UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

DISS

and

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL:
AN INTERNATIONAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN EXPLORATION

by
Cornelis Vaandrager
24392881

A graphic novel and mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MA: Creative Writing
Department of Afrikaans
Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria
South Africa

Supervisor
Professor Henning Pieterse

February 2011

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this submission is a graphic novel entitled "Diss". The novel is set in South African in the near future, and is based on Dante's "Inferno". The work also draws on various ancient mythologies and works of fiction. Essentially, this graphic novel is a reflection on contemporary South African society, as the reader travels with the main character, Dirk, through the rooms of a club in the South African capital, Pretoria. The club contains the nine circles of hell, and leads Dirk to discover aspects of himself that he has suppressed, such as his mother's brutal murder. He meets his three guardians from ancient Egyptian mythology, who are also the keepers of the hallway. He further has to confront the three aspects of the Queen of hell, based on the three archetypal aspects of woman, who tempt him into letting go of a memory. At the climax, he is confronted with the queen herself, who, craving the taste of Dirk's pain, tries to remove the memory from him by force. Throughout "Diss" Dirk's best friend Gugu travels with his, and acts as his moral guide in the club.

The second section is entitled "The graphic novel: an international and South African exploration." The research essay explores the definitions and background of the graphic novel, and looks at how the genre can uniquely explore aspects of time and space, myth and intertext and hybridity and cultural production. To illustrate these aspects the essay explores definitive works in the genre, namely "Maus" by Art Spiegelman, "The Sandman" series by Neil Gaiman, and "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi. The essay further looks at the history of African comics, and, more specifically, the graphic novel publication industry in South Africa. Lastly, the essay explores the possibilities of the graphic novel within the multimodal classroom, particularly in how the genre can be used in promoting literacy.

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Dedication

First off, I would like to dedicate this to my mom, wherever she may be. I like to think that some of her essence resides within me.

Then, there are many people who need to be thanked, for without them, *Diss* would have made a very ungraceful swan-dive into the rocks at the bottom:

My family, for their support and love, even though I'm a bit of a difficult customer. I have *no* idea how they'll respond to this book

Henning Pieterse, for giving me an opportunity and believing in me, even during those times less smooth. Always trust that gut-feel

My M-class and Seittie, for their support and enthusiasm

Gugu, for allowing me the use of her name, and for working *Qaqamba* with me

Monica, for being the one and only princess genius

Yvonne, for being the voice of reason

Elsa and Roger, for being the voices of madness

Robert, for screaming the Tori with me, Batch

The Crazy Vets (Pi, Jew, King David, Penguin and Daddy-Bear), for putting up with me (sorry Pi!)

The Tzar for her editing inputs and buckets of Chardonnay

Megan for the Benoni sushi

Carina for the cheap wine and poker

Lize for being the best coffee-date academic superhero ever

To my grey ladies, **Liezl** and **Su**, for the years

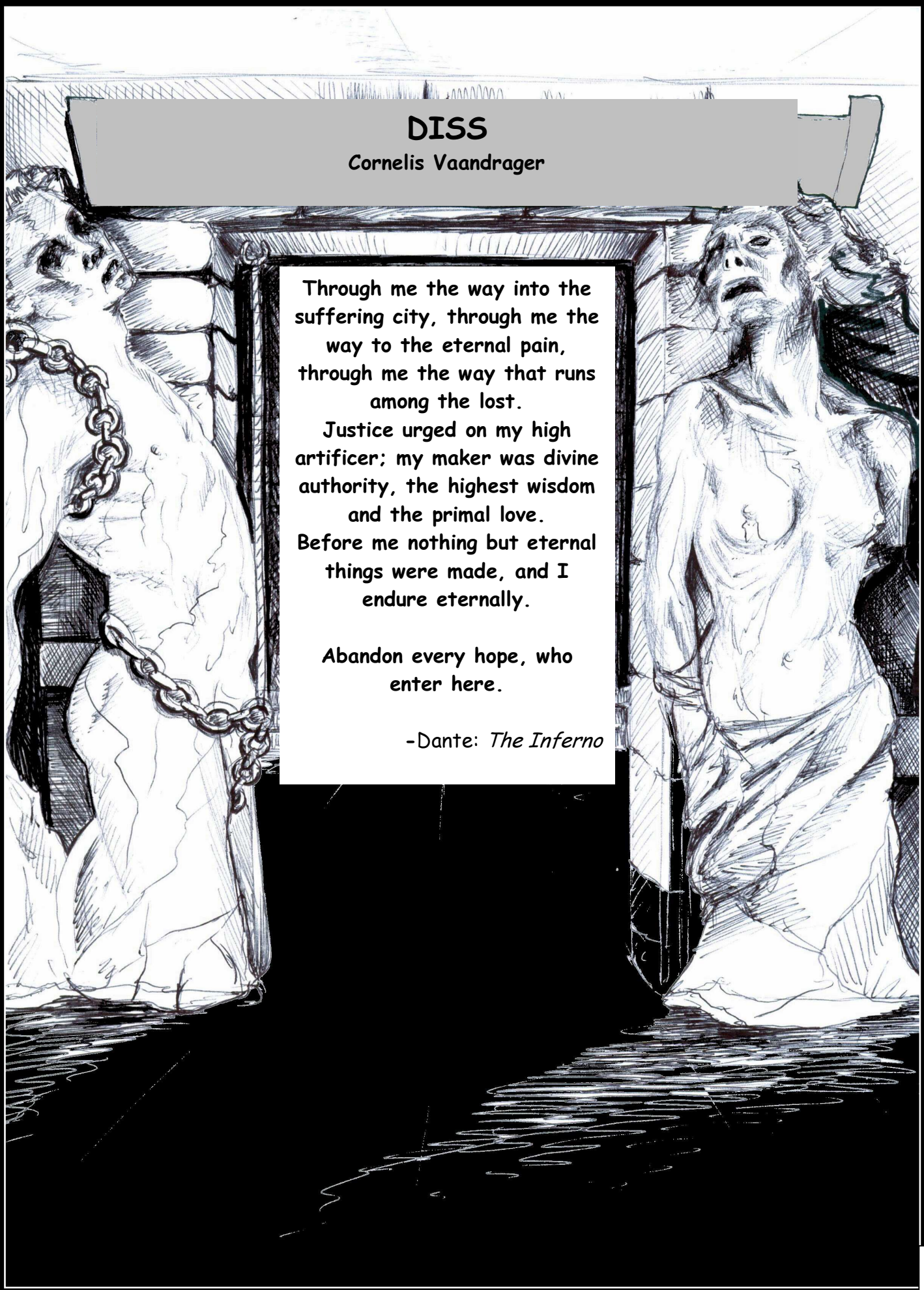
To **Mrs DeVere (aka Louis)**: thanks for the fishcakes

To everyone who gave me pens – thank you – you won't get them back

Indeed, to everyone who made this possible: it's been one hell of a ride (I'm not sure if that pun was intended or not). If I haven't mentioned you by name, it doesn't mean I've forgotten you: it means my pen has dried-up yet again, and I'm going to have to scam another off my long-suffering suppliers.

DISS

Cornelis Vaandrager



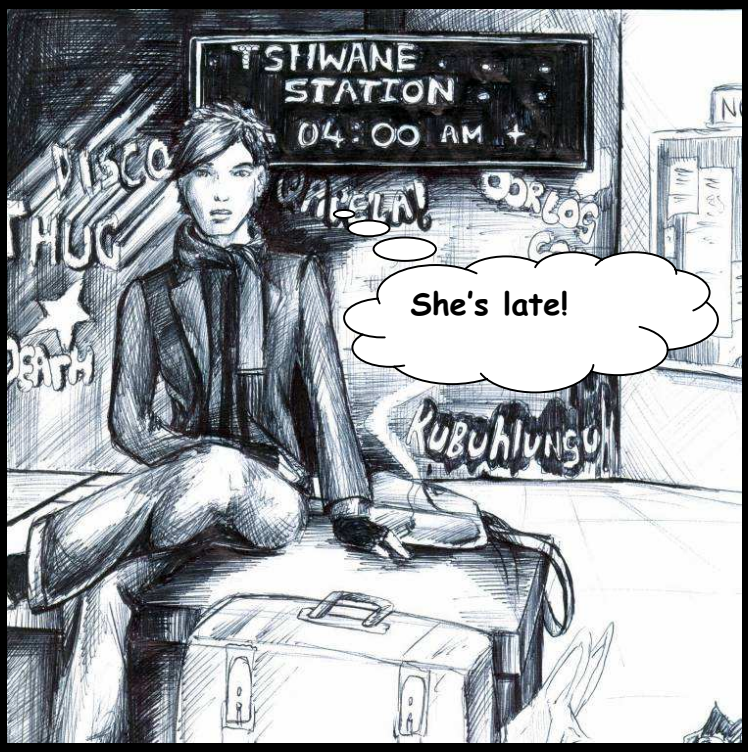
Through me the way into the suffering city, through me the way to the eternal pain, through me the way that runs among the lost.
Justice urged on my high artificer; my maker was divine authority, the highest wisdom and the primal love.
Before me nothing but eternal things were made, and I endure eternally.

Abandon every hope, who enter here.

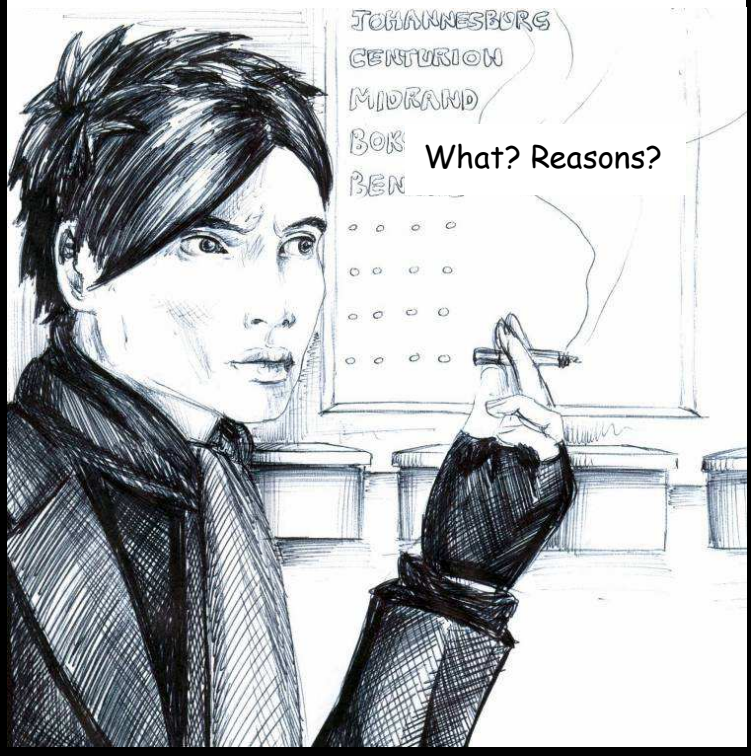
-Dante: *The Inferno*

27 April 2032

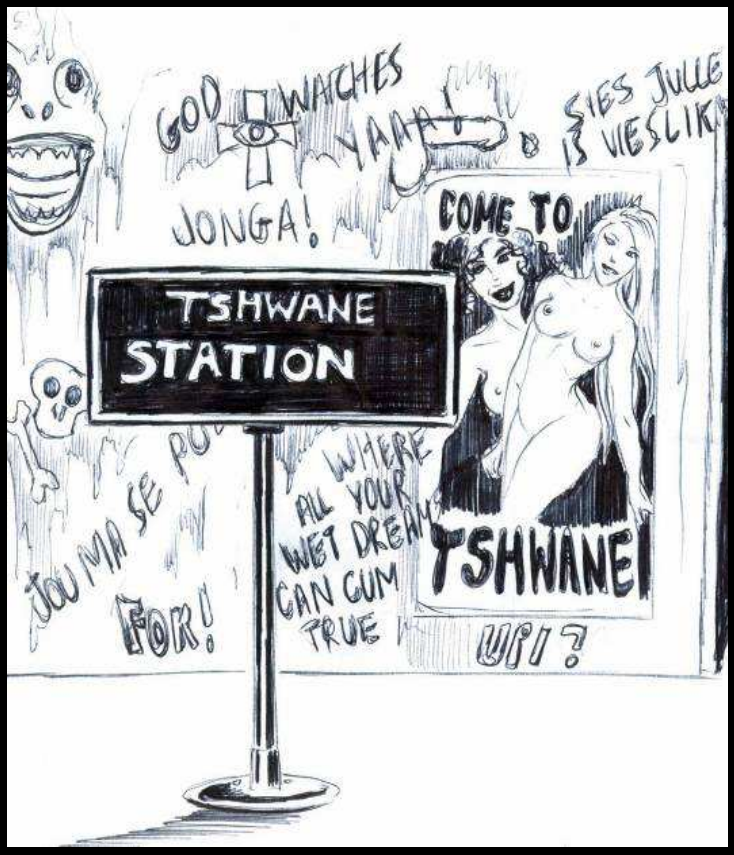
Dirk has been waiting for some time now.



He didn't mean to come to Tshwane on his visit to South Africa. There were -



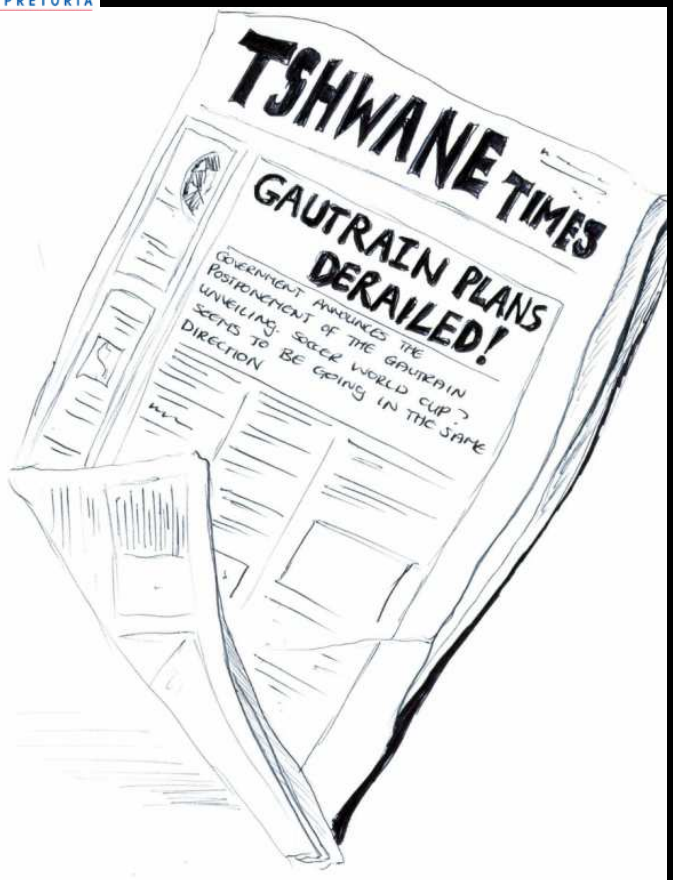
Five years in Amsterdam was a long time away. He expected more to have changed.



Remembering happier times With Gugu.

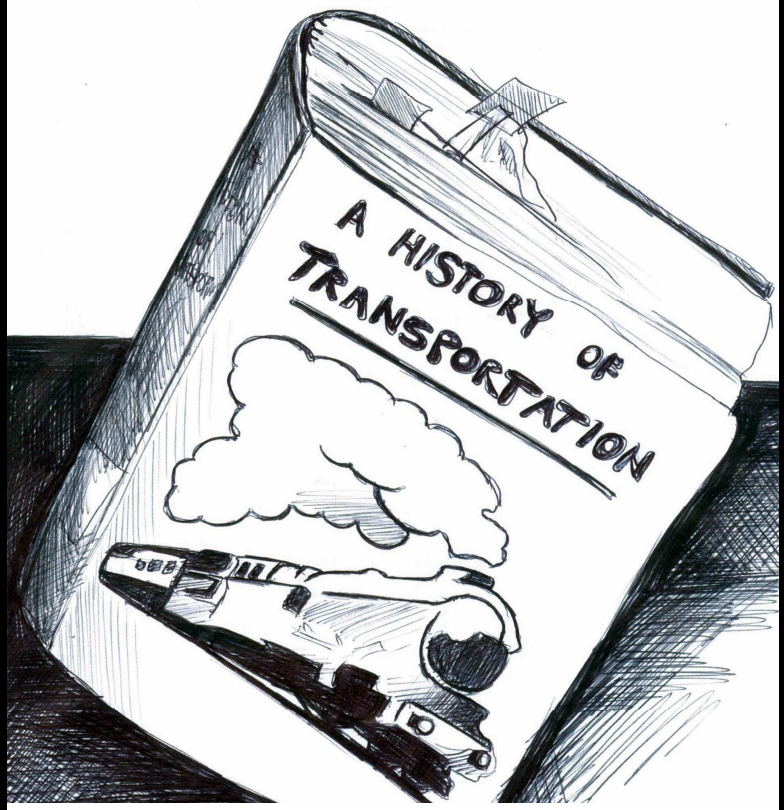
At least he managed to keep **that** friendship through it all.

He took the Gautrain from Jozi earlier that morning. It was cheaper.



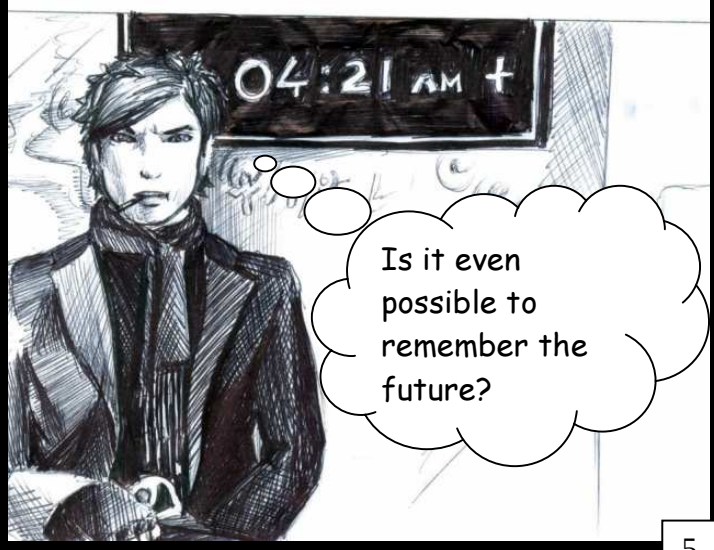
While it was being built, hope and fatalism raced towards a magic finish line:

2010 **Twenty Ten.**



That was years ago, Dirk but a child. It's all written down and recorded, though. History in the making – he was there.

Other memories crawl across his thoughts with insect feet, but he is sure it hasn't happened yet.



Stale

It was all stale

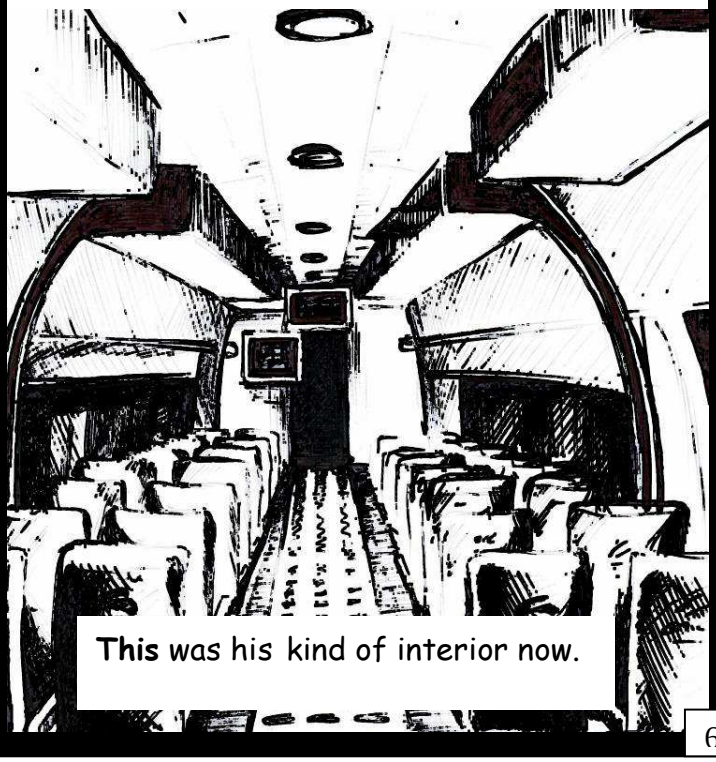
He remembers when it was new, and the excitement of a child's rising awareness that something was happening that was so much bigger than himself.

A child who carried a packet of gummy sweets in his sticky hand, while holding on to his mother with the other - full of hope.

What a cliché.

No.

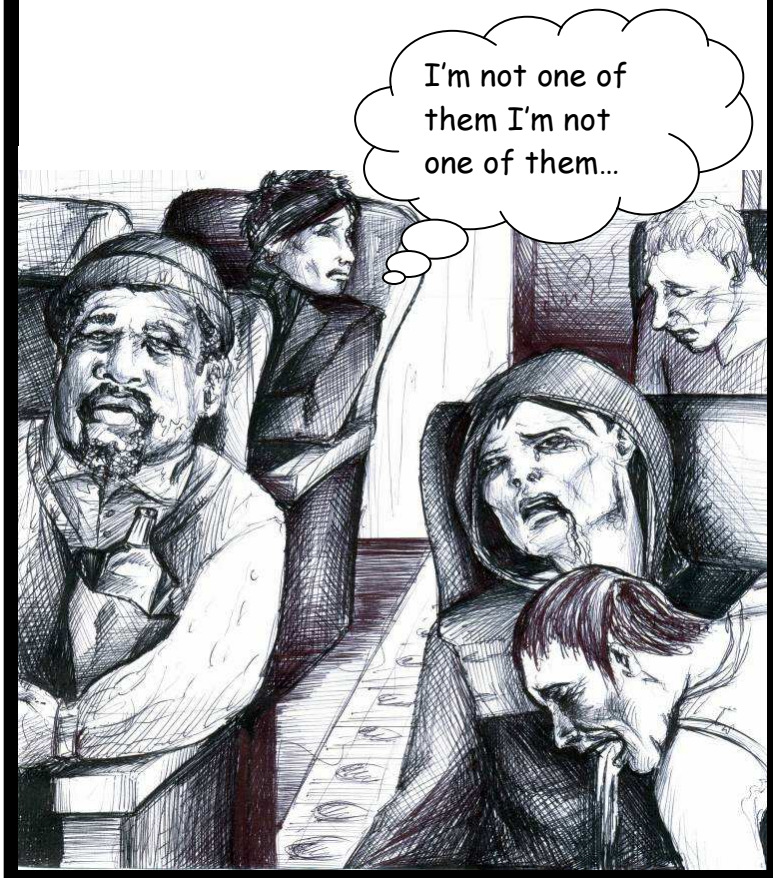
Let hope remain for the young.

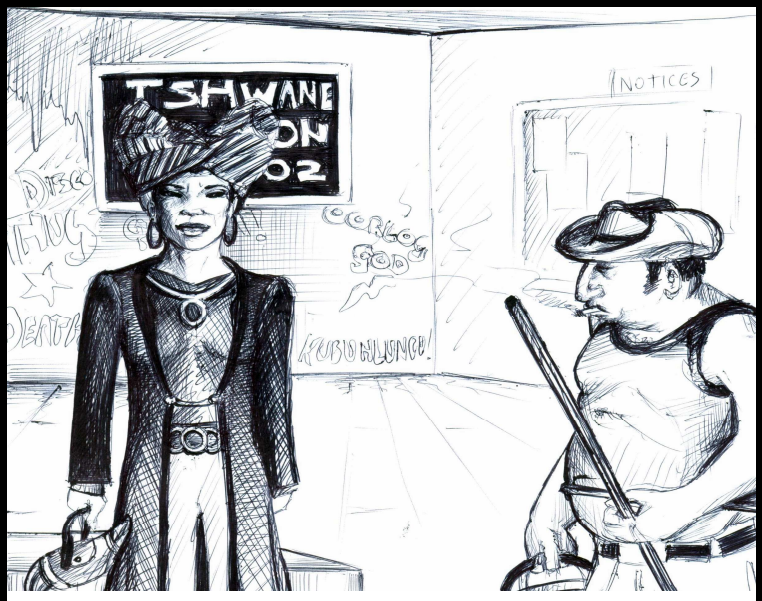


This was his kind of interior now.

The trip had been short, harrowing.

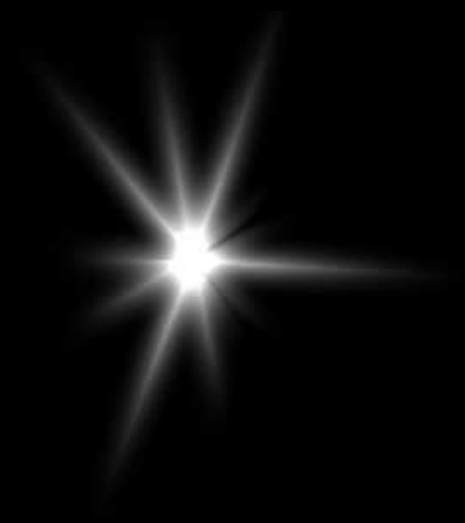
His fellow passengers' pain and vices too close to the surface.



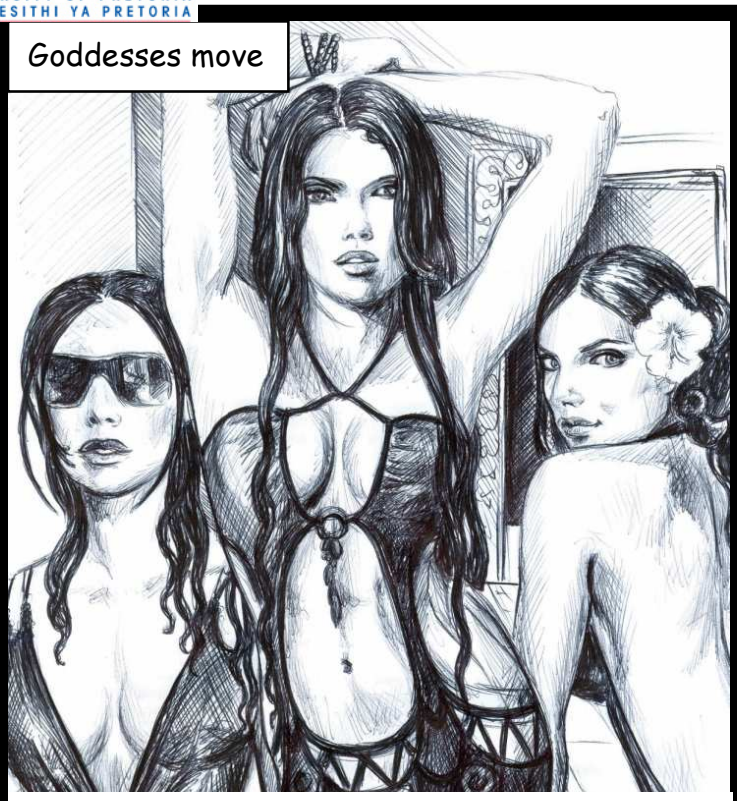


Dirk wants to kick himself for being so paranoid. His thudding heart slows as he settles in to wait – again. He is very tired, and he feels himself nodding off, despite the fact that he's all alone in a virtually abandoned station.

I know I'm dreaming when a point of light
becomes the place where-

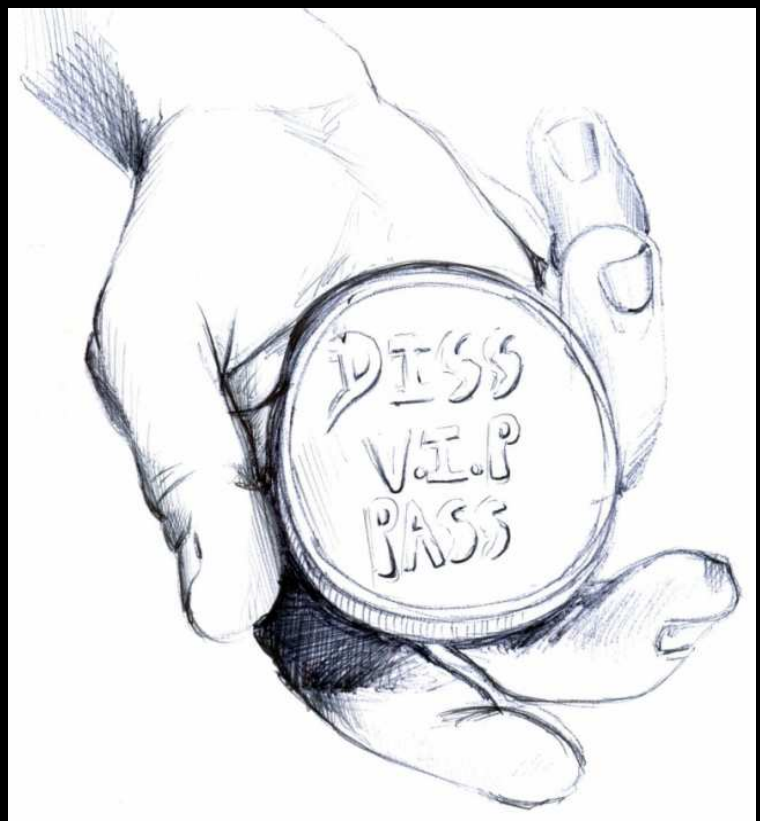


Goddesses move

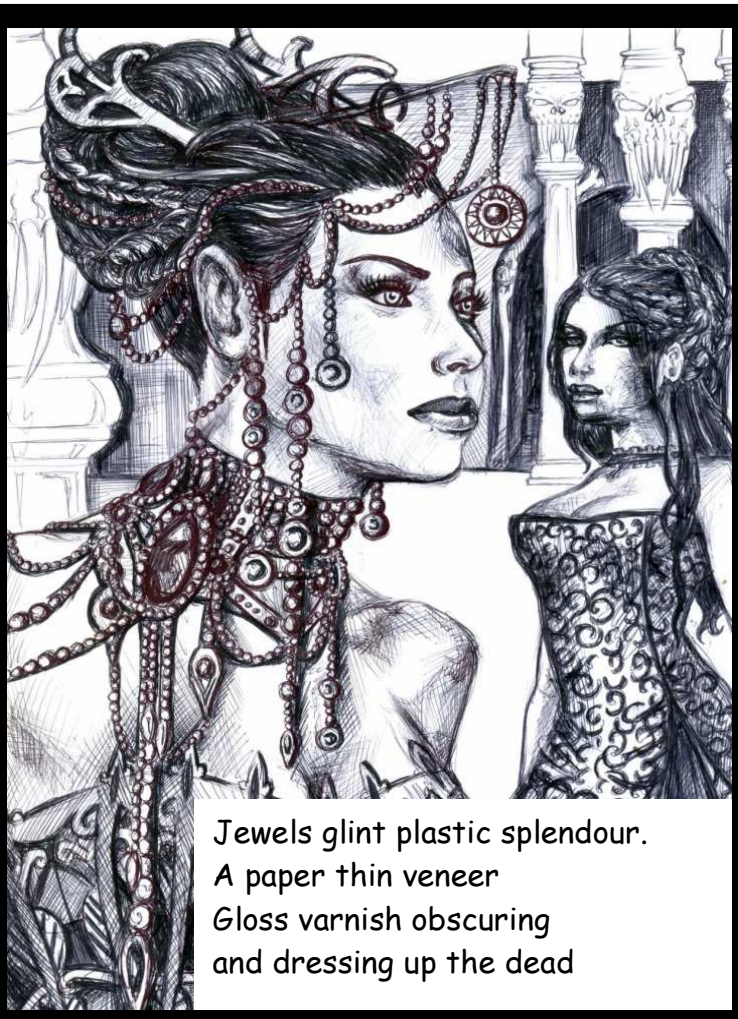


Anointed luminescence
Creatures of shadow untouched
by bright blandishments

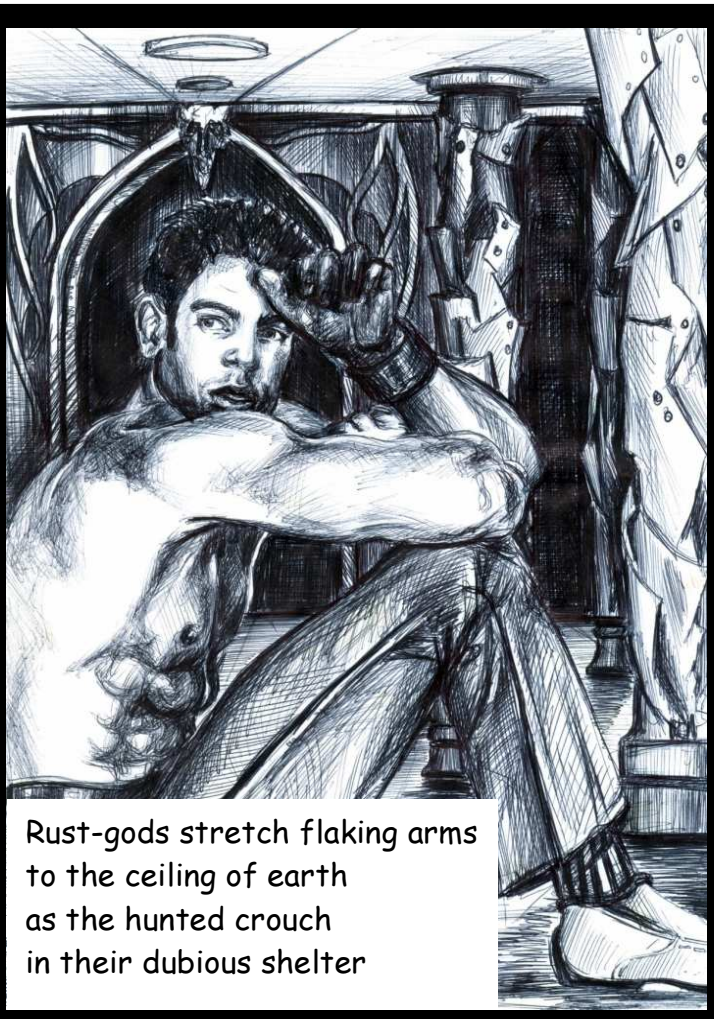
Gods appear. Bright as the dawn
Clad in armour of warm skin
they clutch their crutches closely
Their terrible beauty skin-deep
As their celestial sisters'



I walk a vast clinking plain of blank polished
disks and clutched in my hand the sole
coin stamped with obscure meaning.



Jewels glint plastic splendour.
A paper thin veneer
Gloss varnish obscuring
and dressing up the dead



Rust-gods stretch flaking arms
to the ceiling of earth
as the hunted crouch
in their dubious shelter

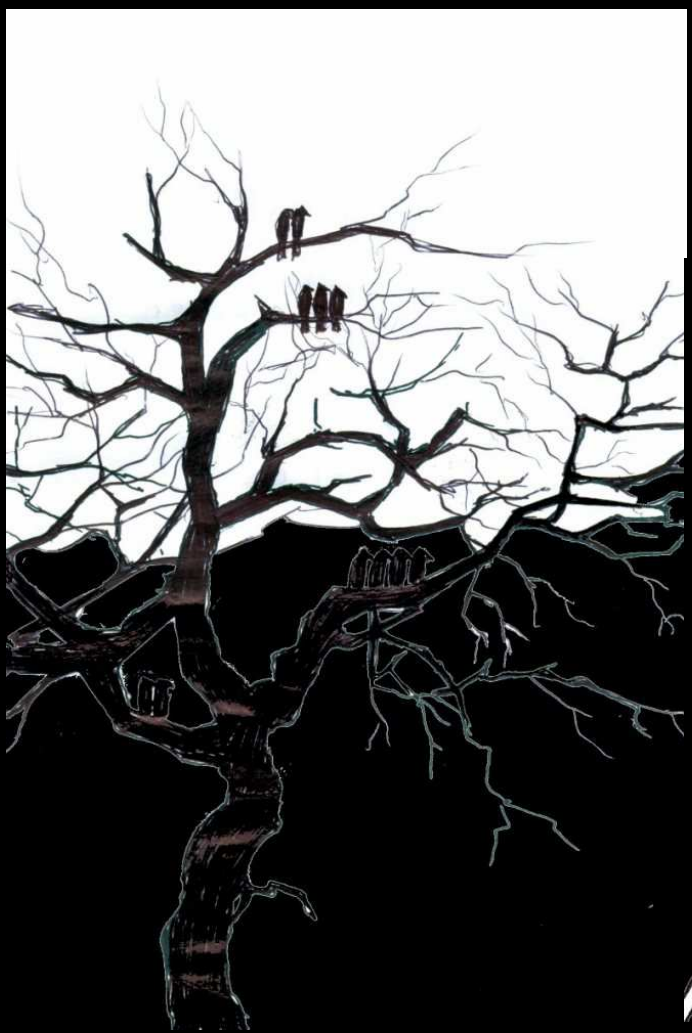
Creatures of malice clutch
at the hems of puppets

And the queens of the shell
toss their hearts on the scale

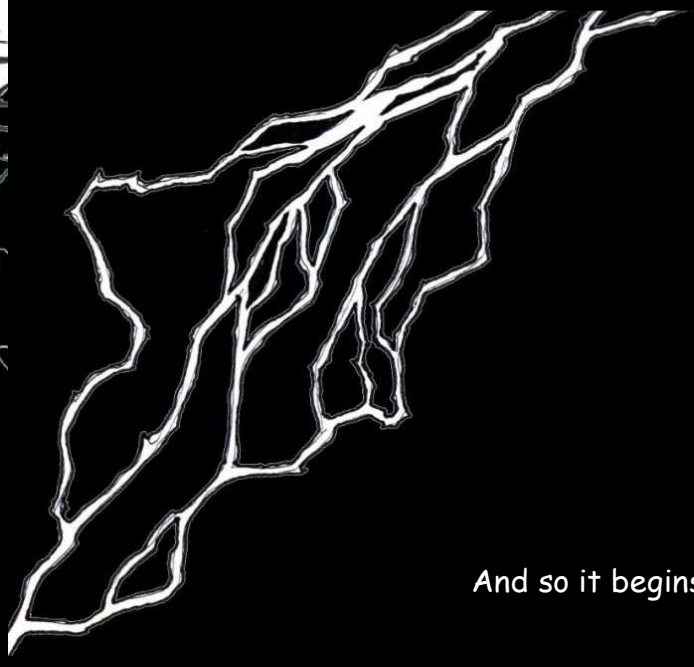
In the liquid tar eyes
of the beastly totem
I see myself refract

At untended yard of bone
the foot of a bare tree
guards a familiar name
seeping into gnarled roots

Magpies and crows avidly protect
the salt-sheen crust of grief oozing up



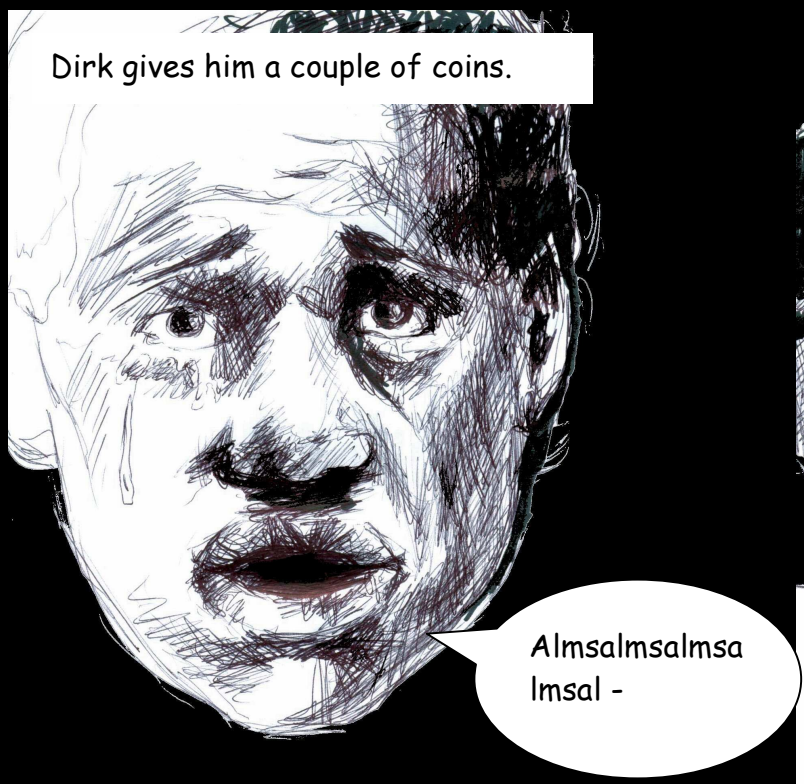
Cracks splinter-scrawl across
my inner-eyelid veins
a sledgehammer story

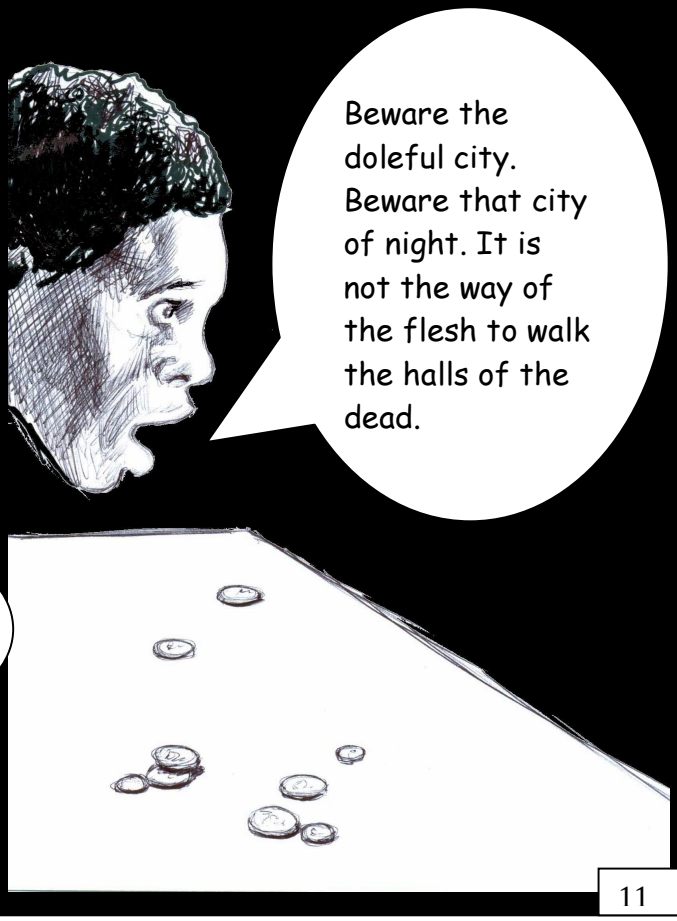


And so it begins.

He must've dozed off
That same insane dream.

A beggar. What's he doing? Chanting?
Alms – almsalmsalmsal msalms-


Dirk gives him a couple of coins.
Almsalmsalmsa lmsal -


Beware the doleful city. Beware that city of night. It is not the way of the flesh to walk the halls of the dead.

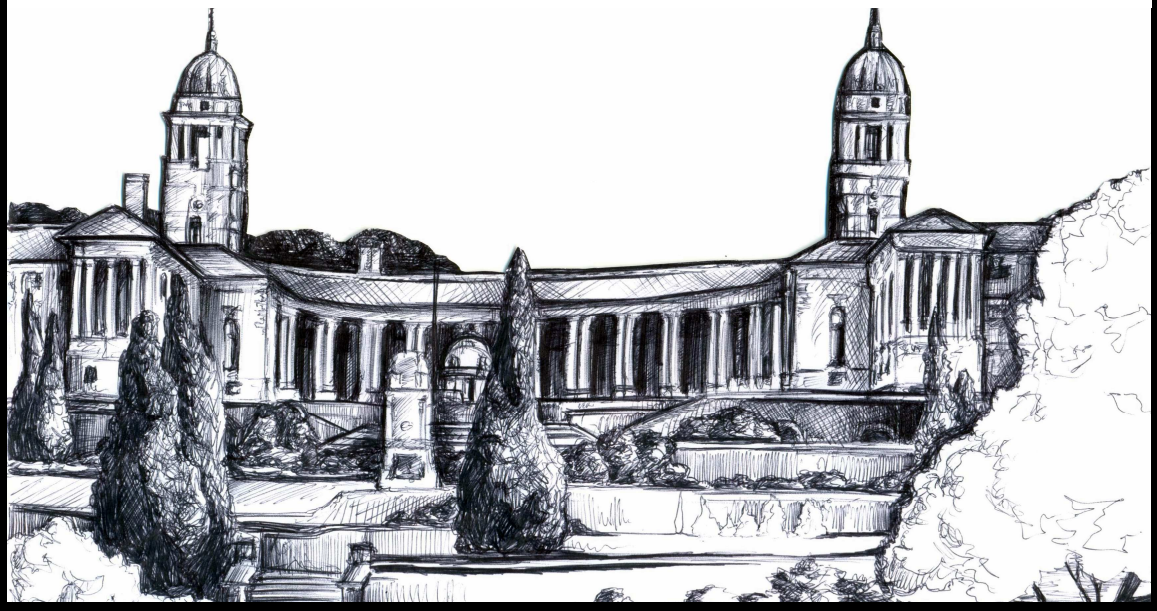
Ugh! The man should be locked up.
Almsalms-
Dirk! Oh honey, I'm so **sorry** I'm late!
Where have you **been?!** It's been hours and there's a **crazy** beggar here!
My dad had the car. There was a crisis at work.
Eish girl, It's been five **years**, but I'm glad to see **some** things never change.
Not in **my** family. I've **missed** you!
I've missed you too, love.
Come on, you look dead on your feet. Let's get out of here. I'm **dying** for a smoke.

The city **had** changed. Dirk was pleased.

"So, you never said why you came to Tshwane? You miss the good old days?"

"It sounds strange, Gugs, but it felt like I **had** to come."

But one can never entirely escape the familiar.



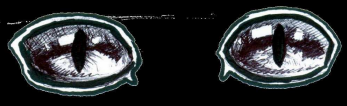
Some post arrived for you, Dirk. **Serious** snail mail.

That's strange. My dad must've sent it on to you. But how did it arrive so quickly?

Dirk stares out of the window at the streets of Tshwane. He cannot shake the feeling of -

At Gugu's flat, Dirk dreams again.

but the dream has changed.



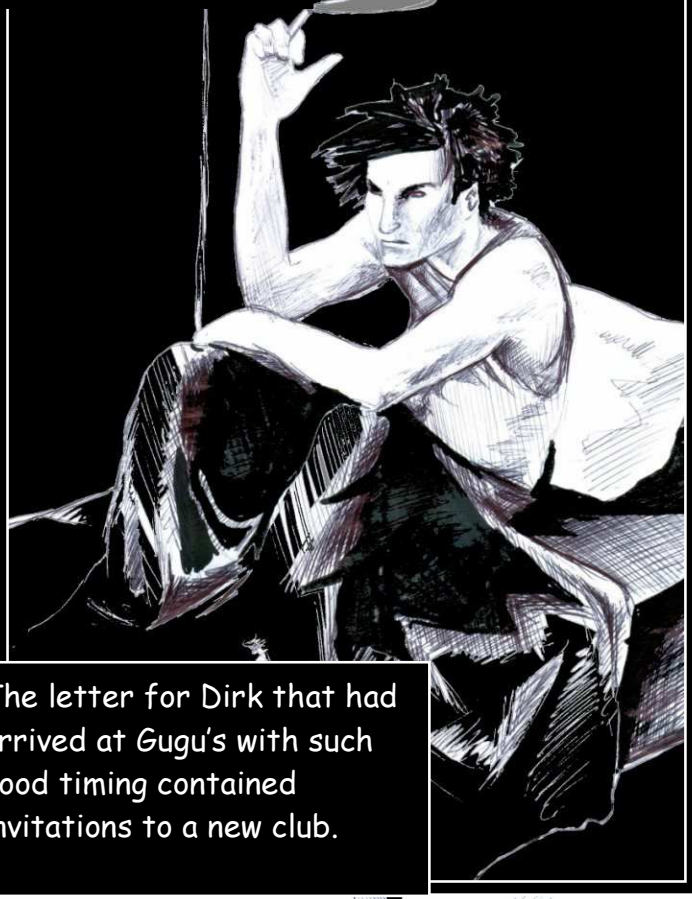
Purrrrrrrrrrr

Ah! You should not have come.

We sent you away, but could not keep you away. My kind is older, not as powerful anymore. We are nearly forgotten.

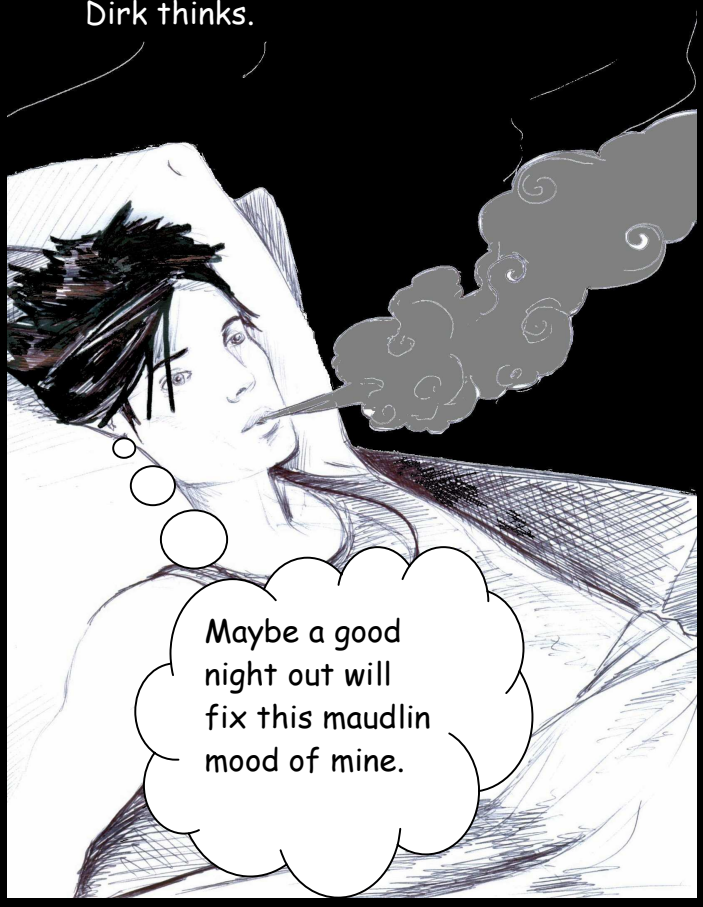
sigh but we do not stop trying merely because we are weak and tired. Sleep now.

The dream fades fast.



The letter for Dirk that had arrived at Gugu's with such good timing contained invitations to a new club.

The invitations large coins, stamped with 'obol', Ancient Greek money, Dirk thinks.



Besides, Gugu had been trying to get in at the club for ages.

Yes, she's right. A night of abandoned forgetfulness is **exactly** what he needs to push these uncalled-for reminiscences back into the dark.

As Dirk waits for Gugu to finish in the bathroom, he thinks, yet again, of one of his last happy memories of Tshwane.

It sounds scary.
Thank you.
It was! There was a gay army and everything, although not very large, but very effective at non-violent protest and resistance.

Ha! Yes, but with better clothes. This was fairly recent wasn't it?

Oh, yes. About ten years ago. You were very young and we tried our best to shelter you from it all. You were such a sensitive child.

I was so fucking **relieved** when it was all over.
Mom!

Yes, the previous decade. Strangely exciting and dooming, frightening and beautiful, all at the same time.

I wonder what she would think of the now?

Dirk? Dirk! Wandering the endless corridors of your mind again?

I was thinking of my mom.

I'm sorry, hon. Do you want to talk?

Nope. I assume you're done in the bathroom? You look magnificent by the way.

sigh Thanks, love. Go make pretty.

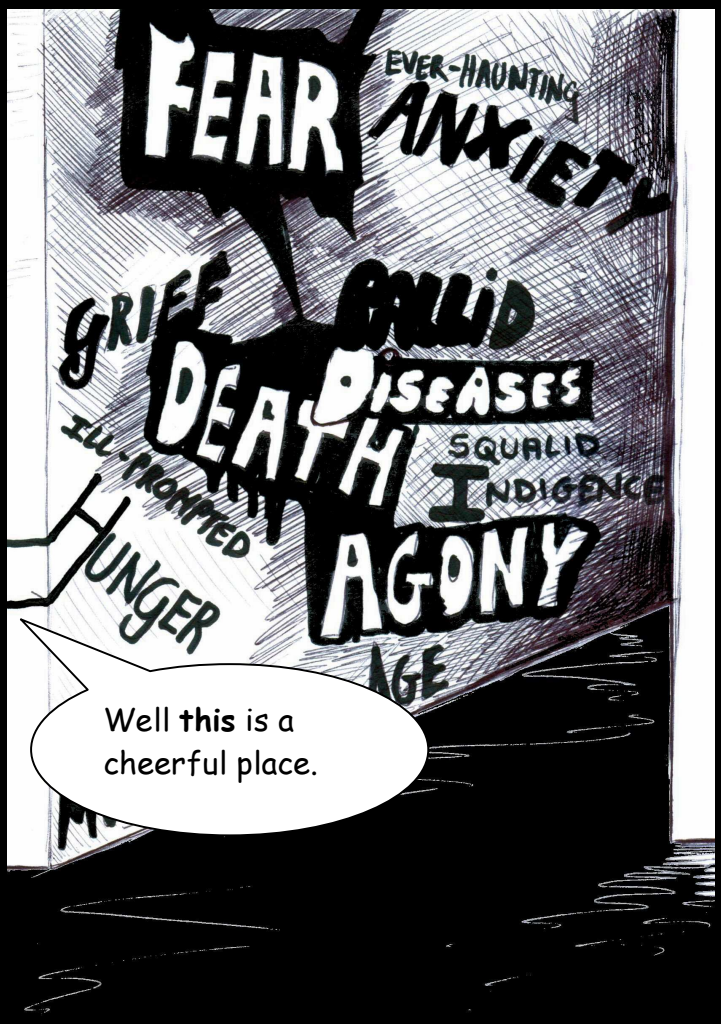
Of all the people Dirk knows and calls 'friend', Gugu is one of the few that truly deserves his trust.

She had been there where others simply faded. He had chased them all away, but Gugs was persistent.

One day, he promised himself, he would tell her everything.

How he had despised her for it.

I told you it was a dodgy part of town. Apparently it's very strange.
I can cope with both dodgy and strange. I **have** been living in Amsterdam, after all.
It's so **gloomy**. Dirk, I'm not sure I like this all that much.
Hey, **you're** the one who's been going on about how *it* this club is.
How weird is **that**. What kind of bird do you think it is?
I have no idea, but what **I** would like to know is what it is **doing** here. Is it just me or are they-
-watching us? Yeah. There's something very familiar about all this, Gugs, but I can't quite put my finger on it.
I wonder why they're not trying to eat each other.


FEAR
EVER-HAUNTING
ANXIETY
GRIEF
SQUALID
DISEASES
DEATH
SQUALID
INDIGENCE
ILL-FROMED
HUNGER
AGONY
AGE
Well **this** is a cheerful place.

Women of the night?
Shh! Yes, they must be turning tricks here.

They look hungry.
Then they should work for a restaurant.
Be nice.

IETY
SES
ALID
DIGENC
Poor things.

Waahahahahah ahahahah!!
F-Fuck!

Hehehe! What dese children doin' down here? Does dey know where dey going? Eh?
What's **wrong** with you? Jumping out like that and frightening people!

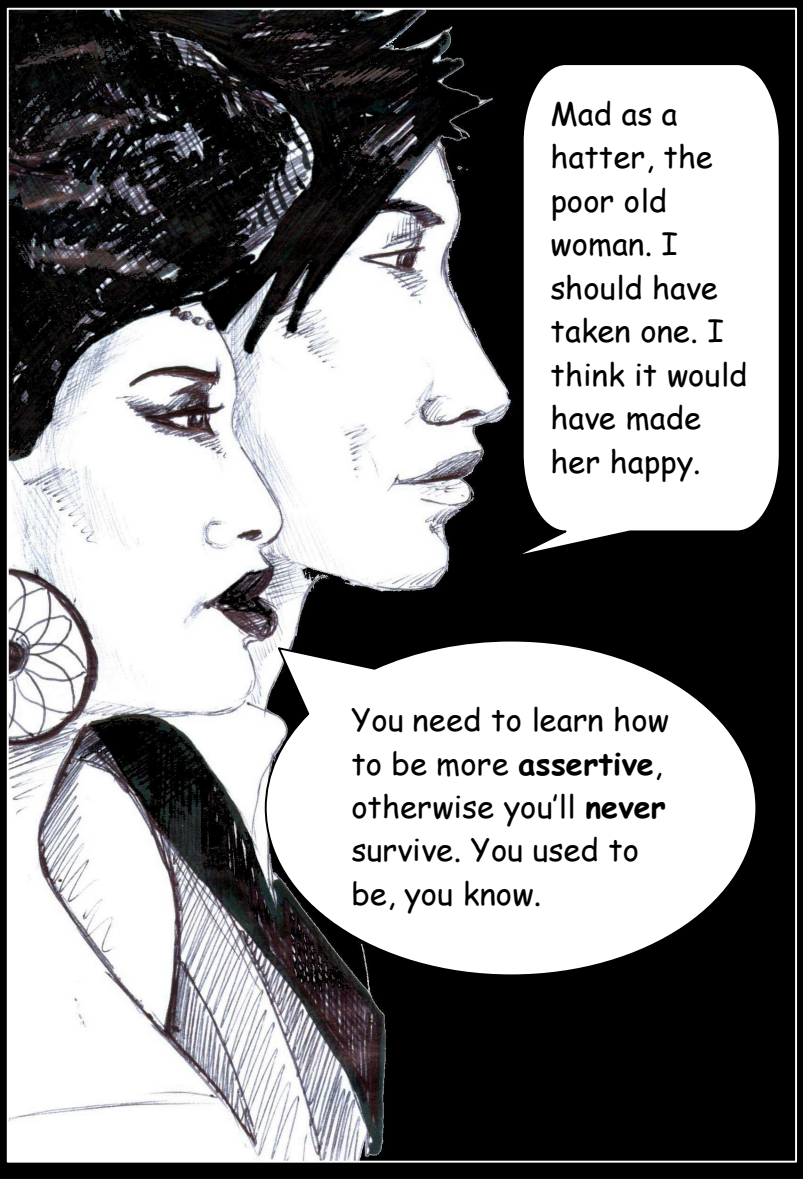
Ah, I sorry, pretty boy.
Okay. Well, you shouldn't do it. We're going to the club now. **Goodbye**.

Wait, I give badges. Take one be cool, yes? Come on, pretty boy. You want to be cool down in club? You want be hot? You want to **burn**?
N-no, thank you. Just leave us alone.

You like **this** one! Yes, oh **yes**!

He said **no**, you daft old thing!

Ahahaha**hahaha**!!!!



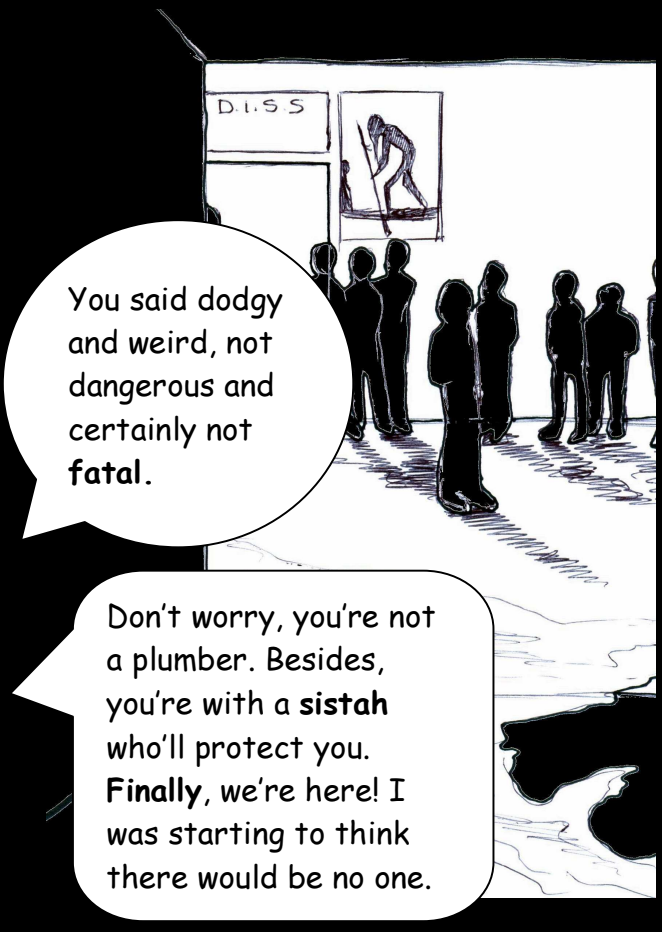
Mad as a hatter, the poor old woman. I should have taken one. I think it would have made her happy.

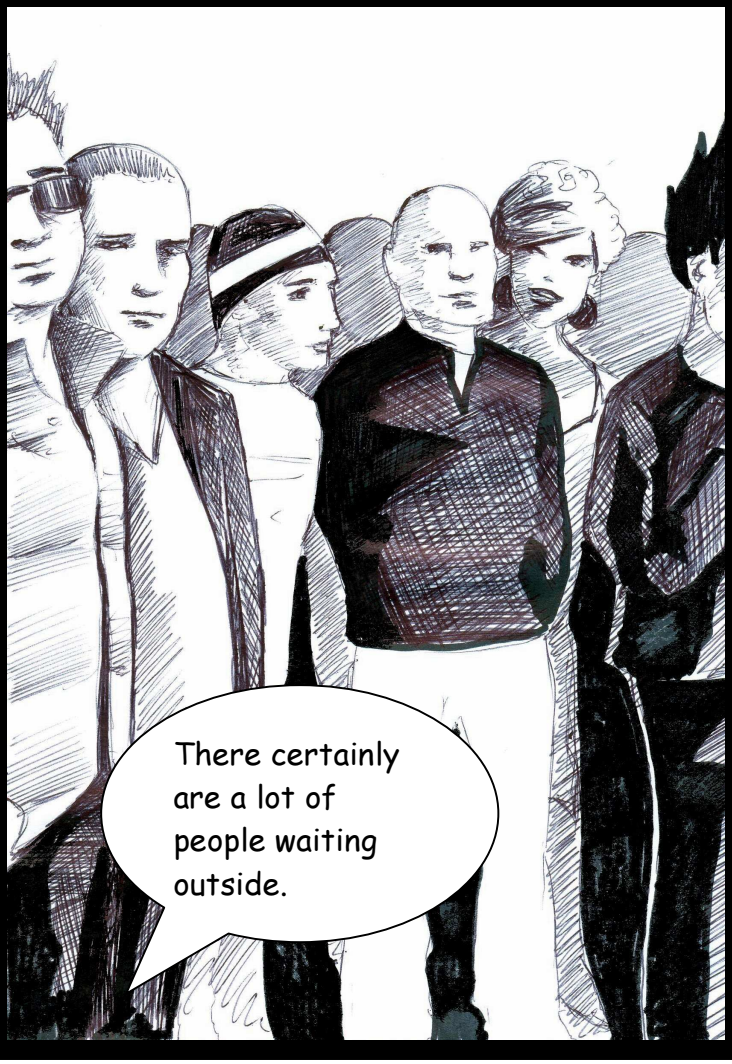
You need to learn how to be more **assertive**, otherwise you'll **never** survive. You used to be, you know.

