

SPONTANEOUS



JOE HARRIS • BRETT WELDELE

SPONTANEOUS



AN ONI PRESS PUBLICATION

SPONTA



MANEQUIN

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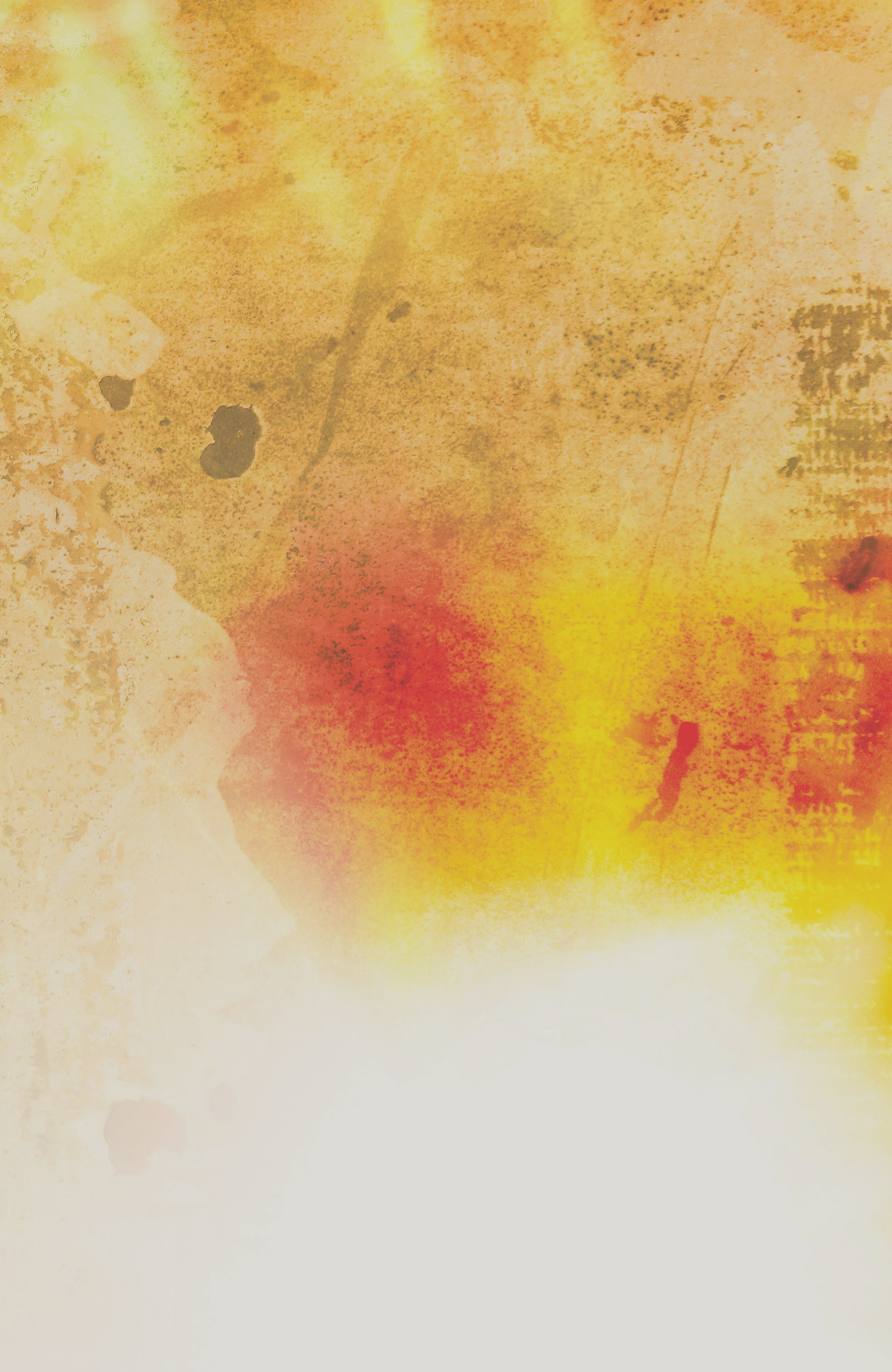
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CHAPTER ONE
"COMBUSTIBLE"





CASE FILE #3.

YOUR AVERAGE SHOPPING MALL FOOD COURT.

APPROX. 20,000 SQUARE FEET IN AREA. TEMPERATURE, A COMFORTABLE 70 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT. FUNCTIONING AIR CONDITIONING AND FILTRATION TO HANDLE THOUSANDS OF CUSTOMERS AND PASSERSBY.

NOTHING *SPECIAL* ABOUT ANY OF IT ALL.

OKAY. SO THAT'S
FIVE MIGHTY MELTS,
SIX FUNNY RINGS, *THREE*
ORDERS OF CHEESY CHEESE,
TWO SUPER-SIPPERS, AND,
LET ME SEE...*ONE*
SIDE SALAD.

DO YOU NEED
ANY *DRESSING*
WITH THAT?

NO.
THANK YOU.



HOW ABOUT
KETCHUP? HOT
SAUCE?
ASPIRIN?

DO YOU HAVE
A **HEADACHE**, BY ANY
CHANCE? **MUSCLE PAIN?**
A **VITAMIN DEFICIENCY?**
HANG ON A SECOND...



HAVE YOU BEEN
SLEEPING WELL?
WHAT ABOUT **URINATION?**
SOMETIMES DIFFICULTY
PEEING IS REPORTED AS
A PROBLEM BEFORE
SOMEBODY--

MELVIN,
WHAT DID I
TELL YOU ABOUT
OUR **GREETING**
POLICY?



I'M **VERY**
SORRY, SIR. HE'S
A NEW EMPLOYEE AND
JUST GETTING INTO
THE SWING OF THINGS
AROUND HERE.

I HOPE YOU'LL
ACCEPT THESE **COUPONS**
FOR YOUR NEXT VISIT
TO **FRIK A FRY** ALONG
WITH FREE REFILLS ON
YOUR THIRSTY-SIZE
SODA.



WE DO
HOPE YOU HAVE A
DELICIOUS DAY
AND COME BACK
AND SEE US
REAL--

HOW'D
HE **KNOW?**



I--
I DIDN'T...



NOT
UNTIL **JUST**
NOW.



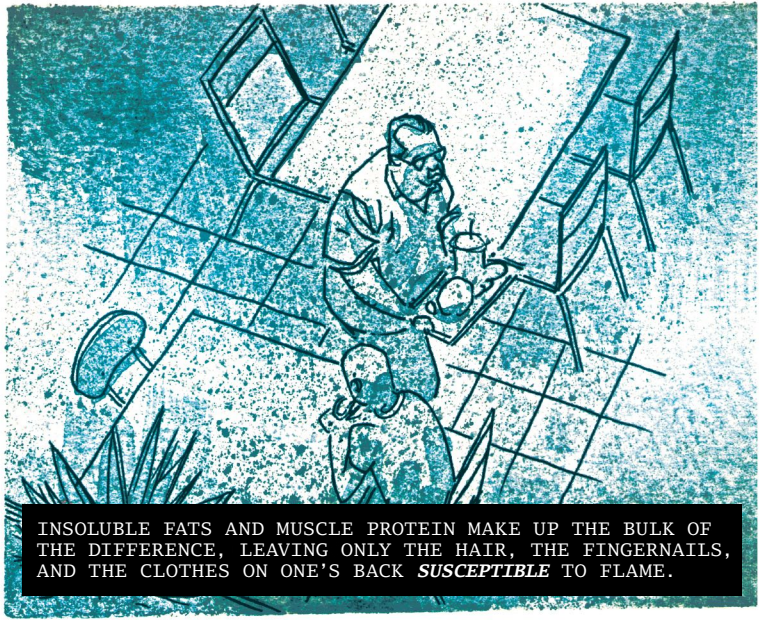
THANKS FOR COMING TO **FRIK A FRY**, SIR!



COME BACK AND SEE US REAL SOON.



THE HUMAN BODY IS COMPRISED OF BETWEEN 65 PERCENT AND 75 PERCENT WATER.



INSOLUBLE FATS AND MUSCLE PROTEIN MAKE UP THE BULK OF THE DIFFERENCE, LEAVING ONLY THE HAIR, THE FINGERNAILS, AND THE CLOTHES ON ONE'S BACK **SUSCEPTIBLE TO FLAME**.



CASE FILE: HUBERT MICHAELS

HT=6'1"

WATER=207.03 LBS. APPROX

WEIGHT=365 LBS.

BODY FAT=??

PROTEIN/MUSCLE= 55.61 LBS APPROX

WE ARE, ALMOST BY DEFINITION, **FIREPROOF**.

BUT MY FATHER ONCE TOLD ME THAT **ALMOST** ONLY COUNTS IN HORSESHOES AND HAND GRENADES.

WHEE!

TOBY, BE CAREFUL!

I'LL GET IT!

SORRY-- I HAVE TO GO ON **BREAK** NOW.

EXCUSE ME?

AND THAT EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US, FOR WHATEVER PLAIN AND BORING STUFF THAT MAKES UP 99.9 PERCENT OF OUR LIVES...

ARE YOU **OKAY**, MISTER?

EXCUSE ME--**PLEASE!**

BRAAAAAP

...IS **SPECIAL** IN HIS OWN WAY.



JESUS,
MARY, AND
JOSEPH...



TOBY,
COME HERE.

WHY'S
HE SO
SWEATY?



DON'T
WANT...TO
LET GO...

I...
I SEE...



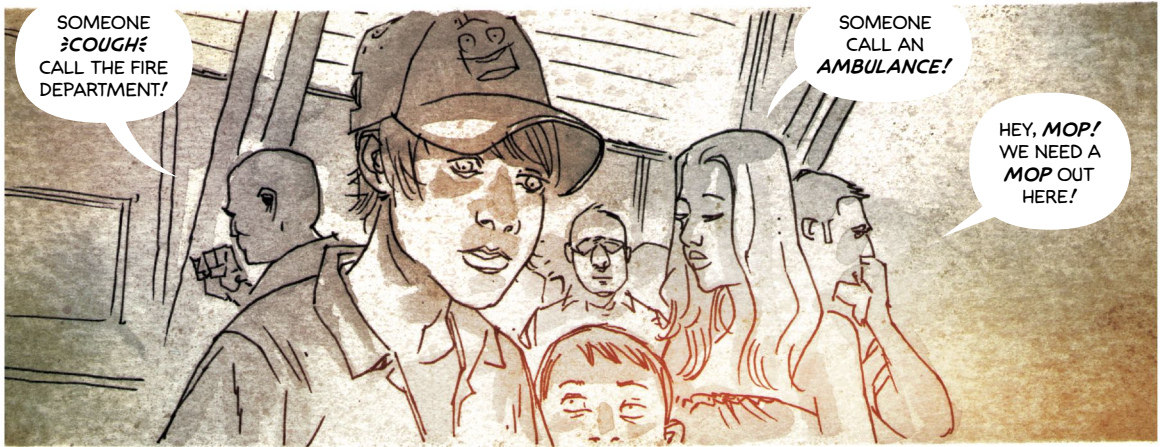
WHAT
IS IT...?

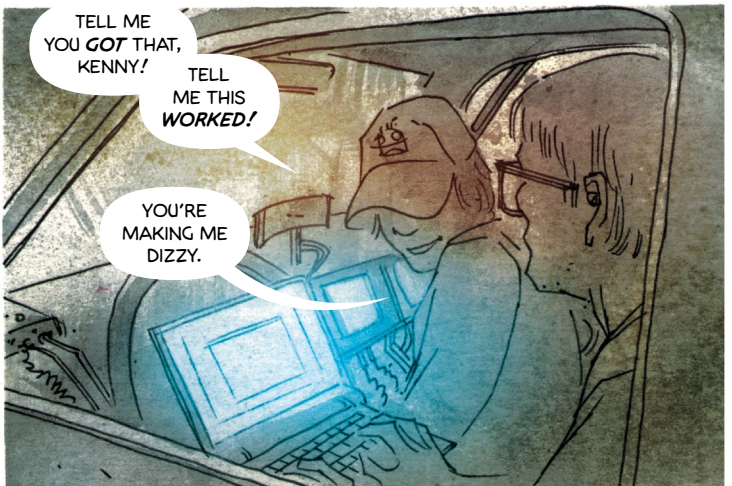
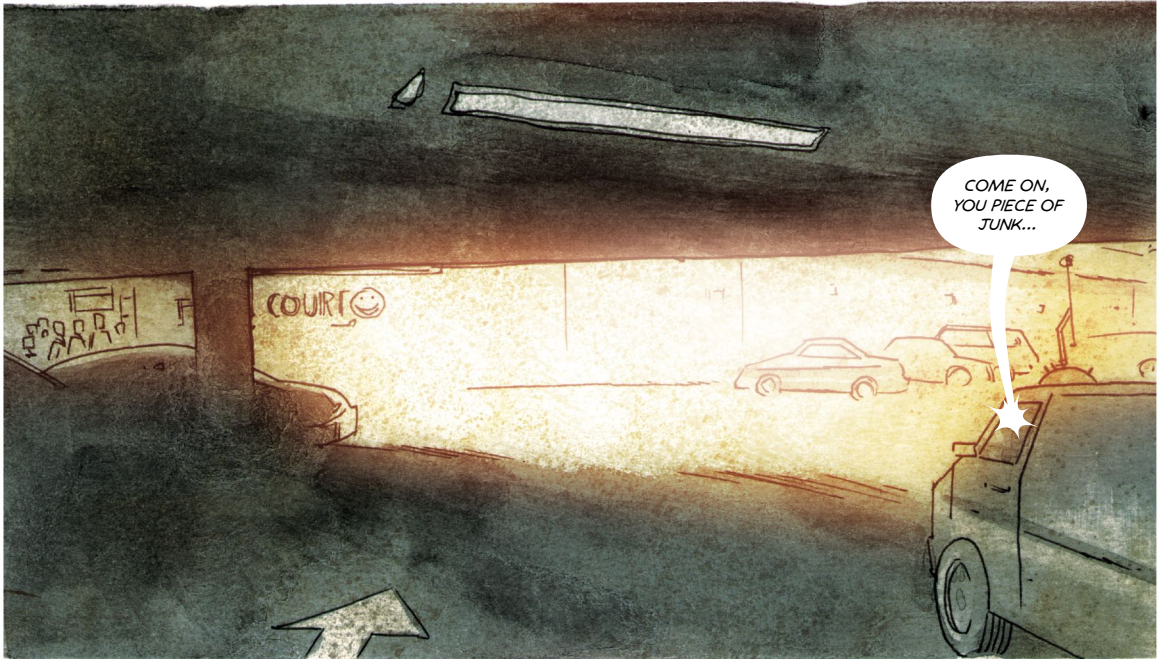
HEY!

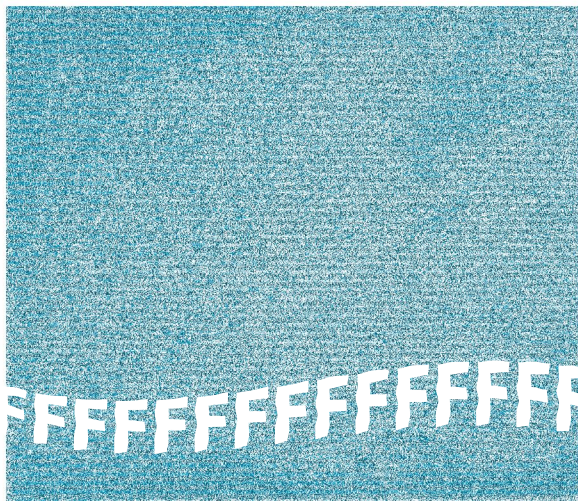
PLEASE--
TELL ME WHAT
YOU SEE!

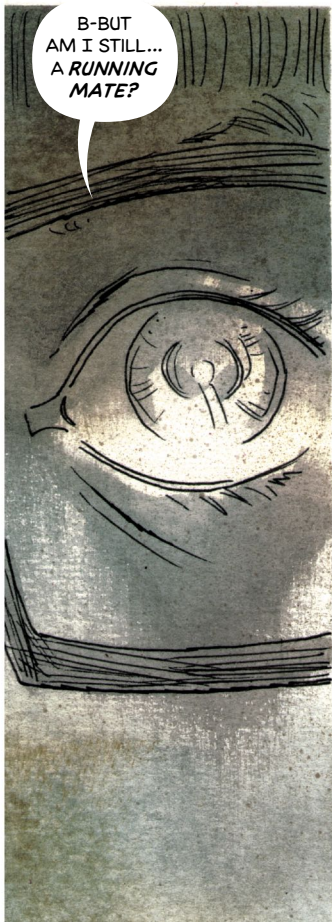


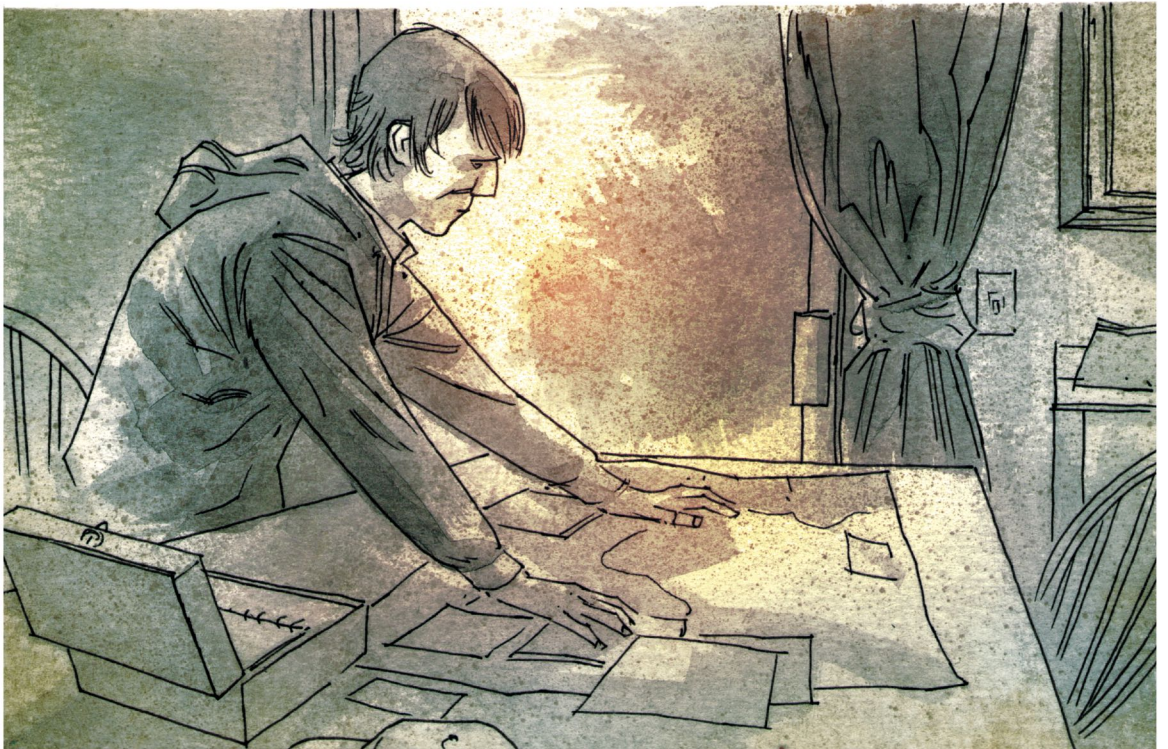
AHHH

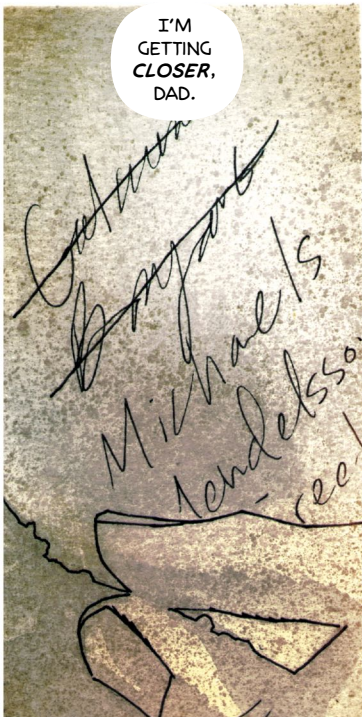
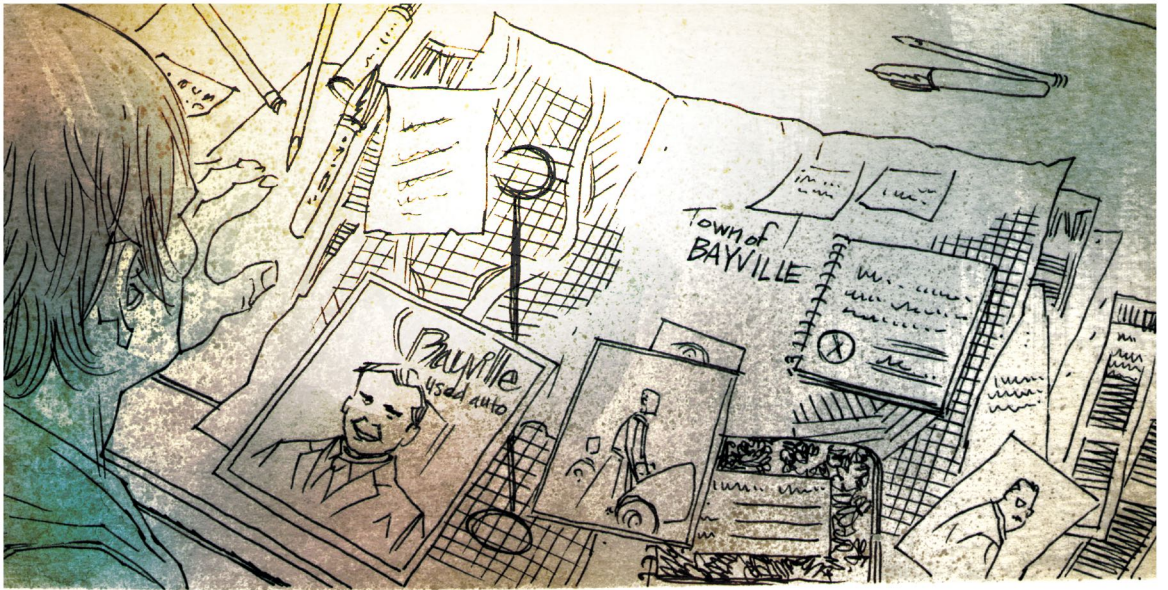














WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT. COME CLOSER AND SEE!



LISTEN TO YOUR FATHER, MELVIN.

OH, HE'S LISTENING. GONNA BE A *SMART GUY*, THIS ONE, AND MAKE A LIVING WITH HIS *BRAINS*.

NOT LIKE HIS *OLD MAN*.



I WANT YOU TO CLOSE YOUR EYES AND MAKE A *WISH*, MELVIN... ONLY DON'T TELL *ANYBODY* WHAT YOU WISHED FOR. AND IF YOU *BLOW OUT* ALL THE CANDLES IN ONE BREATH, IT'LL COME *TRUE*.

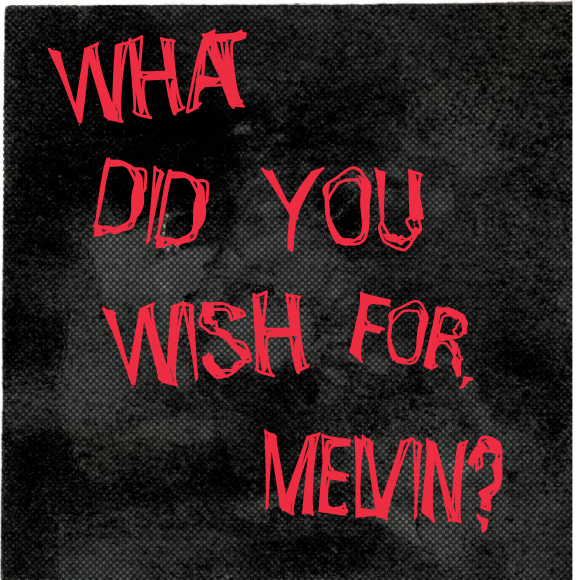
YOU CAN WISH FOR *ANYTHING* YOU WANT, UNDERSTAND?

YES.

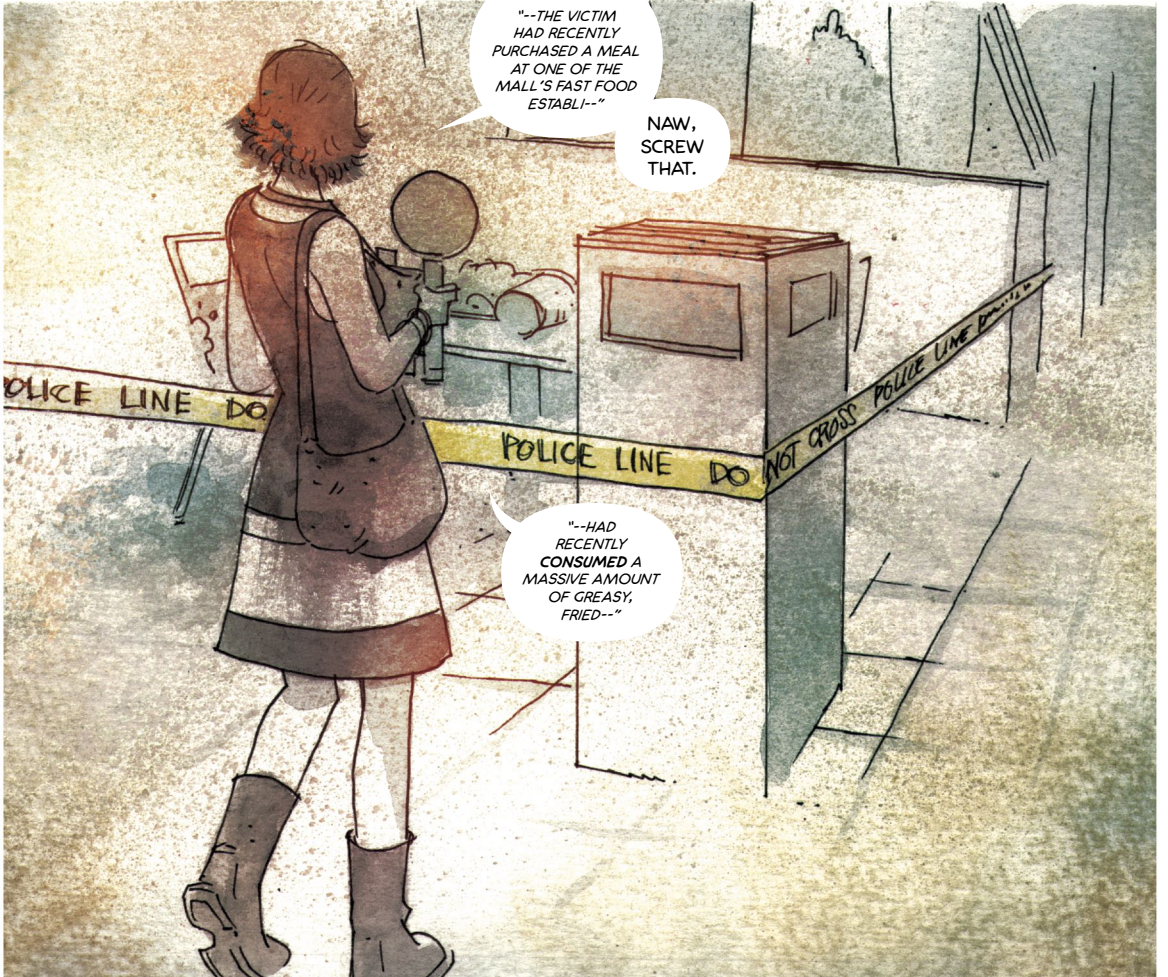
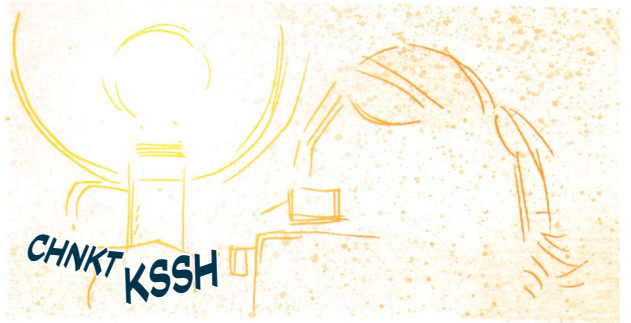
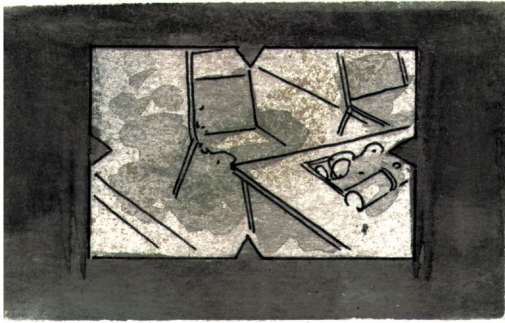


WHY DON'T YOU OPEN A *WINDOW* OR SOMETHING? IT'S LIKE AN *OVEN* IN HERE.

IT'S *THIRTY DEGREES* OUTSIDE.









?

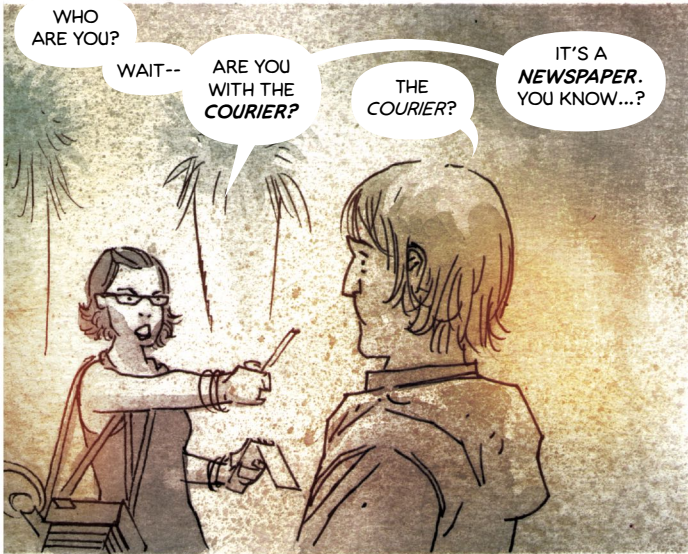
"--ENOUGH TO PROVIDE A **THIRD WORLD COUNTRY** WITH HUNGER RELIEF FOR DAYS AND DAYS--"



THAT'S GOOD...THAT'S GOOD...

DEVELOP THE IDEA. ESCALATE. RAISE THE STAKES.

BRING THE DAYLIGHT TO THE DARK CORNERS. THIS WORLD NEEDS YOU, KID. AND THEY'RE WAITING RIGHT--



WHO ARE YOU?

WAIT--

ARE YOU WITH THE **COURIER?**

THE **COURIER?**

IT'S A **NEWSPAPER.** YOU KNOW...?



OF COURSE YOU DON'T. PRINT IS **DEAD.**

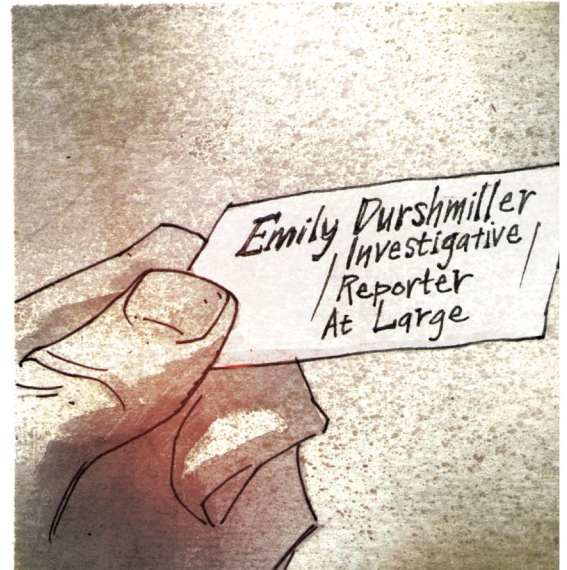
GODDAMMIT...



I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BY--

MY **CARD.**

OKAY...



Emily Durshmitter
Investigative
Reporter
At Large



DID YOU **ESCAPE** FROM SOMEPLACE?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

"AT LARGE..." IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE ON THE **RUN** AND SOMEONE'S TRYING TO BRING YOU IN.

THAT'S WHAT IT **MEANS**, YOU KNOW.



DO YOU **WORK** HERE?

WHAT? WHY DO YOU ASK?



RIGHT.

WELL... NOT ANYMORE.

WAIT!



WHEN THE VICTIM COLLAPSED, DO YOU RECALL ANY SMOKY SMELL?

DID IT COME **BEFORE** HE WENT UP IN FLAMES?

WHAT ABOUT SPARKS? OR CIGARETTES? STATIC IN THE AIR?

MAYBE LIGHTNING?

WE'RE **INSIDE** THE MALL...

