



Jaime
Hernandez

ANGELS and MAGPIES

A LOVE AND ROCKETS BOOK



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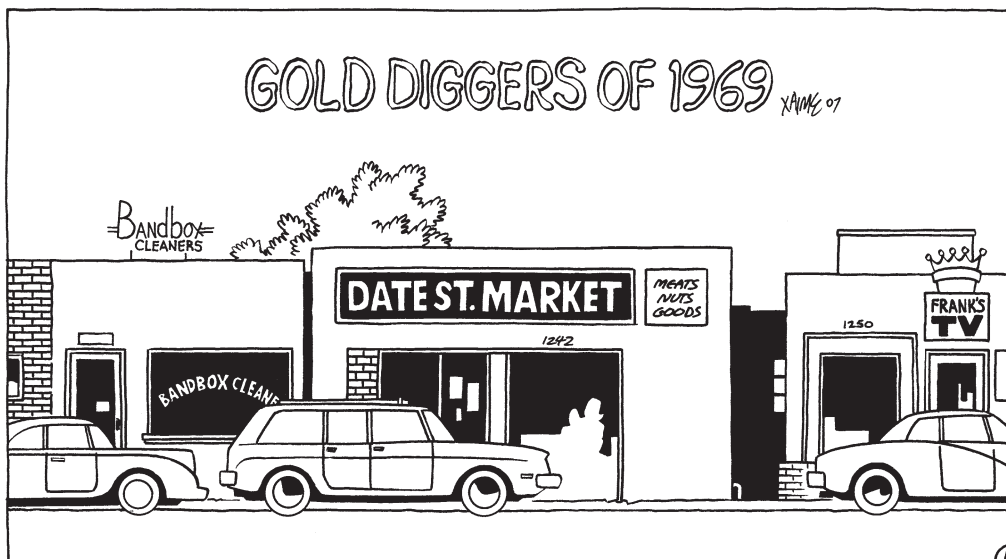
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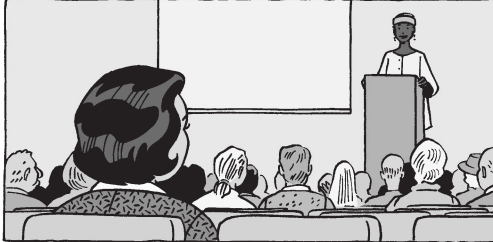
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(2014).

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I WENT TO MEET HER AT THE LECTURE. I WAS REALLY STOKED TO SEE HOW GROWN-UP TSE TSE, I MEAN, PROFESSOR BANDELOS, HAD BECOME BUT ALSO A BIT INTIMIDATED TO BE TRUTHFUL. WHEN I FIRST MET HER, SHE SPOKE FOUR LANGUAGES. NOW, 20 YEARS LATER, SHE WAS UP TO NINE.



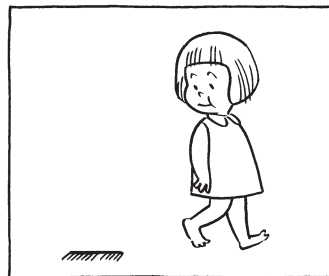
AFTERWARD, WE HIT UP THE TOWN. I ASKED HER WHAT SHE WANTED TO SEE, MUSEUMS OR WHATEVER. SHE WANTED TO SEE THE BROWN DERBY. I HAD TO TELL HER THAT IT'S BEEN A MINI-MAIL FOR DECADES. SHE SETTLED FOR JAY SILVERHEELS'S STAR ON THE WALK OF FAME.



WE WENT TO DINNER, WHERE SHE GRILLED ME ABOUT MY BORING LIFE. SHE SEEMED VERY INTERESTED IN THE FACT THAT I WAS THE MANAGER OF SOME SHODDY APARTMENTS. BUT THEN, TSE TSE WOULD BUILD ME UP IF I WERE A BLOCK OF CEMENT.

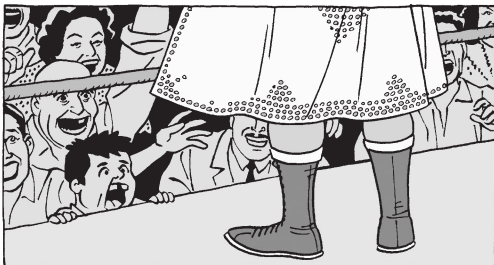


THEN WE GOT ON THE SUBJECT OF A MUTUAL FRIEND OF OURS WHO LIVES IN TSE TSE'S NECK OF THE WORLD, AND LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT THE NEXT FEW WEEKS OF MY LIFE WOULD TAKE QUITE AN INTERESTING TURN.

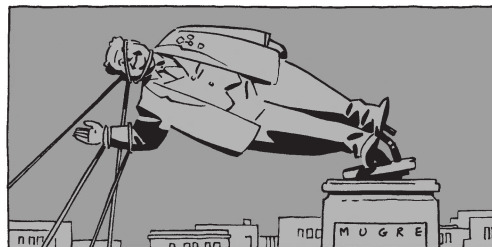




BUT YOU ASK ANYBODY IN MOST LATIN COUNTRIES AND YOU INSULT THEIR INTELLIGENCE. YOU MAY AS WELL BE SPITTING ON THE POPE. SHE'S LIKE THIS LEGENDARY FIGURE. THIS MODERN-DAY SAINT AMONG SAINTS.



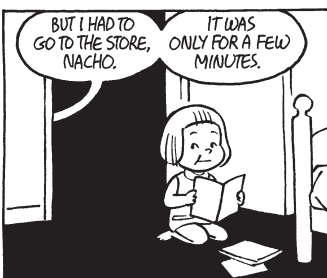
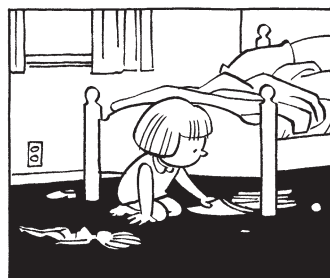
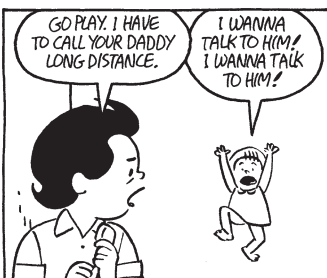
HER FANS RANGED FROM THE POWERFUL RICH TO THE POWERLESS POOR, AND RENA, COMING FROM THE LATTER, USED HER POPULARITY TO HELP HER PEOPLE. ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, AND SHE BECAME A SYMBOL OF UPRHEAVAL AND REVOLT IN LATIN AMERICA, AND ALL SHE HAD TO DO WAS WRESTLE.



NOW, DECADES LATER, SHE LIVES ON SOME REMOTE ISLAND, HIDDEN AWAY FROM HER COLORFUL PAST. JUST WHEN I THINK THAT MUST BE LIVING, TSE TELLS ME THAT RENA WOULD LIKE ME TO COME VISIT HER FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS. I TELL HER I CAN'T AFFORD IT, AND SHE TELLS ME RENA WILL PAY.



I TELL TSE TSE I'LL THINK ABOUT IT, BUT I REALLY DON'T. I JUST GO HOME, BACK TO MY SAFE BOREDOM. THAT NIGHT HOPEY SCOLDS ME FOR MISSING OUT ON AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A LITTLE ADVENTURE IN MY LIFE. I CALL HER A FREAK, BUT THE NEXT THING I KNOW IS I'M ON MY WAY TO THE AIRPORT.





SO HERE I WAS ON THIS PLANE
HEADED TO VISIT RENA. THE FLIGHT
WAS LONG, AND A MILLION HOURS
LATER I HAD ARRIVED. OR I THOUGHT
I HAD ARRIVED. RENA HAD THESE
INCREDIBLY SECRET ROUNDABOUT
INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO
GET TO HER HOUSE.



FIRST I HAD TO FIND THE CABBY WEARING A HAWAIIAN SHIRT. TWENTY
CABBIES WERE WEARING HAWAIIAN SHIRTS, BUT ONLY ONE WAS
WEARING AN L.A. DODGERS HAWAIIAN SHIRT. HE DROVE ME TO A SMALL
CANTINA WAY AT THE EDGE OF TOWN, WHERE I STUFFED MY FACE.

NEXT I WAS TO TAKE A BUS TO THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. THE BUS RIDE WAS
PEACEFUL, BUT ALL THIS SECRECY WAS MAKING ME NERVOUS. RENA MADE A
LOT OF ENEMIES AS WELL AS ALLIES IN THOSE DAYS OF REVOLT AND
UPHEAVAL — THE KIND OF ENEMIES WHO NEVER FORGET.



I DON'T THINK I COULD LIVE LIFE CONSTANTLY LOOKING OVER MY SHOULDER,
BUT THEN I'M NOT RENA. AFTER THE BUS RIDE, ANOTHER CAR PICKED ME UP
AND TOOK ME TO A BEACH, WHERE I TOOK A SMALL BOAT TO THE ISLAND.

TSE TSE MET ME ONSHORE. WHY WE COULDN'T FLY IN TOGETHER WAS NO
DOUBT ANOTHER RENA TACTIC. BUT THIS TIME I REALLY FELT LIKE I HAD
ARRIVED. THAT IS, UNTIL WE HAD TO WALK A MILLION MILES UP TO RENA'S HOUSE.

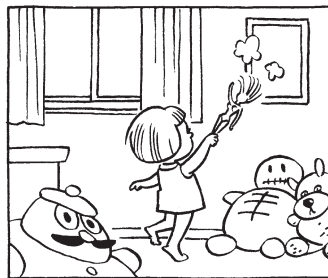


IS IT
TIME
YET?

NO!



DAMN YOU, NACHO.
IF YOU WERE HERE, YOU'D
SEE WHAT I HAVE TO GO
THROUGH...



CAN I
TALK TO DADDY
NOW?

NO. HE
HAD TO HANG
UP.



IS HE GONNA
CALL BACK? IS HE
GONNA COME
HOME SOON?

WHAT DID I TELL
YOU ABOUT FLUSHING
THE TOILET WHEN
YOU'RE FINISHED?



THERE WAS A PORTRAIT OF RENA ABOVE MY BED. I HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN WHAT AN AWESOME SIGHT SHE WAS BACK IN HER HEYDAY, EVEN UPSIDE DOWN.



IT TOOK ME FOREVER TO GET TO SLEEP BUT WHEN I DID, I WAS WOKEN UP BY A CREEPY FEELING THAT SOMEONE ELSE WAS IN THE ROOM. I DIDN'T DARE MOVE. THEN I REALIZED IT WAS RENA CHECKING IN ON ME. CRAZY, BUT I STILL DIDN'T MOVE. SHE SPENT THE NEXT HOUR PACING IN THE ROOM BEFORE RETURNING TO BED.



I WOKE UP IN THE MORNING TO THE SOUND OF AN ANT CRAWLING ON MY FLOOR. THE SUN WAS BRIGHT AND HOT, AND OUT IN THE BACK OF THE HOUSE, I COULD SEE RENA WRESTLING WITH A TREE STUMP SHE WAS TRYING TO UPROOT.



I SHOUTED TO HER NOT TO HURT HERSELF, AND SHE SHOUTED MY NAME AND QUICKLY CAME TO GREET ME. IT HAD BEEN ABOUT A DECADE SINCE I LAST SAW HER, BUT I HAD TO ADMIT, SHE SURE HAD AGED. IT COULD HAVE BEEN BECAUSE SHE HAD STOPPED DYEING HER HAIR. AND SHE IS 70-ISH, I GUESS.





MY FIRST DAY AT RENA'S WASN'T VERY COMPLICATED. I KINDA JUST FOLLOWED HER AROUND, OBSERVING HER DAILY ROUTINE. WE TALKED ABOUT HER, WE TALKED ABOUT ME.



WOULDN'T YOU KNOW IT, RENA WAS ALL EXCITED THAT I WAS A STUPID OL' APARTMENT MANAGER. I SWORE TSE TSE WAS HIDING OUT SOMEWHERE, LAUGHING HER HEAD OFF, HAVING THE WHOLE THING VIDEOTAPED.



I HELPED RENA MAKE LUNCH. SHE SAID THE AVOCADOS WERE SENT ALL THE WAY FROM THE STATES. OF COURSE, THEY'D HAVE TO BE PICKED UP AND DELIVERED IN TOTAL SECRET FASHION. YOU'D THINK THEY'D HAVE ROTTED BY THEN.



I TRIED TO JOKE WITH RENA ABOUT HER CHECKING IN ON ME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, BUT SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. I QUICKLY DROPPED THE SUBJECT. WE SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY NAPPING.

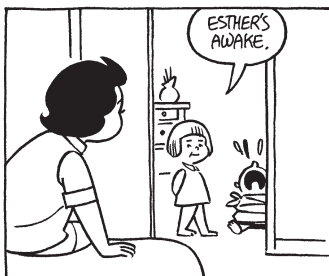
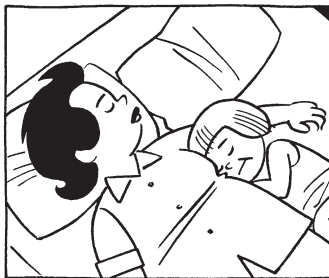


SO THIS IS RENA'S LIFE. SHE SORTA JUST GETS UP IN THE MORNING AND THEN KINDA STAYS ALIVE, AND THEN IT'S TIME FOR BED. NOT MUCH DIFFERENT THAN THIS APARTMENT MANAGER'S LIFE, THAT'S FOR SURE.

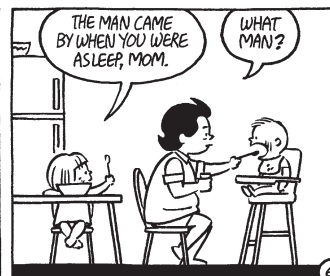


THAT'S YOUR NEW BROTHER OR SISTER.

SHE'S BOUNCY.

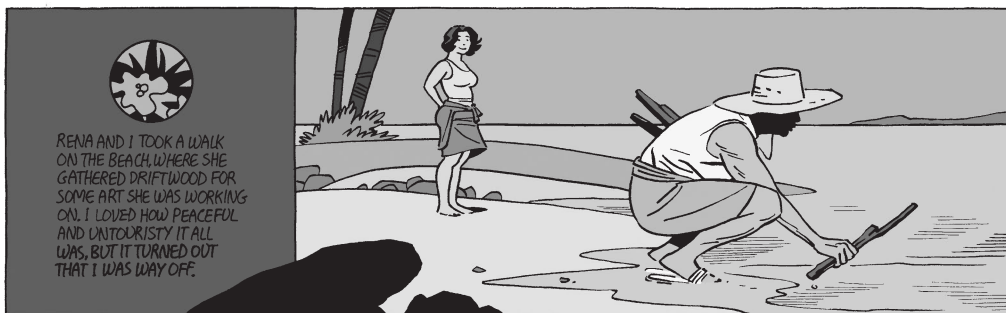


ESTHER'S AWAKE.



THE MAN CAME BY WHEN YOU WERE ASLEEP, MOM.

WHAT MAN?



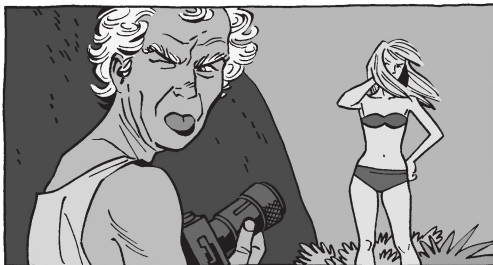
DOWN THE WAY A PHOTOGRAPHER WAS SHOOTING A SWIMSUIT MODEL, IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT BACKDROP. OBVIOUSLY MAINLANDERS. I THOUGHT THEY WERE BEING TOTALLY OBNOXIOUS. RENA APPEARED TO BE UNFAZED.



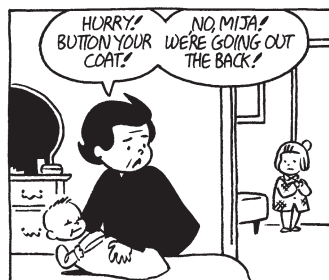
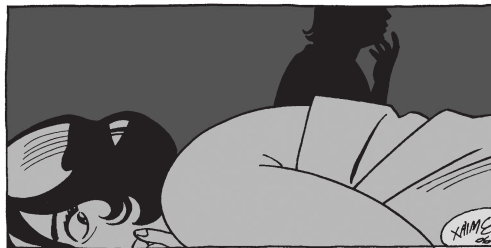
WHEN THEY ASKED HER IF SHE WOULD BE IN THEIR PHOTO, I THOUGHT FOR SURE SHE WOULD BREAK THEIR CAMERA, BUT SHE JUST IGNORED THEM, AND WE CONTINUED ON OUR WAY. THEN, TO MY SURPRISE, I FOUND THAT RENA AND I HAD COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE INCIDENT.



IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT THEY WANTED A SHOT OF A CRAGGY THIRD-WORLD ISLAND LOCAL AS CONTRAST FOR THE HIP BIG-CITY BIKINI GIRL. RENA WAS CERTAIN THAT THEY WERE JUST FANS IN SEARCH OF A CELEBRITY MEMENTO.



I STARTED TO PIECE IT TOGETHER, AND I FIGURED OUT THAT IN RENA'S WORLD, THAT PHOTOGRAPHER WAS MANY THINGS—A NOISANCE, A SPY, A FAN, AN ASSASSIN. IT ALL DEPENDED ON HER MOOD THAT DAY. REALIZING THAT SURE DIDN'T MAKE ME SLEEP BETTER THAT NIGHT.





RENA PAID ANOTHER VISIT TO MY ROOM TONIGHT. SHE HASN'T MISSED ONE SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE. I STARTED TO THINK SHE WAS SLEEPWALKING. I CALLED OUT TO HER TO MAKE SURE. SHE DIDN'T ANSWER AND THEN LEFT THE ROOM. WHETHER IT WAS A WISE IDEA OR NOT, I DECIDED TO FOLLOW HER HIGHNESS.



IN THAT SUPER DARK HOUSE, I COULDN'T TELL WHERE SHE WENT, SO I FELT MY WAY UP TO HER ROOM. SHE WAS FAST ASLEEP IN HER BED, ALMOST LIKE SHE NEVER LEFT IT. HER LAYING THERE REMINDED ME HOW I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT OLD PEOPLE LOOK DEAD WHEN THEY SLEEP, LORD STRIKE ME DOWN.



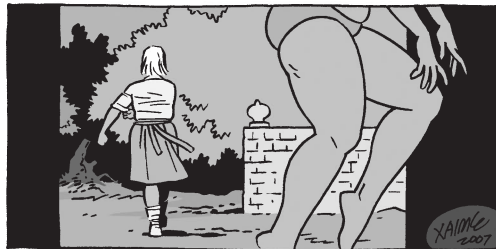
I COULDN'T GO BACK TO SLEEP, SO I WANDERED AROUND THE DARK HOUSE. I ACCIDENTALLY KICKED OVER A PIECE OF RENA'S ART. I PUT IT BACK TOGETHER THE BEST I COULD. I HOPE SHE'S NOT TRYING TO SELL IT, BUT IF SHE IS AND ENDS UP GETTING MILLIONS FOR IT, MAN, DOES SHE OWE ME.



I CAME ACROSS SOME OF RENA'S OLD SCRAPBOOKS. ONE OF THEM WAS FULL OF OLD NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, MOSTLY EN ESPAÑOL. ANOTHER ONE CONTAINED GREETING CARDS SENT FROM FRIENDS AND ADMIRERS. IT WAS HARD TO MAKE OUT THE SIGNATURE, BUT ONE I BELIEVE CAME FROM CARY GRANT.



JUST THEN I HEARD RENA SHUFFLING ABOUT. AT FIRST I THOUGHT SHE WAS SLEEPWALKING AGAIN. THEN I REALIZED SHE WAS JUST GETTING UP FOR THE DAY, AND THE FIRST THING SHE DID WAS HEAD OUT TO GO WRESTLE WITH THAT STUMP. I INCONSPICUOUSLY WENT BACK TO BED FOR ANOTHER TEN HOURS.



THE PARK!
YAY!
THE PARK!
YAY!

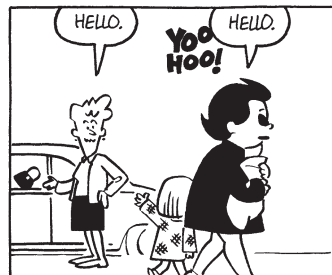
YAY THE PARK.



BUENAS TARDES.

BUENAS TARDES.

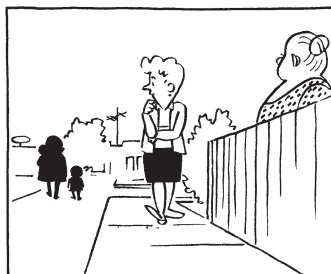
Hi!



HELLO.

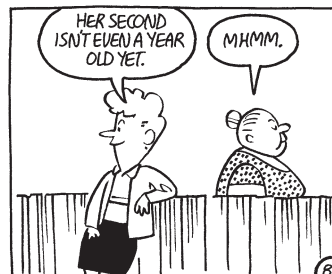
Yoo Hoo!

HELLO.



SHE'S HAVING HER BABY REAL SOON, EH?

ANY TIME SHE SAYS.



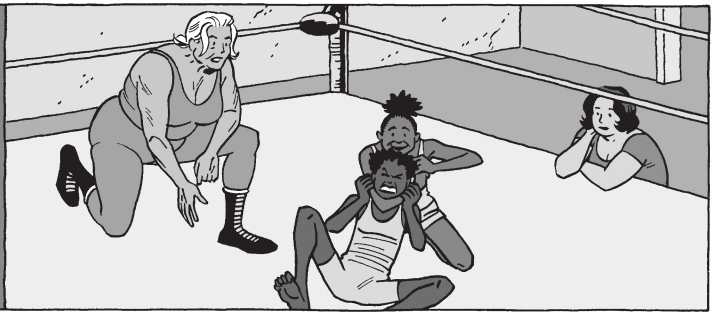
HER SECOND ISN'T EVEN A YEAR OLD YET.

MHMM.

8



TODAY, TSETSE'S DAUGHTERS
CAME BY FOR THEIR WEEKLY
WRESTLING LESSON WITH
RENA. I WAS HOPING THAT
THEIR MOM HAD COME WITH
THEM, BUT FROM WHAT THEY
TELL ME, THAT WOMAN
WORKS 28 HOURS A DAY.



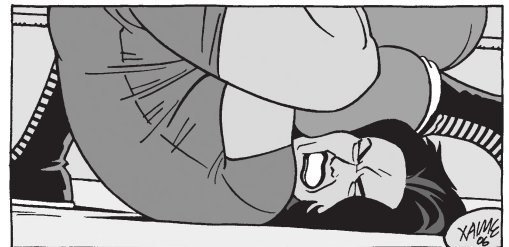
DURING THE LESSON, RENA STARTED TO TELL THE KIDS ABOUT HER ILLUSTRIOUS
WRESTLING CAREER, THE ONE THAT I'VE ONLY HEARD ABOUT A MILLION TIMES,
AND EVERY TIME I HEAR IT, IT GETS A NEW TWIST. THIS TIME, SHE BEAT ALL
FOUR TIGER SISTERS IN A HANDICAPPED MATCH, INSTEAD OF JUST TWO.

I HAD TO EXCUSE MYSELF AND WAS OUT THE DOOR PRETTY FAST. I BLAMED
RENA'S RANTING, BUT THAT WASN'T ALL OF IT. I BELIEVE THAT I WAS SLOWLY
STARTING TO BE DRIVEN MAD FROM ALL THE SOLITUDE. I HATED TO ADMIT IT,
BUT I HAD BECOME BLIND STINKIN' BORED OUT OF MY BRAIN.



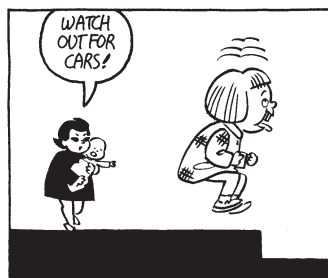
I CAME ACROSS DELFINO, THE BOY WHO BROUGHT ME OVER TO THE DAMN ISLAND
IN THAT SMALL BOAT. HE WAS DELIVERING SOME HOUSEHOLD ITEMS FROM THE
MAINLAND. I CORNERED HIM FOR SOME NEWS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD, AND
WE ENDED UP HAVING A NICE CONVERSATION, TILL HE HAD TO LEAVE.

I WENT BACK INTO THE WRESTLING ROOM, AND RENA WAS STILL AT IT WITH
HER TALL TALES. I MADE SOME KIND OF WISECRACK, AND SHE DRAGGED ME
INTO THE RING AND TURNED ME INTO A PRETZEL. SHE DIDN'T TALK TO ME FOR
THE REST OF THE DAY. MY ACHIN' BODY WAS FINE WITH THAT, THANK YOU.

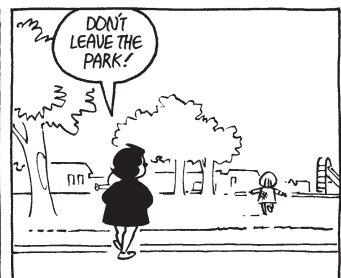


FOR WORKING AWAY FROM
HOME SO OFTEN, THAT NACHO SURE
KNOWS HOW TO FIT TIME FOR THOSE
IN-BETWEENS, DOESN'T HE?

MHMM.



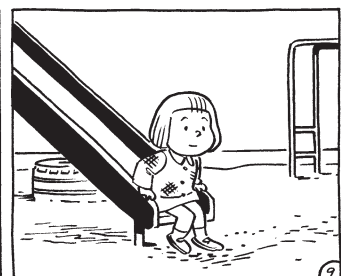
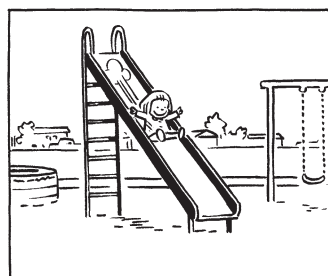
WATCH
OUT FOR
CARS!



DON'T
LEAVE THE
PARK!



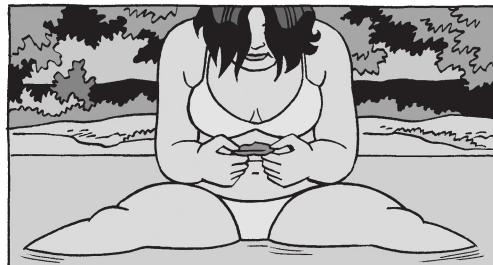
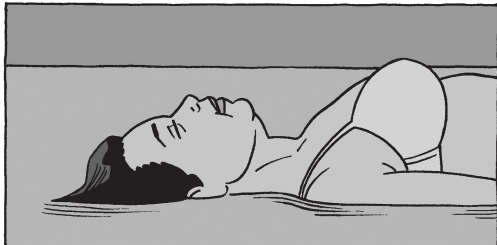
SIGH?





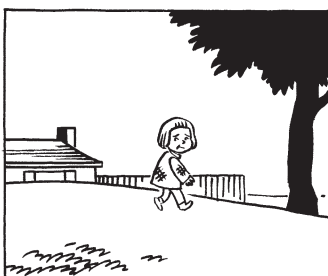
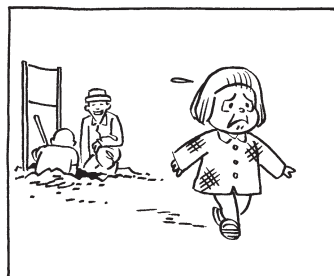
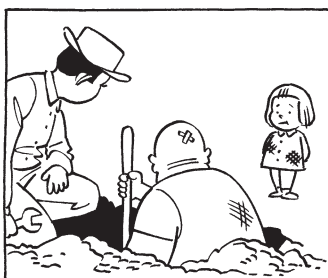
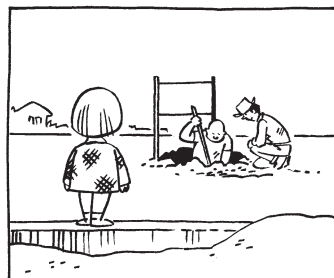
TRYING TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT, I TRIED TO FANTASIZE ABOUT A DESERT ISLAND ROMANCE BETWEEN ME AND SOME NAMELESS HUNK OF FLESH, BUT ALL I COULD PICTURE WAS GILLIGAN RIDING A BAMBOO BICYCLE INTO THE LAGOON. IN FAST MOTION, NO LESS. THAT LED ME TO THINK OF HOME.

I KNOW I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO, BUT AT LEAST NOT ALL OF IT WAS ABOUT TAKING CARE OF TENANTS. SOME OF IT HAD TO DO WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF ME BEING INVOLVED IN SOME BREWING RELATIONSHIP BACK HOME.



I JUST FORGOT TO REMIND MYSELF THAT THAT SHIT DOESN'T ACTUALIZE IF CERTAIN PARTIES INVOLVED (NAMELY ME) FAIL TO ADD INGREDIENTS TO THE BREW. THEN I DID REMIND MYSELF THAT VACATIONS LIKE THIS ARE DESIGNED TO WIPE AWAY ANY SUCH FOOLISH THOUGHTS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO CORRUPT.

RENA AND I SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY WATCHING VIDEO TAPES OF HER OLD MATCHES, AND EVERY TIME SHE WAS CLOBBERED OR BODY SLAMMED ON SCREEN, THE PRESENT DAY RENA WOULD LET OUT A SLIGHT GRUNT.





THE MAINLAND WASN'T TWO MILES FROM THE ISLAND, BUT THE BOAT RIDE WAS STILL KINDA SCARY IN THE BLACK NIGHT. DELFINO'S BUDDY TECHO SEEMED A LITTLE UNSURE OF HAVING THIS OLDER, DRESSED-UP CITY LADY ALONG ON THEIR SECRET ADVENTURE.



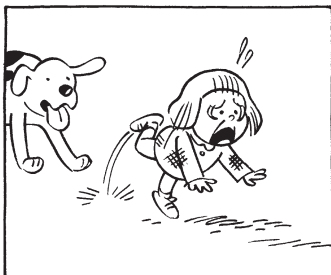
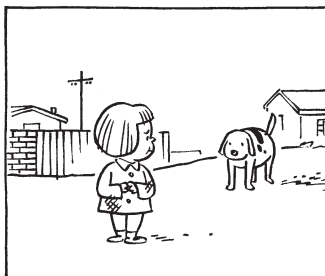
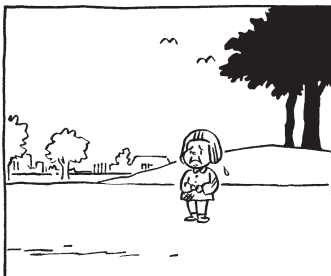
I TOLD THEM IT WAS FINE WITH ME IF THEY WENT OFF AND DID THEIR OWN THING, THAT I WOULD MEET THEM BACK AT THE BOAT AT AN AGREED TIME, BUT DELFINO HAD ANOTHER IDEA. HE WANTED ME TO MEET SOME FRIENDS OF HIS. TECHO AND I FOLLOWED HIM INTO ONE OF THE CANTINAS ONSHORE.

I WAS BLOWN AWAY WHEN I SAW WHO HIS FRIENDS WERE. THERE WAS THE CABBY WHO PICKED ME UP AT THE AIRPORT WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED, THE BUS DRIVER, EVEN THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT WHO SERVED ME ON THE PLANE RIDE OVER. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO FIGURE OUT WHY DELFINO TOOK ME THERE.



EACH ONE OF THEM TOOK A TURN AND TOLD ME HOW RENA HAD HELPED THEM IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER AND THAT THEY OWED HER THEIR VERY LIVES. THE CABBY EVEN STARTED TO CRY. TWO DRINKS LATER, AND I JOINED HIM. ONCE AGAIN, THE CRAZY WRESTLER LADY WAS MY DEAREST, MOST AWESOME FRIEND.

AS THE NIGHT RAGED ON, EVERYONE TOOK TURNS DANCING WITH ME, EVEN ATENAS, THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT. I WAS HAVING SUCH A BLAST, EVEN WITH THE GUILT OF HAVING CROSSED RENA INSIDE ME. I MEAN, SHE WOULDN'T DENY ME A SINGLE NIGHT OF INDULGENCE, WOULD SHE?





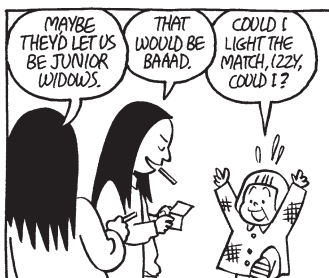
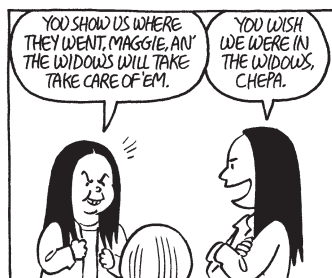
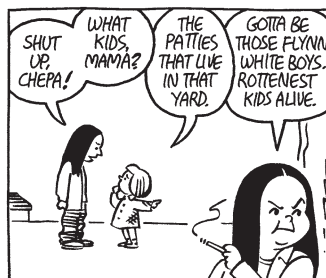
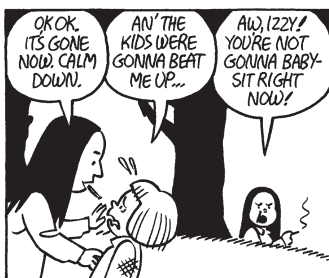
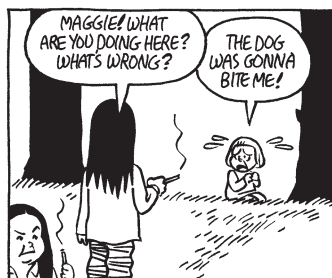
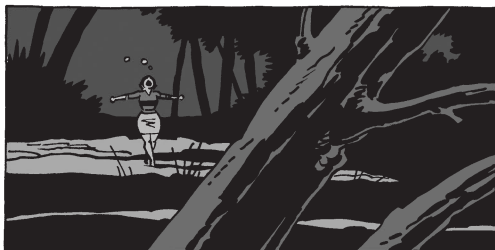
I ASKED DELFINO WHERE HIS BUDDY WAS, AND HE TOLD ME THAT TECO WAS GONNA HANG OUT LONGER AND THAT HE WOULD FIND HIS OWN RIDE BACK. I SENSED THAT THERE WAS MORE TO IT, THAT THE FAT, DRUNK CITY LADY MIGHT HAVE SPOILED THEIR BUDDY TIME AND THAT THEY GOT IN A FIGHT OVER IT.

I ASKED DELFINO IF IT WAS TRUE, AND HE TOLD ME NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IT. WHEN WE GOT BACK TO THE ISLAND, I THANKED HIM FOR THE RIDE AND FOR SETTING ME UP TO MEET HIS FRIENDS SO THAT I COULD SEE HOW FOOLISH I HAD BEEN ACTING TOWARD RENA. HE SAID GOOD NIGHT, AND WE PARTED.



I STUMBLED MY WAY THROUGH THE WOODS BACK TO RENA'S HOUSE. I HAD AN EXTREME CASE OF THE GIGGLES, AND I COULDN'T GET A TIGRES DEL NORTE SONG OUT OF MY HEAD. I THOUGHT THAT IF I SANG IT AT THE TOP OF MY LUNGS, NO WILD ANIMALS WOULD WANT TO EAT ME.

I WASN'T TOO SURPRISED TO SEE RENA WAITING UP FOR ME WHEN I WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR, BUT DID SHE HAVE TO LOOK JUST LIKE MY MOM? I COULDN'T HELP LAUGHING, BECAUSE I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING NEXT, AND BY NOW IT WAS ALL SO DAMN RIDICULOUS.





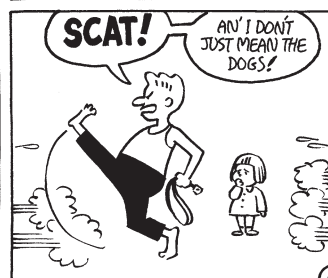
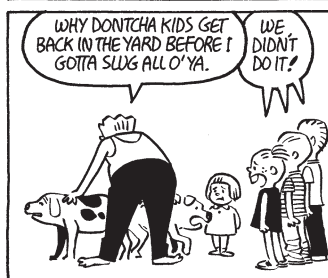
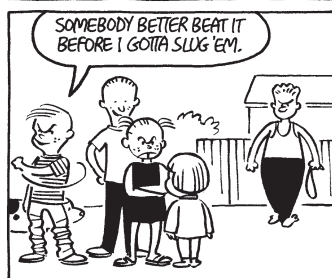
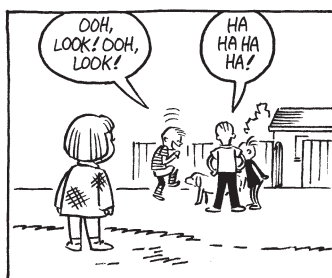
I BASICALLY TOLD HER THAT SHE HAD GONE BEYOND PARANOID, AND SHE TOLD ME THAT I HAD NO ROOM TO TALK, LIVING IN MY SAFE LITTLE SISSY APARTMENT BACK HOME. WE GOT INTO A SUPER-BIG ARGUMENT AND DIDN'T TALK TO EACH OTHER THE REST OF THE WAY HOME.

I WAS GOING BATTY. I NEEDED SOMEONE SAME TO TALK TO, LIKE TSETSE, BUT I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE THE HELL SHE LIVED, THANKS TO THE CRAZY WRESTLER LADY, NO DOUBT. I STARTED TO TAKE MY FRUSTRATIONS OUT ON A STICK AND THE GROUND, TILL I SAW MY GOOD BUDDY DELFINO.



I ASKED HIM WHAT HE DID FOR KICKS. HE CONFESSED TO ME THAT AT NIGHT, AFTER HIS FOLKS GO TO SLEEP, HE AND A BUDDY LIKE TO SNEAK OFF IN HIS BOAT AND GO BARHOPPING ON THE MAINLAND. IN A FIT OF DESPERATION, I ALL BUT BEGGED HIM TO TAKE ME WITH THEM ON THEIR NEXT VOYAGE.

HE WAS RELUCTANT, FOR FEAR THAT RENA WOULD DISAPPROVE, BUT THAT MADE ME ALL THE MORE PERSISTENT. WE FINALLY MADE A PACT NOT TO RAT ON EACH OTHER, AND THE DATE WAS SET. I WAS TO MEET THEM ON THE BEACH AFTER THE CRAZY-WRESTLER-SLEEPWALKER LADY HAD FINISHED HER NIGHTLY ROUND.





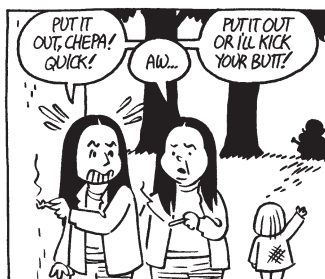
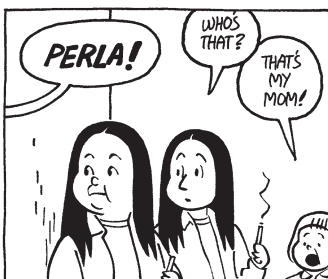
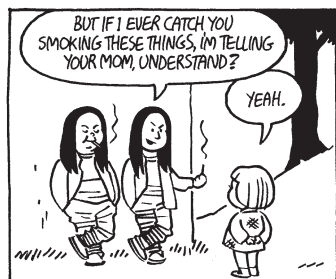
I WAS FUMING, MY BORN-AGAIN LOVE AND RESPECT FOR RENA RETURNED TO CONTEMPT. INSTEAD OF GOING TO BED, I HEADED BACK TO THE BEACH. THIS WAS MY NIGHT, AND NOBODY WAS GONNA SPOIL IT FOR ME. I WAS GOING BACK TO THE MAINLAND IF I HAD TO ROW THE BOAT MYSELF.

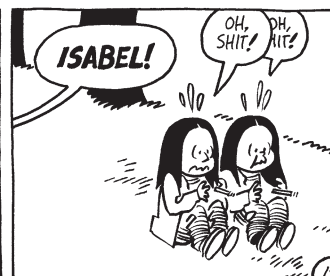
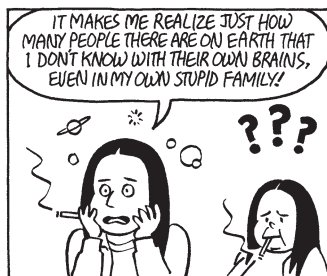
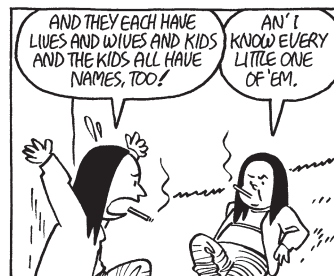
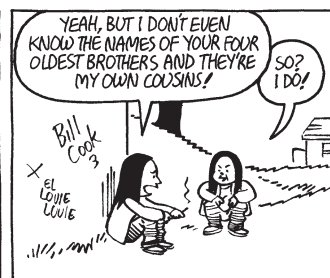
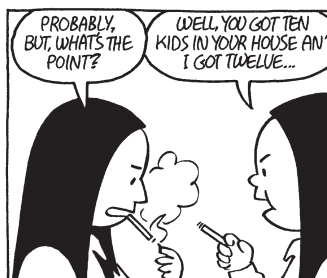
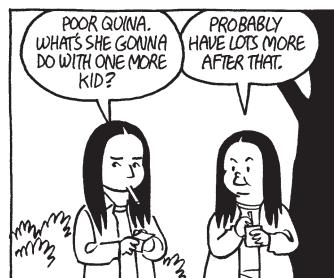
SO THERE I WAS, CROSSING THAT BLACK WATER IN THE BLACK OF NIGHT, BLIND STINKIN' DRUNK AND STUPIDER THAN SIN. MIDDLE-AGED GOING ON ADOLESCENT, THAT WAS ME.



HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAINLAND ALL BY MYSELF WAS A TOTAL MIRACLE. BY THE TIME I REACHED THE SHORE, I DIDN'T FEEL ANGRY ANYMORE, JUST FOOLISH. EVEN THEN, I WASN'T READY TO BRAVE THE TRIP BACK ACROSS, SO I WANDERED ALONG THE BEACH, AT LEAST UNTIL I SOBERED UP A LITTLE.

I ENDED UP AT THE BAR THAT I WAS AT EARLIER WITH DELFINO AND HIS PAIS. I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE ONE OF THEM COULD TAKE ME BACK TO THE ISLAND, BUT THEY WERE ALL GONE. ALL EXCEPT TECO, DELFINO'S CRABBY BUDDY.







I GOT TIRED OF ROWING AND SAT FOR A WHILE. ALL OF A SUDDEN, I FELT REAL SMALL WITH THAT VAST OCEAN BELOW ME AND THAT ETERNAL SKY ABOVE ME. IT MADE ME REALIZE MY TEENY-TINY ROLE IN RENA'S LEGENDARY LIFE. I STARTED TO ROW AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME AT A MUCH HUMBLER PACE.



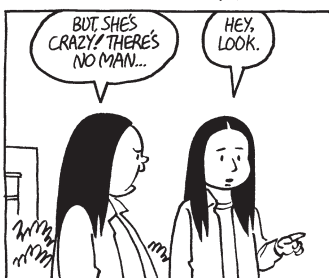
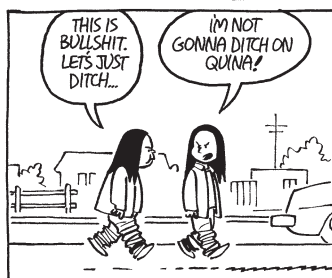
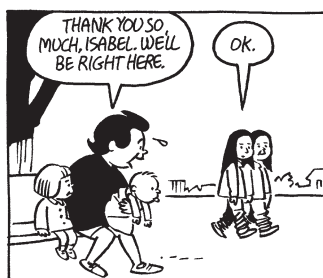
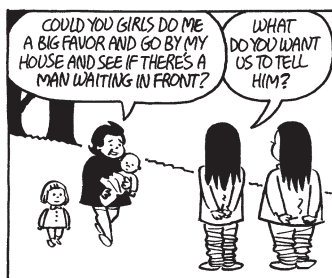
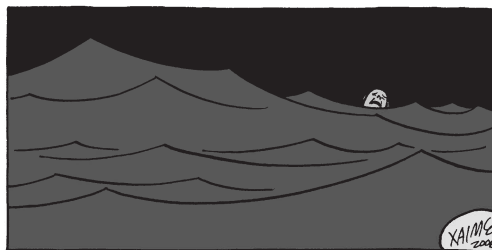
ABOUT HALFWAY TO THE ISLAND, I DROPPED THE OAR IN THE WATER. I THOUGHT DELFINO WOULD BE SUPER MAD IF SOMEONE LOST HIS OAR, LET ALONE STOLE HIS BOAT. I TRIED TO RETRIEVE IT AND WENT STRAIGHT INTO THE DRINK HEADFIRST.



I TRIED TO REACH FOR THE BOAT, WHICH WASN'T MORE THAN A FOOT AWAY, BUT THE MORE I TRIED, THE MORE IT DRIFTED AWAY. PRETTY SOON IT WAS TOO FAR AWAY TO EVEN SEE. DELFINO, PLEASE DON'T BE MAD.



I COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT WAS HAPPENING. I HAD ALWAYS IMAGINED THAT I WOULD END UP DYING IN A HOSPITAL BED OR A COFFEE SHOP CHOKING ON A TOFUKEY SANDWICH, NOT IN SOME FOREIGN BLACK WATERS IN THE BLACK NIGHT ALL BY MYSELF.





I WAS GETTING REAL TIRED, AND I STARTED TO PANIC. I TOOK A MOUTHFUL OF WATER AND WENT STRAIGHT UNDER. THAT'S WHEN I FELT SOMETHING BONK MY HEAD. I GRABBED ON TO FIND THAT IT WAS AN OAR. I THOUGHT IT WAS MY (DELFINO'S) OAR, TIL I FELT IT PULLING ME UP.



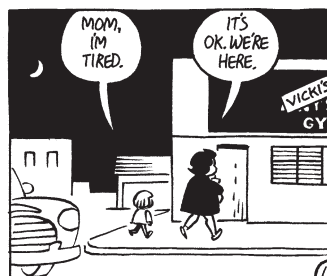
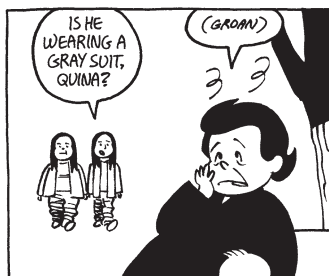
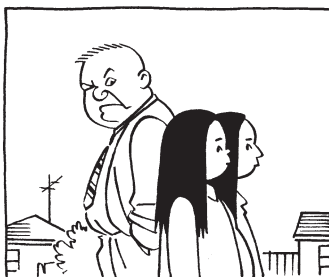
IT WAS TECHO IN ANOTHER SMALL BOAT. I MUST HAVE BEEN TOO HEAVY FOR HIM TO PULL ME IN, BECAUSE HE TOLD ME TO HOLD ON TO THE SIDE, AS WE MADE OUR WAY TO THE SHORE. I WAS ONLY TOO HAPPY TO FOLLOW ORDERS.



HE KEPT ASKING ME IF I WAS O.K., AND THEN HE TOLD ME THAT HE HAD BORROWED A BOAT TO GET HIMSELF HOME AND THAT HE KNEW SOMETHING WAS FUNNY WHEN HE SAW DELFINO'S (MY) BOAT FLOATING ALONG BY ITSELF. I WAS JUST GRATEFUL THAT HE HAD FOUND ME IN ALL THAT DARKNESS.



TECHO OFFERED TO HELP ME GET BACK TO RENA'S, BUT I WAS TOO BUSY CHECKING TO SEE IF I HAD LOST MY PASSPORT, WHICH I HAD PUT IN THE INNER POCKET OF MY SKIRT, IN CASE I NEEDED IT WHEN I VISITED THE MAINLAND. THAT'S WHEN THINGS GOT DOWNRIGHT SURREAL.





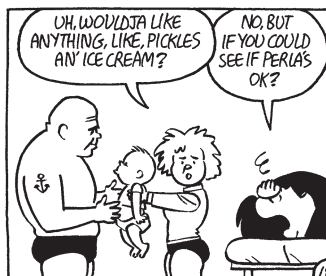
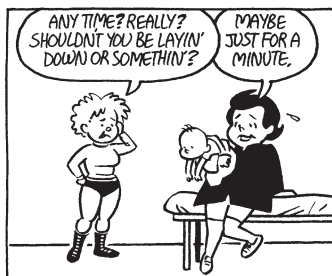
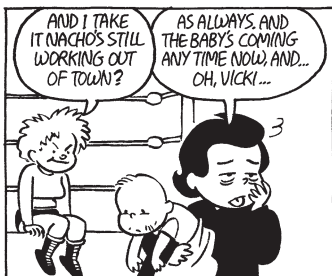
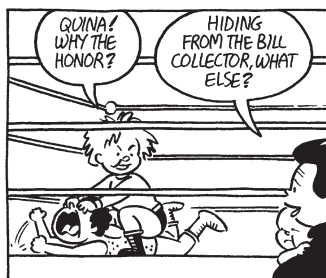
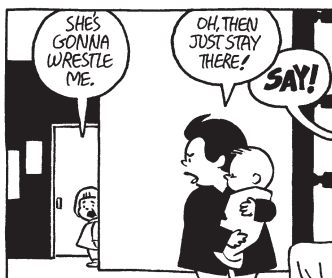
HE WON AND RAN OFF WITH IT INTO THE JUNGLE. IT WAS NOW CLEAR WHY HE HAD FOUND ME SO EASILY OUT IN THE WATER. HE WAS FOLLOWING ME TO ROB ME, BECAUSE HE REALLY BELIEVED THAT I WAS THAT FAT, RICH CITY LADY.

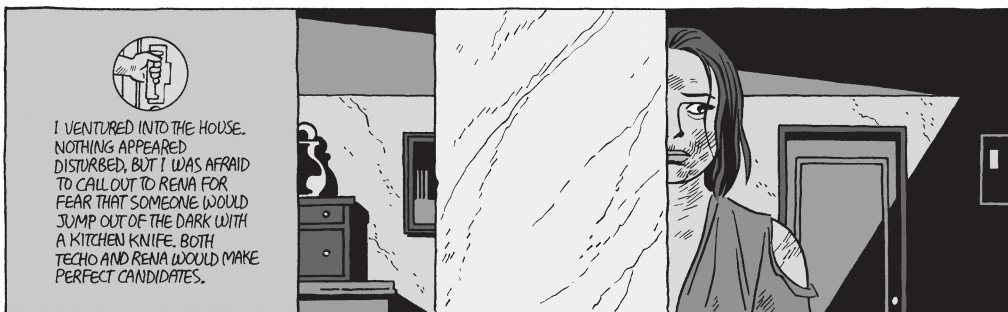
WHETHER IT WAS INTENTIONAL OR NOT, TECO WAS HEADING STRAIGHT FOR RENA'S HOUSE. I COULDN'T TAKE A CHANCE, SO I CHASED AFTER HIM. HE WAS WAY AHEAD OF ME, SO I DECIDED TO TAKE A SHORTCUT.



OK,, SHORTCUT CANCELED. PROCEED TO MAIN ROUTE.

HALF-CRIPPLED AND LOOKING LIKE DEATH WARMED OVER, I FINALLY MADE IT TO THE HOUSE. IT STOOD VERY STILL. I WAS AFRAID TO GO IN, BUT I KNEW THAT I HAD TO. NOT SO MUCH FOR RENA'S SAKE, BUT FOR TECO'S. I DON'T THINK THE KID REALLY KNEW WHAT HE WAS IN FOR.





THE BOTTOM FLOOR WAS EMPTY. BEFORE I MADE MY WAY UPSTAIRS, I SAT MY SOGGY ASS DOWN TO REST FOR A MINUTE. I WAS OUT IN TWO SECONDS.



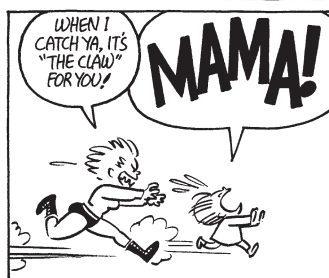
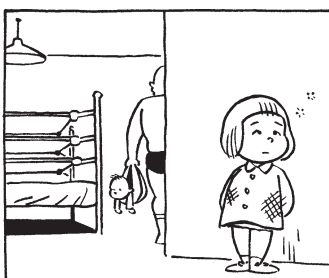
IT'S BEYOND ME HOW LONG I LAID THERE, BUT IT WAS LIGHT WHEN I WOKE UP. THINGS REMAINED QUIET. NOBODY HAD KILLED ME. NOBODY EVEN BOTHERED TO WAKE ME TO TELL ME TO CLEAN UP MY MOLDY, BATTERED BODY, SO I WENT AHEAD AND TOLD MYSELF.

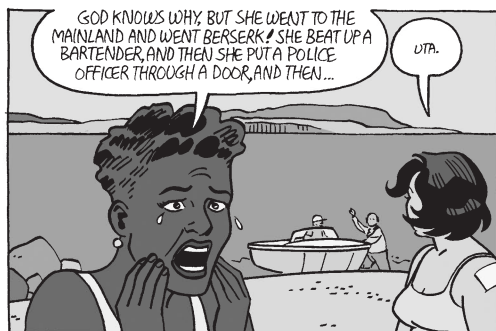


I TOOK A BATH AND DRESSED MY WOUNDS. ANOTHER HOUR HAD PASSED, AND THERE WAS STILL NO SIGN OF LIFE. I STARTED TO FEEL LIKE I WAS BEING PUNISHED FOR MY IDIOTIC BEHAVIOR, AND I GOT ALL BLUBBERY.



I THOUGHT OF PACKING MY BAGS AND GOING HOME, BUT I HADN'T THE SLIGHTEST CLUE OF HOW TO GO ABOUT IT. I STEPPED OUTSIDE FOR SOME AIR, AND I SAW A GROUP OF MEN RUNNING BY. ONE OF THEM POINTED AT ME. I ALMOST RAN BACK INTO THE HOUSE, BUT I SAW THAT TSE TSE WAS WITH THEM.



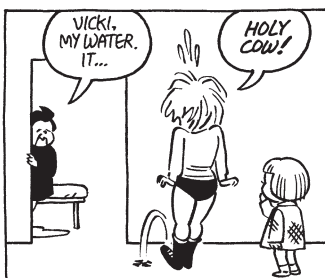
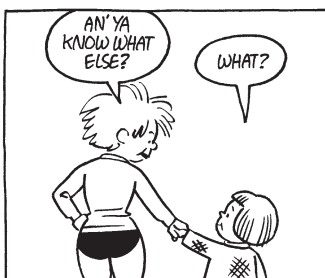
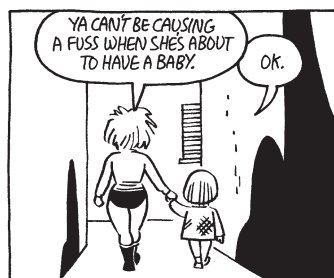


RENA MUST HAVE GONE LOOKING FOR ME, BUT NOBODY SEEMED TO KNOW THAT TSE TSE STOPPED FOR A MINUTE TO ASK ME ABOUT MY BANDAGES AND BRUISES, BUT I TOLD HER THAT I JUST FELL INTO A BUSH OUTSIDE RENA'S HOUSE. I FELT THAT IT MIGHT BE BETTER IF I KEPT MY ADVENTURE TO MYSELF.



I DIDN'T EVEN LET ON THAT CROSSING THAT STUPID WATER ONE MORE TIME WAS GIVING ME A STOMACHACHE. WE TOOK A CAB TO THE POLICE STATION, BUT THE STREET WAS BLOCKED WITH PEOPLE, SO WE HAD TO WALK THE REST OF THE WAY. IT SURE DIDN'T FEEL LIKE THERE WAS A STREET FAIR GOING ON.

IT WAS JUST AS I THOUGHT. ALL THOSE PEOPLE WERE THERE FOR RENA. WORD ABOUT HER RAMPAGE MUST HAVE SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE, BECAUSE IT BECAME A REGULAR MEDIA CIRCUS. WHETHER SHE WANTED IT OR NOT, RENA WAS DEFINITELY BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT.





WE WEREN'T SURE IF WE SHOULD STAY AND WAIT FOR HER, BUT WE DID. TSETSE APOLOGIZED FOR BEING ABSENT DURING MY VISIT AND LEAVING ME TO DEAL WITH THE CRAZY WRESTLER LADY MYSELF. THEN SHE ASKED ME HOW MY STAY HAS BEEN. I SMILED, SHE NODDED AND WE LEFT IT AT THAT.



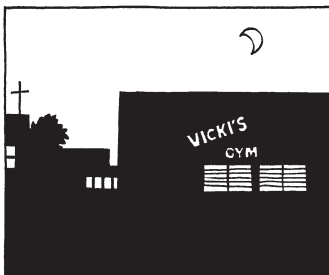
WE STARTED TO TALK ABOUT HOW THE THREE OF US MET 20-SOME-ODD YEARS AGO. I WAS A YOUNG ASPIRING MECHANIC'S ASSISTANT WORKING IN A SOUTH AMERICAN JUNGLE. TSETSE WAS A TRANSLATOR FOR THE NATIVES OF THE REGION. RENA WAS THERE BECAUSE SHE'S RENA.



MOST OF IT IS A BLUR NOW, BUT I DO REMEMBER THAT IT WAS QUITE AN ADVENTURE. COME TO THINK OF IT, THE FEW TIMES I'VE EVER SPENT WITH RENA HAVE ALWAYS TURNED INTO SOME KIND OF CRAZY ADVENTURE, BUT NONE I HAVE EVER REGRETTED, I'M PLEASED AND SURPRISED TO SAY.



THEN THE CROWD FELL SILENT. I LOOKED UP TO SEE THAT SHE HAD COME OUT, LOOKING LIKE A QUEEN HOLDING COURT. SHE RAISED HER HAND TO WAVE, AND THE PLACE WENT BONKERS. I HAD TO ADMIT, THE OLD GIRL STILL HAD IT. LIKE IN THE PORTRAIT ABOVE MY BED, RENA WAS STILL AN AWESOME SIGHT.





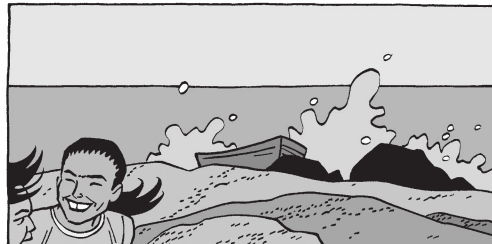
A FEW MINUTES LATER, DELFINO WALKED UP. MY HEART JUMPED BECAUSE SEEING HIM REMINDED ME THAT I LOST HIS BOAT IN THAT STUPID OCEAN. IT JUMPED A SECOND TIME WHEN HE HANDED ME MY SOGGY PASSPORT. HE SAID THAT HE FOUND IT IN THE JUNGLE NOT FAR FROM THE BEACH.



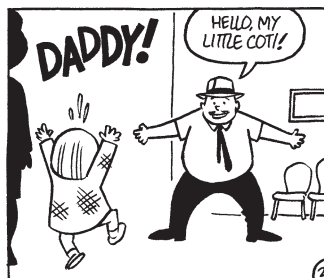
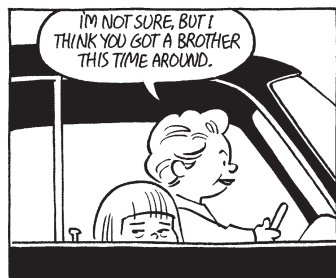
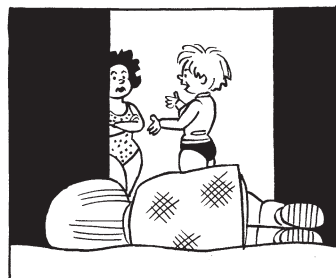
I WAS THE CLOSEST TO KNOWING ANYTHING OF HIS WHEREABOUTS, AND I KNEW ZILCH, SO I KEPT MY MOUTH SHUT. I DECIDED TO KEEP THE ENTIRE TECO - PASSPORT - BLACK OCEAN THING TO MYSELF. IN A WAY, TECO WAS CLAMMING UP, TOO. HELL, I WOULD IF I WERE THE WORLD'S WORST ROBBER.



HE ALSO SAID THAT HIS BOAT WAS FOUND WASHED UP ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. BEFORE I COULD CONFESS, HE ACCUSED HIS BUDDY TECO OF STEALING IT AND SAID THAT HE WOULD CLOBBER HIM - THAT IS, IF HE COULD FIND HIM. IT TURNED OUT THAT TECO HAD PRETTY MUCH DISAPPEARED.



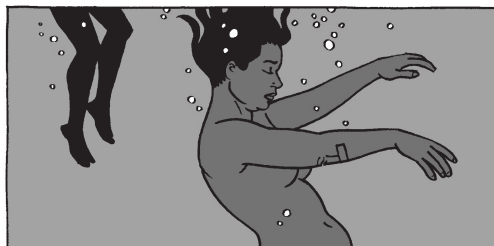
BUT WHAT WAS RENA'S TAKE ON ALL THIS? WAS I IN FOR THE SPANKING OF MY LIFE? IF SHE FOUND OUT ABOUT TECO, WOULD HE GET IT WORSE? I WAS SORT OF HOPING NOT. AFTER ALL, THE BOY DID SAVE MY LIFE. NO, I BELIEVE THE ANSWER CAME AFTER I PUT MYSELF TO BED THAT NIGHT.





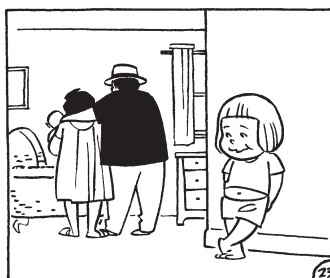
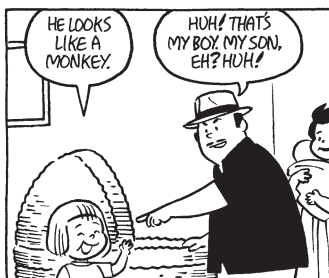
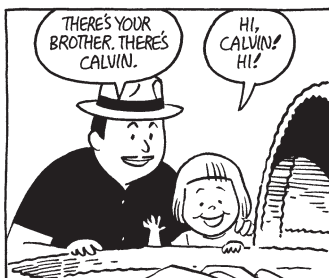
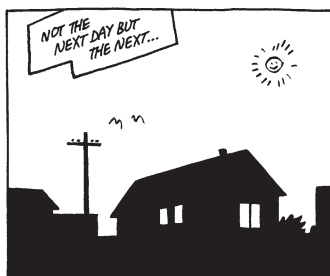
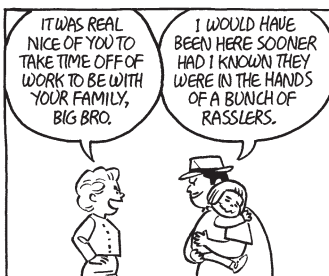
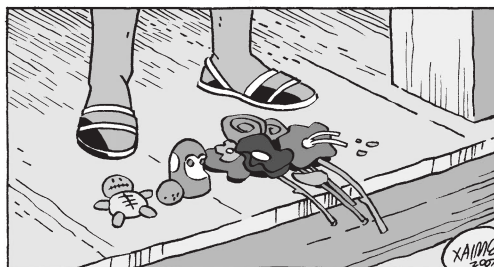
I WAS AFRAID IF I WENT BACK TO SLEEP, THE DREAMS WOULD CONTINUE, SO I TRIED TO CONCENTRATE ON MY DESERT ISLAND ROMANCE FANTASY AND IT ACTUALLY STARTED TO WORK. THE WEIRD THING WAS, MY PARTNER HAD NO FACE. MAYBE THAT WAS BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID TO OPEN MY EYES.

I WAS GETTING ALL HOT AND BOTHERED, THEN MY FANTASY SLIPPED INTO A DREAM. WE ROCKED AND ROLLED ON THE SAND AND PREDICTABLY ENDED UP IN THE WATER AND STARTED TO DROWN. AT LEAST I WAS ABLE TO WAKE UP. MY PARTNER WASN'T SO LUCKY. OH WELL, I WAS GOING HOME IN THE MORNING.



I ROLLED OUT OF BED TO A FAMILIAR SIGHT OF RENA STANDING ON HER PORCH FACING THE DREADED STUMP THAT STUBBORNLY SAT UNMOVED. BUT THIS TIME SHE SEEMED CONCERNED ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER.

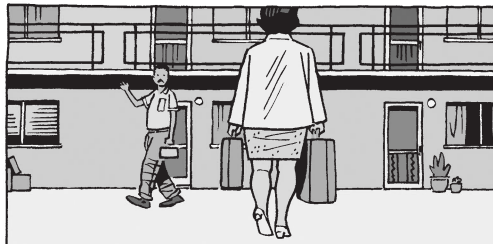
AT HER FEET LAY FLOWERS AND GIFTS LEFT OVERNIGHT BY WHAT SEEMED TO BE FANS AND ADMIRERS. SHE GRUMBLED SOMETHING UNDER HER BREATH ABOUT TRESPASSING BUT I COULD TELL SHE WAS REALLY PRETTY STOKED.





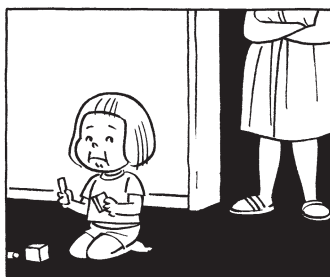
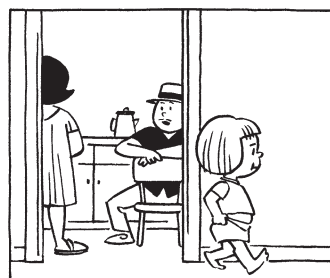
HISTORY IS OFTEN WRITTEN AFTER THE SUBJECT IS DEAD AND GONE AND BY COMPLETE STRANGERS, SO HOW ARE THEY GONNA WRITE ABOUT RENA AND ME? ABOUT MY LOVE AND ADMIRATION FOR HER? THEY'RE NOT GONNA WRITE ABOUT OUR BITTER FIGHTS AN' SHIT. THEN AGAIN, WHY SHOULD THEY?

COMPARED WITH EVERYTHING SHE HAS ACCOMPLISHED IN HER AMAZING LIFE, THAT'S JUST A TEENY-TINY FACT FLOATING SOMEWHERE OUT IN THAT BLACK OCEAN. I GUESS IT WOULD HAVE TO BELONG IN MY OWN BOOK, HUH? "COLLECTING THE RENT—SECRETS OF THE APARTMENT MANAGER."



I TURNED 40 ON THE DAY OF THE BIG TECO ADVENTURE. I THINK IT WAS OBVIOUS WHY I DIDN'T TELL ANYONE. I SIMPLY DID NOT WANT TO BE SEEN AS THE FAT, OLD CITY LADY, EVEN THOUGH THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS SEEN AS. PETTY AND VAIN AS IT SEEMS, THAT WAS MY BIRTHDAY WISH.

NOW, WITH ALL THAT SAID AND DONE, I'M GLAD I NEVER TOLD ANYONE, BECAUSE I FEEL THAT THAT WAS MY VERY OWN SPECIAL NIGHT. ONE THAT SOMEDAY WILL BE TOLD ABOUT IN MY OWN BOOK. THE END.



ANNO DOMINI.

COOPERMAN COMICS GROUP

T-GIRLS

ADVENTURES

OCT NO. 33

INTRODUCING...
BOOT ANGEL!

**LOOK
OUT!**

THERE SEEMS TO BE
SOMETHING ALIVE INSIDE
THOSE METEORITES!

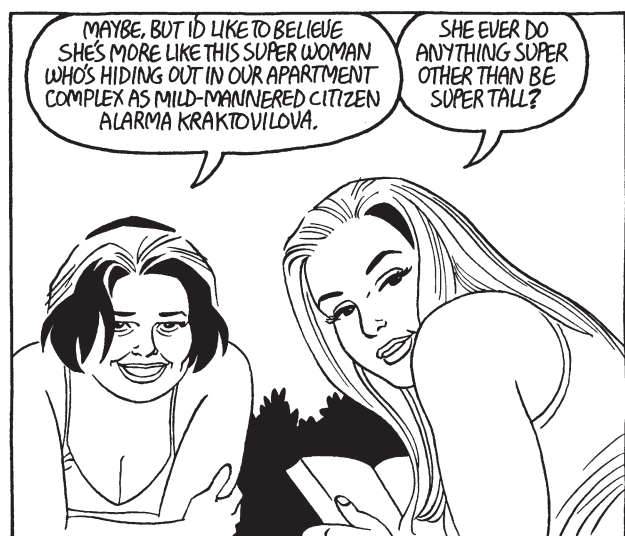


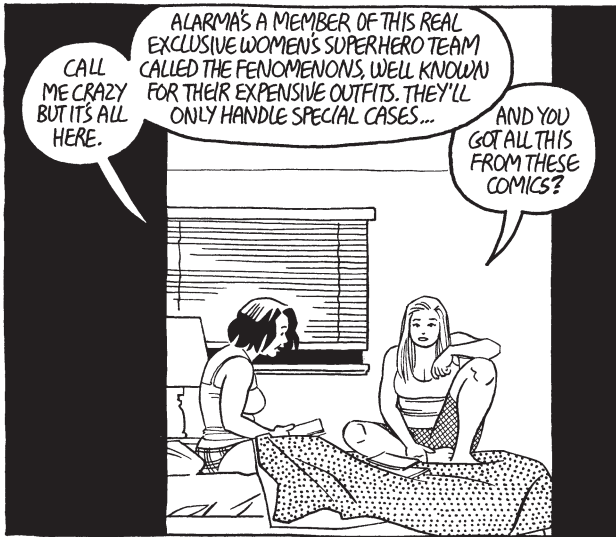
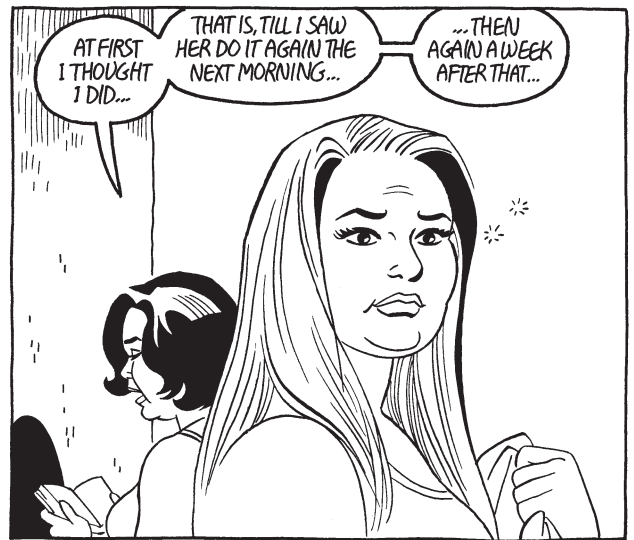
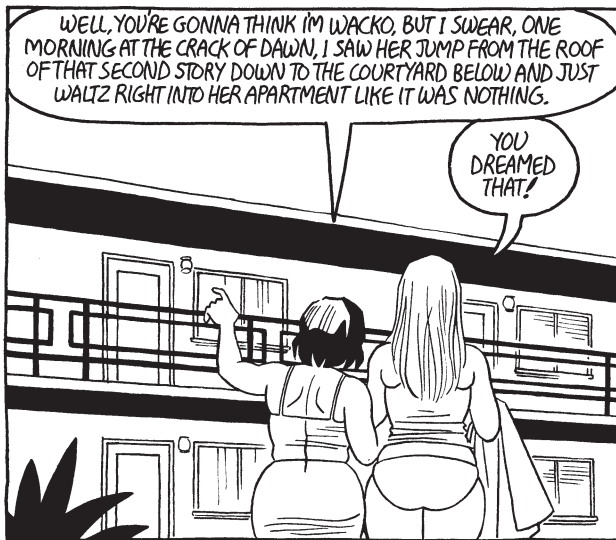
NEW STORIES!

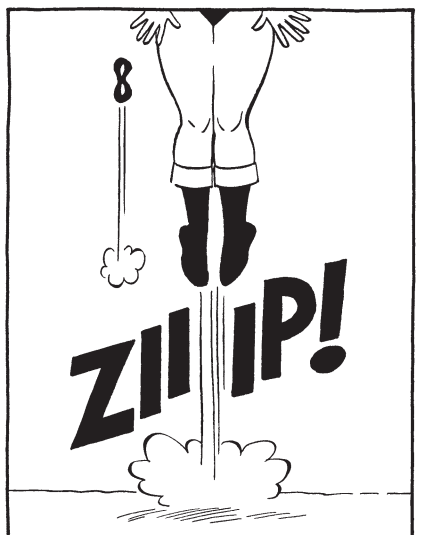
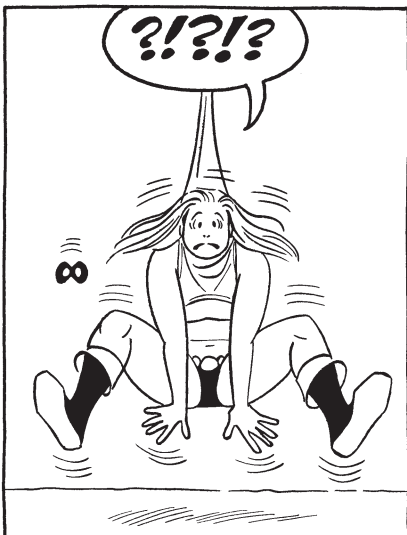
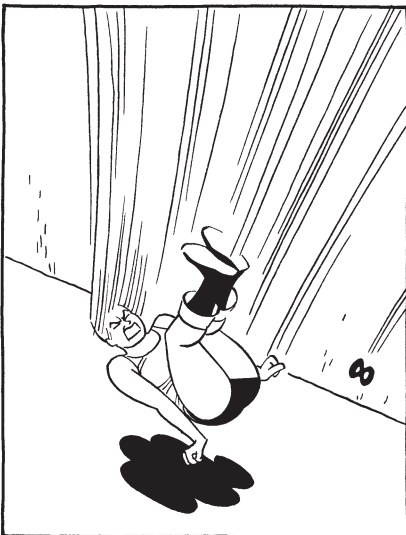
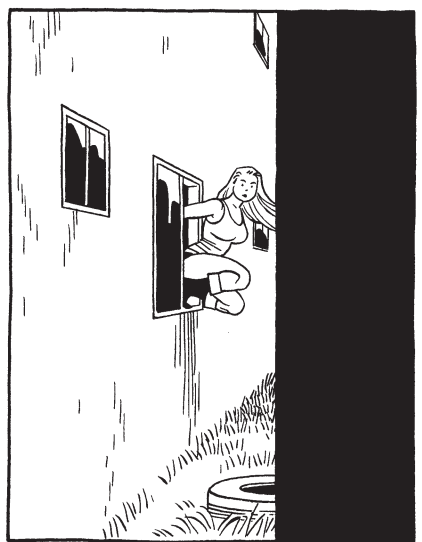
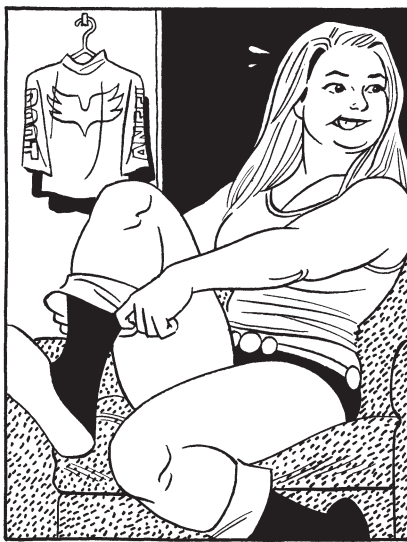
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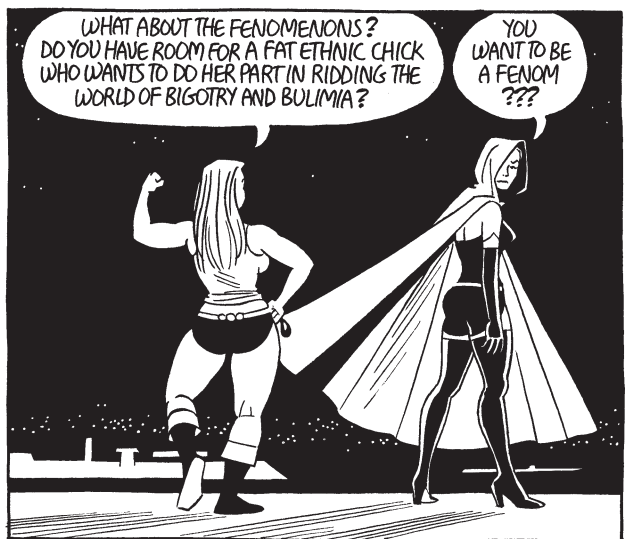
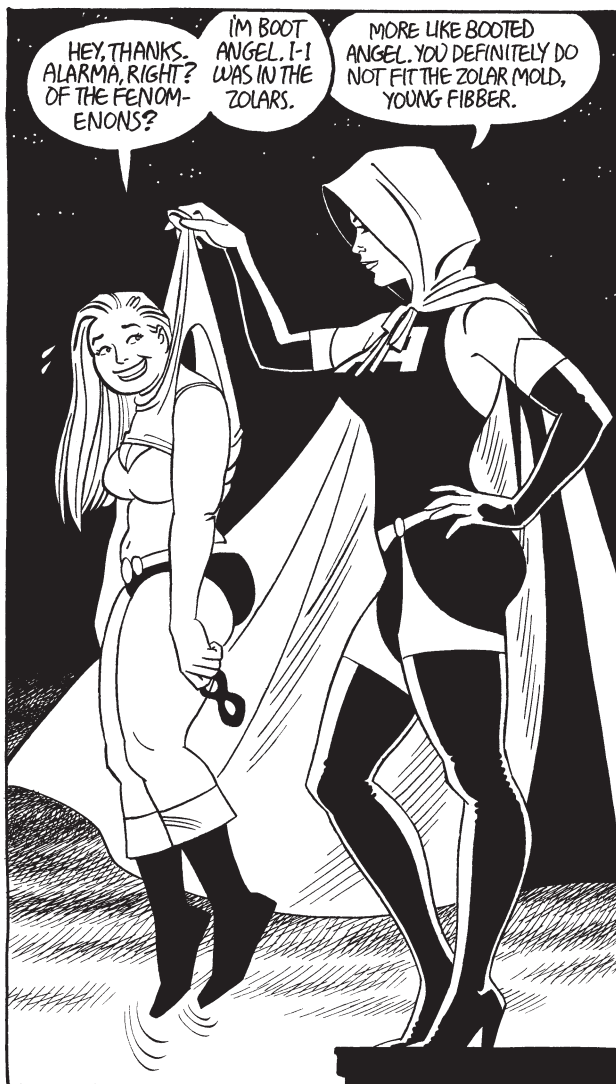
THE SEARCH FOR PENNYCENTURY

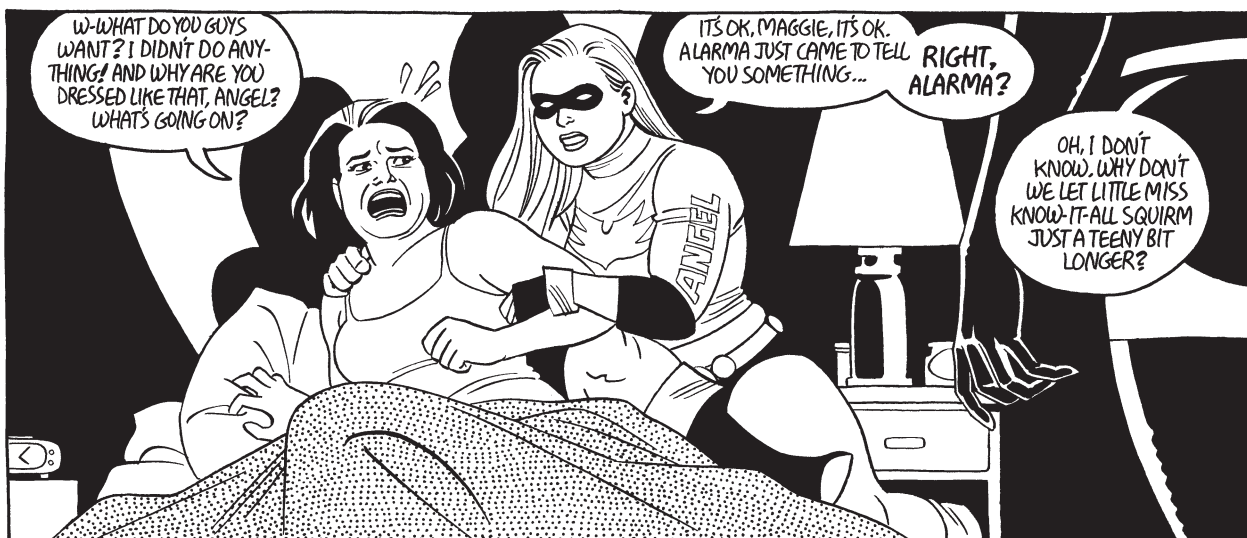
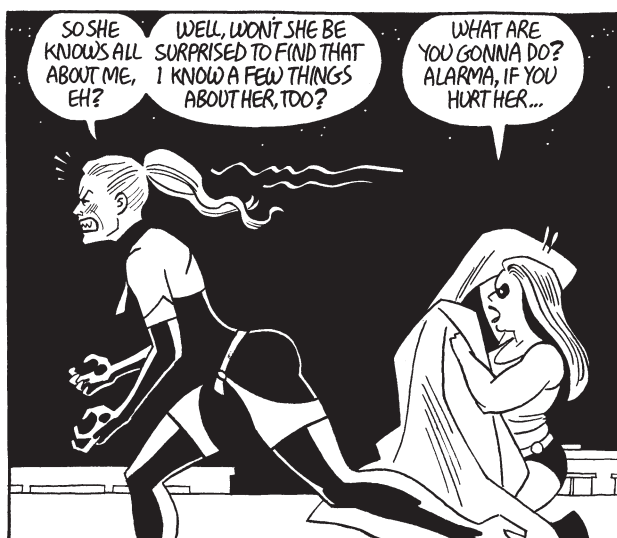
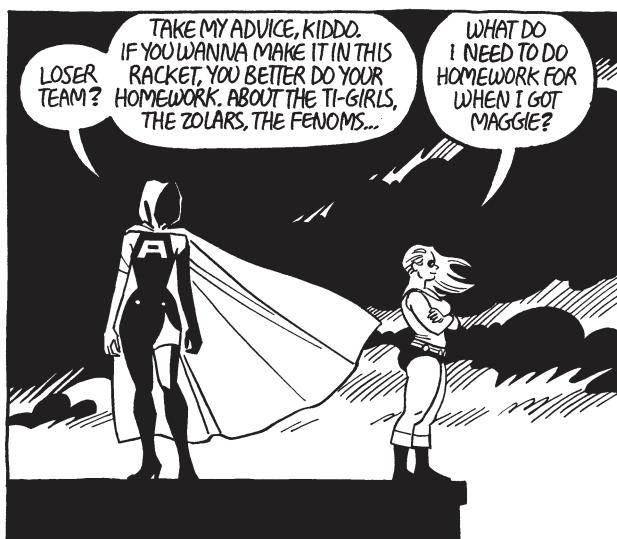
XAIMC 2006
2007

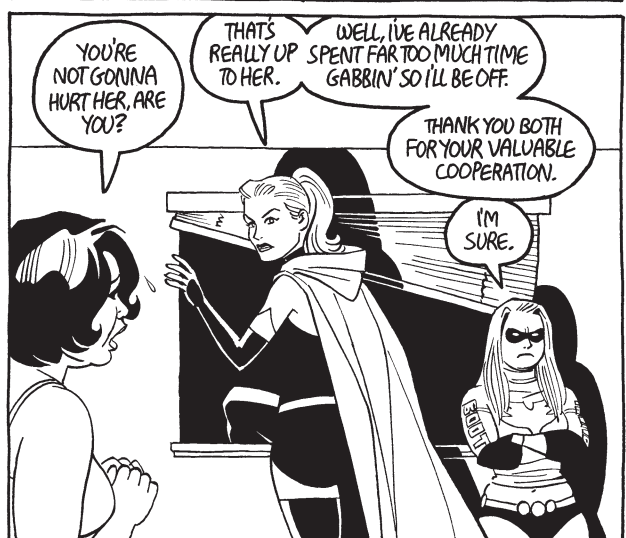
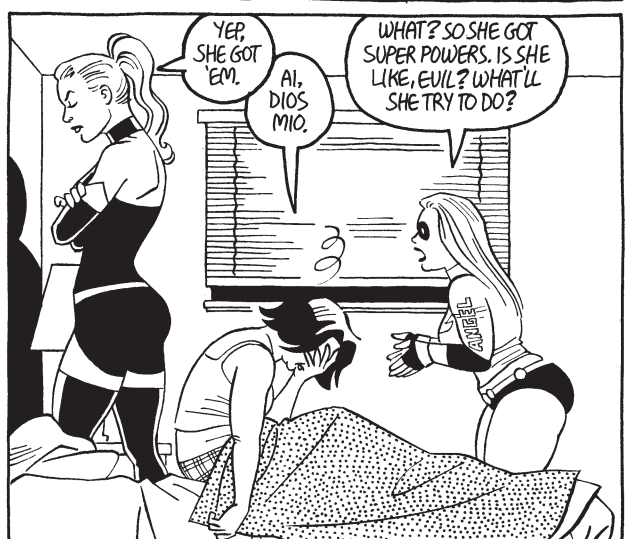
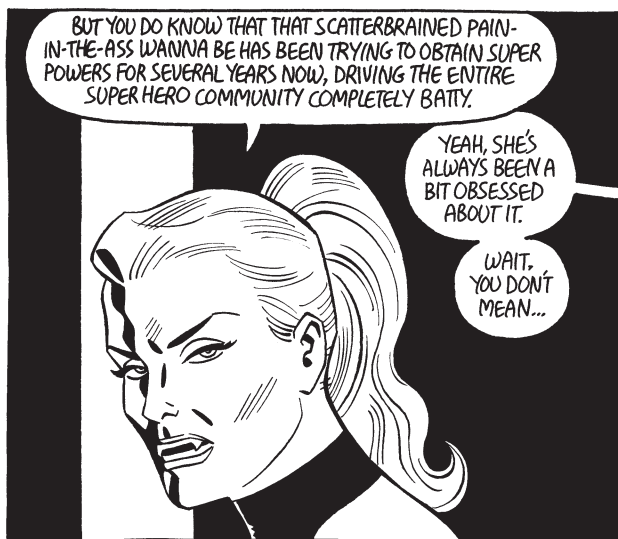
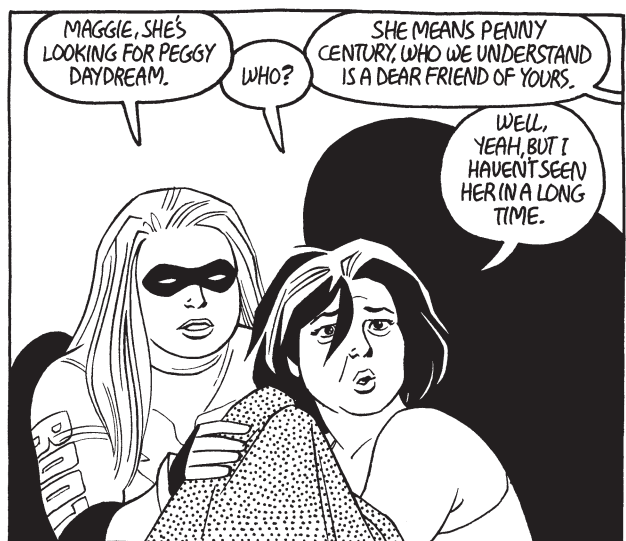


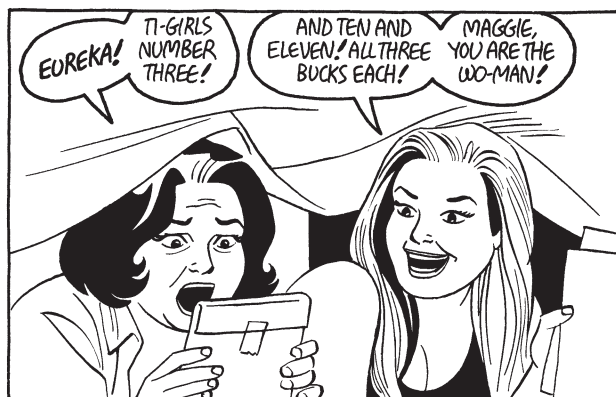
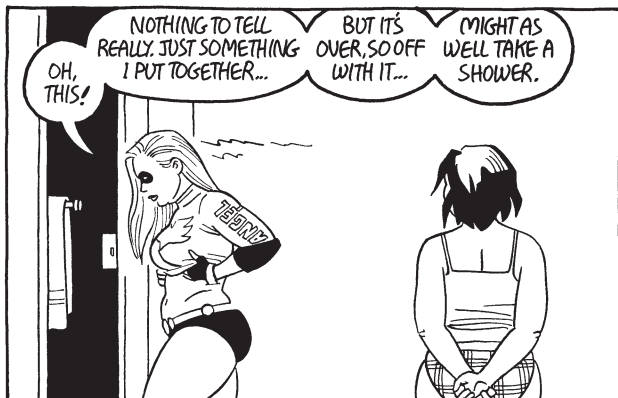
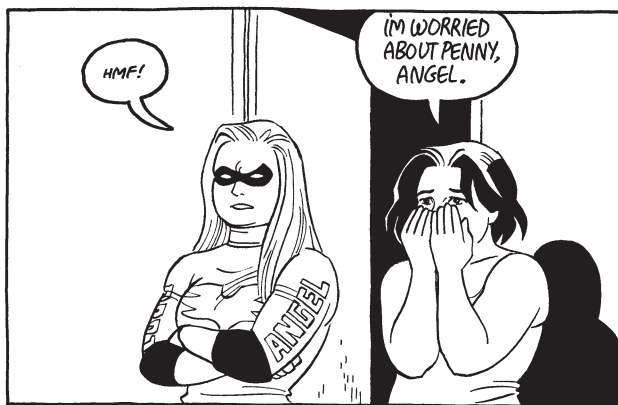


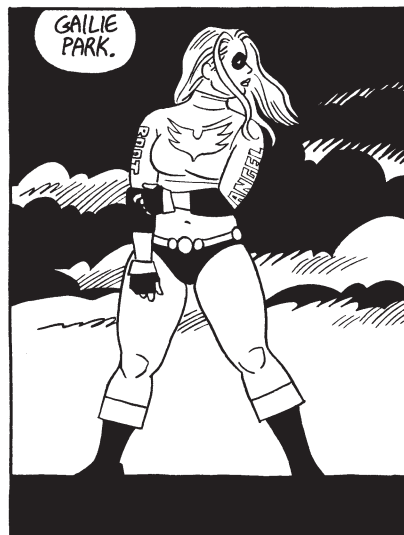
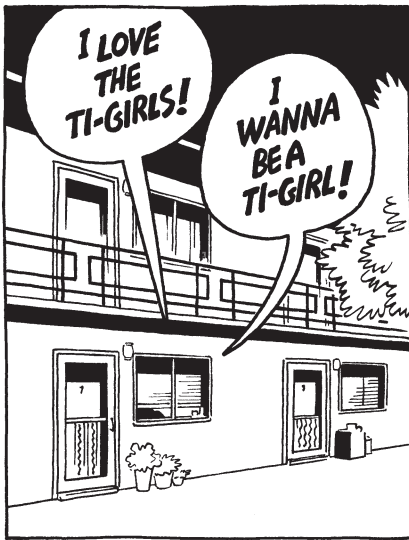


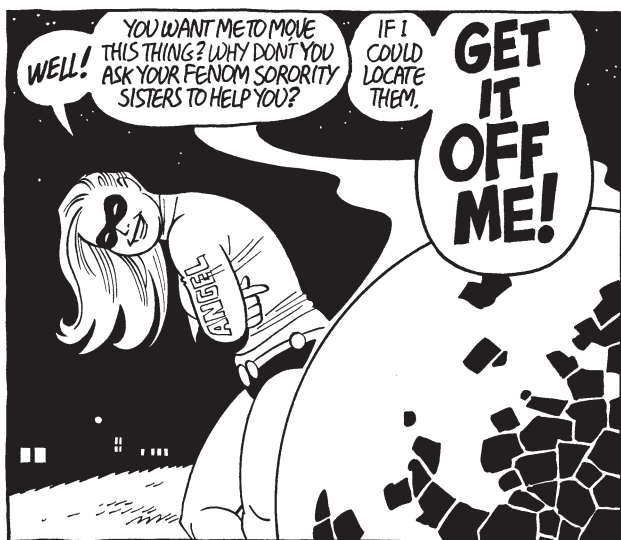


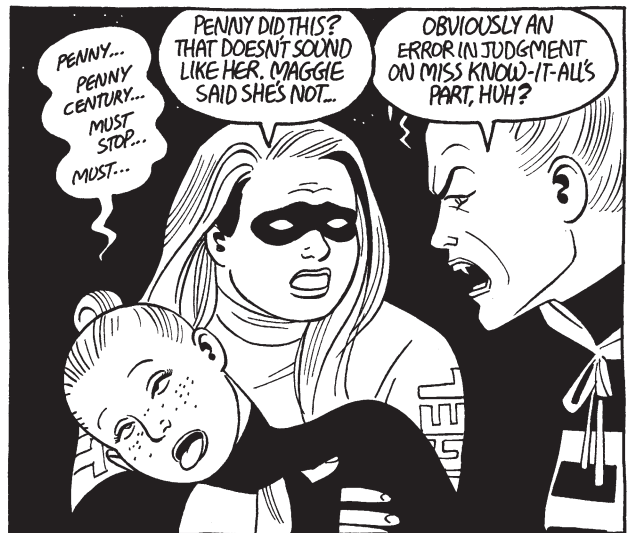
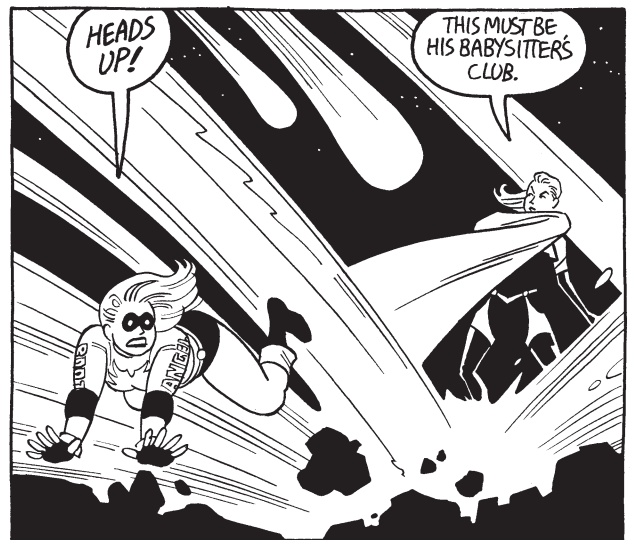


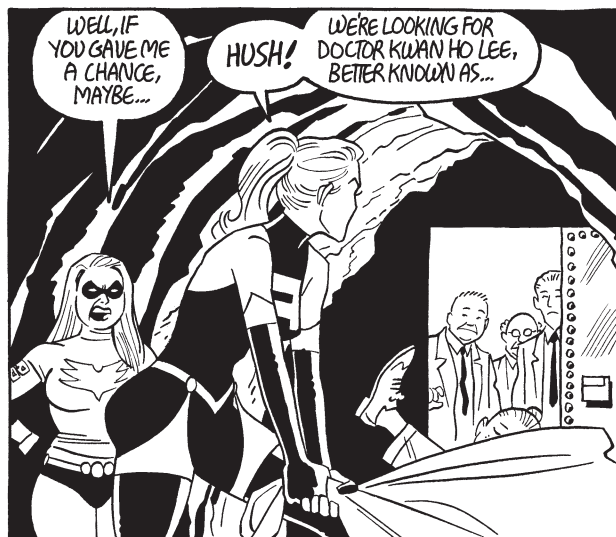




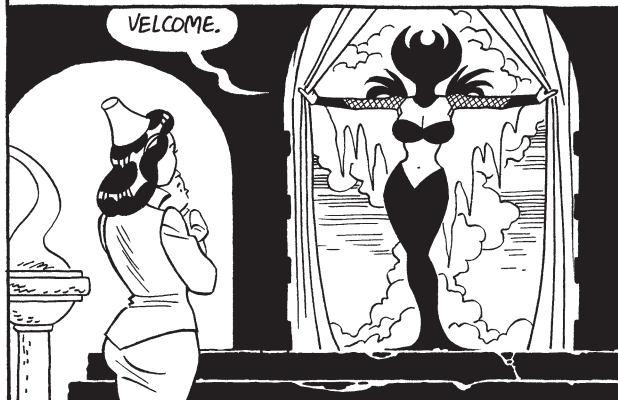




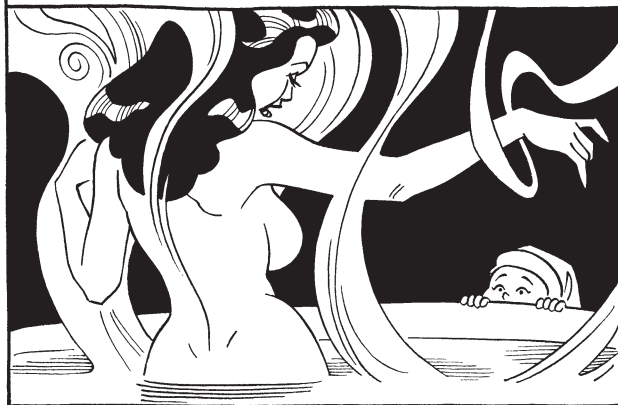




"SHE GOT A TIP ABOUT A HAS-BEEN SORCERER NAMED VAKKA BOOME WHO HAD CLAIMED TO HAVE DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF OBTAINING THE 'GIFT.' PENNY WAS WARNED REPEATEDLY THAT IT WAS MOST LIKELY A SCAM, BUT BY THIS TIME, SHE WAS DESPERATE, DETERMINED AND DEAF TO ALL SKEPTICISM.



