

# Counting The Stars

A spanko goes to art school

By  
Rude Rumps



Ages  
18+



# MY ADVENTURES IN SPANKOLAND

It feels stange writing the intro to my second graphic novel, since I never thought I'd finish the first one! Writing doesn't come naturally to me: words don't flow easily and I tend to get tangled up in them. I think much better in pictures. My memories are like fragmented snapshots: lips compressed in annoyance; bright, blue eyes, wide open, gazing lovingly; a naughty smile; an open palm crashing down to strike a bottom. You get the idea.

So, how did I manage to not just finish a story, but...gulp...two novels? Well, working in the comics medium, which I've only done for the last five years, has been a big part of it for sure—finally, a way to create narratives without needing endless words! But, I don't think that's the only thing. Ever since I turned fifty, I've had this urge to tell my side of story, so to speak. I guess that's natural when you get older.

When I finished my first graphic novel, "Growing Up Spanko" (GUS), after something like two and a half years of working on it almost every night, I was so exhausted I couldn't imagine starting all over again. So, to kind of trick myself into doing a sequel, I decided I'd do a series of "short story" comics instead of another big graphic novel. The idea was that each story would stand on its own, and would kind of express one theme or idea, rather than trying for a continuous narrative. It didn't quite work out like that—two of the stories here are longer than any of the chapters in GUS, and if anything, this comic is more detailed and intense—but hey, it helped me finish the novel!

Like GUS, "Counting The Stars" (CTS) is autobiographical, and about trying to navigate the world as a young person with a spanking fetish. GUS covered from my pre-school years right up to when I left my hometown to go to college. CTS picks up from there, and delves into my experiences during my first two years of art school. In GUS, I touched on how spanking became eroticy charged for me as I entered

adolescence. Well, by college, spanking became my full-blown sexual identity, even if I didn't completely understand that it was back then. This all took place in the 1980's, before the internet. I had almost no idea other spankos even existed. There was certainly no playbook for us. So, we had to invent it. We definitely didn't always get it right, but it made for some interesting stories, like the ones I tell here.

Also like GUS, CTS isn't only about spanking (don't worry, though, there's still plenty of bottom smacking in here!)—it's also about growing up. Second to childhood, many of my most vivid memories are from my college years. Everything seemed possible. There were so many firsts and such intensity to each day: living away from home, being in a serious romantic relationship, starting to learn a profession, experiencing art that transformed me, and discovering myself. So, all that's woven in here.

But, just like I said about GUS, although CTS is autobiographical, that doesn't mean everything here is literally true. I've changed the names and details about people to protect their identities. Some characters are composites of people. Events have been rearranged, cut out, or in some cases invented, to make the story flow better. The dialogue is almost all made-up. This stuff happened decades ago, and I didn't walk around with a tape recorder. So, except for a few phrases that stuck in my head forever, I had to come up with what people had said based on my best recollections. As Neil Gaiman's version of Robin Goodfellow says in the *Sandman*, "This is magnificent—and it is true! It never happened; yet it is still true. What magic art is this?"

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Although I think I always see things through the lens of a spanko, my other influences show in CTS, too. I've been a visual artist pretty much my whole life, and you'll see lots of references to different art pieces and styles here (like the cover!) You'll also see references to poetry and literature that I discovered in college and that permanently changed how I see the world.

What maybe stands out the most in CTS, though, are my musical influences. For as long as I can remember, visual art and music have kind of been smushed together in my brain. So, I tried to use the comics medium to express aspects of music visually: different voices by using combinations of narrative boxes and inlaid panels, harmony with colors, tempo with the flow across panels, and volume with fonts and the sizes of floating music notes. Spankings are also part of the music in many stories, as you'll see! I'm not sure I was always successful showing all that, but I had fun trying.

Anyway, here's a little about each of the four stories in CTS (don't worry, no spoilers):

"Hans"—how I met my spanko boyfriend and our first time playing together. It's the second shortest piece in CTS, mostly taking place over one night, the most erotic, and probably my overall favorite.

"Little Martha"—my first encounter with a Little, my housemate Martha. This is the shortest piece, really more of a vignette, although it gets into some interesting and complicated aspects of Littles. Martha and her roommate also appear in the next two longer stories.

"Counting The Stars"—more about my relationship with Hans and how things eventually fell apart. This is the longest piece, the most serious, and of course the title for the whole graphic novel. It delves into situations and feelings that are in some ways unique to spankos, but also have aspects that I think are universal to romantic relationships. Several pages in this story are my favorites in the entire novel, because I think they convey the really complicated emotions I was feeling at the time.

"Crystal Thought Time"—getting spanked while on hallucinogenic drugs, a road trip to Mexico, self-discovery, and transcendence, are some of the themes in this one. This is the second longest piece, and the hardest to describe. It has both light-hearted aspects and heavy ones, and goes places I don't think you'll expect. I experimented the most with this one, which led to some of the most visually intense pages in CTS.

I'll close with a few words about how I created the art, which I know isn't traditional for comics. I did pretty much everything using Daz3D, Photoshop, and Illustrator. My process was to first do rough panel layouts, and place narrative boxes and word balloons in Illustrator. I then created a 3D scene for each panel and rendered it in Daz. Next, I did digital painting in Photoshop to create a more graphic/painterly look, and applied filters to get the colors and textures the way I wanted them. Finally, I cropped the images into the panels and did the lettering in Illustrator. I have to say, lettering in comics is underrated. For me, creating sound effects, laying out type, etc., is what made everything come together.

So, that was my process. Except, for in "Crystal Thought Time" (pages 31-34), I experimented with an AI image generator. I collaged parts of the pictures it made together, digitally painted on top of them, etc., to make the images that went into the panels. Knowing what I do now about AI, how it steals artists' work, I don't think I'll use it again. But, this was when it first came out, and I think it works for this sequence in the story, which is about hallucinating (maybe the only thing AI is good for?)

Well, I hope you enjoy CTS! I started it in December 2021, and here I am writing this in August 2024. It was truly a labor of love!

Yours,

*Rude Rumps*



# HANS

Art & Story by RUDE RUMPS

IT HAPPENED IN *DECEMBER* 1986, NEAR THE *END* OF MY FIRST *SEMESTER* AT NESFFA\*.

I WAS WORKING THE *NIGHT* SHIFT AT *GINA'S FAMOUS PIZZERIA*, AS USUAL.

I WASN'T A VERY GOOD *WAITRESS*.

I WAS ALWAYS *DISTRACTED*.

\*NEW ENGLAND SCHOOL FOR FAMOUS ARTISTS.

A *SONG* WOULD GET *STUCK* IN MY HEAD...

...OR I'D THINK ABOUT A *PAINTING* I WAS *WORKING* ON...

...OR I'D *IMAGINE* MYSELF *OVER* SOME GUY'S *KNEE*.

SO, I *OFTEN* GOT *ORDERS* *WRONG*.

**WTF?!?** THIS ISN'T WHAT WE *ORDERED!*

MY *FRIEND* SAID *NO PEPPERONI!*

THIS IS THE *SECOND* TIME YOU *BROUGHT* A *PEPPERONI* PIZZA!

THAT *NIGHT*, I WAS REALLY *BAD*. I KEPT BRINGING THE *WRONG* ORDER TO THIS *TABLE* WITH *THREE* GUYS.

THEY *DEFINITELY* *WEREN'T* *ART* SCHOOL *TYPES*.

CAN YOU *NOT* *SEE*, WE ARE VERY *HUNGRY*, JA?

BUT, I CANNOT *EAT* THIS.

PEPPERONI IS *DETESTABLE*.

I GUESSED THEY WERE *FRAT* BOYS FROM THE *IVY* LEAGUE COLLEGE ON THE *OTHER* SIDE OF *TOWN*.

ONE HAD A *GERMAN* *ACCENT*, THOUGH, WHICH WAS *KIND* OF *INTERESTING*.

I *TELL* YOU WHAT--BRING THE *WRONG* PIZZA *AGAIN*, *MÄUSCHEN*, AND I'LL *TURN* YOU *OVER* MY *KNEE!*



I WAS CAUGHT **TOTALLY OFF-GUARD**.

IT'S WHAT WE **SPANKOS** CALL A **STARTLE**.

I THINK I **BLUSHED** FROM **HEAD-TO-TOE**.

I'D **FANTASIZED** ABOUT **ENCOUNTERS** LIKE THIS FOR **YEARS**. BUT, WHEN IT REALLY **HAPPENED**...

...I **DIDN'T KNOW** HOW TO **REACT**.



WAS HE JUST A **WEIRD CREEP**?

SHOULD I **DUMP** A GLASS OF **WATER** ON HIS **HEAD**...

...AND TELL THE **MANAGER** TO **TOSS** HIM AND HIS **FRATBOY** FRIENDS OUT?

OR, WAS HE **ONE** OF **US**?

Hmmm...**MAYBE** I'LL HAVE TO BRING YOU **MORE PEPPERONI** PIZZAS, THEN.

YES, **SOMETHING** IN HIS **FACE** TOLD ME HE WAS **INDEED**... **ONE** OF **US**.



IT WAS NEAR **CLOSING** TIME, AND I KNEW THE **KITCHEN**'D BE REALLY **PISSED** IF THEY HAD TO MAKE **MORE** FOOD. SO, I BROUGHT THE **RIGHT ORDER**, EVEN THOUGH I WAS **TEMPTED** NOT TO.

THE **GERMAN GUY** LOOKED VERY **DISAPPOINTED**.

THEN, I HAD TO **HELP** CLEAN UP IN THE **KITCHEN**. WHEN I **RETURNED**, HE AND HIS FRIENDS WERE ALREADY **GONE**.

HE'D LEFT ME **TWO** THINGS: A **BIG TIP**, AND A **NOTE** ON HIS **NAPKIN**.



I SPENT A WEEK **AGONIZING** OVER WHETHER TO **CALL** HIM.

ON THE ONE HAND, I **WASN'T** REALLY **PHYSICALLY** ATTRACTED TO HIM. AND, EVEN IF I WERE, HE **DIDN'T SEEM** LIKE MY **TYPE**.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I HAD A **STRONG HUNCH** WE HAD **SOMETHING BIG** IN COMMON.

AND, WELL, THE **GERMAN** ACCENT WAS **KIND** OF **SEXY**.





FINALLY, I DECIDED TO CALL HIM. IT WAS A FRIDAY NIGHT.

WE DIDN'T GET TO TALK LONG, BECAUSE HE WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE ON A SKI TRIP.

I AVOIDED BRINGING "IT" UP RIGHT AWAY. SO, AT FIRST WE JUST CHATTED ABOUT THE USUAL THINGS.

HI, IS THIS HANS? IT'S RUDE, THE WAITRESS FROM GINO'S PIZZERIA.

Ah, JA, WUNDERBAR! I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU TO CALL!

HE CAME FROM VIENNA AND WAS AN ECON MAJOR.

HE WAS ALSO A COMPETITIVE SKIER.

AND, AS I SUSPECTED, HE WAS IN A FRATERNITY.

SO, um, I'VE GOTTA QUESTION...

FINALLY, I BROUGHT "IT" UP.

...WOULD YOU REALLY DO WHAT YOU SAID TO ME, OR WAS THAT JUST A JOKE?

I DID NOT JOKE. IT WOULD BE THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE, TO DO THAT TO YOU.

YES, HE WAS ONE OF US.

I HAD LOTS MORE QUESTIONS, BUT MY ROOMMATE WALKED IN JUST THEN, AND HANS HAD TO GET READY FOR HIS TRIP.

WE AGREED TO MEET IN A WEEK, WHEN HE'D BE BACK.

FOR THE NEXT SEVEN DAYS, I COULDN'T THINK ABOUT MUCH ELSE.

THE DAY WE'D PLANNED TO MEET, I HAD MY LAST FINAL, IN MY ROMANTIC POETRY CLASS.

IT LASTED UNTIL THREE FIFTEEN.

I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO OVER TO HANS' HOUSE RIGHT AFTER, AT FOUR.

I REALLY WASN'T GOING TO HAVE MUCH TIME TO GO BACK TO MY DORM TO CHANGE.

BESIDES, I PLANNED TO STOP OFF AT GINO'S TO GET A SURPRISE FOR HANS.

SO, I GOT DRESSED UP BEFORE MY FINAL.

I FELT QUITE SILLY, AND RATHER CHILLY, SITTING THERE IN MY LITTLE BLACK DRESS, WRITING A MESS ABOUT BYRON AND SHELLEY.

"OF THAT COLOSSAL WRECK, BOUNDLESS AND BARE...BOTTOM?"

NO, THAT'S NOT IT. SOMETHING ABOUT "STRETCHED...OVER HIS KNEE?"



4:08 PM...

W-WOW! I HAD NO IDEA FRAT HOUSES COULD LOOK SO NICE!

JA, IT'S A HISTORIC LANDMARK.

MOST OF THE BROTHERS HERE LIVE LIKE SWINE.

BUT, I KEEP MY ROOM NEAT, JA?

HERE, I BROUGHT YOU SOMETHING TO EAT.

AND, YOU ARE EIGHT MINUTES LATE, TOO.

KOMM, KOMM, YOU SHALL GET WHAT YOU DESERVE NOW.

HE HAD CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYING. IT WAS TURNED UP VERY LOUD.

Ah, MÄUSCHEN, YOU ARE TRULY A BAD ONE.

I DON'T THINK THAT WAS A COINCIDENCE.

AT THAT POINT, THE RECORD WAS PLAYING RAVEL'S BOLÉRO.

HE PUT ME OVER HIS KNEE, AND STARTED RIGHT IN.

THE SMACKS WERE PRETTY HARD, BUT NOT EXTREME.

AND, HE STOPPED TO RUB MY BOTTOM EVERY SO OFTEN.

HE WAS INDEED A VERY GOOD SPANKER.



YES, IT WAS A **VERY** GOOD SPANKING, EXCEPT FOR ONE **PROBLEM**.

I'D **RUSHED** OVER WITHOUT USING THE **BATHROOM**...

...AND, HIS KNEE WAS **PUSHING** RIGHT AGAINST MY **BLADDER**.

Um, **TIME-OUT**. I GOTTA USE THE **RESTROOM** REAL QUICK.



**SICHER**, IT'S RIGHT DOWN THE **HALL**.

REMEMBER TO **WASH** YOUR **HANDS** VERY WELL.

AT LEAST **THIRTY SECONDS** UNDER THE **TAP**. **COUNT SLOWLY**.

A FEW **MINUTES** LATER...

GUESS WHAT?

I **DIDN'T** WASH MY **HANDS**.

AT ALL.

THE RECORD WAS PLAYING **ROSSINI'S THIEVING MAGPIE**.

IT WAS **JUST** A **GENTLE** SMACK ACROSS MY **FACE**.

**SMACK!**



THE **SMACKS** ACROSS MY **BOTTOM**, THOUGH, **WEREN'T** GENTLE AT ALL.



IT WAS A **QUICK** SPANKING, BUT HE **ABSOLUTELY** **PADDLED** THE **DAYLIGHTS** OUT OF ME.

NOW, GO WASH YOUR **HANDS** **PROPERLY**.

AND, WHEN YOU RETURN, **EVERYTHING** **OFF**--NOT A **STITCH** OF **CLOTHING** ON YOU, **MÄUSCHEN**.







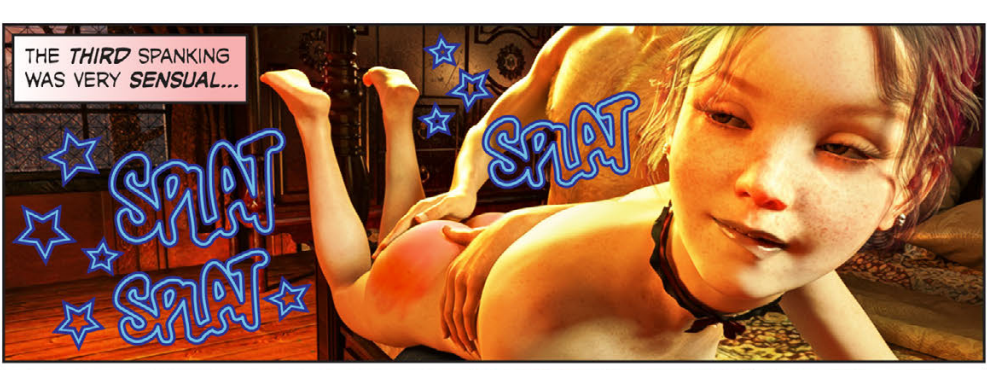
I HAVE A REQUEST... ...WILL YOU TAKE YOUR SHIRT OFF WHEN YOU SPANK ME AGAIN?

I WAS GOOD, AND DID WHAT HANS ASKED.

WELL, ALMOST.

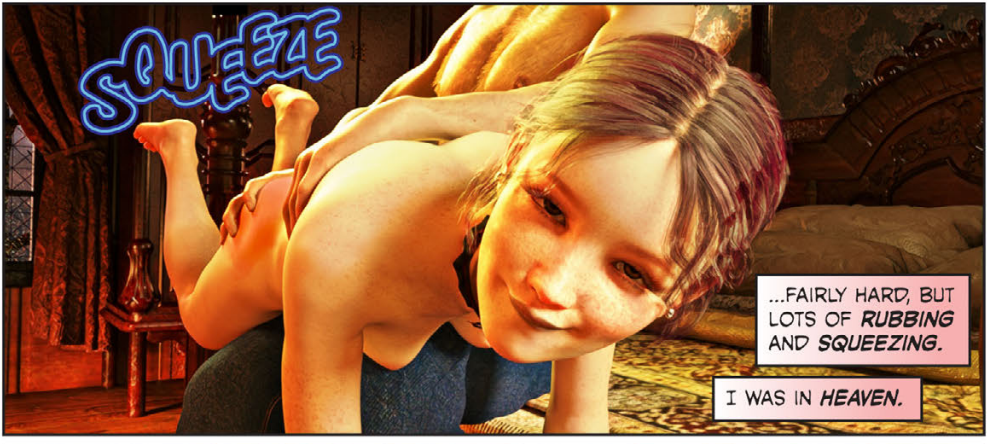
I'D LEFT MY LITTLE COLLAR ON.

NOW, RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S SCHEHERAZADE WAS PLAYING.



THE *THIRD* SPANKING WAS VERY *SENSUAL*...

SPAT SPAT SPAT



SQUEEZE

...FAIRLY HARD, BUT LOTS OF RUBBING AND SQUEEZING.

I WAS IN HEAVEN.



SPAT

I WAS POSITIONED RIGHT OVER HIS CROTCH, AND I COULD FEEL THAT HE WAS VERY AROUSED, TOO.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG HE COULD HANG ON.

BUT, HE DREW THAT SPANKING OUT A LONG, LONG TIME.

HE KEPT ALTERNATING BETWEEN FIRM AND SOFT, FAST AND SLOW.

I THINK I HAD LIKE FIFTY ORGASMS.

THEY WERE THE QUICK, FLUTTERY KIND.



Ach, TIME FOR A LITTLE BREAK. MY HAND'S ALL WORN OUT!

Um, YOU COULD TRY DOING SOMETHING GENTLER WITH IT FOR A WHILE.



YOU MEAN THIS, JA?

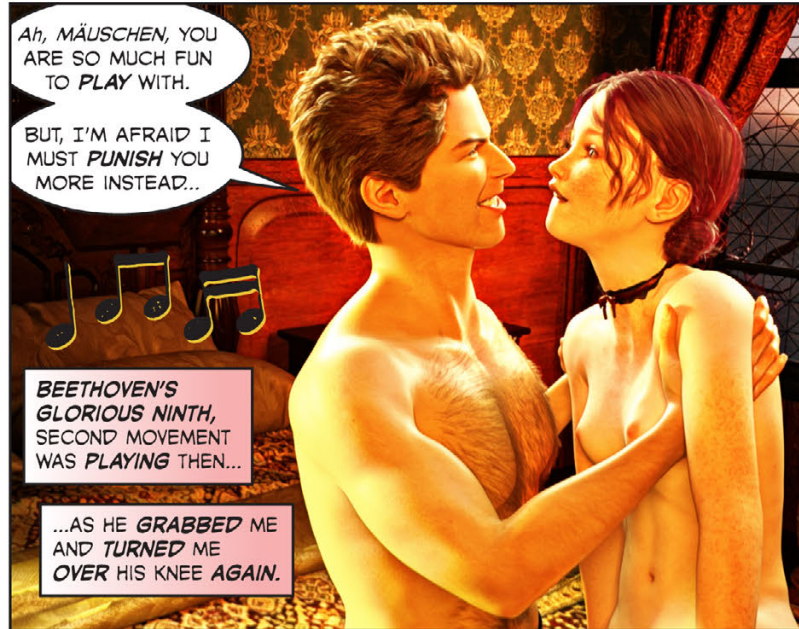
HOLDING HANDS?



NO, SILLY, THIS!

I PUT HIS HAND RIGHT WHERE I WANTED IT.





Ah, MÄUSCHEN, YOU ARE SO MUCH FUN TO PLAY WITH.

BUT, I'M AFRAID I MUST PUNISH YOU MORE INSTEAD...

BEETHOVEN'S GLORIOUS NINTH, SECOND MOVEMENT WAS PLAYING THEN...

...AS HE GRABBED ME AND TURNED ME OVER HIS KNEE AGAIN.



...BECAUSE YOU LEFT YOUR LITTLE COLLAR ON...

...AND, I TOLD YOU-- EVERY STITCH OF CLOTHING OFF!

THE FOURTH SPANKING WASN'T FUN.

IT FELT LIKE I WAS REALLY BEING PUNISHED.

HE USED A HEAVY WOODEN HAIRBRUSH WITH, BIG, STEEL BRISTLES ON THE OTHER SIDE.



HE KEPT IT UP FOR A GOOD FIVE MINUTES....

THWACK THWACK THWACK THWACK



...SMACK, AFTER BLISTERING SMACK...

THWACK THWACK THWACK THWACK



THWACK THWACK THWACK THWACK

...UNTIL MY BOTTOM WAS AN INFERNO OF PAIN.



FINALLY, HE PUT THE HAIRBRUSH DOWN...

...AND TOOK SOMETHING FROM HIS BEDSTAND.



...THEN, BEFORE I KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE SLID THE ICE CUBE INTO MY BOTTOM.

HANS WAS VERY WICKED INDEED.

THIS WILL REQUIRE MUCH SCRUBBING OF MY HAND, BUT THAT IS A NECESSARY SACRIFICE.



THE FEEL OF THE COLD, WET ICE ON MY BURNING BEHIND WAS A SHOCK...



WHEN HE RETURNED FROM WASHING HIS HANDS, I WAS READY.

MEIN GOTT, I DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD TAKE ANY MORE.

I'D FOUND A BELT IN HIS WARDROBE AND LAID IT OUT CAREFULLY FOR HIM.

BUT, IT SEEMS YOU NEED IT. SO, YOU SHALL HAVE IT.

Oh, AND I TOOK MY COLLAR OFF.

ONE.

TWO.

THREE.

FOUR.

FIVE.

SIX.

YOU'LL RECEIVE FIFTY LASHES, MÄUSCHEN, AND YOU MUST COUNT EACH ONE.

CRACK

CRACK

This Ae Nighte,

This Ae Nighte,

Evry Nighte An Alle,

...FORTY-SEVEN, FORTY-EIGHT, FORTY-NINE...

CRACK

CRACK

CRACK

Fire An Fleet...

...FIFTY.

CRACK

...An Cannle Leet,

An Christ...

...Receive Thy Saul.





WE MADE **LOVE** AGAIN.

AND, **AGAIN**.

AFTER THAT, WE DRANK TWO BOTTLES OF **WINE**, AND ATE SOME SWISS **CHOCOLATES** THAT HIS PARENTS HAD **SENT** HIM.

THEN, HANS **PASSED OUT**. I DISCOVERED HE **SNORED**.

**SEX** ALWAYS LEAVES ME **RAVENOUS**.

I'M NATURALLY **NOCTURAL**, AND WAS TOO **OVERWHELMED** TO **SLEEP**, ANYWAY.

SO, I STAYED UP ALL **NIGHT**, READING HANS' **BOOKS** AND **DEVOURING** THE COLD, LIFELESS **PIZZA**.

HANS HAD **REFUSED** TO TOUCH IT. HE WASN'T **EXAGGERATING** ABOUT DETESTING **PEPPERONI**.

HANS **AWOKE** WITH THE **DAWN**, AND ME **CRYING**.

W-WHY DO YOU **WEEP**, MÄUSCHEN?

I-I THOUGHT YOU **WANTED** ME TO **HURT** YOU THAT WAY LAST NIGHT...?

I-I DID. IT WAS **BEAUTIFUL**.

I-IT'S LIKE YOU'RE MY **PRINCE CHARMING**.

I-I'M JUST **AFRAID** I'LL **WAKE UP** AND THE **FAIRY TALE** WILL BE **OVER**.

THE **FAIRY TALE** **LASTED**, MORE OR LESS, FOR **ELEVEN MONTHS** AND **SEVEN DAYS**.

BUT, THAT'S A **STORY** FOR **ANOTHER TIME**.

THE **MAGIC** WAS STILL **EVERYWHERE** ON OUR **SECOND DAY** TOGETHER.

WE ATE **GRANOLA** WITH **YOGURT** FOR **BREAKFAST**...

...HE GAVE MY **WET BOTTOM** A GOOD **SPANKING** IN THE **SHOWER**...

...HE TRIED OUT A **RULER** AND A WOODEN **SPATULA** ON IT, TOO...

...WE HAD **SEX** IN ABOUT **TEN POSITIONS**...

...THEN, HE **SPANKED** ME SOME **MORE**.

IT WAS ONLY WHEN IT STARTED GETTING **DARK** THAT I SUDDENLY **REMEMBERED** MY **DAD** WAS SUPPOSED TO **DRIVE UP** THAT AFTERNOON TO HELP ME **MOVE** MY STUFF **OUT** OF THE **DORM** FOR THE **WINTER BREAK**.

THERE WERE **NO CELLPHONES** BACK THEN. SO, I **RUSHED** BACK TO MY **DORM** IN THE **POURING RAIN**, WEARING **HANS' TRENCHCOAT** OVER MY LITTLE **BLACK DRESS**.

IT **TURNS OUT**, MY **DAD** HAD BEEN **WAITING** IN HIS **CAR** FOR **HOURS**.

I **TOLD** HIM I'D BEEN AT THE **LIBRARY** AND **LOST TRACK** OF **TIME**.

I **DON'T THINK** HE **BELIEVED** ME.

THE END



# LITTLE MARTHA

Art & Story by RUDE RUMPS

HANS AND I SAW EACH OTHER ALMOST EVERY DAY OF THE SPRING SEMESTER.

IT WAS A VERITABLE FEAST OF SPANKING AND SEX.

THEN, HE WENT HOME TO EUROPE FOR THE SUMMER, AND I SPENT A MISERABLE THREE MONTHS STEWING IN MIDDLEBRIDGE.

WHEN I CAME BACK TO SCHOOL IN THE FALL FOR MY SOPHMORE YEAR, I HAD TO FIND A CHEAPER PLACE TO LIVE THAN THE DORMS, BECAUSE MY PARENTS COULDN'T AFFORD TO SEND ME AS MUCH MONEY.

THERE WAS BARELY TIME TO LOOK AROUND BEFORE CLASSES STARTED, SO I TOOK THE FIRST PLACE I FOUND.

IT WAS A ROOM IN THIS BIG THREE-STORY HOUSE THAT DIDN'T COST MUCH, BECAUSE IT WAS PRETTY FAR FROM CAMPUS.

THE OWNER WAS THIS THIRTY-SOMETHING GUY NAMED TOM, WHO'D INHERITED THE PLACE FROM HIS PARENTS.

LONG AGO, IT'D BEEN A GRAND HOUSE. THE OUTSIDE WAS STILL QUITE LOVELY.

THE INSIDE WAS ANOTHER MATTER. TOM WAS RENTING OUT EVERY SQUARE INCH OF THE PLACE.

MOST OF THE "LARGER" ROOMS WERE SHARED BY THREE TO FOUR STUDENTS. THE SMALLER ONES, LIKE MINE, WERE CONVERTED CLOSETS.

ONE GIRL, WHO WAS A BASKETBALL PLAYER, SLEPT WITH HER FEET STICKING OUT OF HER OPEN DOOR, BECAUSE OTHERWISE SHE COULDN'T STRAIGHTEN HER LEGS OUT.

WHEN I MOVED IN, THE ROOM NEXT TO MINE WAS ALREADY OCCUPIED.

HEY! ANYBODY HOME? I'M YOUR NEW NEIGHBOR!

**KNOCK!  
KNOCK!**

HI, I'M RUDE!

WOW! FRIDA! I LOVE HER WORK!

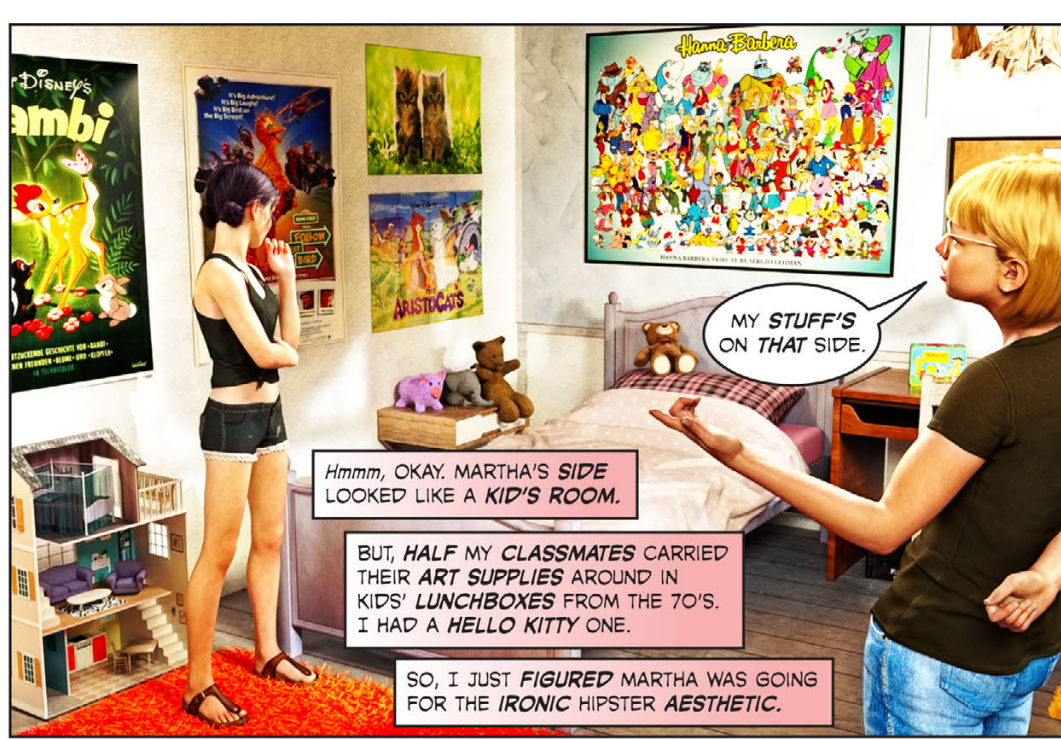
DO YOU PAINT?

