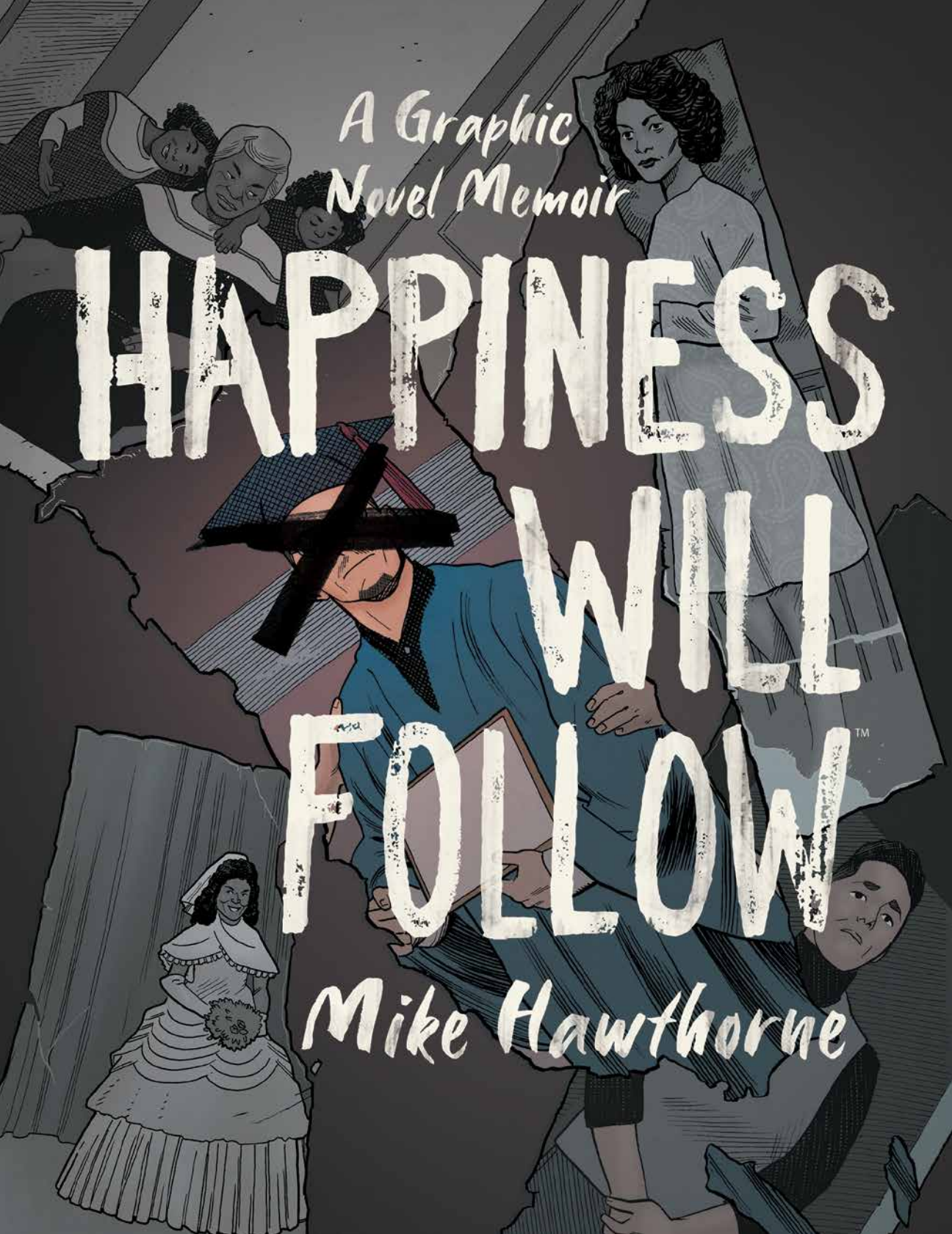




*A Graphic
Novel Memoir*

HAPPINESS WILL FOLLOW™

Mike Hawthorne

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Published by
ARCHAIA™





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A Graphic Novel Memoir

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ARCHAIA™

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The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams is quoted on page 128 of this graphic novel.

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BOOM! Studios, 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90036-5679. Printed in China. First Printing.

ISBN: 978-1-68415-545-3, eISBN: 978-1-64144-711-9





Dedicated to **Blanca**.





A woman with dark hair, wearing a brown jacket and pants, is walking down a hallway with a black and white checkered floor. She is holding the hand of a small child wearing a blue jacket and a blue hat with a white pom-pom. They are walking towards a door on the left. A brown shoe is visible on the floor near the door.

FACT IS, I MAY NOT
HAVE EVER REMEMBERED
THIS DAY AT ALL IF IT
WEREN'T FOR THIS SHOE.

A close-up shot of a brown, worn-out shoe with laces. The shoe is positioned on a checkered floor, and a portion of a black and white checkered bag is visible in the foreground.

THIS OLD SHOE SCARED
THE SHIT OUT OF MY
MOTHER--BLANCA THE
UNFLAPPABLE.

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, THIS WAS NO SMALL FEAT. MY MOTHER'S COURAGE WAS KNOWN BY ALL OF US IN THE OTERO CLAN.

I GREW UP HEARING STORIES ABOUT HER COMING TO THE AID OF A BOY WHOSE FACE HAD BEEN BURNED WITH BATTERY ACID. SHE THREW HIM IN A COLD BATH THEN CARED FOR HIS BURNS.



OR HOW SHE WENT OUT LOOTING DURING THE NEW YORK BLACKOUT OF '77, BULLETS SCREAMING OVERHEAD.



¡VAYA Y
CONSIGUEME UN
POLICIA!

¡AVANSA!

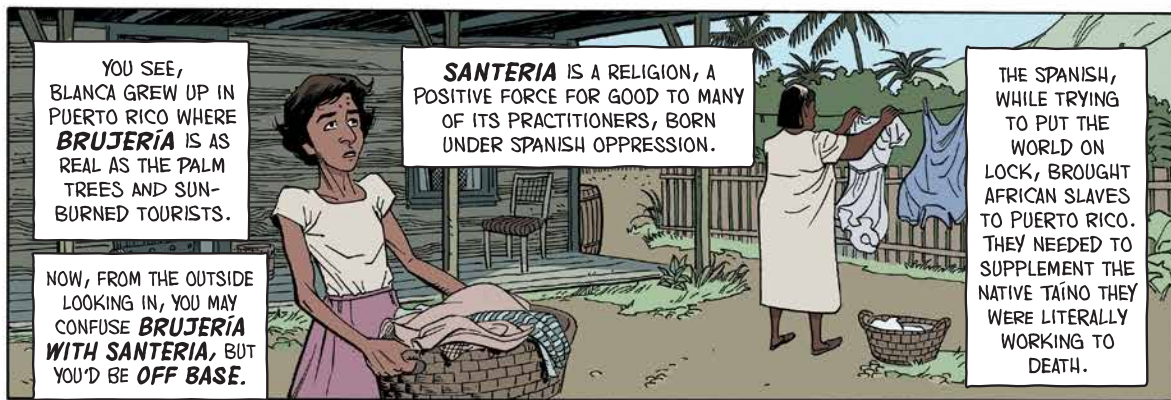
I MYSELF
WITNESSED HER
HELPING A GUY WHO
WAS HAVING A
SEIZURE ON THE
STREET. HE WAS
LAYING THERE,
HALF OFF THE CURB,
STIFF AND SHAKING
UNCONTROLLABLY!



THIS SHOE WAS A
DIFFERENT
BUSINESS ENTIRELY.

THIS WAS A
CURSE.
¡BRUJERÍA!





YOU SEE, BLANCA GREW UP IN PUERTO RICO WHERE **BRUJERIA** IS AS REAL AS THE PALM TREES AND SUN-BURNED TOURISTS.

SANTERIA IS A RELIGION, A POSITIVE FORCE FOR GOOD TO MANY OF ITS PRACTITIONERS, BORN UNDER SPANISH OPPRESSION.

THE SPANISH, WHILE TRYING TO PUT THE WORLD ON LOCK, BROUGHT AFRICAN SLAVES TO PUERTO RICO. THEY NEEDED TO SUPPLEMENT THE NATIVE TAINO THEY WERE LITERALLY WORKING TO DEATH.

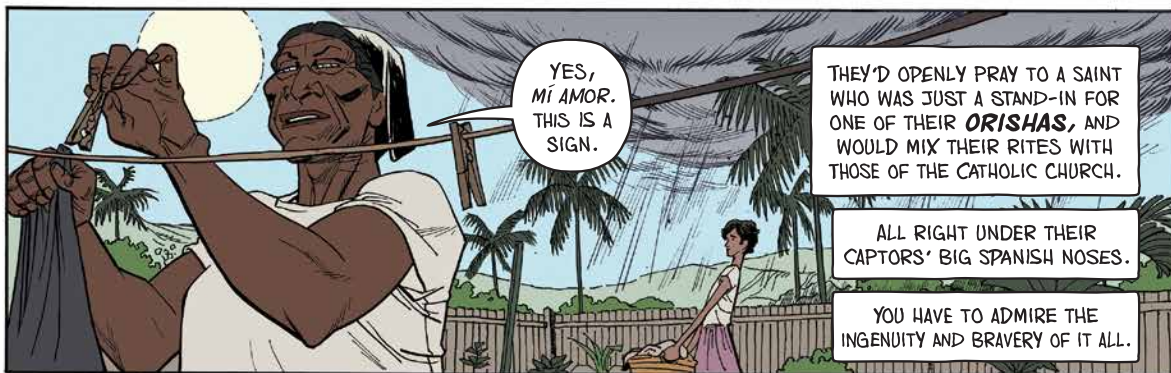
NOW, FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN, YOU MAY CONFUSE **BRUJERIA** WITH **SANTERIA**, BUT YOU'D BE **OFF BASE**.



ABUELA... IT'S RAINING, BUT THE SUN IS STILL OUT.

THE SPANISH **TRIED** TO FORCE THE SLAVES TO WORSHIP CATHOLIC SAINTS. NATIVE GODS WERE FORBIDDEN--LOCKED INTO WHATEVER **IMAGINARY PRISON** DICTATORS SEND PEOPLE'S DEITIES TO.

BUT THE TAINOS AND AFRICANS CAME UP WITH A CLANDESTINE WAY TO IDENTIFY THEIR DEITIES WITH THE SAINTS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.



YES, MÍ AMOR. THIS IS A SIGN.

THEY'D OPENLY PRAY TO A SAINT WHO WAS JUST A STAND-IN FOR ONE OF THEIR **ORISHAS**, AND WOULD MIX THEIR RITES WITH THOSE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

ALL RIGHT UNDER THEIR CAPTORS' BIG SPANISH NOSES.

YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THE INGENUITY AND BRAVERY OF IT ALL.



THIS HAPPENS ON A DAY WHEN A **BRUJA** IS TO WED.

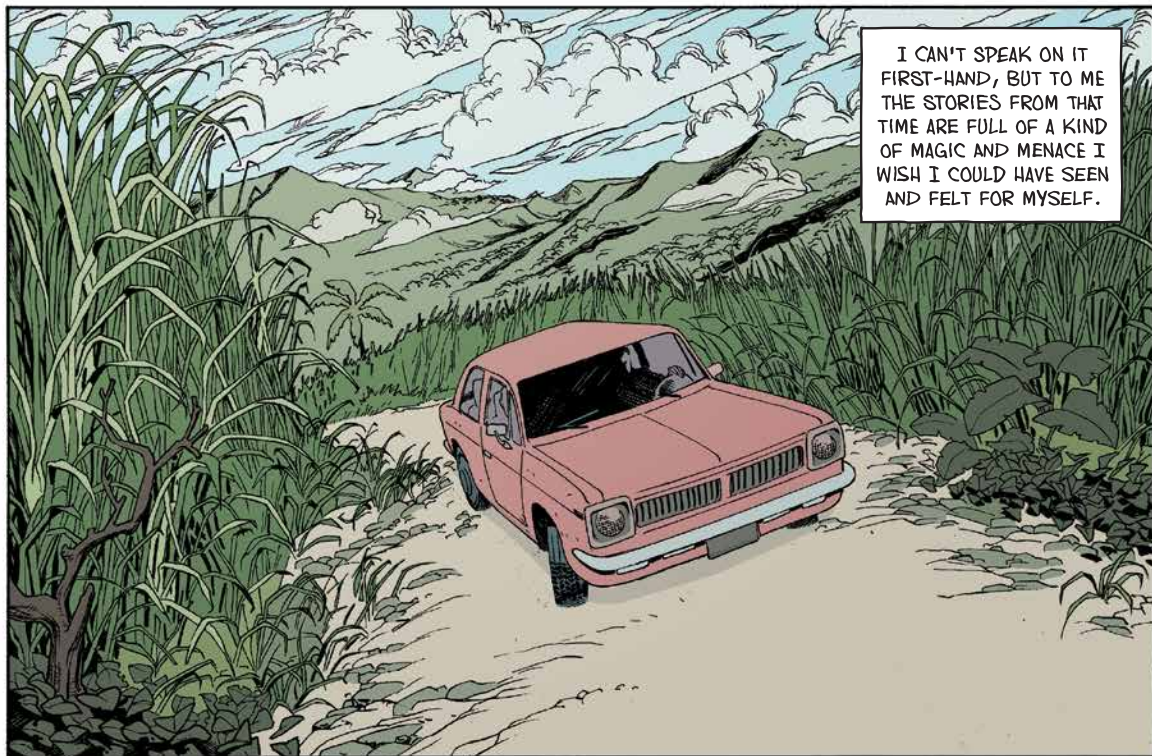
BUT **BRUJERIA** IS A DIFFERENT THING ENTIRELY, IT'S THE BAD STUFF.

THE STUFF THAT MAKES **WEIRD SHIT** HAPPEN AT BEST, **HURTS** PEOPLE AT WORST.

BEFORE I GET **TOO** FAR AHEAD OF MYSELF, I SHOULD MENTION THAT I HAVE A HALF-SISTER, LINDA.

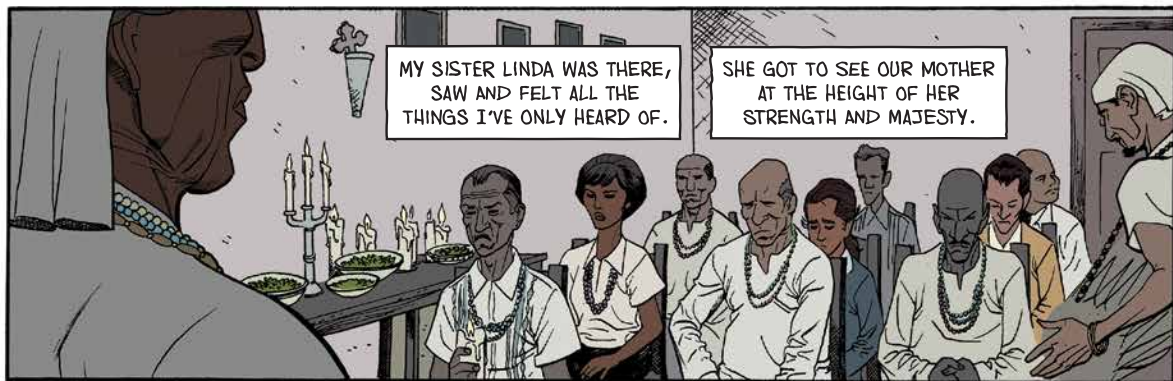
LINDA IS ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS OLDER THAN ME, AND HAD A DIFFERENT FATHER. BECAUSE OF OUR AGE DIFFERENCE, SHE GOT TO EXPERIENCE A SIDE OF OUR MOTHER THAT I ONLY SAW A GLIMPSE OF.

SHE ALSO GOT TO SEE HOME WITH OUR MOTHER, A THING I MISSED OUT ON.



I CAN'T SPEAK ON IT FIRST-HAND, BUT TO ME THE STORIES FROM THAT TIME ARE FULL OF A KIND OF MAGIC AND MENACE I WISH I COULD HAVE SEEN AND FELT FOR MYSELF.





MY SISTER LINDA WAS THERE,
SAW AND FELT ALL THE
THINGS I'VE ONLY HEARD OF.

SHE GOT TO SEE OUR MOTHER
AT THE HEIGHT OF HER
STRENGTH AND MAJESTY.



SHE
EXPERIENCED
THE MAGIC...

A YOUNG
LADY HERE
BELIEVES IT IS
ACCEPTABLE
TO **CROSS**
ONE'S
LEGS!



...AND **MENACE** THAT
WAS OUR MOTHER.



GROWING UP IN THIS WORLD MUST
HAVE GIVEN MY MOTHER AN INTENSE
BELIEF THAT ANYTHING COULD BE
ACHIEVED WITH A LITTLE HELP.

EITHER FROM JESUS OR CHANGO.

SANTERIA OR CATHOLICISM.

TAKE YOUR PICK.



EXAMPLE:
MY FATHER.

DAD WAS
MARRIED.

JUST
NOT TO MY
MOTHER.



A SMALL PROBLEM, AND
JUST THE KIND OF THING
SANTERIA CAN FIX.

AFTER ALL, THERE
ARE ALWAYS LOVE
SPELLS TO BE
CALLED UPON.



OF COURSE, THE
SPELLS DIDN'T
STICK. SO SHE
TRIED THE **OLD
FASHIONED**
WAY OF TRYING
TO KEEP HIM.

ACCORDING TO BLANCA,
FOUR TIMES BEFORE ME
AND ONCE AFTER.

NONE (INCLUDING ME)
WOULD MAKE HIM STAY.

MY "BROTHERS"
MUST HAVE FAVORED
MY FATHER, BECAUSE
NONE OF THEM
STAYED EITHER.

SHE TOLD ME THEY
ALL MISCARRIED.



BUT BLANCA
COULD BE REALLY
DAMNNED FICKLE.
SHE WOULD TELL
ME HOW SHE'D
MADE PLANS TO
ABORT ME.

HAD IT NOT BEEN
FOR HER ASTHMA,
THE DOCTORS
WOULD HAVE DONE IT,
TOO. MY MOTHER'S
BAD LUNGS WERE
MY SAVIOR.

