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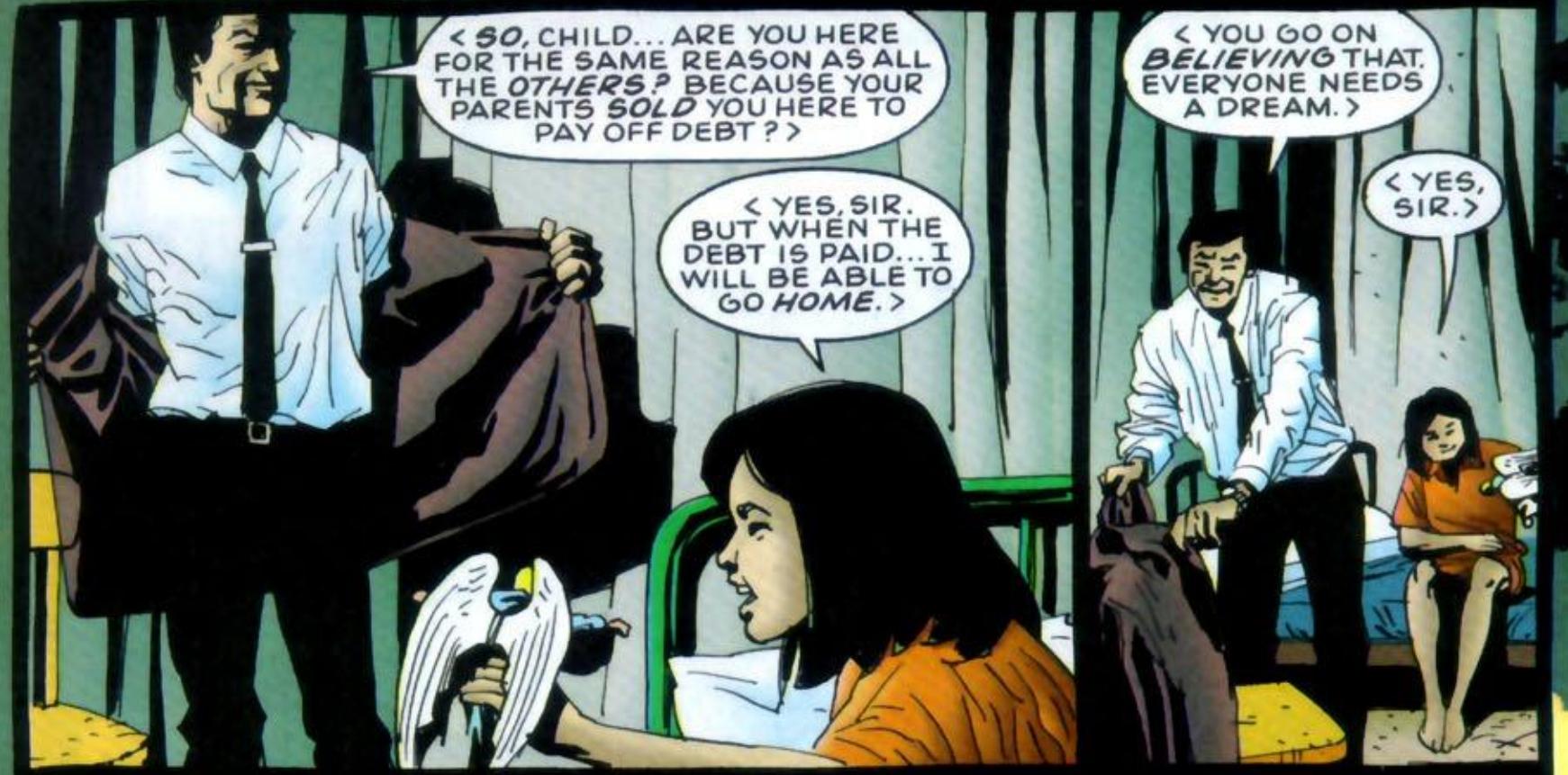
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SUPergirl 32, May, 1999. Published monthly by DC Comics, 1700 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SUPergirl, DC Comics Subscriptions, P.O. Box 0528, Baldwin, NY 11510. Annual subscription rate \$23.88. Canadian subscribers must add \$12.00 for postage and GST. GST # is R125921072. All foreign countries must add \$12.00 for postage. U.S. funds only. Copyright © 1999 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved. All characters featured in this issue, the distinctive likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of DC Comics. The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this magazine are entirely fictional. Printed on recyclable paper. Printed in Canada.