Um, HIYA. I'M MARTHA. I DO TEXTILES...

...NOT FINE ART.

AND, THE FRIDA PRINTS ARE MY ROOMMATE'S.





MY STUFF'S ON THAT SIDE.

Hmmm, OKAY. MARTHA'S SIDE LOOKED LIKE A KID'S ROOM.

BUT, HALF MY CLASSMATES CARRIED THEIR ART SUPPLIES AROUND IN KIDS' LUNCHBOXES FROM THE 70'S. I HAD A HELLO KITTY ONE.

SO, I JUST FIGURED MARTHA WAS GOING FOR THE IRONIC HIPSTER AESTHETIC.



Oh, SO COOL! TOTAL KITSCH!

SAY, I JUST BOUGHT A BAG O' POT. WANNA SMOKE A JOINT?

I WAS SO ANXIOUS OVER MOVING, BEING AWAY FROM HANS, AND THE NEW SEMESTER...

...THAT I NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING TO RELAX.



Uh, NO THANKS. I DON'T DO DRUGS.



WHATCHA DO WHEN YOU'RE STRESSED THEN?

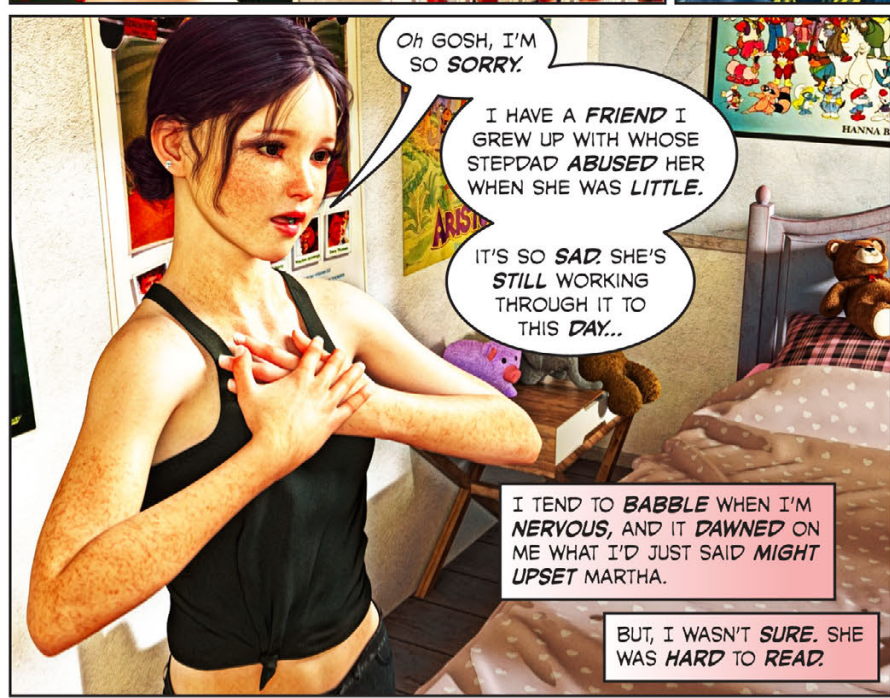
I'M SO WOUND UP RIGHT NOW, I COULD EXPLODE!



WELL, THERE IS SOMETHING I'VE BEEN DOING FOR YEARS.

IT TOTALLY TAKES CARE OF STRESS.

'CEPT MY THERAPIST SAYS I SHOULD BE CAREFUL ABOUT IT, 'CAUSE I HAD SOME CHILDHOOD TRAUMAS.



Oh GOSH, I'M SO SORRY.

I HAVE A FRIEND I GREW UP WITH WHOSE STEPDAD ABUSED HER WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE.

IT'S SO SAD. SHE'S STILL WORKING THROUGH IT TO THIS DAY...

I TEND TO BABBLE WHEN I'M NERVOUS, AND IT DAWNED ON ME WHAT I'D JUST SAID MIGHT UPSET MARTHA.

BUT, I WASN'T SURE. SHE WAS HARD TO READ.



Oh, IT WAS NOTHING LIKE THAT.

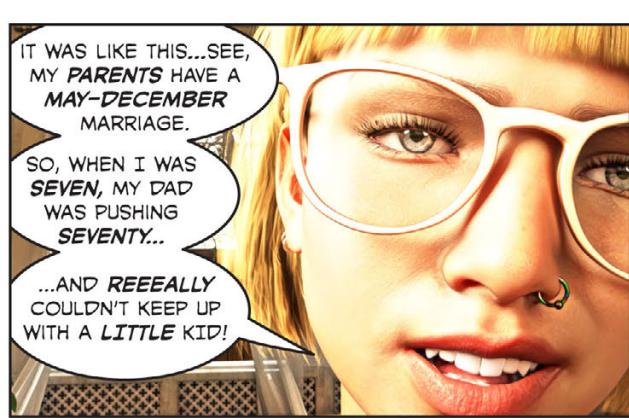
MY DAD'S A COMPLETE PUSSYCAT.

EVEN HIS SPANKINGS WERE A TOTAL JOKE.

WELL, I WASN'T EXPECTING THAT.

OF COURSE, THE "S" WORD MADE MY EARS PERK UP.





IT WAS LIKE THIS...SEE, MY PARENTS HAVE A MAY-DECEMBER MARRIAGE.

SO, WHEN I WAS SEVEN, MY DAD WAS PUSHING SEVENTY...

...AND REEEALLY COULDN'T KEEP UP WITH A LITTLE KID!

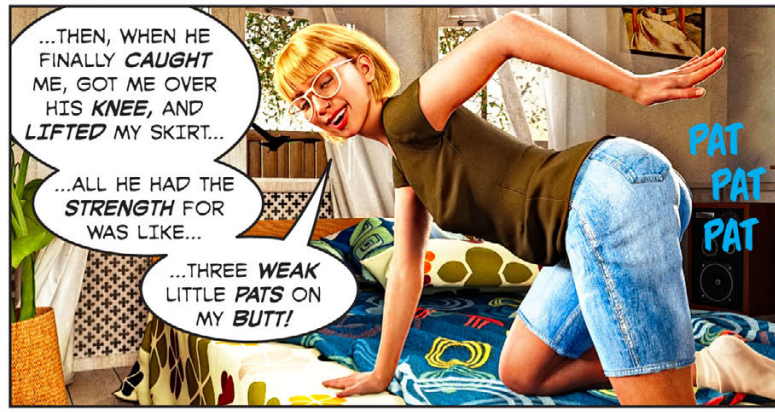


IT WAS HILARIOUS!

WHEN HE WAS SUPPOSED TO PADDLE ME, I'D TAKE OFF RUNNING...

...AND HE'D CHASE ME 'ROUND AND 'ROUND, 'TIL HE WAS TOTALLY OUT OF BREATH...

I WAS ALWAYS UP FOR LISTENING TO A GOOD SPANKY STORY.



...THEN, WHEN HE FINALLY CAUGHT ME, GOT ME OVER HIS KNEE, AND LIFTED MY SKIRT...

...ALL HE HAD THE STRENGTH FOR WAS LIKE...

...THREE WEAK LITTLE PATS ON MY BUTT!

PAT PAT PAT



SUDDENLY, FROM SOME DEPTHS WITHIN MARTHA...

...SHE BURST FORTH WITH A LAUGH THAT ALARMED THE CROWS NESTING IN THE BIG MAPLE TREES AROUND THE HOUSE.

HAHA HAHA HAHAHAHAHA HAHA HAHA



THEN, JUST LIKE THAT, SHE SOUNDED NORMAL AGAIN.

SO, YOU WANNA SEE HOW I DE-STRESS?

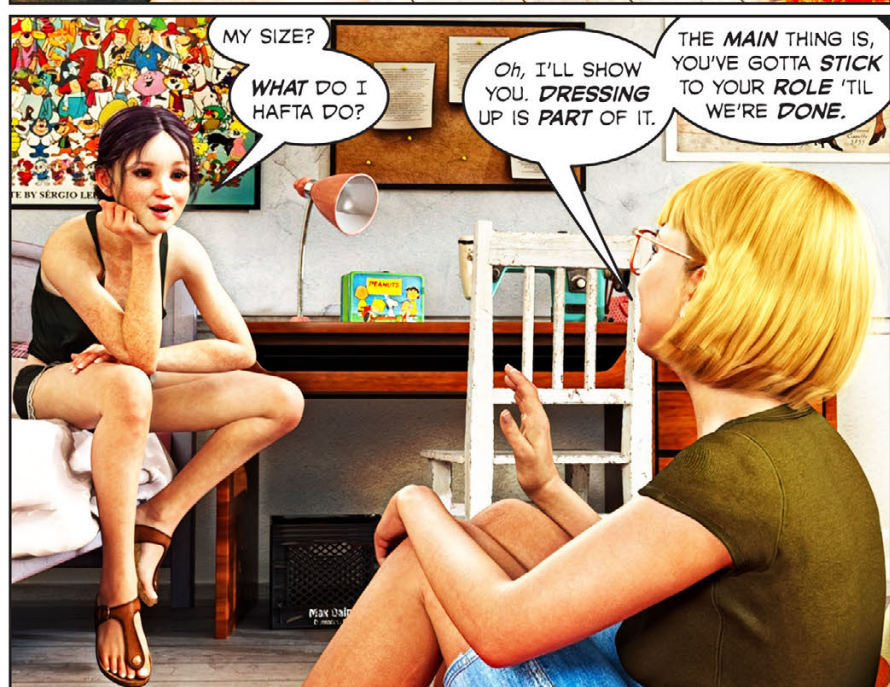
I THINK I'VE GOT SOMETHING IN YOUR SIZE...



FIVE MINUTES LATER, AFTER I'D CHANGED INTO THE DRESS SHE'D GIVEN ME, I CAME BACK TO HER ROOM.

HIYA, I'M LITTLE MARTHA. I'M FIVE.

WANNA PLAY?



MY SIZE?

WHAT DO I HAFTA DO?

Oh, I'LL SHOW YOU. DRESSING UP IS PART OF IT.

THE MAIN THING IS, YOU'VE GOTTA STICK TO YOUR ROLE 'TIL WE'RE DONE.





FIRST, WE JUMPED ON HER BED...



...THEN, WE PLAYED DOLLS.



OUR KOOL-AID TEA PARTY WAS THE BESTEST...



...AND OF COURSE, WE COLORED WITH CRAYONS.



IT TOOK ME RIGHT BACK TO BEING FIVE, WITHOUT A CARE IN THE WORLD.

IT WAS THE MOST RELAXING THING, EVER.



THINGS WERE GOING GREAT, UNTIL MARTHA GOT BORED WITH HER COLORING BOOKS.

I NEED SUM'THIN' BIGGER FOR DRAWIN' ON!

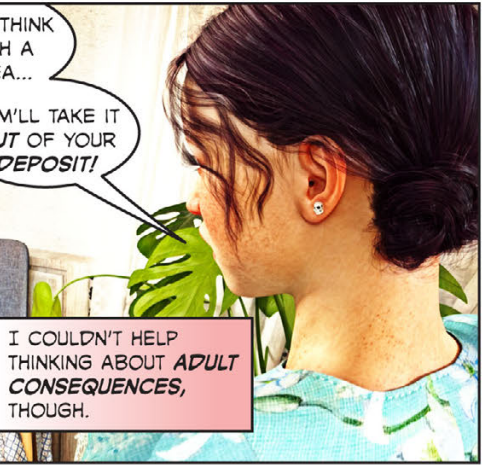


WATCHING HER DRAW ON THE WALL THING SURE TRIGGERED SOME "INTERESTING" MEMORIES.

Um, I DON'T THINK THAT'S SUCH A GOOD IDEA... TOM'LL TAKE IT OUT OF YOUR DEPOSIT!



I COULDN'T HELP THINKING ABOUT ADULT CONSEQUENCES, THOUGH.



**HISSSSS**  
NOT YET! YOU'VE GOTTA STAY LITTLE, 'TIL I SAY WE'RE DONE!



Sigh, IT'S LA CHANCLA FOR YOU, THEN!

IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT SEEMS TO WORK FOR YOUR AFLICCIÓN!

I DEDUCED THIS WAS THE OWNER OF THE FRIDA PRINTS.

HER DAY OF THE DEAD TOP WAS TO DIE FOR.



JUST THEN, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN I'D EVER SEEN WALKED INTO THE ROOM...

LITTLE MARTHA???  
AYE YAI YAI! NOT CRAYONS ON THE WALL AGAIN!



I LATER LEARNED SHE WAS NAMED CARMELITA...

...WAS HALF PERUVIAN...

...AND A WOMEN'S STUDIES MAJOR AT HANS' SCHOOL.

SHE ALSO SEEMED TO BE VERY HANDY WITH A SANDAL.

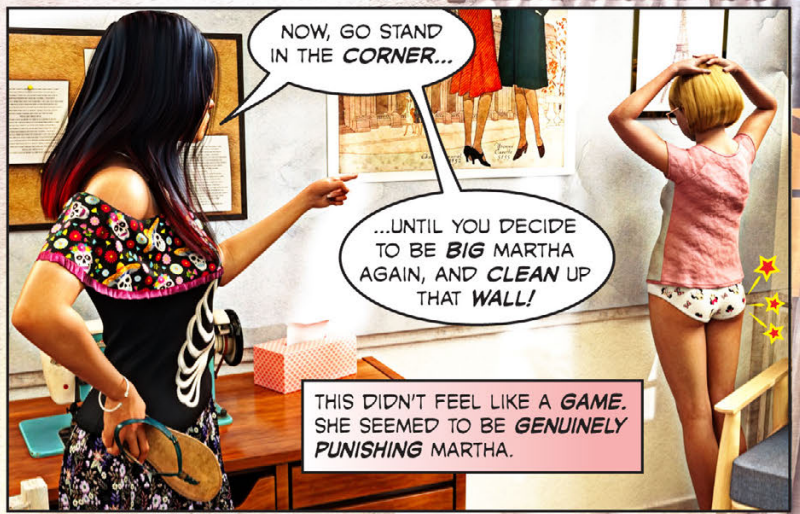


I WAS TRANSFIXED.



IT ALMOST SEEMED LIKE I WAS DREAMING.





NOW, GO STAND IN THE **CORNER**...

...UNTIL YOU DECIDE TO BE **BIG MARTHA** AGAIN, AND **CLEAN UP** THAT **WALL!**

THIS DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A **GAME**. SHE SEEMED TO BE **GENUINELY PUNISHING** MARTHA.

DESPITE MAKING A **BAD** FIRST IMPRESSION, I LATER BECAME **GOOD FRIENDS** WITH CARMELITA.

I SOON LEARNED THAT CARMELITA AND MARTHA'S **RELATIONSHIP** WAS KIND OF **COMPLICATED**.

MARTHA HAD **DATED BOYS** IN HIGH SCHOOL, BUT WAS BASICALLY **ASEXUAL**, THOUGH PEOPLE DIDN'T CALL IT THAT **BACK** THEN.

CARMELITA **PREFERRED** WOMEN.

I KNOW, BECAUSE I HAD A **BRIEF FLING** WITH HER, AFTER I FINALLY **BROKE UP** WITH HANS THE **NEXT** YEAR.

SHE REFUSED TO USE **LA CHANCLA** ON ME, THOUGH.

INSTEAD, SHE GAVE ME A **LONG LECTURE** ABOUT HOW **EROTIC** SPANKING WAS **ANTI-FEMINIST** AND A PRODUCT OF THE **PATRIARCHY** DESIGNED TO **SUBJUGATE** WOMEN.

SO, **WHY** DID SHE SPANK **MARTHA**?

KNOWING WHAT I DO NOW ABOUT **AGEPLAY**, IT SEEMS MARTHA WENT REALLY **DEEP** INTO **LITTLE SPACE**.

CARMELITA SAW THIS AS SOME KIND OF **POSSESSION**, AND **HITTING** MARTHA WITH **LA CHANCLA** AS A TYPE OF **EXORCISM**.

OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, SHE SAW **PAIN** MADE MARTHA **SNAP** OUT OF HER **FUGUE** FASTER.

CARMELITA WAS ALSO TAKING ON A KIND OF **MATERNAL, CARE-TAKER** ROLE, FROM WHAT I COULD TELL.

IT DEFINITELY WASN'T AN **EROTIC** THING TO EITHER OF THEM, THOUGH, AND MARTHA CERTAINLY **DIDN'T** LIKE IT.

AS I SAID, THEIR RELATIONSHIP WASN'T **SIMPLE**.

BUT, BACK THEN I WASN'T SO ANALYTICAL ABOUT IT. I JUST **ACCEPTED** THEM FOR **WHO** THEY WERE.

AND AS FOR YOU...

...I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT YOU HAVE SOME **NERVE**...

AND THEN, SHE NOTICED ME!

...DRESSING UP LIKE THAT AND **ENCOURAGING** HER **AFLICCIÓN!**





ANYWAY, **PLAYING** WITH MARTHA HAD **INSPIRED** ME TO TRY SOMETHING **NEW** WITH HANS.

HIYA! WANNA **PLAY?**

Hmmm. ARE YOU **MEANT** TO BE **LITTLE BO PEEP?**

AFTER MUCH **BEGGING**, SHE **GRUDGINGLY** LOANED ME THAT **FRILLY, LITTLE GIRL DRESS**.

NO, I'M **LITTLE RUDE**.

I'M **FIVE**, AND IF YOU **DON'T** PLAY WID ME...

...I'LL **KICK** YOU HARD AS I CAN **INNA SHINS!**

LET'S JUST SAY, MY **INNER CHILD** CAN BE **PRETTY INTENSE**.

WITH HANS, THERE WAS NO **QUESTION** WHERE THIS WAS **HEADED**.

WHAT A **STRANGE** GAME, MÄUSCHEN. BUT, **WHY NOT?**

I'D GONE TO THE DEPARTMENT STORE AND **BOUGHT** THE BIGGEST **SIZE** OF **LITTLE GIRL UNDERWEAR** I COULD FIND.

Ah, THESE ARE **NEW**, Ja? BUT, I MUST SAY I MUCH **PREFER** THE **SEXY RED** ONES.

NO MATTER, THOUGH. I'LL **ALWAYS** HAPPILY TURN YOUR **KLEINER ARSCH SEHR ROT**.

FOR A **MOMENT** I GOT INTO **LITTLE SPACE** AGAIN LIKE WHEN I'D **PLAYED** WITH MARTHA--**VULNERABLE**, **INNOCENT**, **CURIOUS**, **SWEET**, AND **OH-SO-NAUGHTY**.

BUT, HANS KEPT SAYING AND **DOING** THINGS THAT **SNAPPED** ME OUT OF IT, AND THEN I'D JUST FEEL LIKE AN **ADULT DRESSED UP** IN A **SILLY COSTUME**.

I **TRIED** IT AGAIN WITH HIM A **FEW** MORE TIMES, BUT HE **NEVER** REALLY GOT IT, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A **SPANKO THROUGH-AND-THROUGH**.

HE **LOVED** THE IDEA OF **PADDLING** A **NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD** GIRL PUTTING ON HER **GOTH-PUNKETTE VAMP** PERSONA, BUT NOT ONE TRYING TO LOOK AND ACT LIKE A **FIVE-YEAR-OLD**.

**SNACK** **SNACK**

THROUGHOUT THE **YEARS**, I'VE **SOMETIMES** MANAGED TO GET INTO **LITTLE SPACE** WHILE BEING **SPANKED**.

IT'S **NOT** REALLY BEEN THROUGH **DRESSING UP** OR **ANYTHING** SPECIFIC.

IT'S JUST SOME **SWITCH** THAT **FLIPS** IN MY **HEAD**.

IT'S A **MYSTERY** TO ME **WHY** AND **WHEN** IT HAPPENS, BUT WHEN IT DOES, IT'S **WONDERFUL**.

**THE END**



# COUNTING THE Stars

Art & Story by RUDE RUMPS

THIS IS A *SAD* STORY. IT'S ABOUT HOW THINGS *UNRAVEL* AND THEN DON'T EVER QUITE *FIT* TOGETHER AGAIN.

SO, IF YOU *ONLY* LIKE *HAPPY* STORIES, *SKIP* THIS ONE.

HANS AND I HAD BEEN *TOGETHER* ALMOST A YEAR.

THE *SPANKO* PART OF OUR *RELATIONSHIP* WAS *GREAT*.

BUT, WE HAD *PROBLEMS* WITH THE *REST* OF IT.

I *CONFESS* I HAD QUITE A BIT TO DO WITH OUR *TROUBLES*.

I WAS VERY *INSECURE* AND *IMMATURE* ABOUT *LOTS* OF THINGS.

I *REMEMBER* ONE DAY, I WAS WITH HIM IN THE *LIBRARY* AT HIS SCHOOL.

IT WAS EARLY *OCTOBER*, AND IT WAS ONE OF THOSE *AUTUMN HEAT WAVES*.

I WANTED TO BE *OUTSIDE* HAVING *FUN*. BUT, HIS FIRST *QUIZ* WAS COMING UP AND HE SAID HE NEEDED TO *STUDY*.

SO, I *JOINED* HIM IN THE *LIBRARY*, JUST TO BE *WITH* HIM.

HANS TOOK SCHOOL *SERIOUSLY*. HE WANTED TO GET INTO A GOOD *MBA* PROGRAM.

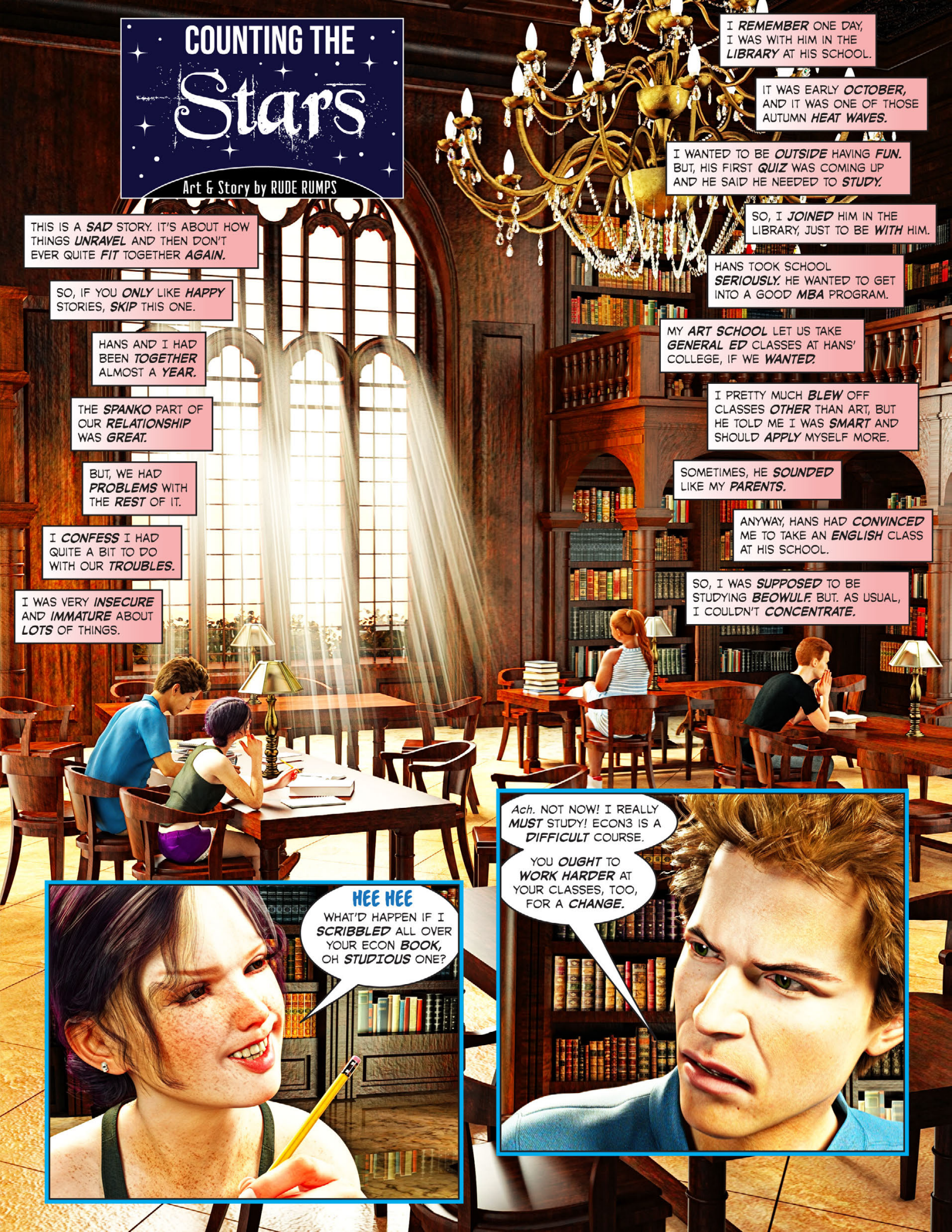
MY *ART SCHOOL* LET US TAKE *GENERAL ED* CLASSES AT HANS' COLLEGE, IF WE *WANTED*.

I PRETTY MUCH *BLEW* OFF CLASSES *OTHER* THAN ART, BUT HE TOLD ME I WAS *SMART* AND SHOULD *APPLY* MYSELF MORE.

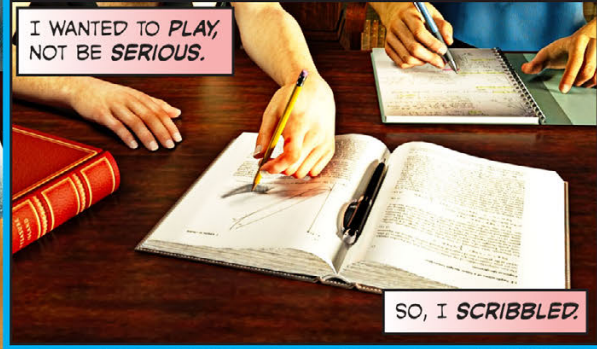
SOMETIMES, HE *SOUNDED* LIKE MY *PARENTS*.

ANYWAY, HANS HAD *CONVINCED* ME TO TAKE AN *ENGLISH* CLASS AT HIS SCHOOL.

SO, I WAS *SUPPOSED* TO BE STUDYING *BEOWULF* BUT, AS USUAL, I COULDN'T *CONCENTRATE*.







I WANTED TO PLAY, NOT BE **SERIOUS**.

SO, I **SCRIBBLED**.



ALL RIGHT, THAT'S IT!  
KOMM, KOMM!

IT SEEMED **MAYBE** I WAS GOING TO **GET** WHAT I WANTED.



GET UP THERE! JETZ!

HANS LED ME **DEEP** INTO THE **STACKS** OF THE **LIBRARY**.

I WAS **AFRAID** PEOPLE WOULD **HEAR**, BUT THAT MADE IT EVEN MORE **EXCITING**.



NOW, GO HOME!

HE ONLY GAVE ME A FEW **WHACKS**, BUT HE SEEMED TO BE **HITTING** AS HARD AS HE **COULD**. I REALIZED HE WAS **GENUINELY MAD**.



B-BUT, I WANNA **STAY**--

**NO**, I AM **SERIOUS**.

WE'LL **NOT** SEE EACH OTHER **UNTIL THURSDAY**, WHEN MY **EXAM IS OVER**.

SO, I **SLUNK** OFF. I HADN'T MEANT TO **REALLY** MAKE HIM **ANGRY** LIKE THAT.



A COUPLE WEEKS LATER, THE CHILL WAS ALREADY IN THE AIR IN NEW ENGLAND.

HANS GOT HIS QUIZ BACK, AND HIS GRADE WAS ONLY A C+.

I FELT VERY GUILTY.

I-I USED TO HIDE THIS UNDER MY MATTRESS WHEN WAS LITTLE...

...I STOLE IT FROM THE KITCHEN DRAWER.

I DESERVE IT, FOR NOT LETTING YOU STUDY, AS HARD AS YOU CAN SPANK ME.



Hmmm. YOU WERE SPANKED BY YOUR PARENTS WITH THIS?



WELL, I REMEMBER MY MOM USED IT ON ME AT LEAST ONCE...

...WHEN I WAS FIVE AND ALMOST BURNED THE HOUSE DOWN!

BUT, MOSTLY I SPANKED MYSELF WITH IT WHEN I WAS FEELING GUILTY.

IT'S VERY HEAVY...AND IT REALLY HURTS.

HANS DIDN'T NEED ANY MORE CONVINCING.



VERY HARD, THEN. I CAN'T SAY YOU DON'T DESERVE IT!

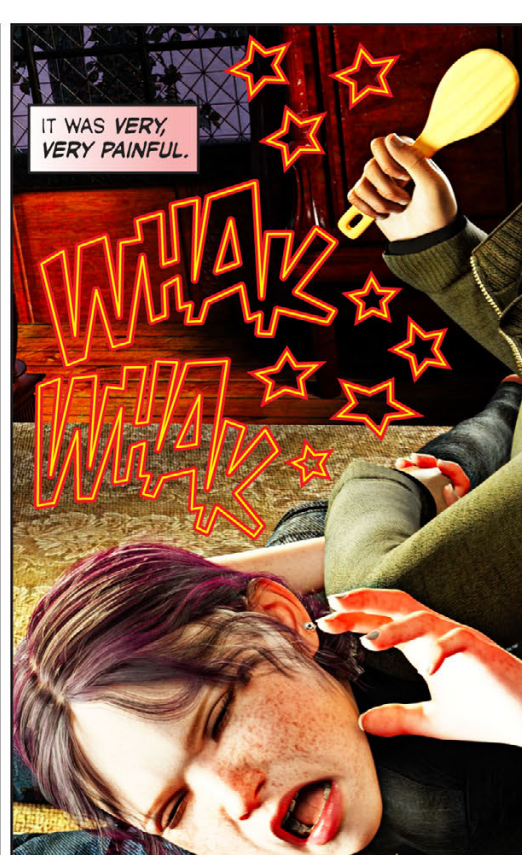
FIRST ON YOUR JEANS, BECAUSE I THINK IT WILL MAKE NICE SOUNDS....

