SHADOWS BEHIND THE SCREEN:

A Story of Child Trafficking

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INTRODUCTION

This graphic novel is about Blue, victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Blue met her trafficker online and started to engage with him through different online platforms. After the exchange of intimate messages, pictures and videos, she realises that something is wrong... but too late. Shadow blackmails her into meeting in-person, when the sexual exploitation starts.

The graphic novel aims to provide an **interactive learning experience** that demonstrates how digital evidence can be effectively used through the three main stages of the criminal justice procedure in human trafficking cases: victim identification, evidence collection, and trial. By exploring these stages, the graphic novel highlights the potential and challenges of integrating digital evidence and tools into criminal investigations.

This graphic novel is designed in a **pick-a-path** format, meaning that at key stages of the criminal procedure—such as victim identification, evidence collection, and trial—the reader can choose which path to follow. At each stage, the reader will choose between three possible directions:

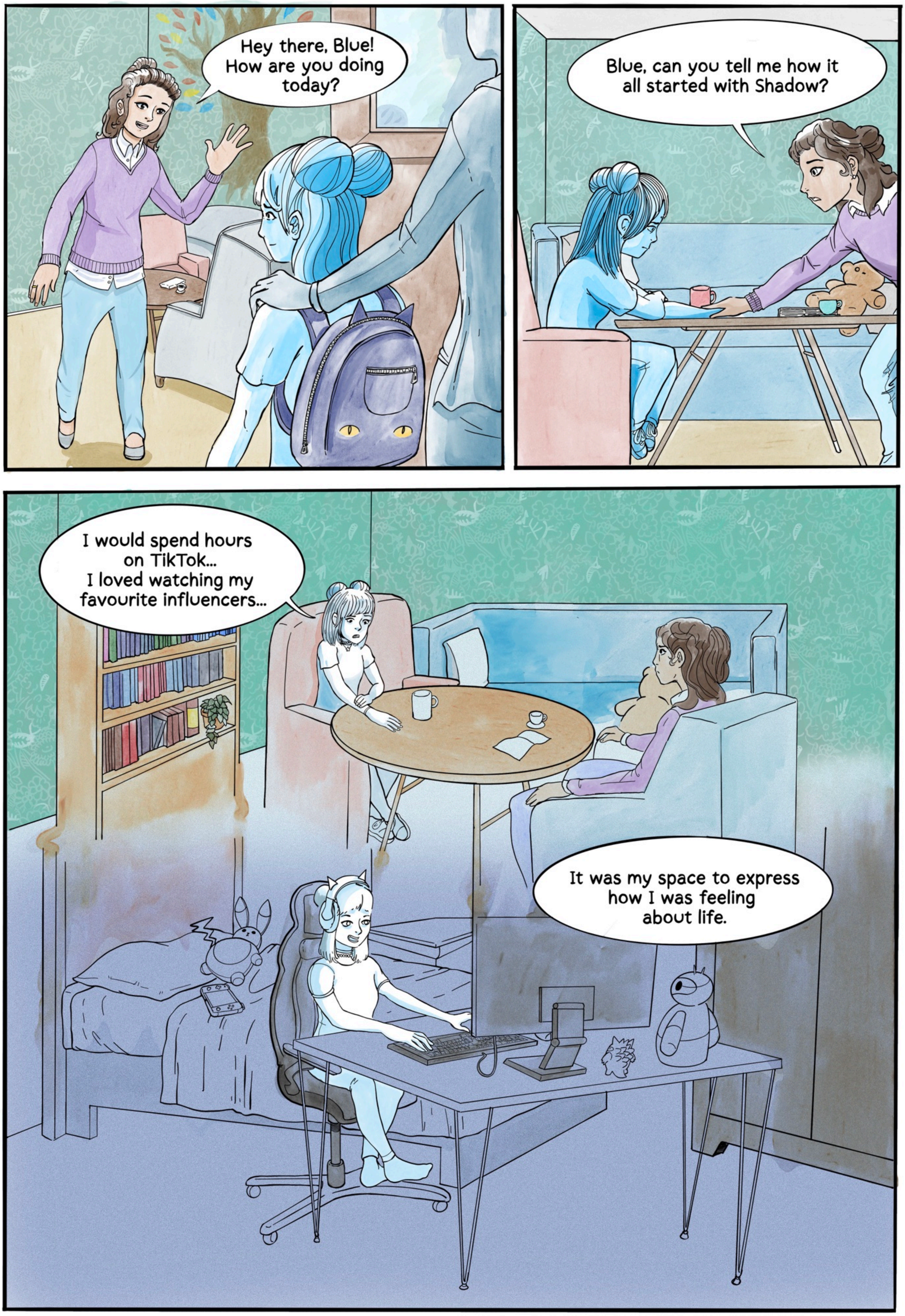
Path 1 demonstrates the positive impact of using digital evidence and tools.
Path 2 shows how professionals may handle a case with limited reliance on digital evidence and tools.
Path 3 represents how missed opportunities can lead to unresolved cases, underscoring the fragility of human trafficking cases



At the end of each chapter, the reader will find an explanatory section providing further context on the events depicted in the story. These sections provide additional information related to victim identification, evidence collection, and prosecution, drawing connections between the fictional narrative and real-world procedures. They aim to support practitioners in reflecting on current approaches and learning from practical insights.

This graphic novel was developed as part of the **DISRUPT** project, which aims to strengthen professionals' capacities in conducting digital evidence-based investigations, prosecutions, and judicial responses in cases of child trafficking for sexual exploitation.

PROLOGUE


Hey there, Blue! How are you doing today?
Blue, can you tell me how it all started with Shadow?
I would spend hours on TikTok... I loved watching my favourite influencers...
It was my space to express how I was feeling about life.

I would also make my own content, about gaming for example! And I would meet so many nice persons through these videos!

I loved disappearing into the world of TikTok, because I felt so sad and lonely at school and at home.

Not now, Blue.

TikTok was my safe space when Shadow started commenting on it.

Following For You

47 comments

@user018
nice.
2h
0

@shadow
I love your videos!
U have such a cool vibe.
1h
1

@Blue
Aw thank u! This was good to read, im lonley these days.
1h
2

@shadow
Lonley?! How? Ur so much cooler than other kids on this app
1h
1

@Blue
Oh, really:)?
1h
1

@shadow
yes, dm me back))
1
Add comment...

I liked his compliments...
I liked feeling special.

Soon, texting Shadow became a part of my every day life.

Telegram

All 13
Personal 3
Group
Channels 4
Bots
Favorites 2
Story 4

Shadow
Added you!

We exchanged numbers and started talking over Telegram.

Shadow made my days bearable.

It felt like I had a new special friend.

It was nice to have someone so close to talk about anything to.

We started talking about more than just gaming. Shadow seemed to really understand me--

--how my parents didn't get why I loved gaming...

...or how nervous I was about the future...

...Our messages become more and more romantic.

Shadow, I think I like u...

Blue...I feel the same way.

Reallllly:)???

One night, Shadow asked for a picture...to "feel closer", he said.

I WANT TO SEE U, BLUE.

I was nervous but didn't want to seem weird, so I sent one.

He sent one back. It felt...normal, I guess.

ur turn:)

We started to share more intimate messages and pictures. It was quite exciting, because I couldn't talk about this stuff with my parents or at school.

Telegram

All

Soo sexy, Blu!

u think so?:)

not as sexy as u;)

He began to use words like "I love you", "I miss you" and "You're the only girl for me," ...And I believed him.

To prove I trusted him, we exchanged our social media passwords.

Password for all social media: GamerBlue2009

Shadow: Don't u trust me?

Blue: I have nothing to hide from you.

At first sending more revealing photos to Shadow was fun....

But Shadow was posting my pictures on another Instagram account that he created for me...

Blu u r sooo sexy, I want to show u off on IG!

Are u sure..?

I didn't feel 100% comfortable with this, but he kept on telling me...

..He started asking me for videos... I wanted to draw the line there.

If you love me, you would do this for me...

When I tried to stop, Shadow posted a nude on the story of my personal account for 5 minutes!
I was so horrified that all my friends would see this picture, it was the worst feeling.

Blue, don't use your phone at the table.

Your Story

Shadow took the picture offline, but I was so afraid...

Shadow, I want to stop.

I can't let you go Blue, you're too special! I need to see you in real life!! Please meet me next week, after that I promise I'll stop with everything!

I couldn't say no...

...imagine what else he could have posted!

I couldn't stop anymore, he had this kind of power over me.

At this point, our relationship was consuming all my time.

I felt alone... and trapped.

I didn't talk to my friends, I avoided my parents...

Are u okay?

Where are you?

Blue?!!

A few days later, Shadow told me that he would pick me up after school.
He told me again that he would post videos of me on my Instagram if I wouldn't agree

Telegram
STORY
FAVOURITES
Blue
Client 1
Client 2
Client 3
Contacts
Client 1 is typing...
Client 1
Client 3
Blue
Client 5
NEW 💗💗🌷🌸 IS AVAILABLE...
SOUNDS GOOD. WHAT ELSE?
THE USUAL SPOT. YOU WANT 🍆🐷🐷?
💎💎 IN ADVANCE
🧀🍕 ALSO AVAILAE

See u there? I'll handle transport.

I thought he wanted to meet so we could talk about everything... I had no clue what he was actually planning...

Did you bring your ID, Blue?

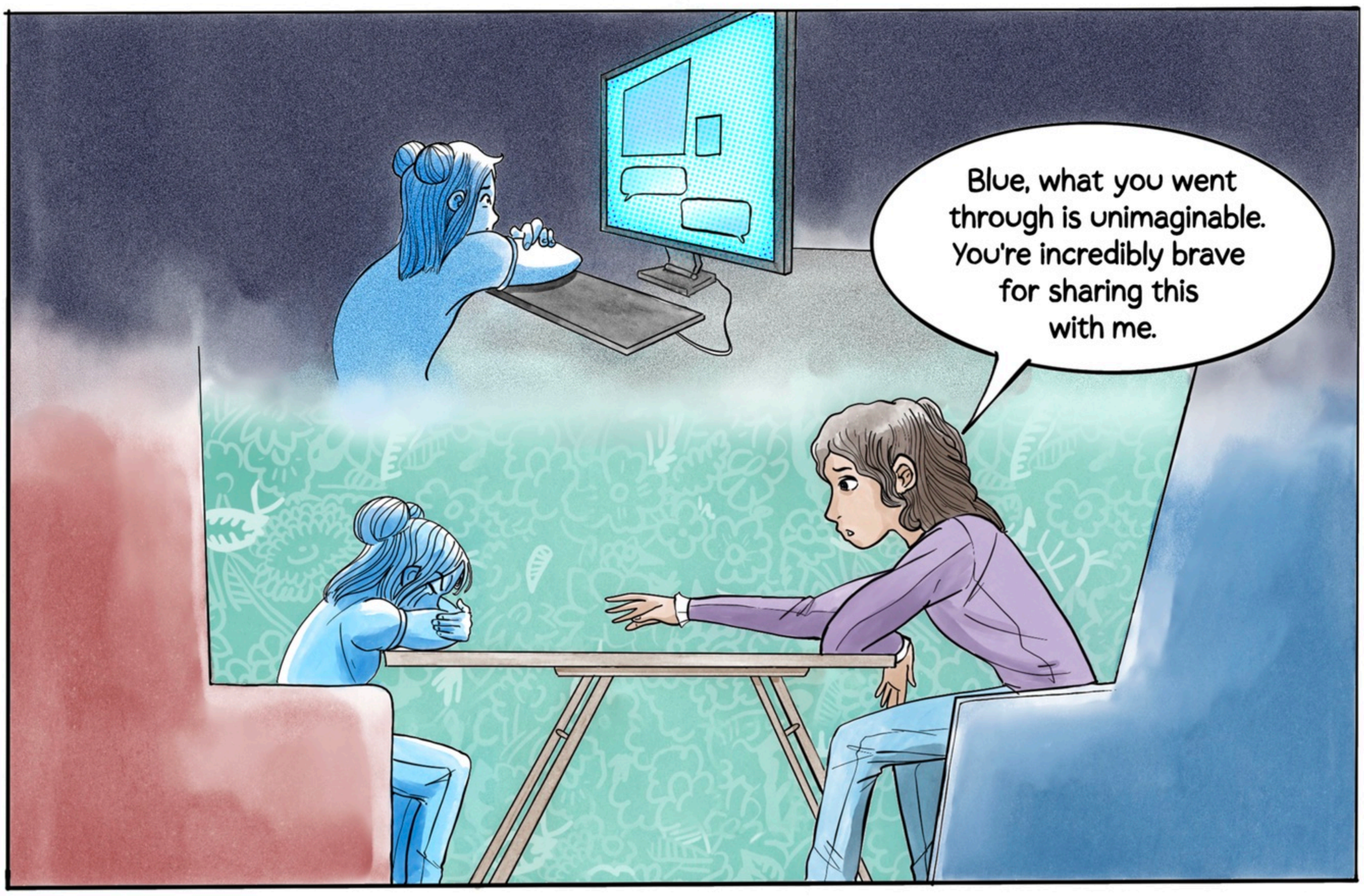
I felt so scared, but I didn't want to make him angry...

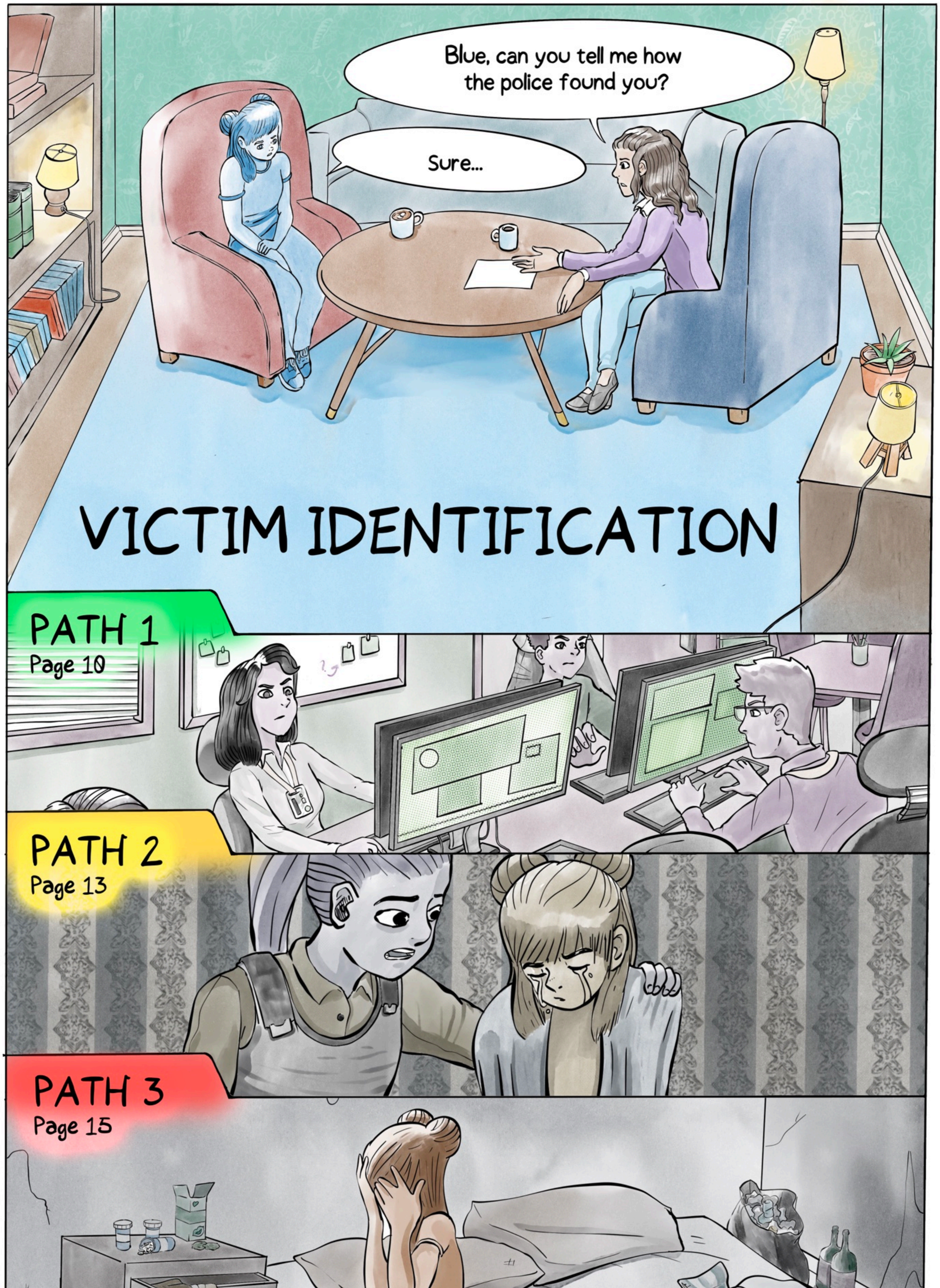
He picked me up by car and we drove to Belgium

BELGIUM

But when we arrived there, it turned out it was much worse than I expected.

