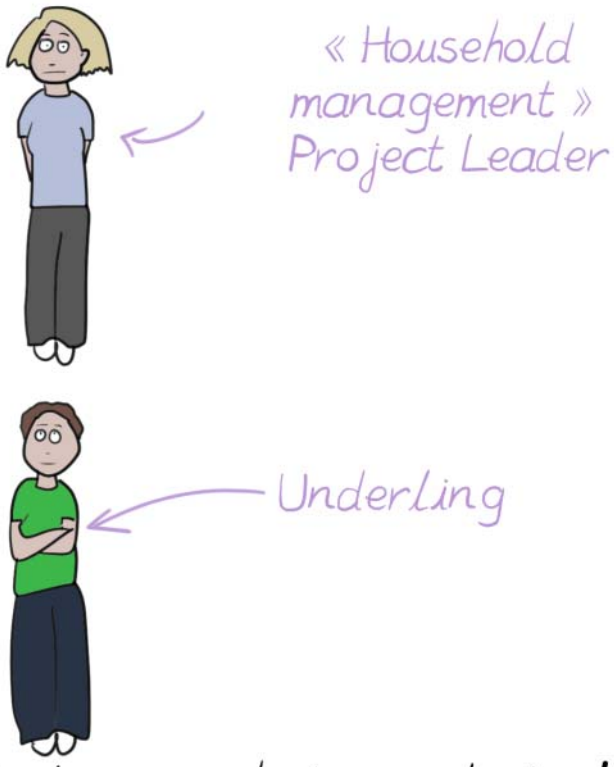


It's a scene that must seem familiar to many new parents.



And I thought it said a lot about how things get organised at that stage in our lives.

When a man expects his partner to **ask him to do things**, he's viewing her as the manager of household chores.



So it's up to her to know what needs to be done and when.

The problem with that, is that planning and organising things is **already** a full-time job.

At work, once I started managing projects, I quickly stopped participating in them. I didn't have the time.

So when we ask women to take on this task of organisation, and at the same time to execute a large portion, in the end it represents 75% of the work.

Feminists call this work **the mental load.**

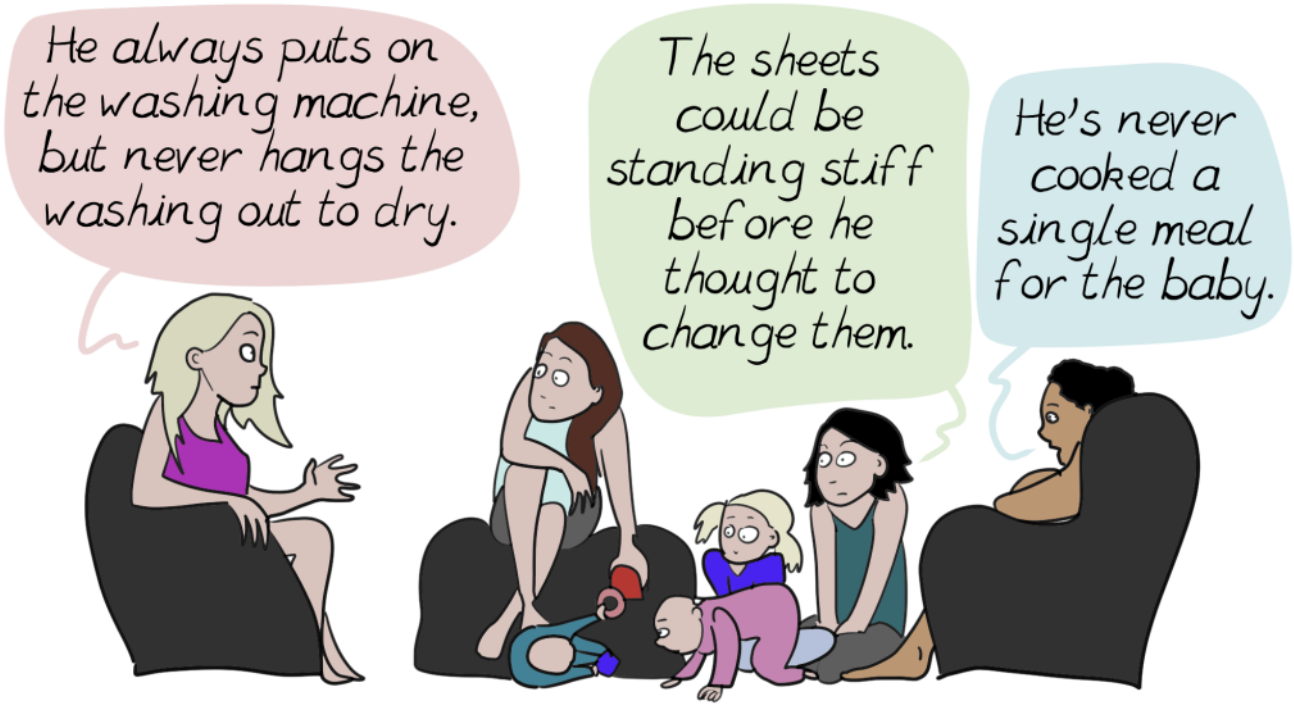
The mental load means always having to remember.