"THE PROCESS WAS SIMPLE AND PAINLESS AND TO EVERYONE'S AMAZEMENT (AND CHAGRIN) IT WORKED. FINALLY PENNY HAD FULFILLED HER LIFELONG DREAM TO FLY AMONG THE GIFTED, EVEN THOUGH THE GIFTED WOULD NEVER FLY AMONG HER AFTER THE CONTROVERSIAL AGREEMENT SHE MADE WITH VAKKA.



"AND THEY WERE OFF. OFF ON A MISSION, NOT TO AID THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE, BUT TO HAVE FUN AND CAUSE MISCHIEF WHEREVER THEY PLEASED. PENNY WAS FLYING HIGH. SO HIGH, SHE FAILED TO NOTICE THE INCREDIBLE CHANGE LITTLE MAITE WAS GOING THROUGH.



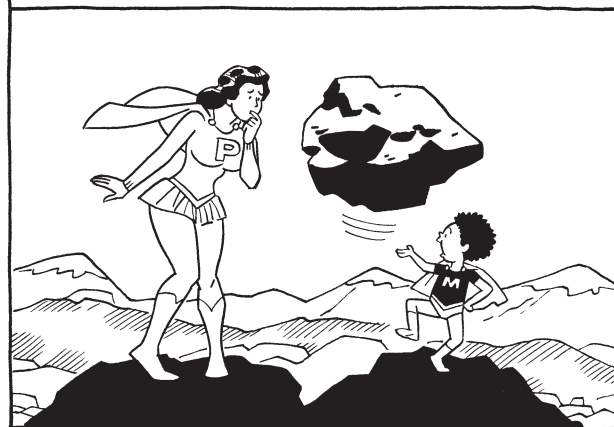
"VAKKA'S CONTRACT WAS STANDARD BUT OUTDATED. INSTEAD OF MONEY AS PAYMENT, SHE WOULD GET PENNY'S NEXT BORN CHILD. STILL, PENNY SIGNED. AFTER ALL, SHE THOUGHT, WOMEN GIVE THEIR BABIES UP FOR ADOPTION EVERY DAY, DON'T THEY?



"VAKKA WAS ACTUALLY MORE ELATED ABOUT THE ACHIEVEMENT THAN PENNY. AS SHE CELEBRATED BY DANCING AROUND LIKE AN IDIOT, PENNY SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET MORE BANG FOR HER BUCK AND QUICKLY DIPPED HER LITTLE DAUGHTER MAITE INTO THE MAGIC BATH WATER THAT HAD TRANSFORMED HER.



"HER GROWTH RATE HAD STARTED TO INCREASE TO WHERE SHE HAD AGED A FULL YEAR IN THE PERIOD OF A SINGLE MONTH. PENNY CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE MAGIC BATH WATER'S POTENCY WAS TOO EXTREME FOR MAITE'S LITTLE SYSTEM.



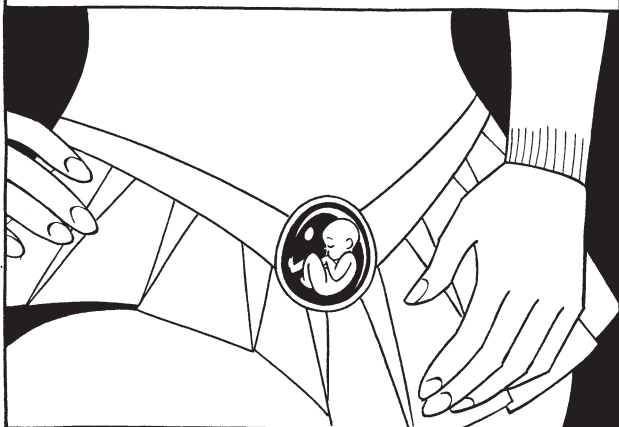
"AN OUTRAGED PENNY ACCUSED VAKKA OF FOUL PLAY. VAKKA BLAMED IT ON PENNY'S SELFISHNESS. AN INTENSE FEUD BEGAN THAT ESCALATED INTO AN ALL-OUT WAR. IT BECAME SO INTENSE, THAT SIX MONTHS INTO IT, PENNY FAILED TO NOTICE A CHANGE SHE HERSELF HAD GONE THROUGH.



"PENNY WAS NEARLY NINE MONTHS PREGNANT, YET SHE WAS NOT SHOWING. DOCTORS CONFIRMED THAT HER BABY WAS IN PERFECT HEALTH, BUT THAT AT BIRTH, IT WOULD BE A MERE ONE INCH IN SIZE. PERHAPS ONE MORE VICTIM OF THE MYSTERIOUS MAGICAL BATH WATER.



"ONE MORNING BETWEEN BATTLES, HER BABY WAS BORN. NOW, WHETHER IT WAS IN WRITING OR NOT, IN NO WAY WAS PENNY GIVING IT UP TO VAKKA BOOME. SHE NAMED HER THIMBELINA AND KEPT HER SAFE INSIDE A CHARM ATTACHED TO HER BELT.



"THIS INFURIATED VAKKA EVEN MORE AND THE WAR ESCALATED TO GALACTIC PROPORTIONS, AS IT BECAME TOO BIG FOR EARTH. TEN MORE GRUELING MONTHS OF INTENSE GIVE AND TAKE HAD PASSED WHEN THE TIDE FINALLY SHIFTED TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE MORE EXPERIENCED VAKKA.



"AN EXHAUSTED PENNY WAS DOWN FOR THE COUNT AND VAKKA WAS ZEROING IN FOR THE KILL, WHEN A NOW TEENAGED MAITE CAME TO HER MOTHER'S RESCUE AND FINISHED OFF THE EQUALLY EXHAUSTED VAKKA WITH A SUPER RIGHT CROSS THAT SENT HER SAILING OFF INTO ETERNITY.



"PENNY WAS SO PROUD AND WANTED TO CELEBRATE WITH HER TWO DAUGHTERS WHEN MAITE DEALT A CRUSHING BLOW. SHE WAS LEAVING PENNY FOREVER, OFF TO SEE THE UNIVERSE. AFTER ALL, SHE ONLY HAD A GOOD SIX OR SEVEN YEARS BEFORE SHE WOULD DIE OF OLD AGE.



"PENNY WAS CRUSHED TO LOSE HER DAUGHTER MAITE SO SOON IN LIFE, BUT WAS DOUBLY CRUSHED WHEN THE CHARM THAT CARRIED HER FOURTH DAUGHTER WAS GONE FROM HER BELT. WHO COULD TELL WHEN, HOW OR WHERE IT HAPPENED DURING THE INTENSE TEN MONTH BATTLE?"



THIS THREW PENNY INTO A MENTALLY DESTRUCTIVE STATE THAT SOMEHOW INCREASED HER POWER A HUNDREDFOLD, THUS, BRANDING HER A THREAT TO LIFE IN HEAVEN ITSELF.



MY SUGGESTION IS TO FIND HER DAUGHTERS. THAT MAY SOUND EASIER SAID THAN DONE, BUT IT MAY BE THE ONE THING THAT'LL SAVE US ALL.

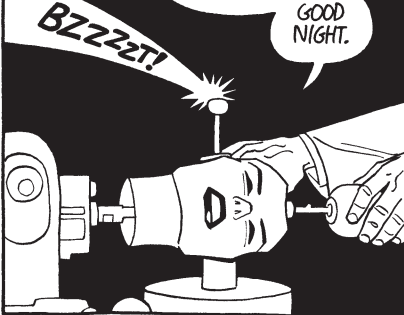


I WISH I COULD HELP YOU BUT THERE'S NO TELLING HOW LONG I'LL BE LAID UP.

I MUST GO TO SLEEP NOW.

MAY GOD AND SCIENCE GO WITH YOU.

GOOD NIGHT.

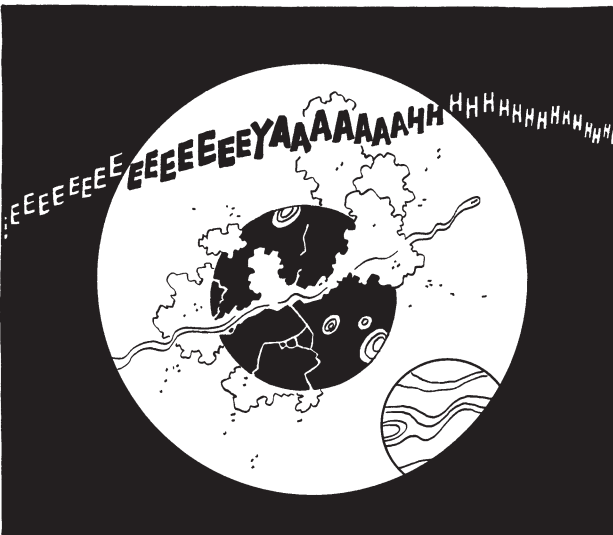


LAYS IT ON PRETTY THICK, DON'T SHE?

UH HUH.



BUT WE CAN DO THIS, RIGHT? I MEAN...



THAT DISTANT FLASH. THAT SAD, SAD CRY...

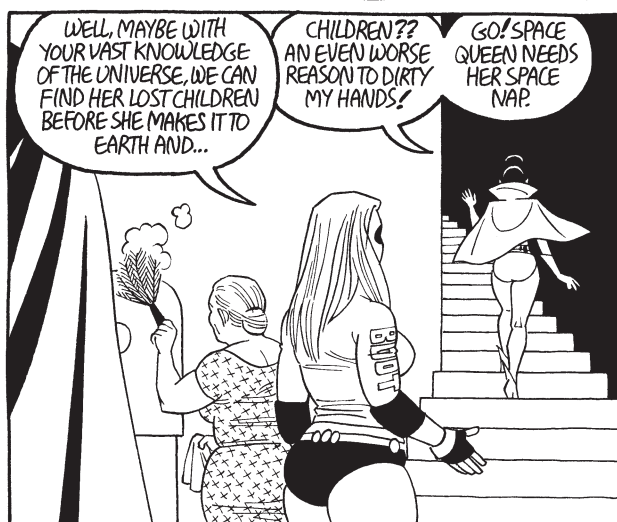
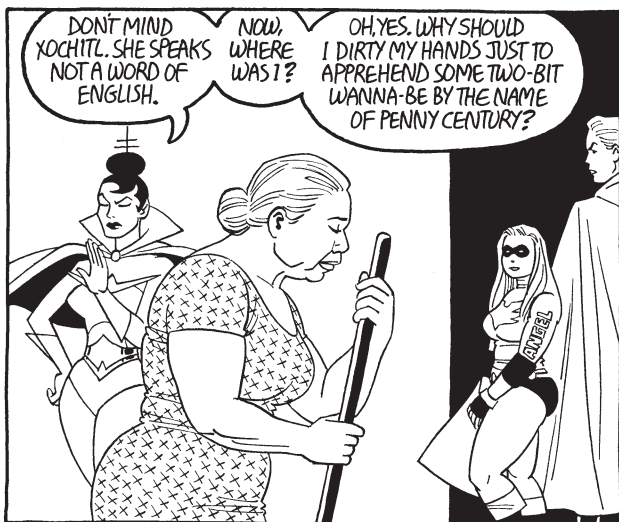
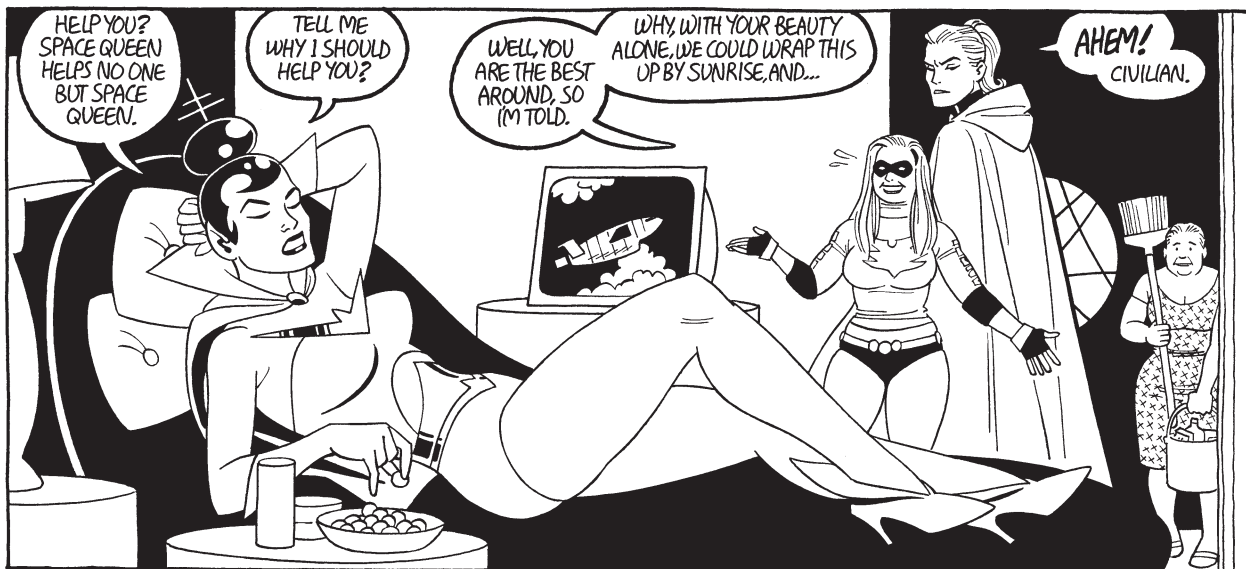
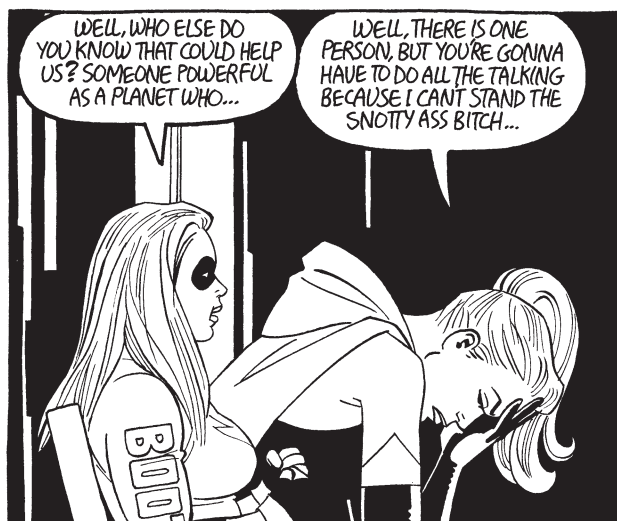
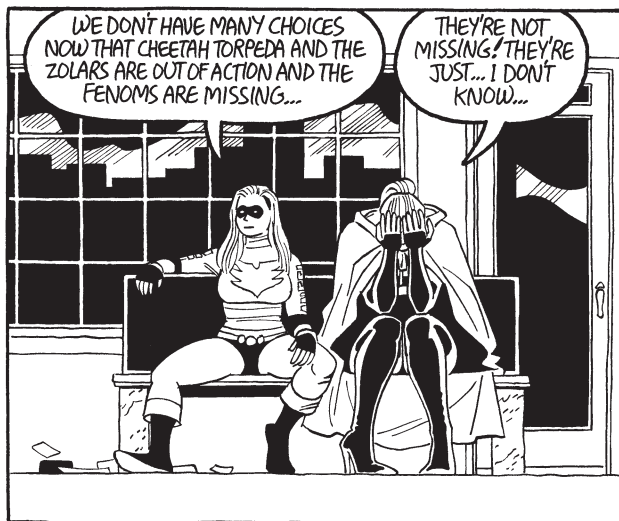
PENNY?

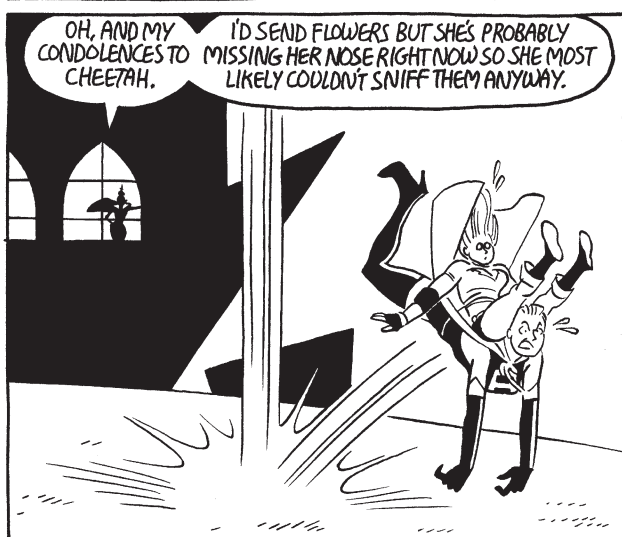
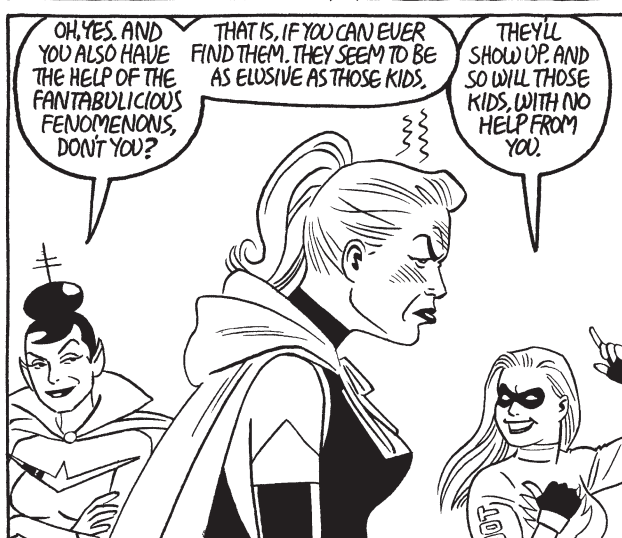
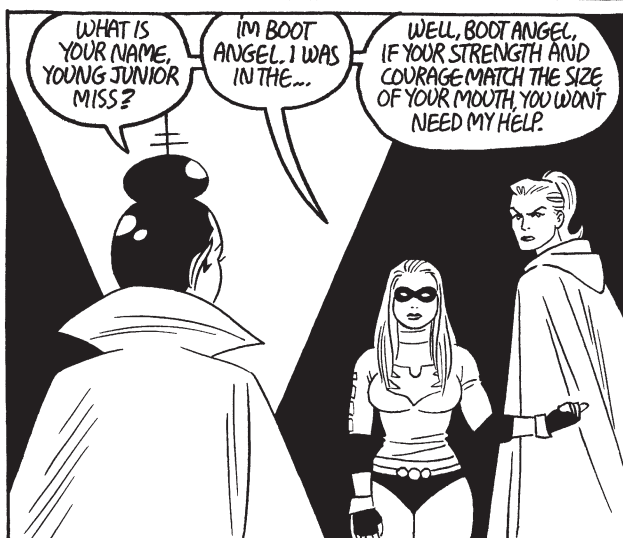
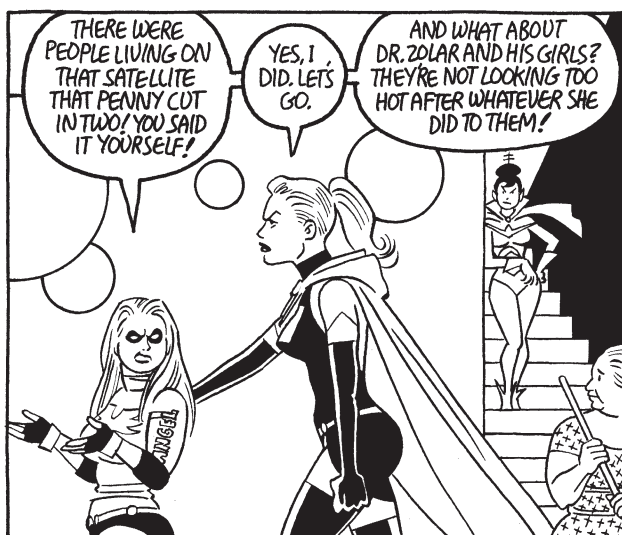
UH HUH.

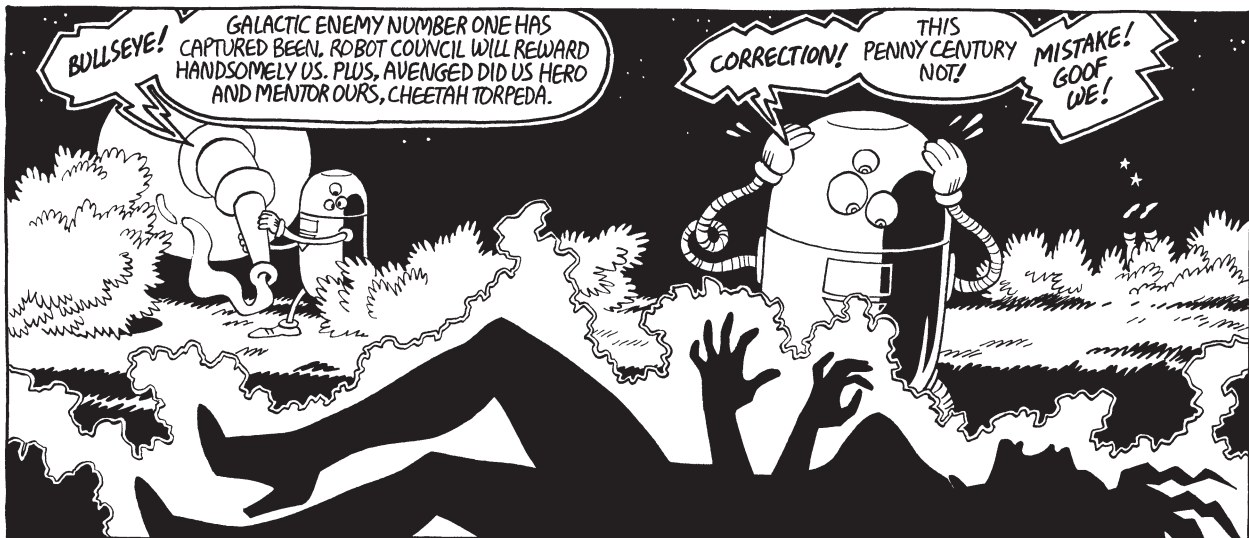
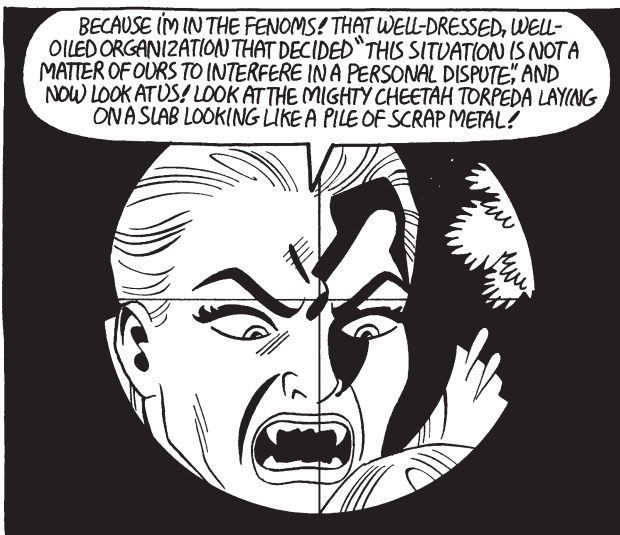
WE'RE GONNA NEED MORE HELP, AREN'T WE?

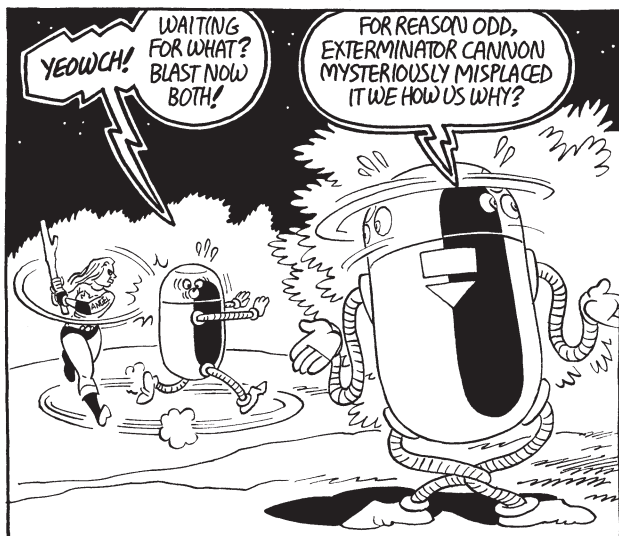
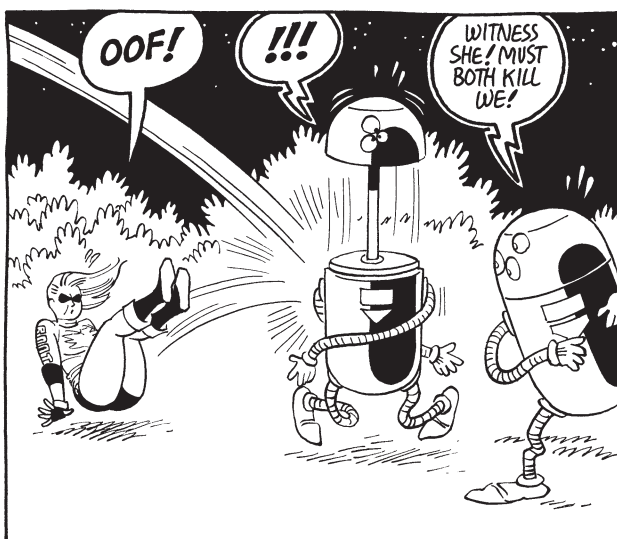
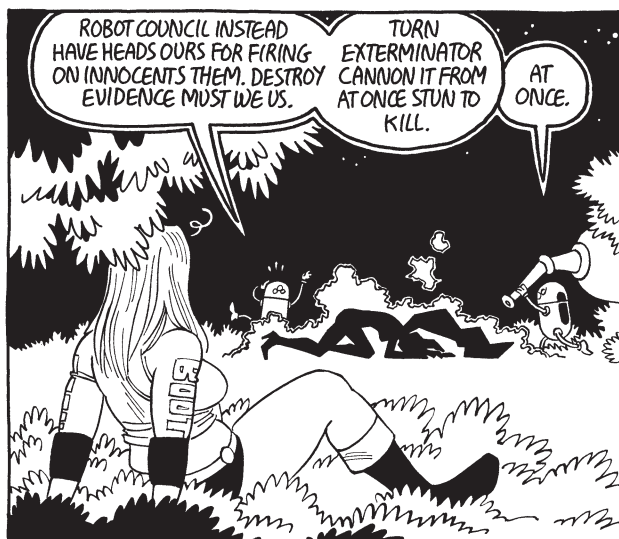
UH HUH.

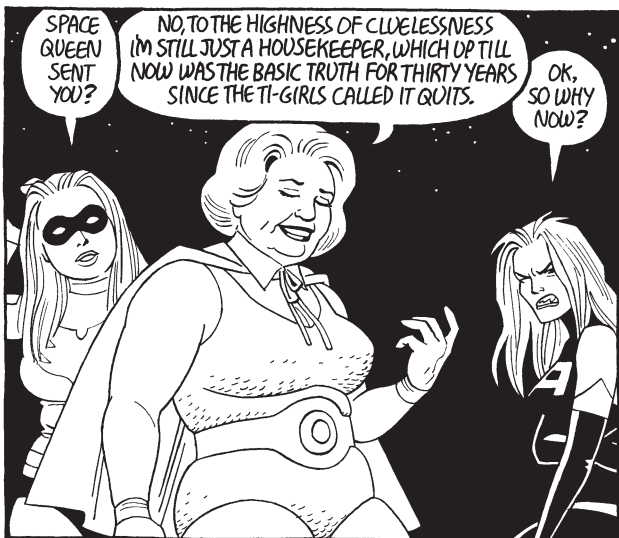
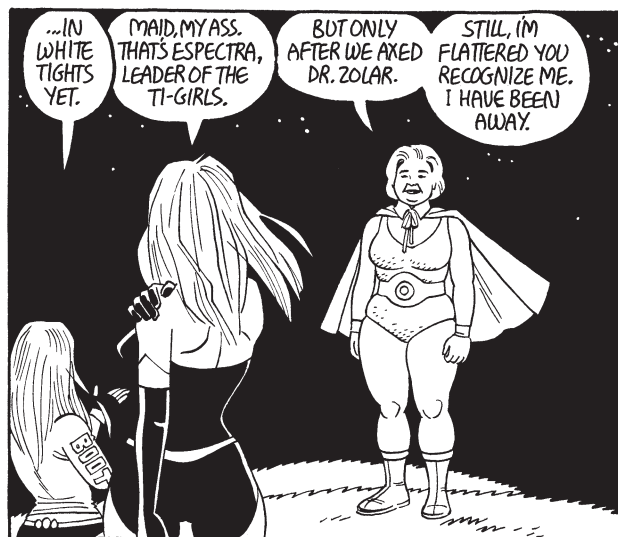
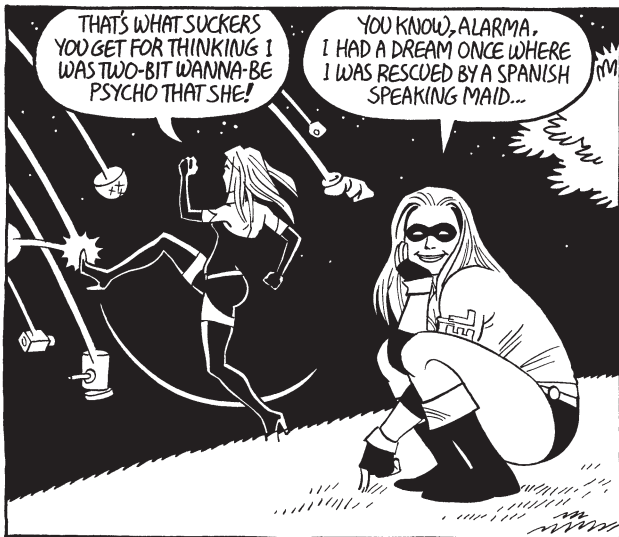
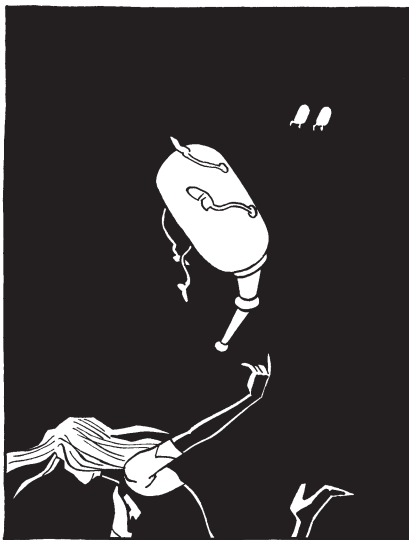


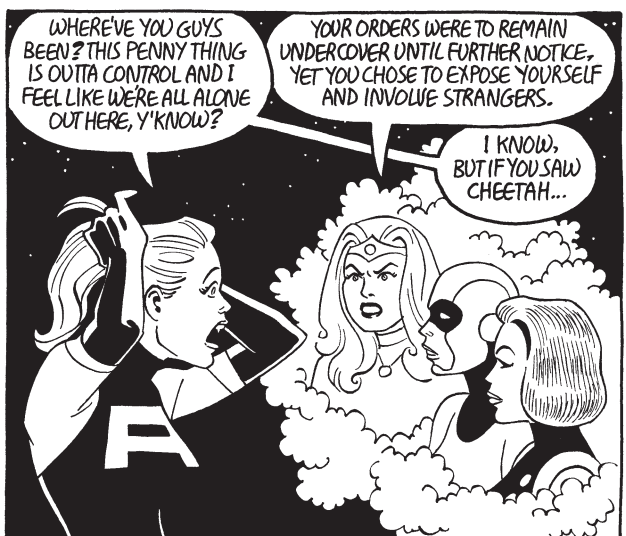
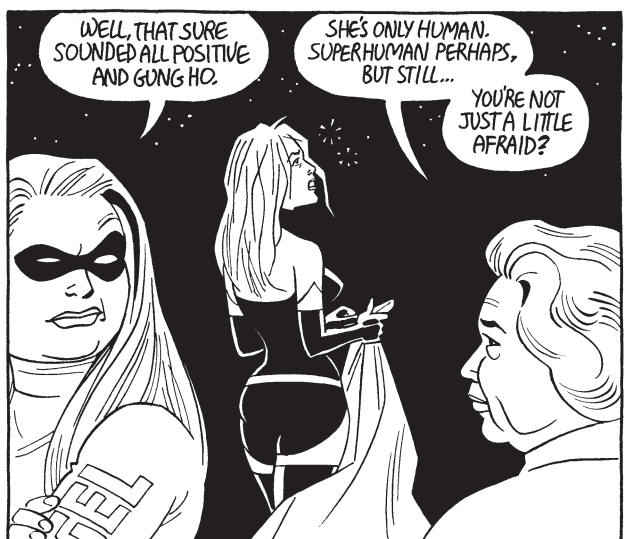
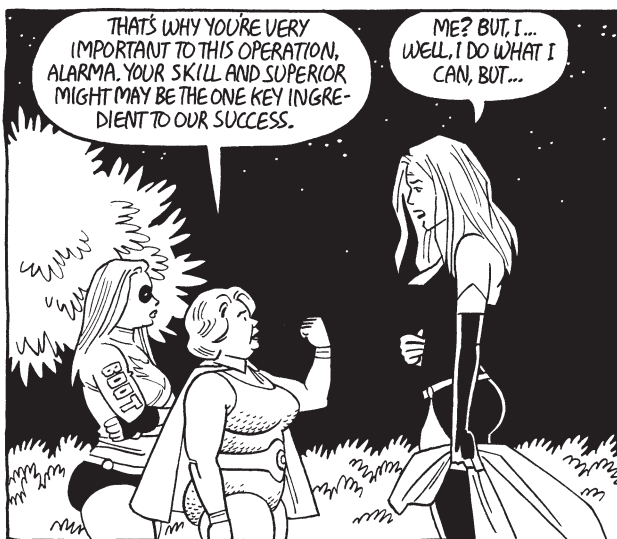


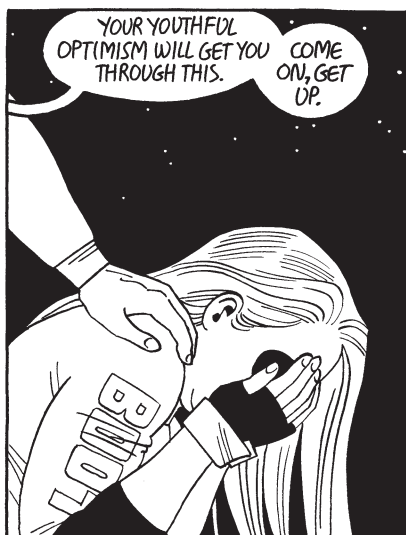
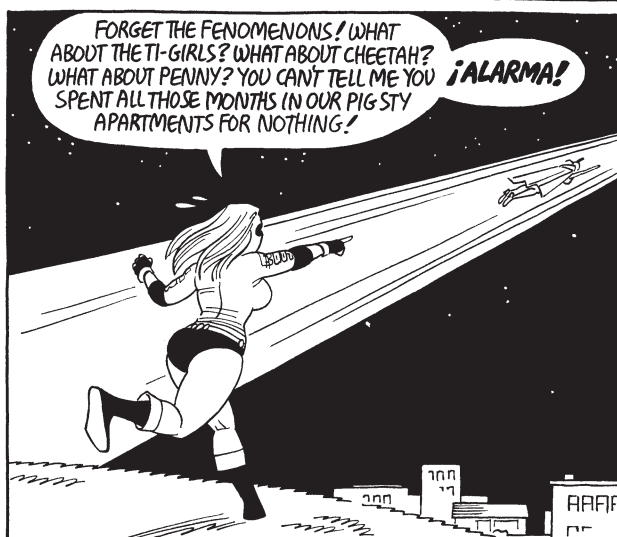
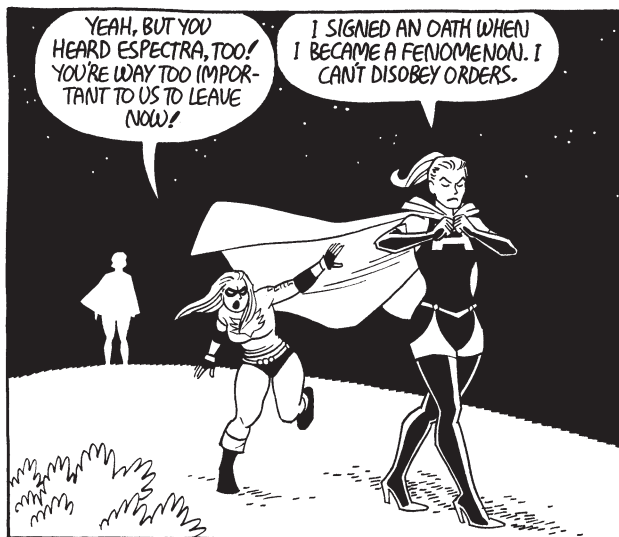
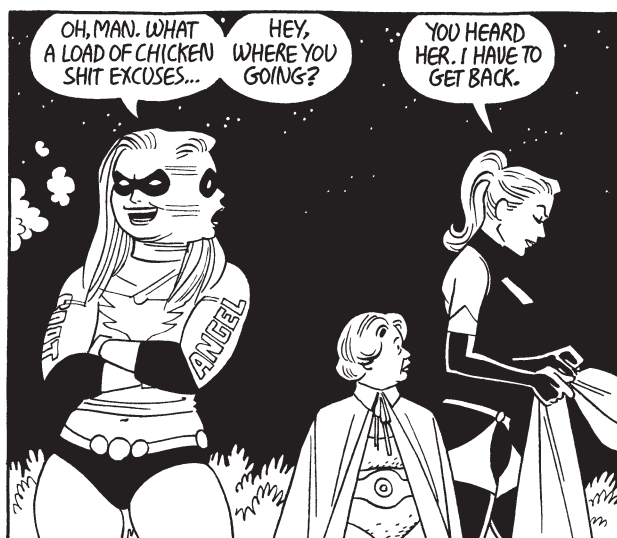


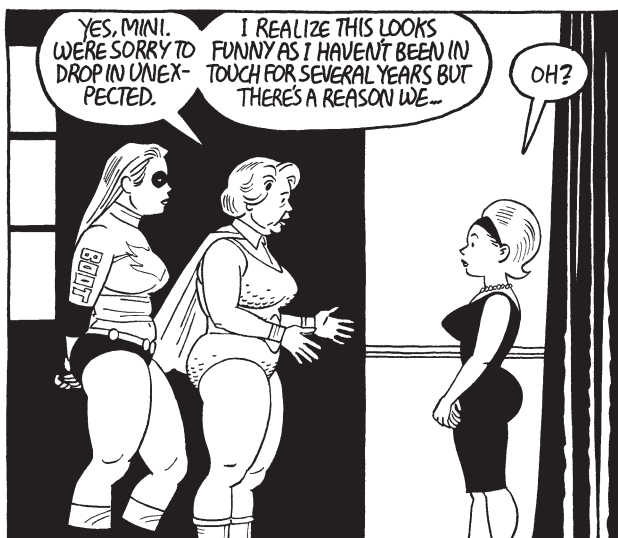
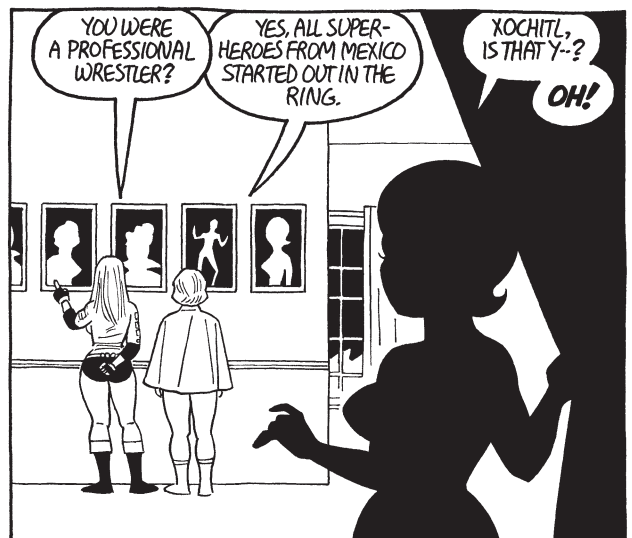
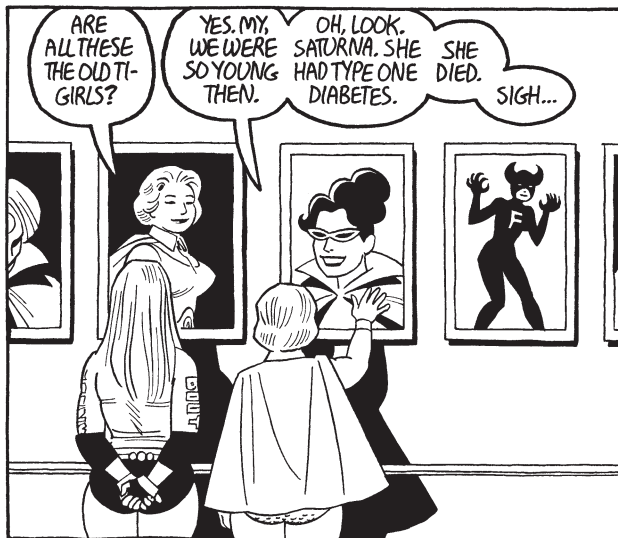
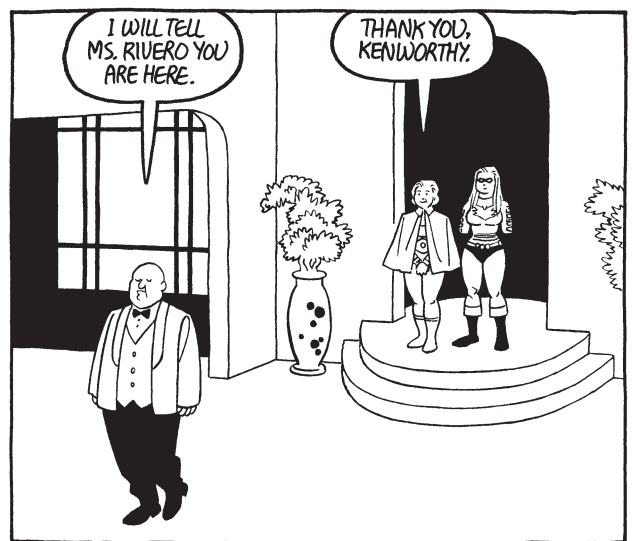


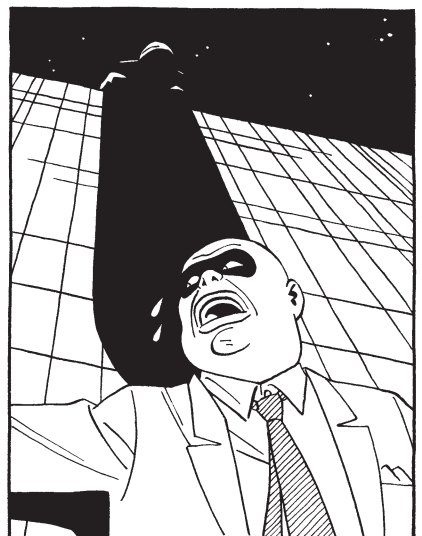
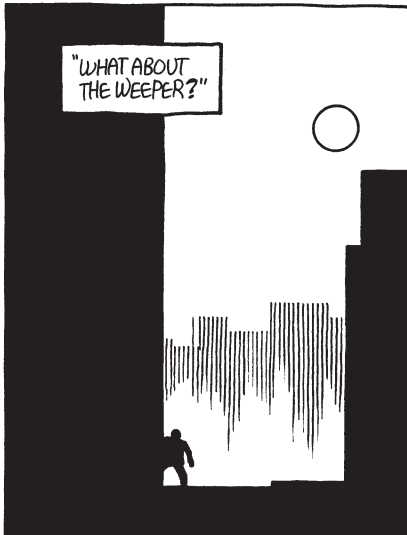
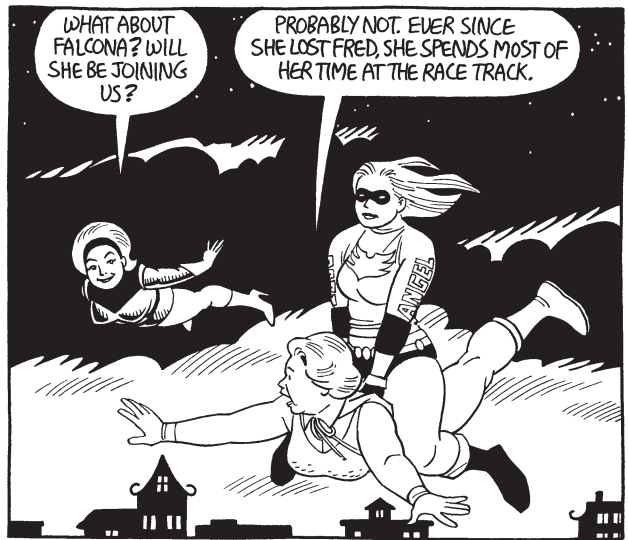
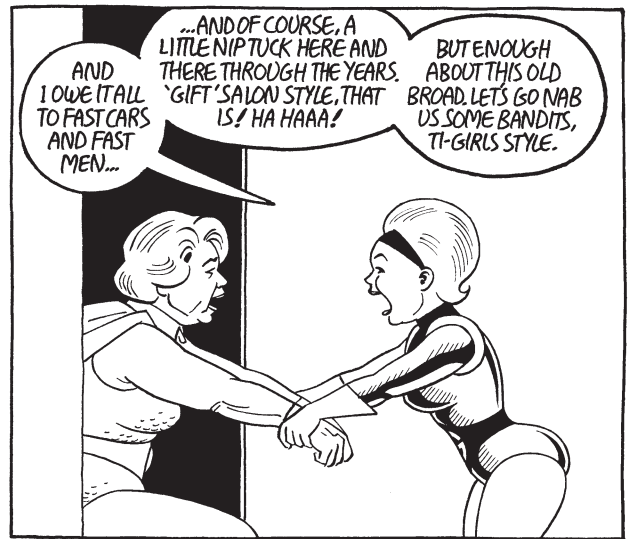
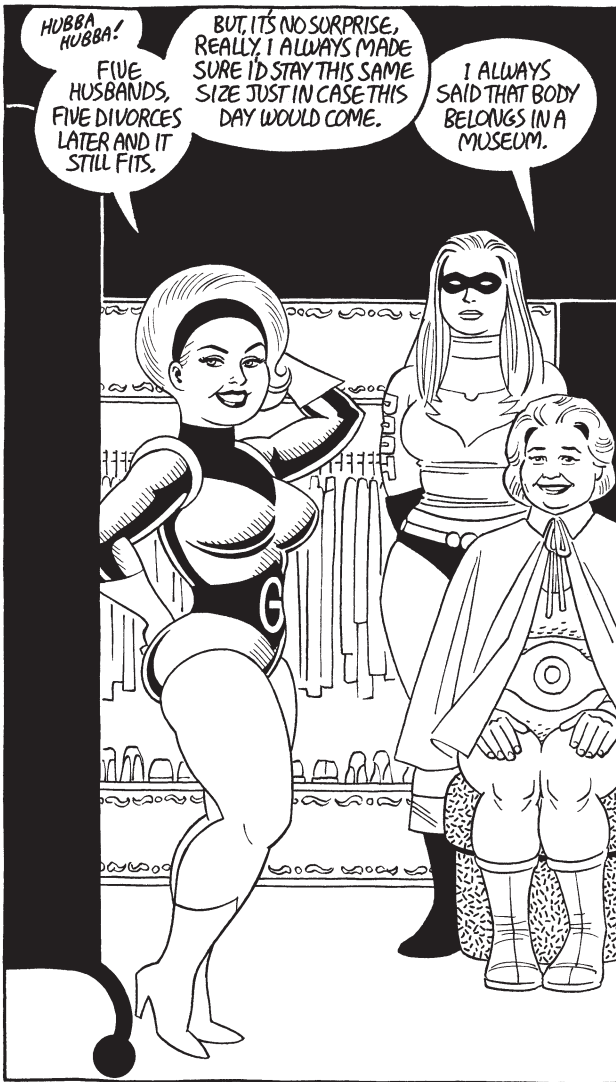


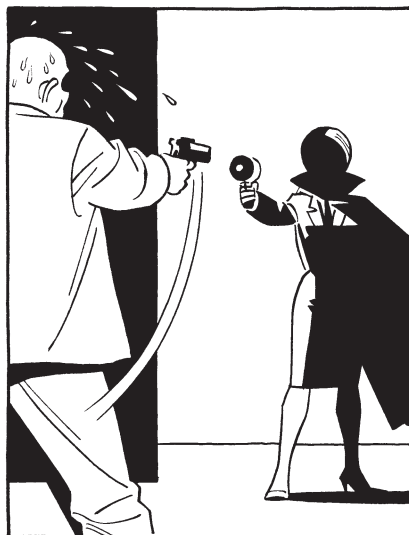
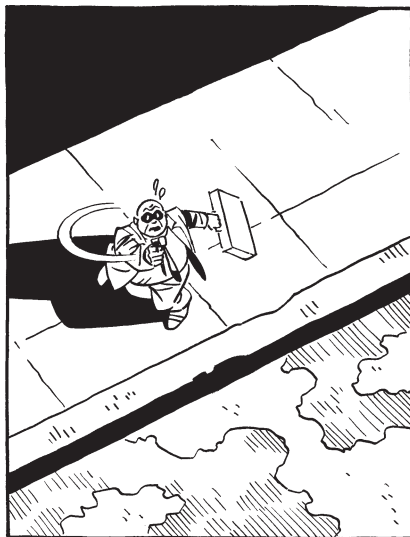


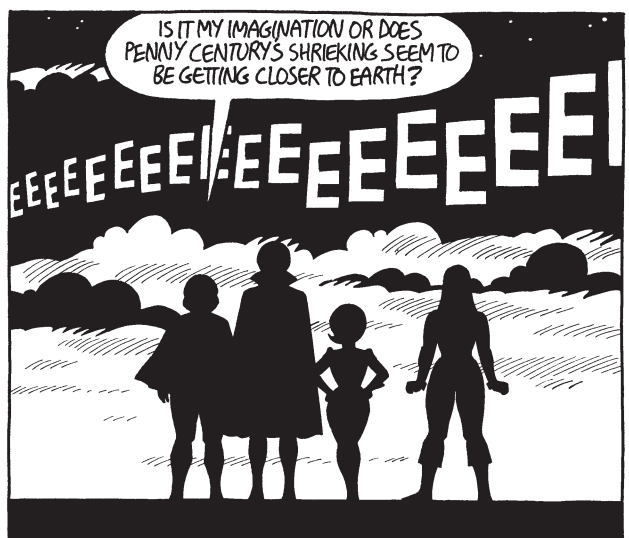
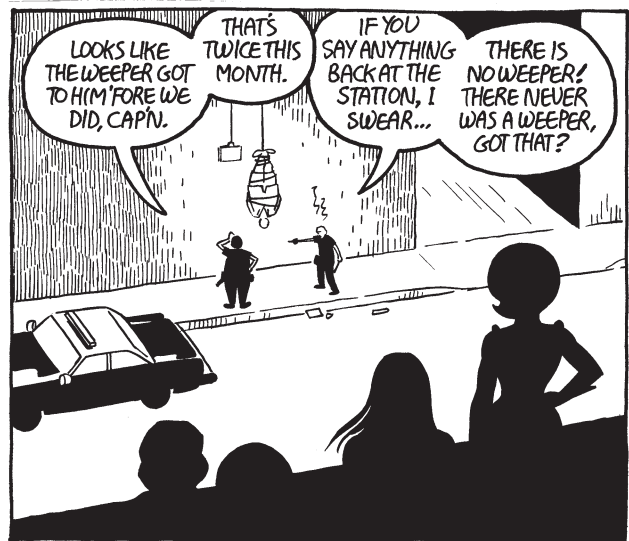
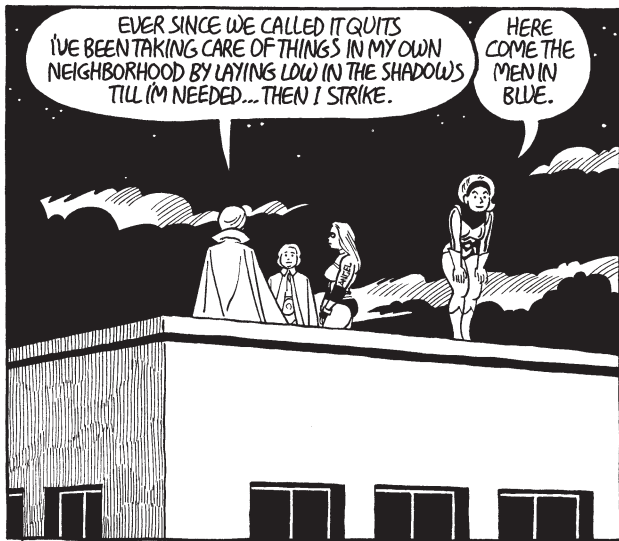
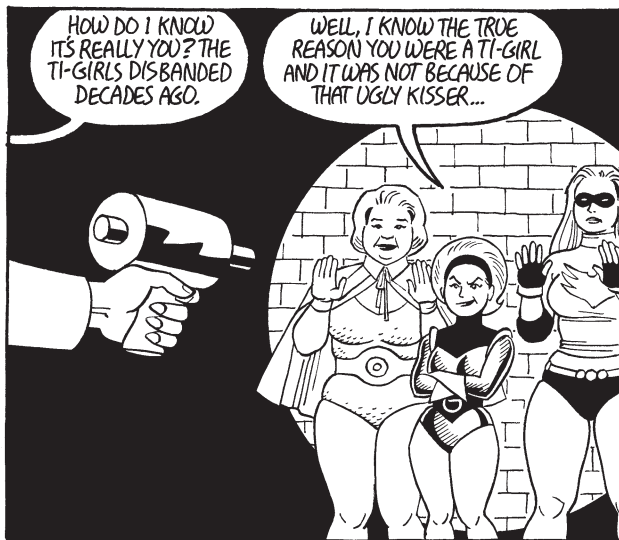














COOPERMAN COMICS GROUP

TI-GIRLS

ADVENTURES

DEC NO. 34

GANGWAY!

SHE'S TURNED
HERSELF INTO A
PENNY BOMB!



XAIME
2006 -
2008

PART

2

PENNY is FOUND

HERE SHE COMES, LIKE A BAT OUT OF HELL IN A HAND BASKET!

SHE LOOKS PRETTY UPSET, DOESN'T SHE?

MORE MAD. MAD WITH GRIEF.

WELL, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? LET'S GO!



ANGEL, WAIT! LET'S DO THIS TI-GIRLS STYLE!

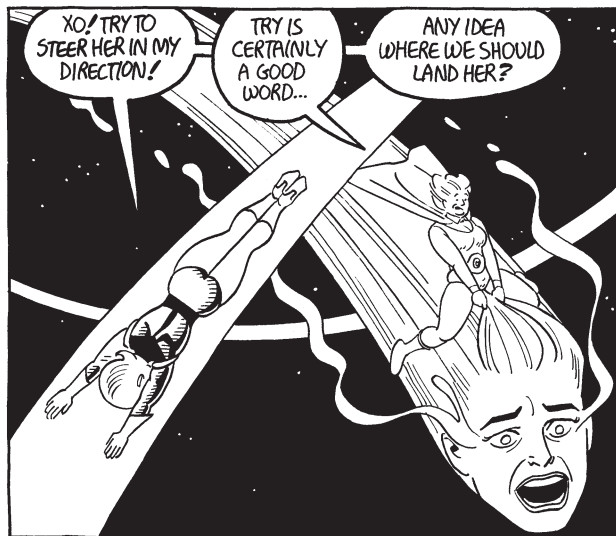
XOCHITL, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THIRTY YEARS AGO I HAD THE LAST TURN.

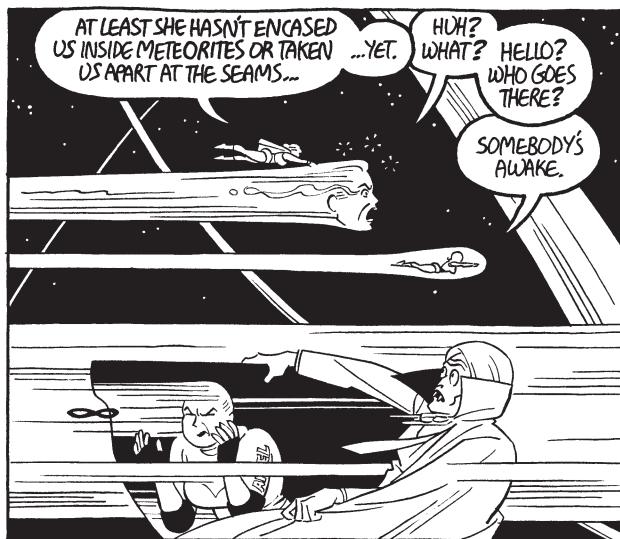
I GUESS (I'M ON).

ROUND ONE: THE DIPLOMATIC APPROACH.

CAREFUL, ESPECTRA. SHE SEEMS OBLIVIOUS TO ALL AROUND HER.

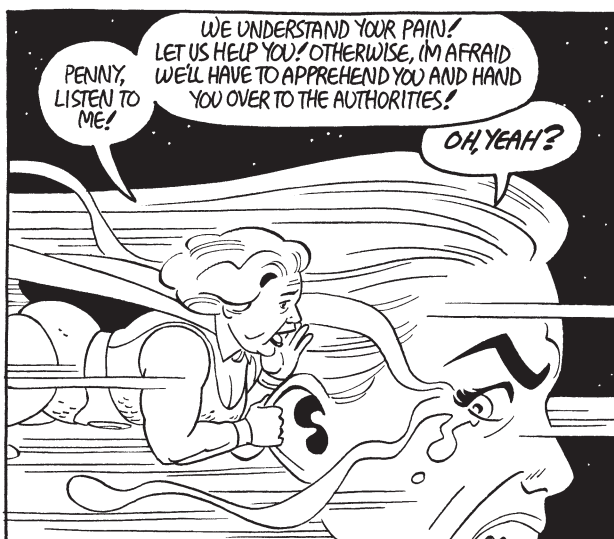






AT LEAST SHE HASN'T ENCASED US INSIDE METEORITES OR TAKEN US APART AT THE SEAMS... YET.

HUH? WHAT? HELLO? WHO GOES THERE? SOMEBODY'S AWAKE.



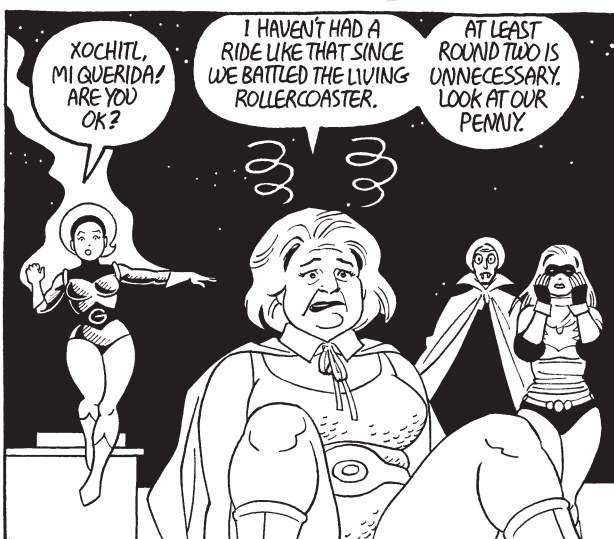
PENNY, LISTEN TO ME!

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR PAIN! LET US HELP YOU! OTHERWISE, I'M AFRAID WE'LL HAVE TO APPREHEND YOU AND HAND YOU OVER TO THE AUTHORITIES!

OH, YEAH?



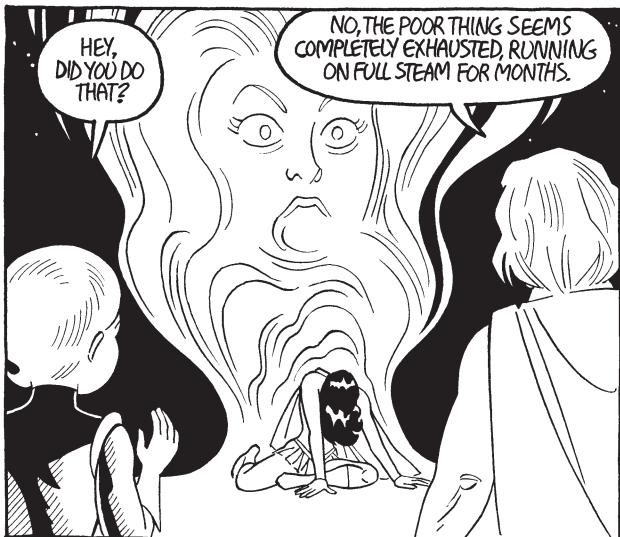
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO HAND ME OVER IF YOU CAN'T EVEN STAY IN THE SADDLE?



XOCHITL, MI QUERIDA! ARE YOU OK?

I HAVEN'T HAD A RIDE LIKE THAT SINCE WE BATTLED THE LIVING ROLLERCOASTER.

AT LEAST ROUND TWO IS UNNECESSARY. LOOK AT OUR PENNY.



HEY, DID YOU DO THAT?

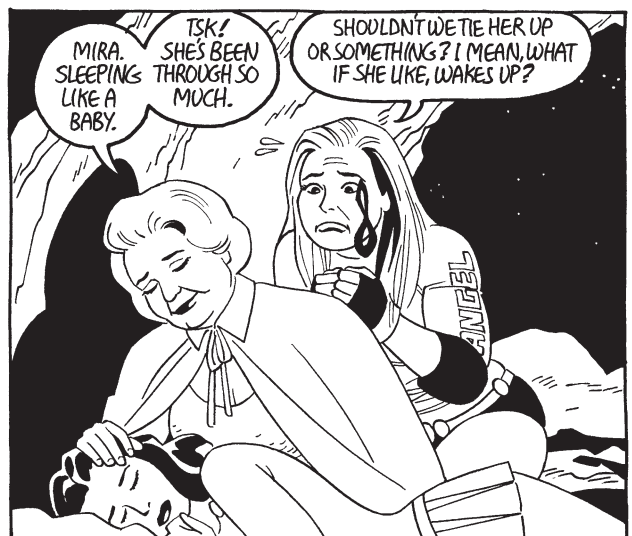
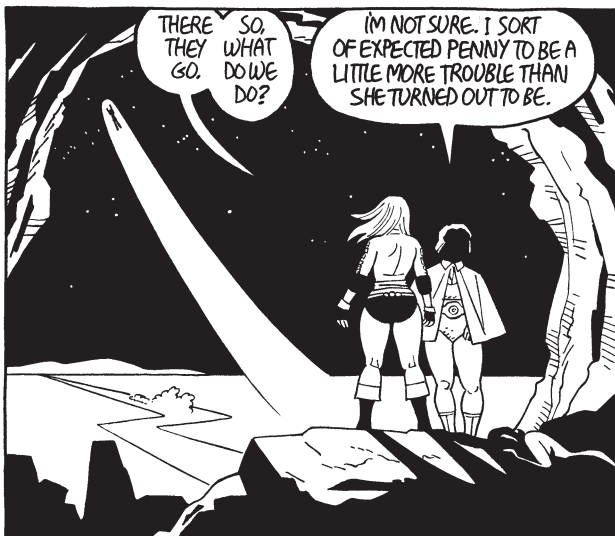
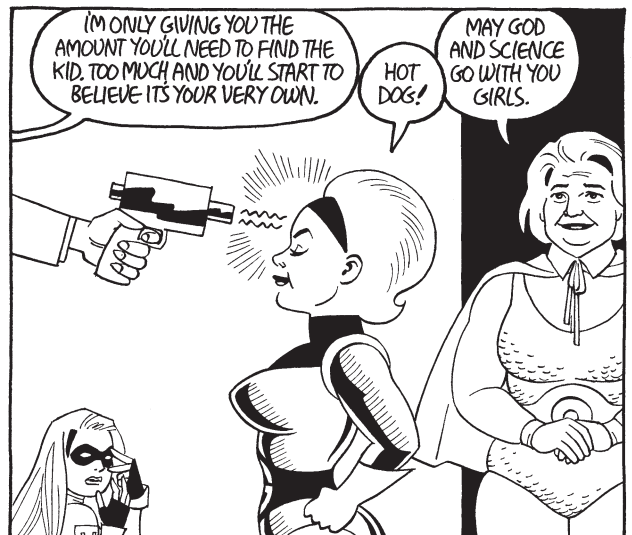
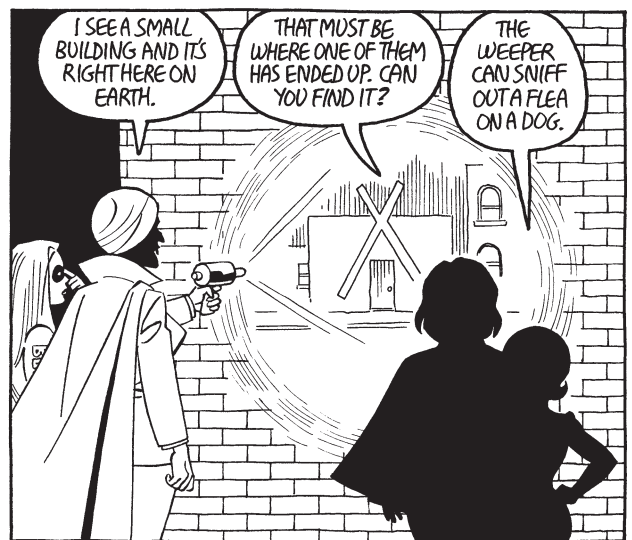
NO, THE POOR THING SEEMS COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED, RUNNING ON FULL STEAM FOR MONTHS.

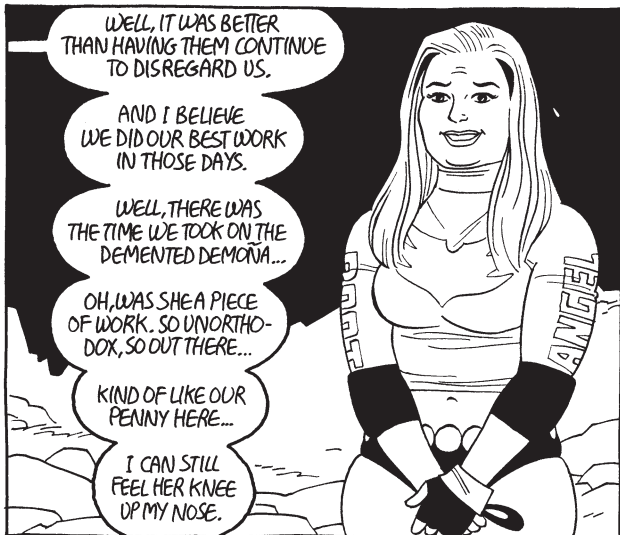
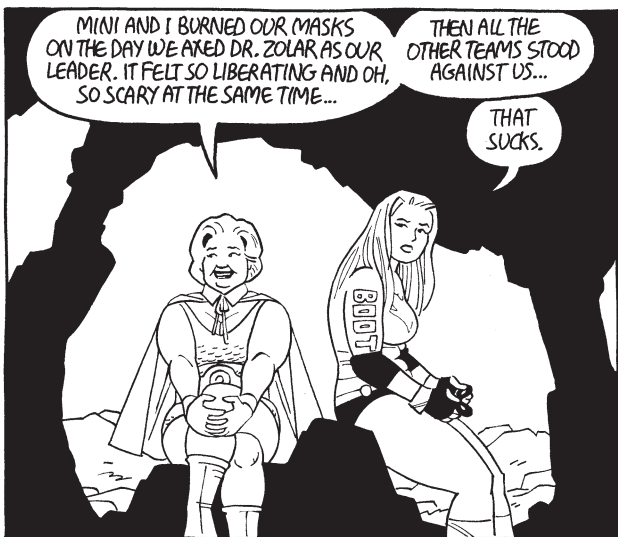
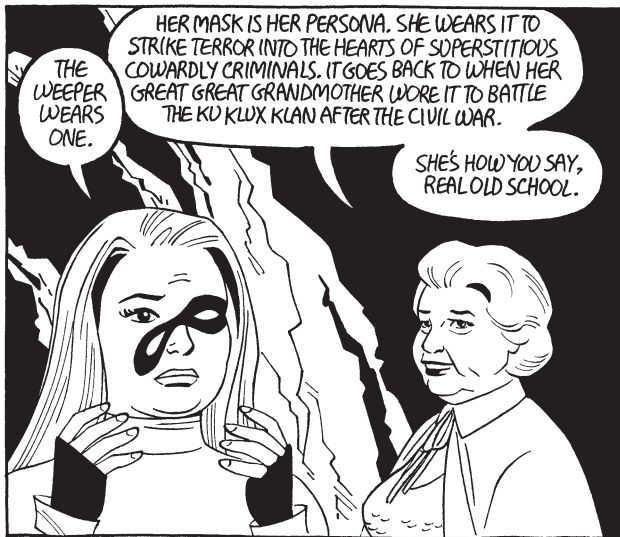
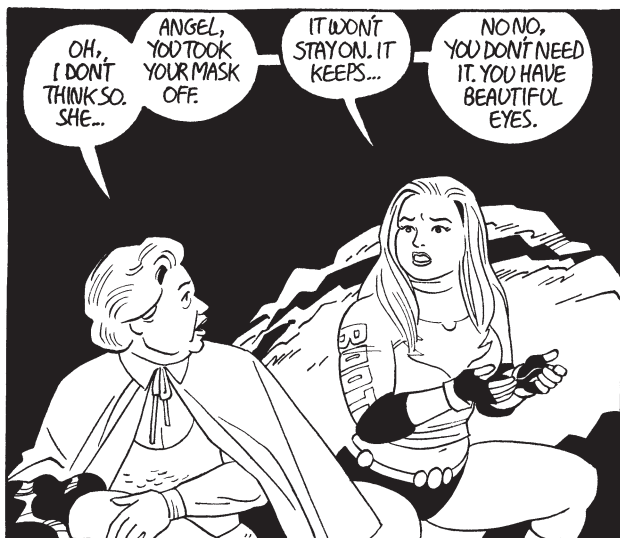


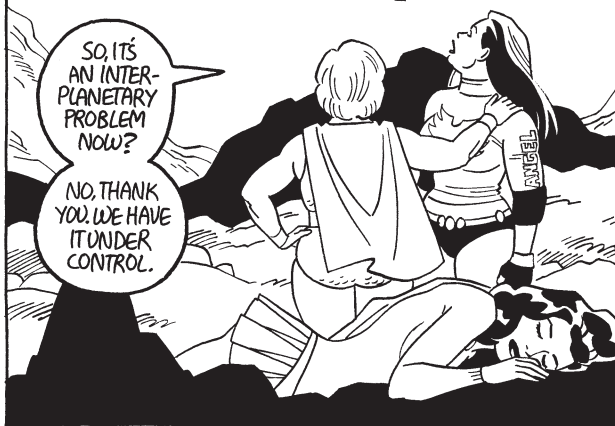
I BELIEVE I'M ON FOR ROUND THREE: INTERROGATION.

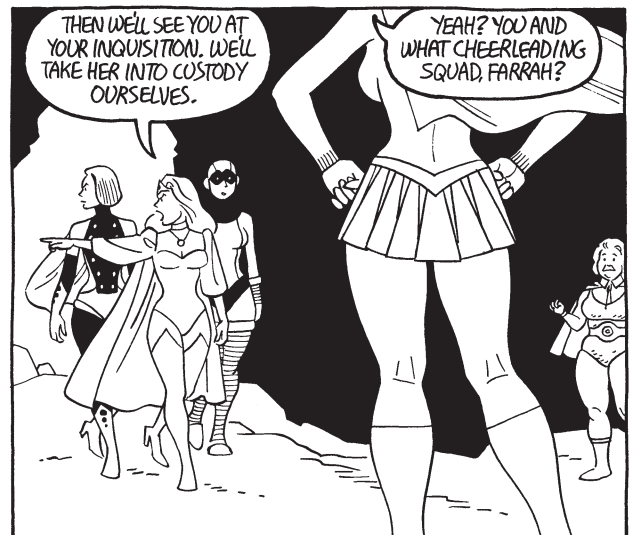
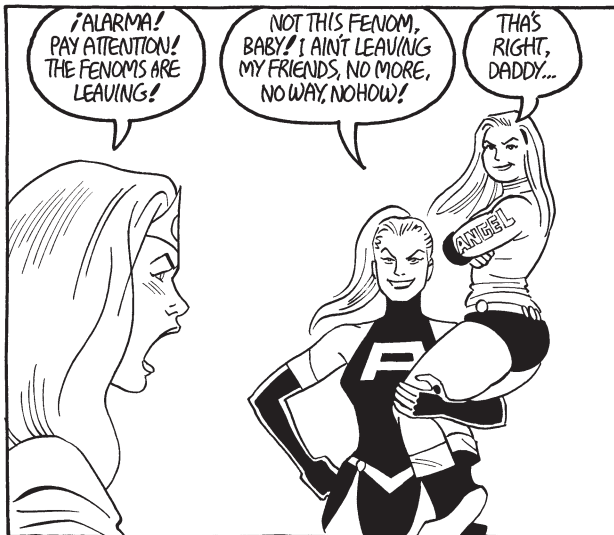
BE GENTLE, ROCKY.

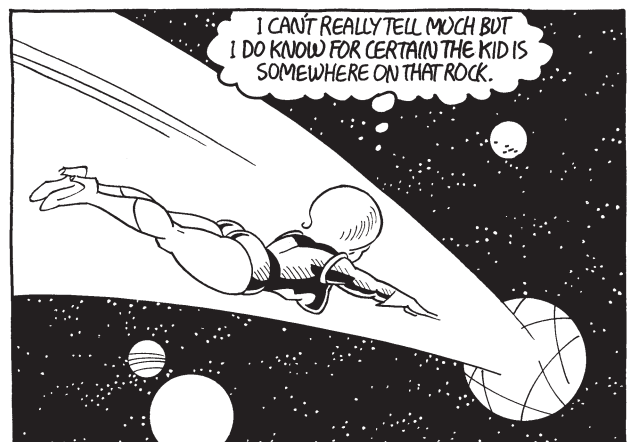
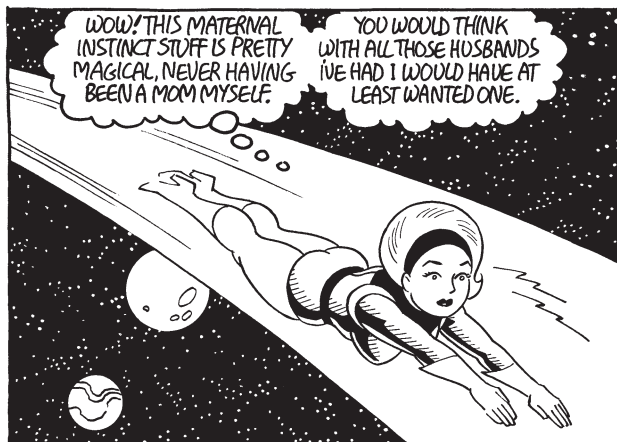
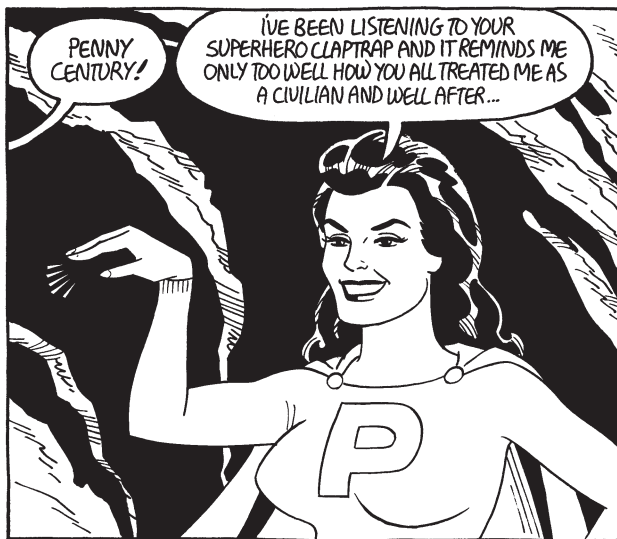
WHAT'S SHE GONNA DO?













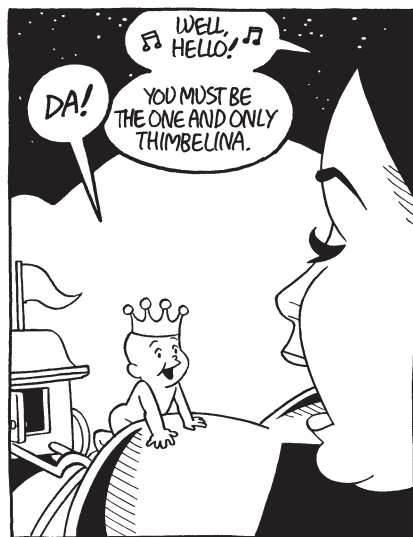
ALL RIGHT, YOU GUYS!
I WAS ONLY KIDDING ABOUT
THE GULLIVER BIT!

NOW TURN ME
LOOSE BEFORE I TEAR
UP THIS PLACE!



OH, IT LOOKS LIKE I'M GONNA
MEET THEIR QUEEN. MAYBE SHE CAN
TELL ME WHERE THE KID IS.

I KNEW I SHOULD
PAID MORE ATTENTION WHEN
WE LEARNED ESPERANTO
IN SCHOOL.



WELL,
HELLO!

DA!

YOU MUST BE
THE ONE AND ONLY
THIMBELINA.



MAMA...

OH, I KNOW.
YOU MISS YOUR
MAMA SO VERY
MUCH.

DON'T
WORRY, BABY.
YOU'RE GONNA
SEE HER REAL
SOON.



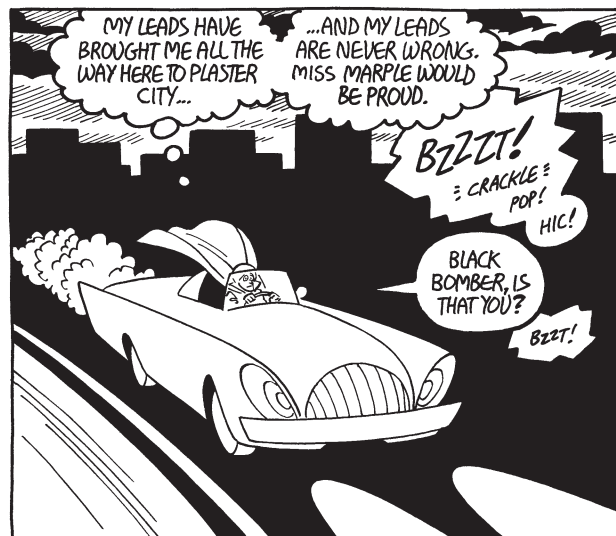
SORRY, FELLAS, BUT I
GOTTA TAKE YOUR QUEEN. THERE'S
FAR MORE IMPORTANT THINGS
FOR HER TO DO AT HOME.



HEY!

YOU REALLY
KNOW WHERE TO
HURT A GAL!

OH OH, WHY DO
I GET THE FEELING
THAT THESE AREN'T
JUST HARMLESS
TOOTHPICKS?



MY LEADS HAVE
BROUGHT ME ALL THE
WAY HERE TO PLASTER
CITY...

...AND MY LEADS
ARE NEVER WRONG.
MISS MARPLE WOULD
BE PROUD.

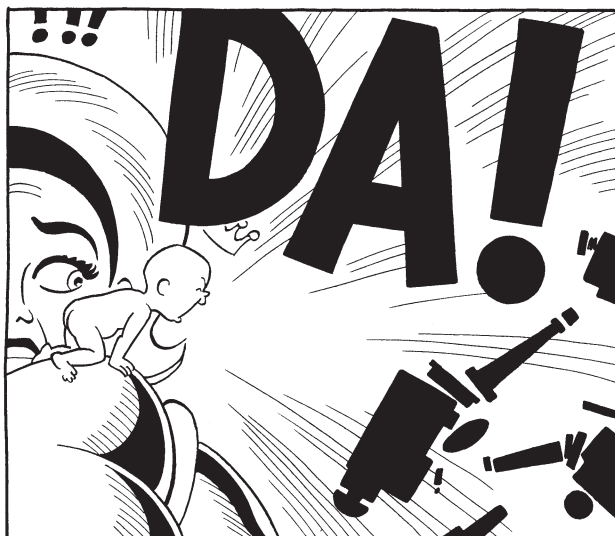
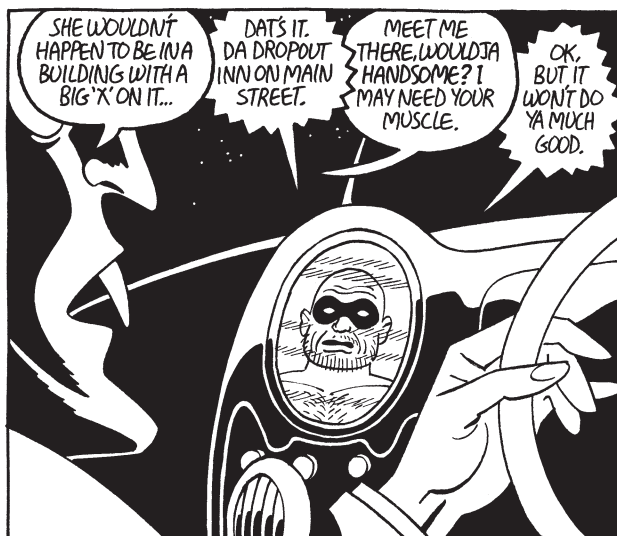
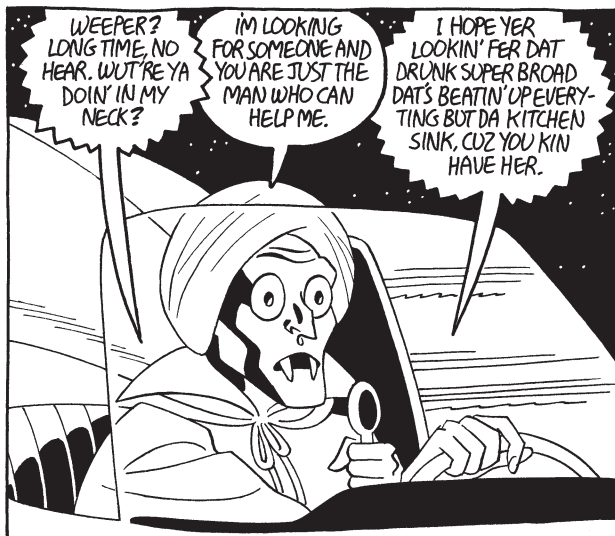
BZZT!

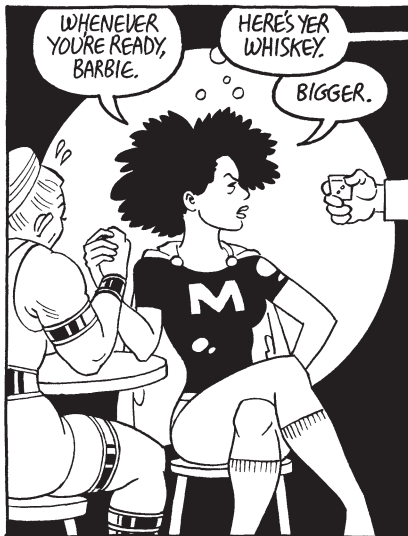
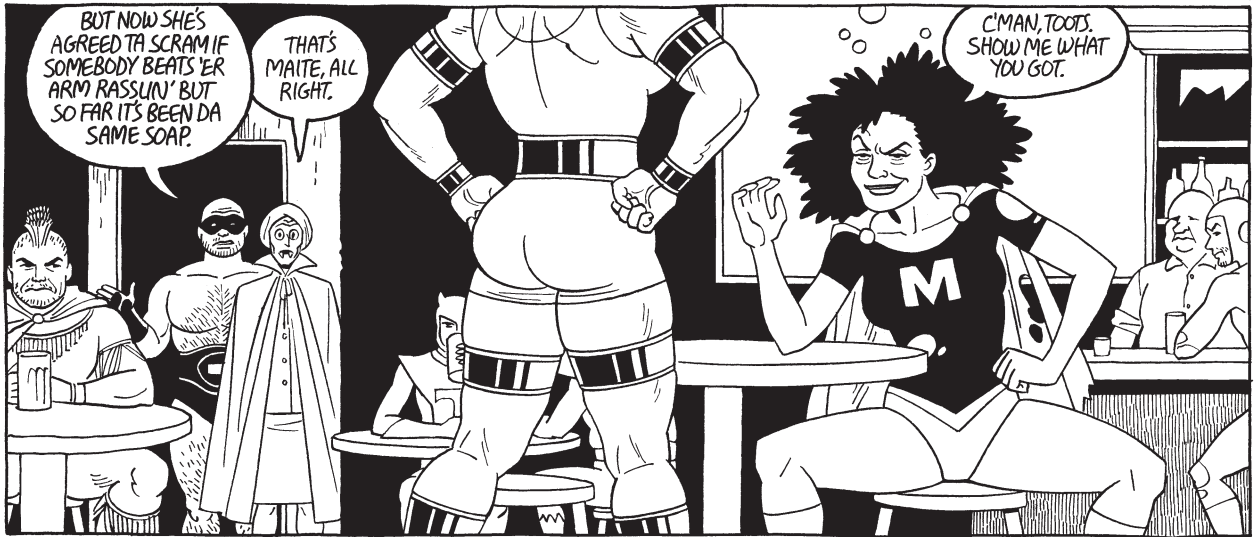
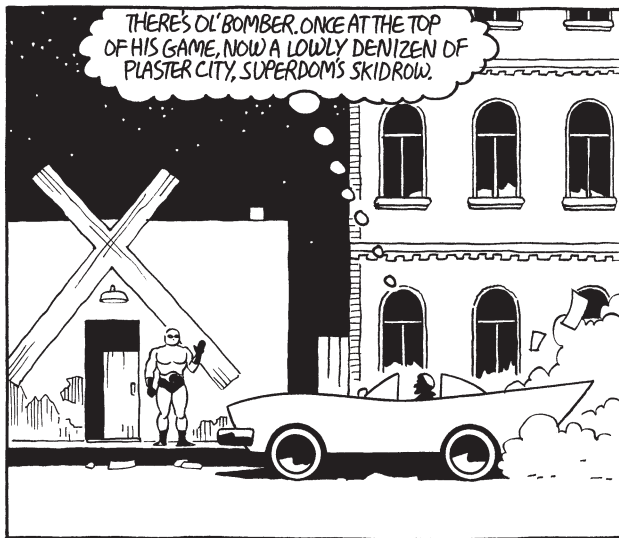
= CRACKLE =
POP!

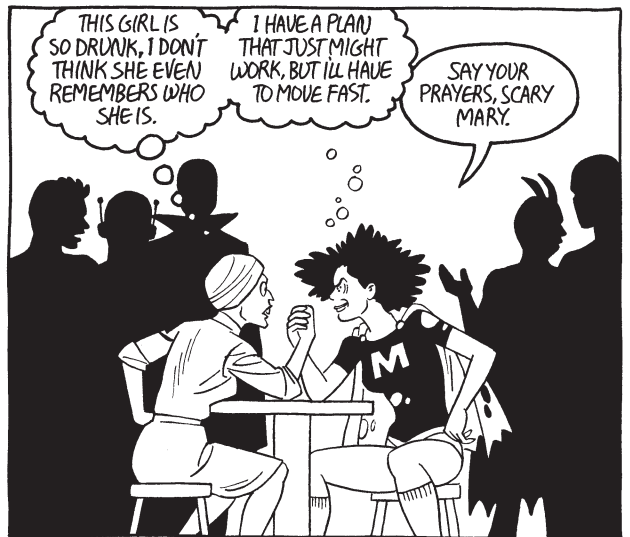
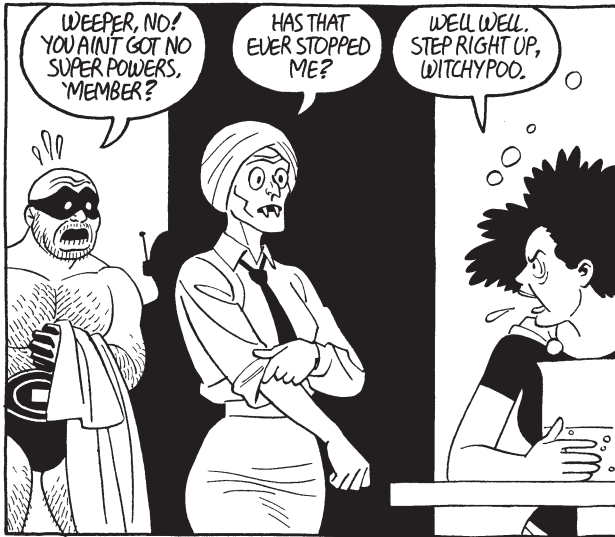
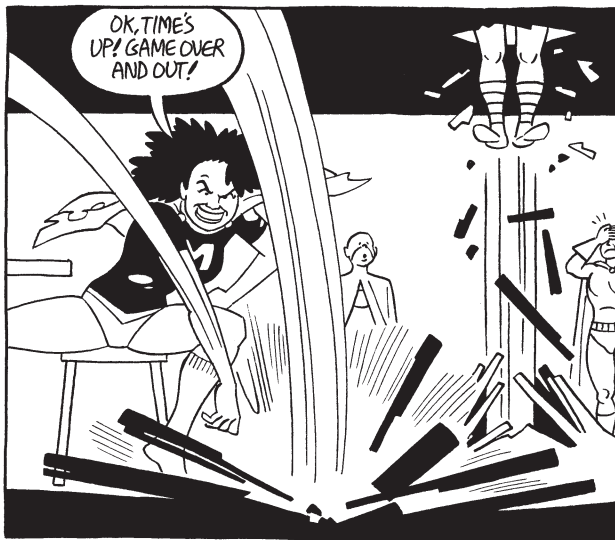
HIC!

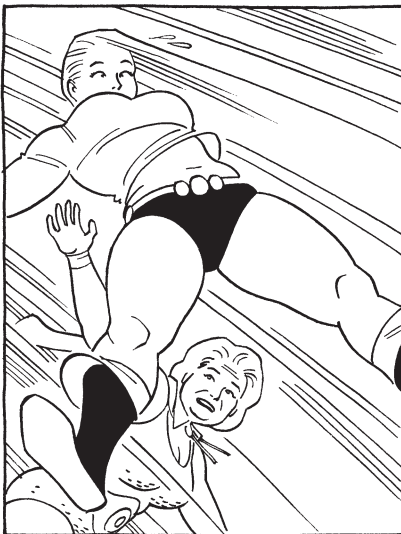
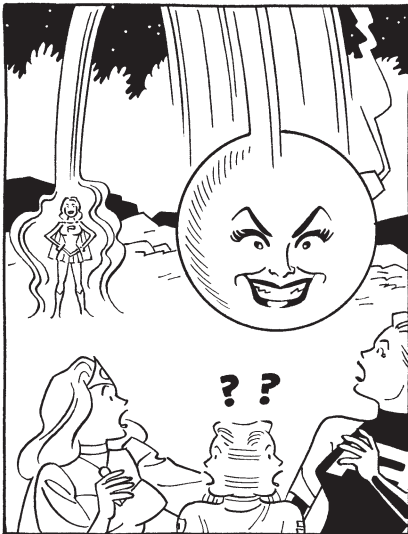
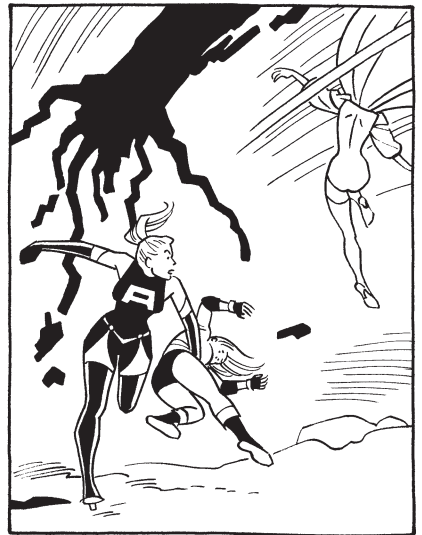
BLACK
BOMBER, IS
THAT YOU?

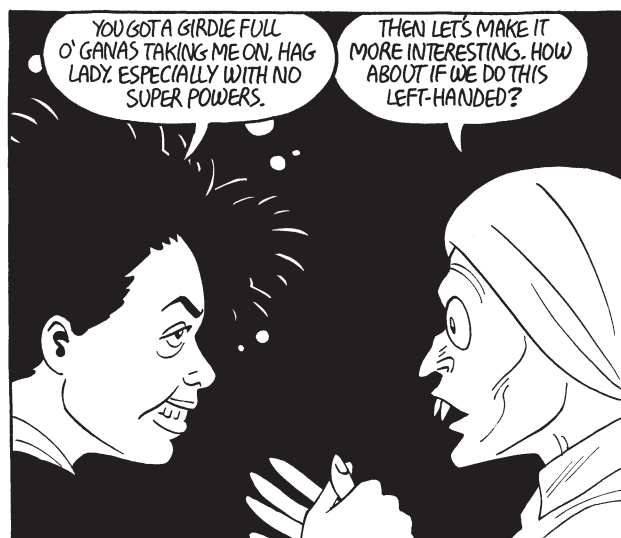
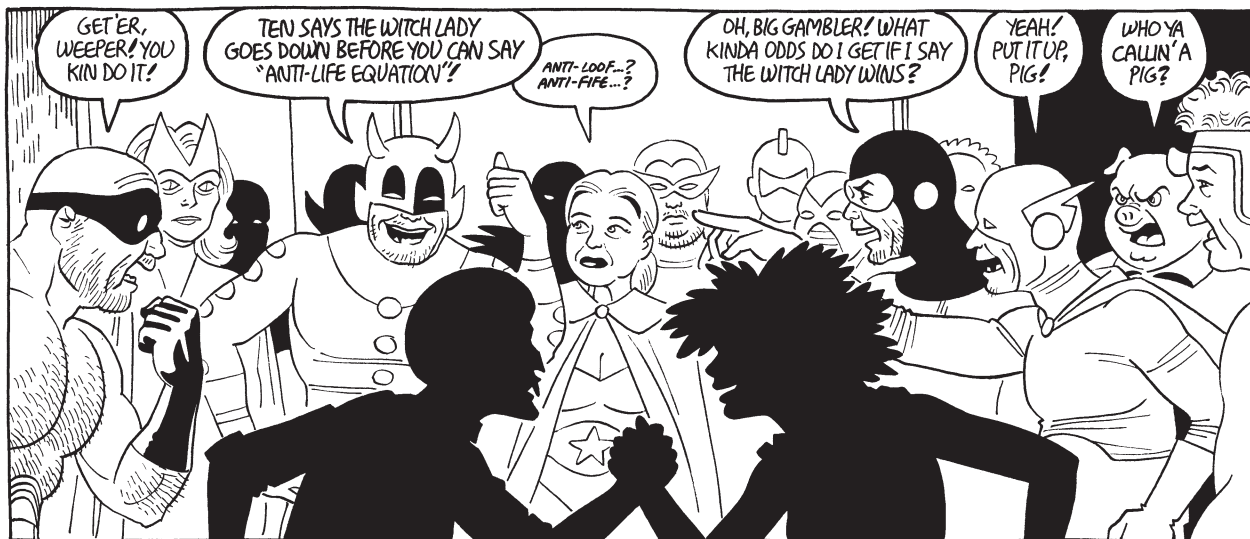
BZZT!