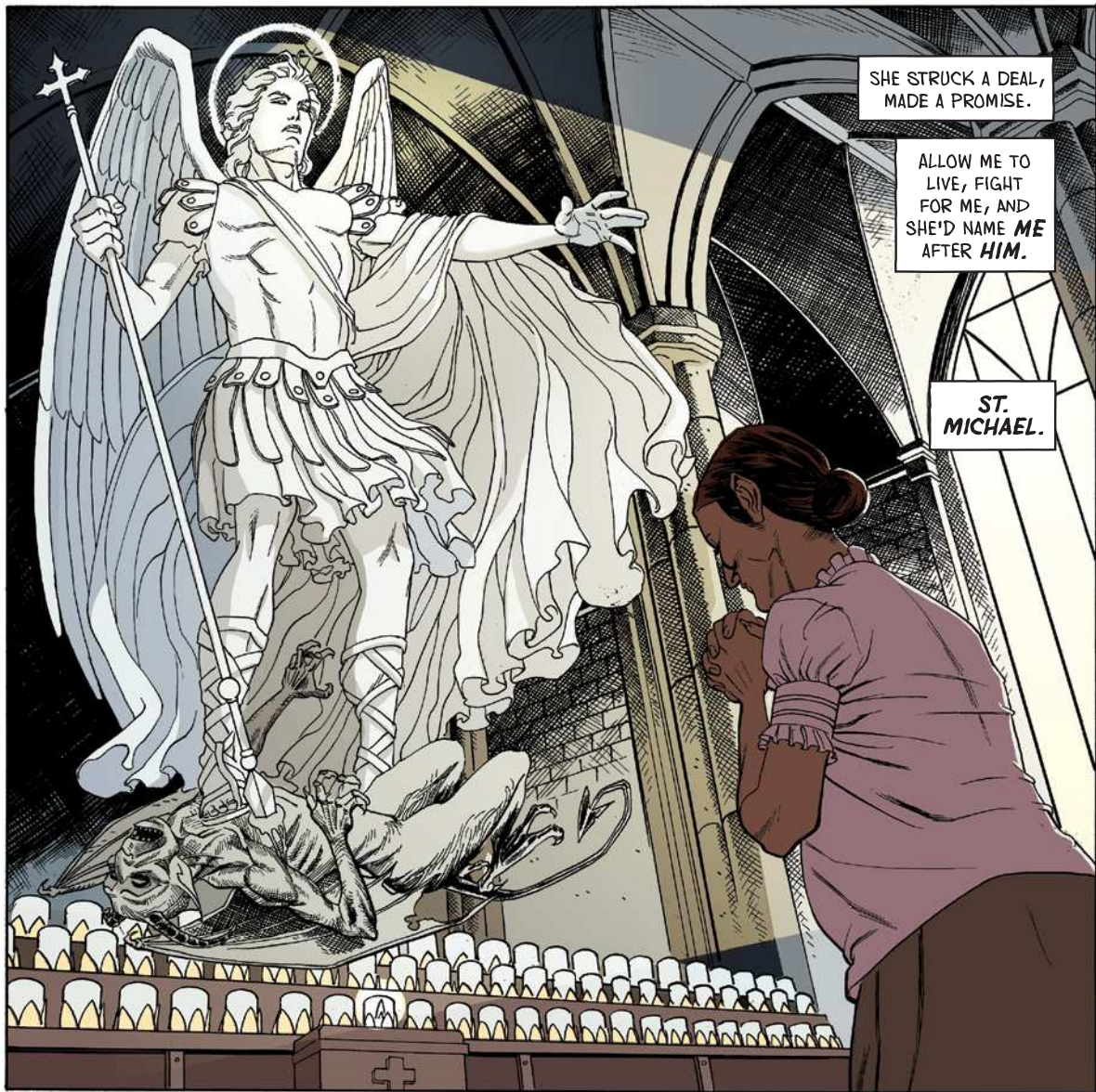
HALLELUJAH...

...I GUESS.

FORCED WITH **HAVING TO KEEP ME**, SHE DECIDED TO TRY AND AVOID ANOTHER MISCARRIAGE.

SHE TURNED TO THE OLD STANDBY FOR HELP-- THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

SPECIFICALLY, THE CHURCH'S RESIDENT MUSCLE-- **ST. MICHAEL.**



SHE STRUCK A DEAL, MADE A PROMISE.

ALLOW ME TO LIVE, FIGHT FOR ME, AND SHE'D NAME **ME** AFTER **HIM**.

ST. MICHAEL.



ST. MIKE, NOT ONE TO BACK AWAY FROM A SCRAP, MUST HAVE TAKEN THE DEAL BECAUSE I WAS BORN HEALTHY AND HAPPY IN A LOWER MANHATTAN HOSPITAL.

MICHAEL ANTHONY HAWTHORNE.

(THE LAST NAME SWIFTLY PILFERED FROM MY FATHER WHEN HE WASN'T LOOKING, EVEN IF I WAS A BASTARD.)



HOWEVER, WHEN IT CAME TO MY FATHER, ALL THE SPELLS AND PRAYING DIDN'T HOLD.

DAD WOULD BE OUT OF HER LIFE BEFORE I WAS OUT OF DIAPERS.



AFTER ALL, HE HAD A WIFE AND **OTHER** KIDS TO TAKE CARE OF.



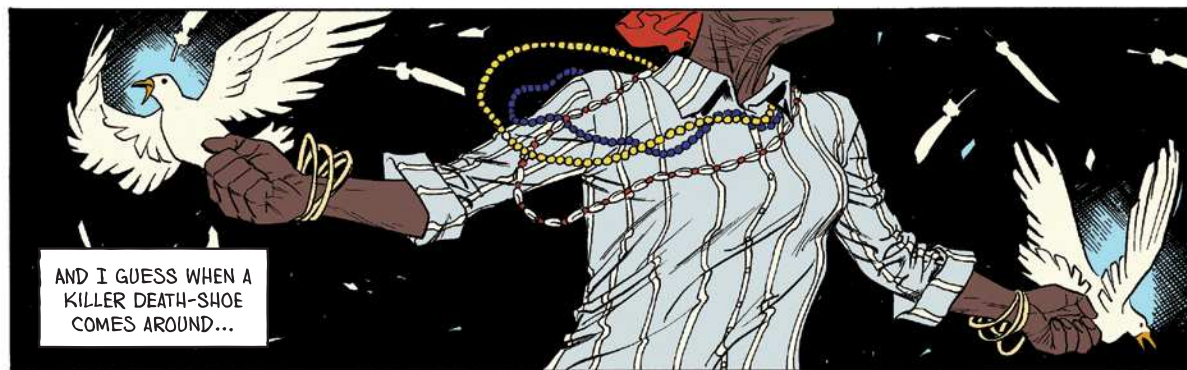
BUT HE DID LEAVE A CONSOLATION PRIZE BEHIND.



THE FAILURE OF
THE LOVE POTIONS
DIDN'T CAUSE
BLANCA TO LOSE
FAITH IN SANTERIA
ALTOGETHER.



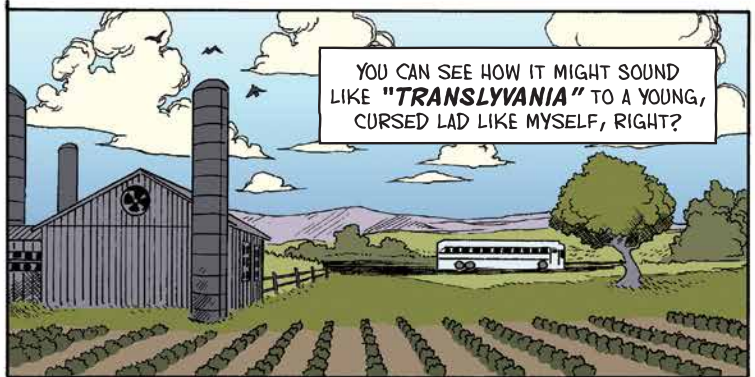
THIS **NEW**
PROBLEM
NEEDED A FIX
THAT **ONLY**
THE OLD
WORLD COULD
PROVIDE.



AND I GUESS WHEN A
KILLER DEATH-SHOE
COMES AROUND...



...YOU SURE AS **HELL**
DON'T LOOK TO
ST. MICHAEL AGAIN
FOR PROTECTION.





I SHOULD'A **BEE**N SO
GODDAMNED LUCKY.



BLANCA'S
PLAN WAS
SIMPLE--SEND
ME TO LIVE IN
PENNSYLVANIA
WITH A FRIEND
SHE'D MET WHEN
SHE LIVED IN A
CONVENT (MORE
ON THAT LATER).

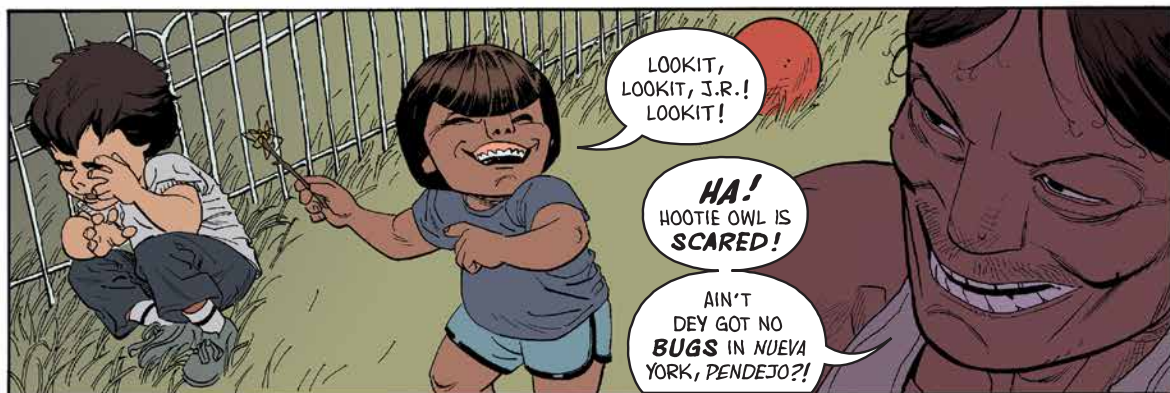
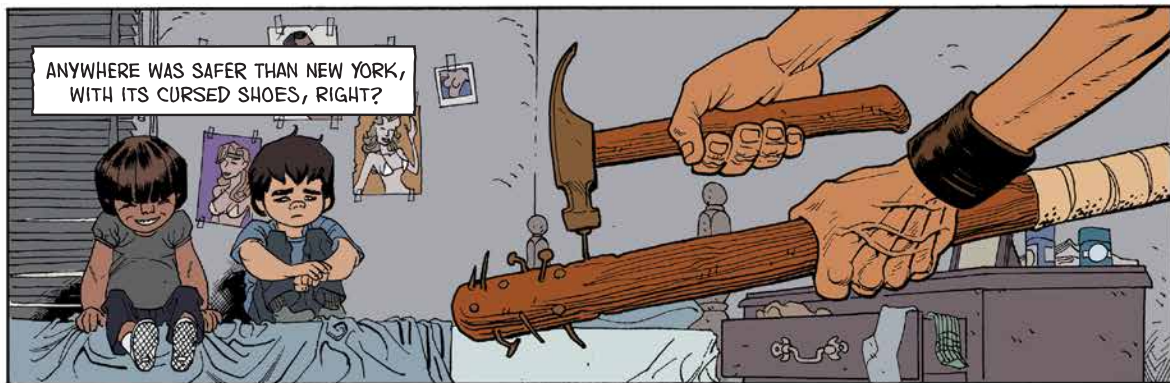


SHE'D THEN
RETURN TO
NEW YORK
TO SETTLE
HER AFFAIRS
AND JOIN ME
LATER.

IT WOULDN'T
BE LONG. A
FEW MONTHS. A
YEAR MAYBE?

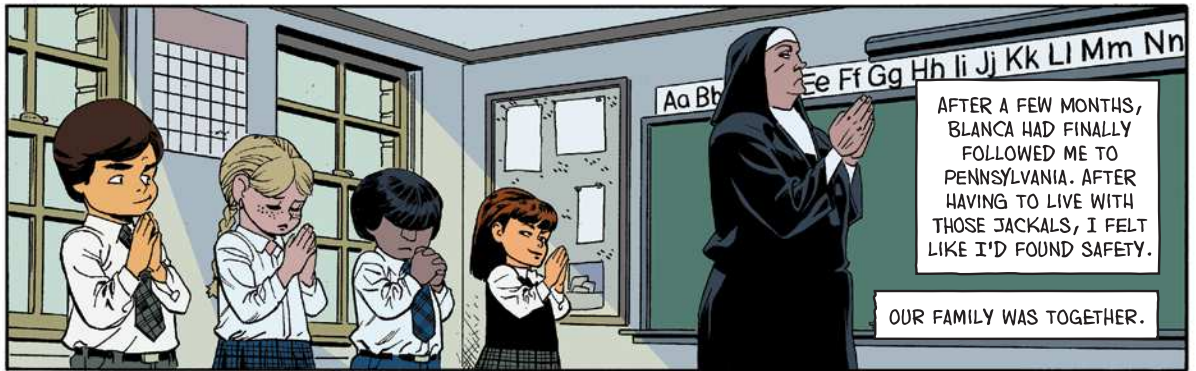


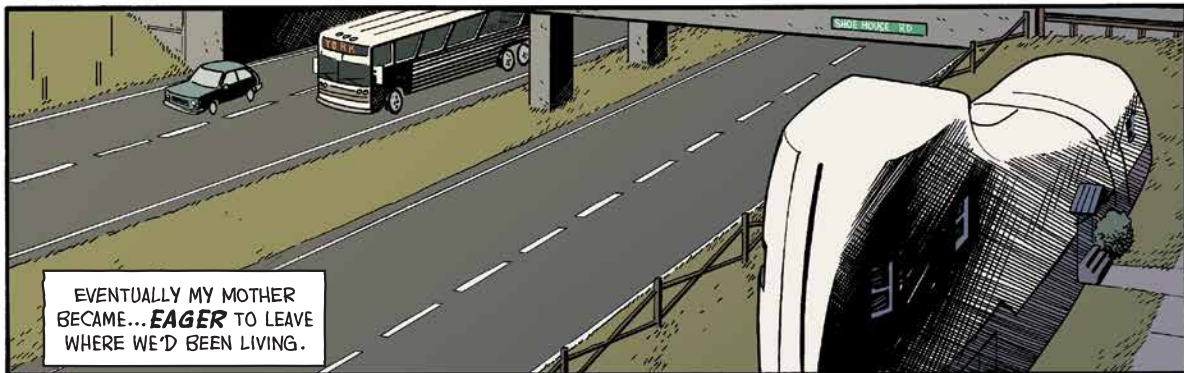
I'D BE SAFE THERE.











EVENTUALLY MY MOTHER BECAME... **EAGER** TO LEAVE WHERE WE'D BEEN LIVING.



SHE NEVER REALLY GAVE A SOLID REASON WHY, SHE JUST VAGUELY FELT IT WAS A RACIST CITY AND THAT SHE'D NEVER HAVE A CHANCE TO BUY A HOME (HER DREAM) THERE.

SHE WANTED TO TRY A NEIGHBORING CITY. SOMEWHERE THAT OFFERED HER A MODICUM OF **HOPE**.



A PLACE **NOT** LIKE NEW YORK.



ENTER **OLDE YORK**.

YORK CITY, PENNSYLVANIA.





I THINK THE BIGGEST REASON MY MOTHER MOVED TO YORK WAS BECAUSE HER HALF-BROTHER AND HIS FAMILY WERE ALREADY THERE.



¡ME CAGO EN LA MADRE! ¡DÁRLE UNO POR MÍ!

THEY WERE ROUGH AND TUMBLE, NO DOUBT.



BUT THEY WERE TIGHT WITH EACH OTHER. THE WAY FAMILY IS **SUPPOSED** TO BE.

AND AS WITH MOST PUERTO RICAN FAMILIES, IT WAS THE **MATRIARCH** OF THIS CLAN THAT HELD THEM TOGETHER.



SHE WAS MORE THAN JUST LATIN FAMILY ADHESIVE, MORE THAN JUST SOMEONE TO COOK THE RICE AND TAKE THE SANDAL TO AN ASS WHEN SOMEONE ACTED UP.

TÍA "CHUCHI" WAS **KIND** BUT... **FORMIDABLE**.



MY MOTHER
WOULD TELL
STORIES ABOUT
TÍA CHUCHI.



SAYING SHE
HAD A GIFT.

SHE HAD
ABILITIES.



AND SHE WAS **NOT**
TO BE
TRIFLED
WITH.



NOW,
MAYBE
IN YOUR
CIRCLES
THAT
SHIT
WOULD
GET
LAUGHED
OFF.



BUT WE'RE
PUERTO
RICANS.



THIS KIND OF SHIT IS TAKEN
AS SERIOUSLY AS A HEART
ATTACK AND CANCER...

...ALL ROLLED INTO ONE!



THE HOUSE HAD NEVER BEEN ANYTHING BUT WARM AND WELCOMING, BUT WHEN WE MOVED IN, I BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE MY OLD CURSE MOVED IN WITH US.

THE CURSE, MY IMAGINATION-- THEY TAINTED THIS PLACE THAT HAD BEEN A HOME.



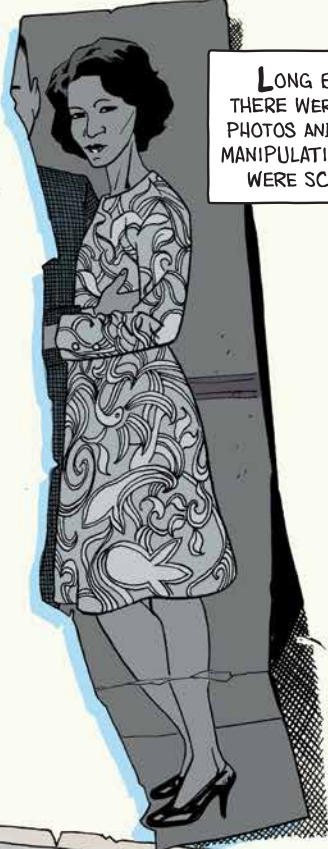
THE CURSE INFECTED HOW I PERCEIVED THE WORLD, MAKING THINGS MEANT TO PROTECT AND GIVE COMFORT INTO THINGS THAT WERE FRIGHTFUL.

LOOKING BACK ON IT, IT'S ALL BULLSHIT. JUST THE POWER OF SUGGESTION.

BUT AT THE TIME, IT FELT REAL. I WAS CERTAIN THERE WAS NO SAFE PLACE.



NO HOME FOR MY MOTHER AND ME.



LONG BEFORE
THERE WERE DIGITAL
PHOTOS AND DIGITAL
MANIPULATION, THERE
WERE SCISSORS.