That the baby grew another 3cm and can't fit into his trousers anymore,
that he needs to get his booster shot,
or that your partner doesn't have a clean shirt left.
BIP

The mental load is almost completely borne by women.

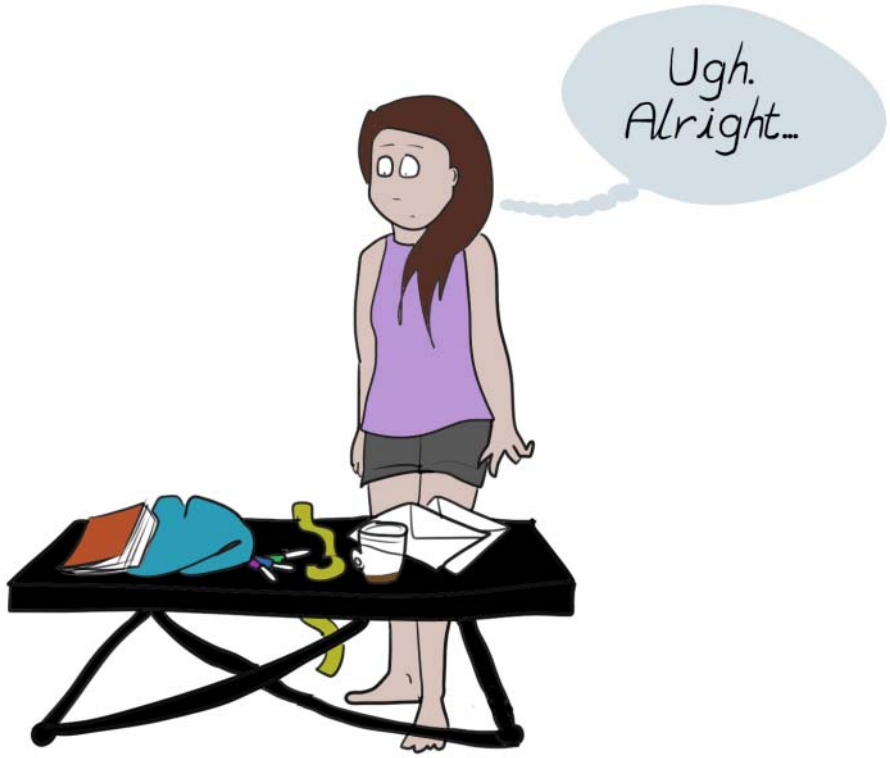
It's permanent and exhausting work.
And it's invisible.