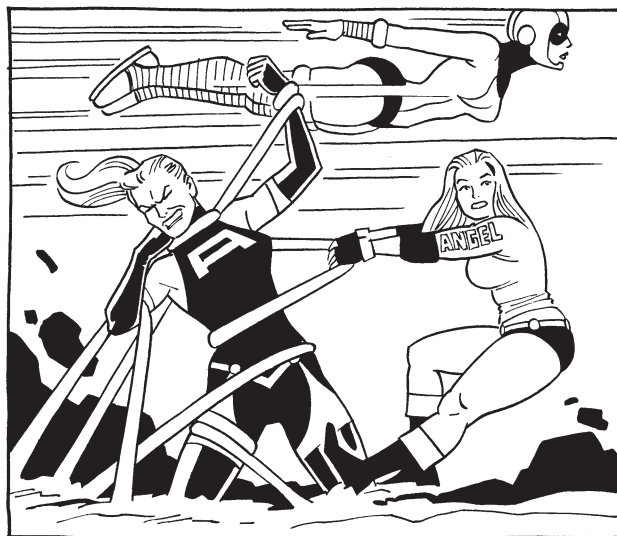
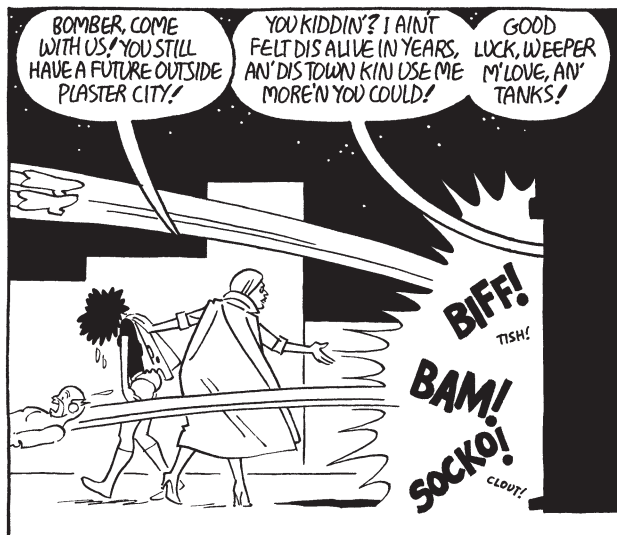


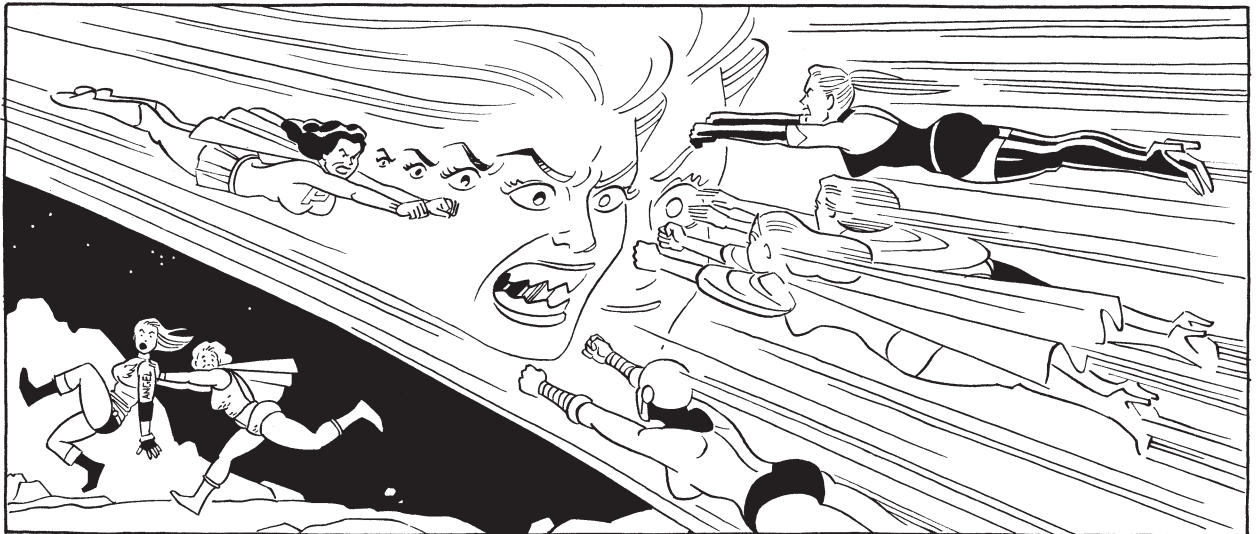
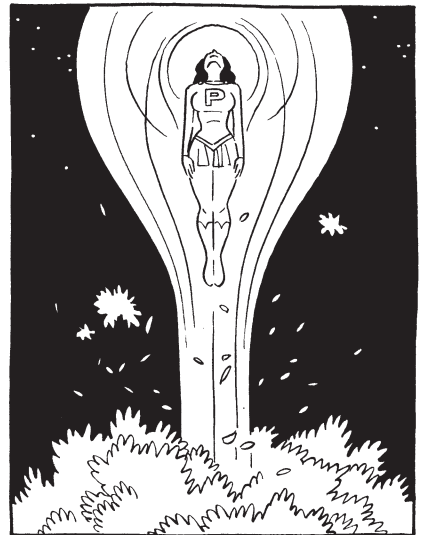
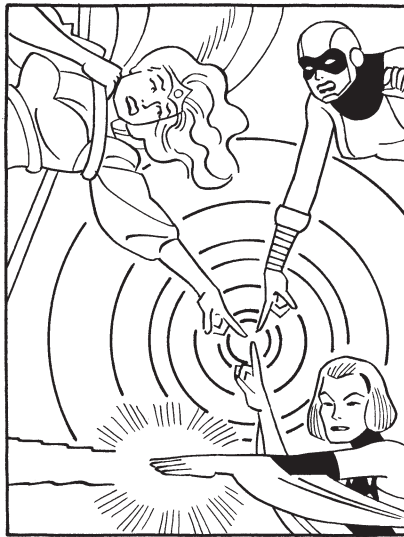


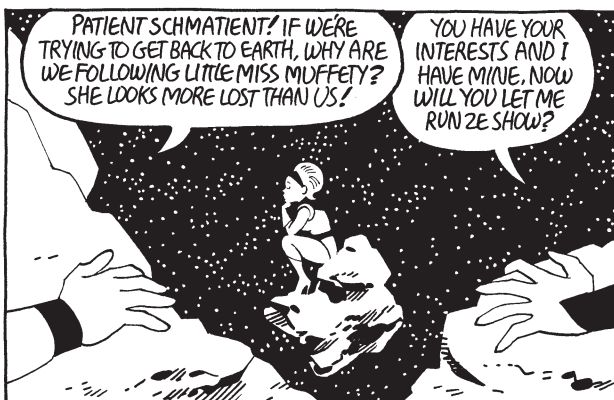




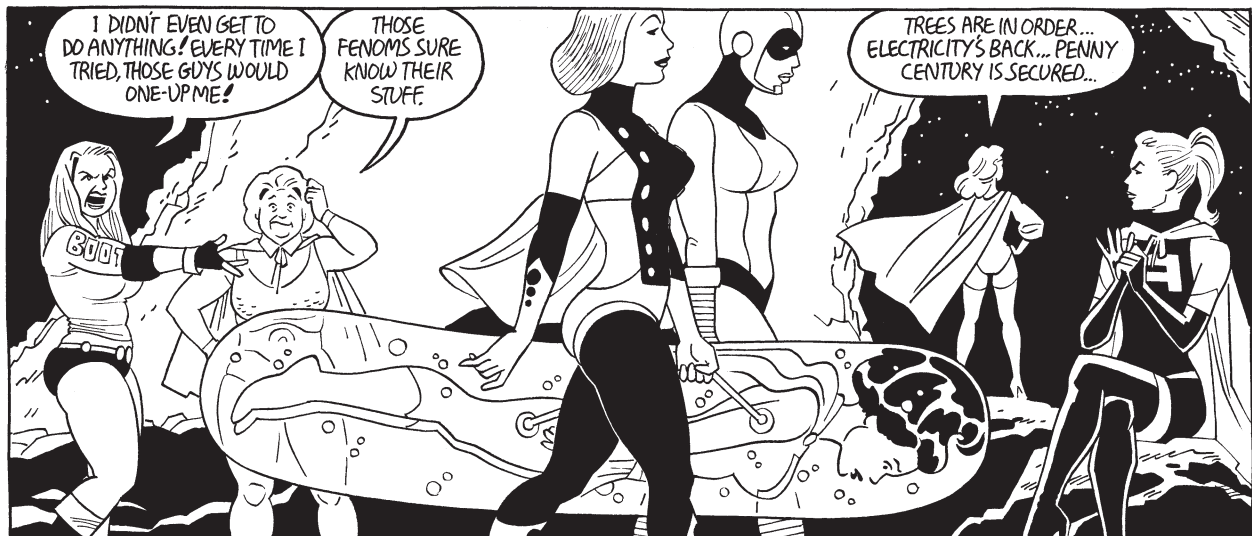
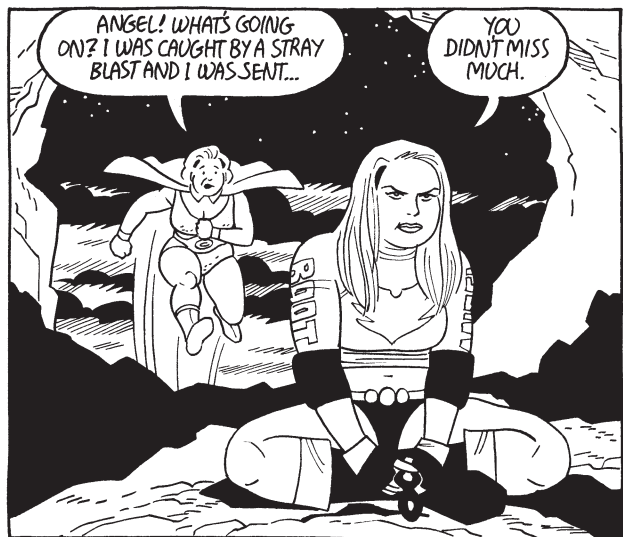
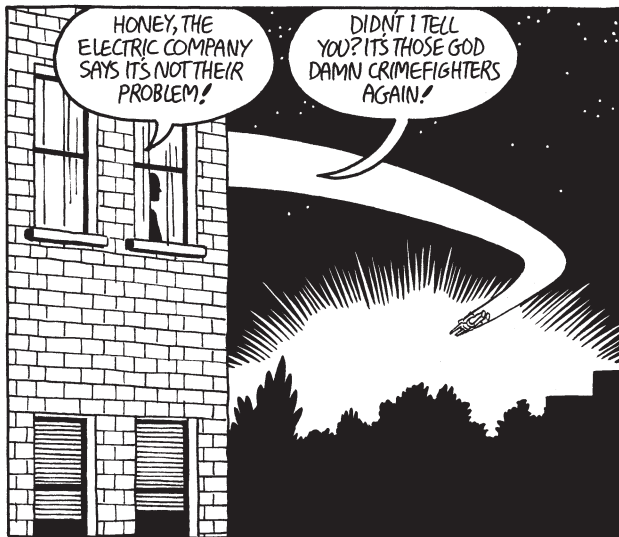


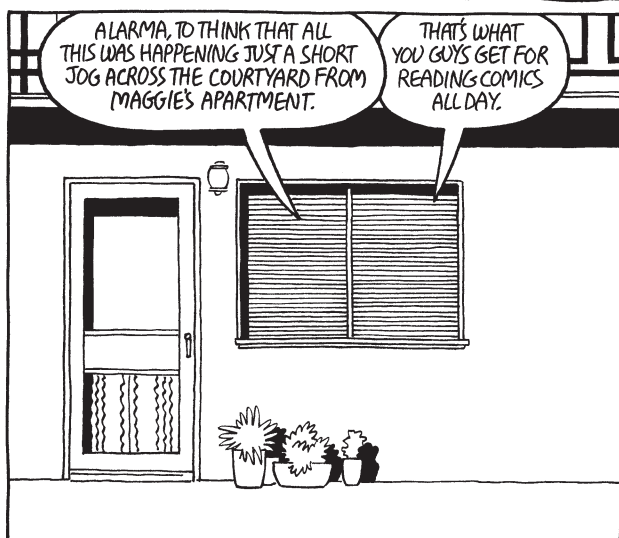
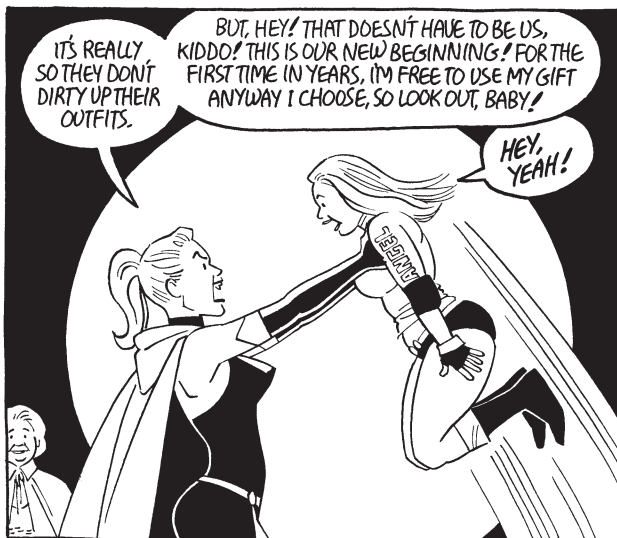
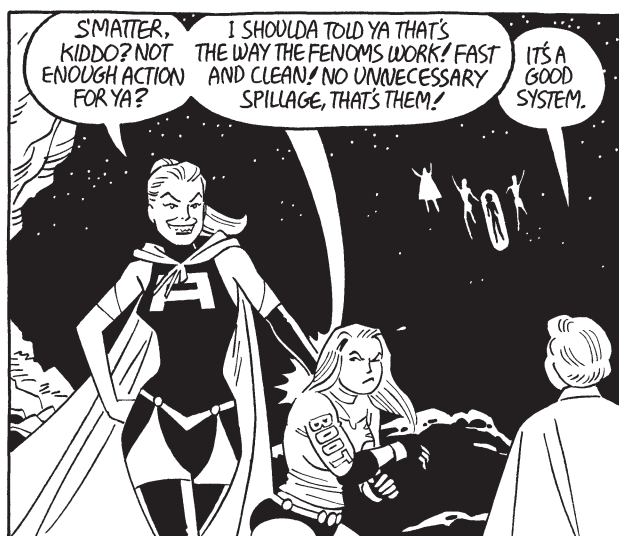
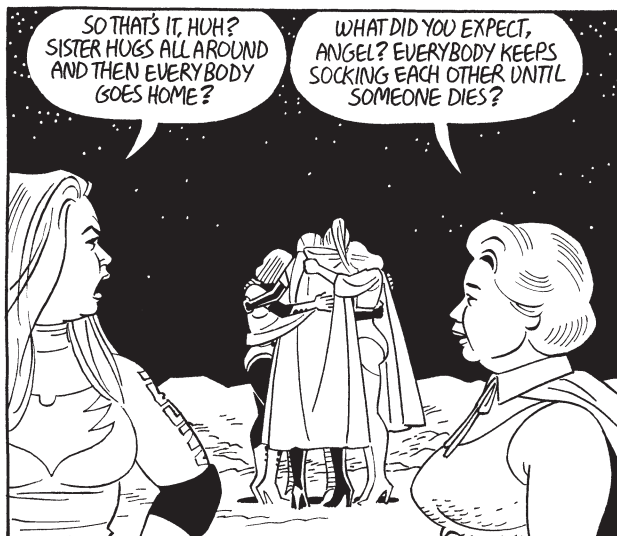
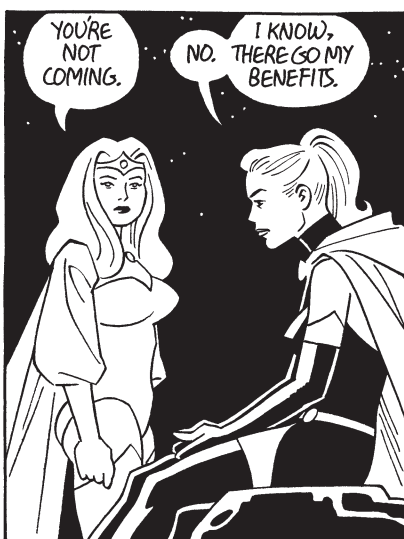


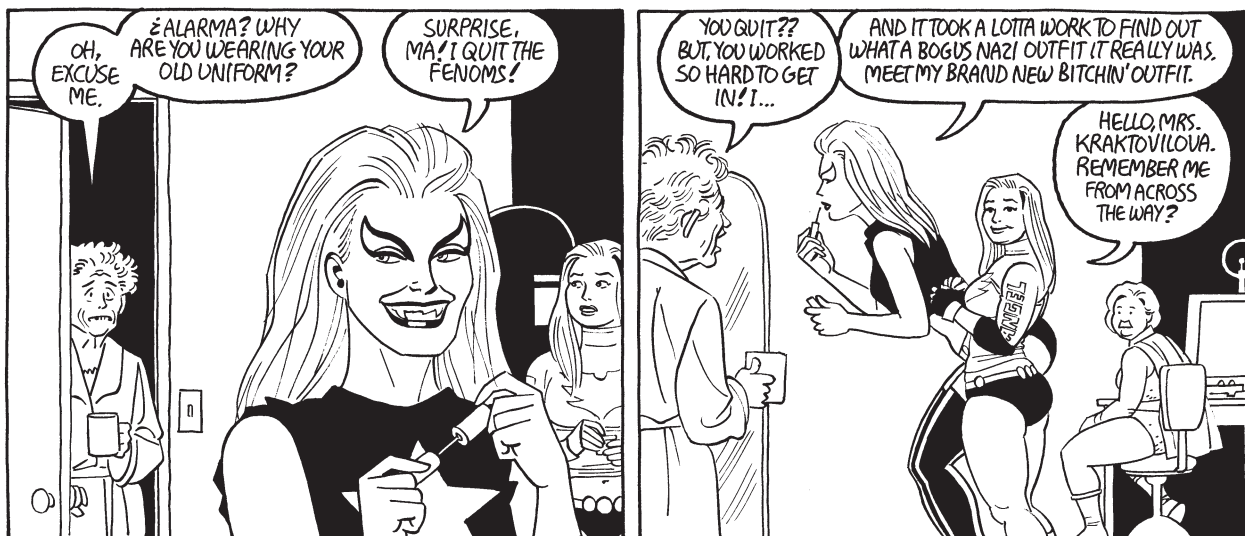
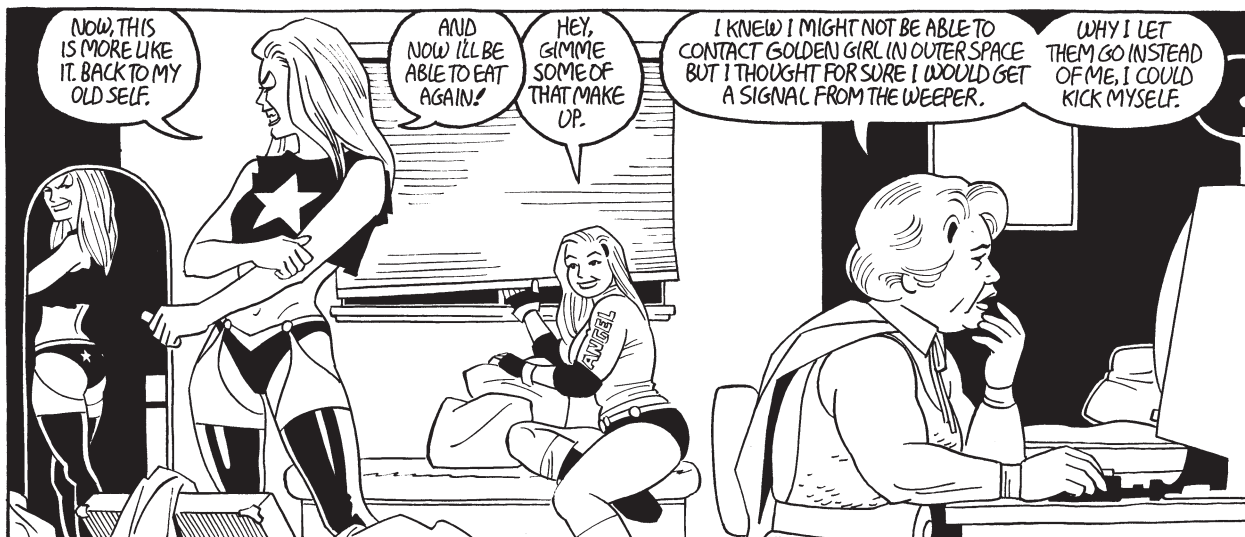








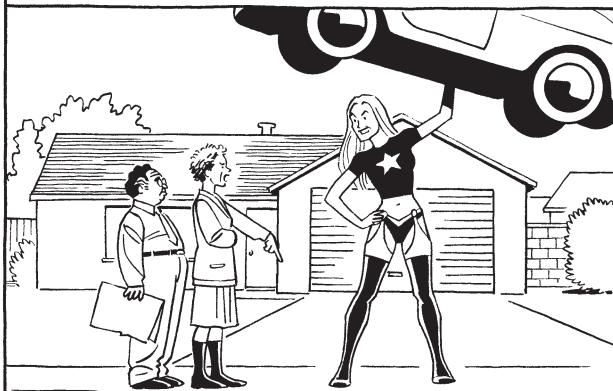




WE DEFECTED FROM RUSSIA WHEN ALARMA WAS THREE. THEY HAD BIG PLANS FOR HER AS SOME SORT OF SECRET WEAPON, BUT MY HUSBAND AND I HAD OTHER PLANS FOR OUR LITTLE GIRL.



"WE WERE HOPING THAT ONE DAY SHE WOULD BECOME COMRADE 9 OR 10, NEXT IN LINE OF BILLIONAIRE H.R. COSTIGAN'S BODYGUARDS. BUT WHEN SHE BECAME OLD ENOUGH, WE FOUND THAT SHE HAD PLANS OF HER OWN.



"SHE WASN'T A VILLAIN, BUT HER MANNER WAS A BIT RECKLESS AND MENACING TO HER PEERS, SO WE ENROLLED HER IN THE FENOMENONS. IT WAS WHAT SHE NEEDED. THEY TAUGHT HER DISCIPLINE AND TEAMWORK. SHE WAS FINE AS LONG AS..."



PROMISE ME YOU'LL KEEP AN EYE ON MY BABY. I DON'T WANT HER TO GET INTO ANY TROUBLE.



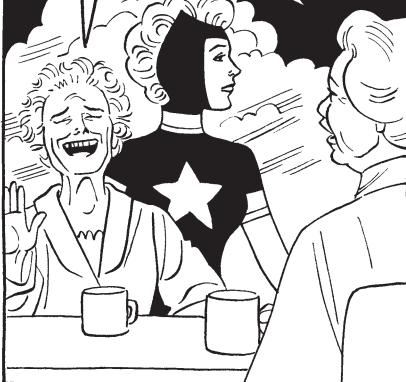
AND BY THE WAY, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A GREAT ADMIRER OF YOURS... WE WILL.

PRAVDA, THE RED TRUTH!



OH, HA HA! AND I YOURS, ESPECTRA! WASN'T THAT A TIME?

YES, IT'S TOO BAD THE COLD WAR MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR ALL OF US TO BE FRIENDS.



BUT, ON OCCASION, WE DID SHARE A COMMON ENEMY...

THE MAD DR. BLITZ!

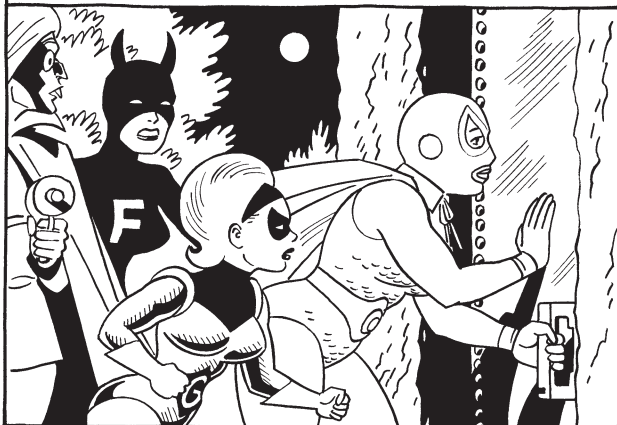


WORD HAD IT, YOU WERE THE LAST TO SEE HIM ALIVE.

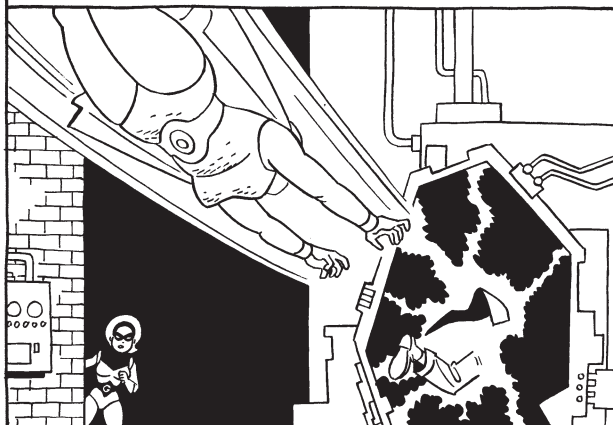
IN A SENSE, YES, IT WAS WHEN THE TI-GIRLS WERE STILL UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DR. ZOLAR.



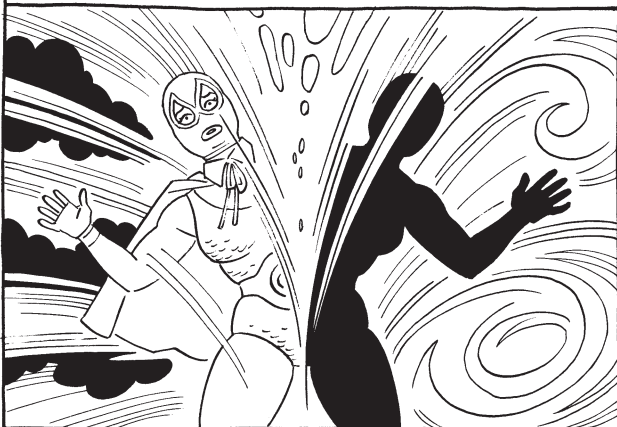
"IN THOSE DAYS I WAS CALLED FUERZA. THE MAD DOCTOR HAD BOASTED THAT HE CREATED A TIME PORTAL THAT HE WAS GOING TO USE TO TELEPORT DINOSAURS AND NAZIS TO OUR TIME TO DO HIS EVIL BIDDING, BUT THE TI-GIRLS WERE CLOSING IN FAST.



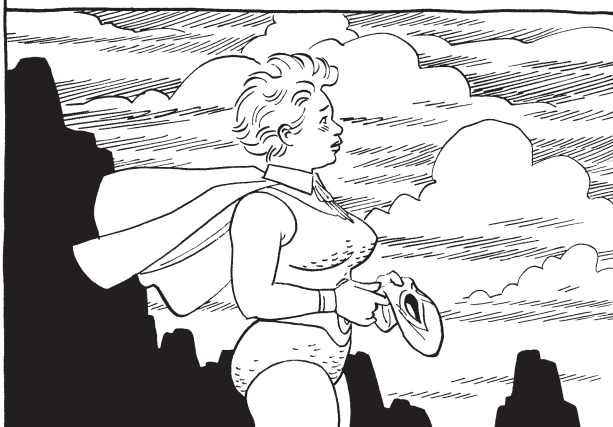
"WE INFILTRATED HIS LAIR AND I WAS RIGHT ON HIS TAIL. HE RAN THROUGH HIS TIME PORTAL AND I FOLLOWED HIM NOT KNOWING THAT HE HAD INSERTED AN EXPLOSIVE DEVICE IN THE MACHINE THAT HE WOULD DETONATE IF EVER THE JIG WAS UP.



"I WAS HALFWAY THROUGH THE PORTAL WHEN IT EXPLODED. I COULD FEEL HALF OF ME VENTURING INTO ANOTHER TIME PERIOD AND THE OTHER HALF REMAINING IN THE PRESENT, KNOWING THAT THE MAD DOCTOR HAD POSSIBLY ESCAPED FOREVER.



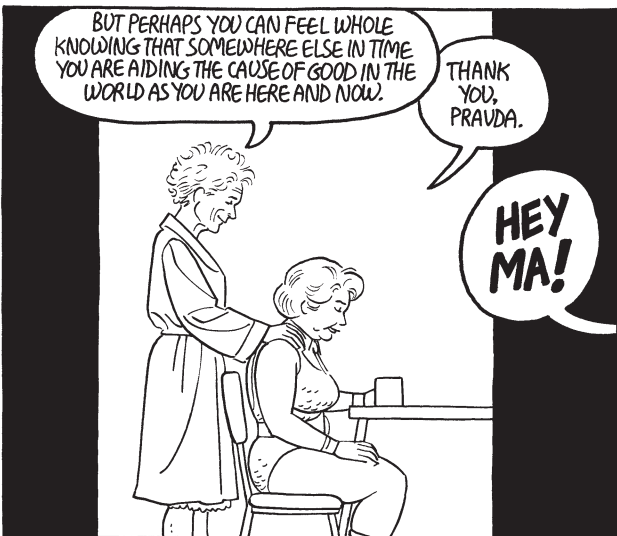
"FROM THEN ON, I POSSESS THE MAKE UP AND SPIRIT OF A GHOST, HENCE MY CURRENT NAME. WHILE I USE MY GIVEN GIFT TO AID THE CAUSE OF GOOD IN THE WORLD, I REMAIN FOREVER HALF A PERSON, NEITHER HERE NOR THERE ... COMO UNA ESPECTRA."



BUT PERHAPS YOU CAN FEEL WHOLE KNOWING THAT SOMEWHERE ELSE IN TIME YOU ARE AIDING THE CAUSE OF GOOD IN THE WORLD AS YOU ARE HERE AND NOW.

THANK YOU, PRAVDA.

HEY MA!

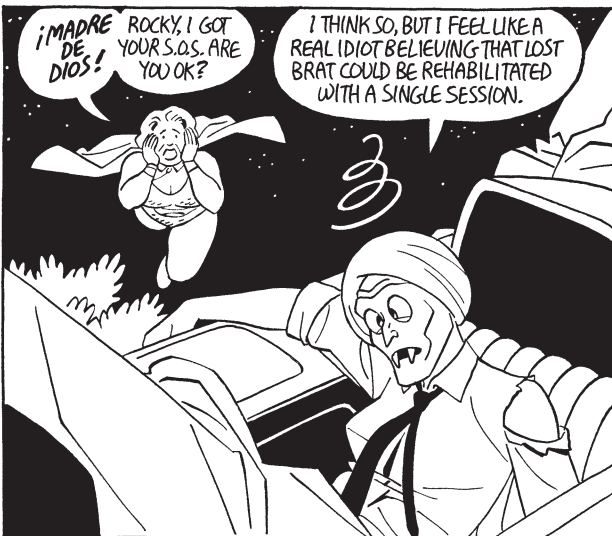
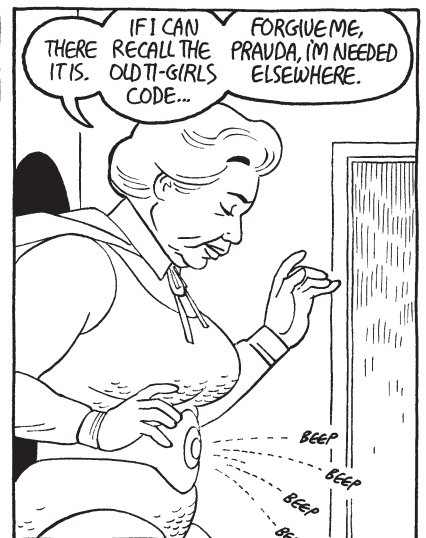


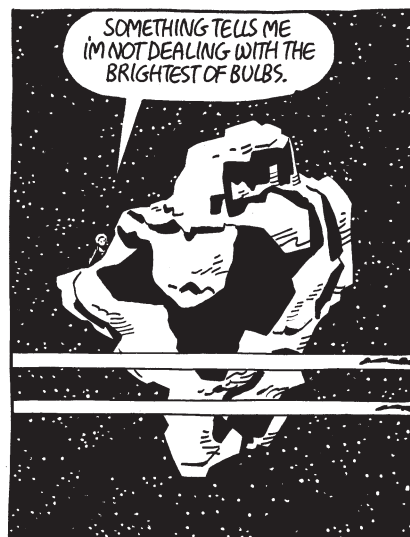
THERE'S A WOMEN'S PRISON BREAK IN RANCHO CUCAMONGA.

RELAX AND ENJOY YOUR COFFEE, ESPECTRA. WE'LL HANDLE IT.

DON'T WAIT UP, MA!









COOPERMAN COMICS GROUP

T-GIRLS

ADVENTURES

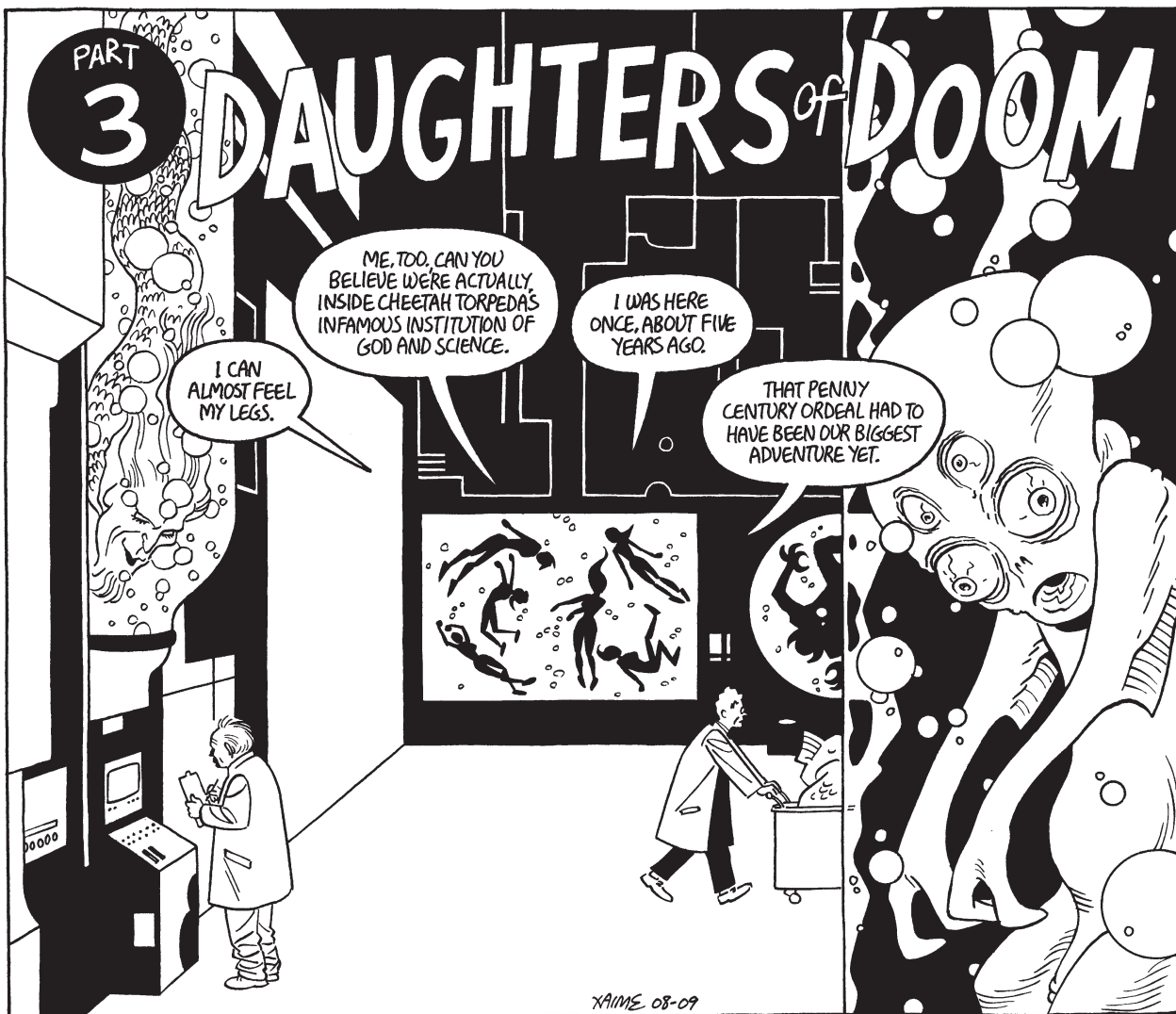
JAN NO. 35



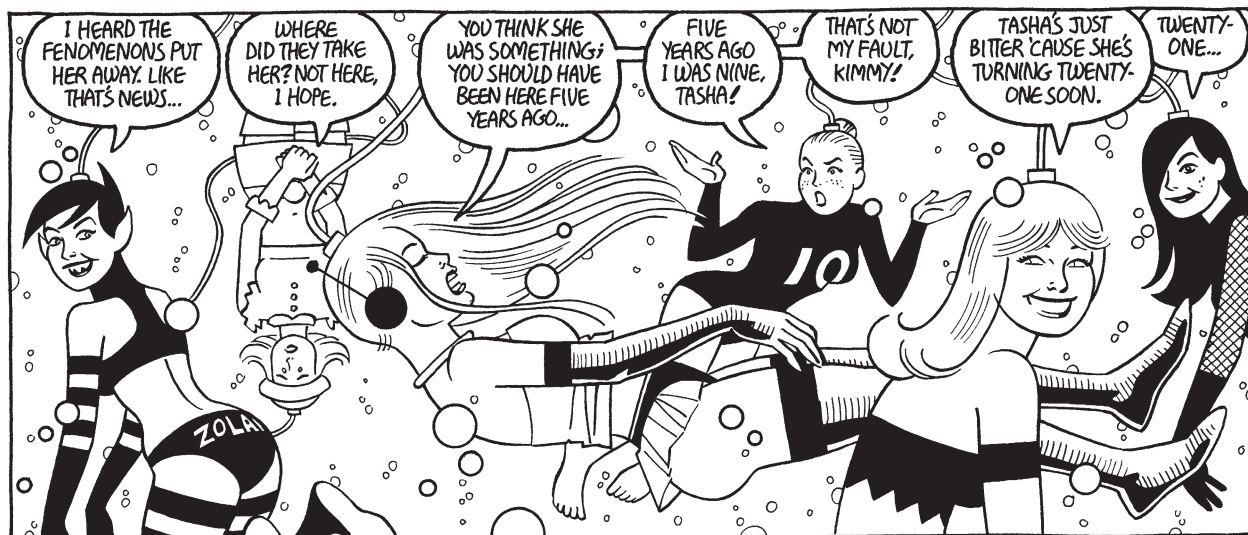
PART

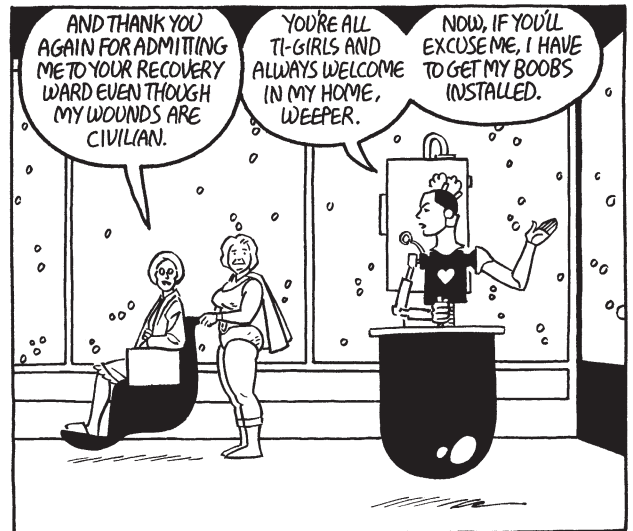
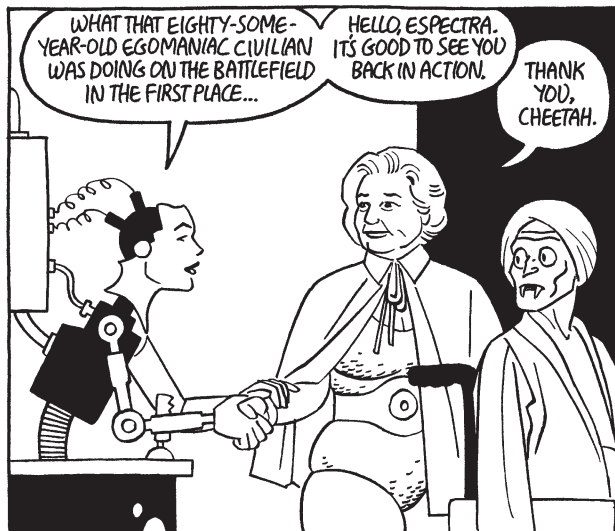
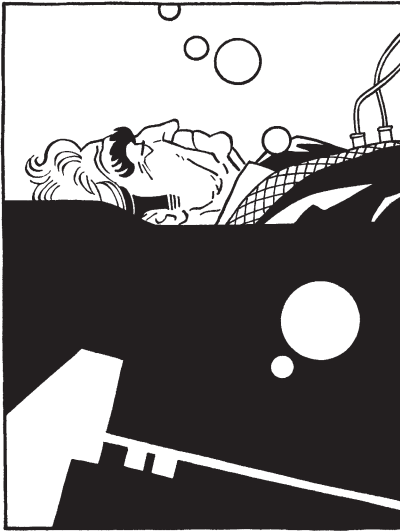
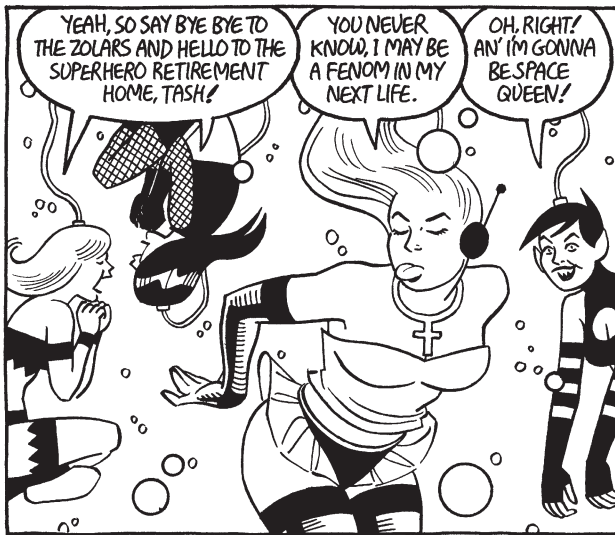
3

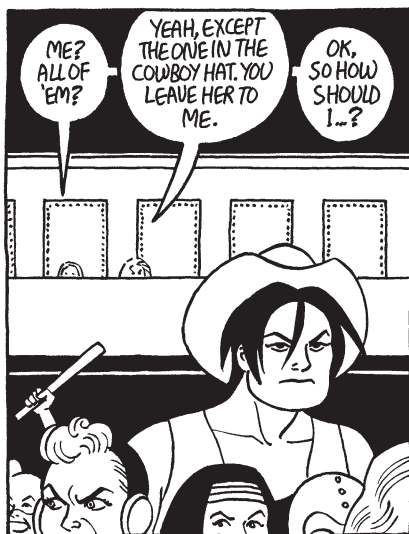
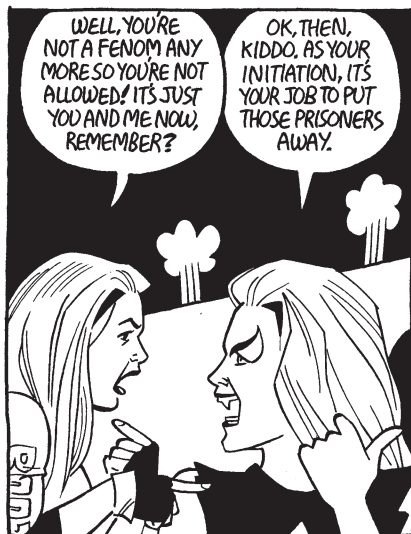
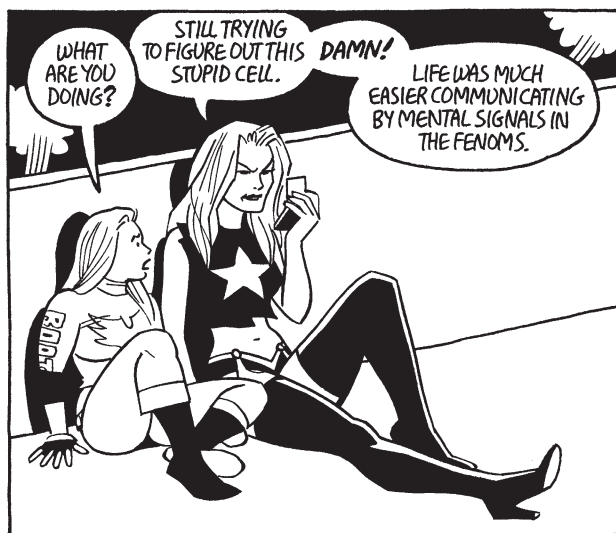
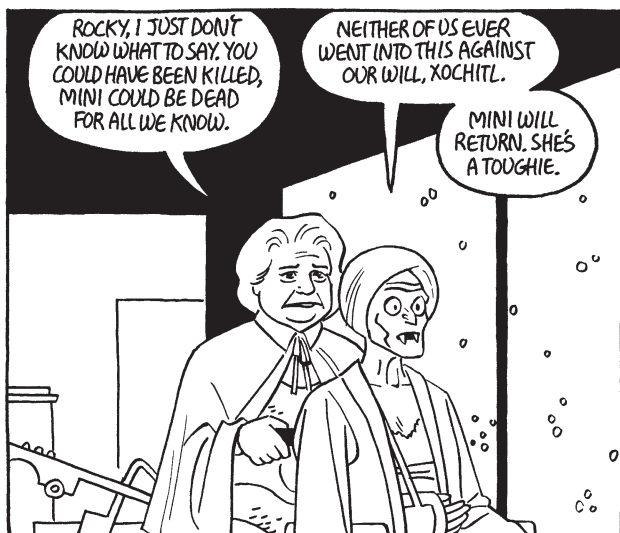
DAUGHTERS of DOOM

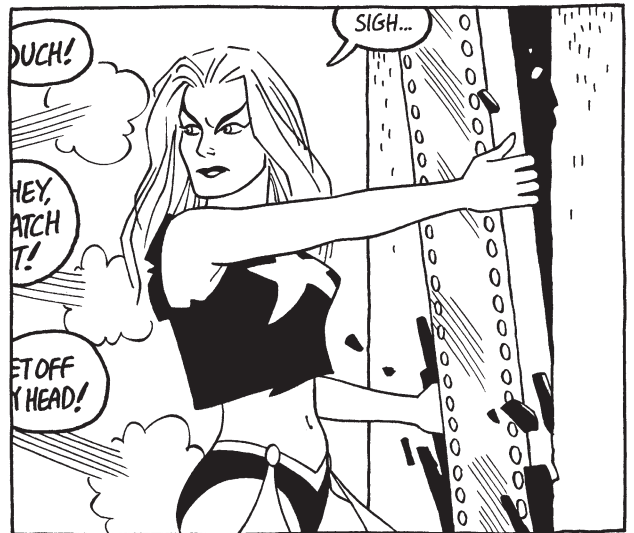
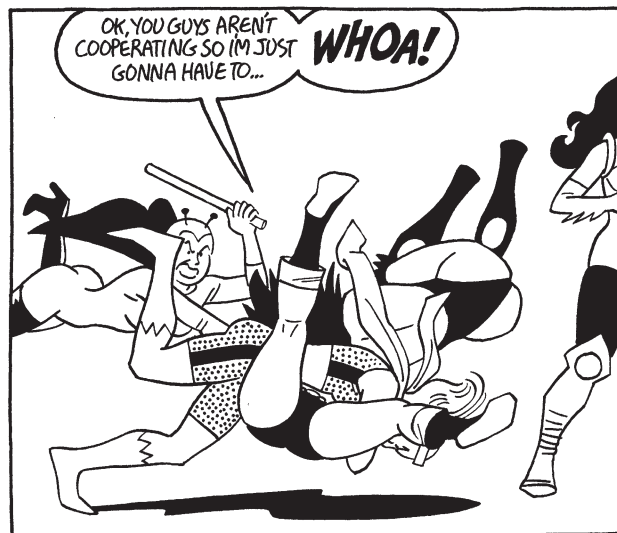
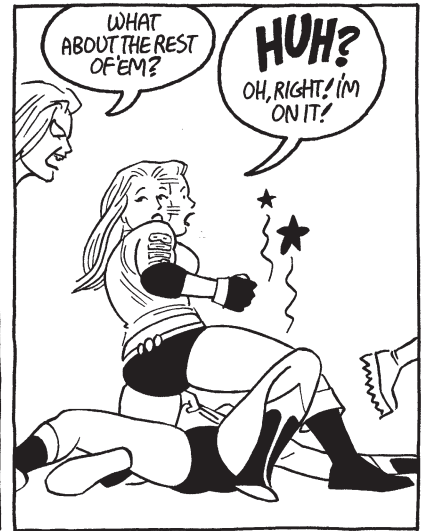
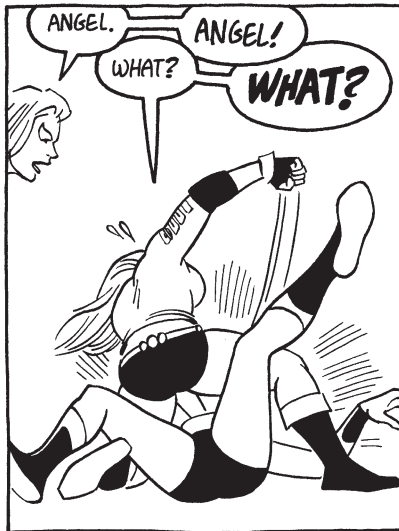


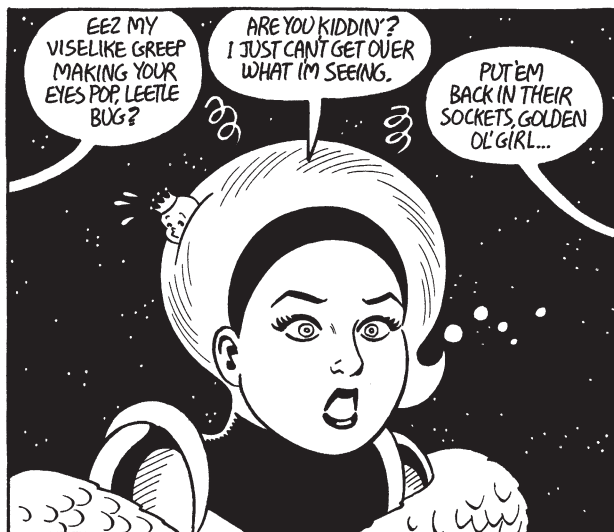
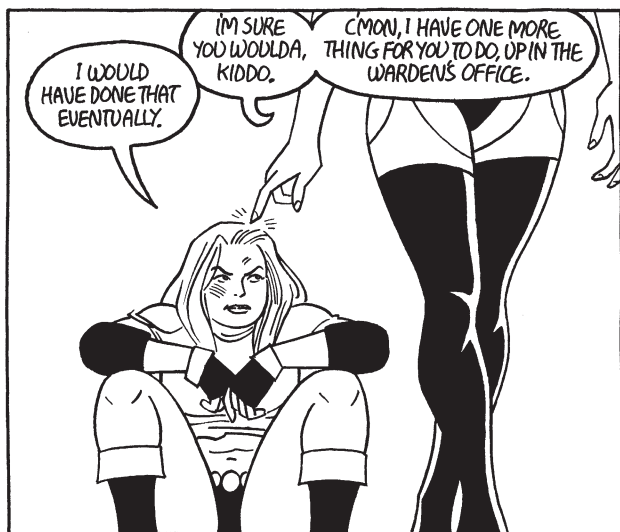
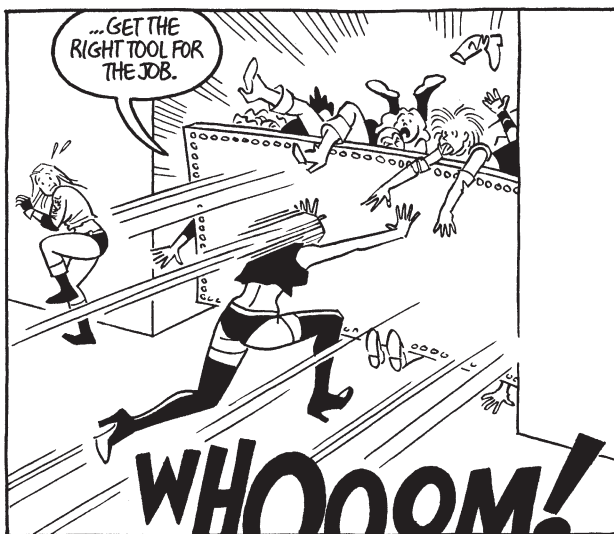
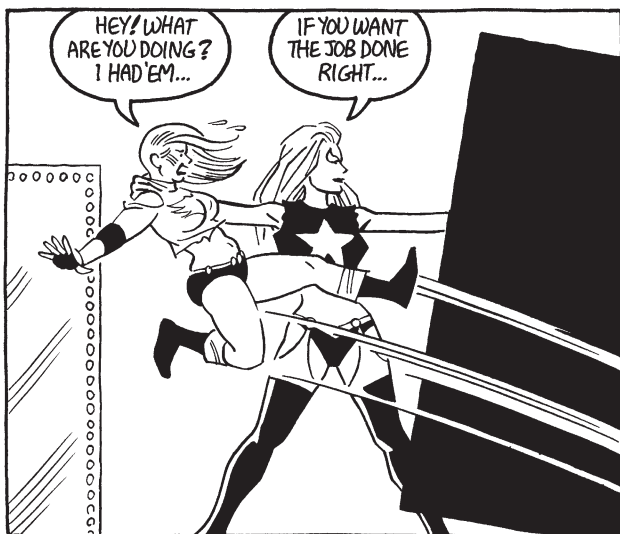
XAIME 08-09



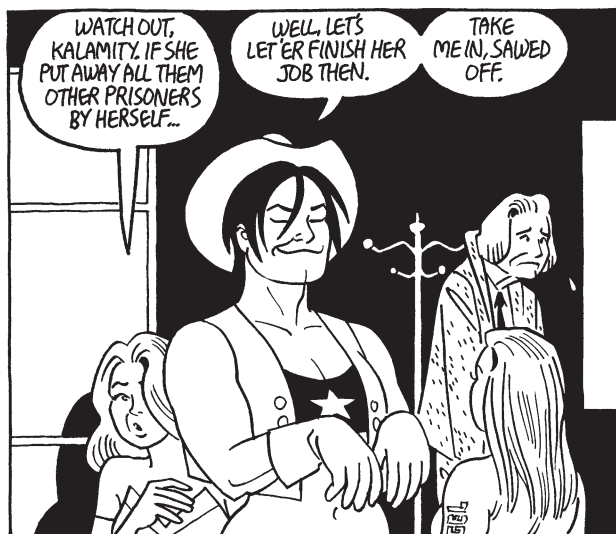
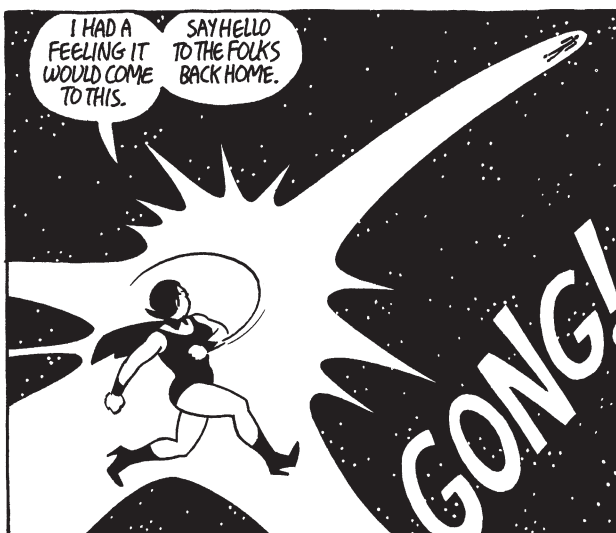


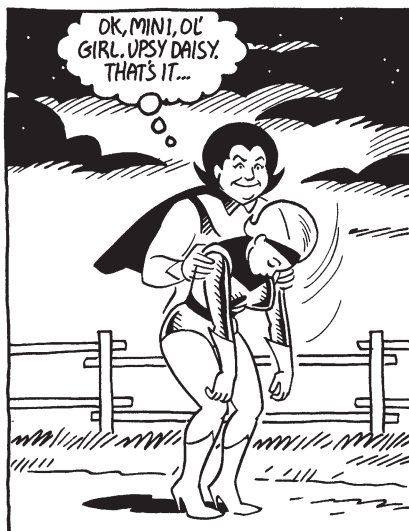
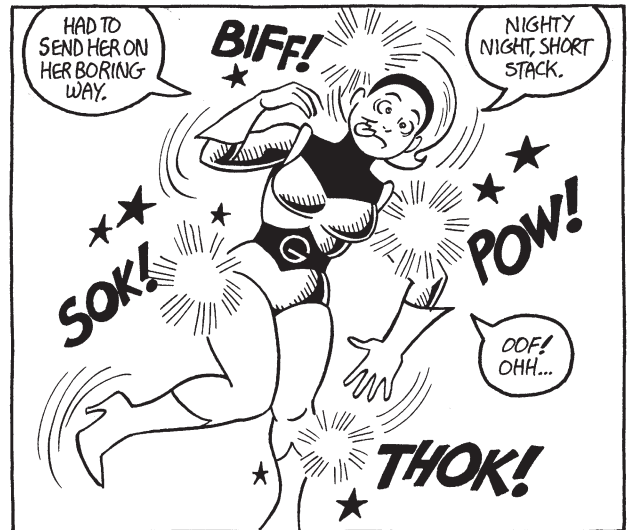
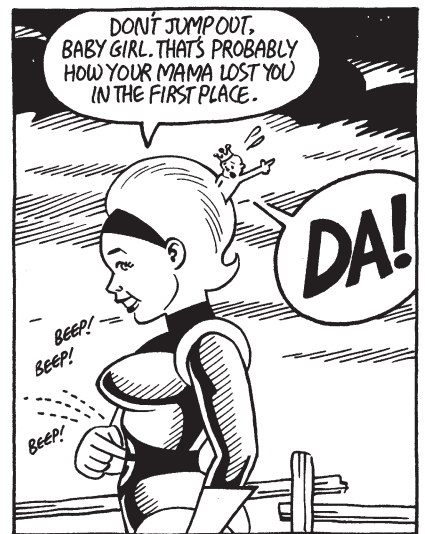
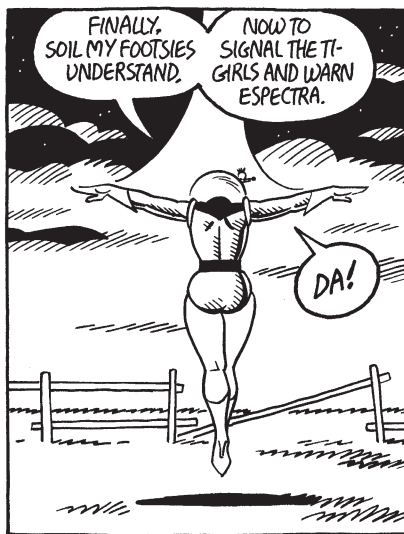


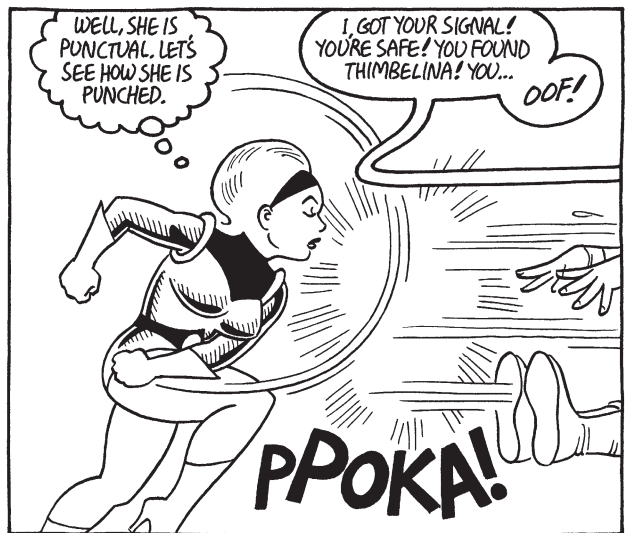
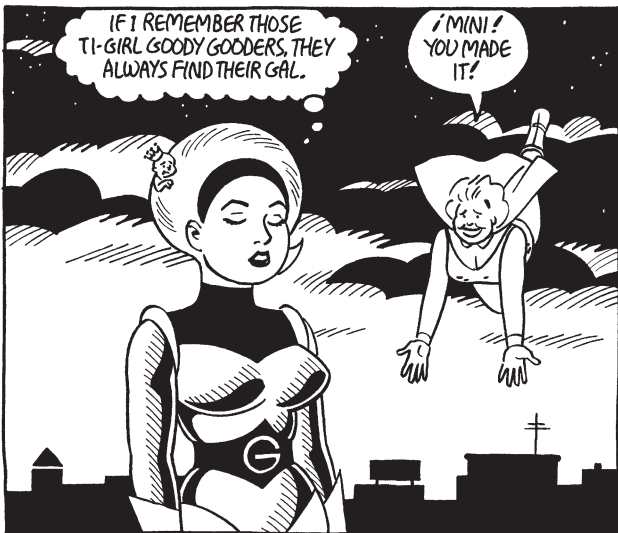
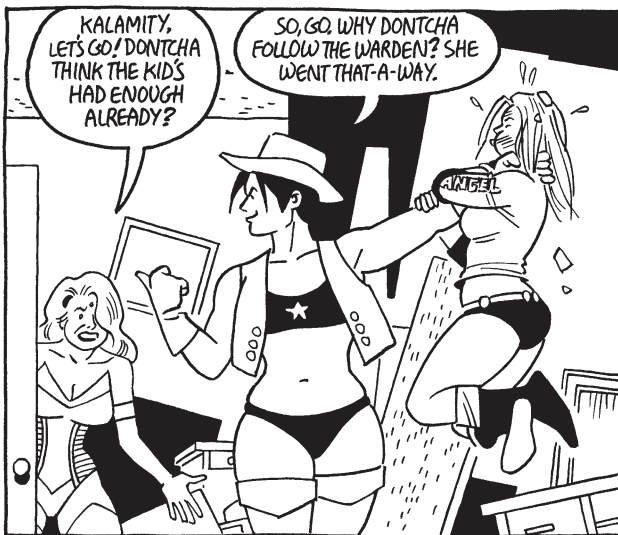


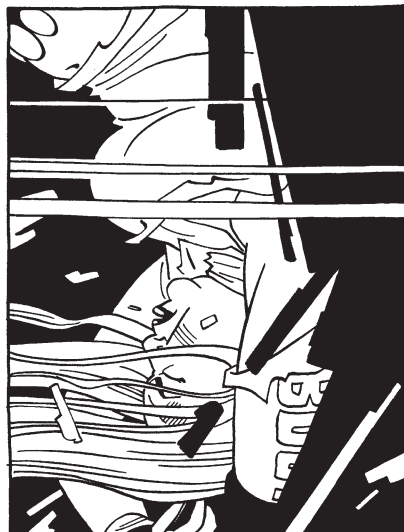
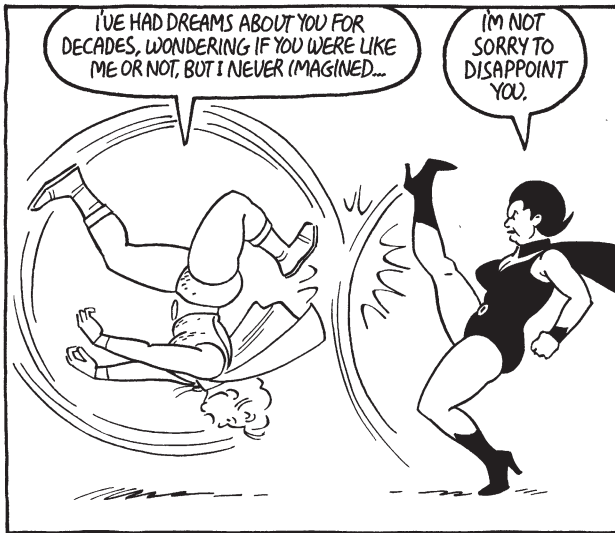


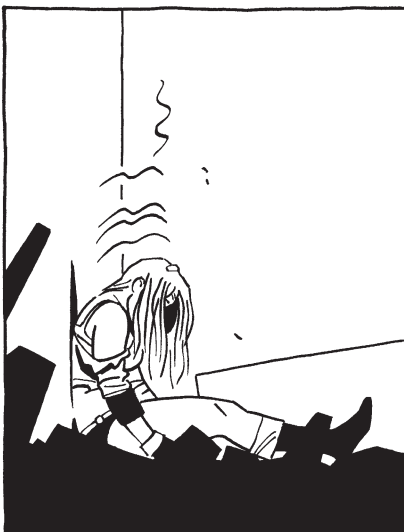
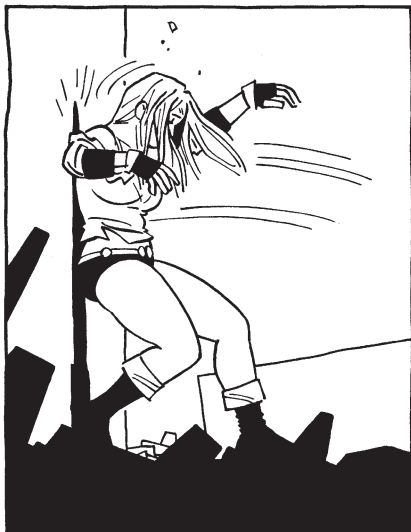
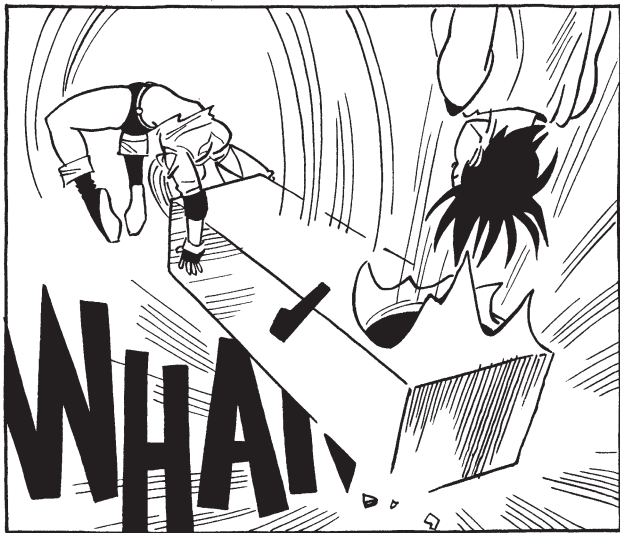
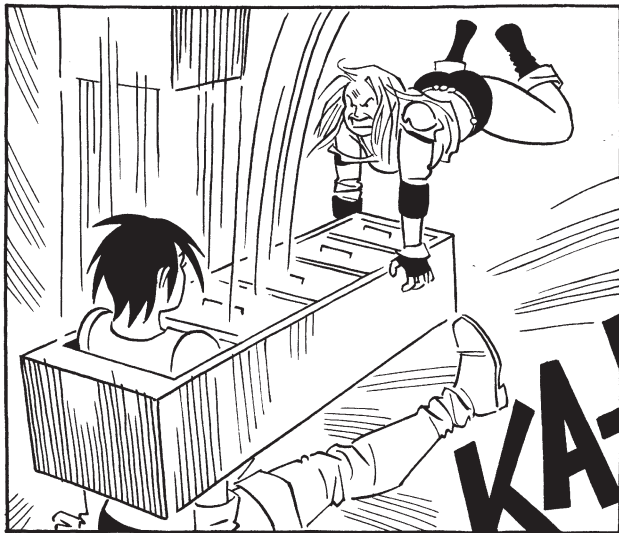
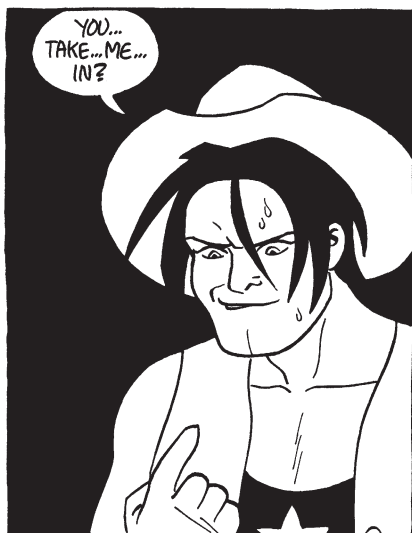


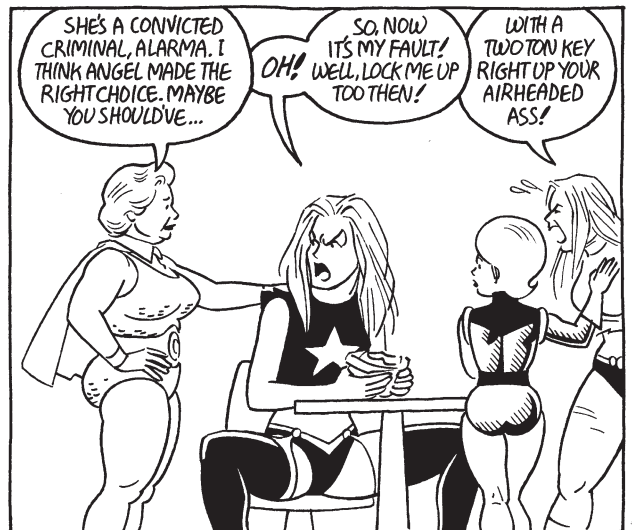
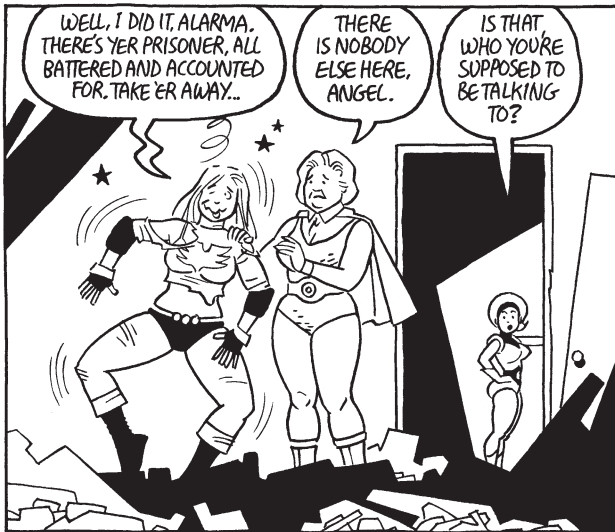
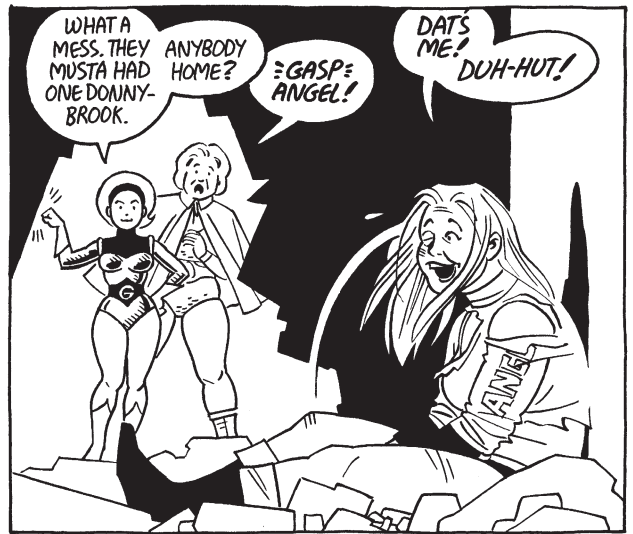
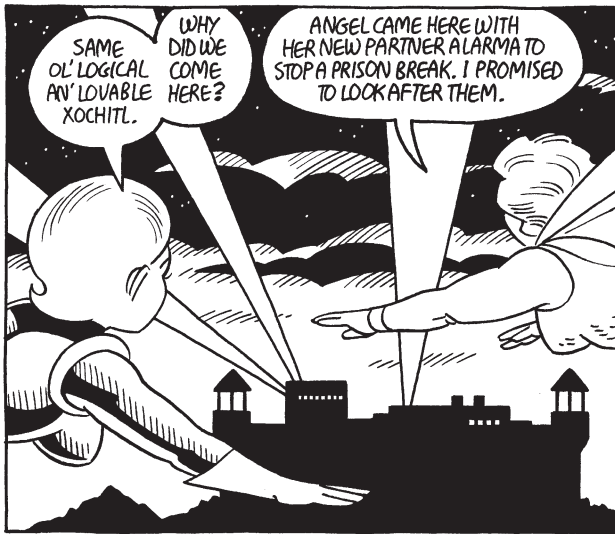


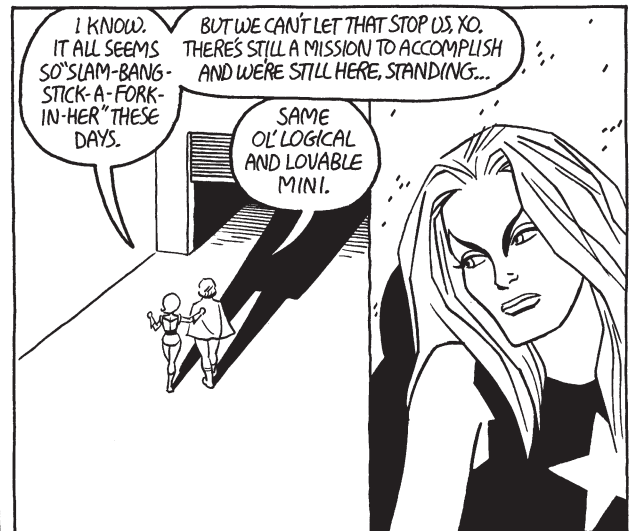
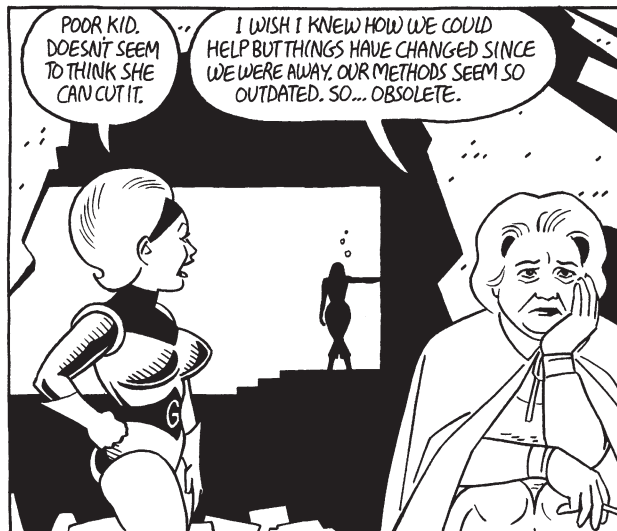
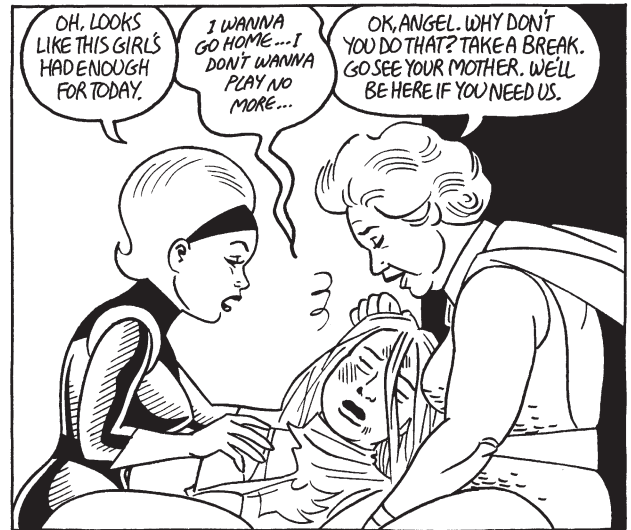
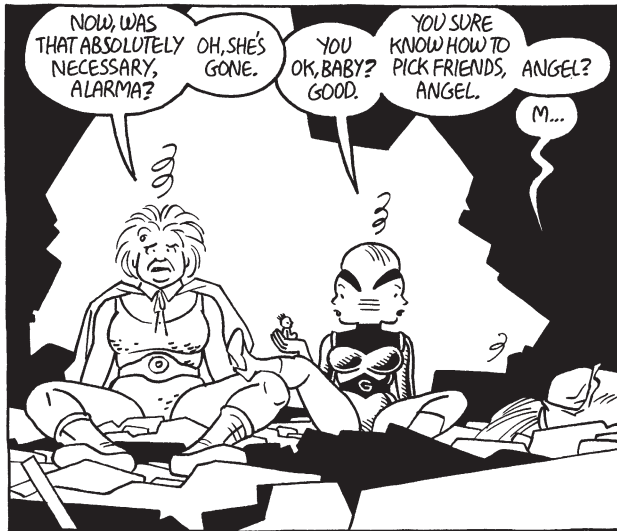
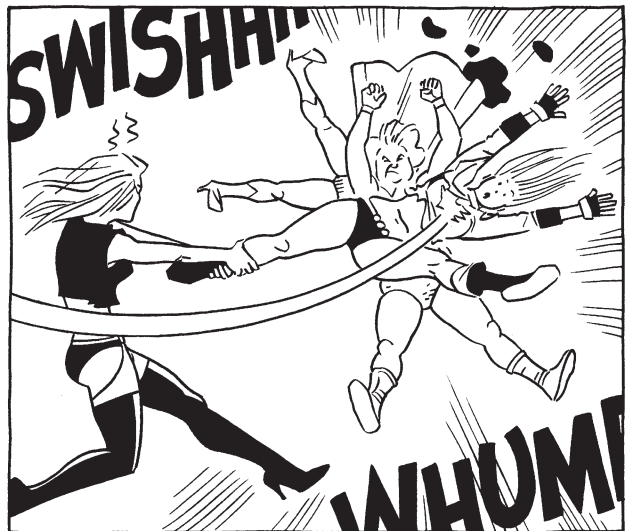


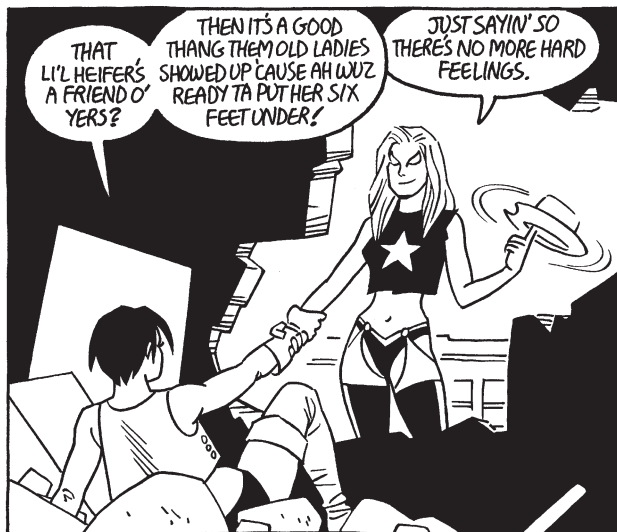
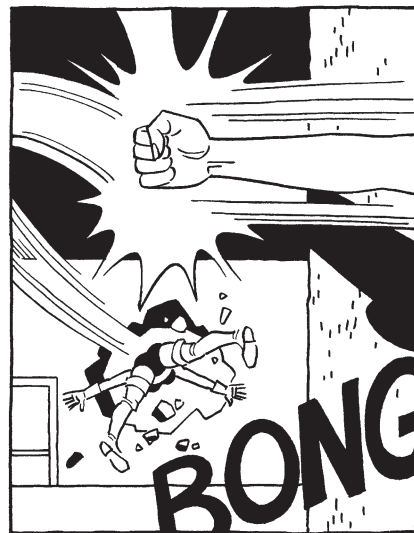
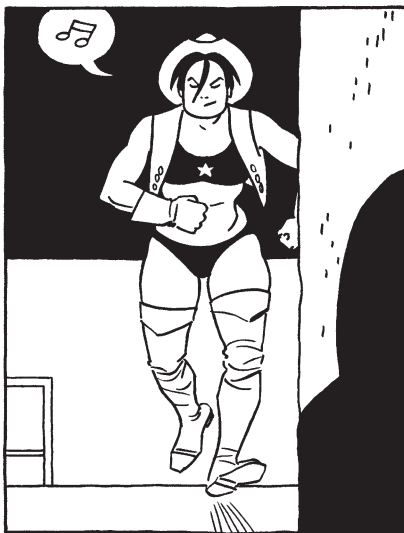
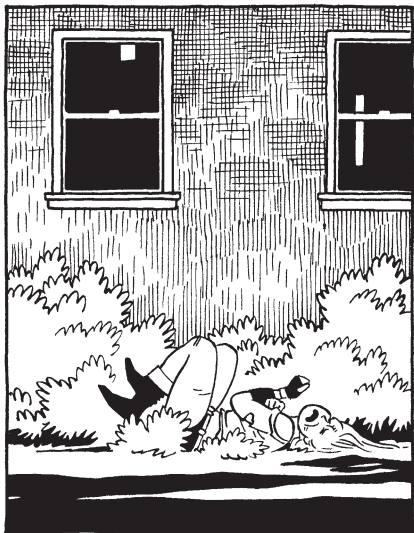
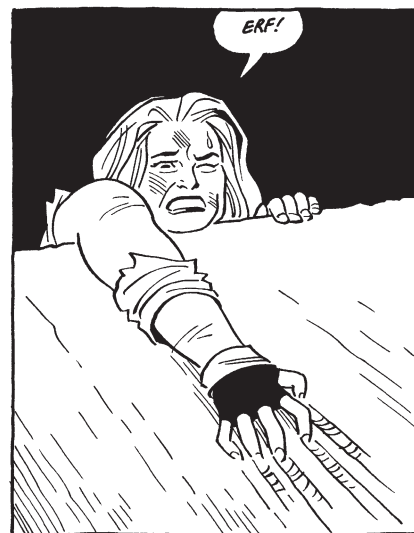


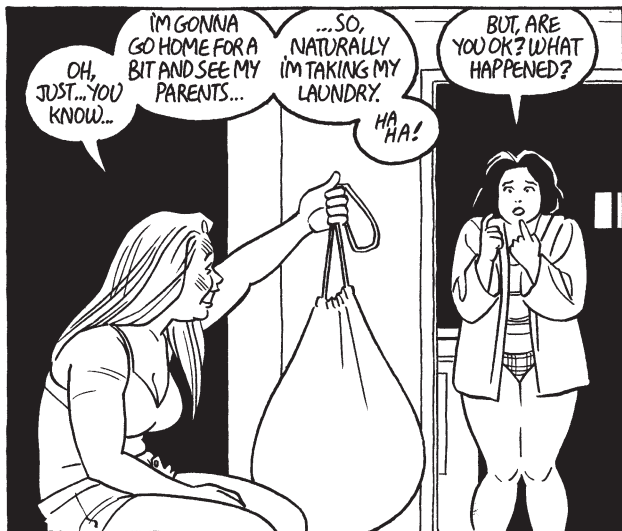
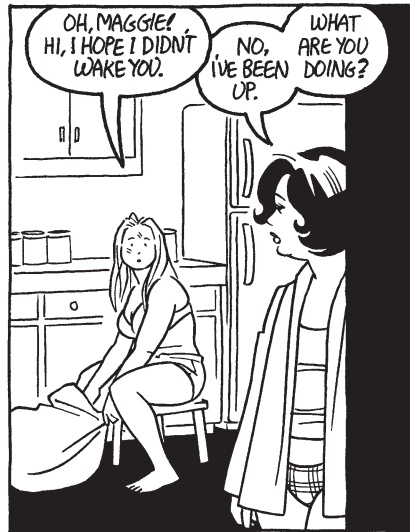
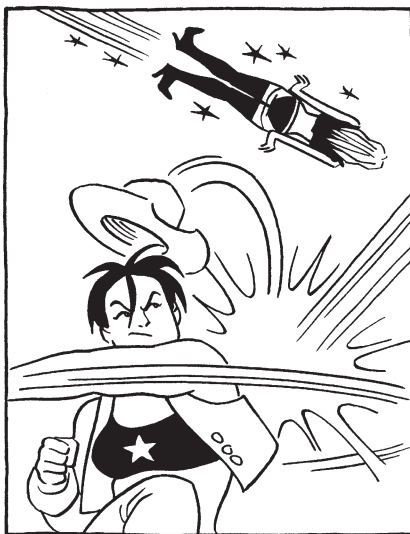


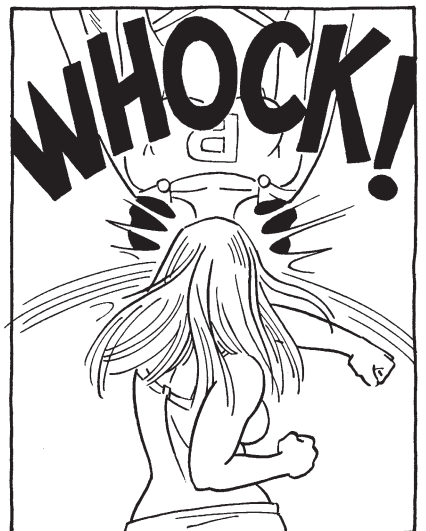
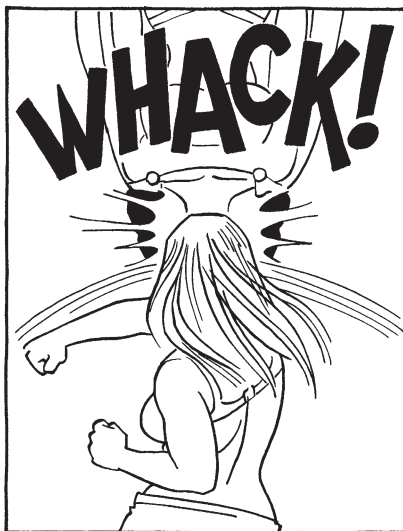
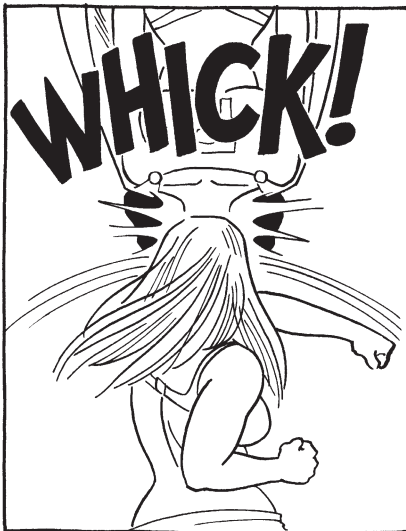
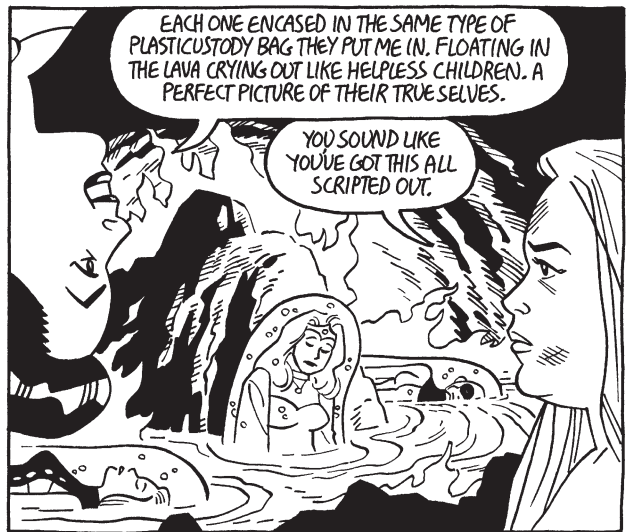
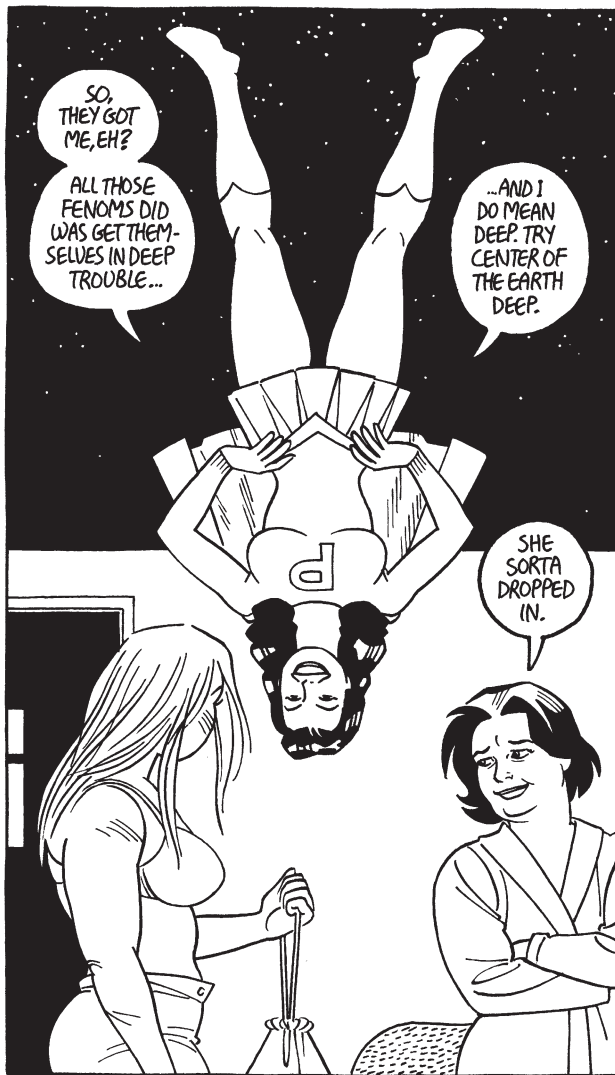


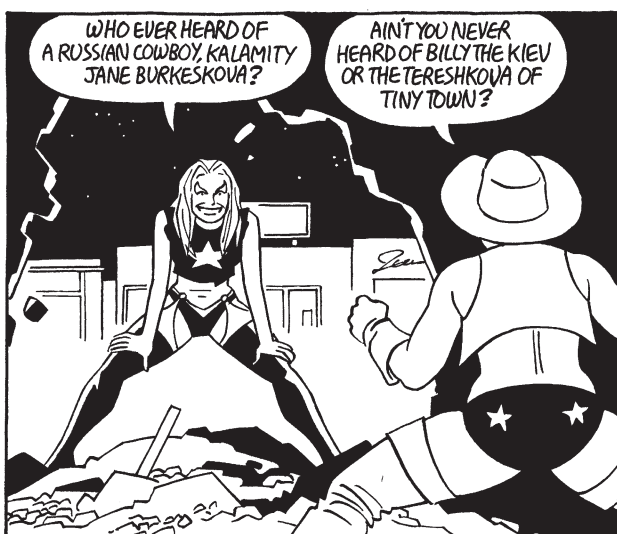
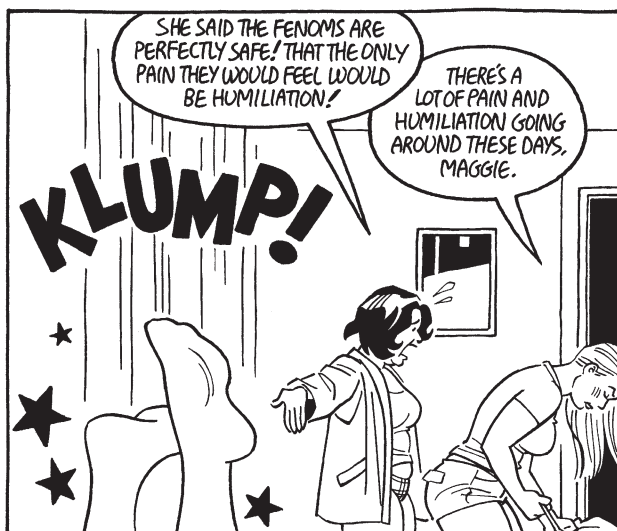


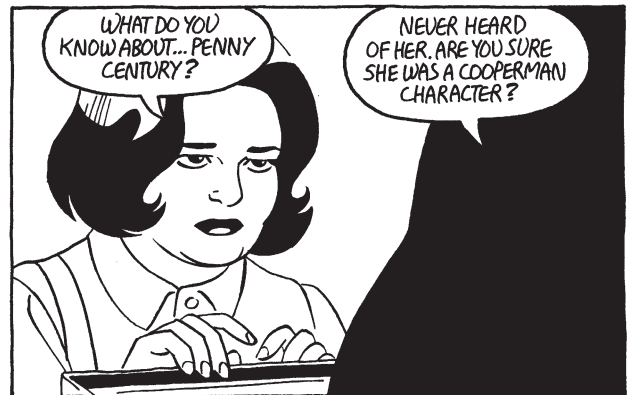
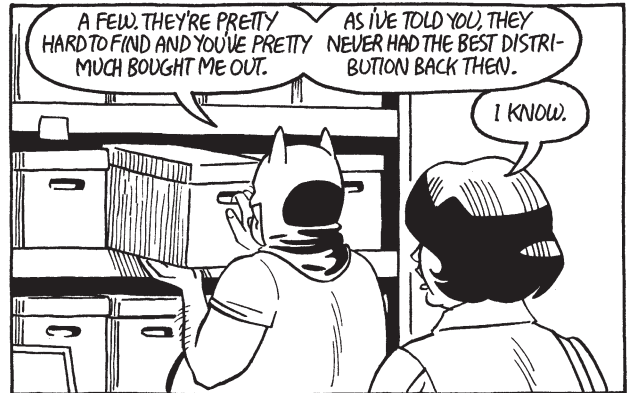
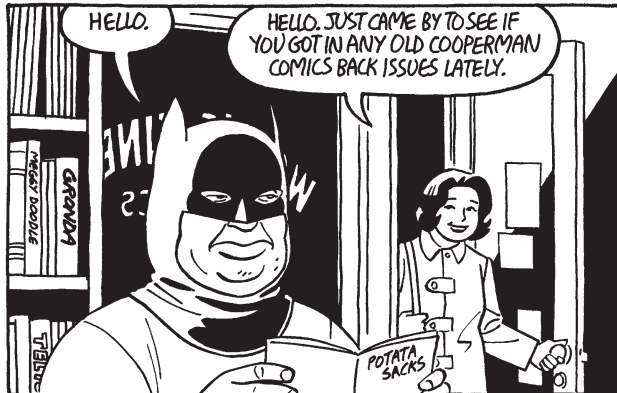


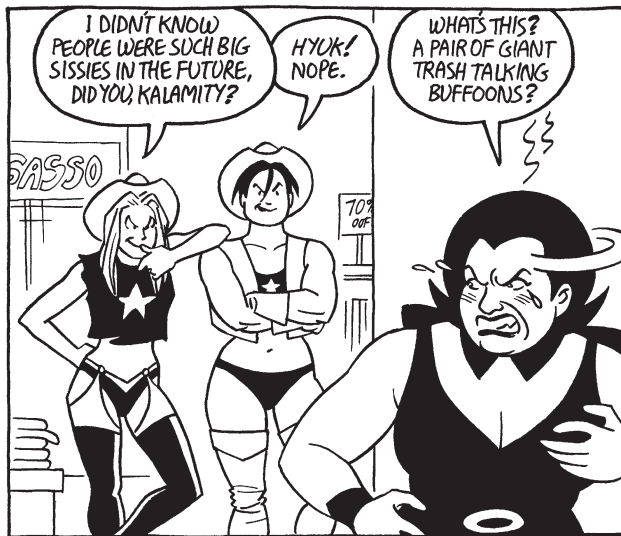
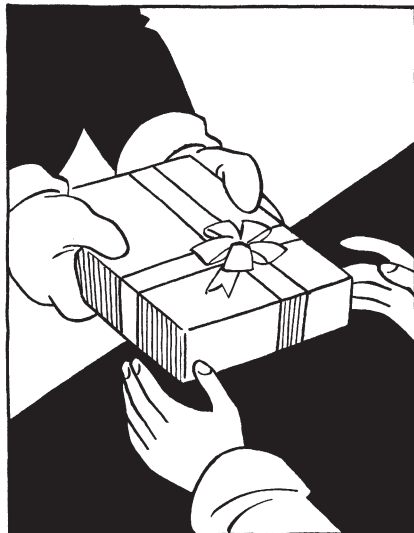