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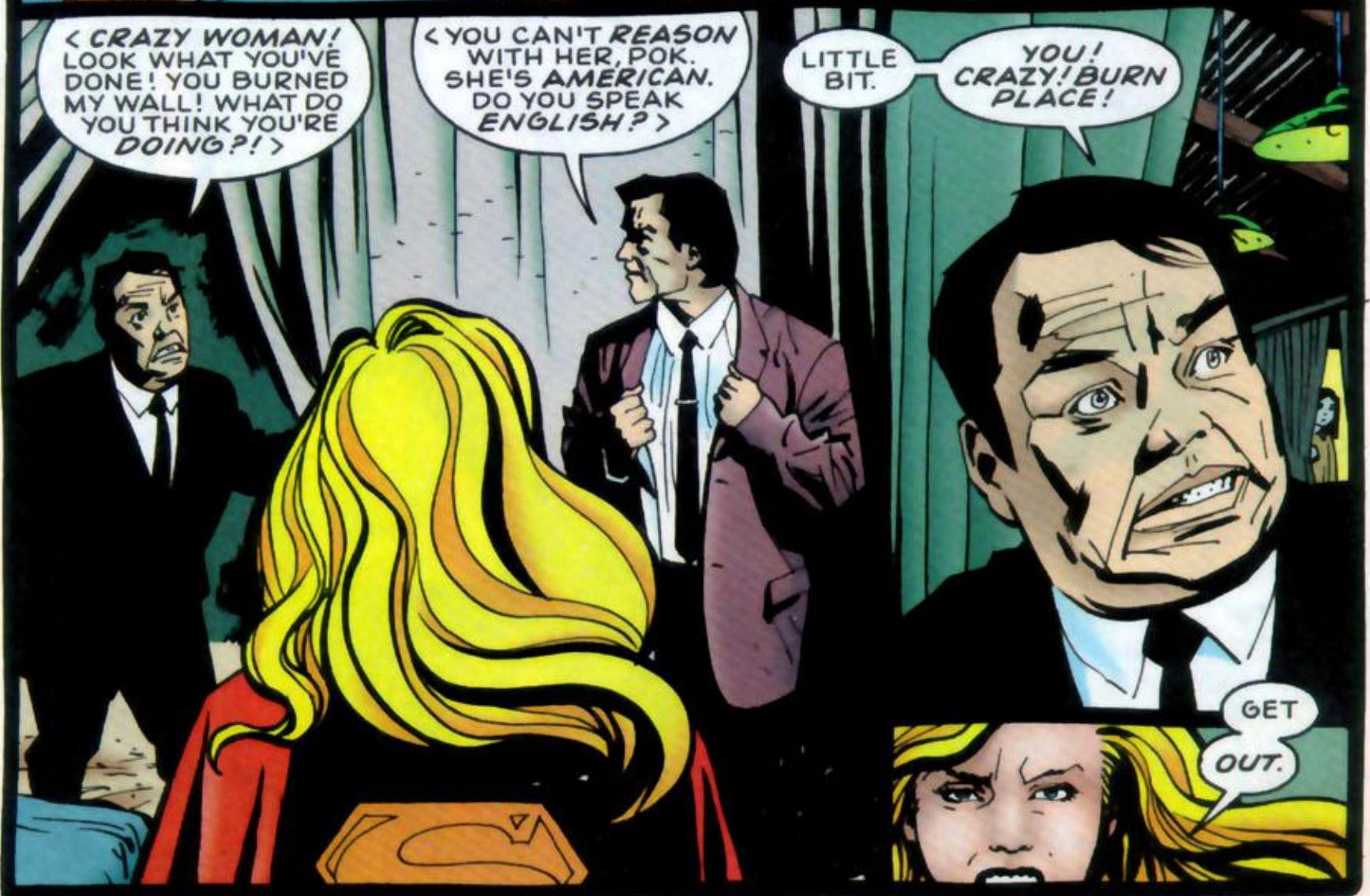
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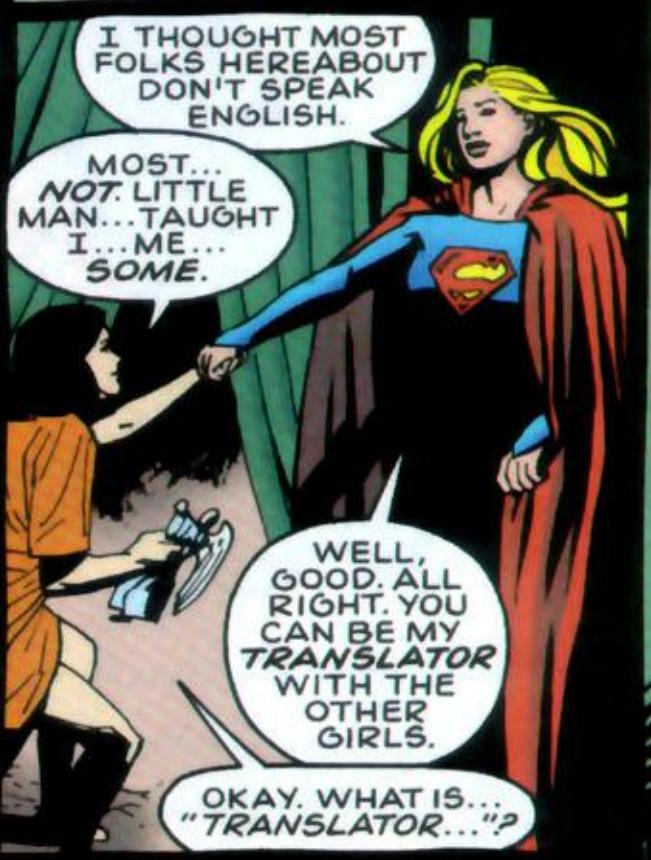


