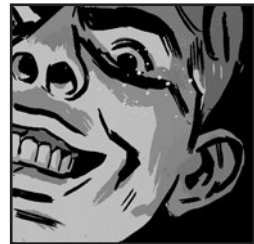


VOLUME 1: A DARKNESS SURROUNDS HIM



OUTCAST™

BY **KIRKMAN**
& **AZACETA**



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"IT'S FOUR YEARS!
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?"



YOU'RE FIFTEEN AND HE'S **NINETEEN**. THAT'S A BIG DIFFERENCE!

SAME AS YOU AND DAD-- OH, WAIT, YOU'RE RIGHT--

--I'M NOT PREGNANT!



GET BACK HERE!

CRUMPLE

Crispies
MUNCH MUNCH



JOSHUA-- WHAT ARE YOU EATING?!

IT'S ALMOST BEDTIME.





WE'RE BORN BELIEVERS. WE'RE JUST MADE THAT WAY.

A CHILD WILL SPEND **FIVE MINUTES** TELLING YOU WHAT EVERY ILLEGIBLE SCRIBBLE THEY'VE DRAWN ACTUALLY **IS**.

AND THEN THEY STILL **BELIEVE** YOU WHEN YOU TELL THEM WHAT A GOOD ARTIST THEY ARE.

FLIK



WE WANT TO TRUST. WE **WANT** TO HAVE FAITH... IN **EVERYTHING**.

THAT'S WHO WE **ARE...**



AND YET I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT MY SIDE IS **LOSING**.

POOR ADVERTISING, IF YOU ASK ME.

THAT'S WHY YOU'RE CHIEF OF POLICE, BRIAN... **SMART**.



I KNOW YOU DIDN'T WANT TO BE DISTURBED, BUT THERE'S A WOMAN TO SEE YOU. SAYS IT'S **URGENT**.

TAKE A BATHROOM BREAK, FELLAS.

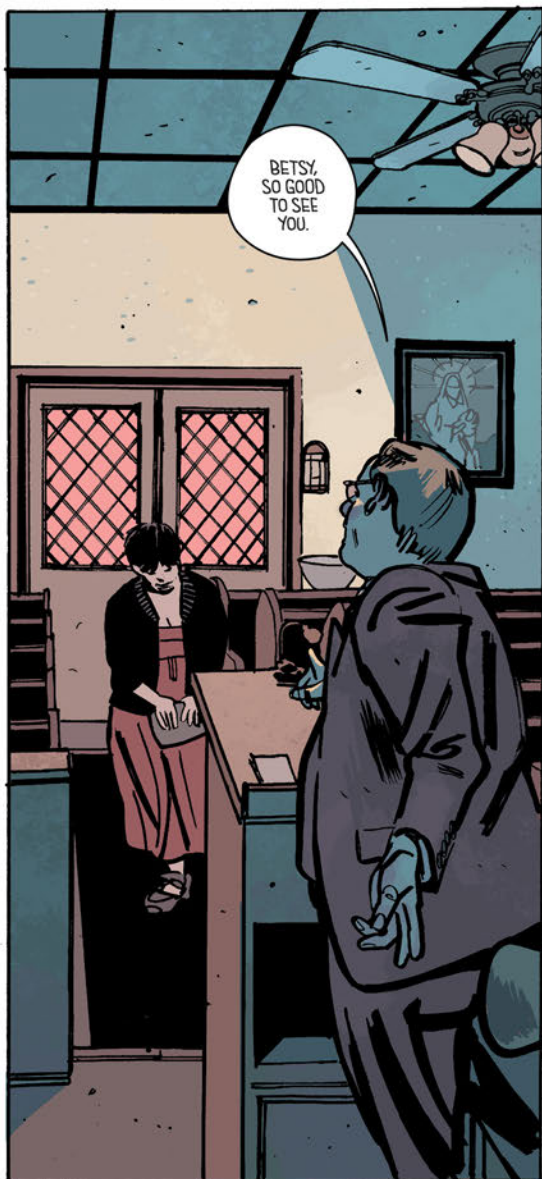


ALSO, REVEREND... IT'S THE MORNING.

I CAN SEE THAT.

PLEASE KEEP CLOSED

LUNNY



BETSY, SO GOOD TO SEE YOU.



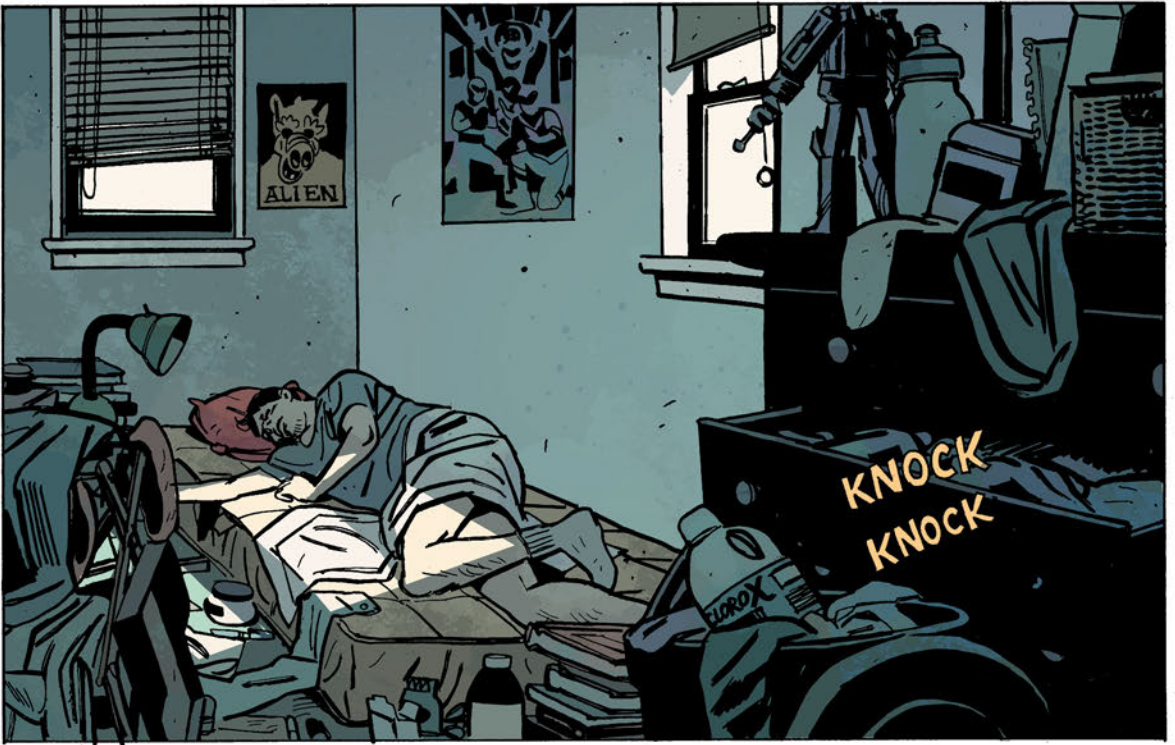
OH, REVEREND... IT'S HORRIBLE...

WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?



IT'S JOSHUA, HE'S... WHAT YOU HAD TALKED ABOUT...

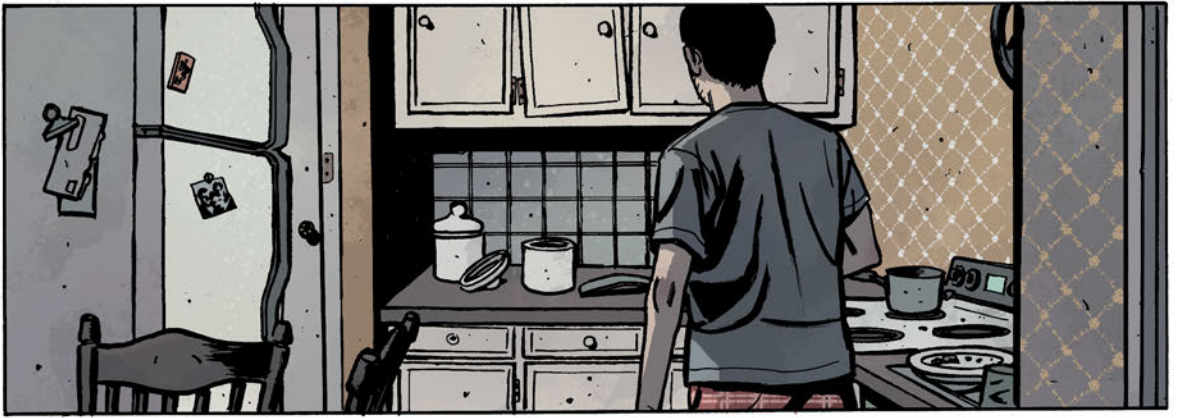
...IT'S HAPPENING TO HIM.













GODDAMN IT, KYLE.

EVERY TIME YOU MAKE ME DO THAT. **EVERY GODDAMN TIME. WHY?** YOU KNOW I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE.

PLEASE GO.

NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.



IT'S WORSE THAN I THOUGHT. WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU ATE A VEGETABLE?

DO YOU **REMEMBER** SOLID POOPS?



WHY ARE YOU HERE, MEGAN?

JUST MAKING SURE YOU'RE ALIVE, BIG BROTHER.



I'M NOT YOUR—

SHUT UP.



NO, **SERIOUSLY**. SHUT UP AND DON'T SAY THAT. YOU'RE MY **BROTHER**. YOU'RE PART OF THE FAMILY, AND I CARE ABOUT YOU.

SO **ENOUGH** WITH THE MOPEY BULLSHIT.



YOUR MOTHER WAS A MEAN, CRAZY BITCH—BUT THAT WAS A **LONG TIME** AGO.



THAT BALONEY IN THERE IS GOING TO **KILL** YOU. IT'S NOTHING BUT MELTED PIG SCROTUMS AND SODIUM.

LET'S GO GET SOME **REAL** FOOD.



I'M FINE WITH WHAT I HAVE. C'MON. LET'S NOT DO THIS AGAIN.

NOT LEAVING UNTIL YOU COME WITH ME TO THE GROCERY STORE. YOU KNOW HOW THIS DANCE GOES.



THIS PLACE IS **DISGUSTING...** AND I STILL KEEP COMING BACK. YOU SEE HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU?

THE FACT THAT I DON'T RUN OUT SCREAMING SHOWS HOW DEDICATED I AM. LET'S... **GO.**



YOU'RE NOT **SAFE** HERE... AROUND **ME.** PLEASE...

NOT THAT BULLSHIT AGAIN...

I'M **SERIOUS.**

IF I GO, WILL YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?



SURE. JUST GIVE ME **ONE HOUR** TO GET YOU OUT OF THIS PLACE... SHOW YOU SOME SUNLIGHT.

IF YOU'RE **LUCKY...** THE FUCKING PLACE WILL BURN DOWN WHILE WE'RE GONE.



THIS IS MY HOME, MEGAN.



WELL, IT'S A **SHITTY** HOME. GET DRESSED, I'LL BE IN THE CAR.



IN THE NAME
OF **JESUS!** I
COMMAND YOU
TO **RELEASE** THIS
CHILD!



YOU WILL
RECOGNIZE THE
POWER I HOLD OVER
YOU! POWER GIVEN
TO ME BY JESUS
CHRIST!

NO--
POWER!
NO--



RUAARRGH!



OH,
GOD--!



LEAVE
THIS ROOM
**RIGHT
NOW!**

YOU'RE A
DISTRACTION
I CAN'T
AFFORD.
GO!







KYLE?

KYLE BARNES?

SORRY... SORRY.



KYLE, I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU. I HEARD YOU'D MOVED BACK HERE ABOUT A YEAR BACK, BUT... YOU'VE **CHANGED** SO MUCH.

YEAH... UH... I WAS **FIFTEEN** WHEN YOU SAW ME LAST.



MY WORD, HAS IT BEEN **THAT** LONG? MEGAN, SURE WOULD BE NICE TO SEE THAT FAMILY OF YOURS IN MY CHURCH SOME TIME.

LET IT **GO**, REVEREND.



OKAY, THEN. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU WELL, KYLE.

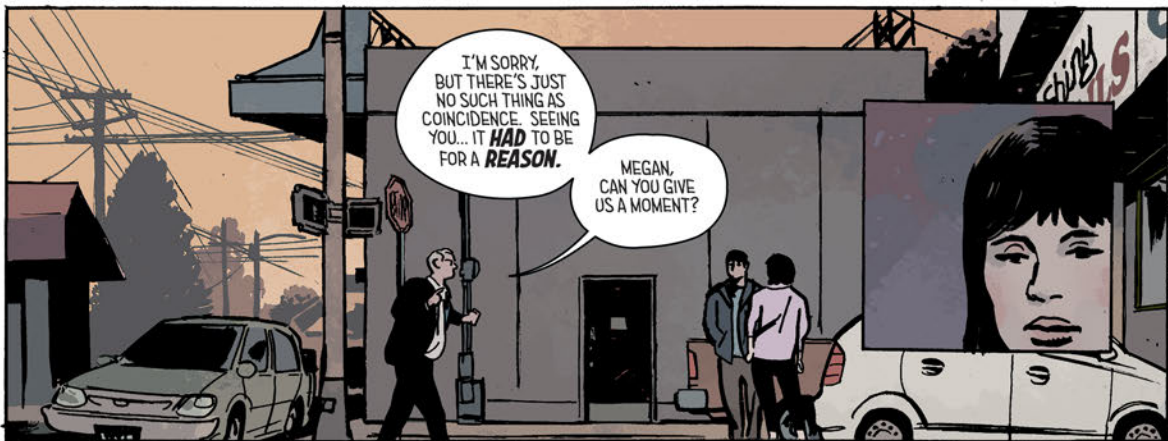
I JUST WANTED TO SAY HELLO.