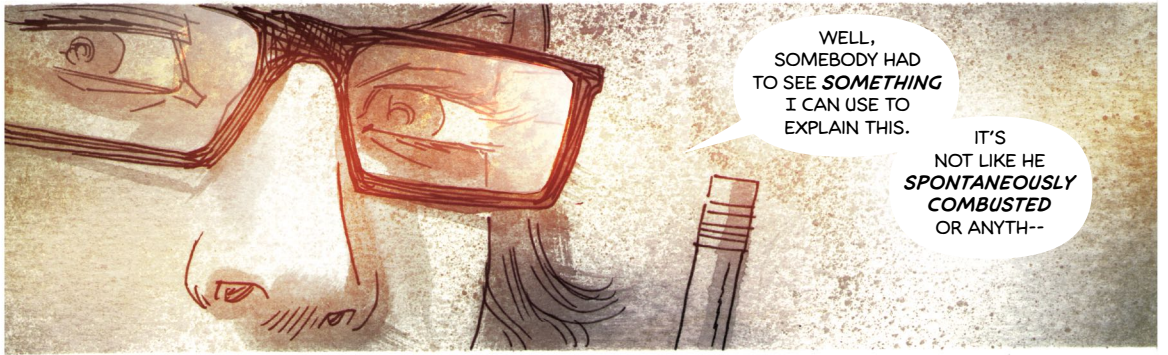


HOW ABOUT *RITUAL SUICIDE*?

WHAT--?

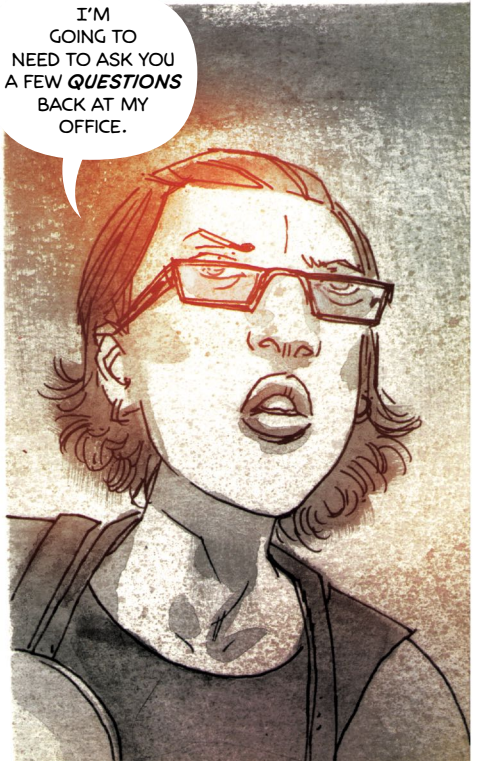
YOU KNOW, LIKE THE *BUDDHIST MONKS* WHO SET THEMSELVES ON FIRE?

DID HE SEEM *AGGRIEVED*?



WELL, SOMEBODY HAD TO SEE *SOMETHING* I CAN USE TO EXPLAIN THIS.

IT'S NOT LIKE HE *SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUSTED* OR ANYTH--



I'M GOING TO NEED TO ASK YOU A FEW *QUESTIONS* BACK AT MY OFFICE.



SO, LET ME SEE IF I UNDERSTAND YOU CORRECTLY. THE DECEASED-- **WAIT**. DO WE EVEN KNOW HIS **NAME**?

WHAT WAS IT, HUEY? UNICORN?



HUBERT. HIS NAME WAS **HUBERT MICHAELS**.

--MYSTERIOUSLY GOES UP IN **FLAMES** IN FRONT OF A PACKED SHOPPING MALL. DOZENS OF PEOPLE SEE IT, BUT NOBODY CAN **DESCRIBE** IT VERY WELL. NOBODY SNAPS A PICTURE, SNEAKS A VIDEO, **NOTHING**.

BUT **YOU**, MELVIN OF THE FOOD COURT, SAY HE **SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUSTED**.

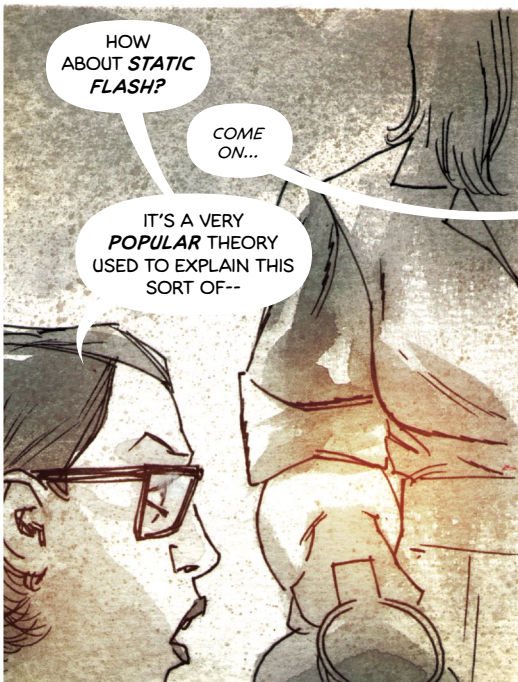
ACTUALLY, **YOU** SAID THAT...



LOOK, I DID SOME **RESEARCH** INTO SOMETHING CALLED THE **WICK EFFECT**. MAYBE THERE WAS AN IGNITION SOURCE. A SPARK. **SOMETHING**.

UNDER THE RIGHT CONDITIONS, CLOTHING CAN ACT LIKE A CANDLE WICK, AND BODY FAT **BURNS** LIKE FUEL.

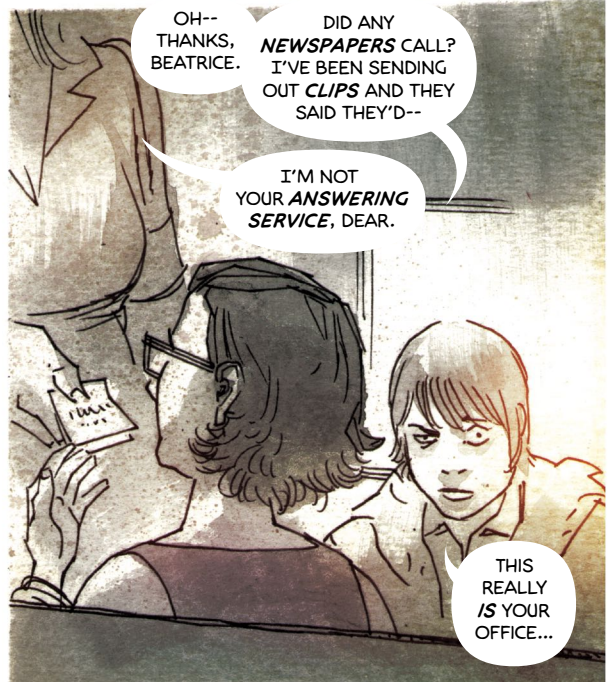
HE WASN'T HAVING A ROMANTIC DINNER. IT HAPPENED **FAST**.



HOW ABOUT **STATIC FLASH**?

COME ON...

IT'S A VERY **POPULAR** THEORY USED TO EXPLAIN THIS SORT OF--



OH-- THANKS, BEATRICE.

DID ANY **NEWSPAPERS** CALL? I'VE BEEN SENDING OUT **CLIPS** AND THEY SAID THEY'D--

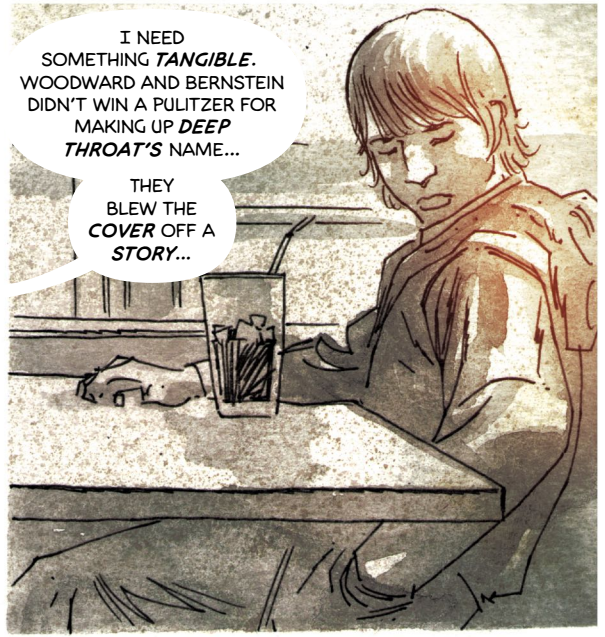
I'M NOT YOUR **ANSWERING SERVICE**, DEAR.

THIS REALLY **IS** YOUR OFFICE...



"LOCAL MAN
BURNS IN SHOPPING MALL
TRAGEDY"... "UNEXPLAINED
INFERNO CLAIMS SHOPPER"...
UGH.

I WEEP
FOR THE STATE OF
OUR **MEDIA**, MELVIN.
ALL SIZZLE AND
NO STEAK.



I NEED
SOMETHING **TANGIBLE**.
WOODWARD AND BERNSTEIN
DIDN'T WIN A PULITZER FOR
MAKING UP **DEEP
THROAT'S** NAME...

THEY
BLEW THE
COVER OFF A
STORY...



...THOUGH
IT **WAS** A PRETTY
COOL NAME FOR
A SOURCE.

UH-HUH.



EVERYONE'S
TREATING THIS LIKE
CROP CIRCLES APPEARED
IN THE LOCAL CORNFIELD
OR THE **VIRGIN MARY'S**
FACE POPPED UP ON
SOME BREAD MOLD.

BUT I DON'T
HAVE **TIME** FOR
BULLSHIT. IF IT'S A
STORY, THERE'S
A **TRUTH**. I JUST
NEED TO
FIND--



WHAT THE
HELL IS WRONG
WITH YOU,
DUDE?!

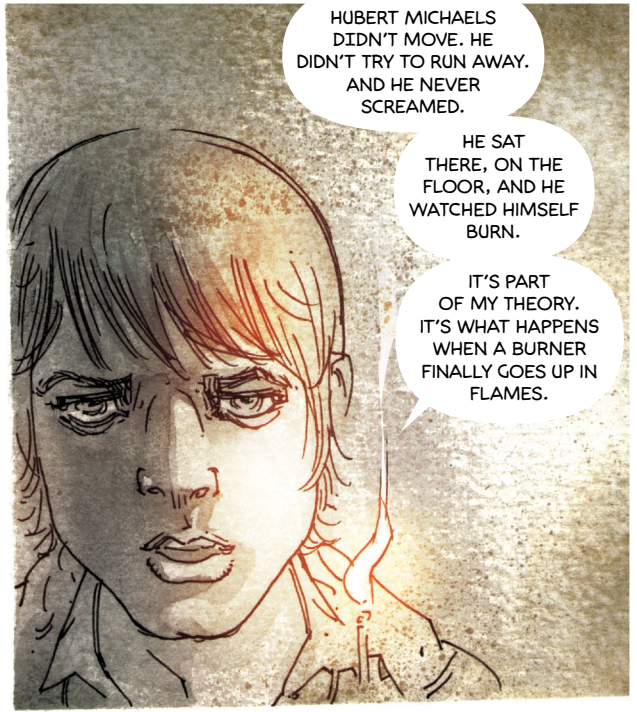


WHY DID YOU MOVE?

BECAUSE YOU'RE A FREAK!

WHY ELSE?

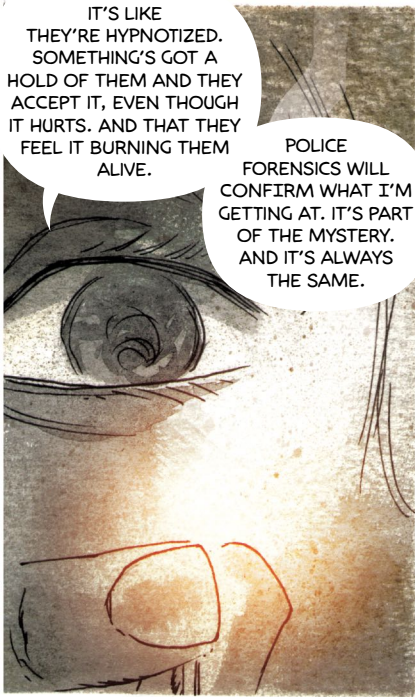
BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE BURNED ME!



HUBERT MICHAELS DIDN'T MOVE. HE DIDN'T TRY TO RUN AWAY. AND HE NEVER SCREAMED.

HE SAT THERE, ON THE FLOOR, AND HE WATCHED HIMSELF BURN.

IT'S PART OF MY THEORY. IT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BURNER FINALLY GOES UP IN FLAMES.



IT'S LIKE THEY'RE HYPNOTIZED. SOMETHING'S GOT A HOLD OF THEM AND THEY ACCEPT IT, EVEN THOUGH IT HURTS. AND THAT THEY FEEL IT BURNING THEM ALIVE.

POLICE FORENSICS WILL CONFIRM WHAT I'M GETTING AT. IT'S PART OF THE MYSTERY. AND IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME.



A **BURNER**?

IT'S JUST A **TERM** I USE. IT SOUNDS MORE APPROPRIATE THAN **VICTIM**.

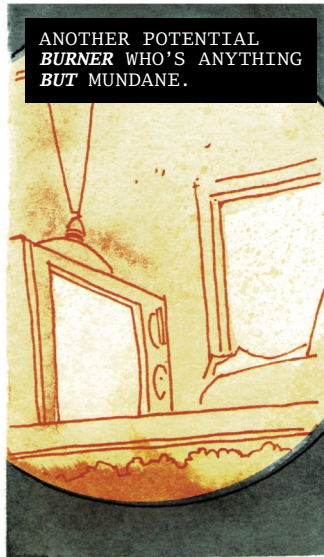
WHEN YOU...

I **TRACK** THEM. I CHART HISTORIES, PLOT LIKELIHOODS AND OTHER VARIABLES AND FACTORS IN ORDER TO TRY AND DEVELOP A **PREDICTABILITY** MODEL.

I **KNOW** WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.



SO WHO'S **NEXT**?





UM,
WHERE
ARE YOU
GOING?

GONZO.



OBJECTIVE
JOURNALISM IS
A MYTH. **HUNTER
THOMPSON**
KNEW
THAT.

HUNTER
THOMPSON?

WE NEED
TO EXPERIENCE
THIS STORY FROM
THE *INSIDE*,
MELVIN.



EASY
NOW...

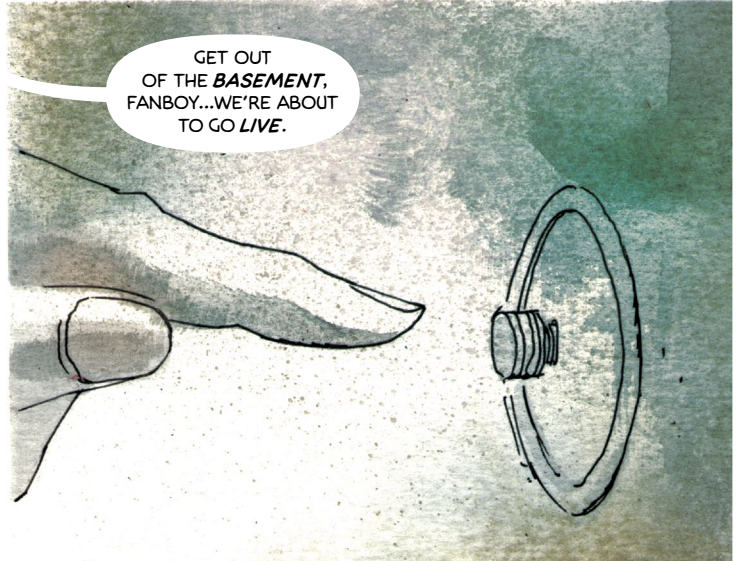


WHAT
STORY? I DIDN'T
AGREE TO ANY
SORT OF
STORY!



OH DEAR...

KRSSH



GET OUT
OF THE *BASEMENT*,
FANBOY...WE'RE ABOUT
TO GO *LIVE*.

KA-THOOM

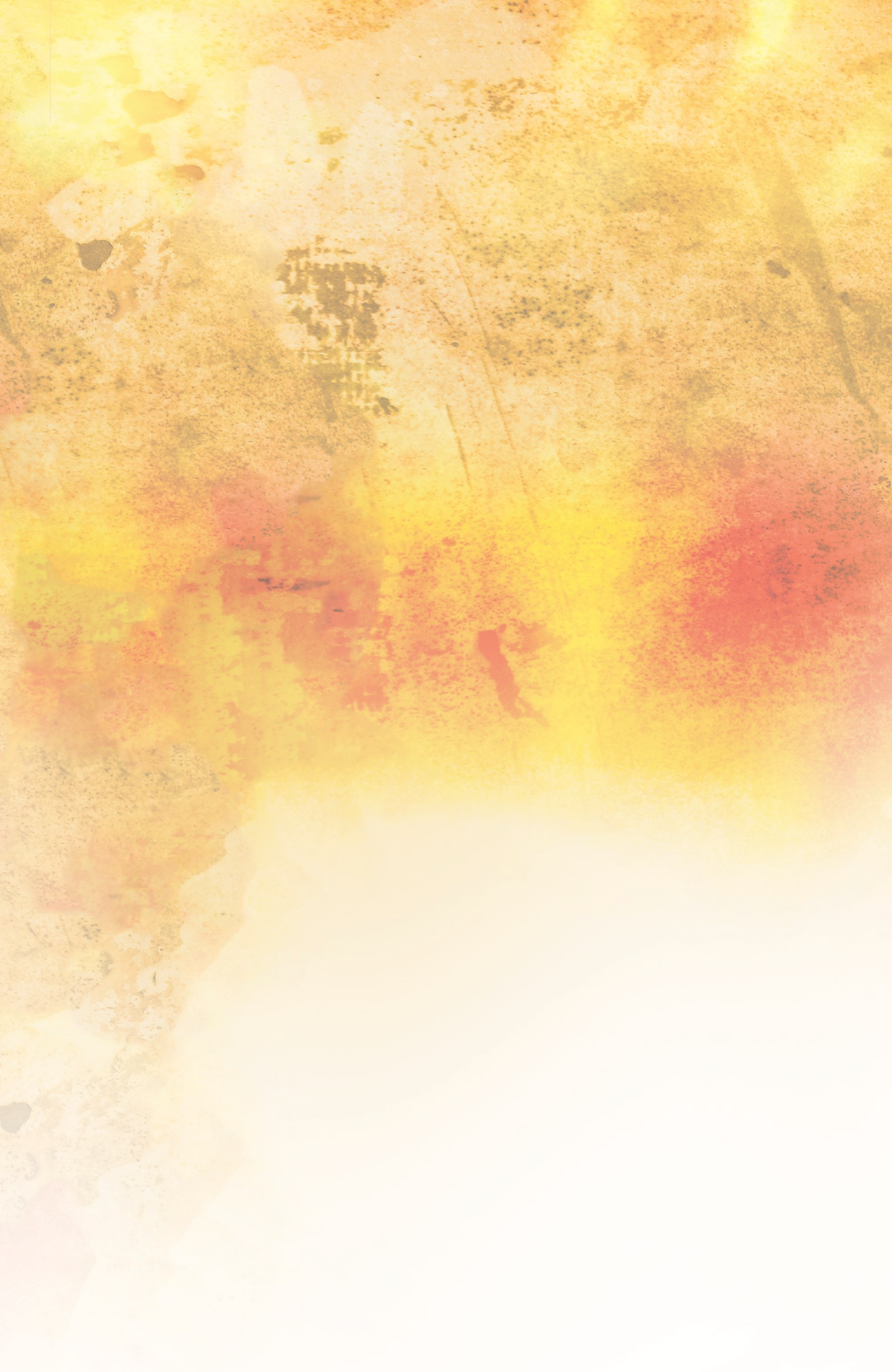


CHAPTER TWO "MELVIN"

see the face in the fire.

least
you not
my friend
how threat
you what will
my friend
regard and
tion at all
of let your
heily to lead
all in
of let your
distress, a





HELLOOOO...

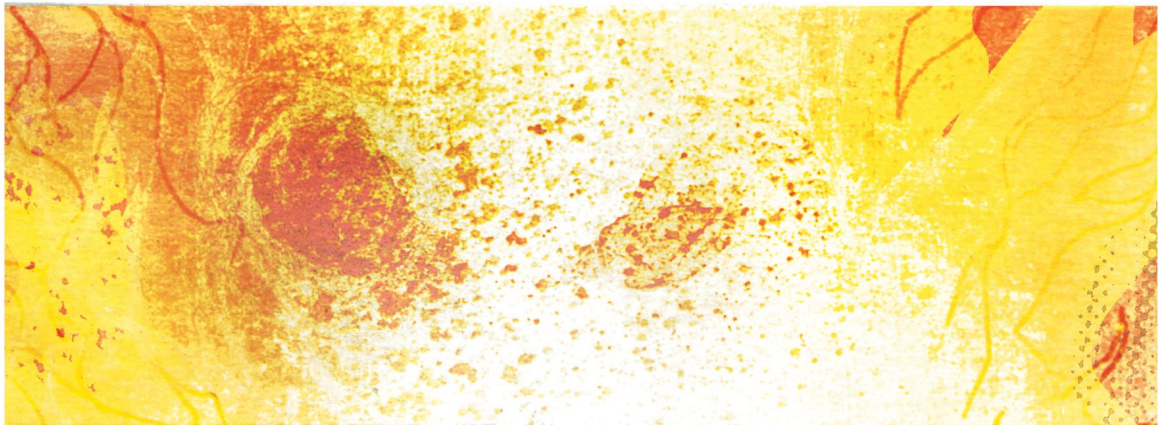
HEY--YOU
IN THERE?

C'MON,
KELVIN
MELVIN...

OPEN YOUR
EYES!

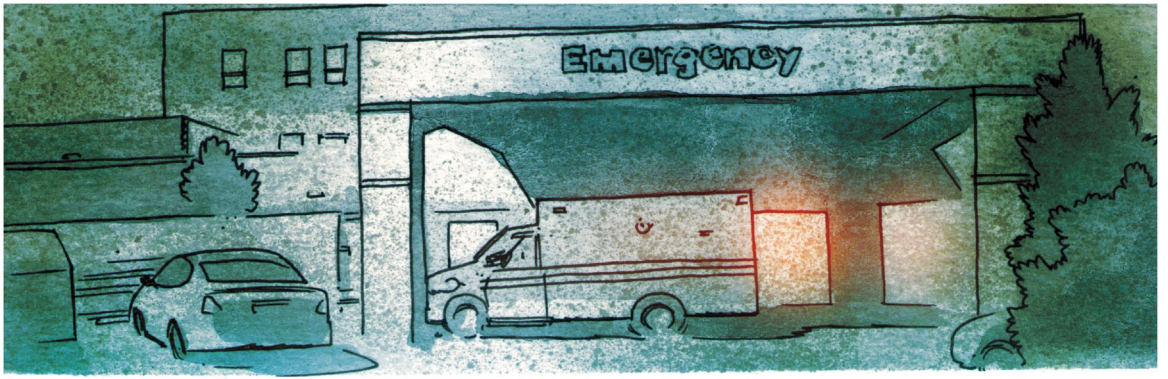
PLEASE LEAVE
ME ALONE...





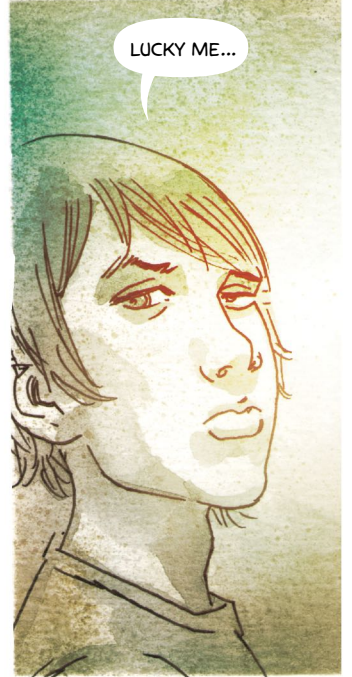






WELL, YOU'VE GOT A FEW **BUMPS** ON YOUR HEAD, BUT THERE'S NO CONCUSSION. FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, YOU'RE LUCKY YOU WEREN'T BURNED TO A CRISP.

EXCEPT FOR THOSE SCRAPES AND BRUISES, YOU'RE FINE.



LUCKY ME...



KAYLIE, I SAID DO **NOT** RUN OFF LIKE THAT.



MELVIN REYES, RIGHT?



CHIEF DONNA MILKEN, BAYVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT. YOU THINK WE CAN TALK FOR A SECOND?

DO I KNOW YOU?



YOU PROBABLY DON'T *REMEMBER*. MY FAMILY LIVED ACROSS THE STREET. BUT YOU WERE REALLY LITTLE STILL WHEN WE MOVED ACROSS TOWN.

I ALWAYS FELT BAD. ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR *FOLKS*, I MEAN.



SO HOW DID YOU KNOW OLIVIA MENDELSSOHN?

I DIDN'T.

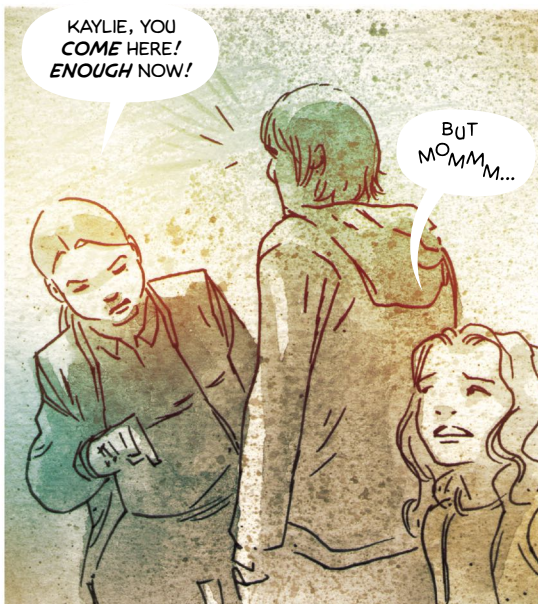
REALLY? A NEIGHBOR SAID HE'D SEEN YOU AROUND BEFORE. I THOUGHT, MAYBE SHE WAS A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY OR--

I DIDN'T *KNOW* HER.



WELL, WE'RE CHECKING TO SEE IF THERE WAS A PROBLEM WITH THE *GAS LINE*. FROM WHAT WE CAN TELL, MRS. MENDELSSOHN WAS FIXING HERSELF A CUP OF TEA WHEN THINGS WENT KABLOOEY.

IT WASN'T THE--



KAYLIE, YOU *COME* HERE! ENOUGH NOW!

BUT MOMMM...



I'M SORRY, YOU WERE *SAYING*?

NOTHING...

I JUST HAVE A *HEADACHE* AND THINGS ARE A LITTLE FUZZY, YOU KNOW?



WHAT DID I
TELL YOU ABOUT
RUNNING OFF?

STOP...IT'S
THE POLL-EECE...

THAT'S
RIGHT.

SO, DOC
SAYS I'M ALL
CLEAR AND--



YOU LOOK
A LITTLE *FLUSHED*,
MR. REYES. ARE
YOU SURE YOU'RE
OKAY?

LOOK, I'M *FINE*.
HOSPITALS FREAK
ME OUT.

I JUST
WANT TO
GO *HOME*
ALREADY.



THEN TELL
ME WHAT YOU
WERE YOU DOING
UP THERE,
MELVIN.



WE SAW
SMOKE.



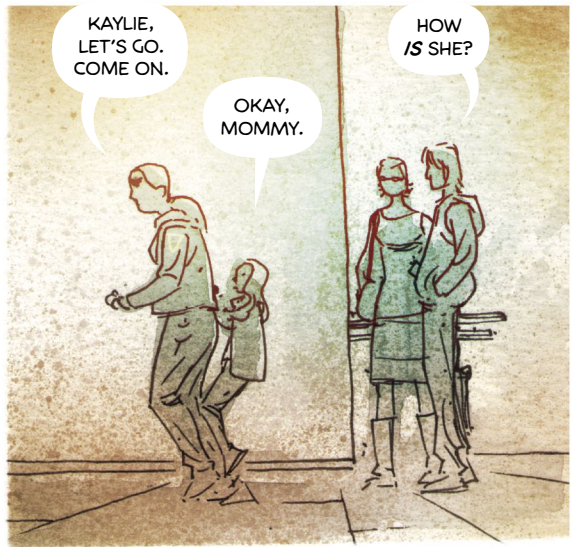
EMILY
DURSHMILLER,
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTER.

MY CARD.



SMOKE,
HUH?

WELL...IF
I HAVE ANY
QUESTIONS,
I'LL BE
IN TOUCH.



KAYLIE,
LET'S GO.
COME ON.

OKAY,
MOMMY.

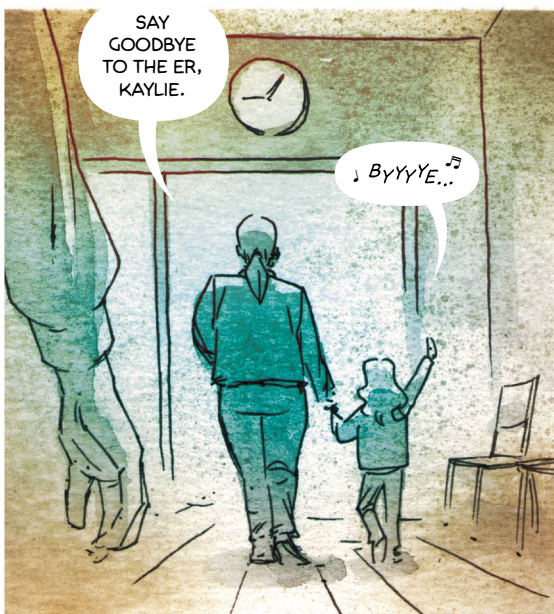
HOW
IS SHE?



I MEAN,
WHAT DID THEY
FIND INSIDE...
THAT WAS **LEFT**
OF HER?



YOU TOOK A
HELL OF A **BUMP**
TO THE HEAD. GET
SOME REST,
MELVIN.

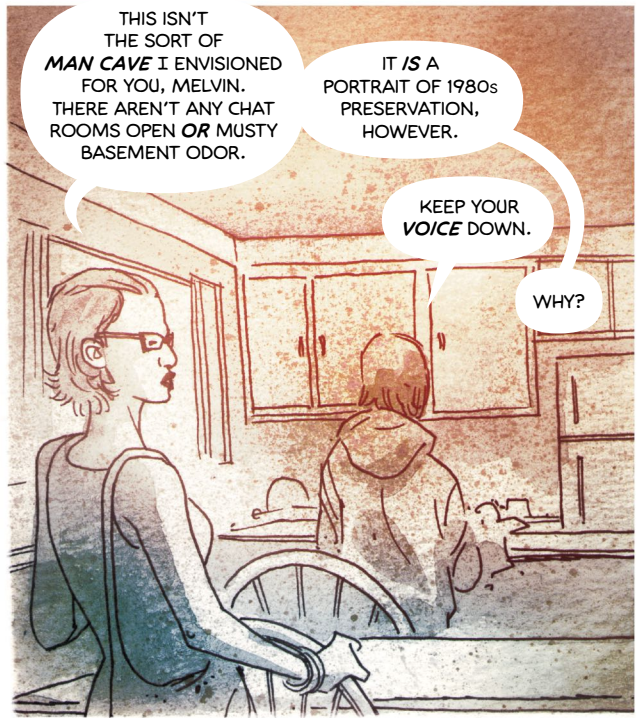


SAY
GOODBYE
TO THE ER,
KAYLIE.

Byyye...



DUDE, WHO
CALLED THE
HEAT?



THIS ISN'T THE SORT OF **MAN CAVE** I ENVISIONED FOR YOU, MELVIN. THERE AREN'T ANY CHAT ROOMS OPEN **OR** MUSTY BASEMENT ODOR.

IT **IS** A PORTRAIT OF 1980s PRESERVATION, HOWEVER.

KEEP YOUR **VOICE** DOWN.

WHY?



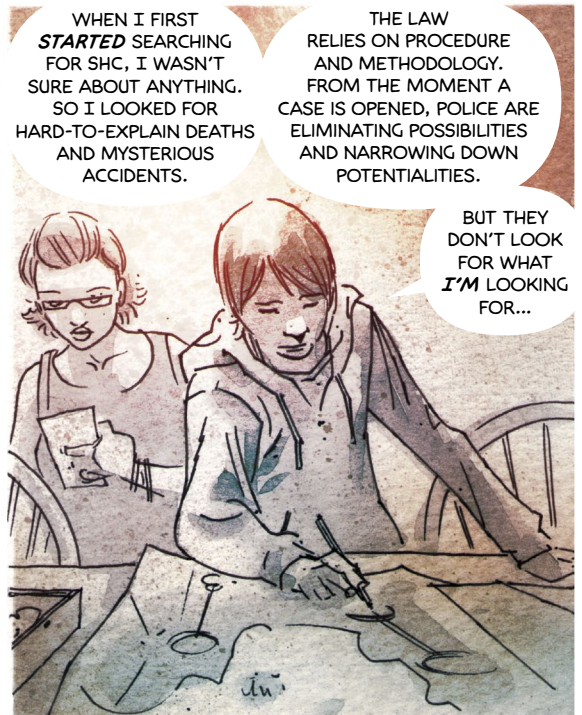
...

MY **MOTHER** IS SLEEPING.