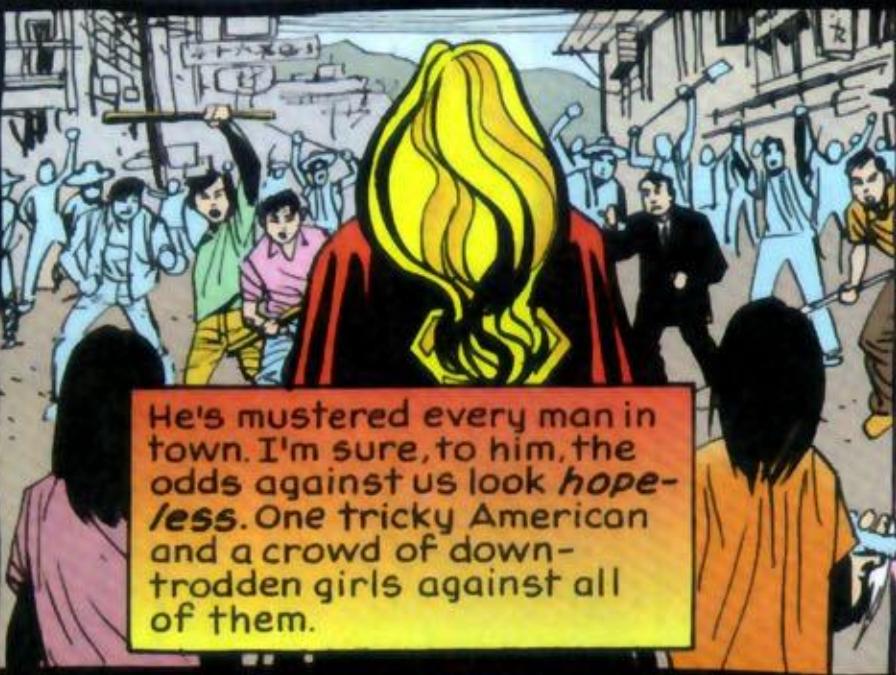
THE QUALITY OF MERCY

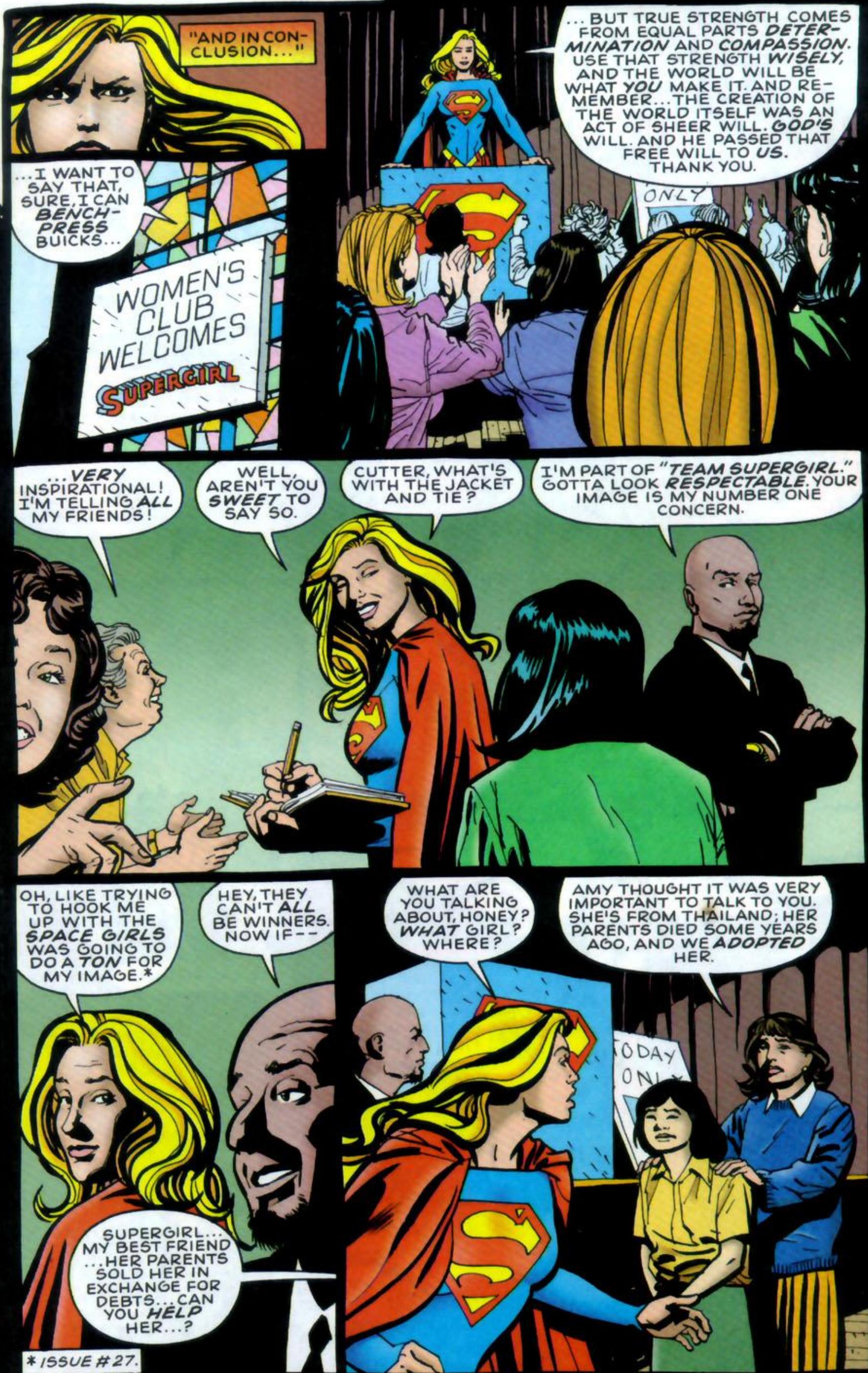
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* ISSUE #27.

I HAD A FRIEND... MAI... WE KEPT IN TOUCH, LIKE WE PROMISED. AND SHE WROTE TO ME... MEN CAME TO HER PARENTS, LIKE THEY DO TO MANY PARENTS... OFFERED THEM MONEY... AND THEIR DAUGHTERS ARE TAKEN AWAY TO A BAD HOUSE, TO WORK OFF THE DEBT.

WE TOLD AMY THAT... WELL... PEOPLE SUCH AS YOURSELF... SUPERBEINGS... YOU DON'T GET INVOLVED IN SUCH THINGS. YOU DEAL WITH END-OF-THE-WORLD THINGS, OR SUPER-VILLAIN THINGS. NOT LITTLE PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES...