So while most heterosexual men I know say that they do their fair share of household chores,



their partners have a rather different perspective.

For me, the fact that this load exists becomes obvious when I decide to take care of a simple chore, like clearing the table.



I start by picking something up to put it away,

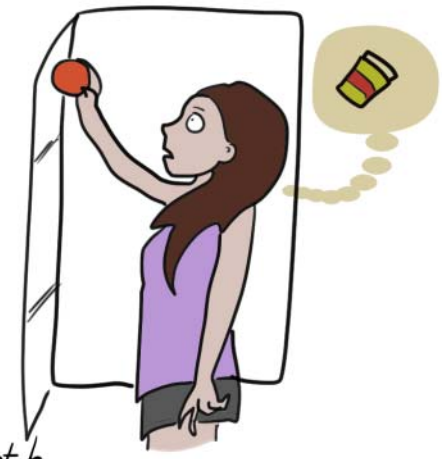
but on the way I come across a dirty towel that I go put in the laundry basket,

which I find full.

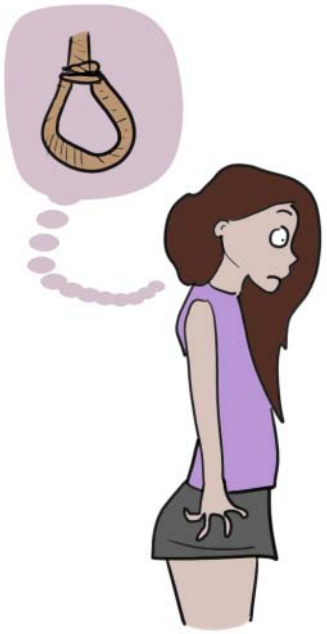
So I go to the washing machine,

...and I see the vegetables that I need to put in the fridge.

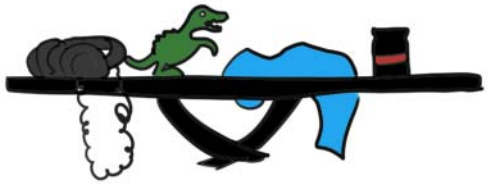
As I'm putting away the vegetables, I realise that I need to add mustard to the shopping list.



And so on and so forth.
In the end, I'll have cleared away my table after 2 long hours.



Only to find it covered in stuff again later that evening.



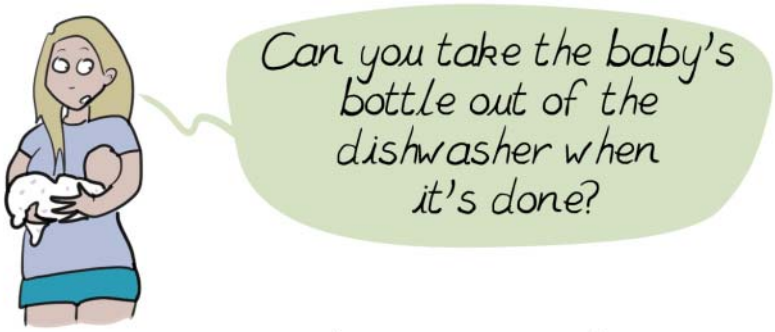
If I ask my partner to clear the table, he'll just clear the table.

The towel will stay on the floor,

the vegetables will rot on the kitchen counter,

and we won't have any more mustard for dinner.

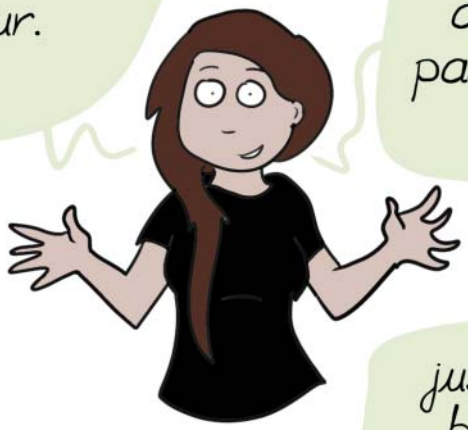
It's like when my friend J., on her way to bed, asked her husband:



... and getting up for the first nightly feed found the dishwasher open, with just the bottle on the counter, and everything else still inside.