...WHILE **OTHER** ASSUMPTIONS ARE PROVEN TRUE.

COME HERE. I WANT TO **SHOW** YOU SOMETHING.



WHEN I FIRST **STARTED** SEARCHING FOR SHC, I WASN'T SURE ABOUT ANYTHING. SO I LOOKED FOR HARD-TO-EXPLAIN DEATHS AND MYSTERIOUS ACCIDENTS.

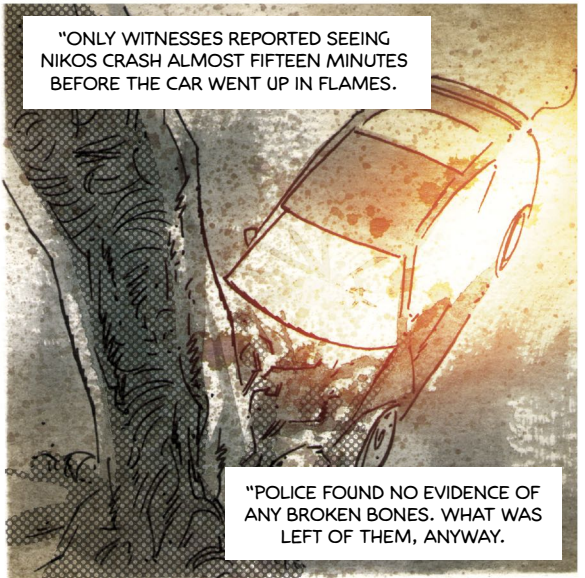
THE LAW RELIES ON PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY. FROM THE MOMENT A CASE IS OPENED, POLICE ARE ELIMINATING POSSIBILITIES AND NARROWING DOWN POTENTIALITIES.

BUT THEY DON'T LOOK FOR WHAT **I'M** LOOKING FOR...



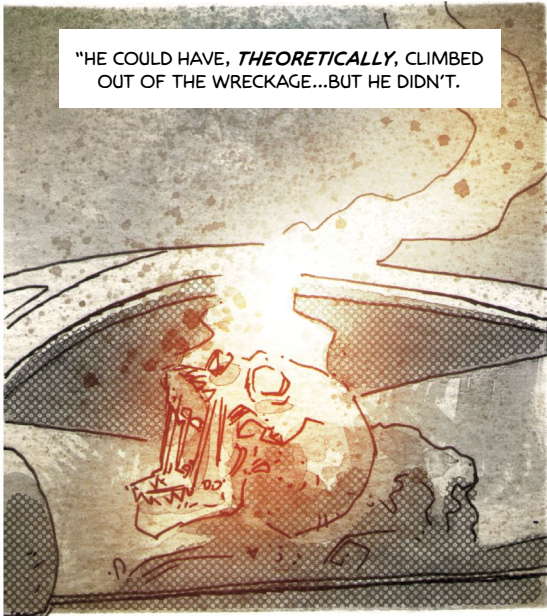
NIKOS GALIANOS, AGE FIFTY-NINE. OFFICIAL CAUSE OF DEATH?

PERISHED IN A CAR WRECK OUTSIDE TOWN.



"ONLY WITNESSES REPORTED SEEING NIKOS CRASH ALMOST FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE THE CAR WENT UP IN FLAMES.

"POLICE FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF ANY BROKEN BONES. WHAT WAS LEFT OF THEM, ANYWAY.



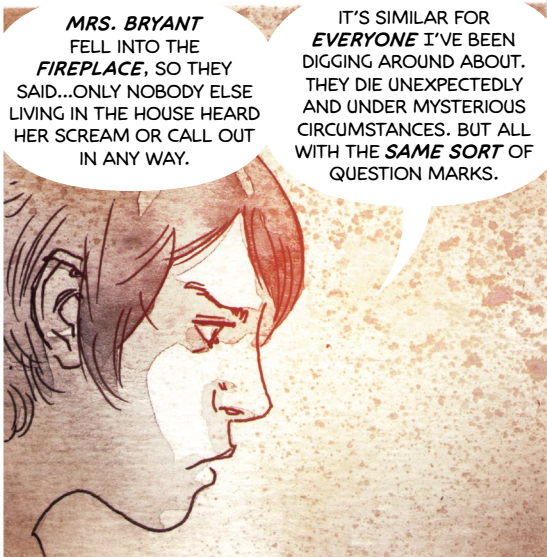
"HE COULD HAVE, *THEORETICALLY*, CLIMBED OUT OF THE WRECKAGE...BUT HE DIDN'T.



ARE YOU SURE WE SHOULD **STAY** HERE, MEL--?

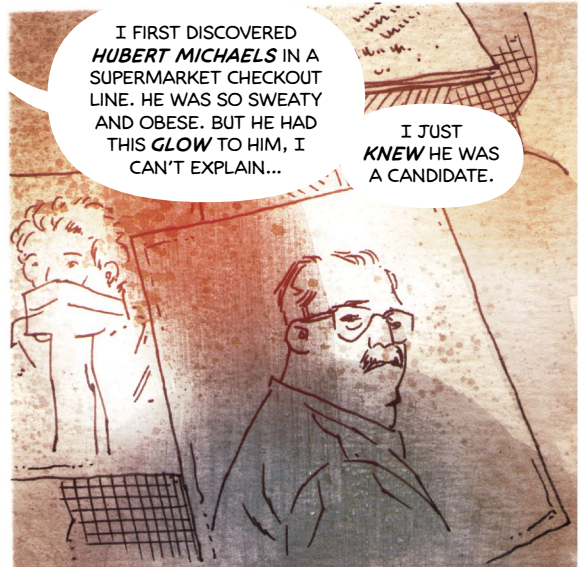
SHHH!

"SO WHAT *HAPPENED* OUT THERE? WHY DID HE LOSE CONTROL AND CRASH HIS CAR?"



MRS. BRYANT FELL INTO THE **FIREPLACE**, SO THEY SAID...ONLY NOBODY ELSE LIVING IN THE HOUSE HEARD HER SCREAM OR CALL OUT IN ANY WAY.

IT'S SIMILAR FOR **EVERYONE** I'VE BEEN DIGGING AROUND ABOUT. THEY DIE UNEXPECTEDLY AND UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT ALL WITH THE **SAME SORT** OF QUESTION MARKS.

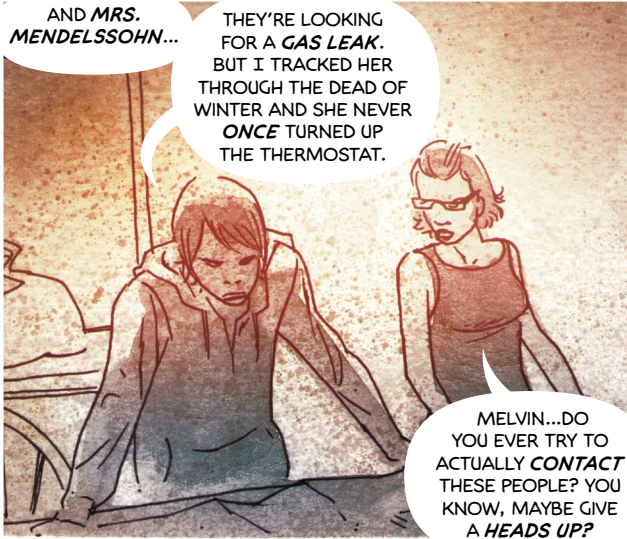


I FIRST DISCOVERED **HUBERT MICHAELS** IN A SUPERMARKET CHECKOUT LINE. HE WAS SO SWEATY AND OBESE. BUT HE HAD THIS **GLOW** TO HIM, I CAN'T EXPLAIN...

I JUST **KNEW** HE WAS A CANDIDATE.

AND MRS. MENDELSSOHN...

THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A GAS LEAK. BUT I TRACKED HER THROUGH THE DEAD OF WINTER AND SHE NEVER ONCE TURNED UP THE THERMOSTAT.



MELVIN...DO YOU EVER TRY TO ACTUALLY CONTACT THESE PEOPLE? YOU KNOW, MAYBE GIVE A HEADS UP?

I NEVER--

I MEAN, I THOUGHT THAT WOULD, YOU KNOW--

WHAT, VIOLATE THE PRIME DIRECTIVE?



ALL I'M SAYING IS, IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.

ERIN BROCKOVICH DIDN'T JUST GO AFTER A BOOK DEAL, MELVIN. AND SHE DIDN'T FIGHT THE POWER JUST TO GET JULIA AN OSCAR.

SOMETIMES WE NEED TO PUT THE PUBLIC GOOD FIRST.

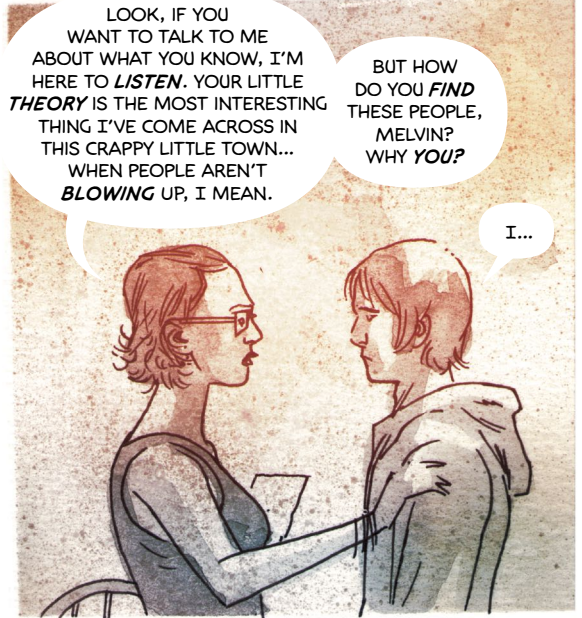
ERIN BROCKOVICH?



LOOK, IF YOU WANT TO TALK TO ME ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW, I'M HERE TO LISTEN. YOUR LITTLE THEORY IS THE MOST INTERESTING THING I'VE COME ACROSS IN THIS CRAPPY LITTLE TOWN... WHEN PEOPLE AREN'T BLOWING UP, I MEAN.

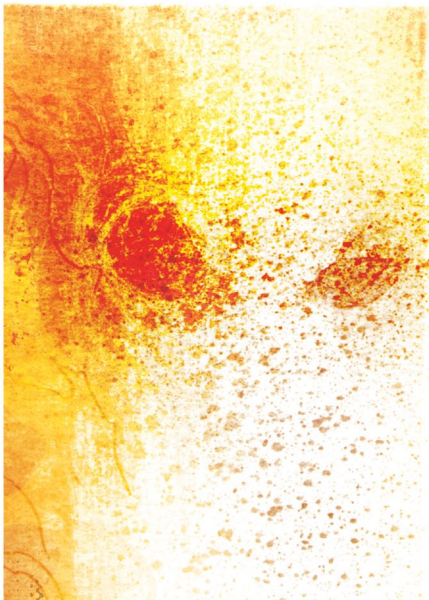
BUT HOW DO YOU FIND THESE PEOPLE, MELVIN? WHY YOU?

I...



I-I CAN'T TELL YOU THAT.

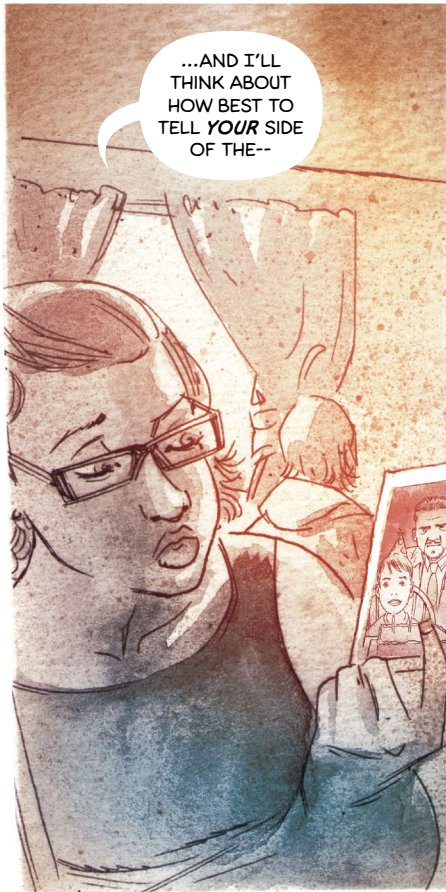
NOT YET.





WELL, I'M NOT REALLY INTO THE WHOLE **ANONYMOUS SOURCE** THING. WORKS FOR SOME PEOPLE, SURE. BUT YOU CAN JUST AS EASILY OUT **VALERIE PLAME** AND END UP WITH **WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION** ALL OVER YOUR FACE.

SO THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU WANT TO TELL ME...



...AND I'LL THINK ABOUT HOW BEST TO TELL **YOUR** SIDE OF THE--



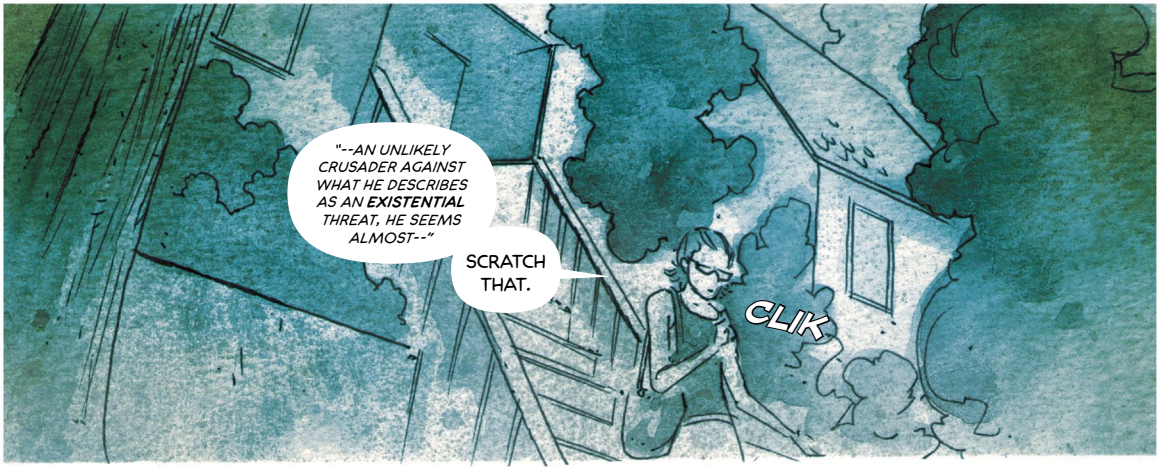
WHAT AREN'T YOU **TELLING** ME, MELVIN?

I'LL THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU **SAID**, MS. BROCKOVICH...



TOWN OF BAYVILLE

...AND I'LL LET YOU KNOW.



"--AN UNLIKELY CRUSADER AGAINST WHAT HE DESCRIBES AS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT, HE SEEMS ALMOST--"

SCRATCH THAT.

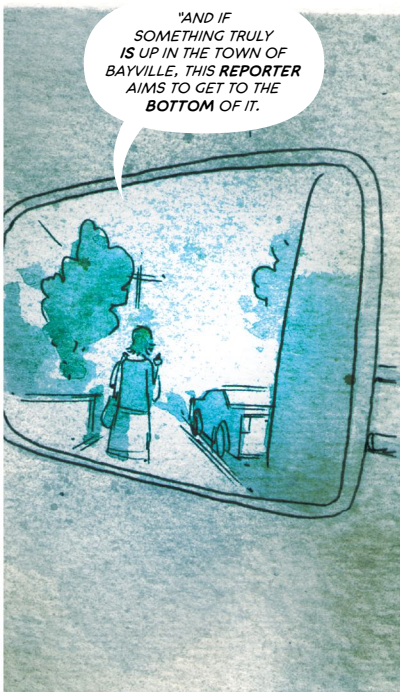
CLIK



"TILTING AT WINDMILLS BUT AIMING FOR DRAGONS, REYES HAS THE CLASSIC MAKINGS OF A CRANK.

"BUT THERE'S SOMETHING HONEST ABOUT HIM THAT GOES BEYOND HIS LACK OF PRETENSION AND CURIOUS FASHION HABITS.

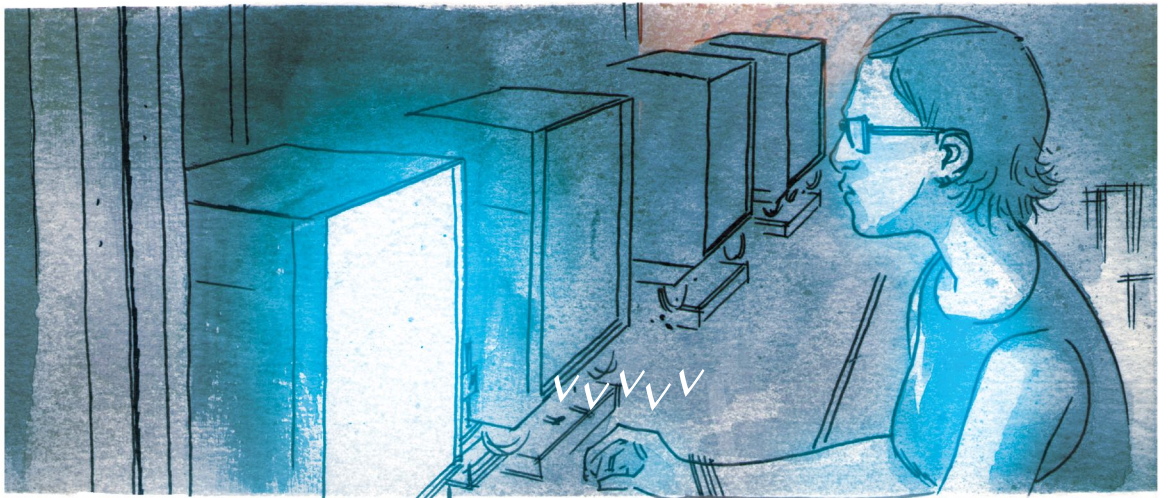
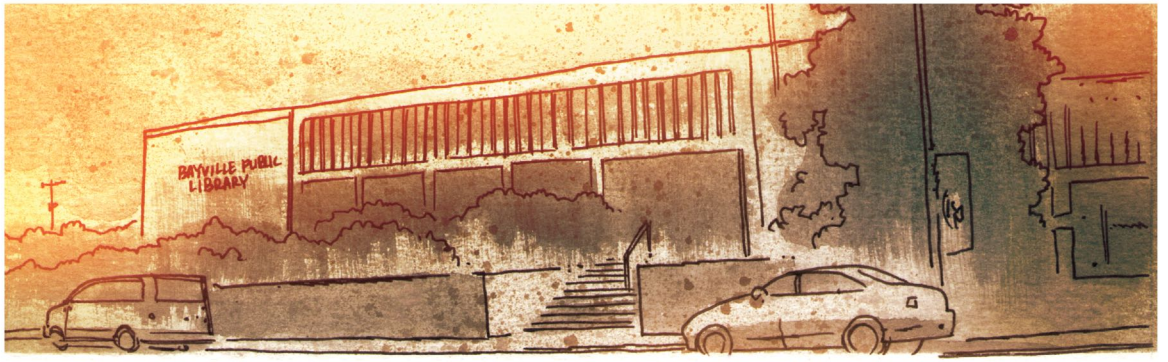
"HE'S GIVEN TO CLAIMS YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT OUT OF A GUY WHO LOOKS LIKE HE JUST WANTS TO DISAPPEAR. HE BELIEVES HE'S ONTO SOMETHING AND SO HE'S GOT TO BE RECKONED WITH.



"AND IF SOMETHING TRULY IS UP IN THE TOWN OF BAYVILLE, THIS REPORTER AIMS TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT.



"WHEREVER THE HOLE MIGHT LEAD..."





"MAN FOUND DEAD IN CAR FIRE."



"POLICE AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS IDENTIFIED THE BADLY BURNED REMAINS OF NIKOS GALIANOS, A 59-YEAR-OLD BAYVILLE MAN, AT THE SCENE."



"GALIANOS HAD BEEN RETIRED ON A DISABILITY PENSION FOLLOWING A WORK-RELATED INJURY AND—"

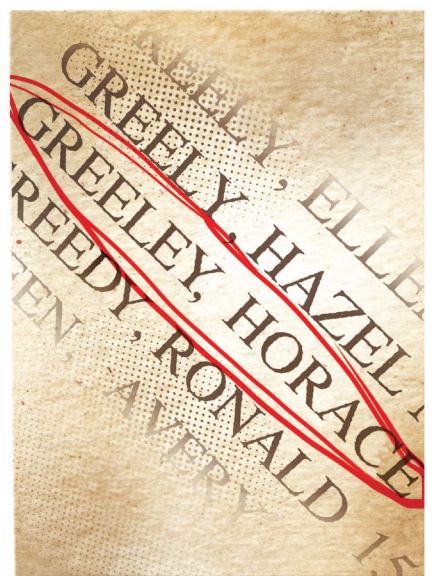
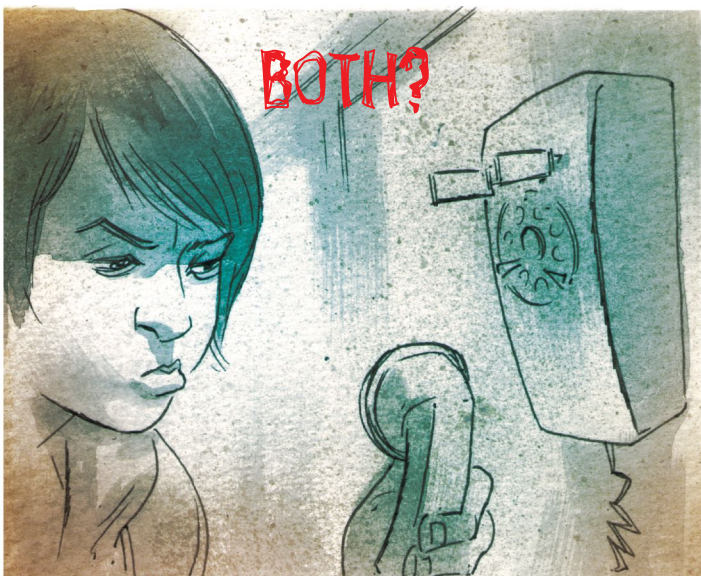
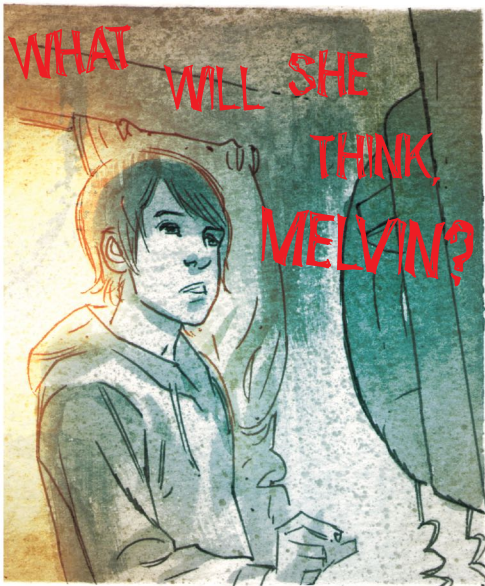
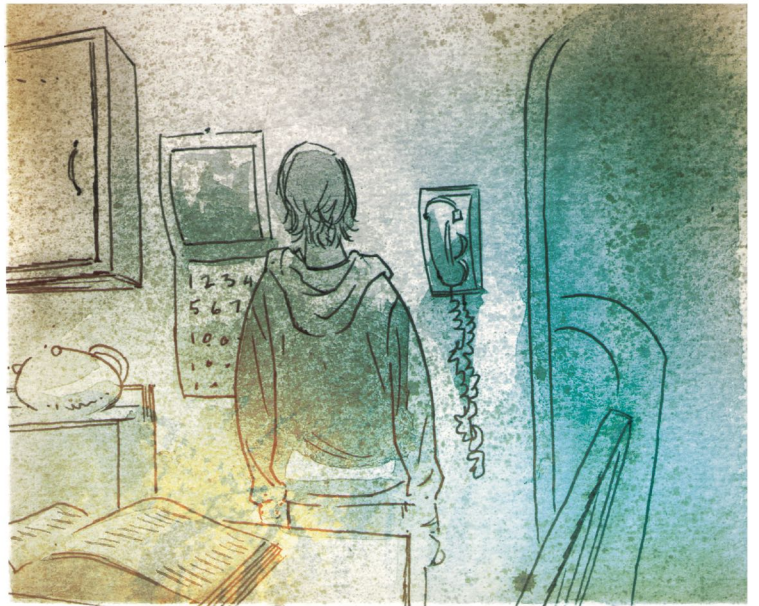
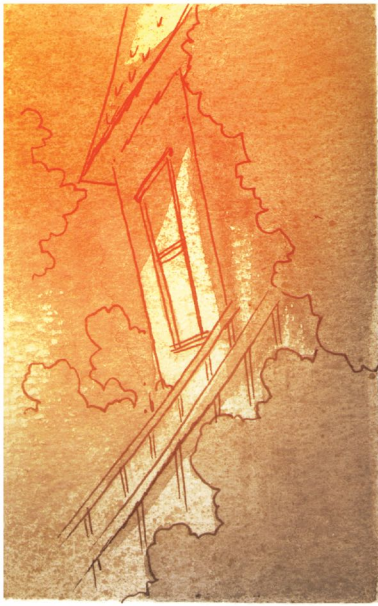
ZZZZ.

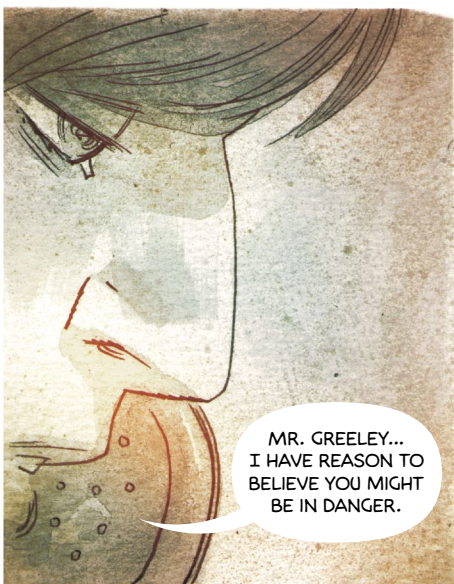
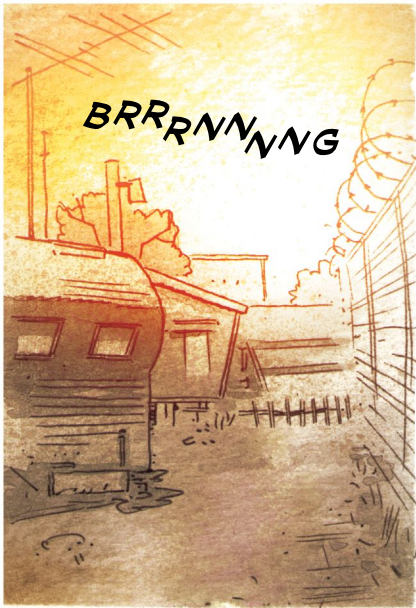
"THE BODY OF MARJORIE BRYANT WAS DISCOVERED BY HER CHILDREN, WHO CALLED THE BAYVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT AFTER THICK SMOKE FORCED THEM FROM THE HOUSE."

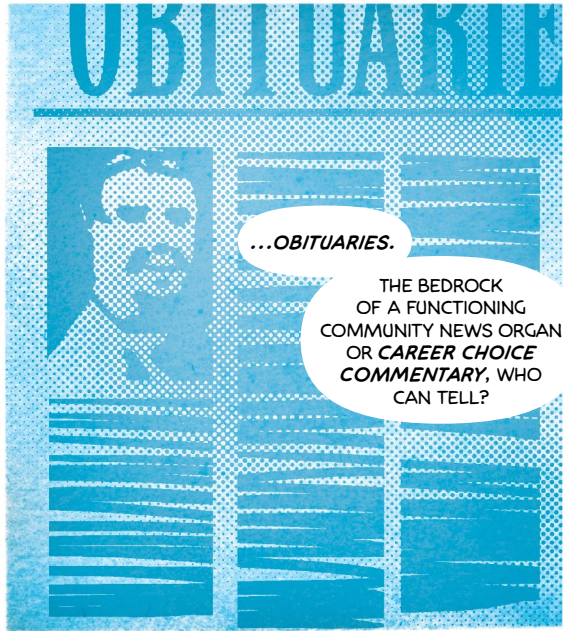
PFFT.

SOMEWHERE IN BAYVILLE A BIRDCAGE IS MISSING ITS BEST LINING...



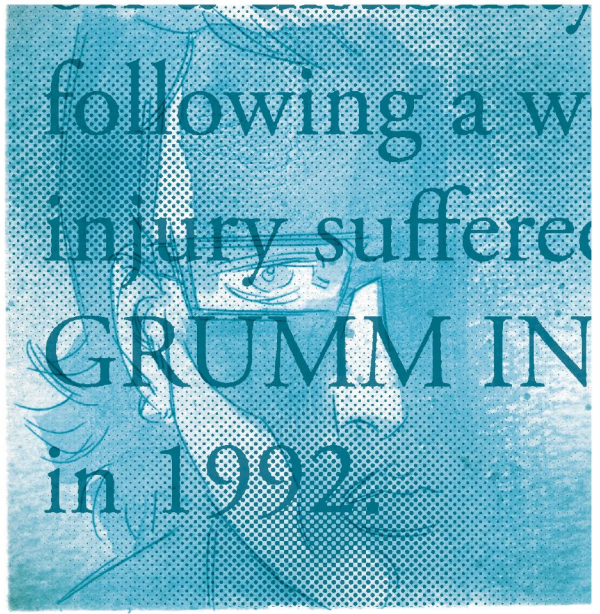


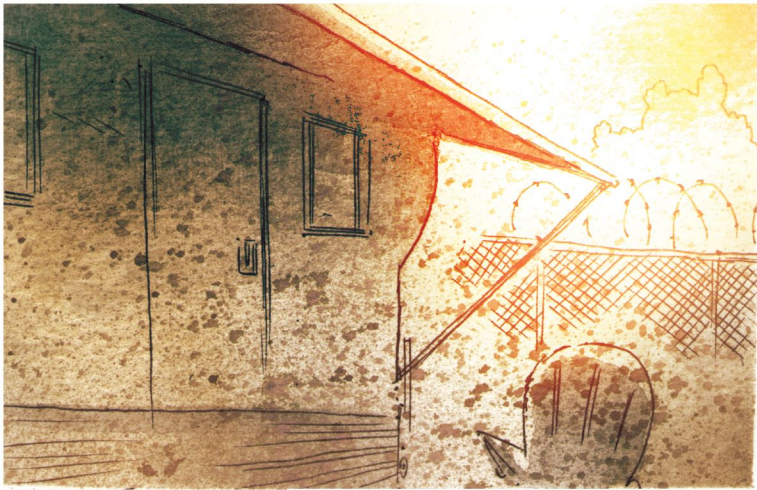


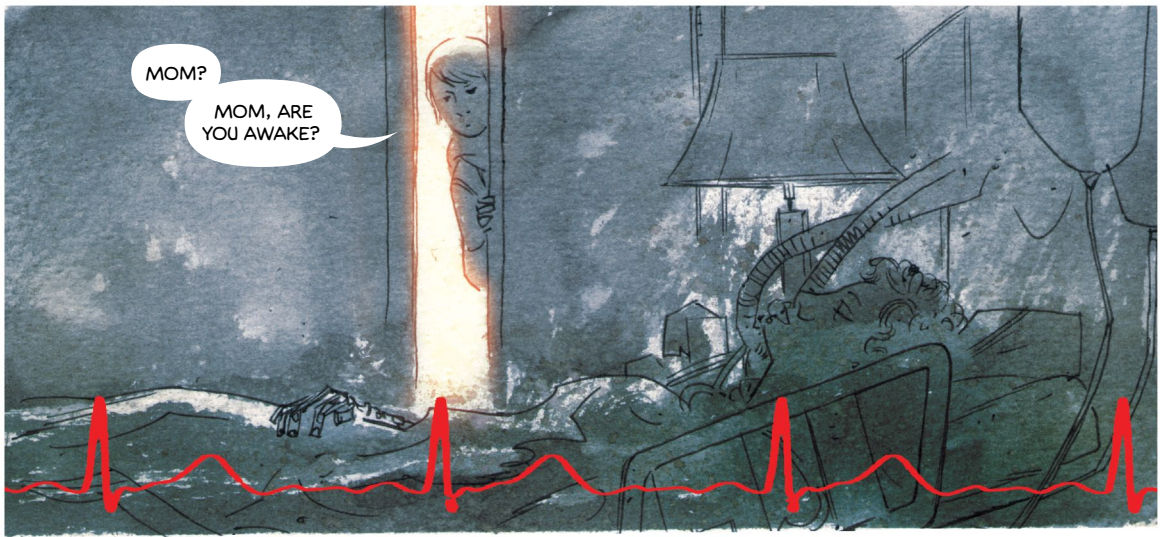


MARJORIE BRYANT, 63
of Bayville
Died Monday; services Thu
Fifteen--year employee of
Grumm Industries



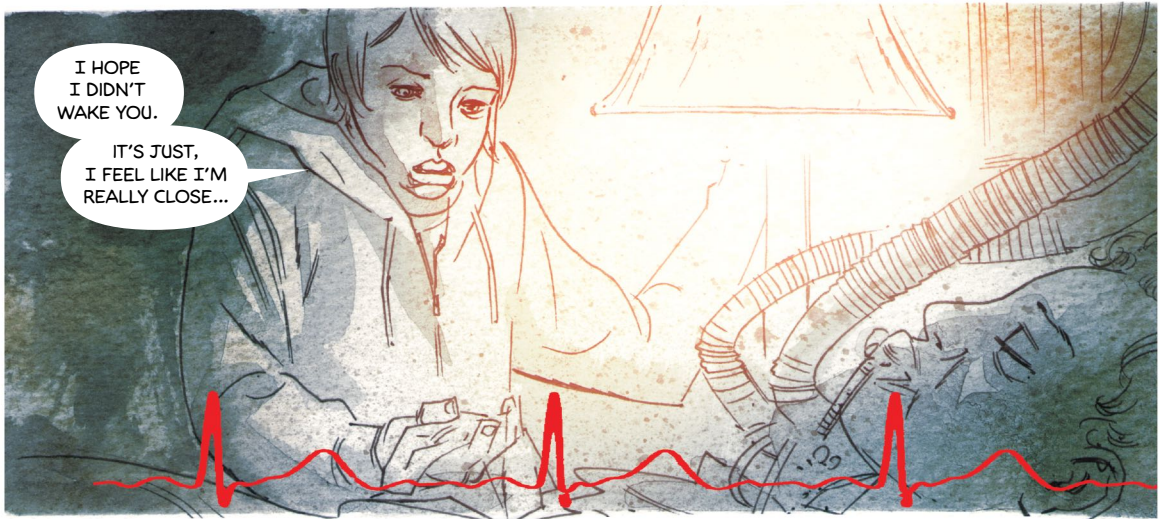






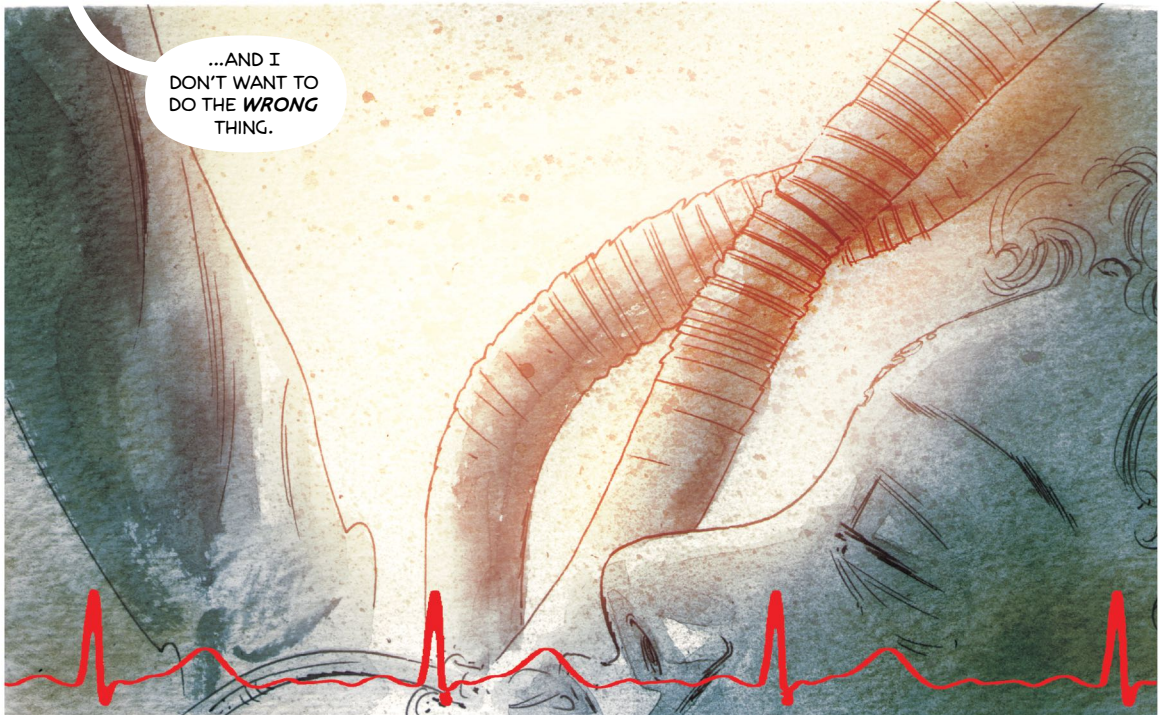
MOM?