...there was nothing I could do...


Blue, what you went through is unimaginable. You're incredibly brave for sharing this with me.


Blue, can you tell me how the police found you?
Sure...
VICTIM IDENTIFICATION
PATH 1
Page 10
PATH 2
Page 13
PATH 3
Page 15

PATH 1

Alright, team! Today we're focusing on the trafficking network of Shadow!

We're looking for any signs of recent activities.

We need more evidence to find these guys, so we can catch them red-handed!

Exactly, that's why we monitor their closed communities with sock-puppet accounts.

Any sign can be of importance!

@Shadow

Hmm... Looks fishy.

BLUE

SHADOW

WHO IS INTERESTED ?

ALSO AVAIL-ABLE.

NEW IS AVAILABLE...

ADVANCE

Shadow's active in this server, but he's using covert language!

Luckily we're used to seeing this by now!

FOUND AN UNDERAGE GIRL

That's better!

Hey, check this out... looks like Shadow is on the move with a new victim. Let's follow this case, we'll probably need to act fast!

You're right! I'll call our Belgian colleagues!

Colleagues, Shadow is on the move with a new victim and is planning to use the same hotel as last time.

Great, thanks! We'll make sure our team is ready for interception.

POLICE

POLICE

Remember, the victim's safety comes first!

305

POLICE

To be continued...

PATH 2

Our daughter has been missing for more than a day!

We have to find her as soon as possible! She's a minor!

We'll start by questioning friends and family.

She seemed distant but we thought it was just puberty...

I didn't notice anything strange... Blue usually kept to herself

HOMEWORK
Pg. 180 #6-8, 12, 14
Pg 250 #1-10, 12
Pg 253 #2, 8-20
Formula Pg.

Well, I did notice she had made a new Instagram account...

Bluee
7 Posts
10 Followers
This account is private.
Follow
Message
Email

Her profile pic looked kinda intimate... Blue just got defensive when I asked about it.

Now that I remember, I saw Blue step into a car in front of school two days ago!

We got the plate number from the school cameras!

I'll request street camera logs now!

We've tracked the license plate crossing over into Belgium!

We found the car with the missing girl, they drove into Belgium!

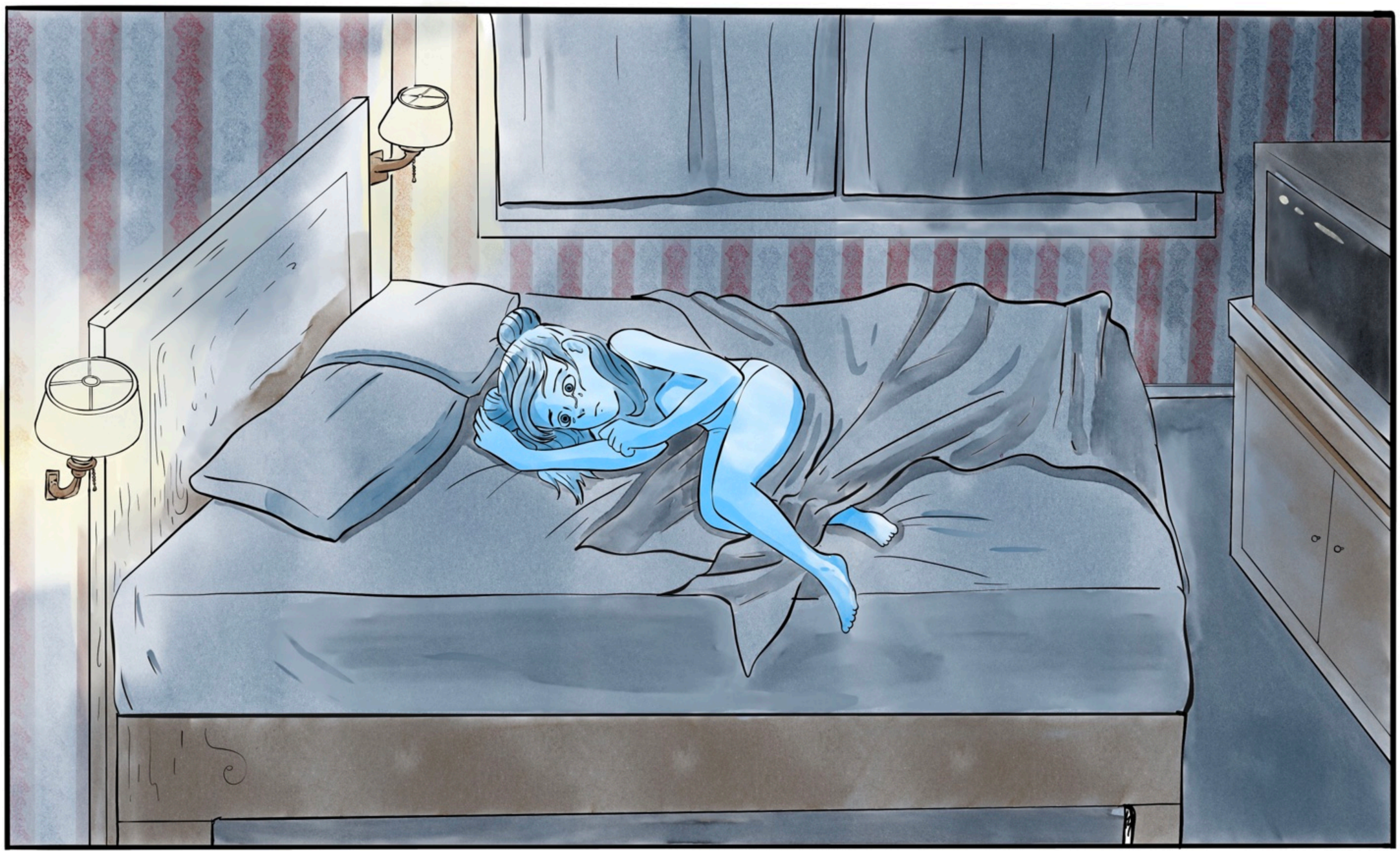
Okay, Our team is ready for the search.

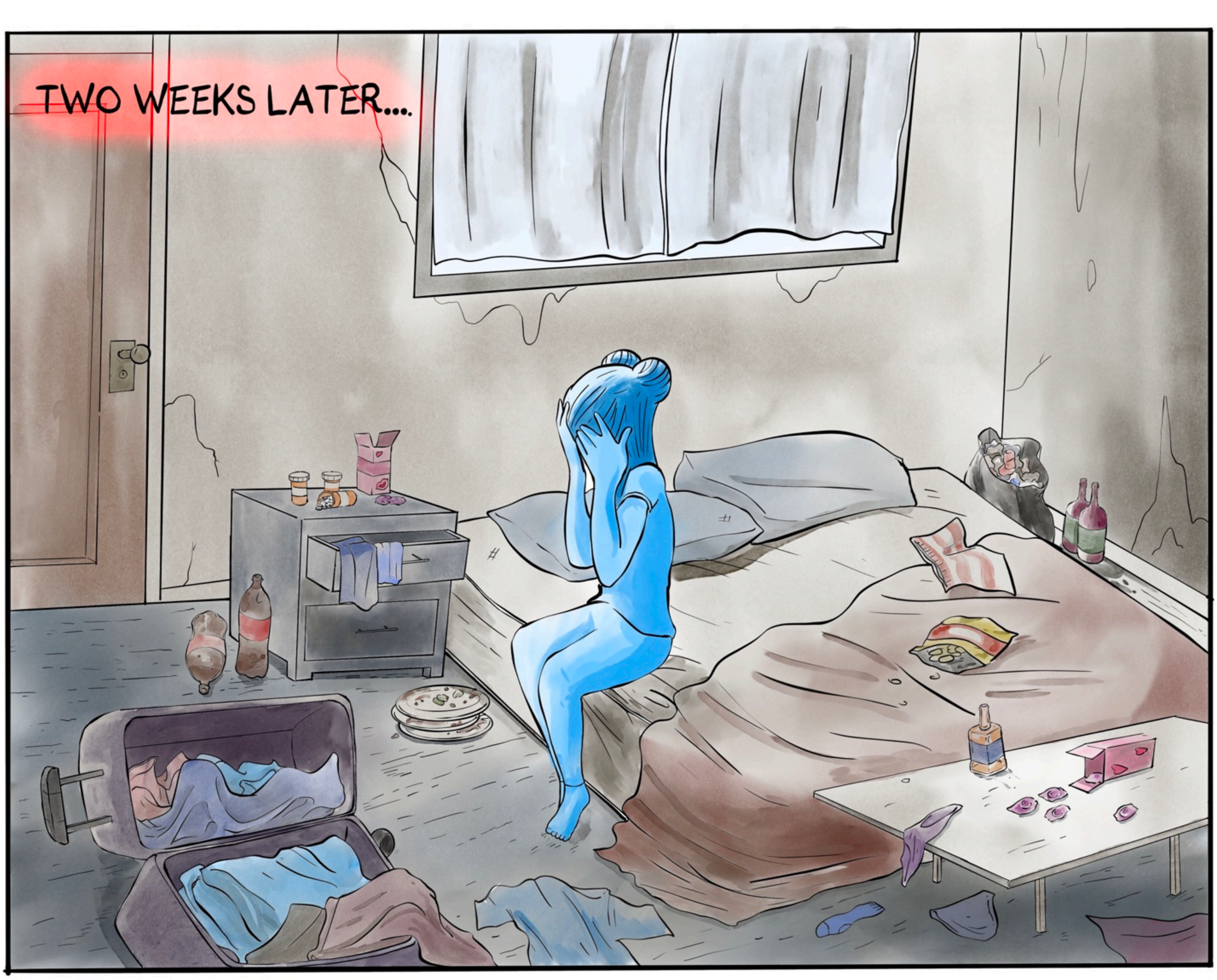
We've tracked the car through traffic cameras to a hotel... looks like it's been there for a night already!

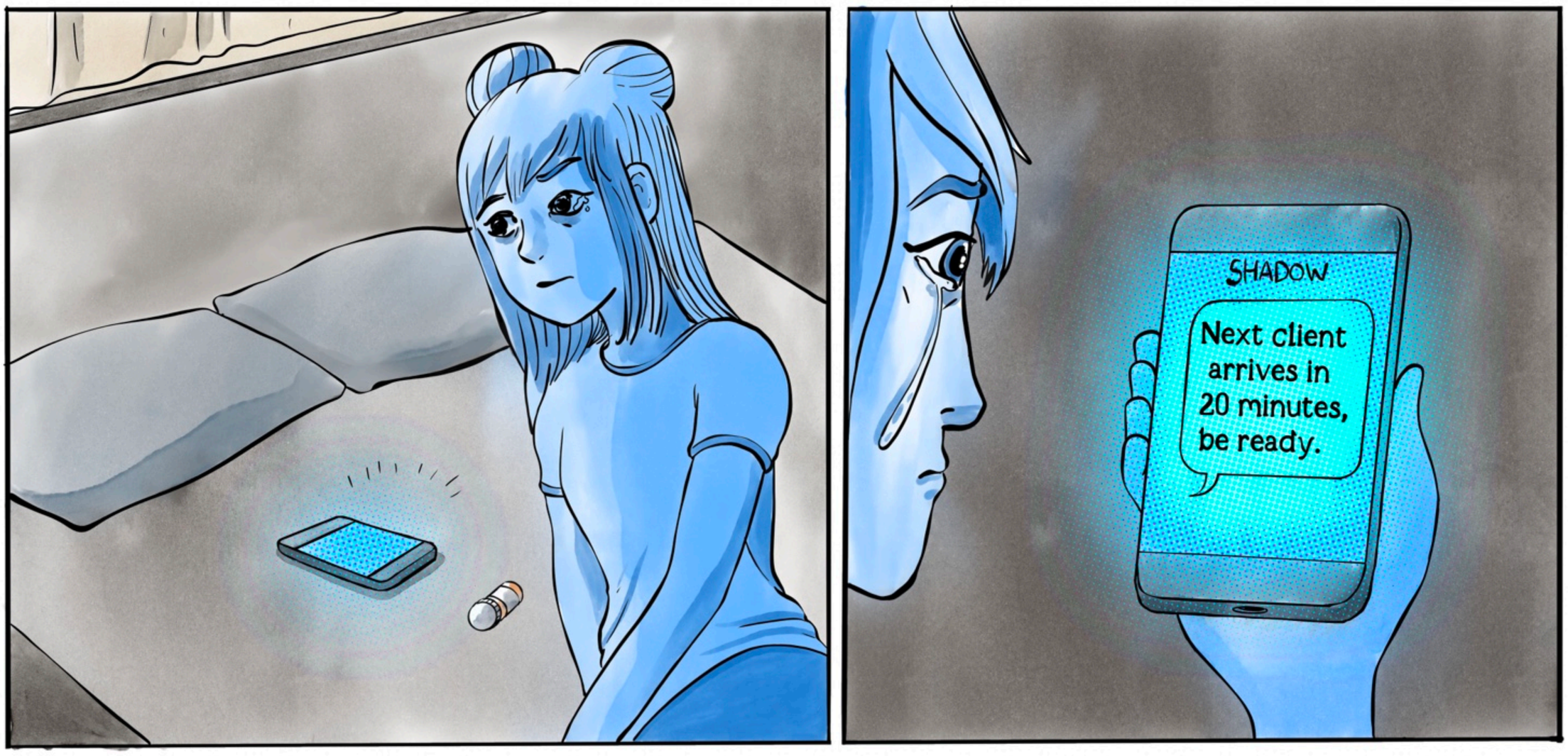
Don't worry Blue, you're safe now...no one wil hurt you again.

To be continued...

PATH 3









THE END

CHAPTER 1 – VICTIM IDENTIFICATION

Proactive investigations in the field of human trafficking mean the investigation, arrest and successful prosecution of traffickers without having to rely upon the cooperation and testimony of the victims[1]. Carrying out proactive digital investigations in cases of child trafficking is an essential but challenging step. In this stage, law enforcement investigators seek to find ways to trace criminals' digital footprints, which requires an in-depth understanding of the digital footprint of the crime. In the case of human trafficking, indicators can be linked to the following components:

a) Information related to recruitment

b) Information related to transportation

c) Information related to reception & exploitation

Thus, traffickers are compelled to engage in one or more of the following online activities:

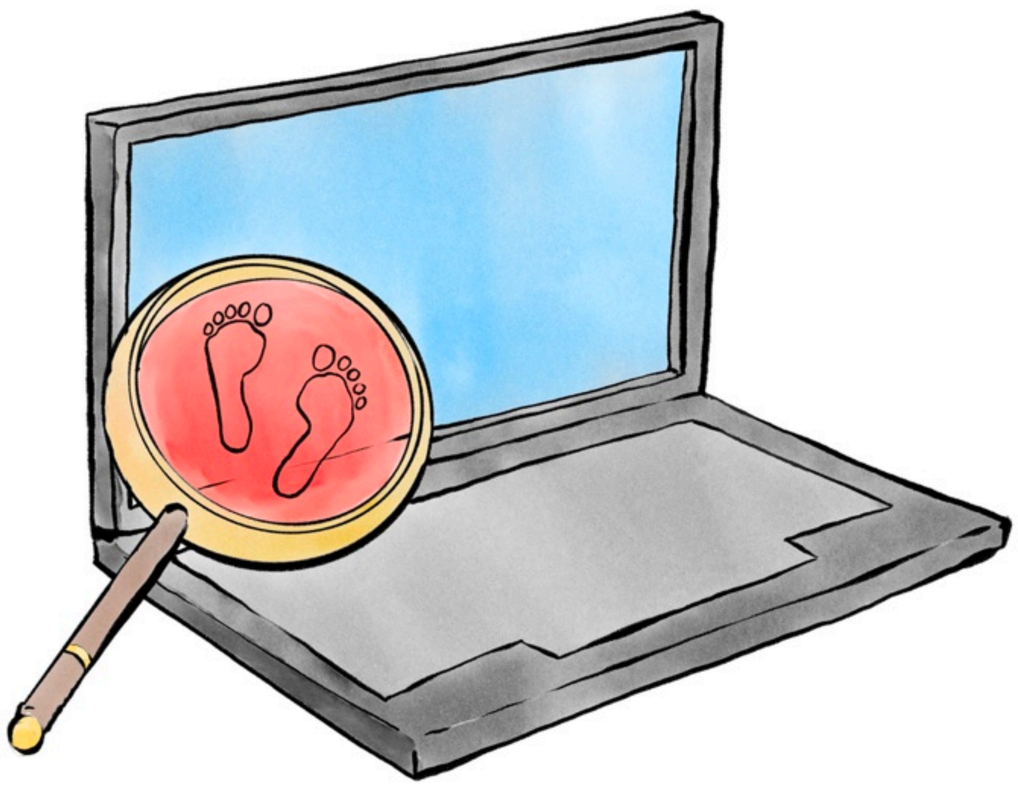
a) Advertising (part of both recruitment and exploitation)

b) Renting/Buying of premises

c) Facilitation of transportation (this can vary from purchasing false documents to arranging transit)

d) Communication with other members of the criminal network, potential victims and/or clients (organising recruitment, transportation and exploitation)

e) Financial transactions (for all the above)