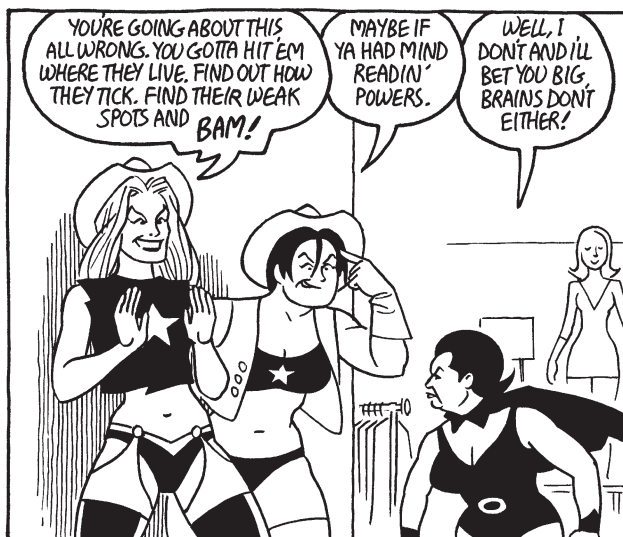


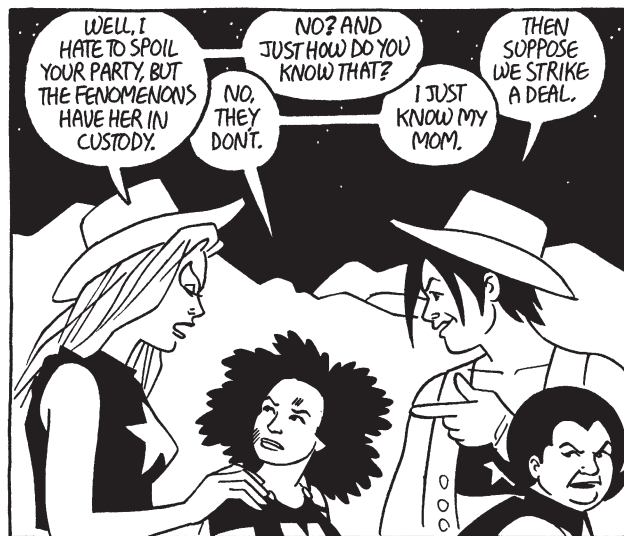
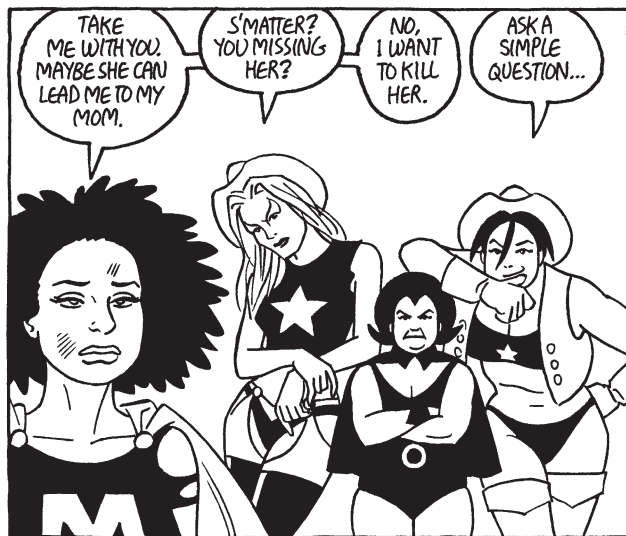
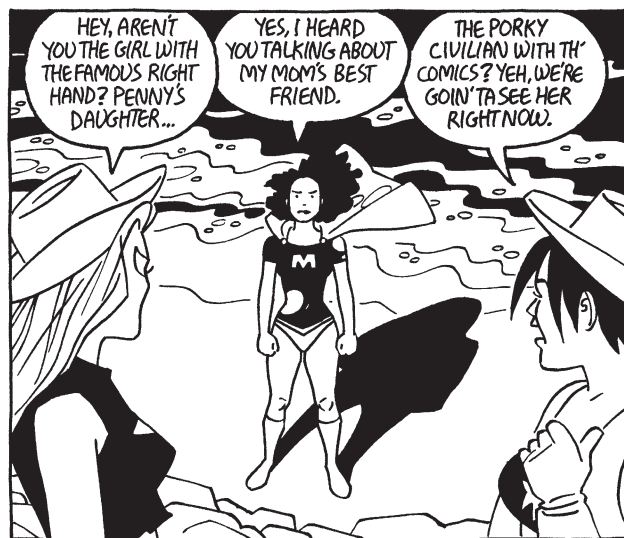
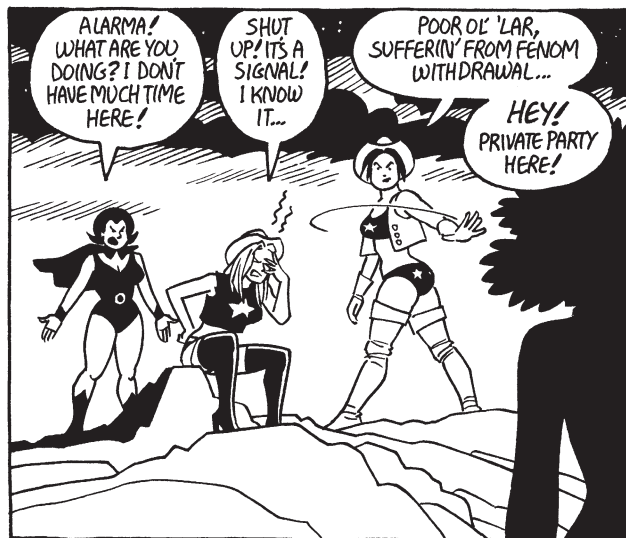
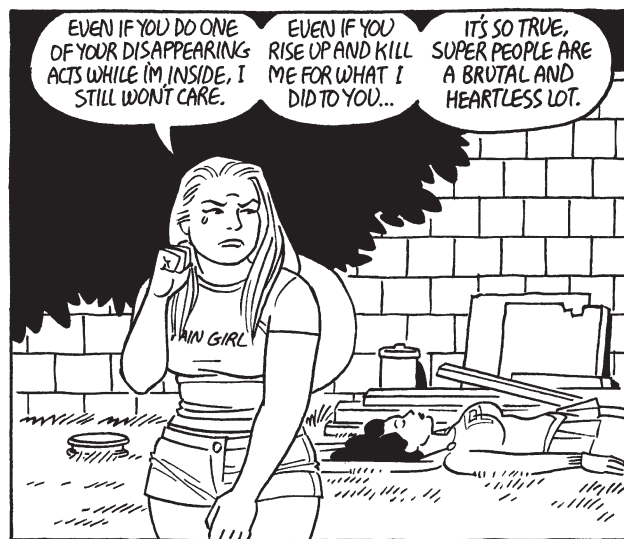


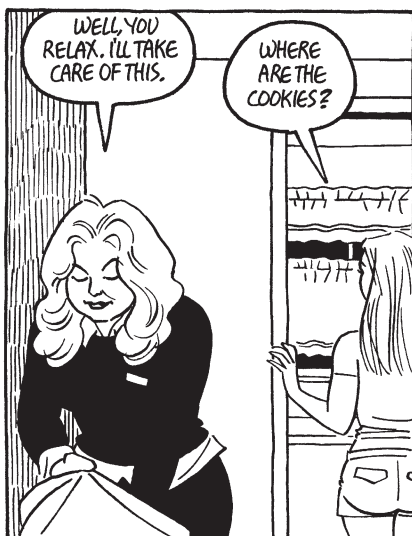
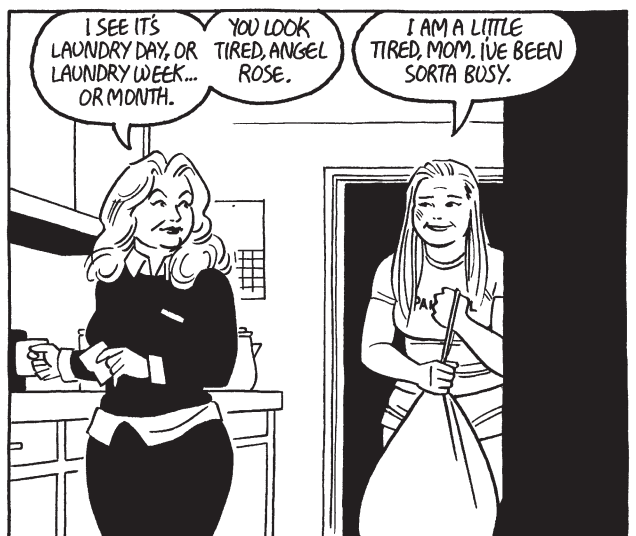
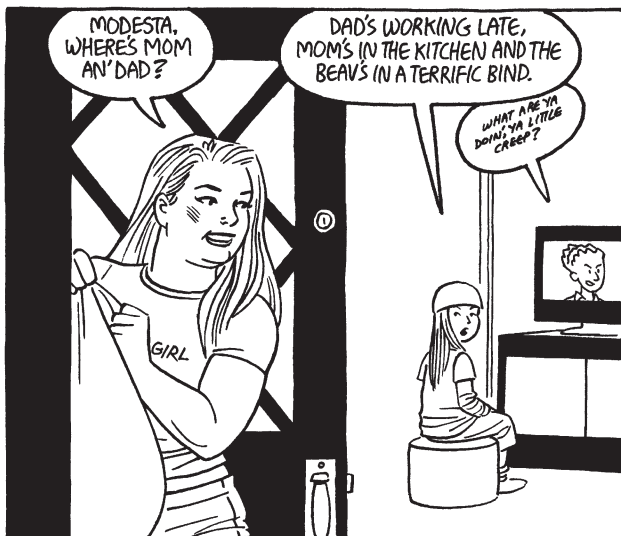
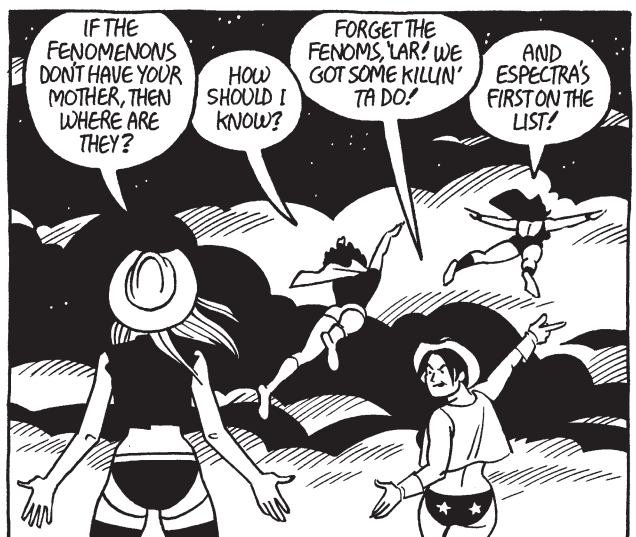
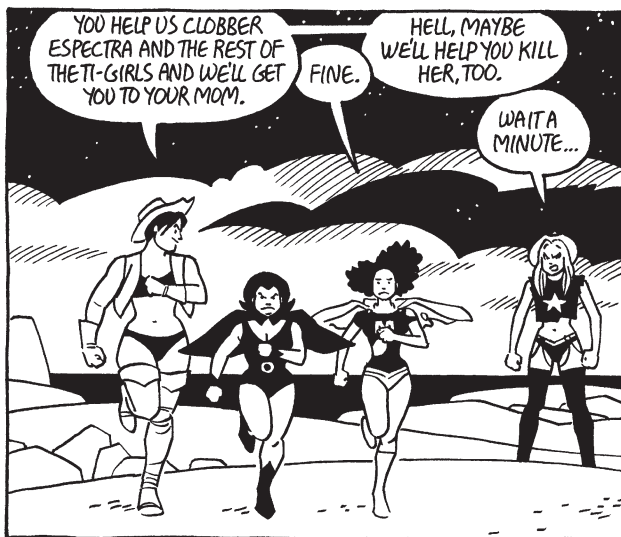


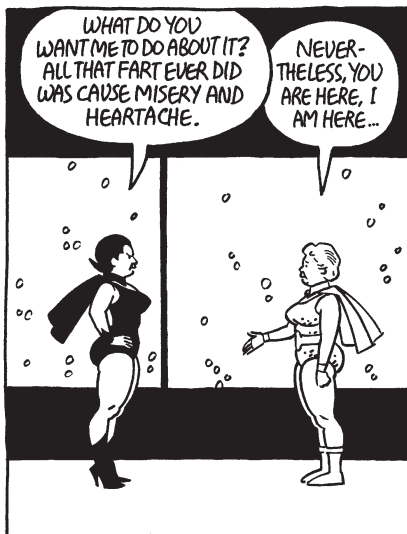
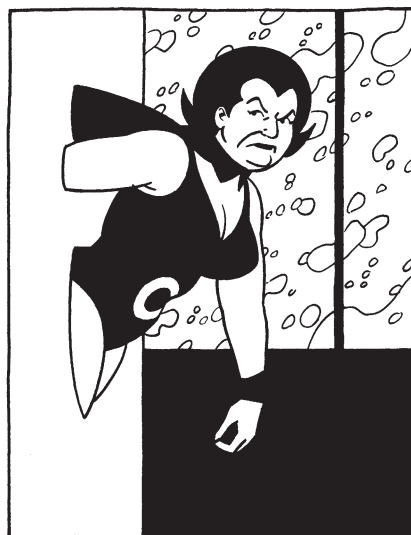
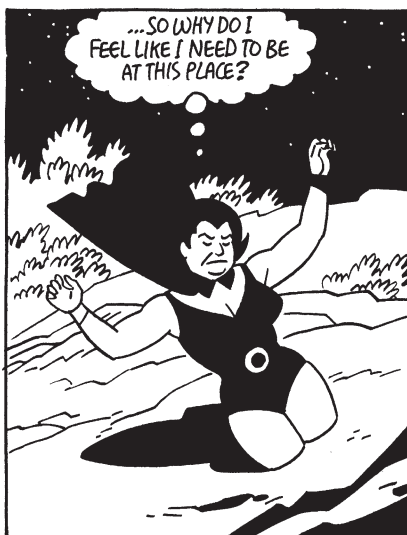
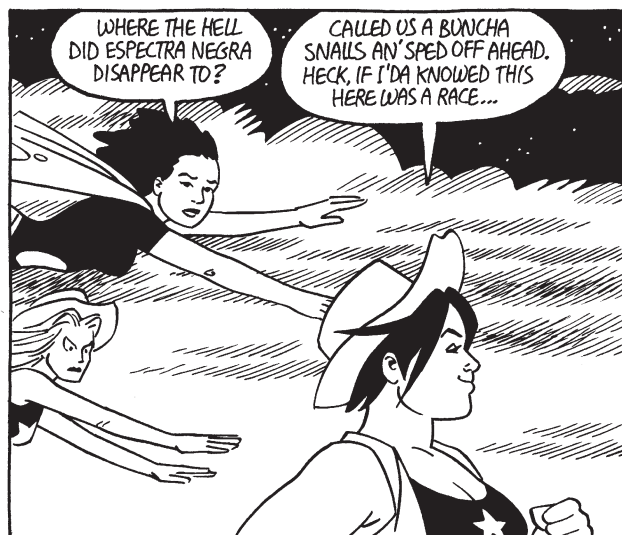
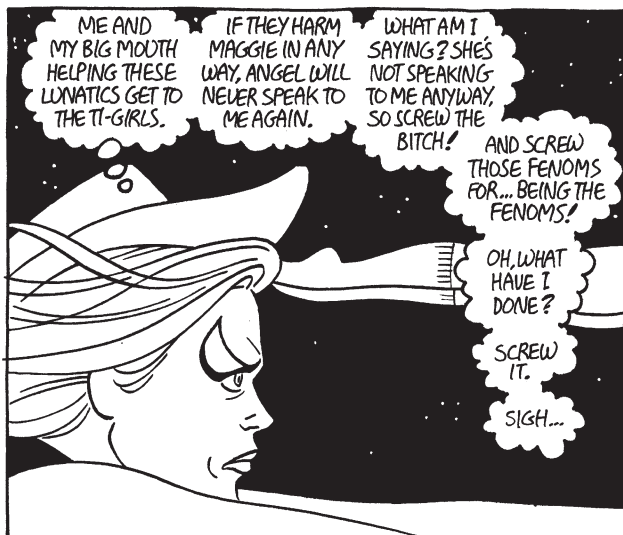


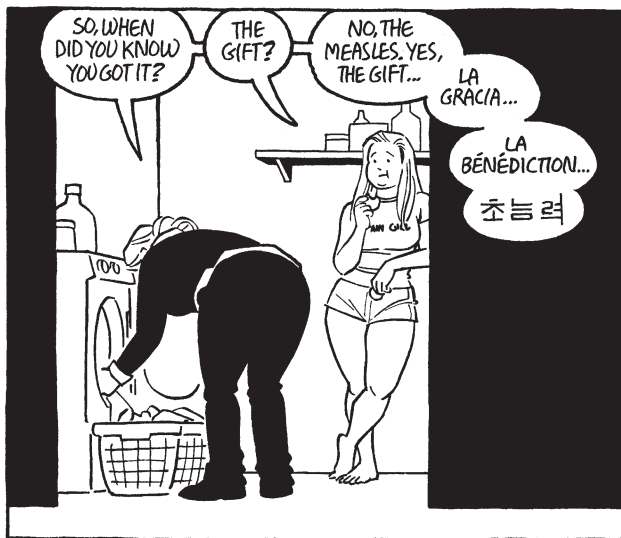


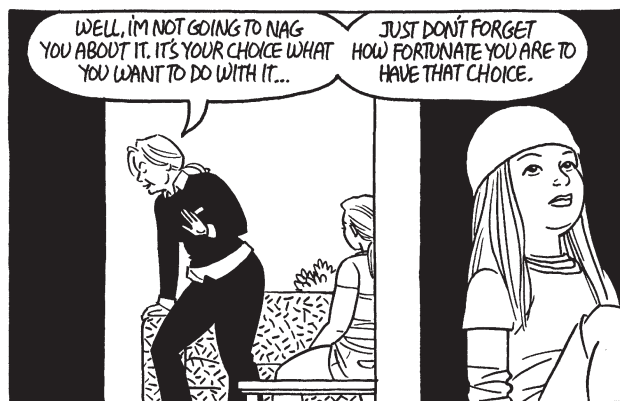
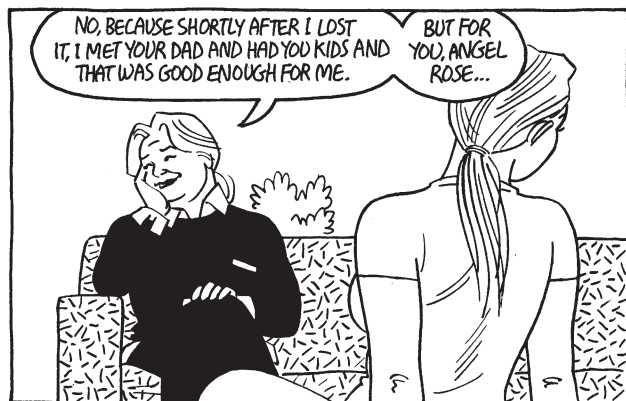
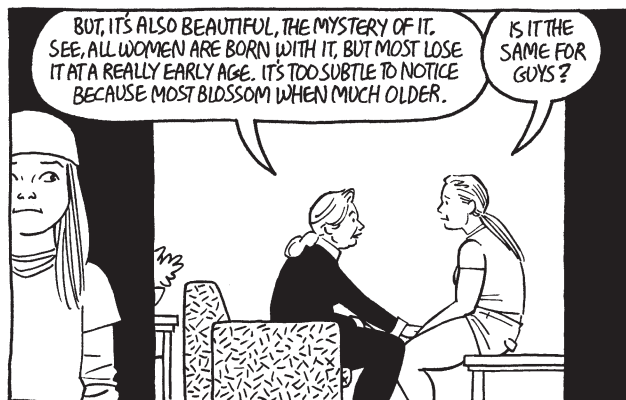
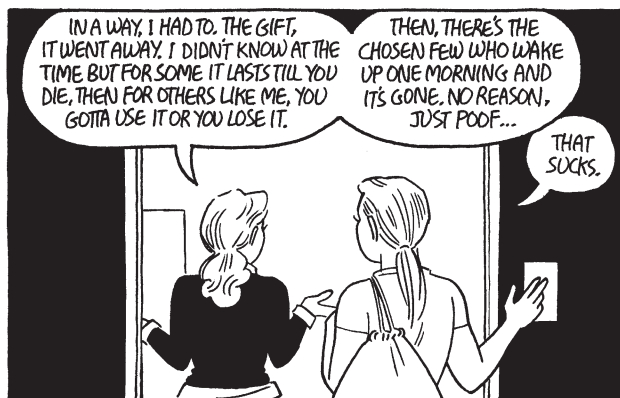
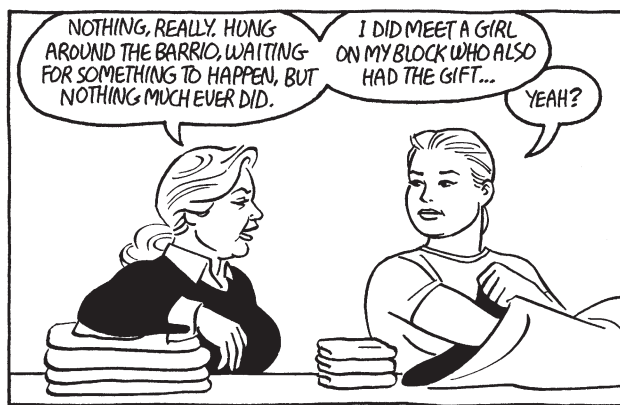
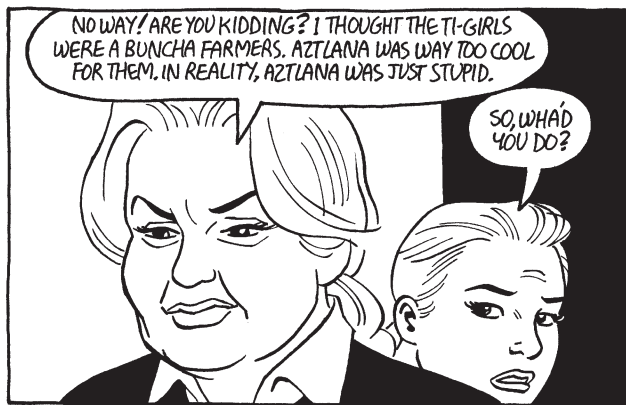












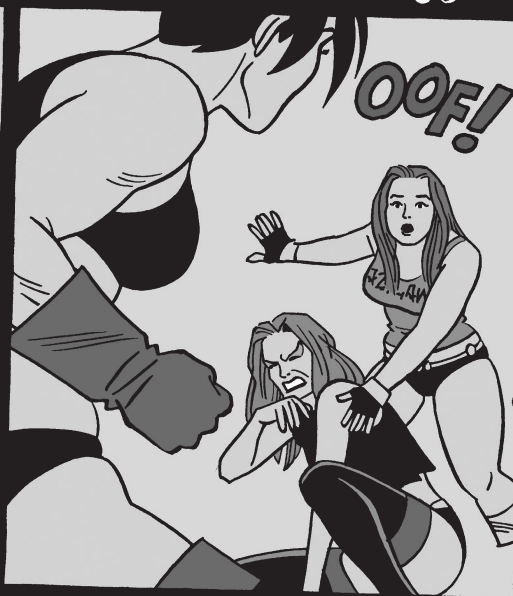
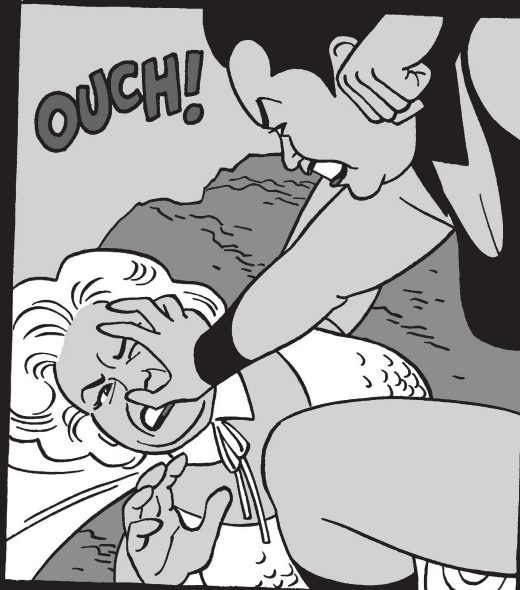
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COOPERMAN COMICS GROUP

TI-GIRLS

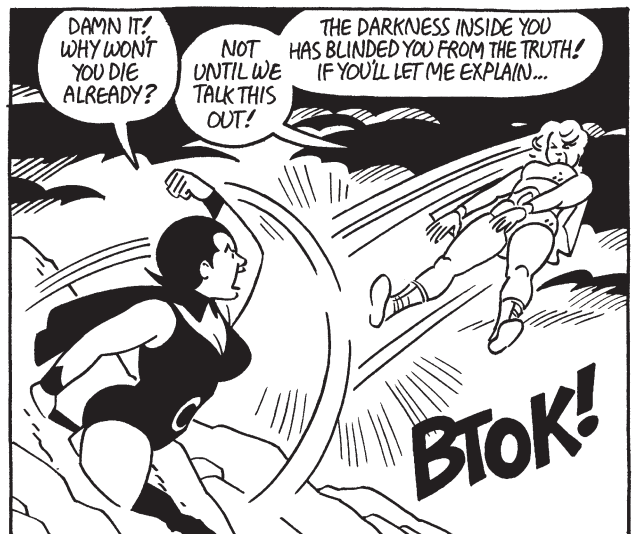
ADVENTURES

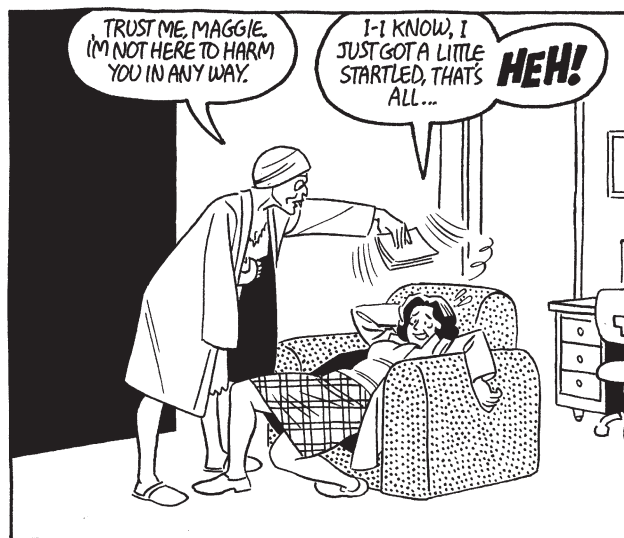
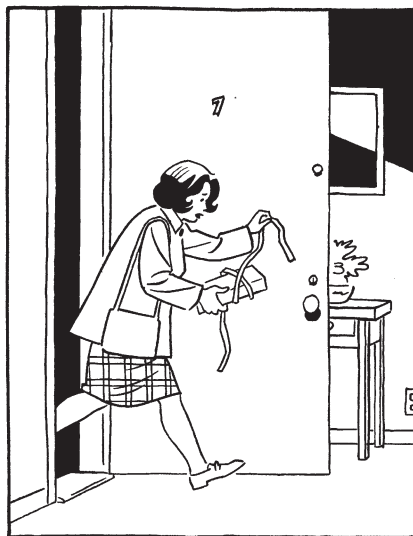
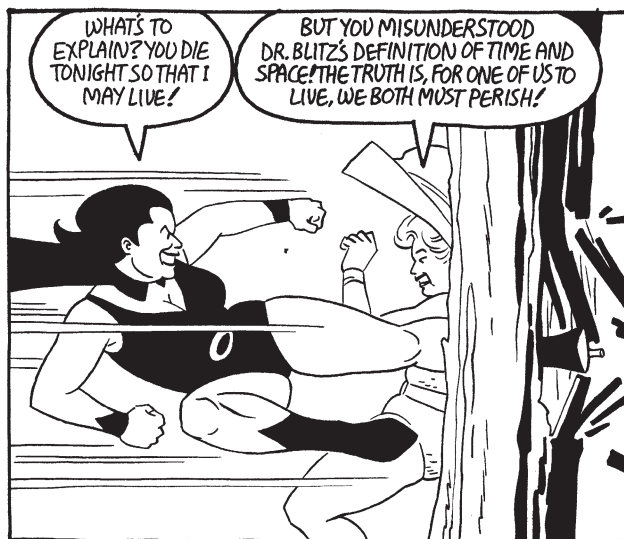
FEB. NO. 36

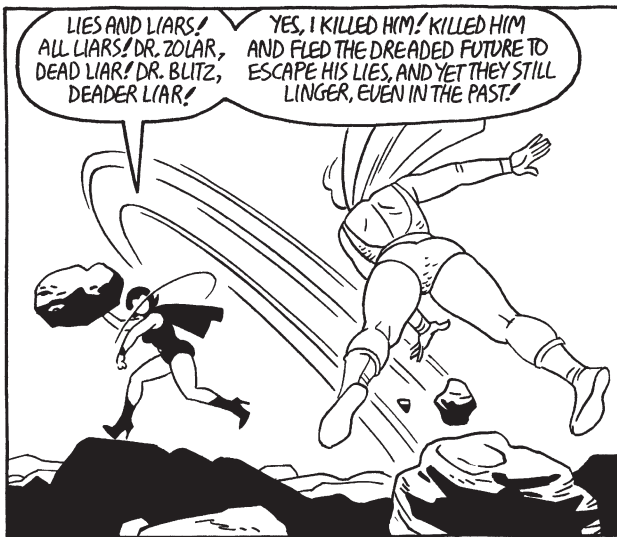
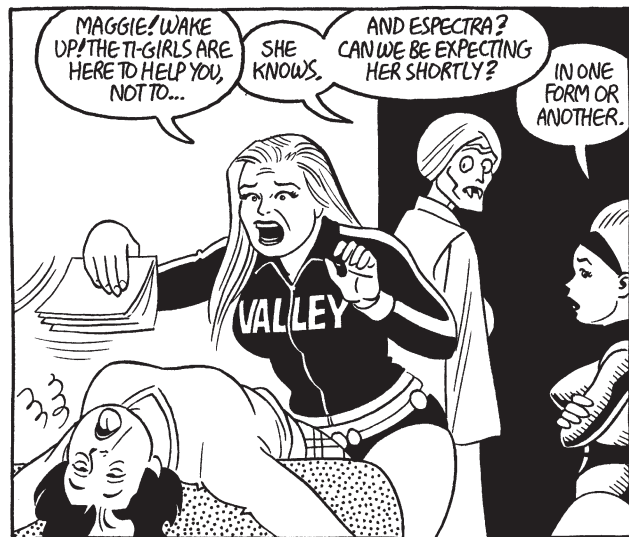


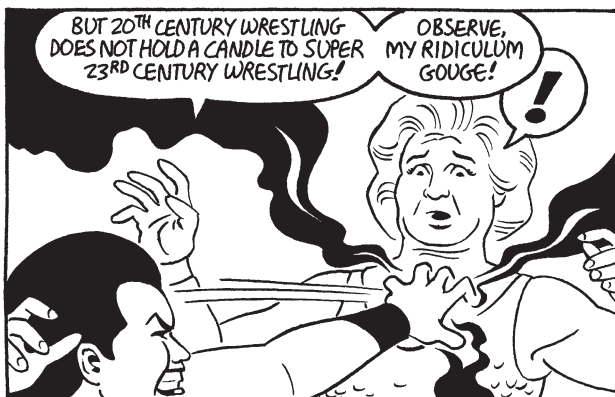
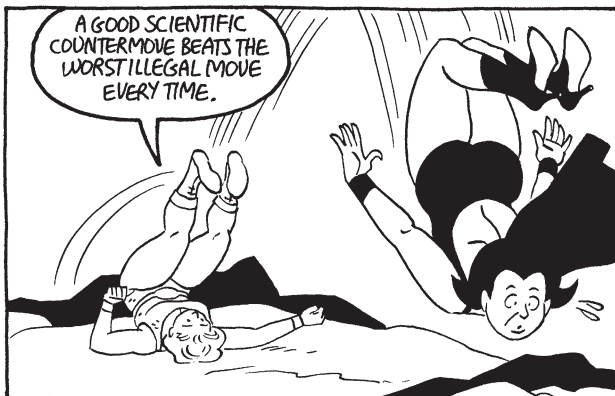
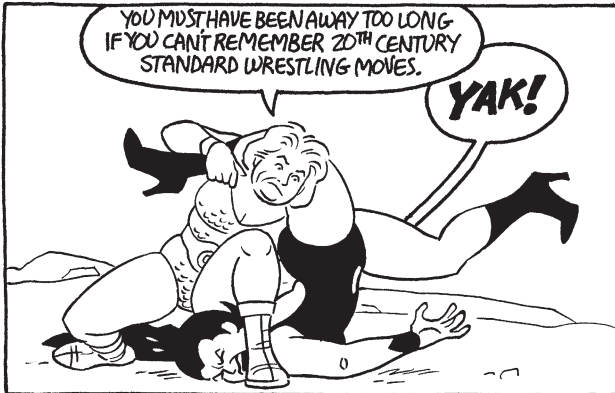
PART
4

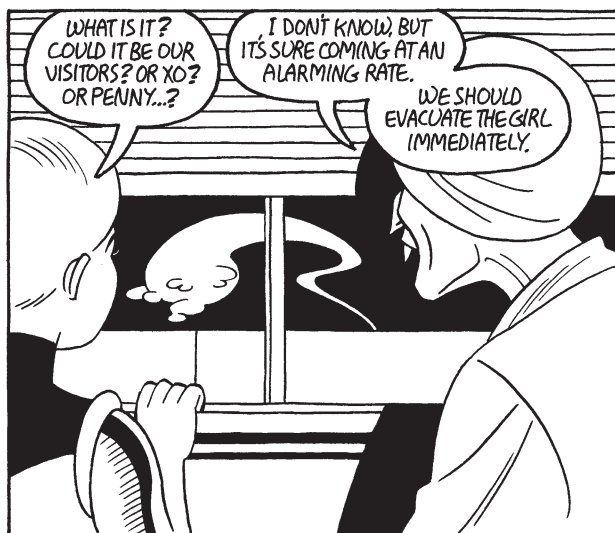
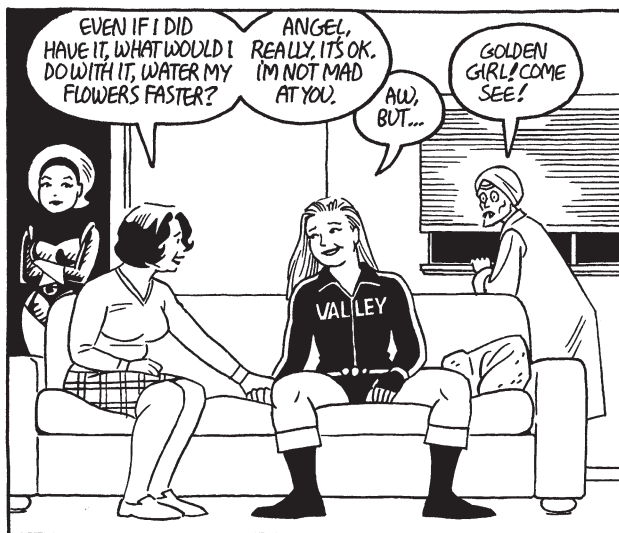
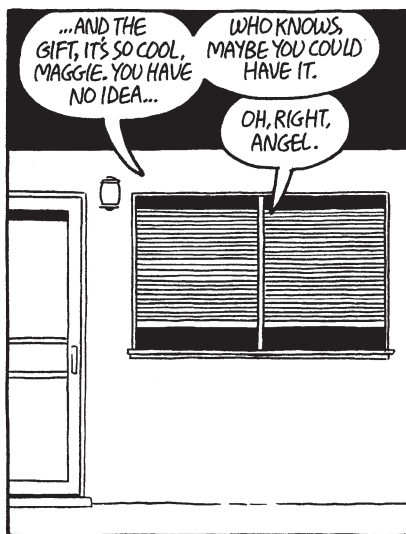
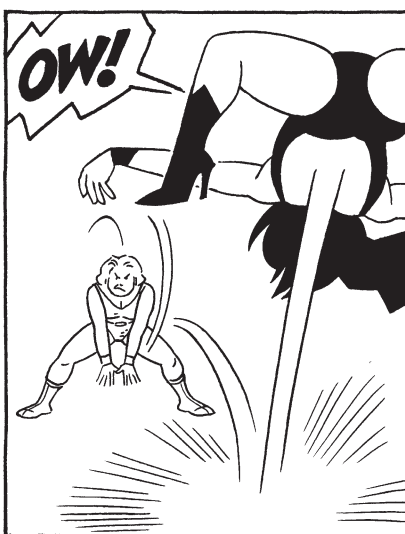
MOTHERS of MERCY

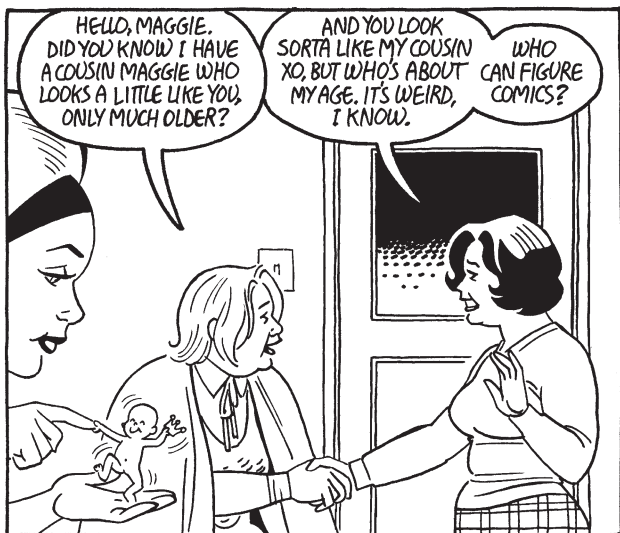
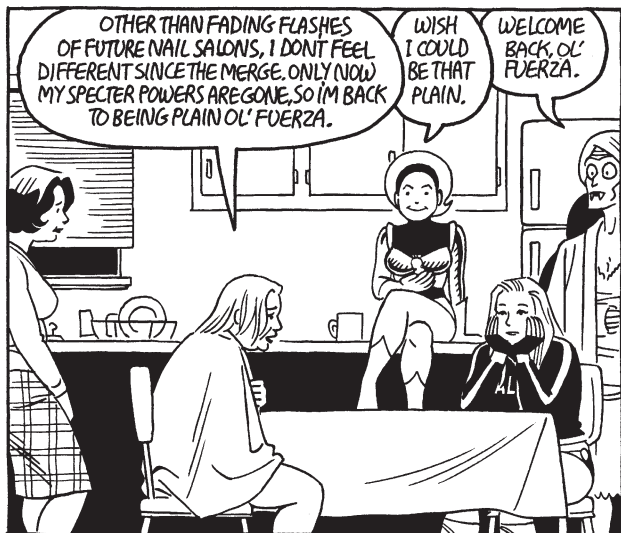
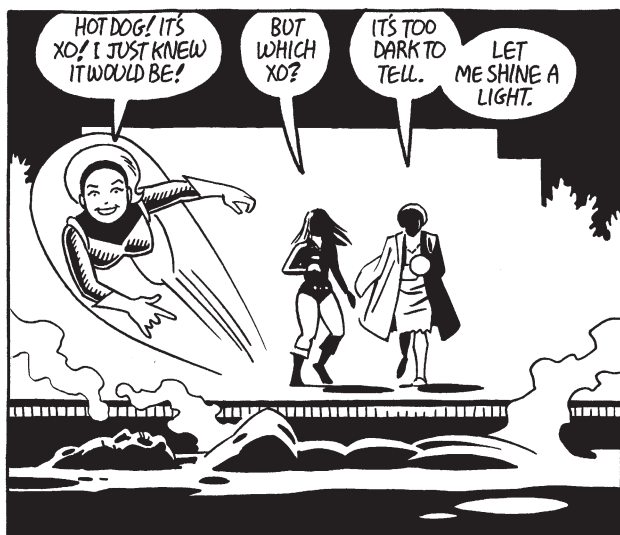


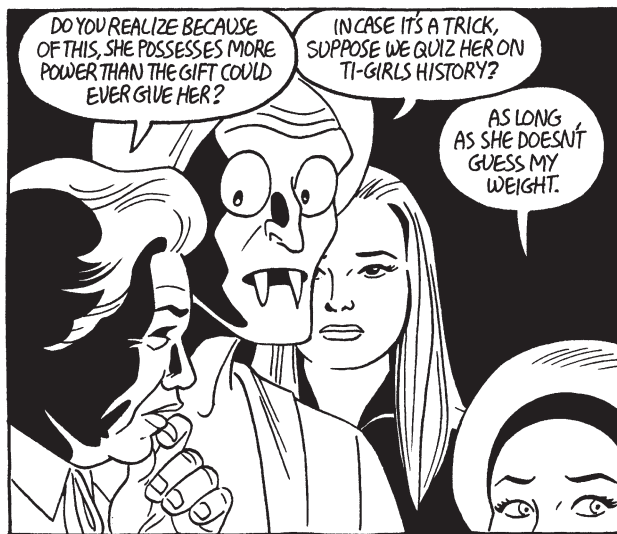
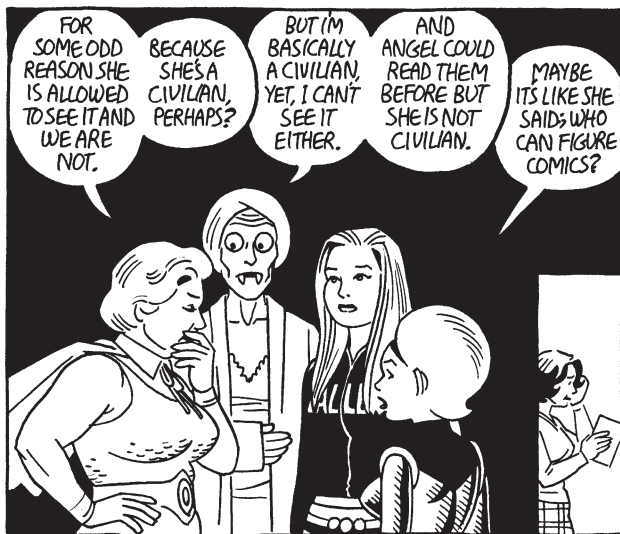
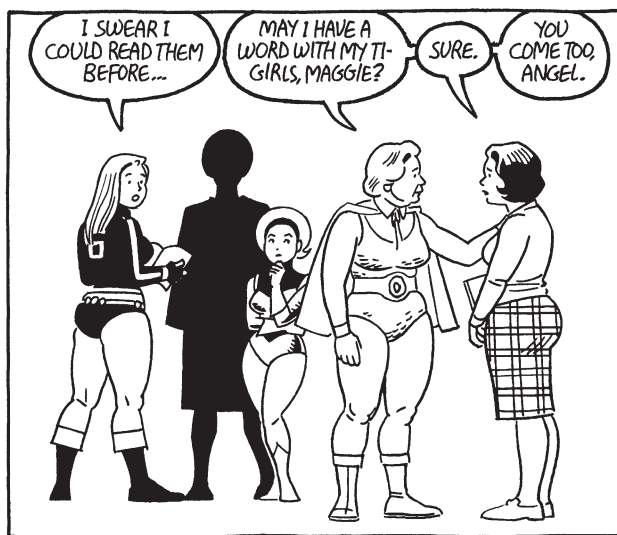
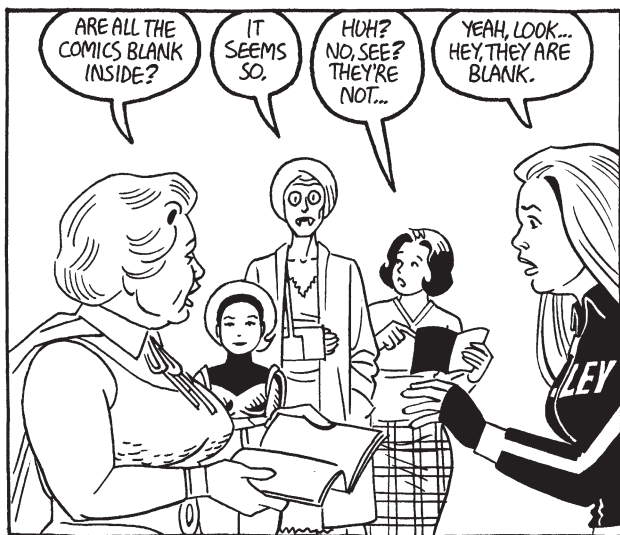












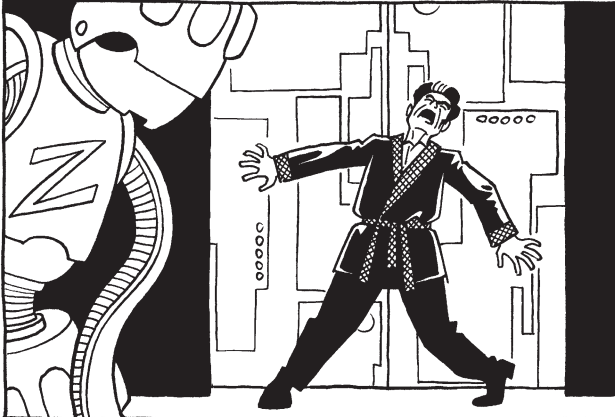
THOUGH THE GIFT HAS EXISTED SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME, IT WASN'T UNTIL THE 20TH CENTURY SUPERHERO BOOM THAT WOMEN STARTED TO USE IT IN LARGE NUMBERS, BUT LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, SUCCEEDING IN THE SUPER BIZ WAS DIFFICULT FOR ANYONE WHO WASN'T WHITE OR MALE OR A WHITE MALE.



THEY WERE JOINED BY TIGER WOMAN SO THEY DECIDED TO CALL THEMSELVES THE TI-GIRLS. MISS MICRO JOINED NEXT AND CHANGED HER NAME TO TINY TAYLOR. THEY WERE READY FOR THE WORLD BUT WHAT THEY GAINED IN STRENGTH, THEY LACKED IN LEADERSHIP.



DR. ZOLAR WAS A STRIDENT MEGALOMANIAC AND AFTER A FEW YEARS OF INFIGHTING, THE TI-GIRLS COLLAPSED. TITAN GIRL RAN AWAY WITH A DRUMMER BACKEAST AND THE REST EITHER QUIT OR RETIRED, THUS LEAVING THE DOCTOR WITH EGGS ON HIS FACE.



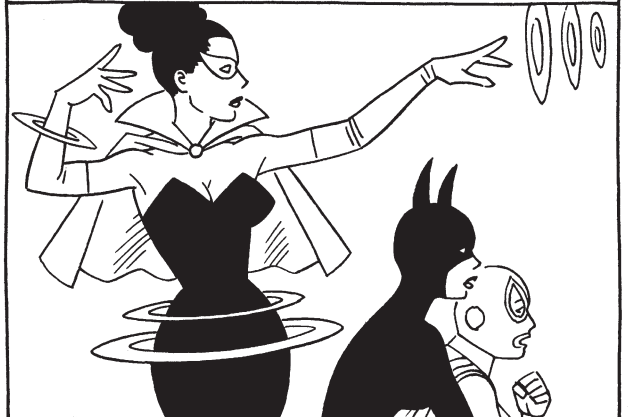
IT WASN'T UNTIL THE LATE 1950'S DID THINGS START TO CHANGE WHEN ONE DAY TITAN GIRL AND MADAM TIME MET AND MADE THE BOLD DECISION TO QUIT THEIR MALE-DOMINATED SUPER TEAMS AND FORM THEIR OWN ALL-FEMALE SQUAD.



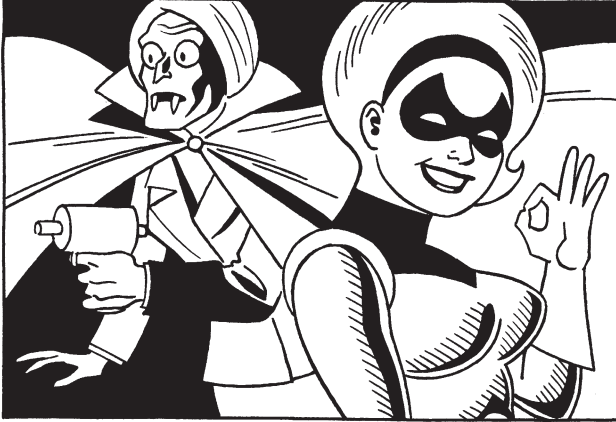
TITAN GIRL MET AND MARRIED A BRILLIANT SCIENTIST NAMED DR. ZOLAR, FAMOUS FOR ADVANCING THE CAREER OF MIRACLE WOMAN IN THE 40'S. HE WAS SOON VOTED IN (BY HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE) AS THE LEADER OF THE TI-GIRLS.



IMMEDIATELY DR. ZOLAR STARTED RECRUITING AN ALL-NEW TI-GIRLS. HE FOCUSED ON YOUNG, INFLUENTIAL MISFITS AND REJECTS FROM OTHER TEAMS, LIKE THE DIABETIC SATURNA, THE ALCOHOLIC FALCONA AND AN ILLEGAL ALIEN (IMMIGRANT) NAMED FUERZA (LATER ESPECTRA).



THEY KEPT THE TI-GIRLS TITLE BECAUSE DR. ZOLAR CLAIMED IT WAS GOOD FOR BUSINESS. THE LAST TWO MEMBERS THAT MADE UP THE ROSTER WERE THE MAVERICK WEEPER AND A BORED, RICH SOCIALITE DIVORCÉE NAMED GOLDEN GIRL.



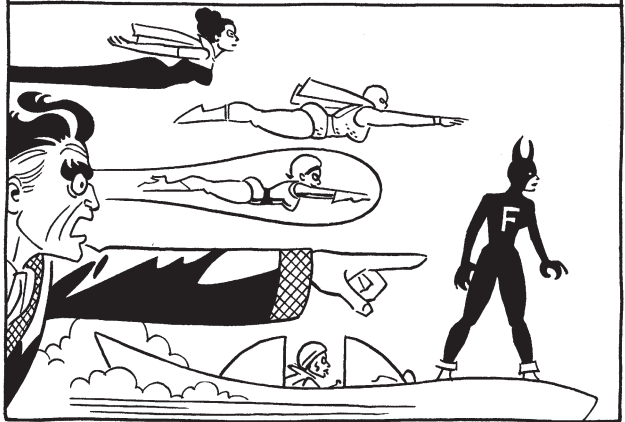
EVENTUALLY, THE TI-GIRLS BECAME FED UP WITH ZOLAR'S EXPLOITATION AND IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, FIRED HIM. THIS BROUGHT ESPECTRA AND GOLDEN GIRL CLOSER TOGETHER AND A DIVORCE TO ZOLAR SOON FOLLOWED. THE TI-GIRLS BECAME MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER INTO THE NEXT DECADE.



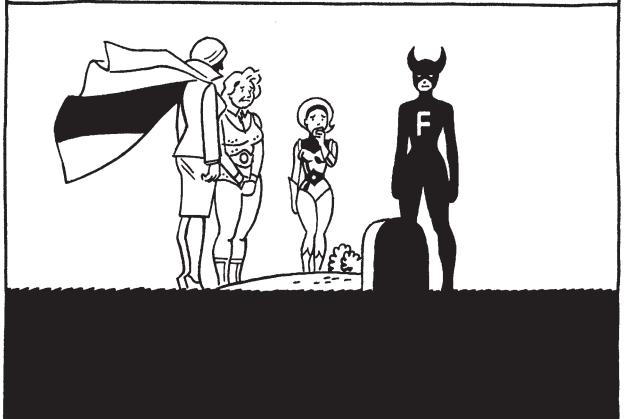
DR. ZOLAR SPENT THE NEXT TWO DECADES TRYING TO BUILD AND PERFECT HIS ULTIMATE SUPER WOMEN'S FIGHTING TEAM. FINALLY, THE PHENOMENONS WERE BORN. TWO MONTHS LATER, AFTER A BRIEF ELDPEMENT WITH SON SWAIN, THEY TOO FIRED AND DIVORCED HIM.



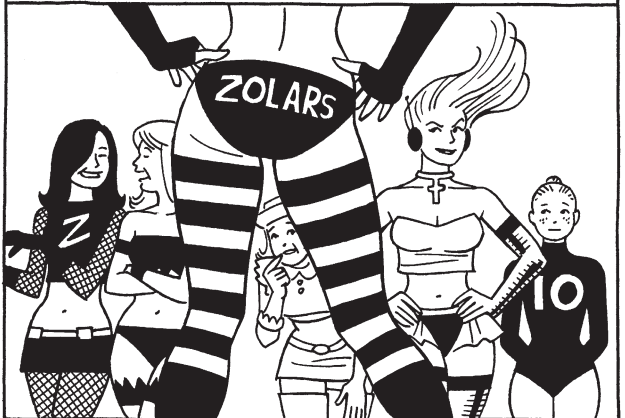
FUERZA (ESPECTRA) AND ZOLAR WERE MARRIED EVEN THOUGH HE OPENLY DATED GOLDEN GIRL ON THE SIDE. THE NEW TI-GIRLS BECAME QUITE A POWERFUL FORCE IN CRIMEFIGHTING, EVEN WITH ALL THE JEALOUSIES AND MISTRUST IN THE RANKS.

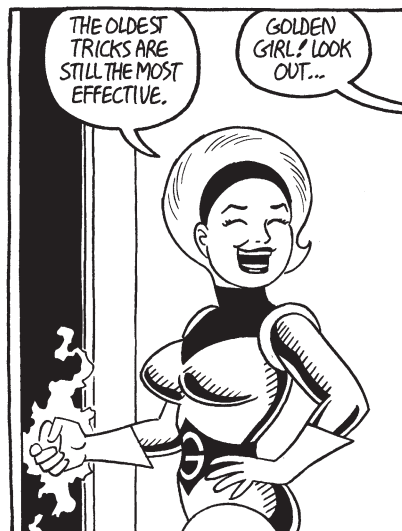
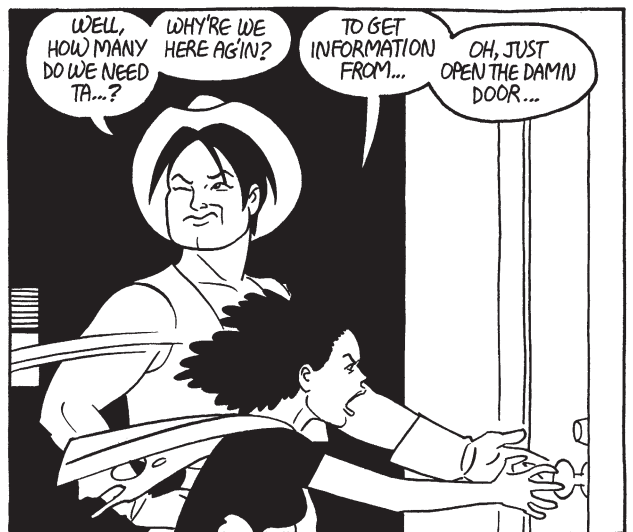
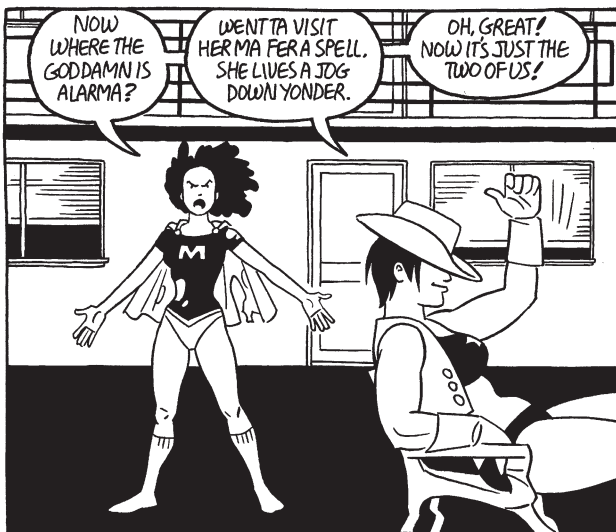
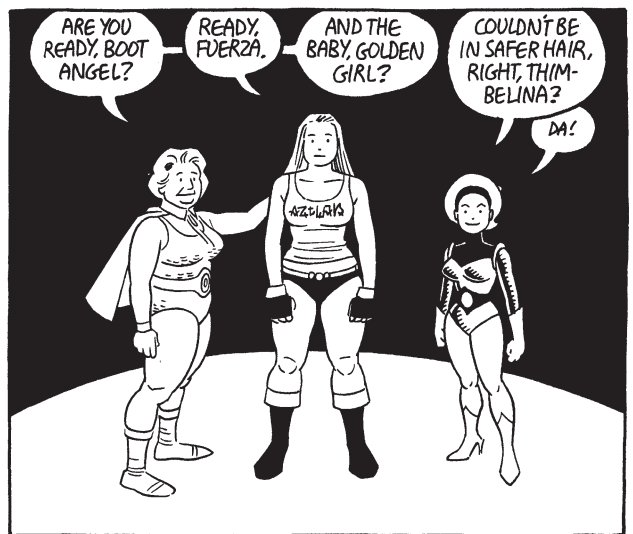
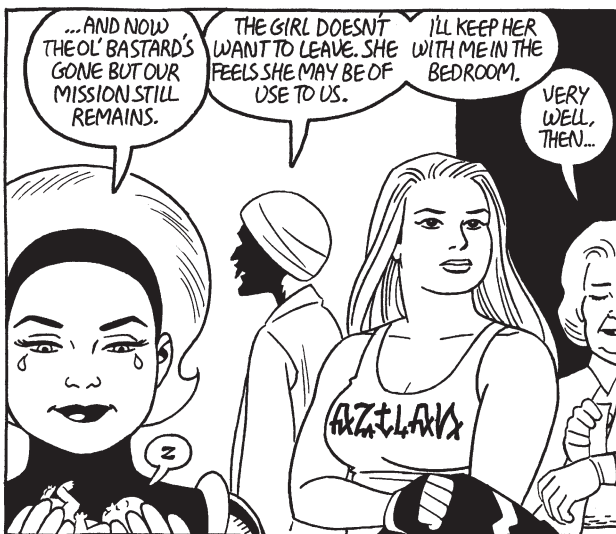


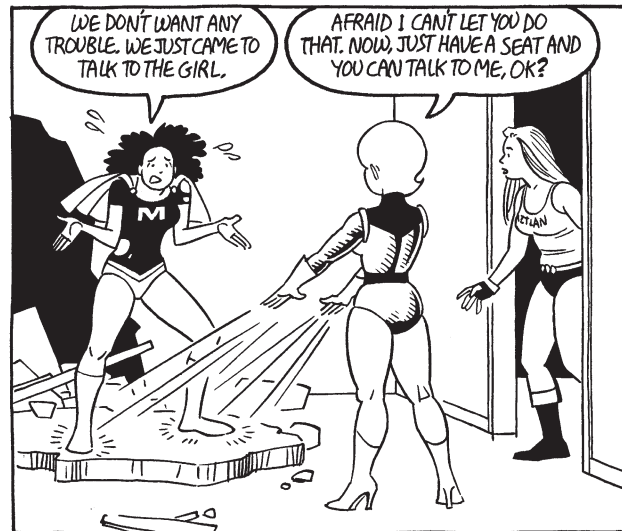
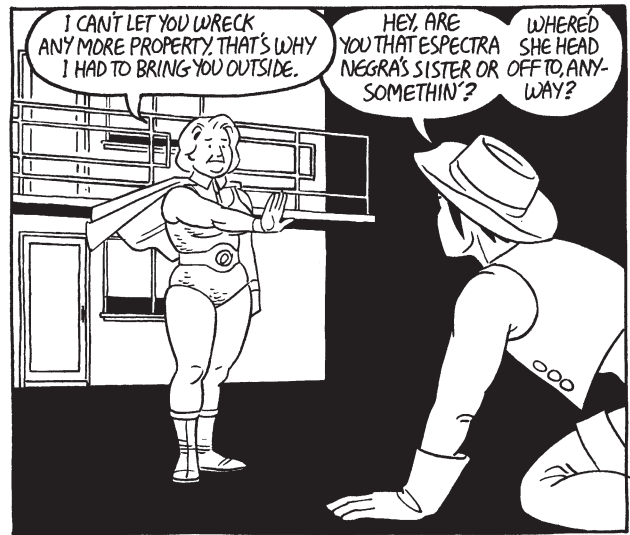
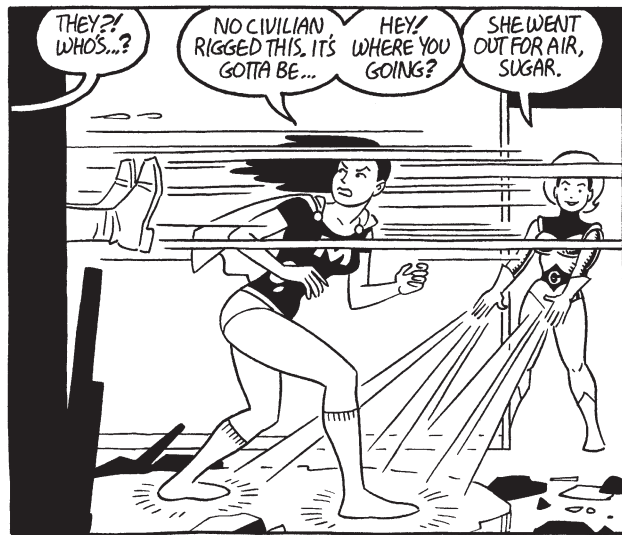
THE TEAM FINALLY FOLDED SEVERAL YEARS LATER WHEN DR. ZOLAR TOOK THEM TO COURT OVER THE RIGHT TO THEIR TITLE. ALTHOUGH HE LOST, THEY WERE FINISHED DUE TO THE LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE SUPERHERO COMMUNITY AND THE TIMELY DEATH OF THE TERMINALLY ILL SATURNA.

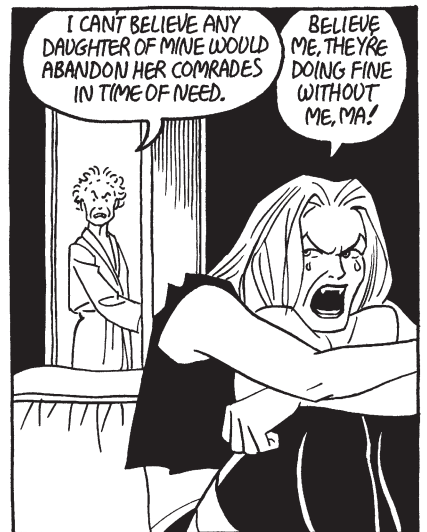
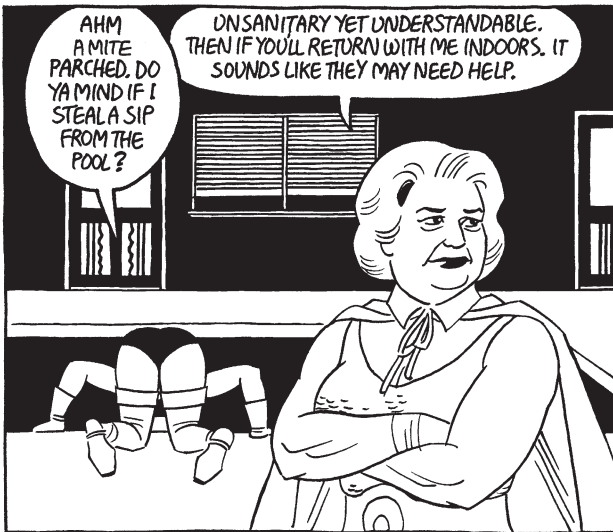
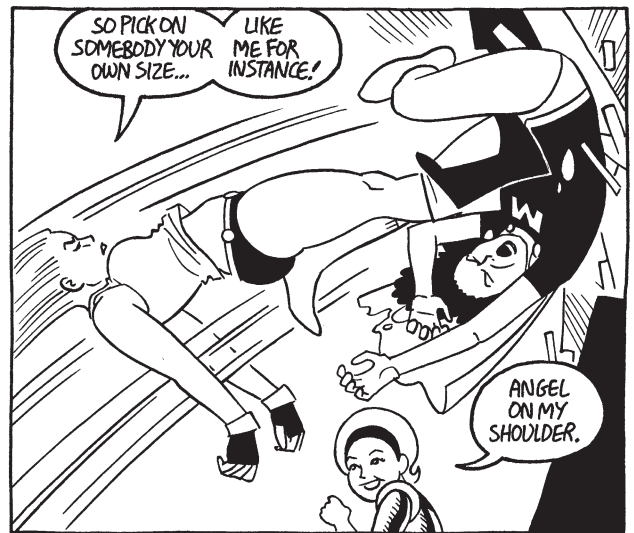


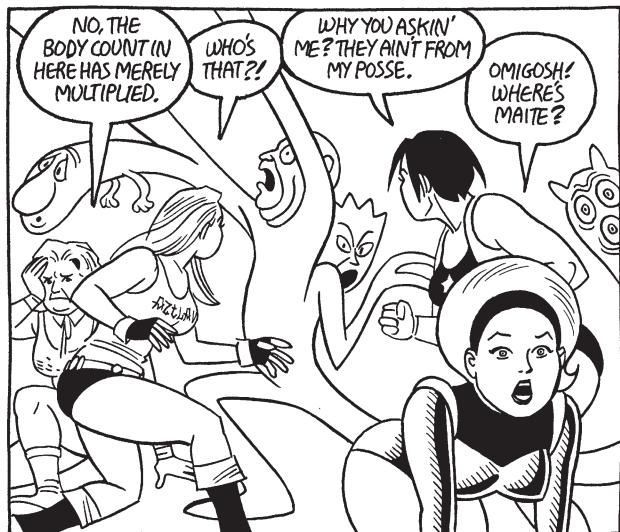
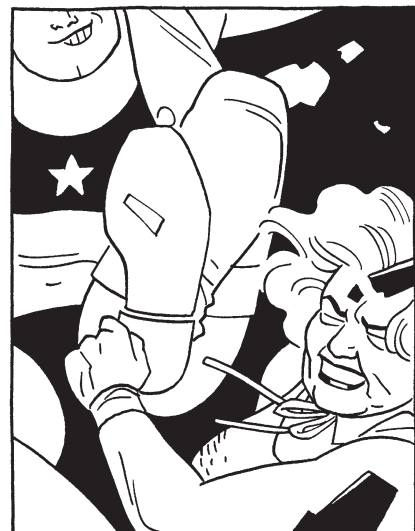
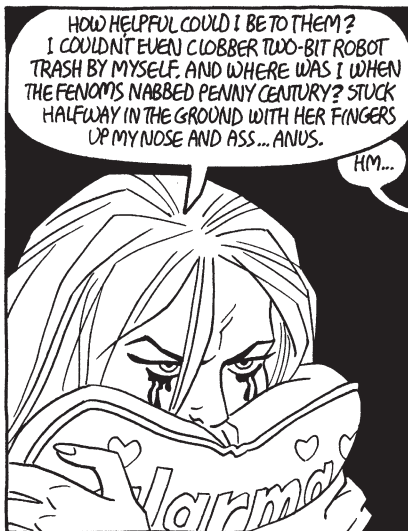
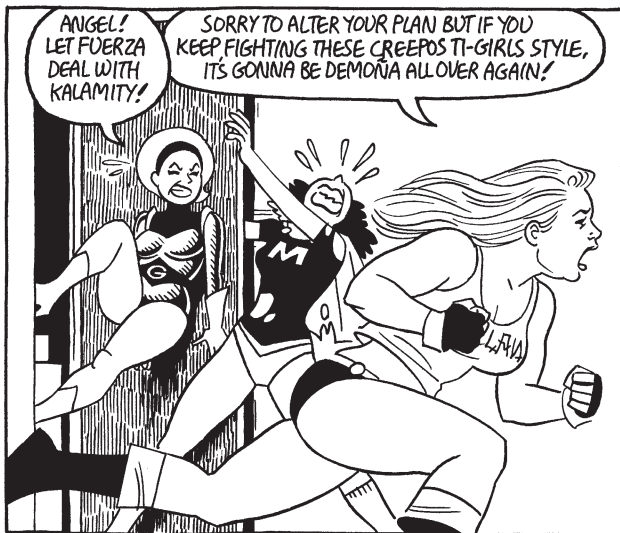
STILL, NOT TO BE OUTDONE, HE CREATED THE ZOLARS, WHO IN THEIR CONTRACT, WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO FIRE HIM, NOR COULD ANYBODY DIVORCE HIM. THAT IS, IF AN UNDERAGE GIRL WOULD WANT TO MARRY AN 80-YEAR-OLD MAN IN THE FIRST PLACE... WHO WASN'T RICH.

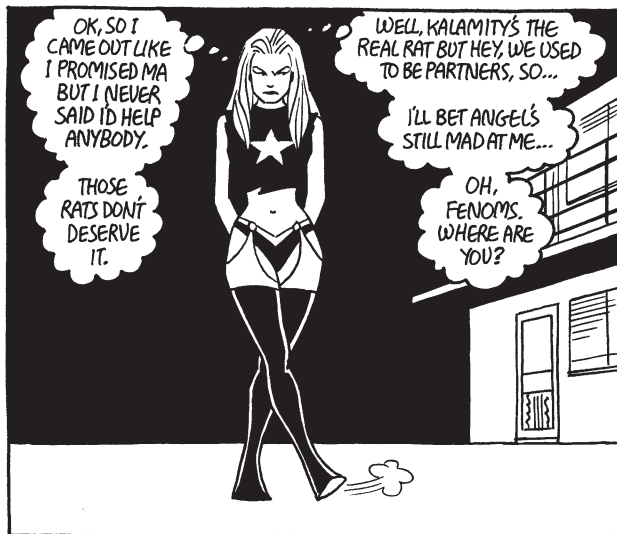


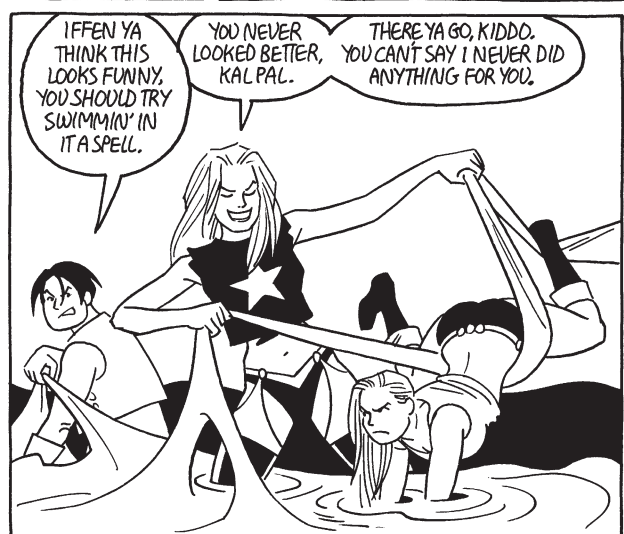
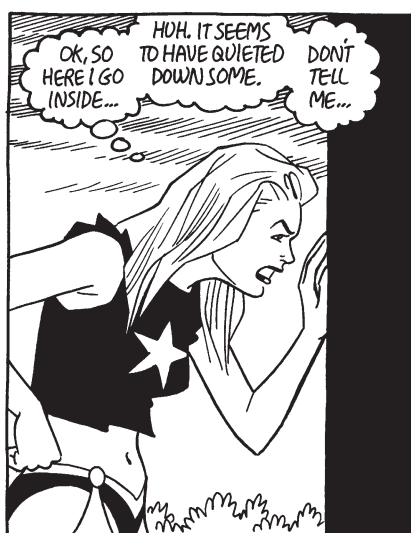


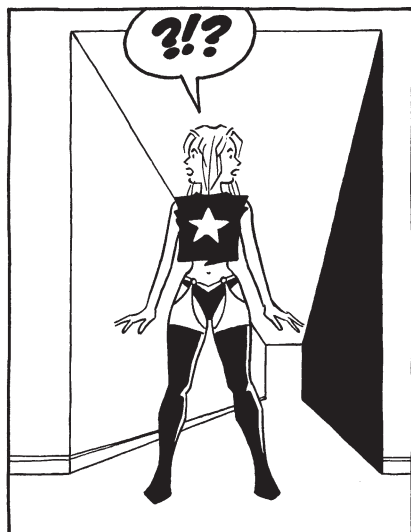
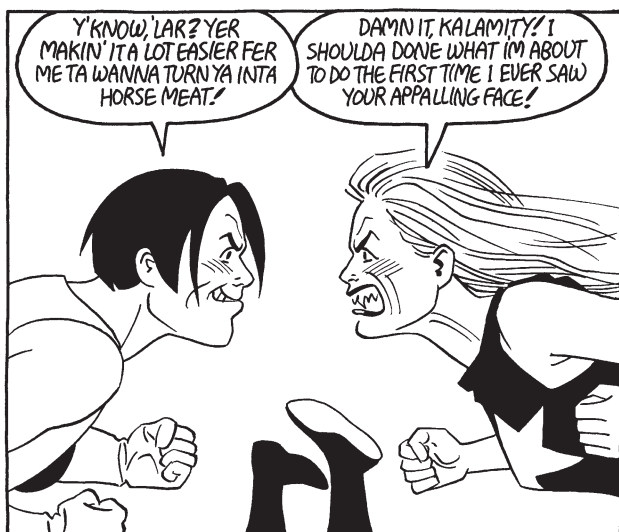
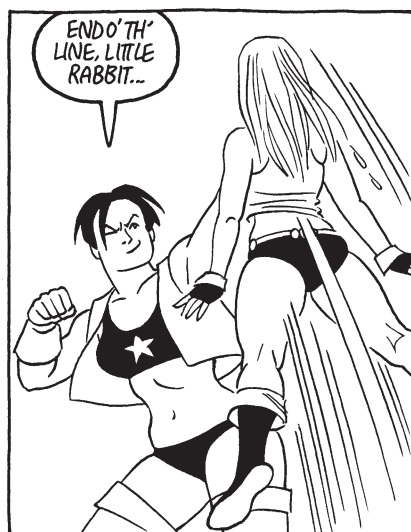
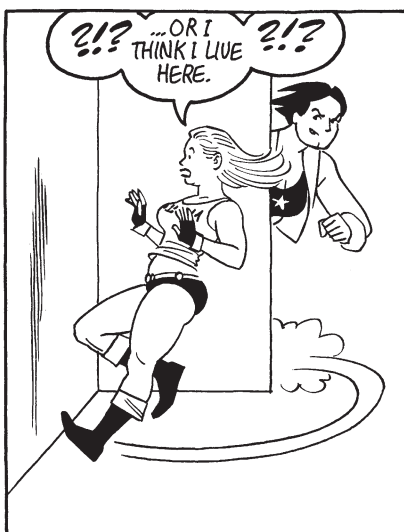
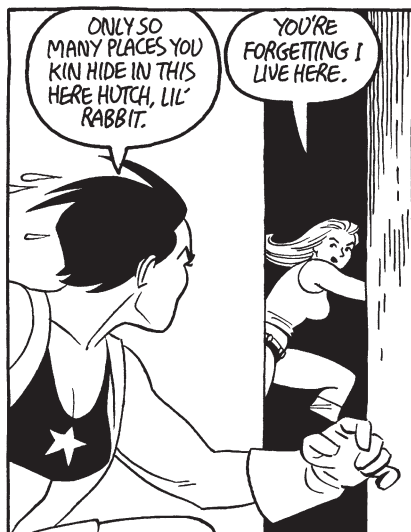


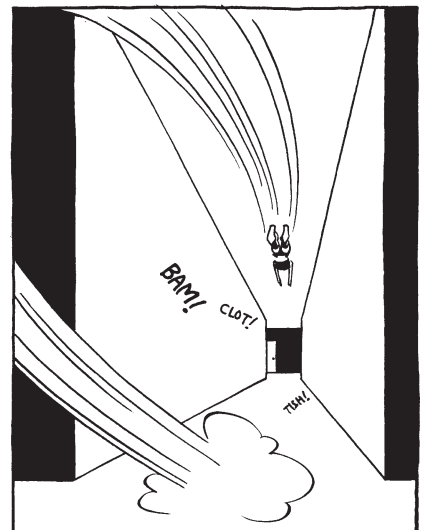
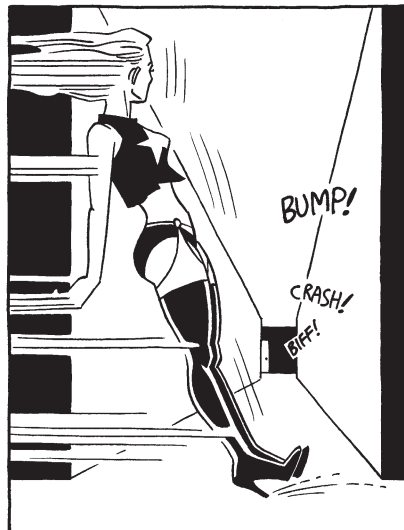
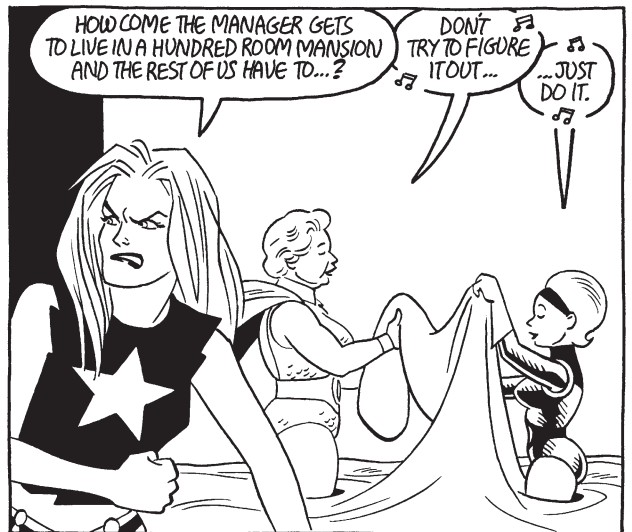
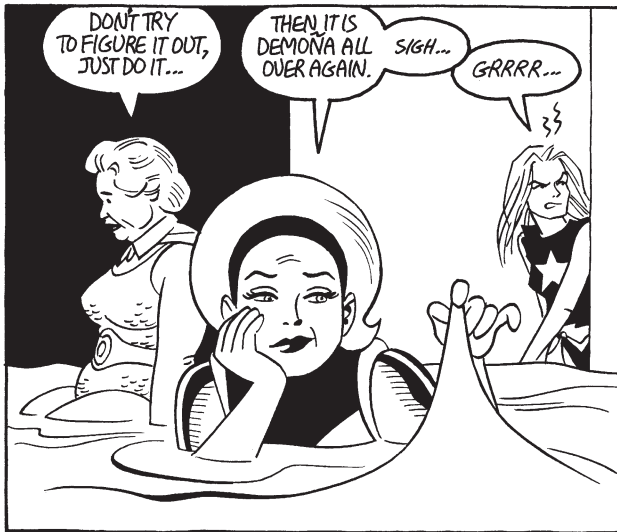
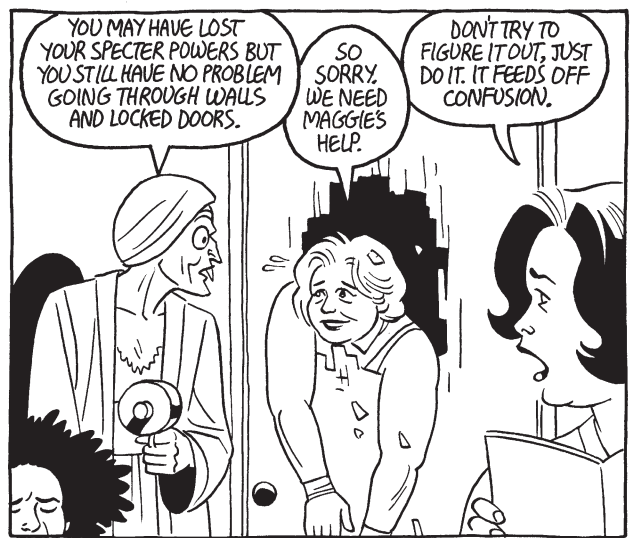
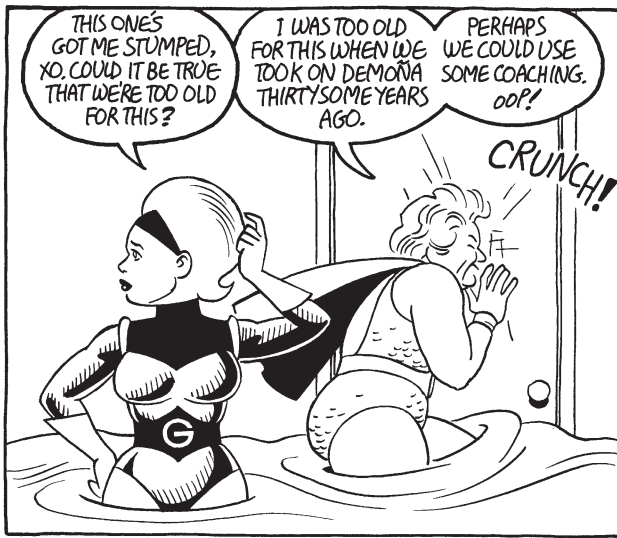


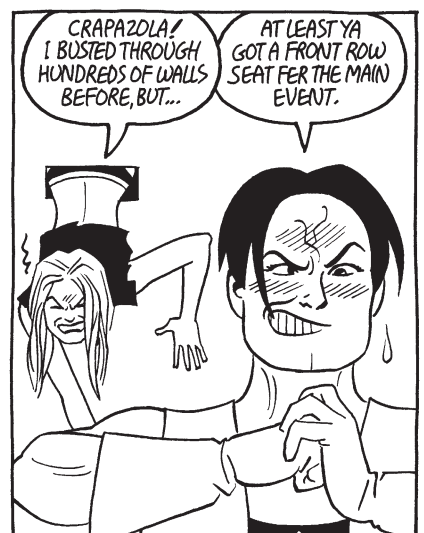
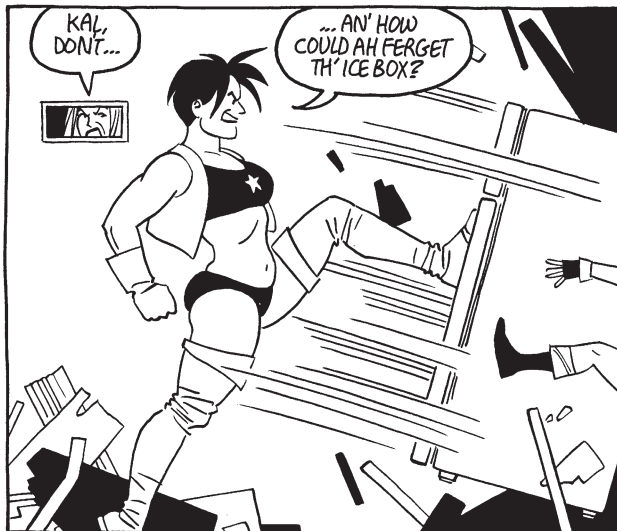
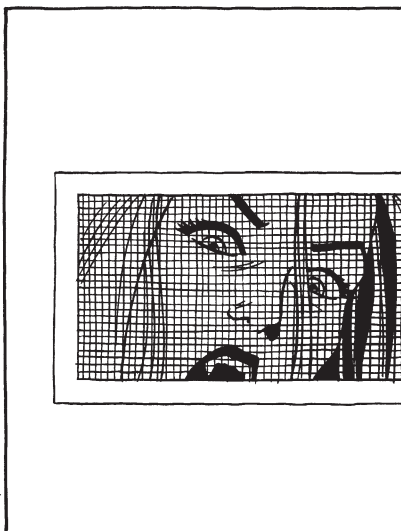


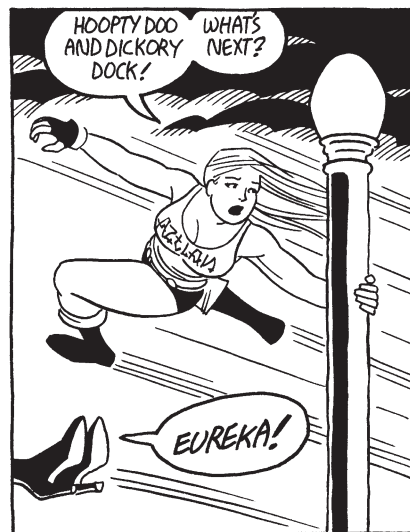
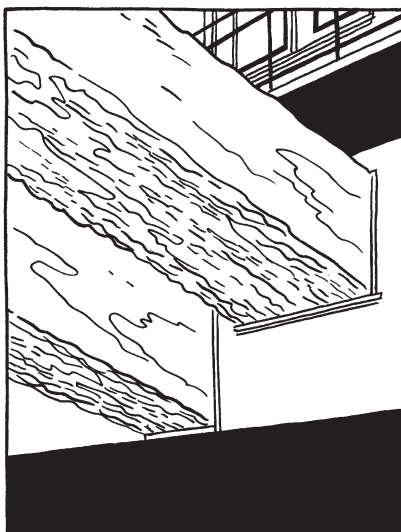
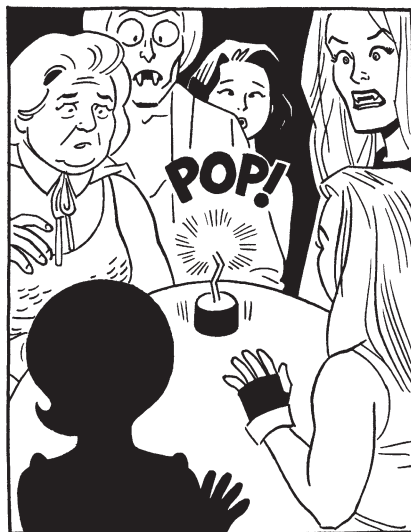
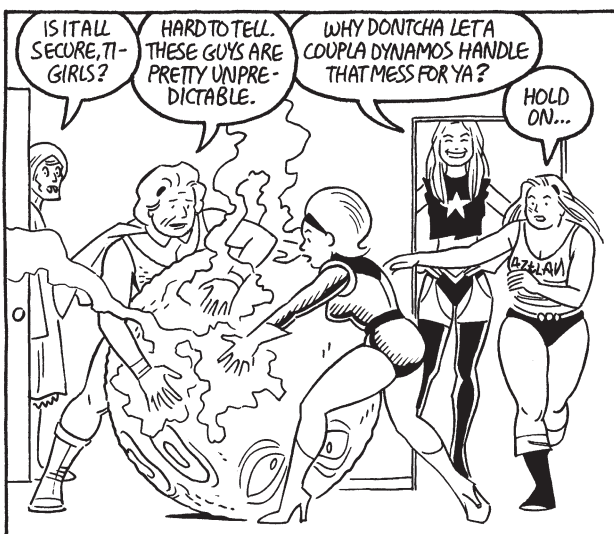
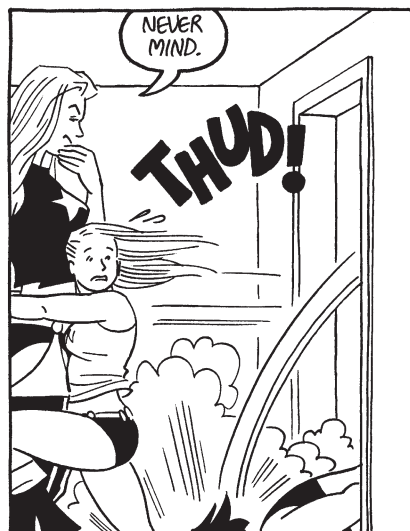
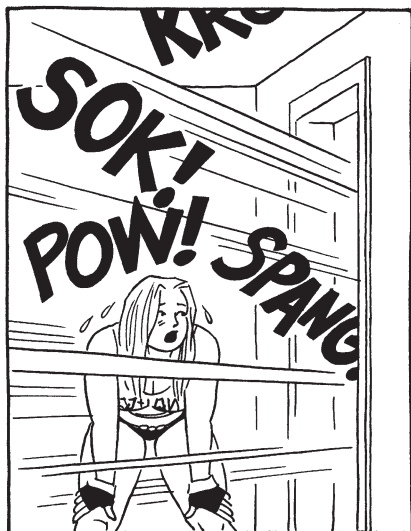


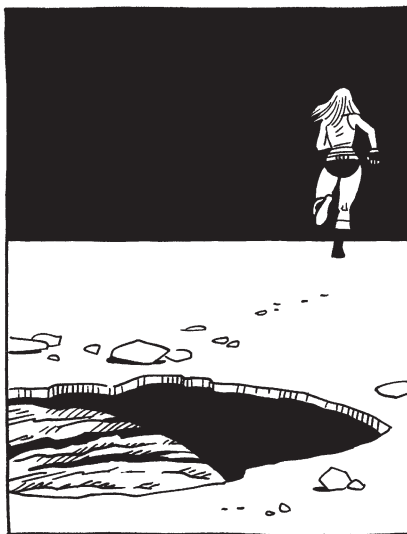
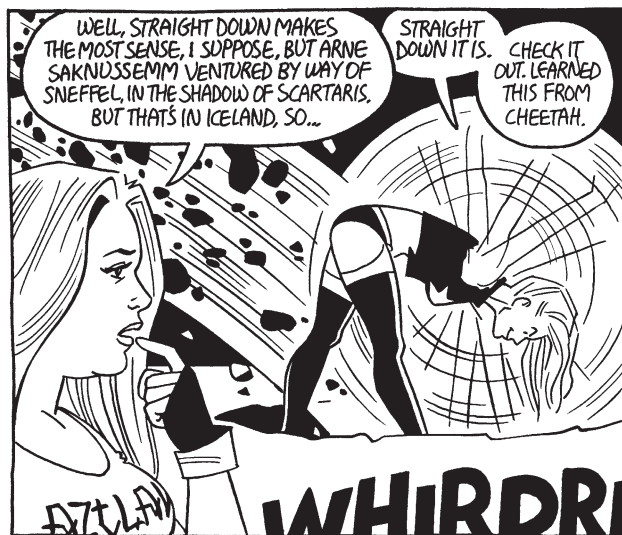
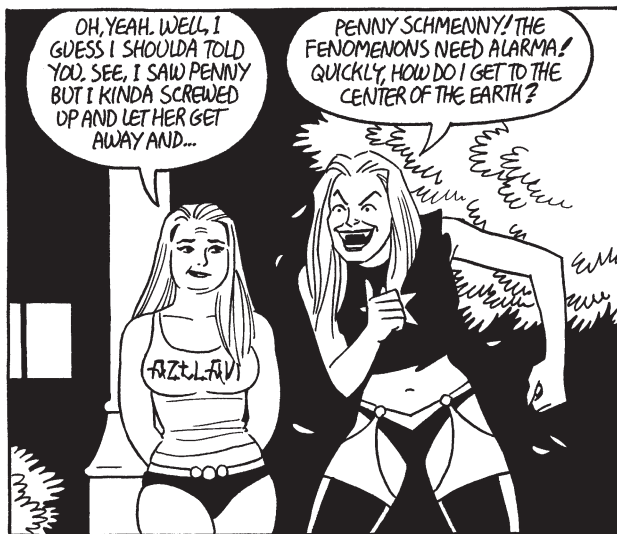
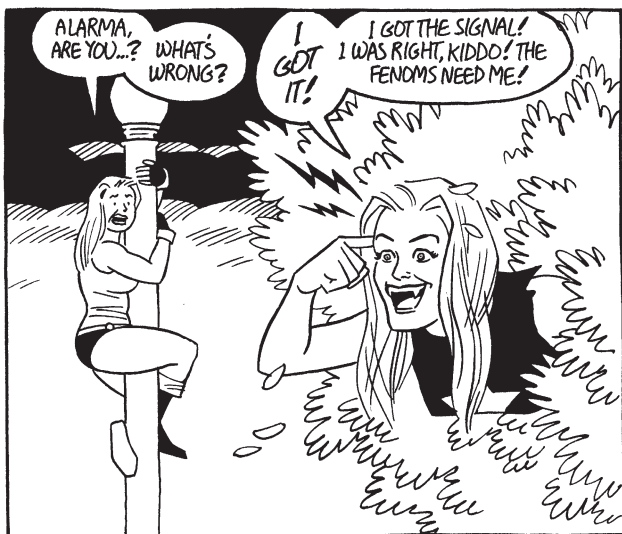


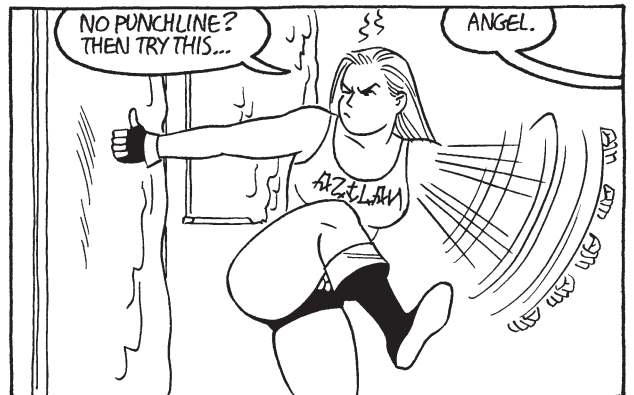
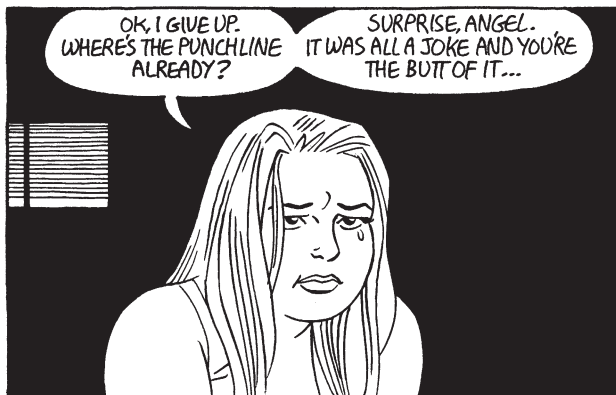
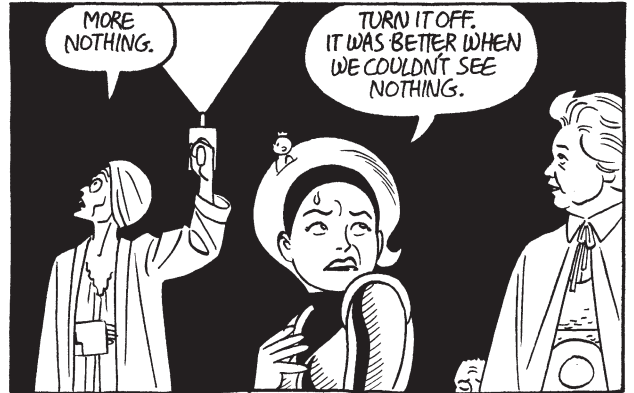
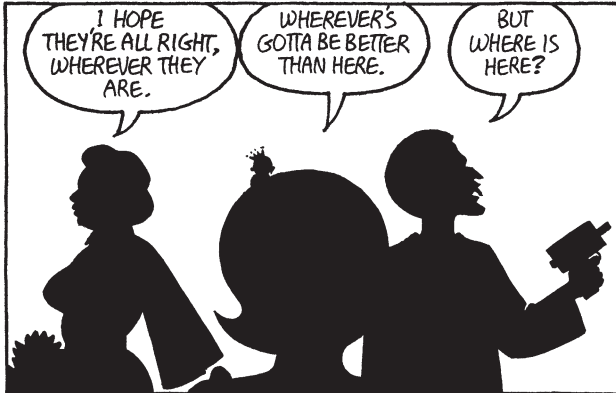
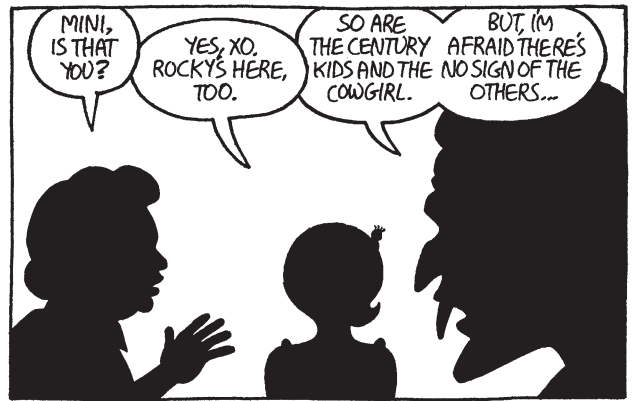
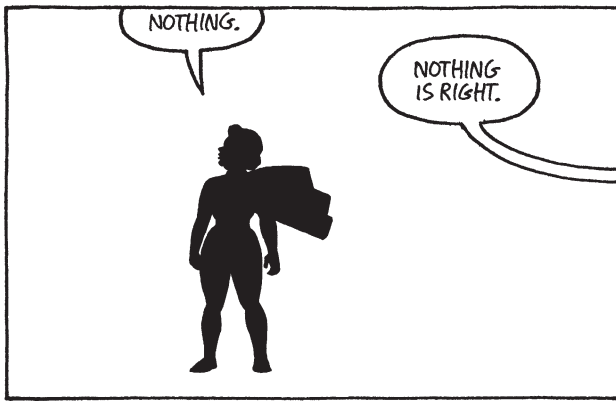


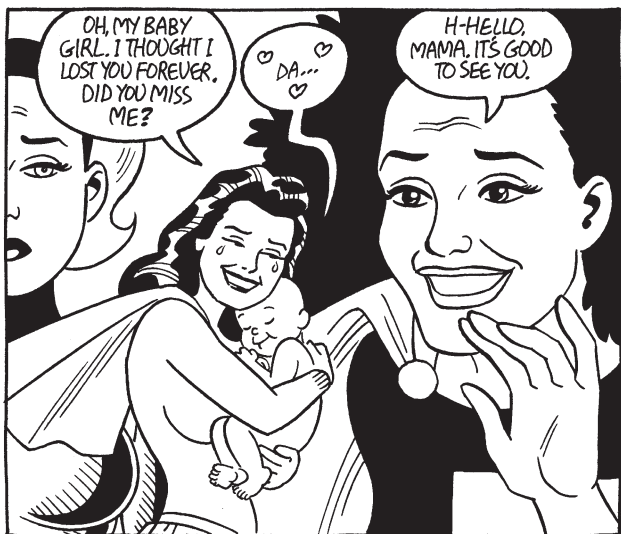
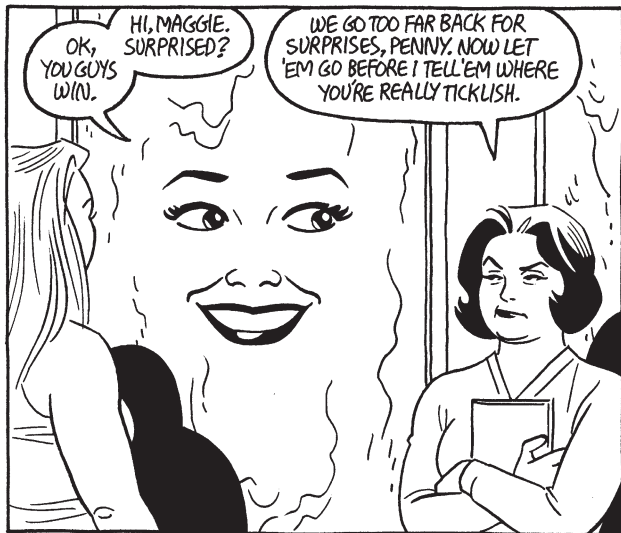
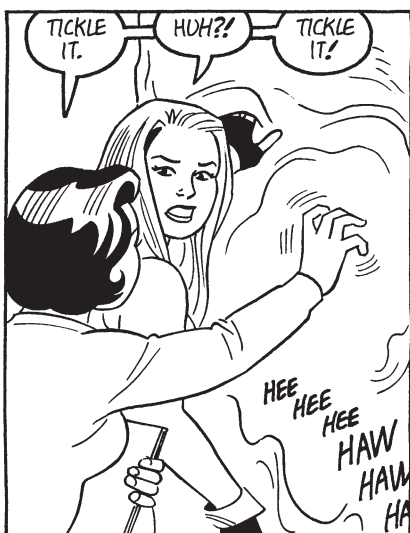
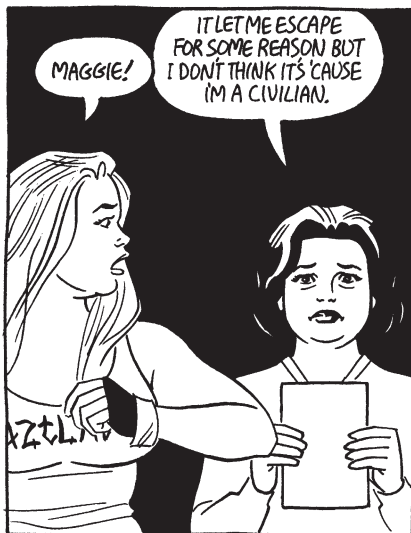


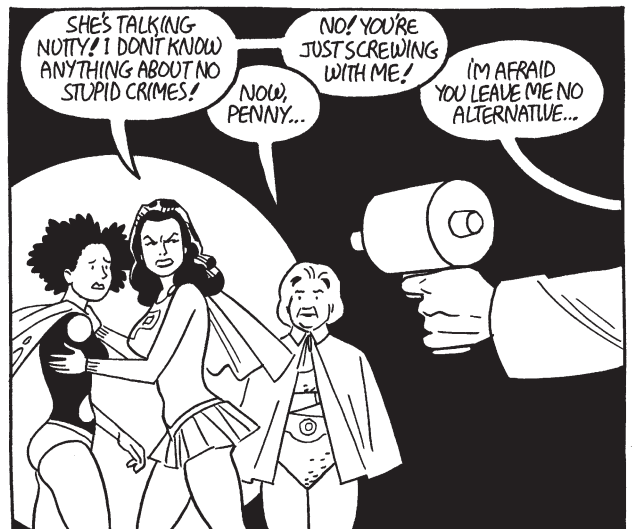
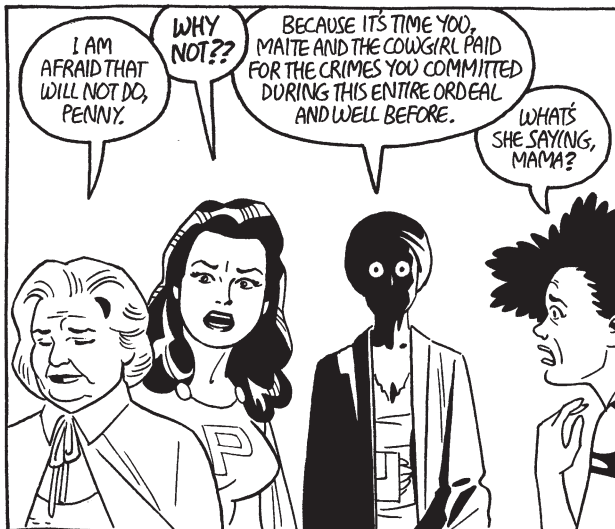
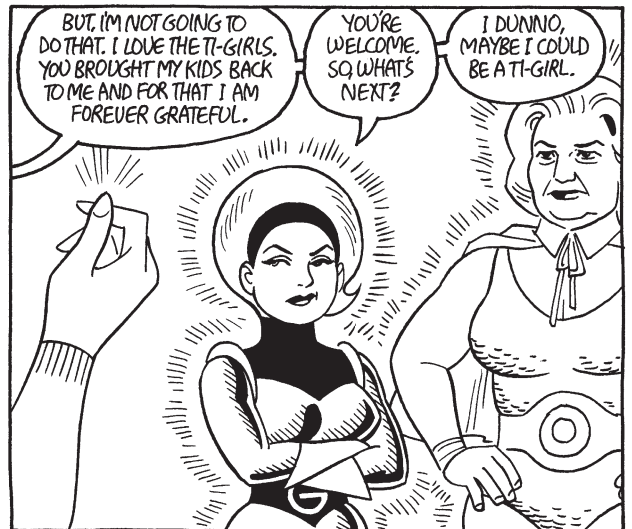


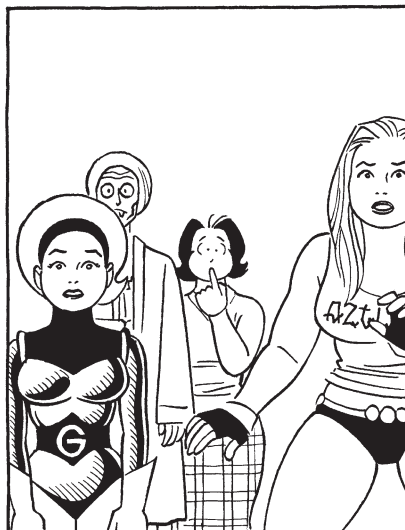
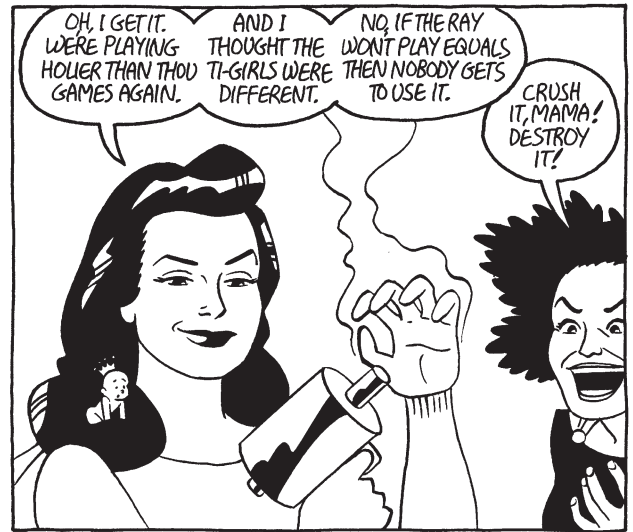
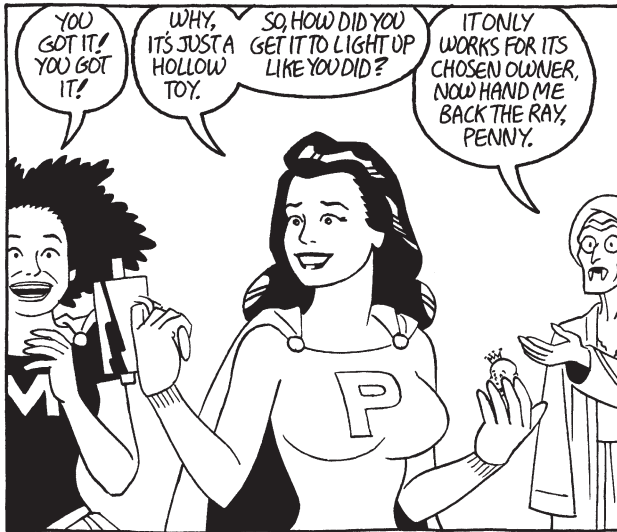
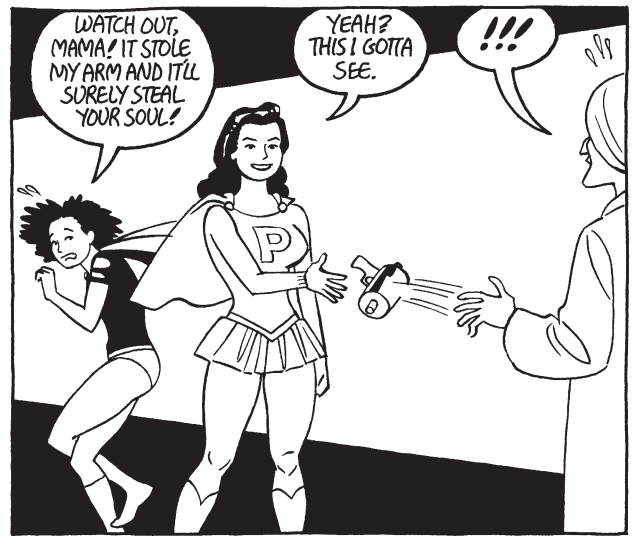
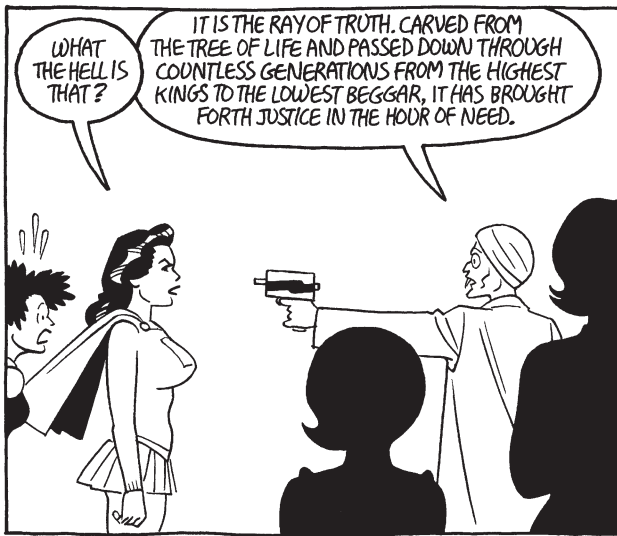












ANNO DOMINI.