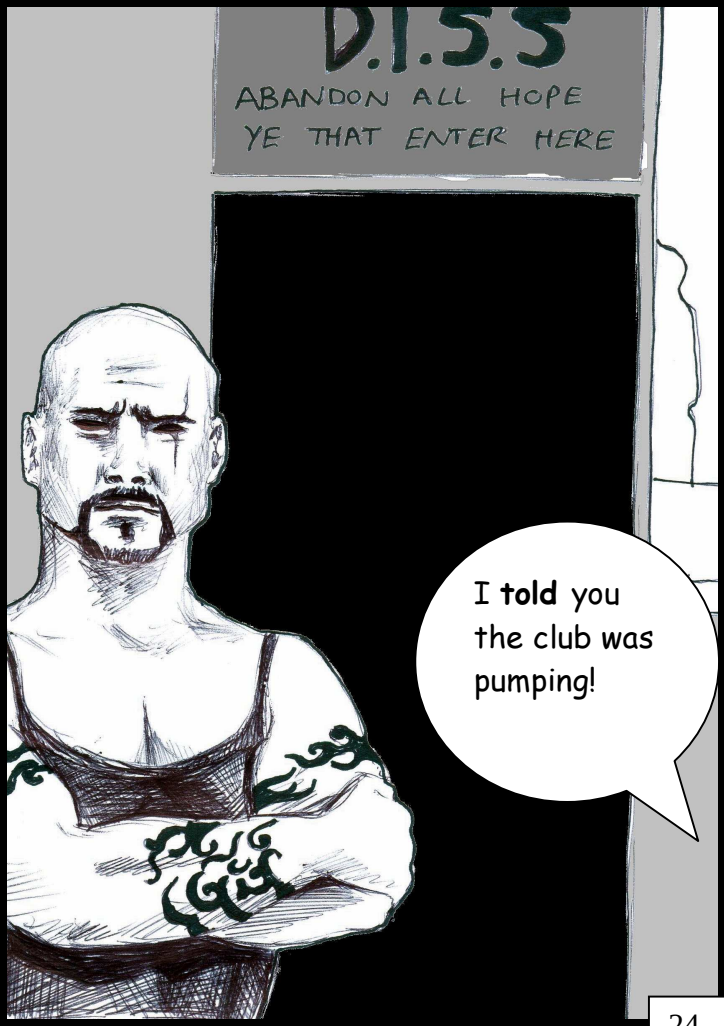
Ew! Do you think it's sewage?

I don't know, but I think we would have smelled it. Just step over it.

Easier said than done, Gugu. It's a freaking **river**!
I think the plumbers would probably get murdered for their lunchboxes here, which is why it hasn't been fixed, and won't be either.

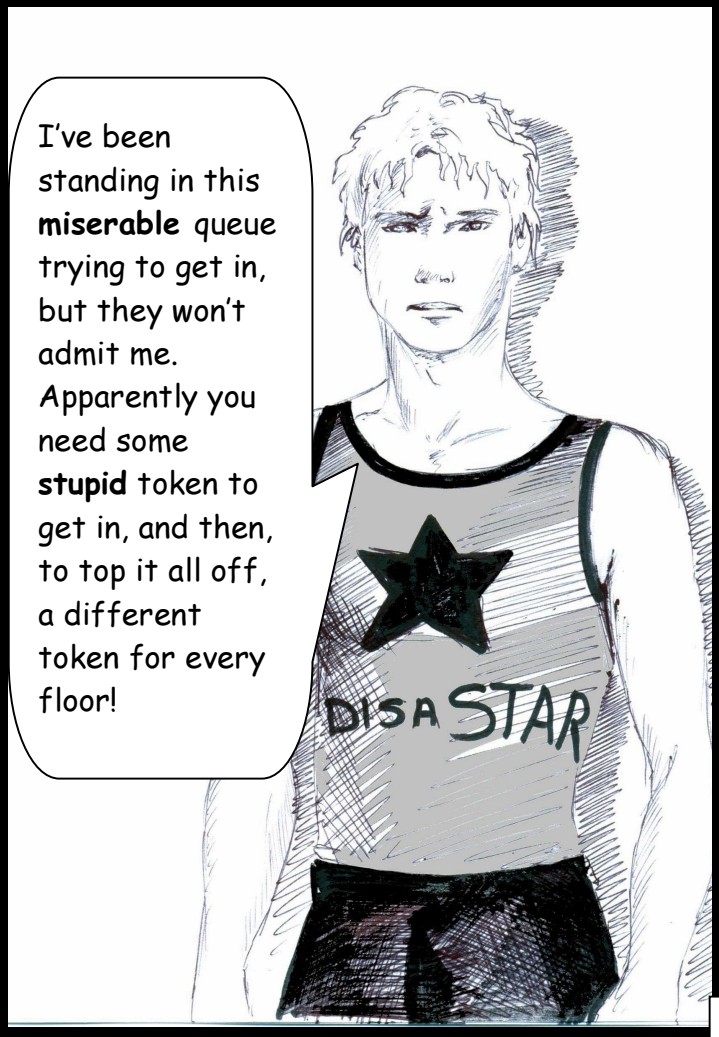

D.I.S.S
You said dodgy and weird, not dangerous and certainly not **fatal**.
Don't worry, you're not a plumber. Besides, you're with a **sistah** who'll protect you. **Finally**, we're here! I was starting to think there would be no one.

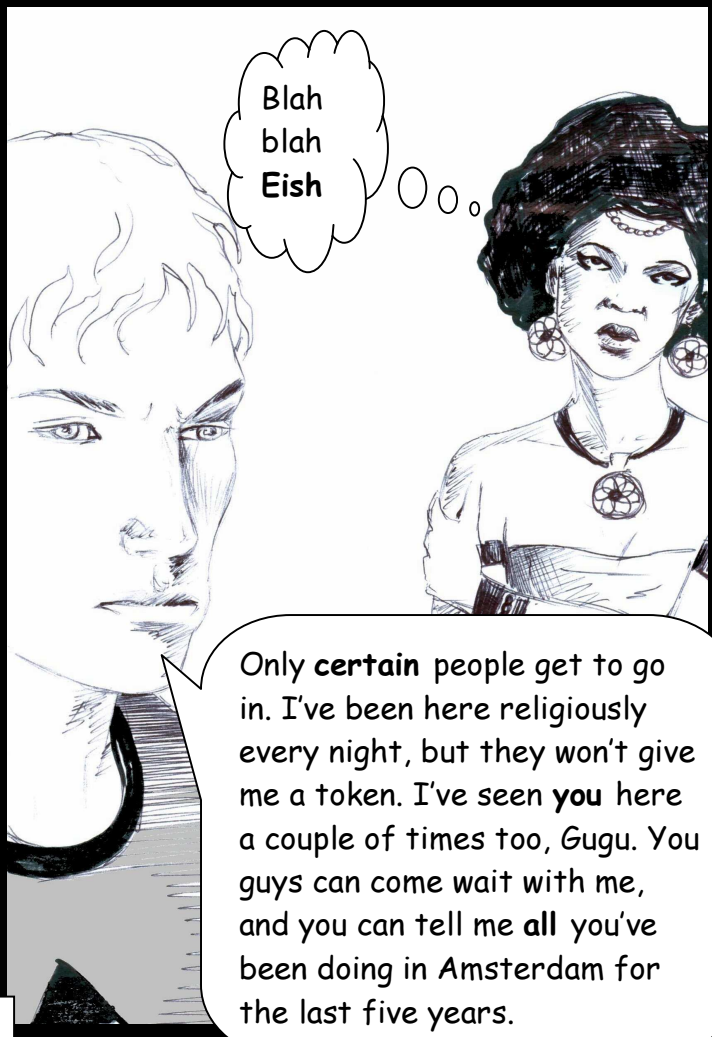

There certainly are a lot of people waiting outside.


D.I.S.S
ABANDON ALL HOPE YE THAT ENTER HERE
I **told** you the club was pumping!

S
PE
HERE
ROW ROW ROW YOUR
BOAT
This queue is going to take **forever!**
Dirk?
Dirk!
Gugu!

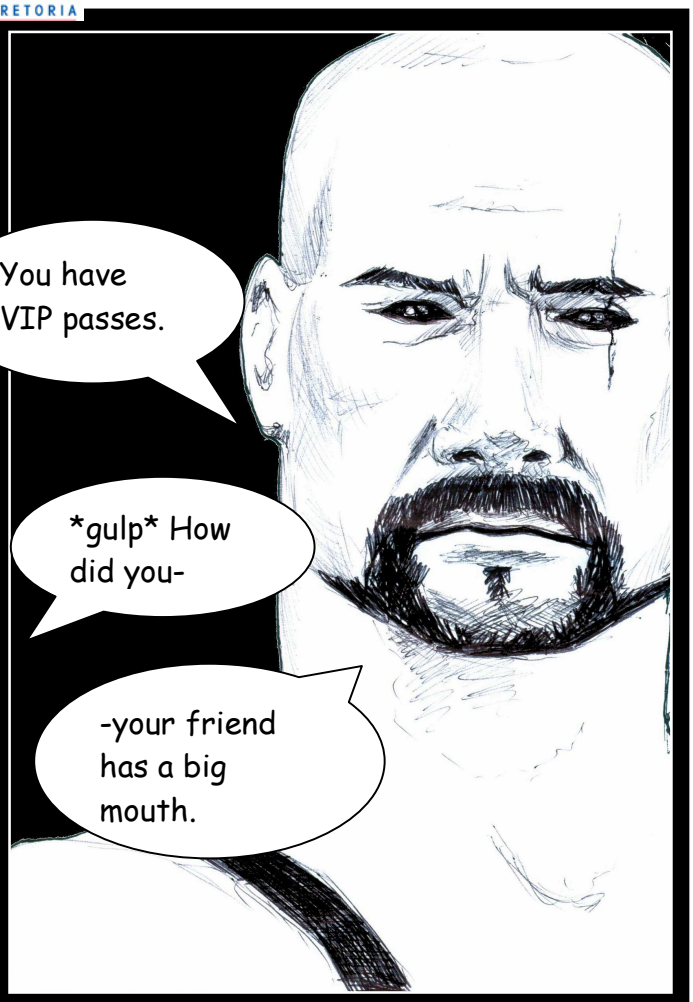
Here we go.
Dirk, how **are** you? What are you doing here? Gugu, why didn't you **tell** me he would be in town?
Whoa! Slow down. Hi, Jason, I'm doing well and you?

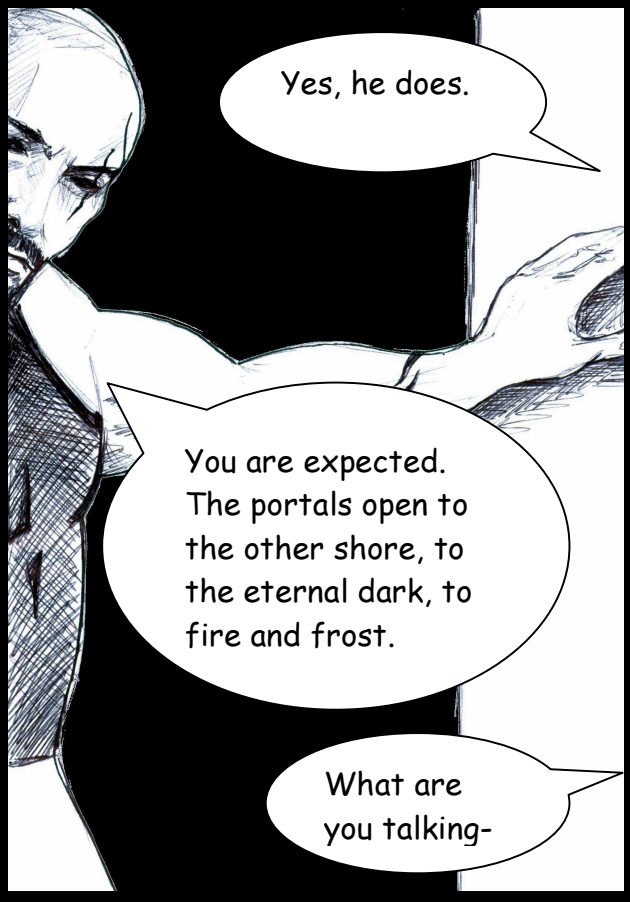

I've been standing in this **miserable** queue trying to get in, but they won't admit me. Apparently you need some **stupid** token to get in, and then, to top it all off, a different token for every floor!
DISA STAR


Blah blah **Eish**
Only **certain** people get to go in. I've been here religiously every night, but they won't give me a token. I've seen **you** here a couple of times too, Gugu. You guys can come wait with me, and you can tell me **all** you've been doing in Amsterdam for the last five years.

Actually, we have these VIP passes already.
What? I don't **believe** it! They give access to **everything**. How did you get them?
By post
I've been here every night and you just happen to get them by **post**? That is **so** unfair.
Let's at least ask the bouncer.
Dude, look at him. I do **not** want to piss him off. We'll try to organise something for you inside.
Bitch *ahem* Ok, thank you. I appreciate it, guys.
Dirk, **please**, you have to let me go **with** you. I'll do **anything**.
We only have these two. I don't think we'll be able to help you.

You two, come **here!**
Aw **no**


You have VIP passes.
gulp How did you-
-your friend has a big mouth.

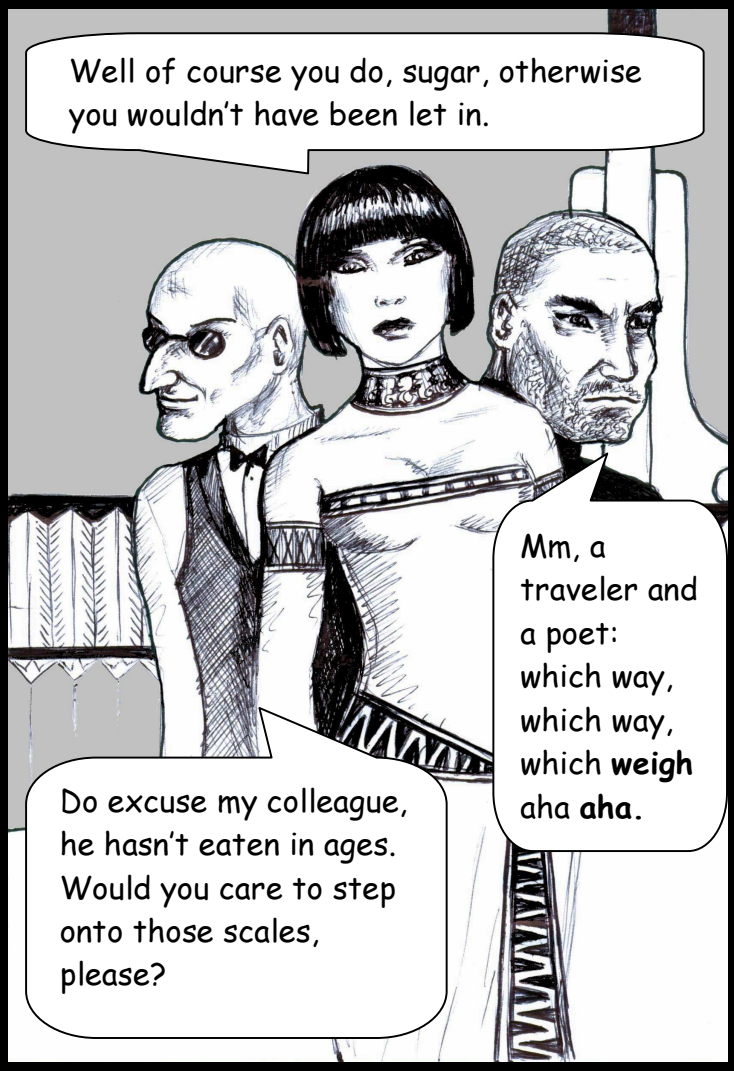

Yes, he does.
You are expected. The portals open to the other shore, to the eternal dark, to fire and frost.
What are you talking-

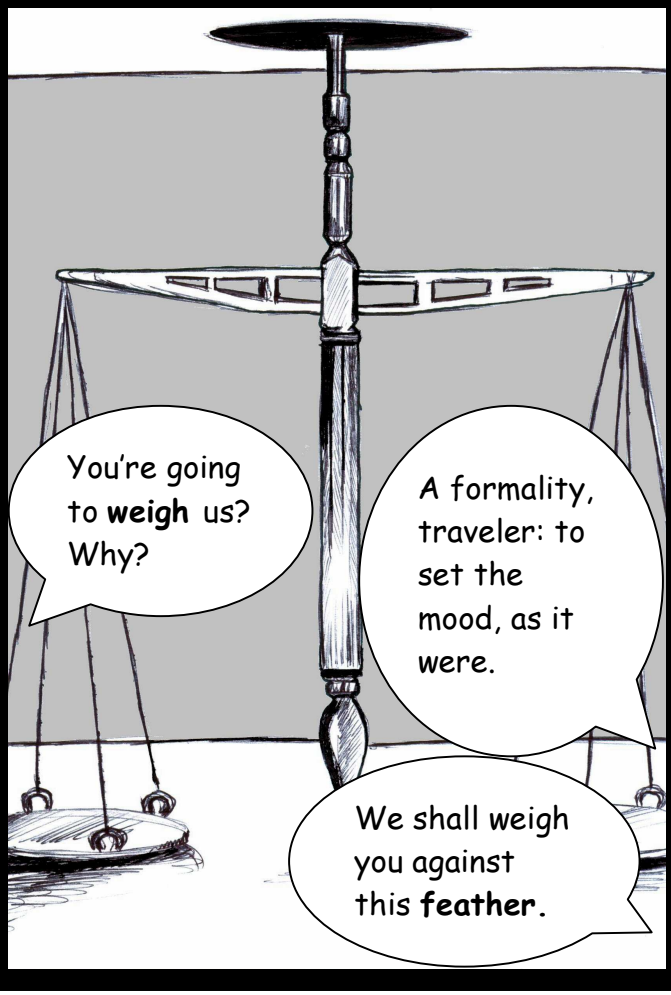
ABANDON A
YE THAT EN
-to the club
O-of course, thank you.
Welcome, travelers. Partake of the cornucopia of **excess**, the horn of plenty, and join in the **dance**. Welcome to **drink**. Welcome to **drugs**. Welcome to **Diss**.

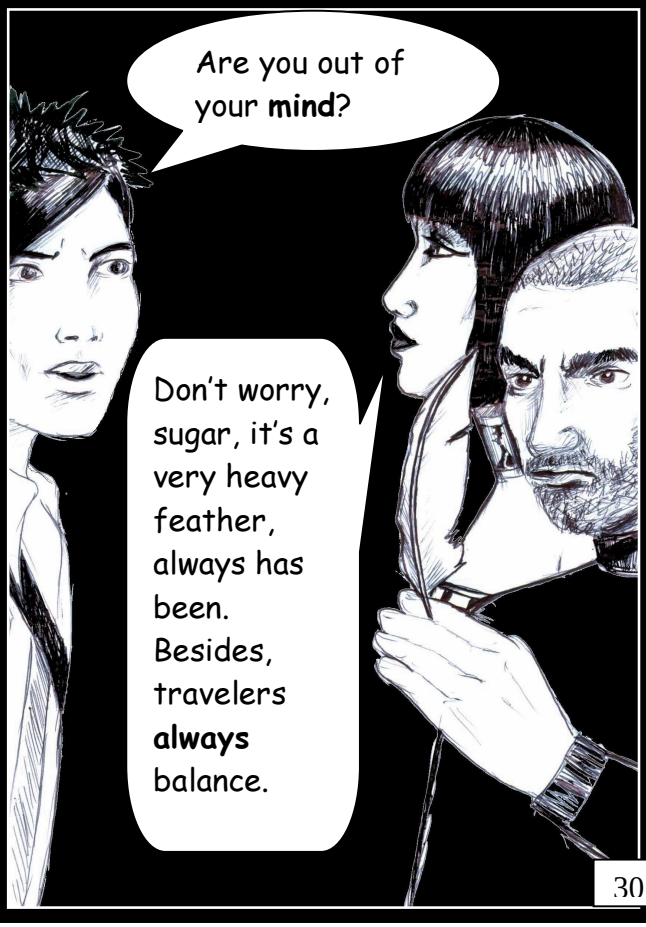
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL PAIN
THROUGH ME THE WAY THAT RUNS AMONG THE LOST
Um, Gugu, hon, what kind of club did you say this was again?
It's a new ah **themed** club.
Please let it not be a fisting bar.

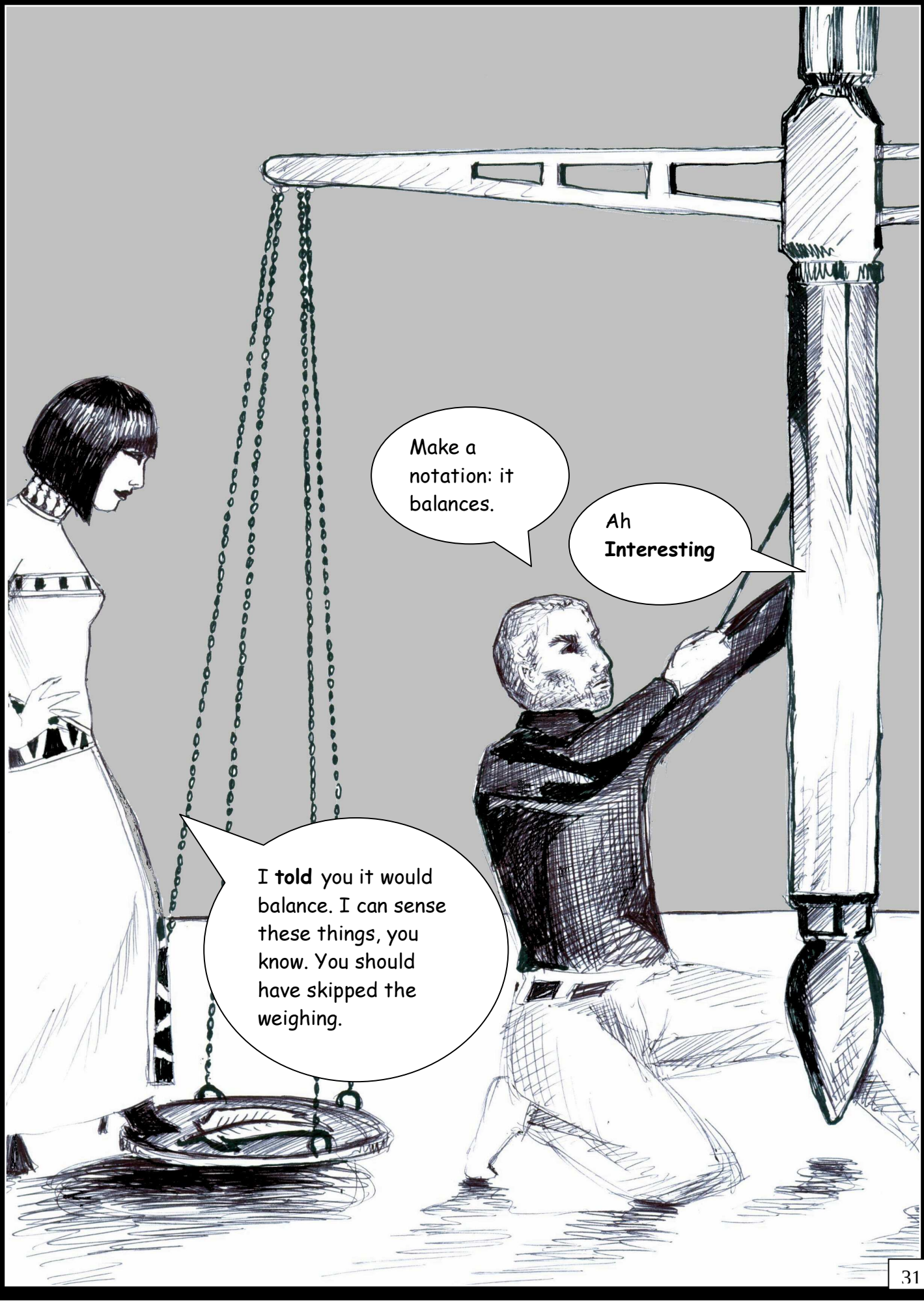
It is the **law**.
You and your **laws**. They're meant to be broken. Weighing him could-
-**Shh!**

Revelers! **Welcome.**
Hello
We **have** tokens, you know.


Well of course you do, sugar, otherwise you wouldn't have been let in.
Mm, a traveler and a poet: which way, which way, which **weigh** aha **aha**.
Do excuse my colleague, he hasn't eaten in ages. Would you care to step onto those scales, please?

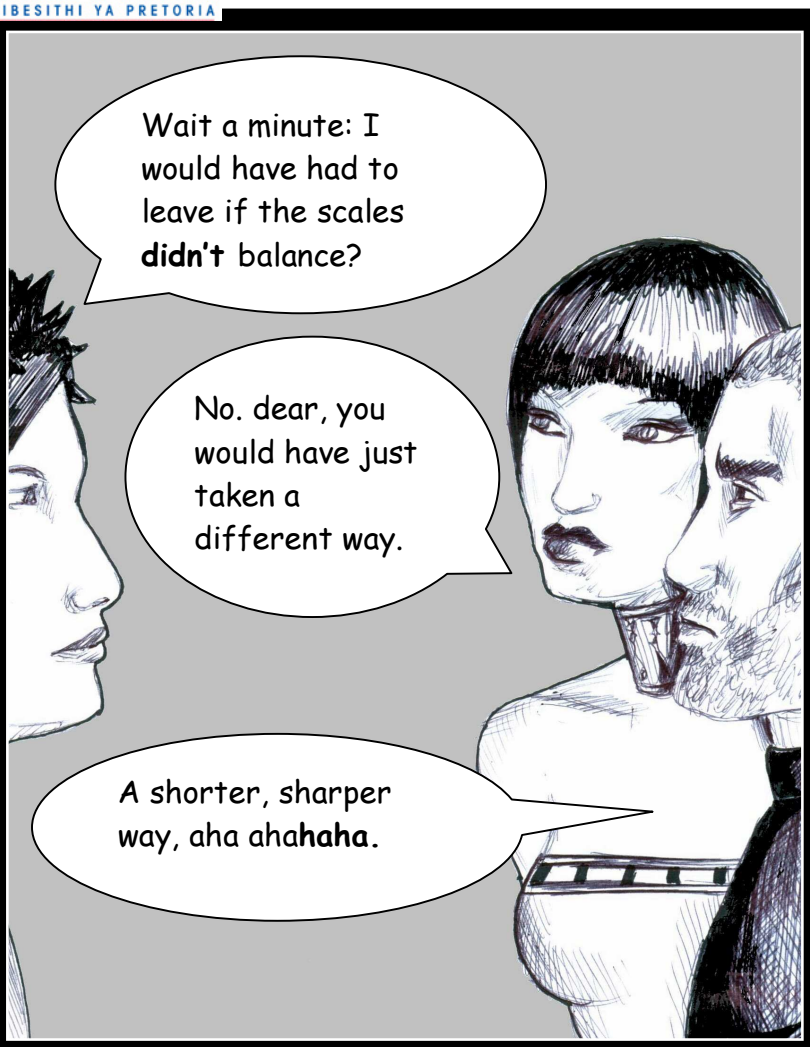

You're going to **weigh** us? Why?
A formality, traveler: to set the mood, as it were.
We shall weigh you against this **feather**.


Are you out of your **mind**?
Don't worry, sugar, it's a very heavy feather, always has been. Besides, travelers **always** balance.

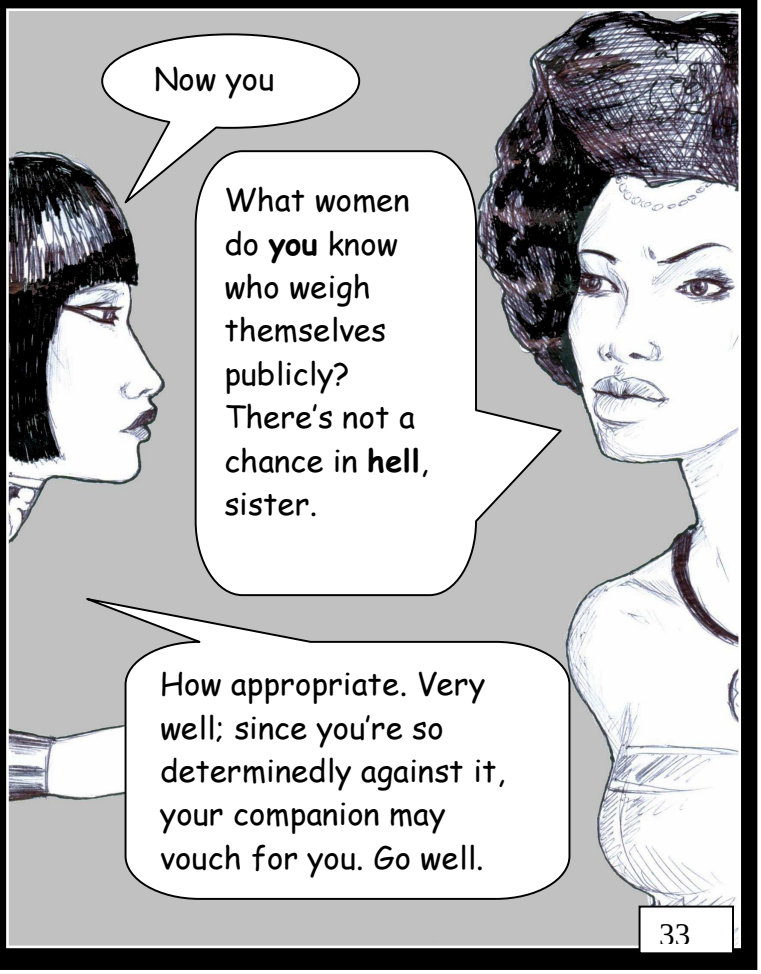

Make a notation: it balances.
Ah **Interesting**
I **told** you it would balance. I can sense these things, you know. You should have skipped the weighing.

It is traditional, and Mr. Jaquel would have gotten upset if the forms weren't kept.
Don't you **dare** patronise me, you dried up old fossil. **You're** the one with the infernal **annotations**, you supercilious bastard!
Boys, please! This discussion is pointless in any case, so calm down.

Yeeees, you're right, it balances and they have the coins.

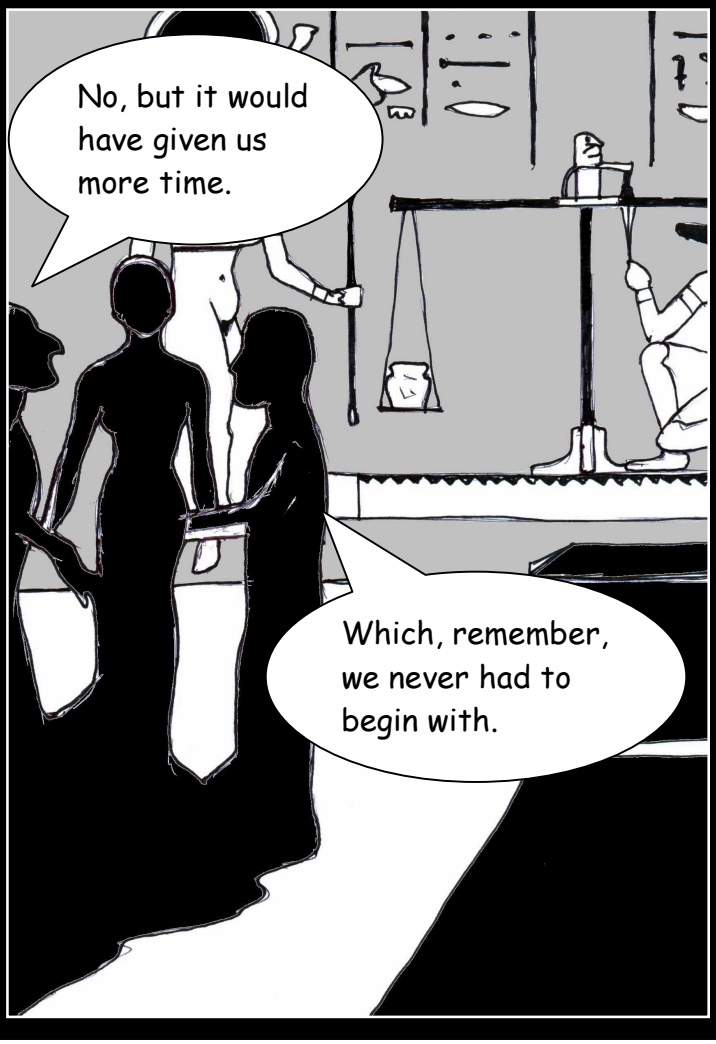

Wait a minute: I would have had to leave if the scales **didn't** balance?
No. dear, you would have just taken a different way.
A shorter, sharper way, aha aha**haha**.

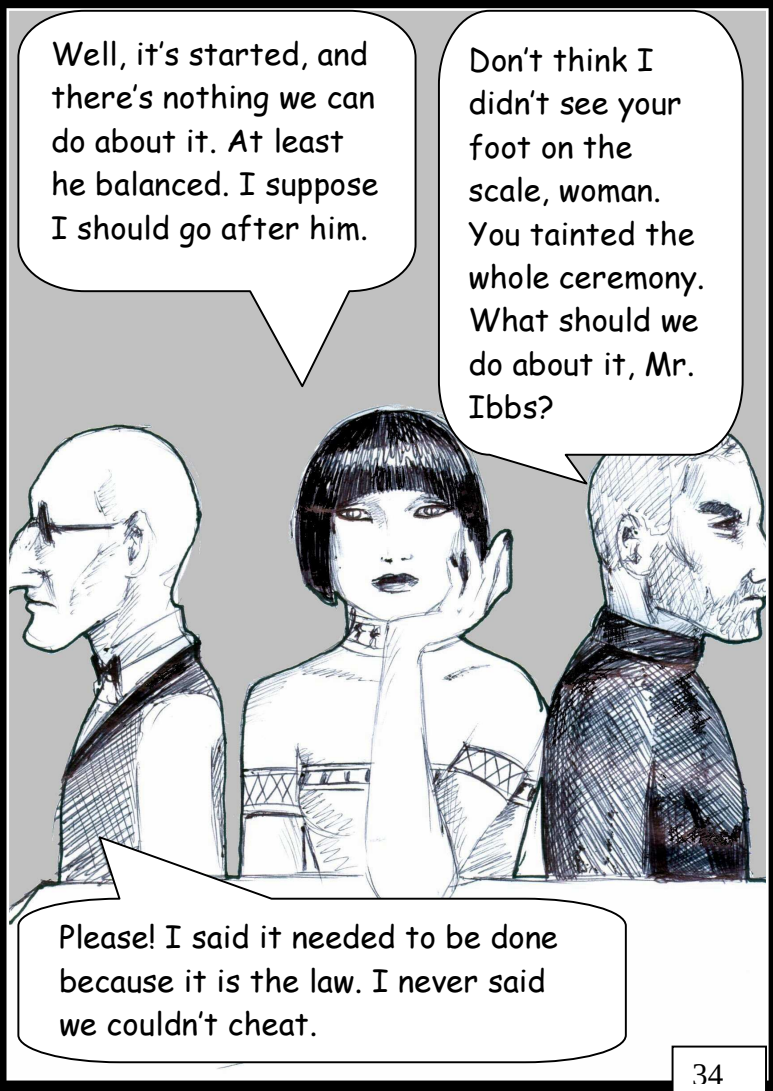
What on earth – yeah, I really don't like the look of **that** way. I'll go the other.
Of course, you will.
Again, don't mind our other colleague in the slightest.

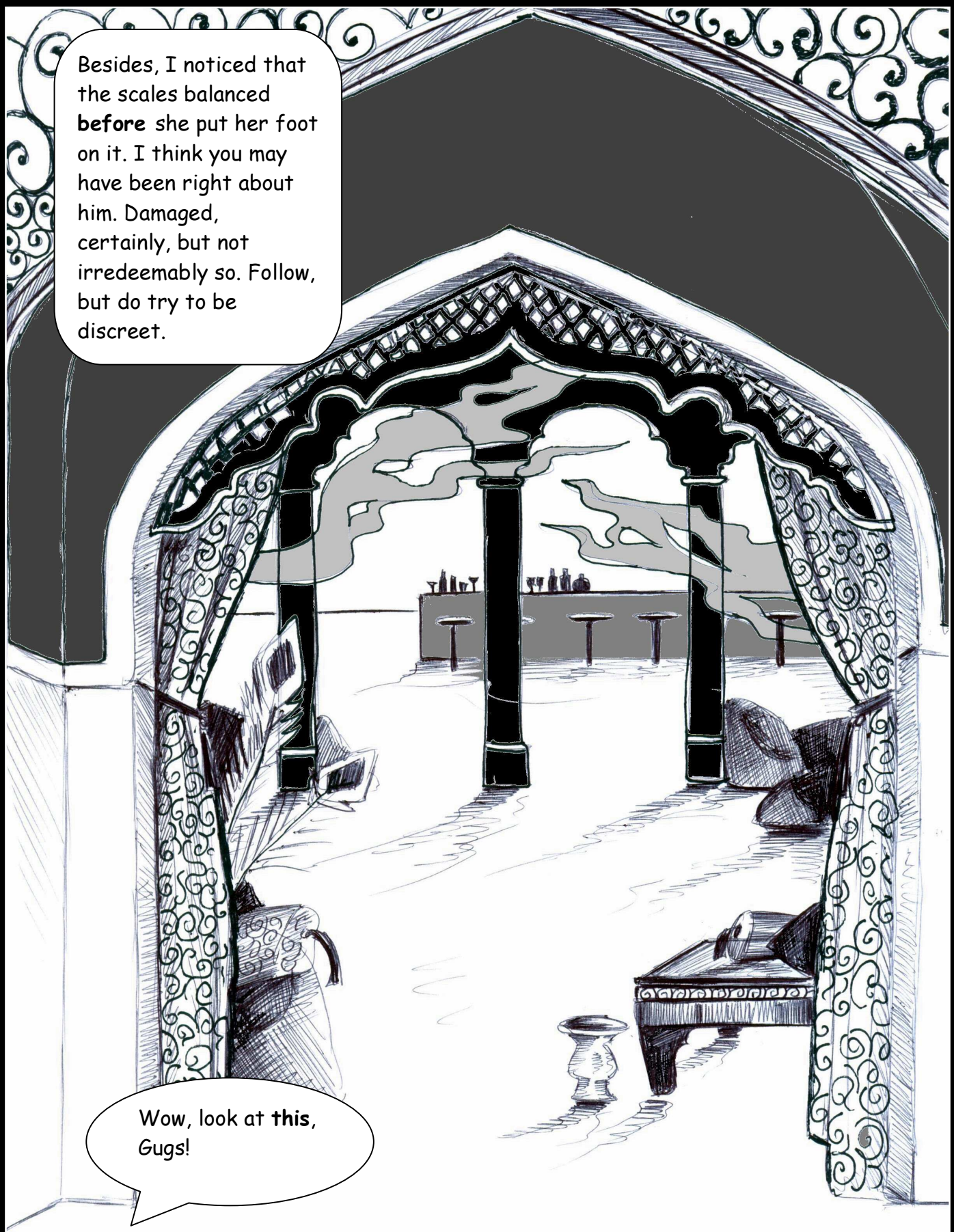

Now you
What women do **you** know who weigh themselves publicly? There's not a chance in **hell**, sister.
How appropriate. Very well; since you're so determinedly against it, your companion may vouch for you. Go well.

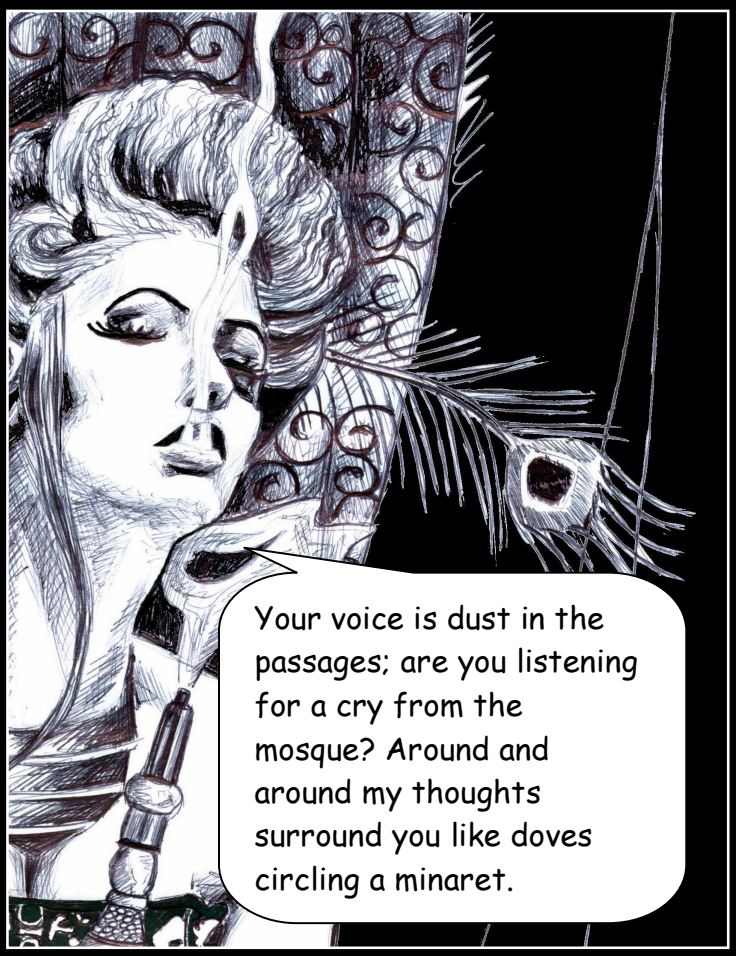
Strange people

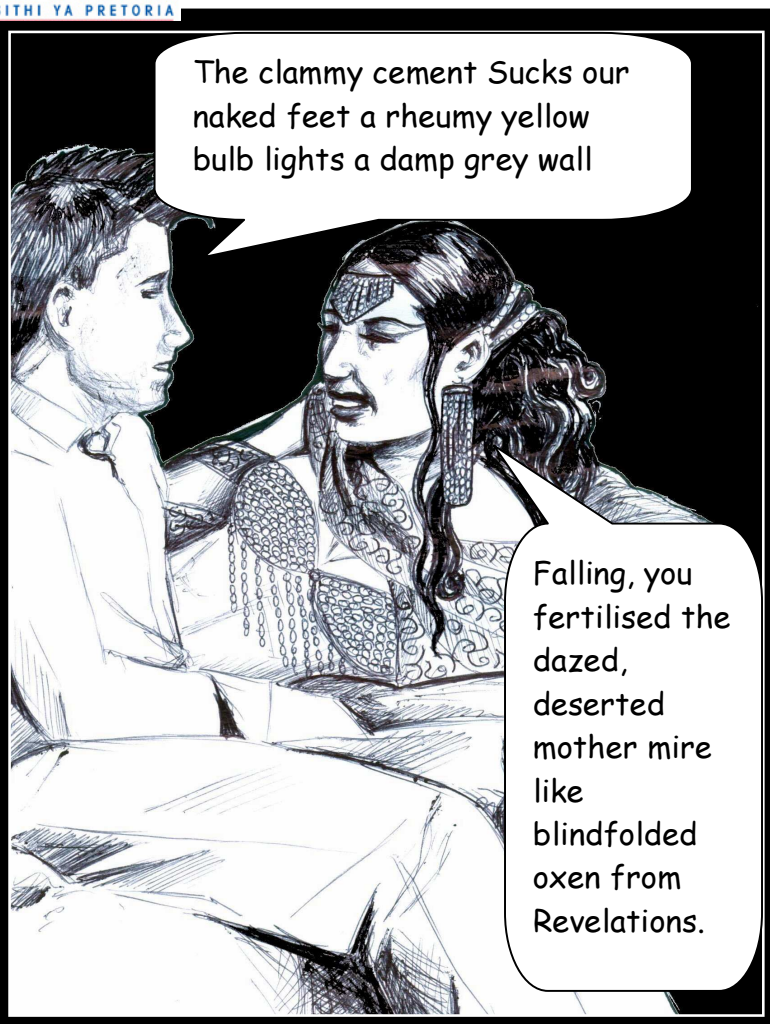
We should have made him leave.
Do you **really** think that would have solved anything?

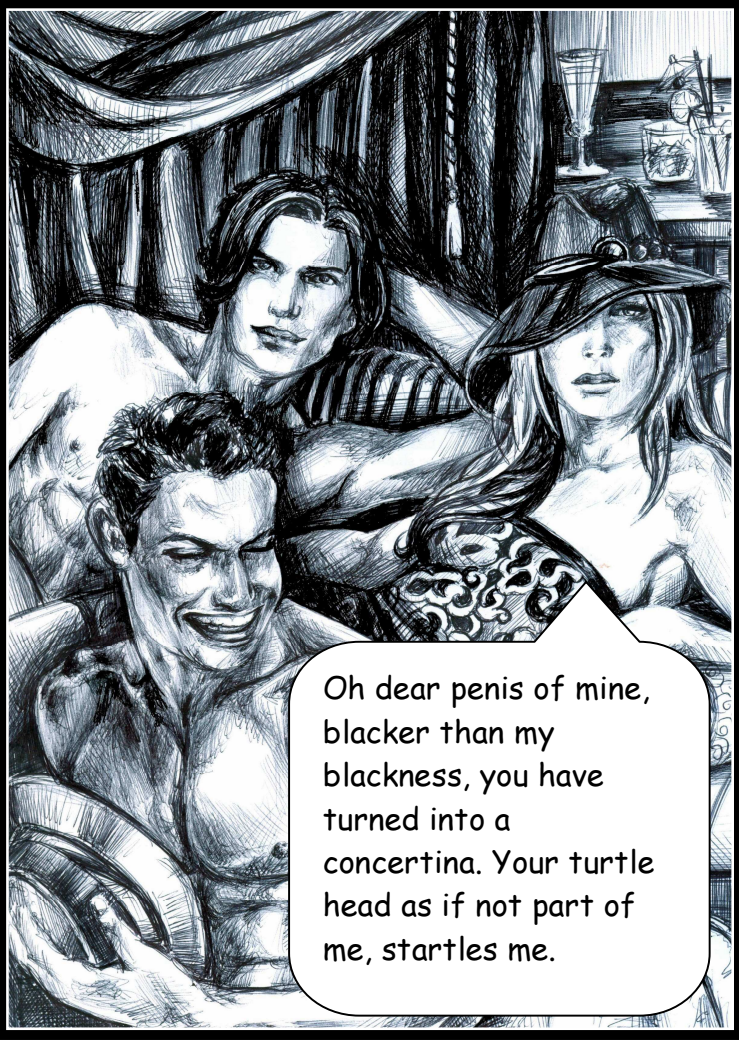

No, but it would have given us more time.
Which, remember, we never had to begin with.

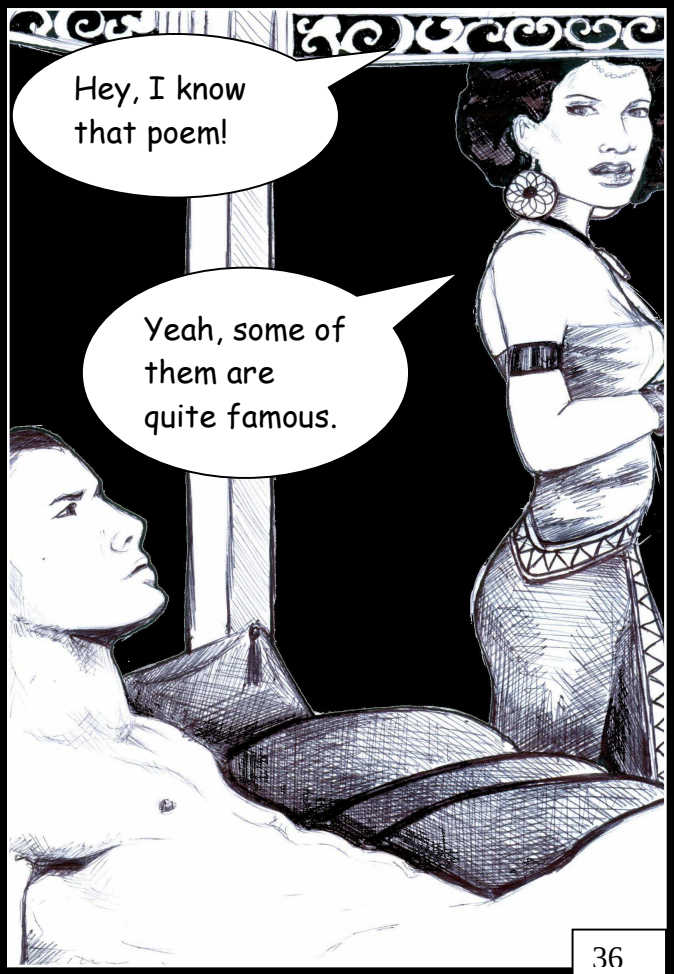

Well, it's started, and there's nothing we can do about it. At least he balanced. I suppose I should go after him.
Don't think I didn't see your foot on the scale, woman. You tainted the whole ceremony. What should we do about it, Mr. Ibbs?
Please! I said it needed to be done because it is the law. I never said we couldn't cheat.


Besides, I noticed that the scales balanced **before** she put her foot on it. I think you may have been right about him. Damaged, certainly, but not irredeemably so. Follow, but do try to be discreet.
Wow, look at **this**, Gugs!

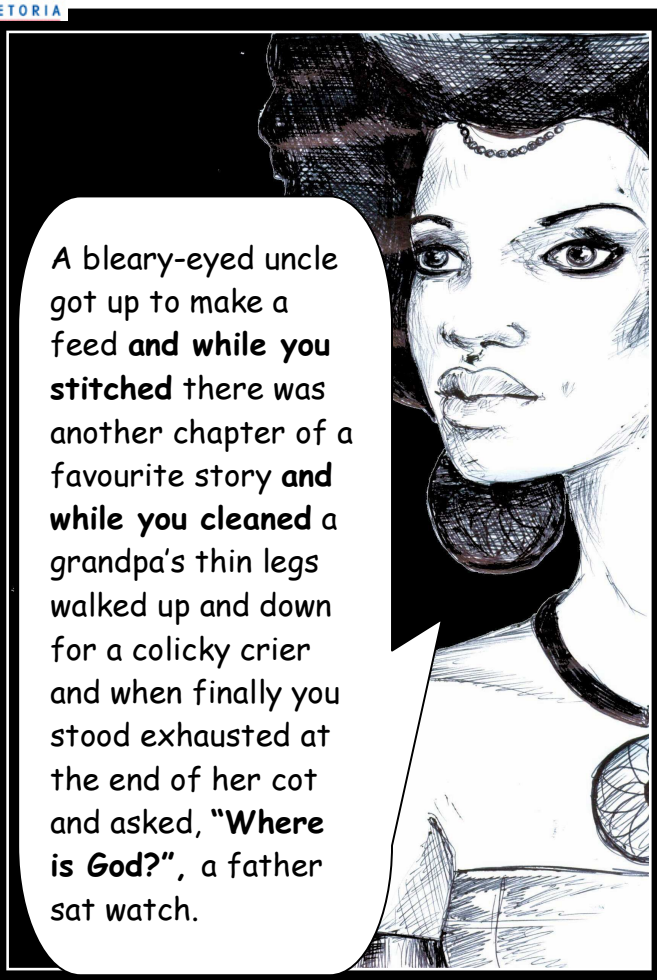

Your voice is dust in the passages; are you listening for a cry from the mosque? Around and around my thoughts surround you like doves circling a minaret.

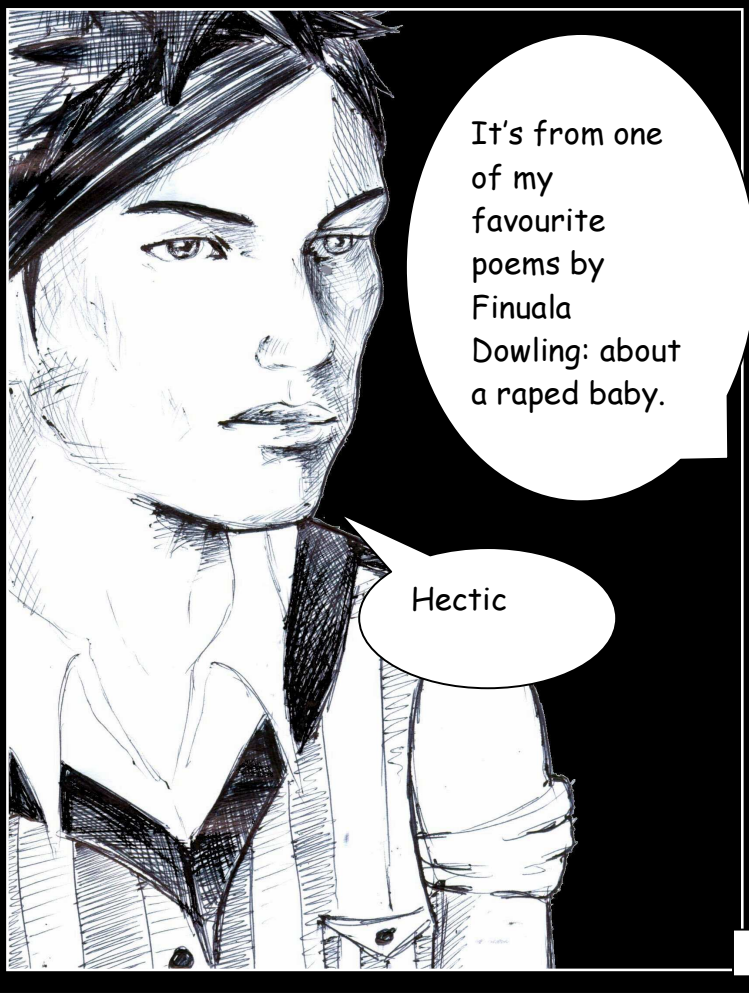

The clammy cement Sucks our naked feet a rheumy yellow bulb lights a damp grey wall
Falling, you fertilised the dazed, deserted mother mire like blindfolded oxen from Revelations.

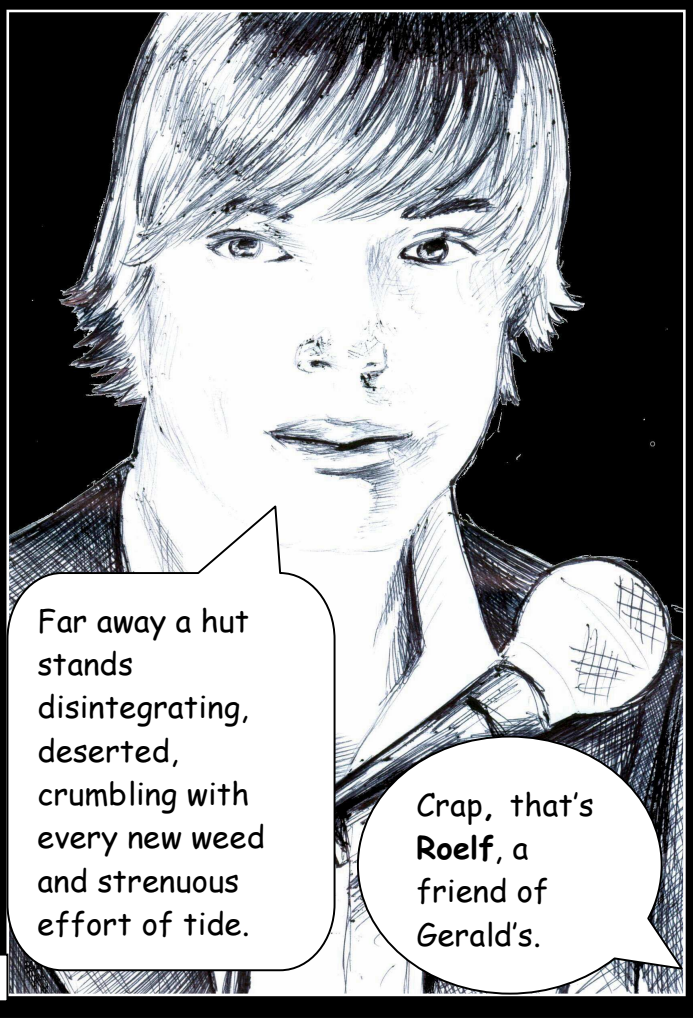

Oh dear penis of mine, blacker than my blackness, you have turned into a concertina. Your turtle head as if not part of me, startles me.


Hey, I know that poem!
Yeah, some of them are quite famous.

It's like a poetry opium den. I **love** this!
Well you **are** a poet.


A bleary-eyed uncle got up to make a feed **and while you stitched** there was another chapter of a favourite story **and while you cleaned** a grandpa's thin legs walked up and down for a colicky crier and when finally you stood exhausted at the end of her cot and asked, **"Where is God?",** a father sat watch.

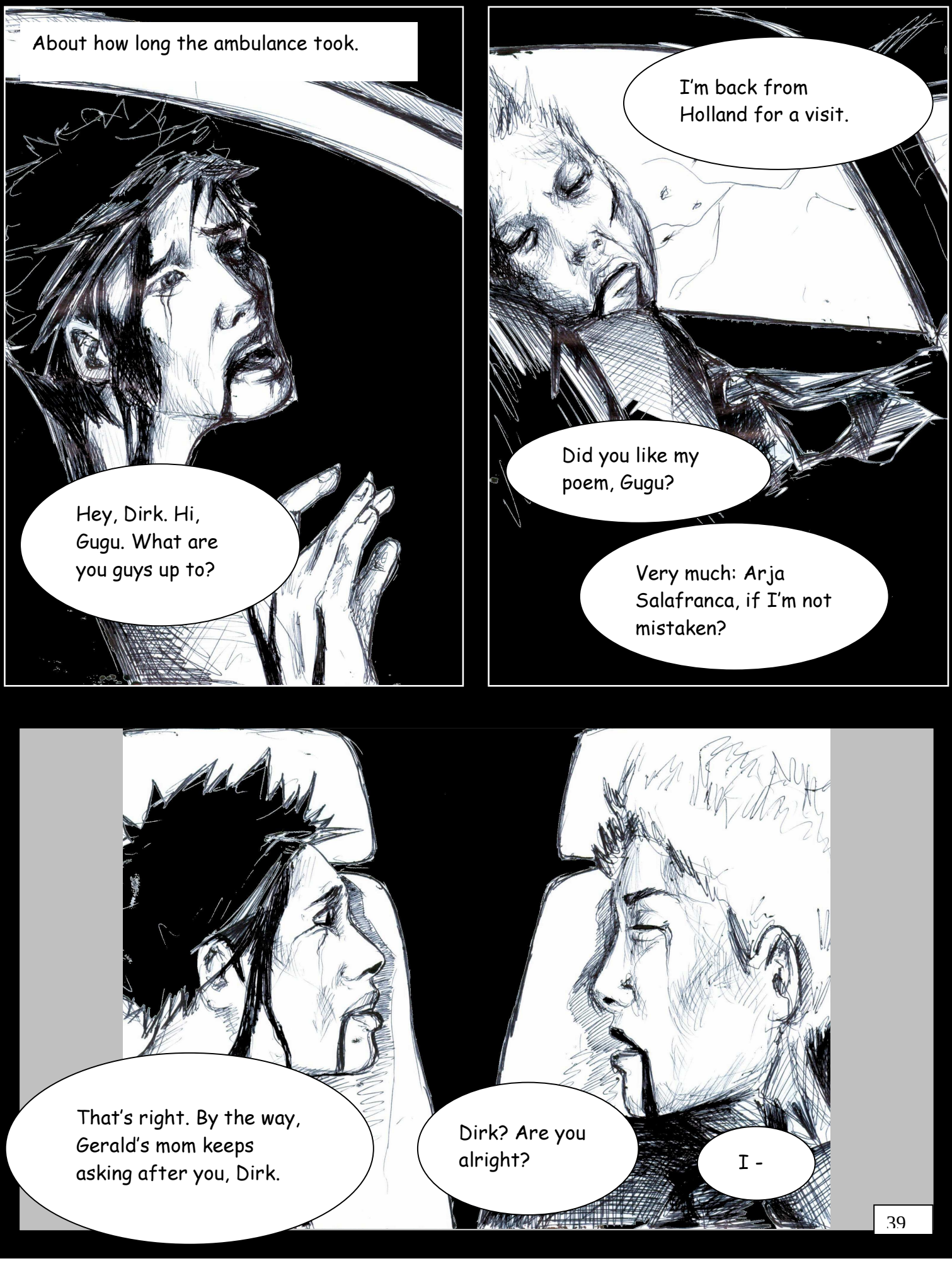

It's from one of my favourite poems by Finuala Dowling: about a raped baby.
Hectic


Far away a hut stands disintegrating, deserted, crumbling with every new weed and strenuous effort of tide.
Crap, that's **Roelf**, a friend of Gerald's.

Gugu had once told Dirk how important it was to talk about loss, about grief. She read a book, and told everyone around her to 'share'.

To mislead her, Dirk had spoken about the lesser of two evils, about Gerald.

