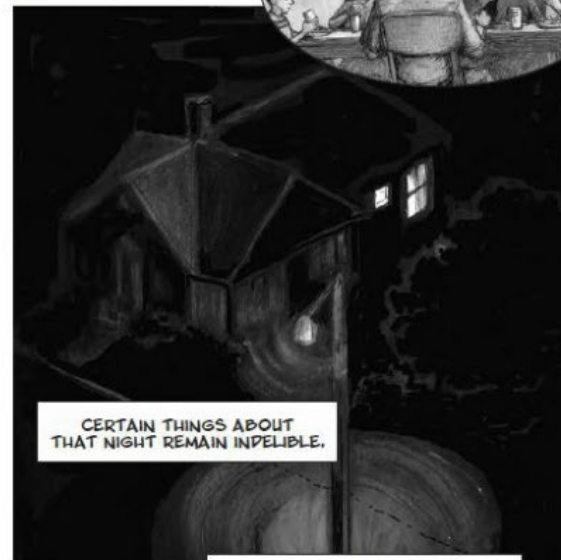


chapter 10
SCHOOL LESSONS



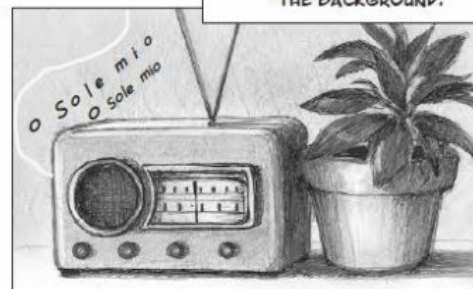
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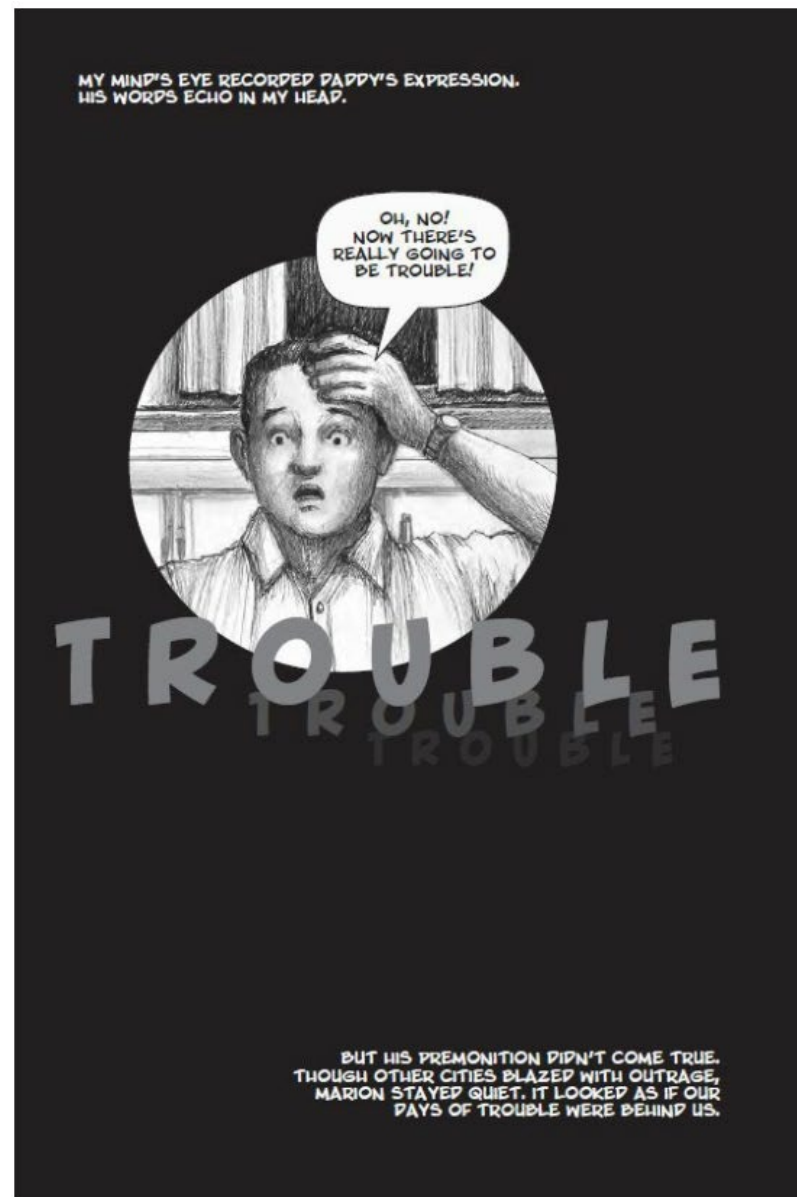
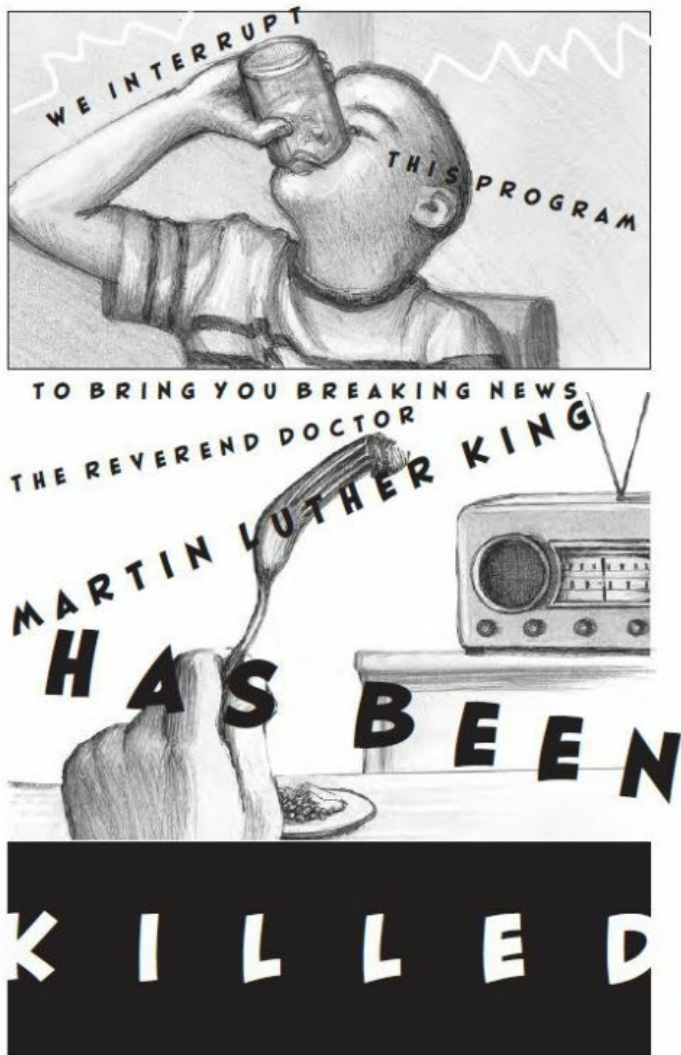
AN APRIL EVENING:

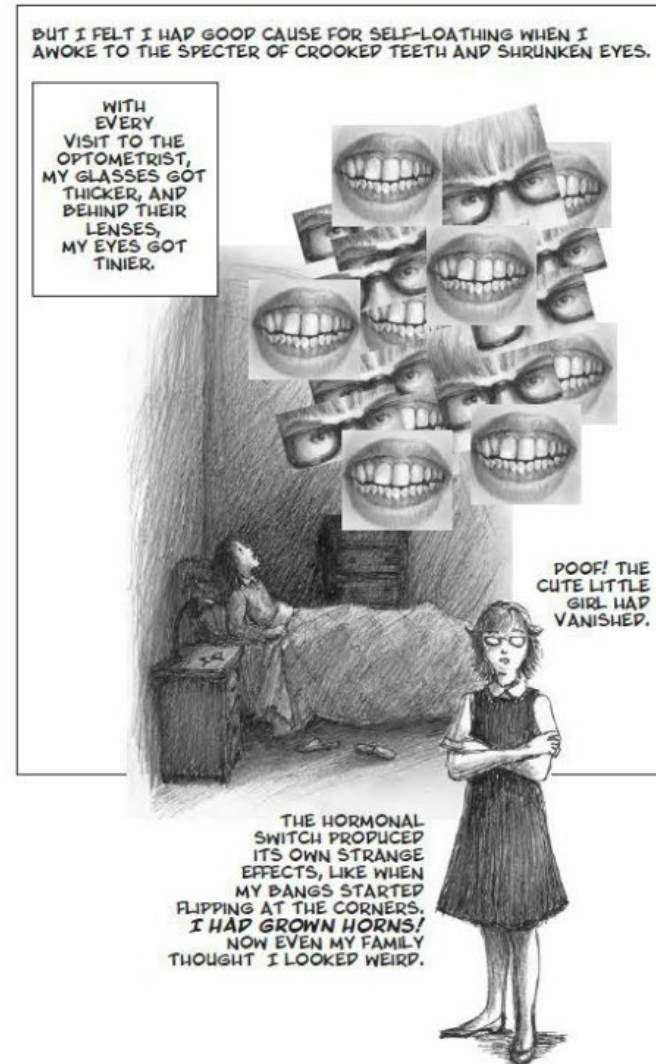
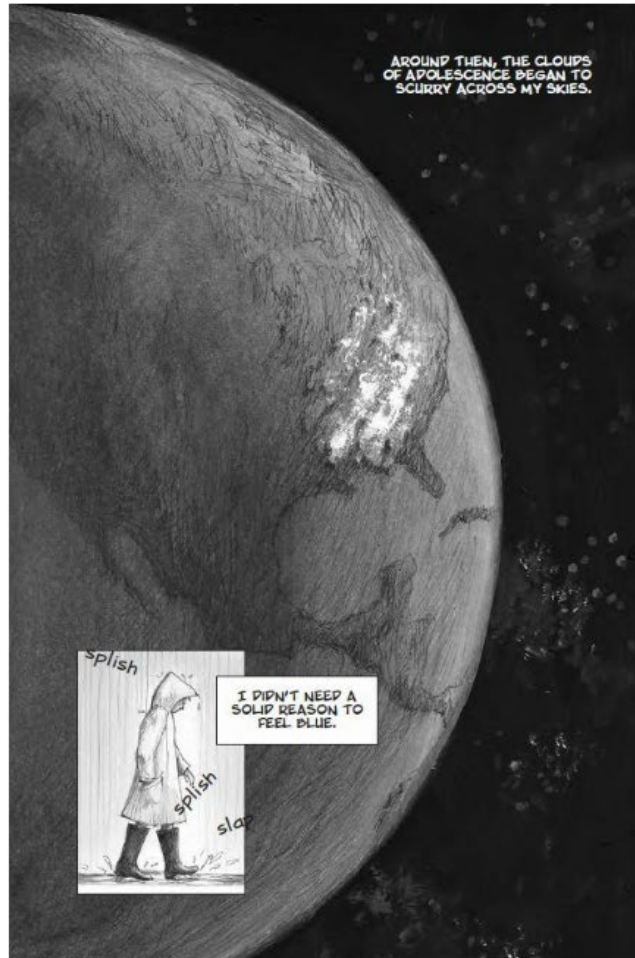