...AND, MAYBE LEAVE NICE ROUND MARKS, TOO, JA?



VERY HARD WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

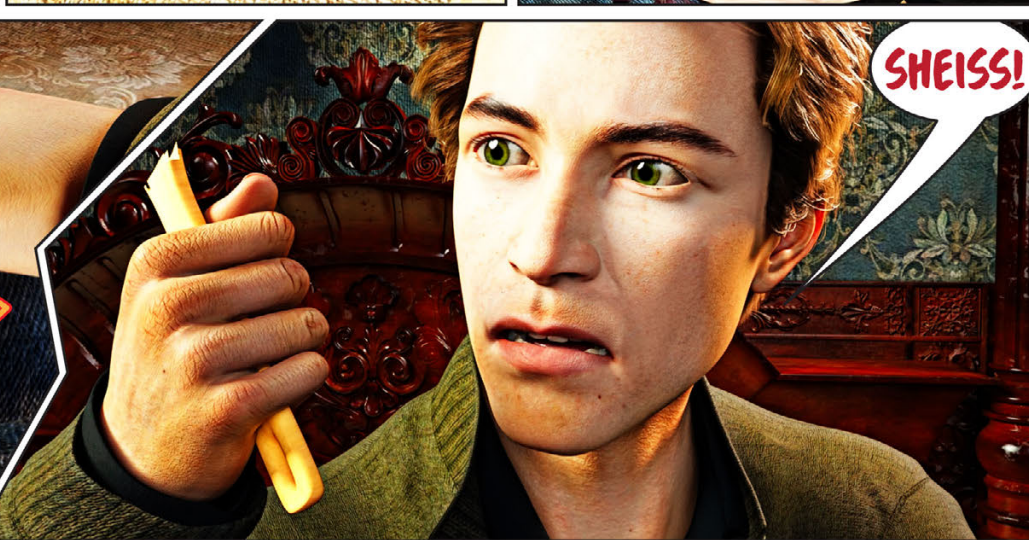




IT DIDN'T REALLY LOOK LIKE IT, BUT IT WAS TRULY A FEARSOME IMPLEMENT.

ALL OF ITS WEIGHT WAS CONCENTRATED AT THE END.

IT WAS VERY, VERY PAINFUL.





MY **BOTTOM** REALLY **HURT** **BAD**, BUT I WAS STILL FEELING VERY **GUILTY**.

I WAS PRETTY **SURE** THERE WERE **ALREADY** SOME **MARKS**. I WANTED TRUE **BLACK-AND-BLUE** **BRUISES**, THOUGH.

HANS HAD NEVER **QUITE** GONE THAT **FAR**. I **DECIDED** IT WAS **TIME** HE **DID**.

WELL, I-I STILL **DESERVE** **MORE**...

...AND, WITH MY **PANTS** **OFF**.

Y-YOU COULD USE A **BELT**, O-OR THAT **HAIRBRUSH**.

M-MEIN **GOTT!**

W-WHAT IS IT?

Oh. **WOW**.

BUT, YOU **DON'T** HAVE TO **STOP**.

I REALLY WAS **AWFUL** TO YOU...

...A-AND YOU KNOW, I **DO** LIKE **MARKS** **SOMETIMES**.

IT SEEMS I **ALREADY** HAD MY **BRUISES**.

WELL, I'LL JUST USE MY **HAND**, AND **NOT** VERY **HARD**...

OTHERWISE, I **WORRY** I'D **DRAW** **BLOOD!**

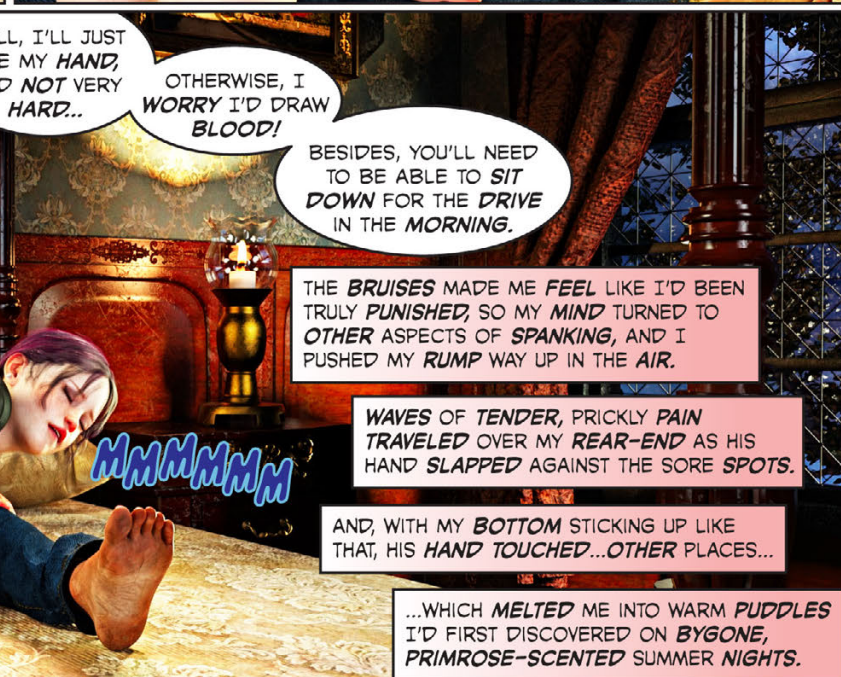
BESIDES, YOU'LL NEED TO BE ABLE TO **SIT** **DOWN** FOR THE **DRIVE** IN THE **MORNING**.

THE **BRUISES** MADE ME **FEEL** LIKE I'D BEEN **TRULY** **PUNISHED**, SO MY **MIND** TURNED TO **OTHER** **ASPECTS** OF **SPANKING**, AND I **PUSHED** MY **RUMP** WAY UP IN THE **AIR**.

**WAVES** OF **TENDER**, **PRICKLY** **PAIN** **TRAVELED** OVER MY **REAR-END** AS HIS **HAND** **SLAPPED** AGAINST THE **SORE** **SPOTS**.

AND, WITH MY **BOTTOM** **STICKING** UP LIKE THAT, HIS **HAND** **TOUCHED**...**OTHER** **PLACES**...

...WHICH **MELTED** ME INTO **WARM** **PUDDLES** I'D **FIRST** **DISCOVERED** ON **BYGONE**, **PRIMROSE-SCENTED** **SUMMER** **NIGHTS**.





THE NEXT DAY WAS THE BIG EVENT. I WAS FINALLY TAKING HANS TO MEET MY PARENTS.

WE'D BEEN TOGETHER TEN MONTHS, AND I'D WAITED THIS LONG.

IT WASN'T THAT I WAS ASHAMED OF THEM.

IT WAS JUST THAT EVERYTHING WITH MY PARENTS WAS SO...AWKWARD.

ESPECIALLY WITH MY MOM.

I'D PREPARED HER FOR THE VISIT, AND BEEN VERY CLEAR THAT HANS WAS INDEED MY BOYFRIEND.

NONETHELESS, SHE INSISTED ON CALLING HIM MY "COLLEGE FRIEND."

REALITY WAS SIMPLY NO MATCH FOR MY MOM.

HAVING A BIT OF TROUBLE SITTING DOWN, MÄUSCHEN?

Oh, TRUST ME, I CAN FEEL EVERY BUMP IN THE ROAD.

DON'T WORRY, THOUGH, IT GETS SMOOTHER IN MIDDLEBRIDGE.

EVERYTHING'S BORING THERE, INCLUDING THE STREETS.



YOUR PARENTS WON'T EAT ME ALIVE, WILL THEY?

NO, YOU'LL BE FINE...



...AS LONG AS YOU DON'T SHARE THAT YOU BEAT MY BUTT PURPLE LAST NIGHT, WITH MY MOM'S OLD COOKING SPOON.



HANS, RIGHT?

IT'S SO NICE TO FINALLY MEET ONE OF RUDE'S COLLEGE FRIENDS!

A PLEASURE, MRS. RUMPS.

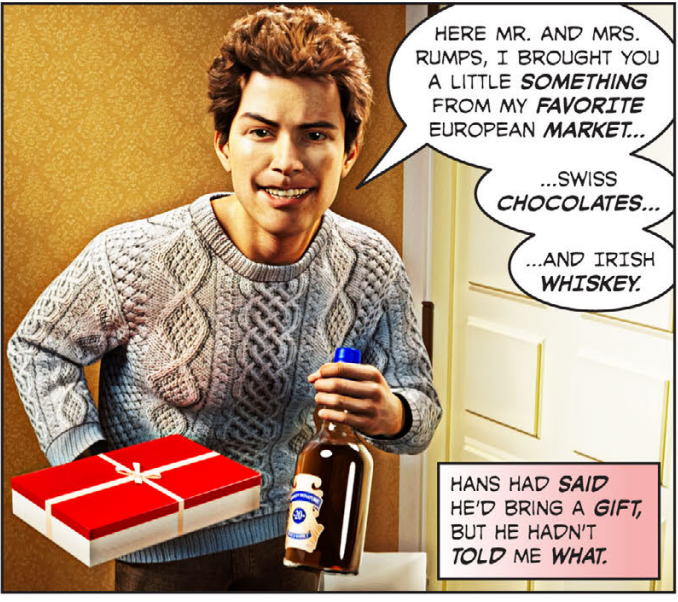


THANK YOU FOR COMING ALL THE WAY OUT HERE!

I KNOW WE'RE WAY OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

Oh, BUT THE DRIVE WAS BEAUTIFUL. WE GERMANS REALLY ENJOY WATCHING WOODS.





HERE MR. AND MRS. RUMPS, I BROUGHT YOU A LITTLE **SOMETHING** FROM MY FAVORITE EUROPEAN MARKET...  
...SWISS CHOCOLATES...  
...AND IRISH WHISKEY.

HANS HAD SAID HE'D BRING A GIFT, BUT HE HADN'T TOLD ME WHAT.



THANK YOU, HANS. ESPECIALLY FOR THE CHOCOLATES.  
BUT, RUDE MUST'VE TOLD YOU, WE DON'T DRINK.

WELL, **MAYBE** JUST A **DROP** AFTER DINNER?  
I'VE SUCH **FOND** MEMORIES OF HAVING A **GLASS O'** WHISKEY IN THIS **COZY** LITTLE PUB IN **KILKENNY**...



A BIT LATER, AT DINNER.

...SAY, I WAS **WONDERING** MR. AND MRS. RUMPS...  
...WAS RUDE A **DIFFICULT** CHILD?  
THE KIND WHO **NEEDED** LOTS OF **DISCIPLINE**?  
WELL, I WOULDN'T **NECESSARILY** SAY THAT--

\*YES, I WAS WEARING THE SAME CLOTHES THE NEXT DAY. I COULD NEVER FIND TIME TO DO LAUNDRY. IT DROVE HANS CRAZY.



YOU'RE SO EVIL!



Oh, SHE WAS **DIFFICULT** ALL RIGHT!  
NOT **BAD** EVERY SINGLE DAY...



...BUT, WHEN SHE WAS AROUND **SIX** OR **SEVEN**, ABOUT ONCE A **MONTH**...  
...SHE NEEDED A **GOOD, HARD** SPANKING!  
THEN, WHEN SHE WAS IN **HIGH SCHOOL**...

LUCKILY, MY DAD **CHANGED** THE **SUBJECT**.





WHEN DINNER WAS OVER, I HELPED MY MOM WASH THE DISHES.

THEN, WE JOINED HANS AND MY DAD IN THE LIVING ROOM.

SORRY HANS, I HAVE TO MAKE AN EARLY NIGHT OF IT--I HAVE A BAD HEADACHE.

THERE'S BLANKETS AND SHEETS IN THE HALL CLOSET. RUDE CAN HELP YOU MAKE UP THE COUCH.



Ah, THANK YOU MRS. RUMPS. I HOPE YOUR HEADACHE IS BESSER TOMORROW.

G'NIGHT, HONEY. WE'RE GOIN' TO LISTEN TO BITS OF A FEW RECORDS BEFORE BED.

IT TURNS OUT HANS IS ALSO VERY KEEN ON MUSIC.



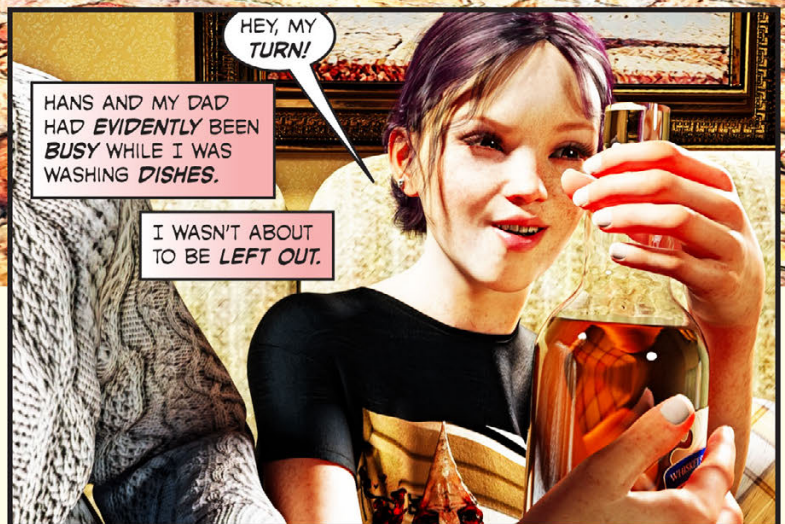
"THIS IS MY FAVORITE RECORDING OF BACH'S CELLO SUITES."

"DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD THIS PIECE, RUDE?"



CARE FOR SOME MORE WHISKEY, MR. RUMPS?

Oh, YES! BUT JUS' 'NOTHER DROP!



HEY, MY TURN!

HANS AND MY DAD HAD EVIDENTLY BEEN BUSY WHILE I WAS WASHING DISHES.

I WASN'T ABOUT TO BE LEFT OUT.





MY DAD HAD MORE THAN A DROP.

AND HANS HAD HIS SHARE, TOO.



BUT, I HAD AT LEAST HALF THE BOTTLE.

WHEN WE'D EMPTIED IT, MY DAD PRODUCED TWO DUSTY OLD BOTTLES OF WINE HE MUST'VE KEPT HIDDEN FOR YEARS.

AND, THEN, THE SINGING STARTED.

NOW, 'ERE'S A SONG SUITED TO THE JUICE O' THE BARLEY!



AS I WAS GOIN' O'ER THE FAR FAMED KERRY MOUNTAINS...





I MET WITH CAPTAIN FARRELL AND HIS MONEY HE WAS COUNTIN'

I FIRST PRODUCED ME PISTOL AND THEN PRODUCED ME RAPIER

SAYIN' STAND AND DELIVER FOR HE WERE A BOLD DECEIVER

MUSH-A RING DUMB-A DO DUMB-A DA, WHACK FALL THE DADDY-O, WHACK FALL THE DADDY-O...

THERE'S WHISKEY IN THE JAR!

I COUNTED OUT HIS MONEY AND IT MADE A PRETTY PENNY

I PUT IT IN ME POCKET AND TOOK IT HOME TO ME DARLIN' SPORTIN' JENNY

SHE SIGHED AND SHE SWORE THAT SHE NEVER WOULD BETRAY ME

BUT THE DEVIL TAKE THE WOMEN, FOR THEY NEVER CAN BE EASY





I FIRST PRODUCED ME PLONKER THEN LIKEWISE CAPTAIN FARRELL



SAYIN' STAND AND DELIVER, FOR JENNY'S QUIMS A BOLD RECEIVER

I COUNTED MORE'N ONE HUN'DRED TWENTY THRUSTS INTO ME DARLIN' JENNY



THEN CAPTAIN FARRELL RODE 'ER HOME TO LONDON, WHILE PUTIN' IT IN 'ER ARSE



SHE SIGHED AND SHE SWORE THAT SHE NEVER HAD A DILLY FINER

'CEPT WHEN THE DEVIL TOOK THAT WOMAN, FOR HE HAD A HAMPTON TEN TIMES BIGGER

WHACK FALL THE DADDY-O...

WHACK FALL THE DADDY-O...



THIS PART OF THE SONG DIDN'T NEED ANY CHANGES TO AROUSE MY IMAGINATION.



I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT ELSE HAPPENED THAT EVENING, WHICH IS PROBABLY FOR THE BEST.

HANS SWORE HE TOOK ME INTO MY ROOM AND I FELL ASLEEP THERE.

BUT SOMEHOW, I LATER ENDED UP IN THE LIVING ROOM IN MY UNDERWEAR...

...AND UNDER THE COVERS WITH HANS.

WELL, HANS, I SEE YOU'RE AN EARLY RISER LIKE ME!

CAN I MAKE YOU SOME BREAKFAST?

PANCAKES? THOSE ARE POPULAR IN GERMANY, TOO, AREN'T THEY?



JA, DANKE, MRS. RUMPS. PANCAKES SOUND DELICIOUS.



RUDE SAYS I MAKE GREAT FLAPJACKS.

BUT, SADLY, SHE'S RARELY UP EARLY ENOUGH TO GET THEM FRESH. WHY, I BET SHE WON'T EMERGE FROM HER ROOM FOR ANOTHER FOUR HOURS AT LEAST!

Ach! I AM SO SORRY, MRS. RUMPS. I'VE NO IDEA HOW RUDE--

--CAN SLEEP ALL DAY? WELL, SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN A NIGHT OWL! EVEN WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE.

TRUST ME, WE WON'T SEE HER UNTIL PROBABLY NOON!

IT'S STRANGE, THOUGH. MR. RUMPS WAS TIRED THIS MORNING, TOO...

...AND, AFTER ALL OF YOU TURNED IN SO EARLY!

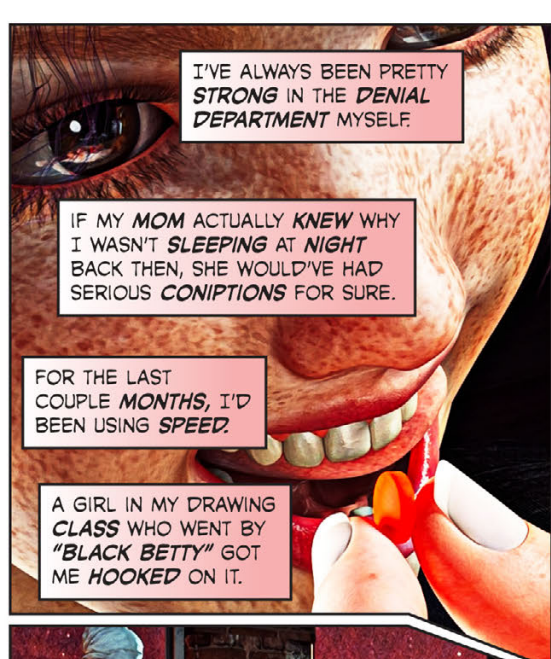
IT WAS AS IF MY MOM WAS DEAF THE NIGHT BEFORE, AND BLIND IN THE MORNING.

YES, DENIAL WAS DEFINITELY HER SUPERPOWER.

GROAN







I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PRETTY STRONG IN THE DENIAL DEPARTMENT MYSELF.

IF MY MOM ACTUALLY KNEW WHY I WASN'T SLEEPING AT NIGHT BACK THEN, SHE WOULD'VE HAD SERIOUS CONIPTIONS FOR SURE.

FOR THE LAST COUPLE MONTHS, I'D BEEN USING SPEED

A GIRL IN MY DRAWING CLASS WHO WENT BY "BLACK BETTY" GOT ME HOOKED ON IT.



NESFFA WAS A WEIRDLY COMPETITIVE PLACE.

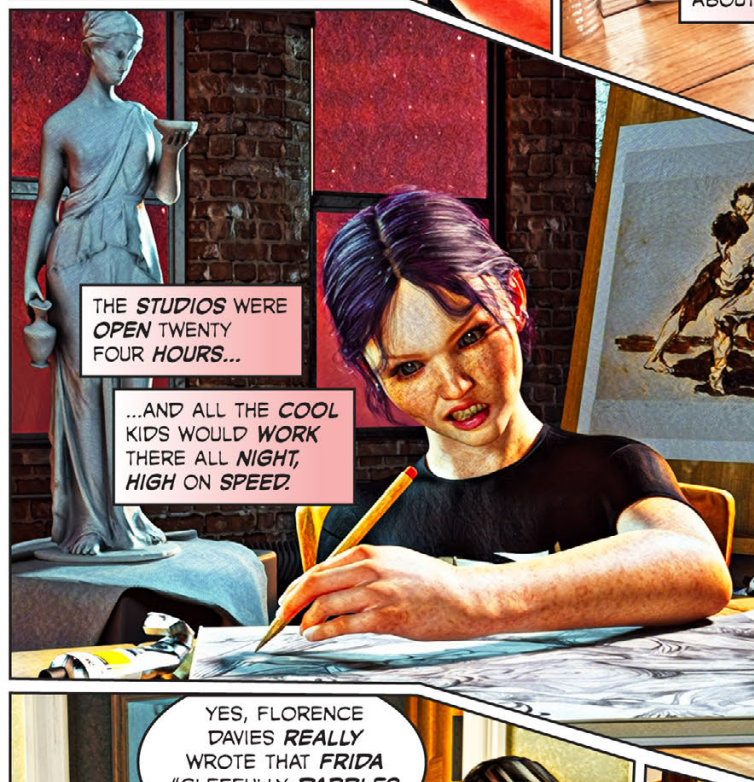
KEEP THOSE HANDS MOVING!

KEEP THOSE HANDS MOVING!

DON'T THINK, JUST DRAW, KIDDOS, DRAW!

NOBODY CARED MUCH ABOUT GRADES...

...BUT EVERYBODY BRAGGED ABOUT HOW MUCH THEY DREW OR PAINTED.



THE STUDIOS WERE OPEN TWENTY FOUR HOURS...

...AND ALL THE COOL KIDS WOULD WORK THERE ALL NIGHT, HIGH ON SPEED.



I'D STAY UP FOR DAYS, THEN DRINK TO TRY TO COME DOWN, AND COMPLETELY CRASH.

MURGLE? MURGLE?



YES, FLORENCE DAVIES REALLY WROTE THAT FRIDA "GLEEFULLY DABBLES IN WORKS OF ART!"

WHA--?

URGLE? URGLE?

WHEN I WAS AWAKE, I WAS SO WIRED, I STARTED TO SEE THINGS OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE.



GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!

W-WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, RUDE?

THERE'S NOBODY THERE!

GURKLE? GURKLE?





THE MONTH *PASSED QUICKLY*, AND SOON IT WAS *HALLOWEEN*, MY FAVORITE HOLIDAY.

HANS' *FRAT HOUSE* ALREADY HAD A *HAUNTED* VIBE, AND MEMBERS HAD A *REPUTATION* FOR *THROWING* THE MOST *AMAZING* HALLOWEEN *PARTIES* THERE.

*BEFORE* I STARTED *DATING* HANS, I WAS TOO *ART-SCHOOL-COOL* TO SET *FOOT* IN A *FRAT* HOUSE. NOW, THOUGH, I WASN'T ABOUT TO *PASS UP* A *CHANCE* FOR *FREE BOOZE*.

I WAS *SUPPOSED* TO MEET HANS THERE AT *9:30 PM*.

BUT, I ENDED UP GETTING REALLY *WIRED* ON *SPEED*, GOING TO THE *ART STUDIO*...

...*HANGING* OUT AND *DRINKING VODKA* WITH THIS *GOTH GUY* IN MY CLASS...

...WHO DID *INCREDIBLE SCRATCH-BOARD* WORK, AND I HAD KIND OF A *CRUSH* ON. WELL, AT LEAST AN *ARTISTIC CRUSH*...

...SO, BY THE TIME I GOT INTO MY *COSTUME* AND *MADE* IT OVER TO THE *PARTY*, I WAS *TWO HOURS LATE* AND TOTALLY *SMASHED*.



WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I *PHONED* OVER AND OVER!

AND NOW, YOU COME *HERE*, VERY *LATE* AND *DRUNK*?



JEEZ LOUISE, YOU SOUND LIKE MY *MOM!* LIGHTEN UP N' LEZ GO *PARTY!* ≡MUURP≡



NEIN, WE'LL GO *NOWHERE!* YOU'RE IN NO *CONDITION!*



CHRIST, YOU ARE JUST LIKE MY SHITTY MOM!

I BETCHA THINK SHE WAS GREAT FOR GROUNDING ME ON HALLOWEEN, WHEN I WAS IN THIRD GRADE.

YA'KNOW YOU'RE ONLY EIGHT FOR ONE FUCKING HALLOWEEN IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, AND SHE HADTA RUIN IT FOR ME!

WELL, YOU'RE NOT GONNA RUIN THIS ONE FOR ME, YOU GAWD-DAMNED GERMAN CONTROL FREAK!

I TOLD YOU, YOU'RE STAYING HERE!



LEMME GO, OR I'LL SCREAM MY HEAD OFF...

..AND THEN SCREW THE FIRST FRAT BOY WHO COMES ALONG TO RESCUE ME!



THAT'S ENOUGH. YOU'RE VERY DRUNK, AND DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.

LISTEN CLOSELY... I WON'T REPEAT MYSELF...

...TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES, AND BEND OVER THE CHAIR, JETZ!



WHAT HE SAID UTTERLY DISARMED ME.

THE STERN, COMMANDING TONE...

...THE PHRASE "BEND OVER"...

...WORDS I'D PLAYED OVER AND OVER IN MY HEAD SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL...

...IT ALL HIT MY SPANKO BRAIN LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING...

...AND I WAS NO LONGER AN INTOXICATED, NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD GOTH HELLION...

...BUT INSTEAD, A SORRY, CHASTENED CHILD.

I HEARD HANS RUSTLING AROUND IN HIS BEDSTAND.

SKRITCH



I ASSUMED HE WAS GETTING THE HAIRBRUSH...

...BUT, THEN I FELT SOMETHING POINTY AND MOIST SCRATCHING ACROSS MY BOTTOM.





WHA--?

I **TURNED** AROUND, TO SEE HE WAS **WRITING** SOMETHING ON MY **RUMP!**

IT'S **INDELIBLE.**

THIS WAY, YOU'LL HAVE THESE **WORDS** FOR A **WHILE** AS A **REMINDER.**

I DON'T KNOW THAT YOU'LL **REMEMBER** MUCH OF **TONIGHT,** OTHERWISE.

NOW, OFF TO **BED** YOU GO!



**NEIN, NOT** WHEN YOU'RE LIKE **THIS.**

**BELIEVE ME,** YOU'LL GET YOUR JUST **DESERTS** TOMORROW WHEN YOU'RE **SOBER.**

HUH? **A-AREN'T** YOU GONNA **SPANK** ME? **≡MUURP≡**



I WAS MORE **WIPED** OUT THAN I THOUGHT.

WHEN I **WOKE** UP, IT WAS **LATE** AFTERNOON...

...AND IT **FELT** LIKE SOMEBODY HAD **TAKEN** A **JACKHAMMER** TO MY **HEAD.**



W-WHY ARE YOU SO **GOOD** TO ME?

HERE, **ASPIRIN,** **COFFEE,** AND **CHICKEN** SOUP FROM **KATZ'S** FAMOUS **DELI.**



**JA, I AM** **GOOD** TO YOU **INDEED.** **SEE,** I **FETCHED** **THIS.**

IT'S A **NICE** **FRESH** **SWITCH,** FROM THE **BIG** **TREE** IN **FRONT.**

WHEN YOU'VE **FINISHED** YOUR **SOUP,** I'LL PUT IT TO **GOOD** **USE.**



HANS HAD **SWITCHED** ME ONCE **BEFORE** WITH A **TWIG** FROM THAT **VERY** **SAME** **TREE.**

IT **WASN'T** **FUN.**

THE **WOOD** WAS **SUPPLE,** AND **LASHED** ALL AROUND WHEN IT **HIT,** LEAVING **LONG,** **RED** **WEALS** ON MY **BOTTOM** AND **THIGHS.**

I THINK YOU **TRULY** **WON'T** BE ABLE TO **SIT** FOR A **WEEK,** AFTER **THIS.**

ALSO, IT SEEMED LIKE I WAS **ALLERGIC** TO THE **BARK** OR SOMETHING, BECAUSE MY **SKIN** HAD **SWELLED** UP AND **ITCHED** LIKE **CRAZY.**

I'D TOLD HIM I **DIDN'T** WANT TO TRY IT **AGAIN,** WHICH WAS **OBVIOUSLY** **WHY** HE'D **CHOSEN** THAT **IMPLEMENT--**HE MEANT TO **PUNISH** ME FOR **REAL** FOR MY **SHENANIGANS** ON **HALLOWEEN.**



SWISH  
THWIP

HANS USUALLY TURNED ON LOUD MUSIC WHEN HE SPANKED ME, SO HIS FRAT BROTHERS WOULDN'T HEAR THE BLOWS.

BUT THIS TIME, IT WAS DEAD QUIET, EXCEPT FOR THE SWITCH.

IT'S A DISTINCTLY SCARY SOUND, ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT VERY LOUD, UNLIKE A PADDLE OR EVEN A HAND.

THE PAIN WAS TRULY INTENSE.

I THINK I HAVE A PRETTY HIGH TOLERANCE, BUT IT BROUGHT ME TO THE EDGE.

BACK THEN, WE'D NEVER HEARD OF SAFEWORDS. IF WE HAD, I MIGHT'VE USED ONE.

BUT, PROBABLY NOT. I TOOK A CERTAIN PRIDE IN BEING ABLE TO TAKE IT.

PLUS, I FELT LIKE I REALLY DESERVED IT THAT TIME.

SWISH  
THWIP  
SWISH  
THWIP

WHEN I CAME BACK FROM WHEREVER I'D GONE, HANS HAD FINISHED AND WAS HOLDING ME.