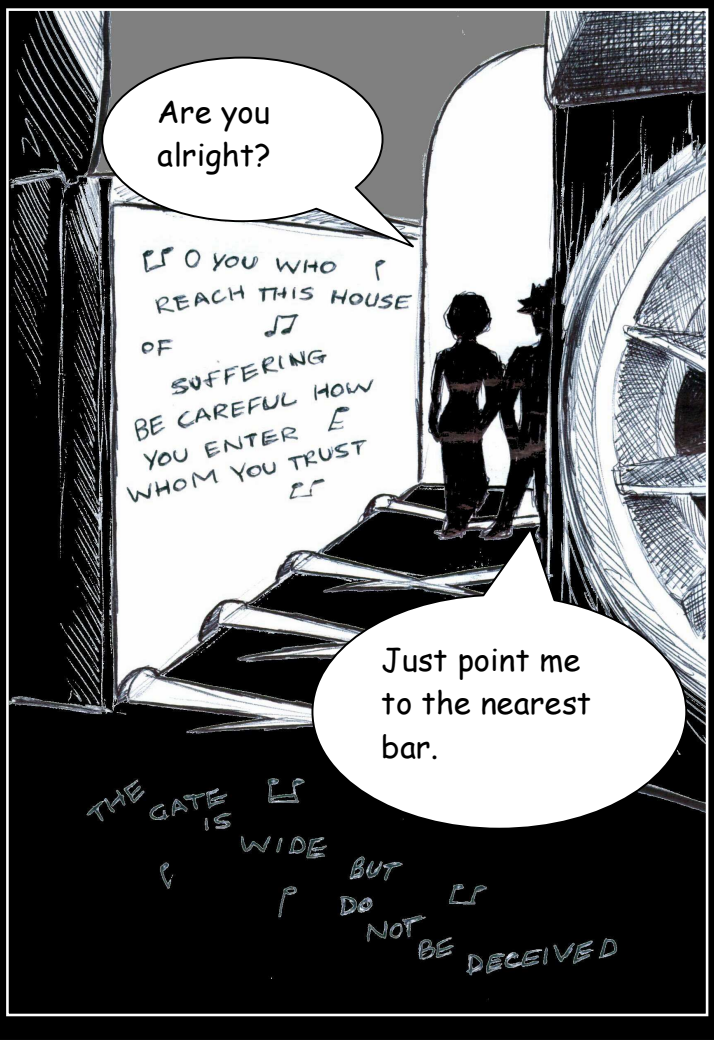
About how Dirk was driving.

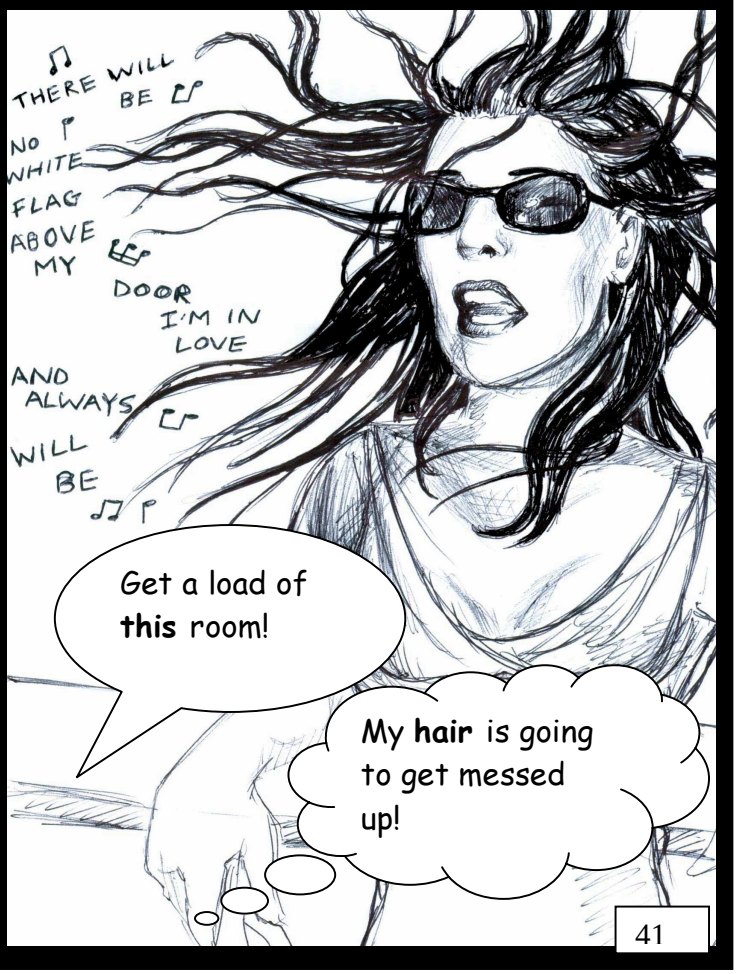

About how long the ambulance took.
Hey, Dirk. Hi, Gugu. What are you guys up to?
I'm back from Holland for a visit.
Did you like my poem, Gugu?
Very much: Arja Salafranca, if I'm not mistaken?
That's right. By the way, Gerald's mom keeps asking after you, Dirk.
Dirk? Are you alright?
I -

The sirens were very loud. They eclipsed the roaring in his ear, for which he was pathetically grateful. Gerald's eyes were closed – *thank you*, *thank you* – he didn't have to see them. He was slipping in and out of consciousness by the time he was extracted from the crumpled metal confine. They had switched the sirens off so the roaring susurrus had returned; an ocean of sound slamming against his eardrums from deep within his head. The lights of the ambulance were still on, though: he could see the veins on the inside of his eyelids flash a watery red every time the pulse-light flared. He tried to trace their path, something meaningless and repetitive to do to distract him. Funny how that was the last thing he remembered of that night. No, the last thing he remembered was the sound of a long zip being closed not far away.

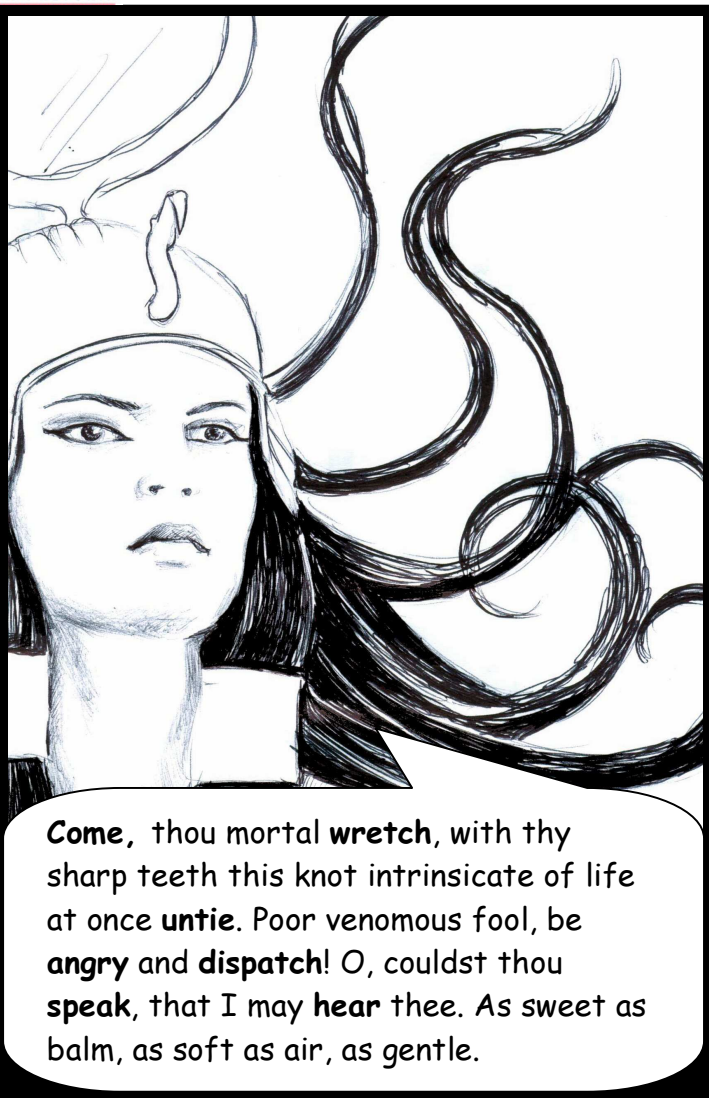
Dirk –
He's looking good these days, don't you think?

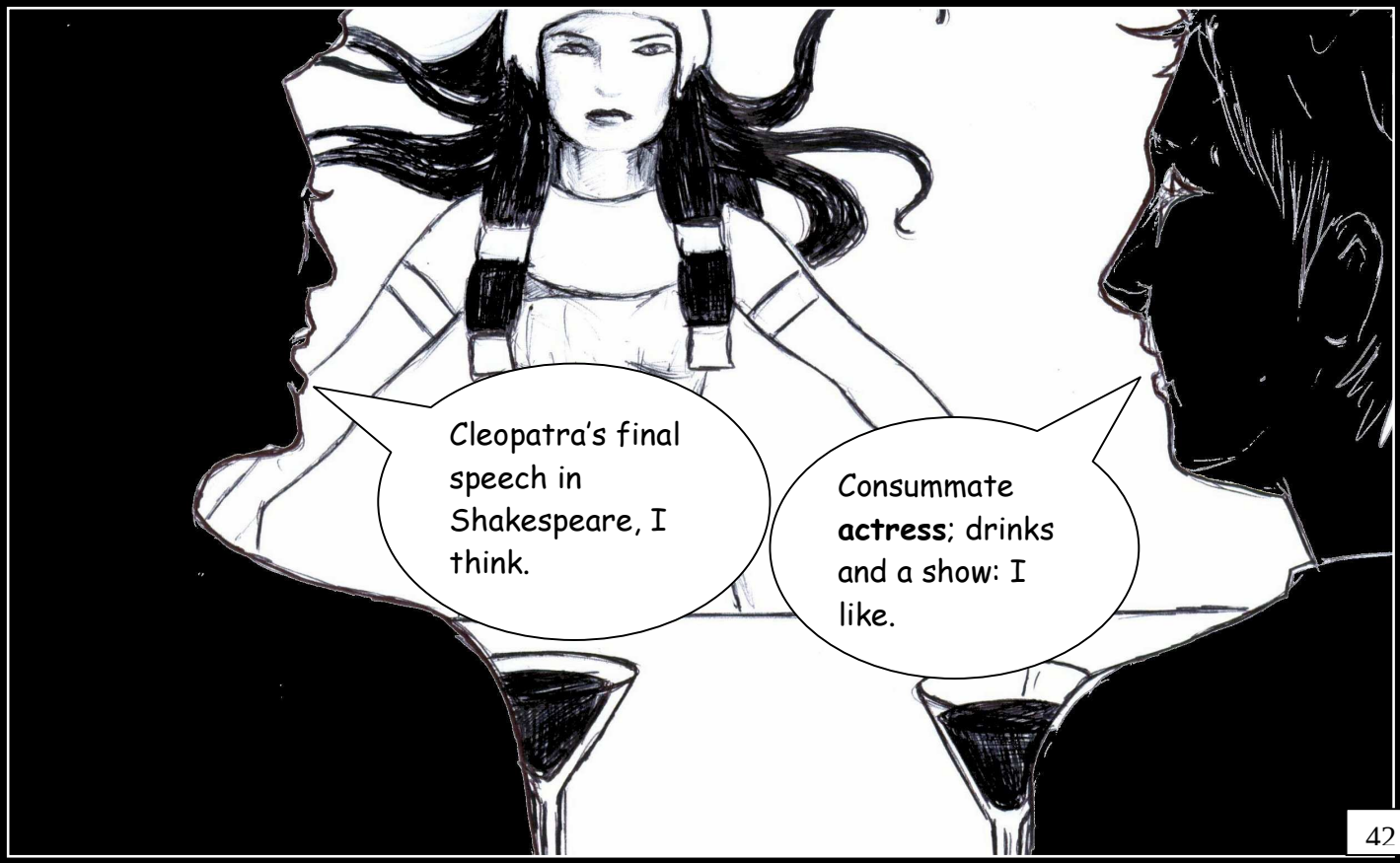
Dirk.
Not now, Gugu, okay? Let's just move on.
It's never now.


Are you alright?
O YOU WHO REACH THIS HOUSE OF SUFFERING BE CAREFUL HOW YOU ENTER WHOM YOU TRUST
Just point me to the nearest bar.
THE GATE IS WIDE BUT DO NOT BE DECEIVED

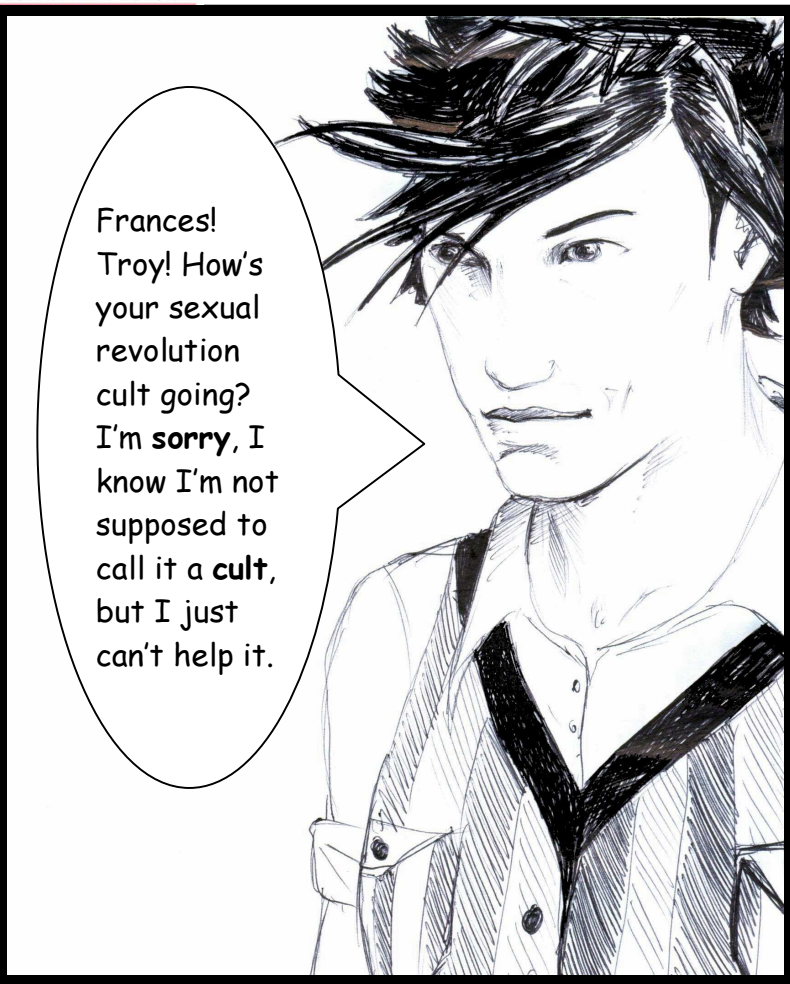

THERE WILL BE NO WHITE FLAG ABOVE MY DOOR I'M IN LOVE AND ALWAYS WILL BE
Get a load of **this** room!
My **hair** is going to get messed up!

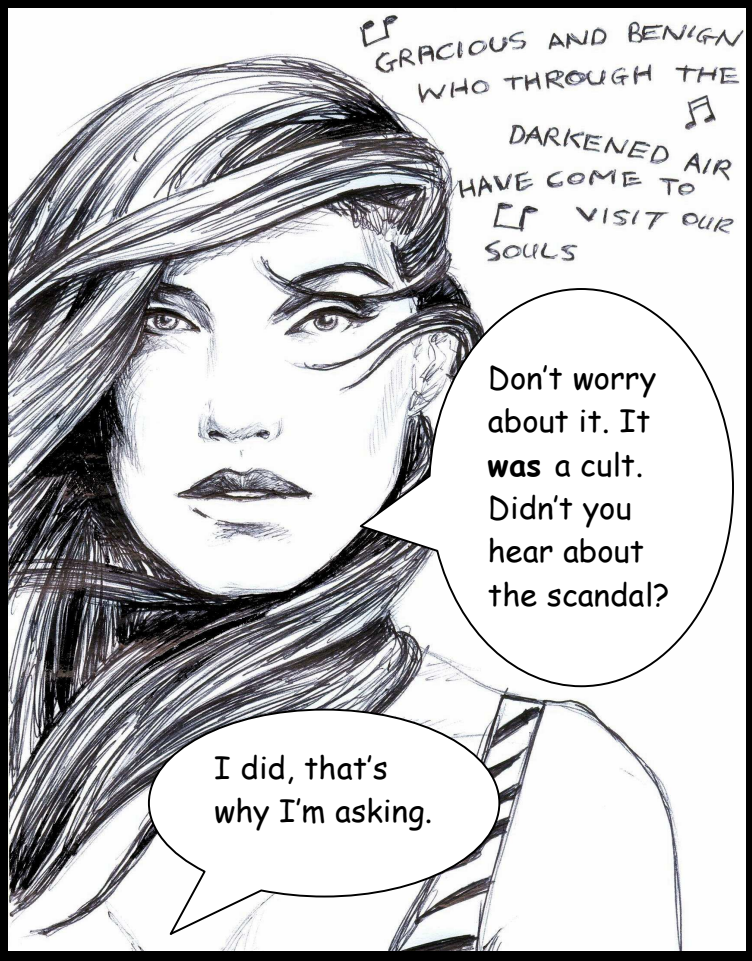
Eish, **more** Egyptian.

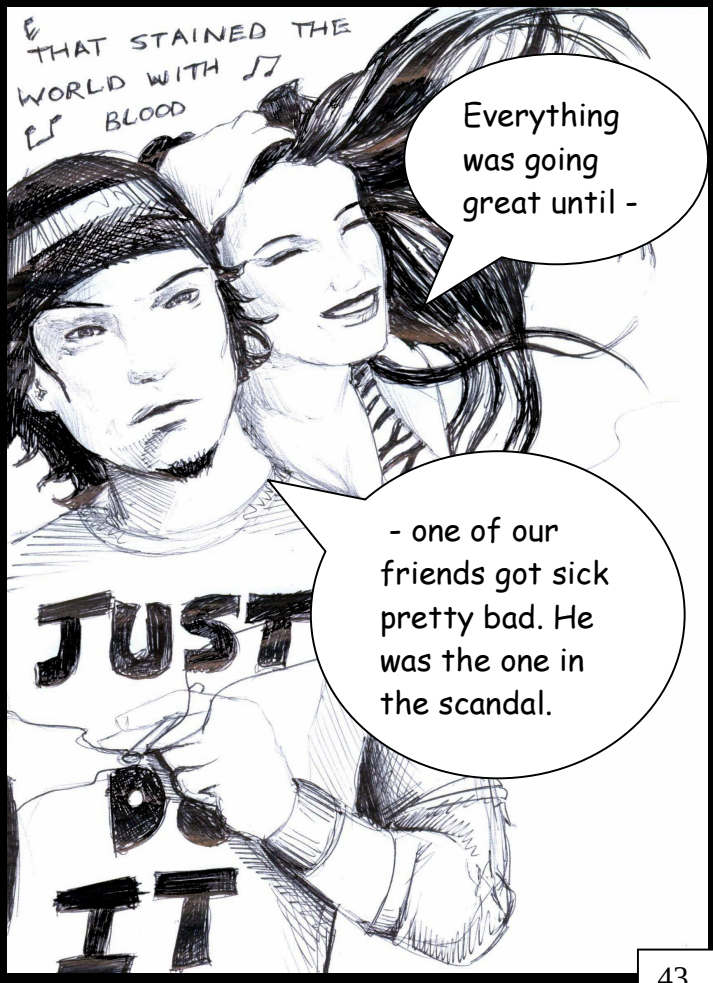

Come, thou mortal **wretch**, with thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate of life at once **untie**. Poor venomous fool, be **angry** and **dispatch**! O, couldst thou **speak**, that I may **hear** thee. As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle.

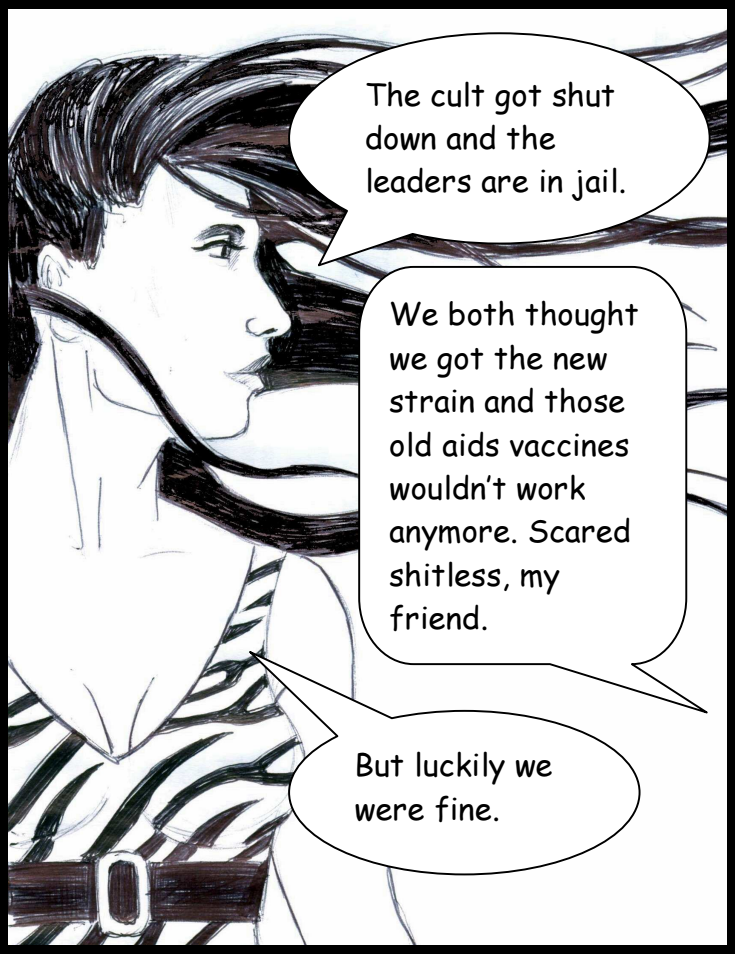

Cleopatra's final speech in Shakespeare, I think.
Consummate **actress**; drinks and a show: I like.

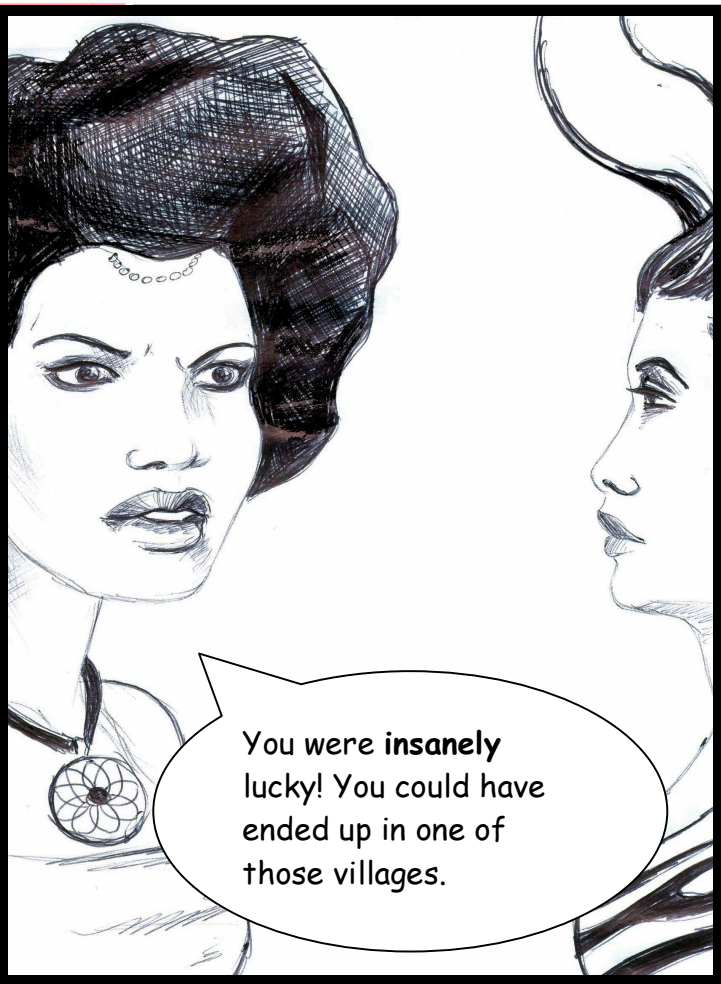
Dirk, baby!
Dude!


Frances! Troy! How's your sexual revolution cult going? I'm **sorry**, I know I'm not supposed to call it a **cult**, but I just can't help it.

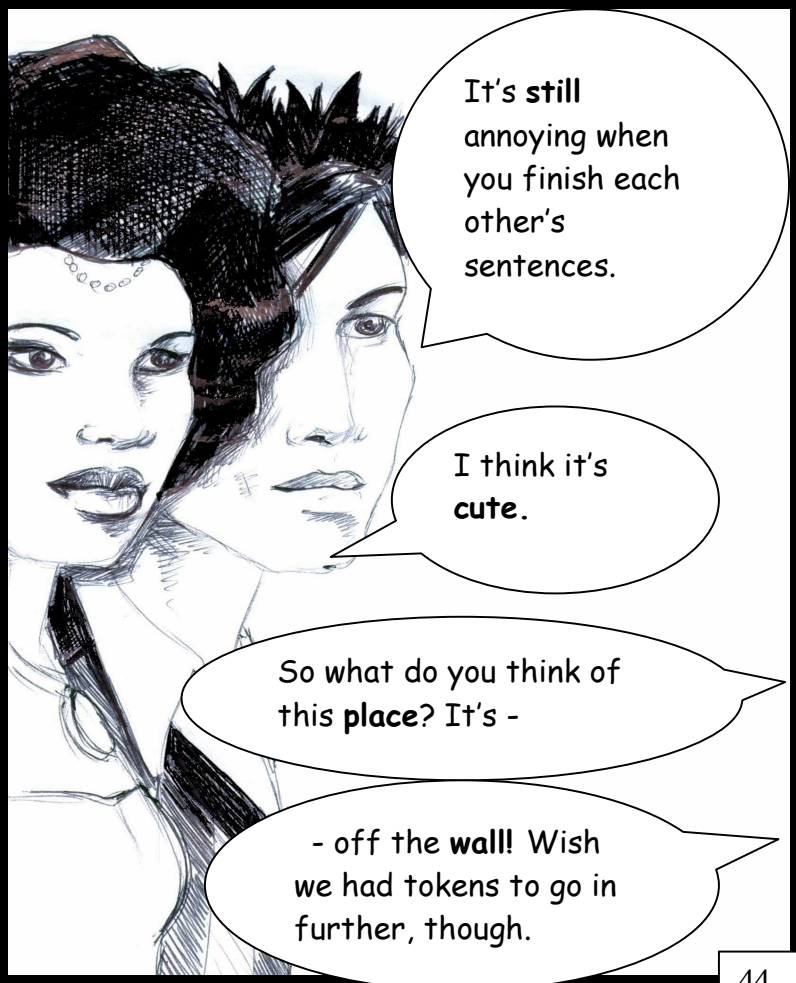

GRACIOUS AND BENIGN WHO THROUGH THE DARKENED AIR HAVE COME TO VISIT OUR SOULS
Don't worry about it. It **was** a cult. Didn't you hear about the scandal?
I did, that's why I'm asking.

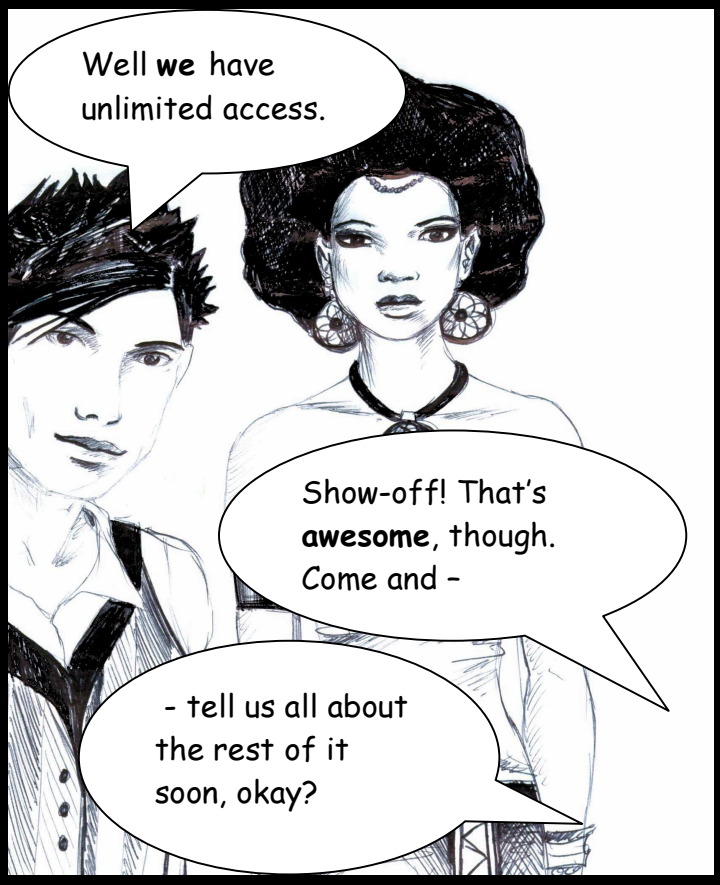

THAT STAINED THE WORLD WITH BLOOD
Everything was going great until -
- one of our friends got sick pretty bad. He was the one in the scandal.
JUST DO IT


The cult got shut down and the leaders are in jail.
We both thought we got the new strain and those old aids vaccines wouldn't work anymore. Scared shitless, my friend.
But luckily we were fine.

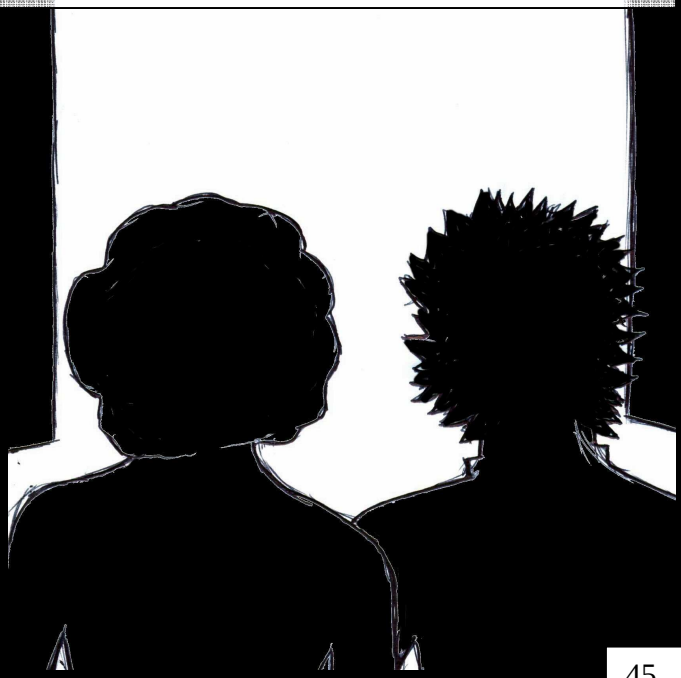

You were **insanely** lucky! You could have ended up in one of those villages.

I **know!** We're taking –
- it slow now; almost got **badly** burnt.


It's **still** annoying when you finish each other's sentences.
I think it's **cute**.
So what do you think of this **place**? It's -
- off the **wall!** Wish we had tokens to go in further, though.



Dirk was surprised that a club like this could even exist in Tshwane. One moment the city was the conservative twilight zone, and the next, **wham** – the cultural mecca. Well, he wasn't going to complain. As Frances had said: off the **wall**. Fabulous.



A warm snowstorm

What the - ?

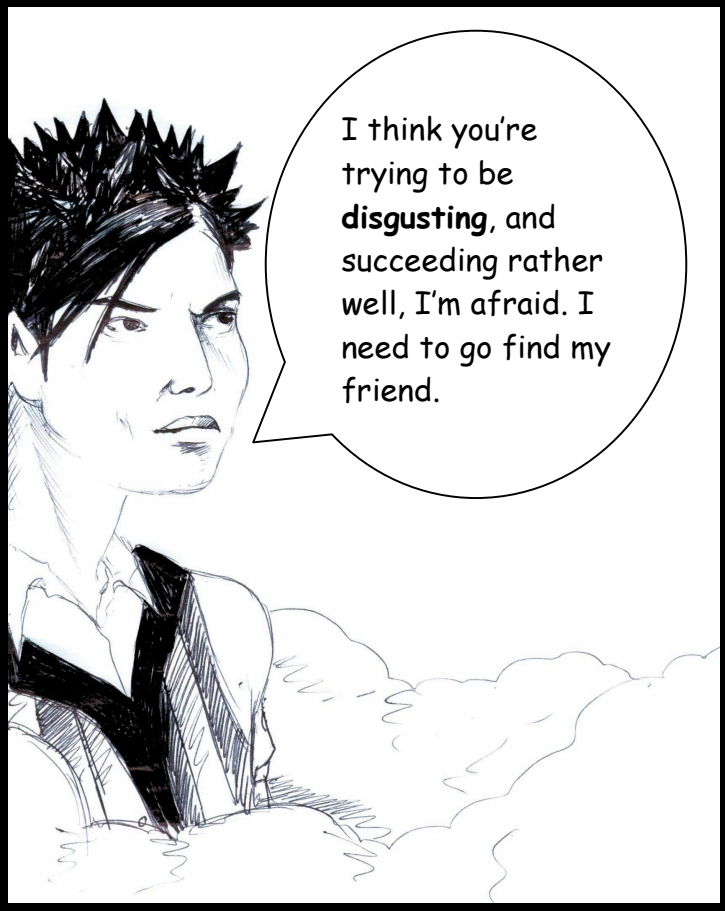
A **foam** party! Don't lose sight of me, okay?

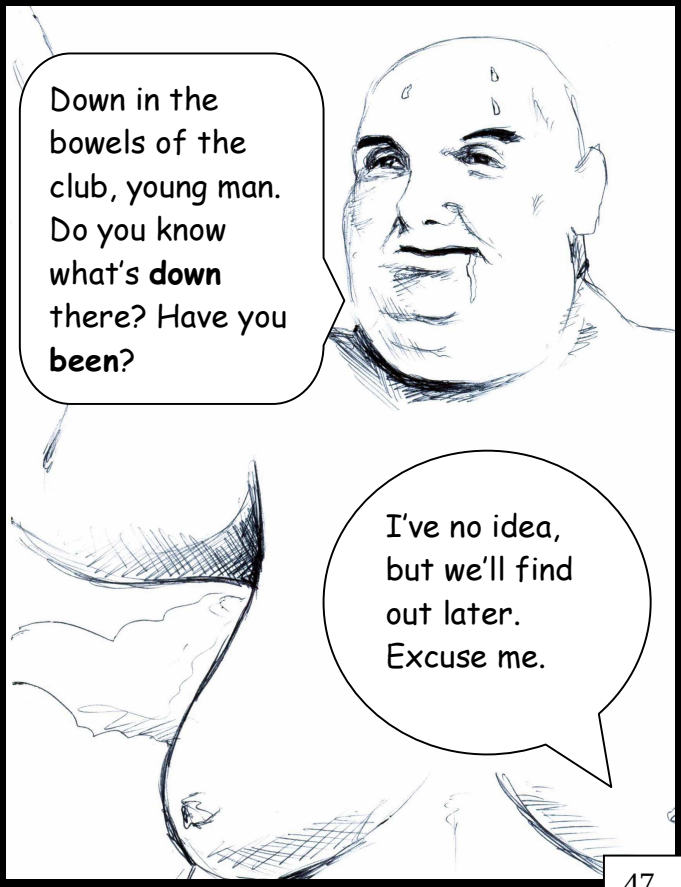
Okay

Hey, Gugs, come and look at this **painting**! At least the frame's nice. Gugs? Gugu?

Excuse me.
Oink

I'm sorry, what did you say?
Ahem, do you know what's down there?
Down there?
Down there.


I think you're trying to be disgusting, and succeeding rather well, I'm afraid. I need to go find my friend.


Down in the bowels of the club, young man. Do you know what's down there? Have you been?
I've no idea, but we'll find out later. Excuse me.

You mustn't be squeamish, pretty thing. You must go: taste the depravity. Experience the reek of lust and the feel of abandoned wantonness on your sweat-dewed skin **yeeeessssssssss** your youth an attraction, your beauty a currency. Play with the darkness and win its prize **mmmmm.** Yes yes, you're shame a soothing balm. She likes that. **They** like that.

Heavy breathing

Sweat

drool

I told you not to lose **sight** of me. Okay, so here's the low-down: the barman just told me to avoid a really fat guy. He shouldn't be too difficult to spot..

Too late.

You do seem to attract the **nasties**.

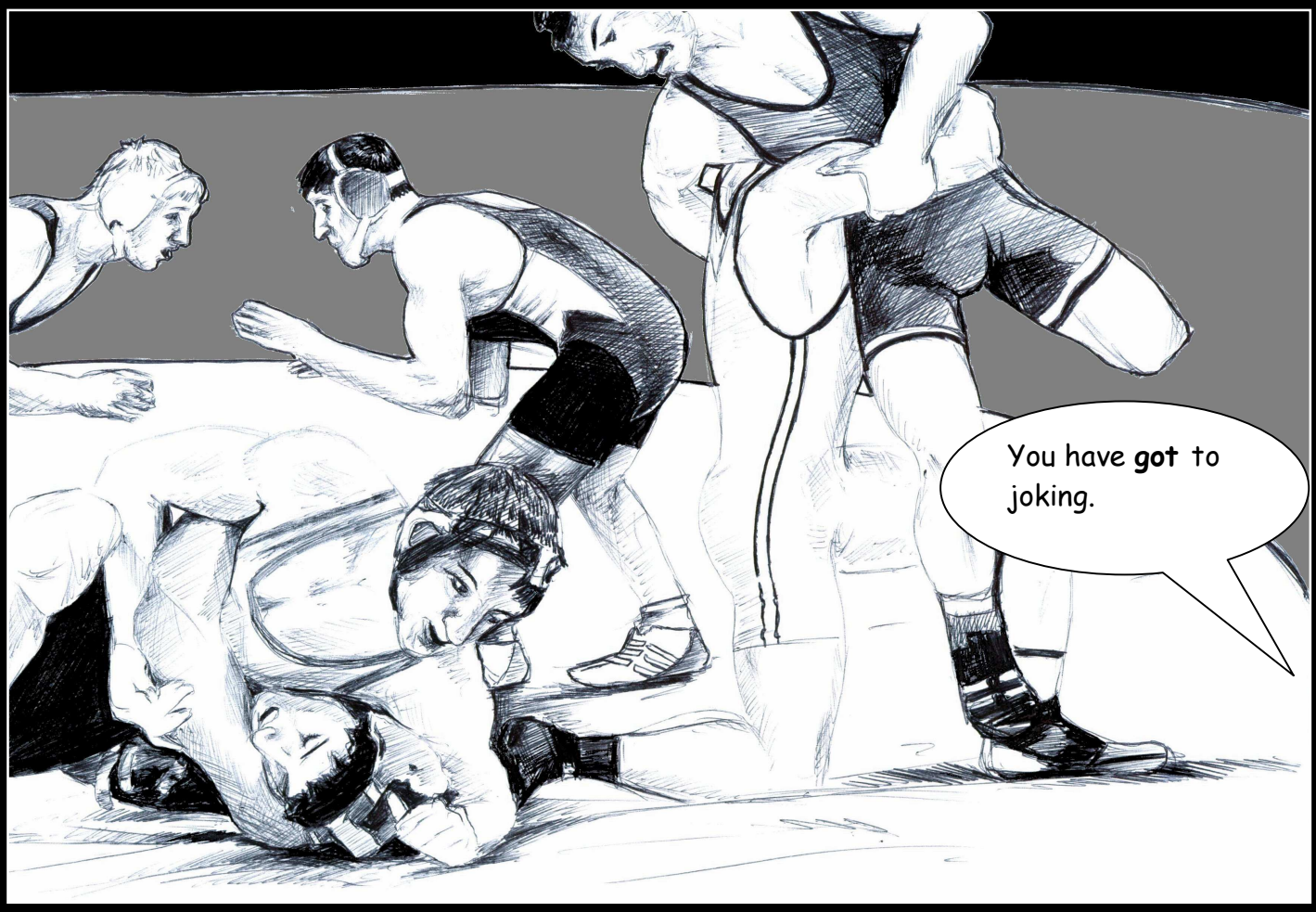
What can I say? I have a gift.

Apparently the fat guy's here almost every night.

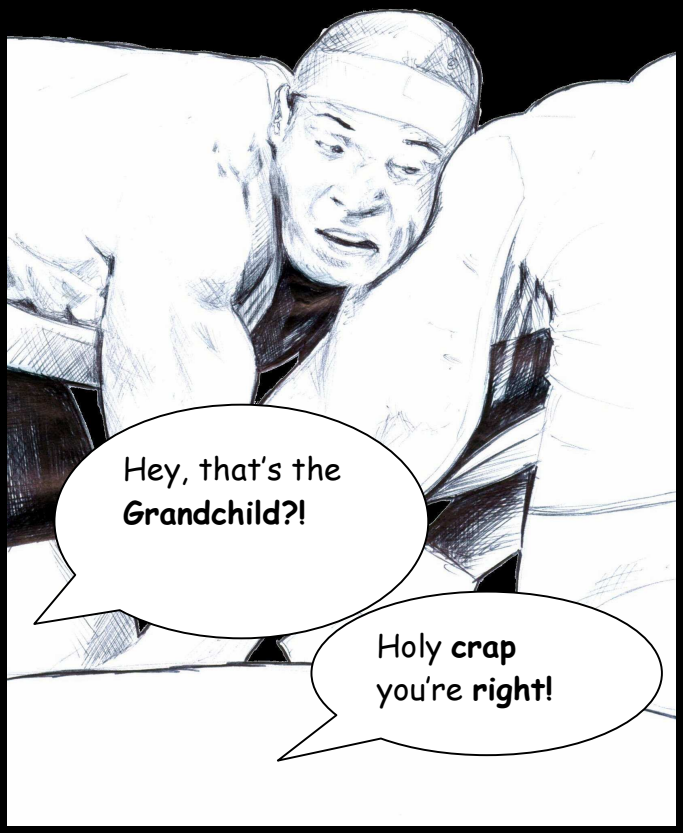
He hangs around by the door trying to get glimpses of the other parts of the club, but he doesn't have a token. It's quite sad, really.

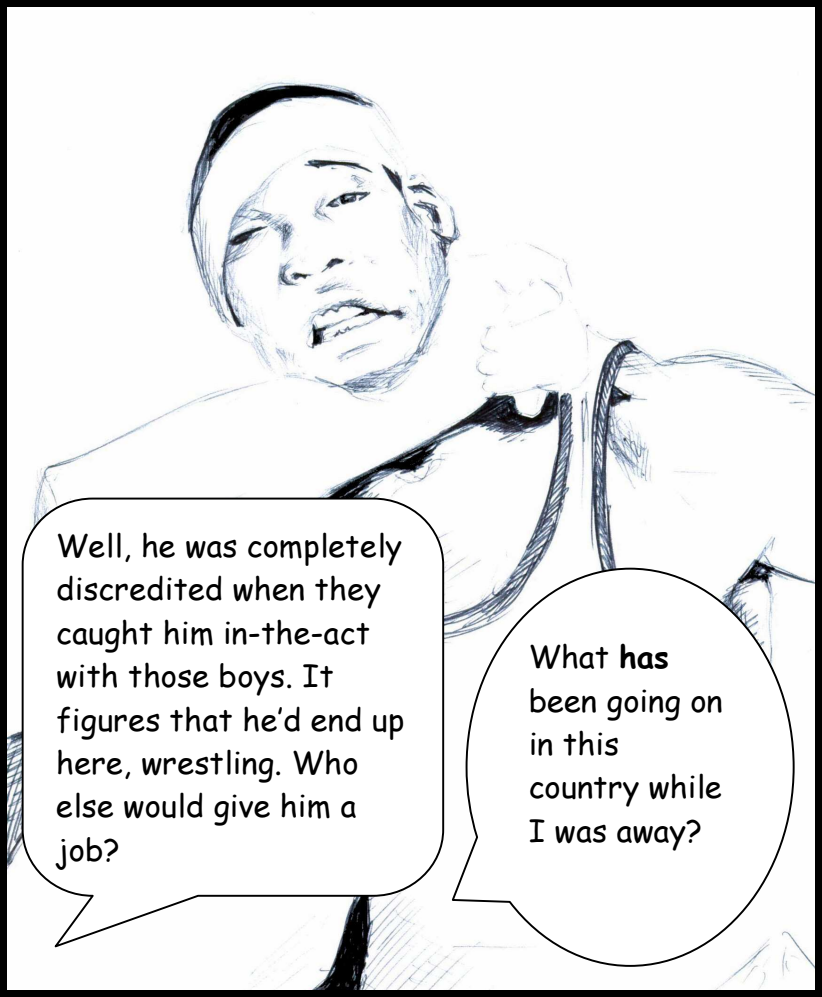
Yeah, and basically **cumming** in his acreage of toweling when someone speaks to him, the gluttonous old **fuck**.

Dirk! How much have you had to drink? You're starting to do your nasty drunk-talk. Let's go, before my hair wilts under all this foam like that girl over there. Besides, I can't wait to see what the rest of this place looks like!

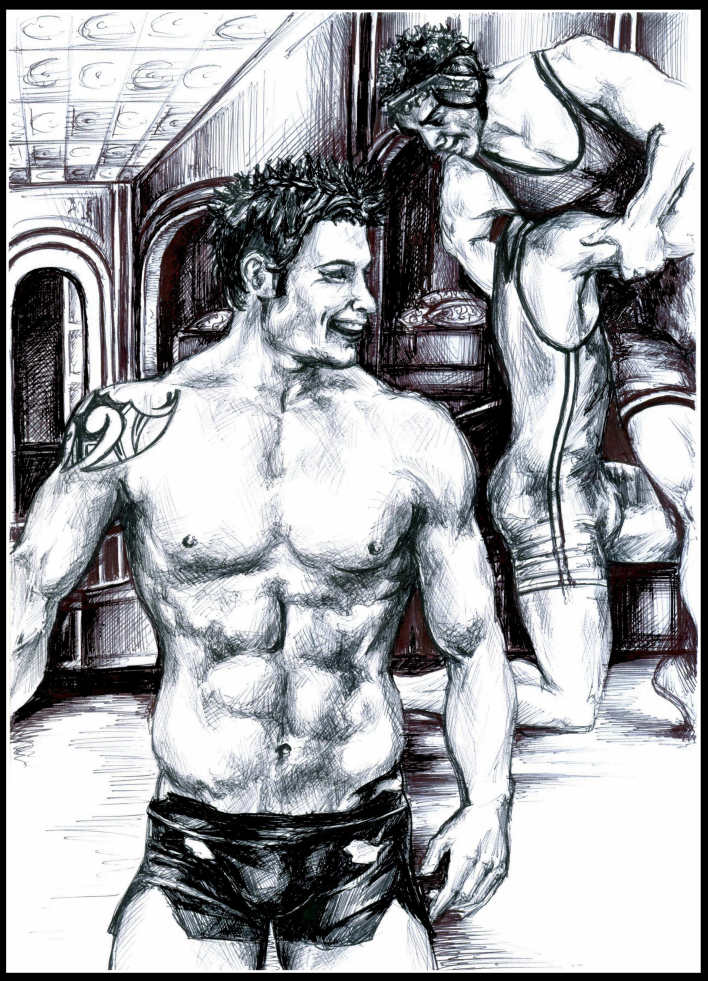

You have **got** to joking.

Isn't that the cult dude?
Which cult? They're a dime a dozen these days.


Hey, that's the **Grandchild?!**
Holy **crap** you're **right!**


Well, he was completely discredited when they caught him in-the-act with those boys. It figures that he'd end up here, wrestling. Who else would give him a job?
What **has** been going on in this country while I was away?

I mean, he was the official grandchild of **decency restoration**. Remember those rant-and-rave speeches of his?!
Yeah, well, that was until they found him with somebody else's grandchildren in his lap!



Anyway, Dirk, who **cares** about a bunch of has-been politicians and disgraced social figures: I see me some **pretty** boys wrestling!

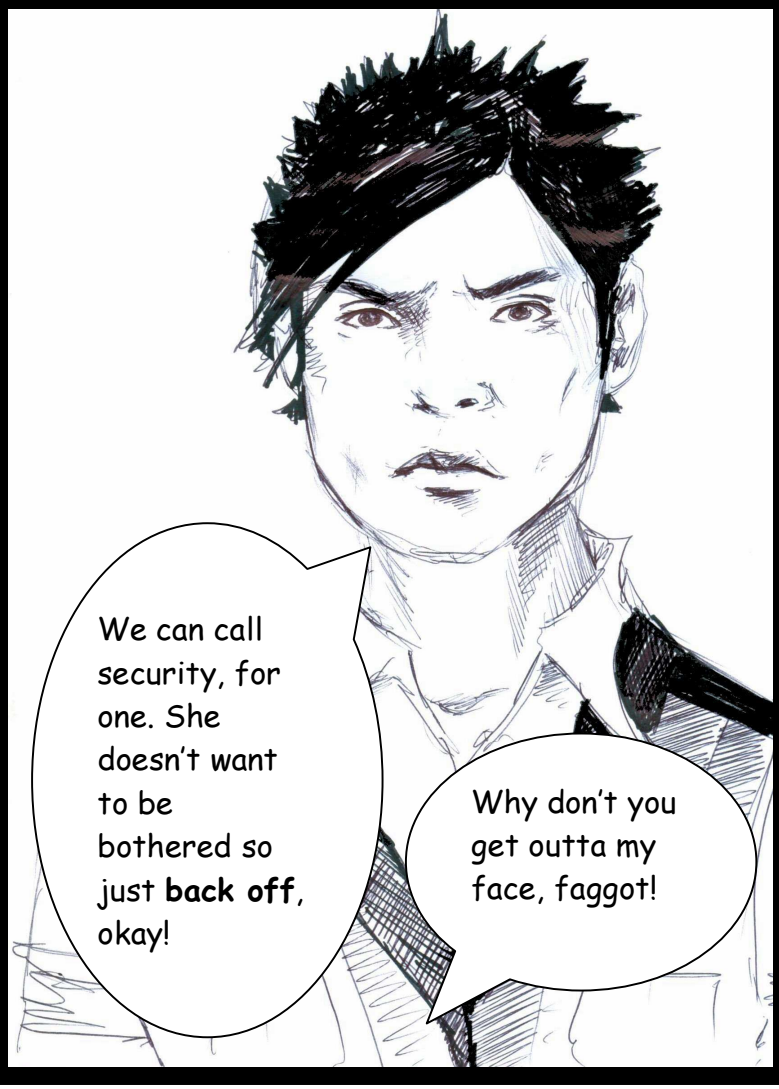
Do you know what one of the guys at the bar just told me? The next room is **mud wrestling.**

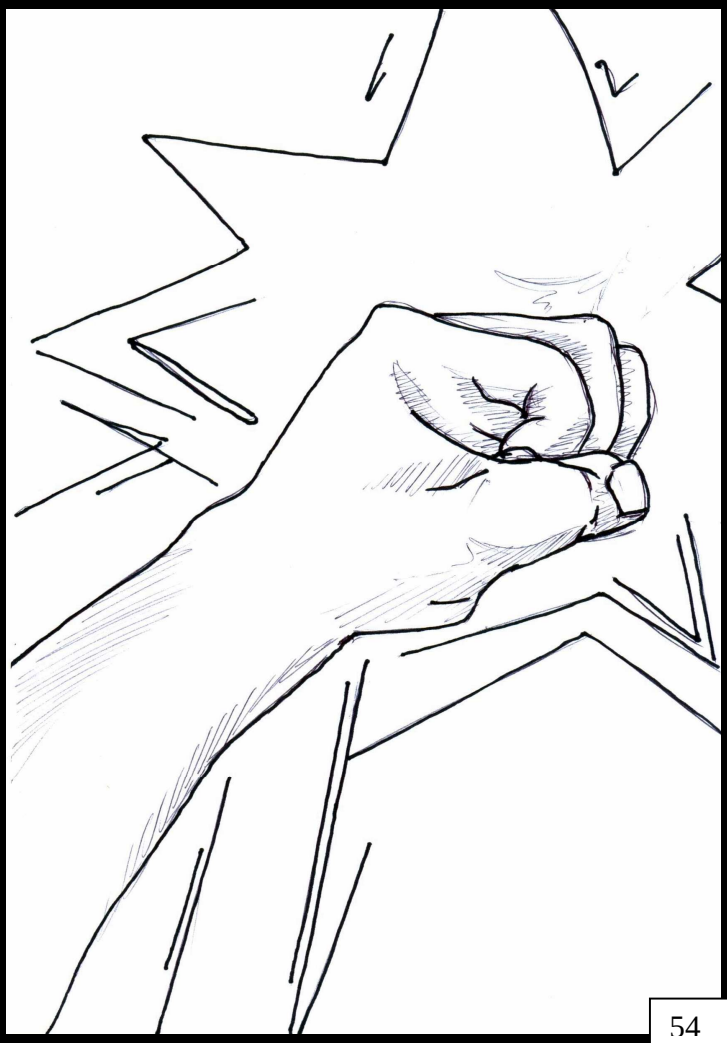
This I **have** to see! Goodbye pretty boys!

Gugu, with due respect to Lewis Carroll, all I can say is:
"Curiouser and curiouser"
What's up with all the geriatrics?
I'm sure they would also -
- Like to get in on at least **some** of the fun.
Mmm all that nubile **flesh**.
Gugu! You're **terrible**.

Ew get **away** from me!

Yeah? Yeah? And what you gonna **do** about it?


We can call security, for one. She doesn't want to be bothered so just **back off**, okay!
Why don't you get outta my face, faggot!



Ooooh yeeessss
What?!

First time down here?
Yes
Thanks for getting rid of him, although I'm sure you didn't have to be so – um – rough.

Harder **Harder!**
Exit time, Dirk!
Quick, while she's busy kicking his ass.

Hahaha that's why he's **here**. That's why **I'm** here: to beat people up, followed by a little slap and tickle, of course.
You mean he wanted **me** to hit him?
Of **course**. What else would be the point? **My turn!**

It surfaced in a hideous spinning flash.

Dirk, come home. It's getting late.

But I still have **so** much work to do *giggle*

Work?

Teeheehee, yeah. I'm almost done.

I thought you said you still had lots. Of **work**.

Yeah, well, I'll be as quick as I can.

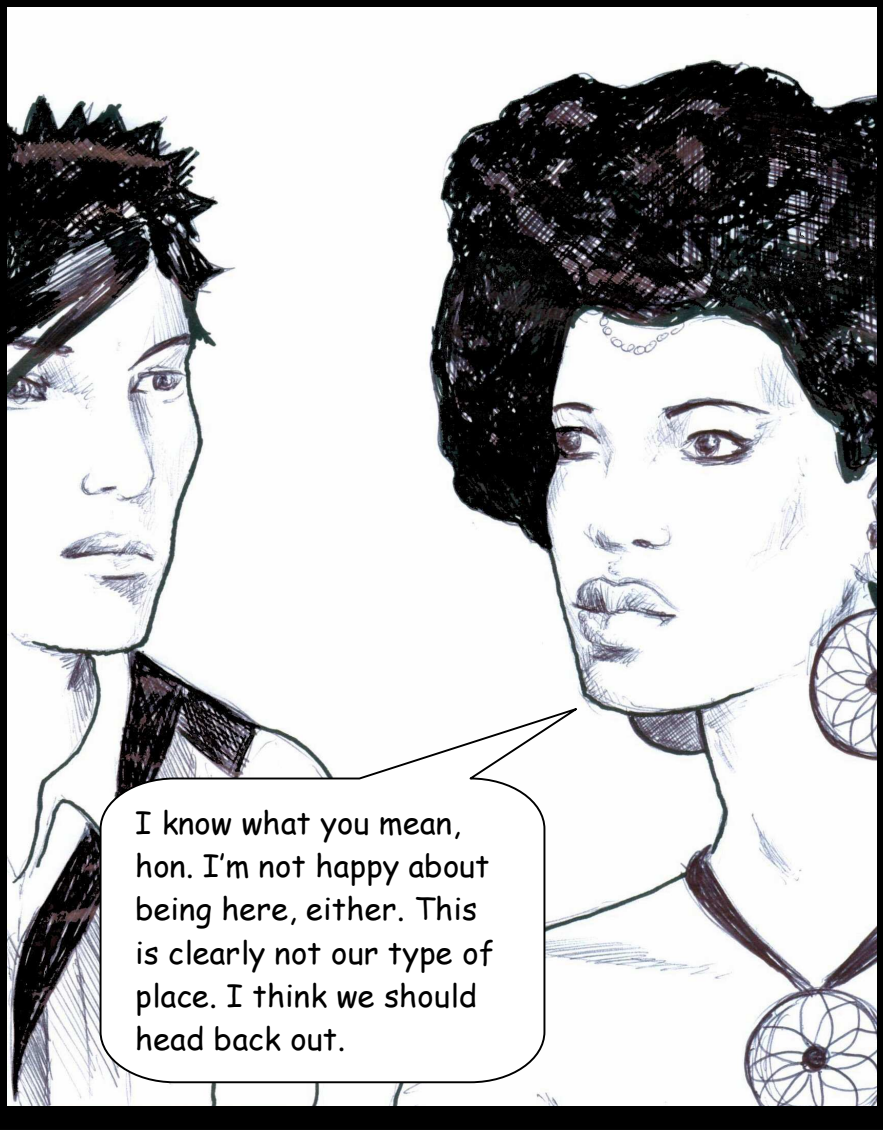
Come home come home come home

Come to me

Patience

That stupid bitch knocked you down.

What am I doing here?



I know what you mean, hon. I'm not happy about being here, either. This is clearly not our type of place. I think we should head back out.

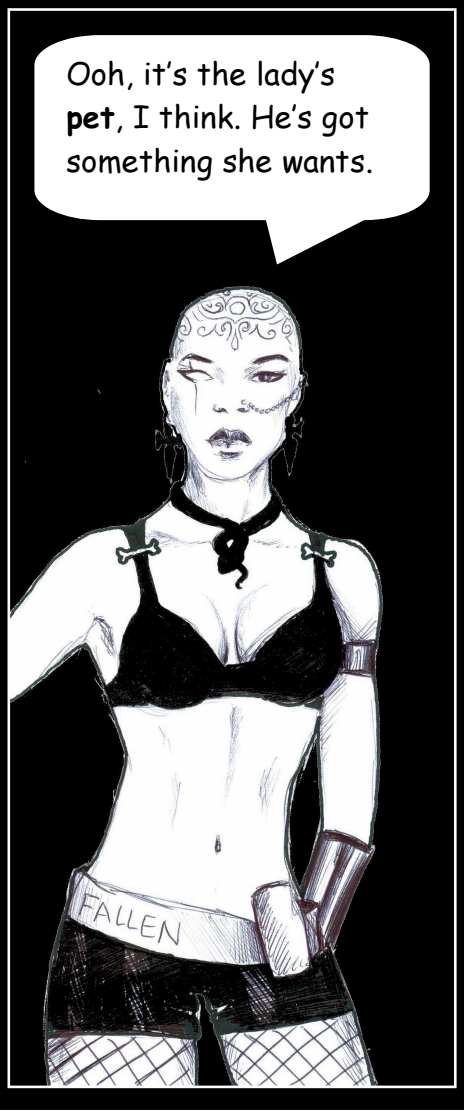
That's not what I meant. I. Yes.
I – um – yes, let's get out of here. Just not all the way back trough this room, please.

We'll find another exit.

EXIT
There's an exit sign. Let's go.

And where do you think **you're** going?
We would like to leave, thank you.

Well, well, what do we have here, then?
ANGEL


Ooh, it's the lady's **pet**, I think. He's got something she wants.
FALLEN

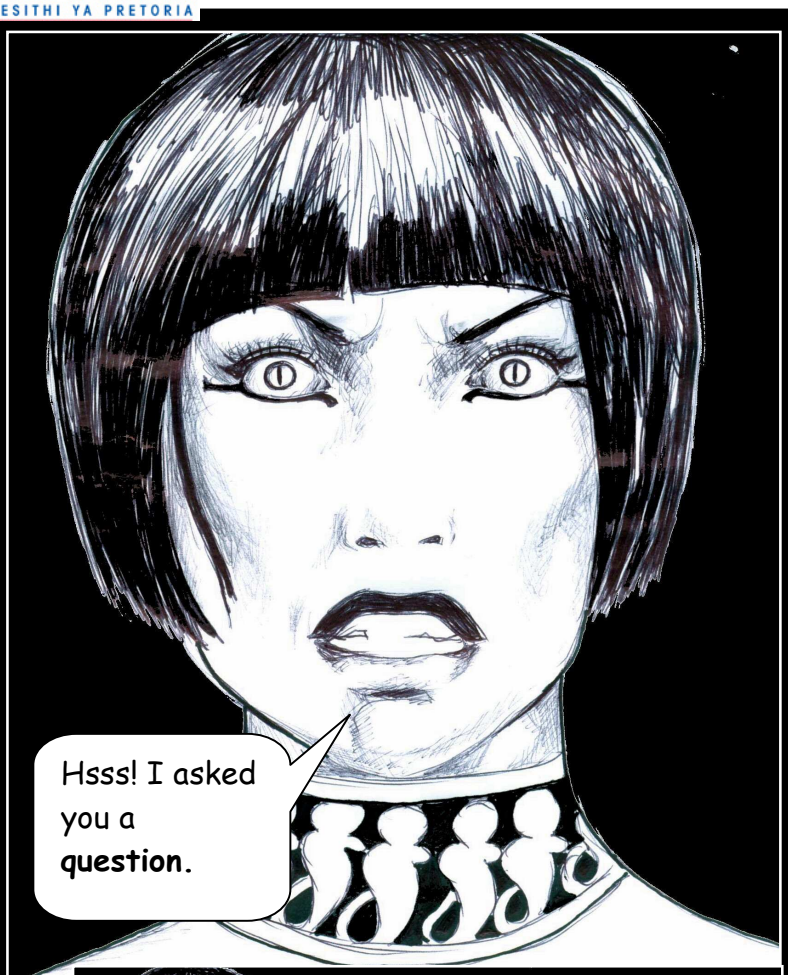
It **is** him. Yes, he's got something she **craves**.