WHAT?

WHAT'D I DO?





I'M SORRY, BUT THERE'S JUST NO SUCH THING AS COINCIDENCE. SEEING YOU... IT **HAD** TO BE FOR A **REASON**.

MEGAN, CAN YOU GIVE US A MOMENT?



THERE'S A BOY I'M WORKING WITH, ABOUT THE SAME AGE YOU WERE, WHEN YOUR MOTHER...

WELL, HE'S A LOT LIKE SHE WAS ACTUALLY. **STRONGER**. MORE DIFFICULT THAN **USUAL**.

THIS IS A LOT TO ASK, BUT I WAS WONDERING IF MAYBE YOU COULD...

WHAT?

Y'KNOW... LIKE YOU DID WITH YOUR MOTHER.



I TOLD YOU, I DIDN'T **DO** ANYTHING. I'VE BEEN TELLING YOU THAT FOR **YEARS**.

ONLY BECAUSE I'M SURE YOU'RE **WRONG**. I APOLOGIZE FOR BEING BLUNT, BUT THE BOY IS JOSHUA AUSTIN. HIS FAMILY LIVES ON THE OLD HUME FARM.

YOU REMEMBER IT.



I DON'T KNOW...

YOU COULD DO SOME GOOD, IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT... I'LL BE THERE EVERY DAY UNTIL I SAVE THIS POOR BOY'S IMMORTAL SOUL.

GOOD SEEING YOU, MY SON.

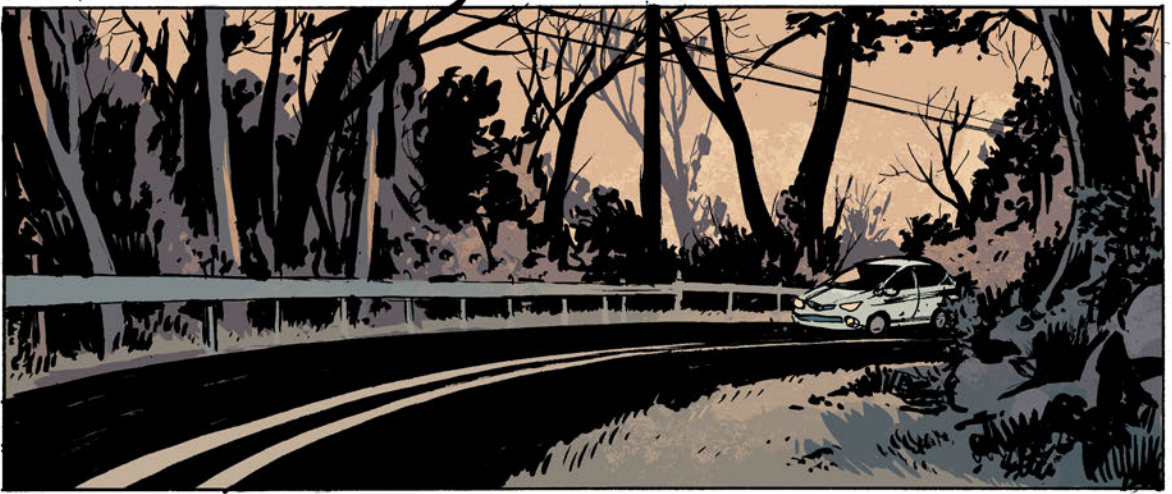


WHAT'D HE WANT?



NOTHING. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I HELD UP MY END OF THE DEAL. YOU SAID **ONE HOUR**.

TAKE ME HOME.



THIS **ISN'T** THE WAY HOME.

FOR **YOU** IT ISN'T.

TAP TAP TAP
TAP TAP TAP



FUCK, MEGAN. **NO.** I'M NOT DOING THIS. **PLEASE.**

IT'S **THIS** KIND OF SHIT THAT MAKES ME NOT WANT TO GO ANYWHERE WITH YOU.



OH, WHAT-THE-FUCK-EVER. YOU HAVEN'T SEEN MY NEW HOUSE. IT'S BEEN **TWO YEARS.**

YOU WOULDN'T EVEN **RECOGNIZE** HOLLY. SHE'S GOING TO **LOVE** SEEING YOU. I'LL COOK YOU DINNER. IT'LL BE GREAT.



YOU DON'T HATE US ENOUGH TO JUMP FROM A MOVING CAR-- I'LL TAKE THAT AS A WIN.









HELLO?



...



ANYONE THERE?



KYLE?









OH, YOU **KNOW** ME?

WHAT'S MY **NAME?**



WE'RE **ALWAYS** LOOKING FOR YOUR KIND.

OUTCAST.

ONE OF MANY.



SO YOU KNOW ME, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME? NICE.

YOU DOING THIS TO SKIP SCHOOL? SEEMS LIKE **OVERKILL--** WAY TOO ELABORATE. WHY DON'T YOU STOP WASTING THIS POOR GUY'S TIME?



SO **BIG** AND **STRONG...** WOULD BARELY **FIT** IN THAT PANTRY NOW.



HOW--?



JOSHUA--
NO!





HA! HA!



WHAT WAS THAT?! WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?! I COMMAND YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS--



GRRRRR



ARE YOU OKAY?

YEAH.



I NEED A CIGARETTE.



STUFF HE SAID, HEARD ANY OF THAT BEFORE? IT MAKE SENSE TO YOU?

DEMONS ARE OFTEN **TRICKSTERS**. THEY TRY TO FOOL YOU INTO BEING MORE SCARED OF THEM THAN YOU SHOULD BE.



WHAT HE DID TO YOU IN THERE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT WAS. I'VE NEVER **SEEN** THAT... BUT WE HAVE THE POWER OF **GOD** ON OUR SIDE.

WE'LL PREVAIL.



"POWER OF GOD?"

IF EVEN **YOU**, AFTER WHAT YOU'VE LIVED THROUGH, DOUBT HIS POWER-- THEN WE'VE ALREADY LOST THIS WAR.



DID YOU KNOW I WAS MARRIED?



A FEW YEARS AFTER YOUR MOTHER'S EXORCISM, AFTER YOU'D GONE TO LIVE WITH THE HOLT FAMILY... SHE LEFT ME.

COULDN'T REALLY SAY **WHY**, EXACTLY. OUR SON WAS EIGHT AT THE TIME AND SHE LEFT HIM IN MY CARE. SHE JUST LEFT.

I WAS NOT IN A GOOD PLACE. THE CONGREGATION HELPED WHERE THEY COULD... BUT I SOON BECAME COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY **OVERWHELMED** BY IT ALL.

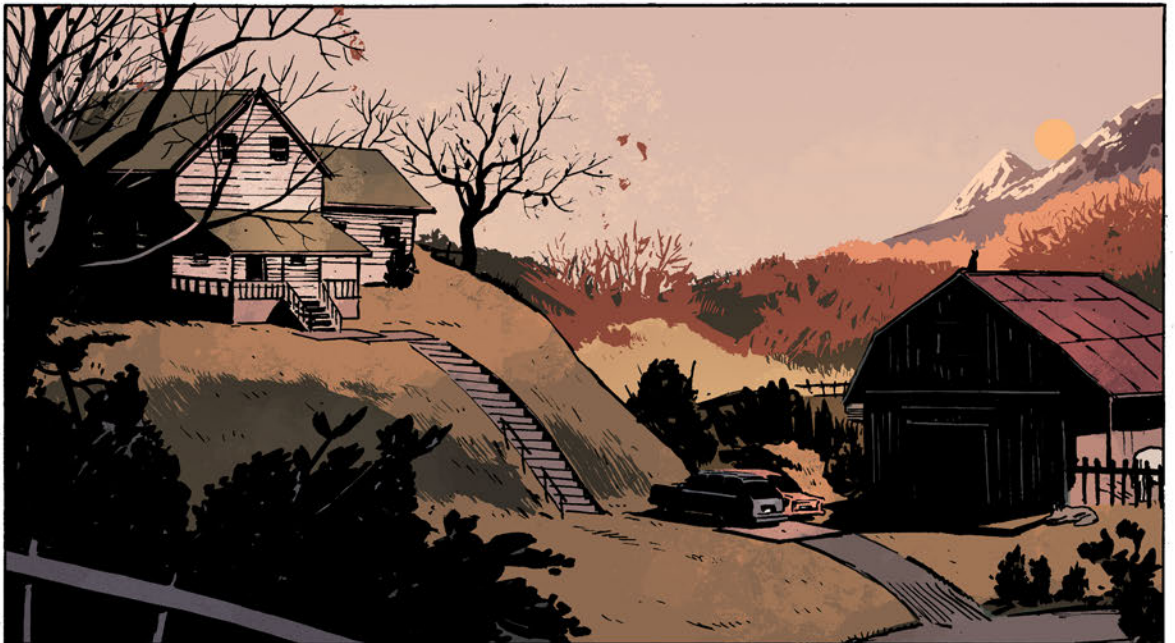
I WAS STANDING IN MY KITCHEN ONE DAY AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "I CAN'T **DO** THIS ANYMORE."

I SUDDENLY FELT **WARM...** PROTECTED. AS THIS HAPPENED, I COULD FEEL A HOLE FORMING AT THE TOP OF MY HEAD... AND SOMETHING **ENTERING** THROUGH IT.

IT Poured DOWN... FILLING ME. I KNEW SOMETHING WAS TAKING OVER, THAT IT WOULD HELP ME CARRY MY BURDEN, IT WAS SO... **SEDUCTIVE.**

I WELCOMED IT.















AAAAGGHH!



WHAT **ARE** YOU?!



WHAT DO YOU **WANT** FROM ME?!

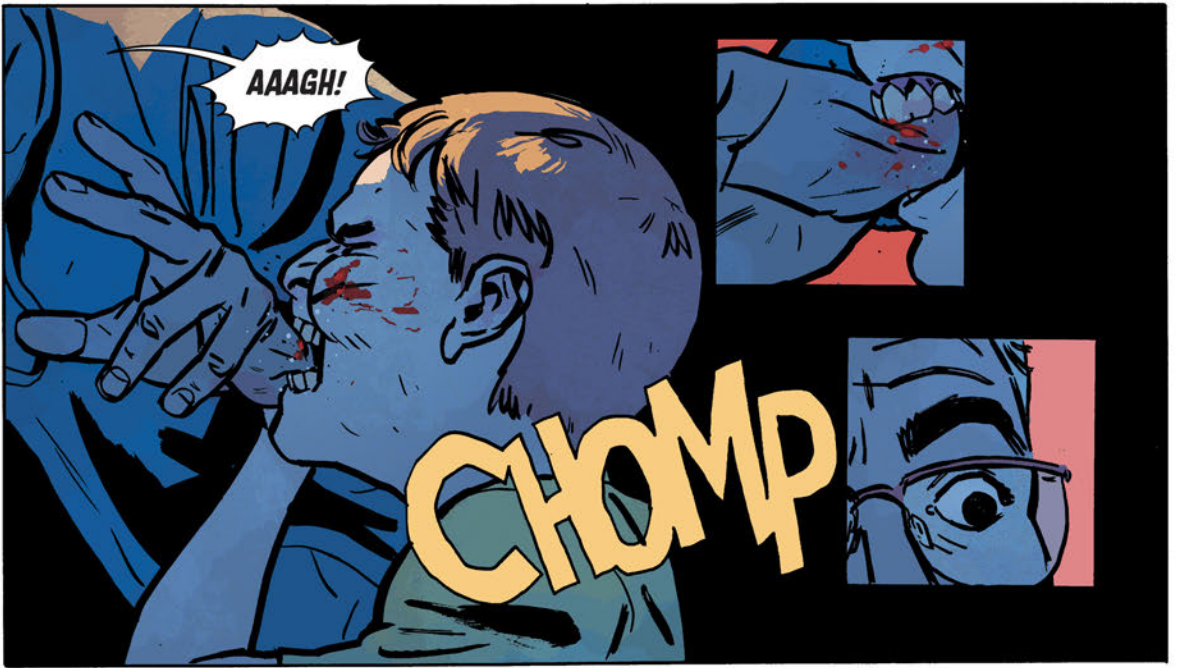


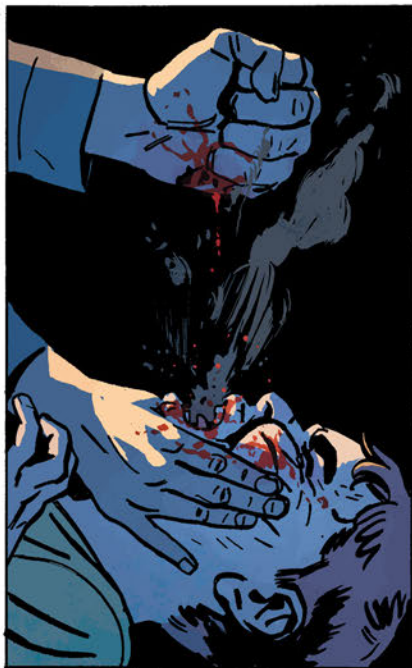
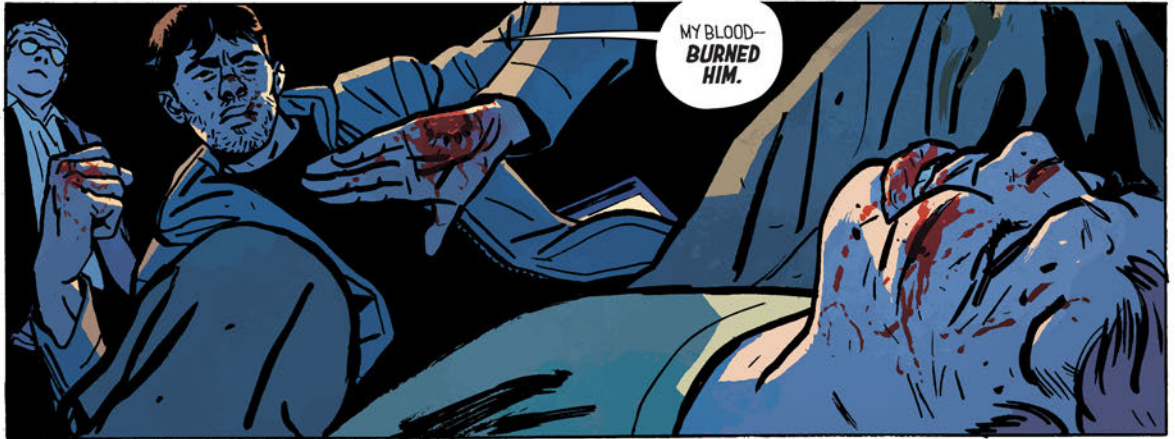
WHY WON'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?!