I'M AFRAID THAT'S TRUE, MA'AM.

THE HELL IT IS.

THE HELL IT IS, MA'AM. IF YOU NEED HELP, SUPERGIRL IS YOUR... UHM... GIRL...

CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE SHE IS? SPECIFICALLY, WHERE I CAN FIND HER?

I... I THINK SO. I HAVE HER LETTERS... AND IT'S WHERE I USED TO LIVE... I HAVE MAPS...

WHAT... WHAT WILL YOU DO?

WHATEVER IT TAKES.

GOOD THING SHE'S ON OUR SIDE, HUH, LADIES?



Looks like the
men have
gathered their
courage.

But I hear
whimperings
of fear and
confusion...



...from
the girls.



Perhaps my wings are
scaring them? All right,
then...

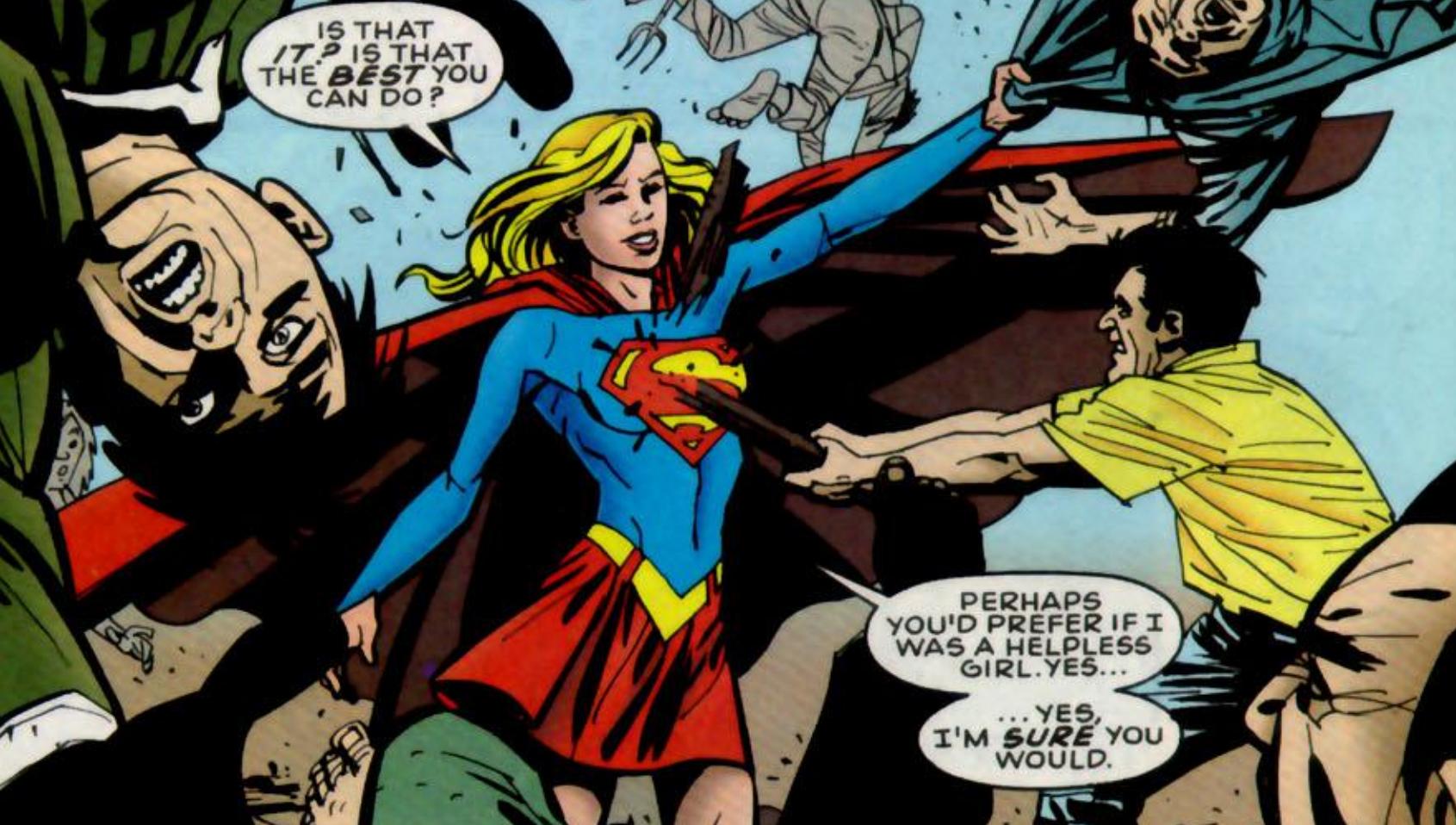


GENTLEMEN... I TAKE
IT YOU WANT A
PIECE OF ME.