MOM, ARE YOU AWAKE?



I HOPE I DIDN'T WAKE YOU.

IT'S JUST, I FEEL LIKE I'M REALLY CLOSE...



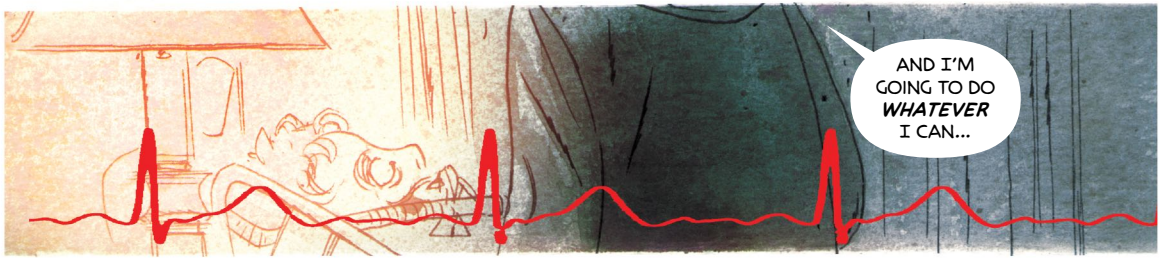
...AND I DON'T WANT TO DO THE **WRONG** THING.



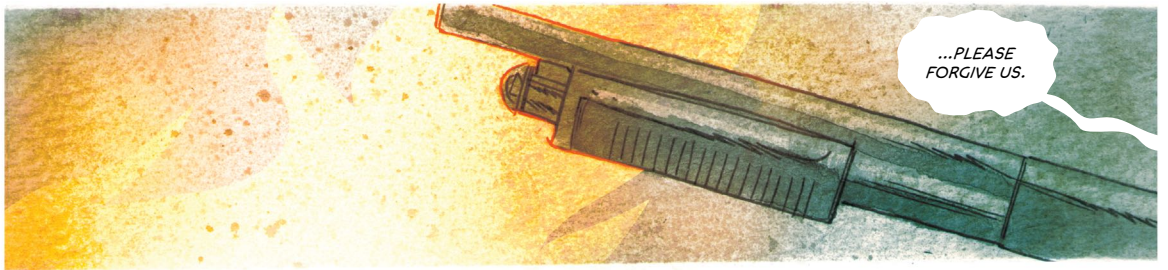
I'M GOING TO GET TO THE **BOTTOM** OF THIS, I PROMISE. I'M GOING TO **PROVE** IT WASN'T SOME FREAK ACCIDENT THAT TOOK DAD FROM US.



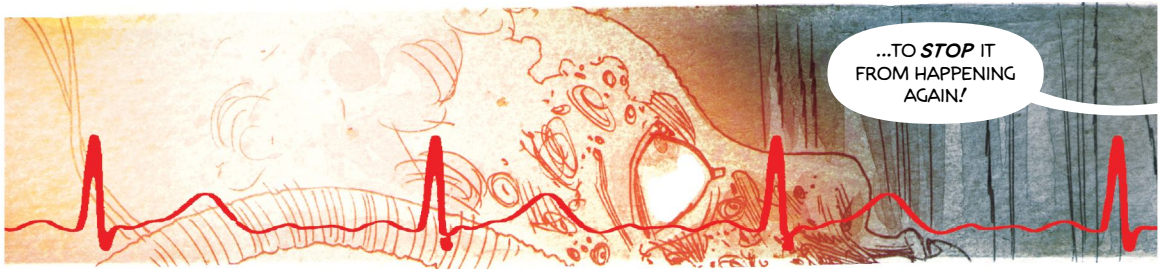
MY GOD, MELVIN...



AND I'M GOING TO DO **WHATEVER** I CAN...



...PLEASE FORGIVE US.



...TO **STOP** IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN!





CHAPTER THREE
"SMOLDER"

and ye shall fe

era Rideout

1938

Los Angeles, Calif

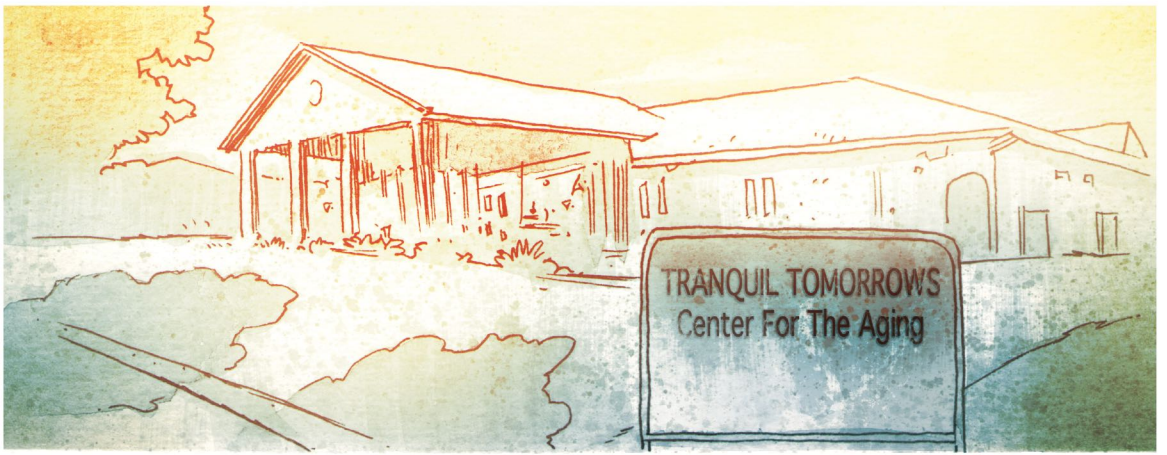


ATLAS

Centigrade - used chiefly in English speaking countries
used more widely in scientific work.
In any temperature scale it is necessary to define at
least two fixed points on the scale. The two commonly
used are the temperature at which pure ice melts and
the temperature at which pure water boils under standard
conditions. The fixed points of these scales are:
Fahrenheit 32°

Calif 5





I'M *SORRY* FOR THE STATE OF THINGS AROUND HERE.

WE'RE ALREADY SHORT ON STAFF AND YOUR *VISIT* CAUGHT US A LITTLE OFF GUARD.

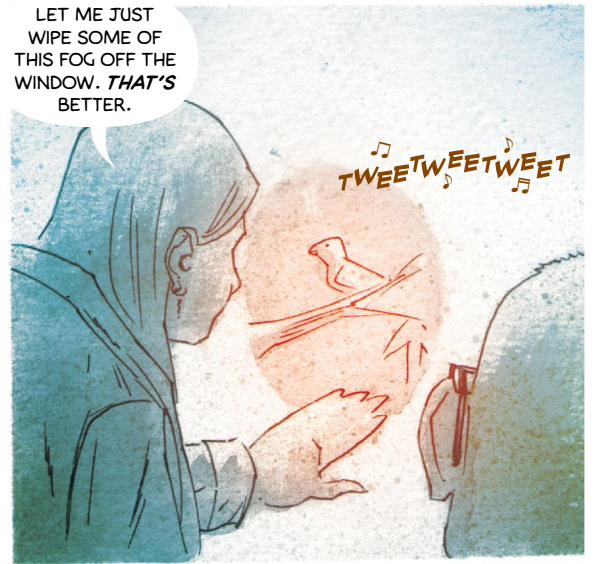
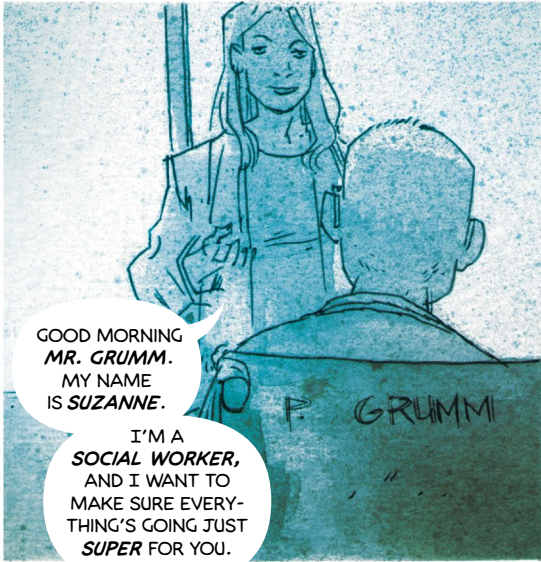


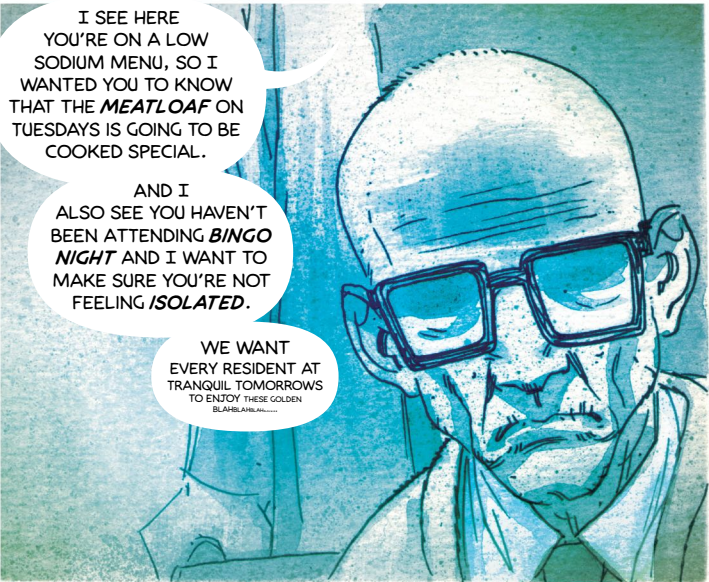
WELL, I WAS RECENTLY *ASSIGNED* THIS CASE AND THOUGHT IT BEST TO JUST DROP BY AND SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE.

ARE YOU *SURE* I CAN'T GET YOU A CUP OF COFFEE... OR SOME TEA, MAYBE?



NO, THANK YOU. THIS SHOULDN'T TAKE VERY LONG.





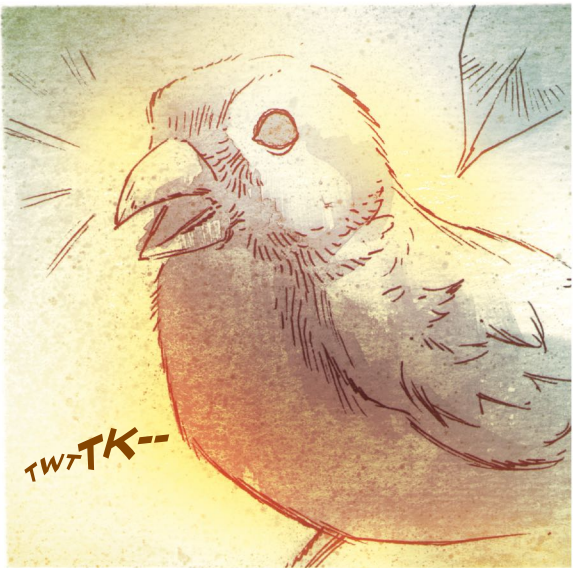
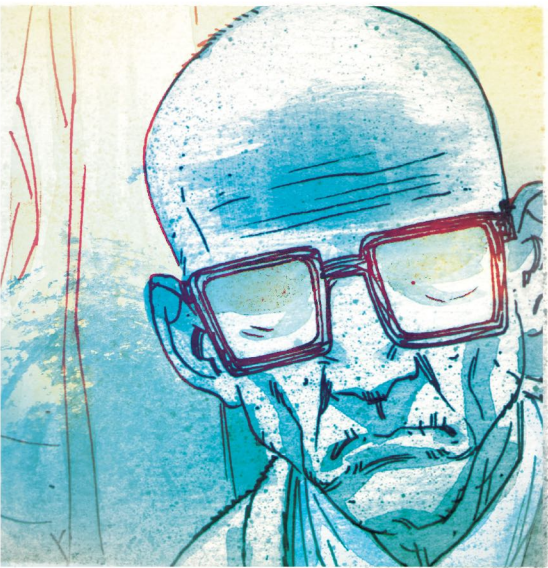
I SEE HERE YOU'RE ON A LOW SODIUM MENU, SO I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT THE **MEATLOAF** ON TUESDAYS IS GOING TO BE COOKED SPECIAL.

AND I ALSO SEE YOU HAVEN'T BEEN ATTENDING **BINGO NIGHT** AND I WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE NOT FEELING **ISOLATED**.

WE WANT EVERY RESIDENT AT TRANQUIL TOMORROWS TO ENJOY THESE GOLDEN
BLAHBLAH.....



TWEETWEETWEET



TWT--

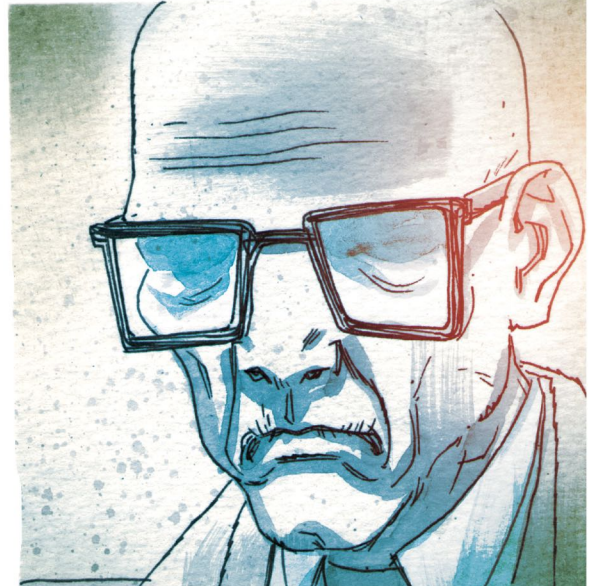
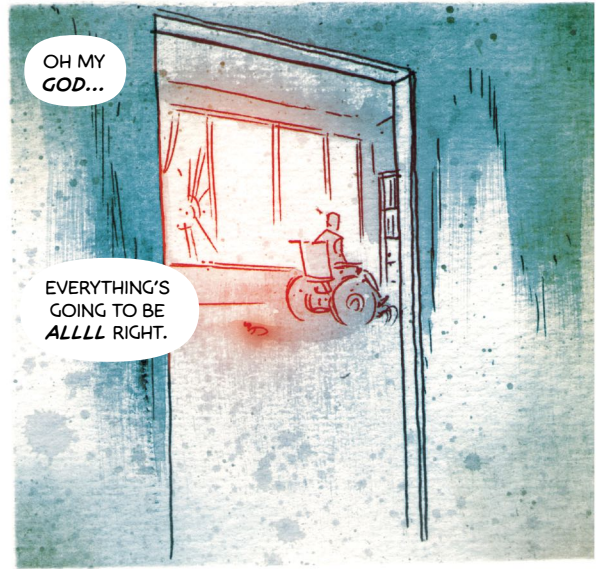


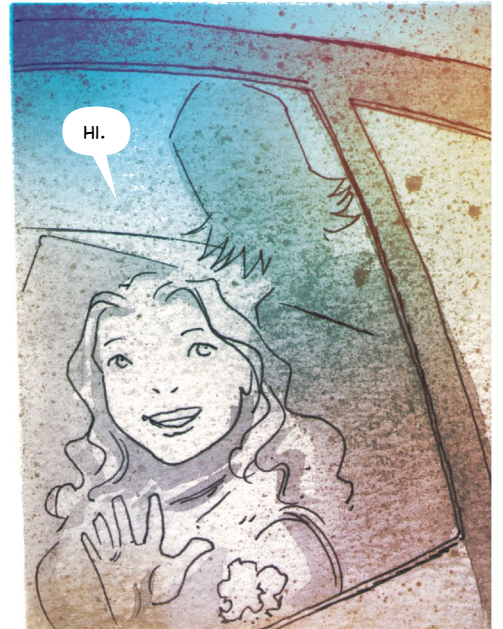
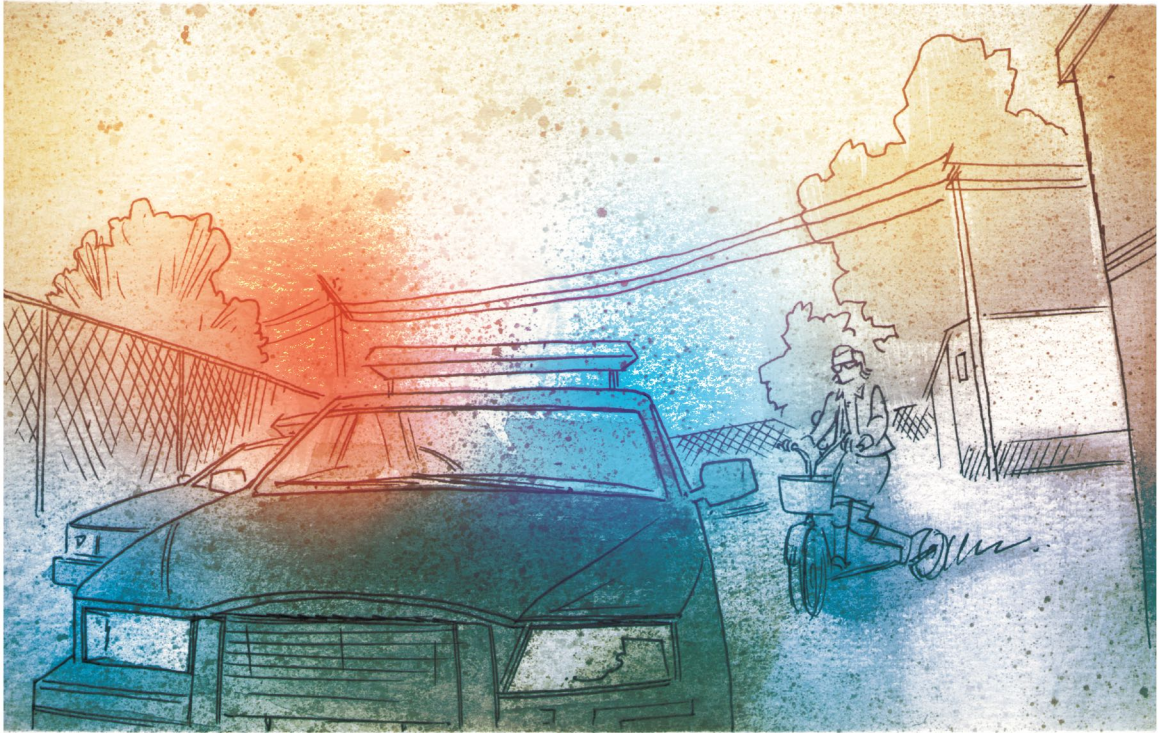
...BLAHBLAHBLAHBACK ON THE SECOND AND FOURTH TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH, AND WE'LL MAKE SURE YOU'RE COMFORTAB--

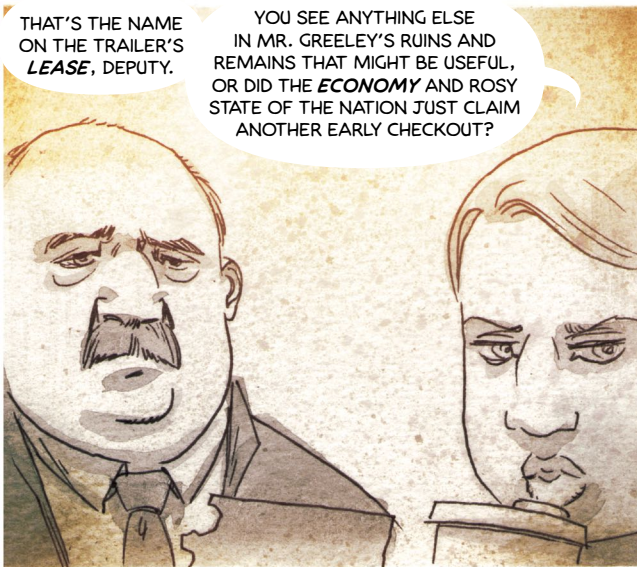
KASHHH



AJEEEE!









YOU KNOW, I COULD JUST **CALL** YOU WHEN WE'RE READY TO PUT OUT A STATEMENT ON THE CASE.

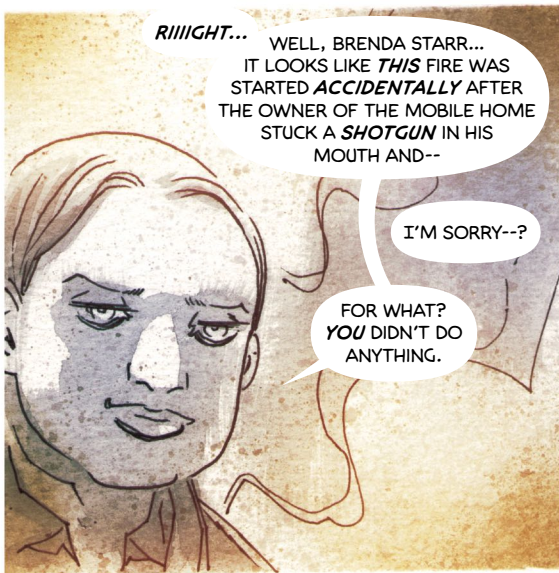
I'M SURE THAT WOULD SUIT THE **DEPARTMENT** JUST FINE...



OR, YOU KNOW, YOU CAN STOP BY AND **SEE ME** AT THE STATION HOUSE.

MAYBE WE CAN **SHARE** INFORMATION AND HELP ONE ANOTHER OUT?

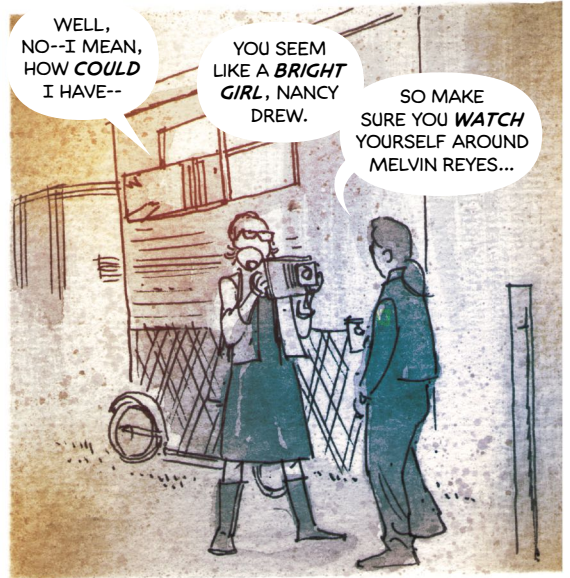
I WON'T BE **PRESSURED**, CHIEF. I WILL **NOT** BE SILENCED.



RIIIIGHT... WELL, BRENDA STARR... IT LOOKS LIKE **THIS** FIRE WAS STARTED **ACCIDENTALLY** AFTER THE OWNER OF THE MOBILE HOME STUCK A **SHOTGUN** IN HIS MOUTH AND--

I'M SORRY--?

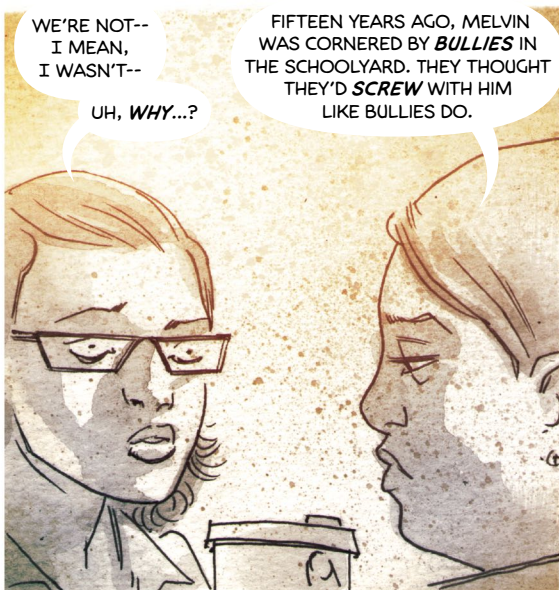
FOR WHAT? **YOU** DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.



WELL, NO--I MEAN, HOW **COULD** I HAVE--

YOU SEEM LIKE A **BRIGHT GIRL**, NANCY DREW.

SO MAKE SURE YOU **WATCH** YOURSELF AROUND MELVIN REYES...



WE'RE NOT-- I MEAN, I WASN'T--

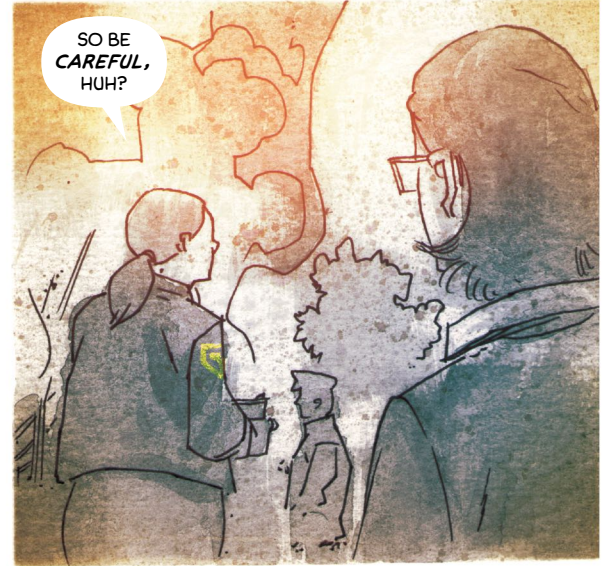
UH, **WHY...**?

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, MELVIN WAS CORNERED BY **BULLIES** IN THE SCHOOLYARD. THEY THOUGHT THEY'D **SCREW** WITH HIM LIKE BULLIES DO.



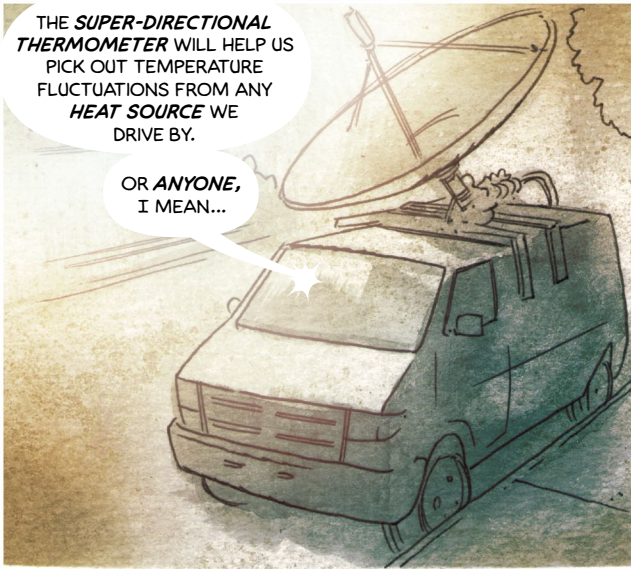
C'MON, **KELVIN MELVIN...**

"HE TOOK A BEATING LIKE THIS **EVERY DAY**, I HAVE TO THINK. AND I'M SURE HE WOULD HAVE RUN AWAY IF THEY **LET** HIM..."



THE *SUPER-DIRECTIONAL THERMOMETER* WILL HELP US PICK OUT TEMPERATURE FLUCTUATIONS FROM ANY *HEAT SOURCE* WE DRIVE BY.

OR *ANYONE*, I MEAN...



I FIRST GOT THE IDEA WATCHING *SPACE TELESCOPES* ON THE DOCUMENTARY CHANNEL. THEY WERE MEASURING THE *REDSHIFT* OF NEARBY STARS AND IT WAS *SO COOL* AND I COULDN'T *WAIT* TO SHOW YOU WHAT I--

DO YOU THINK I'M *STRANGE*, KENNY?



I KNOW I'M NOT TYPICAL. I ONLY STARTED TRACKING *SHC* BECAUSE *NOBODY ELSE* WAS.

AND THE WORLD NEEDS TO *KNOW*, RIGHT?

I--I THINK YOU'RE THE *GREATEST*, MELVIN...



I MEAN, TACTICS *EVOLVE*. MISTAKES GET MADE BUT WE *LEARN* BY DOING. THAT'S HUMAN. THAT'S *NORMAL*.

I'M NOT AFRAID TO MAKE *CHANGES*...

OHH! I'VE GOT THE PERFECT THING!