I WAS SOBBING AND MY BOTTOM WAS NUMB WITH PAIN.

I FELT TRULY AT PEACE...

THEN, SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENED.

I THINK IT HAD TO DO WITH WHAT KINKSTERS CALL SUBSPACE.

OR, MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE THE VEIL BETWEEN THE WORLDS WAS VERY THIN THAT DAY.

IT FELT LIKE I WAS FLOATING OUTSIDE MYSELF, DETACHED FROM THE PAIN.

...LIKE EVERYTHING BETWEEN US WAS GOING TO BE OK AGAIN.



TWO DAYS LATER, HANS' PARENTS ARRIVED ON A VISIT FROM GERMANY.

Ach, THESE ARE ART SCHULE KLEIDER, JA? FOR CATCHING THE PAINTS?

THEY INVITED ME TO DINNER AT A RESTAURANT THEY SAID WAS "CASUAL."

I THOUGHT THAT MEANT IT WAS OK TO WEAR MY OLD JEANS AND CONCERT T-SHIRT.

HANS WARNED ME WHEN I SHOWED UP AT HIS PLACE.

BUT, THERE WAS NO TIME TO CHANGE, BECAUSE AS USUAL, I ARRIVED AT THE LAST MINUTE AND HE COULDN'T BE ONE MOMENT LATE.

I WAS SOBER, THOUGH, AT LEAST AT THE START.



I COULD DEFINITELY STILL FEEL THE WELTS FROM THE SWITCHING WHEN I SAT DOWN.

DO NOT WORRY! SIT, SIT!

TRY THE WINE, PLEASE. IT IS A VERY GOOD YEAR.

NEIN, KEINER WEIN, ABBA. IN AMERICA, SHE IS UNDERAGE FOR ALCOHOL.

S-SORRY, I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS SUPPOSED--



Tosh, IT IS ONLY WEIN. IT WOULD BE ALLOWED IN DEUTSCHLAND.

GO NOW, TRY IT!

YOUR PARENTS ARE LEHRER, HANS SAYS. AT YOUR ART SCHULE?

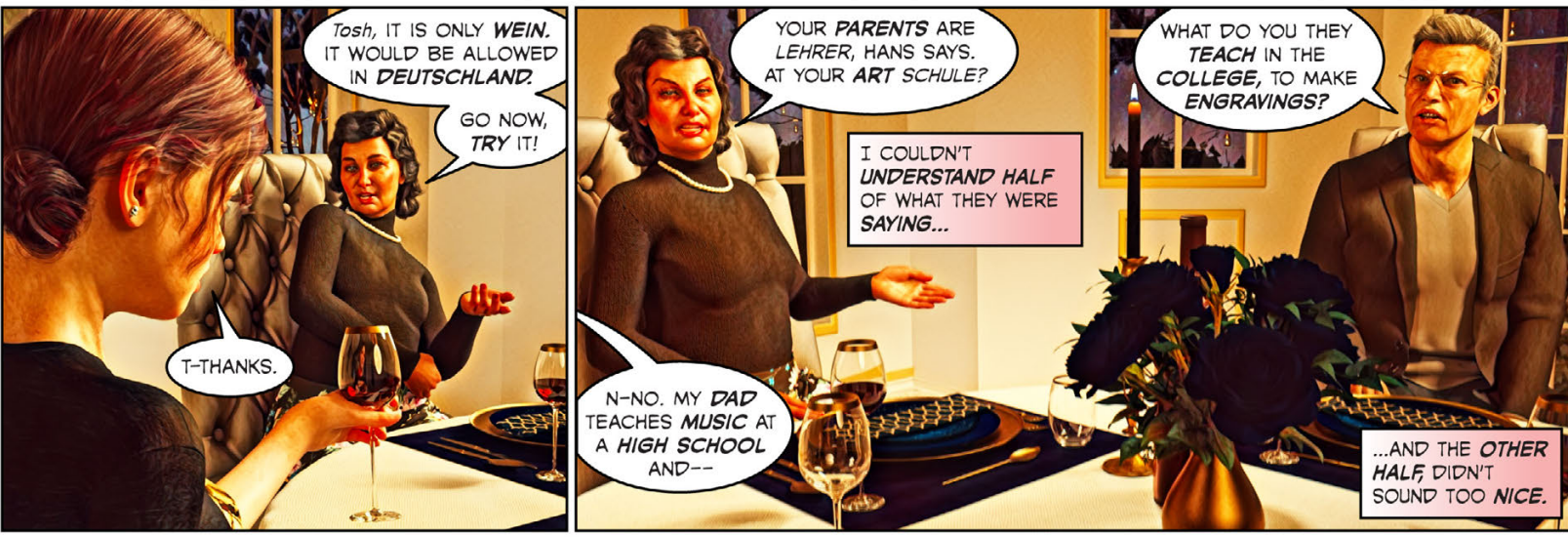
WHAT DO YOU THEY TEACH IN THE COLLEGE, TO MAKE ENGRAVINGS?

I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND HALF OF WHAT THEY WERE SAYING...

T-THANKS.

N-NO. MY DAD TEACHES MUSIC AT A HIGH SCHOOL AND--

...AND THE OTHER HALF, DIDN'T SOUND TOO NICE.



Ach, NOT HOCHSCHULE? THAT IS TOO BAD.

WELL, AT LEAST SHE IS PRETTY.

SO, I DRANK MORE WINE.

IT WAS INDEED A VERY GOOD YEAR.

BUT, SO THIN. DO YOU NOT HAVE ENOUGH GELD TO BUY FOOD?

BESIDES, I COULDN'T GET A WORD IN EDGEWISE.

OR WINE? YOU DRINK MUCH! SHALL WE ORDER ANOTHER BOTTLE? I'D ENJOY MORE TO TRY FOR MYSELF.







WHY IS YOUR HAIR THIS COLOR? ARE YOU IN--HOW DO YOU SAY IT--EIN ZIRCUS?

CIRCUS. THAT IS THE ENGLISH WORD. ALMOST THE SAME.

MY HAIR?!? ≥MUURP≥ WHAT ABOUT YOURS? IT'S AWF--

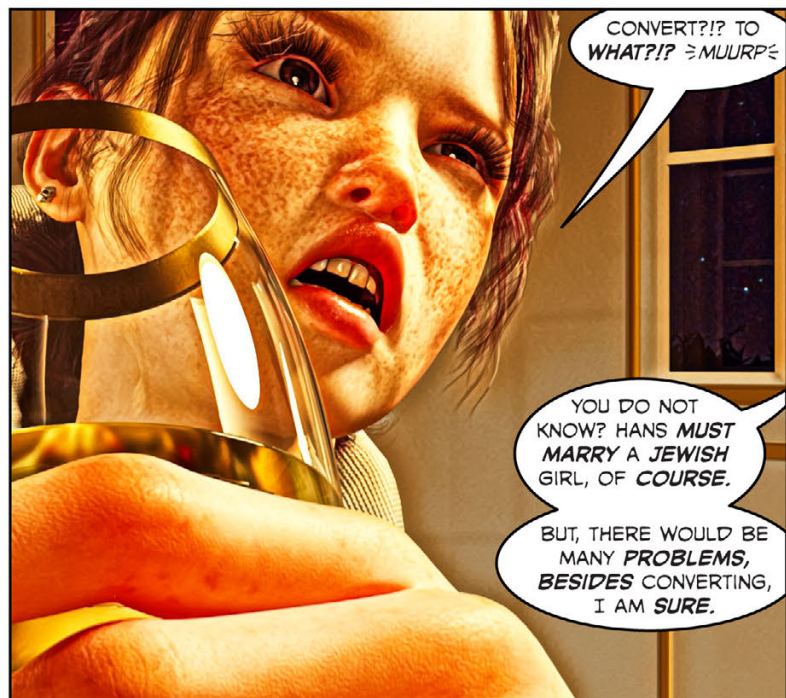


DO YOU HAVE TATTOOS?

SHE ASKS, BECAUSE IT IS ABOUT CONVERSION.

TATTOOS?!? ≥HIC≥ THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BIZ--

ALTHOUGH, THIS IS NOT TRUE. YOU CAN CONVERT WITH TATTOOS.



CONVERT?!? TO WHAT?!? ≥MUURP≥

YOU DO NOT KNOW? HANS **MUST** MARRY A JEWISH GIRL, OF COURSE.

BUT, THERE WOULD BE MANY PROBLEMS, BESIDES CONVERTING, I AM SURE.



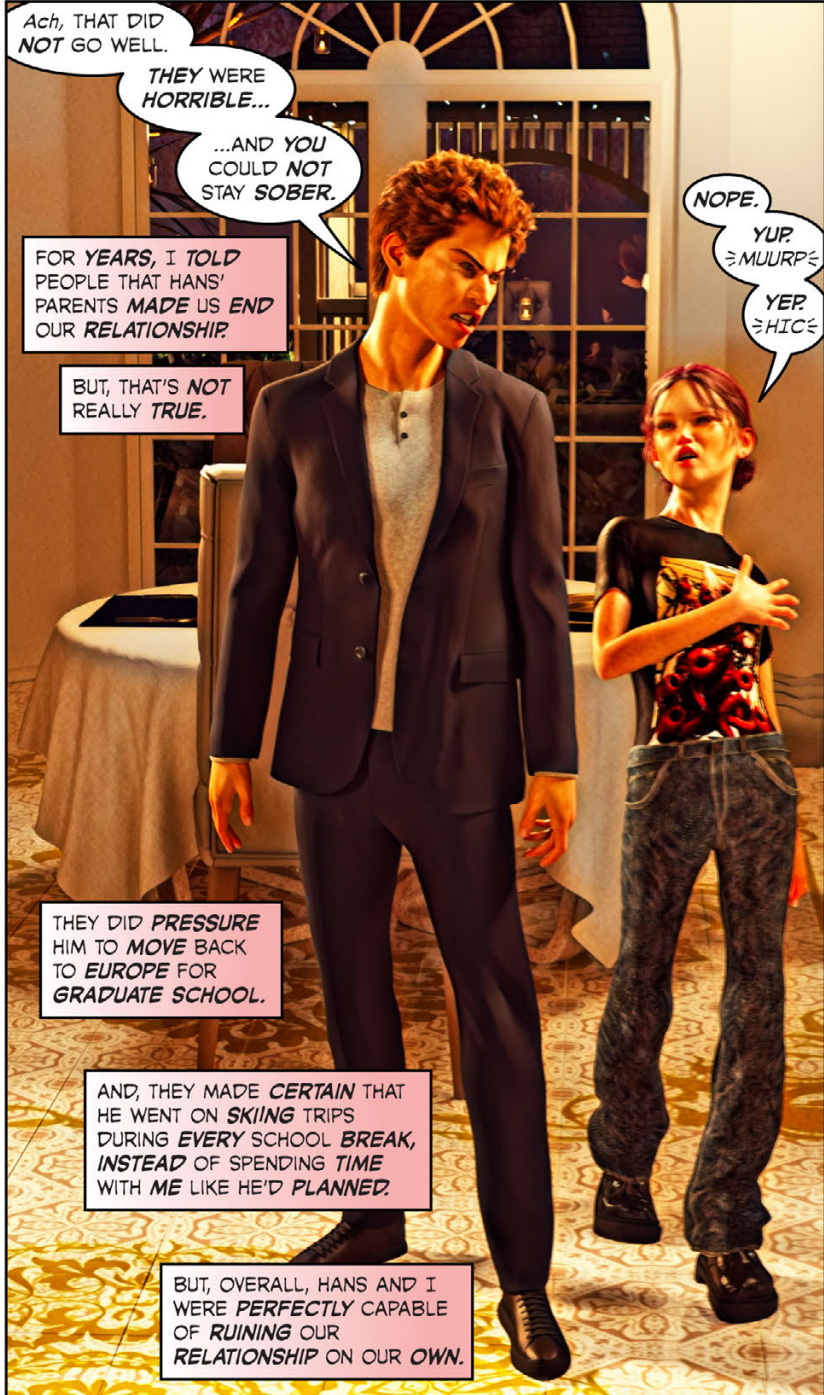
DAS IST GENUG, MUTER UND ABBA!

RUDE AND I ARE NOT THINKING OF MARRIAGE YET.

WE WILL LET YOU KNOW IF WE DO.

NOW, CAN WE JUST HAVE DINNER? MAYBE WITH LESS TALK, JA?

I CAN'T SAY THE REST OF THE DINNER WAS ANY LESS AWKWARD.



Ach, THAT DID NOT GO WELL.

THEY WERE HORRIBLE...

...AND YOU COULD NOT STAY SOBER.

FOR YEARS, I TOLD PEOPLE THAT HANS' PARENTS MADE US END OUR RELATIONSHIP.

BUT, THAT'S NOT REALLY TRUE.

NOPE.

YUP. ≥MUURP≥

YEP. ≥HIC≥

THEY DID PRESSURE HIM TO MOVE BACK TO EUROPE FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL.

AND, THEY MADE CERTAIN THAT HE WENT ON SKIING TRIPS DURING EVERY SCHOOL BREAK, INSTEAD OF SPENDING TIME WITH ME LIKE HE'D PLANNED.

BUT, OVERALL, HANS AND I WERE PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF RUINING OUR RELATIONSHIP ON OUR OWN.



OVER THE *NEXT FEW MONTHS*, HANS AND I *BROKE UP OVER AND OVER*.

WE'D HAVE *HUGE FIGHTS*.

THEY'D ALWAYS *END* WITH MY SAYING I *NEVER* WANTED TO SEE HIM *AGAIN*.

THEN WE'D HAVE *ANOTHER BATTLE...*

WITHIN *WEEKS*, WE'D GET *BACK TOGETHER* AGAIN, AND IT'D BE LIKE *OLD TIMES* FOR A *WHILE*, WITH LOTS OF *SPANKING*.

...*FOLLOWED BY* ANOTHER *RECONCILIATION...*

...WHEN HE'D *SPANK* THE *DAYLIGHTS* OUT OF ME....

...AND WE'D HAVE *MIND-BLOWING* MAKE-UP *SEX...*

...THEN, THE *CYCLE* WOULD *START ALL OVER AGAIN*.

DURING *ALL THIS*, MY *SPEED* AND *BOOZE ADDICTIONS* GOT *WORSE AND WORSE*.

EVERY *TIME* HANS BROUGHT THAT UP, I FELT *JUDGED* AND *CONTROLLED*, AND I'D *DOUBLE DOWN*.

I *HARDLY SLEPT* OR *ATE*.

I GOT SO *SKINNY*, I SAW *BONES* STICKING OUT I *NEVER KNEW* I HAD.

I CAME CLOSE TO *FAILING* MOST OF MY *CLASSES*, EXCEPT *DRAWING*, WHICH I KEPT UP WITH *FRENETIC* ENERGY.

HANS' *GRADES* SUFFERED TOO, AND HE *WORRIED* HE WOULDN'T GET INTO *GRADUATE SCHOOL*.





THAT *SPRING*, OUR RELATIONSHIP *FINALLY* FELL APART, *ONCE* AND FOR ALL.

RIGHT BEFORE HANS LEFT FOR A *SKI* TRIP IN *SWITZERLAND*, WE HAD AN *ENORMOUS* FIGHT.

I'D TOLD HIM I FELT *TOTALLY CONTROLLED* BY HIM, AND NEEDED TO DATE *OTHER* PEOPLE. I DON'T THINK I REALLY EVEN *MEANT* IT, BUT I'D SAID IT.

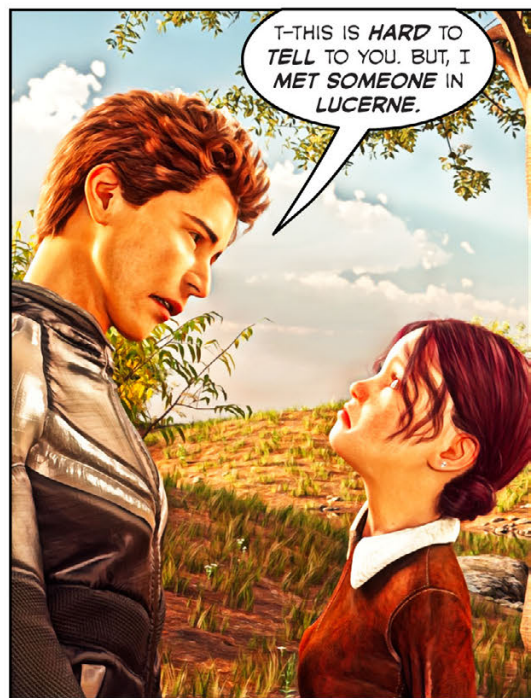
WHEN HE GOT *BACK*, HE CALLED ME AND SAID HE *WANTED* TO MEET UP.

I WAS SPENDING THAT *WEEKEND* AT MY *PARENTS'* HOUSE, HELPING THEM *REPAINT* THE FRONT *PORCH*.

HE SAID IT WAS TOO *IMPORTANT* TO TELL ME ON THE *PHONE*, SO HE'D *DRIVE* OUT THERE AND WE'D TALK ABOUT IT IN *PERSON*.

WELL, IF HANS WAS *WILLING* TO MAKE A *PILGRIMAGE* TO *MIDDLEBRIDGE*, *WHATEVER* HE HAD TO SAY MUST BE VERY *SERIOUS* INDEED.

I-I THINK PERHAPS YOU'RE *RIGHT* ABOUT SEEING *OTHER* PEOPLE.



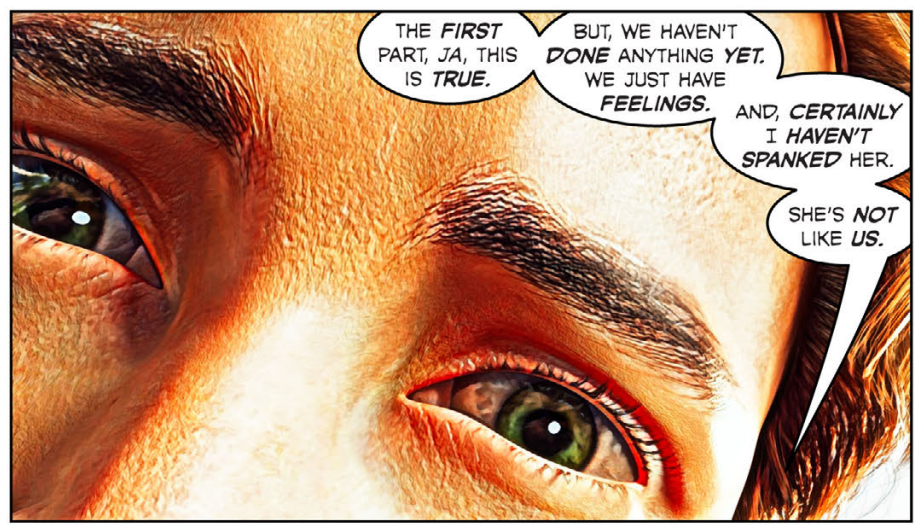
T-THIS IS *HARD* TO TELL TO YOU. BUT, I MET SOMEONE IN *LUCERNE*.



S-SHE'S *BLONDE* ISN'T SHE? *TALL*, WITH BIG *BREASTS*?

YOU'VE *FUCKED* HER...

...A-AND *SPANKED* HER, HAVEN'T YOU?



THE *FIRST* PART, JA, THIS IS *TRUE*.

BUT, WE HAVEN'T *DONE* ANYTHING *YET*. WE JUST HAVE *FEELINGS*.

AND, *CERTAINLY* I HAVEN'T *SPANKED* HER.

SHE'S *NOT* LIKE *US*.



Y-YOU SAY IT LIKE THERE'S *SOMETHING* *WRONG* WITH *US*.



WELL, JA, I'VE BEEN THINKING. *M-MAYBE* WHAT WE DO *ISN'T* *GOOD* FOR *US*.

WHAT WE *HAVE* IS *MAYBE* AN *ADDICTION*, JUST LIKE THE *DRUGS*.

IF WE *STAYED* TOGETHER, I'D KEEP *WANTING* TO *HURT* YOU, AND THAT'S *NOT* HOW IT *SHOULD* BE FOR ONE YOU *LOVE*.





Y-YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT.

THERE'S NOTHING THE MATTER WITH US.

W-WE JUST LOVE IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre



I-I DON'T KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

I ONLY KNOW I FEEL VERY HOLLOW RIGHT NOW.

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;



I-I'D BETTER GO...

...I HAVE TO FINISH PAINTING THE PORCH BEFORE I LOSE THE LIGHT.



Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold



FUELED BY BOOZE AND SPEED...

....I WAS DETERMINED TO GET BACK AT HANS BY "SEEING" AS MANY PEOPLE AS I COULD.

I STARTED WITH SCRATCH-BOARD GUY.

BUT, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I WANT YOU TO HURT ME!

MAN, Y-YOU'RE TOTALLY WIGGIN' ME OUT. NO WAY COULD I DO THAT. SEE, I'M A VEGAN...



AND, IN AN ATTEMPT TO REALLY MESS WITH HANS, I SLEPT WITH A GUY IN HIS FRATERNITY.

GAWD, THAT'S SO FUCKIN' KINKY! YOU REALLY WANT ME TO SLAP YOUR BOOTY WHILE WE DO IT?

WHAT'D MY OLD MAN THINK, IF HE KNEW HE WAS SHELLIN' OUT FIFTEEN GRAND A YEAR FOR ME TO BE HERE, SCREWIN' A GOTH ART SCHOOL CHICK!

Oh, I'M SURE HE'D BE THRILLED. NOW, YOU DO HAVE WHAT MY LAST BLONDE BOYFRIEND CALLED A "JIMMY HAT," RIGHT?



SICK OF MEN, I EVEN HAD A SIX WEEK-LONG RELATIONSHIP WITH CARMELITA.

SI, BUT THAT'S FOR HER AFLICCIÓN.

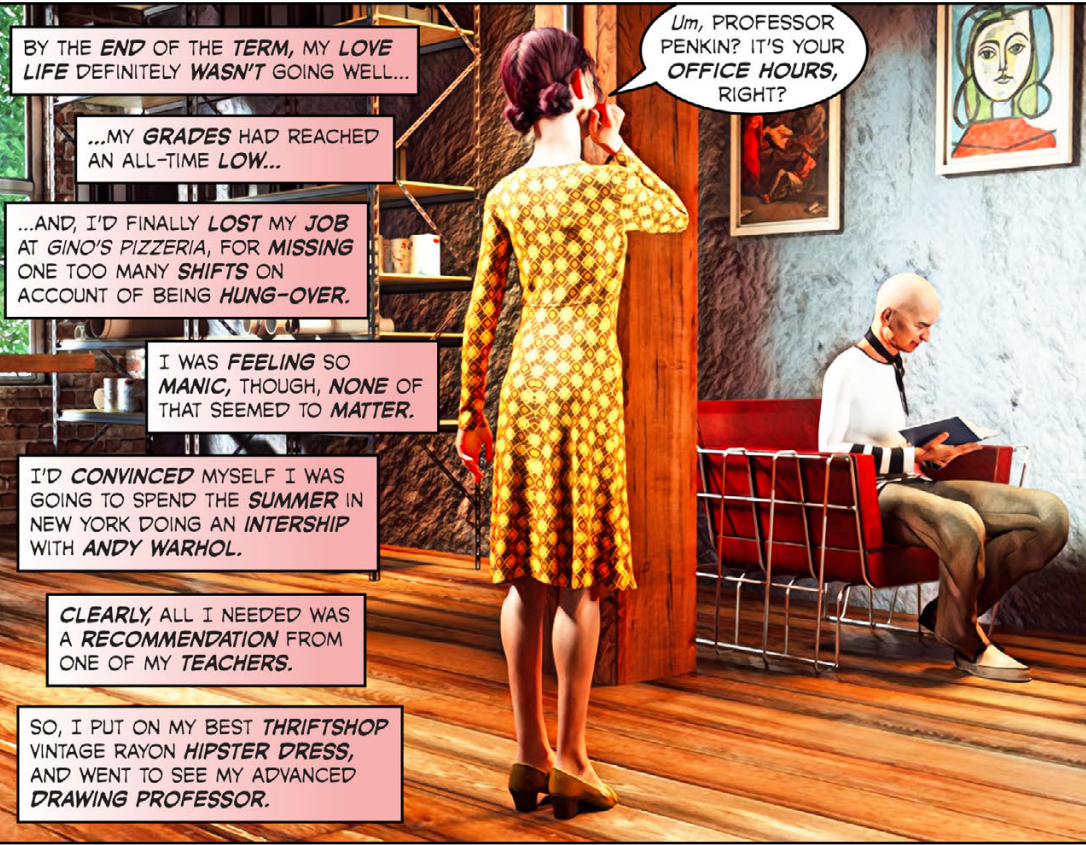
¿COMPRENDES? IT CANNOT BE A "PLEASURE," WITHOUT SUBJUGATING OURSELVES TO THE WORST OF THE PETTY BOURGEOIS PATRIARCHS.

GO BACK TO HOW ZILLAH EISENSTEIN RECONCEPTUALIZED DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM...

BUT, I'VE SEEN YOU DO IT TO MARTHA WITH LA CHANCLA!







BY THE **END** OF THE **TERM**, MY **LOVE** **LIFE** DEFINITELY **WASN'T** GOING WELL...

...MY **GRADES** HAD REACHED AN ALL-TIME **LOW**...

...AND, I'D FINALLY **LOST** MY **JOB** AT **GINO'S PIZZERIA**, FOR **MISSING** ONE TOO MANY **SHIFTS** ON ACCOUNT OF BEING **HUNG-OVER**.

I WAS **FEELING** SO **MANIC**, THOUGH, **NONE** OF THAT SEEMED TO **MATTER**.

I'D **CONVINCED** MYSELF I WAS GOING TO SPEND THE **SUMMER** IN NEW YORK DOING AN **INTERSHIP** WITH **ANDY WARHOL**.

**CLEARLY**, ALL I NEEDED WAS A **RECOMMENDATION** FROM ONE OF MY **TEACHERS**.

SO, I PUT ON MY BEST **THRIFTS**HOP VINTAGE **RAYON HIPSTER** DRESS, AND WENT TO SEE MY **ADVANCED** **DRAWING** PROFESSOR.

Um, PROFESSOR PENKIN? IT'S YOUR **OFFICE HOURS**, RIGHT?



Hmmm? SAY, WOULD YOU **MIND** MAKING ME A **CUP** OF **TEA**?

THERE'S A **LITTLE** **KITCHENETTE** DOWN THE **HALL** ON THE **RIGHT**.

**EARL GREY**, PLEASE.



S-SURE.

WHY **NOT**? I'D GOTTEN **USED** TO **SEXIST** PIGS IN **ART** SCHOOL.



THANK YOU!

Ah, IT'S **ALMOST** **ELEVEN** THIRTY. **MEDITATION** TIME!

I JUST **EMPTY** MY **MIND**, LOOK OUT THE **WINDOW**, AND THINK ABOUT **ART**!

YOU'RE **WELCOME** TO **JOIN** ME.



THERE'S THIS **CRAZY** **SQUIRREL** WHO **ALWAYS** COMES RIGHT ABOUT **NOW**, AND SITS IN THAT **TREE**.

HE MAKES THE MOST **GROTESQUE** **FACES** AT ME.

REMINDS ME OF **FRANCIS** **BACON**.

Um, OK.



**FIFTY** MINUTES LATER.

ZZZZZZ

Hmmm. I GUESS MR. **SQUIRREL** **DIDN'T** VISIT **TODAY**.

WELL, I'M **OFF** TO **LUNCH**! THANK YOU **AGAIN** FOR THE **TEA**.





W-WAIT PROFESSOR PENKIN!

I-I WANTED TO ASK YOU FOR A REC LETTER.

I WANT TO DO A PAINTING INTERNSHIP IN NEW YORK WITH ANDY---

Hmmm? YOU'RE IN MY CLASS?



Y-YEAH. I-I DO THE SUPER DETAILED DRAWINGS OF DEMONS N' FAIRIES N' STUFF.

YOU SAID I HAVE REALLY GOOD SKILLS...



Oh, OF COURSE. NOW I REMEMBER. PRETTY, DECORATIVE DRAWINGS.

BUT, PAINTING? YOUR WORK IS FAR TOO REPRESENTATIONAL FOR A TWENTIETH CENTURY FINE ARTIST.

YOU'D REALLY FARE BETTER IN COMMERCIAL ART.



B-BUT--

BESIDES, ALL THE SERIOUS INTERNSHIPS ARE GONE BY NOW. YOU HAVE TO APPLY EARLY IN THE SPRING.

THEY MIGHT STILL HAVE SOMETHING AT THE LOCAL PRINT SHOP ASK CHRIS IN CAREER SERVICES.

I'LL BE HAPPY TO WRITE YOU A LETTER, THOUGH I DON'T KNOW IF YOU EVEN NEED ONE FOR THAT KIND OF JOB.

OVER THE NEXT COUPLE WEEKS, I HAD TO LAY OFF SPEED, BECAUSE I RAN OUT OF MONEY TO BUY IT.

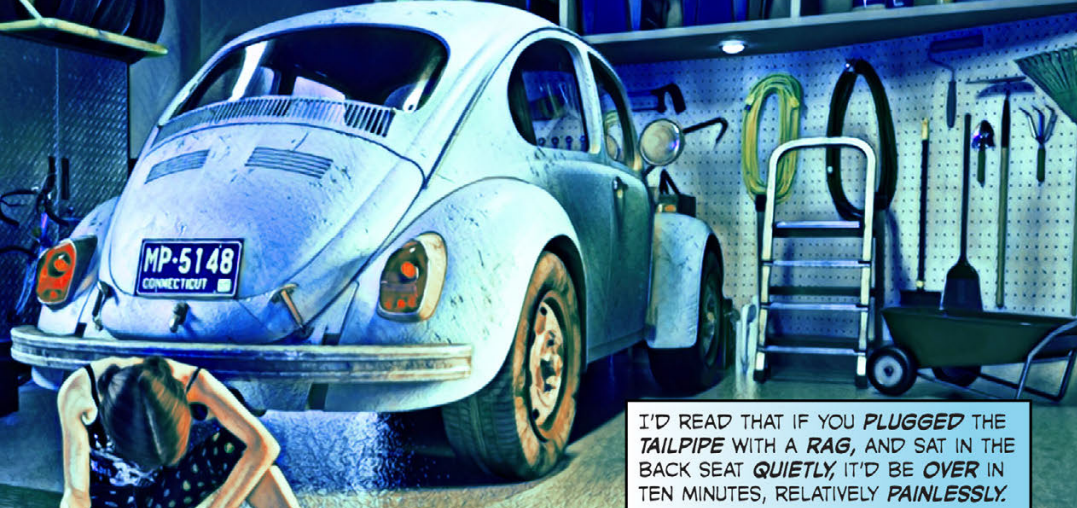
AS A CONSEQUENCE, REALITY SOON SET IN.