What our partners are really saying, when they ask us to tell them what needs to be done, is that they **refuse to take on their share of the mental load.**

Of course, there's nothing genetic or innate about this behaviour.



We're not born with an all-consuming passion for clearing tables,

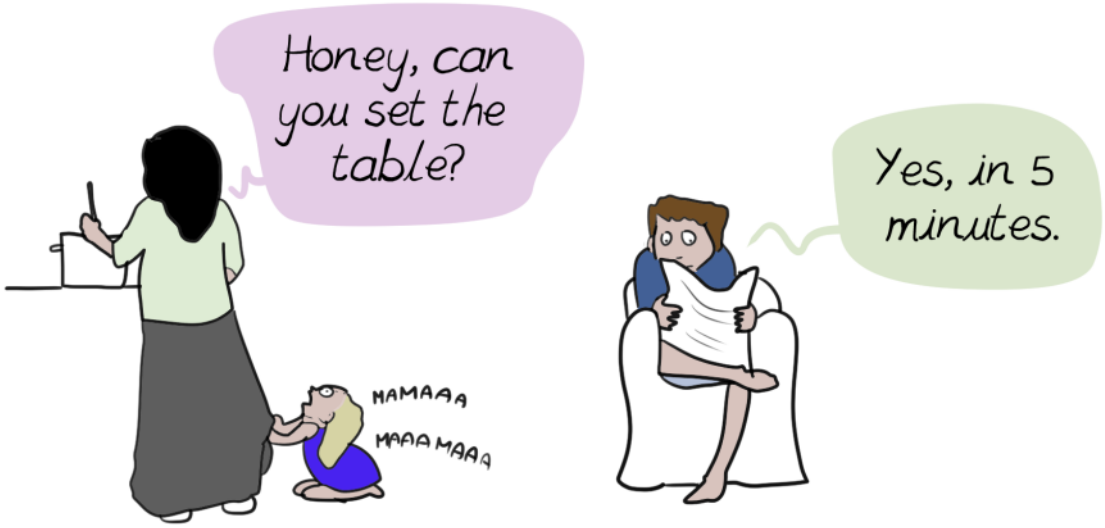
just like boys aren't born with an utter disinterest for things lying around.

But we're born into a society,

In which very early on, we're given dolls and miniature vacuum cleaners,

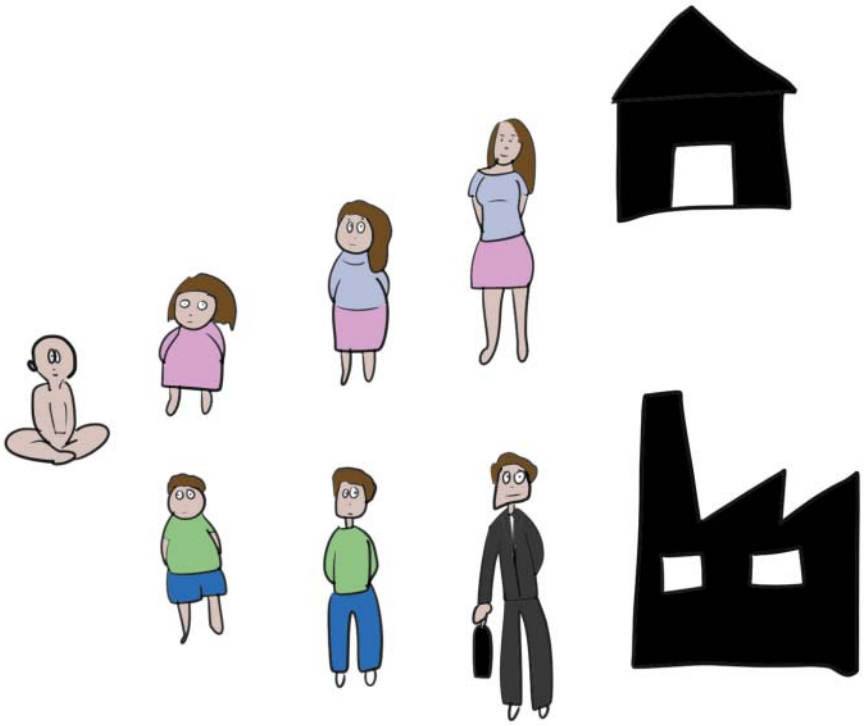
And in which it seems shameful for boys to like those same toys.