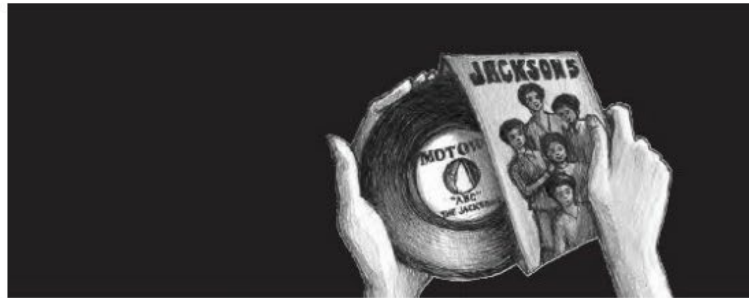
CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT
THAT NIGHT REMAIN INELIBLE.

WE WERE EATING DINNER.
THE RADIO PLAYED IN
THE BACKGROUND.









THIS
HAPPENED AT
THE WORST
TIME, JUST
WHEN LOOKS
BEGAN TO
MATTER LIKE
NEVER BEFORE.



YOU HAD TO BE COOL AND BEAUTIFUL TO SECURE YOUR SPOT.
I WAS NEITHER, AND BOY-GIRL PARTIES BECAME HELLISH
REMINDERS OF THOSE PERCITS.



I HEARD ABOUT A RABBI FROM A NEARBY TOWN WHO'D CONVINCED HIMSELF THAT PASSERSBY MUTTERED, "THERE GOES A JEW," EACH TIME THEY SAW HIM. MY INSTINCT TOLD ME HE HAD IT WRONG.



IT'S POSSIBLE THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED TO ME AS I WALKED AROUND MARION.



BUT THAT WASN'T NECESSARILY TOPMOST IN PEOPLE'S MINDS. IT'S MORE LIKELY THAT THEY DIDN'T SEE ME AT ALL.

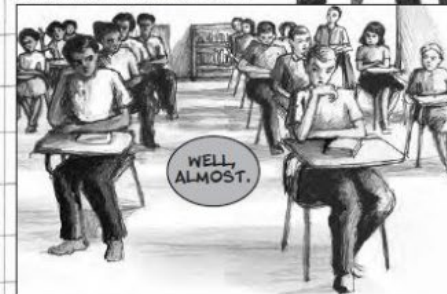
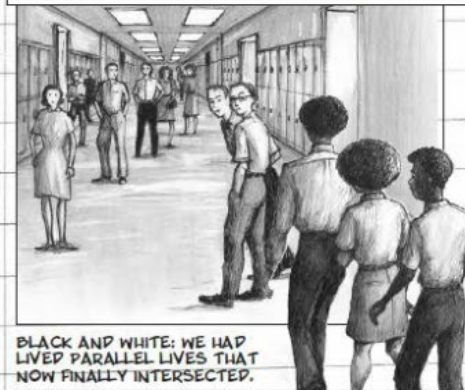


8TH GRADE:



TWO GREAT CHASMS CLOSED.

AND THE YEAR THAT PERRY COUNTY SCHOOLS SUCCEPDED TO COURT-ORDERED DESEGREGATION.



EACH DAY PRESENTED A NEW FIRST AT FRANCIS MARION HIGH SCHOOL.

MANY WHITE KIDS HAD NEVER ADDRESSED BLACK ADULTS WITH TITLES OF RESPECT.



THEY DID NOW.

MOST WHITE KIDS HAD NEVER SEEN AFRO PICKS OR PATSHIKIS UP CLOSE—UNTIL NOW.



WHITE ATHLETES HAD NEVER SHARED A FIELD OR A COURT WITH BLACK ATHLETES.



WHITE CHEERLEADERS HAD NEVER CHEERED FOR BLACK PLAYERS. THEY DID NOW.

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR INGRAINED BIASES TO EMERGE.

EW! I'M NOT DRINKING FROM ANY FOUNTAIN EVER AGAIN!

GROSS! ME NEITHER!



ONE DAY, I STOOD IN LINE FOR THE PENCIL SHARPNER.

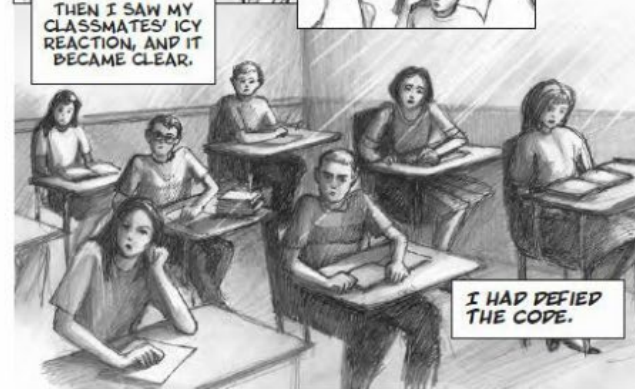


YOUR TURN.

THANKS.



THEN I SAW MY CLASSMATES' ICY REACTION, AND IT BECAME CLEAR.



I HAD DEFIED THE CODE.

OUR NEW SCHOOLMATES FLAUNTED THE RULES LEFT AND RIGHT.



MY REGARD FOR THE RULES WAS GIVING WAY TO THE CURRENT SITUATION, NAMELY, A RAPPORT WITH MY BLACK CLASSMATES.



BUT THE SPARK OF CONNECTION LEAPT OVER THESE INITIAL GAPS.