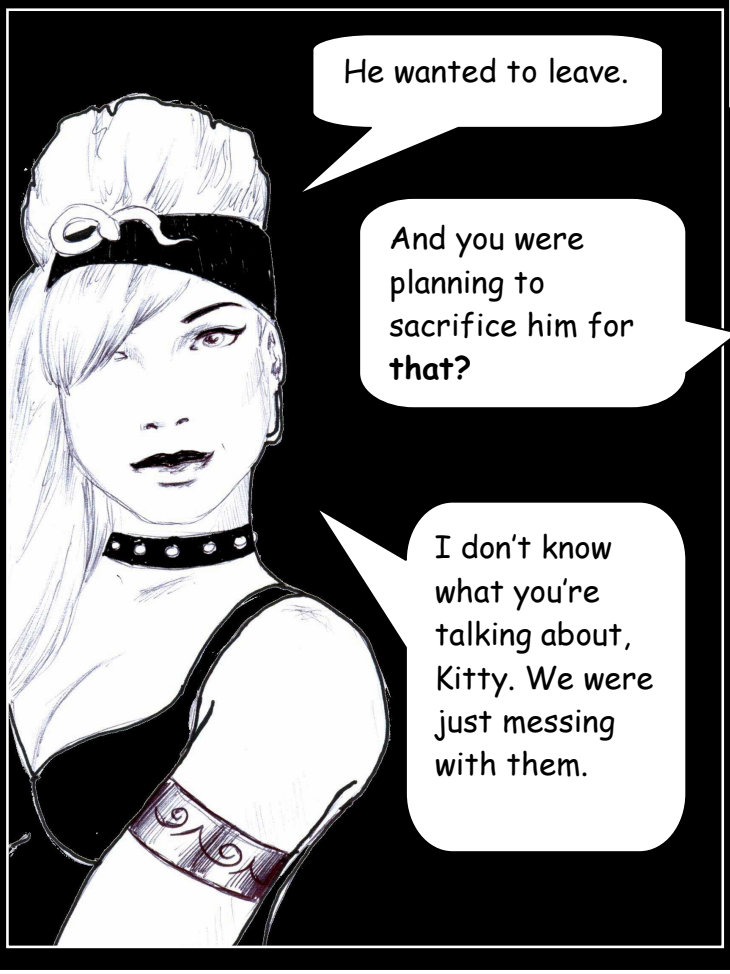
ANGEL
Come over here, pretty boy.

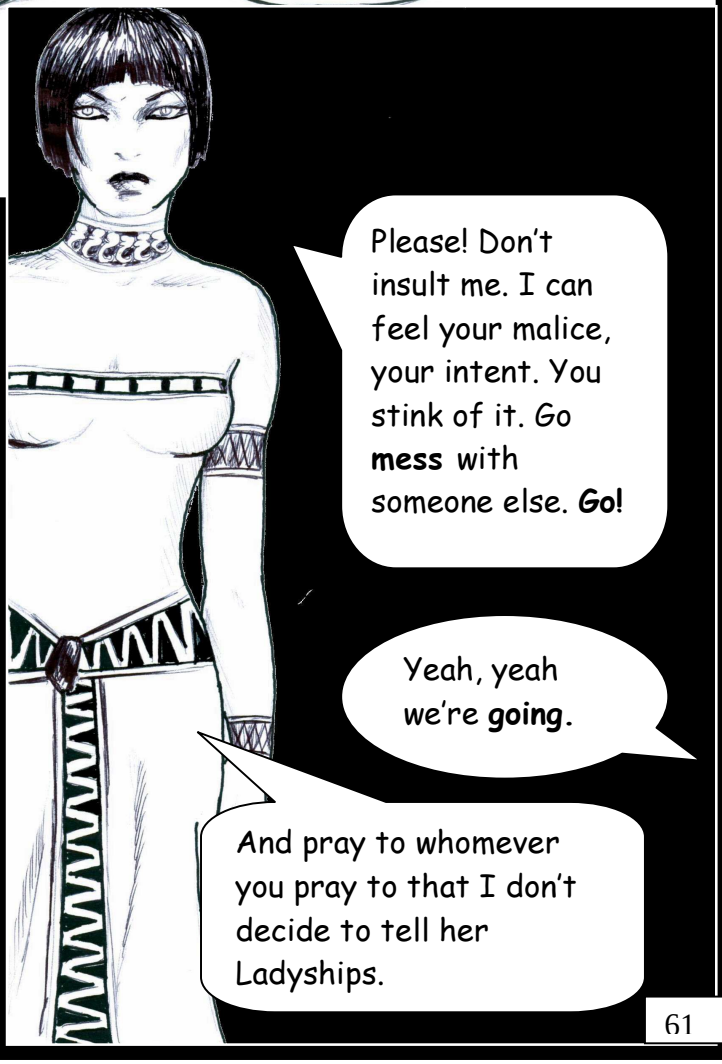
ANGEL
Will you be **our** pet too, pretty boy? Will you give us what **we** crave?
I don't know what you're talking about. We just want to get out of here.

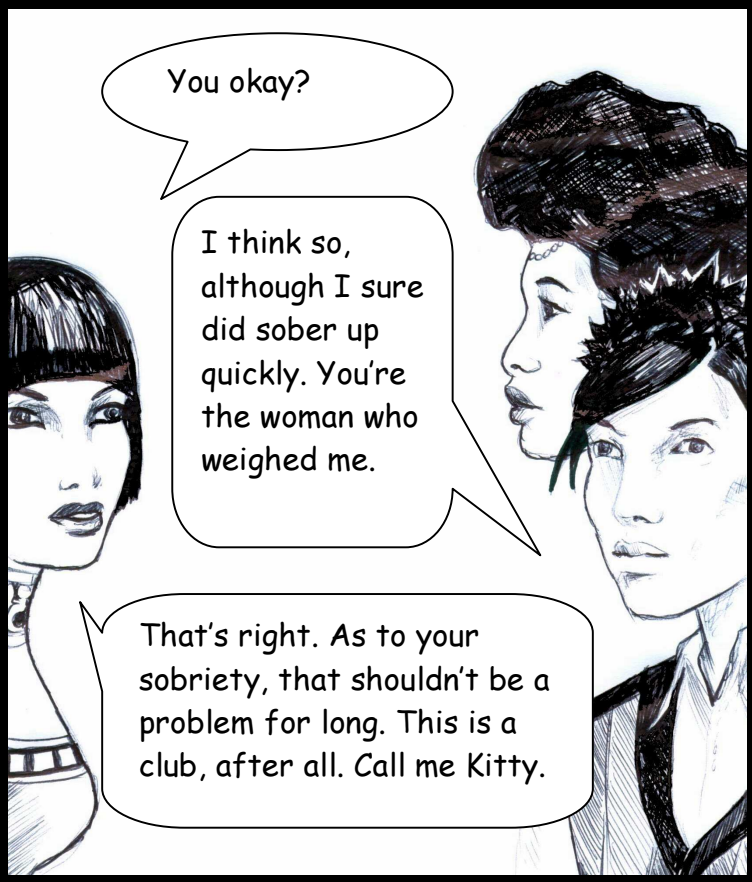
Aw, little boy don't want to play?
Look, I don't want any trouble.
Please just leave him alone.
We weren't talking to **you**, bitch!
So you want to **leave?** Pound of flesh, you little whino **cunt**.
Yes, yes, you **must**.
ANGEL
The Lady will be angry.
But we haven't in **so long**.
Screw the lady! **Feast!**

What the **hell** do you think you're doing?
ANGEL
Shit
You!

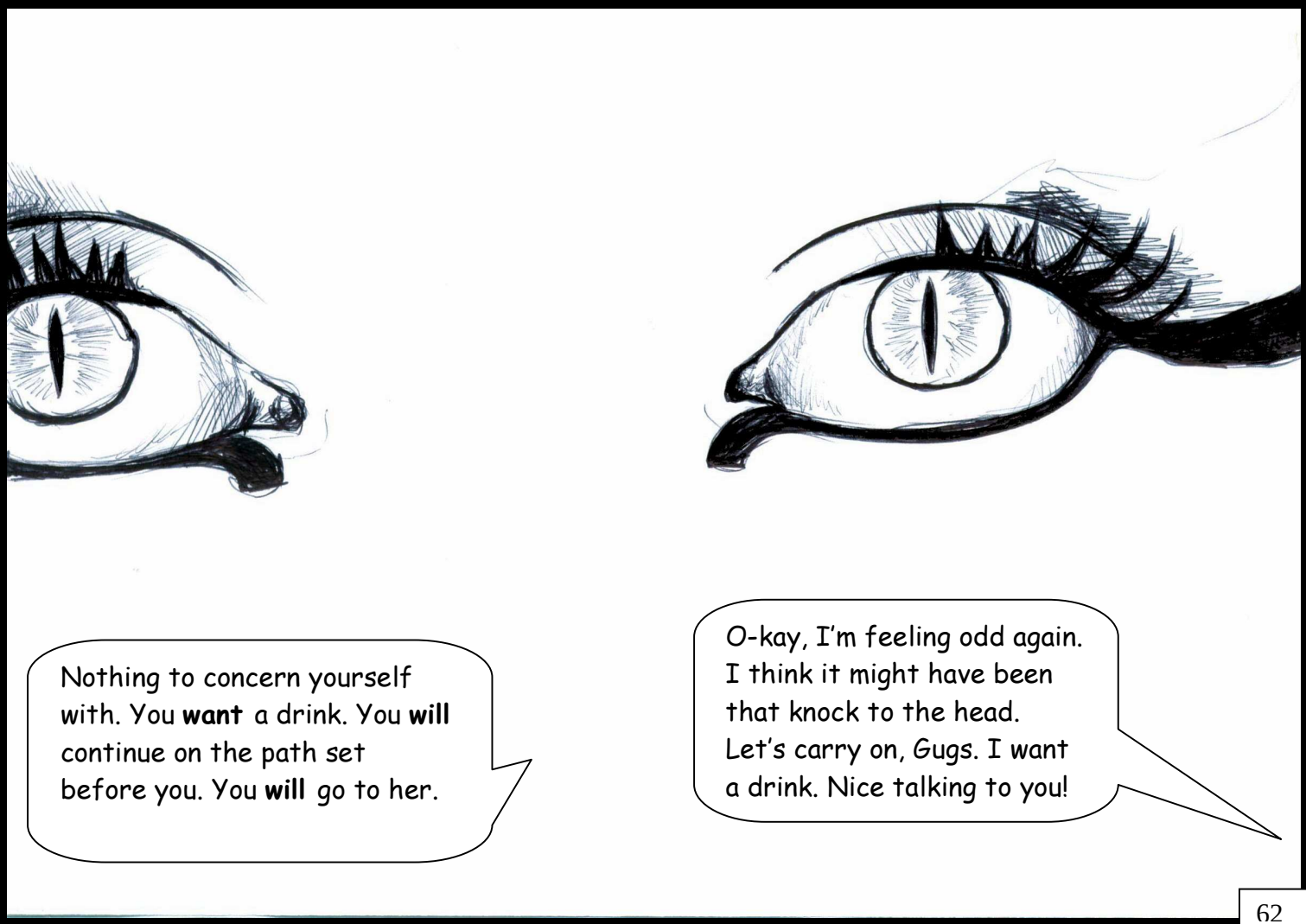

Hsss! I asked you a **question**.

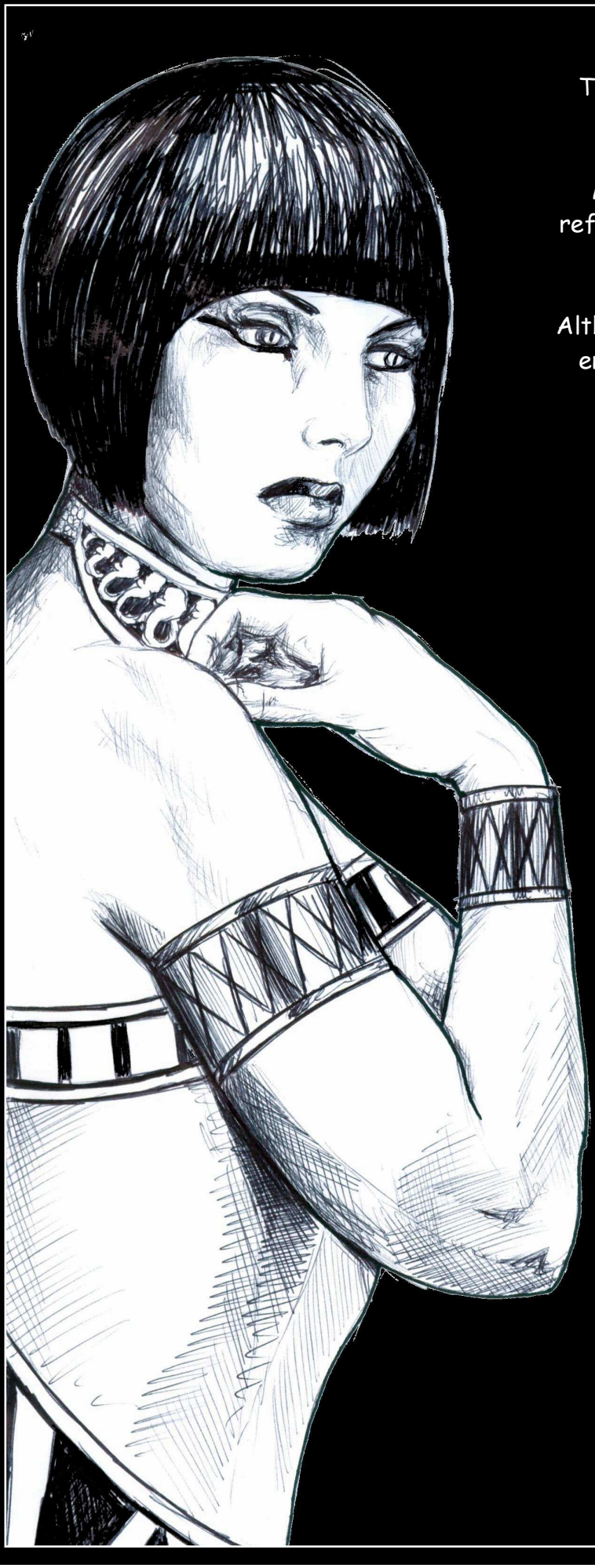

He wanted to leave.
And you were planning to sacrifice him for **that?**
I don't know what you're talking about, Kitty. We were just messing with them.


Please! Don't insult me. I can feel your malice, your intent. You stink of it. Go **mess** with someone else. **Go!**
Yeah, yeah we're **going**.
And pray to whomever you pray to that I don't decide to tell her Ladyships.


You okay?
I think so, although I sure did sober up quickly. You're the woman who weighed me.
That's right. As to your sobriety, that shouldn't be a problem for long. This is a club, after all. Call me Kitty.

What was that all about? What just happened?
Yes, all that about a sacrifice? Why can't we leave? Can you tell us, Kitty? What's going **on?**


Nothing to concern yourself with. You **want** a drink. You **will** continue on the path set before you. You **will** go to her.
O-kay, I'm feeling odd again. I think it might have been that knock to the head. Let's carry on, Gugs. I want a drink. Nice talking to you!



The memory has awakened and there's no going back, now.

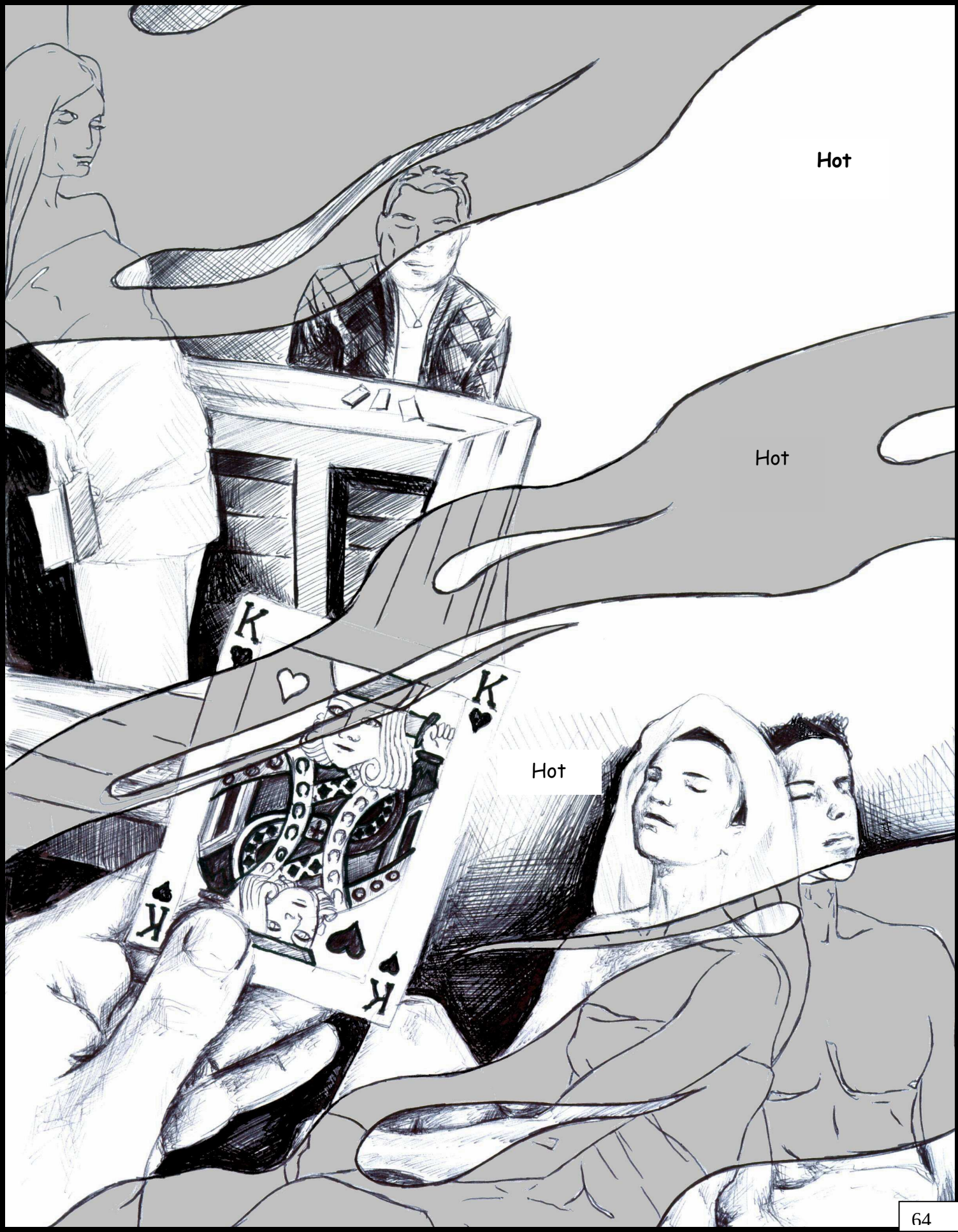
May you become the weapon your name reflects, and may that weapon be strong and sharp.

Although I fear the forge fires were not hot enough, and that you will break under too much strain.

The three who are one are waiting.

You've met one and refused her token.

May you be as strong with the other two.

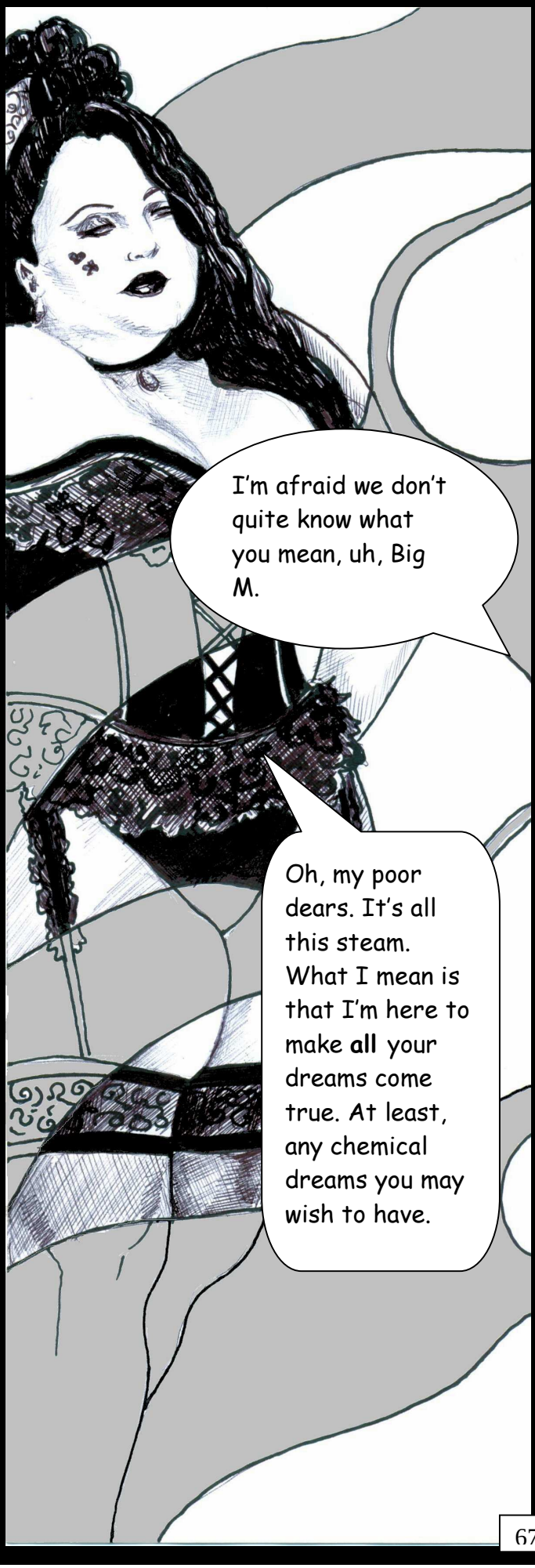

Hot
Hot
Hot

Whoa, I think there's something in this steam.
Mmm, I knooooow

Oh, my **darlings! Welcome!** I've been waiting for you.
Hello
Waiting for us?
Don't interrupt, **naughty** children. You see, I like the sound of my own voice.
Yes, little precious ones, I've been **dying** to meet you. I've heard so much about you from my other third.
Other third? Don't you mean other half?

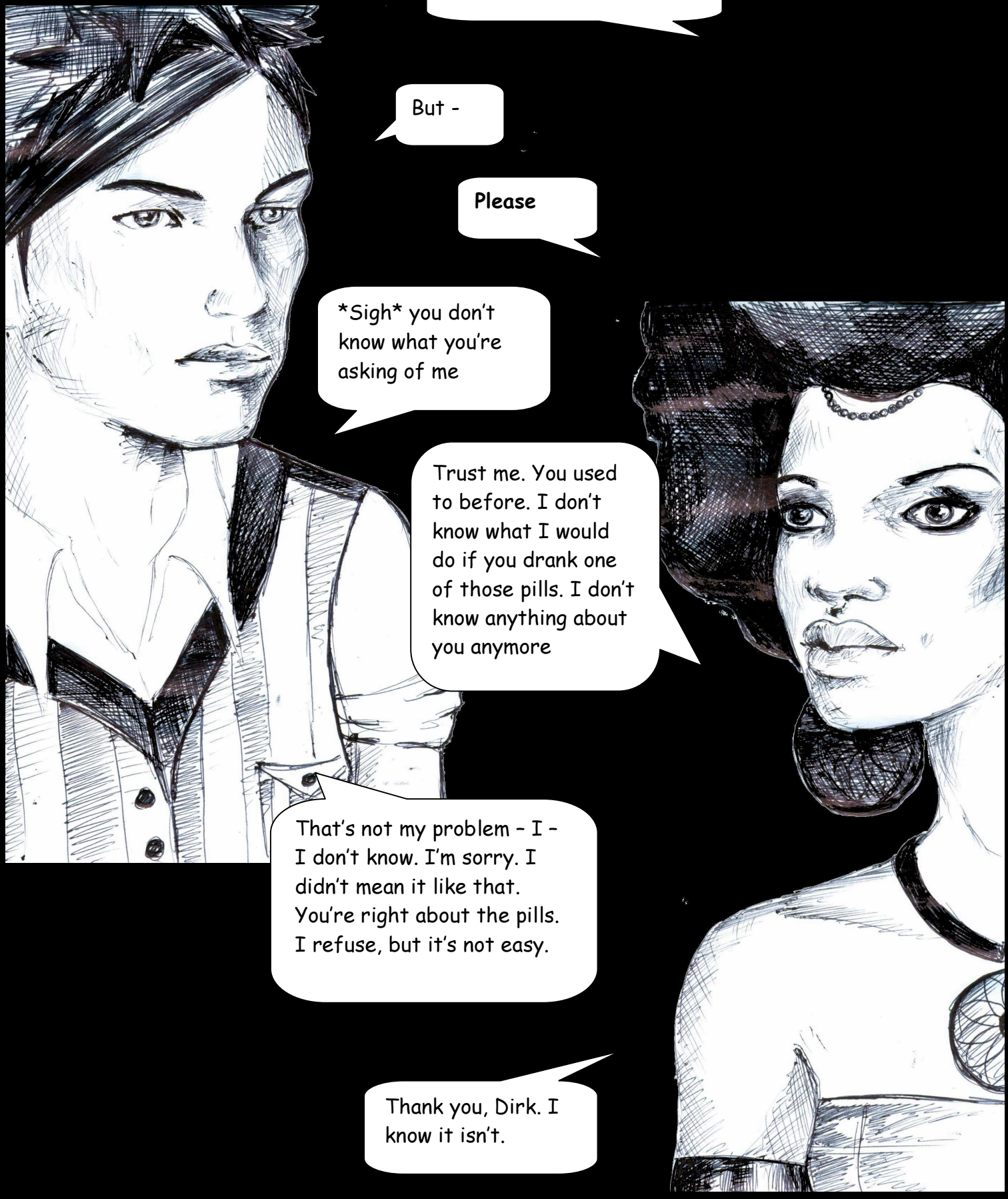
If you interrupt me again, I'll snap you like a twig, understand? Now, you may answer.
Y-yes, we understand.

Good! I love it when people understand each other, don't you? Don't answer that, it was rhetorical. **Now**, the question is not what you can do for Big M, but rather what Big M can do for **you**, if you'll excuse the cliché. You may answer.


I'm afraid we don't quite know what you mean, uh, Big M.
Oh, my poor dears. It's all this steam. What I mean is that I'm here to make **all** your dreams come true. At least, any chemical dreams you may wish to have.

This little pill, my puppies, will give you **such joy**.
DEMENTIA
I **offer** one of these pills to each of you. Come on, sweeties.
You may voice your gratitude.
I don't think that's such a good idea.

Come now. You're young, you're beautiful. Don't you want to let go for a while? All the cares of your young life put on hold.
Your thoughts light, the view breathtaking. Just think – standing on the precipice of despair, weighed down by shame, by guilt – imagine these worrisome chains falling from your pretty little soul. Imagine sloughing your skin of pain to float with the gorgeous. This, and more, I can provide. Just pop it in your mouth. Just **take** it.
Yeah, **that's** what I need.
No more shame, no more guilt.
Dirk! What are you saying?
Come on, sister. Let's take one!
I don' know you like this, Dirk. What happened to you?
Don't listen to the little bitch, my dear. If she refuses to take the pill that's **her** problem. Do you want what I described? Do you **want** it?
Yes
You know I'm no prude, but I don't want to take one. I don't want **you** to either
But I want it. I want what she described. When that woman knocked me out I went to a very bad place. It was so awful, and it's still right here: right beneath the surface


Don't do it. Please, Dirk
But -
Please
Sigh you don't know what you're asking of me
Trust me. You used to before. I don't know what I would do if you drank one of those pills. I don't know anything about you anymore
That's not my problem – I – I don't know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. You're right about the pills. I refuse, but it's not easy.
Thank you, Dirk. I know it isn't.

You refuse **me**? Ooh, she was right! You **are** a little minx, aren't you? **AHAHAHAHAHAHA**
Well, I am impressed, my dears. Well impressed. You might say you've dodged yet another bullet, but we'll see how you do against the last offering, shall we? I could tell from the beginning you weren't supposed to reside within **my** aspect, and neither are you meant for the crone, but we'll see with the last one.
Get thee gone, or in less exalted terms: **Fuck off!**
AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!

I have no words.

Giggle She's right, there must be somthin in this steam.

Dirk, this steamy smoke is **really** getting to me

giggle I quite liked her, apart from the whole drug dealer thing.

She was like some Grande Madame in a cheap brothel.

Ooh, sister, I'm all **over** the show.

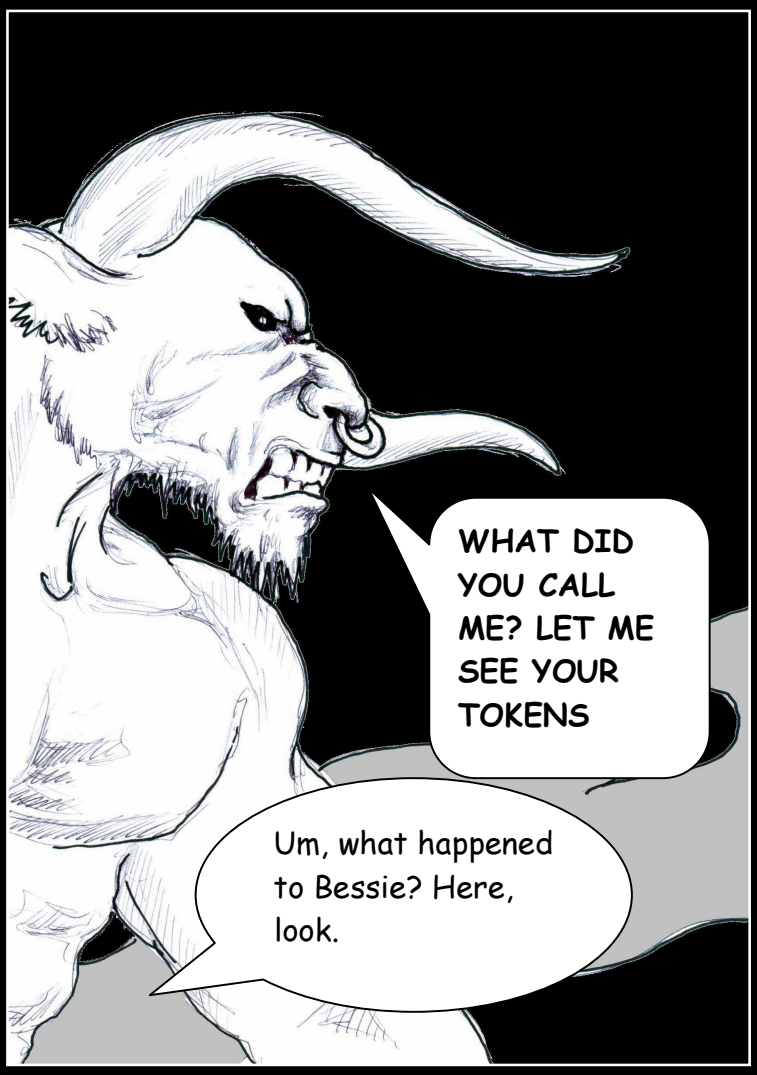
Stop it, you're making me **laugh** *giggle*

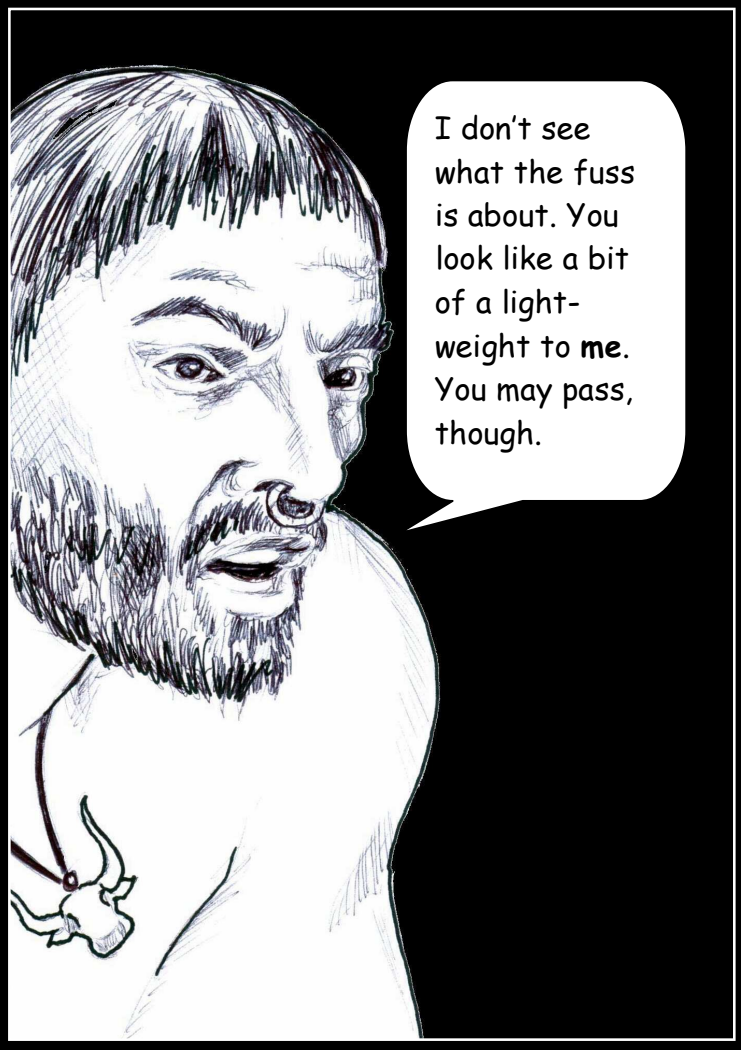
giggle

Balls to the wall!

Ahahaha, I think we need to get some fresh **air!**

FOUNDER OF CULT XXVI
Dirk's right about the fresh air. That statue just winked at me!
Call me Bessie.
Well heloooo Bessie. Hey, **you're** not Bessie. Bessie was **prettier**.


WHAT DID YOU CALL ME? LET ME SEE YOUR TOKENS
Um, what happened to Bessie? Here, look.


I don't see what the fuss is about. You look like a bit of a light-weight to **me**. You may pass, though.

Mo. . . o O
?

Floors and walls a blood red. Not the bright happy red when people think of when they say 'blood red'.

But the colour of **blood**: from hot gushing arterial blood to the colder slower darker blood of veins.

Welcome! Welcome, I am **honoured**. Please, do accept this drink with our compliments for coming this far.

Are you real?

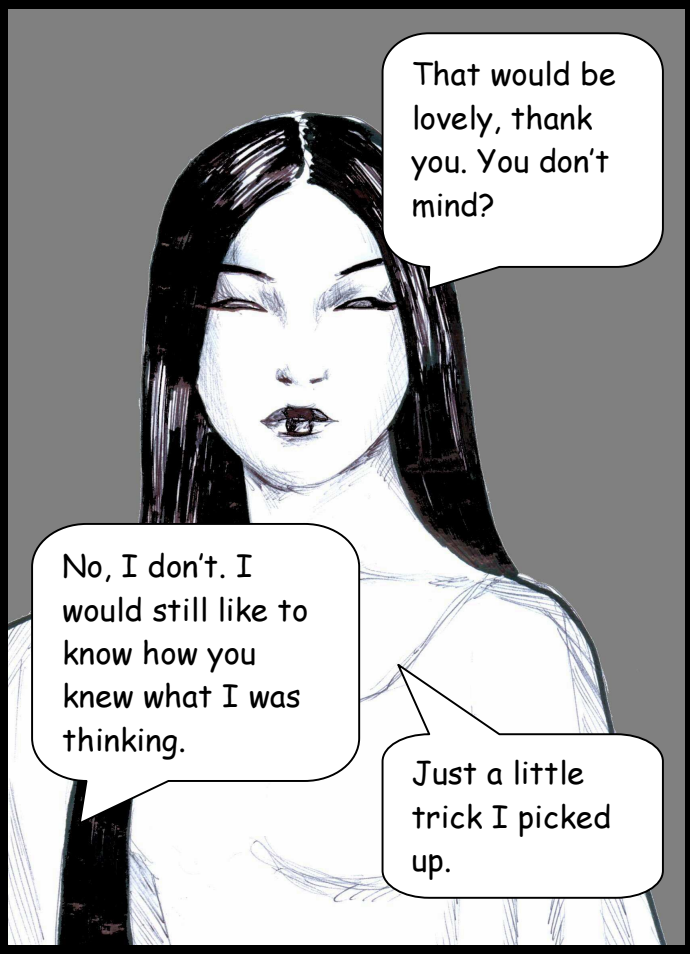
Well, what a silly question: of **course** not!

Do follow me to your table.

It looks like it **is** possible to drown yourself in drink in **this** place.

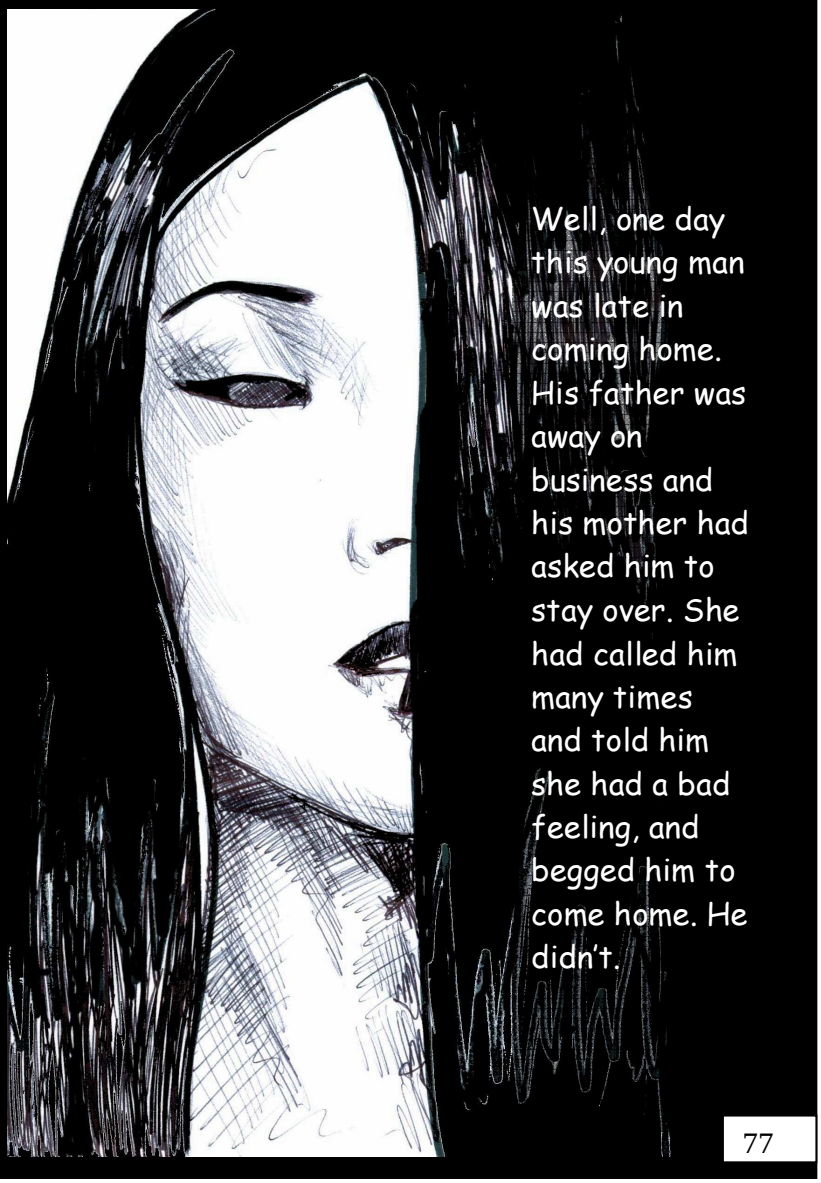
Of **course** it's possible. It **is** a liquid, after all.
Excuse me?
Oh, you weren't thinking that at **me**, I assume.
How did you **do** that?

Here you go. Let me get you fresh drinks.
I think we're fine for now. We haven't even started on **these**.
Nonsense! I'll go, shall I? A chair for your new lady friend?


That would be lovely, thank you. You don't mind?
No, I don't. I would still like to know how you knew what I was thinking.
Just a little trick I picked up.

Would you like me to tell you a story?
A story? What is this, primary school?
Let me tell it to you, please..

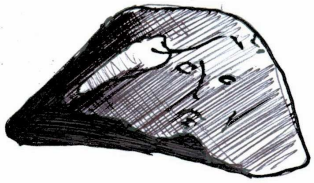
Fine, tell us your **story**.
Excellent! It all begins with a boy: a young man, really.


Well, one day this young man was late in coming home. His father was away on business and his mother had asked him to stay over. She had called him many times and told him she had a bad feeling, and begged him to come home. He didn't.

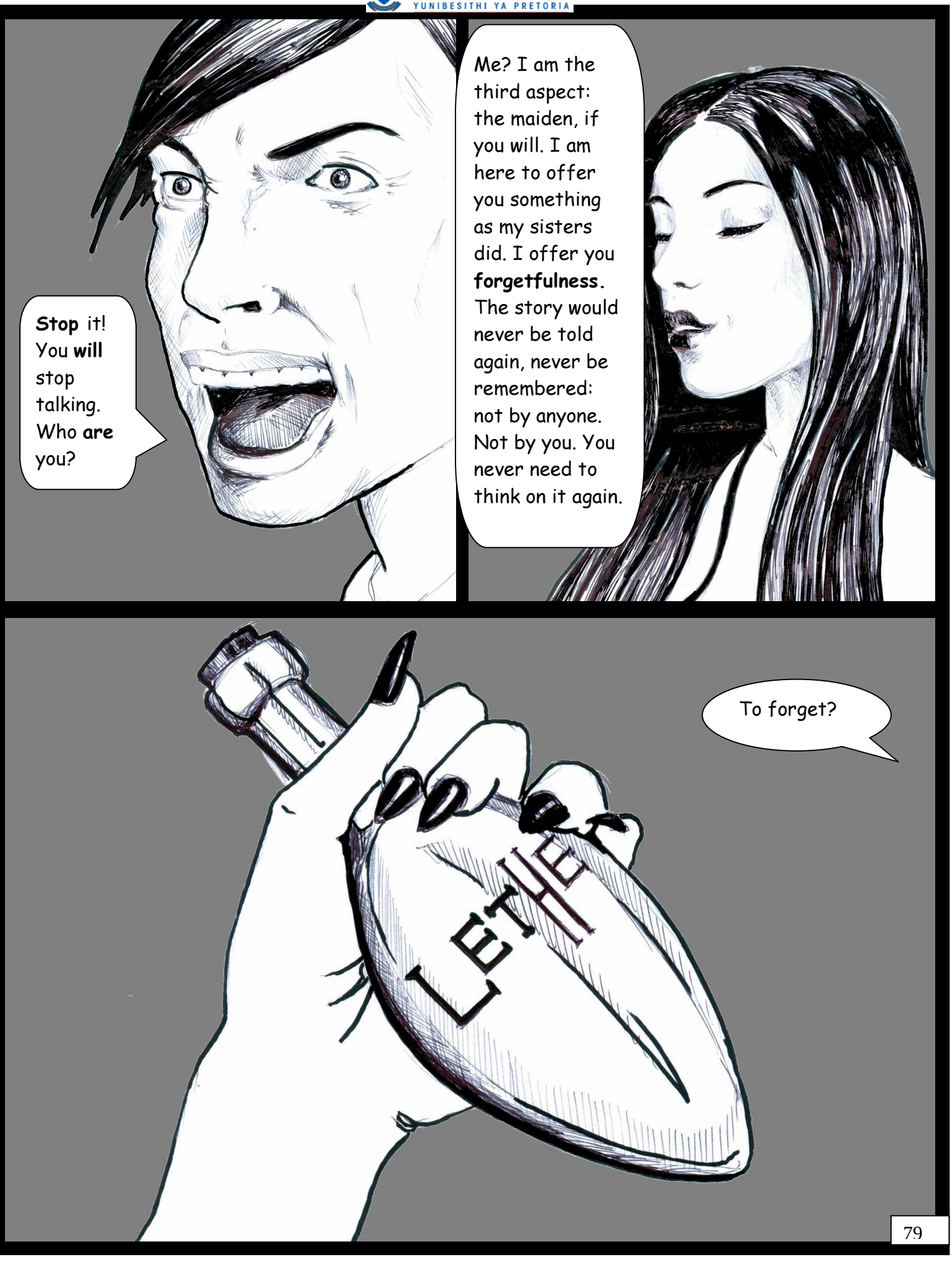
He opened the front door, calling out to his mother.

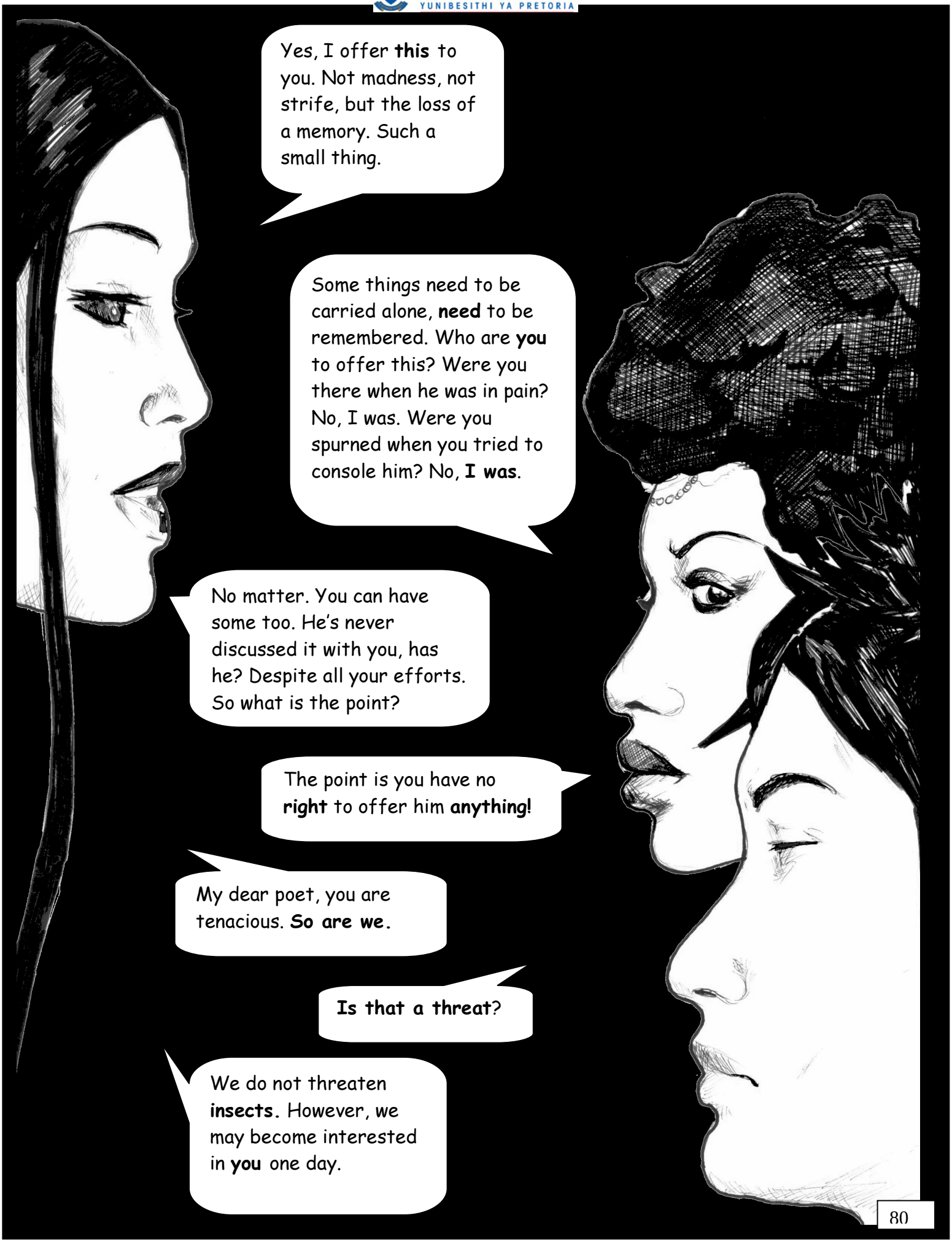
She didn't answer. It was rather late, so the young man assumed she had gone to bed. All the lights were on, however.

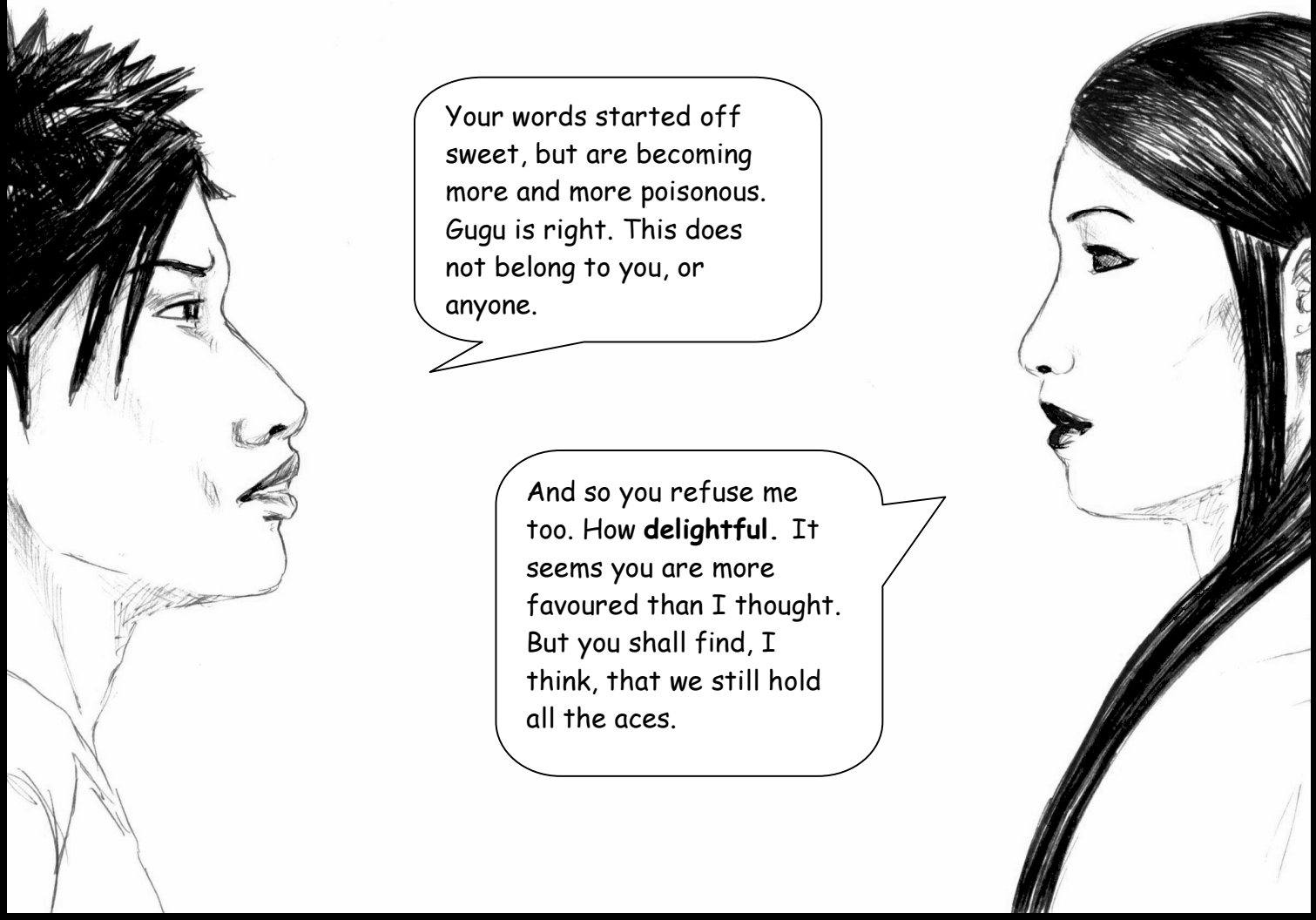
He thought it odd that a lone shoe was lying at the end of the hallway, but he was drunk. You see, he lied to his mother. He had told her he was working, but he was out with his many friends.

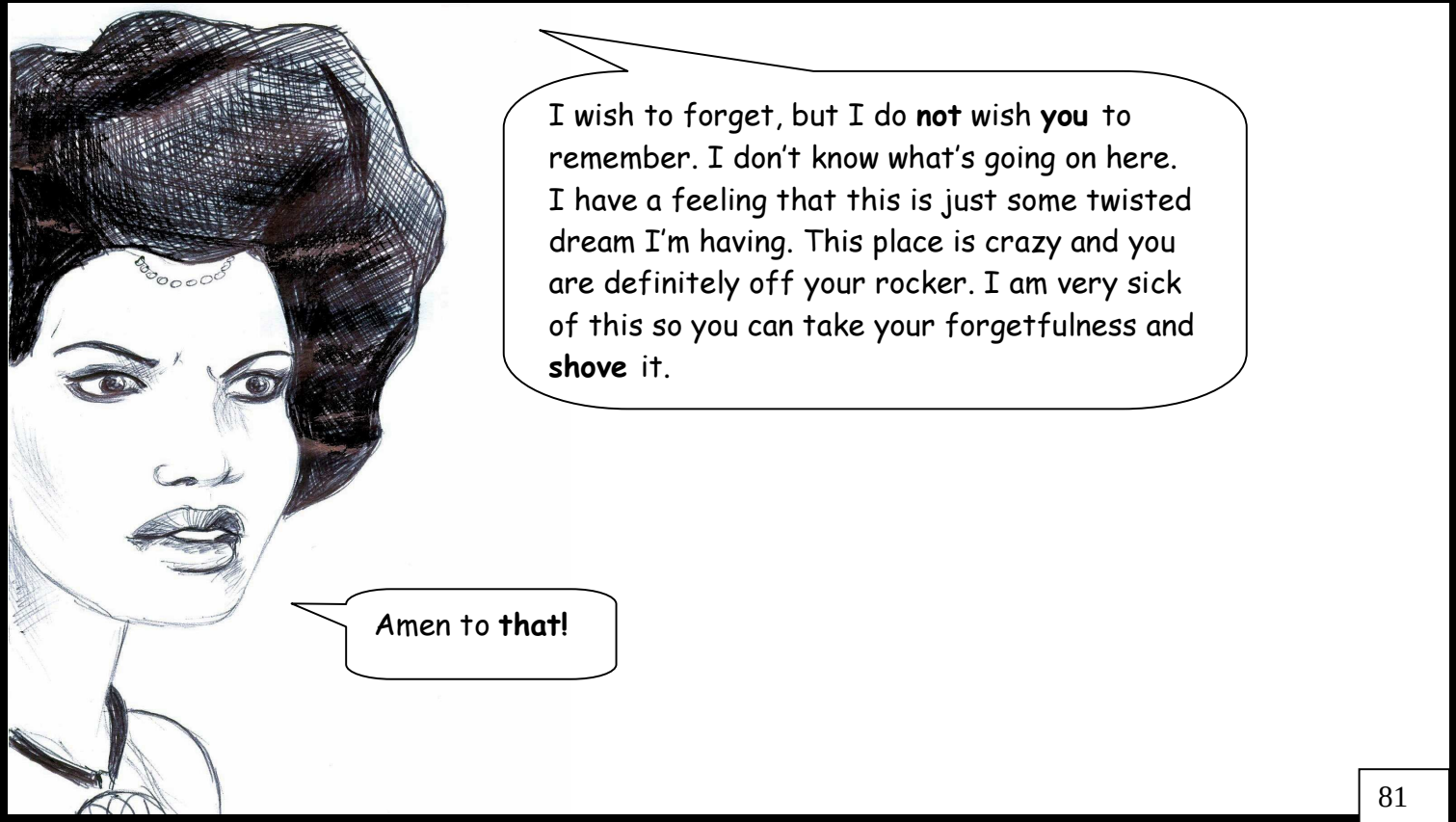


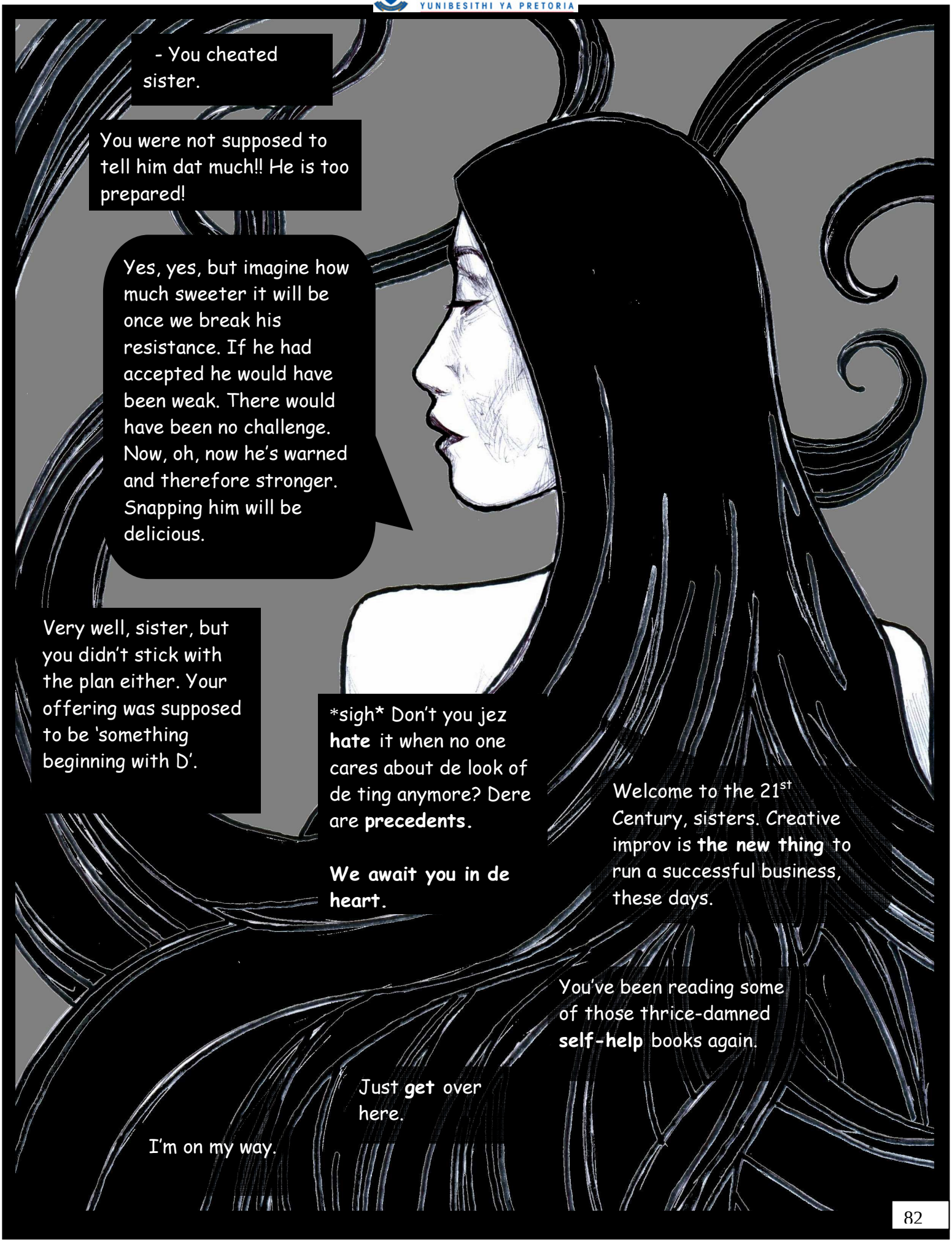
The young man reached and almost touched his reflection.


Stop it! You **will** stop talking. Who **are** you?
Me? I am the third aspect: the maiden, if you will. I am here to offer you something as my sisters did. I offer you **forgetfulness**. The story would never be told again, never be remembered: not by anyone. Not by you. You never need to think on it again.
LETHE
To forget?

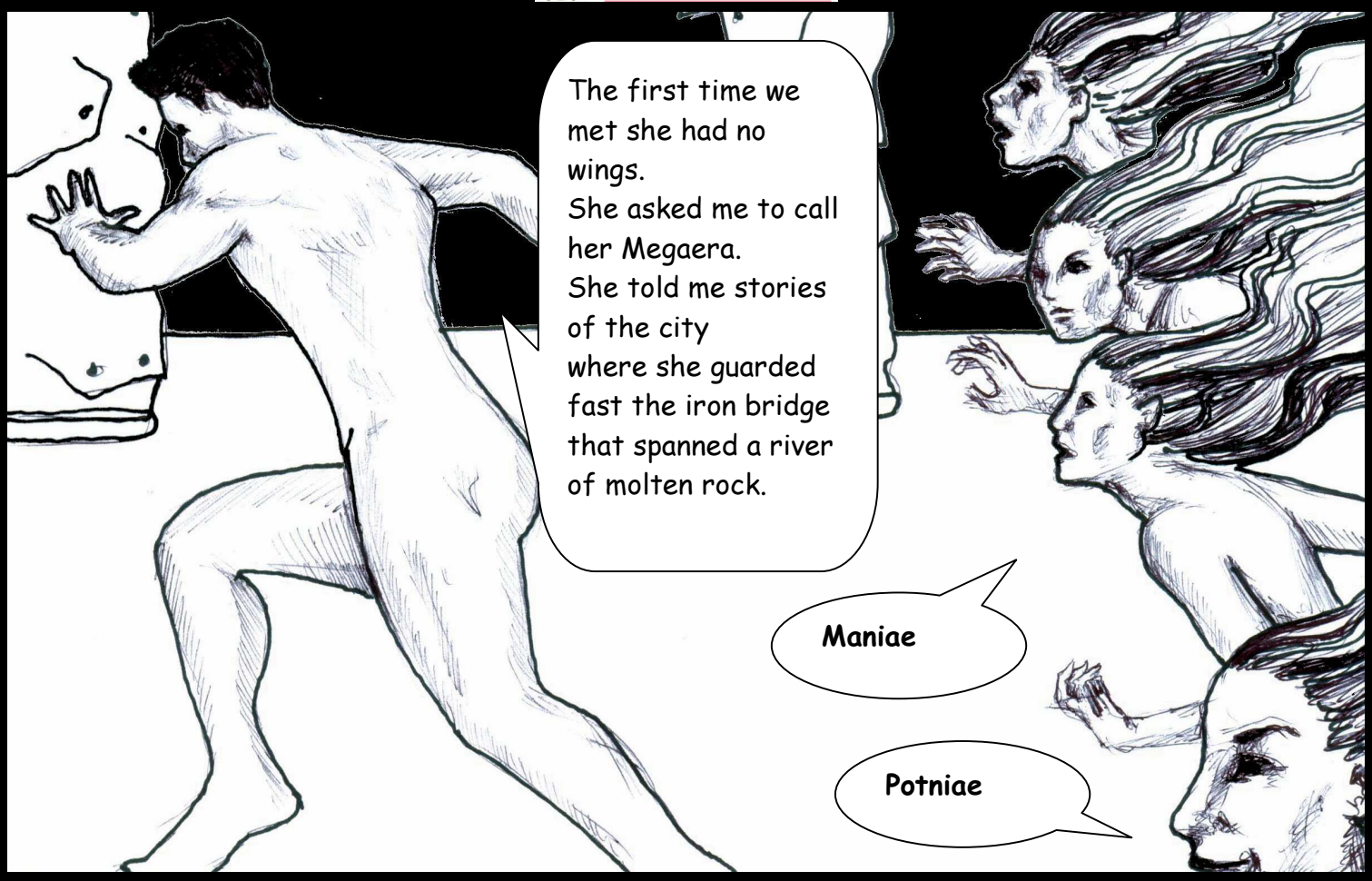

Yes, I offer **this** to you. Not madness, not strife, but the loss of a memory. Such a small thing.
Some things need to be carried alone, **need** to be remembered. Who are **you** to offer this? Were you there when he was in pain? No, I was. Were you spurned when you tried to console him? No, **I was**.
No matter. You can have some too. He's never discussed it with you, has he? Despite all your efforts. So what is the point?
The point is you have no **right** to offer him **anything!**
My dear poet, you are tenacious. **So are we.**
Is that a threat?
We do not threaten **insects.** However, we may become interested in **you** one day.