OUTCAST--

--NEED YOU!













WE SHOULD LEAVE THEM BE. LET ME DRIVE YOU HOME.

OKAY. THANKS.



I **REALLY** THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO JAIL.

CHIEF GILES IS A FRIEND OF MINE. AND BETSY IS **THANKFUL** FOR WHAT YOU DID. YOU SAVED HER SON.



YEAH. I GUESS I **DID**.

I WAS ABLE TO **HURT** THAT THING... WHATEVER IT WAS... DRIVE IT OUT OF JOSHUA.



YES, YOU DID. YOU HAVE A **GIFT**, KYLE.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THERE... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT. WAS IT LIKE THAT WITH YOUR MOTHER?



I DON'T REMEMBER...

WHEN IT HAPPENED TO **MY WIFE**...

IT WAS SO **DARK** I THOUGHT I WAS **SEEING** THINGS.





I DIDN'T
HIT MY WIFE...
THAT **WASN'T**
ALLISON.

BUT WHO
WOULD HAVE
BELIEVED
ME?



YOUR
MOTHER,
THEN YOUR
WIFE...

MY
LORD...

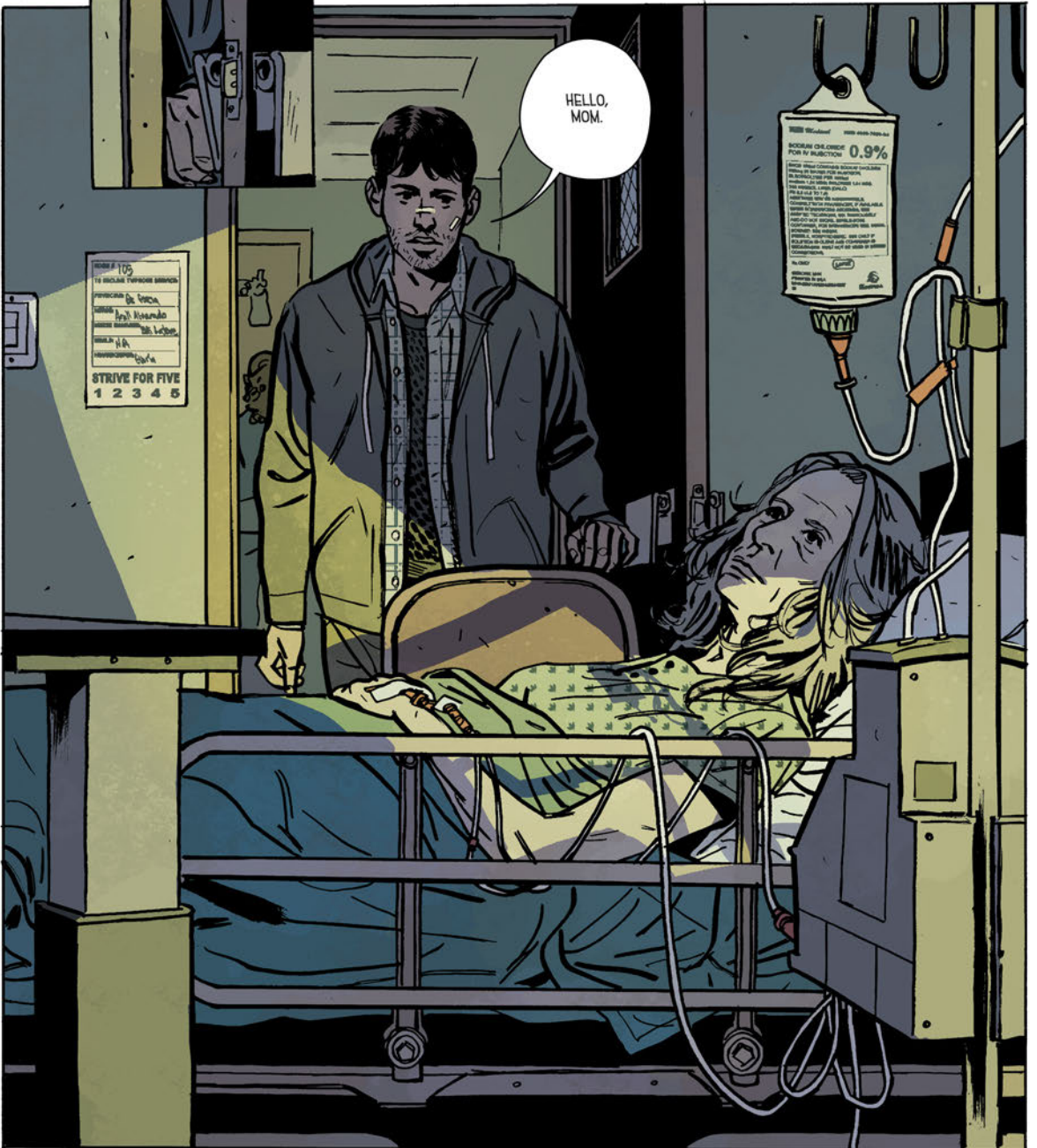


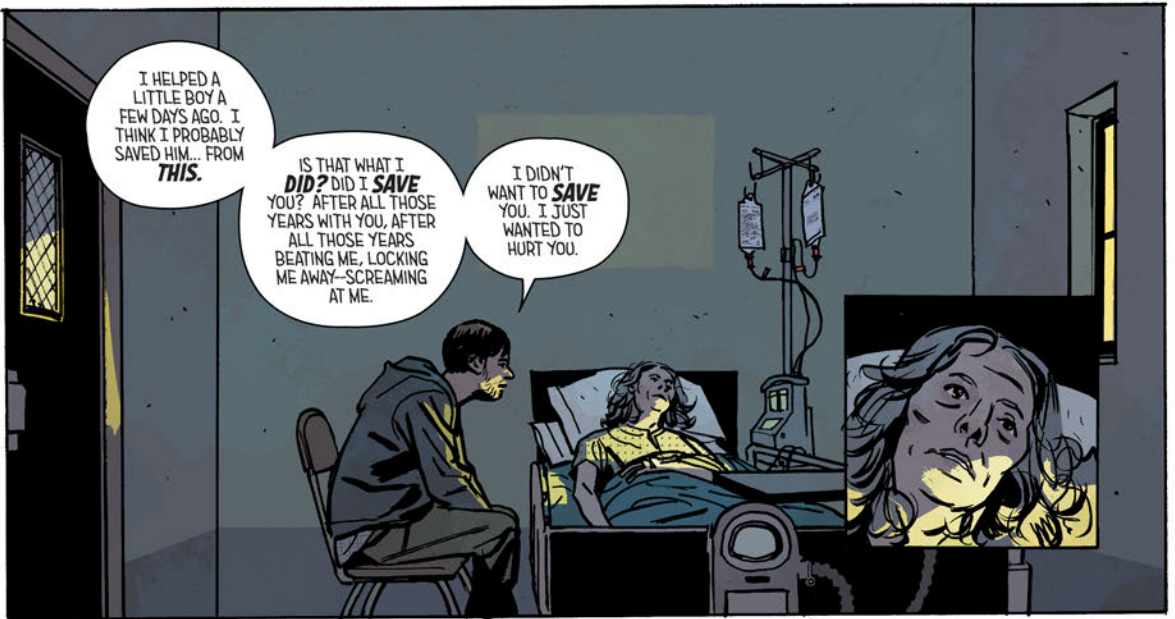
SEEMS LIKE
THEY'VE BEEN
TRYING TO HURT
ME MY WHOLE
LIFE.

AND IF I'M
EVER GOING TO
MAKE THINGS
RIGHT BETWEEN
ALLISON
AND I...



...I
NEED TO
FIND OUT
WHY.





I HELPED A LITTLE BOY A FEW DAYS AGO. I THINK I PROBABLY SAVED HIM... FROM **THIS**.

IS THAT WHAT I **DID**? DID I **SAVE** YOU? AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS WITH YOU, AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS BEATING ME, LOCKING ME AWAY—SCREAMING AT ME.

I DIDN'T WANT TO **SAVE** YOU. I JUST WANTED TO HURT YOU.



I REMEMBER THAT DAY WHEN YOU CAME AT ME AND I THOUGHT FOR THE FIRST TIME—I HEARD IT IN MY HEAD, LOUD AND CLEAR... AS IF SOMEONE IN MY HEAD WAS **YELLING** IT TO ME—

"ENOUGH."

I WAS THROUGH WITH IT, THROUGH WITH THE BEATINGS, THROUGH WITH YOU.



I HATED MYSELF FOR SO MANY YEARS AFTER THAT... I THOUGHT I'D DONE SOMETHING WRONG, THAT I SOMEHOW **BROKE** YOU THAT DAY... AND THAT'S WHY YOU ENDED UP HERE.

EVERYTHING YOU DID... YOU WERE VICIOUS AND CRUEL FOR SO LONG... BUT NOW YOU WERE HERE AND I WAS—WAS I SOMEHOW **WORSE**?

I USED TO THINK—EVEN STUCK IN THIS FUCKING BED YOU'RE STILL HURTING ME.



AND NOW I THINK... WAS THAT NOT **YOU**? WERE YOU A VICTIM, TOO?

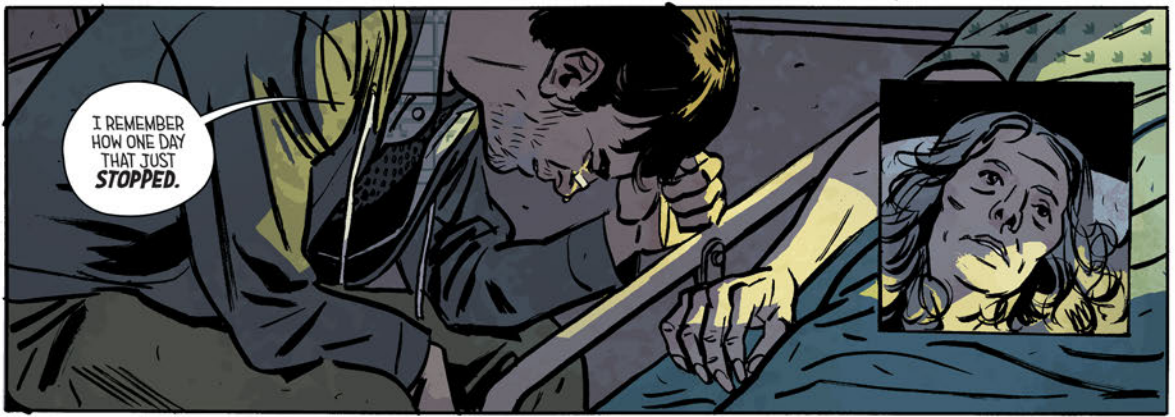
I THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WERE BEFORE... WHAT LITTLE I CAN REMEMBER OF THAT TIME.



THE BRIGHT HOUSE DAYS, I CALLED IT... THE DAYS WHEN THE WINDOWS WERE OPEN IN THE SUMMER AND THE BREEZE WOULD COME THROUGH THE HOUSE.

I REMEMBER YOU DRAWING WITH ME... PLAYING TAG OUTSIDE.

YOU WERE A **MOTHER** TO ME. A GREAT ONE.



I REMEMBER HOW ONE DAY THAT JUST STOPPED.



NOW I'VE SEEN THINGS. I KNOW IT WASN'T ME THAT MADE YOU CHANGE, OR ALLISON... IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS... BUT I KNOW I'M NOT THE SOLE CAUSE. I KNOW THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE AT WORK.



SO NOW I LOOK AT THIS PERSON WHO MADE MY LIFE A LIVING HELL... AND I THINK... MAYBE I HAD IT ALL WRONG.

I START FEELING SORRY FOR YOU... AND HATING MYSELF EVEN MORE.