[1]UNODC, Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2006.
Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/HT-toolkit-en.pdf

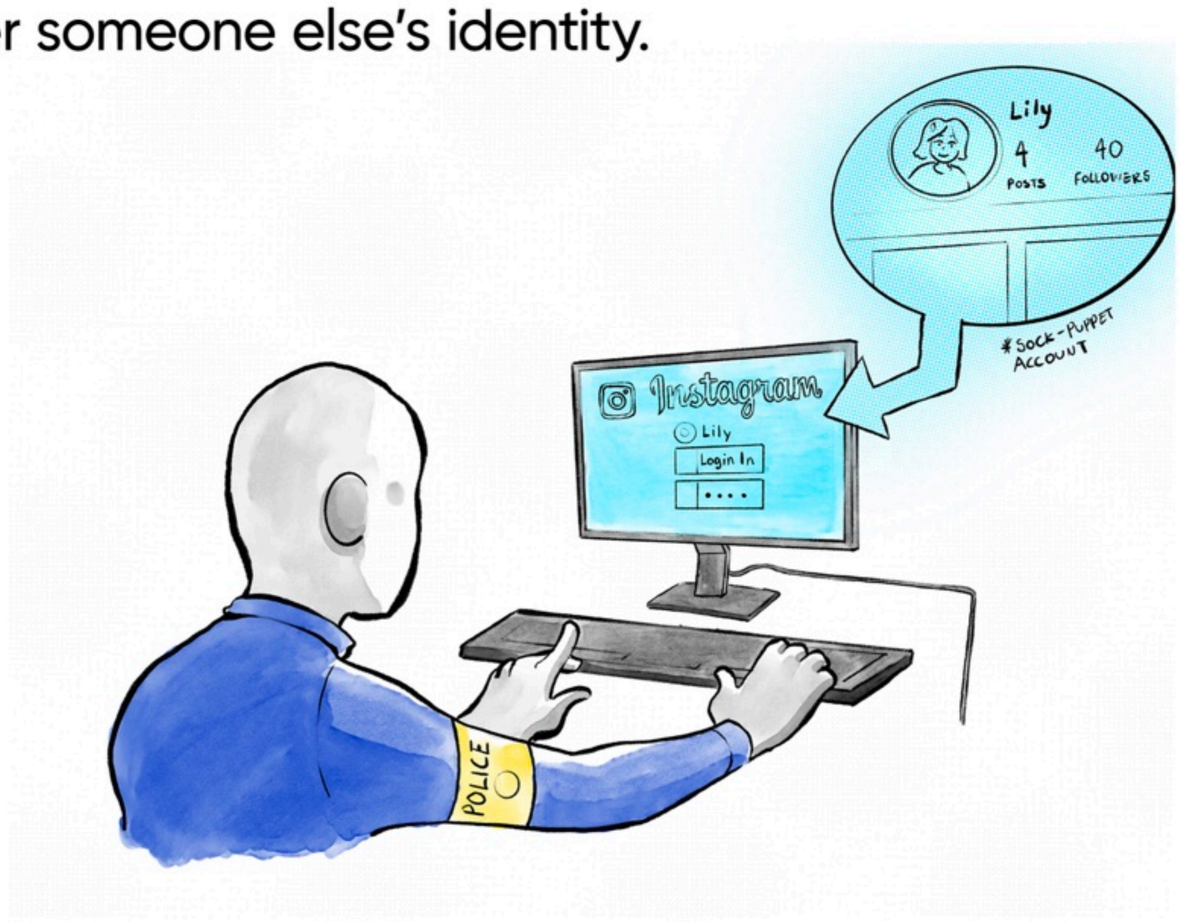
Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) has been extensively used to collect information on different types of crimes. In the case of child trafficking, OSINT can be used to:

- To monitor news media for information related to child trafficking incidents at the local and international level, which may provide insights into the profile of the victims and suspects as well as the modus operandi being employed (e.g., modes of transport, how the victims were recruited)

- Identify indicators of child trafficking across social media platforms and other

Some potential sources are online media outlets, public discussion groups on social media and gaming platforms, publicly accessible databases (e.g., business registration information), and escort and job advertising websites.

During online investigations, law enforcement practitioners may need to engage in online interactions on chat channels, online forums, or by becoming 'friends' with the suspects or their friends on social media. This can be done using 'sock puppets' or by taking over another person's account and communicating with the suspect under someone else's identity.



Good practices in creating sock-puppets:

- Adopt robust OPSEC procedures: employ a password manager – to manage different accounts with strong passwords; use a burner phone with a prepaid SIM card; be careful about the WIFI networks you employ (never use personal ones); conceal IP address.

- Use an email service that looks legitimate (e.g., Gmail) and won't raise any red flags by AI systems deployed by platforms to check for fake users.

- Create a credible persona using tools such as FakeNameGenerator, ensuring that the name matches the target group, or for photos, This Person Does Not Exist. When using AI-generated photos, make sure to zoom in closely to check for flaws and remedy them. It is also important to consider gender dynamics in your choice of sock-puppet and to ensure that you cultivate a distinct personality trait for your persona to help with credibility. Make sure that your login patterns emulate the behavioural patterns of your persona.

- Establish an actual social history across different platforms

- Employ a long-term approach to using sock puppets and age your accounts before using them for operational purposes[2].

Online threat indicators

There is no "one size fits all" approach to online threat indicators for human trafficking, as these are often platform-, crime- and culture-dependent. For example, on social media platforms such as Instagram, an indicator of exploitation can be found in certain emoji combinations, such as:

- References to virginity - emojis for cherries & cherry blossom



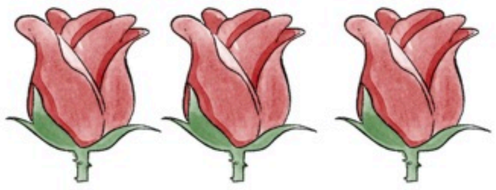
- Young age – growing hearts, butterflies and fairy emojis.



- Movement references – aeroplane emojis signifying 'new in town' or 'need to travel to a place where the person is located'



- Price: roses (number of roses may be an indicator of price)



- Trafficker: crowns (single and double crowns can indicate the presence of a trafficker and that they are the ones in control – the boss)



[2]DISRUPT Manual on using digital evidence to combat child trafficking, 2025. Available at https://victim-support.eu/publications/disrupt-manual/

Though effective in proactive approaches to combating THB, digital investigations can also be particularly challenging due to the following:

a) **Lack of authentication information**: accounts are often unauthenticated, and children-specific platforms typically do not include age verification mechanisms

b) **End-to-end communication encryption**

c) **Difficulty in spotting clear indicators and patterns of crime**: it is difficult for investigators to sift through large volumes of online data (e.g. monitoring all parts of an online game - both audio & text chat); signs of recruitment and/or grooming are often complicated to detect as most perpetrators share more explicit information via private messages; perpetrators frequently employ "imperfect" language forms online, such as non-standard language and linguistic variability making automated detection challenging.

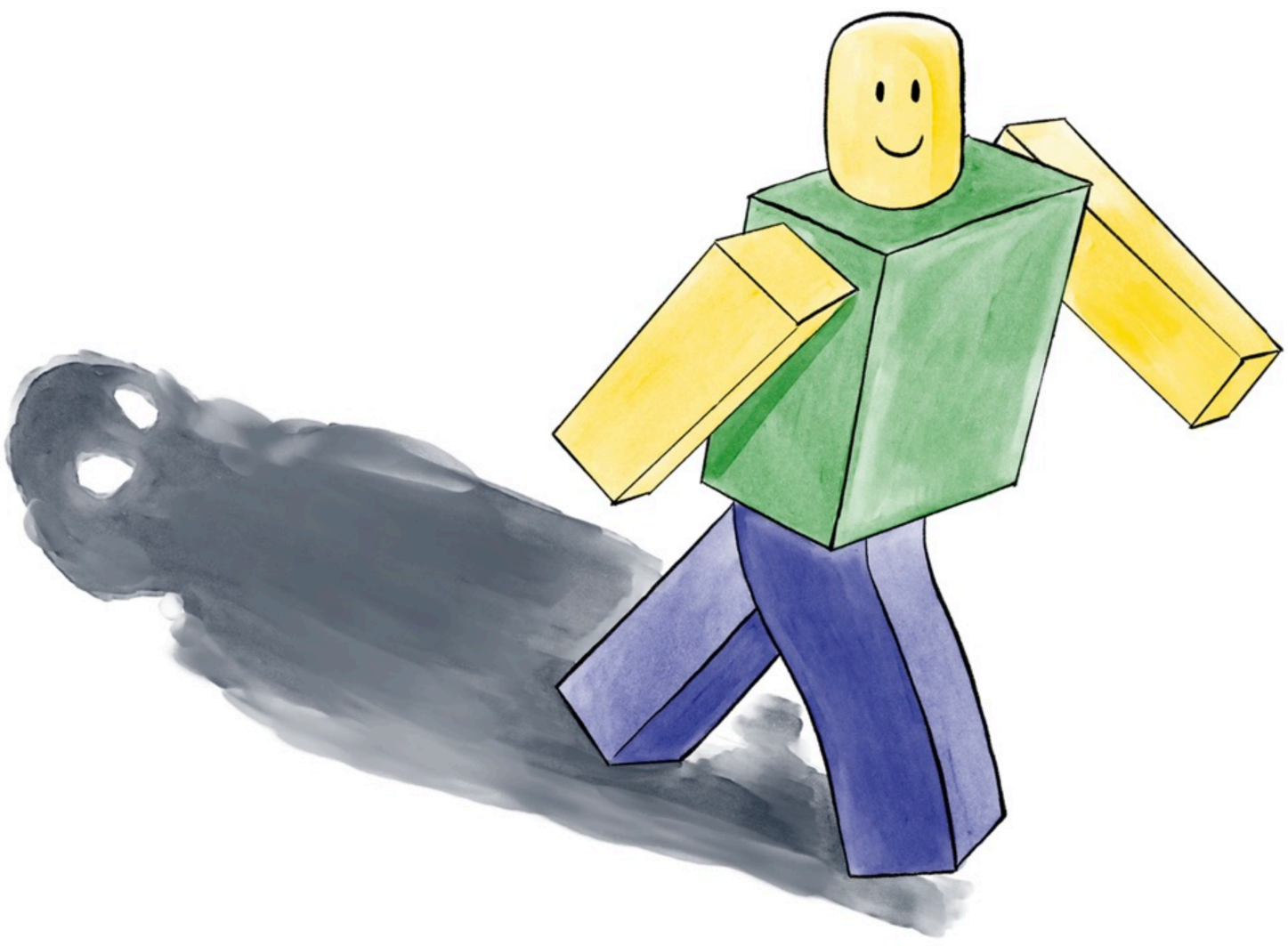
d) **Ephemeral content**: online content can be altered very quickly

e) **Legal limitation**: Depending on the jurisdiction, online investigations may have different constraints[3]



[3]DISRUPT Manual on using digital evidence to combat child trafficking, 2025. Available at https://victim-support.eu/publications/disrupt-manual/

It is in this context that games should be mentioned. Games provide a unique opportunity for adults to interact with children and form relationships with them. They can also mask financial transactions between victims and perpetrators (e.g., using in-game money gifts). Although games are public venues, their content is largely ephemeral in nature (e.g., chats via voice or text), making it difficult for authorities and/or parents to detect instances of grooming.



While Roblox has parental controls, employs AI plus human-based moderation, and prohibits sexual content, children have still found ways to circumvent these controls such as using external platforms like Discord alongside Roblox to voice chat to other users free of filtering and to share links to user-created, hidden, sexually explicit, subgames known as 'condo games'.

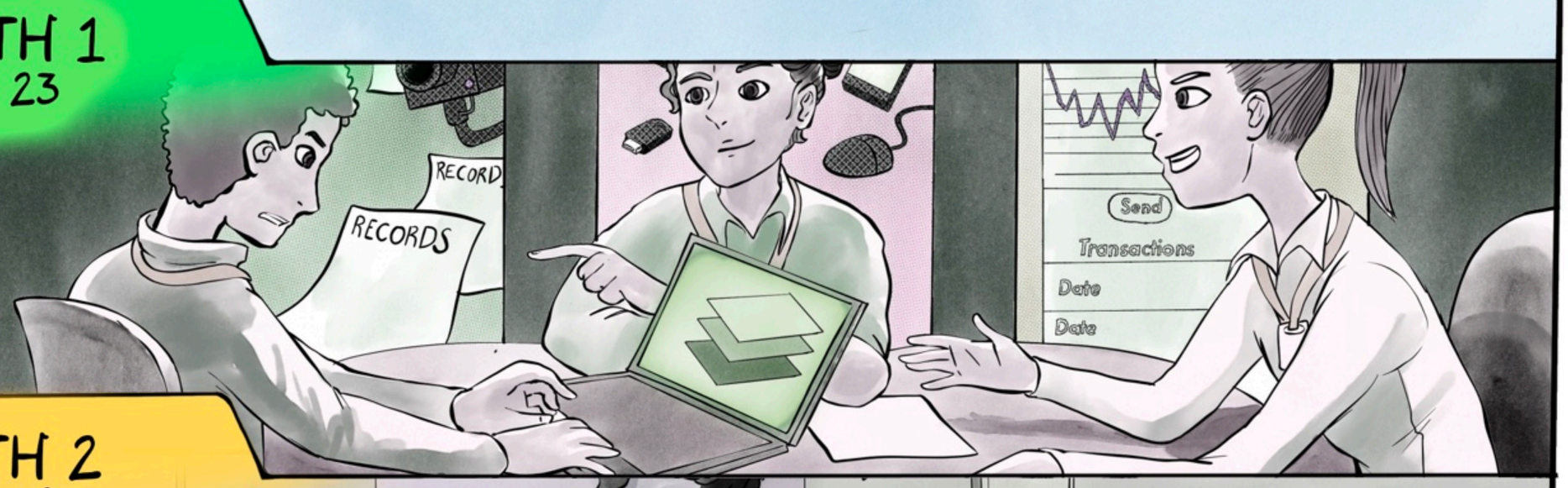
In addition to the above, there is also the problem of data complexity (e.g., the ability to constantly monitor both text chat and audio conversations) and lack of authentication (e.g. users using encrypted channels and providing false credentials).

The police did an amazing job finding you, Blue. You're safe now.

I'm so glad they found me. But after that, lots of things happened during the investigation.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION

PATH 1
Page 23



PATH 2
Page 26



PATH 3
Page 30



PATH 1

We've got a solid trail here: different Instagram profiles linked to Shadow's phone number...

...plus contact between Shadow and his clients.

But the prosecutor will want more. We need to be thorough...

Are there surveillance cameras near places where Blue and Shadow could have met? Or communication data?

We'll also need to pull data from Shadow's phones and computers. Every bit counts.

And we're tracking the payments Shadow received from his clients.

Once we have this, we can link Shadow directly to human trafficking!

RECORDS

RECORDS

RECORDS

€42.475.25

Deposit

Send

Transactions

Date

Date

This is the LEA platform of META, created for law enforcement officers.

We can request data from META about the flagged Instagram profiles.

Meta

This will make our case even stronger.

We should try reaching out to the identified victim, Blue, to get her statement.

@blu3dreamz

CHILDREN'S HOME

We're so glad you're here, Blue. This is Max, our facility dog--

Hi, Max. I'm glad you're here too.

--he's here to help you feel more comfortable.

Blue, can you tell me what happened?

Blue, don't hesitate to reach out to us, okay? We're here for you.

Okay, I will.

We're still on it. We'll let you know as soon as there's an update.

Here's everything we've got--digital evidence, Blue's testimony, and all other information we could gather.

This looks solid. We'll take it to court.

Great job everyone!