I WAS BROKE, ABOUT TO FAIL OUT OF SCHOOL, AND NOBODY LOVED ME.

I MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LIVE WITH ALL THAT. BUT--A COMMERCIAL ARTIST? WORKING IN A PRINT SHOP?

SO, I HATCHED A PLAN. I DECIDED I'D CARRY IT OUT ON MY TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY, WHICH WAS THAT SATURDAY.

I CONVINCED MY LANDLORD, TOM, TO LET ME PUT MY CAR IN HIS GARAGE FOR THE WEEKEND. I TOLD HIM MY BOYFRIEND WAS GOING TO FIX THE ENGINE.



I'D READ THAT IF YOU PLUGGED THE TAILPIPE WITH A RAG, AND SAT IN THE BACK SEAT QUIETLY, IT'D BE OVER IN TEN MINUTES, RELATIVELY PAINLESSLY.

I FIGURED IT'D BE POETIC JUSTICE TO TIME IT FOR 9:45 AM, WHEN MY BIRTH CERTIFICATE SAID I'D COME INTO THE WORLD.



9:35 AM, JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO STUFF THE RAG IN MY TAILPIPE.

RUDE, ARE YOU IN HERE?

MP-5 CONNECTICUT

HANS?!? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I THOUGHT YOU'D ALREADY LEFT FOR THE SUMMER.

NEIN, MY FLIGHT'S IN THREE HOURS.

I KNOW YOU'LL GO OUT DRINKING WITH SOMEONE TONIGHT FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY.

BUT, I THOUGHT IF I CAME BY NOW, YOU'D BE ASLEEP...

N-NO, TOM HEARD WRONG. HE NEVER LISTENS.

I-I TOLD HIM I'M GONNA PAINT MY CAR BLACK.

BLACK? IN THE MORNING? ON YOUR BIRTHDAY?

THIS SOUNDS VERY STRANGE, ALSO.

ARE YOU SURE YOU ARE OK?

...AND, I'D SURPRISE YOU IN BED, LIKE IN THE OLD TIMES.

I MET TOM OUTSIDE, THOUGH, AND HE SAID YOU WERE IN THE GARAGE WAITING FOR ME TO FIX YOUR AUTO. THAT IS VERY STRANGE, I THINK.

NO, I'M REALLY NOT OK.

MY WHOLE LIFE'S A MESS.

WELL, I BROUGHT YOU A BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

M-MAYBE THAT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER?





THANKS. Y-YOU DO CARE, DON'T YOU?

Y'KNOW, I'D ASK YOU TO DO SOMETHING ELSE FOR MY BIRTHDAY...

...EXCEPT I KNOW YOU THINK THAT'S WRONG NOW.

\*THE PRESENT TURNED OUT TO BE AN ARTIFICIAL-SMELLING STRAWBERRY POTPOURRI. HANS WAS NEVER ANY GOOD AT PICKING OUT GIFTS.



ACH, I'VE DONE MUCH THINKING ABOUT THAT.

HOW CAN SOMETHING THAT MAKES US FEEL SO GOOD, BE BAD?



I-IT WOULDN'T MEAN WE'RE GETTING BACK TOGETHER AGAIN, THOUGH.

IF WE DID, IT'D START THE VICIOUS CYCLE ALL OVER AGAIN.



JA, YOU ARE RIGHT. EVEN THOUGH YOU ACT VERY SILLY SOMETIMES, MÄUSCHEN, I THINK YOU CAN BE VERY WISE.

IT WOULD JUST BE SOMETHING YOU NEED, AND I'LL HAPPILY GIVE YOU, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU DESIRE.



Y-YES, I'D LIKE THAT VERY MUCH RIGHT NOW.



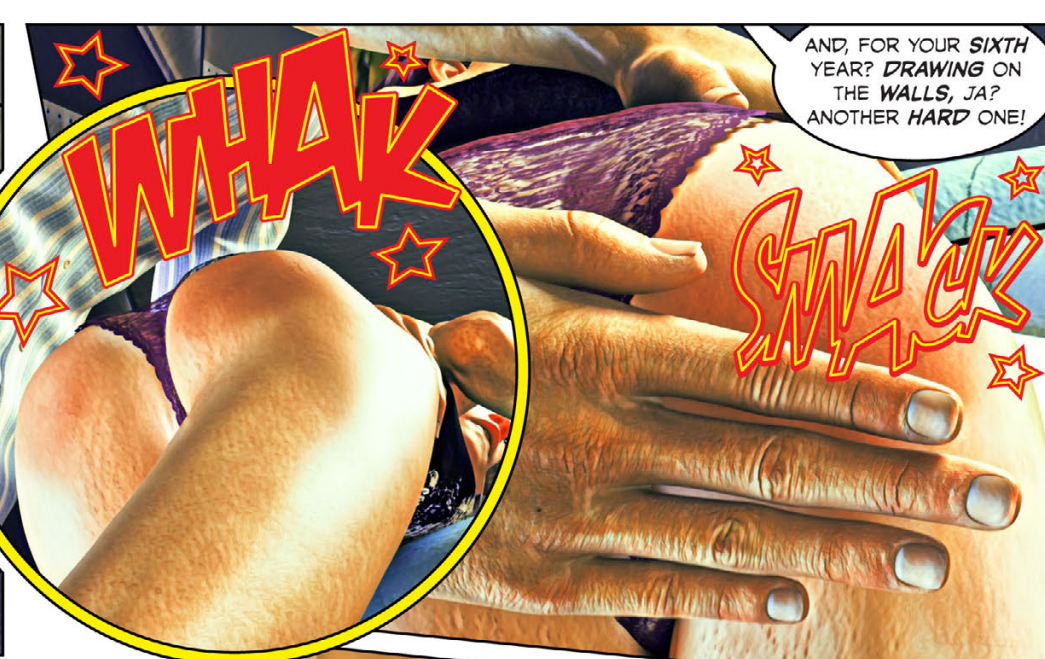
EINS...ZWEI... DREI...VIER...

HE STARTED OUT TENTATIVELY, GENTLY EVEN, BECAUSE IT'D BEEN LONG ENOUGH THAT WE'D FORGOTTEN THE RHYTHMS OF OUR BODIES.

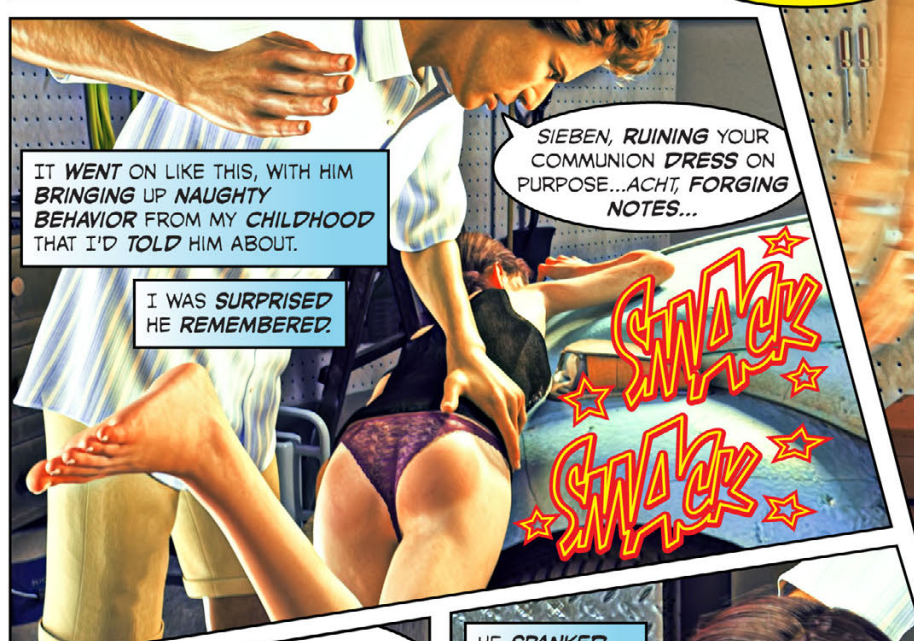




NOW FOR THE FIFTH YEAR, IT MUST BE HARD, JA?  
 THAT'S WHEN YOU ALMOST BURNED DOWN YOUR HOUSE WITH YOUR SILLY SÉANCE.



AND, FOR YOUR SIXTH YEAR? DRAWING ON THE WALLS, JA? ANOTHER HARD ONE!



IT WENT ON LIKE THIS, WITH HIM BRINGING UP NAUGHTY BEHAVIOR FROM MY CHILDHOOD THAT I'D TOLD HIM ABOUT.

I WAS SURPRISED HE REMEMBERED.

SIEBEN, RUINING YOUR COMMUNION DRESS ON PURPOSE...ACHT, FORGING NOTES...

SWACK SWACK SWACK



...NEUN, STEALING FROM THE DIMESTORE...ZEHN, CUSSING OUT A PRIEST AND A NUN...

SWACK SWACK SWACK

EVENTUALLY, HE GOT TO NINETEEN.



AND, FOR LAST YEAR, YOU WERE VERY, VERY BAD. I KNOW, I WAS THERE.

YOU'LL GET FAR MORE THAN ONE SMACK FOR THAT.



HE SPANKED FAST AND VERY HARD. IT HURT.

SWACK SWACK SWACK



THERE, THERE MÄUSCHEN. YOU HAVE ONLY TWO LEFT, AND I PROMISE THEY WON'T BE HARD...

...BECAUSE I KNOW THIS YEAR YOU WILL TRY TO BE GOOD.

BUT, I WASN'T CRYING FROM THE PAIN.

IT WAS FOR ALL I'D DONE TO SCREW UP MY LIFE THAT LAST YEAR.

SOB!



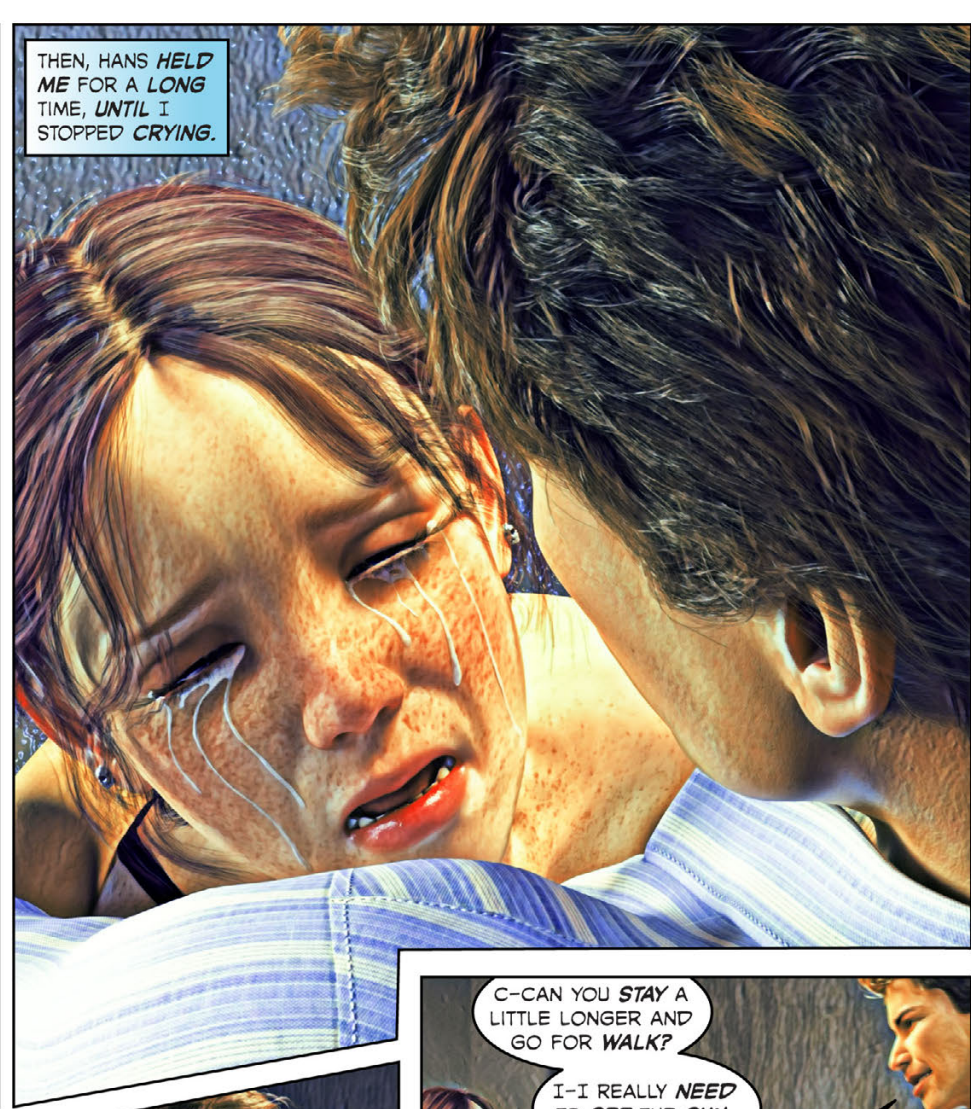


ZWANZIG...  
...AND ONE TO GROW ON.

AS PROMISED, THE FINAL TWO SWATS WEREN'T HARD, JUST A BIT FIRM...

...AUGURING A BETTER YEAR, IF I'D ONLY BEHAVE.

SMILE  
SMILE



THEN, HANS HELD ME FOR A LONG TIME, UNTIL I STOPPED CRYING.



Y-YOU KNOW, YOU SAVED ME TODAY FROM DOING SOMETHING I DON'T THINK I REALLY WANTED TO DO.



MEIN GOTT! YOU DON'T MEAN WHAT YOU TRIED TO DO WHEN YOU WERE FIFTEEN?

Y-YOU MUST NOT THINK SUCH THINGS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN, BUT I THINK THERE IS A KIND OF MAGIC IN YOU.

THE WORLD CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE THAT.



C-CAN YOU STAY A LITTLE LONGER AND GO FOR WALK?

I-I REALLY NEED TO SEE THE SUN, RIGHT NOW.

JA, JA, IF THAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.

I'LL JUST TELL HERR CABBIE TO DRIVE LIKE WE'RE ON THE AUTOBAHN, SO I GET TO THE AIRPORT ON TIME.

I THINK AGREEING TO LEAVE LATER FOR THE AIRPORT WAS ABOUT THE MOST CONTROL HANS EVER GAVE UP IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.

IT SEEMS THINGS LIKE THAT ARE ALWAYS CLEAREST AT THE END.





IT'S FUNNY. AN HOUR  
AGO I **WANTED** MY  
**WORLD TO END.**

BUT **NOW**, WITH THE **SUN**  
**SHINING** LIKE THIS, AND  
AFTER WHAT YOU **GAVE**  
ME IN THE **GARAGE...**

...WELL, IT MAKES  
ME **THINK** OF A  
**POEM** I ONCE  
**READ...**

"Razors pain you;  
Rivers are damp;

Acids stain you;  
And drugs cause cramp.

Guns aren't lawful;  
Nooses give;  
Gas smells awful;

You might as  
well live."

--Dorothy Parker

HANS **ENDED** UP TAKING A  
NICE **WALK** WITH ME FOR  
ABOUT **HALF AN HOUR...**

...THEN HE BECAME VERY **NERVOUS**  
THAT HE'D **MISS** HIS **FLIGHT**, AND  
MADE US **RUN** BACK TO MY **ROOM**,  
SO HE COULD **CALL** A **TAXI**.

IT'S **HARD** FOR  
PEOPLE TO **CHANGE**.

TO MAKE THE STORY **TIDIER**, I'D LIKE TO SAY  
WE MADE A **CLEAN BREAK** AFTER THAT DAY.  
BUT, THAT'S **NOT** HOW **REAL LIFE** WORKS.

I **SAW** HIM **ON** AND **OFF** IN HIS  
SENIOR YEAR, BEFORE HE WENT **BACK**  
TO **EUROPE** FOR **GRAD SCHOOL**.

HE GAVE ME **QUITE** A FEW MORE  
**SPANKINGS**, AND WE EVEN **SLEPT**  
TOGETHER **SOMETIMES**.

BUT, WE WERE **NEVER**  
A **COUPLE** AGAIN.

I **LOOKED** HIM UP ON THE **INTERNET** A FEW  
**YEARS** AGO. HE WAS A **BANKER**, LIVING IN  
GERMANY, **MARRIED**, WITH **CHILDREN**.

I **THOUGHT** ABOUT **CONTACTING**  
HIM, BUT DECIDED **NOT** TO.

**WHOEVER** HE'S **BECOME** NOW WOULD BE  
**NO MATCH** FOR MY HANS, WHO WILL **REMAIN**  
IN MY MIND **FOREVER** TWENTY-ONE,  
**FANCY-FREE**, AND **BEAUTIFUL** AS THE **SUN**.



# Epilogue

I ENDED UP TAKING THE INTERNSHIP AT THE *PRINT SHOP*.

IT TURNED OUT TO BE *MUCH BETTER* THAN I EXPECTED.

THE SHOP, *FALCON PRESS*, WAS OWNED BY A MIDDLE-AGED *HIPSTER* COUPLE.

THEY WERE *EX-TATTOO* ARTISTS, WITH VAGUE TIES TO THE *CIRCUS*. WHEN BUSINESS WAS *SLOW*, THEY'D SIT AROUND *INKING* EACH OTHER.

FER CRISSAKES, DON'T OVER THINK IT!

JUS' BE YOU, BE BOLD, AND MAKE IT LOOK COOL.

TRUST ME, THE DUDE'LL LOVE YOUR DESIGN. YOU'VE GOTTA FLAIR FER IT.

Y-YOU DON'T THINK IT'S TOO, YA'KNOW, LITERAL?



I GOT TO DO REAL PROJECTS RIGHT AWAY.

SOME JOBS WERE PRETTY BORING, LIKE LOGOS FOR PIZZA SHOPS.

BUT, I GOT FUN ONES, TOO, LIKE POSTERS FOR MUSIC FESTIVALS AND PLAYS.

IT SEEMED LIKE SACRELIGE AFTER ALL THE INDOCTRINATION AT NESFFA, BUT I FOUND IT VERY SATISFYING TO MAKE ART THAT WAS MEANT TO BE DIRECT AND TO THE POINT.

I LEARNED TO USE A COMPUTER FOR THE FIRST TIME, TOO!

THE BOX THINGY ON THE SIDE IS CALLED A DISC DRIVE.

SOMETIMES IT MAKES NASTY GRINDING SOUNDS.

JUS' PICK IT UP 'BOUT TWO INCHES, AND DROP IT ONNA TABLE.

JIMBO FIGURED OUT THAT'LL STOP THE FUCKING NOISE.

AT THE START, I WAS VERY SKEPTICAL.

I'D SEEN BOYS PLAYING PRIMITIVE GAMES ON COMPUTERS IN HIGH SCHOOL...

STAY AWAY FROM THIS RUSSIAN GAME, THOUGH. IT'S LIKE CRACK!

...AND I KNEW BUSINESSES USED THEM FOR ACCOUNTING AND STUFF...

...BUT, I'D NEVER THOUGHT OF USING THEM FOR ART.

EVENTUALLY, THOUGH, I REALLY TOOK TO DIGITAL MEDIA, ALTHOUGH I'M NOT A TECHY TYPE AT ALL.



ART HAS ALWAYS BEEN OBSESSIVE FOR ME. SO, I GUESS BEING ABLE TO ERASE OVER AND OVER IS ONE REASON I LIKE DIGITAL!

IRONICALLY, MANY OF THE F.A. MAJORS I KNEW AT NESFFA COULDN'T MAKE MONEY AND EVENTUALLY GAVE UP ON ART ENTIRELY. WELL, I'M STILL AT IT, EVEN IF I "JUST" DO COMMERCIAL ART.

\*EARLY ATTEMPTS TO USE A MOUSE LEFT-HANDED!



SOMETHING *ELSE* HAPPENED THAT *SUMMER* THAT I'LL *NEVER* FORGET.

IT CAME ABOUT, BECAUSE I'D GO OUT AND *SMOKE CLOVE CIGARETTES* IN THE *ALLEY* *BEHIND* THE PRINT SHOP.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT REALLY *HELPED* WITH GETTING OFF *DRUGS*, BUT I FELT VERY *COOL* SMOKING *DJARUM BLACKS*.

AND, I DID FINALLY *KICK* MY *SPEED HABIT*. BY *AUGUST*, I EVEN FELT *HUNGRY* AGAIN, AND DIDN'T LOOK A COMPLETE *SKELETON* ANYMORE.

I'D TAKEN UP *SMOKING*, BECAUSE I'D HEARD IT *BLUNTED* SOME OF THE *CRAVINGS* WHILE QUITTING *SPEED*.



ANYHOW, ONE *NIGHT* I WAS OUT IN THE *ALLEY* SMOKING AND I HEARD *COUGHING*.

WHEN I TURNED AROUND, I SAW THIS YOUNG, *ONE-LEGGED* GUY *LOUNGING* ON CRATES AGAINST THE *SIDE* OF A *BUILDING*.

*YOYE!* DON'T YOU KNOW THOSE ARE *BAD* FOR YOU? THEY CAUSE *CANCER*.

**COUGH  
COUGH**

WELL, AT LEAST I'VE GOT A *REASON* TO BE *HANGING* OUT IN A *DARK* ALLEY.

PRAY TELL, MR. *HEALTHY*, WHAT'S *YOUR* EXCUSE?



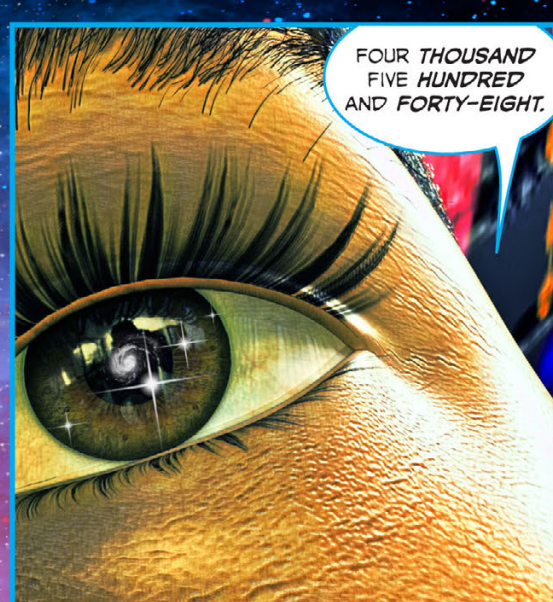




I AM COUNTING THE STARS.



Oooooo. AREN'T THERE AN AWFUL LOT UP THERE TO COUNT?



FOUR THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHT.



AND, HOW MANY HAVE YOU COUNTED SO FAR?

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVEN.



WELL, DON'T LET ME INTERRUPT YOUR...STAR COUNTING "FUN."

I'LL GO SMOKE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ALLEY, SO I DON'T RUIN YOUR VIEW.



THE NEXT DAY, I WAS FINISHING PRINTING MENUS I'D DESIGNED FOR JOSE'S, THE MEXICAN RESTAURANT RIGHT AROUND THE BLOCK.

AND, GUESS WHO SHOWED UP?

W-WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?

¡HOLA! I'M HERE TO PICK UP THE ORDER FOR JOSE'S.





JOSE'S IS THE RESTAURANT OF MY UNCLE.



Oh gosh. S-SORRY WE GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT.

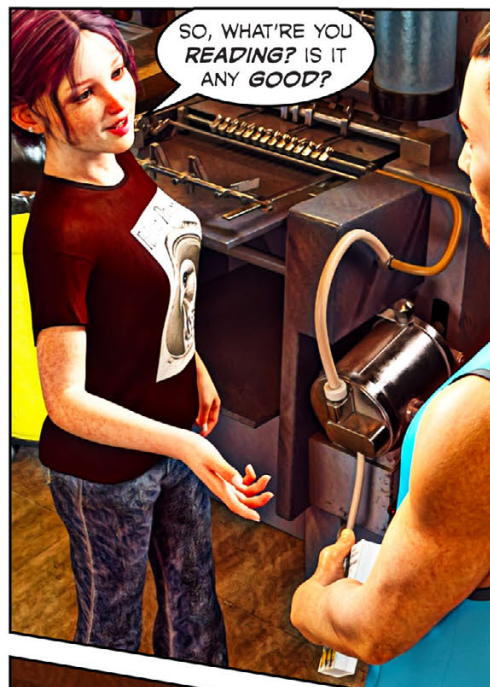
I'M RUDE. I GO TO NESFFA AND I'M INTERNING HERE OVER THE SUMMER.

MUCHO GUSTO. I AM ESTEBAN.

I AM VISITING FROM LOS ANGELES. I AM MEANT TO HELP MY UNCLE...

...BUT, AS YOU KNOW, MOSTLY I COUNT THE STARS.

UGH. FREUDIAN SLIP. I COULDN'T BELIEVE I'D SAID "FOOT."



SO, WHAT'RE YOU READING? IS IT ANY GOOD?



SI. IT IS THE GREATEST NOVEL EVER WRITTEN.

IT WILL SET YOUR BRAIN ON FIRE.

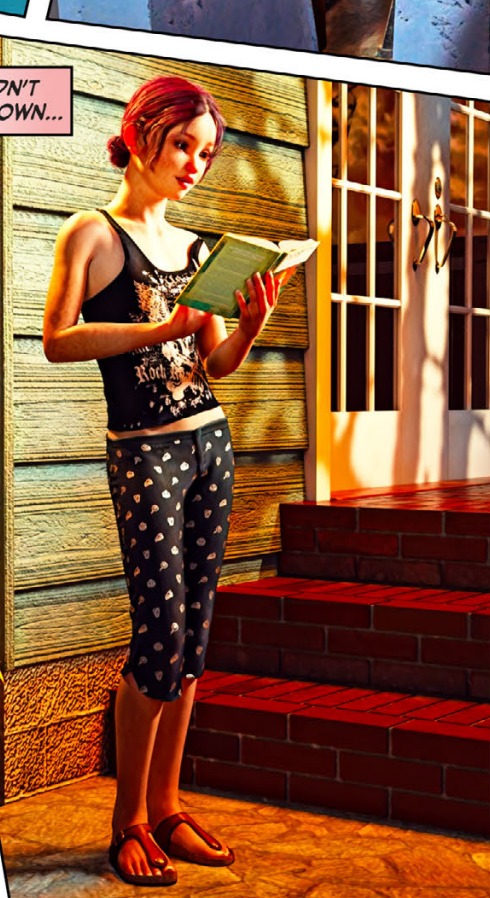
IF YOU DON'T READ THE SPANISH, THERE IS A TRANSLATION I HAVE HEARD IS GOOD.

MY COUSIN HAS A COPY. I CAN BORROW IT FOR YOU, AND BRING IT LATER IF YOU LIKE.



HE BROUGHT IT ON A FRIDAY AFTERNOON.

I STARTED READING IT AT WORK, AND GOT TOTALLY ABSORBED.



I COULDN'T PUT IT DOWN...



...AND FINISHED IT IN A MARATHON SESSION BY FOUR A.M. ON SATURDAY.



HE WAS RIGHT.

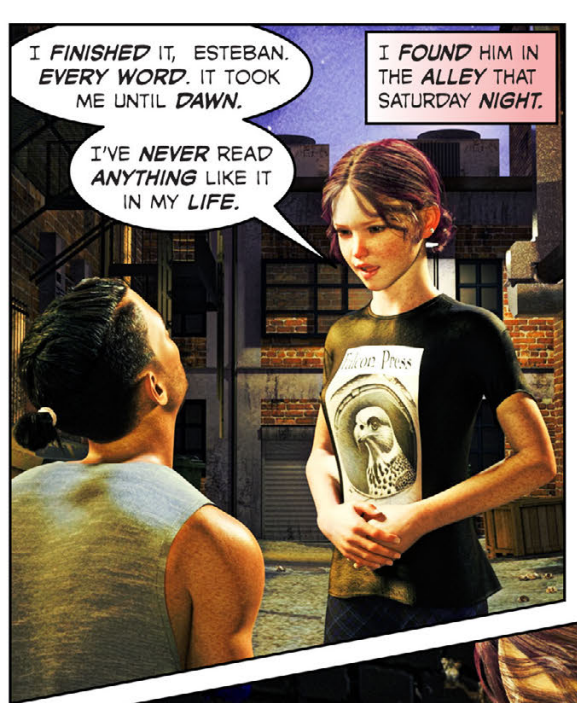
ONE HUNDRED YEARS  
OF SOLITUDE SET MY  
BRAIN ON FIRE.



I'D NEVER BEFORE ALLOWED  
MYSELF TO UNDERSTAND THAT  
FOR SOME OF US, REALITY  
AND MAGIC ARE INSEPARABLE.

\*REMEDIOS THE BEAUTY  
ASCENDING TO HEAVEN.

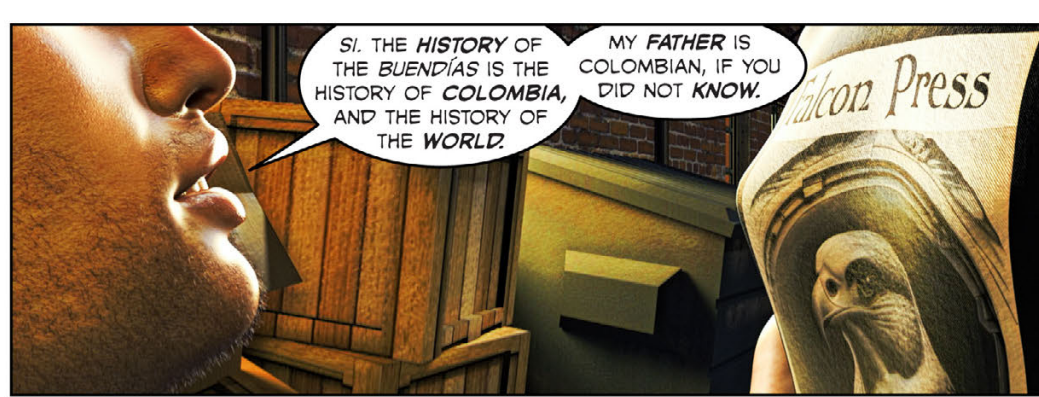




I FINISHED IT, ESTEBAN. EVERY WORD. IT TOOK ME UNTIL DAWN.