COOPERMAN COMICS GROUP

T-GIRLS

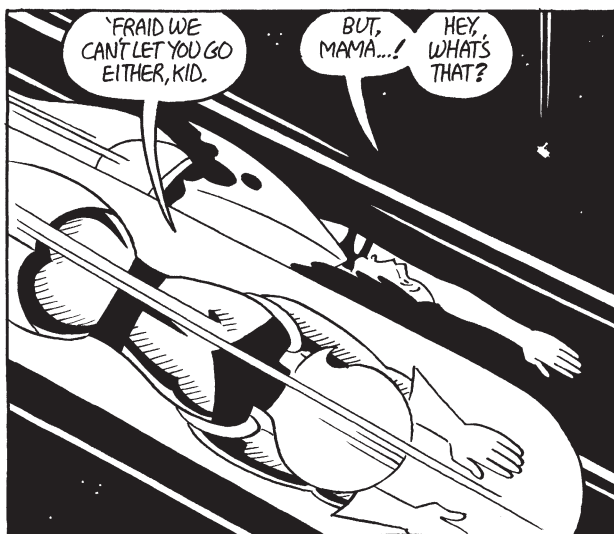
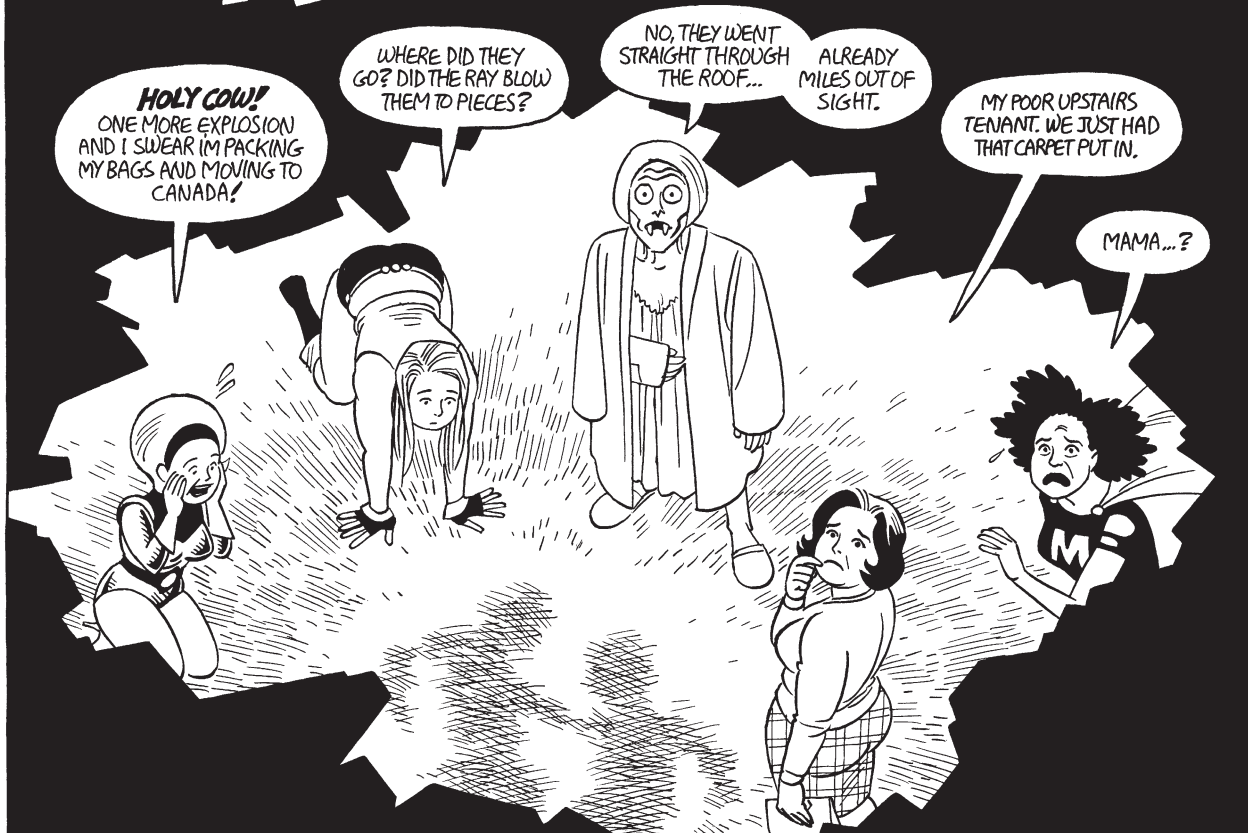
ADVENTURES

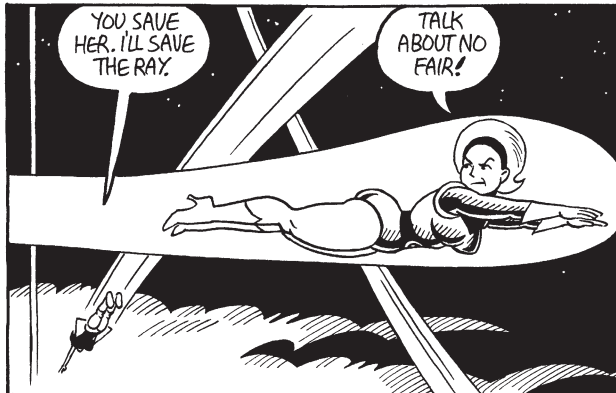
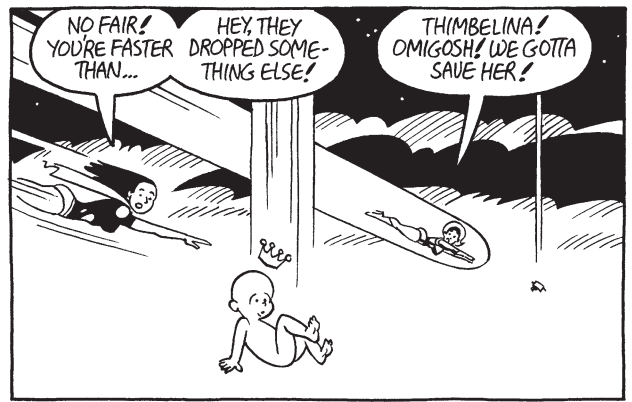
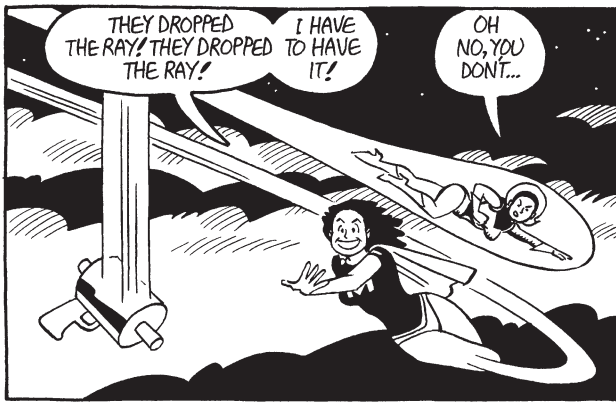
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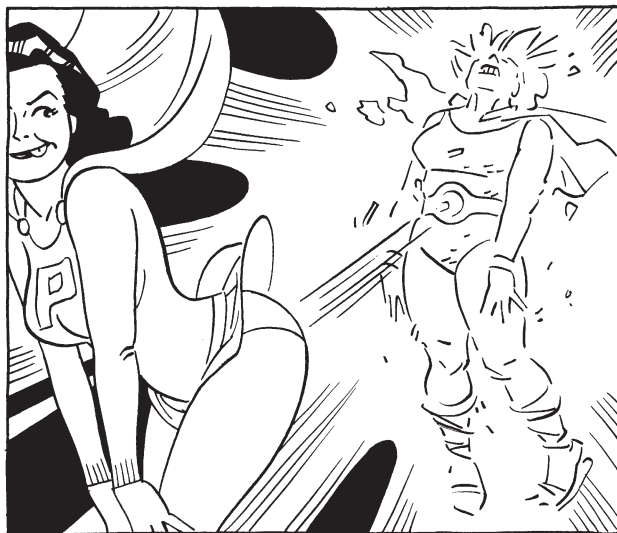
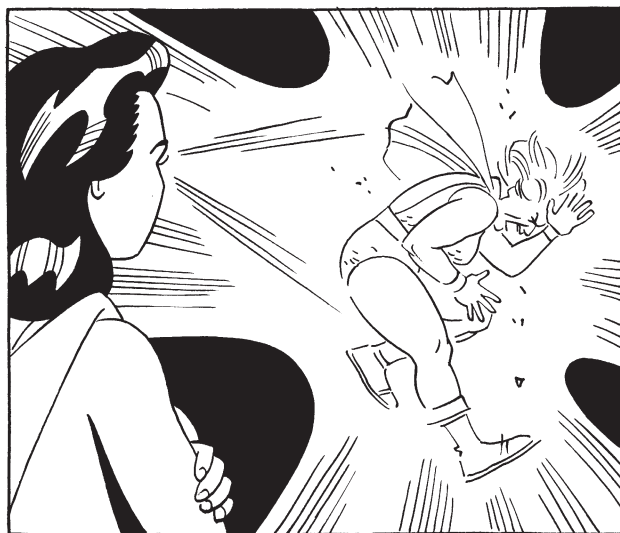
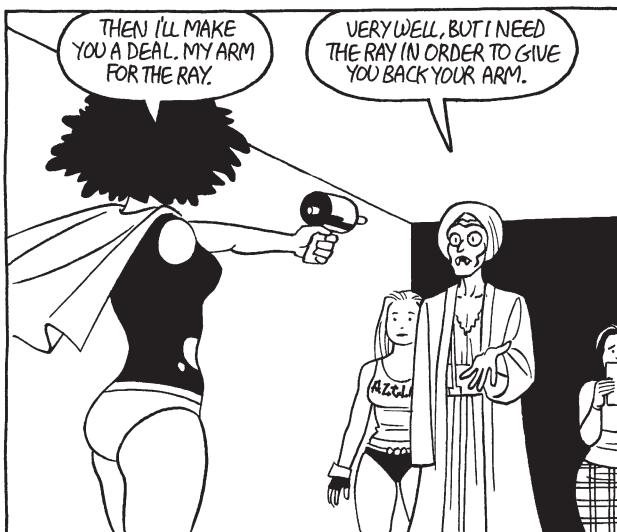
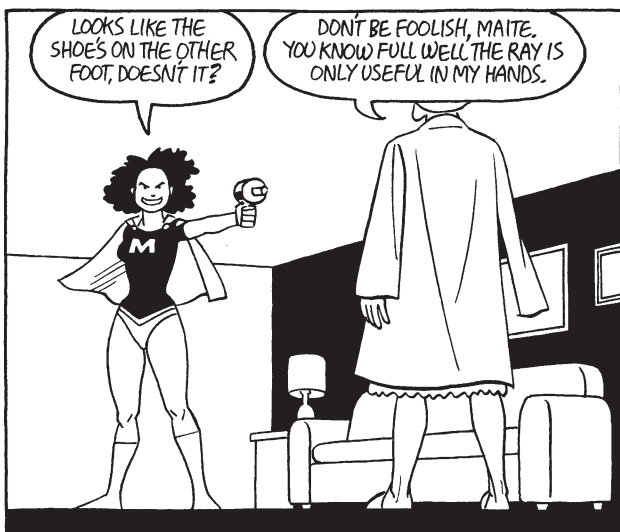


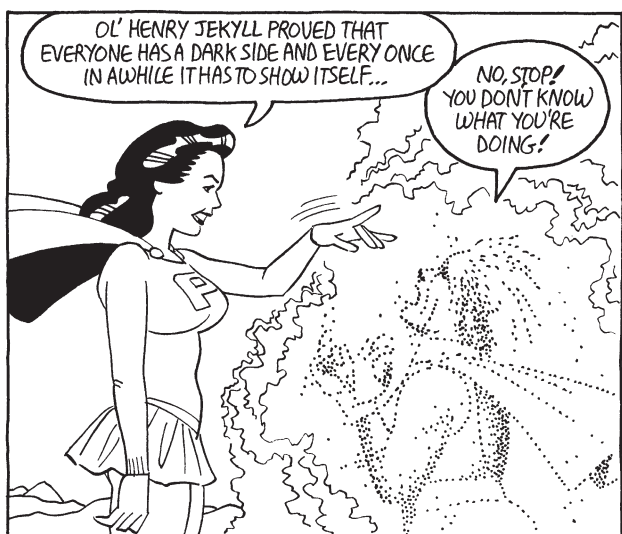
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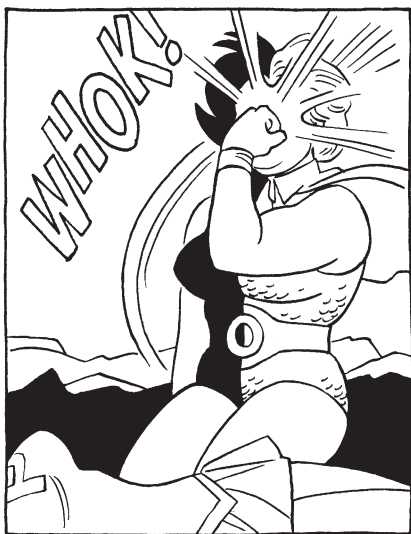
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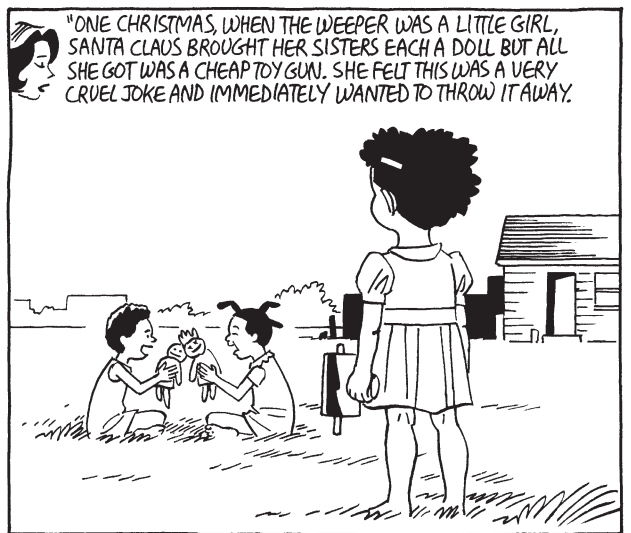
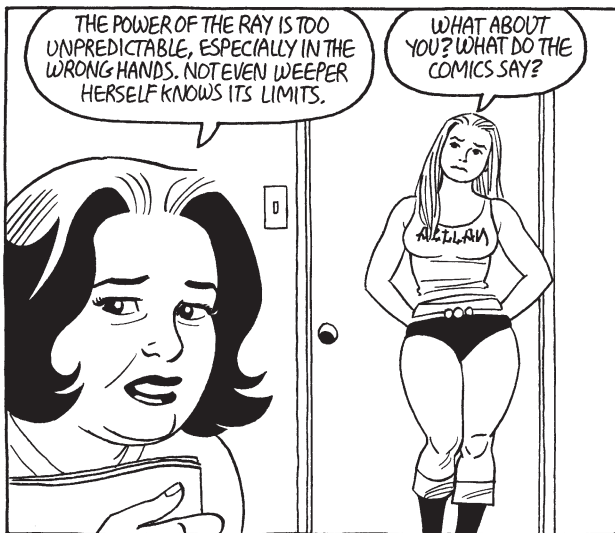
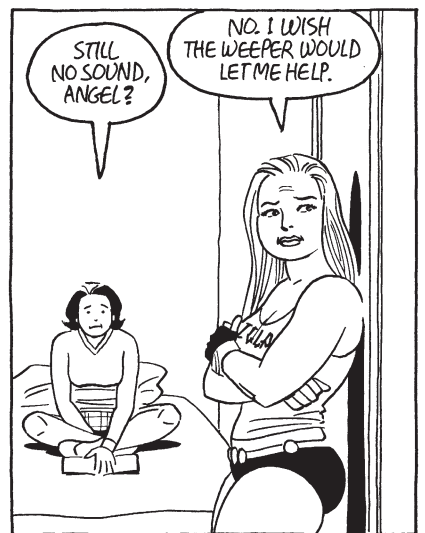
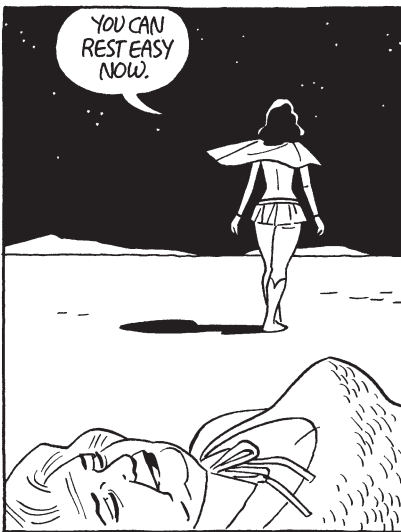


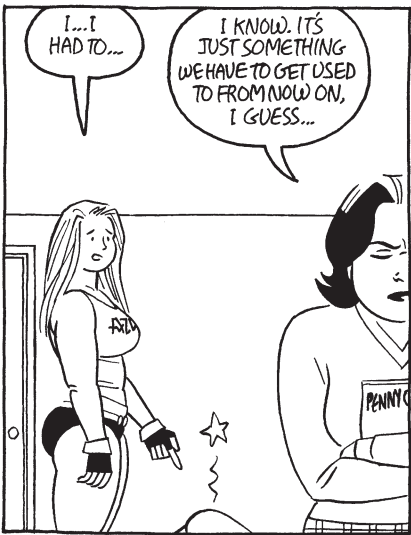
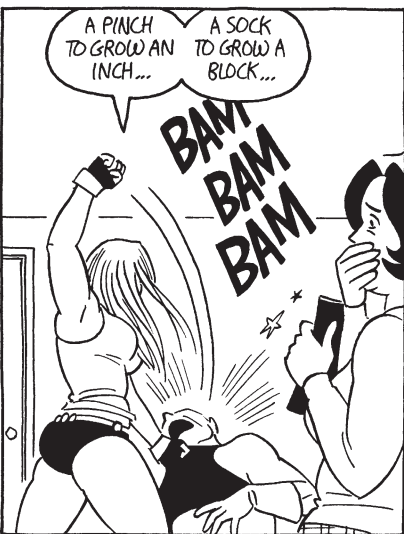
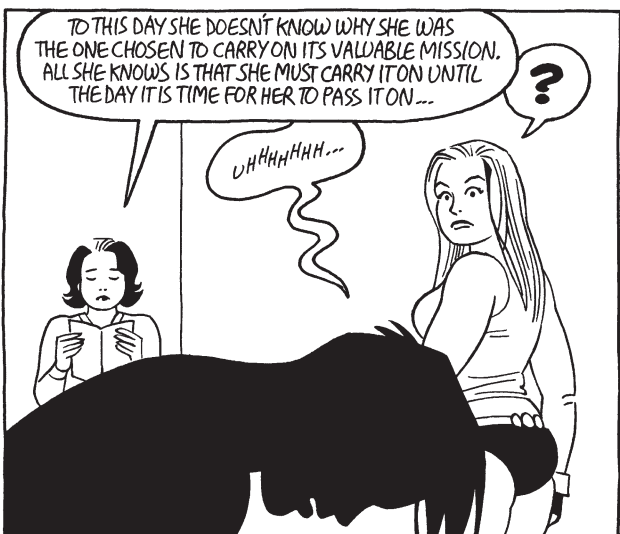
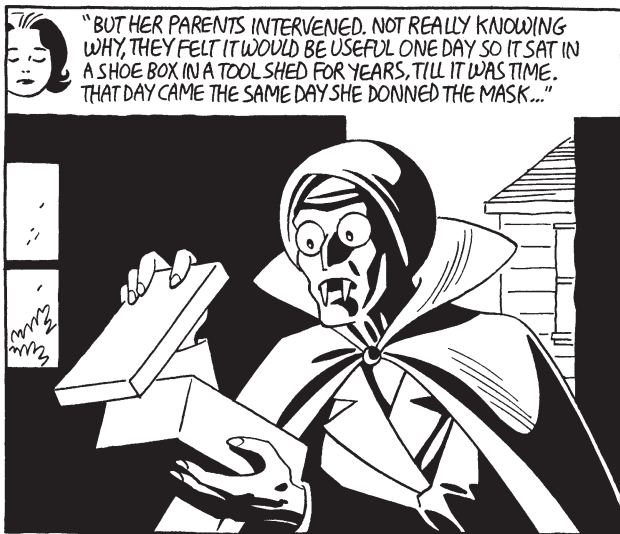


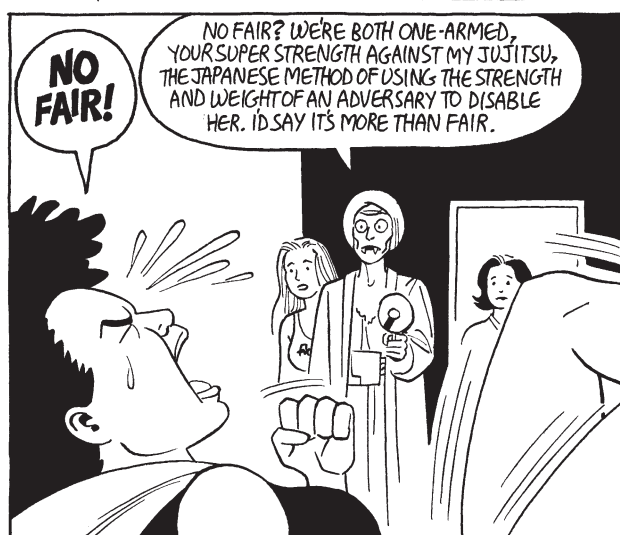
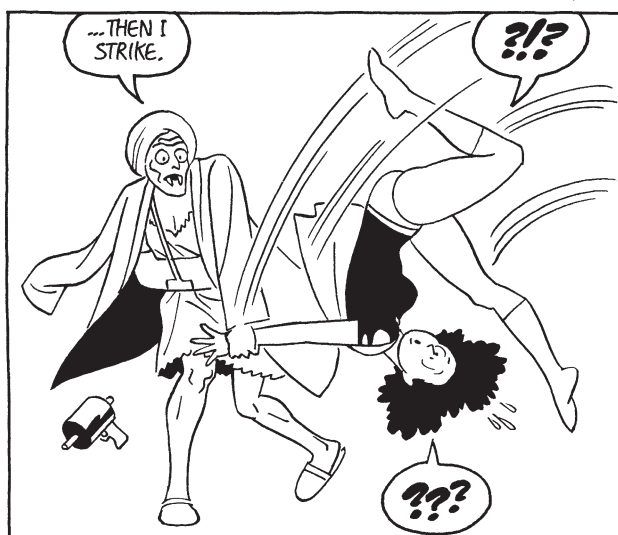


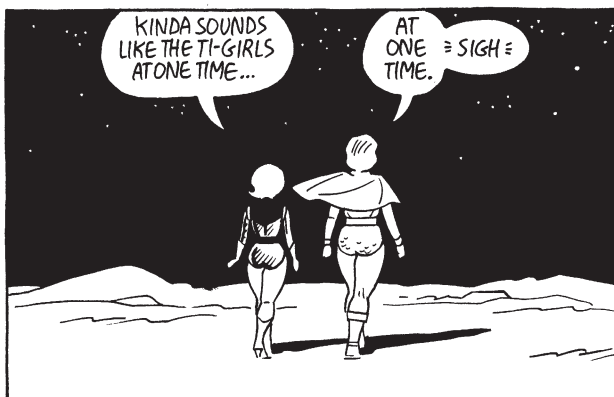
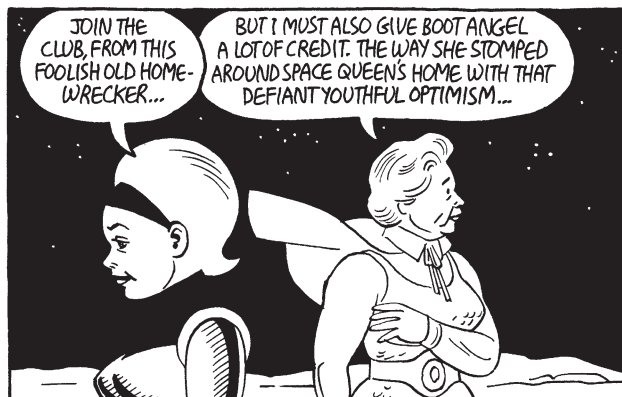
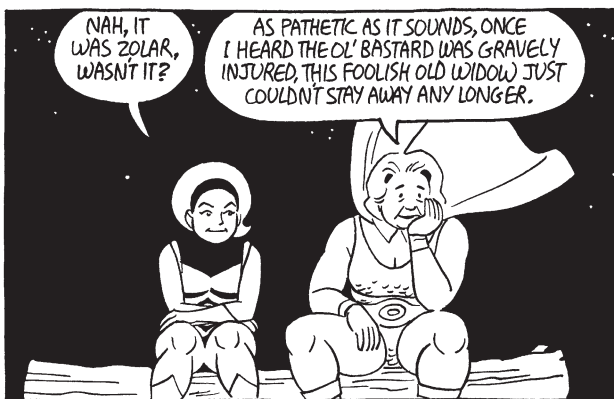
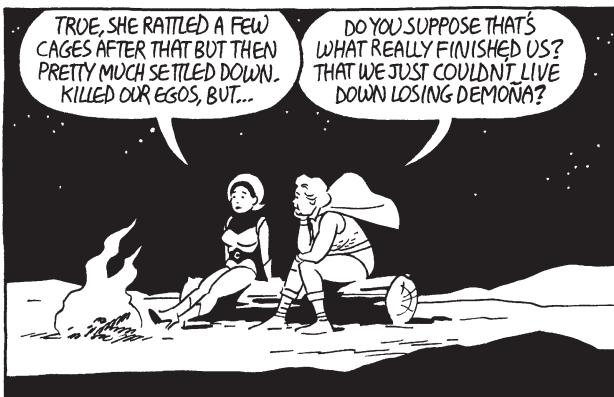
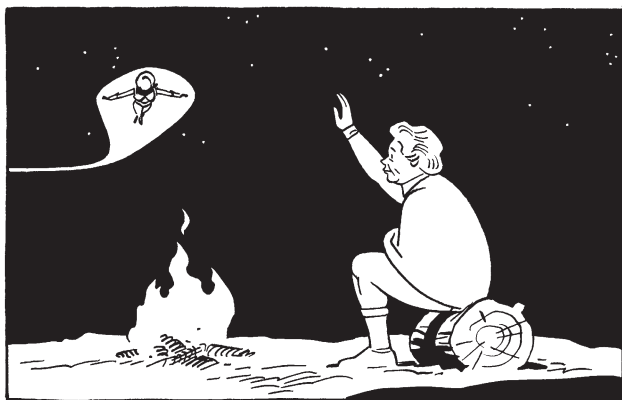




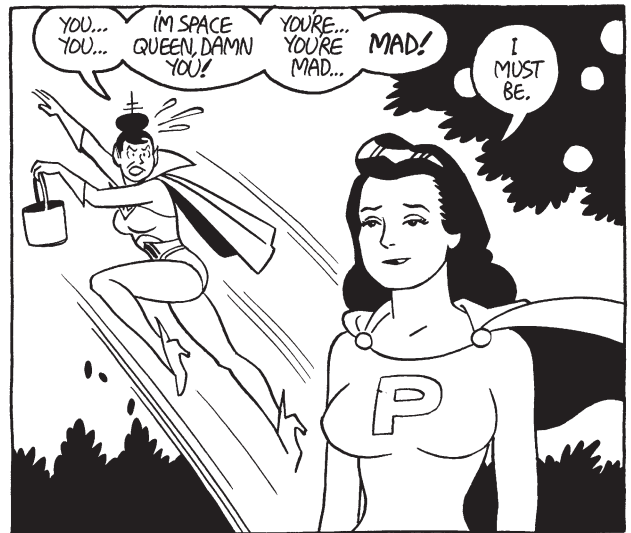
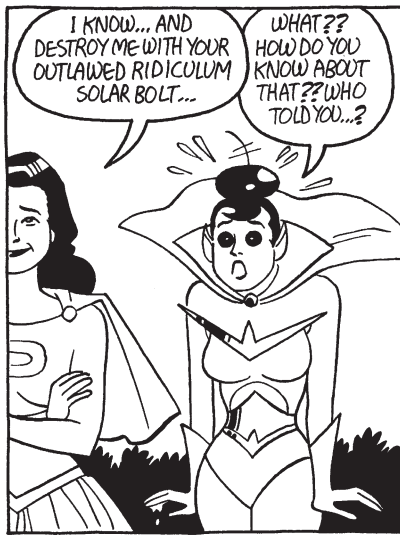
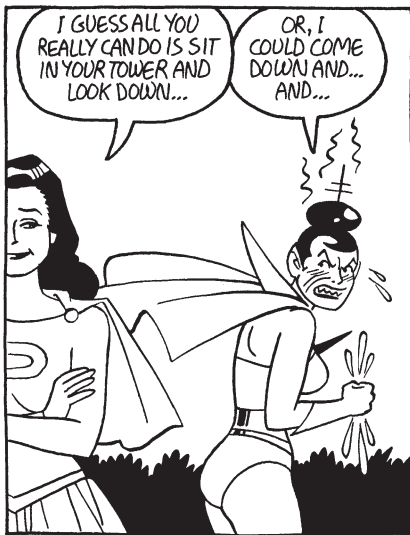


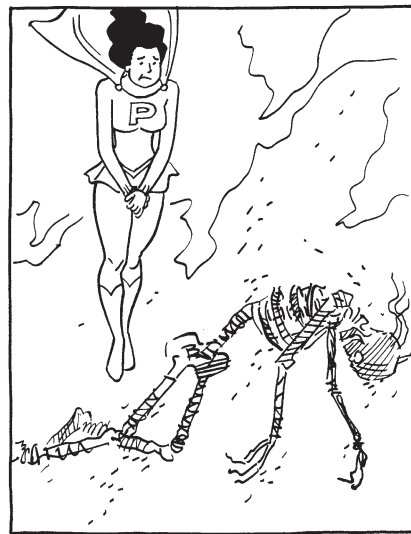
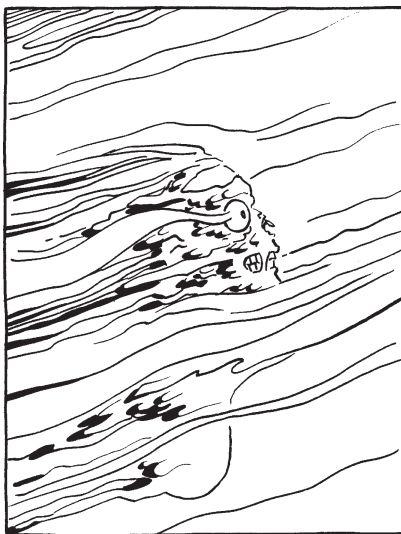
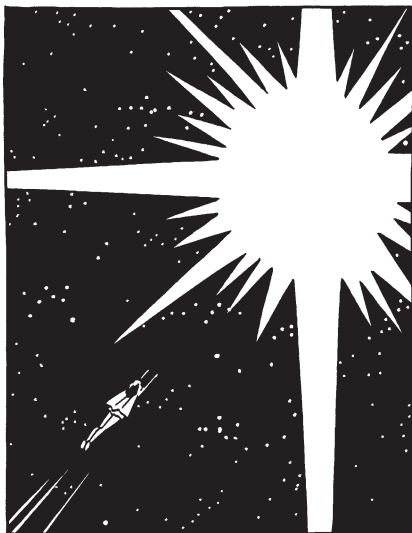
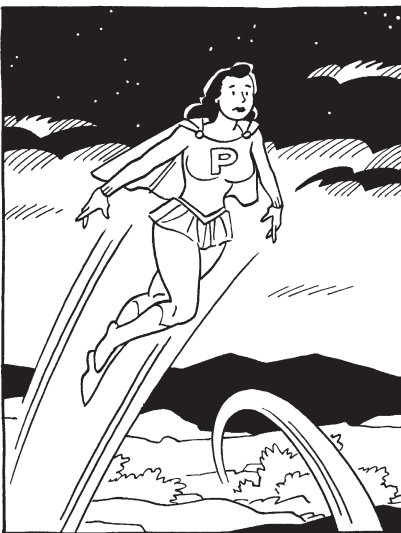


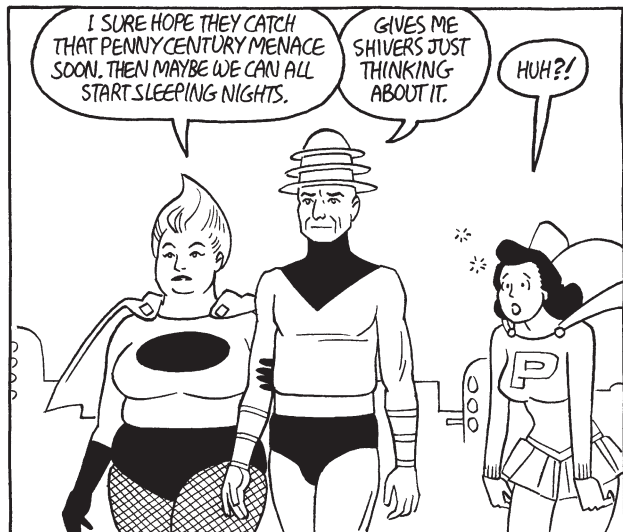
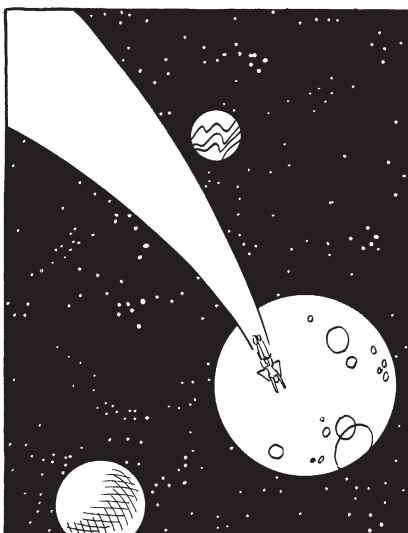


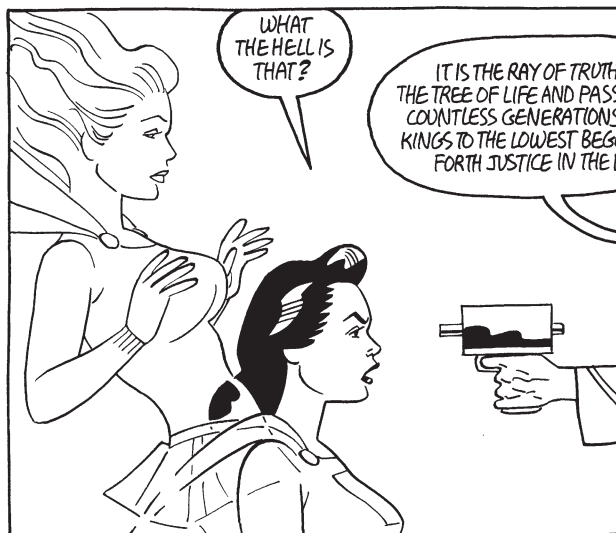


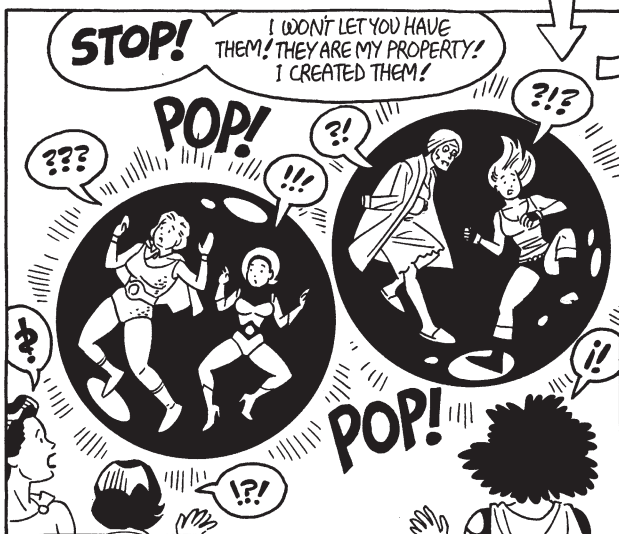


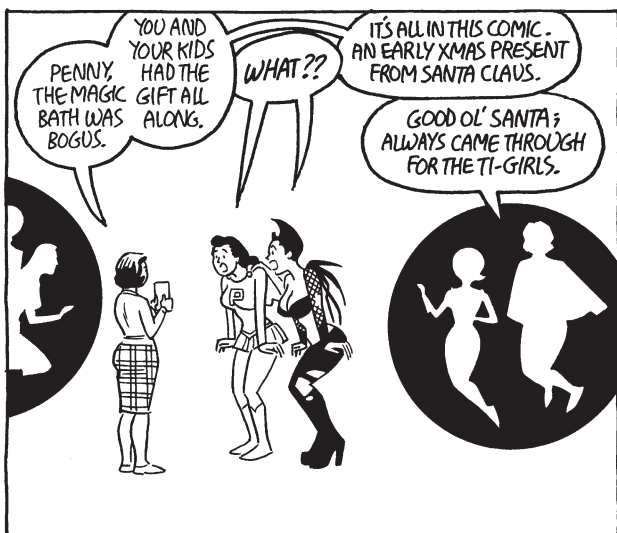
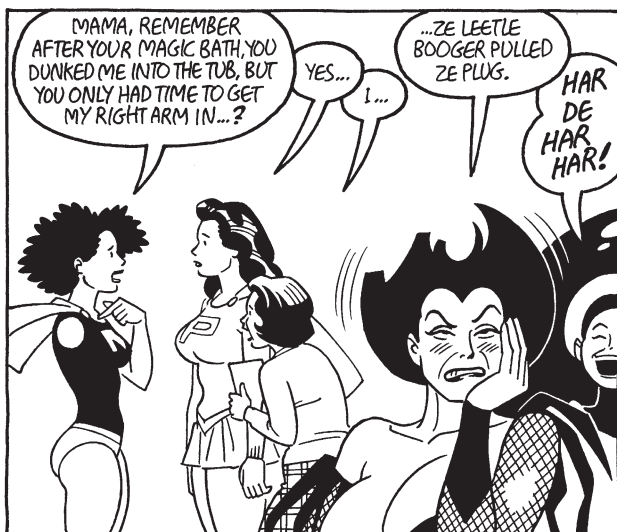
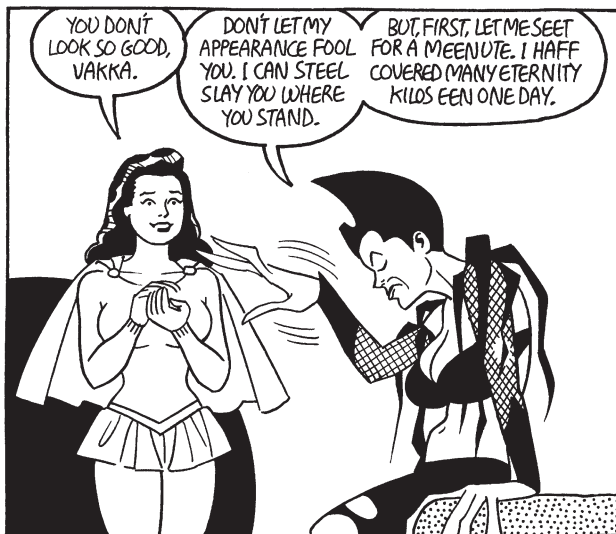


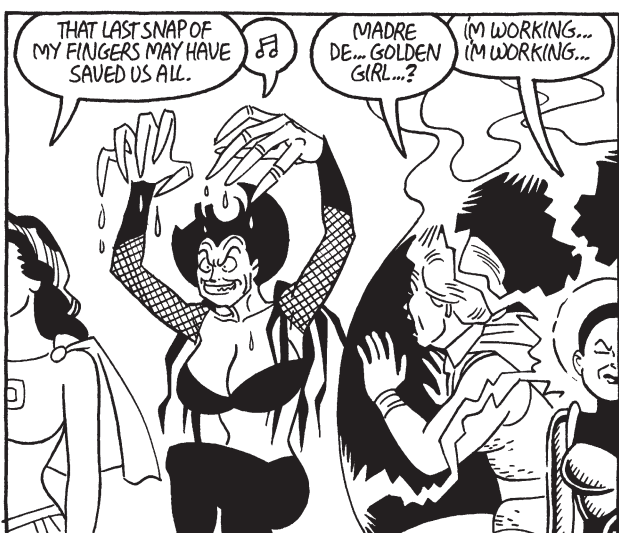
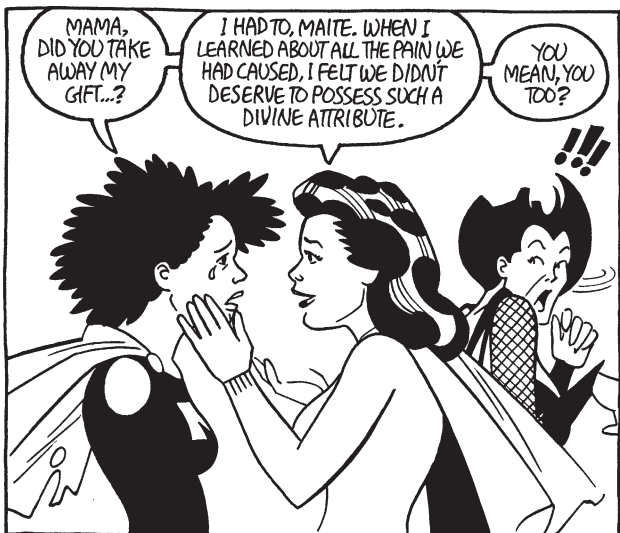
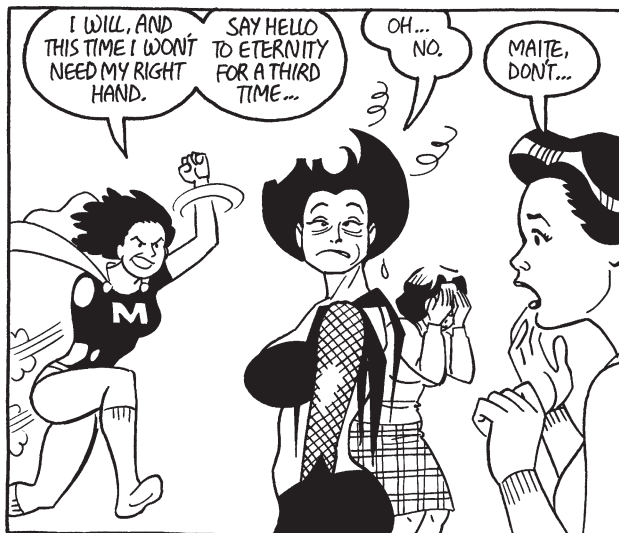
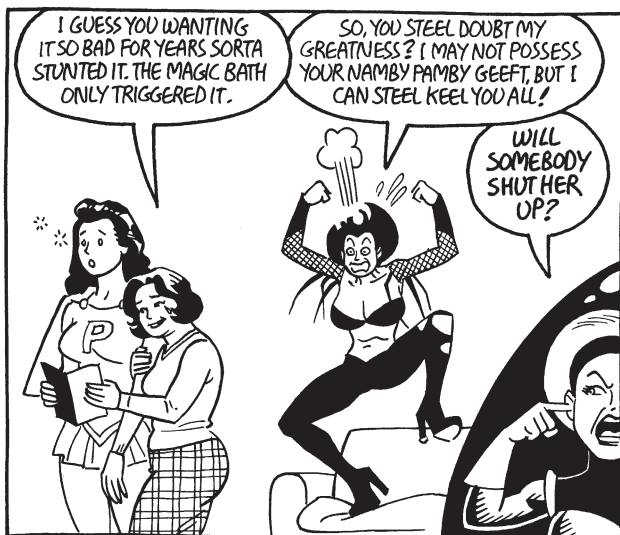


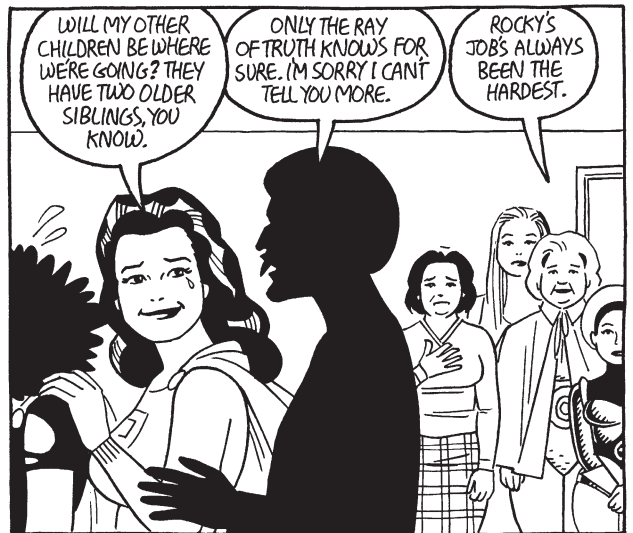
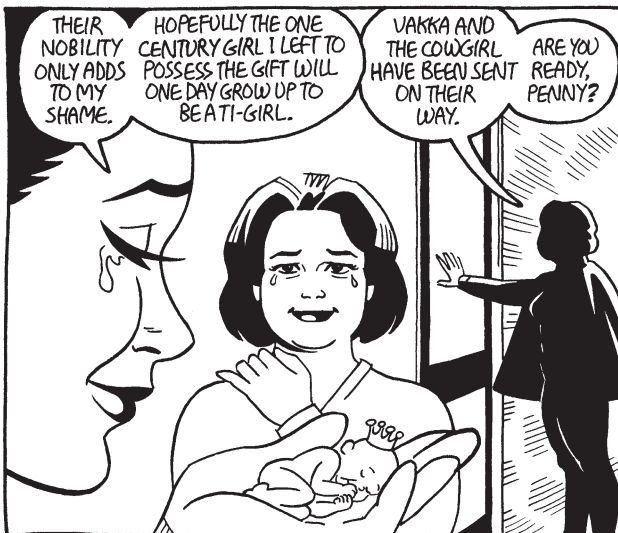
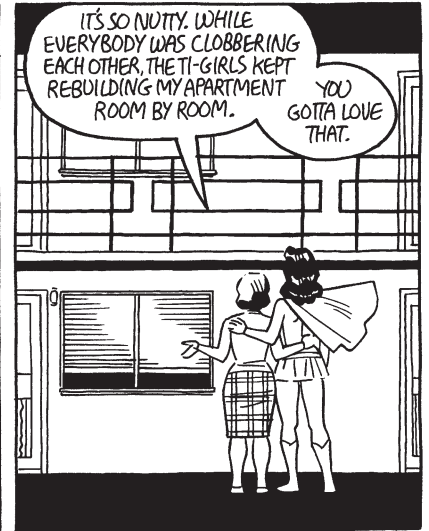


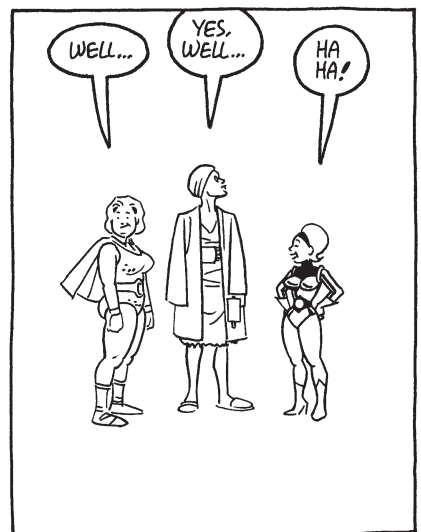
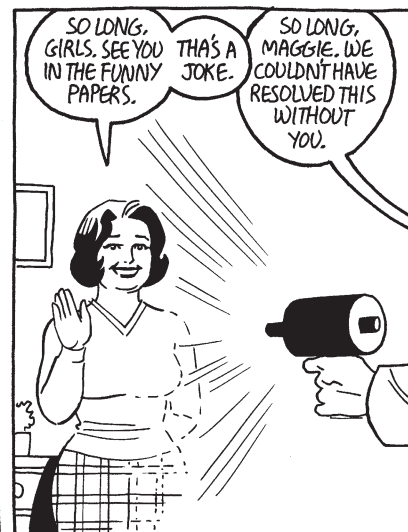
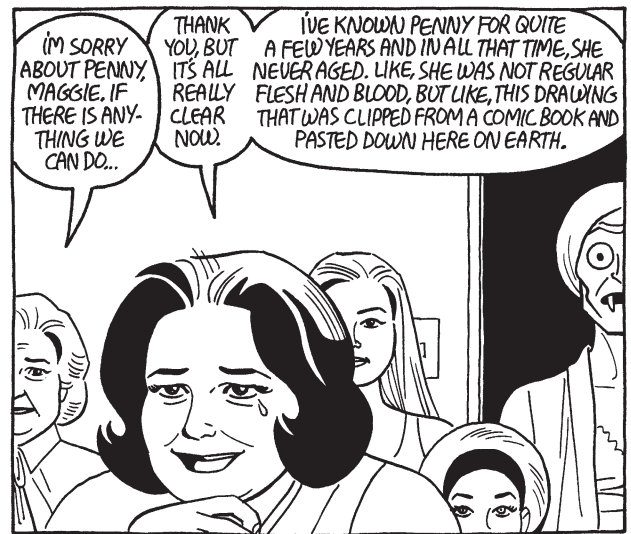
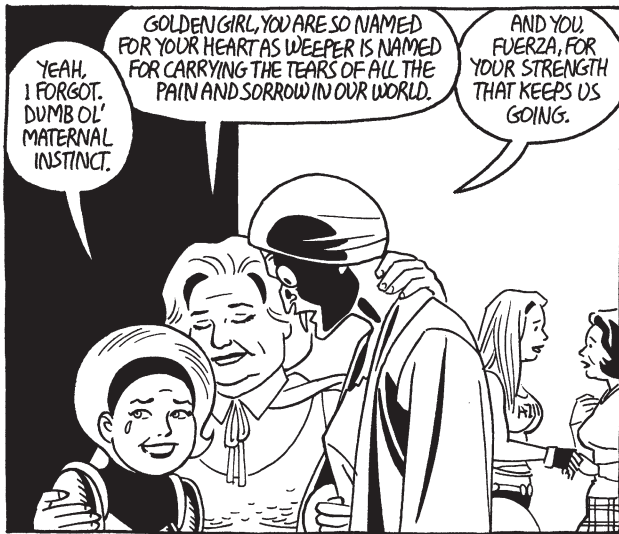
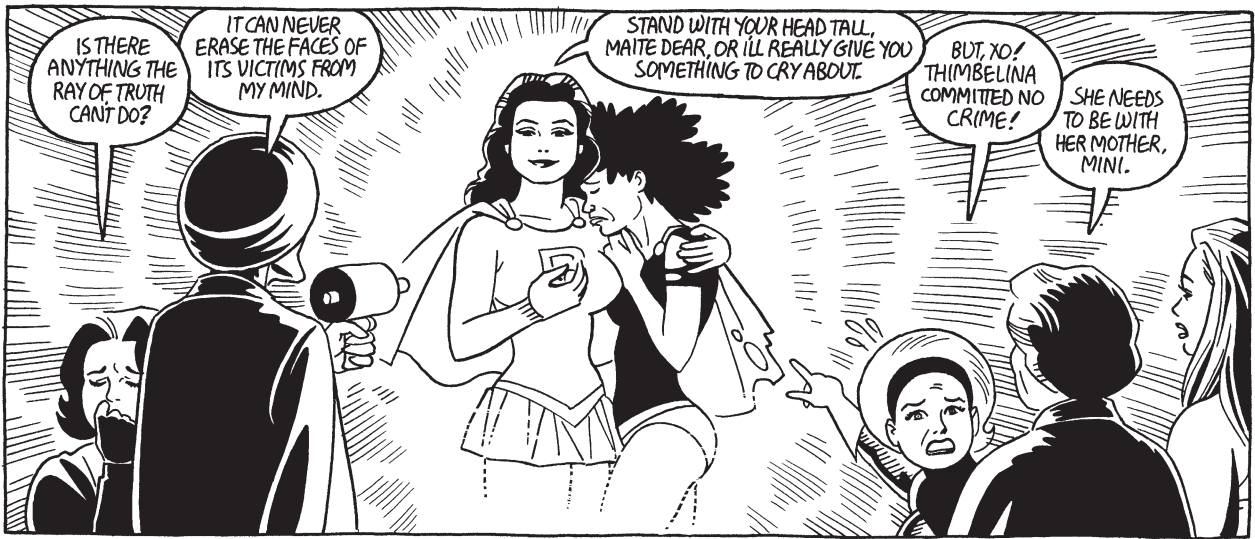


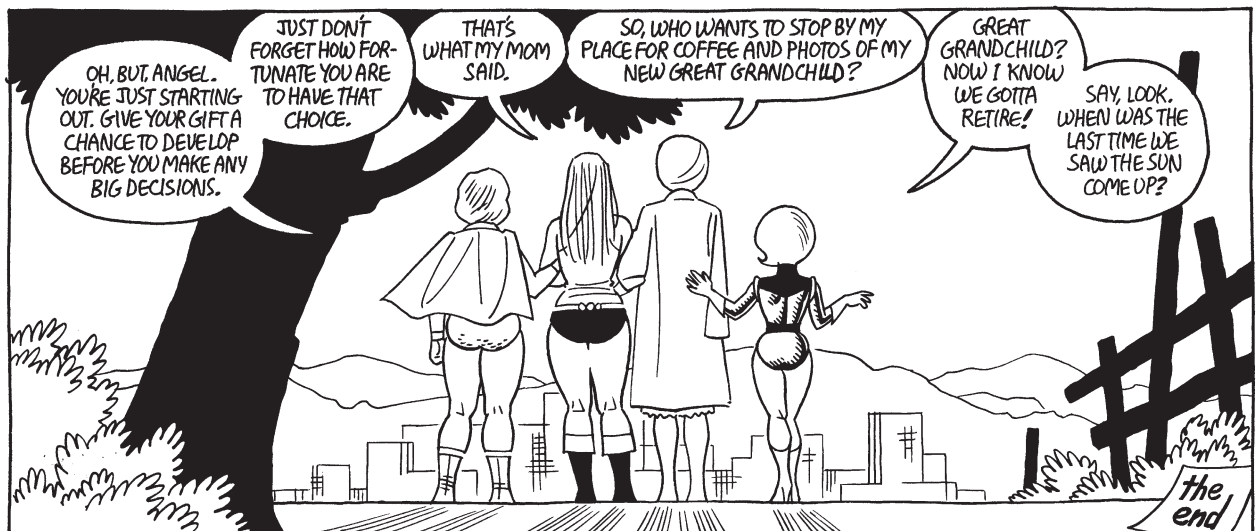
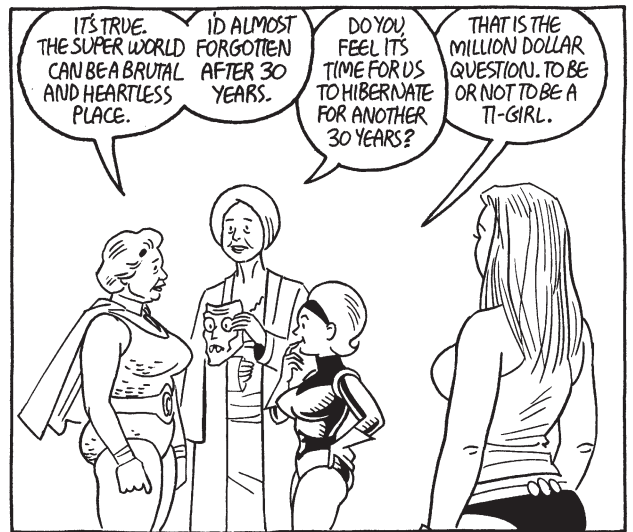
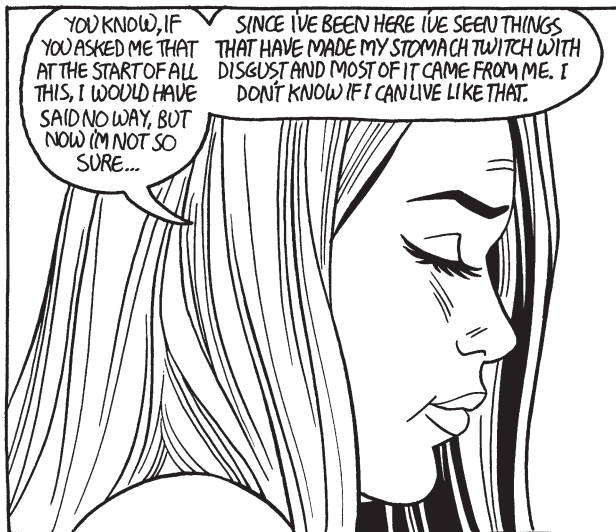
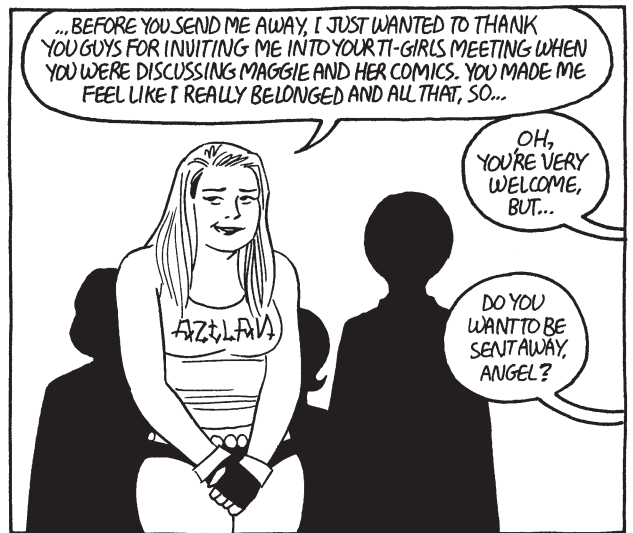
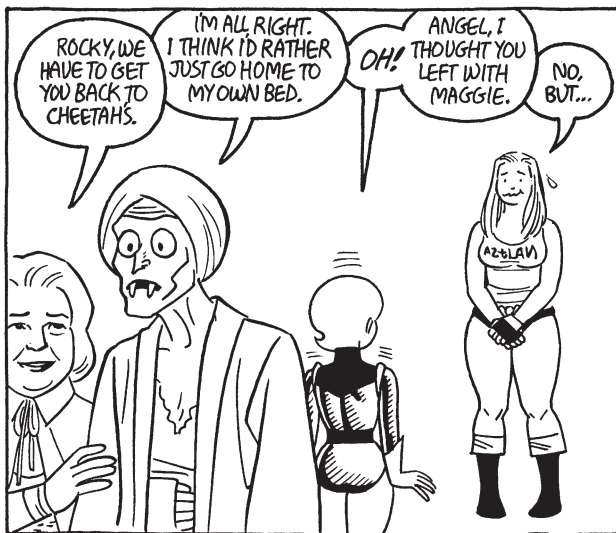


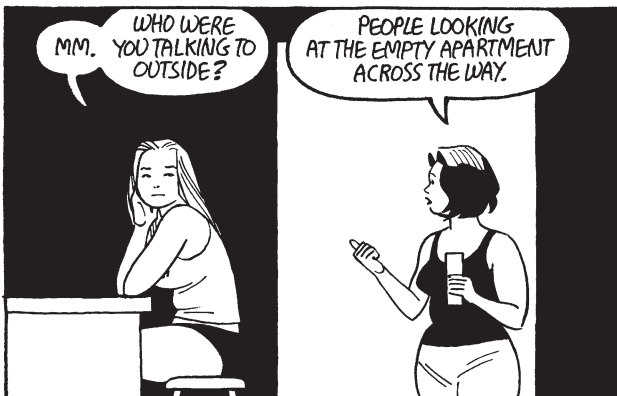
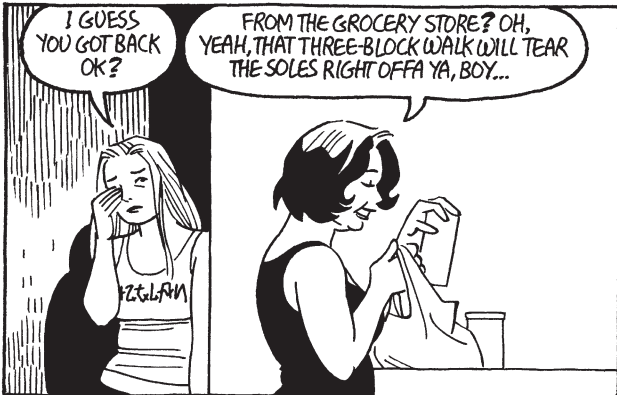
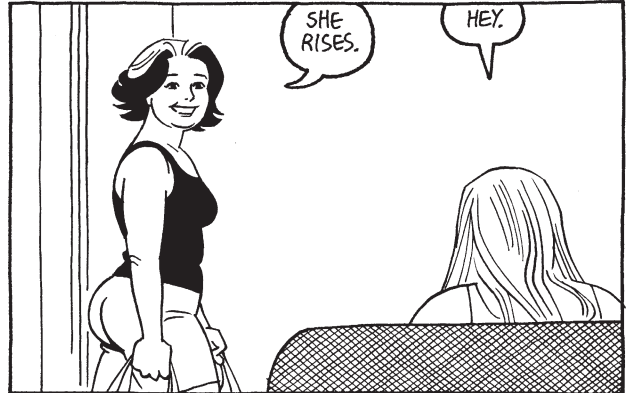
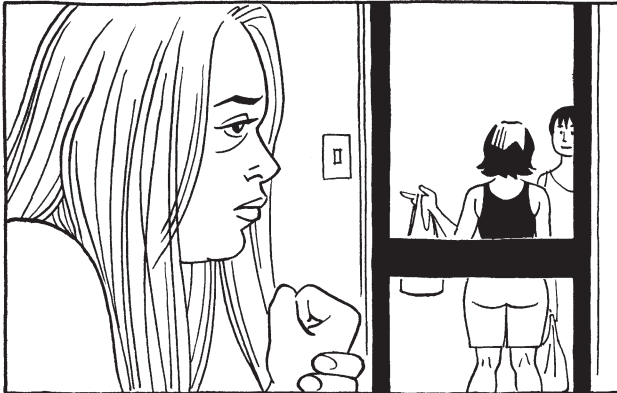


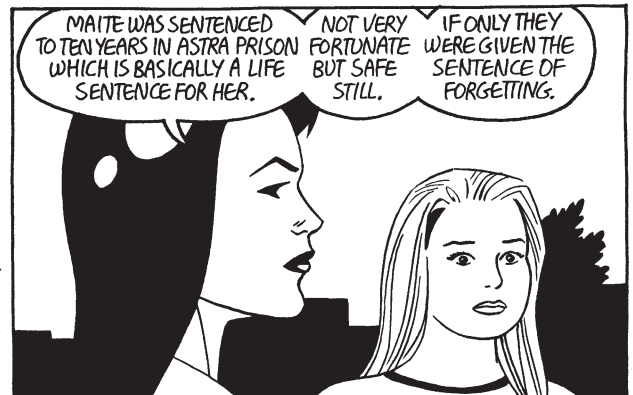
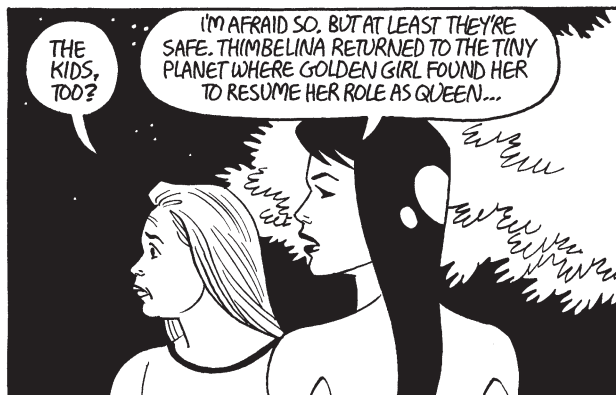
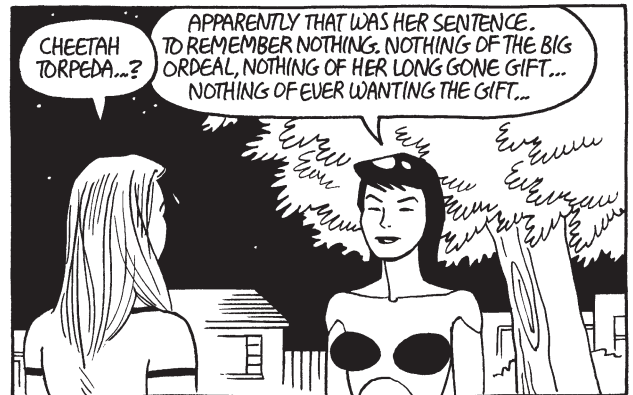
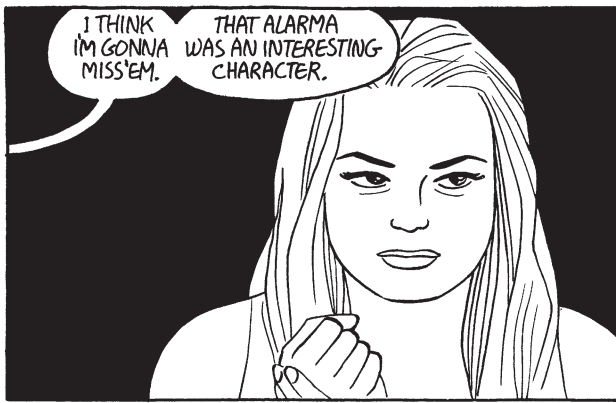


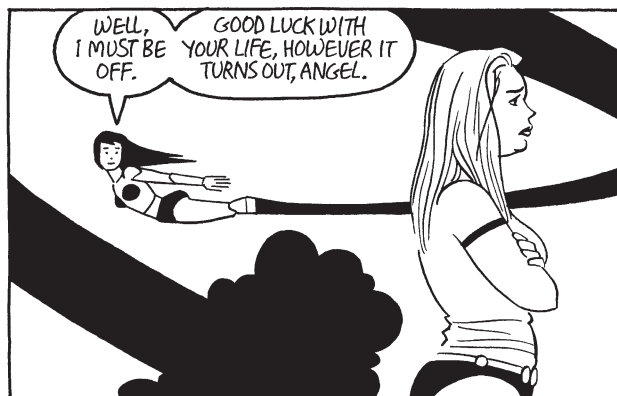
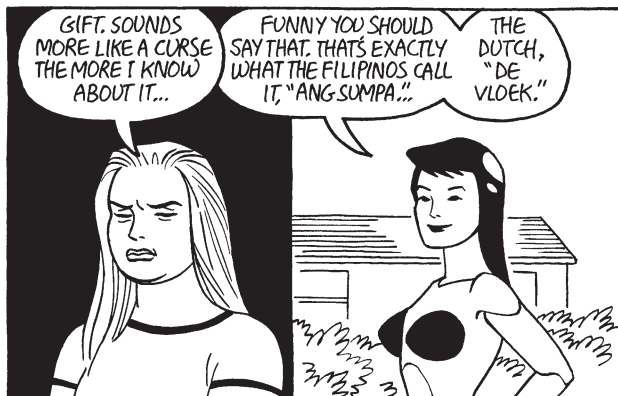
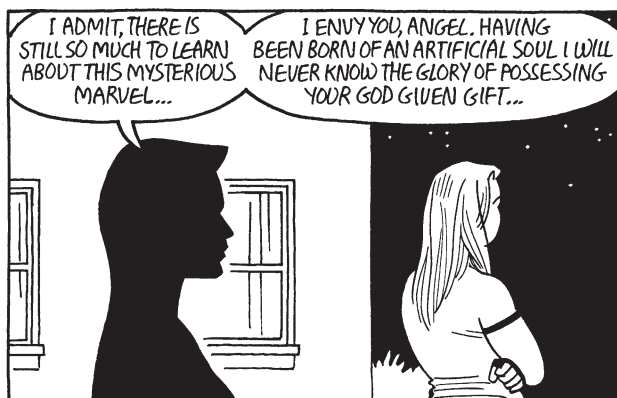
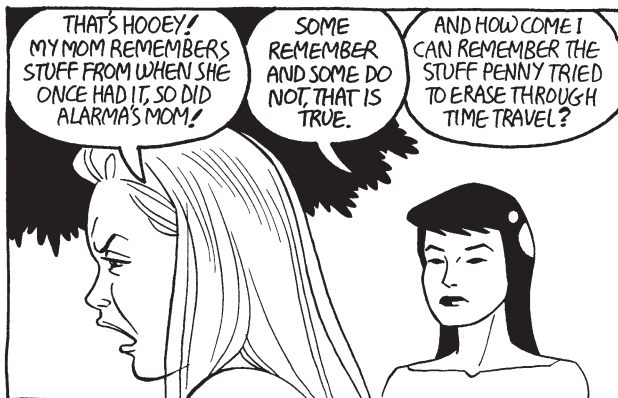
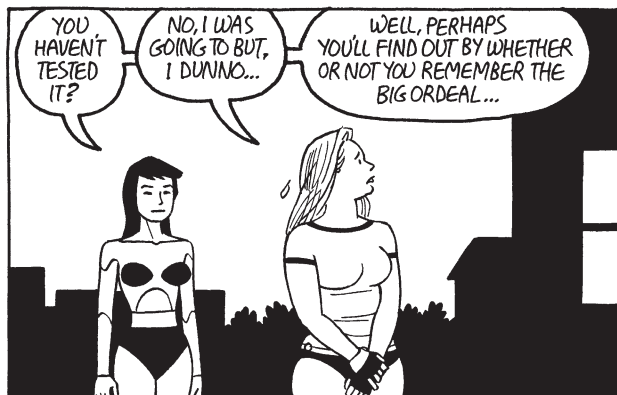
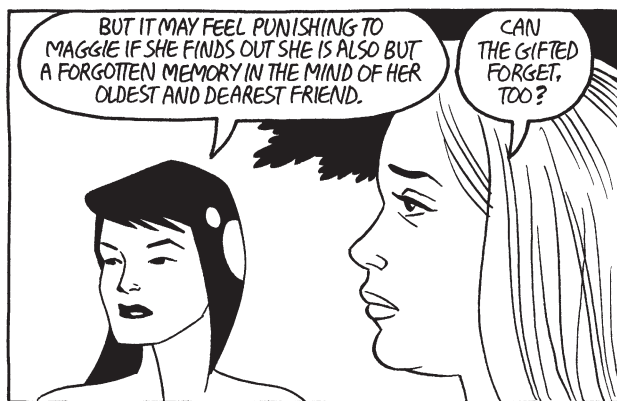
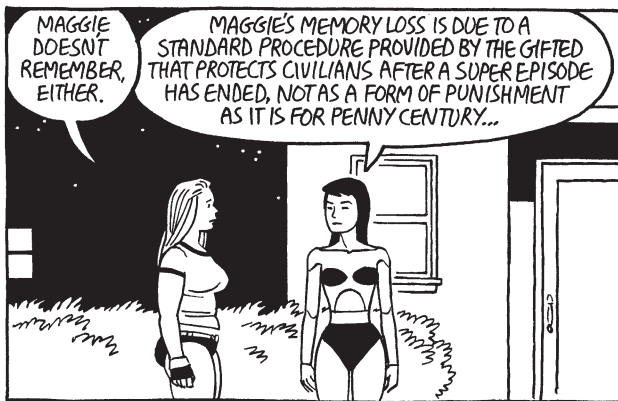


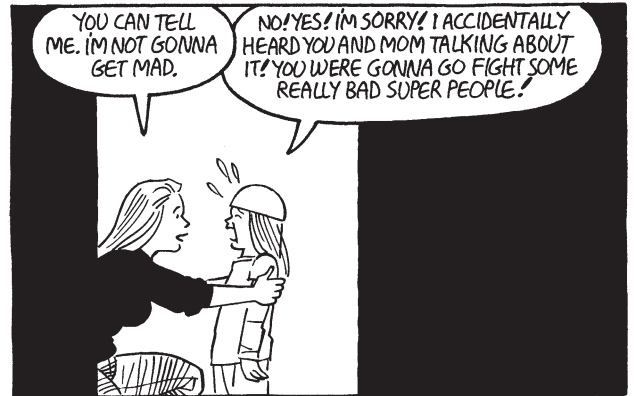
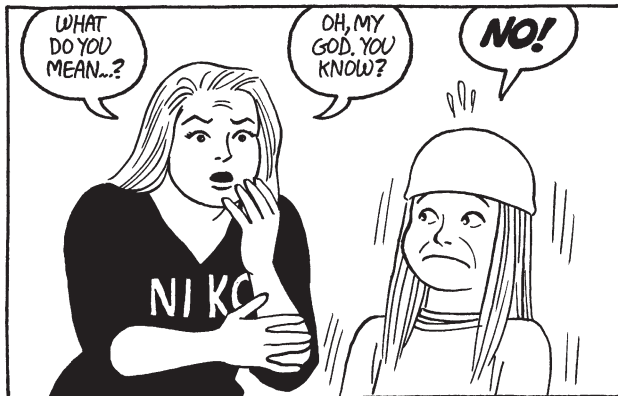
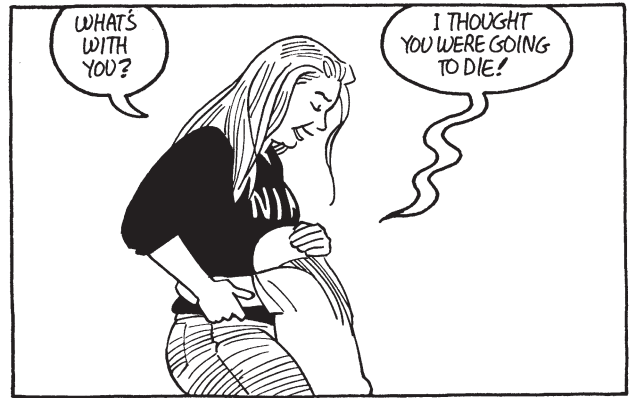
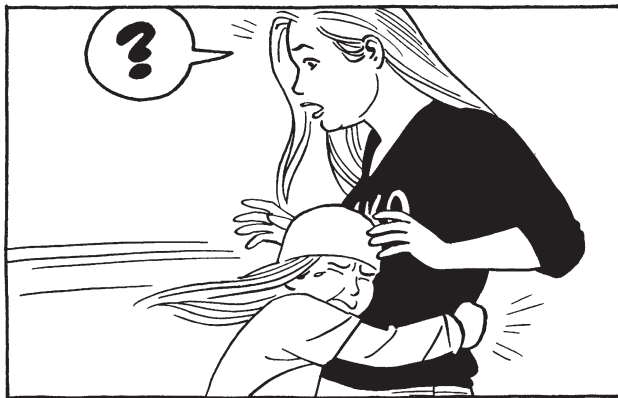
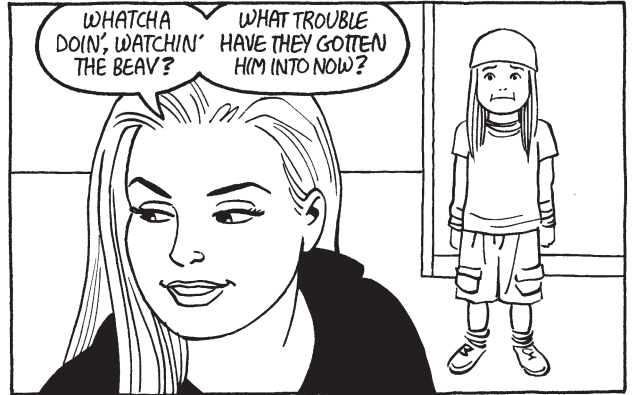
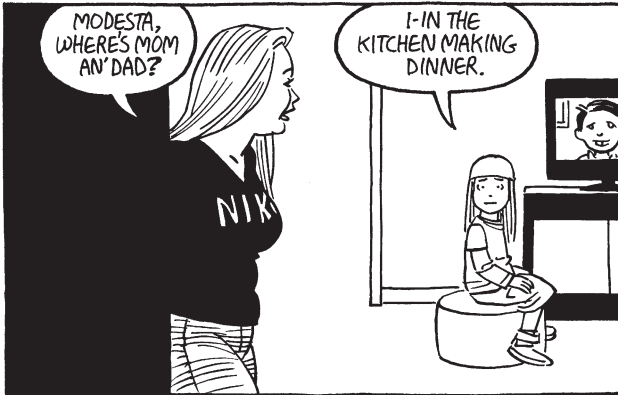
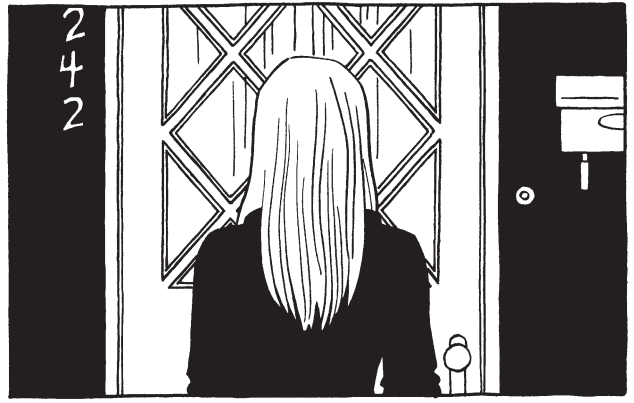
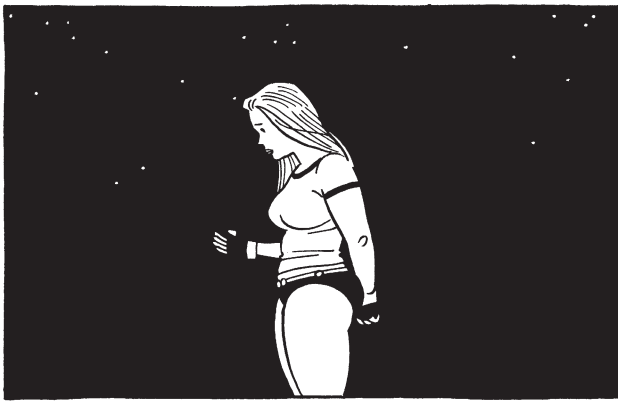


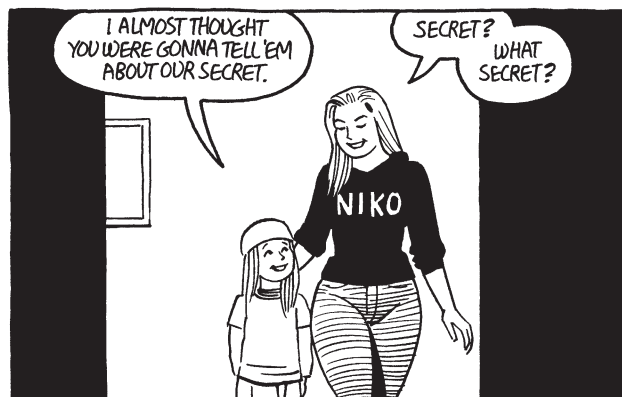
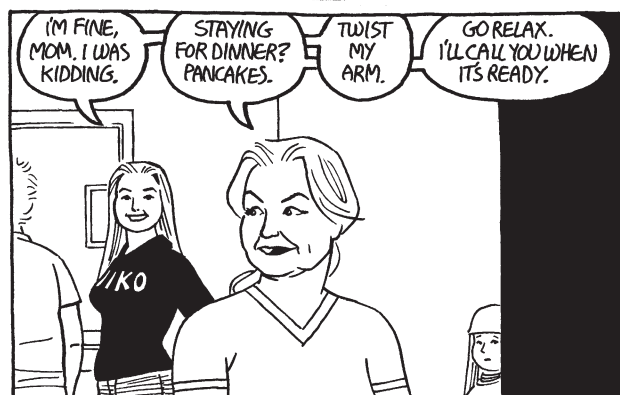
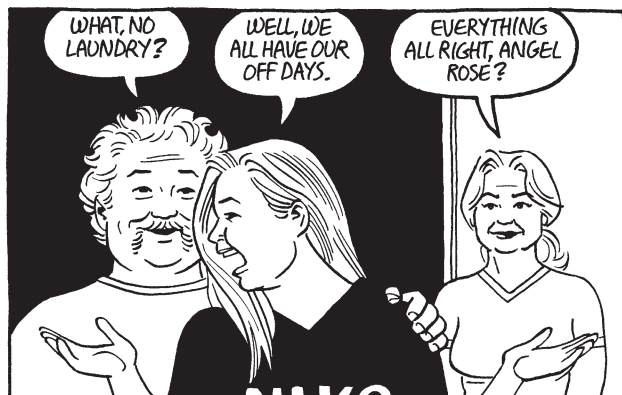
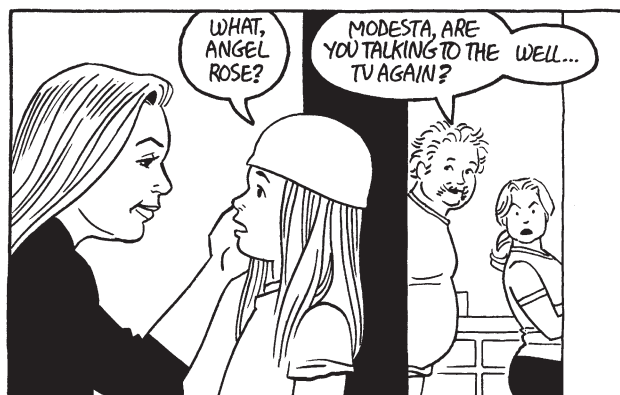










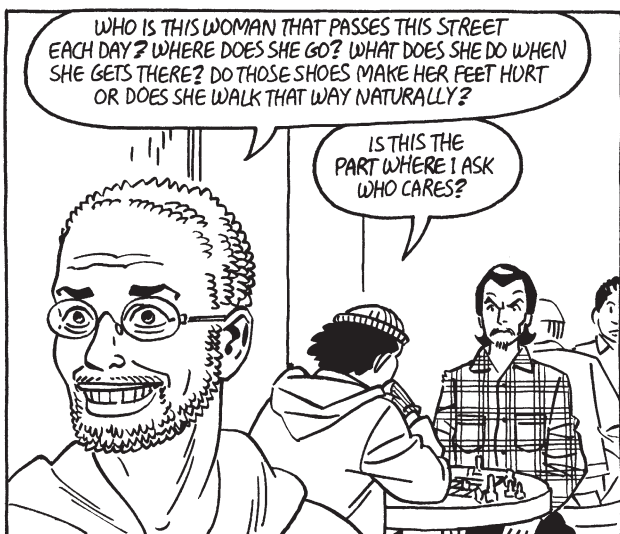
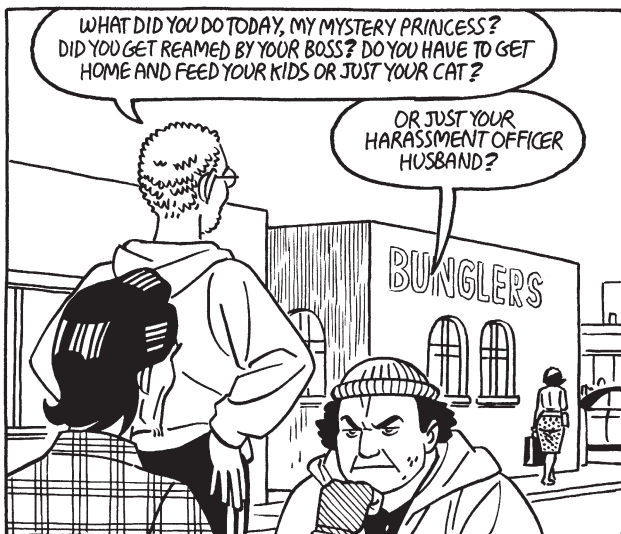
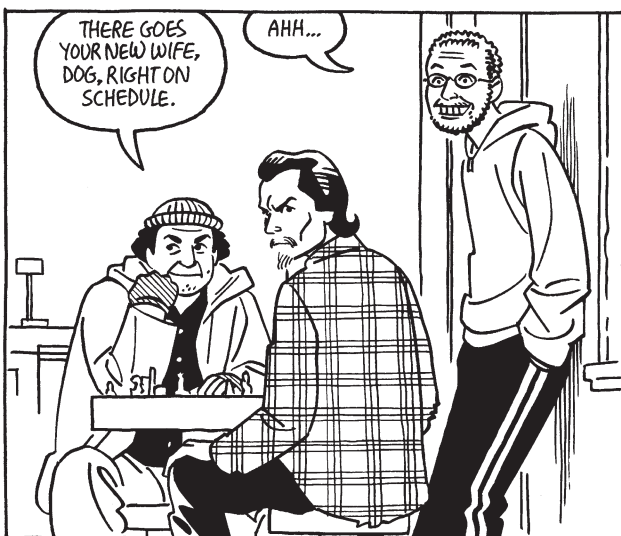
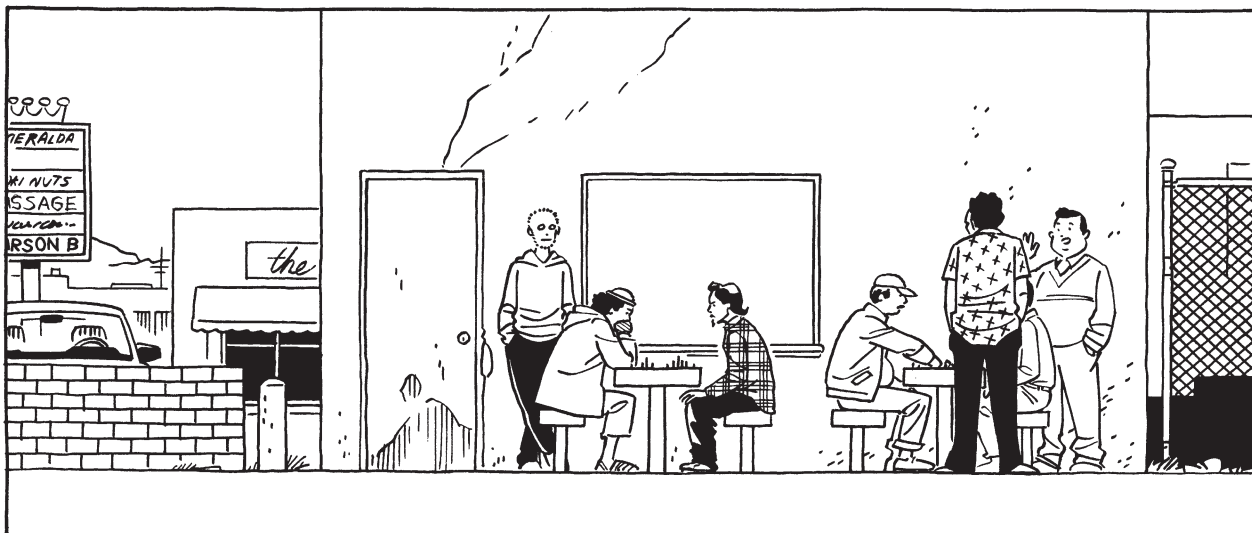


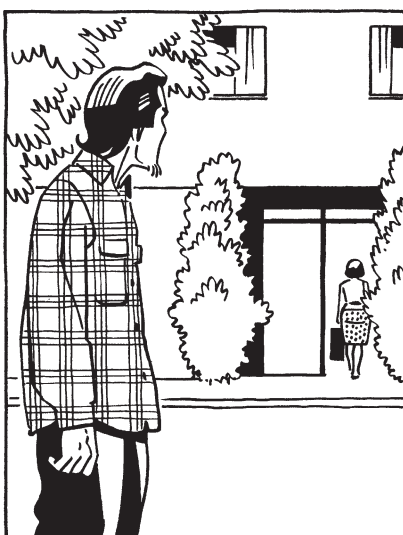
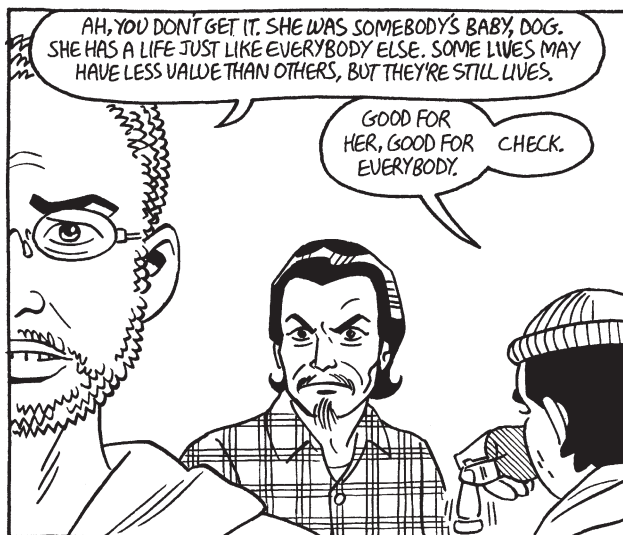
1

THE LOVE BUNGLERS

PART ONE



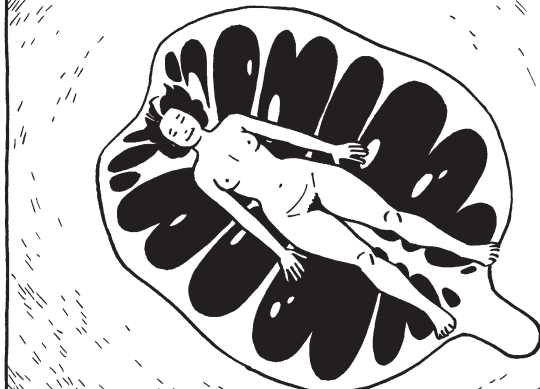




I'M HAVING A DREAM WHERE I'M
SUNNING MYSELF LAYING ON THIS
GIGANTIC TROPICAL LEAF.