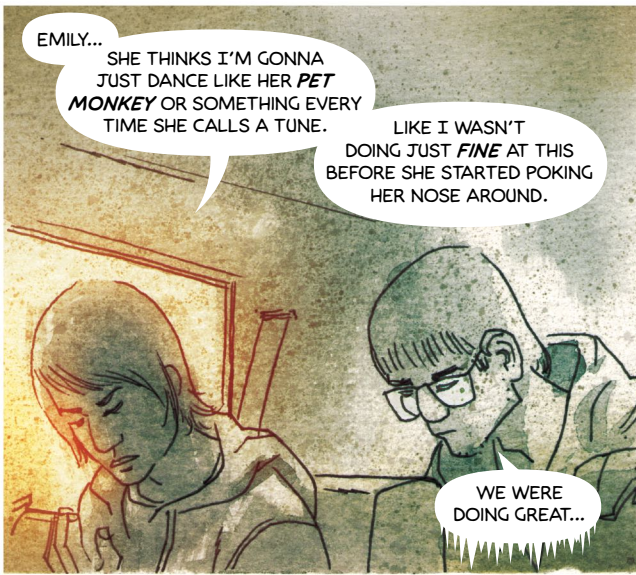


I MEAN, WHO IS *SHE* KIDDING? AT LEAST I DON'T PRETEND TO HAVE A CAREER AT A *NONEXISTENT* NEWSPAPER.



WHAT?

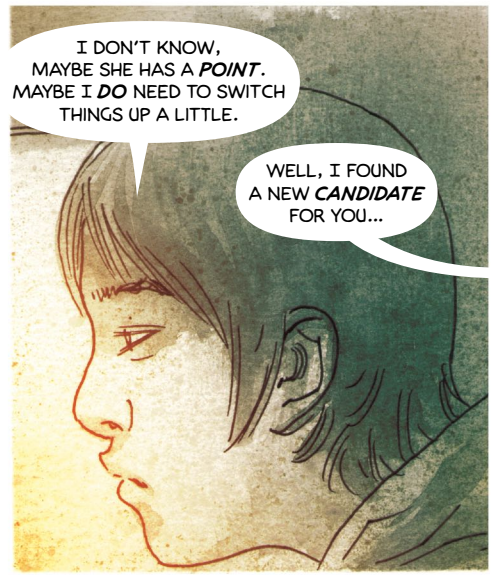




EMILY... SHE THINKS I'M GONNA JUST DANCE LIKE HER **PET MONKEY** OR SOMETHING EVERY TIME SHE CALLS A TUNE.

LIKE I WASN'T DOING JUST **FINE** AT THIS BEFORE SHE STARTED POKING HER NOSE AROUND.

WE WERE DOING GREAT...



I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE SHE HAS A **POINT**. MAYBE I **DO** NEED TO SWITCH THINGS UP A LITTLE.

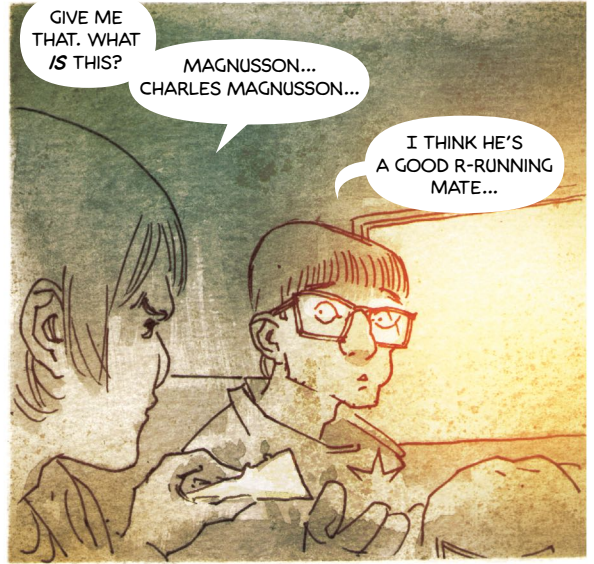
WELL, I FOUND A NEW **CANDIDATE** FOR YOU...



WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I--I KNOW YOU DON'T **WANT** ME TO DO ANY ROMANCING ON MY--

FREELANCING-- AND **NO**, I DON'T WANT YOU TO DO **ANYTHING** ON YOUR OWN!



GIVE ME THAT. WHAT **IS** THIS?

MAGNUSSON... CHARLES MAGNUSSON...

I THINK HE'S A GOOD **R-RUNNING** MATE...



YOU DON'T KNOW **ANYTHING**. HE IS **NOT** ON MY LIST OF **CANDIDATES**.

YOU DON'T HAVE A **CLUE** HOW I REALLY--



THAT'S **IT**.

WHAT'S IT, MELVIN...?

"IT'S *NOTHING*, KENNY... I GOTTA GO..."

OKAY, SO THERE WAS THIS *COMPANY* THAT USED TO OPERATE OUT HERE ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO NAMED *GRUMM INDUSTRIES*...



FROM WHAT I COULD GATHER, THEY DID *GOVERNMENT CONTRACT WORK* MAKING AIRPLANE PARTS AND MACHINE COMPONENTS ALONG WITH SPECIAL *FUELS* AND *COMPOUNDS*.

THEY ALSO HANDLED A LOT OF *MILITARY CONTRACTS*, AND, FROM WHAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO DIG UP, PLENTY OF IT WAS *TOP SECRET* STUFF.

OKAY.



ARE YOU *LISTENING* TO ME?

BECAUSE I CAN FIND *ANOTHER* BASEMENT-DWELLING BURGER FLIPPER WHO'LL BE MESMERIZED BY THIS STORY, LET ALONE THE RARE PROXIMITY OF *LADY PARTS*, IF YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED.

I'M *LISTENING*, JEEZ...





SO ONE NIGHT, THIS **FIRE** BREAKS OUT. MORE LIKE AN **EXPLOSION**, I MEAN...

AND THE ENTIRE GRUMM COMPLEX WAS **BURNED** TO THE GROUND.



"THE WAY I COBBLED IT TOGETHER AND COUNT IT, **TWENTY-TWO PEOPLE** DIED IN THAT FIRE.



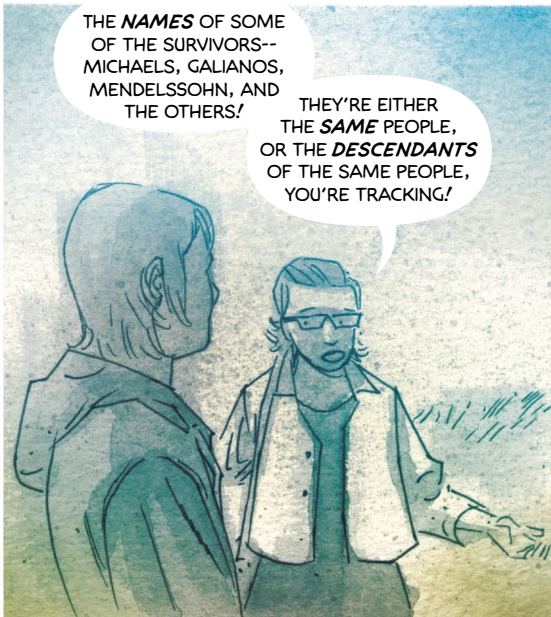
"BUT SOME OF THEM GOT **OUT**..."



SOME OF THEM **LIVED**, MELVIN!

HALLELUJAH.

WHAT'S YOUR **POINT**?

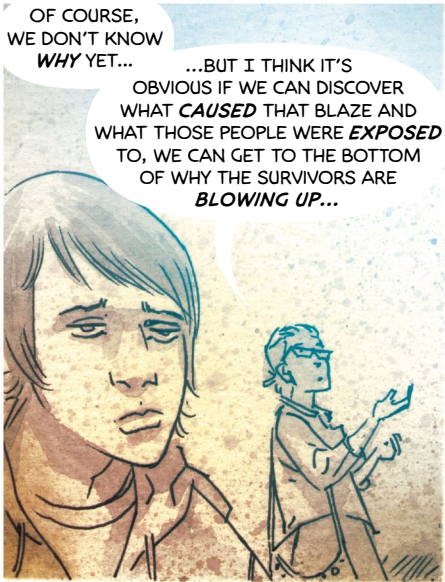


THE **NAMES** OF SOME OF THE SURVIVORS-- MICHAELS, GALIANOS, MENDELSSOHN, AND THE OTHERS!

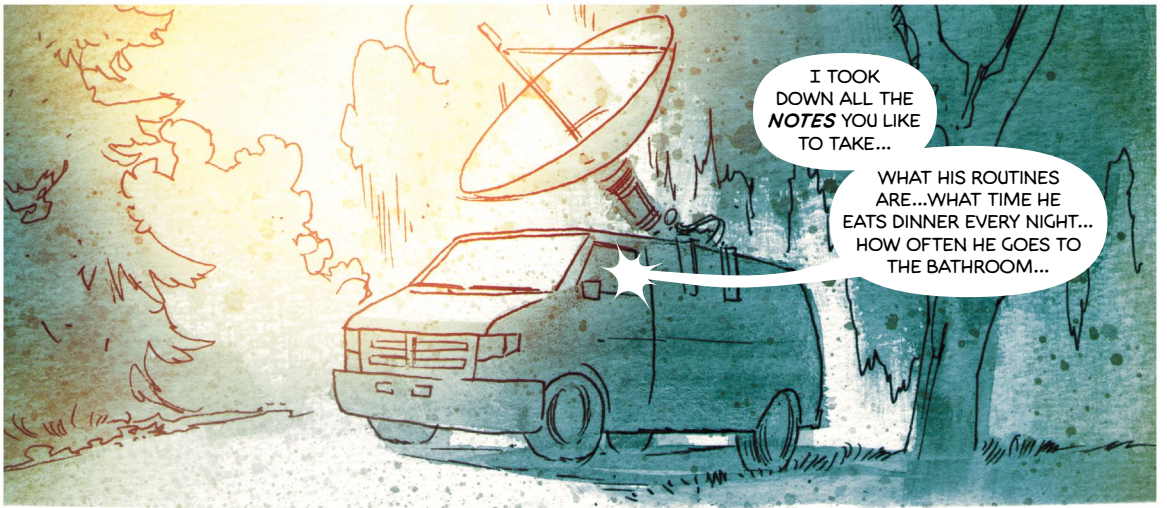
THEY'RE EITHER THE **SAME** PEOPLE, OR THE **DESCENDANTS** OF THE SAME PEOPLE, YOU'RE TRACKING!



THEY'RE THE ONES WHO'VE BEEN **SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUSTING!**







I TOOK
DOWN ALL THE
NOTES YOU LIKE
TO TAKE...

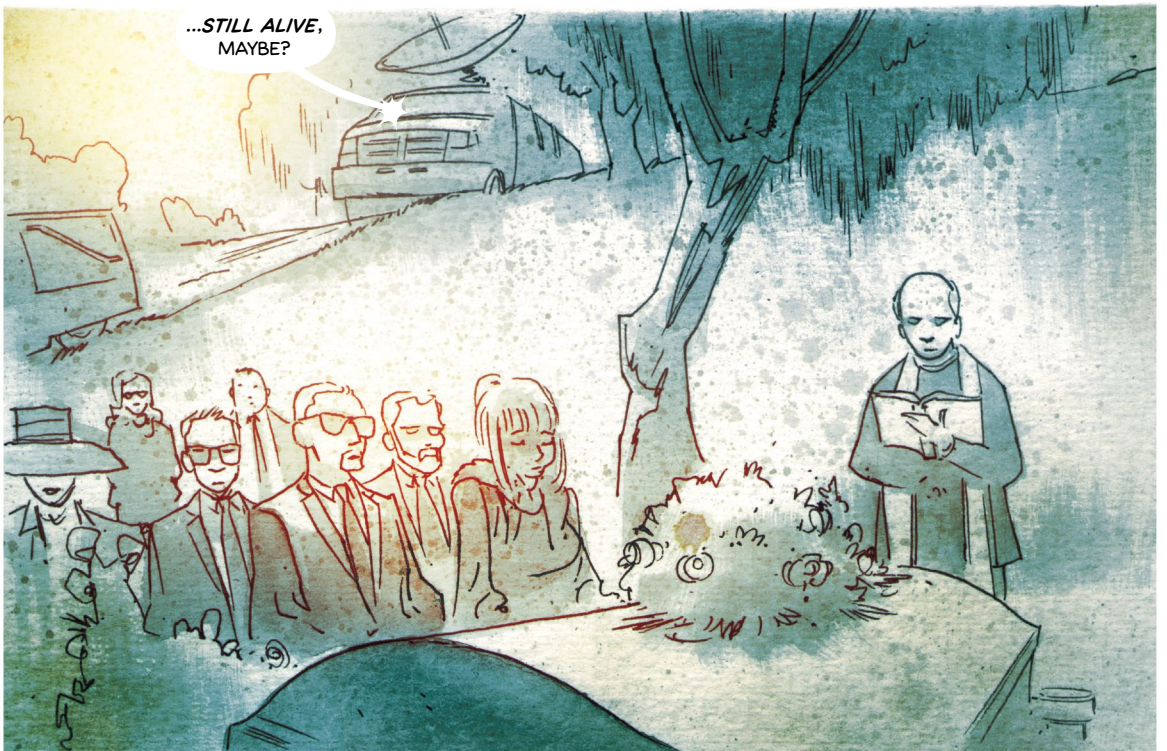
WHAT HIS ROUTINES
ARE...WHAT TIME HE
EATS DINNER EVERY NIGHT...
HOW OFTEN HE GOES TO
THE BATHROOM...



I DON'T
BELIEVE THIS...

WHAT'S **WRONG**,
MELVIN? I TOOK
YOU TO FIND **MR.**
MAGNUSSON LIKE YOU
ASKED ME TO--

YOU GAVE ME
THE IMPRESSION
HE WAS, I DON'T
KNOW...

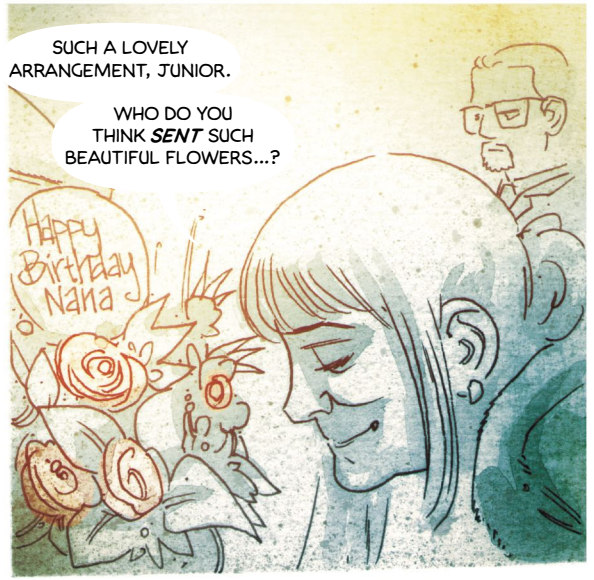


...**STILL ALIVE**,
MAYBE?



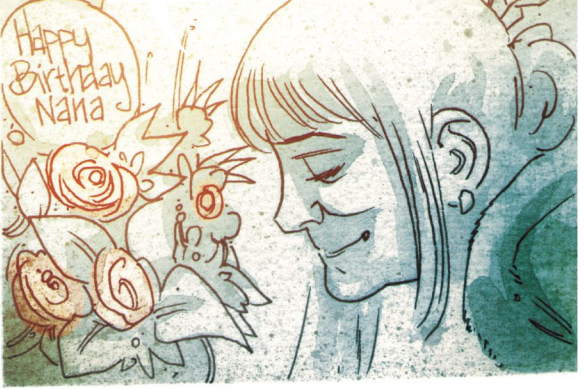
...WE COMMEND TO
ALMIGHTY GOD OUR
BROTHER AND COMMIT HIS
BODY TO THE EARTH...

¡SNIFF!



SUCH A LOVELY
ARRANGEMENT, JUNIOR.

WHO DO YOU
THINK *SENT* SUCH
BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS...?



¡TTÉ!

WHO DO YOU
THINK, MOTHER?



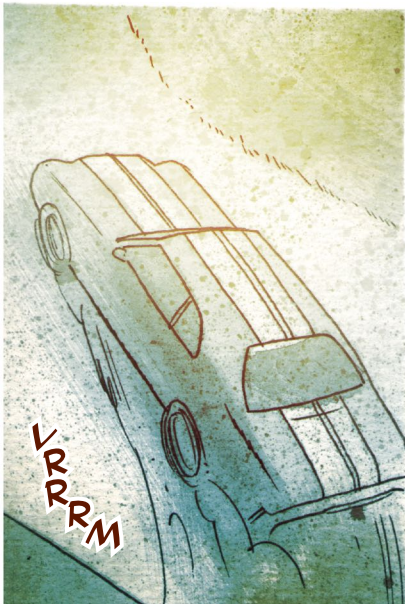
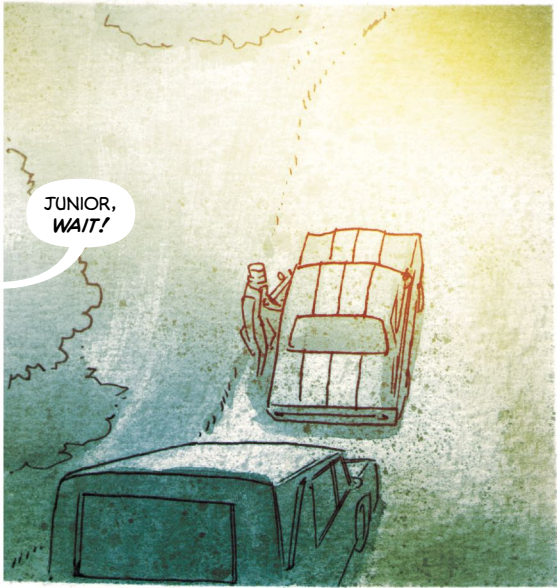
HE THINKS
HE CAN JUST *BUY*
EVERYTHING...

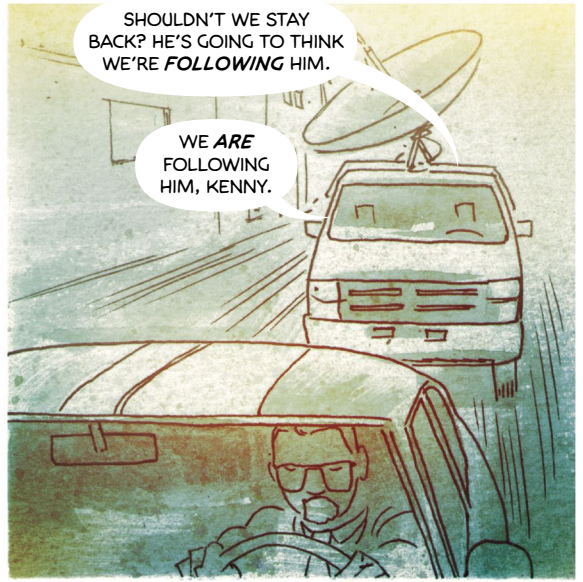
DON'T,
JUNIOR--

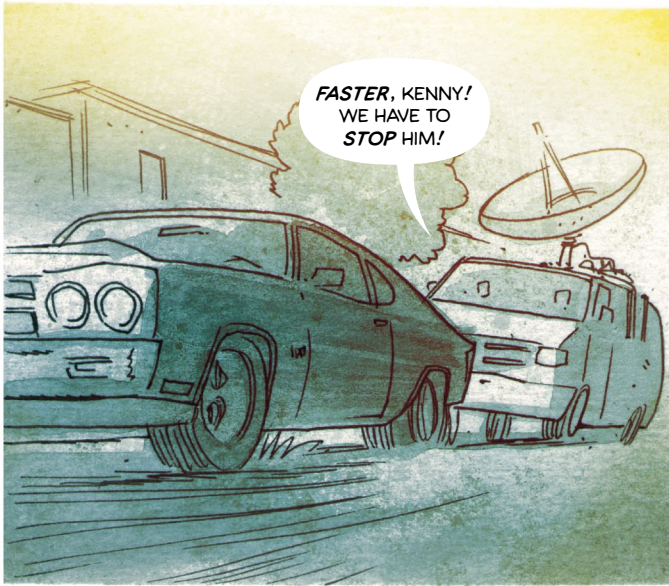
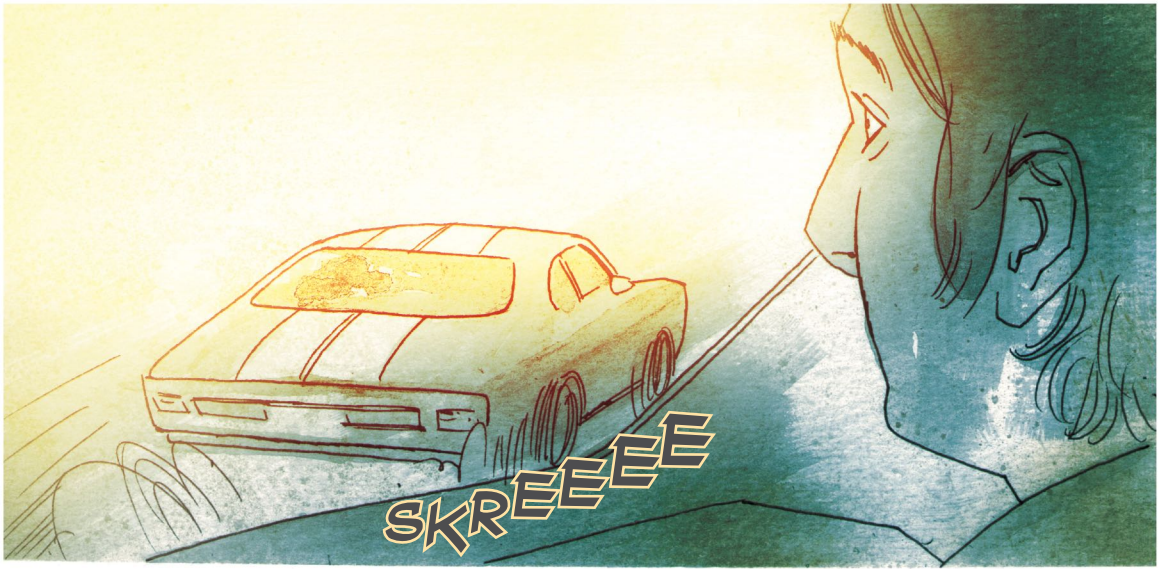
...ASHES TO
ASHES, DUST
TO DUST...

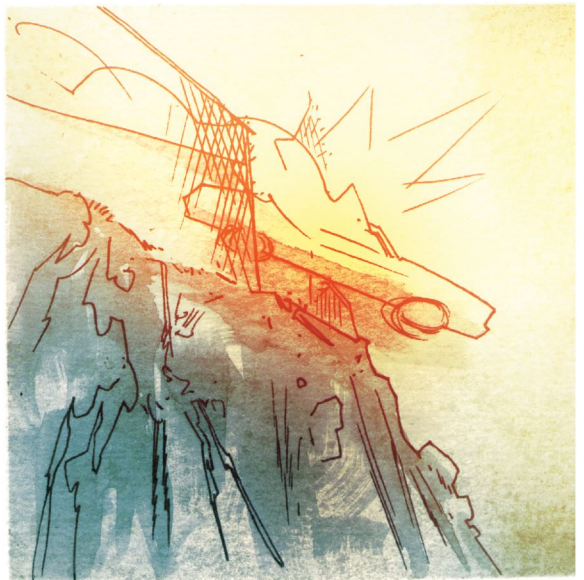


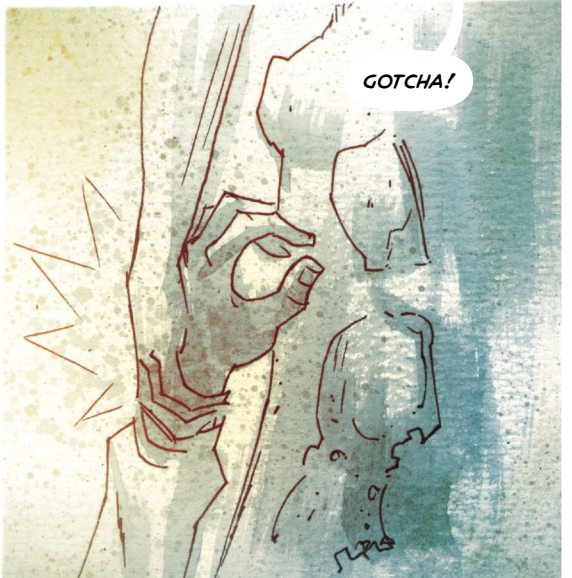
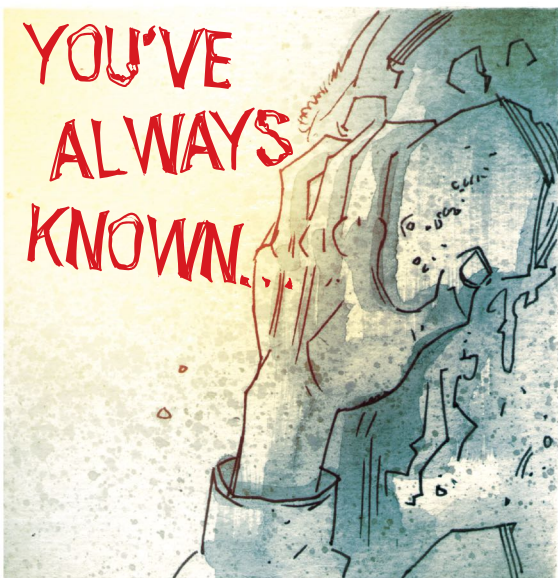
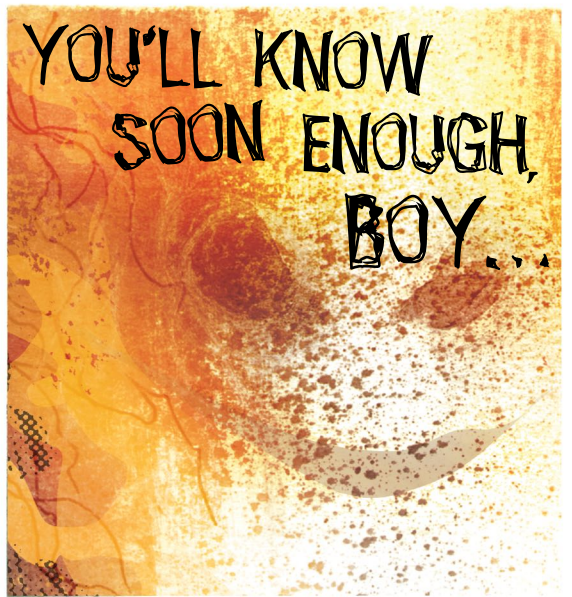
HE THINKS
EVERYTHING'S
FOR *SALE*...

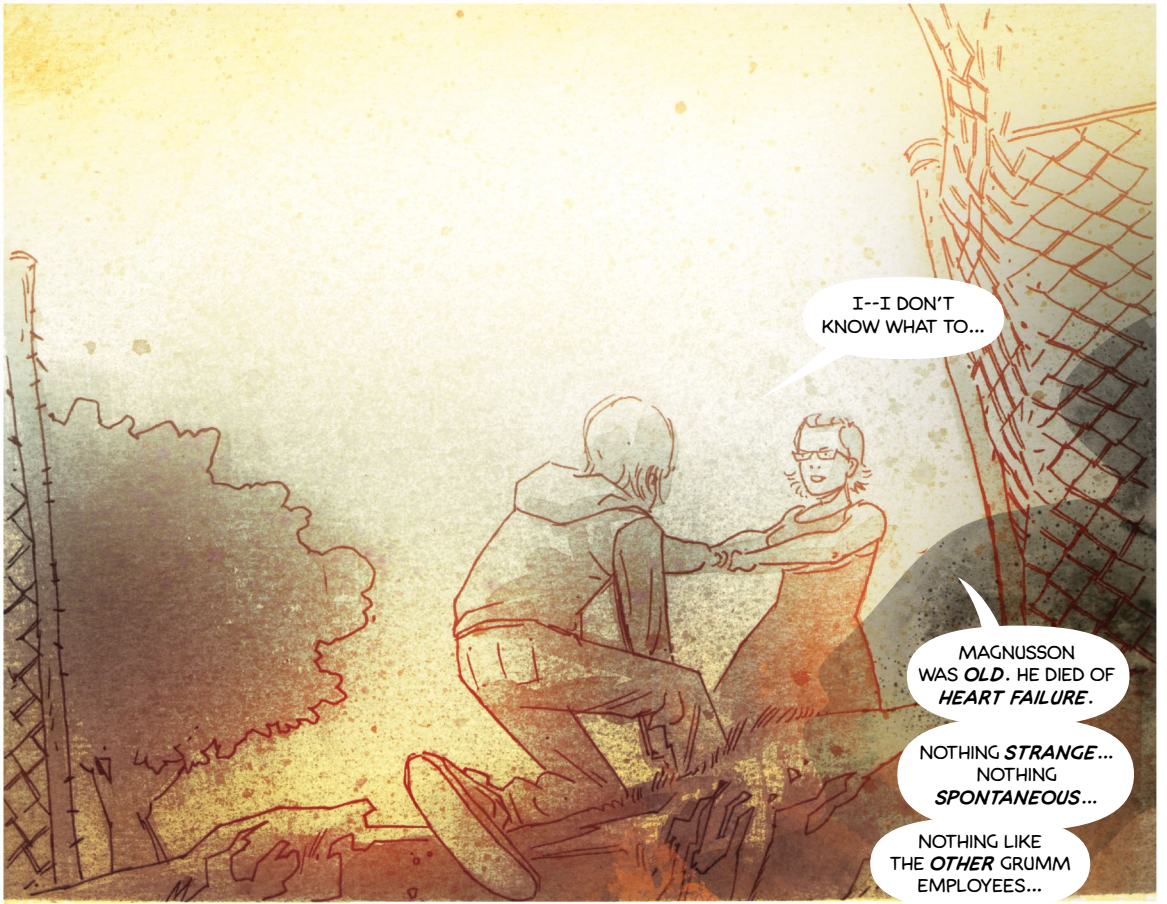












I--I DON'T
KNOW WHAT TO...

MAGNUSSON
WAS *OLD*. HE DIED OF
HEART FAILURE.

NOTHING *STRANGE*...
NOTHING
SPONTANEOUS...

NOTHING LIKE
THE *OTHER* GRUMM
EMPLOYEES...



BUT HIS
DESCENDANT...

HIS
SON...



I THINK...WE
SHOULD TALK.



I'VE BEEN ALONE WITH THIS...FOR SO LONG, I...

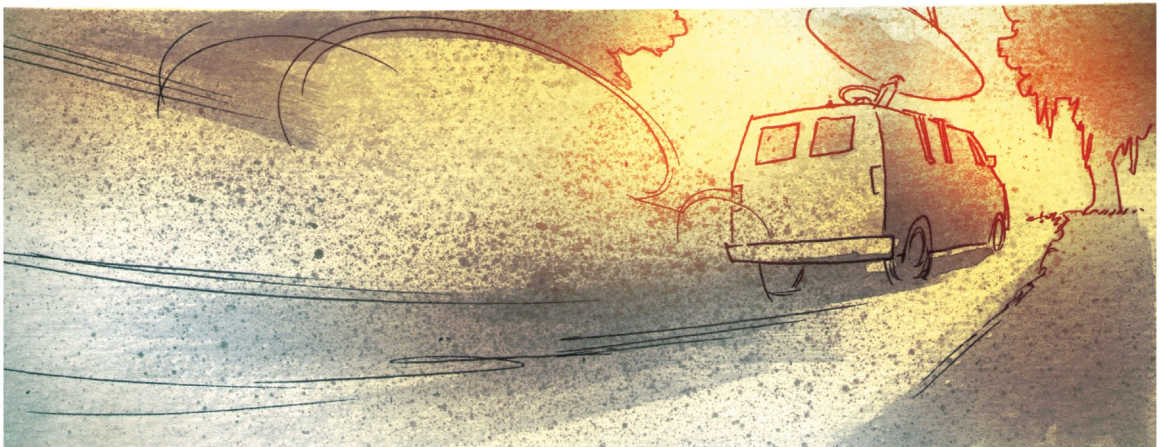
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EVEN *TRUST* AND...



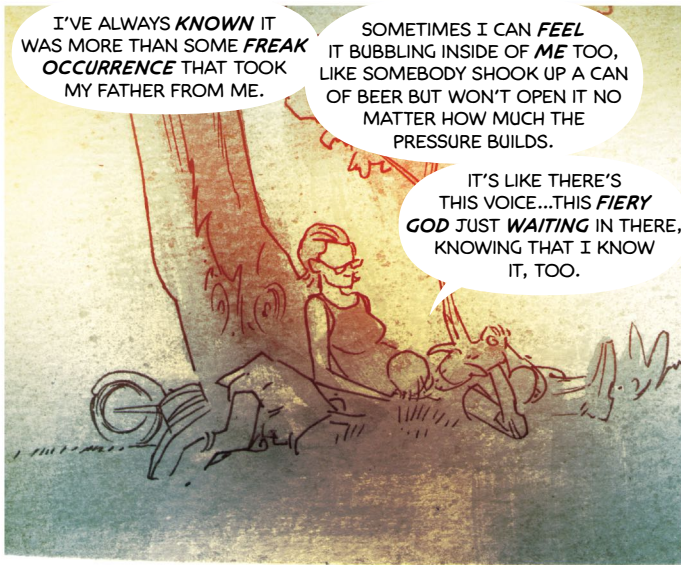
SHHH... I KNOW...



I KNOW...