THAT YEAR I SWAPPED MY GLASSES FOR CONTACT LENSES.

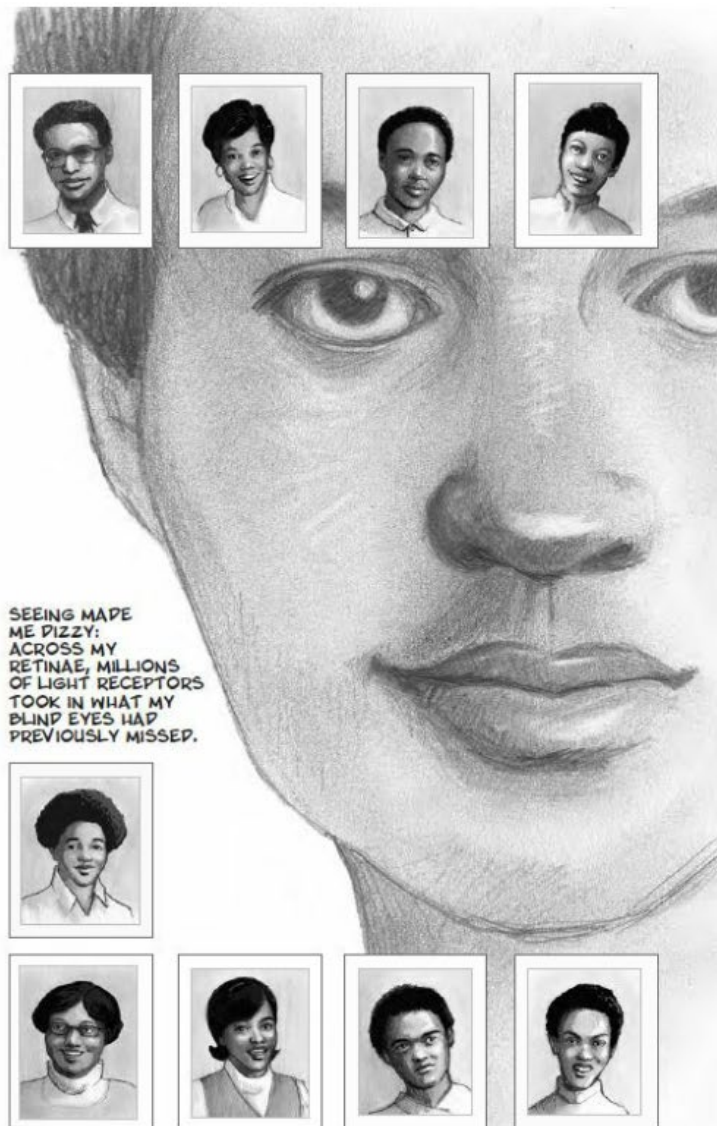


IT'S PURE COINCIDENCE THAT ALONG ABOUT THEN, I BEGAN TO SEE AFRICAN FACES.



NOW THAT MY EYES WERE OPENED, THOSE OLD FACIAL TEMPLATES VANISHED FROM MY HEAD.

Q S
N H G
M O Y B
T D C R
' R Z J B
P Q M F N
O L A C J K R D I



SEEING MADE
ME DIZZY:
ACROSS MY
RETINAE, MILLIONS
OF LIGHT RECEPTORS
TOOK IN WHAT MY
BLIND EYES HAD
PREVIOUSLY MISSED.

GONE WERE THE DAYS WHEN I WAS DESPERATE TO BLEND IN. NOW
I FORMED ALLIANCES WITH KIDS WHO EMBRACED RACIAL HARMONY.

WE ATE
TOGETHER!
IT FELT
LIBERATING
TO SPURN
THOSE OLD
RIGID CODES.



THE VIOLENCE OF 1965 SEEMED
LIKE SOMETHING FROM EONS PAST.

YET SOME PEOPLE
HADN'T LOST THEIR
TASTE FOR RACIAL
SLURS AND RACIALLY
CHARGED BRAWLS.

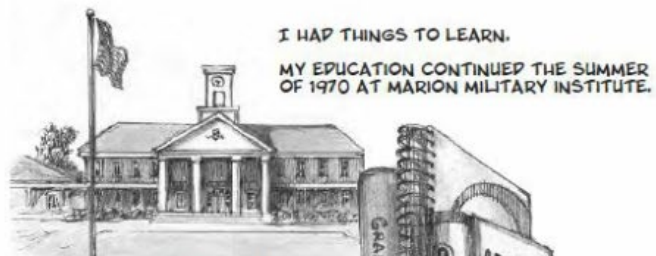


BEYOND THE VIOLENCE LAY MANY MORE
EXPRESSIONS OF RACISM.



FRATERNIZING WITH BLACK
KIDS GOT ME LOOKS OF
CONTEMPT ON A DAILY
BASIS. SOMETIMES THEY
CAME FROM OLD FRIENDS,
AND THAT HURT.

STILL, I FIGURED MY DEFIANCE
WOULDN'T COST ME MUCH
BESIDES REJECTION.



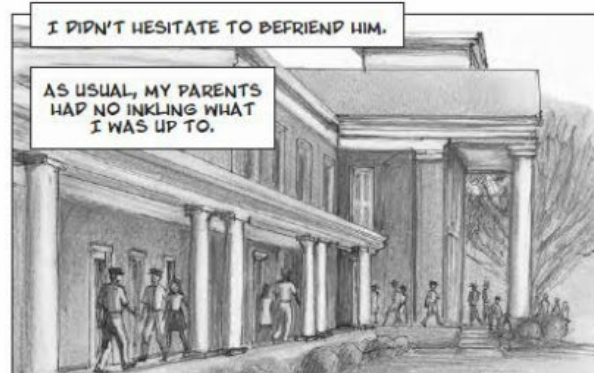
I HAD THINGS TO LEARN.