In which we see our mothers in charge of household management, while our fathers only execute the instructions.



And in which culture and media essentially portray women as mothers and wives, while men are heroes who go on fascinating adventures away from home.

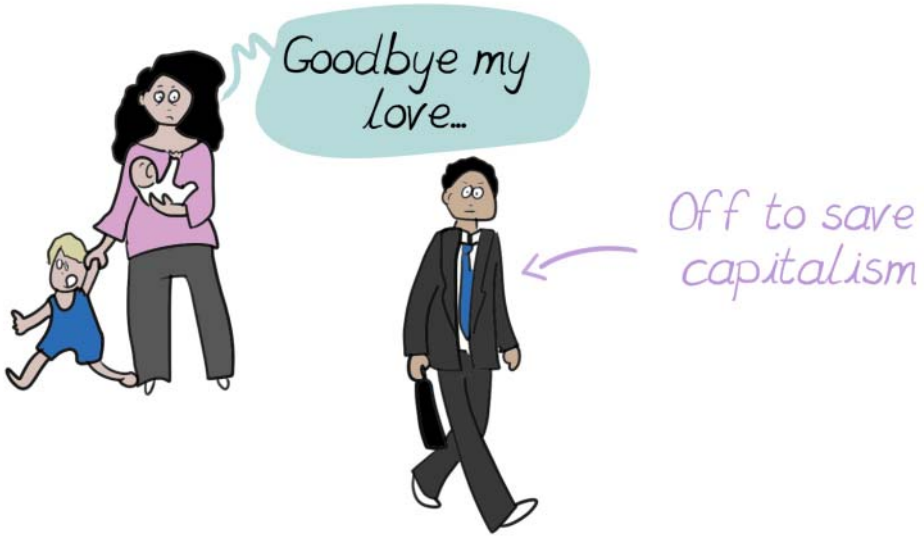
This conditioning will take effect from our earliest years, and on into adulthood.



And while women are more and more present in the workforce, they still remain the only ones in charge of the household.

When we become mothers, this double responsibility blows up in our face.

11 days after we go through the ordeal of giving birth, our partner goes back to work.



And it seems normal to him.

During this time, while recovering from our stitches in between two sleepless nights, we'll be thinking about everything that concerns the baby.

Choosing a nanny...

... buying clothes...

... medical check-ups...