A SIMPLE PAIR OF
SCISSORS COULD
REMOVE HISTORY,
REMOVE THE TRUTH.

SOMETIMES
THE TRUTH
BEHIND A PICTURE
DOESN'T HAVE TO
BE CUT OUT.



YOU JUST HAVE TO
KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT.

WITH MY SISTER...
THE **TRUTH** WAS
THAT SHE WAS GAY.



AND **THAT**, RIGHT
THERE, WAS THE RUB.







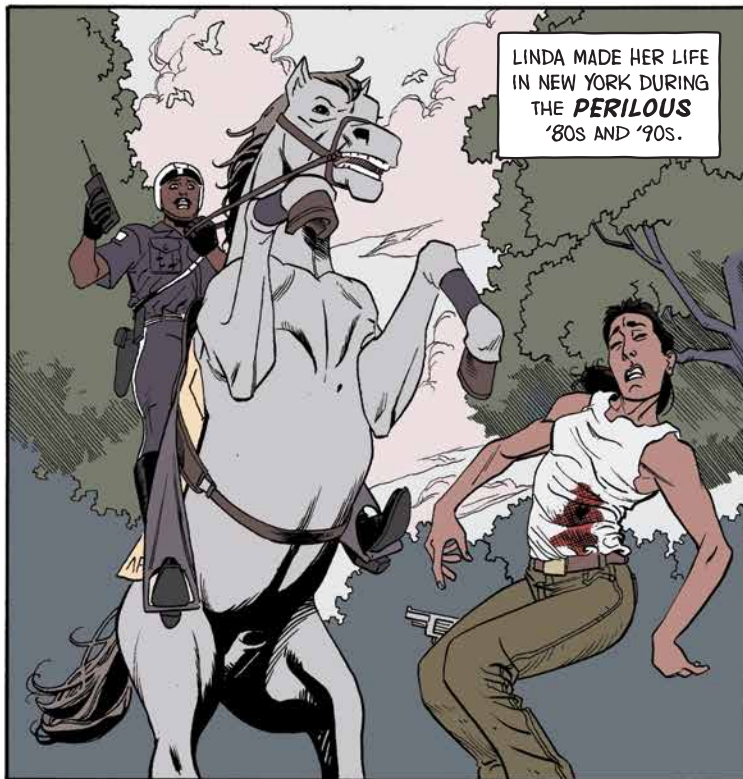
WE WENT BACK TO LIVING
OUR LIVES SEPARATELY.



WE DIDN'T HEAR
REPORTS ABOUT
LINDA UNLESS IT
WAS BAD NEWS.



UNFORTUNATELY FOR LINDA, THE BAD
NEWS WAS ALWAYS **VERY BAD**.



LINDA MADE HER LIFE
IN NEW YORK DURING
THE **PERILOUS**
'80S AND '90S.



BLANCA **CONSTANTLY** WORRIED
ABOUT LINDA, BUT NEVER LET ON
TO LINDA THAT SHE DID.



YEARS LATER, WHEN MY MOTHER'S MIND BEGAN TO BREAK FROM REALITY MORE AND MORE, I'D SEE HER CRY OVER LINDA FOR THE FIRST TIME.



SHE'D CONVINCED HERSELF OF SOMETHING HORRIBLE.



THAT LINDA WAS SICK.

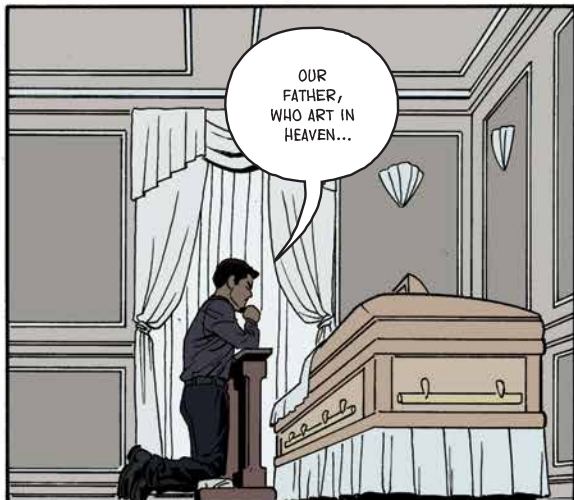
THAT LINDA WAS DYING.

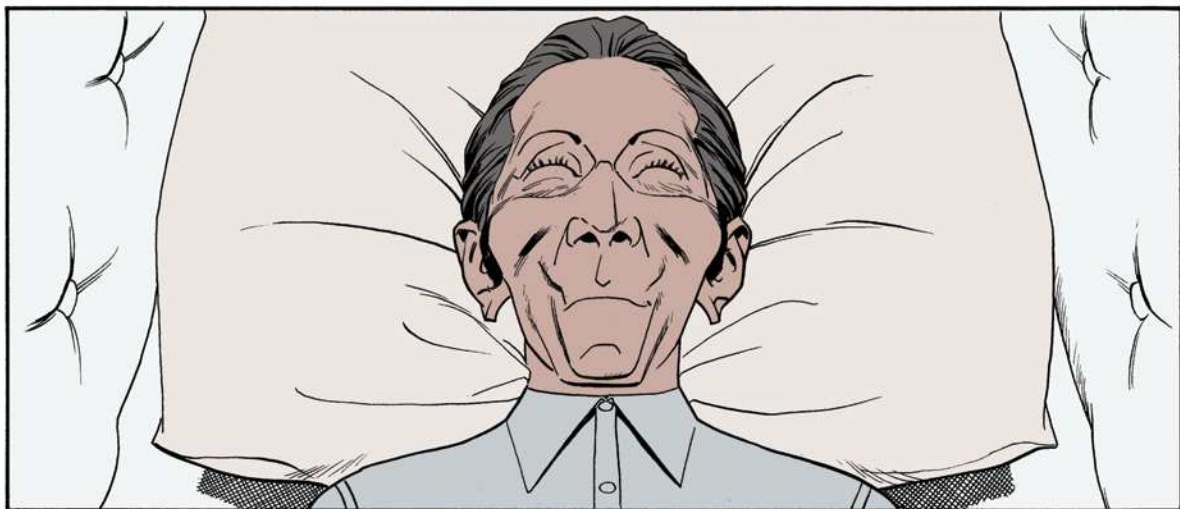


HER LOSS WAS SO PALPABLE, SO REAL...
I FELT DEVASTATED!

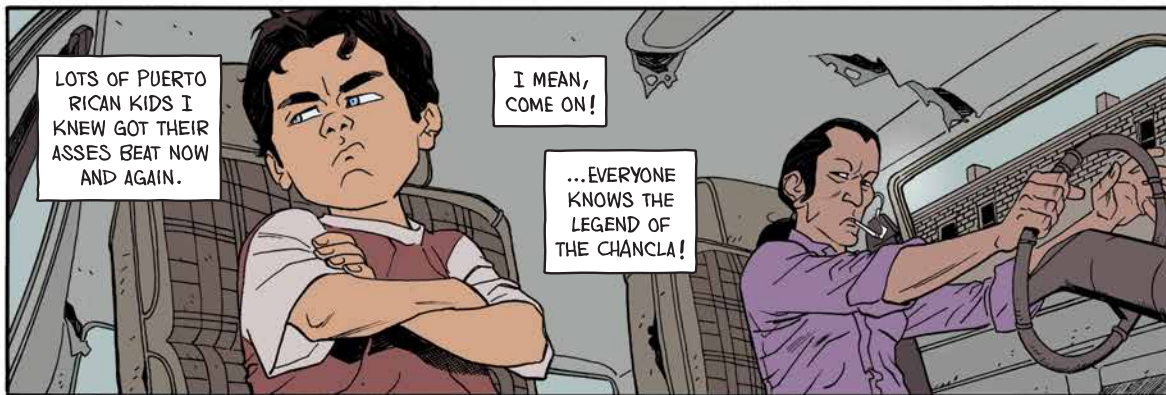
IF ONLY I'D KNOWN THEN...















"PUÑOS FROM
NOW ON."

THAT WAS THAT.



I'D GET KNOCKED OUT A FEW MORE TIMES IN MY LIFE.

ONCE WITH HALF A BRICK TO THE BACK OF MY HEAD.

(I CAN'T RECALL MANY DETAILS ON THAT ONE, SO DON'T ASK.)



ANOTHER TIME WHEN I SAID "FUCK YOU" TO AN OLDER AND **BIGGER** KID...

WHO KNEW YOU COULD GET YOUR ASS KNOCKED OUT BY GETTING HIT IN THE STOMACH?

(NOT MY DUMB ASS..)

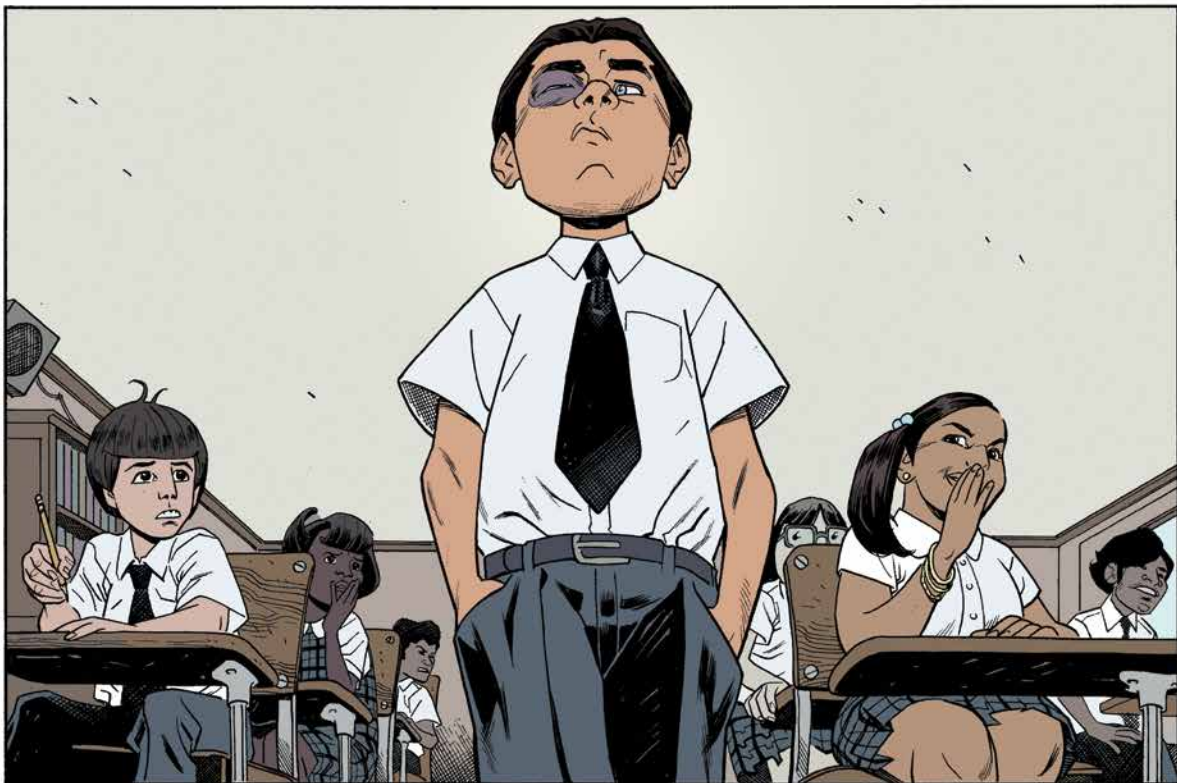
...WITH AN **ATTITUDE PROBLEM** AND A **TEN-SPEED**.



BUT **THIS** ONE.



THIS IS THE ONLY ONE THAT **HURT**.





I REACTED TO
MY HOME LIFE
THE WAY YOU'D
EXPECT.



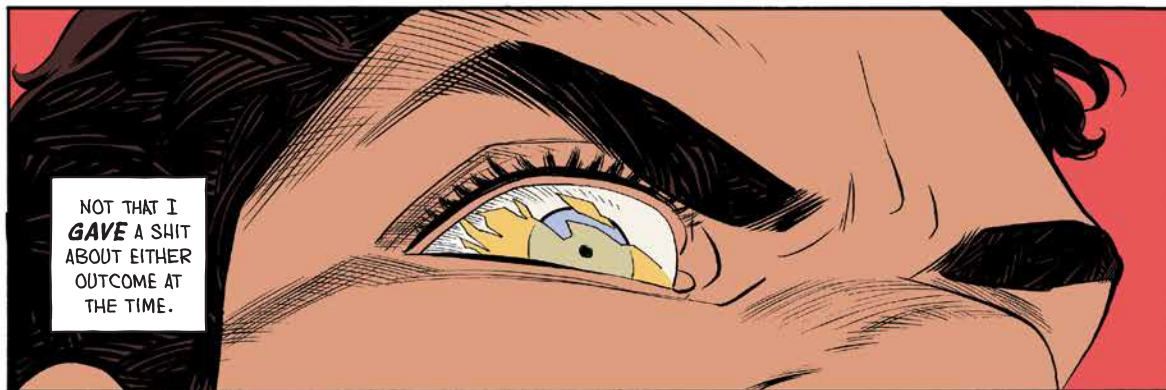
AND, MUCH LIKE MISERY,
DESTRUCTIVENESS **LOVES** COMPANY.

IN THE POOR NEIGHBORHOODS WE LIVED IN, THERE
WERE PLENTY OF **ANGRY KIDS** FOR COMPANY.



ONCE YOU PUT DESTRUCTIVE
KIDS TOGETHER, THE STUPIDITY
GROWS EXPONENTIALLY.

IT'S A FUCKING MIRACLE I
DIDN'T BLOW MY FACE, OR
SOMEONE **ELSE'S**, OFF.



NOT THAT I
GAVE A SHIT
ABOUT EITHER
OUTCOME AT
THE TIME.



MY MAIN PARTNER-IN-CRIME WAS DAMIEN, ONE OF THE FEW WHITE KIDS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD.



PEOPLE WOULD JOKE THAT HE WAS DAMIEN FROM THE OMEN, AND I WAS MICHAEL MYERS FROM HALLOWEEN.



WE DID OUR BEST TO LIVE UP TO THE NAMES.



WE WERE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO UP THE ANTE.

LIKE THE TIME WE TRIED TO MAKE A BOMB TO USE ON GOD KNOWS WHO. (I DON'T RECALL ANYMORE.)

WE FILLED THAT 40-BOTTLE WITH EVERY MANNER OF DOG SHIT **NASTINESS** YOU CAN IMAGINE, AND A FEW YOU **CAN'T**. THEN WE GOT THE BRILLIANT IDEA TO COOK IT SO THAT ALL THE FUNKINESS-BOMB WOULD BECOME MORE POTENT.



HAD WE NOT BEEN SO **DUMB**, WE'D HAVE BEEN DANGEROUS.

RATHER, MAYBE WE WERE DANGEROUS **BECAUSE** WE WERE SO DUMB.



OH MY **GOD!** WHAT HAPPENED?!



I EXPECTED TO BE **KILLED** WHEN THE BOTTLE BLEW UP.

NOT BY THE BOTTLE.



BY DAMIEN'S **MOTHER**.



IF I PULLED A STUNT LIKE THAT IN **MY** HOUSE...

...BLANCA WOULD HAVE PUT A BEATING ON MY LITTLE ASS THE LIKES OF WHICH HAVE RARELY BEEN PUT UPON **MAN** OR **BEAST**.



INSTEAD, SHE FRANTICALLY BEGAN CLEANING UP **OUR** MESS!

I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS HAPPENING.



DAMIEN'S MOTHER, HOWEVER, WAS REACTING LIKE **SHE** WAS THE ONE ABOUT TO CATCH A BAD ONE.







WHEN IT CAME TO WHAT SHE CONSIDERED "OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS," BLANCA DIDN'T LIKE TO GET **TOO** INVOLVED.

SHE WAS ALSO THE KIND OF WOMAN THAT BELIEVED IF A MAN BEAT YOU IT WAS BECAUSE YOU **ALLOWED** HIM TO BEAT YOU.



IT WAS ON THE VICTIM IF SHE...OR HE...GOT BEATEN.



IN BLANCA'S WORLD, YOU EITHER **GAVE** PEOPLE SHIT...

...OR **ATE** SHIT.



THE CHOICE WAS YOURS.









"AN OLD PRO."

MY ANGER
HAD ME ON A
FAST TRACK
TO BEING A
FUCK UP.



ONE NIGHT, AFTER
I HAD DONE GOD-
KNOWS-WHAT AND
GOTTEN MYSELF
GROUND...



...MY GANG OF
HOODLUMS DECIDED
TO GO ALL OUT WITH
OUR SCORCHED
EARTH CAMPAIGN.



WHEN THEY WERE
CAUGHT ('CAUSE **OF**
COURSE THEY GOT
CAUGHT), WHOSE NAME
DID THEY DROP?

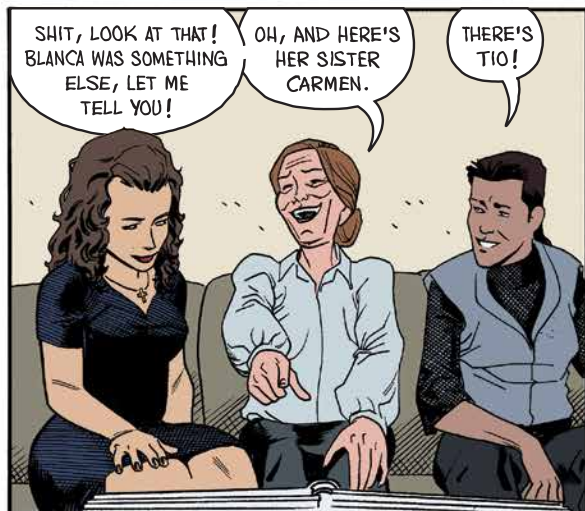
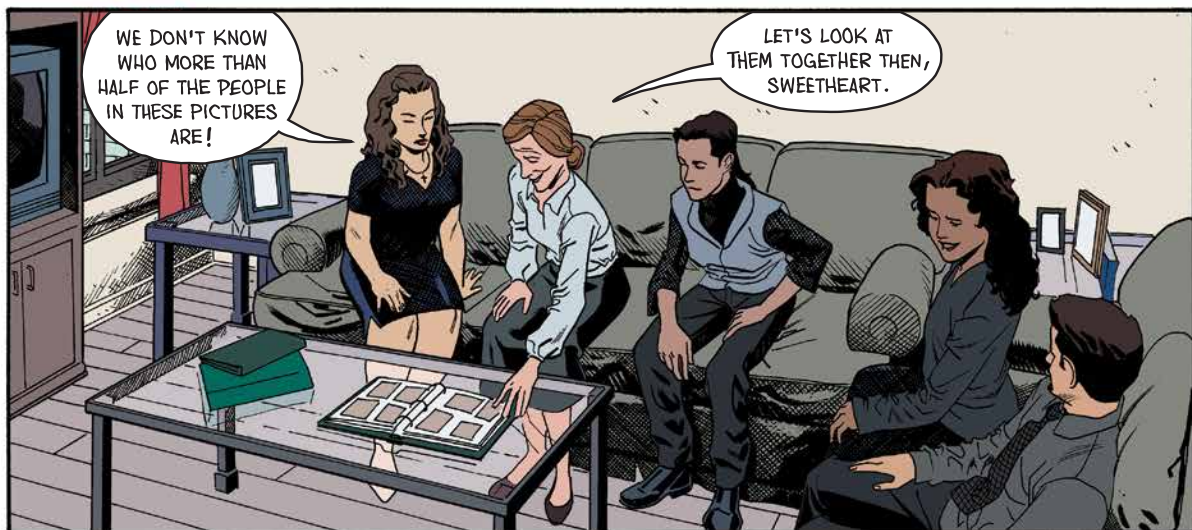
MICHAEL ANTHONY
HAWTHORNE.