PATH 2

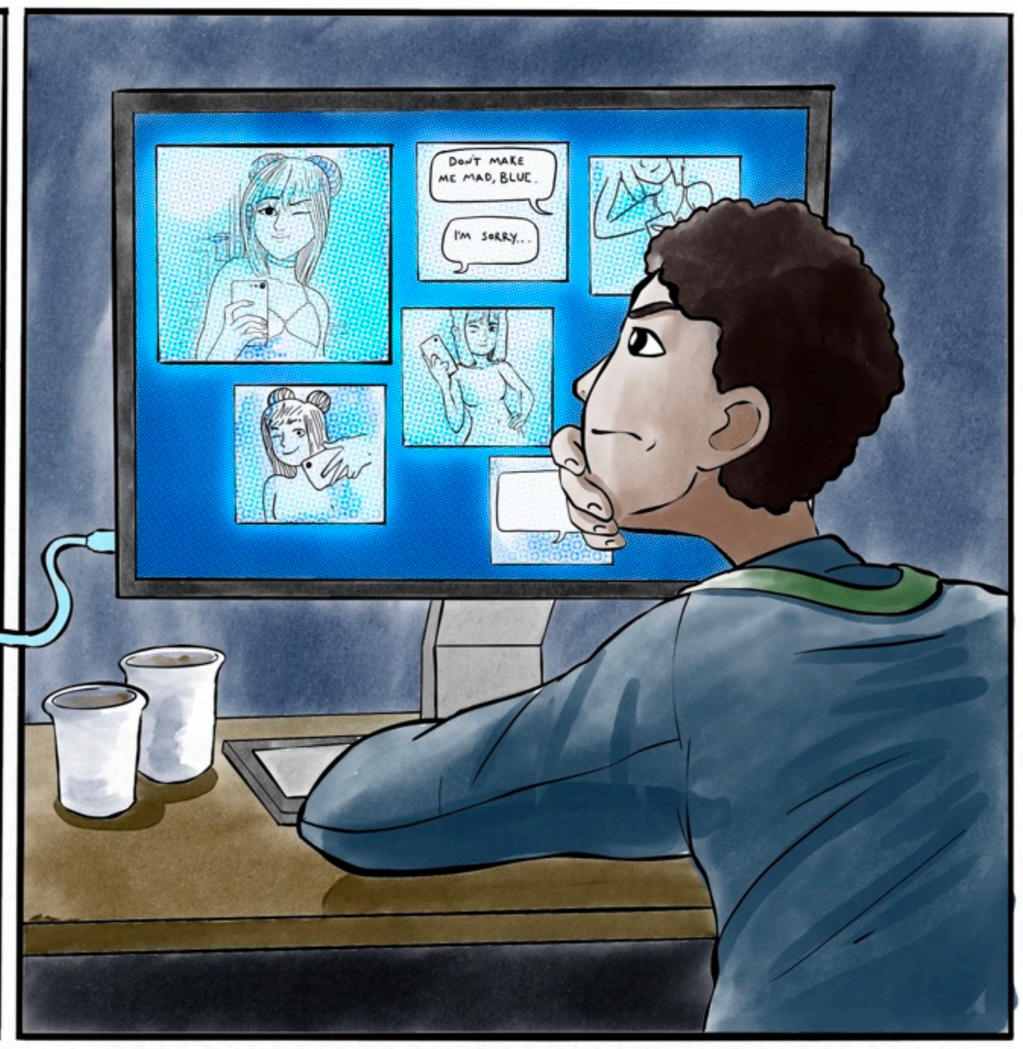
Well, we got his phone from the hotel.

Let's request a search warrant for his home.

EVIDENCE

In the meantime, we need to get some evidence from his clients, and get a statement from Blue.

BLUE



Should we confiscate the gaming computer? Could be important...

EVIDENCE

No, his games aren't important! We need proof of the clients!

You want to question Blue already? It's only been a few days and she's still in shock.

We're sorry, but she could help us get a prompt conviction for Shadow...

Blue, thank you so much for coming...

I know this is hard, Blue, but we want to catch the people who hurt you.

Can you maybe show me your conversation with Shadow on Telegram?

I'm sorry but I deleted everything as soon as I could. I felt so... disgusted with myself...

That's...Uhm, that's okay Blue, don't worry. We can work with that...

Thanks again. We'll be in touch.

How did it go, Blue?
Are you feeling okay?

CHILDREN'S HOME

I don't know...
I feel bad that I couldn't help.

We need to check city cameras around the routes Shadow may have taken for any further evidence of trafficking.

Shadow, we can't get any info about your clients from your phone. We know you have them, so just tell us.

€42.475.25
Send
Deposit
Transactions : None
ate : None

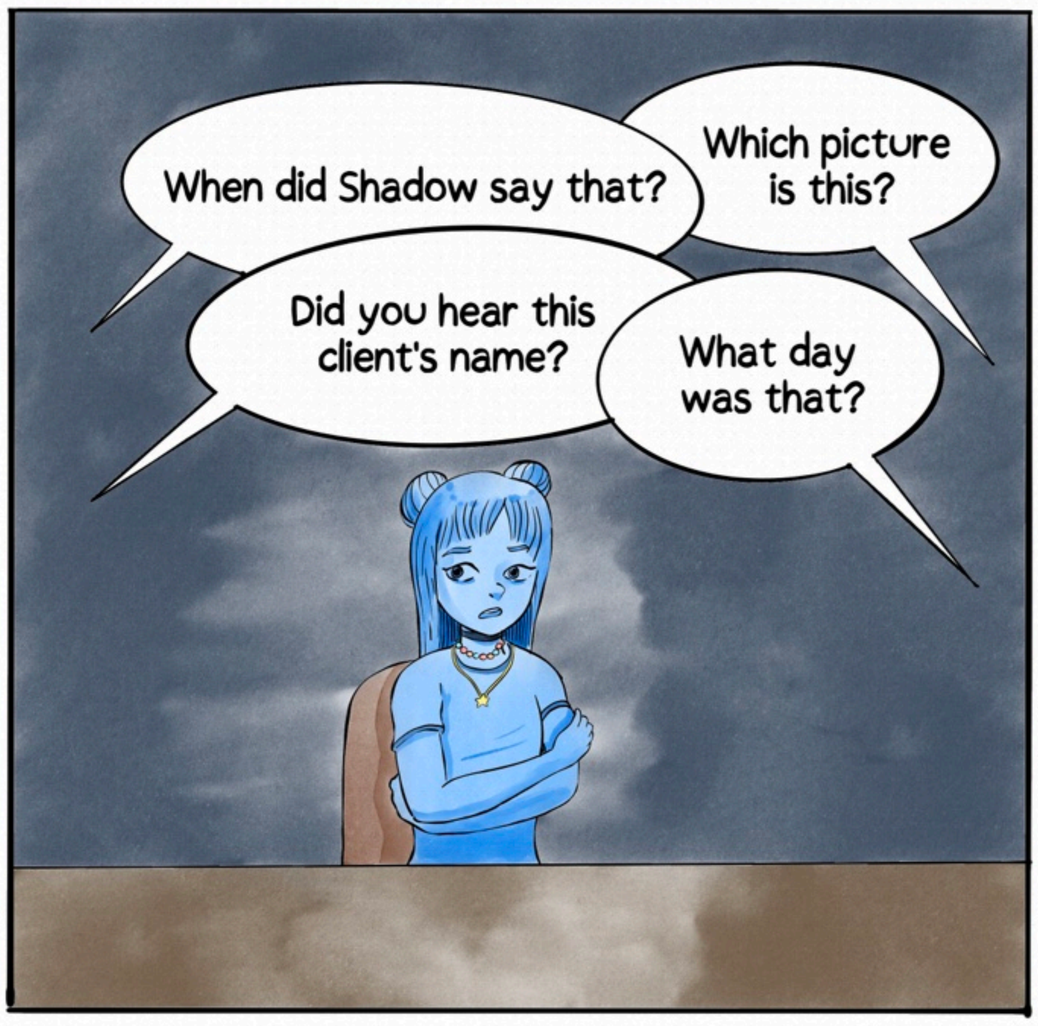
The bank transactions arrived. They don't show anything.

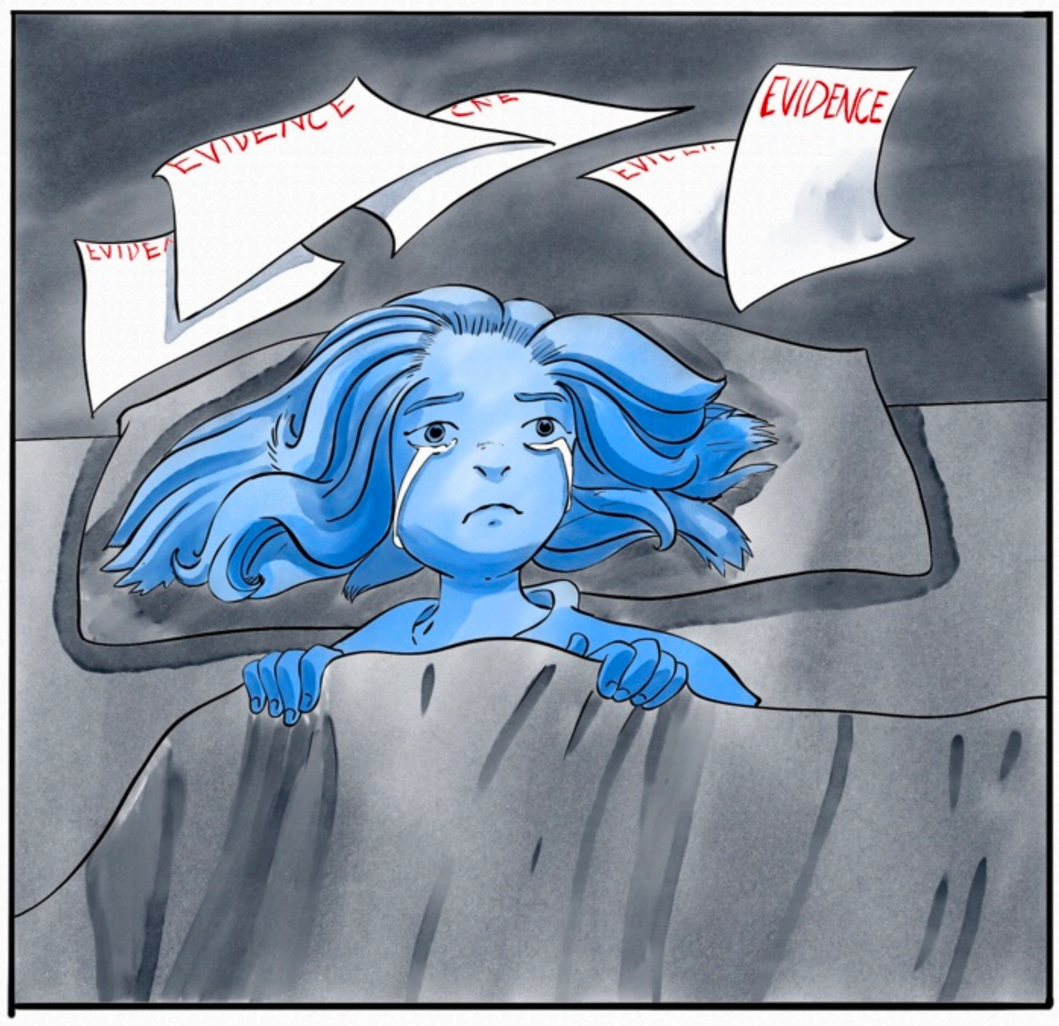
Here's the logs from Telegram... Just as unhelpful as Shadow.

FROM : TELEGRAM

Shadow won't talk and we didn't get any useful data from Telegram...

Hm. Looks like we should interview the victim again.







To be continued...

PATH 3

Okay let's focus team! We have Shadow's phone from the arrest and his laptop from the house search.

EVIDENCE

Blue, can you tell us how you met Shadow?

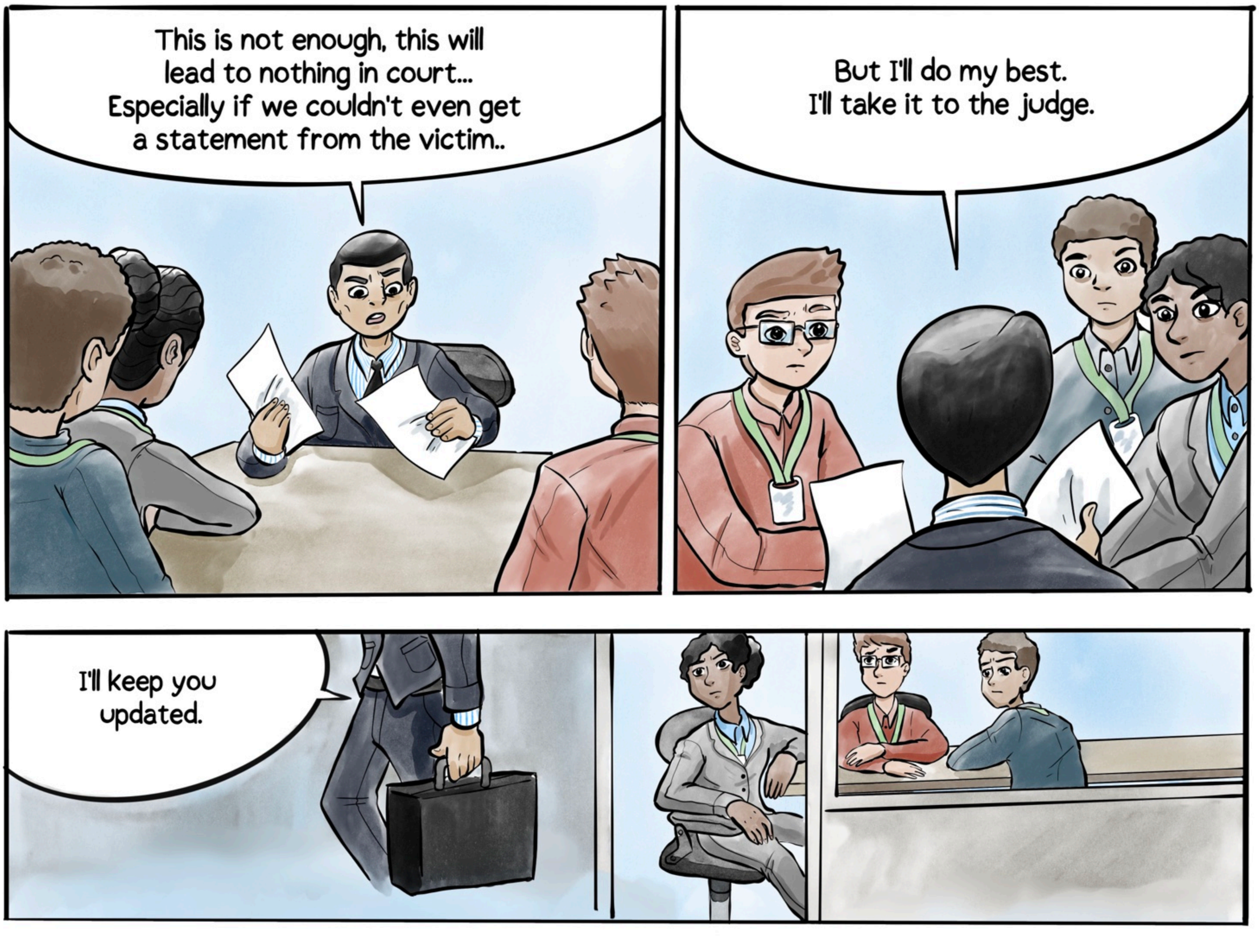
How did he convince you to go to Belgium with him?

When did you realise something was wrong?

What went wrong? Was it me?

I thought Shadow loved me...didn't he?

Blue, we really need your help if we want to put Shadow in jail...


This is not enough, this will lead to nothing in court... Especially if we couldn't even get a statement from the victim..
But I'll do my best. I'll take it to the judge.
I'll keep you updated.

The End

CHAPTER 2 – EVIDENCE COLLECTION

When it comes to digital evidence in cases of child trafficking, it is essential to remember that often traffickers ensure any digital exchange between them and the victim is done on encrypted platforms where messages get deleted after a time. Recovering such data can be challenging for digital forensics experts, even when they have possession of the actual physical devices (e.g., the victim's mobile phone and/or perpetrator's mobile phone).

Thus, there are cases where the only way to retrieve the data is to contact the platforms themselves. Most platforms have dedicated law enforcement guidelines and access points.