MY EDUCATION CONTINUED THE SUMMER OF 1970 AT MARION MILITARY INSTITUTE.

AS THE CHILD OF A FACULTY MEMBER, I RECEIVED FULL TUITION BENEFITS, SO WITH AN EYE TOWARD EARLY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION, I ENROLLED IN SUMMER CLASSES.



MI, AS THE SCHOOL WAS COMMONLY KNOWN, HAD JUST ACCEPTED ITS FIRST BLACK CAPET.



I DIDN'T HESITATE TO BEFRIEND HIM.

AS USUAL, MY PARENTS HAD NO INKLING WHAT I WAS UP TO.

ALL WE EVER DID WAS WALK AROUND CAMPUS BETWEEN CLASSES.



ON OUR STROLLS, WE NEVER NOTICED RAISED EYEBROWS OR SIDE-LONG GLANCES. I GUESS WE NEVER LOOKED AROUND THAT MUCH.



ARE YOU SERIOUS?

I'M PROP-PEAP SERIOUS. COME HAVE A LOOK.

WE'VE GOT TO NOTIFY THE COMMANDANT.

RRRRRING

THE COMMANDANT GOT THE NEWS AND, SOON, SO DID THE TOWN.

THIS IS HOW I IMAGINE THE GRAPEVINE IN OPERATION:

THEY WERE
STANDING
AWFUL
CLOSE.
I SAW IT
WITH MY
OWN EYES.



ARE THEY
GONNA BE
EXPELLED
OR WHAT?

I JUST
GOT OFF THE
PHONE WITH
JANET. SHE
SAW 'EM
KISSING!



GROSS!

ONLY
REASON
I'M PASSING
THIS ALONG
IS SO YOU
CAN BE
PRAYING.



BECAUSE
SHE MIGHT
BE P-R-E-G?

PSST.
IT'S A
JUICY ONE.
HOLD YOUR
HORSES 'TIL
I GET OFF
THE PHONE.

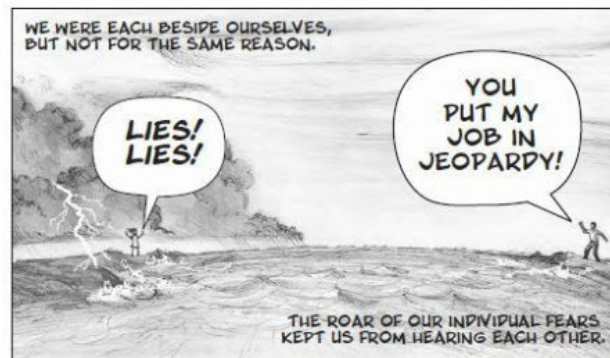
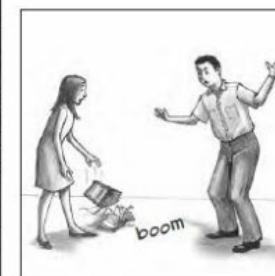


OH, MA
GAWD!
HURRY
UP!

SHE'S
RUINED HER
LIFE. HOW
TRAGIC.
I FEEL SO
BAD FOR
HER POOR
PARENTS.



OH, NO!
LET ME
CALL THEM
RIGHT AWAY
BEFORE IT'S
ALL OVER
TOWN!



WITHIN A FEW DAYS, I RECEIVED A DISCIPLINARY LETTER FROM THE COMMANDANT.

Dear Lila,

Uxccolv iw ssqo d...
biygl fwasqd...
Tplm cj iero...

I RECALL ONLY ONE PHRASE.

Opj boaul cvnle...
Sppro bnbi tgaiwetb einf...
you will restrict yourself to bona fide academic activities. Omumne len web...
mom emre wfcewecwt blkcode.

Please call my office as soon as possible for an appointment.

DADDY DID NOT LOSE HIS JOB, BUT HE PROBABLY LOST CONFIDENCE IN MY GOOD SENSE.



IN THE FALL, I WENT BACK TO FMHS, WHERE LIFE RETURNED TO NORMAL.

UP TO A POINT.



GOING TO SUMMER SCHOOL HAD THROWN MY SCHEDULE OFF COURSE.

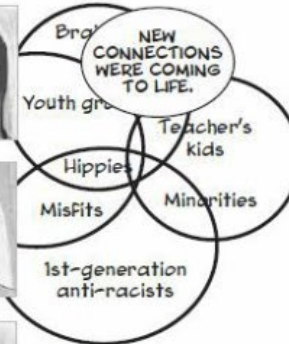


I HAD ONE FOOT IN THE 10TH GRADE, ANOTHER, IN THE 9TH.

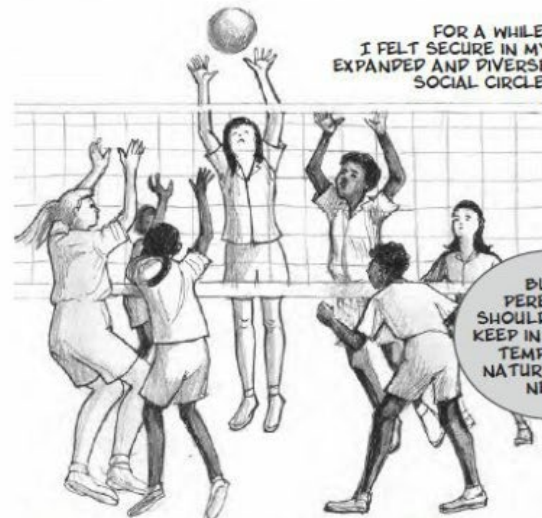
AND I WAS NO LONGER IN THE CLASS OF '74.