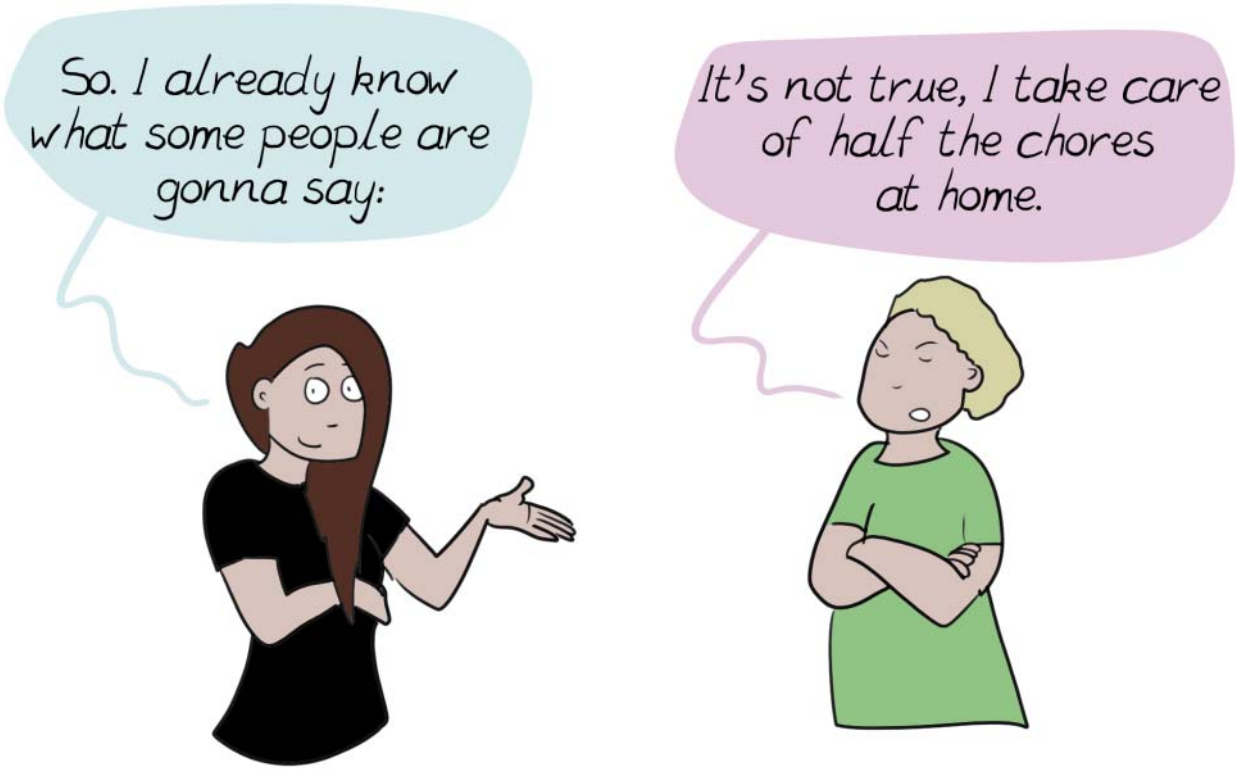
... preparing meals.

And once we're back at work, things will get so hellish that it will feel less exhausting to keep doing everything rather than to battle with our partner so that he does his share.

That's why you find fathers with children who are already a few years old, and who still don't know where to buy their clothes, what to feed them, when they need their next vaccination, or even the nanny's phone number.

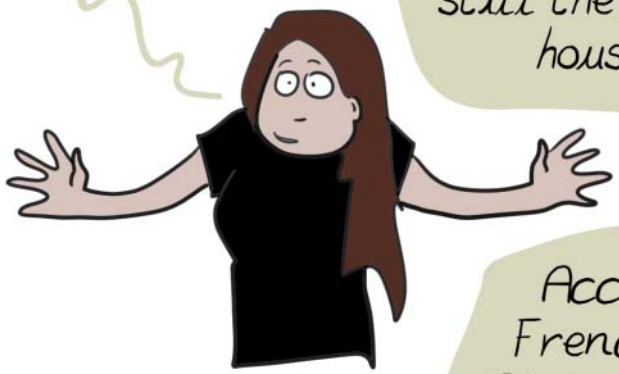
Of course, there's nothing forcing us to do all this.
The problem is that when we stop, the whole family suffers.

So most of us feel resigned to the fact that we are alone in bearing the mental load, nibbling away at our work or leisure time just so we can manage everything.


So. I already know what some people are gonna say:
It's not true, I take care of half the chores at home.