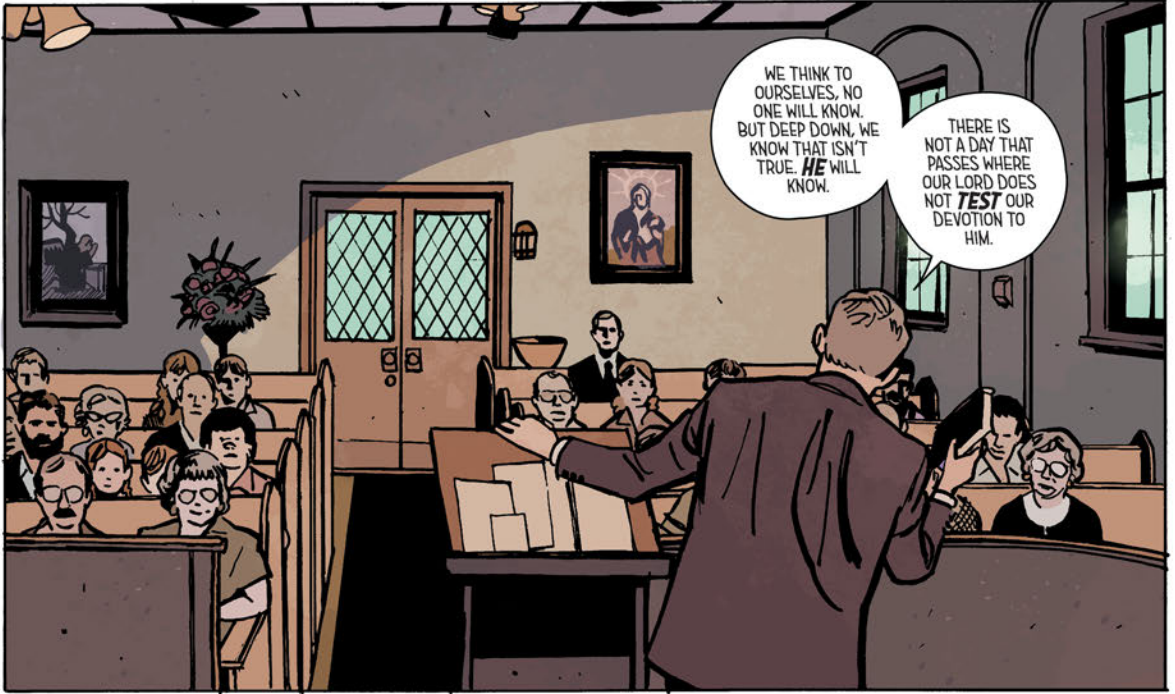
DAMN IT.

YOU ARE STILL SOMEHOW TORMENTING ME FROM THIS BED.



WE ARE, ALL OF US, PRESENTED WITH **TEMPTATION**.

THAT EXTRA DONUT, THE WRONG CHANGE AT THE BANK, THOSE PICTURES OF THAT ACTRESS YOU LIKE THAT YOU HEARD ABOUT ONLINE, THE NEIGHBOR'S HUSBAND, MOWING WITH HIS SHIRT OFF.



WE THINK TO OURSELVES, NO ONE WILL KNOW. BUT DEEP DOWN, WE KNOW THAT ISN'T TRUE. **HE** WILL KNOW.

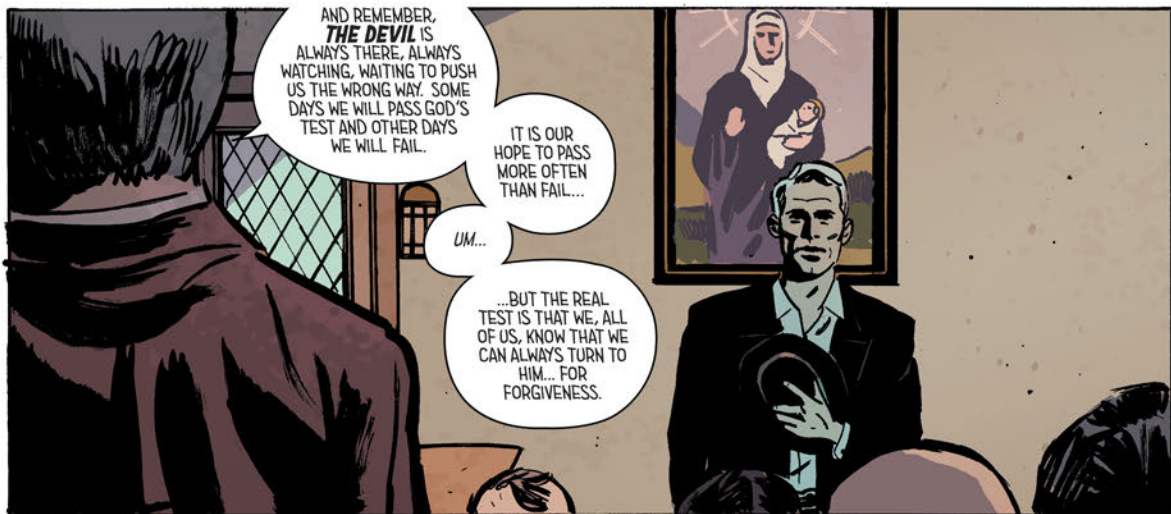
THERE IS NOT A DAY THAT PASSES WHERE OUR LORD DOES NOT **TEST** OUR DEVOTION TO HIM.



IT IS AS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THIS AS IT IS TO ALSO RECOGNIZE...

...THAT **NONE** OF US ARE PERFECT.





AND REMEMBER, **THE DEVIL** IS ALWAYS THERE, ALWAYS WATCHING, WAITING TO PUSH US THE WRONG WAY. SOME DAYS WE WILL PASS GOD'S TEST AND OTHER DAYS WE WILL FAIL.

IT IS OUR HOPE TO PASS MORE OFTEN THAN FAIL....

UM...

...BUT THE REAL TEST IS THAT WE, ALL OF US, KNOW THAT WE CAN ALWAYS TURN TO HIM... FOR FORGIVENESS.



I WANT TO THANK ALL OF YOU FOR COMING TODAY. IT WARMS MY HEART TO BE ABLE TO SHARE GOD'S WORD WITH THOSE EAGER TO RECEIVE IT.

I APPRECIATE ALL THE HELP YOU'VE GIVEN ME IN SPREADING THAT WORD. I SEE SOME NEW--



--NEW **FACES** IN THE CHURCH TODAY.

WELCOME, AND I HOPE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.















DONNIE?

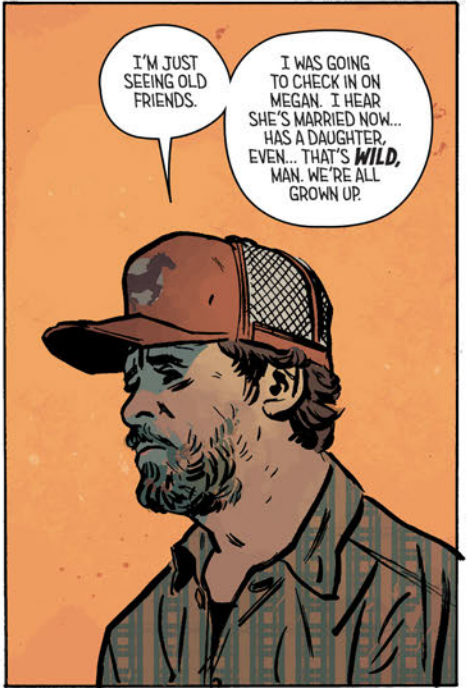


KYLE BARNES? THAT YOU?

HEY, MAN... I BARELY RECOGNIZED YOU, YOU'RE **SKINNY, MAN.**



WHY ARE YOU HERE?



I'M JUST SEEING OLD FRIENDS.

I WAS GOING TO CHECK IN ON MEGAN. I HEAR SHE'S MARRIED NOW... HAS A DAUGHTER, EVEN... THAT'S **WILD, MAN.** WE'RE ALL GROWN UP.



I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.



IT'S STILL **LIKE THAT** THEN? C'MON, MAN. I WAS A FUCKING KID MYSELF.

I'M DOING THE TWELVE-STEP THING. RIGHT NOW I'M MAKING AMENDS TO THE PEOPLE I'VE WRONGED. IT'S SOMETHING I **GOTTA** DO.

SHE'LL UNDERSTAND THAT.











HOW LONG DID DONNIE LIVE THERE BEFORE YOU CAME?



LONG ENOUGH. SIX MONTHS OR SO. HE'D ONLY STARTED WITH HER MAYBE A MONTH OR SO BEFORE THEY TOOK ME IN.



I'LL NEVER KNOW HOW HER PARENTS COULD HAVE BEEN SO DAMN **CLUELESS**. IT WAS A BIG HOUSE, SURE... BUT THEY WERE SO... CHECKED OUT.



THEY TOOK IN A LOT OF KIDS, BUT THAT WAS NO EXCUSE.



YEAH, SO MANY KIDS COMING IN AND OUT, STAYING A YEAR, SIX MONTHS... I WAS ONE OF THE FEW THEY ACTUALLY ADOPTED.

I THINK MEGAN HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT. SHE WAS ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR ME... EVEN THEN.



SHE TOLD ME... DONNIE USED TO BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF YOU.



A FEW TIMES. YEAH... I STARTED SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR OF HER ROOM. HE'D COME IN... I'D BE THERE.

I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO WIN THE FIGHT... BUT I KNEW HOW TO TAKE A BEATING.

I WAS AN OLD PRO AT THAT...

SKRITCH SKRITCH



EVENTUALLY... HE GAVE UP AND STOPPED COMING AROUND. THEN HE FINALLY MOVED ON TO ANOTHER HOME.

NEVER KNEW WHERE THAT WAS... NEVER **CARED.**

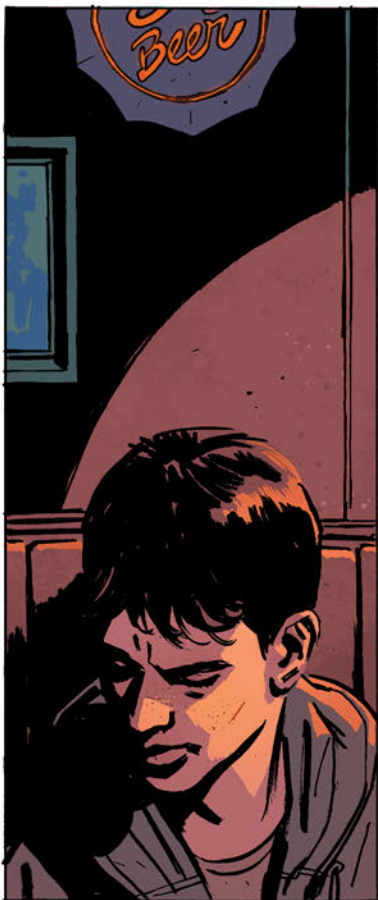


Y'KNOW... I STILL CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT.

WHAT?

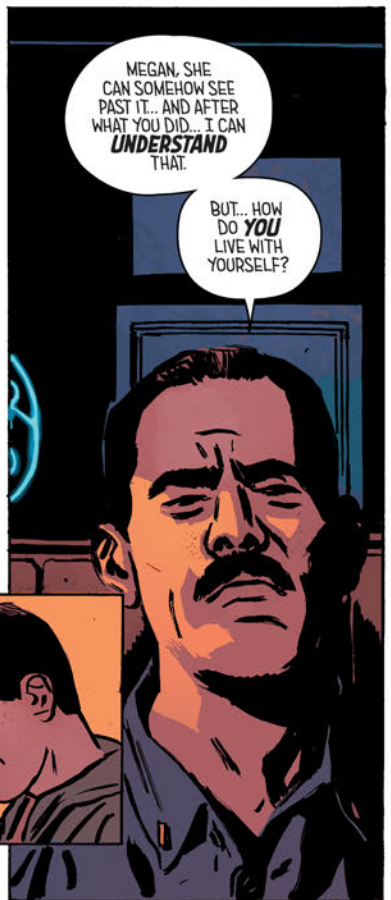


MAN LIKE YOU, EVERYTHING MEGAN TOLD ME ABOUT YOU... THEN YOU GO AND BEAT **YOUR DAUGHTER** UP?



SHE WAS IN THE HOSPITAL FOR A WEEK. SHE ALMOST **DIED.**

MEGAN AND I... WE **SAW** ALLISON... WHAT YOU DID TO HER.



MEGAN, SHE CAN SOMEHOW SEE PAST IT... AND AFTER WHAT YOU DID... I CAN **UNDERSTAND** THAT.

BUT... HOW DO **YOU** LIVE WITH YOURSELF?





I'LL HAVE TO BE QUICK. I'M TOLD VISITING HOURS HAVE ALREADY ENDED.

KOFF!

KOFF!



SARAH, DEAR SARAH... SUCH A **TRAGEDY** TO SEE YOU LIKE THIS. YOU HAD SO MUCH **FIRE** IN YOU...

...SO MUCH **LIFE.**

IT'S SO SAD.



THE WORST PART IS YOUR SON WILL NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH YOU FOUGHT BACK... HOW MUCH YOU **RESISTED.**

YOU WOULD HAVE GIVEN YOUR **LIFE** TO STOP US... AND IN A SENSE... **YOU DID.**

AND NOW,
DESPITE ALL
YOUR
EFFORTS...

**WE
HAVE HIM
ANYWAY.**











PEOPLE
THINK GOD
SWEATS THE
DETAILS...



PEOPLE THINK
HE'S GOT TIME TO
WATCH EACH AND EVERY
THING WE DO. LIKE HE
REALLY CARES WHAT WE
SAY AND WHETHER OR NOT
WE'RE REALLY FOLLOWING
HIS RULES. IT'S SUCH
BULLSHIT.

HE'S NOT
MARKING DOWN EVERY
IMPURE THOUGHT OR BAD
WORD. HE DOESN'T **CARE**
IF YOU LOOK AT YOUR
NEIGHBOR'S WIFE OR DRINK
ON A SUNDAY OR
MASTURBATE.

HE'S A
LITTLE BUSY
WAGING **WAR** ON A
COSMIC LEVEL WITH
THE DEVIL AND THE
FORCES OF EVIL.

HE JUST
WANTS US TO BE
GOOD AND BE GOOD
TO EACH OTHER. SO
REALLY... MASTURBATE
ALL YOU WANT.



WELL, THAT'S A RELIEF!