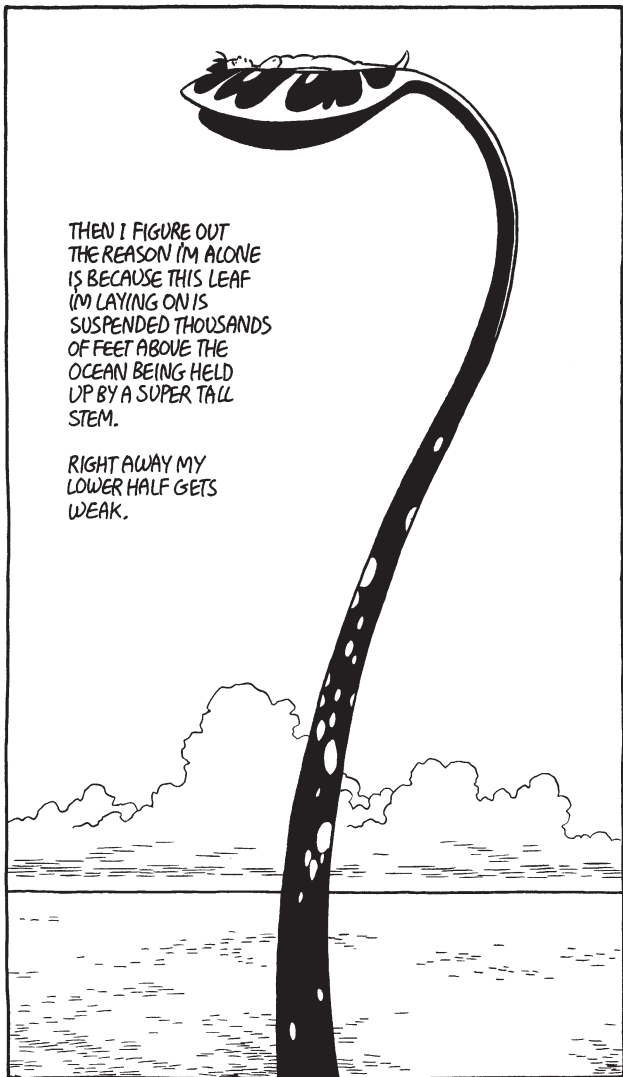


OF COURSE I DON'T KNOW IT'S A DREAM. ALL I KNOW
IS I'M VERY COMFORTABLE, THE SUN IS WARM AND
THERE'S NOBODY ELSE AROUND FOR MILES.



THEN I FIGURE OUT
THE REASON I'M ALONE
IS BECAUSE THIS LEAF
I'M LAYING ON IS
SUSPENDED THOUSANDS
OF FEET ABOVE THE
OCEAN BEING HELD
UP BY A SUPER TALL
STEM.

RIGHT AWAY MY
LOWER HALF GETS
WEAK.



I WANT SO BADLY TO GET DOWN BUT I'M TOO SCARED TO
MOVE, THANKS TO MY TERRIBLE FEAR OF HEIGHTS.

THERE IS NOT A SINGLE THING TO GRAB ONTO SO EVERY
INCH OF MY BODY HUGS THAT STUPID LEAF.



IT TAKES FOREVER
BUT I FINALLY GAIN
ENOUGH COURAGE TO
TURN OVER ONTO MY
STOMACH SO I HAVE A
BETTER CHANCE OF
HOLDING ON BUT IT'S
NOT SO EASY WHILE MY
BODY IS STEALING
EVERY OUNCE OF
GRAVITY TO
SURVIVE.



I FINALLY MAKE IT ONTO MY STOMACH, SO WHAT NEXT?
I TRY TO MAKE MY WAY DOWN, DON'T I?

BUT I'M IN NO HURRY BECAUSE I AM STILL UTTERLY
TERRIFIED, SO I LAY TWICE AS LONG ON MY STOMACH
AS I DID ON MY BACK, CLINGING, CLINGING.



THEN I FIGURE I MUST HAVE HAD THE COURAGE TO GET
MYSELF UP THERE, SO I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET DOWN.

SLOWLY, I MOVE MY WAY BACKWARDS TO THE STEM. AT
LEAST ON THE STEM I'LL FEEL LIKE I HAVE SOMETHING TO
HOLD ONTO.

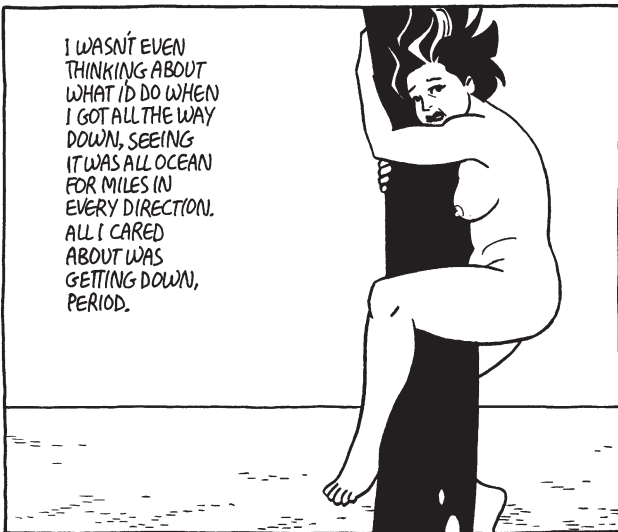


THE STEM FEELS
SPONGY, YET STURDY
SO I START TO FEEL MORE
CONFIDENT AS I INCH
MY WAY DOWN.

EVEN IF IT TAKES
A LIFETIME TO REACH
BOTTOM, AT LEAST I
WON'T FALL TO
MY DEATH.



I WASN'T EVEN
THINKING ABOUT
WHAT I'D DO WHEN
I GOT ALL THE WAY
DOWN, SEEING
IT WAS ALL OCEAN
FOR MILES IN
EVERY DIRECTION.
ALL I CARED
ABOUT WAS
GETTING DOWN,
PERIOD.



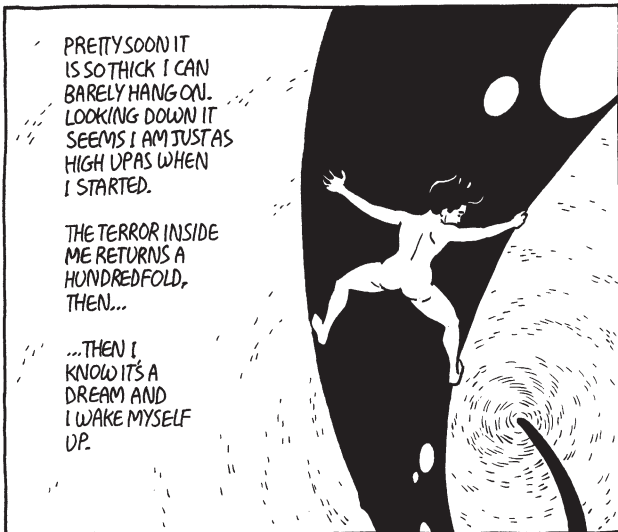
SO, DOWN I GO,
FEELING BETTER WITH
EVERY INCH I TAKE.
THEN I NOTICE THE
STEM IS GETTING
THICKER THE
FURTHER DOWN
I GET.

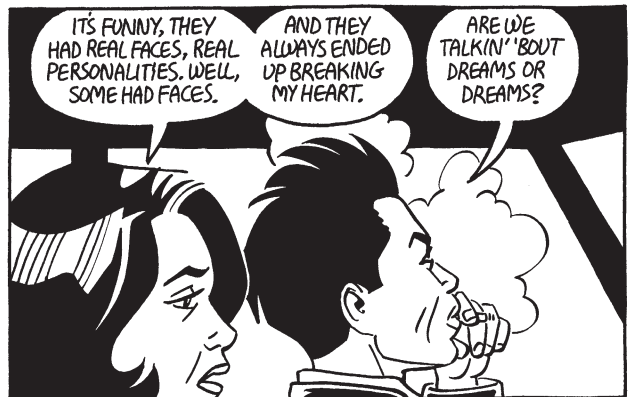
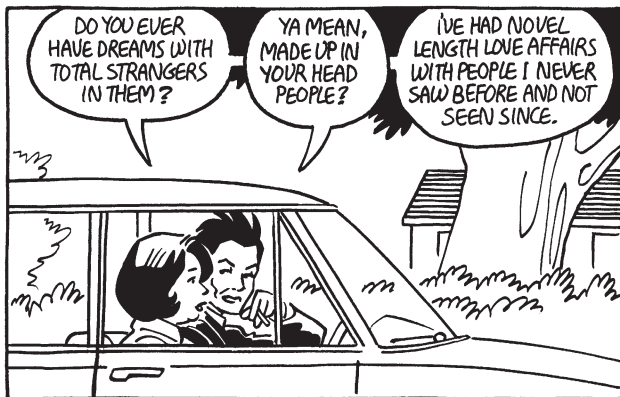
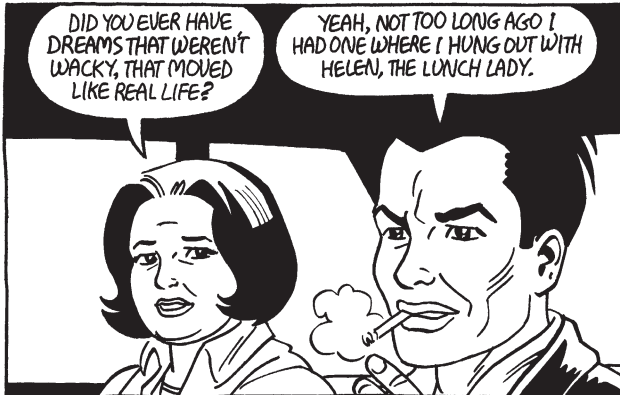


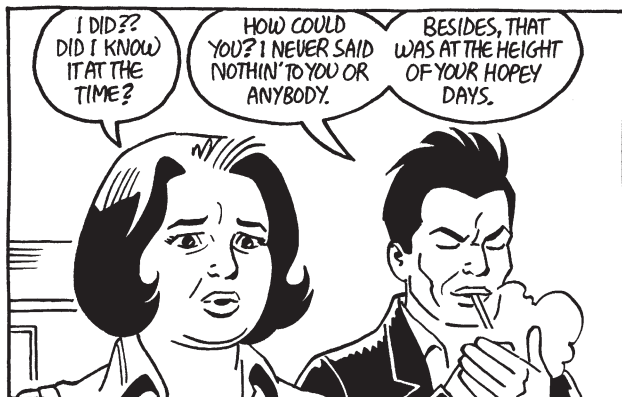
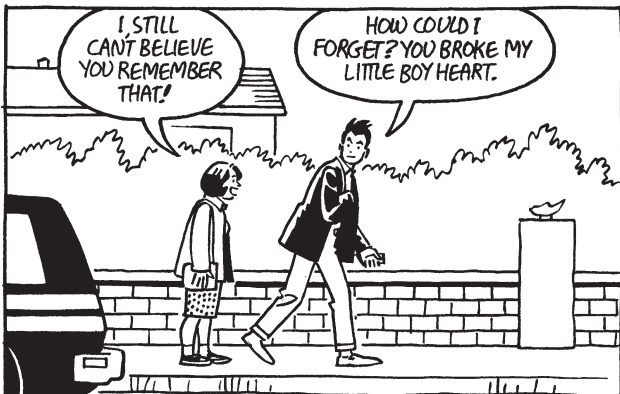
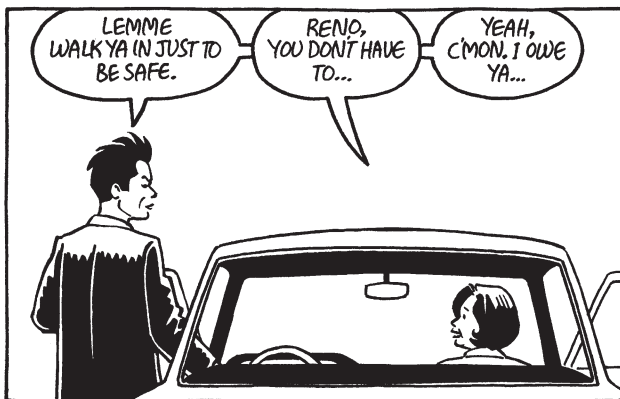
PRETTY SOON IT
IS SO THICK I CAN
BARELY HANG ON.
LOOKING DOWN IT
SEEMS I AM JUST AS
HIGH UP AS WHEN
I STARTED.

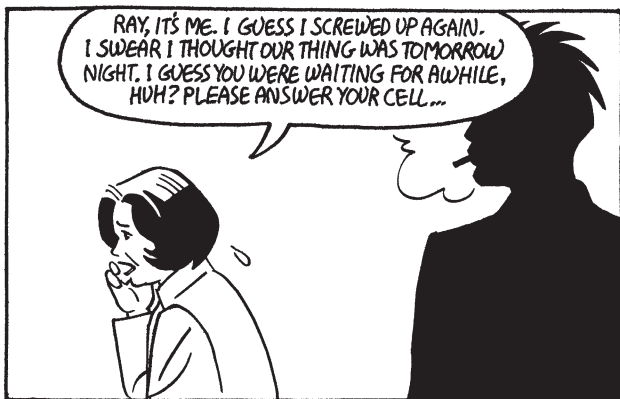
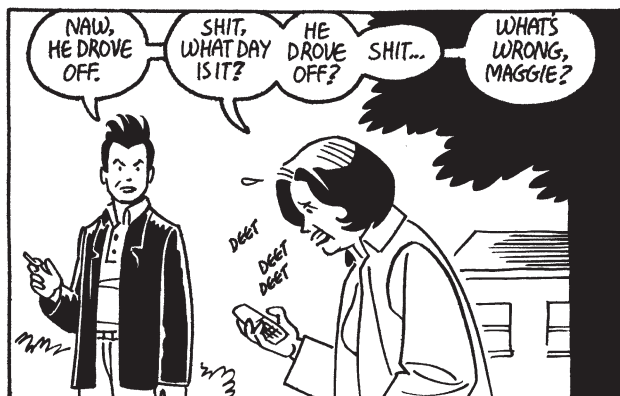
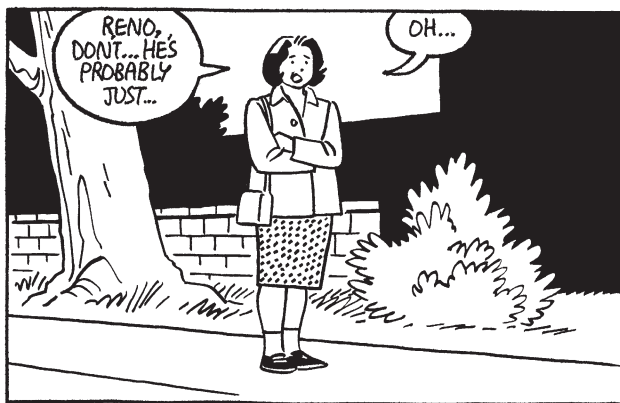
THE TERROR INSIDE
ME RETURNS A
HUNDREDFOLD,
THEN...

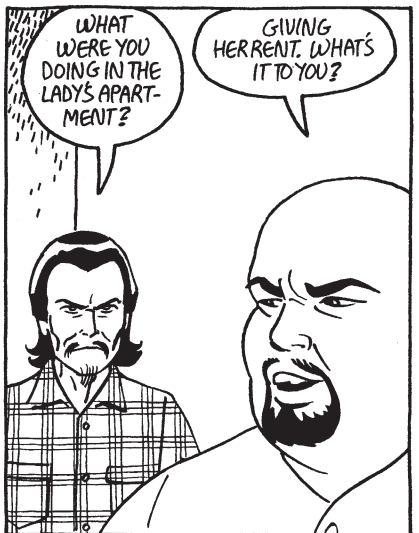
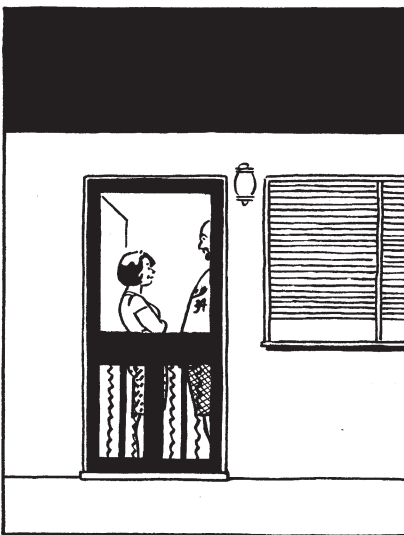
...THEN I
KNOW IT'S A
DREAM AND
I WAKE MYSELF
UP.

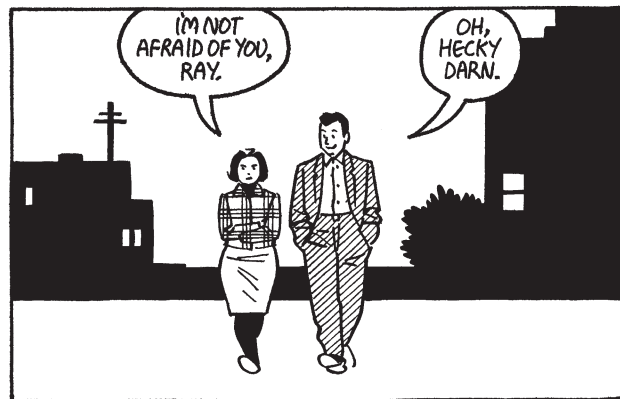
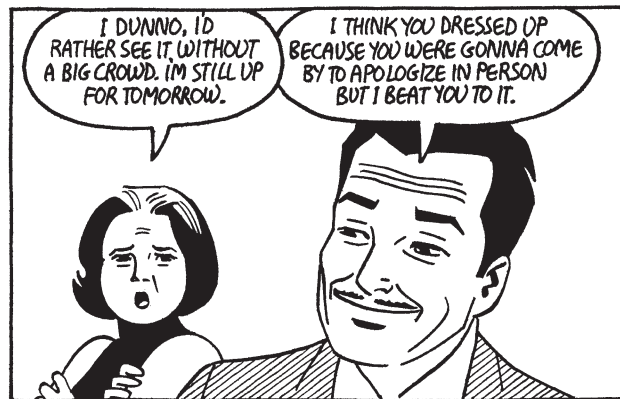
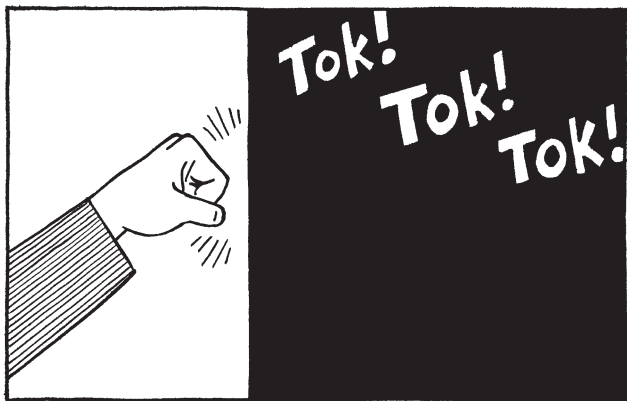


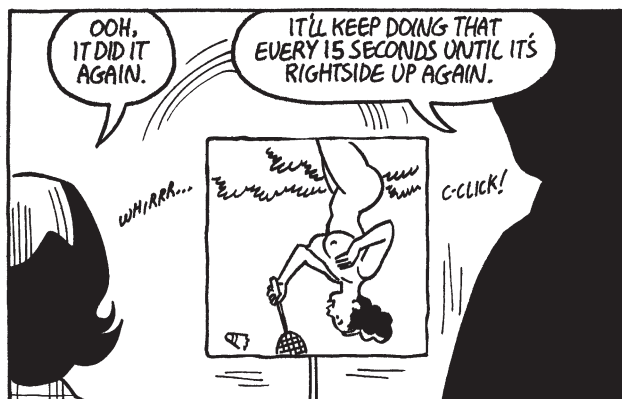
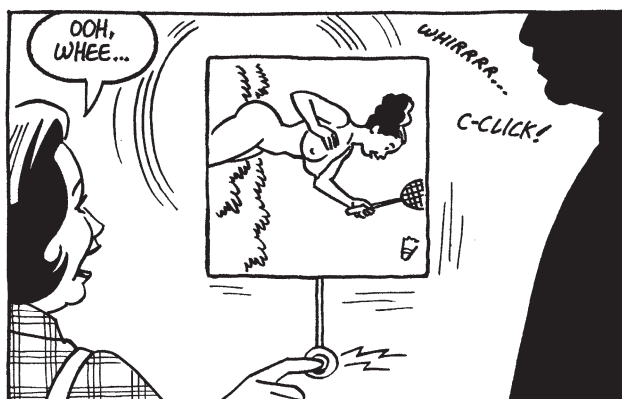
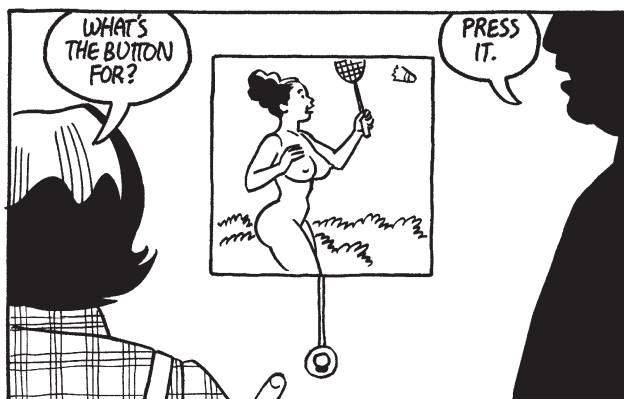
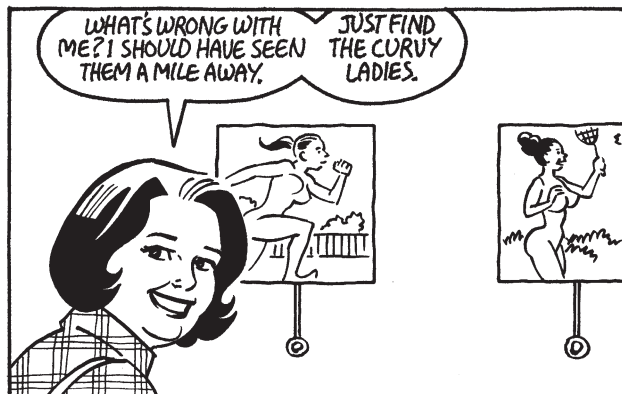
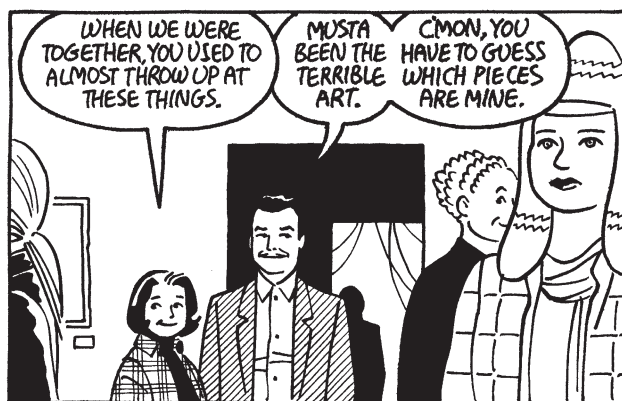


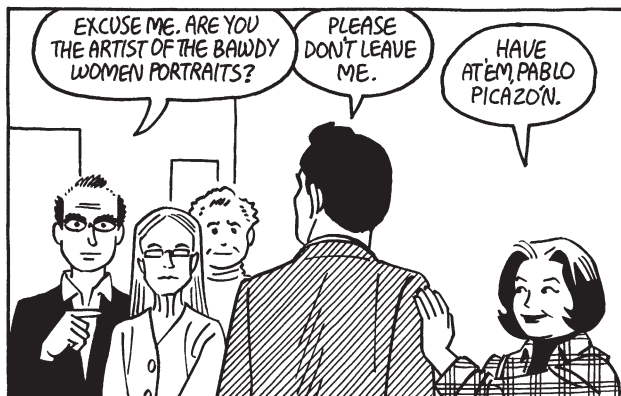
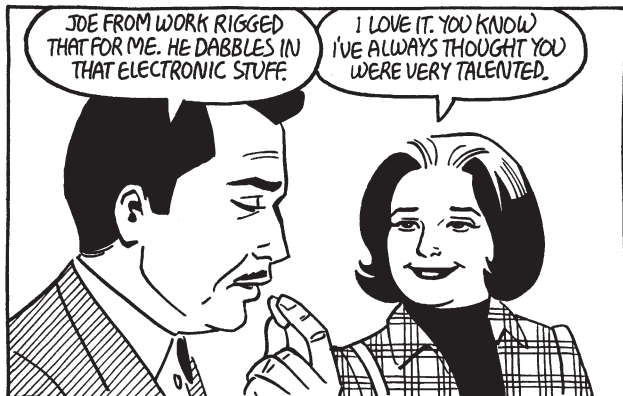
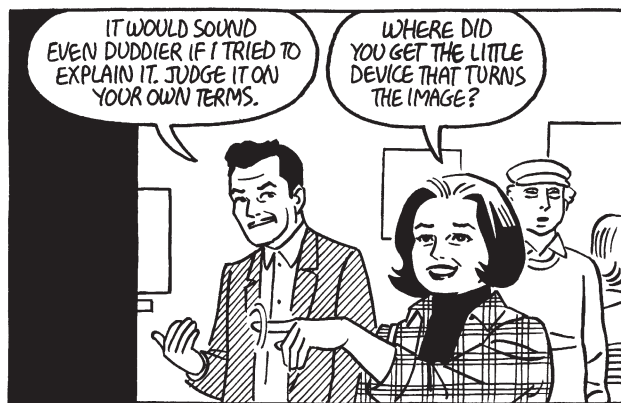
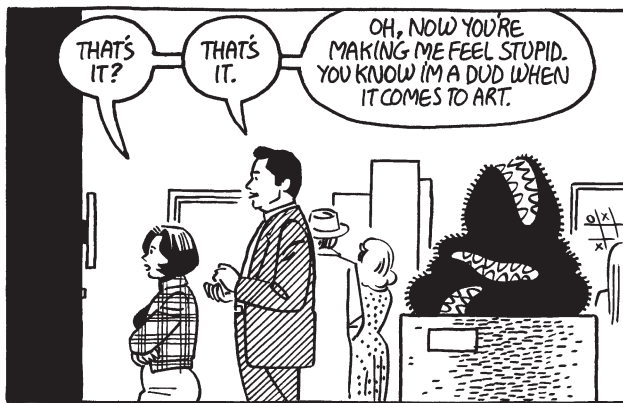


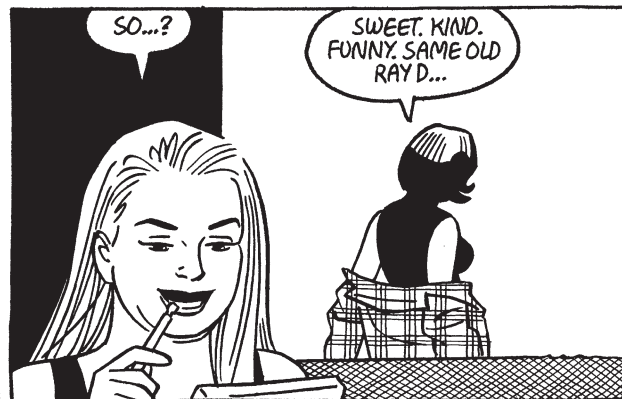
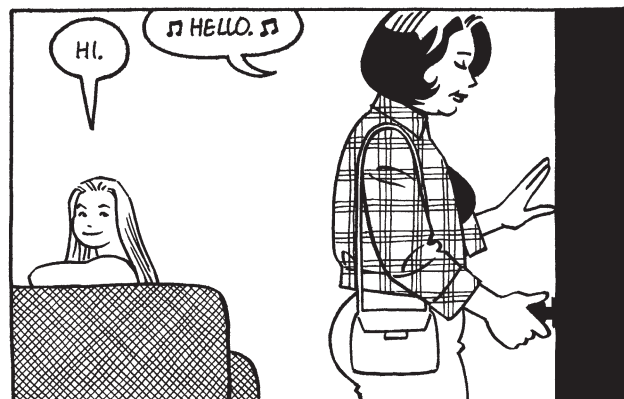
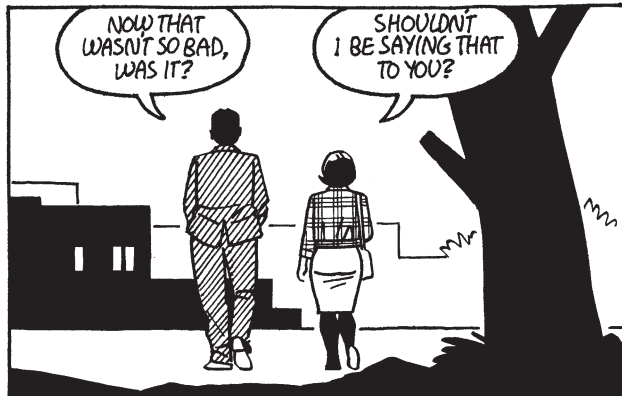


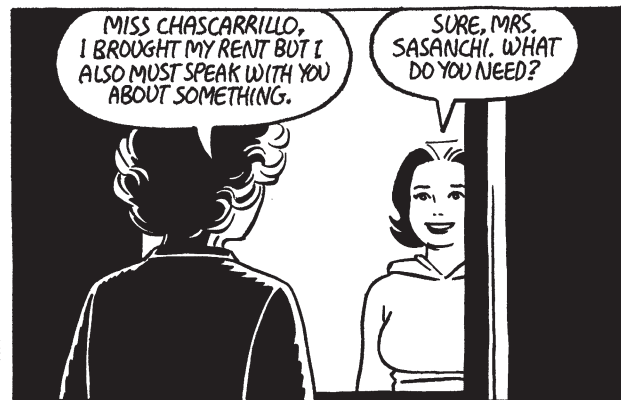
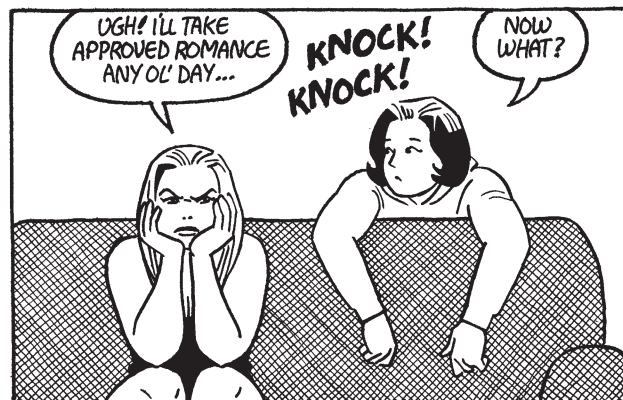
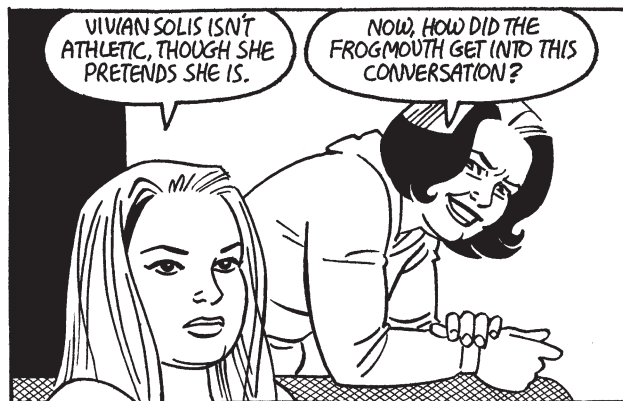
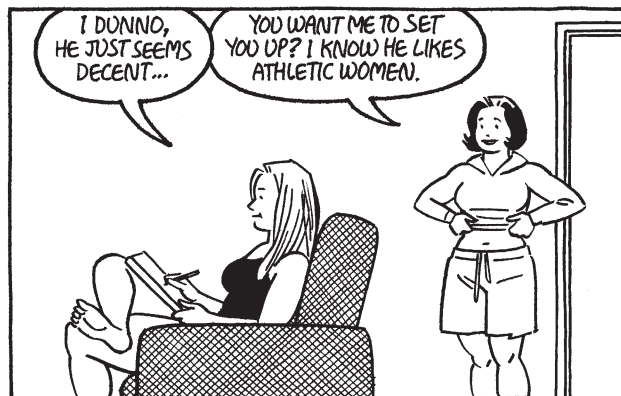
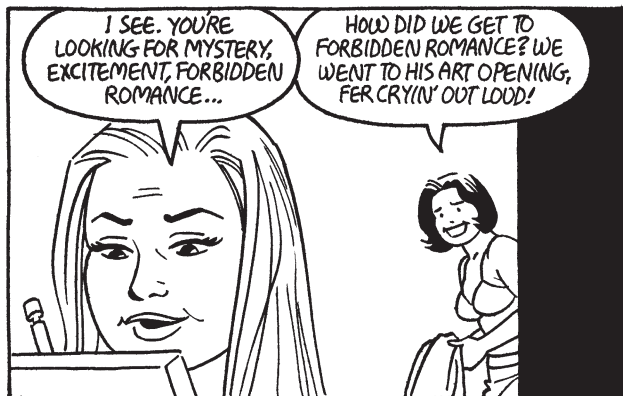
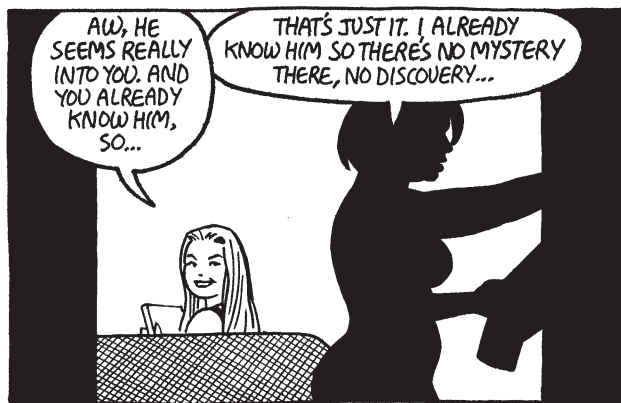
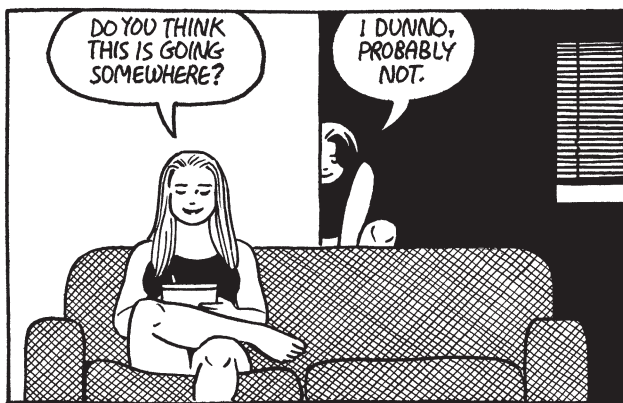


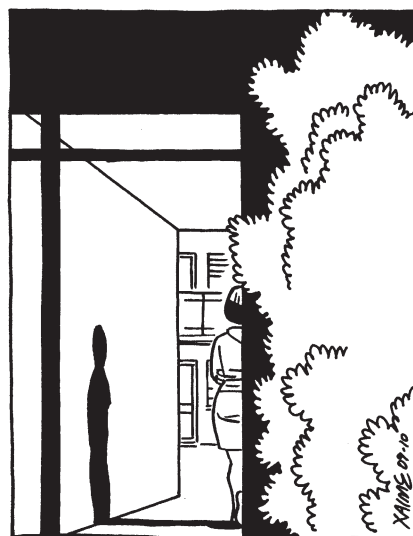










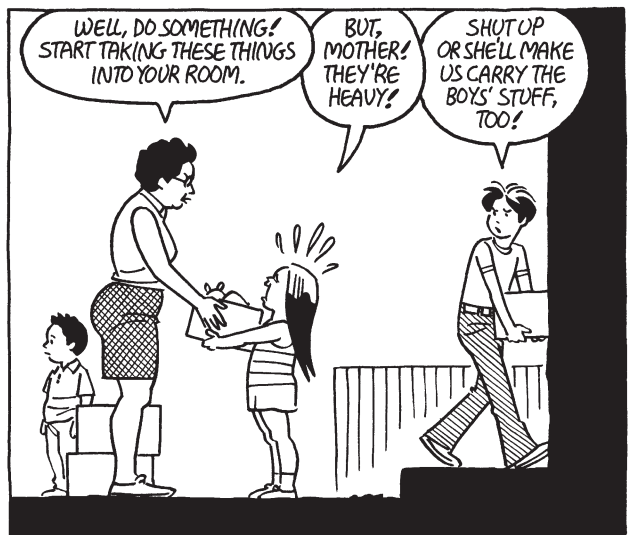
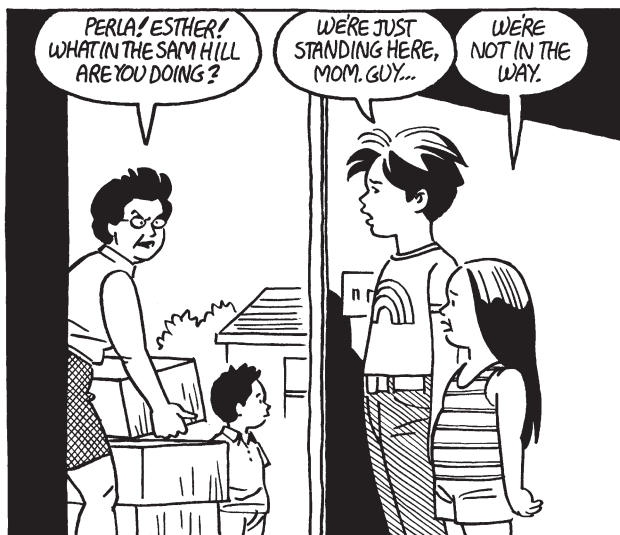
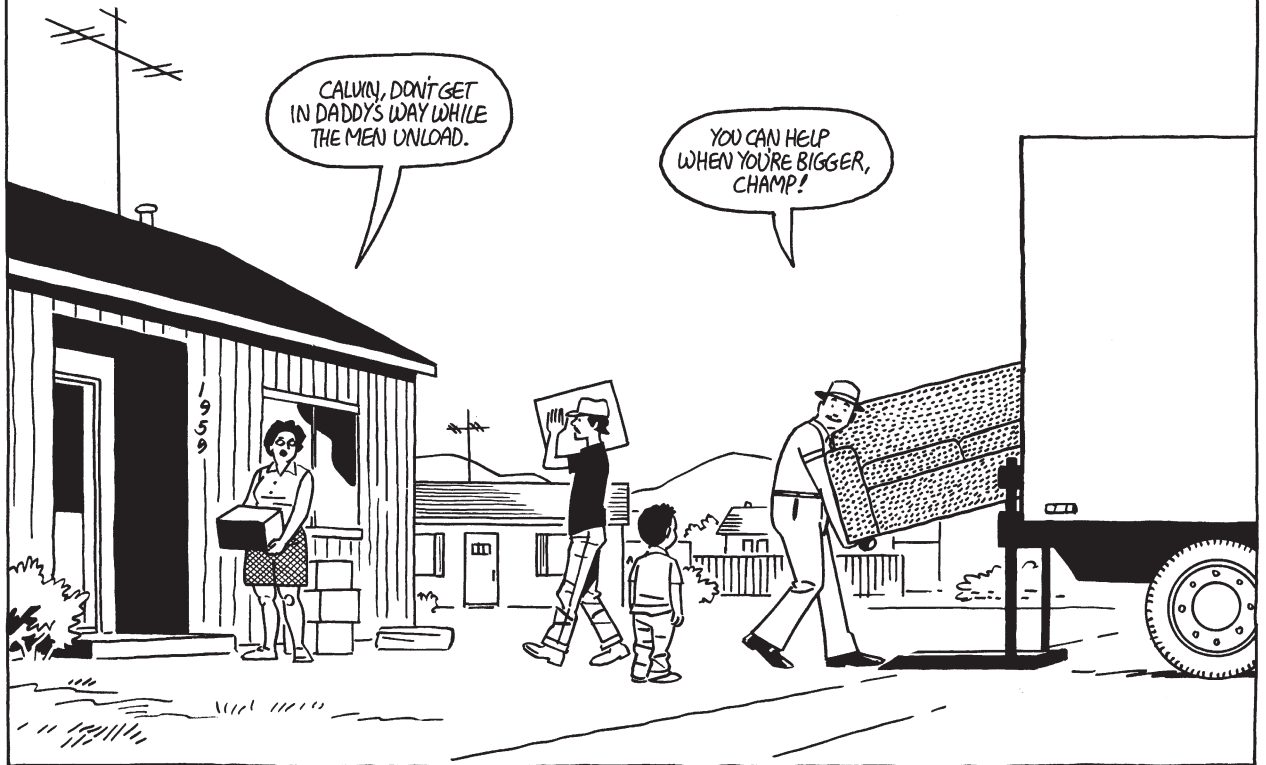


2

BROWNTOWN

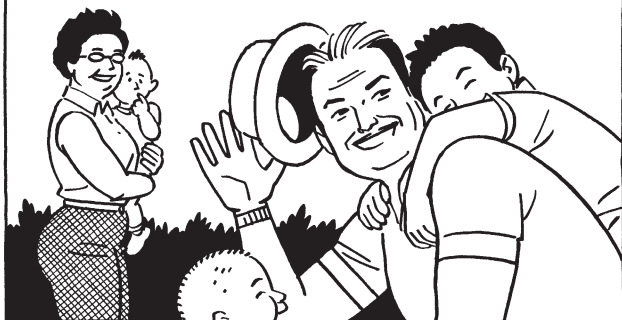


BROWNTOWN



DEAR LETTY,

WELL, WE MADE IT TO CADEZZA AND I ALREADY HATE IT. BUT AT LEAST WE'RE CLOSER TO MY DAD'S WORK SO NOW HE CAN LIVE WITH US ALL THE TIME INSTEAD OF JUST EVERY OTHER WEEKEND.



I STILL MISS YOU EVEN IF I JUST SAW YOU THIS MORNING WHEN WE SAID BYE. SO, I'LL SAY BYE AGAIN FOR NOW. BYE!

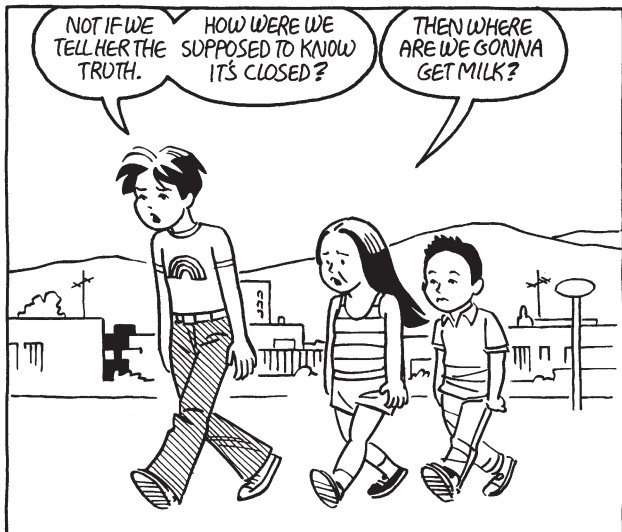
LOVE,
MAGGIE
(BUT NOBODY
CALLS ME THAT
HERE)



NOT IF WE
TELL HER THE
TRUTH.

HOW WERE WE
SUPPOSED TO KNOW
IT'S CLOSED?

THEN WHERE
ARE WE GONNA
GET MILK?



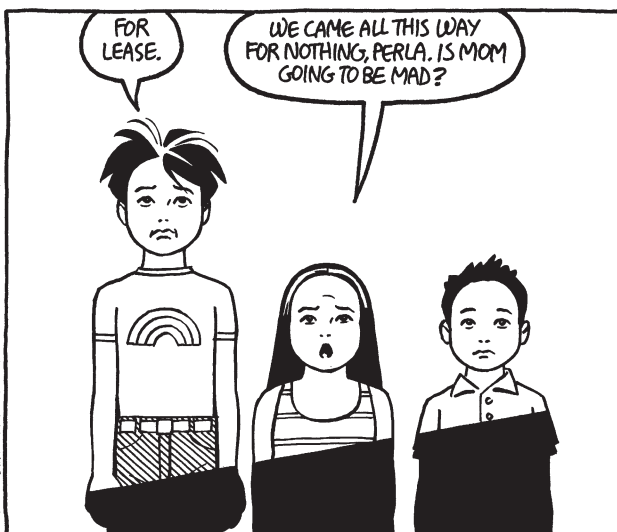
DID I TELL YOU I HATE IT HERE? EVERYTHING IS BROWN. ALL THE BUILDINGS ARE BROWN. OUR HOUSE IS BROWN. EVEN MY BEDROOM IS BROWN.

THIS TOWN IS BROWN, IT GETS ME DOWN
IT EVEN MAKES ME WANT TO FROWN.



FOR
LEASE.

WE CAME ALL THIS WAY
FOR NOTHING, PERLA. IS MOM
GOING TO BE MAD?



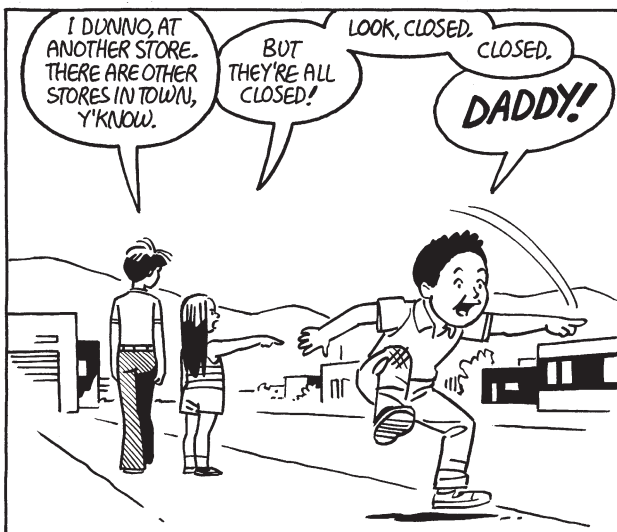
I DUNNO, AT
ANOTHER STORE.
THERE ARE OTHER
STORES IN TOWN,
Y'KNOW.

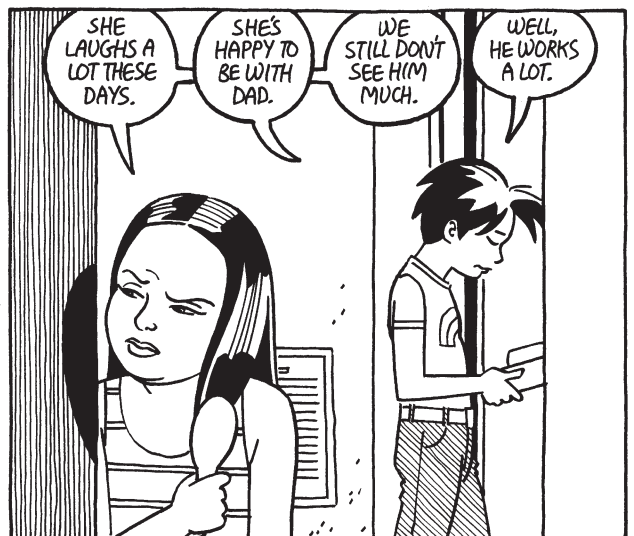
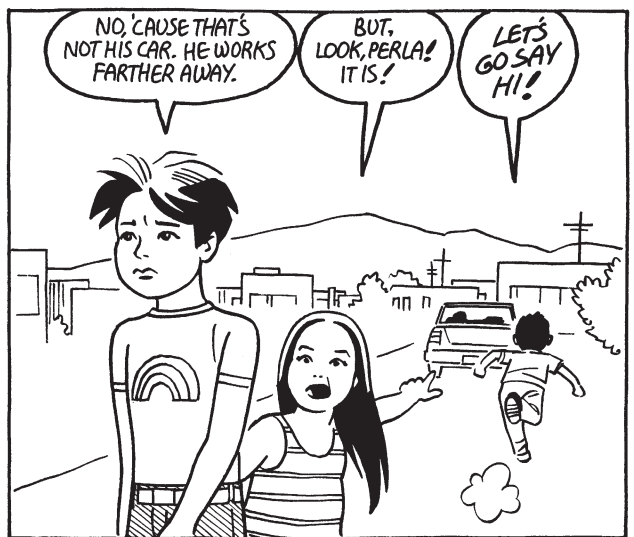
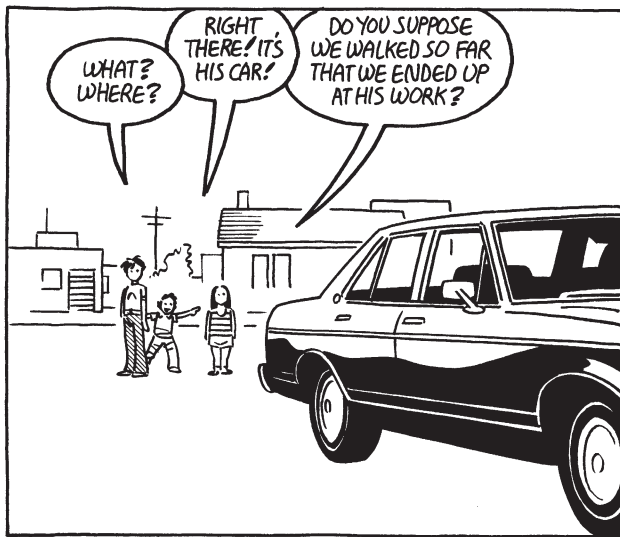
BUT
THEY'RE ALL
CLOSED!

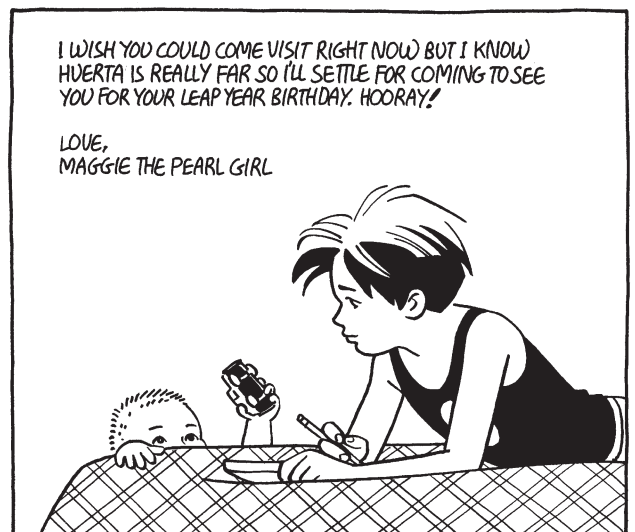
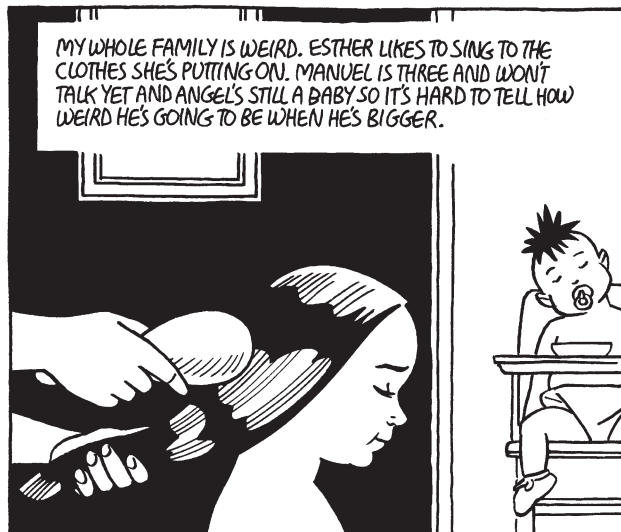
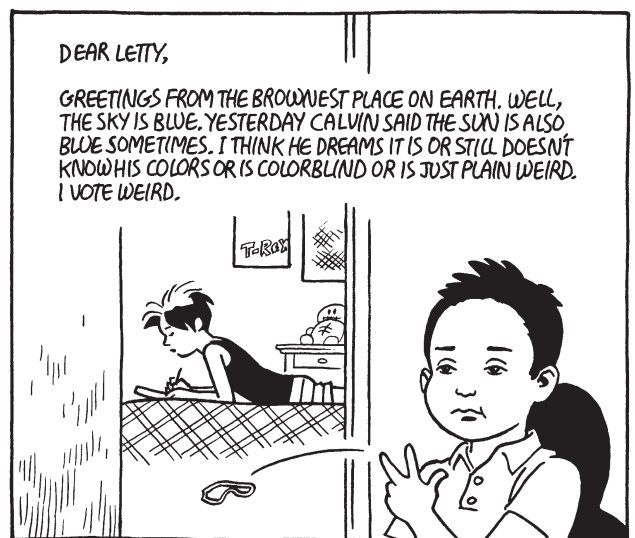
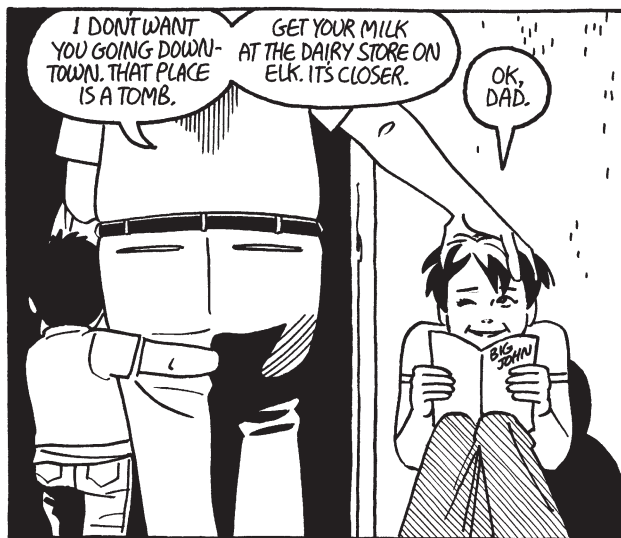
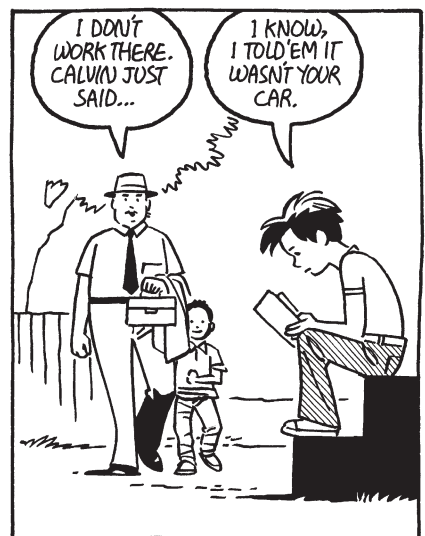
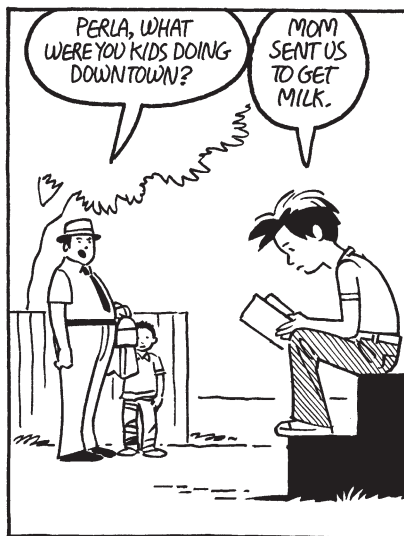
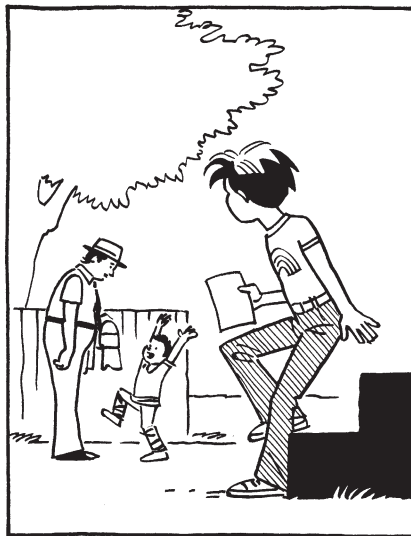
LOOK, CLOSED.

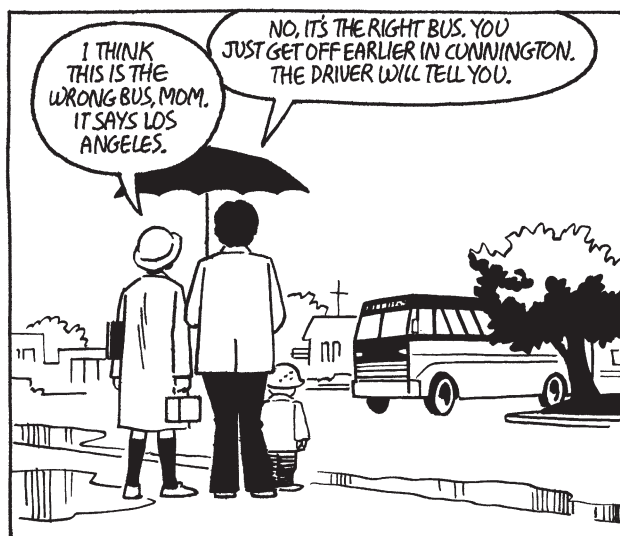
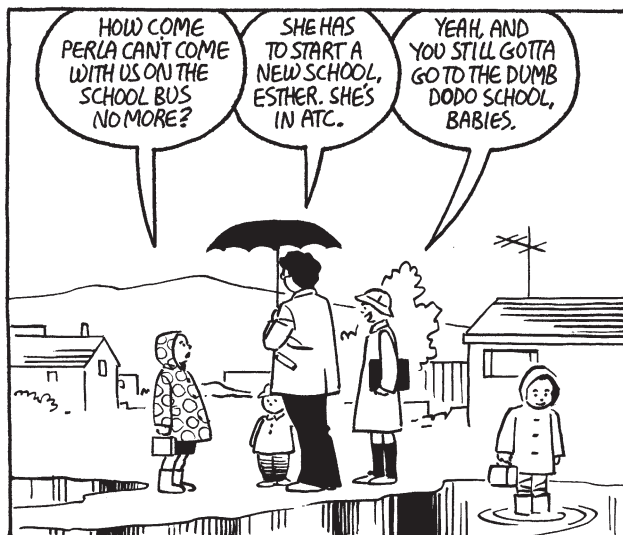
CLOSED.

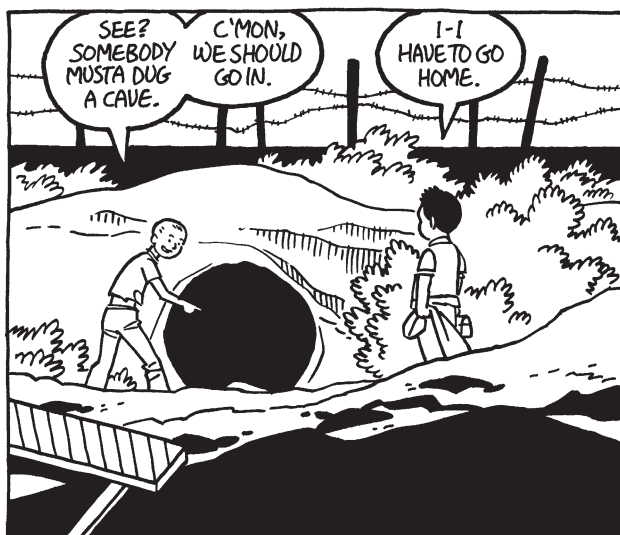
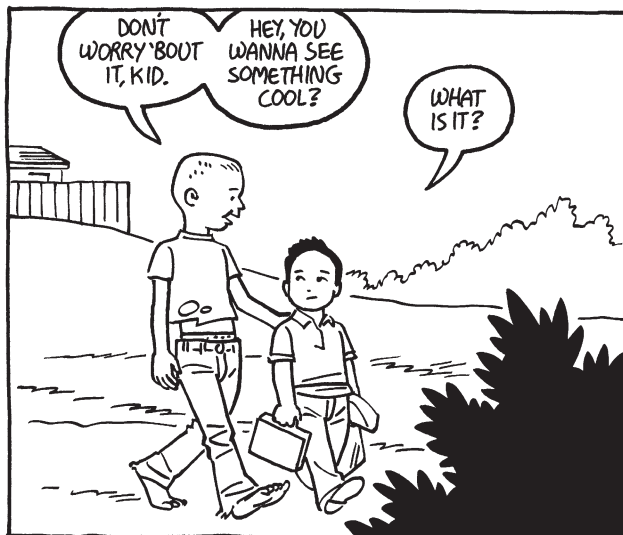
DADDY!

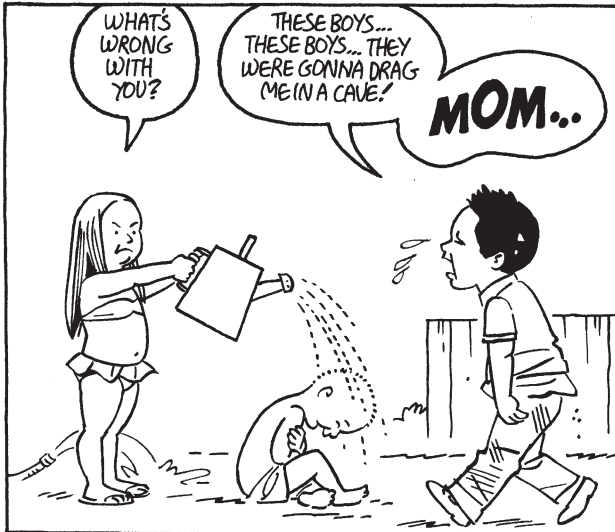








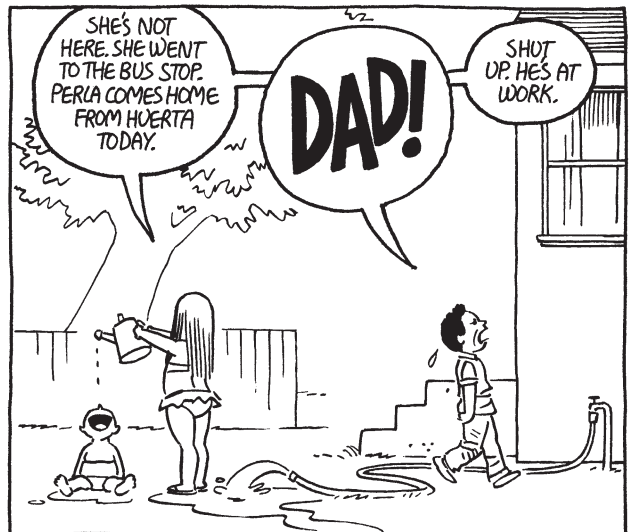




WHAT'S
WRONG
WITH
YOU?

THESE BOYS...
THESE BOYS... THEY
WERE GONNA DRAG
ME IN A CAVE!

MOM..



SHE'S NOT
HERE. SHE WENT
TO THE BUS STOP.
PERLA COMES HOME
FROM HUERTA
TODAY.

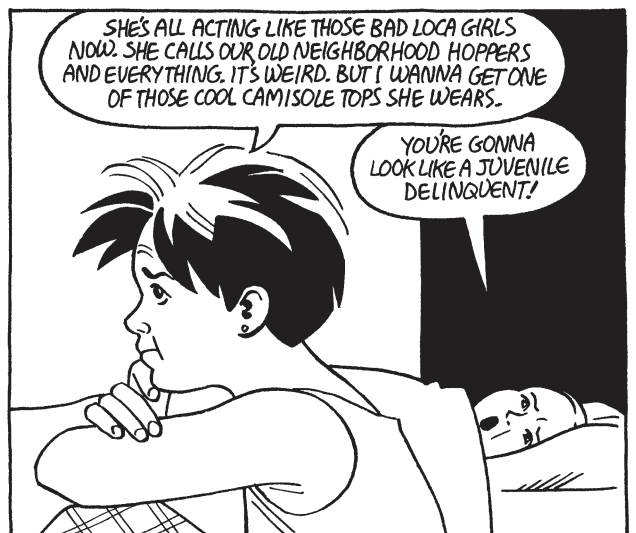
DAD!

SHUT
UP. HE'S AT
WORK.



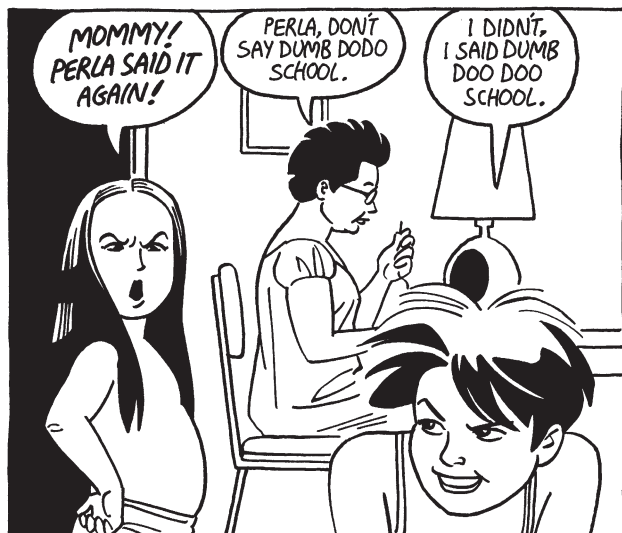
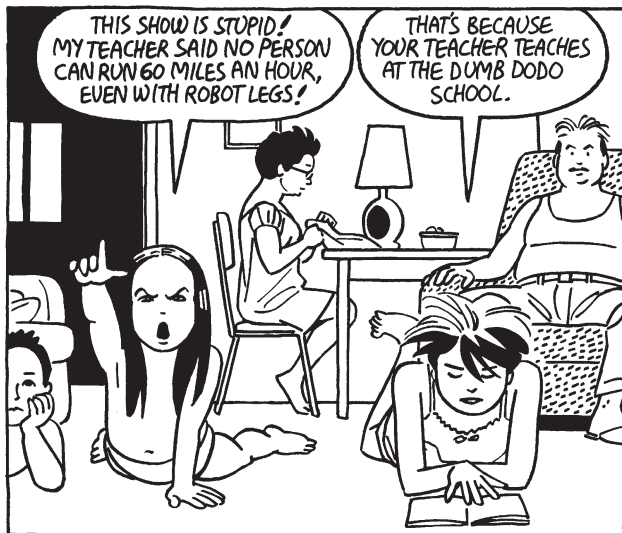
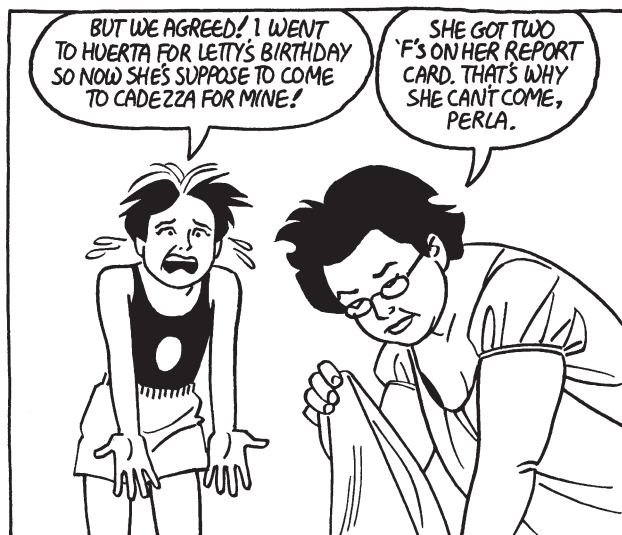
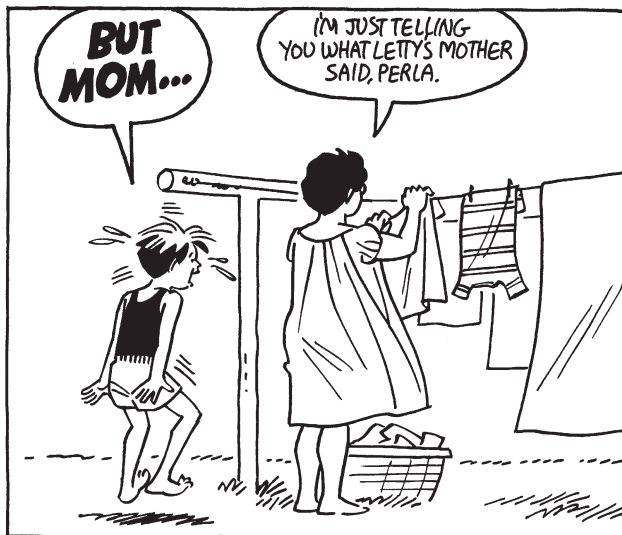
TELL ME ALL
ABOUT HUERTA AND
DISNEYLAND AND
LETTY'S BIRTHDAY,
BUT DISNEYLAND
FIRST.

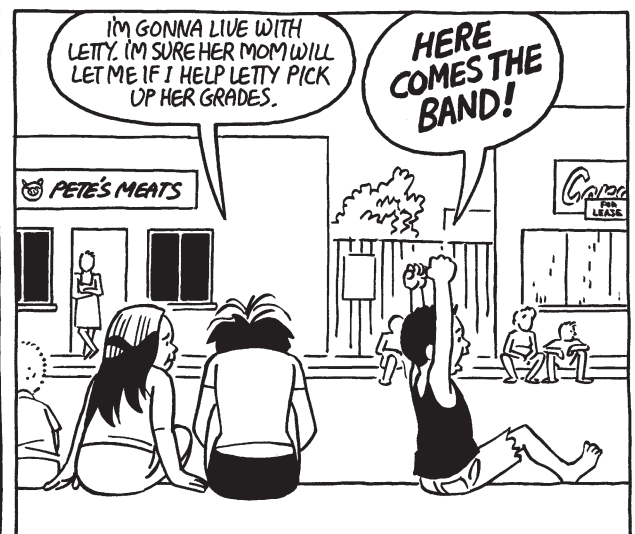
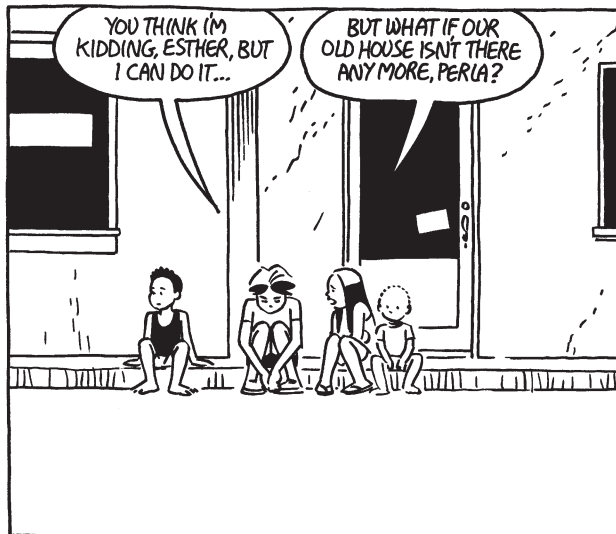
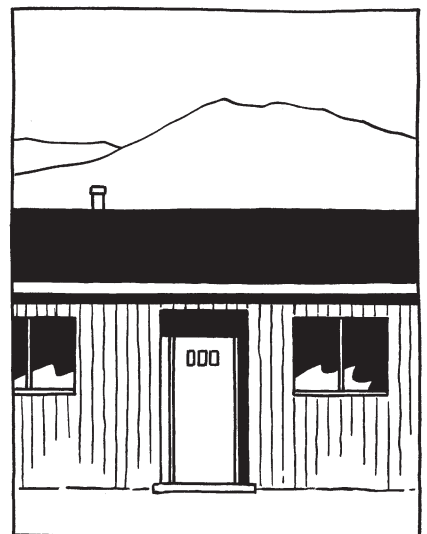
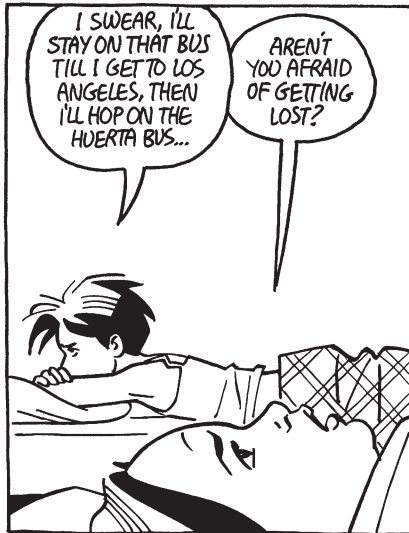
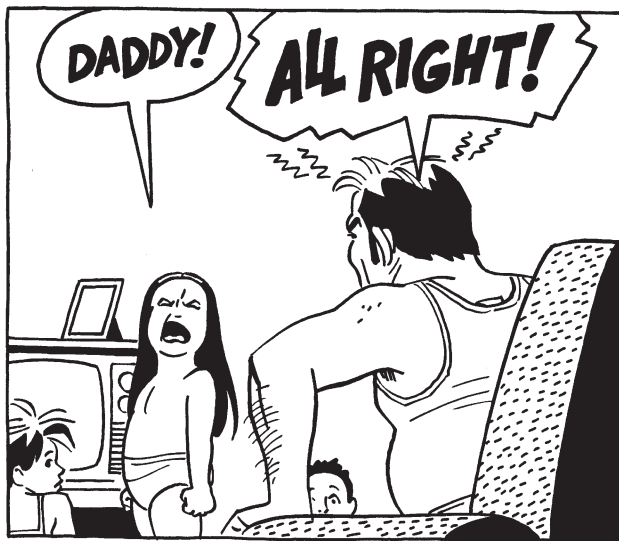
DISNEYLAND WAS OK BUT
LETTY WASN'T INTO IT AS MUCH
THIS TIME AROUND.

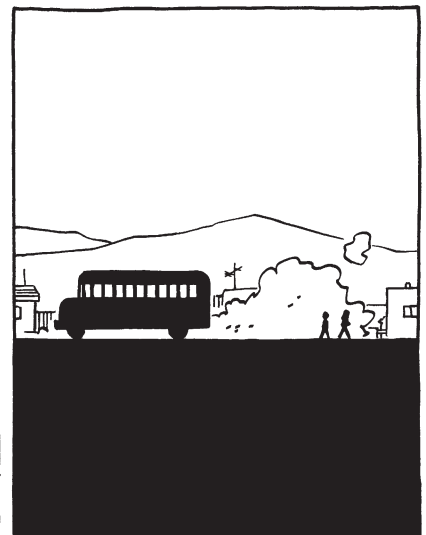


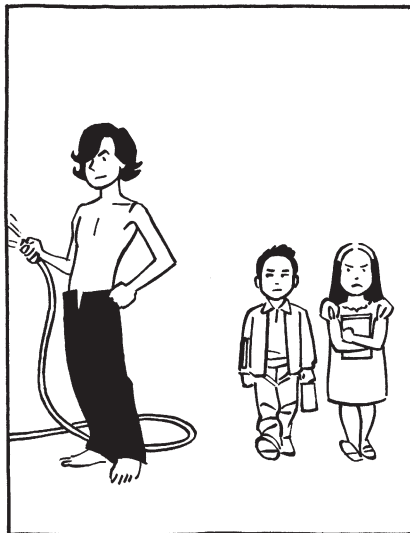
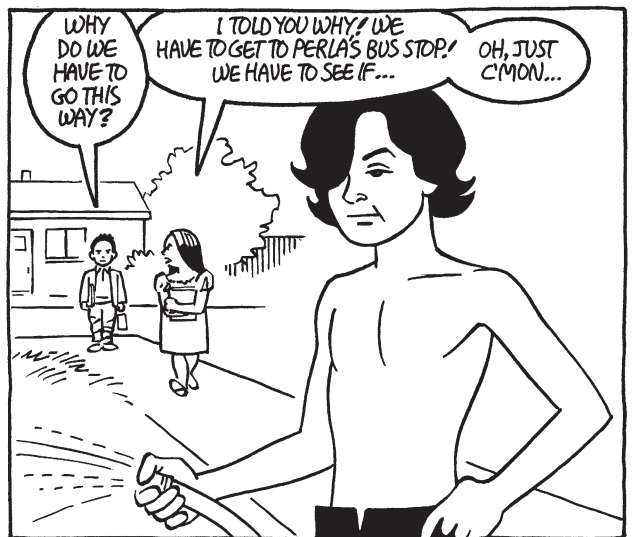
SHE'S ALL ACTING LIKE THOSE BAD LOCA GIRLS
NOW. SHE CALLS OUR OLD NEIGHBORHOOD HOPPERS
AND EVERYTHING. IT'S WEIRD. BUT I WANNA GET ONE
OF THOSE COOL CAMISOLE TOPS SHE WEARS.

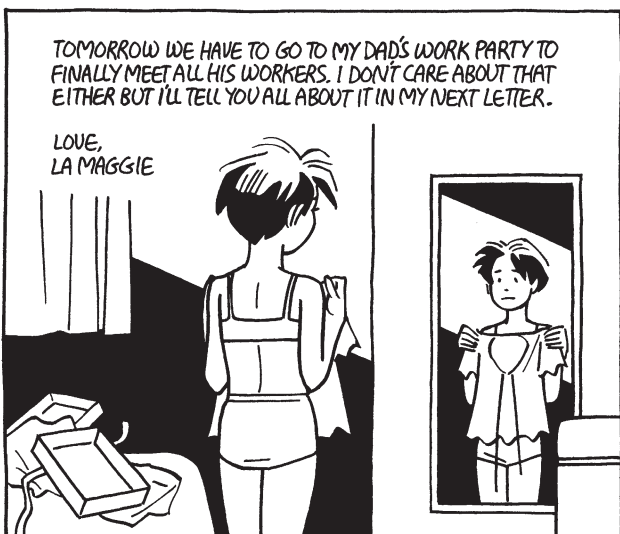
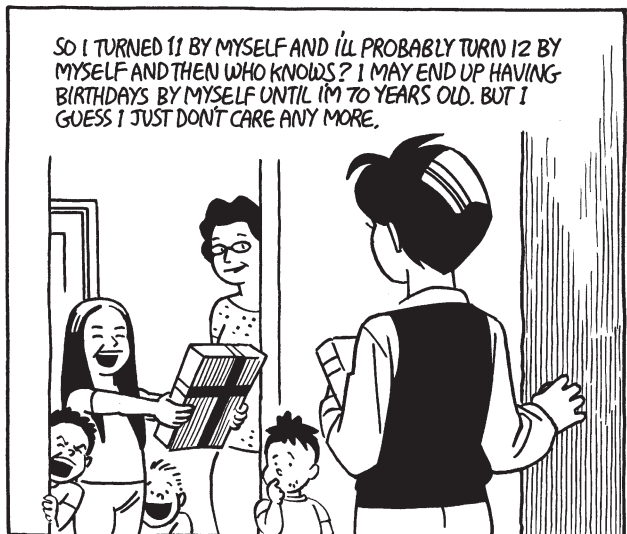
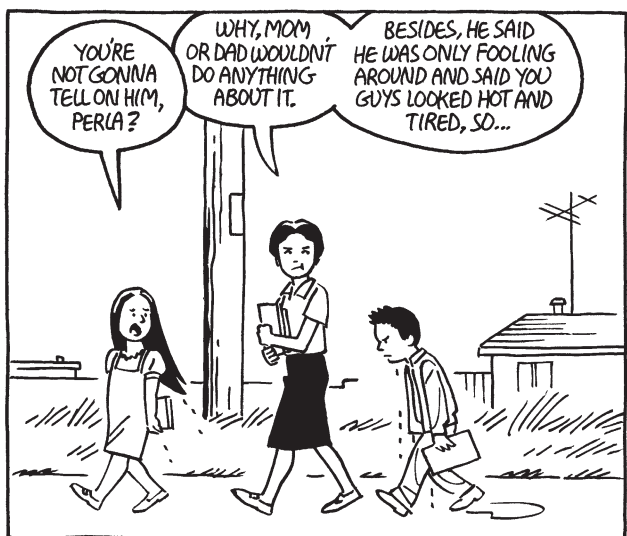
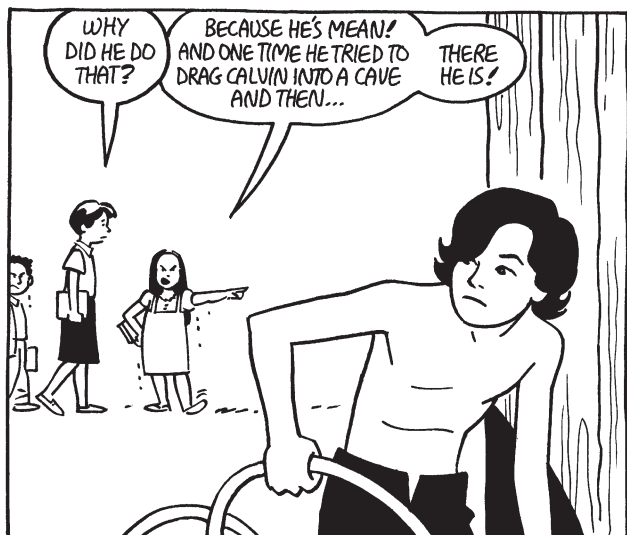
YOU'RE GONNA
LOOK LIKE A JUVENILE
DELINQUENT!