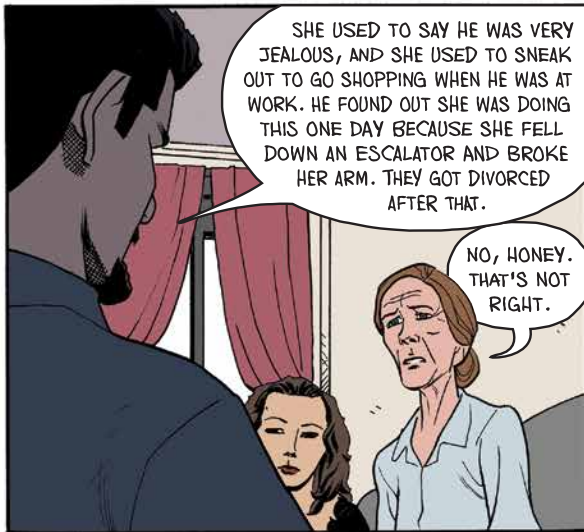


TURNS OUT, ALL THOSE FIRES WE
SET, ALL THOSE BULLSHIT STUNTS
WE PULLED, HAD EVENTUALLY
GOTTEN BACK TO THE AUTHORITIES.

THESE
GUYS WERE
HEARING
MY NAME.
THEY KNEW
ABOUT
ME.

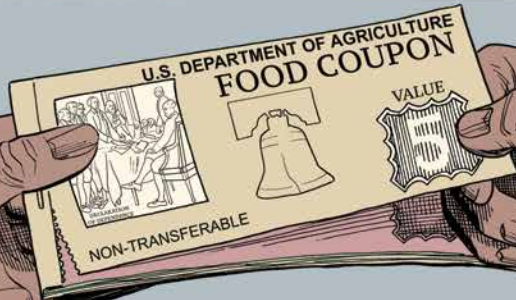








AMERICANS
ACTUALLY STARTED
TO BELIEVE THAT
POOR PEOPLE
LIVED FAT OFF
OF GOVERNMENT
CHECKS AND
FOOD STAMPS.



IF WAITING IN
SALVATION ARMY
LINES FOR
HANDOUTS WAS
LIVING FAT, THEN
I WANTED NO
PART OF IT.



I FELT LIKE I WAS
HEARING THE SAME
MESSAGE OVER
AND OVER.

"FUCK THE POOR."







IT ACTUALLY
WASN'T TILL
YEARS LATER,
WHEN I WAS
AN ADULT, THAT
I BEGAN TO
REALLY GET
WHAT HAD BEEN
HAPPENING.



MY MOTHER, IN HER OWN HAM-FISTED WAY, HAD DECIDED TO
DO SOMETHING TO TRY AND STEM THE TIDE OF OUR POVERTY.



NO, NO...
THIS IS JUST
SUGAR.

I'LL GET
RID OF IT
FOR YOU.

NO
WORRY.



LET ME PUT
IT TO YOU
STRAIGHT,
I DON'T
JUDGE HER
FOR IT.

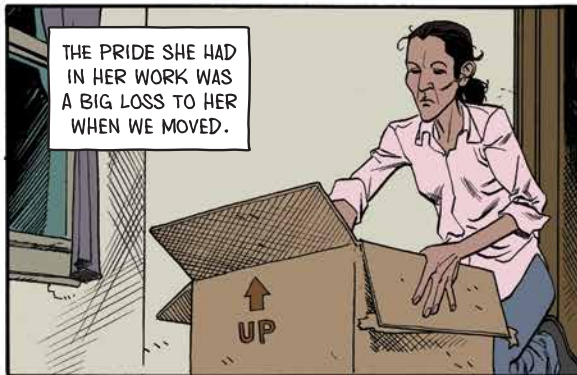
SHE WAS IN A CONSTANT
STATE OF DESPERATION.



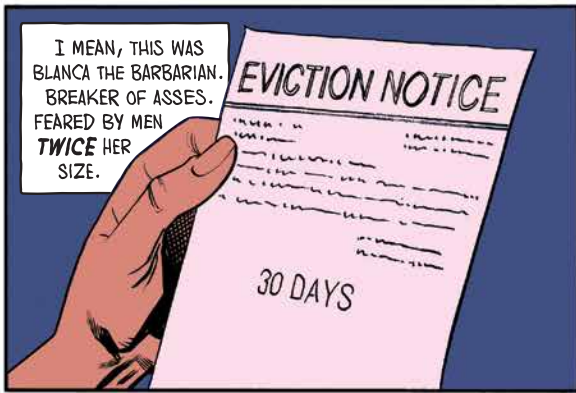
SHE WAS JUST PLUGGING
HOLES IN A COLLAPSING DAM.



AND SHE
HAD TO
TRADE IN
HER PRIDE
TO KEEP
DISASTER
AT ARM'S
DISTANCE.









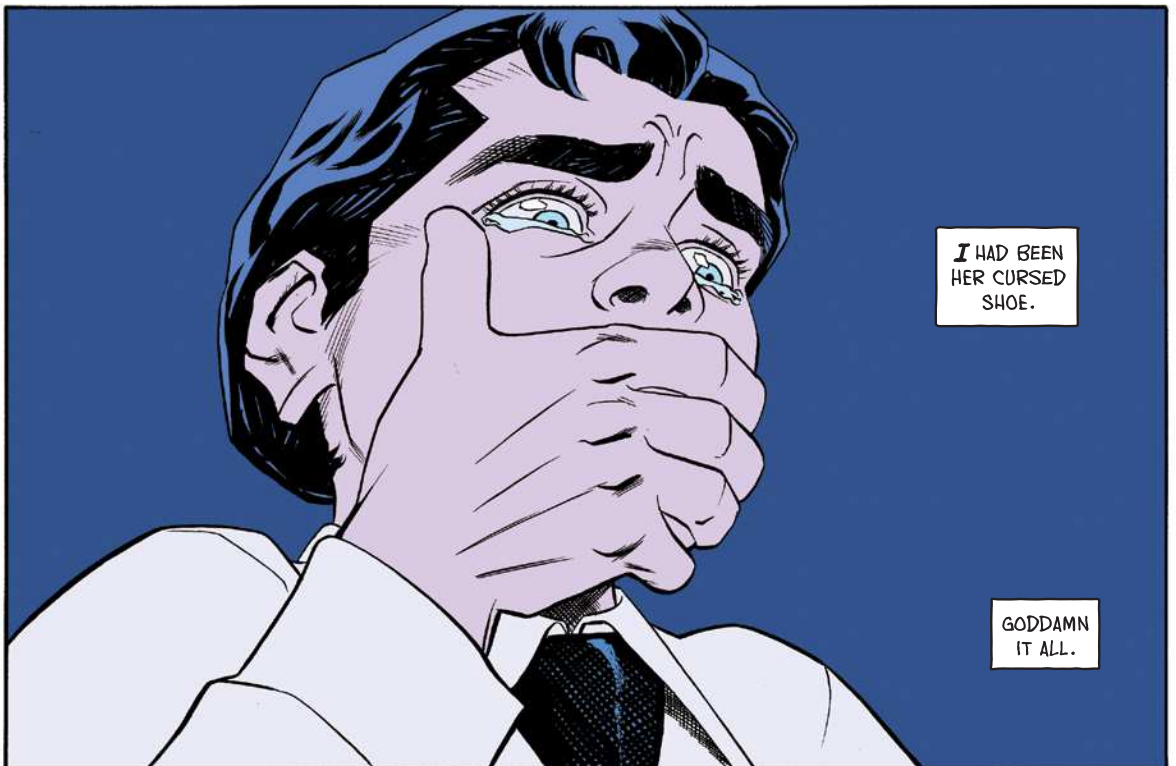


STILL, MY
FORCE FIELD
OF CHILDHOOD
IGNORANCE
HELD STRONG.



'TILL, FINALLY,
SOMETHING
MADE IT CRACK.

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT WAS.
MAYBE THE LOOK
IN HER EYES,
OR HOW COLD
SHE FELT.





MY MOTHER
TRADED IN HER
PRIDE OVER
AND OVER TO
TRY AND DIG
US OUT OF
OUR HOLE.



THIS WOMAN WHO'D ALWAYS
BEEN SO FIERCE AND
INDEPENDENT HAD TO ASK FOR
MORE AND MORE CHARITY.

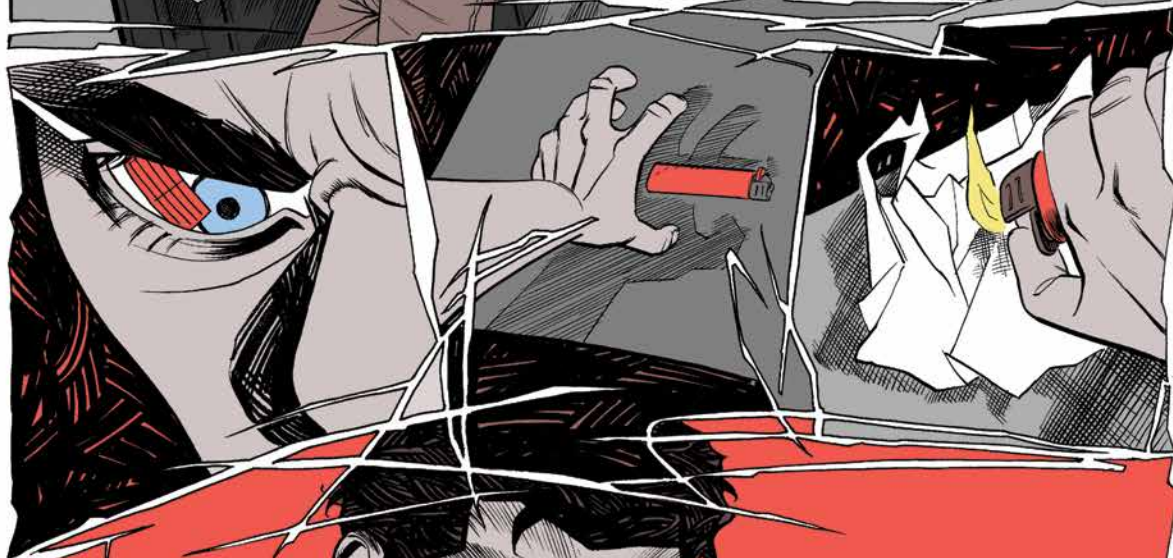


I HATED
TO SEE
HER HAVE
TO LOWER
HER HEAD.



I HATED THAT
WE WERE
TRAPPED IN
THIS LIFE.







I'D LIVE IN THAT
SELF-HATRED
FOR A LONG TIME.



AND THIS WAS
ONE THING BLANCA
COULDN'T
BEAT OUT OF ME.





WE EVENTUALLY GOT OUR OWN APARTMENT AGAIN, AND THINGS BEGAN TO LOOK UP.

I MANAGED TO COME TO TERMS WITH HAVING POVERTY AS A ROOMMATE.



WE DIDN'T BECOME **FRIENDS**, BUT I COULD FINALLY FACE IT WITHOUT WANTING TO LOOK AWAY.



I COULD FIND SOMETHING CLOSE TO HAPPINESS AGAIN.

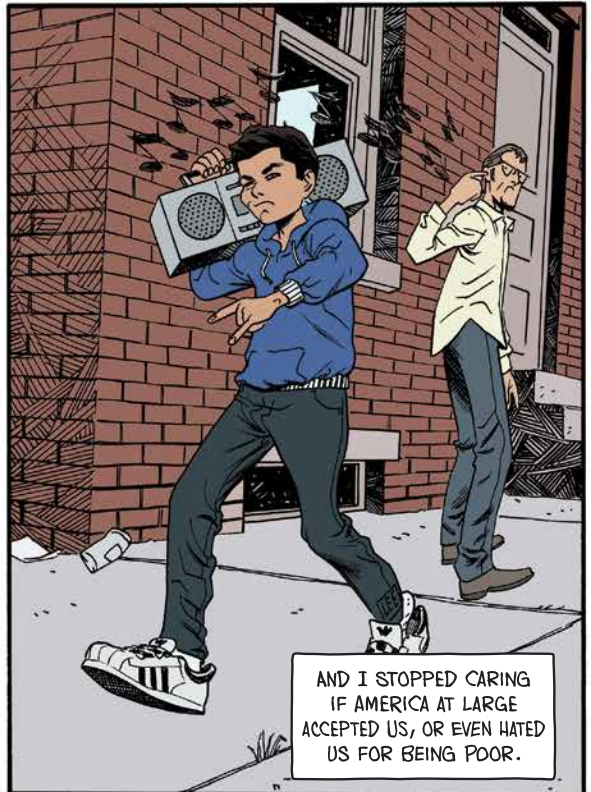


I ALSO FOUND THINGS TO LOVE.





I STARTED TO
FEEL LIKE THERE
WAS SOMETHING
NEW GROWING
AROUND US.



AND I STOPPED CARING
IF AMERICA AT LARGE
ACCEPTED US, OR EVEN HATED
US FOR BEING POOR.



I SAW A
BURGEONING
CULTURE BORN
OF POVERTY AND
THE INGENUITY
IT INSPIRES.

I WAS GRATEFUL FOR
FEELING LIKE I WAS A
PART OF SOMETHING.

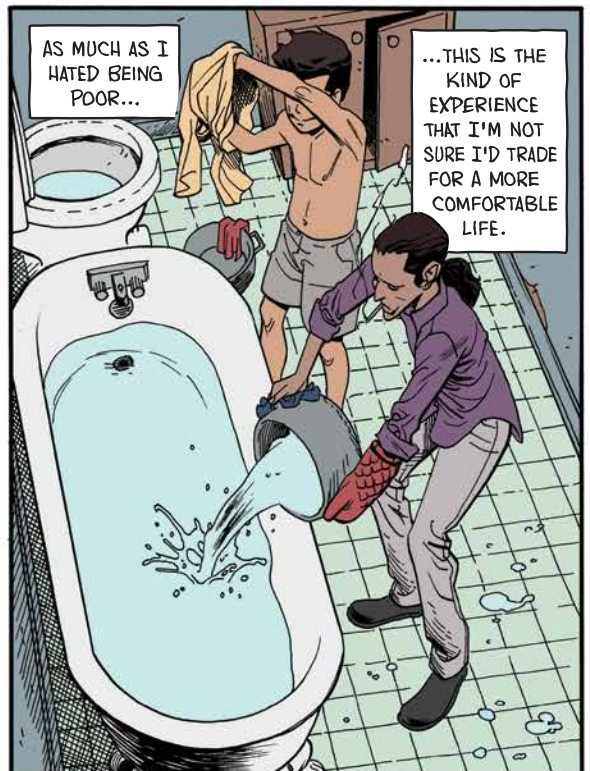




YOU GOT
CREATIVE WHEN
THINGS WENT
BADLY.



YOU MADE THINGS WORK
WITH WHAT YOU COULD DO.



AS MUCH AS I
HATED BEING
POOR...

...THIS IS THE
KIND OF
EXPERIENCE
THAT I'M NOT
SURE I'D TRADE
FOR A MORE
COMFORTABLE
LIFE.





...THIS WAS PRETTY
GOOD REGARDLESS.



BLANCA GOT THE ITCH TO MOVE AGAIN. PARTLY TO GET OUT OF OUR APARTMENT AND INTO A HOUSE.



WE'D JUST BEEN ACCEPTED INTO SECTION 8, SO SHE FINALLY HAD HER CHANCE TO MOVE INTO SOMETHING WITH MORE THAN ONE FLOOR.



WE MOVED TO A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WAS NOTORIOUS, KNOWN BY LOCAL FOLKS AS "THE JUNGLE."

A SHITTY, RACIST NAME FOR A BLACK AND LATINO NEIGHBORHOOD.

GOOD OL' YORK.



TRUTH WAS, THE NEIGHBORHOOD DID HAVE ITS PROBLEMS. BUT THIS *WASN'T* A JUNGLE.







WHEN BLANCA
WAS DRINKING,
SHE WAS HAPPY.

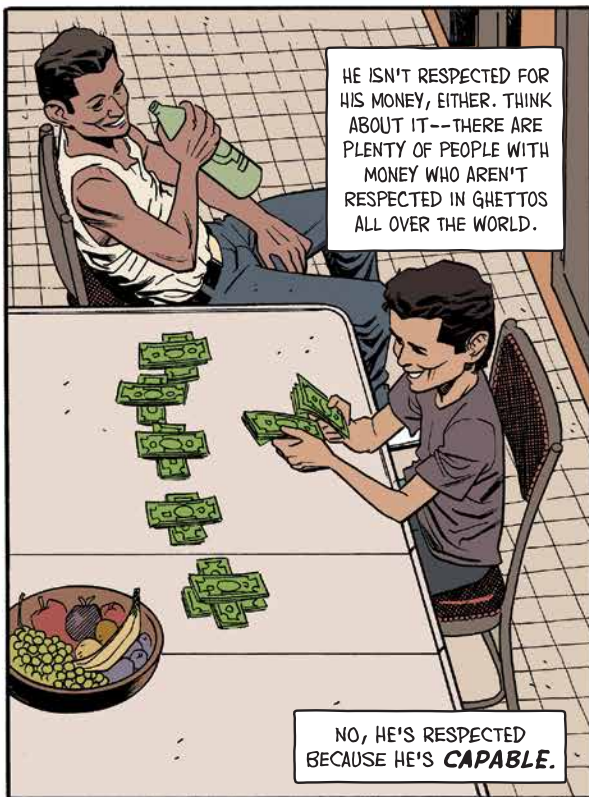
AND
WHEN
SHE WAS
HAPPY,
I WAS
HAPPY.