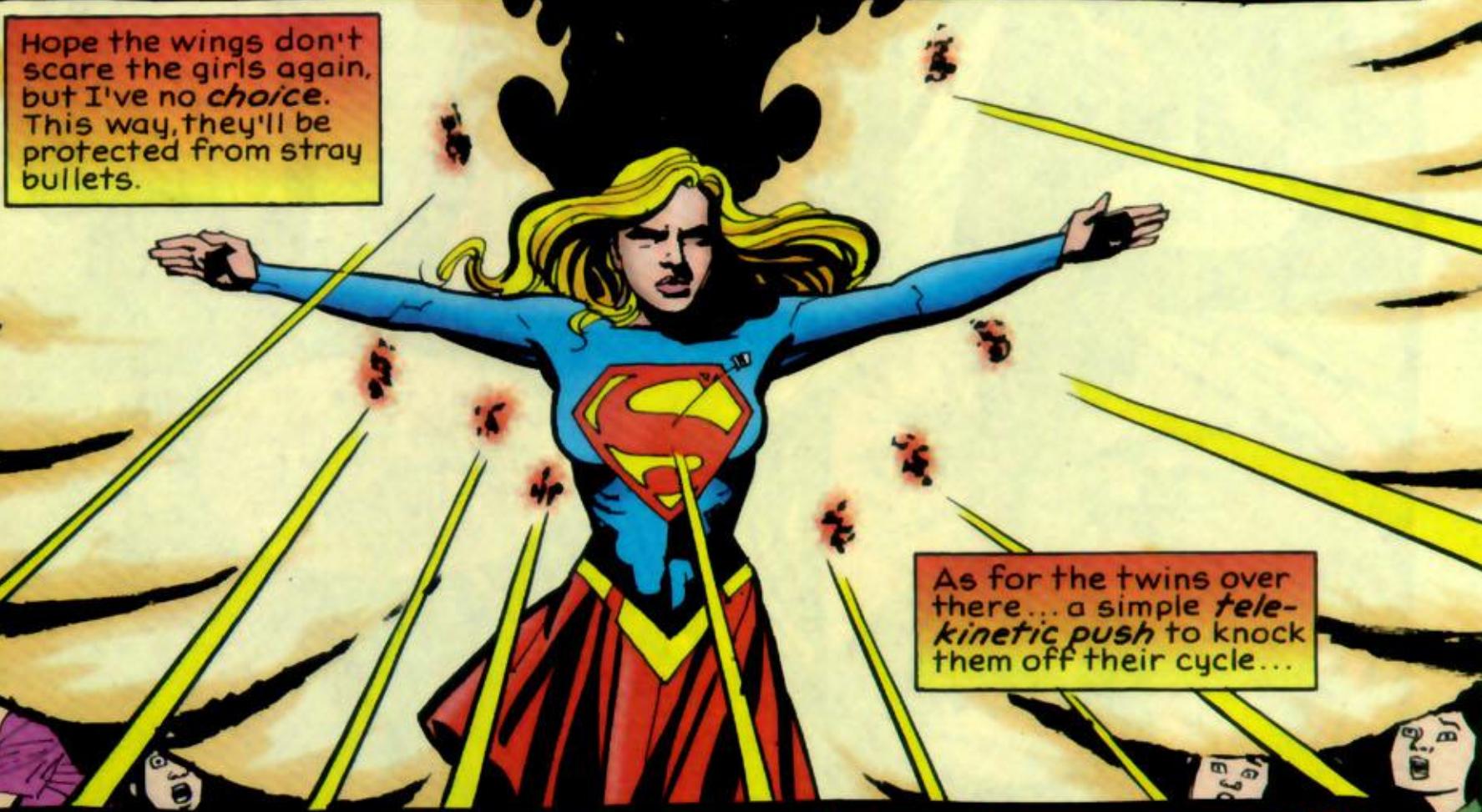
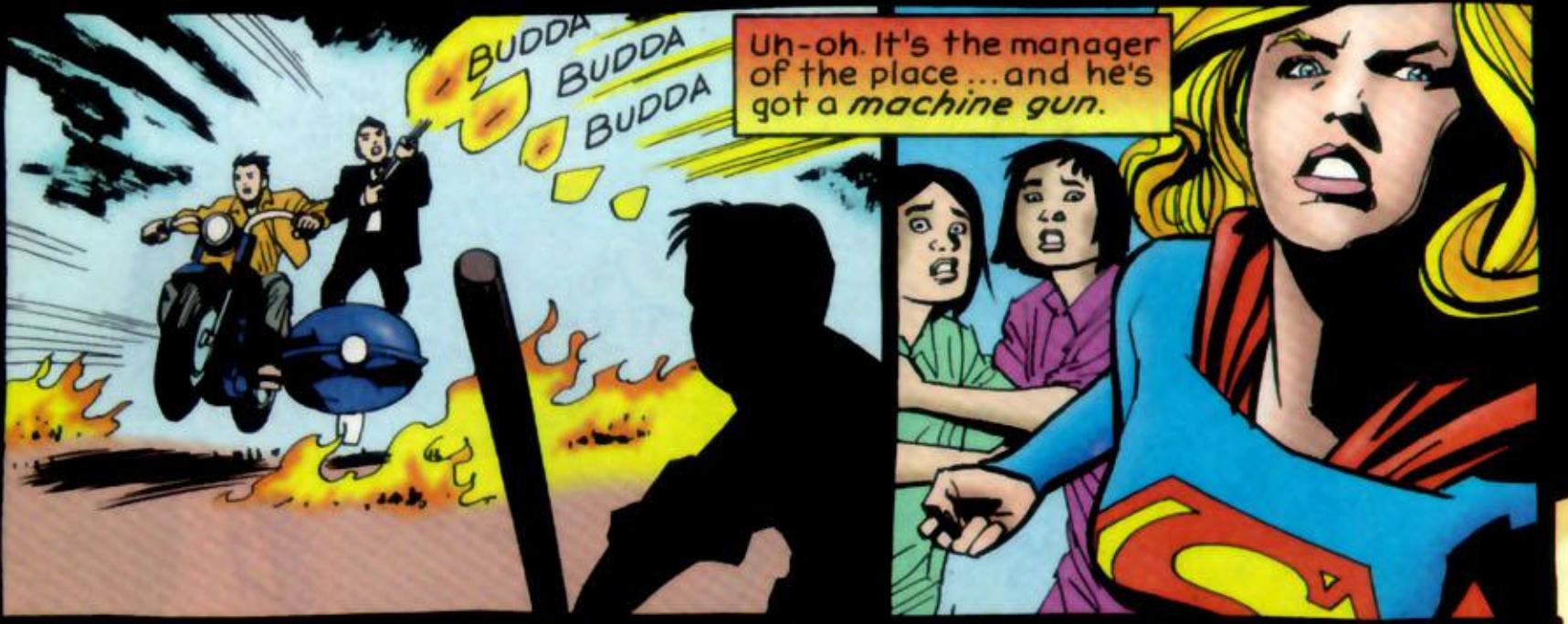
COME ON,
THEN. LET'S SEE
WHAT YOU'VE
GOT.