OLD FRIENDSHIPS ERODED FURTHER.



OUR WORLDS INTERSECTED IN SURPRISING WAYS.



FOR A WHILE, I FELT SECURE IN MY EXPANDED AND DIVERSE SOCIAL CIRCLE.

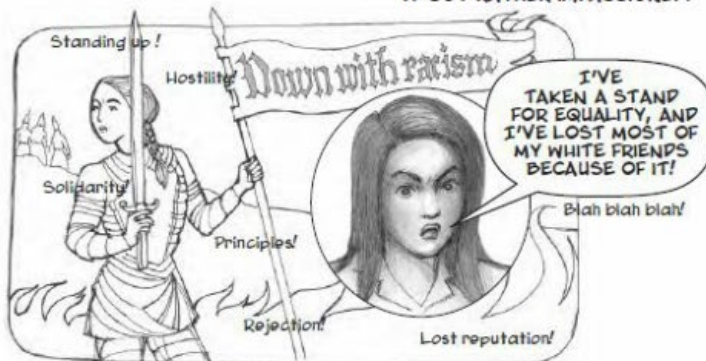
BUT A PEREGRINE SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THE TEMPORARY NATURE OF HER NEST.

THE MIGRATORY LIFE BRINGS SWEEPING VISTAS, BUT IT'S HARD TO NAIL DOWN WHERE HOME IS OR FIND A PEOPLE YOU CAN CALL YOUR OWN.

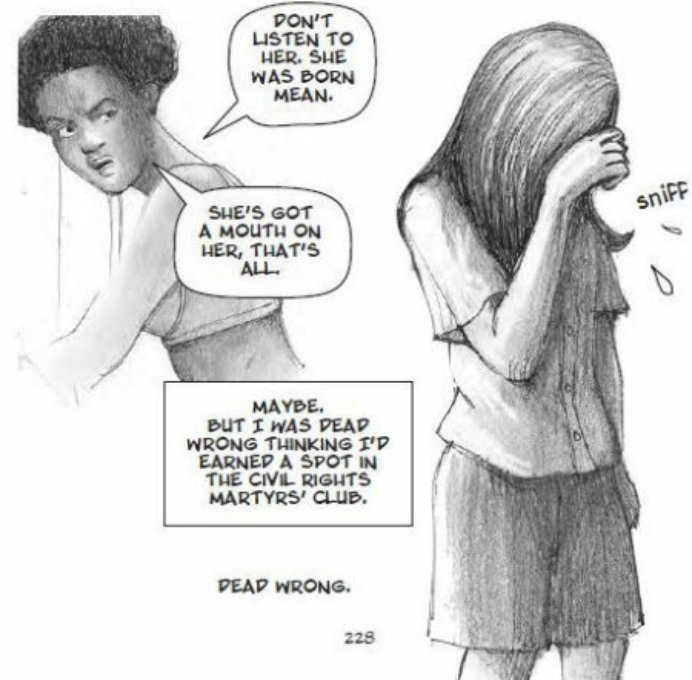




IT GOT RATHER IMPASSIONED.



I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT HAPPENED, BUT THE LOCKER ROOM HAD EMPTIED OUT. ONLY TWO OF US REMAINED.



1971

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR MEANT NEW SCHOOL SUPPLIES:
SHARP PENCIL POINTS, CLEAN PAPER, FRESH PAGES.
I LOVED ALL THAT.

BYE.

MY BROTHER BEGAN HIS
STINT AT FMHS THAT
YEAR. I WAS A JUNIOR.



OUR WALK NOW WAS ONLY AS LONG AS THE PATH
FROM THE CAR TO THE SCHOOL'S FRONT DOOR.



HEY,
ARGENTINA
BOY!

I WOULD LIKE TO REPORT FMHS AS A
WONDERFUL FRESH START FOR JOHNNY,
BUT RIGHT AWAY HE HAD DETRACTORS.

HE WASN'T TOO
KEEN ON SCHOOL
TO BEGIN WITH.



Am
G
C
D

HE WOULD RATHER HAVE BEEN
POPPING WHEELIES SOMEWHERE
OR LEARNING NEW CHORPS ON
HIS GUITAR.

NOT
DIAGRAMMING
SENTENCES.

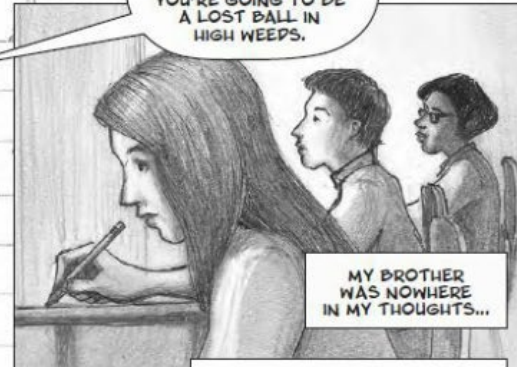
NOT
WRESTLING
HIS STUFF OUT
OF A BOTTOM
LOCKER.

OR DEFENDING HIS SISTER'S HONOR.

IT HAPPENED
DURING ALGEBRA
ONE AFTERNOON.

Simplify

Y'ALL BETTER
GET THIS NOW,
OR IN A FEW WEEKS
YOU'RE GOING TO BE
A LOST BALL IN
HIGH WEEPS.



MY BROTHER
WAS NOWHERE
IN MY THOUGHTS...