I'VE ALWAYS **KNOWN** IT WAS MORE THAN SOME **FREAK OCCURRENCE** THAT TOOK MY FATHER FROM ME.

SOMETIMES I CAN **FEEL** IT BUBBLING INSIDE OF **ME** TOO, LIKE SOMEBODY SHOOK UP A CAN OF BEER BUT WON'T OPEN IT NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE PRESSURE BUILDS.

IT'S LIKE THERE'S THIS VOICE...THIS **FIERY GOD** JUST **WAITING** IN THERE, KNOWING THAT I KNOW IT, TOO.



SOMETHING CAUSED THIS, MELVIN. SOMEBODY **DID** THIS TO YOU, AND TO YOUR FATHER AND EVERYBODY ELSE.



AND WE'RE GOING TO **FIND OUT** WHO.

GRIMM



WEEEEE



CHIEF--WE NEED TO **TELL** YOU SOME THINGS. THERE'S MORE TO THIS THAN YOU REALIZE.

YOU LIKE TO MAKE **PHONE CALLS**, MR. REYES?



WHAT IS SHE **TALKING** ABOUT, MELVIN?

GO ASK **HORACE GREELEY**...

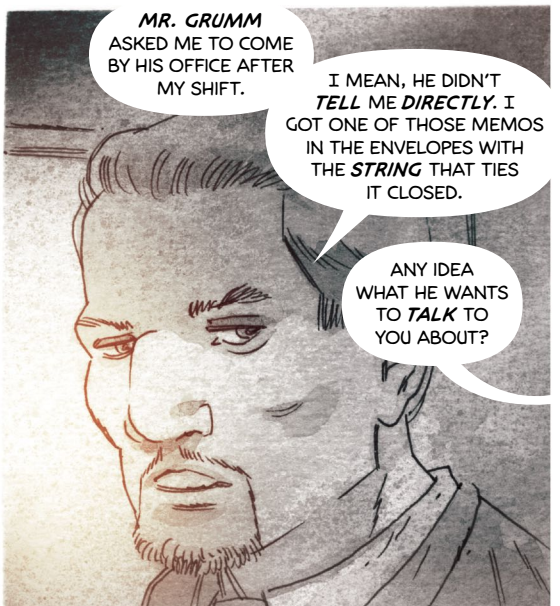
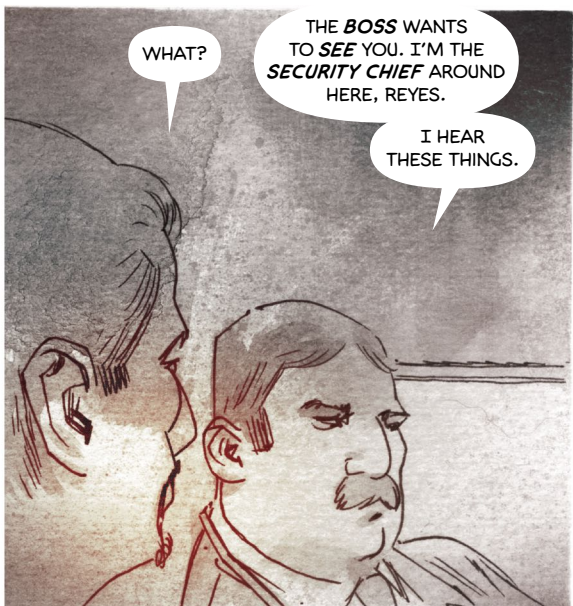
...BECAUSE
MELVIN REYES
IS **UNDER**
ARREST.

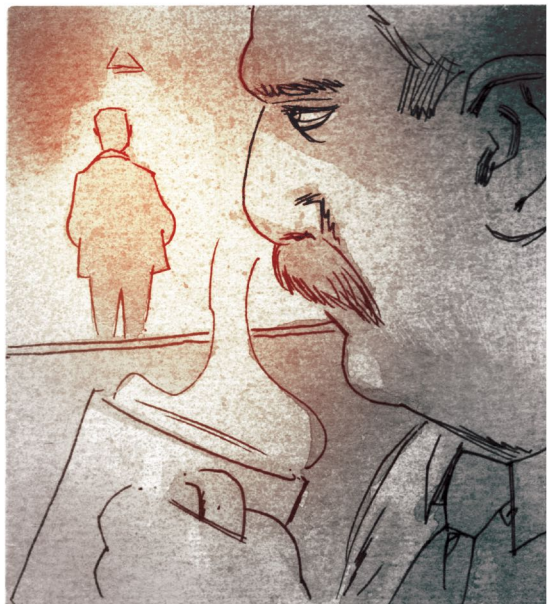
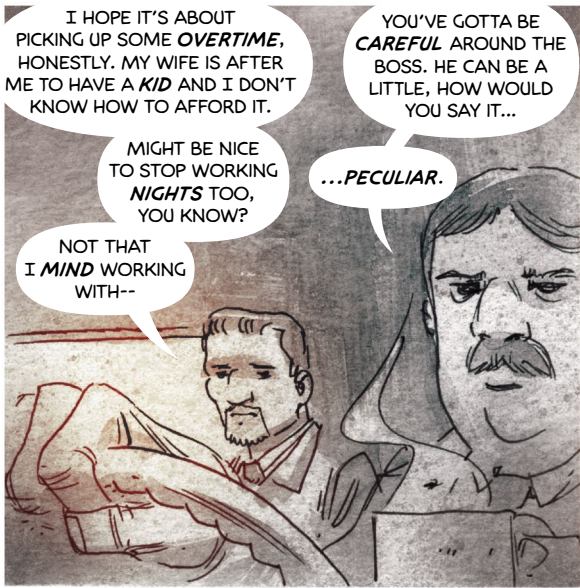


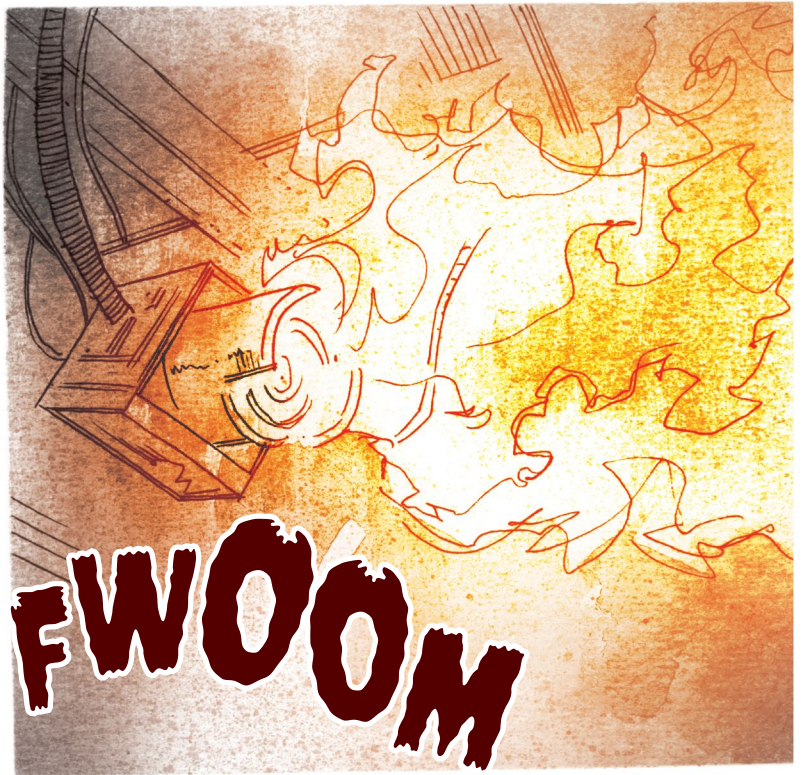
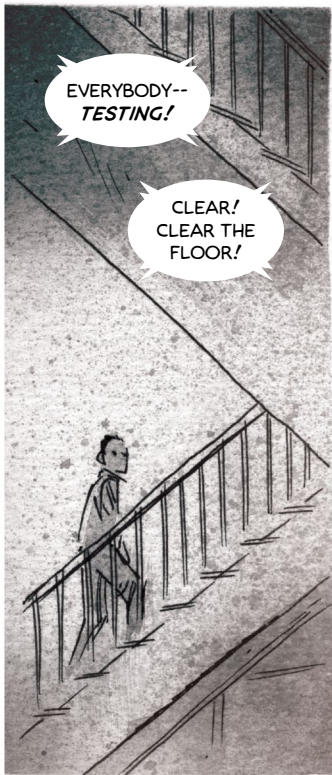
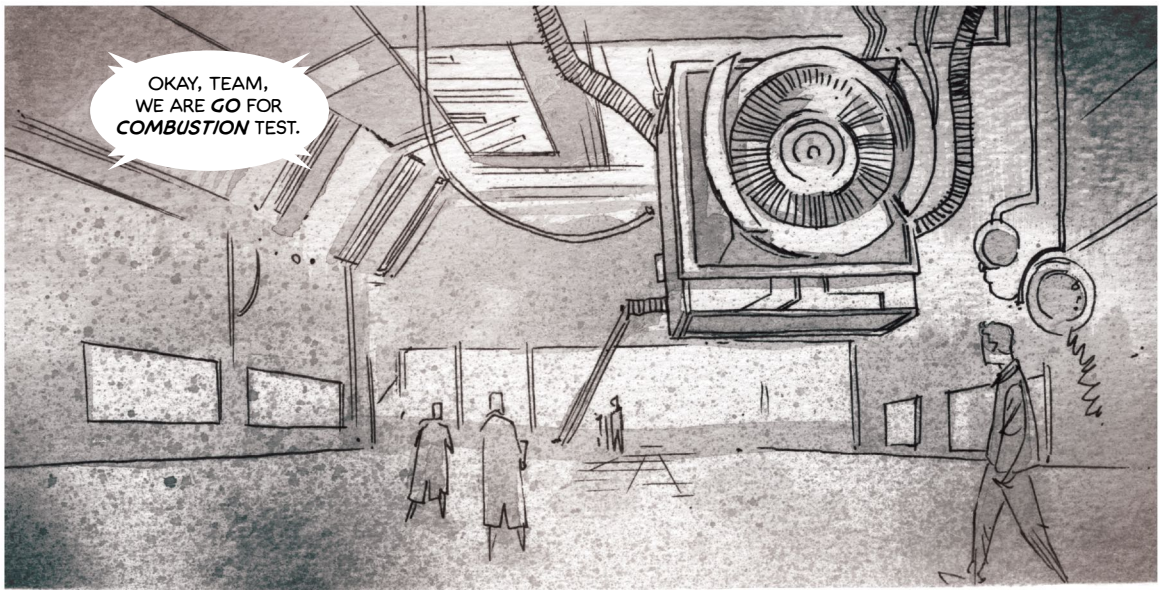
CHAPTER FOUR
"BURN"

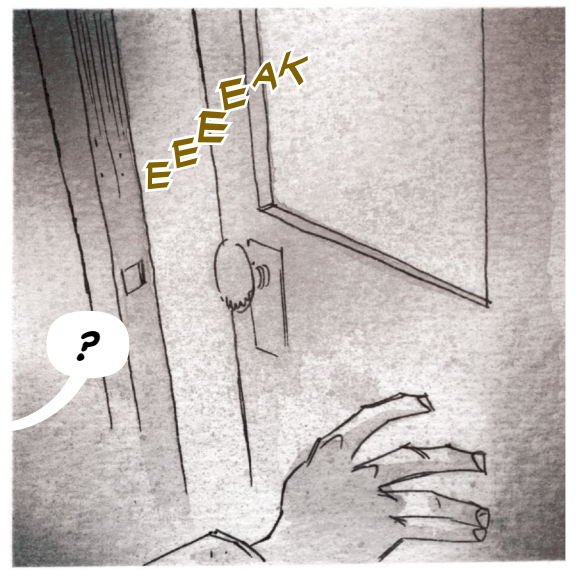
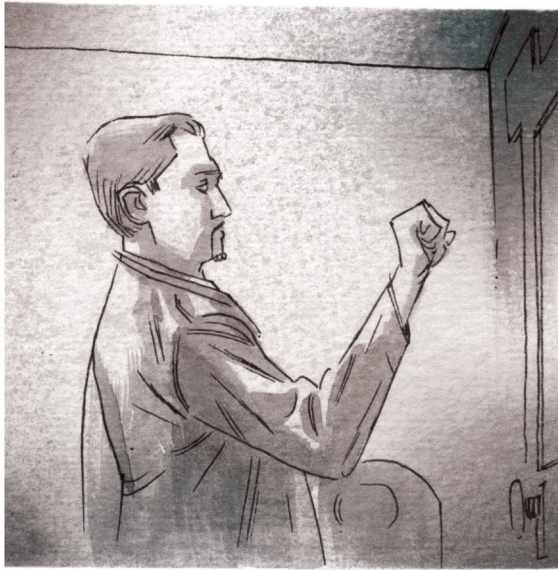














WELL...MY PARENTS WEREN'T ABLE TO *SEND* ME TO COLLEGE, SIR. SO I DON'T THINK I--

PROMETHEUS STOLE *FIRE* FROM THE GODS AND GAVE IT TO *MAN* SO THAT HE MIGHT CRAWL FROM THE DARKNESS AND INTO THE WARMTH AND LIGHT.

BUT THE GODS WERE NOT *PLEASED*. AND SO *PROMETHEUS* WAS PUNISHED.



I--I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I *APPRECIATE* WORKING HERE, MR. GRUMM.

HRM...I HEAR THAT SO *INFREQUENTLY* THESE DAYS...



ARE YOU A MAN I CAN *TRUST*, MR. REYES?

I SEE *TRUST* AS A MATTER OF HONOR. I HOPE I CAN *EARN* THAT FROM YOU, SIR.



YOU MAY YET, SON.



YOU MAY YET...



THAT *GRUMM* FIRE WAS ALMOST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO...



HELL, EVERYBODY IN THIS *TOWN* EITHER WORKED THERE OR KNEW SOMEBODY WHO DID.

BUT MR. MAGNUSSON! MR. GREELEY!

DIED IN A *CAR WRECK*. PUT A *GUN* IN HIS MOUTH.



LOOK, TOUGH GUY...I *HAVE* TO HOLD MELVIN REYES. THERE ARE *DEAD PEOPLE*, AND HE'S WHAT THEY *APPEAR* TO HAVE IN COMMON.

AT LEAST THAT'S THE ANSWER WHAT DON'T INVOLVE *MAGIC*.



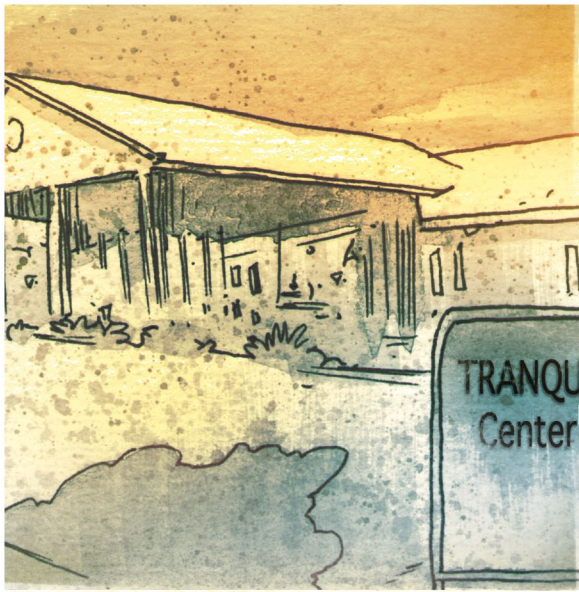
GO DIG UP SOME *SECRETS*, INDIANA. YOU GET ME SOMETHING I CAN GO TO THE *DISTRICT ATTORNEY* WITH AND I'LL LISTEN.

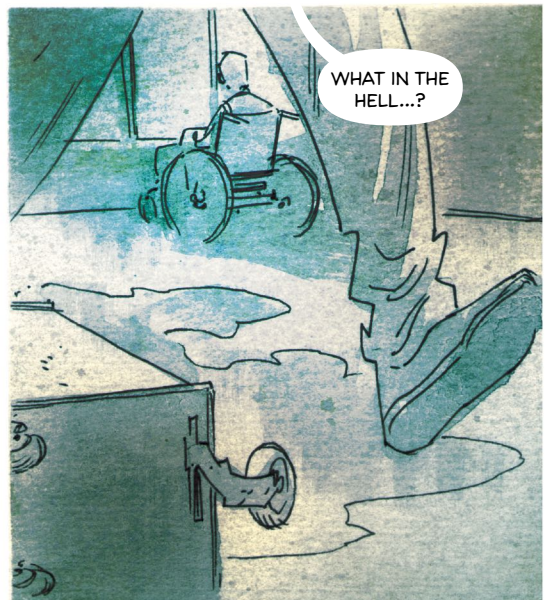
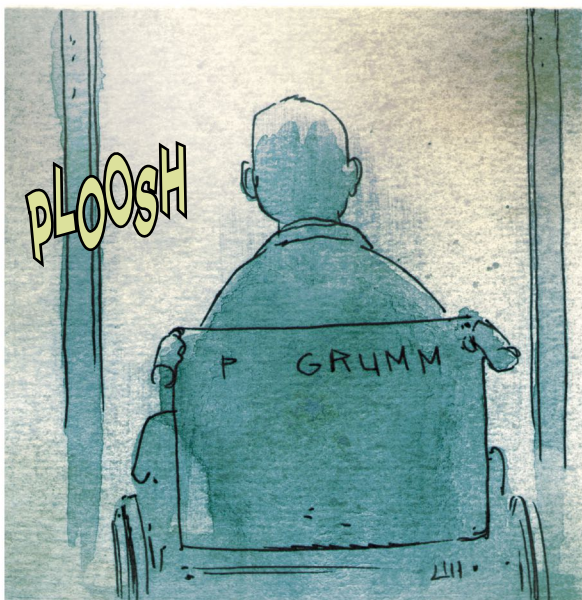
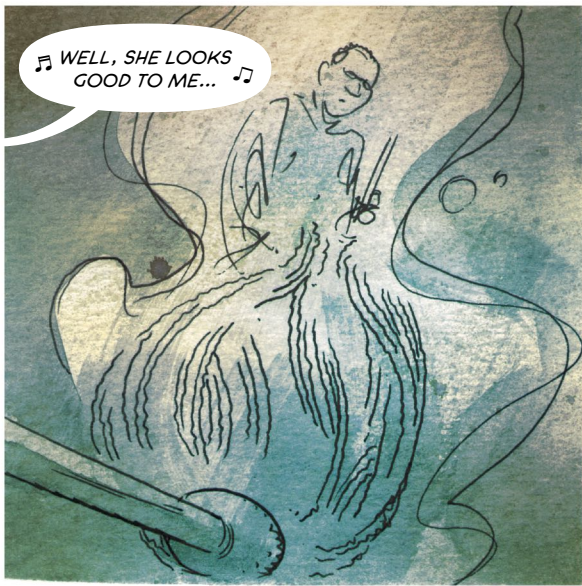
BUT *UNTIL* THEN, STAY OUT OF MY BUSINESS WHILE I MAKE SURE *NOBODY ELSE* GETS HURT.

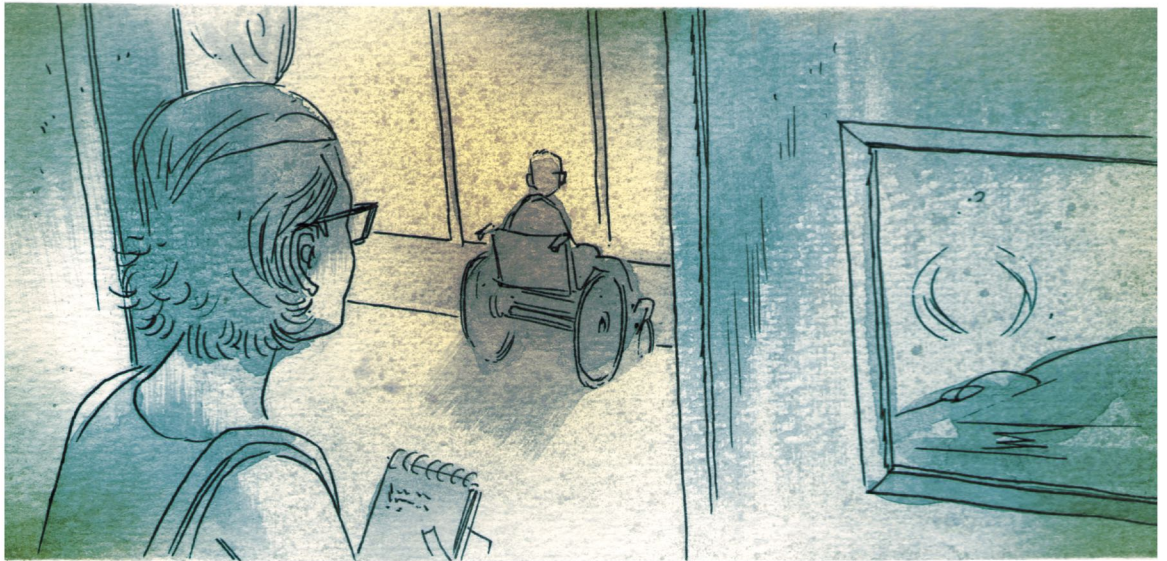


ESPECIALLY *HIM*.

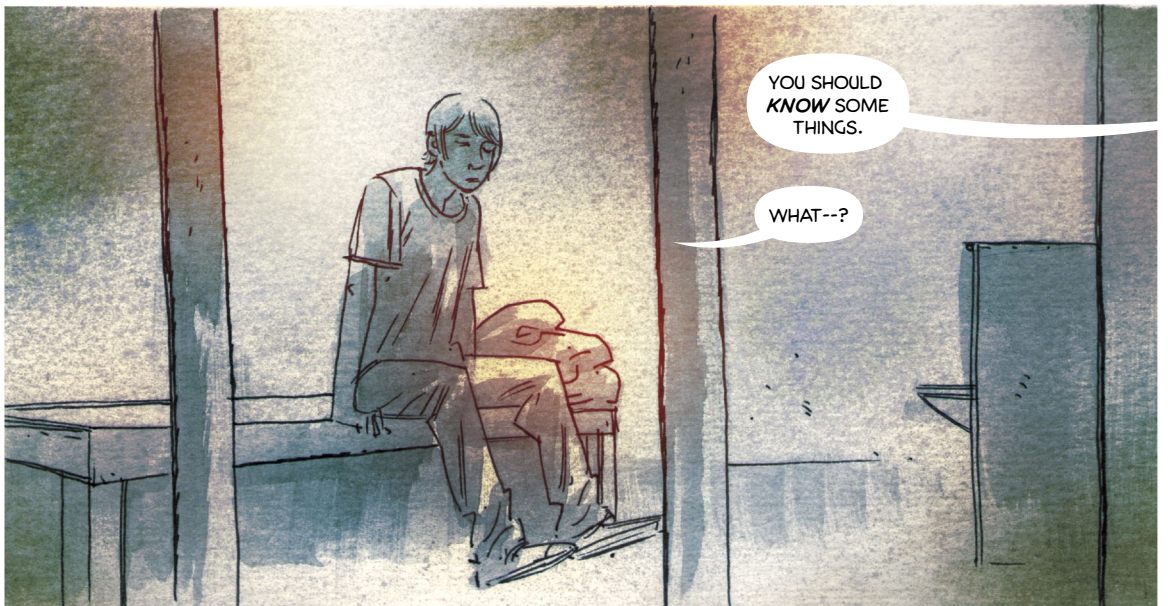


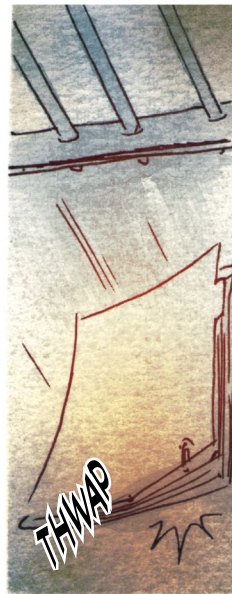






WAKE UP,
BOY...





TOWN RECORDS HAVE POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS RESPONDING TO AN **EMERGENCY CALL** AT APPROXIMATELY 11:30 P.M. WITNESSES DESCRIBED A **FIREBALL** THAT ENGULFED THE INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX YOU OWNED AND OPERATED.

BUT I FIND **NO RECORD** OF THE CAUSE OF THAT FIRE...



NEWSPAPERS QUOTED MULTIPLE GRUMM INDUSTRIES **EMPLOYEES** WHO SURVIVED THE NIGHT SHIFT BLAST AS HAVING WORKED ON **SECRET GOVERNMENT PROJECTS...**

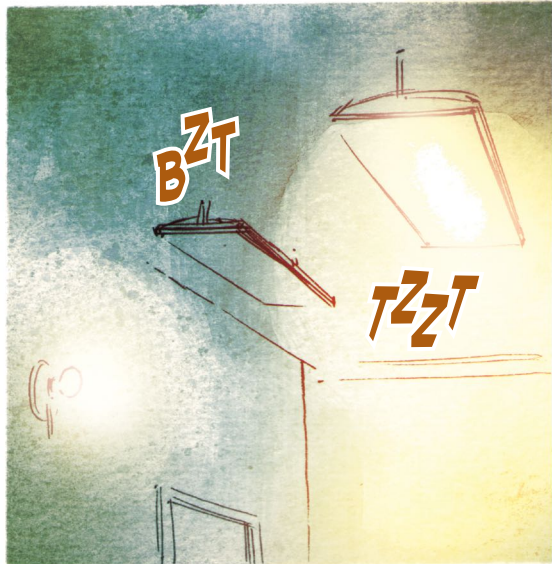


ONLY I FIND **NO RECORD** OF ANY SUCH PROJECTS LISTED IN THE BAYVILLE FIRE COMMISSIONER'S REPORT BLAHBLAHBLAH...



BZT

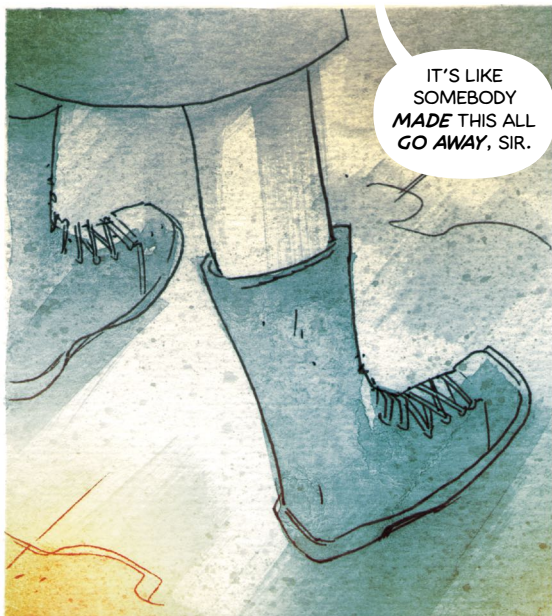
TZT

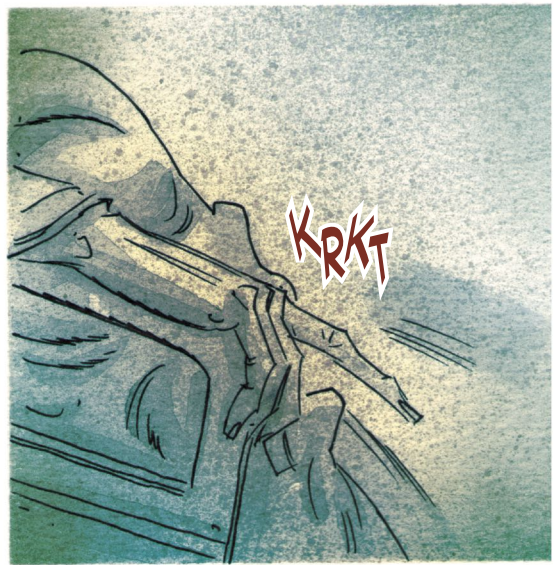


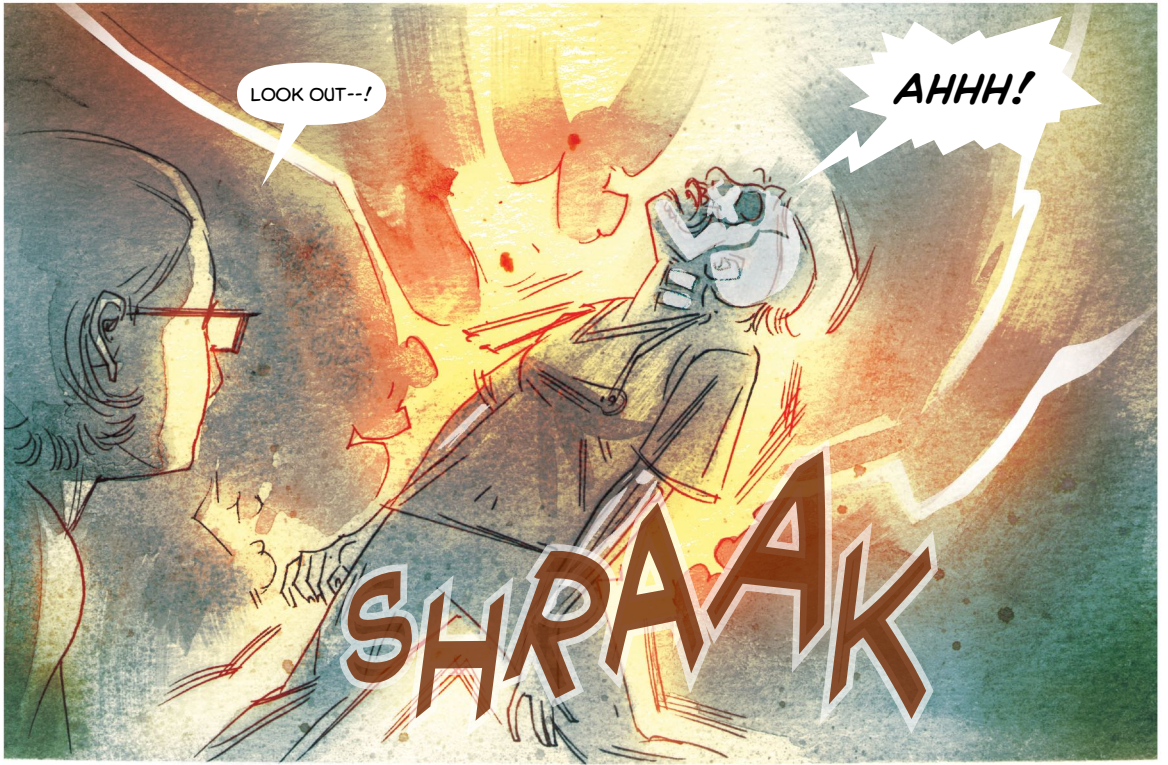
SO, YEAH...LIKE I WAS SAYING...