I WOULDN'T HAVE
MANY MORE DAYS
WITH HER LIKE THIS.



I DON'T THINK THE
DRUG DEALER IN
GHETTO CULTURE IS REALLY
ADMIRED JUST BECAUSE OF
THE SHIT HE OWNS.

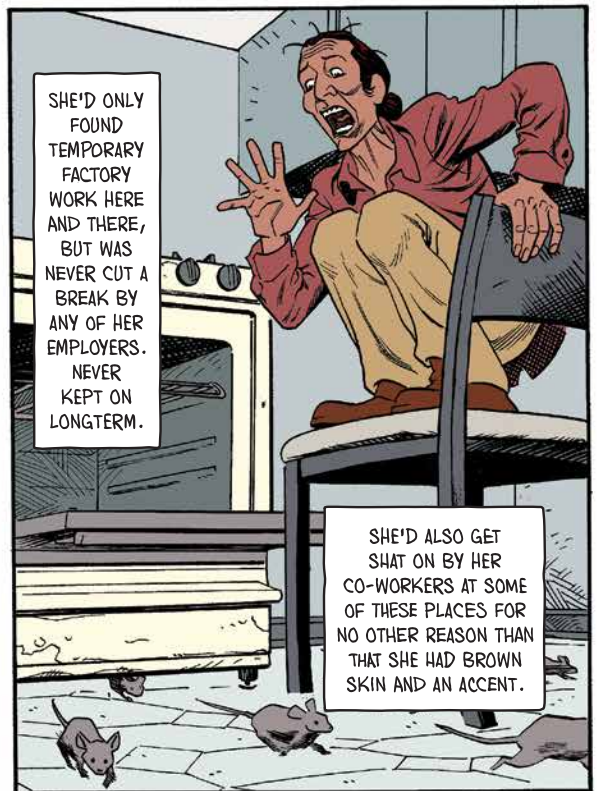
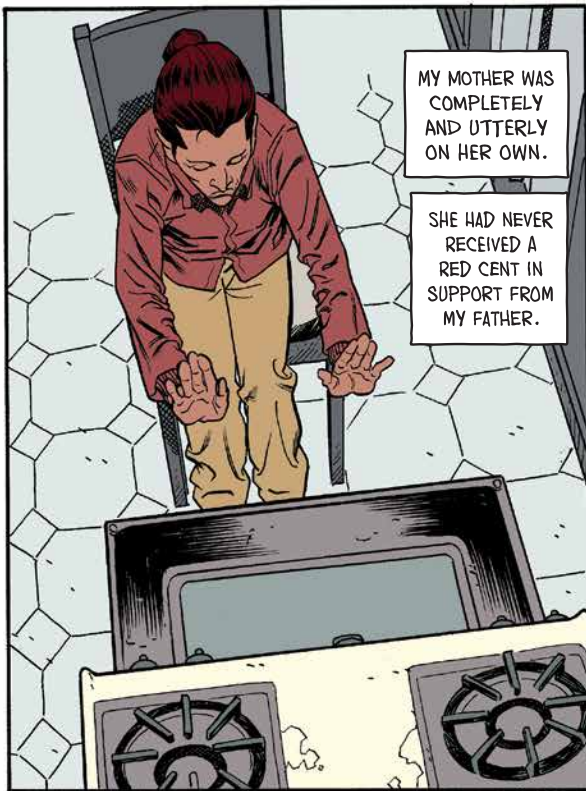


HE ISN'T RESPECTED FOR
HIS MONEY, EITHER. THINK
ABOUT IT--THERE ARE
PLENTY OF PEOPLE WITH
MONEY WHO AREN'T
RESPECTED IN GHETTOS
ALL OVER THE WORLD.

NO, HE'S RESPECTED
BECAUSE HE'S **CAPABLE**.



FOR THOSE WHO
FEEL BROKEN
AND HELPLESS,
THERE DOES NOT
EXIST A MORE
INSPIRING THING.





SLOWLY BUT SURELY,
EVEN THE DRINKING COULDN'T
MASK THE REALITY OF WHAT
SHE WAS FACING.

REALITY
MADE HER
CRACK.



I'M NOT SURE
I'M ELOQUENT
ENOUGH TO
ARTICULATE WHAT
THAT LOOKED
LIKE, WHAT IT
FELT LIKE.

THE CLOSEST
WAY TO EXPLAIN
IT IS TO SAY THAT
HER **SOUL** HAD A
MELTDOWN.

SHE WAS BEYOND
DESPERATION, BEYOND
DEPRESSION.

SHE HAD REACHED A
POINT WHERE NOTHING
WORKED, AND HER
INSIDES **BROKE.**

SHE CRUMBLLED,
AND CURSED GOD
IN UNADULTERATED
ANGUISH.

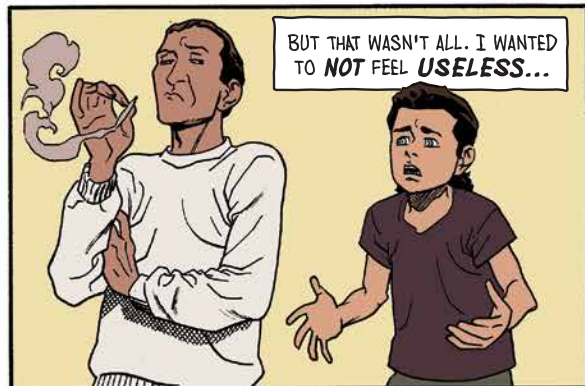
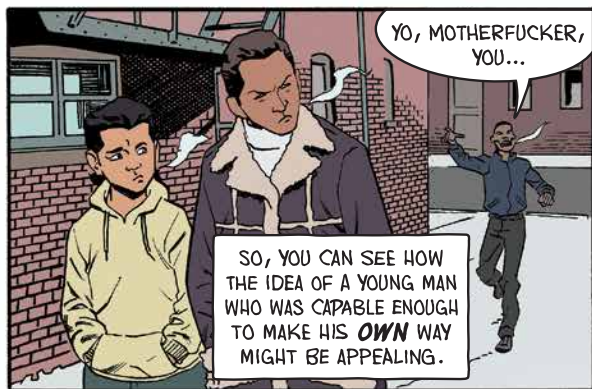
SHE BEGGED SATAN
HIMSELF TO COME
AND TAKE HER, TO TRADE
HER FRAGMENTED SOUL
FOR AN OUNCE OF HELP.

SHE WANTED TO TRADE
HER **ETERNITY** FOR
A SMIDGEN OF HOPE.



WHAT HELP COULD
I, THE FUCKING
UNABORTED
BASTARD FETUS OF
AN INDIFFERENT
FATHER, OFFER?

NOTHING BUT A
MOUTH TO FEED, AND
A LINGERING CURSE
FOLLOWING US.





THE DUDES I KNEW IN THIS LIFE
WEREN'T STUPID--THEY WERE
WELL AWARE OF HOW PRECARIOUS
THEIR SITUATION REALLY WAS.



I WAS SHOWN WHERE
DEALING DRUGS
WOULD LAND ME.



I WAS TAUGHT
BY **EXAMPLE**.



I LEARNED THAT THE IMAGE OF A DRUG
DEALER MAKING HIS OWN WAY IN THE
WORLD WAS ONE PART BRAVADO...



...AND TWO PARTS
BULLSHIT!



FINDING THAT
OUT MADE THE
WORLD JUST A
LITTLE MORE
COLD FOR ME.

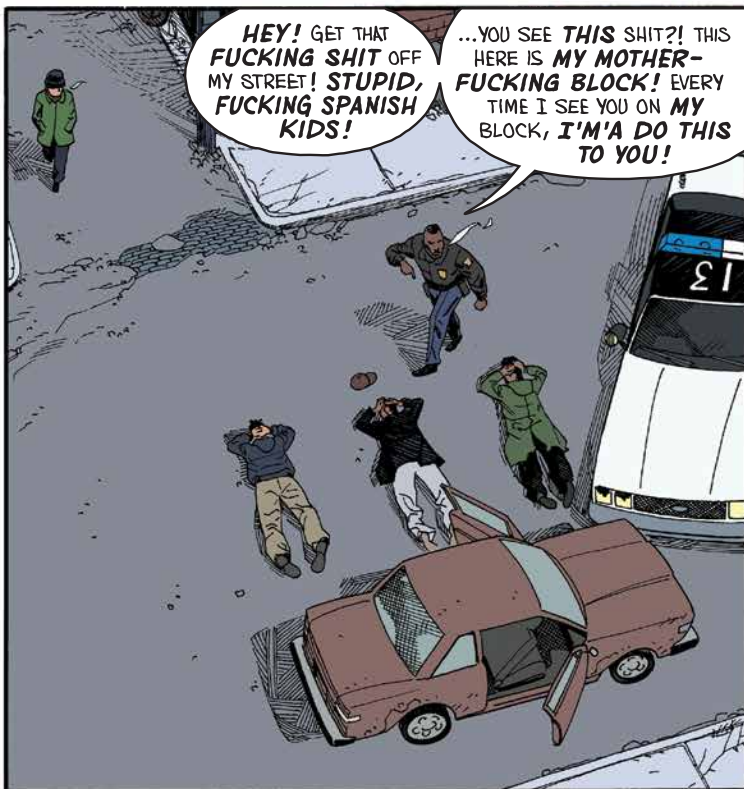






MORAL PANIC.

THAT'S HOW YORK RESPONDED TO ITS GROWING DRUG AND CRIME PROBLEMS.



HEY! GET THAT FUCKING SHIT OFF MY STREET! STUPID, FUCKING SPANISH KIDS!

...YOU SEE THIS SHIT?! THIS HERE IS MY MOTHER-FUCKING BLOCK! EVERY TIME I SEE YOU ON MY BLOCK, I'M'A DO THIS TO YOU!



EVERY! FUCKING! TIME!

YOU FELT THIS DESPERATION TO GET A HANDLE ON HOW BAD THE CITY WAS GETTING, AND I THINK THE EASIEST THING TO DO WAS TO FIND A SCAPEGOAT.



A GROUP OF PEOPLE TO POINT ONE'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER AT, AND TO BLAME FOR ALL YOUR TROUBLES.



THE LATINO COMMUNITY WAS GROWING IN YORK CITY AROUND THE SAME TIME AS THE "CRACK EPIDEMIC."

AND FOR MANY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, THE RESIDENT "SCARFACES" WERE CLEARLY **US**.







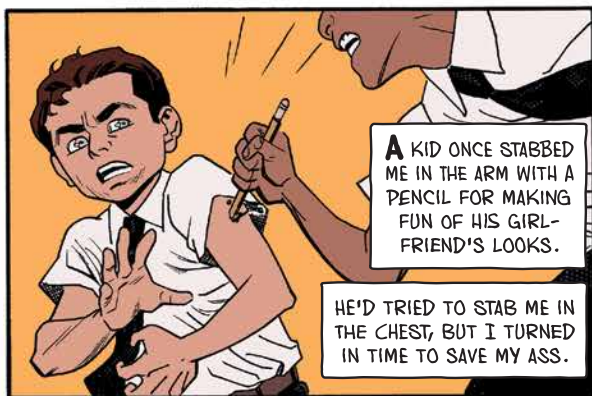


...FOLLOWED
BY THE **SMALL**
ONES.



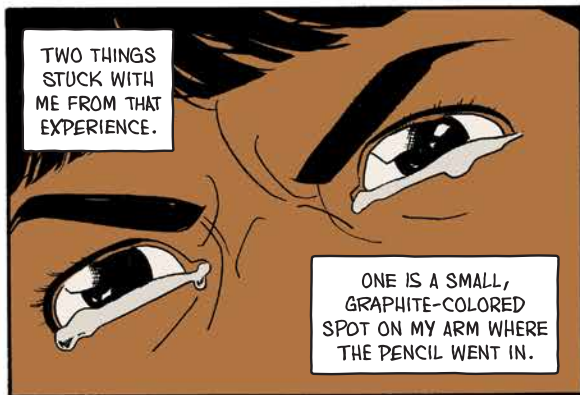
SHE'D WORKED HARD TO CREATE THIS **SMALL ISLAND** WE
LIVED ON, AND SHE WASN'T GOING TO LET IT GO UNGUARD.





A KID ONCE STABBED ME IN THE ARM WITH A PENCIL FOR MAKING FUN OF HIS GIRL-FRIEND'S LOOKS.

HE'D TRIED TO STAB ME IN THE CHEST, BUT I TURNED IN TIME TO SAVE MY ASS.



TWO THINGS STUCK WITH ME FROM THAT EXPERIENCE.

ONE IS A SMALL, GRAPHITE-COLORED SPOT ON MY ARM WHERE THE PENCIL WENT IN.



THE OTHER WAS THE LOOK IN THE KID'S EYES.



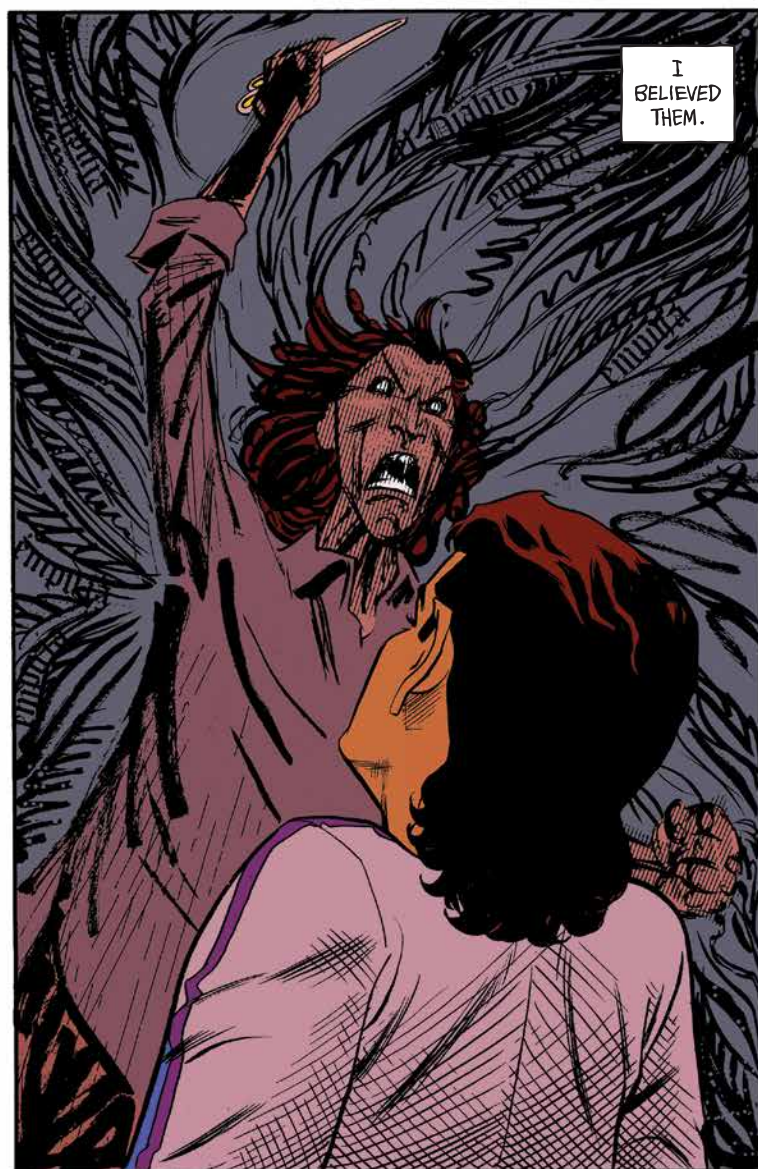
THEY WERE THE EYES OF SOMEONE WHO TRULY WANTED TO HURT ME.

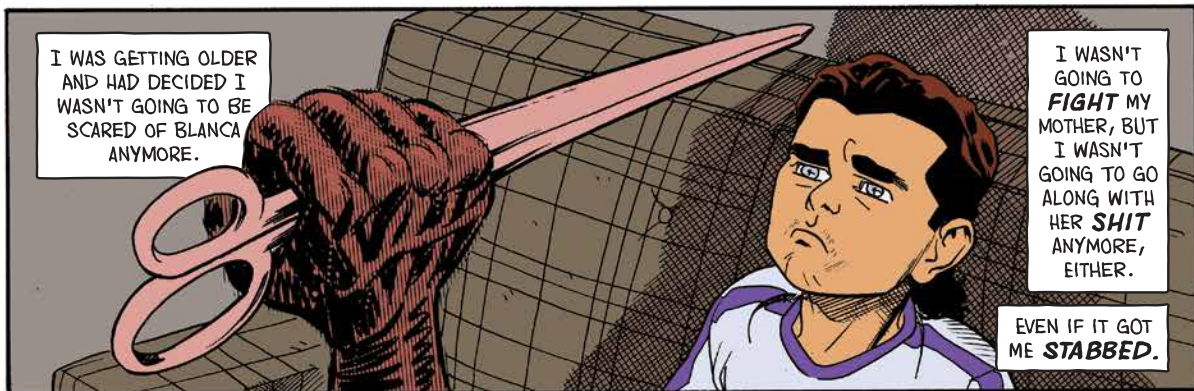


THESE EYES, HOWEVER...



THESE EYES WERE WORSE, BY FAR.





I WAS GETTING OLDER
AND HAD DECIDED I
WASN'T GOING TO BE
SCARED OF BLANCA
ANYMORE.

I WASN'T
GOING TO
FIGHT MY
MOTHER, BUT
I WASN'T
GOING TO GO
ALONG WITH
HER **SHIT**
ANYMORE,
EITHER.

EVEN IF IT GOT
ME **STABBED**.



HOPEFULLY
IT **WOULD**
GET ME
STABBED.



BECAUSE
ANYTHING
WOULD BE
BETTER THAN
CONSTANTLY
BEING IN
FEAR.



I THINK
SHE SAW
THAT.



SHE
SAW IT
IN MY
EYES.



MY EYES
SAID TO HER,
"I DON'T CARE
ANYMORE."