Your words started off sweet, but are becoming more and more poisonous. Gugu is right. This does not belong to you, or anyone.
And so you refuse me too. How **delightful**. It seems you are more favoured than I thought. But you shall find, I think, that we still hold all the aces.


I wish to forget, but I do **not** wish **you** to remember. I don't know what's going on here. I have a feeling that this is just some twisted dream I'm having. This place is crazy and you are definitely off your rocker. I am very sick of this so you can take your forgetfulness and **shove** it.
Amen to **that!**


- You cheated sister.
You were not supposed to tell him dat much!! He is too prepared!
Yes, yes, but imagine how much sweeter it will be once we break his resistance. If he had accepted he would have been weak. There would have been no challenge. Now, oh, now he's warned and therefore stronger. Snapping him will be delicious.
Very well, sister, but you didn't stick with the plan either. Your offering was supposed to be 'something beginning with D'.
sigh Don't you jez **hate** it when no one cares about de look of de ting anymore? Dere are **precedents**.
We await you in de heart.
Welcome to the 21st Century, sisters. Creative improv is **the new thing** to run a successful business, these days.
You've been reading some of those thrice-damned **self-help** books again.
Just **get** over here.
I'm on my way.

Are you alright?
I'm so tired. **So tired**. I should have accepted. I should have forgotten.
No, you did the right thing. I get the feeling this place is for you, Dirk. Just you.
I know. This is insane. I'm red raw, Gugs. I feel like I'm about to split at the seams. My skin will crack and everything will spill out like so much worthless meat.
Dirk, I'm here.
I'm always here.


The first time we met she had no wings.
She asked me to call her Megaera.
She told me stories of the city where she guarded fast the iron bridge that spanned a river of molten rock.
Maniae
Potniae

Stories like the son of poetry who played to them; made them wail and weep.
About the other ones she guarded, she was single-mindedly silent.
Dirae
Dirae

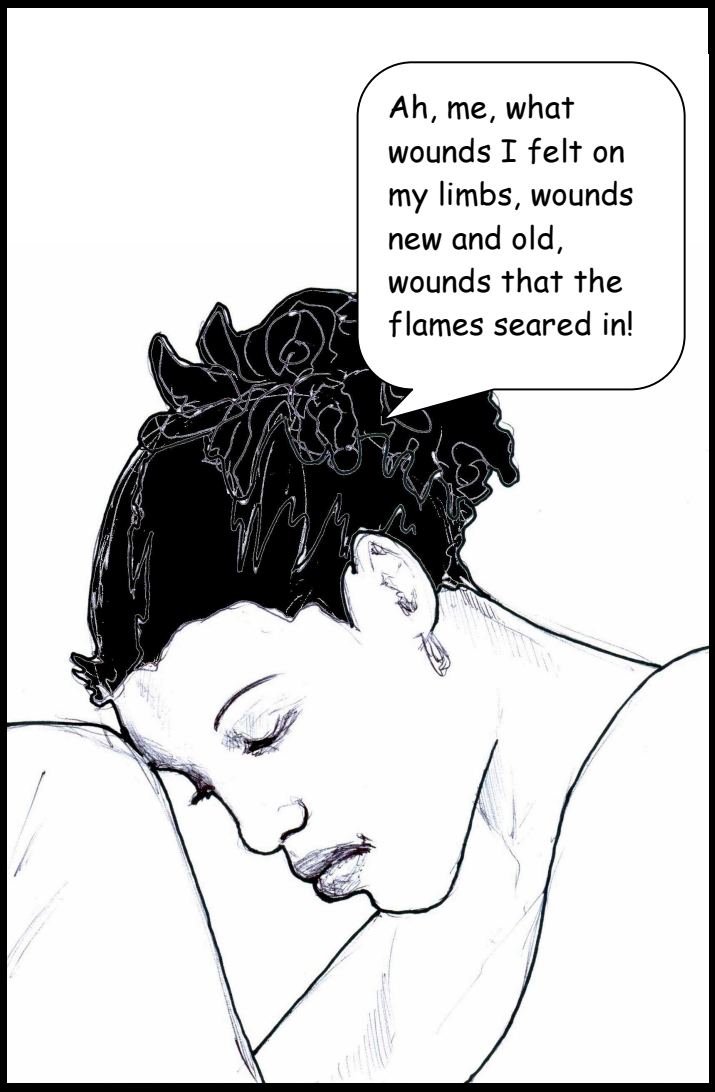
Her cold mane coils: snapping and scaled.
From her orbs courses crimson blight.
So beautiful, my jealous one,
but above all so unceasing.
Unceasing, Grudging, Emerging from Night
Beneath the earth Punishing
Her dark sisters and she shadow me
until I willingly stand before her and raise my abandoned dead eyes,
at last, to see her rawhide wings spread.

That was **disturbing**.
After everything you've seen so far, you're **surprised?**
I think **not** being surprised anymore can get dangerous in this place.

A beach party, tinny Calypso music
Tears
It burns it burns
Fire from the sky
It burns it burns Molten rain
It burns it burns, and we cry the tears of flame

They're not doing anything – not moving.
The water's hot.

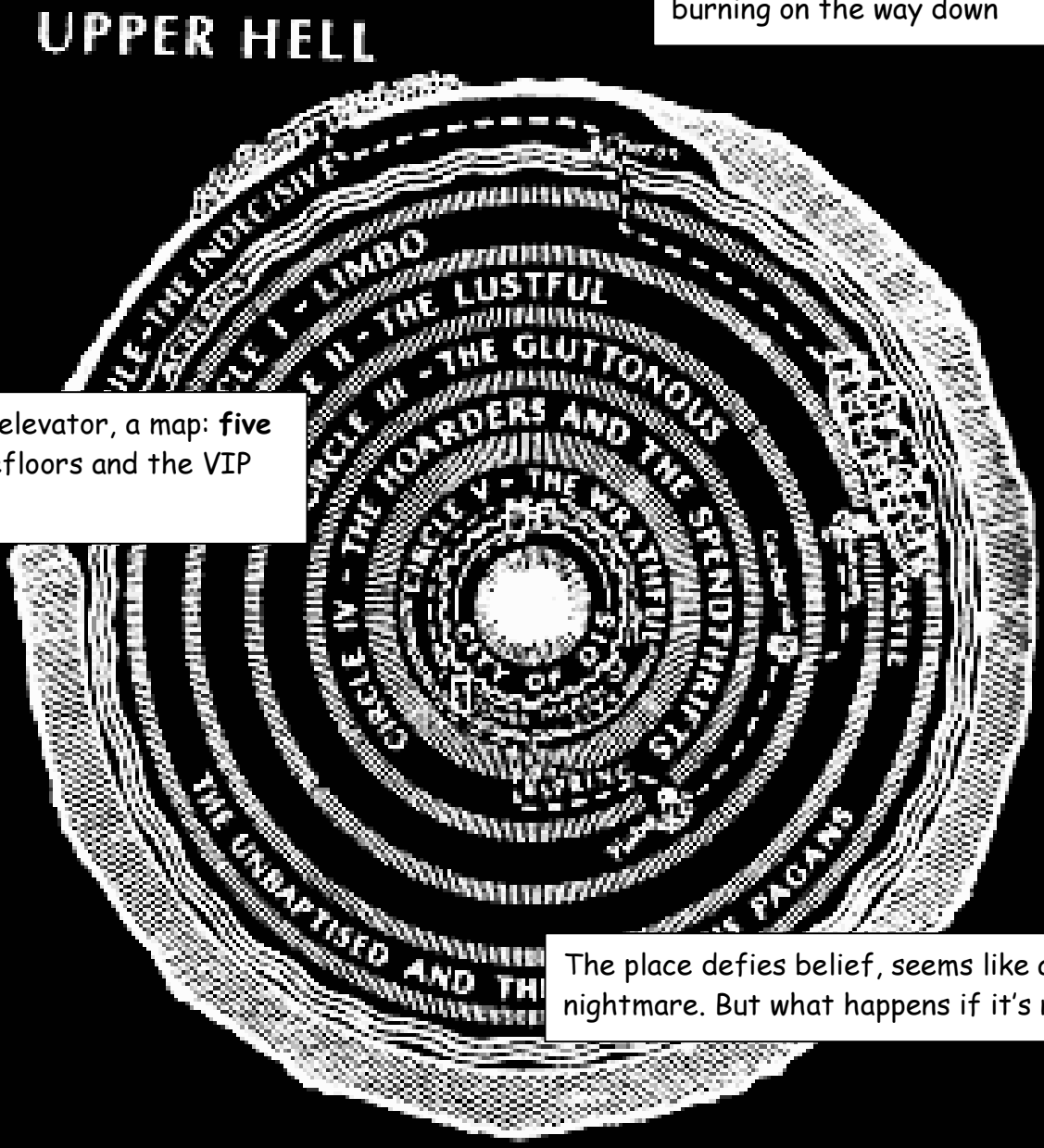
Too hot for **me**, thanks. I just want to get through this as quickly as possible.
Agreed



The sand is unbearably hot. Why do they stay here?
Emptiness haunting -

Industrial Elevator manned by a bouncer with the shadow of a demon

Shooters called **Inferno** burning on the way down

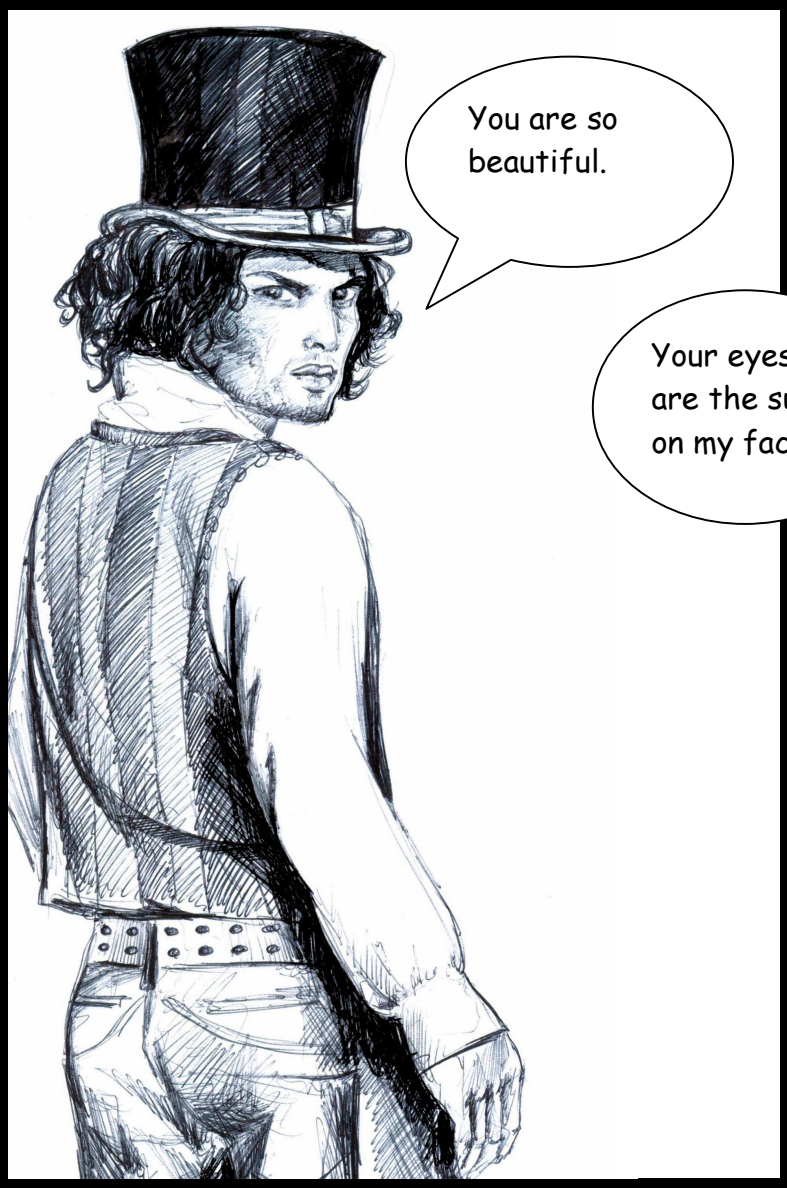


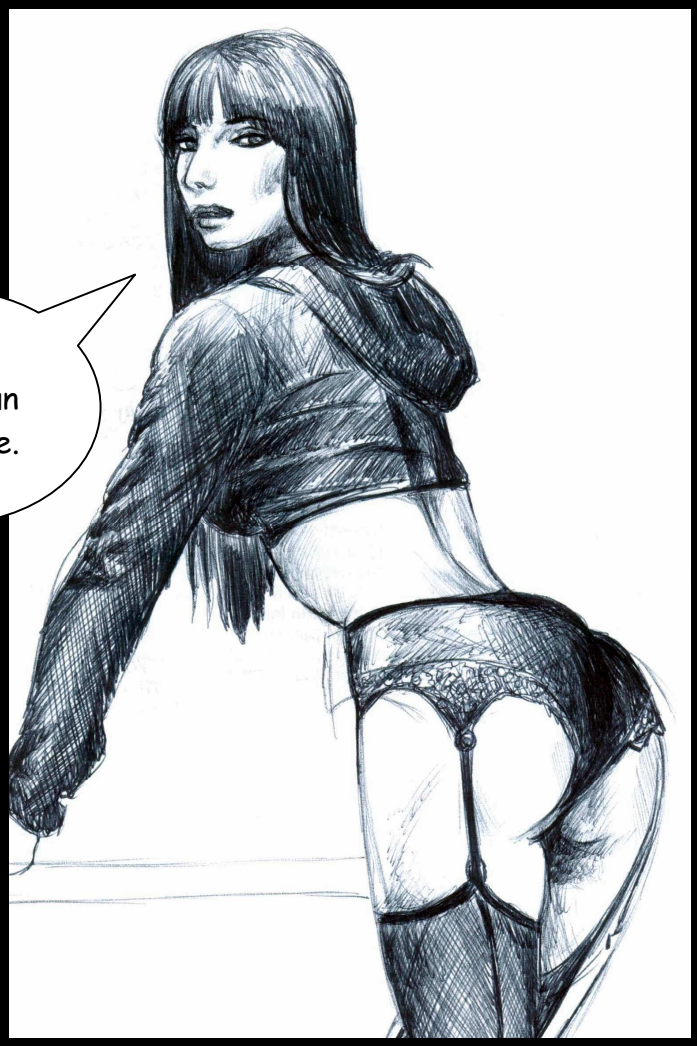
Inside the elevator, a map: **five** more dancefloors and the VIP area

The place defies belief, seems like a nightmare. But what happens if it's not?

The room of flatterers approaches…

UNWRAP ME
BEAUTIFUL
GORGEOUS
FUCK
FILTHY
MMMM
What's this supposed to be?
I don't know, hon, but get me a drink and let's **mingle**.
I thought he wanted to get through this as soon as possible.


You are so beautiful.


Your eyes are the sun on my face.

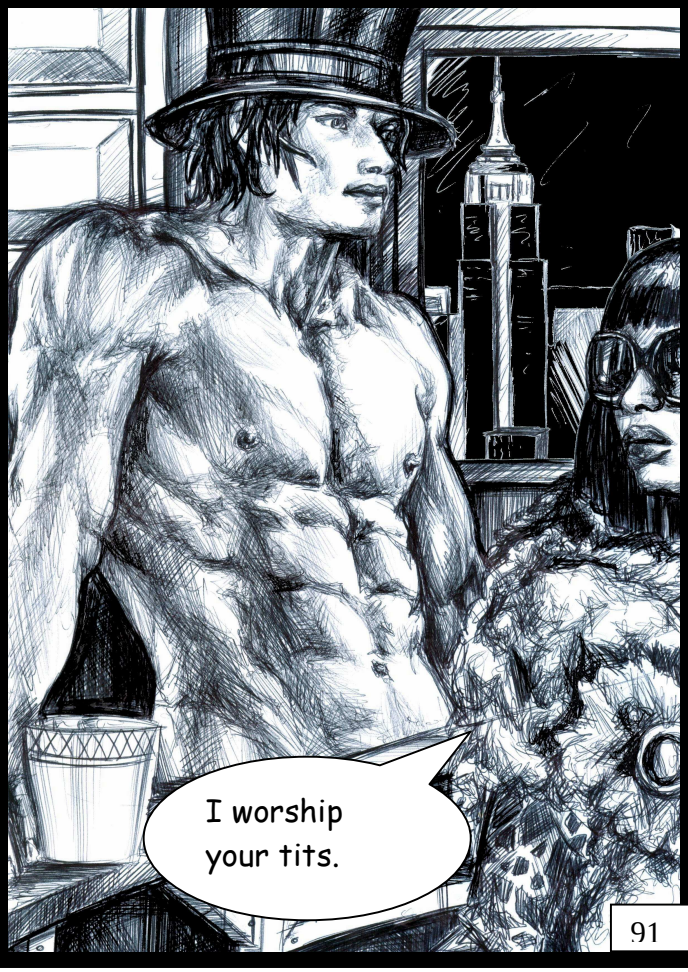
Your breasts are a soothing balm.

Your thighs are my hope

Your penis my joy
Your vagina my haven

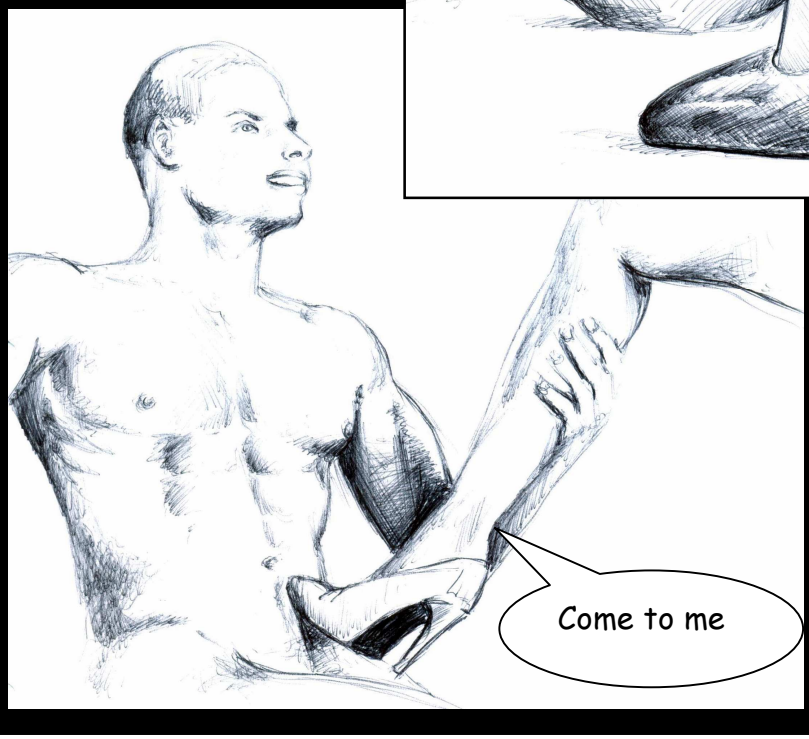
Come to me
Come in me

I worship your arms.


I worship your tits.

I worship your cunt.

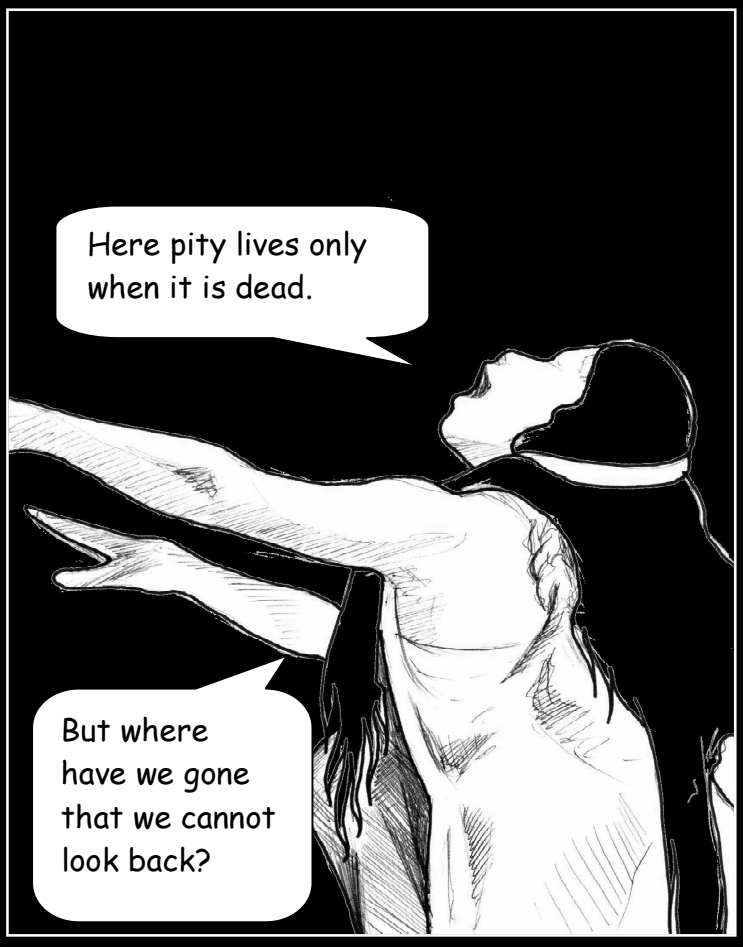
I worship your cock.

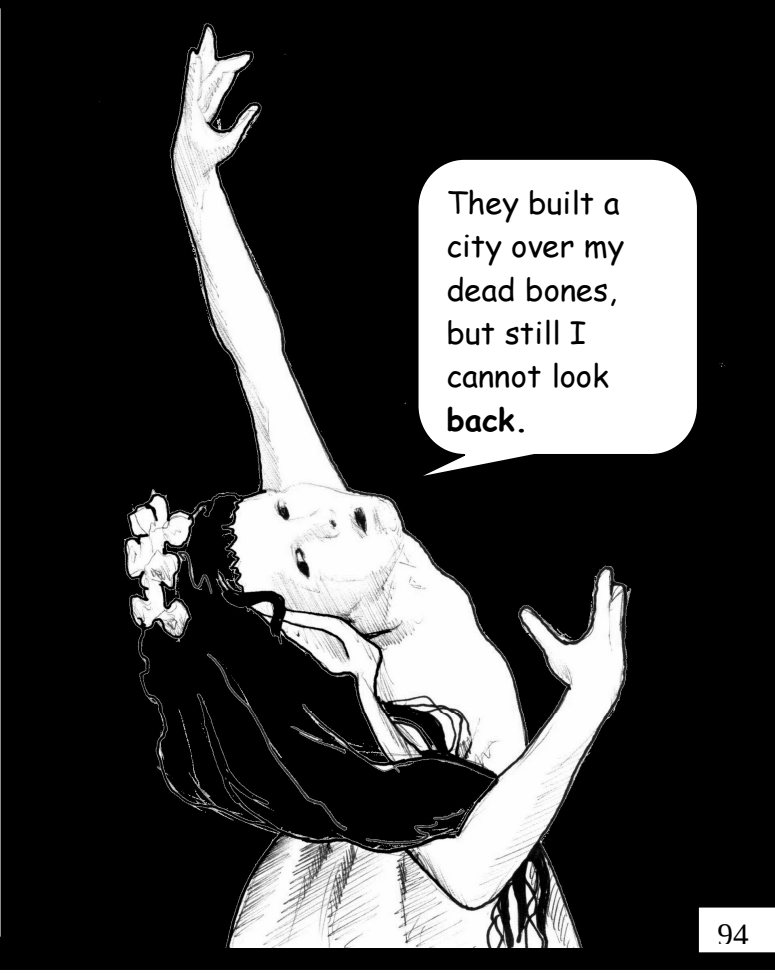


Do you want to join my congregation?
I don't think we're what you're looking for in a congregation. Come on, Dirk. let's go.
Wait! He's a **really** cute priest.
Dirk, that was definitely **not** a real priest. Come **on**. You're like an emotional roller coaster. It's exhausting.
I've decided none of this is real: it couldn't possibly be. So I might as well have some fun along the way.

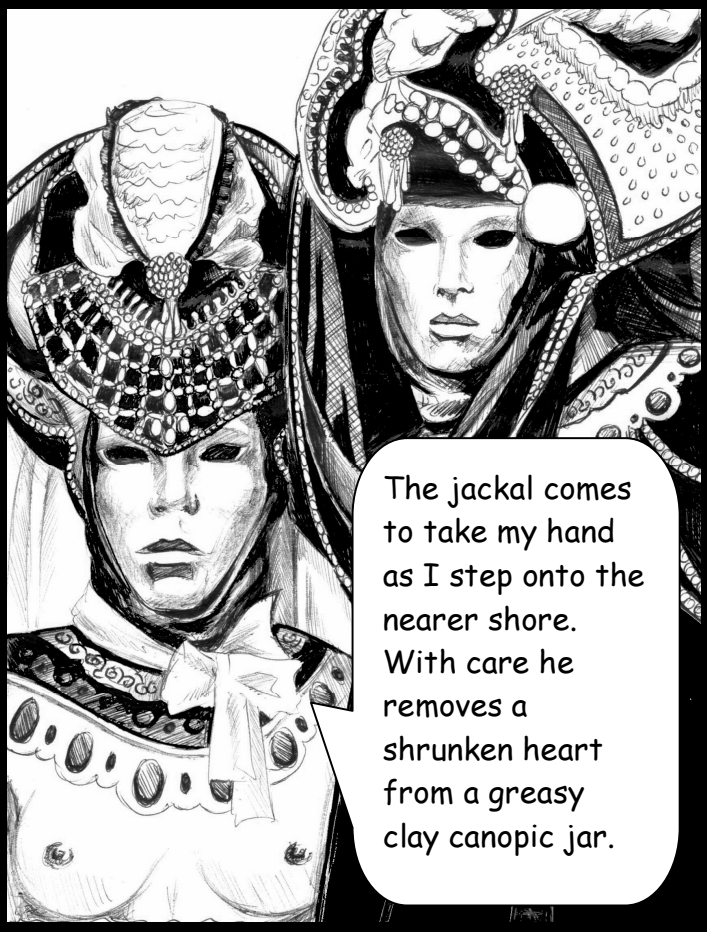
None of this is real? What about me?

I open my heart a little .
I look forward, but walk back.


Here pity lives only when it is dead.
But where have we gone that we cannot look back?

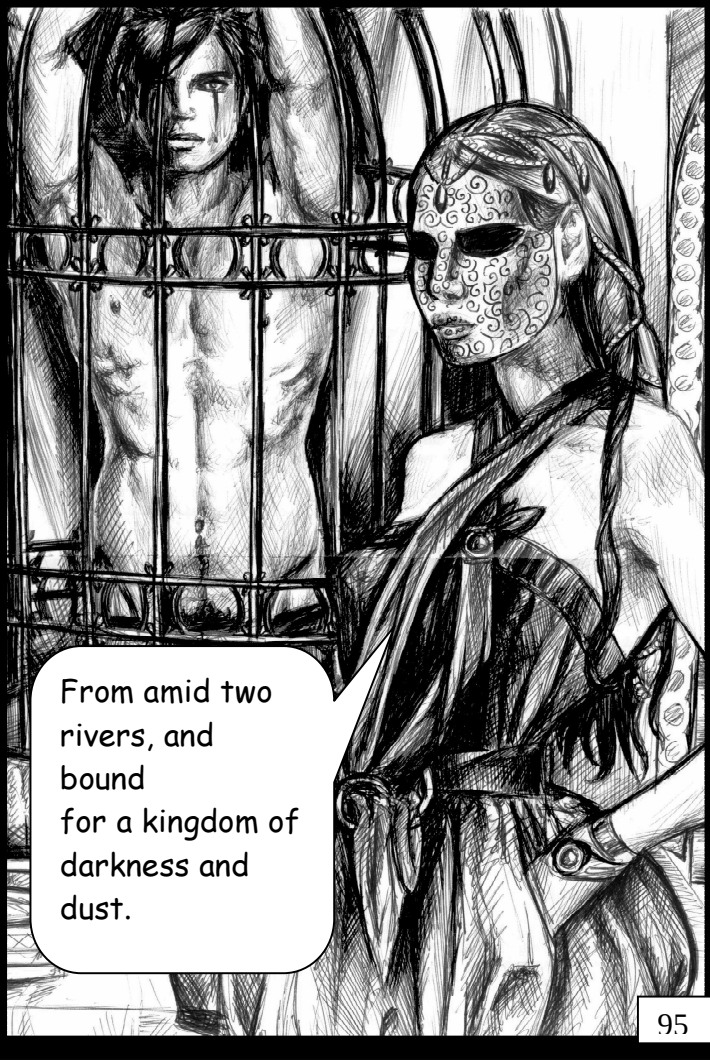

They built a city over my dead bones, but still I cannot look **back**.

Just keep moving, Dirk. Do you believe you're still in Amsterdam, in your convenient little hideout? This **is** real. **I am real**. Don't you **dare** run away again, even if it's in your mind this time. **Face it**.

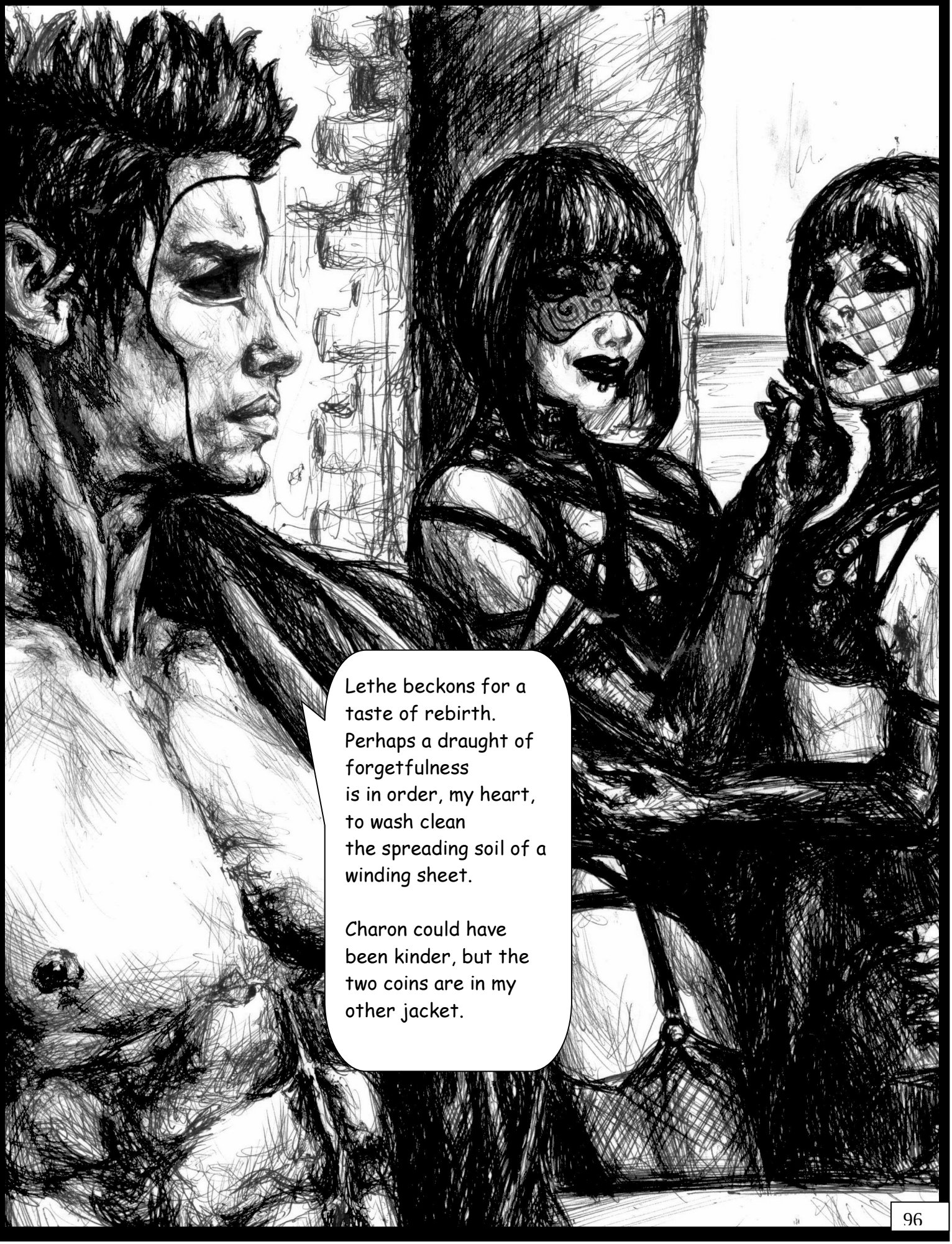


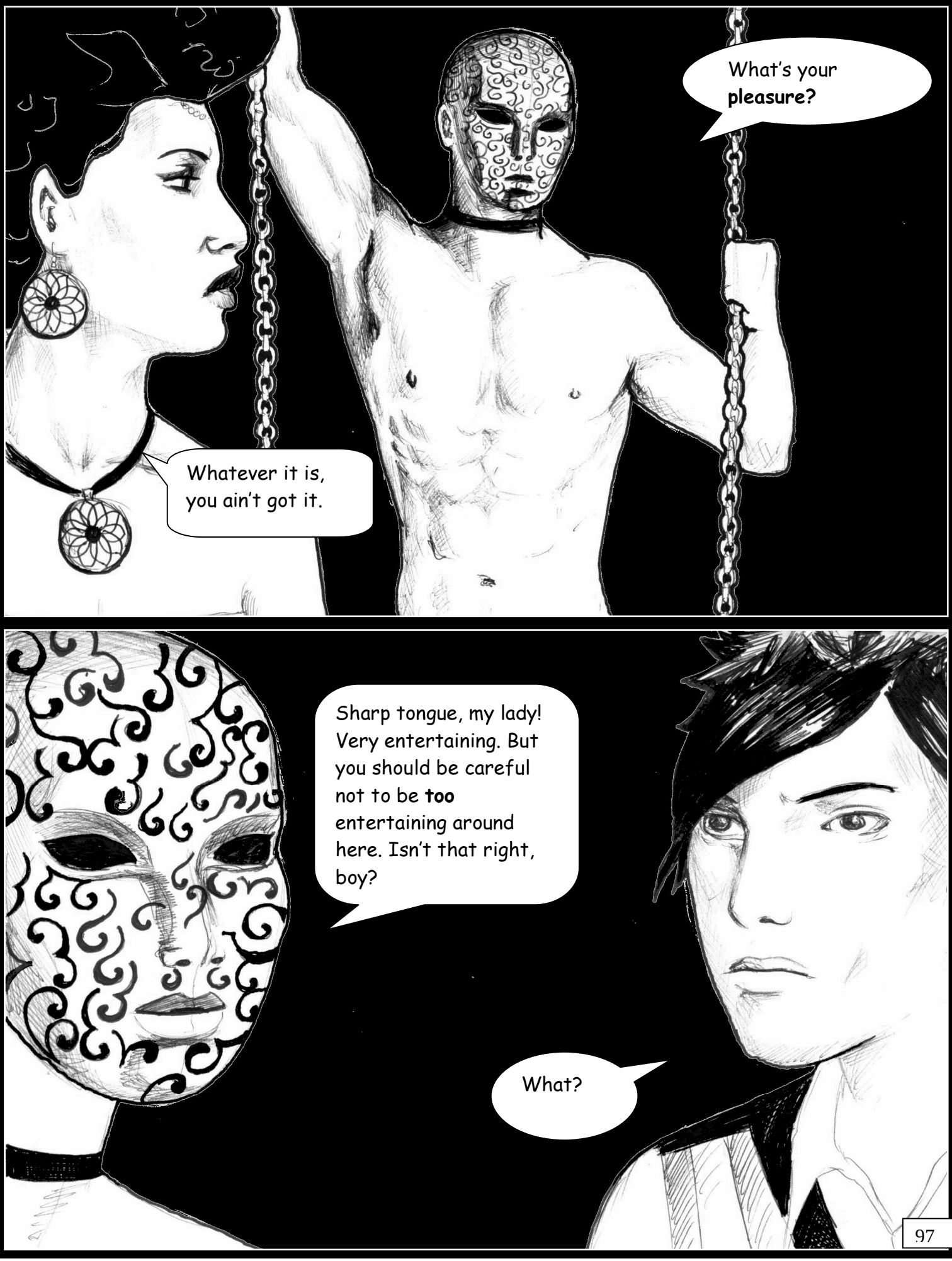
The jackal comes to take my hand as I step onto the nearer shore. With care he removes a shrunken heart from a greasy clay canopic jar.

Or maybe one of the other boats:
that one at the end of the pier.

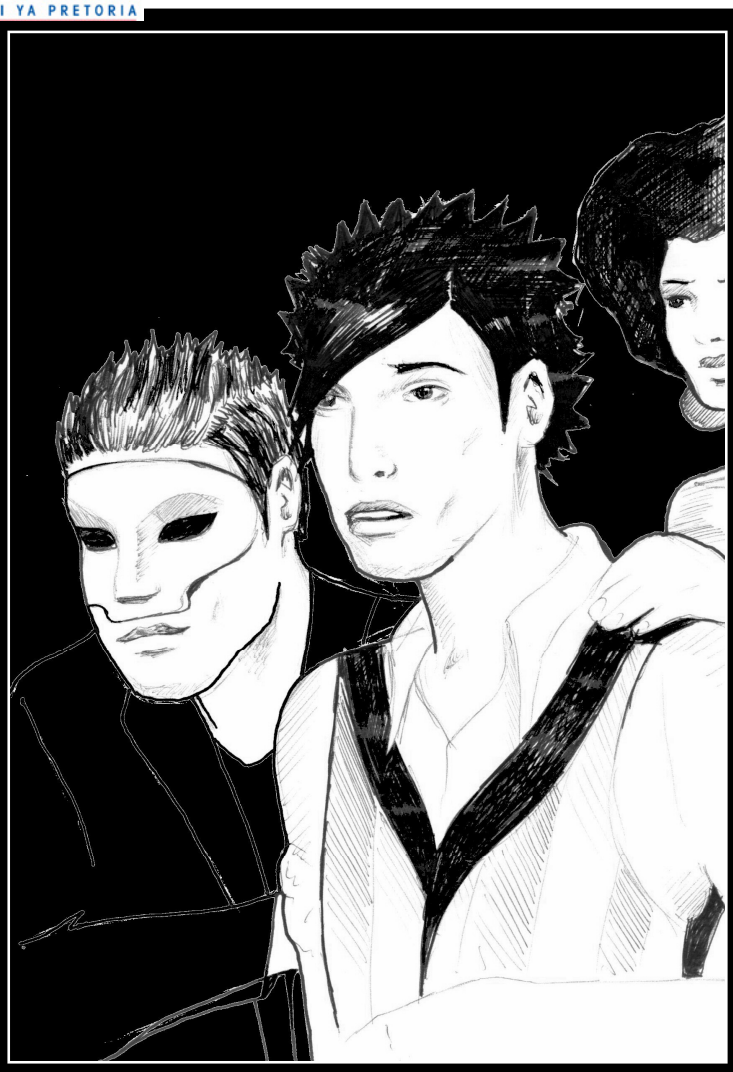


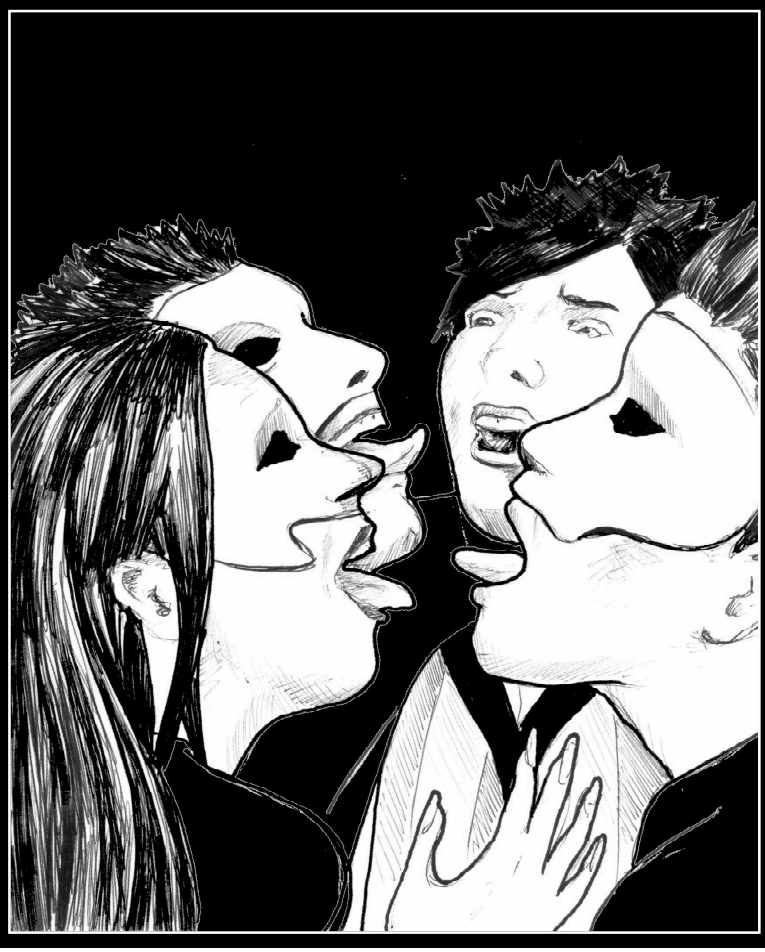
From amid two rivers, and bound
for a kingdom of darkness and dust.

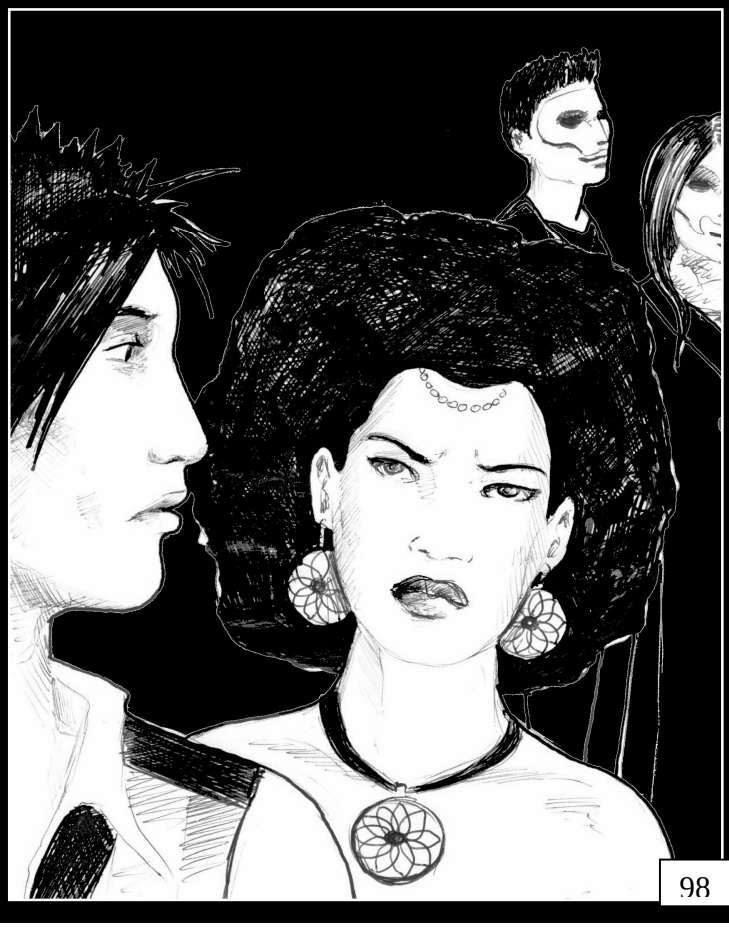

Lethe beckons for a taste of rebirth. Perhaps a draught of forgetfulness is in order, my heart, to wash clean the spreading soil of a winding sheet.
Charon could have been kinder, but the two coins are in my other jacket.

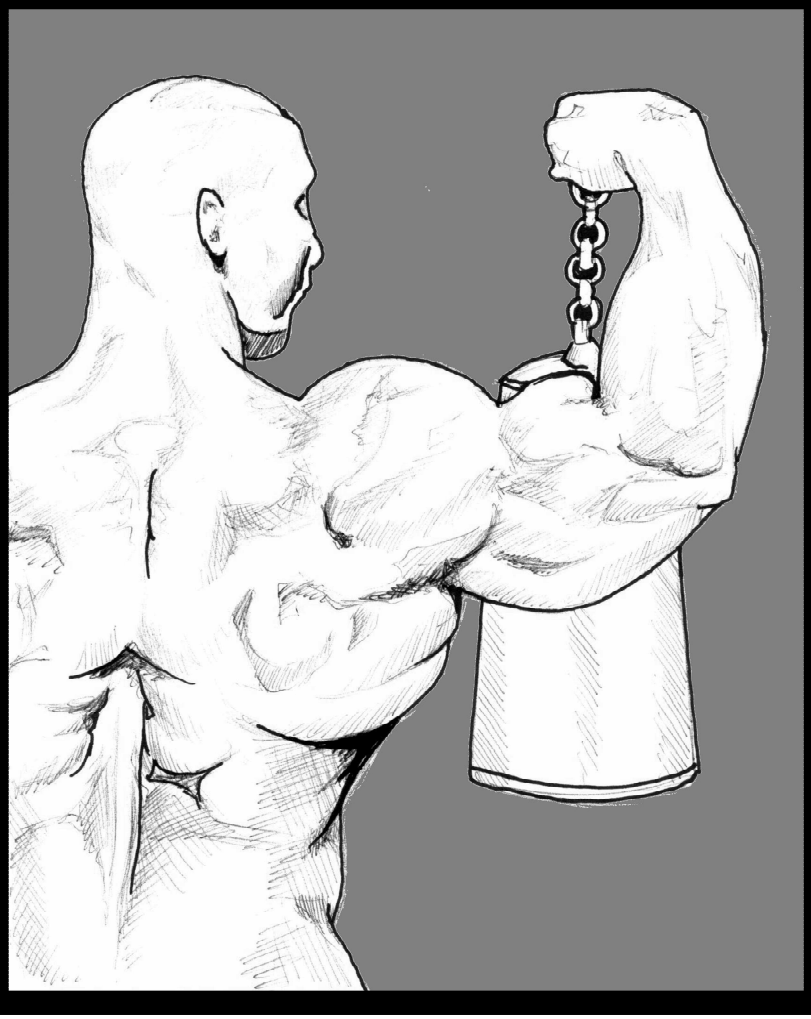

What's your **pleasure?**
Whatever it is, you ain't got it.
Sharp tongue, my lady! Very entertaining. But you should be careful not to be **too** entertaining around here. Isn't that right, boy?
What?

Come, my people need to show you through to the next floor.

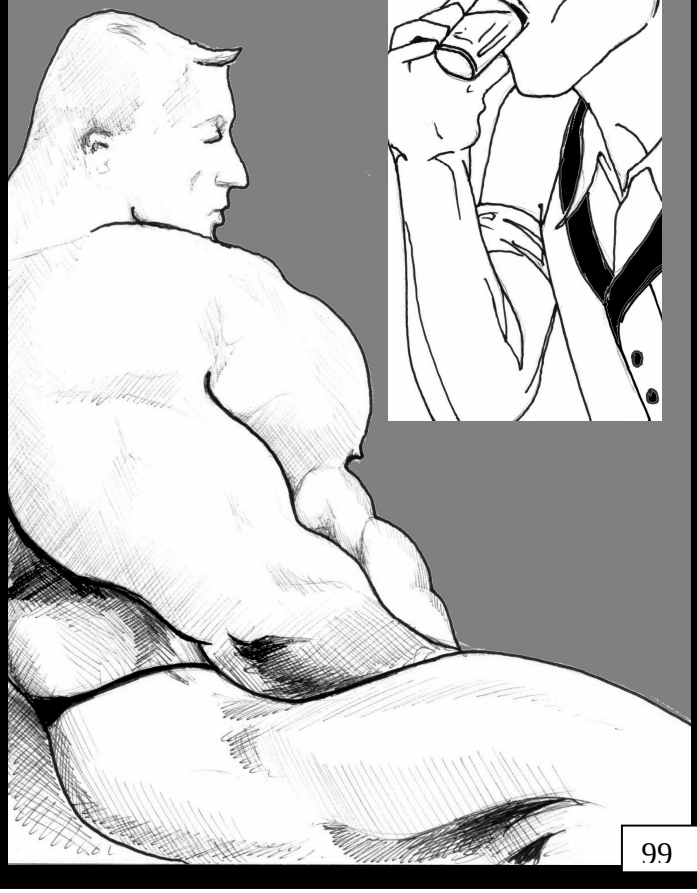






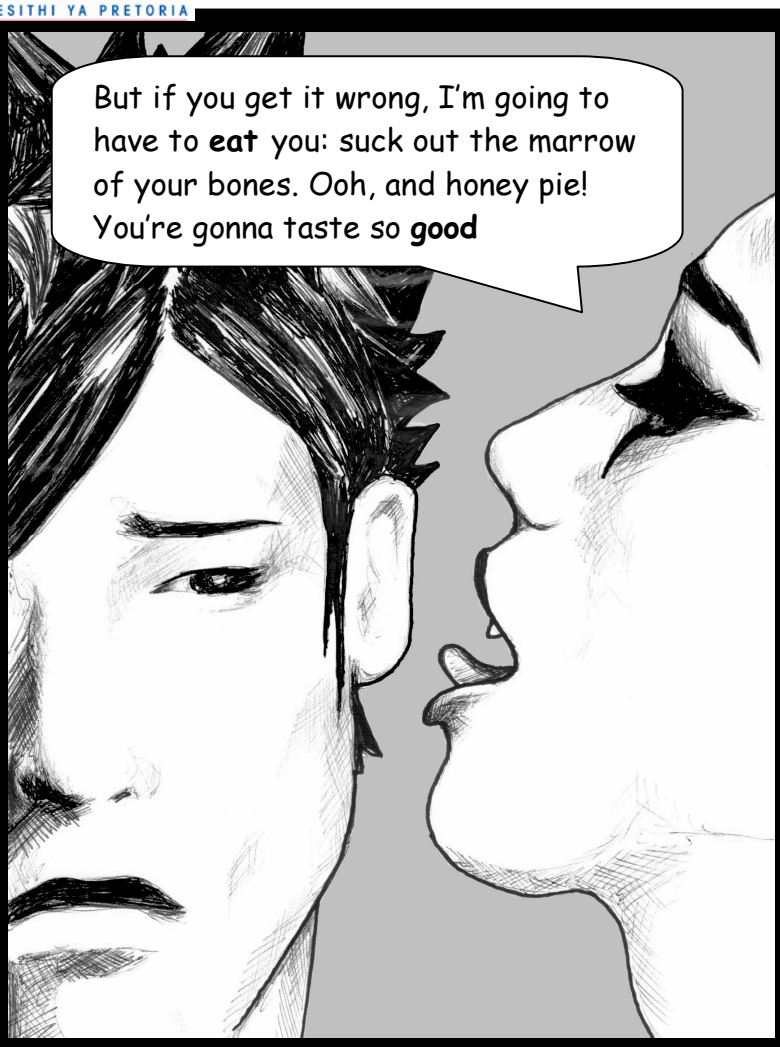


Coping mechanisms

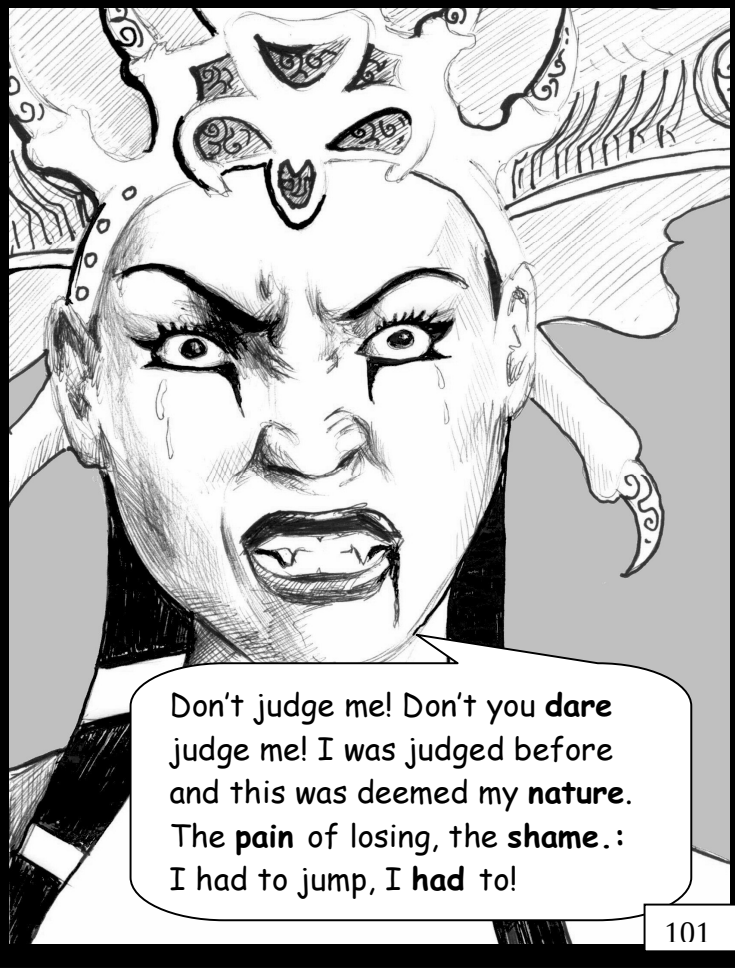


No no **no!** I'm not good with snakes, Dirk!
I can steal the breath from a child in the night
That is no feat. I can steal the beard off a venerable man, without him noticing.
What about **you?**
gulp Uh, I suppose I've stolen a library book once. **Please** don't let your pet come any **closer!**
Stealing the wisdom of a **city**
Why didn't I think of that?
Dirk! We're leaving

Hello Dreamer, or is it traveler? I have a riddle for you
Uh, okay


But if you get it wrong, I'm going to have to **eat** you: suck out the marrow of your bones. Ooh, and honey pie! You're gonna taste so **good**

sigh what's **wrong** with you people?


Don't judge me! Don't you **dare** judge me! I was judged before and this was deemed my **nature**. The **pain** of losing, the **shame**.: I had to jump, I **had** to!

Don't listen to old stone-face. More than two thousand years and she's still bitter. Have some of **this**

I'm not into that
Don't worry. This is not an official offering or anything like that. You look like you need to relax – just have some

You're right. We **do** need to relax

Once more unto the **breach!**

Unwashed **bodies**

The stink of **sweat**

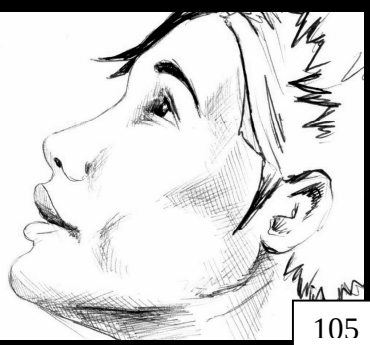
The reek of **ordure**

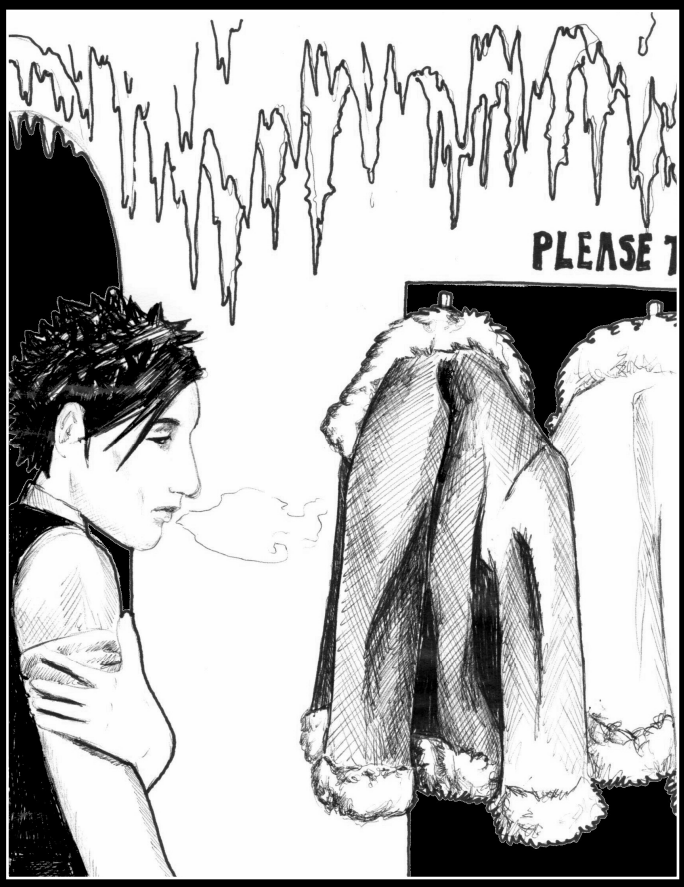
The perfumed sickliness of **putrescence**

PESTILENCE 30
25
40
15
30
Can I offer you a **pestilence?**
What's in it?

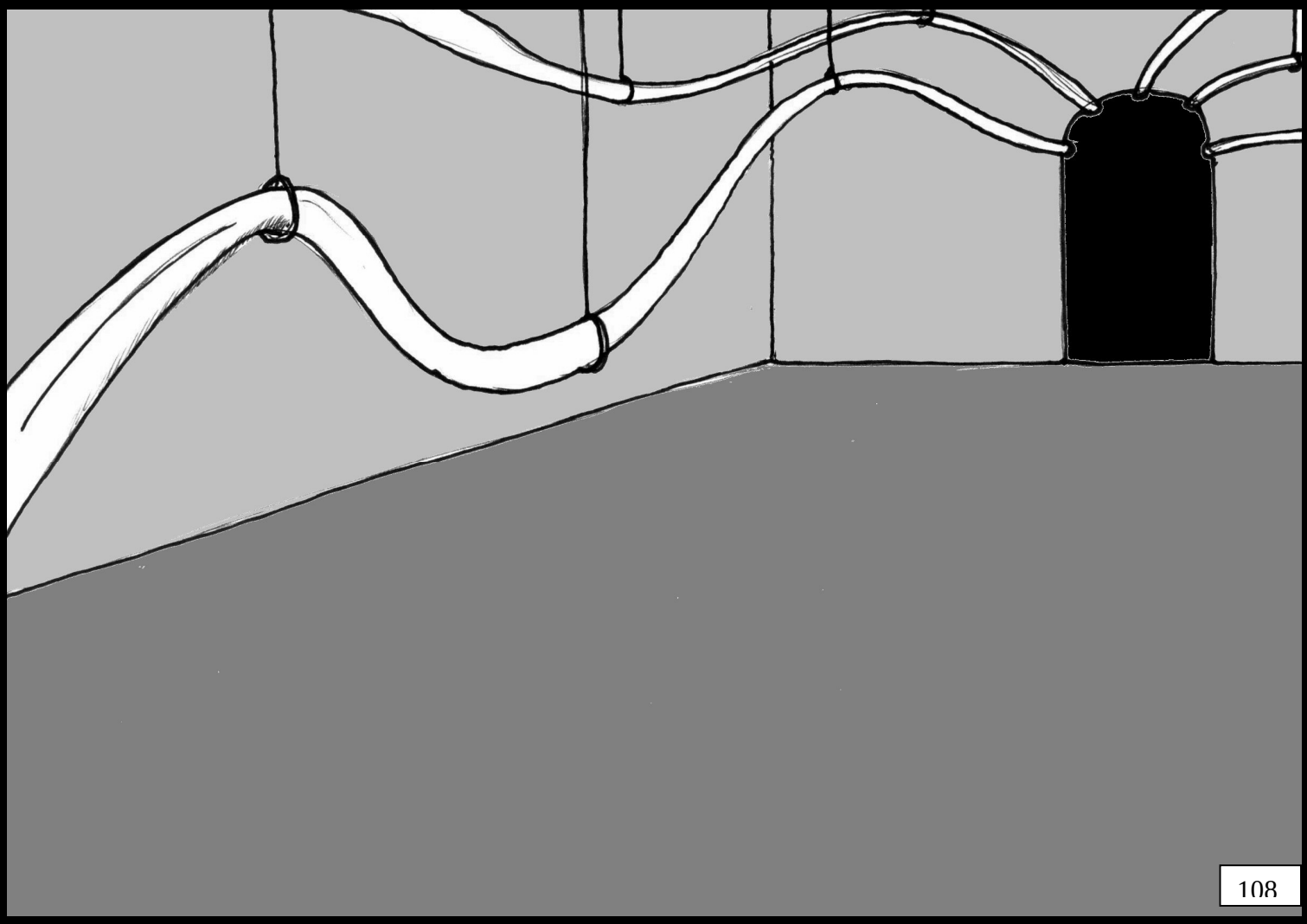
Tequila
And assorted **bugs**
Ugh

You know, Dirk, there was a time before everything went sour: you had the sweetest smile. So many opportunities wasted. I know you don't want to hear this now, and I understand you were in a lot of pain, but it's been five years. When will you and your dad have a real conversation? **When will we**?