...WHEN SUPPENLY, ONE OF THE
COACHES APPEARED AT THE
CLASSROOM DOOR AND CALLED
ME OUT TO THE HALLWAY.

THERE'S
SOMETHING
GOING ON WITH
YOUR BROTHER
OUT BACK.

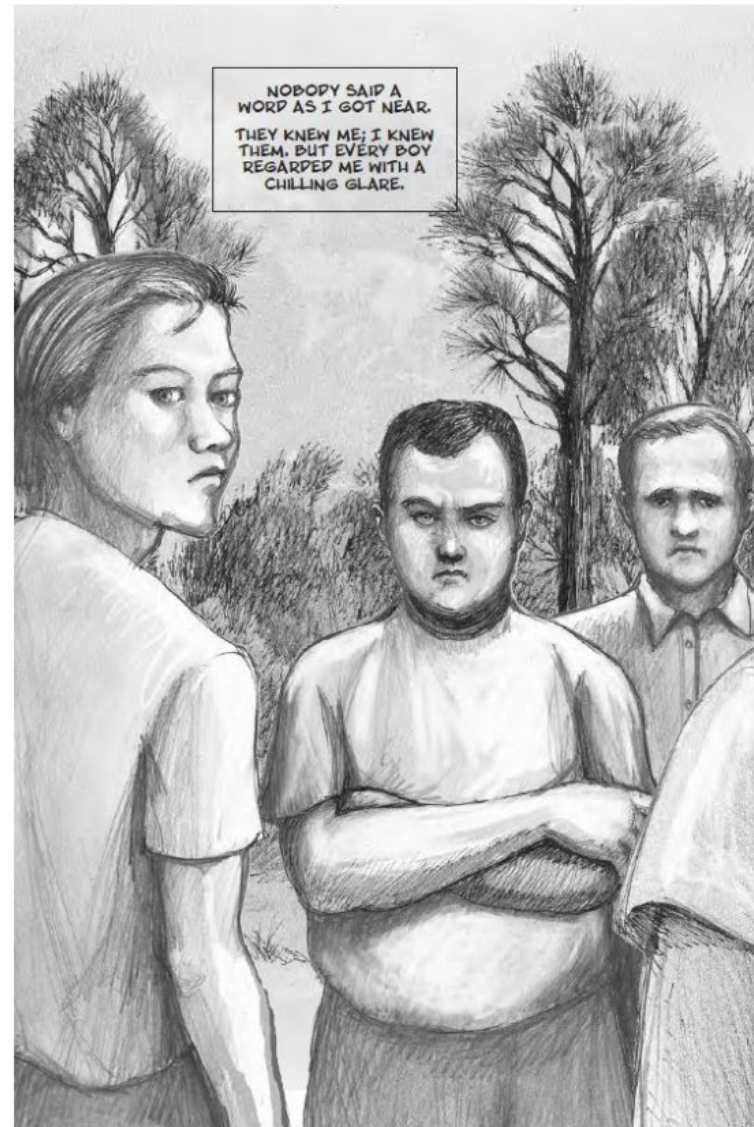
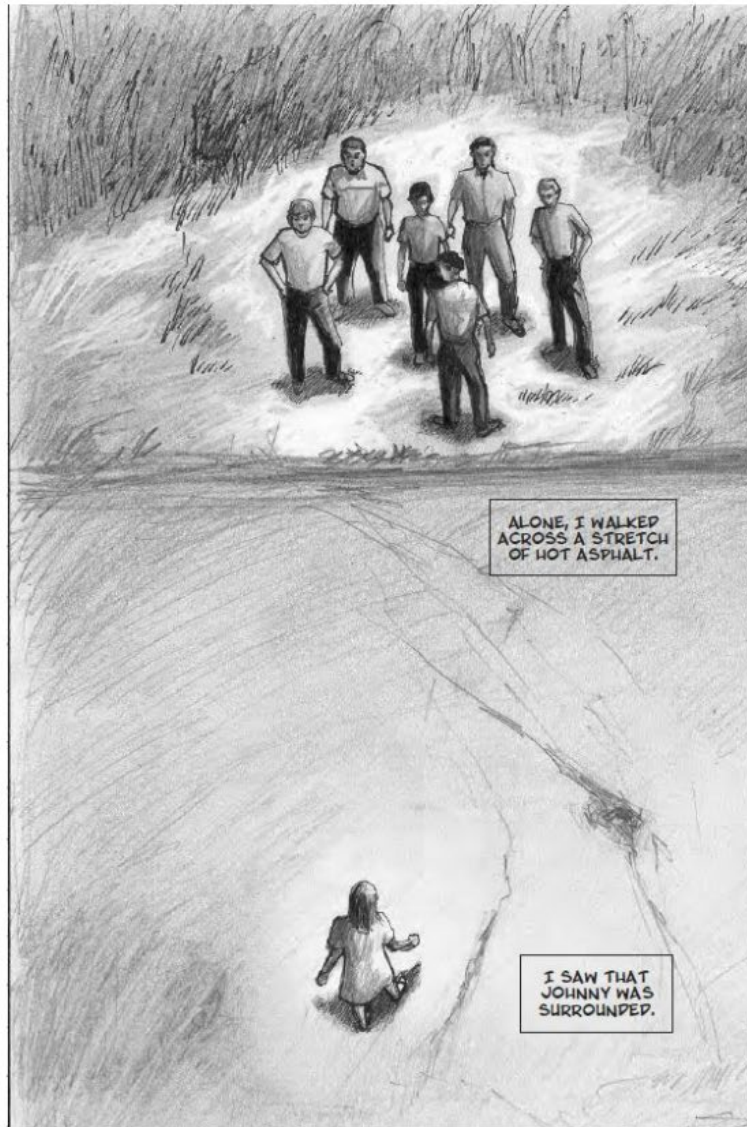


OVER
THERE.