YOU SAID IT, GILES!



I'M SERIOUS.



LOOK AT THIS WORLD AROUND US, FILLED WITH **WICKEDNESS**. I THINK ABOUT THE THINGS I'VE **SEEN** AND I CAN'T HELP BUT ASK, "WHY GOD, WHY?" AND LET ME TELL YOU A SECRET.

SOMETIMES I GET A **FEELING** AND SOMETIMES THERE'S A **SIGN**... BUT I DON'T HEAR HIS VOICE. NOT LIKE MOSES DID, OR ABRAHAM, OR JESUS... WHY? MAYBE HE GOT TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE WAR AND HE **FORGOT** ABOUT US.

HE DOES NOT ANSWER BACK.

MAYBE HE'S **LOSING**.



I'M SORRY, GUYS... I'M JUST...

I'M JUST **DRUNK**.



FOLD.

I'M HITTING THE PISSER.









TELL HER I'M...
...UNDER THE WEATHER.



OH. OKAY THEN.
HOW DID THE GAME GO? SURE WAS A LONG ONE.



YEAH.
SURE WAS.



THIS SHOULD COMPLETE THE ROOF FUND AND COVER THE REST OF THE FALL PICNIC.
AMAZING.



THE LORD PROVIDES.





ALLISON WAS... STARTED OUT JUST WANTING TO **LOOK** AT HER. THEN ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS LISTEN TO HER. I FOUND HER FASCINATING. I HUNG ON EVERY WORD SHE'D SAY.

THE MORE I LEARNED ABOUT HER, THE MORE I WANTED TO KNOW. WE COULD TALK FOR HOURS.

...

SHE WAS THE ONLY PERSON I EVER KNEW TRULY LOVED ME.



I'M VERY SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.



OH, SORRY... ALLISON DIDN'T DIE.

WE JUST...



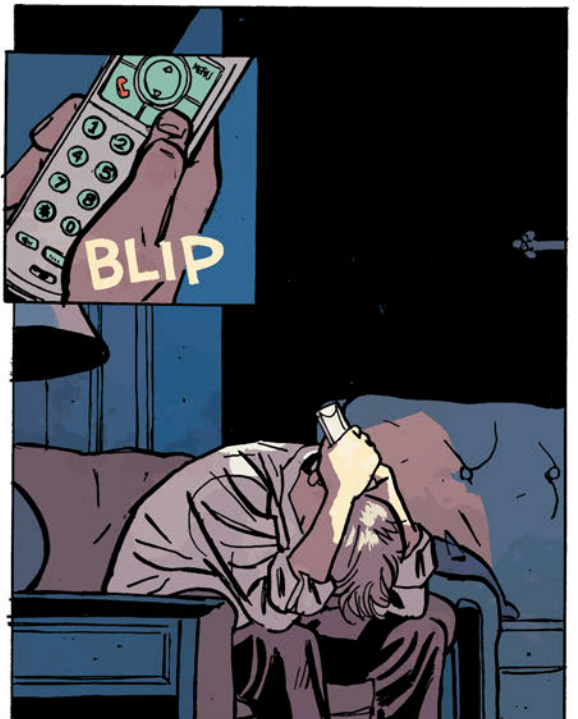
IT DIDN'T WORK.



HEAR THERE'S A LOT OF THAT THESE DAYS.

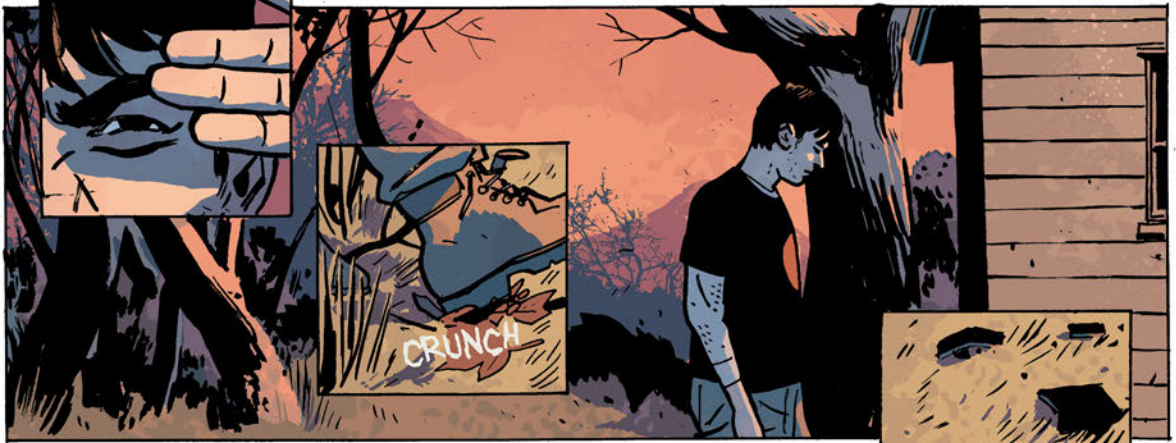


YEAH.















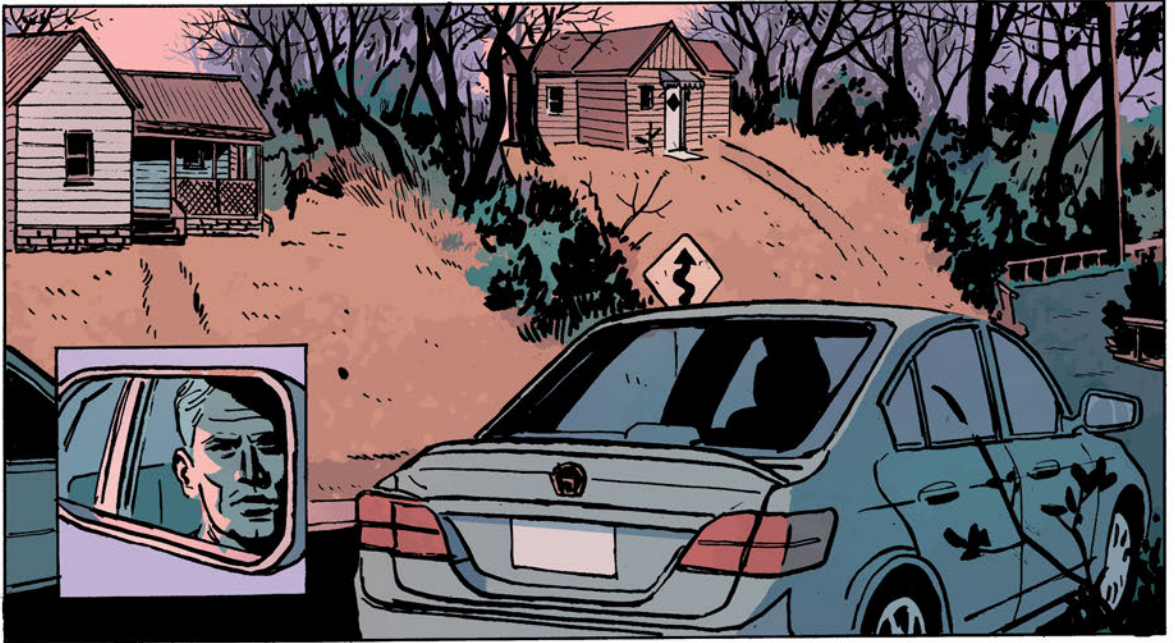
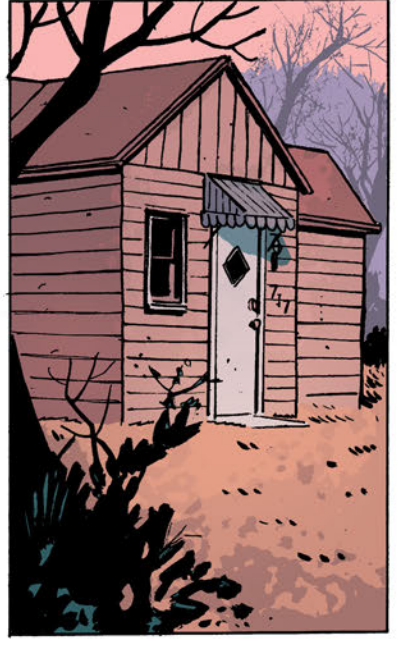


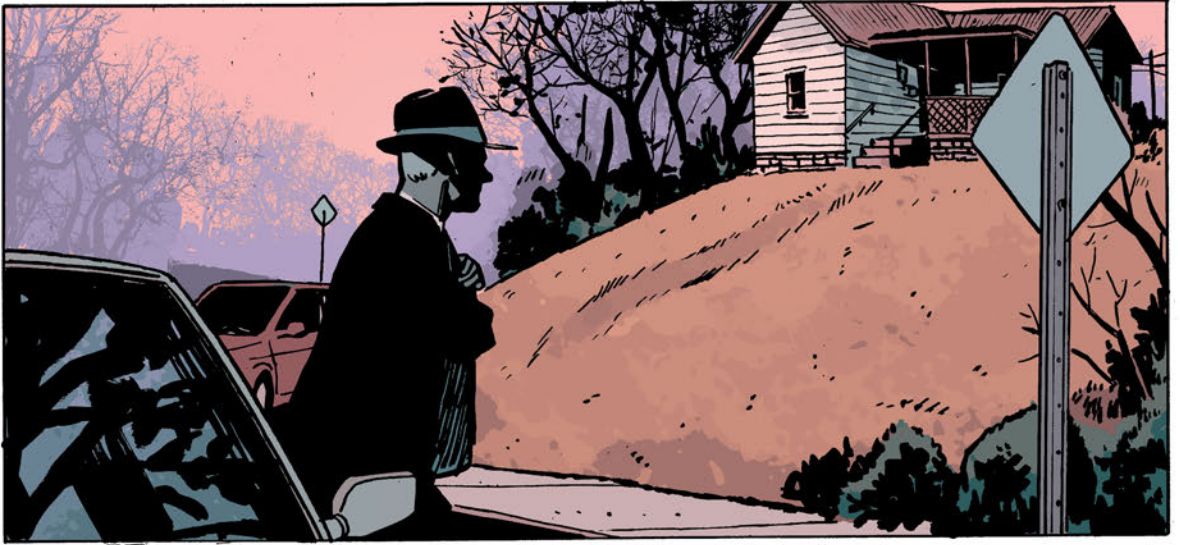
KYLE
BARNES?

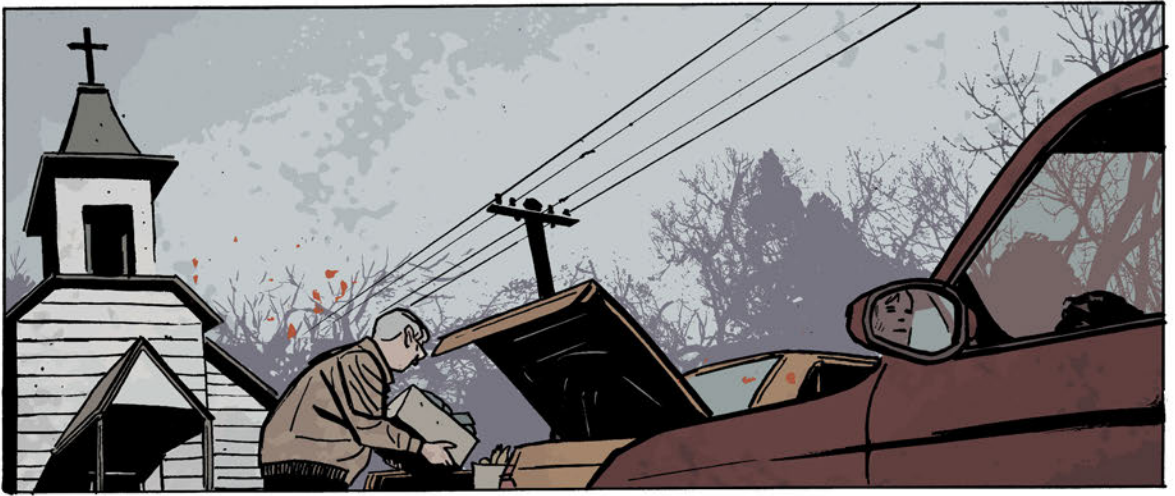
I'M
DETECTIVE
**LUKE
MASTERS...**

...I NEED
YOUR HELP.













SEE IF THE GUY REALLY IS POSSESSED.

EXORCISE HIM IF WE CAN.



WHAT'D YOU SAY TO HIM?

I SAID I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU.



IS IT JUST ME, OR DOES IT SEEM LIKE YOU'RE SUDDENLY BUYING INTO ALL THIS?

IT'S JUST YOU.



I JUST WANT **ANSWERS**... I'M NOT CLAIMING TO ALREADY HAVE THEM. I WANT TO WORK WITH YOU TO FIND MORE OF THESE PEOPLE... TO FIGURE THIS THING OUT.

JUST SO HAPPENS... ONE SEEMS TO HAVE COME TO ME.