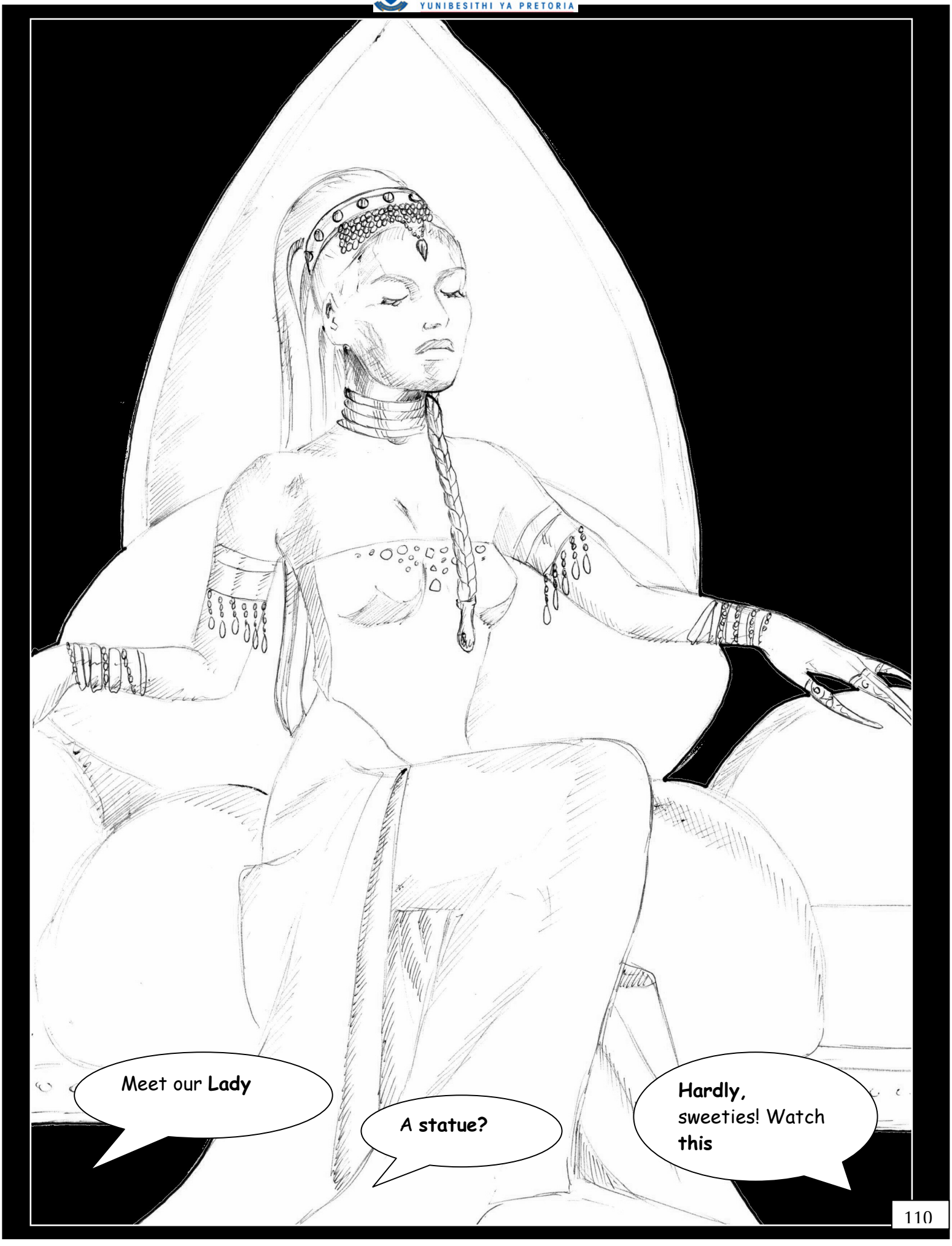



PLEASE 7

ICE
GOO
SHIT



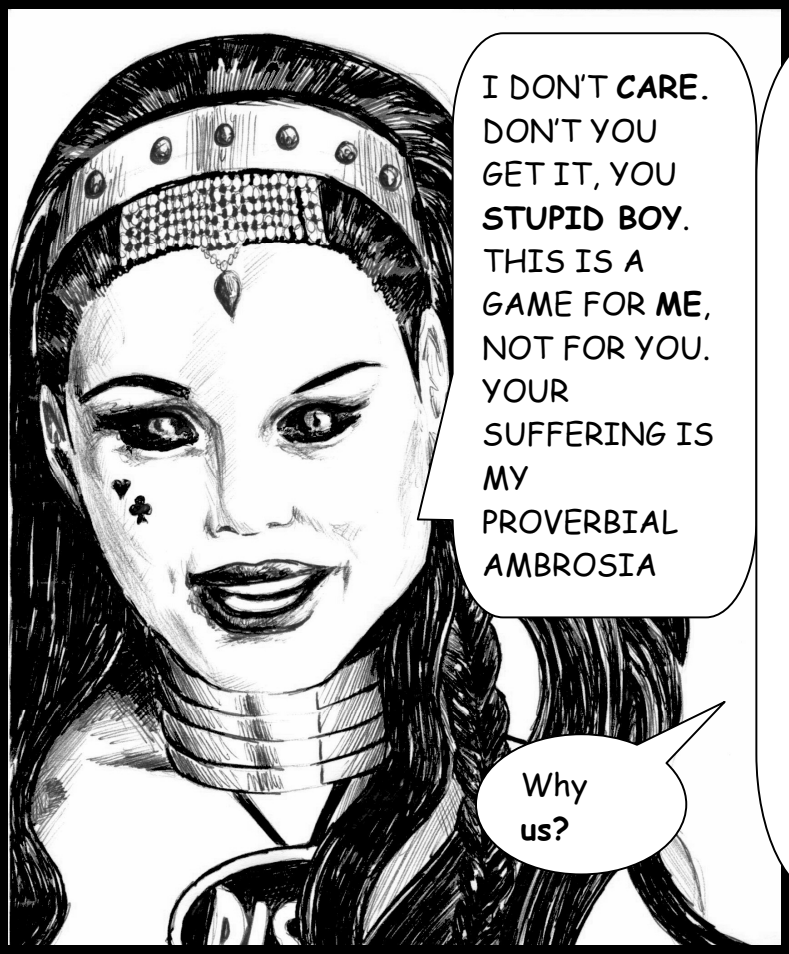
Hello, again **sweeties**. I'm **so** glad you made it
Haha**hahaha!** Dey looking a bit **crazy**
Don't listen to them, dear people. **Do** step this way
DISCORD

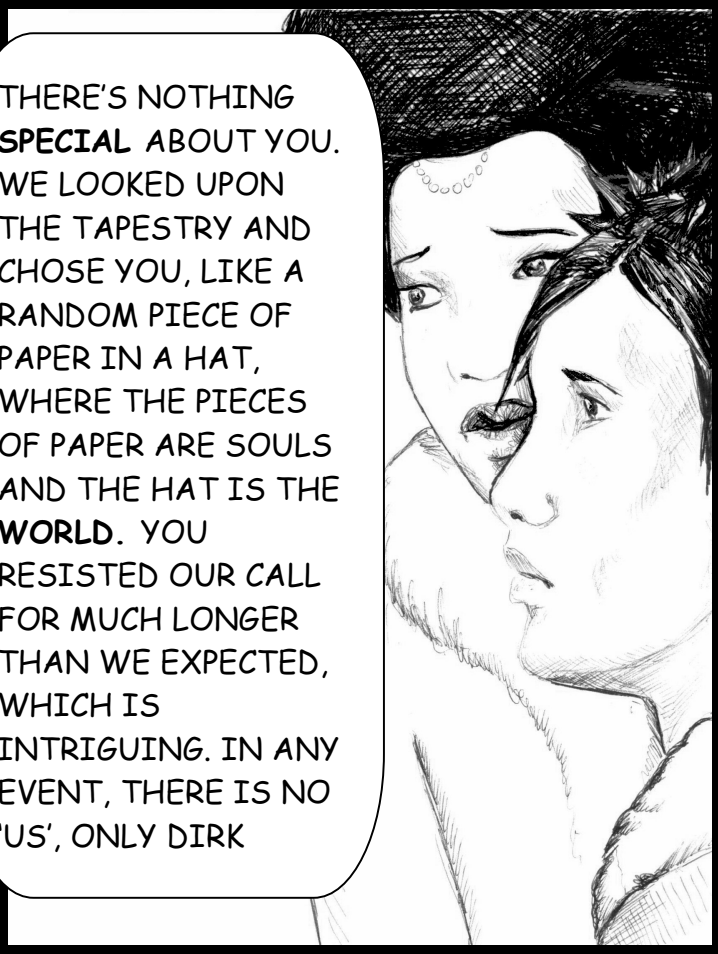

Meet our **Lady**
A statue?
Hardly, sweeties! Watch **this**

Sigh I always hate this part. It's so **undignified**
It makes me look thinner
Nuffin will ever make **you** look thinner
Shut up, the both of you, and concentrate

DISCORD
GOOD EVENING. I TRUST YOU HAD A **PLEASANT** JOURNEY
HAHAHAHA, NO, I DON'T IMAGINE THAT YOU **DID**
What
the
Fuck
Is going **on** here?!

THIS IS A **GAME**. AN AGE - OLD GAME STARRING A STRING OF NOW-FAMOUS PLAYERS, BUT A GAME NONE THE LESS
DISCORD
A game?! We have been subjected to **madness** and **suffering!**

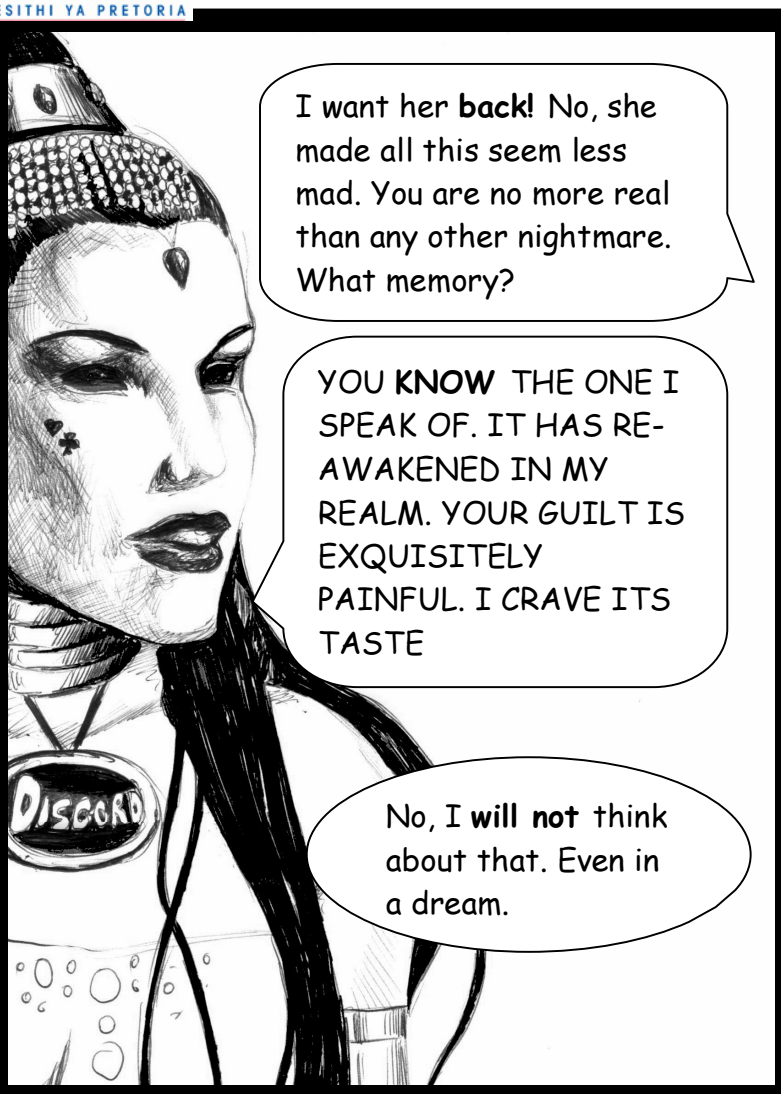

I DON'T **CARE**. DON'T YOU GET IT, YOU **STUPID BOY**. THIS IS A GAME FOR **ME**, NOT FOR YOU. YOUR SUFFERING IS MY PROVERBIAL AMBROSIA
Why **us?**


THERE'S NOTHING **SPECIAL** ABOUT YOU. WE LOOKED UPON THE TAPESTRY AND CHOSE YOU, LIKE A RANDOM PIECE OF PAPER IN A HAT, WHERE THE PIECES OF PAPER ARE SOULS AND THE HAT IS THE **WORLD**. YOU RESISTED OUR CALL FOR MUCH LONGER THAN WE EXPECTED, WHICH IS INTRIGUING. IN ANY EVENT, THERE IS NO 'US', ONLY DIRK

I THINK THE POET HAS BEEN PROTECTING YOU FOR **QUITE** LONG ENOUGH
Gugs!! Where is she? What did you **do?**

What did you do!!

DO STOP WHINING! I SAID THERE WAS NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT YOU, BUT YOU DO HAVE A MEMORY I WISH TO **SAVOUR**. THE POET WAS GETTING ON MY NERVES, AND IN MY WAY. **NOW, THE MEMORY**

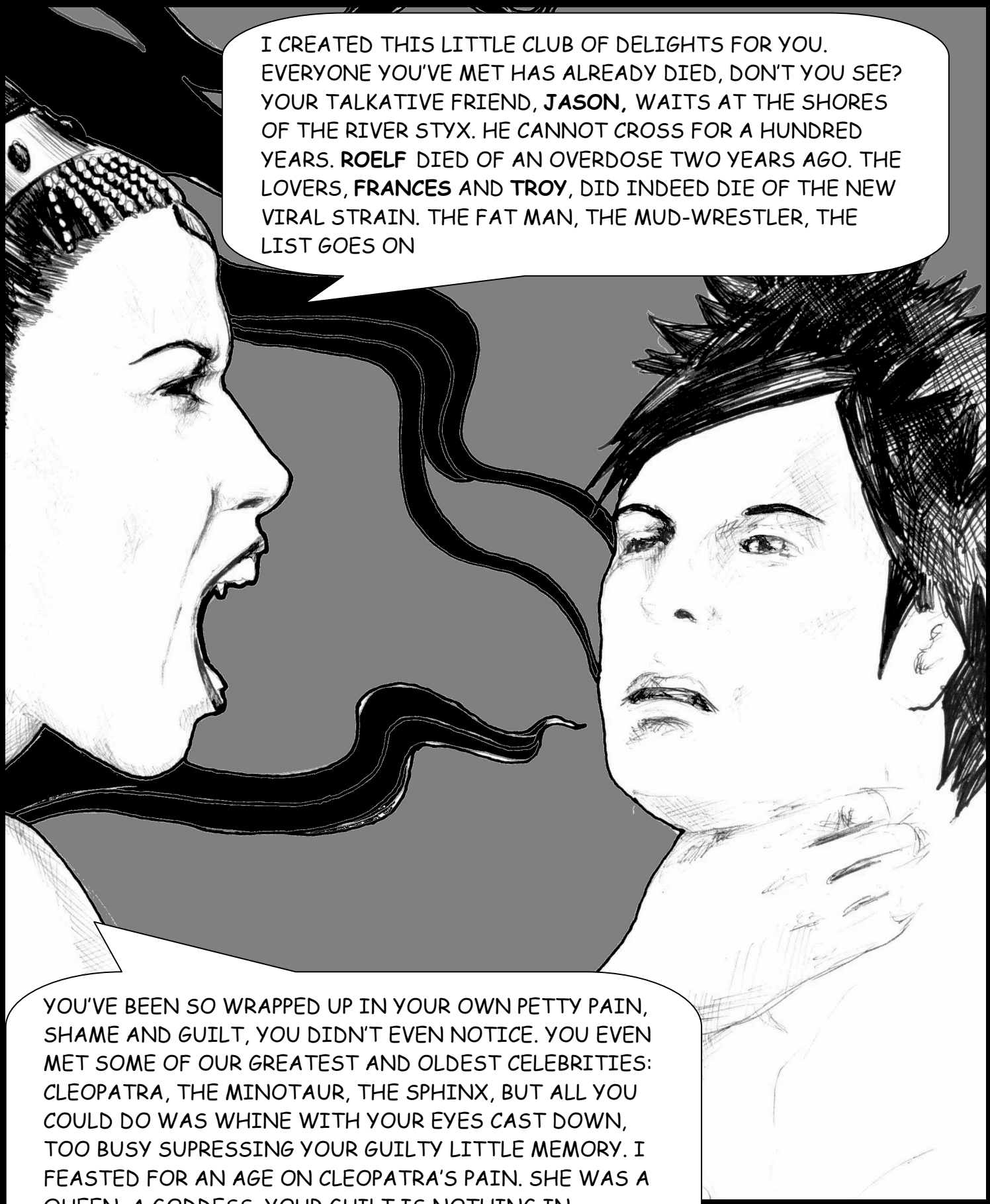


I want her **back!** No, she made all this seem less mad. You are no more real than any other nightmare. What memory?

YOU **KNOW** THE ONE I SPEAK OF. IT HAS RE-AWAKENED IN MY REALM. YOUR GUILT IS EXQUISITELY PAINFUL. I CRAVE ITS TASTE

No, I **will not** think about that. Even in a dream.

YOU HAD BETTER START CONCENTRATING, **BOY**, OR YOU WILL LOSE YOUR SOUL THAT MUCH FASTER. THIS IS NO DREAM, AND YOU CANNOT RUN AWAY THIS TIME. DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU HAVE A **CHOICE** IN THIS**?!**


I CREATED THIS LITTLE CLUB OF DELIGHTS FOR YOU. EVERYONE YOU'VE MET HAS ALREADY DIED, DON'T YOU SEE? YOUR TALKATIVE FRIEND, **JASON**, WAITS AT THE SHORES OF THE RIVER STYX. HE CANNOT CROSS FOR A HUNDRED YEARS. **ROELF** DIED OF AN OVERDOSE TWO YEARS AGO. THE LOVERS, **FRANCES** AND **TROY**, DID INDEED DIE OF THE NEW VIRAL STRAIN. THE FAT MAN, THE MUD-WRESTLER, THE LIST GOES ON
YOU'VE BEEN SO WRAPPED UP IN YOUR OWN PETTY PAIN, SHAME AND GUILT, YOU DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE. YOU EVEN MET SOME OF OUR GREATEST AND OLDEST CELEBRITIES: CLEOPATRA, THE MINOTAUR, THE SPHINX, BUT ALL YOU COULD DO WAS WHINE WITH YOUR EYES CAST DOWN, TOO BUSY SUPRESSING YOUR GUILTY LITTLE MEMORY. I FEASTED FOR AN AGE ON CLEOPATRA'S PAIN. SHE WAS A QUEEN, A GODDESS. YOUR GUILT IS NOTHING IN COMPARISON. I WILL FEED ON IT FOR BUT A SHORT TIME, BUT I **WILL** HAVE IT!

Mom! It's me, Dirk. Sorry I'm late. Why's the door open?

Nooooooooo!

Mom? You've left all the lights on. **Again**

YES, **GIVE** IT TO ME!

Mom?

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
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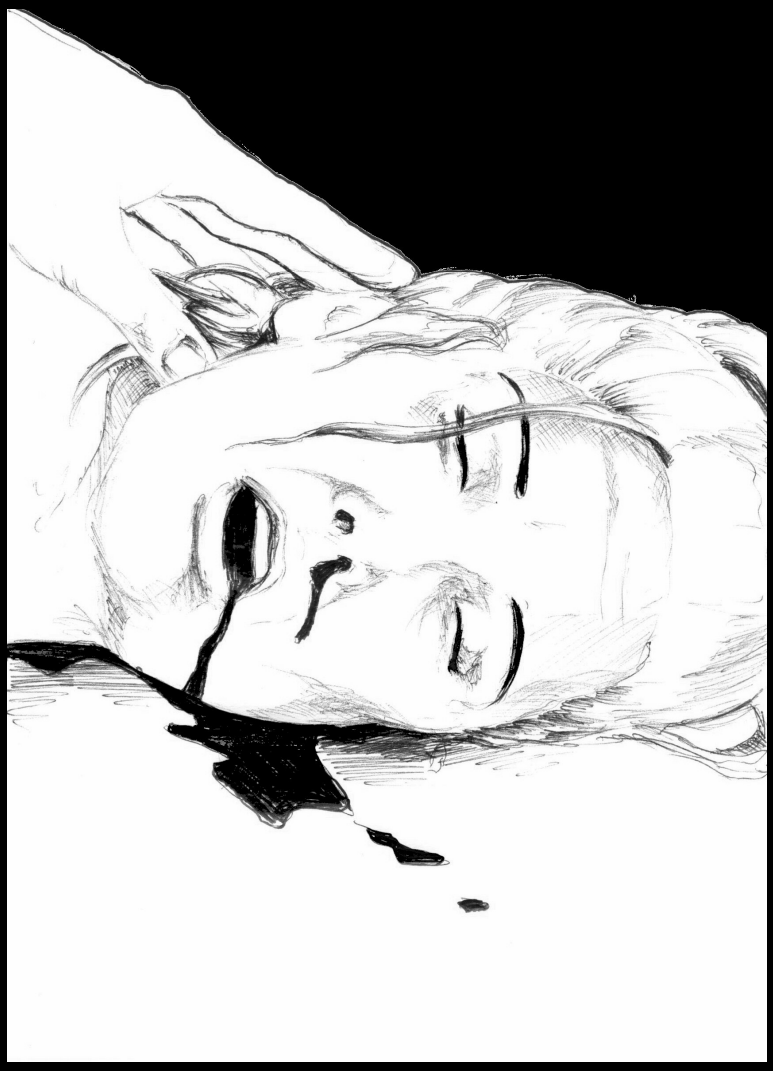
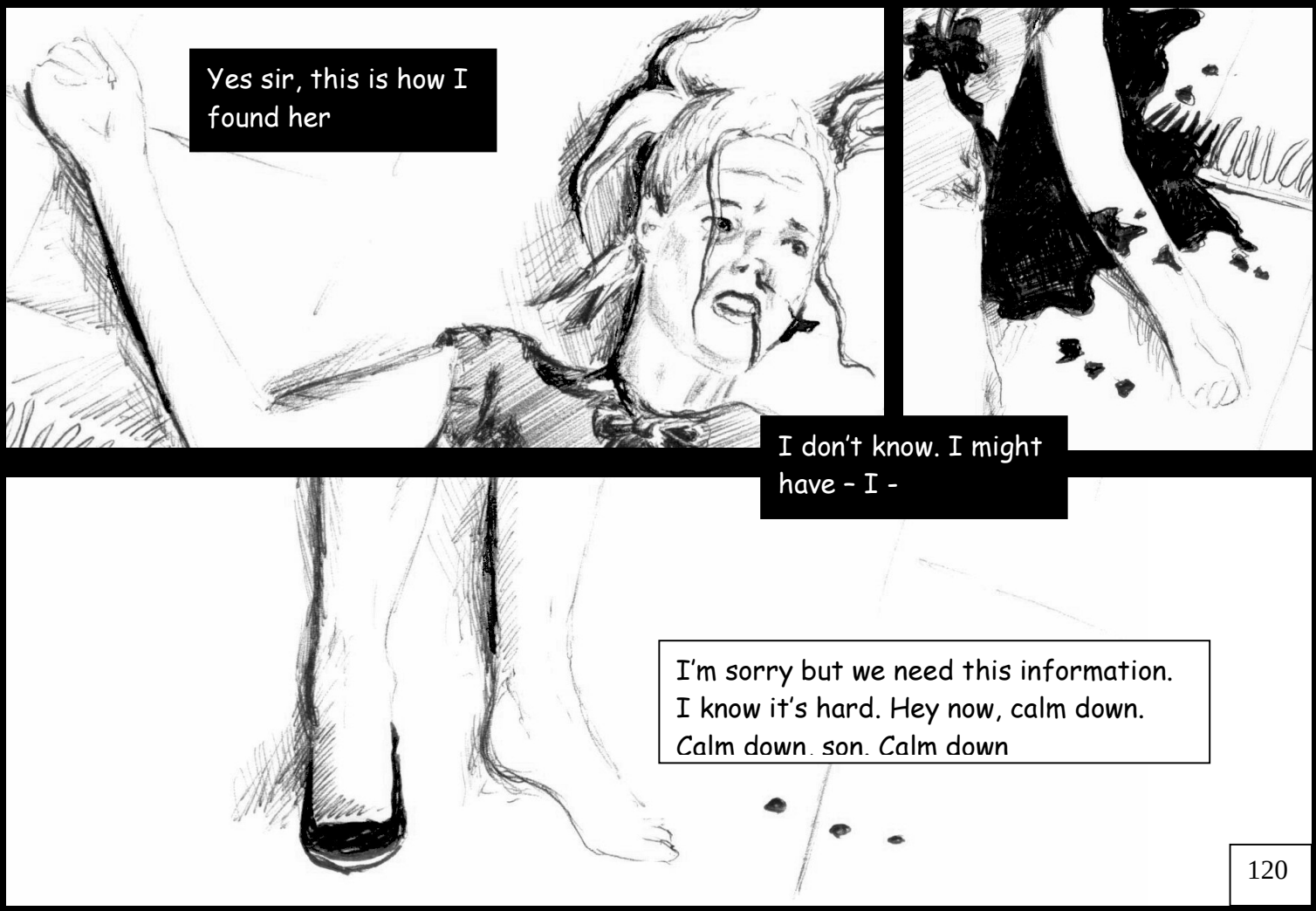


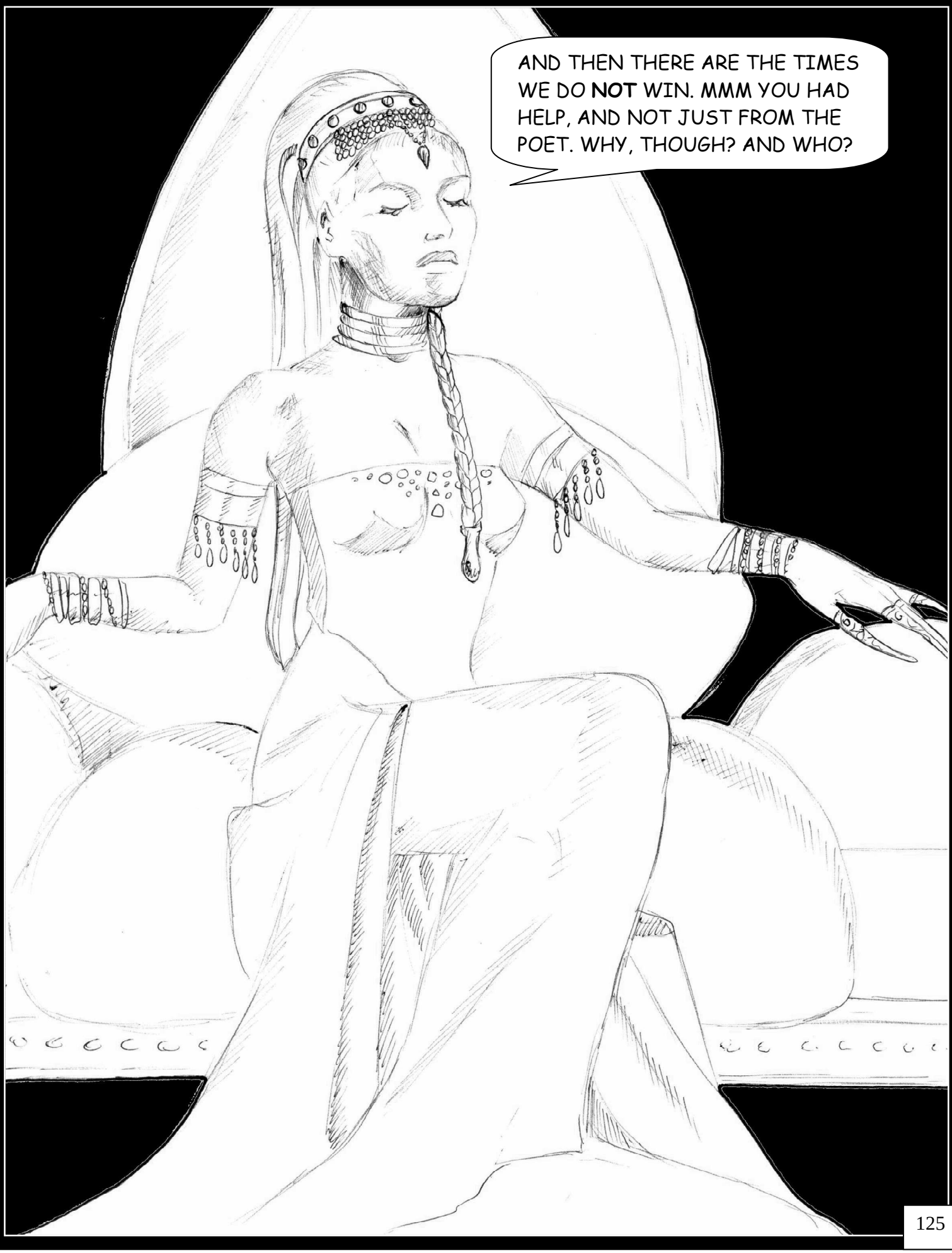
Dad it's me please come home come home come home I can't do this she's on the floor in the lounge the carpet that you like so much she bought it for you remember it's red now red she's not breathing anymore I took the knife out and she's not breathing not breathing aren't you listening I wasn't there I was out I've been drinking and I wasn't there I wasn't there are you there? Who? Mom I'm talking about mom she's on the floor and there's a knife and so much blood so much blood her shoe was in the hallway and all the lights were on she left them on I know it's late but she always leaves them on you always complain about the bill later I'm on the stairs and she's down there all alone but I can't go down I can't see her again her eyes were open and I closed them but they were glassy so I closed them and now there's blood on my hands I can't go to the bathroom to wash it off I can't move my legs won't move and I can't breathe dad daddy please come home please if you're here it won't be real it won't be true I had some weed and I passed out and now I'm talking in my sleep and when I wake up I'll go downstairs and see the pattern in the carpet you know the one that mom bought you the one you like so much I'll see the pattern in the carpet and I'll have some coffee I'll see the pattern in the carpet and you'll be there complaining about the bill and mom will be there and the knives will all be in the drawer where they belong and I won't see my reflection in little droplets of red and there won't be a shoe I'll go out tonight and come home early and you won't be gone and we'll watch the bad old movies that she liked and this -

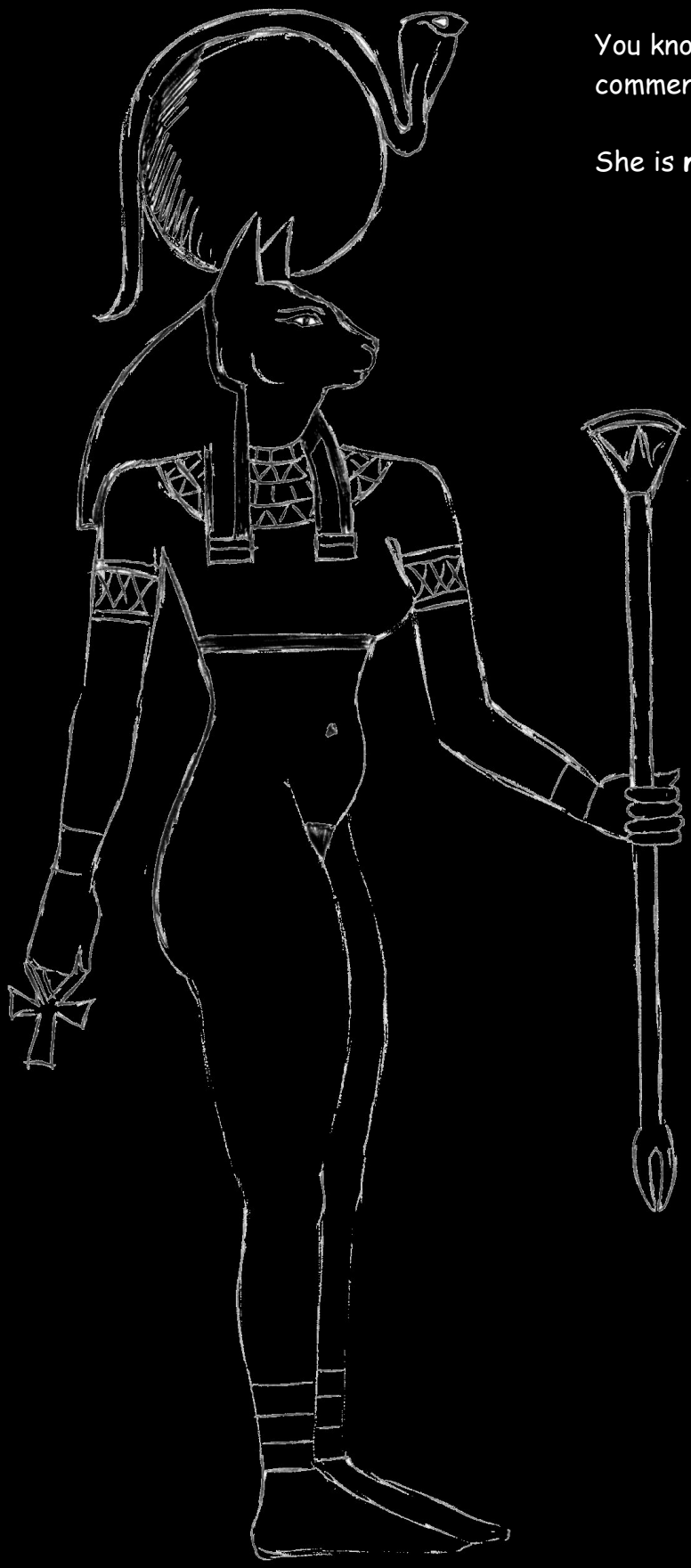
I pressed the panic button. I can hear sirens coming. I have to go, I think. Come home, dad.



GIVE IT TO ME NOW! YOU **CANNOT** RESIST
No! I will NOT give it! Get out of my HEAD!
You play with people like some huge powerful sadistic cat, you monstrous **whore**. I will not give you the **satisfaction**
YOU PATHETIC WORM!

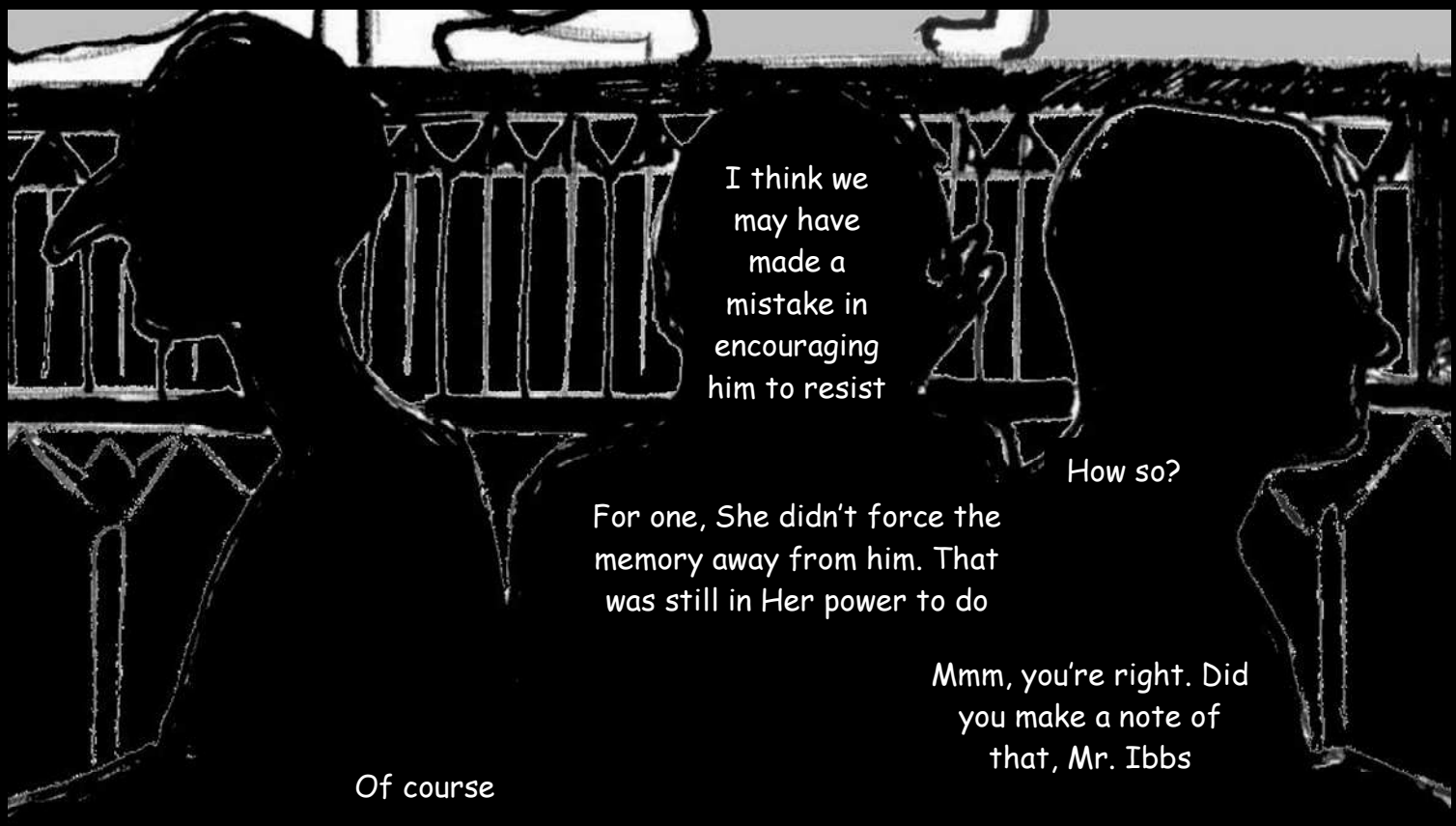
WE ALWAYS WIN!


AND THEN THERE ARE THE TIMES WE DO **NOT** WIN. MMM YOU HAD HELP, AND NOT JUST FROM THE POET. WHY, THOUGH? AND WHO?



You know, I really didn't appreciate that comment about a cat.

She is **nothing** like a cat



I think we may have made a mistake in encouraging him to resist

How so?

For one, She didn't force the memory away from him. That was still in Her power to do

Mmm, you're right. Did you make a note of that, Mr. Ibbs

Of course

My point is that now She's very interested in him. She is wondering how it was possible for him to resist after everything She'd put him through. She now knows he's special: something we were very careful to hide from Her

Next time She'll try to separate him from the poet sooner. Or She'll just destroy her

Yes, now we have two to protect

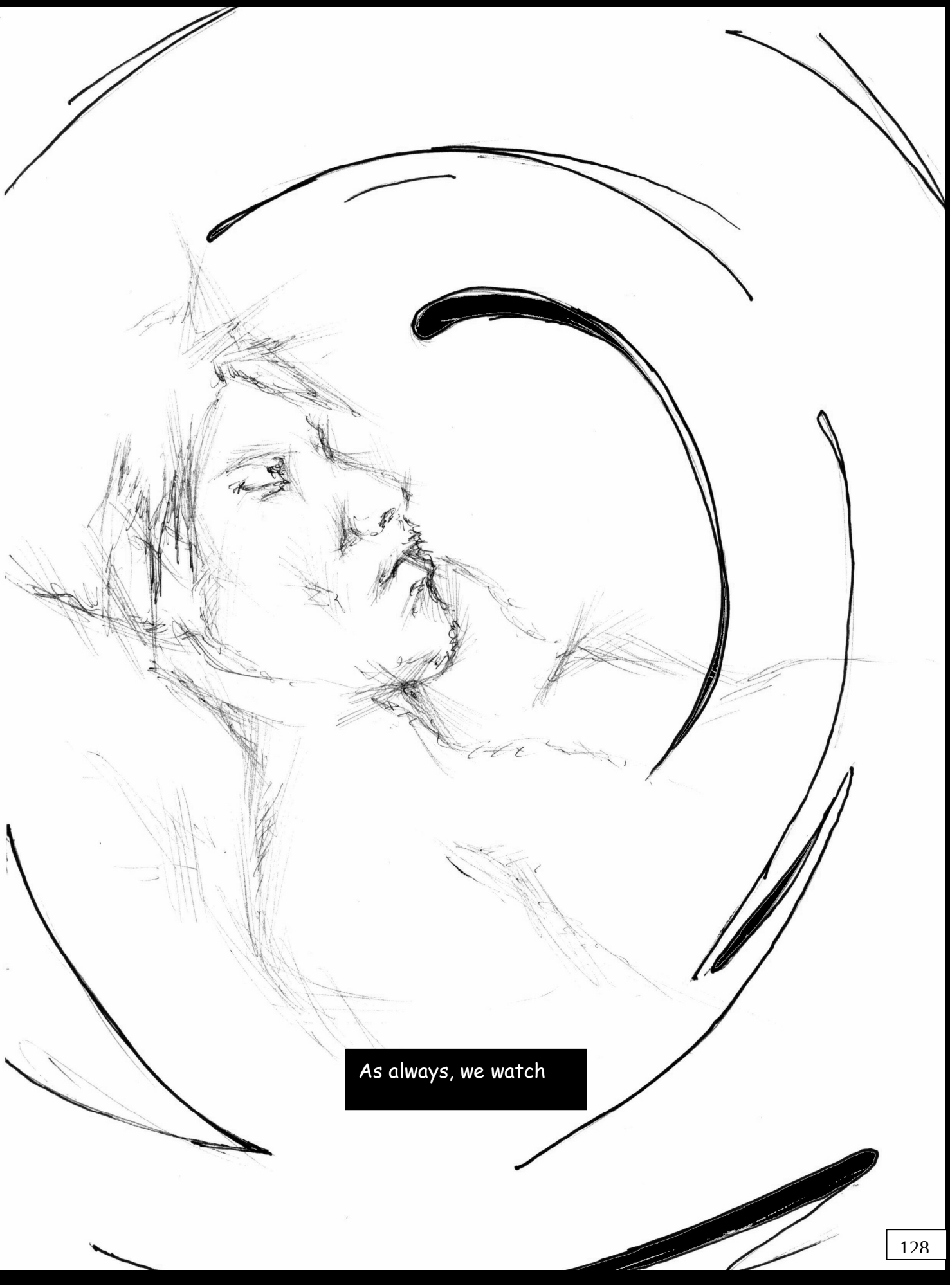
Do you think She suspects us?

Of course She does. That makes it even more fun for Her.

sigh Gentlemen, I think we might be in for a bumpy ride

That we are

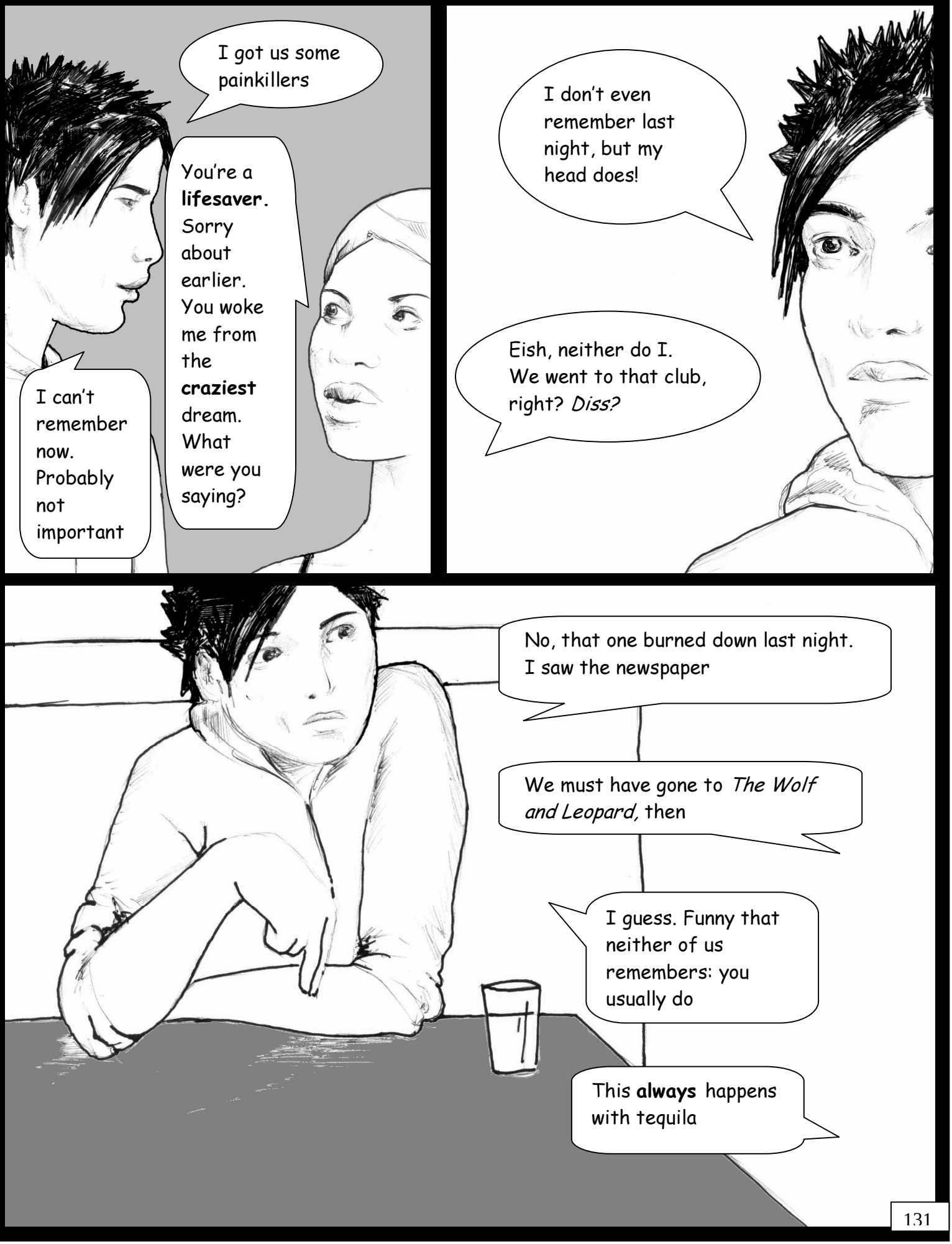
So what now?

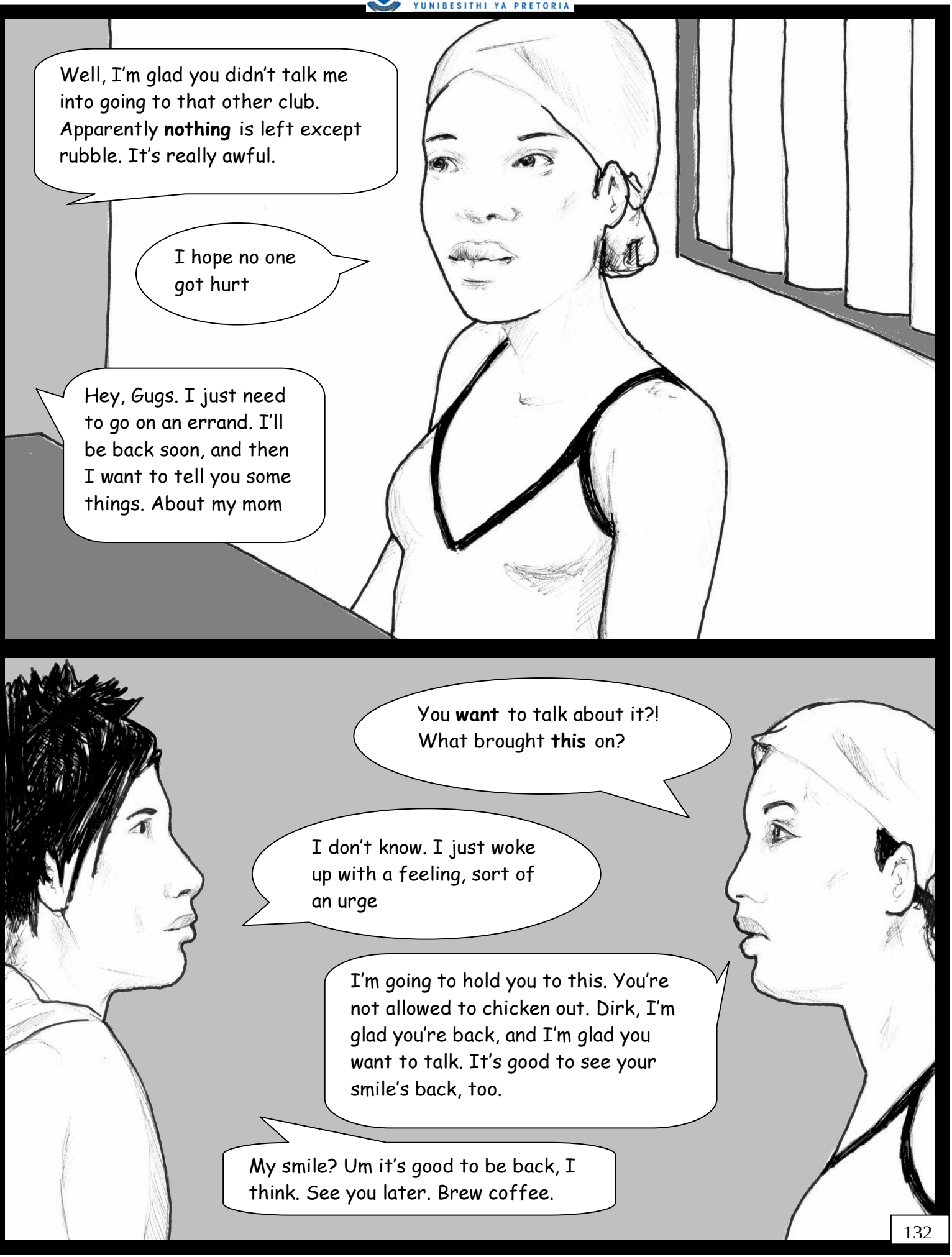

As always, we watch

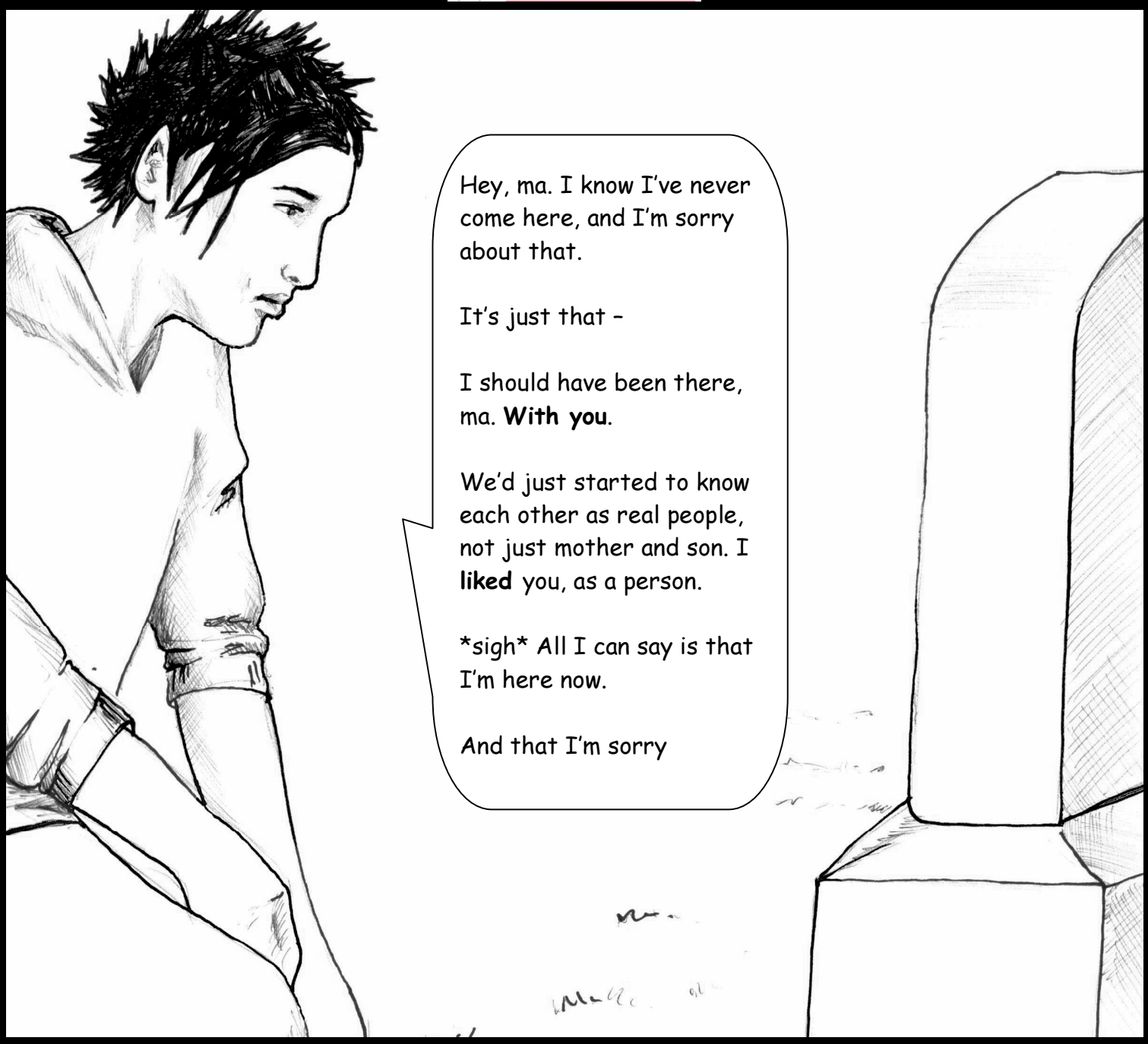
Gugs!

Wh? What? Ooh, my **head!**
I thought you were **gone**
Why? Ah, dude, it's too early for this. Since you're up, please **please** can you go down to the shop and get me some serious headache tablets? This is the **mother** of all hangovers!

TSHWANE T
DISS BURNS
LAST NIGHT

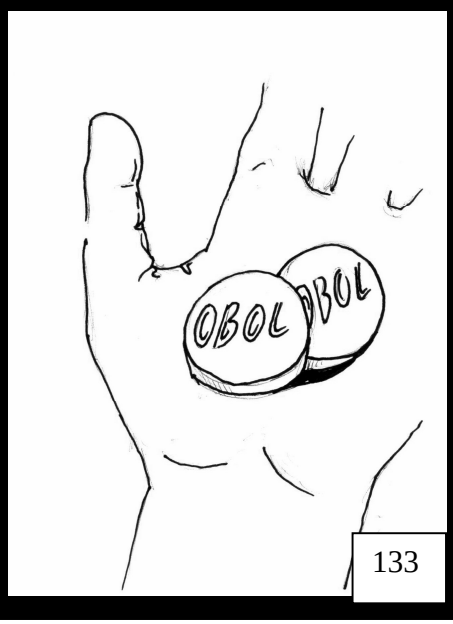

I got us some painkillers
You're a **lifesaver**. Sorry about earlier. You woke me from the **craziest** dream. What were you saying?
I can't remember now. Probably not important
I don't even remember last night, but my head does!
Eish, neither do I. We went to that club, right? *Diss?*
No, that one burned down last night. I saw the newspaper
We must have gone to *The Wolf and Leopard,* then
I guess. Funny that neither of us remembers: you usually do
This **always** happens with tequila


Well, I'm glad you didn't talk me into going to that other club. Apparently **nothing** is left except rubble. It's really awful.
I hope no one got hurt
Hey, Gugs. I just need to go on an errand. I'll be back soon, and then I want to tell you some things. About my mom
You **want** to talk about it?! What brought **this** on?
I don't know. I just woke up with a feeling, sort of an urge
I'm going to hold you to this. You're not allowed to chicken out. Dirk, I'm glad you're back, and I'm glad you want to talk. It's good to see your smile's back, too.
My smile? Um it's good to be back, I think. See you later. Brew coffee.


Hey, ma. I know I've never come here, and I'm sorry about that.
It's just that –
I should have been there, ma. **With you**.
We'd just started to know each other as real people, not just mother and son. I **liked** you, as a person.
sigh All I can say is that I'm here now.
And that I'm sorry

GRAVEYARD

What's this?


OBOL
OBOL

I know it's a bit late. I think you've crossed already, but just in case

For the boatman

HERE LIES
AMANDA
VAN REISG
BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD
WITH ALL OUR LOVE

OBOL

OBOL

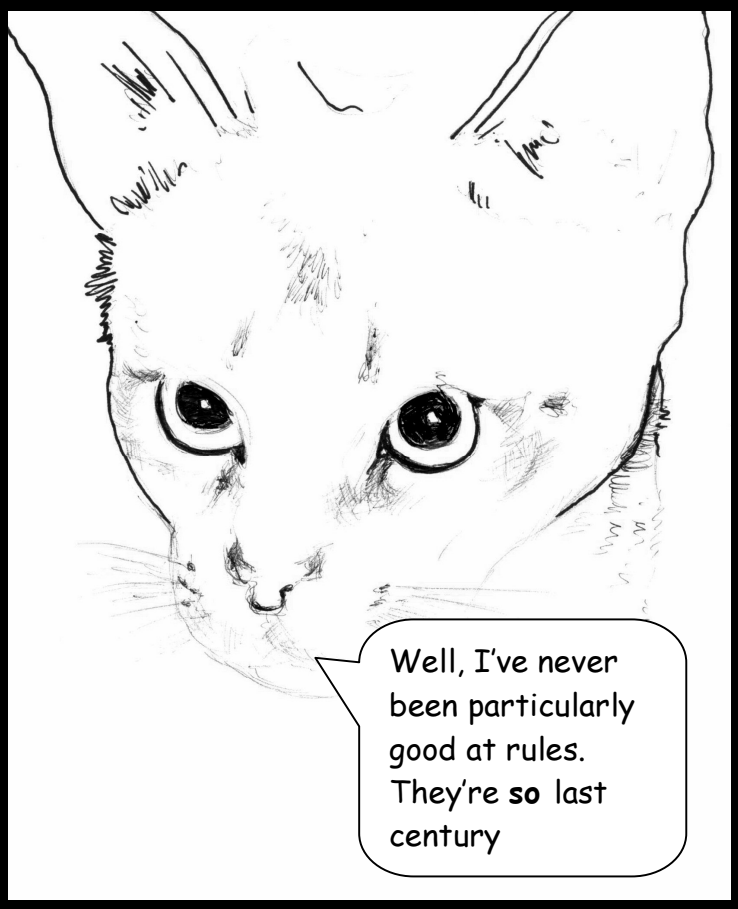
Bye ma. **I miss you,** Don't worry, I'll be fine. After all, Gugu's there to kick my ass if I screw up again

WITH ALL OUR

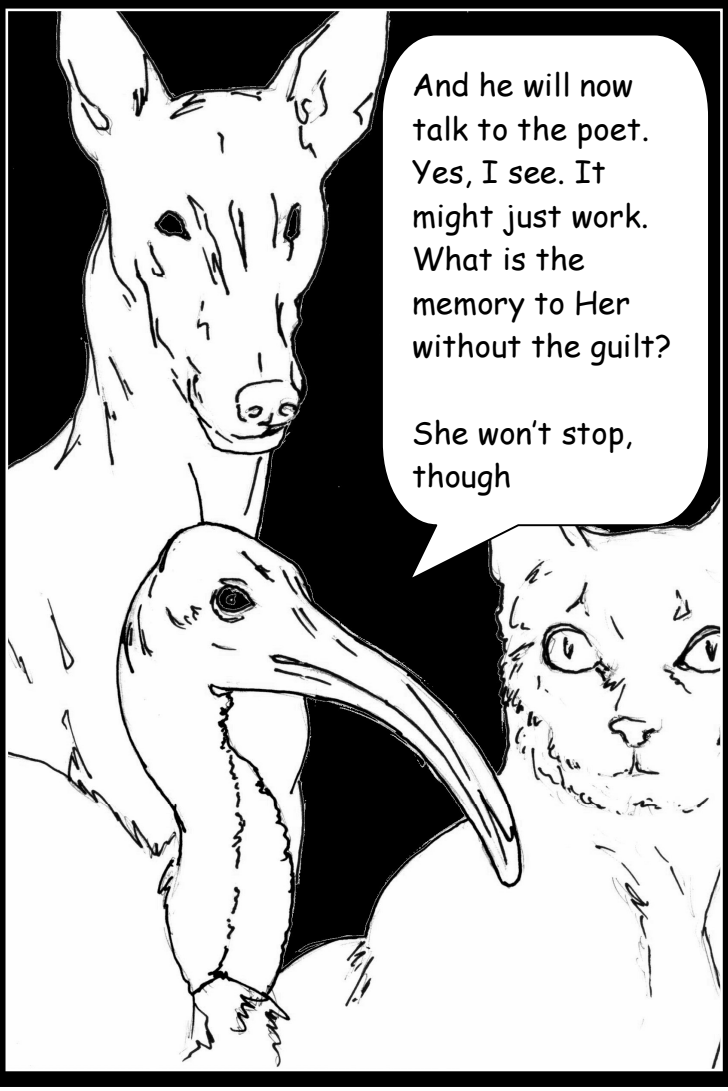
OBOL

OBOL

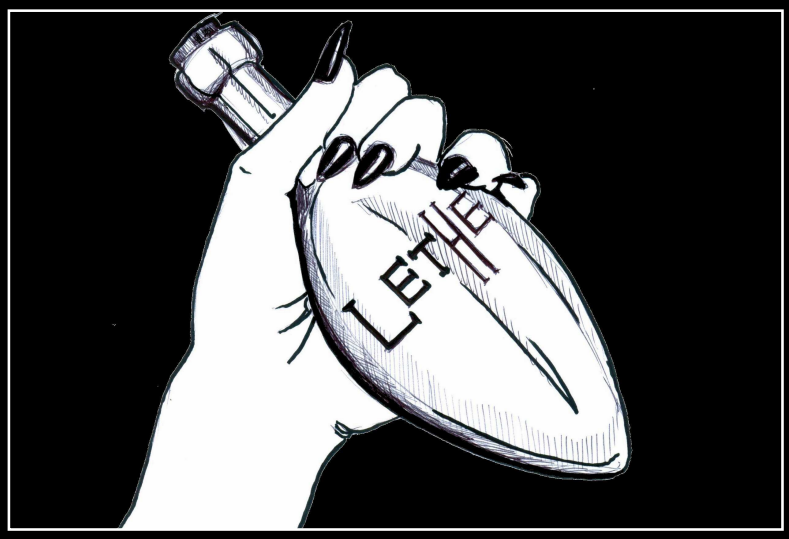
So many of them forget what should not be forgotten


Well, I've never been particularly good at rules. They're **so** last century

We're going to have to do some **serious** cheating if we're going to get through this one, Kitty.
Who says I haven't already. He came **here**, didn't he?