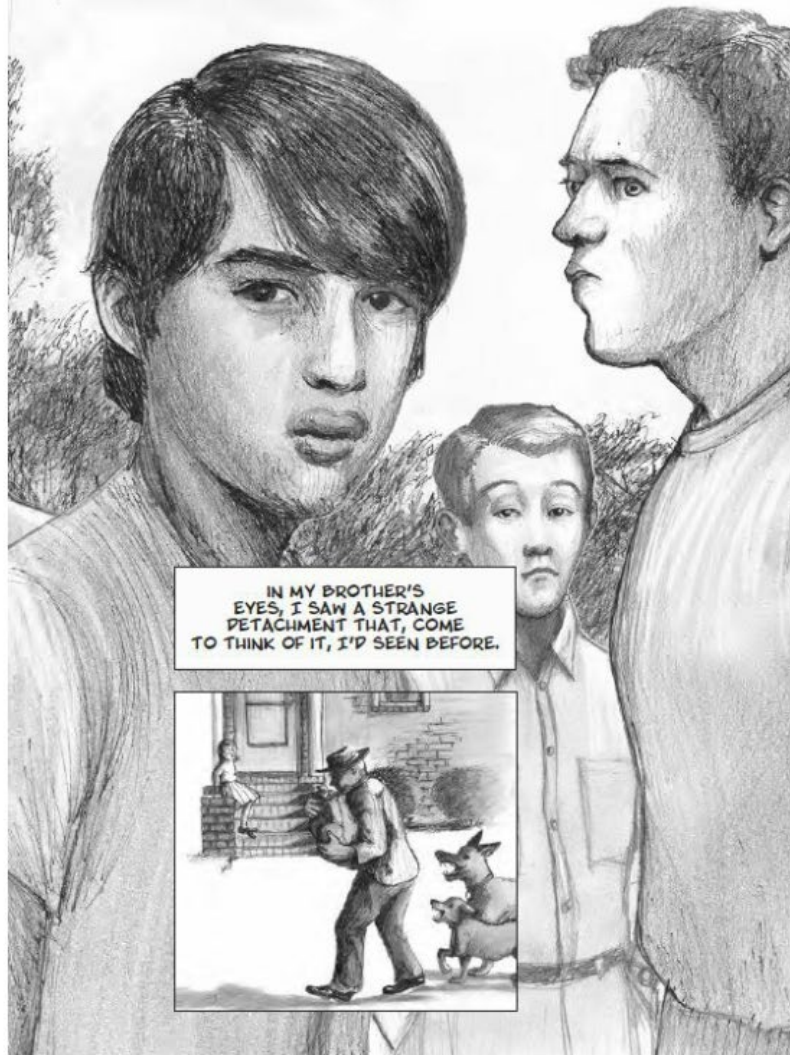


A GROUP OF BOYS STOOD IN THE BAKING SUN.
MY BROTHER WAS ONE OF THEM.

$$\frac{(9x^2y^3)^2}{(6x^4)^3} = \frac{81x^4y^6}{216x^{12}} = \frac{9}{24x^8} = \frac{3}{8x^8}$$



I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HAD LED TO THIS STANDOFF.



IN MY BROTHER'S EYES, I SAW A STRANGE DETACHMENT THAT, COME TO THINK OF IT, I'D SEEN BEFORE.



I HAVE REPLAYED THIS ENCOUNTER IN MY HEAD, WISHING I COULD INSERT A DIFFERENT ENDING.

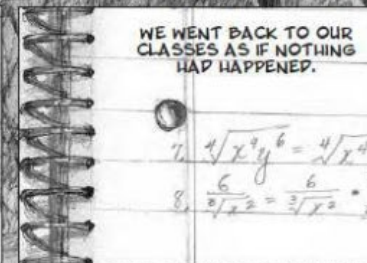
NOT THE SAFE, REASONABLE OUTCOME THAT ACTUALLY OCCURRED.

COME ON.

ARE Y'ALL OKAY?



WE WENT BACK TO OUR CLASSES AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.



WE ROPE BACK HOME AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

I TURNED AROUND AND THEY'D FORMED A CIRCLE...



EVENTUALLY,
JOHNNY TOLD ME
THE REST OF THE
STORY, BUT I CAN'T
SEEM TO PLACE THAT
CONVERSATION.

WAS IT SOMEWHERE
AROUND THE HOUSE, OUT OF
EARSHOT, SWALLOWED UP BY
THE SOUNDS OF NORMALCY?

THE WORDS, THEY WERE
THE UNFORGETTABLE PART.

SO THEY SAID,
"YOUR SISTER'S A
NIGGER LOVER."

HOLA!
I SMELL
SOMETHING
DELICIOUS!

THEY REALLY
SAID THAT?

YOU'RE NOT
MAKING THIS
UP?

MAMA,
SHOULD I
SLICE A FEW
TOMATOES?

NO!

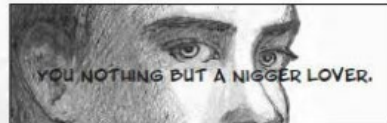
NOW HE TELLS ME.

OH, WHAT I WOULD GIVE TO PUT
THE WHOLE THING ON REWIND,



AND RUN IT BACKWARDS TO THE POINT
WHERE I TOOK MY BROTHER'S HAND.

EXCEPT THIS TIME,
I'D LOOK THE RINGLEADER IN HIS HATE-
FILLED EYES AND DEMAND HE
SAY IT TO MY FACE.



HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