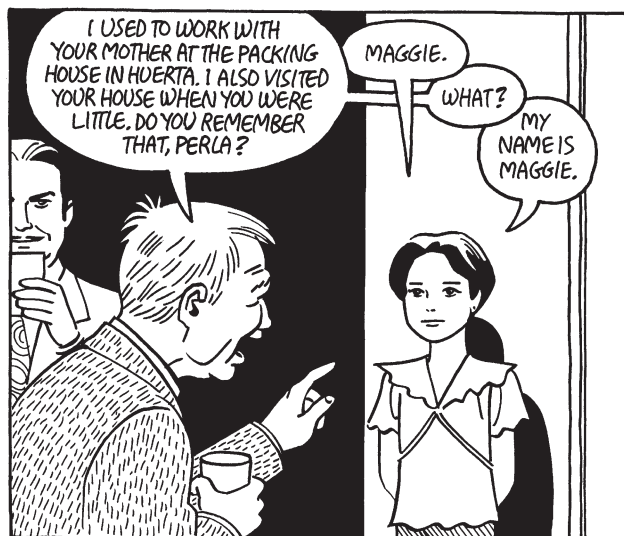


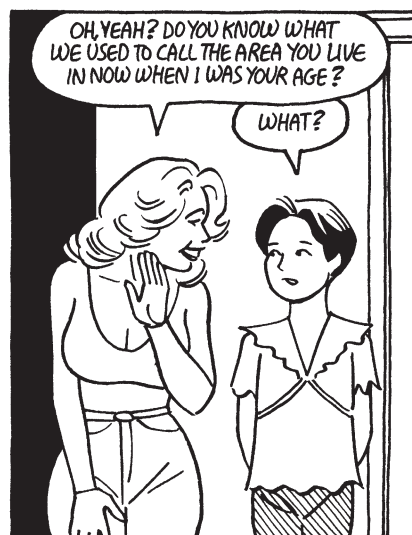
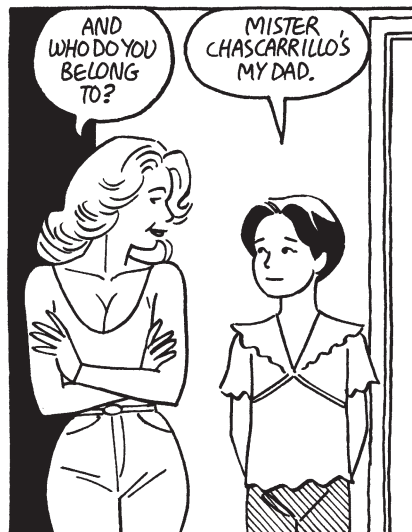


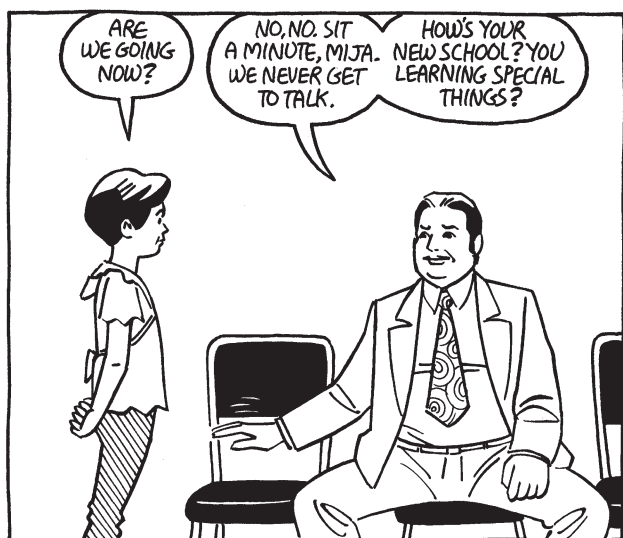


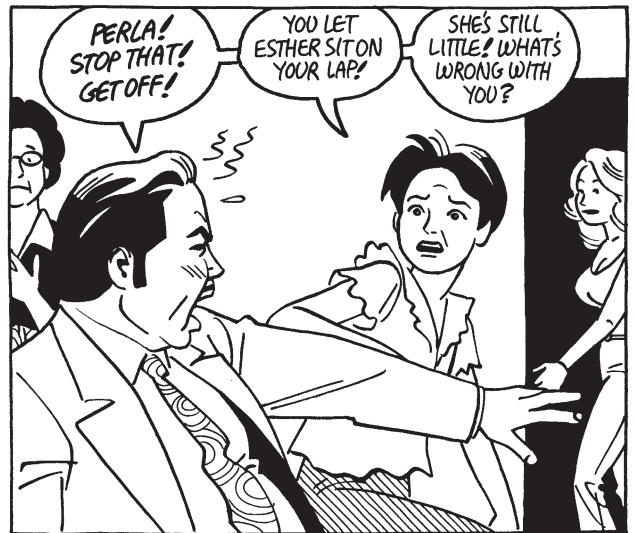
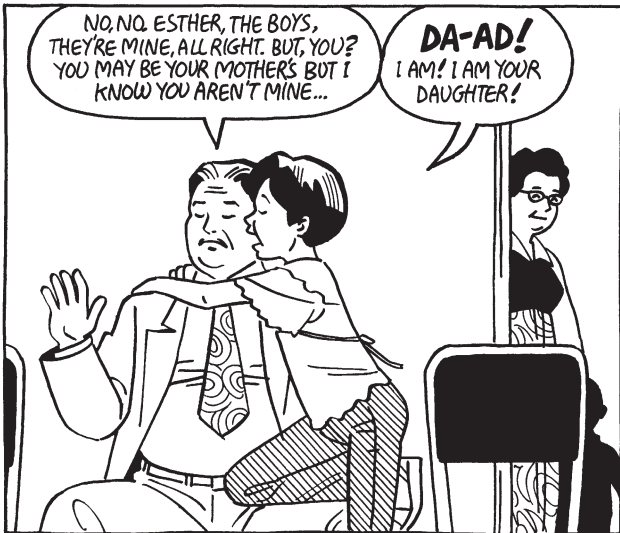
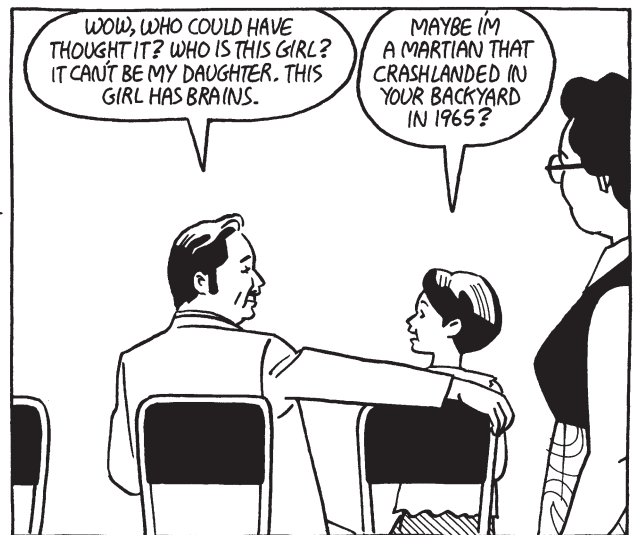


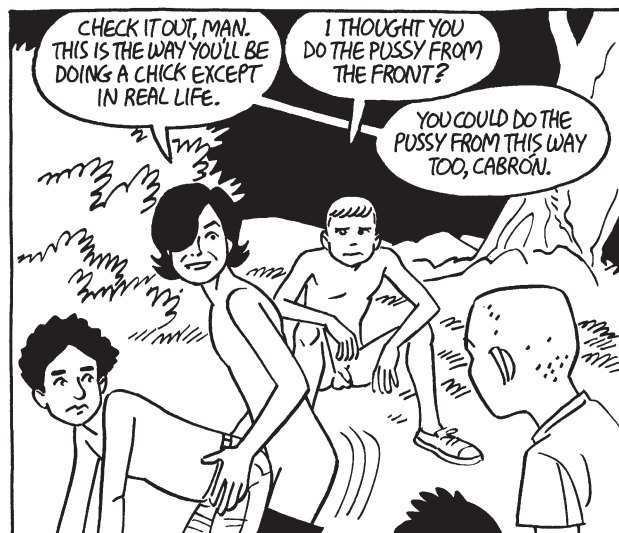
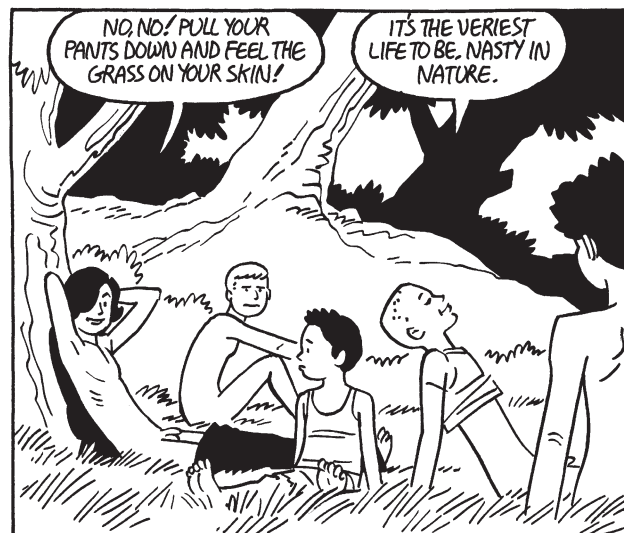
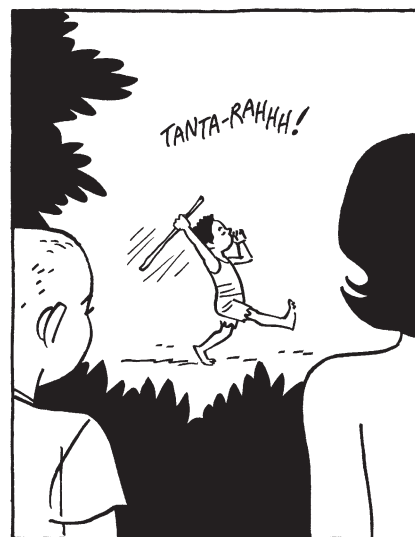
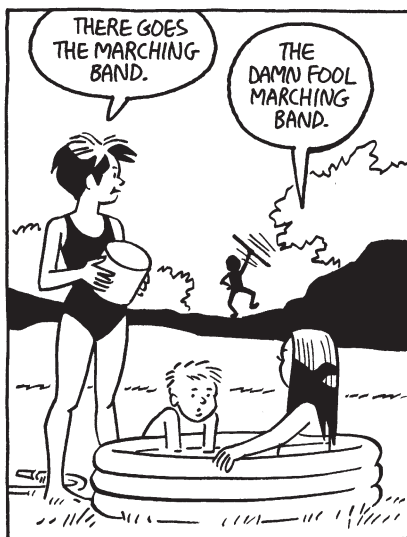


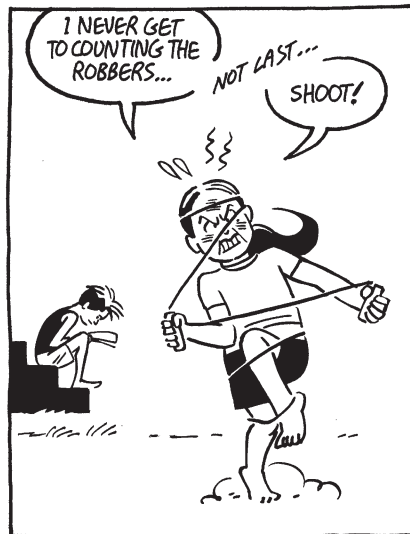
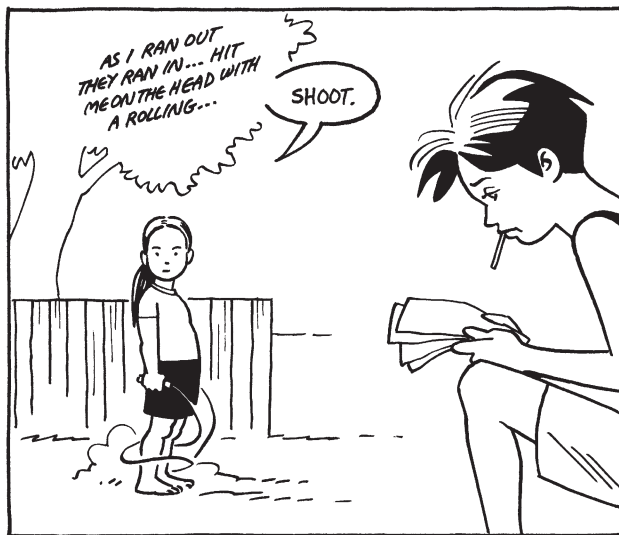
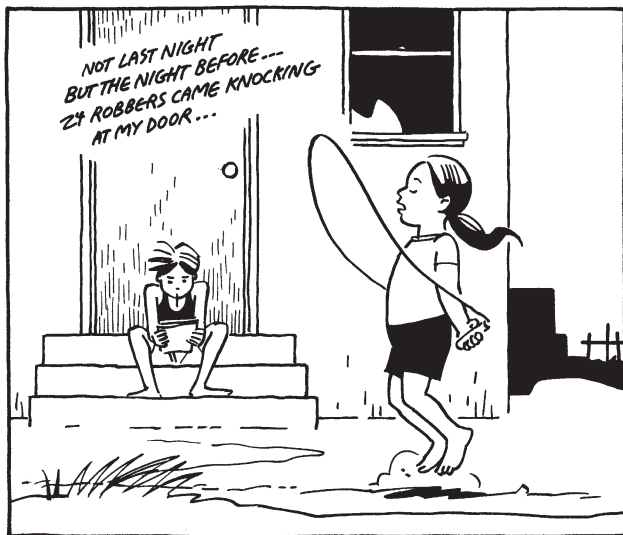
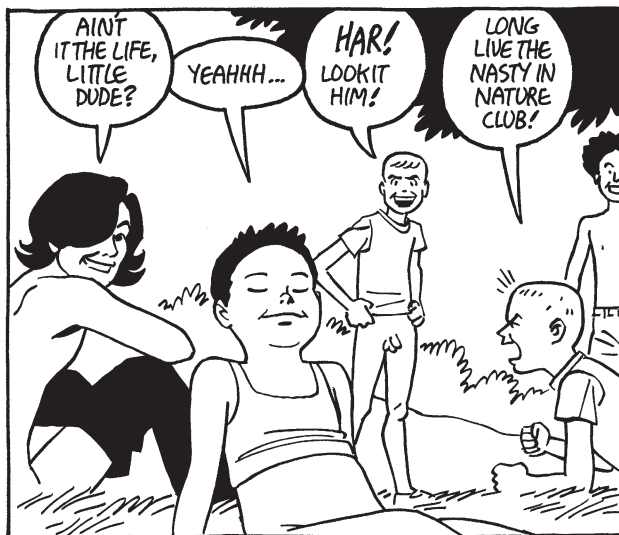


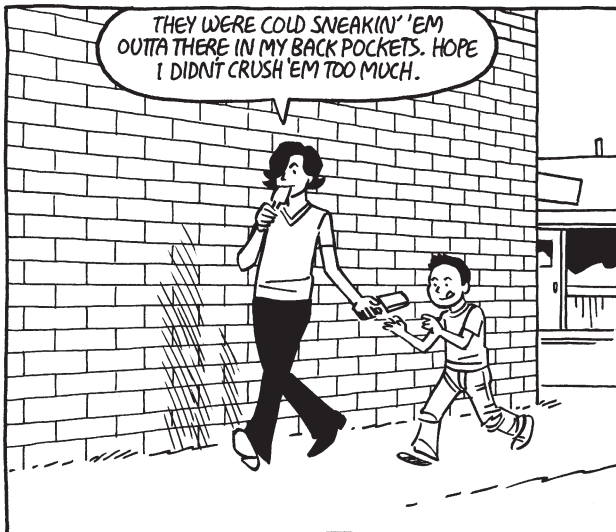
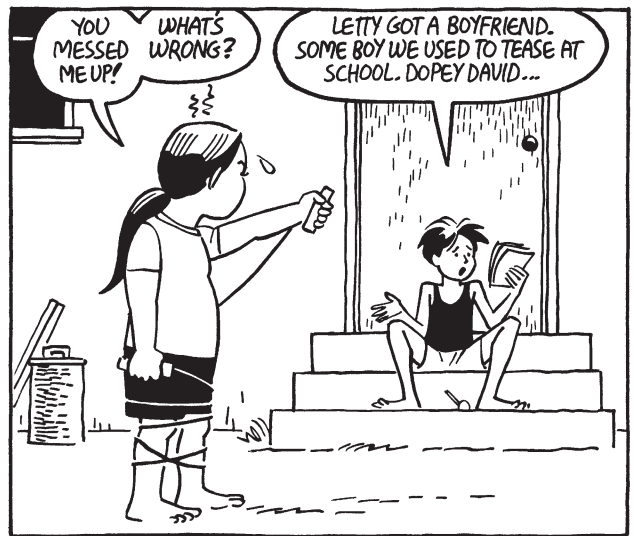
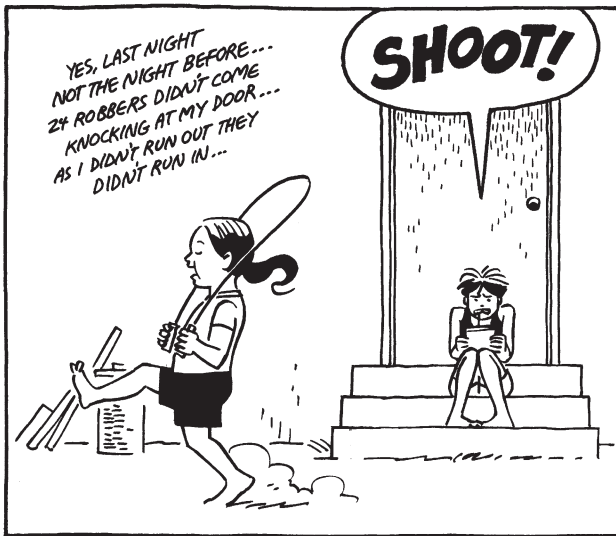


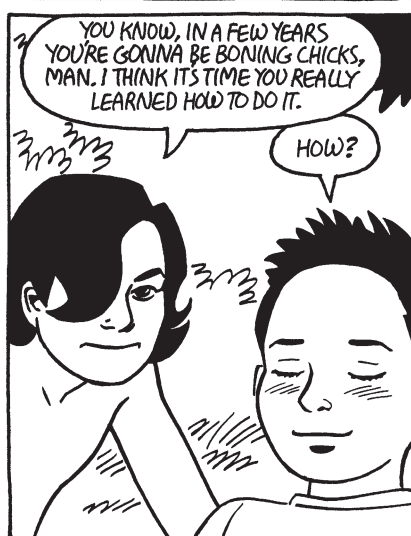


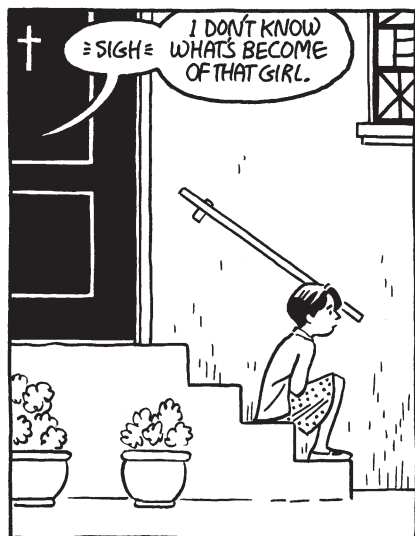
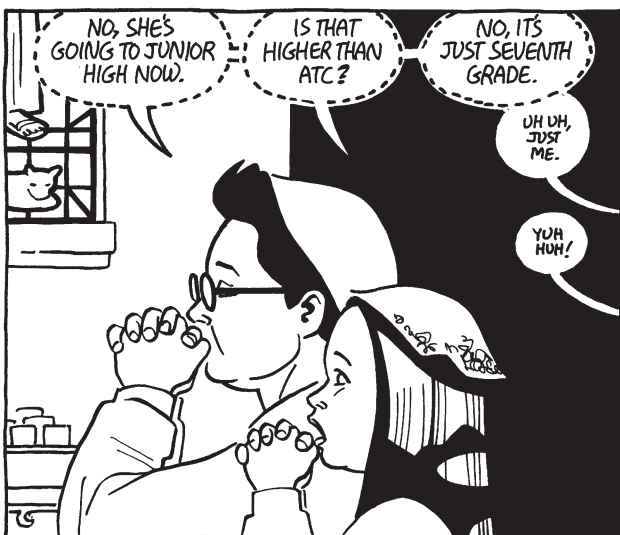


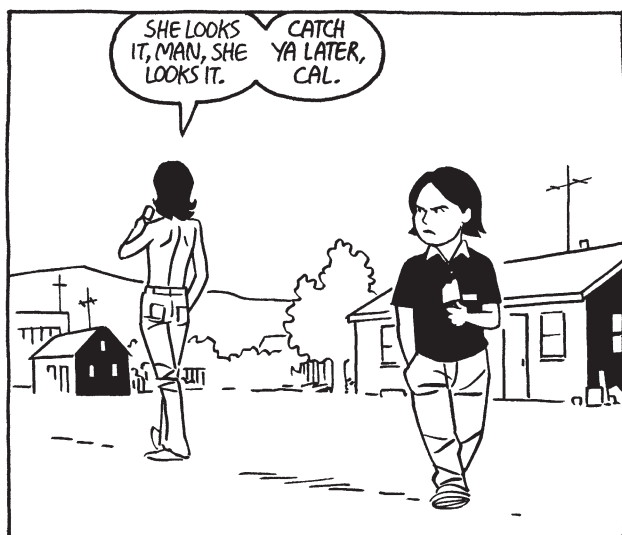
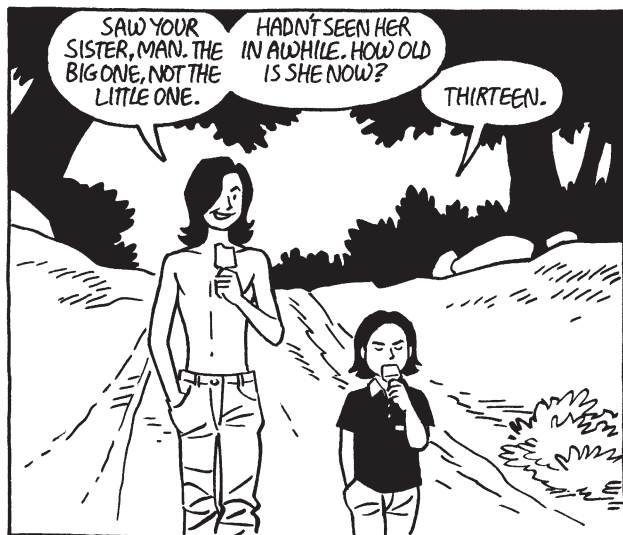


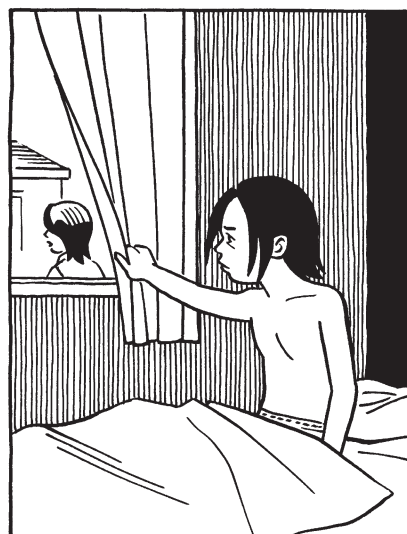
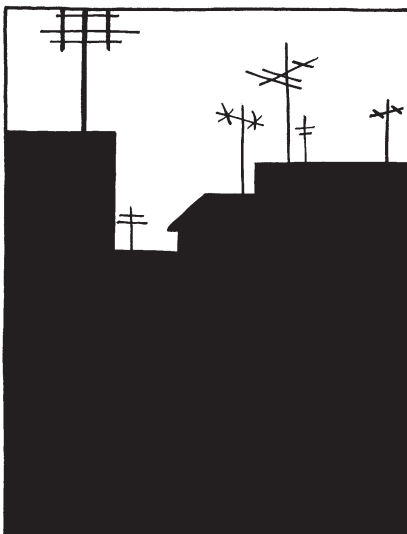
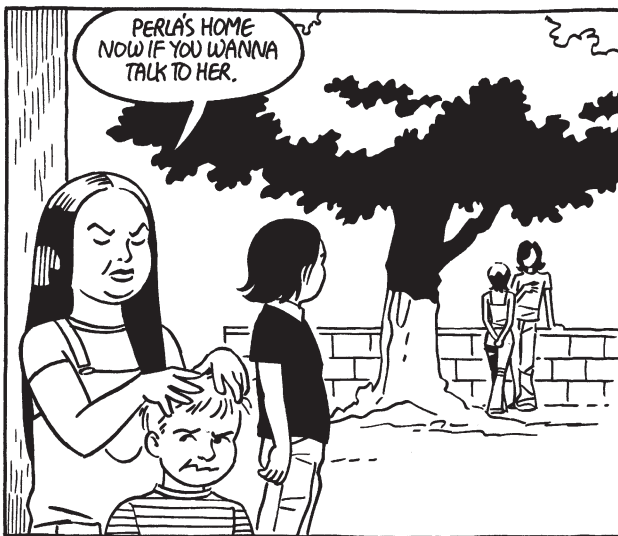
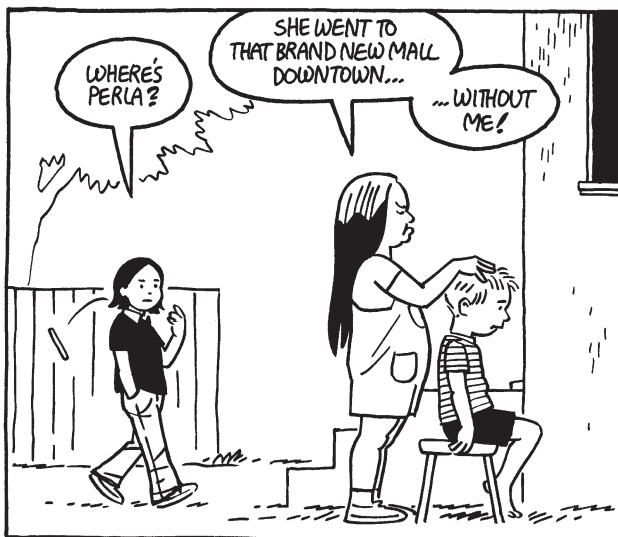


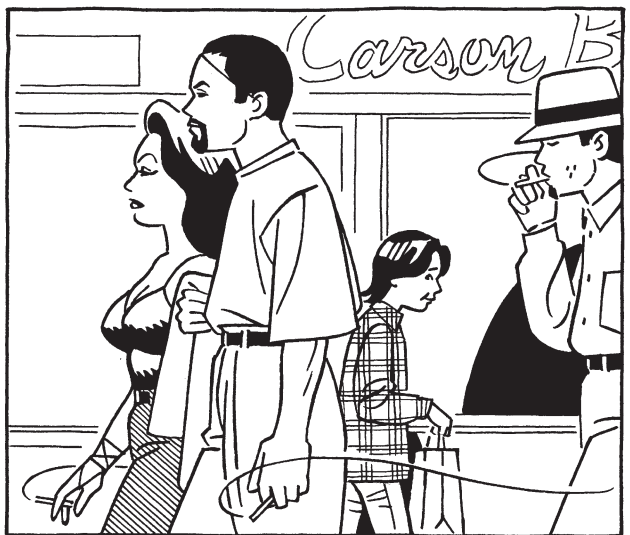


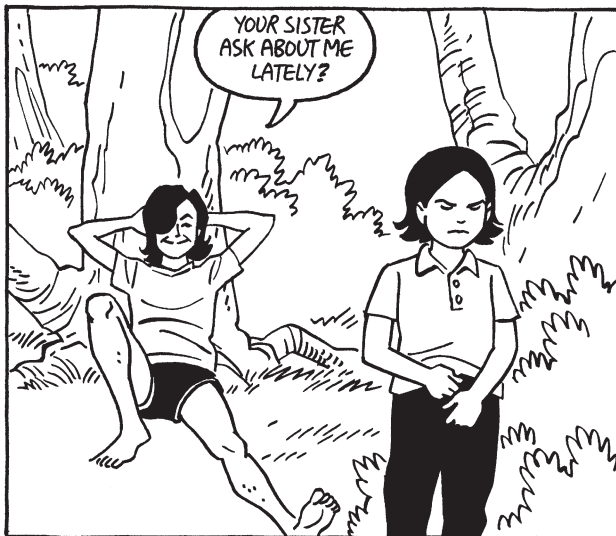


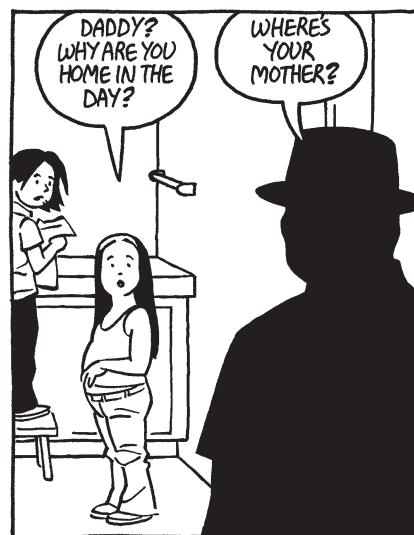
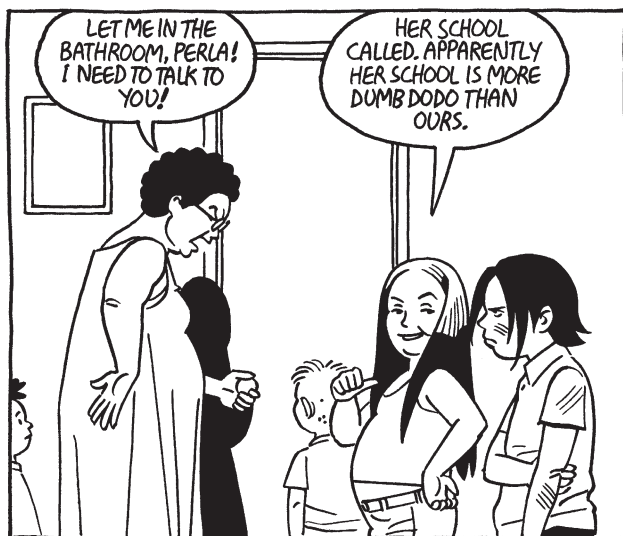


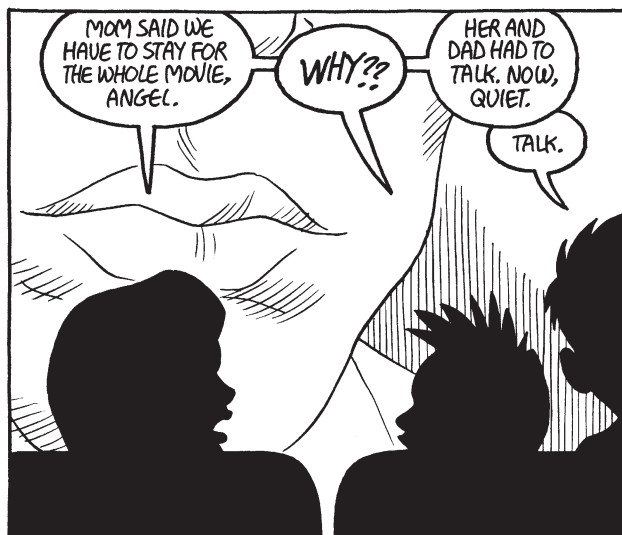
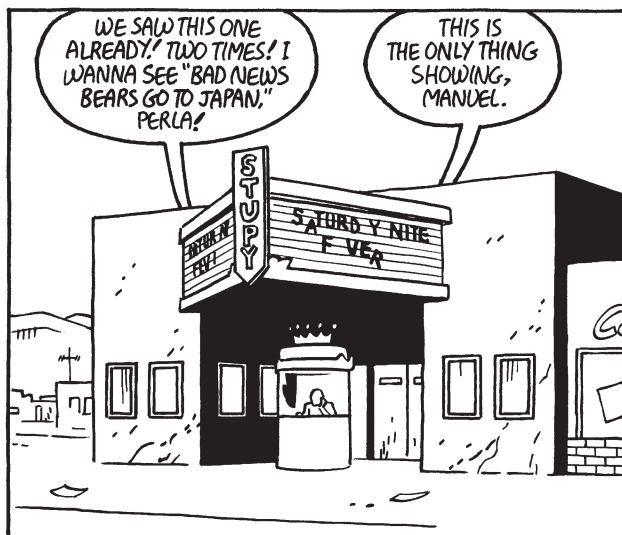


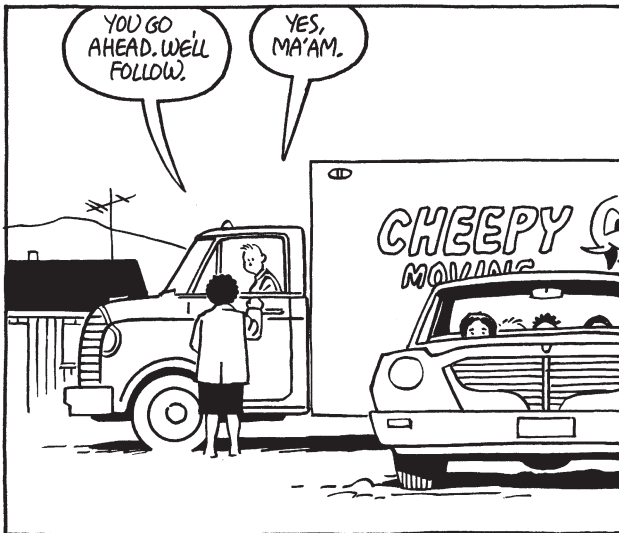


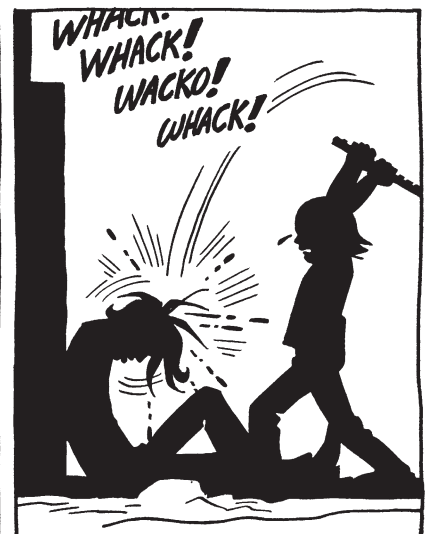
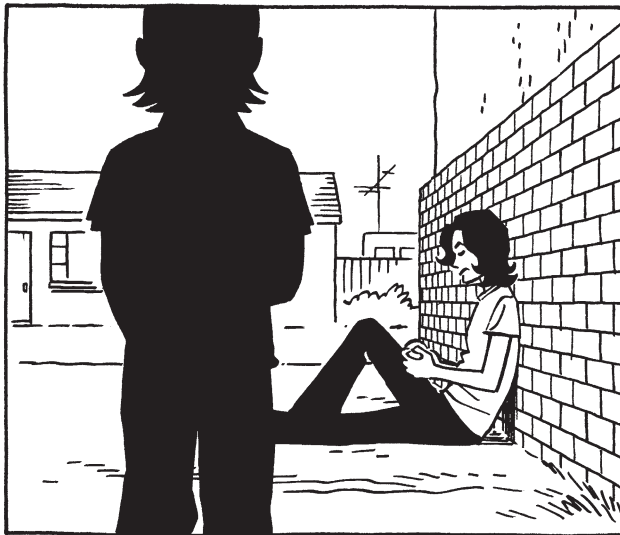


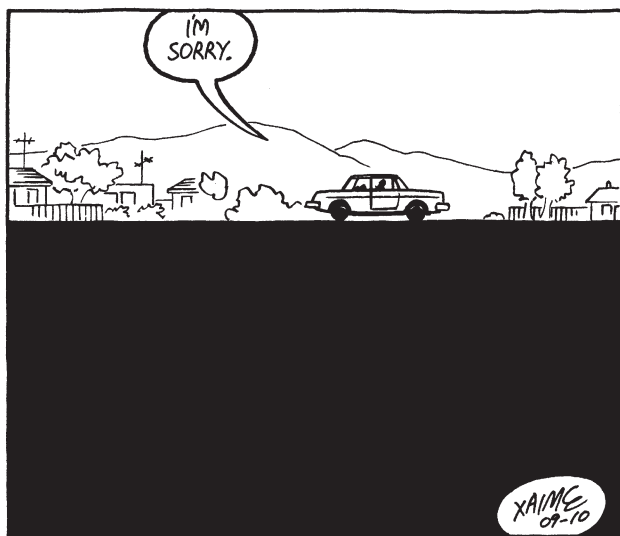












3

THE LOVE BUNGLERS

PART TWO



WHAT A WEEK THIS HAS BEEN TRYING TO GET TO THIS EVENING. MY MOM'S HEALTH ISN'T GETTING BETTER, A FEW PEOPLE WERE LET OFF AT MY WORK AND IT WAS MY JOB TO TELL THEM. AND MY LANDLORD WON'T FIX MY FRIDGE SO IT'LL STOP MAKING CRAZY BIRD WHISTLES.



IF THAT AIN'T ENOUGH, THE FROGMOUTH SUDDENLY DECIDED SHE WANTS TO GET BACK TOGETHER AFTER DUMPING ME FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS MONTH. I WOULDN'T COMPLAIN BUT I'VE WAITED TOO LONG TO HAVE A SECOND CHANCE WITH MAGGIE.



I WASN'T TRYING VERY HARD TO HIDE THE FACT THAT I WANTED TO BE WITH HER. MAGGIE, ON THE OTHER HAND, PLAYED IT COOL AND STEADY. THE CHASE WAS ON. TROUBLE IS, I DON'T KNOW IF I STILL POSSESS THE ENERGY AND PATIENCE FOR THIS SORT OF THING.



AS OUR DATE PRESSED ON, THE MAGIC STARTED TO WEAR OFF AND SHE STARTED TO BECOME LESS THE EXOTIC CREATURE I BUILT HER UP TO BE AND MORE JUST THE MAGGIE I REMEMBER. STILL, THIS IN NO WAY MADE ME WANT HER ANY LESS.

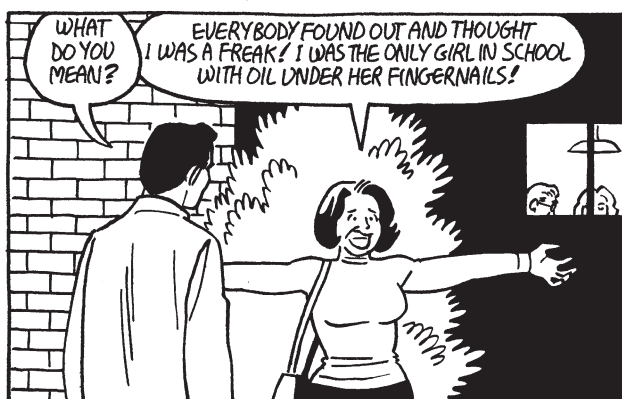
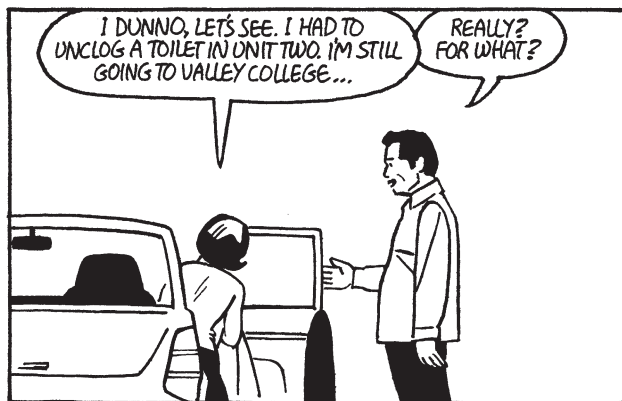


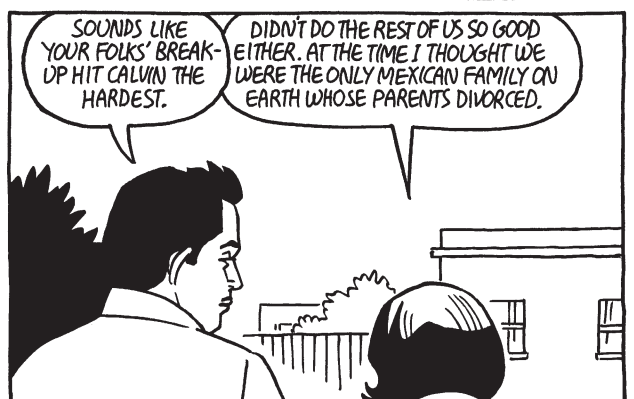
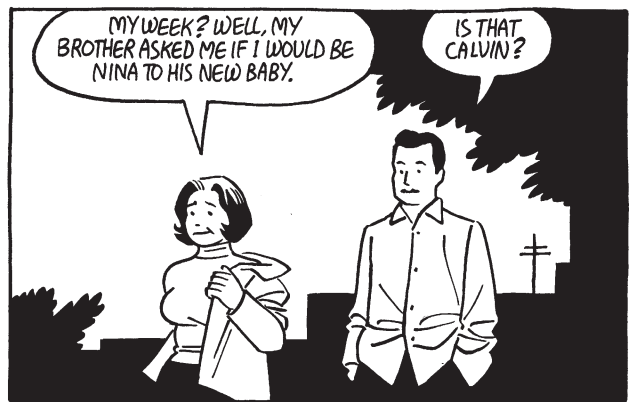
THE SIGNS OF TIME PASSING NOT ONLY SHOWED ON HER FACE AND BODY BUT ON HER SPIRIT AS WELL. NOT IN A BAD WAY, MORE IN AN ACCEPTING WAY. THAT STARTED ME BELIEVING SHE MAY NOT HAVE NEED FOR AN UPTIGHT, UNSETTLED BUFFOON.

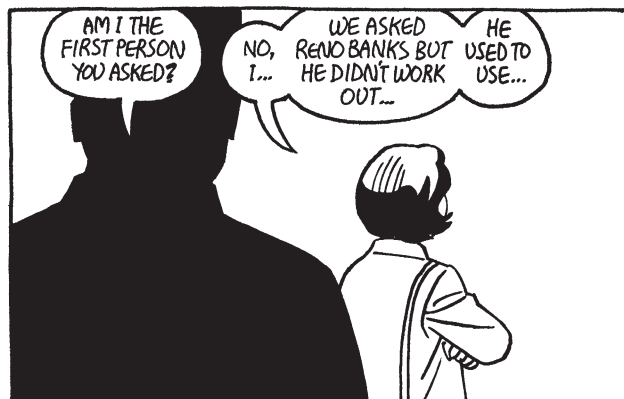


BUT JUST WHEN I'M READY TO ACCEPT THIS FOR WHAT IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE, JUST TWO FRIENDS CATCHING UP OVER DINNER, SHE FLASHES ONE OF THOSE WARM, COMFORTING SMILES AND SUDDENLY THE CHASE IS BACK ON AND I'LL MOW DOWN ANYONE IN MY PATH.









RIGHT THEN THE TONE CHANGED. IT FELT JUST LIKE OUR NOT SO GOOD TIMES TOGETHER AND I WAS NOT GONNA GO THERE. I SPOKE UP AND TOLD HER I FELT LIKE I WAS BEING USED AND TO MY SURPRISE, SHE IMMEDIATELY APOLOGIZED.



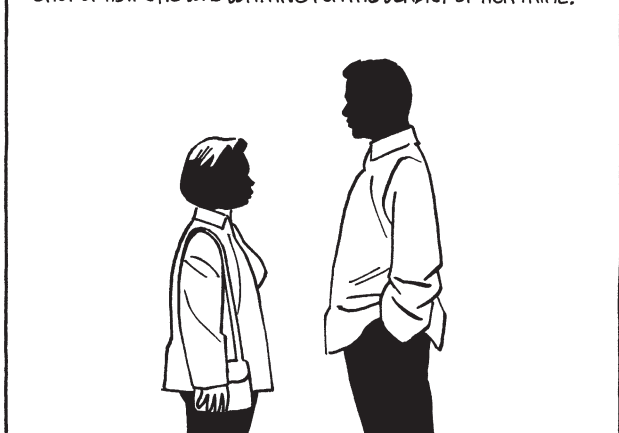
BUT EVEN MORE SURPRISING, THE APOLOGY WASN'T FOR THE DONOR BUSINESS BUT FOR LEADING ME ON. THAT LED HER TO CONFESS IN A SIDEWAYS SORT OF WAY THAT I WASN'T THE ONE FOR HER. MY INSIDES TURNED INTO MASA BUT I DIDN'T SHOW IT.



THEN THE LAST 17 YEARS OF HER LIFE STARTED TO POUR OUT OF HER. FROM A CROSS COUNTRY JOURNEY BACK FROM THE EAST COAST TO HER SHORT LIVED REUNION WITH HOPEY TO HER EVEN SHORTER LIVED MARRIAGE TO SOME OLD SKATEBOARDER HOTROD DUDE.



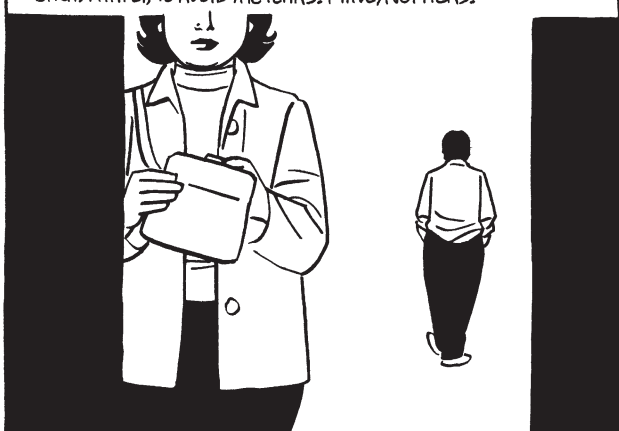
SHE ENDED WITH A STORY ABOUT HOW SHE HAD AN ACCIDENT ON HER RECENT TRIP WHERE SHE NEARLY DROWNED AND THAT SHE'S BEEN HAVING CONSTANT NIGHTMARES RELATING TO IT. THEN SHE SHUT UP AS IF SHE WAS WAITING FOR THE VERDICT OF HER TRIAL.



ANY OTHER REJECTED FOOL MIGHT THINK SHE WAS TRYING TO STEAL THE VICTIM SPOTLIGHT BUT IT SEEMED TO ME LIKE SHE WAS LOOKING FOR CLARITY, SOME KIND OF ANSWER TO IT ALL. WELL, IT WAS CLEAR TO ME I WASN'T THE GUY TO GIVE IT TO HER.



WE TRIED OUR BEST TO MAKE PARTING AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE, PROPOSING FUTURE LUNCH DATES, BUT AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, IT WOULD BE BEST TO JUST WALK AWAY AND NOT LOOK BACK. PARTLY, TO AVOID THE TEARS. MINE, NOT HERS.





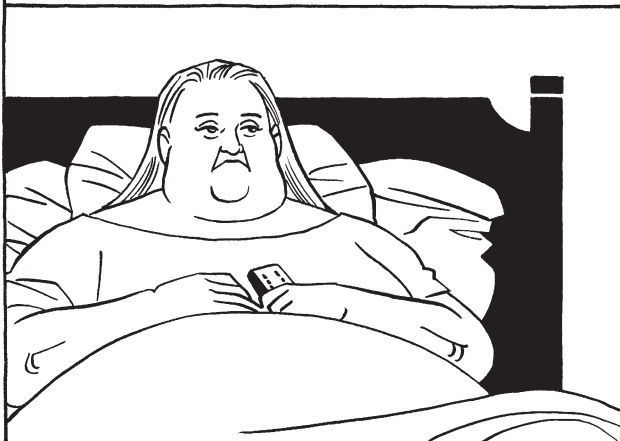
4

THE LOVE BUNGLERS

PART THREE



AT 6:21 I HEAR THE RATTLE OF YOUR TRUCK PULL UP THE DRIVEWAY. YOU COME IN TIRED NOT SAYING A WORD. YOU WASH UP AND START DINNER.



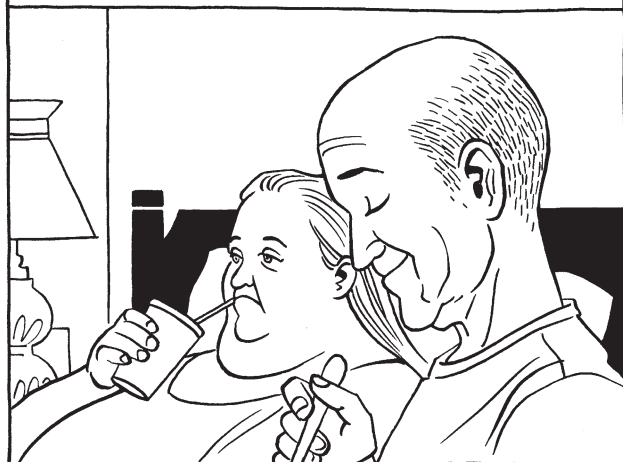
WE USED TO TALK MORE BEFORE OUR BOYS MOVED OUT. MAYBE WE'LL SEE THE GRANDKIDS THIS WEEKEND.



SOMETIME DURING DINNER YOU LEAN OVER AND GIVE ME A PECK AND TELL ME THINGS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING UP.



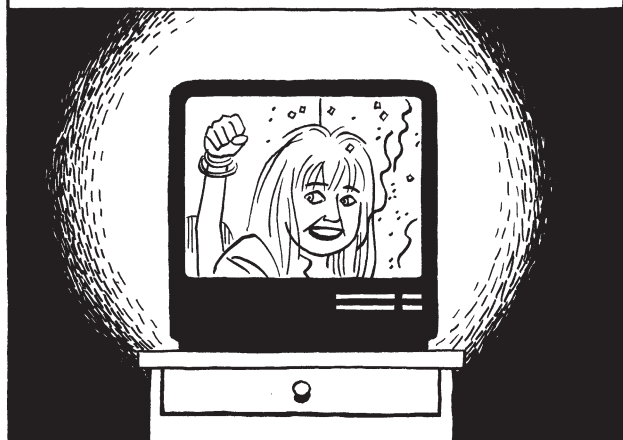
I TELL YOU I LOVE YOU AND YOU SMILE AND THOSE ARE THE LAST WORDS WE SPEAK FOR THE NIGHT.

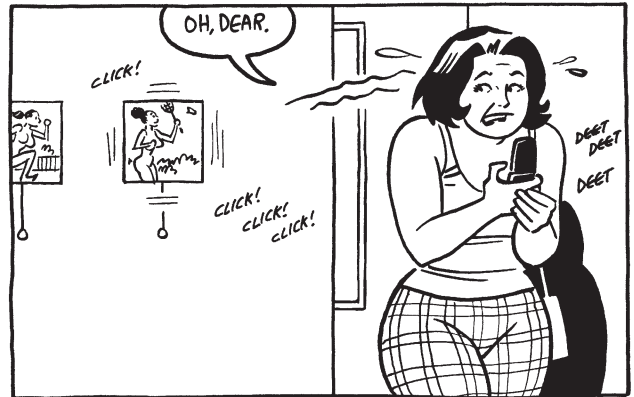
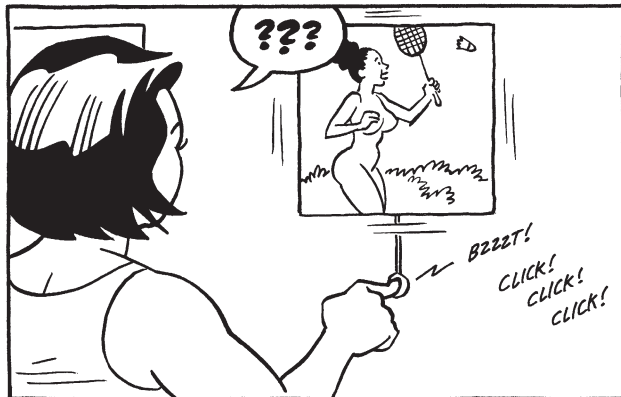
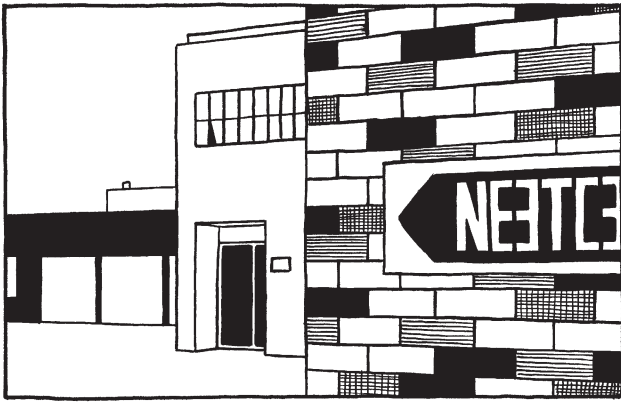


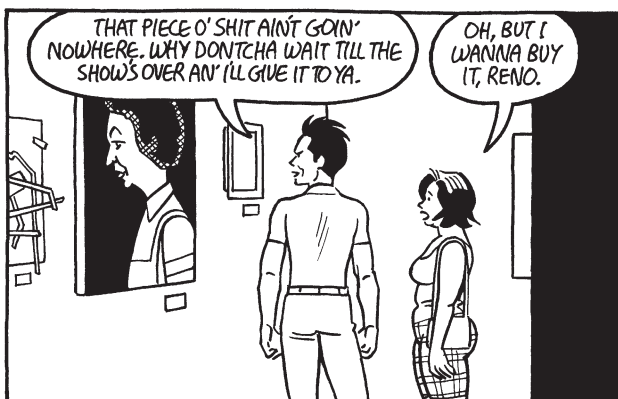
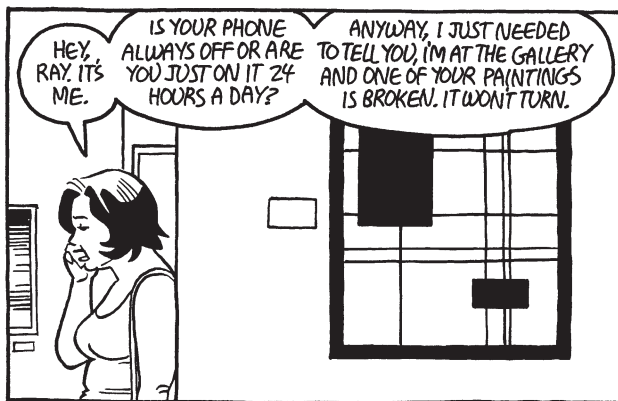
THERE WAS A TIME IN OUR MARRIAGE WHEN I DIDN'T LOVE YOU. I DIDN'T HATE YOU BUT THE LOVE WAS NO LONGER THERE.

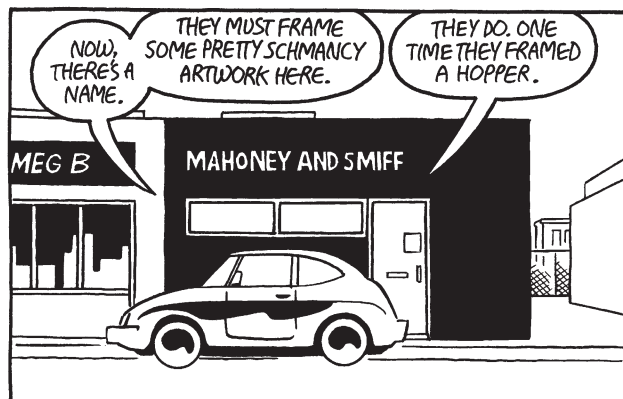
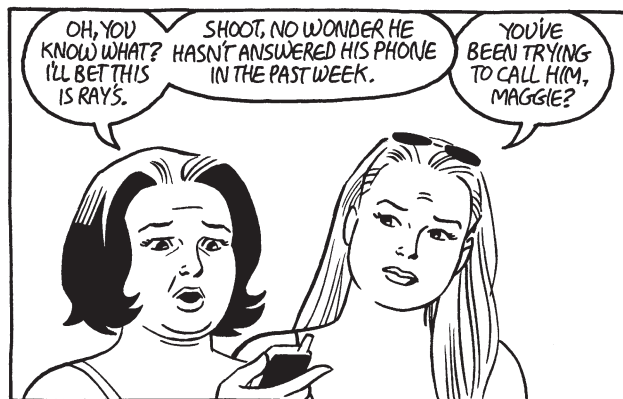
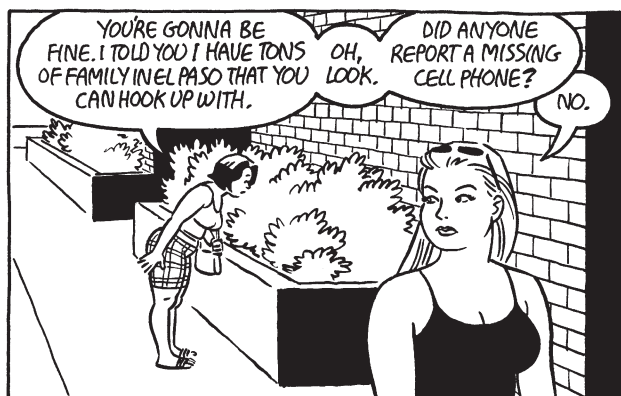
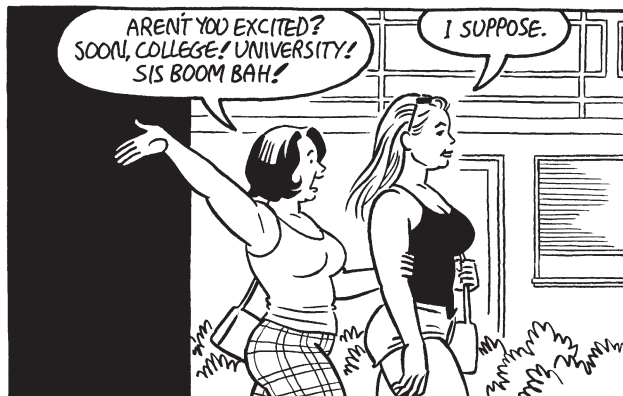


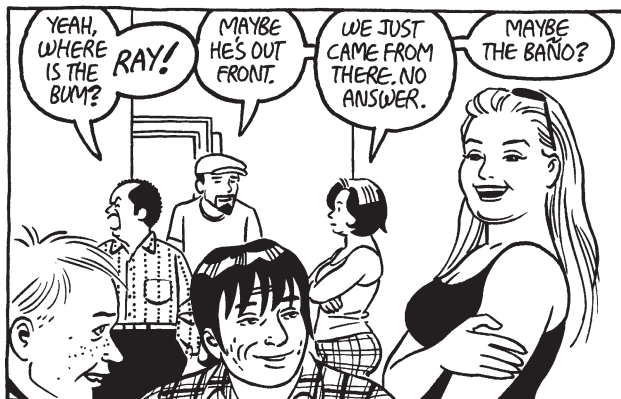
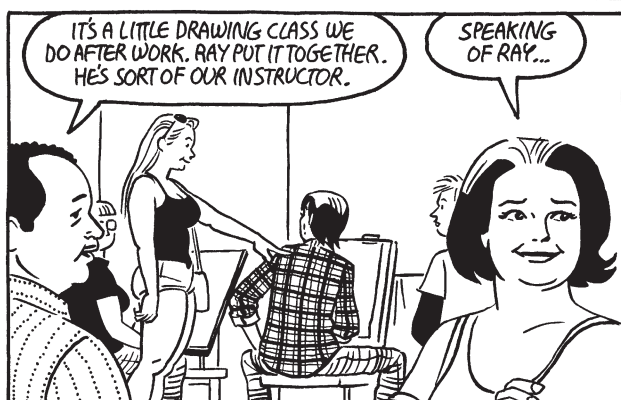
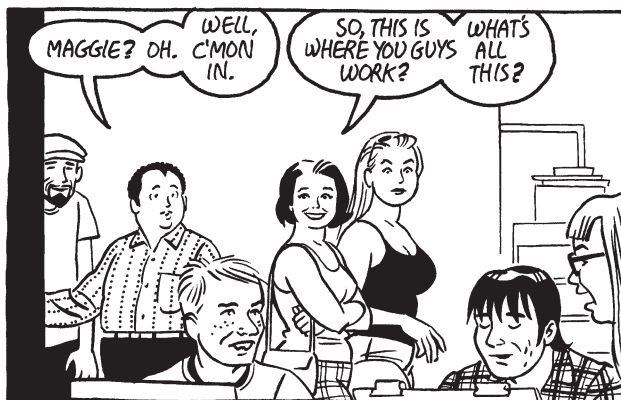
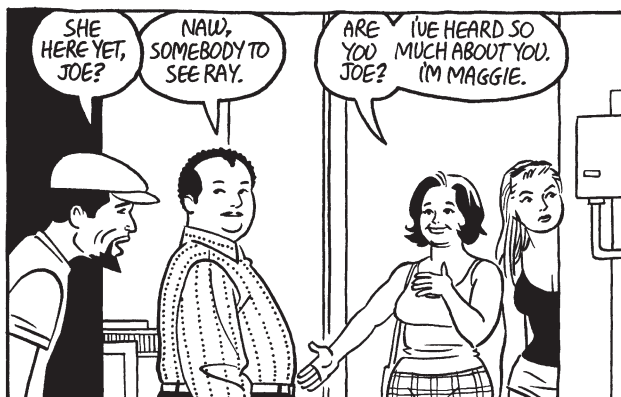
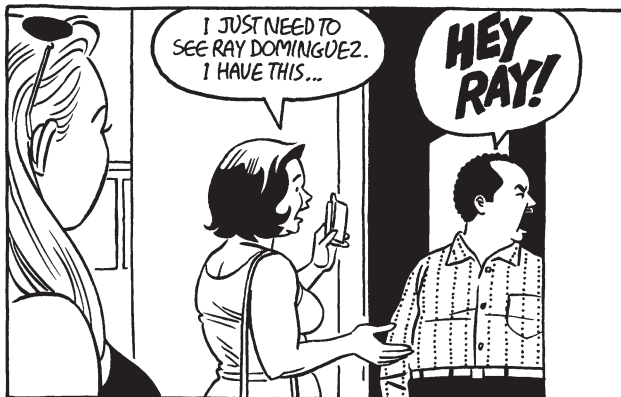
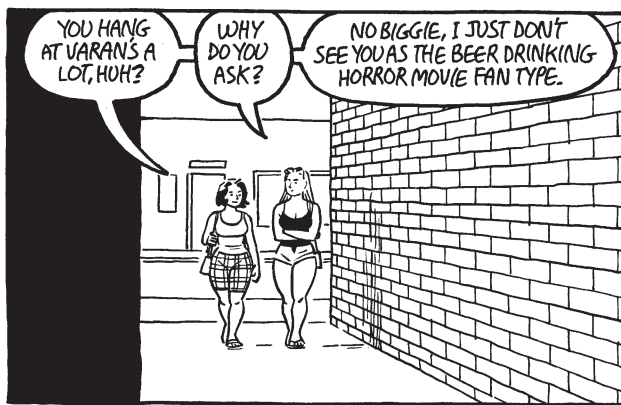
WITH TIME I LEARNED TO LOVE YOU AGAIN AND I STILL DO. I NEVER TOLD YOU I DIDN'T LOVE YOU AND I DON'T THINK I EVER WILL.

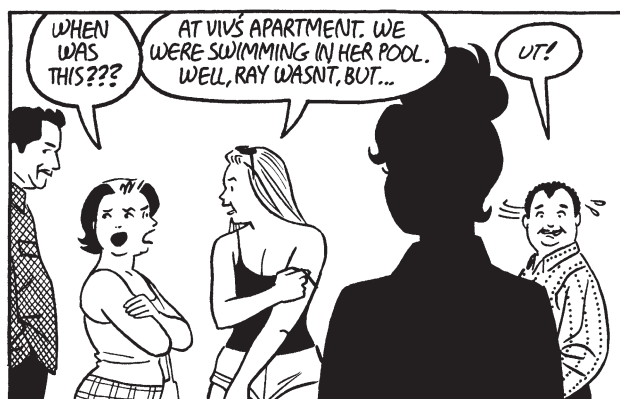
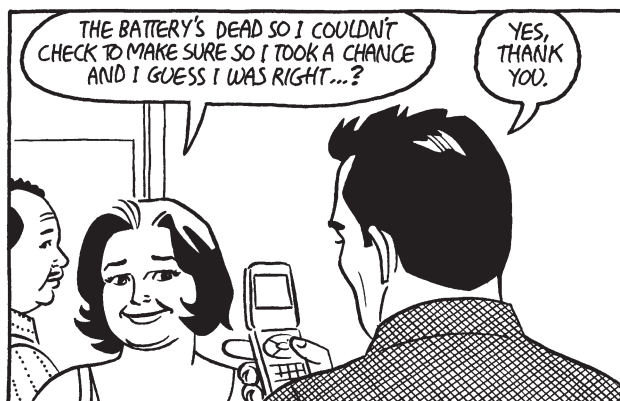


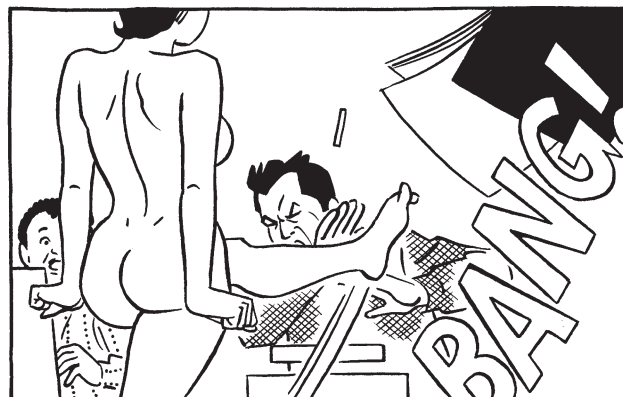
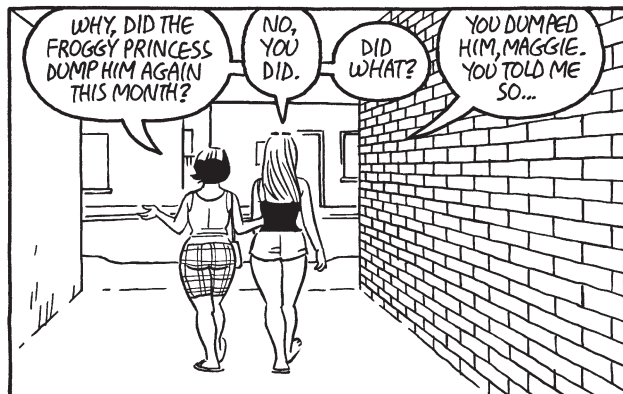
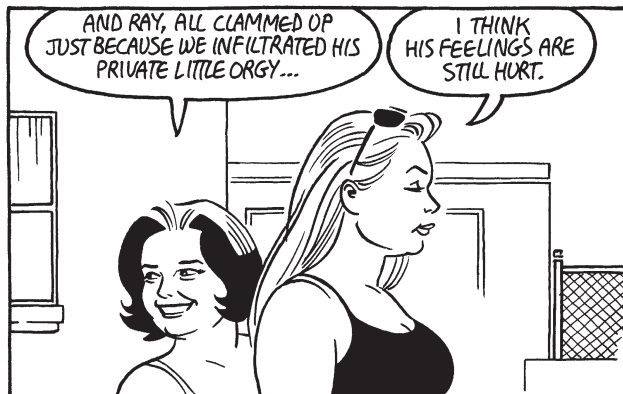
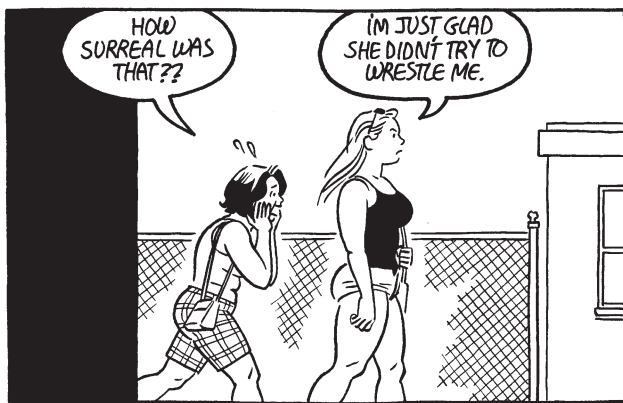


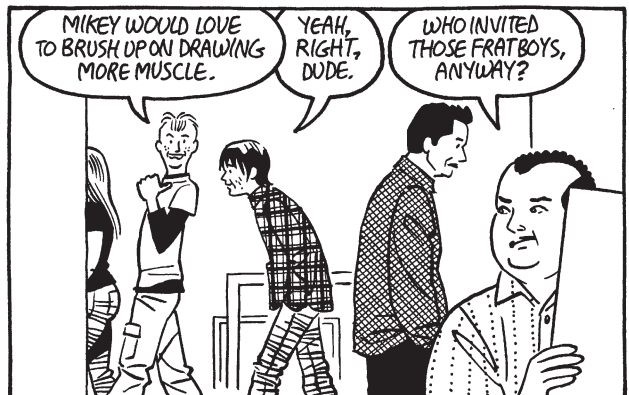
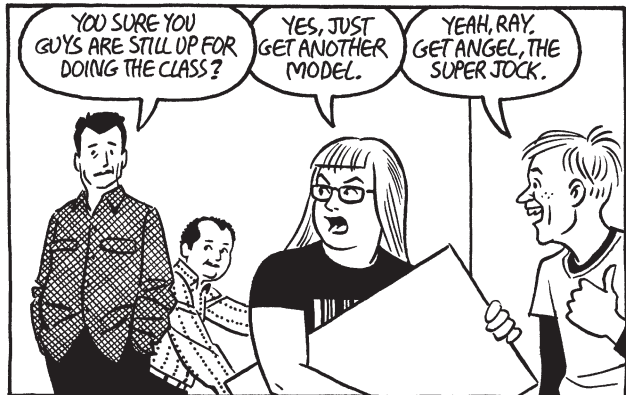
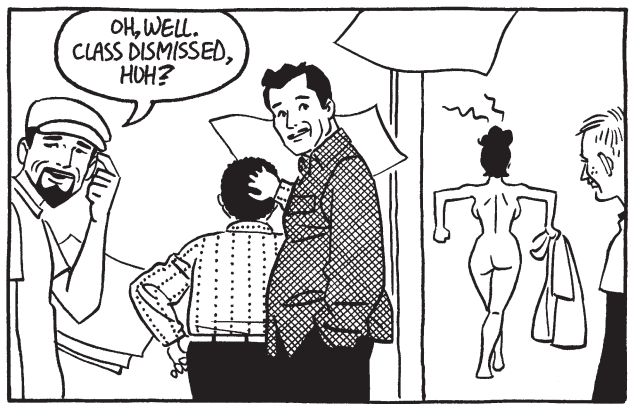
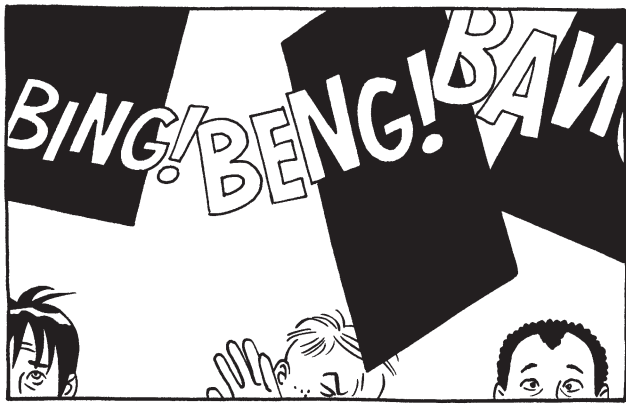


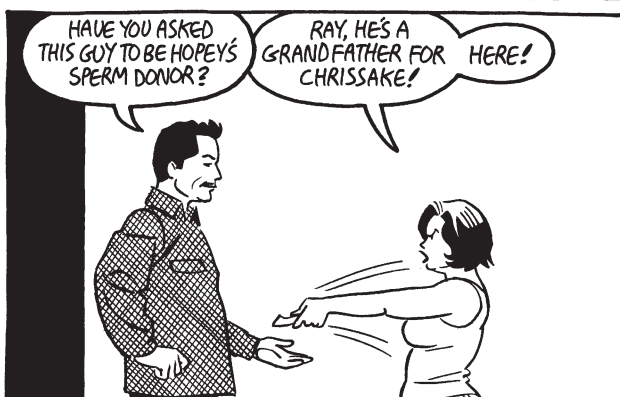
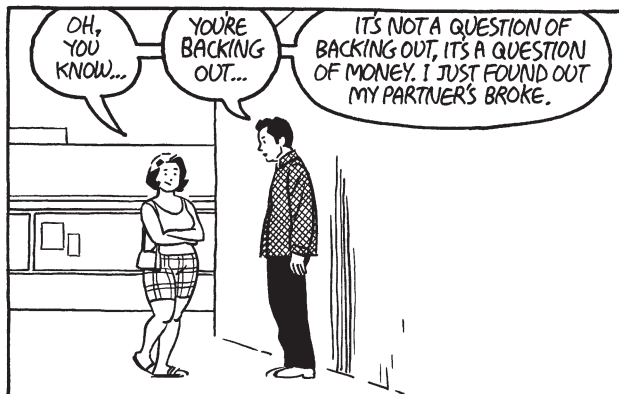


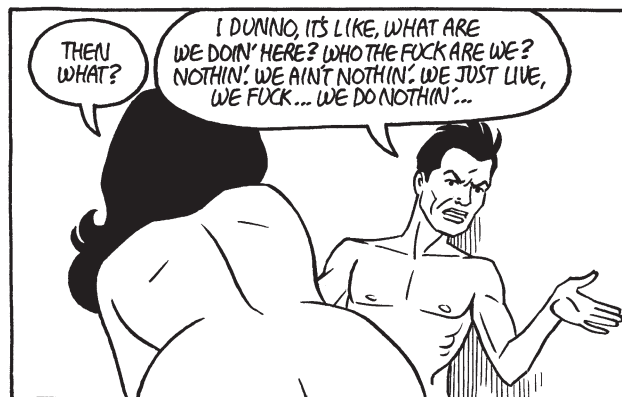
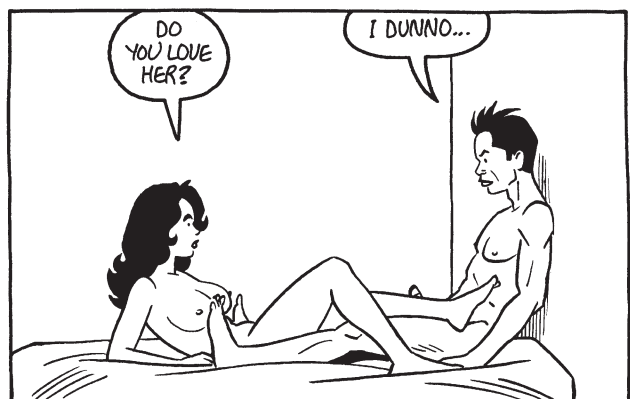
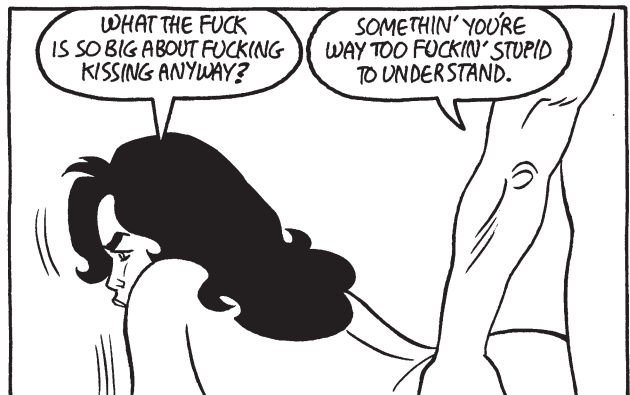
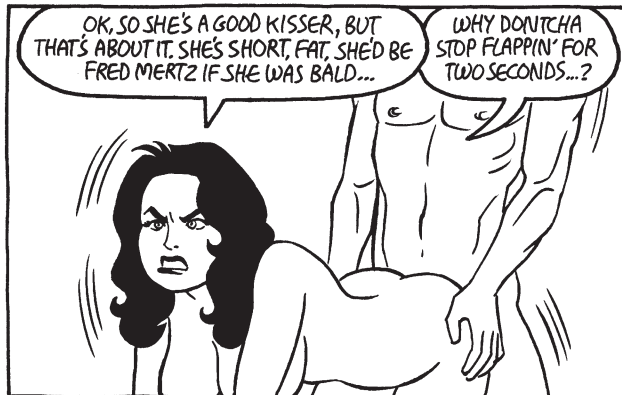
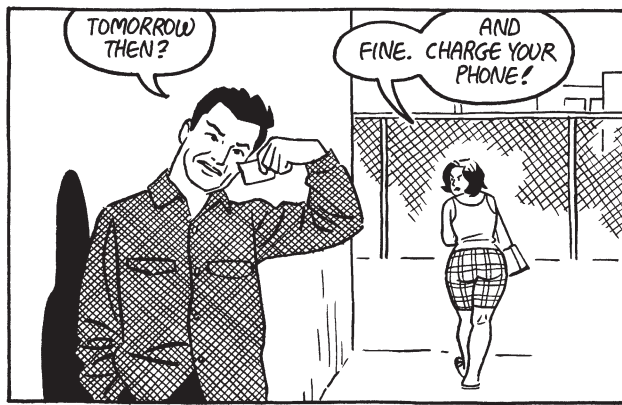


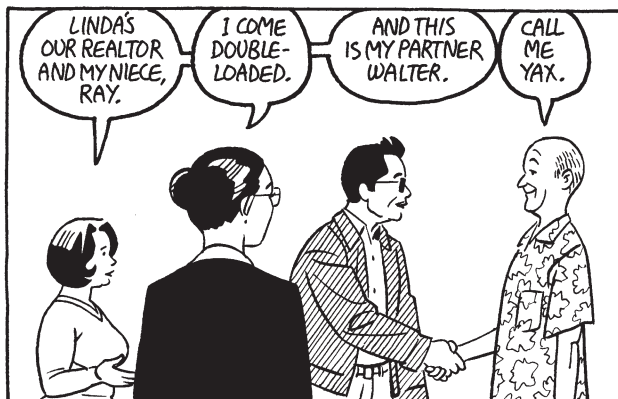
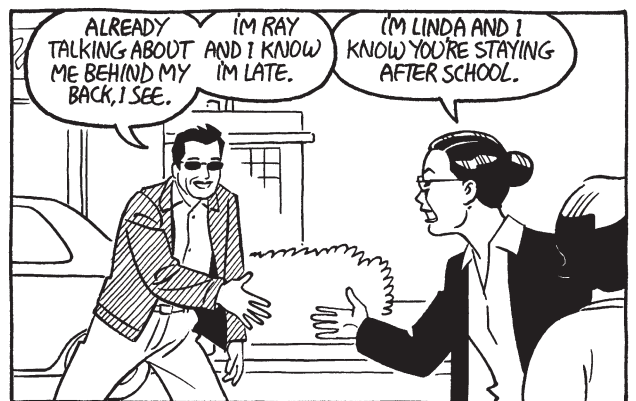
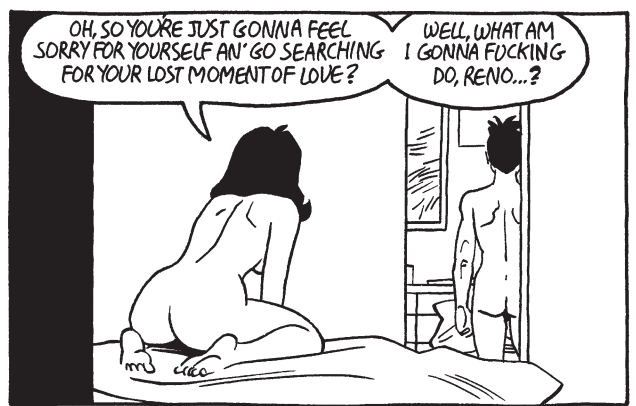
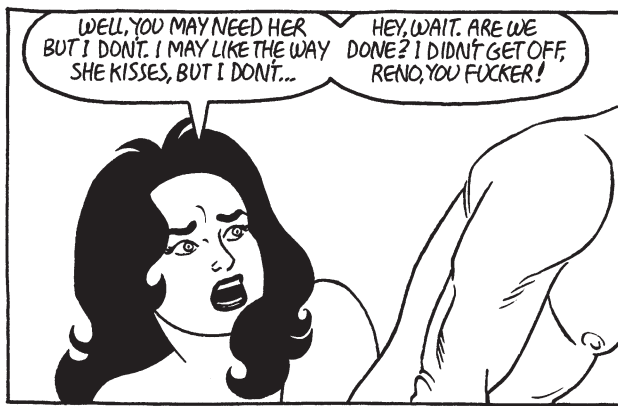


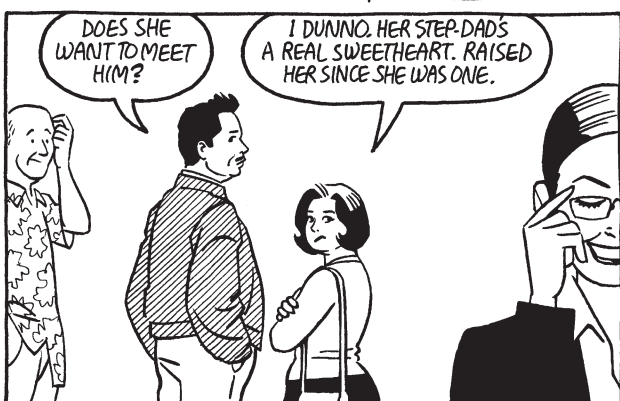
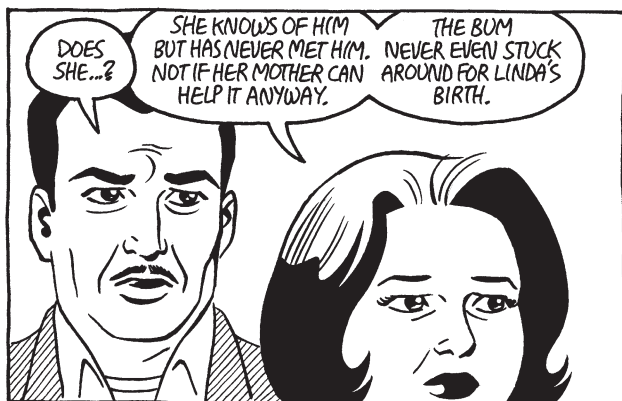
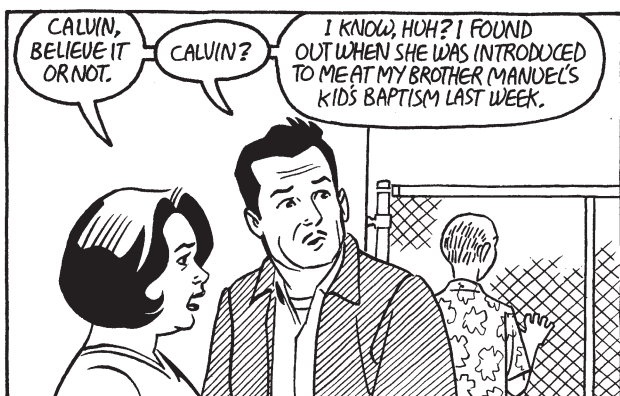
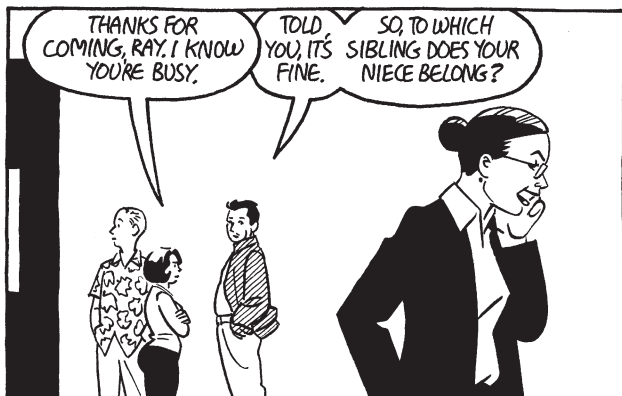


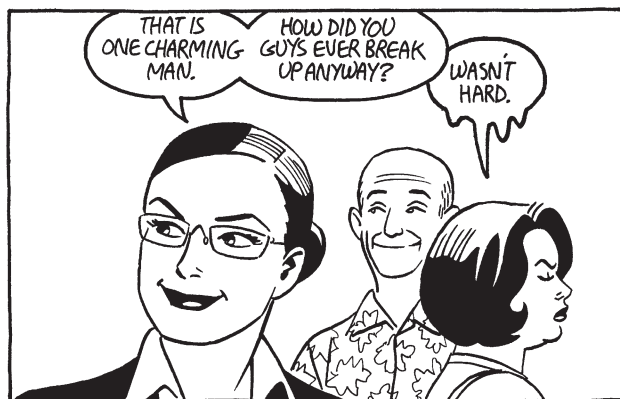
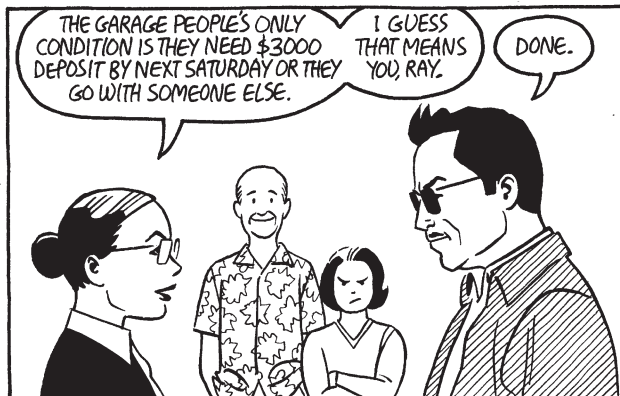
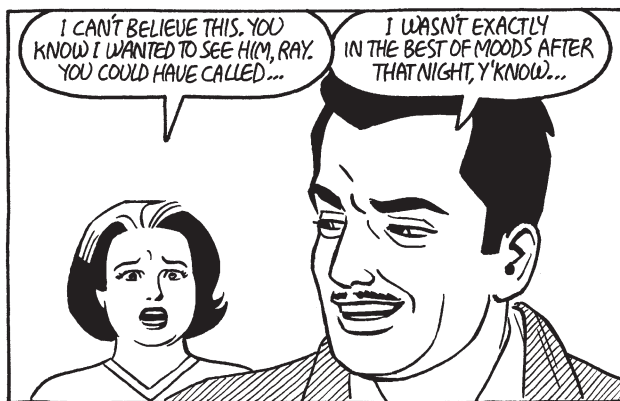
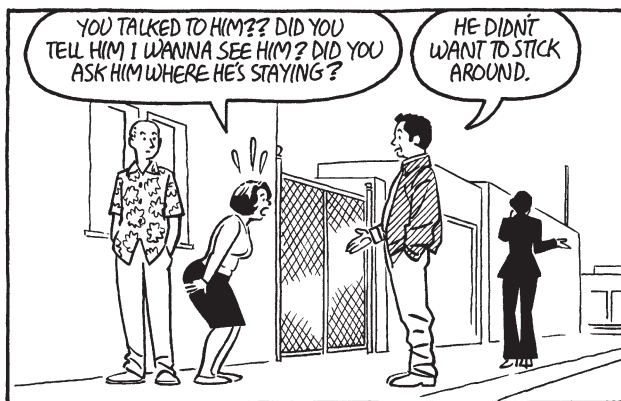


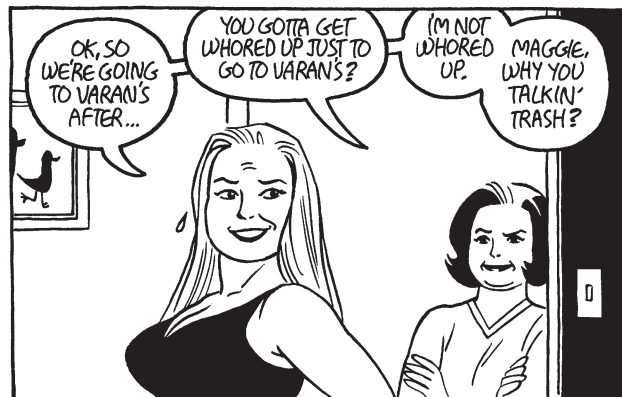
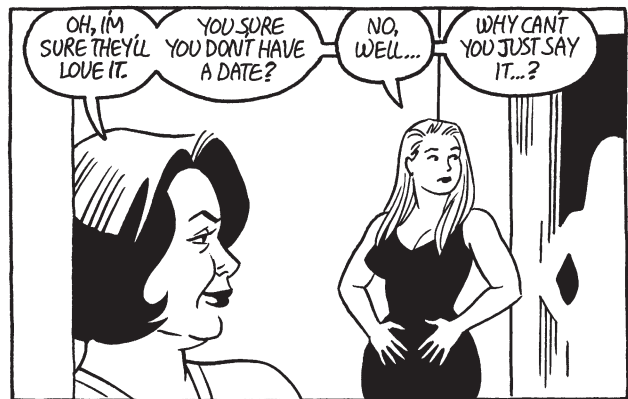
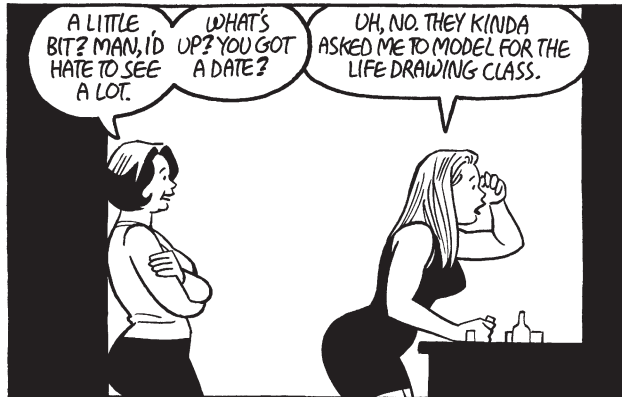
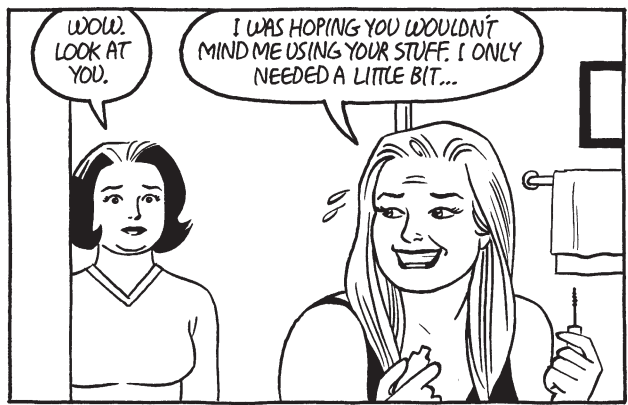
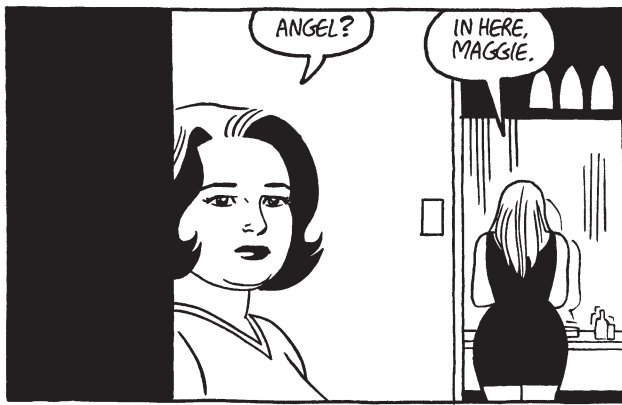


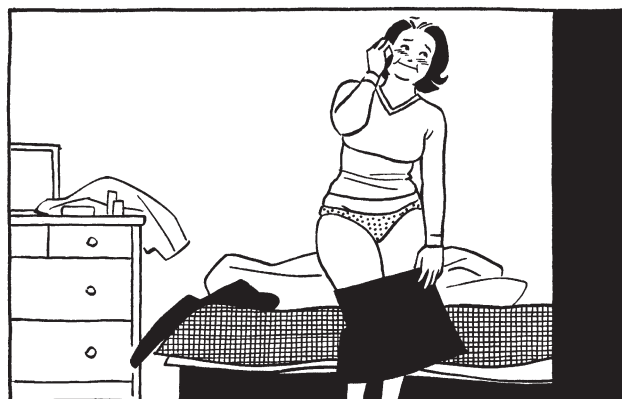
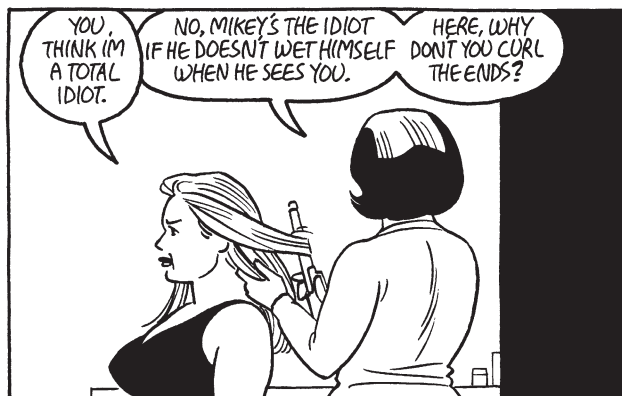
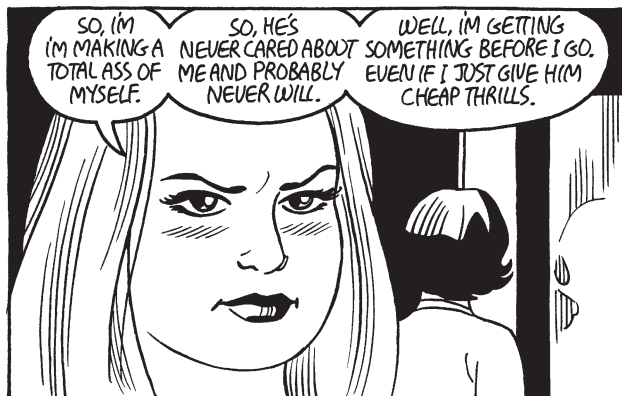
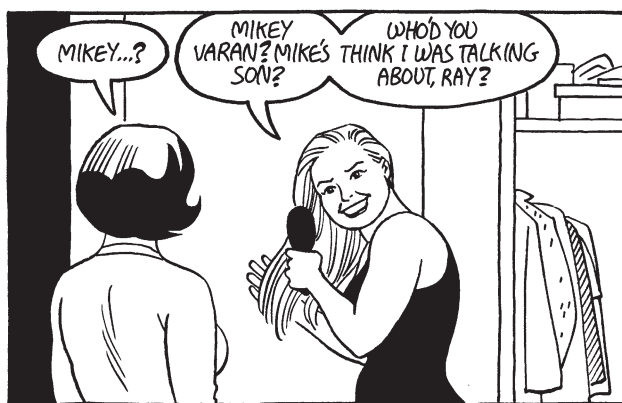
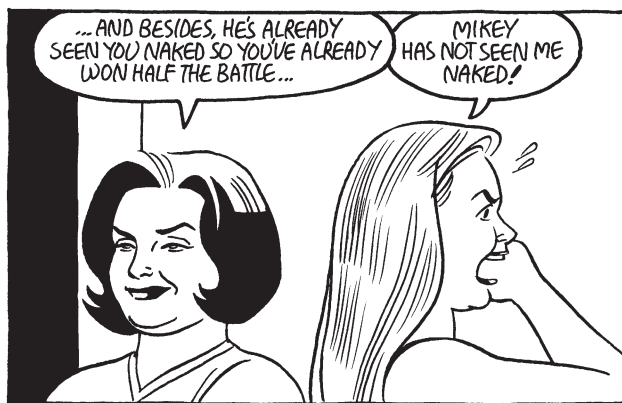


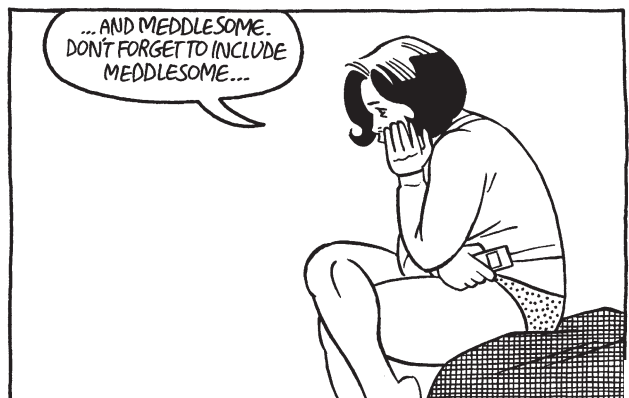
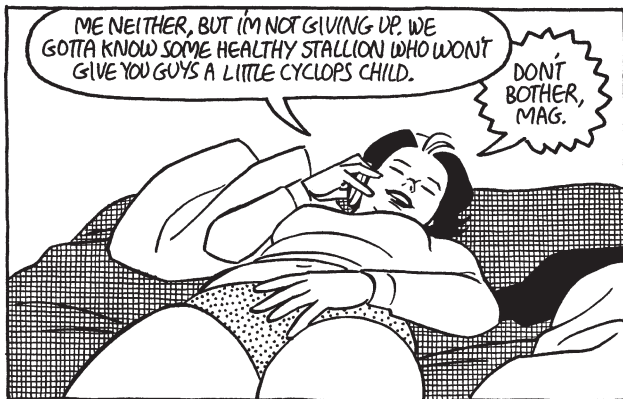
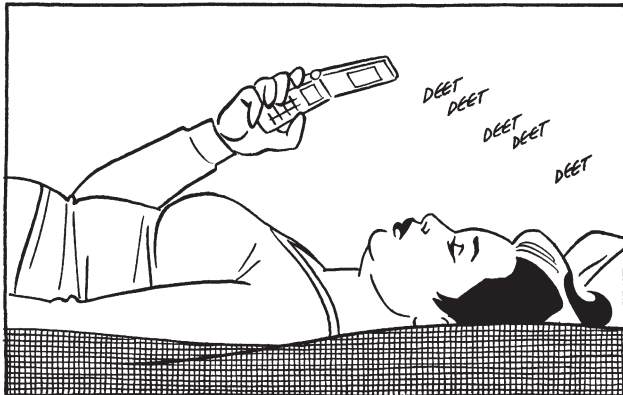
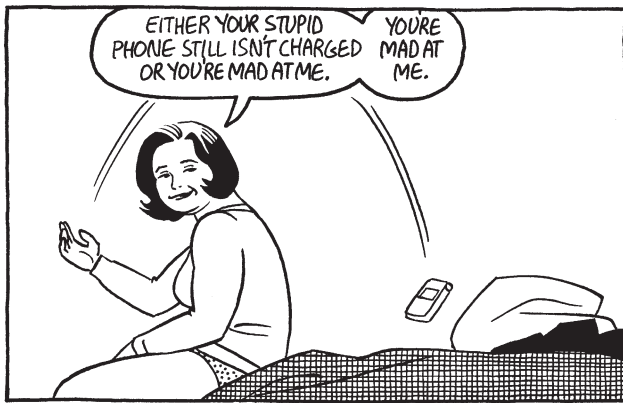












5

THE LOVE BUNGLERS

PART FOUR



I'M SOMETHING LIKE SIX OR SEVEN YEARS OLD AND I'M RIDING IN A GOLD STATION WAGON WITH A LADY I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE I'M FREAKED OUT OR ANYTHING. EVEN IF THIS LADY IS A STRANGER, SHE'S NOT REALLY, YA KNOW?



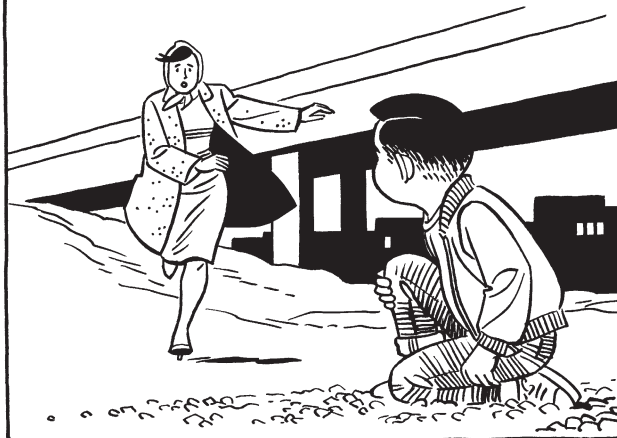
IN THIS DREAM WE ARE FAMILIAR, SORT OF LIKE TRAVELING PARTNERS ON SOME URGENT JOURNEY. THERE IS SOMETHING WARM AND TRUSTING ABOUT THIS LADY. SHE IS BEAUTIFUL AS WELL AS MY PROTECTOR.



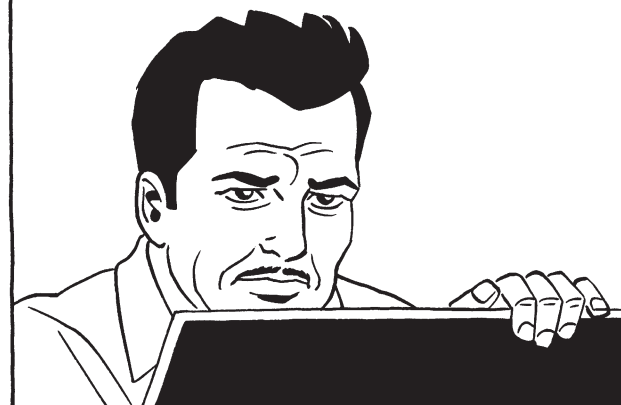
SO WE'RE DRIVING ON SOME FREEWAY AND SUDDENLY I'M THROWN FROM THE CAR AND I GO SAILING OFF THE OVERPASS TO WHAT SHOULD BE MY DEATH, BUT BECAUSE IT'S A DREAM, I LAND ON THE GRAVEL BELOW SHAKEN BUT NOT HURT.



THE LADY RUNS UP WITH GREAT CONCERN TO SEE IF I'M OK. I AM IN LOVE WITH THIS WOMAN WHO I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. THEN I WAKE UP NEVER TO SEE OR DREAM ABOUT HER AGAIN.



I SURE COULD USE HER RIGHT NOW, THEN MAYBE I'D NEVER HAVE TO FEEL LIKE A TORTURED TEENAGER AGAIN. I WOULD'VE NEVER FALLEN IN LOVE AGAIN HAD I KNOWN THE FALLOUT HURTS JUST AS BAD AT 43 AS IT DID AT 15... OR 22... OR 29... OR...



ANGEL SEEMS TO BE DOING OK, CONSIDERING A FEW STUDENTS DECIDED TO NOT SHOW UP FOR HER FIRST DAY AS LIFE DRAWING MODEL. THE MAIN ONE HAPPENING TO BE THE ONE STUDENT ANGEL CAME ESPECIALLY TO POSE FOR...



I KNOW WHY HIS BUDDIES DIDN'T SHOW, THEY WERE ONLY IN THE CLASS TO SEE VIV NAKED, BUT MIKEY VARAN, I DON'T GET, IS HE JUST A BASHFUL BUFFOON OR IS HE REALLY OUT TO PUNISH ANGEL SIMPLY BECAUSE SHE HAS OBVIOUS FEELINGS FOR HIM?



I COULD GO ON AND MENTION HOW BEEP BEEP KICKAPOO SHE WAS LOOKING BUT IN THE SHORT TIME I'VE KNOWN HER I FEEL A FATHER/DAUGHTER THING WITH HER AND I WANT TO KILL ANYBODY WHO FUCKS WITH HER FEELINGS.



WHEN IT'S TIME TO BREAK DOWN THE CLASS, I NOTICE JOE'S COUSIN LOUIE CHATTING HER UP. I START TO FANTASIZE THAT I'M WITNESS TO THE BEGINNING OF A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP. ONE THAT WILL UNITE THEM TILL THE END OF TIME. BUT THEN, THAT'S TOO EASY.



AFTER EVERYBODY HAS HEADED OUT, I SEE THAT MY PHONE IS FINALLY CHARGED AND THERE ARE 25 MESSAGES THAT HAVE PILED UP ON IT SINCE I LOST IT A WEEK AGO AND 23 OF THEM ARE FROM MAGGIE. ARE YOU SHITTING ME?

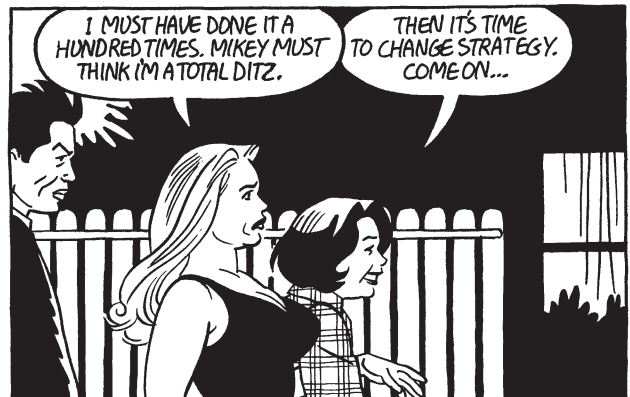
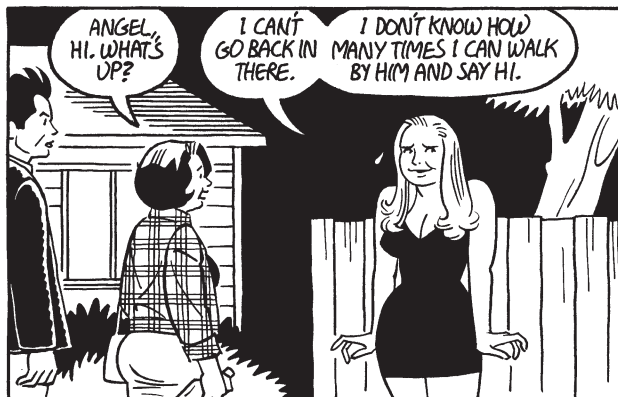
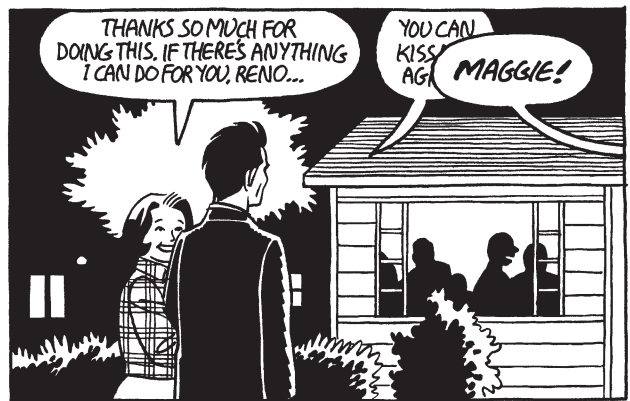
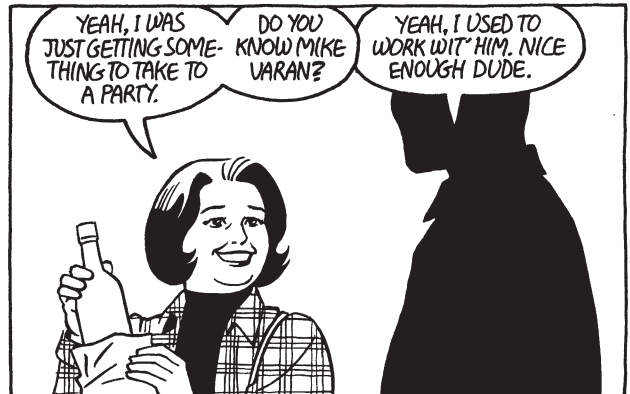


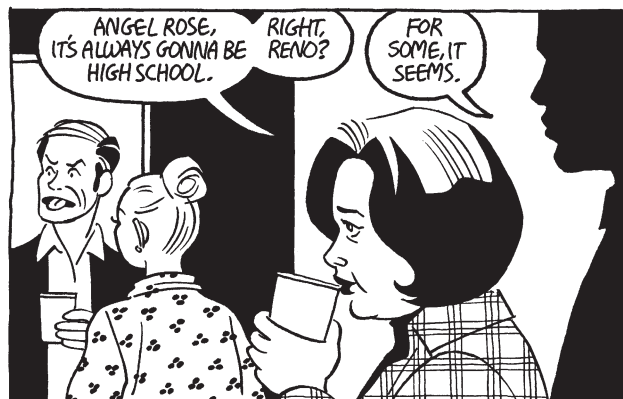
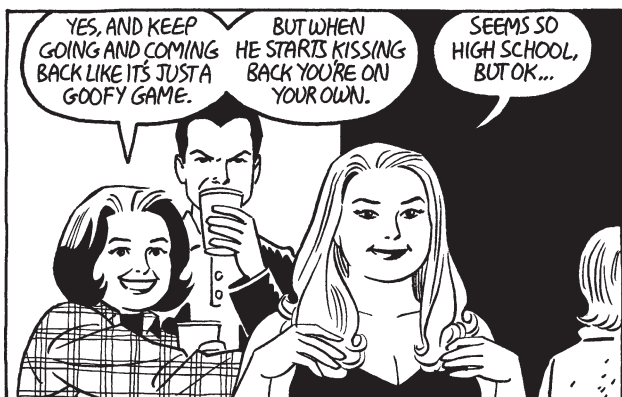
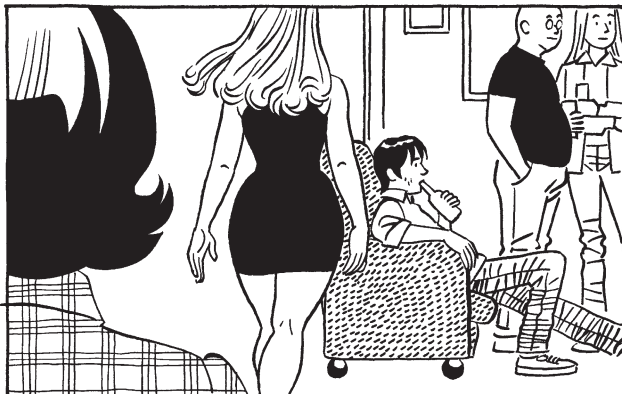
FIRST THING I DO IS START DELETING THEM ONE BY ONE, BUT THEN I FIGURE I SHOULD BE A GROWN UP AND AT LEAST LISTEN TO THEM. WHO KNOWS, ONE COULD BE HER TELLING ME ABOUT THE OTHER ASSBITE SHE'S DECIDED TO MARRY, WHOEVER IT MAY BE.