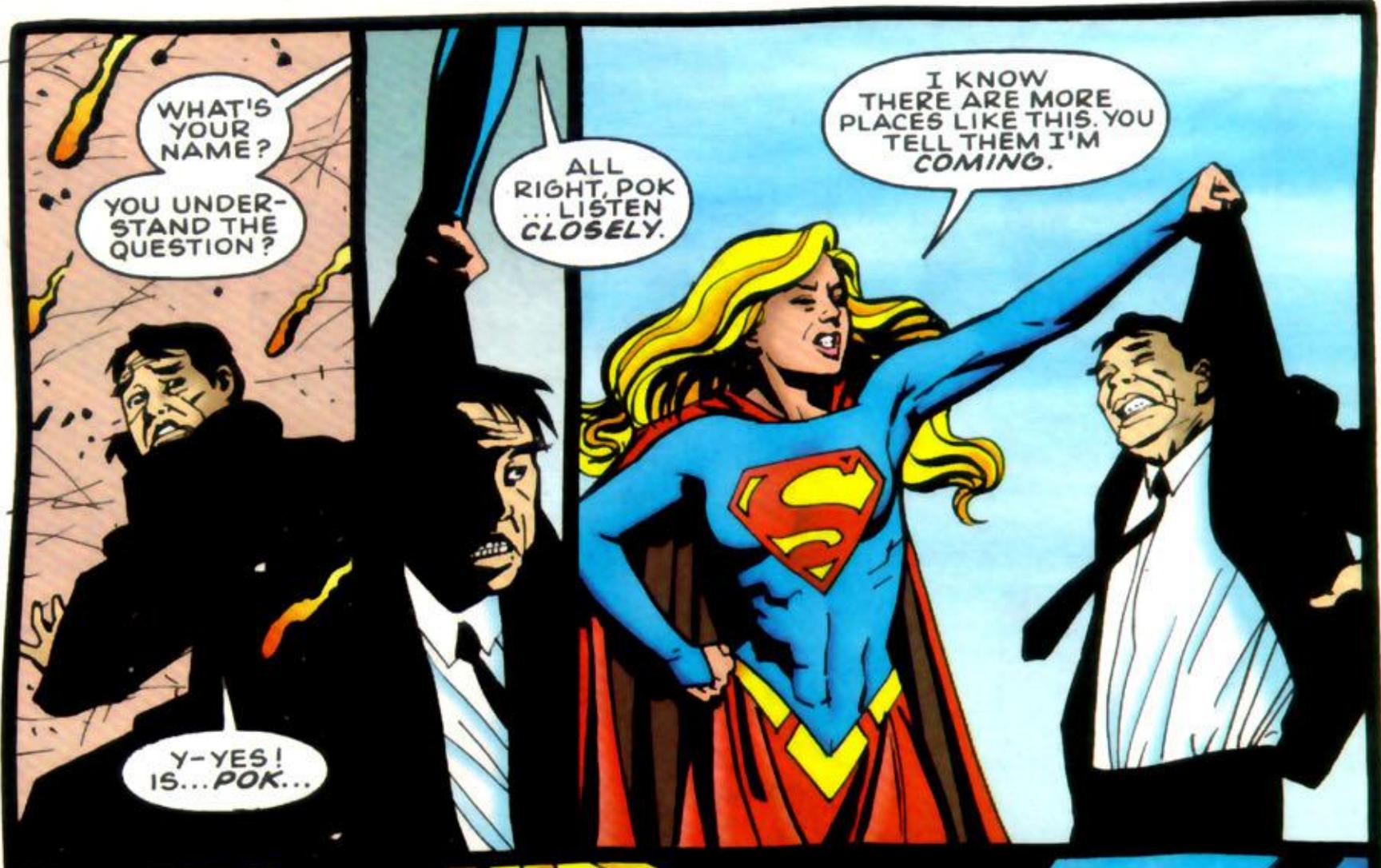


IS THAT
IT? IS THAT
THE BEST YOU
CAN DO?



PERHAPS
YOU'D PREFER IF I
WAS A HELPLESS
GIRL. YES...
... YES,
I'M SURE YOU
WOULD.







MR. CARNIVEAN,
HE NEVER SAY ANY-
THING ABOUT SUPER-
HEROES TAKING
INTEREST IN THIS
OPERATION.

THIS SUPER-
GIRL... WHY SHE
BOthering? I'M
NOT SUPER-VILLAIN.
I'M NO ONE. NO
ONE.

EVERY SO
OFTEN, MR. SADUAK,
ONE OF THESE "DO-
GOODERS" TAKES A
WHACK AT SOCIAL ILLS.
IT CAN BE ANNOYING,
I KNOW... AND VERY
UNFORTUNATE, IF YOU
HAPPEN TO BE THE
TARGET.