And he will now talk to the poet. Yes, I see. It might just work. What is the memory to Her without the guilt?
She won't stop, though

No, She won't.
But we'll be waiting



Forgetfulness

THE END

Endnotes on *Diss*

1. The inscription above the gates of hell/the club is taken from Dante's *Inferno*. Throughout, *Diss*' author has made use of the 1980 University of California Press Mandelbaum translation of the *Inferno*. Any page references in the endnotes will be according to this edition. The inscription on the gates of Hell is at the beginning of Canto III, page 20.
2. Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy* in the 14th Century. It served as an allegory for his home city, Florence. It is the story of Dante who is accompanied by the Roman poet, Virgil, through the Catholic afterlife: *Inferno*, *Purgatorium* and *Paradiso*. *Diss* uses the *Inferno* as a basis text on which to build a story set in a South Africa of the near future.
3. The *Inferno* is the first book of the Divine Comedy, and it takes Dante through the circles of Hell. Dante, with Virgil as his guide, travel through all nine circles of hell, until he meets Lucifer, its emperor.
4. *The Aeneid* is an Epic Poem written by Virgil about the travels of Prince Aeneas after the fall of Troy, and the ultimate founding of Rome. He travels to Africa and meets Dido of Carthage, who falls in love with him. After many adventures he finally finds himself in Italy, where he travels to the Underworld. The beginning of *Diss* was based on the passageways before one finds the gates. Throughout, the author has made use of the Dryden translation published by P.F Colliers & sons in 1909.
5. The beggar at the train station paraphrases the Penguin Classics inscription on the Gate of Hell, in Canto 3, page 89.
6. The graffiti on the walls as Gugu and Dirk walk towards the club entrance are quotes from the *Aeneid*: "Revengeful cares and sullen sorrows", "pale diseases and repining age", "want, fear and famine" (Book Six, Page 216).
7. The prostitutes in *Diss* are the Gorgons of the *Aeneid*, waiting outside the gates of the underworld under an elm tree (Book six, Page 217).
8. The character of Discord also appears in the *Aeneid* as Strife, who "shakes her hissing tresses and unfolds her snakes" (Book Six, Page 217).
9. Charon is the famous boatman of the Underworld. He ferries the souls of the dead across the River Styx into the realm of the Underworld. In both the *Aeneid* and the *Inferno*, Charon features. The most important aspect of Charon is that he does not allow anyone to cross who has not had a proper burial. The souls of the dead need to be buried with two coins to pay his toll. Dirk's friend, Jason, is loosely based on one of Aeneas' crewmembers, Leucaspis, who was swept overboard and not given proper funereal rights. It is therefore his lot to wander for a hundred years before being wafted over the Styx into the Underworld. Aeneas promises Leucaspis that he would find his body and bury him properly so that he need not suffer any longer (Book 6, Page 217 and 218).
10. *Diss* also makes use of a lot of Ancient Egyptian mythology. The Egyptians believed that after death the heart of the departed is weighed against the feather of Ma'at, the goddess representing the Universal Rule. Anubis, the jackal headed god of mummification does the weighing and Thoth, the scribe of the gods, annotates the findings. If the heart and the feather balances, the soul is allowed to enter on the difficult road to the Field of Reeds. If the heart is heavier than the

feather, the soul goes another way, and is consumed by the crocodile-headed demon known as the Devourer of Souls. *Diss* breaks away from the mythology slightly in that the third deity present is not Ma'at, but Bast (or Bastet), who is the cat-headed goddess of the home. She also ties in with Sekhmet, the lioness headed goddess, who serves as Pharaoh's protector. Together with Isis, Bast is often associated with magic as well. These three deities, Bast especially, serve as Dirk's protectors throughout his travails in Club Diss, and even before.

11. The Gorgon prostitutes may also be seen as the Furies (the Ancient Greek avenging goddesses) or harpies. Their shadows become wings. The three aspects of the Queen of hell can also be seen as the Furies, but they represent the archetypal roles of women too. The three witches: the maiden the mother and the crone.
12. The first circle of hell/the club is Limbo, inhabited by those who were worthy but lived before Christianity and/or without baptism (Page 31 of Canto IV). Poets feature here and welcome Dante as one of their own, like Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. There is also a catalogue of other great-hearted spirits in the noble castle of Limbo. *Diss* takes the theme of the poets and uses South African examples. The first is Henning Pieterse, Carl Pierre Naude, Dennis Brutus, Angifi Dladla, Finuala Dowling and finally Arja Salafranka. Some of the characters speak sections of the poetry, like Gugu (Finula Dowling's poem) and Roelf (Arja Salafranka's poem). The poem extracts quoted are: *Arabesque* by Henning Pieterse, *Cold* by Dennis Brutus, *Ode to deserters* by Charl-Pierre Naudé, *Fire of the gods* by Angifi Dladla, *To the doctor who treated the raped baby and felt such despair* by Finuala Dowling and *Apartheid miniatures* by Arja Salafranca.
13. The second circle of hell is where the lustful are forever buffeted by violent storms (Canto V, page 39). Cleopatra, Helen and Achilles are condemned to this circle. In the Aeneid, Aeneas discovers that after he left Carthage (Fate and the gods force him to), Dido killed herself, and now resided within the Mournful Fields, the Underworld equivalent of the Second Circle (Book Six, Page 222). There are similarities between the Greek Underworld and Dante's Hell, but not in terms of the structure of the realm. In *Diss* the second circle is represented by the room with the fans. Note that the music in the background are excerpts from the *Inferno*, as well as the singer, Dido. Cleopatra delivers the final monologue of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*. **[reference to be provided]** The two characters, Troy and Frances are based on the characters of the lovers, Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, who killed themselves for love in the *Inferno.* Of course, South African commentary is also put in throughout *Diss* since, like the *Inferno*, it tries to be social commentary as well, but on a much smaller and less overt scale. The first extract written into the panel as a song is from the speech of the demon, Minos, who guards the circle: "O you who reach this house of suffering,/ be careful how you enter, whom you trust;/ the gate is wide, but do not be deceived!" (Canto V, Page 38). The second song is that of the modern singer Dido, entitled "White Flag" The third song is from Francesca's tale of their love and death: "O living being, gracious and benign,/ who through the darkened air have come to visit/ our souls that stained the world with blood…" (Canto V, Page 42).
14. The painting of the three headed dog is based on an illustration in the Mandelbaum *Inferno* (Page 47). It is one of 42 illustrations done by Barry Moser

for the Mandelbaum translation. The dog, Cerberus, torments the souls in this circle, where the glutonous, supine, are flailed by cold and filthy rain (Canto VI, Page 49).

15. The Fourth Circle is where the Avaricious and Prodigal, in opposite directions, roll weights in semi circles (Canto VII, Page 55). In *Diss* we find wrestling.
16. The Fifth circle of hell houses the wrathful and sullen, the former besmirched by the muddy Styx, the latter immersed in it (Canto VIII, Page 65). In *Diss* the wrestling theme continues with mud wrestling.
17. Still within the fifth circle of hell, the demons, the fallen angels, try and obstruct Dante and Virgil's entrance into the city, Dis (Canto VIII, page 65)The three women who wish to attack Gugu and Dirk are the fallen angels. A heavenly messenger causes the fallen angels to flee in Dante (Canto IX, Page 73). In the case of *Diss* the character of Kitty (Bastet) returns to save Dirk and Gugu from the sacrifice of the Fallen Angels. Note that throughout *Diss* there are echoes of the aspects of the Queen of Hell, who always appear as a trio.
18. The sixth circle of hell contains the arch-heretics, entombed in red-hot sepulchers (Canto IX, Page 73).Within the steam room of *Diss*, Dirk and Gugu meet the third aspect, the mother figure. Dante meets and speaks to a heretic pope, Anastasius (Canto XI, Page 91) but Dirk only gets winked at by the founder of a cult. In this room, Dirk receives a second offering. The steam that they breathe allows Dirk and Gugu to see what's really going on. In Dante, there is a section where Dante shows how the damned are unable to see the present, but can foresee the future (Canto X, page 88).
19. The seventh circle of hell contains three rings. In the first Dante meets the minotaur, (Canto XII, Page 99), and so do Dirk and Gugu in their drug-induced vision.
20. The first ring also contains the tyrants and murderers, who are immersed in the river Phlegethon, the river of blood. They are watched over by centaurs who duck their heads under when they surface for air (Canto XII, Page 99). Here, Dirk and Gugu also meets the third aspect of the Queen of Hell, the maiden, who breaks away from tradition and offers them a sip from a bottle labeled 'Lethe'. According to Ancient Greek mythology, Lethe is one of the rivers of the Underworld. It is the river of forgetfulness that runs through the Fields of Elysium. It was said that when the heroes tire of the Elysium fields they drink from the waters of Lethe in order to forget their old lives, and return to the earth as new born babies.
21. The second ring of the seventh circle houses the suicides and squanderers. The dreary wood is where the suicides have been turned into strange trees, whereas the squanderers are hounded and rent by bitches (Canto XIII, Page 107). *Diss* uses the imagery of the Furies again, as hell hounds, unceasingly pursuing the souls of the dead not trapped in the pillars. The Furies were known for pursuing the living relentlessly, and driving them mad. The terms used in *Diss* are all either Latin or Greek references to the Furies, as well as their characteristics.
22. The third ring of the seventh circle house those who have committed violence against god. The third ring is also divided into three zones. The zone of blasphemers, supine on fiery sand (Canto XIV), the sodomites, endlessly crossing the fiery sands beneath the rain of fire (Canto XV and XVI). The third zone

contains those who have committed violence against nature and art, the usurers, each seated beneath the rain of fire with a purse (Canto XVII, page 143) The depressed individuals who sit on the hot sands of the pool room in *Diss*, quote directly from the *Inferno*: “and there he left his tendons strained by sin” (Canto XV, Page 128) and “what wounds I saw upon their limbs,/wounds new and old, wounds that the flames seared in!” (Canto XVI, Page 135).

23. The eighth circle is called Malebolge, with its 10 pouches where ‘ordinary’ fraud is punished. The first pouch contains the panderers and seducers scourged by horned demons. The second pouch contains the flatterers immersed in excrement (Canto XVIII, Page 153).
24. The fourth pouch of the eighth circle is where diviners, astrologers and magicians have their heads turned backwards. The people in twisted positions in *Diss*, quote directly from the *Inferno*: “Here pity only lives when it is dead” (Canto XX, Page 170), “They built a city over her dead bones” (Canto XX, Page 174).
25. In the fifth pouch of the eighth circle, Dante and Virgil meet the demon, Malacoda, who along with his fellow demons escort them to the next pouch (Canto XXI, Page 179). They are pursued by the demons and escape (Canto XXIII) In *Diss* the masked people escort Dirk and Gugu. Instead of torturing a soul along the way, in *Diss* they ‘torture’ Dirk by licking him, and Gugu drags him away.
26. In the sixth pouch of the eighth circle is housed the hypocrites in capes of lead (Canto XXIII, Page 197). The body builder room is the *Diss* equivalent.
27. In the seventh pouch of the eight circle is the snake pit where the thieves are housed (Canto XXIV, Page 207).
28. In the eighth pouch of the eight circle are housed the fraudulent counselors, clothed in flame that burns them. The sphinx , Ulysses and Diomedes are to be
29. found here. In Dante, Ulysses tells the tale of his final voyage (Canto XXVI, Page 225). In *Diss* the sphinx wishes to ask Dirk a riddle. Ulysses offers them a smoke.
30. The tenth pouch of the eighth circle houses the falsifiers. The first group of falsifiers (of metal) is plagued by scabs, lying on the earth and scratching furiously (Canto XXIX, Page 251). There are also falsifiers of others’ persons, coins, and falsifiers of words. They are biting mad and berserk, suffering from an unquenchable thirst, suffering from a ravaging fever that makes them reek (Canto XXX, Pages 261-266). In *Diss* the room is filled with people eating off each other, and surrounded by a constant stream of swearing.
31. Still in the tenth pouch of the eighth circle, there are those that suffer from non-ceasing plague and pestilence (Canto XXX, Page 266). In *Diss*, Dirk and Gugu are offered a drink called “Pestilence”
32. The ninth circle is the central pit of hell, where the Ancient Greek river, Cocytus, freezes the heart/ninth circle of hell. The passage towards the ninth circle is where the giants of old reside (Canto XXXI, Page 269).In *Diss*, Prometheus is one of the giants/stilt walkers. His punishment for stealing fire from Mount Olympus was to have two vultures peck out his liver each day, just to have it re-grow during the night, hence the vulture holding the VIP plaque at the entrance.
33. The first ring of the ninth circle is where traitors and their kin are immersed in ice, heads bent down. The second ring of the ninth circle is where traitors to their

homeland or party are housed, gnawing at the other's head (Canto XXXII, Page 279). In *Diss*, Dirk and Gugu enter a room of ice and put on coats. They witness a group of people eating each other.

34. The third ring is where traitors against their guests jut out from the ice, their eyes sealed by frozen tears (Canto XXXIII, Page 287). In *Diss*, the frozen tears have become pipes from which people drink.
35. The fourth ring of the ninth circle is where traitors to their benefactors are fully immersed in ice. Lucifer, the emperor of hell resides here, and with his three mouths rend Judas, Brutus and Cassius (Canto XXXIV, Page 295). From here on, *Diss*, moves away from the *Inferno*. Dirk and Gugu are confronted by the three aspects of the Queen of hell, and taken to her statue.

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THE GRAPHIC NOVEL:
AN INTERNATIONAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN EXPLORATION

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1. Introduction and Definitions

1.1 Introduction

Graphic novels have increased in esteem in relatively recent years. Many film adaptation of graphic novels have been made, which is indicative of the genre's popularity : *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, 2003; *Watchmen*, 2009; *V for Vendetta*, 2005; *300*, 2007; *From Hell*, 2001; *Alien vs. Predator*, 2004; *Barb Wire*, 1996; *Blade*, 1998, 2002, 2004; *Constantine*, 2005; *Faust: Love of the Damned*, 2001; *A History of Violence*, 2005; *Road to Perdition*, 2002; *Sin City*, 2005; *Tank Girl*, 1995; *Virus*, 1999; *Wanted*, 2008; *Persepolis*, 2007; *Ghost in the Shell*, 1995, 2004, to name but a few. It is clear from this list that there is a wide array of genres and types of comics and graphic novels being adapted for film, ranging from thrillers, literary/art-house, magic realism, fantasy, manga and horror. Many of these films also attained both critical and popular acclaim in their time, underscoring the rising esteem of the films, as well as the comic books and graphic novels they are based on; some even achieving cult status. *Sin City* was nominated for a Golden Palm at Cannes in 2005; *V for Vendetta* won an Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films award in 2007. Others, however, have achieved less positive acclaim, such as *Barb Wire*. Given their popularity, it is therefore remarkable that graphic novels and comic books in general have received relatively little scholarly review and academic research attention. This research essay aims to explore the graphic novel as a genre, and provide an overview of three of the most influential literary graphic novels published, namely *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi and *The Sandman* series by Neil Gaiman et al.

The research essay firstly broadly examines the definitions of *graphic and text representation of stories*. Given that this essay is of limited scope, it is essential to narrow the focus of the research to include only a specific sub-genre of graphic narrative: the graphic novel. The essay will therefore only briefly mention genres such as *superhero comic books* and *Japanese manga*. It is, however, important to inspect these other genres in the context of how they have influenced and informed the graphic novel. To that end, a brief overview of the history and development of the graphic novel as genre is prepared as background and contextual framework (See 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5).

Secondly, the essay gives an overview of three of the most acclaimed and literary graphic novels to have been published: *Maus* (1986), *Persepolis* (1969) and *The Sandman* series (1989-1996), in order to illustrate the unique ways in which this medium can be used. The essay looks at Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to explore the singular way that the graphic novel deals with history and time. *The Sandman series*, written by Neil Gaiman, serves to indicate unique ways to approach the recreation and re-appropriation of myths, as well as the use of intertexts. Lastly, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi illustrates how memoir, liminality and identity can be explored, particularly within the context of Iranian exile literature. The essay also takes examples from *Diss*, the graphic novel enclosed here, to illustrate the same unique ways graphic narrative conveys meaning.

The next section of the paper brings the focus closer to Africa and what is termed the "New Wave" of African comics. The paper also explores the South African publication industry to determine the reasons for the lack of official publication of graphic novels, the alternative publication possibilities, as well as what is being published that is of a graphic narrative nature, such as illustrated novels, anthologies of socio-political cartoons, and children's books.

In section 5, the research essay aims to briefly look at the educational possibilities of graphic narrative in the multimodal South African classroom, especially in promoting the increase of literacy. The scope of the essay does not, however, allow for an in-depth investigation of educational graphic novels, but rather aims to give a brief overview of research done in this regard.

1.2. Definitions

The first step in understanding the graphic representations of stories broadly known as 'graphic novels' is to arrive at a working definition of them, as well as an umbrella term that includes the various genres. Eddie Cambell states that the term *graphic novel* is "currently used in at least four different and mutually exclusive ways"[1] Firstly, readers of *comic books* (usually short action-based comics without complex narrative and thematic aspects), refer to them as *graphic novels*. Secondly, "it is used to classify a format – for example, a bound book of comics either in soft or hard cover – in contrast to the old-

[1] E. Cambell, "What is a graphic novel?" in *graphic literature*, March – April 2007. p. 13.

fashioned stapled comic magazine."[2] Thirdly, it refers to comic-based narrative of the same complexity, in terms of story-line, themes, among others, as a purely prose novel. Lastly, it is used to "indicate a form that is more than a comic book in the scope of its ambition."[3]

According to Derek Parker Royal, "comics are a composite text made up of words and images that, taken together, can have an impact far different from that produced by more traditional modes of narrative such as the short story or the novel."[4] He goes on to say that comics, much like film, "relies on visual language that encourages a more immediate processing time within the reader and, on the level of interpretation, a more 'efficient' exchange between author(s) and audience…"[5]

On another level, Mark Bernard and James Bucky Carter state that "comics, graphic novels, and sequential art belong to a rich artistic and literary tradition due in no small part to their ability to utilize the techniques of cubism and futurism."[6] What Bernard and Carter mean by this is that graphic novels in general, and, in the context of their paper, Alan Moore's work in particular "is able to use the cubist and futurist tendencies of the comic medium to superbly explore notions of time and space."[7] They further argue that sequential art, graphic novels and comic books have an ability to bridge the space-time continuum, where a reader can find him-/herself becoming aware of being in two different times and spaces at the same instance in the text, as well as becoming conscious of the physical space the reader him-/herself fills during that same moment.[8]

According to Joost Pollmann, "comics are a mix of visual and verbal elements and … text, picture, and typography together form a refined grammar that is capable of communicating 'the human condition' in quite a different way than literature and painting

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[2] E. Cambell, "What is a graphic novel?" in *graphic literature*, March – April 2007. p. 13.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] D. Parker Royal, "Introduction: coloring America: multi-ethnic engagements with graphic narrative" in *MELUS*, Vol. 32 (3), 2007. p. 7.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] M. Bernard and J.M. Carter, "Alan Moore and the graphic novel: confronting the fourth dimension" in *ImageTexT*, Vol. 1 (2), 2004. p. 1.
[7] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[8] *Ibid*, p. 7.

do."[9] He uses the term *literary comic* to describe works that highlight said human condition. Literary comics need not contain monsters and superheroes, as the more traditional comics do. Pollmann asks, "Why should only adventures be enchanting? And why should danger always be embodied by extraterrestrials or murderous zombies when the true horrors are our own *chimeras*?"[10]

Paul Gravett believes that graphic novels are very difficult to define. There are various connotations to the term. Some believe graphic novels to be pornographic literature, whereas others believe it is nothing but gaudy escapism. Gravett states that it encapsulates both, be it erotic graphic novels or superhero comics, but is much more than these limiting definitions. The other belief, according to Gravett, is that the term *graphic novel* can make people expect the visual equivalent of an extended, fictional work. The genre does include these text types as well, but is not limited to them. In actuality, the term 'graphic novel' is not quite definitive, but has lasted longer than terms such as *illustories*, *picto-fiction* or *sequential art*.[11]

J. Madison Davis and W. Eisner explore how graphic novels are still being connoted with the comic books of childhood and adolescence, and considered only as "mindless entertainment incapable of carrying the significant adult themes one would expect to find in the novel."[12] Comics are not seen as true literature, and neither are they seen as true art.[13] The graphic novel, in the sense of the visual equivalent of an extended fictional work, however, has increasingly become comics' road to recognition as a form of serious literature.[14] Despite scholastic exploration of the literary value of the genre, as well as the impact of certain works like *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman,[15] which is undoubtedly literary and deals with very complex and harrowing themes that won it a Pulitzer Prize, popular opinion is still that the graphic novel, or *graphic narrative*, is a hybrid form, neither serious literature nor serious art. According to Scott, ever since *Maus* was published in 1984 for the first time, "the comic book has been seen as a

[9] J. Pollmann, "An art of the real: about the adulthood of contemporary comics" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 1 (2), 1999. p. 107.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] P. Gravett, *Graphic novels: stories to change your life*, 2005. p. 8.
[12] J. Madison Davis, "How graphic can a mystery be?" in *World literature today*, July-August 2007. p. 7.
[13] W. Eisner, *Graphic storytelling and visual narrative*, 2006. p. 3.
[14] C. Hatfield, *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*, 2005, p. ix.
[15] A. Spiegelman, *Maus: a survivor's tale*, 1986.

legitimate extension of literature, not necessarily a form of 'pretty pictures' associated with children."[16] The counter-argument is that graphic narrative, even though it is a hybrid form, should be considered on its own merits; what it *is* rather than what it is not. In other words, graphic narrative should be evaluated as a hybrid synergy between art and text, as a separate literary form.

Gretchen E. Schwarz, in a study of graphic novels in adolescent and adult literature, found that graphic novels "offer value, variety and a new medium for literacy that acknowledges the impact of visuals."[17] She also highlights that graphic novels offer diverse alternatives to the more traditional prose texts, and that they can promote literacy, for instance: "Graphic novels can introduce students to literature they might never otherwise encounter, such as Peter Kuper's rendition of Kafka, *Give it up! And other stories*[18]".

Stephen E. Tabachnick explores graphic novels in academia, stating that "[the] excitement of newness alone is not very lasting in academe. But instead of sputtering out like other trendy fireworks, the graphic novel has been steadily gaining in brightness among audiences both inside and outside the academy."[19] This points to the graphic novel and other comic genres having more of a lasting effect. Indeed, as Tabachnick asks: "Is this recent popularity of graphic novels … an instant trend that will soon pass, or does it point to a deeper, more lasting shift in our culture?"[20] Charles Hatfield gives a possible reason for the genre's lasting effect. He states that "Comic art is not a form necessarily defined by simplicity or transparency but rather a potentially complex narrative instrument, and potentially challenging reading experience".[21]

Paul Gravett asks, "So what are graphic novels?"[22] Judging from the variety of definitions, it is not a narrowly defined genre. Gravett goes on to say that the term "graphic novel signifies a movement rather than a form. Consequently, there is nothing to

[16] C. Scott, "The 'good' comics: using comic books to teach history" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 8 (1). P. 546.
[17] G.E. Schwarz, "Graphic novels for multiple literacies" in *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy*, Vol. 46 (3), 2002. p. 262.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] S.E. Tabachnick, "A comic book world" in *World literature today*, March-April 2007. p. 24.
[20] *Ibid*, p. 24.
[21] C. Hatfield, *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*, 2005. p. 152.
[22] P. Gravett, *Graphic novels: stories to change your life*, 2005. p. 9.

gain from defining it."[23] The goal of the movement is to "take the form of the comic book, which has become an embarrassment, and raise it to a more ambitious and meaningful level."[24]

For the purposes of this study, however, one cannot simply eschew definitions. Definitions are essential for a contextual framework. Therefore, the study will be making use of the term *graphic narrative* and *comics* when describing the genres of comics in general, and stay with the term *graphic novel* when describing specific works of a more complex, literary nature.

2. Historical Background

When undertaking a study of any literary genre it is important to explore its historical roots. According to the introduction in Michael Pawuk's book, *Graphic novels: a genre guide to comic books, manga, and more*, "The use of art to tell stories has been with us since the dawn of man. From prehistoric cave paintings to icons of the Christian Orthodox Church, and more."[25] Granted, this is a very simplified statement, but it will suffice for the purposes of this study as an introductory sentence. According to Mario Saraceni, "Comics in the form we know now were first created in the last half of the nineteenth century in England. The first regular comic strip appeared in 1884 and featured the first comic hero."[26]The focus of this study will not go that far back, but will rather start with the *woodcut novels* of the 1910s, a more direct root of the modern Western graphic novel; move on to *manga* in Japan; and look at the new era of comic books, comic strips and the rise of the graphic novel in the Postwar and Early Cold War era (1946-1963); the 60s to the 80s; and, finally, the new millennium comics.

2.1 Woodcut Novels

According to Chris Lanier, the woodcut novels of the 1910s and onwards dispensed with text altogether, telling the story through pictures alone. These books "don't dispense with character, theme, or plot. Instead of sentences and paragraphs, however, they use a

[23] P. Gravett, *Graphic novels: stories to change your life*, 2005. p. 9.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] M. Pawuk, *Graphic novels: a genre guide to comic books, manga, and more*, 2007. p. xvi.
[26] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 1.

sequence of images. The effect is something like a silent film stripped of its intertitles".[27] Lanier goes on to discuss the popularity of the woodcut novels, and the main themes of class struggle and urban life. A number of artists from countries such as Germany, then-Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Canada, and the United States became creators of woodcut novels, which, according to Lanier, still informs the work of some contemporary graphic novelists, such as Peter Kuper and Eric Drooker.[28] The most well known of the woodcut novelists was the Belgian wood engraver, Frans Masereel, and his work, *Die Sonne*, published in Germany in 1927. [29] (See *Figure 1*)[30] The popularity of the woodcut novel lay in its wordlessness, traversing "the nationalist boundaries of language and even the class boundaries of literacy".[31] Unlike the cartoon strips of America and Britain, these woodcut novels were whole narratives, exploring complex themes, and not solely relying on humour in order to get their message across.

Figure 1: Die Sonne

[27] C. Lanier, "The 'woodcut novel': a forerunner to the graphic novel" in *World literature today*, March-April 2006. p. 15.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] W. Eisner, *Graphic storytelling and visual narrative*, 1996. p. 138.
[30] http://www.flemings.u-net.com/masereel.jpg
[31] C. Lanier, "The 'woodcut novel': a forerunner to the graphic novel" in *World literature today*, March-April 2006. p. 15.

2.2 Manga

Another very important genre of graphic narrative, which has had an indelible influence on western graphic novelists and cartoonists, is the Japanese comic art form, *Manga*, which will briefly be discusses in the context of Japanese culture, and then, more comprehensively, in how it has informed the genre of the graphic novel.

According to Kinko Ito, the Japanese language is not straightforward and clear, but rather relies on "contextual cues such as facial expressions, gestures, eye glances, length and timing of silence, tone of voice, and grunts…"[32] English, to a lesser degree, also relies on these cues, but the clear and direct linguistic message is more important than the accompanying gestures and cues, which in the Japanese language, according to Ito, is essential. Each image in *Manga* should therefore have its own acoustic counterpart.[33] The important aspect to note here, is that these contextual cues can be, and have been, expressed in manga with great success and eloquence.[34]

Ito goes further to explore the history of manga in Japanese culture, tracing it back to 607 CE in Ancient Japan; Bishop Toba's "the Animal Scrolls" during the Middle Ages; the "Otsu Pictures" and ending with examining Western influences and interest on and in Manga during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867).[35]

Manga has always had an element of satire in it, especially during the modern era with the civil rights movement and the political reform movement, "known as the Freedom and People's Rights Movement"[36], where manga played an important role in the development of freedom of speech. Manga truly became known in Japan with the work of Rakuten Kitazawa (1876-1955) (See *Figure 2*)[37], and the exchange of ideas and knowledge with the leading comics industry in the world, the United States, in the 1920s and 1930s.[38] After WWII manga started reflecting the social changes in Japan to a

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[32] K. Ito, "A history of *Manga* in the context of Japanese culture and society" in *The journal of popular culture*, Vol. 38 (3), 2005. p. 457.
[33] J. Pollmann, "An art of the real: about the adulthood of contemporary comics" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 1(2), 1999. p. 107.
[34] K. Ito, "A history of *Manga* in the context of Japanese culture and society" in *The journal of popular culture*, Vol. 38 (3), 2005 p. 457.
[35] *Ibid*, 458-460.
[36] *Ibid*, p. 462.
[37] http://www.lambiek.net/artists/k/kitazawa_r/kitazawa_r_cover.jpg
[38] K. Ito, "A history of *Manga* in the context of Japanese culture and society" in *The journal of popular culture*, Vol. 38 (3), 2005 p. 463.

greater extent. A new form of manga called *gekiga* emerged in 1957, which read like novels, and emphasised the seriousness of the genre, rather than the humorous aspects, which was the cornerstone of manga for many years.[39] The 1960s saw the true rise of manga[40] in the form of serials and magazines for adults, mostly tailored for men, whereas the 1970s saw the incorporation of sexuality as a theme (especially male homosexuality) into the stories, as well as the start of academic and educational manga[41] The 1980s saw a major boom of manga in Japan and the West specifically, with erotic manga being created for adult women. Later, manga cafés became very popular as well, and they remain so even to this day.[42]

Figure 2: Rakuten Kitazawa

[39]K. Ito, "A history of *Manga* in the context of Japanese culture and society" in *The journal of popular culture,* Vol. 38 (3), 2005 p. 467.
[40] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The Journal of American culture,* Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 212.
[41] K. Ito, "A history of *Manga* in the context of Japanese culture and society" in *The journal of popular culture,* Vol. 38 (3), 2005. pp. 469-471.
[42] *Ibid,* pp. 472-473.

2.3 The Postwar/Cold War era in America

According to Garyn G. Roberts, the invention of the atomic bomb, the postwar era and the Cold War, brought in a new era of comic book publishing in the West. The sequential art stories of the Bible, for instance, that could be found in the EC Comics publication of M.C. Gaines, was too conventional and familiar to readers who had experienced the aftermath of WWII and were experiencing the vast destructive potential of their world during the Cold War.[43] M.C. Gaines' son, Bill, had a much stronger notion of the perception shift in Western consciousness, and when he took over from his father, he started to publish entertaining parodies, such as *Tales from the crypt* (See *Figure* 3)[44]. He also started the *MAD* comic book in 1954, a forerunner of *MAD Magazine*.[45] [46]At the same time, Charles Schulz created the famous *Peanuts* cartoon (*See Figure 4*)[47], out of necessity because, according to Roberts, "The world of the continuity comic strip was changing; it was being allotted decreasing space in newspapers."[48] The newspaper comic page and the comic book have been the most dominant forms of graphic narrative, according to Charles Hatfield, and this is the period during which they rose to prominence.[49] According to Saraceni, *Peanuts* was the start of comics becoming more intellectual.[50]

[43] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 211.
[44] http://uncivilsociety.org/charles-schulz-peanuts-5.jpg
[45] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 211.
[46] P. Buhle, "The left in American comics: rethinking the visual vernacular" in *Science and Society*, Vol. 71 (3), 2007. p. 350.
[47] http://www.collectedcomicslibrary.com/ec_comics_archives/tales_from_the_crypt_archives/images/tales_from_the_crypt_archives_3.jpg
[48] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 212.
[49] C. Hatfield, *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*, 2005, p. 5.
[50] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 2.

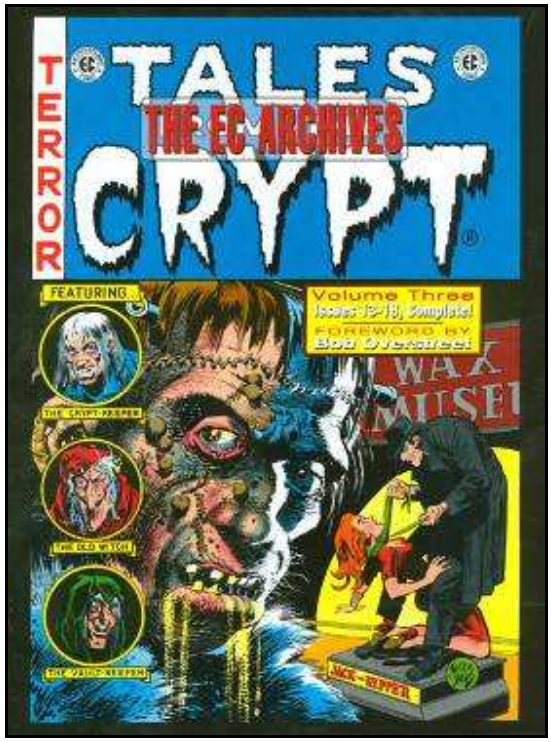

Figure 3: Tales from the crypt

Figure 4: Peanuts

Continuing in America, the 1940s saw the brief decline of superhero comics, which appeared in the late 1930s, but saw the rise of crime and horror genres. The

increase of violent depiction in these comics, however, finally led to censure in both Britain and America in the 1950s.[51]

2.4 Comics in the 1960s to 1980s

The 1960s to 1980s in America again saw the rise of superhero cartoons. Some of the greatest and most lasting superhero comics, like the *Fantastic Four*, *X-men*, *the Hulk*, new *Superman* and *Batman* stories, *Spiderman* etc. were created during this period[52] An important sub-genre arose as well, styled *Alternative Comics*. The aim of alternative comics was to "push back the thematic horizon of the form".[53] Underground cartoons, or *Comix*, was part of this alternative movement, and were characterised for being experimental and intended for adult readers.[54] Although not styled as such, these were the first contemporary graphic novels. Cartoons of political commentary, like *Doonesbury*, became very well known in the 1970s (See *Figure 5*)[55], as well as cartoons of alternative social commentary, such as the well-known marijuana-smoking, lazy, hippie trio, *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* in America. In Europe comics became increasingly intellectual, and started to attract scholarly attention.[56] Furthermore, in America in the late 70s, Will Eisner created the first comic styled as a *graphic novel*, titled A *Contract with God*[57] and in the world of underground comics, Spiegelman's *Maus*, as mentioned before, received critical acclaim.[58] Also, in the 1980s, *Manga* was more rigorously introduced to the Western World, accompanied by a stream of "Japanese animated cartoons to Europe and America."[59]

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[51] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 2.
[52] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 212.
[53] C. Hatfield, *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*, 2005. p. 3.
[54] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 3.
[55] http://www.visualeditors.com/apple/wpcontent/uploads/2007/07/doonesbury_072605.gif
[56] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 3.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 212-213.
[59] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 3.

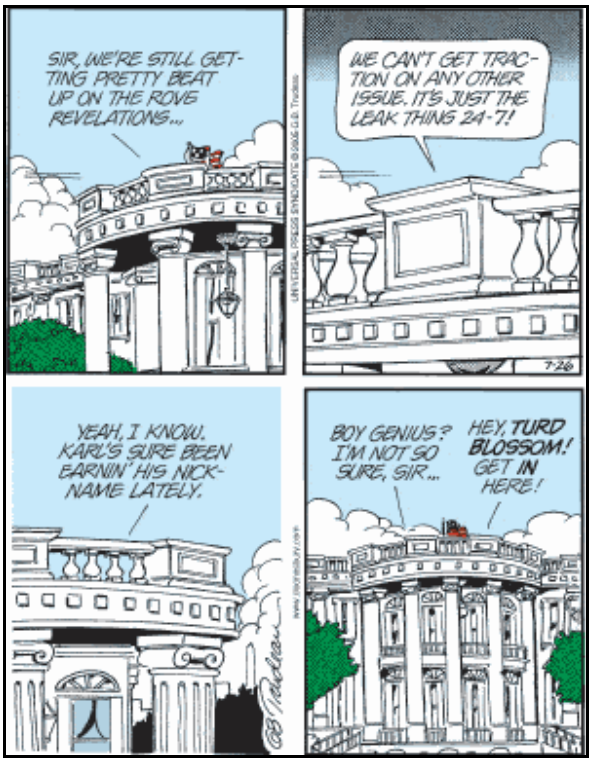

Figure 5: Doonesbury

2.5 New Millennium comics and collaboration

From the 1990s onwards, more adult comics were published than ever before, and these included serious themes and form experimentation.[60] This section looks at the new millennium graphic narratives, as well as comic-culture melding, particularly the graphic narrative of marginalised cultures and of the French Manga fusion of Frédéric Boilet, styled *Manga Nouvelle*.

During the 1990s classic comic strips and comic book stories started being reprinted in book form and anthologies, like Frank Miller's *Dark Night Batman*. Together with novel-length graphic narrative, these forms started becoming very popular under the umbrella term of *graphic novel.*[61] A great asset to graphic narrative is the development

[60] M. Saraceni, *The language of comics*, 2003. p. 3.
[61] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 213.

and use of electronic formats, which was not available to previous generations of creators.[62]

Charles Hatfield describes how the graphic novel and other graphic narrative have found great mainstream popularity since 2000. He cites a few examples, such as the Book Expo America in 2003, which included a graphic novel pavilion; the boost of the genre from translated Japanese *Manga*; the continuing popularity of graphic novel publishing houses such as Pantheon's graphic novels, as well as major book publishers signing distribution deals with alternative comic publishers, such as the deal between Fantagraphics and W.W. Norton in 2001.[63]

Evidently there has always been an *alternative comics* movement in graphic narrative. Recent graphic novels have become platforms for many oppressed groups, and serve as a demystifying agent, and provide dispossessed and marginalised groups a voice, a role that literature and art have often played. M.A. Chaney specifically looks at recent African-American graphic novels, and states that "[r]ich examples may be found in graphic novels by African-Americans where narrative drawing combines with strategies for revising the boundaries between black and white."[64] Chaney goes on to say that many graphic novels by African Americans explore numerous "binary formulations central to the maintenance of Western culture"[65], such as the boundaries between past and present, and performance and history.[66]

According to Rob Vollmar, there are three main contemporary graphic narrative movements, which have proven to be the source of all other visual narrative movements: *bande dessinée* (Franco-Belgian), *comics* (British and American) and *manga* (Japanese).[67] He goes further to say that all three movements evolved in a similar manner, from being "a medium associated with disposable novelty at the dawn of the twentieth century to one already commanding the stage as a vibrant and literary form in the

[62] G.G. Roberts, "Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium" in *The journal of American culture*, Vol. 27 (2), 2004. p. 213.
[63] C. Hatfield, *Alternative comics: an emerging literature*, 2005. p. 152-153.
[64] M.A. Chaney, "Drawing on history in recent African American graphic novels" in *MELUS*, Vol. 30 (3), 2007. p. 175.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*.
[67] R. Vollmar, "Frédéric Boilet and the Nouvelle Manga revolution" in *World Literature Today*, March-April 2007. p. 34.

emergent twenty-first."[68] His main point is that due to globalisation, the boundaries between the three traditions have become very narrow, and that their respective markets have drawn closer together, which led to the impulse of what Vollmar calls *cross-pollination*, both creatively and economically, of the traditions.[69] Vollmar then writes about the Nouvelle Manga (See *Figure 6*)[70] movement, which is:

> [a] sophisticated, international organization that has, in the span of five years, successfully affiliated its efforts with a broad network of publishers reaching the three fundamental markets for narrative art … Moreover, the critical acclaim that these works have generally received upon their arrival is often adequately superlative to open up additional language markets … that reach wider audiences yet.[71]

From this very brief exploration of the historical roots and development of graphic narrative it is apparent that graphic narrative is more than just comics. There is clearly an urge to convey meaning through sequential art, as well as an urge to give graphic narrative a more solid place in literature. The main traditions of graphic narrative have led to a multitude of offshoots. The cultural boundaries are narrowing between styles, which, like many disciplines both creative and academic, are giving rise to more collaborative work, as well as synergies of traditions.

[68] R. Vollmar, "Frédéric Boilet and the Nouvelle Manga revolution" in *World Literature Today*, March-April 2007. p. 34.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] http://www.narbonic.com/17_cover.jpg
[71] R. Vollmar, "Frédéric Boilet and the Nouvelle Manga revolution" in *World Literature Today*, March-April 2007. p. 38.

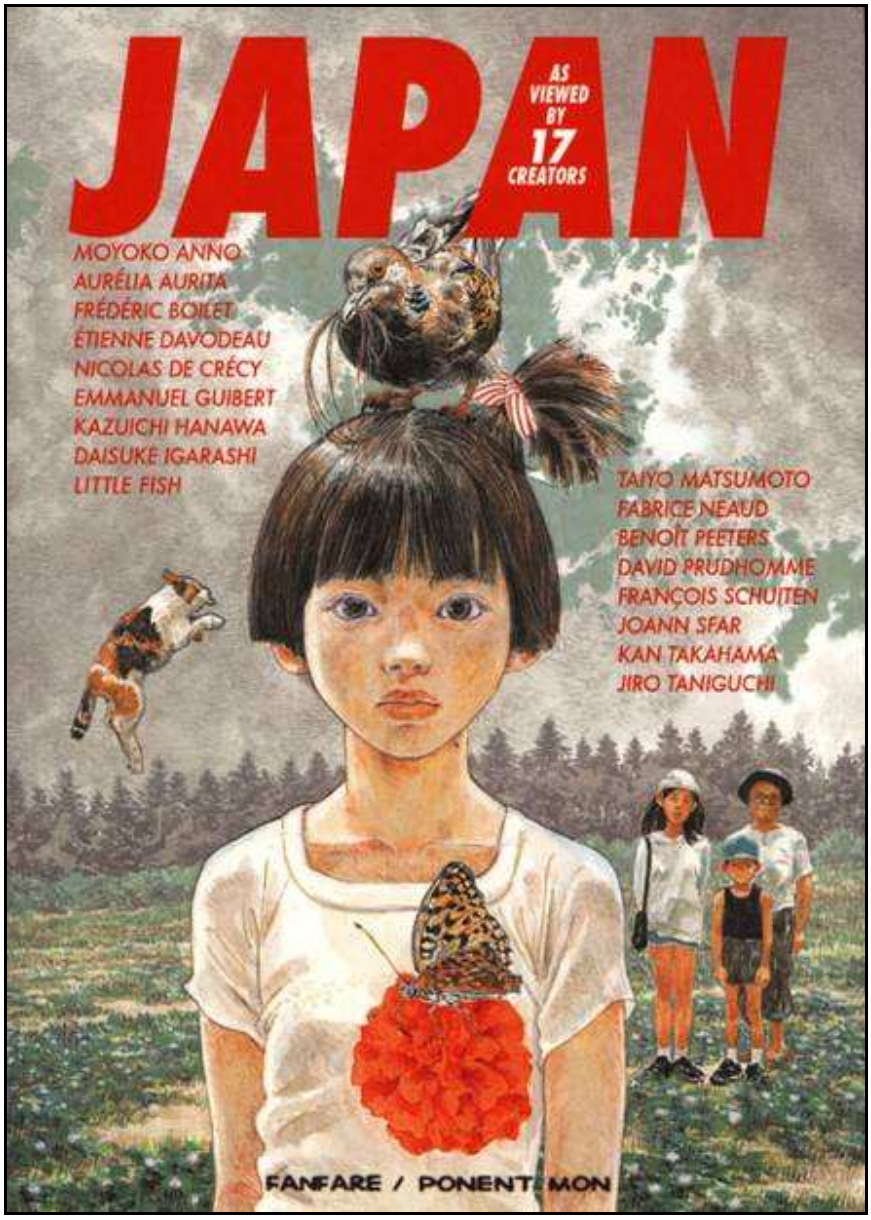

Figure 6: Nouvelle Manga

3. The Graphic Novel: Three illustrative examples

3.1 *Maus*

3.1.1 History, time and social memory

When undertaking a study of the graphic novel, it is important to look at illustrative examples to indicate the unique possibilities of the genre. A good launching point would

be Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. As previously mentioned, this novel received a Pulitzer Prize for literature, so it is essential in any study of graphic narrative to briefly look at this text.

Maus is the story of Art Spiegelman's parents and their experiences during the Holocaust and Auschwitz. The panels seem almost cute at the start of the novel, since the characters are depicted as various animals. Jews are drawn as mice, Nazis as cats, Poles as pigs and Americans as dogs. Spiegelman's girlfriend in the novel is French, and is therefore depicted as a frog. This might make one believe the novel will be childish and endearing, but this is far from the truth. In reality the vicissitudes of the Holocaust and Auschwitz are drawn harrowingly and with incredible impact. The full title of the first section of the graphic novel is *Maus: my father bleeds history*, reflecting that the past features prominently in this graphic novel, not only the history of the Holocaust, but also on a more personal level.

The story is of Artie, a contemporary comic book artist and writer, discovering the story of his father's life during World War 2 as a Jew. Artie conducts interviews with his father, which highlight their relationship. Flashbacks take the reader to Poland and Auschwitz. At the same time Artie's own story also emerges, his relationship with a sometimes autocratic and difficult father, and his reactions to his mother's suicide. Artie's success as an artist also comes to the fore through this story, as well as the inner workings of the publication industry, and the oftentimes insensitive giants of the trade.

According to Hillary Chute, many "readings of how *Maus* represents history approaches the issue in terms of ongoing debates about Holocaust representation in the context of postmodernism, or in relation to theories of traumatic memory."[72] She further argues that the form of *Maus* itself is essential to how it represents history.[73] She uses *Maus* in her argument to illustrate how graphic novels and graphic narrative can be used to very effectively represent, approach and express "serious, even devastating, histories."[74] She aims to show that the way in which "comics make language, ideas and

[72] H. Chute, "'The shadow of a past time': History and Graphic representation in *Maus*" in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, summer 2006. p. 199.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*

concepts 'literal' is to call attention to how the medium can make the twisting lines of history readable through form."[75]

Erin McGlothlin also writes about how Spiegelman's graphic novel tackles aspects of history, but more in terms of temporality and narrative. McGlothlin states that "the comic book format … with its easily differentiated depictions of … separate temporal levels and … physical manifestations of the same character (young versus old [for instance]), appears to clarify the disparities between the past and the present and to divide the two temporalities into distinct units in a much more visceral way than narration."[76] She goes on further to state that using visual images as a "supplement to narration seems to be an ideal message for demarcating the differences between Holocaust experience and the contemporary lives of the survivor and his son."[77] Her most salient point is that whilst the comic format allows for the clear separation of the past from the present, in *Maus's* case specifically, it also serves to show that the past and the present are inextricably linked with each other, "intimately interconnected … for the past is revealed as constitutive to the present, and the present makes demands on the ways in which the past is represented."[78] In the case of *Maus*, therefore, the Holocaust past is an integral element of the present and the present becomes the key for representing the past. This integrality of past and present is depicted in such a way that is distinctive to the graphic narrative genres. It is submitted that the well-written graphic novel, therefore, has a unique perspective on the functions of time. There exists much more of a sense of immediacy than in more traditional prose novels.

Matthew T. Jones investigates *Maus* in terms of the construction of social memory. He defines social memory as "'recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the group.' Of central importance to the construction of social memory is the concept of 'historical imagination' which is described … as the incorporation of historical events into personal memory experiences."[79] He makes use of Barbie Zelizer's

[75] H. Chute, "'The shadow of a past time': History and Graphic representation in *Maus*" in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, summer 2006. p. 199.
[76] E. McGlothlin, "No time like the present: narrative and time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*" in *Narrative*, Vol. 11 (2), May 2003. p. 178.
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] M. T. Jones, "Construction of social memory through strategies of reflexivity: a case study in three texts by Art Spiegelman" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 9 (2), 2007. p. 373.

argument of the role of mass media in the process of re-appropriating the memory of events, especially the role that comics, popular films, and other forms of popular culture has played in, what she calls, "the shaping and reshaping of memory".[80] Jones' main aim in his article is to look at the strategies of reflexivity in the work of Art Spiegelman to determine how the self-reflective aspects (the writer commenting on the writing process) of *Maus*, for instance, serves to construct a more authentic social memory than that of mass media.[81]

In his conclusion, Jones states that "what the reader [of *Maus*] does not expect is a sense of immediate personal impact and relevance, since the Holocaust is a part of history, not a part of the reader's experience … Spiegelman succeeds in reconstituting this sense of personal immediacy that is essential for the continued relevance of Holocaust memory to future generations."[82] Jones quotes Tabachnick (1993) who said that "Spiegelman has conflated the past and present, modern America and Second World War Europe, and has succeeded in making the Holocaust a permanent part of the contemporary reader's historical memory".[83]

Hillary Chute is a reader who also looks at the traditional escapism of comics in relation to *Maus*, as well. She cites a quote by Spiegelman, in which he says: "I'm trying to make comics that can wake you up, like caffeine comics that get you back in touch with things that are happening around you."[84] She states that *Maus's* "challenging multivocality, cross-discursivity [sic], and the thick surface texture of its pages demand a reading process that engages the reader in an act of consumption that is explicitly anti-diversionary."[85] In other words, rather than being escapist or a diversion, as is the more traditional view of comics reading, *Maus* is quintessentially focused on the real, rather than the fantasy and, in fact, gives to the reader a sense of confronting a hyper-reality.

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[80] B. Zelizer, "Reading the past against the grain: the shape of memory studies" in *Critical studies in mass communication*, Vol. 12 (2), 1995. pp. 221-229.
[81] M. T. Jones, "Construction of social memory through strategies of reflexivity: a case study in three texts by Art Spiegelman" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 9 (2), 2007. p. 373.
[82] M. T. Jones, "Construction of social memory through strategies of reflexivity: a case study in three texts by Art Spiegelman" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 9 (2), 2007, p. 391.
[83] S. Tabachnik, "Of *Maus* and memory: the structure of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel of the Holocaust" in *Word & Image* Vol. 9 (2), 1993. p. 161.
[84] H. Chute, "'The shadow of a past time': History and Graphic representation in *Maus*" in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, summer 2006. pp. 213-214.
[85] *Ibid*, p. 214.

Moving from the specific to the more general, Chute writes about graphic narrative and calls it "a contemporary form that is helping to expand the cultural map of historical representation. Its expansive visual-verbal grammar can offer a space for ethical representation without problematic closure."[86] Lastly, she writes more specifically about *Maus*: "Epitomizing the possibilities of the new comic form, *Maus*, interlaced with different temporalities whose ontological weave it frames and questions through special aesthetics, rebuilds history through a potent combination of words and images that draws attention to the tenuous and fragile footing of the present."[87] Chute, McGlothlin and Jones have all investigated *Maus* in terms of some aspects of time and form, an indication of the importance of these aspects in *Maus* specifically, and also, in more general terms, an indication of the possibilities and unique characteristics of the graphic novel as genre.

3.1.2 Examples from the text

One of the main points discussed on *Maus* is the self-reflective nature of the novel. The writer's personal experiences are strongly linked with the story of his father during the Holocaust. The most poignant of these moments in the text is where Spiegelman inserts a graphic novel within a graphic novel about his mother's suicide.[88] (See *Figure 7*). Robert S. Leventhal states that "this text-within-the-text recounts Artie's own incomplete or failed attempt to work through the traumatic loss of his mother, his own melancholic and masochistic tendencies to internalize the dysfunction of his family and his mother's depression, and the degree to which his writing bears the mark of that loss and is itself a type of working-through in its own right."[89]

[86] H. Chute, "'The shadow of a past time': History and Graphic representation in *Maus*" in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, summer 2006. p. 214.
[87] *Ibid*, p. 220.
[88] A. Spiegelman, The complete *Maus: a survivor's tale and here my troubles began*, 2003, Penguin books, London, p. 102.
[89] R.S. Leventhal, "Art Spiegelman's Maus: working through the trauma of the holocaust" www.Iath.virginia.edu/holocaust/spiegelman.html,

Figure 7: Prisoner on the hell planet: a case history

In *Figure 8* the reader sees Artie working on his father's story, and telling his story of writing *Maus*. Significantly, he is human wearing the mask of a mouse. The flies that surround him become clear in the next panel, where it shows that his writing desk stands amid the corpses of those who died at Auschwitz. This is a particularly poignant reflection on writing about such a harrowing theme, and the haunting memories of the creator's subject.

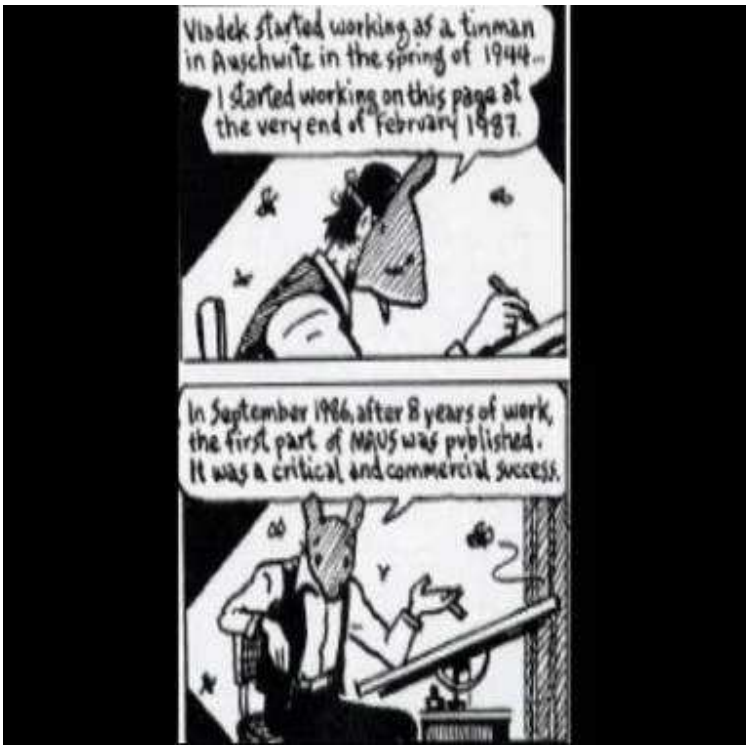

Figure 8: The self-reflective nature of Maus[90]

[90] A. Spiegelman, The complete *Maus: a survivor's tale and here my troubles began*, 2003, Penguin books, London, p. 102.

3.1.3 Examples from *Diss*

In *Diss*, the form of the novel plays with time and space as well. In this scene (See *Figure 9*) the main character is confronted with a memory from his past. He meets an old friend of his lover's, and they have a conversation. The main character's thoughts, however, are not in the present, but rather in the past. The narrative continues in the present, whereas the images move into the past. At the same time, the reader is aware that the novel's present is his/her future. This is a unique technique that the prose novel cannot convey, and puts the reader in two places, together with his/her physical space, at the same time.

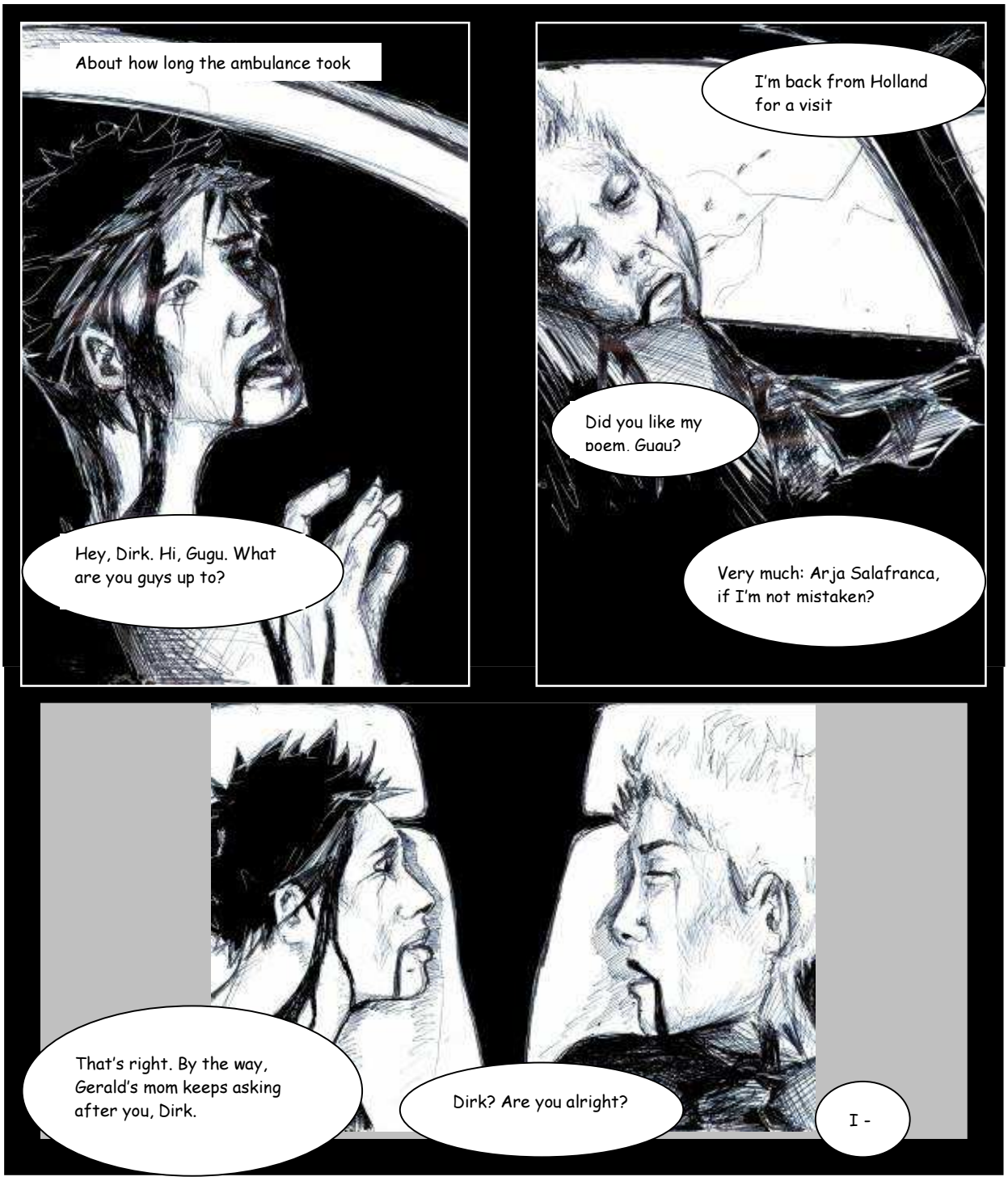

Figure 9: Diss and time

3.2 *The Sandman*

3.2.1 Serials, myth and intertextuality

Maus has been mentioned with regards to the unique way in which graphic narrative can tackle issues of history and time. *Maus* is a book-length work in two volumes and has been published as such. It is also important to examine one of the graphic serials that has appeared in published book form, and also styled a graphic novel. A good example is Neil Gaiman's critically acclaimed science-fiction/fantasy series, *The Sandman*, specifically how it deals with the concepts of myth and intertextual cues in a contemporary, though fantastical, setting and society.

The Sandman Series, originally comprised of 75 issues separately published, has been put together in 10 volumes by Vertigo Press, a branch of DC comics between 1991 and 1997.[91] The main character throughout the serial is Morpheus, the king of dreams. He is one of the Endless, who are reflections of archetypal human emotions. These are Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and Delirium. Each of these characters exists together with humans and gods. They often make bargains with each other, using a range of human emotions as their playing field. They are reflections of the emotions they represent as well, both physically and in terms of personality.

According to David E. Goldweber, the main character, Morpheus, or the King of Dreams, "crafts, controls, and oversees dreams of all types – happy, sad, comforting, frightening. The manifest importance of dreams is stated repeatedly in the series … in each of these … dreams, the dreamers have starring roles and are either in the midst of indulging their own deepest secrets – or on the verge of discovering these secrets for the first time.[92] Goldweber goes further in his argument by stating that Morpheus is not just the king of dreams, but of stories as well: "Dreams and stories are never concerned merely with facts, but with facts presented in a particular way, usually a special way that highlights those facts … often, dreams and stories present facts using symbols, analogies and metaphors.[93]

[91] D.E. Goldweber, "The function of dreams and stories in the Sandman" in *International journal of comic art*, Vol. 3 (1), 2001. p. 77.
[92] *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.
[93] *Ibid*, pp. 81.

In the after-word of the 10th volume of the series, *The Wake*, Gaiman refers to the entire series as "a story about stories", whether it be Caesar Augustus employing a storyteller, ancient Hungarian mythology featuring werewolves and magic, African tribal tales, or the tales of the Celtic Elves.[94]

Alisa Kwitney states that "Within the two thousand pages of *The Sandman*, caliphs and presidents and angels struggle with the vocation of rulership[95]" The serial contains many stories, and they are all woven together with myth and intertexts. Indeed, Kwitney maintains that *The Sandman*: assume[s] a certain level of sophistication on the part of their audiences. You won't find any comic book footnotes to explain the multitude of arcane historical, mythological, literary, and comic book references … although these lovely, clever bits are woven into the fiction, their use is never arbitrary: the stories are never clever for the sake of being clever."[96]

Kurt Lancaster wrote an article on the integration of Shakespeare into popular culture by examining *The Sandman*'s intertextual references to both the figure of Shakespeare, as well as his work.[97] The focus of the article is how Shakespeare has been popularised through the medium of graphic narrative, whereas the focus of this research essay is to see how graphic novels can incorporate and make use of intertextuality, as well as recreate and revive myth in a unique way. There are many intertextual references in *The Sandman*, but this essay will look at the references to Shakespeare in more depth to serve as an illustrative guide to other references.

In Gaiman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*[98] the historical figure of Shakespeare, the characters from his plays, and the plays themselves are used to populate and fertilise the world that Gaiman created with *The Sandman*. The character of Shakespeare makes a bargain with the Dream Lord, Morpheus, so that he might fulfil his greatest desire: writing great plays, better than his friend, Marlowe.[99] Later in the volume, Gaiman explores the play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, itself. According to Lancaster, "[I]n

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[94] N. Gaiman et al, 1991: *Sandman, Volume 10: The wake***,** DC Comics, After-word.
[95] A. Kwitney, 2003: *The Sandman: king of dreams*, DC Comics, New York, p. 20.
[96] *Ibid*, p. 21.
[97] K. Lancaster, "Neil Gaiman's 'A Midsummer night's dream': Shakespeaer integrated into popular culture" in *Journal of American culture*, October 2000. p. 69.
[98] N. Gaiman et al, 1992: *Sandman Volume 3: Dream Country*, DC Comics.
[99] K. Lancaster, "Neil Gaiman's 'A Midsummer night's dream': Shakespeaer integrated into popular culture" in *Journal of American culture*, October 2000. p. 69-71.

Gaiman's story – a work richly layered with a plethora of meaning on art, beauty, family, and other-worldliness – he [Gaiman] provides a parallel meta-commentary on the action and plot of Shakespeare's play and his personal life[100]. The character of Shakespeare is the head of a travelling group of players who perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the real King and Queen of the fairies and their court. Gaiman continuously parallels Shakespeare's play to the reactions and natures of the real Fey. Peach Blossom, a nightmarish creature, is offended at the idealistic way in which he is portrayed in the play, for instance.

According to Joseph Campbell there are four functions of myth: mystical – "realising what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery"; cosmological – "showing you what the shape of the universe is"; sociological – "supporting and validating a certain social order"; and pedagogical – "how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances."[101]

Lancaster states that:

> Gaiman layers this story [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*] with these [Campbell's] four functions of myth by revolving them around four layers of fiction that continually shift through the work: the mystical is represented as the otherworldliness of European Fairy and Gaiman's own mythology through the character of the Dream Lord; the cosmological is represented through the historical world of Shakespeare, his contemporaries and Hamnet [Shakespeare's son who features in the *Sandman*]; the sociological is found in the European world-view as projected through the Athenian characters in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and the pedagogical weaves itself through the themes of love conveyed in both stories.[102]

From the Lancaster quote the complexities of the various stories, intertextual references and mythic references in *Sandman* become clear. Rather than mere fantasy escapism, *The Sandman* acts as a multifaceted reflection of contemporary society and, in the broader context, an expression of the human condition. It is submitted that *Sandman* therefore fulfils the requirements of both a work of great fiction, as well as high art, being art "which deals with lofty and dignified subjects and is characterised by an elevated style

[100] K. Lancaster, "Neil Gaiman's 'A Midsummer night's dream': Shakespeare integrated into popular culture" in *Journal of American culture*, October 2000. p. 71.
[101] J. Campbell, 1991: *The power of myth: with Bill Moyers.* Doubleday, New York, pp. 38-39.
[102] K. Lancaster, "Neil Gaiman's 'A Midsummer night's dream': Shakespeare integrated into popular culture" in *Journal of American culture*, October 2000. p. 75.

avoiding all meretricious display."[103] At the same time, *The Sandman Series* serves as a work of popular fiction.