Promising practices in collaboration with social media platforms[4]:

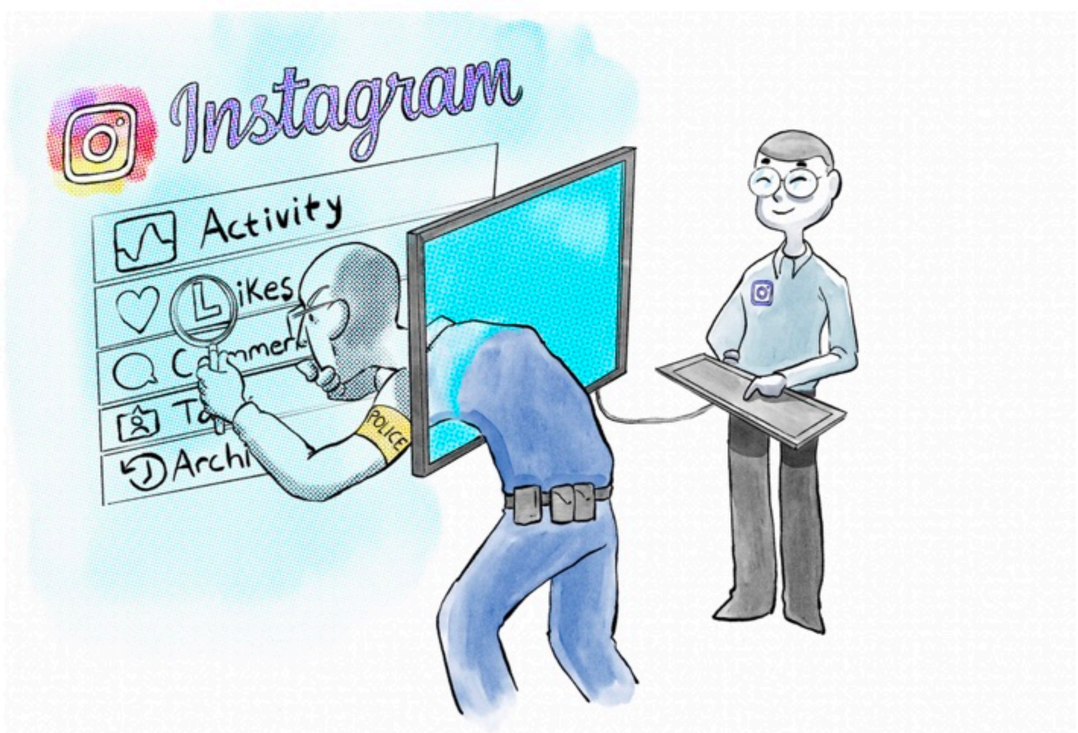
1. Encouraging law enforcement authorities to share more in-depth sensitive information and intelligence about what they see and forecast. This would include authorities providing more direct access to intelligence and ongoing operations.

2. Granting higher vetting status to view such material to representatives of tech companies.

3. Ensuring that all requests for information are very clear and include all the necessary supporting legal documents, including details on operational context.

4. All law enforcement urgent requests should follow the “emergency” definition provided by the tech platforms.

5. Tech companies and tech developers should be more open and upfront about new and emerging technologies and the potential security threats of their use by criminals research.



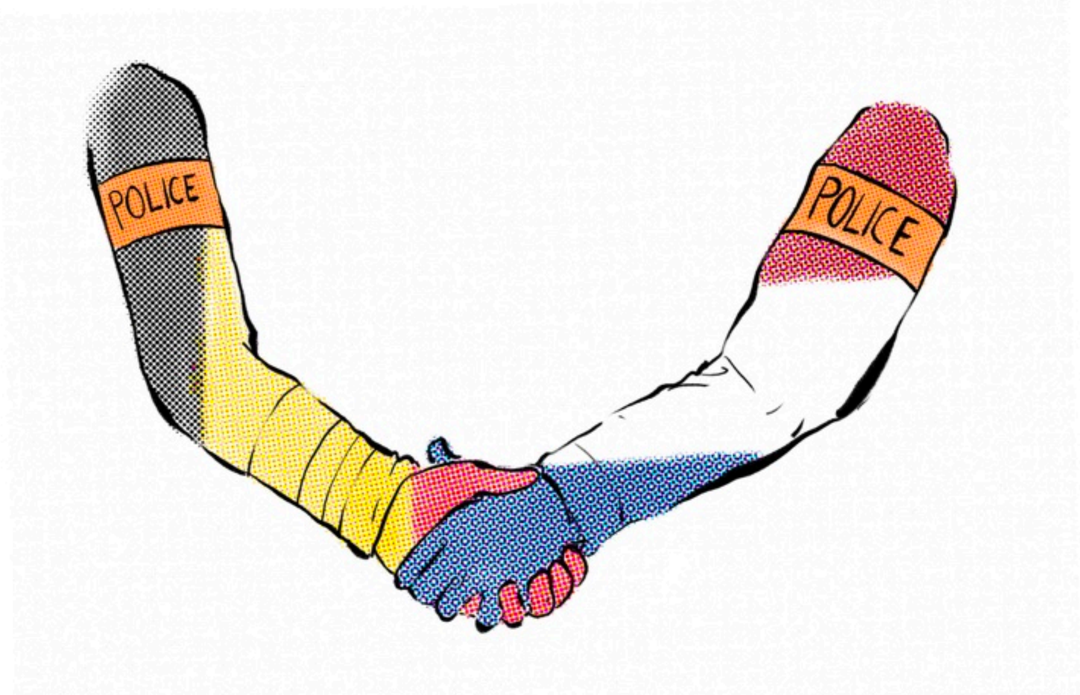
[4]DISRUPT Manual on using digital evidence to combat child trafficking, 2025. Available at https://victim-support.eu/publications/disrupt-manual/

6. Companies' trust and safety teams should receive additional training on how to interact with and cooperate with law enforcement.

7. Developing an experience exchange programme allows identified personnel within law enforcement agencies and tech companies to be embedded within each other's operational functions.

8. Create permanent liaison positions, e.g., embed (or second) law enforcement personnel (e.g., data scientists) to tech companies.

9. Developing joint strategic research requirements, identifying and prioritising areas of mutual concern for further development and investigation through



In certain complex cases of human trafficking, successful investigations are usually the result of the work of joint investigation teams (JIT). This is because:

- Traffickers often commit the crime in more than one jurisdiction, and joint investigations reflect that situation.

- Joint operations allow for the collection of evidence in each of the jurisdictions involved in the crime

- Traffickers are often more vulnerable in the countries of origin and/or transit than in the countries where the exploitation takes place.

- Joint operations also enable investigators to agree on the strategy that will most likely lead to a conviction (e.g., coordinating decisions on tactics for collecting evidence, the best location for prosecution, and the categories of offences being targeted).

- Joint investigation teams can be a way forward in addressing intelligence fragmentation. For example, Eurojust often supports national authorities from the countries of origin, transit, and exploitation of victims to regularly meet and spontaneously exchange information on suspects and potential victims in their investigation

Promising practices in using joint investigation teams in combating human trafficking:

1. Early involvement of Eurojust can foster stronger cooperation among countries involved and a more effective information exchange, leading to the early identification of all potential victims and their locations

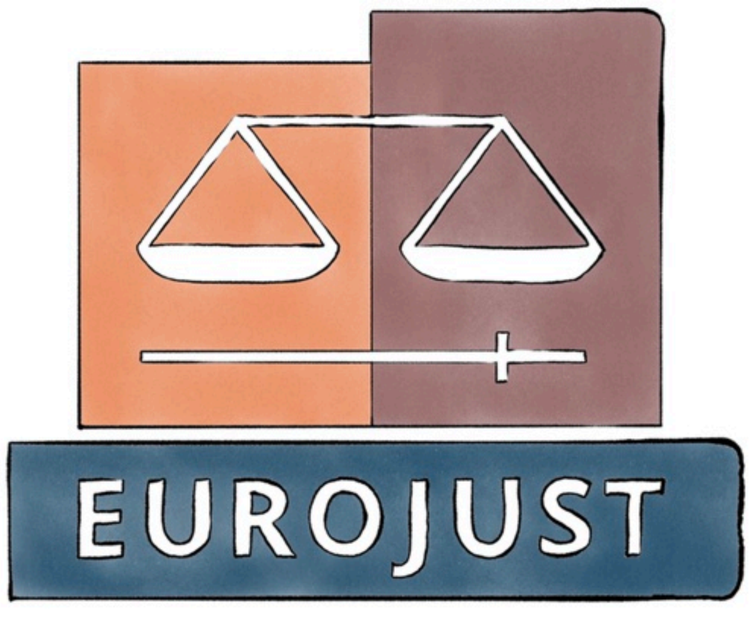
2. Early involvement of Europol can assist in cross-matching data on victims, detecting possible links between investigations, and improving crime analysis, especially in terms of financial intelligence.

3. Formulating a specific objective in the JIT agreement to identify, rescue and protect the victims, which means this common task can be evaluated at the end of operations

4. Active monitoring of adult websites by countries of exploitation to detect potential victims (in the case of sexual exploitation).

5. Request information on money flows, as this often leads to identifying potential victims' names and locations.

6. Request passenger name record (PNR) data at the beginning of the investigation, as this can provide important information on suspects' and potential victims' identities and travel patterns[5].



In many jurisdictions, the collection, analysis and use of digital evidence in THB-related legal proceedings is quite challenging due to several reasons:

a) **Lack of resources**: These can include the availability of a well-trained forensic expert, the cost of procedures, access to forensic tools, or time.

[5]EUROJUST, Eurojust Report on Trafficking in Human Beings. Best practice and issues in judicial cooperation, 2021. Available at https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/publication/eurojust-report-trafficking-human-beings

b) **Weak procedural mechanisms to scrutinise digital evidence on trial or pre-trial**: This often takes the relevance and probative weight of the expert testimony for granted, while fully understanding or challenging it requires a level of technical literacy that many judges, prosecutors and lawyers do not possess. In most jurisdictions, there are no clear or effective procedures to challenge expert reports or examine the reliability of scientific findings.

c) **Overlap in roles**: Due to the shortage of personnel, digital forensics is often conducted by law enforcement officers who are not digital forensic scientists and as such, they may lack the competence to attribute, evaluate, interpret and reconstruct digital traces. Moreover, there are significant differences between the investigation objectives and digital forensics as a science. The fact that they are performed as one makes the quality evaluation of both harder, poses questions about professional bias, protection of innocent defendants and equality of arms regarding digital forensics aid for the defence[6].

Research has further shown that prosecutors are risk-averse, refusing to take up cases they feel they would lose. Due to the nature of the crime, child trafficking can be considered high risk, mainly because of the unreliability of victims in human trafficking cases[7]. Additionally, most jurisdictions do not have the resources to investigate and prosecute these cases without victims' testimonies. This leads practitioners to dismiss the human trafficking element and seek convictions on lesser crimes, such as producing child pornography, prostitution or child grooming.



[6]Stoykova, A. (2021). Digital Evidence: Unaddressed Threats to Fairness and the Presumption of Innocence. Computer Law & Security Review, 42, Article 105575: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2021.105575

[7]Nelms, J. (2020). Perceptions of Barriers in Prosecuting Human Trafficking Cases. An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Nova Southeastern University: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1321&context=fse_etd/

This brings us to the victim's testimony. Most child trafficking cases indeed require the forensic interviewing of victims. In such cases, the following good practices should be followed:

- **Understanding child victims and witnesses**: Specialised professionals should conduct forensic child interviews.

- **Evidence-based child interviewing:** Interviews in cases of suspected child abuse should be conducted according to evidence-based interview protocols, such as the NICHD interview protocol or other protocols based on scientific evidence.

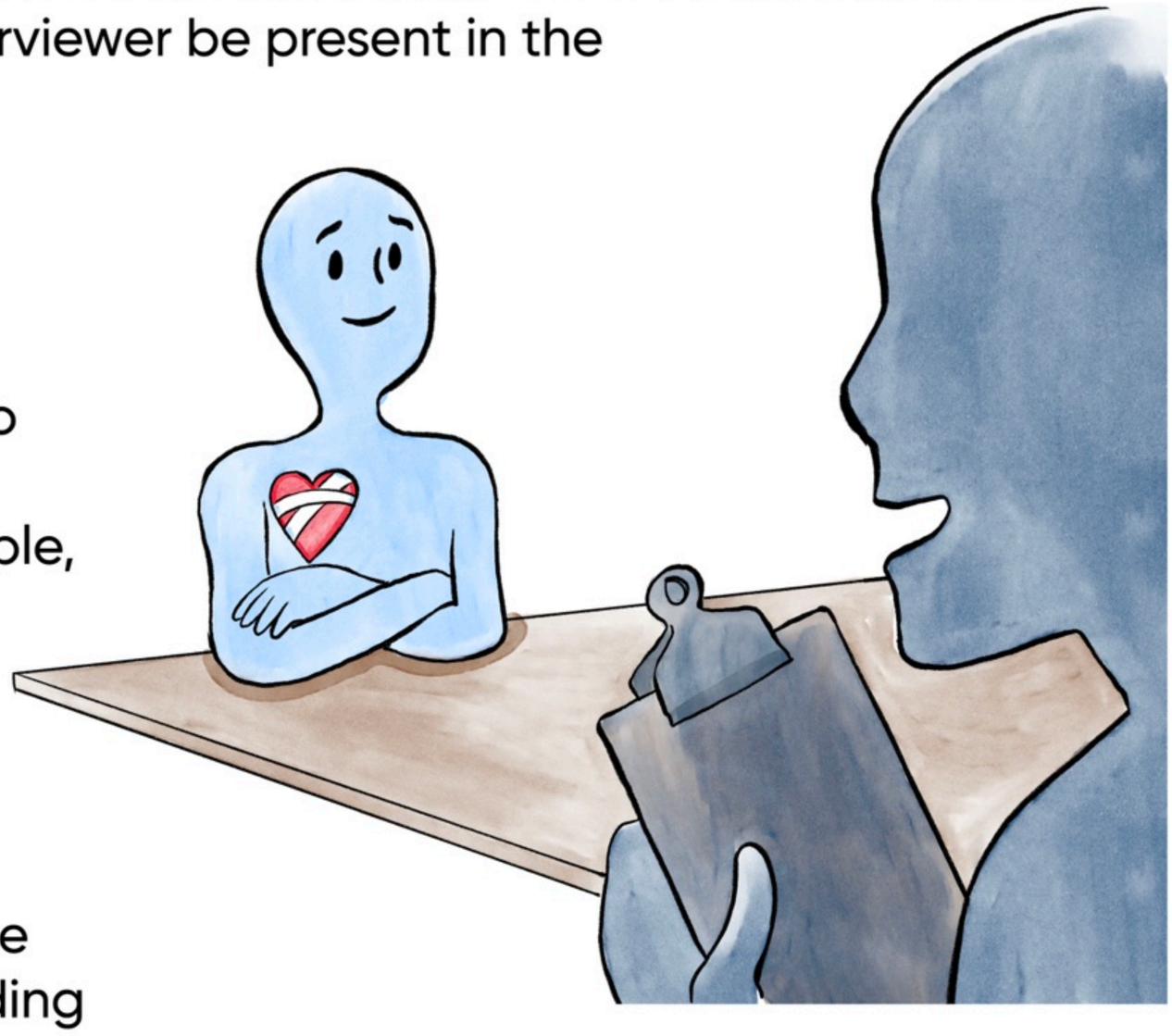
- **Accommodate any unique needs the child may have**, including physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities

- **Phases of the interview and the importance of adequately preparing the child witness:** Interviewers should strive to conduct the interviews in a child-friendly way, following the general principles of phasing the interview (introduction, ground rules, practice interview, substantive part, and closure).

- **Number of persons present at the interview**: It is recommended that only the child and the interviewer be present in the interviewing room

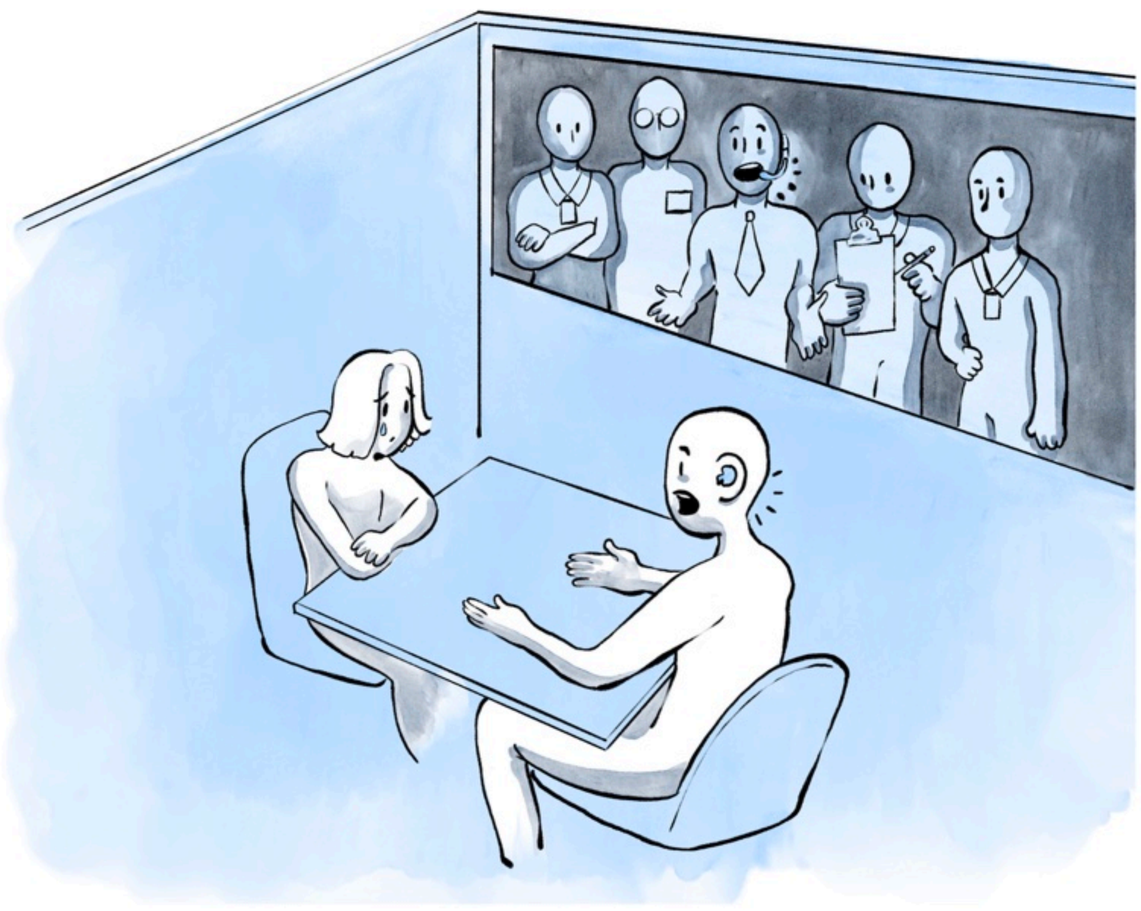
- **Cultural aspects and interpretation in the interview:**
  Interviewers are advised to take cultural aspects into account, and where possible, interpreters should have specialised training in child interviewing

- **Training of interviewers**:
  Interviewers should receive specialised training,including continuous assessment an feedback on their interviewing style for quality assurance[8].