CARNIVEAN HAS
TO DEFEND
ME!

MR. CARNIVEAN IS A
GREAT PROONENT
OF FREE WILL... AND
SELF-RELIANCE. IF
YOU WISH TO BE
DEFENDED, YOU
DO IT.

YOU
HOLD IT!
YOU--

--ARRGH!!

I DID NOT SAY THAT MR.
CARNIVEAN WOULD LEAVE
YOU DEFENSELESS, SADUAK.
WEAPONS WILL BE FORTH-
COMING... SPECIAL
WEAPONS...

... BUT IF YOU EVER
LAY A HAND ON ME,
I WILL LEAVE YOU
BONELESS.
CLEAR?

C-CLEAR....!

A different place...

A slightly different time...but the words are the same, the actions identical.

< THIS PLACE IS CLOSED. >

But this time the interruption...

...has a bit more of poetic justice about it.

< IDIOT CHILD! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? YOU GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I -->

< NO. YOU GET OUT. >
< NOW. >

AHHHHH!!



Mai shows them the way. At first the girls are *hesitant* ... but then, unleashed from both physical and psychological restraints, they set about their work with *relish*.

The expected resistance comes *faster* this time. But the girls' safety is my paramount concern.

...as the girls, with impunity through thrown rocks and pieces of wood... display their *anger*.

OKAY, THAT'S ENOUGH, GIRLS. WE SHOW THEM STRENGTH ... BUT IN THE END, THE GREATEST STRENGTH IS COMPASSION.



We go from town to town, the pattern repeating itself, more girls joining us with each stop.

I'm playing a dangerous game here. I'm seeking to empower these girls...to let them know that they can, and must, take command of their lives.

But at the same time, I have to make sure they don't come to harm. I can't let the blood of a single innocent be spilled.

I have to let them even the score... take back some of what was taken from them...

...but I also keep reminding them that it mustn't go too far.

That ultimately, they must have compassion... even for their enemy. Compassion melded with strength in numbers and spirit. It's the only way these girls can survive.

<REMEMBER,
GENTLEMEN...DON'T
FIRE UNTIL YOU SEE
THE FLAMES OF
HER EYES.>

<SHE'LL
ATTACK
FIRST...>

<...CLEAR
THE WAY FOR
THE GIRLS...>

<STEADY...
STEADY...>

<NOW, MR.
SADUAK.>

<I
SEE THEM!
HERE THEY
COME!!>

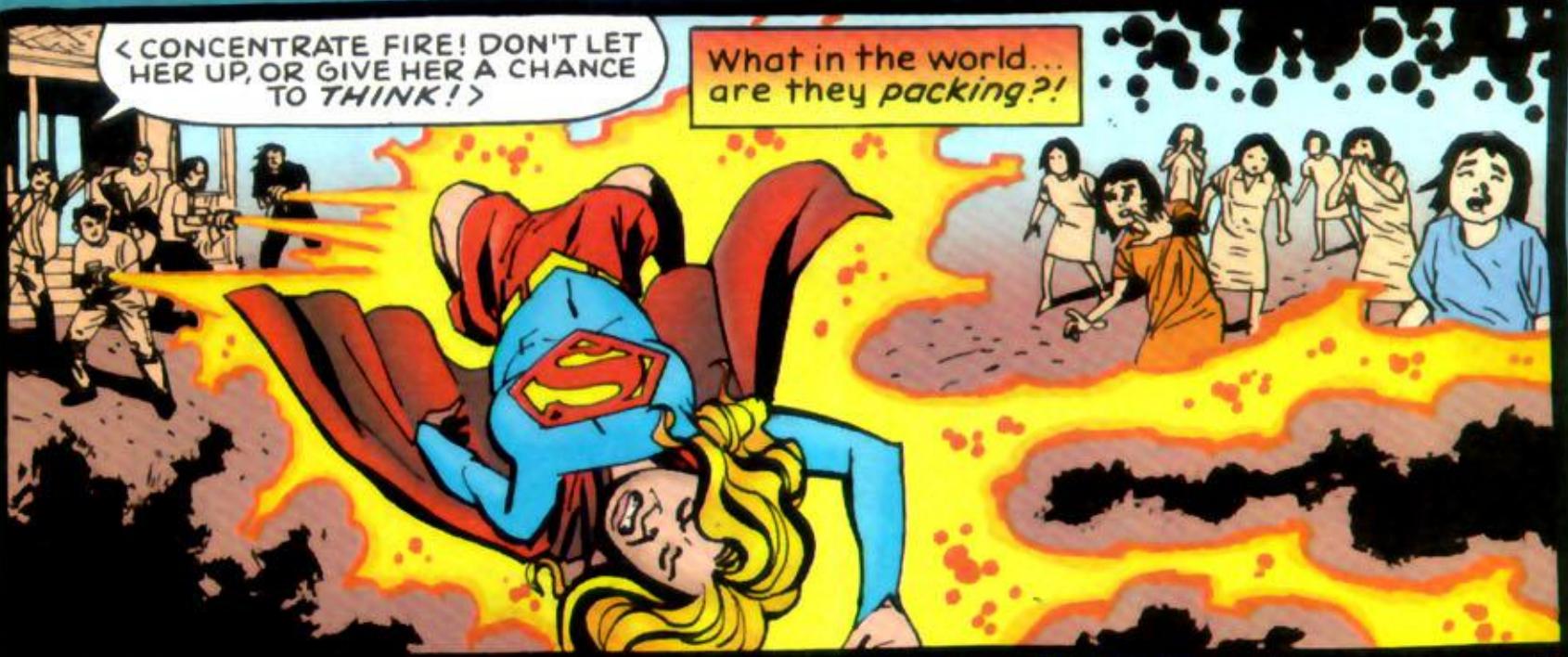
<FIIRE!!>

ARRRRHHHHH!!