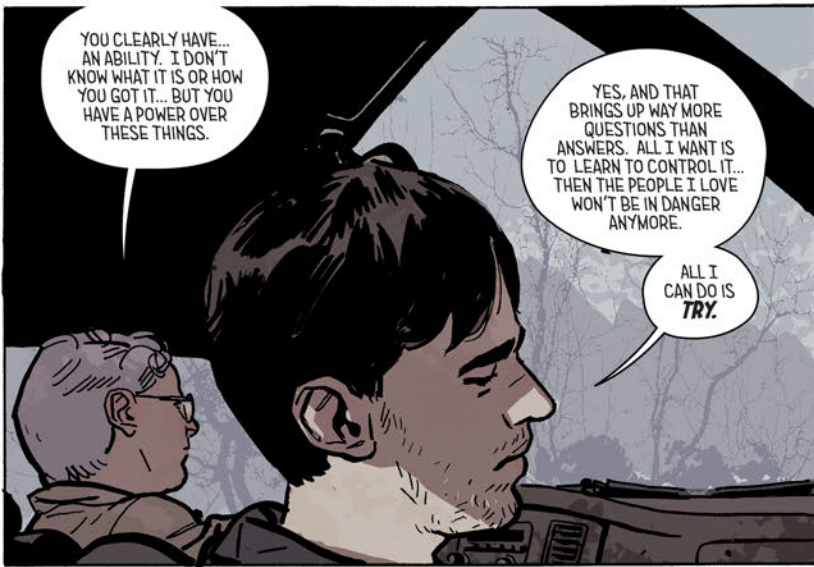


PRaise the LORD, REVEREND. YOU'RE A LIFESAVER.



HOW MANY MORE?

JUST ONE.



YOU CLEARLY HAVE... AN ABILITY. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS OR HOW YOU GOT IT... BUT YOU HAVE A POWER OVER THESE THINGS.

YES, AND THAT BRINGS UP WAY MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS. ALL I WANT IS TO LEARN TO CONTROL IT... THEN THE PEOPLE I LOVE WON'T BE IN DANGER ANYMORE.

ALL I CAN DO IS **TRY.**



WE'RE HERE.



MIND YOURSELF.

MILDRED... SHE'S A CHARACTER.



YOU BOYS COME RIGHT IN.



I'LL PUT THIS IN THE KITCHEN.



I GOT YOU.





SHE WAS FALLING... I CAUGHT HER, I TRIED TO BE GENTLE, BUT DAMN... I DIDN'T KNOW IT'D HURT HER SO MUCH.



A YEAR OR SO BACK... MILDRED WAS **AFFLICTED**. I HELPED HER, BUT IT TOOK ITS TOLL.

HER RECOVERY WASN'T EASY.



SHE WAS POSSESSED?



YEAH.



BUT I **EXORCISED** HER... TOOK A FEW WEEKS... BUT I DID IT.

COULD HAVE USED YOU, THEN.







HE WAS MY PARTNER... **SEVEN YEARS** WE WERE ON THE JOB TOGETHER. HE WAS MY CLOSEST FRIEND.

MY HOUSE WAS PRACTICALLY HIS SECOND HOME. WAS THE ONLY PLACE HE HAD A HOME-COOKED MEAL AS AN ADULT.

GUY WAS **HABITUALLY** SINGLE.



MY WIFE, TERRY... SHE ALWAYS TRIED TO GET HIM TO SETTLE DOWN. HE WASN'T PARTICULARLY GOOD-LOOKING AND THAT WASN'T CHANGING FOR THE BETTER AS HE GOT OLDER.

THEY WERE **FRIENDS**, TERRY AND BLAKE.

AND HE WAS A GOOD MAN. I KNEW HIM, I KNEW **EVERYTHING** ABOUT HIM.



DO YOU UNDERSTAND? I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN **THAT** WRONG ABOUT HIM, TERRY EITHER.

HE SAID HE WAS FEELING REALLY STRANGE, THOUGHT HE WAS SICK. HE'D COME OVER TO OUR PLACE ANY TIME HE GOT SICK AND WE'D TAKE CARE OF HIM.



THEN HE **KILLED** HER.



I'M VERY SORRY.



THANK YOU, REVEREND.



WAS HE ACTING STRANGE THAT DAY WHEN HE CAME TO YOUR HOUSE?



YEAH. NOTHING TOO BIZARRE. WE'D TALK TO HIM AND HE WOULDN'T RESPOND. LIKE HE WAS SOMEWHERE ELSE... BUT WE THOUGHT HE MAYBE HAD THE FLU OR SOMETHING.

HIS RESPONSES WOULDN'T REALLY MAKE SENSE WHEN HE DID TALK... THEN HE'D SNAP OUT OF THAT AND SEEM FINE FOR A WHILE.



IT WAS AFTER. THAT'S WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THIS WASN'T THE BLAKE I KNEW.

HE DIDN'T EVEN REALLY RECOGNIZE THAT HE'D DONE A BAD THING. HE REGARDED THE... MURDER... LIKE IT WAS SOME KIND OF GAME.



HE DIDN'T DEFEND HIMSELF, HE DIDN'T EXPLAIN HIMSELF. HE WAS JUST... **HAPPY.** ABOUT ALL OF IT.

I TRIED SPEAKING TO HIM... ONCE...



IT WAS POINTLESS.

WHATEVER HE IS NOW... THAT'S **NOT** THE MAN I KNEW.



NO ONE **BELIEVES** ME. I'VE STOPPED TALKING ABOUT IT BECAUSE PEOPLE WERE STARTING TO THINK I WAS **CRAZY**.

MY ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE HAS BEEN EXTENDED A FEW TIMES OVER NOW. I'VE BEEN TAKING THAT TIME... DOING MY OWN INVESTIGATION.

THAT'S HOW I FOUND YOU.



PEOPLE DON'T PRESS CHARGES, AREN'T WILLING TO TESTIFY... **REPORT** STILL GETS FILED. THOSE REPORTS CAN BE ACCESSED FOR OTHER INVESTIGATIONS.

I HAVE FRIENDS IN A FEW DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS IN THE STATE. SOMEONE HEARS A STORY ABOUT SOMEONE "NOT ACTING LIKE THEMSELVES"... I GET TIPPED OFF.



SEEMS LIKE YOU BEAT THE HELL OUT OF SOME WOMAN'S SON. SHE SAYS YOU SAVED HIM... THAT YOU "BROUGHT HIM BACK."

HOW DOES **THAT** WORK? THAT MAKES ME LOOK INTO YOU.



DON'T TAKE ME LONG TO FIND THE STORY OF YOUR MOTHER... WHAT'S PUBLIC AT LEAST. THE ABUSE, HOW NO ONE EXPECTED IT... HOW ONE DAY... SHE JUST CHANGED.

YOU DO THAT TO HER... PUT HER IN THAT BED?



I'M SORRY.

I DIDN'T MEAN TO...



WHAT ARE YOU ASKING US TO DO?



YOU'VE HELPED PEOPLE IN THE PAST.

I JUST WANT TO BE NEXT.



AND THIS GUY IS... IN PRISON?



IF I CAN GET YOU IN... YOU'LL TALK TO HIM?



YES.

IF YOU CAN GET US IN... WE'LL TALK TO HIM.



WE'RE REALLY DOING THIS?

I'LL PICK YOU UP TOMORROW.



WHAT?

I'M ACTUALLY A LITTLE SCARED.



I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'VE DISCOUNTED THESE THINGS FOR SO LONG... AND NOW THEY'RE BECOMING **REAL**.

NO.



I'M TRYING TO GET ALLISON BACK. BUT HOW CAN I EVER EXPLAIN THIS TO HER? IF WHAT'S IN ME HURTS HER... AND I CAN FIX THAT... MAYBE, OKAY... THAT GOES AWAY.

TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT BETWEEN US? I DON'T KNOW THE NEXT STEP.



YOU'VE GOT TIME.



CRIT CRUMPLE CRACK





KNOCK KNOCK

YES?

OH, UM... I TOOK NORVILLE'S CAR THE OTHER DAY. HE'D SAID I COULD ANY TIME I NEEDED A WHILE BACK, AND WHEN HE DIDN'T ANSWER I FIGURED HE WAS NAPPING.

JUST WANTED TO LET HIM KNOW... AND THANK HIM.

NORVILLE PASSED A COUPLE DAYS AGO. I'M VERY SORRY.

OH, GOD.

WENT IN HIS SLEEP. IT WAS VERY PEACEFUL. I FIND CONSOLATION IN THAT.

I'M HIS BROTHER, SIDNEY. I'LL BE STAYING HERE WHILE I GET HIS AFFAIRS IN ORDER.

IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, ANYTHING AT ALL, I'M JUST NEXT DOOR. I'M KYLE.

WISH IT WERE UNDER MORE PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES, KYLE... BUT IT'S EXCELLENT TO MEET YOU JUST THE SAME.









LUKE.

OH,
HOW I'VE
MISSED
YOU.



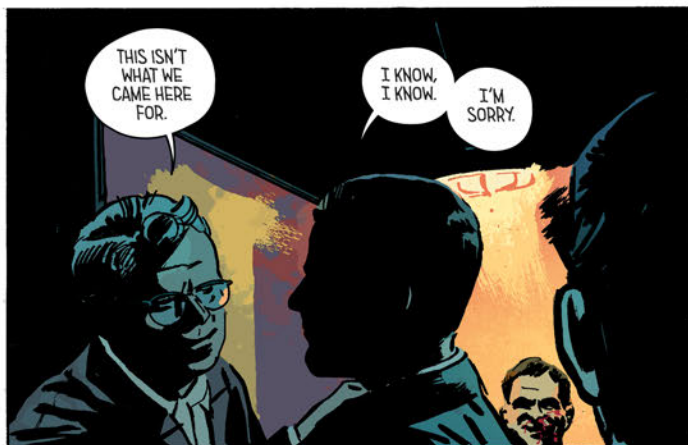
CLANK

DID YOU **KNOW?** I NEVER GOT TO TELL YOU THIS... WE DIDN'T GET TO TALK MUCH AFTER THAT PART I DIDN'T LIKE. **HATED IT,** REALLY.

YOUR WIFE WAS SO **WARM** AND **WET** INSIDE. THE DEEPER I WENT, THE WARMER AND WETTER SHE GOT, UNTIL ALL THAT WARMNESS AND WETNESS BEGAN TO POUR ONTO THE FLOOR AND GET COLD.

IT WAS SO **RED...** MORE **RED** THAN ANYTHING I'D EVER SEEN.







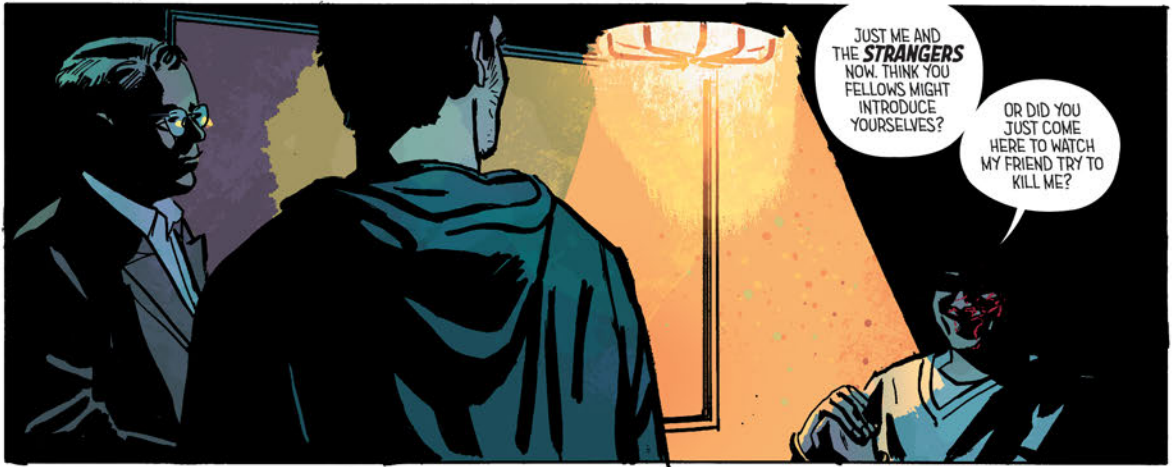
I THINK YOU SHOULD LET US TALK TO HIM.

YOU'RE JUST A DISTRACTION AT THIS POINT.



OKAY... YEAH.

YOU'RE RIGHT.



JUST ME AND THE **STRANGERS** NOW. THINK YOU FELLOWS MIGHT INTRODUCE YOURSELVES?

OR DID YOU JUST COME HERE TO WATCH MY FRIEND TRY TO KILL ME?



I'M REVEREND ANDERSON AND THIS IS KYLE. WE JUST CAME HERE TO TALK WITH YOU.

WE'RE FRIENDS OF LUKE'S.



NO YOU'RE NOT. LUKE WOULD FUCKING **HATE** A COUPLE OF GUYS LIKE YOU.

DON'T GET ME WRONG. I LOVE THE GUY, BUT HE'S A TOTAL MEATHEAD JOCK. HE'D BE FIGHTING THE URGE TO DUNK YOUR HEADS IN A TOILET AND PULL YOUR UNDERWEAR UP INTO YOUR ASS CRACKS.

THAT SHIT DOESN'T GO AWAY. CAN'T BE FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE YOU DON'T RESPECT. **NOPE.**



IF YOU "LOVE" THE GUY... WHY DID YOU KILL HIS WIFE?



THAT'S A RATHER COMPLICATED AND INVOLVED STORY. I REALLY DOUBT YOU'RE WILLING TO SIT THROUGH IT... AND IF YOU DID... I DOUBT YOU'D ACTUALLY **COMPREHEND** IT.



TRY US.