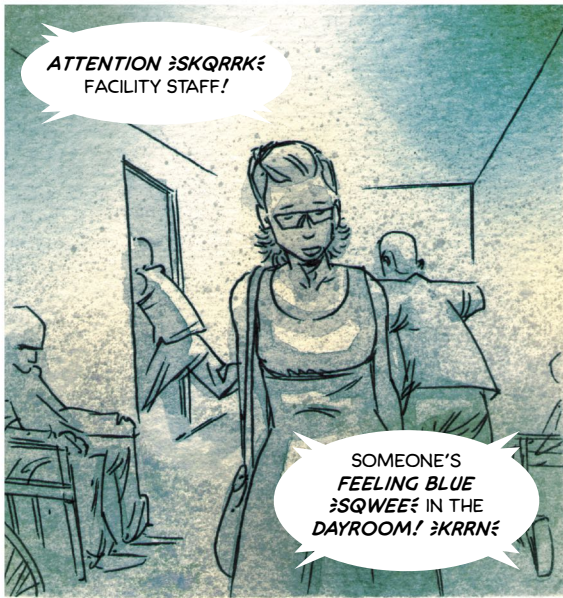


IT'S LIKE SOMEBODY **MADE THIS ALL GO AWAY, SIR.**



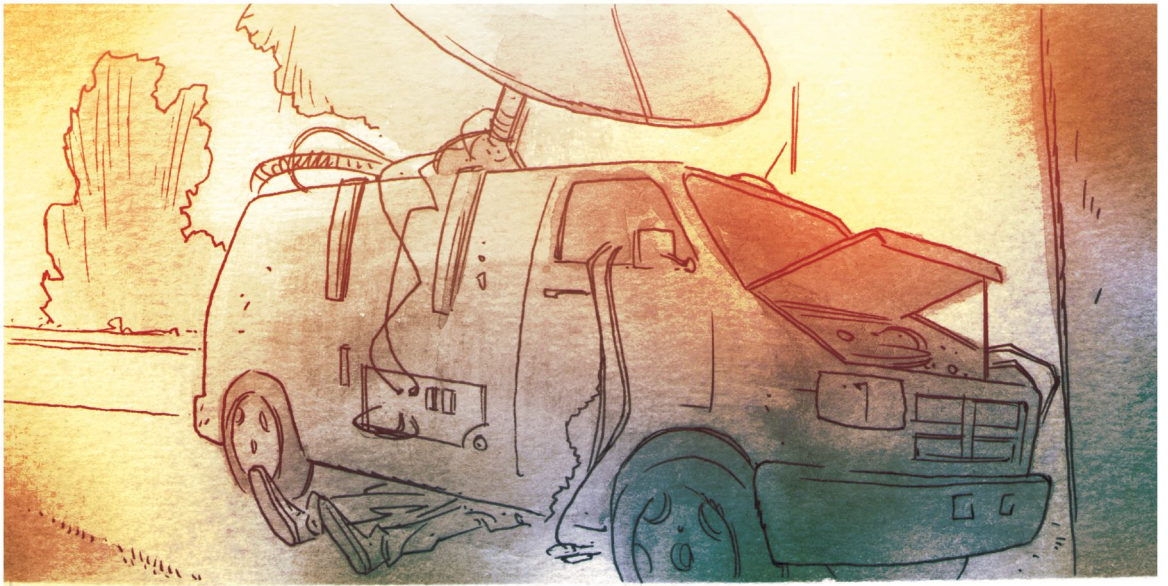


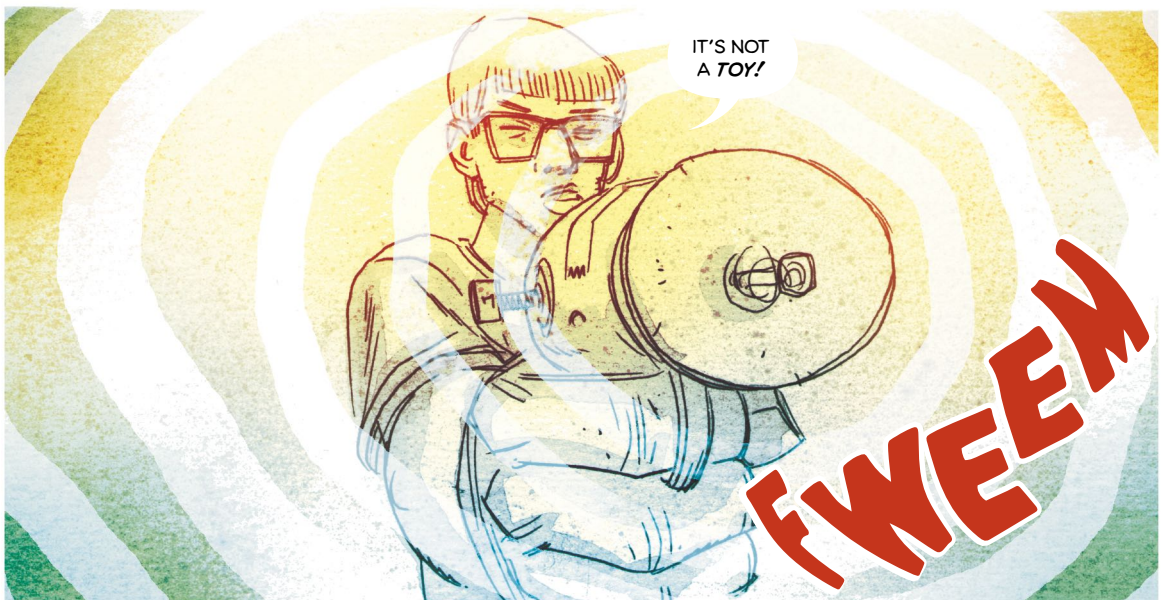
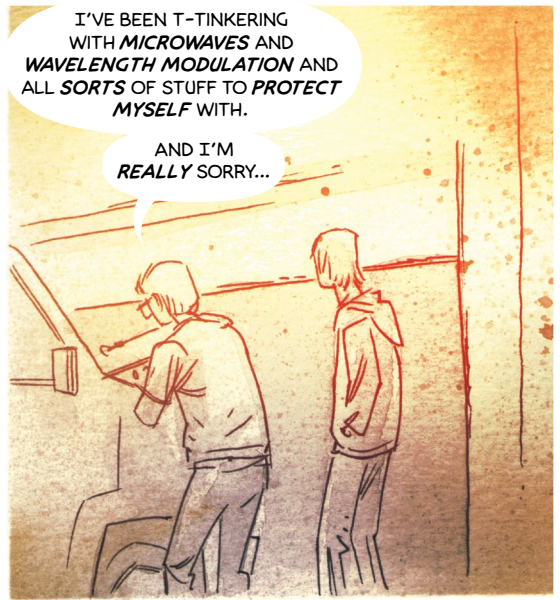




NAME	DATE
Kenny	4/28/w
Kenny	4/13/2-
Kenny	5/3 m
Kenny	5/7 a
Kenny	5/5 v
Kenny	6/2 -
Kenny	6/8 -
Kenny	7/3 -
Kenny	7/14 -
Kenny	8/12 a
Kenny	8/24 w
Kenny	8/31 w
Kenny	9/4 -
Kenny	9/8 -
Kenny	9/24 w
Kenny	10/14 w

A guestbook table with names and dates. The names are all "Kenny" and the dates range from 4/28/w to 10/14/w.







"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND *ANYTHING!*"



THIS IS CHIEF MILKEN. ALL UNITS, COME IN, PLEASE.

KHHHÉ



DEPUTY, THERE'S A PILEUP OUT HERE ON MAIN AND INVERNESS AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON.

KHHHÉ

GODDAMMIT, LORNE, ARE YOU *THERE?*



SONOFA--

GODDAMMIT, LORNE!

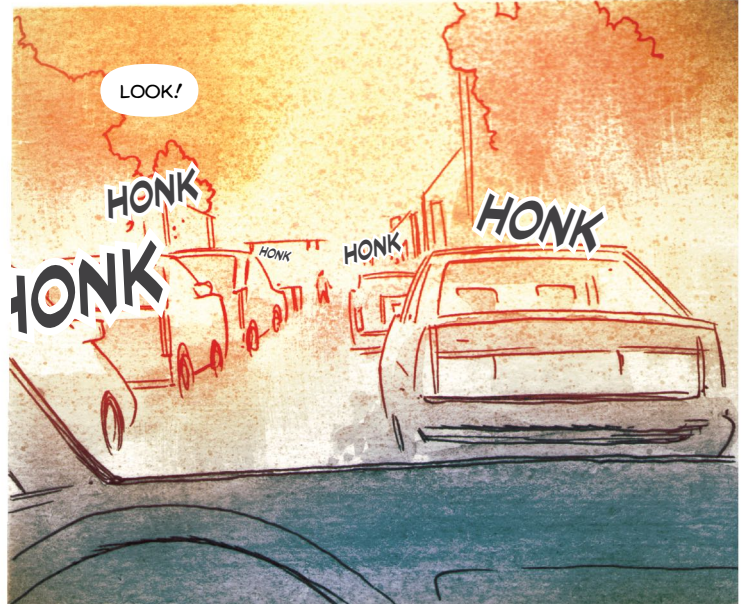


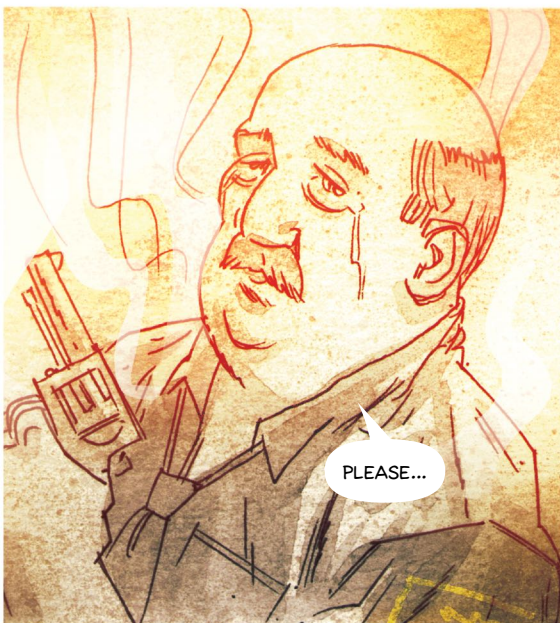
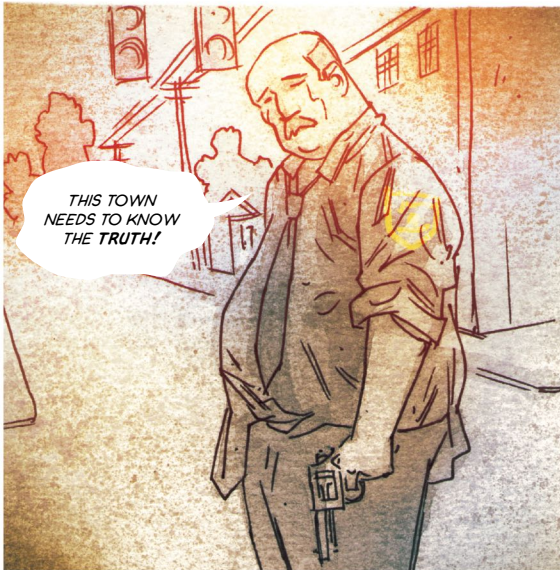
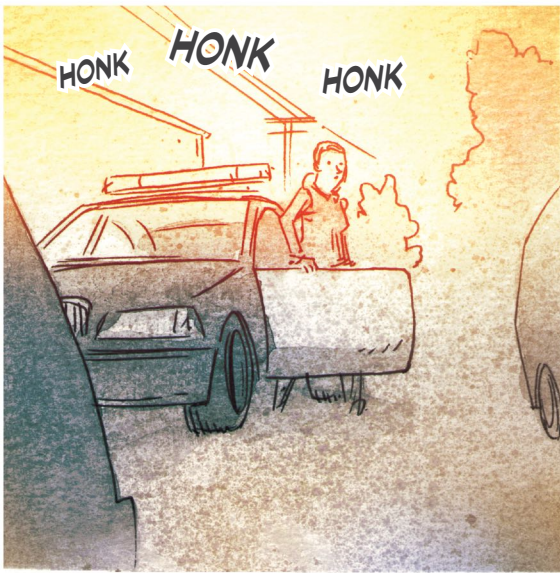
KAYLIE, WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT BEING A POTTY MOUTH?

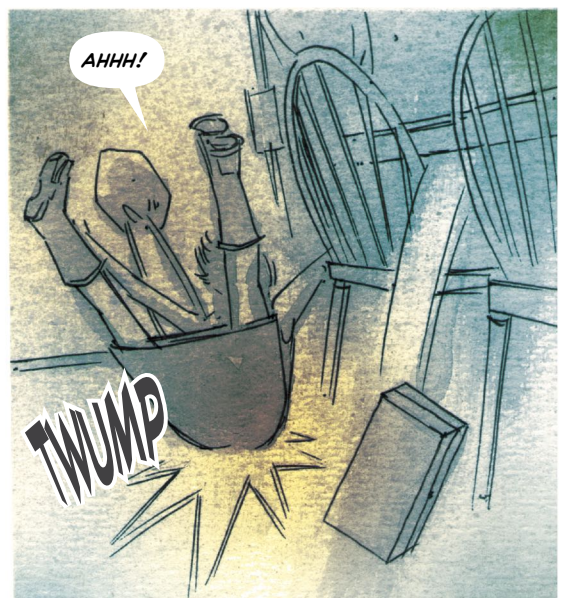
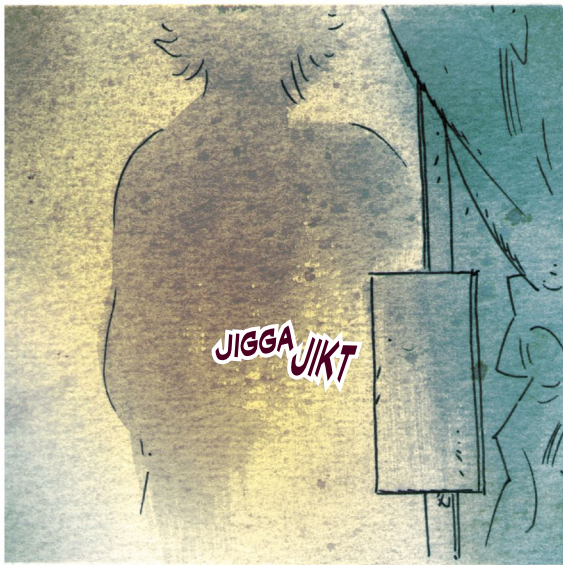
NO, MOMMY...



LOOK!





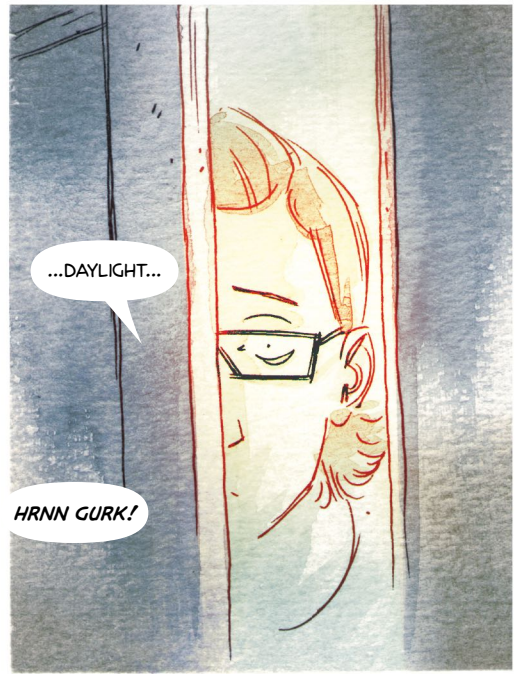






GURG HGG!

OKAY...BUT I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I'M ARMED WITH THE POWER OF PURE, MUCKRAKING...



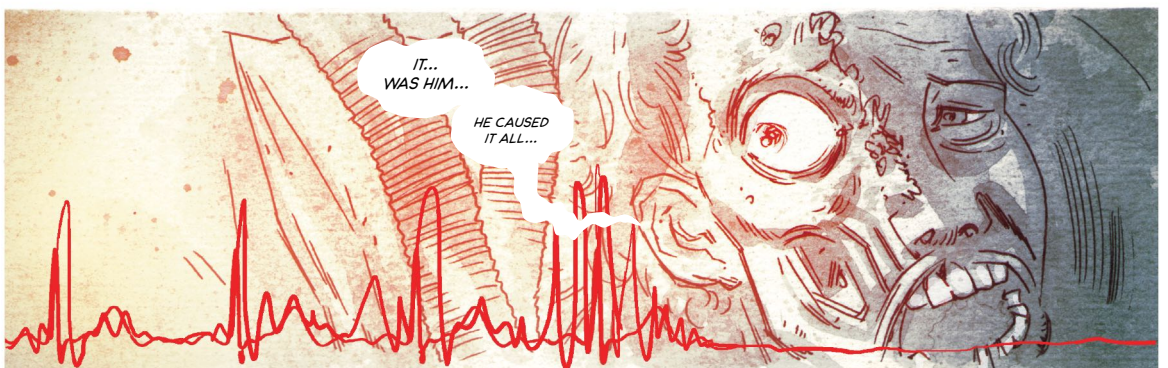
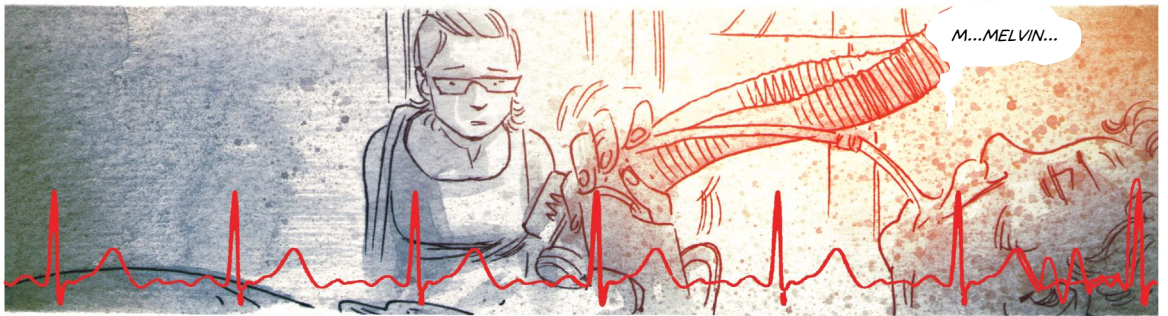
...DAYLIGHT...

HRNN GURK!



HRRG
MMM-M-
MRKG!

BEEPT BEEPT BEEPT BEEPT BEEPT



"IT WAS MELVIN..."



"THE POST-MODERN PROMETHEUS"

16012

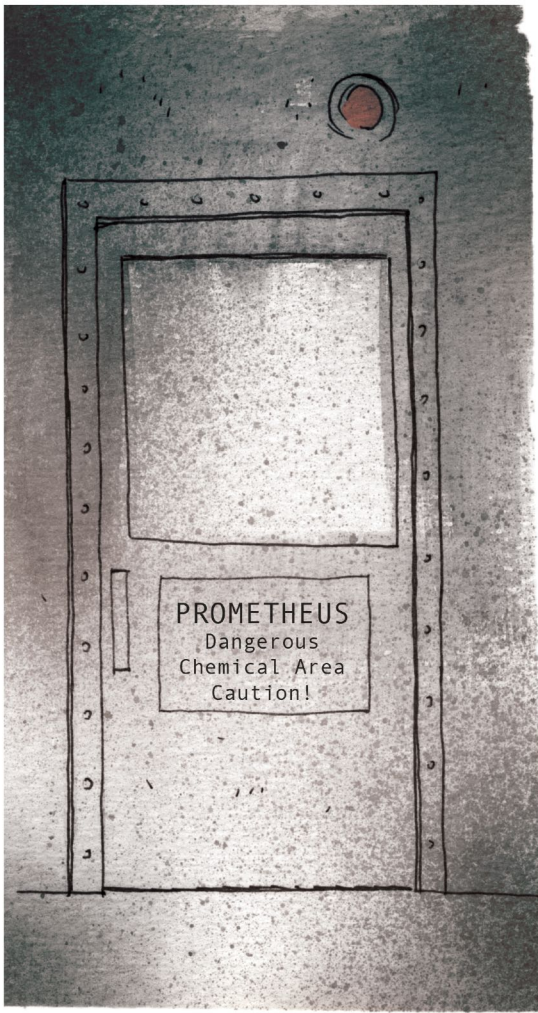
162



spontaneous combustion, the outbreak of fire without the aid of any external source of heat from an overheat source. Spontaneous combustion occurs when inflammable matter, such as oil or coal, is stored in bulk. It begins with oxidation processes, bacterial fermentation, or atmospheric oxidation under conditions permitting ready dissipation of heat from the centre of a haystack or a







Bayville Town.
Twenty-five years ago.

A scene of unimaginable horror and
almost indescribable destruction.

All told, twelve employees of local military and government contractor Grumm Industries died in the initial explosion of a highly secretive and dangerously unstable chemical compound being developed there. The blaze that followed would claim ten more.



But for those fortunate survivors of that terrible night, the ensuing cover-up would prove to be an altogether different fire...



Phineas Grumm had a way with chemicals and compounds.

Under his direction, Grumm Industries developed corrosives and accelerants and untold number of secret, classified, or mercifully forgotten chemical weapons of war.

It was whispered among those who worked for him that Grumm had crafted enhanced powers of the mind to compensate for his advanced years and physical failings.

His potions and elixirs, they claimed, had contributed to make Grumm something more than human.

His work was mysterious, tireless, and brazen..

GENTLY, MY LOVE... SHHH...

COUGH

MR. GRUMM-- SIR!

But the Prometheus Project was to be his masterpiece.

WE NEED TO GO NOW, SIR!

NO!

KRAK
KRAK

Some speculated Prometheus to be a weapons program. Still others insist it involved highly classified fuel compounds or propulsion systems.

AHHH!

To this day, nobody can say for certain just what it was.

Grumm left no notes.

And precious few witnesses.

Survivors would have to be dealt with, of course.

But Phineas Grumm was a man of great influence. Where loyalty was not given, it was purchased.

And where it could not be purchased...

...it was secured by other means.

Lava
lounge

COME ON,
DAMMIT...
COME ON!



I'M READY,
YOU *FIERY*
BASTARD!



WHY AREN'T
YOU *LAUGHING*
NOW...?



IT DOESN'T
WORK ON *YOU*, DOES
IT? NO MATTER HOW
MUCH YOU MIGHT *WANT*
IT TO RIGHT NOW.





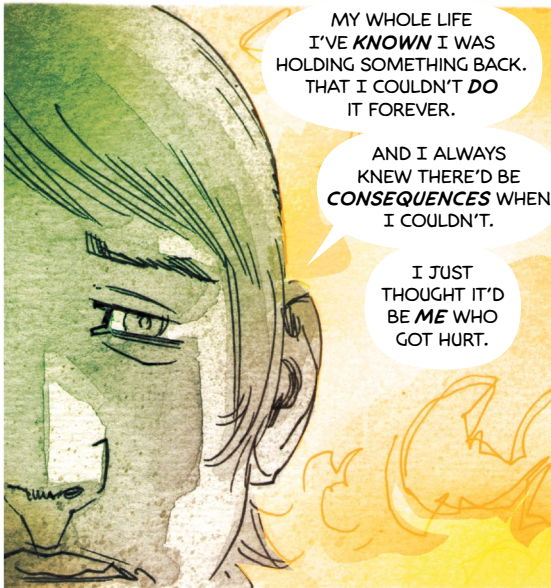
IT'S ALL **MY** FAULT, EMILY.

THE BURNERS... KENNY...

EVEN MY... MY...

YEAH, BUT **YOU'RE** NOT YOUR FAULT.

YOU DIDN'T MAKE **YOU** **ARE**, MELVIN.



MY WHOLE LIFE I'VE **KNOWN** I WAS HOLDING SOMETHING BACK. THAT I COULDN'T **DO** IT FOREVER.

AND I ALWAYS KNEW THERE'D BE **CONSEQUENCES** WHEN I COULDN'T.

I JUST THOUGHT IT'D BE **ME** WHO GOT HURT.



I NEVER MEANT--

I KNOW.

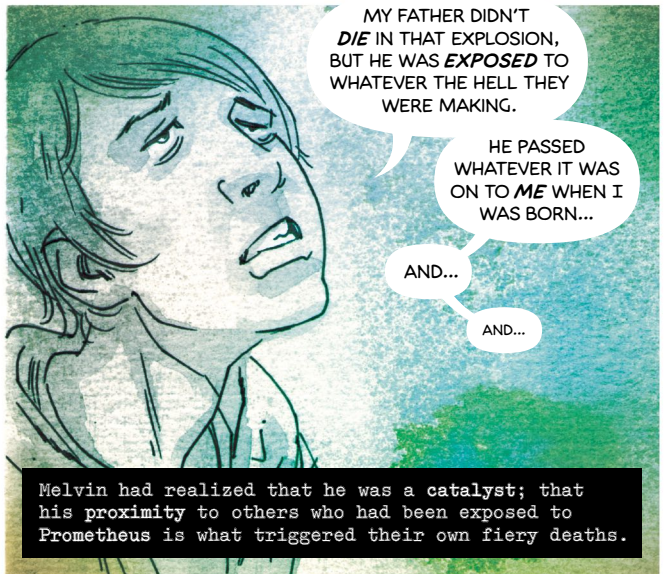
I NEVER WOULD HAVE--

OF COURSE YOU WOULDN'T.



MY LIFE IS A **STEPHEN KING** NOVEL.

STEPHEN KING...?



MY FATHER DIDN'T **DIE** IN THAT EXPLOSION, BUT HE WAS **EXPOSED** TO WHATEVER THE HELL THEY WERE MAKING.

HE PASSED WHATEVER IT WAS ON TO **ME** WHEN I WAS BORN...

AND...

AND...

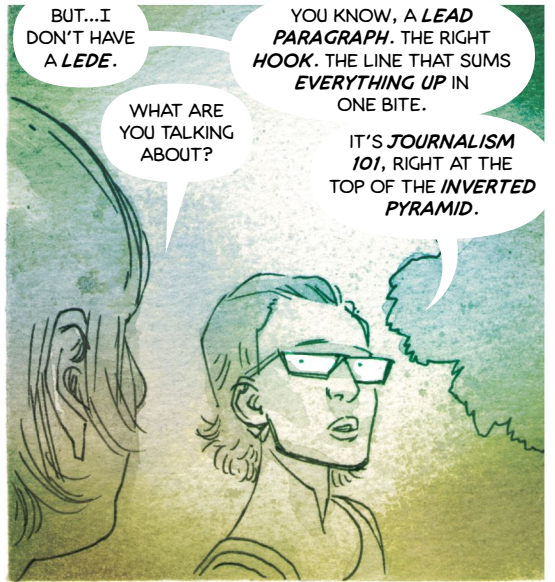
Melvin had realized that he was a catalyst; that his proximity to others who had been exposed to Prometheus is what triggered their own fiery deaths.



SO YOU'RE GOING TO **WRITE** IT, THEN. YOUR **BIG EXPOSÉ**.

I ALREADY KINDA STARTED.

OH.



BUT...I DON'T HAVE A **LEDE**.

YOU KNOW, A **LEAD PARAGRAPH**. THE RIGHT **HOOK**. THE LINE THAT SUMS **EVERYTHING UP** IN ONE BITE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

IT'S **JOURNALISM 101**, RIGHT AT THE TOP OF THE **INVERTED PYRAMID**.



THE **INVERTED PYRAMID**.

IT **SUCKS**, MELVIN!

THEY SAY IT'S FOR MAKING SURE YOU GET THE **MOST IMPORTANT** STUFF OUT EARLY, BUT WHAT IT **REALLY** MEANS IS THAT THEY GET TO **CUT YOUR STORY** TO MAKE ROOM FOR **ADVICE COLUMNS...**

...AND **HELP-WANTED ADS...**

...PERSONALS...



TV LISTINGS...



THE **SUDOKU PUZZLE...**

THE **FREAKIN' COMICS** SECTION, FOR THE LOVE OF--!

WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP



EMILY.

WHAT-- ?





Melvin Reyes was born less than a year after the Grumm industrial fire.



He was only three years old when what he believed to be spontaneous human combustion took his father from him before his very eyes.



He dedicated his young life to determining the cause of something he considered to be more than a phenomenon--

GROUND TEAM,
THIS IS *SPARROW*. WE
ARE IN POSITION.

SUSPECT IS ADVANCING
WEST AND IS CONSIDERED
EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

--a spiritual, almost supernatural manifestation of power and energy that could not be conquered and would never be contained.

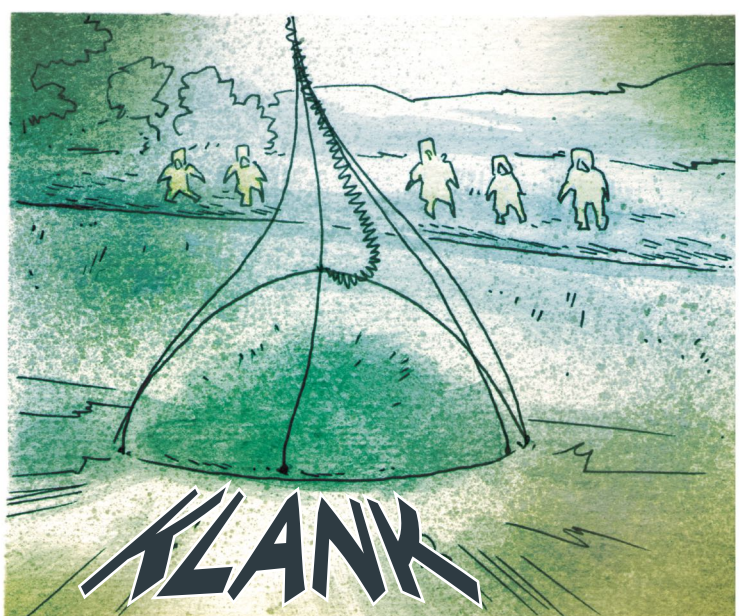
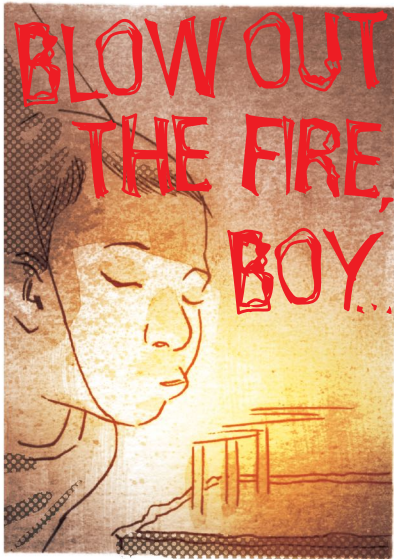
COPY THAT,
SPARROW.

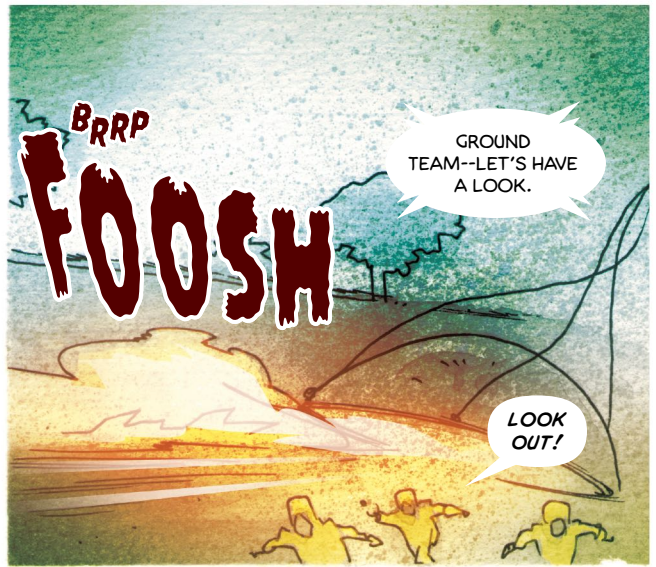
GROUND TEAM
IS A *GO* FOR
TENT PEGS.

WHAT THE
HELL IS A TENT
PE--

SHRAAK

He could never have imagined how both very wrong... and very right he'd be proven that same day.









YOU WAIT
RIGHT THERE,
KAYLIE.

MOMMY'LL
BE RIGHT BACK.

♪ IT'S THE ♪
P-P-POLL-EECE!



YOU SHOULD
HAVE LET US *KNOW*
YOU WERE COMING,
CHIEF MILKEN.

I COULD
HAVE MADE SURE
MR. GRUMM
WAS READY...

WELL, I
THOUGHT
SOMEONE MIGHT.



IS THERE ANY
NEXT OF KIN THE HOME
DEALS WITH, OR SOMEBODY
I CAN TALK TO ABOUT MR.
GRUMM'S FINANCES?

OH, I'M AFRAID
THERE *ISN'T* ANY
FAMILY.

AND MR. GRUMM'S
NEEDS ARE *PROVIDED*
FOR BY A PRIVATE
TRUST.