[8]See Korkman, J., Otgaar, H., Geven, L. M., Bull, R., Cyr, M., Hershkowitz, I., ... Volbert, R. (2024). White paper on forensic child interviewing: research-based recommendations by the European Association of Psychology and Law. *Psychology, Crime & Law,* 1–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2024.2324098 and APSAC (2023). Forensic Interviewing of Children. APSAC Practice Guidelines. https://apsaclibrary.org/guidelines/30014.pdf

- **Using blue rooms**: The questioning of children, both at the pre-trial stage and the trial stage of the criminal proceedings, may take place in the so-called "blue rooms", which allow for child-friendly questionings with the participation of a psychologist. A non-transparent glass separates the room where the child and a specially trained specialist are sitting from another room where the representatives of the authorities and the parties sit (judge, prosecutor, police officer, psychologist, person charged and their defence counsel). The two rooms are connected through a screen and microphones, and the questioning/hearing is recorded. The prosecutor asks questions that the person interviewing the child hears on the phone receiver and paraphrases so that they will not traumatise or hurt the child. Blue rooms usually have different entrances to avoid any contact between the person charged and the child[9].



The above-mentioned suggestions aim to avoid secondary victimisation of the victim. Secondary victimisation is the re-traumatisation of a victim as an indirect result of assault, which occurs through the responses of individuals and institutions, such as police, judicial institutions and social service providers, to the victim. Victims of human trafficking have an increased risk of secondary victimisation for multiple reasons, such as:

a) Psychological consequences of human trafficking

b) Needing to talk about sensitive and personal experiences that can make them feel shame.

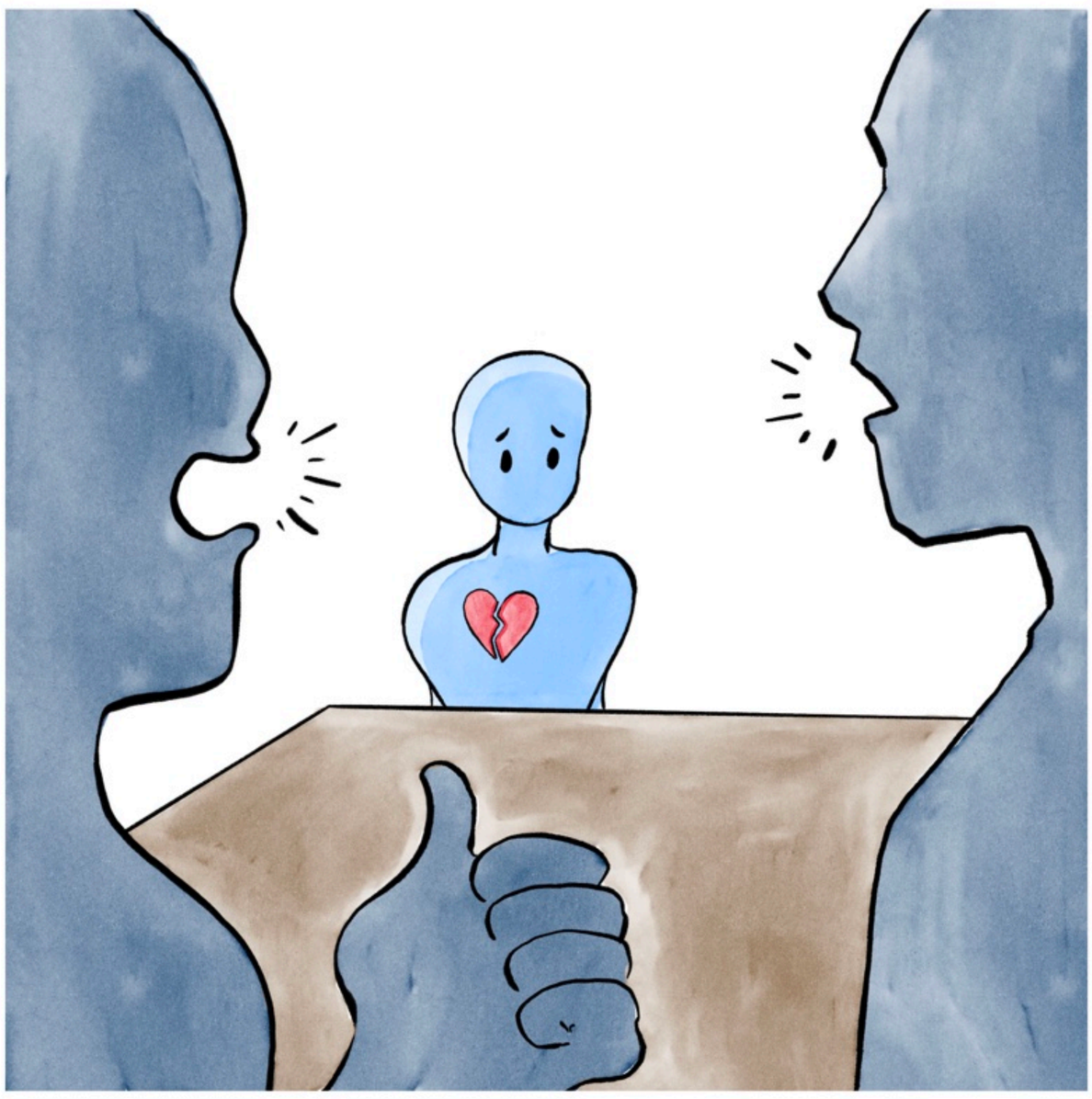
c) Serious risk of reprisal from the traffickers.

[9]FRA (2015). Child-friendly justice Perspectives and experiences of professionals on children's participation in civil and criminal judicial proceedings in 10 EU Member States.
Available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2015-child-friendly-justice-professionals_en.pdf

Some examples of secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings include a lack of identification, a lack of safety and trust during the criminal proceedings, victims are not believed, victims are subjected to multiple and intensive hearings, victims are treated disrespectfully, especially during interviews with defence lawyers, and victims lack knowledge about their rights.

Considering that the nature, type and impact of a crime directly influence the needs of victims, an individual needs assessment must be carried out for each victim. This should be modelled on the following key categories:

- the need to be recognised and treated with dignity and respect.
- the need to be protected from further victimisation and secondary victimisation.
- the need to be supported and receive understandable information.
- the need to access justice; and
- the need for compensation and restoration[10].



[10]Victim Support Europe (2023). Safe Justice for Victims of Crime. Available at: https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1677284356SafeJusticeforvictimsofCrime_compressed1.pdf

TRIAL

Blue, did you attend the trial?

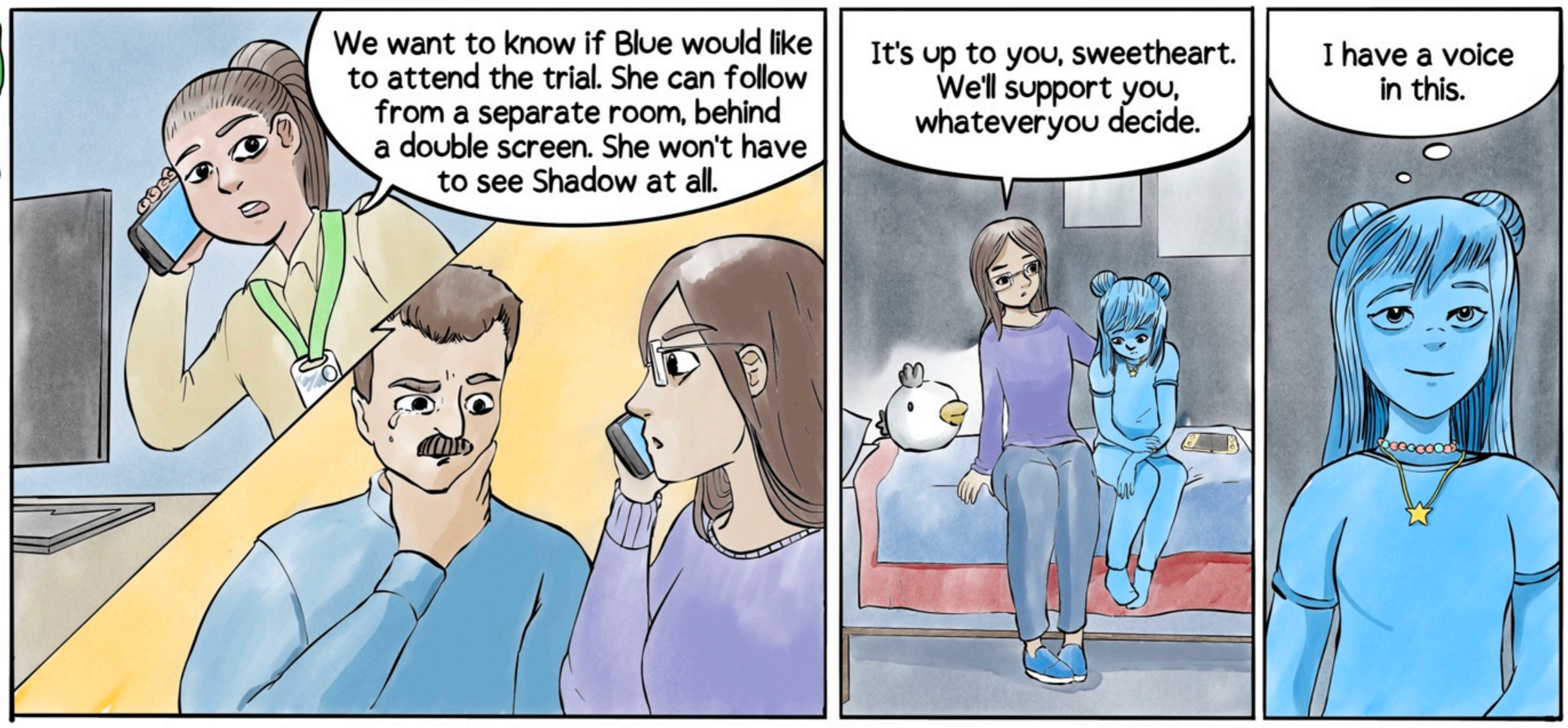
No, but I heard about what happened...

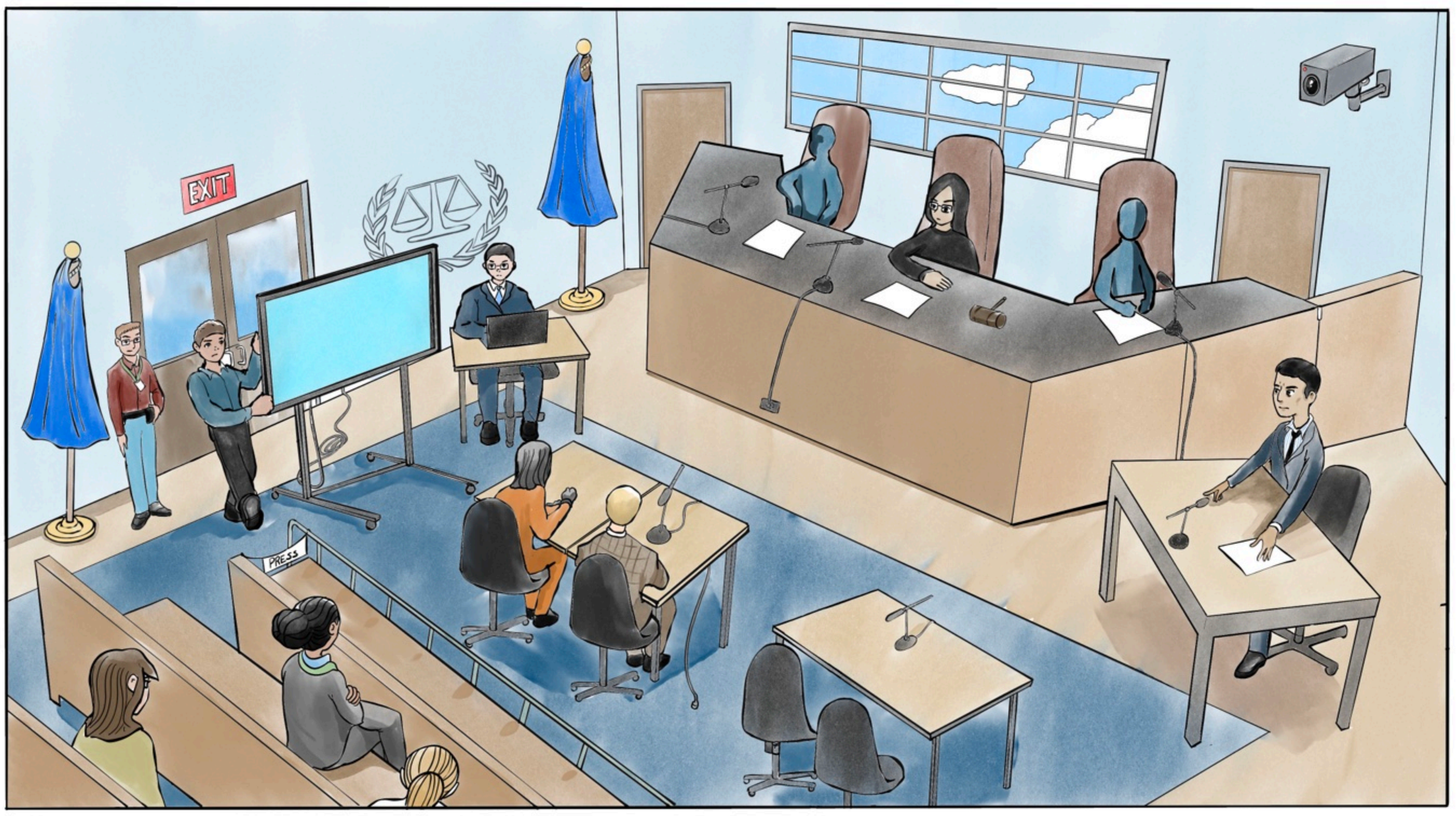
PATH 1
Page 40

PATH 2
Page 43

PATH 3
Page 46

PATH 1





Your Honour, as you can see, we have meticulously traced the communications on several platforms between Shadow and Blue, along with the financial benefits Shadow gained from these illegal activities.

You can see here how we have made sure that the evidence was stored correctly, without the possibility to tamper with it

ITEM: EXPLICIT PHOTOS FEATURING A MINOR

+

ITEM: SECURITY FOOTAGE OF SHADOW

+

€42.475.25
Deposit
Send
Transactions
Date
Date

ITEM: BANK TRANSACTIONS

This evidence clearly demonstrates how Shadow profited from exploiting Blue.

I...I didn't want to make him angry...I didn't know what he would do...

I had no choice...

There is enough evidence to prove Shadow's guilt to child sexual exploitation. But in this case, I want to plea for Shadow's guilt of human trafficking charges, as the evidence is ample.

Given the overwhelming evidence and the serious nature of these crimes...

I sentence the defendant to the maximum term allowed by law!

You've been through so much, Blue. I'm so proud of how brave you've been through all of this.

Sharing my story...it felt good. like something was lifted. I'm glad I did it.

PATH 2

Would Blue like to attend the trial? It would be in a separate room, behind a double screen.