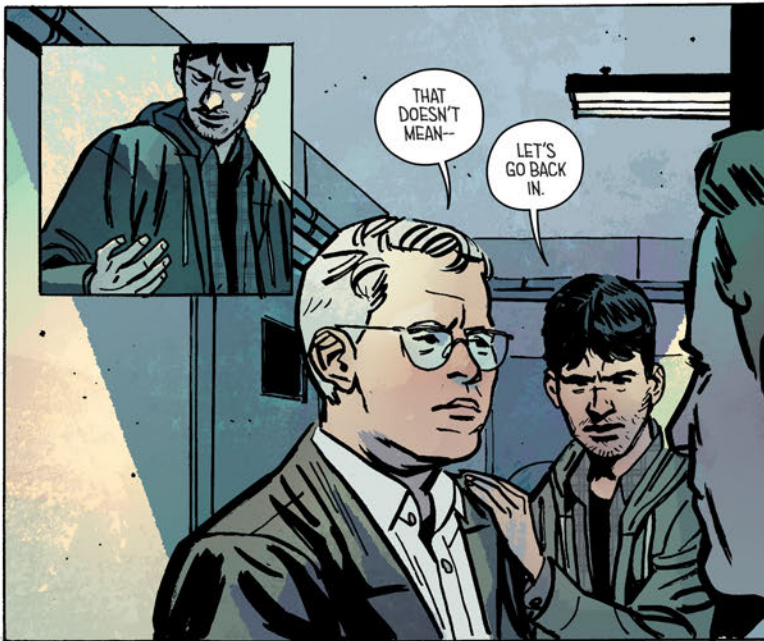
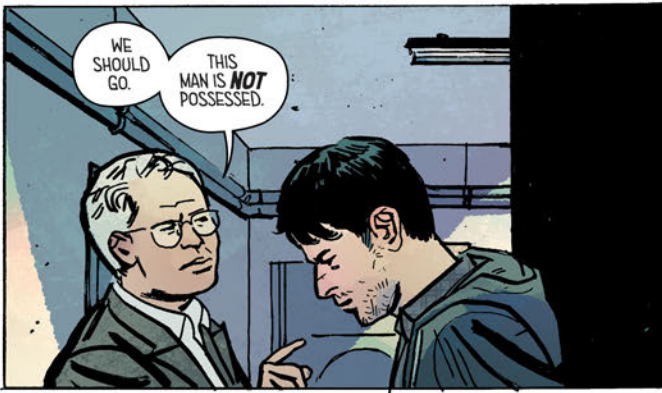
DO I KNOW YOU?

I FEEL LIKE I'VE **SEEN** YOU SOMEWHERE.



CAN I SPEAK WITH YOU OUTSIDE?







WELCOME BACK.
I MISSED YOU BOTH.
THAT MAY SEEM INSINCERE,
BUT I HONESTLY SPEND
MOST OF MY TIME
ALONE
THESE DAYS.

BEING IN LAW
ENFORCEMENT HAS
MADE ME VERY...
POPULAR
HERE.

I HATE BEING
ALONE. THAT'S NOT
WHAT THIS LIFE IS
SUPPOSED TO BE
ABOUT.



GO
AHEAD.



WHAT'S
THIS?

AND **WHO**
ARE YOU? WHY
DO I FEEL LIKE
I KNOW YOU?



YOU
KNOW
ME?



->NGG.<-

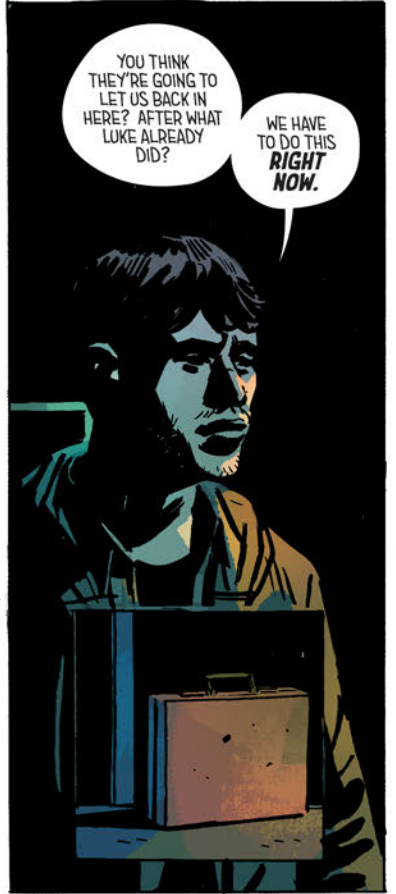




SOMETHING I SAID?



WE'RE NOT PREPARED FOR THIS.



YOU THINK THEY'RE GOING TO LET US BACK IN HERE? AFTER WHAT LUKE ALREADY DID?

WE HAVE TO DO THIS **RIGHT NOW.**



JOSHUA... HE SAID THE **SAME** THINGS. KYLE, WE SHOULD **DISCUSS** THIS.



THERE'S NO TIME. HE'S **RIGHT HERE.** WE MAY NEVER GET ANOTHER CHANCE AT THIS. IF THAT'S NOT ENOUGH TO GET YOU OVER YOUR **FEAR...** REMEMBER... THERE'S A MAN IN THERE.

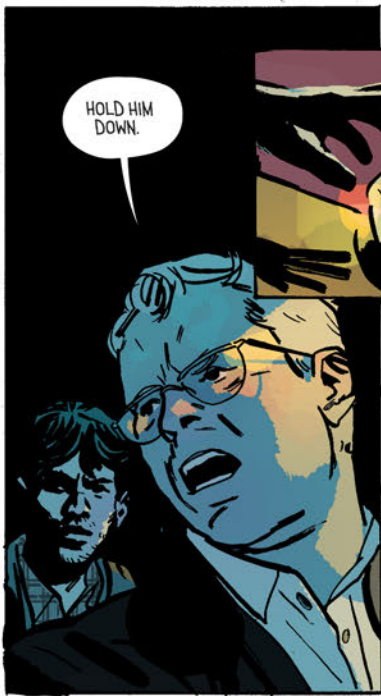
LET'S GIVE THIS GUY HIS LIFE BACK!



OKAY.







HOLD HIM DOWN.



DO NOT FUCKING TOUCH ME AGAIN!

GUARD!

KLANG



GUARD!!

I'M SORRY.



AAARRGH!

KLANX



IN THE NAME OF JESUS, I CAST YOU OUT!

HOLD HIM STILL.



WRAMP

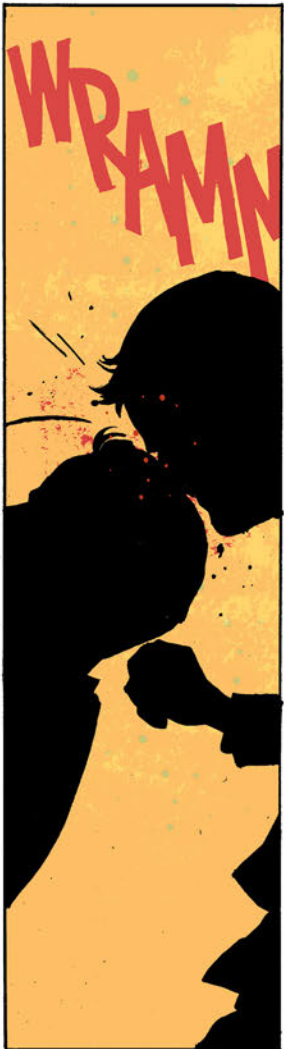
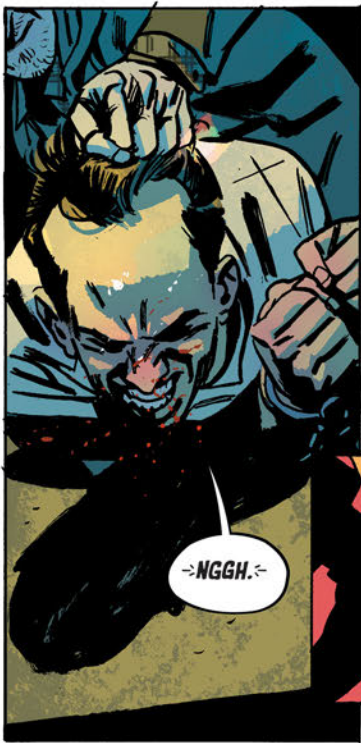
NAARRG!



BEGONE, DEMON!

LEAVE THIS MAN! YOU DO NOT BELONG HERE! YOU HAVE NO POWER HERE!

AAARRGH!





NO...
THAT WAS
ME.

I WAS
TOUCHING
HIM.



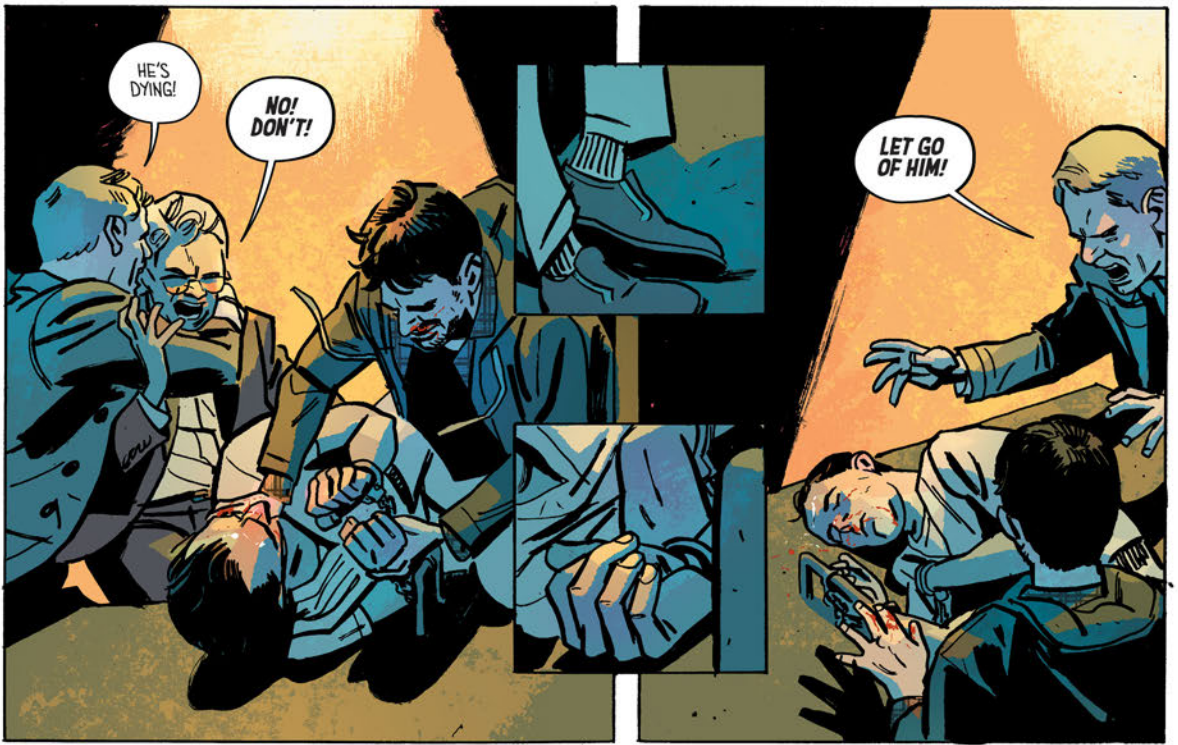
THAT
WAS *ME*.



HELP ME
GET HIM
ON THE
TABLE.









MORE.







TOMORROW.

THE WOMAN THAT YELLED AT ME WHEN WE DROPPED OFF FOOD... LET'S GO SEE HER TOMORROW.

MILDRED? WHY?



JUST A HUNCH. I KNOW YOU'RE RATTLED, BUT I FEEL LIKE WE'RE ON THE VERGE OF SOME ANSWERS HERE...

...WE'RE FIGURING THINGS OUT.



THE DEMON IN BLAKE MORROW... IT WAS POWERFUL... MORE **POWERFUL** THAN YOU OR I.


THE LORD **FAILED** US.



WHAT IF THAT WASN'T IT AT ALL? I KNOW YOU THINK YOU HAVE THIS FIGURED OUT, REVEREND... BUT WHAT IF YOU DON'T?



THEN GOD HELP US ALL...



... BECAUSE I
DON'T KNOW HOW
ELSE TO FIGHT
BACK AGAINST
THEM...

...AND IT'S
CLEAR TO ME NOW...
THEY POSE A MUCH
GREATER THREAT THAN
I EVER COULD HAVE
IMAGINED.



SIDNEY?



SORRY IF I STARTLED YOU.

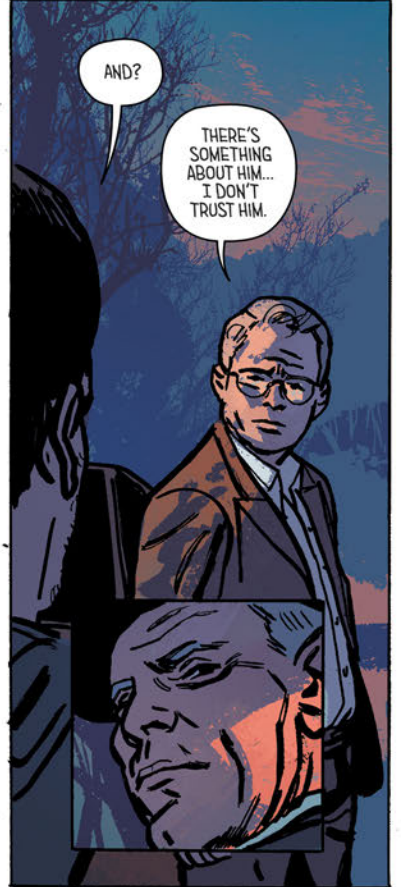


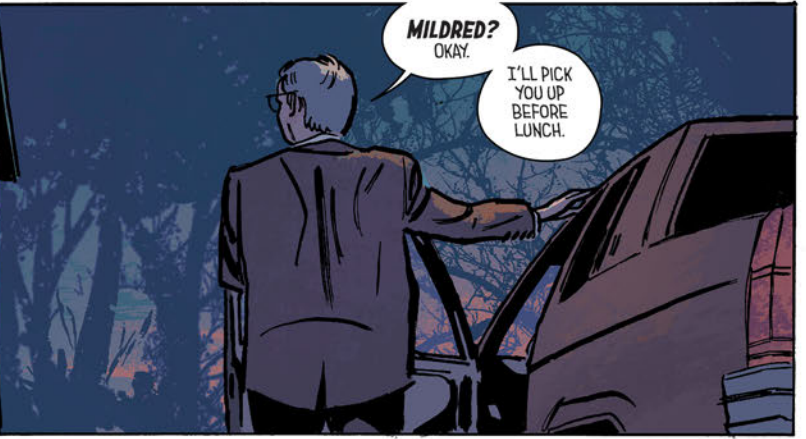
I WAS JUST OUT WATCHING THE SUNSET. I DIDN'T WANT TO INTERRUPT...