"**KILL
ME.**"



WHEN HER PHILOSOPHY OF PUÑOS BEGAN TO FAIL HER, BLANCA SEEMED TO PICK UP A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF ISOLATION.

SHE FIXATED ON BUILDING HER OWN GREAT WALL TO KEEP OTHERS OUT AND US IN.



SHE MANAGED TO KEEP A JOB AT A LOCAL FACTORY AND FOCUSED MORE AND MORE ON WORKING.



AFTER MUCH HAND WRINGING AND BARTERING, SHE ALSO MANAGED TO BUY A SMALL HOUSE IN A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD.

SHE GRADUALLY CUT OFF THE SMALL TIES SHE HAD WITH HER REMAINING FRIENDS AND FAMILY, QUITTING ALL SOCIALIZING COLD TURKEY.

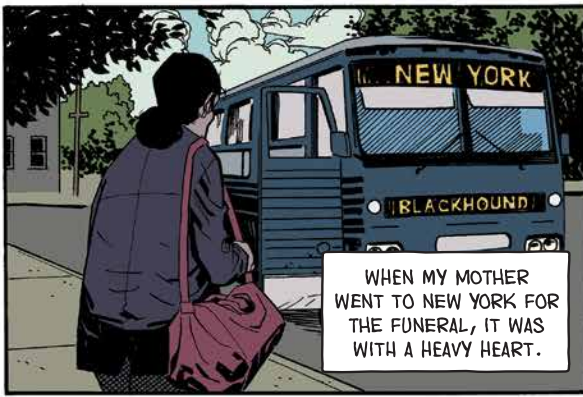
SHE CONVINCED HERSELF THAT SHE DIDN'T NEED ANYONE.



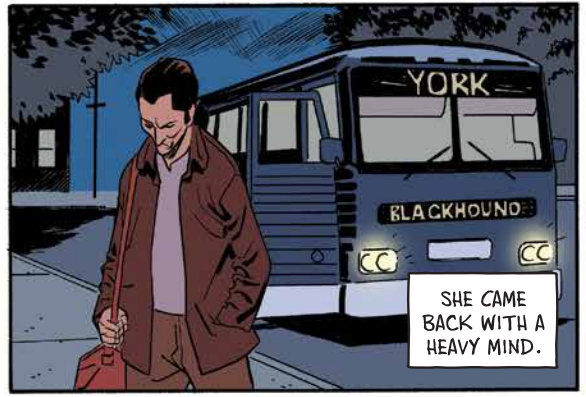
SHE WAS HUNKERING DOWN.

THIS HOUSE MADE BLANCA'S ISLAND OF SOLITUDE COMPLETE.





WHEN MY MOTHER
WENT TO NEW YORK FOR
THE FUNERAL, IT WAS
WITH A HEAVY HEART.



SHE CAME
BACK WITH A
HEAVY MIND.



BLANCA SAID
THAT WHILE AT
THE FUNERAL,
A FIGHT BROKE
OUT BETWEEN
BATTLING
FACTIONS.

IT WAS NASTY, AND
BLANCA FELT THAT IT
OPENED UP A FISSURE
IN THE FAMILY.



MY GRANDMOTHER
CHOSE THE SIDE
MY MOTHER WAS
NOT ON.



ACCORDING TO
BLANCA, HER MOTHER
SAID SHE HAD ONLY
ONE CHILD NOW--

MEANING
MY AUNT.



WE WERE
CUT OUT.

A BIT OF IRONY,
I GUESS.



...BLANCA'S ANGER AND RECKLESSNESS WAS STILL POTENT.



MINE WAS GETTING THERE, TOO.



I BEGAN TO HATE EVERY MOMENT I HAD TO SPEND WITH HER IN HER DUNGEON.



I GREW ANGRIER BY THE DAY.



I WOULD BIDE MY
TIME, ABSORB HER
SPITE FOR AS LONG
AS I COULD.



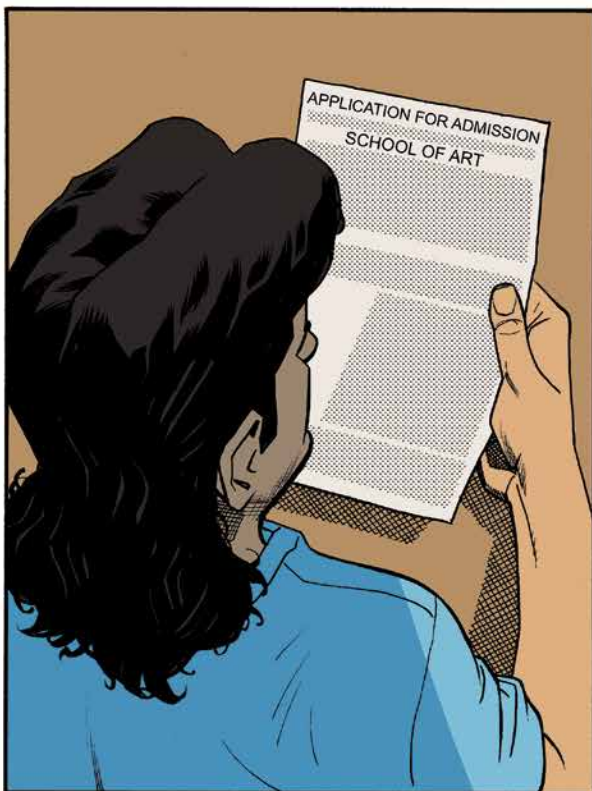
BUT ALWAYS WITH AN
EYE TOWARDS ANY
REASONS TO NOT BE
AT HOME WITH HER.

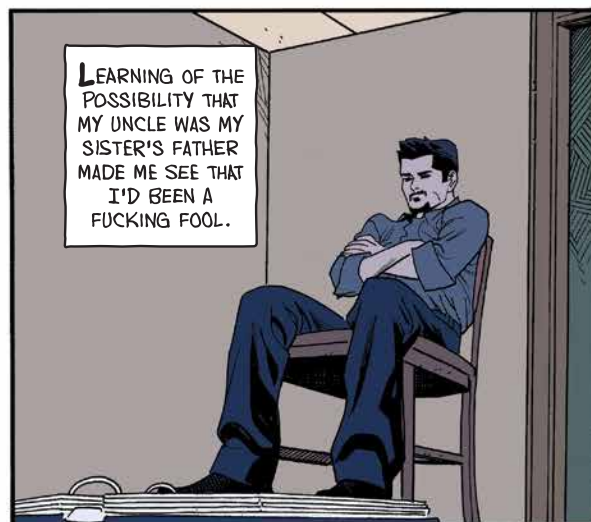


ALWAYS THINKING
OF ANY WAY TO BE
AWAY FROM HER HATE.



I TRIED
HARD
NOT TO
CONSIDER
THE LAST
ROUTE OF
ESCAPE.







IN THE MONTHS AFTER HER DEATH, I'D LEARN THAT MOST OF WHAT I KNEW TO BE OUR HISTORY WERE **LIES**.

LIES, LIKE SHACKLES, TO KEEP ME THERE WITH HER.

TO KEEP ME IGNORANT TO HER PAST, AND OUR PRESENT.

BLANCA **HAD** MARRIED A MAN IN PUERTO RICO AS A TEENAGER, AND DIVORCED HIM IN CUBA, BEFORE SHE EVEN CAME TO THE UNITED STATES.

DRIVER'S LICENSE
8310
BLANCA I OTERO R
20 MAPLE
PENNSYLVANIA
Blanca Otero

AND THE MAN **HAD BEATEN** HER.

SHE KNEW WHAT THAT FELT LIKE **FIRSTHAND**.

I LEARNED THAT SHE **HADN'T** BEEN PREGNANT WITH ANY OTHER BOYS BUT ME.



I LEARNED
SHE **HADN'T**
ATTEMPTED
TO ABORT ME.



WHY SUCH A
GODDAMNED
HURTFUL LIE?!



I LEARNED SHE WASN'T
THE AGE I THOUGHT SHE
WAS, THAT HER BIRTH
DATE I KNEW WASN'T
REALLY HER BIRTHDAY.



THE BIG ONE, THE ONE I
CAN'T TO THIS DAY WRAP MY
BRAIN AROUND, WAS THAT
LINDA WASN'T SICK AT ALL.



SHE **WASN'T** DYING.



WHY **SAY**
THAT?!



DID SHE HATE ME
SO MUCH SHE HAD
TO DIG THAT DEEP
TO HURT ME?



HAD HER MIND
SNAPPED SO
SEVERELY THAT
SHE BELIEVED ALL
HER OWN LIES?!





IT WAS
HARD TO
IMAGINE
THE **OLD**
BLANCA,
OR RATHER
THE **OLD**,
YOUNG
HER.

THE VERSION
OF HER THAT
SUPPOSEDLY
PARTIED IN
JAMAICAN
CLUBS BACK
IN NEW YORK,
HAPPILY
DANCING TILL
ALL HOURS OF
THE NIGHT.



IT WAS HARD
TO IMAGINE A
TIME WHEN SHE
ALLOWED A SMILE
ON HER FACE
(SOMETHING
SHE'D GIVEN UP
WHEN SHE LOST
HER TEETH
YEARS AGO).

IN A WAY, SHE
ACTED LIKE A
WIDOW.



SHE
REFUSED TO DATE
ANYONE,
REFUSED TO TAKE
CARE OF HERSELF.

SHE ALWAYS HELD OUT
HOPE THAT MY FATHER WOULD
COME LOOKING FOR HER.

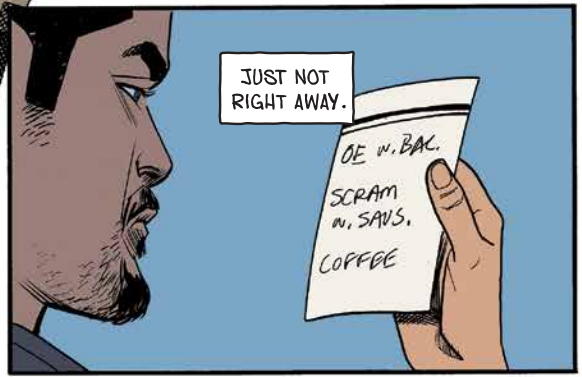
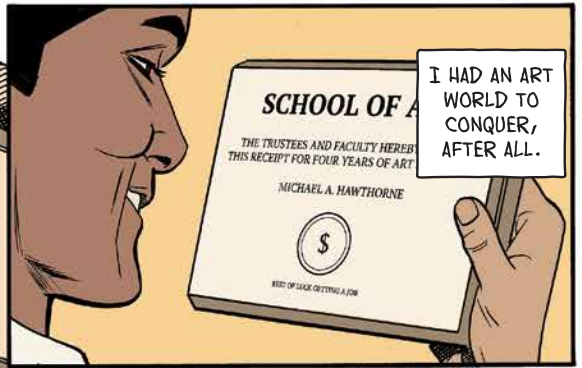


I THINK THAT, ONCE I LEFT
HOME TO GO TO COLLEGE,
HER CANCEROUS LONELINESS
GREW AND GREW.



ME? I WAS JUST
HAPPY TO BE GONE.













MY MOURNING PERIOD.

I COULDN'T REALLY AFFORD ONE.

MY MOTHER ALWAYS SAID, TAKE THE WORLD ON **CREDIT**, AND NOW THE WORLD WAS COMING FOR ITS POUND OF **FLESH**.



SIMPLY PUT, SHE OWED MORE THAN THE VALUE OF HER ENTIRE LIFE.

EVERYTHING SHE HAD ACCOMPLISHED WAS DISAPPEARING FASTER THAN I COULD UNDERSTAND.



I COULDN'T THINK STRAIGHT, MY MIND A FUCKING JUMBLE OF EMOTIONS AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS.



I HAD TO WORRY ABOUT SHIT THAT SEEMED SURREAL AND BEYOND MY ABILITY TO COMPREHEND IT.

THIS IS KIND OF NICE.

THEY'RE GOING TO BURN HER UP IN IT.



I HAD TO GO BACK TO HER DUNGEON AND FIND THINGS OF HERS WE WANTED TO KEEP BEFORE THE HOUSE WAS FORECLOSED ON.



LITERALLY SNEAKING INTO HER HOUSE TO STEAL HER SHIT BEFORE THE **REAL** OWNERS CAME FOR IT.



I ALSO HAD TO MAKE PLANS FOR AN IMPROMPTU FAMILY REUNION...



...OVER MY MOTHER'S DEAD BODY.



THE NIGHT
BEFORE BLANCA
DIED, SHE CALLED
ME AND ASKED
ME TO VISIT.

I BLEW HER OFF.

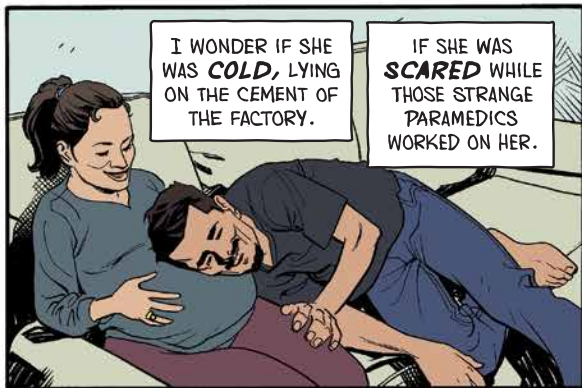
I DIDN'T WANT TO
BREATHE THE STENCH
OF LONELINESS AND
CIGARETTES THAT
FILLED HER HOUSE.



I WONDER WHAT SHE THOUGHT OF THAT NIGHT, WHEN
SHE WENT TO BED WITH THAT **ACHE** IN HER ARM...



...OR WHEN SHE WENT
TO WORK WITH THAT
TIGHTNESS IN
HER CHEST.



I WONDER IF SHE
WAS **COLD**, LYING
ON THE CEMENT OF
THE FACTORY.

IF SHE WAS
SCARED WHILE
THOSE STRANGE
PARAMEDICS
WORKED ON HER.



HOW WOULD
SHE HAVE
REACTED TO
SEEING
HERSELF
IN SOPHIA?



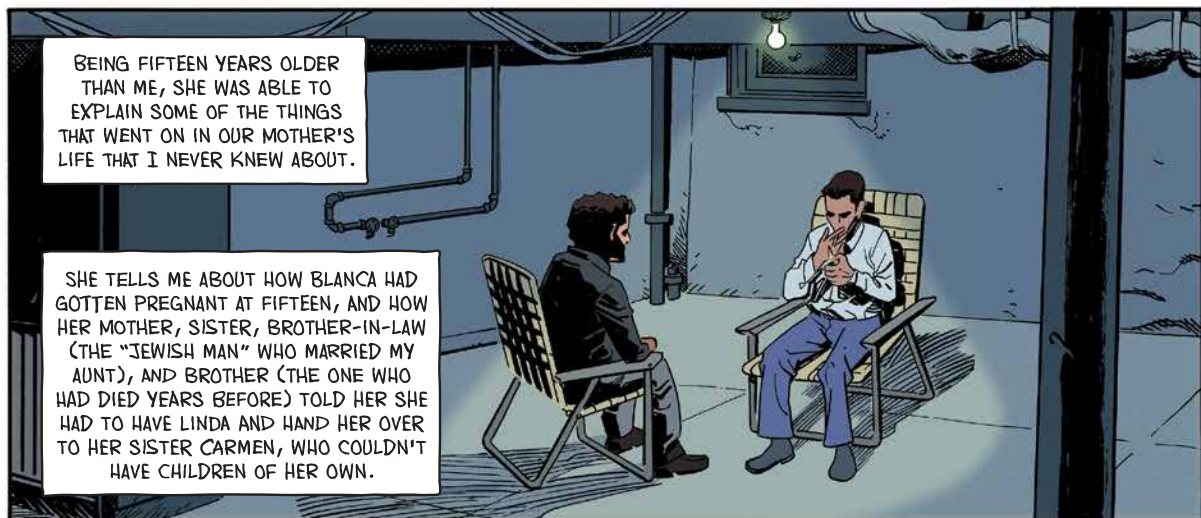
OR SEEING
MY **FATHER**
IN MARIA?



OR **DESPINA**
IN MICHAEL?



I WONDER IF SHE
HATED ME FOR **NOT**
COMING TO **SEE** HER
THAT LAST NIGHT.



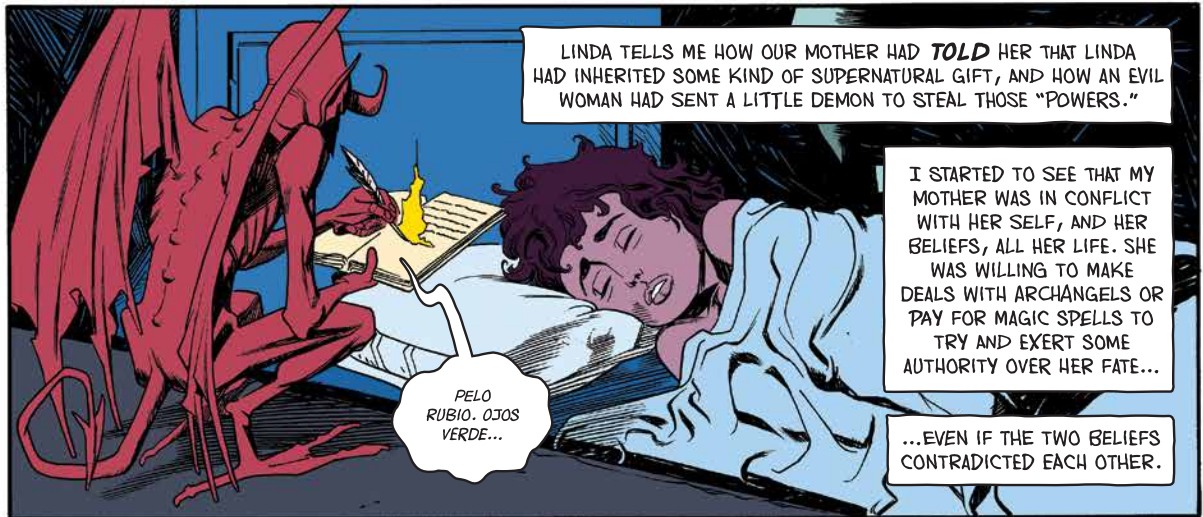


LINDA WAS SENT TO LIVE IN FOSTER CARE FOR FIVE YEARS AND DIDN'T RECOGNIZE OUR MOTHER WHEN SHE CAME FOR HER.



LINDA TOLD ME A STORY ABOUT OUR MOTHER HIRING BRUJAS TO PUT SPELLS ON PEOPLE SHE DIDN'T LIKE.