In that case, just as well! (But try and confirm it with your partner)

If things are like that in your home, it still doesn't change the problem: statistically, women are still the ones managing household tasks.



According to the French Institute of Statistics, women are still devoting 2.5 times more hours to chores than men.

And if this gap has been narrowing, it's not because men are doing more...
... but because wealthier households outsource these tasks, most often to poor immigrant women.
We can't really say that it's a good solution.

No, for things to change, it seems clear that men have to learn to feel that their home is also their responsibility.

For a start, it would be good if fathers insisted on their right to be with their family in the first months of their child's life.

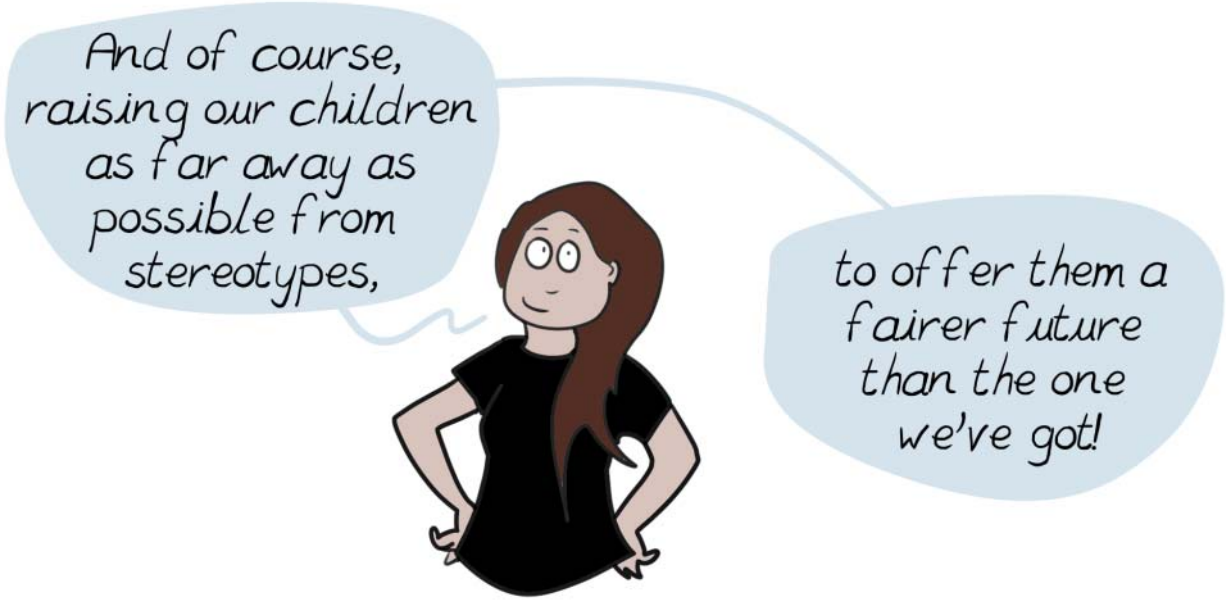
Right now, only feminists are demanding longer paternity leave, and without much success. It's time to take the lead!

It can also help to start from the beginning, and to divide up recurrent and non-critical chores

even if that means becoming a bit more tolerant of stuff lying around!

And also, sometimes simply leaving the house without preparing everything beforehand, and not feeling guilty about it!

A role reversal can often be more effective than confrontation.


And of course, raising our children as far away as possible from stereotypes,
to offer them a fairer future than the one we've got!

POSTED IN FEMINISM

1,744 thoughts on “You should’ve asked”

1. **Erica Sampson**
   SAYS:
   25 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 20 H 04 MIN
   I think what bothers me is that I shouldn’t HAVE to ask! A man has eyes and can see what needs to be done. Shopping has to be unloaded, dishwashers need emptying, dirty kids need their faces washed, laundry needs folding etc etc. Its not new…these things are daily occurrences and have been