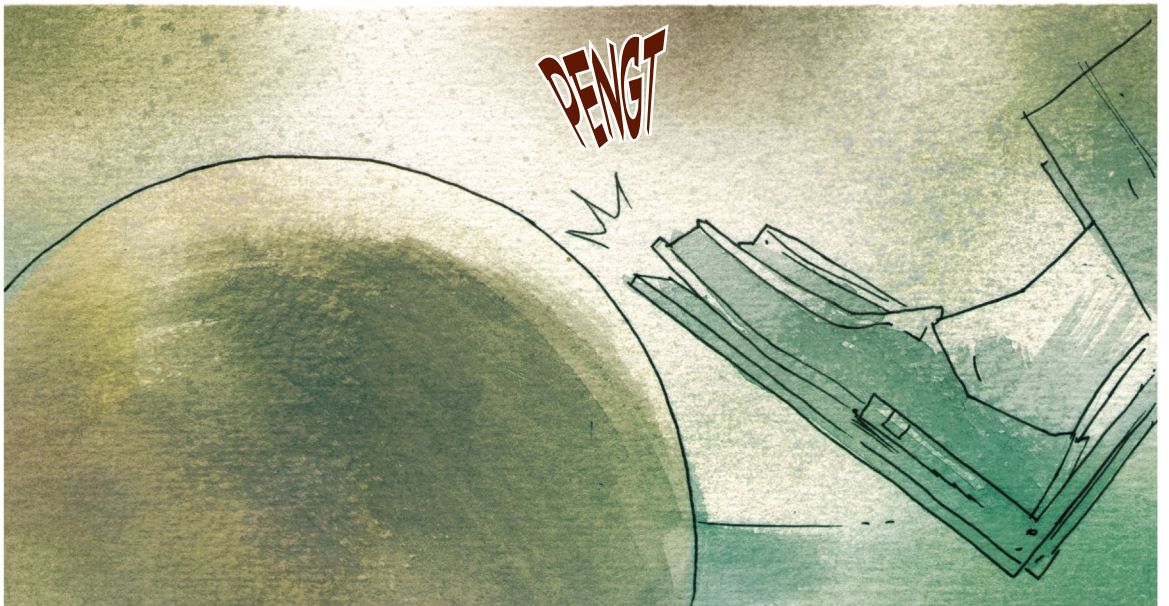
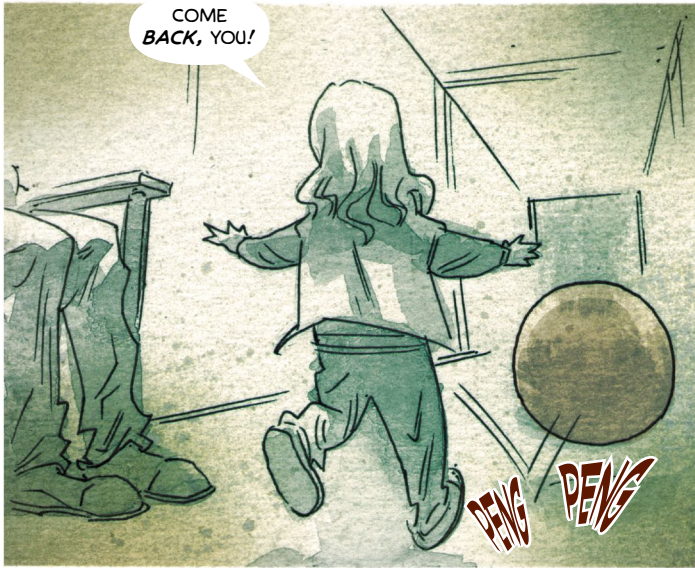
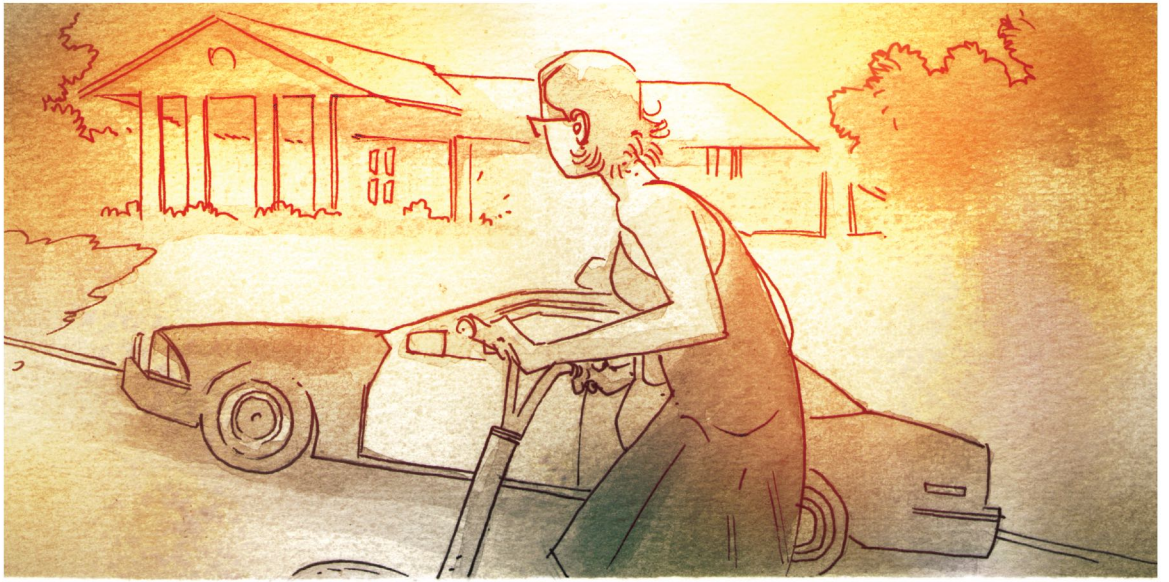


WELL, I *WOULD*
LIKE TO ASK HIM A
FEW QUESTIONS.

I'M SORRY TO SAY
ADVANCED YEARS HAVE
TAKEN MR. GRUMM'S
SPEECH FROM HIM...



...BUT I *DO*
SUSPECT HE'S
LISTENING OFTEN
ENOUGH.





I DO TRUST YOU'LL **RESPECT MR. GRUMM'S DELICATE CONDITION** AND BE **BRIEF** WITH YOUR INQUIRY.

LIKE YOU SAID, HE CAN'T **TALK** ANYMORE.



SO HOW MUCH COULD I REALLY--



WHAT THE HELL IS **THIS?**



HELP US PLEASE



NNNGH...



THIS IS CHIEF MILKEN. I NEED AN AMBULANCE OUT AT **TRANQUIL TOMORROWS...**

POSSIBLE **STROKE VICTIM--** OVER.



COPY THAT,
CHIEF. THIRD CALL
TODAY ALREADY FROM
THE **OLD FOLKS**
HOME.

YEAH, BUT
THIS IS **STAFF**, NOT
A RESIDENT--
CHRIST, HE'S
ALREADY **COLD**.

IT'S LIKE
THE BRAIN JUST...
SHUT DOWN.



OKAY, CHIEF.
WE'LL GET A **RESCUE**
OUT THERE RIGHT
A--

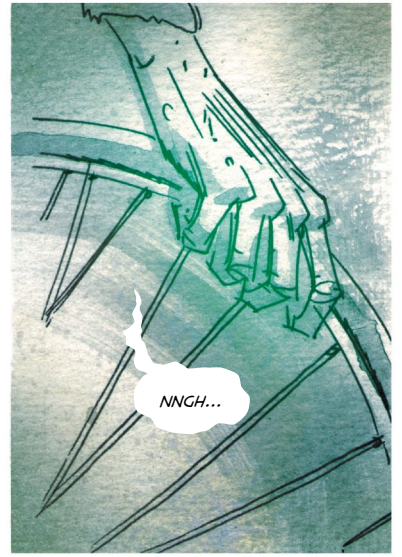
CHANGE THAT
ORDER, FOLKS...



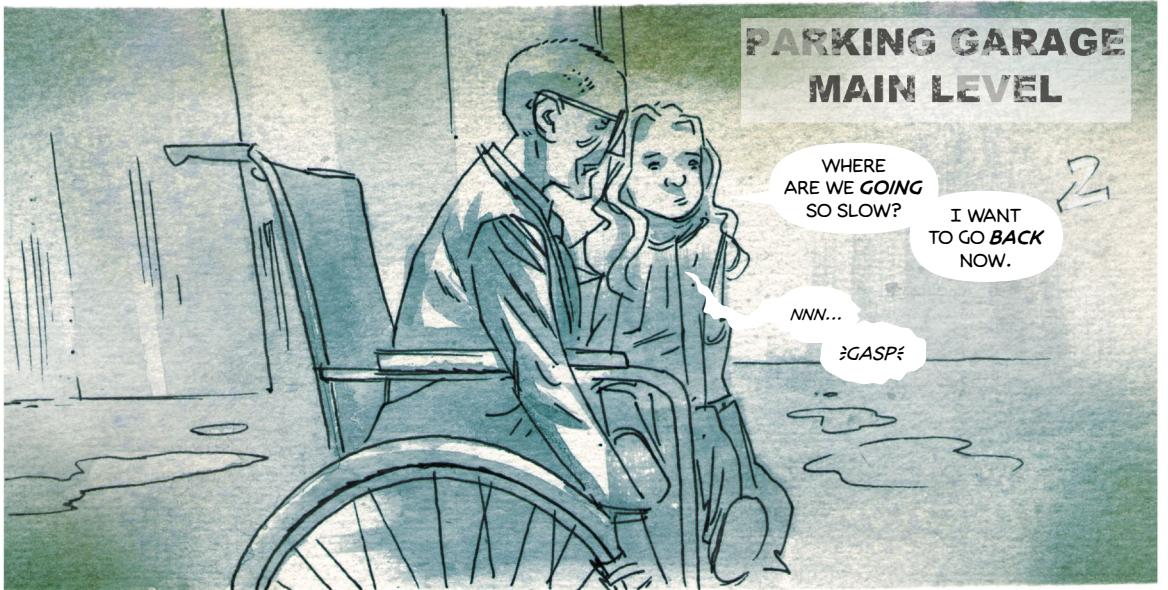
BETTER MAKE
IT **TWO!**



HNN...



NNGH...



**PARKING GARAGE
MAIN LEVEL**

WHERE
ARE WE *GOING*
SO SLOW?

I WANT
TO GO *BACK*
NOW.

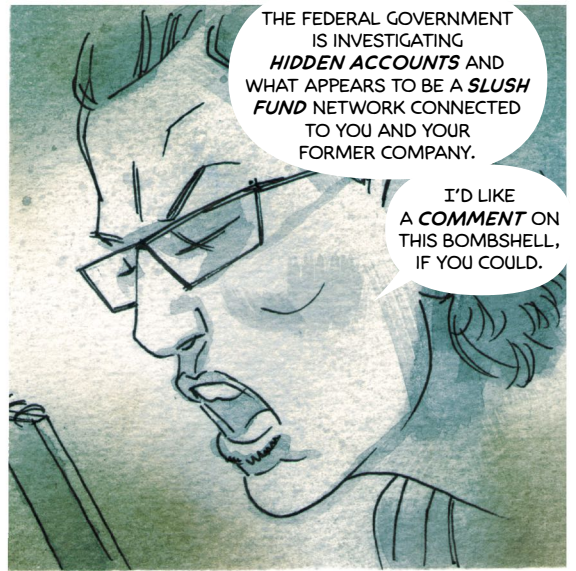
NNN...

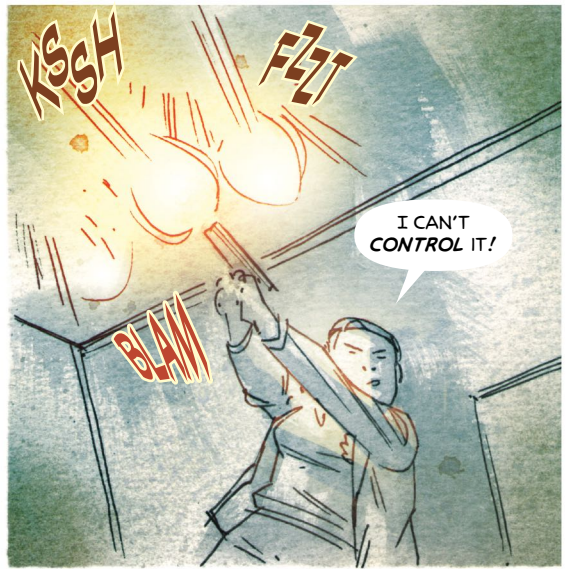
GASP?

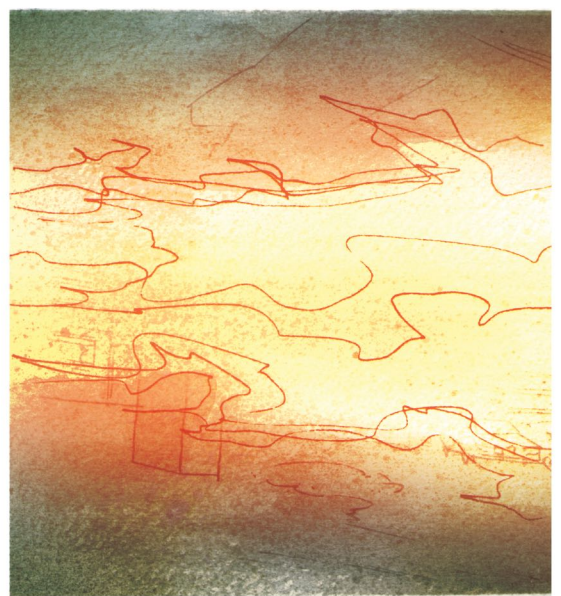
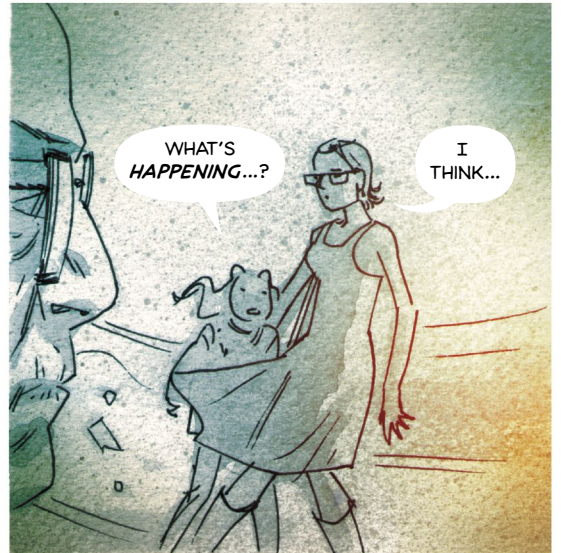
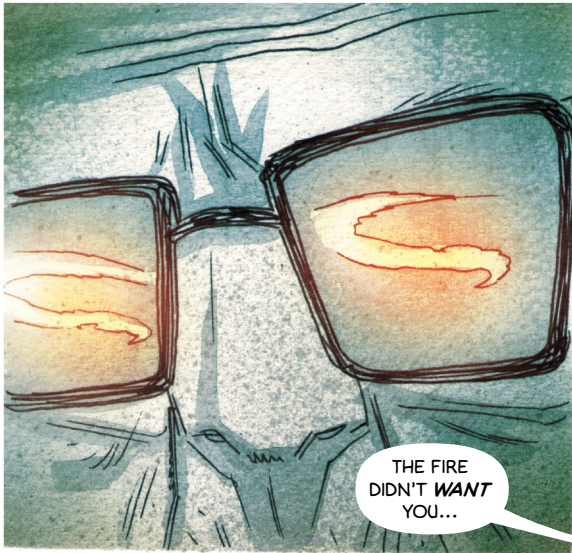
2

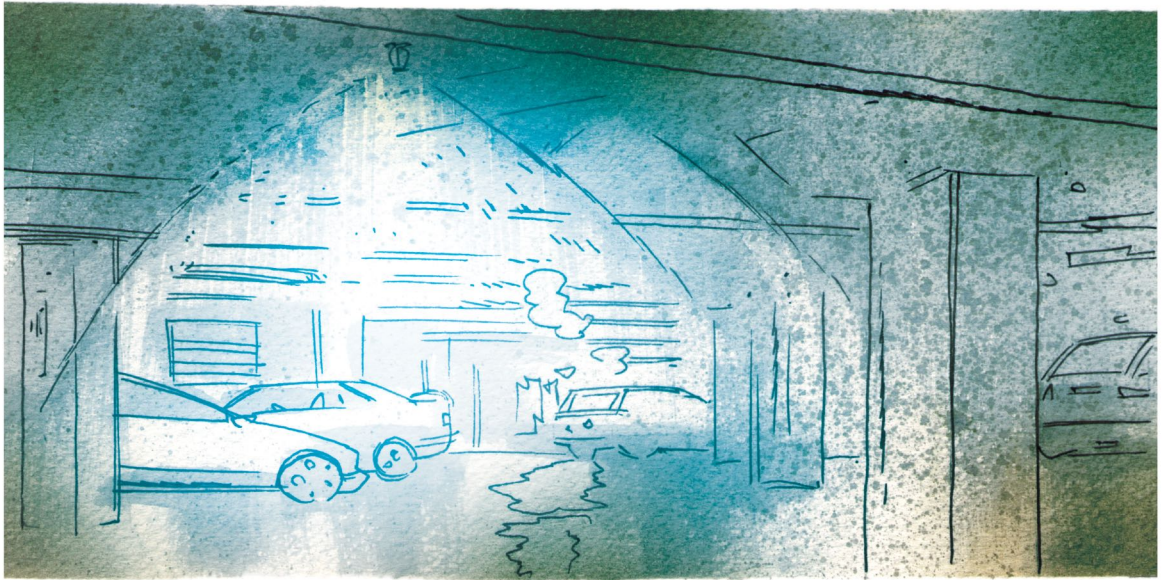


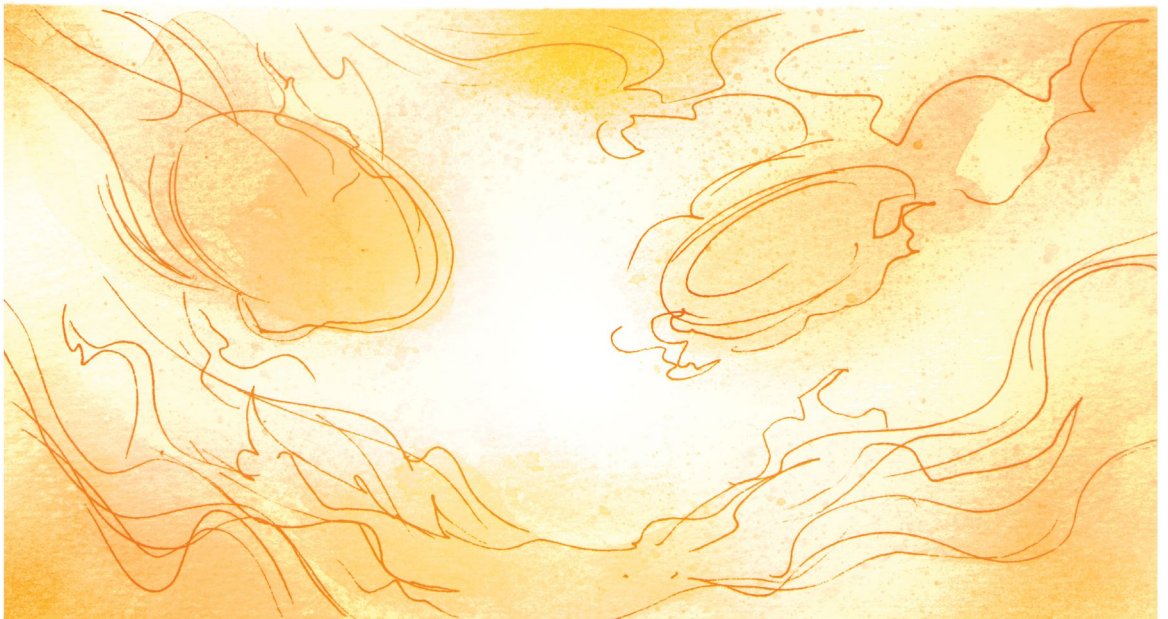
MR. GRUMM...
I WAS HOPING I
MIGHT *FINISH* ASKING
YOU A FEW
QUESTIONS.

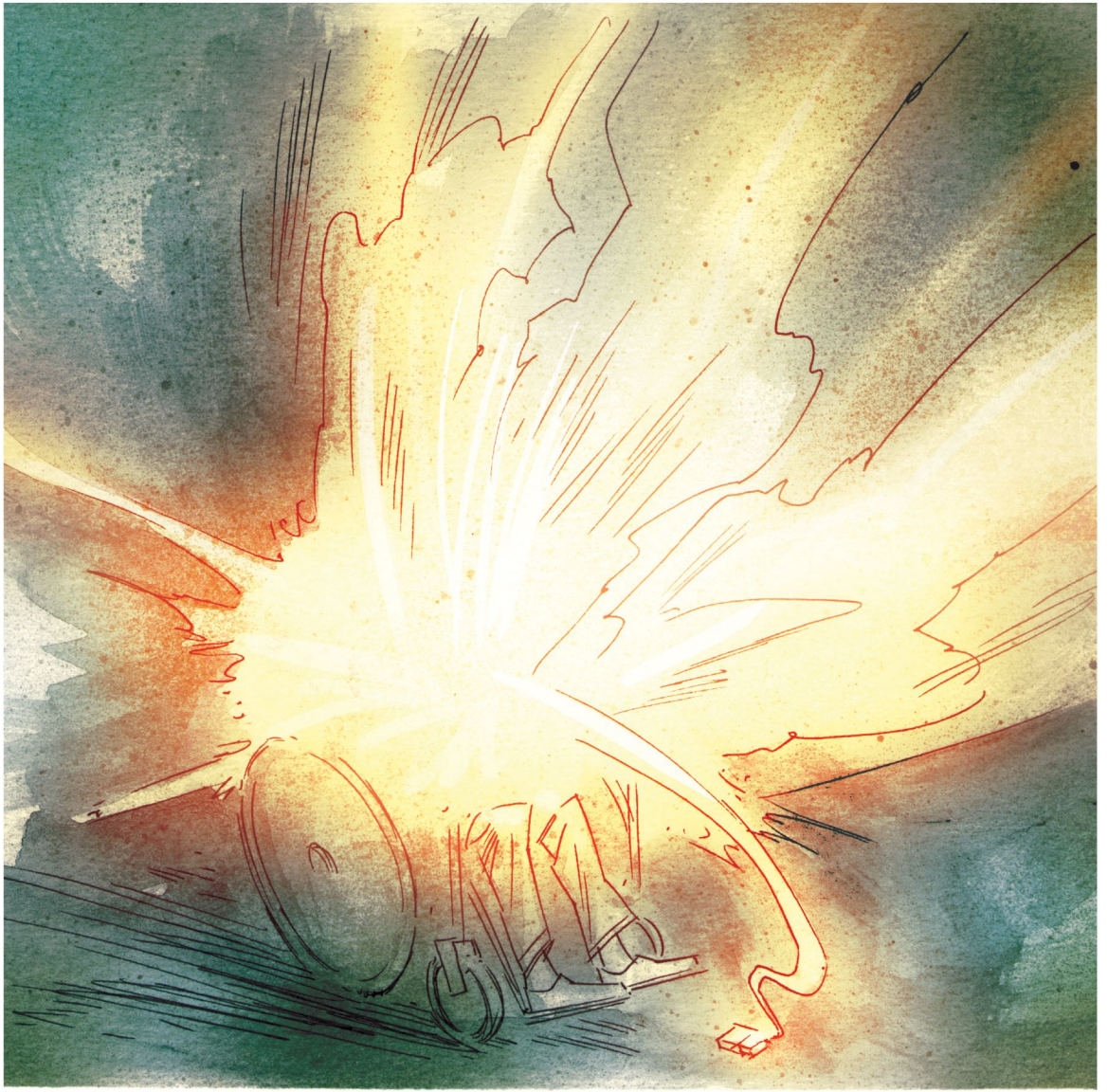












Melvin Reyes was just three

DON'T BURY
THE LEDE...



LOOK,
MOMMY...

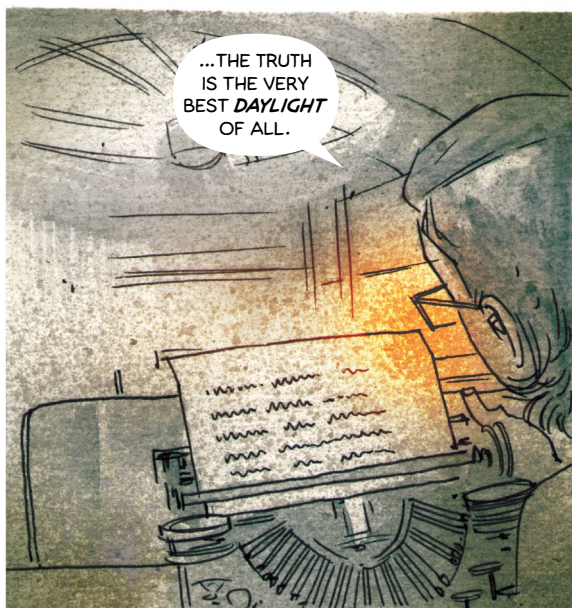


AND ALWAYS
REMEMBER...

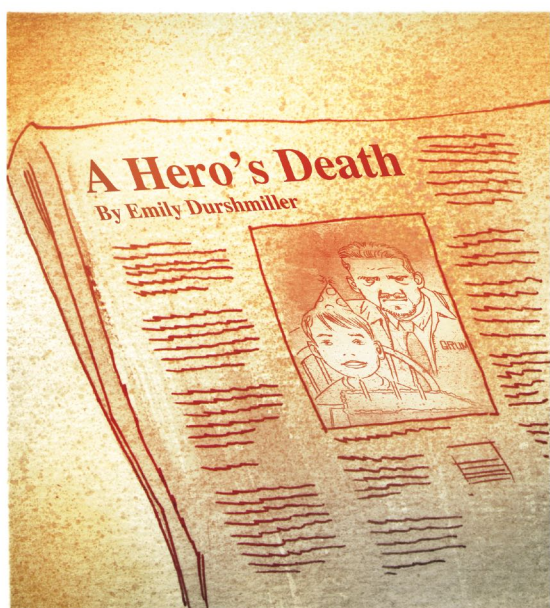


"--ALERTING PARAMEDICS,
CHIEF MILKEN WAITED WITH THE
SUSPECT'S FIRST ALLEGED VICTIM
WHO HAD GONE INTO SHOCK
FOLLOWING A TREMENDOUS
LOSS OF BLOOD."

HOORAAAAY!

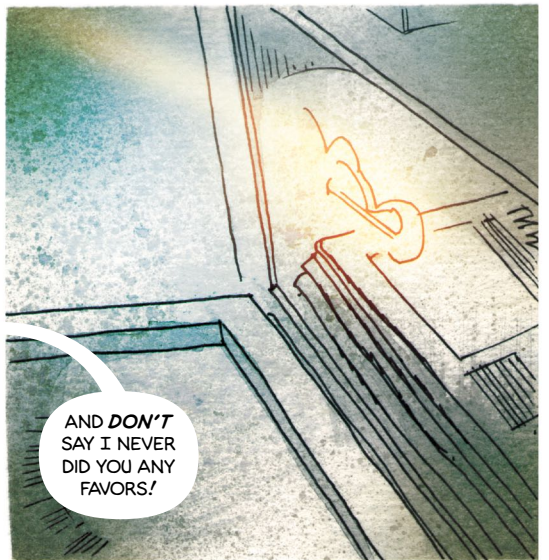
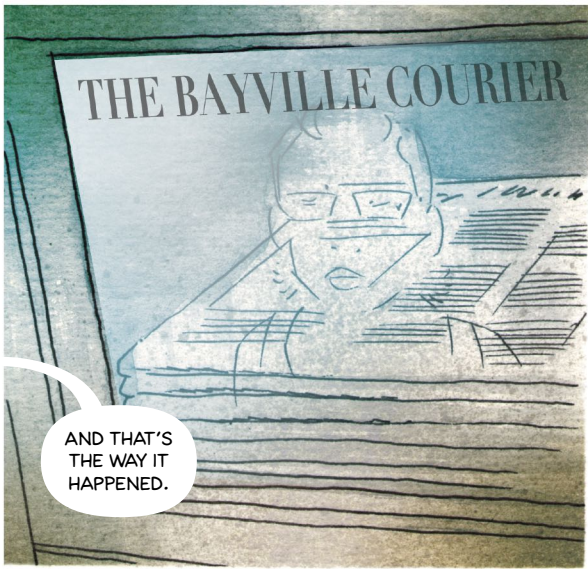


...THE TRUTH
IS THE VERY
BEST DAYLIGHT
OF ALL.



A Hero's Death

By Emily Durshmitter



SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION

by Melvin Reyes—Age 10
(with help from Kenny)

It is very hard for people to burn. You need a lot of heat, like a big fire, and usually most people die from smoke inhalation.

But **SOMETimes** . . . **SOME** people SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUST. This means they CATCH FIRE and BURN without any source of heat or fire!

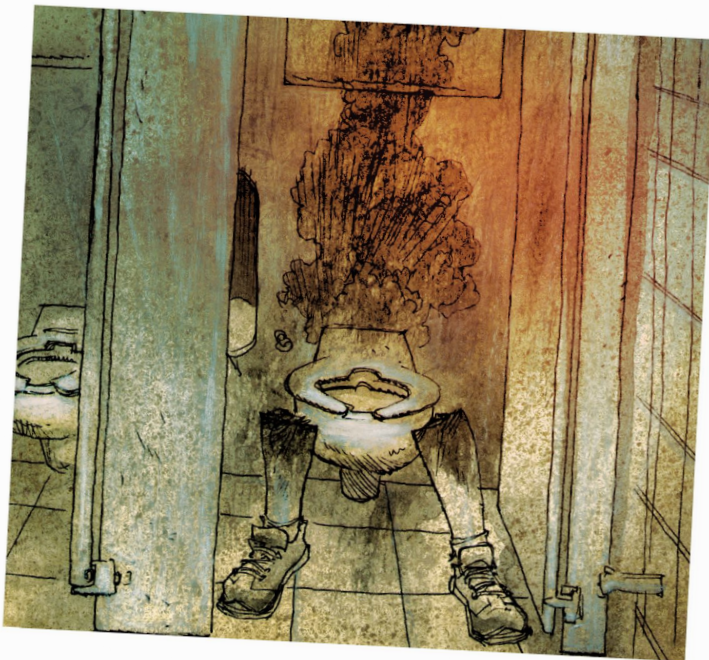
It is very mysterious, but also it is very dangerous and it can cause a lot of pain for families and can frighten kids and make them miss their parents when they die.

There have been many reported cases of SHC over the years. These cases have baffled police and so-called “scientists”:

- 1) Mary Reeser (67 years old) died at her Florida house. She was almost **COMPLETELY BURNED AWAY** . . . but the house wasn't damaged at all. The case is still open and unsolved.
- 2) Helen Conway (Nov. 8, 1964) was said to have burned almost completely away in 21 minutes! Some have tried to explain this manamana with a theory called “The Wick Effect” (but they are wrong! see later).



- 3) John Bentley was 92 years old when he was discovered in his bathroom, burned to death. His remains were severely damaged, but his bathroom wasn't except for the grease and fat the smoke left on the walls.



These are just a few of the ~~millions thousands~~ MANY cases that have raffled incubators for

Many people don't believe in SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION. These ~~jerk stupid morons douchebags skeptics~~ often fail to consider some key things in their investigations...

- 1) People who SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUST don't run away! If the fire was really caused by a cigarette or a fireplace or the stove, like some ~~douche~~ skeptics say, the victim would scream or try to escape. Even if they were on fire and would probably burn to death, wouldn't they try to leave the house? In reality, I think, the fire hypnotizes them. There is a face. A Fiery God ~~XXXX~~ Forget this part please.
- 2) Explanations such as STATIC FLASH and THE WICK EFFECT are ridiculous. These are ways unbelievers usually get out of doing the hard work needed to get to the bottom of this ~~manamana~~. Static Flash says people build up static electricality until they just blow up, and Wick Effect means the body burns like a candle with something like clothes acting as the wick. But this would take a long time! Note: Helen Conway died in about 20 minutes!

Spontaneous Human Combustion was even mentioned in Charles Dickens's famous book, Bleak House. An old man named Mr. Crook is a victim. Also, the movie Spinal Tap has a drummer spontaneously combust RIGHT ON CAMERA!

I DON'T THINK THAT WAS REAL, MELVIN.

In ~~confusion~~, SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION is usually regarded as a mystery or an urban legend, junk science, and make-believe. But I know it isn't, even if I can't prove it yet.

I made a promise. I know I will someday.

*Phenomenon!
You're gonna get us
failed Kenny!*

*IT WAS ON
THE MUPPETS
LAST NIGHT...
I GOT CONFUSED...*

*Conclusion!
Kenny, you're fired
from this job!*

NooOoO!

*shut UP,
Kenny!*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



JOE HARRIS

"No one writes horror quite like Joe Harris" says Wizard World of the acclaimed writer of numerous comics, graphic novels, and movies mixing horror with tales of superheroes and the supernatural.

As a young creator at Marvel Comics, Joe launched the cult-classic Spider-Man spinoff series *Slingers*, and wrote myriad other titles, including *Bishop: The Last X-Man*. He has written for all major comics publishers and franchises, including the X-Men, Spider-Man, Batman, and others.

He conceived and cowrote the screenplay for the hit Sony Pictures film *Darkness Falls*, and the politically themed slasher movie and Fox release *The Tripper*, before returning to comics and launching creator-owned properties that brought his experiences in publishing and moviemaking together.

His supernatural title *Ghost Projekt* was published by Oni Press. Called the Best Miniseries of 2010 by Wizard and lauded by Ain't It Cool News as "one of the finest" of the year, the tense tale of ghosts, gambits, and Cold War-era secrets is currently being adapted for television by SyFy.



BRETT WELDELE

Since bursting onto the scene at the dawn of the new millennium, Eisner-nominated painter Brett Weldele has been working nonstop. His work has covered a wide range of genres, including crime, science fiction, and superheroes, and he has worked with Marvel, Top Shelf, Oni Press, Image, Graphitti Designs, Boom Studios, AiT, Devil's Due, and Zenescope.

His unique fusion of pen, ink, toner, and paint has caught the eye of fans and critics alike. Projects have included the movie tie-ins *Southland Tales: The Prequel Saga* and *Se7en: Wrath*, as well as the bestselling graphic novel for Top Shelf, *The Surrogates*, adapted into a major motion picture from Touchstone Films starring Bruce Willis, and its follow up, *The Surrogates: Flesh and Bone*. Recent releases *The Light* and *Spontaneous* continue to showcase Weldele's love of atmosphere.

An avid follower of music technology, the versatile Weldele lives in Oregon and spends his free time making experimental music on a Mac.





PHENOMENON,

CONSPIRACY,

OR DELUSION?

"Kelvin" Melvin Reyes was only three years old when spontaneous human combustion took his father from him. He's since devoted his life to exploring the mystery behind the phenomenon, searching for a pattern and predictors that he might save others from that same fiery fate. But the closer he gets to his goal, the further things lead down a well of secrets, horrors, and terrible truths.

**IS SHC REAL? AND IF SO,
CAN IT BE STOPPED?**

What follows is a supernatural trip down a suburban rabbit hole as Melvin's quest to honor his father's memory unlocks the mysteries of his town's dark past and his own family secrets. From acclaimed writer and filmmaker Joe Harris (*Ghost Projekt*, *The X-Files*) comes a slow-burn horror thriller of obsession, belief, and restitution.