I FOUND HIM IN THE ALLEY THAT SATURDAY NIGHT.

I'VE NEVER READ ANYTHING LIKE IT IN MY LIFE.



SI. THE HISTORY OF THE BUENDÍAS IS THE HISTORY OF COLOMBIA, AND THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.

MY FATHER IS COLOMBIAN, IF YOU DID NOT KNOW.



NO, I DIDN'T.

I CONFESS I'D LIKE TO KNOW LOTS MORE ABOUT YOU, ESTEBAN.

I-I FIND YOU FASCINATING.

W-WOULD IT OFFEND YOU IF I ASKED ABOUT... YOUR LEG?



IT IS NO PROBLEM. I WILL TELL YOU.

IT WAS OSTEO-SARCOMA. CANCER OF THE BONE.



O-oh gosh. HOW LONG AGO DID IT HAPPEN?



ONLY ONE YEAR AND A HALF IN MY LAST TERM OF HIGH SCHOOL.

I HAD PAIN AND INFLAMACIÓN IN MY LEG. MY MOTHER THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY FROM GROWING.

BUT, IT BECAME VERY BAD SO, I VISITED A DOCTOR.



"THE DOCTOR TOOK MANY PICTURES."

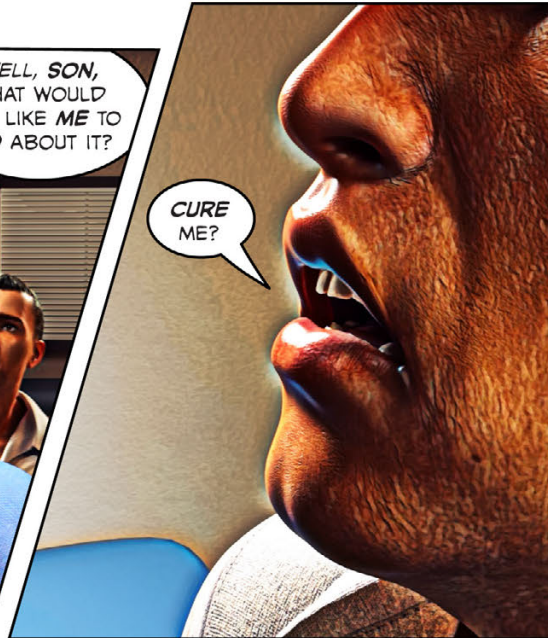
"HE SPENT A LONG TIME IN SILENCE LOOKING AT THEM."

"FINALLY, HE SPOKE."



WELL, SON, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO DO ABOUT IT?

CURE ME?



Hmmm...

IF I AMPUTATE ABOVE THE KNEE, GIVE YOU CHEMO, AND DOSES OF RADIATION...

...YOU'LL HAVE ABOUT A FIFTY-FIFTY CHANCE.

"RIGHT BEFORE THE SURGERY, A VERY OLD NURSE CAME BY. SHE SWABBED MY ARM AND THEN GAVE ME AN INYECCIÓN."



"I COULD NOT STOP SHIVERING. IT WAS LIKE A GLACIER IN MY VEINS, THE COLDEST THING IMAGINABLE."

"I ASKED HER WHAT IT WAS SHE HAD GIVEN ME."



"SHE TOLD ME, THE PURPOSE OF IT IS TO REFRIGERATE THE HEART."

"THAT WAY, WHEN YOU WAKE UP, YOU WILL NOT MISS WHAT THE SURGEON HAS TAKEN FROM YOU SO MUCH, SHE SAID."





"LOSING MY LEG WAS NOT THE WORST PART, THOUGH."

"YOU SEE, WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN MY AUNT TOOK ME TO A CURANDERA, TO SEE MY FUTURE."

"FOR MANY YEARS, I WOULD DREAM OF THAT GIRL."

"SHE SAID I WOULD SEEK KNOWLEDGE AND LEAD A SIMPLE LIFE."

"SHE ALSO SAID I WOULD HAVE A LITTLE GIRL WITH LONG, DARK BRAIDS AND BIG, BROWN EYES, AND THAT SHE WOULD REMEMBER ME AFTER I HAVE DISAPPEARED FROM THIS EARTH."

"I IMAGINED JUST HOW SHE'D LOOK."

BUT, I CAN HAVE NO CHILDREN NOW, BECAUSE OF THE TREATMENTS.

SO, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED: THE CURANDERA LIED, AND MY DREAMS WERE ALL FALSE.

M-MAYBE SHE DIDN'T LIE, ESTEBAN. MAYBE SHE MEANT SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

Y-YOU KNOW, I HAD LONG, DARK BRAIDS WHEN I WAS LITTLE.



WE'RE ALL *CONDEMNED* TO *SOLITUDE* IN SOME *WAYS*, I SUPPOSE.



C-CAN I *HOLD* YOU?



LIKE A *MAIDEN* WHO GOES TO *LIE* WITH *YOUNG SOLDIERS* THE *NIGHT BEFORE* THEY'RE SENT OFF TO *BATTLE*?

S-SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



ONE HUNDRED AND NINE.

YET, WE HAVE THOSE FEW *SUMMERS*, WHEN WE'RE *TEN* OR *TWENTY* OR SOMETIMES EVEN *OLDER*, IF WE'RE BLESSED TO LIVE THAT *LONG*, WHEN WE CAN *REACH* ACROSS THE *VOID* AND *TOUCH* ANOTHER *BEING*.

THEN, THE *WORLD* SPLITS *OPEN* LIKE AN *ENORMOUS GOURD*, AND WE SEE IT'S FULL OF *SEEDS* BRIGHT AS ANY *STARS*.

*ESTEBAN* WENT *BACK* TO *LOS ANGELES* AT THE *END* OF THAT *SUMMER* WHEN I WAS *TWENTY*.

I *NEVER* SAW OR HEARD FROM HIM *AGAIN*.

I'VE WANTED TO *TELL* THIS *STORY* FOR OVER *THIRTY* YEARS.

I *TRIED* MANY TIMES--STARTING SHORT STORIES, A NOVEL, AND MANY PAINTINGS, BUT I COULD NEVER *FINISH*. UNTIL *NOW*.



WHEN **SUMMER ENDED**, I HAD TO LEAVE THE BIG **HOUSE** I'D **SHARED** WITH **MARTHA** AND **CARMELITA** FOR THE LAST **YEAR**, BECAUSE THE **LANDLORD** HAD **RAISED** THE RENT **SIXTY-TWO DOLLARS**.

IT WAS A **THREE** BEDROOM HOUSE THAT A **FAMILY** WITH TWO **KIDS** HAD JUST **MOVED** OUT OF.

THE **NEW** PLACE I FOUND WAS **LESS** MONEY AND VERY **NICE**, BUT IT WAS WAY **OUT** IN THE **SUBURBS**.

THE **DAD** HAD GOTTEN A **JOB** IN **BOSTON** AND THEY'D HAD TO **RELOCATE** ABRUPTLY, SO HE WAS WILLING TO RENT IT **CHEAP**.

# CRYSTAL THOUGHT TIME

Art & Story by RUDE RUMPS

I GOT THE **SEVEN-YEAR-OLD** DAUGHTER'S **ROOM**, COMPLETE WITH HER OLD **FURNITURE** THAT THEY'D **LEFT** BEHIND.

YOU'RE **POSITIVE** YOU DON'T WANT TO PUT THIS **STUFF** IN THE **BASEMENT**?

THE OWNER'S SAID WE CAN **STORE** ANY **FURNITURE** DOWN THERE WE DON'T WANT.

I'M SURE **PETER** CAN SCARE UP A COUPLE **STRONG** GUYS TO HELP **MOVE** IT.

MY **HOUSEMATES** WERE **PAUL** AND **PETER**, TWO **GAY** MEN IN THEIR LATE **TWENTIES**.

**PAUL** DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A **HOBBIT**.

HE LIKED TO **LOUNGE** AROUND, SMOKING A **PIPE** AND EATING EUROPEAN **CHOCOLATE** BARS.

Nah, I'M **GONNA** LEAVE IT.

I KINDA **LIKE** ALL THE **KITSCH**. IN AN **IRONIC** WAY, OF COURSE.

HE **RAN** SOMETHING CALLED "**THE PEOPLE'S PLUMBER COLLECTIVE**" OUT OF HIS **BEDROOM**.

**DING DONG**

AYE, **M'LADY**. AS YOU **LIKE** IT, THEN!

AS FAR AS I COULD TELL, THEY WENT AROUND FIXING **TOILETS** AND **SINKS**, AND THEN LEFT **COMMUNIST** LEAFLETS IN THEIR CUSTOMERS' **BATHROOMS**.

UNLIKE **PAUL**, **PETER** DIDN'T SAY **MUCH**. ALL I **REALLY** KNEW ABOUT HIM WAS...

Hey, I THINK THAT'S **GREGOR** AT THE **DOOR**.

....HE WORKED AS A **SECRETARY** AT **HANS'** SCHOOL....

...MOUSSED HIS **HAIR**....

...AND HAD ABOUT **TEN** BOYFRIENDS.

**DING DONG**





WHO'S GREGOR? ANOTHER ONE OF PETER'S BOYFRIENDS?



NO, HIS CANDYMAN.

GREGOR'S AN INTERESTING CHARACTER, ALL RIGHT.

HE HAS A DOCTORATE IN CHEMISTRY...MAKES DESIGNER PSYCHEDELICS...

...INVENTED THE INFAMOUS \$50 OMELETTE...RUNS AN ETHICAL NON-MONO--



Hey, FAR OUT.

LITERALLY A LITTLE KID'S ROOM.

A FUN PLACE TO PLAY, huh?

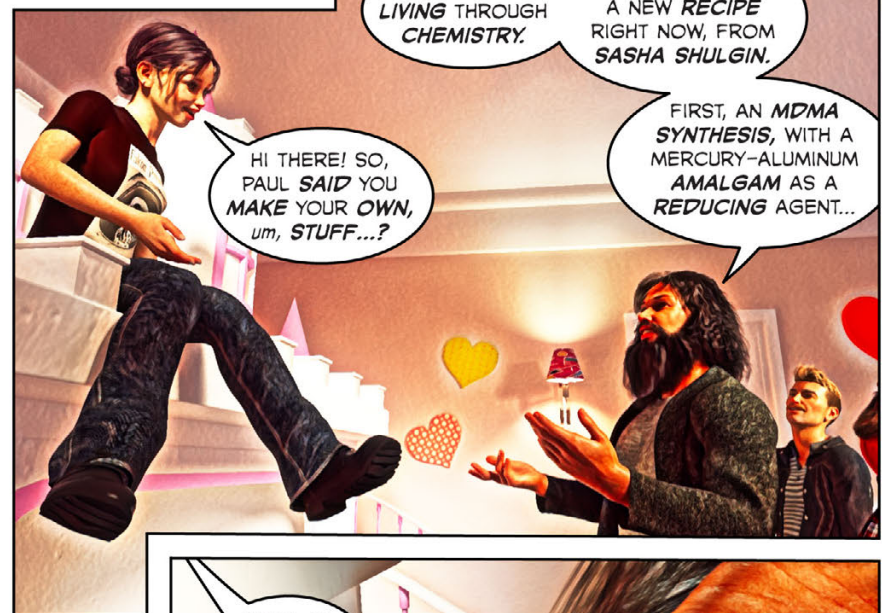


GREGOR, MEET MY NEW HOUSEMATE, RUDE.

SHE'S AN ARTIST. AND, uh--

NAMASTE.

--ONLY TWENTY! THE BABY OF OUR LITTLE COMMUNE, AS YOU CAN SEE.



Yep. BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY.

I'M WORKING ON A NEW RECIPE RIGHT NOW, FROM SASHA SHULGIN.

HI THERE! SO, PAUL SAID YOU MAKE YOUR OWN, um, STUFF...?

FIRST, AN MDMA SYNTHESIS, WITH A MERCURY-ALUMINUM AMALGAM AS A REDUCING AGENT...



OK, EVER DONE ECSTASY? IT'S A RELATED COMPOUND. LESS VISUALS AND EVEN MORE EMOTIONAL.

Um, SORRY. I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

I COULD BRING SOME BY TOMORROW, WHEN I FINISH THE BATCH...IF YOU WANT TO TRY IT.



WELL, IT SOUNDS COOL.

BUT, I'M KINDA BROKE RIGHT NOW.

DON'T WORRY, IT'D BE ON THE HOUSE-- IF YOU'LL WRITE A COMPLETE TRIP REPORT.

NOT MANY PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN IT YET. I NEED MORE VOLUNTEERS.



ELEVEN PM., TWO DAYS LATER.

ALL MOVED IN?

I'D DECIDED TO TAKE GREGOR UP ON HIS OFFER.

MOSTLY, I DID IT OUT OF CURIOSITY.

ALSO, I WAS TWENTY AND DID MANY THINGS WITHOUT THINKING.

YEP, THIS IS EVERYTHING.

AND THE ROOM'S STILL MOSTLY EMPTY!

I NEVER HAD SO MUCH SPACE IN MY LIFE!

AND, I SURE NEVER HAD A GIANT CASTLE BED LIKE THAT WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

SO, NO WAY WAS I GONNA STICK IT IN THE BASEMENT!

Well, I HAVE YOUR PILL AND TRIP LOG RIGHT HERE.

WHO'S GONNA BE YOUR SITTER? PAUL?

SITTER?

VERY FUNNY. YA'KNOW, I'M ACTUALLY AN ADULT, DESPITE THE FURNITURE!

BELIEVE ME, THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME I'VE GOTTEN STONED.

UNDERNEATH MY BRAVADO, I HAD AN INKLING I WAS IN OVER MY HEAD.

I MEAN, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG WITH BEING A GUINEA PIG FOR THE CHEMISTRY EXPERIMENTS OF A DRUG DEALER WHO LOOKED LIKE RASPUTIN?

YET FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, I TRUSTED GREGOR.

HE WAS ODDLY CHARISMATIC. KIND OF A CROSS BETWEEN A BIG TEDDY BEAR AND SATAN.

NO SITTER, NO TRIP. THAT'S THE DEAL. YOU'RE TAKING A NOVEL DISSOCIATIVE SUBSTANCE.

YOU NEED SOMEONE TO TAKE CARE OF YOU. THAT'S BEING A RESPONSIBLE PSYCHONAUT.

O-ok. Um, C-COULD YOU DO IT?

ALL RIGHT. I CAN STAY UNTIL THREE A.M.

YOUR TRIP WILL BE OVER BY THEN. THIS ONE DOESN'T LAST TOO LONG.

OPEN WIDE.

THERE WAS A FAINT, BITTER, METALLIC TASTE.

IT REMINDED ME OF TAKING COMMUNION.

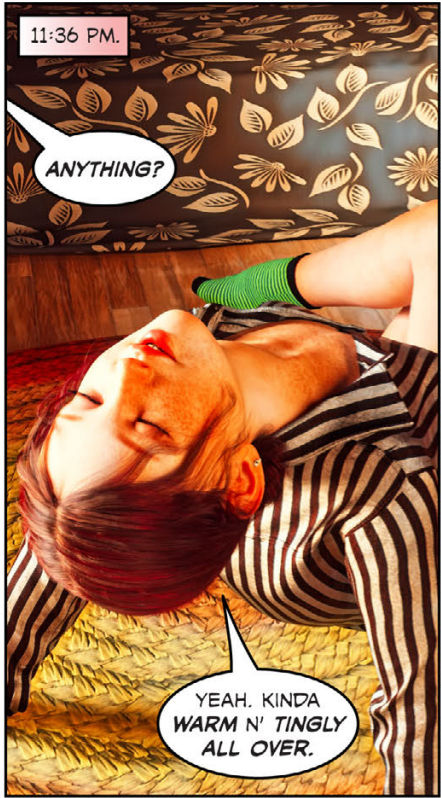




11:21 PM, FIVE MINUTES IN.

ANY EFFECTS?

NOPE. I FEEL TOTALLY NORMAL.



11:36 PM.

ANYTHING?

YEAH. KINDA WARM N' TINGLY ALL OVER.



11:46 PM.

WHAT'RE YOU FEELING NOW?

L-LITTLE. LIKE I'M SIX.



Hmm. WELL, SET AND SETTING MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.

I COULD SEE HOW THIS ROOM, THIS WHOLE ENVIRONMENT--

I WOULDN'T EXACTLY SAY I ACTUALLY THOUGHT I WAS SIX.

IT WAS MORE LIKE THE DRUG WAS OPENING ME UP, AND LETTING ME EXPRESS THAT PART OF MYSELF.



Um, I DUNNO WUZZAT MEANS.

BUT, WOULDJA READ ME MY FAVORITEST BEDTIME STORY?



WELL, ALL RIGHT. BUT, REALLY I'M SUPPOSED TO BE MORE OF AN OBSERVER...

HERE, MR. GEEGOR!

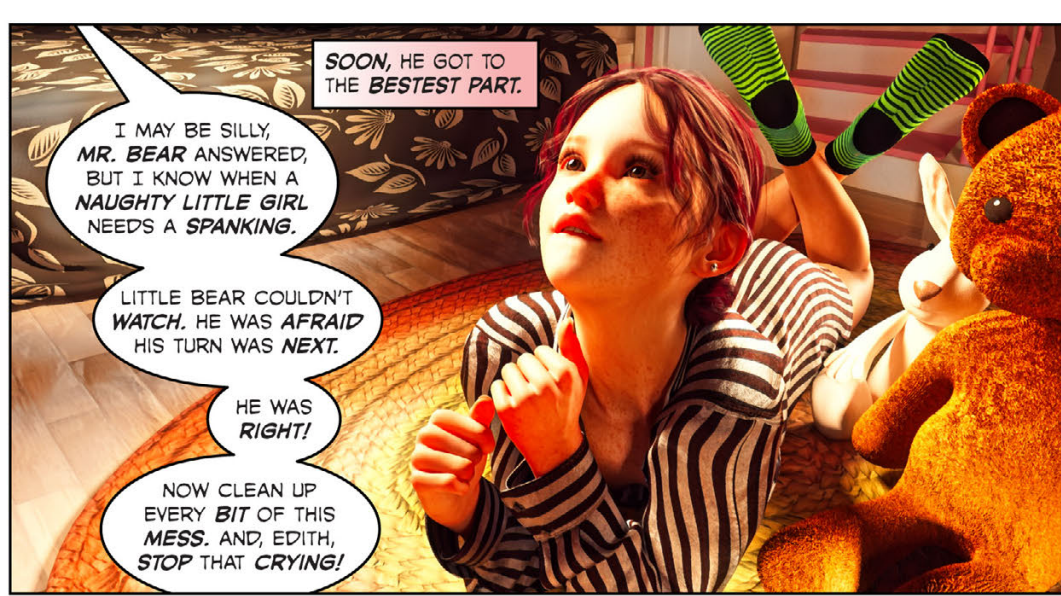


ONCE THERE WAS A LITTLE DOLL. HER NAME WAS EDITH.

SHE LIVED IN A NICE HOUSE AND HAD EVERYTHING SHE NEEDED EXCEPT SOMEBODY TO PLAY WITH.

SHE WAS VERY LONELY!





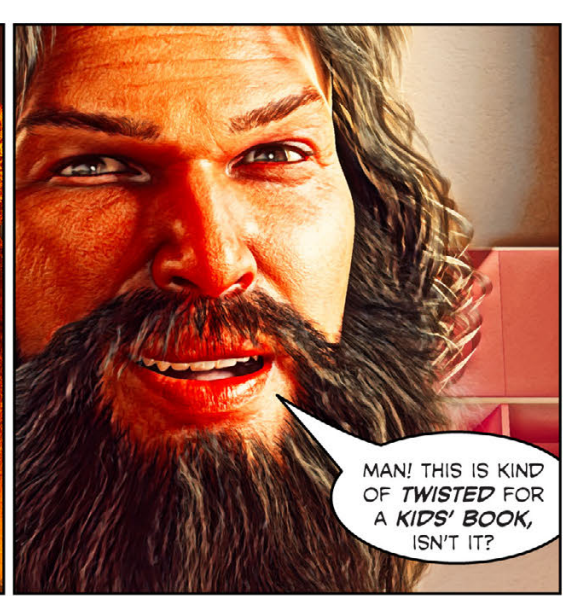
SOON, HE GOT TO THE BESTEST PART.

I MAY BE SILLY, MR. BEAR ANSWERED, BUT I KNOW WHEN A NAUGHTY LITTLE GIRL NEEDS A SPANKING.

LITTLE BEAR COULDN'T WATCH. HE WAS AFRAID HIS TURN WAS NEXT.

HE WAS RIGHT!

NOW CLEAN UP EVERY BIT OF THIS MESS. AND, EDITH, STOP THAT CRYING!



MAN! THIS IS KIND OF TWISTED FOR A KIDS' BOOK, ISN'T IT?



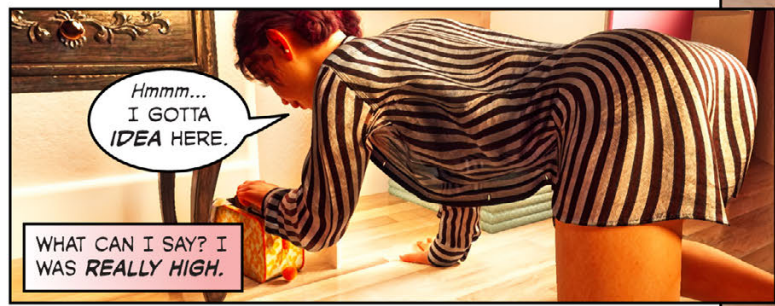
DON' YOU SAY THAT 'BOUT MY FAVORITEST BOOK!



I REALLY SHOULD'N'T. YOU'RE LEADING ME INTO GONZO TERRITORY HERE.

BUT, IN HUNTER S. THOMPSON'S OWN IMMORTAL WORDS..."TUNE IN, FREAK OUT, GET BEATEN."

Well, SILLY OLD THING, YOU GONNA DO IT OR NOT?



Hmmm... I GOTTA IDEA HERE.

WHAT CAN I SAY? I WAS REALLY HIGH.



MR. GEGOR IS JUST A SILLY OLD THING



GREGOR GAVE ME A *SURPRISINGLY FIRM SPANKING*. HE WAS A *BIG GUY*, SO MAYBE HE DIDN'T QUITE *KNOW HIS OWN STRENGTH*.

OR, MAYBE HE *KNEW EXACTLY WHAT I NEEDED*.

HE REALLY DID *REMIND ME OF A BEAR*.

IF I *CLOSED MY EYES*, IT ACTUALLY *FELT LIKE I WAS IN THE BOOK*.

AND, THAT MADE ME THINK SOME *STRANGE THOUGHTS*, LIKE...

MIR GEGOR  
IS JUST A  
SILLY OLD THING



...IF *TEDDY BEARS* HAVE *SOFT PAWS*, HOW COME IT *HURTS* WHEN THEY *SPANK*?

IS IT BECAUSE *DOLLS* HAVE *EVEN SOFTER BOTTOMS*?

YES, THAT'S A *SPANKO'S BRAIN ON DRUGS*.



FROM THERE, I GOT AN INTENSELY **EROTIC** FEELING.

**LEARNING YOUR LESSON, "EDITH?"**

**SWAT SWAT**

BUT, THE **DRUG** SOMEHOW WOULDN'T LET ME FINISH MY **ORGASM**.

IT FELT LIKE I WAS **TRAPPED** AT THE **BEGINNING** OF IT **FOREVER**.

YOU OK?

**SWAT SWAT SWAT**

Uh, uh, uh, uh...

IT **WASN'T** EXACTLY **PLEASANT**.

BUT, THEN THAT **PASSED**, AND I GOT **OFF** GREGOR'S **KNEE**. I FELT **DIFFERENT...**

...THE **NOTES** OF **COOL JAZZ** PLAYING WHILE MY **DAD CUDDLED** ME...

...LIKE **SOFT, WHITE BIRTHDAY CAKE** WITH **CONFETTI SPRINKLES...**

...**DUST NOTES DANCING** IN THE **LIGHT** OF A **SUMMER MORNING** COMING THROUGH THE **WINDOW** IN MY **CHILDHOOD BEDROOM....**

...AND THEN, THINGS **SHIFTED** ABRUPTLY TO **HORRIBLE, WRACKING GUILT!**

IT'S OK, JUST **LET IT ALL OUT.**

I-I **ACTUALLY SLAPPED** MY **DAD** **ONCE!**

A-AND I'D **SNEAK** OUT THE **WINDOW** TO HAVE **SEX** WITH MY **27-YEAR-OLD ART TEACHER!**

A-AND I WAS SO **BAD** TO **HANS** AT THE **END**, SEE...

I-I **THINK IT'S OVER.**

I-I **FEEL SO EXHAUSTED**, LIKE I'VE GONE THROUGH **EVERY EMOTION** IN **EXISTENCE.**

I-I **HOPED** I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING **TOO WEIRD**, AND, YOU DIDN'T GET THE **WRONG IMPRESSION** ABOUT ME.

FINALLY, AT **2:43 AM.**

NO, NO, YOU DID **GREAT!** I THOUGHT IT'D, *er*, **HELP** YOUR **TRIP** IF I **PLAYED ALONG** WITH THE **AGE REGRESSION STUFF** A BIT.

BUT, I WOULD'VE **STOPPED** YOU IF YOU **TRIED ANYTHING DANGEROUS.**

AND, DON'T BE **EMBARRASSED**. I'VE **SEEN IT ALL**. **WHATEVER** HAPPENS IN A **TRIP**, STAYS IN A **TRIP**, I SAY.

YOU DID SO **GOOD**, I'D LIKE TO **INVITE** YOU--IF YOU'RE **UP TO IT**--TO A **LITTLE GROUP 2CB** EXPERIENCE AT MY **PLACE** NEXT **WEEKEND...**



THE NEXT *SATURDAY*,  
10:34 PM, AT  
GREGOR'S "HOUSE."

AT FIRST I THOUGHT I HAD  
THE *WRONG DIRECTIONS*.

IT WAS AN OLD *FACTORY*  
BUILDING, IN THE *INDUSTRIAL*  
SECTION OF TOWN.

WELCOME TO  
*DELTA-Q*, OUR LITTLE  
ETHICAL *NON-MONO*GAMY  
COMMUNITY.

RUDE, MEET  
HEATHER, ALAN,  
PATTY, AND SANDY.

*2CB* CAN CAUSE *NAUSEA*  
ON AN *EMPTY STOMACH*,  
SO WE HAVE SOME *JUICE*  
AND LIGHT *SNACKS* ON  
THE TABLE.

ONCE YOU'VE  
*SETTLED IN*, WE  
CAN GET *STARTED*.



Hmmm. SHE'S A  
LITTLE *OVERDRESSED*,  
ISN'T SHE?

AND, HOW *OLD* IS  
SHE ANYWAY? LOOKS  
STRAIGHT OUTTA  
HIGH SCHOOL.

*HISSES!* YEAH,  
VERY *IMMATURE*,  
OBVIOUSLY.

I HOPE SHE DOESN'T  
THINK THAT *OUTFIT'S*  
GONNA *HELP* GET HER  
INTO *GREGOR'S BED*.

IT'S *NOT* LIKE  
*DELTA-Q'S* TAKING  
*NEW MEMBERS*.



Hrmp. TALK ABOUT  
*IMMATURE...PRETENDING*  
I'M *NOT HERE!*

ANYWAY, YOU TWO HAVE  
*NOTHING TO WORRY*  
ABOUT. GREGOR'S  
*HARDLY MY TYPE*.





OK, EVERYBODY GRAB A PILL.

ONSET IS ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES.

YOU'LL PROBABLY FEEL SOME ANXIETY AND UNPLEASANT SENSATIONS, BUT THAT SHOULDN'T LAST LONG.

TEN MINUTES LATER.

Ah, YES. AND FOR RUDE, HER SPECIAL ROUTE OF DELIVERY.

AS I WAITED FOR IT TO KICK IN, I CHATTED WITH HEATHER, WHILE STAYING AS FAR AWAY FROM SANDY AND PATTY AS POSSIBLE.

HEATHER WAS VERY SWEET, THOUGH A BIT SLOW ON THE UPTAKE.

SHE'D HAD A TOUGH CHILDHOOD, A WILD ADOLESCENCE, AND WAS KICKED OUT OF THE HOUSE AT SEVENTEEN.

SHE'D WORKED A BUNCH OF JOBS, INCLUDING AS A COCKTAIL WAITRESS, UNTIL SHE MET ALAN.

HE WAS THE SCION OF A FAMILY WHO'D MADE THEIR FORTUNE IN CANNED SOUP AFTER GRADUATING FROM HANS' SCHOOL, HE'D STAYED IN TOWN, HANGING AROUND AIMLESSLY.

HIS FAMILY FINALLY AGREED TO FINANCE A MICRO-BREWERY THAT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO RUN, BUT MOSTLY HE SAILED AND COLLECTED GUITARS.

HEATHER ALSO TOLD ME ABOUT SANDY AND PATTY. THEY WERE BOTH GRAD STUDENTS AT HANS' SCHOOL. PATTY STUDIED ECOLOGY AND SANDY STUDIED SEMIOTICS.

THE GROUP HAD ALL MET THROUGH GREGOR A COUPLE YEARS AGO, BECAUSE OF HIS DRUG EXPERIMENTS. THEY THEN DECIDED TO START THEIR LITTLE COMMUNE.

AS WE WERE TALKING, I SUDDENLY FELT IT.



One pill makes you

WARRIOR

THIS ONE WASN'T SUBTLE.



And If You  
Go Chasing  
Rabbits

And You Know  
You're Going  
To

Go



Two Om?





BAD, BAD GIRL!  
YOU'VE RUINED  
OUR TEA!