ONE OF THE FUNNIER ONES INVOLVED TYING A STRING AROUND A PIG'S TONGUE TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM TALKING ABOUT HER.



LINDA TELLS ME HOW OUR MOTHER HAD **TOLD** HER THAT LINDA HAD INHERITED SOME KIND OF SUPERNATURAL GIFT, AND HOW AN EVIL WOMAN HAD SENT A LITTLE DEMON TO STEAL THOSE "POWERS."

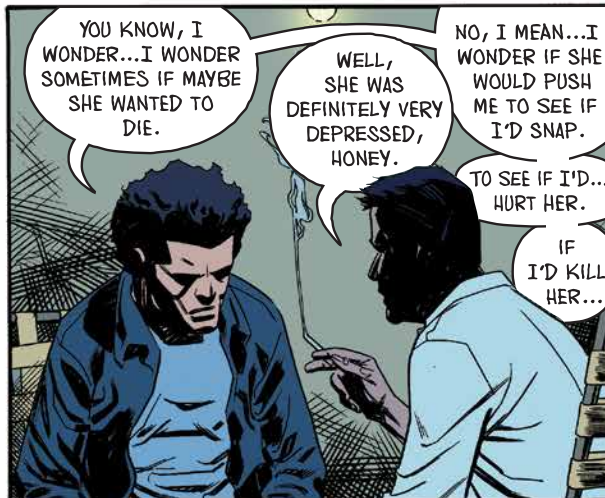
I STARTED TO SEE THAT MY MOTHER WAS IN CONFLICT WITH HER SELF, AND HER BELIEFS, ALL HER LIFE. SHE WAS WILLING TO MAKE DEALS WITH ARCHANGELS OR PAY FOR MAGIC SPELLS TO TRY AND EXERT SOME AUTHORITY OVER HER FATE...

...EVEN IF THE TWO BELIEFS CONTRADICTED EACH OTHER.



WE ALSO TALKED ABOUT THE **ABUSE**.

WE BOTH HAD SIMILAR WAR STORIES.



YOU KNOW, I WONDER...I WONDER SOMETIMES IF MAYBE SHE WANTED TO DIE.

WELL, SHE WAS DEFINITELY VERY DEPRESSED, HONEY.

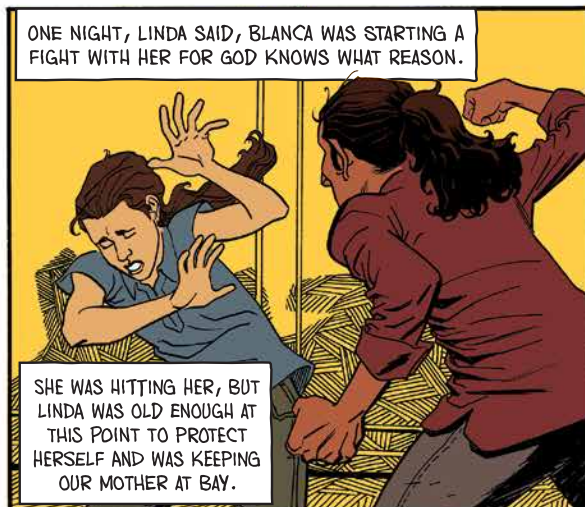
NO, I MEAN...I WONDER IF SHE WOULD PUSH ME TO SEE IF I'D SNAP.

TO SEE IF I'D... HURT HER.

IF I'D KILL HER...



...BECAUSE SHE COULDN'T DO IT HERSELF.





I RECALL THE INCIDENT WITH THE SCISSORS YEARS AGO.

WE WERE FACING THE **SAME SHIT**, ONLY FIFTEEN YEARS APART.



YOU KNOW, THE THING THAT HURT THE MOST WAS HER **LYING** ABOUT YOU DYING.



I DON'T KNOW **WHY** YOU DIDN'T COME TO **ME** AND ASK.



LINDA, YOU **HAVE** TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE WERE LIVING. SHE **LIED**, OVER AND OVER, AS EASILY AS TELLING THE TRUTH. SHE STRESSED THAT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.

SHE ALSO HAD ME REALLY BELIEVING NO ONE **GAVE A SHIT** ABOUT **US**.



AND TO BE HONEST, IT DIDN'T SEEM THAT FAR-FETCHED. NO ONE **EVER** CALLED. NO ONE **EVER** WROTE. NOT FOR HOLIDAYS. NOT FOR BIRTHDAYS.

AS FAR AS I KNEW, WE REALLY WERE **ALONE**.



IN MANY WAYS, LINDA AND I ENDED UP THE SAME.

WE WERE BOTH WAY TOO EASILY CUT OFF FROM FAMILY.

OUR MOTHER HAD SEEN TO THAT.

A FEW YEARS LATER, ANOTHER TRAGEDY STRUCK.

I GOT NEWS THAT A COUSIN I'D GROWN UP WITH **ACCIDENTALLY** SHOT HIMSELF.

HE'D JUST GOTTEN OUT OF JAIL, AND WAS WITH SOME FRIENDS DRINKING AND PLAYING SPADES.

AFTER THE GAME, HE WENT TO GO SEE A GIRLFRIEND WHOM HE HAD A ROCKY RELATIONSHIP WITH.



HE TOOK A GUN WITH HIM.

WHILE HE WAS ARGUING WITH HER IN THE CAR, THE GUN WENT OFF.

HE LOOKED THE SAME AS WHEN WE WERE KIDS, WHEN HE HIT ME ACROSS THE BACK WITH A CURTAIN ROD DURING A FIGHT.



NOW HE WAS DEAD.

HIS MOTHER WOULD PASS SOON AFTER, TOO.

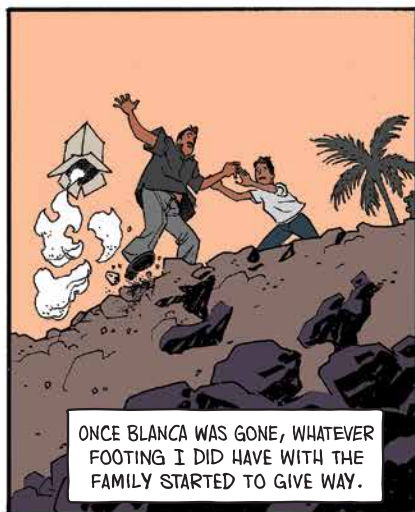
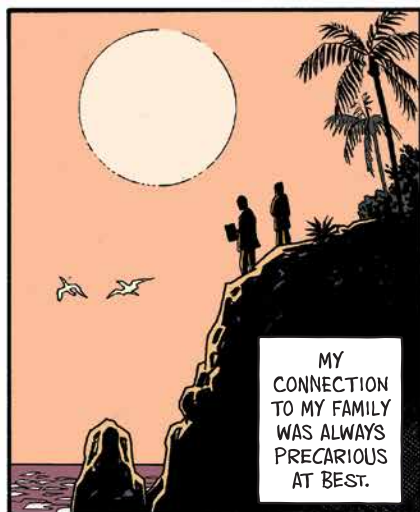
AS WELL AS HIS FATHER.

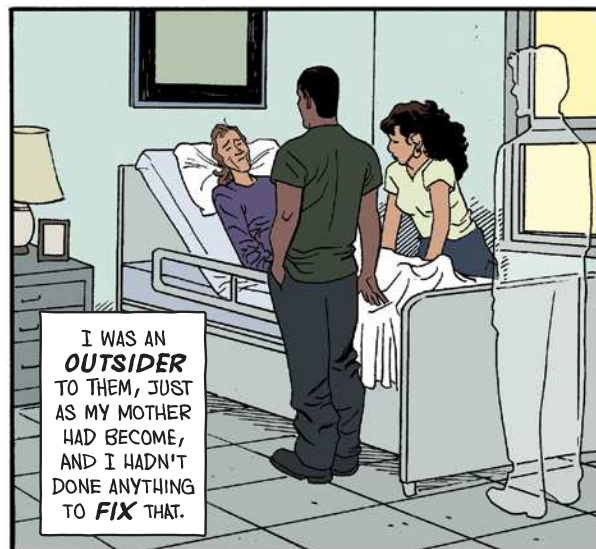
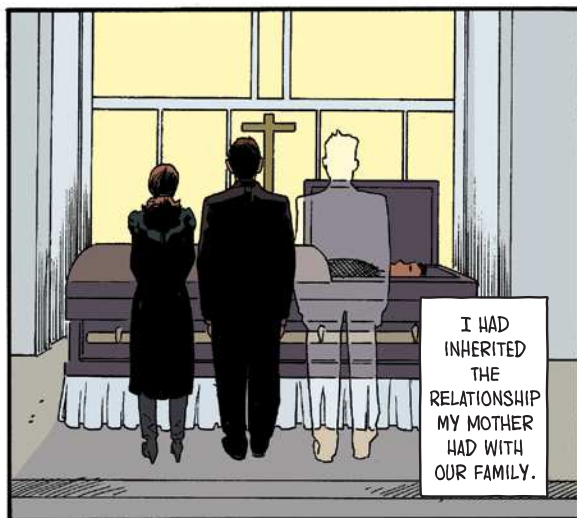
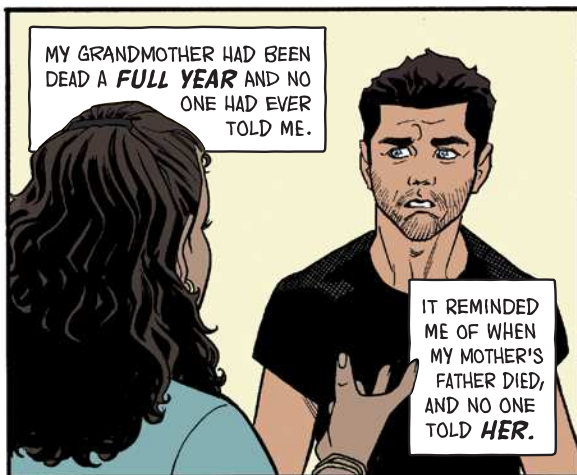
AND I'D BEEN **TERRIBLE** ABOUT KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THEM.









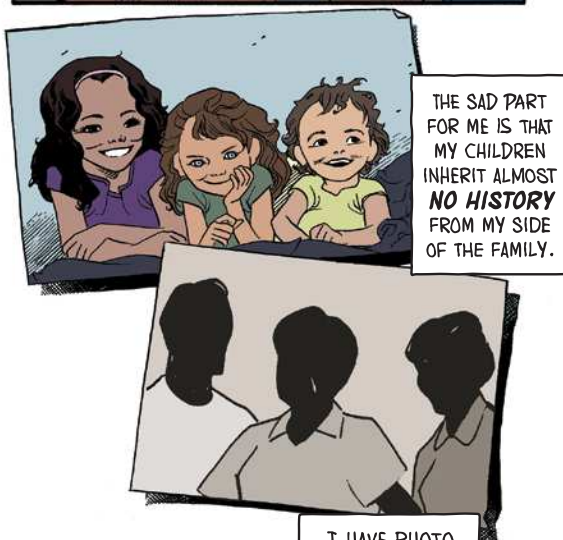




I'D BECOME
A **GHOST**
RELATIVE.



AND THE
LIVING WENT
ON WITHOUT ME.



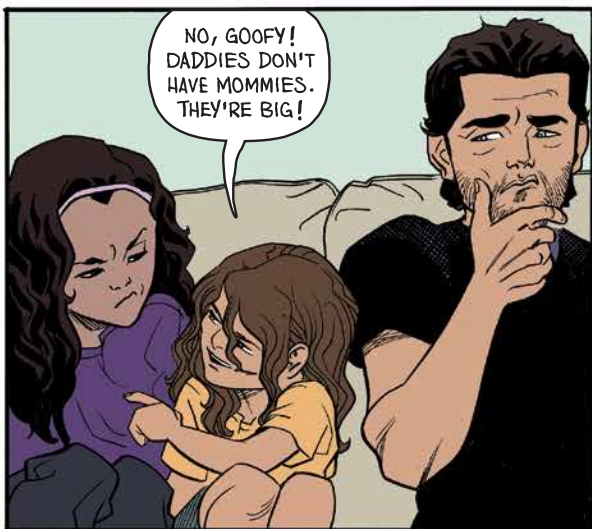
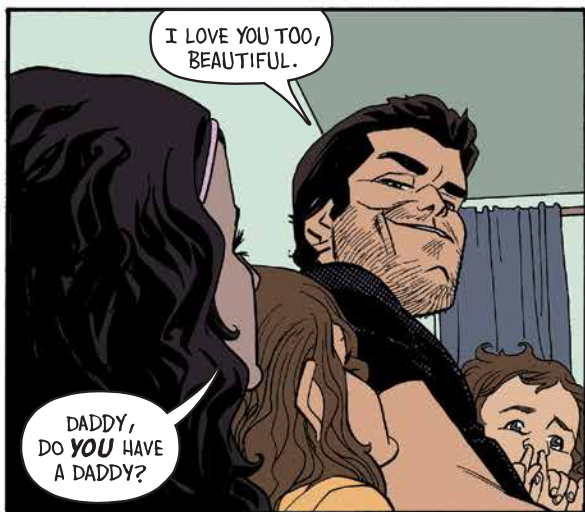
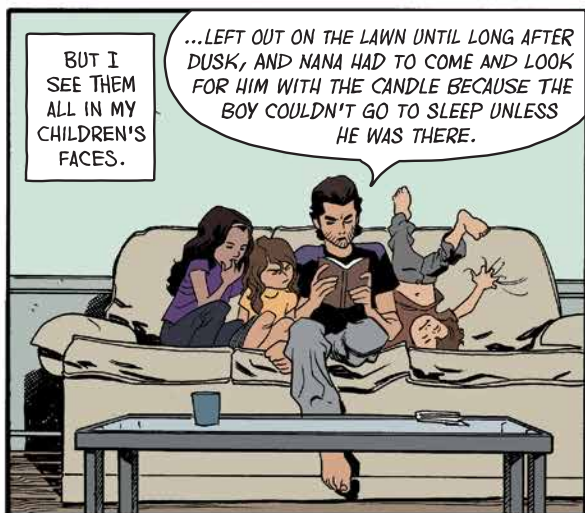
THE SAD PART
FOR ME IS THAT
MY CHILDREN
INHERIT ALMOST
NO HISTORY
FROM MY SIDE
OF THE FAMILY.

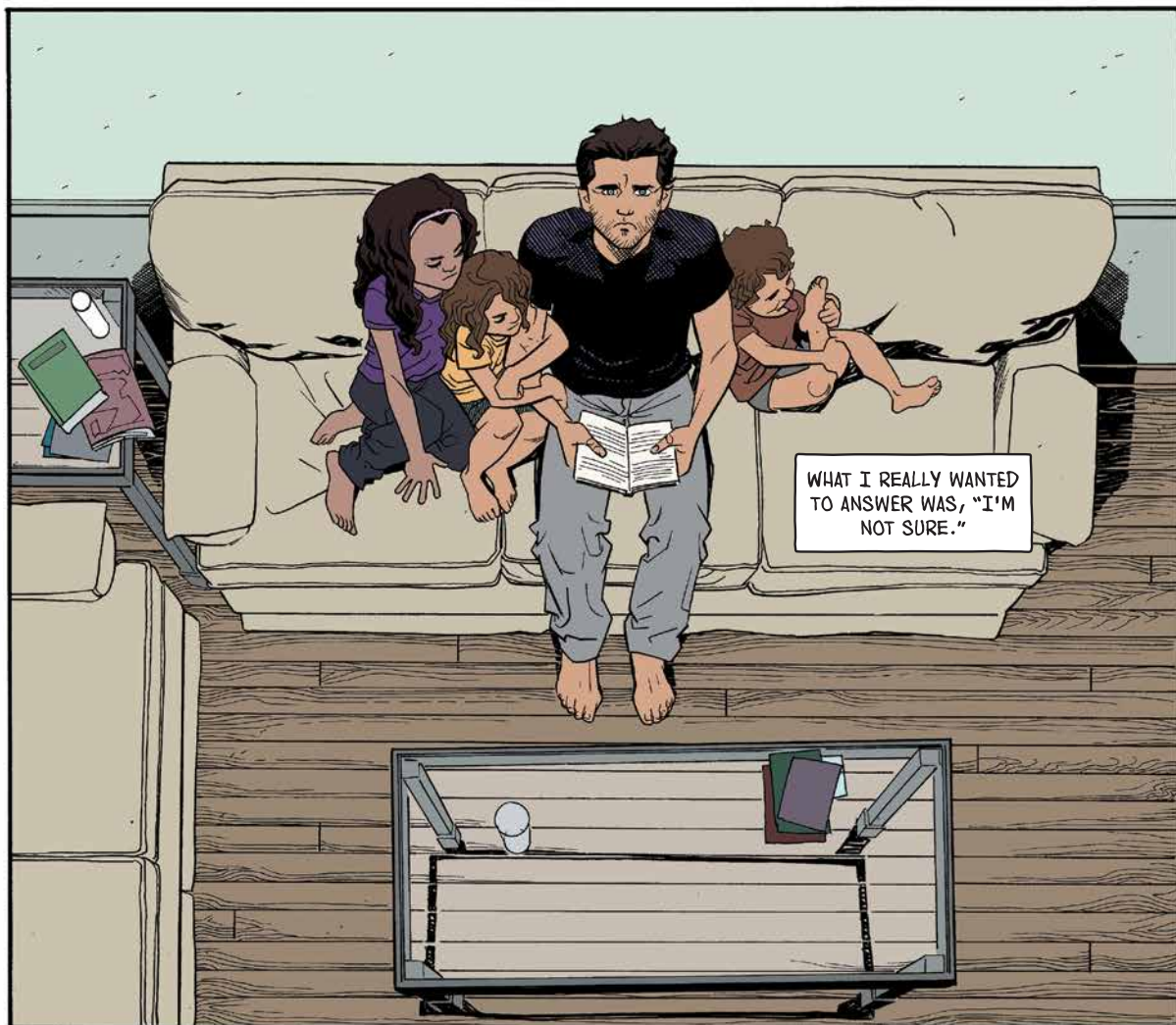
I HAVE PHOTO
ALBUMS FULL OF
RELATIVES I
DON'T KNOW.



AND THESE TWO
I KNEW **LEAST**
OF ALL.

**PHANTOM
PARENTS.**







AFTER ALL THESE YEARS,
I WISH I COULD SAY THAT
I DON'T BELIEVE IN THE
CURSED SHOE ANYMORE.