It's up to you, Blue...

I won't go.... But I have a purpose in this trial...

EXIT

PRESS

The evidence we have indicates Shadow manipulated Blue into sexual exploitation!

MESSAGE LOGS SAMPLE

It's obvious that she was at the hotel against her will!

How can you prove this evidence has not been tampered with?

Uhm, I--

Well, of course we would never temper evidence!

I...I don't remember I guess...

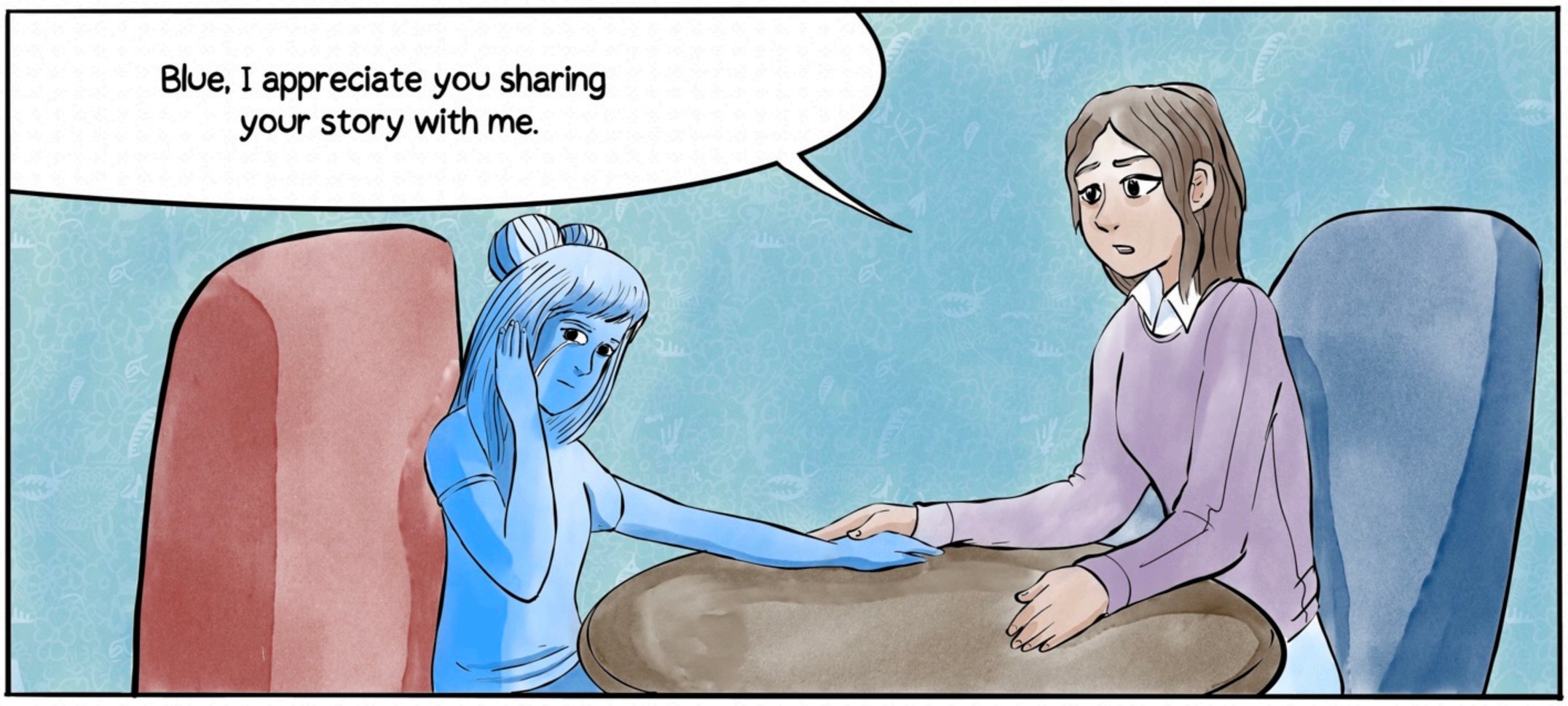
It happened so...fast...

He should be tried for numerous crimes, including trafficking!

...Shadow will be convicted for the sexual exploitation of a minor. However...

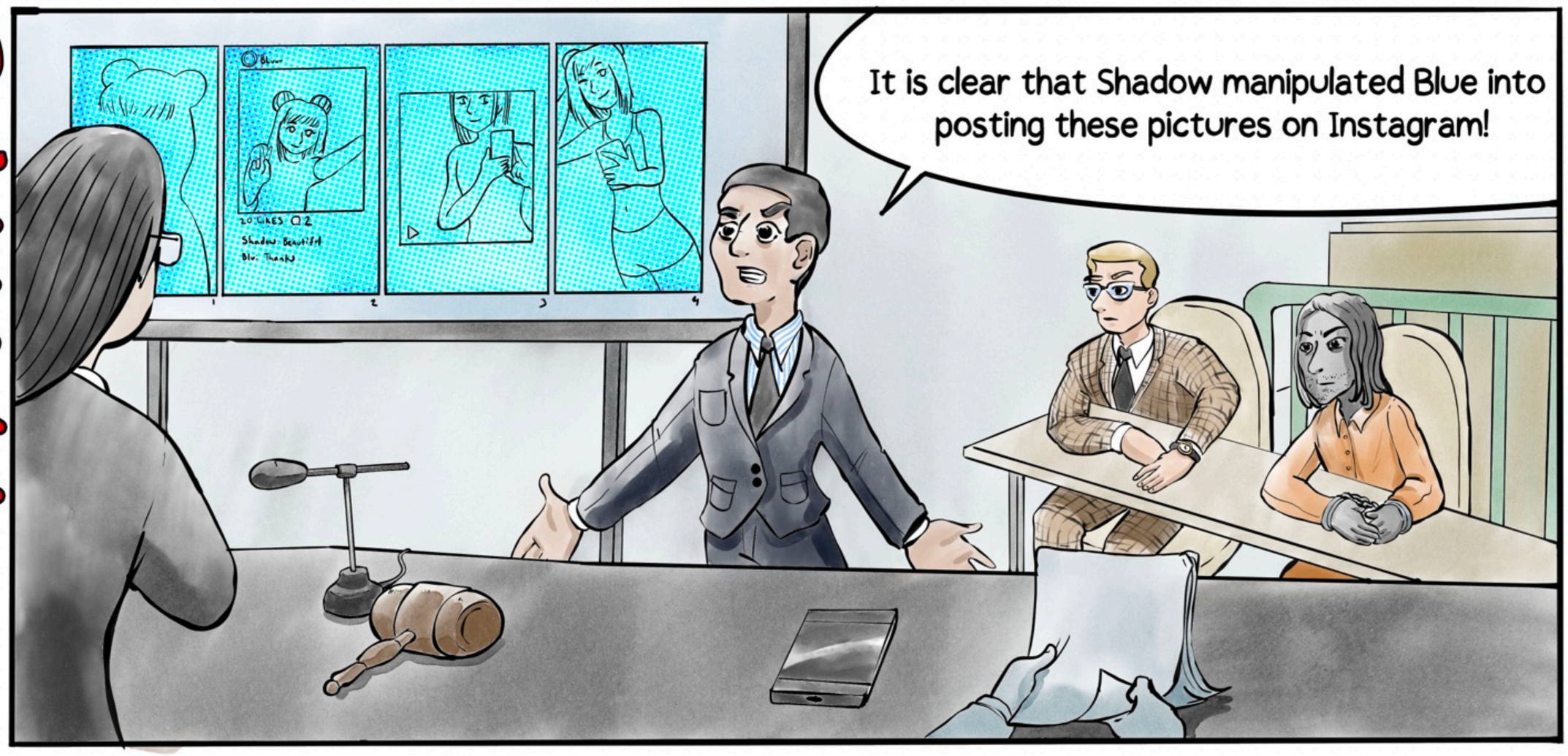
On the basis of the evidence presented and given the circumstances...

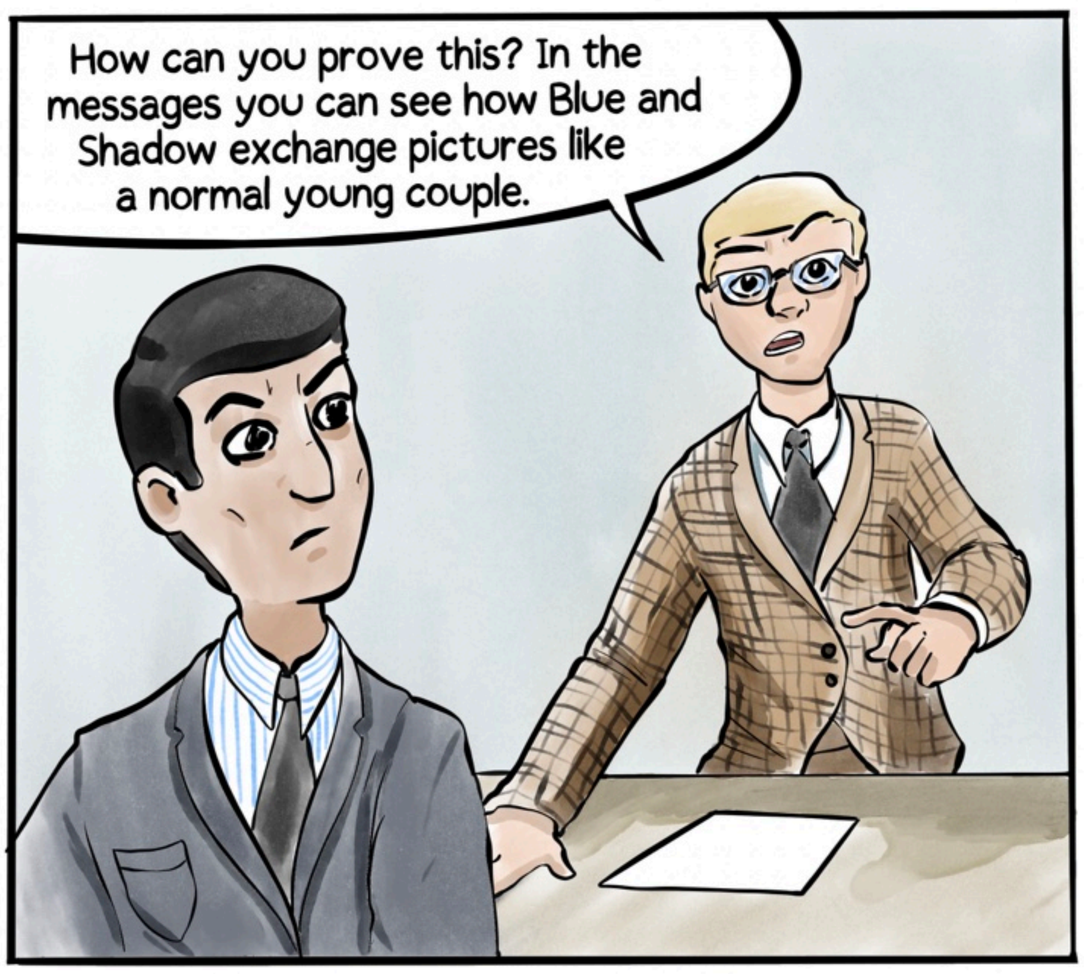
...there is not enough evidence to provethe human trafficking charge.

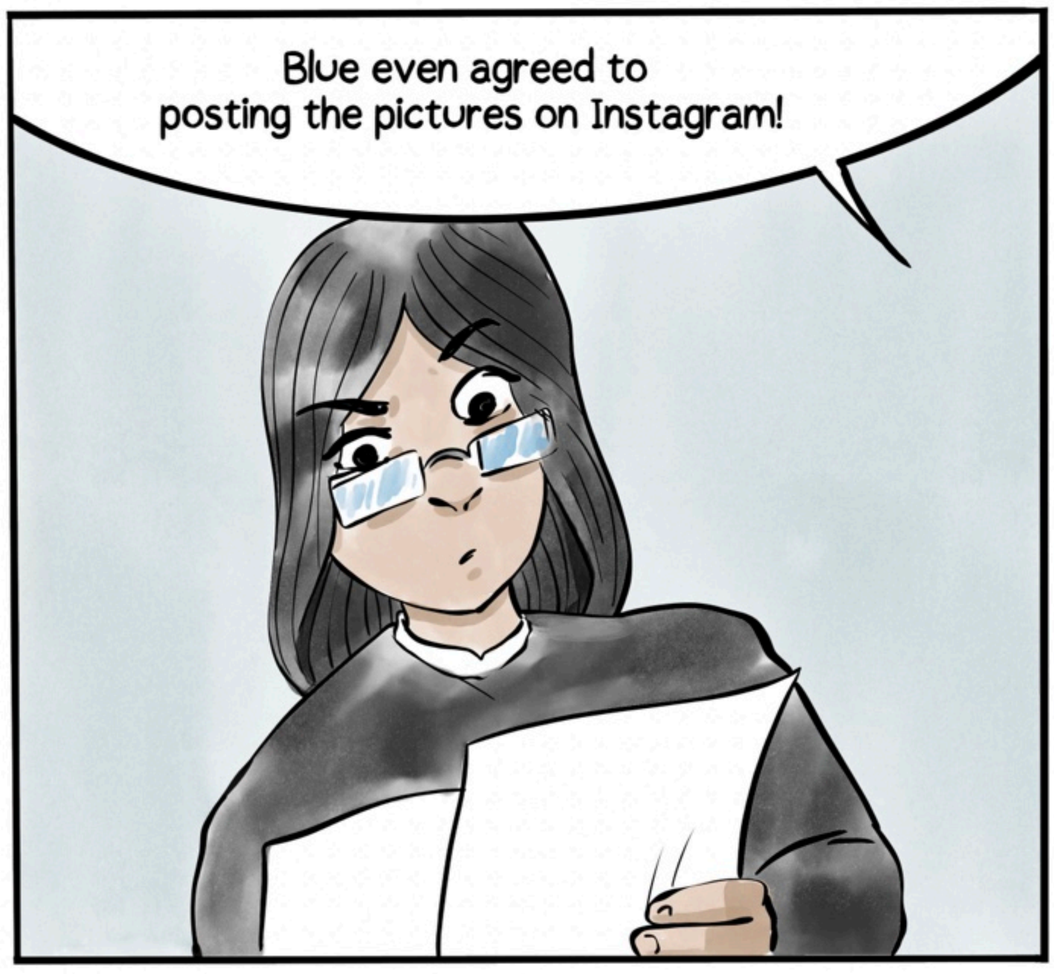


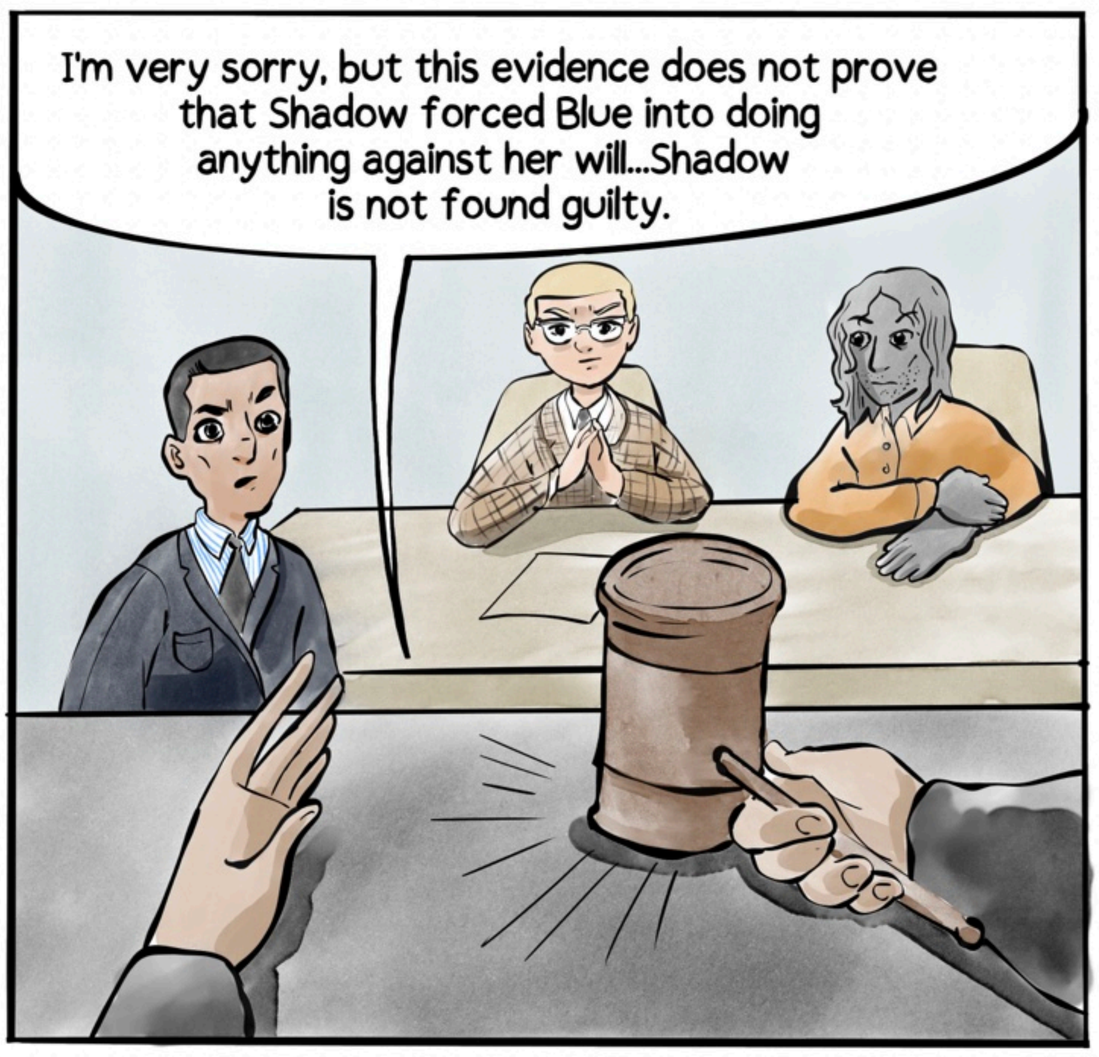
The End

PATH 3


20 LIKES
Shadow: Beautiful
Blue: Thanks
1
2
3
4
It is clear that Shadow manipulated Blue into posting these pictures on Instagram!