Tell 'em a  
Hookah Smoking  
Caterpillar



TO THE  
CATERPILLAR,  
FOR YOUR  
COMEUPPANCE!

GULP!

Has Given  
you The Can



SOMEBODY'S  
HANKERIN' FOR A  
SPANKERIN'!



LEMME GO, YOU  
OVERGROWN  
BUG!

AND, geez, THAT  
HOOKAH STINKS! WHAT  
DO WORMS SMOKE  
ANYWAY? MULBERRY  
LEAVES?





MULBERRY, huh? VERY FUNNY, BRAT.

FOR YOUR INFO, IT'S MILKWEED!

LISSEN, MISS RUFFLE BUTT, WHEN YOU'VE GOT HANDS LIKE MINE...

...YOU SPANK ANY WAY YOU CAN!

OUCH! OUCH!

NO FAIR! NO FAIR!

YOU'RE A... LEG SPANKER!

SPAT

SPAT

LIKE THIS, FOR INSTANCE.

YEOWCH!

Whap

OR, LIKE THIS!

AND NOW...OFF TO THE CHESSBOARD WITH YOU!

OW! OW! AND DOUBLE OW!

Whap

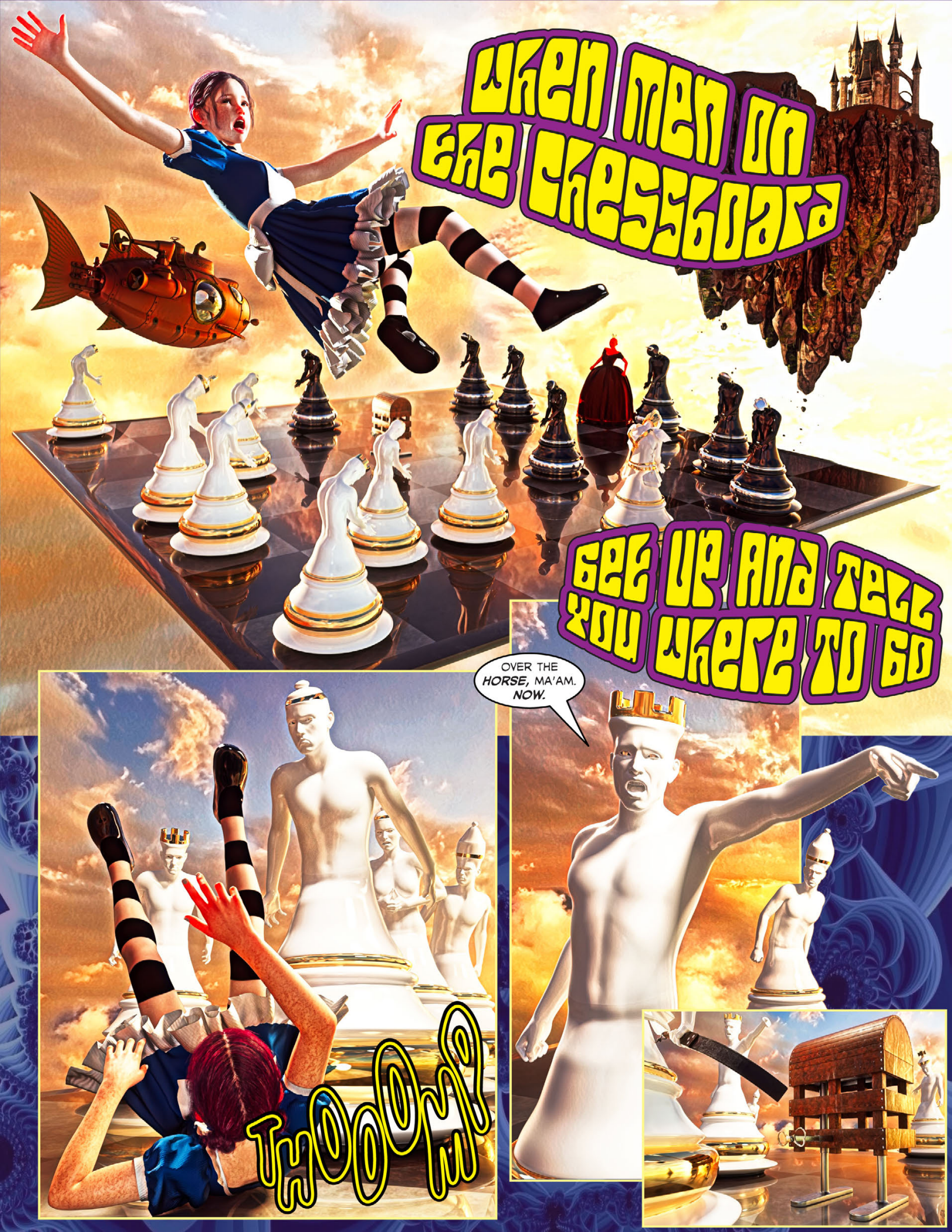


When men on  
the chessboard

See up and tell  
you where to go

OVER THE  
HORSE, MA'AM.  
NOW.

TWO





AND THE WHITE KNIGHT  
IS TALKING BACKWARDS

AND THE RED QUEEN'S...

dab lriɹ! dab  
lriɹ! ouɹ ɹsum  
eb deknɹps!

...OFF WITH  
HER CLOTHES!

CRACK

PRESTO! A BLANK  
CANVAS. NOW STRAP  
HER BOTTOM 'TIL IT'S  
BLACKBERRY-BLUE!

CRACK



REMEMBER what the

DORMOUSE



CRACK



feed your

HEAD

MMRRFF



FEED YOUR

HEAD



Y-YOU OK, RUDE?

KOFF KOFF





W-WHOA THAT WAS A QUITE A TRIP.

IT'S KINDA STARTING TO WEAR OFF.

NOW I ONLY SEE STUFF THAT'S NOT THERE IF I CLOSE MY EYES AND CONCENTRATE.

THOUGH, THINGS STILL LOOK SHIMMERY...AND SO MANY COLORS!

SURE YOU DON'T WANT A DRINK? IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU WERE CHOKING.

\*OK, I TOOK SOME ARTISTIC LICENSE ON THE ALICE IN WONDERLAND PART--IT HAPPENED MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO. BUT, I DO REMEMBER SOME PIECES VERY DISTINCTLY: THE SENSATION OF FALLING, THE BRIGHT, BRIGHT COLORS, LITERALLY FEELING LIKE I WAS IN A STORY BOOK, AND BEING SPANKED ON A CHESSBOARD!



Now, I'M FINE. I WAS JUST HALLUCINATING.

YA'KNOW, THERE'S SOMETHING I TOTALLY HAFTA TRY WHEN I'M HIGH LIKE THIS...

IT WAS JUST TOO GOOD A CHANCE TO PASS UP.



CATCH!

OOOF

THUMP



HERE. YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

REALLY HARD, THIS TIME...TIL THERE'S BRUISES.



WELL, YOU'RE IN LUCK!

LAST SUMMER I WAS IN SAN FRANCISCO AND ONE OF MY PARTNERS TOOK ME TO A BDSM WORKSHOP.

THEY TAUGHT US TO USE IMPLEMENTS SAFELY, INCLUDING PADDLES. SO, I'M CONFIDENT I CAN CONTROL THE DESCENT, AND USE JUST ENOUGH FORCE TO CAUSE MILD BRUISES.

IT'S FASCINATING, REALLY. THERE'S DEFINITE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ENDORPHINS FROM BDSM AND OUT-OF-BODY--



LOOK, I KNOW YOU'RE A SCIENTIST AND ALL...BUT, WOULD YOU JUST SHUT UP AND SPANK ME?

AND, DON'T WORRY, THE BRUISES DON'T NEED TO BE TOO MILD.

RIGHT, THEN. WE'LL DO IT IN ALAN'S RECORDING STUDIO. IT'S SOUND-PROOFED.

SMEK SMEK



Whoa. I thought it was wearing off, but now...

...IT'S LIKE ALL MY SENSES ARE MIXING TOGETHER.

SYNESTHESIA? I WONDER HOW THIS WILL FEEL THEN?

WHEN THE PADDLE STRUCK, I SAW BRIGHT, SCINTILLATING EXPLOSIONS, LIKE FIREWORKS...

...THE SOUND WAS LIKE THE CRACK OF LIGHTNING ON TOP OF ROLLING THUNDER...

...MY NOSE WAS FILLED WITH A SHARP, SULFUROUS SMELL LIKE THOSE RED CAPS USED BY BOYS IN TOY PISTOLS...

...AFTER THAT, A RAW, SALTY TASTE FILLED MY MOUTH LIKE WHEN YOU BITE YOUR LIP, FOLLOWED BY THE BURN OF CHILE PEPPERS...



...THEN SENSATIONS LIKE MY BOTTOM WAS BEING SCRAPED BY SANDPAPER, GIVEN A BILLION HARD PINCHES, AND LICKED BY FLAMES.

...WITH A FINISH OF SWEET, SLIPPERY, OVERRIPE MANGO...



AT SOME POINT, I CLOSED MY EYES AND THE WORLD CHANGED.

I HAD THIS INTENSE FEELING I WAS "ROYAL" IN SOME WAY--PERHAPS A PRINCESS OR YOUNG QUEEN...

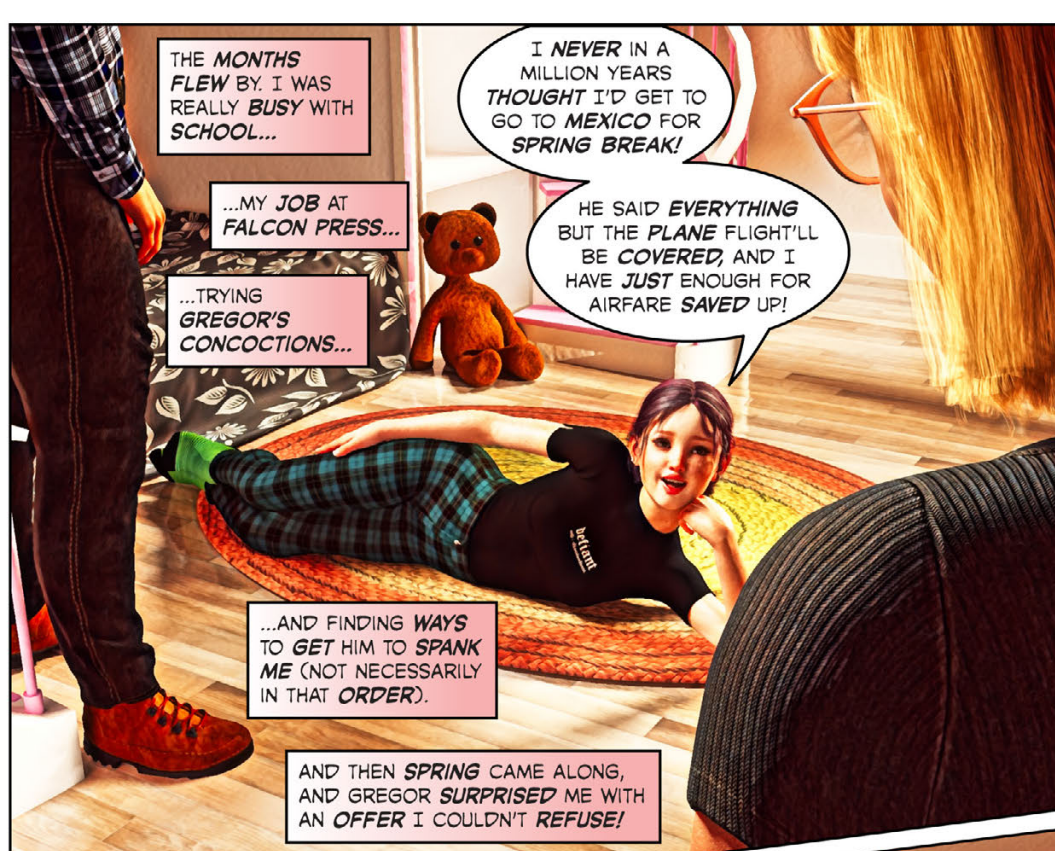
...A ROYALLY SPOILED BRAT, GETTING A ROYAL PADDLING FROM MY STERN KING...



...UNTIL I WAS ROYALLY BRUISED.

(THOUGH, I THINK HE DID HOLD BACK A LITTLE.)





THE MONTHS FLEW BY. I WAS REALLY **BUSY** WITH SCHOOL...

...MY JOB AT FALCON PRESS...

...TRYING GREGOR'S CONCOCTIONS...

...AND FINDING WAYS TO GET HIM TO SPANK ME (NOT NECESSARILY IN THAT ORDER).

AND THEN SPRING CAME ALONG, AND GREGOR SURPRISED ME WITH AN OFFER I COULDN'T REFUSE!

I NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS THOUGHT I'D GET TO GO TO MEXICO FOR SPRING BREAK!

HE SAID EVERYTHING BUT THE PLANE FLIGHT'LL BE COVERED, AND I HAVE JUST ENOUGH FOR AIRFARE SAVED UP!



RUDE! HE'S A FRIGGIN' DRUG DEALER WHO LOOKS LIKE CHARLES MANSON!

YOU DON'T SPEAK A WORD OF SPANISH, SO BEST OF LUCK WHEN Y'ALL LAND IN A MEXICAN JAIL!

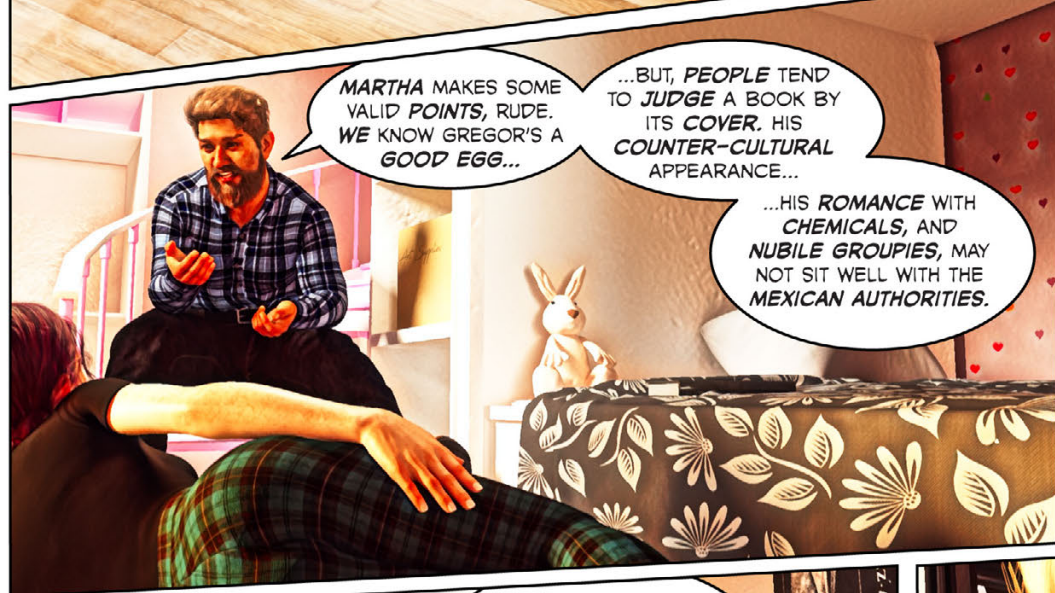
BESIDES, YOU REALLY WANNA TAG ALONG WITH HIS HAREM?



B-BUT IT'S THE LAND OF FRIDA AND DIEGO!

Y-YOU'VE BOTH BEEN. I'VE HARDLY TRAVELED AT ALL!

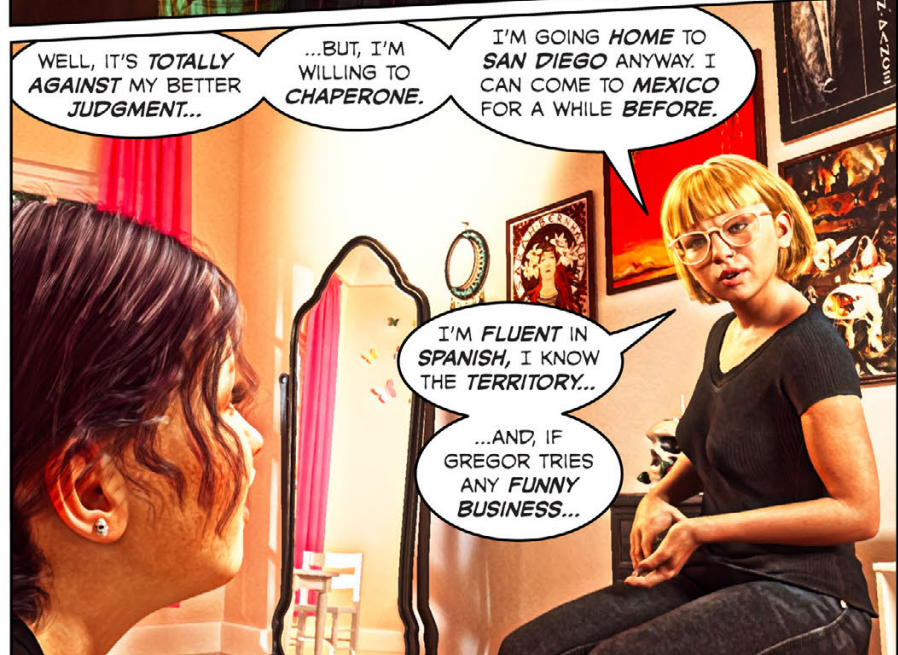
I'VE JUST GOTTA GO! BESIDES, HE PROMISED HE WON'T BRING ANY DRUGS!



MARTHA MAKES SOME VALID POINTS, RUDE. WE KNOW GREGOR'S A GOOD EGG...

...BUT, PEOPLE TEND TO JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER. HIS COUNTER-CULTURAL APPEARANCE...

...HIS ROMANCE WITH CHEMICALS, AND NUBILE GROUPIES, MAY NOT SIT WELL WITH THE MEXICAN AUTHORITIES.



WELL, IT'S TOTALLY AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGMENT...

...BUT, I'M WILLING TO CHAPERONE.

I'M GOING HOME TO SAN DIEGO ANYWAY. I CAN COME TO MEXICO FOR A WHILE BEFORE.

I'M FLUENT IN SPANISH, I KNOW THE TERRITORY...

...AND, IF GREGOR TRIES ANY FUNNY BUSINESS...



...I'LL KICK HIS BIG, HAIRY ASS!



WE RENDEZVOUSED AT A SPOT JUST ACROSS THE BORDER, WHERE GREGOR HAD RENTED A "VEHICLE."

SHE'S A BEAUTY, ISN'T SHE?



YEAH, PEACHY KEEN...  
...ESPECIALLY IF YOU LIKE GETTING PULLED OVER AND PAYING BRIBES.

LUCKILY, SANDY COULDN'T COME. UNFORTUNATELY, PATTY COULD.

WELL MARTHA, YOU'LL BE GLAD TO KNOW, I LEARNED SPANISH! OBSERVE...

<PLEASE SIR, TOMATO OUR GRAPHIC?>\*

WHA, DUDE? WHY YOU TALKIN' GIBBERISH?

\*TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH.

<WHAT CAN I TELL YOU? HE'S A STUPID HIPPIE. WILL YOU TAKE OUR PICTURE, SO I CAN LAUGH AT IT WHEN I'M FORTY?>\*

<OF COURSE, IT WILL BE MY PLEASURE.>\*





AND SO, THE FIVE OF US VENTURED OFF INTO THE HILLS OF MEXICO.

WOW! I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M REALLY HERE!

Some old Mexican cowboy come steppin' up to me

Sayin' "How do you do, young feller"



IF ANYBODY'S HUNGRY, I MADE AVOCADO SANDWICHES.



Um, NO THANKS. I'M NOT REALLY A FAN OF VEGETABLES.



WELL, THAT'S A PROBLEM. WE'RE A VEGETARIAN COMMUNITY.

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU EAT, ANYWAY?



And how'd you like to go spend a summer pleasant...

...in the hills of Mexico?"

IT WAS RIGHT ABOUT THEN, I GOT THE DISTINCT SENSE WE WERE ALL IN FOR ONE SERIOUSLY LONG, STRANGE TRIP.

Uh, MOSTLY TUNA. STRAIGHT FROM THE CAN.

I'VE GOT COLD SPAGHETTIOS IN MY THERMOS IF YOU WANT 'EM.





AS WE DROVE ON AND ON, WE CAME TO A VERY DESOLATE STRETCH OF ROAD.

ZZZZZZZZZ

I COULDN'T SHAKE THE UNCANNY FEELING, THAT I'D BEEN THERE BEFORE.



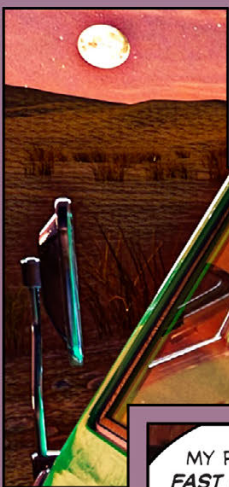
NOT JUST THAT I'D PASSED THROUGH THERE, BUT THAT I KNEW THOSE ARID, LONESOME HILLS INTIMATELY.



I COULD DRIVE, IF YOU WANNA SLEEP FOR A WHILE.

DON'T WORRY, I'M NOT TIRED AT ALL.

I JUST TOOK A HANDFUL OF TRUCKER PILLS.



MY PLAN'S TO DRIVE AS FAST AS I CAN ALL NIGHT. THAT WAY, WE'LL AVOID THE WORST OF THE HEAT, AND WE'LL BE SWIMMING IN THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA BEFORE NOON!



"...THE SOLITUDE OF THE MEXICAN, UNDER THE GREAT STONE NIGHT OF THE HIGH PLATEAU THAT IS STILL INHABITED BY INSATIABLE GODS...

"...IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE NORTH AMERICAN, WHO WANDERS IN AN ABSTRACT WORLD OF MACHINES, FELLOW CITIZENS AND MORAL PRECEPTS."  
--OCTAVIO PAZ





I MUST'VE FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE EARLY MORNING.

WHAT HAPPENED?!?  
WHAT HAPPENED?!?  
WHAT HAPPENED?!?  
WHAT HAPPENED?!?

# BOOM



NOW, THIS IS A PROBLEM.

WELL, I'VE GOT GOOD NEWS, AND BAD NEWS.

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS.

I PASSED OUT FOR A MINUTE AND DROVE OFF THE ROAD A TAD.

THAT WOULD'VE BEEN OK, EXCEPT THIS VAN WAS IN A MAJOR ACCIDENT AT SOME POINT, AS I JUST DISCOVERED.

SO, EVERYTHING'S MESS'D UP NOW-- THE FRAME'S CRACKED AND THE ENGINE'S SHOT.

THE BODY'S MOSTLY BONDO AND SCRAPS OF RUSTED METAL!

THE OTHER ISSUE IS, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH WATER.



YOU BAD, BAD MAN!

YOU DROVE US INNA BROKEN CAR 'N' CRASHED IT...

... 'N' NOW YOU WANTS US TO WALK INNA DESERT WID NO WATER???

YOU'LL HAFTA CARRY ME ALLA WAY YOU STUPID, STUPID POOPY-HEAD!



OW! OW!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER?

CRUNCH

SOMETIMES, LITTLES JUST COME OUT.

NOW, THE GOOD NEWS...

IF WE FOLLOW THE ROAD, THERE'S A TOWN ONLY TWENTY-SEVEN MILES AWAY.

AND, IF WE TAKE A BRIEF SHORTCUT, WE CAN SHAVE ALMOST TEN MILES OFF THAT.

ALSO, WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF AVOCADO SANDWICHES.





I'VE NEVER HAD ANY INTEREST IN BEING A *DOM*, AND CAN'T IMAGINE I *EVER* WILL...

COME HERE, YOUNG LADY!

...BUT, SOMETIMES, YOU GOTTA DO, WHAT YOU GOTTA DO.



NOW, YOU'RE GOING TO BEHAVE YOURSELF..

...AND COME ON A NICE, LONG WALK, JUST LIKE MR. GREGOR TOLD YOU.

GO ON, MISSY, MARCH!

ONCE THAT *LITTLE PROBLEM* WAS TAKEN CARE OF, WE WERE ON OUR WAY.

G-Gosh. IT'S SO DRY HERE.

DON'T WORRY, I KNOW HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE *DESERT*.

I SPEND *EVERY* SPRING IN *BAJA*, FOR MY FIELDWORK STUDYING *KANGAROO RATS*.

DID YOU KNOW THEIR *URINE* IS *SEVENTEEN* TIMES MORE CONCENTRATED THAN THEIR *BLOOD*?

Wow, THOSE *RATS* SOUND *RAD*. TELL ME IF YOU *SPOT* ONE!

YA'KNOW WHAT I'M GONNA BE ON THE *LOOKOUT* FOR? A *SINALOAN MILK SNAKE*!

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO *SEE* ONE!



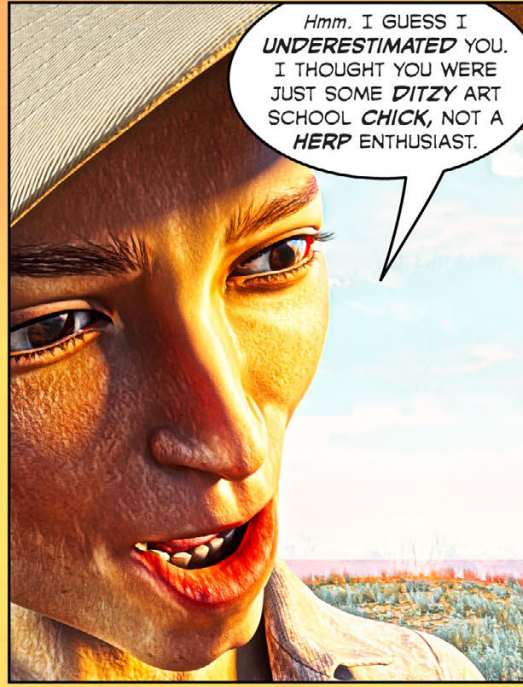




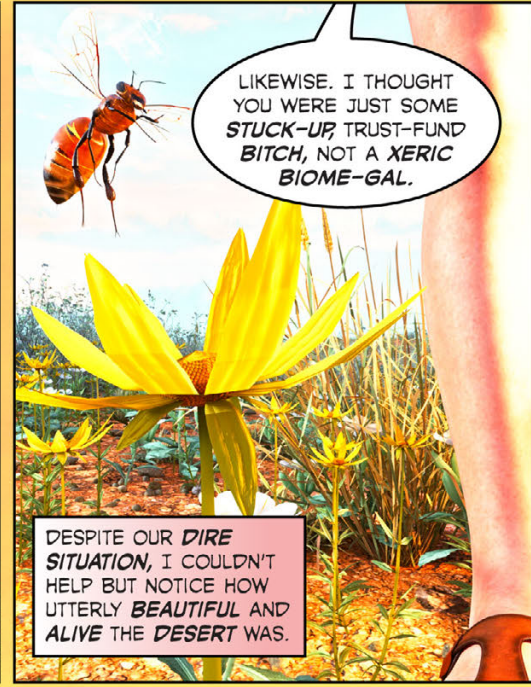
Huh? HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SNAKES?

Oh, I'VE BEEN INTO THEM SINCE I WAS LITTLE.

I HAD A BALL PYTHON, SLITHER, WHO WAS THE FIRST LOVE OF MY LIFE.



Hmm. I GUESS I UNDERESTIMATED YOU. I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST SOME DITZY ART SCHOOL CHICK, NOT A HERP ENTHUSIAST.



LIKELIKE. I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST SOME STUCK-UP, TRUST-FUND BITCH, NOT A XERIC BIOME-GAL.

DESPITE OUR DIRE SITUATION, I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE HOW UTTERLY BEAUTIFUL AND ALIVE THE DESERT WAS.



TWO HOURS LATER.

JEEE-ZUS. IT'S HOTTER'N A NUN'S CROTCH OUT HERE.



THREE HOURS LATER.

JUST TAKE SMALL SIPS. WE ONLY HAVE ONE FULL CANTEEN LEFT.



FOUR HOURS LATER.

ARE WE THERE YET?\*

\*REPETITION EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-NINE.



FIVE HOURS LATER.

Whoa. I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD.

I WONDER IF IT'S SOMETHING I KINDA, um, ATE AT THAT GAS STATION...

...LIKE A, urp, BEEF BURRITO.



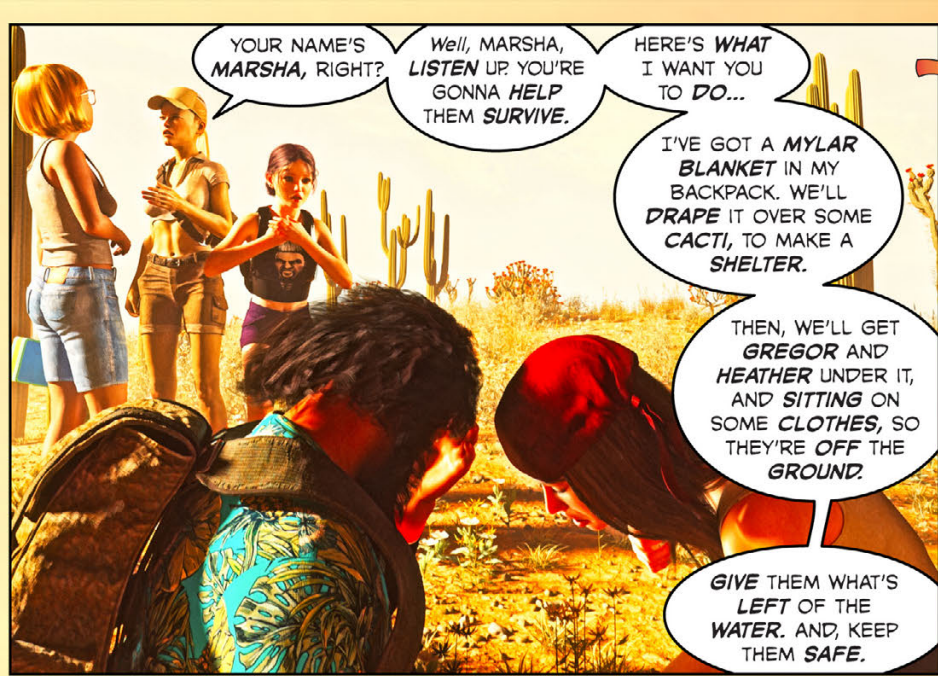
I-I'M NOT FEELING SO GREAT, EITHER.