FOR ALL I KNOW,
MY MOTHER COULD
HAVE BEEN LYING
ABOUT THAT TOO.

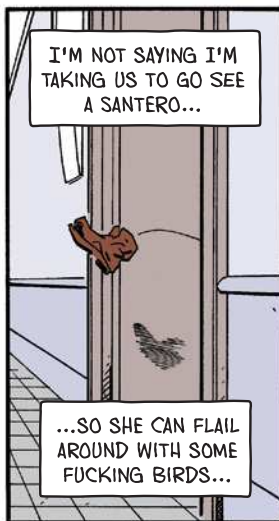
BUT,
SOMETIMES...



...I
SWEAR
THERE IS
**SOME-
THING**
THERE.



SOMETHING PICKING
ON SOPHIA, THE CHILD
THAT **MOST** LOOKS
LIKE AN OTERO.

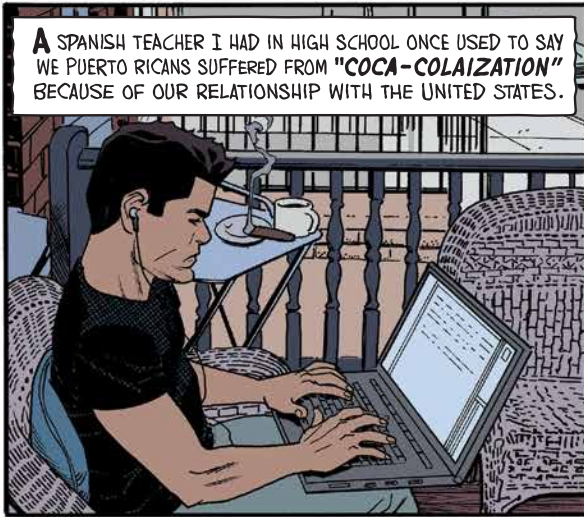


I'M NOT SAYING I'M
TAKING US TO GO SEE
A SANTERO...

...SO SHE CAN FLAIL
AROUND WITH SOME
FUCKING BIRDS...



BUT I AM
**KEEPING
WATCH.**



A SPANISH TEACHER I HAD IN HIGH SCHOOL ONCE USED TO SAY WE PUERTO RICANS SUFFERED FROM "**COCA-COLAIZATION**" BECAUSE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES.



HE HAD A POINT.



I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHERE WE CAN FIT INTO A PLACE AS OVERWHELMING AS AMERICA.



¿HOLA NIÑOS, CÓMO ESTÁN USTEDES HOY?



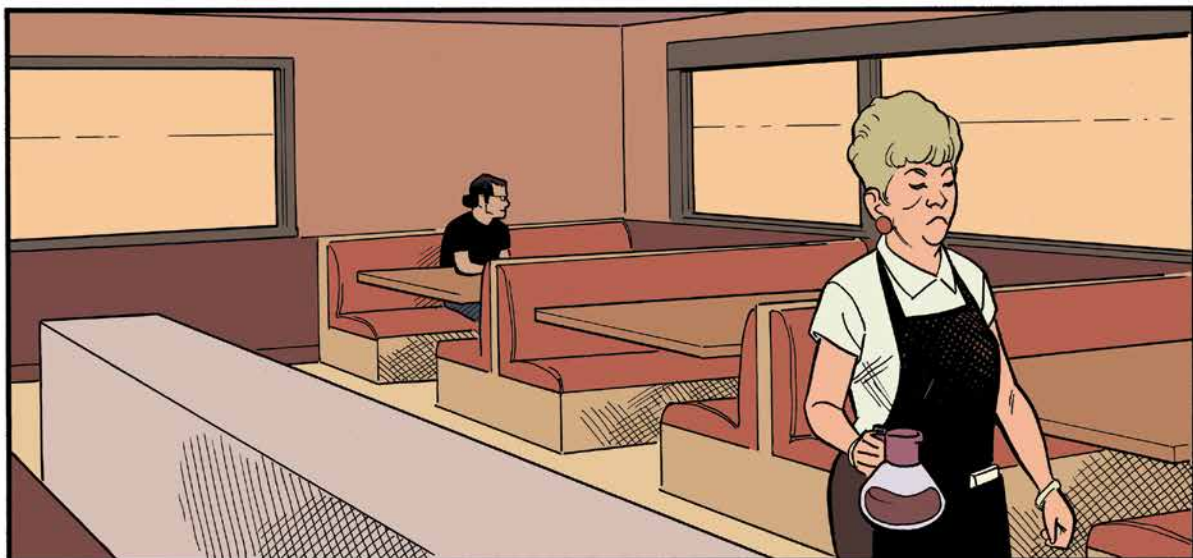
HE SAID, "HOW ARE YOU TODAY?"



I'M FINE!



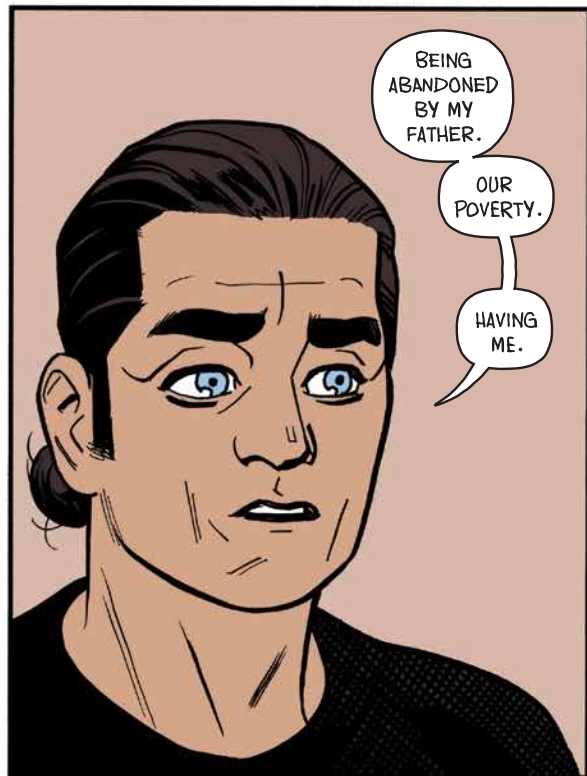


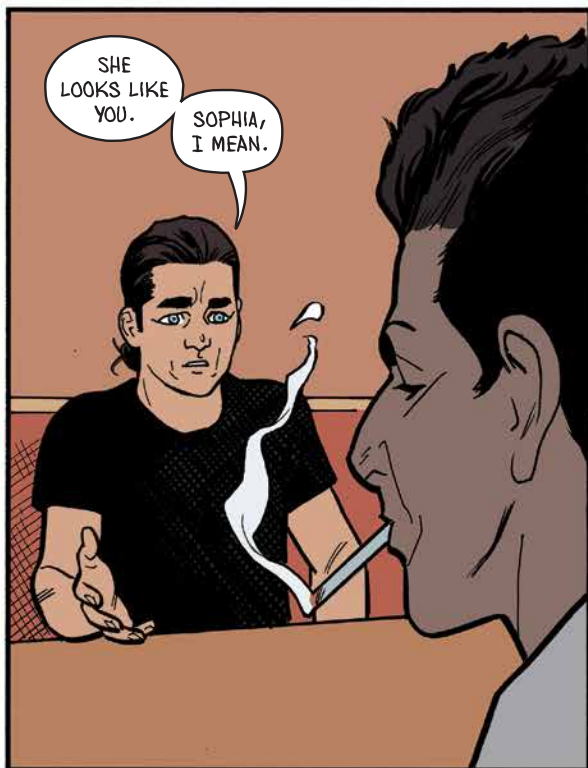




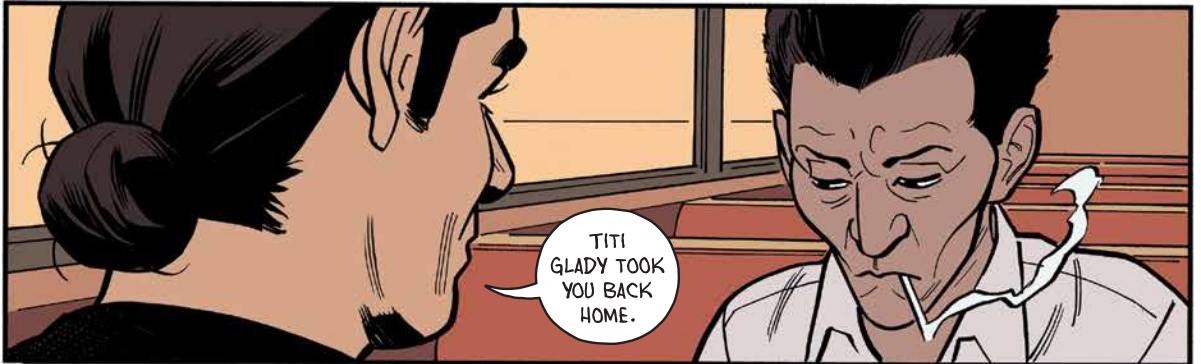
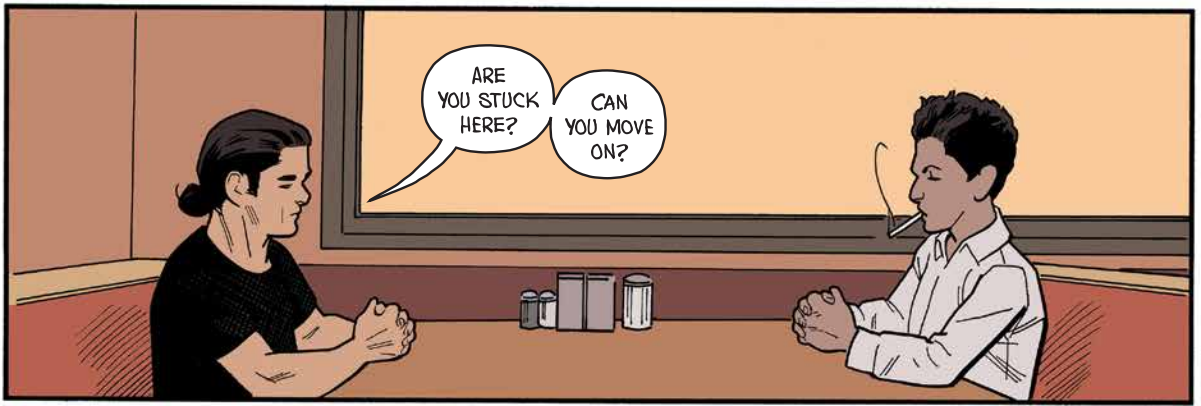
















I'VE NEVER
BEEN TO
PUERTO RICO.





YEARS AGO,
WHEN I
ORIGINALLY
FINISHED
THIS BOOK,
I'D PLANNED
TO GO.

I WROTE THAT
ORIGINAL ENDING
(THE ONE YOU JUST
SAW, WHERE I'M
DRAWING ON THE
SIDEWALK WITH MY
KIDS) THINKING
THE NEXT STEP
WAS TO GO TO
PUERTO RICO AND
TAKE MY CHILDREN
TO SEE WHERE THE
GRANDMOTHER
THEY NEVER MET
CAME FROM.

THEN THINGS HAPPENED.

FAMILY GOT SICK. THREE
FAMILY MEMBERS IN THIS
BOOK HAVE SINCE DIED.
SEVERAL WENT TO JAIL,
GOT OUT, WENT BACK.

MY KIDS BECAME MY
FOCUS. GETTING THEM
INTO GOOD SCHOOLS,
KEEPING THEM SAFE,
HIDING ALL THE
IN-FIGHTING IN OUR
FAMILY FROM THEM.

SOME FAMILY STRUGGLED WITH ADDICTIONS.
A COUPLE OF OVERDOSES. ONE GOT VERY SICK.

HE DIED
YOUNG.

AND MY WORK. MY ALL-IMPORTANT WORK.
DRAWING ANOTHER PAGE. FINISHING ANOTHER BOOK.

SO VERY IMPORTANT.

IT WAS EASY TO FIND
EXCUSES TO NOT LIVE.



TRUTH IS, I **AVOIDED**
GOING. I DIDN'T KNOW HOW
TO DO IT. WOULD IT BE A
VACATION? RETRACING MY
MOTHER'S HISTORY? WAS I
SUPPOSED TO FEEL A
BELONGING? A DISCONNECT?

WHAT'S IT MATTER? I MAY
GO, I MAY EVEN "FIT IN."

BUT I WON'T
BELONG.

MY MOTHER "STOLE" MY LAST
NAME TO KEEP ME SAFE IN
WAYS SHE NEVER WAS, BUT BY
DOING THAT SHE TOOK AWAY A
BIT OF HER FROM ME.

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND
ANY OF THAT GROWING
UP. BUT NOW THAT
SHE'S GONE, I GET IT.

WITHOUT MY
MOTHER, I DON'T
GET TO BELONG
TO ANYONE, OR
ANY PLACE.



SO, I HAVEN'T
GONE TO PUERTO
RICO.

I'D LIKE TO,
BUT I DON'T
DESERVE IT.

NOT
WITHOUT
HER.





WHILE IN THE THICK OF MAKING THIS BOOK, I WAS CONSTANTLY WORRIED ABOUT GIVING EACH PERSON DEPTH AND NUANCE. I DID MY BEST...BUT I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT AS A READER, YOU MAY COME AWAY THINKING OF FOLKS IN THE STORY AS "GOOD" OR "BAD."

PARTICULARLY WITH BLANCA. SHE COULD BE ABUSIVE, I UNDERSTAND THAT. BUT, THINK SHE'S THE VILLAIN? READ THE BOOK AGAIN, ONLY THIS TIME, SEE IT THROUGH HER EYES.



THE CHAPTER
WHERE WE WERE
HOMELESS? YEAH,
READ IT AGAIN.

THAT IS AN INTENSELY
PROUD WOMAN CASHING IN
HER PRIDE SO HER SON HAD
A BED TO REST HIS HEAD ON.





THE CHAPTER WHERE SHE BEAT MY ASS?

IT'S WRONG, I KNOW, I KNOW.

BUT SHE WAS ALONE RAISING A BOY IN
THE '80s, WHEN BOYS LIKE ME ENDED
UP IN JAIL EVERY DAY.

SHE'D ONLY KNOWN
FORCE. IT'S HOW YOU
KEPT PEOPLE IN LINE,
IN HER MIND.



SHE BEAT ME INTO SUBMISSION.

I KNOW THAT.

AND MAYBE YOU'LL SAY I'M
RATIONALIZING HER BEHAVIOR,
BUT I PRAY YOU SEE HER
STRUGGLE.



THAT CHAPTER WHERE SHE SOLD DRUGS?

OKAY. OKAY. IT'S BAD, I KNOW.

BUT I WAS ALWAYS FED.



YOU EVER
HAVE TO CHOOSE
BETWEEN MONEY
AND NO MONEY?



I MEAN,
REALLY
CHOOSE?

IN THE FACE OF
NOT EATING?

WHEN SHE DIED, SHE WAS UNDER FIVE FEET
TALL, AND LESS THAN A HUNDRED POUNDS.

SHE SPOKE WITH A HEAVY ACCENT IN A
WORLD THAT HELD THAT AGAINST HER.

SHE WAS A SMALL WOMAN
WHO HAD TO SURVIVE A LIFE
THAT WAS NEVER FAIR TO HER.



SHE WAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF
AS A TEEN, LOST HER KID,
SENT TO A CONVENT AGAINST
HER WILL, THEN HAD TO MAKE
IT THROUGH THE WORLD
WITHOUT SUPPORT.



SHE WAS ABANDONED BY MY FATHER AND
NEVER RECEIVED A CENT IN CHILD SUPPORT.

SHE WAS HURT. AND HURT PEOPLE HURT
PEOPLE. THAT'S NOT AN EXCUSE FOR HOW SHE
TREATED ME, IT'S JUST A FACT.

BUT THROUGH IT ALL, SHE GENUINELY
BELIEVED IN LOVE. I BELIEVE SHE LOVED ME,
DESPITE IT ALL. I THINK SHE DID HER BEST.

MAYBE I AM RATIONALIZING HER ABUSE.

I AM.

I KNOW IT.



I DON'T CARE.

I MISS HER.





Special thanks to **Linda** for the guidance.

Extra special thanks to **Despina, Sophia, Maria,**
and **Michael** for the love and support.

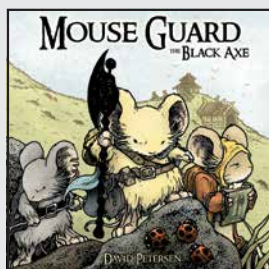
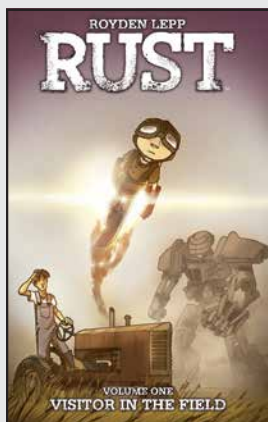
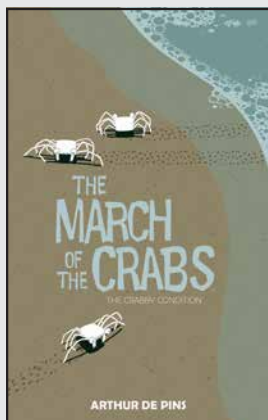
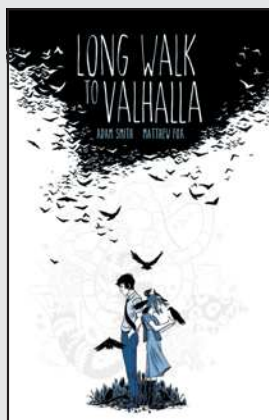
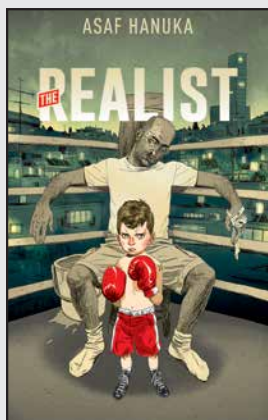




Photo by Despina Hawthorne.

MIKE HAWTHORNE is an Eisner and Harvey Award-nominated cartoonist and illustrator best known for his record-setting run of *Deadpool* and his more current work on *Spider-Man*. In addition to his comic work, Hawthorne has served as a story artist and illustrator for Fox, Illumination, Epic Games, and Marvel Entertainment, where he did concept work for the upcoming *Moon Knight* and *Hitmonkey* shows.

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