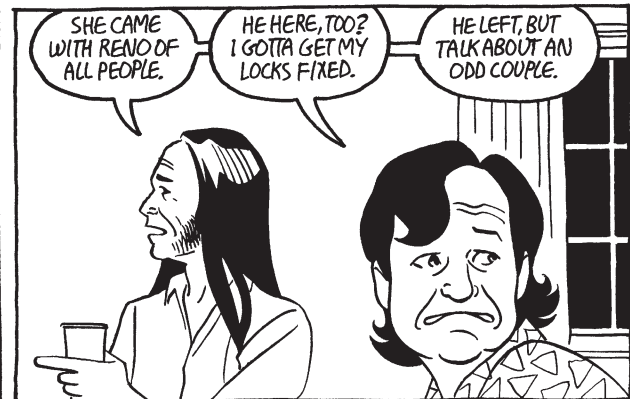
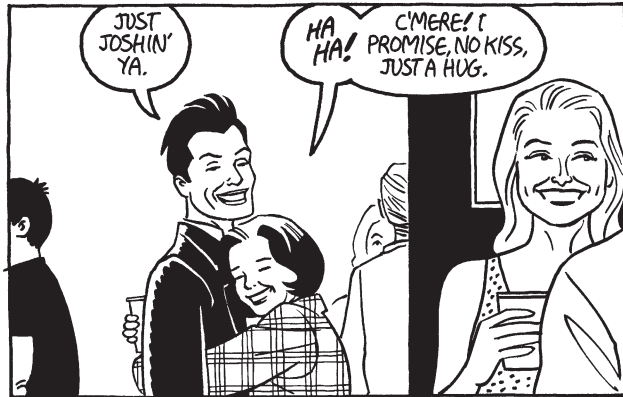
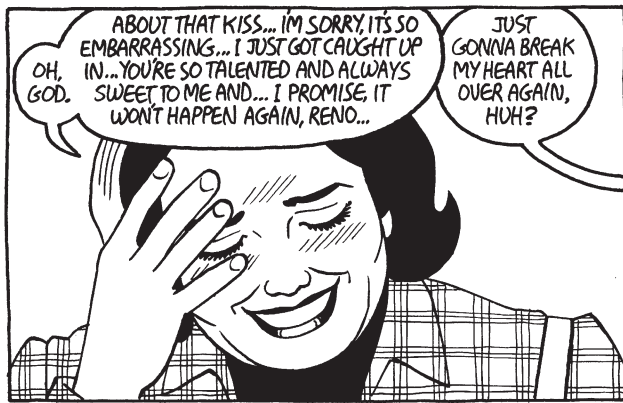


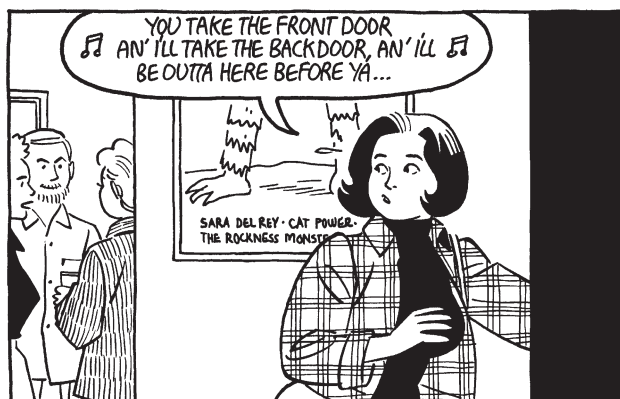
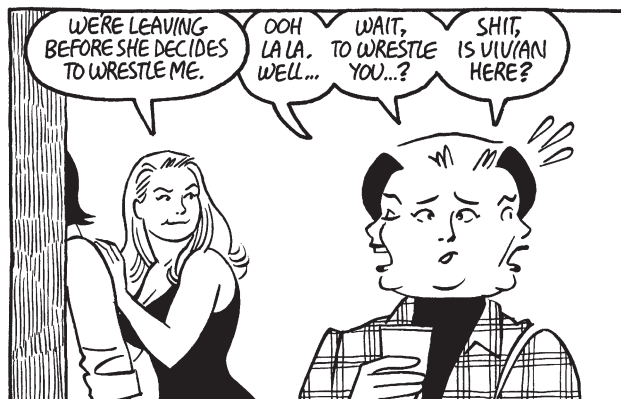
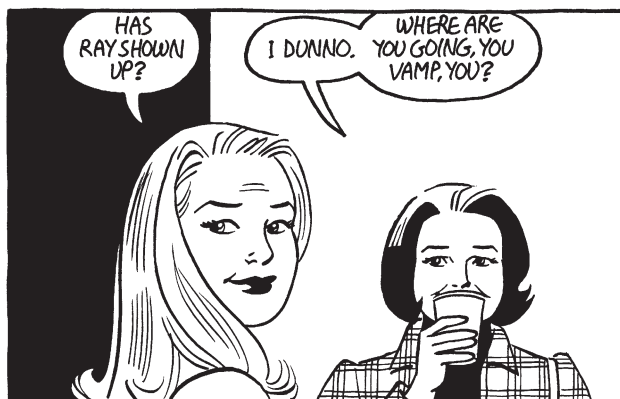
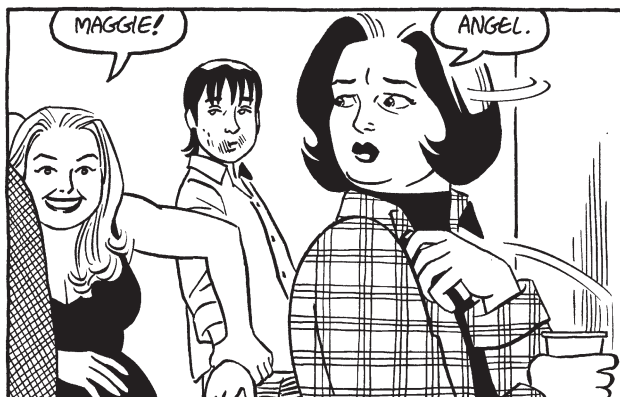
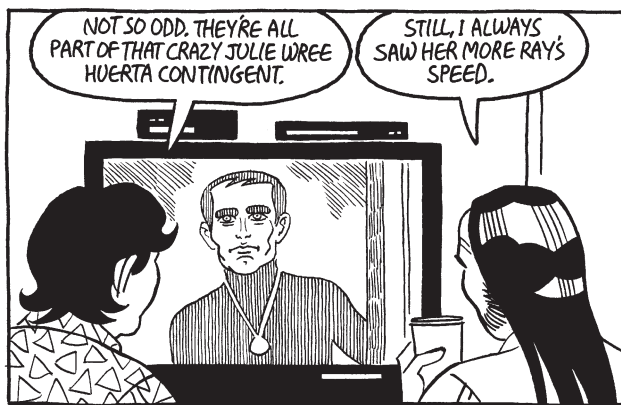
BUT IT'S NOT TO BE. OUT OF THE 23, ONLY TWO HOLD INFORMATION I CAN USE. ONE, ABOUT SOME BROKEN ART OF MINE AND THE OTHER BEING ABOUT NEXT SATURDAY BEING THIS COMING SATURDAY AND NOT THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY.

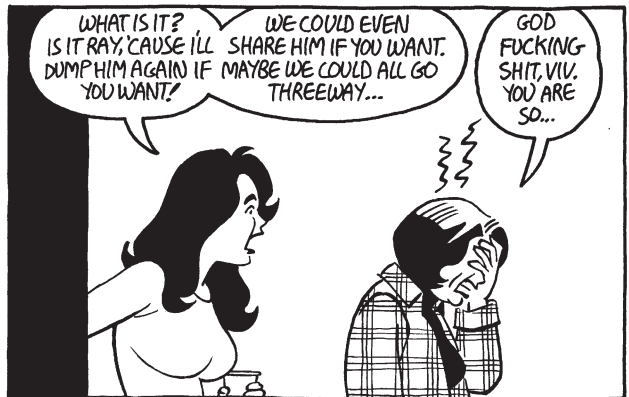
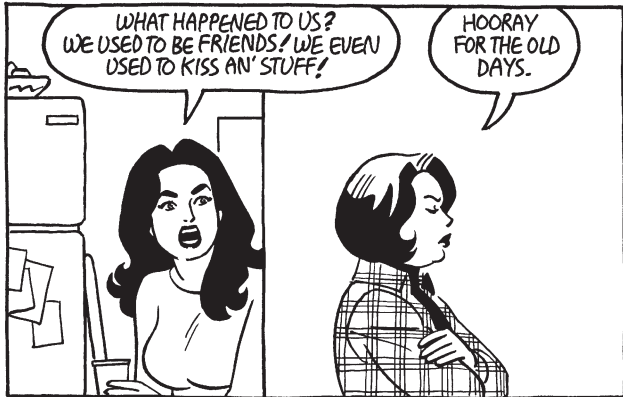
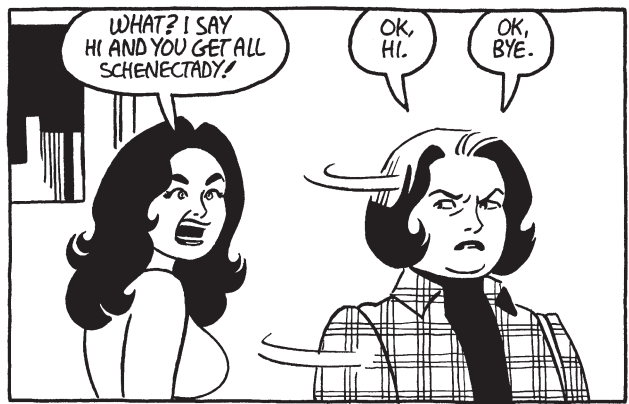
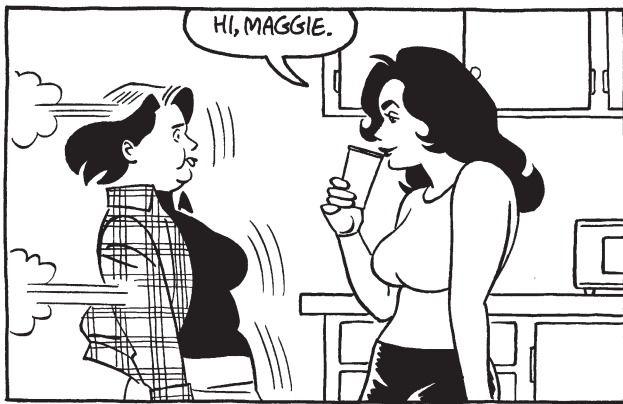


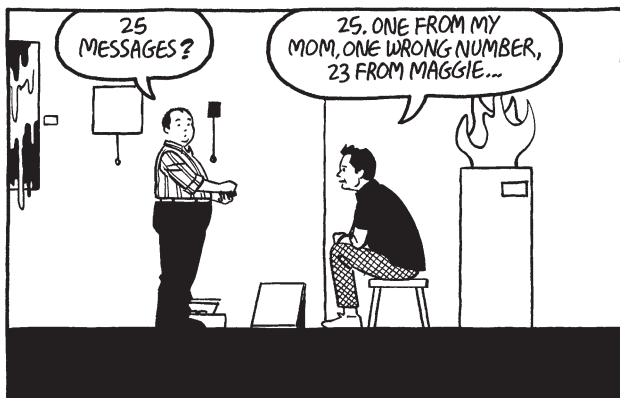
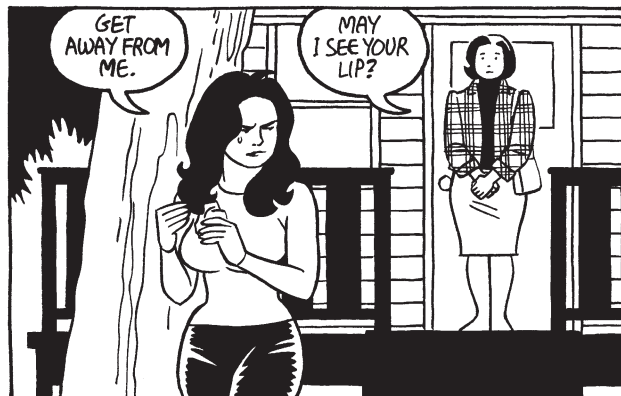


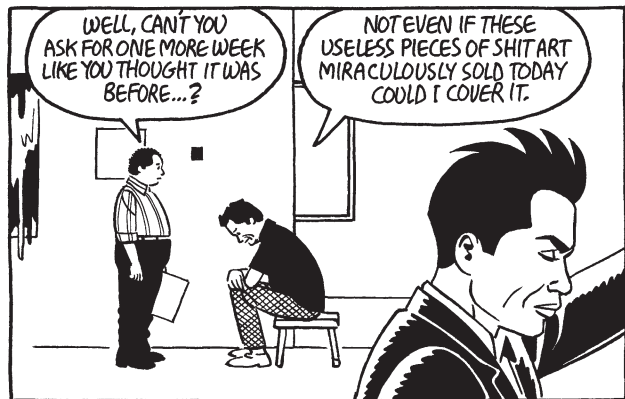
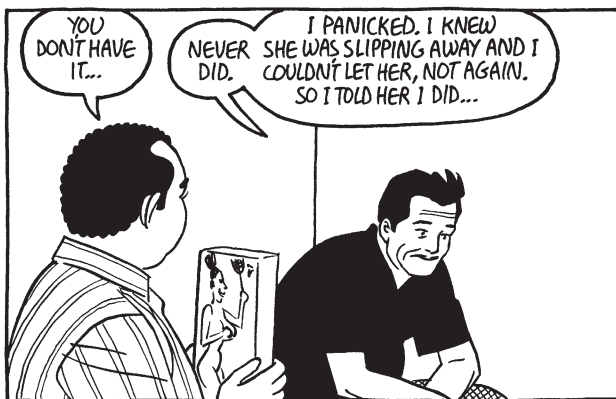
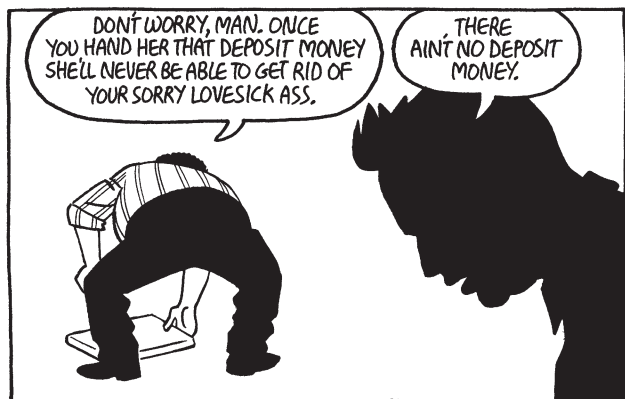
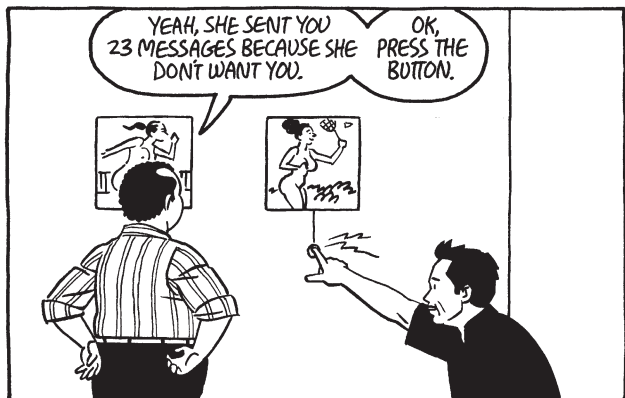
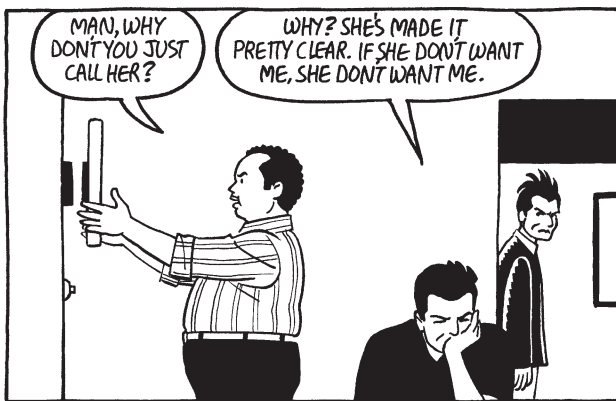


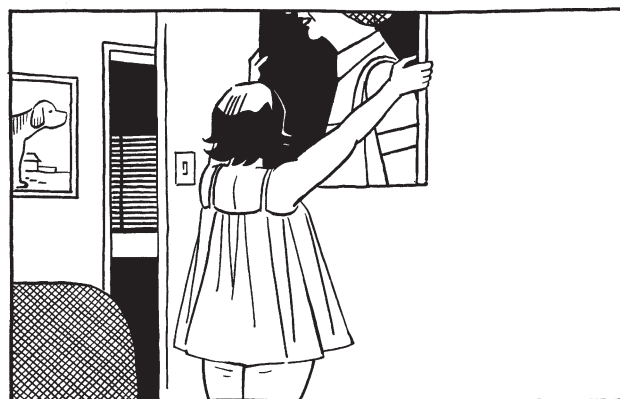
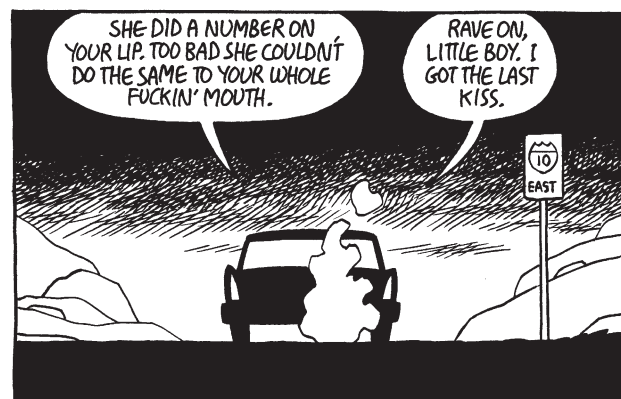
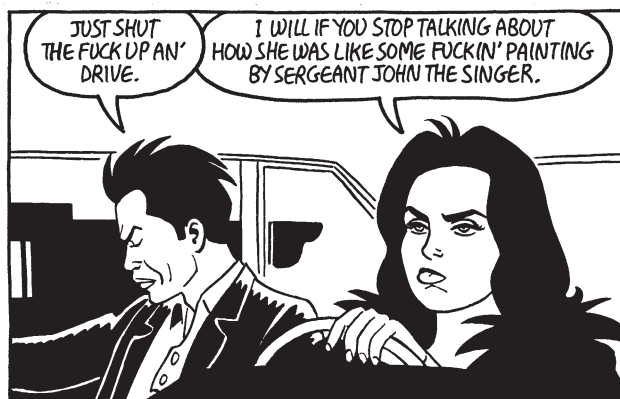
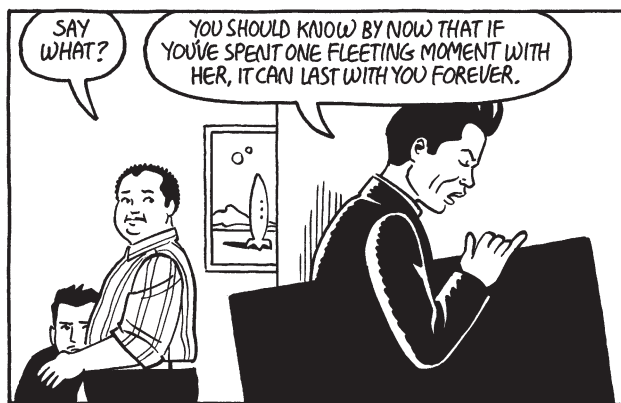


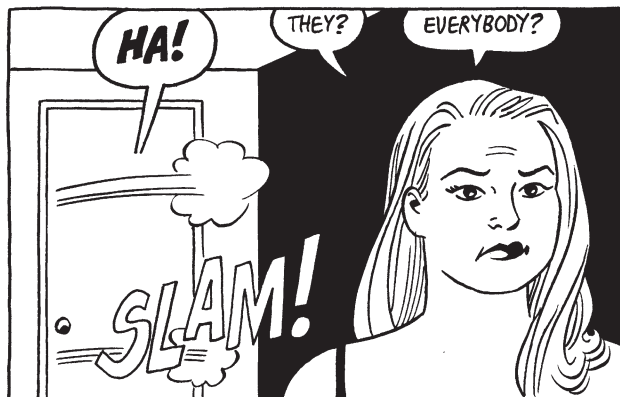
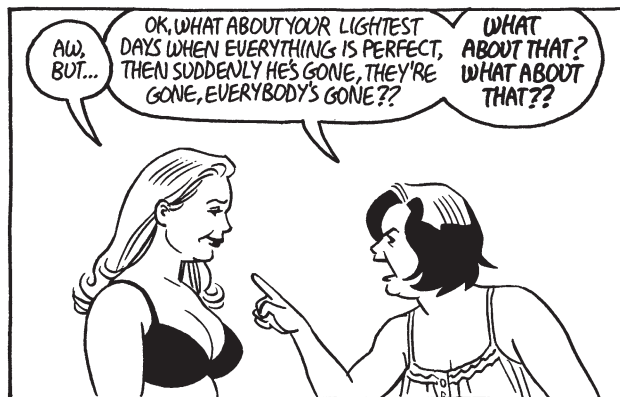
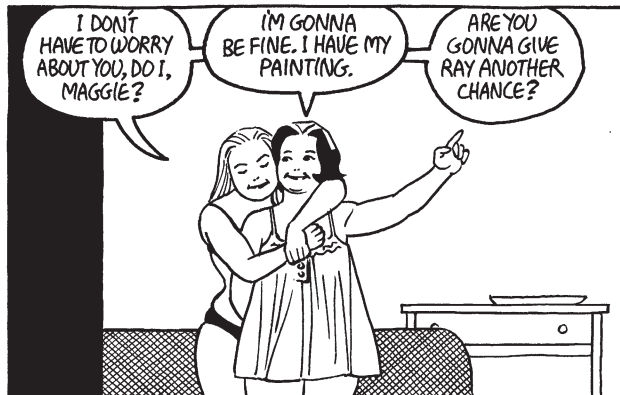
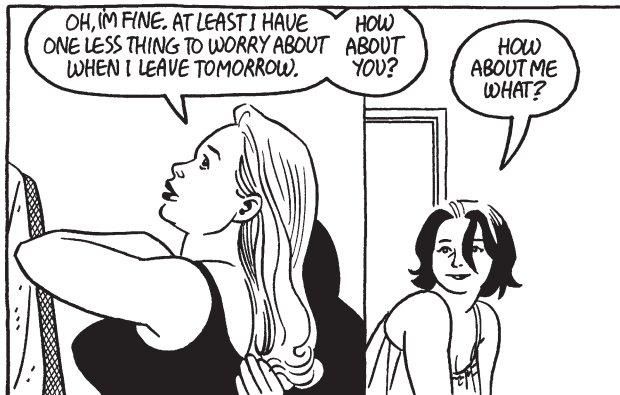
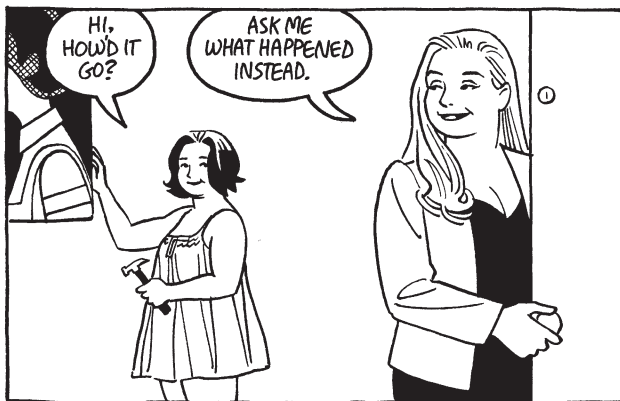












6

RETURN FOR ME



RETURN FOR ME



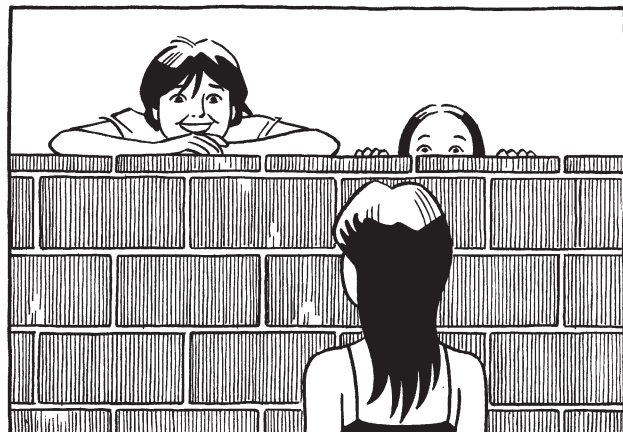
AT FIRST I WAS SO EXCITED THAT MAGGIE WAS MOVING BACK TO OUR OLD NEIGHBORHOOD. SHE WAS GONE FOR THREE WHOLE YEARS AN' SHE ONLY CAME TO VISIT A FEW TIMES EVEN IF WE WROTE A LOTTA LETTERS BACK AN' FORTH.

I WAS THINKING OF ALL THE THINGS WE COULD DO TOGETHER BUT THE FIRST TIME I WENT OVER, HER MOM SAID SHE COULDN'T COME OUT, TO TRY LATER. I SAID OK AND WENT HOME.



THE NEXT DAY I WENT BACK AND MAGGIE ANSWERED THE DOOR. I THOUGHT, COOL, SHE'LL COME OUT, BUT SHE SAID SHE COULDN'T. SHE HAD TO STAY IN THE HOUSE. I SAID OK AND WENT HOME AGAIN. THE NEXT TIME I WENT OVER SHE SAID IT AGAIN.

THE TIME AFTER THAT I HEARD HER AN' ESTHER AN' HER BROTHERS PLAYING IN THEIR BACKYARD. I CALLED FOR HER TO COME OUT AN' SHE SAID SHE HAD A LOTTA CHORES TO DO BUT MAYBE SHE COULD COME OUT TOMORROW. THAT'S WHAT SHE ALWAYS SAID, MAYBE TOMORROW.



TWO WEEKS LATER AN' SHE STILL COULDN'T COME OUT. I STARTED TO GET SUSPICIOUS. MAYBE SHE DIDN'T WANNA COME OUT. MAYBE SHE DIDN'T WANNA BE MY FRIEND NO MORE. WHAT WAS SO COOL ABOUT THOSE DAYS IN CADEZZA ANYWAY?



MY OLDER BROTHER TOLD ME I WAS BEING STUPID. HE SAID THAT MAGGIE'S MOM AN' DAD GOT DIVORCED AN' THAT'S WHY MAGGIE AN' HER FAMILY ARE ACTING LIKE HERMITS. LIKE HE THINKS HE KNOWS EVERYTHING. I NEVER EVEN HEARD THAT WORD, DIVORCED, EXCEPT ON TV.

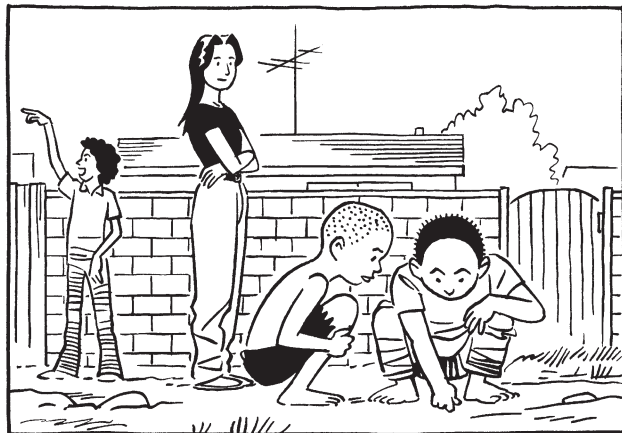
WELL, I HAD ENOUGH SO I STOPPED TRYING. IF SHE DIDN'T WANNA BE MY BEST FRIEND ANY MORE THAT WAS FINE WITH ME. ONE TIME I SAW HER WALKING HOME FROM THE STORE. (INSTEAD OF BEING EXCITED THAT SHE WAS OUT, IT WAS MY CHANCE TO SHINE HER ON AN' I DID.



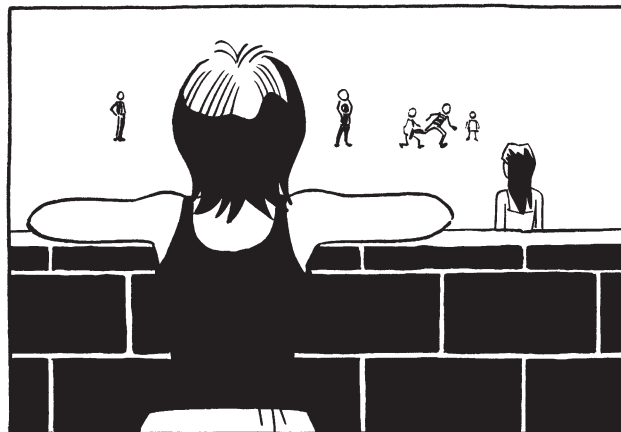
BUT I TRIED TO UNDERSTAND SO I TRIED TO STILL BE HER FRIEND, EVEN IF I COULDN'T HANG OUT WITH HER. I HAD TO THINK OF A WAY TO MAKE HER COME OUT SO I STARTED HANGING WITH THE KIDS WHO PLAYED IN THE EMPTY FIELD ACROSS THE ALLEY FROM MAGGIE'S BACKYARD.



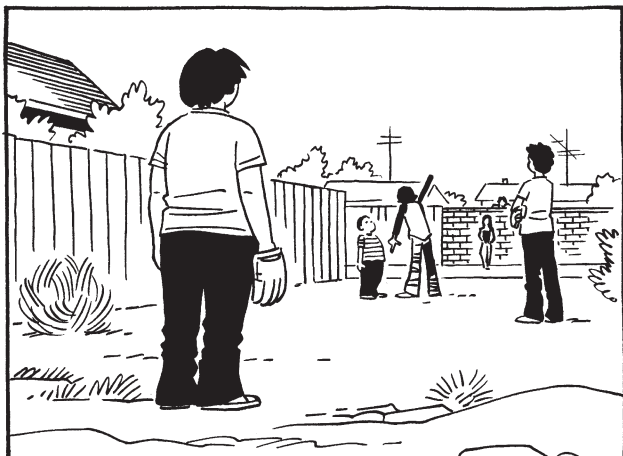
IT STARTED TO WORK A LITTLE. SHE WOULD AT LEAST WATCH FROM THE TOP OF HER FENCE, EVEN IF SHE WOULDN'T REALLY COME OUT. SHE WOULDN'T SAY ANYTHING, SHE'D JUST WATCH. I THOUGHT MAYBE SHE WAS MAD AT ME FOR SHINING HER ON. I WAS TOO SCARED TO ASK HER.



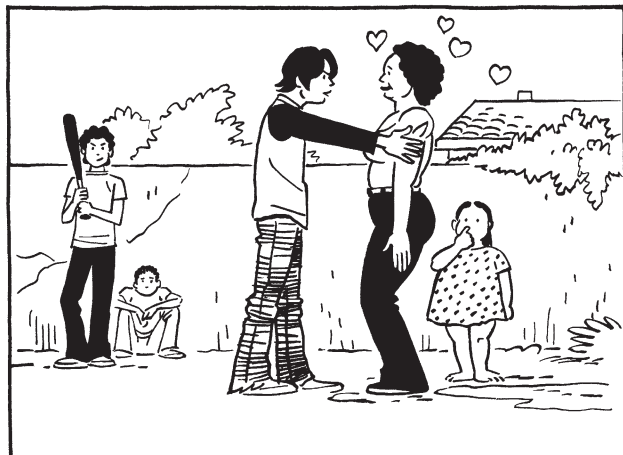
ONE FUNNY DAY, ROBERT AN' SPEEDY AN' THE GUYS STARTED A GAME OF LINE IN THE EMPTY FIELD. IT SEEMED LIKE EVERY KID IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WAS OUT. EVEN THE CHASCARRILLO KIDS, ALL LINING THE TOP OF THAT FENCE.



SOMETIME DURING THE GAME, THE GUYS STARTED ARGUING WHERE THE FOUL LINES WERE AN' STARTED MAKING KIDS STAND AS THE FOUL POLES SO NOBODY COULD CHEAT.



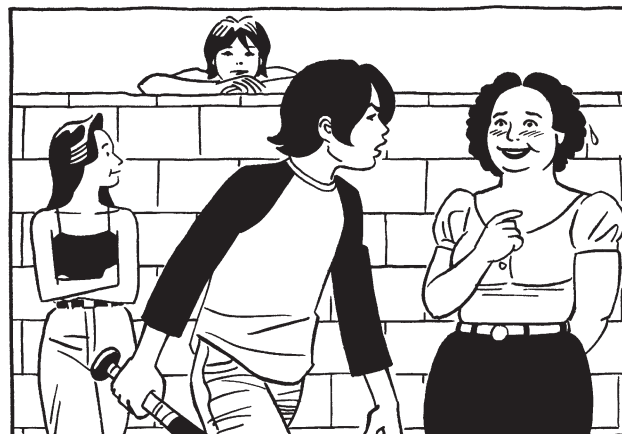
I'M SO SURE. YOU KNOW SHE WAS ONLY DOING IT TO IMPRESS SPEEDY 'CAUSE SHE LIKED HIM. SHE EVEN WORE HER SCHOOL BLOUSE AN' IT WASN'T EVEN SCHOOL YET. SO, BLANCA WAS THE THIRD BASE LINE.



SPEEDY GOT UP TO BAT AN' WE WERE ON HIM LIKE NOthin'. HE HIT A FOUL BALL AN' IT NEARLY HIT BLANCA BUT IT SPLASHED MUD ON HER SCHOOL BLOUSE. BOY, WAS SHE EMBARRASSED AN' MAD AS HELL, TOO.



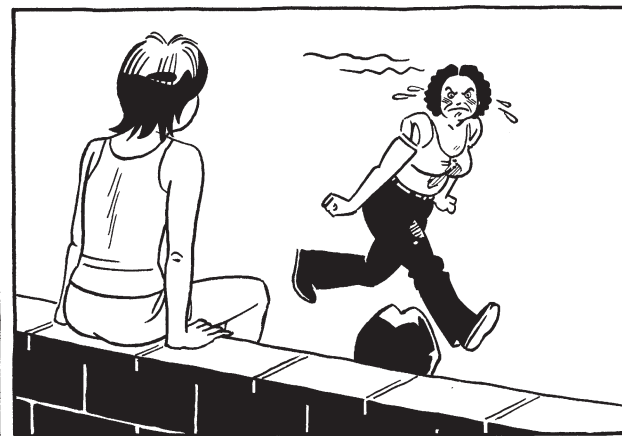
SPEEDY ASKED ME AN' MAGGIE TO DO IT BUT WE BOTH SAID NO AN' WE SAID IT AT THE SAME TIME AN' THAT MADE ME THINK THAT MAYBE MAGGIE WAS COMING BACK TO NORMAL. SO, SPEEDY WAS GOING AWAY ALL MAD AN' THEN BLANCA SAID SHE WOULD DO IT.



MAGGIE MUMBLED SOMETHING ABOUT HOW BIG BLANCA'S BOOBS GOT AN' THAT REALLY BROKE THE ICE AN' WE WERE BEST FRIENDS AGAIN. MAN, YOU SHOULD'A HEARD US WITH THE BOOB JOKES, BUT NOT TO HER FACE OF COURSE. PRETTY SOON WE WERE TALKIN' MESS ABOUT EVERYBODY.



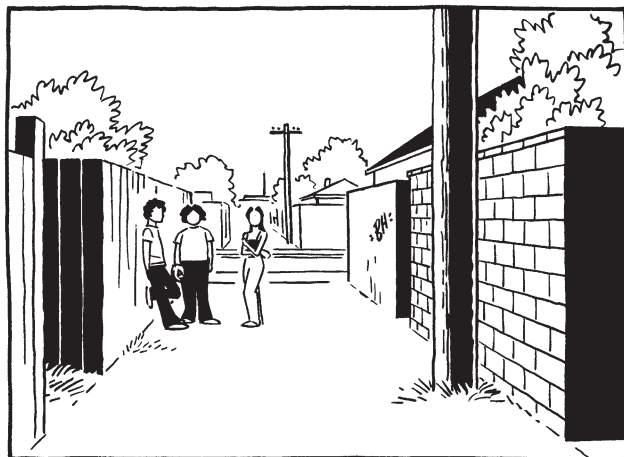
I GUESS MEAN' MAGGIE DIDN'T KEEP OUR GIGGLES TO OURSELF ENOUGH 'CAUSE BLANCA GAVE US THE BIGGEST MADDOGGING BEFORE SHE RAN HOME. THAT'S NERVE, I THOUGHT. WHY MADDOG US? WE WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES LAUGHING. WE DIDN'T SPLASH HER NEITHER.



THE NEXT TIME SPEEDY WAS UP HE HIT A LONG ONE INTO SPOOKY THE SMOKEY'S YARD. NOBODY WANTED TO GET IT. WHEN WE WERE LITTLE, PEOPLE USED TO SAY THAT SPOOKY USED TO KIDNAP CHILDREN AN' USE 'EM AS DARTBOARDS. I GUESS SPEEDY WAS STILL SCARED.



OH, WELL. SO THEY BOTH WENT OVER THE FENCE. WE ALL WAITED DOWN THE ALLEY. I DIDN'T WANNA HEAR NO SCREAMING CHILDREN OR ANYTHING EVEN IF I DIDN'T BELIEVE THOSE STORIES.



IT WAS FUNNY WHEN MAGGIE PUSHED HIM ALL MAD AN' WALKED AWAY BUT IT WAS KINDA WEIRD BECAUSE SHE HAD THE SAME MAD LOOK ON HER FACE THAT BLANCA HAD. ALMOST SAD AS IT WAS MAD. COULD IT REALLY BE 'CAUSE OF SOME STUPID ELEVEN YEAR OLD?



EVERYBODY WAS CALLING HIM A WUSS SO HE SAID HE'D GO GET IT IF SOMEBODY WENT WITH HIM AND GUESS WHO VOLUNTEERED? MAGGIE! DON'T TELL ME SHE LIKED SPEEDY, TOO! HE WAS BARELY GOING INTO JUNIOR HIGH AN' MAGGIE AN' BLANCA WERE GOING INTO HIGH SCHOOL.



IT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER BEFORE THEY CAME OUT. THEY WEREN'T RUNNING SO WE FIGURED MR. SMOKEY WASN'T HOME. ROBERT WAS MAKING ALL LIKE THEY WERE LOVEBIRDS AN' SHIT AN' ALL SPEEDY DID WAS TALK ABOUT HOW SCARED MAGGIE WAS AN' ALL THAT.



I HAD TO KNOW WHAT WENT ON AN' MEAN' MAGGIE TOOK OFF DOWN THE ALLEY. SHE WAS TOO MAD TO NOTICE THAT SHE WAS GOING AWAY FROM HER HOUSE BUT I WASN'T GONNA TELL HER. I DIDN'T WANNA MESS UP ONE OF THE BEST DAYS IN A LONG TIME.



I KEPT ON BUGGING HER ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN SPOOKY'S YARD. SHE FINALLY SAID SHE WAS MAD 'CAUSE SPEEDY WAS DIFFERENT WHEN THEY WERE ALONE. SHE SAID THEY WERE SCARED TOGETHER AN' THEY TALKED FOR A LONG TIME, ABOUT STUFF SHE SAID. WAS THAT ALL, I SAID?



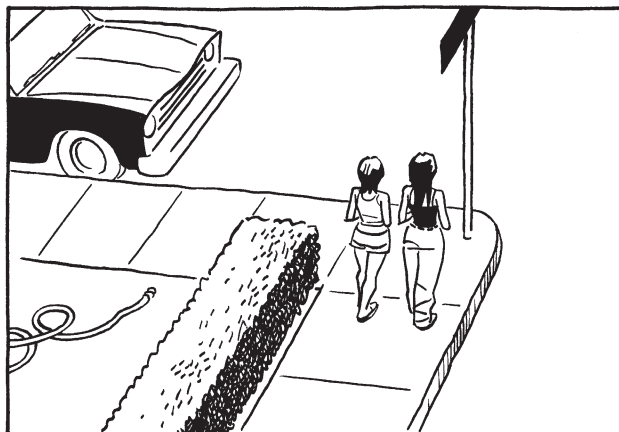
I STOPPED BUGGING HER ABOUT SPEEDY AN' WE JUST KEPT WALKING. WE WALKED BY OLD PLACES KINDA GETTING MAGGIE USED TO THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD AGAIN, EXCEPT NOW IT WAS HOPPERS AN' WE WERE BADASS CHAVAS CLAIMING OUR TURF. DON'T EVEN MESS WITH US, MAN.



I TOOK HER DOWN A STREET A FEW BLOCKS AWAY WHERE SOME OF THE OLDER HOMEBOYS HUNG OUT. THEY WEREN'T THE BADDEST VATOS LIKE BIG EDDIE AN' LITOS AN' THOSE SAYS BUT I STILL THOUGHT THEY WERE COOL. ESPECIALLY MANDO. OOPS, I GAVE IT AWAY, I GUESS, HUH?



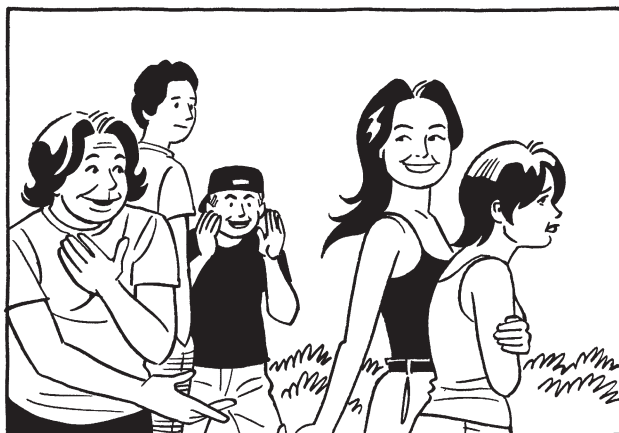
THE ONLY INTERESTING THING SHE SAID WAS SHE KNEW A BOY IN CADEZZA WHO HAD HAIR THAT WENT DOWN OVER ONE EYE LIKE SPEEDY. IF THAT'S INTERESTING AT ALL. MAYBE IT WAS INTERESTING TO ME 'CAUSE SHE NEVER WROTE TO ME ABOUT THAT BOY.



MOSTLY EVERYBODY WE PASSED WELCOMED MAGGIE BACK BUT SHE DIDN'T SEEM TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT. SHE HATED THAT THEY WERE CALLING HER THAT NEW NAME. YOU CAN'T REALLY BLAME 'EM 'CAUSE THAT'S HOW PEOPLE KNEW HER NOW. PERLA LEFT AN' MAGGIE RETURNED.



MANDO DID HIS USUAL SLACKTALKING WHEN WE WENT BY. AFTER THAT, I ASKED MAGGIE WHAT SHE THOUGHT OF HIM AN' SHE JUST SAID SHE HATED THE WAY THEY ALL LOOKED AT HER. WELL, ALL EXCEPT THE TALLEST ONE WHO SHE THOUGHT WAS JUST PLAIN STUCK UP.



BOY, WAS SHE SHOCKED WHEN I TOLD HER THAT WAS LIL RAY WHO GREW ALMOST A FOOT SINCE SHE WAS GONE. SHE CHANGED HER MIND ON THE SPOT AN' SAID SHE LIKED HIM, BUT TO NEVER TELL ANYBODY. I SAID OK 'CAUSE SHE ACTED REAL SERIOUS ABOUT IT.



HARVEY KEPT ASKING MAGGIE IF EVERYTHING WAS OK AT HOME LIKE HE KNEW ABOUT HER MOM AN' DAD BUT SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO WANNA TALK ABOUT IT BUT SHE DID TELL HIM SHE KNEW ABOUT FIXING CARS. WELL, EVERYBODY, INCLUDING ME, WAS LIKE, WHERE DID THAT COME FROM??

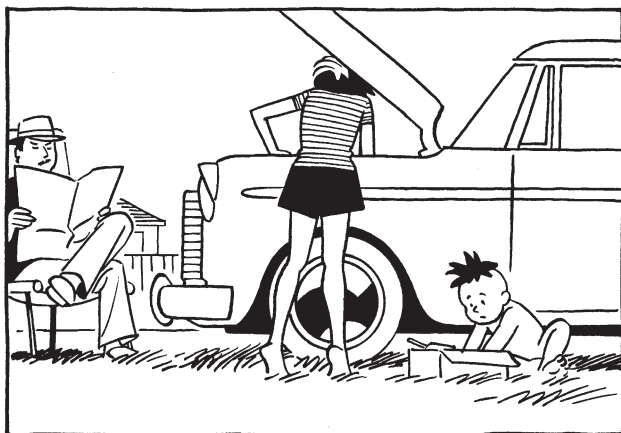
WE CAME UP TO SAL'S GARAGE WHERE HARVEY AN' LOUIS WORKED. HARVEY CAME OUT AN' WAS ALL EXCITED TO SEE MAGGIE LIKE HE WAS HER UNCLE OR SOMETHING. LOUIS JUST KEPT CALLING HER MAGGIE O MAGGIE LIKE HE ALWAYS DID SINCE SHE WAS LIKE, BORN.



SHE SAID THAT IN CADEZZA WHENEVER SHE GOT IN TROUBLE HER DAD WOULD MAKE HER TAKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE ENGINE OF THEIR CAR AN' CLEAN IT AN' HAVE TO PUT IT BACK IN CORRECTLY OR SHE WOULD HAVE TO DO IT AGAIN.



TO TEST HER, HARVEY ASKED HER TO ADJUST THE CARBURETOR IN THE CAR. LOUIS WAS WORKING ON BUT MAGGIE SAID THERE WASN'T ONE IN THERE AN' THEY SAID SHE WAS RIGHT SO LOUIS ASKED HER IF SHE WANTED TO HELP HIM PUT IT IN AN' GUESS WHAT, SHE DID!



THEY MUSTA BEEN THERE FOREVER WORKING ON THAT THING BUT THE MORE THEY DID IT, THE MORE MAGGIE LIKED IT. I GUESS IT WAS LIKE HER AN' SPEEDY JUST TALKING IN SPOOKY THE SMOKEY'S BACKYARD, BORING THINGS JUST INTEREST HER.



I WAS SO BORED I WAS GONNA LEAVE WHEN MAGGIE'S MOM WALKED UP LOOKING FOR HER AND BOY, DID SHE LOOK MAD. LUCKY FOR MAGGIE HARVEY CALMED HER DOWN AND TOOK THE BLAME.



IT MADE ME WONDER WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO GET DIVORCED. I KNOW BLANCA'S PARENTS DIDN'T HAVE TO GET DIVORCED, THEY BOTH JUST SPLIT ON HER. I STARTED TO FEEL GUILTY. THE ONLY PROBLEM I HAD AT HOME WAS A KNOW-IT-ALL BROTHER WHO WAS RIGHT ABOUT MAGGIE.

I COULD HEAR HIM ALL BRAGGING TO HER MOM ABOUT MAGGIE FIXING THE CAR. MAGGIE WAS JUST HAPPY SHE WASN'T GONNA GET THE CINTO. IMAGINE, STILL GETTING WHIPPED AT 13. YOU DIDN'T HEAR THIS FROM ME BUT I THINK MAGGIE'S MOM KINDA WENT NUTS IN CADEZZA.



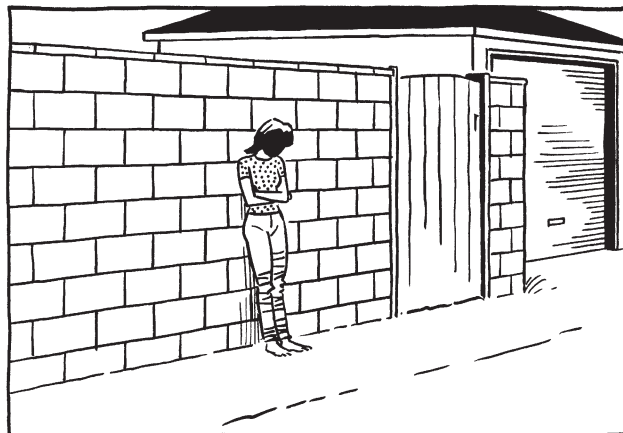
SOON HIGH SCHOOL STARTED AN' I GOT TO SEE MAGGIE MORE. WE SPENT A LOTTA TIME SPYING ON MANDO AN' RAY AN' LISTENING TO PUNK ROCK RECORDS. MAGGIE EVEN GOT AN AFTER SCHOOL JOB AT SALS, HELPING FIX CARS. SHE GOT HER PICTURE IN THE PAPER AN' EVERYTHING.



THEN CAME THE WEIRD DAY. MAGGIE WAS IN THE ALLEY BY HERSELF CRYING. SHE SAID HER MOM WANTED TO MOVE AGAIN. THIS TIME UP TO DAIRYTOWN TO BE CLOSER TO FAMILY, SINCE SHE HAD A NEW BABY. I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. MAGGIE JUST CAME BACK TO ME, YOU KNOW?



THEN THE STORY GOT WEIRDER. HER MOM WANTED MAGGIE TO STAY IN HOPPERS, AT LEAST UNTIL SCHOOL ENDED AN' GET THIS, 'CAUSE SHE HAD A GOOD JOB! TALK ABOUT CRAZY! I MEAN, I WAS HAPPY SHE GOT TO STAY BUT, TO BE LEFT BEHIND BY YOUR OWN FAMILY, C'MON!



C/INTO/BELT

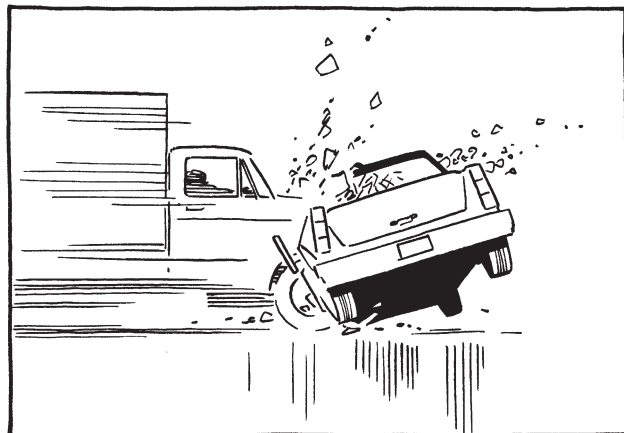
THAT'S WHEN THINGS GOT WEIRDER THAN WEIRD. SO, NOW MAGGIE WAS LIVING ON THE RICH SIDE OF TOWN WITH HER TIA WHO WAS A LADY WRESTLER ON TV, AN' CRAZIER THAN HER MOM, IF YOU ASK ME. SHE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRAIN US BUT WE WERE LIKE, CHALE, TAMALE.



I TOLD HER SHE SHOULD STAY AT MY HOUSE BUT SHE SAID HER MOM CALLED EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE TO CHECK ON HER AN' SHE DIDN'T WANNA GET HER TIA IN TROUBLE WITH HER MOM. CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT SHIT? DEFENDING ONE NOT OVER ANOTHER NOT.



MAGGIE STARTED SPENDING MORE TIME AT SAL'S. I GUESS FIXING CARS TOOK HER MIND OFF HER PROBLEMS. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. I WANTED SO MUCH TO HELP HER. EVEN IF HER LIFE WAS BECOMING MORE FUCKED UP AT LEAST SHE WOULD HAVE ME THERE TO--



ONE TIME MAGGIE WANTED ME TO COME OVER AN' SAID IT WAS OK 'CAUSE HER TIA WASN'T HOME. WHEN I GOT THERE I FOUND OUT HER TIA WAS WRESTLING IN TEXAS SO MAGGIE WAS LIVING ALL ALONE IN THAT HOUSE FOR OVER A WEEK! MAN, HOW YOU GONNA ACT???



ANOTHER DAY I CAUGHT BLANCA TELLING MAGGIE SHE WAS GONNA KICK HER ASS FOR BEING COLD TO HER THAT ONE DAY. I KNEW IT WAS REALLY BECAUSE SPEEDY LIKED MAGGIE MORE. I MEAN, THE FUCKIN' BITCH DIDN'T CALL ME OUT AN' I WAS JUST AS GUILTY.

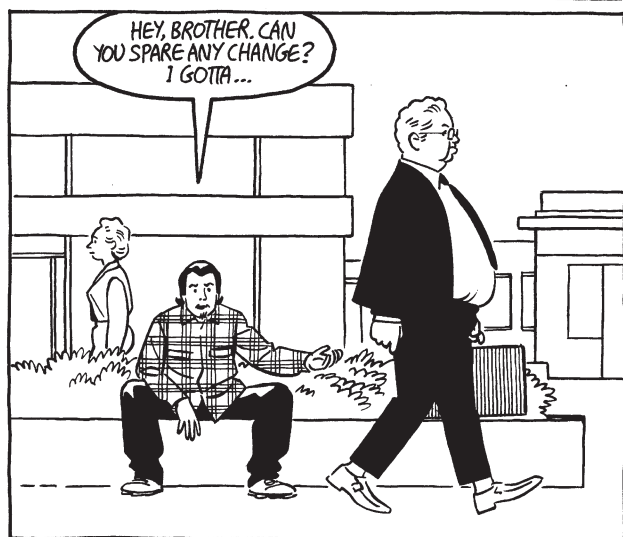
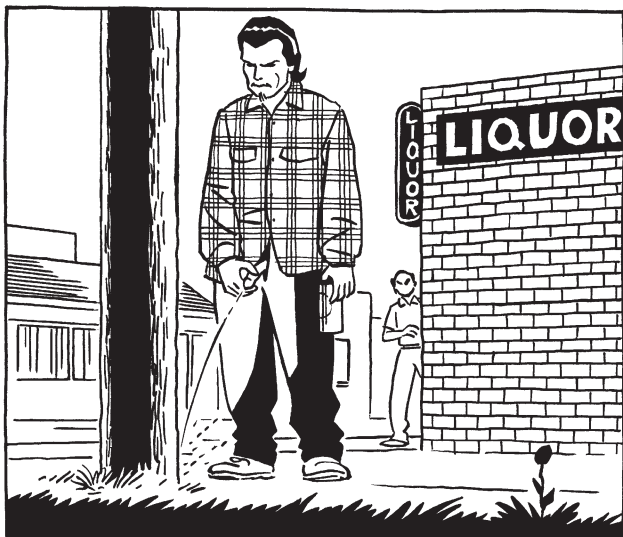


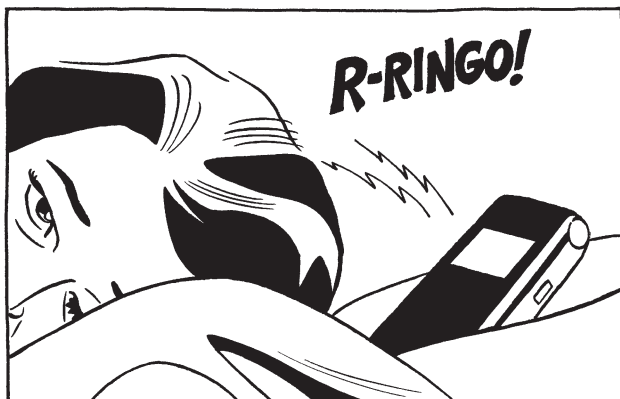
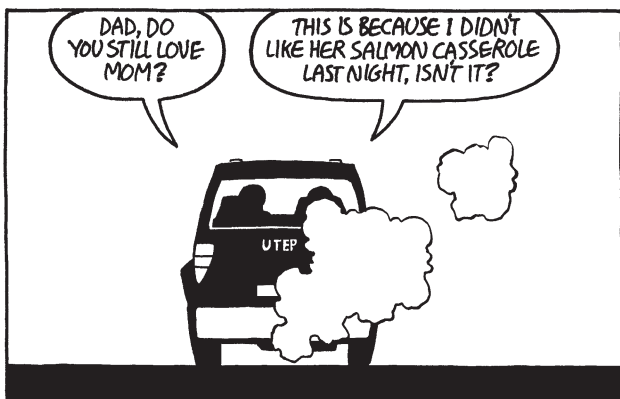
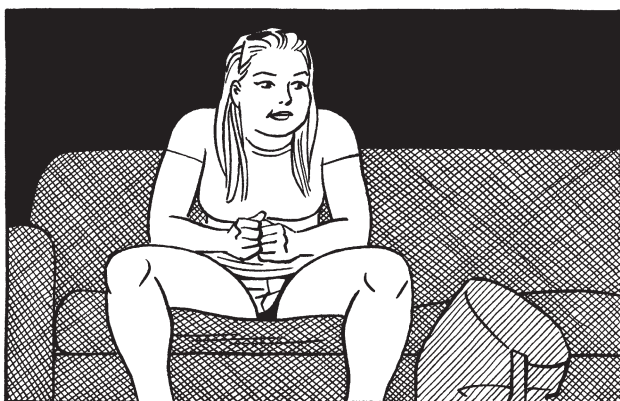
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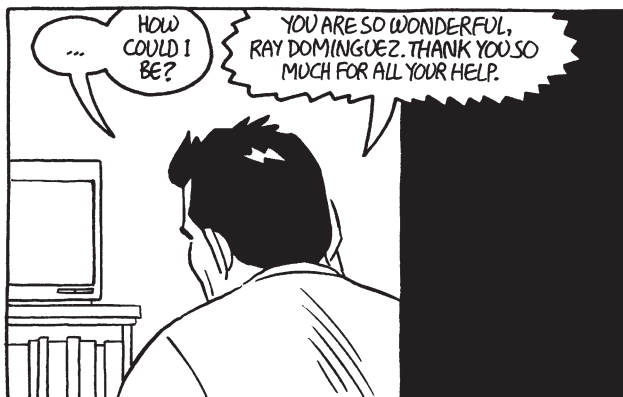
THE LOVE BUNGLERS

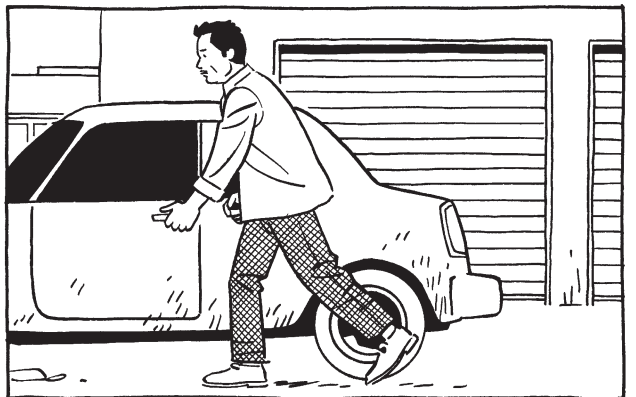
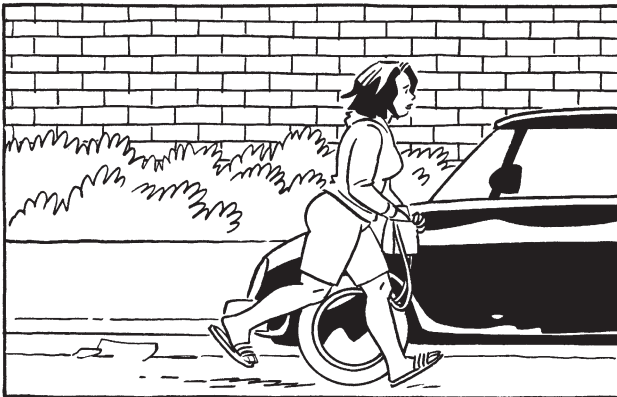
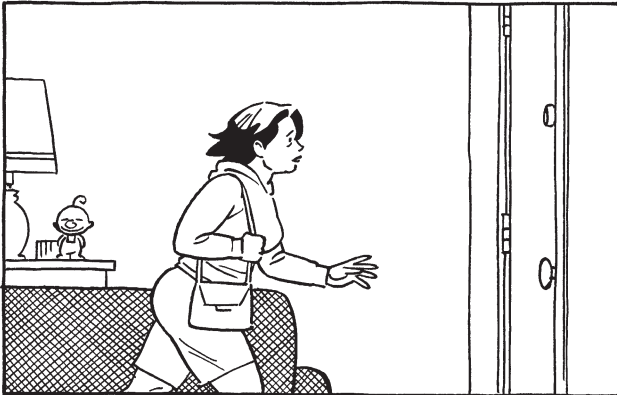
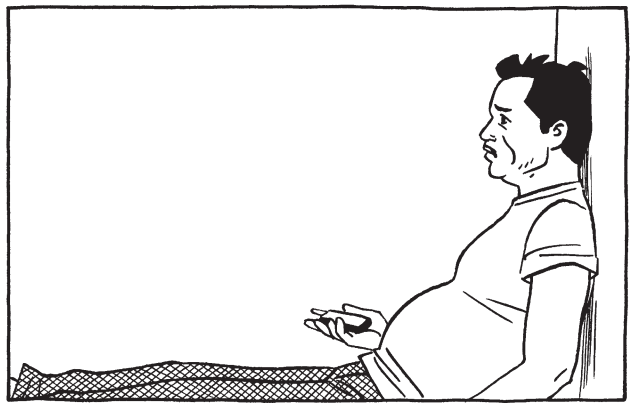
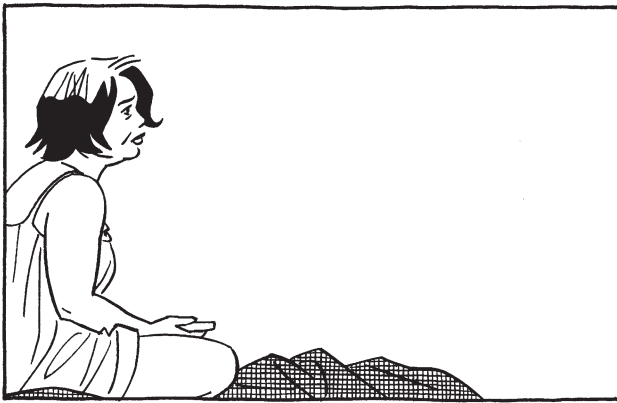
PART FIVE

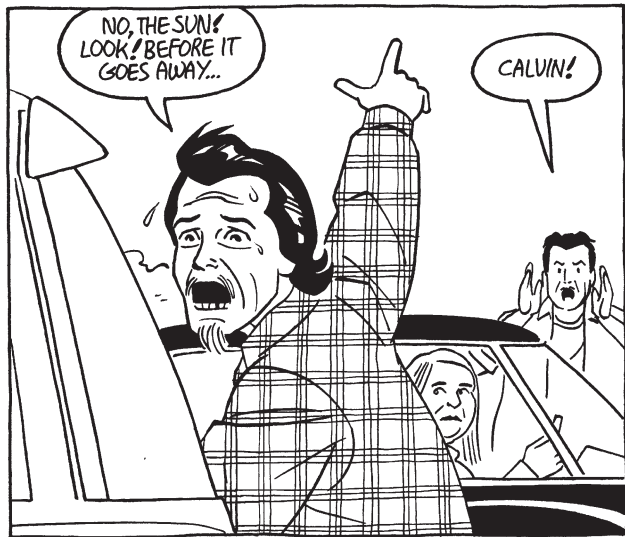


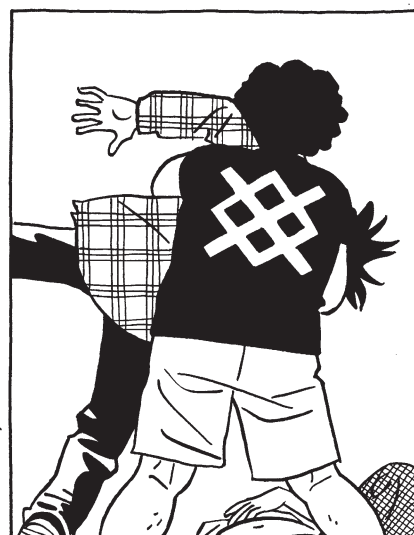


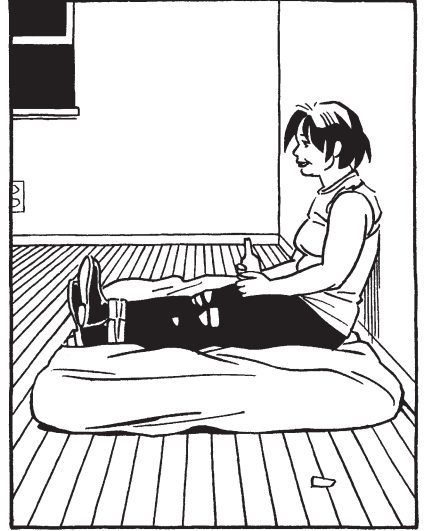
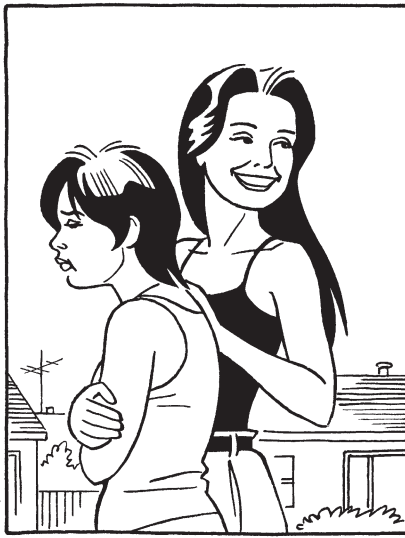
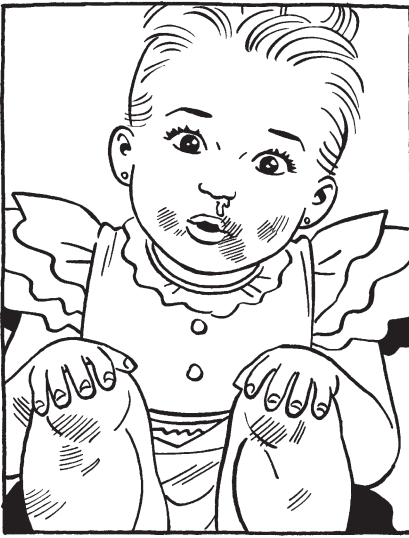


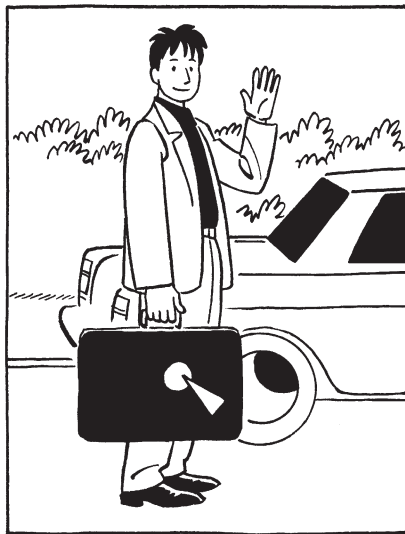
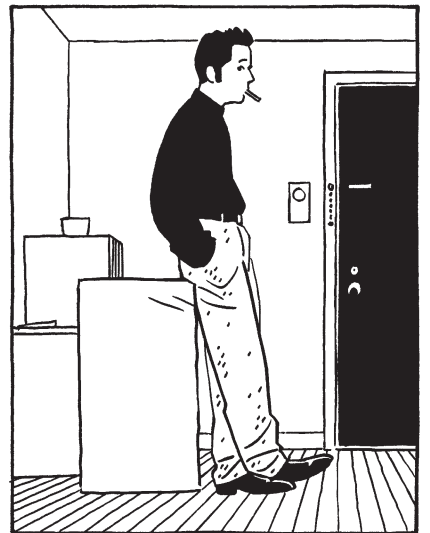
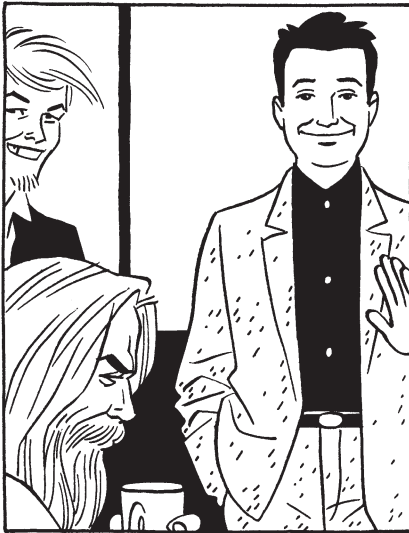
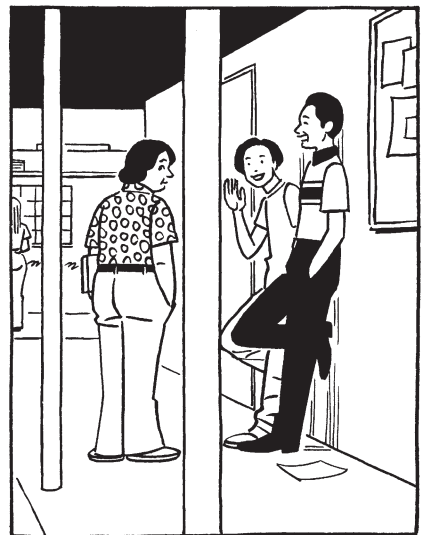


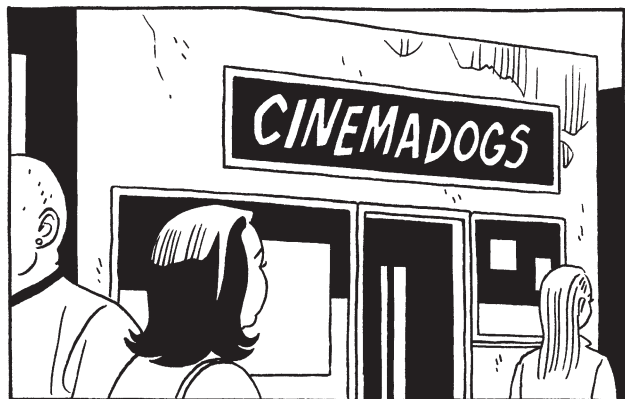
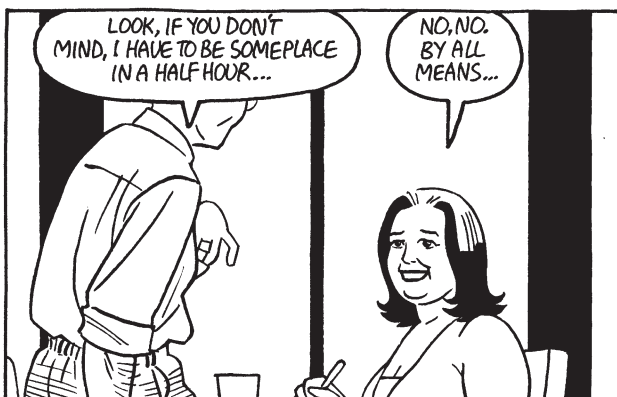
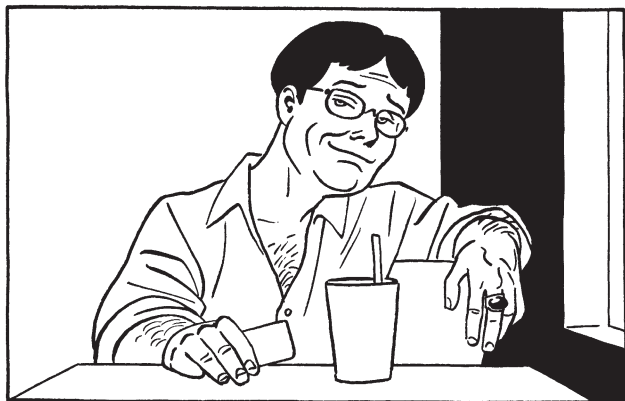


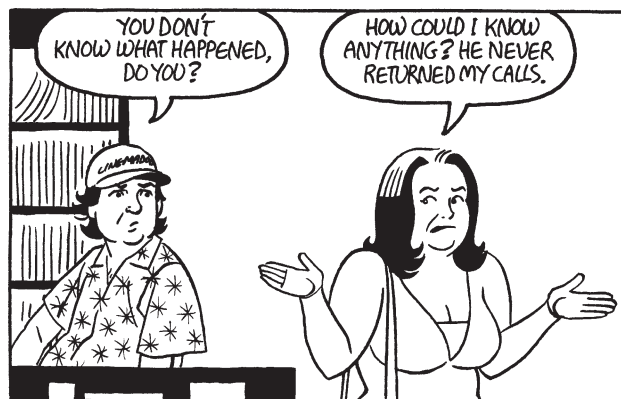


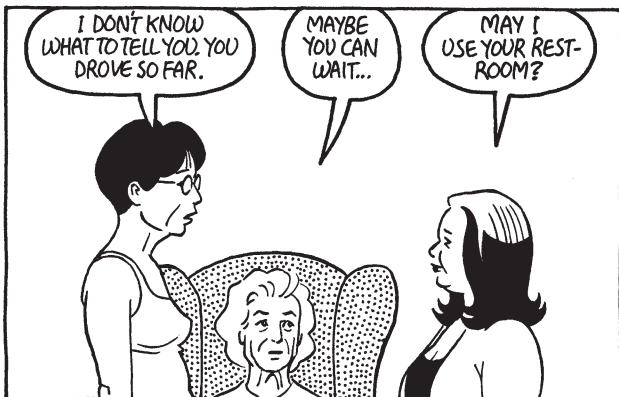
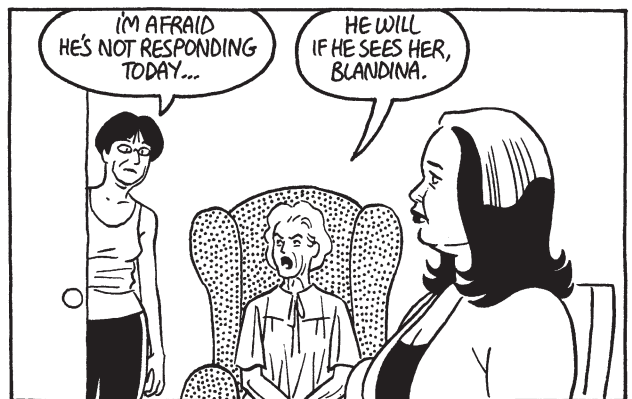
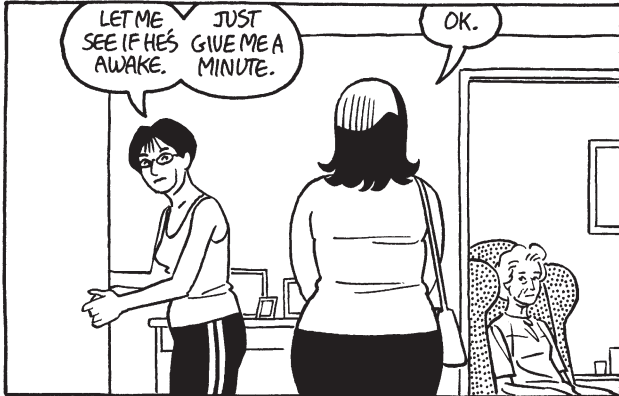
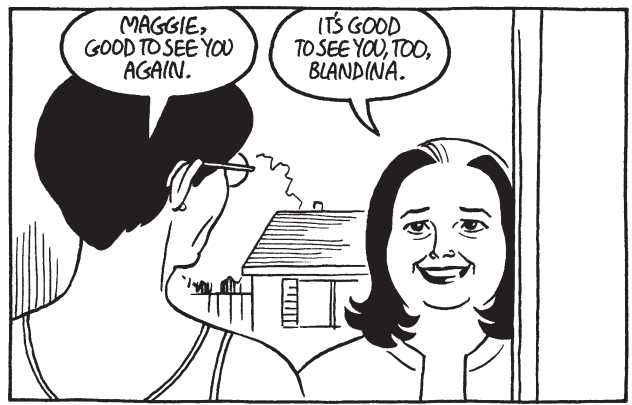
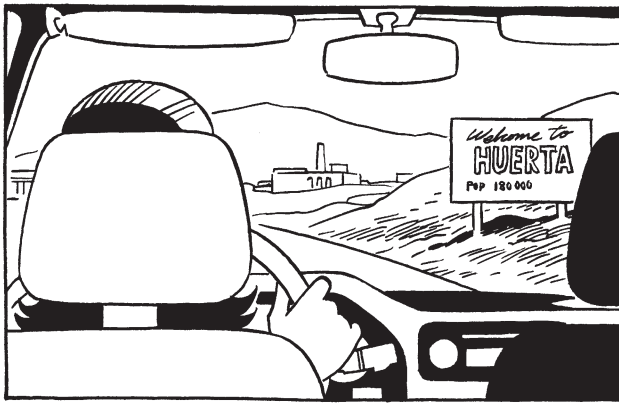


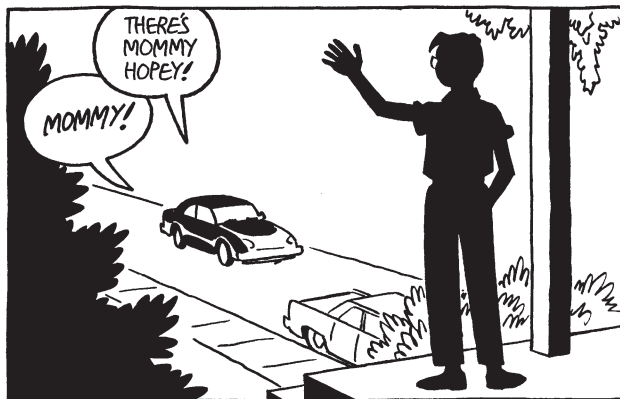
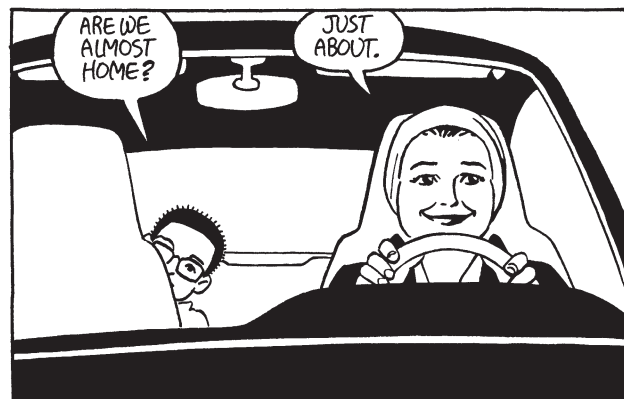
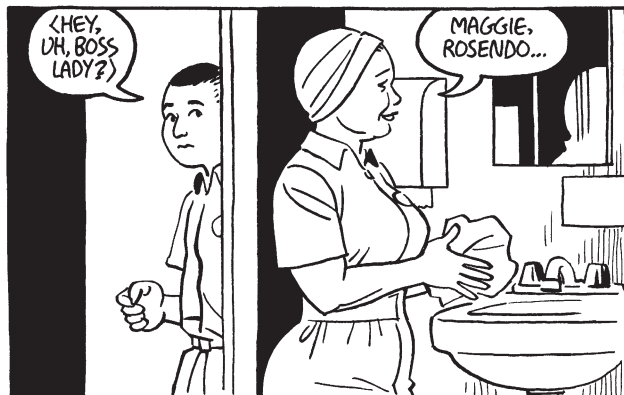




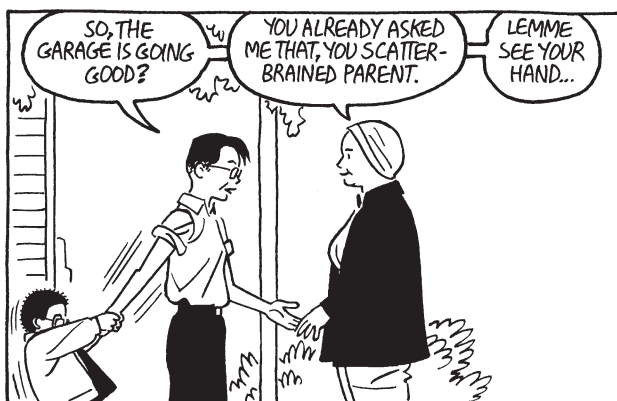
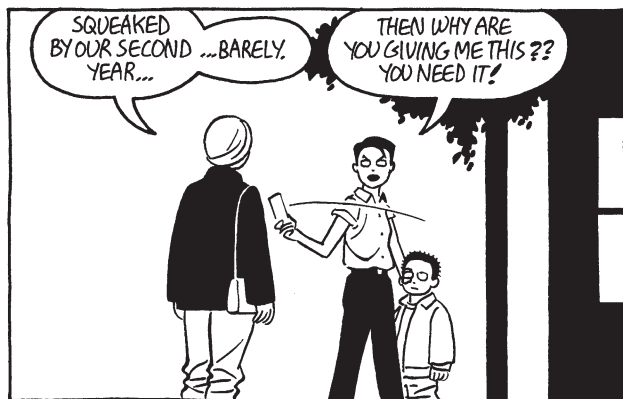
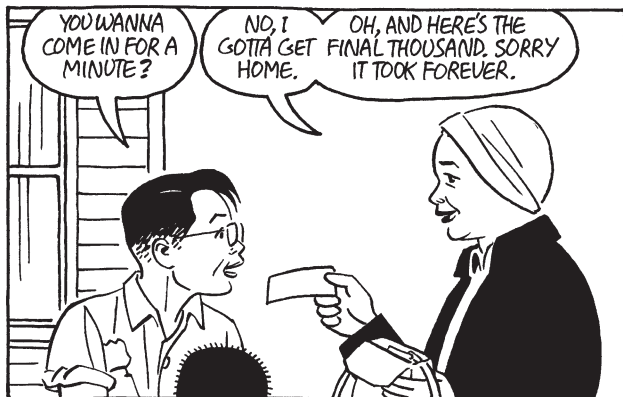
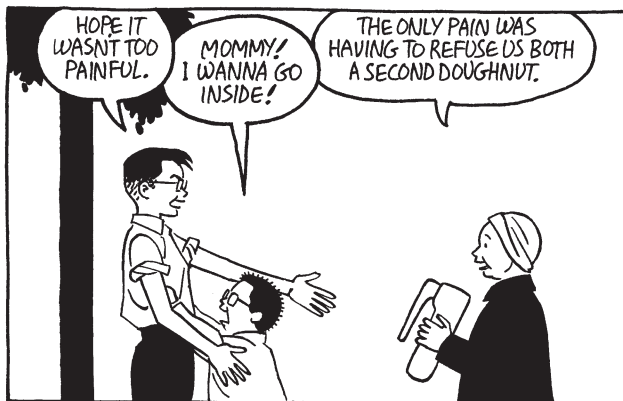


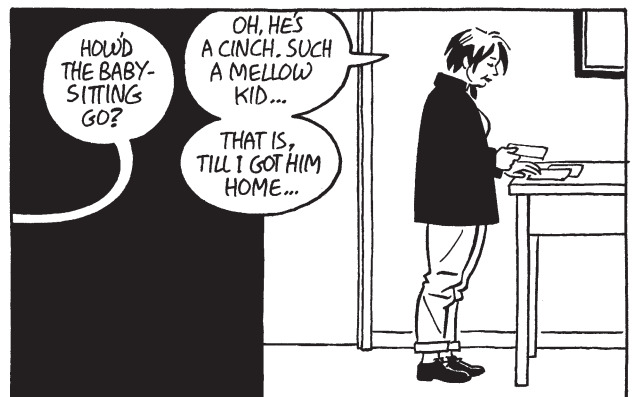
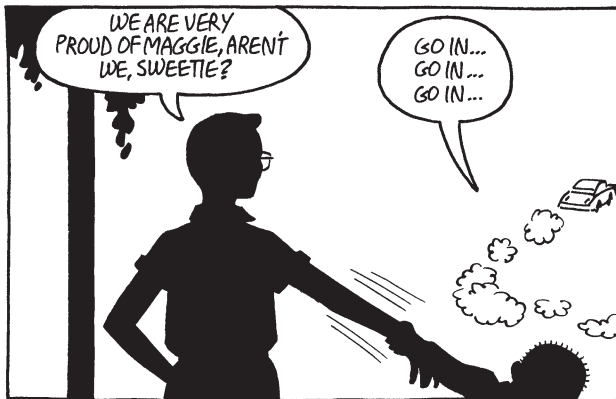
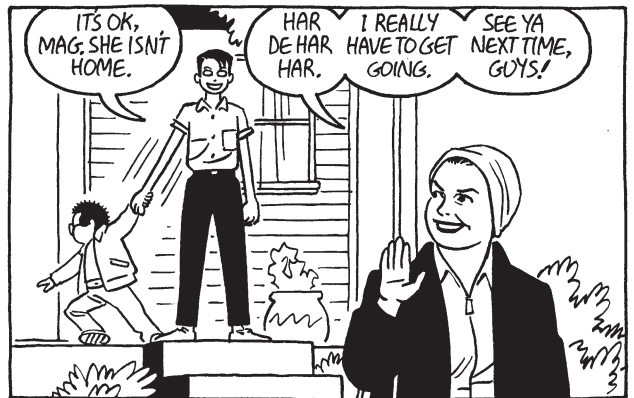
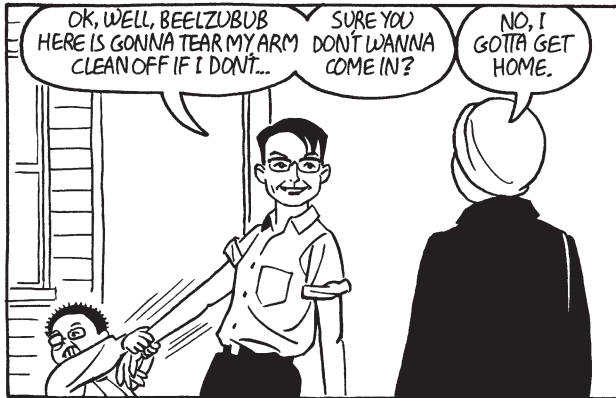
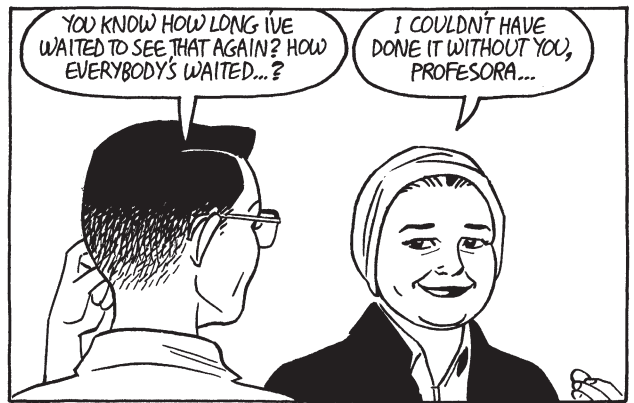
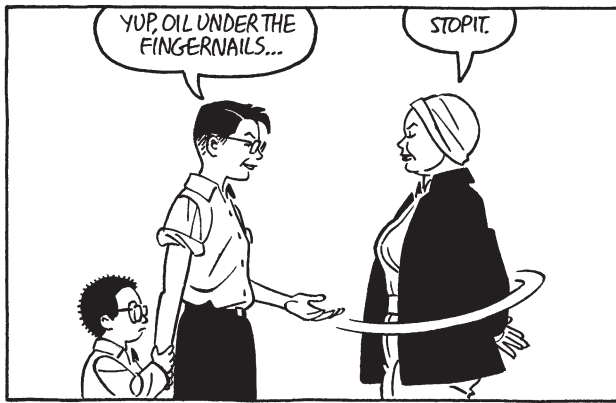


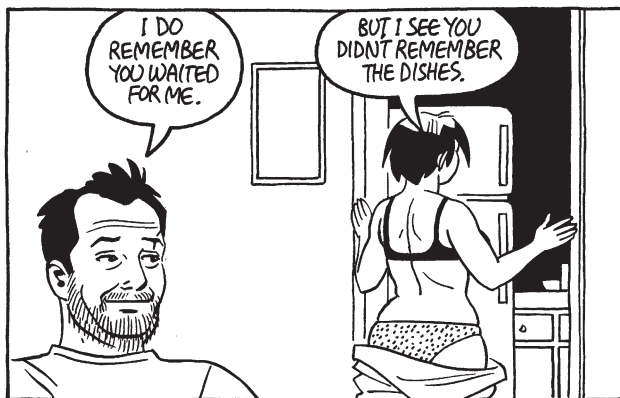
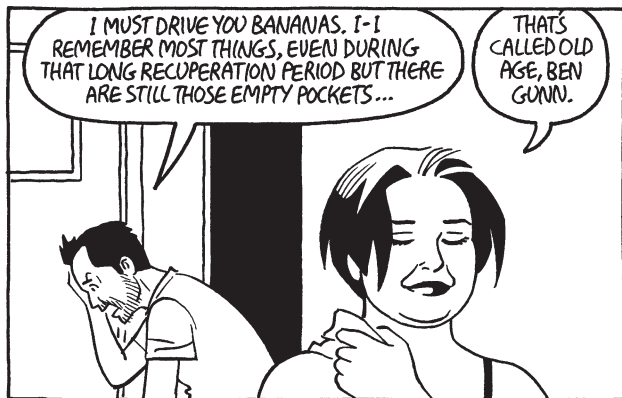
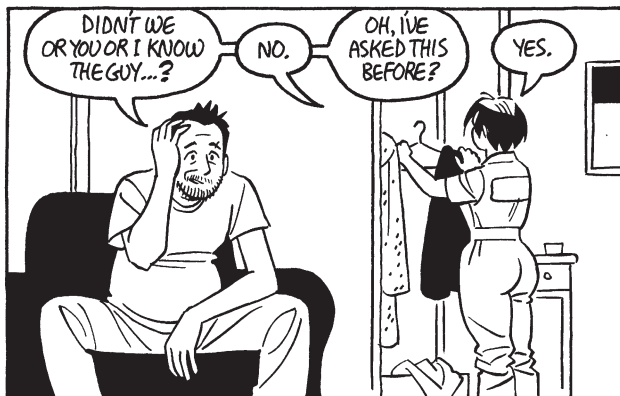
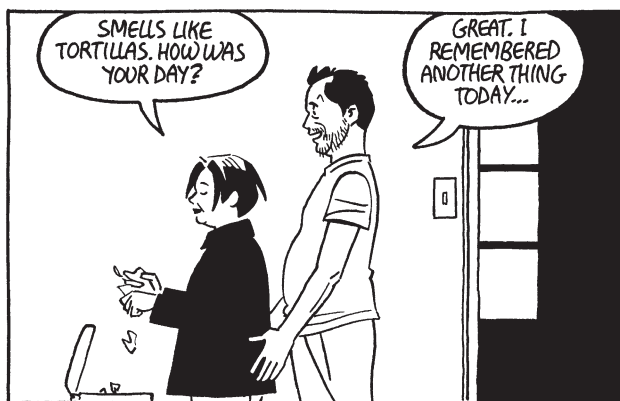




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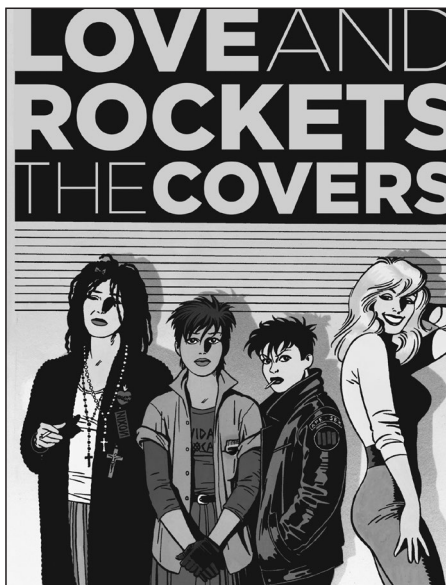






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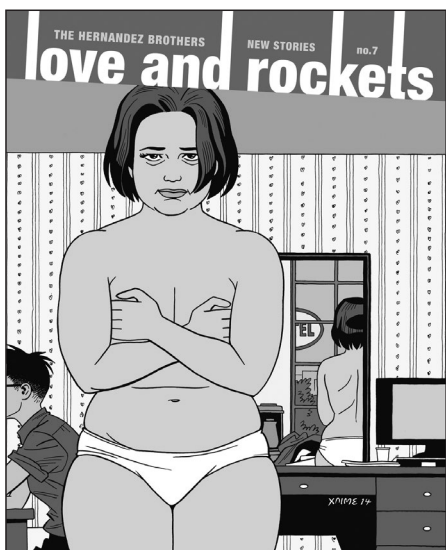
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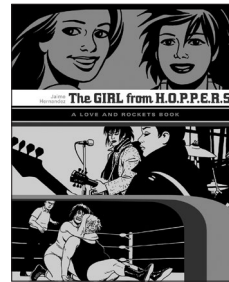
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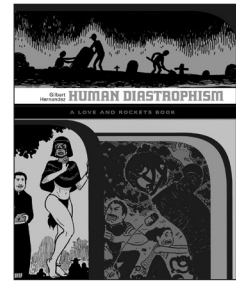
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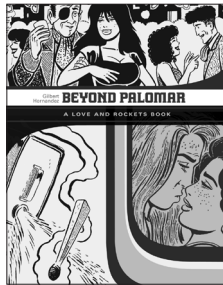
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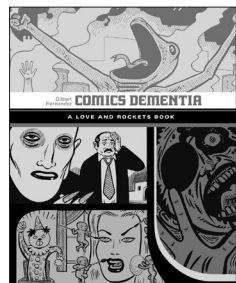
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JAIME HERNANDEZ



Born in 1959, Jaime Hernandez enjoyed a pleasant childhood in Oxnard, California, with four brothers and one sister. Their mother had been an avid comic book fan as a girl, and she passed onto them a love of Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko's Marvel comics, Hank Ketcham's (and Al Wiseman's) *Dennis the Menace*, and the Archie comics line. A further strain of DNA was added when an older brother smuggled R. Crumb's *Zap* into the house.

As puberty and other interests invaded, Jaime's enthusiasm for mainstream comics waned. The Los Angeles punk rock scene began to thrive, and this anarchistic and gritty aesthetic invaded Jaime's approach to writing and drawing. Mostly self-taught (although he cites the significant impact a figure-drawing instructor had on his skills), Jaime assimilated these influences, and in his hands the much-hyped and often misunderstood punk netherworld became a very real, habitable place populated with human beings rather than stereotypes.

Such were the humble beginnings of *Love & Rockets*, the internationally acclaimed series Jaime created with his brothers, Gilbert and Mario, in 1981. Over thirty-five years later, *Love & Rockets* has been translated into many languages, won numerous awards for excellence, and is one of the defining post-underground comic book titles of the last quarter century.

Jaime Hernandez resides in Los Angeles, California, with his wife and daughter.

The sublime, the superpowered, and the senior citizen converge in this collection. In *The Love Bunglers*—which may be Hernandez’s greatest masterpiece in his thirty-five-year career—the past and present collide as Maggie and Ray’s middle-aged reunion is threatened by long-buried family secrets. Out of the past comes “Gold Diggers of 1969,” featuring a charming, *Peanuts*-inspired Li’l Maggie. In Hernandez’s 2006 *New York Times* Funny Pages serial, Maggie pays a visit to Queen Rena, who is living out her twilight days on an island after a lifetime as a wrestler and an adventuress. In the lighter Ti-Girls segment, superheroics get a screwball spin when Angel of Tarzana and her sidekick, Maggie, square off against Dark Penny Century.