I'LL LEAVE YOU BOYS TO IT.



GOOD NIGHT.







REVEREND...

YOU SAID YOU WOULDN'T BRING THIS ONE BACK TO MY HOME.



I KNOW, MILDRED... BUT KYLE IS AWFUL NICE. I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST FOR YOU TO GET TO KNOW HIM.



PLEASE, MAMAM... WILL YOU LET US IN?

WE BROUGHT YOU SOME SUPPLIES FOR THE WINTER.



OKAY, BUT THAT ONE STAYS AWAY FROM ME.

I'LL PUT THIS IN THE KITCHEN.



WILL YOU BE COMING TO THE CHILI COOK-OFF NEXT WEEK?

DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I'LL EAT... BUT I'LL CERTAINLY BE THERE.



IS YOUR SISTER STILL WITH US? WE HAVEN'T TALKED ABOUT HER IN A LONG WHILE, IT SEEMS.

WOULDN'T KNOW, TO BE HONEST... BUT I RECKON SO. WE HAVEN'T TALKED IN MONTHS.

I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT. WHAT HAPPENED?

AFRAID THAT'S MY BUSINESS, REVEREND.



YOU'RE ALL SET, MA'AM. I PUT THE BLANKETS IN YOUR LAUNDRY ROOM BECAUSE I FIGURED YOU MIGHT WANT TO WASH THEM FIRST.

I THINK WE'RE ALL SET THEN.

WE'LL LEAVE YOU BE.



ONE SECOND.







OH, GOD.
OH, GOD.
OH, GOD.



REVEREND?
YOU OKAY?



NO, I'M NOT OKAY, KYLE. THAT WOMAN IN THERE, SHE ATTENDS MY SERVICE. I BRING HER FOOD. WE'VE TALKED FOR **HOURS** BEFORE.

I **KNOW** HER... SHE... SHE'S A **FRIEND** OF MINE.

AND SHE HAS A **DEMON** INSIDE OF HER.



SHE NEEDED ME... AND I... I **FAILED** HER.



OH, GOD...



WE SHOULD GO.
SHE'S WATCHING.



THIS IS A BREAKTHROUGH. AT THE VERY LEAST THIS MEANS WE HAVE **ACCESS**. WE PROBABLY WON'T BE ABLE TO GET BACK IN TO QUESTION BLAKE, BUT MILDRED IS **RIGHT THERE**. WE CAN TALK TO HER. MAYBE SHE'LL GIVE US SOME ANSWERS.

SHE SEEMS SCARED OF ME. THAT'S SOMETHING WE COULD USE.

NO.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN, NO?



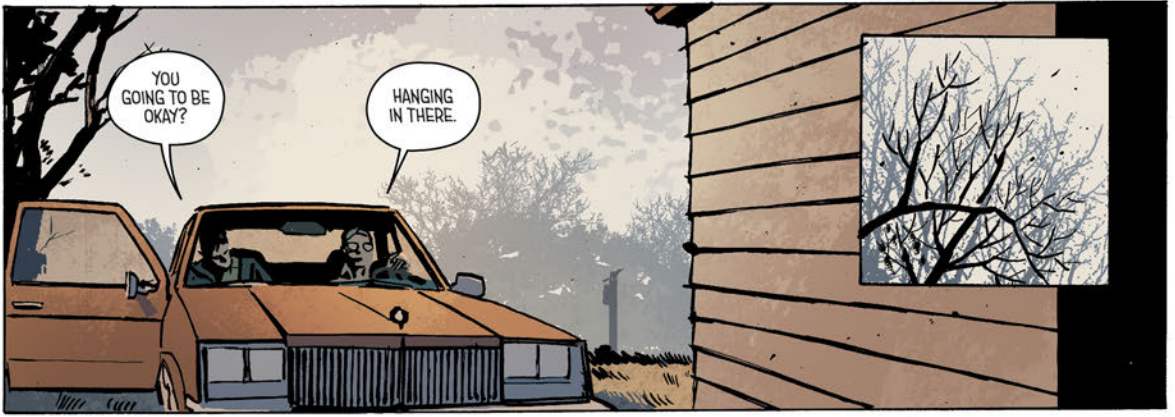
THERE'S A WOMAN IN THERE, HAS TO BE, FIGHTING FOR HER ETERNAL SOUL. I'M GOING TO RESEARCH, I'M GOING TO ASK GOD TO GRANT ME THE STRENGTH TO FACE HER... IN A WAY WE COULDN'T WITH BLAKE.

I CAN'T HAVE YOU TALKING TO HER BEFORE I'M READY.

THE EVIL THAT HAS HER WOULD NEVER GIVE YOU A STRAIGHT ANSWER ANYWAY. PROBABLY JUST FILL YOUR HEAD WITH BULLSHIT.



I DON'T KNOW...







YOU'RE NOT CRAZY, Y'KNOW.



HOW DID YOU GET--?

I SAW THE WAY YOU WERE LOOKING AT ME THAT DAY IN THE CHURCH. **YOU KNEW.** YOU WERE JUST AFRAID TO TELL SOMEONE... TOO SCARED THEY'D THINK YOU'D LOST YOUR MIND.

WELL, YOU WERE ABSOLUTELY **RIGHT** ABOUT ME.



YOU **KNOW** MY NAME.

WELL...

...AT LEAST A **FEW** OF THEM. I HAVE **SO MANY.**



WHAT DO YOU WANT?

SO MUCH... A GREAT MANY THINGS. TOO MANY TO LIST.



I DO, HOWEVER, WANT A VERY PARTICULAR THING... FROM YOU.



YOU'VE GOTTEN SO CLOSE, YOU AND YOUR FRIEND.

TOO CLOSE.



YOU'RE STARTING TO LEARN THINGS THAT YOU SHOULDN'T. THINGS THAT SIMPLY AREN'T TO BE KNOWN.

I'M TELLING YOU IT HAS TO STOP.



THIS KNOWLEDGE IS FORBIDDEN.



FROM THIS DAY ON, EVERY TIME YOU SEE MY MARK...

REMEMBER THIS WARNING...



...AND HEED IT.

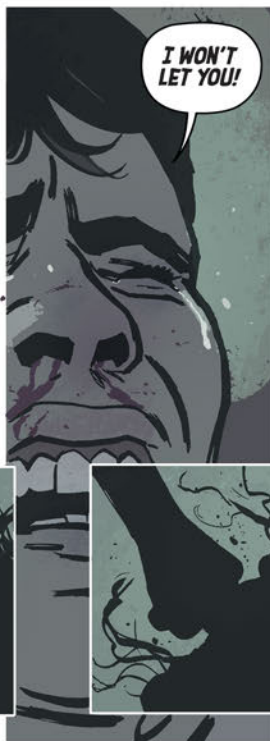


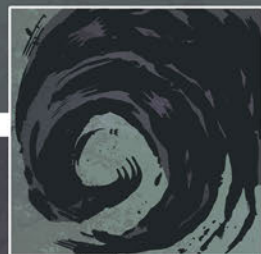


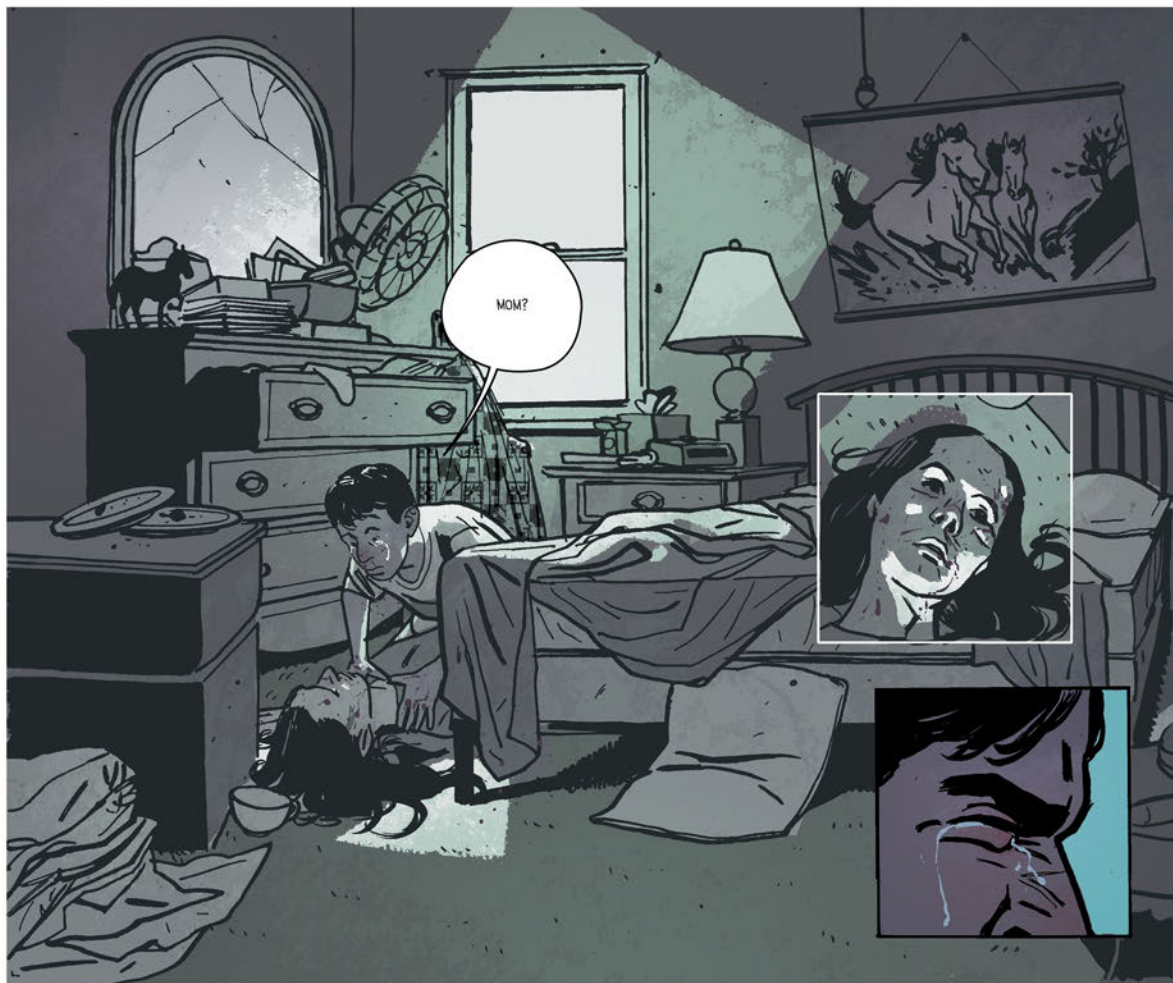
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TO BE CONTINUED

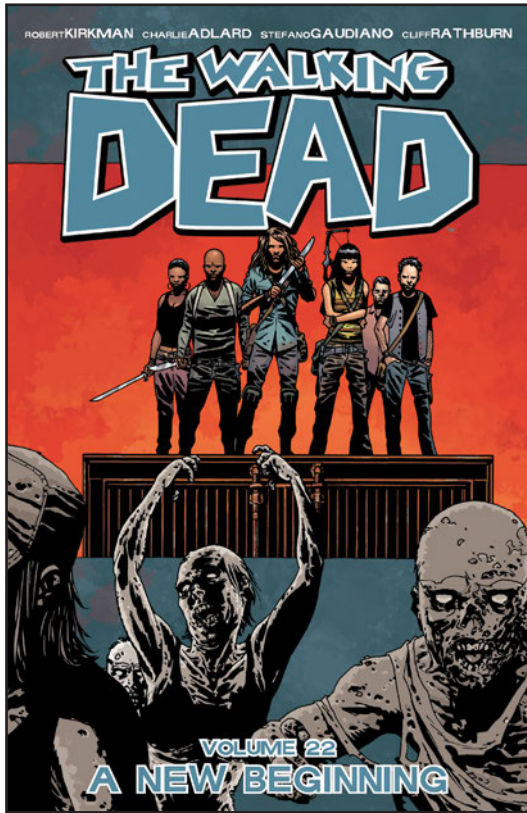
"Seems like they've been trying to hurt me my whole life."





“...I need to find out why.”

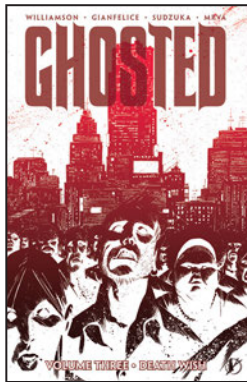
FOR MORE TALES FROM ROBERT KIRKMAN AND SKYBOUND



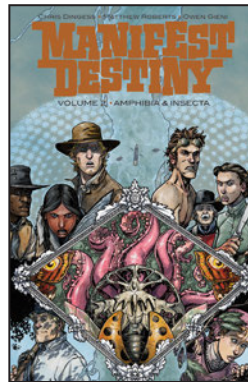
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