GHOOM!

< CONCENTRATE FIRE! DON'T LET HER UP, OR GIVE HER A CHANCE TO THINK! >

What in the world... are they packing?!



Well, let's see them shoot me...

...if they can't stand up.



THWOOOM

THANK YOU.

THERE.
SO MUCH FOR
THOSE.

GIRLS--
FREE YOUR
SISTERS!

MUCH
OBLIGED.

THANK
YOU.

KRUNK





< She's... she's dead... >



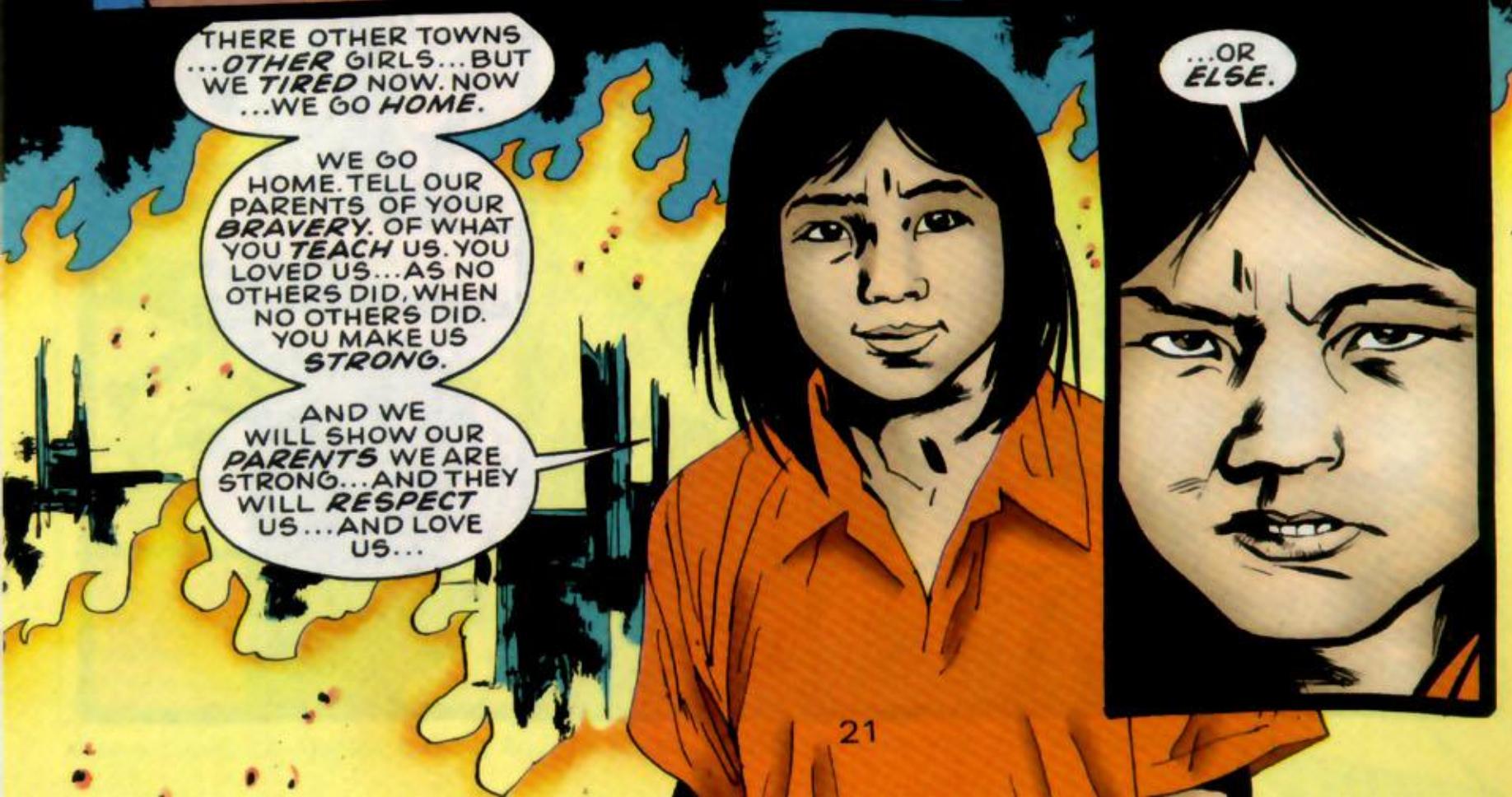
< YOU SEE! YOU SEE WHAT COMES OF DISOBEDIENCE! NOW... NOW THERE WILL BE PROPER-->

< KILL THEM! > < KILL THEM ALL... >



<... IN THE NAME OF SUPER-GIRL! >





Oh God... what...



I STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND, SIR. WHY DID YOU TOSS AWAY A PORTION OF THE OPERATION... EVEN, ADMITTEDLY, A SMALL PORTION ... TO HAVE US SET UP SUPERGIRL?



QUITE RIGHT, SHE MUST BE HUMBLED... AND THE FIRST STEP IN DOING SO IS TO underscore FOR HER JUST HOW HOPELESS HER SITUATION IS. SHE MUST LEARN THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS CANNOT BE SOLVED CLEANLY... OR AT ALL. SHE MUST LOSE, JUST WHEN SHE BELIEVES SHE IS WINNING. AND FROM THAT DESPAIR...