How can you prove this? In the messages you can see how Blue and Shadow exchange pictures like a normal young couple.


Blue even agreed to posting the pictures on Instagram!


I'm very sorry, but this evidence does not prove that Shadow forced Blue into doing anything against her will...Shadow is not found guilty.




Blue, thanks a lot for sharing your story.
It hasn't been easy...
Thank you, it does feel good to share. But it scares me to think Shadow is free, without any charges, free to go after another victim...

The End

CHAPTER 3 – TRIAL STAGE

Child victims of THB must receive appropriate protection and support during criminal justice procedures. The special protection measures for child victims as outlined in the Council of Europe's Guidelines on child-friendly justice include, among others:

a) **Child-oriented questioning**: Child victims' statements often serve as key evidence in THB cases, and the reliability of this evidence can be enhanced through child-appropriate questioning techniques.

b) **Specialised training for professionals**: Interviewers should undergo specialised training, including knowledge of developmental psychology, trauma psychology, and memory psychology. Judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement practitioners must also receive comprehensive training in child-appropriate victim-centric approaches.

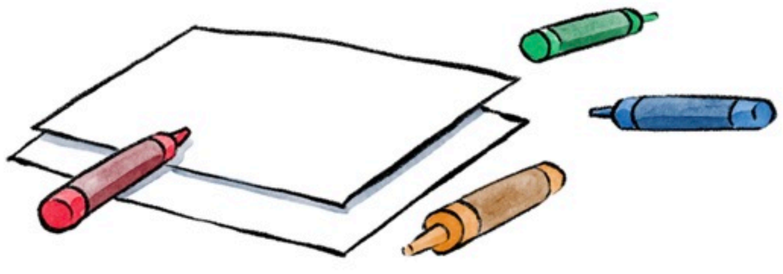
c) **Establishing child-friendly environments**: States should ensure the availability of child-friendly facilities at police stations and courts.

d) **Standard interview guidelines**: Developing and implementing standard procedures for recording interviews with child victims is essential. These guidelines should be tailored to protect the child's well-being and ensure that interviews are conducted in a consistent, respectful and non-traumatic manner.

e) **Inter-institutional cooperation**: Effective cooperation among various institutions, including law enforcement, social services, and child advocacy groups, is crucial for protecting child victims and ensuring comprehensive investigations

f) **Addressing Regional Disparities**: Efforts should be made to reduce regional disparities in developing cooperation structures. This includes ensuring that all regions have access to the necessary resources and support systems to protect child victims.



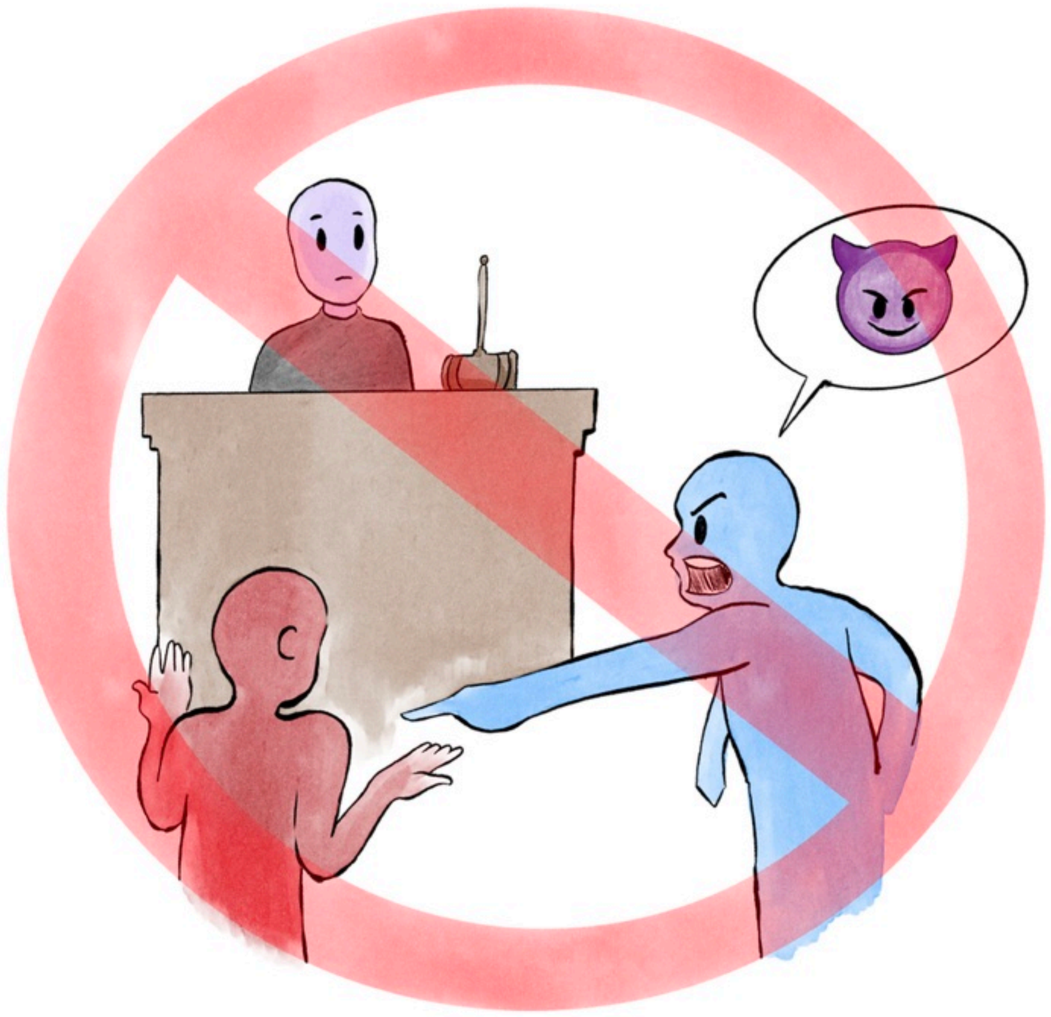


g) **Networking Infrastructure**: Establishing a centralised networking structure can facilitate formal cooperation and improve the efficiency of victim support services. This infrastructure should include clear protocols and channels for communication among all relevant stakeholders.

h) **Data Protection and Resource Allocation**: States must clarify data protection regulations to enable effective information sharing while safeguarding the privacy of child victims. Additionally, adequate financial resources should be allocated to support these cooperative efforts and to raise awareness about the importance and benefits of networking and cooperation.

i) **Using assessment catalogues & guidelines**: While recognising that an 'assessment catalogue' or checklist can be too rigid for addressing the diverse needs of child victims, a well-prepared guideline can be helpful. Such guidelines should serve as a support tool, ensuring that all relevant factors are considered and that practitioners understand the purpose and importance of each inquiry[11].

Forensic and digital evidence are core components in the prosecution of all human trafficking cases. However, their collection and use in court are not without challenges. Overindulgence in "smoking gun" evidence that can yield forensic results has led to multidisciplinary teams ignoring the utility and bearing of corroborating evidence. Investigators and professionals who follow their own presumptions based on prior cases without exploring the victim's statement for clues may miss key evidence.



[11]DISRUPT Manual on using digital evidence to combat child trafficking, 2025. Available at: https://victim-support.eu/publications/disrupt-manual

Though constantly evolving there are a number of challenges in relation to digital forensics which must be kept in mind:

a) **Technical challenges**: data volume; handling and processing speed, breaking encryption, capturing volatile data, storage concerns, proliferation of devices, proprietary data formats and protocols, the use of data obfuscation methods, data backup and recovery; detecting of fake or manipulated materials.

b) **Procedural challenges**: standardisation affecting consistency, reliability, and legal admissibility of forensic findings.

c) **Legal challenges**: include evidential integrity, cross-border digital evidence retrieval, and challenges in data sharing.

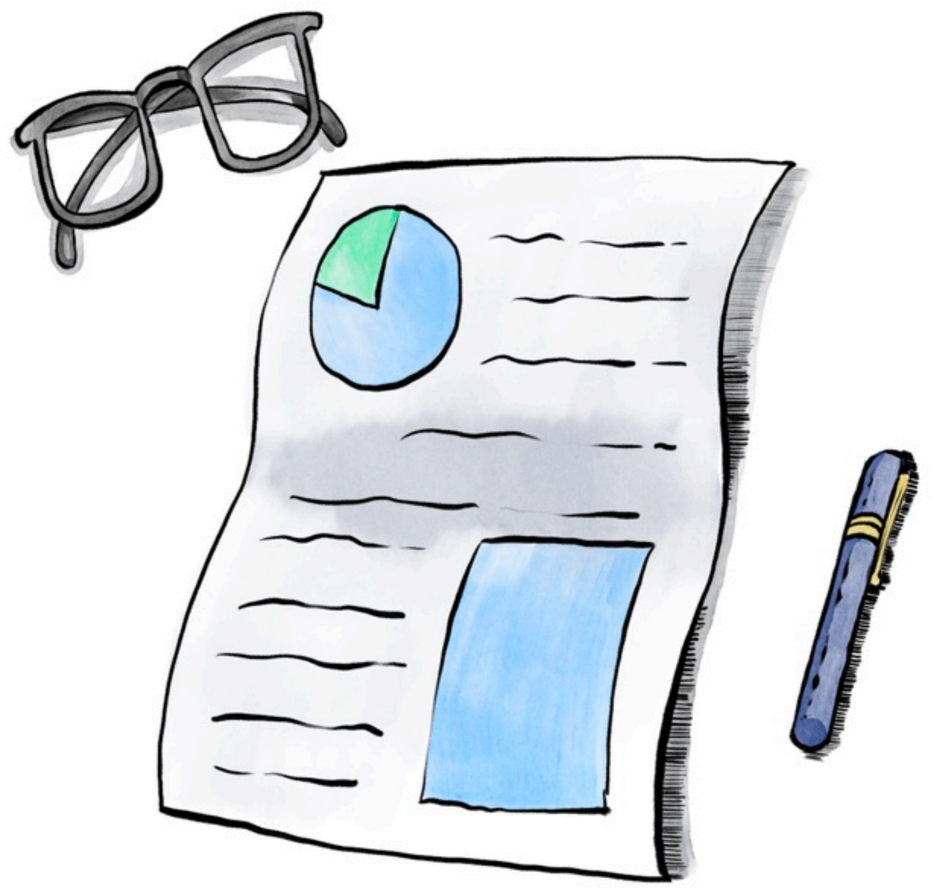
When it comes to presenting digital evidence in court, the following best practices should be followed:

- **Selection of information**: Only information which is supported by the examinations carried out should be presented.

- **Clarity**: Presentation of evidence should clearly state the results of any evaluation and interpretation of the examination.

- **Structure**: Written reports should include all the relevant information in a clear, concise, structured and unambiguous manner as required by the applicable legal process.

- **Use of peer review**: Written reports must be peer reviewed.

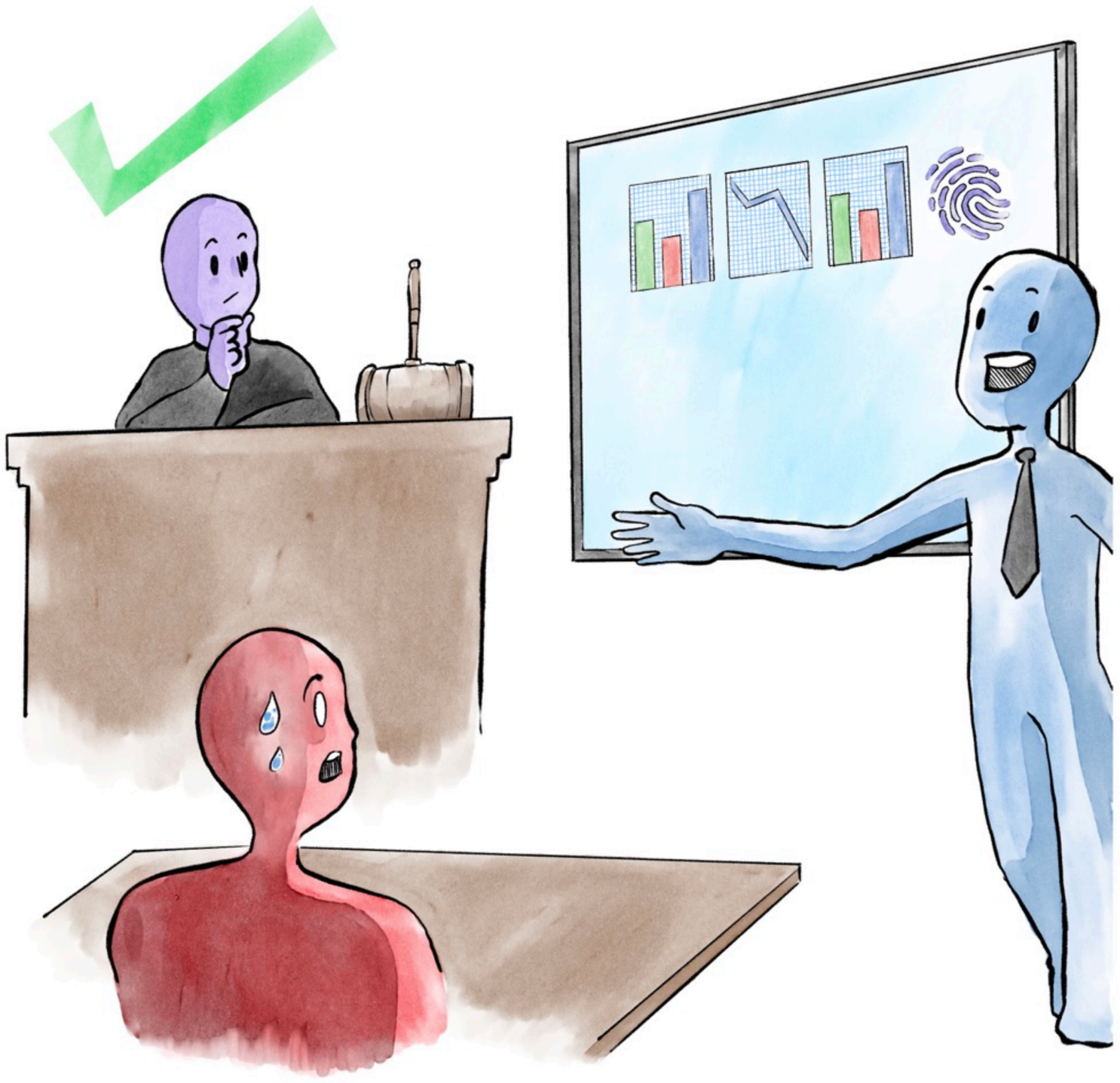


- **Answering questions:** Expert witnesses should resist responding to questions that take them outside their field of expertise unless specifically directed by the court. Even then, a declaration as to the limitations of their expertise should be made.

- **Identifying errors and/or limitations:** All known limitations and errors should be clearly identified in the report

- **Understanding context:** The context of the data must be both understood and accurately represented in any generated reports and statements.

- **Provenance:** Significant care should always be given to ensure that the provenance of provided results is accurate in terms of both ownership and how the data came into existence on the media being analysed[12].



[12] ENFSI (2015). Best Practice Manual for the Forensic Examination of Digital Technology. Available at https://enfsi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1._forensic_examination_of_digital_technology_0.pdf