It is important to examine Louise Nortjé's research in order to investigate how graphic novels in general and *The Sandman* in particular approach both the revival of myth as well as contemporary myth creation in more detail.

Nortje writes that myth is one of the main ways in which ancient societies affirmed and reaffirmed their histories. She calls myth a "traditional, sacred story about superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, ghosts and spirits, set outside historical time, in a supernatural world, or sometimes [it] goes between the supernatural world and that of human history."[104] The crux of Nortje's argument, however, is not the definition of myth, but the ongoing process of myth creation. She states that:

> Myths do not belong to the past – the creation of myths can be seen as a typical human activity, and the process of creating myth is a current, ongoing one. Thus creating myth is evidently a primal and universal function of the human mind, as it seeks to find a unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and tries to explain the meaning of an individual's life.[105]

Nortje also examines the creation of myth in a postmodern, technological society. She states that the "verbal retelling of stories and myths seem to be [a] thing of the past in Western civilisation."[106] She concludes that the graphic novel (what Nortje calls a derivative of the comic book medium) is one of the best tools of "creating contemporary myth suitable for a postmodern society that can be both useful and enlightening to many."[107] She specifically looks at *The Sandman Series* within this context, and writes:

> *The Sandman* [series] tells a story, and simultaneously many stories, of worlds that do not exist in reality – worlds where the paranormal is considered to be normal, and impossible things become possible…[it] incorporate[s] fantastical beings, and realms are represented which are not ordinarily thought to exist, but nevertheless, the stories do have some connections with reality…[it] not only incorporates old and new mythological elements necessary for creating myth, but also includes archetypal characters, giving readers symbols that are easy to understand and relate to. The series functions as a contemporary myth, showing a

[103] www.dictionary.die.net
[104] L. Nortje, "Contemporary myth and the graphic novel medium" in *P-yp!* Spring 2008, pp. 2-3.
[105] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] *Ibid.*

> certain view of the universe, the world and society, and commenting on how to live a 'human lifetime under any circumstances'[108]

From the above-mentioned argument one can construe that the series successfully approaches both myth as well as intertextuality in a way that is unique to the graphic novel as a medium. The visual and textual elements of the series work well together in order to establish a memorable set of old myths transported into a modern setting.

3.2.2 Examples from the text

Figure 10[109] shows the queen of the fairies while she watches Shakespeare and his players perform *A midsummer night's dream*. This serves as both a good example of the use of intertext as well as mythology. The real Titania watches a reproduction of her world in play-form. She is speaking to the Dream Lord, Morpheus, and he reflects on Shakespeare's bargain with him.

[108] L. Nortje, "Contemporary myth and the graphic novel medium" in *P-yp!* Spring 2008, pp. 3.
[109] N. Gaiman et al. *Sandman: Volume 3: Dream country,* 1991, DC Comics, New York.

Figure 10: Myth and intertext in The Sandman

In the next example (*Figure 11*)[110], Morpheus has received the key to hell from Lucifer, who decided to retire (a very human quality is given to Lucifer). Forces in the world, including those of order and chaos, arrive at Morpheus' dream palace and vie for the ownership of hell. This scene serves as a good example of the creation of modern myths. Gaiman depicts these forces in ways that reflect the modern world, as well as the ancient world at the same time.

[110] N. Gaiman et al. *Sandman: Volume 4: Seasons of mist*, 1992, p. 113.

Figure 11: Myth in the modern world

3.2.2 Examples from *Diss*

Like the *Sandman*, *Diss* also makes use of both myth and intertexts. The entire novel is based on Dante's *Inferno*, so it is an intertext in its entirety. At the same time, other intertextual references are used as well. *Figure 12* shows characters reciting poetry from contemporary South African writers. The novel therefore becomes a reflection of contemporary culture as well.

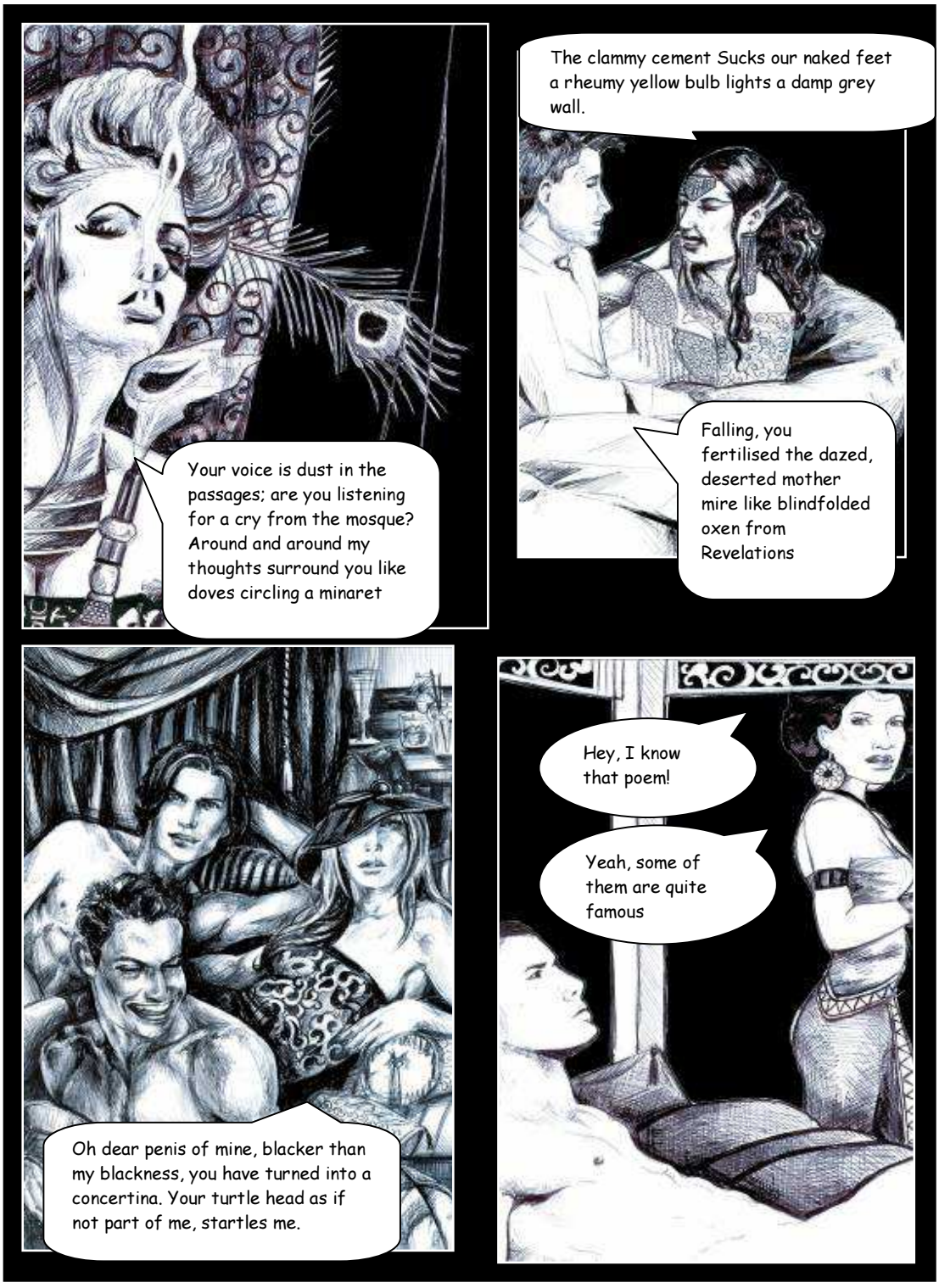

Figure 12: Diss and intertexts

The mythology of *Diss* is based on Dante, but other mythological references are also used. Egyptian legends plays a significant role, as a counter-myth to the Greek and Roman (*See Figure 13*).

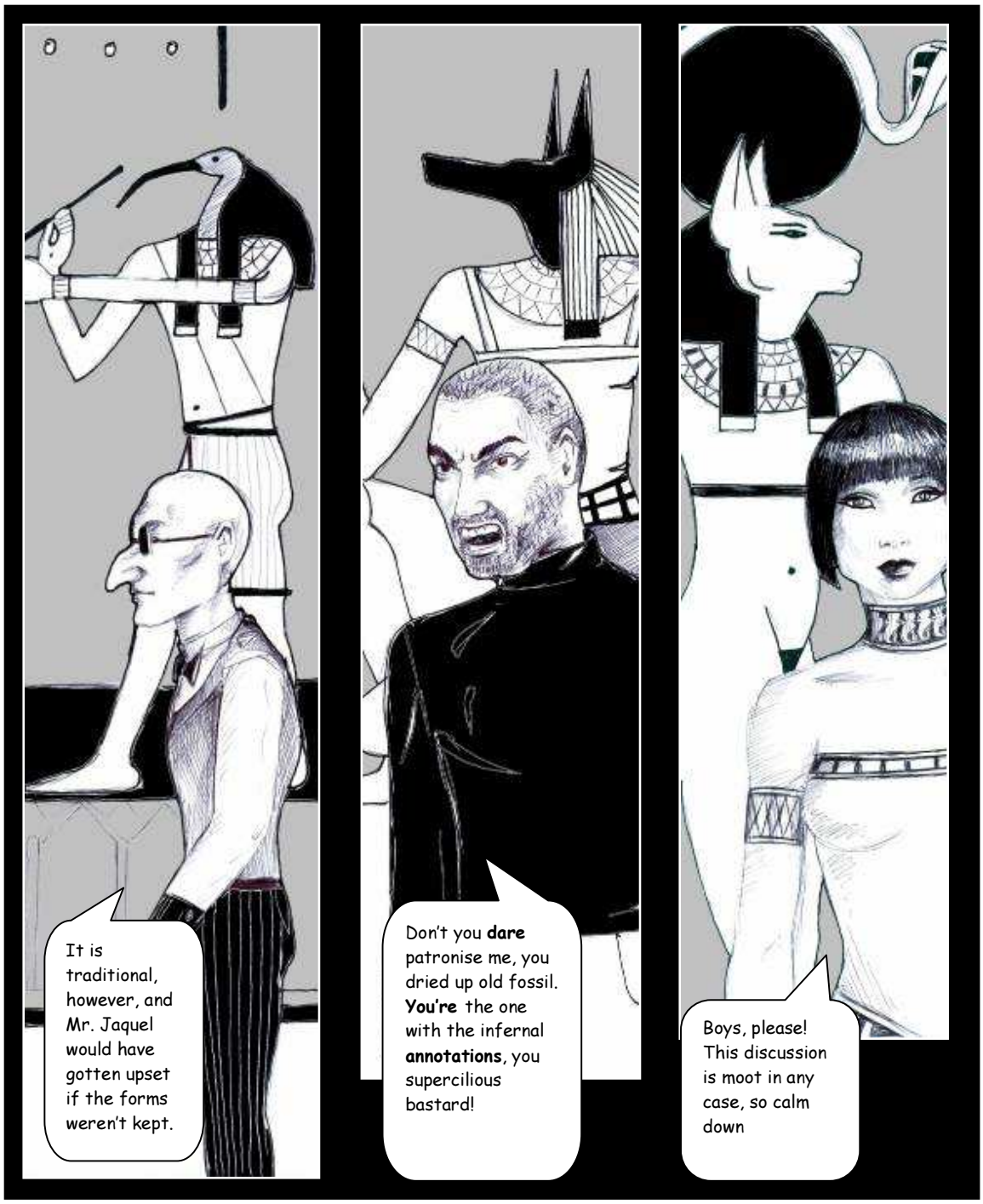

Figure 13: Diss and mythology

3.3 *Persepolis*

3.3.1 Memoir, identity and liminality

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi is an autobiographical graphic novel, or memoir, on Satrapi's experience of fundamentalist Iran, and her removal from Iran to Europe for her schooling. In terms of historiography, memoir is considered a primary text, which needs to be corroborated with other texts in order to ascertain the veracity of the writing. In terms of a creative work, however, memoir can highlight the life of a particular individual and his/her experiences within a culture. *Persepolis* succeeds in doing this. First of all, it shows the experiences of a young girl before the fundamentalist government took over; moves over to the experiences of a relatively free-thinking and liberal teenager in a fundamentalist regime follow; and lastly, the experience of 'exile' in Europe is shown where the main character has gone for schooling. *Persepolis II* deals with the return from exile.

The Iranian Diaspora community has grown immensely, and according to Amy Malek, "[T]he … community … established and growing [has arrived at] the coming-of-age of the second generation … heralded by the publication of numerous memoirs that have brought the Iranian Diaspora experience to the realm of popular culture."[111] Malek specifically examines *Persepolis* as a unique form of exile cultural production because it blends the genres of memoir and the graphic novel in a way that "provide[s] resonance with Iranian and non-Iranian readers alike."[112]

In her article, Malek seeks to examine "the construction and negotiation of identity issues within the diaspora, including hybridity, liminality, and interrogations of the third space created in and by exile."[113] In her opinion, *Persepolis 1* and *2* provide an exceptional way in which to confront and examine these issues because the two volumes as a whole offer "uniquely apt examples of exile cultural production, illustrating how Satrapi's liminality allowed her to create a third space where issues of exile, return and identity negotiations can be performed while bending and blending Western genres with

[111] A. Malek, "Memoir as Iranian exile cultural production: a case study of Marjane Satrapi's 'Persepolis' series" in *Iranian Studies*, September 2006, Vol. 39 (3). p. 353.
[112] *Ibid.* p. 354.
[113] *Ibid.*

Iranian history and culture." [114] She further calls *Persepolis* a unique "blend [of] the genres of memoir and [the] graphic novel."[115] Nancy Miller writes: "What gives Satrapi's project its distinctive place in the expanding domains of life writing … is neither obviously new – the Iranian revolutionary saga in graphic form – nor the familiar story of the daughter leaving home and separating from her mother, but the arc of the autobiography created by the interlocking visual and narrative trajectories that link the two."[116]

Jennifer Worth also writes about *Persepolis*, but in terms of embodied performance. The focus of her article is on the written word and its role as an artistic outlet, especially in Iran, "where Islam has been a formidable presence since the seventh century and the official state religion since the sixteenth century."[117] She goes on to say that in such an environment "the opportunities of women to be publicly seen and heard have been extremely limited, making the pull of the written word particularly strong."[118]

The main focus of her article is to take terms from performance studies and highlight concepts within the graphic novel, particularly *Persepolis*, where this performance approach works well since the novel is a first person account. For the purposes of this paper it is more important to look at her view of the graphic novel in general. She writes, "[t]he traditional novel is regarded as an outlet for women denied a public presence; the graphic novel goes a step further, allowing presence both vocally and physically through repeated self-portraiture, which deals frankly with distinctly corporeal issues of visibility, sexuality and identity."[119]

In terms of identity, Worth writes that Satrapi is unlike her contemporaries as she does not focus solely on the difficulty of resolving identity issues within the context of liminality, but rather, "she demonstrates the complex interplay of political and personal history that serves to construct – or obstruct – the formation of identity itself, ultimately

[114] A. Malek, "Memoir as Iranian exile cultural production: a case study of Marjane Satrapi's 'Persepolis' series" in *Iranian Studies*, September 2006, Vol. 39 (3). p. 353.
[115] *Ibid.*
[116] N. Miller, "Out of the family: generations of women in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Life Writing*, April 2007, Volume 4(1). P. 16.
[117] J. Worth, "Unveiling *Persepolis* as embodies performance" in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 32 (2). P143.
[118] *Ibid*, p. 144.
[119] *Ibid*, p. 143.

breaking away from a marginalised, 'caught between' identity, ironically, through an embrace of her liminal status."[120]

Worth writes that "Satrapi's project ... not only represents the effects of historical trauma (revolution, war, and so on) but additionally foregrounds the female body, also considered un-presentable under the Islamic regime."[121]

It is submitted that at this point one should note the similarities between *Maus* and *Persepolis* in terms of historical representation. Researchers on both graphic novels mention that they highlight historical events in a uniquely more visceral and immediate manner than traditional prose novels.

Rocio Davis' analysis of *Persepolis* examines Satrapi's use of the comic medium. He calls comics or graphic narrative a "thematically and representationally complex form that deploys the strategic juxtaposition of sequential text and image."[122] He calls Satrapi's use of the graphic novel "the medium for her memoir that enacts her process of self-identification and negotiation of cultural and/or national affiliations [and that her] juxtaposition of image and words, constitutive of graphic narratives, yield a new artistic, literary and creative experience – a revised aesthetic."[123] In terms of graphic narrative as autobiography, Davis poses an elegant argument:

> "[W]riters sensitive to how differences in cultural contexts and paradigms create specific responses revise established genres to destabilize ideology and conventional strategies of meaning in order to enact distinct socio-cultural situations. Readers who encounter these revisionary texts are thus obliged to reexamine their expectations and critical perspectives."[124]

According to Davis, autobiographical texts, or memoirs, have become dialogic and therefore multi-layered, where the writer can explore the relationship between the personal and public spheres. Due to this, ethnic representation has become central to these texts, and specifically to the process of self-awareness. In Satrapi's text, for instance, the narrative of her childhood explains and highlights the present self, and

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[120] J. Worth, "Unveiling *Persepolis* as embodies performance" in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 32 (2). p 144.
[121] *Ibid*, p. 146.
[122] R. Davis, "A graphic self: comics as autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Prose Studies*, December 2005, Vol. 27 (3), p. 264.
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *Ibid*, p. 265.

indicates how the past can only fundamentally be understood through narrative.[125] Miller agrees with this, writing that "in the interaction between the words and drawings, in the gaps, connections and silences that structure what we might think of as the 'trans-verbal' spaces of the comic book world, *Persepolis* realigns the domain of the personal and the political, the singular and the collective."[126]

In terms of cultural reflection, Davis argues that "autobiographical comics in particular are a distinctive and rewarding domain for exploration from a critical, cultural and gender perspective."[127] This coincides with Malek's argument of trans-cultural displacement and exile. Satrapi writes from the perspective of the Iranian cultural Diaspora, giving her a unique view on both Western as well as her own Iranian culture. As she stands somewhat on the outskirts she can therefore be critical of the culture that she cannot be wholly part of.

It is important to note another similarity between *Maus* and *Persepolis*. Even though *Maus* has been acclaimed as a historical graphic novel, it is also an autobiographical one. Davis says that *Maus* is so powerful an autobiographical text that it has elevated and assured the role of the graphic novel as autobiography. He highlights that writers such as Spiegelman and Satrapi have demonstrated the flexibility of the graphic novel as a medium in order to reflect and represent memory, dreams, possibilities as well as the idiosyncrasies of the present.[128] He does not mention *The Sandman* series, but the similarities are clear. Gaiman also explores history, memory and dreams.

After exploring the nature of the graphic novel memoir, cultural representation and identity, as well as liminality in Satrapi's *Persepolis*, it is important to close off with some of Davis' arguments. He maintains that "in the context of trans-cultural writing that negotiates the historical and cultural upheavals in Iran in the latter part of the twentieth century, Marjane Satrapi harnesses the expressive possibilities of the [comic book] form

[125] R. Davis, "A graphic self: comics as autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Prose Studies*, December 2005, Vol. 27 (3), p. 265.
[126] N. Miller, "Out of the family: generations of women in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Life Writing*, April 2007, Volume 4(1). P. 16.
[127] R. Davis, "A graphic self: comics as autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Prose Studies*, December 2005, Vol. 27 (3), p. 267.
[128] *Ibid.*

to enact the dramatic changes she experienced as a child."[129] He also highlights that the narrator's subjectivity in the novel is "based upon a series of shifting affiliations and growing awareness of the complexity of religious, ideological, gender, class and even literary issues."[130]

Lastly, and in terms of the bridge between cultural production and private production that Satrapi makes use of, Davis writes that

> she successfully weaves the paradigms of children's culture – family, school, idols – with the ethnic and national concerns that surround her and gradually impinge upon their [the family] private lives, and her secret one … By giving her memoir Iran's historical name, she posits the text as a double narrative of memory – that of a country and a childhood lost, as well as the intricate connection between the two … Satrapi intelligently juxtaposes her own experiences with the larger political scene, consistently privileging the personal over the political, but always limning [joining] the connection between the two…The use of verbal and graphic images signal the tensions inherent to transcultural self-identification, and illustrates the vexed discourses of imposed forms and chosen manners of self-representation. From the very beginning, Marji's story is one of contradictions, of a child finding herself between cultural, political, religious, linguistic and social demands and impositions.[131]

3.3.2 Examples from the text

Figure 14[132] highlights the cultural aspects of *Persepolis*. Marja's mother is a proud feminist, and believes her daughter is ready to stand up for what she believes in. The peaceful anti-veil demonstration becomes ugly when fundamentalist men beat the women for protesting. This is also a reflection of the private life versus the public life of especially Iranian women. They are forced to wear the Islamic veil outdoors, but indoors they are free-thinking and liberal.

Figure 15[133] also highlights the public and private lives of women, specifically the main character as a young girl and how she felt about the veil. The graphic is particularly poignant, even though it is simplistically drawn.

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[129] R. Davis, "A graphic self: comics as autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" in *Prose Studies*, December 2005, Vol. 27 (3), p. 269.
[130] *Ibid.*
[131] *Ibid*, p. 272-273.
[132] M. Satrapi, *Persepolis,* 1969, Pantheon, New York, p. 76.
[133] *Ibid*, p. 6.

Figure 14: Persepolis as cultural production

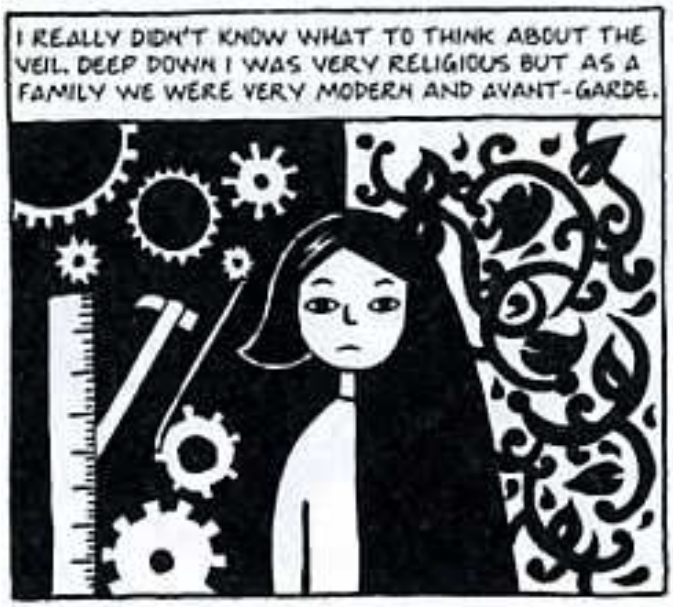

Figure 15: Persepolis as memoir

3.3.3 Examples from *Diss*

Diss also acts as a cultural product. Even though the story deals with ancient mythology, it also deals with a contemporary South Africa. It's set in the future, and reflects back on contemporary concerns in the country, like HIV/Aids, infrastructure, corruption and so forth. The contemporary history and culture of South Africa is the history of the novel, whereas the mythology is both the ancient history and the present in *Diss*. In *Figure 16* the main character speaks to his mother on gay issues she had to deal with in her (our) time. Like *Persepolis,* the graphic novel medium has allowed *Diss* to uniquely explore aspects of sexuality. Set in the future, the main character finds himself in a social context where being gay is completely accepted. His mother, however, remembers when being gay was not. She tells her son about her experiences in our contemporary society. The main character sees her reality as history, but at the same time this history is our reality as well.

Culturally, *Diss* works on a personal level as well, as it deals with themes of the writer's loss of his own mother, as well as aspects such as love and friendship the writer has to deal with in his own life. (*See Figure 17*). In this scene the main character remembers his state of mind following his mother's murder.

Figure 16: Diss and cultural production

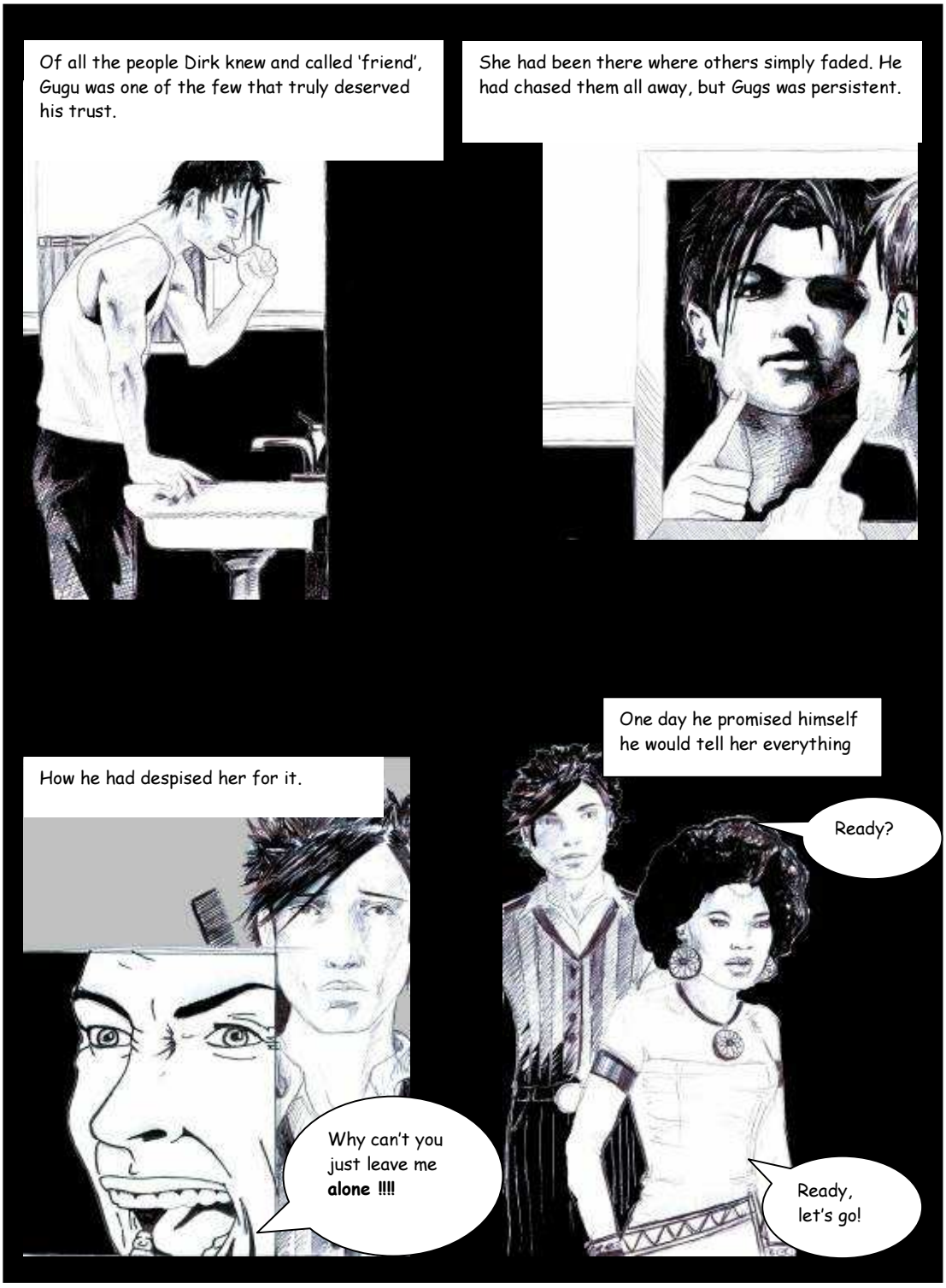

Figure 17: Diss and memoir

4. Graphic narrative in Africa

4.1 Africa in general

We move on to graphic narrative and comics in Africa…

According to Massimo Repetti, non-African readers "easily make stereotyped assumptions about African comics, because too often their storylines and drawings rely on stock characters and recurrent themes, such as witchcraft."[134] He goes on to say that African comics draw a lot on European forms, in terms of realism and line usage. But Repetti maintains that African comics are hybrid forms: "What we see here is the creolization of comics, a phenomenon in which the mass media have played an essential role. Creolized culture implies mutual exchange and transfer, a flow of meaning in continuous movement, breaking up old relations and setting up new connections"[135] He fundamentally believes that this process or exchange of culture

> has nothing to do with Western colonialism … it is more a relationship between, on the one hand, the comics created in a large-scale process in industrialized countries that tend to be conceived for and read by a 'globalized' audience, and on the other hand, African authors who change style, acquire different knowledge, and make creative contributions to their societies [African societies] that are richer than the local culture in which they originate.[136]

He traces the history of the comic book in Africa from post-colonialism to contemporary society. After independence, comics arose that celebrated nationalism and the government. This period stretched between 1960 and 1990, and aimed to provide a graphic

> mirror of the political reality of nation building, which in terms of spirit and orientation underpinned the process of Africanizing comics subject matter and stories … The new independent countries launched literacy programs, conditions were created that fostered comics drawn by African authors for local readers. These comics presented traditional African stories handed down by word of mouth over the years … and also made zealous parallels between the struggle against imperialism and the history of colonialism.[137]

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[134] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007. p. 16.
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] *Ibid.*
[137] *Ibid*, p. 22.

During a series of dictatorships [Mobuto Sese Seko in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Idi Amin in Uganda], which resulted in angry political cartoons and censorship, comics started to change in countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. Multi-party systems were instituted in Africa, and more freedom was given again to comic book writers and artists. Multi-party systems also resulted in an increase in platforms for African comics, such as newspapers.[138] Other mass media also greatly influenced African comics. Television and television soapies, led to an increase of comics depicting everyday life, similar in format and plot to the TV genre. Music also played a great role in comics, as some comics arose in collaboration with music albums.

The marriage between comics, mass media, fine art and street culture gave rise to a very distinctive genre of comics on the continent.[139] Also in the decade between 1990 and 2000, comics in Africa moved from the popular to the more literary, and converged "on current affairs or fragments of everyday experiences, or took the form of dramatic and fantastic creations."[140] Characters started responding to the environments of their nations, such as economic crises and political instability. Protagonists "became involved in stories and misfortunes that echoed the experiences of the readers."[141] In other words the artists or writers became the voices of critique. They were outspoken regarding corruption and inequality in the postcolonial state [Nigeria, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo etc.].[142] "Thus the artist assumes the role of witness and judge on an ethical level as he creates a credible 'bridge' linking his personal need for truth, victims' thirst for justice, and public space."[143]

As African comic art became more politicized and critical of governments, the fear of repercussions from these governments started to limit creativity, and in order to publish more difficult and direct African comics, artists had to move to Europe. This resulted in serious collaborations. "New contacts with the world of publishing and the ambitious narrative projects of a new artistic phase explain the period of success that

[138] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007. p. 22
[139] *Ibid*, p. 20.
[140] *Ibid*, p. 23.
[141] *Ibid*, p. 24.
[142] *Ibid.*
[143] *Ibid*, p. 25.

began in 2003."[144] Artists were no longer confined to newspapers and magazines, but the rise of collaboration and interest from publishing houses led to larger, more serious projects, whose principles were founded on the centrality of the book: the graphic novel.[145] Repetti maintains "[t]his rising generation of African comic book artists is gaining a growing fan base."[146]

Some examples of African comics published by well-known international houses are: Ivoirian Gilbert Groud, with *Magie noire,* published by Albin Michel (2003); South African Karlien de Villiers, with *Meine Mutter war eine schöne frau,* published by Swiss publisher Editione Moderne (2005); Ivoirian Faustin Titi, with *Une éternité à Tanger,* published by Italian house, Lai Momo (2005); South African Joe Daly, with *Scrublands*, published by well-known American house, Fantagraphics (2006); Congolese Pat Masioni, with a history of genocide, *Rwanda 1994: decente en enfer*, published by Albin Michel (2005); Congolese Haillain Paluku, with *Missy*, published by Boite à bulles (2006); Cameroonian Biyong Djehouty, with *Soundjata, la bataille de Kirina*, published by Menaibuc (2004); Ivorian Marguerite Aboue, with *Aya de Yopougon*, published by Gallimard (2005); Yvan Alagbe with *Nègres jaunes*, published by Amok (2002); and Olivier Bramanti with *Qui a connu le feu*, published by Amok,/Fremok (2004). One of the best-selling French comic books in 2003 was Mauritian artist Man Keong Laval NG's *La ballade au bout du monde: Les pierres levees*, published by Glènat (2003).[147] (See *Figures 18*[148]*, 19*[149] *and 20*[150])

[144] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007, p. 27.
[145] *Ibid,* p. 28.
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] http://a21.idata.over-blog.com/620x800/3/17/56/93/Illustrations/BD-Magie-Noire/Page3-copie.jpg
[149] http://a21.idata.over-blog.com/420x562/2/52/06/66/Rwanda-1994-int-grale---presse.jpg
[150] http://www.sudplanete.net/_uploads/images/illustrations/70_15_23_02.jpg

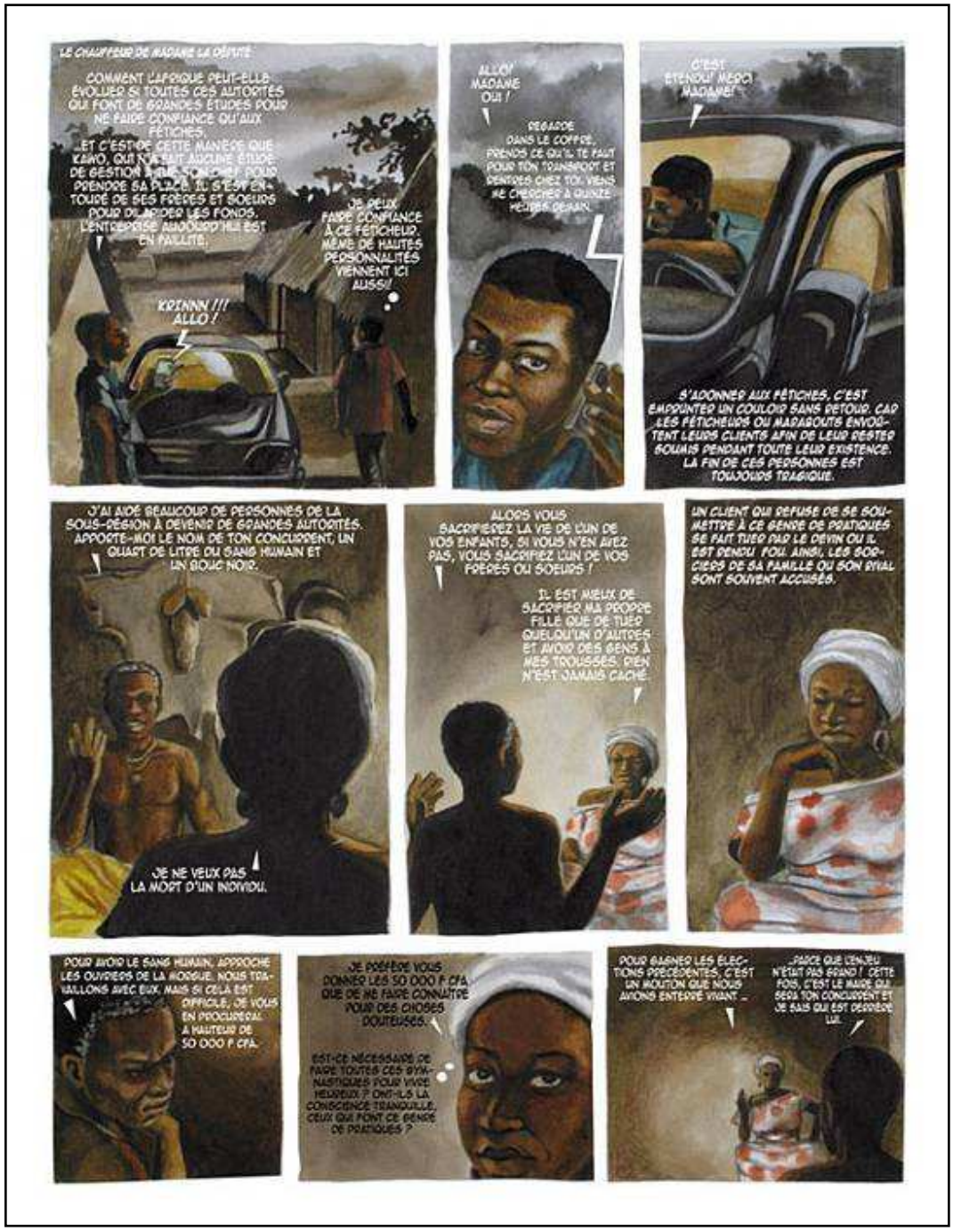

Figure 18: Magie Noire

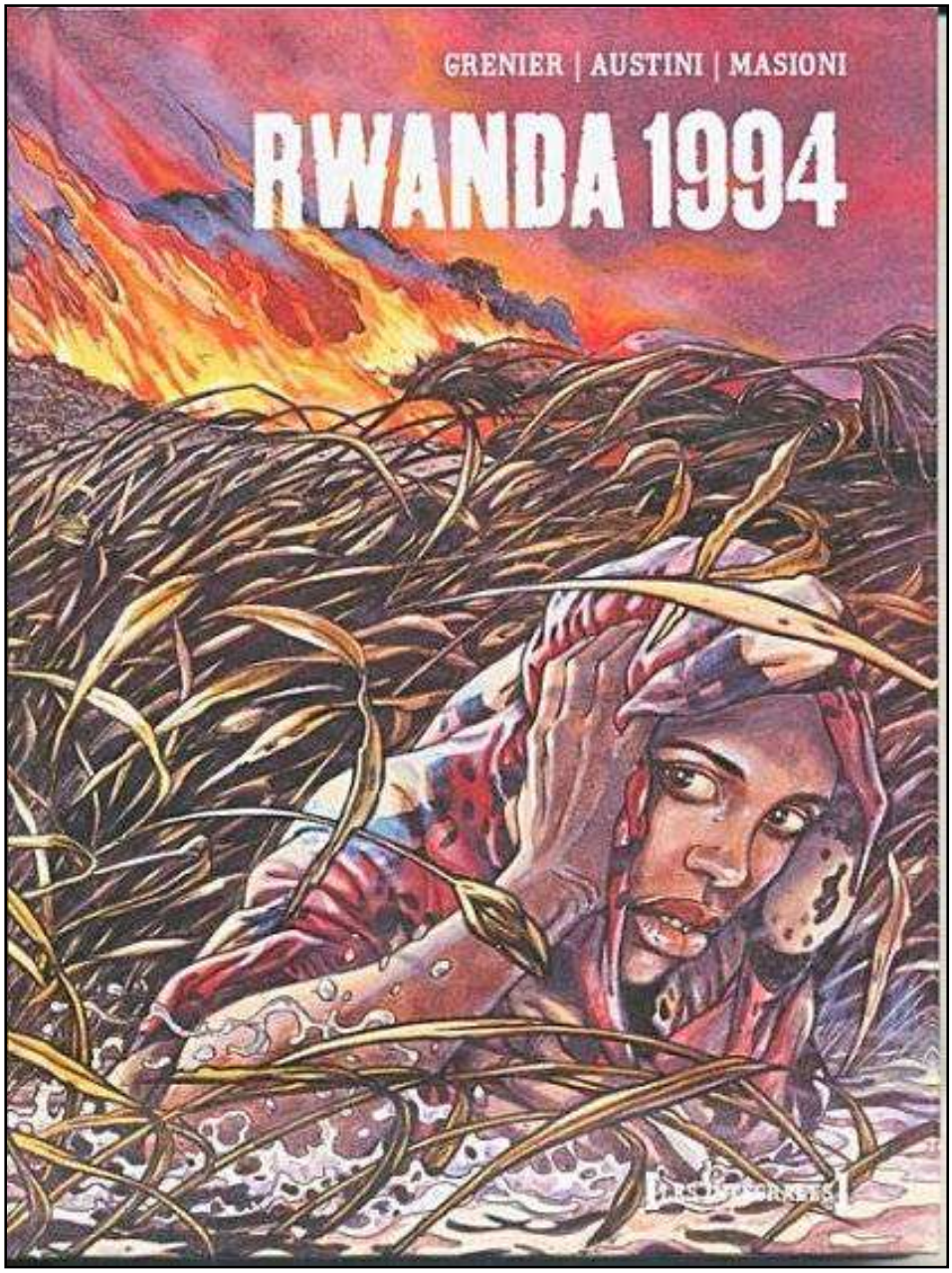

Figure 19: Rwanda 1994: decente en enfer

Figure 20: Missy

According to Repetti more and more of these artists and works are also receiving internationally renowned comic book prizes and awards. He says "These authors see the graphic novel as an attempt to meet the need for supranational, collective communication between themselves and their readers – both African and European – with a strong local

(African) tendency towards comics using the register of the everyday, autobiography, and the documentary."[151]

Lastly Repetti calls the surge of African comics the "African wave", and writes that this so-called wave is of particular interest to researchers of the medium, even though there aren't many. It is of particular interest to scholars as the African wave is currently primarily concerned with the emergence of postcolonial states, which makes these stories fiction as well as cultural artifacts produced against the backdrop of transformations in African society.[152] To close off he says the African wave "is part of the contemporary international comics scene and shows many of the deep transformations that have affected the language and the publishing forms of the medium."[153]

4.2 South Africa

Focusing more specifically on South Africa, we take a look at what has been done in the publication industry, and the reasons for the limited graphic novel publication.

Some critically acclaimed graphic novel works have come out of post-Apartheid South Africa. Repetti states that "[a] new generation of South African authors has emerged that works for an idea of the art comic and graphic and narrative experimentation where the boundaries between art, design, comic and narrative become blurred."[154] He goes on to say that these artists' works are inextricably linked to the Apartheid years in South Africa, and these works look back at their own personal landscapes against the backdrop of the political landscape.[155]

Repetti poses an elegant parallel between post Apartheid narratives and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC used narrative to tell tales of suffering and reconciliation. Repetti states that "[m]edia coverage of the hearings generated a performance made up of testimony and memory which created an emotionally laden space."[156] The most well-known work to come out of the Commission is Antjie Krog's

[151] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007, p. 28 – 29.
[152] *Ibid*, p. 34.
[153] *Ibid.*
[154] *Ibid*, p. 29.
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*

Country of my skull (1998)[157], primarily about the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Other artists who work within this emotionally laden space are Anton Kannemeyer, the founder of *Bitterkomix* magazine (See *Figure 21*)[158], Paddy Bouma, Karlien de Villiers and N.D. Mazin.

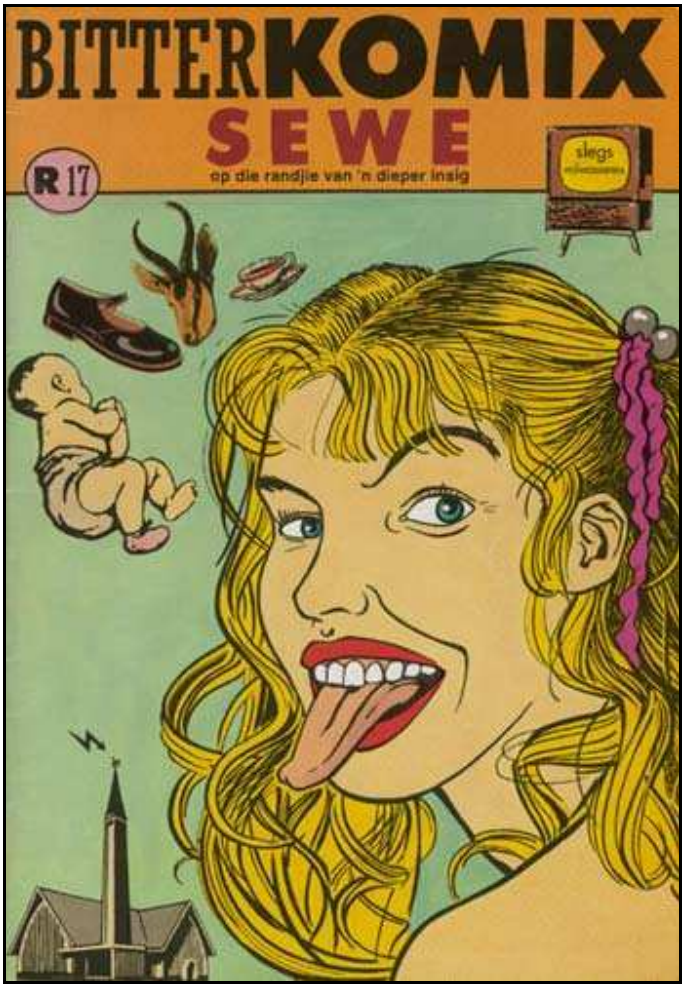

Figure 21: Bitterkomix

These artists "walk a tightrope between the truth of the facts and emotional truth, two worlds which were connected because Apartheid touched the lives of everybody and everybody had a story to tell."[159]

Karlien de Villiers wrote the acclaimed graphic novel, *Meine mutter war eine schone Frau*, published by Swiss house, Editione Moderne, in 2005 (See *Figure 22*)[160].

[157] A. Krog, *Country of my skull*, Random House, 1998.
[158] http://www.picha.nl/uploaded_files/1Bitterkomix_01.jpg
[159] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007, p. 29.

She says that "[a]ny private suburban drama took place against the backdrop of a very absurd and grotesque political situation. All memories of personal pain, joy and wonder are entangled with the acceptance of a deeply divided, turbulent society."[161]

Figure 22: Meine muter war ein shone frau

Graphic novels or visual narrative techniques have also been used in South Africa as part of community-based projects. One such text is *Ayhe! Modern stories written and*

[160] http://www.lambiek.net/artists/d/de-villiers_karlien/de-villiers_karlien.jpg
[161] M. Repetti, "African wave: specificity and cosmopolitanism in African comics" in *African arts*, Summer 2007. p. 29.

illustrated by Capetonians. It was published by the Arts and Media Access Centre in 2007. The project was facilitated by Anthony Sloan from Modern Audio Drama.[162]

Seventy young people, mostly from the Arts and Media Access Centre, were involved in the project called a "24-hour stay-awake conclave". The project was put together to commemorate the closing of the Access Centre. The artists and writers put together scripts and storyboards, and performed them. Six of the story boards were published separately in *Ayhe! Modern stories written and illustrated by Capetonians*. The point of the project was to have the writers and illustrators explore their personal lives, creating stories that resonate with young people from similar backgrounds.[163]

Projects such as these, together with the acclaimed South African artists who publish graphic novels, indicate that the genre resonates in South Africa. Most of the graphic novels, however, are published by international houses. In an interview with Nikil Singh, co-creator, with John Harris Dunning, of *Salem Brownstone* (See *Figure 23*)[164], published by British house Walker Books in 2009, he states that due to the lack of market in South Africa, he did not even consider trying to publish in South Africa, and went directly to international publishing houses. South African publishers rarely take on a graphic novel project, due to the high risk nature of the genre.[165]

[162] A. Sloan et al. *Ayhe! Modern stories written and illustrated by Capetonians*, 2007, Arts and Media Access Centre AMAC.
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] http://kaganof.com/kagablog/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/1108.jpg
[165] Interview with Nikil Singh, July 2009.

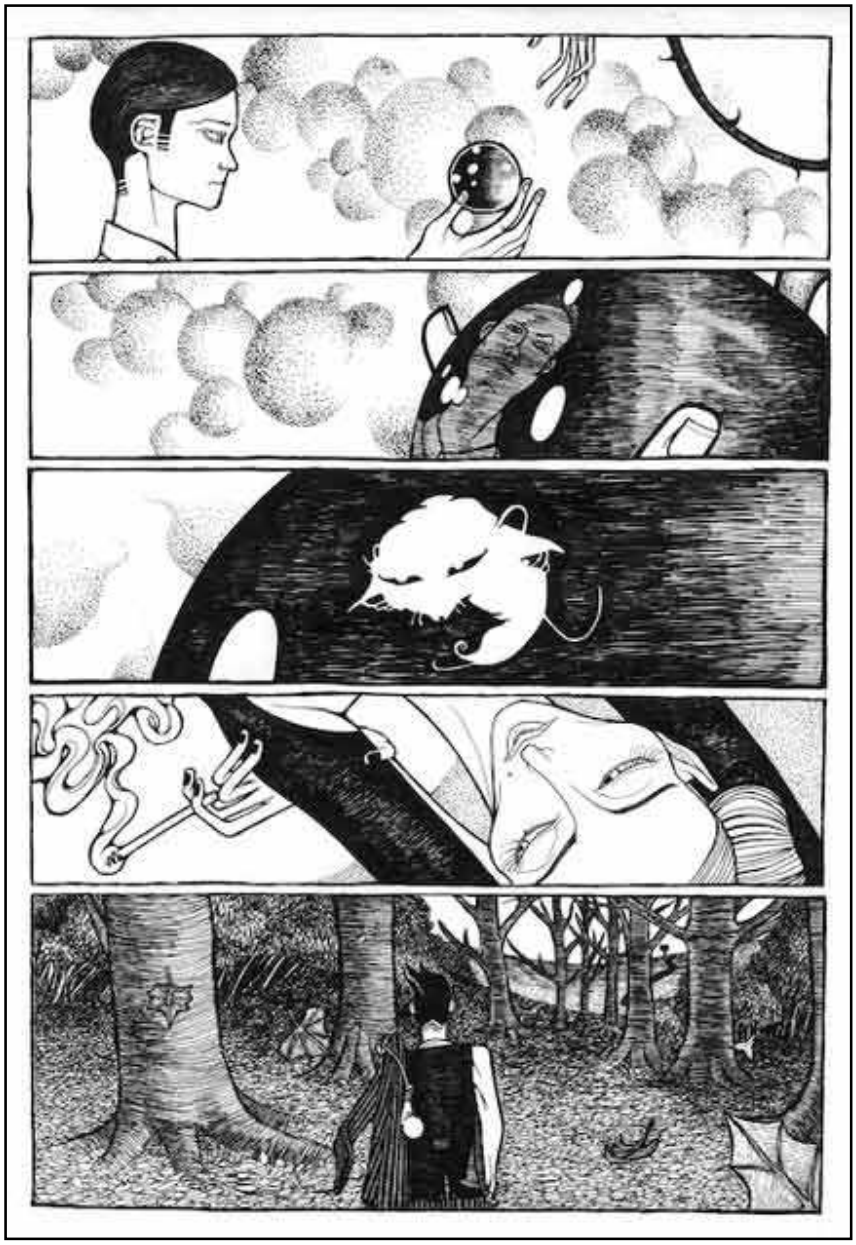

Figure 23: Salem Brownstone

In an interview with LAPA, a prominent South African publishing house, the researcher asked what the nature of the South African graphic novel publication industry is. LAPA maintains they are interested in graphic novels, but rarely receive submissions. Furthermore, the house needs to assess the risk involved in taking on a project of this nature. According to LAPA, in South Africa the only comics-style books sold are political cartoons like *Madame and Eve* and *Zapiro*. Despite the huge success and popularity of Kannemeyer's *Bitterkomix*, there is still very little market for book-length

graphic novels.[166] The most well known graphic novel published in South Africa in Afrikaans is the collaboration between Alistair Finlay and Tinus Horn called *Hemel op aarde* published by Queillerie in Cape Town in 1997.[167]

An alternative to formal publication is self-publication. Last year, Brandon Carstens published a graphic novel in South Africa called *Project H* (See *Figure 24*)[168]. The novel is a gritty crime graphic narrative, the first of its kind in South Africa, and deals with issues in Cape Town's poorer communities, such as the drug trade. In an interview, Carstens stated that self-publishing a graphic novel "was definitely a risk on my part because of the huge lack of awareness of the format in South Africa, and it weighed greatly on my mind introducing my first book into a market place that has yet to grasp the concept of the modern graphic novel and how it's slowly losing its juvenile stigma globally."[169]

[166] Interview with LAPA publishers, 2009.
[167] A. Finlay and T. Horn, *Hemel op aarde*, Queillerie, 1997.
[168] http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2103/3545516398_2a805bd781.jpg
[169] Mike, www.crimebeat.book.co.za/blog. *A chat with brandon carstens*, 8 June 2009.

Figure 24: Project H

From the above it is clear that the graphic novel and cartoon industry in South Africa is a young one, with much room for expansion. Even though some publishing houses are willing to take on graphic novels, they cannot as there is a limited readership in the country. Self-publication is an option, but the marketing and publicity platforms are also limited. The only option most graphic narrative creators in South Africa have is

to take their work to international publishing houses, as Karlien de Villers and Nikil Singh did.

5. Graphic narrative and the classroom

The exploration of the graphic novel publication industry in South Africa has shown that there is very little readership in the country. This research essay aims to suggest that a readership can be created.

In literacy education a lot of new research has come out on what is called the 'paradigm shift' in educational approaches. This shift has taken place among students whose literacy skills no longer come from purely written texts. These new texts are called Multimodal, and include visual media like television and film, multimedia, written texts, as well as synergies between the written and the visual, like graphic novels.[170]

According to Maureen Walsh, "[m]ultimodal texts are those texts that have more than one 'mode', so that meaning is communicated through a synchronization of modes…they may incorporate spoken or written language, still or moving pictures."[171]

Walsh maintains that reading written text and reading visual text are two different processes. With the written word, reading is based on logic, and involves "[d]ifferent levels of decoding, responding at affective and cognitive levels, critiquing and analyzing."[172] This reading process is the logic of speech. Reading visual media is different. According to Walsh, the logic of the image "involves the presentation of space and simultaneity."[173] The text itself is arguably no longer the dominant form of multimodal texts, but rather one part of a multi-layered message.[174]

Katherine Bucher and M. Lee Manning agree, writing that graphic novels resonate with young people: "Growing up with television and video games, contemporary young adults look for print media that contain the same visual impact and pared-down writing style and contribute to their enthusiasm for visual rather than written literacy." [175]

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[170] M. Walsh, "The 'textual shift': examining the reading process with print, visual and multimodal texts." in *Australian journal of language and literacy,* 2006, Vol. 29 (1), p. 24.
[171] *Ibid.*
[172] *Ibid.*
[173] *Ibid*, p. 26.
[174] *Ibid.*
[175] K. T. Bucher and M. L. Manning, "Bringing graphic novels into a school's curriculum" in *The clearing house,* 2004, Vol. 7 (2), p. 67.

Gretchen Schwartz maintains "[m]edia literacy education, social issues, and graphic novels all have a role to play in ... civic education. The graphic novel is especially useful for secondary students because many titles touch on important social-political issues. Moreover, this medium offers excellent opportunities for media literacy education."[176] At the same time, Schwartz finds that graphic novels are often based on the author's own experiences, which can engage students "who are not well served by the usual text materials."[177] She writes that the graphic novel can promote study and inquiry, and "deserves consideration by educators…as it offers unique stories in a unique format and can serve well to teach both media literacy along with explorations of social justice."[178]

Margaret Mackey and Jill Kedersha McClay argue that "[w]hen print text was the primary vehicle of adult reading, it made sense for readers to start with the support of illustrations in picture books and gradually be weaned away from pictures into undiluted print text. Today, however, graphics intertwine with text as primary meaning-bearers, in both fictional and non-fictional forms, in every aspect of daily life."[179] The essential point of their research is to illustrate how the picture book, comic books and the graphic novel allow for the reader's attention to move from text to pictures in new ways with each different reading. They argue that this leads to the reader constructing "fluid and plural possibilities out of what seems at first glance to be a singular text."[180]

Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher discovered similar results in their research on remedial students. They found that graphic novels are powerful tools in engaging students in authentic writing, and promoting literacy in students who have been placed in remedial classrooms. They found that "[t]he use of these forms of popular culture and media afforded us a space to provide students with instruction on the craft and mechanics of writing. Our students became not only better writers but also more knowledgeable consumers of ideas and information."[181]

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[176] G. Schwartz, "Media literacy, graphic novels and social issues" in *Simile*, 2007, Vol. 7 (4), p. 1
[177] *Ibid*, p. 11.
[178] *Ibid.*
[179] M. Mackey and J. K. McClay, "Graphic routes to electronic literacy: polysemy and picture books" in *Changing English*, 2000, Vol. 7 (2), p. 191.
[180] *Ibid.*
[181] N. Frey and D. Fisher, "Using graphic novels, anime, and the internet in an urban high school" in *The English journal*, 2004, Vol. 93 (3), p. 25.

Specifically with regards to HIV/Aids in South Africa, Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith have some ideas of the graphic novel as an alternative popular source of education. They have found that the current HIV/Aids education systems are not as effective as was hoped. They argue that "we should not lose sight of the possibilities for alternative literary forms. Here we are thinking, for example, of the work that has been done with regard to the photo novella. One such South African example is *Roxy: life, love and sex in the nineties*… (See *Figure* 25)[182]. Another genre is the graphic novel. Graphic novels … can be a powerful tool in visual literacy."[183]

[182] http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/gifs/roxy1.gif
[183] C. Mitchell and A. Smith, "'Sick of Aids': life. Literacy and South African youth." In *Culture, health and sexuality*, 2003, Vol. 5 (6), p. 517.

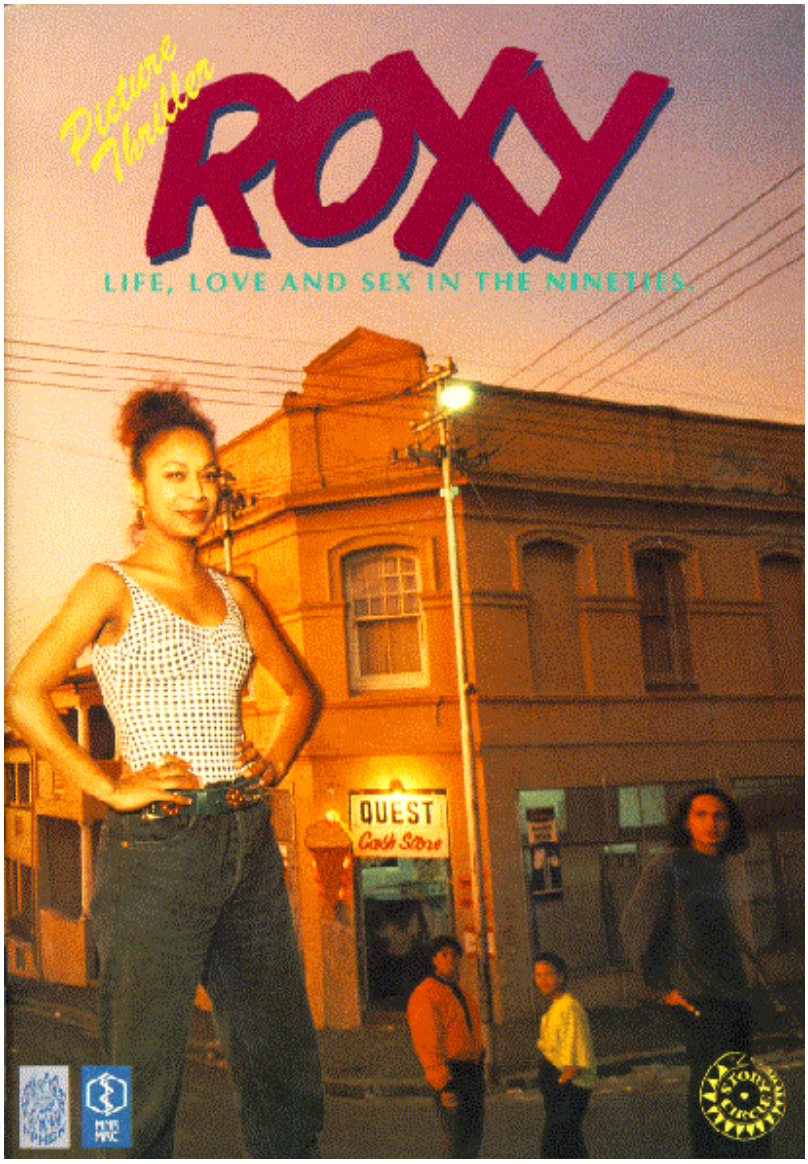

Figure 25: Roxy: life, love and sex in the nineties

Most of these studies have taken place in the developed world, but are applicable to developing nations too, especially in countries where the language of instruction is not the mother tongue. It is submitted that promoting literacy levels through graphic narrative can be an effective educational tool, as the medium has accompanying visual cues for an early reader. More complex graphic novels can be used with older students, to highlight social problems like HIV/Aids, for instance. Graphic novels can serve to both educate and enrich through literature.

6. Concluding Remarks

This research essay has explored the definitions of graphic narrative and the graphic novel (Section 1), the historical background and influences on the graphic novel (Section 2), explored the unique ways in which the graphic novel tackles certain topics as illustrated through *Maus*, *The Sandman*, and *Persepolis* (Section 3), looked at the state of African graphic novels and the South African publication industry (Section 4), and, finally, the educational possibilities of graphic narrative (Section 5).

In conclusion, it is clear that the graphic novel has much to offer both young and old. The perception that graphic narrative is base and superficial reading is an outdated one, and yet it endures. Graphic narrative has the ability to convey meaning in unique ways. As illustrated with *Maus*, it can portray harrowing themes, and look at history with a sense of immediacy that can be applied to the contemporary reader. The visual aspect of the genre can transport the reader into the moment in ways traditional prose is unable to. At the same time, it has the capacity to reflect on contemporary life in virtually the same space on the page. As shown with *The Sandman*, graphic novels can be effective in creating modern mythologies for contemporary society. The process of myth-creation is an ongoing one. Given the popularity of the serial, myth still has a prominent role to play in a modern society of reason and science. Intertextual cues also provide a more layered reading, serving to educate at the same time. In *Persepolis*, we saw the voiceless being given a voice. Marginalised groups and cultures can use the graphic novel as a medium to tell their stories of suffering and hope, as well as to convey a poignant reflection of hybridity in a western-dominated milieu.

In terms of publication, graphic novels have gone from strength to strength. A new wave of African comics and graphic novels has been published by internationally renowned houses. However, publication industries on the continent have some work to do to catch up. Few graphic novels are being published in countries like South Africa. Understandably, there is a limited readership in the country, which is the main reason cited for the lack of publication.

On the other hand, researchers in the field of multimodal education are promoting graphic novels. The genre not only promotes literacy, but is also popular among young adults in school, as it speaks to the sense of visual immediacy that they face on a daily

basis with television and the internet. Lastly, graphic novels can serve to promote awareness and literacy in the developing world. Researchers have found that informative literature on social issues like HIV/Aids are not as effective as was hoped. These researchers are promoting literature, including alternative literatures like graphic novels as a means to educate. Graphic novels can therefore find a home in literature and education at the same time.

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