AND, ALL I HAD WERE THOSE DAMNED AVOCADO SANDWICHES.



UGH.





YOUR NAME'S **MARSHA**, RIGHT?

Well, **MARSHA**, LISTEN UP. YOU'RE GONNA **HELP** THEM **SURVIVE**.

HERE'S **WHAT** I WANT YOU TO **DO...**

I'VE GOT A **MYLAR BLANKET** IN MY **BACKPACK**. WE'LL **DRAPE** IT OVER SOME **CACTI**, TO MAKE A **SHELTER**.

THEN, WE'LL GET **GREGOR** AND **HEATHER** UNDER IT, AND **SITTING** ON SOME **CLOTHES**, SO THEY'RE **OFF** THE **GROUND**.

**GIVE** THEM WHAT'S **LEFT** OF THE **WATER**. AND, KEEP THEM **SAFE**.



**RUDE**, YOU'RE **WITH** ME.

WE'RE GONNA GO **FIND** **WATER**, AND **REAL** **SHELTER**.

WE'LL BE **BACK** **SOON**.



I JUST WANT YOU TO **KNOW**, IN CASE WE **DON'T** MAKE IT **OUT** OF **HERE...**

...I'M **SORRY** I WAS **MEAN** TO YOU. I WAS **JEALOUS**.

LOTS OF **MEN** LIKE **CUTE** **LITTLE** **WAIF** **TYPES**.



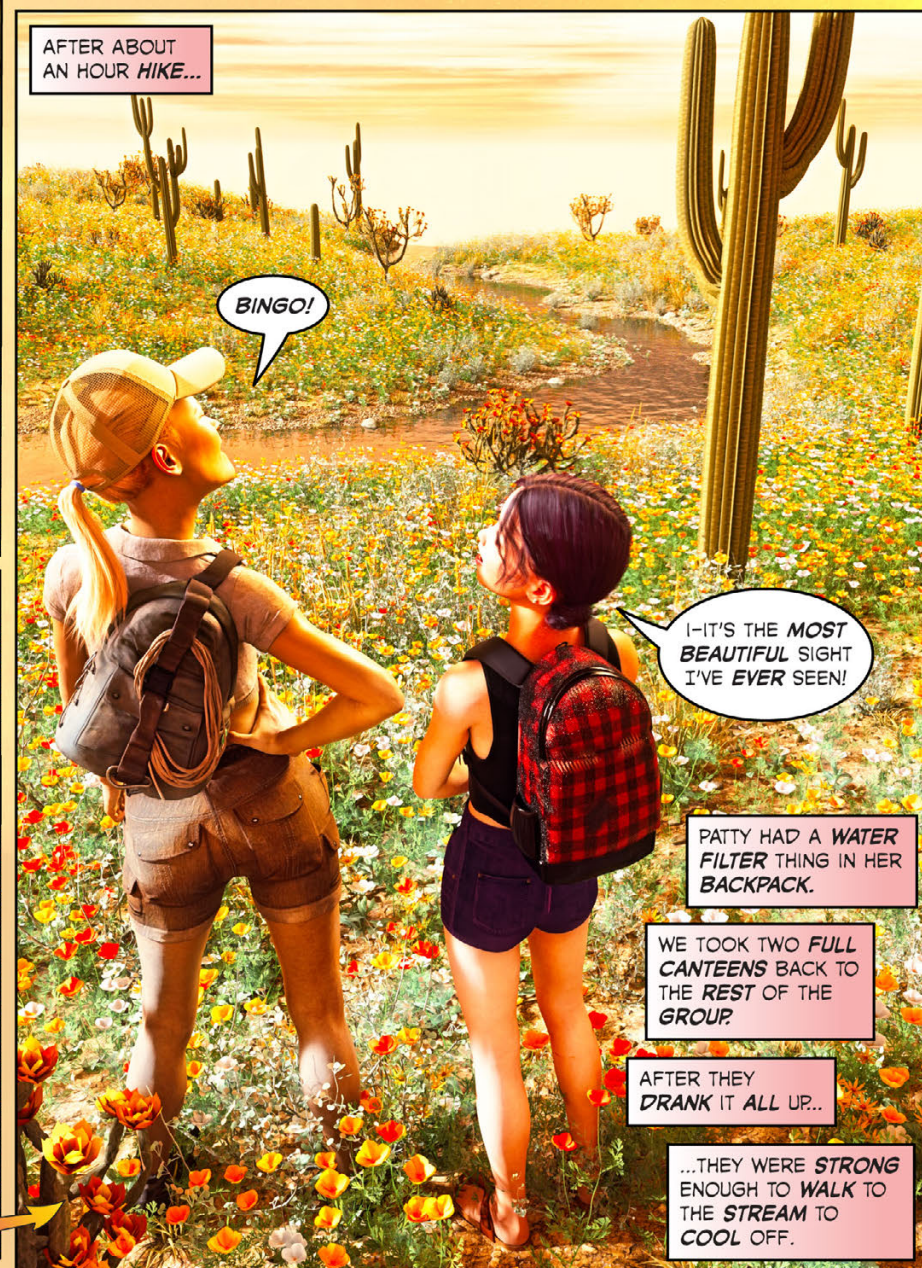
BUT, **GREGOR** **EXPLAINED** HE'S **NOT** **ATTRACTED** TO **TINY** **WOMEN** LIKE YOU. THEY **REMINDE** HIM OF **CHILDREN**.

SO, I **STOPPED** **WORRYING**.

BESIDES, YOU'RE **NOT** **EVEN** **VEGETARIAN**.

T-THANKS, I **GUESS**.

A-ARE WE **REALLY** IN **BAD** **TROUBLE**? LIKE WE **COULD** **DIE** **OUT** **HERE**?



AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR **HIKE...**

**BINGO!**

I-IT'S THE **MOST** **BEAUTIFUL** **SIGHT** I'VE **EVER** **SEEN!**

**PATTY** HAD A **WATER** **FILTER** **THING** IN HER **BACKPACK**.

WE TOOK TWO **FULL** **CANTEENS** **BACK** TO THE **REST** OF THE **GROUP**.

AFTER THEY **DRANK** IT **ALL** **UP...**

...THEY WERE **STRONG** **ENOUGH** TO **WALK** TO THE **STREAM** TO **COOL** **OFF**.



Well, THE **DESERT** CAN BE **UNFORGIVING**.

BUT, HAVE YOU **NOTICED**, THE **VEGETATION'S** **CHANGING**?

THAT'S A **GOOD** **SIGN**. I'M **PRETTY** **SURE** THERE'S **WATER** **NEARBY**.



AFTER RESTING A WHILE, AND LOADING HEATHER UP WITH KAOPECTATE, WE RESUMED OUR TREK.

BY DUSK, WE CAME TO A SMALL TOWN.

HOLA, SEÑOR AND SEÑORITAS!

MAY I HELP IN SOME WAY?

I AM JAIME MOLINA, THE ACTING MAYOR OF SANTOS TOBAR.

Oh, GREAT, YOU SPEAK ENGLISH!

SEE, OUR VAN BROKE DOWN...

...AND WE HAD TO TAKE A LONG HIKE THROUGH THE DESERT.

WE NEED TO FIND A HOTEL...

...AND IN THE MORNING, MAYBE YOU COULD HELP US FIND A CAR TO RENT, TOO?

AND FOOD...IN CANS!

Ah, YOU HAVE MUCH LUCK!

WE OWN, TOO, A LITTLE MARKET THAT SELLS FOOD IN CANS!

I OWN A SMALL HOTEL, WITH MY WIFE!

I OWN ALSO A TINY BUS, AND CAN DRIVE YOU TO NAVOLATO TOMORROW!

ALL THIS I CAN OFFER, FOR ONLY ONE THOUSAND AMERICAN DOLLARS!

A THOUSAND DOLLARS?!? WHY THAT'S HIGHWAY---

Er, LEMME TRY.

<SIR, I MUST WARN YOU, THE TALL BLONDE LADY IS CRAZY. SHE HAS ESCAPED FROM AN ASYLUM.>

<HER PASSION IS TAKING TESTICLES FROM MEN. SHE COLLECTS THEM BY NIGHT. SHE HAS TAKEN THEM FROM THE HIPPIE MAN ALREADY, BUT HE LIKES THAT.>

<WE DO NOT HAVE THE MONEY YOU ASK, SO WE WOULD WANDER THE STREETS.>

<I HAVE GREAT FEAR THE NIGHT AIR WOULD STIMULATE HER PASSIONS, AND SHE WOULD THEN GO INTO HOUSES, INCLUDING YOURS, AND COLLECT TESTICLES.>

<DO YOU NOW SEE OUR PREDICAMENT, MAYOR MOLINA?>\*

\*TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH.





HE DECIDED MY JOKE WAS FUNNIER THAN HIS...

...SO, HE'LL ONLY CHARGE US A HUNDRED BUCKS.

BUT, HE SAID THERE'S ONE CONDITION... ...SOMEDAY, ONE OF US HAS TO PAINT A PICTURE OF HIM.

AFTER MORE BACK-AND-FORTH...

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA

WHAT A CHARACTER, huh?



I'M NOT SURE THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEANT, BUT HERE'S TO YOU, JAIME MOLINA!

THE NEXT DAY, WE GOT TO NAVOLATO AS PLANNED, WHERE GREGOR RENTED A NEW CAR.

HEATHER WAS STILL REALLY SICK, THOUGH.

MARTHA WAS TOTALLY PISSED OFF AT GREGOR, AND PLANNING TO VISIT HER FAMILY IN CALIFORNIA ANYWAY...

...SO, SHE TOLD US TO DROP HER AND HEATHER OFF AT THE AIRPORT IN MATZALÁN.

FROM THERE, THEY'D FLY TO SAN DIEGO, WHERE HEATHER COULD SEE A DOCTOR.

MARTHA TRIED TO GET ME TO COME WITH THEM, BUT I WASN'T ABOUT TO LEAVE MEXICO YET, ESPECIALLY NOT BEFORE SEEING THE BEACH!

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE REALLY HERE!

IT'S MORE GORGEOUS THAN I EVEN IMAGINED!

SO, I HAVE A SURPRISE! I PHONED AN OLD FRIEND, CANDELA, WHEN WE STOPPED IN NAVOLATO.

SHE'S A CURANDERA, AND SHE'S WILLING TO TAKE US ON A LITTLE TRIP WITH SACRED PLANTS TOMORROW NIGHT.

SHE DOESN'T HAVE A CAR, SO I FIGURED I'D SLIP AWAY FOR A FEW HOURS IN THE A.M. AND BRING HER BACK HERE.

Uh uh, I THINK YOU'D BETTER REST. GIVE ME DIRECTIONS, AND I'LL GO FETCH HER.

IT'LL BE NICE. SHE CAN TELL ME WHAT KIND OF FRIENDS YOU TWO REALLY ARE...

...AND, I CAN SEE HOW TALL SHE IS.





THE NEXT MORNING, PATTY LEFT TO GO PICK UP GREGOR'S FRIEND.

Um, CAN WE TALK?

PATTY TOLD ME SOME STUFF IN THE DESERT.

I-I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK.

SHE SAID YOU'RE NOT ATTRACTED TO ME...

...A-AND I REMIND YOU OF A CHILD.

NO, I WOULDN'T SAY THAT AT ALL.

SEE, PATTY HAS HER OWN VERSION OF REALITY.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I THINK EVERYBODY HAS A "TYPE" FOR ROMANTIC PARTNERS...

Hmm, I GUESS MAYBE IT'S TRUE...YOU DO REMIND ME MORE OF LIKE THE WEIRD, BUT COOL, OLDER BROTHER I NEVER HAD, RATHER THAN A GUY I'D DATE...

...BUT THEN, WHAT ABOUT THE SPANKING PART?

NOBODY'S EVER DONE THAT TO ME BESIDES ROMANTIC PARTNERS.

...AND I GET THE DISTINCT SENSE I'M NOT REALLY YOURS, AM I?

Oh, AND I KEPT TRYING TO GET MY BEST FRIEND GROWING UP TO SPANK ME...EXCEPT, SHE TURNED OUT TO BE A LESBIAN...

Well, EXCEPT FOR MY PARENTS WHEN I WAS LITTLE...AND, THE PRINCIPAL IN KINDERGARTEN WHEN I THREW A BOOK AT MY TEACHER...

**SPLAT**  
**SPLAT**

I DON'T REALLY EVEN REMEMBER HOW I ENDED UP IN THIS POSITION, BUT I DID.

Gawd, I'M SO CONFUSED!

IS THERE SOMETHING DEEP BETWEEN US, GREGOR?

OR, WAS IT ALL LIKE A SCIENCE EXPERIMENT TO YOU?

AND, HERE'S ANOTHER QUESTION...WHY DOES SPANKING ON WET SKIN HURT MORE?

**SPLAT**

TO THIS DAY, I REALLY CAN'T DEFINE MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GREGOR.

HE WAS DEFINITELY NEVER A BOYFRIEND.

YET, I SHARED THINGS WITH HIM AND LET HIM TAKE ME PLACES THAT I HAVEN'T ALLOWED ANYONE ELSE TO.

DO YOU JUST KNOW SOMETHING LIKE THAT, OR DO YOU HAVE TO DO RESEARCH?

**SPLAT**  
**SPLAT**

MAYBE IT'S PRECISELY BECAUSE OUR RELATIONSHIP NEVER FIT INTO A NEAT LITTLE BOX, THAT HE'S ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE FROM MY COLLEGE YEARS THAT I'VE STAYED IN TOUCH WITH.





THAT NIGHT, I MET CANDELA.

SHE WAS *ONE* OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO *RADIATES* AN *OTHER-WORLDLY* POWER.

I SUSPECT *EVEN* PATTY *SENSED* IT.

I WILL *PREPARE* YOU WITH *CEREMONIAL* WORDS.

SHE HAD US *DRINK* A WHOLE *BOWL* FULL OF THIS *VISCOUS*, *BITTER*, VEGETAL MASH...

...AS SHE *CHANTED* IN A LANGUAGE THAT *EVOKED* CREEPING *VINES* AND *CARVED* JADE.

AFTER ABOUT *FIFTEEN* MINUTES, I FELT *BAD* CRAMPS AND WAVES OF *NAUSEA*.

ONCE THAT *PASSED*, THERE WAS *NOTHING* FOR A *LONG* WHILE.

THEN, I NOTICED *COLORS* BECOMING MORE *INTENSE*...

...AND, THE *BEACH* BEGAN TO *PULSATE* WITH THE *MUSIC* GREGOR WAS *PLAYING*.

AND, AT THE START, YOU WILL HAVE *YOUR* *FAMILIAR* THINGS--THE *FIRE* AND YOUR *MUSIC*--AS *COMFORT*.

BUT, AFTER A *TIME*, YOU'LL *HEAR* ONLY THE *PLANTS*, AND THEN I *CANNOT* *AID* YOU.

The simple act of an oar's stroke put diamonds in the sea

That crystal thought time in Mexico





There in the Valley  
of Scorpio beneath  
the cross of jade

AT FIRST, I KEPT  
MY EYES WIDE  
OPEN...

Kingdoms of ants  
walk across my feet

Grasshoppers  
creaking in the  
velvet jungle night

...AND, IT WAS LIKE I  
WAS ZOOMING IN AND  
OUT OF REALITY...

Watching a black-  
eyed native girl cut  
and trim the lamp

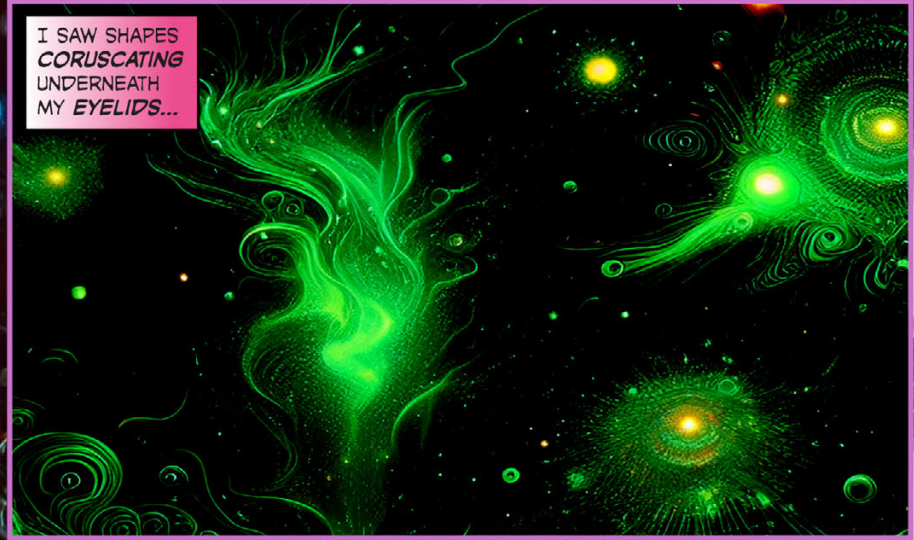
...AND SEEING NEW COLORS  
AND TEXTURES I NEVER  
KNEW EXISTED.

AFTER A WHILE, THOUGH,  
THE WORLD AROUND ME  
STARTED TO FEEL LESS  
SUBSTANTIAL.

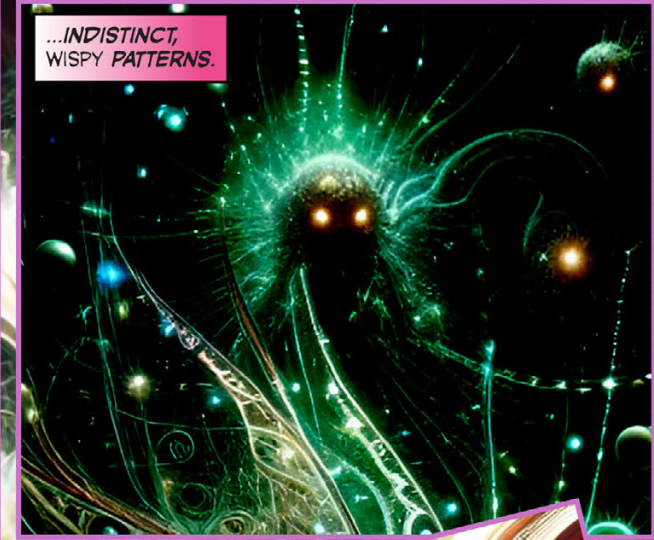
THEN, I CLOSED MY  
EYES, AND WENT  
WITHIN MYSELF.



I SAW SHAPES  
CORUSCATING  
UNDERNEATH  
MY EYELIDS...



...INDISTINCT,  
WISPY PATTERNS.



WHEN I **CONCENTRATED**  
ON THEM, THEY TOOK THE  
**FORM OF LILIES.**

**INFINITE** LILIES.



A FAINT **HUM** COALESCED  
INTO **VOICES**, AND I COULD  
HEAR **THEM** TALKING.

We dream endlessly,  
together, and so  
create the world.







What is it to  
be one of us?

Rooted to the spot,  
the world pushes  
over us like a river.

We take from it  
what we need, and  
we give back to  
the stream.



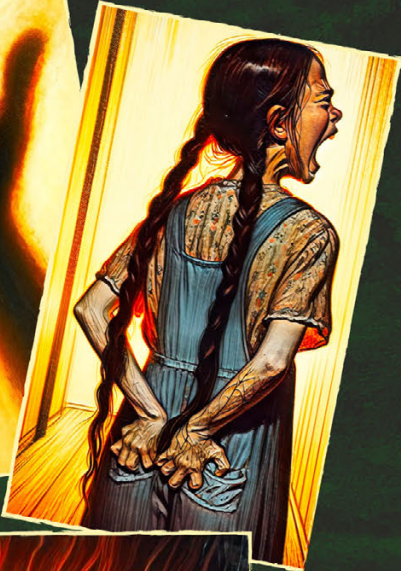
But, you are not plants.



You are animal.

You know anger. You know pain.

While you move, scurrying over the earth, you are stuck in another inexorable river: time.



It propels you forward, and you dream, alone.

When you awaken, you are haunted by what once was, is no more, and shall not be again.

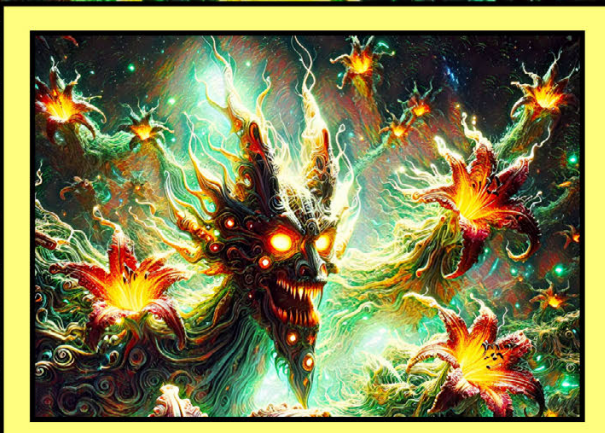


What is more feeble than a god?  
It wails, starving,  
smelling the blood of a victim,



eats sacrifices and hunts for the entrails  
of the created, in order to sink its hundred  
rapacious teeth into them.

(A god. Or certain men, who have a destiny).  
Each day dawns  
and the world is once again devoured.  
- Rosario Castellanos





I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I WAS COMPLETELY LOST IN THE MOUTH OF THAT HORROR.

IT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER. FINALLY, THOUGH, I WAS SOMEWHERE ELSE.



I WAS CERTAIN I WAS IN A REAL PLACE. THINGS FELT SOLID AGAIN.

BUT, I WASN'T ON THE BEACH ANYMORE. AND, IT WAS NOW DAY, NOT NIGHT.



YOU DO NOT BELONG HERE.



COME, I WILL TAKE YOU TO SOMEONE WHO WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO.

HI'YA, KIDDO.

FLOOEY?!? MY IMAGINARY CHILDHOOD PLAYMATE?!?

WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?

AND, WITH AN AZTEC WARRIOR, OR WHATEVER HE IS?

OBVIOUSLY, I'M STILL HALLUCINATING. B-BUT, IT FEELS SO REAL!







ME, **NOT REAL?**  
Hmmm. BUT, DON'CHA  
**REMEMBER** WHAT THE  
SKIN HORSE SAID?

ANYWAY, YOU  
ASKED WHAT I'M  
DOING **HERE** IN  
OL' MÉJICO.

WELL, **SAME** AS  
**ALWAYS**. SEEING TO  
IT YOU GET INTO A  
LITTLE **MISCHIEF**...

...BUT KEEPING  
YOU OUTTA **BIG**  
**TROUBLE**, LIKE  
MICTLANTECUHTLI'S  
MOUTH.

A BETTER  
**QUESTION**,  
THOUGH, MIGHT  
BE, WHAT'RE YOU  
DOING **HERE?**

T-TRYING TO  
**FIND MYSELF**,  
I GUESS.

LIKE W-WHAT'S  
MY **PURPOSE?**

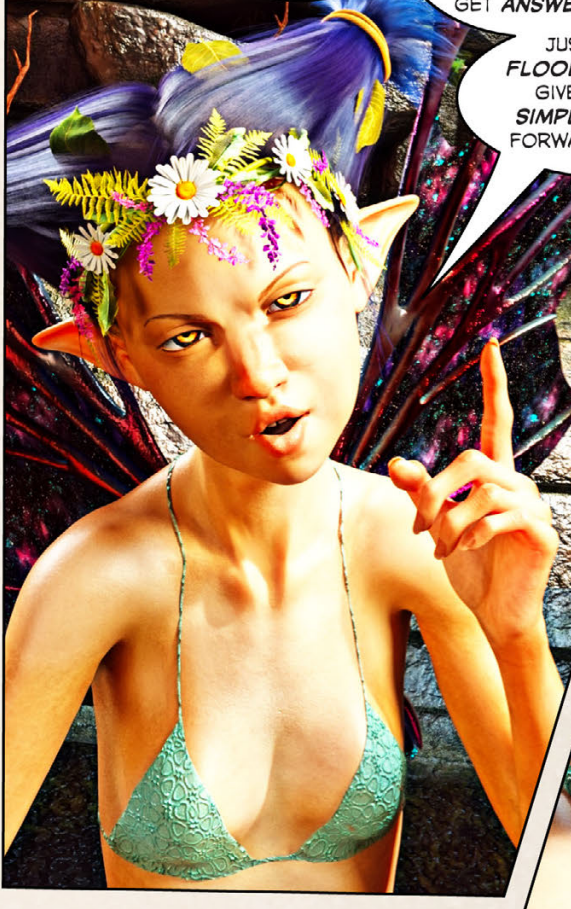
AND, WHAT  
DOES IT ALL  
**MEAN?**

TRYING TO **FIND**  
**YOURSELF?** Tch,  
tch, **KIDDO**.

HAVE YOU EVER  
**CONSIDERED**  
YOU WERE  
**NEVER LOST?**

YA'KNOW, YOU  
**DON'T NEED** ALL  
THOSE **NASTY**  
**CHEMICALS** AND  
FUNNY **PLANTS** TO  
GET **ANSWERS**.

JUST ASK OL'  
**FLOOEY**, AND SHE'LL  
GIVE YOU SOME  
**SIMPLE**, STRAIGHT-  
FORWARD **ADVICE**...



FINALLY: **GET**  
YOURSELF  
**SPANKED**.

THAT'S IT. **END**  
OF **PHILOSOPHY**  
**LESSON**.

NOW, LET'S  
**HAVE SOME**  
**FUN!**

LEMME SEE...  
**NUMBER ONE:**  
**WORK HARD** AT  
YOUR **ART**.

**NUMBER TWO:**  
**FIND SOMEBODY**  
TO **LOVE**.



TO THIS DAY, I STILL **DON'T** KNOW **WHERE** I WENT THAT **NIGHT**.

GREGOR AND PATTY **FOUND** ME THE NEXT **AFTERNOON**, ABOUT **TWO MILES** UP THE **BEACH**.

THEY SAID WHEN THEY **CAME DOWN** FROM THEIR **TRIP**, IT WAS **DAWN**, AND THEY **NOTICED** I WAS **GONE**.

APPARENTLY, **CANDELA** TOLD THEM I'D JUST **WANDERED OFF** AT SOME POINT, AND SHE **DIDN'T** SEEM TOO **CONCERNED**.

GREGOR AND PATTY SPENT **HOURS** FRANTICALLY **SEARCHING**, BUT **COULDN'T** FIND ME UNTIL MUCH LATER, EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE **CERTAIN** THEY'D **ALREADY LOOKED** ON THAT STRETCH OF **BEACH**.

GREGOR **ADMITTED** THIS TIME, **EVEN** HE'D GOTTEN IN **OVER HIS HEAD**.

HE **DIDN'T** KNOW **WHAT** WAS IN THE **BREW** **CANDELA** HAD **GIVEN** US, AND WAS **PISSED** SHE'D BEEN SUCH A **BAD "SITTER."**

FOR MY PART, I **SWORE** I'D BEEN **SWIMMING** WITH **FAIRIES** AND **AZTECS**.

WE **STAYED** FOR TWO MORE **DAYS**, **TRYING** TO **ENJOY** THE **BEACH**, BUT ALL OF US WERE PRETTY **SHAKEN**.

WHEN I GOT **BACK** TO NESFFA, IT WAS **REASSURING** TO FEEL THE **GRANITE** BEDROCK UNDER MY **FEET** AGAIN, AND THE **FAMILIAR** CHILL IN THE **AIR** OF EARLY **SPRING** IN **NEW ENGLAND**.

FOR THE REST OF THE **SEMESTER**, I **FOLLOWED** FLOOEY'S **ADVICE**, LAYING OFF **DRUGS** AND **BOOZE** **ALMOST** COMPLETELY, SO I COULD **BUCKLE DOWN** IN MY **CLASSES**. FOR THE **FIRST** TIME, I GOT **GOOD** GRADES.

I ALSO **REALIZED**, ALTHOUGH **HANGING OUT** WITH GREGOR HAD BEEN **FUN** AND QUITE AN **ADVENTURE**, I WANTED SOMETHING **MORE**.

I WAS STARTING TO FINALLY GET **OVER HANS**, AND **READY** TO FIND **LOVE** AGAIN. AND, I **DID**. OR, AT LEAST I **THOUGHT** SO. BUT, THAT'S A **STORY** FOR **ANOTHER** TIME.

Oh, AND I DEFINITELY GOT **MORE SPANKINGS**. BUT, THAT'S ALSO A **STORY** FOR **ANOTHER** TIME.

SO, **LIFE** WENT ON. AS THE **YEARS** PASSED, I **GREW** UP, AND THAT **TRIP** WAS **RELEGATED** TO AN **AMUSING** **TALE** OF MY **WAYWARD** **COLLEGE** **DAYS** THAT I'D **SHARE** WITH **FRIENDS**.

EXCEPT, I **ALWAYS** LEFT **OUT** CERTAIN **PARTS** OF THE **STORY**.

WHAT I **DIDN'T** WANT TO TALK ABOUT WAS HOW MEXICO HAD **CHANGED** ME. I'D **SEEN** SOMETHING THERE I WASN'T **MEANT** TO, OR, AT LEAST THAT I WASN'T **READY** FOR.

THE **BEST** **WAY** I CAN DESCRIBE IT IS, EVEN THE MOST **EVERYDAY** THINGS **NO LONGER** LOOK ENTIRELY **FAMILIAR** TO ME, NOW THAT I HAVE AN **INKLING** OF WHAT LIES **BENEATH** THE **SURFACE**.

AS THEY SAY, YOU CAN **NEVER** PUT THE **GENIE** **BACK** IN THE **BOTTLE**.

THE END



A coming-of-age story from the kink community by Rude Rumps, a digital artist with a lifelong spanking fetish, *COUNTING THE STARS* takes readers on a wild ride through her goth-punk college years in the 1980's.

As she explores her sexuality and discovers what it means to be an artist, we're introduced to a cast of memorable characters including her slightly off-kilter spanko boyfriend from Germany, an ageplayer housemate with a bad attitude, Marxist plumbers, and a polyamorous chemist who makes designer psychedelics.

Erotic, humorous, heart-breaking, subversive, and poetic, this stunningly illustrated graphic memoir sheds new light on the boundaries of human intimacy.

